



Heanor & District Local History Society

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VE DAY 75th ANNIVERSARY

(Contributed by Clive Booth)



On the 7th May 1945, after five and half years of conflict in the European theatre of World War II, the German army surrendered unconditionally to the Allied forces, bringing to an end a major part of the largest armed conflict the world had ever seen.

The next day, the 8th May, was declared VE Day (*Victory in Europe Day*), a public holiday, when there would be celebrations and street parties all over the country - and our area would be no different.

But, before we look at the celebrations in Heanor and the surrounding district, let's take a look at the situation leading up to it. The surrender of Germany was anticipated and it had already been announced, by the Government, that the day following the capitulation of the German forces would be a public holiday. People were therefore already in a state of excitement, not at the thought of a day off from work and a party, but because of all the other implications. The fighting would end, loved ones would return home, there'd be no more air raids, no more black-outs and the easing of rationing was on the horizon.

People were therefore waiting eagerly for VE Day, they knew it was coming - but just not when. On the 8th May the Derby Daily Telegraph reported as follows:

VE-DAY DELAY LEFT CROWDS PUZZLED AND IMPATIENT



Derby yesterday received the news of the end of the greatest war in history in a manner that was something of an anti-climax after the expectancy created by earlier reports that it was only a matter of hours before the final announcement.

At each hour groups gathered outside radio shops in



Hampden Street, Langley Mill

the hope of hearing the announcement of Germany's unconditional surrender. It came - but from German sources only. Hours passed and there was still nothing from our own Government.

Instead of the expected excitement the mood changed to one of impatience over the niceties of international procedure and the demand was, in effect; "Let's have the news that it's VE-Day and be done with it."

A Trent conductress at Derby 'bus station on seeing the Telegraph headlines, shouted: "That's good enough for me. I've got a day off."

A man grumbled; "We've got it from every country in the world except our own."

The 'official' announcement of the cessation of hostilities did eventually come from the Government, enabling the celebrations to get under way. Overleaf is how the Ripley and Heanor news reported the surrender in its 11th May 1945 edition:



Lower Dunstead Road, Langley Mill

The War in Europe is Over GERMANY SURRENDERS UNCONDITIONALLY

Germany capitulated unconditionally to the Allies on Monday, so the war in Europe is over. Every living member of the German armed forces is now technically a prisoner of war.

The announcement was made by the B.B.C. in the nine o'clock news on Monday night, and accordingly Tuesday was VE Day and was, generally speaking, observed as a holiday excepting in the matter of decorating, most people being busy with flags and bunting. And then about 11 o'clock down came the rain, and it poured for several hours, accompanied by flashes of lightning and claps of thunder.

The good old British weather, eh? But it didn't dampen people's enthusiasm.

The surrender document had been first signed by Germany at 2.41am on the 7th May, and it stipulated that all hostilities would cease at 11.01pm on the 8th May, though in practice they ceased immediately.

As stated earlier, the surrender was not unexpected and many plans had already been made in anticipation of the document being signed. The term 'VE Day' had first been used in September 1944, so the people had known it was coming for some time. The Government had even issued instructions as to how the VE-Day celebrations should be carried out. The Ripley & Heanor News edition for the 4th May 1945 reminded people what these were:

The Government have suggested how "VE" Day celebrations should be carried out, viz. church bells to be rung, special services of thanksgiving, "VE" Day and the next to be public holidays, and the Sunday following a National Day of Prayer and thanksgiving. Bonfires will be permitted, but must not burn salvage. Cinemas, etc., to be kept open, festivities in parks and open

spaces arranged, and sympathetic consideration given to applications for the extended opening hours of licensed premises. Food shops should remain open a few hours on "VE" Day, and close the next day, but supplies of milk and bread must continue.

There are to be no more warning sirens, and hooters can be sounded. Lighting restrictions are abolished except within five miles of the coast.

It was announced in the same newspaper that the Government had decided to speed up the release of men from the Forces, and that the first would be demobbed within six weeks of VE Day, giving many people hope that they would soon be reunited with loved ones.

The same 4th May 1945 edition of the Ripley & Heanor News also reported on the instructions issued for food traders locally as follows:

"VE" Day and Food Trade

Ministry of Food gave the following advice in regard to food trade arrangements for VE Day and VE-plus-one Day. Traders are asked to make their arrangements in advance, to let their staff and customers know by posters in their shop windows. Grocers should remain open on VE Day for at least one hour and, if possible, for two hours after the announcement has been made. If VE Day should come on a Friday grocers are asked to open on the Saturday and close on the Monday. Dairymen must deliver milk both on VE Day and VE Day-plus-one. Restaurants are asked to keep open on those days. Bakers are asked to keep to keep open for an hour, if necessary two hours, after the announcement and to open on VE-Day-plus-one for an hour or two for the sale of bread only. Shops dealing in perishable goods such as fish, vegetables and where sufficient storage is not



Midland Road Road Chapel, Heanor



Langley, Heanor
(Photo courtesy of Jacquie Maxted)

available, meat, should keep open for a sufficient time to clear stocks.

