London blitz – the agency of locality: an examination into diversity of experience across the localities of London

London Blitz – The Agency of Locality: an examination into diversity of experience across the localities of London

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ABSTRACT

Historians have often viewed the London blitz as a single uniform event that whilst the severity of bombing varied across the capital the experience of being bombed was broadly the same. A city wide view predominates which fails to fully take into consideration the myriad components of the complex metropolis. Whilst some historians have argued that the agencies of class, gender and race helped shape wartime experiences, the agency of locality acting as a force determining the lived experience of aerial bombardment has so far been neglected. For the first time in the historiography this thesis conducts a local area analysis examining the blitz through six London boroughs, Metropolitan Boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington; County Boroughs of East Ham and Croydon; and the Municipal Borough of Acton. These boroughs are representative of the assorted administrative, economic, socio-political variables prevalent in wartime London taking into consideration the make-up of the city itself that lay beneath the bombs. The experiences of the main London blitz of 1940-1941, Tip and Run raids 1943, Little Blitz 1944, and V-Weapon attacks 1944-1945, are derived thematically by focusing upon air raids, provision of air raid shelters, homelessness, and communal feeding. Official government records at the central, regional and local levels, Mass Observation records, diaries, letters and reminiscences attest to wide and differing blitz experiences across the capital. The agency of locality now offers us a fresh approach whereby through immersing ourselves within individual boroughs we can fully appreciate that locality was determinate of how the blitz was experienced by the Londoner.

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Abbreviations Used in this Thesis

AFS	Auxiliary Fire Service
ARP	Air Raid Precautions
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
DAB	Delayed Action Bomb
HE	High Explosive
HO	Home Office
IB	Incendiary Bomb
LCC	London County Council
LCDR	London Civil Defence Region
LPTB	London Passenger Transport Board
MAGNA	Mutual Aid for Good Neighbours Association
MBSJC	Metropolitan Borough's Standing Joint Committee
MCC	Middlesex County Council
MHS	Ministry of Home Security
MO	Mass Observation
MOF	Ministry of Food
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOI	Ministry of Information
NFS	National Fire Service
PLA	Port of London Authority
RAF	Royal Air Force
RTA	Regional Technical Adviser
UXB	Unexploded Bomb

V1	Flying Bomb or Doodlebug
V2	Long Range Rocket
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

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Chapter One: Introduction and Historiography

Preamble

> London was no longer one great city: it was a collection of small towns. People went to Hampstead or St. John's Wood for a quiet week-end, and if you lived in Holborn you hadn't time between sirens to visit friends as far away as Kensington. So special characteristics developed, and in Clapham where day raids were frequent there was a hunted look which was absent from Westminster, where the night raids were heavier but the shelters were better…Gray's Inn and Russell Square were noted for a more reckless spirit but only because they had the day to recover in.[1]

Through the term, 'London blitz', we have become accustomed to understanding that the city as a whole faced the air raid sirens and bombing raids, that despite some areas being hit more than others, actual blitz experience was the same wherever in the capital one happened to be. I contend that in actual fact there were many London blitzes, not one, influenced by a myriad of metropolitan localities giving rise to an agency of locality that helped shape the lived blitz experience. To fundamentally grasp the London blitz one must fully appreciate the very city that lay beneath the enemy bombers.

To move the conversation on I have in this thesis walked through the streets of individual London boroughs, nuclei of determinate forces, encapsulating not just the familiar co-determinate agencies of class, gender, and race, but potent local factors so far overlooked and until now left fully unexplored. Within the borough bounds I shall demonstrate the geographic, geological, socio-economic, demographic, political, local administrative, and historical forces, which coupled with the dumb luck of bombing raids combined to mould the wartime Londoner.

This thesis argues that a more complex and nuanced understanding now emerges as to the extent Londoners themselves either lacked or had agency over varied local differences, either pre-destined or decided by human operation, variables capable of both interacting with each other and changing over time. Some local characteristics such as ground conditions, availability of underground railway lines, industrial targets, property types, population density, prevalent economic circumstances, and geographic position were simply unalterable. Whilst other influences, local politics, attitudes

[1] Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear* (1943), p. 69.

towards civil defence, hostility to government policy, capacity of borough leadership and voluntary endeavours were instead amenable to efforts on the ground. What arises is an impression of London blitz experience refracted through the diversity of individual boroughs.

Eve of the main London Blitz – [June–September 1940]

Blitzkrieg translated into English means 'lightning war', a conjunction of overwhelming military might deployed at whirlwind speed to stun and overrun the enemy. Earlier that summer on 17 June 1940 France had surrendered to Germany following a Blitzkrieg attack that had commenced only the month before. Britain was now positioned as the next victim with perhaps the English Channel her most effective defence.

Twenty two years had passed since bombs had struck mainland Britain, now on 9 May they returned falling near Canterbury, Middlesbrough was next, and as day broke on 18 June eight bomb craters were discovered in Croydon, the first bombs had fallen within the Greater London area. [2]

Just before midnight on 24 August Vera Brittain and her husband sat in their Chelsea home drinking tea when a series of sudden distant crashes rang out and they were hardly in the air raid shelter before, "the Nazi raiders, like enormous malevolent mosquitoes, whine above the river".[3] That night central London areas as far apart as Islington, Tottenham, Millwall, Finsbury, Stepney, East Ham, Leyton, Coulsdon and Bethnal Green were all struck.[4]

The steady tempo of air raids continued as August turned to September, as we can see from the following London Civil Defence Region (LCDR) Situation Report.

> London under red warning for seven and half consecutive hours, and later for 40 minutes. Very extensive but ineffective bombing, both H.E. and I. B. Lasting continuously from 2100 to 0600, covering all nine groups and 35 separate local authority areas. Some areas were bombed on two separate occasions, and bombs fell in several areas during the period between the two warnings. Appreciable damage in only seven or eight areas, and serious casualties in only nine areas. Total casualties 153, 5 killed, 30 hospital cases.[5]

In this period on the eve of the main London blitz a total of 257 Londoners lost their lives.[6]

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[2] His Majesty's Stationery Office, *Front Line 1940-1941 The Official Story of the Civil Defence of Britain* (1942), p. 6.
[3] Vera Brittain, *England's Hour* (1941), p. 96.
[4] Basil Collier, *The Defence of the United Kingdom* (1957), p. 207.
[5] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.
[6] Winston G. Ramsey (ed.), *The Blitz Then and Now – Volume I* (1987), p. 6.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940-July 1941]

At 5pm Saturday 7 September 300 bombers accompanied by some 600 fighter escorts began attacking dock and oil installations along the lower reaches of the Thames.[7] At just after 8pm these startlingly destructive events prompted the issuing of the invasion alert code CROMWELL.[8] Ted Harrison in Hackney vividly recalled, "…looking out from my verandah and seeing the German planes flying over in formation, about twenty of them and there were a couple of our fighters after them…And when I saw these Junkers, I thought, 'Blimey, we've lost the war'".[9] Compared to previous nuisance raids the relative ferocity of this attack caught the breath of Londoners dubbing the day 'Black Saturday' leaving around a 1000 people dead.[10] The main London blitz had begun.

Successive attacks of this scale resulted in alert CROMWELL remaining in force for the following twelve days. LCDR intelligence reports for the week ending 11 September indicated that, "there was concentrated bombing of London with the apparent object of crippling the docks and dislocating railway communications".[11] Casualties for 9 September alone amounted to 412 killed and 747 seriously injured[12], little wonder that Ralph Ingersoll remarked, "…in the month of September, between Saturday 7th September, and Sunday 15th September, Hitler almost took London – and didn't know it".[13]

As summer turned to autumn night time air raids intensified and shelters not originally intended or designed for sleeping started to be used as dormitories and by the middle of September the practice of sleeping in shelters had become widespread.[14] One result was the rush of people to shelter in underground tube stations, previously prohibited, who felt safer deep underground away from the sound of bombs. In early November the first census of London's shelters was conducted that found nine per cent of the estimated population spent the night in public shelters, four per cent in the tube

[7] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 236.
[8] Should the invader come, or should his coming seem imminent, plans for defence would be put into effect by issue of the code-word 'CROMWELL'. Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 131.
[9] Howard Bloch, *Black Saturday – The First Day of the Blitz – East London memories of September 7th 1940* (1984), p. 6.
[10] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 239.
[11] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Intelligence Reports.
[12] Winston G. Ramsey (ed.), *The Blitz Then and Now – Volume II* (1988), p. 83.
[13] Ralph Ingersoll, *Report on England* (1941), p. 8.
[14] Sir Arthur Salusbury MacNalty, *The Civilian Health and Medical Services Volume I – The Ministry of Health Services; Other Civilian Health and Medical Services* (1953), p. 193.

station shelters, and twenty seven per cent in household shelters, or a total of forty per cent of Londoners sleeping overnight in air raid shelters.[15]

For in fact the authorities had miscalculated expecting air raids to bring a far greater degree of fatality and had underestimated the widespread damage to buildings leaving many alive, but with no homes to live in.

> It was the rest centres that were full, for the damage to property was heavy compared with damage to life and limb…in the event there were no areas in which a centre was not open…and transfers were thus impossible except on the smallest scale.[16]

Plans that originally foresaw the use of rest centres for just twenty four hours were swiftly disabused, "In fact it was evident that the centres, instead of serving as temporary shelters, had to be converted into hostels to provide individuals with living accommodation for any period up to a month on end".[17]

"When people were rendered homeless by the destruction of their homes they were cared for in the rest centres…But many other Londoners found themselves in difficulties even though their homes were not destroyed", as bomb craters interrupted water, gas and electricity supply.[18]Heavy attacks on London left large numbers of people deprived of the simple everyday amenity of cooking for themselves, "The Prime Minister and Cabinet are all very anxious regarding communal feeding, especially in London, in many districts at the present time it is so very necessary…".[19] The response of London County Council (LCC) was the establishment of the Londoners' Meals Service providing communal feeding to air raid victims with the first hot meals served from a trailer canteen in Poplar.[20]By Christmas, from a standing start in September, a total of 139 centres were serving around 80, 000 hot meals a week within London County.[21]

From the end of the first week in September until the middle of November the capital was attacked nightly by an average of around a 160 German bombers (Italian planes contributed to the offensive from October, making sixteen night sorties that month and eight in the first half of November).[22]

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[15] Terence H. O'Brien, *Civil Defence* (1955), p. 392.
[16] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/MIN/2776, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Papers December 1940.
[17] Ibid.
[18] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/RC/GEN/1/1, LCC Meals Services History March 1945.
[19] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/RC/GEN/1/2, Letter from H. L. French Ministry of Food to E. C. H. Salmon Clerk to the LCC 21 October 1940.
[20] LMA, LCC/RC/GEN/1/1, LCC Meals Service History.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 256.

Except for one respite, 2 November, London was continuously bombed for seventy six nights,[23] during which time over 13,000 tons of High Explosive (HE) and nearly one million incendiaries had been hurled at the metropolis.[24]

During the winter raids remained constant but they no longer occurred on consecutive nights. On the evening of 29 December Charles Ritchie walking home noticed, "…the pink light of an enormous fire somewhere in the City",[25] for whilst raids had become less frequent, what he was now witnessing was the start of one of the greatest raids of the blitz. The City of London was the target of intensive incendiary bombing designed to 'fire' the City and cause a conflagration on a scale not seen since the Great Fire of London. Deliberately striking when the Thames was at an abnormally low tide restricting fire hose supply the enemy ignited the square mile destroying the Guildhall, eight Wren churches and only just leaving St. Paul's Cathedral relatively unscathed. Guy's hospital had to be evacuated, the Central Telegraph Office was wiped out, and five major railway termini were closed along with sixteen underground stations.[26] In total twenty eight major fires were started along with 1, 438 lesser ones burning out one quarter square mile of the City of London[27], leaving 163 dead and 509 seriously injured.[28]

From 27 January to 3 February 1941 only 213 bombs[29] fell in the entire London region as the enemy turned its attention from the capital to begin raiding major provincial cities across the United Kingdom. All this was to change in April when London earned the dubious distinction of becoming the first city to withstand 1,000 tonnes of HEs in one single attack.[30] The heaviest raid thus far of the main London blitz commenced during the night of 16-17 April when 450 or more aircraft struck the metropolis. "More bombs and more parachute mines were dropped, more fires were started, more civilian damage done, and more casualties caused than in any previous raid".[31] The bombing continued without pause from 2100 hours to 0430 killing 1, 179, a total of sixty six boroughs were hit, with the greatest weight of attack bearing down on a quadrilateral, whose corners were Willesden and Hackney on the north side and Barnes and Lewisham on the south.[32]

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[23] Richard M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (1950), p. 257.
[24] Denis Richards, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume I The Fight at Odds* (1953), p. 206.
[25] Charles Ritchie, *The Siren Years* (1974), p. 81.
[26] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 408.
[27] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Intelligence Reports.
[28] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 408.
[29] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Intelligence Reports.
[30] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Volume II*, p. 507.
[31] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Intelligence Reports.
[32] Ibid.

During the raid of 10 May the following selection of messages were received in the Home Security War Room at LCDR Headquarters registering widespread chaos.

> 0036 SOUTHWARK H.E. Borough Road blocked. Mains Damaged WESTMINSTER Dolphin Square. No casualties. LAMBETH 2325 H.E. Norwood Road blocked. BETHNAL GREEN 2350. H. E. Roman Road. Mains damaged ISLINGTON 2342 Heavy incendiary attack. H. E. at Stonefield Road ST MARYLEBONE 2340 H. E. Wells Street. ST PANCRAS 2350. H.E. and I.B.s at CAMBERWELL, TWICKENHAM, FELTHAM and HAMMERSMITH.[33]

Next morning standing on Westminster Bridge John Colville took in the ravaged city before him, "…the livid colour of the sky extended from Lambeth to St. Paul's, flames were visible all along the embankment, there was smoke rising thickly as far as the eye could see. After no previous raid has London looked so wounded…".[34] This final and most devastating raid of the main blitz took the lives of 1, 400 Londoners and injured a further 1, 800.[35]

On the night of 27-28 July sixty aircraft raided the south-east paying particular attention to London. From this date onwards no further attack was made for the remainder of the year and throughout the winter of 1941-1942 the capital was left unmolested. Looking back over the period of the main London blitz, perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of civilian deaths outnumbered those killed in the armed forces. Not until two years of war had passed did the number of civilians killed fall below the total fatalities among soldiers, sailors and airmen. Not until over three years had passed was it possible to say that the enemy had killed more soldiers than women and children.[36]

Tip and Run Raids – [1943]

1943 continued the trend of decreasing attacks, yet some major raids still took place such as on 17 January when 100 bombers dropped forty seven tons of munitions striking mainly southern suburbs.[37] What became known as 'tip and run' raids declined progressively from eighty in January, to fifty two in March, thirty nine in June and fewer and fewer as the year progressed.

Little Blitz – [1944]

In the first months of 1944 Operation Steinbock was launched against London consisting mainly of brief hour long attacks bringing about a new phase known as the Little Blitz. Whilst raids were geographically widespread, areas previously lightly blitzed such as south and west London were now

[33] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 688.
[34] John Colville, *The Fringes of Power Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (1985), p. 386.
[35] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Intelligence Reports.
[36] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 335.
[37] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 437.

hardest hit.[38] After a couple of years of relative peace the resumption of heavy raiding brought about a sense of unease, "London seems disturbed by the raids and less ebullient than in 1940-1941",[39] lasting from January to April the Little Blitz took the lives of 1, 280.[40]

V-Weapons – [1944-1945]

During midsummer a Royal Observer Corp look-out on the North Downs reported hearing on 13 June a put-put-put sound and witnessed a pilotless object flying overhead, "making a noise like a Model-T Ford going up a hill" which came to earth near Gravesend, the second falling in Sussex and the third hitting its London target in Bethnal Green. From 15 to 16 June more flying-bombs were aimed at London prompting the Home Secretary to inform the House of Commons that attacks of the V-1 flying bomb or 'doodlebug' had begun.[41] With roughly fifty bombs a day reaching Greater London Air Marshall Hill commented in his dispatch, "an intermittent drizzle of malignant robots seemed harder to bear than the storm and thunder of the 'blitz'".[42]

Not one of the ninety five local authorities in LCDR escaped the V-1 menace yet it was the boroughs to the south and south-east, those directly in the flight path known as 'doodlebug alley', that were hardest hit. Croydon was the most affected followed by the boroughs of Wandsworth, Lewisham, Camberwell, Woolwich, Greenwich, Lambeth, Beckenham, Orpington and Battersea.[43] During the flying bomb ordeal over 2, 000 V-1s reached London killing on average 2.2 persons and seriously injuring 6.3 per strike.[44]

On 8 September at 6.40 p.m. a loud explosion occurred in Chiswick, west London, followed a few seconds later by the sound of a heavy object rushing through the air as the first V-2 rocket, a supersonic ballistic missile, arrived shattering a number of houses killing three people.[45]In the next twenty four hours a further sixteen V-2 rockets fell and by early October rockets were arriving at the rate of two or three a day.[46] The approaching end of the war in 1945 brought no respite for Londoners when V-2 rocket attacks were joined by V-1 flying-bombs in the heaviest raiding since the

[38] John Conen, *The Little Blitz* (2014), p. 36.
[39] Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p. 475.
[40] Conen, *The Little Blitz*, p. 37.
[41] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 370.
[42] Ibid. p. 372.
[43] Norman Longmate, *The Doodlebugs – The Story of the Flying Bombs* (1981), p. 118.
[44] His Majesty's Stationery Office, *On the State of the Public Health During Six Years of War* (1946), p. 145.
[45] Hilary St. George Saunders, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume III The Fight is Won* (1954), p. 169.
[46] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 413.

previous summer.[47]In total the Vertgeltungswaffen[48] campaign had directed a total of 2, 420 V-1 flying-bombs and 517 V-2 ballistic rockets at the capital.[49]

At the end of the Second World War 29, 890 Londoners had been killed and 50, 507[50] seriously injured by incendiaries, high explosives, oil bombs, mines, flying-bombs and missiles that had fired, strafed, blasted, cratered, mauled and smashed London for nearly five years.

Historiography Review

We can clearly see what a cataclysmic event the London blitz was and one worthy of the attention of historians. Almost immediately during the main blitz several books were published capturing the first-hand experiences of authors witnessing what they begin to call the 'Battle of London'[51], a trend that continued throughout the rest of the war and into the immediate post-war years,[52] "At no other moment in history have so many British citizens felt compelled to write so extensively about their daily lives and ideas".[53] The intent of this cohort of early blitz chroniclers was to ensure that this

[47] Winston G. Ramsey (ed.), *The Blitz Then and Now – Volume III* (1990), p. 427.
[48] Meaning 'retaliation weapon' with 'v-weapon' the shorthand moniker used for V-1 flying-bombs and V-2 ballistic missiles.
[49] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 682.
[50] Ibid. p.677.
[51] *London Front* by F. Tennyson Jesse and H.M. Harwood (1940)
Post – D by John Strachey (1941)
Dusk to Dawn by A Warden (1941)
History Under Fire by James Pope – Hennessey (1941)
Bomber's Moon by Negley Farson (1941)
Women and Children Last by Hilde Marchant (1941)
Hell Came to London by Basil Woon (1941)
They Stayed in London by George Seva (1941)
The Lesson of London by Ritchie Calder (1941)
Carry on London by Ritchie Calder (1941)
Towards the Morning by James Lansdale Hodson (1941)
This is London by Edward R. Murrow (1941)
Postscripts by J. B. Priestley (1941)
A London Diary by Quentin Reynolds (1941)
Into the Blitz by William Strange (1941)
Report on England by Ralph Ingersoll (1941)
England's Hour by Vera Brittain (1941)
[52] *A Village in Piccadilly* by Robert Henrey (1942)
The Bells Go Down – The Diary of a London A. F. S. Man by Anon (1942)
While London Burns by F. Tennyson Jesse and H. M. Harwood (1942)
War Comes to the Docks by Ben T. Tinton (1942)
Home Front by Hilde Marchant (1942)
The Bull's Eye by Reginald Bell (1943)
War over West Ham by E. Doreen Idle (1943)
Between the Thunder and the Sun by Vincent Sheean (1943)
The Incredible City by Robert Henrey (1944)
Cockney Campaign by Frank R. Lewey (1944)
The Siege of London by Robert Henrey (1946)
Living Tapestry by Peter Conway (1946)
Westminster in War by William Sansom (1947)
[53] Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz – Fighting the People's War* (2009), p.4.

epoch was recorded and not lost amongst other wartime events, and as contemporary histories they provide a narrative reportage chronicling the blitz as it unfolded. In doing so they differ from the later more reflective historiography written from a greater distance in time and thus offering more critical analysis. Nonetheless, as we shall see, their effect was to set a path for later historians to follow, as the contemporaneous histories distinguish themselves by instead creating and becoming part of blitz history.

Here in the early blitz histories a 'London Can Take It' mentality of hardy collective resilience was first conceived and propagated, "…the life of London continues to-day as if there had been no bombing at all. The streets are as fully crowded. All the shops and offices are open".[54] The 'business as usual signs' hung outside bombed shops became indicative of defiance; "…it is just another example of the indomitable pluck, which will one day, give this great city the slogan: 'you can't beat a city that won't be beaten".[55] As so much was seen to be resting upon their collective shoulders this was a singular time for Londoners to take especial pride in themselves.

> This, then, is a wonderful moment for us who are here in London, now in the roaring centre of the battlefield, the strangest army the world has ever seen, an army in drab civilian clothes, doing quite ordinary things, an army of all shapes and sizes and ages of folk, but nevertheless a real army, upon whose continuing high and defiant sprit the world's future depends.[56]

London as one, and not its component localities, is presented as facing the enemy onslaught. The ubiquitous 'blitz spirit' papering over the cracks continually echoes throughout the historiography reverberating loudest within later more popular works.

Simultaneously one of the strongest forces helping to inculcate this sense of stoicism was provided by the speeches of Winston Churchill.

> These cruel, wanton, indiscriminate bombings of London are, of course, a part of Hitler's invasions plans. He hopes, by killing large numbers of civilians, and women and children, that he will terrorize and cow the people of this mighty imperial city, and make them a burden and an anxiety to the Government and thus distract our attention unduly from the ferocious onslaught he is preparing. Little does he know the spirit of the British nation, or the tough fibre of the Londoners, whose forebears played a leading part in the establishment of Parliamentary institutions and who have been bred to value freedom far

[54] Basil Woon, *Hell Came to London* (1941), p.41.
[55] Negely Farson, *Bomber's Moon* (1941), p.12.
[56] J. B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (1941), p.74.

> above their lives…All the world that is still free marvels at the composure and fortitude with which the citizens of London are facing and surmounting the great ordeal to which they are subjected, the end of which or the severity of which cannot yet be foreseen.[57]

Almost immediately one can then detect throughout the main body of blitz chronicles a mimicking of this pervasive sense of exceptionalism.

Discordant notes can however be heard emanating from some blitz chroniclers such as those struck by Vera Brittain in *England's Hour* (1941).

> Some parts of the city have temporarily lost the ordinary facilities of civilised living: there are rumours of shelter epidemics, and many children not yet evacuated have been inoculated against diphtheria…Far down the river, a broken sewer pours into the Thames; its putrid odour is blown by the wind as far west as the Strand.[58]

Ritchie Calder writing in *The Lesson of London* (1941) and *Carry on London* (1941), as part of his efforts to improve the lot of blitzed Londoners, adopted a strident tone in highlighting cases of official bungling, "Calder was arguing for specific social improvements, and so does not conceal the fear and near panic at the start of the bombing…".[59] *War Over West Ham* (1943) by E. Doreen Idle stands as a further outlier, written as a report for the *Fabian Society* studying community adjustment under fire, it proclaimed to be an effort that, "urgently needs doing…it was more than bricks and mortar that collapsed in West Ham…".[60]

Depictions of wartime London also come to us through works of literature that in a similar vein to the blitz chronicles, sought to report directly from the scene of a ravaged metropolis. "The imagery created by blazing London raged through the poetry of Stephen Spender, T. S. Elliot, Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, George Barker, Stevie Smith and Arthur Waley", and by the same token, "…there was an underplaying of emotion, there was control and an awe-inspiring display of adaption to a shattered scene".[61] Graham Greene in *The Ministry of Fear* (1943) placed the reader directly beneath the terror of an air raid. In *The Heat of the Day* (1949) Elizabeth Bowen wrote about the unparalleled transformative effect upon the city, "That autumn of 1940 was to appear, by two autumns later, apocryphal, more far away than peace. No planetary round was to bring again that particular conjunction of life and death; that particular psychic London was to be gone for ever; more bombs

[57] Charles Eade, *The War Speeches of the Rt. Hon Winston S. Churchill, Volume I* (1961), p.256.
[58] Brittain, *England's Hour*, p.190.
[59] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege. Literary Life in London 1939-1945* (1977), p.41.
[60] E. Doreen Idle, *War Over West Ham* (1943), p.6.
[61] Ronald Blythe, *Private Words Letters and Diaries from the Second World War* (1991), p.252.

would fall, but not on the same city".[62] Such writing has left a lasting impact, "The image of suffering London and the stoic unbeatable Londoner resonated at once round Britain and the world. And resonated in the imaginations of generations that followed until the end of the twentieth century and into the next".[63]

During this period we also see the emergence of locality-specific publications taking the form of either wartime reminiscences, *Post D* (1941), *Raiders Overhead* (1943), *Cockney Campaign* (1945), *Westminster in War* (1947), or official borough publications, *Croydon and the Second World War* (1949). Whilst they strove to retell local blitz experiences in their respective localities, Chelsea, Finsbury, Stepney, Westminster, and Croydon, this is done without realising the importance of doing so, for they stubbornly remain parochial narratives. Nonetheless an imprint is made upon the later historiography, such as *The People's War* (1969) that leant heavily upon them for source material.

Following on the heels of the wartime chronicles came the publication of the official history series of the Second World War. Her Majesty's Stationary Office published over thirty books in a series titled *History Of The Second World War* written by historians given unique access to government records. The official history series was crucial to all subsequent historical writing on this subject influencing Tom Harrisson in *Living Through the Blitz* (1976) and Juliet Gardiner in *The Blitz* (2010).

In the United Kingdom Civil Series the key texts relating to the blitz that feature heavily in this thesis are, *Problems of Social Policy* by Richard M. Titmuss (1950) which focuses on post-raid services of rest centres and communal feeding. *Food Volume II Studies in Administration and Control* (1956) by R. J. Hammond concentrating on food control and emergency feeding arrangements. Lastly, *Civil Defence* by Terence H. O'Brien (1955) covers civil defence policy and services. In addition to the Civil Series others have proven useful such as the United Kingdom Military Series which includes the following volumes relating to all stages of the blitz, *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume I The Fight at Odds* by Denis Richards (1953), *Royal Air Force 1939-1945 Volume III The Fight is Won* by Hilary St. George. Saunders (1954), and *The Defence of the United Kingdom* by Basil Collier (1957). Finally within the United Kingdom Medical Series, *The Emergency Medical Services Volume II (Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Principal Air Raids on Industrial Centres in Great Britain)* by C. L. Dunn (1953) and *The Civilian Health and Medical Services Volume I (The Ministry of Health Services; other Civilian Health and Medical Services)* by Sir Arthur Salusbury MacNalty (1953) provides information on shelter conditions and air raid casualties.

[62] Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (1949), p. 92.
[63] Jerry White, 'Unreal City: Reflections on London and the Novel in the Twentieth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue.56 (2003), p.25.

It is perhaps surprising that within the compendious volumes of the *History of the Second World War* there is no one single volume devoted to the blitz. The reason for this being that the series is organised by government departments each one presenting its own blitz perspective. Furthermore as a result of taking a national rather than regional viewpoint, an account of the blitz as seen by the Londoner is conspicuous by its absence. Moreover in offering an account of the subject based upon official material and historical research the official histories form a unique historiographical component. In mirroring the approach of the academic historiography I shall utilise the official histories as valuable source book material, yet remain conscious of the limits to critical analysis and nuance presented by their formal presentation and remit.

Shortly after the official histories were published came the first retelling of the blitz for a wider audience demonstrating an ever present and increasing hold of the subject upon popular imaginations generating an impressive volume of writings, and whilst all have something to say, we must single out the most relevant. *The Blitz* (1957) by Constantine Fitzgibbon and *The City That Wouldn't Die* (1959) by Richard Collier, were later followed by *The People's War* (1969) by Angus Calder, *Living Through the Blitz* (1976) by Tom Harrisson and *London at War* (1995) by Phillip Ziegler. In more recent times many more books have been released, *Wartime Britain* (2004) by Juliet Gardiner, *The Longest Night* (2005) by Gavin Mortimer, *The First Day of the Blitz* (2007) by Peter Stansky, *The Blitz – The British Under Attack* (2010) by Juliet Gardiner, *Target London* (2012) by Christy Campbell, *The Bombing War* (2013) by Richard Overy, *The Little Blitz* (2014) by John Conen and *The Secret History of the Blitz* (2015) by Joshua Levine.

A distinction can be made between academic and popular works within the historiography. A popular history of the blitz is typified by, *The Blitz* by Fitzgibbon, *London at War* by Ziegler, *The Longest Night* by Mortimer and *The Secret History of the Blitz* by Levine. A distinguishing feature here is an absence of academic referencing such as footnotes, and only with the exceptions of *London at War* and *The Secret History of the Blitz* any bibliography. In presenting broad sweeping narratives these works serve a popular audience and with scant and opaque use of source material lack the academic rigour and apparatus of more scholarly writers.

Key academic studies comprise, *The People's War* by Angus Calder, *Living Through the Blitz* by Harrisson, *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991) by Angus Calder, *We Can Take It!* (2004) by Mark Connelly, *British Civilians in the Front Line* (2006) by Helen Jones, *The First Day of the Blitz* by Stansky, *London Was Ours* (2008) by Amy Helen Bell, *The Blitz – The British Under Attack* by Gardiner, *Cities into Battlefields* (2011) edited by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, *The Bombing War* by Overy, *At Home and Under Fire* (2013) by Susan R. Grayzel, *The Coming of the Aerial War* (2014) by Michele

Haapamaki, *Death From the Skies* (2014) by Dietmar Suss, *Britain's War – Into Battle 1937-1941* (2016) by Daniel Todman, and *Britain at Bay 1938-1941: The Epic Story of the Second World War* (2020) by Alan Allport. All of these works are characterised by academic inquiry, offer greater analysis instead of narrative structure, and reflect evolving historical disciplines and approaches.

Across this divide academic works frequently borrow from and utilise popular publications. For example in depicting an air raid on the Surrey Docks Stansky quotes from eye-witness interviews first conducted by Fitzgibbon and printed in his work *The Blitz*.[64] Whilst the approach between academic and popular histories differs it is nevertheless made upon similar ground within the same context sharing and revising material in not very different ways. What defines the academic and popular division is an understanding that academic historiography is presented as written by historians in contrast to popular historiography created for a lay audience.

Another interaction is whereby modern-day works continue to be influenced by earlier publications. Angus Calder (incidentally the son of Ritchie Calder) in his study *The Myth of the Blitz* takes issue with *Post D* by John Strachey. Critiquing it as contributing to a 'blitz myth', "This would become a staple of formal and unofficial propaganda".[65] In contrast some popular studies unquestioningly perpetuate the 'blitz spirit' cliché that we have already come across in the contemporary histories.

> One of the more remarkable features of London life during the blitz was the way in which, beneath a veneer of violence and perpetual crisis, most people pursued their day-to-day avocations as if all was as usual in the world.[66]

This relationship of either refuting or confirming earlier writings confirms how in later years contemporary writers continue to shape and mould blitz history.

The most significant academic doctoral thesis on the blitz is by Robin Woolven, *Civil Defence in London 1935-1945 The formation and implementation of the policy for, and the performance of, the ARP (later Civil Defence) services in the London Region*, completed in 2001 at King's College, London. Woolven's thesis is based solely on civil defence with emphasis placed on the regional level of government not previously covered in the historiography.[67]

Critique of Historiography – An Absence of Locality

[64] Peter Stansky, *First Day of the Blitz* (2007), p. 87.
[65] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991), p. 200.
[66] Phillip Ziegler, *London at War* (1995), p. 150.
[67] In addition to Woolven a further academic thesis on the blitz is by Sean Dettman, *America and the Blitz*, completed in 2013. Dettman looks at the London Blitz of 1940-1941 and the effect of the blitz on US public opinion.

What strikes the reader of London blitz history from the very beginning is the precedence given to the date 7 September 1940.

> At teatime, or to be precise at 4.14pm on Saturday, September 7, 1940, 348 German bombers – Heinkels, Dorniers and Junkers – and 617 Messerchmitt German fighters crossed the English Channel into British airspace, forming a block 20 miles, filling 800 square miles of sky…This was the first day of the London Blitz…[68]

Harrison starts using mass-observation [MO] records from this day, "this record begins at 8.15pm, 7 September".[69]To open his account Mortimer pinpoints the date, "Saturday 7 September 1940 was the day Hitler had chosen to launch his attack on the British people".[70]

7 September 1940 is presented as the start of the London blitz with no mention made to the many raids that took place in London prior to this. As we have already noticed raids started significantly earlier, with the subsequent 'nuisance raids' amounting to a sharp loss of life and material. Instead 7 September 1940 is taken as a convenient date to label the start of the blitz, one that distorts reality, as by this time Londoners were already becoming used to bombing.

Air raid shelters are one of the key components in the historiography with great and repetitive attention paid to the Tilbury Shelter in Stepney.

> The floor was awash with urine…only two lavatories for 5000 women, none for men…overcome by the smell. People are sleeping on piles of rubbish…the passages loaded with filth. Lights dim, or non-existent…they sit, in darkness, head of one against the feet of the next…there is no room to move and hardly any to stretch. Some horses are still stabled there, and their mess mingles with that of the humans.[71]

The Tilbury Shelter was seen as, "The most notorious, which was actually part of the Liverpool Street goods station, off the Commercial Road, Stepney".[72] This term, 'notorious' is often repeated as is evidenced in subsequent writing on the subject. "The notorious Tilbury Shelter".[73] "London's most notorious shelter: the Tilbury in Stepney".[74] "The most famous, or notorious, of all London's shelters was found under the Tilbury railway arches in Stepney",[75] "…such as the notorious Tilbury Shelter in

[68] Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz*, p.1.
[69] Tom Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz* (1976), p.59.
[70] Gavin Mortimer, *The Longest Night, 10-11 May 1941, Voices from the London Blitz* (2005), p.11.
[71] Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, p.118.
[72] Constantine Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz* (1957), p. 149.
[73] Ziegler, *London at War*, p. 116.
[74] Juliet Gardiner, *The Blitz – The British Under Attack* (2010), p. 72.
[75] Angus Calder, *The People's War* (1969), p. 182.

Stepney".[76] It would appear that historians are blindly following one another in their treatment of the Tilbury shelter and in their monotonous phrasing blunt any impact they wish to make. With this concentrated focus our field of view becomes restricted at the expense of wider issues, and this one shelter allowed to epitomise air raid shelters regardless of conditions existing elsewhere.

The Tilbury shelter forms a continuous thread running right through blitz history one that is first woven by polemicist Ritchie Calder whose, "vivid reports helped to make the world aware that temporarily the front line of the war was in London".[77]

> The shelter was the basement of a great warehouse…sanitation barely existed…the result was that you were ankle deep in filth, which was trodden into blankets on which people were to sleep…people slept among the filth…it was appalling.[78]

Then as we have already seen in the preceding paragraph subsequent writers pick up this thread replicating the same pattern, sentiment, and arguments. Historians are steered onto territory already staked out, yet we must take greater care as,

> Ritchie Calder had greatly exaggerated the number of people taking refuge in the Tilbury shelter, as he had inflated the number killed in the bombing of South Hallsville School.[79] He did so because, as a campaigning journalist, he had an urgent agenda. In his view government was culpably negligent of the safety of its citizens – particularly its poorest citizens, who had not the resources to make their own arrangements.[80]

A further instance of contemporary chronicles greatly impacting later works is to be found in the considerable and lasting attention paid to the boroughs of West Ham, Stepney and Westminster. As we have touched on already these three London boroughs were first given prominence in *War Over West Ham*, *Cockney Campaign*, and *Westminster in War*. They all set out wartime experiences within places such as the Tilbury Shelter and often focus upon the inadequate responses of authorities. The effect of which was to cloud the views of later historians such as Angus Calder who echoed their earlier arguments.

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[76] Joshua Levine, *The Secret History of the Blitz* (2015), p.45.
[77] Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Calder, Peter Ritchie, Baron Ritchie Calder* (2012), http://www.-oxforddnb –com. ezproxy.lib.bbk.ac.uk/view/10.1093/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb – 9780198614128 – e – 30891.html
[78] Ritchie Calder, *Carry on London* (1941), p.40.
[79] Refers to South Hallsville School rest centre, Canning Town, bombed in the early hours of 10 September 1940, according to Ritchie Calder, "About 450 homeless lost their lives in that school…". Ritchie Calder, *Lesson of London* (1941), p. 20. West Ham Council announced the death toll as seventy-three. Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 33.
[80] Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 76.

> It will already be clear that London local government emerged discreditably from the blitz. An inordinate number of examples of squalor and neglect can be culled from the annals of Stepney and West Ham.[81]

Again we see that what is first given voice by the earlier blitz publications continues to resonate throughout subsequent parts of the historiography.

Any reading of blitz history soon encounters a frustrating use of identical sources. For example a particular account of an air raid made by a fireman is first used by Calder in *The People's War*.

> In the Surrey Docks…the fire officer in charge of the resulting inferno sent an exasperated message to his superiors, 'send all the bloody pumps you've got; the whole bloody world's on fire.[82]

Ziegler repeats the quotation in *London at War*, "The Surrey Commercial Docks was so fiercely ablaze that the fire officer signalled desperately, 'send all the bloody pumps you've got, the whole bloody world's on fire'.[83] In *Britain at Bay 1938-1941: The Epic Story of the Second World War* (2020) we see the same quote, "The holocaust reached Rotherhithe and Wapping less than a minute afterwards 'The whole bloody world's on Fire', a Fire Brigade station officer yelled to his telephonists as they call frantically across the city for reinforcements".[84] Fifty years separate these writings yet still we see an unimaginative borrowing from one historian to another with certain stories having become emblematic of the London blitz.

Historiographical Themes: Home Front Studies

The 'Home Front' as the epicentre of the London blitz begins to claim our attention with the publication of *The People's War*.

> While the Battle of Britain was still very much in progress, what is sometimes called the Battle of London had begun. It was the battle of an unarmed civilian population against incendiaries and high explosive; the battle of firemen, wardens, policemen, nurses and rescue workers against an enemy they could not hurt. The front line troops were doctors, parsons, telephonists, and people who in peacetime life had been clerks, builders labourers and housewives. Where the bombs fell, heroes would spring up by accident; a sixteen-year-old messenger boy riding through the cratered streets on his bicycle, an elderly hospital

[81] Calder, *The People's War*, p.192.
[82] Ibid. p. 157.
[83] Ziegler, *London at War*, p.113.
[84] Alan Allport, *Britain at Bay 1938-1941: The Epic Story of the Second World War* (2020), p. 333.

> porter flinging himself over a trapped nurse to save her at the cost of his own life as yet more masonry fell.[85]

We see the London blitz as exceptional not just as the first incidence of modern war in Britain, "…but more importantly because civilians participated in redrawing the modern urban space by inscribing on it their own importance".[86] The home front is defined by moving the focus from the military scene to rest upon the domestic, "Bombing was a brief, if dangerous, operation for the bomber crew, but it was a profound social fact for the victims who lived more permanently with its consequences".[87]

From the home front arises the notion of a 'People's War',

> …the sense that rich and poor, civilians and fighters, were 'all in it together', that privilege was or should be in abeyance and that even conscripted effort had a voluntary character. It also implied formally, and not only for those who had previously identified themselves as socialists, the idea that the 'old war' of capitalist boom, slump and war was being bombed out of existence, so that victory would be followed by social justice.[88]

'People's War' is seen as a contemporary concept, whose currency can be valued in the wartime Ministry of Information (MOI) film *London Can Take It* (1940), "More popular than other types of propaganda because it simultaneously honoured individual blitz experiences and united people in a common cause, the rhetoric of the People's War offered British citizens an idea with and against which to represent the Blitz meaningfully".[89] Cognisance of a 'People's War' allows us to more fully appreciate that, "Bombing targeted the economic, social and cultural fabric of the nation, and in so doing it laid bare the sinews that articulated the nation, exposing them to close examination".[90]

The question of morale amongst those bearing the burden on the home front is first treated as a totem of civilian indefatigability with O'Brien declaring, "The phrase 'London can take it' became current, and there is small doubt that this reflected the reality of the situation".[91] Yet later historians have since discovered,

> The London Blitz is what Pierre Nora calls a lieux de memoire, a place of primary importance in the memory of the war, and a space in which participants, historians, and the creators and

[85] Calder, *The People's War*, p.156.
[86] Amy Helen Bell, *London Was Ours Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (2008), p. 8.
[87] Richard Overy, *The Bombing War – Europe 1939-1945* (2013), p.127.
[88] Angus Calder, 'Britain's Good War?', *History Today*, Volume. 45, Issue.5 (May 1995), p.56.
[89] Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz,* p.6.
[90] Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940. History, Myth and Popular Memory* (2000), p.70.
[91] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 401.

> inheritors of national memory continue to thrash out new meanings and new applications for the memory of the war.[92]

Again we see that what is first posited during and immediately after the blitz leaves a lasting imprint upon the very history of that event itself.

A contested discourse over morale has since developed first initiated by Angus Calder; "Questioning these optimistic interpretations, Calder suggested that panic and defeatism after major raids, looting of bombed premises, black marketeering, strikes, juvenile delinquency, and higher rates of infantile mortality all indicated that civilian morale was not uniformly robust".[93] All of which is vigorously argued against by Robert Mackay in *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-1945* (1999).

> The majority of civilians really did make the best of their situation, adjusting to the changes, carrying on with what they had been doing as far as possible. Mass Observation and Home Intelligence reports provide overwhelming evidence to support the claim that has often been made that the emergency brought out the best in most people, that neighbourliness and disregard of class distinctions came more readily in this situation of shared danger and anxiety...No amount of attention paid to the counter-indicators of looting, absenteeism, black-marketeering and panics can conceal the fact that, although ubiquitous, this behaviour attached to but a small minority of the population.[94]

In *Death from the Skies* (2014) Dietmar Suss moves the debate onwards with his comparative study between, "two constitutionally different political systems: British democracy and National Socialist dictatorship".[95] Suss maintains that in reality responses to bombing were ambivalent and that, "morale always stood for many things at once: it was the object of contemporary academic investigation, a term used in the propaganda war, a military objective, and finally, after 1945, a historiographical point of reference and the blueprint for future war".[96]

Historiographical Themes: The Myth of the Blitz

"Behind the rhetoric of 'we can take it' the social response to the German bombing was complex and fractured…in the face of the bombing, there were many historical realities, not one".[97] For those

[92] Bell, *London Was Ours*, p. 198.
[93] Edgar Jones, Robin Woolven, Bill Durodie, and Simon Wessely, 'Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-examined', *Social History of Medicine*, Volume. 17, No. 3. (2004), p.464.
[94] Robert MacKay, *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-1945* (1999), p. 146.
[95] Dietmar Suss, *Death from the Skies How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II* (2014), p. 8.
[96] Ibid. p. 9.
[97] Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 126.

writing about blitz history exposing a 'myth of the blitz' has emerged as a major trend attempting to expose and reason with widely held popular pre-conceptions. Tom Harrisson, utilising his experience at MO, was an early exponent.

> It has proved something of an advantage to this writer, co-ordinating and necessarily selecting from a mass of old records, that he had an unusually wide experience of living through the blitz. It has been a greater advantage, however, that he has not been subject to the subsequent three decades of brain-washing. Living, from 1944 to 1970, outside Europe, out of regular contact with British newspapers and radio.[98]

For Harrisson in writing *Living Through the Blitz*, "The conflicts between fantasy and reality are one of the main subjects of this book".[99] This 'myth busting' approach does not take the form of any dialectic with other parts of the historiography, rather it takes aim at popular everyday assumptions built from and sustained by a variety of actors and sources, ranging from wartime propaganda, contemporary writings, novels, films, newspapers and widespread readily understood anecdotal accounts.

One can however take issue with Harrisson in his self-proclaimed belief of objectivity. In setting up MO Harrisson saw the role of the organisation as bridging the gap between elite and popular culture enabling the masses to speak for themselves.[100] During wartime Harrisson opined, "…that the government should be made fully aware of all the trends in civilian morale. They need an accurate machine for measuring such trends; a war barometer".[101] Writing in 1940 Harrisson proclaimed,

> I am determined that whatever happens, M-O shall come through the war and bring out a complete record of it…After the war…a lot of people are going to be really grateful to us for all we have done now…we are going to have quite new things to say…[102]

A motivating factor for Harrisson was to advocate the needs of civilians on the front line of the blitz[103], and to see him as solely denouncing a myth of the blitz would be to miss these motivations.

In contrast to Harrisson a less compromised approach is taken by Angus Calder applying a more traditional historical technique.

[98] Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, p.13.
[99] Ibid. p.18.
[100] James Hinton, *The Mass Observers – A History, 1937-1949* (2013), p.3.
[101] Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, *War Begins at Home* (1940), p. v.
[102] Ibid. p. 196.
[103] Hinton, *The Mass Observers*, p. 195.

> No doubt I shall be accused of wilful debunking. But I have not tried to explode ideas merely for the sake of the bang. Nor can I claim much credit for uncovering falsehoods long concealed. If a mythical version of the war still holds sway in school textbooks and television documentaries, every person who lived through those years knows parts of the myth which concerns his or her own activities are false. The facts which destroy the legends are not hard to come by.[104]

Calder looks beyond the 'legend' in portraying the reactions of air raid victims.

> To judge from certain versions of the blitz, it was a mean and pusillanimous Londoner who did not emerge from the debris with a wisecrack on his lips…but it was something close to hysteria which produced many of the gay remarks, and those who made them might be found, a few hours later, sobbing uncontrollably in the rest centres.[105]

We can perhaps assign greater value to these accounts for they lack any ulterior motive and in so doing display greater impartiality.

Writing twenty years later, in the keystone text on the subject, Calder greatly expands upon this approach in *The Myth of the Blitz*.

> My case for applying the word to the blitz is that the account of that event, or series of events, which was current by the end of the war has assumed a 'traditional' character, involves heroes, suggests the victory of good God over satanic evil, and has been used to explain a fact: the defeat of Nazism.[106]

Roland Barthes (*Mythologies,* 1957) is utilised to develop the thesis further.

> In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically, it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is…without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.[107]

The nature of blitz history is singular in character, "The blitz exists for any curious person in an unaccountable proliferation of accounts and published and unpublished documents…no archives of

[104] Calder, *The People's War*, p.15.
[105] Ibid. p. 187.
[106] Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*, p. 2.
[107] Ibid. p. 3.

such abundance exists for any other 'major event' in British history…".[108] Yet it is this peculiarity that lends itself to myth creation, "…successful after-raid looters have not written their memoirs. Cowardly people in local government have not advertised their shame". Yet, "…the memoirs and documents which do exist testify so abundantly and frankly to panic, to horrified revulsion, to post-raid depression, to anti-social behaviour, that the general pattern is plain...".[109]

As we have just seen in helping explain a blitz myth historians often call upon the works of others, "This notion of people feeling brotherly and sisterly kinship with strangers invites comparisons with Benedict Anderson's descriptions of a nation as an "imagined community", "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion".[110] According to Wasson such an 'imagined community' existed in blitzed London, "There is indeed an element of truth to the grand story of community spirit and jovial defiance…anecdotes abound of laconic cockney responses to the bombing".[111] Yet such representations of solidarity come at a price as they "leave little room for the experience of those who had to fight for spaces on the tube platforms, or who felt visceral disgust at seeing public shelterers in the "tube",…or the many victims of bombing who then became victims of looting".[112]

The blitz is presented in a warts and all fashion turning away from a traditional approach hitherto taken in the historiography. "I can't bear it, I can't *bear* it! If them sirens go again tonight, I shall die!", "It's me nerves, they're all used up, there's nothing left of me strength like I had at the start", "It's the dread, I can't tell you the dread, every night it's worse".[113] "'There is not one man I know who's getting used to it, if anything it is getting everybody down'".[114] "I shall never forget the next fortnight as long as I live…sleepless terrified nights, and days when you could fall off your chair with weariness".[115] As we can see from the above quotations such contemporary accounts alluding to something other than a pervasive sturdy blitz spirit have only emerged with the advent of 'myth busting' nearly fifty years after the event, what was first expounded by Calder and Harrisson has later been pursued by others such as Ziegler and Gardiner.

[108] Ibid. p. 119.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War – Dark London* (2010), p. 16.
[111] Ibid. p. 17.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, p. 95.
[114] Ziegler, *London at War*, p. 293.
[115] Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 43.

This particular strand of blitz history stimulates a strong counter response, "This discussion of myth has so far left out an important aspect: the fact that at certain times there is a *need* for myth".[116] In her work *London Was Ours* Bell asserts, "I do not believe that a myth, or collective memory of the war, exists separately from the people who created it".[117] Instead there exists a requirement to fully analyse and understand participant's memories and consideration of how they recorded their roles and experiences. For Connelly in *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, "…the myth contains many elements of truth and should be viewed as a particular explanation and interpretation of events rather than as a cleverly designed falsification of reality".[118] Indeed proponents of myth-busting are in fact unconsciously reworking that myth as they focus upon it; furthermore any memorializing of the blitz is not inaccurate, "…it simply emphasises certain elements".[119] In seeking to correct misconceptions the case for a myth of the blitz unbalances the equilibrium, it has become an over-correction.

> The obsessive search for the hidden truth about the British and the Second World War, conclusively proving that it wasn't all jolly cockneys and sing-alongs in shelters, is as ridiculous as saying that it was nothing but jolly cockneys and wise cracks about the Hun. Both are present and, contrary to the detractor's view, both are part of the mythologised war.[120]

In contrast Connelly determines, "The popular version of the Second World War is the product and aggregate of a number of sources and a vast collection of individual experiences which have created a remarkably robust history".[121]

Elsewhere others, such as Edward Smithies in *Crime in Wartime – A Social History of Crime in World War II* (1982), seek to pierce any fabled image of the blitz in a more nuanced and balanced fashion.

> The war has generally been regarded as a heroic period in the country's history; this study, however, is concerned with the underside of that achievement: the English people in their unheroic moments. Yet these two aspects of the country's experience cannot be separated from one another.[122]

[116] Hewison, *Under Siege*, p. 47.
[117] Bell, *London Was Ours*, p. 6.
[118] Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (2004), p. 1.
[119] Ibid. p.5.
[120] Ibid. p. 8.
[121] Ibid. p. 300.
[122] Edward Smithies, *Crime in Wartime – A Social History of Crime in World War II* (1982), p. 2.

In searching for a truer insight into life under fire scholars continue to work away at any carapace of wartime sentimentalism, often deploying underutilised tools to do so. In *Pacifism and the Blitz* (2013) Richard Overy explains,

> The article is at the same time a contribution to the growing debate on the nature of British society under the impact of bombing, in which dissenting or nonconformist voices have attracted little attention despite the recent efforts to deconstruct the myths of community solidarity and consensus.[123]

Pacifism during the Blitz provided an important vein of discourse during a time when, "the government and media were united in presenting a common belligerent front and an ideal of community solidarity in the face of shared disaster".[124] The historiography has a tendency to tear itself apart over a 'myth of the blitz', when really both blitz spirit and myth busting are different sides of the same coin. Whilst it has not been our purpose here to join that dispute, we must acknowledge its relevance to us in looking beyond any trope of a single London-wide blitz experience.

Shaping Wartime Experience: Metropolitan Differentials

"Experience, in Joan Scott's classical definition, 'then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain'…people's experience of war in an urban environment was neither unfiltered nor immediate, but rather mediated through culture and/or space".[125] In seeking to distil a purer sense of wartime experience historians have come to challenge any popular memory that this was a time of solidarity.

> In this idea of the nation in wartime, all internal divisions disappear. Conflicting interests of class, race, politics and gender are collapsed together to create a picture of a unified nation, united in battle against Nazi Germany. While divisions of, for example, gender, are still present, they are denuded of all antagonism; they appear instead as accepted and unproblematic, 'natural' ways of delineating society.[126]

[123] Richard Overy, 'Pacifism and the Blitz, 1940-1941', *Past and Present*, Volume. 219, Issue.1 (2013), p.202.
[124] Ibid. p. 235.
[125] Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, 'Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War: An Introduction', in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields – Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, (2011) p.75.
[126] Lucy Noakes, *War and the British, Gender, Memory and National Identity* (1998), p. 6.

A 'pull of unity' has been created, a desire to be part of a unified collective, resisting any incorporation in the name of particularity, difference, or group distinctiveness.[127] So that we can lay hold of a better understanding of life under fire let us now explore the forces that attempt to defy generalisation.

Class

Defined by Geoffrey Field in *Blood, Sweat, and Toil – Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (2011), "Class is best understood as structured inequality which is produced and reproduced in economic, social, cultural, and political relations".[128] For our purposes class has a significance that hitherto has been left unexplored.

> Despite the increased attention paid to the impact of bombing on civilian populations most of the current historiography has focused on the cultural aspects, showing little interest in issues of class…workers and working-class areas in bombed countries were often explicitly identified by the bombers as the main target; and workers were, in the majority of cases, the principal victims of the raids. This fact requires further investigation from both historians of war and of labour.[129]

Indeed as most working class communities found themselves geographically situated at the metropolitan epicentre, class should now be seen as an important variable influencing civilian morale. [130] When developed further we find that class was a potent force, "Even the experience of the Blitz itself was not the same across classes, since people had very different routines and sheltering practices depending on social background",[131] a theme that we shall be exploring in much further detail over subsequent chapters.

It is argued that class had a predetermining influence even before the first bombs fell:

> Issues of class and the financial obligations of the government towards its citizens were at the core of the leftist ARP critique from its inception…current ARP policy only exacerbated the economic disparity between the rich and poor and between wealthy and impoverished

[127] Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (2003), p.7.
[128] Geoffrey Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil – Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (2011), p.4.
[129] Claudia Baldoli and Matt Perry, 'Bombing and Labour in Western Europe, from 1940 to 1945', *Labour History Review*, Volume. 77, No. 1. (2012), p.3.
[130] Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'The Blitz, Civilian Morale and the City: mass-observation and working-class culture in Britain, 1940-41', *Urban History*, Volume. 26, No. 1. (1999), p. 78.
[131] Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz,* p.14.

> boroughs, especially since the burden of communal costs would disproportionately affect poorer areas.[132]

The decision taken by authorities to forbid the use of London Underground stations as shelters was based upon the assumption that working class Londoners would succumb to panic and refuse to re-emerge to carry on with their work. When this policy was later reversed we see contemporary evidence of fierce snobbery: "when journalist and propagandist Sefton Delmar heard the courage of Londoners praised, he 'thought with shame of those able-bodied proletarians in the Underground, publicly copulating on the platforms and blocking up the stations for those who had to go to work'".[133] Working-class Londoners themselves deeply resented, "rich youths who would amuse themselves at night by 'slumming' around the tube shelters sniggering at the awful sights and smells".[134]

As London came under fire a popular refrain was the levelling effect of bombs, "On September 11 1940 the Daily Express asserted that 'bombs show no class distinction' and that the raids had transformed London from 'an uneven city' to a 'common state'".[135] A notion rigorously challenged when one pays closer attention to the make-up of the metropolis.

> But there was a class geography of bombing raids. Especially in September, they were concentrated on the docklands and the East End area, particularly West and East Ham, Stepney and Silvertown, hemmed in by the Thames, the river Lea and the docks. These areas also had fewer social provisions for raids, partly because of lack of organisation and will on the part of local authorities and the London County Council. Bombs also had more impact on the social geography of East and South London due to a working class culture that lived mainly in the street and public institutions such as pubs.[136]

Others have pointed towards the rise of local activism that saw demands to open up basements in commercial buildings as shelters, provisioning of the homeless in empty dwellings, and the sit-in organised by the Stepney Communist Party Chairman Phil Piratin at the exclusive Savoy Hotel, as proof of class antagonism.[137] Again we can return to the Tilbury shelter a place much visited by 'blitz

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[132] Michele Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War – Culture and the Fear of Airborne Attack in Inter-War Britain* (2014), p.114.
[133] Amy Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945', *Journal of British Studies*, Volume.48 (January 2009), p. 156.
[134] Joanna Mack and Steve Humphries, *The Making of Modern London 1939-1945* (1985), p. 62.
[135] Bell, *London Was Ours*, p. 48.
[136] Ibid. p. 62.
[137] Geoffrey Field, 'Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940-1941', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, Number.62, (Fall, 2002), p. 17.

tourists', "…it soon became a tourist attraction for people from 'up West' to gawp at the hellish conditions their fellow Londoners were suffering a few miles away".[138]

Nonetheless the exigencies of hostilities also stimulated a binding of society: "…the raids also fostered community across classes – gratitude to local doctors, clergy, and WVS who worked in the shelters or manned Citizens Advice Bureau; department stores and firms that opened their basements as refuges".[139] Yet class difference can even be detected working upon the best of motivations.

> Mass Observation records indicate that individuals who joined up as ARP wardens or volunteers did so for a variety of reasons. Class and political identification caused subtle differences in the reasons given for volunteering. A sense of duty and patriotism were most commonly cited as the primary motives of the upper class and readers of right-wing newspapers, a desire to 'help' was cited as primary motive. The desire to 'help' echoes some of the ideas of popular cooperation and community action that the leftist ARP critics had advocated.[140]

Furthermore when we later delve into blitz experiences across the boroughs of London it will become increasingly apparent how the agency of class has particular saliency to the wider work of this thesis.

Gender

On 22 September 1940, as the London blitz reached a crescendo, the novelist and broadcaster J. B. Priestley offered the following observations on the position of women as part of his popular Sunday radio talks *Postcripts.*

> For this is total war, and total war is war right inside the home itself, emptying the clothes cupboards and the larder, screaming its threats through the radio at the hearth, burning and bombing its way from roof to cellar. It's ten times harder being a decent housewife and mother during such a war than it is being a soldier. You have to make a far greater effort to keep going, for you've no training, and discipline to armour you. The soldier has his own responsibilities, but when he assumed them he was released from a great many others; whereas his women-folk know no such release, but have more and more responsibility piled upon them.

[138] Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 74.
[139] Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil*, p.77.
[140] Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p.199.

> And they needn't even be wives and mothers. Nothing has impressed me more in this bombing battle of London than the continued high courage and resolution, not only of the wives and mothers but also of the crowds of nurses, secretaries, clerks, telephone girls, shop assistants, waitresses, who morning after morning have turned up for duty neat as ever – rather pink about the eyes, perhaps, and smiling tremulously, but still smiling.[141]

We will now turn our attention to, "…women's history, understood as the traversing of urban space by more women doing more and different jobs than ever before. This change in gender balance meant that women were more exposed to the violence of warfare visited on metropolitan space than ever before".[142]

In an echo of the First World War conflict would come to shape the lives of women in singular ways as they responded to both mobilization and their role on the home front.

> State agents linked a variety of behaviours and qualities – serenity, steadfastness, self-service – that could perhaps be best exhibited by women (and should be expressed by all) with the maintenance of good, civilian morale and the civil identity necessary for the successful outcome of the war.[143]

Whilst it is tempting to believe that this was a moment that cut across gender boundaries historians such as Lucy Noakes in *War and the British, Gender, Memory, and National Identity* (1998) point towards the contrary.

> Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have argued that war provides a moment in time when gender roles stand out in very clear relief. Using the metaphor of a double helix, they show how, while gender roles may change in wartime, they remain the same *in relation to one another*. Women may have moved into new fields of occupation during the war, but these occupations were still understood to be subordinate to those of men; women moved into the factories, but men moved into the higher-status occupation of soldiering. Although women were conscripted in Britain during the Second World War, their work was seen as vital in order to support the male combatants in the forces and to replace the men in the factories who had gone away to fight.[144]

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[141] Priestley, *Postscripts*, p. 78.
[142] Jay Winter, 'Metropolitan History and National History in the Age of Total War', in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields – Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, (2011) p.219.
[143] Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire – Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (2012), p. 295.
[144] Noakes, *War and the British,* p. 19.

While women entered new fields they still found areas cordoned off to them.[145]

We have already seen that as bombers flew closer to the home front women were seen as particularly at risk, perceived as the primary potential victims of air raids, encouraged to take responsibility for defending both the home and its inhabitants.[146] Some have looked towards the 'Housewive's Service' of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), where recruits undertook domestic and caring tasks, as confirmation of, "…how the boundaries of public and private were blurred and stretched".[147] Source material can itself be telling.

> While Norah's diaries were undoubtedly written only for herself, their engagement with national and international events invites us to interrogate the boundaries between the public and private and to explore her reception of and engagement with public narratives about gendered wartime expectations. Very few sources offer access to the interior emotional lives of working-class girls and women in England in the 1930s and 1940s. When valued as ordinary writing, the pocket diary begins to do just that.[148]

Women are very much present in much of the thesis that follows, we will see the frequent use of multiple female sources, mostly diarists, as part of a conscious effort to reflect both women's and men's blitz experiences.

Race

The issue of race provides further deviation from the trope of Londoners being 'all in it together' beneath the falling bombs. One canard often exposed is that Jewish citizens behaved in a way that differed to a more Anglo-Saxon ideal.

> In the early days of the war, during the mass evacuations from the cities, for example, Mass Observation reports suggested that Jews were widely believed to be cowards whose first thought was to save themselves. Such images persisted through the Blitz, as Jews were accused of crowding into shelters, getting into shelters early in the day to secure the best places and otherwise monopolizing shelter space. Home Intelligence reported in early September 1940 that anti-Semitism was growing in districts heavily populated by Jews who

[145] Ibid. p.14.
[146] Lucy Noakes, ''Save to Serve': Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain 1937-41', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume. 47, Number. 4 (2012), p. 737.
[147] Maggie Andrews, ''Nationalising Hundreds and Thousands of Women': a domestic response to a national problem', *Women's History Review*, Volume. 24, Number. 1 (2015), p. 121.
[148] Alison Twells, ''Went into raptures': reading emotion in the ordinary wartime diary, 1941-1946', *Women's History Review*, Volume. 25, Number. 1 (2016), p. 156.

> ‘are said to show too great a keenness to save their own skins and too little consideration for other people’…[149]

Observing tube station shelterers George Orwell noted,

> The other night examined the crowds sheltering in Chancery Lane, Oxford Circus and Baker Street stations. Not all Jews, but, I think, a higher proportion of Jews than one would normally see in a crowd of this size. What is bad about Jews is that they are not only conspicuous, but go out of their way to make themselves so. A fearful Jewish woman, a regular comic-paper cartoon of a Jewess, fought her way off the train at Oxford Circus, landing blows on anyone who stood in her way.[150]

The picture becomes more complex when one steps back a little further to fully take in the true diversity of metropolitan life, “ ‘In fact, the presence of considerable coloured elements was responsible for drawing Cockney and Jew together, against the Indian’ ”. Although it was perhaps not entirely a scene of inter-racial strife, “A Nigerian air raid warden in another part of London wrote fondly of his Blitz experiences and the friendliness of people in his area”.[151] To go into this issue further would be beyond the compass of this chapter, suffice to say that whilst we cannot fully do justice to it here, we must at least show awareness.

Shaping Wartime Experience: The Agency of Locality

Into this wider field of distilling wartime experience enters my work exploring the agency of locality, a hitherto overlooked factor which helped to shape and mould the lived experience of aerial bombardment. Thus far we have seen how early blitz histories conceived and propagated an image of ‘London Can Take It’ of sturdy collective resilience expressed by all Londoners. Even though at times the mask of defiance may slip, and local variance acknowledged, with Basil Woon in *Hell Came To London* (1941) admitting, “…a crowd of East Enders condemned to spend their nights in “The Arches” heard about the goings-on of the rich folk at the Savoy”,[152] blitz chronicles maintain an ever present and increasing hold of blitz spirit upon popular imaginations. We have however witnessed a subsequent swing of the historiographical pendulum towards more revisionist histories reacting against any heroic orthodoxy, demonstrating varied and contradictory responses to bombing, for the London blitz was not a monolithic experience. By joining this conversation our aim is to further

[149] Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p.94.
[150] Jerry White, ‘Jews and Bombs: The Making of a Metropolitan Myth, 1916-1945’, in Colin Holmes and Anne J. Kershen (eds.), *An East End Legacy – Essays in Memory of William J. Fishman*, (2018) p.17.
[151] Field, ‘Nights Underground in Darkest London’, p. 19.
[152] Woon, *Hell Came to London*, p. 156.

pierce the trope and demonstrate how locality helps unlock a clearer understanding of the London blitz.

If for a moment we allow ourselves to step back into the pre-war period of air raid precautions we are further pointed towards the fractured nature of London, for whilst it was believed a regional structure of government would best protect the capital, "…London local authorities enjoyed considerable autonomy and could be relied upon to resist any attempts to alter their relationship with central government departments".[153] Wide fundamental differences of attitude existed across the plethora of boroughs, "Poplar appears to have been an outstanding example of organization and commitment…At the other extreme was West Ham, where some Labour councillors had opposed even setting up an A. R. P. Committee"[154], moreover whilst the historiography notes these differences, it is not until this thesis, that the implications are followed through.

Despite this hotchpotch scene some historians have treated locality by addressing the city as a single entity rather than seeing areas in their own right. "On the night of 28-29 August, London was under red alert for seven hours and bombing was reported in Finchley, St. Pancras, Wembley, Wood Green, Southgate, Old Kent Road, Mill Hill, Ilford, Chigwell and Hendon". [155] An air raid on Croydon aerodrome is viewed collectively from various vantage points in London.

> Walking in Putney…an observer saw the sky to the south-east 'full of black smoke clouds'…in Streatham nearby when the siren went that evening, commuters simply walked home from the station at the same pace as usual. At Ealing Broadway, when the All Clear sounded some 200 people were seen pouring out of public shelters…[156]

What grows in significance from a further reading of the historiography is not just how locality is alluded to but how it is later employed, such as when the East End is often required to speak on behalf of much more than just itself, "The places in *Fires Were Started* were selected by Jennings to construct a representation of a particular event and to place that event within the context of both local and national history".[157]

In describing air raid shelters divergences between localities are referenced yet they become generalised upwards depicting a London-wide view.

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[153] Robin Woolven, 'The London Experience of Regional Government 1938-1945', *London Journal*, Volume. 25, Number. 2 (2000), p. 59.
[154] A. D. Harvey, 'Local Authorities and the Blitz', *The Contemporary Review*, 257 (1990), p. 198.
[155] Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 83.
[156] Calder, *Myth of the Blitz* p. 139.
[157] Michael McCluskey, 'Humphrey Jennings in the East End: Fires Were Started and Local Geographies', *The London Journal*, Volume. 41, Number. 2 (2016), p. 187.

> Phyllis Warner in Holborn considered that 'we are lucky in having our own shelter…so that we can have mattresses and even a table and chair or two down there…Mr Stuart Murray of Croydon had 'turned his shelter into a family bedroom' by nailing a double layer of chicken wire across a wooden frame to provide two upper and two lower layer bunks…Eighteen year old Margaret Turpin's family had a brick built shelter in the garden of their East End home. 'It was so small, My brother was nearly six foot, there was my father, myself, my sister, my mother and a baby, and somehow we were supposed to be able to sleep in this shelter but it was impossible'.[158]

Locality is not contextualised, "After 13 September the Luftwaffe's attack gradually spread across the whole spectrum of the capital, and the East End was indeed no longer alone…Night after night the planes came back and it was the same whether you were a docker in Bow or a debutante in Park Lane…".[159]

A generalised London-wide experience can often be blatantly made.

> Thus did the Blitz come to Bermondsey. It was much the same in the neighbouring boroughs of Southwark and Deptford, Greenwich and Woolwich, and north of the river in Stepney, Poplar, West and East Ham…It was just as bad, that night, in the other East End riverside boroughs.[160]

Moreover when Calder writes that, "The case of the London Borough of Paddington, socially a very mixed area, will provide an example, not necessarily representative of the balance of various types",[161] the point is missed. We are being asked to look above and over the localities of London fixing our attention on the capital as a whole obscuring our view of what happens below.

Despite the predominance of the city wide approach a more complex and nuanced treatment of locality can yet be seen, and Richard Overy makes this point well.

> There were also wide differences dictated by topography and social geography in the nature and number of shelters built before the Blitz. In urban areas with unsuitable geological conditions or low lying poorly drained ground, there were few cellars or basements and councils had to resort to large numbers of brick-built surface shelters, whose evident vulnerability made them unpopular with shelterers. In the London borough of West Ham the low-lying ground made it difficult to install any domestic shelters, either Anderson, surface

[158] Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 58.
[159] Leonard Mosley, *Backs to the Wall London Under Fire 1939-1945* (1972), p. 134.
[160] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p. 60.
[161] Calder, *The People's War*, p. 181.

> or trench, while the absence of gardens in most working class housing ruled out outside shelter. A wartime analysis of West Ham's Blitz observed that garden shelters were also disliked because they cut families off from the community around them; communal shelters came to be preferred for social as well as practical reasons.[162]

Daniel Todman writing in *Britain's War Into Battle 1937-1941* (2016) alerts us to diversity within a district, "There were significant local variations even within the East End in the amount of shelter available. Stepney, which was bombed more heavily than any other borough in September, was particularly badly served".[163] Whilst these approaches stand out they are never fully explored and the potential left underutilised, for the historiography looks at but does not explore locality.

In seeking to understand how Londoners themselves viewed the wartime metropolis Ziegler posits two contrasting examples, the second of which is worth quoting from at length, "Another effect of the blitz, Eric James believed, was that parochialism had broken down. People from Bermondsey who had never visited the West End, or even crossed the river, now thought as Londoners".

> Every district, every street, was a unit preoccupied primarily with its own affairs. The heavier the bombing, the less people cared about anyone except their immediate neighbours, concluded a Home Office report in early October. 'Whereas two weeks ago, a raid on London upset the whole of London, today Streatham or Stepney scarcely worry at all if there have been a great many bombs on Shoreditch or Lewisham'. Local loyalties pulled as never before: a labourer insisted on returning to his badly damaged home from relatives in Fulham only half a mile away because 'I'm a Chelsea man'; a woman found her way back to what was little more than a heap of rubble – 'Why should I let 'Itler drive me out of Poplar?'. A conviction that their fire was more important than one in the next district led to some of the few angry crowd scenes in the war; in Brixton inhabitants formed a cordon to stop a fire engine moving off to another borough and had to leap aside as it accelerated away.[164]

Furthermore when historians think locally determinative agencies are discovered working side by side.

> Yet, despite this growing sense of community solidarity throughout London, the suburban way of coping with the bombing remained more private than the working-class mode which developed in inner London. Whereas many East Enders packed into public shelters and

[162] Overy, *The Bombing War*, p. 137.
[163] Daniel Todman, *Britain's War Into Battle 1937-1941* (2016), p. 477.
[164] Ziegler, *London at War*, p. 167.

> entered into a communal lifestyle, suburban families still preferred to keep themselves to themselves.[165]

Here locality helps us to gain our bearings and we can better see how class worked upon people's responses to air attack.

"The blitz, a catastrophe falling upon almost the whole of Britain, may also be regarded as an individual crisis in the history of every town and village suffering under it". E. Doreen Idle continues in this vein demonstrating how some contemporary writers first understood the significance of the local.

> Events in any town are qualified by the peculiar history underlying it – by the class of people forming the majority of its population, by its characteristic type of building, and by its civic history. Problems of the future evoked by raids will need solutions adjusted to each locality, even while the experience of every locality helps to illumine problems confronting the whole country.[166]

Wasson asks in *Urban Gothic of the Second World War – Dark London* (2010), "London was emphasised, then, but which London?".

> The metropolis defies definition. The different towns that comprise Greater London have distinct characters which intensified when blackout and petrol rationing made movement difficult…London's numerous villages experienced very different Blitzes. The heterogeneity of London's spaces is echoed by the heterogeneity of the war years.[167]

This fundamental requirement to recognise and be aware of the very city on which the blitz took place is the very bedrock of the thesis.

All these points are further substantiated when we step outside of London and comparatively consider the raids upon Liverpool and Coventry,"…the particular issues discussed in relation to Coventry and Liverpool do illustrate how local studies may provide valuable insights into the generation and dissolution of morale".[168]

We can now see how the baton of local studies has increasingly been picked up. Helen Jones in *British Civilians in the Front Line – Air Raids, Productivity and Wartime Culture, 1939-45* (2006)

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[165] Mack and Humphries, *Making of Modern London*, p. 64.
[166] Idle, *War Over West Ham*, p.9.
[167] Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War*, p. 24.
[168] David Thoms, 'The Blitz, Civilian Morale and Recognition, 1940-1942', in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds.), *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain* (1995), p.11.

proclaims, "…it will be argued here that the experience of air raids gave many people a strong sense of local pride and an enhanced sense of local identity…".[169] Writing in the *Local Historian* Sally Sokoloff takes aim at any preconceived idea of the irrelevancy of the local;

> Many wartime measures were the responsibility of local government precisely because they had to intrude deeply into people's lives and this gave play to local initiative and popular feeling, resulting in considerable variation of experience...Furthermore, the production in recent decades of much 'Home Front history' as local history suggests that local experience had an authenticity that merits historical enquiry.[170]

A growing sensitivity to locality has emerged from the historiography, than has perhaps been previously recognised, alongside a greater appreciation of its significance to blitz history.

Nonetheless in the main by taking too broad a perspective and leaving locality at the fringes the historiography has a distorting flattening effect upon our view of the London blitz. It is possible to be looking at the blitz whilst still not really seeing the whole subject, "There was no greater hammer-blow in the twentieth century, of course, than the blitz. It involved, uniquely, all London's localities in a single shared experience".[171]What is left unexplored is how distinct localities themselves helped determine blitz experiences for Londoners. Finsbury Borough Council campaigned for deep shelters, those living in Bermondsey were forced by lack of suitable terrain for domestic shelters to huddle underneath vulnerable railway arches, residents of Kensington enjoyed bespoke communal feeding arrangements, the people of East Ham struggled on the front line of the London Docks, people in Croydon were at greater risk living next to the bull's eye of the aerodrome, and Acton residents felt especially exposed in the vicinity of industry. We can obtain a more considered view of the blitz once the agency of locality is recognised and the inherent instability of a single London-wide blitz accepted. Once dismantled the notion of unity can be rebuilt, the pieces better fitted together, upon a more solid foundation. This thesis aims to fill an inadequacy, for whilst sturdy wartime resilience existed, these were very real experiences, they played out differently wherever in London you happened to be.

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[169] Helen Jones, *British Civilians in the Front Line – Air Raids, Productivity and Wartime Culture, 1939-45* (2006), p. 7.
[170] Sally Sokoloff, 'The Home Front in the Second World War and Local History', *Local Historian*, Volume. 32 (2002), p. 22.
[171] Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century* (2001), p. 102.

Local Area Analysis

In finding out the extent of this diversity it is necessary to ask, how far was the blitz experience for Londoners shaped and determined by local circumstances? In answering this question I shall for the first time in the historiography conduct a local area analysis. In so doing demonstrate the existence of varied and contrasting blitz experiences across the capital and argue that locality was an influence upon them. The local area analysis will look at the metropolitan boroughs, Finsbury, Bermondsey, and Royal Borough of Kensington. The county boroughs of East Ham and Croydon, and the Municipal Borough of Acton. All of these boroughs were within the Greater London area of the Metropolitan Police district, which would later be used to define the LCDR.

To fully understand and appreciate the variation presented by the six local boroughs we must comprehend how governance and administrative structures were significant. The government structure of London was inordinately complex which demands detailed explanation. The population of Greater London was recorded in the 1931 census at 8, 203, 942 people which compared to the population of Greater Paris of 4, 933, 855 and Berlin at 4, 190, 847.[172]London contained more persons than 15 other European states such as Holland, Belgium, Greece, Finland, Bulgaria, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark.[173] To govern a city of this size existed a cornucopia of 117 authorities which included the LCC, City Corporation, twenty eight metropolitan borough councils, Metropolitan Water Board, Port of London Authority, five county councils, three county borough councils, thirty five municipal borough councils, thirty urban district councils, four rural district councils and six parish councils. Little wonder that this arrangement had been described as, "in a class by itself".[174]

Key to this structure was the local authority which, "covers all classes of local governing bodies whose functions it is to provide services for the inhabitants of a particular area".[175] Three distinct forms of local authorities are covered by the six boroughs, Metropolitan (Finsbury, Bermondsey, and Kensington), County Borough Councils (East Ham, Croydon) and Municipal Boroughs (Acton).

All Metropolitan Boroughs consisted of a Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors who were elected every three years; council membership varied from thirty to sixty though the number was fixed for each council.[176] The Town Clerk was the administrative head running departments responsible for carrying out the duties of the council with some functions shared with LCC. Municipal Boroughs were also

[172] William A. Robson, *The Government and Misgovernment of London* (1948), p. 163.
[173] Ibid.
[174] C. Kent Wright, *The A.B.C. of Local Government* (1939), p. 21.
[175] Ibid. p. 205.
[176] E. C. R. Hadfield and James E. MacColl, *Pilot Guide to Political London* (1945), p. 16.

composed of Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors yet in contrast shared more authority with the overarching county councils who administered a number of services within them.[177] In 1888 every borough consisting of a population of 50, 000 was made a County Borough.[178] A County Borough possessed the combined powers of a county council and borough council and had complete administrative jurisdiction within its borders.[179]

The administrative county of London was comprised of the twenty eight Metropolitan Borough Councils plus the Corporation of the City of London and was governed by the LCC. The total area consisted of one-sixth of all Greater London[180] stretching from Poplar in the east, to Putney and Hammersmith in the west, Finsbury Park to the north and Crystal Palace in the south[181] the boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington were within the jurisdiction. The council was responsible at the London County level for the maintenance of highways, tunnels, bridges, fire brigade, housing, parks and open spaces, licensing, schools, ambulance service, hospitals and welfare centres.[182] Of the remaining four county councils within the Greater London area the other relevant Council is the MCC (Middlesex County Council). Responsible for the administration of Middlesex comprising both municipal boroughs and urban districts of which the Municipal Borough of Acton was part.

Above the boroughs and county councils sat the LCDR, established from the Metropolitan Police District often taken as denoting the bounds of Greater London, an area comprising 692 square miles within a fifteen mile radius of Charing Cross in central London.[183] The regional plan grouped local authority areas for wartime control and mutual support. This took the form of local authorities within the administrative county of London divided into five groups with four further groups outside London County serving Middlesex, Hertfordshire and the remaining counties bordering the region.[184]

The Six London Boroughs

> Shoreditch (especially Hoxton), Finsbury, parts of Stepney (like Wapping), Poplar, Southwark, Bermondsey, north Lambeth and more had within them clusters of streets with a…village feel…'The Bethnal Greener is…surrounded not only by his own relatives and their acquaintances, but also by his own acquaintances and their relatives'.[185]

[177] Herbert Morrison, *How London is Governed* (1949), p. 99.
[178] Kent Wright, *A.B.C. of Local Government*, p. 205.
[179] Morrison, *How London is Governed*, p. 98.
[180] Robson, *Government and Misgovernment*, p. 164.
[181] Morrison, *How London is Governed*, p. 2.
[182] Ibid. p. 73.
[183] Robson, *Government and Misgovernment*, p. 164.
[184] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 184.
[185] White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p. 118.

Before we look in depth at the six chosen London boroughs it is important to realise that they have not been selected to offer a comprehensive view, instead they are representative of their type, an effective sample demonstrating the varied distinctive settlements of the metropolis, and rather than place or space, they speak towards topographical locality as would have been understood by the contemporary Londoner. They offer up a wide range of size, population, social conditions, and economic status, coupled with a governance structure that is equally varied. It is key that we understand how locality operated at the borough level to so that we may comprehend how people's experiences were shaped and determined by the areas they lived in.

Metropolitan London: Finsbury

The Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury, with the exception of Holborn, was the smallest of the metropolitan boroughs.[186] Finsbury was situated between Islington on the north and the City of London on the south, with Shoreditch forming the eastern boundary and the boroughs of Holborn and St. Pancras the western.[187] The 1921 census recorded the population of Finsbury at 75, 995 which had fallen by the time of the 1931 census to 69, 888 and estimated to be lower still at 58, 700 in 1937.[188] The proximity of Finsbury to the City of London was seen as responsible for the number of dwelling houses giving way to business premises and thus reducing the dormitory population of the borough.[189] Whilst by comparison to other London boroughs the population of Finsbury was small, within its 586 acres the population was still in excess of many provincial towns.[190] The day population of Finsbury was increased to approximately 150,000 from the resident total of 69, 888 as workers from outside the borough journeyed to work there during the day.[191]

Finsbury was a place crammed full with only twelve acres of open space[192], "most of the borough consists of streets of mean dwelling houses interspersed with factories and other business premises with, here and there, large blocks of working class tenements".[193] Widely distributed throughout Finsbury were a number of various medium and light engineering industries that included manufacture of motor cars, printing machinery, household devices, metal work, electrical equipment and watch making workshops.[194] Each industry had a number of factories larger than

[186] Finsbury Borough Council, *The Official Guide to the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury* (1935), p. 35.
[187] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *The New Survey of London Life and Labour Volume VI Survey of Social Conditions (2) The Western Area* (1934), p. 381.
[188] LCC, *London Statistics 1936-38 Vol. XLI* (1939), p. 39.
[189] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 381.
[190] Finsbury Borough Council, *Official Guide*, p. 35.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 381.
[193] Ibid.
[194] J. H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *County of London Plan 1943* (1943), p. 85.

those found in such boroughs as Bethnal Green, Shoreditch or Stepney. 2, 523 factories were based in Finsbury employing 66, 556 people.[195] Of all London boroughs Finsbury had the most acute overcrowding and the highest death rate.[196] According to the Street Survey of London conducted in 1930 the percentage of persons in poverty stood at 13.2.[197] In 1934 local historian W. H. Yeandle observed Finsbury as, "crammed with history, not the history of kings and statecraft, but of the ordinary lives of ordinary people".[198]

Being part of London County Finsbury was classed as a Metropolitan Borough with a council consisting of fifty six councillors and nine alderman.[199] In 1934 the political distribution of seats on the borough council was Labour forty seven councillors and Ratepayers Association (affiliated with the Conservative Party) nine seats. The 1937 local election returned forty eight Labour councillors with only eight for the Ratepayers Association.[200] For elections to the LCC Finsbury returned two representatives. In the elections of 1934 and 1937 both seats were held by the Labour Party[201] who dominated political life throughout the borough.

Metropolitan London: Bermondsey

To the immediate south east of central London sat the Metropolitan Borough of Bermondsey. Bordered by the Thames to the north and east with the neighbouring boroughs of Southwark to the west and Camberwell and Deptford to the south. Bermondsey measured 1, 503 acres in size with a population of 111, 542 as recorded in the 1931 census.[202] The borough was divided into two parliamentary constituencies, Rotherhithe and Bermondsey (west). Politically the borough was a one party state with the Labour party holding all fifty four seats on the Borough Council in both the 1934 and 1937 local elections. Labour also held both seats representing Bermondsey on the LCC.[203]

Docks dominated working life and constituted the chief employment of residents in Bermondsey with men employed as dock labourers, seamen, bargemen and pilots.[204]Other sources of employment consisted of the railways, tanning industries and large factories consisting of food manufacture, chemical production and engineering works employing 31, 058 people in 711 factories

[195] Ibid. p. 160.
[196] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 382.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Richard Tames, *Clerkenwell and Finsbury Past* (1999), p. 7.
[199] Finsbury Borough Council, *Official Guide*, p. 36.
[200] Hadfield and MacColl, *Pilot Guide to Political London*, p. 167.
[201] Ibid.
[202] LCC, *London Statistics*, p. 32.
[203] Hadfield and MacColl, *Pilot Guide to Political London*, p. 160.
[204] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *The New Survey of London Life and Labour Volume III Survey of Social Conditions (1) The Eastern Area* (1932), p. 358.

in total.[205] Within the 1, 503 acres of Bermondsey 406 acres were given over to the waters of the Surrey Commercial Docks dealing predominantly in timber and situated in Rotherhithe.[206] Riverside homes, warehouses and factories fringed the docks which could only be accessed by two roads, whose bridges when raised, transformed the area into an island completely isolated from the rest of Bermondsey. Observers of life in the borough remarked that, "Not one Londoner in thousands visits Bermondsey, its life is almost as self-contained as that of a provincial town".[207] In contrast to East Ham whose docks and factories only partly characterised it, the prevalent industry, factories and docks defined life in the borough of Bermondsey.

Extensive poverty and deprivation marked life for residents in Bermondsey. Speaking in 1933 Dr Alfred Salter, local parliamentarian and community doctor, recorded his 'first view of Bermondsey' at the turn of the century describing a scene little changed four decades later.

> The house was one up, one down…there was one stand-pipe for twenty five houses. There was one water-closet for the twenty five houses and a cesspool. Queues lined up outside that water-closet, men, women and children, every morning before they went to work. It was utterly impossible for them to maintain bodily cleanliness. The conditions of thousands of homes were the same.[208]

The *New Survey of London Life and Labour* recorded the Dockhead area as, "…the enumeration district with the highest degree of overcrowding in the whole of London…there is not a single middle class street in the whole borough". The proportion of persons living in poverty according to the 1929-1930 street survey stood at 17.5 per cent, exceeded by only three other boroughs in the eastern area. The proportion of persons living more than three to a room was 6.5 per cent as compared to an average 3.4 per cent in East London.[209]

Metropolitan London: Kensington

Situated in west central London the Royal Borough of Kensington contained a variety of distinct areas and neighbourhoods. Many large houses were found stretching from South Kensington, towards High Street Kensington and northwards to Holland Park and Notting Hill. These areas consisted of grand homes built around a common garden square such as could be found at Hereford Gardens. Towards the west the nature of the area altered with mostly lower middle class, and in the

[205] Forshaw and Abercrombie, *County of London Plan 1943*, p. 160.
[206] James D. Stewart, *Bermondsey in War 1939 – 1945* (1981), p. 3.
[207] Fenner Brockway, *The Life of Alfred Salter – Bermondsey Story* (1951), p. 11.
[208] Ibid. p. 12.
[209] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. III*, p. 357.

back streets, working class homes.[210] In the north of Kensington the neighbourhood of Notting Dale, "includes some of the most notorious slums in London".[211] This borough of contrasts was home to many museums, the Royal Albert Hall and Kensington Palace. Plentiful open spaces could be found most notably Kensington Gardens which merged into Hyde Park.

Kensington was home to 180, 677 people, as recorded in the 1931 census, living within the 2, 290 acres of the borough.[212] Whilst Kensington was characterised by its museums, gardens, parks and grand homes the percentage of those living in poverty was relatively high at 7.9 per cent compared to the West London average of 4.0 per cent. A position owing to areas such as Notting Dale, where thirty eight per cent of working class families lived two or more to a room a figure exceeded by only six other boroughs in all of London. Employment was connected with transport, commerce and personal service with one half of female workers employed in domestic service.[213] Large factories existed principally in engineering with most industry consisting of small scale clothing and furniture manufacture. Industry was a source of employment for 10, 748 people working in the 1, 014 factories found in the royal borough.[214]A number of well-known department stores resided in the borough such as Barker's Stores, Derry and Toms, Ponting's and Harrods which according to the official guide, "make Kensington the Mecca of shoppers from near and far".[215]

Kensington was incorporated as a Metropolitan Borough in 1899, joining Finsbury and Bermondsey, as part of the LCC. Local politics were shaped by the many social variations in the borough.

> South Kensington, which contains a Royal Palace and Holland House, are about the most solidly conservative boroughs in London. Whereas North Kensington, most of which is run-down, noisy and congested, is mainly socialist, while West Kensington, depressing and socially miscellaneous, remains, politically speaking, debatable ground.[216]

The Municipal Reform party, affiliated to the Conservative Party and akin to the Ratepayer's Alliance in East Ham and Croydon, was the strongest political force in Kensington. Results for elections to the borough council in 1934 returned forty six seats for Municipal Reform as opposed to just fourteen seats for the Labour Party mainly represented in North Kensington. Elections in 1937 saw Municipal Reform increase their representation on the council by two to forty eight councillors gaining seats

[210] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 427.
[211] Ibid.
[212] LCC, *London Statistics*, p. 32.
[213] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 427.
[214] Forshaw and Abercrombie, *County of London Plan 1943*, p. 160.
[215] Charles White, *The Royal Borough of Kensington* (1948), p. 34.
[216] Rachel Ferguson, *Royal Borough* (1950), p. 65.

from Labour. Municipal Reform held both Kensington North and Kensington South seats on the LCC.[217]

Suburban Essex: East Ham

The County Borough of East Ham could be found towards the eastern end of London. The borough extended from Wanstead on the north down to the River Thames on the south with the County Borough of West Ham an immediate neighbour. East Ham was a relatively large borough comprising 3, 324 acres with a population of 142, 394 as recorded in the 1931 census.[218] From the Victorian era onwards East Ham experienced phenomenal growth from 497 houses and a population of 2, 858 in 1861 to 29, 602 houses during the inter-war years.[219] This development of East Ham was made possible by the introduction of good transport connections to central London with the first railway line established in 1839.[220]Little overcrowding was recorded during this period and the percentage of those living in poverty was lower than in neighbouring boroughs at 9.9 per cent.[221]

East Ham achieved County Borough status and became administratively autonomous in 1914.[222]Five years later the number of wards in East Ham was increased to ten represented by thirty councillors accompanied by ten alderman.[223] The 1934 local election returned twenty three Labour councillors and seven independent councillors. This result was exactly mirrored in the returns of the 1937 elections. As in Finsbury and Bermondsey the Labour Party was the predominant force in East Ham, "With all ten alderman, and a solid electoral majority, Labour never held less than three-quarters of the council from 1933 onwards. This made East Ham one of Labour's strongest inter-war bastions…".[224]

Being a London suburb the relationship between the metropolis and East Ham was influential, "for many residents what happened in London was as important, or even more important, than what happened in East Ham itself".[225] In the northern and central parts East Ham was a dormitory town with suburban and middle class residents comprising skilled and semi-skilled workers travelling westwards from the borough to work each day in central London.[226] The southernmost wards were a

[217] Hadfield and MacColl, *Pilot Guide to Political London*, p. 176.
[218] LCC, *London Statistics*, p. 32.
[219] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. III*, p. 393.
[220] W. R. Powell (ed.), *A History of the County of Essex volume VI* (Oxford, 1973), p. 5.
[221] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. III*, p. 393.
[222] Brian Evans, *Bygone East Ham* (1993), p. 14.
[223] Powell, *County of Essex*, p. 22.
[224] Sam Davies and Bob Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales, 1919-1938: A Comparative Analysis Volume 3: Chester – East Ham* (2006), p. 595.
[225] Ibid. p. 569.
[226] Ibid. p. 557.

predominantly industrial and working class area with heavy engineering, chemical, and utility plants typical of the Port of London river front. The Beckton Gas Works and Royal Victoria Dock were situated in adjacent West Ham. This mixture of working life provided East Ham with a distinct pattern of social stratification.[227]

Suburban Surrey: Croydon

At 12, 617 acres the County Borough of Croydon was one of the largest boroughs in the London region (and largest of the six boroughs studied). Croydon situated twelve miles south of central London with its northern borders the boroughs of Wandsworth and Camberwell, to the east Penge and Beckenham, the west Mitcham, and the south Coulsdon and Purley. Several smaller locales made up Croydon as a whole such as South and Upper Norwood, Addiscombe, New Addington, Norbury and Waddon. The 1931 census recorded the population of the borough at 233, 032[228] far greater than in the metropolitan boroughs. Croydon became a County Borough in 1888 and the only town of that rank in the wider county of Surrey.[229]

According to the official guide Croydon was the, "principle shopping centre of north-east Surrey",[230] the excellent railway links to London and the wider area contributing to the success of Croydon as a retail outlet. Other sources of employment in the borough consisted of the Southern Railway and manufacturing concerned mainly with clothing, light engineering, metal work, furniture, light chemicals, printing and stationery.[231]Croydon aerodrome was first developed during the First World War soon becoming, "the airport of London; its air services linked it with every continent and country".[232] In 1937 the official unemployment rate was recorded at 4.7 percent, low not only in national terms, but the lowest recorded for any County Borough in the comparatively prosperous south and south east. Croydon, like East Ham, was a dormitory town for the London commuter and described as "overwhelmingly the home of the middle – class suburbanite".[233]Croydon also boasted the lowest death rate and highest health record of any large town.[234]

Residents were in the main professional, managerial and clerical workers commuting each day to their jobs in the city. This suburban middle class heavily influenced the predominantly conservative politics of the borough. The parliamentary constituencies of Croydon North and Croydon South were

[227] Patrick Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan 1944* (1945), p. 38.
[228] Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales*, p. 162.
[229] W. C. Berwick Sayers, *Croydon the Official Guide* (1948), p. 21.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan 1944*, p. 39.
[232] W. C. Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War* (1949), p. 2.
[233] Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales*, p. 162.
[234] W. C. Berwick Sayers, *Croydon Official Guide*, p. 23.

both solidly Conservative with the Labour Party failing to mount any serious challenge. Following the 1937 local elections the position on the borough council was the Ratepayer's Alliance, affiliated with the national Conservative Party, forty six seats, Labour with ten seats and one seat held independently.[235]As a County Borough Croydon was administratively autonomous and independent from any regional government. Of all the places surveyed Croydon possessed a distinct singular identity setting itself apart from and different to the rest of the greater London area.

Suburban Middlesex: Acton

Finally, situated due west from London on the main road to Oxford was the Municipal Borough of Acton part of the wider MCC. The centre of Acton was located around five miles from Marble Arch in central London which could be reached within thirty minutes using the several railway routes that operated through the borough such as the Central London, Great Western, District and Piccadilly lines.[236] Acton measured 2, 305 acres which in 1931 was home to 70, 008 residents.[237]

Acton was incorporated as a municipal borough in 1921 with a council formed of a mayor, eight aldermen and twenty four councillors.[238]The borough was represented on the MCC by three representatives one for each of the three county electoral divisions of Acton North East, Acton South East and Acton West.[239]Similar to Croydon the conservative Ratepayer's Association was a strong political force and held the balance of power on the council with twenty three seats to the nine held by the Labour party following the 1931 local election.[240]Nevertheless the Labour Party was a growing force in the borough as results for the 1937 elections to the MCC showed Labour winning all three seats holding Acton South East and gaining both Acton North East and Acton West.[241] In elections to the borough council that year Labour won half the total seats won by the Conservatives.[242]

Compared to the wider area Acton was an atypical borough with 26.6 people per acre compared to the Middlesex county average of only 8.4 resulting in Acton having one of the highest population densities in west London.[243]In 1934 the area was described as, "The crowded borough of Acton…this apparently mediocre and suburban township".[244] The percentage of working class families living two

[235] Davies and Morley, *County Borough Elections in England and Wales*, p. 147.
[236] Acton Borough Council, *Acton – The Official Guide* (1935), p. 16.
[237] LCC, *London Statistics*, p. 34.
[238] Jonathan Oates, *Acton – A History* (Chichester, 2003), p. 86.
[239] Acton Borough Council, *Official Guide*, p. 6.
[240] C. R. E. Elrington (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England – A History of Middlesex – Volume VII* (1982), p. 32.
[241] Barbara Humphries, *The Roots of Labour in a West London Suburb* (1986), p. 23.
[242] Ealing Local History Library, 22/10/37/7d, Elections Municipal – Acton Borough Council – Election 1937.
[243] Oates, *Acton*, p. 88.
[244] Ibid. p. 86.

or more persons to a room was nineteen per cent compared to the wider London average of twenty five per cent. Unlike Bermondsey the *New Survey of London Life and Labour* noted that "there are no bad slums in Acton". The percentage of those living in poverty was recorded at 2.8.[245]

In contrast to East Ham and Croydon suburban Acton was not a 'dormitory borough' as 14, 600 people who lived outside Acton came to work in the borough whilst 13, 200 Acton residents worked elsewhere.[246]Work in the borough was mostly carried on in the numerous industries and factories manufacturing motor vehicles, food, confectionary, dyeing and cleansing establishments and several laundries. The prevalence of the laundry business in Acton was so extensive as to involve 1, 800 workers earning the borough the sobriquet "Soapsud Island".[247] The position of Acton on the border between the London and Middlesex administrative counties was fortuitous, for less strict building regulations in suburban Middlesex, compared to central London, prompted considerable relocation of industry to areas such as Acton Vale. In the north of the borough Acton was criss-crossed with a maze of railway lines, sidings, engine and carriage sheds onto which was superimposed the great industrial concentration of Park Royal.[248]In 1932 Park Royal consisted of twenty eight factories in Victoria Road, thirty four in the Chase estate, five in the Great Western estate, six along Western Avenue and Cumberland Avenue that contained ten factories. A vast complex employing 13, 400 people in Acton.[249]

From walking along the streets of the six boroughs we have touched the fabric of a city on the cusp of war. Through our reconnoitring, we have seen more than we may at first have realised, for if we recall those earlier metropolitan differentials, especially class, walking across a borough boundary could transport one into quite separate worlds. Localities become more distinctive, set themselves apart from one another, when they are seen through the forces that shaped the lives of Londoners.

Applying a Thematic Approach

To analyse blitz experience requires we look at the subject thematically focusing first upon air raids. A variety of sources from Home Intelligence Reports, Air Raid Logs, Bomb Censuses and anecdotal evidence record the occurrence, extent, duration, damage and casualties caused by bombing. These records were either made by the boroughs themselves or by central and regional government with

[245] Sir H. L. Smith (ed.), *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol. VI*, p. 451.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid. p. 452.
[248] Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan 1944*, p. 23.
[249] C. R. E. Elrington, *A History of Middlesex*, p. 28.

analysis broken down borough by borough. The local nature of air raids varied across London and exploring this fact helps to adequately depict life under fire.

The 1937 Air-Raid Precautions (ARP) Act placed a legal duty upon local authorities to protect citizens from aerial attack. The act set out sixteen separate requirements that all authorities must include in their ARP schemes. The provision of air raid warnings, shelters, gas masks, heavy rescue and debris clearance were just some of the stipulations. Of all of these the requirement and provision of air raid shelters will be our main focus.

Shelters designed to protect people from bombing took various forms including domestic shelters in back gardens and public shelters such as trenches, basement and surface shelters built to protect scores of people. Shelter provision was based upon many factors such as affordability, space, environment and necessity that differed across London. Shelters were often ad hoc such as in London Underground stations, warehouses, railway arches, cellars, even caves and tunnels. By viewing shelters at the borough level we will be able to notice vagaries of local conditions becoming clear to such a degree as to be the difference between life and death.

In addition to loss of life bombing destroyed and damaged a multitude of properties and homes rendering thousands of Londoners homeless. At the height of the blitz the number of homeless in need of accommodation at rest centres became acute. The number made homeless was often based upon a series of local features such as the severity of bombing, quality of housing and capacity of authorities to cope. The duty to provide rest centres and services to billet people in secure accommodation was laid upon the nebulous government structure of London. Given these circumstances and set of factors the issue of rest centres-homelessness aptly demonstrates the variety of blitz realities apparent across London.

As we have seen the blitz for those that survived brought many hardships of which the inability to cook and find food caused by the destruction of amenities was key. The requirement of communal feeding was often overlooked by authorities charged with a primary focus on the protection of civilians from air raids and necessity to rehouse the homeless. An analysis of the need for and provision of communal feeding helps to draw out blitz experiences peculiar to a local area.

Many more facets of the London blitz could be explored such as civil defence in its entirety, evacuation, fire service and emergency medical services, yet word count restrictions must exclude them. The subjects of air raids, shelters, rest centres-homelessness and communal feeding have been chosen as they aptly portray the day-to-day experience of surviving metropolitan life under fire, as well as showing a particular vulnerability to local variation. Moreover our purpose is not to

provide an evaluation of civil defence services but is instead an attempt to understand how this variation stimulated the agency of locality.

Thesis Structure

The thesis will be structured around the following chapters, Planning for War – London and the Localities, Main London Blitz Local Response – Metropolitan London, Main London Blitz Local Response – The Suburbs, Post-Blitz London – The Local Response, and Local Response – Conclusions.

Chapter two shall analyse proposals and approaches made by all tiers of government at the central, regional and local levels towards civil defence planning, encompassing the inception of air raid precautions in 1935 through to the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939, and open the case that blitz experiences were ultimately determined and characterised by local circumstances. Once this foundation has been laid we will turn in detail to blitz responses in the six chosen local boroughs. As far greater material relates to the main London blitz 1940-1941 this period will be divided over two chapters, chapter three will consider the inner metropolitan London boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington, and chapter four will include the outer suburban boroughs of East Ham, Croydon and Acton. Each chapter will look at our themes of air raids, shelters, rest centres-homelessness, and communal feeding in turn. Moving on from the main London blitz chapter five will cover the post-blitz period 1943-1945 and for the sake of completeness thematically look at all six boroughs together divided by the separate incidences of Tip and Run raids, Little Blitz and V-Weapons. Here our purpose shall be to demonstrate how the agency of locality continued to play a key part in wartime London. To conclude chapter six will argue that the research question posed has been answered, that for Londoners blitz experience was shaped and determined by the agency of locality.

Sources Used

Source material exists at a number of different archives reflecting the various areas covered. The **National Archives** at Kew houses records relating to central government with files for the Home Office (HO), Ministry of Health (MOH), Cabinet Office, Department of Works, and Department of Housing and Local Government being the most relevant. The majority of material is situated in the HO files relating to the ARP Department and LCDR. Subjects covered mainly include air raids and shelters with some material relating to rest centres and communal feeding. Perhaps the most pertinent series is entitled, ‘London Boroughs’ HO 207 which contains valuable material on all boroughs within London Region.

Valuable personal memoirs and diaries reflecting blitz experiences reside at the **Imperial War Museum Archives** covering a number of boroughs. This material provides a human touch and colour of ordinary lives under fire that complement the somewhat dry sterile official papers at other archives. The **Mass-Observation Archive** also adds to this rich seam with records capturing daily life on the London home front.

The **London Metropolitan Archives** contain a substantial amount of material that is relevant and useful covering all facets of the London blitz. The records of the LCC and MCC are both housed here. Sources relevant to all of the six boroughs can be accessed across all the themes of air raids, rest centres-homelessness, and communal feeding. Key documents are the minutes of Civil Defence Committees of the LCC and MCC respectively. Valuable correspondence between borough councils and all tiers of government can be found touching on all aspects of the blitz in the boroughs. LCDR situation reports and intelligence reports record detailed accounts of air raids broken down by borough containing key information. Records relating to the Londoners' Meals Service document the development of communal feeding in London County. Statistics showing homelessness figures and rest centre demand across London are extremely helpful as they show precise figures at the borough level.

Local History Libraries provide borough level material for Finsbury, Bermondsey, Kensington, East Ham, Croydon and Acton. This consists of council minute books for full council and ARP/Civil Defence committees. Local ARP log books are kept showing in detail local incidences of air raids across the war years. Correspondence, memorandum and briefing documents capture material across the subjects of shelters, rest centres-homelessness and communal feeding. Material on the boroughs themselves such as maps, population, employment and transport all build a picture of local everyday life. Local newspapers from the period help to create a narrative of life in the boroughs during the war years, although censorship does hinder the amount of precise detail available with more beneficial material provided for the years immediately prior to the outbreak of war.

Taken together this research provides a comprehensive view encompassing the blitz across the whole of London. The historiography provides an incomplete picture leaving out the view from the localities. It shall be shown that by taking a path hitherto untrodden into the boroughs we can see how the blitz was truly experienced. How within a metropolis as diverse as London there was instead a Finsbury, Bermondsey, Kensington, East Ham, Croydon and Acton blitz, as it was for each of the several localities of the capital.

Chapter Two: Planning for War – London and the Localities

Pre-War Fears

"The early hours of Sunday, 3rd September 1939, were hours of violent thunderstorm and torrential rains. It seemed as if the elements were crying out in protest against the drama which the curtain was to be raised later on that fateful day."[250] At the moment Britain declared war on Germany a deep sense of dread and foreboding was felt, "The Prime Minister's broadcast informed us that we were already at war, and he had scarcely ceased speaking when a strange, prolonged, wailing noise, afterwards to become familiar, broke upon the ear."[251] This was of course an air raid siren and the first heard in wartime. Winston Churchill articulated what went through his mind at this moment, sentiments no doubt shared by fellow Londoners that September morning.

> Our shelter was a hundred yards down the street…As I gazed from the doorway along the empty street and at the crowded room below, my imagination drew pictures of ruin and carnage and vast explosions shaking the ground; of buildings clattering down in dust and rubble, of fire-brigades and ambulances scurrying through the smoke, beneath the drone of hostile aeroplanes. For had we not all been taught how terrible air raids would be?[252]

What exactly were these fears and pre-war anxieties that people had been taught to expect once war arrived?

Air raids during the First World War demonstrated their destructive effect and sowed the seeds of fear should such an event be repeated. During that conflict the total number of casualties in England from air raids were 1, 414 killed and 3,416 wounded, in addition to fifty one airship raids, 643 aircraft dropped a total of 8, 776 bombs.[253] Over two-thirds of all property damage was concentrated in London where a total of 668 people were killed and 1,938 wounded.[254]

Contemporary accounts from the interwar period added to the canvas of public trepidation as they painted a picture of a nightmarish future should the bombs ever be dropped again.

> A bombing aeroplane can carry a load which varies from half a ton upwards. But we may take 1 ½ tons as an average. Thus a squadron of 270 planes could drop 400 tons of bombs, or nearly

[250] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/RC/GEN/1/1, LCC Meals Services History.
[251] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume I The Gathering Storm* (1948), p.319.
[252] Ibid.
[253] H. Montgomery Hyde and G. R. Falkiner, *Air Defence and the Civil Population* (1937), p. 44.
[254] Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights – London in the First World War* (2014), p.252.

> double the weight dropped in Britain during the whole of the last war…In fact the "knock-out blow" might kill 50, 000 to 100,000 Londoners.[255]

Whilst those who agitated for a collectivist approach to ARP such as J.B.S. Haldane[256] should be seen in context such worries of a "knock-out blow" were nevertheless indicative of current thinking permeating official planning.

Instances of aerial warfare occurring in theatres of conflict all around coloured the environment in which the British government began to draw up ARP plans. The Italian air force was used to subdue the Abyssinian armies in 1935-36. Both Italian and German air forces were in action during the Spanish Civil War taking part in high profile raids on Barcelona, Guernica and Madrid. And in 1937 the Japanese air force made a series of destructive raids on Shanghai, Nanking and Canton.[257] By 1938 a Cabinet report predicted that 3, 500 tons of bombs would be dropped on London on the first day followed by 700 tons per day thereafter,[258] "At the outbreak of war in 1939, military planners assumed that a bombing campaign against London would be imminent and that such a campaign would result in the collapse of civil society and government."[259]

Planning for War: Central Government

Let us now turn to look at the plans made to guard against such a "knock-out blow", those designed to keep people alive under fire, starting at the central government level.

As far back as December 1923 at a meeting of the Committee on the Co-ordination of Departmental Action on the Outbreak of War it was decided that the HO was the most appropriate Whitehall department for the responsibility of ARP. In the following month the CID (Committee of Imperial Defence) ARP sub-committee was appointed to enquire into, "the question of Air Raid Precautions other than Naval, Military and Air Defences".[260] In March 1934 the Prime Minister asserted that the CID viewed ARP as an, "essential accessory to the arrangement for home defence ever since 1924".[261]

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[255] J.B.S. Haldane, *A.R.P.* (1938), p.63.
[256] Leading contemporary scientist whose "participation in organized political activity increased in the 1930's in response to Hitler and to other events. He visited Spain three times during the Civil War, and advised the Spanish government about defence against gas attacks and air raids. As a result of this experience published *A.R.P.*, which gave a quantitative estimate of likely effects of air raids…during this period he also became associated with the communist movement…but did not become a member of the Communist Party until 1942". V.M. Quirke, 'Haldane, John Burden Sanderson (1892-1964)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
[257] Robert MacKay, *Half the Battle – Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (2002), p.20.
[258]Ibid.
[259] Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p.25.
[260] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.13.
[261] Ibid. p.50.

Shortly after this statement the HO began preparing the first circular on ARP to local authorities published on 9 July 1935.[262]

In this same period the CID made "only brief and casual references to…the victims of air attack" where some consideration around communal feeding also took place.[263] In October 1936 the MOH prepared a report on the relief of financial distress in time of war which, "did not arouse any ministerial interest in the subject of the circumstances of people made homeless by air attack".[264]

The HO first circular on ARP grafted responsibility for civil defence on to the existing structure of local government, "responsibility will rest on local authorities for ensuring that adequate measures of civil protection against air raid dangers are taken in their own districts".[265] Part of these schemes were to earmark places which might be used as air raid shelters to be made safe against gas and HE blast. These shelters were envisaged to protect those caught out in the streets as government persisted with the policy, formulated in the First World War, of "dispersal" whereby people were encouraged to take shelter in their own homes as opposed to crowding together in public shelters.[266] Yet the first circular was a sketch rather than a blue print[267] providing only an outline guide to local authorities who were soon grappling with one of the thorniest of ARP issues, finance.

At a conference hosted by LCC on 18 March 1937 local authorities made clear their position on ARP finance in a joint letter to the Home Secretary.

> The whole financial responsibility for the measures to be taken, which are as national in character as are the defence services, should rest with His Majesty's Government.[268]

Many local authorities were becoming concerned over the lack of specific authority for ARP expenditure, an issue much in evidence when we later look at the plans made by individual London boroughs, with some authorities reported in April showing a tendency to "go slow" with ARP measures. This controversy resulted in the Home Secretary taking the issue to Cabinet who agreed that parliamentary ARP legislation should now be prepared.[269]

Unlike air raid precaution plans that dealt with raid services the consideration of post-raid services such as homelessness and communal feeding were hampered by lack of departmental ownership. The

[262] Ibid. p.56.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.
[265] The National Archives, HO 45/17197, Air Raid Precautions First Circular 9 July 1935.
[266] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.84.
[267] Ibid.p.66.
[268] Ibid.p.93.
[269] Ibid.p.93.

ARP Department was seen as, "…pre-occupied with the size and complexity of its tasks. It was, too, understaffed, and its small band of officials were, in consequence, greatly overworked", with the attention of the CID not drawn to the "'neglected problem of homeless persons" until summer 1937.[270]

The ARP Act 1937 brought to a close "…the two and half years of voluntary effort on the part of local authorities by imposing on the larger authorities the duty to submit ARP schemes to the Secretary of State."[271] The Act mandated to local authorities the responsibility for, "the protection of persons and property from injury or damage in the event of hostile attack from the air".[272] At the time of the Act coming into force on 1 January 1938 the vexed issue of finance was finally resolved. Local authorities were legally empowered to incur ARP expenditure, back dated to the first circular on 9 July 1935, with the Secretary of State authorised to pay grants at a standard rate of 60-75 per cent of approved expenditure.[273] At the end of January the HO issued to local authorities a set of draft regulations setting out the seventeen necessary functions to perform, one of which being the, "provision of shelters for the protection of the public".[274]

At the end of March the HO produced a "model" ARP scheme for local authorities with air raid shelter provision comprising both public shelters in the streets and the creation of makeshift refuges inside homes. In Parliament on 1 June the Home Secretary urgently requested local authorities to conduct surveys of available shelter provision remarking, "so far as shelters are concerned, we have only begun to touch the fringe of the problem".[275] At this stage authorities in London were seen as "deplorably behind" and for the first time government promoted the construction of additional trench shelters in parks and open spaces.[276]

At this juncture arose the threat of war from the Munich crisis[277] and the HO announced on 24 September that trench shelters offering protection to ten per cent of local populations should be completed in three days time.[278]

> …the Munich crisis found both the ARP Department of the Home Office and the public largely unprepared. There had been no real progress in providing shelters either for the general public

[270] Ibid.
[271] Ibid.p.106.
[272] Ibid.p.107.
[273] Ibid.p.108.
[274] Ibid.p.109.
[275] Ibid.p.148.
[276] Ibid.
[277] September 1938 saw Germany forcibly annexe the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia often referred to as 'Munich' after treaty signed at Munich temporarily resolved the crisis.
[278] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.161.

or for Government servants; and the Government could merely resort to encouraging local authorities to dig temporary trenches.[279]

Recalling the Munich crisis Sir Harold Scott, Chief Administration Officer for the ARP Department remembered that, "The crisis had stripped bare the weaknesses of civil defence organisation".[280] Local authorities could only use shelters in buildings with the owner's consent, lacked technical information, and were restricted by availability of necessary materials. Little wonder that as the Munich crisis passed the majority of London boroughs reported they had no public shelters available.[281]

Munich had shown the very real likelihood of war which now jolted efforts to provide comprehensive plans for protection and relief, and in October the MOH established the Relief in Kind Committee to identify the kind of social problems that could occur.[282] As it was expected that air raids would see an exodus of citizens fleeing London the committee quite remarkably asked the India Office for experienced advice on how to maintain public order amongst large masses of people. Fortunately the committee delayed drawing up plans for the welfare of those stampeding to the countryside and now started work on schemes for homeless people remaining in urban areas.[283]

The breathing space of a year between the Munich crisis and outbreak of war provided central government with a valuable opportunity to implore local authorities to rapid completion of air raid precaution schemes. It was first decided that trenches dug during the crisis would be made permanent and new statutory powers given to local authorities over strengthening existing buildings for use as shelters.[284] On 21 December the government announced a new form of domestic shelter for household provision the "Anderson" shelter.[285] In February 1939 the LCDR was created.[286]In charge of London Region was a Senior Regional Commissioner and two Regional Commissioners, (Sir Ernest Gowers and Admiral Sir Edward Evans appointed Regional Commissioners with the appointment of a Senior Commissioner deferred), designated to develop and co-ordinate ARP across the metropolis.

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[279] C.M. Kohan, *Works and Buildings* (1952), p.355.
[280] Sir Harold Scott, *Your Obedient Servant* (1959), p.108.
[281] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.162.
[282] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.49.
[283] Ibid.p.50.
[284] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.170.
[285] The "Anderson" was designed as an outdoor or surface shelter consisting of fourteen corrugated steel sheets weighing about 8 cwt. A corrugated steel hood, curved for greater strength, would be sunk some two feet in the ground and covered with earth or sandbags. The structure would be 6ft high, 4ft 6in wide, and 6ft long and provided with two exits. It was intended to accommodate four, or at a pinch six, persons. It could be erected fairly quickly by unskilled labour and would not take up much space. It would not, as the authorities made plain from the outset, be 'bomb-proof', i.e. protect its occupants from a direct hit. But it would offer a good measure of protection against bomb-splinters, blast and falling debris. Dr. David Anderson had taken a large part in the designing of this shelter. (O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.187).
[286] Ibid. p.183.

Spring 1939 witnessed Hitler's complete seizure of Czechoslovakia, yet "the capital's state of preparedness was according to the ARP Department, "deplorably behind-hand". Some metropolitan boroughs had made good progress, others seemed to be paralysed…"[287] Government now came forward with the 1939 Civil Defence Act which empowered local authorities to designate buildings as public shelters, construct shelters underground, and provide and install material for strutting private basements to augment the provision of domestic shelters.[288]

The MOH Relief in Kind Committee now produced an interim report which outlined a skeleton scheme for dealing with the problem of people made homeless by air raids. Emergency stations, run by the Public Assistance Authorities, were to provide food and hot drinks to people not encouraged to stay long as no seating accommodation was to be provided.[289] As a first step in April LCC was invited by the MOH to devise a provisional scheme for its area.[290]

Progress had been made with making trench shelters permanent and as war approached in August around three-quarters of the work had been completed.[291] On the eve of war "government and local authorities made strenuous efforts to complete and extend public shelters",[292] including provision of lighting, seating and sanitation. As war broke out local authorities in London took over and labelled extra buildings as public shelters including vaults and cellars under pavements.[293]

On 1 September two days before war was declared against Germany the MOH convened an emergency meeting to consider the state of arrangements for the care of homeless people and decided to expand schemes already underway.[294] The newly created Ministry of Food was pressed to consider setting up communal feeding centres yet concluded, "…that there was no demand at that time".[295] In a situation "described as hectic"[296] at the MOH a decision was taken to issue to Public Assistance Authorities a circular on homelessness asking them to consider, "the desirability of improvising temporary shelter of some kind",[297] which did not arrive until after the outbreak of war.

[287] Scott, *Your Obedient Servant*, p.109.
[288] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.193.
[289] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.51.
[290] Ibid.p.284.
[291] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.197.
[292] Ibid.p.198.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.53.
[295] R. J. Hammond, *Food Volume II – Studies in Administration and Control* (1956), p.351.
[296] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.53.
[297] Ibid.p.92.

Planning for War: Regional and County Level

A key component part in the implementation of central government plans would be the role played at the regional and county level by LCC, MCC and LCDR. Work to enact the first circular of July 1935 was less than instantaneous with problems of execution still being wrestled with at a conference between LCC officials and staff of the HO ARP Department in November 1936.

