

Knowledge Organiser: Depression, war and recovery 1930-1951 (Unit 1)

Key Question 4: How did people in Britain cope with the experience of war?

Timeline of events

- 1 September 1939: Evacuation of children begins
- 1940: The Blitz begins
- 2 September – 2 November 1940: London bombed every night
- 19-21 February 1941: Three Nights' Blitz in Swansea
- 1944-1945: V-1 and V-2 attacks

Important concept

The horrors of war were felt by all the British population. There were bombing raids, evacuation, rationing, government control and great loss of life to endure. But out of the chaos came the idea of the British 'Bulldog' or 'Blitz' spirit. People worked together for the greater good. For some, new opportunities were available which changed their lives for the better.

Key words

Blitz	Intense bombing campaign undertaken by the German air force against British cities.
Incendiary bombs	Fire bombs.
Evacuation	The movement of children from an area of danger to a place of safety.
Rationing	A specific amount of food given to individuals during a time of shortage.



The bombing of British cities

- In the autumn of 1940, the German Air Force, the Luftwaffe, began its bombing campaign on British cities. London was bombed every night from 2 September to 2 November. Over 15,000 people were killed. The raids continued until 1941, and then restarted in 1944-45 with the use of V-1 and V-2 bombs.
- Londoners took shelter in the underground station. A spirit of wartime friendship and co-operation was created.
- Swansea was bombed for three nights between 19 and 21 February 1941. The port, docks and oil refinery were targeted. Two hundred and thirty people were killed and 397 injured. Seven thousand homes were destroyed.
- Most other major cities such as Belfast, Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, Cardiff, Liverpool and Manchester also experienced bombing by the Luftwaffe.

Evacuees and their host communities in Wales

- Evacuation began on 1 September 1939, when people were moved out of the cities in danger of bombing raids to safer areas in the countryside, or to areas less likely to be targeted by German bombers, such as Wales.
- Children, pregnant women and people with disabilities were evacuated. Evacuated children were allocated to host families.
- Many schools were evacuated and children travelled with their teachers to the countryside.
- Around 1.5 million people were evacuated in the first wave. During the 'Phoney War', many evacuees returned back home only to return once the Blitz started.
- Evacuees had mixed experiences in their new homes. Some were treated badly or abused, and there were many stories of evacuees bed wetting and having nightmares. They were used as unpaid workers and saw little empathy or support.
- Others were treated as part of the family and developed a strong bond with their host families. They saw the countryside for the first time and experienced a better standard of living. Some evacuees remained with their host families once war was over.

The need for rationing

- Rationing was introduced almost immediately once war was declared.
- Food, clothing, coal and petrol were rationed.
- Britain was importing almost 40% of its food from abroad, and there was a real threat of starvation from German U-Boat attacks. In March 1942 alone, the Germans sank 275 ships.
- Ration books were issued to everyone and coupons were used to get goods such as meat, eggs, butter and sugar.
- Some goods were bought on the black market.
- The Ministry of Food produced pamphlets with recipes and information about food waste. People were encouraged to grow their own food with the 'Dig For Victory' campaign.
- Rationing improved the diets of many people as they ate healthier food.

The contribution of women to the war effort

- Women's contribution to the Second World War was even greater than it had been during the First World War. By 1943, 57% of workers were women. They played vital roles within the armed services, munition factories and land army.
- From December 1941, women aged 19-30 were conscripted to work and by 1943, 17 million women were either in the forces or engaged in war work. Government propaganda urged women to aid the war effort.
- Women enlisted in a number of different forces - Women's Auxiliary Air Force (**WAAF**); Auxiliary Territorial Service (**ATS**); Women's Royal Naval Service (**WRENS**). By the end of the war in 1945, there were 450,000 women in the military. They carried out essential office work, driving and domestic duties as well as working as mechanics, welders, pilots, carpenters and gunners.
- Women also performed nursing roles at hospitals. Many of the code breakers at Bletchley Park were women.
- The salaries of women were usually less than those paid to men.
- The Women's Land Army was created to help ease the shortage of male farm labour, this was essential to secure food production and operate farm machinery.
- Many women joined the Women's Voluntary Service (**WVS**). They knitted balaclavas and socks for servicemen, provided refreshments for those who sheltered in the underground and helped people who had lost their homes in the German bombings. This group had one million members by 1943 and usually consisted of older women.
- Women also collected scrap metal needed for the war effort.