The Home Front
How did people prepare for the war at home?

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Introduction

Britain started to prepare for the Second World War at least a year before it actually started.

In 1938, the government began to build new warships and increase its armaments. However, this war would not just involve soldiers. The government expected the war to disrupt and threaten the lives of civilians left at home. This happened in a variety of different ways, from cutting down railings to be melted down and used in munitions factories, to rationing and evacuation plans.

Between 1938 and 1939, the government thought of all the possible dangers and difficulties the Home Front would face during war, and started to take precautions. People were needed on the home front to help with all sorts of things. They were encouraged to plant vegetables on any spare land they had to supplement the rationing, but people were also recruited into a variety of essential positions such as Air Raid Wardens and the Home Guard. People were also encouraged to think about their safety, and the government spent a great deal of time educating people on what to do in situations such as an Air Raid, or a Gas Attack, as well as providing information on how to make rations stretch further and how to keep yourself healthy.

Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is one of a series of posters designed to encourage people to grow their own food:

   a) Why did the government want the Home Front to ‘Dig for Plenty’?
   b) If the Home Front had not organised growing more of its own food, what would have happened?
   c) Would a poster showing what would happen if people did not start to ‘dig’ have been more or less effective? Explain your answer.

Look at Source 2

2. This is a government poster about evacuation:

   a) Who is the ghostly figure whispering ‘Take them back!’?
   b) Where is he pointing?
   c) What does he want the mother to do and why?
   d) Why might this mother be tempted to ‘Take them back’?
   e) Why were civilians evacuated during the Second World War?
Look at Source 3 a, b and c

3. These were leaflets produced during the war:
   a) Who produced these leaflets?
   b) What dangers are these leaflets about?
   c) How many different types of gas masks would the government have to provide?
   d) How useful do you think the advice offered in these leaflets is?
   e) The government had to be careful not to scare people, but at the same time it wanted people to take notice and be prepared.
   f) How do these leaflets:
      • get people to take notice?
      • educate people?
      • reassure people?

Look at Source 4

4. This poster shows a woman slapping Hitler in the face.
   a) What type of war work does this poster advertise?
   b) What is happening in this poster?
   c) Can you explain the double meaning behind the caption?
   d) Why was the work of part-time women workers an essential part of defeating Hitler?
   e) How might this poster encourage women to contribute to the war effort?

Look at Source 5 a and b

5. These are wartime waning posters.
   a) What dangers do these sources warn the public about?
   b) Who was the local air raid warden for Drypool Green?
   c) What was the air raid signal for ‘all clear’?
   d) In the months leading up to September 1939 many towns practised their air raid signals and taking shelter. Why do you think this was necessary?
   e) Read the section in Source 5a called ‘Fire Precautions’. Which parts are the public likely to follow?
   • likely to ignore?
   f) Look at Source 5b. Read all the labels. How would each precaution help save lives if there was an air raid?

Look at Source 6

6. This is a telephone conversation between Mr. Cleave and Captain Denaro a mine laying specialist in 1940
   a) Why were mines placed on the beaches?
   b) What is Mr. Cleave complaining about?
c) According to Mr. Cleave, was placing mines on the beach an effective way of protecting Britain?

d) Do you think Mr. Cleave was being unreasonable?

e) What does this source tell us about the power the government had over people’s lives during the Second World War?

Look at Source 7

7. This picture shows Hitler balancing on a telephone line.

a) What other precautions were taken to protect Britain?

Background

Evacuation

Evacuation plans had been in preparation well before the outbreak of war. Small scale evacuation of women and children were carried out in September 1938 but the real evacuation began in September 1939. The Government had planned to evacuate about 3 million people but in the end only 1 million left home. A few hours after the war was declared on the 3 September 1939, almost all of them had been evacuated from the danger areas to the reception areas.

Air Raids

The biggest danger came from air raids. Air raids meant both danger and disruption. 60,595 civilians died as a result of enemy action in the UK. Homes, work places and public buildings were destroyed. Streets were subject to the "Blackout" - lighting restrictions - and the ban on street lighting caused a huge rise in car accidents. Volunteers were needed to be trained in civil defence duties. These included fire-fighting, first aid and ambulance driving.

Civilians were instructed in how to protect themselves against poison gas attacks and issued with gas masks, which they were encouraged to carry on all journeys. Fortunately, poison gas was never used as a weapon in Britain. They were also given materials to build air raid shelters in the backyards. Strong buildings were also prepared for use as air raid shelters.

