

Fire Basket

Lines written for the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War

Victory over death, the end of war,
Yet in the easy morning say a prayer
For Sybil Laura Young, from Bournemouth: bombed.
No bunting, flags, or make-do dress for her;
No V.E. Day kiss or gaslight in her hair
Outside amongst the fountain's coloured water.
She wasn't there; she is not here: one daughter.
Yet victory over death, the end of war.

In the lonely afternoon say a prayer
For Lance Bombardiers Norman and John
Up on the roof of Beales department store,
Who aiming well their triple Lewis guns
Engaged a pack of Focke Wulf fighter planes
And shot one down in Bournemouth bay. At dusk
Remember Unter Officier F.K. Schmidt;
No victory over death. One end to war.

Calm this evening. The Square is still. I think
Of stoker David Gear, bleeding and bruised,
Wading through waves of rising dust clouds
Towards the electric powers switches
Down in the boiler room of the blazing Metropole;
Of airmen trapped upon the upper floors
And the fire crews rescuing
With their turntable ladders: small victories

Over death. And I remember Verger
Arthur Davis of St Peter's, who when
The louvres in the belfry flashed alight
Battled to protect the bell-frames from the sparks;
Also the Reverend Hedley Burrows
Whose congregation formed a human chain
To carry bucket after bucket after bucket to the tower,
Element against element

In the name of One whose Victory over Death

We put our faith in. So many thoughts and prayers
For those we loved at home and all who fought
And bled abroad, in Europe and the East.
In honour of the Bournemouth dead, we pledge
To keep their memory burning in the mind,
A balefire for our conscience. Let us be
For them a Home Guard; their own Fire Watchers.

James Manlow

Poet Laureate for Bournemouth

This poem was written for the lighting of Bournemouth's commemorative beacon to mark the 70th anniversary of VE Day. It was also read during the morning wreath-laying ceremony at the Bournemouth War Memorial in the Central Gardens.

I am indebted to local historian John Walker and to Michael Edgington's book 'Bournemouth and the Second World War' for many of the details in this poem.

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