Waste into Weapons

During the Second World War, the United Kingdom faced severe shortages of many essential raw materials. To keep its armaments factories running, the British government enlisted millions of people in efforts to recycle a wide range of materials for use in munitions production. Recycling not only supplied British factories with much-needed raw materials but it also played a key role in the efforts of the British government to maintain the morale of its citizens, to secure billions of dollars in Lend-Lease aid from the United States, and even to uncover foreign intelligence. However, Britain’s wartime recycling campaign came at a cost: it consumed many items that would never have been destroyed under normal circumstances, including significant parts of the nation’s cultural heritage.

Based on extensive archival research, Peter Thorsheim examines the relationship between armaments production, civil liberties, cultural preservation, and diplomacy, making Waste into Weapons the first in-depth history of twentieth-century recycling in Britain.

Peter Thorsheim is Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
Dedicated to my parents,
Howard and Julie Thorsheim
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Waste into Weapons: Recycling in Britain during the Second World War

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Excerpt

More information
Waste into Weapons

Recycling in Britain during the Second World War

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Contents

List of Figures viii
List of Tables ix
Acknowledgments xi
Introduction 1

PART I: BEATING PLOWSHARES INTO SWORDS
1 Salvage in Times of Peace and War 13
2 Persuasion and Its Limits 34
3 Britain’s Darkest Hour 54
4 Private Enterprise and the Public Good 75

PART II: ALLIANCES
5 Lend-Lease 101
6 Waste Becomes a Crime 132

PART III: HISTORY, CULTURE, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES
7 The Built Environment 159
8 Wasting Paper 180
9 Requisition 202
10 Victory and Postwar 232
    Conclusion 256

Bibliography 263
Index 279
Figures

1 Paper recycled as percentage of paper consumed in the United Kingdom, 1939–55  page 49
2 “Up Housewives and at ’Em!”  63
3 Aluminum salvage  67
4 Salvaging kitchen waste  72
5 “Anti-Waste Drive”  83
6 Boy Scouts carry paper to salvage depot  87
7 Royal visit to municipal salvage works  91
8 “Put Out More Salvage for More Munitions”  94
9 Salvage exhibition in Westminster  95
10 “What Happens to Lend-Lease Sent to Britain”  109
11 Beaverbrook visits Washington  112
12 Stettinius confers with Roosevelt  120
13 Imports of iron and steel scrap to the United Kingdom, 1938–45  123
14 The global reach of Britain’s wartime salvage efforts  152
15 Iron and steel scrap purchased within the United Kingdom, 1938–45  163
16 Using brute force to remove railings  171
17 Turning paper into pulp  189
18 Women sorting waste paper  191
19 “Waste into Weapons”  194
21 Soviet ambassador cuts railings of embassy  213
## Tables

1. Ministry of Supply  
2. Salvage Departments  
3. Works Departments  
4. Inputs of Scrap to the UK Steel Industry  
5. Materials Salvaged by Local Authorities

---

1. Ministry of Supply  \( \text{page 30} \)  
2. Salvage Departments  \( \text{43} \)  
3. Works Departments  \( \text{135} \)  
4. Inputs of Scrap to the UK Steel Industry  \( \text{162} \)  
5. Materials Salvaged by Local Authorities  \( \text{255} \)