# VICTORY IN EUROPE

On 8 May 2025, this country will mark the 80th anniversary of VE – Victory in Europe – Day. There will in fact be 4 days of national celebrations, starting on 5 May, Bank Holiday Monday. In London, these include events around the Cenotaph in Whitehall and a flypast of current and historic military aircraft. The WI has produced a recipe for an official orange and ginger cake to be enjoyed at street parties. In local communities, we are encouraged to raise a special VE Day flag at 9am on 8 May while town criers proclaim the commemoration. The close of the day will see cathedral and church bells rung across the country at 6.30pm and beacons lit nationwide at 9.30pm.

So, what exactly is being commemorated? On 8 May 1945, Britain officially celebrated the end of the Second World War in Europe, following the declaration of ceasefire on 7 May. After nearly six long years of war, the relief must have been enormous. No longer was there the risk of being attacked by bombs, alerted by the sound of air raid sirens precipitating a rush to shelters. At last, the hated blackout curtains could be taken down, lights be visible in windows and used again on bicycles and cars. The effects of the war continued for many years, not least food rationing which was maintained until the early 1950s, bread actually being rationed for the first time in July 1946. Neither did Victory in Europe mean that servicemen and women could immediately return home and the war in Asia against Japan was still going on, not finishing until 15 August 1945.

Nevertheless, jubilant celebrations took place on VE Day 1945. Many people flocked to central London where an estimated 100,000 gathered outside Buckingham Palace. They cheered sightings of the prime minister Winston Churchill and repeated balcony appearances by King George VI and his family throughout the afternoon and evening. The impromptu party continued in the streets with singing and dancing into the night. Throughout the country, thanksgiving services and parades, street parties and dances offered the chance to celebrate the end of the war. In Dorney, the celebrations included a concert and dance in the village hall and an outing to Whipsnade Zoo for the children. Physical signs of the conflict remained for some time in Dorney. Surface air raid shelters at various points in the village were not removed until 1946 and traces of the army camp on the common – subsequently used as temporary housing – were still visible in 1958.

In 1995, Britain celebrated the 50th anniversary of VE Day. In London, the Royal family was involved in three days of thanksgiving and celebrations, culminating with a concert by Dame Vera Lynn outside Buckingham Palace, before beacons were lit all round the country. A variety of events took place in towns and villages, but nothing was organised in Dorney. The then editor of DPN wrote in June 1995, *"When I saw other local villages celebrating the victory and remembering the sacrifices that achieved it, I felt ashamed that it appeared to be a non-event in Dorney."* This echoed the view expressed by a Dorney resident in a letter to the same issue.

The 75th anniversary fell during the first year of the Covid pandemic. With everyone instructed to stay at home and observe social distancing, a programme of planned events for May 2020 had to be cancelled. Queen Elizabeth II broadcast a message at the same time on 8 May that her father had done 75 years earlier. She recalled the joyous celebrations of 1945, remembered those who had died in the conflict and expressed a confident hope for continuing peace and free nations. And she reflected the strange circumstances the country was then living through: "*Today it may seem hard that we cannot mark this special anniversary as we would wish. Instead we remember from our homes and our doorsteps. But our streets are not empty; they are filled with the love and the care that we have for each other. And when I look at our country today, and see what we are willing to do to protect and support one another, I say with pride that we are still a nation those brave soldiers, sailors and airmen would recognise and admire."* Instead of communal events, families marked the occasion together at home. From a tea party in my neighbour's front garden wafted the strains of Vera Lynn singing, *We'll meet again…..,* words that carried an added poignancy when so many were separated.

Now, five years later, the country is preparing for the 80th anniversary. We are reaching a point when there are fewer people alive who remember VE Day 1945 or even remember the stories told by parents or grandparents. And, at the time of writing, there is still a war taking place in Europe and many European countries are actively planning to increase their defensive capabilities. All the more reason, perhaps, to remind ourselves of the value of the hard-fought peace we have enjoyed for the past 80 years. With this in mind, our neighbours in Burnham have planned a full day of events for 8 May, from a two-minute silence at their war memorial at 11am, through an afternoon tea dance, to lighting the beacon at night. Dorney School will mark the day with some special activities and Year 6 pupils will be learning more about WW2 and its impact during the term. Dorney church is hoping to hold a special service of commemoration.

So, let's all make the most of this occasion; let's put up the bunting, wind up the gramophone to release Vera Lynn's voice again, bake that orange and ginger cake and give thanks that here in Dorney, at least, we still know peace.

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