



CHILTERN
OPEN AIR
MUSEUM

*Where buildings come
alive through history*

Defend the Home Front!



Supported by
The National Lottery[®]
through Awards for All



Location:

- Thame Vicarage Room.

Practical Notes:

- During the Defend the Home Front workshop the children will be split into smaller groups and will be using tools, including stirrup pumps. We therefore ask that all adult helpers are actively involved in this workshop.
- There are photo opportunities throughout these activities.

Purpose and content of the activity session:

- During this session the children will be able to explore the work of volunteers in defending Britain during the Second World War, with particular reference to the Home Guard and the Auxiliary Fire Brigade Service.
- During the session the children will also be able to explore the role of Scouts during the Second World War
- The Museum teacher will help the children to explore these themes through drill, fire fighting and decoding messages.
- At the end of the workshop all participants will receive a training certificate.

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:

Thame Vicarage Room: Fully Accessible to all users.

Defend the Home Front: The activities undertaken in this workshop require good hand-eye co-ordination skills, but can be undertaken by all children when a suitable level of support is provided by school staff and helpers. There will be some marching involved in the activity.

Historical Background

Civil Defence Volunteers

Knowing that war was likely to come, Stanley Baldwin (the then Prime Minister) invited local authorities to make plans to protect civilians in September 1935. Although some authorities did build brick bomb shelters, very little was actually done and so in April 1937 the government created an Air Raid Warden's Service. Within a year 200,000 volunteers had been recruited for just this area of civil defence. In fact by 1937 one and a half million people (of whom over two thirds were volunteers) were involved in civil defence including:

- Air Raid Wardens
- Ambulance Drivers
- First Aid helpers
- Fire Fighters
- Women's Voluntary Service

The country was divided into districts with units of each of the Civil Defence Services available in each district.

Air Raid Wardens:

The air raid warden's duty is to help the public during an air raid, and to tell the local authority what is happening and what kind of Air Raid Precaution Services are required to deal with the situation.

These men were responsible for sounding the air raid sirens and to play another siren to announce that it was safe to leave the shelter. They also had to deal with unexploded bombs and it is estimated that one in ten bombs dropped on Britain didn't explode. The Wardens had to arrange for the areas to be evacuated, the roads closed within a 600 yard radius of the bomb and to call the Bomb Disposal Unit.

First Aid helpers and ambulance services:

These people were under the control of the Local Medical Officer of Health and the First Aider's duty was to triage (as it is known now) the site of an air raid, this meant that they had to help everyone who was injured at the scene and send the people who needed the most help to the First Aid Points and/or Hospitals first. Every district also had ambulance services, mobile units and rescue parties and decontamination squads.

The Auxiliary Fire Brigade Service:

These volunteers supplemented the normal fire service and dealt primarily with fires caused by air raids.

Home Guard

At the start of the Second World War the government were inundated with requests from a large number of middle aged men and those in reserved occupations as to what they could do for their country. Therefore in October 1939 Winston Churchill suggested that a Home Guard of men over the age of 40 should be created. It wasn't until the Germans launched their Western Offensive that this idea was taken forward.

With the Nazis having invaded many of the European countries such as Norway and Holland, with France on the brink of collapse, the invasion of Britain looked imminent. On Tuesday 14th May 1940 Anthony Eden, War Minister, made an announcement to the nation after the 9 o'clock news on BBC radio. He described the form of warfare that the Germans had been using against countries such as Holland and Belgium and requested help from civilians to ensure that the armed forces' defences of England were supported.

"... Since the war began the government have received countless inquiries from all over the kingdom from men of all ages who are for one reason or another not engaged in military service, and who wish to do something for the defence of their country. Well, now is your opportunity.

We want large numbers of such men in Great Britain, who are British subjects, between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five, to come forward and offer their services. The name of this new Force which is now to be raised will be the 'Local Defence Volunteers'. ... "

Any man who wished to volunteer was asked to go to his nearest police station to give his name. Many men were already on their way to the police station before the end of Mr. Eden's speech. The government had only expected a total of 175,000 men to volunteer during the war, however within twenty four hours of Eden's speech 250,000 volunteers had signed up, within the first month 750,000. By the end of June 1940 over one and a half million volunteers were involved, which equalled the size of the regular army.

