

Half a Crown) and a Five Shilling piece (Crown) which was largely out of circulation by the 1950's and was minted for special occasions. There were also Notes : 10 Shilling Note; 1 Pound Note, 5 Pound notes etc.



The cost of living is difficult to equate between then and now. During the 1950's the average wage increased from £5 per week to £9. Inflation across the decade ran at 43% so there was a noticeable improvement in the standard of living. However, in comparison with 2020 where the average weekly wage is around £500 - £14.53 in 1950's terms, people were still hard pressed. Housing though was then very cheap. The average house price in 1952 was £1891 (£35,400 in today's value). By 1959 prices had inflated to £2170 (£35,400 in today's value). This was 380 and 241 times the average salary respectively. Now the average price (2020) is around £285,000 – 570 times the average salary. Borrowing, however, was not quite so easy and restrictions on mortgages were then much tougher.

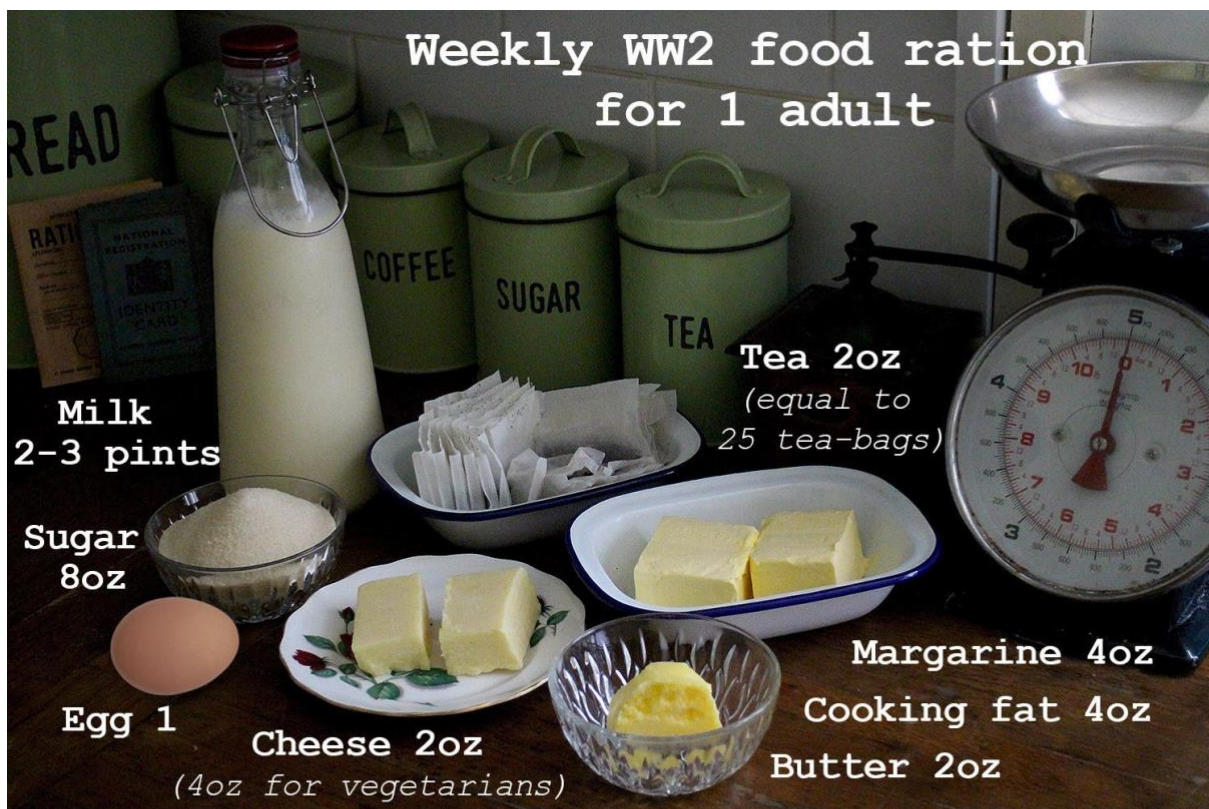
By today's standards, however, the new and emerging technology cost a fortune:

1951	Murphy 12 inch Television	cost £80	£1,800 in today's value
1961	Murphy 17 inch Television	“ £69	£1,100 “
1958	Servis Washing Machine	“ £59-10s-0d.	£1,388 “
1959	K.E.C. Refrigerator	“ £72	£1,687 “
1959	Toaster	“ £6- 10s-9d	£141 “
1957	Austin A35 Car	“ £569-17s-0d	£21,090 “

In the 1950's 1/3 of income was spent on food and disposable income was extremely limited. Now (2016) it is just 10.5%. Bearing in mind that £1 in 1950 is worth £34.40 in 2020, some comparison of cost can be roughly calculated.

