



Children in Wartime

“In 1941 there was a great scare that German spies and fifth columnists were infiltrating the country. My sister and I were fascinated by what we heard about this and decided to keep a careful watch for anyone acting suspiciously. One dark evening we went for a walk and ... faced a number of windows from a group of simple workshop type buildings ... one of them had a small gap through [the window] which we could look inside and see a single man doing something we did not recognise and bring surrounded by hundreds of wire brushes. We decided this was suspicious and when we got home we reported it to my father. He dismissed our concern and within a few weeks he was doing the same wire brush making in our conservatory, having met the man we watched and arranged to make a little money by helping him.”

Frederick Boyce, child in Hertfordshire during WW2

Children actively participated in fundraising events and collected scrap materials for the war effort. During the First World War, the 1st Banbury Scout troop took over an empty shop and set up a waste paper depot. The masses of paper and jumble they collected were sent off to various manufacturers to recycle into new products, with

any money raised being given to the St Dunstons Society for blinded servicemen. Girl Guides in Oxford helped raised money for the war by giving concerts. The children of Oxfordshire also collected conkers, newspapers, rags and metal to aid munition production in the county.

Boy Scouts in Oxford quickly offered their services in the first few days of the First World War. They gathered and formed teams to guard and patrol key sites in the city such as bridges and telegraph lines. In addition to their patrols, children also worked to carry messages and set up first-aid posts around where they lived.

During the First World War, some children tried to join the army by lying about their age. In some cases the child's real age was discovered and they were advised to try again when they reached 18 years old. Even so, some children slipped through the army screening process and become boy soldiers, with some as young as fourteen being sent abroad to fight. Some of these children may have been influenced by propaganda and promises of honour and glory as a soldier, as many adults would have been.

Read the text above again. Can you pick out all the things that wartime children would collect to help the war effort? Place all the objects you think that children collected in the basket!



QUESTION

Lots of the materials above were recycled for the war effort, but do you know why the government asked children to collect conkers?

ANSWER

There is a large amount of starch in conkers which could be made into acetone, an essential chemical in the making of weapons. If the children collected enough conkers, Britain could then produce acetone at home and not have to buy it from other places!