

# Wartime West Sussex 1939 – 1945

## VE-DAY and VJ-DAY

### VE Day celebrations in Bognor Regis

### Bognor Observer May 12<sup>th</sup> 1945

### HAPPY CROWDS CELEBRATE VE-DAY

### DANCING IN THE HIGH STREET

...You can be sure that on such a day as VE-Day the boys and girls of Bognor did not miss any opportunity for celebrating in their own way.

In the morning after the dancing in the High Street a gang of them on bicycles shot round and round the town, whooping and shouting, waving flags and ringing their bells. But their real celebrating came in the evening.

About six o'clock the gang burst on to the Pier which, of course, is officially out of bounds, and climbed up to the Roof Tea Gardens where they hoisted the Union Jack. Later, they crossed the gap in the pier by swaying cat-walks, one of them actually cycling over, and made for the pavilion at the end. Some of them lit fireworks and dropped them over the side on to people on the beach. They also went into the Cinema where one of them played a small pedal organ found there.

Eventually they returned to the promenade to find a police sergeant waiting for them, so they put their hands on top of their heads like captured German soldiers and solemnly filed out past the sergeant to surrender. Curiously, he did not take any action, so they gave him three hearty cheers and made off.

But that was only the beginning: the gang, now numbering 30 to 40, formed a long "snake", each hanging on to the one in front, and marched off along the Esplanade, zig-zagging from one side of the road to the other, and singing at the tops of their voices. At the head of the column was a young man wearing a gold cardboard top hat decorated with red, white and blue ribbons, and a dilapidated old raincoat. Another had "blood-stained" bandages completely covering his face, wore a battered old hat and a white coat with "V" chalked on the back. Yet another was dressed in a clever Cossack dress, and one of the girls wore a red, white and blue skirt.

As they passed the Carlton Hotel an approaching bus drew up before them. Much to the astonishment of the driver, who just sat there with his mouth open, the

whole column marched round and round the bus until at last it managed to get away.

Down the Esplanade they went, the snake growing longer and longer as they wound to and fro across the road. Astonished passers-by stood on the pavement and stared as they marched past, singing and shouting, stamping and pushing. Round into York Road, then through Gloucester Road they went, and into the High Street where they captured another bus...

After a brief rest at the station, the snake, now 80-200 strong, re-formed and, accompanied by a large crowd of amused spectators, wound their way, still singing, through the traffic bollards, the bus station, and the shop fronts, to High Street, where they spent a happy hour dancing...

The bonfire proved a great success even though the N.F.S. had to put it out at dim-out time. It was built just by the West End car park where a large crowd gathered to watch. About 12 to 15ft high, it was topped by an absurdly realistic figure of Hitler who dropped from a stick planted in the centre.

A man ran round with a blazing rag, lighting it at several points, and in a moment long tongues of fire licked up the sides. Soon the fire was a mass of flame; great black clouds of smoke fled spark-flecked across the fields.

Hitler would not burn for a long time. He smoked a little but some time passed before, with a cheer, the flames appeared on his clothing. More cheers came when a stone dispersed his burning head in a shower of sparks and flaming straw and, at long last, when his whole body fell from the pole into the middle of the fire in a glorious jumbled mass of burning straw and cloth.

After dancing to those ever-present loud-speakers bathed in the warm glow of the fire, the vast happy crowd gradually broke up, topme home to bed, some to the Pavilion, and some to the town, where noisy uproarious celebrations continued far into the night.

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