

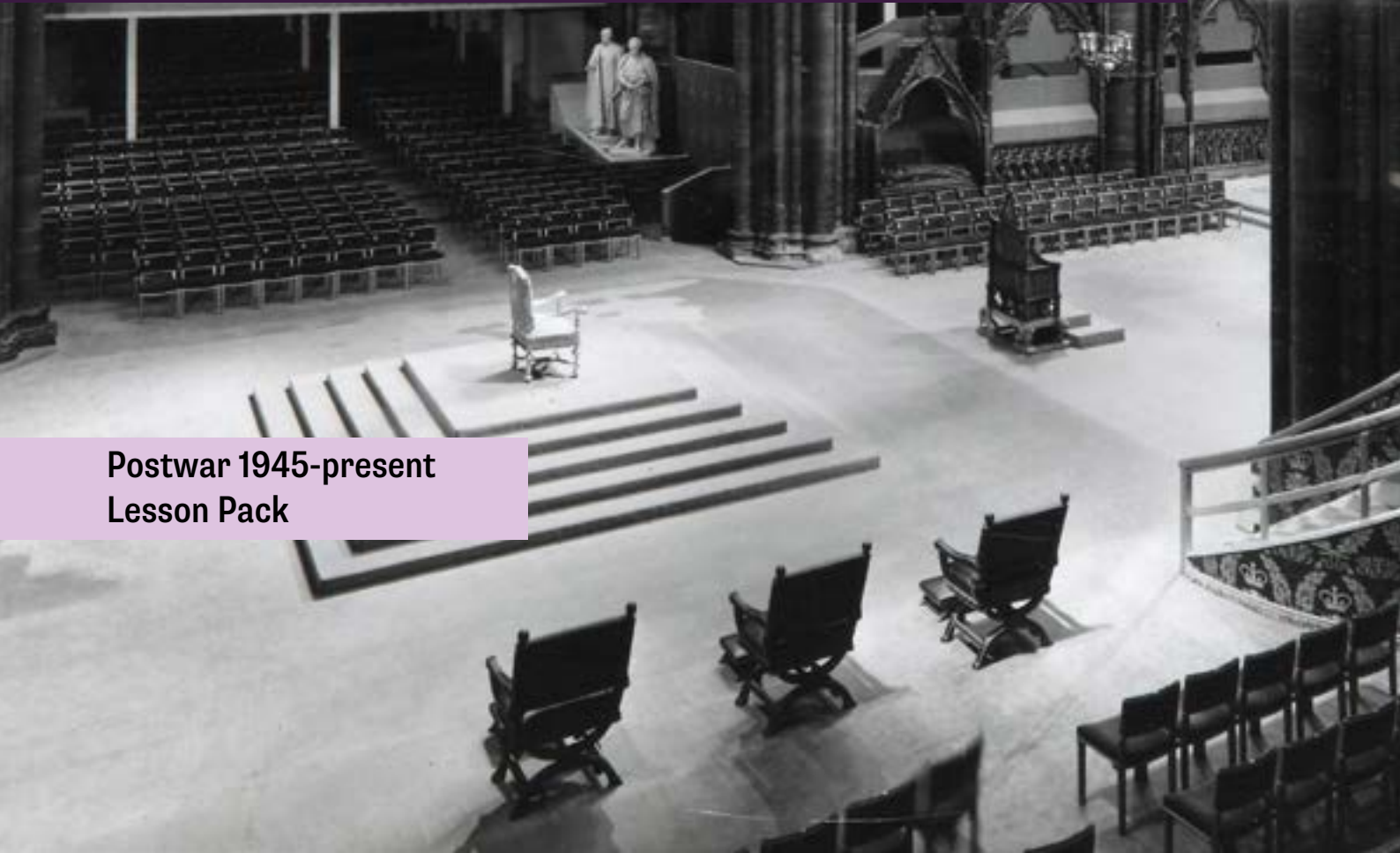


THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

How did people live in 1950s
Britain at the start of the
Queen's reign?



Postwar 1945-present
Lesson Pack

Teacher's Notes

Focus

To encourage pupils to use original sources to find out about the past in the first decade of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

Part 1: Pupils engage with the starter source, a poster relating to Britain's recovery after the Second World War with prompt questions for discussion. A second source expands discussion and encourages pupils to think about change and the differences between past and present.

Part 2: Building on this approach, pupils study 4 sources which reflect different examples of technological and social change in the decade: television; motorways; holidays; tinned foods.

