

# WE'LL MEET AGAIN

Islington on the Home Front  
in photographs (1939-45)

An exhibition commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe (1945-2020).

*We'll Meet Again* portrays the daily sacrifice and determination of the people of Islington and Finsbury, and how they 'kept calm and carried on' during these six historic years.

Presented by Islington Museum  
April 2020



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The Second World War was a conflict fought on several fronts. Not only was victory secured by the forces fighting on the front line, but also by the daily sacrifice and determination of the people they left behind on the 'Home Front'. This experience between 1939 and 1945 was unique in British history. Twelve million British families fought their own battle, including those in Islington and Finsbury, who went without all but the most basic necessities.

Aspects of the Home Front were common to all: rationing, the blackout and, more terrifyingly, enemy air raids and the threat of untimely death. It was to prove a long period of regulation and shortage. Children were evacuated, men and women conscripted into the forces or directed into essential war work, homes disrupted and lives were put on hold for an indefinite duration. Those not called to the armed forces helped the country in many ways: Civil Defence, the Women's Voluntary Service, working in munitions factories, digging for victory and raising money for the 'war effort'.

With its title taken from one of the most famous songs of the war, and sung by Vera Lynn, *We'll Meet Again* portrays Islington and Finsbury's home-front experience during these six historic years. Upon the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, this photographic presentation commemorates all who bravely endured life on the Home Front in Islington, Finsbury and beyond.

*We'll Meet Again* is dedicated to the memory of [Mary Cosh](#) (1919-2020).

# WE'LL MEET AGAIN

## Islington on the Home Front in photographs 1939-45 timeline

### 1939

**25 FEBRUARY:** Islington residents first to receive Anderson shelters in London.

**3 JUNE:** *Military Training Act* – first peacetime military training draft for men aged 20-21.

**24 AUGUST:** Parliament enacts *Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939*.

**1 SEPTEMBER:** Germany invades Poland. British Army officially mobilised. Blackout enforced – all windows papered, painted or sealed. Over the course of three days 1.5 million British evacuees were sent to rural locations considered to be safe.

**3 SEPTEMBER:** Britain and France (plus Australia and New Zealand) declare war on Germany. Government orders gas masks to be carried at all times. Cinemas, theatres, and public places closed. First air raid sirens sounded in London, but are a false alarm.

**4 SEPTEMBER:** Start of 'Phoney war', RAF leaflet raids on Germany begin.

**7 SEPTEMBER:** The *National Registration Act* is passed, introducing identity cards.

**23 SEPTEMBER:** Petrol rationing introduced.

**28 SEPTEMBER:** Warsaw surrenders to the Germans.

**1 OCTOBER:** Call Up Proclamation – all men aged 20-21 must register with military.

**NOVEMBER:** London schools start to reopen as evacuee children return to the capital.

**17 DECEMBER:** Many evacuees return for Christmas. Places of entertainment re-open.

# 1940

**JANUARY:** 35% of London schoolchildren had returned from evacuation.

**8 JANUARY:** Food rationing begins: 4oz of ham, 4oz bacon, 12oz sugar, 4oz butter per adult per week.

**MARCH:** Meat rationed to 1s 10d [9p] worth a week for adults – about 1lb in weight.

**10 MAY:** Chamberlain resigns as Prime Minister and Winston Churchill forms National Government. Germany invades Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland.

**11 MAY:** Royal Air Force (RAF) drop first bombs on German mainland.

**14 MAY:** On BBC Radio, Anthony Eden calls for creation of Local Defence Volunteers militia, renamed the Home Guard on 23 July.

**22 MAY:** The *Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1940* is passed, granting the Government more control over persons and property.

