

The Wartime Child Care Centres in Canada and Great Britain: The 60th Anniversary

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On July 1, 1942, a child care centre opened in a former primary school in a working-class district of Birmingham, England, which was to have a significant impact on Canadian child care history. The Garrison Lane Nursery Training School in Birmingham was staffed by experts in early childhood education from the Institute of Child Study in Toronto, Ontario. The Institute of Child Study (hereafter referred to as the Institute) under the direction of Dr. William E. Blatz was the leader in Canada of the scientific child study movement.¹ Their involvement in Birmingham was part of the war effort by Canadian mental health experts carried out under the auspice of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene. On the same day as the Garrison Lane School opened in 1942, the Canadian government announced that it would share the cost of operating wartime child care centres with the Provinces on an equal basis.ⁱⁱ Again, the Institute of Child Study played a lead role in setting the program for the wartime nurseries, based in part on their recent experience at Garrison Lane. The staff of the wartime nursery training centre in Ontario were all graduates of the Institute (Institute of Child Study, 1942, p. 19).

In this article, the story of Garrison Lane and the Ontario wartime day nurseries is

told in the words of two women who were teachers at the Nursery Training School, Dorothy Millichamp and Mary Wright.ⁱⁱⁱ Interviews were conducted with Millichamp and Wright as part of a larger study of the history of early childhood education in Canada. For the purpose of this article, material related to the wartime nurseries was transcribed and related with minor editing. Millichamp was one of the first three graduates of the Institute in 1932, and Assistant Director of the Institute from the same year. Upon her return from England she became the director of the wartime child care program in Ontario. Mary Wright was a graduate student in the Psychology Department at the University of Toronto, and on staff at a mental health service for children in Ottawa. As members of the nursery school division of what was called the Canadian Children's Service, they field-tested the Institute's novel approach to nursery school education. The children at Garrison Lane lived in very different circumstances than those who attended the Institute's nursery school in Toronto. The two schools that were associated with the Institute—the nursery school and Windy Ridge Elementary School—were "the mecca of Toronto's middle-class mothers" (Raymond, 1991, p. 38). In contrast, Garrison Lane served children from struggling, working-class families who were living in the midst of World War II. The site of the Garrison Lane Nursery Training School was an "abandoned bomb-damaged school" in inner city Birmingham, which had been reconstructed (Wright, 2000, p. 105). The training school included a demonstration

day nursery for training Child Care Reservists, who were employed in the numerous child care facilities set up by health and educational authorities to care for young children whose mothers were working as part of the war effort (Wright, 1996). As described by Millichamp and Wright below, the Institute's version of nursery education proved an effective form of early intervention, as measured by an increase in the IQ of the children over the time of the program's operation from 1942-1944.

In the early 1930s, the preschool education of the famous Dionne Quintuplets was managed by Blatz and implemented by nurses trained under Millichamp and others from the Institute. However, the isolation of the Dionne sisters from their peers and parents prevented the full realisation of objectives of the nursery school program, namely, to promote healthy personality development of children both through their nursery experience and via their parents trained according to the methods of child study. The three dimensions of child study—nursery education for the children, parent education for the adults, as well as research—was possible in the Garrison Lane program.

The most important research finding from the Garrison Lane project was the effect of the preschool program on the children's IQ scores. The dominant view of IQ in the 1930s was that it was fixed at birth according to social and genetic factors. Preschool was devised to promote healthy personality development, and not necessarily to increase IQ. What was called mental hygiene, or mental health in today's terms, was a preoccupa-

tion of Blatz and his associates at the Institute of Child Study. Although the children at the Institute's nursery school were routinely tested, Blatz had little interest in the "intelligence question" (Raymond, 1991, p. 37). However, a controversial line of research had developed in the same decade at a child study research centre in the United States that challenged the view that intelligence was immutable. Beth Lucy Wellman, working at the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station at the State University of Iowa, had published the results of her research on the positive effects of preschool experience on children's IQ (Crissey, 1991). The Institute's involvement at Garrison Lane provided the Canadian researchers with the opportunity to try to replicate Wellman's findings. As Millichamp and Wright describe below, children who participated in the Garrison Lane program showed positive changes on their Stanford-Binet test scores. Although the children were never followed up in a formal manner, and the study was not published in scientific journals, the results left the Institute's staff "steamed up" in the words of Millichamp, and eager to promote their brand of nursery education as beneficial for all children.

