

# A MOMENT OF SHARED CELEBRATION

## Thursday 8 May 2025

# VE DAY 80

**PLANS BY WEST HORSLEY PARISH COUNCIL TO CELEBRATE THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY ARE WELL UNDERWAY. THERE WILL BE TWO MAIN EVENTS**

### MORNING COFFEE, CAKE AND A CHAT AT WEST HORSLEY VILLAGE HALL

Join members of the West Horsley Parish Council (WHPC) for coffee, hear the VE Day 80 Proclamation and listen to local historian June Davey share anecdotes of what life was like in Horsley towards the end of WWII.

This will be a free, ticketed event. Keep an eye on the WHPC website for more information.



### HERE IN EAST HORSLEY

VE Day will be commemorated by a display of flags throughout the village. In addition, we are pleased to present the following special supplement with accounts of what daily life was like living in the Horsleys during the war.

Our special thanks to contributors Susan Little, Wendy Rumble, Brian Dunning, Peter Poole and Clifton Clarke. We are also indebted to the late Pam Bowley who, in 1986, published 'East and West Horsley in World War II', a short but exceptionally valuable book detailing village life in wartime Britain.



### BEACON LIGHTING AND JAZZ NIGHT AT WEST HORSLEY PLACE

The main VE Day 80 celebration will take place in the stunning grounds of West Horsley Place. This will be a free community event suitable for all ages. Throughout the evening there will be live music performed by the Sarah Jane Eveleigh Jazz Quartet, and a series of free 1940s SWINGDYHOP dance workshops to sign up for. Climb aboard one of our WWII jeeps for a family photo opportunity and enjoy some games in the recently opened Sensory Garden.

You are invited to find a picnic spot in the beautiful Rose Garden, and tuck into some of the locally produced food and drink that will be on offer. Enjoy some traditional fayre from Howes Fish & Chips, artisan sausages and burgers from Rupert's Street Catering, and ice cream from Gray's Gelato. Wash it all down with a hot cup of English tea from Tigerlily Bus Company, a gin & tonic from Silent Pool, an ale, lager or a soft drink from The King William IV tent or a glass of sparkling wine from the WHPC pop-up bar.

Towards the end of the evening assemble in front of the Manor House and join communities across the UK to light our beacon.

West Horsley Parish Council is looking for volunteers to assist during the evening event. If you are interested, please email [clerk@westhorsley.info](mailto:clerk@westhorsley.info). There will be a free drink waiting for all volunteers at the WHPC pop-up bar.

To be the first to hear more about these events please join the WHPC emailing list at: [www.westhorsley.info](http://www.westhorsley.info).



## BUILD UP TO WAR

**"THE TEACHERS AND PUPILS THEN ALL CROUCHED UNDER THEIR DESKS UNTIL THE ALL-CLEAR WAS GIVEN"**

Even before war was declared the evacuation of children began and the Horsleys were among the villages chosen to receive some. When the children arrived, they were given medical examinations before being allocated to the various households. Those who lodged the evacuees were paid 12s 6d (62 1/2 pence) per child per week by the government. It wasn't only humans evacuated to Horsley. For example, a number of valuable racehorses were evacuated to the stables at West Horsley Place and the nearby barn was one of the locations where Messrs Thompson & Taylor of Brooklands safely stowed their racing cars during the duration of the war.

With the increased number of children in the Horsleys, the schools were very overcrowded. Classes at Saint Martin and Saint Mary schools had to be split in two with some children attending in the morning and others in the afternoon.

The headmistress of Saint Martin's from 1942 until after the war was Miss Hawkes. She had between 50 and 60 pupils and, as there was no air raid shelter, she had an arrangement with the ARP (air raid protection) wardens to telephone her if the alarm sounded. The teachers and pupils then all crouched under their desks until the all-clear was given.



*"With increased fear of bombing, beds were moved down to the basement of our shop"*

**SUSAN LITTLE WRITES:**

I was born six months before war broke out in 1939. I had an idyllic childhood in East Horsley but, as I grew up, I became acutely aware of the war. Early memories of blackout curtains, air raid warnings, searchlights and droning enemy aircraft stand out. East Horsley was on the German bomber flight path to London. During air raids, we could hear the siren clearly, three miles away in Bookham. At night, when we heard the siren, our family went down to an office from our top floor flat in Bishopsmead Parade, and I was carried in a blanket. We sat it out down there, until the 'all clear' was sounded, and I could sense the relief as we climbed back upstairs to bed. Later on during the war, with increased fear of bombing, beds were moved down to the basement of our shop where we slept every night.

