

Britain in the 1930's

Awful Auntie is set in the early 1930's, an era dominated by the effects of an economic downturn, the 'Great Depression'. For many areas of the country, particularly the North, this brought great hardship as heavy industries and mines began to close down causing unemployment figures to rise sharply. All areas of the country were affected to some degree, even the rich, forcing many to have to get rid of some or all of their servants.

However, there were signs of recovery, as new, lighter industries such as car making and electronics manufacturing gradually began to grow. For those with a job, living standards rose significantly.

New houses were built in leafy areas on the outskirts of towns and cities from which people would commute to work. These were lived in mostly by people employed in regular, professional occupations such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, bank clerks etc, who could easily get a mortgage. A typical three- bed roomed house would cost between £400 and £600 and could be purchased with a £5 deposit.



By 1933, the National Grid had been completed which brought electricity into the homes of those who could afford it and sales of new labour saving devices such as vacuum cleaners, washing machines, fridges and electric ovens increased dramatically. Few people, apart from the rich, had telephones in their home, but telephone boxes in the street were a common sight.



Broadcasting

Television was only in its experimental stages in the 1930's but by 1933 half the houses in Britain had a radio. Broadcasts were transmitted by the BBC and would provide a range of programmes including music, news bulletins, comedy and talk shows. Families regularly gather around the radio to listen to drama serials and stories.



Exercise

- In groups of three or four, imagine you are recording a radio drama series in a studio in the 1930's
- Look at the extract from the script of Awful Auntie below
- What sound effects would you need to use to bring the scene to life?
- Try making the noises with your voice to give an idea of what they would need to sound like.
- What differences would there be for the actors between performing on a stage and on the radio?
- Try recording your extract on a computer or phone and listen back to it.
- Is there anything you would like to change in order to make the scene come alive for the listeners?

THE ENGINE ROARS INTO LIFE

STELLA Hooray! It still goes. I knew the old Rolls wouldn't let us down.

SOOT Now move the gear stick forward.

STELLA Well, I know where that is. I'm getting the hang of it, Soot.

SOOT We 'aven't moved yet.

STELLA You're in for a surprise.

SOOT You're tellin me. So move it – now!

STELLA Here we go! (THE ENGINE REVS UP) Ah, we forgot one thing.

SOOT What's that, m'lady?

STELLA We forgot to open the doors!

THE CAR LURCHES FORWARD AND SMASHES THE DOORS APART

STELLA Ha, ha – we're through.

SOOT It was nearly over before we started.

STELLA Let's head for the gates.

SOOT Change gear, then.

THE CAR STARTS TO GO BACKWARDS

SOOT No, that's reverse. Move the stick, up left.

STELLA The gates are up ahead.

SOOT What's that noise behind us?

STELLA Oh, no, it's my aunt. She's on her motorcycle, with Wagner in the side car.

SOOT Keep your eyes straight ahead.

STELLA They're gaining on us, Soot.

SOOT Straight to fourth gear, then. Hard down right.

STELLA The gates are coming up. Any moment now. They'll come crashing down.

SOOT Hold on for impact.

STELLA Here we go!

THEY CRASH INTO GATES AND STOP

Cinema



The 1930's was the great age of cinema going. For many, a visit to the picture palace provided an escape from the harsh realities of life. Virtually every town, suburb or housing development had at least one cinema and many were open seven days a week. The vast majority of films were black and white, although by the middle of the decade, there were a few in colour. Almost half of Britons went to the cinema once a week, some twice. Particularly popular were the Saturday morning children's clubs where for as little as fourpence you could enjoy a whole morning of entertainment. Particularly popular were westerns or science fiction films with characters such as 'The Lone Ranger' or 'Flash Gordon'. The audience would get very involved in the action, stamping their feet booing the baddies, to the extent that sometimes you could hardly hear the film! There were ice creams and sweets available to buy from usherettes if you had money, but no giant buckets of popcorn or fizzy drinks as we have today.

Many chain cinemas ran 'Saturday Clubs', where there would be other entertainments such as fancy dress competitions and live theatre shows, as well as the films. Club members would have badges and always sang their club song before the film began, the words being projected on the screen.



Exercise 1

- Imagine you are living in the 1930s'.
- It is Saturday evening. You went to the cinema that morning for the first time to see a cowboy film.
- Write a brief diary extract about your experience.
- Try and include some of the following:
- What did the cinema look like inside? How many other children were there? How did you feel about them? What was the film like? Did you have anything to eat? Will you go again next week?

Exercise 2

Below are the words to the Odeon Saturday Morning Children's Club song:

We come along, on Saturday morning

Greeting everybody with a smile.

We come along, on Saturday morning

Knowing that it's well worth while.

As members of the GB club, we all intend to be,

Good citizens when we grow up, and champions of the free.

We come along, on Saturday morning,

Greeting everybody with a smile,... smile....smile

Greeting everybody with a smile.

- Imagine you are in charge of the Saturday morning club in your local cinema.
- Write a new song for the children to sing.
- It needs to be fairly simple as some of the children are very young and may not be able to read. Can you make it rhyme?

Exercise 3

Here are a few examples of Children's Cinema badges:



- Your children's club needs a badge that the members can proudly wear.
- It is your job to design it.