

'We did our bit' – The
New Forest's Home
Front During World
War 2



An accompanying booklet to the
exhibition.

Introduction

The Second World War, 1939-1945, was a defining moment of the twentieth century. It was a global conflict which not only involved those on the frontlines, but also the population at home to an extent like never before. The Home Front was needed for a few crucial reasons. One aspect was mobilising the citizens to aid in the war effort, for example through factory work to provide resources for the military. However, another key reason for the Home Front was to protect the public or provide the impression of protection. In addition, it was also about control, where the British people were faced with a difficult situation and high levels of government intervention. While the courage and sacrifice of the countless soldiers was important, the Home Front and experiences of the civilian population were an extensive side to WW2 that need to be looked at.

The New Forest and its population were left relatively unaffected during the First World War. However, WW2 caused a dramatic impact of the Home Front in many ways. The large area was of key significance for the military in the campaign Operation Overlord (the Battle of Normandy in 1944), launching the invasion of German-occupied Western Europe. Thousands of troops were stationed, alongside an armada of ships off the

Forest's coastline. Twelve airfields were also built in preparation for D-Day.



Figure 1 - A photo showing employees outside the Ampress Wellworthy factory, which was important during wartime.

This booklet expands upon the exhibition, looking at the various Civil Defence and volunteer organisations during the War. It also looks at other aspects of the New Forest's Home Front and how the civilian population was affected during this difficult period, including war work, rationing and children's experiences. At the back of the booklet, there is information about the St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery in Lymington, where most of the sources used came from. This is part of a project carried out by students from Bournemouth University (Stephen Brown, Lee Chadwick, Aaron Kamal and Ella Cook), in collaboration with the St Barbe Museum.

Civil Defence and Volunteer Organisations

A crucial part of the Home Front was idea of civil defence and volunteer organisations. There was a great need to protect the civilian population, whether that be from air raids or even the prospect of invasion. For this reason, various groups were formed and evolved in this period. These include the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), Home Guard and Air Raid Precautions/Wardens' (ARP, changed to Civil Defence Service in 1941). These had different duties and responsibilities during the War.

Alongside this were other methods of protecting the public. The use of information booklets provided to households was an effective way of informing the people about how to prepare for future air raids. The 1938 'The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids' booklet was one such example. It offered a range of advice on how to cost-effectively prepare a home against a bombing. For example, it advises that the best place for a refuge room would be in a basement, where it could be made reasonably gas proof. The top floor is to be avoided though. Other information includes sealing window frames with pasted paper in order to prevent glass shattering from an explosion and severely injuring the inhabitants.

HOW TO CHOOSE A REFUGE-ROOM

Almost any room will serve as a refuge-room if it is suitably constructed, and if it is easy to reach and to get out of. Its windows should be as few and small as possible, preferably facing a building or blank wall, or a narrow street. If a ground floor room facing a wide street or a stretch of level open ground is chosen, the windows should if possible be specially protected (see pages 30 and 31). The stronger the walls, floor, and ceiling are, the better. Brick partition walls are better than lath and plaster, a concrete ceiling is better than a wooden one. An internal passage will form a very good refuge-room if it can be closed at both ends.

The best floor for a refuge-room

A cellar or basement is the best place for a refuge-room if it can be made reasonably gas-proof and if there is no likelihood of its becoming flooded by a neighbouring river that may burst its banks, or by a burst water-main. If you have any doubt about the risk of flooding ask for advice from your local Council Offices.

Alternatively, any room on any floor below the top floor may be used. Top floors and attics should be avoided as they usually do not give sufficient protection overhead from small incendiary bombs. These small bombs would probably penetrate the roof but be stopped by the top floor, though they might burn through to the floor below if not quickly dealt with.



A cellar or basement is the best position for a refuge-room if it can be made reasonably gas-proof.



In a house with only two floors and without a cellar, choose a room on the ground floor so that you have protection overhead.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST FIRE

An air attack may include the use of large numbers of small incendiary bombs. So many fires might be started that the fire brigades could not deal with them, and every citizen must be prepared to help. Do these things the moment you receive official warning that war threatens.