> The Clerk of the Council referred to the fact that the Town Clerks of the various Metropolitan Boroughs were supplying him, unofficially, with copies of their schemes, and to the difficulties of carrying out discussions with all twenty-eight Metropolitan Borough Councils…he pointed out that until the division of responsibility in London between the Council and the Metropolitan Borough Councils was definitely settled in detail little could be done in London.[298]

Meanwhile MCC waited until the passing of the 1937 ARP Act before even starting a programme of civil defence planning.[299]

The ARP Act 1937 now mandated that LCC prepare an ARP scheme in respect of the administrative county of London.[300] Responding to the above need for clarity embodied by the Clerk of the Council, the ARP (London) (Allocation of Duties) Order 1938 settled the division of duties between LCC and the constituent metropolitan boroughs. LCC was responsible for the provision of shelters in its dwellings and buildings, rescue and demolition parties, ambulance services, fire services, communal feeding arrangements and rest centres for those rendered homeless.[301]

The Act likewise situated the responsibility of protection upon MCC, "…the county council was charged, in the event of hostile attack from the air, with the duty of making arrangements for the protection of persons and property within the county".[302] MCC saw it as essential to establish a county wide scheme, "[for an] area so highly urbanised as Middlesex where the geographical boundary is artificial, and often known to but few, and the population overlaps, it is essential that there should be a county scheme".[303] The method of a county scheme was seen as the only device whereby, "complete

[298] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/1/152, Proceedings of conference between HO and LCC 13 November 1936.
[299] Sir Clifford Radcliffe, *Middlesex* (1952), p.214.
[300] Kent Wright, *A.B.C. of Local Government,* p.139.
[301] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/1/152, Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee, Report by the Clerk of the Council, An analysis showing the respective responsibilities of the several authorities having Civil Defence functions in the Administrative County of London.
[302] Radcliffe, *Middlesex*, p.214.
[303] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/MIN/4/1, MCC ARP Conference with Local Authorities 22 February 1938.

co-ordination and co-operation be secured" and as the duties to be carried out were very largely local, "it is urgent on the local councils to be actively up and doing" with uniform schemes adapted to local conditions. MCC would take on approved expenditure and ensure a fair allocation of financial resources.[304] Nonetheless unlike London County, which divided roles between the county council and local boroughs, MCC had sole responsibility for a civil defence scheme, placing it at the head of a chain of responsibility that would see MCC taking county wide ownership passing directions down to the constituent boroughs.[305]

In February 1938 at a full MCC meeting formal approval was given that the powers of the county council under the ARP Act were delegated to an ARP Committee.[306]

> It was resolved that a Standing Committee of the County Council, consisting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the County Council, together with two members from each of the six committee areas be appointed to deal with matters under the provisions of the ARP Act, 1937.[307]

In April after receiving a copy of the "model scheme" the ARP Committee noted that these instructions would, "necessitate amplifications, excisions, amendments and re-arrangements of all the draft schemes prepared by local authorities, and the necessary information has been passed to them accordingly". The same meeting decided that public shelters for small numbers of people caught in the street, particularly in shopping areas, should be sought but that, "no larger provision of public shelter is desirable". It was agreed that officers of local authorities were to be asked to make early progress with a survey of existing buildings which might be available for use as public shelters.[308]

At the same time in London County meetings were held between representatives of the county council, constituent boroughs and HO officials to ensure adequate consultation.[309]

> It was then arranged that there should be established a joint meeting of members of the London County Council, the City Corporation and of the Metropolitan Borough's Standing Joint Committee, at which normally the leading representative of the Council took the chair.

[304] Ibid.
[305] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/WAR/1/001, Memorandum from C. W. Radcliffe Clerk of MCC to all local ARP Controllers in Group 6 LCDR.
[306] LMA, MCC/MIN/4/1, MCC Council Minutes 24 February 1938.
[307] Ibid.
[308] LMA, MCC/MIN/4/1, MCC ARP Committee Minutes 12 April 1938.
[309] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/1/153, LCC Memorandum 22 June 1945.

> At those meetings, which were not very frequent, any matters of common interest were discussed.[310]

In December the LCC ARP Committee was established with the order of reference encompassing, "The preparation of schemes under the ARP Act, 1937, and any necessary action with a view to such schemes being carried out by the executive committees concerned". It was further resolved that Herbert Morrison, Leader of LCC, would serve as Chairman of the ARP Committee.[311]

A small co-ordinating committee of the LCDR was established in February 1939 and soon afterwards detailed plans for grouping together local authority areas for war-time control and mutual support were finalised. The LCDR Regional Headquarters were situated in the Geological Museum, South Kensington where the Regional Commissioners and attendant staff were based.

> These were officers of the Crown of a kind unknown in peace-time, responsible to the Minister of Home Security for the civil defence of the various regions into which the whole country was divided…Greater London was Region No.5, the smallest area, but the most complex…Local government did not take kindly at first to the conception of Regional Commissioners, seeing in them, under guise of war necessity, an insidious beginning of direct bureaucratic administration from the centre which might permanently endanger the ancient independence of local authorities in local affairs.[312]

Following the appointment of the Regional Commissioners meetings between LCC, City Corporation and MBSJC (Metropolitan Borough's Standing Joint Committee) were replaced by meetings of a new London Regional Council led by the Senior Regional Commissioner to secure a degree of co-ordination and co-operation. [313]

The first signs at the regional level to prepare for post-raid homelessness can be seen in March with the LCC proposing to establish forty-three rest centres in Public Assistance Department buildings where hot drinks, tinned food, bread, margarine, jam, biscuits and warm milk for children would be made available.[314]LCC plans were soon seen as a model to emulate with fifty-four other public assistance authorities elsewhere using them as a basis for their own schemes.[315]

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[310] Ibid.
[311] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/MIN/532, LCC ARP Committee Minutes 13 December 1938.
[312] Morrison, *How London is Governed*, p. 118.
[313] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/1/153, LCC Memorandum 22 June 1945.
[314] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/MIN/2776, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Papers, 26 November 1940.
[315] Hammond, *Administration and Control,* p.284.

A letter received at LCC from the MOH on 6 June officially asked for the, "establishments of depots at which persons temporarily without food and shelter can be given immediate assistance in kind during or after an air raid at food stations".[316] The result was to increase the original forty-three rest centres to a new total of seventy providing at short notice the supply of a simple meal to a maximum of 15,000 people at one time. Whilst the rest centres were not to be used as night time shelters, blankets could nevertheless be lent to people for temporary use until the Public Assistance Board made provision for their accommodation. On 23 June at a conference between MOH officials and the LCC Public Assistance Department the Ministry considered that the homelessness problem would, "largely be met by "absorption" of distressed families into the households of friends and neighbours".[317]

The MCC Public Health Committee received the same letter explaining that officers from the Ministry had semi-officially been in touch with the Council's Public Assistance Department and that the Minister understood there would not be "any practicable difficulties in making arrangements for the establishment of depots at which persons temporarily without food and shelter could be given immediate assistance".[318] The Public Health Committee then proposed a provisional scheme of purchasing three mobile field kitchens which were rejected by the MOH in favour of various halls in the county acting as feeding centres for the homeless providing hot water and soups. Again no bedding would be provided for long, "it being understood that the persons helped would after refreshment and a short rest, naturally make their way to accommodation at the homes of friends or relatives".[319]

At the end of June the LCC ARP Committee resolved that an approach should be made to central government pressing for the provision of effective shelters for the population in vulnerable riverside areas. As the provision of air raid shelters was a matter for the Metropolitan Borough Councils the committee called on the MBSJC to make representations to the HO in which the County Council "would happily lend its support".[320] The MCC determined in July that local councils were in the best position to provide public air raid shelters acting as agents exercising the powers of the county council in their name. In regards to air raid shelters in streets the county council themselves would provide public shelter on any highway.[321]

[316] LMA, LCC/MIN/2776, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Papers 26 November 1940.
[317] Ibid.
[318] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/WE/PA/2/90, MCC Public Assistance Department Relief of Distressed Persons in War Time.
[319] Ibid.
[320] LMA, LCC/MIN/532, LCC ARP Committee Minutes 29 June 1939.
[321] LMA, MCC/MIN/4/1, MCC ARP Committee Minutes 11 July 1939.

The London County Chief Officer of Public Assistance recommended on 3 July that sheltering those rendered homeless was as equally important as feeding them[322] and sought permission to purchase blankets from the MOH, which was denied on the same grounds as before, "that blankets would tempt people to remain in the rest centres for longer than was necessary".[323] The growing realisation that the evacuation of children from London would free up space for further rest centres allowed homelessness plans to start using LCC school premises for both the feeding and sheltering of bombed out Londoners.[324]

By 1 September around ninety schools were prepared bringing the total number of rest centres to ninety-six in London County.[325] One half of these were designated as "first-line" centres equipped for immediate use with the remaining half scheduled as reserve "second-line" centres to be used in the event of first-line centres being put out of action. Arrangements were made for the rest centres to be supplied with bread and margarine from the council's food depots with a stock of dry biscuits on hand if it was found impossible to make deliveries after an air raid. Within twenty-four hours of war being declared on 3 September food sufficient for the feeding of 750 Londoners was transported to each of the "first-line" rest centres.[326]

"It is, of course, common knowledge that the scheme contemplated by the county council has never been completed and that the temporary arrangements for dealing with "operations" and other matters in time of emergency came into effect in September 1939", this frank admission from the Middlesex County Clerk blamed the failure for drafting a county-wide ARP scheme on the lack of time available to resolve the complexities involved.[327] The temporary arrangements, "so made by the County Council provided for considerable decentralisation"[328] to local boroughs with ARP services being co-ordinated at the centre by the County Council Emergency Committee as Middlesex braced itself for war.

Planning for War: Local Authorities

The remaining element in pre-war planning resided at the coal face of the individual local authorities who themselves had varying and contrasting sets of responsibilities. County boroughs such as East

[322] LMA, LCC/MIN/2776, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Papers 26 November 1940.
[323] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.53.
[324]LMA, LCC/MIN/2776, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Papers 26 November 1940.
[325] Ibid.
[326] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/MIN/2760, LCC Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Minutes 14 February 1940.
[327] LMA, MCC/WAR/1/001, Letter from C. W. Radcliffe Clerk MCC to clerks of Local Authorities, sub-group Controllers and A.R.P. Controllers 5 June 1942.
[328] Ibid.

Ham and Croydon, as we have seen, were completely autonomous, and being administratively self-sufficient no relationship existed between them and their wider counties. As scheme making authorities the duty to protect citizens rested solely with the county boroughs, although as part of the Metropolitan Police District there would be interaction with LCDR. And unlike metropolitan and municipal boroughs, county boroughs maintained their own fire brigades. In London County the part played by the metropolitan boroughs in their share of civil defence services with LCC was the provision of public shelters, billeting of the homeless and first aid posts within the borough bounds.[329] In Middlesex local authorities such as the Municipal Borough of Acton had a role to play in the devising and provision of the county scheme for civil defence.[330] Furthermore the 1939 Civil Defence Act made local councils, such as Acton, responsible for private and domestic shelters.[331]Let us now make a start by considering first the plans made by the metropolitan boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey, and Kensington.

Metropolitan London: Finsbury

In the two years immediately following publication of the first HO ARP circular in 1935 the only record of activity in the Borough of Finsbury appears to be the establishment of ARP Committees for 1936 and 1937.[332] Unfortunately only minutes of full council meetings remain for this period, yet when compared to later years, the lack of any reports from the ARP Committee seem conspicuous by their absence. Perhaps the reason for this somnolence can be detected in the attitude of the Member of Parliament for Finsbury, Rev. G. S. Woods, who in defending Finsbury Council against criticisms of uncooperativeness in ARP remarked;

> The only way to defend the people of Finsbury against air-raids is to have no war…It would cost millions of pounds to defend Finsbury against attack from the air and we in the borough are too poor to make the necessary provisions. If we had the means it is highly probable that our precautions would be futile. We want to prevent war from breaking out not take precautions against it.[333]

In the months and years ahead it shall come to be seen that this political stance of the borough will only grow in saliency.

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[329] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/1/152, Civil Defence and General Purposes Committee Report by the Clerk of the Council, An analysis showing the respective responsibilities of the several authorities having Civil Defence functions in the Administrative County of London.
[330] LMA, MCC/MIN/4/1, ARP Department Circular No.9/1939 – 26 January 1939.
[331] LMA, MCC/WAR/1/001, Memorandum from C. W. Radcliffe Clerk of MCC to all local ARP Controllers in Group 6 LCDR.
[332] Islington Local History Library, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 19 November 1936.
[333] *Islington Gazette,* 29 September 1937.

On 11 February 1938 the London Federation of Peace Councils decided that Finsbury would be the place to hold a mass-meeting chaired by the Mayor on the subject of ARP,[334] which further helps us to take the temperature of the local political climate. A number of prominent activists attended the meeting including Professor J.B.S. Haldane, whom we have met before and will shortly do so again, speaking on "Air Raid Precautions – what we must do". The meeting focused on themes chiming with earlier local sentiments we have just witnessed namely, "…a genuine peace policy based on the principles of the League [League of Nations] and the restraint of aggression as the surest way to maintain peace and give the best protection".[335]

By April at a special meeting of Finsbury Council, lasting less than ten minutes,[336] a report from the ARP Committee confirmed that the ARP Act 1937 had now been considered leading the committee to conclude.

> In view of the magnitude and importance of the duties imposed upon the council in the preparation of a scheme for ARP in the borough, are of opinion that the membership of the committee should be increased.[337]

The committee further recommended the appointment of the Town Clerk, J. E. Arnold James, as ARP Officer serving the 58, 700[338] residents of the borough.

The sudden Munich crisis in September spurred further action when the ARP officer ordered the digging of trench shelters at various sites in the borough such as Myddelton Square, Wilmington Square, Charterhouse Square and Northampton Square each capable of accommodating 1,000 people. Work had also commenced on constructing trenches at other sites bringing the total amount of people to be protected to 6,500 residents. At this stage what was described as a "tentative start" was made to survey the borough for cellars that could be adapted as public shelters.[339]

As trenches were being constructed in Finsbury the borough council began to draw conclusions on shelter provision which would lead them down a path taking them a considerable distance away from the course expected of them.

> We are impressed by the fact that the proposed trench system even when completed would only serve to protect a small percentage of the resident population and would be hopelessly

[334] *Holborn and Finsbury Guardian*, 11 February 1938.
[335] Ibid.
[336] *Holborn and Finsbury Guardian,* 29 April 1938.
[337] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 14 April 1938.
[338] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[339] Islington Local History Library, Finsbury Borough ARP Committee Minutes 4 October 1938.

> inadequate in an emergency which arose during the daytime, whilst the estimated cost of £25,000 is out of proportion to the results likely to be achieved.[340]

A survey of business premises that could serve as emergency public shelters had produced results that had been, "almost entirely nugatory" leading the ARP Committee to decide, "steps should be taken to organise a survey of the borough promptly and efficiently with a view to the construction of underground shelters on scientific lines calculated to afford protection to the maximum number of persons in an emergency". The committee subsequently advised the council to instruct avant-garde architects, Messrs. Tecton (see below), to conduct such a survey, "with a view to formulation of a scheme of shelters for submission to the Home Office for approval".[341]

An interim report by Tecton was submitted in November and as a result of their investigations thus far the architects reported.

> They were of the opinion that the only satisfactory method of dealing with the problem of protection in this borough was by the provision of large underground shelters, capable of accommodating the whole of the population, with an additional capacity of ten per cent for persons caught in the streets, such shelters being sited mainly below open spaces and capable of being used in normal times as car parks and storage warehouses.[342]

Alongside the report the committee were informed that the £500 so far granted the firm had been exhausted and an application for £100 additional funding was duly paid.[343]

This activity in Finsbury had by January 1939 caught the attention of the HO ARP Department.

> The Lord Privy Seal asked me if I knew whether the Finsbury Shelter Scheme, which I believe has been prepared by Professor Haldane, and which has already appeared in the Press, has officially reached the Department. I understand from the Lord Privy Seal that he has undertaken to examine this scheme himself, and if it has come in, perhaps, you would see that it is sent along to him at once with any remarks that may be necessary.[344]

This HO memorandum is telling in that it erroneously presumed the "Finsbury Shelter Scheme" was prepared by Professor J.B.S. Haldane, perhaps conflating the activities of the left-wing peace

[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid.
[342] ILHL, Finsbury Borough ARP Committee Minutes 1 November 1938.
[343] Ibid.
[344] The National Archives, HO 207/617, Region No 5 (London) Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 28 January 1939.

campaigner in Finsbury with the efforts of the Council, that had by this stage raised such a degree of interest as to warrant scrutiny by the most senior government figure responsible for ARP.

At a meeting of the Borough ARP Committee on 1 February the final report from Messrs. Tecton detailing the Finsbury shelter scheme was received.

> The most practicable method of affording protection, having regard to the degree of safety compared with the cost of various types of shelters at various points in the borough, each shelter accommodating the whole of the resident and working population within a predetermined area. The size of such area was calculated so as to enable every person to reach the shelter within a short period of a contemplated air raid warning. The shelters…are of reinforced concrete construction, approached by wide ramps…and during peace time easily adaptable for commercial purposes, such as car parks, warehouses, etc.[345]

A total of fifteen deep bomb-proof shelters were proposed such as at Finsbury Square for 12,400 people, Tabernacle Street Artillery Ground housing 7,900 and at Northampton Square with provision for 6,000 persons. The total cost would amount to £1,388,860 which would cover construction of the shelters to include air conditioning plants, lighting and lifts. The committee resolved to instruct the Town Clerk to forward the proposals to the HO as constituting the ARP scheme for the borough.[346]

On 7 February in referring the deep shelter scheme to the HO the Town Clerk informed the government that Finsbury Council had already decided, without waiting for word on the wider scheme, to halt any further provision of other shelters.

> My Council are of the opinion that it is possible to provide complete protection in such shelters as compared with the partial protection which must be afforded by trenches…and accordingly they have decided to defer any further action with the regard to the completion, filling in or reconstruction of trenches in the borough, pending the observations of the Government upon the above mentioned scheme of shelters.[347]

At the same point Finsbury Council staged a public ARP exhibition which was opened by Herbert Morrison Leader of LCC, also present at the opening was Alderman H. Riley, Chairman of the ARP Committee, who heralded the council's plans as, "the first bomb-proof shelter scheme inside London, and differed from what had been envisaged in any other borough so far".[348]

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[345] ILHL, Finsbury Borough ARP Committee Minutes 1 February 1939.
[346] Ibid.
[347] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 7 February 1939.
[348] *Islington Gazette*, 7 February 1939.

Just six weeks after submission of their scheme to the HO Finsbury Council decided they had waited long enough and would proceed regardless of official sanction.

> That in view of the delay on part of H. M. Government in giving a decision upon the proposals submitted for the construction of deep bomb-proof shelters…the Town Clerk be authorised…to proceed forthwith with that portion of the bombproof shelter scheme situate in the Busaco Street area, which provides for a shelter to accommodate in the event of war, 7,600 residents in the vicinity.[349]

This shelter would include rooms for First Aid and Warden's Posts as well as a decontamination and gas filtration chamber. A ventilation plant would serve the shelter and in peace time be used to deal with petrol fumes from the 150 cars envisaged using the site as an underground car park.[350]

Finsbury Council would not have much longer to wait to receive the decision of the Lord Privy Seal which was communicated to them on 18 April.

> As regards the specific proposals made by Messrs. Tecton, Sir John Anderson feels obliged to reject them. A shelter, however strongly protected, is of no value to those who cannot or do not reach it and thereby secure protection. He is advised that on any probable view of the conditions of an actual air raid, there would not be any real prospect that the inhabitants of the borough, as a whole, would succeed, within the warning period, in gaining access to the proposed shelters. The distances which would have to be covered, the scale upon which the entrances are conceived, and the actual form which the shelters take afford little hope that more than a proportion would secure cover before the end of the warning period. Your council will recognise that the suitability of a shelter or a shelter system cannot be judged only by the safety which it would afford to those who are in it. It is of equal importance that the persons for whom it is intended should be able to reach it and to enter it.[351]

The HO further noted "technical defects involved in the proposals" and confirmed that plans were being arranged for a survey of shelter provision in, "vulnerable areas with a view to the use of various methods of shelter protection" and hoped that Finsbury Council will, "make a fresh approach to the problem in the light of this survey".[352]

A full council meeting was convened to consider the response to the HO at which the Mayor confirmed he had received a large number of communications from residents and businesses criticising the

[349] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 23 March 1939.
[350] ILHL, Finsbury Borough ARP Committee Minutes 24 April 1939.
[351] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 25 April 1939.
[352] Ibid.

decision of the Lord Privy Seal as had been reported in the press. Finsbury Council resolved to authorise Tecton to amend the deep shelter scheme to incorporate as far as possible the observations made by government for resubmission to the HO for approval. It was further decided to hold a plebiscite of the borough to, "impress upon H. M. Government the urgent desire on the part of the residents of Finsbury for bomb-proof shelters". To reinforce this message a petition outlining public concern at the, "lack of adequate protection and demand for bomb-proof shelters" was to be delivered to the government. [353]

On 8 May the Town Clerk confirmed to the HO ARP Department that Finsbury Council were amending their deep-shelter scheme for resubmission and helpfully included, "considered observations submitted by Messrs. Tecton upon your criticisms".[354] Which behind closed doors drew the following response in an internal memorandum from HO officials.

> It is obvious that these people intend to make political capital out of the present position…There is no point in continuing controversy with the Council. Messrs. Tecton think it proper to go right outside technical considerations in their comments, and one of the authors of the scheme in a newspaper recently attacked the Government for its frivolous attitude towards the problem of shelter.[355]

So what was happening here? It is at this moment in the narrative that we should pause, step back, and try to put into context this developing confrontation between Government and Finsbury Council.

Let us first remind ourselves of the prevailing tension of the period when, "The danger of a war, coming suddenly, and wiping out hundreds of civilians in their homes through aerial bombardment and gas attacks was brought home to the average man",[356] a moment in which, "bombing touched a raw nerve in Britain…"[357] In response to this mood of trepidation and anxiety left-wing pacifist activism began to take root and flourish.

> Increasingly in the mid-1930s pacifists began to develop their own local organizations by creating peace councils made up of delegates from trade unions, local women's groups, the political parties and local societies…the peace council movement grew rapidly during 1936 and 1937.[358]

[353] Ibid.
[354] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 8 May 1939.
[355] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 16 May 1939.
[356] Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (1966), p.535.
[357] Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age – Britain Between the Wars* (2009), p.334.
[358] Ibid.p.253.

And we have of course already seen in February 1938 the London Federation of Peace Councils choose Finsbury as fertile ground to hold a mass-meeting.

It was no accident that architects Messrs. Tecton were chosen by Finsbury Council to design a shelter scheme as the firm was led by modernist architect Berthold Lubetkin someone well suited to the task, (who had previously worked for the council designing the pioneering Finsbury Health Centre) "It was in the work undertaken for the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury that Lubetkin's socialist aspirations found their architectural fulfilment".[359] Tecton published a book, *Planned A.R.P.*, presenting plans in direct contrast to the approach taken nationally.

> The present chaotic state of this country's A.R.P. is due to the fact that there has been no planned policy, but rather a spontaneous growth. The difference between planned and haphazard A.R.P. lies simply in the fact that while the former is based on a careful analysis of value for money and of the actual conditions in the areas concerned, the latter is not.[360]

In light of such pronouncements it is scarcely surprising that a clash between Finsbury Council and the HO began to emerge, for this was a time ripe for, "'Municipal Socialism' increasingly…a plausible strategy for undermining the National Government…".[361]

The "dissident"[362] Labour council in Finsbury and Lubetkin at Tecton formed a potent combination putting forward plans, "intended to serve as a model of a mass-scientific scheme instituted…for the urban working class".[363]

> The real basis of conflict between the government's vision and that of the architects and scientists, therefore, lay in the latter group's ideology of applied social commitment, whereby their skills could and should be used to address social concerns. As these architects and the government committees approached ARP from opposite directions, their respective conceptions of how to go about protecting the population from aerial bombardment developed along parallel but quite distinct lines. The conflict between these two lines of thought reached some kind of climacteric with the Finsbury plan and the official response it drew.[364]

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[359] John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin* (2002), p.35.
[360] Tecton Architects, *Planned A.R.P. Based on the Investigation of Structural Protection Against Air Attack in the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury* (1939), p.123.
[361] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties – An Intimate History* (2010), p. 202.
[362] Allan, *Lubetkin,* p.35.
[363] Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p.153.
[364] Joseph S. Meisel, 'Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol.5, No.3, (1994) p.317.

Running beneath the borough of Finsbury therefore were fault lines much deeper than the proposed mass shelters.

"The discussion about ARP could be tailored to specific issues dear to leftist constituencies, such as class bias, the role of local authorities, and the status of civil liberties".[365]

> Later on, critics pointed out that many urban Britons lacked outdoor spaces to install government-provided Anderson shelters. Consequently, they felt that government plans were biased against the urban poor, those very civilians who were at the greatest risk from aerial warfare. They believed that current ARP policy only exacerbated the economic disparity between the rich and poor and between wealthy and impoverished boroughs, especially since the burden of communal costs would disproportionately affect poorer areas.[366]

The issue helps throw a light upon the diversity of London localities, in Westminster, £16 3s. was available for protection per individual, with the prosperous areas of Holborn and Richmond rating at £9 5s. and £4 7s respectively. In areas such as Walthamstow, Bethnal Green, Camberwell, and Lambeth this amounted to less than £2.[367] It was further argued that poorer areas of the East End required more protection than wealthier areas such as Kensington where structures were solidly built and where there were few strategic targets.[368] In the final analysis, "the critics believed that the structure of government ARP reflected all the worst class inequalities of British Society that they were sworn to oppose".[369]

June 1939 saw friction increase between the HO and Finsbury Council with the RTA (Regional Technical Adviser) observing.

> I see from the press that the Finsbury Borough Council have recently approved a further proposal for the erection of an underground car park which would serve as an air-raid shelter in time of war. This proposal may not yet have been submitted formally to the Department…There is a tendency in the Press to treat Finsbury as a test case, and it will be wise for the Department to pay special attention to proposals from this borough.[370]

At a meeting of the ARP Committee on 22 June Finsbury Council decided to defer consideration of a letter from the HO that confirmed continued refusal of the deep-shelter plans, "The Lord Privy Seal

[365] Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War*, p.106.
[366] Ibid. p. 115.
[367] Ibid. p. 117.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid. p. 116.
[370] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 7 June 1939.

regrets that he would not be prepared to approve the proposals of the council and to instruct the architects to amend the scheme previously submitted".[371]

With the outbreak of war only a matter of weeks away government officials noted with exasperation that, "Finsbury have not taken advantage of our offer to co-operate with them in making a survey of their district with a view to framing shelter proposals in substitution of the "Finsbury Scheme" which we turned down".[372] The ARP Department RTA now resorted to more indirect methods.

> I should like you to consider how far it would be possible for our technical people to make an appreciation of the shelter possibilities in Finsbury, independently of the borough authorities and without making any overt enquiries on the spot. Have we, or can we obtain without consulting the local authority, such information as would enable us to say what practical schemes for shelter accommodation in Finsbury could be put into operation, as alternatives to these which are being put forward by the Borough Council?[373]

HO technical advisers were now charged with finding out the number of private homes that could fit Anderson shelters, to what extent basements could be strengthened, and the opportunities for siting public shelters.[374]

The HO Deputy Chief Engineer duly reported an interview held with the Finsbury Borough Engineer which confirmed, "No survey of the borough has yet been started",[375] but cast an intriguing new light upon the issue.

> I refrained from delving too deeply into local politics but I sensed that the Council are not unanimous in their advocacy of a deep shelter policy and I think that a hint that anyone refusing to explore every possible means to afford shelter to the public would be shouldering a very grave responsibility might expedite the survey and the provision of shelter other than the deep ones.[376]

This delay in exploring alternative means of shelter by stubbornly adhering to the deep-shelter scheme was causing such concern as to now necessitate the application of political chicanery and coercion, which might now prosper in at last bringing about some form of agreed shelter provision for Finsbury residents.

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[371] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council ARP Committee Minutes 22 June 1939.
[372] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 7 June 1939.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid.
[375] TNA, HO 207/617, Finsbury Borough Public Shelters 19 June 1939.
[376] Ibid.

Almost lost in this sea of turmoil is any mention of preparations for war other than the issue of air raid shelters. Nevertheless the Town Clerk replied to the LCC Chief Officer of Public Assistance that the Finsbury Medical Officer of Health was directed to work with the county Public Assistance Officers in drawing up an outline scheme for, "the feeding and temporary lodging of persons in London who may be rendered homeless as a result of aerial bombardment".[377]

As war came to Finsbury the ARP Officer submitted to the Borough Emergency Committee a list of surface and basement shelters now started and under development. A further section of the report concluded, "In view of the national emergency, work had been suspended on the construction of the Busaco Street Shelter" as it had on the Finsbury Square Shelter and on the building of all other parts of the underground mass shelter scheme.[378] If it were not for the deep-shelter controversy one wonders how different the planning of shelter provision in Finsbury could have been instead of the rushed, slap-dash, and incomplete programme in existence at the start of hostilities.

Metropolitan London: Bermondsey

At a full council meeting on 26 May 1936 a Bermondsey Borough Council motion proposed that the authority as a matter of urgency should consider ARP.

> That all previous council declarations appertaining to ARP be rescinded, and that the whole question, on the lines suggested in the Home Office memorandum, be referred to a special committee for a scheme to be formulated and submitted to the Council for approval.[379]

The previous council declarations now being reversed had stated that, "the action suggested in the HO circular in the event of a mass air raid would be futile and ineffective"[380] and later recommended that in response to HO ARP proposals, "the council declines to take the suggested action".[381] Less than a year after making such pronouncements the socialist administration had a change of heart reversing its pacifist stance, "If this council were unprepared in respect of doing something for the civilian population in the event of an air raid what could we say?".[382] The above motion was carried and consequently an ARP Committee was constituted.[383]

[377] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CE/WAR/1/37, Letter from Finsbury Borough Town Clerk to Chief Officer of Public Assistance LCC 2 August 1939.
[378] Islington Local History Library, Finsbury Borough Emergency Committee Minutes 20 September 1939.
[379] Southwark Local History Library, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 26 May 1936.
[380] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 24 September 1935.
[381] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 22 October 1935.
[382] *South London Press*, 29 May 1936.
[383] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 26 May 1936.

The issue of expenditure, more precisely who was to pay for it, was raised not long into the tenure of the ARP Committee. On 17 July the Town Clerk was instructed to write to the HO on behalf of the committee asking for advice on financing the ARP scheme now under consideration by the Council.

> …before proceeding further the committee are desirous of knowing exactly the proposals of the Government as to reimbursing the Council any expenditure which be incurred in the preparation and operation of a scheme.[384]

The Town Clerk went on to stress, "The Committee are of the opinion that no expense whatever should fall upon the Local Authority, and I am directed to ask for a definite assurance that the whole cost…will be borne by the Government",[385] an opinion that we shall later see echoed by other boroughs.

The Bermondsey ARP Committee now produced a skeleton plan for the borough and reported to full council.

> We have considered various circulars and memoranda issued by the Home Office (ARP Department). Although it may be that when every possible precaution has been taken, both by the Government and other Authorities, there is little that can be regarded as likely to be effective against aircraft, bomb or gas attacks, we think it is incumbent on the Council as representatives and in the interests of, the inhabitants of the Borough, to be prepared as far as practicable for any emergency, and to formulate a scheme which would mitigate as far as humanly possible the after effects of such attacks.[386]

Provision of air raid shelters for the public caught out in the streets was included as part of the ARP scheme to protect the 98,790[387] residents of the borough.

In April 1937 central government confirmed that Bermondsey Council would receive grant funding of seventy percent towards ARP expenditure,[388] yet nearly a year later this seems to have had little effect, with the local newspaper reporting that, "Bermondsey Borough Council has been cold and casual about the whole subject".[389] The *South London Press* went on to suggest that perhaps the council was taking its lead from the people of Bermondsey, citing a response to being asked by a reporter where

[384] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 22 September 1936.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.
[387] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[388] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough Council Minutes 27 April 1937.
[389] *South London Press*, 18 February 1938.

the local ARP department was a local resident had retorted, "There isn't one. Down here we don't hold with such things".[390]

The Munich crisis of September 1938 prompted greater efforts from the council with 3,930 feet of temporary trench shelters constructed across the borough in places such as, Southwark Park, Pearson's Recreation Ground, Tooley Street Recreation Ground, Silwood Street – Rope Walk and on Snowsfields waste land. The trenches were excavated to a depth of between five and six feet and the total number that could be accommodated in all the trenches was 5,500 people with perhaps a maximum total of 8-9,000 sheltering for a shorter time. Once the crisis had passed the Town Clerk reported a HO recommendation that trenches should be made permanent and increased to cover ten percent of borough inhabitants which would see a further 7,000 feet of trenches dug in Bermondsey.[391]

Councillor P.E. Eyles Chairman of the ARP Committee stated in February 1939 that, "…precautions in Bermondsey were as far advanced as in any other borough in the Metropolis".[392]Yet later that same month HO ARP Department files record a visit to Bermondsey diagnosing a problem of shelter provision unique to the local environment.

> Bermondsey has a peculiar problem by reason of its congestion and the nature of the terrain. The population is 100,000; from this some 30,000 may be deducted to cover children and others to be evacuated. The 'Anderson' shelter is applicable to a limited extent…as generally speaking there is 'space' for only 15,000 – 20,000 people who could be served in this way…basements contribute nothing…[a] number of objections to further trench construction [in] parts of the borough [as] water is encountered near the surface.[393]

To mitigate such circumstances Bermondsey Council proposed a number of alternatives, construction of shelters beneath blocks of flats, surface shelters consisting of a steel structure covered with nine feet of reinforced concrete accommodating up to seventy people and the possibility of using the railway arches approaching London Bridge station. Contrary to the confident pronouncements of Councillor Eyles it was reported that, "…the council are very anxious to start with some aspect of their shelter programme soon".[394]

[390] Ibid.
[391] Southwark Local History Library, Bermondsey Borough ARP Committee Minutes 20 December 1938.
[392] *South London Press*, 14 February 1939.
[393] The National Archives, HO 207/996, Region No 5 (London) Shelters in Bermondsey 20 February 1939.
[394] Ibid.

The ARP committee were informed in May that a survey of possible basement shelter provision had identified only eighty seven basements that could be adapted and that over 1000 were totally unsuitable to be used as shelters.[395] Other forms of alternative shelter provision were proceeding with the erection of an experimental surface shelter in Leroy Street, with two more planned for Rotherhithe, if these new shelters met HO approval.[396] Further work had also commenced on experimental underground shelters on the Tower Bridge and Purbrook Street housing estates.[397] As war broke out shelter provision amounted to Anderson shelters for 18,008 people, 1,040 persons in Overground Shelters, 700 in Basement Shelters under flats, 1,400 in Trench Shelters, and 5,470 underneath adapted railway arches with 2,000 beneath arches at London Bridge station.[398] When combined with various other miscellaneous types of shelters, some still under construction, a total of 60,728 from an expected wartime population of around 70,000 residents could be protected.

Not until 22 August was consideration given towards planning for homelessness in the borough when the Town Clerk replied to a letter dated 27 July from LCC that suggested an outline scheme for feeding and housing those bombed out.[399] The ARP Committee now directed the Town Clerk to inform the County Chief Officer of Public Assistance that Bermondsey Council would make arrangements for their officers to be in contact regarding the operation of such a programme for those made homeless.[400]

Metropolitan London: Kensington

By 1936 the Royal Borough of Kensington was already active in planning for war having resolved to, "co-operate with H. M. Government in air raid precautionary measures".[401] Previous co-operation had taken the form of consultations between representatives of the Council and the HO resulting in Lt. Cmdr C. C. L. MacKenzie being charged with organising precautionary measures for the 175,600[402] people residing in the borough.[403] The local press reported in January 1937 that Kensington Borough Council were to stage an exhibition, "In order to stimulate public interest it was considered desirable to hold an exhibition of the various safety measures which the ARP Department of the Home Office

[395] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough ARP Committee Minutes 23 May 1939.
[396] *South London Press*, 26 May 1939.
[397] Ibid.
[398] SLHL, Bermondsey Borough ARP Committee Minutes 27 September 1939.
[399] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CE/WAR/129/10, Letter Bermondsey Borough Town Clerk to Chief Officer of Public Assistance LCC 22 August 1939.
[400] Ibid.
[401] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 1 December 1936.
[402] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[403] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 1 December 1936.

suggest that householders should take against the possibility of air attack."[404] A refreshing level of eagerness that must have warmed the hearts of officials.

Yet this was not blind enthusiasm and Kensington Borough Council, as we have already seen with Bermondsey, challenged the government over covering the cost of ARP expenditure that had by the start of January already amounted to £1,000.[405] The Council affirmed,

> That the Government should now be pressed to make proper grants-in-aid of this new type of expenditure which is outside the purposes for which the block grant is paid. The question of ARP is, in our view, essentially a national rather than a local matter and we consider that the approved expenditure should be borne by the National Exchequer.[406]

It was further agreed that Kensington would lend its support to the Associations of Local Authorities now making representations to the government over the issue.[407]

Despite such reservations throughout 1937 the Council continued to press ahead with their plans,

> Kensington residents can rest assured that the Kensington Borough Council is doing everything in its power to safeguard the inhabitants from the dangers of an air attack should one occur. Some months ago an ARP Officer was appointed, and much valuable work has been undertaken.[408]

In November the Mayor of Kensington opened another ARP Exhibition the third of its kind to be hosted by the Council, with lectures given twice daily,[409] which saw in the week ending 17 December a total of 4,066 visitors to the exhibition averaging 678 people per day.[410]

In May 1938 membership of the ARP Committee was increased by an additional nine members to, "cope with the A.R.P. work" which now included proposals to establish an ARP Office in North Kensington to be under the direction of an additional Borough ARP Officer with two assistant staff.[411] Later that month the Council staged a demonstration of air-raid precautionary measures at the junction of Kensington High Street and Warwick Road which drew the following commendation from Wing Commander E. J. Hodsoll, HO Inspector-General of ARP, addressed to the Mayor.

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[404] *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 8 January 1937.
[405] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 1 December 1936.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Ibid.
[408] *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 5 November 1937.
[409] *The Kensington News and West London Times,* 12 November 1937.
[410] *The Kensington News and West London Times,* 17 December 1937.
[411] *The Kensington News and West London Times,* 13 May 1938.

> I felt I must write and thank you for your kindness yesterday at the demonstration and again to send my congratulations to you on the really excellent show which we saw. I was delighted to hear of the progress of your training, and the way things generally, are going, and I cannot tell you how grateful we are for your personal interest in this important matter. The demonstration last night was really first class propaganda and a very great help.[412]

It is impossible to imagine either of the other two metropolitan boroughs receiving the praise that was now heaped upon Kensington Borough Council.

The prevalence of shops in the borough was seen as an asset to be utilised in the provision of shelters and the ARP Committee reported that 2,809 people could seek refuge inside basements along Kensington High Street. A further survey of shops in Notting Hill Gate demonstrated that there was basement accommodation available for 1,442 shoppers who may be caught out during an air raid in the area.[413] On 15 September plans were submitted to the HO for the construction of trench shelters in parks and open spaces for 12,000 people two weeks before the Munich crisis propelled other authorities to take such action. During the crisis instructions were given to the council by the HO to begin trench shelter excavation and trenches were dug in Kensington Gardens, Avondale Park, Barlby Road Recreation Ground, War Memorial Playing Fields, Campden Hill Square, Arundel Gardens, Norland Square, Onslow Square, and the garden enclosure opposite South Kensington Underground Station.[414]

May 1939 saw the completion of an entire borough wide survey for the provision of Anderson shelters with a large number being delivered and erected by the council in private houses. The additional temporary ARP staff employed to carry out the survey were now retained for an inspection of basements in homes that would require strengthening to act as air raid shelters.[415] The government stated in the House of Commons, in response to a question from the Member of Parliament for North Kensington, that "Kensington is leading the other London Boroughs in A.R.P. work".[416]

In August the Town Clerk responded to a request from the LCC Public Assistance Department that the council had no objection to the use of part of Barlby Road School for emergency feeding and rest centre provision.[417] It was later confirmed that the Kensington Housing Manager would co-operate with LCC public assistance officers in, "connection with the arrangements to be made for feeding and

[412] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 31 May 1938.
[413] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 22 September 1938.
[414] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 9 November 1938.
[415] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Kensington Borough ARP Committee Minutes 16 May 1939.
[416] *The Kensington News and West London Times,* 11 August 1939.
[417] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CE/WAR/1/37, Letter from Kensington Borough Town Clerk to the Chief Officer of Public Assistance LCC 15 August 1939.

temporary lodging of persons who may be rendered homeless as a result of war".[418] Kensington Borough Council pushed forward with plans to extend existing trench shelters in St. John's Hill – Ladbroke Grove, Brompton Square, Earl's Terrace, Holland Park and Ovington Square just days ahead of the outbreak of war.[419]

Suburban Essex: East Ham[420]

In East Ham the 131, 100[421] residents saw themselves as especially vulnerable to attack from the air should such an event ever occur,

> Inevitably East Ham stands in the route of such an attack. London will certainly be the focus of any offensive. And whether by day or night, the Thames is an excellent landmark by which to make such an approach. In East Ham we have two vital and strategic objectives which will draw the fire of the invaders – the gas works at Beckton and the Docks. The gas works represent one of the main arteries of the metropolis, and their destruction would do a great deal towards paralysing our city. The Docks, being life blood of the Port of London, are another obvious target.[422]

Given this anxiety it is perhaps surprising to learn that it was not until autumn 1937 that the County Borough began to consider planning for war, a tardiness that did not impress the local Civic Organisation opposition party, "in a matter so important as this the Council might have made their tentative arrangements before a final decision was made as to the cost".[423] The council remained defiant justifying its inactivity on having to wait for the government to confirm what proportion of the ultimate cost they would have to pay.

In June 1938 one month into his tenure as East Ham Borough ARP Officer Mr. John Harris admitted to the press that local ARP preparations were lacking, "East Ham is very backward in its scheme compared with many other London districts, but that is largely due to the fact the council has been trying to save the ratepayer's money".[424] The ARP Committee met later that summer to discuss the

[418] LMA, LCC/CE/WAR/1/37, Letter from Kensington Borough Town Clerk to the Chief Officer of Public Assistance LCC 25 August 1939.
[419] The National Archives, HO 207/682, Region No 5 (London) Kensington Public Shelters including trenches 30 August 1939.
[420] A reliance on the East Ham Echo as source material should be noted due to the absence of official county borough records for the period.
[421] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[422] *East Ham Echo*, 22 April 1938.
[423] Ibid.
[424] *East Ham Echo*, 10 June 1938.

issue of shelter provision and promised "some concrete proposals in this direction".[425] A relatively glacial pace in contrast to the work we have already seen made by some of the metropolitan boroughs.

The issue of whether or not central government should bear the total cost of ARP continued to be an irritant for East Ham Borough Council.

> The Mayor said that that they had been a little later than some districts in starting, but that they were out to catch up and give the best protection. The council still felt that the cost should be borne by the nation as a whole and not by local authorities but they had to apply the laws of the country, and to provide the best air-raid precautions they could.[426]

This less than fulsome reassurance perhaps prompted major industrial firms in the borough such as Tate and Lyle to develop their own ARP plans equipping staff with decontamination outfits, formulation of evacuation schemes and construction of sandbag protection at the local sugar refinery. Trade Unions at the Docks co-operated with the PLA (Port of London Authority) drawing up plans for shelters in warehouse vaults and even proposing the use of barges as a novel form of trench shelter.[427] An ingenuity and energy distinctly lacking in the approach shown by the local scheme making authority.

The very real risk of war in September compelled East Ham Borough Council to respond with the digging of trench shelters designed to accommodate 14,000 people across the borough. These were public shelters designed to protect those caught outside during an air raid unable to reach any form of domestic refuge and the council now invited residents to "inspect for their guidance" model garden trenches dug in Central Park, Plashet Park and Wanstead Flats.[428]

By autumn the issue of ARP was set to become a major issue in the forthcoming municipal elections due on 1 November.

> A heavier poll than usual is anticipated, given good weather, and the election question seems to depend to a large extent upon whether the public blame East Ham's unpreparedness at the end of September on the Labour majority in the Council, or upon the Government's Home Office.[429]

A considerable bone of contention in the campaign was the claim made by the Labour party election address that, "No Council did more for its people" in regards to ARP. A statement which drew a howl

[425] *East Ham Echo*, 22 July 1938.
[426] *East Ham Echo*, 16 September 1938.
[427] *East Ham Echo*, 30 September 1938.
[428] Ibid.
[429] *East Ham Echo*, 28 October 1938

of protest from the opposing Civic Organisation party whose spokesman Councillor Harper retorted that, "a cool analysis…would show that few councils in the country could have done less". To substantiate this point Councillor Harper referred to the fact that in February 1936 East Ham Borough Council established an ARP Committee which had met only twice in the succeeding 18 months.[430]

The re-election of the Labour Council did little to lessen the controversy which came to such a pass in January 1939 that local ARP wardens passed a vote of no confidence in the ARP Committee in protest against the lack of headway being made.

> East Ham's A.R.P. volunteers are up in arms against the Council, and in particular the A.R.P. Committee. Like volunteers in many other districts, they are dissatisfied with the rate of progress in the borough defence scheme, but unlike most of these other disgruntled workers, they have directed their complaint at the Council, and not at the Home Office. On Monday evening, the volunteers gathered in East Ham Town Hall when many scathing things were said about the A.R.P. Committee.[431]

The ARP wardens aimed to make the council aware of the, "considerable discontent among the voluntary workers…from all over the borough there have been sundry grumbles and complaints…the great thing had been delay all the way round".[432] Such was the parlous state of precautionary plans in the borough.

In February problems began to emerge with the shelter provision that did exist in East Ham with the Borough Engineer writing to the HO ARP Department about the trench shelters dug during the Munich crisis.

> Most of these trenches are either partly or wholly filled with water and very few of them are excavated to the full depth of 6'0 and quite a number well under 4'0 deep…In view of the fact that several of these trenches are unfenced and in public recreation grounds, I am directed to ask if we may have authority to fill in these trenches as we are rather afraid that…an accident may occur and somebody drowned.[433]

[430] *East Ham Echo*, 21 October 1938.
[431] *East Ham Echo*, 27 January 1939.
[432] Ibid.
[433] The National Archives, HO 207/595, Region No 5 (London) East Ham Public Basement and Trench Shelters 13 February 1939.

It was subsequently explained that the flooding of the trenches was due to the nature of the soil and low lying level of East Ham and at this late stage the council were now pursuing, "other means of shelter to be provided for persons caught in the streets".[434]

With hostilities declared the Borough Engineer reported to the Council Emergency Committee that progress was being made in the construction of surface shelters across East Ham with forty two shelters completed out of a planned 1,272 in Little Ilford, seventy five finished of the total 138 allocated in Cyprus and 103 ready from 372 earmarked for North Woolwich. A total of 16, 439 Anderson shelters accommodating 98,600 people had been erected and one communal shelter was completed in Colston Road with two more planned for High Street South and Church Road. Of the 222 planned basement shelters 152 were "virtually completed" providing refuge for 8,206 people. The London and North Eastern Railway Company had agreed to lease land to the council for the construction of shelters for those living on Whitta Road where the erection of domestic surface shelters was impracticable.[435] As East Ham faced the outbreak of war one cannot escape the impression that it did so with a hotchpotch of incomplete running repairs.

Suburban Surrey: Croydon

As early as 1935 Croydon Borough Council initiated plans to consider, "what precautionary measures could be taken to defend the civil population from the effects of air attack". In October the council set up a Special ARP Committee which laid down the lines of a general scheme to be drawn up by the principal officers of the council as well as officials from the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance.[436]

In September 1937 an organising officer for ARP was appointed with the caveat that this should only be confirmed after the question of who was to pay for expenditure was answered.

> The salary to be paid for such an appointment to be at the rate of £400 per annum, the appointment to be of a temporary nature…the intention being that the appointment should not be proceeded with until the Government had decided the question of grant.[437]

At this juncture the local press crowed that Croydon was, "continuing its policy of setting an example to the rest of the country in air raid precautions",[438] that unlike East Ham, this county borough would continue to devise a local ARP scheme in the expectation that the funding issue would be resolved.

[434] TNA, HO 207/595, East Ham Public Basement and Trench Shelters 18 February 1939.
[435] Newham Local History Library, East Ham Borough Emergency Committee Minutes 27 October 1939.
[436] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.4.
[437] Croydon Local History Library, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 20 September 1937.
[438] *Croydon Times,* 25 September 1937.

Croydon Borough Council would not have long to wait as by January 1938 central government confirmed that grants would be paid to meet sixty per cent of approved ARP expenditure. The Special ARP Committee now reported in February that they had completed a draft general precautions scheme to safeguard the 242,300[439] residents in the borough.[440]

By September a survey had been made of public parks and open spaces for possible trench shelters provided as part of a block system to accommodate a large number of people at one time. The ARP Committee conducted a further survey of existing buildings containing basements which could potentially act as public shelters for those caught out in the streets or for those residents lacking sufficient protection at home. A somewhat distinctive form of shelter was further proposed whereby concrete pipes 6 feet in diameter, 4 feet long and 3 inches thick, already ordered for corporation construction purposes could now be employed as blast and splinter proof shelters. These pipe shelters would be placed across Croydon with excavated earth used to protect them and an order for 3,000 feet of piping was authorised.[441]

The Munich crisis now cast an inquiring light upon on the state of local ARP.

> If enemy bombers swoop on Croydon – generally regarded as a vital spot in the Metropolitan area – what will happen? What precautions have been taken and what work is now in hand to safeguard the lives and homes of the inhabitants of Croydon? Those are questions which every man and woman in the Borough has been asking in the past few days.[442]

After a special conference between representatives of the local press and council officials the *Croydon Times* passed the verdict that, "Croydon is well prepared".[443] Trench shelters already dug were now made permanent and the positioning of the concrete pipe shelters in open spaces and parks now began.[444] "Everything is being done as quickly and expeditiously as possible there is to be no waiting for meetings of sub-committees or committees or anything of the kind. I think it will be agreed that we have got a move on and we are keeping moving",[445] declared Alderman Wood Roberts, ARP Committee Chairman, portraying the vibrant can-do attitude of the council.

In a move reminiscent of the Finsbury deep shelter scheme the ARP Committee considered in January 1939 proposals to develop a similar form of shelter in Croydon.

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[439] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[440] CLHL, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 27 January 1938.
[441] CLHL, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 19 September 1938.
[442] *Croydon Times*, 24 September 1938.
[443] Ibid.
[444] CLHL, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 3 October 1938.
[445] *Croydon Times*, 1 October 1938.

> The Committee are impressed with the need for providing bomb-proof shelters in central areas where large numbers of people may be found during an air raid, and with this in view alternative schemes have been prepared for constructing a bomb-proof shelter on that part of the Fairfield site which, by reason of its existing levels, peculiarly lends itself to such a purpose. The plan which the Committee favour…would provide accommodation in peace time for 810 cars in double lane parking, and shelter for approximately 30,000 persons in an emergency. It is roughly estimated that the cost of such a scheme would probably be from £300,000 to £360,000, and the Committee recommend that they be authorised to place this proposal before the Home Office and to urge them to approve the scheme in principal for grant purposes.[446]

The committee also recommended seeking HO approval for proposals to tunnel under Grangewood and Duppas Hill Recreation Grounds to provide further deep bomb-proof public shelters.[447]

The Town Clerk subsequently wrote to the HO detailing the deep shelter plans and asked for, "observations of the Home Office on this proposal…[and] if such a policy commends itself to the Department".[448] The observations of the HO are available to us from an internal memorandum.

> It is true that the proposal is less obnoxious in the case of Croydon, where the density of population is not so great and where, therefore, it is unlikely that in the, shall we say, square mile of which the site would form the centre there would be more than 30,000 people, as would certainly be the case in most of the more dense Metropolitan areas…one reaches, indeed, a sort of dilemma: if the area is really a less dense one, there will be too many trying to get in, and if the area is a less dense one, they would have to come too far…[449]

When looking at the plans in greater detail HO officials began to raise serious concerns over the efficacy of the Croydon proposals, "A vast number of entrances would be, of course, a sine qua non, but given these entrances it seems to be very doubtful indeed whether any control arrangements which could be devised could manage the safe entry of such a vast concourse as 30,000 people".[450]

Following a deputation of borough officials to the HO in February a certain coolness can suddenly be detected from the council towards its own proposals, "The plans submitted to the Department were not intended to be more than a general outline of a possible method of construction to enable the

[446] CLHL, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 13 January 1939.
[447] Ibid.
[448] The National Archives, HO 207/974, Region No 5 (London) Croydon Public Shelters including Basements and Trenches 25 January 1939.
[449] TNA, HO 207/974, Croydon Public Shelters including Basements and Trenches 27 January 1939.
[450] Ibid.

Government to consider the proposals in principle".[451] Unsurprisingly the plans were rejected by the HO in March. According to the official borough historian refusal was on the grounds that the government was committed to a preference of domestic shelter provision.[452]

In July the Croydon Public Assistance Committee decided to form a sub-committee to begin considering, "How families rendered homeless and without food as the result of aerial bombardment in time of war would be dealt with in Croydon".[453] Officials from the MOH had been liaising with the council Public Assistant Department on this matter who formed the impression,

> That there would not be any practical difficulties in making arrangements for the establishment of a depot at which persons temporarily without food and shelter could be given immediate assistance in kind during or after an air-raid.[454]

It was reported that the Croydon Public Assistance Officer had discussed at various conferences the necessity of co-ordination between adjoining authorities to act in conjunction in tackling the needs of bombed out residents. The Town Clerk confirmed to members of the Public Assistance Committee that, "the main idea would be to requisition suitable places, and a large amount of equipment, he hoped would be provided by the government".[455] Despite these plans for post-raid services only being drawn up in the lengthening shadows of war they represent a greater deal of progress than we have seen thus far in other boroughs.

Having not allowed themselves to be side tracked by focusing solely on a deep-shelter scheme, or distracted by running to keep up, the provision of air raid shelters in Croydon appeared robust as war began. Completed trench, concrete pipe, basement and surface shelters offered accommodation to 6, 947 residents which would rise to a total of 11,016 refuge places in the borough once shelters under construction were finished. The number of Anderson domestic shelters already delivered to Croydon numbered 22, 822 with more to follow. Further plans were confirmed to bring public shelter provision up to a maximum of 25,000 people or ten per cent of the population.[456] The day before war was declared the headline in the *Croydon Times* read, "Croydon is prepared to face any emergency".[457]

[451] TNA, HO 207/974, Croydon Public Shelters including Basements and Trenches 20 February 1939.
[452] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.16.
[453] *Croydon Times*, 15 July 1939.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Ibid.
[456] CLHL, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 15 September 1939.
[457] *The Croydon Times,* 2 September 1939.

Suburban Middlesex: Acton

ARP was first referred to in the proceedings of the Municipal Borough of Acton in October 1935 with the General Purposes Committee deciding to wait for preliminary proposals from MCC before proceeding further.[458] In October the Clerk of MCC wrote to the committee asking for officers to confer with county officials, "with a view to preparing a draft scheme of air-raid precautions for the consideration of the county Parliamentary Committee and local authorities throughout the county".[459] The proposal was agreed to and Acton Borough officers were duly authorised to begin discussions with the county authority,[460] yet as we have already seen it was not until the 1937 ARP Act that a county programme of civil defence began in earnest.

In May 1937 the ARP Committee considered a report on the county scheme now being compiled and noted to themselves the special relevance of this matter.

> We feel that it is important that the scheme of precautions should be as comprehensive and practical as possible in the case of a borough having the characteristics and geographical position of Acton and in view of the magnitude of the task of preparing a scheme embodying all the matters suggested by the Home Office.[461]

The committee then agreed, "that the appointment of a whole-time air raid precautions officer with special training and knowledge of the work is essential" and passed a recommendation seeking authorisation to do so from the council.[462]

At a full council meeting in July an amendment to the report recommending the appointment of an ARP officer was tabled.

> That the Council adhere to the resolution already passed to await the decision of the Government upon the financial questions before taking any further action.[463]

The amendment was carried and the appointment rejected on the grounds that such a move would be inconsistent with earlier support given by the council to the Associations of Local Authorities not to incur any ARP expenditure until a decision on the issue of finance had been reached. The possibility of an impasse over this issue threatened to occur when ARP Committee members responded by recording, "inasmuch as the resolution passed by the council in April prevents even the appointment

[458] Ealing Local History Library, Acton Borough Council General Purposes Committee 4 October 1935.
[459] ELHL, Acton Borough Council General Purposes Committee 6 December 1935.
[460] Ibid.
[461] Ealing Local History Library, Acton Borough ARP Committee 5 May 1937.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Ealing Local History Library, Acton Borough Council Minutes 12 July 1937.

of an air raid precautions officer…it is undesirable that the Council should continue to be bound by it."[464]

By December a special meeting of the council resolved the deadlock having noted that the Associations of Local Authorities had withdrawn their previous opposition.

> We are strongly of opinion that that there should be no further delay in the preparation of a practical and comprehensive scheme of ARP, and that the appointment of a whole-time officer to deal with the numerous matters set out in the outline of the work is essential. The co-operation of the existing chief officers and their staffs will, of course, be required but it is clear that none of them could undertake the immense amount of work involved.[465]

After this fractious and hesitant start to precautionary planning the newly appointed ARP Officer, Major A. Bruce Stevens, stated, "Well, we must prepare and continue to be prepared to defend our home population and home resources, especially in great industrial centres like Acton."[466]

At the start of 1938 the thorny issue of finance was finally settled when MCC resolved that all expenditure under the ARP Act incurred by borough and district councils within the scope of the county scheme would be treated as outlay to the general county rate. The ARP Committee in February considered the latest preparations towards the draft scheme and concluded, "We have given our general approval to the outline of the scheme…and it will be accordingly be prepared upon the lines indicated".[467]

The Borough Engineer reported in July that a survey of buildings in the district capable of being adapted as small shelters had been completed as well as a map showing suitable sites for trench shelters in available open spaces.[468] By spring 1939 borough councillors criticised local shelter provision, some of whom attacked Anderson domestic shelters, "as being farcical and that the people of Acton had no confidence in them. Many shelters were only being accepted because they would provide good coal sheds after the war'"[469] Councillors now called upon MCC to allow Acton to proceed with waterproofing Anderson shelters in the borough that had already become waterlogged. It was noted in an ARP Committee report that the county council had given authority for 100 shelters to be drained yet this would still leave around 1,000 shelters in a flooded condition.[470]

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[464] ELHL, Acton Borough Council ARP Committee 20 July 1937.
[465] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 3 December 1937.
[466] Ibid.
[467] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 24 February 1938.
[468] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 1 July 1938.
[469] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 1 March 1939.
[470] Ibid.

Plans for public shelters were on the agenda for the ARP Committee in April whose minutes record a discussion around the, "consideration of information available about the construction of deep public shelters, a subject on which many conflicting opinions have been expressed".[471] It was agreed by the committee to support a resolution passed by Southall Town Council that read:

> The Town Clerk be authorised to make representations to the County for an examination to be initiated into the question of the provision of deep underground shelters in Middlesex.[472]

By lending their weight to an enquiry it was hoped that some clarity would result which the committee could put to good use.[473] In May the committee had secured on loan from Hammersmith Council a number of sample steel shelters to be erected so that residents would have an opportunity to inspect this form of shelter provision.[474]

Out of these nebulous, protracted and somewhat patch work plans of Acton Borough Council, that made no mention of post-raid services, approximately 3,300 sites had been earmarked for domestic Anderson shelters, with around 1,500 places requiring alternative types of shelter provision.[475]As war broke out plans by the council to construct blocks of trench shelters were approved by the HO with each holding around 153 people. These would augment a number of public trench shelters scattered across the borough at places such as, Acton Park, Wesley Playing Field, East Acton Open Space, Springfield Gardens, The Woodlands Open Space, South Acton Recreation Ground and Southfield Road Playing Fields[476] all designed to keep the 69,100[477] residents safe when the bombs fell.

Planning for War: Conclusions

Now that we have considered these precautionary schemes, and the fears that preceded them, we can draw several conclusions as to how London planned for war.

"London is now beginning to look a little like what it was expected to be thirty-six hours after the outbreak of war"[478], commented Jock Colville over eighteen months later as he viewed the after-effects of a major raid on 19 April 1941, reminding us of a certain gap between anticipation and actuality. There was in fact no "knock-out" blow, "The authorities, drawing up and implementing the plans for civil defence, had based them on the expectation of a swift, gigantic assault, probably by

[471] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 12 April 1939.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Ibid.
[474] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 12 May 1939.
[475] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 10 July 1939.
[476] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/ES/ARP/3, LCDR Group 6 – Part 1 Acton Borough Council.
[477] LCC, *London Statistics,* p.39.
[478] Colville, *Fringes of Power*, p.376.

daylight. So the blitz caught ARP on the wrong foot when it came".[479] How effective could plans be that had failed to accurately forecast the nature of the threat when it materialised?

