

75th Anniversary of Victory in the Pacific August 2020

*The following paragraphs have been edited from a previously published article
Prepared for the 60th Anniversary of VP Day in 2005*

The World War 2 honour roll at St. Peter's Church was destroyed in the fire of 1949, although Irene King records the names in her book about the church. This honour roll was reinstated as part of the 60th Anniversary of VP Day remembrance service on 14th August 2005. Geoffrey Brock, Charles Fletcher, Gordon Henry, Lachlan Macquarie, Geoffrey Oxlade, Robert Burns, Barry O'Neil and Harold Thomas were originally listed on this honour roll. Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Brock died in Atherton from illness contracted during service on Ambon – (the Australian flag in the church is dedicated to his memory), while Chief Stoker Lachlan Macquarie went down with the *Perth* during the Battle of Sunda Strait. Squadron Leader Geoffrey Oxlade died during the Battle of Britain (and has his own memorial in the church), while Flight Sergeant Gordon Henry died in a flying accident over the North Sea in November 1944. (The details of his connection with Box Hill have not been established.) Leading Aircraftman Charles Fletcher was killed in a training flight accident near Kingston, S.A.; his remains are buried in Box Hill Cemetery. Private Robert Burns and acting Corporal Barry O'Neil both died while prisoners of war of the Japanese, while Gunner Harold Thomas was killed in action in Rabaul. The present St. Peter's Church was one of a number of buildings constructed as peace memorials following the Second War, so its part in the VP Day 60th Anniversary commemorations was fitting.

Ian Shand, at the time a school student, records in his history of the Box Hill Boys Technical School, how it and the local community reacted to the announcement of VP Day. The Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, announced the end of the war in a 9.00 a.m. radio broadcast on 15th August, 1945 then proclaimed a two day holiday. Headmaster Shelton called an assembly at the Technical School and told the students, amidst cheers, that the Japanese had given in and the fighting had stopped. He then dismissed a class at a time to avoid too much exuberance as the boys left for home. Ian Shand himself remembers accompanying his 7-year old friend Bill Cherry and his dad, when they went with a noisy backslapping trainload of joyful people into the city to celebrate VP Day. Flinders Street Station was like an ants' nest, with happy people scurrying everywhere. They forced their way into the crowd in Swanston Street to make their way towards the Town Hall and Bourke Street. A tram was trying to do the same but with little success. It was just inching along dingling its bell, but the crowd took little notice, they were so worked up. They all had the same idea, and so the street became wall to wall of boisterous people shouting, singing and dancing. At one stage my dad was worried that I would get trampled on, so he made me hang on to the back of the slowly moving tram and stood over me to protect me from being crushed. He concludes, "I've never seen or felt anything like it ever (since). Melbourne really 'went to town' in celebration that day." Another school boy at the time, John S. Martin, remembers that there were celebrations one evening a few days later at Box Hill City Oval, with fireworks and a communal celebration of joy. St. Andrew's Church hosted an augmented choir for the impressive performance of the 'Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's *Messiah*, and for a few days everyone went around in an exalted state. (Irene King nee Clark writes in her memories of St. Peter's Box Hill of the same performance: it was originally intended to have the Box Hill Orchestra accompany the choir, however the conductor the Vicar of St Peter's the Rev'd Oliver Hole, in a fit of frustration and temper, peremptorily dismissed the orchestra during a rehearsal, so the final performance was accompanied by organ and piano alone.)

Compiled by W.R. Orange 4th August, 2005 (Revisions 10/8, 15/8, 17/9) This article appeared in an earlier form in the Box Hill R.S.L. booklet '60th Anniversary of the ending of World War II'.

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Memories of VP Day August 1945

John S. Martin in his recollections of WWII wrote the following - Declaration of peace on Thursday 16th August 1945 was a joyful occasion. This was really the end for us. I was at Mont Albert Central School in Form 2 (year 8) at the time and the head master came into every room to tell us that the war had finished and we could go home. We had only been there for a short while. When I got home we sat glued to the wireless and listened to joyful music and Mr Chifley talking to the nation.

Then there was a local celebration one evening – I cannot remember if it were on the Thursday, the Friday or the Saturday – at the Box Hill City Oval on the north-west corner of the Box Hill Oval (opposite Box Hill High School). I walked up there with our neighbours, the Drydens, to see the fireworks and join in the communal expression of joy. At Sunday at church the augmented choir sang Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus” from *The Messiah*, which was very impressive, as was the last hymn “Now thank we all our God”. It had been the basis of the sermon, and I can still remember that the minister said that it was written during the Thirty Years War in Germany (1618-1648) by a Lutheran minister who had strongly guarded and encouraged his flock during the terrible devastations and hardships they suffered during that war. For a few days everyone went around in an exalted state. (Irene King née Clark writes in her memories of St. Peter’s Box Hill of the same performance: it was originally intended to have the Box Hill Orchestra accompany the choir, however the conductor, the Vicar of St Peter’s the Rev’d Oliver Hole, in a fit of frustration and temper, peremptorily dismissed the orchestra during a rehearsal, so the final performance was accompanied by organ and piano alone.)

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Some more recent memories recorded from local residents in August 2020

Bill St. Aubyn, now 95, was serving as an aircraft fitter with RAAF 76 Squadron (Kitty Hawks) in Labuan, North Borneo in August 1945. The announcement of the end of the war was received with some cheering and relief, then the servicemen and women went back to work. 76 Squadron was re-equipped with Mustangs and went on to be part of the Occupation Forces in Japan. Bill St. Aubyn was transferred to 13 Squadron flying Venturas: 13 Squadron spent several months picking up the troops and prisoners of war around the surrounding island for repatriation to Australia. Bill was flown to Laverton two days before Christmas 1945: his group were then transported to outside Flinders Street Station where they were left to find their own ways home - he caught a taxi to his home in Richmond where his future brother-in-law had to pay his fare because he had no Australian currency on him. After joining a holiday camping with his family at Rye he soon resumed work with the PMG as a telephone technician.

Geoff Steinicke's recollections were also of a relatively low key marking of VP Day, after a more significant celebration of VE Day in June 1945 when there was a thanksgiving service in the local St. Augustine's church in Mont Albert North. At the time he was a 15 year old Applied Chemistry student at Swinburne Technical College and his classes had been joined by some somewhat older and highly motivated student colleagues, returned servicemen from Europe who had resumed or taken up their studies under the CRTS and paid 7/6 per week.

Barbara Evans, who was a young girl at the time, remembered her father using her red, white and blue hair ribbons to decorate the family car, then taking the family to drive up and down the local streets with much waving and tooting of car horns. At the same time her husband to be **Brian** was a student and member of the Army cadet corps at Northcote High School. The Northcote High School cadet corps joined other units to join the VP Day march down Burke Street. Brian's father was an industrial chemist responsible for testing aviation fuel as it arrived by in port by tanker ship: as a member of an essential service he had the permits required to have a telephone at home and an alarm clock. The family became long term friends with one of the fuel tanker ship captains who alerted them to the number of enemy submarines in Bass Strait and had survived two sinkings by torpedo.

Kath Holgate was a young girl living in Burnley Lancashire, U.K. at the time of the announcement of the end of the war. A younger sister had just been born at their home and Kath was allowed to accompany the attending midwife to dance with others in the streets of the town centre.

(With thanks to William Orange for compiling and supplying this material.)