



Britain in the 20th century



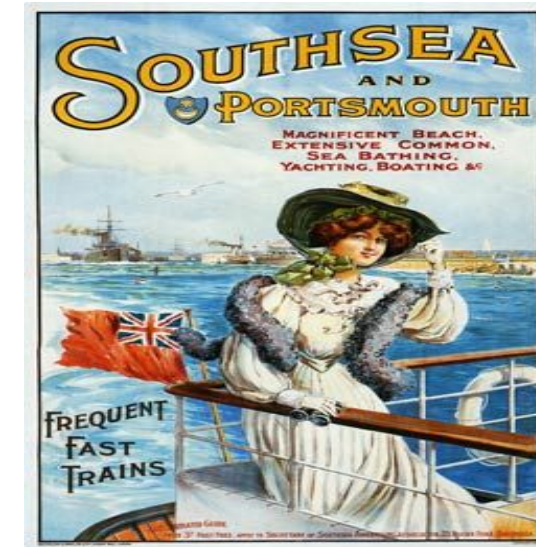
Entering the century



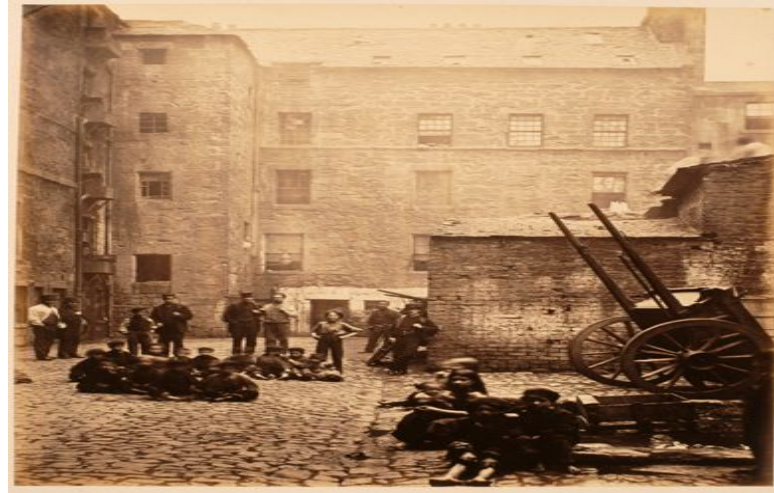
- At the turn of the 20th century > Britain is the world's No1 power, at the peak of its imperial conquest
- However, its political and economic supremacy begins to be threatened by the aspirations of other industrial countries, especially Germany and the USA
- The stability of the Empire > shaken by the home rule movements in Ireland and India
- Socially > genuine improvements in health, education, extending suffrage, women's rights, financial accountability of big companies and banks, etc.
- The price to pay > the enlarged role of the state in implementing reforms and administering the state > retreat from the purely free-market theories and the idea of self-help so precious to the Victorians
- Crisis of faith > the religion of one's parents ceases to be automatically adopted in the face of the challenges of modernity

Edwardian Britain (1900-1910)

- Edward VII ("Bertie") > eldest son of Victoria and Albert
- Sociable, vivacious, loyal, easy-going; however, to Prince Albert, he was a disappointment > the sense of failure accompanied him all his life
- He became a notorious gambler and womanizer > embodiment of the late 19th century decadence
- He became a king at 59
- A popular monarch, recognized for his common touch, great personal charm and interest in public life
- His rule marked the end of the stiff Victorian morals
- Edwardian period – subject of much nostalgia and idealization

