

Family History Research Group

Newsletters 1-5

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Family History Group

Newsletter One



Victory in Europe

Christine Garrity

Sadly I don't have anyone to ask about memories of VE Day, but I do know that it was my Mother in Law's 17th birthday as she was born on 8th May 1928.

I had a look through a book called Four Villages, which tells the history of Brinscall, Withnell, Abbey Village and Withnell Fold, where I found the paragraph below.

Following the cessation of hostilities in Europe (VE Day), the whole of Withnell district celebrated with a huge bonfire on the top of the 'Red Delph'. This disused quarry was situated at the Bury Lane end of Boardman's Heights. This was a truly wonderful time.

This got me thinking and I started searching on the internet, where I came across the following report from the Lancashire Evening Telegraph on celebrations in East Lancashire.

Bunting and Bonfires marked VE Day

VE DAY, May 8, 1945 marked the end of the Second World War in Europe, when the Germans signed an unconditional surrender.

People came out into the streets and into the town centres, throughout the country, to celebrate the end of six years of hostilities.

The government gave the go-ahead for a public holiday, that lights could once again go on, that bonfires could be lit using salvaged materials and that “until the end of May you may buy cotton bunting without coupons, as long as it is red, white or blue, and does not cost more than one shilling and three pence a square yard.”

The stage was set for a party and it began in East Lancashire in the afternoon and continued late into the night, with dancing by floodlights and singing.

One of the celebrations was a giant bonfire at the junction of Addison Street and Devonport Road in Blackburn, which attracted hundreds of people.

Children were brought from their beds to see the fun and they roasted potatoes at the fire.

Service visitors to the YMCA enjoyed free meals, cigarettes, sweets and beds for the night.

After Churchill’s announcement, hooters, buzzers and whistles were sounded at local works across Burnley and the town hall clock was illuminated for the first time since September 1, 1939.

In Accrington, musical selections were played in Broadway, which had been lined by elms and there was floodlit dancing in the street until midnight.

Singing and waving flags, children flocked to the centre of Darwen, where the municipal buildings were bedecked with flags of the Allies and Dominions. About 10,000 people gathered for a thanksgiving service.

In the evening huge crowds walked the main street, discussing the news, youngsters let off fireworks near the Circus where a small bonfire blazed. One little girl said shyly: “I shall have a daddy now, like all the other girls.”

In Nelson, St Mary’s parish church, the tower over Barclays Bank and the town hall, were mass of floodlights and colour and 5,000 people assembled at Victoria Park where a huge bonfire was lit.

As bells pealed and services of thanksgiving took place in many places of worship, street parties were another feature of the VE celebrations.

Neighbours brought out their trestle tables and tablecloths and conjured up a party tea from the meagre war time rations.

One memory of VE Day, which remains with Ken Robinson, of Blackburn, was Winston Churchill's voice crackling over the wireless allowing 'a brief time of celebration' followed by the refrains of Vera Lynn, the Glenn Miller Band and comedian Tommy Hanley .

The last official event of VE Day was a broadcast to the nation by King George VI at 9pm. Buckingham Palace was lit up by floodlights and two searchlights made a giant 'V' above St. Paul's Cathedral.

In the early hours of May 9, the illuminations were turned off – the war in Japan was still being fought.

Isn't it amazing what you can find on the internet!

Christine found the article in a back copy of the Lancashire Telegraph your challenge this month is to find it on-line. You will have to think carefully about the search terms you use. Good luck!



This is a photograph of one of our members and his sister Margaret. The year was 1945 and he was six years old at the time. So who do you think the boy might be?

All will be revealed in the next newsletter.



What's in a Name?

Janice Parr

After setting the task of researching surnames in our last newsletter, I looked up the origins of the surname Booth on:

<https://boothancestry.wordpress.com/ancient-origins/dunham-massey-booths/>

As my Grandmother's maiden name was Booth, I got quite excited to find that the Booths of Dunham Massey had traced their origins back to Norman times and possibly made their way over from France with William the Conqueror. Could I be related to them and could my ancestors have belonged to the Gentry? I have always believed that I came from North West peasant stock.

