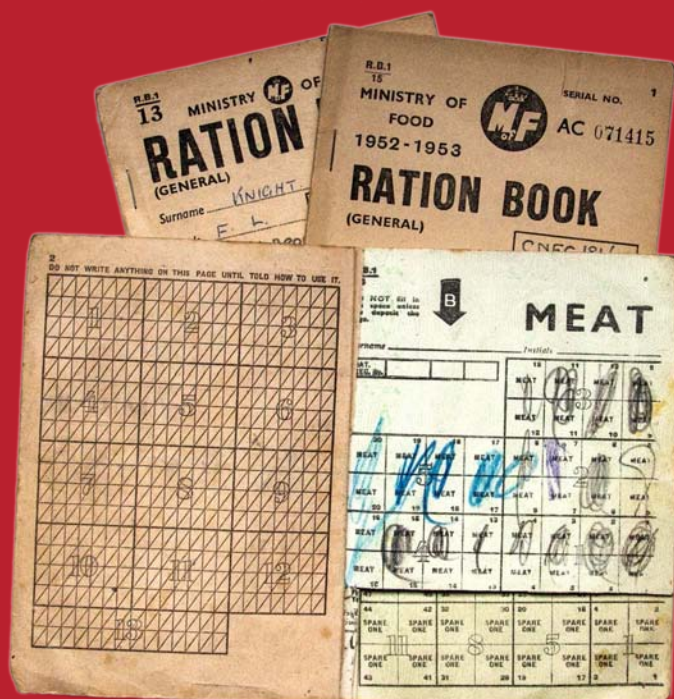

Food Rationing at the Master's House 1939 – 1954



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The Rationing System

Celia Kellett, Friends of The Master's House

World War II began on 3 September 1939 and food rationing began only a few months later on 8 January 1940; by August 1942 nearly all foods except bread and vegetables were rationed.



Before the war, the British government devised **Food Defence Plans** and, in readiness, had imported 55 million tons of food from other countries. World War II began on 3 September 1939. German submarines and planes began attacking our supply ships, hoping to weaken us thus drastically reducing our imports of everything, including food. To prevent shortages, food hoarding, profiteering or big price rises the government introduced a rationing system, which lasted for 14 years, from 1939 to 1954.

The government held a **National Registration Day**, when each family or individual had to register with local suppliers from whom their ration would be bought, no other supplier could be used. Each supplier's details were stamped into each ration book, which contained coupons to be handed to or signed by the shopkeeper every time rationed goods were bought. Ration books came in 7 colours for different groups of people; the main ones were buff for adults, green for pregnant women and blue for children.

Front cover photo:
Pat Strauss

Food Rationing

There were no supermarkets then, so people had to visit the butcher for meat, the baker for bread, the greengrocer for fruit and vegetables and the grocer for tea, sugar and other foods. Shopkeepers were only provided with enough supplies for their registered users. The rationing system made sure that people all got an equal amount of food every week. In addition to the rationed foods people were allowed 16 extra points every month, to use on their choice of other food items. People were also encouraged to grow their own food at home or on their allotment.

In October 1939 the 'Dig for Victory' campaign started, where lawns and flower beds were turned into fruit and vegetable gardens. Chickens, rabbits, goats and pigs were also reared anywhere land was available, including in parks and gardens in towns and cities throughout the land, as a way of providing extra meat. The 'Dig for Victory' campaign encouraged people to grow their own food, in their gardens, on allotments and on any spare ground they could find.

The standard ration varied at different times during the war - the quantities given were for one person for one week, a few were for one month.

FOOD	MAXIMUM	MINIMUM	APRIL 1945
Meat	1s. 2d.	1s.	1s. 2d.
Bacon & Ham	8oz	4oz	4oz
Loose Tea	4oz	2oz	2oz
Cheese	8oz	1oz	2oz (vegetarians had an extra 3oz - instead of meat ration)
Butter	8oz	2oz	2oz
Lard	3oz	2oz	2oz
Sugar	16oz	8oz	8oz
Preserves	1lb jam	8oz	2lb marmalade per month
Sweets	16oz	8oz	12oz per month

Eggs: were rationed and allocated as available, 1 egg per week (or 1 pkt of egg powder (makes 12 'eggs') per month). Children and invalids 3 per week, expectant mothers and vegetarians allowed 2 eggs per week.

Milk: 3 pints per week, with priority for expectant mothers and children under 5 years-old. Older children 3.5 pints and certain invalids up to 14 pints per week. Everyone also received 1 tin of milk powder every 8 weeks (equivalent to 8 pints).

Tinned and dried food: 24 points every 4 weeks.