My father, Kenneth Chown, was not called up into the armed services, due to a physical disability. He joined the Auxiliary Fire Service and served with the Horsley unit, which used a wooden garage near the railway station as its headquarters. I remember the hut was fitted out with bunk beds and I am told it was unheated!

Food rationing was strict in those days and I saw at first-hand how it was carried out in my parents' shop. Customers were registered with a grocer and collected their rations weekly. Some weeks when the ration of, say, butter was meagre, it was issued fortnightly to householders. Lard, butter and margarine were smacked up by hand with a pair of wetted wooden pats and the large blocks of fat were weighed carefully into portions to ensure the week's supply went round all the registered customers. Likewise, sugar, tea, eggs, cheese and bacon were shared out.

Other goods bore 'points' value. It was a complicated business selling products as well as counting out, cutting up and collecting the points coupons from the ration books. One summer, my father and I delivered harvest rations on the shop errand bicycle. I sat in the big wicker basket on the front. We took cheese, butter and tea to farm workers, who were cutting corn with a binder machine and stooking the sheaves of grain.

I have a clear recollection of the joy everywhere on VE Day. Bunting and flags were hung out along the parade of shops. Everyone was so happy.

*"Sometimes we saw RAF or USAF planes limping home with trails of smoke filling the summer skies"*

**BRIAN DUNNING RECALLS:**

In 1944 my parents' home at Molesey was blasted by a bomb and we sought refuge in West Horsley at a bungalow in Shere Road called 'Basing' owned by a farmer called Mr Jeffries who managed Hillside Farm. Often in the hay fields we would watch as flying bombs roared overhead towards London. Sometimes we saw RAF or USAF planes limping home with trails of smoke filling the summer skies. In those impressionable years, it all seemed perfectly normal as if country life was the natural backdrop to death and destruction.

The woods at the top of the hill were full of shell dumps - thousands and thousands of brass cases with grey warheads. They were neatly arranged in compact piles by the side of the road. At no time did I ever see any sign of a guard, indeed in all the months I spent in Horsley I cannot remember ever seeing a single soldier in uniform. Presumably, somebody must have been in charge of the ammunition but for all practical purposes, those vast stores of explosive material were left unattended, trusting to the common sense of the local people.

Essential services operated efficiently and promptly. The buses functioned on time, the Waterloo trains were more frequent than they are today and it was possible to go into Guildford and have afternoon tea just as if the war wasn't happening.

In 1944 I happened to be in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace when I was astounded to see a group of high-ranking German officers sauntering along in full dress uniform, polished boots, Iron Crosses and hi-peaked caps - some were even carrying batons. They were accompanied by a couple of British officers in rather prosaic battledress khaki jackets. Quite what was afoot I never found out. I presume they were prisoners of war fresh from Normandy who were being escorted on an uplifting educational tour.

A few weeks later, I was standing near the old pumping station in Shere Road waiting for a bus when a lorry load of German officers paused at the crossroads while the British driver examined his map. One of the officers, who looked as if he'd come from a fancy dress ball, spotted me in my school uniform and raised his baton at me in a salute. Being polite in those days I touched the tip of my cap.

**"EAST HORSLEY WAS ON THE GERMAN BOMBER FLIGHT PATH TO LONDON. DURING AIR RAIDS, WE COULD HEAR THE SIREN CLEARLY, THREE MILES AWAY IN BOOKHAM."**



*"But I suspect many of these brave young Canadians perished in the raid on Dieppe"*

**PETER POOLE WRITES:**

I was born in 1936 in London. Three years later, in September 1939, war was declared against Nazi Germany. At first there was an uneasy stalemate, but with the ever-increasing threat of bombing, mass evacuation of children started in earnest. My mother and I were despatched to East Horsley, staying for a time with my aunt and uncle at 'Fieldview' in Forest Road - my grandparents lived a few houses away. My father had already been called up into the RASC (Royal Army Services Corps) at the outbreak of war. Soon many more evacuees arrived and were housed throughout the area. Subsequently, my mother managed to rent beautiful 'Rustlings', also in Forest Road, where we spent the duration of the war.

We became used to the sound of Canadian truck engines revving up at 5.00 am.

A camp consisting of Nissan huts had been erected on land beyond Nightingale Avenue in West Horsley. Our gang often visited to cadge sweets from the soldiers billeted there.

One morning we noticed the eerie silence at 5.00. We hastened down to the camp, but the troops had all gone; absolutely no sign of anyone having been there. Wandering around empty huts, I can still remember the strange feeling. It was never established, but I suspect many of these brave young Canadians perished in the raid on Dieppe.