Wright remained in England until 1944, in charge of training the Reservists and working in the Garrison Lane Nursery School. Millichamp returned to Toronto to take charge of the government-funded child care programs for the children of mothers working in war industry, called wartime day nurseries (Prochner, 1994). As Organising Secretary for the Ontario Day Nurseries Branch, Millichamp worked to set nursery school standards in child care centres across the province, establishing the first centre early in February 1943. After the war, these standards became part of the legislation governing day nurseries in Ontario. In the next section of this article, the story is told in the words of Mary Wright and Dorothy Millichamp.

An Interview with Mary J. Wright: Memories of the British Garrison Lane Nursery School

In 1939, when I went to Toronto I intended to be a clinical psychologist. I was a "bleeding heart." By 1941 [C. Roger] Myers and [Edward Alexander] Bott had gone off to the war and nearly everybody else was involved in it in one way or another. There was nobody available to teach clinical courses in the Department of Psychology at the University of Toronto. All that were left, at that point, were the Institute people. I used to think that those little people in the preschool looked more sensible than the students that were on the campus. They were busy, doing all kinds of things that looked important—and I began to think I would like to know what this was all about. That year, I took courses from everybody who was teaching anything that was related to the children. Then in the summer, to do my clinical work, I interned at the Whitby Psychiatric Hospital, and there I got to know

Elsie Stapleford^{iv}, Elsie was 'the' psychologist there at that time, and that is how we became friends. When she moved on from there to Ottawa, to run the Protestant Children's Village, she talked me into joining her. I thought I might as well do so, because graduate training at Toronto had virtually ceased. In Ottawa, I was supposed to be in charge of school-aged children, but was involved with the younger ones too.

In the spring, Blatz phoned me, and asked if I would go with him to England, and of course by this time I was dying to get into the war. The WAC's^v hadn't been organised yet, there wasn't much for women to do, but this was a real opportunity. The team he put together included Dore [Dorothy] Millichamp,

who was at that time in charge of student training and the assistant director of the Institute; Margie [Margaret Fletcher], who was in charge of the preschool; and Anne Harris who was a teacher at his [Blatz's] Windy Ridge School,^{vi} Bill and Anne were friends, closer than friends, and she ultimately became his second wife. And then they took two younger ones: Mary McFarlane, who later became Mary Smith,^{vii} and myself. She and I were the juniors as compared with the others. We arrived in Birmingham in June 1942, and we opened the school on the first of July, Canada's Dominion Day.

When we opened we had to enrol all the children in two days, and they had to have medical inspections. We had a medical doctor doing things with them that made several unhappy. It was not the sort of thing one would ordinarily do if

one had complete control of the situation. I remember that there were the six of us, and this is the order we received each of the children, the order of presumed talent: Blatz took the first, Margie the second, Dore the third, Anne the fourth, Mary McFarlane the fifth, and myself the sixth. As the children came in, Blatz was supposed to get the child settled before number seven came along.

It was just at this time that there was much controversy about what early education could do for children. Beth Wellman was saying that IQ was a function of education rather than genetic capacities. Because I knew how to do testing, having worked in mental health

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clinics for a couple of summers, they put me on the job of doing the Binet's on these children at regular intervals. Of course they responded to the educational program. I was tremendously impressed with what happened to those children, who came from bombed-out low-income families. What we found was that they made great IQ gains. We concluded that they always had the intellectual capacity, but that they didn't utilise it. It was like having a chest of gold that couldn't be opened. It was the motivation and the persistence that they were developing at school. They were learning to solve problems, learning that they could do things if they tried, and their new approach reflected their test performance. And that's the interpretation that we were giving it, rather than that we were doing anything to their natural capacity. And I still believe that.

We worked a little bit in the home, but we focused more on encouraging the parents to observe in school and be with us. In the beginning we couldn't understand what they were saying.

We had to get an ear for their dialect which took a while. But we encouraged them to come in and see what we were doing. At first they'd say, "oh you're just better educated than we are" or something like that. And we'd say, "no, no." We had a few evening sessions with them. Bill was good at talking with them. They came to love us, and they had a big party for Bill. At that time he was virtually bald, and the gift for him was military brushes!