- 1 Make sure that you know the emergency fire brigade arrangements in your neighbourhood—whether fire patrols have been established and where the nearest fire station is.
- 2 Clear the loft, attic, or top floor of all inflammable material, paper, litter, lumber, etc., to lessen the danger of fire, and to prevent fire from spreading.
- 3 If the materials are available, protect the floor of the loft, attic, or top floor in one of the following ways—with sheets of corrugated iron or plain sheet iron (gauge 22 or thicker) or asbestos wallboard, or with 2 inches of sand (if the floor will bear the weight).
- 4 It is advisable to coat all woodwork in the attic or roof space with lime-wash, to delay its catching fire. A suitable mixture is 2 lb. of slaked lime and 1 oz. of common salt with 1 pint of cold water. Apply 2 coats.
- 5 For controlling an incendiary bomb (see page 27), have on an upper floor a bucket or box of dry sand or earth with a shovel fitted with a long handle. Better still, have a Renball sand container (Home Office Specification). It has a suitable scoop and bow and is strong enough to hold a small incendiary bomb without risk of burning through.
- 6 Water is the best means of putting out a fire, but water mains may be damaged in an air raid or the flow restricted by fire fighting operations, so make sure that you have some water ready in buckets or cans in get-at-able places about the house.

Figure 3 - It highlights the best place in the home for a refuge room.

Figure 2 – It also offers important ways of preventing fires from starting in the house.

Women’s Voluntary Service:

The WVS was formed in 1938 and was initially created to help recruit women into the ARP. They would perform a number of duties in aiding civilians during and after air raids, such as first aid, feeding and even the evacuation of children. What is impressive, is that by 1943 the organisation had over one million volunteers. They were an integral part of civil defence during WW2.

In the Borough of Lymington (abolished in 1974), the WVS was administered in three centres, New Milton, Lymington and Milford. The WVS in Lymington was first organised by a Miss Wilson and the office was at her home before being moved later. She was described as being a 'formidable lady.' There were various jobs the WVS in the New Forest organised, particularly back-up work for Civil Defence. These included teaching and training housewives about firefighting with buckets and stirrup pumps, first aid and how to make new things out of old. What is also interesting, is that towards D-Day, complex arrangements were to be made by the WVS for an evacuation of the area, due to the German's training rockets on the South Coast. Luckily, the invasion forces got there before the rockets were prepared.



Figure 4 - Hazel Pinder in WVS uniform in front of her car.

As mentioned in the exhibition, Hazel Pinder was a member of the WVS during the War. Her, along with many other women, were doing what they could to help the local community and protect the people. They carried out various duties, such as first aid, driving, teaching and evacuation, in a time when the New Forest was affected like never before.

Home Guard:

The Home Guard, initially called the Local Defence Volunteers, was an armed citizen force that would act as a defence force in the event of an invasion. It was formed in May 1940 after France fell and a German invasion was probable. It was made up of male volunteers that were ineligible for military service, such as those too young or too old, such as veterans of WW1.

The Boldre Platoon of the Home Guard was formed in the summer of 1940 and was organised by Gerald Duplessis, the local councillor, with the headquarters being at his house, Newtown Cottage. It was the councillors that organised much in the war, from ARP, first aid, to the distribution of ration books. Duties of the Guard included patrolling the roads and rivers, manning sandbagged trenches to guard strategic posts. They were mostly a static force but were trained to shoot and handle guns. There was also little contact between neighbouring divisions, such as with the Lymington company, despite the overlapping of areas.

Air Raid Precautions:

The ARP encompassed a variety of organisations and guidelines that were focused on protecting the civilian population from air raids. This was changed to the Civil Defence Service in 1941, due to an increasing number of roles. The most significant service was the Air Raid Wardens, who were trained to help give advice to the public, reported bombs and helped civilians during and after a raid.

