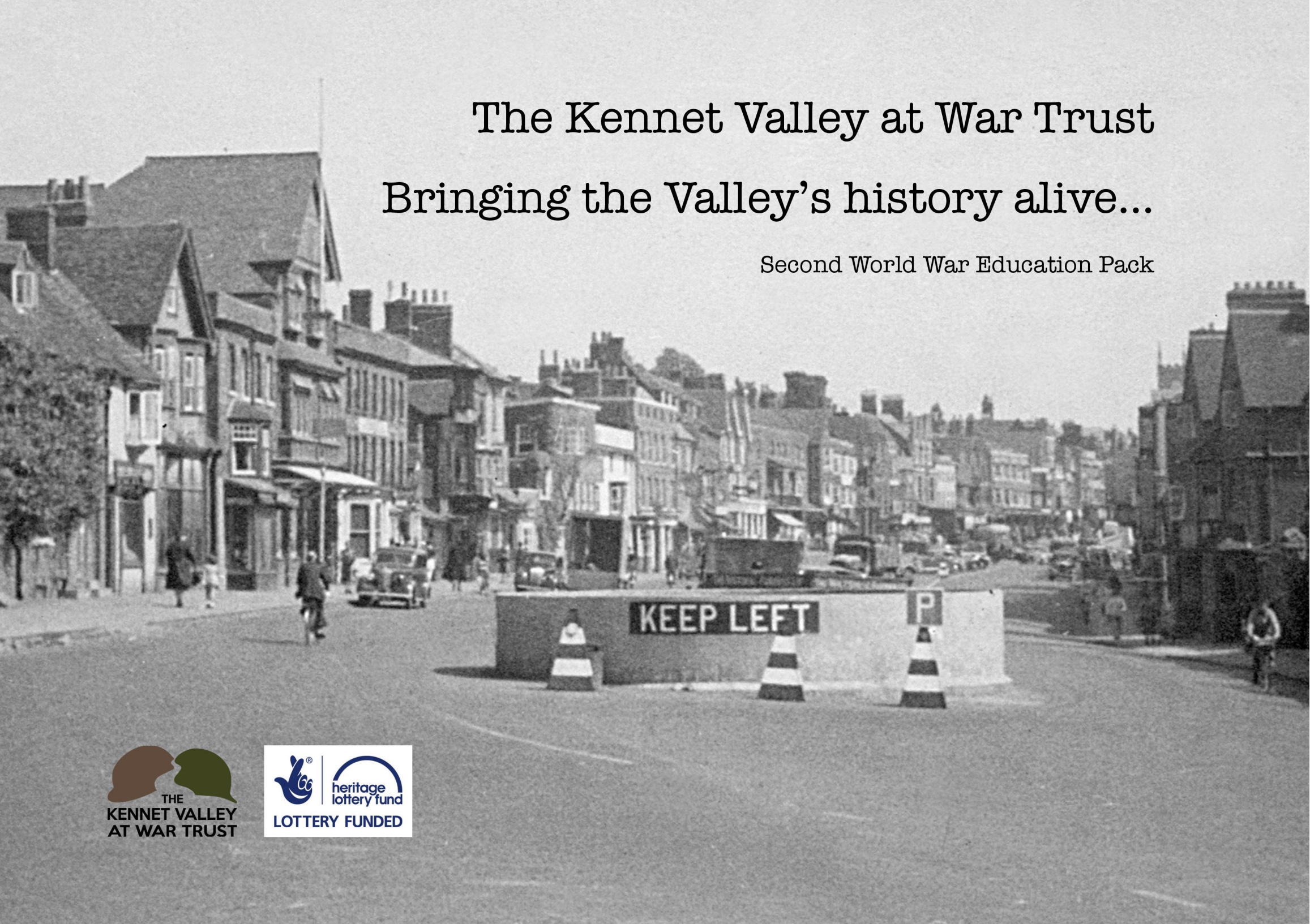


The Kennet Valley at War Trust Bringing the Valley's history alive...

Second World War Education Pack



Cover image: Marlborough High Street, viewed from the south west during the Second World War (Merchant's House Marlborough).

This Education Pack has been designed to provide an engaging and rewarding experience. Every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy.

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A copy of the pack can be downloaded from www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

Formed in 2006, the Kennet Valley at War Trust was born from a resurgence of interest in the events of the Second World War, and by a tangible desire amongst the local community to preserve the history of the Kennet Valley and to use the information, artefacts and displays in the Trust's care to help educate all age groups and nationalities about the history of the area during the war.



(Merchant's House Marlborough)

The Trust's collection is housed in a small museum within the evocative setting of Littlecote House, near Hungerford, in surroundings which have changed little since 1945. Unique to the Kennet Valley, the Museum is important to those who live locally or who are connected with the valley's war-time experience. Of regional significance, the collection also draws interest from a range of ex-service organisations and from the US airborne community. The museum is open daily between the hours of 10.00am and 4.00pm, and is free of charge to the general public.

This Education Pack has been developed by the Kennet Valley at War Trust in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Fund, and with the help of local primary and secondary schools, in order to provide a new educational resource specifically designed to enable more people to learn more about and celebrate their local heritage.

A pdf version of the Education Pack, together with other educational resources, can be downloaded from:
www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk



The Heritage Lottery Fund

From the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife, we use National Lottery players' money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about. www.hlf.org.uk.

How to use the Education Pack

The Education Pack is in two parts: background information and a set of classroom activity plans for teachers; and original images and texts, to be used with those plans.

The activities, which are principally designed for pupils aged between 9 and 14, can be adapted to suit older or younger students who are studying the history of their local area. Each activity includes background information, helpful ideas, and links to curriculum subjects and additional online resources. These can be used in lessons or as part of a larger cross curriculum project.

Slide packs, for use with each activity, can be downloaded from: www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

The activities show what can be achieved with the resources provided, and should be used to develop your own ideas and lesson plans.

As you do so, remember that the pack is about the men and women of the Kennet Valley and those British and American soldiers, airmen and airwomen who were based there, and who lived through the momentous events of the Second World War, and whose sacrifices helped to make the Allied victory possible.

This is their story.



British fighter pilots running for their aircraft, 1940



(© IWM HU 49253)

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Background: the Kennet Valley

The Kennet Valley follows the course of the River Kennet which rises near Avebury in Wiltshire, and flows east through Marlborough, Hungerford and Newbury before joining the River Thames on the reach above Sonning Lock at Reading, Berkshire. People have lived in the valley for thousands of years.

Avebury's sarsen stones and Marlborough's ancient mound hint at the Valley's prehistoric past; and the remains of a Roman villa can still be seen in the grounds of Littlecote House. Given over to agricultural use for most of its history, in the 18th and 19th centuries the Valley bowed to the need to transport goods between the port of Bristol and London, first by canal, then by rail; which led to the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway, with its base in Swindon.

In September 1939 the declaration of war triggered a period of significant change. Over the coming months the countryside was transformed from a peaceful rural idyl into an armed camp. Faced initially by an influx of British soldiers to guard against a German invasion, the encampments and billets first occupied by the 42nd and 48th Infantry Divisions passed, via a number of other military tenants, to the American troops of the 101st Airborne Division, who were based in the Valley from late 1943 until autumn 1944.

As a consequence, the area became a huge building site. Focussed initially on the construction of anti-tank and pill box defences along the Kennet and Avon Canal, the effort switched in 1941 to airfield construction. Covering approximately 500 acres each, Membury, Ramsbury, Welford, Greenham Common and Aldermaston airfields were to become home from 1942 to the US Air Force. Alongside the 4,500 acre ammunition depot at Savernake Forest, the airfields and other military bases played a vital role in the liberation of Europe.