In following the course of planning and preparations for war we noticed a number of silences over comprehensive and detailed post-raid services, where little attention is paid, if at all, to schemes for rest centres or communal feeding. Nothing can be found for example in the plans for East Ham and Acton of the need to prepare for those affected by the aftermath of bombing, leaving such matters to be addressed only when enemy bombers were staring down upon London.

The civil defence call to action was met with markedly mixed reactions from local authorities, often defined along party political lines, resulting in an uneven patchwork of preparations across the capital. The controversy over the Finsbury deep shelter scheme distorted all other plans for the borough. The local environment in Bermondsey placed restrictions upon shelters, necessitating the planned use of a plethora of alternatives such as beneath railway arches. Kensington Council was seen by government as a metropolitan exemplar for all other local authorities to follow. Plans made by East Ham were distinctly recalcitrant in nature and exposed as running to keep up when war broke out. In distinct contrast Croydon took a proactive and thorough approach seen as ready to face any emergency. Tensions within Acton Borough Council, and between itself and MCC, resulted in a hotchpotch of slowly developed plans. And whilst the issue of finance was a common challenge to all boroughs how each of them responded noticeably varied.

We shall next turn to blitz responses in each of the six boroughs, and in so doing we are now equipped with the knowledge of how pre-war planning had already initiated the process of shaping and determining blitz experience.

[479] Calder, *The People's War*, p.165.

Chapter Three: Main London Blitz Local Response – Metropolitan London

Air Raids

"How I do hope those beastly murderers are not coming to visit us tonight. It is now striking 9.P.M. and just about their time. I really do dread the dark coming on. I wish it could be daylight all the time."[480] Eighteen months previously when war was declared, a war which would bring such terror, the scene in the same borough of Kensington could not have been more different in its tranquillity.

> Two of us lunch in Kensington High Street. It is a lovely day and everybody is going about their normal business, wearing summer frocks and looking very calm.[481]

By turning first to the local response in the three inner metropolitan London boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington we will be able to see how locality would come to shape the seminal experience of the London blitz.

To guide us through many months of air raiding we shall initially look at the following tables demonstrating bombing statistics and demographic flux. Whilst this period was one of population decline right across metropolitan London a closer interrogation of the figures shows a consistent trend whereby boroughs within the inner ring of London County emptied far more than those on the outer ring. Varied responses to bombing severity often prompted an exodus of residents away from boroughs worst affected towards areas in a relatively better state. Local authorities receiving the hardest blows against them were far less able to cope with the needs of survivors compared to those less mauled and potentially able to offer greater safety and comfort.

In addition to providing bombing figures the data collected from air raids allows us to glimpse the variety of metropolitan locales through the depiction of population, housing and acreage of individual boroughs. The impact of bombing can truly be sensed not only through the weight of ordnance received, houses demolished and damaged, but if we allow ourselves to appreciate the varying extent different authorities would have to respond to a diversity of destruction. For instance the calculation of casualties per bomb can help tell us the true toll exacted by raiding as it provides not only a gauge of the number killed in a borough but the efficacy of local efforts to keep Londoners alive under fire.

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[480] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, MS36148-36247, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 18 April 1941.
[481] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/4/12/2, MO Diarist Irene Mary Anderton Naylor 29 August 1939.

Table 3.1 demonstrates the demographic trends of the main London blitz period. All local authorities within the administrative County of London are shown; with the three boroughs of this study highlighted in red. The boroughs are all listed in order of percentage reduction in population between mid-1938 and the conclusion of the main London blitz. The date range begins on 15 January 1941 the starting point of data collection; 19 April 1941 following major raid of mid-April; and 31 May 1941 the conclusion of air raids. It is possible to compare the three boroughs against all other inner London metropolitan authorities; as well as the calculated population percentage reduction for all of the County of London which is highlighted.

Table 3.2 highlights the amount of bombs dropped on inner London during the main London blitz and includes casualty figures and number of houses demolished. The boroughs are all ranked by weight of bombs in kilograms per acre. All the boroughs within the County of London are included with the exception of the City of London. For purposes of comparison the three boroughs of this study and totals for County of London, calculated where possible, are highlighted in red.

Table 3.3 shows detailed analysis of air raid casualties throughout the main London blitz period. The boroughs are ranked by total number of casualties. Casualty figures are broken down by numbers killed, admitted to hospital and treated at first aid posts. All authorities within County of London are listed. Total figures for the County of London have been calculated wherever possible. Figures for the three boroughs of this study, and County of London, are highlighted in red for comparator purposes.

Table 3.1 – Main London Blitz Demographic Trends
Source: The National Archives, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.

Local Authority	No. Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 15 January 1941	Population 19 April 1941	Population 31 May 1941	Population Percentage Reduction
Stepney	25,612	200,500	79,225	74, 031	70,969	65 %
Paddington	21,592	137,400	77,525	56 ,703	56,028	59 %
Poplar	23,958	134,400	62,046	59,008	54,971	59 %
Shoreditch	14,097	80,360	39,137	38,196	36,301	55 %
Bermondsey	19,134	97,420	50,116	46,948	45,803[482]	53 %
Chelsea	13,368	56,050	31,853	28,497	27,316	51 %
Southwark	29,113	145,300	78,385	76,057	72,890	50 %
Bethnal Green	18,156	92,910	50,330	50,263	48,030	48 %
Holborn	6,462	34,350	23,716	18,321	18,127	48 %
Westminster	22,536	124,400	69,450	69,650	66,909	46 %
Finsbury	8,924	56,960	33,660	32,610	31,430	45 %
St. Marylebone	19,974	90,680	51,250	50,035	49,562	45 %
Camberwell	43,502	222,400	130,364	129,711	126,413	43 %
Kensington	28,999	174,100	99,826	100,874	99,479	43 %
Lambeth	48,873	272,800	169,864	161,100	156,446	43 %
St. Pancras	28,638	179,400	107,591	105,906	103,663	42 %
Greenwich	21,734	95,770	58,350	57,278	56,316	41 %
Hackney	37,859	205,200	126,497	123,459	121,739	41 %
Battersea	28,045	141,700	83,115	85,292	84,329	40 %
Deptford	18,300	95,460	67,553	58,170	56,430	40 %
Stoke Newington	8,368	50,480	31,409	31,272	30,868	39 %
Hampstead	17,552	90,480	60,555	57,102	56,348	38 %
Fulham	26,245	137,700	86,794	87,126	87,163	37 %
Islington	45,360	292,300	190,403	190,004	187,458	36 %
Lewisham	56,000	229,000	148,090	149,458	147,674	35 %
Wandsworth	80,163	340,100	226,851	228,062	222,915	34 %
City of London	2,359	9,180	6,780	6,305	6,151	33 %
Woolwich	29,870	150,900	102,911	104,173	101,983	32 %
Hammersmith	17,402	125,100	81,615	85,379	85,868	31 %
County of London	762, 195	4,062,800	2,425,261	2,360,990	2,318,579	43 %

[482] In the original file contained in HLG 7/608 the population figure for Bermondsey was recorded on 31 May 1941 at 54,803. This would show a marked increase over the figures for the previous weeks and was against the general trend. On checking files for the weeks either side of 31 May 1941 the population figure was recorded at 45,803. It appears that the figures five and four were transposed in the writing of this data and that the correct figure should indeed be 45,803. This is of course significant as it greatly impacts on the calculation for the population percentage reduction figure. Calculations based on the erroneous figure shows a percentage reduction in the Bermondsey population of just 43%. Using the correct figure, the population percentage reduction for Bermondsey comes out at 53%.

Table 3.2 – Air Raids on Inner London during main London Blitz

Source: The National Archives, HO 186/952, General Intelligence – London Region Reports 1.1.41 – 5.3.44

Borough	Population Average of Sept.1940 Dec. 1940 Mar. 1941 June. 1941	Houses Pre-War	Acres (land & inland water)	Total Weight of Bombs (kg) from Nov.1940 to July 1941	Total Serious Casualties from Sept. 1940 to Sept. 1941	Weight of Bombs (kg) per acre	Casualties per 1,000 population	Weight of Bombs (kg) per 1,000 population	Houses demolished and beyond repair per thousand of pre-war (approx.)	Houses demolished and seriously damaged per thousand of pre-war (approx.)
Holborn	20,350	6,462	406	22,646	508	56	25	1,132	90	197
Southwark	80,763	29,166	1,132	62,310	1,648	55	20	769	34	115
Westminster	71,173	22,536	2,503	125,258	2,142	50	30	1,764	42	170
Stepney	93,613	37,206	1,766	72,216	1,298	41	14	768	165	255
Lambeth	176,285	48,873	4,083	145,983	2,722	36	15	829	70	178
Shoreditch	42,553	13,859	658	23,828	1,136	36	26	554	214	-
Bermondsey	52,965	19,606	1,503	49,536	1,566	33	30	935	100	168
Finsbury	33,733	10,500	587	19,636	445	33	13	578	65	115
Poplar	66,415	23,977	2,331	61,808	1,525	27	23	936	111	273
Deptford	60,738	18,250	1,564	36,526	700	23	11	599	59	118
Bethnal Green	53,228	18,156	760	17,050	406	22	8	322	55	123
Battersea	89,112	28,440	2,163	43,662	537	20	6	491	26	47
Stoke Newington	34,150	8,813	864	17,220	322	20	9	506	28	71
Greenwich	61,973	21,630	3,858	69,660	1,130	18	18	1,124	48	61
St. Marylebone	52,990	19,974	1,473	27,181	900	18	17	513	23	34
Camberwell	140,975	41,179	4,480	71,689	2,135	16	15	508	39	126
Chelsea	30,183	13,016	660	10,771	876	16	29	359	43	68
St. Pancras	112,160	25,670	2,694	40,878	1,488	15	13	365	40	68
Hackney	137,020	37,859	3,287	45,110	650	14	5	329	66	145

Borough	Population Average of Sept.1940 Dec. 1940 Mar. 1941 June. 1941	Houses Pre-War	Acres (land & inland water)	Total Weight of Bombs (kg) from Nov.1940 to July 1941	Total Serious Casualties from Sept. 1940 to Sept. 1941	Weight of Bombs (kg) per acre	Casualties per 1,000 population	Weight of Bombs (kg) per 1,000 population	Houses demolished and beyond repair per thousand of pre-war (approx.)	Houses demolished and seriously damaged per thousand of pre-war (approx.)
Paddington	82,488	21,592	1,357	16,856	701	12	9	206	27	72
Islington	194,770	46,296	3,092	32,910	1,729	11	9	169	43	62
Lewisham	159,623	60,000	7,015	74,445	1,405	11	9	465	37	71
Woolwich	108,410	37,232	8,282	90,219	1,300	11	12	835	29	55
Kensington	105,180	29,653	2,290	19,930	733	9	7	190	29	75
Wandsworth	240,148	80,163	9,107	79,570	1,611	9	7	332	29	55
Fulham	92,545	26,964	1,706	13,976	550	8	6	150	24	46
Hammersmith	88,158	23,959	2,287	13,235	681	6	8	150	22	45
Hampstead	62,405	16,997	2,265	14,344	300	6	5	231	14	37
County of London	2,544, 106	788,028	74,173	1,318,453	31,144	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3.3 – Detailed Analysis of Air Raid Casualties during main London Blitz.
Source: C. L. Dunn, *The Emergency Medical Services – Volume II Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Principal Air Raids on Industrial Centres in Great Britain* (1953), p.212.

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
Lambeth	1,449	227.1	1,301	1,713	2,383	5,397	25.2	3.7
Westminster	1,287	329.1	800	1,878	1,886	4,564	54.3	3.5
Poplar	757	207.8	631	894	2,266	3,791	39.9	5.0
Wandsworth	1,363	95.1	683	710	2,286	3,679	13.2	2.7
St. Pancras	651	154.6	724	799	1,829	3,352	25.4	5.1
Southwark	605	342.0	695	1,250	1,339	3,284	32.8	5.4
Stepney	1,219	441.8	616	884	1,689	3,189	24.3	2.6
Islington	569	117.8	554	1,162	1,322	3,038	13.7	5.33
Camberwell	1,228	175.4	585	1,624	740	2,949	17.0	2.4
Woolwich	1,487	114.9	351	1,251	1,248	2,850	23.0	1.9
Bermondsey	875	372.6	617	942	1,230	2,789	39.3	3.2
Lewisham	1,369	124.9	586	656	1,527	2,769	14.2	2.0
Hackney	634	123.4	511	975	1,088	2,574	15.0	4.1
Shoreditch	293	285.0	416	577	1,328	2,321	43.0	7.9
Deptford	740	302.2	275	645	880	1,800	23.7	2.4
Bethnal Green	287	241.7	270	448	1,007	1,725	26.5	6.0
Greenwich	942	153.3	239	475	918	1,632	21.8	1.7
Paddington	288	135.8	266	445	906	1,617	16.8	5.6
Finsbury	225	245.3	295	432	858	1,585	40.6	7.0
St. Marylebone	409	177.7	356	691	534	1,581	25.5	3.9
Chelsea	256	248.2	376	572	499	1,447	38.1	5.7
Kensington	553	154.6	241	535	590	1,366	10.9	2.5
City of London	413	391.6	204	362	790	1,356	226.0	2.0
Battersea	502	148.5	240	234	746	1,220	11.3	2.4
Fulham	424	159.1	235	351	613	1,199	11.3	2.8

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
Hammersmith	314	95.1	248	530	364	1,142	11.5	3.7
Holborn	360	567.5	277	485	309	1,071	41.2	3.0
Stoke Newington	214	158.5	224	146	272	642	15.7	3.0
Hampstead	347	98.0	141	161	259	561	7.7	1.6
County of London	20,060	-	12,957	21,827	31,706	66,490	-	-

Eve of the main London Blitz – [June – September 1940]

In June 1940 following the fall of France and Belgium newcomers began to arrive in Kensington whose presence was soon noticed, "Kensington: amongst all classes dislike of Belgians is growing. They cause shortage of butter and are disagreeable people".[483] Concerns about butter aside, in the months to come, Kensington residents would more and more experience new neighbours as the borough became a safe haven for refugees from both abroad and across London. Later that same month Vere Hodgson in Kensington recorded in her diary hearing the threat of a new and more deadly arrival.

> Tuesday, 25 June 1940, last night at about 1. a.m. we had the first air raid of the war on London. My room is just opposite the police station, so I got the full benefit of the sirens. I shook all over, but managed to get into my dressing – gown and slippers, put my watch in my pocket, clutch my torch and gas-mask, and get downstairs…[484]

Over the course of that summer Londoners would increasingly become aware of the danger fast approaching their city.

In August bombs started to fall on metropolitan London with Finsbury the first of the three boroughs to be struck when Incendiary Bombs (IB)[485] fell in an air raid between 0300 and 0340 hours on 25 August.[486] On the night of 28 August Bermondsey was the next recipient of IB with forty scattering widely causing the burning out of Woolworth's shop on the Old Kent Road.[487] Cecil Beaton living at the time in Kensington recorded his air raid observations on 30 August, "The sky was rose-coloured, and each vast explosion was preceded by a flash of blinding light".[488]

As August turned to September the pace of air raids perceptibly began to increase. Living on Thurloe Street, near South Kensington Underground Station, Hilda Neal jotted in her diary for 1 September;

> Must get to bed tonight before the siren shrieks and get some sleep if possible. Listened to the 'planes last night for hours – coming and going, coming and going, droning and zooming. Heard lots of bombs exploding in distance, not so far away, between 2-3 a.m.[489]

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[483] Addison, Paul and Crang, Jeremy A. (eds), *Listening to Britain – Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour May to September 1940* (2010), p.74.
[484] Vere Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges* (1999), p.7.
[485] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, London Civil Defence Region Situation Reports.
[486] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. I*, p.241.
[487] James D. Stewart, *Bermondsey in War* (1981), p.4.
[488] Cecil Beaton, *The Years Between Diaries 1939 – 1944* (1965), p.38.
[489] Imperial War Museum, 11987 Private Papers, War Diaries Hilda Neal 1 September 1940.

On the night of 6 September Vere Hodgson noticed shelter habits forming, for whilst she herself preferred to hunker down inside the house, her mother slept in the Anderson shelter. As soon as the all clear sounded at 3.30 a.m. her mother returned to bed.[490] That same night twelve HE bombs fell on Bermondsey destroying houses in Stork's Road and Keeton's Road.[491] Sarah Hough aged sixty two of 113 Stork's Road became the first recorded air raid fatality in the borough.[492] The freakish results of HE bombs were only beginning to be realised as the body of a missing person in Keeton's Road was later found on a nearby roof.[493] As the three London boroughs receive a foretaste of what was to come the eve of the main London blitz grows in greater significance as we see a process of acclimatization start to take root.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

The Surrey Commercial Docks in Rotherhithe, Bermondsey were home to approximately 3000 residents,[494] and amongst this local population was half a million tons of timber, the chief commodity of the docks.[495] Shortly after 17.00 on 7 September 1940 German bombers attacked this vulnerable target as they raided across the Port of London, "…wood-piles, riverside wharves and warehouses were being deluged with high explosives accompanied by cascades of incendiary bombs".[496]

For those in the Rotherhithe Docklands Settlement the planes were first mistaken as flocks of pigeons in the distance, yet they were soon disabused of such a notion, "…oil bombs and thousands of incendiaries began to fall all around us…the fire brigade was there but the water mains were burst…so things just burned…men carried older men and women to safety – some were wheeled on barrows- and so we left…"[497] The scene which now unfolded is best described by the Borough Deputy ARP Controller Harold Travers.

> Filled with such combustible material, the whole area became an inferno within minutes. Flames shot hundreds of feet into the air, and the area was filled with thick black, acrid smoke, with particles of soot floating down from the sky…The single road leading down to the inhabited area from Lower Road was flanked on either side with high fires, the noise of which

[490] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.40.
[491] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.4.
[492] John Hook, *"These Rough Notes" The Raids on Southwark (formerly the Metropolitan Boroughs of Bermondsey, Camberwell and Southwark) 1940-1945 (1995), p.2.*
[493] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.4.
[494] Southwark Local History Library, Report by Harold Travers Deputy ARP Controller Bermondsey – Incidents at Surrey Docks September 7/8th, 1940.
[495] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.5.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ben T. Tinton, *War Comes to the Docks* (1942), p.54.

> was indescribable…the enemy air fleet never ceased to continue to plaster the fire area with missiles of all kinds, sometimes descending to machine gun the assembled services…[498]

As evening turned to night the raid wore inexorably on and on.

By nightfall the only option for those caught in the conflagration was to evacuate the area of the Surrey Docks. Thomas Winter living with his family in Bryan Road recounts the exodus, "We were herded back to Rotherhithe Street and now started to run along the only possible escape road from this ever growing fire…one could never tell what new peril awaited us further along the road".[499] At nearby Redriff School a stretcher party leader could barely believe the sight of refugees that now confronted him.

> It looked one flaming mass…to us it seemed a remarkable thing that people could get out of that area, and when we saw – when we saw the people come streaming down from dockland we were absolutely amazed. They seemed to come like an army marching and running from the area. The people…looked in a very, very bad condition, they were dirty, dishevelled and hurrying to get away.[500]

Of particular concern was that the three bridges connecting the Surrey Commercial Docks to the rest of Bermondsey would be severed trapping those attempting to flee. [501] The bridges held yet the fires would continue to burn long into the following days.[502]

For Finsbury ARP Warden Barbara Nixon 7 September began as a peaceful if not blissful day, "…one of those beautiful early autumn days which feel like spring, and can make even London streets seem fresh and gay".[503] At 16.43 an air raid siren abruptly pierced the scene prompting residents to head to shelters;

> The women were frankly fussed and ran, grabbing their children by bits of skirt or jacket ; one woman rushed down, her hair a pile of soapsuds straight from the Saturday afternoon shampoo; the children were excited, the men made a point of swaggering in front of the womenfolk , and walked slowly and soberly. But nobody was seriously frightened. There had

[498] SLHL, Report by Harold Travers Deputy ARP Controller Bermondsey – Incidents at Surrey Docks September 7/8th, 1940.
[499] Southwark Local History Library, Thomas S. Winter *A Shout from the Night* (1995).
[500] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p.57.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.8.
[503] Barbara Nixon, *Raiders Overhead* (1980), p.12.

> been repeated 'alerts' and a few actual bombs dropped during the preceding weeks. Something might possibly happen this time, but probably not.[504]

By 23.06 forty six IBs had fallen on the borough with serious fires reported in the Goswell Street area[505] suggesting that something more serious was indeed happening this time.

The next morning as the all clear siren sounded across Finsbury groups of people trailed back home from the shelters asking passing ARP wardens if they were likely to receive another such raid that night.[506] Reviewing the air raid damage of shattered houses and smashed glass that lay often inches deep in the streets, Barbara Nixon noted, "That day London had changed".[507]

On the night of Thursday 12 September Hilda Neal sat alone during an air raid on the top of the stairs listening to, "Hair – raising bangs. Expected to find South Kensington in ruins this morning…"[508] Elsewhere in the borough Rachel Ferguson vividly recorded her own experience.

> Again, the raid started at dinner time – a bang that shook us a bit and put out of action the little cinema two gardens away. Then another crash that brought the dinner service leaping out of the plate-rack, sent part of the kitchen ceiling on to my head (I didn't feel a thing), blasted in the door, which didn't fall flat, but, rather unnervingly, advanced, upright, into the room before collapsing, destroyed our glass roof, and filled the room with acrid dust through which we peered as in a fog…thank God the electric light held. The floor was heaped with plaster and glass and china.[509]

The heavy raiding inaugurated earlier in the week had now advanced further westwards to Kensington. Whilst the blitz now spread right across metropolitan London[510]; the intensity of the bombing would always be greatest over the East End of the capital amongst the predominantly working class populations of the docks such as in areas south of the river in Bermondsey.

During mid-September Gertrude McMullan of Holland Park, Kensington, wrote to her sister expressing disbelief as the bombing unfolded all about.

> …We certainly are absolutely on the battlefield, of the greatest and most appalling war ever fought. I feel as if it can't be true, and that it must be some horrible night-mare. For a fortnight,

[504] Ibid.
[505] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.
[506] Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p.18.
[507] Ibid.
[508] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 12 September 1940.
[509] Ferguson, *Royal Borough*, p.88.
[510] By 9 September 1940 every Metropolitan Borough had reported some form of air raid damage. (Todman, *Britain's War Into Battle,* p.483.)

> or more, they have been at us night and day, almost without ceasing. The nights seem the worst – they go on for 8 ½ and 9 hours. The noise is terrible – guns and bombs. I've heard plenty of real screaming bombs lately…There is a raid going on now it began at 2.15. That is the 4th one today…Last night from 8.10 till 1.45 a.m. most of the battle seemed to be just over our house…It is really amazing to one, that we are still alive, and the house standing. How long are these nights of terror going on?[511]

Nearby Vere Hodgson noted in her diary a similar sentiment of alarm and dismay, "I felt every moment I should be buried beneath the ruins…They arrived again at 8 p.m. prompt. Earlier every night! What a prospect for the winter".[512] In and amongst this pandemonium Home Intelligence reports recorded that in the bombed areas of Kensington there was a prevalence of neighbourly help for fellow air raid victims.[513]

Elsewhere the Surrey Commercial Docks continued to be a scene of destruction as summer faded into autumn, on 7 October HE bombs struck Bellamy's Wharf in Rotherhithe, causing a fire reported to be raging beyond control.[514] Cecil Beaton commented in his diary for 12 October on the air raid damage all around him in South Kensington;

> One still feels a sinking of the heart at the sight of ever more bomb damage: windows blown in and tumbled wreckage of rubble in the road. A small dwelling – its front cut away – gives a doll's house effect, with the parlour, where the evening meal was being eaten on the cloth covered table, a teapot and bowl of tomatoes exposed to passers-by. Pictures have been knocked crooked by the blast. Skyed high in the air remain the useless bath and lavatory with the pathetic little roll of toilet paper still affixed to the door, and the staircase leads to an upper floor that no longer exists.[515]

As six weeks of continuous night bombing gradually began to take a toll Vere Hodgson complained that, "We are all speechless with fatigue. I shall sleep if bombs fall round my bed!"[516]Sleep would remain a rare luxury as the very next night IBs landed on Gloucester Road Underground station causing fires, HE bombs fell in Thistle Grove and Brompton Road, and up to thirty fire engines tackled a blaze at the Natural History Museum.[517]

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[511] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 16 September 1940.
[512] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.46.
[513] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.456.
[514] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/2, LCDR Situation Reports.
[515]Beaton, *The Years Between*, p.38.
[516] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.66.
[517] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/2, LCDR Situation Reports.

In Finsbury later that October bombs partly demolished the Northampton Buildings on Rosomon Street trapping casualties inside. Nearby that night HE struck the Hugh Myddleton School on Corporation Row, an Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) sub-station, causing four dead and eleven seriously injured. On 20 October a fire was reported at the West Warehouse in the Surrey Docks which had caused ammonia to escape from the cold store.[518] This incident highlighted the peculiar hazard of living close to the docks for the ammonia fumes in fact penetrated the Trident Street Shelter forcing the inhabitants to take flight during the raid.[519] Bermondsey had by now experienced a total of 229 air raid warnings of which seventy seven developed into bombing raids.[520]

London received its heaviest raid for two months on the night of Sunday 8 December[521] during which the flats in the Peabody Buildings in Clerkenwell, Finsbury were hit causing thirty casualties.[522] Three weeks later on 29 December during the extensive firebombing of the City of London nearby boroughs such as Finsbury received glancing blows. The premises of the Gas Light and Coke Company on Goswell Road were demolished killing three; whilst elsewhere in the borough a mixture of HE and IB killed a further four, including two firemen.[523] Bermondsey was also in the path of the bombers as they crossed the Thames heading for the City with 177 local incidents reported averaging one every three minutes during the seven and a half hour raid.[524] The most serious incidences occurred around London Bridge where, "a large commercial area was practically wiped out".[525] As 1940 drew to a close in Bermondsey it was calculated that in the last quarter of the year raids amounted to a total of 1,108 hours or a period equivalent to forty six days.[526]

At the start of 1941 the toll of three months raiding could be seen in the decreasing number of people living in the capital. Whilst this decline was caused in part by the evacuation of some children and families, and those that could do so choosing to leave, the depredations of the blitz remained a salient factor behind an ever dwindling total of residents. The population of Finsbury was recorded in mid-1938 at 56,960 which had by January 1941 fallen by forty percent to 33,660.[527] By the New Year Bermondsey was recorded as being one of the six most heavily bombed boroughs in London.[528] The

[518] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/3, LCDR Situation Reports.
[519] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.16.
[520] Ibid. p. 19.
[521] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. II* p.327.
[522] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/4, LCDR Situation Reports.
[523] Ibid.
[524] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.21.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid.p.22.
[527] The National Archives, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.
[528] The National Archives, HO 186/952, LCDR (Intelligence Branch Report No.1) January 1st 1941. Of the three inner London boroughs studied Bermondsey was the only one to be listed, the other most heavily bombed areas were; Stepney, Shoreditch, Chelsea, West Ham and Camberwell.

population of Bermondsey had halved recorded at 50,116 on 15 January 1941 representing fifty one percent of its 1938 total.[529] This was perhaps not surprising given that by this time 1,324 of 19,606 houses had been demolished representing seven percent of the total housing stock.[530] The population of Kensington had dropped from a pre-war population of 174,100 to 99, 826 in 1941 representing a fall of forty two percent.[531]

Whilst the inhabitants of Kensington decreased the borough continued to become more heterogeneous in nature as war refugees continued to seek sanctuary. During January diarist and war correspondent James Lansdale Hodson accompanied an air raid warden attempting to organise household fire-bomb parties from amongst the emerging polyglot community.

> We went to a house where sixteen aliens live, to see if we could arrange a fire-bomb party. The landlady is Norwegian, sixty if she's a day, an enormous face, rugged, kindly. Living there are French, Belgians, a German Jewess, Austrians…Some have been in concentration camps, one has a withered arm, most are partly invalids. Tough luck to escape from the Nazis and then be bombed again like this.[532]

On Sunday 12 January Hilda Neal took a stroll around her neighbourhood taking in the recent bomb damage, "Craters by Evelyn Gardens, Queensberry Place…all with some tale of woe…All windows from Cromwell Road to Sussex Place in Queens Gate smashed".[533] By the end of the month Hilda noted in her diary for 27 January that there had been no raids in Kensington for the past week and as a result, "have managed comfy nights in bed".[534] This was not to last for three days later air raids returned announced by the sound of anti-aircraft gunfire heard throughout the night.[535]

In February the home of Alfred Salter, Member of Parliament for Bermondsey West, was bombed on Stork's Road, whilst the house remained standing and the Salters unhurt, the shock of the incident forced them to leave.[536] Characteristically Alfred Salter remained chiefly concerned for his constituents;

> The wreckage is simply appalling. The rows and rows of houses rendered uninhabitable by the blasting of windows, the tearing out of window frames and the dislocation of doors is indeed

[529] TNA, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.
[530] TNA, HO 186/952, LCDR (Intelligence Branch Report No.3) January 29th 1941.
[531] TNA, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.
[532] James Lansdale Hodson, *Towards the Morning* (1941), p.33.
[533] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 12 January 1941.
[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, p.229.

> a piteous sight. The inhabitants have gone and no one knows whether they will ever come back…[537]

The Salters now joined the ever growing retreat from the borough of the bombed out and dislocated.

Barbara Nixon had by spring 1941 been transferred to another ARP wardens post in Finsbury, post 13, at the bottom end of the borough touching the City of London at Moorgate. This markedly commercial part of Finsbury remained reeling from the firebombing of the City on 29 December 1940. Nixon familiarised herself with the area and noticed as she walked down the streets,

> This had been one of tall, though old-fashioned office buildings. Not one was left; there were only heaps of charred rubble and bricks. At the far end, in solitary dinginess, a public-house was still standing. Despite the fact that it was not much damaged, it was boarded up – its roof was still there, but its customers had all gone. The next street was only a footpath between piles of bricks and beams, and for acres on each side there was complete devastation. The area had been thickly covered with factories, and warehouses, and office buildings; now, it was a fantastic tangle of girders – girders a foot thick, twisted and curled like a child's hair-ribbon.[538]

After dark the desolation became complete, "at night it was a dead city", as the small shops were neglected and the blocks of flats abandoned, "it was difficult to believe that this was London, whose uproar never sank below a steady rumble, even in the small hours".[539] Despite this upheaval, and the demographic ebb and flow all around, this vicinity remained insular, "'In 13's' area…lived a community as closely knit together as that of any Cotswold village".[540] This small segment of Finsbury adds its own contribution to the challenge of generalising a single London-wide blitz experience from amongst such varied localities of the metropolis.

Throughout springtime raids became sporadic yet the night of 16 April wreaked havoc across all of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington. In one of her regular letters to her sister, Gertrude McMullan chronicled the events of the night in Kensington;

> We are still alive, and the house still undamaged!...It began at 9.p.m. and went on, without a lull, till 4.55 a.m. We couldn't possibly think of going to bed. We just sat up the whole night, expecting every moment to be our last! It did seem a long time…The bombs were horrible – screaming ones. Six screamers came almost all together at one time – perfectly awful…The

[537] Ibid.
[538] Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p.77.
[539] Ibid.p.78.
[540] Ibid.p.85.

> sky was wonderful that night. I went up to the drawing – room and looked out. The German flares hung about in the sky – like electric arc lights, descending very slowly and lighting up the place like day…There was a terrific fire raging in the N.East…it was terrible to see but also very beautiful. The whole sky was lit up by it…[541]

Amongst the several bombs raining down that night a Delayed Action Bomb (DAB) damaged a 24 inch gas main in Kensington Park Road and an Unexploded Bomb (UXB) fell on the Town Hall. The British Empire Hotel in De Vere Gardens was reported to be very badly damaged by blast which was at the time occupied by refugees.[542]

That same night in Bermondsey a parachute mine struck the Royal Oak public house in Morgans Lane killing eleven whilst demolishing twenty three houses injuring a further seventeen people. Another mine took out the Silwood Street area in the early hours causing extensive damage to houses in Bracton Road, Eugenia Road, St. Helena Road, Westlake Road, Warndon Street and Tissington Street.[543] Not just residential property was affected as HE bombs destroyed large quantities of sugar in the 'D' Warehouse on Cotton's Wharf and the Bricklayers Arms railway yards suffered severe fires and significant damage.[544] Perhaps the most momentous event that night was when the gas holders of the South Metropolitan Gas Works in Rotherhithe were hit causing two giant explosions sending sheets of flame high into the sky.[545]

Amidst the munitions hurtling down upon Finsbury several were oil bombs that generated widespread conflagrations and by the small hours of the morning Barbara Nixon remembered, "to the north of us, to the south, to east and to west the horizon was red".[546] Finsbury was home to a number of residential garden squares and near her home Nixon witnessed an appalling scene in one of them;

> Three HE's had come down in a cluster, demolished four houses, shattered several others, and blown a huge crater in the middle of the road, bursting a large water main. Eleven people had been crushed and drowned.[547]

Even after the constant night bombing of the preceding year air raids retained a capacity to devastate and shock.

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[541] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 18 April 1941.
[542] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/6, LCDR Situation Reports.
[543] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.25.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. II*, p.535.
[546] Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p.121.
[547] Ibid. p.122.

Saturday 10 May was for residents in the three metropolitan boroughs of this study aptly emblematic of the entire period. In Kensington Gertrude McMullan expressed relief to her sister at surviving but described having to "dwell as if about to depart".[548]

> We all sat up the whole night till dawn…It was extremely unpleasant. The bombs crashed all round us and the fires, and red sky, in all directions was very frightening!...We have given your name and address to our Chief Warden, as our nearest of kin, in case we all get demolished one of these nights.[549]

In just this borough twenty one people were killed and sixty six both seriously and slightly injured. HE bombs showered across Finsbury hitting sites as diverse as the Bovril's factory on Old Street, the Fire Station on Roseberry Avenue, a Barrage Balloon station and properties on Holford Square. [550] One single bomb struck Whitecross Street causing a crater that severed the vital arteries of metropolitan life scything across a water main, sewer, telephone cables, gas mains and electricity cables.[551] The casualty figures for that night in Finsbury stood at twenty eight killed, eighty one seriously injured, fifty three slightly injured and forty two missing presumed dead.[552]

South of the river in Bermondsey Thomas Winter and his family on the Redriff Estate listened to the sound of German planes releasing their payloads above as the raid developed;

> The noise quickly developed from the whistling down sound to a rushing ugly noise like an express train about to hit you. Everyone in the flat threw themselves under the large wooden table in the centre of the room. We arrived in an untidy heap at the same time as six bombs crashed into the estate – not with individual explosions but seemingly one terrific, almighty and terrible ear-piercing bang!...[we] felt the sickening blast and severe concussion of the terrific force.[553]

Elsewhere the Mayor of Bermondsey Albert Henley was killed outright by a bomb fragment piercing his heart. Damage was crippling and unlimited with many areas suffering notably Southwark Park Road, Grange Road, Abbey Street, Leathermarket Street, Pages Walk, Martins Crescent, Rotherhithe Street, Elgar Street, Peak Frean's Factory, and Lipton's Factory.[554] In total sixty one people were killed, 133 seriously injured and 144 slightly wounded, as parachute mines, oil bombs, IB and HE bombs

[548] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 10 June 1941.
[549] Ibid.
[550] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/7, LCDR Situation Reports.
[551] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CE/WAR/4/32, LCDR Incidents Group 3.
[552] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/7, LCDR Situation Reports.
[553] Mortimer, *Longest Night*, p.214.
[554] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.27.

tumbled from the sky.[555] By the morning "roads were blocked by great masses of debris, craters, and miles of tangled hose-pipes, fires were still burning or smouldering all around; and nearly all water, gas and electricity services were disrupted".[556]

Shelters

Eve of the main London Blitz

As the outbreak of war approached MO investigators conducted research into the initial provision of shelters in Finsbury, dubbed 'In search of the Finsbury Shelter'. This search began in Finsbury Square, which on a hot afternoon appeared to be nearly deserted, with only a few women on benches and children playing on the round green enclosure in the centre of the square. Within the green remained a number of trench shelters slit and cut into the ground left from the Munich crisis of the previous autumn. During their examinations MO noticed a group of four ARP wardens inspect the trenches only to leave after ten minutes locking the entrance gate behind them. Investigators began asking residents the whereabouts of the much vaunted "large Finsbury Air Raid Shelter". The following responses were recorded.

> Waitress in Express Dairy, Finsbury Square: 'It's in this district. Not exactly here. I couldn't tell you where it is exactly'.
>
> London Transport Traffic Controller in Finsbury Square: 'They haven't started it yet'.
>
> Tobacconist Finsbury Pavement: 'Never heard of one. I don't think there is such a place'.
>
> Passer-by 5 minutes from Finsbury Square: 'Sorry, I don't know. I think I have read about it. But I don't think there is such a place'.[557]

That lazy summer day the listless desuetude of the ARP wardens was matched only by the apathetic and confused attitude of residents towards their own provision of shelter in the borough.

Finsbury Council at a meeting of the Emergency Committee during the first week of the conflict decided to retain architects Messrs Tecton, Ove Arup and G. R. Falkiner Nuttall to advise and assist in the construction of shelters.[558] Later the Committee were briefed on the progress to date of shelters either completed or under construction. Messrs Tecton had begun work on twenty two surface shelters and had completed twenty seven basement shelters. Examples of basement shelters

[555] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/7, LCDR Situation Reports.
[556] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.27.
[557] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/2/23/5/A, In Search of the Finsbury Shelter 29 August 1939.
[558] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 6 September 1939.

included those situated in the Temple Press building on Rosomon Street (800 persons), Polytechnic Building (300), Whitbreads Brewery (700) and Owen's Boy's School (250). Elsewhere in the borough Falkiner Nuttall had begun construction on ten basement shelters including one at Sadler's Wells Theatre housing 440 people. Three further surface shelters were proposed to be built at Wynford Houses and Mandeville Houses with provision for fifty and 350 shelterers respectively.[559] In time the decision to continue with architects Tecton et al would come to widen and deepen that fault line, previously witnessed, which ran between Finsbury Council and central government, tensions from which would reverberate further still.

Having completed their survey in Finsbury MO investigators moved on to Kensington to further test attitudes towards shelters. Along Holland Park Avenue they saw graffiti underneath a sign directing towards a trench shelter which pithily read, "JUST RABBIT HUTCHES MATE".[560]

South of the river *The Evening News* proclaimed, "The Borough of Fortresses – Bermondsey is Well Dug In". According to the article Bermondsey Borough Council had been working strenuously to complete a comprehensive shelter scheme for all borough residents.

> They have not been content in this riverside borough, with its factories and densely – populated streets, to help only those caught out of doors during a raid, Mr. W. E. Baker, the A.R.P. Controller said: "We are providing strong shelters for every person living in this borough, and our scheme will be permanent".[561]

This programme of building continued the pattern we first saw in chapter two of constructing shelters in a variety of locations across the borough to accommodate the dense urban environment and water-logged terrain characteristic of Bermondsey. Shelters were placed in wharf buildings, on housing estates, over waste ground, inside factories and underneath railway arches. These railway arch shelters were completed in the face of opposition from railway companies as the ARP controller boasted, "we had to fight the Southern to get them".[562] Required by the distinct nature of the locality these railway arch shelters would later come to define the Bermondsey shelter experience.

A veritable cornucopia of public shelters in Bermondsey was publicised in the *South London Press* on 6 October 1939. These could be found in places such as the St. Olave's Grammar School (200 persons), Holy Trinity Church – Dockhead (400), Great Central Hall (200), Hartley's Jam Factory (350), Rouel Road Synagogue (350), Clare College Mission – Raymouth Road (350), Odessa Wharf (600),

[559] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 20 September 1939.
[560] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/2/23/5/C, Public reactions to Air Raids in London 10 September 1939.
[561] *The Evening News*, 29 September 1939.
[562] Ibid.

Trinity Wharf (250), Globe Wharf (250), Platform Wharf (1000) and Lower Ordnance Wharf (1200). Amongst these were the many railway arch shelters dotted across the borough which had been opened at Druid Street (200), Maltby Street (2000), Stanworth Street (350), London Bridge Station (a total of four railway arches with capacity for 5100), White's Grounds (800), Abbey Street (260), Spa Road (260), Linsey Street (800), 'John Bull Arch' Southwark Park Road (150) and Raymouth Road (100).[563] Being so close at hand these railway arch shelters must have seemed an obvious place for Bermondsey residents to turn in preparing to seek protection.

One railway arch shelter in particular, at Stainer Street, was now beginning to receive distinct attention from LCDR. On 16 November the RTA recorded that whilst no formal application had been received from Bermondsey Borough Council the shelter had by now already been completed. The shelter consisted of Stainer Street itself which ran through an arched tunnel beneath the railway lines approaching London Bridge Station connecting Tooley Street with St. Thomas Street. Pavements lined the roadway off of which a number of storage vaults could be accessed. The shelter was designated to accommodate 1500 persons yet the shelter itself did not conform to code standard. It was reluctantly noted however that, "there seems no doubt that this tunnel will be used as a shelter to its full capacity whether sanction is given or not".[564]

Decided on the grounds of forced necessity and circumstance the Stainer Street railway arch shelter now received official endorsement by Sir Alexander Rouse LCDR Chief Engineer.

> It is in a place where shelter is badly needed…the chances of a direct hit with a large bomb are comparatively small, and if we refuse to allow it to be used as a shelter for 1,500 people we shall deny 1,500 people of what is probably much better shelter than they get elsewhere. On the other hand if we allow this shelter there is a definite risk of 1,500 people being killed or wounded by one bomb. I am of the opinion that we must face the fact that it will be used, and allow it as a shelter for 1,500 persons.[565]

Ultimately later events would come to colour these portentous words.

Before sufficient shelter provision could be completed in Finsbury discussion continued to meander over the exact form such shelters should take. On the 23 November the Borough ARP Controller reported that in company with the Borough Engineer and representatives of Messrs. Tecton a meeting had taken place with the HO over shelter accommodation. In response to a request from Finsbury Council to construct their own bespoke variant of communal shelters the HO had first

[563] *South London Press*, 6 October 1939.
[564] The National Archives, HO 207/507, Bermondsey Railway Arch Shelter – Stainer Street 16 November 1939.
[565] TNA, HO 207/507, Bermondsey Railway Arch Shelter – Stainer Street 4 December 1939.

insisted that it was now absolutely necessary for the Council to conduct a detailed survey of the borough showing where, a) Anderson shelters could be provided, b) strutted basement shelters may be constructed, and c) where surface shelters could be placed. The HO stated they were only prepared to sanction communal shelters in cases where the provision of these standard types of shelter was impossible. The HO did concede that in order to avoid delay approval in principle was given to the erection of communal shelters in neighbourhoods where fifty percent of the population could be accommodated. The Finsbury Emergency Committee immediately authorised Messrs. Tecton to prepare communal shelter provision in such circumstances; whilst deferring a decision on a borough survey to the next meeting of the committee.[566]

Having subsequently agreed to carry out a survey of the borough to understand the exact requirement of shelter provision Messrs. Tecton reported back to the Emergency Committee in May 1940.

> To sum up the situation, we are proceeding with all possible basements, and would like to proceed with the street shelters if some method can be found for reimbursing our expenses. It has to be clearly understood, however, in our opinion it would be impossible to protect the whole population of the borough by means of street shelters and basements, and that some further solution will have to be investigated in conjunction with the Home Office for sheltering the remaining population.[567]

On considering this report Finsbury Emergency Committee were, "impressed with the urgency of the problem" and once more duly resolved to request a meeting with the HO to discuss the situation.[568]

By the early months of 1940 the position regarding air raid shelters in Kensington appeared in contrast to have been proceeding seamlessly. Trench shelters for 5,500 persons had been constructed. Public basement shelters housing 10,789 people had been provided and work was in hand to increase capacity for a further 2,910 persons. Completed surface shelters amounted to 180 persons with more scheduled for 740 people. Anderson shelter provision totalled 5,616 persons. Strengthened domestic basement shelters had been completed for 10,350 persons and work was in hand to provide for 540 more. Shelters in municipal flats had now been completed for 6,400 residents with work planned for another 183. From this a grand total of shelter provision was available to 43,208 people in the borough.[569] A few weeks later communal surface shelter capacity

[566] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 23 November 1939.
[567] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 21 May 1940.
[568] Ibid.
[569] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 30 January 1940.

had increased to 590 persons with ongoing construction designed to add to this provision for another 710 people.[570] It was perhaps no wonder that this activity caught the attention of residents with Vere Hodgson remarking on 2 July, "they seem to be building shelters all over Kensington".[571]

At this very moment these various states of air raid shelter provision were about to be put to the severest of tests.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

In the days leading up to the commencement of the main London blitz the sounding of air raid sirens in Bermondsey prompted residents to make a beeline for shelters. It was reported that every night during the first week of September as many as 700 people crowded into the South London Mission in Bermondsey Street.

> Mothers and fathers with their little children, carrying blankets and bedding under their arms, file into the underground hall…spreading their bedding on the floor, they settle down to sleep for the night, mothers cushioning their babies heads on their arms.[572]

Being heavily sandbagged and several feet underground the hall of the South London Mission was seen as one of the safest points in the borough as bombs began to fall.[573]

As the blitz proper began others in Bermondsey were less well protected in the shelters available to them. In a back yard between Anchor Street and Ambrose Street a bomb exploded close to an Anderson Shelter. The local ARP warden, Mr Mills, described the shelter as being, "half-buried…everybody was all mixed up there, the sandbags had all blown in on 'em".[574] Along Rotherhithe Street many residents sought sanctuary inside the several nearby wharf buildings such as the egg warehouse at Bellamy's Wharf and neighbouring Globe Wharf. Any hopes they would be safe in such substantial buildings were soon dashed when the ARP post warden reported,

> I had a tidy few people in there, and in this shelter this night the top of it was well alight. And I called one of my individuals out on the quiet, and I says to him, I said – Bill, we shall have to evacuate the people out, even in our own dust carts.[575]

Having discovered their nearest public shelter destroyed the family of Tommy Steele now had to flee elsewhere in search of protection. "We'll have to go to Hays Wharf. That was the nearest shelter. It

[570] KCLHL, Kensington Borough Council Minutes 5 March 1940.
[571] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.13.
[572] *South London Press*, 6 September 1940.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p.54.
[575] Ibid. p. 55.

was well towards the river and the main battle. Across Jamaica Road we ran, down past the tea-houses and into Hays".[576]

Further north in Finsbury that night a perceptible change could be seen taking hold upon the mood of shelterers. Visiting the public shelters Barbara Nixon noticed that what at first seemed apprehension when the raid started, had now hours later, turned into a distinctly nervous atmosphere.[577] For the actual experience of sitting out a raid inside a shelter had turned out to be quite different to the one many had anticipated.

> By midnight they were frightened. Very few of them had imagined that they would have to sit in a shelter for more than an hour or so; neither for that matter, and more inexcusably, had the authorities. They had not brought rugs or blankets or provisions, some even had no coats, as it had been a warm evening. The wooden benches round the wall were packed, and the remainder had to stand, or sit on bits of newspaper on the concrete floor: the overcrowding was appalling, and the air stank.[578]

Withstanding these conditions in close proximity to your neighbour did nevertheless prompt more pleasant side effects, "whereas before few of us had even known our next-door neighbour, within a week people called good morning to one…and we chatted in the grocer's as though we were villagers".[579]

Of the shelters on offer in Kensington one large public shelter could be found within the pedestrian subway that ran underneath Exhibition Road in the south of the borough. Living nearby Hilda Neal took refuge there on 9 September 1940 as bombing became continuous.

> Go to the shelter in Exhibition Road…A perfectly awful night. Those who couldn't sleep wouldn't let others who could have done, they walked in and out, and chattered, first to one and then to another…I curled up on about 2 ½ feet of narrow form on my cushion and made the best of it.[580]

The next evening Hilda returned, "I spent the night in the Exhibition Road Shelter. Alert 8 p.m. – 5.50 a.m. I lay on a bench very cold later on", she subsequently observed that, "men snore in shelter regardless of guns, unless they are very loud, which wakes them".[581] The Kensington Medical Officer

[576] Tommy Steele, *Bermondsey Boy – Memories of a Forgotten World* (2006), p.38.
[577] Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p.16.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Ibid.p.17.
[580] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 9 September 1940.
[581] Ibid.

of Health, Dr James Fenton, reported, "The Council's Public and Communal Shelters are now in daily use and already there are complaints that the atmosphere in the shelters gets very foul".[582]

The MOI compiled daily Home Intelligence reports on the state of morale throughout the course of the London blitz. On 16 September it was noted that within the capital people could be found trekking considerable distances seeking alternative shelter accommodation as local provision was often inadequate. Of the three inner London boroughs studied only Bermondsey was listed as one of the areas where inhabitants were forced to find better protection.[583] Reading the intelligence report for the very next day the fact that Bermondsey residents were obliged to depart their own borough is perhaps not surprising,

> Bermondsey contact reports 'talk against Government on account of inadequate number and poor equipment of local shelters. Shelters under railway arches have insufficient seats and people are forced to sit and lie on pavement'.[584]

Needing to leave the self-contained confines of a borough such as Bermondsey could only have added a further unique dimension for those in the vicinity.

After three weeks of continuous bombing public shelters were not only in constant use but the pattern of night raids meant that most were becoming dormitories. Kensington Borough Council responded with alacrity to the fact that shelters were now being used in such a way.

> I have encouraged in every way an attempt to make shelters more comfortable and in this borough we are experimenting with the installation of different types of bunks in tiers. We are trying out metal bunks, wooden bunks and also a form of hammock. All these recent developments are requiring more frequent inspections, and we have introduced a weekly inspection as a minimum and in certain types of shelter we are going more frequently. Each day I send reports to the Chief Warden, dealing with matters of general order and discipline which require his attention, and other reports on health matters to the Borough Engineer, who has employed additional staff to sweep out public shelters and to employ latrine buckets daily…sprays have been supplied to each warden's post and wardens are spraying out the shelters with disinfectant daily.[585]

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[582] The National Archives, MH 76/586, Public Air Raid Shelters Inspections – Kensington M.B.C 10 September 1940

[583] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.427.

[584] Ibid. p.430.

[585] TNA, MH 76/586, Letter from James Fenton, Medical Officer of Health, Kensington to Sir Arthur S. MacNalty, MOH, 26 September 1940.

Upon receipt of this report the Chief Medical Officer observed, "Dr Fenton's letter from Kensington shows how much can be achieved by an energetic medical officer of health in face of the present difficulties".[586]

The demands now placed upon shelters was becoming so acute as to prompt LCDR to request that all local authorities look at the necessity of increasing capacity through making use of private shelters in commercial premises, prompting Finsbury Council to respond.

> Steps had been taken to obtain the co-operation of the larger business houses who had constructed shelters for the use of their employees during the day by making such shelters available for the public at night. Five of the larger firms had agreed to this suggestion subject to the use of the shelters being supervised by wardens or shelter marshals and to the Council being responsible for the cleaning. The Borough Engineer was instructed to submit a list of further suitable basements which might be similarly utilised.[587]

In the inimitable style of Finsbury it was decided not to let the matter rest there. The Emergency Committee further resolved that this situation offered another chance to press their case through representations to the Ministry of Home Security (MHS), "as to the desirability of constructing additional concrete shelters in preference to the use of basements".[588] As we see again even at this juncture Finsbury never wasting an opportunity to campaign for what they saw as the special case of their borough.

"One of the most depressing sights I remember were those stragglers–of–the–dusk hauling their bedding to the deep shelters",[589] recalled the incomparable Rachel Ferguson. These were the shelters forming within London Underground Stations which existed across Kensington.[590]

> One felt 'If this gone–to–earth business can happen in Kensington, nothing is now impossible'. The Tubist Colony was impossible in a different way; it was merely personally deplorable. My first sight of it was of a queue of squalid individuals outside Notting Hill Gate tube station, waiting for permission to go down to the platforms. These were the members of the save–your–skin brigade, in their panicked desire for life seeing nothing

[586] TNA, MH 76/586, Memorandum from the Chief Medical Officer 30 September 1940.
[587] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 25 September 1940.
[588] Ibid.
[589] Ferguson, *Royal Borough*, p.103.
[590] Within the Metropolitan Borough of Kensington five London Underground stations were used as air raid shelters; Notting Hill Gate, Holland Park, Earl's Court, Gloucester Road and South Kensington. Of the many stations dotted throughout the borough these five were the deepest and therefore sanctioned to be used as shelters.

> disproportionate in a day–long wait, every day, in the street, to which they also condemned their children…were such lives worth saving?[591]

Notwithstanding the sneering classist intolerance of Rachel Ferguson, which questions the notion of any prevalent hardy collectivism in the London blitz, the use of tube station shelters was an opportunity open only to those who had them at their disposal. When compared to Finsbury which lacked any underground stations and Bermondsey where only London Bridge station was at hand, the residents of Kensington were fortunate to be able to prevail themselves of this further means of shelter.

The first-hand accounts of sheltering in Kensington tube stations comes down to us through the reports of MO such as the one from 20 September when an investigator observed Holland Park Underground Station. A conversation with the station porter provides vivid evidence,

> There's no sanitation. I'm sorry for the small children down here all those hours – it was terrible last night – the atmosphere and smells. I don't blame them for coming out its funny the women's morale seems better than the men's'. Told investigator a man had had hysterics the night before and started a panic and had to call in the police.[592]

In the station lift travelling down to the platforms two women expressed their opinions of what it was like to hunker down for the night. A seventy five year old lady declared, "Its terrible dear what a life". Whilst a younger women aged twenty five explained, "I'm fed up its so difficult with the kids but you do feel safe and that's something".[593] When one actually listens to the voices of those who left their homes to spend an entire night underground it is possible to understand why, despite such privations, this form of shelter was chosen.

As night fell Holland Park station was entirely reconfigured from an underground railway into an air raid shelter. "Already the Tube corridors were fairly full, people sitting leaning against the walls, dirty blankets and dirty pillows, bundles of food – the men were reading books and papers. Women knitting".[594] A window into this subterranean world is opened by the comprehensive observations of the MO investigator who spent the night amongst the tube shelterers.

> Quite a few fairly well dressed people but mostly very poor…some luggage and bedding was very neat but on the whole it was mostly dirt and confusion already smell was strong. Very

[591] Ferguson, *Royal Borough*, p.103.
[592] MOA, SxMOA 1/2/23/5/E, Observations in the London Underground 20 September 1940. (Punctuation as original).
[593] Ibid.
[594] Ibid.

> little chatter, people looked pale and tired. It seemed much quieter there than in a large street shelter where people talk incessantly...Female 25 said 'Its wonderful down here you can't hear anything and we can sleep'. Two or three others commented on feeling safe there.[595]

Not only does this provide a further demonstration as to why people wanted to shelter in the tubes but reference to the very poor suggests that within Kensington such use was preordained along class lines. Reminding us that the agency of class could interact alongside the agency of locality in shaping the blitz for the Londoner.

Returning to Holland Park station on 25 September MO recorded a steady movement of people throughout the station during the evening. Just before eight o'clock a headcount was conducted by the investigator to determine the amount of people sheltering, "there were about 300 people on each platform, and over 200 in each passage. The emergency stairs held over another hundred and in all there must have been 1200 people on the station…Proportion is roughly two women to one man and one child."[596] Just who were all these people?

> Most of the people in the shelter are working class people from the neighbouring streets. Some have come from other parts of London, hoping to get a better place in a less populated area such as Holland Park.[597]

From this we can further see how the particular variable of where you lived in the capital came into play. For not only were Kensingtonians fortuitous in having underground station shelters at their disposal; they lived in a locale where people preferred to be. As we saw previously Kensington residents had to share their borough with refugees, who in this case constituted fellow Londoners, electing to travel across the metropolis seeking safety before the bombs fell. All of which suggests a fragmented kaleidoscope within one city which by itself was simply unable to provide a single London wide blitz experience.

The American journalist Negley Farson[598] writing in *Bomber's Moon* discovered for himself the advent of tube shelters; "South Kensington was clean, warm, not too fuggy, and as comfortable, I

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[595] Ibid.
[596] Ibid.
[597] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/1/5/10/1, Shelter in London - How people behave in shelters 25 September 1940.
[598] Angus Calder in *The Myth of the Blitz* roundly praises Negley Farson, "His book *Bomber's Moon*, was one of the first to cover the Blitz…It is particularly well written, with a restraint lacking in most Blitz writing at that time. Farson had known England for a quarter of a century and was able to put what was happening into long perspective". (Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*, p.209.).

suppose, as a tube station that is being used can be made – for a shelter."[599] The scene inside South Kensington Underground Station painted by Farson so intensely depicts the phenomenon of tube sheltering that it deserves quoting from at length.

> It was about six a grey–haired man came in, took off his overcoat, folded it, sat down on it with his back against the wall, opened his evening paper–but before he began reading it he said to a comfortable looking old lady by his side.
>
> 'Well, Ma, how have you been today?'
>
> That touch of domesticity, in a tube, almost bowled me over. 'Yes, sir', he said, as he filled his pipe; 'this is far better than being bombed!' He shook his old head and chuckled.
>
> Living in South Kensington myself, within a block of this tube, I frequently pass through this night refuge. The old man and his wife are no longer there. It is one of the mysteries of this tube – life that I shall never know why they left, or where to, or if they have caught a bomb.[600]

Within the bowels of the five Kensington tube station shelters, it is perhaps not too fanciful to imagine, this tableau of life under fire beneath the streets repeating itself night after night.

On the afternoon of 3 October Captain Duncan, LCDR Officer, visited the four railway arch shelters beneath London Bridge Station. His subsequent report does not pull its punches, starting as it does with the words, "I find it difficult to put my impressions regarding this shelter into words".[601] The London Bridge Station Master confirmed that around 3000 people occupied the shelter complex nightly and were expected to tolerate the most atrocious conditions.

> The water supply consists of one tap. Lavatory accommodation, which is entirely inadequate, consists of Elsan fixtures behind temporary partitions with the doorways screened by sacking – some of the flooring is of concrete, but the greater part is just earth…At one of the exits there is a doorway large enough to take trucks which leads into a room where hides of freshly killed horses are being piled. Blood and the accompanying refuse is flowing out into the passage which is occupied by bedding.[602]

[599] Farson, *Bomber's Moon*, p.70.
[600] Ibid. p.72.
[601] TNA, HO 207/507, Memorandum 'Shelter at London Bridge Station' by Capt. Duncan Regional Officer Groups 4 and 8 to the Senior Regional Officer 3 October 1940.
[602] Ibid.

The Borough Medical Officer of Health, who accompanied Captain Duncan, is stated as saying that, "there is here the finest breeding ground for an epidemic that he has yet discovered".[603] After nearly a month of sustained daily bombing such were the hardships some were forced to endure in order to escape death from above.[604]

Only a short walk away in the neighbouring borough of Southwark existed the deep tunnel shelter situated within a disused tunnel for underground trains that ran underneath Borough High Street[605], inside which the Bermondsey Medical Officer described the lavatory facilities as, "very much better than that now in use in the London Bridge shelters".[606] Yet despite the state of the railway arch shelters at London Bridge some users actually choose to be there, "the population in these arches at night comprises some of the roughest elements in London. People come from as far away as Bow and Poplar".[607] As we saw in Kensington, Bermondsey residents - although to a much lesser degree - would have to rub shoulders with people from outside their borough.[608] For Londoners where you were from and the prevailing local conditions combined to provide a blitz experience that was as every bit unique and varied as the capital itself.