Item	Cost then	Cost now	Item	Cost then	Cost now
Baked Beans	10d	£1.41	Orange Squash	3s-3d	£5.52
Peas (canned)	1s-1d	£1.84	Biscuits	11d	£1.55
Tomato Soup	1s-1.5d	£1.91	Porridge Oats	1s-1d	£1.84
H.P. Sauce	10.5d	£1.48	Corn Flakes	1s-4.5d	£2.33
Instant Coffee	2s-9d	£4.67	Toilet paper (Izal)	1s-2d	£1.98

Food, then, was generally more expensive than now, and, of course, it was not freely available until the early 1950's because of rationing. Since so much of our food was imported and because of the German U-Boat campaign designed to starve the nation into submission, it became immediately necessary to impose rationing as a fair and equitable way to distribute limited supplies. Petrol was the first to be rationed in 1939 followed on January 8th 1940 by restrictions on bacon, butter and sugar and later meat, jam, biscuits, breakfast cereals, cheese, eggs, lard, milk and canned and dried fruit. Almost all of these controlled items were rationed by weight except meat which was rationed by price. The typical weekly food ration for an adult comprised:



+ 16 points per month on the points system

Fish, vegetables and fruit were not rationed but supplies were limited. Some types of imported fruit all but disappeared. Lemons and bananas became unobtainable. Oranges tended to be reserved for pregnant women and children and even home grown apples were often limited to 1 each. Most controversial was bread which was not rationed until 1947. The 'National Loaf' of wholemeal bread replaced the ordinary white variety to the distaste of housewives who found it mushy, grey and indigestible. Fish was not rationed but prices

increased considerably as the war progressed and neither was alcoholic beverages like wine and whisky but all became scarce. Beer was the exception. Considered vital as a morale booster production was maintained but as ingredients became scarce even this was watered down.

There were several tiers of rationing – The Standard tier; Army and Navy Rations; Special Civilian Rations (ie miners, and Special Supplementary Rations for Invalids.

As the war progressed rationing was extended to other commodities such as clothing which was rationed on a point system. In the beginning the allowance was 66 points for adults with 10 extra points allocated to children, but as time went on the points were reduced to 24 points in 1946 severely restricting what could be purchased.

Men and Boys	Adult	Child
Unlined mackintosh or cape	9	7
Other mackintoshes, or raincoat, or overcoat	16	11
Coat, or jacket, or blazer or like garment ..	13	8
Waistcoat, or pull-over, or cardigan, or jersey	5	3
Trousers (other than fustian or corduroy) ..	8	6
Fustian or corduroy trousers	5	5
Shorts	5	3
Overalls, or dungarees or like garment ..	6	4
Dressing-gown or bathing gown	8	6
Night-shirt or pair of pyjamas	8	6
Shirt, or combinations—woollen	8	6
Shirt, or combinations—other material ..	5	4
Pants, or vest, or bathing costume, or child's blouse	4	2
Pair of socks or stockings	3	1
Collar, or tie, or pair of cuffs	1	1
Two handkerchiefs	1	1
Scarf, or pair of gloves or mittens	2	2
Pair of slippers or goloshes	4	2
Pair of boots or shoes	7	3
Pair of leggings, gaiters or spats	3	2

Women and Girls	Adult	Child
Lined mackintoshes, or coats (over 28 in. long)	14	11
Jacket, or short coat (under 28 in. in length)	11	8
Dress, or gown, or frock—woollen	11	8
Dress, or gown, or frock—other material ..	7	5
Gym tunic, or girl's skirt with bodice ..	8	6
Blouse, or sports shirt, or cardigan, or jumper	5	3
Skirt, or divided skirt	7	5
Overalls, or dungarees or like garment ..	6	4
Apron, or pinafore	3	2
Pyjamas	8	6
Nightdress	6	5
Petticoat, or slip, or combination, or cami-knickers	4	3
Other undergarments, including corsets ..	3	2
Pair of stockings	2	1
Pair of socks (ankle length)	1	1
Collar, or tie, or pair of cuffs	1	1
Two handkerchiefs	1	1
Scarf, or pair of gloves or mittens, or muff	2	2
Pair of slippers, boots or shoes	5	3

