

## Controller of Matches in WWII - by David Gray



*Newspaper Cutting: 'Sir Sydney Chapman, Match Controller, has reduced consumption by one third.'*

The **Central Price Regulation Committee** and the **Controller of Matches** were specialized bodies established by the British government during World War II (primarily under the Price of Goods Act 1939 and subsequent legislation) to manage the economy, prevent profiteering, and ensure the fair distribution of essential goods.

### 1. Central Price Regulation Committee (CPRC)

Established in 1939–1940, the CPRC was the top-level body responsible for overseeing the regulation of prices for non-food essential goods during World War II.

- **Purpose:** Its main function was to advise the Board of Trade on price control measures to prevent unjustifiable increases in the prices of goods, thus protecting consumers from war profiteering. It ensured that the prices of non-food consumer goods (such as clothing, hardware, and furniture) did not rise faster than the actual increase in production costs.
- **Structure:** It worked alongside regional Local Price Regulation Committees. These local committees received complaints about high prices and investigated suspected profiteering by traders.
- **Actions:** The CPRC scrutinized price increases, determined fair margins, and dealt with issues like war risk insurance premiums being illegally added to costs multiple times in the supply chain.
- **Powers:** Under the Price of Goods Act, they had the authority to investigate, and if the Committee found evidence of overcharging, they could submit it to the Board of Trade for potential prosecution. It advised the Board of Trade on which goods should have "permitted prices" or fixed profit margins. By 1941, under the Goods and Services (Price Control) Act, its powers were expanded to set maximum prices for a wider range of services and second-hand goods.

### 2. Controller of Matches

The Controller of Matches was a government official, working within the Board of Trade, responsible for the strict regulation of the match industry under the Matches (Control of Prices) Orders, managing the severe shortage of matches during WWII. He was tasked with controlling the production, distribution, and price of matches during the war, and ensuring that supplies were available to the public at fixed, reasonable prices as they were a strictly rationed, vital item.

- **Purpose:** Because timber and chemicals were scarce during the war, matches became a vital but limited resource. The Controller's job was to manage the supply chain and enforce statutory price caps to prevent black-market trading.
- **Price Control:** The Controller ensured that matches were sold at a regulated price, frequently issuing orders (like Statutory Instrument No. 1476 of 1949, following wartime powers) that established a sliding scale for prices based on the number of matches in a box.
- **Regulation:** If a manufacturer wanted to sell a box with a different number of matches, they had to receive a specific Order from the Board of Trade to ensure it remained under price control.
- **Context:** Matches were a major part of the wartime "Price Regulation" scheme, which included the Control of Matches Order, which meant they could not be sold above fixed prices, similar to other scarce goods like clothing and fuel.



During the Second World War, the British government appointed numerous "Controllers" and established specific schemes to manage nearly every essential commodity. These regulations were often designed to prevent waste, stop the black market, and ensure that raw materials were diverted to the war effort.

### Specific Commodity Controllers

Beyond the **Controller of Matches**, several other officials were appointed by the **Board of Trade** and the **Ministry of Supply** to oversee specific industries:

- **Controller of Diamonds:** Diamonds were vital for industrial use (such as in precision cutting tools for aircraft engines). The Controller oversaw the strategic stocks and ensured industrial diamonds did not fall into enemy hands.
- **Controller of Timber:** Wood was strictly rationed for construction and manufacturing. This regulation made items like Christmas trees and wooden toys nearly impossible to find for civilians.
- **Controller of Tobacco and Snuff:** Tobacco was not officially rationed by coupons, but the Controller managed its importation and distribution to prevent severe shortages and ensure supplies reached the armed forces.



- **Other Controllers:** Officials were also appointed for commodities like **Molasses, Sulphur, Flax,** and **Wool** to manage the "sole purchase" and distribution of these materials by the government.

### The Utility Schemes (CC41)

For complex consumer goods, the government introduced the **Utility Scheme**, marked by the famous **CC41** ("Civilian Clothing 1941") logo, also known as "The Cheeses."



- **Utility Clothing:** Regulations dictated exactly how much fabric could be used. For example, men's trousers were banned from having "turn-ups" (cuffs), and the number of pockets on jackets was limited to save cloth.
- **Utility Furniture:** Only 30 approved designs were allowed. To buy new furniture, citizens had to apply for permits, which were usually reserved for newlyweds or those who had lost their homes in the Blitz.
- **Utility Footwear:** Even the height of shoe heels was regulated (limited to 2 inches) to conserve leather and rubber.

### Notable Regulated Items

| Item   | Regulation Method      | Key Restriction  |
|--------|------------------------|--|
| Soap   | Rationing weight       | by Standard ration was 4 coupons per month; different types had different point values.                  |
| Paper  | Paper Orders           | Control Newspapers were cut to 25% of their pre-war size; wrapping paper was largely prohibited.         |
| Petrol | Fuel & Lighting Orders | Private motoring was restricted to a "basic ration," which was suspended entirely between 1942 and 1945. |

During World War II, the British government established a comprehensive system of control for essential commodities to manage imports, manufacturing, and raw material distribution. These controls were primarily operated through the Ministry of Supply (for raw materials) and the Ministry of Food.

Based on Ministry of Supply reports and records from late 1939 to 1940, the following individuals served as key Commodity Controllers for these specific items:

## Ministry of Supply Raw Material Controllers (1939–1940)

- **Aluminium:** Ministry of Supply, Aluminium Control, Shrewsbury.
- **Chrome Ore, Magnesite and Wolfram:** Mr. W.T.V. Harmer.
- **Cotton:** Sir Percy Ashley, K.B.E., C.B..
- **Fertilisers:** Mr. H. V. Cunningham.
- **Flax:** Rt. Hon. Earl De La Warr, P.C. (Deputy: Mr. J. S. Ferrier).
- **Hemp:** Mr. A. M. Landauer.
- **Industrial Ammonia:** Mr. F. C. O. Speyer.
- **Iron and Steel:** Col. Sir W. C. Wright, Bart., K.B.E., C.B..
- **Jute:** Mr. G. Malcolm, C.B.E..
- **Leather:** Dr. E. C. Snow, C.B.E..
- **Molasses and Industrial Alcohol:** Mr. A.V. Board.
- **Non-ferrous Metals (Lead, Zinc, Tin, Copper, Brass):** Mr. J. C. Budd & Mr. W. Mure.
- **Paper:** Mr. A. Ralph Reed.
- **Plastics:** Mr. A. V. Board.
- **Silk and Rayon:** Mr. H. O. Hambelton.
- **Sulphuric Acid:** Mr. H. Garrod-Thomas.
- **Timber:** Major A. I. Harris.
- **Wool:** Sir Harry Shackleton.



Hemp

## Key Food Commodity Controllers

The Ministry of Food managed controls over items including:

- **Animal Feedstuffs**
- **Bacon and Hams**
- **Canned Fish, Fruits, and Vegetables**
- **Cereals**
- **Cocoa, Tea, and Sugar**
- **Cold Storage & Freights**

- Imported Eggs, Fresh Fruit, and Vegetables
- Meat and Livestock
- Oils and Fats

#### Other Major Controls

- **Coal Controller:** Controlled fuel production.
- **Minister of Production:** Lord Beaverbrook.
- **British Purchasing Commission (North America):** Arthur Blaikie Purvis (1941) & Sir Clive Baillieu (1942).



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