The LCDR Situation Report for 0600 hours 26 October contained the following information, "Bermondsey. 1945 HE bomb through railway arch into public arch shelter at Druid Street. 50 killed. 78 seriously and 17 slightly injured".[609] Almost inevitably it seems one of the many railway arch shelters had been hit. This particular one comprised three railway arches which were acting as a combined billiard hall and public shelter. The bomb had come through the railway line, penetrated the archway, and exploded upon impacting the ground inside the shelter. Lil Patrick later recalled that her brother had been in the Druid Street shelter when it was hit.

> My brother was out with his friends and they went into the local billiard hall which was also being used as a shelter with lots and lots of families in there that hadn't been evacuated…He was one that was injured. But he was unconscious and burnt, and it took us three days to

[603] Ibid.
[604] Conditions in the London Bridge railway arch shelters are resonate with those found in other large shelters elsewhere in the capital such as the Tilbury railway arches in Stepney. We have already seen how between 14-16,000 people would use the shelter at the height of the blitz in highly unsanitary circumstances leading Angus Calder to write in *The People's War* "This became the largest, and perhaps the most unspeakable of all London's shelters". (Calder*, The People's War*, p.182.). All of which suggests that whilst the London Bridge shelter was dreadful it was perhaps not entirely unique.
[605] Beard, Tony and Emmerson, Andrew, *London's Secret Tubes* (2004), p.27.
[606] Ibid.
[607] Ibid.
[608] The influx of residents from Bow and Poplar was possibly indicative of the extremely difficult situation developing in East End boroughs as the blitz reached an apogee of destruction, such refugees arriving in Bermondsey shelters was therefore most likely a topical event unlikely to have persisted.
[609] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/3, LCDR Situation Reports.

> find him because his identity card and driving licence and those kind of things were stolen out of his jacket pocket.[610]

Those that survived were badly burnt and needed to be untangled from a mass of dismembered and unrecognisable remains strewn about within. Little wonder that this one incident was seen as, "an ordeal sickening to body and soul".[611] A LCDR investigation established that if suitable structural alterations had been made, "considerable casualties might have been saved". The Senior Regional Officer concluded that this warren of arches, "were in fact quite unsuitable for use as public shelter at all".[612]

Sir Phillip Game Metropolitan Police Commissioner visited a variety of public shelters in Bermondsey the day following the Druid Street bombing. Perhaps understandably given immediate events the deputation visited the scene and reported upon the wider supply of railway arch shelters in the borough.

> I think we all agreed that in their present state they are death traps…the roofs, especially anywhere near the crown of the arch, is not proof against even a small H.E. Bomb. I should estimate that even a 50 kilo bomb would penetrate the crown, and that any larger bomb would penetrate the roof anywhere. The damage we saw was caused by a bomb coming through the roof without disturbing it and bursting on the floor.[613]

Over the course of the next few days and weeks the use of the phrase 'death traps' would prove to be a prescient one when coming to describe railway arch shelters. On 29 October a bomb exploded at the junction of Galleywell Road and Rotherhithe New Road damaging the railway arch and killing five; during the same raid the 'John Bull' railway arch in Southwark Park Road was penetrated by a bomb. On 15 November the railway arch shelter on Linsey Street was struck and on 8 December the 'John Bull' arch was once again victim to a direct hit.[614]

Central government later admitted in an internal memoranda that "the shelter problem in Bermondsey is exceptionally difficult" owing to the borough consisting of, "highly congested flimsy property" rendering "the normal types of shelter largely inapplicable". As a direct consequence railway arch shelters and riverfront warehouses were seen as "great standbys in finding shelter" for residents responding to the paucity of provision on offer, yet now that railway arch shelters were

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[610] Davis, Rib and Schweitzer, Pam (eds), *Southwark At War – A book of memories* (1996), p.9.
[611] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.16.
[612] The National Archives, HO 207/996, Bermondsey Metropolitan Borough – Public Shelters 30 October 1940.
[613] TNA, HO 207/507, Memorandum from Sir Phillip Game – Metropolitan Police Commissioner to LCDR 28 October 1940.
[614] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.20.

regularly being bombed, "pressure on the warehouse basement shelters has increased".[615] Over the course of the coming months these exceptionally difficult circumstances in Bermondsey were set to only grow in intensity.

On 7 November a conference was held between the LCDR Commissioners, Sir Ernest Gowers and Admiral Sir Edward Evans, and senior representatives of Finsbury Council. On the agenda was the condition of public shelters, the unsatisfactory state of trench shelters left untouched since 1938, and the loss of capacity in other public shelters owing to the introduction of bunking and provision of canteens. Finsbury now stepped forward with the following ambitious proposals for shelter construction.

> King Square – Two-decker shelter for 2,340 persons providing sleeping accommodation with a ventilation and filtration plant.
>
> Spa Fields – Two-decker shelter for 2,220 persons providing sleeping accommodation.
>
> Radnor Street – Single-decker shelter for 516 persons providing sleeping accommodation.[616]

The Commissioner's immediate response was that it was extremely unlikely necessary materials and labour would be available. Instead it was suggested that Finsbury should press on with securing further basement shelter in the borough. The Town Clerk pushed back by stating that the council were, "loath to make use of basements of any but the best buildings".[617]

In addition Finsbury put forth striking plans for the construction of 'health' shelters in the borough.

> Finsbury proposed to construct four special "health" shelters for persons suffering from infectious and contagious diseases. Separate bays will be allocated to different diseases, and accommodation will also be provided for the healthy family of a diseased person, so that families need not be broken up among different shelters, when one of their members is sick. A doctor, a nurse and clinical facilities will be provided. Each shelter will accommodate 400 persons, and is estimated to cost about £10,000.[618]

Harold Scott, LCDR Chief Administrative Officer, also present, suggested that, "the problem could be solved more quickly and more economically by setting aside parts of ordinary shelters as sick bays",[619] a notion comprehensively dismissed by the Town Clerk who "felt that the public might

[615] The National Archives, HO 207/510 Bermondsey, Hay's Wharf – Tooley Street, Chamberlains Wharf and Cotton's Wharf 7 August 1941.
[616] TNA, HO 207/617, Note of meeting with representatives of Finsbury 7 November 1940.
[617] Ibid.
[618] Ibid.
[619] Ibid.

refuse to use a shelter, part of which they knew to be set apart for infectious and contagious persons, and that public opinion would force the diseased to go to the "health" shelters".[620] In tabling such grandiose plans the stage was set for a further act in the clash between Finsbury Council and central government over the precise nature of air raid shelter provision in the borough.

In pondering their response to Finsbury LCDR drew upon weekly reports by the RTA that threw an interesting perspective upon the ongoing situation.

> With reference to the meeting with the Finsbury officials on 7 November the attached weekly report by Mr. Warren, Regional Technical Adviser, throws a somewhat different light on the representations…The fact stands out that Finsbury are making practically no attempt to get shelter which can easily be made available, while they put forward schemes for shelters which will take 4 months to construct, and will involve a heavy bill. Mr Warren has been continually frustrated by the Borough officials in his attempts to see the results of their alleged survey of other buildings, and is now making an independent survey.[621]

Matters had now come to such a pass that within an internal memorandum Harold Scott recommended, "In view of the attitude of the council towards the whole problem it seems that strong action is necessary and perhaps the commissioners will consider giving the authority directions".[622]

At this juncture Sir Ernest Gowers wrote to the MHS Permanent Secretary, Sir George Gater, referring the whole matter to the highest echelons of government. A damning indictment of the local council is contained within the correspondence detailing the Finsbury shelter schemes.

> When it is remembered that there is a large amount of unused shelter capacity available in the borough, and that so far as the surface shelters are concerned, their emptiness is largely due to the Local Authority not making them habitable, it is difficult to understand what arguments can be justifiably used in favour of the scheme. In putting forward the scheme as a replacement of the unusable trenches the Local Authority are on stronger ground, but they are not taking advantage of the basement shelters which they could get because of their prejudice against the use of basements. The prejudice is obviously founded on the arguments of the Technical Adviser, Mr. Arup, whose report indicates his continued hostility to the Government's policy, dating back from his connection with the Tecton organisation…the whole history of our dealings with Finsbury has been unsatisfactory, and it

[620] Ibid.
[621] TNA, HO 207/617, Memorandum by Harold Scott 8 November 1940.
[622] Ibid.

was only with the greatest difficulty that we practically forced them to construct communal shelters.[623]

Describing the proposals as, "a preposterous waste of money", Sir Ernest claimed that the scheme amounted to spending £45,000 on shelter accommodation for around 5,000 people, when pre-existing basement shelters contained spare capacity for 7,000 residents. In addition communal surface shelters could house 3,000 people, yet a recent shelter census demonstrated only 200 using them.[624] As the position was, "a delicate one steeped in 'politics'", Sir Ernest proposed that the final decision should lay with the Minister of Home Security.[625] With bombs falling around about surely all that mattered for Finsbury residents was the supply of places to seek protection, yet the local authority seemed content to continue to haggle over the very nature such shelters should take.

Meanwhile contained within a LCDR shelter inspection report for February 1941 is reference from the previous autumn of the existence of a Bermondsey Shelter Council on which sat local voluntary bodies and the Borough Council.[626] The purpose of which was to organise entertainments and recruit voluntary workers to act as shelter marshals.[627] The work of the shelter council now came to the attention of the popular news magazine *Picture Post*.

> Life in a community such as a shelter has to be a little organised, or the best natured people will become bored, quarrelsome, shiftless. So Bermondsey set up a Borough Shelter Council, of which the Mayor is Chairman. This Council's job is to look after the comfort and entertainment of the thousands who meet nightly in the shelters. It was in co-operation with the shelter council that the L.C.C. began to send its instructors to give classes in the shelters. Now there are as many as eight regular classes a week in some shelters. The subjects studied are dress making, handwork, arts and crafts, first aid, drama. Besides this, some shelters have a weekly discussion group. Nearly any night of the week you'll find dresses being cut out in one part of the shelter, while, over in a corner, a drama-group prepares a play with

[623] TNA, HO 207/617, Letter from Sir Ernest Gowers to Sir George Gater 23 November 1940.
[624] This small proportion of communal shelter use was indicative of a wider hostility towards this particular type of shelter, "Brick and concrete surface shelters were usually the least favoured, particularly the communal type…These lacked privacy and had none of the amenities of some of the larger public shelters. In spurning them the public were also influenced by the doubts already mentioned about their safety, fostered in some places by the leaders of the 'deep shelter' agitation". (O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.507.). The doubts mentioned around the safety of the concrete surface shelters arose from the shoddy construction of some whereby detonating bombs would blow out the walls causing the concrete roof to fall upon and kill those sheltering inside.
[625] Ibid.
[626] Bermondsey was not alone in forming a shelter council as others could be found in Stepney where "a shelter committee was democratically elected", (Calder, *People's War*, p.183.), and "a ginger group for Swiss Cottage shelterers produced a newspaper called the *Swiss Cottager"*. (Ziegler, *London At War*, p.132.).
[627] The National Archives, HO 207/512, Bermondsey Shelter Inspection Reports 15 February 1941.

> which they hope to entertain us one of these days. Elsewhere, the children have laid out the paints and brushes provided for them…All the shelter classes are popular, for they allow everyone to pass the evenings together in cheerful, varied and useful occupations, instead of the monotony which is often the shelterer's lot.[628]

Here we see the agency of locality affecting blitz experience in a positive way. For whilst we have seen in Bermondsey air raid shelter provision handicapped by deleterious local circumstances; those that made use of that provision could draw on the warmth of human contact that could be found in this borough and in those other localities where such shelter communities existed.

A heavy air raid on Bermondsey marked the night of 17 February 1941 resulting in thirty four incidents one of which took place at 22.28[629] in the Stainer Street Railway Arch shelter that we came across previously. LCDR listed the incident as the worst that took place that night across the capital when a HE bomb demolished the railway arch causing an estimated thirty five deaths and seventy six injuries.[630] An Intelligence Officer found that all those killed, with the exception of one, were in a small area within 100 feet of the place the bomb detonated and eighty feet from the steel front door entrance which was blown inwards, resulting in "no hope for those in the path of the door".[631] Bermondsey resident Joe French provides a compelling recollection of what took place.

> The worst bombing was Stainer Street arch. I had a relation who was on the rescue…he was never right for two or three months after what he saw in there…the bomb went right through first and then exploded inside. It was all arms and legs all over the place. He was really bad for two or three months with shock. It is well known amongst old Bermondsey people because hundreds got killed in there.[632] They reckoned everybody in Abbey Street lost somebody.[633]

The final casualty figures could not be determined yet it was understood that sixty eight dead bodies had been recovered and over 175 people had to be treated for varying degrees of injury.[634]

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[628] *Picture Post*, 20 March 1941.
[629] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.23.
[630] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/5, LCDR Situation Reports.
[631] TNA, HO 207/507, Report of LCDR Intelligence Officer – Bombing of Stainer Street Arches, London Bridge 17 February 1941.
[632] Hundreds of people is certainly an exaggeration of the final number of fatalities that in fact numbered less than one hundred. This is perhaps a common popular response to inflate such figures maybe to mirror in the mind the devastating impact of such incidents.
[633] Davis and Schweitzer (eds), *Southwark At War*, p.11.
[634] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.23.

What took place at Stainer Street would be a shocking event for any community yet this was perhaps especially so for the people of Bermondsey, as local physician Dr. Morton, explained.

> The thing that really shocked the whole neighbourhood and set people talking and feeling worst were the bigger incidents, such as the Stainer Street Arch and the Druid Street Arch. Large numbers of people were killed, sometimes whole families wiped out. Bermondsey is a very small borough, and most people know one another in it. The people have lived there for years and years. They don't come to Bermondsey to live, they've always lived there. It's a corner of London, and news of tragedies like that just shook everybody. It was on everybody's lips, everybody was shaky after it, and there were people deciding to evacuate.[635]

An official report into the incident found that local people had "unbounded faith in the safety of the arches", and quite remarkably the following night those who survived and normally sheltered there now took refuge in the adjacent Weston Street arch which was not a recognised shelter.[636] The Stainer Street incident serves as an exemplar of railway arch shelters in Bermondsey. Despite the conditions we have seen, the tragedies that we have witnessed, such shelters were necessary for the people of the borough. Not only had circumstance forced this type of shelter upon residents it was in a place where the closely knit community keenly felt the loss of their own.

Meanwhile Harold Scott wrote to the Finsbury Town Clerk on 4 March to inform the council of the final ruling taken on the shelter schemes proposed by the borough in November. With incidents such as Stainer Street perhaps in mind the Minister of Home Security Herbert Morrison took the following decision.

> As your Council are aware, it has always been the object of the Minister to avoid large concentrations of persons in places where a direct hit might result in heavy casualties. In some cases the use of existing accommodation of this kind had been unavoidable, but recent experience has afforded strong reinforcement of the Minister's view and the construction of new shelters must conform with this policy. For these reasons the Minister has decided with regret that he is unable to approve the proposals submitted by the Council.[637]

[635] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p.146.
[636] TNA, HO 207/507, Report of LCDR Intelligence Officer – Bombing of Stainer Street Arches, London Bridge 17 February 1941.
[637] TNA, HO 207/617, Letter from Harold Scott to Finsbury Town Clerk 4 March 1941.

In preparing to refute accusations from Finsbury that this decision was depriving residents of shelter a MHS report emphasised, "the Council themselves could make available very much more public shelter than they are doing". The RTA contributed his opinion on the construction of shelters, "The RTA does not know what Finsbury have been doing about this since last November, but if their progress returns are correct they have achieved nothing"[638], which was conceivably the most lamentable aspect of this saga.

Following the end of the main London blitz in May 1941 a LCDR RTA wrote what perhaps should be seen as the lasting epitaph on the Finsbury Council shelter disorder.

> This is a difficult borough in that they are obsessed with the deep shelter complex and have consistently held up their shelter programme in efforts to obtain shelters of a more elaborate and expensive description than the types sanctioned from time to time by government. In the first instance all shelter schemes were held up in an effort to obtain deep shelters for the whole population…After communal shelters were built they did nothing to popularise this type of shelter…One thing that has always struck me when dealing with Finsbury is that the officials of the Borough appear to be afraid of their council and the Borough Engineer takes up the attitude that since the Borough has employed a consultant for the construction of their schemes, he has no responsibility or concern with regard to the preparation of the schemes or carrying out the work.[639]

This provides a perfect precis of the peculiar circumstances that undermined and determined shelter provision in Finsbury, and we can see how the agency of locality acted upon shelter experience for residents on the simple basis of where they happened to have lived.

Homelessness – Rest Centres

Eve of the main London Blitz

Once the all clear siren had sounded the attention of air raid survivors would turn to post-raid services such as the assistance on offer for those rendered homeless by enemy action.

As we saw in chapter two nascent plans for dealing with homelessness began to take shape in the months leading up to the outbreak of war led by LCC who were to provide rest centres across the County of London. By November 1939 it had been decided that in Finsbury three emergency rest centres were to be established at Bath Street, Compton Street and White Lion Street.[640] In

[638] TNA, HO 207/617, MHS Report 24 March 1941.
[639] The National Archives, MH 76/585, Public Air Raid Shelter Inspections 7 July 1941.
[640] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CE/WAR/1/37, LCC Emergency Committee 24 November 1939.

December in response to an appeal from the LCC Chairman, Mrs Eveline Lowe, the Mayors of Finsbury and Bermondsey both confirmed that their boroughs might be relied upon to offer every assistance and co-operation in support of the LCC rest centre scheme.[641]

Early in 1940 that scheme continued to develop with the earmarking of 'first line' rest centres and 'reserve' rest centres within the administrative county. In Kensington a first line centre was to be established at Portobello Road School in Notting Hill with a reserve centre situated in the North Kensington Central School.[642] In comparison a far greater number of rest centres were thought to be necessary to prepare in Bermondsey with three first line centres designated; Redriff Estate Community Centre in Rotherhithe, Keeton's Road School and Laxon Street School. Reserve centres were placed at Albion Street School and at the Riverside Senior School.[643] The original number of three rest centres in Finsbury had by now been reduced to two with the first line centre at Compton Street School and the reserve centre to be Bath Street School.[644] At a meeting in July the Finsbury Emergency Committee resolved that the assistance of the WVS might be enlisted to help in the relief plans for people made homeless as a result of air raids.[645] The extent and nature of the bombing which was now about to occur would impact upon the three inner London boroughs in very different ways and many residents would require all the assistance that could be mustered.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

"Bermondsey Rest and Feeding Centre bombed",[646] these stark words were contained within the LCDR Situation Report for 7 September 1940, after the Keeton's Road School first line rest centre had received a direct hit from a HE bomb just as it was receiving a tide of refugees fleeing the inferno of the Surrey Commercial Docks. An account of the scene comes down to us from Police Sergeant Peters.

> The first major incident to which I attended was at Keeton's Road School. The people had been evacuated from Rotherhithe owing to the docks being well on fire, and some were taken into Keeton's Road School along with all their belongings and their families and food. Soon after ten o'clock a bomb fell on the school and I, along with a number of others, were

[641] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/WE/RC/1/1, Emergency Feeding Centres – Cooperation with Metropolitan Borough Councils.
[642] LMA, LCC/MIN/2760, LCC Public Assistance Department List of Emergency Feeding and Rest Centres 14 February 1940.
[643] Ibid.
[644] LMA, LCC/MIN/2760, LCC Public Assistance Department List of Emergency Feeding and Rest Centres 24 April 1940.
[645] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 8 July 1940.
[646] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.

> ordered down. On reaching the school we entered by the playground. Fire had started going through some of the rooms…A little further along I, with another officer, was searching amongst the debris and after a while my brother officer bent down and pulled something out. He thought it was a piece of bread. But it turned out to be part of a small child, the upper part, the upper limbs of a small child. This so upset us that we came out into the street. There were a number of bodies laying on the footway and in the road. I stood and watched these for a few moments. Eventually some of them stood up, and to my relief they were not all dead. But there were some of them who were dead.[647]

It was a perilous night for numerous families who had sought safety in the centre such as the following from Acorn Walk who would never return home, Emily Kate Bond aged 38 and her children, Ronald Ernest (15), Robert Edwin (14) and Pamela Joyce (21 months) of number 60. Alongside them were found Norah Brown 45 years old and her children, Charles Thomas (20), Edith Violet (11), Vera (9), Doris (6), Joan (3) and Ann (8 months) of number 42.[648]

On 10 September Home Intelligence reports recorded, "Bermondsey Citizen's Advice Bureau inundated with mothers and young children, hysterical and asking to be removed from district".[649] The very next day as the blitz began to spread out across the capital it appeared that Bermondsey was one of the localities suffering more than most.

> Bermondsey reports women and children, old people and invalids impatient to escape to less vulnerable area. Bermondsey Rest Centres overcrowded, with many people there since Saturday night. People in these centres nervous of remaining there as local school used for same purpose was badly bombed last week. Re-billeting is proceeding.[650]

The shock waves emanating from Keeton's Road School continued to spur residents from this intertwined and kindred community to seek protection in what they hoped would be safer areas of the capital other than their own.

One of the places people from Bermondsey went to was the neighbouring borough of Deptford yet it appeared on 12 September that the authorities there had no means of handling such an eventuality.

> When panic-stricken people from Bermondsey arrived at Deptford, they were housed in a school, but no arrangements for billeting were in hand.[651]

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[647] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p.59.
[648] Hook, *"These Rough Notes",* p.4.
[649] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.411.
[650] Ibid. p.417.
[651] The National Archives, MH 101/57, MOH War Diary 12 September 1940.

All of which contrasted sharply with the situation in Kensington that very same day where it was noticed, "Kensington people rendered homeless in night joking when taken in by neighbours".[652]

In Kensington it was not just neighbours who were taking in the homeless but the borough itself was seen as a haven of relative safety for the bombed out who now flocked there from across London. On 17 September the Town Clerk reported that 300 homeless from the East End had already been billeted in council or housing association property or empty property in Ladbroke Grove. The Council now agreed to a request from the MOH that arrangements be made to accommodate a further 3000 homeless people.[653] In a letter dated 22 September to the LCC Public Assistance Officer the Town Clerk set out the developing situation at the Portobello Road School Rest Centre.

> As you know, this centre is being used by homeless refugees from Paddington as well as those from Kensington, and also as a clearing house for refugees from the East End boroughs.[654]

The trend that we witnessed earlier of local residents forced to share their own amenities with strangers who had chosen to be in Kensington over their own more severely afflicted locality continued at pace as bombing wore on.

Not all however chose to leave the places where they lived and despite the destitution in which they found themselves chose to stay where they were even if that meant staying in a rest centre. By mid-September an emerging issue was the number of homeless overcrowding first line and reserve rest centres.

> Many refuse to move, or prefer to remain, in these stations rather than go to another London borough. Some of them would be prepared to go into the Country. Enquiries indicate that, generally speaking, these people are content to stay where they are so long as they are being housed and fed.[655]

Within Bermondsey it was recorded that over 500 people were staying put inside rest centres rather than take up the offer of being moved to some other part of the metropolis.[656]

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[652] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.417.
[653] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Kensington Borough Emergency Committee Minutes 17 September 1940.
[654] LMA, LCC/WE/RC/1/1, Letter from F. Webster Town Clerk and Solicitor Kensington Borough to the LCC Public Assistance Officer 22 September 1940.
[655] The National Archives, MH 101/58, MOH War Diary Part "O" War Incidents (London Only) Extracts from Reports June – September 1940 17 September 1940.
[656] Ibid.

At this time strenuous efforts were underway in Finsbury to help the homeless as the Borough ARP Controller related, "services had worked very long hours by day and by night in order to minimise the distress caused to residents who had lost their homes".[657] It was found necessary that such efforts included the requisitioning of property by Finsbury Borough Council.

> Sadler's Wells Theatre and certain premises in King Square had been requisitioned, and food had been provided on the first day and breakfast on the second where necessary…The authority of the Ministry of Health would be forthcoming for the purchase of furniture and bedding and the following supplies had been obtained: 300 mattresses, 250 pillows, 255 blankets and 350 paillasse covers.[658]

Of those making use of such makeshift rest centres were; Mrs Bateman and her five children from 55 Risinghill Street; Mr Henry Harrison with his wife and five children; Mrs Dale and her son and two grandsons of 24 Hermes Street; Mr and Mrs Anderson and their two children from 49 Donegal Street and a Mr Webb from 15 Donegal Street.[659] It cannot have been many Finsbury residents who would ever had imagined that they would have found themselves homeless and temporarily residing in the renowned Sadler's Wells Theatre.

By the start of November Finsbury Council gave the impression that a seamless and efficient system of dealing with the bombed out was in operation in the borough. The local billeting officer provided a confident report to the Emergency Committee.

> After an air raid, persons rendered homeless are advised by the Police and Air Raid Wardens to go to the nearest rest centre set up by the LCC where rest, warmth and food are supplied…Two or three Billeting Officers, according to the number of persons concerned, then attend at the centre. Persons who can be billeted with friends are dealt with first. Others are billeted in houses; the remainder are sent to the Council's shelters at King Square and Sadler's Wells Theatre until information is obtained of the condition of their houses as to whether or not the tenants may return, according to the Surveyor's report or unexploded bomb. If they cannot return home, accommodation is found for them as soon as possible. All the persons attending the rest centres are dealt with the same day. The rest centres are visited by Billeting Officers each day after a raid, who attend to any persons who may call. In addition a request is made to the officer-in-charge of the rest centre to send anyone

[657] Islington Local History Library, Finsbury Emergency Committee Minutes 25 September 1940.
[658] Ibid.
[659] Islington Local History Library, Sadler's Wells Theatre Billeting List September 1940.

> enquiring for the Billeting Officer to the Health Centre, Pine Street. Every person interviewed is informed of the various services operating to relieve immediate distress.[660]

It was further reported that up to and including 29 October the total number of homeless persons so far dealt with numbered 2,510. In addition 364 people from other boroughs were supported within Finsbury.[661]

The actual experience of the homeless differed markedly from the above picture painted by the local authority. Finsbury ARP Warden Barbara Nixon tells of a local family who in the pouring rain had to endure, "the distribution of money, clothes, and cups of tea, each took place in different centres, and two of them in carpet slippers, had to go to five different addresses".[662] Nor was this the only example Nixon could cite of difficulties the bombed out were encountering.

> There were a great many other grievances current at the time. The homeless, locally, were not yet in overwhelming numbers, yet the relief organisation was inadequate. There was no General Information Bureau, and no branch of the Citizen's Advice Bureau, and yet when some of the residents formed a People's Advice Bureau, with the aim of giving information about claims for damage, etc., the Town Hall asserted that this was run by the Communist Party and should be boycotted. No doubt there were Communists on the committee, and, if so, it was surely to their credit. Even in the middle of the miseries of the blitz, party politics and prejudices could not be forgotten…But ours was by no means the only borough which did not provide adequate relief organisation; some were far worse.[663]

These first-hand, as opposed to official, accounts compel our attention towards such local difficulties and their subsequent impact upon Londoners lives.

As stresses increased upon local services voluntary bodies began to step in and provide additional help. The Oxford and Bermondsey Club, run by Peter Marindin who previously worked helping local boys, now adapted the club as a rest centre. His efforts did not go unnoticed as reported in the *South London Press* on 1 November.

> The doors of the Oxford and Bermondsey Club have been thrown open to the bomb-stricken of the borough. One of the Club's buildings in Tanner St is one of the main rest centres for people driven out of their homes. Mr Marindin and his band of voluntary helpers have worked day and night to ease the plight of those temporary refugees. On Tuesday the

[660] ILHL, Emergency Committee Minutes 1 November 1940.
[661] Ibid.
[662] Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p.49.
[663] Ibid. p.50.

> Queen paid a flying visit to Bermondsey and her first call was at the rest centre to talk to the homeless and see the great work the volunteers were doing for them…between 50 and 120 people are always staying at the rest centre and nearly 100 were there when the Queen called.[664]

The article further relayed that, "the Queen then went on to the Time and Talents Club in Abbey Street, Bermondsey where a private communal centre is being run by workers of the club". Such local voluntary efforts reinforce the argument that specific local circumstances, eliciting a particular local response, heavily influenced blitz experience.

As post-raid services in areas most heavily affected by bombing struggled to keep up the MOH continued its efforts to transfer people from the East End to less crowded rest centres in western boroughs. As we saw previously the movement of people from one part of London to another was easier to plan than put into effect. It is worth reiterating what were seen as the four main reasons for the difficulties experienced as they appear in a LCC Rest Centre Service report from 26 November.

> a) East-enders do not want to live in the West End, where shopping facilities are unsuitable to their needs and where the people and environment are strange to them.
>
> b) Again the compulsion in this matter of accommodation is entirely one-sided. There is no compulsion whatever on homeless persons, however grave the problem of disposal may be, to fall in with the arrangements made for them.
>
> c) The bombing was soon extended to all parts of London and persons transferred from the East End to other boroughs at once became uneasy when they found themselves, inevitably for a short period, in a rest centre in the new borough which was already occupied by persons rendered homeless by bombing in that borough.
>
> d) Although some boroughs were better than others, it was exceptional for the billeting arrangements to be efficient enough to provide acceptable accommodation quickly.[665]

Kensington was one of the boroughs designated to receive homeless East-Enders with arrangements made to accommodate 900 people. Yet it was not possible to record how many actually reached the borough or remained.[666]

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[664] *South London Press*, 1 November 1940.
[665] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/MIN/2776, Minutes of LCC Civil Defence General Purposes Committee 1940 26 November 1940.
[666] Ibid.

At the turn of the New Year in 1941 a number of homeless were still to be found residing inside Bermondsey rest centres for three weeks or even longer. The LCC Rest Centre Service found on 27 January 109 persons and fifty two families in occupation. Twenty two were awaiting repairs to their houses, six had arrangements in hand to depart, twenty seven others were awaiting housing repairs, whilst forty four were recorded under the category "slowness of rehousing".[667] One can surmise that the local gravitational pull was keeping residents where they were for such a length of time.

In April the Finsbury ARP Controller met with Henry Willink, LCDR Special Commissioner for homelessness.[668] The latest efforts by the Council to assist the bombed out was discussed. It was agreed that it was now possible to suspend the use of Sadler's Wells Theatre as a rest centre but to keep it prepared in case of any future emergency. It was also decided to permit persons to remain in rest centres for four to five days unless arrangements could be made to remove them sooner. This being Finsbury however it was recorded that the attention of LCC be drawn, by the Special Commissioner, to the concerns of the council around the provision of adequate air raid shelter for those remaining in the rest centres.[669]

Statistics from the final and most devastating raid of the main London blitz on 10 May are illustrative of how the three inner London boroughs were affected to such varying degrees and demonstrate the divergent extent to which services would have needed to respond. The figures are provided below in table format to enable an easier comparison to be made.

Table 3.4 – Admission of Homeless Persons reported at 21:00 hours on 11 and 12 May 1941
Source: TNA, HO 186/952, General Intelligence London Region Reports – Intelligence Branch Report No.11

Borough	**May 11 1941 Number of Persons**	**May 12 1941 Number of Persons**
Finsbury	479	77
Bermondsey	1,274	101
Kensington	117	1

[667] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/ESTAB/3/70, Minutes of LCC Civil Defence General Purposes Committee 30 January 1941.
[668] The Finsbury ARP Controller would not have been alone in liaising with Commissioner Willink who had been appointed the previous September to co-ordinate services for homeless people across London region. Titmuss outlined the complexities ahead for this vital task. "Not only had he the responsibility of seeing that a large group of services, such as billeting, rehousing, furniture, supply and salvage, hostels and house repairs, were efficiently organised by the local authorities; he had also to ensure that each service found its place in a single scheme with a single aim in view. This meant that he had to secure co-ordination between all the different bodies, both official and voluntary, in London's two-tiered system of government". (Titmuss, *Social Policy*, p.287.).
[669] ILHL, Finsbury Emergency Committee Minutes 23 April 1941.

Table 3.5 – Admissions and Discharges in LCC Rest Centres in the period 1 – 21 May 1941
Source: TNA, HO 186/952, General Intelligence London Region Reports – Intelligence Branch Report No.11

Borough	Admissions Number of Persons	Discharges Number of Persons
Finsbury	586	518
Bermondsey	1,599	1,406
Kensington	128	126

At the conclusion of air raids the LCC Rest Centre service analysed by borough the admission of homeless persons per 1000 of the pre-war June 1939 population. The figures below for the three metropolitan boroughs only reinforce the above impression of how being bombed out of your own home varied across the capital.

Table 3.6 – Admissions of Homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war (June 1939) population.
Source: London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/10/1, LCC Rest Centre Service – Homeless in each borough as at 17 May 1941

Borough	Admissions of homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war (June 1939) population.
Finsbury	40
Bermondsey	66
Kensington	6

The final table comes again from the LCC Rest Centre service and ranks the metropolitan boroughs affected by homelessness in order of those that were highest and lowest in the administrative county. Again the statistics are presented in terms of the number of homeless per 1,000 of pre-war population.[670] The three boroughs are denoted in red type.

[670] The number of homeless per 1,000 of pre-war population slightly differs between tables 3.6 and 3.7. For example in table 3.6 the admissions of homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war population is recorded in Finsbury as 40, in table 3.7 it is 38. Both tables take the same time frame from 7 November 1940 to 17 May 1941. This discrepancy may be explained by the use of a different set of pre-war population figures. In table 3.6 the population is recorded as that in June 1939. For table 3.7 the source of pre-war population figures is not provided. It may be that table 3.7 is using the 1938 population figures which were more widely used by LCC for the administrative county. Such a difference could very well effect the calculation of homeless per 1000 of pre-war population and explain the marginally different figures.

Table 3.7 - Admissions of Homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war population showing the highest and lowest boroughs in the administrative county.
Source: London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/1/131, Correspondence from March 1941 to September 1941, Letter from E. J. B. King Chief Assistant LCC Social Welfare Department Rest Centre Service to E. C. H. Salmon County Clerk LCC 17 May 1941.

Highest Boroughs:	**Admissions of homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war population.**
Bermondsey	60
Bethnal Green	50
Holborn	43
Southwark	40
Finsbury	38
Poplar	31
Stoke Newington	30
Stepney	26
St. Pancras	20

Lowest Boroughs:	**Admissions of homeless since 7 November 1940 per 1000 of pre-war population.**
Hammersmith	3
St. Marylebone	4
Hampstead	4
Kensington	5
Paddington	6
Chelsea	7
Wandsworth	9
Lewisham	9
Islington	13

As we can see of all the twenty eight metropolitan boroughs making up the administrative county Bermondsey was to suffer the most in terms of those bombed out and made homeless by enemy action. Finsbury was also to find itself listed within the top five boroughs worst affected. To the west Kensington was amongst those least impacted which then could of course afford to be offered as a refuge for the homeless from elsewhere. These figures allow one to imagine that were it to be possible to have asked the residents of these three boroughs if they felt the trauma of homelessness was being born equally across the capital the answer would have been a self-evident no.

Communal Feeding

Eve of the main London Blitz

"North Kensington…communal kitchen in district proving great success",[671] read a Home Intelligence report for Friday 26 July 1940. The communal kitchen in question was located in Dalgarno Way and would be the germ of wider communal feeding both within Kensington and beyond. The prime instigator behind this community kitchen was Flora Solomon, Chief Welfare Officer at high street store Marks and Spencer.[672]

> I spied a disused community centre with an archaic Aga cooker in Dalgarno Way, near the gas works in the shabby section of the so-called Royal Borough of Kensington. It was ideal for the purpose and my welfare department descended upon it in a body. We scrounged crockery from the Marks and Spencer stock-rooms and had leaflets printed which my staff and I personally distributed in the neighbourhood…'Have a hot lunch at your Communal Restaurant', the leaflet read. 'Two courses, eightpence. Tea, one penny'. Gradually they filtered in, and the enterprise actually became profitable".[673]

Within this period the need to respond to the wartime economy in food, fuel, and human energy, provided the motivation behind such prototype communal feeding with Dalgarno Way being ideally situated, "in a working class district where the rapidly rising cost of living is an additional and important factor to be considered".[674] The restaurant was primarily designed to cater for the requirements of the large blocks of flats in the neighbourhood that housed 5,000 people, made up of 2,000 adults and 3,000 children.[675] The ready presence of this singular communal feeding facility in Kensington would soon pay dividends when the emergency of the blitz began in earnest.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

The WVS could also be found endeavouring to feed Kensingtonians in need. The local WVS office was on alert around the clock ready to man mobile canteens wherever they were needed in the

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[671] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.273.
[672] Flora Solomon was in fact a contemporary of the notorious Russian spy Kim Philby whom she had befriended at Cambridge University. "The daughter of a Jewish-Russian gold tycoon, Solomon was another exotic bloom in the colourful hothouse of Philby's circle: as a young woman she had an affair with Alexander Kerensky, the Russian Prime Minister deposed by Lenin in the October Revolution, before going on to marry a British First World War general. In 1939, she was hired to improve working conditions by Marks and Spencer". (Ben Macintyre, *A Spy Among Friends – Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal* (2014), p.28.).
[673] Flora Solomon, *Baku to Baker Street* (1984), p.180.
[674] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Memoranda The Communal Restaurant – An Experiment August 1940.
[675] Ibid.

borough. On one occasion in the opening days of the blitz three canteens worked for twenty-four hours feeding 1,389 people.[676] During that first week of September 1940 calamity quickly befell the North Kensington communal restaurant.

> One of the first bombs to fall on London crashed into Dalgarno Way. Luckily, our restaurant was empty at the time, but our precious Aga cooker succumbed. Walking over the site the next morning I observed the aftermath with a sick feeling: men and women gazing in stupor at their destroyed homes, gas mains blown, charred timbers still sending up trails of smoke, a silent queue at a stand-pipe waiting to fill kettles and saucepans. And rescue teams burrowing through the rubble to bring out the living, whether this be a human or a mewing cat. Nightfall again, and a glow hung over the sky to proclaim the message that London was burning. We now knew we were truly at war.[677]

In South Kensington Hilda Neal noted in her diary, "Not much gas now to light; kettle very slow to boil; pressure been tremendously reduced".[678] Whilst not quite as immediate as the sudden detonation of high explosives such privations wrought by air raids readily began to be felt upon everyday life.

Unlike air raid shelters and homeless rest centres that were subject to pre-war planning a programme of communal feeding was only tackled on the hoof, "communal feeding came with a rush one of the major social revolutions was bombed into existence".[679] Whilst consideration was given to providing nourishment to the bombed out in rest centres this succour was only available to the homeless and quite some distance away from what would later become comprehensive communal feeding efforts. As communal feeding did not feature in the previous chapter on planning for war it is worth pausing here briefly to consider and understand the formulation of this service within the County of London.

As we witnessed briefly in chapter one it was during this period at the beginning of September, months after the inauguration of the communal kitchen at Dalgarno Way and nascent feeding plans in Kensington, communal feeding efforts at the central and regional level began to emerge. Contained in a letter dated 5 September from the Ministry of Food (MOF) to E. C. H. Salmon, Clerk to

[676] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, W.V.S. A Record of 21 Years Service in the Royal Borough of Kensington 1959, p.5.
[677] Solomon, *Baku to Baker Street*, p.180.
[678] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 9 September 1940.
[679] Ritchie Calder, *The Lesson of London* (1941), p.127.

the LCC, was a precis of a meeting held between them the day before to introduce the concept of a London wide feeding scheme.

> The main reasons for developing communal feeding are of course that the rise in prices of foodstuffs is affecting adversely the poorer classes generally as wages are not in all cases keeping pace with the rise with the result that a great number of people are on the poverty level of subsistence and not being properly fed.[680]

It is worth noting that at this point with actual bombs just beginning to fall on the capital communal feeding was conceived not as a vital post-raid exigency but as a means to relieve the poor.

Just a few days later with the enemy now commencing major sustained aerial attacks on London communal feeding plans advanced quickly. On 12 September the County Clerk next met with the Minister of Health Malcolm MacDonald to explain that, "in view of the failure of the gas service in certain parts of London and its possible failure in others, this meals service ought to be set up…and done on a big scale".[681] Salmon subsequently mentioned;

> That a plan had not yet been made at County Hall as to how the work should be done, but the general idea was that food should be produced in the kitchens of the Council's establishments or from mobile kitchens; that it should be sold at certain prices; that the people should come for food with their own receptacles and carry it away hot to their homes.[682]

Whilst what would later be known as the Londoners' Meals Service at that moment consisted of just a chief officer and one assistant the Minister now requested that communal feeding services as outlined by LCC be promptly organised.[683]

In Bermondsey a programme of communal feeding was being co-ordinated through the Borough Food Office working together with the local Public Assistance Committee and WVS. Being part of the County of London communal feeding fell within the purview of the LCC Londoners' Meals Service[684] nevertheless, "Bermondsey Council, with its knowledge of local conditions, is smoothing out difficulties…local missions and social workers are also doing great work in helping local people".[685]

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[680] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/RC/GEN/1/2, Londoners' Meals Service – Correspondence with MOF on Communal Feeding for Londoners.
[681] LMA, LCC/RC/GEN/1/2 Minutes of Conference at the Ministry of Health on 12th September 1940.
[682] Ibid.
[683] LMA, LCC/RC/GEN/1/1 LCC Meals Services History.
[684] Food was primarily provided within LCC rest centres, for a list of rest centres in the three inner London boroughs please refer to above *Homelessness-Rest Centres* section.
[685] *South London Press*, 13 September 1940.

On Sunday 15 September the LCC County Clerk paid a visit with his aides to Bermondsey where they met Mr. Allen ARP Group Controller and Mr. Travers ARP Deputy Controller to discuss the ongoing establishment of the Londoners' Meals Service in the borough. A somewhat sanguine approach was adopted by the Bermondsey officials who reported that whilst recent raiding had disrupted gas supplies many residents could still rely on coal cooking.[686] Mr. Travers issued a cautionary warning to LCC regarding the particular nature of Bermondsey residents.

> He described his fellow citizens of Bermondsey as champion scroungers who had every medal possible for that type of conduct and said that we should have to be very careful if we started in that borough a service where food was supplied for payment to make certain that we got our money.[687]

Communal feeding efforts therefore would conceivably have to be tailored to the bespoke characteristics of this distinct pocket of south-east London.

Later that very same day a bomb struck Bermondsey Town Hall killing many staff and utterly destroying the Food Office housed within the building, "At first sight it looked as if this very vital service to Bermondsey people might be completely disorganised with possibly serious consequences".[688] Just how vital was the need for communal feeding is illustrated by a contemporary account from Bermondsey resident, Mrs. Itzinger, which is worth quoting at length.

> It was a good three weeks after the Blitz started, and sometimes we had no gas. And then we'd come home and we found we had no water. And we used to have to run round all the places where the roads were up, and perhaps there'd be just a little trickle running right through and we used to ask the man that was there whether it was all right to drink. And he says: "Oh, yes!". So we used to get a bucket and take a little mug, and put in and fill the bucket up. And then there'd be another poor old soul come along, and she says: "Is the water all right, ducks, do you think it'll be all right? Do you think we'll be able to get our dinner in the oven in time, before the gas goes off again?" And I used to say: "Oh yes, dear, don't worry". So she says: "I don't know, every time I start to get me dinner in the oven, so the blessed warning goes". And she says "off goes the gas again, into the shelter again, and then we come back again". And then she says: "and there's the dinner all spoilt, and if you'd

[686] LMA, LCC/RC/GEN/1/2, Notes of interviews – The Clerk of the Council visit to the East End of London and to Bermondsey 15 September 1940.
[687] Ibid.
[688] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.11.

> happened to forget to turn the gas off, well," she says, "your dinner was absolutely done for", she says "and bang's gone your rations again".[689]

Strenuous and hazardous work by surviving Bermondsey Food Office staff saw key records transferred to the Central Public Library and an emergency food office set up within just twenty four hours allowing the management of communal feeding to continue.[690]

As the pace of incessant bombing became sustained records of the Kensington WVS portray an almost daily need for the emergency use of mobile canteens.

> September 20th: 12.p.m. Mobile Canteen called to feed Civil Defence Rescue Party. At midnight a wardens post called for Mobile Canteen to feed 500 people after an incident.
>
> September 23rd: 7.p.m. Mobile Canteen called out to feed refugees at a refugee hostel at 63 Gloucester Road.
>
> September 24th: Mobile Canteen called out 8 times to feed refugees and Civil Defence Rescue Parties in different parts of Kensington.
>
> September 25th: Several calls for Mobile Canteen for feeding purposes, as well as 3 meals supplied to the homeless at the hostel at 63 Gloucester Road.[691]

Within these reports we can detect once again, as we saw with the use and provision of shelters and rest centres, that the wartime population of Kensington was a varied one comprised of both local residents and outside refugees all in need of the same local relief services.

By the end of September, despite being devastated earlier in the month, Dalgarno Way communal restaurant was back up and running. According to a Home Intelligence Report for 27 September the service was continuing to provide support in the teeth of adversity, "North Kensington Community Centre communal kitchen now provides 600 midday dinners for workers and children in neighbourhood in spite of difficulties such as water being cut off temporarily".[692] Dalgarno Way was now catching the attention of a wider audience through the pages of *Picture Post* that illustrated the imperative demand for the assistance on offer.

> One of the most interesting communal restaurants is the North Kensington feeding centre at Dalgarno Way…Most of the men and many of the women are on war jobs in local factories.

[689] Fitzgibbon, *The Blitz*, p.116.
[690] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.11.
[691] KCLHL, W.V.S. A Record of 21 Years Service in the Royal Borough of Kensington, p.6.
[692] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.458.

> Whole families come to the restaurant because, they say, it is cheaper than providing the same meal at home (saves gas and meat coupons) and cleaner. Many of them could certainly not afford such a meal every day otherwise. Those who don't want to eat at the centre can buy their meal and take it home. Many women buy their husband's meal at midday and "hot it up" for him at night.[693]

The success of Dalgarno Way Communal Restaurant now provided a spur for the planned expansion of a wider chain of feeding centres throughout the borough. Following a meeting between Flora Solomon and the Mayor of Kensington, R.C.D. Jenkins, Solomon reiterated, "I feel sure you ought to be able to go ahead immediately and make your borough a working example for others to copy, for there is no doubt that every day the question of communal feeding becomes more urgent".[694] As the months of the blitz wore on Kensington would show itself to be this prophesied exemplar.

The borough of Finsbury, in contrast to the hive of activity taking place in Kensington and Bermondsey, could be found to have adopted a more lackadaisical attitude towards feeding residents. The first mention of communal feeding that can be found in the council minutes dates to 4 November and records the authorities response to the MOF initiative to feed those caught overnight in public air raid shelters.

> The [ARP] Controller reported that steps had been taken to ascertain to what extent local caterers would be prepared to co-operate in the provision of the food required, but that the information was not yet complete.[695]

Three weeks later the council was updated that preliminary arrangements had been made to supply food in twenty shelters and arrangements were pending in regards to a further ten.[696] In Bermondsey shelter feeding services were already being provided yet they were perhaps not what they might be. In railway arch shelter '61' along St. Thomas Street the LCDR Shelter Officer reported that when he visited on the night of 10 November the lighting system completely failed plunging 1600 shelterers into darkness and besides, "there is a small canteen run by a private firm near the main door but the arrangements are primitive".[697]

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[693] *Picture Post*, 5 October 1940.
[694] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Flora Solomon, Michael House, Baker Street to Mayor of Kensington 21 October 1940.
[695] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 4 November 1940.
[696] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 25 November 1940.
[697] TNA, HO 207/512, Report by Regional Shelter Officer – W. Timson 15 November 1940.

On 12 December Mayor Jenkins announced to *The Kensington News and West London Times* the formation of the Kensington Communal Services Committee.

> A community kitchen committee has recently been set up in Kensington in order to co-ordinate and assist in the work of community feeding. There are several types of kitchen, both fixed and mobile operating in the borough, some of which are being run by the LCC and others by private persons or by the Women's Voluntary Services. The kitchens and canteens are doing fine work not only in the bomb damaged areas but by providing good and cheap meals for those engaged on war work or mothers who are finding it difficult to find the time and money to prepare meals for their families.[698]

Accompanied alongside was an appeal to the residents of Kensington, "Our chief need at the moment is for supplies of knives, forks, spoons, cups, saucers and plates…this would be a very practical way for the inhabitants to help one another at the present time".[699] Such public-spiritedness was not just confined to the Royal Borough of Kensington, for in Bermondsey it was reported that butchers had raised £208 for the purchase of a mobile canteen.[700]

As 1940 drew to a close plans by the Kensington Communal Services Committee were starting to come to fruition. Mayor Jenkins, chairman of the committee, proposed in total a chain of twelve community kitchens for the borough, comprising seven already in daily service (including those run by LCC), with five more centres to be created. When working fully such a scheme would provide 3,000 meals a day across Kensington. On 21 December it was reported by *The Star* that 2,000 meals were being served daily from the existing restaurants. Vice-Chairman of the Committee was Flora Solomon, whom we met earlier establishing the Dalgarno Way communal restaurant, she was joined by representatives of LCC, WVS, Salvation Army, and the London Council of Social Service. Meals consisted of meat, vegetables and a sweet, with charges of eight pence for adults (manual workers receiving an extra – large cut of meat for ten pence), and children four pence. The committee was determined that food would always be available whatever the circumstances.

> [They] have made comprehensive alternative plans to meet any emergency. If gas, electricity or water supply is cut off, field kitchens will be built and food cooked in bins and other vessels. The method maybe primitive, but there will be no gap.[701]

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[698] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Mayor of Kensington R.C.D. Jenkins to The Editor *The Kensington News and West London Times* 12 December 1940.
[699] Ibid.
[700] *South London Press*, 16 December 1940.
[701] *The Star*, 21 December 1940.

According to Mayor Jenkins impetus for this co-ordinated communal feeding service was provided by recent heavy bombing in Manchester and Southampton which had witnessed, "…the disastrous effect which a lack of feeding places has on the morale of the people".[702]

The imagination of many was once again captivated by such local communal feeding initiatives with the *Observer* reporting at length on the programme of the Kensington Communal Services Committee.

> Kensington has taken the lead in the opening of communal feeding centres. There are now eight in the Royal Borough, and another will shortly be opened…Premises have been let free, and each kitchen is self-supporting. There is a nucleus of paid cooks and helpers, with a splendid backing of volunteer assistants. The main object is to feed those who have been bombed from their homes or have no cooking facilities.[703]

The Kensington News and West London Times published an account of a tour taken around local communal restaurants which included a visit to St. Clement's Mission Dining Hall situated in Notting Dale, "In what used to be a soup kitchen, a few hard-working enthusiastic women are serving 'sit-down' and 'cash and carry' meals to the mothers and children of one of London's poorest districts".[704] Communal feeding restaurants were situated throughout the wide-ranging areas of Kensington with the following in the north of the borough; Bevington Road School, Portobello Road; Campden Institute, Lancaster Road; St. Clement's Mission Dining Hall, Sirdar Road; Venture Club, 138 Portobello Road; Dalgarno Communal Kitchen; 1st Feather Club[705], Ladbroke Grove; 7th Feather Club, Edenham Street. In the south of Kensington could be found; Kings College of Household and Social Science, Campden Hill; Servite Hall, 252 Fulham Road.[706] All of which proved to *The Kensington News and West London Times* that, "communal feeding was true, good and cheap".[707]

A little further east towards the centre of London communal feeding provision within the Borough of Finsbury continued to move at a relatively glacial pace. Since we last left Finsbury in November

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[702] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Mayor of Kensington R.C.D. Jenkins to F. Webster Town Clerk Royal Borough of Kensington 31 December 1940.
[703] *Observer*, 31 January 1941.
[704] *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 31 January 1941.
[705] Feather Clubs were the progeny of Edward VIII when Prince of Wales, "[he] gave practical effect to his concern with the Feather Clubs, the first of which opened in Ladbroke Grove in 1934. These were originally intended to provide amenities for the unemployed, though they increasingly embraced those on low pay too. The clubs were largely run by a woman who had in effect been the Prince of Wales's *maitresse en titre* for sixteen years, Mrs Dudley (Freda) Ward, but Edward took an interest in their activities and visited them on occasion". (Gardiner, *The Thirties*, p.377.).
[706] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Memorandum – Royal Borough of Kensington Communal Kitchens.
[707] *The Kensington News and West London Times*, 31 January 1941.

1940 the council had been attempting to augment the Londoners' Meal Service by continuing to make arrangements with catering firms to provide meals to those within public air raid shelters. In January 1941 the ARP Controller provided an update to the Emergency Committee on the number of catering licences thus far issued.

> Forty-two licences had been issued for the supply of foodstuffs in shelters. In fifteen cases the necessary electrical apparatus had been installed, and the installation was proceeding in the other twenty-seven shelters. When the facilities in the forty-two shelters were completed it would be possible to serve a total of 12,000 people.[708]

Nevertheless there remained a number of shelters to which no catering firm had made any tenders and it was mooted that perhaps the local authority would need to establish an organisation for the provision of refreshments in these shelters.[709] Whether or not the people of Finsbury had read about or heard by word of mouth of the more comprehensive communal feeding initiatives already underway in nearby boroughs they may have viewed some of their fellow Londoners through envious eyes.

Bermondsey communal feeding schemes had been operating for six months by the end of February 1941 with a number of communal restaurants forming the backbone of the effort. In a borough singularly impacted by the blitz the Monnow Road School domestic centre was reported as just one example where an excellent dinner could be found.

> Your only qualification for such a privilege is that you must be one of the borough's bombed-out, or be otherwise adversely affected by the war. There are other centres in the district – one at Page's Walk, another at the Time and Talent's Settlement, Dockhead, where you may get much the same service and value…Bermondsey with its factories and workshops and its little homes whose gas stoves will never cook again, have a greater need than many boroughs, coffee-shops, the inevitable standby of many men, are growing more few and far between and their customers find the feeding centres a great relief to their minds and pockets and ration books.[710]

The Monnow Road centre first opened on 30 September 1940 with just thirty five hot dinners served that day, on the following day 120 dinners were provided, by early spring 1941 the centre was catering for 200 – 250 meals daily.[711] The absolute necessity of such an endeavour was given voice

[708] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 6 January 1941.
[709] Ibid.
[710] *South London Press*, 28 February 1941.
[711] Ibid.

by a local woman using the restaurant, "I'm real glad to get this, I've been coming here for weeks now and it has always been a good dinner, I really don't know what I'd do without them. It will be a long time before my stove cooks a dinner again".[712]

The following figures from the LCDR Intelligence Report for the night of the major raid of 16 April demonstrate the number of admissions into feeding and shelter stations across the three metropolitan boroughs.

Bermondsey	497
Kensington	24
Finsbury	282[713]

Not only do these figures demonstrate a discrepancy in the number of residents seeking sanctuary we should also remember the disparity of communal feeding provision they sought and found.

The publicity given towards the work of the Kensington Communal Services Committee began to draw visitors to the borough to see for themselves the ongoing communal feeding scheme. The Metropolitan Borough of St. Pancras Medical Officer of Health made enquiries into the operation of the committee, to whom Mayor Jenkins responded suggesting that he was not alone in his curiosity.

> Many visitors from other municipalities have come to study our methods and organisation, and if your Borough would care to visit some of our kitchens, I shall be pleased to make the necessary arrangements on hearing from you.[714]

Illustrious figures such as Clementine Churchill made the effort to witness the working of the communal restaurants and following her visit Mayor Jenkins responded, "May I on behalf of the committee say how much we appreciated your coming here and would assure you that the real and practical interest you showed in the working of the various kitchens has inspired us to still greater efforts".[715] The reputation of the Kensington Communal Services Committee was clearly burnished and shining brightly reflecting mostly upon the local residents who received a much-praised service through the good fortune of residing in this particular area of London.

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[712] Ibid.
[713] TNA, HO 186/952, Intelligence Branch Report No.9.
[714] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Mayor of Kensington R.C.D. Jenkins to Dr. Maitland Radford, Public Health Department, Saint Pancras Town Hall, Euston Road 13 March 1941.
[715] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Mayor of Kensington R.C.D. Jenkins to Clementine Churchill, 10 Downing Street 31 July 1941.

Writing in *Carry on London* Ritchie Calder (one of the contemporary blitz chroniclers we first came across in chapter one) recorded his extensive first-hand blitz experiences which included paying homage to the programme of communal feeding in Kensington. Of those that made a certain impression upon Calder was, "…a woman who did all her good by stealth. She was one of the great figures – the modern Lady of the Lamp was the modern Lady of the Ladle – and her name was Flora Solomon".[716] Calder extended his approval further;

> To-day, there are twelve communal feeding centres in the borough of Kensington, posthumous children of Flora Solomon's first experiment. The Royal Borough of Kensington has now sponsored them. There was no greater evangelist for community feeding than the Conservative Mayor, Jenkins.[717]

The conspicuous work of the Kensington Communal Services Committee is thus recorded into posterity for all those who wish to gain an insight into surviving life under fire on the streets of the capital.

Final mention of Kensington communal feeding is perhaps best left to the key protagonists themselves. In May Flora Solomon wrote to Mayor Jenkins,

> May I take this opportunity of thanking you once more most sincerely for your remarkable help and co-operation, without which we certainly could not have carried on. Maybe we have not as yet achieved very much, but one thing is certain – that the example of the efforts being made in your borough under your leadership is bearing fruit daily, for time after time one hears Kensington quoted as a progressive influence.[718]

If we refer back to the initiation of the Kensington Communal Services Committee it must have been obvious to all involved, that in the words of Flora Solomon, Kensington had indeed become an example for others to copy.

Conclusion

Now that we have witnessed the course of the London blitz upon three metropolitan boroughs, Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington, what have we learnt? Can it be argued that an agency of locality played a leading role in forming blitz experiences for those who withstood this onslaught?

[716] Calder, *Carry on London*, p.72.
[717] Ibid.p.75.
[718] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Letter from Flora Solomon to Mayor of Kensington R.C.D. Jenkins 22 May 1941.

Even within the same month that air raid sirens first sounded in anger one can begin to detect a diversity amongst the component parts of the capital. Inhabitants of Kensington immediately noticed sharing their streets with outsiders as they mingled with refugees from the continent, initiating concerns over the resulting detrimental impact upon butter supplies. Soon such concerns were to prove trivial as far greater travails would begin falling from the sky upon all no matter from where they had originated.

Soon after heavy raiding commences it becomes obvious that the deadly payloads from enemy bombers are not apportioned equally with areas bombed more extensively than others. For instance the docks of Bermondsey would be targeted by the enemy, whilst Finsbury would take glancing blows, and Kensington further west would only later receive the hit first thrown against the centre of the metropolis. Surely it must be reasoned however that the actual experience of being bombed was a uniform one for no matter how many munitions fell upon your neighbourhood the actual impact and toll of high explosives would be the same within Finsbury as in Bermondsey. Yet as 1941 began demographic evidence suggested not just an unequal disparity in the number of actual bombs but also an accompanying divergence of blitz experience. The population of Bermondsey dramatically decreased by just over fifty percent, an occurrence not matched in either Finsbury or Kensington, and equalled only by five other boroughs within the county of London.

Any conception of a single unified London–wide blitz becomes ever harder to sustain when we turn to scrutinise air raid shelter provision. If we take ourselves back to the shelters on offer around London Bridge we can see that within walking distance existed the stark conditions of the arches beneath the railway station juxtaposed against the Borough High Street deep tunnel shelter network that could boast conditions of almost comparative luxury. The agency of locality can be seen acting powerfully within this postcode lottery of air raid shelters available to neighbouring Londoners.

