

Party Like it's 1945: How did Hampshire Celebrate the End of WWII?

Intro: Hello and welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts and enthusiasts and asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold tales.

In today's episode, Cathy Booth will be talking to social historian Emma Muscat, as she brings to life the celebrations that so many enjoyed at the end of World War II. From cake faking to glass shortages, it was no trifling matter. Over to you, Cathy.

Cathy: Emma Muscat is a social and food historian who regularly appears on television and radio. She was recently filmed as a featured contributor to a documentary commemorating the 75th anniversary of VE Day, also acting as a historical consultant and food historian for the drama reconstruction.

So, Emma, what I'd like to start with is, what are your links with Hampshire?

Emma: I live in Southampton. I'm originally from East Sussex, but I was a student in Hampshire in the 90s and a postgrad student.

I came back to live in Hampshire at the turn of the last century, or this century even, the early 2000s. I've pretty much stayed in and around here ever since.

Cathy: You do quite a lot of your research around the area that you live, don't you?

Emma: Yes. I would suggest very strongly that always look at the history that's on your doorstep. So, always start with the local history.

So although I get asked to talk about a number of topics in relation to 20th century social history and food history in particular, I always try to get a local angle where I can. So, something in Hampshire, looking at Hampshire as a whole or looking at Southampton, I always try and get my locality in there.

Cathy: So, now what I'd like to talk about is the VE and VJ Day. First of all about the social and historical context, and then moving on to, later, how Hampshire commemorated them. So, first of all, what are VE and VJ Day?

Emma: VE Day is simply Victory in Europe Day. Now, that took place in 1945 the 8th and the 9th of May, and it simply means the end of the war in Europe. VJ Day is the middle of August, in 1945, official end of the global war. So the Pacific War, which was still raging in May 1945, but of course didn't end until the middle of August.

Cathy: And what would have been different for people in Britain immediately on those dates?

Emma: If we go back to the start of 1945 in Britain, we are looking at the fact that people knew there was something – of course, unlike today where we're used to 24 hour news, we're used to things being relatively uncensored. Back then, a lot of the news that you listened to, of course your radio was your main source of information. So the news that would be coming forward would be heavily censored. But there was still that feeling that something was about to come to an end. That feeling of anticipation, and that really begins to pick up pace from about end of February into March. Housewives were certainly trying to, not stockpile, stockpile of any sort was forbidden. And not only was it forbidden, it was a criminal offence.

You'd get a substantial fine and up to two years in prison if you were caught doing it. But legitimately saving your ration coupons to get extra supplies in, because you knew a big party was around the corner. So in that regard, everyday life carried on as normal. Obviously rationing actually didn't end until 1954. So you would be expected to continue. Now, what was really interesting about the announcements and the actual VE Day celebrations themselves, 'cause it wasn't officially announced until the evening of the 7th of May. People were really keeping very close to their radios, because they thought the announcement was going to be made anytime now. The first indication that possibly VE Day could be imminent was that an announcement was made by the Board of Trade at about five o'clock in the afternoon on the 7th to say that, it would be possible to purchase bunting as long as it was in red, white and blue plain cotton. Obviously, fabric was rationed in World War II. But they were going to release this fabric so that you could purchase pre-made bunting or make your own bunting. So the housewives up and down Britain thought, "Oh, this is interesting, 'cause the Board of Trade would never allow the public to have such a free rein with something so frivolous as bunting, if it really wasn't going to go ahead." So we always say that the housewives had that sort of sixth sense that something was about to happen. But the announcement didn't finally get made til 7:40 in the evening on the 7th. And it was a very short, perfunctory announcement declaring that the war in Europe was over, and the next two days would be a public holiday.

