

Lest we Remember : Are we remembering too much?

A Thought for the Conference : May 2003

Are we in danger of remembering too much?

Imagine the following. What will happen in 2014? (and this is as far in the future as the first International Peace Museums Conference is in the past). There will be popular memorial 'celebrations' at the restart of war, but this time the war will be played in peoples minds, egged on by curiously addictive shadowy and jerky images. Such events will dominate the historical scene for four years, as anniversary after needless anniversary is displayed and vaingloriously dissected for new and old generations.

And even after that it will continue, on and on. Just as Nelson's Victory re-enraptured the UK population in 1905, (*The Times Oct 20, 21, 23 1905*) then, as the 21st century unfolds further, so will the old century continually throw its powerful visual net over everyone, capturing people by incessant use of the moving monotones.

But do we really need to see all this? Certainly, use the occasions to mark the events and to inform everyone, but I suspect it'll be to the detriment of positive, forward creative thinking.

Lest we forget! If only!

Indeed, as a society, we are seemingly not allowed to forget events, with flashes of TV archives regularly rekindling popular passions. Relatively recent anniversaries are replayed ad nauseam. It seems that if old antagonisms can be stirred up then so much the better for viewer ratings. It doesn't matter whether the pictures are on horrific crimes of individuals, or their victims, or the parlous state of peoples and of nations.

Of course history is knowledge. Museums store knowledge. Peace museums, collectively, remind us of the bad and the good. But surely we all want to inspire people to do better things. Remembering not to repeat the bad of the past is just one important task.

However, to do creative or lateral thinking, we need to put less emphasis on what has been and more on what might be. We need to be less constrained by existing modes of thought and past events. It's difficult enough to shake oneself free of the inertia of history to creatively think of new ways of tackling the future. We need to do more free-thinking.

So before these awful anniversaries rear their ugly centenaries, we should be taking the opportunity to think laterally and creatively. As a start, instead of overly concentrating on the mind-numbing slaughter in the fields of Flanders, we could spend the immediate forthcoming years developing innovative presentations which will use those events as a starting block, but not as the whole show.

Elise Boulding's concept of the 100 year present could be a good tool (*Culture of Peace 2000* p163). Her thesis is that what was done up to 100 years ago affects the present, and what is done now will affect the future 100 years.

Let's keep our peace perspective on the past in perspective and develop peace perspectives on the future.

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