

On The Home Front

Panel 1: Wartime in North Craven

World War II was declared on 3 September 1939. Sometimes known as the 'People's War', it affected everyone in Britain. Men left their homes to fight or worked in civil defence, women took jobs in industry and agriculture or joined the auxiliary services. Travel restrictions, rationing, shortages of all kinds, the blackout and the constant fear of invasion all influenced the daily lives of the population

Thousands of children were evacuated to safe havens and across the country people were involved in the war effort: National Savings schemes, digging for victory and salvage drives

This was a war fought on two fronts - on the battlefield and at home. Here is the story of the contribution made by the people of North Craven to the war on the home front

Images

- Churchill with cigar (background)
- Selside signal box (The first signalwomen to take charge of Selside signal box)

Panel 2: Pulling together

The people of North Craven had an impressive record of supporting the war effort through voluntary service and fundraising. The sums raised through National Savings campaigns and during the special war savings weeks were outstanding. During War Weapons Week in March 1941 £206,350 was raised, representing an average of £13 per head of the population or £400 at today's values

People of all ages worked together to produce goods, grow and preserve their own food and provide practical comforts for the sick and those on active service. An RAF maintenance unit was based in Settle and many of the men were billeted with local families

Images

- Angus' fire hose production (Testing fire hose for the Royal Navy at George Angus Limited, High Bentham about 1942)
 - War Weapons Week Settle (War Weapons Week 1941: the scene in front of The Shambles with a German Messerschmitt aircraft)
 - Otterburn otter (Otterburn used a stuffed otter which was moved across the bridge to record the money raised during 'Salute the Soldier' week)
 - Form a savings group poster
 - Local Savings Committee programme
 - Telegram
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Panel 3: A safe haven

Plans were made early in the 1930s for the evacuation of children, pregnant women and the disabled in the event of war. Families in North Craven opened their homes to evacuees, although in the early months of the war many children returned home as nothing much seemed to be happening - this was the time of the so-called 'phoney war'

In March 1940, the Craven Herald reported that evacuees from Bradford were returning home and it was at this time that schools in the area were experiencing outbreaks of scarlet fever and mumps, causing the school term to be shortened

Great efforts were made to absorb the evacuees into the community and normal school life. In Langcliffe, an unoccupied house, Mount Pleasant, was requisitioned for the evacuees, who helped in the running of the home and were encouraged to join in the local social life

All children participated in the war effort including National Savings campaigns and work on allotments. Five-year-olds from Bentham Council School made blankets to send to needy families overseas and children from Bentham Parochial School raised money for the Lord Mayor of London's Relief Fund and contributed to the RAF Comfort Fund

In the very hard winter of 1940, evacuees experienced some of the common hardships of rural life when many villages were cut off by snow and became short of food

Many evacuees returned home with happy memories of their stay. Some never left and others came back to live and work

Images

- Evacuees at High Birkwith (Group of evacuees at High Birkwith, Horton, 1940)
- Photograph of Pat Marshall and handwritten notes (Memories of evacuee Pat Marshall of happy times at Close House, Giggleswick)
- Cutting from Craven Herald
- Line drawing of little boy: 'Someone here is going to need your help'

Panel 4: The lighter side

Despite the fears and hardships of war, people found time to relax and enjoy themselves. The cinema was the great morale booster and the Nuvic in Settle offered nightly entertainment of regularly changing films. The radio was another great resource: people could hear the latest news of the war and enjoy plays and comedy shows. Entertainers such as Flanagan and Allen and Vera Lynn sang patriotic and popular songs

Zion Congregational Church held 'song-game-dance' socials and in the Toc H Rooms the Settle Services Club had a base where sing-songs, games and reading could be enjoyed

The Ribble Dance Band of Long Preston, formed in the early 1930s, entertained throughout the war years all over the district. They occasionally played at the Winter Gardens in Morecambe and raised money for comfort funds, the British Legion and the Red Cross

Images

- Nuvic cinema programme
- Photograph of Harry Robinson with banjo (Harry Robinson of the Ribble Band with his banjo at Tosside Institute)
- Dance ticket
- Nuvic cinema photograph
- Zion poster (Poster drawn by the Reverend George Moffat)

Panel 5: Tightening our belts

Rationing was introduced in 1940 and everyone was issued with ration books and clothing coupons. Permits were allocated for the purchase of furniture for the newly married, those starting families and the bombed-out. Shopkeepers only had a certain quantity of unrationed goods to sell and queues became a common sight. Only five inches of bathwater was allowed and in 1942 soap was rationed. The whole community put their efforts into growing food, digging up gardens and working on allotments

Although the rationed diet was meagre, it was well-balanced and nutritious and, in general, kept people healthy. Menus were devised to make the best use of the food available and ingenious use was made of ingredients to produce wholesome meals. The Ministry of Information issued posters and took space in newspapers urging people to 'waste not, want not' and 'make do and mend'

Images

- Ration book
- Clothing book
- Utility mark (The 'Utility' symbol, a standard set up early in the war)
- Man in Utility suit
- Sheep's Head Broth recipe
- Pot luck poster
- Photograph of rabbits (Mr Cox of Burnley who came regularly to buy rabbits from William Blades of Capon Hall, Malham Moor)
- Reasons for rationing

Panel 6: Feeding the nation

In the early days of the war, North Craven farmers pledged themselves to produce all they could to help their country and reduce the need to import vital foods

Organisation of food production was in the hands of the West Riding War Agricultural Executive Committee, the 'War Ag', who set targets for the ploughing up of land traditionally used only for pasture. Crops grown included oats, kale, mangolds and potatoes and the War Ag provided tractors for cultivation at a time when most farmers were still using horses

The wet climate and thin soil were unsuitable for growing corn and yields were patchy. The most useful crops were kale and mangolds which provided essential winter feed for animals

With many men away on active service and much additional work to be done, Italian and German prisoners of war and especially members of the Women's Land Army, the 'Land Girls' provided extra labour on the farms

Images

- Threshing machine (Threshing machine at Otterburn)
- Cornfield at Lower Hardacre (Harvesting oats, Lower Hardacre, Clapham, 1942)
- Italian prisoner of war (Sabeno Luongo, an Italian prisoner of war who worked at Lodge Hall, Horton until 1947)
- Land girls on tractor (Land Army girls at work, Horton)
- Land girls outside hostel (Land Army girls outside their hostel in Mill Close, Settle)

Panel 7: HMS Ribble

HMS Ribble, 'our ship', was adopted by the people of the Settle Rural District as a result of raising the astounding sum of £197,000 during Warships Week in February 1942. In commemoration of this, a plaque bearing a brass plate, was presented the following year on behalf of the Admiralty, and in return, the Chairman of the Settle Rural District Council presented a carved oak plaque which was to be mounted on the upper deck of the ship

The Ribble, a frigate of the River class, was built by Blyth Shipbuilding and Drydock Company Limited and immediately commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy as HMCS Ribble in July 1944

Manned by a Canadian crew throughout the war, HMCS Ribble was one of the ships of the 26th Escort Group of Western Approaches Command. Until the end of hostilities she was on anti-submarine patrols, providing protection to convoys. In October 1944 she towed the severely damaged HMCS Chebogue to safety in Swansea Bay

At the end of the war the Ribble was returned to the Royal Navy and remained in reserve until 1957 when she made the voyage to Blyth to be scrapped

Efforts are being made to trace any surviving artefacts from the ship, especially her bell and the carved plaque pictured here

Images

- Photograph of HMCS Ribble (HMCS Ribble)
- Photograph of ship's officers (Officers of HMCS Ribble)
- Photograph of carved plaque (Plaque depicting Ingleborough, the gift of Settle Rural District)
- Warship Week plaque cutting

Update April 2014: HMS Ribble's bell: The present owner of the bell, who lives near Vancouver, served as the Navigating Officer on the frigate HMCS Ribble. He was able to purchase the bell from the Admiralty in 1958 and have it shipped back to Canada. 'The bell regularly sits on the hearth in my living room. With the gallows that I made for it, the bell has brought in the New Year a couple of times in harmony with the bells of the ships at anchor in the bay below us. Each May on Battle of Atlantic Sunday I take it to the Remembrance Services at Sailors Point in North Vancouver where it is rung in the Ceremony of the Missing Ships.'. The owner wishes to remain anonymous.



Image of bell from HMS Ribble

Panel 8: Prepared to defend

Preparations for safeguarding the local population against air attack were put in hand well before the war. The Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Department of the Home Office produced a series of practical handbooks, gas masks were issued and anti-gas training given. Local air

raid wardens and auxiliary firemen were recruited and all householders were urged to prepare themselves

In Settle, public air raid shelters were designated in cellars and a warning siren erected on the Town Hall. The blackout was strictly enforced throughout the district and offenders fined as a matter of course

In the early years of the war the threat of invasion was very real and units of Local Defence Volunteers, later known as the Home Guard, were formed. They were trained to act as the first line of defence in their own locality and their job was to keep watch and protect key sites such as the Ribbleshead viaduct which were seen as prime targets for attack

A chain of observation posts was established at Horton, Settle, Bentham and Caton, staffed by members of the Royal Observer Corps, whose job was to plot and report the movement of all aircraft passing overhead

Images

- Photograph of Settle observation post (Wartime observation post above Settle)
- Horton Home Guard (Members of Horton Home Guard)
- Settle ARP (Settle ARP, War Weapons Week, 1941)
- Cutting about air raid shelters
- Bentham fire brigade (Bentham Fire Brigade, 1942)

Panel 9: Celebrating peace

May 8 1945, designated VE Day to mark the end of the war in Europe, was celebrated as a national holiday. Throughout the district, people of all ages took part in thanksgiving services in the churches and celebrated with parties, dances, bonfires and processions. In Settle, one of the largest crowds ever seen in the town filled the Market Place. Flags flew from public buildings and houses were decorated with bunting

Although the fighting had ended in Europe, the war continued to rage in the Far East until August. Mindful of this and of the need to honour the fallen, local people turned almost at once to the task of searching for some fitting means of commemorating those who had given their lives during six years of conflict

Images

- Settle Market Place on VE Day
- Craven Herald cuttings: "Settle Celebrates Victory" & "A People's Effort"
- Dedication of Long Preston war memorial