



Teacher/ older student information sheet

History of waste

The earliest recorded landfill was in the Cretan Capital, Knossos in 3000BC. The waste was put into large pits and covered with earth.

However, waste collection in the UK wasn't established until a much later date. In Medieval London, household waste became a problem as the population grew and rubbish was often thrown out into the streets. In the mid-1300s, London began to employ people called "Rakers" who would rake the waste off the streets and load it into carts. In 1407, it was ruled that household waste was to remain in people's property until the rakers could remove the waste. It was then either sold as compost or dumped in the marshes in Essex.



In 1515, court records show that Shakespeare's father was fined for 'depositing filth in a public street'.

By the early 1800's people started making a living from going through people's waste. "Toshers" were people who worked in the sewers searching for items such as coins, metal, rope and even jewellery. This was a dangerous but lucrative way to make a living. Some people known as "Mud-larks" scavenged the riverbanks looking for discarded materials, but they made a very poor living from doing this. Also, there were "Dustmen" who collected ash from the coal fires. The dust was taken to a dust yard where men, women and children worked through the waste pile sieving the coarse section of dust. The dust was then used as a soil conditioner and in brick making.





The first prototype of an incineration plant was designed and constructed in Nottingham in 1874. It was given the name "destructor" with the aim to generate energy from waste. During the next 30 years a further 250 destructors were built across Britain.



The Public Health Act 1875 made it the duty of each local authority (council) to remove and dispose of waste. The Act also stated that householders would have to keep their waste in a moveable container. This was the beginning of the dustbin, which the local council would collect once a week.



By the late 1800s, all household waste was collected in moveable containers and sorted by hand, usually by women or girls. A large proportion of the waste was re-used, for example, glass and metals were returned to merchants.



The British Paper Company was established in 1890 to make paper and board from recycled materials. The waste paper was obtained from the Salvation Army and the Rag-And-Bone men.

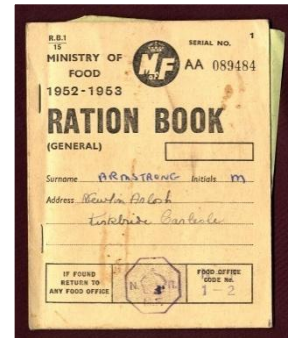


In the 1930's people burned paper and coal to heat their homes and for hot water, which led to very little paper waste being thrown out into the bins. There was also only a small percentage of textiles, glass and metals in their bins due to recovery and re-use schemes.





World War II started in 1939 and continued until 1945. During these years, there would have been very little waste. Fuel and food was rationed and there was a rise in reclamation and recycling. Local Councils made efforts to legislate against the dumping of waste. Throughout the country, tips up to a mile long were burning continuously.



After World War II, landfill became the preferred method to dispose of waste with little thought of the environmental impact. The post war period saw a boost in the salvage industry due to a demand for materials. Public awareness around environmental concerns began to develop.



By the 1960s private contractors had started to appear in the waste industry and they began to take over work that had previously been considered as a public works activity.



In the 1970s, increased concern over waste led to the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which aimed to control waste disposal. The first recycling bottle banks appeared in 1977.



The 1980s saw an increase in public concern over waste disposal, especially hazardous waste. The Commons Environment Committee inquiry 1989, chaired by Sir Hugh Rossi, recommended that waste regulation was passed from local authorities to a central body.





In the 1990s, the Waste Duty of Care was introduced to ensure the safe management of waste to protect human health and the environment. These new regulations would mean that anyone who imports, produces, keeps, carries, treats or disposes of waste must take responsibility for it.



In 2000, the waste strategy for England and Wales was finalised and published, setting strict new recycling and composting targets for local authorities (25% by 2005 and 30% by 2010). Following this, the Household Waste Recycling Act 2003 was introduced which stated that by 2010, local authorities would have to provide every household in England with a separate collection of at least two types of recyclable waste. This meant that everyone could easily take part in recycling from home using colour-coded wheelie bins. UK Recycling rates increased significantly and by 2019, UK households were recycling over 45% of their waste.



Present day: Local and Central government continue to drive forward the message of recycling and waste minimisation. 'Simpler recycling' rules mean that we will be able to recycle the same materials, whether at home, work or school, putting an end to confusion over what can and can't be recycled in different parts of the country.