Background image: British and American soldiers gather near Watership Down, south of Newbury, 1944



Background: the Second World War

Historians disagree over the causes of the Second World War... some believe it was caused by German ill-feeling following the Treaty of Versailles which led to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party; others blame British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the 'appeasers', who failed to stand up to Hitler's aggression.

The war, which broke out when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, was a global conflict involving more than a 100 million people from 30 different countries.



Neville Chamberlain holding the paper which, he believed, committed Hitler to a peaceful settlement.
30 September 1938

Public Domain

Following a quiet period known as the 'Phoney War', in May 1940 the Germans attacked and quickly destroyed the Allied forces in France. The British faced the Germans alone.

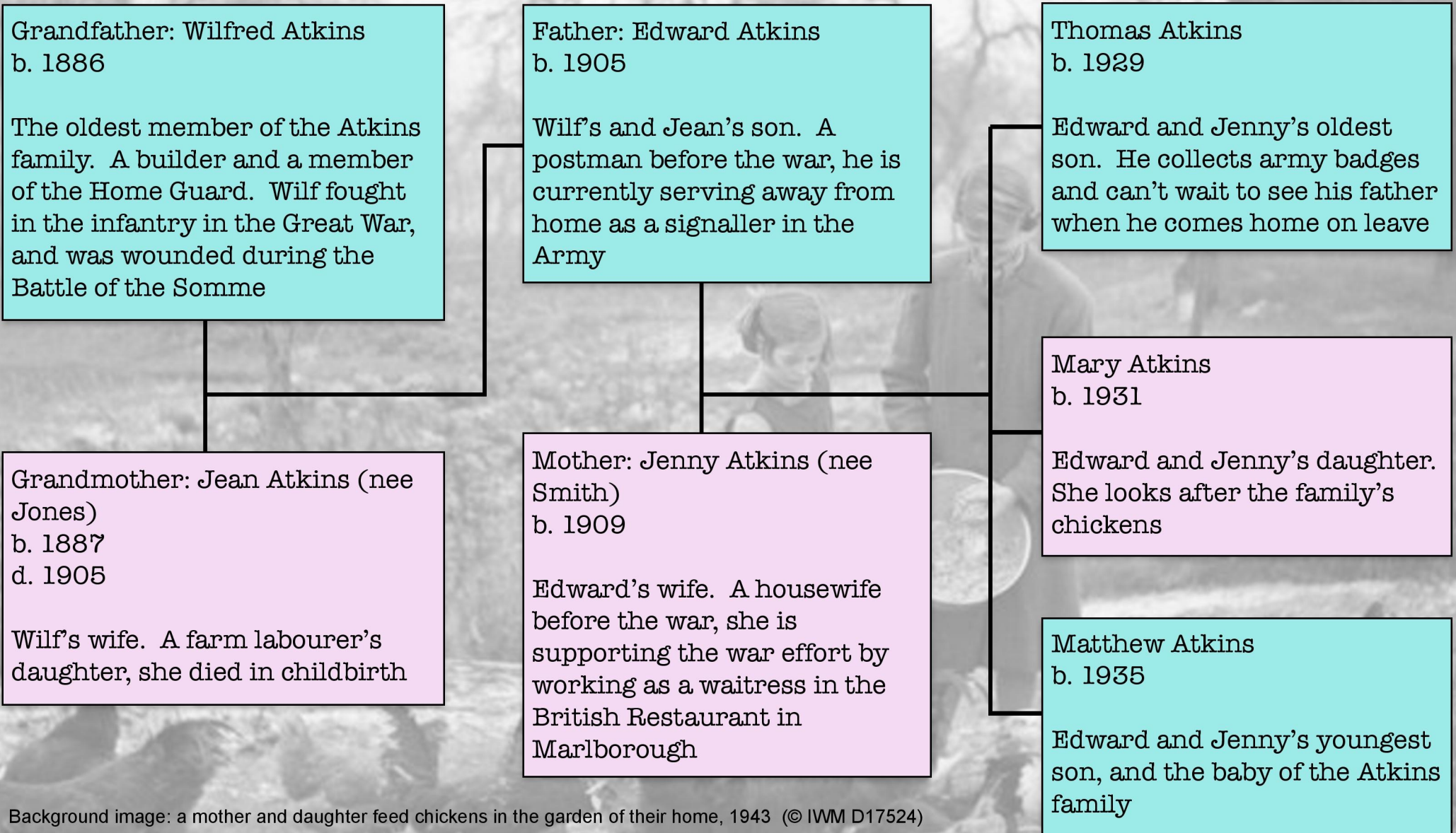
Hitler invaded Russia in June 1941; and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the USA into the war on the Allied side. In Europe the Nazis implemented their 'Final Solution', the extermination of the Jewish people.

In the years that followed, a series of Allied victories started to change the course of the war; including El-Alamein in Egypt (November 1942) and Stalingrad in Russia (January 1943). The Allies invaded Nazi occupied Europe on D-Day, 6 June 1944, and Germany finally surrendered on 7 May 1945. On 6 August 1945 the Americans dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima; Japan surrender on 15 August 1945. The war was finally over.

Link to the BBC's 'Bitesize' primary and secondary education website for KS2 and KS3 history: www.bbc.co.uk/education

Background: the Atkins family

For as long as anyone can remember, the Atkins family has lived in the Kennet Valley.



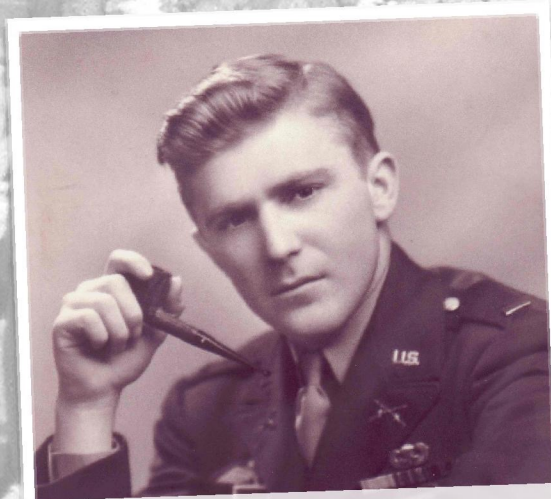
Background image: a mother and daughter feed chickens in the garden of their home, 1943 (© IWM D17524)

Background: the Atkins family circle

The Atkins family had a wide circle of friends; due to the war, many were new to the Kennet Valley.



British parachutist Don McArthur was based near Hungerford in 1944



American Reed Pelfrey was billeted in Chilton Foliat. He parachuted into France on D-Day



Sheila Major, one of 112 evacuees at Ramsbury School



Martin Cound and four 'Land Girls' from the local hostel

Background image: Ramsbury School, summer 1941 - a mixture of local children and evacuees; the girl circled is Sheila Major (Mrs W Swain)

Introductory activity: the inter-war years



Ramsbury High Street, 1925

Sources A and B describe different aspects of life in the Kennet Valley during the 1920s and 1930s. Ask your pupils to investigate the legacy of the Great War and the impact of the Depression on rural southern England, and discuss their findings. Using the sources as inspiration, get them to write a short story, or a letter to a friend, based on their imagined experience of a member of the Atkins family.

Age range: 9–14

Curriculum links: English and History

Learning objectives: use research and literacy skills to learn about rural life in the Kennet Valley between the world wars; use it as a basis for creative writing



Boarding the train at Swindon Railway Station on a works outing to Weston-super-Mare, 11th July 1924



*Marlborough High Street,
around 1930*

Activity 2: the defence of Britain

'Operation Sea Lion' was the name given to the German's plan to invade Britain across the English Channel during the Second World War. In response, from May 1940, the rapid construction of fortifications quickly transformed the countryside, especially southern England, into an armed camp.

Lying across a likely German attack route, the natural obstacle provided by the Kennet and Avon Canal was reinforced with a series of concrete pill boxes, anti-tank barriers and reinforced road blocks. Local towns and villages were also fortified against potential attack.

