



Cumbria at War

1939 - 1945

A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters, for use in secondary schools.

© Cumbria Archive Service

A Cumbria Archive Service learning resource for secondary schools,
created by Guy Woolnough September 2009, edited for web Apr 2011

Cumbria at War, 1939-1945

A Role Play Exercise in seven chapters for use in secondary schools.

Chapters:

1. *Introduction: VE Day, Cumbria, May 1945.*
2. *In Uniform: those who served in uniform in Cumbria.*
3. *Working: those who worked in Cumbria to help win the war.*
4. *Home Supplies: how Cumbrians got what they needed in the war.*
5. *Away from Home: evacuees, and Cumbrians serving overseas.*
6. *Missing Home: prisoners of war, Cumbrians and Germans in Cumbria.*
7. *Not Coming Home: remembering those Cumbrians who fell in the war.*



Cumbria at War 1939 - 1945

A Role Play Exercise for use in secondary schools, in seven chapters.

Chapter I: Introduction

VE Day, Cumbria May 1945

Marking the day the war in Europe ended: hopes and concerns for the future

© Cumbria Archive Service

A Cumbria Archive Service learning resource for secondary schools,
created by Guy Woolnough September 2009, edited for the web April 2011

VE day was the day on which the war in Europe ended.

Everyone felt a powerful sense of relief. In this recording, a Burton* woman who was just 20 years old on VE Day, describes how she and her friends reacted.



Listen to Kath Salrein describing how she rang in the peace (open the separate link on our webpage)

Although the war against Japan was still going on, VE day was a very important milestone, so a special holiday was announced by the government. Parties were held all over Britain to celebrate.

But people still knew that there were plenty of problems ahead. More bad news, more struggle, a lot of hard work and continuing shortages. But at least, on VE Day, people could pause, think about rebuilding their future and look forward to the good times that would arrive in the end.

* Burton in Lonsdale, five miles south east of Kirkby Lonsdale. See the map on p 14 of the “Missing Home” section of this project.

MEMORIES

Everyone who was there at the time remembers VE Day well.

YOU WRITE... THE BEST LETTERS

FEATURES TWO

Secret wartime radio network recalled

SIR, — The advent of VE Day 1945 has prompted me to reflect on this day, 50 years ago, as to my whereabouts and, for what it is worth, send you my own personal memories of my association with Whitehaven.

At that time I was a Technical Assistant II with the BBC and was working at a small medium wave broadcasting station (100 watts A.M.) situated in the local brickworks on the outskirts of the town. The engineer in charge was Mr Jenkins.

This station was one of many similar ones strategically located in 'secret' sites all over the UK and formed part of the 'H Group' network; they served the local area with the BBC Home Service and would be used in the event of enemy occupation of main cities, to broadcast instructions to the local population.

In addition they were to be used to confuse enemy aircraft using certain broadcasting stations for homing and navigational purposes: whether this worked or was used in this respect — I do not recall.

Soon after VE Day the 'H Group' stations were all closed down and the staff dispersed. I was sent to the large overseas short wave broadcasting station at Penrith (Skelton Pasture) known

as 'OSE 8 & 9'.

I stayed on at Penrith until VJ Day and left the BBC shortly afterwards to join a telecommunications group with G.E.C. in Coventry.

During my stay in Whitehaven I joined the Whitehaven Rambling Club where I made many friends. Most Sundays (shifts permitting) were spent walking in the beautiful Lakeland countryside situated so conveniently.

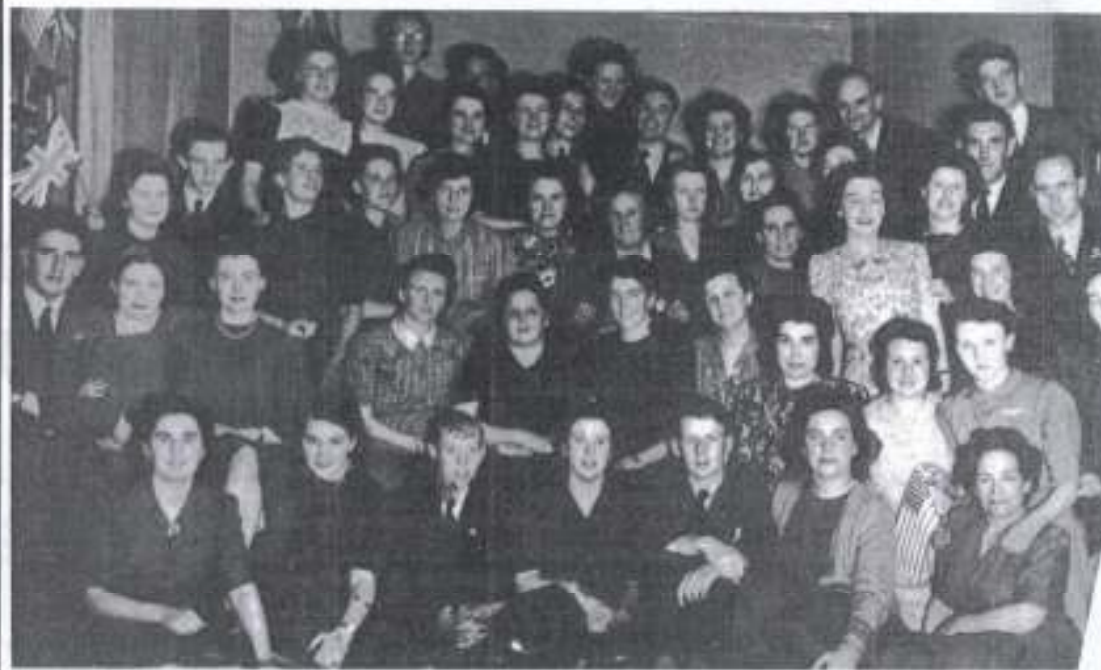
To mark the VE celebrations the Rambling Club organised a celebration event at The Golden Lion, Whitehaven on May 16, 1945. We all danced to records of Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman, no name but a few.