As they observed us working with the children, we talked with them when we got a chance, and made them feel at home in the place. They responded to this and they could learn by watching. They weren't the kind that you could give a lecture to and know they would go home and translate that into action. I think that for people who are not academic that's the way to go. We need to bring them in as equals and work

with them. I tried to do the same thing when we had low-income families with us at the University of Western Ontario preschool.

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An Interview with Dorothy A. Millichamp: Memories of the Ontario Wartime Day Nurseries

Garrison Lane was really our first experience at applying the Institute's theory, principles, and practices to a group of under-privileged children. We learned a tremendous amount about these children, and about the ways and means of teaching, supporting, and helping them to live in a nursery school and to develop all kinds of learning patterns. You see, they did not have conventional eating habits. They'd say "a piece, a piece, a piece, a piece, a piece" and expected a piece of bread. Some of them didn't know how to eat off a plate, they would put their heads down on the plate. The nursery was in the slums of Birmingham, and we were working with children who were very poor.^{ix} They had no idea how to play with typical nursery school materials. They had obviously played on the street or in the gutter with a stick or anything they could find because they had no toys, so when they first came all they did was run circles and throw things. We had to introduce them to play, which meant a lot more adult

intervention and a lot more adult participation than we were doing with our very 'normal' children from highly educated families at the Institute's nursery school back in Toronto.

I didn't compromise my view concerning what was good for children. I was young enough and I was going to go straight ahead, and these were going to be good as far as I was concerned.

If I had started with our wartime day nurseries in Ontario without the experience in Birmingham, I wouldn't have known how to help the staff. In Canada,

I was an administrator and was rarely in the nursery school. At Garrison Lane I gained experience firsthand working a teacher in the program. It needed all of us to handle the program, to handle the children, so I learned firsthand a great many things about how to work with children who were not academically and intellectually ready for school. The children came from circumstances that were similar to those of the children in day nurseries in Toronto prior to the war, but in many cases the children at Garrison Lane were further behind developmentally. I don't remember any wartime nursery in Ontario where we faced the developmental lags that we faced at Garrison Lane. We were testing the Garrison Lane children, and one of the interesting things was how their IQ's were coming up. In other words, they were not mentally retarded children, but they were mentally undeveloped children who had a long way to go. In contrast, none of the programs in the wartime nurseries in Ontario were

research-oriented. We were much too busy setting up the nurseries to have time to carry out research.

Getting a wartime nursery started in Ontario was a long process, but it was partly a long process because of our standards. Appointing someone from the Institute to be the director of the wartime nurseries, meant that we started the standards. This was one of the

great differences from other provinces. Ontario started with child study standards. This meant that we were fussy about the building and its layout; we were fussy that we got the right equipment, and we were very fussy about staff.

However, sometimes we had to compromise, especially with staff. We managed to get very able, intelligent people, who because it was wartime, were keen, who cared and were interested in children. From that point on, we could teach them, and they were very willing to learn. But we were very definitely compromising on staff. Later we had time to follow up with many of those people and provide them with training. But at the time, they simply went in and they learned on the job, and a lot of the visiting I did was to help them run the nurseries. They would call me, and they sometimes sounded desperate, and I'd go over and just join in with the staff if they were short or if they were needing help. As time went on I sometimes found I had to change staff. I remember once going into a school, and every child was crying. It was obvious that the staff couldn't keep a group of children content. In such cases I would suddenly transfer someone who had the qualifications to go into the nursery and take charge. There was a lot of shifting, and staff were often asked to go out of town to help out wherever they were needed.

We used the same program in the wartime nurseries as at the Institute, which was free outdoor play, free indoor play, washing, eating, and sleeping.

I didn't compromise my view concerning what was good for children. I was young enough and I was going to go straight ahead, and these were going to be good as far as I was concerned. I didn't have any qualms. My difficulties were in what I considered to be essential standards which we couldn't always meet. I remember one school being without a fence around the yard,

and my terror. I used to wake up at night terrified. I think my struggle was for the standards, and of course we had a big struggle to get enough staff. When we began, we had two qualified staff assisted by volunteers in each nursery. Although we struggled very hard to get more paid staff, we never did get a sufficient number. The main problem was that we didn't increase our number of staff according to the number of children. The nursery on Rose Avenue occupied both floors of a very small house, and had just two paid staff. One worked upstairs and one downstairs, and the only other help was from volunteers. I often helped at Rose Avenue just to increase the staff complement. Staffing was the greatest problem, and the one we continue to struggle with, against the government powers.