Wilf Atkins, aged 54, is a builder by day and a member of the Home Guard by night. He has been asked to design and build a pill box to defend crossings over the Kennet and Avon Canal near Hungerford.

Age range: 7-14

Curriculum links: Art and Design, English and History

Learning objectives: study authentic resources about defending the Kennet Valley against a potential German attack during 1940 and design and build a model pill box

Defending Britain, December 1940



© IWM H5844

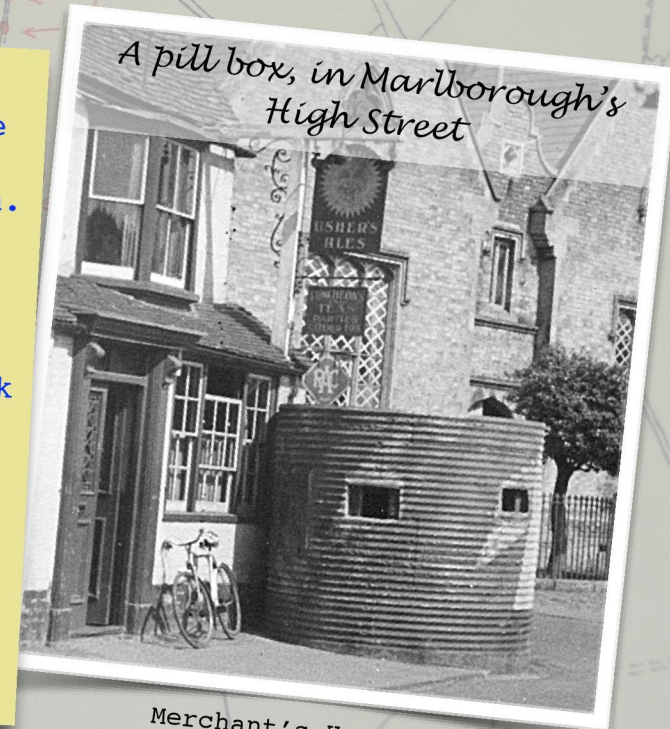
Background image: a Home Guard map of Great Bedwyn (Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre)

Using sources C, D and E, ask your pupils to investigate the plans for defending the local area against a German invasion.

Divide the class into pairs; ask each pair to design and build a model pill box using the art materials provided. Ask older children to think about the impact of these and other defences (for example, road blocks) on the lives of those living in the local area.

Get them to discuss their findings.

A pill box, in Marlborough's High Street



Merchant's House Marlborough

Activity 3: the propaganda war

Posters were often used as a propaganda tool by the British Ministry of Information to convey simple messages, or to raise the country's morale. What messages do the posters on this page convey?

Using sources D, E, F and G, ask your pupils to investigate life on the Home Front and the British use of propaganda posters during the Second World War.

Jenny Atkins, who worked in the British Restaurant in Marlborough, was upset by the amount of food wasted in people's kitchens. Divide the class into pairs; ask each pair to design and create a propaganda poster aimed at reducing kitchen waste; get them to discuss their posters and the effect they have.

Age range: 9-14

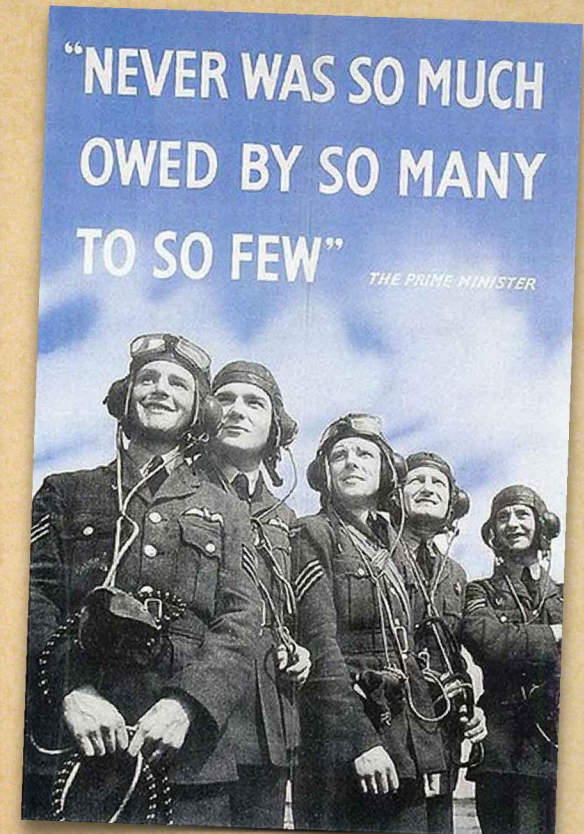
Curriculum links:

Art and Design,
Citizenship,
English and History
Learning

objectives: set against the backdrop of the Home Front, use research skills to learn about the use of propaganda posters during the Second World War; design and create a propaganda poster



(© IWM Art.IWM PST 3641)



Public Domain

Activity 4: the enemy

Following the British Army's evacuation from Dunkirk in late May and early June, and fearing a German invasion which could come at any moment, in 1940 the people of the Kennet Valley unexpectedly found themselves on the nation's front-line.

More than 70 years later, it is difficult to fully appreciate the impact that these events had on the local population. Whilst the country's major cities bore the brunt of the enemy action, the Battle of Britain was fought in part in the skies above the Kennet Valley, and the towns of Swindon, Newbury and Marlborough were bombed on a number of occasions.

Using sources G and H, ask your pupils to research the impact of the air war on the local area, and the implications of housing enemy prisoners of war in the Kennet Valley during the Second World War.

Ask the students to think about the affect that these events had on the local people, and the ethical dilemmas they faced.

Working in small groups, get the pupils to discuss and act out the different points of view of the people described in the sources - local children and adults, prison guards and enemy prisoners of war. Use this as a basis for staging a class debate about the treatment of prisoners of war.

Background image: The remains of the Senior Council School, Newbury, destroyed by a German bomber which attacked the town on 10 February 1943 (West Berkshire Museum)

Age range: 11-14

Curriculum links: Citizenship, Drama and Religious Studies

Learning objectives: use research skills to learn about the air war and enemy prisoners of war in the Kennet Valley; stage a class debate exploring the ethical dilemmas facing people during wartime

Closer to home, Italian Prisoners of War (POWs), captured during the North African Campaign, were housed in 'Camp 25' at Lodge Farm, a mile to the east of Baydon. Towards the end of the war the Italians were replaced by German prisoners, many of whom were caught in mainland Europe.

As a consequence, Tommy, Mary and Matthew Atkins often saw POWs at work in the fields.



Heins Fimmers, a German Army POW at Baydon Camp from 1946 to 1948. After his release, he married a local girl and settled in Wiltshire
(H Fimmers)

Activity 5: the Americans

The surprise Japanese attack against the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor brought the USA into the war on the Allied side in December 1941.

Having held out alone against the Germans for over two years, the British welcomed the first American troops to arrive on British soil in 1942 with a mixture of relief and curiosity.

The GIs were known for their generosity; and for having access to candy, Coca-Cola, cigarettes and nylon stockings. By the end of the war, tens of thousands of American soldiers, airmen and service women would be based in the Kennet Valley. Many were from the 101st Airborne Division - one of the first units to parachute into Nazi occupied Europe on the 5th June 1944, the eve of D-Day.