Next the Americans arrived, stationed in the Hatchford Park area. Soldiers often came into the village in their enormous trucks and battle tanks. We got to know many of them, and quickly learned the ploy "Have you got any gum chum", said to any kind and patient soldier. At Parkside School we used to watch them play softball on our playing field. They erected an enormous net hung from an oak tree branch, which we stood behind safe from the not so soft softball. We did not know then, but it was all building up to D-Day.

*"Enemy planes flew over so low that we used to fire stones at them with catapults"*

**CLIFTON CLARKE RECALLS:**

We were on holiday on Hayling Island the day war broke out. Fearful of an imminent invasion, we were promptly asked to leave and return home back to West Horsley where we lived in Lower Gardens, just off Long Reach. I was born in November 1933 and when war started, I was attending the Church School in The Street. Often enemy planes flew over so low that we used to fire stones at them with catapults. We assumed they were aiming to drop their bombs on the railway line.

During one particularly harsh winter, one boy tried to skate on Sheepwash Lake but fell in when the ice broke and sadly drowned.

Food was rationed, so we used to go poaching with catapults and air rifles to try and catch rabbits. Once a Messerschmidt landed in a field just behind Broom House, the pilot must have bailed out. When we arrived at the scene of the crash, the plane was half buried in soft ground, but I still managed to grab a piece as a souvenir.

For a while, enemy planes were flying overhead virtually every day. We would often see RAF fighter pilots chasing them. We had a makeshift bomb shelter in our living room, three feet high with wire mesh round the sides.

One evening my dad and uncle were having a drink in the Barley Mow. They were playing snooker and left their beer glasses on a windowsill. A bomber flew over and dropped a bomb which exploded with such force that it broke all the windows and blew the beer glasses across the room - my uncle was soaked.

On another occasion, a bomb exploded in East Lane at the Junction with Nightingale Avenue, leaving a 20-foot crater; all the utility mains were cut, windows were shattered and tiles blown off roofs. Two days later, two more bombs fell further down East Lane, this time leaving a 30-foot crater and again causing extensive damage. Residents began to complain about the Canadian lorries that were parked along the roads, saying they were making excellent targets for the bombers.

*"We could see barrage balloons adorning the sky to protect the Vickers aircraft factory at Weybridge"*

**WENDY RUMBLE RECALLS:**

From our house in Butlers Hill, we could see barrage balloons adorning the sky to protect the Vickers aircraft factory at Weybridge. One day, on my way home from school, a balloon had broken free and had trailed over here. It was a terrifying experience to see one so close. On another occasion, an aircraft was shot down and my parents witnessed a pilot parachuting out of it.

By a cruel twist of fate, the only tragic victim of the war in West Horsley was my constant companion, Marion Jordan, evacuated here from Bromley. She was staying at Fir Tree Cottage (now Hornbeams). I was living next door at the time with my grandfather Thomas Simmons at The Laurels because he was a widower, and my father was away in the RAF. One evening bombs were dropped near the house and Marion sadly lost her life. Our front door was blown up the stairs and all the windows came in. My grandfather happened to be in the Barley Mow at the time and the ceiling came down, but no one was hurt.

**"ON ANOTHER OCCASION, A BOMB EXPLODED IN EAST LANE AT THE JUNCTION WITH NIGHTINGALE AVENUE, LEAVING A 20-FOOT CRATER."**





# LIFE IN THE HORSLEYS

**“THERE WERE A FEW SECONDS OF OMINOUS SILENCE – THEN THERE WOULD BE AN ALMIGHTY EXPLOSION”**

## **More reminiscences from people who lived in East and West Horsley during World War II.**

There were several cafes in Horsley during the war. Thatchers had opened in 1934 and served lunches and teas. There was also Duncombe Farm (now an insurance agency) and the Wayfarers Cafe (now the funeral directors). One could go out for tea or coffee to meet one's friends and occasionally buy cakes “off the ration” to take home. On special occasions one could also dine at the Horsley Hotel (now La Meridiana).

In June 1942 the government brought out an order that restaurants could only charge a maximum of five shillings per meal. The only cafe in West Horsley was a tumbledown wooden building at the top of Shere Road called Dewdney's Cafe. Before the war, the ‘All England Cycle Race’ used to stop there for refreshments. This place was very popular, and people walked there from miles around. The great attraction was that you could have a boiled egg with your tea.

