

Bridport Museum &
Local History Centre:

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A Child's War



**Bridport
Museum**



www.bridportmuseum.co.uk

Dear Teacher,

Here is your WW2 'A Child's War', on loan from Bridport Museum.

Your pack includes a USB stick containing longer texts and copies of most things so that you can print off from it or use with your whiteboard. The folder is full of paper copies of the same texts, and small objects that children can handle or you can display.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT NOBODY PUTS THE GAS MASK ON.



The masks all contained tiny amounts of asbestos and at the time it wasn't understood how dangerous it was to inhale if it is exposed through damage.

We have focussed on local children's wartime experiences in the Bridport area, although there are some first-hand accounts from London children to provide a contrast. We have not gone into the causes of the war, its battles, its effects, or the Holocaust, which could fill another loan box. There are suggestions for learning activities, but you'll also have your own.

We would appreciate feedback- what did you use, what went down well, what needs to improve, any learning activities you'd like to contribute to the pack?

Just drop us an email, and we'll use your comments to improve future packs.

The loan is free, but as we're dependent on unpaid volunteers, donations and grants, any contribution to Bridport Museum would be welcomed.

If you'd like to visit the Museum itself, then please do get in touch.

Best wishes,

Emily Hicks, (Director), Ann Sydney, Julie Gardner & Bruce Upton, (volunteers)

What's in the box?

Please check the contents are complete before returning to the museum. Then leave clean for the next group. Thank you.

Item/object	Quantity	Checked and present?

Suggestions for using this box

Write a poem pretending you are a child during World War II.

What would you want your Mum to spend your clothing rations on? You have to follow the ration rules! You only have 66 coupons to last a year, and you are growing!

You are an evacuee. You must carry your gas masks and carrier bag, or small case containing everything you need. You have been told to take one change of clothes. It's September. What would you take?

How was life different for a child in the city and one in the country during WWII?

Make one of the wartime recipes.

Try the malt extract (using a stick). This is an authentic taste of WWII! Children were given it because rations didn't provide many calories!

Talk to the oldest person in your family. Do they remember the War?

Visit the War Memorial in South Street.

Look at the shrapnel in the Museum.

What do you think people's experiences on the Home Front can teach us today?

Pretend you live in 1940. Design a poster showing children how they can help the War Effort.

Did your house exist in 1939 at the start of the War?

Dress like you live in 1942. Listen to music of the time.

Why did the countries go to War? Who was on which side?

First person account:

Elizabeth Buckler Gale

In the autumn of 1939, evacuees came from London. We had our lessons in the mornings and they used our classroom in the afternoons, when we went out on Nature Walks. We carried our gasmasks in cardboard boxes.

The windows of the school were gummed over with criss-cross tape, in case there was an air raid and our astute Headmaster, who was a leading light in the ARP, did surprise drills. We had to put on our gasmasks and get under the desks. At six years old, this worried me, as I wondered if my parents knew that there was an air-raid. I can't remember being told that it was only pretend.

In the country we never went hungry. There were plenty of rabbits and vegetables. At school we drank fresh milk and were given Horlicks tablets and rose-hip syrup to supplement our diet. Everyone in the village, appeared to dabble in a bit of Black Market and there were huge tins of dry, army biscuits and condensed milk. Eggs had to be sent to collecting stations, so, even on a farm, we often ate reconstituted egg powder. I remember queuing at the butcher's shop for our meat rations. Practically every other food commodity, clothing, petrol and coal, were rationed. Sweets were few and far between. We had ration books and identity cards and wore identity bracelets, (in case we were killed).

There were many nights when we heard enemy aircraft droning overhead. They flew over Burton Bradstock, having crossed the channel en route to bomb Bristol, Bath and Yeovil. They sometimes jettisoned surplus bombs on their return. Most landed in the sea but some fell in the fields near by. One bomb was only two hundred yards from where we lived. It went straight down into a wet area and only one of our windows was broken by the blast. My father would carry me outside, at night, to witness the guns being fired at sea and around Portland. I can picture incendiary bombs falling, the searchlights everywhere and the sight of barrage balloons, in the sky.