And there was also that people were waking up the next day thinking "Well, do we still go to work?" You know, it's a public holiday, but what does this actually mean? So it's really interesting looking at some of the oral history surrounding that. So in answer to your question, because they were used to being very disciplined, taking the instructions and making sure that they followed the rules from the government, whichever government department was issuing them, they were expected to do so. So there wasn't any question of, "Oh, well, it's going to possibly happen, so I won't bother going to work." So it's quite late in the day. And there's a really lovely story that actually in London, it was a group of youngsters, in their teens and twenties, who'd made their way up to Trafalgar Square. This was on the 7th, on the sort of late afternoon, expecting any moment to hear this announcement that victory in Europe was about to be declared. And, when it got to six o'clock they all went back home, and of course they only had to wait an hour and 40 minutes later. And those that hadn't already left London came straight back into the West End and started partying from the 7th. So if you were young, free and able to, your party began on the 7th, but officially it was the 8th and the 9th.

Cathy: How were those days, the Victory in Europe and Victory in Japan?

Emma: VE Day is Victory in Europe Day and VJ Day is Victory in Japan Day. And for those women and men who had sons or relatives fighting overseas and those women who had husbands or boyfriends still overseas, still perhaps by that stage a large proportion were in prison of war camps in the Far East, in Burma or Singapore. And so for a number of people the VE Day was quite bitter-sweet, because unless your loved one was fighting in Europe, your war hadn't ended. And for those also who had lost loved ones, not everybody felt in the mood to celebrate. But a majority of people did.

Street Parties

Cathy: So apart from those people, did everyone join in with the street parties?

Emma: A majority of people did embrace VE Day, and it was an opportunity for young and old to really let down their hair. It was pressing pause and lifting all the restrictions that had been in place over the wartime. Just these two days of really letting loose and what's really interesting, particularly in relation to Hampshire, we look at Southampton being a port town. There were very strict rules as well that were issued as to, not how to commemorate and celebrate VE Day – but in Southampton, because it was a port city, you were not allowed – ‘cause one of the things that often people did up and down the country was light bonfires, this act of lighting bonfires. Cinemas were lit up for the first time since the beginning of the war. All the fairy lights were coming out from the back of the cupboards, it's amazing the amount, if you look at the photographs from the time, the incredible display of decorations that people had. So everybody was allowed to put all the lights on. And if you lived within five miles of a port, like Southampton, you were forbidden from lighting these bonfires for VE Day. But of course, nobody took any notice, and actually, very few crimes were reported. It was a generally good natured event. But, interestingly enough, in Southampton, they of course, like a lot of towns, they couldn't have charge sheets for these two days events cause you imagine all the beer and all the drinking that was going on.

Of course, there were things that did happen and they couldn't have empty charge sheets. So you do get crimes recorded, but they're usually broken windows and drunken behaviour. But very low-key and lots of blind eyes were turned for that occasion. There were lots of special constables, particularly in Southampton, that were asked to do 12 hour shifts because they expected it to be, not disorder, but if you like good, human, minor infractions they did expect to take place. But of course the people of Southampton and surrounding areas, they lit all their bonfires. They put all the lights on in the shops. The cinemas were all lit up. And they were worried about any potential enemy action. So that's why they said, you know, please don't illuminate your area too much.

But nobody took any notice. And in fact, in Southampton, there was a new housing development near the city centre and it wasn't obviously complete. And they were just wooden door frames.

And these bonfires weren't just started after midnight on the early hours of the 8th. ‘Cause it's one minute after midnight on the 8th of May is when all the celebrations really do begin to

kick off in earnest with all the ships in the port sounding all their horns. People started to light bonfires as early as that.

But they wanted to keep the bonfires going, to keep the home fires burning was the kind of the symbolism of that. Of course, you're going to run out of material to put on your fire. So, there were a number of cases that people were pulling off the wooden door frames off this new housing development in Southampton to add to the bonfire.

But again, a blind eye was turned to that, but the government had said "Please don't use these very scarce materials because although we're letting our hair down for two days, ultimately, resources are very scarce."

Celebration

Cathy: So you're mentioning the bonfires there. How else did people celebrate?

Emma: Interestingly, there was a lot of fireworks. And we have a diary in Southampton Archives by a gentleman called Daniel Cox, who was a keen diarist actually, and the World War II diaries are of particular interest. But he said, I don't know where anybody got these fireworks from because if you had a store somewhere that you'd kept from the start of the war, they might be a bit damp, you didn't know whether you were going to use them again and they were brought out of mothballs really for the occasion.