Ken Byrom quickly disillusioned me by sending information from a book he was reading.

He informed me that the book starts with the original use of land as hunting "forests" for the King. It explains that although the forests were primarily for hunting deer, the land was so extensive that cattle could also be utilised, and they created what was called "vaccaries" (from the Norman French vache, meaning a cow) - land set aside for the grazing of cattle. This land was leased out to a boothsman for £3 per year. These herdsmen built themselves a house and cowshed in the centre of their territory and these became known as Booths. The name Booth still survives in what was the old forest, in village names such as Barley Booth and Roughlee Booth in Pendle, and Crawshaw Booth in Rossendale.

Ref. Historic Halls of Lancashire by David Brazendale

This didn't come as any surprise as the earliest Booths I have found from my family were farmers on Coppull Moor.

VE Day in Huyton

John Poole

The last Mawdesley u3a Newsletter contained a request from the Family History Group for parent/grandparent reminiscences of VE Day. There was no suggestion that any of the members themselves might have had any recollections – was this out of kindness, respect for the elderly, or disbelief that anybody that old might still have a memory! Sorry to disappoint you but –

My parents would regularly turn out the lights on hearing the air-raid warning siren – and turn them back on again on hearing the “all-clear”. The VE Day Message must have been broadcast after dark. Mum and Dad got me out of bed to witness the revelry in the (suburban) street – it obviously must have meant a lot more to them than to a 5-year old.

As if by magic, there was a piano (and pianist) in the middle of the road – and not very far away (what appeared to me) a huge bonfire. Whether this was to keep everybody warm was difficult to decide from the bedroom window – but for what seemed like years later, there was an enormous crater in the roadway where the fire had melted the tarmac!

An air-raid shelter occupying about half the width of the roadway had also been built earlier – the crater and shelter provided welcome opportunities for adventure for kids with very few toys. We would always play out in the street simply because there weren't any vehicles to speak of.

I was in the area quite recently and went back to have a look round. The houses in the street now looked all to be in private ownership (my parents rented from a private landlord). A house a few doors along had been hit by an incendiary bomb during the War (suffering superficial damage to a front porch). Needless to say, just about every house had had (probably) several facelifts in the ensuing 75 years. Oh, and getting down the street was more difficult than when there were wartime shelter and crater – there could well now be an average of at least two cars per household!

Octogenarian!

Prisoners of War and American Forces in Huyton – some interesting websites

http://www.bbc.co.uk/liverpool/content/articles/2006/04/24/huyton_internment_camp_feature.shtml

<https://www.knowsleynews.co.uk/erich-kirste/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wX6R_YUtOQ

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/51/a4517651.shtml>

Isn't it amazing what you can find on the internet!

I think we must remember that even though the celebrations took place for VE Day, the war continued in other parts of the world. It would be some time before many members of the Armed Forces made their way home.

I think we should also give some thought to the devastation left in Europe.



A bombed city somewhere in Germany

There will be many more W.W.2 articles to read in later editions of the May Newsletter.

Michael Dickinson has recommended we look at the National Archive website. At the moment, they are allowing free downloading of some records and there is also a wealth of information to be found. The hyperlink will take you to a message from the Chief Executive and Keeper of the Archive.

https://clicks.e-connectservice.com/profile/S-282241@dgO0DMb1Y-Awz_f_ITCdsaYKQOV54XUtITily7uAze0.@11

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Two



A Tale from Wartime

Martin Bryan



William Bryan, pharmacist and member of the Home Guard

Six rifles, but alas, only three bullets!

That is how my father and his platoon were equipped to defend the village of Upholland from a German invasion. Yes he was in a reserved occupation and joined the Home Guard in the rank of Sergeant.

He loved 'Dad's Army' and told me stories which could have been written for the programme, and he had characters in his platoon who mirrored those on screen. One in particular, named Ted Stewart, was a real life character of Private Walker, who was the man to go to if you wanted anything doing.

Father had to go on manoeuvres, but the Home Guard didn't have pristine uniforms. Somehow Ted Stewart presented father with a very smart light Trench Coat with epaulettes, which, apparently, was the envy of the regular officers at the camp.