We used the same program in the wartime nurseries as at the Institute, which was free outdoor play, free indoor play, washing, eating, and sleeping. This was the easiest program to staff, because the play periods didn't require a lot of intervention.

The hardest times were the dining room, and the sleeping room program. But the children were not deprived children like at Garrison Lane. They knew how to play with the materials. It also helped that at that time there was more discipline at home. There was a greater expectation that the children would listen to adults and respond to them. But I can remember one problem. Because the children were at the nursery from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 or 6:00 P.M. every day, and because they were there over a period of years, beginning at 2-years-of-age, the older children began to outgrow the program. In order to solve this problem we developed what we called a 'super-senior' program and the older children were all called 'super-seniors.' The 'super-seniors' were allowed a number of privileges, for instance, they kept a record on themselves, if they were washing and dressing and things like this, anything to give them a little feeling of importance and significance. They also did more to help the teacher. Of course they loved to be called the 'super-seniors.' They weren't the seniors, they were the 'super-seniors.' When the staff first came to me with this problem they were desperate, and they said "we are

going to have to spank these children." I said "oh no you aren't, you can't do that, we'll have to think." So that is when I gathered the senior staff and supervisors and we went into this in considerable detail.

One of the advantages of having Blatz's program in place in the wartime nurseries, was that it was a terribly safe program, because it

limits things like corporal punishment. You don't use corporal punishment, but it gives the teachers alternatives for dealing with the difficulties. It empha-

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sised the freedom of the children, and play, which was a safety valve for the children and a safety valve for the staff. It gave them the option of removing a child from the group if a child was out of control, which was a safety valve, so the staff didn't get as angry, and as frustrated. They could send a child home if they felt it was necessary, which was also a safety valve. And the consequence was easy for a child to understand. So it was one of the safest programs you could have. It gave the staff a complete outline of what to do when, and they weren't at a loss.

However, the program, and Blatz's philosophy behind the program, was always being misinterpreted, and nearly always in terms of the extent of the freedom which the children were allowed. Blatz tended to emphasise his respect for children, his respect for their independent effort. His advice about the number of things you shouldn't punish children for, immature, childish behaviours and so on, seemed always to leave the impression that there was too much freedom. And that came through in the media, and we were always fighting it. Actually, there was a great deal of control, more than there is now.

Part of the reason was the emphasis on the routines. That was theoretically based on Blatz's belief that routines were a basic need of the human being, which the human being must learn to meet adequately in order to feel satisfied. And of course this was emphasised by the Freudian point of view that many adults were psychologically damaged because of inadequate handling of things like the bathroom routine, and the eating routine in particular. So the role of the adult in the nursery program was

spelled out. This was essential at the time, because it was believed that this was where people would be doing most harm, frightening the child, and expecting them to be adult-like when they were still children.

It was not difficult to follow this program in a wartime nursery, because it was natural to a child and his particular time of life, and of interest to him. Children are interested in learning skills such as dressing and washing. At Garrison Lane, if we weren't careful the children would go into the washroom a second time. They loved turning on the taps. Most of the children didn't have running water in their own homes. The bathroom routine was very carefully handled. A teacher can get more and more angry with a child who is wetting her clothing, and it's an awful nuisance in a nursery. But the particular program told us what to do. We were able to train the child quickly because of the regu-

larity of the routine.

From the Institute's point of view, nobody knew about children learning to wash and learning to dress, and nobody knew anything about toilet training, and the development of learning about elimination. All of these things were being studied and reported. At that point it was something that had to be learned about children. Nowadays, everybody knows just about everything there is to know about it. It's like orange juice. Now we don't tell every mother to give her child orange juice. Everybody knows. It's in the culture

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Conclusion

The Garrison Lane Nursery School and the Canadian wartime child care centres were certainly more than interesting historical footnotes, but in fact they have left several legacies for future developments in early childhood education in Canada and they also foreshadowed later developments in the field. We can consider these legacies as particular gifts guided by the individuals involved in the creation and running of the training school and child care centres, as well as considering the less tangible influences such as the impact on and links with current philosophical approaches to early childhood education.

