

The Children's War

The Second World War



Introduction



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Children collecting firewood in Montgomery, December 21,

The Second World War brought many changes to the lives of children in Wales. As well as the distress that was caused by moving evacuees from towns and cities, the children of Wales had to get used to a new way of life at school and home. Safety became a part of everyday life, and children played their part in the war effort.

Gas Masks



Children practising wearing gas masks, 1939. The government encouraged people to practise wearing them ready for an attack by the enemy.

It was very important for children to learn about safety. From 1935 onwards, the government started to stockpile gas masks in case the enemy were to use poisonous gas in an attack.

Masks of different sizes for children of different ages were created, including a colourful one for young children under 5 years of age, which was called a 'Mickey Mouse' mask. There was even a gas mask for babies.

Gas Masks for Babies

Luckily the gas masks were never used, as there were no gas attacks on Britain.



A gas 'mask' designed for babies. This would have been issued to everyone with a small baby at the onset of the Second World War. The baby would be put inside, and oxygen had to be pumped in manually via the hand pump seen on the exterior of the device.

Gallery

Children had to carry their gas masks with them at all times. They also had to practice using them often at school in order to ensure that they could be worn quickly if there was an attack.

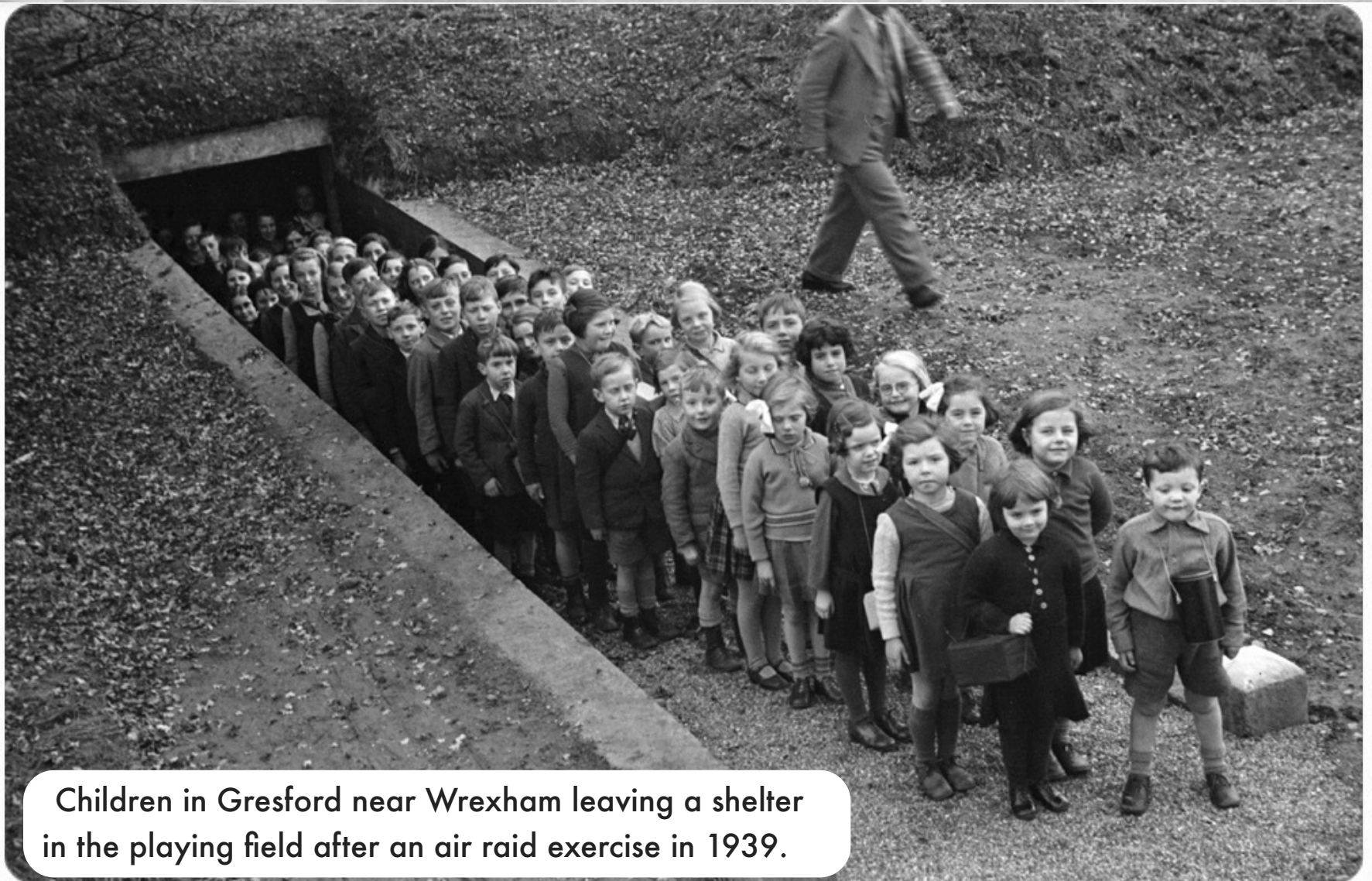


The 'Mickey Mouse' gas mask for children aged 18 months to 4 years old. (© South Wales Police Museum)

School life



Children would also practise what to do and where to go during air raids.



Children in Gresford near Wrexham leaving a shelter in the playing field after an air raid exercise in 1939.

Many schools had their own shelters in cellars or in the school grounds. When the siren sounded, the children were expected to rush to the shelter, and if there was no time to reach the shelter, to go and hide under the table in the classroom.

School life



A group of boys
learning gardening
skills.

Girls cooking in
school.



Girls practicing their
sewing skills.

Children's Contribution

Everyone was expected to contribute to the war effort. Children could contribute in a number of different ways, which varied from collecting scrap metal to repairing clothes, helping to grow vegetables or catching moles.

Schoolchildren would learn new skills so that they could contribute more effectively. Generally, there was a clear difference between the type of work that boys and girls were expected to do, with boys learning skills such as gardening and girls learning to sew and cook.



QUIZ

How many boys are gardening in this photograph?



- ☐ A. 9
- ☐ B. 7
- ☐ C. 6
- ☐ D. 10

Additional Work

Children would often help with work on the farms, including pest control. This was important work as it prevented scarce foods from being destroyed.

Boys of Church School, Welshpool
learning how to catch moles,
March 1941.

