

# Learn about the Home Front

Everyone was expected to do their bit for the war effort. Not everyone could join up to fight the enemy. So what could people do on the Home Front? Some, especially women, went to do vital work in factories or on farms. Others gave their time, most of it without being paid, to join what was called Civil Defence. There were more than a million people doing these volunteer jobs throughout Britain, out of a population of around 41 million.

**If you had been an adult during the war, what would you have volunteered to do?**  
**Read about the different roles:**

## Police

- Police officers were involved in all aspects of Civil Defence
- The local Chief Constable was in overall control of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) and Civil Defence.
- The Police coordinated the activities of the other services
- Police officers pitched in to help where and when needed



*Police patrolling a bomb damaged Exeter Street.  
Devon Heritage Centre*

They had to keep doing all their normal duties, as well as dealing with crashed aircraft, shot-down enemy air crews, checking identity cards and trying to stop the black market (buying and selling provisions illegally outside the wartime rationing system).

## ARP Wardens

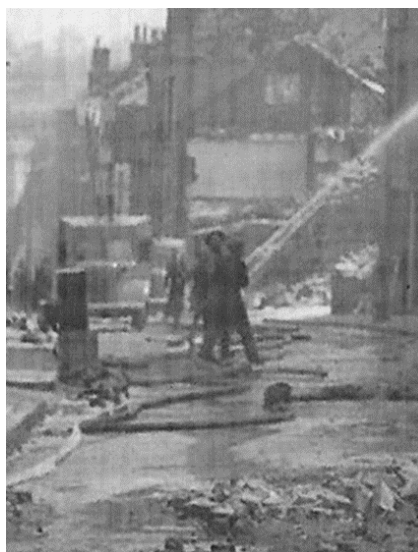
- Most wardens, about nine in every ten, were part-time volunteers
- Towns and cities were split into sectors, with five or six wardens to each sector
- Wardens had their own patch and had to get to know everyone in it, especially those who might be useful in an emergency



*Senior Warden Walter Hawkins, Okehampton Street, Exeter 1941.  
Express and Echo*

They had to know where all the shelters were located. They had to know where all the water, gas and electric supplies were located. They had to decide which rescue services were needed after an air raid. They enforced the blackout.

## Fire Services



*Putting out fires after an air raid on Exeter.  
Devon Heritage Centre*

The Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) was formed in 1938. This was a national body that worked alongside local fire services. In 1941, the National Fire Service (NFS) was established, joining them all up in the nationwide institution we still have today.

**A volunteer Fire Guard Team usually had three people, who might be men or women. Its roles were:**

- One person to work the pump (called a stirrup pump)
- One to work the hose
- One to fetch more water for the bucket

## Rescue and Demolition Parties

- Rescue Teams located and recovered casualties after bombing raids
- They cleared a path for the fire and ambulance teams to work
- They shored up dangerous buildings or demolished them
- Rescue Parties were usually men – ten to each party
- The work was demanding, dangerous and often gruesome, but very rewarding when they rescued people and saved lives.



*An Exeter Rescue Party with other members of the Civil Defence.  
Devon Heritage Centre*

## First Aid Parties

First Aid Parties worked day and night to treat people with light wounds at the scene. They carried stretchers with more seriously injured people to ambulances. They often had to help Rescue Parties release people who were trapped under rubble and in burning buildings.

A First Aid Party was usually a team of four people – one doctor, one or two nurses, and one or two nursing helpers - plus a driver. Some posts were mobile, so they would move around to wherever they were needed most.



*First aid bag, typical of those carried by First Aid Parties.  
RAMM handling collection*

## Ambulance drivers

Each ambulance was usually staffed by two people. Both driver and attendant were often women. They often had to collect and transport the wounded while air raids were still going on around them.



*Poster showing women ambulance workers in Stoke Newington, London.  
Credit: Trade Union Collections, London Metropolitan University*

## Women's Voluntary Service (WVS)

WVS duties included:

- helping with evacuation
- making medical supplies, bandages, pyjamas and dressing gowns
- knitting for troops
- running nurseries for working mothers
- organising drives to collect scrap metal and other scarce materials
- staffing canteens and restaurants
- organising libraries
- distributing stirrup pumps
- caring for lonely and elderly people
- helping in mobile canteens during air raids, or soup kitchens for people who need food
- staffing mobile laundries and distributing clothing



*A typical WVS soup kitchen in Exeter.  
Devon Heritage Centre*

## Women's Land Army (WLA)

Most members of the WLA - commonly known as Land Girls – already lived in the countryside, but about one in three came from London and other cities. They worked on the land and in farms, taking the place of men who had been called up to the armed services.



*Poster encouraging women to join the WLA.  
Imperial War Museum*

We needed to produce more food to make up for food not being brought in from other countries, so more help was needed on the farms. Most Land Girls already lived in the country but about one in three came from London and other cities. The Women's Timber Corps has now been formed due to forestry workers also being called up for active service.