

Victory

On 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered and the war in Europe was over. Two days of national holiday were announced and the following day was declared 'VE Day' (Victory in Europe). The initial celebrations were spontaneous as people danced in the streets. Although the official end of the Blackout was not until 15 July, bonfires were lit and one at Wigginton could be seen for several miles. A captured Nazi flag was laid across the road in Berkhamsted for people to drive and walk over and another one was set alight in Nash Mills, Hemel Hempstead.

Thanksgiving services were held and church bells were rung. The bells of the parish church at Kings Langley were rung by four of the bellringers who had performed the same duty at the end of the First World War. The bells of St Mary's Church, Hemel Hempstead, rang from 2.00pm to 5.00pm on the second day of the national holidays.

On 6 August the United States of America dropped the first nuclear bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The Japanese surrendered three days later, when a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki. 'VJ Day' (Victory in Japan) was celebrated on 16 August, but the mood was rather quieter. A number of organised events were held in September and October to celebrate both VE and VJ Days.

A year later, in May 1946, the Government announced that it was to spend £380 million on creating 20 new towns, which would house one million people. One of these towns was Hemel Hempstead, which would shortly change beyond all recognition.

The residents of Deaconsfield Road, Hemel Hempstead, organised a party for local children to celebrate VE and VJ Days. The party was held at Crabtree School on Saturday, 1 September 1945. Various sports and races were held in the afternoon and a special tea was followed by a cinema show, conjurer and ventriloquist. The party ended with a bonfire and fireworks. (DACHT : HH 2228.88)

The Marlowes Canteen operated throughout the war, offering servicemen and women modestly priced refreshments. It was also a popular meeting place, with provision for billiards and table tennis. The canteen was run by volunteers for the six years of its existence and, inside the programme, praise was given for the, "willing and cheerful volunteers, whose loyalty is manifested by the fact that not once throughout the war was there a breakdown in the service." The back page is printed with a number of memories including, "Sirens, Rattling Windows, Ominous Crashes, Black Out and Torches." (DACHT : HH 2228.87)

Demolition of anti-blast wall outside the Time Office, at John Dickinson's. (DACHT : 62.12.12)



This card was given to John Dickinson employees to commemorate the victory and stated that a 'Victory Bonus' would be paid. (DACHT : 1391.3)



A street party to celebrate VE Day at Hillfield Road, Hemel Hempstead. Street parties were held throughout the borough for the local children, who enjoyed an open air tea and entertainment in the form of games, competitions and, in the case of Gaddesden Row, donkey rides. (DACHT : 62.30.5.1-3)



By the end of the war, over 55 million people had been killed. During the celebrations of VE and VJ Days, silences were held to remember those who had lost their lives, both servicemen and women and civilians. (DACHT : 3112.08)



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