In 1939 the railways found themselves in a similar situation to where they had been 25 years earlier. On 3rd September of that year, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced solemnly on radio that Britain was at war with Germany. However, rather than entering the conflict from a period of relative prosperity, the “Big Four” railway companies – the LMS, LNER, GWR and Southern Railways – were suffering from a distinct lack of money and resources well before the declaration had even been made. They had managed to survive the Great Depression of the late ‘20s and ‘30s, but only just, and to be plunged into a war in 1939 was the last thing they needed.

“Operation Pied Piper”

One of the first effects on the railway companies, which were taken - as in WW1 - under government control, was the need for Evacuation trains. These were needed immediately and plans, referred to as “Operation Pied Piper”, had been in place for some time. So it was that, two days before the September 3rd announcement, the evacuation of children and others began. It was a huge undertaking, and in the first 3 days, some 1.5 million people, over 800,000 of which were children of school age, were displaced from their urban homes, and sent to relative safety in the country. Other groups included were young mothers, children under 5, pregnant mothers, disabled persons and teachers and other helpers. This was a voluntary scheme, but many took up the offer, feeling that there would be too many risks in staying in the cities.

The trains in which the evacuees travelled were specially laid on, but the evacuees themselves did not know exactly what was happening or where they were meant to be going. They travelled with a minimum of luggage: one small suitcase with as many clothes as could be packed inside; some food for the journey, such as sandwiches; a regulation issue gasmask in a cardboard box, and a small paper label with the evacuees’ name and address. The carriages in which they travelled were often ones without corridor connections, which meant that there was no opportunity to get to a toilet en-route, especially as the compartments were also locked for safety at the start of the journey and not unlocked until the end!

When the evacuees arrived at their destinations they were usually taken to a building such as a Town Hall, where the process of “billeting” would be carried out. This was when the children and others were allocated to stay with a particular family or person (this was known as their “billet”). Often the evacuees would not be the ones that the people receiving them had expected, but everyone had to make do with the situation.
The initial period of the war was to become known as “The Phoney War” in that the expected attacks did not immediately come. Several thousand of those who had been evacuated returned to the cities within a few months, and many would be evacuated again once the prospects of invasion looked even more likely following the Fall of France in May 1940

The Effect on the Railways

Aside from the evacuation, there were many other effects on the railways in wartime which greatly affected the lives of those who travelled and worked on them. At the outbreak of war, station nameplates, as well as road signs, were removed. The reason for this was to prevent the enemy from knowing where they were in the event of an invasion. This meant that, often, travellers unfamiliar with a route or an area would not know where they were. As it was regarded as suspicious behaviour if any stranger was to ask where they were, it became extremely difficult to find the way around. Indeed, so awkward did the war make railway travel, that posters stated: “Is Your Journey Really Necessary?” – a plea to reduce the number of unnecessary journeys to the bare minimum. This was meant to lessen the strain on everyday services, which were being changed and cut, often at short notice, to make way for trains carrying troops and equipment.

In addition to the removal of signs, the railways were also required to comply with the Blackout Regulations, which meant that no building should show any form of light after dusk. The reason for this was that, when it was dark, in the era before the use of infra-red “night vision” and other such technological advances, enemy planes (particularly bombers) would be unable to identify their targets and get their bearings using easily spotted landmarks, e.g. towns and cities, on the ground. Blackout curtains were installed in the windows of all buildings, including stations, with all exterior lights switched off.

Railway carriages’ lights were dimmed, with bright bulbs replaced by ones which glowed a dim blue. There were blinds on carriage windows to keep even this low level of light safely inside. On the engine footplate itself, thick canvas was hung between the cab and tender to prevent the bright glow from the engine’s firebox being spotted from above. Problems encountered included people getting off at the wrong stations, passengers falling off almost invisible platform edges and goods yard staff being unable to read destination labels in dark conditions.

Austerity Measures

The continuing war also affected the railways in other ways. With an absence of skilled men and resources it became more difficult to maintain the rolling stock. The glamorous expresses, with their brightly liveried engines and carriages, were no more and the LMS’s streamlined “Coronations” were painted plain black and then slowly stripped of their streamlining to make maintenance easier. To be fair, the streamlining had been more of a publicity gimmick rather than something which was actually economical, as any small speed benefits were cancelled out by the extra coal consumption of the heavier streamlined engines!
The LNER’s fleet of streamlined A4s fared slightly better, keeping all of their streamlined cladding above footplate level but losing most of that around the wheels. Like the LMS locos, when in the workshops, these were repainted in plain black as an economy measure. One of these A4s, “Gadwall”, was wrecked in an air raid in 1942 when a bomb hit the York train shed where it was housed.

Servicing became less and less frequent during the course of the war, and some locos ran for long periods without proper maintenance. Loads hauled were also much greater than before and it was not unknown for a passenger locomotive to pull a train made up of around 20-25 carriages.

The War Affects Production

The huge locomotive works, such as those in Scotland, e.g. Cowlairs, St. Rollox and the North British company in Glasgow, had their vast production lines turned over to the making of such vital items as components for Rolls Royce Merlin engines (as used in the Spitfire and Mosquito aircraft) as well as gliders which would take part in D-Day in 1944. They consequently became prime targets for German bombers.

Locomotive production was confined to making engines that were going to be essential to the war effort. Austerity was the key word, with engines made which would be stripped of all excesses and easy to maintain. Such designs were the War Department Heavy Freight 2-8-0s and 2-10-0s, 0-6-0 Saddle Tanks (some later known as LNER J94) as well as the unique Q1 class 0-6-0s built by the Southern Railway. Many of the engines produced would be immediately shipped abroad to help with the movement of men and equipment across Europe following the June 1944 D-Day landings. The Bo’ness and Kinneil Railway has four “Austerity” 0-6-0 STs in various stages of condition, with one of these (War Department (WD) 75254) in operation on the railway.