The Colour Party of Parachute Infantry at Littlecote House, surrounding Ramsbury, Chilton Foliat

the 506th Regiment, based and the villages of Aldbourne and



(Roger Day)

Age range: 9-14

Curriculum links: Drama, English and History

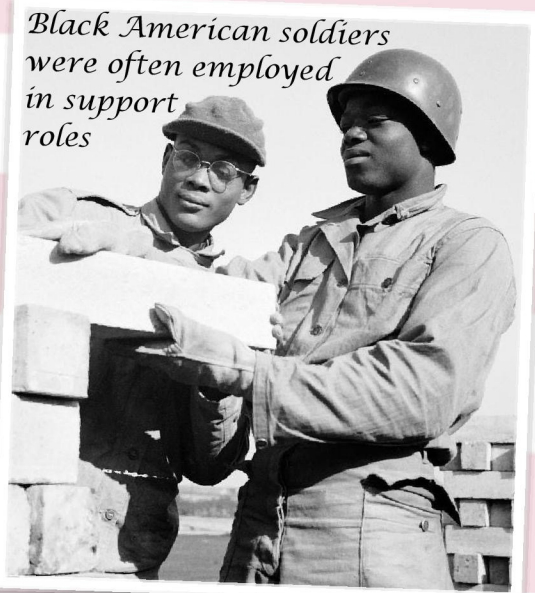
Learning objectives: study authentic resources to learn about the lives of the American soldiers based in the Kennet Valley over the winter of 1943-1944; use the knowledge to write and perform a short play

Mary Atkins, aged 9 in 1942, remembers the American soldiers for being very friendly, for their odd eating habits, and for being very brash with their money. She and the other children would gather around them and ask "got any gum, chum?"

Using sources I, J and K, ask your pupils to research the experiences of the local people and the US troops billeted in the Kennet Valley from 1942 until the end of the war.

Ask the children to think about the impact that the Americans had on the lives of the local people. Get them to discuss their findings.

Using this knowledge, ask them write and perform a short play.



Black American soldiers were often employed in support roles

(© IWM H33450)

Activity 6: D-Day

Age range: 9-14

Curriculum links: English and History

Learning objectives: use research skills to learn about the experiences of those who trained for and took part in D-Day, the Allied invasion of Nazi occupied Europe; write a diary entry describing the imagined experience of a soldier or civilian based in the local area.

On the evening of 5th June 1944 Jenny Atkins was disturbed by the drone of aircraft and, as she looked skyward, she was surprised to see massed formations of Allied bombers heading south. Whilst this was nothing unusual, she couldn't remember ever seeing so many aircraft before, and she wondered what was going on.

In the days that followed, Jenny realised that she had witnessed the start of the largest air and sea invasion in history, code-named 'OVERLORD'. Many of the American paratroopers based in the Kennet Valley left early on the morning of D-Day, 6th June 1944, bound for France in gliders towed by C-47 transport aircraft.

Using sources K, L, M and N, ask your pupils to investigate the experiences of the American soldiers based in the Kennet Valley who took part in D-Day. Get them to discuss their findings.

Using the sources as inspiration, ask them to write a diary entry describing the imagined experience of a soldier parachuting into Normandy, or a civilian who watched them depart.

Background image: C-47s from the 437th Troop Carrier Group, freshly painted in their distinctive black and white invasion stripes, line up on Ramsbury Airfield on 6th or 7th June 1944 (D Bolce)



US Paratroopers arrive in Normandy by glider

National Museum of the US Air Force

Activity 7: remembrance and war

Age range: 7-14

Curriculum links: Art and Design, Citizenship and History

Learning objectives: study authentic resources and design a new war memorial

Remembrance is part of British life, culture and heritage.

Each year, around the 11th November (the anniversary of the 1918 Armistice which led to the end of the First World War) millions of people, whatever their background or their beliefs, take part in a wide variety of Remembrance events.

Once designed to commemorate great victories, since the 19th century war memorials have been used as focal points for remembrance in the community, and to commemorate those who have died in the service of their country.

Using sources O and P, ask your pupils to investigate the purpose of remembrance, and research a variety of different war memorials.

If you have a war memorial near your school, try to arrange a visit to study it in detail. Who is remembered on it; what does this tell us; why is this important? Get them to discuss their findings.

Ask your pupils to design a monument to commemorate those members of the Home Guard who served in the Kennet Valley during the Second World War.



*The Cenotaph in Whitehall,
London*

Public Domain

Introduction to the sources

The sources include a range of original documents, including:

- Photographs, taken before, during and after the Second World War
- Extracts from personal memoirs
- Diary entries
- Propaganda posters
- Contemporary plans and maps
- Useful links to other education resources and websites

They have been chosen to reflect different views of the impact of the Second World War on the Kennet Valley.

This is real history, which brings the Valley's wartime history alive...



British motor cycle dispatch riders from the Queen's Bays pose for the camera on the main drive to Littlecote House, 1941-1942

Source A: the effect of the Great War

Popular memory tends to forget that 88% of those who served in uniform during the Great War returned home, many with terrible wounds, missing limbs or with 'shell-shock'. It was their needs, the needs of the living, that led to the creation of service charities such as the Royal British Legion.

The 12% who did not return represented around one million people - and the loss affected every community in Britain.

The public's desire to remember all who died was felt throughout the country, and countless war memorials and monuments sprang up across Britain, and overseas wherever soldiers had fallen. These memorials were usually engraved with the names of those who did not return, providing a physical reminder of the effect of the Great War on the local community.



(Hungerford Virtual Museum)

The war also altered British society forever, leading to fundamental social, cultural and economic changes, and a revision of the role of women both at home and in the workplace.

Some useful links about the First World War
Remembering the fallen: www.britishlegion.org.uk
The Home Front Legacy Project: new.archaeologyuk.org
Women and the First World War: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Source B: the Great Depression

Originating in the US stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression marked Britain's worst economic period of the 20th century.

At its height in 1932, those living in the north of England and Scotland, home to Britain's heavy industries such as coal mining, steel production and textiles, were hardest hit, with unemployment reaching 70% in some areas.

In contrast, industries like electricity generation and car production, and agriculture flourished.

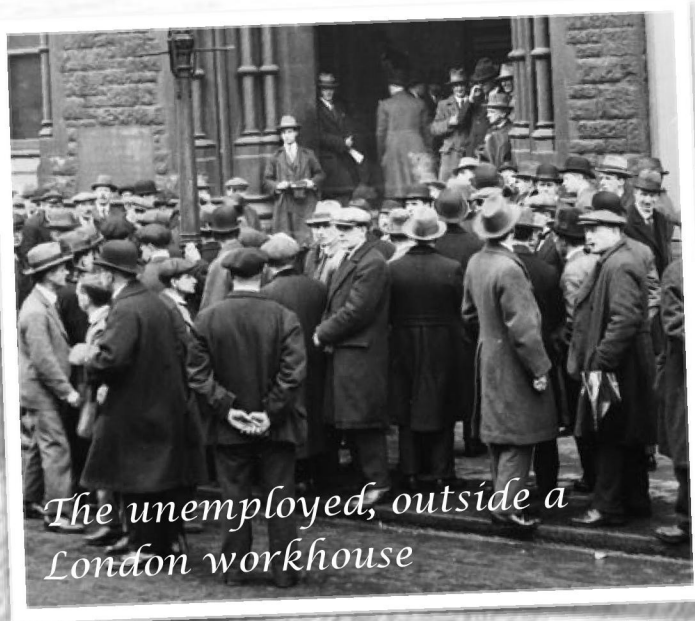


Whilst poverty and unemployment blighted large areas of the country, the people of the rural Kennet Valley, many of whom were farmers, suffered less than those in Britain's industrial heartlands.

The threat of another war with Germany following the rise of the Nazi party led, from 1936 to a policy of rearmament, and the start of economic recovery. The Depression highlighted the need for a comprehensive welfare state, and a tax funded National Health Service - which would both be introduced after the Second World War.