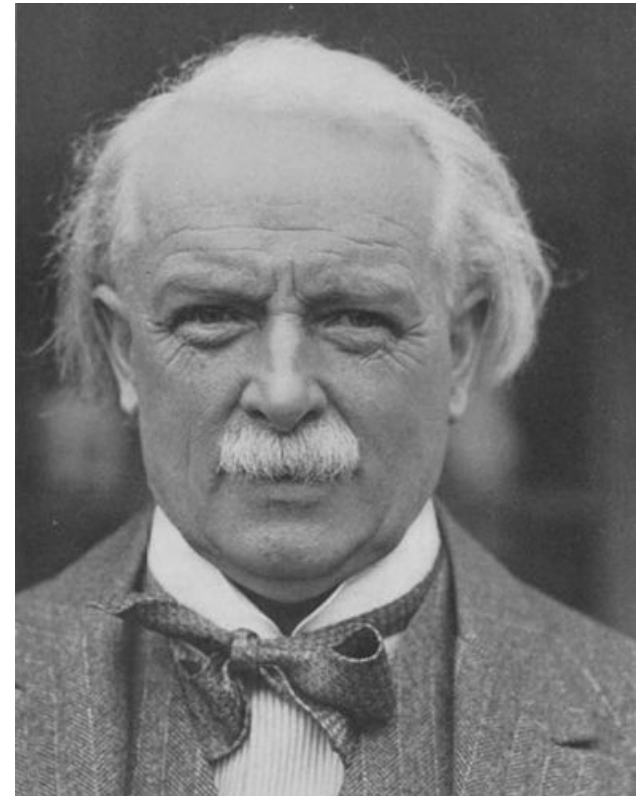


Poverty in Edwardian Britain



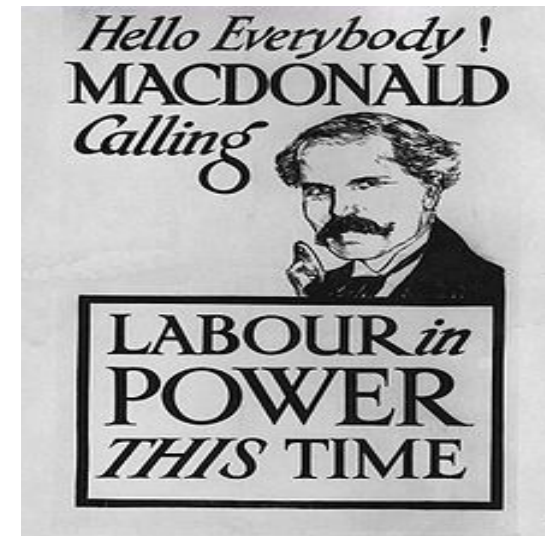
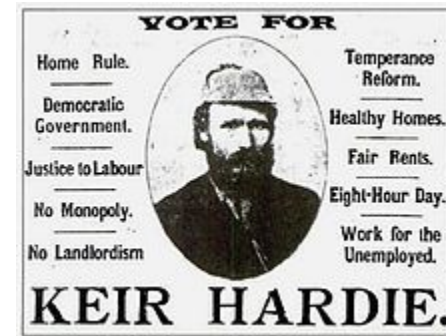
David Lloyd George and wealth redistribution

- Edwardian era- dominated by the liberal party
- 1909 – government produced a so-called **People's Budget**, championed by Chancellor of the Exchequer Lloyd George and his ally W. Churchill
- The budget >revolutionary in that it was built on the principle of **wealth redistribution**
- It introduced taxes on the rich (increased income tax, progressive taxation and duties on inheritance, ownership and sale of property), as well as radical welfare programmes to pay for welfare (pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits, etc.)
- Lloyd George: *This is a war Budget. It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness. I cannot help hoping and believing that before this generation has passed away, we shall have advanced a great step towards that good time, when poverty, and the wretchedness and human degradation which always follows in its camp, will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests".*



Birth of the Labour Party

- Its origins > in the late 19th century increase in the number of urban workers and in the extension of the right to vote to working-class males > a new political party needed to represent their interests and needs
- Established in 1900 at a conference of various socialist groups in Britain
- The name Labour Party > since 1906
- Very important > its association with trade unions
- The first chairman: **Keir Hardie**
- In its beginnings > the party "a largely unimaginative grouping of ageing trade-unionists" (BBC History)
- Its subsequent leader **Ramsay MacDonald** > gave it a new and distinct ideology, based on the relationship between socialism and parliamentary democracy



The Windsors: popular monarchy

- May 1910 – George V. succeeds Edward VII.
- His personality and style – different > rather than on pomp and show, an emphasis on public duty
- In touch with the problems of ordinary Britons, himself leading an “average” lifestyle and having sympathy for various social causes
- -expression: introducing **Orders of the British Empire** to outstanding public personalities to celebrate their contribution to society
- Important move – changing the name of the royal dynasty from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha into **Windsor** (appeal to English patriotism and tradition and separation from the German past of the dynasty)



First World War

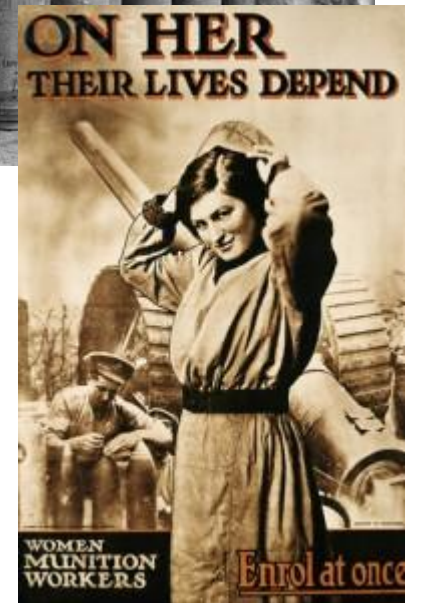
- In 1914 > Europe hadn't experienced a major war for a century
 - The wars taking place among the powers – lasted a few months at most and did not involve too many casualties
- **WWI**
 - 9 million dead (950,000 of them British)
 - end of three empires (Ottoman, Austro-Hung., Russian)
 - most families affected by loss or wounding of a member > a nationwide trauma
 - the British cease to feel "at home" in the world > it becomes an alien place (as expressed in literature of the period)
 - The experience of this war – unlike anything experienced before; totally confusing to most population
 - Positive outcome for Britain > greater democracy (universal right to vote)



Lloyd George's war cabinet

- Lloyd George > heads a **War Cabinet** > the country in a state of **total war** where every individual is to play their part in the war effort
 - compulsory conscription introduced (6 million people > nearly all fit men)
 - Increased agricultural production
 - Introduction of rationing (for meat, sugar and fat)
 - Naval convoy system created > all merchant ships crossing the Atlantic (bringing food from America) travelled in groups under the protection of the British navy > this significantly reduced the threat of German submarine attacks and the danger of Britain being starved to death
- Lloyd George's policies > finally helped Britain to achieve victory in November 1918, but it was a victory at a terrible cost

Women- liberation from domestic service





Post-war reality



- During the 1918 General Election Lloyd George gives a promise of comprehensive reforms of education, housing, health and transport, stating that Britain would become ...“a land fit for heroes to live in“ (=the soldiers)
- Despite his re-election, he remained dependant on the coalition with the Conservatives, who were not interested in implementing such reforms
- The period following the end of the war is accompanied by social tension
 - housing shortage > people start to share house and flats > this leads to creation of slums.
 - High unemployment among demobilised soldiers > 2,000,000 unemployed in 1921
 - Many of the former soldiers turn to begging > rather than heroes, they become a problem

Moreover, Britain grapples with serious economic problems due to stagnating exports and competition from other, more dynamic countries



The spirit of the 1920s

- The 20s – an era of disillusionment with all forms of public life > no fascination of leadership; dead to the idea of responsibility
- However, it was a great time for the arts
- Very few authors concerned with immediate problems of societies > rather, the focus is on private philosophies and exploration of inner world (**Modernism**)
- The most notorious: the **Bloomsbury Group** (an informal circle of intellectuals with avant-garde ideas and attitudes regarding art, literature, morality, sexuality, gender ...)
- Some famous Modernists (Bloomsbury or not) = Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound

- The legacy of the Modernists > problematic in many ways > they established a literary sensibility and an aesthetic canon that excluded common readers or viewers > a highly exclusive form of writing and art > most people consider this avant-garde culture an incomprehensible
- This widened the split between popular and "high culture" continuing to this day
- Most Bloomsbury members > uninterested in the problems of common man; many of them in fact opposed democracy as a vulgarizing social form

Inter-war period

- The mass of English people – obsessed with popular culture > gramophone records, newspapers, fashion, radio (=“wireless“)
- Dancing – a popular means of entertainment (charleston, swing, foxtrot) > dance halls become an important vehicle for mating & dating
- Jazz music is growing popular (developing from ragtime)
- Cinemagoing
- A culture of shopping develops > society turns consumerist



The Flappers

- A term describing a "new breed" of young Western woman
- attributes: short skirts, short hair (a "bob"), went to jazz clubs, excessive makeup, drinking, treating sex in a casual way, smoking, driving cars > challenging the acceptable "ladylike" behaviour
- Boyish physique, divorced from aspects of maternity
- Rather than fulfilling the wife's role – they went out of work; independence was valued
- They voted, but they were often scorned by the suffragettes
- In Britain – they were the product of the growing cultural influence of America

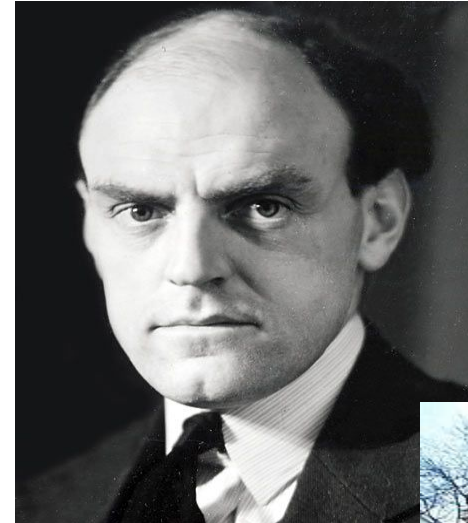
The Flappers # 2

The Stampmith ©20



Foundation of the BBC

- 1922 – the BBC founded (British Broadcasting Company, later Corporation) > the world's first national broadcasting organisation
- Its first manager – a Scot **John Reith** > an iconic figure of high moral standards
- He transformed the BBC into a public-service organization with the aim to *inform, educate and entertain* > a model continuing to this day
- His approach – quite autocratic; ruling the corporation with an iron hand
- Reith - driven by a high-minded vision of bringing culture to the masses > radio seen as a vehicle of education
- The radio service – extended to TV service in the 1930s
- The only problem: the masses prefer entertainment to education > the BBC has to make compromises for most of its history



The Great Depression

- In between 1929-1932 > Britain hit by the Great Depression (the country not yet fully recovered from the economic effects of WWI)
 - beginning- the Stock Market Crash in New York in October 1929
 - The American economic collapse > a domino effect on the world trade
- Unemployment in Britain – up from 1 mil. to 2.5 mil. (20% of insured workforce)
- The most afflicted areas – the industrial and coalmining regions (especially the North of England, Scotland around Glasgow and the South of Wales) > hunger marches
- However, British families were not as hard hit as those in the US because of welfare (unemployment benefit) provided to workless workers



Abdication crisis

- January - 1936 George V dies > his playboy son David succeeds him as Edward VIII > a celebrity figure, very popular
- However, in 1936 he resigns over his decision to marry a divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson
- Simpson – unacceptable for the political establishment (as Head of the Church of England, Edward was not allowed to marry a divorcee)
- Edward – informed on his abdication in a famous BBC broadcast:

"I have found it impossible to carry the heavy burden of responsibility and to discharge my duties as King as I would wish to do without the help and support of the woman I love"
- Edward – succeeded by his shy brother Bertie (George VI) > originally very reluctant, but grew into a much-loved king



Rise of fascism

- The rise in extremism across Europe > reflected in Britain in the figure of Oswald Mosley
- Mosley – an ambitious young Socialist serving in MacDonald's government, from which he resigned in disappointment over the rejection of his Keynesian proposals
- A trip to Mussolini's Italy in 1932 > inspired him to found the British Union of Fascists (BUF)
- He also organized corps of paramilitary stewards (**blackshirts**) > often involved in street fights
- The most famous: **'The Battle of Cable Street'** (an anti-Jewish rally in East End)
- In spite of Mosley's fervour – fascism never caught on in mainstream British politics



Churchill and the outbreak of WWII

- March 39 – Hitler's Reich absorbs Czechoslovakia, marking the failure of appeasement
- Churchill to Chamberlain: "*You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.*"
- 3 September 1939 - Britain declares war on Germany
- Churchill - appointed First Lord of the Admiralty and a member of the War Cabinet (a position he held in the first part of WWI)
- When informed about this, the Board of the Admiralty sent a signal to the Fleet: "**Winston is back**"
- Churchill – a vocal critic of appeasement in his "Wilderness Years" > now ready to assume his role as a wartime leader
- May 1940 – he becomes PM



Brilliant films on Churchill!



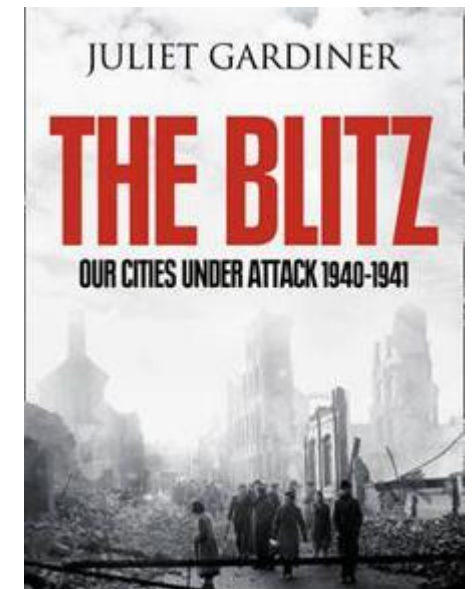
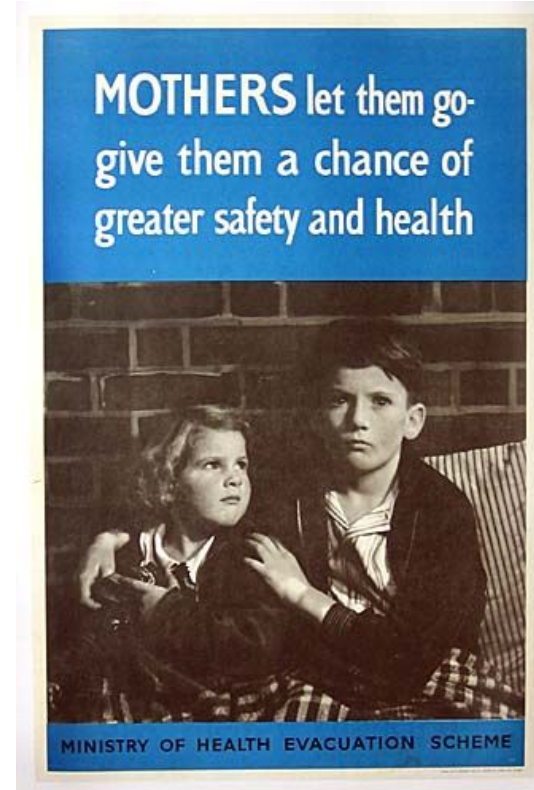
The Blitz

- The Blitz: bombing raids over Britain in 1940-41.
- Targets: industrial and civilian centres (London, Coventry, Birmingham)
- aim = to destroy British morale before planned invasion
- Britons – find refuge in the Tube or home air-raid shelters
- Their bravery and calm during the raids > gave rise to the “myth of the Blitz” (model of civic behavior)

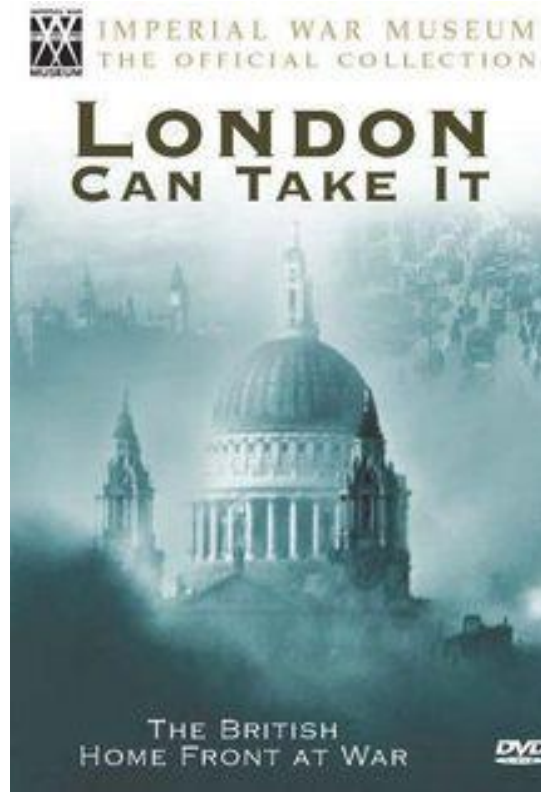


Evacuation

- Following the outbreak of WWII, the government decided on the evacuation of cca 3 million people to rural places safe from German air attacks
 - the biggest and most concentrated transfer of population in British history
 - The majority of evacuees: children
 - Name of the evacuation: Operation Pied Piper
 - The transfer: coordinated by teachers and volunteers
 - Each child receiving a foster family upon arrival
- Overall, the operation was a success and a logistic wonder
- Many children – benefited from the healthy environment of the country
 - The evacuation > helped raise awareness of poverty of urban children and contributed to bringing the classes together
- > One the result of this > a move towards the Welfare State after the War



Historical document: *London Can Take It*



□ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLgfSDtHFt8>

Post-war period





Post-war period

1945 – election victory of the Labour Party
(Churchill defeated)

A new era in politics – building the welfare state (a
“New Jerusalem”) > the country moves to the left
The hardships of the Great Depression + WWII >
create a political will for a more egalitarian (and
socialist) regime

- nationalization of industries, growth of the public
sector

“consensus politics” > the trend is respected by both
Labour and Conservatives

The arrival of Thatcherism

- The mixed economy (state and private sector in the economy) > delivers good wages to workers + unparalleled equality and social mobility
- However, 1970s brought an economic crisis which showed the weaknesses of the system (over-regulation and emphasis on full employment makes industry uncompetitive; trade unions become too powerful and dictatorial)
- a series of crippling industrial strikes > end of Labour rule, Margaret Thatcher becomes Prime Minister in 1979
- Britain embraces free market economy
- “TINA” (There Is No Alternative = i.e. to free market Capitalism) > a situation lasting ti this day
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