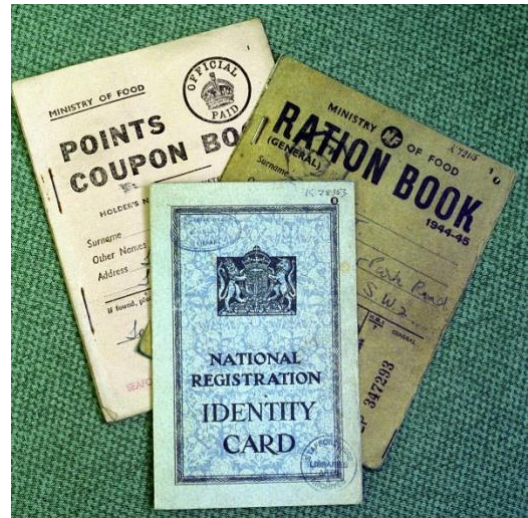
Rations were also introduced for Soap, Coal and Paper, and, not surprisingly, many consumer goods were affected by a shortage of components. Razor Blades, Baby bottles, alarm clocks and cooking pans for example were all hard to come by. Petrol was further restricted. In 1942 the civilian petrol ration was cancelled and petrol only became available to official users. Fuel supplies to approved users was then dyed and the use of this for non-essential purposes became an offence.

In addition to rationing the Government equalized the food supply through subsidies on items consumed by the poor and working class to make them more affordable. In 1942-3 £145 million was spent on food subsidies including £35 million on bread, flour and oatmeal, £23 million on meat, £11 million on milk and £13 million on eggs.

Access to rations was cleverly and robustly controlled. In the first instance everyone had to get an Identity Card. To do this housewives collected together the whole family's birth certificates and took them to the local Church Hall, School or somewhere similar for registration. Later equipped with Identity Cards they were allotted the appropriate ration

books, generally buff in colour for adults and blue for children. These were, in turn, taken to the local grocers and butchers to be registered for ration supply.

A Ration Book contained coupons – very small squares- one for each week. These provided what was considered our basic needs – tea, cheese, butter, margarine, bacon, porridge, wheat flakes, shredded wheat, lard, sugar and eggs. Each week, then, housewives went to their appointed grocery shop, handed the grocer the families ration books and he would cut out that week's coupons. These coupons were then sent to the Ministry of Food to be counted. That way they could calculate how much the grocer's supplies should be. Generally, you were given what the grocer had been supplied with. At the butchers there was also little choice. The butcher could only sell what he had been issued with. Again the weekly coupon was cut out.



There was no shopping around. All food, milk and meat prices were set by the Ministry of Food so prices were the same in every shop in the U.K. Under the Retail Price Maintenance Scheme this also applied to off-ration goods as an attempt to be fair to everybody during the shortages.

Stage by stage, as the world recovered and the economy picked up, rationing was abandoned. The first to be liberated was flour in 1948 as imports from America regained some normality. Clothing followed in 1949 with petrol, canned and dried fruit, chocolate, biscuits, treacle and mincemeat coming off ration in 1950. Tea followed in 1952 and sweets, sugar and butter in 1953. Finally, Meat, cheese and fat were de-rationed in July 1954. The most visible signs of austerity were finally over.

There was no obesity crisis in the 1940's, neither was there any malnutrition. Surprisingly, rationing improved the health of the British people. Infant mortality declined and life expectancy rose. This was because it ensured that everyone had access to a varied diet with enough vitamins. As the war progressed housewives were bombarded with ingenious and eccentric ideas to vary the diet on limited ingredients. Carrots, for example, were used as an alternative to fruit in cakes, roasted chicory and dandelion root were used in place of scarce coffee, even liquid paraffin was used as a alternative to cooking fats in frying and pastry making. People once again demonstrated their incredible ability to 'make do and mend'!

Working life was also very different. The employment profile has changed considerably over the years :

	1950s	2020
Population	50 million	62.5 million
Total Workforce	23 million	32 million
Employment by sex	Men: 96%, Women 46%	Men: 75%, Women 66%
Part-time	4%	26%
Number of Private Sector Firms	160,000	4.5 million
Working Hours	40 – 48	37
Holidays	16 days /year	Minimum 28 days
Occupations:		
Manufacturing	8.7 million	2.5 million
Mining and Quarrying	880,000	60,000
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	725,000	460,000
Public Sector	6 million	6 million