Links to articles about the Great Depression

www.history.com and
www.bl.uk/learning



(German Federal Archive)

Background image: the view towards the Kennet Valley from Gallows Down, Inkpen
(© Andrew Smith)

Source C: the German's invade France



A German Panzer III tank

(German Federal Archive)

By 1940, the German's had harnessed technology to wage a revolutionary new form of 'lightning warfare': Blitzkrieg.

The use of radio allowed Wehrmacht commanders to move freely around the battlefield, enabling them to take control of the situation from the front.

Improved tank firepower, mobility and protection, and the integrated use of ground-attack aircraft instead of artillery, also permitted inspirational

panzer leaders, such as General Heinz Guderian, to operate at a higher tempo and defeat their opponents.

On 12th May 1940, following a quiet period known as the 'Phoney War', the German's launched a surprise attack through southern Belgium into France, shattering the Allied front, leading to a rapid collapse in the French defences. Winston Churchill ordered the evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk, and between 27th May and 4th June 1940 338,226 British and French soldiers were rescued from the beaches.

Had they invaded, the Germans would have used the same tactics in Britain.



General Heinz Guderian during the Battle for France

(German Federal Archive)

Links to articles about Second World War battles:

www.historylearningsite.co.uk and spartacus-educational.com

Source D: Ironside's Stop Line

Britain's defences - constructed in 1940 under the direction of General Ironside - consisting of lines of concrete pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles, were the country's last line of defence against the German panzers had they invaded.

Stop Line Blue ran along the Kennet and Avon Canal as far as Reading. Built from reinforced concrete and brick, many pillboxes have survived, and can still be seen alongside the Canal.

Useful links

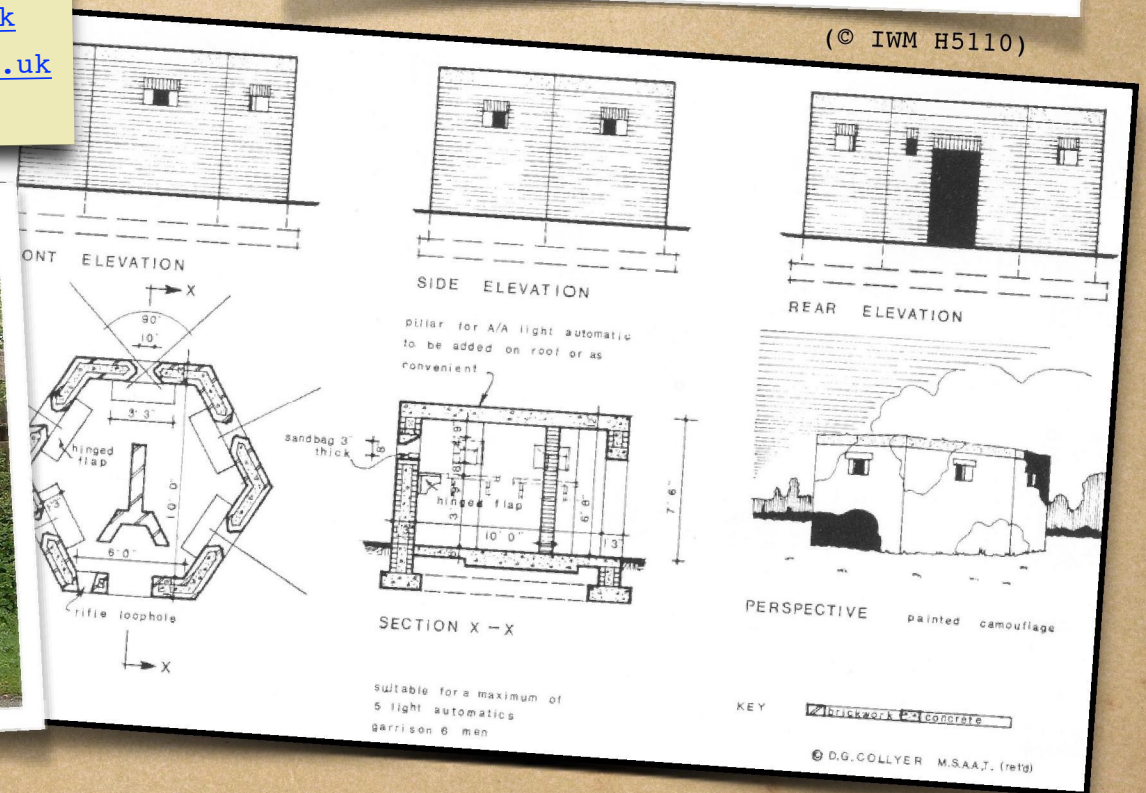
Anti-invasion defences www.pillbox-study-group.org.uk

Defence of Britain Project archaeologydataservice.ac.uk

Marlborough War Walk www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk



(© IWM H5110)



(© H Wills)

Source E: the Home Guard

The Local Defence Volunteer Force, later renamed the Home Guard, was created on the 14th May 1940 to protect Britain from invasion.



(© IWM D4355)

By the end of 1940 1.5 million men and boys had volunteered - and almost every town or village in the Kennet Valley would have had its own Home Guard detachment.

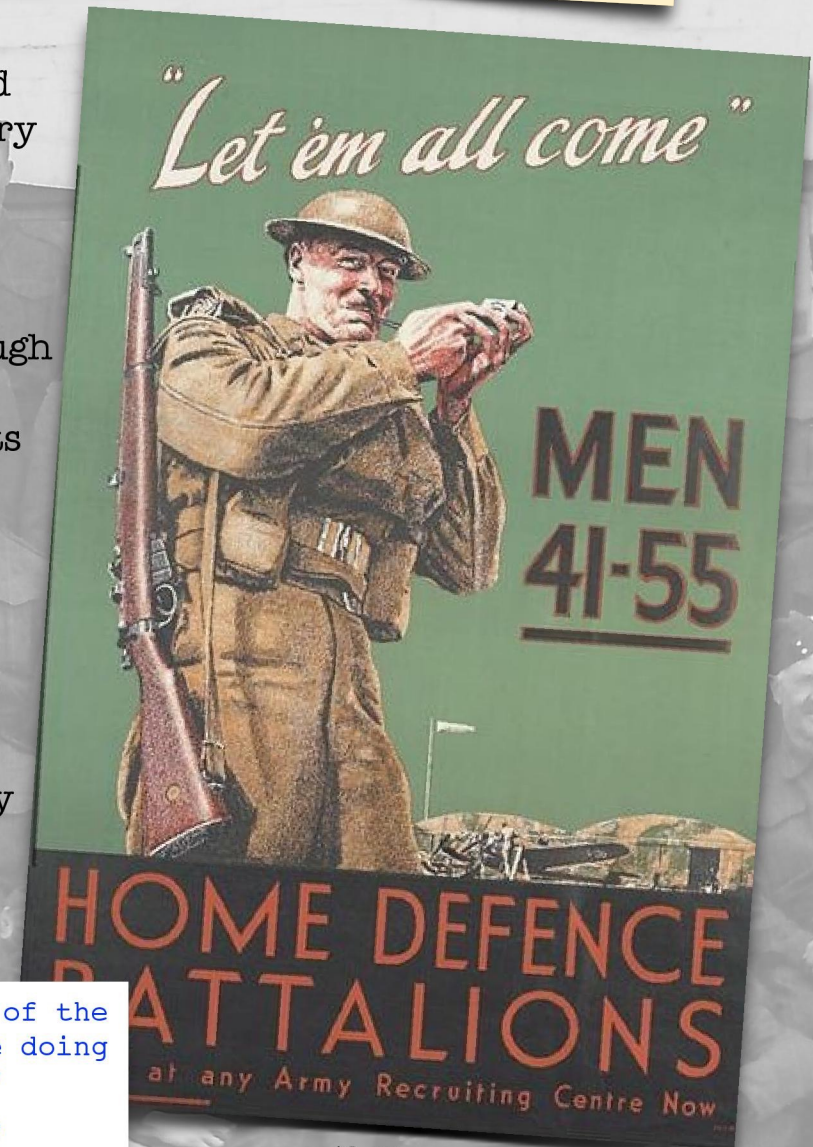
In Marlborough, the boys of Marlborough College were asked to volunteer, and those over 17 years - with their parents permission - joined the local unit: The 6th (Marlborough) Battalion of the Wiltshire Home Guard.