The photograph (right) is a record of the occasion. I'm sure that it will revive some pleasant memories for the Rambling Club members of 50 years ago. I am on the extreme left (area folded). Two other BBC engineers are in the picture — Mark Rogers of St Bees and Mr Ferguson of Whitehaven.

Happy VE anniversary to you all.

Ian H. McDonald,

34, The Scotchhill,
Keresley,
Coventry,
CV6 2EX.



Here is a letter sent by Ian McDonald who is recalling his wartime days in Cumbria, including a photo of him with his friends celebrating VE Day.

Pictures from Kendal Castle Street School

VE Day “Magazine”



Street parties were held all over Britain to mark VE Day. Despite rationing, people managed to find enough food for a celebration. These pictures were drawn by the primary school pupils.

Pictures from Kendal Castle Street School VE Day “Magazine”



The Union Flag was waved all over Cumbria, Britain and Europe

29

1948

29th Mar, - Closed at noon for Easter holiday. We end the school year with 43 on roll, plus two vacancies. Average no. on roll for year = 44. Average attendance 87.2. Percentage for year = 84.8%.

5th Apr, - Re-opened this morning. Admitted two infants, - Kathleen Anderson and John Graham.

13th Apr, - Horn II E. completed, and returned to H.E.R.

16th Apr, - Admitted four Stalker children, - from Distington.

20th Apr, - Attendance for week = 89.44%.

23rd Apr, - Admitted one boy, Francis R. Tracey, from Keswick.

7th May, - Have today received from Stores Dept. 40 pairs of plimsolls, viz:-

10 Pairs, - Size I; 11 size II; 11 size III, 5 size IV; 3 size V.

8th May, - School closed today and tomorrow for Victory Celebrations.

10th May, - Re-opened school this morning.

11th May, - This afternoon we have had Victory Sports and tea, at school. Attendance for week = 91.46%.

14th May, - Twenty-one absent this morning. Very wet. Closed 3.30 P.M. for Whitmonkdale holiday, which this year will be one week. Attendance for week = 82.8%.

28th May, - Re-opened this morning. Nine absent, - three of which are reported as measles cases. The weather is still cold; very cold in school.

Gosforth School Headteacher's log book

The head reports that there were two days off for Victory Celebrations, followed by Victory sports and tea on the day school reopened. But overall, it seems that plimsolls and attendance were more important.

Pictures from Kendal Castle Street School VE Day "Magazine"



Bonfires had been banned during the blackout, so VE Day bonfires were very popular. Look what's on top of this one.

PROPAGANDA

to remind people why we fought the war.



No time for home life,
because . . .

The Nazis attained power by a false appeal. The two things most dear to German hearts, they said, were in danger—religion and family life. Both of these a Nazi Government would save.

Yet home life, like traditional religion, scarcely exists now in Nazi Germany. Father must be constantly attending Party meetings, and Mother going to the National Socialist Women's Union. Let either of them show any laxity in this respect, and the dreaded Gestapo will be after them. Disappearance into a concentration camp may follow.

Meanwhile, the sons must give up practically all their spare time to Hitler Youth activities, and the daughters their leisure to the League of German Girls. It is rarely indeed that all members of the family can be at home together.

The older generation, who remember a sadder atmosphere, may resent this bitterness, but the young people are conditioned to it, and willingly accept it. Family ties are kindly and sentimental, whereas the youthful Nazi glories in being hard and unemotional—an automaton among his fellow automatons.



The content of this propaganda leaflet might have made people think about what life had been like in Britain during the war. Mum and Dad working long hours, volunteering for extra work, wearing uniforms. The children helping with salvage collection in their spare time, doing war work with organisations like the Scouts and Guides, youngsters running wild without proper supervision. As you will see from the other sections of this project, there wasn't much time left for home life.



Rescue teams at work in Vernon Street. During hectic activity on 14 April a pair of ambulances were sent to Vernon Street at 3.32am. The siren for the all clear went 10 minutes later.

Cumbria was not the main target for German bombers, but there were a few raids. Barrow, with its naval ship yards, did experience a serious raid, as you can see from this photo. The recollection of raids like this were still vivid for many Cumbrians in 1945.

This Project

Although everyone agreed that Victory in Europe was great news, everyone had been affected by the war and was concerned about what the future would hold.