**27 MAY – 3 JUNE:** Evacuation of British Allied troops from Dunkirk.

**4 JUNE:** Churchill's "We shall fight them on the beaches speech."

**10 JUNE:** Italy declares war on Britain.

**17 JUNE:** France requests armistice from Germany, following invasion.

**18 JUNE:** Churchill's "This was our finest hour" speech.

**19 - 28 JUNE:** 25,000 Channel Island refugees arrive in England.

**30 JUNE:** German occupation of Channel Islands.

**JULY:** Tea, margarine and cooking fats reduced to 2oz a week.

**9/10 JULY - 31 OCTOBER:** The Battle of Britain.

**22 JULY:** Defence Regulation 58AA introduced banning strike action.

**25 AUGUST:** First RAF raid on Berlin.

**7 SEPTEMBER:** Start of the night Blitz on London. This continues every night through to 2 November, causing 30,000 deaths.

**15 OCTOBER:** Dame Alice Owen's School shelter in Finsbury hit by a parachute bomb, killing 109 of the 143 taking shelter. This was the highest loss of civilian life in a single incident in Islington throughout the war.

**29 DECEMBER:** Major fire raid on the City of London.

# 1942

**FEBRUARY:** Soap rationed to 3oz a month.

**6 APRIL:** No more white bread.

**30 MAY:** RAF launches first thousand-bomber raid against Cologne.

**JUNE:** Austerity regulations ban pockets, pleats and long socks.

**1 JULY:** Basic civilian petrol ration abolished, making fuel unavailable to private car owners.

**15 NOVEMBER:** Church bells ring for the first time since May 1940 to celebrate victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein.

**1 DECEMBER:** Sir William Beveridge's Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services published. The Ministry of Labour reports that 1942 strikes cost 1,527,000 working days, as compared with 1,079,000 in 1941.

# 1943

**16 MAY:** RAF 'Dam Busters' raid.

**JULY:** Petrol, fuel, blankets, beer and food very scarce.

**24 JULY:** Start of RAF 'fire storm' raids on Hamburg.

**25 JULY:** Mussolini resigns.

**29 JULY:** Women aged 19-50 called for work in plane and munitions plants. Men eligible for military service to work in coal mines by ballot.

**17 AUGUST:** British and US troops conquer Sicily.

**8 SEPTEMBER:** Italy surrenders to the Allies.

**23 SEPTEMBER:** The Ministry of Health reports that 1942 births totalled 654,039 versus 480,137 in 1941; deaths 66,811 versus 55,043. Infant mortality was 49 per 1,000, the lowest on record for Britain.

**18 NOVEMBER:** RAF begins night raids on Berlin.

**14 DECEMBER:** First of 33 fortnightly ballot draws for compulsory recruitment for coal mining – known 'Bevin Boys'.

# 1944

**21 JANUARY:** Start of Operation Steinbock or the 'Baby Blitz', a Luftwaffe night bombing campaign against southern England, which continued until May 1944.

**6 JUNE:** D-Day. Allied armies land in Normandy to liberate occupied Europe.

**13 JUNE:** The first V-1 ('Vergeltungswaffe' or 'Vengeance weapon') rocket to hit London landed at Bow.

**18 JUNE:** The first V-1 rocket attack in Islington hit Spencer Street and Wynyatt Street, Finsbury, killing 13 people and injuring 83 more.

**27 JUNE:** Highbury Corner suffered one of Islington's most destructive wartime attacks. A V-1 flying bomb dropped on Highbury Corner killed 28 people, including a four-year-old girl, and injured a further 150.

**25 AUGUST:** Liberation of Paris.

**3 SEPTEMBER:** Liberation of Brussels.

**8 SEPTEMBER:** First V-2 rocket attack.

**17 SEPTEMBER:** Allied airborne army lands at Arnhem. Blackout replaced by a partial 'dim-out'.

**25 SEPTEMBER:** Last British troops withdrawn from Arnhem.

**DECEMBER:** 1oz of extra tea for over-70s.

**3 DECEMBER:** Home Guard stood down.

**26 DECEMBER:** V-2 rocket missile exploded at the junction of Mackenzie and Chalfont Roads, Islington. Over 340 people were casualties of this attack, including 73 deaths and 86 suffering from severe injuries.