Part 3: Three suggested creative activities:

- Create a new of invitation card for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in June 1953 based on an original from the time.
- Work in pairs/small groups to design your own Coronation game based on an original chart to show the route of the coronation.
- Create an illustrated timeline for the decade using our resource timeline.

Teachers may prefer to use any of the original sources here to create their own resources and activities or adapt the activities provided here for use in their schemes of work.

Enquiry Question: What can we find out about life in 1950s Britain using documents from the time?

You can find this lesson online at: nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/platinum-jubilee/life-in-1950s-britain/

Suitable for:

Primary History

Time period:

Postwar 1945-present

Connections to the Curriculum:

Events within living memory that are significant nationally or globally.

Teacher's Notes

Introduction:

Teacher explains that Elizabeth II became Queen in the 1950s and what it was like to live then:

People living in 1950s Britain saw many changes after the Second World War. There were differences in living conditions, work, transport, entertainment and music. However to begin with, life was still difficult for many at the start of the decade. Rationing and shortages continued and people still queued for food. Life did gradually improve. More gadgets were invented for the home, for example, electric cookers and fridges, vacuum cleaners, televisions and tape recorders. New foods like spaghetti were available! In February 1953 sweet and chocolate rationing ended with sugar in later in the same year. In July, 1954 meat and all other food rationing ended in Britain. As the decade continued, people started to afford holidays with holiday pay. Some used caravans or stayed in holiday camps. Other people stayed in boarding houses at the seaside. Many industrial towns had local holiday weeks called 'wakes weeks' when the local factory shut down for maintenance and all the workers took their holidays at the same time. Fashions changed too in the decade with Christian Dior's 'New look' for those who could afford it! Bright pastel colours were the rage, a shift from wartime uniforms and drab colours.

Part 1:

How can we use these photographs to find out about Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee?

1. Show the class the poster on a whiteboard/or as printed copy. Poster called: 'New homes rise from London's ruins', Catalogue ref: WORK 25/234 E1

Discuss the following questions:

- What can you see in this poster?
- Can you explain what the poster is for? [Advertising new housing in Poplar.]
- What does the large hand coming out of the broken buildings suggest?
- Does the poster have a message?
- Is it hopeful, happy or sad? Explain your ideas.
- Can you describe the photograph in the middle of the poster?
- Why is this photograph in the poster?
- Can you describe how colours are used in the poster?
- Why do you think these particular colours have been used?
- Can you find the Festival of Britain symbol in the poster?
- Can you find out about the Festival of Britain? [Teacher explains that the Lansbury estate in Poplar was an attraction that was part of the Festival of Britain 1951.]

2. Show photograph to the class on a whiteboard/or as printed copy: 'Living room in show home, Poplar, 1951, Catalogue ref: WORK 25/209/3872

Divide the class into small groups/pairs. Print the questions below on separate cards. Ask the pupils to discuss their answers and report back to the class.

- What can you see in this photograph?
- How different is this living room to something we might have today?
- Why might this photograph have been taken?

Teacher's Notes

- What does this photograph tell us about life in the 1950s?
- How does this photograph connect to the message of the poster you looked at? [brighter future, a better life after the Second World War]

Part 2:

How can we use these 4 documents to find out about changes during the 1950s Britain?

1. Use this document, Letter to the BBC, December 1952 Catalogue Ref: HO 256/232. Show the class the document on a whiteboard/or as printed copy.

Teacher explains that this source is part of a government letter to the BBC asking about the plan to film the Coronation live for television. The public were also going to be told what they were going to see. It was hoped to screen the coronation in cinemas as well, not everyone had a television. Teachers can also highlight that television, as a source of information and entertainment, is one of the many technological changes seen during the 70 year reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

N.B. As this text is challenging, read the extract together and underline the key points in the transcript to create a summary of the main points. Discuss meanings of difficult words. Once pupils have grasped the content, discuss the prompt questions.

Transcript

Another Question, which goes somewhat further, has been put down by Mr. Murray for Answer on 21st January; "To ask the Assistant Postmaster General what arrangements he is making throughout the country to relay the televising of the Coronation procession; what is to be done in this connection for children to see the procession in safety; and if he will have this matter looked into, so that every available hall and cinema should be utilised for television on 2nd June 1953, and thus give that section of the public who have not been able to purchase a television set the opportunity of enjoying the procession.