Cathy: So there were fireworks and there were bonfires?

Emma: Bonfires, fireworks. If you lived near the ports, you would hear the ships. The sirens from the ships were a constant, sort of background soundtrack to the occasion. And then of course, if you had your street party, you would have entertainment. People would wheel the piano out into the road, so there'd be a real cacophony of noise.

It was a very noisy, very bright, very fun filled few days. A complete contrast to what had obviously gone on during the war with all the blackouts and all the restrictions. And particularly obviously light and not showing any light was a very, very important part of the sort of home front defences.

The question that I've been asked quite a few times is when people look at the photographs – there's a lot of home video footage, some colour, some black and white – people say, so how on earth did they get all these fancy dress costumes in times when resources were really scarce or all these incredible decorations from streamers to flags. And it wasn't just British flags, it was a lot of American flags. Harrods sold American and British flags in readiness for VE Day.

So as I was saying earlier about preparing. People knew it was coming. So obviously retailers just had these in stock out the back. But one of the reasons being was that in May 1935, George the Fifth's Silver Jubilee, and also the Coronation of George the Sixth as well in 1937.

So of course you've got these two incredibly big civic occasions where people already had those decorations tucked away in the back of the cupboard. And one lovely little story, it's on the Isle of Man, there's a teacher training college. And a young girl is traveling back. She'd been out for the day on the 7th, and she was heading back towards her accommodation. And she gets there, and the housekeeper who is looking after the young ladies at this college has got a box of chocolates out from under the stairwell. It's been there since 1939 and they're a little bit white, you know, obviously been there for many years. But people, at that stage would eat almost anything, because they weren't fussy. Their palates were completely destroyed by a lot of the wartime food that they had consumed.

And you get stories also of bottles of Sherry that had been lingering in the back of cupboards waiting for that special occasion to open and food items that had been tucked away. And perhaps if you were very lucky, you'd been able to procure some peaches or some tinned peaches or some jams.

In Southampton, we have quite a lot of oral history testimony about D-Day in 1944, because of course the streets were filled in the build up to D-Day with tanks and military personnel. And they often were there for quite some time before they got their final orders. And a lot of the local people, as far as up to the Common and Shirley, and in order to sort of thank them – 'cause obviously the Americans always had really good rations, they were really well fed – and they donated or gave to local people, and certainly local children, chocolate and tins of fruit and lots of jams. Although, some things were available, very difficult to get hold of by this stage in the war. So those special items that were in the back of your store cupboard, would have been brought out for your VE Day party.

So you get lots of out-of-date foods, you get lots of extraordinary foods. And I think the best image that I've seen is in colour home footage of one VE Day party with so much food, including strings of doughnuts used as decoration. Just a community shared all of their resources or their coupons to put together a feast.

Cathy: I'm interested in knowing what would have looked different from a street party of today?

Emma: That's really interesting. I mean, obviously street parties today, some people make their food all completely from scratch, others would choose to perhaps buy pre-packaged items. And of course, this was a time where there were synthetic products around, and one thing that does tend to surprise people is that food colouring, and also synthetic food flavourings, were also around then. In fact, we used quite a bit, even though they might've been out of date and kept for many, many years, from perhaps the start of the war. So, certainly the amount of food is quite extraordinary. In terms of bread, bread is a really interesting example because the national loaf was a deeply unpleasant thing to eat, but people didn't mind. It was legally adulterated¹ with chalk and vitamins were added. So the national

¹ 'Adulterated', with its pejorative connotations, is not quite correct. Chalk was added to provide adequate amounts of calcium (essential for bone and tooth health) to the diet. The main reasons wartime bread was not very palatable were that the flour was nearer to wholemeal than people were

loaf was a uniformed loaf, not like the range of breads that we have today. I've made national loafs for display purposes, it's heavy food.

A lot of jellies. A lot of blancmanges. The other aspect of it is some of those street parties, obviously they're very proud of the spread that they've been able to put on for the neighbourhood. You often see these three-tiered cakes, and you think, how on earth did they get all the ingredients to make that three-tiered – looks like a wedding cake.