# 1945

**1 FEBRUARY:** Part-time members of National Fire Service are stood down.

**8 MARCH:** V-2 attack on Charterhouse Street and Smithfield Market. 110 people were killed, with extensive damage to surrounding buildings.

**23 MARCH:** British troops launch final offensive across the Rhine.

**27 MARCH:** Last V-2 attack – on Orpington, Kent.

**29 MARCH:** Last V-1 attack – on London.

**29 APRIL:** German troops in Italy and Austria surrender.

**30 APRIL:** Adolf Hitler commits suicide.

**2 MAY:** Civil Defence Service is stood down.

**7 MAY:** German forces in the west surrender to General Eisenhower.

**8 MAY:** Victory in Europe 'VE-Day'. Street parties throughout Britain. Second German surrender, to the Russians in Berlin.

**9 MAY:** Liberation of German-occupied Channel Islands takes place.

**16 JUNE:** The *Family Allowances Act* passed. Mothers receive tax-free payments for each child - the first state payment in Britain going directly to a wife rather than her husband.

**18 JUNE:** Demobilisation of armed forces begins.

**26 JULY:** The Labour Party wins the general election with a historic landslide. Clement Attlee becomes Prime Minister and forms a new government.

**15 AUGUST:** Victory in the Far East. 'VJ-Day' celebrations for victory over Japan.

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EVACUATIONS



# Evacuation from Holloway, Islington

16 September 1939

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Teachers from Holloway carry their baby while supervising the evacuation of local school children.

Teachers took an immense share of the responsibility for the care and organisation of evacuated pupils, which often disrupted their own lives. All those involved in evacuation found themselves learning how the 'other half' lived, sometimes a pleasant experience, sometimes a painful one.

Image: Picture Post



# Tollington Park Central School evacuees 1939/40

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Evacuated girls from Tollington Park Central School, Islington tending to a vegetable garden in Huntingdon. The Ministry of Agriculture encouraged civilians to grow their own fruit and vegetables to maintain a healthy diet during a time of rationing and reliance on tinned food.

So-called 'Victory Gardens' were cultivated in private gardens and public parks, including Highbury Fields. There were vegetable allotments in Hyde Park and Regent's Park, and King George VI even instigated vegetable gardening at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.



# Highbury Park Vale School evacuees 1939/40

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Highbury Park Vale School, Islington, evacuees milking a cow in the country. Dealing with farm animals was an entirely new experience for most Islington children, many of whom would have never seen a cow before.

Additions to the school curriculum included nature studies, practical geography and local history. Upbeat articles in the press encouraged the healthy country lifestyle, and how the children were too busy with lessons, new friends and activities to be homesick.



# North Islington Nursery evacuees 1939/40

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North London Islington Nursery evacuees playing and having fun outside at Ashenden, Essex.

Several large and famous country houses in Britain, including Blenheim Palace and Chatsworth House, hosted groups of evacuated nursery-aged children and their mothers. Many of these grand houses also became temporary schools. In some instances, the houses and their staff benefited from a sense of new life being brought into stately surroundings.



# Islington schoolboy evacuees fishing 1939/1940

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Whilst away from the city, evacuees took part in many new outdoor activities, including fishing. The *Holborn and Finsbury Gazette* describes such a fishing trip in 1939, “The river is a big attraction and in the shallows you will find many [evacuated] youngsters, hardly ‘complete anglers’ for their equipment usually consists of a jam jar, line and a bent pin, but all very optimistic and happy.”

Throughout the war, fish was not rationed but it became increasingly scarce and more expensive to buy as the war progressed.



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# SHELTERS

# Air-raid trenches, Islington Green

24 January 1939

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Sir John Anderson (centre), Minister for Civil Defence inspects new air-raid trenches on Islington Green. During the visit he formally handed over the trenches to Islington Mayor Douglas Jackson (right). Also present was Lord Wolmar (left), with members of Islington Council standing above.