They had instructions for the Post Offices too:

Post Office Services on Cease Fire Day

Public counters will remain open for an hour after the signal has been given, or until the usual time, whichever is earlier. No further delivery of letters and parcels will commence after the signal, but if the final collection of the day has not been made letter boxes will be finally cleared for the day. On the public holiday following the cease fire day main Post Offices will only be open from 9.00am until 12 noon. The large country sub-post offices will be open from 9 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. All classes of business will be transacted. Pensions and allowances may be presented for payment at any office which is open irrespective of the normal office of payment. There will be no deliveries or collections. Telephone services will be available as usual, but with reduced staff, and the public are asked to avoid using the telephone (or telegraph) services during the celebrations period except for really urgent matter. The cheap rate for telephone calls made in the evening will be suspended on Cease Fire Day, and will not be resumed until the next ordinary working day after the end of the cease fire holiday period.

It seems that almost everything would be closing down for the VE Day celebrations. But what of the celebrations themselves around our area? We'll start at Loscoe, where the Ripley & Heanor News (11th May 1945) reported:

Denby Lane Mission, Loscoe, held a thanksgiving service on Tuesday evening, conducted by Miss Nancy Slack, when a fairly large number attended. The choir ably rendered the anthem "Gratitude to God."

A thanksgiving service was held at Loscoe Baptist Church, conducted by four members - Mr. D. Tarlton, Mr. Sims, Mr. B. Platt and Councillor J. W. Lilley. There was a large attendance. The choir rendered Jackson's "Te Deum" and Mr. G. Thorpe ably rendered the solo, "Consecration Hymn."

A thanksgiving service was held in St. Luke's Church, Loscoe, on VE night, when the church was full. The service was conducted by the Vicar (Rev. C. J. Ough). Communion service was held on Wednesday morning.

Loscoe Denby Lane people had a good VE Day. Two large bonfires, with effigies of Hitler and Goering in the middle, were set ablaze at dusk and burned until 5 a.m. on Wednesday morning.

On Wednesday afternoon the womenfolk of the district provided tea for over 100 children of the district, set out in Grammer Street. After tea, games and sports were held in a field close by.

At the Loscoe Denby Lane VE-Day festivities prizes for sports were given in saving stamps to the value of £3 11s. 6d. The field for sports and games was kindly lent by Mr. Hicking. Competitions were held for eggs and cigarettes.

In the same edition, the Ripley and Heanor News also reported on Heanor and Smalley's celebrations:

At Heanor the town was gaily decorated and services of thanksgiving held. Big bonfires were lighted at the Coppice and Woodside Collieries and in Smalley



Langley Farm, Heanor
(Photo courtesy of Jacquie Maxted)



Holbrook Street, Heanor

district. In Nelson Street area there was an outdoor tea for the children, and a sing-song. Also in several other parts of the district.

On the Sunday following VE Day, the 13th May, Heanor Urban District Council organised a United Service of Thanksgiving on the Town Ground commencing at 3.00pm. There was to be a parade of Magistrates, Members of the Council, Civil Defence Organisations, the British Legion, the GTS (*Girls Training Corps*), the ATS (*Auxiliary Territorial Service*), Girl Guides, Red Cross and other organisations. They were to assemble on the Market Place at 2.15pm for the parade to the Town Ground where there would be massed choirs to lead the singing under the direction of Mr Albert Angell, L.R.A.M. and services led by local clergy and ministers.

At Codnor the residents of Jessop Street celebrated on VE Day, but those in the West Hill area threw their big bash on the weekend following. This is how it was reported in the Ripley & Heanor News edition of the 18th May 1945.

CODNOR

One of the best sights for some time in Codnor was witnessed in the West Hill district last Saturday, when the parents of Cross Lane, West Hill and Pinewood Avenue organised a tea for the children, to commemorate VE Day. Some 53 children sat down, followed by 68 parents. After tea a sports programme was gone through, under the capable management of Mr. A. Buckley and Mr. T. Gordon and helpers, and prizes awarded. A slow bicycle race and musical chairs evoked much laughter.

Music was provided by Master J. Burgoyne and Master Jeff Parrott. Later on ice cream and biscuits were given to the children, and light refreshments to the

parents. Cigarettes and tobacco were given to the elder gentlemen, and each child received 2s. Thanks are extended to the people for the loan of various utensils. A huge bonfire, with Hitler's effigy in the centre, community singing, and dancing brought the day to an end.

All the children of Jessop Street, 14 years and under were entertained to a victory tea in the Wesleyan Schoolroom on Tuesday, after which they were given ice cream and a bag of sweets, and later played games in a field kindly lent by Mr. Wilson. The tea was provided by the residents of Jessop Street, and collected

by Mrs. Newton and Mrs. Shaw. Other ladies helped serve the tea.

Of course, whilst all these celebrations were going on, lots of people were still away in both the armed forces and prisoner of war camps, and it would take some time to get them all back home. But, as the Derby Daily Telegraph reported on the 17th May 1945, the process had already started.

In the midst of (*VE-Day*) celebrations, there arrived at Derby L.M.S. station some of the men who had suffered to make victory possible – an ambulance trainload of ex-prisoners who had returned by air from Germany, where they had been hiding in woods and barns from German guards.

Some were weak and exhausted as the result of long months without proper food, others had old-standing wounds. Some were airborne men from Arnhem.

The station crowd cheered them as they were taken to our hospitals in ambulances. They smiled and waved in return. It was a VE-Day sidelight which those who saw it will never forget.



Bank Street, Langley Mill