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Teacher Information Pack

GREAT BRITAIN .. IT'S 1931 AND THE FUTURE LOOKS BLACK

When Great Britain was dragged into the economic abyss, Prime Minister Ramsey McDonald (Labour) invited Stanley Baldwin (Conservative) to join a coalition government to tackle the national crisis. It was the country's areas of heavy industry, such as Newcastle and Liverpool that suffered the most. In 1934, the starving men of Jarrow marched 300 miles to London to present a petition to Parliament to emphasise the seriousness of their plight.

THE POOL OF LIFE?

Liverpool once a thriving international port and main artery feeding the hearts of the new industrial towns should have had a bright and prosperous future but, in 1931, the future seemed as black as its soot smeared buildings. The heart of the nation had stopped beating and the artery had almost ceased to flow.

THE FORRESTER FAMILY ARRIVE IN LIVERPOOL

Desperate to find employment, Helen Forrester's father, who had recently been declared bankrupt, arrived in Liverpool at Lime Street Station with his wife and seven children one cold January morning. He remembered Liverpool as a bustling wealthy city, the place where his family had once made its fortune and where he would now re-build his. It had not occurred to him that his hometown had been hit by the depression, in fact, it was one of the hardest hit with many of its inhabitants bordering on starvation. Responsibility of government towards its people was not a familiar concept in the early 1930's and the 'Welfare State' was still eighteen years and a world war away.



Jarrow Crusade Marching to London 1936



Liverpool street scene circa:1930's

Floundering in a city that was fighting for survival, Helen's father, despite his public school education, failed to gain employment and his family was reduced to living in an infested attic room. With the help and advice of a local priest they did manage to receive a meagre sum from the local parish, but neither of Helen's parents had the vaguest idea how to manage a household budget. Food, coal or soap was never the main priority and most of it was squandered on cigarettes.

Consequently the full burden of looking after a family of nine fell on Helen's young shoulders. It cost two pence to cross the Mersey in 1931, a journey which would have taken Helen to the security of her Grandmother's home on the Wirral, but it might just as well have been a million pounds such was their poverty.

WORLD EVENTS OF 1931

- 10 Jan 1931: Prince Edward meets Wallis Simpson at a house party.
- 12 Apr 1931: Spain becomes a republic with the overthrow of King Alfonso XIII.
- 01 May 1931: Empire State Building in New York, (the world's tallest building), officially opened.
- 19 Sep 1931: Mukden Incident begins Japanese occupation of Manchuria.
- 17 Oct 1931: Chicago gangster, Al Capone, convicted of tax evasion (11 years imprisonment).
- 27 Oct 1931: UK General Election.
- 10 Nov 1931: Lionel Barrymore & Marie Dressler receive Oscars for their roles in 'A Free Soul' & 'Min & Bill'.