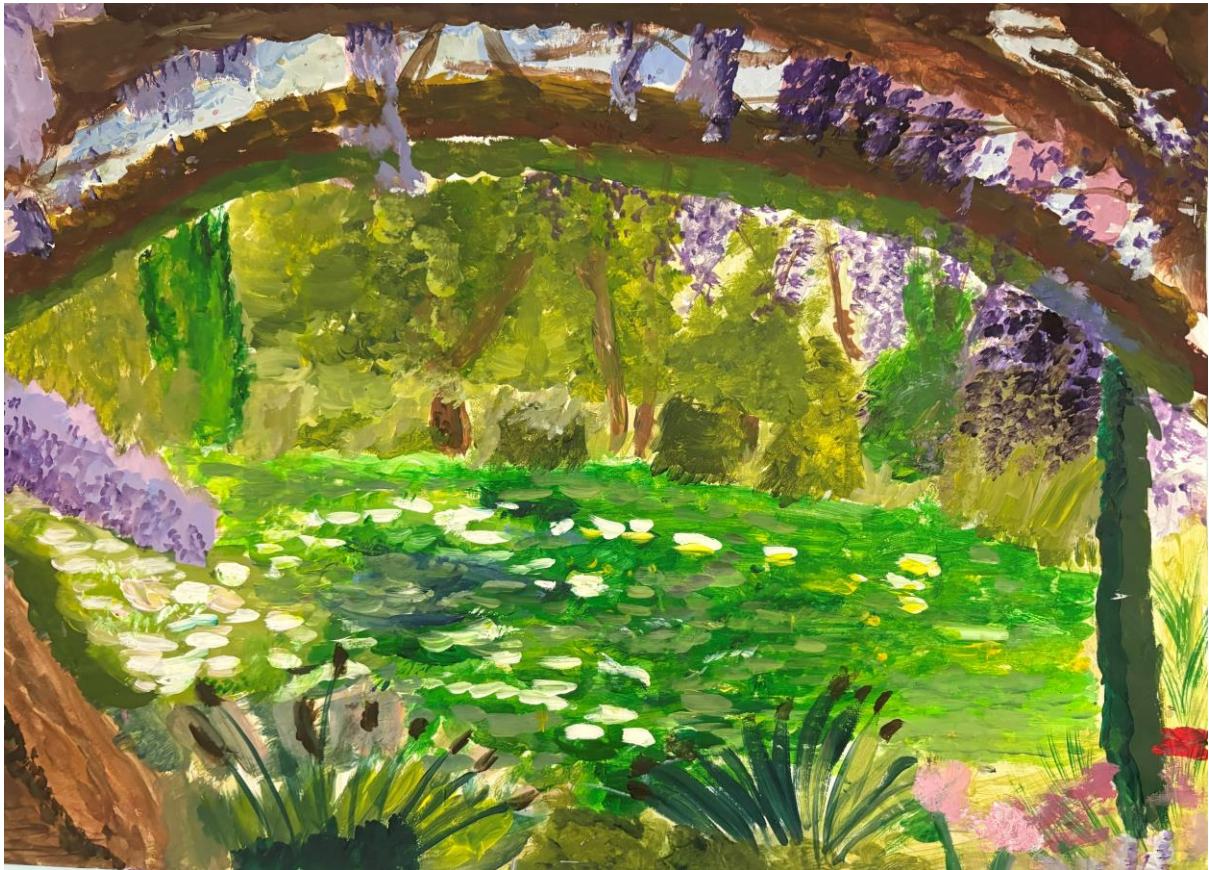


*'My dear friends; this is your hour.'*



Victory in Europe

8<sup>th</sup> May 1945

Winston Churchill

Some years ago, I found myself a bystander to a private and quietly dignified act of remembrance at the Cenotaph in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan. Once the city's busiest downtown commercial and residential district, the park is built on an open field which existed entirely as the result of the explosion of the atomic bomb dropped on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, an instant of apocalyptic destruction.

The A-Bomb Dome is all that remains of the Industrial Promotion Hall and the old city. Immediately below the epicentre of ground zero, the occupants of that building

were killed instantly; only the twisted girders and half-melted wreckage remain, now preserved as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Cenotaph stands more or less at the centre of the park.

I do not understand Japanese, but the integrity of that short ceremony and the brutal silence that pervades any such place of horror, was nonetheless, achingly profound. People stood quietly, locked in their own reflections, much as people do at Auschwitz and Kigali, and all the darkest places of the heart.

She stepped toward me from out of the small gathering, graciously offering a stick of incense, an older lady, quietly serene. She was inviting me to make some gesture of my own, to make more real an experience that could otherwise so easily exist on the periphery of a tourist narrative. She guided me forward, closer to those assembled that day, and closer to her. We had no common language, only her smile, and mine. I placed the incense alongside hers on the altar table. We stood awhile; we bowed, and then she quietly drifted away out of the park.

2025 marks the eightieth anniversaries since the ending of the Second World War in Europe (May 1945) and in Japan (August 1945). Important though those victories would surely be, understanding them within the context of their broader impact on humankind, is something I believe to be essential to the education of every child and adult.

Each year at Remembrance, we pause to reflect on the great sacrifice of the many who gave their lives in war and specifically the two world wars, 1914 – 1918, and 1939 – 1945. We read aloud the names of past pupils of this school, now engraved on the walls of the Memorial Chapel at King's. We encourage children to ask their parents and grandparents about members of their own families who have served in war and lived through its horrors.

Remembering is important; but what of living?

Particularly moving for some of our pupils was a meeting earlier this year with two survivors of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki. Both now very elderly, they spoke with an unfettered vulnerability of their experience of the moment of the attack; where they hid, and the bewildering silence that came immediately after the explosion. In the rest of the world VJ Day was, of course, one of great celebration. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people were hardly surviving. Days and months and years would not mitigate the devastation wrought by that moment on the lives of these two small children.

Much later on that same day when I visited Hiroshima, I saw her again, by chance, at the restaurant where we were having an evening meal. She recognised us, and this time there was someone who could translate. It was only then that I learned that she was a child-survivor of that day in August 1945. Orphaned, she had lived her whole life alongside the regrowth of the city and its people, but it was to ground zero that she would go, every day perhaps, to remind herself that it is in both remembrance and forgiveness, that humanity finds itself once again able to dream.

This is your hour! Make it really count. Make it a reflection of the dreams of peace which give hope to the victims of war, a peace that must be found deep within each of us before it can ever be around us.

*Yvette Day*

*Head and Master over the Choristers*