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Japan's WWII Legacy by Hiroko Sherwin

Book review by Roy Ludlow

How did this gentle nation come to commit such appalling atrocities in the Second World War and why has she largely failed to atone and mourn for them? These are the questions that Hiroko Sherwin, who lives in Winsley, seeks to answer in this magnificent and meticulously researched, if harrowing, book, which is being published both here and in Japan.

Japan's war began back in 1931 with the unprovoked invasion of Manchuria.

We are reminded that Emperor Hirohito was considered to be a god and so to be obeyed without question. Then, within the Armed Forces there was a lack of respect for life and a total disregard of the Geneva Convention.



Men and women's lives were ruined ... You simply could not avoid being brutalised. All this we learn from accounts given by veterans in the first half of the book.

And what of the situation post-war? Officially, in terms of atonement, it has been patchy. Hirohito never apologised either to his own people or to his former enemies. Sincere apologies have been given by prime ministers, only to be revised by successors. The Yushu-kan War Museum gives a heavily revisionist interpretation of history.

It has been left to individuals to atone for the sins of their forbears. Fortunately, their efforts, often in the face of initial hostility, have been truly inspirational. I defy anyone to read the second half of the book without being deeply moved.

This splendid work deals with a specific period in the history of one nation. Yet, in terms of man's inhumanity to man, the need for atonement and the power of forgiveness, it has a message for fallen humanity which is eternal. For this, Hiroko Sherwin deserves our unswerving gratitude. It makes for compulsive reading.

■ Hiroko has lived in Winsley for 15 years and will be speaking about her book in Winsley Village Hall on Friday, February 26 at 7.30pm.