

Teachers' Notes

Cumbria at War: 1939-1945. A role-play exercise

This unit of work is targeted at KS3 pupils and presents opportunities for them to piece together original evidence from the county's archives in order to build-up a picture of the war-time experience in Cumbria.

It starts with an interest in the Home Front in Cumbria, but aims to go beyond the usual categories by looking at issues such as the Cumbrians who served abroad, who were prisoners of war and those who did not return.

The whole project is divided into 7 chapters (listed below). We have chosen the subjects to reflect the usual Home Front topics, such as rationing and evacuation, but we have aimed to look at each from a slightly different angle. For example, the focus of interest in chapter 1 on home supplies gives little coverage to rationing (which has been extensively covered in text books), but concentrates mainly on the black market in Cumbria. The use of oral history has enabled us to find a different story from that presented in the contemporary sources.

The themes covered by this learning resource reflect the impact of the War on Cumbria. For example, whilst Cumbrian towns such as Barrow were bombed, there are few references to air raids. However, themes relating to prisoners of war and industry each have their own chapter.

The aim is to allow students to construct a story from the evidence, so we have presented the main task as a role play exercise. The task is only outlined: teachers need to decide for themselves precisely how they will use the presentation. The role play could be implemented in a modest or highly ambitious fashion.

We have tried to make the presentation easy to use. There are clearly marked signposts to the linked audio, or to supporting websites.

It is important to impress upon students the fact that the contents of this project are all based on the archives, any of which can be consulted using the references given at the appropriate Archive Centre. Students need to consider the reliability of these sources: just because they are primary sources does not mean they are the 'truth'. This point can be tackled constructively using some of the oral evidence in particular.

We have envisaged pupils working in small groups, extracting information from the presentation. Teachers may wish to print out certain pages of the presentation.

The presentation is divided into the following downloadable chapters (PDFs) on the website:

1. *Introduction: VE Day, Cumbria, May 1945.*
2. *In Uniform: those who served in uniform in Cumbria.**
3. *Working: those who worked in Cumbria to help win the war.**
4. *Home Supplies: how Cumbrians got what they needed in the war.**
5. *Away from Home: evacuees, and Cumbrians serving overseas.*
6. *Missing Home: prisoners of war, Cumbrians and Germans in Cumbria.**
7. *Not Coming Home: remembering those Cumbrians who fell in the war.*

* Supported by oral history, downloadable as separate audio file (MP3 format).