ARP training took place in the New Forest all throughout the spring and summer of 1939, where there was a mock air raid on Lymington in June and a trial black-out across the whole of Southern England on 9 August. As mentioned in the exhibition, Lt Col James Edmond was an ARP Head Warden at this time. He used a white sheet, black tape, pieces from a 'Halma' board game, alongside other small pieces to make a map of Lymington for training purposes.



Figure 5 - Pieces of the board game 'Halma,' used for civil defence training.

BOROUGH OF LYMINGTON L.R.F.

RECORD OF BOMBS DROPPED.
1940

DATE	POSITION	ESTIMATED SIZE OF BOMB	NUMBER	ARP REF.
June 27th.	Lynore Lane	250 Ks.	2	V5
" "	Lower Pennington	1.B.	2	S5
" "	Gedlers Farm	250 Ks.	1	S6
Aug. 2nd	Nr. Pennington Rectory	50 Ks.	1	O8
" "	Nr. Birel Castle	50 Ks.	1	R2
" 17th.	Ashley Ginton Estate	50 Ks.	1A	L1 M15 N1
" 23rd	New Milton	50 Ks.	2A	J7
" "	Arnewood, Hordle	-	1A	O18 P)
" 28th	Lymington River	250 Ks.	1	T8
Sept. 1st	Ashley Common & Barton	-	8	K5 L8
" 3rd	Pennington	50 Ks.	7	R7
" 5th	Woodside & Oxey Marshes	250 Ks.(2) 50 Ks.(1)	13	T5/6 K10
Oct. 14th	Nr. Plough Inn (Stanleya)	250 Ks.	1	K10
Nov. 17th	Nr. Hordle Grange	Oil Bomb 250 Ks.(1) 50 Ks.(1)	1	K10
" "	In Marshes S. of Pennington House	50 Ks.	2	L9
" "	Tiptoe - Nr. Plough Inn	-	1	S4
" "	Waterloo Rd. Lymington	50 Ks.	1	K10
" "	Lymington River, Nr. Bridge	250 Ks.	1	T8
" "	Between Cooks Farm & Beech Farm, Hordle	1.B.	50	K18 O)
" "	South of Buffaloe Cottage	50 Ks.	5	O)
" "	" "	1.B.	5	G12
" "	Bushley Copse	50 Ks.	1	G12
" 18th	Arnewood Lodge	-	1	H10
" 23rd	Stoneford Cottage, Everton	250 Ks.	1	J7
" "	Yaldhurst	50 Ks.	2	H5 R8
" "	Broadmead	50 Ks.	1	O8
Dec. 1st	Lea Green Farm	1.B.	1	H5
" "	Wainford Copse	-	1	O7
" 8th	Pennington Marshes	-	1	S4
" 12th	Lower Pennington	-	1	R5
" 21st	Manor Farm, Lea Green	250 Ks.	1	H5
" "	400 Yds. S.E. Yeation House, LeaGrs.	250 Ks.	1	M5
" "	Pennington Marshes	250 Ks.	1	T4
1941				
March 11th.	Lynore (Agerton Cottage)	250 Ks.	1	G4
April 10th	Mouth of River	250 Ks.	1	V5
" "	" "	250 Ks.	1	V5
" "	1/2 ml. N. of Cordeystone	250 Ks.	1	O8
" 18th	Bushley	250 Ks.	2	O7/10
May 3rd	Lymington & Pennington	500 Ks.	1	S7/8 S7/8
" "	" "	1.B.	150	S7/8
" 12th	Pennington	50 Ks.	21	S5
" "	" "	1.B.	48	S5
June 16th	Great Wear Copse	50 Ks.	1	H9

Figure 6 - A record of bombs dropped on Lymington Borough in 1940, reported by ARP wardens.