Workers

The working lives of most of the adult population changed with the outbreak of war. To fight the war men aged between 18 and 41 were needed in the navy and army. This would take them away from their jobs in factories and farms. To fill the shortage, women were recruited for jobs previously done by men. Women worked in the factories, constructing weapons and many others joined the Land Army to work on farms.

Rationing

Much of the food, clothes, and fuel which Britain needed came from abroad. The war disrupted and prevented these supplies from arriving. This meant shortages of the essentials to keep life going. In 1941, rationing was introduced in Britain. The Ration
Book became indispensable for every man, woman and child, ensuring a fair distribution of what meager essentials were available. The Government also tried to encourage people to grow food on every available piece of land.

Invasion

Another danger was from invasion. When in 1940 the Channel Isle fell into German hands and it looked as though the RAF was loosing the Battle of Britain, the Government called on volunteers to join the Home Guard - Dad's Army - to help defend Britain from attack.

Teachers Notes

This lesson asks pupils to develop their understanding of the war on the Home Front from their basic understanding. Through primary source analysis it examines how those involved on the Home Front were encouraged to deal with the war and the problems that shortages and uncertainty created. Pupils investigate the organisation and bureaucracy behind the ARP system, before looking at details of how individuals were advised to take precautions. This lesson helps pupils understand the attitude to the war on the Home Front, as well as developing their ability to use source evidence to question and challenge existing beliefs.

This lesson can form part of studies for Key Stage 1&2 Scheme of Work Unit 9 and Key Stage 3 Scheme of Work Unit 18. In addition, it offers coverage of National Curriculum requirements for History in England, relating to general requirements of knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past, together with breadth of study requirements to study significant events and developments from across the twentieth century. Similarly there are clear links to citizenship and PSHE issues that can be explored further with teacher development.

Sources

Illustration : INF 3/96 - Dig on for Victory Poster
Source 1 : INF 3/98 - Dig for Plenty Poster
Source 2 : INF 13/171 - Don't Do It Mother Poster
Source 3 A, B & C : HO 186/2247 - Gas Raid Quiz and Gas Mask Leaflets
Source 4 : INF 3/400 - Just a Good Afternoons Work poster
Source 5 A : HO 186/2247 - ARP Notice
Source 5 B : ZPER 34 - Air Raid house picture from the Illustrated London News, 1938
Source 6 : WO 199/94 - Conversation between Mr Celave & Capt. Denaro regarding beach mines
Source 7 : INF 3/232 - Be Careful what you say poster

Schemes of Work

What was it like for children in the Second World War?
Key Stage 1 & 2 Unit 9
Hot war, cold war why did the major twentieth-century conflicts affect so many people?
Key Stage 3 Unit 19
Source 1: Dig for Plenty poster - Artist: Le Bon (INF 3/98)
Source 2: Don't do it, Mother - Leave your children in the safer areas poster (INF 13/171)
Source 3a: Gas Raid Quiz Leaflet (HO 186/2247)
Source 3b: War Gas Leaflet (HO 186/2247)

WAR GAS
OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

IF THE GAS RATTLES SOUND

Put on mask, holding your breath until mask is in position. Turn up collar. Put on gloves or keep hands in pockets. Take cover in nearest building quickly. Put up umbrella if you have one.

IF YOU GET GA SSED
by Vapour Gases
1. Keep your mask on even if you feel discomfort.
2. If discomfort continues, go to First Aid Post.

by Liquid or Blister Gas
1. Dab, but don’t rub the splash with your handkerchief. Then destroy the handkerchief.
2. Rub No. 2 Ointment well into place (buy a 6d. jar now from any chemist). In an emergency, chemists will supply Bleach Cream free.
3. If you can’t get the Ointment or Cream within 5 minutes, wash the affected place with soap and warm water.
4. Take off at once any garment splashed with gas.

HOW TO PUT ON YOUR MASK
1. Hold your breath. 2. Hold mask in front of face, thumbs inside straps. 3. Thrust chin well forward into mask. Pull straps as far over head as they will go. 4. Run finger round face-piece taking care head-straps are not twisted.

MAKE SURE IT FITS
See that the rubber fits snugly at sides of jaw and under chin. The head straps should be adjusted to hold the mask firmly. To test for fit, hold a piece of paper to end of mask and breathe in. The paper should stick.

ALWAYS HAVE YOUR GAS MASK WITH YOU—DAY AND NIGHT. LEARN TO PUT IT ON QUICKLY.
Source 3c: Gas Helmets for Babies Leaflet (HO 186/2247)

What to do about GAS

HINTS TO MOTHERS

★ Learn to put on baby’s gas helmet quickly, while wearing your own mask. Your Health Visitor will show you how. If you don’t know her address ask at Town Hall or at the Child Welfare Centre.