Discuss the following questions:

- What event is going to be filmed by the BBC for television?
 - Why do you think the government wanted the coronation to be filmed?
 - How can the public see the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II?
 - What does this document show us about the early days of television?
 - How has television changed today?
2. Use this poster: 'Be sure to be in the holiday picture - join a National Savings Club', 1950, Catalogue ref: NSC 5/650.

Teacher's Notes

Show the poster on a whiteboard/or as printed copy. Discuss the following questions:

- What can you see in this poster?
- What do the words say in the poster?
- What do they mean?
- Why are people being encouraged to join a savings club?
- How is this poster designed to attract attention?
- How does this poster show that life in the 1950s changed from during the Second World War?

3. Use this document entitled 'Prime Minister opens first Motorway, 1958, Catalogue Ref: MT 121/22.

This is a Press notice from the Ministry of Transport and Civil aviation announcing the opening of the first motorway in Britain. This is another example of Britain changing in the first decade of Queen Elizabeth's reign. More motorways developed in her 70 years as Queen.

Introduce the source as a 'Mystery Document' to the class. Show the class the document on a whiteboard/or as printed copy. Ask the pupils to examine the document as an object, they do not need to read it at first. Discuss the following questions:

- What does it look like? [It is a statement. Not a letter, no address or named person]
- What does heading at the top say?
- Who is the message is from?
- How is the text set out?
- Can you describe the logo?
- What is a 'press notice' do you think? [Clue: think of another word for newspapers]
- What does the text say?
- What do you think this source could be? [a statement to the media]
- Why was this an important event?
- Why has this message been sent out to the newspapers?
- Have you ever travelled on a motorway?
- How do motorways change travel and business in the country?

4. Use this poster entitled 'Benedict peas', 1951, Catalogue ref: ZLIB 17/129A.

Teacher explains that processed peas are dried peas sent to a factory where they are soaked in water with green colouring, put into cans and sold.

Divide the class into small groups/pairs. Show the class the poster on a whiteboard/or as printed copy. Discuss the following questions:

Teacher's Notes

- What type of source is this?
- What is the product which is being advertised?
- How does the poster encourage people to buy 'Benedict processed peas'?
- Have you ever tried 'processed peas'?
- What does the cartoon at the bottom of the poster suggest about the role of women? [Despite women's employment in the First & Second World Wars, a married woman's place was still considered to be in the home in the 1950s.]
- Can you explain why this poster is probably aimed at women?
- What does this product suggest about tinned foods in the 1950s?
- How could we find out more about people ate in the 1950s?

Plenary:

Discussion question

- Look again at ALL SOURCES [for parts 1 & 2]
- Which one shows the most important change in 1950s Britain? Pupils put their own case for source of their choice.

Creative activities:

1. Timeline activity

Teachers use the 1950s resource timeline to create an illustrated chronology on 1950s Britain for display. Pupils draw/paint images focussing on particular years in the decade.

2. Create a new of invitation card for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in June 1953. Look at the example of one that was used at the time.
3. Work in pairs/small groups to design your own Coronation game based on this original chart to show the route of the coronation. Take a close look at the map. Discuss what you can see before you begin.
 - Write a list of the rules to play the game.
 - How many can play?
 - How do you get round the board?
 - Do you face any problems which send you back, or rewards which help you go forward?
 - Design a cover for the lid of the box for your game.
 - Play your game!

'New homes rise from London's ruins'