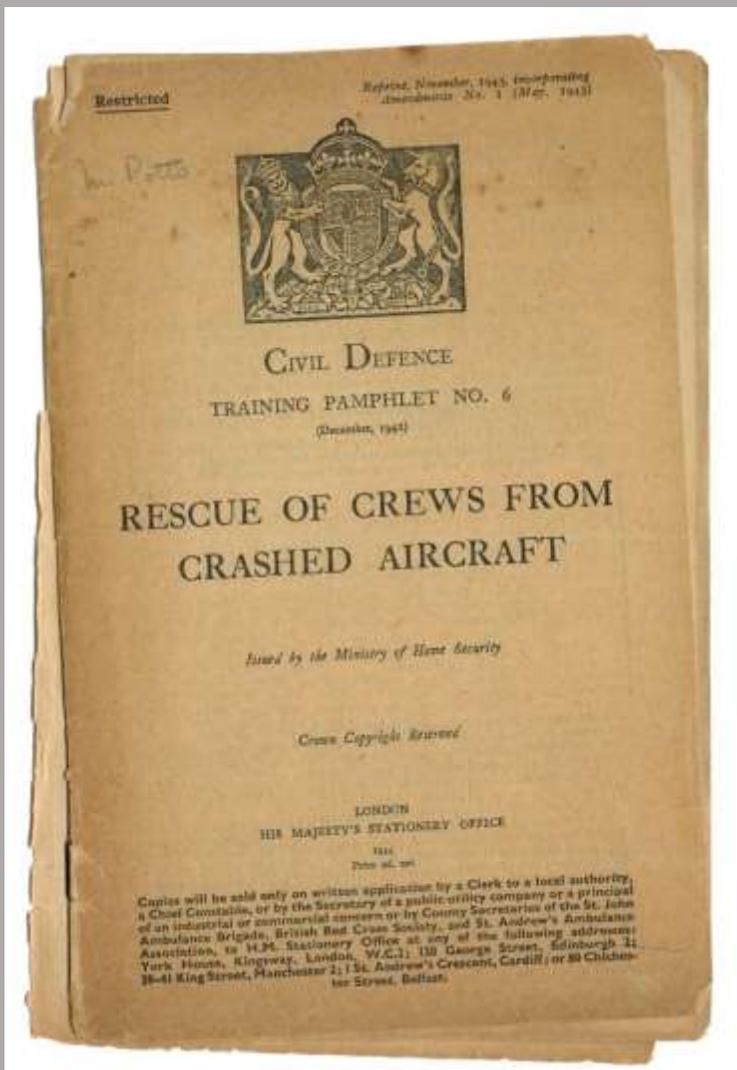


Figure 7 - A 1943 Civil Defence training booklet, likely used by Col James Edmond.

Daily Life During the WW2

While Civil Defence and other volunteer organisations were an important aspect of the Home Front during WW2, there are other key avenues to look at. Daily life was greatly affected, where the population had to become accustomed to new rules and regulations like never before. The New Forest was no different. Gas masks, which became symbolic in many ways to what wartime life was like, were issued across the area. More than 10,000 were given to people in the New Forest initially. Eventually, everyone was carrying their own mask, where a total of 38 million were issued nationwide.



Figure 8 - An adult gas mask, which came in a brown cardboard box.

The new rules were varied. Ringing church bells was reserved for a call to arms in the event of an invasion. Restrictions to transport, food and clothing were also introduced. What is also interesting is that all road signs across the Forest were removed, this was done to confuse any potential invaders. However, while the locals would know their way around, any visitors or holidaymakers would have had trouble and were viewed with suspicion, due to the threat of spies in people's minds. The impact of the WW2 seeped into many aspects of people's lives, both adults and children.

Children's Experiences:

While it is clear that adults were impacted by the war, whether that be from being soldiers, civil defence volunteers, or war work, children were also greatly affected and had to show resilience at a young age. This was evident by the need for evacuation, often being away from family for long periods of time.

The availability of toys and games was normal at first, but soon the materials, factories and workers were given to wartime needs. This meant that shortages were common, where they had to make do with what they had or be particularly creative. For example, a person recalled their time as a child during the war, where they used two pieces of wood to make a plane to play with. Parents would find scraps of material to make dolls or cuddly animals for their children.

