



A message from Provost Brennan

VE Day. 8 May 1945

By April 1945 the game was up for fascism in Europe. In Italy, Partisans had executed Mussolini then hung him from a lamp post. Hitler committed suicide to avoid a similar fate. At about the same time British soldiers liberated Belsen concentration camp. One of those soldiers was the 18 year old Joe Gallagher whose family later ran the Cardwell Nursery.

Then on 8 May, Allied top brass 1945 met the German Field Marshal Keitel in Berlin army to arrange the second and final surrender. Keitel tried to argue. But Zhukov – the Soviet Field Marshal - was in no mood for any nonsense. At 11.30 pm that night he accepted Germany's unconditional surrender.

The following day there were spontaneous celebrations across Europe and America. And Inverclyde was no different.

The war had had a huge impact here. For the first time in over 10 years Inverclyde's shipyards had full order books and the Depression of the 1930s was at an end at last. The women of Inverclyde joined in the war effort and some ended up working in the yards. Foreign servicemen – Poles, Americans and French sailors – were stationed here and some of them even stayed after the war was over.

But it wasn't all fun and games. Education was a bit too haphazard and some children rarely attended school. Shamefully, the Italian community had suffered internment and persecution here and across Britain. Rationing was meant to ensure fair shares for all but some went hungry. For the majority, fruit like bananas or oranges were rare luxuries.

And civilians in Inverclyde died too. On 2 nights in May 1941, the Luftwaffe brought death and destruction to the streets and homes of Greenock and Port Glasgow. As well as the 271 Inverclyde civilians who died in that blitz another

448 men and 3 young women from Inverclyde died serving in the forces. In 1945 Greenock's Burgh commissioned a special Greetings Card. It was delivered to every soldier, sailor and air-force man who returned home.

VE Day wasn't the end of the war. But it let the people rejoice. And rejoice they did. The celebrations continued even after VE Day. In Belville Street, there was a street party for a returning POW who would later become a local Head Teacher.

And across the UK it was the same. A time of celebration. But it was also a time for taking stock. There was a determination that things must change. In the June General Election of 1945, the people of Britain elected a Labour Government. That government's finest and most lasting achievement was, and remains, the National Health Service. We rely on it today as never before.

Provost Martin Brennan