As people met to celebrate the victory, they were all talking about what they had gone through in the last six years, and what they hoped or feared the future held in store for them.

As you will see from studying this unit of work, everyone's experiences and hopes were different.

Your group is going to recreate a VE Day celebration. Over the Spam sandwiches and cups of tea, everyone is going to be talking. Each person is going to take a role, and join in the discussion, expressing his or her regrets and hopes, and listening to the problems and aspirations of the others at the gathering.

Here are the sorts of people who will be there:

- A Home Guard veteran
- A refugee from Europe
- A miner: perhaps he's a Bevin Boy
- A seaman; he could be a Danish fisherman
- A spiv, someone who deals on the Black Market
- A conscientious objector, who did work but refused to fight
- A German prisoner of war*
- A farmer
- A business person: factory owner with war contracts
- A factory worker
- A Land Army girl
- A WAAF, WREN or member of the ATS
- An evacuee who is still in Cumbria

* He may not have been invited, but he is still there, because he has been working on a farm or in an industry locally

The list is not exclusive: you can easily add new characters if you give it some thought. For example, the injured soldier.

You will not only think about what your character does, but also what he or she has suffered in his or her family. Your character will have some of the following: children, parents, wife or husband, sweetheart, brothers or sisters, friends etc. They have all been involved in the war, so it is certain that some of them will have been in danger and overseas. Some of your nearest and dearest may be dead, injured, missing, still fighting in the East, prisoners or even on the run from the police! This means that you will be concerned, angry, worried, upset, frightened or even just relieved when you talk to the other people at the celebration.

There are some things you may not want to talk about: for example, you may not want to blurt out that you've made a fortune on the black market since the war started. But of course the black marketeer will be listening carefully to what people say. He or she might spot an opportunity to buy some bacon from a farmer, or to sell something "off ration" to someone who wants a present for a loved one coming home.

To prepare for this, you will find it useful to look at the words or recordings of the people who really experienced the war. You will also need to be familiar with the facts about life on the Home Front.

First, you need to know the key facts about life in Cumbria during the war.

Then you need to work out the back story of your character:

- What has she/he been doing during the war?
- Who in his/her family has been fighting overseas?
- Who in his/her family has been killed, injured or lost?
- What has she/he gained and lost during the war?
- What are his/her hopes for the future?

When you are secure in your back story, you are ready to enjoy the VE Day celebration!

- You are welcome to visit us to see the documents that you have found out about through the project. Or you might be interested in coming to see other material that we hold here.
- You can do this by printing off and completing the form on the next page. You will need to have it signed by your teacher and also get the school stamp on it.

Cumbria Archive Centres in Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven



***At Kendal we are on the lower ground floor of the
County Offices, Stricklandgate, Kendal***

Bring the signed form along to us on your first visit and we will give you a reader's ticket. It will look like this one.

CUMBRIA ARCHIVE SERVICE School Readers Ticket No. Name School Date of expiry Signature

If parents or teachers want to visit, please ask them to bring along their driver's licence or other official proof of their ID. You will be asked to leave all bags in one of our secure lockers here. You may use only pencil in our searchroom. This is due to the unique and irreplaceable nature of the documents we have on access. There is also a very strict rule about not eating and drinking in the search room. All the offices are open daily Mondays to Fridays. Barrow and Whitehaven Archive Centres are also open one evening a week and some Saturdays. There is no need to book in advance.

CUMBRIA ARCHIVE SERVICE

School Readers Ticket registration form

FOR COMPLETION BY SCHOOL AND PUPIL	FOR COMPLETION BY RECORD OFFICE
Name of pupil	Issuing Office
Address of pupil	Ticket No.
Stamp of school	Date of issue
Signature of pupil	Date of expiry
Signature of teacher	

Preparing for a visit

It is always important to know what you want to see.

If you want to see material mentioned in this project please note down and bring along the reference number of the document in which you are interested (you will find this in the box at the bottom of each page).

If you are interested in other material here make sure you have a clear idea of what you want to do. eg start to find out about your family tree or the history of your house or your village or a specific topic.

In the case of your family tree come armed with some information about where and when your parents or grandparents were born. Really you would need to have ancestors born or living in Cumbria for you to be able to progress your family tree using the Cumbria Archive Centres.

Please be sure to allow yourself enough time for your research as this almost always takes longer than you expect!

Staff here are very approachable and are able to give you the advice you need.

We look forward to meeting you.

*School groups are also welcome. Teachers can contact archivists at the Archive Centres to arrange this, details are on the next slide.

Weblinks for Cumbria records

Cumbria Archive Service: www.cumbria.gov.uk/archives

- Contact: barrow.record.office@cumbriacc.gov.uk
carlisle.archives@cumbriacc.gov.uk
kendal.record.office@cumbriacc.gov.uk
whitehaven.record.office@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Kendal Library Local Studies Collection

- www.cumbria.gov.uk/libraries/localstudies
- Wherever you live in Britain, there will be a local record office and libraries with local collections. They will be able to help you with similar research about the place where you live.

Copyright conditions apply.

Material may, however, be copied by Cumbria Schools for the purpose of classroom study.