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MUSEUM

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alive through history*

Dig for Victory



Supported by
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Location:

- Northolt Barn

Practical Notes:

- Part of the Dig for Victory workshop is an outdoor activity. It is important that your group dresses warmly and appropriately.
- The rationing treats made are “chocolate truffles” that include crushed almonds and almond essence. Please let the education officer know **in advance** if any children attending the workshop have a nut allergy as an alternative can only be provided with advance notice.
- There are photo opportunities throughout these activities.

Purpose and content of the activity session:

- During this session the children will be able to explore food rationing during and immediately after World War 2, with particular reference to the 1940s Prefab at the Museum.
- The Museum teacher will help the children to explore the prefab garden, design their own garden (thinking about what types of food they could grow and how it could be used) and to make a rationing treat to take home (thinking about how much of the week’s rations would have been used).

The explanation will vary in emphasis having regard to the age, ability and current or recent schoolwork (e.g. What was it like for children in the second World War?) or interest if known beforehand.

Access Statement:

Northolt Barn & Dig for Victory: Fully Accessible to all users.

Historical Background

Food Rationing:

During the war, and for a considerable time afterwards, some foods were rationed. This was because there was not enough for everyone to have just what they wanted.

Before the war Britain, as an island, imported 55 million tonnes of goods, broken down as follows:

- 50% of its meat
- 70% of its cheese and sugar
- nearly 80% of fruits
- about 90% of cereals and fats

Britain was in no position to be able to feed its population in the event of war without first making provision. To this end a “Food Defence Plans Department” was created by the British government in 1936 and in 1940 John Boyd Orr (Rowett Institute in Aberdeen) warned the government that, *“the health line of the Home Front may become as important as the Maginot Line.”*

By this time however the government had understood that adequate nutrition for its people was part of the war effort, as it would lead to an energetic workforce in the factories, homes and services. Through advertisements from the Ministry of Food the British public learnt that eating wisely was part of defeating Hitler.

The government also realised that the majority of factories in Britain would be concentrating on the war effort and so food and other household items would be in short supply. So, in early 1940, rationing of some items began, ensuring that what *was* available was distributed fairly and no one went without *anything* completely. The country was split into nine areas and shopkeepers could obtain supplies only from their local area, for example only people within 10 miles of Slough were able to obtain Mars Bars (the Museum would be lucky!).

All families were issued with ration books (shown below), which contained coupons for different foods. Each family had to register with a shop and the shopkeeper was then issued with enough food for the people on his list alone.



Food was rationed in the following order:

From January 1940

Sugar
Butter
Ham
Bacon

From March 1940

Meat

From July 1940

Tea

And the list of rationed food was later to include

Preserves (jam, margarine, syrups and treacle)
Sweets
Cooking fats
Eggs (1 egg per person, weekly).

Other food was on a 'points system' and each person was allocated a certain number of points each month, to spend as they wished or on whatever was available, these were usually tinned foods.

Beer and cigarettes were never rationed in order to keep the public morale high.

The weekly allowance per person could and did vary throughout the year due to shortages. However, the average adults' weekly allowance during 1943 was:

- 3 pints of milk,
- 3¼lb - 1lb meat,
- 1 egg or 1 packet of dried eggs every 2 months,
- 3-4 oz cheese,
- 4 oz bacon and ham,
- 2 oz tea, 8 oz sugar,
- 2 oz butter,
- 2 oz cooking fat plus 16 points a month for other rationed foods (usually tinned) subject to availability.



Hints were given by the government to cooks on how to make the most of the food they had. For example:

1. Meals should be planned ahead to make the best use of food, fuel and money.
2. Cooks should fill every shelf in the oven to use the fuel most efficiently.
3. When possible, food that was grown in the garden or in the wild (for example blackberries, crab apples, mushrooms and dandelion leaves) should be used, and anything that couldn't be eaten then should be 'bottled' to preserve it for the future. There were no freezers at that time in ordinary houses.
4. Left overs and scraps of food should never be wasted and should be used in a variety of ways, so stews and casseroles were very popular.

To ensure that as many eggs as possible were eaten but did not 'go off'; the government introduced dried eggs (a tin of which can be seen in the larder in the prefab kitchen). One tablespoon of dried egg mixed with two tablespoons

of water equalled one egg and the Ministry of Food stated that these were, *“pure fresh eggs with no additions, and nothing but the moisture taken away.”*

Choice and variety of the available foodstuffs decreased noticeably during the war, for example before the war there were 350 varieties of biscuits; these were reduced to 20.

Even cat and dog food was rationed. You could feed a small amount of a person's own meat ration to them but if you gave them too much fresh meat you might have been prosecuted. Some recipe books even included meals for them.

Under the leadership of Lord Woolton, the Ministry of Food led a campaign of information for the benefit of the people, including 'Food Facts' in newspapers and magazines with weekly advice columns for the cook. Soup advertisements also stated, *“Rations go twice as far this way ... Start with platefuls of piping hot, thick, appetizing soup, and plenty of bread. It's filling and satisfying and you can make do with smaller servings of the rationed foods...”*

Information leaflets were issued, particularly with ideas for recipes using the new dried eggs and milk and on how to make the most of the foods that were available still.

