

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

# Home Front 1939-1945 film sources

Using film as evidence in history

Key Stages 4-5 | Second World War 1939-1945

Video sources



# Introduction

Suitable for:

KS 4 - 5

Time period:

Second World War  
1939-1945

Take a look at this group of government public information films and two amateur films which were used as propaganda to persuade the Home Front population to support various campaigns to help win the war.

Messaging from the Ministry of Information covered topics like the dangers of 'Careless talk', the need to 'Dig for Victory' or 'Make do and mend'. Films were also used to explain rationing, evacuation, recruitment of women and men into civil defence, give advice about safety in the blackout or ensure support from the Empire. Films helped to drive these messages home along with other Ministry of Information leaflets and the posters displayed in shops and shop windows, council buildings or village halls.

Many people take the moving image for granted. They frequently assume that the images they see are a true and accurate portrayal of the events of "what is happening". Of course this can be in part explained by the fact that the visual image is far more seductive than the written word. This is because we impose our own meaning on what we see. The idea that "I won't believe it until I see it" is very significant here.

It is important, therefore, to learn to evaluate film as evidence. This can be achieved by understanding more about the process of filmmaking by investigating how the content and nature of a film can be determined by editing, use of montage, choice of camera angles, target audience and so on. Therefore, we must consider how films are produced in order to ask what they can tell us. We must study what films show us and how they show it.

Like all historical evidence, film must be considered very carefully

# Introduction

and used with other forms of evidence to build up a picture of a historical event. Questions have to be asked of it:

- Why and when was this film produced?
- Who is the target audience?
- What is the filmmaker trying to tell the audience?
- How might a given story be selective or simplified?
- If there is music, commentary or dialogue how do they influence the nature of the film?
- It is also important to bear in mind that censorship or even sponsorship can also affect the final form of a feature or documentary film.
- What is the impact of technology on the process of filmmaking, have new methods changed the process?

Film is such an important historical source because it was the first form of mass communication in the 20th century. Films can also be sources for understanding propaganda. They can be sources for providing insight into the values, concerns and issues of their times.

## Connections to curriculum:

### **Key Stage Four**

Edexcel GCSE History:

- C 1900– present: Warfare and British society in the modern era
- Experience of war: The impact of war on civilians, including recruitment and the organisation of a Home Front during Second World Wars. Government use of censorship and propaganda in wartime.
- The historic environment: London and the Second World War, 1939–45

OCR GCSE History:

- The First and Second World Wars: the beginnings of 'total war', including the impact on people's lives, increased state power and the changing relationship between the state and the people.

### **Key Stage Five**

AQA GCE History:

- The People's War and Peace, 1939–1951
- The social and cultural impact of 'total' war: conscription; women and children; civil liberties and restrictions; propaganda; the Blitz; plans for reconstruction including Beveridge and the Butler Act; policies of post-war Labour government, including the creation of the NHS and medical advances.

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# Tasks

Watch a film and discuss/answer the questions:

- Select 3 to 5 documents from either of the below Home Front collections to show how they can be used to support the message and content of one or more of the films:

[Home Front 1939-1945 \(part one\)](#)<sup>1</sup>

[Home Front 1939-1945 \(part two\)](#)<sup>2</sup>

- Write a report/record a video to explain your choice of documents.
- What are the advantages of using public information films like these with document sources as evidence for life on the Home Front?

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/home-front-1939-1945-part-one/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/home-front-1939-1945-part-two/>

# The Home Front



## BRITAIN CAN TAKE IT<sup>1</sup>

1940

© IWM (COI 944)

This is a shorter version of the film 'London can take it' and was re-edited for a British audience. It is introduced by American journalist Quentin Reynolds and released in 1940.

- How would you describe the tone of Quentin Reynolds commentary?
- How are the city of London and its citizens portrayed?
- What does the film reveal about the role of ARP (Air Raid Precaution) workers?
- What is the main message of the film?
- How is sound and music used in the film to create its message?
- Why is the date of this film's production helpful in understanding its purpose?

# Blackout



## DANGERS IN THE DARK<sup>2</sup>

1941

© IWM UKY 295

This film is about the importance of road safety and the dangers caused by the blackout. Made in 1941.

