

Background to Rationing

The term 'rationing' is used to describe the measures introduced by the Government between 1940 and 1954.

The Second World War meant that Britain had to curtail imports, including food, materials and fuel.

Rationing was introduced to ensure a fair distribution and equality for all, and to prevent anyone from suffering the consequences of hunger and poverty.

No one could avoid rationing – royalty and the Prime Minister also had to adhere to these rules!

Clothing and Textile Rationing

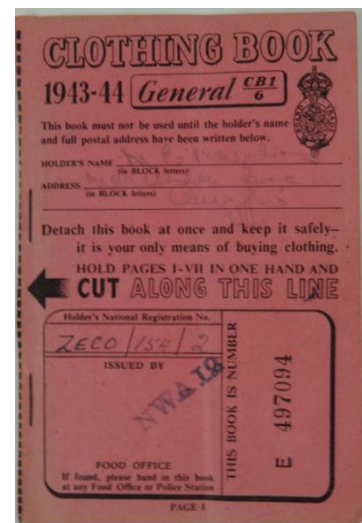
The increased demand for army clothes and uniforms placed enormous pressure on the textile industry in Britain.

By June 1941 clothes were rationed and everyone received coupon booklets.

Each item of clothing had a specific coupon value, for instance a man's coat was 16 coupons (11 for a child). A ladies woollen dress was 11 coupons (8 for a child) and men's shoes were 7 coupons (3 for a child).

Initially each adult would receive 66 coupons annually.

As the War progressed and textiles became increasingly scarce, by 1945 each adult only received 24 coupons annually. Children would receive an additional 10 coupons to account for growth.



Ration book



'Make Do and Mend'

The government launched a successful campaign to encourage women to mend, adapt and sew their own clothes.

Pamphlets and posters were produced suggesting how to prevent damage to woollen items, how to make shoes last longer and how to care for different fabrics.

Night classes were held and sewing lessons given at schools for girls. It was necessary to be creative and all kinds of fabrics were re-used, e.g. skirts were created from old military uniforms, baby clothing from cushion covers, sleepwear from old parachutes and rag mats from old rags.

Pressure was put on housewives to be fashionable during the rationing period as there were concerns that a lack of interest in personal appearances could signify a low morale, which would in turn have devastating consequences for the War effort. Due to the fact that women had to create their own clothes, there was a growth in individuality and personal style.

Emphasis was placed upon not wasting anything and there were inspectors who could impose penalties or imprison those who broke the Rules.

Weddings and Rationing

RATIONING

Despite these years of hardship, there was an increase in the number of weddings during the Second World War as young people faced uncertain prospects for the future. Due to the rationing restrictions it was difficult to celebrate weddings traditionally and particularly inventive solutions were seen.

Wedding dresses

In Storiel's collection there is a red wedding dress that belonged to a girl from the Isle of Man who married in 1944. Rationing made it more difficult to walk into a shop and buy a dress. One option was to make your own dress. This dress has been made using as little fabric as possible to avoid waste.

In other instances, parachutes were used while others saved their clothes coupons for the big day, or adapted and renewed borrowed dresses or family heirlooms donated by family members.

The husband's suit

The men were often in the army, air force or navy and would therefore decide to marry in their uniforms. This would save on coupons as there would then be no need to buy a new suit.

Some females who were members of the armed forces would also marry in their uniforms to save their coupons.



Makeup

Makeup was sparse and very expensive during this period and women therefore 'invented' their own makeup.

Beetroot was used as lipstick, chalk as face powder and shoe polish as mascara.

Some of the women used gray browning on their legs and drew a black line on the back to give the impression that they were wearing tights.

Wedding Cake

Since eggs were rationed, baking a cake during the Second World War was a challenge.

Icing was also banned during rationing as it was considered to be a total waste of sugar.

Couples would save their sugar and butter coupons for their weddings to create a small fruit cake.

Some were more imaginative and would create fake cakes with cardboard decorated with rice paper to give the impression of luxury.

Wedding feast

Some couples saved their coupons for months before their celebration whilst others limited the number of guests and had very small weddings.

Rather than luxurious foods, some decided to serve vegetable soup, a common meal during the rationing period.

Another deception was to provide food on small plates to give the impression that the portions were bigger!

Jewellery / Rings:

RATIONING

Gold was a rare commodity during the War and there would be a waiting list of months at jewellers.

To overcome this some couples would borrow rings to use for the day and others inherited rings from family members.

Some women also created necklaces or chains by using fragments of enemy fallen aircrafts if they had been shot down close by.

Flowers

Despite the fact that flowers were not rationed there was a greater emphasis on using the land to produce nutritious vegetables rather than to grow 'decorations'.

Bouquets would often be made from wild flowers, and some would even add cabbage leaves to bulk up the posy!

Vehicles

Petrol was also rationed, and the location of any weddings would have to be carefully considered. It was common for couples to have their ceremony at the local church or chapel, followed by celebrations and a wedding feast in their back garden.

Like today, couples relied heavily on the support of family, friends and neighbours when arranging their weddings and the local community would play a pivotal part in arranging the wedding. Families and friends would often also give their coupons to couples as wedding gifts.



Recycled sack made into a tablecloth

Bibliography

- Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War* (Llundain, 2015)