The previous year, serious civil defence efforts began. Cellars and basements were taken over as shelters, and trenches, such as these on Islington Green, were dug in the parks and residential open spaces. Buildings were also sandbagged and barrage balloons tethered over London.



# Anderson Shelter, Carlsbad Street, Islington February 1939

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Cllr Douglas Jackson, Mayor of Islington, visits London's first steel air-raid or 'Anderson' shelter. Resident Mrs Spong of 3 Carlsbad Street (now York Way Court) is seen here with her son Ernest. Named after Minister for Civil Defence, Sir John Anderson, and issued free to anyone earning less than £250-per-year, the shelters were made from corrugated steel sections.

Their bases were buried three feet in the ground and the tops covered with earth. These shelters gave good protection, except in the case of a direct hit. This photograph appeared on the front page of the *Daily Sketch* on 2 March 1939.

Image: Daily Sketch





# Public air-raid shelter, Islington 1940/41

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An ARP (Air Raid Precautions) warden, wearing Pattern No.41 overalls, sits with three young women in an unidentified public shelter in Islington during the London Blitz.

This 'moral-boosting' photograph was taken by Bill Brandt, the Ministry of Information's official photographer. It would appear in ministry publications and popular magazines, such as the *Picture Post*.

Image: Imperial War Museum [IWM: D1546]



# Air-raid shelter, Islington

1 November 1940

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Islington residents displaying 'Blitz spirit', sharing drinks with neighbours while sheltering in an unidentified underground location.

Many Londoners used tube stations and underground tunnels as air-raid shelters. They preferred to use the tunnels and platforms because they felt safest deep underground. Stations were fitted with bunks, supplied with first-aid facilities and equipped with chemical toilets. An estimated 170,000 people sheltered in the tunnels and stations during the war.



# Communal air-raid shelters, Islington

8 April 1944

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This photograph shows new communal shelters constructed in an Islington street in 1944.

These contained private quarters and were built in areas where there were three and four-storey houses that could not be provided with either Anderson or Morrison shelters; the latter form of shelter were steel cages with mesh sides.

Image: Illustrated London News



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# BOMB DAMAGE

# Auxiliary Fire Service drill, Islington 1939/40

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This dramatic photograph shows members of the Auxiliary Fire Service dealing with a blazing 'incendiary bomb crater' during a demonstration at an Islington square. Drills such as this were common during the early days of the war to ensure that crews were prepared for the 'real thing'.

The Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) was formed in 1938, as part of the Civil Defence Service. Its role was to supplement the work of fire brigades at local level. The AFS and the local brigades were superseded three years later by the National Fire Service.



# St Mary's Church, Upper Street, Islington after 9 September 1940

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At 10.20pm on 9 September 1940, the third night of the London Blitz, a high explosive bomb destroyed the majority of St Mary's church, leaving only the tower and spire intact.

The bomb exploded near the communion rails and brought the roof and galleries crashing down. The main body of the church was completely wrecked. St Mary's was rebuilt following an appeal, and dedicated in 1956.



# Pentonville Prison, Islington

after 11 May 1941

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The night of 10/11 May 1941 found the rescue services once again fully extended, with what proved to be the most devastating raid on London during the Blitz. Islington's rescue services operated at nine major incidents including one at Pentonville Prison, where a string of high explosive bombs scored a direct hit on the prison's C-Wing. The wing was rebuilt in 1958 as Pentonville Prison's education block.

The attack on the prison killed 13 people. In total that night, over 1400 people were killed in the capital and 1800 seriously injured.



# Finsbury Square, Finsbury

15 October 1941

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This atmospheric photograph shows firefighters bravely tackling a fire at Finsbury Square. The attack was part of the Luftwaffe's 'Tip and Run' raids that followed the Blitz. These ad-hoc raids occurred between May 1941 and December 1943, and were carried out by fast-moving German fighter-bombers.