- Why is the title of this film effective?
- How does the opening of the film try to persuade people of the dangers of the blackout?
- What advice does the film give about the dangers of travelling in the dark?
- Why does the film suggest that being careful in the dark helps the war effort?
- Why do you think this film was made?

# Home Guard



## WARWICKSHIRE HOME GUARD TRAINING IN COVENTRY<sup>3</sup>

1942

© IWM MGH 6900

Amateur film made by Lieutenant Leonard Stanley North, a rifle instructor with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment during the Second World War. It shows the Coventry Home Guard in 1941.

- What military skills training for the Home Guard is evident in this film?
- What evidence is given of life outside training in the Home Guard?
- What is the value of using an amateur film like this as evidence of the role and purpose of the Home Guard?
- Can you write your own commentary script for this silent film?

## Women at War



### WOMEN AT WAR<sup>4</sup>

1941

© IWM MGH 3728

John Winant, the American Ambassador to Britain introduces film which shows the variety of jobs carried out by British women since the outbreak of war, and thanks America for sending aid to victims of the London Blitz. Made in 1941 and released in Britain and America.

- What 'told' and 'untold' information does the film provide about women's lives before the war in the first 3 minutes of the film?
- How are women in the countryside supporting the war effort?
- What is the role of Women's Voluntary Services?
- What is the role of women in the Land Army?

# Women at War

- What jobs are women carrying out in:
  - Women's Air Transport Auxiliary Service
  - Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service
  - Factories
  - Civil Defence- Did you spot Princess Elizabeth in this section?
  - Transport services
  - Communal restaurants
- Why do you think this film was made?

## Everyday Life



### RATIONING IN BRITAIN<sup>5</sup>

1944

© IWM COI 155

The film shows how rationing was experienced by a family of four and how it was designed to create fair shares for all of the population. Film was released in 1944.

- How much food did Britain import before the war?
- Why was rationing introduced?
- How did the rationing system work?
- How did rationing change the buying and living habits of people in Britain?
- What details does the film give about life in 1940s Britain?
- How do you know that film has been created to appeal to an American audience? [Clue: think about language; mention of Lend-Lease. A policy from 1941-1945 whereby United States supplied Britain and her allies with food and supplies]

## Everyday Life



### MAKE DO AND MEND<sup>6</sup>

1943

© IWM NPB 13037

This film shows a family discussing the ration system for clothing and suggests how old clothes can be used to make new garments. Released 1943.

- Why do you think this film was made?
- How are women encouraged to make do and mend?
- Who do you think is the audience for this film?
- Do you think the film succeeds in its message?

## Careless Talk



### JIG-SAW<sup>7</sup>

1944

© IWM UKY 560

A 'Careless talk' campaign film released in 1944. The film shows how small pieces of information can fit together like a jigsaw puzzle to provide the enemy with valuable information which costs lives.

- How does the film create tension at the start?
- What are the different ways in which valuable information be given away according to the film?
- Do you think this film is effective in getting its message over?
- Why does Anne say directly to the audience –'I hate those talkers' at the end of the film?
- Is 'jigsaw' an effective title for this film?

# The Empire Home Front



## FOOD FROM THE EMPIRE<sup>8</sup>

1940

© IWM COI 258

- Why is there more food production in Britain during war time?
- Why are the 'British Commonwealth of Nations' sending food to Britain?
- What goods are sent to Britain?
- Why is a shopping basket used to explain in the film do you think?
- What is the film trying to emphasise about the British Empire's contribution?
- How does the film infer Britain's relationship with the colonies in the commentary?
- What does the film reveal about how food reaches Britain and is distributed in war time?
- Who is the audience for this film?

## Bombing of Britain



### LONDON BLITZ SCENES REVISITED - 1946<sup>9</sup>

1946

© IWM MGH 1354

This is an amateur film shot by a former Auxiliary Fire Service fireman, George Eves. It shows life in London in the years straight after the Second World War. We see the effects of bomb damage on London as well as the start of post-war reconstruction.

- Can you describe the effects of bomb damage on the city?
- Can describe the new post-war prefabricated bungalows?
- Why do you think this film was made?
- Do you think the film has a message?
- Can you write your own script for the film?

## Video links

- <sup>1</sup> <https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/1861>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060006243>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060046308>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060009785>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060021462>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/1956>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://film.iwmcollections.org.uk/record/2373>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060021513>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060010173>



## Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

## Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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## Find out more:

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