

Piermaster's House Tour Notes for Teachers

The following notes can be used to make the most of a visit to the Piermaster's House if you cannot book for one of our members of staff to take you on a tour with the group.

They can also be used to recap back at school after one of our tours.

To book, please ring 0151 478 4788

1. In front of the House, look at the Garden:

"Dig for Victory". There were no lawns or flowers grown, only what people could eat. Mostly carrots and potatoes (i.e. Potato Pete and Dr. Carrot).

The only time in history when food has been grown at the Albert Dock is since 2004 when the Spirit of the Blitz exhibition was on.

During WWII, parks were dug up all around the city to provide more space for allotments for people who lived in flats and back to backs to grow food.

The Piermaster's House garden had potatoes, tomatoes, beans, carrots, onions, beetroot, marrow, lettuces, rhubarb and strawberries.

It may have been thought frivolous during wartime to grow fruit but they would have been useful to make into jams and preserves and they are full of vitamins.

People would add plenty of herbs to food to make up for the bland flavours and they would then be dried for the winter.

The surround to this garden would be unusual, as during the war the railings would have been donated to be melted down to make planes and munitions. Pots and pans were also sent off when they became too damaged to repair.

2. Front Kitchen:

Look at the **Kitchen range**: "What is this called?" and "What is it used for?" etc.

Very economical to use as coal and all fuel was rationed. It would therefore have been the only warm room in the house.

Multiple uses are cooking, heating, baking and toast.

Bathing: They used a tin bath in front of the range (see if you can see this bath in the back kitchen!). All the family would have sat around watching. Only a small amount of water was used, to share between everyone – Dad first, then Mum and each child down to the youngest.

Ironing: Flat irons were left heating on the bars of the range. There were always two in use – using one while the other is heating up. Again, always use cloth to pick up. The Ironing board is the same design as today but wooden. Many people would just have spread a blanket on a table instead.

Oven: Always hot because of the constant fire, this was good for long slow cooking. Meat rationing meant that you would probably have poor quality tough meat and slow cooking made the meat tender. Mum would have made a pan of Scouse with cheap meat and vegetables from the garden in the morning and left it cooking all day. Rice pudding was also a delicacy in a range oven.

Toasting Fork on griddle: Stale bread was used for toast and bread and butter pudding. In wartime, white bread became “grey” as they left out bleaching agents.

Clothes would dry over fire: “Make Do and Mend”. When clothes had been passed along too many times and had holes in, they were *darned*. This would last for a while. Then the garment was unpicked, the wool washed and then wound tightly round the back of a chair to get the kinks out.

Then they would knit something else out of the wool.

They could do this several times although each time the clothes would get smaller as the wool would get thinner and thinner.

“Jones” Sewing Machine: It was useful to make your own clothes as you could get more material with coupons than ready-made clothes and you could take sleeves out of clothes for summer and put them back for winter.

3. Back Kitchen:

Where’s the fridge? Different ways to keep food cold or fresh – pickles and jams.

How do you make these? “Anyone eaten pickled onions?” What preserves them?

Vinegar! But what about strawberries etc? Sugar.

Sugar was rationed during war but in late summer and autumn when children were on holidays, they would go into the country and pick soft fruits for jam-making.

The government gave a special sugar ration at this time especially for making jam to boost morale.

They also **shopped** more often. Children were sent shopping to the local **Co-Op** (*look for CWS labels on the food – Co-Operative Wholesale Society*) every one or two days.

They would take a list and their shopping basket with coupon book and newspapers.

In the shop, they would queue up and then hand over their list to the assistant who would go and fetch all of your shopping for them and wrap it in the newspapers. No plastic carrier bags during the war.

They would still have to pay for the cost of these items – the coupons were only to let them know how much of everything they could have.

There were no tills in these shops. When they paid, the assistant would put the money and receipt in a tin which was attached to a wire running across the ceiling, and then whiz the whole thing into a booth where a cashier sat who would sort out the change and send it back in the tin again!

Everyone had a Co-Op number that they had to tell the assistant every time they bought something – *ask children to find relatives who remember theirs*. Ledgers were kept of how much everyone spent so that every 3 or 4 months, totals were added up and a “divvy” (dividend) was given back to you – like loyalty card schemes you have nowadays in supermarkets.

Mincer on side of table was used for grinding up all the yucky bits of meat (eyes, snouts, brains etc) and using as mince or sausages.

They would keep all of the old vegetable peelings in a metal bucket (under the sink) and when this was full, it became known as “swill”. This was taken to someone local who had a pig and because they were helping to feed it, they would then have a share in the pig. Records were kept as to how much they had given so when it was slaughtered, they would be entitled to a portion. Similar deals were done with hens and eggs.

Making Tea – there was only loose tea, which was rationed. No tea bags!
Having a day out at the seaside (New Brighton) – there were few big holidays.
Mum would take packed lunch and teapot with dry tea in. They could buy a penny's worth of boiling water from a stand on the pier and make their own cups of tea on the beach.

