

FRIENDS OF GOSPORT MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2005

FRIENDS SUMMER SOCIAL

12.30 - 3.30 on Sunday 3rd July

at Grange Farm, Rowner

Cold Buffet and Wine

Tickets £7-50 available from

the Discovery Centre

LACOCK ABBEY VILLAGE & MUSEUM

Coach Trip on Saturday
24th September

The February Newsletter contained a brief description of the Village & Abbey as well as a booking form for this trip.

A few places still available - contact:-

Mary Duly, 4 Westcliff Close, Lee-on-the-Solent PO13 9JS Tel: 02392 359804

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THIRTY-EIGHT members attended the Annual General Meeting held in the Discovery Centre on the 18th May and approved a new Constitution for the Friends of Gosport Museum. The Chairman thanked members for their support during what had been a difficult year with the Museum being closed for much of the time as the new Discovery Centre was fashioned and furnished. He thanked Joan Russell who is retiring from the post of Project Director and congratulated her on a wonderful year which saw the publication of her book, *Gosport 800*, her election as Citizen of the Year, and riding in a horse-drawn carriage in the Founders Day Parade last August. He also congratulated the Curator on putting together the new exhibitions in the Discovery Centre. Following her report the Curator answered a number of questions about the future of the Museum and explained some of the difficulties that had to be overcome.

Tim Wills, the Manager of the Discovery Centre informed us about his career in the Royal Navy and Theatre Management prior to being appointed to his present post. He reported that there has been a very considerable increase in the number of people using the Centre compared to those who previously visited the Central Library and the former Museum. He is looking forward to introducing many more events and projects to meet the needs of the people of Gosport.

MEMORIES OF VE DAY

from Joan Symonds

I first heard that the war was over when I was doing my French homework; everyone soon went into the garden, passing on the news to neighbours - no more homework that evening !!

My clearest memory of the next day - V.E. Day - is being part of a great crowd in Portsmouth Guildhall Square, with everyone singing and dancing in circling groups. The tune I especially recall was "The Yellow Rose of Texas". It was a really international gathering with servicemen and women from all the Allies and from all branches of the three services. Many had exchanged or lost caps, and were climbing all over the statues.

Gosport celebrated the end of the war with Borough events. I remember one in St. George's Field and one at St. Vincent's. I'm really not sure which was for VE Day and which for VJ Day in August. There were hundreds of marching servicemen and women, Marine bands and various processions, including the Mayor and Council in their robes. It was certainly patriotic, even jingoistic. It seemed that all Gosport was there; nearly all walked, everyone cheered and sang vigorously. I remember a real sense of being part of a warm and thankful community.

from Mary Duly

Such news as "The war is won !!" circulates pretty quickly !! Westfield College students (girls only in those days) bubbled with excitement when we queued for breakfast on the lovely staircase to the dining room of St Peter's College to which we were evacuated from London (Oxford students under false pretences) on the morning of May 8th 1945. My group of friends quickly decided we would head for London.

We knocked up a picnic lunch for survival purposes from what was to hand. Remember rationing was strict. I found an egg, hard-boiled it - or so I thought, but discovered to my embarrassment when I tried to eat it in a very crowded railway compartment that it was anything but a real test of eating etiquette !

Something told us to head for Parliament Square. Getting there from Paddington Station was no problem - the public services were running well. Everywhere was crowded - young and old, civilians mingling with service folk of many nations (U.S.A., Free French, and Polish as well as our own services). The atmosphere was euphoric, a mixture of relief and happiness.

The highlight of the day was the realisation that the car slowly approaching from Whitehall carried Mr Churchill, the hero of the hour, standing up, beaming and demonstrating the famous V-sign, on his way to make the official announcement to Parliament. Even better, the crowd parted just where we stood and the car passed slowly right beside us: we couldn't have had a better view, or left with a more wonderful memory.

I stayed on in London for a lovely meal in Soho with a family whose daughter had been evacuated to my Yorkshire village. When with them the happy news came through to two Australian boys in our party that the brother thought missing was safe.