To start with this new force was not provided with uniforms or equipment and civilians were asked to give their personal shotguns and pistols to the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV). Within a few months 20,000 firearms were given in but there weren't enough to go around. With other firearms one in ten LDV had a gun and so other weapons were carried including axes, crowbars, spears and even dummy firearms. Uniforms and equipment started to arrive towards the end of 1940.

In June 1940 France was defeated and the threat of invasion was greater than it had been, the Germans were preparing for "Operation Sealion" by building barges all along the opposite side of the English Channel. Thousands of Local Defence Volunteers were deployed to the South Coast to support the regular army.

In July 1940 the LDV's name was changed to the Home Guard and on 5th November 1940 Winston Churchill spoke of the Home Guard thus:

"Such a force is of the highest value and importance. A country where every street and every village bristles with resolute, armed men is a country against which the tactics which destroyed the Dutch Resistance – tactics of

parachutists, air-borne troops in carriers or gliders, and Fifth Column activities - ... a country so defended would not be liable to be overthrown by such tactics.

Therefore I agree with those who think that the invasion danger has for the time been diminished. ... We must not allow our 'shallow clevers' to lead us into thinking that this is all mere pretence, a manoeuvre to tie us down here and prevent our re-disposing our forces. The vital realities of their duties must be borne in upon the whole of our troops and the Home Guard during the winter months. There must be no relaxation except for the necessary leave."

By the end of 1942 the Home Guard were an extremely proficient and well trained part time army, in fact so proficient that on 20th May 1941 (their first anniversary) they were given the honour of mounting guard at Buckingham Palace (to be bestowed again on their anniversary in 1943). This honour has not been received by some regiments that have been in existence for hundreds of years!

The training manual published in 1941 described the object of the Home Guard as:

"The Home Guard is not a spare wheel kept in readiness to be fitted if anything goes wrong with the others. It is an essential part of the machinery with which Britain is being defended."

In fact the Home Guard's efficiency helped to release much needed troops to fight abroad. They manned anti-aircraft batteries, coastal defences and arms and fuel dumps. They also helped the civil defence volunteers during air raids and an elite force within the Home Guard were trained to go into hiding immediately if Britain was invaded to lead sabotage activities to halt the German invasion.

The Home Guard volunteers were trained in a wide variety of skills:

- Weapon training – rifles and automatic firearms and hand grenades (including how to make them).
- Field craft or understanding your countryside – e.g. guerrilla warfare
- Observation and messages – including camouflage, scouting, reporting and message writing and means of sending messages.
- Obstruction and demolition – including road blocks, movable barricades, motor cycle traps, felling trees and weapon pits.
- Village defence and street fighting – including choosing a village stronghold, creating a well thought out communication network, protecting the water and food supplies, booby traps,
- Anti-tank
- Night Training –including how to move unseen and unheard at night
- Anti-aircraft – including how to deal with a parachutist
- Gas – including identifying different types of gases and how to treat them.
- Discipline and Drill

At the Home Guard's peak it had over 1,793,000 men and 1,206 volunteers died on duty during the four and a half years it was formed.

The Boy Scouts

The Boy Scouts was created in the early 20th Century by Lieut.-Gen. Sir R. Baden-Powell and this organisation was to serve a great purpose during the Second World War. Within Baden-Powell's "Scouting for Boys" manual many skills were taught and valued, even before the war. From the 1911 edition of the manual the following skills were taught and prized:

- Good Observation
- Loyalty and discipline
- Tracking

- Survival skills including fire building, shelter building, catching food, etc.
- Woodcraft including stalking, how to hide yourself,
- First aid
- How to help the police and other emergency services
- Sending and receiving messages

These boys were then ideal for use if Britain was ever to be invaded. Indeed Home Guard manuals gave instructions on how to deploy these “troops”, with jobs such as reconnaissance and transporting messages specifically suited to the scouts because who would suspect a child of reporting enemy numbers and locations to the resistance or delivering messages?

The Boy Scouts were also able to undertake much more mundane jobs vital to the war effort, for example some materials were in very short supply and so the government asked the public for metal to help build planes, tanks and munitions and the scouts went from door to door collecting pots, pans and other scrap metal.