The family would also have taken bottles of cold water and lemonade crystals (on dresser) for the children.

Some of the food may have been sandwiches – sugar butties, jam or dripping.

Washday was always Monday. It would take a whole day. They needed to boil lots and lots of water in the kettle on the range to fill the dolly tub and then would add a “dolly blue” which was like modern detergents (blue would counteract yellow stains on white clothing).

On Sunday night, children would be put in charge of grating pieces of carbolic soap into a dish and then pouring boiling water on it to leave overnight. By the next day, it would be a gloopy mess – this would also be added to water in the tub. Mum would use the posser (up and down) to agitate the water and create lots of soapy bubbles and the dolly stick (twisting round) as well.

For stubborn stains, the washboard would be used. Another tub with clean water in would be used for rinsing and you would start off with whites and move through to darker colours.

The Mangle would be used to wring clothes out and then they would be hung on the line to dry. If it was wintertime or raining, the clothes would go on a maiden in the front of the kitchen by the range – the fire in the back kitchen probably wouldn't be lit. The stone floor was useful in case of spillages but rather cold on the feet.

The carpet beater was used in place of vacuum cleaners as these were very expensive and few people had large carpets.

They had rugs, often home made rag rugs which could be beaten on the line. Lino and stone were brushed and mopped.

4. Parlour:

This room would not have been used except on very special occasions such as Christmas, Easter or when important people visited. Much smarter furniture here – nice clock on mantelpiece, rug on floor, fancy coal scuttle and family photographs (except the one above the china cabinet or Winston Churchill).

The Piermaster may have brought items around the room back from his travels around the world. Look for the mug in the china cabinet with the Queen Mother on their coronation day.

Tape on windows – “what is it for?” Hitler stated that England could not “hide behind their little kisses”. There were lots of different designs for taping windows, our are Union Jacks.

If a bomb went off in the docks, the glass would not shatter into such small pieces and blow into the house.

Also **blackout curtains** – blackout was half hour after sunset and curtains had to be drawn before any lights were lit.

Utility three-piece suite – You were only entitled to new furniture if you had lost all of your old furniture to bomb damage. The furniture was very plain and hardwearing.

No TV – how did they entertain themselves? Radio or “wireless”. The first soaps and children’s hour were on the radio and also important wartime information. People were told to keep a pencil and paper by the radio to note things down.

Leather writing case – who would Mum be writing to? Dad at the front? The children may have been evacuated to North Wales.

5. Adult Bedroom:

This may have been Mum’s room as Dad could have possibly been away fighting. It is quite feminine looking.

Again, **no fires lit** up here unless they were ill.

At nighttimes, Mum would have tied her **hair** up in pipe cleaners (no rollers made during the war) and covered it all with a hairnet. She wanted fashionable wavy hair like the film stars.

The next day, she would unwind the pipe cleaners and then she may have worn a slightly finer hairnet or a headscarf to go to work – why? She could have been a munitions worker in the **factories** and their hair had to be covered so it didn’t get caught up in the machinery.

Look at the **dressing table** – when Mum went on a night out she may used all of these things. Only one colour of lipstick was made - a matt red by “Tangee”.

Also “4-7-11” perfume, not very patriotic, as it was German.

Stockings in the drawer – very sought after items. If you didn’t have nylons, you would have painted your legs the same colour with gravy browning and had a friend paint a line up the back of your legs with eyebrow pencil, like seams.

Look at the **dresses** in wardrobe: Utility again.

Also the **shoes** would have been re-painted to go with every outfit.

They even covered **gas mask boxes** with fabric to match their outfits and used up bits of wool to crochet covers.

You did not go anywhere without your gas mask during the war.

6. Child’s Bedroom:

In the main bed children would have slept been “top to tail”. The good part was that it was nice and warm; the bad part was the smelly feet in your face at night.

No duvets or quilts here, just sheets and blankets.

A **camp bed** has been set up, as they would have taken in friends, relatives or neighbours who had lost their house.

Little boys may have liked reading **comics**, but comics were printed to interest all ages, so they have alternate pages of comic strips and newspaper.

After their mum told them to turn the light out at night, they could have carried on reading under the blankets using a torch so she wouldn’t see the light.

Chamber pot – also called a “Guzzunder” because it “goes under the bed”. It was not very private but better than having to go outside in the dark and freezing cold to use the toilet. They had nasty hard, shiny toilet paper.

Toys: things like the Ark would have been made from bits of wood for them to play with, but not by their dad. He would be away at war. Their grandfather or a family friend could make them. The dolls would be made from scraps of material by their mum or grandmother. Also toys would have been passed down through families like clothes.

Map of Wartime Europe on wall - when they heard news on the wireless about what was happening in the war, they would have gone upstairs and marked it on their map.

From here, you leave the house by the back stairs and go through the back yard where the washing line would have been and the outside “privvie”.

The building facing you housed the coopers (barrel makers) workroom and the Piermaster and his assistant officers.