

VE DAY MEMORIES NEEDED!

BY MIKE HARDING

Next May 2025 it will be 80 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR and the Felpham History Group met at the small hall at St Mary's Centre to discuss how, and even whether, to mark this anniversary next year.

These get-togethers have little formality about them, although there is an agenda. Everyone at the meeting had a family member or members who were involved in the war, some in the far eastern theatre which lasted longer (until August 1945) than the war in western Europe (ending May 1945). The official date of the end of the western conflict is 8 May (VE Day) but fighting went on for a few days more and some were, of course, still suffering from wounds, malnutrition, sheer exhaustion and other problems.

We were keen not to 'celebrate' in a way which ignored the level of suffering which had and is still taking place, but also wanted to reflect the joy and relief which was unleashed when the Axis Powers (Germany and Japan) surrendered.

For those in Britain, 8 May, 1945, was a day of not only huge celebration, but collective relief. Many sacrifices had been made on the home front too, and women had stepped into jobs reserved at that time for men. Women worked in Royal Ordnance factories for example, a perilous occupation. The South and South East was considered too dangerous to site one!!

VE Day in Sussex was celebrated with great gusto. The parties on 8 May lasted all night, there was dancing in the streets (congas!) with bands playing, not least in Bognor Regis, which had suffered casualties and buildings destroyed from earlier bombing raids. It must have been one 'helluva do', across the UK, and the birth rate shot up nine months later! But many troops were still stranded around the world and desperate to get home. Some were not back with their families until over a year later. There's a good article on the Royal British Legion website about this issue – www.britishlegion.org.uk/stories/the-challenge-of-getting-home-after-ww2

We know of planned events in Bognor for next summer and we are talking to RAFA (Royal Air Forces Association) locally to reduce any chance of conflicting activities, and possibly even to join forces. The plan is to hold a multi-media event in Felpham in May 2025. This will involve incorporating music, dance and film as well as displays and information boards. If anyone would like to get involved or has any memorabilia which could be displayed (such as ration books, personal memoirs, photographs, postcards etc.), please email us at:

info@thefelphamhistorygroup.net

The Felpham History Group is part of the Felpham Village Conservation Society. The group meets every month – email for more info.

