



# 1940s Wartime Life Room

The Wartime Life Room can have 20 people at a time. If your class is larger than 17 pupils you will need to split the class into two groups. Each group can take part in two 45 minute sessions as follows

1. **Explore the National War Museum galleries**
2. **Use the Wartime Life handling room.**

**Swap over.**

The 1940s wartime Life Room is split into four sections. In each of these areas you will find objects and information relating to the lives of four different people. Each section tells the personal story of a real person.

1. **Elise Morton – the evacuee**
2. **Kenneth Muir – the soldier**
3. **William Nesbit – the POW (prisoner of war)**
4. **Margaret Maxwell – the ATS girl (Auxiliary Territorial Service)**

This resource pack contains teachers' notes for each area.

You can divide your group into four, to investigate each area. Groups should spend about ten minutes exploring each of the four themes. This will give you time for feedback to round off the session.

### Elise’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of an 11 year old evacuee – **Elise Morton**. Pupils can explore the objects and information in her suitcase, in the bedroom and on the walls. They can discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils can also listen to the memories of Millie Gray, who recounts her own experience as an evacuee during the war.

#### Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Gas Mask** – young children were given these red and blue gas masks. They were called *Mickey Mouse* masks because they made children look a bit like the cartoon character. They would have to carry these with them at all times.
- **Suitcase** – evacuees were limited to what they could take with them. A girl like Elise would be allowed to take the following:

*‘One vest, one pair of knickers, one petticoat, two pairs of stockings, handkerchiefs, gym slip and blouse, hat and cardigan’*

In the suitcase the pupils will find:

- clothing
- favourite toy
- comic book
- boiled sweets
- name tag, all evacuees wore labels indicating their destination.
- **Toys, games and books** – ask pupils to consider similarities and differences between toys from the past and the present. Many toys would also be home made – can they think why?
- **Photographs** – these show different images of children during the war. These can be used as a stimulus for the group to consider what life would have been like for them. What emotions do you think the evacuees were feeling as they were queuing for the bus?
- **Wooden Rattle** – originally designed to scare birds away from crops, these were used to alert people of imminent gas attacks. Neither side carried out gas attacks during the Second World War but gas attacks were used during the First World War.



# Kenneth’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of **Kenneth Muir**, a soldier serving in Europe during the war. Pupils can explore the objects and information found in his kit bag, around the fireplace and on the walls. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils can listen to the memories of George Laidlaw, who recounts his experience as a sailor during the war.

### Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Identification Discs** – these were used to identify soldiers if they were killed in action. They would always wear two, in the event of death the octagonal disc would be placed in the mouth and the other returned to the commanding officer. The disc would contain the soldier’s surname and religious denomination for proper burial arrangements
- **Shaving Kit** – personal hygiene would still have been important. Soldiers would have carried a rolled up toilet bag like this one. Pupils will find a razor and shaving brush inside.
- **Letters** – a letter written by Kenneth telling his parents about life at the Front. This would have been a censored version, as soldiers were not allowed to give too much detail in their correspondence. The second letter was written by Kenneth’s commanding officer expressing his sympathy after Kenneth had been killed in action. It was written just days after Kenneth’s original letter home, and only months before the end of the war.
- **Radio** – most homes had a radio and it became the focal point of the household during the war, especially when the daily news bulletin was broadcast at 9pm. The radio was also very important for morale; variety shows would make fun of Hitler and his generals.
- **Stove and utensils** – pupils could be asked to compare the stove and cooking utensils with what they have in their own kitchen today. What are the similarities and differences? How would this stove have worked?



# William’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of **William Nesbit**, a Scottish soldier in a Polish prisoner of war camp. Pupils can explore the objects and information found in the Red Cross box and on the walls. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils listen to the memories of Geoff Bryden, who recounts his own experience of having been a prisoner of war.

### Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Red Cross box** – the Red Cross played a vital role in providing prisoners of war with food and clothing parcels. They also provided a means for prisoners and their families to stay in touch through the delivery of letters. Items such as corned beef, cigarettes and chocolate were important for maintaining the morale of the prisoners and would also supplement the meagre rations they received in camps
- **Clothing** – balaclava, long jacket, gloves, socks and scarf. William was a POW in Poland, which could get very cold during the winter. The Red Cross would send clothes parcels with items like these
- **Red Cross Armband** – William wore this in his duties as a medical orderly in the camp. A medical orderly has no formal training but can assist medical or nursing staff with routine duties and first-aid
- **Camp currency** – William received these as payment for his work as a medical orderly. These coupons known as Lagergeld could be used to buy razors, shaving soap and toothpaste
- **Telegram** – the telegram is a message from the army informing William’s parents that he is now a POW
- **Letter** – this letter was written to William in 1946. It is from a prison guard, Joseff Blumme, who had struck up a friendship with William in the camp
- **Map** – the map shows the principal POW camps for allied soldiers in Europe. The pupils could try to find William’s camp.



### Margaret’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the lives of women during the Second World War. It focuses on **Margaret Maxwell**, who worked with the Auxiliary Territorial service (ATS). The ATS originally recruited women for driving, clerical and general duties but many of them ended up serving in anti-aircraft command.

Pupils can explore the objects and information found in and around the kitchen area. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

#### Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Respirator and haversack** – this is a civilian issue gas mask from the 1940s. 45 million gas masks were issued in Britain during the Second World War. The mask contains charcoal filters which act as a barrier to the ‘larger than air’ gas particles.
- **Stone pig** – this ceramic hot water bottle is a good mystery object for pupils – can they guess what it might have been used for?
- **Laundry objects** – ironing board, iron, bucket, soap and dolly. Pupils can compare these objects with ones in their own home. How does doing the laundry then compare with today?

- **Pictures of women at war**

- **Anti-aircraft observations**
- **Searchlights**
- **ATS air raid wardens**
- **Making dressings**

These photos all show women at work doing a variety of jobs.

Like many women, Margaret served with the ATS. The vast majority of these women were employed in anti-aircraft command. As well as operating the searchlights, they worked on anti-aircraft guns, but were not officially allowed to fire them.