The buildings ablaze here were located in the north-eastern part of Finsbury Square, near to the junctions with Christopher Street and Wilson Street. There were no reported casualties but the buildings were considered beyond repair and later demolished.





# Pembroke Street, Islington

after 17 April 1941

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On the night of 16/17 April 1941, Pembroke Street, Islington, was badly hit by a parachute mine. Lorries were brought in to clear the vast amount of debris from the bomb damage.

Although the majority of casualties from this were accounted for in two days, it was not until 29 April that the Rescue Service was able to finally leave the incident. In all, 23 residents from numbers 39-52 Pembroke Street died in the attack.



# Charterhouse Street, Finsbury after 8 March 1945

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At 10:58am on 8 March 1945, a V-2 rocket struck the north side of Charterhouse Street at Smithfield Market, near the junction with Farringdon Road, on the boundary of Finsbury Borough with the City of London. The market was very busy at this time with both workers and those queuing for produce.

As captured in this photograph, looking east from Farringdon Road, the huge explosion caused massive damage to the market buildings, affecting the railway tunnel structure below into which many victims fell. In all, 110 people died and 340 injured.



# Mackenzie Road and surrounds, Islington April 1945

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At 7.26pm on 26 December 1944, an enemy V-2 rocket missile exploded at the junction of Mackenzie and Chalfont Roads. More than 340 people were casualties of this attack: 73 people died and 86 suffered from severe injuries.

Many buildings were destroyed, including the Prince of Wales public house on Mackenzie Road. The pub's clientele who were enjoying a celebratory evening out for Christmas accounted for many of the fatalities from the attack. This aerial photograph shows the devastation caused. Paradise Park is now on the site.

Image: Imperial War Museum [IWM: CH15115]



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HOME FRONT

# Arundel Square, Islington

23 September 1939

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Residents of Arundel Square, near Highbury and Islington Station, seen here digging their own trenches and an air raid shelter in a section of the square's gardens.

The 'Dig or Die' slogan, written on placards in the photograph, was not an official term but it sums up the urgent nature of ensuring that protection against air raids was taken seriously. Ultimately, the square suffered only light damage during the war, with just a few houses on the west side receiving direct hits and no reports of any fatalities.



# Finsbury Labour Exchange Penton Street, Finsbury 1939/40

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At the time that this photograph was taken, a huge effort was in progress using posters to encourage recruitment to the armed services, as can be seen here with 'encouragement' pasted on nearly every surface. Note the overriding message on the top of the side wall, which announces "National Service is the business of the citizen."

Posters aimed at civilians included simple instructions, motivational messages, and humorous illustrations, urging everyone to 'do their bit' for the war effort.



# Cloudesley Institute, Islington

6 February 1940

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The photograph captures Islington Mayor Duncan Jackson visiting the Islington air cadets at the Cloudesley Institute, Islington in February 1940. He observed classes on wireless operating, morse code, petrol engines and model aeroplane making, as well as physical training.

The Air Defence Cadet Corps, a volunteer youth organisation, was established in 1938. It was renamed the Air Training Corps in March 1941. 55 cadets who went on to join the Royal Air Force were killed in combat.



# Finsbury Town Hall, Garnault Place after 15 August 1940

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This remarkable photograph shows a German Messerschmitt BF110 that was shot down over Kent, following a raid on Croydon on 15 August 1940. It was displayed outside Finsbury Town Hall as part of a 'Victory Tour' during the Battle of Britain.

The aircraft was probably the most photographed aircraft of the Luftwaffe and the image here shows Finsbury residents getting a close-up view of an enemy plane. The Messerschmitt was then shipped to the USA for evaluation in Spring 1941.





# Firewood piles, Islington 1940/41

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Islington residents gather free firewood from the pile of debris collected from destroyed buildings. While brick, stone and some other materials were salvaged for reuse following bomb damage to buildings, timber was available to collect as an alternative fuel to coal.