Initially armed with a few rifles and some obsolete anti-tank weapons, they were later taught sabotage and guerrilla warfare.

"Summer 1940 was an exciting time at the College, not only because of the situation in the country, but because, although schoolboys, we were doing a man's job and playing a full part in the defence of the country."

John Wilson, a student at Marlborough College, writing in June 1997

Links to articles on the Home Guard
www.primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk/war and
www.historylearningsite.co.uk



(© IWM Art.IWM PST 14618)

Source F: the Home Front

A significant amount of effort was devoted to the 'Home Front' during the Second World War. Rationing, anti-invasion defences, air raid precautions and agricultural and industrial production were all regulated by the Government as part of the war effort. Women were also mobilised to an unprecedented degree.

INVASION EXERCISE

MARLBOROUGH

THIS exercise has been arranged for SUNDAY, 31st JANUARY, 1943, between the hours of 8.30 and 5 o'clock and will be the biggest of the kind attempted in Marlborough. May I take the opportunity of emphasising the following points affecting the people of Marlborough as a whole?

Households living within 00-70 yards of Road Blocks are asked to make their contribution to the realism of the exercise by being ready to evacuate temporarily if required to do so. This does not mean that Military or Civil Defence Forces will enter the house or that everyone is expected to move out. But it is hoped that at any rate one person in each house (where there are more than this number) will be willing to come out, so that the W.V.S. can practice their arrangements for emergency loading.

Those who move will be given a mid-day meal and will be told where to go when evacuated. They must not forget to take identity cards, gas masks, overcoats, and a blanket.

Everybody in the Borough should be ready to play their part in the exercise in the following ways:-

- To assist the Military and Civil Defence Forces to the utmost and to take part in incidents in their streets.
- To be ready to take into their houses temporarily people who have been evacuated.
- To keep off the streets when fighting is taking place in the Town and to avoid at all times standing about in groups.
- To keep in touch with the nearest Warden or Housewife.
- To refuse information to the enemy if interrogated.
- To rely for information on the Official Notice Boards at the following places:-

TOWN HALL
NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE DEPOT, LONDON ROAD
MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE
St. PETER'S CHURCH
St. THOMAS MORE R.C. CHURCH, ELGOT LANE

The Exercise should not
Worship in the Town.

N.B.—All BRITISH Forces wear
Hats. All TANKS will

1, The Green, Marlborough
January 28th, 1943.

"At Preshute we each had our small pot containing the butter ration of 2oz a week. The jam ration of a 1lb jar was meant to last a month, so to eke it out we fell back upon the off ration alternatives such as Fry's chocolate spread, peanut butter and even Radio Malt; the last named being obtained from the High Street chemist..."

David Scaife, a student at Marlborough College, recalling the hardships of war-time rationing



Public Domain



Public Domain

Background image: members of A Company, Marlborough Home Guard, on parade in the High Street, summer 1940 (Mrs 'Vee' Fraser)

Useful links

BBC History 'Home Front' archive www.bbc.co.uk

Propaganda posters in the National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Source G: the Air War

The war with Germany was fought in part in the skies above the Kennet Valley throughout most of the Second World War - initially in the summer of 1940, during the Battle of Britain, when the country stood alone against Nazi Germany; and later during the Blitz, when the German Luftwaffe attacked Britain's cities.

In 1944, when the tide of the war had turned in the Allies favour, the skies above Wiltshire and West Berkshire were filled with British and American bombers carrying the war to Germany, and transport aircraft, ferrying troops, supplies and military equipment to France and Holland.

Newbury was bombed by a lone Dornier bomber on the 10th February 1943. The enemy aircraft attacked from the south with machine guns and bombs, strafing Monks Lane, Chandos Road, Newtown Road, the Railway Station and Market Street. Some 265 buildings were destroyed or damaged. Fifteen people lost their lives and 25 were seriously injured in the raid; most of them at the Southampton Terrace houses, St. Bartholomew's almshouses and the Senior Council School.



Two bewildered ladies stand amid the ruins of St. Bartholomew's almshouses, Newbury, destroyed by the same bomber which struck St. John's Church

US National Archives

"We had blackouts up so mother went outside to look and when she came back she said, 'some poor blighter's getting it tonight!' We went out and you could hear the droning of planes. It went on all night long."

Keith Light, remembering the night of 11 November 1940

Useful links

Frank Capra's 'Battle of Britain' documentary, made for an American audience, 1940 www.youtube.com

An interactive map, showing where the German bombs fell on London during the Blitz www.bombsight.org

Source H: Prisoners of War

Italian POWs began to arrive at Camp 25 in August 1941. Put to work in the fields, the more trustworthy were billeted with local farmers. Those who 'lived in' were allowed a surprising amount of freedom, and were given unrestricted movement within 3 miles of their billet; if the distance was greater they had to be accompanied by a responsible person. They were not however, allowed to enter towns, villages, shops or houses other than those of their employer without permission; and they had to remain in their billet between sunset and sunrise. British POWs in Germany were treated far more harshly.

A member of the Royal Army Service Corps, George Young had landed in France in June 1944 and supplied the army into Belgium, Holland and Germany. Well aware of the reality of war, in 1946 he was attached to Camp 25 in charge of transport. Given the number of German prisoners, he was surprised by the small size of the guard force, which comprised just 2 officers and 14 other ranks.



*Wilhelm Straub,
photographed in 1947*

(Mrs I Graham)

How would you have reacted to meeting a POW? Was it right to befriend prisoners who may have killed family members or friends?

"Nobody can imagine the joy that I experienced upon [hearing] the great news. I spent my last Sunday in Lambourn on the 25th, and the weather was beautiful as I said goodbye to all my comrades."

Wilhelm Straub, on being told that he was going home to Germany, January 1948

"The inmates were sometimes allowed out of camp to attend dances. They were always very polite, and would click their heels before and after a dance. However, if a girl danced with a POW, she risked being ignored by the local boys for the rest of the evening!"

Mrs Ludlow, from Aldbourne, recalling local village dances



Corporal George Young (2nd from right) with German prisoners outside Camp 25's cookhouse

(G Lang)

Links

The history of humanitarian law www.icrc.org

Imperial War Museum archive material about Italian and German POWs in England www.iwm.org.uk

Background image: the last remaining building at POW Camp 25 near Baydon, which was recently demolished (Roger Day)

Source I: friendly invaders

The first American troops arrived in the Kennet Valley in June 1942, when soldiers from the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment descended on Chilton Foliat. At about the same time the 64th Troop Carrier Group, with fifty two C-47 transport aircraft, arrived at Ramsbury Airfield. By September 1943 the number of American service men and women in the area had grown considerably.

As an example, Ramsbury's population grew in the first ten months of 1943 by an astonishing 200%... with the abrupt arrival of 900 men from the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, who were billeted in a new camp in the village, and 2,200 air force personnel based at the nearby airfield.

The experience came as a surprise to many, who thought, like Kenneth Pullman, that Americans would be "very tall, immaculately dressed, running about the country shooting indians, or shooting policemen around Chicago".

The influx of American troops also brought social tension, with black troops, such as those based in the Ammunition Depot in Savernake Forest, segregated from the other GIs as they were in the US.

For many, this was their first time away from home.