Of course, wartime, if you were to get married and you wanted a three-tier celebration cake, the bottom would be the actual cake. And then the top two would be fake cakes so that they look like tiers of a cake, but they're actually cardboard. And you can still see surviving examples actually in museums. They're very rare, but they're really interesting. So when you ever see a three-tier cake during that wartime period, you think "Oh, actually the top tiers are probably fake."

Lots of trifle, and of course, you know, a little bit of sherry. Sherry comes up a lot actually in a lot of oral history. Sherry was quite popular. So you had trifles, you'd get sandwiches. And of course, fruit is extremely scarce unless you live in the country, unless you have an apple tree that you have obviously access to. But, Mock Banana is one of my favourites, and that is actually made from mashed up, boiled parsnips. And you add a little bit of yellow colouring to it, and you add a little bit of banana extract as flavouring, and that would have been put in sandwiches. There's a lot of fake marzipan, people had become quite inventive by this stage in the end of the war, but in terms of ration-book cooking.

So people were very creative and we are encouraged now to be very inventive with our store cupboards and a crisis really does focus the mind. If you were able to get fresh milk, that was fantastic, but it'd often be made with powdered milk. Any cakes that you have, actually, one of the cakes that I made for the drama reconstruction. We were going for one of our early takes, and the actors were sitting down and somebody said "Oh, you've got chemicals in this cake." And it made me smile as I was watching the monitor. Of course, I didn't put chemicals in the cake, but I'd used vinegar and bicarb of soda to help give the cake a rise. Because of course, that was a completely original recipe and it does give that slightly chemical smell. So there was this cake that was made with vinegar and bicarb of soda, but people were very creative and inventive.

Cathy: Did you have to experiment a lot in order to create these cakes and other recipes for the documentary?

Emma: Not really. Because I have done quite a bit of World War II ration-book cookery before, either for if I'd been blogging or for display purposes. So I know the ones that work, and I know the ones that don't.

used to, the bread was sold one day old to discourage people from eating too much of it and of course butter was rationed, 2oz per week.

The only thing that I did, which I would say is slightly different, but it was, it was just really for the camera, was, for example, the custard. I'm using Bird's custard powder, which was obviously a brand has been around since the Victorian era actually, but it's used quite a bit. There's a lot of custard tarts. I added a little bit more yellow colourant in that, just so it looked a little bit more vibrant. So some small tricks like that I would do. And also this was street party food for display purposes only. So nobody was allowed to eat it because it simply needed to be able to hold under the filming conditions.

They took it near to the mouth but they didn't consume it. I think some of them are quite grateful for that actually.

Cathy: What would it have tasted like?

Emma: Some of the things like the sausage rolls. The meat was sausage meat, but the pastry you obviously you haven't got quite so much fat and they used quite a bit of lard back then. And also scrapings from cooking your bacon or cooking your meats.

You kept all that fat that nowadays we don't necessarily keep and we get rid of it 'cause we think fat is bad, but they kept that fat and would reuse it so they haven't got that lovely puff pastry that we would associate with modern day. So they're little bit like bricks with a bit of meat in the middle.

So, I said, "Don't eat those. Please don't eat those." But, it's highly up to them themselves. I mean, nothing would really happen to them because there's just simply, when I say it's just not particularly palatable, rather than it being poisonous.

Good example of that is jellies and blancmanges, cause we had a few scenes in a kitchen. So we showed the preparation, we showed some housewives and some young women making the food. Yeah, sorry, it's not very feminist! We showed them making the sandwiches, we showed them unmoulding the jellies and the blancmanges.

And of course that has to really hold its shape. I will add extra gelatine and a lot of it, so you know, that's quite strong. And extra corn flour into the blancmange. So you wouldn't really want to eat it. It looks amazing because it's held its shape under the lights and after multiple takes. But, it's not very palatable. So it's not going to poison you, but it's just not going to be very pleasant.