**“MR CONISBEE AT PARK CORNER WAS THE ONLY BUTCHER IN EAST HORSLEY AND IF ANYONE HEARD THAT HE OR ONE OF THE GROCERS HAD SOMETHING ‘OFF THE RATION’ THEY RUSHED OFF IMMEDIATELY TO TRY THEIR LUCK.”**

One of the most difficult jobs was trying to devise ways of making meals out of what food was available. It was not made any easier when people had to go down to the shops more than once because the supplies had not arrived. Civilians did not have cars during the war, as there was only a petrol allowance for business purposes, so people either had to walk to the shops or go by bicycle.

There were very few shops near the station then. On the Horsley Hotel side of the road there was a chemist, a hardware shop, Bowmans the Bakers, Kinghams the grocers, Wills and Smerdon, Miss Greengrass's wool shop and on the corner was Kingfishers the Fish Shop. At the bottom of Station Approach, there was Wix's Farm Dairy shop, the Wayfarers Cafe and Reavells Garage. Beyond that were the allotments where people grew vegetables.

Mr Conisbee at Park Corner was the only butcher in East Horsley and if anyone heard that he or one of the grocers had something ‘off the ration’ they rushed off immediately to try their luck. If nothing was available, women set off on their bicycles to Ripley or Cobham to see if they could get anything there.

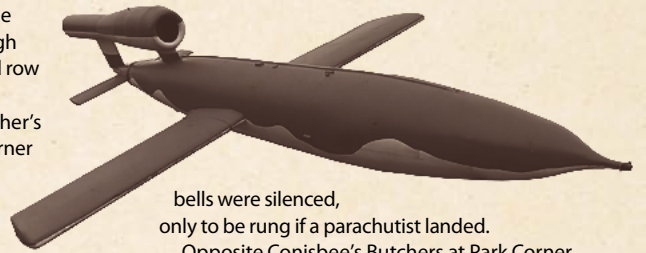
Bishopsmead shops had been built just before the war in 1938. Before that it was still ‘Bishopsmead’ - the meadow left to the village by Bishop Booth in his will for the poor of the parish.

Sheep used to graze there before the shops were built and there was a high flint wall all around it and a splendid row of horse chestnut trees.

In West Horsley there was a butcher's shop and a grocery shop on the corner of Long Reach and next to it was a corrugated iron chapel where the Reverend Lubbock held services. He lived opposite in Church Cottage to which he had retired. Then there was the Forest Stores, where the present post office is and the boot and shoe repair shop on the corner of Pincott Lane.

One local business which engaged in war work was Burbridge Builders Ltd. In July 1940, in the yard behind the railway cottages near Horsley Station, they set up an engineering department to make parts for bombers.

Besides looking after their families, many Horsley women joined either the Red Cross,



bells were silenced, only to be rung if a parachutist landed.

Opposite Conisbee's Butchers at Park Corner, there was a pond and next to it a wooden bungalow with a large shed in the garden. A builder, Mr Parker, lived there with his three daughters. One day during the early part of the war the shed caught fire. There was a fire pump belonging to the AFS stationed at Cobham Way and Donald Chown and his brother Kenneth rushed over with it and managed to put out the fire before the Ripley fire brigade arrived. The Chown brothers were severely reprimanded for using government property for putting out a fire not caused by enemy action.

The first flying bombs arrived shortly after D-Day on 6 June. These were terrifying things which flew overhead on their way to London. First one heard a sound like a low-flying aircraft overhead, then the engine would cut out – there were a few seconds of ominous silence – then there would be an almighty explosion. These became known as Doodle Bugs.

The only recorded flying bomb was one that fell on the boundary of East and West Horsley in Roam Wells Wood, between Hatchlands and the railway line. The resulting blast caused the ceiling in the Old Rectory to collapse and 18 nearby houses suffered broken windows. That very night the Royal Train taking King George VI to Portsmouth had to spend the hours of darkness in the sidings between Horsley and Effingham Junction stations. No official record of this event exists as everything was top secret, but the Station Master said sometime later that it was true and that he believed that Winston Churchill was also aboard.

the St. John's Ambulance Brigade or the WVS (Women's Voluntary Services as well as joining the rota for firewatching.

With the evacuation of Dunkirk and the Germans overrunning Europe, it seemed that Britain would be invaded very soon. One precaution that was taken to the confusion of everyone who had to travel around was the removal of all the signposts and milestones and the obliteration of names on station platforms. All open spaces suitable for planes to land on had to be strewn with concrete blocks, wrecked cars or old farm machinery, in fact any old rubbish that came to hand and the public were alerted to the possibility of spies being all around them. ‘Careless talk costs lives’ was the motto. Church

# VE DAY 80

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