



VE DAY IN ANSTY

In common with all other communities up and down the country, Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) was put aside to celebrate the end of hostilities after more than 5 long years of war in the theatre of Europe.



Like everywhere else Ansty villagers would have been listening to the 'wireless' to a broadcast made by Mr Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister who (with help from our allies) successfully led Britain to victory against Nazi Germany in WW2. Churchill made this statement: 'Yesterday morning at 2:41 a.m. at Headquarters, General Jodl, the representative of the German High Command, and Grand Admiral Doenitz, the designated head of the German State, signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German Land, sea, and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command'.

In his VE Day announcement, Winston Churchill said: 'we may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead.' The day was declared a national holiday to mark Victory in Europe Day (VE Day). The following day (9 May) was also to be a national holiday. However, although the war in Europe was over the war against Japan continued for another four months.

Certainly all Ansty villagers would have rejoiced at this moment with local celebrations including music, dancing and parties and perhaps more organised events at the Arundell Arms and the old recreation hut.

75 years later as we celebrate this anniversary we are involved in another 'world war' – with an invisible enemy called Covid-19 – a coronavirus which has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. It can be a very nasty disease indeed. As a result almost all of the plans to mark this VE Day anniversary have been cancelled. As ever though, our village website on behalf of all parishioners will remember this important occasion with this modest tribute page: the WW2 generation were truly the greatest generation.

To the right is a photograph that was possibly taken on VE Day 1945 in Ansty, judging by the bunting on the cottage walls.

Here we can see the Ansty Silver Band (followed by villagers) and led by flag carrier Stan Macey (in uniform) probably marching towards the old recreation hut located further up the High street. Note the Union Jack flying in the background.

The musicians included (possibly) John Parsons, Steve Parsons, Tom Gurd, William Parsons and Ted Barnard.

This is at a time when the whole of the parish of Ansty belonged to Lord Arundell of Wardour: he was the 'Lord of the Manor'. At the time the local pub was the Arundell Arms (later renamed 'The Maypole') which would have supplied the refreshments and the recreation hut (Secretary Bert Lever) would have been what we would describe today as a local 'community hub'.

Few, if any of these people could have foreseen that the end of World War 2 would help change the very soul of Ansty from a close knit agricultural community to the very different kind of village we have today.

Quite a few members of the wartime Ansty community served in the armed forces, including the famous 'Fighting Sullivans' with a fighting spirit pedigree stretching back two or more generations; other older Ansty parishioners served in the Home Guard – the battalion was based in Warminster.

Throughout World War 2, there were visible reminders of the war all around - soldiers billeted in neighbouring villages and endless military convoys on the road to Shaftesbury and Warminster. Although a rural 'backwater' relatively untouched by the hostilities Ansty folk still endured a long list of difficulties and change to their way of life. Families were split as the 'call up' took hold. There were food shortages followed by rationing; local farms and their workers ploughed up great chunks of the Downs and elsewhere to provide more home grown resources because we could no longer rely on imported foodstuffs; there were constant queues; many money raising events to in order to help the war effort; the establishment of allotments to 'grow your own'; the constant listening to the wireless for the latest grim news; the dread of receiving the 'next-of-kin' letter/telegram. There was little money to maintain anything; travelling was very difficult; fuel was rationed. Probably the only place that thrived was the local pub, the Arundell Arms and a local black market readily supplied by local poachers and others! People just seemed to be living for the day – there really was little to look forward to and Churchill described the beginning of the war as our 'Darkest Hour' when the British Empire and Commonwealth stood alone against the Nazi Axis Powers in Europe. Then gradually the Americans and our other allies really got their act together.

The turning point came on June 6th 1944 (known as D-Day) when the Allied Forces of Britain, America, Canada, and France attacked German forces on the coast of Normandy, France. With a huge force of over 150,000 soldiers, the Allies attacked and gained a victory that became the turning point for World War II in Europe. From then on people became more and more excited and relieved that the war was going to end. When it was announced that May 8th was to be 'Victory in Europe' Day, people everywhere – including Ansty, prepared to celebrate – and how! St James' single church bell would have tolled loudly; the Ansty Silver Band supplied the music and the mayhem and the Maypole area would have been milling with happy Ansty folk and their families and friends, although not all family members by any means would have returned from their postings.



Text source and photo by Tony Keating from 'Ansty - A Wiltshire Village Story' with contributions from Ansty Villagers. 2007.

Sadly, the names of two men who lost their lives are commemorated on a plaque in St James Church – Gordon Frank Brown and John Percival Owen New an RAF , killed in 1944, aged 22. At this time of ‘celebration’ we must reflect on their sacrifice that helped give us our freedom.

BROWN, GEORGE FRANK - Leading Aircraftman 639945 - Royal Air Force – Died 30th September 1944 - Born 1916 - Son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brown; stepson of Hilda Brown, of Ansty, Wiltshire – Buried at Jakarta War Cemetery, Indonesia – Grave/Memorial reference: 3. G. 10.

NEW, JOHN PERCIVAL OWEN - Sergeant/Navigator 1601531 - 226 Squadron, Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve – Died 28th October 1944 - Born March 1923, Christchurch, Hampshire - Son of Reginald Alfred and Susan Mary Ann New, of Ansty, Wiltshire – Buried at Venray War Cemetery, Limburg, Netherlands – Grave/Memorial reference: V. E.10. (source: [Wiltshire-OPC](#))

Lord Arundell’s death and further anxiety for Ansty villagers.

Ansty was still very much part of the Arundell family-run Wardour Estate (as it had been for centuries) and the village consisted largely of tenant famers (and their farm labourers) several smallholdings with other occupations related to agriculture such as the wheelwright, blacksmith or haulier. In 1944 another war casualty was to have a profound effect on Ansty and may well have tempered the May Day celebrations a little.

The 16th Baron Arundell (Lord of the Manor of Ansty amongst other parishes) served in the Territorial Army, rising to the rank of captain in the 2nd Battalion the Wiltshire Regiment. He was part of the British Expeditionary Force and in 1940, during the Battle of France, was taken prisoner-of-war by the Germans. He escaped but was recaptured and was transferred to Oflag IV-C at Colditz Castle. In 1944 he contracted tuberculosis and in accordance with the Geneva Convention, he was repatriated but he sadly died in hospital in Chester aged 37. He was buried in the Chapel of Wardour Castle. He was unmarried and the barony became extinct upon his death. This sad circumstance led to the selling off of almost the entire stock of the large Wardour Estate (including almost every holding in Ansty) to help pay death duties on the estate of the late captain.

Ansty might have joined in with the celebrations at the end of the war on May 8th 1945 but by now there must have been a high degree of uncertainty hanging over the villagers as to their future as almost the entire village belonged to Lord Arundell’s Wardour Estate. Many villagers worked directly or indirectly for the estate interests or were tenants. They probably knew before the war was even over that the rural life they had known for generations was about to change forever.

In 1946 an auction, which was conducted by Messrs. John D. Wood and Co., was held. The part of the estate sold off included 13 large and nine smaller farms, six smallholdings, five houses, 70 cottages, 26 lots of accommodation land, building sites, and woodlands, in all about 3,000 acres, with a rent-roll of £4,341. (this includes all of Ansty parish as well as other local parishes). Many Ansty villagers were able to purchase the property in which they lived and the majority of farms or smallholdings were also sold to sitting tenants.

The population of Ansty before WW2 was in excess of 200 (more than double what it is now) but by 1951 the population had rapidly declined to 163 which should tell its own story.

VE DAY 75th ANNIVERSARY
Friday May 8th 2020



Ansty Remembers ...