★ With more than one baby you need help. Arrange with a neighbour, or find out if your local W.V.S. has a Housewives’ Service.

★ Toddlers soon learn to put on their own masks. Let them make a game of it and they will wear their gas masks happily.

In a gas attack, first put on your own mask, then you will be better able to help baby.

MAKE SURE YOUR FAMILY
HAVE THEIR GAS MASKS
WITH THEM NIGHT & DAY
Source 4: Just A Good Afternoon's Work Poster (INF 3/400)
AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

* The A.R.P. Warden’s Post for your Sector is:  

* The nearest First Aid Post is:  

* The nearest SENIOR WARDEN is:  

Ask him for the name and address of your nearest local Warden and make a note of it here:  

MR GURNEY  

ID: THOMAS CLARENCE JR  

Get to know him now and note any changes in the name and address given here.  

IN CASE OF INJURY  

Weird and gas contamination cannot be cured. Any cuts should go directly to the nearest First Aid Post. If you suspect that your clothing has been contaminated by liquid gas, remove the affected portion immediately and place it outside the house, then wash yourself thoroughly. Severe cases will be taken to hospital.  

GAS MASKS  

Take care of your gas mask. Leave it in a safe place and take it off only in extreme necessity. If you have no gas mask or if your mask does not fit, ask someone at the nearest Senior Warden about it as soon.  

LIGHTING RESTRICTIONS  

All windows, doors, lights or openings which would show any light, must be covered or that no light can be seen from outside. Do not use a light in a room unless the blind or curtain is drawn and remember that a light at the back of the house is just as visible from the air as one at the front.  

AIR RAID WARNING SIGNALS  

A WARNING SIGNAL will be given by police or wardens. The nearest Senior Warden or A.R.P. Warden will blow a horn in your street, and you should take cover immediately.  

* HANG THIS CARD IN A PERMANENT AND PROMINENT POSITION
Source 5a : Transcript of Air Raid Precautions Card (HO 186/2247)

AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

* The A.R.P. Warden's Post for your Sector is:
_____________________________________

*The nearest First Aid Post is :
_____________________________________

*These two posts will always be manned during air raids

Help or advice upon A.R.P. matters will be given by the local wardens.

The nearest SENIOR WARDEN is:
_____________________________________

Ask him for the name and address of your nearest local Warden and make a note of it here:

Mr Greenbury
10 Granham Place, Clarence Street

Get to know him now and note any changes in the names and addresses given here.
_____________________________________________________

IN CASE OF INJURY

Wounded and gas contaminated casualties who can walk should go direct to the nearest First Aid Post. If you suspect that your clothing has been contaminated by liquid gas, remove the affected garment immediately and place it outside the house, then wash yourself thoroughly. Stretcher cases will be taken to hospitals

GAS MASKS

TAKE CARE OF YOUR GAS MASK. Learn how to put it on and take it off and how to store it properly. Keep it ready for immediate use. If you have no gas mask, or if your mask does not fit or seems out of repair, speak to your Warden about it at once.

LIGHTING RESTRICTIONS

All windows, doors, skylights or openings which would show a light must be screened so that no light can be seen from outside. Do not use a light in a room unless the blind or curtain is drawn and remember that a light at the back of the house is just as visible from the air as one at the front.

AIR RAID WARNING SIGNALS
*WARNING SIGNAL* Warbling or intermitent sound on siren. Whistles blown by police and wardens. GAS WARNING Rattles sounded. *RAIDERS PASSED* Continuous sound on siren. *ALL CLEAR Handbells ring. When you hear the WARNING Signal TAKE COVER AT ONCE and stay there until you hear the continuous sound on the siren or the ringing of a handbell. Have your Gas Mask with you. If RATTLES have been used warning you of gas, do not come out until you hear HANDBELLS.

**FIRE PRECAUTIONS**

Be ready to deal with an incendiary bomb. Clear all lumber from your attic NOW, and see that you have easy access to the attic or roof space. Provide two buckets filled with water and, if possible, a stirrup pump with two-purpose nozzle, either producing a spray for dealing with the bomb itself, or producing a jet for tackling the resulting fire.

Have a reserve supply of water in buckets or tubs. Leave used water in bath.

If you have no stirrup hand pump, have two buckets of sand or dry earth near the top of the house, and a shovel with a long handle for putting sand on the bomb. After covering the bomb with sand place it in a bucket which has a few inches of sand in the bottom and remove it from the house. Scrape up every particle of burning metal. The resulting fire will have to be extinguished. Buckets of water or a folded blanket kept wet from a bucket of water might be used.