I though with relief and thanksgiving of my three brothers, now out of danger, all who had been involved since the war began. Edward who had been on his first voyage as a cadet in the Merchant Navy, Peter and John both in the army, Peter on searchlight and John a veteran of D-Day. Now all safe, thank God.

P.S. Now, in retrospect, I feel guilty that I was a student and not in uniform. But it was not expected of me then, no one made me feel a shirker.

from Joan Russell

It is difficult to describe the immense wave of relief and elation that the news of the German Surrender brought to wartime Britain 60 years ago. It was an electrifying experience, engulfing us all, young and old, rich and poor, soldier and civilian, in town and country alike. So when, on that blessed Sunday afternoon at Church Farm in May 1945, the sudden peel of church bells rang out for the first time in over five and a half years, my landlady screamed with shock, and wept. We all rushed outside, and gazed up in wonder at the Church Tower amongst the yew and elm trees etched against a blue, blue sky. The ancient bells jangling out their message of Germany's surrender seemed at that moment the most exciting sound I had ever heard in my life.

Many villagers came running from their cottages to join us, some laughing, some crying, and men and boys wrestling with each other. Tom Horwood suggested a Victory Bonfire party over in his field called "The Riddy", after the afternoon milking. We drifted indoors to listen for an announcement on the wireless, but the accumulator battery had run out.

Mabel gave her husband Tom an unheard of instruction. He was to go to the gate with a dipper and a large jug to skim all the cream off one of the churns awaiting the milk lorry, and to tie a notice round the churn announcing it was "SKIM". This broke her wartime rule never to take cream for her household until cream was available again for everyone.

Old Uncle and Grandpa took some boys to the barns and woodstack to look out stuff for the bonfire. Charlie was sent to fetch the Horwood relatives, who soon arrived with a ham and two dozen bottles of fizzy "pop". Meanwhile I was setting out the best tumblers in the big parlour, and putting out some special biscuits. Next, I made myself useful in the kitchen, helping weigh up flour, sugar and eggs ready for extra baking.

When we were all assembled, Tom ceremoniously poured a good measure of fresh cream into each tumbler, and Mabel topped it up with sweet fizzy pop. We then toasted King George VI and Winston Churchill and "*All our boys - God send them home soon*". In those days no one seemed to count the women's forces, they were so outnumbered by the men.

I was wildly excited, and I have to admit that the sweet, rich, fizzy drink tasted at that moment like the nectar of the gods to me. Nothing before or since ever tasted the same, accompanied as it was by the intense communal elation which the German Surrender had made almost tangible.

All evening we danced and sang to an accordion and ate around the bonfire with old and young baking still more potatoes in the ashes. Finally we leaned against the five-bar gate in the moonlight, talking, talking, talking our heads off. Finally Mabel came out to remind her son Charlie that it would soon be time for the early morning milking.

In those first sweet hours of victory everything seemed possible. I longed to go home to Southampton, my student friends - that close-knit circle from University College, Southampton whom the war had so abruptly dispersed, and my brothers and cousins in the Army, Navy and Fleet-Air-Arm were all coming home ! Wartime letters would no longer link us to each other from the four corners of the earth.

And our beloved Southampton High Street would rise again from its fire-bombed ashes just the same as it used to be. Everything would return to its peacetime normality, which Vera Lynn sang of. "*When Johnny will go to sleep in his own little bed again*". Except of course, that in six years Johnny had outgrown his own little bed. And there never had been any "*bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover . . .*"

HOWEVER it turned out that Wingrave, like many other places all over the country, had jumped the gun. The bells had rung prematurely on that lovely Sunday May 6th 1945, as rumours of the German surrender swept the country.

It was two days later, on Tuesday May 8th that V.E.DAY was officially declared in a radio broadcast by the Prime Minister. Having told the King and Queen the news over lunch at Buckingham Palace, Mr Churchill was delighted to tell us that the German High Command had surrendered to General Eisenhower in the early hours of Monday morning and agreed that "*Hostilities in Europe would cease officially from Midnight tonight*".