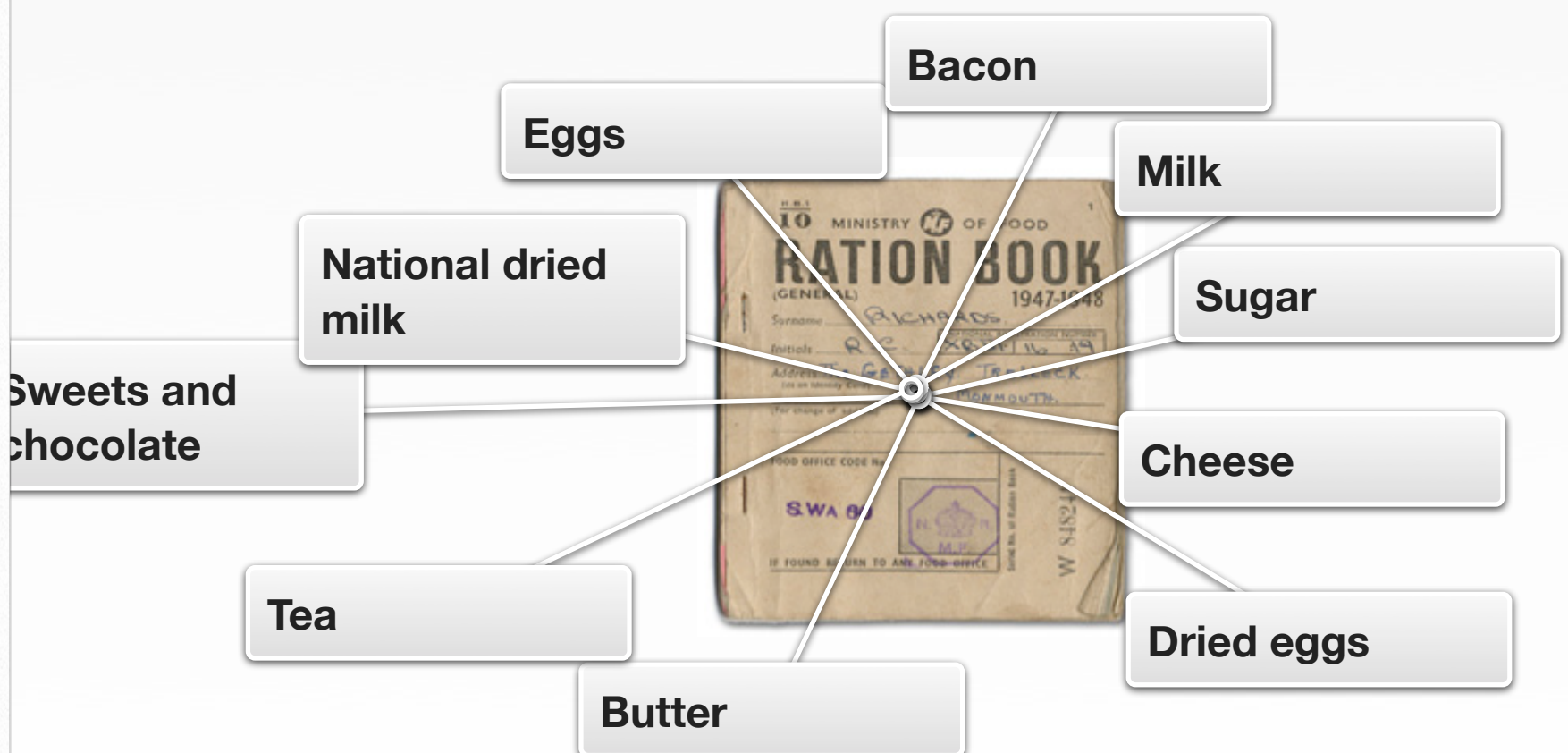


As all types of goods were so scarce, children were also encouraged to be part of campaigns to recycle goods by collecting waste paper and metal.

Rationing

War also meant that children had to adapt their taste to a stricter menu. Britain could no longer depend on imported foods and rationing was introduced. As bananas were no longer imported, children born during the war didn't see any bananas until after the war! Sugar, eggs, butter and flour were also rationed and many a sweet tooth had to rely on the limited supply of sweets and cakes. Treats like ice cream were considered a luxury.

Weekly food ration book



How many ounces of sugar was it possible to have every week?

Young People

From the end of 1941 it became compulsory for young people between 16 and 18 years of age to join youth groups. This was partly because the government wanted young people to help the war effort.

SCOUTS



Newtown Scouts collecting waste paper, November 4, 1939.

If assistance was needed, scouts were asked to help to build air raid shelters, and the older children would often be encouraged to join the armed forces. The Air Force would arrange training camps for boys during the school holidays.

GUIDES



Llanbrynmair Guides and Brownies, June 1, 1940.

Girls could learn new skills as part of the Women's Junior Air Corps. The guides would also go out around the countryside collecting fruit to make jam. The scouts and guides collected scrap metal to recycle.

Urdd Gobaith Cymru

Urdd Gobaith Cymru was popular in Wales as an organisation that provided opportunities for young people to use the Welsh language in their leisure and social activities

URDD GOBAITH CYMRU
EISTEDDFOD GYLCH 1942



The wooden cabins of the Urdd Camp in Llangrannog, August 1940

Although the rationing suspended many of the Urdd's activities and the Urdd's National Eisteddfod was suspended for a period, the Urdd remained very active and popular during the War.

Entertainment

Very few homes had a television during this period but children listened to radio programmes that were provided especially for them, and the children who lived in towns could go to the cinema.

Toys were scarce as factories had to focus on making explosives and planes instead of bikes and metal toys. Children would usually make their own toys out of wood, and recycle old bike parts to make new ones.



The Final of the Montgomeryshire Schools' Football Shield, April 26, 1941.

Gallery

Bomb craters and pieces of planes would often provide entertainment for children, as they arranged competitions to see who could find most pieces of bombs or planes. This could be exceptionally dangerous, especially with bombs that had not exploded. Generally, children managed to create their own entertainment during the period of the war.



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