

LIFE IN BRITAIN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Winston Churchill

One of the greatest British Prime Ministers of the 20th century was Churchill who led a coalition during the Second World War. He often used the radio to speak to the people of Britain and with his strong personality he was always able to inspire them to continue making an effort even during the difficult time of the Blitz when cities were regularly bombed.

The Blitz

In September 1940 the enemy started to bomb Britain. This was called “The Blitz”. London was very badly damaged during the Blitz.

Air raid shelters

Before an air raid, people heard sirens and ran to the nearest shelter. Shelters were in gardens, under houses or, in London, in the underground. Every street had an air raid warden, a man who sent for ambulances or fire engines after a raid and checked the people and buildings. After raid many families found they has lost their homes, schools or members of their families.

Gas masks

Every man, woman and child carried a gas mask all the time in a cardboard box.

Blackout

All windows in houses had heavy black curtains. There were no street lights and cars could not use their lights. This was so that enemy planes could not find targets to bomb.

Ration book

During the war food was divided by rationing. Each family had a ration book which showed how much they could buy every day.

Home guard

Some men could not go and fight because they had some particular family situation or health problem. These people often joined the Home Guard. This was a “part-time army” in Britain which helped guard the British Isles. They had very little equipment and often no uniforms but they did regular training.

Evacuation

Life in the cities became dangerous because of the Blitz so the government decided to send children, without their parents, to the country where they stayed for months or even years on farms or in the big country houses of rich people. It was a difficult experience for these city children, many of whom were very poor. For some it was a chance to change their lives. For others it was a terrible time of unhappiness in a strange situation where they were sometimes treated badly.