Bread: was not rationed during the war BUT you could only buy the wholemeal 'national loaf', which was mushy and grey in colour. All bread sold was one day old, BY ORDER. This was easier to cut into really thin slices, and because the smell of newly baked bread encouraged people to eat more when it was fresh.

Fresh fruit and vegetables: were not rationed, but supplies were very limited. Most imported fruit all but disappeared, particularly lemons and bananas; oranges tended to be reserved by greengrocers, for children and pregnant women because of their vitamin C content.

Meat: of all types was rationed from March 1940 by price, (everything else was rationed by weight). 1s. 2d. would buy about 1lb 3oz (540g) of meat. Offal and sausages were only rationed from 1942 to 1944. Pigeon and rabbit were not rationed if you could catch them or buy from a supplier.

Fish: was not rationed, but supplies were limited because of the danger to fishermen by enemy activity. Prices began to rise, until they were officially controlled from 1941 onward.



Everybody got the standard ration, but there were additional supplements for those with certain illnesses and for pregnant women. Diabetics could surrender their sugar coupons in return for extra butter and margarine, cheese and meat. The children's ration included extra foodstuffs to allow for their growth. The armed forces, miners and those working in agriculture or forestry and railway engine crews were allowed slightly more than the standard because of the physical nature of their work.

British Restaurants' were run by local authorities in schools and church halls, they offered a plain 3-course meal for 9 pence and no coupons were needed. In May 1942 an order was passed that meals served in hotels and restaurants were limited to 3 courses, but only one course could contain meat and the whole meal must cost no more than 5 shillings per customer. This was because of public concern that the rich might be unfairly getting 'luxury' foodstuffs.

Money and weights before metrication

£1 = 20 shillings, 1 shilling = 12 pence (= 5p)
 1oz = 28g, 8oz = 226g
 16oz = 1lb = 453g approx, 1 pint = 562ml
 8 pints = 1 gallon = 4.5litres

Apart from needing coupons from your ration book, you also needed money to pay for your rations too.

The End of the War

World War II ended in Europe on 8 May 1945. However rationing continued, and some got even more severe because of the need to feed many people throughout Europe in areas under British Control, whose economies had been devastated by the war. Some used their power by striking, making things even worse, like dock workers who affected imports of fruit and other foodstuffs.

The Summer of 1946 was wet, it rained so much that the wheat crop was ruined and consequently bread and flour rationing had to start. The following winter of 1946-7 in Britain was very cold, with a long hard frost and deep snow which destroyed a vast quantity of stored potatoes, so potato rationing was also needed for a time, until the new crop had been harvested.



End of food rationing

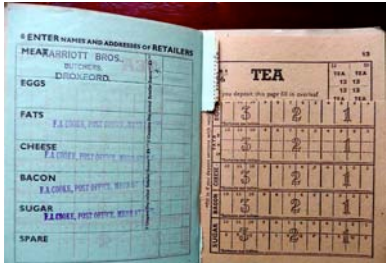
Bread, flour and potatoes all came off ration during 1948, once a new crop had been successfully harvested. In May 1950 rationing ended for canned and dried fruit, chocolate biscuits, treacle, syrup, jellies and mincemeat. Tea rationing ended in October 1952 and in February 1953 sweets came off ration in time for the Coronation on 2 June 1953, and in September that year sugar followed too. It was not until 4 July 1954, more than nine years after the war ended that meat and all the other rationing ended.

Clothes Rationing

The war had made it almost impossible to import goods, including cloth and many other materials needed to make uniforms and parachutes, which were far more important for fighting the war against the Germans, than civilian clothing. Clothes rationing was introduced on 1 June 1941. Cloth at that time was made of natural fibres, like wool, cotton and silk. Modern man-made fibres like nylon and polyester had been invented by then, but their widespread use was not developed until after the war.

People were allocated 66 coupons per year, but this was reduced to only 48 per year in 1942, then 36 in 1943 and only 24 per year in 1945. Utility clothing was introduced, labelled CC41. The 66 coupons allowed the equivalent of one complete outfit each year, although children were allowed an extra 10 to allow for growth, and small sizes had lower coupon values than adult size garments.

The government produced lists of clothing for men and boys, as well as women and girls and how many coupons were required for each. A lined overcoat needed 16 coupons, unlined only 9, mens socks 3, boys socks only 1. A ladies woollen dress needed 11 coupons, a girls only 8, while a pair of shoes needed 5 and a girl only 3 coupons. So to buy a woman's new woollen dress, stockings and a pair of shoes needed money plus 18 coupons (nearly a third of a year's coupons). 'Make do and mend' was the government's motto, with tips in newspapers, magazines and books, on the radio and even special classes on how to give old clothes a new lease of life, by adding a collar or some other trimming, to make clothes look different.