The challenge of the week is to spot Martin's dad and the Private Godfrey lookalike.



Another of his reminiscences which I particularly like was that during his training, if his platoon captured a parachutist who could possibly be German, he should be made to say "Wigan Wagon Works," and if it came out as "Vigan Vagon Vorks" they should shoot him, that is if anyone could remember which rifles were empty and which had one of the three bullets.



I should have got him to write all of the stories down, but I bet a lot of them have been told in Dad's Army.

Father on manoeuvres with his Captain

A Wartime Wedding

Linda Mogg

3rd February 1945 at Aspinall Methodist Church, Manchester, Arthur Baimbridge married Ethel Marion Knight.



“Aunt Lizzie” and Ethel’s Uncle are in the middle back row

My parents Arthur then 23 years old and my mother Ethel 24 years old were married in the presence of my mother’s cousin, and one of my father’s work colleagues. Their wedding photo shows my mother and her cousin wearing smart hats and coats with small floral buttonholes. Why they chose to marry at this point is rather a mystery. Possibly it was my father’s rather bumpy relationship with his mother as the young couple went to live with “Aunt Lizzie” who resided in Stalybridge in her mid-terrace two-up-two down cottage.” Aunt Lizzie” also appears in their wedding picture, but I can’t establish any obvious family relationship; one of my brick walls!

My mother left home at 17 to follow her sister into nursing. First as a children’s nurse, then general nursing where she met my father who was recovering from appendicitis. Later on, during the war she worked at Westhulme Fever hospital, Oldham. She never talked about the war; as nurses lived on site her pre-war and wartime routines were similar. As a child my mother’s medical textbook on infectious diseases had a certain lurid interest! She did admit that German P.O.Ws were in the hospital with diphtheria and typhoid, while most were polite, others were vocal Nazis.



Before the war my father began his apprenticeship at Crossley Brothers engineering company in East Manchester. During the war they produced marine engines, so as my father was rejected by the military he continued to work there, and became a member of the Home Guard. Little was said about that except they guarded the local reservoir. His Home Guard greatcoat, plus gas mask were still in the bedroom cupboard in the 1960s.

Manchester City centre was badly bombed, but my father's only reference to this, was that his walks home from night shifts could include dodging flying shrapnel.

By May 1945 my mother was working in the local children's nursery as married women were not allowed to continue as nurses. The national scheme of day nurseries enabled mothers to continue war-work in the factories. V.E. Day must have been spent in Stalybridge with "Aunt Lizzie" who was a cotton warper in a local mill. My parents never talked about any celebrations or any of the reactions captured by the newsreels in London on that day. Perhaps for many it was just another working day.

Websites of the week

<http://wiganworld.co.uk/album/photo.php?opt=8&id=7939&gallery=76th+County+of+Lancaster+%28Golborne%29+Battn.+Home+Guard.&offset=0> will take you to Wigan World. Is Martin's dad on the photo?

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-citizens-army-1941-online> will take you to the B.F.I. website and a public information film. You will need to scroll down and click on view free. I am sure the script writers of Dad's army must have been inspired by it! Also see if you can spot the John Cleese lookalike about to do his famous walk. (Don't forget to put the film on full screen by clicking on the bottom right-hand corner.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoldEjdZlIs> will take you to an interview with the Monty Python team.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westhulme_Hospital

The mystery boy in last week's newsletter is Ken Byrom. There are more stories to come next week, including Ken's memories of VE Day.

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Three



VE DAY IN ST HELENS

Ken Byrom

I don't remember VE Day at all, although I was nearly six years old and in my second year at school.

I do recall the general election two months later in July 1945. I was still living with my mother and sister at my grandparents' house where we had stayed throughout the war. My father was still abroad in Burma; he wouldn't be home until Christmas.

The prospective MP for St Helens was Sir Hartley Shawcross. The kids in the street went around singing Sir Hartley's election song. These are all the words I remember, but I think there must have been more -

"Vote, vote, vote,
For Hartley Shawcross,
He's the best one in the land."

