

## Recycling – then and now

During World War 2 recycling became key to the survival of the nation. Rationing meant clothes, food and petrol were in short supply and people had to be very imaginative about how they used what they had. There were various campaigns such as Make do and Mend and Dig for Victory. Many posters were produced, designed to catch the eye and get people thinking - Images of servicemen shouting 'bones for explosives' and 'I need your scrap metal' were commonplace. Videos were produced to show in cinemas to encourage people to support the war effort.



Dig for Victory allotment, West Worthing

People became very clever with methods of making clothes last. Clothes rationing was introduced in order to free up factories to produce the many uniforms, tents, protective clothing etc, which were needed for the war effort. The booklet 'make do and mend' was introduced to encourage people to look after their clothes properly in order to make them last. Clothing exchanges were set up. People were given points according to the clothes they brought in which were exchanged for the equivalent. This is exactly like the 'swishing' events which happen today! The only difference is today we are attempting to reduce the amount of clothing that ends up being recycled or in landfill, rather than coping with the fact things are in short supply.

Bones were important! They were used for glue and munitions and were part of the collections which the refuse collectors undertook. Housewives were encouraged to put out the fat left over from cooking meat for it to be used in dynamite. The food waste collected today with your refuse collection is processed and used for both fuel and compost, helping to fuel the processing centre and create natural wildlife habitats on existing landfill sites.

People were encouraged to separate out elements which were recycled, such as paper and card, food (and bones) and metals. This lowered the need for weekly refuse collections, which reduced in frequency, also reducing the use of landfill sites.

Metal was desperately important for the war effort, for making guns, planes, tanks and more. Broken or unwanted pots and pans were put out for collection and recycled. Most decorative metal fencing was removed – the remains of this can still be seen today in some areas. Today we collect metal as it is still a precious commodity – it is sold on for recycling, both reducing landfill and raising revenue to help costs. This includes the tins and metal lids in your recycling and the metal waste collected and separated at the Household Waste Recycling Sites.

Paper and cardboard were collected by the refuse collectors in WW2, it was left out separately for collection, usually tied up unlike today where we ask for it to be clean, dry and loose. Boy scouts were encouraged to do paper collection rounds as part of the war effort, putting paper and cardboard onto carts and taking to the depots for sorting. Paper and cardboard recycling was used for things like shell containers, cartridge wads and interior components for mines.

Recycling, or salvage as it was called then was part of a National Salvage Campaign. In 1940, salvage was made compulsory. By 1942 households could be fined up to £2,500 (over £100k today) and up to 2 years in prison if they did not sort their salvage! This demonstrates how incredibly important it was. Councils were set targets for recycling, similar to today.

Today in West Sussex each household has a recycling bin which takes multiple types of waste materials for recycling – paper, cardboard, tins, metal lids, plastic cartons, plastic food containers etc, which is processed and sent on for recycling. We request that it is clean, dry and loose. Clean in order to be fit to go for recycling and not contaminate the product, loose in order that the sorting machinery at the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) is able to distinguish the type of material it is (which cannot be done if for example plastic food containers are neatly tucked inside a cereal box). Lastly it must be dry. If, for example, wet cardboard goes into your bin it will stick to other materials and contaminate the recycling process – this makes it very difficult to use for recycling into something else.

The reasons for recycling today are very different to those from WW2. We recycle as a result of excess rather than shortage. But there are similarities in the way we deal with it – there is an increasing awareness of the need to recycle, and along with that people are beginning to question what they initially buy. For example, consider when you buy a new winter coat whether it will last more than one winter. When sorting through your wardrobe, give the good things to charity, and ask if they have a rag bag for the not so good stuff. Many charity shops have rag bags which they sell to bring in income. Swishing events are great for swapping clothes – you get tokens on entry to swap for the equivalent value, this is exactly the same as WW2 clothing exchanges. Whatever you do, please do not put your unwanted clothes or fabric into your residual (black bag) waste – it gets caught in the

processing machinery and causes problems. If you dispose of it correctly it will be reused, as it was in the war.

Food waste was collected separately in the war, to use for fertiliser. Food waste is a very useful commodity today and can be used for composting and energy production. West Sussex is currently investigating the introduction of separate food waste collections. We actively encourage composting, and on our website <https://www.wastepreventionwestsussex.co.uk/composting/buy-a-bin/> there is a link to buy a composter for a very reasonable price!

Plastics were not used during the war as much as they are today. Today they are used everywhere, mainly for packaging. Many plastics can be recycled, but we cannot recycle things like carrier bags or crisp packets. There are, however, other outside organisations that can deal with these. We can recycle plastic milk bottles, food containers and many others, again they need to be clean, dry and loose! If you worry about using good clean water to wash them, you can clean them at the end of your washing up, or put them in the top of your dishwasher on top of your normal load and use a lower temperature cycle (using less energy!) the best thing to do is to not use plastics at all in packaging. Use produce bags for loose veg- some supermarkets sell these, but it's better to make your own from old fabrics, that way you reduce fabric waste as well! Use shopping bags which are reusable, take them with you to the supermarket, or better still, make your own! The WW2 housewife never used carrier bags, she took a basket or bag to the shops and the food was put straight in. Wrapping was only used if essential and would be paper, not plastic. Much plastic packaging is not essential, try to buy loose. There are also shops (refill stations) that will refill your old bottles and jars.

During WW2 centralised collection points for certain things, like cardboard and paper meant the correct type of recycling was put in one place and was easier to sort and use. Today, the Household Waste Recycling Sites (HWRSs) perform a similar task. The staff are on hand to give advice and help with disposing of your unwanted items to ensure they go into the correct container and can go straight off for recycling.

We have a lot to learn from the ethos of recycling, or salvage, from WW2. Reduce, reuse, recycle is an expression we need to use in our daily lives. Think about what you buy – is it necessary, will it last. Consider second hand – charity shops and auction sites are a bounty of items, at reduced price and less cost to the environment. Look around for a reused sofa or television, it is amazing what you can find! Finally, recycle – is your item still in good condition? It can go to a charity shop or a swishing event or make some money by selling on an auction site. Can you repair it? Repair cafes are popping up everywhere and are huge fun. They will only charge you for any parts and may ask for a donation. There are also local recycling web pages, including on social media, where you can advertise what you have for free, it is amazing what people are looking for and disposing of. We found a concrete coal bunker on one of these! Disposal at the tip or in your residual waste bin should be the last resort.

Good Luck with your recycling!