Comparing Food

Cathy: So to what extent was the food that you were recreating not good to eat because you'd made it for the cameras, and to what extent was it that we wouldn't have enjoyed it now compared to what we eat now?

Emma: Okay, so say for example, I didn't add extra gelatine and I didn't add all the extra bits. You would have enjoyed it, but you would have found the lack of sweetness in it quite surprising, because nowadays, unless you have a sugar free diet, the palate is used to items with hidden sugars. It was quite basic then, and even though the 30s, before the Second World

War it was quite an extravagant food time actually. I mean, it was the time of lots of mayonnaise and lots of extravagant salads and, and yes, there was a lot of sugary items. But if you imagine for six years you've had very little sugar. Sugar is available, but it's on ration and difficult to obviously get hold of. So for example, custard, which you do add a reasonable amount of sugar. If you were to have custard in the Second World War, if you use fresh milk, great. It's likely that you'd use National Dried milk. You would have found that to have been unpalatable insofar as if you've got a sweet tooth.

But, people tucked into things, you know, they were just really grateful for. It was a huge spectacle and a spread. And I am not suggesting that these foods were unpleasant, because they weren't. It's just to a modern palate they're just different, you know, it's like the lemonade that they had back then. They had lemonade powder, so quite synthetic. But we're used to slightly better quality lemonade. And of course, before the war, it was different. You'd freshly squeeze your lemonade.

Then the wartime comes that becomes synthetic. The nearest you get would be some carbonated soda water or carbonated water with a sachet of lemonade. And in fact, British troops had a sachet of this mixture to put in their own drinks. So it was quite a sort of synthetic, experience for them, but they still enjoyed it. The kids tucked into it. It was an abundance of food, which is always the thing that surprises me about the VE Day celebrations. And to say that it was a lack of dishes available is absolute rubbish.

It was like a children's tea party, but absolutely taken up by, you know, 10/20 fold, 'cause most of the community street parties – I think that's quite an important point to make – they were aimed at more the children and the women in the street. There will be some older men, but any of the younger men and teenage into the 20s and younger women that weren't either serving overseas, if they were around, they might be on leave. Perhaps from the forces not officially demobbed yet. Or they may well have been in reserved occupations. So that's why you get a lot of the images of community street parties. There's a lot of women. It's a lot of children.

Because the youngsters, they went to the towns, they went to the pubs. They did all the things that young people want to do. The street parties were really more aimed at children, predominantly, although once the children had gone to bed in the evening, the adults would sit around and sit around their bonfire and chat and exchange stories. But it would be mostly the older men and some of those women, of course, would be widowed.

Cathy: The other thing I heard was about the men going to the pubs.

Emma: Winston Churchill was concerned that there wouldn't be enough beer to lubricate all the celebrations for VE Day. And so he did, obviously, amongst all his other really important memos and orders that he was issuing at the time. Obviously, beer was really important. He did obviously instruct the breweries to produce predominantly more. Certain parts of the country did run out of beer by the time it got to the second day. What we also have is that by the time it got to the second day, I have also seen a number of oral histories that talk about people having to take their own glassware to the pub.

So if they wanted to carry on drinking, 'cause either the glasses were smashed or broken from the first day, or there wasn't enough to go around. So they would take their glassware from home or a jam jar. So they take their own jam jar and have that filled up with beer. But there were pockets of the country where beer did run very short. And it did, not completely run out, it had to be sort of rationed because obviously the drinking hours were extended. And remember, this was a two-day event. It wasn't just a one-day event. So, drunkenness was a huge, huge, huge problem, but it was good spirited drunkenness, mostly.

That comes back to that sort of what the policemen were turning their blind eye to. But, you know, people were just letting their hair down. And in Southampton, one of the flags from the Civic Centre was stolen and there was a note put in the paper. 'Cause the Daily Echo, they stopped printing. They printed one on the 8th and then they didn't reprint until the 10th. They gave all the staff off, so it really was a national holiday for everybody. Even in the broadcast, the print journalism as well. But there was a note put into the Echo later that week to say that please could they return the flags from the Civic Centre.