I also remember a joke going round at Churchill's expense. You had to say that Churchill wasn't very well. When they asked what was wrong with him, you had to say that he had "Labour pains". When I told my mother the joke, she told me that I must tell it to my Grandad, who had Tory leanings.

Hartley Shawcross was duly elected but he never thanked me for singing his song! By the way, he was a barrister, and after the war became the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials.



A photo of me and my sister Margaret sent to my father while he was serving in the Far East

AN UNPLANNED BABY

Joan Quinlan

During the months leading up to VE Day, and indeed in the following months, my mother and father must have been in a real dilemma.

In the summer of 1944, my mother was a single woman of 35, serving as a Warrant Officer in the Territorial Army. She had met my father who was a Lance Corporal in the same regiment, and they had an intimate relationship. The problem was that he was married, with an infant son and baby daughter. They decided that he would do the honourable thing and return to his family, and that I would be given up for adoption.



When her pregnancy became obvious, my mother was forced to leave the army. She gave birth to me in Gerwyn Hall, Wrexham, just 19 days before VE Day.

Eight weeks later I came to live with the lovely couple in Rufford, James and Ann Baker, who officially became my parents.





My Dad was proprietor of Causeway Garage carrying out essential work on commercial vehicles, and was a member of the Home Guard, so they had spent the war reasonably safely with access to local produce, whilst longing for a child.

After my birth, my mother went to work at the Service Women's Club in London, and later became Warden of a Land Army Hostel in Evesham. She married three years later, and she and her husband went to live in California for 27 years. Despite this 'social distancing', she and my father remained lifelong friends.

Websites of the Week

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartley_Shawcross I do wonder how much time and energy he had to devote to the affairs of St. Helen's.

https://www.google.com/search?q=hartley+shawcross+opening+speech+nuremberg&rlz=1C1LDJZ_enGB500GB568&oq=hartley&aqs=chrome.69i59l2j69i57j0j46mj0 will take you to the opening speech made by Hartley Shawcross at the Nuremberg trials. Interesting to hear his voice and see him in action even though we only get to see the back of his head. What a dreadful but important job for him to have undertaken.

<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/breaking-boundaries> this will take you to the National Army Museum website and gives information about the role women played in the A.T.S during WW2.

<http://caber.open.ac.uk/schools/stanway/army.html> this website again gives information about the role of women in during the war. Not only were those joining the A.T.S. expected to wear ill-fitting uniforms, they were also issued with khaki knickers!

Challenge of the week:

Can anyone suggest what the rest of the words to Ken's song might have been?

Family History Research Group Newsletter Four



MY PARENTS WAR

Anne Sheppard



I often wondered why my parents got married in February 1945- the bleakest, darkest most depressing month of the year. Doing a bit of research on their war records helped to answer that question.

My Dad joined up in 1939 and was assigned to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and spent some time in France before being evacuated from Dunkirk on his 21st birthday. In 1942 the army authorities realised that he had no sight in one eye having been partially blinded as a child probably by measles. He was discharged on medical grounds rather to his annoyance as he had been earning an extra sixpence a day for his excellent shooting skills at target practice! As a qualified electrician he was then deployed on refurbishing ships' electrics for the navy. In later life he said that he served in every one of the Allied navies and this was true. Apparently, the rules of war were that if an enemy ship was captured any person found not to be crew could be executed so Dad became a member of crew for the French, Canadian, American, and British navy ships. Towards the end of the war, he was sent to Bristol to work on blowing up war damaged buildings which had become dangerous. The men worked in pairs and one day when detailed to blow up some warehouses on Bristol Docks his partner set a fuse which was too short. Dad was blown some distance by the explosion and came round to find that he had completely lost his sight and hearing. Fortunately, after a week or so the sight in his good eye returned but his hearing was impaired for the rest of his life leading to total deafness in old age.



Mum had a very different war. She joined the WRENS in April 1943 and was stationed in London. We only discovered a few years before she died that by July 1943, she had been promoted to work in the Admiralty in Whitehall typing orders for the fleet, top secret work code named HMS Pembroke 111. As she had signed the Official Secrets Act, she never spoke of her work till 2013. As the war in Europe was drawing to a close there were plans to deploy all unmarried WRENS in the department to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) under the command of Lord Mountbatten. My Mum disliked him intensely calling him a snob and a womaniser and, in any case, didn't want to be sent to the Far East as she didn't like the heat! Her war record shows that she took unpaid leave in February to get married and subsequently was transferred to Ringtail camp which was in Burscough.