Whilst shopping, women had to be aware of 'bomb-damaged' goods, for example addled eggs or glass shards in the packaging. As food packaging became sparse, shoppers had to remember to take their own paper with them and as bottles were in short supply there was a government campaign to encourage people to return all bottles to be re-used, and housewives collected and saved their paper bags.

Lord Woolton also introduced free school meals for children from poorer families and free cod liver oil and orange juice for the under two's. Expectant mothers received more milk and egg rations each week than other adults.

The government's food control was able to give society a good mixed diet, which benefited their health, and after two years of rationing the British public were slimmer, livelier and healthier than they had ever been. It also resulted in a lower child mortality rate, a significant decrease in TB cases and decreased levels of tooth decay. Children were taller and sturdier, and fewer mothers had died in childbirth, all this whilst there were fewer doctors and nurses available on the Home Front.

Because of rationing no-one starved and although it resulted in plain and boring food throughout the period, it effectively helped to win the war. A Ministry of Food advertisement boasted:

*'Because of the pail, the scraps were saved,
Because of the scraps, the pigs were saved,
Because of the pigs, the rations were saved,
Because of the rations, the ships were saved,
Because of the ships, the island was saved,
Because of the island, the Empire was saved,
And all because of the housewife's pail'*

Dig for Victory:

One month into the war the Ministry of Agriculture launched one of the most memorable slogans of the whole conflict - 'Dig for Victory'.

From this point on, the whole of Britain's home front were encouraged to transform their private gardens into mini-allotments to provide essential crops for families and neighbourhoods alike, and to help the war effort by freeing



up valuable space for war materials on the merchant shipping convoys.

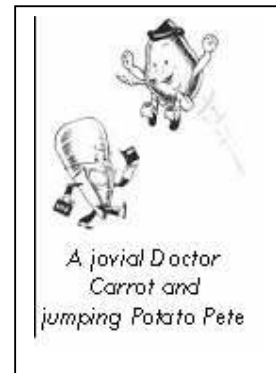
By 1943, over a million tons of vegetables were being grown in gardens and allotments.

During the course of the war, many propagandist moves were made to promote the importance of 'growing your own'. In addition to the circulation of familiar Ministry of Agriculture 'food flashes', literature and poster displays, anthems were also introduced. One such 'Dig for Victory' anthem went;

*"Dig! Dig! Dig! And your muscles will grow big
Keep on pushing the spade
Don't mind the worms
Just ignore their squirms
And when your back aches laugh with glee
And keep on diggin'
Till we give our foes a Wiggin'
Dig! Dig! Dig! to Victory"*

'DOCTOR CARROT'

Carrots were one vegetable in plentiful supply and as a result widely utilised as a substitute for the more scarce commodities. To improve its blandness, people were encouraged to 'enjoy' the healthy carrot in different ways by the introduction of such characters as 'Doctor Carrot'. Culinary delights in the form of curried carrot, carrot jam and a homemade drink called Carrolade (made up from the juices of carrots and Swede!) were suggested by the Ministry of Agriculture.



'POTATO PETE'

Similar to the 'Doctor Carrot' character, but this time using potatoes, 'Potato Pete' was another character introduced to encourage the population to eat home grown vegetables.

Here's the man who ploughs the fields.

Here's the girl who lifts up the yield.

*Here's the man who deals with the clamp, so that millions of jaws can chew
and champ.*

That's the story and here's the star,

Potato Pete

eat up,

'Potato Pete' recipe books were also written to give women suggestions and advice on how best serve potatoes at mealtimes. For example, '*scrubbing instead of peeling potatoes*' was recommended, thus avoiding unnecessary wastage'. Even traditional nursery rhymes were adapted to give a 'Potato Pete' theme! As one poem went;

Those who have the will to win,

Cook potatoes in their skin,

Knowing that the sight of peelings,

Deeply hurts Lord Woolton's feelings.

It was clear that as the war progressed, the Dig for Victory campaign had exceeded all expectations in terms of success.

However, as the following 1944 message from the Minister of Agriculture to all gardeners and allotment holders suggests, complacency in efforts was to be avoided despite the anticipated end of the war only being a few months away. There was clearly still a lot of work to be done, even after the war!

"We can justly congratulate ourselves on what we have achieved. But we must on no account relax our efforts. The war is not yet won. Moreover, even if it were to end in Europe sooner than we expect, the food situation, far from becoming easier, may well become more difficult owing to the urgent necessity of feeding the starving people of Europe. Indeed in many ways it would be true to say that our real tasks will only then begin. Carry on therefore with your good work. Do not rest on your spades, except for those brief periods which are every gardener's privilege".

'MEAT and POULTRY'

Fresh eggs were also produced as people realised the value of keeping chickens in their back yards. The importance of retaining edible scraps of food for pigs was also evoked. These pigs, some of which were purchased with monies collected from organised neighbourhood schemes, once fattened with the scraps, yielded good food too. Pig schemes were often called Pig Clubs.

Rationing of food and other items continued for 14 years (1939 until 1953), with strict control of items even after the war had ended.