

## **Report on research undertaken in the Charente with the aid of the Peter Morris Memorial Travel Award 2016.**

The thesis involves research on commemoration of the Second World War in the Charente department. The objective of the work is to provide a case study of collective memory over a period of more than 70 years, equating to three to four generations. Part of the data collection involves a number of interviews in order to obtain the opinion of individuals who have an interest in the commemoration of this period. Another element of the research requires archival work, mainly involving recording newspaper coverage of commemorative events, of the period from the 'Libération' to the present time at 'les Archives départementales de la Charente', a second objective was to familiarize with the departmental archives and begin data collection. The purpose of my application for travel costs related to the above activities.

A series of 16 interviews were held from the 25.10.16 to the 17.11.16. Wherever possible these were conducted in public institutions, usually 'Mairies' but also in one instance within a museum and, more unusually, an interview began in a 'lieu de mémoire' in woodland and concluded in a bar. However due to the age or infirmity of some volunteers some sessions took place at the volunteer's domicile. All relevant ethical permissions were sought and verified prior to any interviews. The purpose of the study was explained and consent of the participants obtained on each occasion. These conversations gave an insight into the significance of this particular commemoration in the selected community and issues connected with its inter-generational transfer. The return date to the UK was the 25<sup>th</sup> November.

Three visits were made to the archives in Angoulême. The first occasion involved an amount of administration and some training on accessing the documents. The material required for my research is only available as a hard copy and the volumes of interest contain approximately 6 months of back numbers. The purpose of this work is to collect reports on commemoration from the points of view of three local newspapers over a number of decades beginning from the 'Libération'. As well as providing empirical data such as number of ceremonies and details on those attending the articles will be scrutinized for their style of reporting and approach toward these events and if this may be a reflection of a more general opinion. The staff at the Archives expressed an interest in the project and suggested some documents other than newspaper based materials.

To give one specific example of how this fieldwork has enriched the research project through a series of events, my 'woodland' meeting resulted in an invitation to an annual general meeting of a commemorative association ('Association pour le souvenir des Fusillés de la Braconne'). The event also resulted in the publication of article in the *Charente Libre : La mémoire collective au cour de la these* 17.11.2016 (document enclosed in the accompanying email). Fortunately the meeting was held during my stay in France and the event enabled me to request some further interviews and gauge, to some extent, the interest that my research stimulates in a group concerned with a specific form of collective memory. Of particular benefit was the opportunity to arrange an interview with the president of the Jewish society for the Charente. The commemoration of Jewish victims over this period presents a particularly complex situation and so such a meeting could provide substantial direct information to the project.

During the Christmas break I received a copy of the latest bulletin of the ASFB. The project was mentioned in two sections of this publication and highlighted the link between my work and the ambitions of the Association.

The engagement with local people provided an invaluable insight into the sentiments of those who strive to prevent the loss of collective memory of an event which influenced a whole population. I am very grateful for the funding provided by the ASCMF awards committee.

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