So there were all sorts of things like that. I mean, it was good spirited. And one of the questions that I have been asked before actually, and we looked into this in the documentary. Was that there was such an abundance of food. Somebody said, well, would that have been black market food? Obviously, the black market in food hoarding was rife. Pockets of it were, it did happen. I'm sure a number of items that were on display would definitely have been procured by, should we say less than honest means.

It was a risk because most street parties, most were photographed and if your picture appeared in the paper and you suddenly had this enormous crate of beer or this fantastically large slab of butter, I think questions would be asked. So you would be taking a risk. But that's not to say that people didn't. Home brewing was still something that people did if they had the facilities to do so.

Bearing in also mind at this stage in the war, people had allotments and the Dig for Victory campaign was well and truly developed. And even if you've lived in a flat, you'd have a window box. And May time is a time, you know, when you start to get the produce. So having salads, there were some salad items if you had access to an allotment. And the other little detail that I thought it was just a fluke when I first started looking at the imagery. Every street party table that I saw all had flowers on it in vases.

It was quite extravagant. But those flowers weren't the cut flowers that you get from the supermarket. They would be wildflowers that would be growing in your front garden. And so it was a banquet. It really was, as best as they possibly could. It was showing your best side, and I'm sure streets competed against each other to be able to show the best that they could.

Cathy: And I hear that the mayor visiting was quite an important thing for the street parties?

Emma: Yeah, absolutely. So first of all, film stock was extremely difficult to get hold of in the war. So, why do we have so many photographs of these street parties? Well, there's a number of reasons for that. Possibly that you might've kept a precious one or two rolls of film. You kept it carefully in the dark and you just hoped that that would work for the occasion.

Secondly, the local paper would be sending a photographer to as many of those street parties. Cause there were official civic events as well that took place and the street parties is just a part of the story – send an official photographer along. So in addition to that, if you think about the civic nature of it, so you have the official civics events that took place, and most of those were in the afternoon and they were in Southampton outside the Guildhall.

And then three o'clock was the official address that was broadcast on the radio from Churchill that everybody in the country, regardless of what you were doing. 3 PM on the 8th of May you would have listened to, and then nine o'clock in the evening, of course, that same day was the King's speech.

So there was the official events, very more stiff and starchy. But then the mayor and the mayoress would then travel round, and this is not just Southampton, this is other areas. The local mayor and mayoress would travel around to the street parties and you see lots of fun photographs. And those street parties where the mayor and mayoress couldn't attend, what they would do, so they wouldn't feel left out, they would take a man and a woman or a boy and a man, whoever volunteered to be, if you like a fake mayor and mayoress. So you often get in those circumstances where the real mayor and mayoress didn't visit, you'd get examples of a young boy who would be dressed as a woman, perhaps in his sister's clothes to be the mayoress. And then you would get a girl who was dressed as a boy to be the mayor. So they had fun, the fancy dress, that was a big part of it. And they had fancy dress competitions as part of the street parties as well.

And that goes back to the fact that there was costumes and pageantry leftover from the Coronation and the Jubilee before the war started. But we do have some really interesting examples, actually, Bitterne Local History Society had a fantastic example of exactly this taking place.

Obviously the mayor and mayoress of Southampton visited many of the street parties, but this one they didn't. And you have a father and a daughter. The daughter is dressed in the father's clothes and the father is dressed in actually his wife's clothes, and it's actually captioned as such. I won't say their names, but that's quite a common sort of theme, but people were just having fun. It doesn't have the same connotations as it, as it does now. People were just playing around having a bit of fun. And there's a lovely example of one of a mayoral chain made from bottle tops and whatever people had to hand to try and sort of recreate a fake mayor and mayoress.

Cathy: And you mentioned the three-tier cakes. Would those have been wedding cakes?

Emma: Now, the idea of the cardboard-cake, or the cardboard-tier, definitely was something that happened relatively regularly in the wartime, and it was for christenings or weddings where you'd normally have those multi-tiered celebration cakes. And as I say, there are surviving examples in museums up and down the country.