Very clearly there have been seismic shifts in the occupation of the British workforce. In the 1950's national wealth creation depended very largely upon manufacturing and mining - the heavy industries situated predominantly in the coalfield areas of the North, the Midlands and South Wales, creating and engineering metal goods for world-wide distribution. Working practices were heavily reliant upon man-power. Machines were man-operated and unsophisticated by modern standards and assembly of parts was a manual task at bench or assembly line. As demand and pressure for production soared in the post-war age it was men rather than machine that took the brunt of the stress as they were exhorted to work faster and more efficiently. The culture of boss and workers was clear cut and the tendency to dictatorship over collegiality was blatant. There was little employment protection beyond the protestations of the Union Shop Steward and bosses could therefore hire and fire at will. As production increased, so the same pressures were filtered through to the office, banks and distributors etc. throughout the chain. Even Schools were not immune as the post-war bulge of children were fed into an already strained system. Working hours were everywhere longer than they are today. In Mine, Mill and Factory 7.30am to 5pm was the norm, often with Saturday morning working, Similarly, in shops 9am to 5.30pm was usual, 5 and a half days per week with a half-day closing usually on Wednesday, whilst Office workers, seen as something apart, were exceptional in working 9am to 5pm, 40 hours per week. Even Schools universally worked through to 4pm. Everywhere, however, there was a culture of respect and formality seldom evident today, a recognisable chain of command from lowly apprentice to Managing Director, each tier having its own standards and attributes right down to the clothes you were expected to wear. There was a universal demand for civility, honesty, standards and discipline and little reluctance to put you in your place if they slipped.

In an age where few families had cars, transport to work was by public transport. In non-metropolitan areas this was most usually by bus or tram. This meant that the daily commute was relatively short. Most people lived within 6 to 8 miles of their place of work. By the 1950's the economy and flexibility of buses had largely seen off trams and they became the chief form of public transport for the suburban masses. Timetables could easily be adjusted to demand to maximise convenience, and fares, sometimes subsidised, were very affordable. Most suburban buses were double decked with the upper level reserved for smokers and the lower deck strictly non-smoking. At peak commuter times the top deck was usually packed with passengers and it was unhealthily thick with smog. 80% of men and 40% of women then smoked – a legacy, perhaps, of wartime stress and the continuing pains of austerity.

Calming nerves was part of the national strategy post-war. Whilst the workforce may not have noticed much change in the daily grind there was a comforting change of mood. The utopian vision of Beveridge's 'cradle to grave' social security system was shaped into reality. Between 1945 and 1948 the Labour Government launched the new 'Welfare State' with Acts designed to protect the public from adversity, to define a minimum standard of living and alleviate poverty and want. The 1946 National Insurance Act established the framework. For a universal weekly contribution from both employer and employee, verified by the purchase of a National Insurance Stamp, workers became entitled to : Unemployment Benefit; Incapacity Benefit; Invalidity Benefit; State Earnings Related Old Age Pension; Widowed Mothers and Parents Allowance and Assistance with Funerals. Protection against unemployment and sickness was rated at 26 shillings per week (42 shillings for married men) but 156 contributions were required to activate cover. Refinements and adjustments were made under The National Assistance Act in 1948 which provided additional financial assistance for the unemployed and elderly in desperate need, in effect establishing a standardised minimum standard of living for the unemployed.

On July 5th 1948, by Act of Parliament, the National Health Service was launched providing a universal health and care system free at the point of use and paid for under the provisions of the National Insurance system. All aspects of health care were embraced within a three tier 'tripartite' system. Hospital services were organised under 14 Regional Hospital Boards with 400 hospitals; GPs, Dentists and Opticians were separately employed as independent contractors and paid for each person on their lists; and finally more local services including Maternity Services, Health Visitors, vaccination and immunisations, and the Ambulance service were organised by Local Authorities. Having free access to Doctors and Dentists was valued beyond measure. There was a noticeable drop in infant mortality, a rise in life expectancy and a welcome suppression, even eradication of some serious diseases, not to mention, the psychological benefits of always having help at hand and of feeling cared for and cossetted. Whilst for the majority of the population who had healthy and active lives the national Insurance and Health Service changes were comforting background music to their lives, for the vulnerable and needy it was a symphony of relief which shielded them from penury and destitution.