The wireless brought encouragement from Prime Minister Churchill and tips to assist the war effort from the Radio Doctor and Food Minister. I remember hearing Lord Haw Haw broadcasting his propaganda. We all knew that "Careless talk costs lives". We collected waste paper at school, going around to the houses once a week. For this we wore round red, lapel badges. We were 'cogs in the wheel'. When the boys played at being soldiers, we girls had to be the Red Cross nurses. During 'War Weapons Weeks' we sang patriotic songs outside Bridport Town Hall.

First person account:

Elizabeth Buckler Gale

The news of young men from Burton Bradstock being killed sticks in my memory. A soldier from Burton Bradstock called and told of his narrow escape from Dunkirk. He recounted how he was fired on as they pulled him into the boat.

The Chesil Beach and hinterland were out of bounds, covered in barbed wire and mines. There were tank traps and pillboxes everywhere. One night the, (usually silent), church bells rang. This was a sign of an invasion. It turned out to be a false alarm but the village men stayed on watch for ages. My father told me that if there was an invasion, all the women and children were to be taken to Beaminster Tunnel, for safety. I doubted that they could transport us the long way there and in time.

Aged six, in 1940, I was staying the weekend in Yeovil with family friends. A real adventure it was, too, as Yeovil was bombed and we were woken up in the middle of the night and had to clamber into the Morrison shelter, (a reinforced steel table), in the sitting room. In 1942, I saw hundreds of Canadian troops in our fields on a practice raid for Dieppe.

The American soldiers arrived in 1943. They were stationed throughout Dorset. My parents befriended many of them. They came for Christmas dinner and enjoyed glasses of local cider with us. One was nicknamed 'Long Bill'. I did not know their surnames, although my mother wrote to some of their families. My father's smoking seemed boosted with Camel cigarettes and we didn't go short of canned fruit.

In June 1944, all the GIs suddenly left the area. I was told that they were going to fight the enemy, in France. We were all sad and worried for them and listened avidly to the news on the wireless. Throughout the night of June 5th/6th 1944, the planes, some with gliders, flew on and on overhead. The fighting on the beaches was bloody but the newspapers never told us the full story.

The day the soldiers received their leaving orders, I was at school but they sneaked out to say "Goodbye" to my parents and left me a black puppy, with the excuse that it was too small for them to take. I called her Normandy, although she was always known as Little Pupper. She lived to be fifteen.

Several weeks after D-Day, Long Bill came back. I can see him now, walking down the path. A once tall, fine young man, now sad and dejected. He had been wounded. He told us that they had 'lived in their tank for seven weeks'. He was being sent back to the front line again. That was the last we heard of him.

First person account:

Tony Tiltman

I was at the General School, and there we had already had to forgo our gardens in the school, and turn them out for trenches for air-raids. I remember that very well. It was our prize garden, which, where we'd won the shield for eleven or twelve years, or thirteen, or something. We only lost it once. That was what happened there. I remember that as if it was yesterday. I can remember us having chicken in the back garden for some time, before we got rid of all them and turned it into a growing area. We used to grow vegetables.

My father worked as a wood turner all his life, barring his First World War service and he retired after fifty one years with the same company. Edwardses as was, in Gundry Lane. He was on short time prior to the war, and immediately before war broke out camouflage and stuff started coming, and the firm got bigger orders, and he managed to get his full hours in, for the pay was really poor. I think my father, when the war broke out, was earning about thirty eight shillings a week. And out of that my mother used to have to pay a third, a quarter of that for rent. I think it was about eight or ten shillings a week, for a small little house we had in East Street.

We were a family of four. Three brothers and a sister.

I never had many sweets at the best of times. No. I can remember a situation pertaining to that. It was a time when money was very short and I hadn't had a penny to spend on sweets for weeks and weeks. And I took a penny out of my mother's purse, and went to the front door, and couldn't go any further. I had to go back and put it back again.

When the air raid came over I'd been sent down to town by my mother to do some shopping. ... I was there outside the old Post Office when the plane came, when the - er - bomb was dropped. And I dived ... and I knew the plane because I was in the ATC at the time and I knew the plane, so I dived under the seat that was outside the old Post Office. And the glass from Frost's window came across and splattered the chair and the wall. And I saw two people killed. The soldier that was on leave, staying at the 'Star' - the son. The 'Star' I think it was. And he was blown across the other side of the road and was killed by blast, underneath what was Gales Hairdressers. It's not Gales now, but it was then. And a lady who was just coming up through the town by the traffic lights, Mrs Cast. She'd just been in the Post Office to post a letter to her son, and she was killed. That's Keith Cast, Cast, the decorators, used to be in East Street. After that I stayed in town helping to clear up, though Mother wasn't very pleased when I told her what I did, but what could you do? You had to help out, and that's what I done, helped to clear up the aftermath.

