



Quilting and Patchwork during World War Two

During the Second World War, fabric and clothing rations were just as severe as food and fuel. Clothes rationing began in 1941 with the distribution of 66 coupons yearly to every adult. The allowance was later cut to 48 coupons, then 36, and by 1944 only 20 coupons. Clothes rationing continued until 1949.

With fabric so scarce and precious it is unsurprising that many of the quilts made during wartime contain many small, leftover scraps of dress and furnishing materials.

The 'Make Do and Mend' campaign included thrift classes and the distribution of pamphlets featuring characters like 'Mrs Sew-and-Sew', telling people how to make their woollies last longer, how to patch elbows and trousers and how every woman could become her own 'clothes doctor'. This thriftiness is reflected in many wartime quilts.

During the Second World War, Britain received aid from volunteers in a number of allied countries including Canada. The Canadian Red Cross organised for quilters to make patchwork quilts to send over for evacuated and homeless families. Recognised by a label reading 'Gift of the Canadian Red Cross Society', these 'Red Cross' quilts often reflected the taste of their maker but the quilter very rarely indicated where they came from due to restrictions about personalising quilts made for people in Britain.

The quilt on the right is an exception, showing the location of the maker as 'Hallville, Ontario'.



From top: Strippy quilt made in Hallville Ontario and sent to Britain by Canadian Red Cross Quilt in the early 1940s.

V for Victory Quilt, containing morse-code dots and dash fabrics.

Inset - quilt 'gift' label on back of a quilt in the Quilters' Guild collection.

All Courtesy of the Quilters' Guild of the British