

Make Do and Mend

Clothes rationing

On the 1st June, 1941, during the Second World War, the British government introduced clothes rationing. Clothes rationing limited the number of new garments that people could buy, and freed up factory space and labour for other essential war purposes, such as uniform production. Clothing coupon books were given to families, with every item of clothing given a value in coupons. For example, a dress needed 11 coupons and a man's shirt needed eight coupons, as well as money, to buy. Every adult was given coupons to last one year, but this became less as the war progressed. Shoppers were reminded of the need to plan their purchases carefully and make difficult choices between garments, making sure that they were suitable for all seasons.



Ration book of clothing coupons

Make Do and Mend campaign

In 1943, the government introduced the 'Make Do and Mend' campaign. The campaign encouraged people to recycle and repair worn out or damaged clothes by sewing and darning. Handmade and repaired clothes became an essential part of everyday life, with people becoming creative at finding ways to make and care for their clothes. Everyone was encouraged to improve their sewing skills. The character 'Mrs Sew and Sew' was used as part of a publicity campaign to encourage people to make do and mend.



Publicity materials featuring Mrs Sew and Sew

Everyday fashion

Despite its challenges, clothes rationing and the Make Do and Mend campaign did not spell the end of fashion, creativity or business in Britain. It did, however, change the way that people dressed, with practicality and style being important. In 1942, the first 'utility' clothing went on sale. Utility clothing was marked with a distinctive CC41 logo, and was made from materials that were not in limited supply. Adaptions were also made to normal clothing to save on materials. For example, the number of pockets on garments was restricted. Other quirky inventions produced at this time included the 'siren suit', which was a garment that could be put on over night clothes in case of an air raid and handbags with a gas mask compartment.



CC41 logo

Glossary

- coupon** A voucher entitling the holder to buy a certain amount of a rationed item.
- darn** A way to mend a hole in knitted material by interweaving yarn.
- recycle** The process of converting waste materials into new materials.
- rationing** A system that allows each person to have a fixed amount of a commodity.