The *Fuel and Lighting (Coal) Order 1941* came into force in January 1942. Central heating was prohibited in the summer months. Domestic coal was rationed by the government to 762 kg for those in London and South East, less than those in the north, due to the milder climate in southern England.



# Finsbury Food Office Mobile Unit, Finsbury 1942

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Food rationing in Britain was introduced in January 1940 for all adults regardless of age, wealth and status. Children and babies received extra rations of meat and milk.

In 1942 the Ministry of Food launched the Welfare Food Service. This provided free or subsidised cod liver oil and canned orange juice for children under five and pregnant women. The Ministry encouraged Jamaica and British Honduras to produce the oranges used. This cheerful photograph shows the women and younger children of Finsbury outside the borough's Food Office Mobile Unit, where the oil and juice were dispensed.



# Islington mobile diphtheria immunisation clinic 1945

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Diphtheria is a highly dangerous and contagious bacterial disease primarily affecting children. Diphtheria causes a thick covering in the back of the throat, leading to difficulty breathing, heart failure, paralysis, and potential death. The Second World War prompted a number of developments in vaccinations for the protection of soldiers and civilians, including one for diphtheria.

The free diphtheria vaccination was introduced in 1940, reducing the number of cases from over 46,000 in 1940 to 962 in 1950, and the number of deaths from 2,480 to 49.



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# VE-DAY

# Seward Street, Finsbury

May 1945

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Residents of Seward Street, Finsbury enjoying a street party to celebrate Victory In Europe Day. 'VE-Day' commemorates the formal acceptance by the Allies of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces on 8 May 1945.

While London's focal point for celebrations was Trafalgar Square, the Mall and Buckingham Palace, local street parties and celebrations, like this one in Finsbury, were held all over the capital.



# Athelstane Road, Islington

May 1945

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Some celebrations started as soon as the news of the end of the war in Europe was announced on 7 May 1945. Some were postponed until all evacuees returned home so that entire families and communities could celebrate together, such as here in Athelstane Road, Finsbury Park. Events included street parties, parades and bonfires.

Revellers wore their best clothes or fancy dress. They made paper hats and sang and danced in the streets. Material for flags and bunting was de-rationed for the occasion. It was the first festive occasion that many children would have experienced.



# Cloudesley Road, Islington

May 1945

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VE-Day celebrations in the Caledonian Road and Barnsbury areas were particularly lively with music and dancing into the early hours of the morning. In Frederica Street, over 130 children enjoyed a huge tea with jelly and ice cream, they danced to an accordion band and were given a 10s (50p) note each.

In Cloudesley Street and Cloudesley Place, contributions to the celebrations were so generous that there was enough extra money to fund a cinema trip for all residents. The children of Cloudesley Road also had an additional outing, as seen here in this group photograph.



# Tilloch Street, Islington

May 1945

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As families were reunited and local communities came together to celebrate the end of the war in Europe, as seen here in Tilloch Street, Islington the church and the press considered the possibility of reconciliation between Britain and Germany.

An editorial in the *Islington Gazette* titled 'Pray for Germany' commented, "We should have failed if we have merely crushed and humiliated our foes, leaving legacy of bitter hate and sullen resentment. We must pray the German nation might experience a change of heart."





# Seward Street, Finsbury

## May 1945

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As well as street parties, as seen here in Seward Street, VE-Day celebrations in Finsbury included a tea party and a concert for 900 senior citizens at Finsbury Town Hall. An open-air service of thanksgiving at Wilmington Square, Clerkenwell on 13 May 1945 was attended by over 1,000 people.

The Mayor of Finsbury, Frederick Barnett, addressed the older generation, “Thanks are due to you for the way you brought up your children who, after spending their childhood days in ways of peace and happiness, proved themselves, when the testing time came, not merely equals but masters of a nation.”



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All images with thanks to [Islington Local History Centre](#), except where stated.

Additional exhibition programming, including further images and articles available via Twitter [@IslingtonMuseum](#) and on [friendsofim.com](#)

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