

January 1945

By January 1945 it was clear that although the war was turning in the Allies favour, it was by no means over. Hitler began the year by broadcasting a 26 minute speech which offered no information on the battlefield situation or any hint that the war was nearing its end, only a declaration that the war would continue until victory was won. The following day RAF bombers conducted heavy raids on Nuremberg and Ludwigshafen, destroying 90% of Nuremberg's old medieval town. On 3 January British forces made landings on the Burmese island of Akyab with little resistance from the Japanese, and so it continued. January 20th saw the fourth inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and on 22nd January the British IV Corps took Htilin and the Battle of Hill 170 began in Burma. Then, on 27th January, Auschwitz concentration camp, with its last 7,500 inmates still present, was liberated by Soviet forces. On 31st January, the Battle of Hill 170 ended in British Indian victory.

Back at home, life – and the weather – went on... January began with a northerly front across the UK, bringing snow and frosts. An easterly flow developed across the south and this, while not especially cold, did bring wintry showers in the flow. In Milborne Port, families waited for news as their loved ones were spread all over the world. On 5th January, the Western Gazette reported that the Milborne Port for Prisoners of War Fund had sent £16 4s to the headquarters of the Fund as a result of a dance held at the Victoria Hall on Boxing-night, and that during December the British Legion forwarded to each local man and woman serving (numbering 220) a postal order for 10s. as a Christmas gift, with greetings and best wishes for a safe and speedy return. Nearly 100 acknowledgments of the gift, including some from overseas, had already been recieved.

On the 18th of January, severe gales raged across the south of England, and as they cleared to the east they dragged a very cold Arctic flow across the country and the start of the coldest spell of the winter. With cold air entrenched and low pressure across the UK, snowfalls were widespread. Frosts became very severe with -10C at times. The Western Gazette reported that at the Royal Schools of Music examination at Milborne Port, held on November 25th, Miss Phyllis Willcox passed Grade V higher. Miss Barbara Willcox, Grade EL elementary, and Miss Sylvia Cox, Grade ILL transitional, for pianoforte playing. All were pupils of Mr. Harold Sinclair.

At the end of the month, Atlantic systems pushed through and it became milder. The Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser of Saturday 27th January reported on a Conference about Somerset Church Schools; this was a discussion over the 1944 Education Act in which the position of Church Schools was changed. There was a wish to keep the churches involved in education but church schools could not afford to modernise without government help. By negotiation, a majority of the Anglican church schools became 'voluntary controlled' and were effectively absorbed into the state system in return for funding. The Act also encouraged non-sectarian religious teaching in secular schools. A third of the Anglican church schools became 'voluntary aided' which entitled them to enhanced state subsidies whilst retaining autonomy over admissions, curriculum and teacher appointments. The legislation was enacted in 1944, but its changes were designed to take effect after the war, thus allowing for additional pressure groups to have their influence.

The Rev. A. J Moody, Director Education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells, addressed the Conference. Preb. H. M Treen, Vicar of Yeovil and Rural Dean of Marston presided, supported by the Rev A. S. Holbrook Vicar and Rural Dean of Milborne Port. Mr Moody said that though the Act was largely administrative and did not deal much with education, there was one matter which did and that was religious education. He believed it an honest attempt to deal with a difficult situation, it was a compromise, but he thought it a fair compromise. The "aided" school was the better bargain, but placed a burden on Church people. Three hundred of the five hundred rural schools in the county were Church Schools and it was important that they make every effort to save the schools and keep them 'aided' schools. Answering a number of questions, Mr Moody said that owing to the date fixed for the operation of portions of the Act, it was necessary that they get to work once. Milborne Port retained its Church School until 1977, when it was absorbed into the state system.

Lesley Wray, December 2024