On no account throw water on the bomb or an explosion may result.

If you cannot put out the fire send for help to

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* HANG THIS CARD IN A PERMANENT AND PROMINENT POSITION
Source 6: Telephone conversation between Mr. Cleave and Captain Denaro a mine laying specialist in 1940 (WO 199/94)

Hello, is that Mr. Cleave? Yes, who is that speaking? I am Captain Denaro of the Royal Engineers. Oh, yes. About your letter. He said he would not remove the mines. I replied, surely they could be removed to a safer position? He said, he would have the position surveyed. I told him the matter was most urgent, and had counted 13 strung over the fields immediately opposite my house, laying loose and washed about by the tide, and further said, when his men were laying the mines, I pointed out the position in which they were being set would prove a menace, as the battering they would receive from a high tide, and a strong wind, coupled with the further risk of any flotsam and jetsam striking them, would explode them. He said I did not understand the position, and he intended to guard the whole coast. I replied I quite agreed and understood about taking every precaution against an enemy, but he surely did not seriously anticipate, out of the hundreds of miles surrounding the British Isles, the enemy would pick on my 200 feet of foreshore for his invasion plan, and even if he did, the mines would be no deterrent, as they would have already exploded and have done their damage, not to Jerry, but to me. He laughed, and said, they may land anywhere. I replied, yes, but surely the end you are endeavouring to attain, could be so attained without having my property periodically damaged. He asked if I was nervous. I said no, and had yet to learn that objecting to one's house and home being blown up was a symptom of nervousness, but was apprehensive of having my home blown to blazes. I told him occasions mines had exploded, and it was not altogether enjoyable expecting at every high tide for more to go off, and I did most strongly object to being blown up by my own people. He suggested I should let the matter drop, and say no more about it, to which I replied, I most certainly did not intend to let the matter drop. He said my letter had threatened him, and although he had not liked sendo people out of their homes, if I persisted, he would ask for a compulsory evacuation. I replied we had been asked to stick it, and we were going to stick it, and the leaving of the premises would in no way prevent more damage as the matter was at present, I again urged that the mines be removed from the immediate vicinity, and failing this, could they not be properly secured to prevent accidental explosion, but because I lodged a legitimate complaint, to threaten me with expulsion, was only burking the question, and to adopt such an attitude was quite untenable. He again said he would have the position surveyed.
Digest of conversation that took place over the 'phone when Captain Denaro rang me up on Sunday the 22nd of September 1940 at 9.45 a.m.

Hullo. Is that Mr Cleave. Yes, who is that speaking? I am Captain Denaro of the Royal Engineers. Oh yes. About your letter. He said he would not remove the mines. I replied, surely they could be removed to a safer position? He said, he would have the position surveyed. I told him the matter was most urgent, and had counted 13 strewn over the foreshore immediately opposite my house, laying loose and washed about by the tide, and further said, when his men were laying the mines, I pointed out the position in which they were being set would prove a menace, as the battering they would receive from a high tide, and a strong wind, coupled with the further risk of any flotsam and jetsam striking them, would explode them. He said I did not understand the position, and he intended to guard the whole coase. I replied I suite agreed and understood about taking every precaution against an enemy, but he surely did not seriously anticipate, out of the hundreds of miles surrounding the British Isles, the enemy would pick on my 200 feet of foreshore for his invasion plan, and even if he did, the mines would be no deterrent, as they would have already exploded and have done their damage, not to Jerry, but to me. He laughed, and said, they may land anywhere. I replied, yes, but surely the end you are endeavouring to attain, could be so attained without having my property periodically damaged. He asked if I was nervous. I said no, and had yet to learn that objecting to one's house and home being blown up was a symptom of nervousness, but was apprehensive of having my home blown to blazes. I told him on two seperate occasions mines had explided, and it was not altogether enjoyable expecting at every high tide for more to go off, and I did most strongly object to being blown up by my own people. He suggested I should let the matter drop, and say no more about it, to which I replied, I most certainly did not intend to let the matter drop. He said my letter had threatened him, and although he did not like turning people out of their homes, if I persisted, he would ask for a compulsory evacuation. I replied we had been asked to stick it, and we were going to stick it, and the leaving of the premises would in no way prevent more damage as the matter was at present. I again urged that the mines be removed from the immediate vicinity, and failing this, could they not be properly secured to prevent accidental explosion, but because I lodged a legitimate complaint, to threaten me with expulsion, was only burking the question, and to adopt such an attitude was quite untenable. He again said he would have the position surveyed.
Source 7: Be careful what you say poster (INF 3/232)

You never know who’s on the wires!

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY