

Countdown to War

1936

- John Dickinson forms its own ARP committee.
- Germany reoccupies Rhineland (a demilitarised zone since WWI).

1937

- County Air Raid Precautions Officer appointed.
- ARP Act passed - legal obligation for councils to make arrangements for ARP, including fire fighting.

1938

- March - Germany reunites with Austria.
- John Dickinsons make 17,000 gas mask boxes.
- June - Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) launched.
- Emergency Medical Service created to organise existing hospitals.
- September - Britain's Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain declared 'Peace in our Time' after brokering a deal in Munich, which recognised Germany's annexation of Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia.
- November - trial blackout in Hertfordshire.

January 1939

- Trench dug at Churchill, Hemel Hempstead.
- National Service handbook issued to every household.
- Survey of Dacorum households for purposes of evacuation.

February 1939

- Anderson shelters erected in London - named after Sir John Anderson, Lord Privy Seal.
- Hemel Hempstead branch of WVS set up under Miss W Fraser.

March 1939

- Germany invades the rest of Czechoslovakia and Italy invades Albania; Britain and France pledge to defend Poland.
- Territorial Army to double in size - to total 340,000.

May 1939

- Hitler and Mussolini sign the Pact of Steel.
- Government Evacuation Scheme published - listing priority groups.
- Military Training Bill introduced - all males aged 20 and 21 of British nationality had to register at Labour Exchanges.
- Britain urged to 'Dig for Victory'.

June 1939

- Kings Langley WVS organise an unofficial dress-rehearsal for evacuation.
- ARP exercises begin.
- Women's Land Army reformed.

July 1939

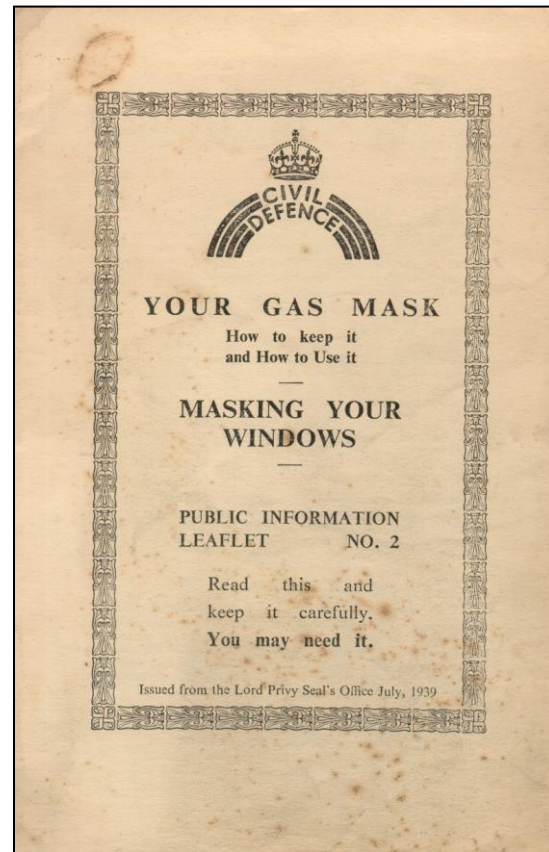
- Conscription introduced.
- Instructions issued on how to blackout your home.

August 1939

- Hitler and Stalin sign Non-Aggression Pact.
- Trial blackout.
- 29th Aug - Observer Corps (later Royal Observer Corps) man posts for first time.
- Treasures removed from London galleries and museums.
- 31st Aug - 1st September - evacuation of 1.5 million children, school teachers and expectant mothers.

September 1939

Germany invades Poland and this time Britain and France declare war on Germany on 3rd September.



This leaflet gave advice on protecting homes from bombardment. People bought 'scrim', a fine canvas to paste onto windows to prevent the glass shattering. (DACHT : BK 3112.18)

There were frightening predictions about what devastation could be caused by modern weaponry and a fear of poison gas being dropped on towns and cities. (DACHT : BK 3912.87)



Men and children fill sandbags outside the Market House, Akeman Street, Tring. (© M. Bass)

Men camouflage a roof at Apsley Mills. (DACHT : 62.12.3)



First aid parties practise a drill in Butts Meadow, Berkhamsted. (DACHT : BK 7646)

National Registration took place on 19 September 1939. It was similar to a census and, once compiled, identity cards were issued. (: KISMS 97.022)

Digging air-raid shelters off High Street, Tring. A car park now occupies this site. (© M Bass)