But yes, not every street party would have or choose to have a three-tier celebration cake. If they could afford or managed to have enough coupons together to be able to get enough dried fruit to pull together to make at least one cake. Then the other two would be, if it was a

threetier, then the top two would be cardboard cakes. Yeah, definitely. Just to give the illusion really.

Cathy: And were there many weddings at the same time?

Emma: Yeah, I can't give you the exact number. We know that there was a baby boom nine months later.

That's where the term comes from. And if you want to read a little bit more about that, if you have a look on the Office for National Statistics and put in VE Day, there's a fantastic article about the babies that were born nine months later. That's a really interesting read and that is where the term, obviously, baby boomers originated from.

So in terms of the weddings. So that would depend on whether your loved one was at home on leave at the time. If they were fortunate to be so, then you would be in a position to double-up the street party as your reception. And that did happen. And we do have a number of examples of that. And the only reason we, we know about that is it comes to us in the oral histories.

Whatever your circumstances were you had to still apply for a special license. Talking earlier about the timeframe of this, so although the government had a, not a different timeframe, but there was a lot going on behind the scenes. The treaty was being signed in Rheims, and there was all that going on. You know, public weren't told until the evening of the 7th of May, so it was really too late if you had then said, "Oh, well let's get married tomorrow." So those that would have married during the VE Day celebrations on the 8th and the 9th would have already applied for a special license. So then they would go, "Oh, actually, let's have it on VE Day," you know? So if they're already in the system, then they could choose that as a day to legally get married. But you couldn't just decide the night before, because even in the, you know, wartime it would be still too quick. Unless you were on board a ship. But that's another story.

Cathy: Going back to your recipes, which is your favourite that you created for that time period?

Emma: Oh, the favourite to have recreated. I love doing jellies. I love moulded desserts because I like when they come out. It's the jeopardy of it. Sometimes they work and they come out the mould and sometimes they don't. But then they're quite fun and they're visually quite fun. If we just stick to the street parties, because obviously that's party celebration food, I think there are a couple that I think are ingenious, and not made specifically for the street parties, but were certainly ration-book, cookery shortcuts. One is Mock Marzipan, which is made with broad beans, which is sieved multiple times through a sieve. And you don't think it's gonna work. But once you do it, and once you add the almond essence, and then you add a little bit of sugar to it, you get the most amazing Marzipan. And the other thing which I think is really clever, and this was used in World War I in – rationing came very late in World War I towards the end of the war – and that is using warm milk to bulk out butter. And it is just brilliant. You have to do it very gradually and very slowly, but it really works. Although there is a point of which it can split and turn over quickly, but it really, really works.

Cathy: So, how do you do that?

Emma: Well, it's a similar method to when you're making mayonnaise. You have to take it very, very, very, very slowly. So you warm the milk and then, obviously during the Second World War, you're talking about rotary whisks, so that's hand whisks, but slightly better than just the normal whisk or beater.

So you need something reasonably robust and it's, it's best done as a two-handed job. So you put the butter that you've got into a bowl, not straight from the fridge, it needs to be at room temperature and the bowl needs to be slightly warm, not hot, because it will melt the butter. Then you warm the milk, so not hot and not too warm. And then you just get somebody to just gradually tip the milk in and bearing in mind it was full cream milk here we're talking about, we're not talking about today with skimmed and semi-skimmed and dairy free. And it only works with that, and I know that from direct experimenting, you have to use proper organic butter. So it needs to be the pure stuff. So not with all sorts of bits added. So you put your milk slightly warm, you slightly start to pour it into your butter.

And then you turn really quickly with the rotary – I'm saying the rotary whisk, because if you want to be authentic, that's what you need to be using. But if you want to do it as a modern day, then you just use your electric hand beaters. But it needs to be a slow, slow stream.

You just get this amazing amount of butter. But there is a point it can start to split and you can sort of see it sort of turning over, but it's a great way to stretch a very prized ingredient.

Cathy: For somebody who isn't particularly good at cooking, but wanted to contribute to say, a celebration in an authentic way, from the 1940s, could you recommend a recipe they could use?

