



Immediate Release

## Fashion on the Ration: 1940s Street Style

5 March – 31 August 2015

Press View 4 March 2015

To mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1945, IWM London is launching a major new exhibition *Fashion on the Ration*, exploring how fashion survived and even flourished during wartime.

During the Second World War British men and women had to find new ways to dress as austerity measures and the rationing of clothes took hold. They demonstrated amazing adaptability and ingenuity by adopting more casual styles and by renovating, recycling and creating their own clothes. Bringing together **300 exhibits** including **clothing, accessories, photographs** and **film, official documents** and **publications, artworks, wartime letters, interviews** and **ephemera**, some of which have never been on display before, *Fashion on the Ration* presents a sense of what life was like on the home front for men and women during wartime Britain.

Divided into six sections, *Fashion on the Ration* will reveal the reality of living in Second World War austerity Britain, by focusing on what people wore, their sense of identity and how they coped with the demands and deprivations of wartime restrictions and shortages.

- **Into Uniform** looks at how Second World War Britain became a nation in uniform, arguably the biggest visible change to how people dressed at the time. Many key pieces of uniform, both from the men's and women's services, will be on display revealing the pride and even jealousies felt by those stepping into uniform for war service.
- **Functional Fashion** explores how the demands of wartime life changed the way civilians dressed at work and at home, inspiring retailers to sell innovative and stylish products, such as gas-mask handbags, blackout buttons and siren suits, all of which will be on display.
- **Rationing and Make do and Mend** will look at why clothes rationing was introduced in 1941, how the scheme worked and how it changed the shopping habits of the nation. With limited options for buying new clothes, people were encouraged to be creative and make clothes last longer by mending, altering, knitting and creating new clothes out of old material. Items on display include a bridesmaid's dress made from parachute material, a bracelet made from aircraft components, a child's coat made from a blanket and on display for the first time a bra and knickers set made from RAF silk maps for Countess Mountbatten.
- **Utility Clothing** was introduced in 1941 to tackle unfairness in the rationing scheme and standardise production to help the war effort. Utility fashion ranges were made from a limited range of quality controlled fabrics and this section will feature a catwalk of pieces, including a lady's cotton summer dress, underwear, a tweed sports jacket and leather gloves, and a girl's velvet green winter dress. Clothing restricted by 'Austerity Regulations' such as shoes with a maximum two inch heel will also be featured.
- **Beauty as Duty** examines the lengths to which many women went, to maintain their personal appearance – and the pressure they felt to do so. On display will be adverts promoting war-themed make-up such as Tangee's lipstick for 'lips in uniform'. Cosmetics and clothing often had a patriotic edge to them as shown in a colourful display of scarves by Mayfair fashion house Jacmar, with wartime slogans such as "Salvage Your Rubber" and "Switch That Light Off". By

wearing these items women were able to overtly demonstrate they were doing their bit for the war effort.

- **Peace and a new look?** This section looks at how the end of the war impacted upon fashion, and considers the long-term impact. On display will be a 'VE' print dress worn by the comedienne Jenny Hayes to celebrate the end of the war, and an example of the ubiquitous demob-suit, issued to men leaving the military services. In 1947, the launch of Christian Dior's ostentatious 'New Look' shook the fashion world desperate for something new after years of pared down wartime fashion. The exhibition ends with a special installation capturing the thoughts of leading fashion commentators, such as *Great British Sewing Bee's* Patrick Grant and fashion historian Amber Butchart discussing the legacy of the Second World War upon fashion.

***Fashion on the Ration*** is an exhibition about coping in the face of adversity and how fashion and style were maintained and even flourished during the Second World War, the impact of which can still be seen on British style and the high-street today.

**Admission: Adults £10, Concessions £7, Children (aged 15 and under) £5. Box office 020 7416 5000, tickets are also available online, please visit: [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)**

## #RationedFashion

### Highlights include:



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*Blackout accessories for sale, Selfridges London, (1940)*  
Ministry of Information Official Photograph

**Detail:** A woman pins a luminous flower onto her jacket lapel and consults her reflection at Selfridge's department store in London. These flowers were prettier than the plain button badges and luminous discs that were also available, but did the same job: making the wearer more visible to other pedestrians and motorists on the dark streets of the blackout.



©IWM EPH 3218  
*Bridesmaid dress made from parachute silk (1945)*  
Clothing

**Detail:** Second World War period (British Home Front) bridesmaid's dress made for and worn by Janet Saunders for the wedding of Ted Hillman (4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment) and Ruby Mansfield in 1945.



©IWM EQU 3967  
Respirator Carrier Handbag  
Accessory

**Detail:** Respirator and carrier: standard civilian pattern respirator with a black rubber mask and metal filter contained within the base of a black leather lady's clutch handbag.



©IWM EPH 3931  
Jacqmar scarf, 'Salvage Your Rubber'  
Accessory

**Detail:** A Second World War period British propaganda scarf by Jacqmar of London, containing numerous representations of domestic objects, with exhortations to save rubber and recycle goods in general. Jacqmar made propaganda scarves from 1940-1945. They were based in Mayfair (16 Grosvenor Street) and many were produced for the export market as well as for wartime sweethearts, particularly in London. The chief designer was Arnold Lever who continued working for the company even after he had joined the RAF. The scarves fall into three main thematic groups of the armed forces, allies and home front. They usually have the Jacqmar name on the scarf.



©IWM PST 8774  
Never Was So Much Owed By So Many To So Few (1940)  
Poster



©IWM ART PST 2832  
Join the ATS (1941)  
Abram Games  
Poster

– Ends –

For further information, including interviews and image requests please contact:  
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### Notes to Editors:

This exhibition comprises 300 pieces of clothing, artifacts, photographs and film, vintage documents and publications, art works, written and oral accounts and ephemera.

### IWM London

IWM London - IWM's flagship branch - tells the stories of those whose lives have been shaped by war through the depth, breadth and impact of our Galleries, displays and events. Visit our brand new First World War Galleries featuring over 1,300 objects from IWM's collections, explore what life was like at home during the Second World War in [A Family in Wartime](#); delve into the world of espionage in [Secret War](#); visit our award-winning [Holocaust Exhibition](#); discover stories of bravery in [The Lord Ashcroft Gallery: Extraordinary Heroes](#); see work by some of Britain's most significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century artists in our [art galleries](#) or take in our latest major temporary exhibitions. Our family learning sessions and events encourage debate and challenge people's perceptions of war.

Open daily from 10am – 6pm (except 24 - 26 December)

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### Publications:

***Fashion the Ration: Style in the Second World*** by Julie Summers. Published by Profile Books, £16.99 in Hardback.

### IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches attract over 2 million visitors each year. [IWM London](#), our flagship branch, marks the Centenary of the First World War with new permanent First World War Galleries and a new Atrium with iconic large object displays. Our other branches are [IWM North](#), housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; [IWM Duxford](#), a world-renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; [Churchill War Rooms](#), housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser [HMS Belfast](#).

### First World War Centenary

**2014 - 2018** marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM will mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country. For more information, visit [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org).