We should remember that the existence of railway arch shelters in Bermondsey were a result of peculiar geographic factors that forced the hapless locals to seek protection where really there was none. Further evidence of the capricious nature of locality can be found in Finsbury where the ideological drive of the local authority hampered adequate shelter availability. In contrast to both boroughs residents in Kensington may have counted themselves fortunate to scramble down deep within the available London Underground shelters insulating themselves from the fiery tempest above. Yet the prevalence of working class tube shelterers indicates a differential along class lines of shelter provision within the constituent elements of this socio-economically mixed area.

It is best left to Londoners themselves to express the variance that existed between the localities within their own city. Let us pause and recollect those whom actually elected to linger within nearby

overcrowded rest centres in preference to being settled elsewhere. Those bombed out would rather leave London altogether for the country rather than stay in an unfamiliar part of the capital. Of paramount concern was the ability to remain where they knew best. All of which suggests London was so fragmented that it was possible to react with aversion to the idea of living anywhere other than one's own neighbourhood. Contemporary evidence attests as to why this may have been so;

> That sense of being 'all in it together' was the secret of the high courage of the working people. They believed it until they discovered differently, found themselves neglected, treated as 'dirty East Enders', frozen out of billets by suburban snobbery with their sufferings forgotten.[719]

A very unstable foundation indeed on which to construct and present a London-wide blitz experience common to all.

With communal feeding the influence of locality can promptly be discovered with the Londoners' Meals Service supplying a basic foundation upon which local authorities built their own efforts resulting in a diverse patchwork of initiatives. What we witness as the blitz wears on is somewhat comparable to local instruments gradually joining a wider orchestra at first conducted by LCC. In the three metropolitan boroughs we saw a clear difference in attempts to adequately feed those in need. The Kensington Communal Services Committee not only stood apart from Finsbury and Bermondsey, it towered over all other boroughs in the service it delivered. What distinguished Kensington communal feeding was the thread first drawn from the pre-blitz Dalgarno Way communal kitchen, then interwoven with the zeal and far-sighted approach of Mayor Jenkins, to produce a tapestry of coordinated communal restaurants of whom the greatest advocates were those who used and witnessed them in action.

In the pre-welfare state days of the blitz the Kensington Communal Services Committee took it upon themselves to fill the gap left by the laissez-faire state. Londoners in other areas of the capital would instead be left with no choice but to fall back on the paucity of meagre minimal communal feeding provision. The vagaries of philanthropy, dynamism, local activism, all hastened by the immediate unimagined crisis of the time, allowed those residing in Kensington to benefit through the arbitrary chance of where in London they called home.

Having seen the three metropolitan boroughs through the entirety of the main London blitz we can now gauge how each of them performed under fire. As we saw in the previous chapter on planning for war where each local authority individually interpreted the civil defence mandate placed upon

[719] Calder, *Lesson of London*, p.37.

them, it should perhaps not be surprising to witness a differentiation in conduct. When we remind ourselves of the divergent social conditions between the three boroughs; Finsbury a small and crowded district nestled against the city comprising tightly packed commercial enterprises jammed in amongst mostly working class streets; Bermondsey defined by the prevalence of the docks, overwhelmingly populated by the poorer classes working in industrial and riverside occupations hardly ever needing to leave this insular borough; and Kensington characterised by well to do residents in the south and central areas bounded by some of the poorest areas in London to the north; we see a hotchpotch of different places, responding contrastingly, providing a kaleidoscope of reaction.

Looking through the prisms of air raid shelters, rest centres and communal feeding services it is fair to claim that Finsbury adopted a recalcitrant attitude hidebound by a doctrinaire mentality. The efforts of this borough were diverted, as they were in pre-blitz times, towards bridling against what were perceived as central government diktats, challenged what were inherent legal duties, instead of doing all that conceivably could be done to sustain residents from aerial bombing. Whereas just south of the river Bermondsey Borough Council, sharing the same socio-economic makeup of Finsbury, despite their own initial political hesitancy, and in the face of the most relentless and devastating bombing targeted against this dockside borough, overcame the severest of handicaps to provide a far more comprehensive and efficient service than the efforts mustered by Finsbury who in comparison had no excuse to offer up what they did. The Royal Borough of Kensington continued into war time the attitude first adopted during the pre-war period of putting into place a model civil defence scheme which delivered an impressive performance throughout the main blitz.

The history that has been written about these three boroughs corroborates the above observations and conclusions. We have already seen the criticisms levelled by Finsbury ARP warden Barbara Nixon against what she saw as the local structural inadequacies in aiding the homeless. Angus Calder singles out the heroism and devotion of Mayor Henley of Bermondsey who, "went without sleep night after night during the raids, ate his Christmas dinner in the A.R.P. control room, and was killed 'on duty' in the last and worst night of blitz in May".[720] Writing in *Carry on London* Ritchie Calder (father to Angus) continued to sing the praises we have already seen him make of communal feeding in Kensington. As a rejoinder to other communal feeding efforts he had seen in various London boroughs Calder again cites Flora Solomon. "It was part of Flora Solomon's social shrewdness that she always conceived shelter canteens as something more than hunger-stifling that is represented

[720] Calder, *People's War*, p.193.

by the tea and bun of the coffee-stall".[721] A forward looking approach benefiting Kensingtonians which certainly could not be detected in the paltry feeding of shelterers in Finsbury.

In addition to weighing up these three boroughs against themselves it is worth looking up and across to various other London local authorities to see how they compare in this broader context. Ritchie Calder toured across the bombed metropolis and decried the Metropolitan Borough of Stepney and County Borough of West Ham as, "the worst administered of all the boroughs",[722] no doubt a reflection of the carnage heaped upon those areas. In contrast Westminster and St. Pancras were hailed as the first to introduce reading libraries in public shelters.[723] Fireman William Sansom writing of his time serving in Westminster spared no praise of his local authority, "Outstanding also will be the tale of various civic achievements, where Westminster bought on its own account and without guidance from above the first bunks to be used in shelters".[724] Nevertheless the blitz historiography is limited when it comes to the integral ninety five individual local authorities of London region which speaks to the sheer amount of variety and dissimilarity on offer ensuring perhaps that there is just too much that could be written.

In going where no one has gone before, down amidst the neighbourhoods and along the myriad streets of the metropolis, it is apparent that fixed by local circumstances, each borough tells a separate story each offering varying experiences of the main London blitz.

[721] Calder, *Carry on London*, p.83.
[722] Calder, *Lesson of London*, p.29.
[723] Calder, *Carry on London*, p.50.
[724] William Sansom, *Westminster in War* (1947), p.13.

Chapter Four: Main London Blitz Local Response – The Suburbs

Air Raids

"Go to bed hopeful; wake up thankful",[725] wrote a South Croydon trader during the height of the main London blitz, reminding us that Londoners living on the metropolitan periphery also felt the need to pray for nightly salvation. As we turn to the occurrence of air raiding upon suburban London we shall begin by noting in the following demographic data, that in direct contrast to all inner London boroughs, some outer London boroughs actually witnessed a net increase in population. A fact wholly consistent with the trend we have already come across whereby some metropolitan Londoners moved out to reside in the suburbs, especially those towards the north and in particular on the far western fringe, away from the direct line of fire. An already complex and far from simple scene is further complicated when one considers that those already living in such boroughs had an experience peculiar unto themselves through which their areas grew whilst the majority of Londoners experienced a diminution of their neighbourhoods.

The County Borough of West Ham is highlighted as a persistent outlier in the bombing figures, alone amongst outer London boroughs in the extent it was pounded, exacerbating the plight of local residents living in an area that will come to be seen as peculiarly vulnerable and unable to cope with such an eventuality. When one compares the set of statistical data for West Ham against those boroughs newly home to so many Londoners, such as Barnet Rural District and Ruislip-Northwood, one can be forgiven for questioning how such divergent places existed within the same city, let alone capable of sustaining any notion of a single London-wide blitz experience.

Table 4.1 shows the demographic trends of the main London blitz. All of the extra-metropolitan areas are shown; with the three boroughs studied in this chapter highlighted in red. The boroughs are all listed in order of percentage reduction in population between mid-1938 and the end of the main raiding period. The date range spans 18 January 1941 when records started; 19 April 1941 after the major raid of mid-April; and 31 May 1941. At a glance it is possible to compare the three boroughs against all outer London authorities; in addition comparison can be made against the calculated population percentage reduction for the total of suburban London which is shown highlighted in red.

Table 4.2 provides comprehensive analysis of air raid casualties from the main blitz period with all outer London boroughs ranked by total number of casualties. Figures for the boroughs of East Ham,

[725] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.47.

Croydon and Acton, and calculated grand totals for the outer London area are shown in red for ease of comparison.

Table 4.1 – Main London Blitz Demographic Trends
Source: TNA, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.

Local Authority	No. Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 18 January 1941	Population 19 April 1941	Population 31 May 1941	Population Percentage Reduction
West Ham	50,247	254,900	118,722	123,899	116,178	-54
East Ham	30,125	129,500	80,765	83,871	80,306	-38
Willesden	42,418	187,600	133,677	126,009	126,401	-33
Acton	17,041	68,670	49,467	47,753	47,759	-31
Walthamstow	35,505	130,800	94,158	92,821	91,182	-30
Leyton	26,306	117,200	84,917	84,197	83,283	-29
Penge	6,817	25,520	19,583	18,434	17,988	-29
Croydon	65,550	243,400	179,721	178,528	175,826	-28
Tottenham	30,816	144,400	104,572	104,655	104,142	-28
Barnes	11,007	40,960	31,156	29,851	30,034	-27
Beckenham	10,300	70,590	52,295	51,164	51,136	-27
Brentford and Chiswick	15,640	61,470	45,847	45,018	44,842	-27
Hornsey	22,251	96,680	70,598	71,078	70,778	-27
Barking	19,441	76,790	57,040	57,660	56,410	-26
Mitcham	17,115	66,020	50,756	51,380	51,713	-21
Richmond	9,758	38,280	32,725	30,163	30,085	-21
Beddington and Wallington	9,222	30,880	23,206	25,085	25,136	-18
Edmonton	26,056	103,200	87,552	85,519	84,839	-18
Wood Green	13,776	53,190	43,383	43,630	43,506	-18
Coulsdon and Purley	14,624	55,070	44,094	45,058	45,455	-17
Ilford	46,000	166,900	141,141	139,509	137,966	-17
Wanstead and Woodford	15,700	54,810	45,256	45,489	45,334	-17
Bromley	16,545	59,470	59,840	50,905	49,881	-16
Hendon	39,049	145,100	123,597	121,904	121,683	-16
Malden and Coombe	11,870	38,820	31,261	32,145	32,632	-16
Dagenham	23,994	107,400	86,565	91,099	91,327	-15
Finchley	17,434	65,140	57,594	55,632	55,408	-15
Kingston	10,000	39,790	34,765	34,766	34,945	-12
Wimbledon	15,800	58,680	42,671	42,525	51,536	-12
Bexley	22,480	77,020	68,349	68,591	68,274	-11
Crayford	7,063	24,590	22,010	21,852	21,885	-11
Sutton and Cheam	21,606	75,580	68,062	67,074	67,270	-11
Ealing	45,154	161,000	139,590	144,858	144,729	-10

Local Authority	No. Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 18 January 1941	Population 19 April 1941	Population 31 May 1941	Population Percentage Reduction
Erith	10,036	39,800	36,814	36,773	36,729	-10
Merton and Morden	18,240	68,980	62,153	63,862	64,386	-7
Waltham Holy Cross	2,034	7,164	6,508	6,897	6,671	-7
Southgate	20,200	67,860	64,785	63,959	63,664	-6
Twickenham	26,716	96,550	92,762	90,772	90,207	-6
Southall	13,457	52,400	49,864	49,727	49,562	-5
Wembley	29,480	118,800	114,727	113,932	113,811	-4
Orpington	14,734	46,320	43,738	44,543	44,894	-3
Chingford	9,100	37,510	33,929	33,901	33,897	-1
Friern Barnet	6,401	27,120	25,688	25,268	24,946	-1
Barnet Urban District	6,222	21,320	22,337	21,082	21,245	0
Chislehurst and Sidcup	16,630	61,750	60,528	62,223	61,333	1
Epsom and Ewell	11,950	59,930	61,920	61,079	60,827	1
Enfield	25,920	91,940	87,914	89,547	89,786	2
Surbiton	14,541	46,600	47,191	47,059	47,736	2
Carshalton	15,207	58,730	55,505	56,654	56,837	3
Chigwell	7,141	23,750	24,766	24,556	24,511	3
Esher	12,104	42,420	45,121	44,487	44,107	4
Harrow	54,460	183,500	191,203	194,175	193,596	5
Yiewsley and West Drayton	4,318	15,670	16,124	16,636	16,710	7
East Barnet	10,220	32,830	37,448	36,618	36,205	10
Bushey	3,420	12,550	14,114	13,721	13,984	11
Uxbridge	11,598	42,800	45,498	47,874	47,772	11
Banstead	7,762	27,500	31,443	31,211	31,341	14
Cheshunt	10,220	32,830	37,448	37,711	37,682	14
Feltham	10,079	30,450	36,349	36,109	36,019	18
Staines	8,114	29,920	35,122	36,206	35,691	19
Potters Bar	4,392	12,010	14,798	14,980	14,707	22
Sunbury	5,760	16,580	20,356	20,410	20,396	23
Barnet Rural District	2,189	9,089	11,824	11,706	11,662	28
Hayes and Harlington	13,994	43,930	55,394	56,189	56,920	29
Ruislip-Northwood	10,994	40,820	52,526	52,949	53,599	31
Outer London	1,211,024	4,670,343	3,952,352	3,948,999	3,934,744	-16

Table 4.2 – Detailed Analysis of Air Raid Casualties during main London Blitz.
Source: Dunn, *Emergency Medical Services*, p.214.

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
West Ham	1,525	207.4	823	1,094	2,836	4,753	18.6	3.1
Croydon	1,193	60.3	434	584	1,486	2,504	10.3	2.1
Ilford	769	58.3	213	750	855	1,818	10.7	2.4
East Ham	778	149.7	364	401	675	1,440	11.0	1.9
Willesden	602	83.2	250	459	566	1,275	6.2	2.1
Tottenham	302	64.1	194	501	505	1,200	8.1	4.0
Walthamstow	482	71.0	125	194	865	1,184	8.9	2.5
Hendon	499	30.8	194	333	627	1,154	7.1	2.3
Barking	505	77.4	129	261	654	1,044	12.3	2.1
Bexley	609	80.0	89	318	538	945	11.8	1.6
Leyton	441	108.8	170	287	480	937	8.0	2.1
Ealing	622	45.6	190	269	442	901	5.6	1.4
Dagenham	486	46.2	129	259	334	722	6.7	1.5
Bromley	759	74.5	166	224	316	706	11.8	0.9
Beckenham	757	81.6	185	120	396	701	9.7	0.9
Hornsey	319	71.1	112	196	301	609	6.4	1.9
Edmonton	237	38.9	90	187	285	562	5.2	2.4
Chislehurst and Sidcup	836	59.7	94	154	285	533	7.6	0.6
Erith	429	71.2	61	154	282	497	12.4	1.2
Acton	330	91.1	90	130	274	494	7.2	1.5
Southgate	218	37.1	91	201	202	494	7.6	2.3
Wanstead and Woodford	312	52.2	124	143	225	492	8.8	1.6

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
Wembley	499	50.7	96	160	195	451	3.8	0.9
Heston and Isleworth	346	30.5	144	136	164	444	4.2	1.3
Wimbledon	276	55.0	104	112	218	434	7.2	1.6
Mitcham	306	66.6	87	153	186	426	6.0	1.4
Twickenham	495	44.8	100	153	169	422	4.7	0.9
Harrow	418	21.3	102	115	203	420	2.3	1.0
Enfield	383	19.8	60	79	228	367	3.6	1.0
Merton and Morden	402	79.5	104	52	208	364	4.9	0.9
Richmond	355	53.5	84	160	114	358	9.2	1.0
Sutton and Cheam	305	45.0	80	177	80	337	3.9	1.1
Barnes	224	54.1	56	94	169	319	7.6	1.4
Finchley	229	42.2	69	82	166	317	4.7	1.4
Brentford and Chiswick	298	77.9	45	72	192	309	5.0	1.03
Carshalton	202	38.6	29	63	212	304	5.0	1.5
Wood Green	192	76.5	52	76	172	300	5.6	1.6
Penge	145	120.5	38	50	209	297	10.6	2.0
Orpington	1,278	39.2	51	60	172	283	5.4	0.2
Barnet Urban District	128	19.1	111	68	103	282	11.3	2.2
Coulsdon and Purley	677	38.9	37	83	162	282	4.5	0.4
Chingford	186	41.5	67	63	145	275	6.4	1.5

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
Malden and Coombe	470	95.1	59	102	98	259	6.2	0.6
Hayes and Harlington	188	23.3	17	98	130	245	5.3	1.3
Kingston	83	38.2	52	42	148	242	6.2	2.9
Staines	117	9.1	14	45	174	233	7.3	2.0
Chigwell	653	46.6	70	68	86	224	8.3	0.3
Epsom and Ewell	427	32.4	19	51	144	214	3.6	0.5
Southall	126	31.0	19	64	82	165	3.1	1.3
Crayford	390	92.4	32	51	69	152	5.8	0.4
East Barnet	99	24.0	10	47	84	141	4.5	1.4
Surbiton	251	34.1	29	42	69	140	2.7	0.6
Beddington and Wallington	214	44.9	32	30	77	139	3.9	0.6
Ruislip-Northwood	256	24.9	22	39	71	132	2.6	0.5
Feltham	228	20.6	6	22	77	105	2.3	0.5
Esher	461	19.8	13	37	50	100	2.3	0.2
Uxbridge	197	12.3	9	27	64	100	2.0	0.5
Sunbury	176	19.9	19	10	48	77	3.5	0.4
Friern Barnet	106	50.6	48	12	13	73	2.6	0.7
Banstead	462	23.1	7	23	34	64	2.1	0.13
Cheshunt	230	17.4	3	9	49	61	3.4	0.3
Waltham Holy Cross	372	21.7	-	11	34	45	6.4	0.1
Potters Bar	182	18.6	5	8	13	26	1.7	0.1

Borough	Bombs all calibres	Bombs per sq. mile	Casualties: Killed	Casualties: Admitted to hospital	Casualties: Treated at first aid-posts	Casualties: Total	Casualties per 1,000 of population	Casualties per bomb
Yiewsley and West Drayton	103	12.4	1	3	20	24	1.3	0.2
Bushey	98	16.2	2	-	11	13	0.9	0.1
Barnet Rural District	233	17.9	-	-	12	12	1.2	0.1
Outer London	26,476	-	6,321	10,068	18,553	34,942	-	-

Eve of the main London Blitz – [June – September 1940]

Before we begin to explore the outer London local blitz response it is worth reminding ourselves of the degree of planning and preparation in the boroughs of East Ham, Croydon and Acton when we last left them at the point war was declared. In East Ham after a much delayed start and muddled progress ARP plans by the County Borough were seen as incomplete and rushing to be ready on time. To the south the fellow County Borough of Croydon could not have portrayed a greater contrast with a proven record of tackling civil defence with alacrity, energetically setting out a programme of shelter provision and having considered the need for post-raid services. As we saw in chapter two plans by MCC to provide a county wide civil defence scheme collapsed by the time of hostilities which subsequently saw the responsibility falling mostly upon the unprepared shoulders of Acton and the other constituent boroughs.

LCC social worker Irene Anderton Naylor herding the evacuation of children at East Acton Station on the day war broke out confided to her diary her feelings upon the instantaneous sounding of the subsequent air raid siren.

> The sirens begin to sound. We wonder if it is a practice, but decide that it must be the real thing. We scatter about the building in small groups. I go to the basement, where I have previously been working, with about four others. Some of us try on our gas-masks and adjust the straps, etc. Somebody puts up the shutters. We sit there keeping perhaps rather self-consciously calm and cheerful. My predominant feeling is one of admiration for Hitler's thoroughness in timing the first raid so accurately. When I afterwards find out that it is a "wash-out" I feel rather disappointed in him.[726]

The following spring the *Acton Gazette* reported the entry of Belgian and Dutch refugees into the borough who had, "…narrowly escaped death when German bombers raided Brussels and Ostend".[727]

[726] MOA, SxMOA 1/4/12/2, MO Diarist Irene Mary Anderton Naylor 3 September 1939.
[727] Maureen Colledge, *Tin Hats, Doodlebugs and Food Rations – Memories of Acton in World War 2* (2014), p.43.

As we know from chapter one Croydon airport was the largest in London which at the outbreak of hostilities became RAF Croydon forming part of No.11 Group, Fighter Command.[728] On 4 June 1940 Home Intelligence Reports recorded that a minority of Croydon residents had requested to be evacuated owing to the fact that the aerodrome was so close at hand.[729] A fortnight later on 18 June, exactly one week before Vere Hodgson in Kensington would hear her first wartime air raid, actual bombs fell on Croydon signifying the first munitions to land within the bounds of Greater London. The advent of bombing was in itself a somewhat minor occurrence with a single enemy aircraft releasing six fifty kilo HE bombs in the vicinity of the village of Addington. Falling in a line sixty yards before a row of council cottages the blast smashed windows and brought down ceiling plaster. Although more significant harm was sustained to the rectory on the opposite side of the road all of the damage was repaired the following day.[730] The raid itself was so limited that many in Croydon remained in ignorance of the incident.[731] Nevertheless increased anxiety resulted with those residents next to Croydon aerodrome who had earlier chosen not to evacuate now expressing doubts, "as stray bombs are bound to miss their objectives".[732] For the people of Croydon these fears were very soon about to be realised.

A month later on 18 July the County Borough of East Ham received a brief introduction into what was on offer from the Luftwaffe. During the early hours four to five HE bombs fell upon a patch of allotments lying before the Barking by-pass. In three cases bombs fell upon open land whilst the fourth demolished a tool shed. Whilst this may appear to have been only the briefest of skirmishes, had the bombs been released a few seconds earlier they would have likely hit the Beckton Gasworks or a few seconds later struck the densely populated Borough of Barking. Over the course of the next few days bombs continued to drop during the night of 22 – 23 July.[733] Sharing some of the same dockside features of Bermondsey the docks of East Ham would continue to receive unwelcome attention from enemy bombers in the weeks and months that lay ahead.

"At last as all was silent we came up again, and I went up to my room, all wobbly and the memory of that vicious sound haunting me. When I came down a few minutes after, I saw K + D + the children sitting on the floor outside dining room door, D said the planes were over again – and then the siren

[728] Douglas Cluett, Joanna Bogle, Bob Learmouth, *Croydon Airport and The Battle for Britain 1939-1940* (1984), p.3.
[729] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.79.
[730] TNA, MH 101/58, Memorandum Croydon Borough War Damage to Buildings 19 July 1940.
[731] Croydon Times, *Croydon Courageous – The Story of Croydon's Ordeal and Triumph 1939-1945* (1950), 18 June 1940.
[732] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.192.
[733] TNA, MH 101/58, East Ham County Borough War Damage to Property.

sounded, so down we all went again".[734] From her home in Sutton Viola Bawtree recounts in her diary the momentous events that had occurred in nearby Croydon on 15 August. That day a formation of German Me.110 fighter bombers, escorted by Me.109 fighter planes, had penetrated to RAF Croydon striking the aerodrome and scoring direct hits against aircraft factories.[735]

A MO observer provides first-hand testimony heard through a fellow lodger who had been working in one of the aircraft factories at the time.

> 'We were in it! We were in it! Cries Mr M, rushing through the front door at about 10.30 p.m. 'We were in it!'
>
> His voice raises to a sort of ecstasy, while landlady and fellow lodgers gather round excitedly. They have been waiting for Mr M's return since they heard the 9 o'clock news; for Mr M is an engineer at the Croydon aircraft factory said to have been bombed. Mr and Mrs K, from the top floor, come rushing down the stairs to join the gathering.
>
> Mr K: 'You're back! Here you are! How was it? How did you get on? Did you see it?'
>
> Mr M: 'See it? We were in it! (he repeats the words 'in it' something like a dozen times in the first minute of conversation). 'We were in it, and I can tell you straight away, they didn't hit the aerodrome!'
>
> Mr K: 'It said they did on the news…'
>
> Mr M: 'Not the aerodrome, they hit the edges of it, and the works but not the aerodrome.'
>
> Mr M: 'The first thing we knew of it, there was a bang, not a terrific bang, it sounded as if one of the fellows had blown up one of the gas things or something like that. There was another and it wasn't until there had been three or four that we realized that there was a raid on and we were in the middle of it!...I can tell you we dived under those benches!'[736]

As the dust settled it was officially recorded that the raid occurred at 19.00 with a mixture of twenty nine HE and six IB falling upon the target area. Factories that had been hit or set on fire were the British N.S.F. Factory, Rollasons Aircraft Works, Redwing Co., Bourjois Scent Factory and Mullard Valve Factory. In total sixty three had been killed, sixty three seriously wounded, and 222 slightly injured.[737]

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[734] Imperial War Museum, 1807 Private Papers of Miss V Bawtree 15 August 1940.
[735] Richards, *The Fight at Odds*, p.170.
[736] Harrisson, *Living Through the Blitz*, p.54.
[737] The National Archives, HO 199/105, London Region and Orpington District including Croydon.

A County Borough housing estate adjacent to the aerodrome became caught up in the incident and was visited by another MO observer the following day.

> Moving across to the estate…I stopped to speak to the housewives leaning over their front gates. They told me how sudden the raid was and that they had no chance to escape to safety before the bombs dropped…A young mother said her babies in their cot were covered with plaster from the ceiling…The mess was indescribable; one house was completely demolished, the house next to it had one side shaved off exposing the interior, bed, pictures etc. At the back of the house was the bomb crater – it was terrific. The wardens said it was 45 feet in diameter and 25 feet deep. Right at the top of the crater was an Anderson shelter, one side of which had been torn off and yet the occupants, a mother and baby were safe. The husband was killed before he could reach the shelter.[738]

When the Croydon Borough ARP Committee met the next day the urgency and severity of the event justified the attendance of the Minister of Home Security Sir John Anderson.[739] Home Intelligence reported from the site, "everybody in district helping people affected by raids; excavation still going on".[740] As the Battle of Britain raged in the skies above, on the ground beneath, Croydon now felt the consequences of playing host to a strategic target. What would later come to impact upon all Londoners was felt first by Croydon residents sharing an experience that for a while was unique unto themselves.

As the month of August drew to a close the perilous position of Croydon continued to threaten. On 25 August large numbers of hostile bombers were detected flying from airbases in Holland and Brest crossing the coast to direct attacks against aerodromes including RAF Croydon.[741] At the same time the airfield was targeted civilians going about their everyday business also drew the attention of the enemy.

> The week-end which closed the month brought about twenty alerts, that on August 25th being accompanied by the machine-gunning of shopping streets. There were no casualties in the streets as the crowds scattered to shelter; but there were casualties in the dive bomber attack which occurred almost simultaneously and was aimed at the aerodrome. The bombs

[738] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/2/23/8/U, Croydon. Air Raids in Britain 1940-41.
[739] Croydon Local History Library, Croydon Borough ARP Committee Minutes 16 August 1940.
[740] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.335.
[741] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. I*, p.239.

> over-shot their target and fell on adjacent roads and houses and on Waterman's Works in Purley Way. Thirty casualties, three of them fatal, resulted.[742]

Bombs also fell upon George Street near East Croydon railway station with one HE blocking the line.[743] For Londoners living on the fringes of the capital there was now no escaping the dark shadow of war edging inexorably over them as it headed towards the metropolitan centre.

It was not just the falling ordnance but the very nature of the conflict that began to shape the lives of the Londoner and helped to characterize places such as the Municipal Borough of Acton.

> Other Londoners who never actually left the capital nevertheless moved around within it. Unmarried women who did not enter the services were directed to work in war production and this often meant moving away from home to live in places like Acton.[744]

For as we have seen previously Acton was home to a plethora of industrial businesses and establishments which were transformed into wartime manufacture including, Napier's Aircraft Factory, C.A.V. Electrical, Wilkinson Sword Factory, and Acton Ltd.[745] As we saw with the inner London boroughs this period was far more relevant than has been previously thought, for we can now understand that this was a moment of singular experience that would prepare and condition those living in outer London for the imminent arrival of the main blitz.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

On the morning of 7 September East Ham reeled from bombing the previous night. The LCDR situation report at 0600 recorded that a direct hit was scored on a shelter at the Harland and Wolff shipyard and a fire started at the Beckton Gasworks severing gas supply to eight boroughs. Severe damage had occurred to various properties including a theatre, shops, and schools, ominously the report concluded, "problem of homeless will be serious".[746] The somewhat dry iteration of bomb damage is vividly brought to life by the accounts of survivors.

> My late husband…was working on a ship repairing for Harland and Wolff. Shocked and covered in blood he tried to cycle home, but was further involved when East Ham Palace[747]

[742] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.43.
[743] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.
[744] Mack and Humphries, *The Making of Modern London*, p.159.
[745] Ibid.
[746] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.
[747] East Ham Palace was the East Ham Palace Theatre.

> was hit. Brought home by wardens, he was taken back to the scene on Sunday morning by the police for a roll-call. He then heard he lost 26 mates working immediately with him.[748]

Unfortunately for East Ham residents the borough would not have any breathing space from this onslaught as the bombers prepared their immediate return.

East Ham was positioned immediately before the fleet of German bombers as they flew up the Thames to attack the docks of the Port of London during the afternoon and evening of Saturday 7 September. Eleven year old school boy Maurice Goymer recalled the impact he witnessed upon his neighbours, "I remember as I ran to my home and saw the looks of strain on the faces of our neighbours. The looks almost said, 'why us?' Many of the men had been through the hell of the Great War, and I could feel the disbelief that it was starting all over again for them – and after so many years".[749] In the aftermath on Monday 9 September Home Intelligence showed that what was beginning to shape blitz experience was not just the bombs falling on you, but where you happened to be at the time.

> No signs of defeatism except among small section of elderly women in 'front line' such as East Ham who cannot stand constant bombing. Districts sustaining only one or two shocks soon rally, but in Dockside areas the population is showing visible signs of nerve cracking from constant ordeals. Old women and mothers are undermining morale of young women and men by their extreme nervousness and lack of resilience. Men state they cannot sleep because they must keep up the morale of their families and express strong desire to get families away from danger areas. Families clinging together, however, and any suggestions of sending children away without mothers and elderly relations considered without enthusiasm.[750]

Residents now took stock, "People congregated in the street to talk. We were still in a state of shock at the happenings…What were we going to do? How would we cope if this was to continue?"[751]

As air raids became a regular daily occurrence IB were beginning to strike their targets in Acton. Over two consecutive days on 25 and 26 September the Mond Nickel company factory and Evershed and Vignolles factory had both become conflagrations.[752] Local diarist Henry St. John noted during this week, " 'at East Acton a house just north of the station had something through the roof' and four

[748] Bloch, *Black Saturday*, p.11.
[749] Maurice Goymer, *Bombs, Stinging Nettles and Doodlebugs* (2006), p.55.
[750] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.407.
[751] Goymer, *Bombs, Stinging Nettles and Doodlebugs*, p.59.
[752] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.

days later observed that Gunnersbury Lane was cordoned off due to an unexploded bomb".[753] On 27 September the destructive power of a single HE bomb was demonstrated when it struck number 22 Faraday Road. The crater created was forty one feet wide by twenty feet deep, wrecking not just number 22 but also numbers 20, 24 and 26. Neighbouring properties number 18 through to number 30 were so badly damaged as to require demolition. Along Faraday Road a total of eight houses were uninhabitable. Even in adjacent roads in Allison Road and Brougham Road some properties were no longer safe to live in.[754] To end the month of September further bomb damage reads like a directory of factories in the borough, on 29 September S and G. Brown Ltd, and Strachans Ltd. were struck, the next night it was the turn of Hoopers (Coach Builders) Ltd., Napier and Sons, Ltd., Bowden (Engineers) Ltd., G. Beaton and Sons, Ltd., and Renaults Factory[755] all drawing the fire of the enemy.

The haphazard nature of bombs tumbling from the sky often resulted in striking terrifyingly vulnerable targets as was the case in Croydon on the night of 10 October.

> During a heavy raid, an enormous uprush of white light, like a gigantic mushroom with a huge black cap, which threw the whole district to the farthest horizons into dazzling illumination. It lasted a few seconds only and gave place to intense darkness. A bomber had scored a direct hit on the largest gas-holder at the Gas Works in Thornton Road, and nearly five thousand cubic feet of gas had ignited as one scorching flame.[756]

Whilst the resulting impact was the loss of gas supply to the area the actual numbers of casualties was remarkably light with only minor injuries to six people who had survived the demolition of three houses.[757]

The impact of air raids upon the daily lives of Actonians is best illustrated by quoting at length from the diary of local resident A. K. Goodlet.

> Monday 14 October 1940
>
> …In the afternoon I went to Acton Vale to pay the interest on Mater's Machine, and saw that last night's raid had done immense damage around the Vale and Chiswick…The night's raid started at dinner and is still going on now, 12.30. It has been very bad, the lights have been cut off and this accentuates the effect…We have had the Vickers in and also another neighbour, a Miss Herbert, is staying the night.

[753] Oates, *Acton*, p.104.
[754] Ealing Local History Library, Acton World War II Incident Reports.
[755] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/2, LCDR Situation Reports.
[756] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.50.
[757] Ibid.

Friday 18 October 1940

Had rather a crowded journey back here and found the Aunts all right, but very shaky. To-night, after dinner, we have had another beastly hammering, far too close to be pleasant, and I have persuaded the Aunts to go down to Ine's to-morrow for a rest.

Friday 25 October 1940

…Arrived here in the dark in the hell of another ruddy raid and found the house all right. The Vickers most kindly asked me (in) and gave me a charming supper and, after chatting to them for an hour I came down here and saw to one or two small matters, and am now having a cup of tea beside the gas fire.[758]

This constant disruption into everyday life was set only to continue.

As we were able to see with the three metropolitan London boroughs we can now at this point appreciate the impact air raids were having upon the demographics of suburbia. In addition to the evacuation of children and more affluent Londoners having the means to move away having already done so, by new year 1941 following weeks of bombardment there were considerably fewer inhabitants remaining. In mid - 1938 the population of East Ham was recorded at 129,500 which had fallen by 18 January 1941 to 80, 765, a decline of thirty eight per cent. Whilst not one of my boroughs studied it is worth at this stage looking to the immediate adjacent borough of West Ham. It is a worthy comparator for both were County Boroughs, outside the London administrative area, yet show a marked contrast in population patterns. West Ham was a far more populous borough whose population stood at 254, 900 people in 1938. By the commencement of 1941 this had dropped dramatically to 118, 722 a fifty three per cent fall in the number of people living in the borough. It is quite remarkable to see such a differentiation between two neighbouring boroughs which can be explained only when one takes into account the agency of locality working upon the variance of air raiding and the subsequent response.[759] Much further out on the London periphery the population of Croydon stood at 243, 400 in mid-1938 that had dwindled by twenty six per cent to 179, 721 in January 1941. The Municipal Borough of Acton was recorded as being home to 68, 670 persons in 1938 which had depreciated by twenty eight per cent to 49, 467 in January 1941.[760] Within the three outer boroughs we can therefore see quite a discrepancy from the thirty eight per

[758] ELHL, A. K. Goodlet – His Journal. Vol 14 July – December 1940.
[759] Testament to this can be found in *War Over West Ham* by E. Doreen Idle who we have already noted conducted contemporary research on behalf of the Fabian Society into the implications of severe air raiding upon life in the area.
[760] TNA, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.

cent drop in East Ham's population compared with just twenty eight per cent for Acton and twenty six per cent for Croydon. When we compare these rates of population decline against the average figure for the three metropolitan London boroughs of forty four per cent we can clearly see a marked variance between inner and outer boroughs.

By early spring 1941 the attacks against East Ham continued with a particularly bad night befalling the borough on 27 February. Between 2100 and 2117 four powerful parachute mines landed, one of which did not explode, but the three that did caused widespread carnage. A canteen at the Isolation Hospital, at the time being used by the Pioneer Corp, was completely demolished resulting in a number of military casualties. The final toll for East Ham that night stood at twenty killed, thirty five seriously injured and 100 slightly injured. Over 3,000 residents were evacuated or made homeless as a result of this sole unexploded parachute mine.[761]

Not since the raid upon Croydon aerodrome the previous summer had the County Borough experienced one of such magnitude as that which took place during the night of 16 – 17 April. Over a period of six hours bombers dropped a total of eighty six HE bombs and three parachute mines.[762] Chief amongst the events that took place occurred at the Queen's Road Homes a public assistance hospital for the elderly. A MHS incident report describes what took place.

> At 22.50 hours on the 16th April – bright moonlight illuminating the town – one of the firewatchers on the tower in the centre of the block of buildings saw a land-mine attached to a parachute coming down. He had not time to reach the bottom of the staircase before the explosion occurred. The male casual ward was totally demolished, the southern end of the west wing of the main block was partially wrecked and considerable damage was done to the remaining portion of homes. The total fatal casualties amounted to 15, (all male inmates), and 12 cases of injury, (also amongst male inmates who had, for one reason or another, not sought shelter). Most of those killed and injured were, however, the bed ridden occupants of the lower ward…who were crushed below the ceiling of the ward above upon which a heavy water tank collapsed.[763]

Elsewhere a second mine struck Limes Avenue wrecking or damaging every house in the road as well as in nearby Lodge Avenue, Wandle Side, Waddon Court Road, Mill Lane, and Purley Way from Alton Road to Jennett Road. The incidents described here were just two of sixty others that occurred

[761] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/5, LCDR Situation Reports.
[762] C. L. Dunn, *The Emergency Medical Services – Volume II Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Principal Air Raids on Industrial Centres in Great Britain* (1953), p.273.
[763] The National Archives, HO 186/2379, Incident Reports Croydon.

which in total claimed the lives of seventy six people, seriously injuring ninety one with sixty five slightly injured, all of whom were unfortunate enough to happen to be in Croydon at the time.

Meanwhile in Acton, "…my mother ran. She ran like the wind before the coming storm. She saw everyday what the bombs could do. She'd seen her friends get torn apart, the odd limb hanging on the lampposts after a raid",[764] recalled Terence Nelhams-Wright (later better known as Adam Faith) when looking back upon his early childhood years. Whilst the last major raid of 10 May was seen as bringing to a close the period of the main London blitz the final bombs to strike Acton did not fall until 7 June when damage was caused to the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) works and Acton Town station signal cabin.[765] Throughout the bombing raids of 1940 – 1941 Acton suffered proportionately more than the neighbouring boroughs of Ealing and Southall. A total of 330 HE, several parachute mines and thousands of incendiaries fell on the borough causing the deaths of ninety people, 130 seriously injured and a further 274 slightly hurt.[766]

The official history of Croydon records the period as,

> This first and greatest epoch in the life of the town, 362 people had been killed, 672 had been sent to hospitals, 813 had been dealt with by first aid posts and 448 sent home after treatment. The damage had been beyond anything experienced in former wars, 1,099 houses had been destroyed, 26, 099 had been damaged and of these 2,665 so badly that they could not be used without substantial repair.[767]

A tumultuous time of fire, explosion, death and destruction brought down from the skies above East Ham, Croydon and Acton.

Shelters

Eve of the main London Blitz

"East Ham citizens who may be doubtful or apprehensive that the borough's A.R.P. arrangements are as adequate as they might be, would be well advised to put any such ideas right out of their heads, and cease to worry along those lines",[768] declared the *East Ham Echo* on 8 September 1939. During this first month of war the county borough now turned to transforming a number of basements into shelters to augment the typical mixture of domestic and public shelters on offer. The East Ham Town Clerk now began to serve notice upon shop owners along main thoroughfares that

[764] Adam Faith, *Acts of Faith* (1996), p.3.
[765] TNA, HO 186/952, LCDR (Intelligence Branch Report No.13).
[766] Dennis Upton, *Ealing, Acton and Southall at War* (2009), pps. 43-46.
[767] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.63.
[768] *East Ham Echo,* 8 September 1939.

the council intended to take over their basements and by the end of September work was underway in 141 premises to provide shelters originally intended for those out in the streets during an air raid.[769]

During the same period in the County Borough of Croydon, "the continuing preoccupation was shelters".[770] The first type of shelter initially developed were a series of trenches dug into such places as Blake's Meadow on Duppas Hill, Grangewood, and in South Norwood and Thornton Heath recreation grounds. Trench shelters were also excavated in the grounds of the Mayday and Warlingham Park Hospitals. These shelters varied from six to eight feet in depth with the majority covered over, lit by electricity, and furnished with sanitary arrangements.[771] On 15 September the ARP Emergency Committee published a statement of public shelter provision demonstrating the number of people who could be accommodated in the borough.

	Completed	Under Construction
Concrete and Timber Trenches	3,390	-
Temporary Trenches (Breast High)	1,620	-
Concrete Tubes	170	775
Temporary Basements	800	-
Strengthened Basements	817	7,711
Surface Shelters	150	2,530
Totals	6,947	11,016

It is worth noticing that the total number of shelter places available to the public was far less than the total to be completed in the future, for despite war having been declared, there remained an amount of catching up to do.[772]

In East Ham a perceived urgency to provide shelter for the prevalent busy shopping areas had now become a fixation for the local authority. On 20 October Mr J. E. Austin Chief ARP Warden proclaimed in a statement to the *East Ham Echo,*

> Anyone who has passed through High-Street on any shopping-day, and especially on a Saturday, must be concerned at the prospect of seeking shelter in the event of a raid. It should be the concern of everybody to know how the shelters which have been, and are being, completed by the corporation, will be controlled. Some of our citizens must be

[769] Ibid, 29 September 1939.
[770] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.15.
[771] Ibid.
[772] Croydon Local History Library, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 15 September 1939.

> prepared to assist in the control of them, to prevent panic, and persons with some training and with some ability to control must volunteer for the work. This is an immediate necessity, and I hope that citizens will respond to the appeal of the Mayor for wardens to control the public shelters.[773]

Less than a month later Admiral Sir Edward Evans, one of London's two Civil Defence Regional Commissioners, paid an official visit. Upon seeing public basement shelters situated on main shopping streets he exclaimed that the scheme, "was a triumph for the corporation". Despite recent concerns and the fact construction began only shortly before war commenced the programme was virtually complete. By November 222 basement shelters had been provided able to accommodate 13,500 people. They were located throughout the borough with seventy four on High Street North (4,750 persons), twenty seven along High Street South (1,560), thirty eight in Barking Road (2,440), thirty two on Green Street (1,740), forty six based on Romford Road (2,780), and five for Station Road (240).[774]

Elsewhere the Croydon ARP Emergency Committee at its meeting on 21 November resolved "that the Home Office be asked to agree to the provision of shelter accommodation for a further 5,000 in view of the large population coming into Croydon daily".[775] Croydon Council had by this time already prepared or was in the process of completing public shelters for 24,000 people or ten per cent of the borough population in accordance with HO regulations.[776] Just who were the additional people entering Croydon who required this additional public shelter? The answer can be found in a letter from E. Taberner Croydon Town Clerk to LCDR.

> Having regard, however, to the large population coming into Croydon for shopping and amusements, the numerous railway stations within the Borough (13 in all), the important flow of traffic through the main roads of the town and the big movement of traffic by tram, 'bus and trolley 'bus, it has been found necessary to concentrate the greater population of the above shelter accommodation in the three main shopping districts of the Borough somewhat to the detriment of areas which, while not so important, require more shelter accommodation than it has been found possible to allot.[777]

[773] *East Ham Echo*, 20 October 1939.
[774] Ibid, 10 November 1939.
[775] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 21 November 1939.
[776] TNA, HO 207/974, Letter from Croydon Town Clerk E. Taberner to Chief Administrative Officer LCDR 24 November 1939.
[777] Ibid.

The request to sanction extra shelter capacity was subsequently agreed to in principle by the RTA.[778] From looking at both East Ham and Croydon we can see that these two retail centres were a magnet for people. Given the large size of Croydon it is possible to imagine a resident in Addington only ever having to travel into central Croydon for their shopping, never needing to step outside the borough bounds, proving that local streets, presented local difficulties, requiring local solutions.

In East Ham along Whitta Road the proximity of the railway line left little space in back gardens for the construction of Anderson shelters. The London and North Eastern Railway Company had agreed to lease land for the erection of shelters and rent negotiations continued that autumn with the local authority.[779] Other infrastructure in the borough caused concern especially around the West Ham football ground which was actually situated in East Ham. The HO repeatedly tried to reassure the Emergency Committee that the re-opening of football grounds was not regarded as involving any necessity for additional shelter provision.[780] Towards the end of the year the RTA noted,

> The public shelter scheme at East Ham consists almost entirely of basements…and it will be observed that the accommodation provided in these basements is 13,527 or just over 10% [residential population]. This scheme has been carried out with my approval as being the most suitable for the borough.[781]

Whilst the shelter provision in East Ham was tailored to the bespoke requirements of the borough, others matters were raising prudish eyebrows in Croydon with the authority directing, "that demonstration Anderson shelters should be dismantled and removed as they were alleged to be a source of moral danger to young people".[782]

During this same period of activity the development of shelters in the Municipal Borough of Acton appeared dilatory by comparison. In a letter dated 21 November C. G. Barnett, RTA, wrote to the Acton Borough Engineer, copying in the MCC ARP Officer, on the subject of public shelters.

> Your total shelter programme now amounts to 4,507 persons or only about 5% of your day population. I think it is very desirable that your complete scheme should be prepared with as little delay as possible.[783]

[778] TNA, HO 207/974, Letter from LCDR to Croydon Town Clerk E. Taberner 8 December 1939.
[779] Newham Local History Library, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 17 November 1939.
[780] Ibid. 24 November 1939.
[781] TNA, HO 207/595, Minute by RTA 5 December 1939.
[782] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 15 December 1939.
[783] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/WAR/2/002, Middlesex County Council 21 November 1939.

The decentralisation of civil defence responsibilities from MCC to Acton placed the borough in stark contrast to the county boroughs of East Ham and Croydon who had always been completely autonomous and solely responsible for civil defence. The closest comparator to the relationship between Acton and MCC would be that of the metropolitan boroughs and LCC, a relationship that nonetheless has been described as subordinate but autonomous.[784] All of which serves to remind us that the sudden reset in administrative arrangements for Acton set it apart from the other five boroughs studied.

In early 1940 difficulties between Acton and MCC resulted in the need for a conference on 12 February between the respective civil defence committees. The meeting began with the Chairman of the Borough Council, "expressing the hope that the discussion to follow would remove the trouble which existed in the borough in connection with Air Raid Precautions…his committee felt that it had not the co-operation of the county committee it was entitled to expect and he hoped that after the meeting a more harmonious state of affairs would exist". A catalogue of misgivings was subsequently recorded for the minutes.

> *Drainage of Public Trenches*
>
> The Town Clerk stated that his Borough had submitted its proposals in connection with drainage of trenches as long ago as October last but no approval to the expenditure involved had yet been received. The Borough Engineer stated that the flooding of trenches in the Borough was a most serious problem and while approval of his Committee's proposals had been awaited expenditure of £20 per week had necessarily been incurred on pumping. Despite this, for the most part the trenches are unusable and if the necessity arose to utilise the trenches it would be the local council who would be blamed by the residents.
>
> *Delay in obtaining approval to proposals*
>
> The Chairman stated that his Borough still has a number of proposals outstanding and asked that early consideration should be given to these. The complaint was made mainly against schemes which had been submitted some considerable time ago, proposals which had been submitted more recently having received early attention.
>
> *Cost of Domestic Surface Shelters*
>
> The chairman stated that his Committee is most concerned over a recent letter received from the clerk of the County Council in which it is stated that the County Council has no

[784] Calder, *People's War*, p.199.

> responsibility in connection with expenditure to be incurred on the erection of Communal Domestic Surface Shelters. The County Civil Defence Committee had approved some of his Committee's proposals for such shelters and it was naturally assumed that the expenditure involved would be recognised by the County Council for Air Raid Precautions grant.
>
> It was stated in reply that it appeared on advice that the County Council had no statutory power to incur expenditure on these shelters, but that the matter is being fully investigated, and although there may be no legal responsibility to do so, it may be that the County Council, provided that the expenditure will rank for grant, will voluntarily undertake to bear the cost.
>
> The Chairman of the local committee stated that his Committee is unwilling to continue with the carrying out of its proposals in the matter until the County Council has accepted financial responsibility.[785]

Thus, shelter provision in Acton, in addition to overcoming the commonplace obstacles we have seen elsewhere, also had to cut back and clear an entangled thicket of misunderstanding and bureaucratic hindrance.

In the weeks leading up to the first bombs dropping on Croydon the local authority now proposed to even further augment public shelter provision. The ARP Committee on 21 May approved a list of sites for surface shelters to house 4,800 persons. Bringing the total public shelter accommodation in Croydon to approximately 35,000 or provision for 14.5 per cent of the normal population. In places where Anderson shelters could not be raised, for example in blocks of flats, plans were in place to construct twenty eight communal domestic shelters for 1,112 residents.[786] On 18 June, as high explosives descended from above, the local authority upped the ante and prepared schemes for more public shelters to take in 10,000 people bringing the total amount of public shelter capacity to 45,000.[787]

Meanwhile Acton Borough Council continued to press ahead with developing sufficient shelter accommodation for their residents with plans to site a trench shelter at the junctions of Noel Road and Saxon Drive. This was seen as an apposite location given the proximity of shops, flats and West Acton station. A view not shared by the Great Western (London) Village Society who objected to the

[785] London Metropolitan Archives, MCC/MIN/8/2, County Council of Middlesex Civil Defence Committee Minute Book No.2 29 February 1940.
[786] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 21 May 1940.
[787] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 18 June 1940.

use of this site as it would interfere with the pastoral appearance of the Society's Estate.[788] Elsewhere at this late juncture a shift in policy by MCC towards the type of alternative to the Anderson shelter badly rebounded upon the Acton ARP Committee.

> The Middlesex County Council have now decided that the alternative form of domestic shelter should, wherever possible, be of the communal domestic type. This new policy has necessitated the abandonment of plans and details already prepared for accommodating 5,000 people in domestic shelters.[789]

On 9 July officers from Acton reported to the Middlesex Civil Defence Committee that the amount of public shelter accommodation required amounted to 7,996 persons, work had been completed for 4,783 with construction ongoing for a further 2,314,[790] almost one thousand short of the total needed.

In Croydon on 16 August Viola Bawtree suddenly found herself in need of public shelter whilst travelling home on the bus, "the conductor called out 'all change here! Hurry up! and we all got out and trooped across to the shelter in the allotments. Quite a lot went in and I feel in a sort of nightmare! There was nowhere to sit and a very young baby near me cried incessantly. Lots of people smoked, and the air got a bit warm".[791] As Croydon aerodrome continued to be targeted a MO observer set out to investigate the trench shelters on Duppas Hill.

> 17 August 1940
>
> Observer goes across the park to Duppas Hill again. This time some people are running and nobody is sitting about or standing round the entrances. In Observers part of the shelter there are about 20 people, housewives and workmen mainly, with two commercial travellers and one or two people out for morning strolls. The housewives start to smoke and are told that smoking is not allowed; one says "oh, of course, I was thinking we were in our own shelter, we can there".
>
> Aeroplanes are heard loudly overhead. People stop talking for a little while. There is a thud that might be a bomb. One woman says "I'm not scared but it makes you feel funny, doesn't it?"

[788] LMA, MCC/MIN/8/3, County Council of Middlesex Civil Defence Committee 21 May 1940.
[789] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 7 June 1940.
[790] LMA, MCC/MIN/8/4, County Council of Middlesex Civil Defence Committee 9 July 1940.
[791] IWM, 1807 Private Papers of Miss V Bawtree 16 August 1940.

> After about a quarter of an hour some people go up the steps out of the shelter and look round. Twice while they are up there an aeroplane comes over and most of them run down again.
>
> The report concluded that, "before the end of it people were out of their shelters, and many of them carrying on with their normal business".[792]

Later that month Home Intelligence reported on 26 August, "East Ham has recruited 10,500 volunteers for Mutual Aid for Good Neighbours Association to provide in each street supplementary system to Civil Defence".[793] What exactly was the Mutual Aid for Good Neighbours Association (MAGNA)? The answer can be found in a MO report.

> East Ham has always been a socially conscious borough; it has always been pointed out as an example in respect of some borough publicity scheme or other; it was here that the idea of MRA originated;[794] and now in wartime, ARP has caught on in a typical manner.
>
> Nearly every house bears a window card – many bear three or four, W for Water, C for Comfort, F for Fire, X for First Aid, notices about shelters, stirrup pumps, intelligence announcements, scrap collection, crush baskets[795] hang outside all over town; lectures and demonstrations are announced on every hoarding.
>
> Mass Observation interviewed the East Ham Deputy Chief Warden and was left with the impression, "the whole department appeared to be ALIVE, which is something one seldom finds in these war-time organisations (Stepney Food Office which is the slowest and dullest place imaginable) charts on the wall, and general schemes betrayed initiative and imagination". According to the warden one of their organising difficulties was an amount of "over-enthusiasm".[796]

A remarkable feature of MAGNA was the voluntary nature of the organisation as explained to the investigator, "The whole thing was done by the people. There was no aid except the training and the organisation. Street Committees were set up, and they had meetings at schools, sometimes with as

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[792] MOA, SxMOA 1/2/23/8/U, Croydon Air Raid Alarm 17 August 1940.
[793] Addison and Crang (eds), *Listening to Britain*, p.367.
[794] In May 1938 Dr Frank Buchman from Pennsylvania called for Moral Re-armament (MRA) at a meeting at East Ham Town Hall, arguing that it was not military rearmament that was needed, but spiritual re-armament – 'guidance not guns'. "The revivalist energy of MRA, its promise of a fresh start, of a better life, of peace in a world where war was again beginning to threaten, of a higher authority that would take charge, was particularly attractive to young men disillusioned with the 'old gang' of secular and religious leaders". (Gardiner, *The Thirties*, pps.503-507.).
[795] Unknown despite research.
[796] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/2/65/3/H, East Ham London Week 5: 24-30 August 1940.

many as 300 in a school". MAGNA had now become a pertinent variable in shelter provision, "the shelter people put signs in their windows, saying that there is room for 'so many' people in his shelter, and then, when there's a raid, any passer-by can use the shelter and get a cup of tea, if they're lucky". The following interview with an East Ham resident on 28 August helps to draw out the detail of the initiative.

East Ham 28 August 1940 House with shelter card in window.

Investigator: - asks about MAGNA, how she belonged to it, etc.

Woman: Oh, you mean that window card. Oh I don't really know very much about it.

Investigator: How did you get it, then?

Woman: Well, you see, a woman came round, and I was standing at the gate, and she said would I put one in my window, if I'd got any room to spare in my shelter. And I said 'Yes' – well, it all helps, doesn't it? But as for what it is, I couldn't say much.

Investigator: Do you know what MAGNA stands for?

Woman: Oh, no – nothing like that. I really don't know much about it. I believe they're got different ones, for first aid, and stirrup pumps, and so on, all to try and help a bit.

Investigator: And have you met any other MAGNA people socially?

Woman: No – only those I knew already. There's a lot down this road, but as a matter of fact, there must be a lot who've got the cards and haven't bothered to shew them because there's a lot with shelters round here. It's only for the day-time, you see – not the night, because everybody's at home in the night.[797]

This casual almost off hand conversation nonetheless provides us with an understanding into this resourceful scheme that helped provide a unique local character to air raid shelters along the suburban streets of East Ham.

In late summer as raiding began to spread out across London region the inception of bombing started to put shelter schemes to the test. In Acton the sound of singing could be heard emanating from within public shelters, yet the Chairman of the Borough ARP Committee uttered words of caution to the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*.

[797] Ibid.

> Cllr Dobbs pointed out that these shelters were not intended for people who had Anderson shelters of their own. In East Acton, he said, it had been found that people who had their own shelters ran out to the communal shelters in the street. They felt safer with friends. They could forget themselves in the singing. But they were running a risk.
>
> "If you are alive and well ten minutes after the raid alarm", Cllr Dobbs said, "you can feel fairly safe. The first four minutes are the moments of peril. If you spend time getting up, and dressing, and collecting your things together, you may just get caught running out to the shelter. If you go to your own shelter where everything has been put ready beforehand, and make up your mind to do a bit of knitting or read a book, you will be all right". Another reason against going into a communal shelter if you had one of your own he pointed out, was that you would be taking up space which might be needed by those who had been caught in the street, or who had no shelter of their own.[798]

On 2 September reports from East Ham recorded nervousness amongst residents and low confidence in Anderson shelters, "owing to fatal casualties in shelters nearby".[799] That week local officials persuaded people on 4 September, "to get a good night's sleep by staying at home on ground floor instead of going out to uncomfortable shelters". Despite this apprehension, "people are behaving splendidly and act in orderly fashion".[800] Inside suburban air raid shelters the strength of such resolve was about to be thoroughly examined as the heavy raiding of the main London blitz was about to begin.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

Having moved during the summer of 1940 to live with her Auntie Bess and Uncle Phil in Croydon Gillian Lynne had arrived just in time to record her experiences of seeking shelter under fire.

> The bombing seemed to be getting worse each night, Auntie Bess, Uncle Phil and I spent most evenings in our basement, or under the stairs, or on particularly heavy nights in a tin Anderson shelter across the road. Some light relief came in the form of a very sprightly, slim, older man who lived on the top floor of Auntie's house and joined us downstairs in the safety of the basement when the bombing became bad. He spent all his time holding a big cushion over his head, bent double like one of the seven dwarfs, saying, 'don't be

[798] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 30 August 1940.
[799] Addison and Crang (eds), Listening to Britain, p.387.
[800] Ibid, p.392.

> frightened, Jill, don't be frightened.' The awful thing was I wasn't frightened. It was the grown-ups' fear that I remember.

When pursuing sanctuary across the road in the neighbouring Anderson shelter conditions inside were often cramped. "Inside were two rough wooden benches – shelves, really – that ran along the walls. Depending on the number of people attempting to push into it – six was the limit – I either sat squashed like a sardine or, if I was lucky enough to be the only child, I was allowed to lie down…somehow the tight-knit togetherness made the constant rain of horror from the skies tolerable".[801]

In East Ham we now find Maurice Goymer at home in the coal cellar which by happenstance was an at hand source of shelter during the major raid of 7 September.

> Mum and I sat in the cellar listening to the battle taking place overhead. We were soon able to recognise the sound of German bombers. They had a distinctive engine sound that came in waves, somewhat like wroom, wroom, wroom. I can visualise the scene as if it was yesterday. Cellars had been built in all the houses to take coal for winter use. Coal was tipped through a hole that was covered by a circular plate. It being September, there was quite a large amount of coal, to cover winter use. Mum and I sat together in the cellar and talked about the new phenomena that the day had brought…How long would these raids last?...The bomb explosions were particularly jarring; maybe this was because we were below ground level and consequently the transmission of sound was greater than it would have been if we had been above ground…The cellar could not be heated. We were cold, we were frightened, and we were beginning to feel the effects of food rationing.[802]

Later in the month an *East Ham Echo* reporter toured the ruined streets of blasted homes and discovered, "…a tapping noise coming from the wreckage. Crawling over piles of debris into what had been the garden I discovered that the noise was emanating from an Anderson shelter which was covered with debris to a depth of 5 feet".[803] Remarkably the occupants escaped unscathed not even realising that their home was no more.

After a month of sustained raiding local authorities began to review the state of their shelter provision with East Ham and Croydon now considering the possibility of deep shelters. The East Ham Town Clerk wrote to LCDR on 4 October,

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[801] Gillian Lynne, *A Dancer in Wartime* (2012), pps. 58-59.
[802] Goymer, *Bombs, Stinging Nettles and Doodlebugs*, pps. 56-62.
[803] *East Ham Echo,* 27 September 1940.

