The Premier (Winston Churchill) and His Majesty the King will broadcast to the nation, it is understood that in accordance with the three Great Powers that an official announcement will made by the Prime Minister at 3 O-clock today 8th May 1945.

Winston Churchill became Prime Minister on the 10th May 1940, as German tanks rolled into France and the Low Countries his predecessor Neville Chamberlain had resigned because of the failure of Allied Operations in Norway in Spring 1940. This was an unusual promotion as Churchill had been directly involved in the very campaigns that led to Chamberlain’s resignation.

Churchill’s qualities lay in his charismatic leadership and lack of fear in making decisions that not everyone agreed with. He was fallible, suffering depression in what he called his ‘Black Dog’ days, but as a master of rhetoric he had few equals in British history and he was to gain status as a talismatic figure to civilians and soldiers alike not only in the British Army but in Allied Forces too.

Monty, Britain’s finest Field Commander

General Bernard Montgomery ‘Monty’ is regarded as the best British Field Commander of the WWII. Monty’s career began in the trenches of WWI as an Infantryman on the western Front; this left him with revulsion at the needless slaughter of soldiers. Monty spent his career making sure that soldiers were not needless sacrificed. He won many campaigns and was well respected for his military and strategic battle skills.

However, Monty like Churchill was a charismatic figure with a lack of tact and some vanity he would regularly castigate his peers if necessary and famously banned Churchill from visiting Normandy and arrested De Gaulle without permission when he landed there.

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In Corby the Local newspaper joyfully mentioned that ‘In view of the fact that tomorrow, Tuesday 8th May, will be treated as Victory in Europe day and will be regarded as a holiday. The day following, Wednesday, May 9th will also be a holiday’. Corby resident Evelyn Craddock recalled, ‘The Piano’s came out into the street. Tables were placed on the green. People pulled together in a real community effort chipping in with money and delving deep into their larders and stores, coming up with a really good spread for the table’.

People had held back and learned to live meagrely through times of rationing and financial hardship and VE Day signalled a light at the end of the tunnel. Evelyn goes on to mention what it was like to celebrate properly without constraint. ‘We had luxuries like icing for cake and made marzipan substitutes: an Almond paste using semolina. The local shopkeepers and Bakers did their bit too and were really generous it’s amazing what everyone managed to contribute.’

“people rejoiced at the end to hostilities that had brought so much fear and misery to the nation.”

Many people in Corby had Fathers, Brothers and sons who had fought in the war and some who still were fighting even though VE Day had been declared. May Taylor recalled that, ‘There was a Home coming party for the workers at Stewarts and Lloyds at the South Road Public Hall. We went to a dance at the Nags Head, where the RAF Dance Band from Benefield came along and played.’

The Celebrations went on throughout the two day holidays and beyond as people rejoiced at the end to hostilities that had brought so much fear and misery to the nation.

Children throughout the war had become accustomed to the shortages with homemade toys and substitute egg powder in food, but VE Day brought joy and sorry in equal measure in remembrance for children who had lost a Dad or an older brother. Local lad Stan Barran speaks about his memories as a child. ‘On VE night lots of children gathered wood to light celebration fires. We were getting a fire together on waste ground off the High Street, when we met a bloke who had a horse and trap which he’d left outside the Cardigan Arms. When he came out he was well and truly drunk, and offered us the large wooden trap for our fire! We were very grateful and it helped make a good fire. I remember later picking out the bits of metal from the ashes.

Children Gathered to Celebrate
Margaret Dickson, Ambulance Driver

97 year old Great Grandmother Margaret Dickson (nee Sneddon) fondly remembers her time in Corby during World War II; her family came to the pioneering Steel Town in 1935 from the steel heartlands of Motherwell in Scotland. The war was hard, even hell at times and Margaret volunteered as an Ambulance Driver working with the St John Brigade in Corby, many people volunteered but few could drive and even fewer were female drivers. A memory that stays with Margaret is when she met the Duchess of Gloucester, recalling that her eyes were the most beautiful blue colour.

The family lived in number 10 Occupation Road and when the end of the war was announced Margaret recalled, ‘Everybody went mad, baking cakes, pancakes and buns, people gave up their ration tokens for the celebrations. Party’s were held in the middle of the street, I remember a party in Highfield Grove’. Margaret said ‘the war was difficult’ but she remembers with great fondness, ‘I spent a many a happy year in Corby’.

Good Old Rations

Before the Second World War started Britain imported about 55 million tons of food a year from other countries. After war was declared in September 1939, the British government had to cut down on the amount of food it brought in from abroad as German submarines started attacking British supply ships. There was a worry that this would lead to shortages of food supplies in the shops so the British government decided to introduce a system of rationing.

Rationing made sure that people got an equal amount of food every week. The government was worried that as food became scarcer, prices would rise and poorer people might not be able to afford to eat. There was also a danger that some people might hoard food, leaving none for others.

Meat, Cheese, Bacon and other foods were rationed and people were encouraged to grow their own vegetables at home to supplement rationing.

London Celebrates

It cannot be forgotten that London was the focus of celebration on VE Day and this city had as much cause as any city to be jubilant at the news that Europe was peaceful once more. During a 34 week period London was bombed 71 times but the worst night arrived on the 7th September 1940 when London became the target for Germany’s Blitzkrieg suffering a total of 57 consecutive nights of bombing. It is with little wonder that the front page of the Northamptonshire ‘News and Chronicle’ carry’s the image of a lit up St Paul’s Cathedral defiant survivor and symbol of London and its people who endured much throughout the war.

A special thank you to Margaret Dickson for sharing her war time memories.
A message from;
Corby Borough Council's Lead Member for Community and Member for Veterans, Cllr John McGhee;

Corby Borough Council commemorate all those who took part in, or, were involved in any way with the Herculean effort made during World war II in liberating Europe from a common enemy.
The current Covid 19 Lockdown has meant that a planned open air event on Friday 8th May, 2020, outside the Corby Cube could not go ahead. Corby Borough Council wish, in some small way, that this publication of how Corby people celebrated the end of hostilities in Europe, brings all of us a little of the 1945 spirit as we look toward a better future.

More Images of Corby Celebrating VE Day

Families celebrate VE Day and the end of a long War. This could be Studfall Avenue or perhaps Occupation Road, if you know where it is and better still if you know any names in the picture please e-mail billy.dalziel@corby.gov.uk. Any information helps with future exhibitions or work on our collections.

These fine children are celebrating the end of WWII and it looks like they’ve taken a break from the party behind (see bunting in middle of picture) to get their photo taken for this historic day.

Deene Close, VE Day (L to R) Rodger Hawkins, Darren Charnly, Richard Charnly, Edward Charnly, Jean Banon, ?, ?, Julie Hawkins, Barbara Trowman, Jean Sweeney, Betty Vale, Morean Anderson, Betty Banon, Jean Charnly, Mary McLine, Tommy Preston, Helen McCartney, Dianne Charnly