Release from stress and anxiety is one key to a happy and fulfilled life. A vital means of achieving this is through effective relaxation and leisure in off-duty hours. Whilst there was

neither time nor money for extravagant leisure pursuits, nor the facilities to support them in the austere post-war era, the spirit of the British people would not be denied and there was much banter and fun and many light hearted moments. Recreation was generally more simple, more localised and more family orientated. In the pre-television age people created their own entertainment. At home it was centred around hobbies, making music and family games punctuated by listening to the 'wireless'. This made a significant contribution to boosting morale by providing:

Comedy; The Navy Lark, Much binding in the Marsh, Educating Archie, The Goon Show etc

Soap Operas: The Archers, Mrs Dale's Diary, The Luscombes etc

Variety Shows: Billy Cotton Band Show, Friday Night is Music Night. Workers Playtime etc.

Magazine Programmes: In Town Tonight, Women's Hour etc

Quiz Programmes: The Brains Trust, Have a go etc.

Children's Programmes: Children's Hour, Listen with Mother etc.

Drama: Radio Plays, Dick Barton Secret Agent etc.

Music: Music while you work, Family Favourites etc. and

News and Current Affairs Programmes.

Many of these programmes were the talk of the workplace.

For many gardening remained an important home pursuit, though some may not have regarded it as leisure!

People also found much fun and entertainment outside the home within the local community. In the post-war years there was still a need for togetherness. There was then an abundance of activities vying for participation and a much greater willingness to get involved. Local Drama groups, Choirs, Choral Societies, Football teams, Tennis Teams, Book Clubs, locally run dances, socials, whist drives, beetle drives to name but a few. Pubs, of course continued to be at the heart of the community as a symbol of socialisation and relaxation offering competitive leagues in Darts, Billiards, Snooker and local games like Skittles and Bat and Trap. Churches and Chapels were also more central to the community with much larger congregations and more pastoral outreach, embracing groups like Mother's Union. Young Wives, Sunday Schools etc. There was also a more diligent routine of home visiting and socialising including outings to the theatre and day trips to the sea side.

Professional entertainment venues were an urban feature. Town councils provided the playing fields for localised sport, swimming pools, skating rinks, dance halls and community halls etc. but by far the most popular and accessible venues of the 1950's were the cinemas and theatres. In the pre-television age, especially during the 40's and 50's, the cinema was by far the most popular form of entertainment. The period is often considered to be the golden age of film, and it too played an important role in boosting national morale in difficult times. Movies of the time were feel-good and moralistic with a tendency to the light hearted and

comic. It was the era of the Ealing Studios. It was sheer escapism and people could not get enough. There were over 5000 cinemas in Britain supported by an estimated 70% of the population and it was not uncommon to see people queued around the block to gain entry into, what became, huge elaborate emporiums seating well over a thousand people. It was a favourite place for young couples and children were courted with special sessions on Saturday mornings. Theatres too were well supported. Repertory and Revues were punctuated by stage shows featuring popular personalities of the time, especially radio comedians and, of course, pantomimes were as essential as they are today. The national obsession with professional football was also alive and well. Hordes pored through the turnstiles on Saturday afternoon in support of the local league football team then raced home to check their football pools against the national results broadcast on the radio in the hope of a miracle. Night life in the cities was somewhat muted by drinking hours. Pubs closed at 10-30pm, sometimes 11pm at weekends, and could only remain open beyond these times with a special license for special occasions. The night time economy was therefore limited and the streets were empty and quiet well before midnight.



The paid annual holiday, introduced under the Holidays with Pay Act of 1938, had real impact in the immediate post-war years. It gave birth to the Holiday Camp and provided a fillip for guest houses, holiday parks and caravanning. It was the age of the great British sea-side holiday and there are examples of whole factories closing down for a fortnight and the entire staff gravitating to the same resort for 14 days of fun and jollity. The naughtiness included hilarious end of Pier Shows, slot machines, fun-fares, candy floss and more than a little alcohol, all meticulously described in risqué post cards sent home to titillate friends and family. For the more discerning, the paid holiday gave the opportunity to develop the passions, whether it be for adventure, walking, sport or hobbies. However, adventure beyond the shores of the country was uncommon and limited to the better-off. Even then it was restricted by strict controls on the amount of money that could be taken out of the country.