ROYAL NAVAL AIR STATION

STATION MOTTO, A PEARL BENEATH THE CLOUD

My Dad had returned to his family in Preston to recuperate from his experience of being blown up and Mum's family happened to live next door. They had known each other since childhood and were planning to marry after the war anyway. When the war ended in May 1945, they were able to take up their married life in Preston and enjoy many years together which only ended with Dad's death in 2008.

V.E. Day at The Square

Joy Lofthouse

My Mum, Joyce Wareing (née Charnley) was born on 18th March 1927 and she is now 93 and keeps well. She's staying with us throughout the Covid Lockdown.

Joyce was 18 on VE Day and lived with her parents in Upholland; she recollects that if war had continued, she would have been 'called up' as had a friend of hers. Her memory of VE Day was going into Wigan on the train and dancing in 'The Square'

"The Square was so busy, absolutely crowded, everyone was very happy and so excited and everyone danced with everyone else. The dancing seemed to go on forever.... there wasn't room to do a waltz so it was more dancing in circles and the conga type dances!"

She remembers dancing with a very dashing airman.... she never knew his name. It seemed to go on forever and she doesn't remember going home but must have eventually!

Joyce was born in Golborne, in a police house, her Dad was a PC. They moved to Upholland (she thought she was moving to Holland) when she was about eleven to another police house in Ormskirk Road (the little section that is now cut off for the dual carriageway to the M58). The house is on the right side of the road and their house was on the right in a solid stone terrace of four, it is still there, or was 2 years ago, opposite Chequer Lane where there was a grocery shop on the corner. Just into Chequer Lane was Greaves butcher on the left, they didn't have a shop but you could go around the back to buy meat.

During the war her Dad, wasn't called up but as a policeman was drafted into Liverpool in the Blitz. She remembers being under the kitchen table during air raids with her Mum, she has no siblings.

Joyce went to Wigan Girls High School, leaving at sixteen to attend Wigan Technical College. She studied typing and shorthand but there were also classes in book keeping, French and Economics - which she didn't think much of! After college she got a junior position, filling in for men at war, in the housing department at West Lancashire District Council, Wigan Road, Ormskirk. She remembers they had huge books and she did 'odd jobs' like filing and making cups of tea. There were three men in the department, Jimmy Dawson, his father Dickie Dawson and Thomas Edwards - they were wicked and teased her. Girls wore hats in those days and she had a blue one with red and a big brim and the men hung it on the light. Some of the men were initially fighting when she started work, certainly Thomas was. As the war finished married women weren't allowed to work in the council offices when the men came back to their original jobs. Her friend, whose husband was head at Bickerstaffe school, had to leave when she got married.

When she was twenty in 1947, Joyce married Thomas (Tom) Edwards. She had to leave WLDC. They moved into Tom's mother's house - The Hollies, 101 Liverpool Road Skelmersdale. Her mother-in-law, a widow, lived with them for part of the year and with her daughter in the Lancaster area for the rest of the year. The house, a semi, is still there it has a bungalow at the right, which was a tennis court when they lived there. (I was born 1957 when they lived in that house and the story goes that they put me in the pram at the far end of the tennis court)!



Mum and I made a cake for the V.E. Day celebrations.

We had a lockdown street party; we all sat in our own drives with tea and cake and shouted to our neighbours!



Interesting websites -

<https://images-of-burscough.co.uk/index.php/hms-ringtail/>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-liverpool-blitz>

After I sent out last week's newsletter, Christine Garrity emailed me with this comment: "It's so interesting to read such personal memories from people in the group. I looked up Hartley Shawcross and according to Google. (Yes, I know, ABC, assume nothing, believe nothing check everything) he seems to have been quite a character. He married 3 times, the third time at the age of 95!"

