

VE DAY 8th MAY 1945

A contemporary description by Bruce Paterson

Extract from a letter, written at age 16 to his mother, from boarding school.

.....
Monday [14/5/45]

The College,
Winchester.

I have been doing all sorts of things since the beginning of the half [= term]. I started organ lessons last Monday. As well as Beethoven Piano Concerto in G, we are doing (or hoping to) [*in school orchestra*] “Pantomime” by Falla; it is in 7 time !

I will start with Monday last when V-day was announced to be the following Tuesday. Cathedral bells were rung for nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of hour [*not permitted during wartime, except as warning of enemy invasion*], and sounded very nice, until 10.15. College [*the 70 scholars aged 13 -18*] stayed up until about 11 pm community singing in Chamber Court [*quad surrounded by their living quarters, and the school chapel*] by candle light and all feeling very light (- headed ?).

Tuesday was of course a Whole holiday, and I had not arranged to do anything as it was such short notice. But we put up flags in strings across chamber court. Some jovial young spark threw a china pot off chapel roof into chamber court; I’ve never seen such an amazing disintegration on impact; there was no piece as big as a halfpenny and the pop it made was terrific. I had a long chat, about 1½ hr at least, with S.W. [*Sydney Watson, head music teacher*]. It started by my choosing for him what hymns to have for the week [*compulsory chapel services every day, twice on Sat & Sun*]. Then went on to Cheadle Hulme etc [*Cheshire, where his mother was living*]; he knows Manchester and round about there quite well as he was born near there. I told him what you said about B.B.C. vices etc [*she was an author and broadcaster*] and so it went on. Then he took me round his garden, which was looking lovely [*many master’s homes were in a nearby street*]; and then it was supper time for me. After, I climbed on the roof [*up a spiral stone stairway*] and got a marvellous view of Cathedral, and some gardens and lovely old houses and beautiful trees with the sun on them, from chapel roof. I wish I could have taken a colour film of it. We had a thanksgiving service in the evening, and the singing was deafeningly wonderful [*about 400 male voices in unison*]. If chapel really likes a hymn, it can sing it magnificently, and it liked those.

At 10.15 pm we had an age long custom called “Illumina”, which we have not been able to do since the war. About 250 candles were put and lit in little niches all the way round the *[high flint]* wall of Meads, that is the field which War Cloister, School *[the big assembly hall]* (where concert was) etc face. Everyone *[the whole school had nearly 500 students]* walked round meads talking to their friends and admired a truly remarkable sight which I think must be almost unique. It was very different from anything I have ever seen before; a mass of little points of light on three sides of one, with a few Verey lights *[military signal rockets]* and fireworks going off at unexpected points to cause amusement, alarm, despondency etc according to whether one was expecting them or not. After that finished, at about 10.45, we were supposed to go to bed, but a small party of us, Mark, Richard, Pat Moberly, and two whom you don’t know, Storey and Hudson, went to St Giles hill at bottom end of high street *[normally out of bounds for all students]* where most of the town was gathered around a ten foot bonfire.

The smell of beer all the way up the steps and all around was almost overpowering in spite of being in no way sheltered from the breeze. We walked in a line right up the high street which was festooned with flags and pretty lights. We tip toed under 2nd masters wide open window from which light was streaming, but he did not seem to hear; *[he was house-master for College]* and after a quick cool bath (very necessary) got into bed by midnight, very hot and cheerful.