In terms of the individuals, Blatz continued to head the Institute until 1960 and

was an advocate for his ideas about security both publicly and in print (1944, 1966). Dorothy Millichamp's work on establishing wartime nurseries in Ontario using the Institute as the standard and the subsequent impact on licensing standards for day nurseries in

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Ontario and elsewhere was outlined earlier; she also continued on faculty at the Institute until the late 1960s. Mary Wright went on to have a distinguished career in Canadian psychology at the University of Western Ontario (see Howe, 1994); she was recently recognised for these achievements with a Gold Medal for lifetime achievements from the Canadian Psychological Association (2001). In 1973, she fulfilled a life-long dream of establishing a high-quality, research-based preschool program for both middle and lower income children, as well as establishing an option in the MA in Child Psychology program to provide graduate training in early childhood education. Certainly, these individuals were part of a small, but dedicated corps who maintained an interest in and

advocated for early childhood education throughout the 1950's and 1960's until it became more fashionable in later decades.

Can we trace of the legacy of Blatz's particular philosophy and its influence on early childhood education in Canada and Britain? Blatz wrote two important and influential books after the Garrison Lane period. The first, *Understanding the Young Child* (1944), was inspired by his experiences at Garrison Lane and the second, (1966) laid out his ideas about the importance of optimal mental health. Certainly, the Institute played a primary role in the training of early childhood teachers for much of the past century and its methods directly influenced many generations of teachers (Varga, 2000). Moreover, the Institute was a model for the establishment of many laboratory nursery schools both in universities and community colleges (Brophy, 2000), which also have been active in the business of training early childhood educators. The idea that early childhood educators require a particular set of competencies that are based on theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge is a cornerstone of these programs.

In terms of philosophical orientation, Blatz's ideas fit into a long tradition of child-centred constructivists such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and the currently fashionable Reggio Emilia approach. Today, we accept many elements of Blatz's philosophy without a great deal of critical thought, specifically notions about the importance of a play-based curriculum, that children's feelings of security are a critical element of socioemotional development, and authoritative methods of discipline and child guidance are most appropriate. Yet, as Wright (2000) points out, in the 1940s many people viewed these ideas as radical. In fact, she describes Blatz as "one of the most controversial figures of his time" (p. 102), because he spoke out forcefully against a number of traditional childrearing methods, in particular

physical punishment, shaming, promoting competition, blind obedience to authority, as well as overprotecting children. Although Blatz gave a number of speaking engagements in Britain during 1942-44, we are uncertain of how his ideas might have had a long-term impact on early childhood education in that country (Richardson, 1989; Wright, 2000); this would seem to be an interesting question for future researchers to pursue.

What is most striking about the interviews with Wright and Millichamp is the basic theme or question: What is the impact of early childhood education on children's development? Certainly, this theme has been central in much of the research conducted in many Western countries in the past 25 or 30 years. In Canada, Mary Wright was a major player in this work (Wright, 1983). In her longitudinal project, two groups of children from low socio-economic families attended the University of Western Ontario (UWO) Preschool for either one or two years. The UWO Preschool employed a constructivist, play-based curriculum that emphasised both cognitive and social skills. Findings indicated that children who attended the Preschool for two years demonstrated greater intellectual, cognitive and self-management skills compared to children who attended for only one year. In the follow-up these low SES children were followed until grade 3 and compared to a control group of children without prior preschool experience. Through grade 3 both groups of the UWO Preschool children maintained superior academic, intellectual and cognitive achievement compared to the control group of low SES children without early childhood education experience. In particular, the children with preschool experience were more likely to be performing at grade level (82%) and none had been placed in a special education class, whereas only 58% of control children were at grade level and two were in special education classes. Although Wright's findings are based on a very