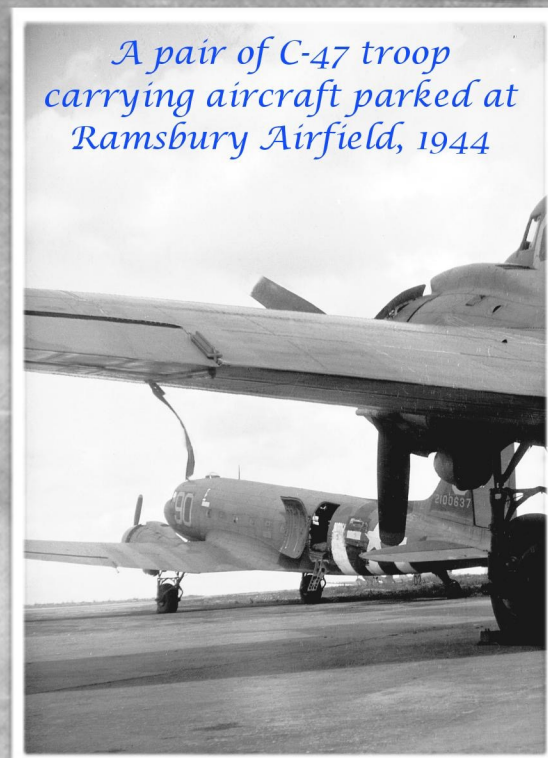
Links to articles about American soldiers in Britain

www.nww2m.com and

www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

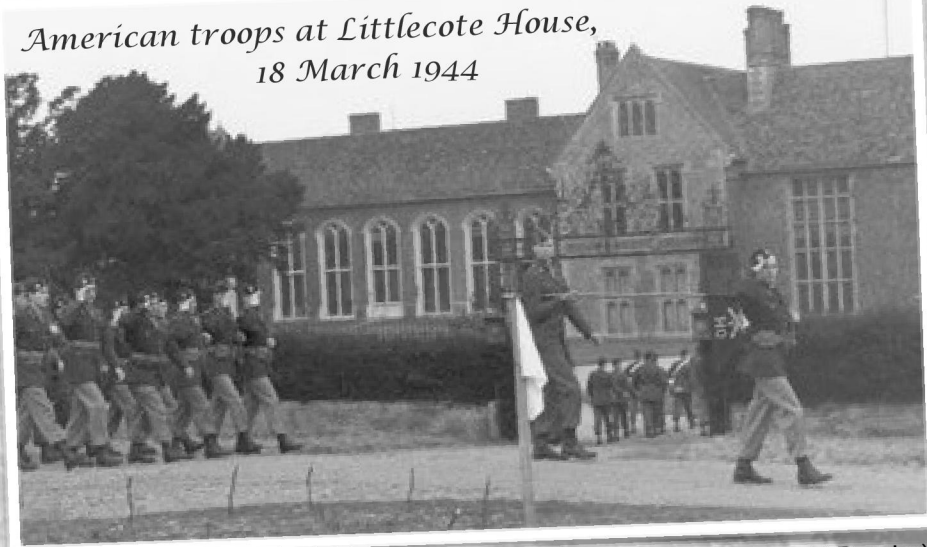


(J Reeder)



(D Bolce)

*American troops at Littlecote House,
18 March 1944*



(J Reeder)

With many British soldiers away from home, the Americans proved to be popular house guests amongst British families.

Homesick GIs were also encouraged to spend time with local people, and were given food packs containing sought after rationed items such as fruit juice, bacon and sugar to share with their hosts.

Described by a few of the locals as ‘Johnny come lately’ to the war, some judged Americans to be as “overpaid, over friendly and over here”; in response, the GIs said that the British were “underpaid, under friendly and under General Eisenhower”, the American Supreme Allied Commander.

Useful links

www.dailymail.co.uk and
www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

Surprisingly for a country at war, the number of parties increased, and many local girls became GI Brides; all of which helped to cement the special relationship which still exists between Britain and the US.

*Mary and
Beryl Gore
with US pilot
Joe Thompson's
hat*



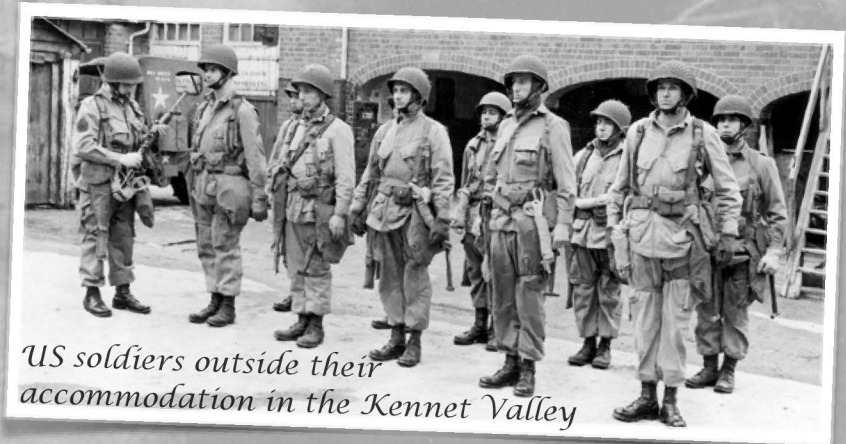
(J Thompson)

Source J: “over here!”

*1st Lt Paul Sherman in
Savernake Forest*



(E Wilson)



*US soldiers outside their
accommodation in the Kennet Valley*

(Roger Day)

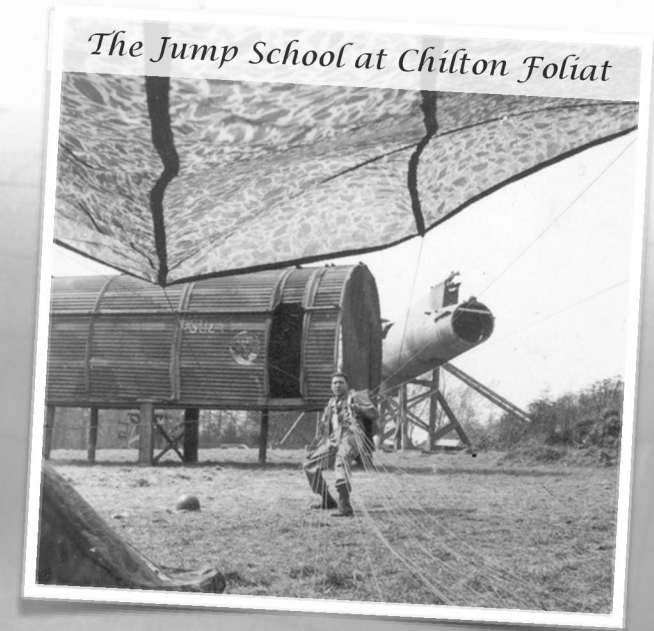
Background image: US soldiers on a route march

Source K: training for D-Day

The Americans and their British allies soon settled into a long period of intensive training in preparation for the long-awaited invasion of Europe.

The Kennet Valley proved to be an ideal training area, as the countryside resembled, in many ways, that of northern France. Exercises took place day and night, and locals were often surprised to find soldiers running through their gardens and hiding in sheds and outbuildings.

Doreen Ramsden, who worked as a Land Girl, recalls walking through an area of woodland: "I heard some rustling and suddenly soldiers came out of the woods and squatted besides the road. It gave us quite a fright. One morning a little while later we reached the same spot and found the road covered with strips of black foil. I believe it was called 'Window' and dropped by aircraft to interfere with radar".



(J Beyrle II)



Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower visit troops at RAF Welford, March 1944

On 14th March 1944 Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower watched a demonstration parachute drop by the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment to the east of RAF Welford, and later inspected the troops.

Soldiers from the area also participated in major exercises across the south of England, including a full-scale rehearsal at the Slapton training area, Devon.