Family History Research Group

Newsletter Five



LONDON FIREFIGHTERS PROTECT ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Joan Quinlan



My son-in-law James's grandfather owned a construction business in London, but during the war he was a Firewatcher, charged with dealing with incendiaries and pulling survivors and the dead from the remains of London during the 56 days that the capital was targeted by The Blitz. Almost every building immediately around St Paul's had burned down, with the cathedral surviving in a

wasteland of destruction. James's 'Papa' was one of the special group; 'St Paul's Watch' urged by the prime minister to protect the cathedral from incendiaries, and its survival was mainly due to their efforts.

'Papa' told the family that when the incendiaries burned through the lead of St Paul's and landed, he and his colleagues would pick them up and throw them into a bucket of water. (In the photograph, 'Papa' is the third man from the left. I hope he put that cigarette out after his tea-break!)



EVACUATION

James's Mum, Patrice, was evacuated during the war with her mother and one-year old twin siblings, after their house in Lever Street, Islington was bombed. The selection process required people to choose their evacuees. The twins were easily chosen, but Patrice and her mother were taken to a separate place in

Wolverhampton. They could see the twins over the garden fence, but were not allowed to have contact. How heart-breaking this must have been! Their own place was packed and the people who took them in were so house-proud that no-one was permitted inside from 9am until 6pm.

James's Nana decided that she would rather face the Blitz and took herself and Patrice back to London to find a place to stay.

At the end of the war, the couple who had looked after the twins wanted to keep them, so there was a bit of a battle before they were given back. Eventually the whole family were reunited when Patrice's father returned.

WHEN THE BELLS STOPPED RINGING

Janice Parr

During World War II in Great Britain, all church bells were silenced, to ring only to inform of an invasion by enemy troops.

My partner Andy's paternal grandfather Wilf is listed in the 1939 register as a foreman bell pattern maker. He worked at Taylor's bell foundry in Loughborough and continued to work there throughout the war. I doubt if bell production continued but I haven't as yet found out what the foundry was used for.

Bell founding has taken place in the Loughborough area since the 14th century so there is a good chance that the bells of your local church were made in the town. Taylor's cast "Great Paul" for St. Pauls Cathedral, "Great George" for Liverpool Cathedral and the 23 bell carillon for Manchester Town Hall.

When peace came, Taylor's were extremely busy casting bells to replace those destroyed and damaged in air raids.

In 2018 the bells of St Paul's again fell silent for the first time since the Second World War so they could be cleaned and restored. There were concerns that the bells could fall from their mounts if they were not repaired. The 12 bells were returned to the foundry of John Taylor & Co in Loughborough, where they were cast in 1878, so specialists could remove grime and fit them with new moving parts.

<http://castingssa.com/bells-of-st-pauls-to-fall-silent-for-first-time-since-second-world-war-as-they-are-removed-for-cleaning-and-repairs/>



Wilf and Vera's son Dennis married Andy's mum Margaret in 1954 at St Peters Belgrave, Leicester. The young couple probably met through church, Wilf was Bell Captain, Choirmaster, and organist at the neighbouring St. James the Greater. Margaret designed and made her own wedding dress. They were both just twenty-two years old but had already saved enough money to pay the deposit on a new three-bedroom semi-detached house in a pleasant suburb of the city. Dennis worked for Taylor's while Margaret was employed at Wolsey garment factory in the design department. They went on to produce a family of five.

Andy is in the middle with his two brothers the two girls came along later



Margaret is now living happily at a Care Home near Bradgate Park in Leicestershire and is where she celebrated her eighty eighth birthday and VE Day during lockdown.

I have encouraged her to write down all she can remember about her life but I have many questions to ask when we are allowed to visit again.

She remembers a big street party on VE Day 1945 and the great excitement and relief everybody felt. Of the food on offer at the party, she remembers very little but of the rabbits, she had quite a bit to say. During the war the family kept several in the back garden. She enjoyed playing with them and gave them all names. Every so often, one would go missing which really puzzled her, John her older brother told her that unfortunately rabbits were excellent escape artists. It was rather odd though that every time one of the bunnies went missing, "chicken pie" appeared on the table!