First person account:

Tony Tiltman

I used to go to the Lyric because that's where the films I wanted to see - things like Buck Jones and things like that. I remember that. And I remember of course there was a baker opposite the Lyric Cinema, and there was a loaf of bread they used to make called Helium, 'cos in the cinema you had, if you were in the front, you had to look up like that (Looks steeply upwards), And would come out with a bit of a headache. But once I'd had two or three slices of this bread I felt a lot better!

We used to take part in anything that was organised by the school, but that's about the only thing. But I was, before I was in the ATC I used to be with the First Aid. I was a First Aid assistant with Dr. Arnett and we used to have our area behind what used to be the Youth Hostel down the end here, what's now Pam's Emporium. That used to be the area where we used to do all the training.

And I used to be a boy singer and I used to go out on the shows in various parts, and we had a chap who organised the shows. And I then I could play the violin, but I can't any more. I saw the Americans. We used to go, when they were at Walditch, when the coloured soldiers were there. We put a show on for them. They made very good doughnuts! The ring ones. Very nice they were!

There was always disagreement between the American and the British soldiers. Because they always had more money and they seemed to pull the girls more. And they could get special things from America, like stockings, And the girls used to fall for that.

And I remember seeing King George VI when he came to Bridport to visit the West Kents for a very brief session.

Source: BBC 'People's War' website.

First person account:

Diana Riglar

When the War began I was six years old. I remember my father would come and wake me up when the sirens sounded at night and put me in the Anderson shelter in the kitchen to sleep on a mattress. It was quite big and took up all the room in the small cottage. I don't know how my mum ever managed to cook in there. When the incendiary bombs fell in Happy Island I seem to remember going along the road to a garage where the Trevett family lived; when we went home the sky was lit up by all the searchlights.

My Dad was working in Elliotts grocery store when bombs fell in East Street. He was lucky it was lunch time and had come to meet Mum and I at the British Restaurant (where the Women's Institute is now) for lunch.

My biggest memory however was on the Sunday in August when we were walking over West Allington Bridge and looked in the sky to see two planes flying so low we could see the swastikas on them. My Dad pushed Mum and I flat on the ground and lay on top of us, as the siren began to wail: it was very frightening. After they were gone we went into fields at North Mill and stayed under the hedge until the all clear sounded. Several people were killed in West Street that day.

We used to go to Wooth farm near Pymore, visiting friends, and I remember coming at home at night when it was pitch black and walking over Coneygar Lane to be greeted at the bottom by sentries on guard: "Halt, who goes there, friend or foe!!" My Dad was in the Home Guard and would spend time on the cliffs in the pillboxes, I imagine on the look-out for the enemy. My uncle Jim was a sergeant in the Royal West Kents and never came home from Dunkirk. His name is on the war memorial in South Street and in Dunkirk as he has no known grave. My Dad never got over his loss, although he lived to be 94.

Mrs Pullman, our neighbour, had two evacuees and when they arrived they also had a sister whom she couldn't accommodate, so she came and stayed with us temporarily until a suitable home became available. One of the boys had been in touch with Mrs Pullman and visited her until the time of her death. He named his daughters Janet and Diana after myself and Janet (Legg) now Bullock.

I remember the soldiers marching out to the Station and also the Americans at the Garage in East Street with their chewing gum, going to school in King Street and having to file in the trenches (now gardens and car park), Mr Foster who regularly inspected our gas masks, ugh! How great when it was all over and food was more enjoyable again. I learnt to cook with dried eggs, made fish cakes with tinned fish, etc., but we always had food, albeit rationed.

Source: BBC "WW2 - People's War" website

Useful Links and Further Resources

BBC The People's War website: first-hand WWII accounts:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories>

KS2: a child interviewing their grandfather who was a child in London during the war:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/history-kis2-living-through-the-air-raids/zjnyrj6>

Contemporary music: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08gd56f>

Dorset History Centre archive: <http://dcc.dorsetforyou.com/calmview/>

Imperial War Museum: iwm.org.uk