



May 8th 2025

The 80th Anniversary of VE Day!

Memories

The second World War ended in Europe on May 8th 1945. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, when announcing this welcome news, gave everyone a day's holiday on which to celebrate. Members of St Paul's congregation and friends from other local churches, have kindly provided us with memories of how they and their families celebrated. We thank them for giving us an insight into the war years, and how people reacted to the ending of war and the declaration of peace. As you read through the names you will appreciate that some of the contributors are now sadly no longer with us.

Barbara Beetham Barbara lived in Graham St, Greaves, just round the corner from Elsie Stackhouse. She was nine years old in 1945 and can clearly remember the excitement of their street party. Her mum made the paper streamers which were hung across the street – she even put the hammer and sickle on one of them!

Denis Beetham Denis was nine at VE Day. He lived in Edward St and went to St Anne's church, which is now the Dukes Theatre. He can remember the sandwiches and jellies at their street party and that there were very few men! He had 2 uncles who were prisoners of war and his dad was still with his unit in Sherwood Forest.

Maureen Curwen Maureen was born in 1939, the same year that Ryelands school was opened. She lived in Longlands Road in Skerton and was one of six children. Living with them was an evacuee, a girl from across the road whose mother had died, and two girls whose mother was out at work. When the sirens sounded, all 10 children plus adults got under the kitchen table! The VE street party was a really big event – lots of people clapping and cheering and having fun.

Muriel Ellison 'I was four and a half years old on VE Day. My few memories are that soldiers were based at Ripley school, and when peace in Europe was announced, they set off some sort of fire crackers. My Dad put me on his shoulders and took me down with all the neighbours. I remember it was very scary. We had a street party to celebrate. Trestle tables and chairs were set out on Pickard Street. The mums gave whatever they could, sandwiches, jellies and cakes made with dried egg. We had lots of games, music and dancing. I can't remember what we had to drink, maybe orange juice we got from the baby clinic. The streets were decorated with bunting made out of scraps of material.'

John Harding John grew up in Leicester. He remembers cycling home from school on VE day and seeing a paper sign in the window of a bicycle shop that said 'Thanks for the Victory'.

Sonja Harding Sonja is from Switzerland and she remembers all the bells in all the churches ringing very loudly.

Jack Hilton Jack was twelve years old and lived in a village just outside Wigan. There was no street as such, so they had their party in the Council Chamber. 'Goodness knows where the food came from. There were meat pies unknown in the days of rationing!' Jack's father was an engineer, directed to work on Halifax bombers at Dick Kerr's in Preston during the war.

Pat Illingworth 'I don't remember what happened that day, but two days later my sister was born and I was sent to stay with the family of a little boy called Kenneth. However, I had had a whooping cough vaccination and developed a mild version of the disease and was removed after one night to an aunt and uncle in Timperley. As a result, I missed the street party and was compensated with a stick of plasticine!'

Richard Impey 'I was just four years and four days old on VE Day and have some distinct childhood memories of a street party taking place in our short road with singing and dancing and shared food; an event like nothing I'd ever experienced before. Until then it had been a life with rationing, without Dad, with sirens warning us of air raids, getting into the Anderson shelter in the garden, or the bed indoors with its steel roof, or listening to the dreaded doodlebugs flying over, and watching the Barrage Balloons just a mile or so away with their wires designed to bring enemy aircraft down where they would do minimum damage, or the searchlights at night. (We lived in Surrey, about 15 miles from London). And then the intriguing sound of Morse Code on the radio sending messages I couldn't understand, but our Dad could, for he taught Morse Code to his fellow soldiers! I was proud of our Dad and glad of our Mum who stayed with us.'

Tricia Impey 'I was only just born and my Dad was on armaments training to go to Japan!!'

Margaret Ives 'I was not quite seven years old at the time. My Father was in the Royal Navy and since the loss of his ship in action in 1941 I had been living with Mother and my brother John with our grandparents in Grimsby. Mother worked in the Sorting Office at the Post Office and had to get up very early and I used to help her each day to lay the fire before she went to work. On VE Day I remember that I had just finished putting some little balls of newspaper in the grate when Mother came in with the day's paper and showed me the headlines. She said 'Look, Margaret, the war's over' and I said 'Does that mean that there won't be any more news now?' The family used to tease me about this for many years afterwards.'