small sample of children they do provide support for the notion that high-quality early childhood education has significant and demonstrable benefits for all domains of children's development, particularly for youngsters from poverty backgrounds (see Howe, Jacobs, & Fiorentino, 2000). The High/Scope study, which has followed a group of poor African-American children for several decades after their early experiences with preschool education, has become the classic in the field (e.g., Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). Interestingly, Blatz took advantage of a naturalistic experiment to test theoretical views about the malleability of children's IQ and his findings would have provided further early support for the view that environment plays a large role in children's intellectual development. It is unfortunate that the data from the Garrison Lane Nursery School were not published in scientific journals, but only discussed briefly in his book, *Understanding young children* (1944, pp. 250-252), which today is read mainly for historical interest. From Blatz's short description, it is apparent that a number of children made substantial gains (more than 10-15 points) in IQ over a 10-month period. These findings would suggest that the nursery school environment had a significant impact on their intellectual skills. It is unfortunate that a more indepth analysis and follow-up was not attempted by Blatz. We can only speculate on why these exciting findings were not published in a form that would have been more accessible for Blatz's contemporaries as well as for modern scholars. It may be that Blatz's deeper interest in children's socioemotional development, rather than their intellectual achievements and skills, did not push him to pursue these findings, as Raymond (1991) has suggested. At any rate, from the vantage point of 60 years later, it seems like a missed opportunity.

In the interviews with Wright and Millichamp, it is also striking that both women considered their time at Garrison

Lane as a formative experience in their own professional development. In fact, it appears to have been a critical episode for both woman and helped set and reinforce their professional course as advocates for children's welfare, in the broadest sense of the word. And what of the children and families who attended the Garrison Lane Nursery School? Beyond the description of the impact of the nursery experience provided in these interviews and Blatz's book (1944), we have no documented evidence of the long-term impact. We can only hope that the experience was as formative in the lives of the children as it clearly has been in the lives of Dorothy Millichamp and Mary Wright!

- ⁱ The child study center at the University of Toronto was known as St. George's School for Child Study from its founding in 1925 as a program of the Department of Psychology, until 1938, when it became an independent academic unit known as the Institute of Child Study.
- ⁱⁱ For a more extensive description of this development, see Prochner (1996, 2001).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Dorothy A. Millichamp, interview by L. Prochner, 2 Aug. 1990, Caledon East, Ont., tape recording, collection of L. Prochner, Montreal. Mary J. Wright, interview by N. Howe & L. Prochner, 25 June 1995, Charlottetown, PEI, tape recording, collection of N. Howe & L. Prochner, Montreal.
- ^{iv} One of the first 3 graduates of the M.A. program at the Institute. See Lowe (2000a).
- ^v The Canadian Women's Army Corps, formed in 1941
- ^{vi} Anne Harris was director of Windy Ridge, an elementary school operated in close association with the Institute.
- ^{vii} Mary McFarland was a graduate of the Institute and director of Manor

Road nursery school, one of the first in Toronto.

- ^{viii} Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale.
- ^{ix} A contemporary view of life in Birmingham is contained in the report by Bournville Village Trust (1941).
- ^x See Lowe (2000b) for a profile of Millichamp.

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The Wartime Child Care Centres in Canada and Great Britain: The 60th Anniversary. Article. Larry Prochner. Nina Howe. .iii Interviews were conducted with Millichamp and Wright as part of a larger study of the history of early childhood education in Canada. For the purpose of this article, material related to the wartime nurseries was transcribed and related with minor editing. The profound instability of the interwar years, including the Great Depression of the 1930s, were not repeated, despite fears to the contrary immediately after the war. Although recessions occurred, for instance, in the US economy in 1953, 1957, 1960, 1966 and [Show full abstract] 1969-71, they were neither particularly severe nor persistent. An only child, Idrissa Akuna Elba was born and raised in London, England. His father, Winston, is from Sierra Leone and worked at Ford Dagenham; his mother, Eve, is from Ghana and had a clerical duty. Idris attended school in Canning Town, where he first became involved in acting, before he dropped... He narrowly avoided an early death during the wartime blitz when a piece of flying shrapnel just The 6th Doctor. 17. Peter Davison. Widely regarded as one of greatest stage and screen actors both in his native Great Britain and internationally, twice nominated for the Oscar and recipient of every major theatrical award in the UK and US, Ian Murray McKellen was born on May 25, 1939 in Burnley, Lancashire, England, to Margery Narrator. Britain's wartime leader spoke about a "brief period of rejoicing" amid "toils and efforts" in the replayed speech. Earlier, the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall led a two-minute silence, and later the Queen will address a nation still in lockdown. Boris Johnson expressed "eternal" gratitude to the wartime generation. Victory in Europe Day marks the day in 1945 when Britain and its allies accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany, bringing the war in Europe to an end. Latest updates as nation marks VE Day in lockdown. What is VE Day?