> The Emergency Committee of my Council are considering various projects in connection with public shelters…In the meantime, so that there shall be no misunderstanding either now or at a future date, the committee are not considering the construction of "deep shelters". They have learnt, however, there may be considerable unemployment amongst miners, and have thought it right at this juncture to enquire if the views of the Government on deep shelter policy is still the same, namely, that they will not be considered for grant purposes. There is, as you appreciate, a certain amount of pressure being brought from some quarters for the construction of deep shelters in the borough, but the committee are not proposing, until they are otherwise informed, to take any steps to consider their construction.[804]

Likewise a week later on 11 October the Croydon Town Clerk felt the need to contact Harold Scott LCDR Chief Administrative Officer to explain in writing, "It is understood that a number of local authorities have made representations to the Government on the question of constructing deep shelters, and while the primary concern, at the present time, of the Air Raid Precautions Committee of my Council will be to press forward with the proper equipment of the existing public shelters they wish to be associated with these representations".[805] Notwithstanding the concerns of East Ham for unemployed miners, both county boroughs nonetheless felt the need to at least demonstrate their contemplation of deep shelters.

Away to the west of London at this moment, "Acton at dusk is like a foreign city. It is so quiet. Walking up Acton Lane, a family passes, the Father carrying a huge dark red bundle on his head, the mother dragging along a delighted little boy. Trolleybuses draw up against the pavement before you know they are there. The winking traffic lights seem brighter. Your familiar streets sink into darkness. Then the alert sounds, searchlights move across the sky, and the sound of guns adds strangeness to the night". This vivid account appeared in the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* on 11 October written by a reporter visiting the variety of public shelters available in the borough.

> I went down to the trench shelter in the Woodlands…People were sitting under the hurricane lamps, talking and knitting, just as if they were round their own firesides. "Plenty of room up here", someone said, welcoming me in. They were nearly all regulars. Everybody knew the Policeman who came into look round: "Hullo, here we are again", they said.
>
> It was usually quiet, like this, a warden said. If too many people came in, he had to wake some of the men and make them sit up. But usually there was plenty of room for everyone

[804] TNA, HO 207/595, Letter from F. D. Littlewood to Chief Administrative Officer LCDR 4 October 1940.
[805] TNA, HO 207/974, Letter from Croydon Town Clerk E. Taberner to Chief Administrative Officer LCDR 11 October 1940.

> to lie down…The sound of gunfire and falling bombs could be heard quite clearly, but no-one had seemed worried by it.
>
> There was a difference of opinion about lighting. The warden thought electric lights ought to be fitted, because fumes from the lamps fouled the air and were bad for the sleepers. But the Policeman, who had been in a shelter when all the lights suddenly went out, preferred hurricane lamps. Shelterers said they like the lamps because they made a little warmth.

This article is of particular value for it offers us the seldom chance to hear the actual voices of shelter users themselves, one of whom explained, "you don't exactly book places…but if you don't get here early, it's gone!"[806]

Let us follow the *Acton Gazette* journalist as he continues his tour of public shelters and now inspects a communal shelter in Bollo Lane, "built for those who have no 'Andersons' in their gardens".

> There are two types of these brick shelters. One has a flat roof, and consists of small compartments built on each side of a passage. Each compartment shelters a family. The one I saw was bone dry and almost comfortable. The families brought in their mattresses every night. The other type has a single row of compartments, with a wall to protect the entrances against blast, and a thinner wedge-shaped roof. Disaster had happened. During the rain, water had come in and soaked the beds. Blankets had to be wrung out afterwards, and the compartments were still damp. The families were chancing it at home.
>
> Mr and Mrs R. T. Halford, of Avenue Road, Acton, were…walking along on their way to a shelter before the warning was sounded. Mr Halford had carried bundles of rugs and a bag which he said contained a thermos flask with tea, and some sandwiches. They said that although their house had not been hit by bombs, they had relatives on the coast who had been bombed out, and Mrs. Halford was anxious not to stay at home during the night raids. "The shelter we use", said Mrs. Halford, "quite orderly, although sometimes we are a bit pushed for room".
>
> "I should like to see sleeping accommodation put in, as some of the older people find it uncomfortable to sit up a long time", Mrs. Halford was very grateful to the shelter marshals, whom she said were always at pains to help anyone in trouble. She added that although the shelter was warm enough at the present, she thought heating would be needed during the

[806] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 11 October 1940.

> coming winter. Mrs. F. Jackman, of Long Drive, East Acton, who was on her way to a shelter with her little daughter when stopped by the reporter, said that she thought there ought to be more and deeper shelters.[807]

These voices of dissatisfaction would grow increasingly in volume and soon be heard ringing out right across the borough.

Despite the reservations of local residents we again see in Acton the migration of people from the hardest hit areas of the capital to what they perceived to be safer out of the way places.

> A family who used to live near the Thames side docks were in the shelter, an elderly woman, her married daughter and husband, and two children. They were all very friendly and eager to talk about their experiences. The married daughter told a reporter how she took her two children to the pictures one afternoon, a few days after mass raids on the East End began. About half-way through the programme an air raid alert was given. Immediately afterwards there was a terrific crash and the screen seemed to come out and hit the audience. She was terrified, as more bombs could be heard falling. Almost every bang was a bomb at that time, she said, because there were few guns in use. Clutching her two children tightly, she waited for the noise to die down.
>
> "We still didn't want to leave", she said, "these homes meant more to us than anything else in the world, but we couldn't possibly live there any longer". After a week or so spent in rest rooms and public shelters the whole family moved out of the East End to a safer district. They still thought it more prudent to spend their nights in a public shelter, however. By this time many other occupants of the shelter had gathered round to ask questions and voice expressions of wonder.[808]

One is left with the impression that only the violent searing experience of the blitz could break the bonds of home and force Londoners to shelter in a foreign locality becoming in the process an object of peculiar curiosity to their new neighbours.

In East Ham that autumn the unexpected heavy use of shelters, for which they were not designed, had become a serious issue as we have seen in other authorities. The Borough Engineer now sought approval from LCDR to install a ventilation plant in basement shelters. On 12 October the RTA noted, "This work was previously turned down as at that time it was considered unnecessary, but now that the basements are occupied by some people during the day and to capacity during the night,

[807] Ibid.
[808] Ibid.

ventilation appears to be essential, as the conditions are particularly bad owing to the length of time the shelters are occupied".[809]

Later in the month the East Ham Town Clerk felt compelled to write to the MHS pointing out a bone of contention with the recent announcement that whilst the government would fully reimburse the whole cost of shelter expenditure from 19 October 1940, they would not compensate boroughs for the total expenditure incurred before that date. The local authority adamantly believed that they had a special case which entitled them to be completely refunded for the cost of shelter provision based upon the following points.

> 1) That my Council's shelter policy has been a progressive one with the object of making adequate shelter provision for as many of the inhabitants of the Borough as possible.
>
> 2) That the present position in the borough is, in common with other areas which have been subjected to heavy hostile air attack, a matter for serious concern to the authority due to the destruction of property and the evacuation of many of the inhabitants.
>
> 3) That the policy hitherto adopted by the Council in providing shelters would appear to their disadvantage in comparison with other authorities whose policy has not been so progressive and who are now forced to provide more shelter accommodation, for which they will receive full reimbursement.[810]

East Ham clearly bridled at the enforcement of a London-wide one size fits all policy that failed to take into account the patchwork pattern of the myriad approaches taken by individual boroughs.

On 27 October a LCDR situation report announced, "Croydon. 21.20 – 21.40. HE and IB damage to South Croydon Railway Station and Selsdon Railway Station and Goods Yard. Also HE Wellesley Road. Electricity show room used as a public shelter".[811] From this stark bulletin it is not immediately obvious that one of the worst events of the blitz in Croydon had occurred. A heavy bomb falling at an acute angle had penetrated the ground just outside the Electric House show room inside of which was situated a large public basement shelter, equipped with a canteen, and sleeping accommodation. The subsequent explosion brought down the corner of the basement on top of the 600 inhabitants. Casualties reached 100 including ten killed, thirty one needing hospital treatment, thirty nine suffering light injuries and many treated for shock.[812]

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[809] TNA, HO 207/595, Internal Memorandum by Ronald Aries RTA LCDR 12 October 1940.
[810] TNA, HO 207/595, Letter from F. D. Littlewood East Ham Town Clerk to MHS 26 October 1940.
[811] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/5, LCDR Situation Reports.
[812] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.50.

Elsewhere in November as winter approached unhappiness with the state of Acton shelter provision now prompted the Labour opposition to table the following motion at full council.

> This Council decides to appoint a deputation to wait upon the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, or failing him, then the Parliamentary Secretary of the Minister, to urge the gravity of the problem of waterlogged public and domestic shelters and the inability of this Local Authority to restore the same to dry and habitable condition upon the basis of the specifications and instructions as issued by the Home Office.
>
> The Town Clerk is also required to inform the Middlesex County Council of this decision and all other Local Authorities in Middlesex concerned with the same problem, as we feel that this being the second winter of the war in which large numbers of our people have been deprived of shelter through the waterlogged conditions complained of, that it should now become a major problem to be dealt with immediately.[813]

Whilst the motion was not carried it nevertheless provides a barometer of the level of discontent and division felt towards the local authority.

By the end of the month local residents felt compelled themselves to act over the state of shelters with the formation of the Acton Campaign for Better Shelters Committee. The honorary secretary Mrs. Avis Clarke wrote to the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* explaining the motivation behind the initiative.

> A number of representative organisations and individuals in Acton are becoming gravely concerned at the accumulating evidence of the inadequacy of the existing shelter policy. Furthermore they are convinced that even now the best possible use is not being made of all the shelter accommodation that is available. The local authorities have been given wide powers that up till now they seem to have been reluctant to use.
>
> With these points in view there has been set up an Acton Safety and Shelter Campaign Committee which has pledged itself to work for the following programme:
>
> 1) The immediate construction of bomb-proof shelters.
>
> 2) The strengthening of existing shelters, full provision of sleeping accommodation, proper sanitation, heating and ventilation.
>
> 3) The opening of all private and business shelters to the public at night.

[813] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 29 November 1940.

4) Equipment of shelters with medical staff and supplies under supervision of the Medical Officer of Health.

5) Increase in the number of A.R.P. personnel.

6) Requisitioning and furnishing of empty flats and buildings where shelters already exist, for rehousing the homeless.

7) Provision of properly equipped rest centres.[814]

Whilst we have seen across both inner and outer London exasperation directed towards the provision of local air raid shelters this is the first time we have witnessed such disquiet prompting the formation of a voluntary body to campaign for adequate provision.

Weather conditions that winter forced the hands of Croydon Council to close a number of trench shelters. At South Norwood Recreation Ground, Woodside Green, Parchmore Road, Grangewood and Thornton Heath Recreation Ground trenches would remain open during the day yet could not be used as dormitory shelters at night owing to the wet conditions.[815] Chairman of the ARP Committee Alderman Roden stated that these shelters "were never constructed for sleeping, and I do not think it is right that women and young children should spend the night in such places…they were for emergency purposes only – for people who were on the recreation ground in day time and happened to be caught out in a raid". Despite the local authority commissioning replacement surface shelters only 150 out of a planned 2,000 communal shelters had been built owing to shortages of available labour and materials. Alderman Roden explained to the *Croydon Times*, "even if we have the materials in some instances we are faced with this question of labour".[816]

At the same time Acton Council now turned to contemplating deep shelters and on 21 December passed a motion instructing the Borough Engineer, "to submit to the next meeting of the Civil Defence Committee a draft scheme and estimate for the construction of a Haldane type[817] of shelter in Acton Park".[818] By 11 January 1941 the Borough Engineer had given his report to the Civil Defence Committee.

[814] Ibid.
[815] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 24 November 1940.
[816] *Croydon Times*, 30 November 1940.
[817] We have of course come across J.B.S. Haldane before in chapter two, the Haldane type of shelter referred to here was a surface structure divided into cells, narrow in shape and able to accommodate 700 persons. (*Municipal Journal, Local Government Administrator and Public Works Engineer* 3 January 1941.).
[818] Ealing Local History Library, Acton Borough Civil Defence Committee 21 December 1940.

> In accordance with instructions received at the last meeting of the Council the Borough Engineer has submitted a scheme for the construction of a "Haldane" type of shelter at an estimated cost of £13,000…In connection therewith we have considered Home Security Circular No.284/1940, indicating that proposals for deep shelters may be developed where tunnels can be driven through firm rock, including chalk and also a letter from Middlesex County Council stating that detailed proposals relating to the provision of deep shelters or shelters of the Haldane type when submitted would be referred to the Regional Commissioners, but in view of the present policy of the Government there can be no guarantee that such proposals will be approved…In all the circumstances we have decided to submit no recommendation on the subject.[819]

Actonians would have no other option than to fall back on the conventional types of shelters that were failing to provide adequate protection.

The following spring found Croydon Council continuing their ceaseless push for shelters which by April appeared to have become somewhat unwarranted and could no longer be supported by LCDR. In response to the request from the Croydon Borough Engineer to approve the construction of a public basement shelter, Harold Scott LCDR Chief Administrative officer informed the Croydon Town Clerk.

> I am desired by the Regional Commissioners to refer to the Borough Engineer's letter of the 27th February to the Regional Technical Adviser regarding the use of the basement of Grangewood Mansions as a public shelter.
>
> The Commissioners have given consideration to the matter but in view of the large amount of shelter accommodation which is already in existence in the Borough and which, in fact, has never been used to capacity, they are unable to agree to the acquisition of further shelter as proposed.[820]

It is remarkable that Croydon felt the need to further expand the already excess shelter capacity available and of being incapable of overcoming that reflex to do so which by now may have been so conditioned from enduring many months of bombing.

The raid of 10 May demonstrated the cruel chance of surviving inside an Air Raid Shelter. Mrs. Ada Palfrey and her twenty year old daughter were both killed outright when the brick surface shelter in

[819] ELHL, Acton Borough Civil Defence Committee 11 January 1941.
[820] TNA, HO 207/575, Letter from Harold Scott Chief Administrative Officer LCDR to Croydon Town Clerk 4 April 1941.

their East Ham back garden received a direct hit. Yet a few feet away standing on the lip of the resulting crater Mrs. Palfrey's neighbours Mr and Mrs. Parsk and their three daughters aged 3, 12 and 14 all survived inside an Anderson shelter.

> Mrs. Parsk said that she heard a whining noise and then a terrific explosion and they were all flung into a heap. The bunk that her husband was lying in was wound round his legs and a piece of a bedstead used to reinforce the shelter was lying across her, pinning her down. "I could tell by the noise of the explosion that the bomb must have dropped on Mrs. Palfrey's shelter and when I heard voices asking how we were, I shouted, 'Don't worry about us, attend to the injured. I didn't know then that they were dead". The only casualty was Violet, the twelve year old, who suffered a bump on her forehead.

All the neighbouring back gardens were strewn with brickwork from the nearby garage that despite having been totally destroyed had left inside a completely untouched vehicle.[821]

Weeks after the final raids an East Ham spinster Miss W. Grant of 9 Montpelier Gardens recorded in her diary on 11 August an exchange with her neighbour that serves as a fitting epitaph for the shelter experience. "Went out met Mrs. F. She is putting all her house in order, and is going to sleep upstairs again. She is rather wonderful I think, considering the great injuries she had last September in an air raid but as she says she got it in the shelter, so she may as well be in a house. 'What is to be will be.' What a hackneyed phrase that is".[822]

Homelessness – Rest Centres

Eve of the main London Blitz

As we have seen previously once the imperative to shelter from an air raid had passed the most immediate need for the bombed out, lacking any alternative,[823] was to seek sanctuary in a homelessness rest centre. In the previous chapter we came across how this blitz experience began to be determined in the initial pre-blitz period where we can now take up the planning and provision of post-raid services in the outer suburban boroughs.

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[821] *East Ham Echo*, 16 May 1941.
[822] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/4/25/2, MO Diarist Miss. W. Grant 11 August 1941.
[823] Other alternatives open to the bombed out often consisted of residing with relatives or neighbours, and this was certainly the hope of those in authority, "It was hoped that the better-off sections of the working class would make their own arrangements like their social superiors; and in fact, only one in seven of London's homeless went through the rest centres. But one in seven was two hundred thousand people. The centres were designed to provide for ten thousand people on any one night – but twenty-five thousand were staying in them nineteen days after the first attack". (Calder, *The People's War*, p.189.).

In chapter two we saw how the Croydon Borough Public Assistance Committee had begun to prepare for the eventuality of homelessness during the immediate weeks before war was announced and by the autumn of 1939 had established the following initial rest centres; Public Hall, George Street; Queen's Hall, Brighton Road; Crosslands, London Road; Fernham Road Hall and Downsview Hall, Thornton Heath; the Stanley Halls, South Norwood, and the Shirley Parish Hall. Philanthropic enterprises also emerged during this time with Colonel and Mrs J.R. Garwood opening their former home, Coombe House, a spacious Georgian Mansion as a rest house.[824]

Despite MCC failing to complete a county-wide civil defence scheme plans were far enough advanced for post-raid services to be under consideration. In October the Middlesex Public Assistance Department advertised a number of halls for the "Relief of Distressed Persons in Wartime" with the following prepared in Acton; St. Thomas's Hall, Bromyard Avenue; St. Dunstan's Hall and Annexe, East Acton Lane; All Saints Parish Hall, Bollo Bridge Road; All Saints School Buildings, Stafford Road; St. Martins Church Hall, Hale Gardens; Oddfellows Hall, Acton Lane; St. Mary's Church, High Street; Churchfield Hall, Acton, and St. Gabriel's Hall, Noel Road.[825]

The attack against Croydon Aerodrome on 15 August 1940 brought the first tide of the bombed out into the borough rest centres which by now were fortunately more than ready to receive them. The homeless service came under the purview of the Public Assistance Officer, Mr Norman P. Walker, who managed the extra resources required by this pre-eminent emergency and it was at this moment that pre-prepared plans were put to the test and found capable. At the call of the Public Assistance Officer contact officers from the rest centres were dispatched to the scene of an incident to make arrangements for the homeless to be ushered to the nearest centre, often conveyed by vehicles kept at the ready, to receive hot tea, coffee, cocoa or soup with biscuits. Colonel Garwood's generous disposal of Coombe House came into its own during this juncture when a mother with twin babies was then followed by forty people pursuing refuge from the raid.[826]

That summer in Acton five further rest centres[827] were added to the available number yet not all could be described as in a state of readiness; the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* reported on 23 August that All Saints Parish Hall, Bollo Bridge Road, "badly needs helpers and equipment of

[824] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.223.
[825] LMA, MCC/WE/PA/2/91, Relief of Distressed Persons in Wartime October 1939.
[826] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.223.
[827] St. Albans Church Hall, Acton Green; Baptist Church Hall, Acton; Acton Hill Methodist Church Hall, Gunnersbury Lane; 8, Station Parade, Noel Road; Old Oak Methodist Church Hall, East Acton. LMA, MCC/WE/PA/2/91, Relief of Distressed Persons in Wartime September 1940.

every kind". All of the borough rest centres relied upon voluntary support with members of the Acton Centre of Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence in charge of the necessary work.

> In each of the halls which are ready is a stock of blankets, babies' napkins, feeding bottles, first-aid kit and cooking equipment. Each helper has promised to bring an extra blanket with her when she is sent for…The halls will be staffed night and day by volunteer helpers. They will work in three shifts, 6am to noon, noon to 6pm, and 6pm to midnight. In each shift there must be at least two clerical workers, to take down the facts about all the people who come in, from four to six canteen workers, and about the same number of general helpers.[828]

In comparison the scene at All Saints Hall could not be more different with no blankets and an inadequate number of available helpers to face the many months of sustained air raiding that now lay ahead.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

We now return to East Ham schoolboy Maurice Goymer as he stood amongst his neighbours taking in the scene left behind by enemy bombs at the beginning of the main London blitz in early September 1940. After surviving the heavy raiding of the day before Goymer now took notice of a fresh apparition emerging from amongst his surroundings.

> During the morning of Sunday, 8 September, we began to see columns of victims of the previous day. I spoke to one lad I knew who had come from the Lonsdale Avenue area of East Ham. He told me that he and his family had lost everything. Their house had been bombed, and they were going to a reception centre where they would be relocated. All of the people carried a minimal amount of possessions in bags and sacks.[829]

Unlike Croydon and Acton the sources for East Ham are silent up to this point on post-raid services and it remains unclear whereabouts the displaced at this very moment could retreat towards. In the face of this developing crisis minutes of the East Ham Emergency Committee record negotiations now taking place for the acquisition of premises outside the borough in Brentwood, Essex, "primarily for the reception of aged and infirm persons rendered homeless as a result of hostile air attack",[830] suggestive not only of the severity of the emergency but the absence of adequate preparations to meet it.

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[828] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 23 August 1940.
[829] Goymer, *Bombs, Stinging Nettles and Doodlebugs*, p.60.
[830] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 17 September 1940.

To fully grasp and appreciate the unfolding situation in East Ham at the arrival of the blitz proper let us for the time being include a comparative study of homelessness in next door West Ham. On 9 September the MOH War Diary registered the dispatch of Inspector Mr C. J. Wood to inspect the camps of homeless having fled from both boroughs to hide away in distant Epping Forest. One of his tasks was to compile a comprehensive list of the circumstances in which houses had been destroyed so that the homeless could be distinguished from those who had homes to go to yet had left them behind to escape their ravaged neighbourhoods. The previous day 570 persons were evacuated from East Ham to the neighbouring borough of Woodford, amongst whom numbered inhabitants of the heavily affected Silvertown area of West Ham.

Inspector Wood now liaised with the surrounding Essex boroughs to organise the transfer of the homeless out of harms way yet met the same level of snobbish resistance we have encountered before inside metropolitan London, "there has even been some evidence of a feeling that persons from Silvertown are not the class to put into polite suburbs".[831] Silvertown was indeed an exceptional area.

> By the building of the Victoria and Albert, and King George V docks, Silvertown virtually became an island. There are about 13,000 people living in this district – its total area about one square mile, much of which is occupied by factories lying in a narrow strip along the bank of the Thames…The houses lie in crowded ships between the docks and factories, dingy and squalid, many of them lodging-houses for seafaring men. Access to West Ham, with its recreational and educational amenities, though possible, is not easy, and Silvertown is to a great extent dependent on its own very limited resources.[832]

The first weekend of that September saw the fiercest thrust of attack propelled against this vulnerable locale necessitating the arrival of ten buses at 3pm on Sunday 8 September to evacuate 1,000 to Wanstead, followed by a further five buses at 5pm to take away another 1,000 to Walthamstow. During the night some 800 Silvertown residents scampered away south of the river via the Woolwich Tunnel.[833]

At the start of the following week with the residual population of Silvertown having dwindled to 2,500 the West Ham Medical Officer for Health made representations to central government that owing to the severity of existing conditions compulsory evacuation of the area should be considered, "the water supply is cut off and the sewerage system damaged. Because of the damage to the main

[831] Ibid.
[832] Idle, *War Over West Ham*, p.47.
[833] TNA, MH 101/58, Extracts from Reports June – September 1940.

north outfall sewer the river is contaminated". Subsequently the West Ham Deputy Mayor claimed, "there was a danger of rioting due in part to the food difficulties". Despite Silvertown remaining a "special case" MOH officials decided against compulsory evacuation owing to the assistance now being provided to both East and West Ham by Essex County Council to establish effective relief in kind measures.[834]

By 16 September around 8,000 homeless from East and West Ham had been transferred to various towns throughout the County of Essex including Dagenham, Walthamstow, Chigwell, Chingford, Ilford, Leyton and Wanstead and Woodford. The ever growing predicament in West Ham called into question the competency of the local authority with the MOH Senior Regional Officer openly suggesting on 19 September that drastic steps may now be required.

> The West Ham authorities are not showing any competence in dealing with their difficulties, and our Inspector, Mr Wood, has to help them continually. The Town Clerk is the only Billeting Officer and is already overworked. The Deputy Public Assistance Officer is doing what he can but cannot billet in addition to carrying out his own work of providing for homeless persons in rest centres. It may be necessary to consider whether some at least of the administration of West Ham should not be taken over.

The Senior Regional Officer went on to report that despite East Ham having had their difficulties the arrangements and position in the county borough were by contrast now satisfactory.[835] Having withstood by themselves somewhat comparable experiences the two neighbouring boroughs of East Ham and West Ham were at this point now demonstrating a greater divergence in response to the initial torrid fortnight of sustained air raids.

Away to the south as October began the Downsview Methodist Church Hall in Croydon offers us a further variation of the homelessness ordeal. In the fortnight ending 5 October 350 bombed out residents flocked to this particular rest centre established by the Croydon Public Assistance Board yet operated by the WVS. An account of the centre comes down to us through the pages of the *Croydon Times*.

> The first batch of homeless people numbered eighty. Since their arrival an even larger batch was catered for at the one time. No fewer than 200 men, women, and children were brought to the hall late one evening, and although only fifteen had been expected, the W.V.S. workers got to work at once cutting hundreds of sandwiches and filling endless rows

[834] Ibid.
[835] Ibid.

> of tin mugs with steaming cocoa and Bovril. Blankets, pillows, sheets, mattresses, cushions, and anything else which could be converted into a comfortable bed, were hastily laid on forms and on the floor. Tired, after their terrible ordeal, and shaken, but generally only suffering from minor injuries, mothers and children and elderly folk were soon comfortable installed in their improvised beds.

Space at the hall was even found to safely stow away a number of pets belonging to the homeless ranging from dogs and cats to canaries. The first eighty inhabitants remained at the rest centre for an average of one week before homes could be found for them. Such was the succour provided that perhaps no greater endorsement could be given than by one woman who claimed that she was sorry to be leaving.[836]

As the main blitz entered a second month notes of discord over homeless facilities were being reported in the pages of the *Acton Gazette and West London Post*.

> The arrangements in this borough for sheltering people made homeless by air raids seem to me inadequate. There are now five halls earmarked by the Middlesex County Council for the reception of these refugees. This means that if a time bomb falls and a street has to be evacuated, the nearest refuge may be three-quarters of a mile away in a totally different district. In Acton people do not usually know the geography of the whole town. They only know the district around their own home, their usual shopping centre and the route to the station. How are they to get up in the middle of the night, tired and sleepy, and trail off with babies and blankets and anything they happen to snatch up, three-quarters of a mile to a parish hall they have never heard off?[837]

At a meeting of the MCC Civil Defence Committee on 7 October the County Chairman Sir Gilfrid Craig asked all constituent local authorities to take over the responsibility for the care of the bombed out. "His Committee were of the opinion, gained from actual experience, that the problem was essentially a local matter and could, therefore, be dealt with more efficiently locally". The minutes go on to record that, "representatives of the local authorities present unanimously agreed to act as agents for the County Council on the lines suggested".[838] An unabashed admission that the

[836] *Croydon Times*, 5 October 1940.
[837] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 20 September 1940.
[838] LMA, MCC/MIN/8/5, Report of a meeting of the Civil Defence Committee with A.R.P. Controllers, Clerks of Councils and Billeting Officers of Group No. 6. of the LCDR with regard to the case of persons rendered homeless as a result of air raids held Friday 7 October 1940.

incomplete county plan for civil defence was inadequate in the face of a reality that was now shaping local responses.

Immediately following this development the Acton Borough ARP Committee wearily resolved at this late stage to take on this unavoidable imposition.

> The organisation of these centres for persons rendered homeless as the result of air raids has hitherto been in the hands of the Middlesex County Council. The arrangements have not been satisfactory and the Middlesex County Council have now decided to delegate all their powers to local authorities. The Town Clerk has reported to us in detail upon the many matters which require attention if the centres are to function as they should and although the new arrangements will throw yet another burden upon the Council's officers, we feel that a considerable improvement will be effected as soon as the matters referred to have received attention.[839]

Previously we have noted that rest centres in Acton, as in Croydon, were staffed by members of the WVS and it was upon these valuable shoulders that an almost unbearable weight was at present being applied. "So far, all the work of the food and rest centres has been done by Women's Voluntary Service members. Busy housewives, with their own homes to look after…[are] sent off to open an empty hall, make tea, provide soup and bully beef and generally look after a crowd of tired and bewildered people. They have never failed to turn out, even if it meant running through falling shrapnel".[840]

By the time autumn turned into winter the prolonged pattern of aerial assault had still not drilled into some local authorities the necessity of providing an efficient network of post–raid support. Titmuss writing in the official history *Problems of Social Policy* brings to us an illustrative example from the County of Croydon.

> The sixteen year old daughter of a widow bombed out on 17th November 1940 spent the whole of Monday the 18th trying to get a few pounds for some clothes. She did not resort to a rest centre…she first went to the town hall; thence she was directed to go to 71, Park Lane, thence to Woburn Road, thence to 166, London Road, Norbury, and at the end of the day had accomplished nothing. Part of that was the Assistance Board's fault, part the result of no administrative centre in Croydon.[841]

[839] ELHL, Acton Borough ARP Committee 9 October 1940.
[840] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 20 September 1940.
[841] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.279.

As we saw with the metropolitan boroughs the distressing experience of losing your home and possessions could often be amplified by having to negotiate an amorphous complexity of inefficient and unresponsive local bureaucracy.

In February 1941 efforts were under way in East Ham to orchestrate a more seamless and effective measure of care for the bombed out with the following address by Mayor Alderman E. F. Markey worth quoting from at length.

> Members of the Council may have seen, and if not I would like them to take an early opportunity of doing so, the Inquiry and Information Bureau which will be shortly in full operation in the large hall. The hall was, as members know, used by the Civil Defence Social and Recreation Club and served a very useful purpose in that connection, but with the problems of the homeless which take on many aspects, they were asked to vacate it so that a greater need might be met. An advisory service on the following matters will be in operation in the hall; war damage and first aid repairs to property, compensation for damage, billeting, rehousing, personal effects and casualties, removal of furniture, assistance for clothes, business and removal, allowances for war injuries, air raid shelters, respirators, W.V.S. and Citizen's Advice Bureau Services, and general enquiries arising out of war problems.

The local authority were now putting themselves into the shoes of the dispossessed and designing a service around them, "that a person who has suffered from enemy attack will be able to be dealt with, at any rate as regards his first essentials, at one visit…with one call at the municipal offices he would be able to see all the departments concerned with his immediate future without having to go round to the various departments individually".[842] All of which was a far cry from the start of the main blitz when some local residents were left with no other option but to escape East Ham to set up makeshift camp in Epping forest.

The East Ham Inquiry and Information Bureau nevertheless cannot be seen as a pioneering endeavour when viewed within the wider London context. As far back as September 1940 in the early stages of steady attack LCC had already seen the potential of post-raid administration centres for metropolitan London with an internal memorandum dated 30 September 1940 considering, "the establishment of a clearing-house in each borough somewhere in the vicinity of the Town Hall or if necessary at a more central place", the impetus having already been provided by the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney where, "the scheme is at present in operation and has proved a marked

[842] *East Ham Echo*, 7 February 1941.

success".[843] By March 1941 administration centres had been established in five of the six boroughs studied with the only exception of course being Croydon, Titmuss having already brought to our attention dislodged locals coping with the absence of co-ordinated assistance, and where only now expenditure for such a purpose was being considered.[844]

At the end of the main blitz period we can now take stock of the harm caused to homes in Croydon from the detailed report compiled by the local Medical Officer of Health.

> Admissions to rest centres, of which seven had been established, were 743 and another 120 were admitted to rest homes. The number of houses totally destroyed was 353, so damaged as to be incapable of repair 831, severely damaged but capable of being made habitable 1,406 and slightly damaged 1, 224. The number of persons who had to be rehoused as the result of the above damage was 2, 021, and the total number of persons for whom billets were found in the borough, including the persons rendered homeless in other boroughs and people evacuated from the coast, was 5, 542. These figures do not include a considerable number of people who found accommodation for themselves.[845]

Besides providing stark statistical data these figures help to furnish us with a portrayal of havoc that over many months had required a sustained response from just this one single locality.

As tendrils of smouldering smoke and eddying dust emanated from the damaged and out of action East Ham rest centres the Public Assistance Officer was required to seek assistance from government to acquire additional premises.[846] As alluded to previously the extra-metropolitan position of East Ham, and that of neighbouring West Ham, within London Region had given rise to a special dynamic as outlined in the following excerpt from Titmuss.

> The problems of the rest centres in that part of the region outside the area of the London County Council were not so very different from those inside the Council's area. There were the same difficulties about food, equipment, sanitation, staff and so on. In general, except for the County Boroughs of West Ham and East Ham, the rest centre service was not so hardly pressed as that for which the London Council was responsible. Partly for this reason, and partly because of the absence of directions from Whitehall on the standards to aim at,

[843]The National Archives, HLG 7/518, Administration and Information Centres in London Region 30 September 1940.
[844] TNA, HLG 7/518, Administration Centres 17 March 1941.
[845] Dunn, *Emergency Medical Services*, p.274.
[846] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports May 1941.

> the rate of improvement was slow and uneven. But perhaps the most important reason was that a system of central government inspection was late in starting.[847]

All of which is suggestive of governmental, administrative and geographical factors that played a contributing factor in helping to shape local blitz experience.

Months after raiding had ceased the unsettledness of the homeless was still being felt as was apparent to the East Ham MO diarist Miss W Grant.

> [October 2 1941] Met Mrs H today and talked to her for the first time. She comes from Stepney and doesn't like the neighbourhood. It's too quiet, I asked her if she thought she would settle here and she said she would for the children's sake, it would be better for them. I wonder what effect all this changing will have after. People have been uprooted and changed about so…

In spite of being fellow Londoners it was not just new arrivals who felt awkward but many locals themselves also found it difficult to accept their new neighbours.

> [October 22 1941] Funny day. Met M. She is fed up with East Ham, so am I, but it is funny how people begin by saying "I'm not a snob, but I can't stand the people coming here now". I admit I feel the same way.

In the face of all the upheaval and trauma experienced by those displaced an amount of weary fatalism now called into question whether such effort was worthwhile, "[November 25 1941] Met a woman whose mother and sister and child were bombed out of E.Ham and went to Romford, where they were killed by a direct hit, which started a discussion on the theory, 'it always follows you up'".[848]

To conclude this section the following tables illustrate the amount of homes wrecked and the consequent number of those made homeless within the three suburban boroughs.

Table 4.3 shows houses demolished and damaged beyond first aid repair with the total percentage of homes hit by bombs based upon the approximate number before the outbreak of war. The County Borough of West Ham is included as a comparator. A marked contrast between the percentage figures of houses hit across the boroughs is perhaps the most striking statistic.

[847] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.269.
[848] MOA, SxMOA 1/4/25/2, MO Diarist Miss. W. Grant.

Table 4.3 – Damage and Repairs to Houses within London Region
Source: TNA, HO 186/952, General Intelligence London Region Reports – Intelligence Branch Report No.18

Borough	Number of Houses	Houses Demolished	Houses Damaged Beyond First Aid Repair	Total Percentage Of Houses Damaged By Bombs
West Ham	50, 247	7,299	7,229	29 %
East Ham	30,125	2,356	3,397	19 %
Acton	17,041	286	358	3 %
Croydon	65,550	987	408	2 %

Table 4.4 contains figures from the last major raid of 10 May 1941 and shows the number of homeless within rest centres at 2100 hours on the two days immediately following the worst incidence of bombing in the capital. Figures are only available for County Boroughs therefore the Municipal Borough of Acton is not included. As with table 3.4 in chapter three which contains data for the metropolitan boroughs over the exact same period we can see the varying degree to which the boroughs were affected.

Table 4.4 – Admission of Homeless Persons reported at 21:00 hours on 11 and 12 May 1941
Source: TNA, HO 186/952, General Intelligence London Region Reports – Intelligence Branch Report No.11

Borough	May 11 1941 Number of Persons	May 12 1941 Number of Persons
West Ham	40	93
East Ham	10	4
Croydon	30	30+

Communal Feeding

Eve of the main London Blitz

We have witnessed before how the need to sustain blitzed Londoners deprived the means of sustenance only dawned upon authorities almost at the very moment enemy planes appeared over the horizon. In chapter three we noted that of the three inner London boroughs only Kensington residents were catered for on the eve of the main London blitz. At this same stage as we turn towards suburban London the borough administrations are completely silent over the provision of communal feeding in East Ham, Croydon and Acton.

Main London Blitz – [September 1940 – July 1941]

We have already noted the enemy scoring a direct hit on the Beckton Gas Works in East Ham during September 1940 with a LCDR situation report registering a total loss of gas supply to eight boroughs depriving residents of that vital amenity.[849] Local resident Gladys Strelitz now instigated an ingenious method in her back garden to feed her family.

> We had no light you see, there was no gas, no electricity – that has been cut off – and all we could rely on was a candle. The house was a mess. Well, I found these four bricks and I put them like a diamond on the back step, and filled it up with paper, bracken and a piece of wood. I'd put the saucepan on that, and stir and make the porridge for the children. 'When will it be ready, mummy?' 'Not long now.' We would put the kettle on and have a cup of tea. We were really scouts.[850]

Such were the lengths some Londoners now resorted to.

Not until after nearly six weeks of incessant bombing had passed could Croydon Council be perceived to have considered the need for communal feeding when on 12 October the *Croydon Times* reported that the Public Assistance Committee had deliberated upon the subject. From amongst the ongoing plans to deal with the homeless the committee observed that two mobile canteens were being purchased for a nascent Emergency Feeding Service.[851] Towards the end of the month the ARP Committee were informed that arrangements to provide light refreshments within public shelters were also now in hand.[852]

To the east of London East Ham had also waited until the autumn before any measure of communal feeding was contemplated. At a meeting of the Emergency Committee on 21 October the Town Clerk reported the he had received a cheque for £195 from the Rotary Club of East Ham to pay for the cost of a mobile canteen, to be controlled and managed by members of the WVS, indicative perhaps of an inclination by the voluntary sector to fill the void left by local government.[853]

The East Acton Baptist Church could also be found volunteering to give assistance to those facing the absence of help. The Reverend Walter Fancutt and his wife at first started a meals canteen using their own rations with the support of friends and neighbours according to the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* on 25 October.

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[849] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/1, LCDR Situation Reports.
[850] Mack and Humphries, *The Making of Modern London*, p.74.
[851] *Croydon Times*, 12 October 1940.
[852] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 30 October 1940.
[853] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 21 October 1941.

> At first there was no equipment: only two gas-rings and the tea-cups and saucers and spoons the church had used for afternoon meetings. They had to serve out stew in saucers to be eaten with spoons, and then wash them all up in time to be used again for the sweet course.

Forty local families streamed through the doors of the church on the first day alone.[854]

In November the Croydon ARP Committee having cogitated upon communal feeding proposals first tabled in October decided that further bureaucratic machinery was necessary to deliver a borough catering service.

> [It is] suggested that a special committee should be appointed…to have representatives from certain other committees, e.g., Public Assistance and Air Raid Precautions, as the setting up of community kitchens may involve the establishment of a Catering Department which can also control, or be available for consultation in connection with, the feeding arrangements at…canteens, etc.[855]

Councillor Britton was duly appointed as Chairman of the new committee on the back of his previous professional experience in the catering industry.[856]

Whilst at first glance communal feeding efforts in Croydon appear somewhat languorous a vital facet of any scheme was the supply of refreshments to those in public shelters. The following excerpt from minutes of a meeting of the ARP Committee on 18 December demonstrates the extent of available nourishment.

> Brief summary of the arrangements made for the supply of hot water and refreshments in public shelters: -
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Refreshments Supplied by Outside Caterers | 10 |
> | Refreshments Supplied from Central Canteen | 7 |
> | Electric Boilers and Urns installed to give an abundant supply of hot water | 57[857] |

[854] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 25 October 1940.
[855] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 25 November 1940.
[856] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.238.
[857] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Air Raid Precautions Emergency Committee 18 December 1940.

In East Ham by contrast shelter feeding was left to local residents such as a Mrs Cowan of Ilford who applied for a licence from the council to sell food in the Wanstead Flats communal shelter.[858]

By the end of 1940 let us pause to step back and consider that by this time communal feeding in the County of London consisted in the main of the Londoners' Meals Service augmented by local voluntary efforts, yet at this time in outer London the picture was more complex. So far we have seen some incipient moves towards devising feeding proposals for those residents so deprived with no actual comprehensive on the ground service having come into operation. As we turn the page into 1941 it is worth taking into account how communal feeding in the extra-metropolitan area was conceived.

Previous chapters have told us that communal feeding was first prompted by the perceived need to respond to wartime economy yet rapidly became catalysed by air raids into a scheme of emergency feeding delivered through the means of mobile canteens, shelter feeding or a sit down restaurant service. To avoid becoming confused by the minutiae let us take as our guide the official historian R. J. Hammond writing in *Food Volume II Studies in Administration and Control*.

> In considering the establishments known as Emergency Feeding Centres, however, it is difficult to disentangle emergency and day-to-day aspects of the Ministry's work [Ministry of Food], for both grew from the same root. 'Looking back it may seem simple to divide up (a) British Restaurants[859], (b) Emergency Meals Service, and (c) shelter feeding, but at the time there was no clear-cut distinction between these three things, we were literally groping towards a policy'. One of the original motives for promoting communal feeding had been that it might fulfil a dual purpose – of providing cheap meals for the working classes in normal times, and food for all and sundry in emergency.[860]

As we return to witnessing how communal feeding played out in the three outer London boroughs let us keep those words in mind to assist ourselves in navigating the varied nomenclature of feeding schemes.

The Acton Civil Defence Committee determined on 11 January 1941 that it must respond to calls from the MOF urging local authorities to set up and operate emergency community kitchens. The committee recommended, "that a scheme be prepared whereby community kitchens can be established in various parts of the borough and that the council undertake the financial

[858] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 3 December 1940.
[859] Often in London County British Restaurant was a moniker used for Londoners' Meals Service establishments and an interchangeable term between the two.
[860] Hammond, R. J, *Food Volume II*, p.369.

responsibility for the scheme on a self-supporting basis".[861] Later the same week MCC felt spurred into action albeit along slightly differing lines as we can deduce from the Civil Defence Committee meeting held on 15 January.

> The Committee was of opinion that emergency feeding arrangements must be organised by the County Committee and the work carried out by the local authorities under the control and supervision of the County Committee, and that the organisation should be on similar lines to that under the control of Mr W. J. O. Newton, C. B. E., the organiser of the Londoners' Meals Service.
>
> It was resolved that the Chairmen of Emergency Committees of the Local Authorities in Group 6 of the London Civil Defence Region, and / or Mayors of the Boroughs and Chairmen of the Urban District Councils, together with the local Controllers and Town Clerks and Sub-Group Controllers be asked to attend a secret and urgent conference to be held at the Guildhall, Westminster, on Friday, 17th January 1941 on the subject of community or emergency feeding.[862]

All of which provides the inescapable impression of local and regional authorities tripping over themselves to hasten an overdue scheme into existence.

"Emergency Feeding and Rest Centres, further progress with Croydon's Emergency Feeding and Rest Centre scheme was reported by the special sub-committee appointed for this purpose, at last Saturday's meeting of Croydon Public Assistance Committee", read the headline in the *Croydon Times* on 18 January.[863] The local authority had now submitted proposals to the MOF for the establishment of ten community kitchens in the following districts; Upper Norwood, South Norwood, Norbury, Thornton Heath, Whitehorse Road, Addiscombe, Waddon, West Croydon, South Croydon and Addington. The feeding programme envisaged that the average number of people served daily at each centre would be 500 with 250 people accommodated at one sitting.[864] One can now detect a gathering of pace as just over a month later on 25 February the Community Feeding Committee reported that additional kitchens were being contemplated to cover further parts of the borough.[865]

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[861] ELHL, Acton Borough Civil Defence Committee 11 January 1941.
[862] LMA, MCC/MIN/8/6, County Council of Middlesex Civil Defence Committee Minute Book 15 January 1941.
[863] *Croydon Times*, 18 January 1941.
[864] Croydon Local History Library, County Borough of Croydon Community Feeding Committee 17 January 1941.
[865] CLHL, County Borough of Croydon Community Feeding Committee 25 February 1941.

February now witnessed the turn of East Ham to begin operating a communal feeding service. On 4 February full Council approved an outline scheme devised by the Town Clerk that included "alternative methods of cooking, the use of schools and a shadow scheme for an extension of the service if and when occasion arises".[866] The inevitable special communal feeding sub-committee had been formed to be chaired by the Mayor Alderman E. F. Markey who made the following address to the *East Ham Echo* on 7 February.

> I can say something about communal feeding which, at the moment is being organised by the Public Assistance Officer at certain Food and Rest Centres, and those who have had their meals there come again, but the numbers increase very slowly. The Emergency Committee are not disheartened by these matters, and are going on with their consideration of this problem which they feel may grow in the future, and if the demand occurs, further centres, not necessarily at Food and Rest Centres, may be opened.[867]

For the moment it appears such exploratory efforts were being grafted on to the existing framework of post-raid homeless support using pre-existing rest centres as venues to feed the destitute.

Only a short while afterwards the East Ham communal feeding sub-committee reported on 12 February that increased action was being taken in response to growing need and now envisaged the use of standalone feeding centres.

> That two communal feeding centres be opened as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made, one in the southern part of the borough…and one in the Little Ilford area…That shadow centres for use in an emergency be set up at the following schools:- Napier, Central Park, Altmore, Dersingham Avenue and the Grammar School for Girls…The Public Assistance Officer proposed to open another centre to deal with the increased demand.[868]

At the end of the month the sub-committee received a further MOF circular that stated emergency feeding centres should provide for one hot meal per day and cover at least ten percent of the population, to which the sub-committee recorded "the Minister's requirements generally appear to be met by the Council's scheme".[869]

At the arrival of spring communal feeding proposals came into fruition in Croydon with the first 'Civic Restaurant' opening in Whitehorse Road on 3 March. According to Borough Historian W. C. Berwick Sayers, "it was the beginning by the Council of what became the first important public effort to

[866] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 4 February 1941.
[867] *East Ham Echo*, 7 February 1941.
[868] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 12 February 1941.
[869] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 26 February 1941.

provide a hot mid-day meal at a small charge, a boon which helped the homeless and all manner of people faced with difficulties of home catering, travelling and food shortage".[870] The clientele themselves were illustrative of the patchwork makeup of this large county borough, "Whitehorse Road and Canterbury Road provided for a predominantly industrial population, and Mason's Avenue the middle-class shopper. Whitehorse Road, in the early days when it was the only restaurant, served nearly 1,000 meals daily".[871]

The decision by Croydon Council to dub communal feeding centres 'civic restaurants' was a deliberate decision to distinguish them from the borough post-raid feeding kitchens as explained by the *Croydon Times* on 8 March.

> In future Communal Feeding Centres are to be known in Croydon as "Civic Restaurants", and…the Ministry of Food has approved the Council's proposals…Councillor Britton [Chairman Communal Feeding Committee] "The object of these centres is to provide people with good meals and to avoid waste of food. We hope people will use these centres because the food position may get worse instead of better. The centres were not for emergencies – provision was being made for such cases…Mr W. H. Kirby (Divisional Food Controller, representing Lord Woolton) [Minister for Food] said the centre was the first in London, and it would give him the greatest pleasure to inform Lord Woolton of the progress that had been made in Croydon…Community Feeding Centres had probably come to stay for a very long time…He congratulated Croydon on its first community centre".[872]

Despite the slowness we have previously observed in responding to emergency feeding the local authority now wasted no time in maturing their plans so that they now included a clear definition of strict communal feeding.

Towards the end of the blitz others can be seen following the communal feeding example set by Croydon with Acton Council recommending the creation of British Restaurants[873] designed to accommodate 250 people at one sitting. These restaurants would be managed by the council under the auspices of the MOF who would provide the necessary materials and equipment.[874] In total three

[870] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second World War*, p.66.
[871] Ibid. p.238.
[872] *Croydon Times*, 8 March 1941.
[873] The name 'British Restaurant' was first coined by Prime Minister Winston Churchill in a minute to Minister of Food Lord Woolton dated 21 March 1941 as a preferred alternative to the term 'Communal Feeding Centre'; "I hope the term "Communal Feeding Centres" is not going to be adopted. It is an odious expression, suggestive of Communism and the workhouse. I suggest you call them "British Restaurants". Everybody associates the word "restaurant" with a good meal, and they may as well have the name if they cannot get anything else". (Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume III The Grand Alliance* (1950), p.663.).
[874] *Acton Gazette and West London Post*, 30 May 1941.

British Restaurants were set up in Acton one in the Kings Rooms adjacent to the Town Hall, one in Standard Road on the Park Royal Estate and one at All Saints School, Stafford Road.[875]

One cannot escape the impression that suburban authorities lacked the initial stimulus provided to their metropolitan neighbours and continued throughout the main blitz period to play catch up in the field of post–raid nourishment. In the final weeks of air raiding the County Borough of East Ham carried on groping around in its quest to requisition premises to house communal feeding centres with rooms along the Romford Road previously used as a paint laboratory and building trades workshop being actively considered.[876] Towards the end of June the PLA felt the need to offer the council the choice of two sites for the erection of a communal feeding centre at the Royal Albert Dock[877], a location perhaps indicative of the varied assortment of places extra-metropolitan Londoners were compelled to resort to in need of succour.

Conclusion

With the arrival of midsummer 1941 the skies above outer London at last emptied of enemy planes releasing those beneath from sirens, raiding and bombing that had brought death, destruction and dislocation to suburbia. As Londoners living on the metropolitan periphery now drew breath let us take this moment to place this unprecedented period into a meaningful perspective.

The three boroughs of East Ham, Croydon and Acton all took their place within the sixty six local authorities that existed inside the London Civil Defence Region yet outside the central ring of the City and Administrative County of London. Looking east from the centre lay the County Borough of East Ham home to a mixture of black coated commuters, a bustling shopping precinct, and riparian docks and dock labourers. Away to the south the larger County Borough of Croydon was a dormitory town to residents as likely to identify with pastoral Surrey as with the capital and proud of their distinctive conurbation comprising light industry, civil aviation, a large retail centre and cottage homes. Directly to the west of central London could be found the Municipal Borough of Acton, part of Middlesex County, a small borough by comparison, more densely packed with industrial estates and rows of Victorian villas. It was upon this varied landscape that aerial bombardment would affect Londoners in equally diverse ways.

Croydon claimed the dubious honour of being the first local authority within London Region to be the recipient of hostile munitions as it sat ringside to the Battle of Britain, with the devastating air raid on Croydon aerodrome in August 1940 testament to the vulnerability of the borough weeks

[875] Colledge, *Tin Hats, Doodlebugs and Food Rations*, p.32.
[876] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 6 May 1941.
[877] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 23 June 1941.

before fellow Londoners would share in a comparable experience. The docks of East Ham next joined the field of battle as the Luftwaffe turned inwards heralding the beginning of the Battle of London. Once the main blitz had engulfed the entire metropolis the varying impact of air raiding can noticeably be detected across the demographics of the outer boroughs with the population of East Ham declining by thirty eight per cent, followed by Acton with a twenty eight per cent drop, and Croydon falling by twenty six per cent. Relatively small figures when compared against the dramatic depopulation of West Ham at fifty three per cent, and still less than the average inner London borough turnover of forty four per cent.

The provision of air raid shelters best illustrates the curious administrative arrangement that existed between Acton Council and Middlesex County Council, that set it apart from the other boroughs covered, and with the collapse of the incomplete county wide plan witnessed additional civil defence responsibilities falling upon the surprised municipal authority. The valuable pause of the pre-blitz period or 'phoney war' was perhaps a more valuable lacuna than it was to other authorities (and maybe just as fortuitous as the time frame between the Munich Agreement of September 1938 and outbreak of war a year later) as it afforded Acton a breathing space to put right pre-existing deficiencies.

"Cutting through East and West Ham and along the Commercial Road we saw a deal of demolished property, these boroughs have suffered severely"[878], read the diary entry of Senior Regional Commissioner Captain Euan Wallace for 19 September 1940, and it was the somewhat symbiotic relationship between the two county boroughs that allows us to include West Ham as a comparator to showcase the plight of the homeless. In spite of suffering similar ordeals the response under fire of both county authorities nevertheless took divergent paths. Regardless of being initially stunned by the severity of the crisis East Ham came to terms with their homeless for this was a borough seen "in the top class"[879], whilst West Ham having already experienced four successive ARP Controllers was later threatened with being taken over by London Region.[880] The atypical nature of West Ham ultimately shows us the agency of locality for it draws out the comparisons, singularity and asymmetries of the London blitz.

In regards to communal feeding no attention was given by the three boroughs in the period before bombs fell towards the need for a service to sustain deprived residents, only towards the end of the main blitz can evidence be gleaned of a fully operational feeding scheme having come into

[878]Bodleian Library, 6B 161 MSS, Extracts from the diary of Euan Wallace 19 September 1940.
[879] Ibid.
[880] Idle, *War Over West Ham*, pps 63-64.

realization. Suburbia perhaps benefited from greater resources at hand in the shape of school kitchens, factory canteens and dockside establishments to feed those in need, and lacked the provocation of severe sustained air raiding that had elsewhere in the metropolis catalysed the relatively rapid creation of the Londoners' Meals Service.

Despite the wealth of material written about the London blitz one can find comparatively little devoted to those Londoners who suffered on the outskirts. Considering that between the wars, "around London, the counties of Middlesex, Surrey and Hertford gained population at five or seven times the national rate"[881], this is perhaps somewhat surprising. Now that a light has been cast upon this neglected component of the capital a myriad of blitz experiences have been illuminated and shown to be configured by locality.

[881] Calder, *The People's War*, p.29.

Chapter Five: Post-Blitz London – The Local Response

"I have had enough. There seems no end of it, and a great weariness of spirit overtakes me at times".[882] One can still feel the palpable fatigue of Vere Hodgson seventy five years after she first recorded this diary entry for 17 March 1945, as we now move on from the period of the main London blitz to the final remaining phases of raiding that had yet to be endured in the capital, and in a variation to the course so far taken this chapter will adopt a simultaneous thematic approach looking across all six boroughs together. During this time we will see that the preceding years of the blitz have helped prepare and condition the response to continued air raids, and how for the Londoner where one happened to be located persisted in shaping wartime experience until the very last weeks of conflict.

To help us take in the broad sweep of five years air raiding on London the subsequent tables provide information taken together for the entirety of all local authorities within LCDR. From when we last looked at the borough population levels at the end of the main blitz on 31 May 1941 we shall see at the start of the post-blitz period that people have begun returning to the capital. This trend continues whereby numbers gradually increase until the advent of the V1 flying-bomb prompts an emptying of the metropolis, and then in spite of thunderous V2 rocket salvos Londoners start returning home. Furthermore as we saw in previous chapters inner metropolitan boroughs show a decrease in population whilst some outer suburban districts, notably those on the far western fringes, demonstrate an actual increase in population. Nonetheless by the end of the war it is worth noting that the net population of Greater London remains substantially lower than the pre-war level.

Analysis of the figures compiled for those boroughs receiving thirty or more V1 strikes helps depict the particular trajectory taken by flying-bombs with districts towards the south and east predominating in contrast to the absence of local authorities towards the north and west. Right up until the last high explosive detonates within the capital we shall see in the ensuing chapter that this continued to be an experience felt by Londoners at different times and to divergent degrees.

Table 5.1 shows the annual number of casualties sustained in the metropolis during the years 1943 to 1945.

Table 5.2 breaks down the casualties by type of air raid; orthodox bombing, V1 flying-bombs, and V2 rockets, from which we are then able to calculate the precise figures for the capital.

[882] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p. 573.

Table 5.3 demonstrates those boroughs in the London Civil Defence Region which received thirty or more V1 strikes. The boroughs studied are highlighted in red with only half, Croydon, East Ham and Bermondsey present as the remaining three, Acton, Kensington and Finsbury, were all geographically situated away from the direct line of fire.

In table 5.4 we are able to see the monthly number of V2 rockets arriving in the capital from September 1944 to March 1945.

Demographic trends of the post-blitz period are available in table 5.5 which contains population figures for all of the local authorities across both inner and outer London. The six boroughs studied are all highlighted in red for ease of reference.

Local authorities are ranked in order of percentage population reduction. The population percentage reduction figure is based upon taking the average borough population across the date range of 30 January 1943 to 31 May 1945.

The date ranges have been specifically chosen to illustrate key milestones of the post-blitz phase, Tip and Run raids and Little Blitz during the timeframe from January 1943 to May 1944, V1s from May to September 1944 (by which time some V2s had also begun arriving), and the final date taken as the end of hostilities in May 1945.

Table 5.1 – Post-Blitz London Fatalities
Source: O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 677.

Year	Killed	Admitted to Hospital (in most cases seriously injured)	Slightly Injured	First Aid Post	Totals
1943	542	989	1,015	6,598	9,144
1944	7, 533	19, 611	33, 212	41, 116	101,472
1945 (1.1.45-9.5.45)	1, 705	3, 836	7, 560	10, 835	23,936

Table 5.2 – Civilian Casualties Caused in the United Kingdom by Bombing and by various forms of Long-Range Bombardment.
Source: Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 528.

Raid Type	Killed	Seriously Injured	Total
Bombing	51, 509	61, 423	112, 932
Flying-bombs (V1s)	6, 184	17, 981	24, 165
Rockets (V2s)	2, 754	6, 523	9, 277
Cross-Channel Guns	148	255	403
Totals	*60, 595*	*86, 182*	*146, 777*

"Of these 146,777 casualties, 80,397 (including about nine-tenths of these caused by Flying-bombs and roughly the same proportion of those caused by Rockets) occurred in the London Civil Defence Region, and 66, 380 elsewhere. Casualties to service personnel are not included".[883]

Therefore we can calculate the total casualties caused by V1 flying-bombs in the London Civil Defence Region as 21, 749.

Casualties caused by V2 Rockets in London Civil Defence Region are calculated as 8, 349.

Table 5.3 – Boroughs or Districts in London Civil Defence Region reporting Thirty or more Flying-Bomb 'Incidents'.
Source: Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 525.

Borough or District	Number of 'Incidents'
Croydon	140
Wandsworth	126
Lewisham	117
Camberwell	82
Woolwich	82
Greenwich	73
Beckenham	71
Lambeth	69
Orpington	67
Coulsdon and Purley	58
West Ham	57
Chislehurst and Sidcup	50
Mitcham	46
Barking	39
Hackney	38
Banstead	37
Poplar	37
Beddington and Wallington	36
East Ham	36
Esher	36
Ilford	36
Wimbledon	36
Merton and Morden	35
Battersea	34
Bromley	34
Sutton and Cheam	33
Westminster	31
Bermondsey	30
Deptford	30
Stepney	30

[883] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 528.

"Notes

1. 'Incidents' include those caused by bombs brought down by the defences.

2. In general each 'incident' was caused by one bomb.

3. The total number of reported 'incidents' in the London Civil Defence Region was 2, 420".[884]

Table 5.4 – The Long-Range Rocket Offensive Analysis of Arrivals in London Civil Defence Region by Months.
Source: Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 527.

September 1944	**October 1944**	**November 1944**	**December 1944**	**January 1945**	**February 1945**	**March 1945**	**Total**
16	32	82	47	114	114	112	517

[884] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p. 525.

Table 5.5 – Post-Blitz Demographic Trends for London Civil Defence Region[885]
Source: TNA, HLG 7/608, Population Statistics for the London Region.