The whole country went mad with spontaneous celebrations of joy and relief. Some went on for days. But for me nothing was ever so sweet as that first premature celebration at Wingrave !

from Margaret Roberts

When asked to contribute my memories of VE and VJ days in 1945 I realised to my surprise that none would come to mind. So I asked my sister about VE Day and she reminded me that the 8th May was our maternal grandmother's birthday. This one was her 76th and Elsie remembered visiting her at Parham Road. She had a day off from work in the Parks Department of Gosport Council, but doesn't remember if it was a special day off or one due to her for working the previous Saturday morning.

**Friends of Gosport
Museum Committee**

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Just as on D Day which had brought back such vivid memories, I was still a WREN on HMS Marshal Soult in the Dockyard on VE Day. I am sure that work must have proceeded as usual if rather more light-heartedly.

However the war was far from over for us as my father, a navy man, was somewhere on the high seas. He had taken passage to Australia where he stayed for a month or two. Now he had moved on we knew not where.

It wasn't until he came back home some time after the war we heard of his travels. He took passage on another ship searching for HMS Illustrious somewhere on the high seas beyond Australia. I remember him telling me that when at last they tracked down HMS Illustrious he had to be transferred to it by boatswains chair. This involved being winched somehow along secured wires between the ships in a kind of hoist. It was, he said, a very frightening experience dangling in mid-air over the ocean.

Not long after he arrived on board HMS Illustrious VJ Day arrived on August 18th 1945 and soon he was looking forward to the journey back to England. However he had to leave the ship in Australia - what a disappointment.

Soon he was on his way by plane to Singapore to be Barrack-master of the Dockyard after the surrender of the Japanese. I have a photograph of him with his staff there. So we didn't see him again for some time, but at least the war was over.

**Please send contributions for the Newsletter
to Bob Whiteley, FGM Newsletter Editor
5 Grange Farm, Little Woodham Lane,
Gosport PO13 8 AB**

The views expressed are not necessarily those of
The Hampshire CC Museums Service or its staff

**Membership of the Friends of Gosport
Museum is open to all - Please contact any
Committee member or ask at the Discovery
Centre for a Membership Application form.**

**This Newsletter was printed and produced with
the help of the Museum**

Curator's Corner

Dear everyone,

Gosport Discovery centre is now open and we are all learning to work in a different way. Change is always difficult but it is amazing how quickly we get used to it.

I'm still working on restoring some order in the collections after the chaos of the work for the Museum on the Mezzanine display. We are developing a new Museum store in the old meetings room which can be opened on occasion to the public and to researchers. It is slow work but we are progressing as fast as we can.

Many of the photographs from the Museum collection have been digitised and are on the web site as 'Gosport Photos' in Local Studies. (www.discoverycentres.co.uk/gosport). Staff at Museums Headquarters spent months doing the work so we are very grateful to them. Many of the Museum-held maps have been integrated with the library collection - this work is on-going. Again, it takes a lot of time.

There have been one or two enquiries about the old green folders of material which used to be in the Museum coffee shop. They had become very shabby and needed replacing. Many of the photographs are available on the web site; and most of the written material is available on the shelves in Local Studies. There were some unpublished articles in the old files which will be made available as soon as possible - they won't be thrown away.

Exhibitions are back in the Gosport Gallery - don't forget to go and see 'Ship to Shore The Maritime Paintings of Colin Baxter' which will be on display from June 25 to August 27. It has

been specially timed to coincide with the Fleet Review and all the other local maritime events this Summer. The private view is on Friday June 24 when Colin Baxter will be present. Please feel free to pop in if you would like - you won't need a formal invitation.

The showcases of Museum objects in the Discovery Centre's Main Site (library building) will need changing soon. Does anyone have any thoughts on what they would like to see displayed? Let me know soon if you have.

One of the cases in the Museum on the Mezzanine displays is a community case, currently occupied by Gosport Model Yacht Club. This case will need changing in October. If anyone is a member of a local group which might want a display for 6 months or so, let me know.

If you have any concerns about anything to do with the Museum Service, please let me know. One of the very important roles of the Friends of Gosport Museum is to provide a link between the Curator and the community. Keep in touch!

Oonagh Palmer
June 13, 2005