Relaxation and entertainment was revolutionised by the advent of the television. It had a truly amazing appeal and was adopted with lightning speed. Invented before the war, by 1952 still only 14% of households had television. Spurred on by the televised Coronation in 1953 it had leapt to 21% and in 1954 it had exceeded 31%. By the end of the decade ¾ of the population were regularly viewing. At first, with only one channel (BBC) in black and white, transmission hours were limited to afternoon and evenings only with shut-down at 10-30pm. There was even a break between 6pm and 7pm, known as the 'toddlers truce', to allow parents to settle their children. ITV came on the stream in 1955 /6 providing a much greater range of programmes free from the conservative restrictions of 'Auntie', the BBC. There remained, however a plethora of regulations of what was acceptable or not covering dress, language and content. Popular programmes across the network included:

Take your Pick, Emergency Ward 10, Double your Money, Opportunity Knocks, Sunday Night at the London Palladium, The Adventures of Robin Hood, Dixon of Dock Green, Hancock's Half Hour, This is your Life, Billy Bunter, Andy Pandy, The Black and White Minstrel Show, Fabian of the Yard, Quatermass, What's my Line to name but a few.

The impact on people's lives was huge. As a means of entertainment, education and relaxation without leaving your arm chair it was compelling. It mesmerised the whole family by bringing the entire world into the living room. It was simply magnetic as it drew you into the real life situations of other people with all their trials and tribulations. So powerful was it that some people even came to identify with TV characters and personalities as friends. There is then no doubt of its advantages but, like all innovations, there were significant downsides which changed people's lives. Above all it stifled conversation. Families sat in silence before the box in the corner. Banter, games, discussion and personal support were all ousted by the magnetism of the television. For the middle aged and elderly, being entertained in the comfort of the arm chair was more attractive than socialising with the much narrower world of the neighbours or turning out for local activities. The active and involved mutated easily into couch potatoes. Whilst knowledge of the world expanded participation in it withered. Life became more individual.

The young were fortunately not so affected. Attitudes to teenagers in particular softened as parents embraced the drive to create a better, more opportunistic world for their offspring. Traditionally teens were subdued and kept on a short leash. Upbringing was stricter and aimed towards Christian standards in behaviour, politeness, reverence to your betters and respect to each other. Children were seen and not heard, they were at the bottom of the pecking order. Early days at work for 14 and 15 year olds were notoriously difficult in that they were firmly put in their place by their elders and used to do the most menial jobs. It is little wonder that as the new post-war world emerged, as the new social and industrial reforms bit, and as personal wealth increased, teenagers were stirred to break free. Egged on by a new vision of life portrayed in American films like 'Rock Around the Clock' and the aggressive beat music of Bill Haley and Elvis Presley there was a 'Youthquake'. The word teenager entered the dictionary signifying the arrival of a new and commercially powerful sub-culture. Rock and Roll music, so different from the staid ballads of the time, instilled a



new and vibrant energy into the young. The dance floors came alive with vigorous, breath-taking and revealing jive routines. Rock and Roll, Skiffle, the guitar and Jiving all became the symbols of a new age. Fashion followed. The ever present teenage need to be different brought forth the 'Teddy Boy' and new fashions for the girls. Record sales soared, the pop song and the weekly hit parade became the new religion; the dance floor and hop, coffee bar and juke box, the Church; and the pop star the focus of adoration. The older generation were utterly bemused by it all. Few were moved by the music, most looked aghast at the fashions and doubtless many contemplated putting up the rent!

The teenage revolution was yet another symptom of female emancipation which accelerated during the 1950's. The image of the Hollywood pin up set in a make believe world of luxury and opulence surrounded by indulgent men, so typical of films with Marilyn Monroe and Diana Dors in the early 50's pushed the boundaries. It was a world away from the dowdy war-weary woman of the 40's living within the strictures of austerity and clothing coupons. It excited aspiration amongst the young and set in motion a trend towards the sexualisation of women aided and abetted by the craze for pop idols emphasising young love and romance. With a world of opportunity for women in the workplace and greater financial independence and spending power, values changed. Changed values changed fashion, and fashion changed the values and attitudes of the masses. Women's clothing became progressively more alluring and more revealing culminating in the teeny weeny bikini. Edwardian women just a few decades earlier, reluctant to reveal even their ankles would have died of a heart attack!

The world of young men was much more sober. Their teenage years were interrupted by National Service. Whilst the war was over, the world was anything but peaceful. There were trouble spots in Malaya, Korea, Cyprus, Kenya and Egypt during the Suez crisis, all demanding the intervention of British troops. Compulsory conscription therefore remained in place until 1958 for all 18 to 20 year olds with the exception of those deemed medically unfit or those working for the essential services of coal mining, farming and the merchant navy. Young men were therefore trained and despatched for 2 years service in defence of the empire.

This chapter has sketched aspects of life at a national / cultural level indicating some of the trends and changes that occurred during the 1945 to 1960 period. There now follows a more detailed analysis of life changes at the more intimate family level. Please meet the Upson family.