

Friern Barnet *Newsletter*

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HAPPY XMAS (WAR IS OVER)

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In Barnet and the rest of Britain, the end of World War Two in 1945 did not see the end of wartime conditions; at least ten years were to go by before there was any real return to pre-war lifestyles.

Take this 1946 advertisement as an example: "There is no shortage of wine," said the Victoria Wine Company. "However, there is a severe shortage of empty bottles. We urge our customers to return their empties so that we can continue to supply our fine wines."

Among the reasons for this and more serious situations, was that Britain was flat broke. Its huge wartime debts, principally to the USA, had to be repaid and that meant that most British-made 'luxury' goods went for export. Also, a devastated Europe had to be rebuilt just as today's Iraq and Syria need rebuilding. Germany and many other parts of Europe were facing starvation and this was to lead to an extra tightening of belts in this country – bread and potatoes were to be rationed for the first time.

Christmas 1946 was in some ways worse than the wartime Christmases. True, the dreaded air raids and blackouts were things of the past and many servicemen had been reunited with their families. But the chronic shortage of food and consumer goods remained. As a gesture to the spirit of the season, the government allowed some extra food rations but just for Christmas week. They make interesting comparisons with today's consumption:

Special weekly ration (per person) in Christmas

- Sugar: increase from 1/2lb to 2lbs (900g)
- Meat: (rationed by price) increased from 1/4d (7p) to 2/- (10p) of which 4d must be taken in corned beef
- Sweets: increased
From 2oz (63g) to 10oz (315g) for people under 18 or over 70 years of age, upon proof of identity by the Food Office

Set against this was the bad news that the popular local government-run civic restaurants which had provided nourishing meals at reasonable prices were scheduled for closure. A typical civic restaurant wartime menu was:

Lentil Soup	1d
Rabbit Pie & Veg	6d & 8d
Braised Liver & Veg	6d & 8d
Steak & kidney Pie & Veg	6d & 8d

Sultana Roll	2d
Rice Pudding	2d
Children's Meals	4d

What of Christmas entertainment? There was no television. The radio and local cinemas were the main sources of amusement and many people enjoyed the delights of the gramophone. HMV's December record releases included the hugely popular local stars, Ann Ziegler and Webster Booth (who lived in Torrington Park) singing *Fold Your Wings* from *Glamorous Night* by Ivor Novello.

The King's Christmas broadcast to the Empire was a must for most families. The Odeon at Barnet was showing *Blue Skies*, with Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire and Joan Caulfield. The North Finchley Gaumont screened *Three Girls in Blue* featuring June Haven, Vivian Blain and Vera Ellen, while The New Bohemia in Finchley offered *London Town* with a British cast that included Sid Field, Kay Kendal, Greta Gynt and Petula Clark. Ballroom dancing was immensely popular. The Arcadia Skating Rink in Finchley opened each day from 2.30pm and hosted dances on both Christmas Eve and Boxing Day.

Much of the entertainment, however, was organised by local clubs and societies. The Finchley and Friern Barnet Rabbit and Poultry Club held its annual show at Martin School, East Finchley, on December 7 – admission was 6d (2.5p). Holy Trinity Church in Finchley performed Handel's *Messiah* while nearby Christ Church had Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.

There were many Christmas gift services including those at North Finchley Congregational Church and Edgware Sunday School, and a fundraising for St Dunstan's Home for wounded ex-servicemen was held at Mill Hill. As ever, schools relaxed their timetables over the Christmas season.

When staff at Manorside School organised their Christmas party, they aimed to make it 'as good as pre-war' in spite of the shortage of rations. They would make up for it, they said, by the high quality of the games and the good companionship which had characterised the war years.

This year, as we indulge in unlimited food and drink; mellowed by the port wine and entertained by *The Great Escape* on TV and the mellifluous call of the mobile phone, may we wish our readers the compliments of the season.

Footnote: This article first appeared in *Barnet Times* on 18 December 2003.

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