The troops finally moved to their D-Day marshalling areas in late May 1944. Those about to go into battle wondered what lay ahead, and whether they would survive.

Links to articles
about D-Day

www.ddaymuseum.co.uk

www.combinedops.com

Background image: soldiers from HQ Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, about to board a C-47 at RAF Ramsbury (J Reeder)

“David came from West Virginia where his family ran a ferryboat service over the Ohio River.

He would come to visit my family at Newbury Road for tea and would be dropped off and collected by his friend, a regimental chaplain. We saw David many times during the Spring of 1944 until late May when suddenly all the American visitors simply seemed to disappear. I went into Newbury one Saturday but the place seemed deserted, and I sensed that something momentous was happening. It was at this time that all paratroopers had been moved out to the airfields from which they would depart for the invasion of Europe.

I vividly remember the night of June 5th 1944 as if it were only yesterday. From about 11.00pm onwards the sky seemed filled with hundreds of aircraft, some pulling gliders as they headed out for Normandy. It seemed to go on for hours, the last wave going over at 3.00am as I watched from my bedroom window.

David parachuted into France on the morning of June 6th 1944.

He survived the campaign and returned to visit once more, to tell me that he had a difficult choice to make but that when his tour of duty was over he would return to his girl in the States. I was very upset by this news, although mother always suspected that this would happen one day. David went on to serve in Holland, Belgium and Germany. After the war he returned safely home.

We wrote to each other and exchanged Christmas cards for a number of years.”

Source M: a civilian's story

In 1944, Joan Greenwood was an eighteen-year-old, living in a terraced house on the Newbury Road, Kintbury. Like many girls of her age, she attended dances held by the American troops billeted in the local area; including the concert by the famous bandleader Glen Miller, held at the Corn Exchange in Newbury.

Joan met David, a US medic serving with the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, at one of these dances.



In this account, she remembers the events of 1944.

Useful links

Glen Miller and wartime entertainment www.mtholyoke.edu

The 306th Airborne Medical Company www.med-dept.com

Background image: medics helping an injured soldier in France, 1944
(US National Archives)

Source N: an airman's story



American airman, Roger Airgood, was based at RAF Membury in 1944. In this account, written in 1992, he describes his experience as a C-47 pilot flying paratroopers into Normandy early on the morning of 6th June 1944.

Useful links

The history of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment www.ww2-airborne.us

The Airborne Museum, Sainte-Mere-Eglise, Normandy www.airborne-museum.org

Background image: C-47 aircraft dropping paratroopers, 1944 (IWM BU1162)



"I was a twin engined pilot flying C-47s as a second lieutenant. In January 1944, after flying training, I moved to Membury Field in Berkshire. We had several practice missions with airborne, both paratroopers and glider infantry.

About June 4th, we were restricted to base and briefed on the pending missions. After the briefing, all flight personnel were segregated from the non-flying personnel, and black and white paint was used to paint the invasion stripes on the aircraft. Later that day, the mission was postponed.

On June 5th ... all crews and airborne reported to their aircraft at 2200 hours. This provided about 40 minutes to help load the paratroopers and check out the aircraft. All had leg packs tethered to their waists. These packs would be lowered after the jump so that the sacks weighing 40 to 80 pounds would hit the ground first. The airborne were usually cocky, unruly characters but this time they were very serious.

We started the engines at 2240 and taxied into take-off position so we could get the planes up and in a V of Vs formation very quickly. Take-off was at 2300. We had a very precise route to follow over the Channel and across Normandy. This was the most complex and ambitious mission we ever faced.

I had very few glimpses of the ground and had to keep the outline of the plane in front in sight. Shortly after getting the 4 minute warning (stand up and hook up) from the lead aircraft I got a glimpse of a church steeple about half a mile ahead. Assuming this to be St. Mere. Eglise, I felt we were on course and that Drop Zone 'A' lay straight ahead. When we got the green light we were flying at about 105 mph and pulling a lot of power. The paratroopers went out in a terrific propeller blast, which was the last thing we wanted to happen. We dropped our troopers at 0102 on June 6th. As soon as the paratroopers were out we dove to get down to 100 feet.

Coming back across the Channel at 3000 feet, the planes and gliders at 500 feet lit up a continuous column going to Normandy. I didn't envy those glider pilots having to fly and land in the dark."

Source O: memory and remembrance

The Second World War's legacy of memory and remembrance is captured in the buildings, war memorials and other monuments - found in almost every village or town - which commemorate those who died or were injured in war.

Worn by millions of people, the poppy has also become a national symbol of remembrance, often reflecting individual and personal memories.



Stan Bowyer, a D-Day veteran, about to lay a wreath of poppies at the Newbury War Memorial, November 2014
James Wadham

Background image: The Memorial Hall, Marlborough College

"Remembrance is acknowledging that a life was once lived."

Nina Sankovitch, author

"These mock battles were great fun but they had a serious side; within a year most of us had joined the Army - and by 1945 nearly a third of my platoon mates had lost their lives."

David Summerhayes, reflecting on his wartime experience as a member of Marlborough College's Officer Training Corps

The Royal British Legion, one of the UK's largest charities, is the national custodian of remembrance, and is responsible for the annual Poppy Appeal which raises money to help all members of the Armed Forces, past and present, and their families.

During the First World War (1914-1918) poppies flourished amid chaos and destruction, inspiring Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae to write a famous poem called 'In Flanders Fields', which led to the adoption of the poppy as a neutral, humble and universal symbol of remembrance and hope.

Remembrance in the UK today is very different to the past. People take part in a wide variety of events, whatever their political or religious beliefs.

Useful links:

Royal British Legion learning pack www.britishlegion.org.uk

The story of poppies and remembrance projectbritain.com

Source P: local war memorials

From the 1870s, war memorials have been used to honour those who have died, rather than to glorify war.

Here are some examples of the different types of war memorial found in the Kennet Valley.



RAF Membury



Littlecote House



Marlborough



Hungerford

Useful links

Learn about war memorials www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org

Search for your local war memorial www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk

Background image: Newbury's war memorial, dedicated on 1 October 1922

Further resources

Archaeology Data Service

archaeologydataservice.ac.uk

BBC History

www.bbc.co.uk/history

BBC Bitesize Primary (KS2) and Secondary (KS3) History

www.bbc.co.uk/education

Bomb Sight

www.bombsight.org

British Library

www.bl.uk

Combined Operations Command

www.combinedops.com

Council for British Archaeology

new.archaeologyuk.org

D-Day Museum

www.ddaymuseum.co.uk

Daily Mail

www.dailymail.co.uk

Eye Witness to history.com

www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

history.com

www.history.com

History Learning Site

www.historylearningsite.co.uk

Imperial War Museum

www.iwm.org.uk

International Committee of the Red Cross

www.icrc.org

Musée Airborne

www.airborne-museum.org

National Archives

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

National WWII Museum

www.nww2m.com

Pillbox Study Group

www.pillbox-study-group.org.uk

Further resources

Project Britain

projectbritain.com

Primary Homework Help

www.primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk

Ramsbury at War

www.ramsburyatwar.com

Royal British Legion

www.britishlegion.org.uk

Spartacus Educational

www.spartacus-educational.com

The Kennet Valley at War Trust

www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

US Airborne

www.ww2-airborne.us

You Tube

www.youtube.com

War Memorials Online

www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk

War Memorials Trust

www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org

Wartime Entertainment

www.mtholyoke.edu

WW2 US Medical Research Centre

www.med-dept.com

Acknowledgements

The Kennet Valley at War Education Pack has been prepared with the generous support of many individuals and organisations, to whom we express our sincere thanks.

A special thank you goes to Ramsbury Primary School, St. John's International Academy Marlborough, and Newbury College, without whose help, advice and support this pack could not have been created.

Rear cover image: Marlborough High Street, viewed from the south west, 2015.

www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk



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