Jean Jeffreys 'I think I was seventeen on VE Day and my mother and I were staying in Reeth, Swaledale. I clearly remember the excitement, a huge bonfire on the village green. Soldiers were camped near and all the village folk were ready to celebrate. I still remember the sadness on my Mum's face, because my Dad was still in Burma. He did not return till 18 months later.'

Arton Medd 'My tenth birthday was a week after VE Day. I woke up on VE Day morning but had not heard my mam (not 'mum' in Leeds) and dad downstairs. I went into their bedroom but they were not up, but they told me it was a holiday. I was worried because at school the day before the headmistress told us that we had to be in school the next morning. Churchill's public holiday announcement had obviously not reached Brownhill School by 4.00pm. What happened the rest of the day I don't remember, but later we joined friends at their street party with potted-meat sandwiches, jelly, blancmange and cakes. I was a choir boy and there was an absolutely full church for a Thanksgiving Service probably on the following Sunday.'

Jean Mount 'I was still living in Bolton at that time and behind our house there were tennis courts. In the tennis pavilion there was a party provided for all the local children. We had jelly, cakes and I think that we had ice cream as well. After the food we played games but most of the young ones (I was one of them) left early as it was bed-time. I remember that the food was enjoyed by all. Not sure who enjoyed it the most – the children or adults who enjoyed watching the children.'

Jean Nicholson 'I was born in the North Riding of Yorkshire into a farming family. We were very lucky and hardly realised there was a war on. In May 1945 I was at school in Richmond and can remember German planes flying over and being told to go under the stairs to shelter. I was taken to a high area to look across the Vale of York towards the coast to see the result of the bombing of Hull. VE Day was just like an ordinary school day. We were later given a one-day holiday to celebrate – it was very quiet – getting in touch with friends from the village and going to celebrate at the village church. We hardly realised how serious it was for other parts of the country.'

Eddie Potter (member of Lancaster Methodist Church and SLCT) Eddie has kindly provided us with a photo of a group of children enjoying the VE Day celebrations in Scotforth. He

pointed out the effigy of Hitler at the front of the photo – and thought perhaps it was later treated as a Guy Fawkes!

Margaret Shaw (member of Lancaster Methodist Church and SLCT) ‘During the war my mother and I lived with my auntie and granddad at the bottom of Bridge Rd. My auntie woke us up to say we were going out to celebrate as it was all over. My mother said I had to go to school, but auntie insisted saying I wouldn’t see anything like it again. We made our way onto Ashton Rd where crowds were making their way down into town. As we got to Ripley School the soldiers were throwing thunder flashes and cheering and shouting. I have never forgotten it! I daresay some people were so relieved that it was all over that they didn’t make much fuss, especially if their husband was in the forces.’

Mary Smith Mary was nine when war broke out – she was in Sunday School when the vicar took them into church to listen to the broadcast saying that we were now at war. She lived in Scunthorpe, in an avenue where there were lots of children, so there was a great street party after VE Day, with much jubilation and excitement – and lots of dancing by the adults. Mary’s older brother was in the RAF and her future husband was a squadron navigation officer also in the RAF.

Elsie Stackhouse ‘My memories of VE Day are not of street parties, because I lived on Greaves Rd with my family. I can recall the shops in the area around the Greaves Hotel – 3 lock-ups: a confectioner’s, a barber’s and a shoe repairer’s, and the greengrocer’s which my mother ran. We lived in the flat above the shops. There was little to sell because everything was rationed. At the Greaves Hotel was the air raid shelter – I went down there once when a bomb dropped not so far away, but it didn’t explode. My father and brother were air raid wardens. The school had a day off to celebrate VE Day, but the shop stayed open.’

Mary Thomas Mary was living in Dalton in Furness. During the war she had continued working in the Post Office on the counter and sending telegrams. They worked as normal on VE Day but they were extremely busy sending off telegrams for people. After work in the evening, she took her two dogs for a walk and made peace with the world on her own. She remembers it being a lovely evening, but she was very sad for the people who had died and those who had lost loved ones. She was extremely glad to be alive.

Thank you to Eddie Potter for providing us with this photo taken on VE Day, of a group of children from Scotforth Rd, Abbey Terrace and Hala Grove. Perhaps you recognise someone!

