Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Warfare and British society, c1250 to the present

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Medieval warfare, c1250–c1500

- Armies were raised through **feudal duty**: lords brought knights and soldiers. Later, kings paid soldiers and used 'commissions of array' to gather men from each county.
- Knights on horseback were the elite, but the **longbow** changed battles: English archers won at Falkirk (1298) and Agincourt (1415).

Gunpowder and the first professional army, c1500–c1700

- Cannons and handguns (muskets) spread. Armies used '**pike and shot**': pikemen protected musketeers while they reloaded.
- In the English Civil War, Parliament created the **New Model Army** (1645), England's first professional, full-time army. It won the Battle of Naseby (1645).

Industrial warfare, c1700–c1900

- Muskets with bayonets, then accurate rifles, and stronger artillery. At Waterloo (1815), Wellington's army helped defeat Napoleon.
- In the Crimean War, the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava (1854) showed poor leadership. Newspaper reports by William Howard Russell and Florence Nightingale's nursing changed public attitudes.
- The **Cardwell reforms** (1868–74) ended flogging in peacetime and the buying of officers' commissions, and shortened service.

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Total war and modern warfare, c1900 to the present

- **Conscription** began in 1916 in the First World War; **conscientious objectors** had to face tribunals. Trench warfare, machine guns, gas and tanks shaped battles such as the Somme (1916).
- The Second World War was **total war**: civilians were bombed, rationed and conscripted. **National Service** continued after the war; the last men were called up in 1960.
- Since then Britain has used a professional volunteer army, with technology such as smart weapons and drones, in wars such as the Gulf War (1991), Afghanistan and Iraq.

London and the Second World War, 1939–45

- **The Blitz** (September 1940 to May 1941): German bombers attacked London for 57 nights in a row at first. Londoners sheltered in Anderson and Morrison shelters and in Underground stations; in 1940 a bomb at Balham station killed many sheltering there.
- Children were evacuated, and from 1944 the V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets hit London. Churchill ran the war from the Cabinet War Rooms.

Key terms

Feudal duty	The obligation of lords to provide soldiers for the king in return for land.
Longbow	A powerful bow that let English archers win battles such as Agincourt.
Pike and shot	Pikemen protecting musketeers while they reloaded.
New Model Army	Parliament's professional army, created in 1645.
Cardwell reforms	Army reforms of 1868–74, which ended peacetime flogging and the buying of commissions.
Conscription	Making people join the armed forces by law.
Conscientious objector	Someone who refused to fight for reasons of conscience.
Total war	War involving the whole population and economy.
National Service	Peacetime conscription after 1945; the last call-ups were in 1960.
The Blitz	The German bombing of British cities in 1940–41.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which weapon helped the English win at Agincourt (1415)?
2. What was the New Model Army (1645)?

Your notes

3. What was 'pike and shot'?
4. What did the Cardwell reforms (1868–74) end?
5. Who reported on the Crimean War and changed public attitudes?
6. When was conscription first introduced in Britain?
7. When were the last National Service call-ups?
8. When was the Blitz?

Answers

1. The longbow
2. England's first professional, full-time army
3. Pikemen protecting musketeers while they reloaded
4. Flogging in peacetime and the buying of officers' commissions
5. William Howard Russell
6. 1916
7. 1960
8. September 1940 to May 1941

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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