Clothing for children was made out of pillowcases or sheets and dresses from old curtains. Parachute silk was highly prized and mainly used for underwear. Wedding dresses were passed from bride to bride, each used many times with minor changes to try to make them look different. Some brides got married wearing a suit they had, with just a new hat for this special day. You could make your own clothes but still needed coupons to buy cloth. Lace and frills were banned to save materials and in 1942 restrictions on the number of buttons, pockets and pleats were introduced. Some fabrics could be bought without coupons, such as blackout material - this could be bleached and then redyed to make a dress. Clogs became popular with women, although they were supposed to be used for work in factories and farms. Hats were never rationed and second-hand clothes did not need coupons; **clothing exchanges** also became popular.

Other Rationing

Petrol rationing

Within a few weeks of the war starting in September 1939, petrol rationing began. After March 1942 all petrol was reserved for official use only until 1 June 1945, when the civilian ration was restored, but it had to be stopped again in mid-1947, until the following year. A red dye was

now put in petrol for commercial vehicles from 1 June 1948. Its use in private vehicles led to the loss of your driving license for 1 year. Petrol rationing continued until the end of May 1950.

Coal, Gas and Electricity rationing

This began in July 1941, with coal rationing, even though most people only had a coal fire to heat their homes in those days. Coal had to be rationed because so many miners had been called up to serve in the forces. Domestic gas and electricity were added the following March, in 1942. Central heating was prohibited during the summer months. Domestic coal was rationed to 1700lb (760kg) for those living in London and the south of England, where the climate was milder. The rest of the country were allowed 2,200lb (1000kg). Anthracite was a type of coal that was not rationed and much-used in coal-mining areas.

Wood rationing

Utility furniture was designed for those needing to replace what had been destroyed by bombing or the newly married setting up home together. Wooden toys and Christmas trees were all but impossible to obtain.

Paper rationing

At the start of WW2 the newspapers were allowed to use 60% of their pre-war

consumption of newsprint. Three years later in September 1942 paper supply came under the Paper Control Order, controlled by the Ministry of Production. By the end of the war in 1945 newspapers could only use 25% of their pre-war usage. Wrapping paper for most goods was prohibited. The paper shortage made life difficult for authors too, such as George Orwell or Agatha Christie; stories had to be much shorter, so fewer pages were needed. Even so it took a year or two from finishing writing a book to its publication.

Soap rationing

This began in February 1942 covering every type of soap, with coupons allocated by weight or by quantity for liquid soaps. This was vital as soap used precious oils and fats in its manufacture, which were needed for food. The ration was four coupons each month, although babies, invalids and some workers were allowed more. One coupon in 1945 would allow the purchase of 4oz bar of hard soap, 3oz of toilet soap or soap flakes or 6oz of soft soap or powdered soap for washing clothes.

Shortages and Black Markets

Many other things were in short supply and could be very difficult to obtain, because many materials, including rubber, plastics and metals, were largely reserved for military use during the war.

There were shortages of all sorts of everyday items such as razor blades, baby feeding bottles, alarm clocks, frying pans and cooking pots, even balloons for childrens' birthday parties. While rationing ensured everyone received their fair share, this left a gap in the market for those who could afford to pay extra. This gap was filled by those involved in black market activities.

For example, although cigarettes and alcohol were never rationed they were in very short supply during the war, but were readily available to those who knew where to go and had the money to pay for them.

The government fought a never-ending battle with those involved with the black market and introduced severe penalties for anyone caught selling on the black market.



Photo: simpleinsomnia via Visualhunt.com

Rationing in Britain during World War Two

DATE	Food Rationing	Clothes Rationing	Other Rationing
1939 SEPTEMBER			Petrol – official use only after March 1942
1940 JANUARY MARCH JULY SEPTEMBER	Bacon, butter, sugar Meat – all types Tea, margarine Butter cut to 2 ounces		
1941 MARCH JUNE JULY	Jam Eggs	Clothes rationing began	Coal (miners called up to serve in forces)
1942 JANUARY FEBRUARY MARCH JULY AUGUST	Rice, dried fruit Tinned tomatoes, peas Sweets, chocolates (8oz. = 200g) and dried egg Biscuits	Clothes ration cut	
1943	Sausages		
1945	WORLD WAR TWO ENDS BUT RATIONING ON SOME ITEMS CONTINUED, UNTIL 1954. ENDING BEGAN IN JULY 1948		
1946 JULY	Flour rationing – poor harvest due to bad weather		
1949 MARCH		Clothes rationing ended	
1950 MAY SEPTEMBER	Canned/dried fruit, mincemeat, Chocolate biscuits, treacle, syrup, Jellies – rationing ended		Petrol rationing ended Soap rationing ended
1952 OCTOBER	Tea rationing ended		
1953	Sweets and sugar rationing		
1954 JULY	All food rationing ends		