School life was also affected quite dramatically in some areas. Many schools were damaged by bombings, which left some without teaching or had to attend others. There were countless problems of overcrowding, interruptions of lessons as well as lack of teaching supplies and resources. There was a lot of gas mask drills and air raid practices. June Webb was evacuated to Lymington in September 1939 when she was ten years old. She recalled that a lot of time in schools was spent in the air raid shelters nearby, singing, doing lessons and gas mask drills. Some schools even made sections of their grounds into gardens where the children could help grow fruit and vegetables to help make up for the food shortage.

Wellworthy Factory:

The Wellworthy factory at Ampress was a significant part of the New Forest's role in the war effort. It produced essential components for the engines that powered the Spitfire Fighter, as well as Bombers, Tanks and Ships. Because of the factory's importance, one of the first measures was to camouflage it by spraying them with green, khaki paint. This would stop any chance of light from being visible in the air. There were people stationed on the roofs to issue a warning to stop working, only when enemy planes entered a 15-mile radius. What is also interesting is that Wellworthy had

its own Home Guard command, which further highlighted the importance it had to the war effort.

Food Rationing:

Rationing was a prominent side effect of the war. There were large shortages of food supplies and resources as a result of the reduced number of imported products. This meant that the policy of rationing was introduced to conserve as much as possible. Booklets which helped families plan their shopping and meals for the week began cropping up. These offered advice and meal ideas based off of the rations available.



Figure 9 - Ration Dinners booklet, offering meal suggestions based on rationing, 1941.

Basic foods such as meat, butter, sugar, eggs and cheese were rationed. Even tea was put on a ration of 2 oz per week.

For children, the greatest hardship of rationing was the that of sweets and chocolate, which was limited to 8 oz per person, every 4 weeks. This was the equivalent of one bar of chocolate. On the one hand, things were better for children in the New Forest due to the stationing of Allied Forces. Sweets, chocolate bars and other food were widely distributed depending on how close to the American bases you lived. They often had a surplus of supplies and were generous.

Conclusion:

WW2 was a period that affected all aspects of life, both on the front lines and in at home. The Home Front was needed to not only maintain morale and bring the community together, it was also vital for the war effort and in protecting the civilian population.

The exhibition and this booklet have shown that The New Forest was impacted like never before, where it became a key area for the military. The population got involved in civil defence and other volunteer organisations as a necessity, carrying out important factory work, whilst staying resilient throughout.

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About St Barbe Museum & Art Gallery

The St Barbe Museum first opened its doors in 1999, attracting visitors to its dynamic museum collection and highly regarded art gallery. The museum sits at the centre of Lymington town, a picturesque and historical village located in the New Forest. Lymington was founded by a charter over 800 years ago and began as an Anglo- Saxon village. St Barbe Museum proudly specialises in collections detailing and reflecting on life along the coastal strip in the south of the New Forest.



For example, other towns that are included amongst the collection are surrounding towns and villages: Barton-on- sea, New Milton and other parishes such as Milford, Sway, Hordle and Boldre.

In particular, the museum narrates the story and shares an insight into the history of the following towns as developing market towns and ports. These have divulged information on smugglers who previously lived in the towns, as well as boat builders and salt makers. The collections from St Barbe additionally focuses on various aspects of the local towns such as home life, industry shops, trades, farming, leisure, sport, war, holidays and the local nature environment. Throughout the collection, this museum holds an extensive photographic archive of the area, as well as a significant number of artefacts revealing the world-famous fossils of the Barton cliffs, as well as detailing the vast number of evacuees that travelled to towns such as Lymington throughout the Second World War.



Interestingly, the museum further develops upon how daily life was during the Second World War, and the importance of the role played by Lymington and surrounding villages towards the national defence. Most importantly, St Barbe focuses on the social impact of the war on the local villages and explores the history of the nearby Wellworthy factory, which supplied aircraft parts throughout the duration of the war. Finally, the museum prides itself with the discovery of the Boldre Hoard, a collection of more than 1600 3rd Century Roman coins, unearthed in a field near Lymington in 2014.

The St Barbe museum also hosts active exhibitions every 8 weeks in order to advertise and promote local artists work in aid of creating shows of national and regional significance.

So, come visit the beautiful St Barbe Museum and explore the rich, local history of Lymington and the surrounding area.