Emma: Well, trifle I think. And I'm not talking about the fancy trifles. It's such a million miles away from a trifle you wouldn't recognize it. At it's basic you need packet of red jelly, which is easy to make. But if you want to be authentic, you'd need to make a cake or have a cake in your cupboard. A Madeira cake, ideally, but slightly stale. A tin of fruit. And then you would put all your sponges on the bottom. If you've got Sherry, you can add a little bit of Sherry just to moisten it. Then what you should do once that's all soaked in you then make your jelly. When you make your jelly you need a really big bowl. That's always the rookie error when people are making trifles. So one packet of jelly will make you one pint of jelly.

With the jelly, when you make it, let it cool down so that it's starting to set, but not setting. Then pour it over the top and then put that into your fridge. Leave it for about an hour, take it out. Drain off the can of fruit, the cocktail fruit, which is very cheap just to buy in the store. You can still get it now.

There are recipes, if you really want to be authentic and you want to be a World War II housewife and do it properly, remember, no waste. You don't waste a thing. So the juice, you would actually use that and add some gelatine and make another layer of jelly. However, if you don't want to do that, you take the strained fruit and then you sprinkle that on top of the

jelly that's just not completely set, but is setting. 'Cause if you don't let the jelly set, everything just rises to the top and it's deeply unpleasant, and that's where people go wrong with the trifle. And then you leave that into your fridge. Maybe two or three hours later, you then make your custard and again, let that slightly set, but put a cover over the custard so it doesn't get a film on the top because you don't want that. And then you add that onto the top. These are all quite simple, sort of pre-made ingredients that are quite sort of straightforward. You just need to take your time doing it.

So the next stage is you can add cream. So cream in the wartime was extremely scarce, so you'd get mock cream, which is made with all sorts of things, including dried powdered milk. It's quite expensive actually, powdered milk now, but you can get semi-skimmed or you can get full. You can actually make mock cream with more custard powder, there's lots of different ways that you can do it.

And then you can put your glacé cherries on the top, if you have them tucked away in the back of the cupboard. So, it's visually quite spectacular and you could add your Hundreds & Thousands, but that's not really World War II. That's not authentic, but there's nothing to stop you doing it. I would say it's quite a simple dish to do, a simple sort of what they call celebration trifle.

Cathy: That sounds wonderful. I think even I could do that one.

Emma: It is actually. It's quite simple, yeah. You don't need to be, you don't need to be, you just need to have patience. And my top tip is just do not pour hot jelly onto anything. The other thing is if you want to be even more simple and do something quite attractive. If you've got a jelly mould at home, even if you haven't and you've got a bowl that you think, "Well actually that could work as a glass bowl." Technically the rules of thumb are you grease a blancmange mould and you wet a jelly mould. But when you're doing something like this and you're doing it in a non-traditional mould, if you wanted to use a glass bowl I would grease it very, very slightly with just a little bit of vegetable oil.

Don't use olive oil cause it would be really unpleasant on the outside. But just grease it so that it would come out. You could get that tin of fruit, that cocktail fruit, and you could, if you wanted to, on the measurements on the jelly, it's usually you put half a pint of boiling water in one packet will make a pint. So you start with cutting up the jelly cubes. You put your boiling water in and it's half a pint. Then you could use, instead of adding cold water to the top, if you really wanted to make sure you didn't waste anything, you could add the juice from the fruit cocktail.

Well, that's what I would do if I was doing it properly. And that makes it up to a pint. Make sure that gets reasonably cold. Not so that it's massively setting, but it's on its way there. Put it into the mould, put it into the fridge for about half an hour, maybe an hour. Then add your fruit, because if you don't, what will happen is if you add it altogether, the fruit would just sink to the bottom.

But on a yellow or an orange jelly, it's fantastic. It looks amazing. And people go "How on earth did you do that?" And you tip it out and it's this incredibly attractive. And it's actually really tasty. If I was doing it for film, I'd add lots of gelatine and it would be unpleasant.

But, there's nothing in that that you wouldn't want to eat with a bit of evaporated milk because that's what people had, evaporated or condensed milk.

Outro: We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you'd like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, winchesterheritageopendays.org, click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you for listening.