Catalogue ref: WORK 25/234 E1



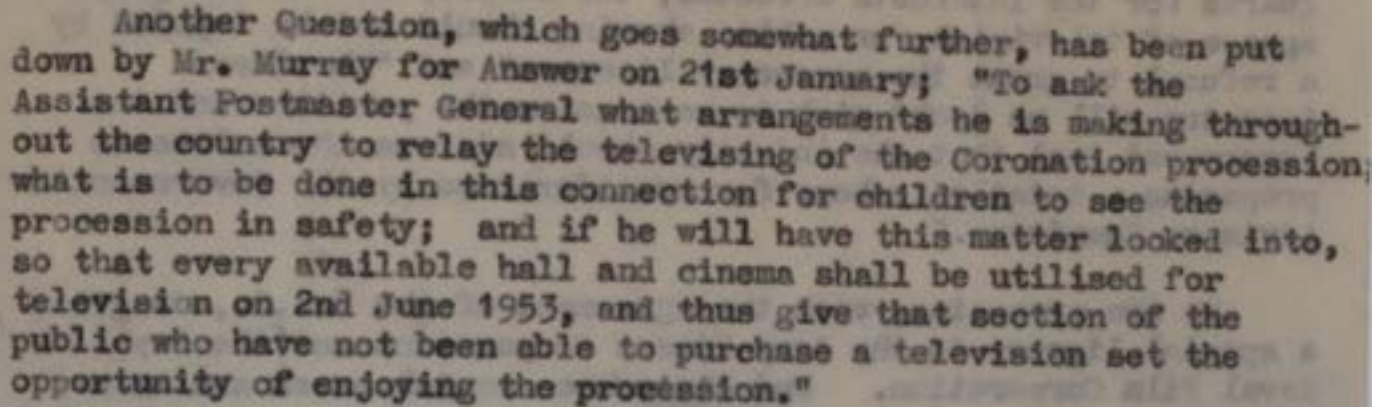
Living room in show home, Poplar, 1951

Catalogue ref: WORK 25/209/3872



Government letter to the BBC, December 1952

Catalogue ref: HO 256/232



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'Be sure to be in the holiday picture - join a National Savings Club',
1950 Catalogue ref: NSC 5/650



Prime Minister opens first Motorway, 1958

Catalogue ref: MT 121/22

Ministry of TRANSPORT and CIVIL AVIATION



**PRESS
NOTICE**

BERKELEY SQUARE, W.1. MAYFAIR 9494 (*PLEASE ASK FOR PRESS OFFICE*)

371

5th December, 1958.

PRIME MINISTER OPENS FIRST MOTORWAY

The Prime Minister to-day opened Britain's first motorway, the Preston By-pass, and so made highway history.

This high-speed road for motor traffic only forms the first completed part of the future motorway between London and North-West England. Preliminary work will start next year on the construction of the connections southwards to Birmingham and later the link northwards to Lancaster will be put in hand.

The total length of motorway covered by the present road programme - including the Medway Motorway for channel port traffic - is about 380 miles, but already the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, Mr. Harold Watkinson, is considering additions to this system.

Transcript: Prime Minister opens first Motorway 1958

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'Benedict peas', 1951

Catalogue ref: ZLIB 17/129A



No other peas are quite the same,
So ask for Benedict by name



Benedict PROCESSED PEAS

Packed by United Cannery Limited, 1 Princes Street, Hanover Square, London, W.1

Invitation card for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in June 1953

Catalogue ref: PC22/11



Route of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation procession in June 1953

Catalogue ref: PC22/11

CORONATION PROCESSION OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II



The Embankment, Hyde Park and inside the Abbey. The troops taking the route will be: The Army; the Cavalry; the Grenadier Guards; the Life Guards; the Household Cavalry; the Royal Air Force; the Royal Navy, with Officers Cadets of all three Services in the Fleet; the Royal Marines; the Royal Artillery; the Royal Engineers; the Royal Signals; the Royal Corps of Transport; the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers; the Royal Army Ordnance Corps; the Royal Army Medical Corps; the Royal Army Veterinary Corps; the Royal Army Educational Corps; the Royal Army School of Music; the Royal Army School of Artillery; the Royal Army School of Cavalry; the Royal Army School of Transport; the Royal Army School of Veterinary Science; the Royal Army School of Music; the Royal Army School of Artillery; the Royal Army School of Cavalry; the Royal Army School of Transport; the Royal Army School of Veterinary Science.

| Head of the Procession | Thames | Whitehall | Parliament Square | Hyde Park | Westminster Abbey | St. James's Park | St. James's Palace | Westminster Abbey | Whitehall | Parliament Square | Hyde Park | Westminster Abbey | St. James's Palace |
|------------------------|--------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Her Majesty The Queen | 2.50 | 3.00 | 3.25 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 | 3.45 |

In addition to the Royal Procession, the Lord Mayor of London will have the Maundy Hoop at 7.15 a.m. to drive in his Royal Coach drawn by six horses along the Embankment, joining the main Processional route at Whitehall. The Lord Mayor will be accompanied by the Lord Mayor's Show, which will be in the form of a parade of floats and bands. The Lord Mayor will be accompanied by the Lord Mayor's Show, which will be in the form of a parade of floats and bands. The Lord Mayor will be accompanied by the Lord Mayor's Show, which will be in the form of a parade of floats and bands.

