

## **Cambian Great Dunmow School Marks VE Day** **with Reflection, Remembrance and Creativity**

Students at Cambian Great Dunmow School took part in a powerful and immersive celebration of Victory in Europe (VE) Day, combining history, creativity and personal reflection to mark the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

The day offered pupils a chance to connect deeply with the past through a range of engaging activities. Learners designed their own medals and commemorative coins, inspired by those awarded to servicemen and women in recognition of their bravery and sacrifice. Each design reflected themes of peace, courage and remembrance, and were proudly displayed across the school.

In the spirit of tradition, pupils also baked a classic English Victoria sponge cake, learning how simple, shared experiences like baking brought comfort and unity during difficult times.

One of the most moving moments of the day came when pupils received a letter from a World War II veteran, offering a personal and heartfelt reflection on what VE Day meant to those who lived through it. The letter described the emotion, relief, and pride felt on that historic day in 1945, helping pupils understand the profound human impact of the war.

**A Year 10 pupil shared:**

***“Reading the veteran’s letter made it feel real. It wasn’t just history—it was someone’s life’.***

The school’s communal dining hall was transformed into a space for remembrance, decorated with archival images of VE Day celebrations from 1945. These visual stories prompted meaningful conversations among students about the joy and loss experienced by so many across the country.

**Headteacher, Carrie-Ann Gibbs praised the pupils for their respectful engagement:**

***“This was a truly special day for our school community. Our students showed empathy, curiosity and a deep sense of appreciation as they explored the importance of VE Day. The letter from the veteran in particular brought history to life in a way no textbook ever could.”***

Cambian Great Dunmow School's VE Day commemoration was a reminder that history is not just something we learn—it's something we carry forward, through understanding, gratitude, and the values we instil in the next generation.

(letter attached)





Return your VE Mail letters to:  
Mervyn Kersh  
VE Mail  
PO Box 1615  
PETERBOROUGH  
PE2 2BH

*Dear friends,*

*I was just 14 years old when war was declared. I was evacuated from London to the South-West of England away from the German Bombers, but I returned home not long after as the bombing hadn't yet begun. My father converted our coal cellar into an air-raid shelter with bunks and a food store and we spent a lot of time there over those months.*

*Just eight days after I left college - I received a letter calling me for training in Lanarkshire, Scotland. A long way from London! After our initial training, we were gathered and assigned to units. We were never called by name, only by number. Ask any veteran, and I bet they'll remember theirs.*

*In June 1944, aged 19, I landed in France as part of the D-Day invasion of Normandy. I was terrified. It took 14 hours to cross the channel, and after I landed on the beach, I made my way inland to search for a suitable place to build up a stock of 1,000 vehicles of all kinds to supply the forward units. At first we occupied a Chateau, a beautiful French castle, but it was full of German booby traps. There were explosives hidden in books, the piano and even in the toilets.*

*Life was tough. I slept under vehicles and in makeshift shelters. Because of my Jewish faith, I couldn't eat regular army rations and survived mostly on tinned peaches and what I could cobble together.*



*In spring 1945, I arrived near Bergen-Belsen concentration camp just after its liberation. I met many of the survivors—Jewish people still in striped uniforms, starving and frail. They were walking to the nearby station hoping to meet someone who had news of their home or their family. I gathered chocolate rations from my fellow soldiers to give away.*

*I missed VE Day. I was on a sealed train for 36 hours with dimmed lights and boarded up windows. I had no idea what was happening in the world outside that carriage. When we arrived in Bruges on 9 May, there was music and people were dancing in the streets. A local told me the war was over. I joined in for a quick dance—and then began my journey home.*

*I arrived back in London earlier than expected. I rang the doorbell and my mother answered. She looked at me and said, “Can I help you?”—she didn’t recognise me after my time at war. The war in Europe was over, but we weren’t released from the army. I was told I’d be sent to invade the beaches of Japan, but the day before I was due to travel, Japan surrendered. Instead, I was posted to Egypt, where it was very hot and I fell ill with dysentery.*

*When I was finally home for good, adjusting to everyday life was not easy. I tried to find a job that matched the skills I’d developed during my service, but it was difficult. There were so many young men like me, all looking for work at the same time.*

*During the war, I served alongside people from different classes, religions, ages and parts of the country, indeed the world. Together we learned about resilience, responsibility and how to stay strong. It takes a lot of strength to achieve peace and we shouldn’t romanticise war and violence.*

*I turned 100 last year and I still visit schools to share my story with young people like you. Now more than ever, it is important that we don’t let the lessons of war fade away.*

*With warmest wishes,  
Mervyn*

*D-Day Veteran, Mervyn Kersh, aged 100*