What Came Next?

The “Big Four” companies would never really recover from the consequences of the war. While many of the designs of the 1920s and ‘30s had demonstrated just how capable they were of maintaining maximum performance with a minimum of outlay, the whole railway system was on its knees. The companies’ income during the war had been capped and once the conflict was over they simply did not have the resources to cope with the enormous backlog of repairs and reconstruction which had built up over the last 6 years. By 1947, with a Labour government in power after its landslide election victory of 1945, proposals for nationalising the railways became a reality, and on 1st January 1948 the era of the “Big Four” was over.
WORLD WAR II:
EVACUATION

Operation Pied Piper was the name given to the massed evacuation of around 1.5 million people, including 800,000 children, from Britain’s cities to the countryside, which took place on September 1st, 1939.

Imagine that you are an evacuee going to an unknown destination to stay with complete strangers. Write in the box below at least six words that would describe how you are feeling.

When you get on to the train, all your possessions, apart from your gas mask, have to fit into a small suitcase. If you were being evacuated now, what would you take with you and why? You are limited to taking ten things which will fit inside. Write below what you would take and why you would take it.

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Before World War II began, Scotland’s railway factories, such as North British Ltd.’s Works in Glasgow, had produced locomotives which were sent all over the world. With the outbreak of war, many of these factories switched much of their production to making essential items such as parts for weapons and aeroplanes, while some still made locomotives which were needed for the war effort.

Many women began to find employment in these factories and, like the rest of the workers, were often making components without knowing what the intended use was!

Why were women suddenly to be found working in these factories? Clue: What were most of the men doing at this time? Write your answer in the box below.

Why do you think that the workers in the factories were often unaware of what the components that they were making were going to be used for? Use the box below for your answer.
WORLD WAR II: WARTIME RESTRICTIONS

During the conflict there were certain restrictions placed on what people could and could not do when travelling on the railways.

During the war what would have happened to the station sign on the right? Why was this done and why would it make it difficult for passengers? Write your answer in the space below.

Below are shown some of the things on the railway which are usually lit at night-time, e.g. the fire in the cab. Think of how the railway staff could help to enforce the blackout and keep things dark. Write in the space provided.
WORLD WAR II:
AUSTERITY

Austerity happens when a Government puts measures in place to reduce or completely stop spending on certain non-essential activities. Austerity measures were carried out during World War II and meant that certain things, which had been commonplace, either stopped or were restricted.

Look at the railway posters below. Which ones would not have been allowed to be used during wartime and why?

1. The Silver Jubilee
2. The Coronation Scot
3. Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh!
4. InterCity Sleepers

Write your answers in the box below.
During the world wars various different types of wagons and vans were used to help the war effort.

On the left is a picture of a gunpowder van. This was built in 1922, between the two world wars. Write in the space below some reasons why you think it is made of metal on the outside and wood on the inside.

Look for the 1941-built tank wagon pictured right.

What contribution would this have made to the war effort in World War II? Write your answer in the space below.

Coal wagons, such as the one pictured left, played a vital role in helping to win the war? Why were they so important? Use the space below to write your answer.
During wartime there were vehicles specially made for transporting supplies, and many other vehicles were adapted for wartime use.

The Duke of Sutherland’s personal saloon (right) was used by Winston Churchill during World War II. Why would the Prime Minister have used a vehicle like this? Write in the space below.

See if you can find the “rectank” wagon (pictured left). It is carrying a tank. What other wartime loads do you think might have been carried by a wagon such as this and how could they have been loaded and unloaded? Write your answers in the space below.

Draw your own wartime load on top of the rectank wagon below.
HOW TO MAKE A GAS MASK

To make each gas mask you will need the following materials:

- 1 sheet of A3 black card (around 260 gsm or thicker)
- A photocopy or print of the mask template on card
- Thin cellophane plastic film (green or clear) – this usually comes in a roll.
- Bubble-wrap (1 piece approx. 10cm x 10cm square)
- 1 piece of elastic (preferably black) approx. 15cm long
- Ballpoint pen, pencil, sellotape, scissors and stapler

Instructions:

The outline

- Using a copy of the template in the pack on card, cut round the outline, then cut out the eye holes and filter hole (see right). Keep the cut-out filter hole circle as you will need it later.
- Draw round the outline and filter hole/eye holes and cut out the mask shape, eyes and filter hole.

Making the eye protectors

- Cut out two pieces of plastic film slightly larger than the eye holes
- Tape them in position behind each eye hole (see right).

Making the filter holder

- Cut a strip of black card approx. 5 cm wide from the top of the A3 black card.
- Bringing the ends together to make a cylinder, try it out for size in the filter hole and tape the ends together (see right).

Making the filters

- Use the cut-out nose hole to draw with a ballpoint pen on to the flat side of the bubble wrap to make two circles. Cut these out carefully.
- Stick little pieces of sellotape around the edge of the bubble-wrap circles (see right)
- Stick one circle on the top of the filter cylinder (see right).
- Stick the other on the cylinder base (see right)
- Attach the filter cylinder to the front of the mask but put the tape on the back of the filter hole.

Adding the elastic

- Cut a piece of elastic approx. 15 cm in length. Staple it to the back of the mask at the edges, making sure that the elastic is halfway up on the outside of each eyehole (right)

You now should have a copy of a 1940s gas mask.
Why not make a cardboard box to keep it in?

Keep it safe! Remember: there may be a gas attack at any moment!

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GAS-MASK TEMPLATE

Copy this on to thick card, cut out and use as a template over thick black card

THE MUSEUM OF SCOTTISH RAILWAYS
World War II Mini Pack

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