

The Second World War and The Blitz

The 'Blitz' was the title given to the period between September 1940 and May 1941 when there were relentless air raids on Britain.

Cities and commercial centres were the main targets of the Nazis.

In 1940 Winston Churchill gave a warning that it was 'not only soldiers' who were engaged in battle, 'but the entire population men, women and children.'

60,000 Britons were killed in these air raids across Britain.

In Wales, Cardiff and Swansea were targeted, as they were important ports used for exporting coal and metals.

In a period of three nights in February 1941, 230 people were killed and 397 injured in Swansea alone.

Who were the ARP wardens?

The ARP (Air Raid Precaution) Service was established in 1937 as part of the 'Home Front' defence.

200,000 volunteered in the first year and over the Second World War period there were over 1.4 million wardens across Britain.

Local Authorities were responsible for recruiting and training.

There were no restrictions as to who could become wardens and women, the elderly and teenagers would be accepted.

Most of the volunteers did so without being paid.

By 1939 some wardens were employed on a full time basis for a weekly salary of £3. The Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) was established to recruit females into the service and by 1940 there were almost 20,000 females employed as wardens.

In 1941, the service was given a new title – The Civil Defence Service, to encompass all of the duties undertaken by the volunteers.



ARP whistle & bicycle light



The ARP

What were the main responsibilities of the wardens?

The wardens were responsible for

- Distributing and inspecting gas masks.
- Making sure the 'black out' regulations were observed. Wardens would check that all lights had been switched off or blocked with card or thick curtains. Heavy fines could be imposed for any breaches.
- Maintaining air raid shelters /Anderson Shelters.
- After any bombing the wardens were responsible for rescuing those caught in the rubble, for reuniting families who had been separated and to find temporary shelters for those made homeless.



ARP rattle



'First Aid Party of the Civil Defence' metal helmet

The different roles within the ARP

- First Aid (the letters FAP could be seen on their helmets) – they were appointed to give medical treatment after air raids.
- Messengers (M) – often young and between 14 and 18 years of age, responsible for delivering messages when phone lines had been destroyed or unavailable.
- Ambulance Drivers (A).
- Fire Service (W/FG) – these were found in cities and larger towns.

Perceptions of of Wardens

The most 'famous' ARP warden is probably Chief Warden Hodges from the 'Dad's Army' television series.

He is a self-important, pretentious and unpleasant character reflecting some of the prejudices of the public during 1939.

The initial months of the Second World War are known as the 'Phoney War' as there was no fighting on the Western Front.

Many treated the wardens with contempt for enforcing the 'black outs' so harshly and for imposing such large fines.

After the bombings started in 1940 attitudes changes rapidly and the wardens were treated with much more respect.

It was an important and dangerous job and almost 7,000 ARP wardens were killed during the Second World War.

The ARP

LOCAL CONTEXT: A bomb dropped on Bangor

On 24 October 1941 a bomb fell on Maesgeirchen causing significant damage.

This was unexpected as Bangor was considered to be a 'safe' area and a refuge for many evacuees from the larger towns.

It is likely that Liverpool would have been the original target but that the pilot had become lost or needed to lighten the flight cargo as he was flying over North Wales.

3 people were killed during the attack: C. Waters, a driver who was on his way home to his wife after hearing the warning siren, Jack Lewis who worked for the Post Office and Anne Roberts, who was staying with her daughter at the time of the incident.

9 casualties were taken to hospital with two in a serious condition. One of the casualties was Glenys Roberts who lost sight in one eye as a result of the bombing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M88F3TE_f3o

An oral history of the bombing:

<https://youtu.be/yEn2cGx1pZQ>