Local Authority	Number of Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 30 January 1943	Population 1 January 1944	Population 6 May 1944	Population 1 July 1944	Population 30 September 1944	Population 30 December 1944	Population 31 May 1945	Population Percentage Reduction
Stepney	25,612	200,500	73,889	73,341	75,673	75,975	67,637	69,518	70,944	-64
Shoreditch	14,097	80,360	35,389	35,459	36,567	36,515	32,922	32,240	34,645	-56
Bethnal Green	18,156	92,910	47,950	47,632	50,189	50,784	44,687	46,179	46,522	-55
Bermondsey	19,134	97,420	45,444	45,371	46,799	46,714	40,698	42,324	43,141	-54
Southwark	29,113	145,300	67,475	70,096	68,343	69,036	61,156	65,011	65,723	-54
Finsbury	8,924	56,960	28,050	27,548	27,722	27,675	24,697	25,845	26,102	-53
City of London	2,359	9,180	5,192	4,823	4,203	4,189	4,249	4,227	4,214	-52
West Ham	50,247	254,900	123,679	127,245	133,299	134,977	117,707	123,158	124,040	-50
Holborn	6,462	34,350	17,059	17,834	18,308	18,501	17,200	17,723	17,410	-48
Westminster	22,536	124,400	63,671	67,527	64,297	65,603	60,543	65,527	67,822	-48
Chelsea	13,368	56,050	29,183	31,965	31,066	30,880	29,463	31,313	32,270	-45
Deptford	18,300	95,460	56,762	57,537	58,439	58,965	48,969	50,969	50,978	-43
Camberwell	43,502	222,400	132,069	133,251	137,374	137,516	113,564	122,300	124,155	-42
Lambeth	48,873	272,800	161,991	166,449	170,308	171,671	143,058	157,123	160,448	-41
Battersea	28,045	141,700	87,973	91,653	89,770	90,329	73,767	81,732	83,939	-40
Poplar	23,958	134,400	52,723	53,212	55,595	55,983	50,309	52,534	53,182	-40
St. Pancras	28,638	179,400	108,340	110,234	108,122	108,756	99,812	104,058	105,498	-40
Kensington	28,999	174,100	103,838	110,259	109,484	109,965	100,999	105,776	107,149	-39

[885] In total ninety four local authorities are enumerated in table 5.9. The source material does however show a varying degree of local authorities with for example Elstree council not featuring in earlier demographic returns of the main blitz period but does occur later on in the post-blitz years. To ensure consistency across the time periods I have left Elstree out of table 5.9 as we are unable to gather statistical data for the authority for the main blitz demographic table 4.1 in chapter four. The file series HLG 7/608 does at times present difficulties of legibility and the best effort has been made to transcribe the data accurately.

Local Authority	Number of Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 30 January 1943	Population 1 January 1944	Population 6 May 1944	Population 1 July 1944	Population 30 September 1944	Population 30 December 1944	Population 31 May 1945	Population Percentage Reduction
St. Marylebone	19,974	90,680	55,031	57,339	54,919	55,090	51,923	54,993	55,707	-39
Greenwich	21,734	95,770	62,803	63,999	64,710	65,138	55,243	58,645	58,314	-36
Islington	45,360	292,300	188,089	191,871	194,687	195,630	174,011	183,268	184,538	-36
Hackney	37,859	205,200	134,859	137,565	142,175	143,280	119,612	130,413	130,820	-35
Paddington	21,592	137,400	88,074	93,421	93,993	94,702	88,125	92,966	94,931	-33
Beckenham	10,300	70,590	57,677	58,901	59,286	59,396	54,565	51,996	54,298	-31
Fulham	26,245	137,700	97,757	100,759	96,384	97,128	86,731	92,149	93,754	-31
East Ham	30,125	129,500	93,575	93,247	94,891	95,201	84,164	87,209	88,224	-30
Stoke Newington	8,368	50,480	34,889	36,767	36,526	36,779	32,185	34,266	34,338	-30
Wandsworth	80,163	340,100	258,804	265,154	264,046	265,022	116,967	243,002	249,506	-30
Lewisham	56,000	229,000	166,653	170,908	174,523	174,763	140,548	152,001	156,492	-29
Hammersmith	17,402	125,100	91,661	94,081	90,769	91,719	81,039	88,286	91,018	-28
Woolwich	29,870	150,900	112,431	112,946	114,787	114,990	102,958	105,166	106,695	-27
Tottenham	30,816	144,400	110,138	110,018	111,225	111,391	101,395	105,701	106,262	-25
Willesden	42,418	187,600	143,200	146,828	143,739	144,669	127,942	137,772	140,732	-25
Walthamstow	35,505	130,800	99,901	100,521	103,540	103,725	96,893	97,562	97,069	-24
Hampstead	17,552	90,480	67,319	72,243	70,847	71,180	66,388	68,264	70,332	-23
Wimbledon	15,800	58,680	46,929	47,790	46,472	46,741	40,186	42,726	44,200	-23
Acton	17,041	68,670	54,990	55,778	55,086	55,917	51,029	53,399	54,759	-21
Croydon	65,550	243,400	198,697	200,819	202,032	201,472	161,992	185,857	191,112	-21
Hornsey	22,251	96,680	77,237	79,313	79,482	79,482	70,791	71,950	73,056	-21
Mitcham	17,115	66,020	54,601	54,526	54,720	54,953	43,765	49,825	51,613	-21
Barnes	11,007	40,960	33,300	33,906	33,158	33,375	31,405	32,372	32,989	-20
Brentford and Chiswick	15,640	61,470	49,320	50,710	49,279	49,788	46,346	48,008	48,758	-20

Local Authority	Number of Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 30 January 1943	Population 1 January 1944	Population 6 May 1944	Population 1 July 1944	Population 30 September 1944	Population 30 December 1944	Population 31 May 1945	Population Percentage Reduction
Coulsdon and Purley	14,624	55,070	51,122	52,411	52,120	52,288	45,159	50,274	50,846	-18
Leyton	26,306	117,200	87,676	88,623	88,654	88,830	79,431	80,550	81,226	-18
Barking	19,441	76,790	66,252	65,768	65,411	65,548	59,133	61,383	61,606	-17
Wood Green	13,776	53,190	44,811	44,699	45,022	45,095	42,087	42,922	43,015	-17
Dagenham	23,994	107,400	93,385	92,839	94,836	95,088	85,079	86,772	90,199	-15
Richmond	9,758	38,280	34,105	34,681	33,205	33,342	30,880	32,045	32,502	-14
Wanstead and Woodford	15,700	54,810	50,105	50,711	48,487	48,783	43,060	44,512	43,858	-14
Beddington and Wallington	9,222	30,880	27,728	28,141	27,782	27,826	24,124	25,914	26,592	-13
Ilford	46,000	166,900	146,480	147,475	154,535	154,907	138,973	143,380	143,082	-12
Kingston	10,000	39,790	35,891	35,838	35,678	35,713	32,675	33,933	34,624	-12
Crayford	7,063	24,590	22,847	22,765	22,736	22,847	19,653	21,636	21,911	-10
Sutton and Cheam	21,606	75,580	71,600	71,219	71,163	71,029	58,537	65,820	67,373	-10
Carshalton	15,207	58,730	56,823	56,524	55,574	55,647	47,168	48,569	52,214	-9
Hendon	39,049	145,100	133,097	134,599	135,080	135,583	125,877	130,388	132,004	-9
Merton and Morden	18,240	68,980	65,990	65,791	66,331	66,408	51,434	61,808	63,459	-9
Finchley	17,434	65,140	60,444	61,285	60,599	60,802	57,739	58,660	59,101	-8
Heston and Isleworth	26,681	101,500	95,328	95,612	94,816	95,239	86,207	91,867	92,761	-8
Chislehurst and Sidcup	16,630	61,750	60,075	60,105	60,309	60,512	50,988	53,199	55,192	-7
Erith	10,036	39,800	37,877	38,134	37,767	37,972	34,201	36,367	36,180	-7

Local Authority	Number of Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 30 January 1943	Population 1 January 1944	Population 6 May 1944	Population 1 July 1944	Population 30 September 1944	Population 30 December 1944	Population 31 May 1945	Population Percentage Reduction
Friern Barnet	6,401	27,120	24,816	25,603	25,574	25,678	24,377	24,910	24,973	-7
Malden and Coombe	11,870	38,820	37,590	37,969	37,085	37,308	31,142	35,239	36,529	-7
Twickenham	26,716	96,550	93,102	93,434	91,772	92,083	81,158	86,487	88,479	-7
Waltham Holy Cross	2,034	7,164	6,715	6,766	6,986	7,006	6,536	6,414	6,377	-7
Bexley	22,480	77,020	77,270	76,815	74,656	74,722	62,939	69,070	69,348	-6
Southall	13,457	52,400	49,707	49,491	50,752	50,747	45,010	48,109	49,067	-6
Southgate	20,200	67,860	65,741	65,901	65,414	65,448	62,270	62,057	62,223	-5
Bromley	16,545	59,470	50,859	51,956	51,745	52,018	44,782	48,465	49,218	-4
Ealing	45,154	161,000	158,272	159,050	158,900	159,563	146,844	153,941	156,916	-3
Penge	6,817	25,520	18,601	18,913	19,309	19,329	15,033	16,109	16,805	-3
Wembley	29,480	118,800	117,604	117,535	117,938	117,708	110,040	112,443	114,792	-3
Barnet	6,222	21,320	20,655	20,438	21,688	21,701	20,850	20,175	20,022	-2
Chingford	9,100	37,510	37,722	37,964	37,760	37,940	35,064	35,505	35,418	-2
Banstead	7,762	27,500	28,222	28,103	28,273	28,312	25,915	26,742	27,091	1
Edmonton	26,056	103,200	86,973	86,951	93,403	93,407	88,025	89,940	90,236	1
Enfield	25,920	91,940	95,187	95,545	94,285	94,493	89,424	91,202	91,614	1
Epsom and Ewell	11,950	59,930	60,488	60,381	61,937	62,161	55,670	60,590	61,450	1
Harrow	54,460	183,500	192,239	190,837	189,720	189,674	174,544	183,266	187,008	2
Orpington	14,734	46,320	48,218	48,970	48,967	48,960	42,678	46,309	46,859	2
Bushey	3,420	12,550	13,168	12,869	12,922	12,911	13,094	12,737	12,721	3
Chigwell	7,141	23,750	24,494	24,519	24,952	24,915	24,682	24,363	24,136	3
Esher	12,104	42,420	44,926	45,143	44,309	44,371	40,949	42,422	42,899	3
Hayes and Harlington	13,994	43,930	58,730	59,354	59,946	59,412	58,497	59,291	59,988	3
East Barnet	10,220	32,830	35,377	35,860	35,220	35,338	33,427	33,529	33,926	6

Local Authority	Number of Houses	Population Mid-1938	Population 30 January 1943	Population 1 January 1944	Population 6 May 1944	Population 1 July 1944	Population 30 September 1944	Population 30 December 1944	Population 31 May 1945	Population Percentage Reduction
Surbiton	14,541	46,600	50,538	51,159	51,235	51,338	45,265	47,370	48,852	6
Uxbridge	11,598	42,800	46,193	45,680	44,937	45,086	45,437	44,792	44,795	6
Yiewsley and West Drayton	4,318	15,670	16,693	16,768	16,438	16,564	16,710	16,422	16,403	6
Cheshunt	5,073	16,940	18,560	18,495	18,598	18,689	18,945	18,600	18,392	10
Staines	8,114	29,920	65,050	35,029	33,607	33,709	33,106	32,869	32,756	13
Feltham	10,079	30,450	36,118	35,886	35,554	35,794	34,400	34,481	35,037	16
Potters Bar	4,392	12,010	14,296	14,509	14,064	14,633	14,556	14,237	14,120	19
Sunbury	5,760	16,580	19,918	19,982	19,686	19,621	19,781	19,465	19,475	19
Ruislip and Northwood	10,994	40,820	54,179	54,054	55,743	56,042	55,933	55,932	55,804	36
Total London Civil Defence Region	1,965,883	8,708,164	6,628,469	6,689,995	6,710,314	6,735,705	5,887,128	6,308,835	6,409,173	-26

Tip and Run Raids [1943]

The winter of 1941-1942 was significant for the absence of any attack against London or other cities, nonetheless a threat remained from a distracted foe, "…though the bulk of the Luftwaffe was employed in Russia, the Mediterranean and elsewhere, substantial forces of bombers, capable of sudden attack on Britain, were maintained in the west".[886] By the end of April 1942 German planes commenced a series of bombings known as the 'Baedeker raids'[887] directed mainly against Cathedral cities across the country and suspected as being reprisals for RAF raids on Germany.[888] London remained free of enemy attention and the total bomb-load dropped in the course of the year amounted to 6,500 tons or the equivalent of one month's bombing during the main London blitz.[889]

Despite the lack of air raids on the capital some residents could still be found hunkered down inside shelters as can be seen from the following table 5.6 which details in part the London County Shelter Census conducted on the night of 5 January 1942 showing the differing number of persons found within the various public shelters of the Metropolitan Boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington. Table 5.7 demonstrates the number of shelterers inside the available London Underground station shelters situated in the boroughs of Kensington and Bermondsey.

[886] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.429.
[887] The term Baedeker is after the well-known German tourist guides and was invented by the Deputy Director of the Foreign Office Press Department, Baron von Stumm, and it stuck despite Goebbel's hostility to the idea of publicly boasting about the destruction of things of cultural value. (Overy, *Bombing War*, p.118.).
[888] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.429.
[889] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.311.

Table 5.6 – Public Shelter Census
Source: The National Archives, HO 200/1, Shelter Census Night of 5 January 1942.

Local Authority	Public Shelter															
	Basements		Trenches		Surface Shelters		Railway Arches, Tunnel, etc		Total		Children Shelterers	Shelterers (as percentage of capacity)				
	Capacity	Occupants	Capacity	Occupants	Capacity	Occupants	Capacity	Occupants	Capacity	Occupants		Basement	Trenches	Surface Shelterers	Railway	All
Finsbury	3,600	96	4,960	41	80	-	-	-	8,640	137	7	3	1	0	-	2
Bermondsey	4,623	825	772	119	2,052	79	7,239	688	14,686	1411	125	11	15	4	10	10
Kensington	4,155	195	500	11	604	54	-	-	5,259	260	-	5	2	9	-	7

Table 5.7 – London Underground stations used as air raid shelters
Source: TNA, HO 200/1, Shelter Census Night of 16 January 1942.

Borough	Station	Number of Shelterers	Capacity
Kensington	Earl's Court	38	710
	Gloucester Road	40	600
	Holland Park	52	750
	Notting Hill Gate	61	490
	South Kensington	46	750
Bermondsey	London Bridge	112	2,050

In an inversion of the main blitz London now found itself relatively becalmed whilst the rest of the nation suffered from sporadic attacks.

> Londoners at this time did feel curiously dissociated from the war, as if they had been left behind in a race everybody was straining body and mind to win. The authorities reflected the mood by closing public shelters which were costly to maintain…There was some protest, but most of the public shelters had been deserted. Only one man had stuck it out in a shelter in Barnes, which cost the council a lot to light and heat. The authorities announced that they were going to cut off the facilities. 'This shelter has been my home for more than a year', protested the man indignantly. 'I shall just sit in the dark and await events'.[890]

By the summer as the skies above continued to be free of raiders the number of underground station shelters in Kensington began to appear superfluous with LCDR Commissioners recommending that Holland Park, Earl's Court and South Kensington shelters should be vacated whilst Notting Hill Gate and Gloucester Road stay open. Arrangements were subsequently made for the occupiers in closed shelters to be transferred to other tube or public shelters.[891]

The turn of 1943 saw the immediate development of a new form of enemy attack of fast low-flying aircraft carrying out brief 'tip and run' raids that were sometimes referred to as 'scalded cat' strikes.[892] On the 17 January the Luftwaffe directly assaulted London for the first time since 1941 introducing the capital to its first of several tip and run raids. The joint diary of Elsie Whiteman and Kathleen Church-Bliss[893] living at number 25 Duppas Hill Road, Croydon depicts events as they happened throughout the night.

> [Sunday 17 January 1943]…About 8.30 p.m. we had an alert, which didn't surprise us very much, as Berlin was bombed heavily last night. We heard heavy firing and lots of planes and so trooped down to the cellar. The raid lasted about 1 ½ hours, but so far as we know no bombs dropped near.

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[890] Ziegler, *London at War*, p. 208.
[891] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Report of the Civil Defence Committee 15 July 1942.
[892] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 438.
[893] Elsie Whiteman and Kathleen Church-Bliss both originally lived in Milford, Surrey and moved to Croydon in 1942…The joint diary of Whiteman and Church-Bliss from February 1942 to November 1944 is written by two middle-aged woman of considerable means who exchanged a comfortable and pleasant life in the Surrey countryside for the grime and exhaustion of factory labour in Croydon at Morrisons Engineering Works situated on the Purley Way. Morrisons was only one of many light engineering firms in the area and produced components for aircraft built by Vickers in Weybridge Surrey. The company worked on parts for Lancasters, Hurricanes, Wellingtons and Spitfires. (Sue Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory A Diary of Life in a Second World War Factory* (2001), p.xx.).

> [Monday 18 January 1943] The alert went again at 4.30 a.m. and very heavy gunfire and planes were heard. Fires were seen over S. Croydon and Purley Way but we heard no bombs. At 5.30 when there appeared to be a lull when we were standing in the porch, we saw a plane catch fire, heard machine gunning and then saw it come down in flames to the south of us.[894]

The toll on Croydon was extensive with the worst incident occurring at Wharfedale Gardens where a bomb destroyed two houses and wrecked several others, whilst elsewhere an IB ignited the Brighton Road gas mains prompting the evacuation of thirty two persons to nearby rest centres. In total eight people were killed with a further thirty four casualties sent to hospital.[895]

Only a few days later on 20 January tip and run raiders returned during a daylight raid when twenty-eight Focke-Wulf FW 190 fighter bombers accompanied by an extensive fighter escort struck London, including the Borough of Bermondsey where a large warehouse in the Surrey Commercial Docks was seriously damaged.[896] The Red Lion Public House, Lower Road, Rotherhithe and three houses were also demolished with two casualties trapped inside the Red Lion awaiting rescue over twelve hours later. Five fatal casualties were recorded along with twenty one seriously injured and two persons reported missing.[897] Many other boroughs were affected including Poplar, Deptford, Greenwich and Lewisham,[898] where a tragedy had unfolded in Catford.

> One [500kg] bomb fell – locals insisted it had been deliberately aimed – on the LCC (London County Council) School, Sandhurst Road, Catford, Lewisham. The bomb struck the school fair and square, blowing out the whole central part where many children were taking their midday dinner break. Altogether, thirty eight children and six teachers were killed…sixty children and a number of teachers were injured. Not surprisingly a vast number of deaths occurred in the dining room, where twenty four pupils and two teachers were killed. Five children died on the staircase and nine on the second floor. The blast also reached the staff room, where three teachers died, and another teacher was killed in the science room.[899]

[894] Sue Bruley (ed.), *Working for Victory A Diary of Life in a Second World War Factory* (2001), p.106.
[895] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.80.
[896] Winston G. Ramsey (ed.), *The Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III* (1990), p.191.
[897] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.
[898] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.314.
[899] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.210.

Londoners living elsewhere, whilst not yet themselves directly in the line of fire, now began to react to the fresh round of air raids. MO diarist Miss. W. Grant of East Ham recorded, "People more upset, some packing to go away. It's a queer war. If it was only over!". The bombings prompted a return to air raid shelters, "Slept down shelter as we had two alerts but no bombs. Slept well. Lovely day. Went to see Mrs. S. Same as usual. Says she nearly went mad during the raid. But of course she didn't".[900]Towards the west in Kensington Vere Hodgson began taking note of the re-emergence of neglected defences, "[Sunday 24 January]…In Kensington Gardens the Wardens were re-opening the trench shelters…Much talk of shelters being locked. But we were all taken by surprise".[901] Local authorities were now having to rapidly revive dormant preparations as can be seen from a meeting of the Kensington Civil Defence Committee on 24 February.

> On 29 September, 1942, we reported the arrangements made by the Regional Commissioners for the closing of the shelters at Holland Park, Earl's Court and South Kensington stations. As the result of raids in January this year, it became necessary to reopen the shelters to the public. It is not the Commissioners' intention, however, to reopen the shelters for regular use unless and until raiding recurs on a heavy scale. Arrangements are therefore being made for the shelters to be closed unless they were required to cope with an overflow of shelterers from the two 'open' shelters at Gloucester Road and Notting Hill Gate. During the five weeks from 17 January to 20 February, a total of 3,415 persons used the Gloucester Road Tube for shelter, and a total of 5, 429 persons the Notting Hill Gate Tube.[902]

It was fortunate such schemes were at hand to once again come into use.

Random attacks continued into spring time and those on the receiving end in East Ham remarked upon their perceived ruthlessness;

> [March 12 1943] Was nearly blown out of bed this morn by explosions when the sirens went. Bombs at Ilford. Mrs R sister has had her house machine gunned. Nice people Germans. I suppose they thought that a row of houses a military target, strictly speaking perhaps they are these days.

Such recurrences of raiding did little to remove local snobbery that we first came across in earlier years, "Mrs M went off as usual about East Ham people and how they looked down on the

[900] MOA, SxMOA 1/4/25/2, MO Diarist Miss. W. Grant 20-21 January 1943.
[901] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.349.
[902] KCLHL, Report of the Civil Defence Committee 24 February 1943.

Poplarites, who were better than the E. Hamites any day. I find Poplar people very touchy about Poplar!",[903] relatively petty concerns when set against one of the worst wartime incidents that occurred on 3 March when a mass panic at Bethnal Green tube shelter resulted in 178 people suffocated and crushed to death.[904]

Homelessness rest centres remained at hand in the boroughs such as the following first line centres in Kensington, Barlby Road Centre; Fox School, Kensington Place; Lancaster Road Centres; and Oxford Gardens School, as well as the second line centre, St. Mary Boltons; and lastly third line centres, S. O. S. Society and People's Hall.[905] Nonetheless the erratic pattern and often isolated incidents of tip and run raids saw little uptake of homeless, as can be noted in Bermondsey when following the 20 January attack no entries were recorded into any of the local rest centres.[906] Of this period one can find little mention or criticism of homelessness provision suggestive of a post-raid service put under little significant strain.

The following table 5.8 highlights the status of communal feeding provided by the Londoners' Meals Service in the month ending 3 April 1943 for the Metropolitan Boroughs of Finsbury, Bermondsey and Kensington. Figures are unavailable for those authorities outside London County and therefore beyond the scope of the service. The figures demonstrate the diverse number of facilities available for the fluctuating population with the three inner London boroughs studied highlighted in red for ease of comparison. It must be noted that the number of meals served corresponds to the grand total for each relevant civil defence sub-group.

Table 5.8 – Londoners' Meals Service provision for month ending 3 April 1943
Source: LMA, LCC/CL/ESTAB/3/77, Report of Inter-departmental committee appointed to review the organisation of the Meals Service Department.

Civil Defence Group	Population in 1,000	No of Restaurants	L.M.S. Restaurants and Central Kitchens	Children's Restaurants	Children's Dining Rooms	Total Meals
Chelsea	29	-	4	-	-	
Fulham	98	-	9	1	2	
Hammersmith	92	-	10	7	6	
Kensington	103	40	7	2	1	*245,188*

[903] MOA, SxMOA 1/4/25/2, MO Diarist Miss. W. Grant 12 - 26 March 1943.
[904] Whilst a night attack of moderate proportions was being made on London, and warnings had sounded, ironically enough no attack was in progress on this particular area. A woman among the crowd entering the shelter, encumbered by a baby and a bundle, fell, causing those pressing behind her to tumble in a heap. (O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 438.).
[905] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/CL/CD/1187, Borough of Kensington General File.
[906] London Metropolitan Archives, LCC/WE/RC/17, Rest Centres Daily Numbers 5th June 1942 – 21 February 1944.

Finsbury Islington Holborn	28 188 17	- - 25	3 17 4	- 1 -	- 4 -	 *171,579*
Bermondsey Camberwell Deptford	45 132 57	- - 33	8 16 6	- 3 -	4 8 1	 *201,417*

Just a single bomb could result in localised devastation that often characterised the sudden and chance nature of tip and run raids, as can be illustrated from the following example in the Municipal Borough of Acton.

> In the small hours of Wednesday 19 May 1943, a bomb fell…[on] the Gladstone Public House, a street corner dairy, five other shops and four houses were destroyed. Another eighty houses were made uninhabitable. The dairyman and his wife, Mr and Mrs Lewis, were killed, as was Mrs Farquharson, owner of a petrol shop, and there were other casualties.[907]

An LCDR situation report for 18 June provides details of a combined HE and Oil Bomb striking the Mount Pleasant General Post Office, Farringdon Road, Finsbury during an alert in the small hours causing an extensive fire that gutted the premises, killed two and injured twenty six. The sheer amount of water needed to extinguish the flames gave rise to concerns of flooding the underground railway beneath. One can still make out a handwritten note scrawled across the situation report that wistfully remarked, "Pity the N.F.S. (National Fire Service) could not save some of this building. I understand it is completely destroyed".[908]

We have previously seen how from the very first days of air raiding the proximity of RAF Croydon threatened the town and three years later was continuing to do so as Whiteman and Church-Bliss noted in their diaries for 4 October, when after a brief lacuna raids returned that autumn.

> We learned today that Croydon had quite a raid on Saturday night. Fortunately, we were away so missed it. The aerodrome was deluged with anti-personnel delayed-action bombs

[907] Colledge, *Tin Hats, Doodlebugs and Food Rations*, p.51.
[908] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.

> and as there were air exercises on at the time our pilots had to be signalled to land elsewhere. The bombs were exploded the next day.[909]

In Kensington plans for the use of station shelters continued to be adjusted, on 24 November the Civil Defence Committee noted, "The arrangement now in force is that the stations at Gloucester Road, Notting Hill Gate and South Kensington are open every night for shelterers and those at Earl's Court and Holland Park are opened on an Alert, or if the accommodation is particularly needed. About 200 to 300 people regularly use the Tube Shelters every night, and three or four times this number during a raid".[910]

In total the 1943 tip and run attacks were responsible for the death of 542 in raids that injured 2,004 Londoners.[911]

Little Blitz [1944]

As Londoners braced themselves for a fifth year of war the fluctuating tides of the conflict now turned in such a way as to present even greater peril and danger to the home front.

> Late in 1943 Britain's offensive had in fact caused the Germans to withdraw all the air strength they could spare from the Mediterranean and Russian fronts and marshal this on the Western Front for reprisals against this country. Every long-range bomber was taken from Italy, and it was estimated that the Luftwaffe could deploy 150 bombers against us on any one night.[912]

A new wave of attack was poised to break upon the capital, "when virtually every serviceable aircraft in the west was ordered to bomb London".[913] The German intention seems to have been retaliation for British bombing rather than the dislocation of Allied plans[914], for which the time was not yet ripe. We will now turn our attention to what the Luftwaffe termed 'Operation Steinbock'[915] or the four months known colloquially as the 'Little Blitz'.[916]

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[909] Bruley (ed.), *Working for* Victory, p.155.
[910] KCLHL, Report of the Civil Defence Committee 24 November 1943.
[911] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 677.
[912] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 439.
[913] Ibid.
[914] Allied plans refers to the invasion of occupied Europe which were not initiated until the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944.
[915] Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.15.
[916] Another name for this period is the 'Baby Blitz' as can be seen in Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.328. Henceforth I shall be using the term, 'Little Blitz'.

On 14 January 1944 a small number of enemy aircraft pierced the defences of the capital and a single raider managed to reach the centre of Croydon,[917] borough historian W. C. Berwick Sayers provides a remarkable account of the occasion which is worth considering at length.

> On the dark, clouded evening…no siren was heard, when there was a dull heavy thud which could be felt two miles away and was followed by a more familiar bomb detonation. They were audible signs of two bombs…The first hit Allders Stores in North End, penetrated to the bottom of the building and exploded…There was severe roof and window damage to Whitgift Hospital and many shop windows over a radius of one hundred yards were blown out.
>
> The Davis Theatre incident was more serious, and yet so infinitely less serious than it might have been as to be remarkable. There was an audience of probably 1,500. A Sonja Henie film had just begun when with a flash and thud came the body of the bomb into the front stalls, its great weight and impetus flinging a score of seats aside, making a small crater in the floor…The body of the bomb, in striking the roof, had been separated from its ignition unit and it was the large canister which came down unexploded. People seated only a few feet away escaped injury and those in the balconies were hardly aware of by what narrow margin a great catastrophe had not occurred.[918]

In total that night five people were killed and thirty three injured requiring hospital treatment.[919]

The first co-ordinated and substantial raid of the Little Blitz on 21 January affected only one of the six boroughs studied, Finsbury, where a single resident was seriously injured and three were slightly wounded.[920] On 29 January events south of the Thames in Bermondsey were somewhat more dramatic as a HE bomb hit the engine room of the SS Fort Louisbourg moored in Greenland Dock, the vessel containing a large cargo of Copra suffered major damage and ten fire appliances were required to tackle the resulting inferno, bombs also struck barges in the adjacent Canada Dock.[921] This last episode bringing to mind the unique characters of the varied boroughs and the particular hazards they could present.

February witnessed a significant intensification of bombing.

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[917] Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.39.
[918] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.88.
[919] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.
[920] Ibid.
[921] Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.46.

> The German Air Force carried out with skill and pressed home a series of attacks on London which proved the heaviest since May 1941, as well as a small-scale operation against Southern and South-East England. The London raids took place on 18th-19th, 20th-21st, 22nd-23rd, 23rd-24th and 24th-25th, and were notable for the increased proportion of aircraft penetrating the capital, the skilful use of flares, the shortness of the bombing and relatively small enemy losses. Much of the success could be attributed to the anti-radio location device used; and to route-marking with flares which enabled the enemy to outflank the defences and approach London from various directions.[922]

To help navigate through the numerous incidents which took place that month we shall now deviate slightly from strict chronology and look at each of the affected boroughs in turn.

The Royal Borough of Kensington felt the brunt of this latest assault phase when in the early morning of 19 February a seventy minute raid dropped five HE bombs and six showers of one kilo IB, that in just two separate incidents killed twenty and injured thirty eight. This was followed the very next day when in an hour long attack three people were killed and twenty injured by seven HE, thirty six phosphorous bombs and five volleys of one kilo IB.[923] Local resident Hilda Neal vividly portrays the local scene in her diary.

> We had about 60 'planes over and one of the fiercest battles overhead I've seen or heard. Fires all round about; flares dropped; destruction widespread. Bombs fell on University of London Domestic Science College in Campden Hill and destroyed a big central block, blasting all the windows in Campden Hill Road. It looks weird and uncanny to see the flapping curtains at the empty frames, with the bitter cold wind blowing through the houses. Must seem a hopeless task to start on getting straight again, especially for the elderly; bad enough if one is young and energetic…One high explosive bomb fell beyond Pontings at back of shops going towards Olympia…We heard a bomb whistle overhead and all ducked. Why? One does, when <u>one</u> hears a bomb coming. It landed at top of Prince Consort Road, next the College of Music, and fell on and destroyed an entire corner…Over 33 of the large houses on one side of Queen's Gate had not a window frame left in, and goodness knows how many the other side. A large part of the Albert Hall windows were blown out, and many others

[922] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 441.
[923] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, The Royal Borough of Kensington Lecture on *'The Adjustment of Civil Defence Technique to Meet Attacks by Flying-bombs and Long Range Rockets'.*

> roundabout. Holy Trinity Church seems to have escaped pretty well except for a few panes of glass.[924]

Fellow Kensingtonian Vere Hodgson recorded that, "all felt second-rate next day",[925]and noted how the bombed College at Campden Hill was home in this diverse polyglot borough to refugees from Gibraltar.

Reading the correspondence of Mrs Gertrude McMullan, Holland Park, Kensington, in a letter dated 21 February one can detect a cracking in any phlegmatic façade that may have existed.

> I may have to come to you any moment! – as it is getting too awful here – quite beyond words! Friday and last night were quite shocking!! I do dread tonight. Maurice has just gone off to Oswestry this afternoon, and I don't blame him at all. He begged me to go with him, but I would rather come to you…Keep all your beds ready for us – we may <u>all</u> have to leave London if this goes on. What a dreadful world we live in. E is better off…I might come up tomorrow afternoon – if we survive tonight.[926]

A feature of these raids was the use of 50 kilo phosphorous incendiary bombs[927] that caused widespread conflagrations of especial alarm to Vere Hodgson, "[Monday 21 February] Huge fires reddened the sky in all directions…Pembridge Square seemed to be on fire…one end of the square was a blazing inferno. They said it was the United Dairies. Lady Montague's house also on fire – and spreading rapidly. We circled around Palace Court – lots of people now out of the shelters…I have never seen such a horrifying fire".[928]

As we saw with tip and run raids the previous year the use of London Underground stations as shelters continued to wax and wane in accordance with the severity of attack. On 23 February the borough civil defence committee minutes record the following;

> On 14 December 1943 we reported the arrangements then in force regarding the opening of the five tube shelters in the borough. The recurrence of raiding has caused heavy pressure on the tube station shelters in the borough and we have, therefore, in consultation with the London Passenger Transport Board, arranged for all five station shelters to be open every

[924] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 19 February 1944.
[925] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.452.
[926] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 21 February 1944.
[927] Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.65.
[928] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.454.

> night. It is hoped to increase the number of shelter wardens to be on duty in order to control the large number of persons using these tube shelters.[929]

LPTB statistics show us that on the night of Wednesday 23 February of the highest tube shelter populations on the underground network Holland Park was home to 1,099 people. The next evening the greatest number of tube shelterers anywhere in the capital was recorded at South Kensington station with 2, 028 seeking refuge, closely followed by Gloucester Road station with 1, 547 inhabitants. By Saturday 26 February the most populated station in London was Notting Hill Gate at 1, 784 shelterers, with Gloucester Road levels remaining constant at 1, 501 people.[930]

Vere Hodgson provides testament to the recurrent use of underground station shelters when writing in her diary on 27 February, "[Sunday 27 February]…queues for the Tubes start at 4pm…children, prams, old people. At Holland Park there are bunks for 500. They have had 1,500 people there this week. They sleep on the platforms with trains passing. One night they had to send the train on as the passengers could not alight among the sleepers".[931] We have noted before the miscellaneous make up of Kensington which at this moment even created tensions beneath street level;

> The number at South Kensington has been due to Gibraltar evacuees themselves taking possession of large part of the eastbound platform. At several stations there have been similar in-roads by these evacuees. Special shelters have been provided for them, but they decline to use them. Their habits have been found to be unpleasant and they have to be kept apart from other shelterers.[932]

Elsewhere in the Royal Borough during this week of sustained assault, from 19 to 26 February, LCC first line rest centres witnessed an influx of the homeless, Barlby Road School took in 231 people, Fox School, Kensington Place housed forty residents, Lancaster Road Schools was sanctuary to 584 persons, and Oxford Gardens School provided solace to 413 of the nearby community. With rest centres geographically situated across Kensington these figures demonstrate both the level of destruction and upheaval, and the somewhat uneven extent of privation suffered within the borough bounds.[933]

Of the fifty six local authorities[934] affected by air raids on 19 February Finsbury received three 250 kilogram HE bombs one of which struck the basement shelter within the Methodist School Mission

[929] KCLHL, Report of the Civil Defence Committee 23 February 1944.
[930] The National Archives, MH 79/500, LPTB Tube Shelters – Report No.32 29th February 1944.
[931] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.456.
[932] TNA, MH 79/500, LPTB Tube Shelters – Report No.32 29th February 1944.
[933] LMA, LCC/WE/RC/18, Rest Centres Daily Numbers February 1944.
[934] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.

Hall on Radnor Street. Of the fifty people present in the shelter somewhat miraculously only two were killed. The other two bombs hit the Guinness Trust flats in Lever Street and again a basement shelter took a direct blow at the Eight Bells Pub on Ironmonger Row.[935] In addition to those killed a total of twelve were seriously injured and 3 slightly wounded that night.[936]

On the night of 20 January in the space of just three minutes between 22.05 and 22.08 bombs burst upon the Borough of Bermondsey responsible for the killing of two people and injuring twenty four others. The worst of the damage occurred at the junction of Spa Road and Thurland Road where a gas main ignited destroying several houses and a school.[937] The singular quality of these air raids was now beginning to alter the behaviour of Londoners in ways previously not seen.

> This Little Blitz was responsible for a quick change in the habits of shelterers. Though in general, after four years of war, morale was not so high as in 1940-41 the population were at first reluctant to take shelter in the same way as before. But the proportion of heavy high explosive bombs was higher than formerly, and, weight for weight, the blast was more powerful; and many people, besides those rendered homeless sought the shelter of the Tubes. The permanent shelter population of the Tubes rose from a low of about 3,000 to a peak of about 50,000, but more who now went to shelter went on the 'alert' and came out on the 'all clear'.[938]

Tube shelter was available for those in Bermondsey, as in Kensington, and was situated at London Bridge station where during the month of February the number of shelterers more than doubled. On 19 February 459 were taking shelter, which only a few days later on 23 February had risen to 1,001 people and continued to climb so that by Sunday 27 February 1, 271[939] were tucked away in subterranean safety.

The geographic location of Acton had up until now somewhat sheltered the municipal borough leaving its inhabitants relatively untouched, yet a phenomena of the Little Blitz positioned the locality more towards the front line leaving it especially vulnerable as enemy bombers took a predominantly north-west course to approach the metropolis.[940] On 22 February one single raid

[935] Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.58.
[936] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.
[937] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.34.
[938] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 440.
[939] TNA, MH 79/500, LPTB Tube Shelters – Report No.32 29th February, 1944.
[940] Upton, *Ealing, Acton and Southall at War*, p. 54.

accounted for the death of thirteen Actonians and injury to a further fifty eight.[941] A vivid account of the time comes down to us through the recollections of local resident James Darbon.

> I had just celebrated my ninth birthday and it became another of my childhood memories. The climatic event for Acton came on 24th February. I was in my grandparents home in Park Road North when a bomb seemed to be coming straight for us. Everyone was frantically looking for a corner for safety. Fortunately, it veered away but landed less than a hundred yards between Palmerston Road and All Saints Road. Nine houses were shattered. Later, when we returned home to Fletcher Road we found that the house of a friend had received a direct hit. The scene was one of utter devastation. Seven houses had been demolished and twenty friends and neighbours killed. Many other houses, including our own, were damaged. A similar scene was being reported in other places such as St. Albans Avenue, Bayham Road, Somerset Road, Carlton Road and the Spelhurst Road area.[942]

Along such suburban streets a total of fifty three[943] lives were lost in the month of February alone.

At the beginning of March a LPTB report on tube shelters noted, "congestion was nowhere observed except at Notting Hill Gate and Earl's Court, where shelterers were on stairs and lift wells…Behaviour is good everywhere except at Notting Hill Gate where the children are still out of hand".[944] Hilda Neal noted that the situation was little better at other stations in Kensington;

> The platform at South Kensington Underground is now crammed at night with shelterers lying not only in bunks, but packed in a row from end to end of the platform like sardines, so that there is only about 16"-18" to walk on when one gets out of the train. The cold and draught must be awful, not to mention the hardness of the platform for those without cushions. Poor souls! It's a pitiful sight to see such misery in the old and work-worn. Children don't seem to mind: a new exciting experience. But it can't be good for them. Such a fug![945]

Elsewhere in Finsbury the absence of any tube stations had prompted the commissioning of a disused underground railway tunnel into use as the City Road tube shelter[946] where on the night of 9

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[941] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/9, LCDR Situation Reports.
[942] Upton, *Ealing, Acton and Southall at War*, p. 54.
[943] Ibid.
[944] TNA, MH 79/500, Week Commencing 5.3.44.
[945] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 13 March 1944.
[946] The City Road Tube Station shelter was first mooted by LCDR in November 1940 during the height of the main blitz as a potential "dormitory shelter". After a period of quintessential wrangling between Finsbury Borough Council and LCDR and LPTB work to complete the station as a shelter was not finalised until April 1942 when it was formally handed over to the local authority as an officially sanctioned pubic shelter. As a result City Road Tube Station shelter only came into use during the post-blitz raids from 1943 onwards, explaining why City Road Tube Station is absent from the Shelter Census figures of January 1942 on page 201.

March MOH inspectors noted a sleeping population of around fifty adults and sixty children, bunks were available for 300 for which tickets were being issued.[947]

By April as the Little Blitz wore on the situation in some Kensington tube stations appears to have become somewhat more regularized and efficient, although substantial problems remained as can be gleaned from the following MOH Inspection Reports that are worth replicating completely.

> [Holland Park Tube Station – Visited 9.40 p.m. April 11 1944]
>
> Population: 200 adults and 100 children. No overcrowding. Shelter Wardens have cubicle.
>
> Sanitary arrangements satisfactory: under the care of one male and one female lavatory attendant.
>
> Drinking Water: 2 suitable cans kept constantly filled and accessible.
>
> Washing Facilities: portable basins in lavatories.
>
> Refuse receptacles provided.
>
> Very poor lighting throughout the station. It seemed so dark that one was unable to judge the cleanliness of the platform, shelterers or bedding.
>
> [Gloucester Road Tube Station - visited 10.20 p.m. 14 April 1944]
>
> Population: The sleeping capacity of this shelter is scheduled at 393 and includes 183 bunks. The average number sleeping now in the shelter is 475, so that it is overcrowded (and very much more so under Alert conditions). There would seem, however, to be no remedy for this.
>
> Disinfestation: There have been no cases of vermin or scabies, but in view of the tendency to overcrowding, bedding (which is ordinarily taken home) is disinfected monthly by the Local Authority.
>
> A busy shelter, well handled in all respects.
>
> [Earl's Court Tube Station – visited 9.45 p.m. 14 April 1944]
>
> Population: The accommodation arrangements here include 150 bunks, and ordinarily speaking 3 people sleep on the floor in front of each tier of bunks. The population in the

[The National Archives, HO 207/618, Finsbury Metropolitan Borough – Tube Railway Shelters – City Road, *passim*.]

[947] TNA, MH 76/585, Finsbury Borough Public Air Raid Inspections.

shelter the night before visiting was 393 – this increases enormously under conditions of Alert by process of invasion.[948]

The final air raid of 18 April consisting of 125 bombers dropping fifty tons of munitions over Greater London brought the Little Blitz to a close[949], during which time we have seen how the return of intense raiding had a galvanizing impact upon timeworn local blitz responses.

The following table 5.9 shows the civilian fatalities sustained within the boroughs of LCDR during the Little Blitz period from January to April 1944. Figures for the six boroughs studied, and grand total for London, are highlighted in red for ease of reference. It is worth noting that of the six boroughs the lowest number of deaths is recorded for Finsbury at three killed, with Croydon the highest at fifty five fatalities, followed by Acton at fifty four, Kensington at thirty one, Bermondsey at fifteen and East Ham with five killed, roughly mirroring the pattern of attack with boroughs towards the west and south of central London worst affected.

Table 5.9 – Civilian Fatalities in the London Civil Defence Region for Little Blitz Period January-April 1944.
Source: Conen, *Little Blitz*, p.122.

Civilian Fatalities in the Little Blitz January – April 1944 in the London Civil Defence Region	
Borough	**Dead**
Acton	54
Banstead	1
Barking	1
Barnes	11
Barnet & Barnet Urban District Council	2
Battersea	32
Beckenham	8
Beddington & Wallington	3
Bermondsey	15
Bethnal Green	1
Bexley	5
Brentford & Chiswick	14
Bromley	4
Camberwell	37
Carshalton	3
Chelsea	86
Cheshunt	1
Chigwell	5
Chingford	0
Chislehurst & Sidcup	3

[948] TNA, MH 76/586, Public Air Raid Shelters Inspections – Kensington M.B.C.
[949] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.328.

City of London	0
City of Westminster	26
Coulsdon & Purley	3
Crayford	2
Croydon	55
Dagenham	7
Deptford	2
Ealing	12
East Barnet	3
East Ham	5
Edmonton	22
Enfield	6
Erith	3
Esher	1
Feltham	8
Finchley	2
Finsbury	3
Friern Barnet	0
Fulham	130
Greenwich	10
Hackney	8
Hammersmith	79
Hampstead	29
Harrow	6
Hayes & Harlington	9
Hendon	10
Heston & Isleworth	13
Holborn	2
Hornsey	8
Ilford	24
Islington	70
Kensington	31
Kingston	2
Lambeth	58
Lewisham	11
Leyton	34
Malden & Coombe	1
Merton & Morden	0
Mitcham	6
Orpington	7
Paddington	24
Penge	0
Poplar	0
Potters Bar	0
Richmond	0
Romford	5
Ruislip & Northwood	0
Shoreditch	7
Southall	0
Southgate	3

Southwark	7
St Marylebone	2
St Pancras	17
Stepney	0
Staines	14
Stoke Newington	2
Sunbury	8
Surbiton	0
Sutton & Cheam	5
Tottenham	9
Twickenham	2
Uxbridge	0
Walthamstow	15
Waltham Holy Cross	0
Wandsworth	90
Wanstead & Woodford	2
Wembley	19
West Ham	6
Willesden	15
Wimbledon	18
Wood Green	0
Woolwich	23
Total London Civil Defence Region	1287

V-Weapons [1944-1945]

"The long-studied assault on England by unmanned missiles now began. The target was Greater London…This new form of attack imposed upon the people of London a burden perhaps even heavier than the air raids of 1940 and 1941. Suspense and strain were more prolonged. Dawn brought no relief, and cloud no comfort".[950] As far back as November 1939, months before air raids by piloted aircraft had even started, the British government began receiving intelligence that the enemy were developing rockets for military purposes. During 1942 reports showed that the Germans were conducting long-range rocket trials along the Baltic coast, and by April 1943 evidence was sufficient to inform the Prime Minister and Minister for Home Security that a new insidious danger had now emerged.[951] In the Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green during the summer night of 12-13 June 1944 six people were killed and nine seriously injured[952] by a strange explosive flying device signifying that the much feared threat against Londoners had arrived.

The object that had struck the capital was a V.1 oder Vergeltungswaffe Eins (Revenge Weapon One), to be referred hereafter as the V1 flying-bomb, a pilotless monoplane with a wing span of seventeen

[950] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume VI Triumph and Tragedy* (1954), pps.34-35.
[951] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 645.
[952] Ibid. p. 652.

feet and an overall length of twenty five feet, the missile averaged 350 miles per hour carrying a warhead of 850 kilograms of high explosive,[953] "To Londoners the new weapon was soon known as the 'doodle-bug', or 'buzz bomb', from the strident sounds of its engine".[954] Three days after the Bethnal Green incident a heavy and sustained V1 bombardment was launched from sites dotted along the channel coast in occupied France and the Low Countries, in the first wave 151 V1s were fired, 144 successfully crossed to England with seventy three hitting the London area. Over the course of the next two weeks an average of 100 V1s were fired each day, and despite the efforts of RAF fighters and static defences at least half that number reached the metropolis.

> In the first fortnight about 1,600 people were killed, 4,500 seriously injured and 5,000 slightly injured; over 200,000 houses were damaged to a varying extent…The reason for this high injury rate was that the flying-bombs did not come only at night when people were under cover but fell at all times throughout the day. As for the damage to houses, the superior blasting power of the flying-bomb was causing much greater destruction to property than the same weight of bombs had caused in previous bombing.[955]

If the rate of damage experienced during these two weeks was continued for two months as many London homes would suffer as had occurred during the entire nine months of the main London blitz.[956]

During this opening phase of attack all six boroughs received their first flying-bombs. On 16 June at 00.10 a V1 landed in Raymouth Road, Bermondsey, completely destroying fifty homes and badly damaging a further 100 houses and business premises. Given the extent of destruction it was perhaps surprising that the death toll was limited to seven persons, with the most striking statistic reserved for the 300 residents rendered homeless.[957] In Kensington Hilda Neal recorded on 17 June her impressions from the previous evening upon this latest bout of calamity to befall London.

> Another nasty broken sleep: was awake all night long, with slight intervals of dozing on bed. No one in house. Alert started 1.5 a.m. Frightful gunfire at intervals. Then a bomb whistled over, followed by shattering crash…Heavy blast all round Gloucester Road and Earl's Court Station. It's a ghastly business.[958]

[953] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.378.
[954] Churchill, *The Second World War Volume VI*, p. 35.
[955] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.653.
[956] Ibid.
[957] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.34.
[958] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 17 June 1944.

Later that same day a V1 contrived to strike the back gardens between Elsenham Road and Chesterford Road, East Ham, killing seven and injuring sixty five neighbouring residents.[959]

The first V1s on the County Borough of Croydon fell during the night of 16 June travelling in lines from New Addington to South Norwood, Elsie Whiteman and Kathleen Church-Bliss acting as factory firewatchers were puzzled and perturbed at the new phenomena as they sought shelter.

> On firewatch last night and to our surprise the alert went at 11.30 and we rushed out to Duppas Hill. A very peculiar raid which we couldn't understand. No fighters were up and no gunfire, but a good many very heavy explosions were heard and several planes roared overhead very low. It went on for hours and we got colder and hungrier every minute, as we have to stand on the steps of the shelter, with nothing to sit on and no cover over our heads. Hour after hour went by and still no all clear. Finally the dawn came and still there were gun-flashes and intermittent firing. At 4am what seemed like a very low plane swished overhead and released a bomb about ½ mile beyond Waddon station. Terrific explosion and a great flash and sparks and debris flew up in every direction…We soon learnt that this peculiar raid was not being made by bombers, but by pilotless aircraft. Fired from France. This information was startling, and as the weather was very stormy and lowering, the feeling of tension was acute.[960]

The next night sorties of V1s continued to fill the sky with a curious commotion, "they sound like a train on the Underground rushing into a station and are quite terrifying. You hear them coming in the distance getting nearer and nearer. Then there is either an explosion or the noise diminishes in the distance".[961] After three days of raids on London a general pattern of attack was beginning to emerge with V1s streaking across the capital from the south-east to north-west, the main weight falling upon the south with Croydon already heading the list of boroughs most affected with seven flying-bombs. Several local authorities reported the reopening of homelessness rest centres including Croydon, Beckenham, Lewisham, Tottenham and Wood Green.[962] In Croydon after a week of persistent bombing thirty people had been killed and 164 hospitalised.[963]

Civil defence plans were now adjusted accordingly to reflect the difference made between V1s and air raids by piloted bombers with one change being the decision to sound sirens only when batches

[959] Newham Local History Library, East Ham Air Raid Incident Reports.
[960] Bruley (ed.), *Working for* Victory, p.189.
[961] Ibid. p. 190.
[962] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/10, LCDR Situation Reports.
[963] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.99.

of flying-bombs arrived at one time.[964] The new offensive presented several other novel challenges and hazards,

> The automatic nature of the pilotless weapon, the purely arbitrary destruction of a bomb that might fall anywhere at any time and with no particular target in view seemed to many much worse than 'orthodox' bombing…the penetrative power of this weapon was slight so that incidents rarely involved the complications of broken gas, electricity or water mains, and there was little tendency for fires to break out. On the other hand the bombs could fall at any time in crowded thoroughfares; the proportion of casualties in the streets was much higher than ever before while the proportion of trapped casualties was lower.[965]

An example of the freakish character of the raids occurred on 18 June when a V1 scored a direct hit during a crowded service at the Guards Chapel, Birdcage Walk, Westminster, killing 119 people and wounding a further 102.[966]

The War Cabinet now determined,

> …that more steps should be taken to mitigate the effects of these attacks. Fresh efforts should be made to improve the amenities in public shelters and to encourage the maximum use of shelters at night so that workers could get some undisturbed sleep…everything should be done to provide emergency feeding and adequate accommodation for the homeless.[967]

The provision of services available to those in Finsbury appear from first glance to have met requirements as we can see from a V1 incident that occurred on 24 June. A flying-bomb had made a direct hit on a block of five storey flats owned by the East End Industrial Company, known as Winton and Pollard Houses. The south west corner of the courtyard had been demolished trapping some casualties with the northern block so badly shattered it had to be demolished to allow the reopening to traffic of the adjacent roadway. Blast had radiated outwards for 500 yards causing major damage to neighbouring properties. Despite this devastation the communal shelters beneath the courtyard remained intact where around seventy five percent of flat occupants were crouched down inside. A

[964] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.657.
[965] Ibid. p.659.
[966] Calder, *People's War*, p.561.
[967] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.653.

borough council mobile canteen was soon in attendance.[968] The sixteen killed and eighty injured was the highest casualty figure recorded that day across London region.[969]

In the course of June four V1s stormed across the Municipal Borough of Acton hitting the Wesley Playing Fields, Shepherd's Bush Cricket Ground, and residential streets, Fletcher Road, Southfield Road, Rugby Road, Saltcoats Road, Church Path and East Acton Lane.[970] Local resident Terence Nelhams-Wright living at East Churchfield Road recalled,

> And then a new weapon came that was even worse than the bombers. A terror-weapon. People tried to make light of it by calling it a 'doodlebug'. But Christ, it scared us all.
>
> One morning, sitting at the kitchen table, we heard the familiar low rumbling noise up in the sky. We all prayed it wouldn't stop whirring before it passed over our house. Suddenly, silence. Today it was our turn. My mother moved fast. She swung me onto her lap, and folded the upper part of her body right down over mine, and prayed. There was the most god almighty blast, and then the whole kitchen window blew in towards us. We went over like a pack of cards, in a hot wave of disintegrating glass and wood. It was a V1.[971]

Joint LCDR Commissioner Admiral Sir Edward Evans inspected the aftermath at Rugby Road, where a V1 had made a direct hit on two houses on the north side of the road causing the complete demolition of four homes and major damage beyond repair to around sixteen to twenty dwellings. During a search in the debris for three missing persons rescuers unearthed a completely intact Morrison shelter[972] despite the fact it lay beneath a large amount of broken masonry. The final toll amounted to two killed, twelve seriously injured and thirty treated at first aid posts.[973]

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[968] The National Archives, HO 186/2388, Incident Reports – Finsbury. After the immediate needs of rescue and first-aid had been met, other facilities were brought in. It was often found better to bring in mobile canteens, bath and laundry units rather than to make people concerned go to the facilities. (O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.660.).

[969] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/10, LCDR Situation Reports.

[970] Colledge, *Tin Hats, Doodlebugs and Food Rations*, p.53.

[971] Faith, *Acts of Faith*, p.5.

[972] Named after Herbert Morrison, Minister of Home Security, the 'Morrison' shelter was first invented towards the end of 1940. Intended for indoor use it comprised a rectangular framework six feet in length, four feet wide and two feet high. The shelter could accommodate two adults with two young children or one older child, lying down. Although this shelter gave less protection than a properly covered 'Anderson', it gave considerably more than the average house. The first deliveries of Morrisons arrived in London towards the end of March 1941. (O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 529.). Being an indoor refuge suitable for almost any home the Morrison had a far greater universal application than the Anderson shelter which depended on the nature of terrain and availability of a garden, or the varying plethora of public shelters, therefore making the Morrison far less susceptible to the agency of locality.

[973] TNA, MH 101/57, MOH War Diary.

Units from the Home Guard and even troops from the United States Marines were drafted into assisting the rescue work at the site of a V1 strike between East Acton Lane and Glendun Road on 27 June where six houses had been demolished and over 130 homes and shops damaged, precipitating the arrival of 130 homeless into neighbouring rest centres.[974] At a meeting of the Acton Civil Defence Committee on 30 June one can see the local authority needing to boost their response.

> In view of the pressure of work caused by recent events we have authorised the Town Clerk to endeavour to obtain the services of an officer from another local authority to assist for such time as may be necessary with the supervision of rest centres on such terms as may be mutually agreed. The County Council will be invited to reimburse the expenditure involved, but in any case we recommend that the action taken be confirmed.

The Committee also reported 1,000 applications had been received from residents for Morrison shelters and that to date 634 had been delivered. Sixty one Anderson shelters had also been dispatched with ninety seven applications remaining outstanding. An increase in the use of public shelters was further noted necessitating the Medical Officer of Health to resume inspections.[975]

By the end of the month the effort of acclimatizing oneself was starting to wear upon already worn-out Londoners such as Hilda Neal.

> We are having horrible days and nights with these 'doodle-bugs' – flying-bombs or robot 'planes, or whatever they are called. The Alerts go on all day, sometimes for hours; one has to be perpetually on the listen to hear them coming. Then when one may do so, we bunk down to the lower floor in the hope it will pass over, and then wait for it to get closer and closer, sail overhead, and then hear the sound sometimes of the shut-off of the engine, a five-seconds wait, and then 'BOOM'! down comes the bomb and the sound of explosion…It's worst at night in the dark. Last night I was in and out of bed from midnight when it began till about 3.30am. By then I was so tired I went back to bed and slept till 8.00am. (With so little rest my heart feels very groggy, tuggings at my throat; the nerves in my legs nag away with the arthritis. I school myself to be very calm, but after so many years of strain, lack of proper holiday, it is impossible not to feel some ill effects).[976]

Hilda also noted that many of her acquaintances were now heading out of the city, "hear Bennie has thrown up her post and fled to Cornwall. Mabs and Daisy have gone to stay with Frances Nevill in Kings Norton, Birmingham". Meanwhile other residents sought solace away from home in public

[974] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/10, LCDR Situation Reports.
[975] ELHL, Acton Borough Civil Defence Committee 30 June 1944.
[976] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 27 June 1944.

shelters, “Follie and Gerty say they now go to Holland Gardens to shelter and feel happier there than in their Morrison shelters; with other people I suppose”. Once again the several tube stations in the borough were being pressed into use, nonetheless it currently presented an unattractive option, “the shelters in the Underground are crammed again; wondering if I’ll go down for the night, but somehow it feels skunky to do so when others have to be above ground.”[977]

Away towards the south in Croydon Elsie Whiteman and Kathleen Church-Bliss felt no such qualms seeking protection in their nearby trench shelter from where they painted a vivid picture of local shelter life.

> Last night we went over before 10 p.m. and got settled into our bunks to get what sleep we could early. We find our trench is occupied exclusively with the highly respectable middle-class house-owners from Duppas Hill. It was very amusing to hear all the various families arriving and bedding themselves out. Torches and hurricane lamps light up the gloom and husbands and wives argue and fuss according to temperament…Noises of children and fish and chip parties come from the adjoining trenches…We could see the things coming over 4 at a time and bombs were falling all over the neighbourhood. We watched the red balls flying through the air and then when the engines cut out we ducked down the steps into the shelter to wait for the crash...During the day various people were fetched away because their homes had been demolished and Costello went off to enquire about his brother who had had a bomb in his road...We decided to spend the night in the Duppas Hill shelter again as we certainly feel safer there and the rushing sound of the bombs is a bit deadened. We weren’t able to get bunks, so took over a mattress and made ourselves pretty comfortable.[978]

Croydon continued to maintain its status as the most heavily bombed London borough where it was now possible to see nine V1s in the air at the same time.[979] Novelist Evelyn Waugh described the ongoing assault on the metropolis “…as impersonal as a plague as though the city were infested with enormous, venomous insects”.[980]

In the space of twenty four hours during 1-2 July ten V1s pounded Croydon making this the most intensive period of the flying-bomb offensive for the county borough.[981] For those residents having to withstand such an onslaught help was increasingly at hand in the form of the local WVS. They

[977] Ibid.
[978] Bruley (ed.), *Working for* Victory, p.192.
[979] Calder, *People’s War*, p.559.
[980] Ibid. p. 560.
[981] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.405.

provided “the active, sometimes almost daily, staffing of Incident Inquiry Posts; the dispensing of innumerable cups of cocoa; the relief provided to hundreds of victims; the help given to householders to clean up damaged homes; the comfort offered to people in shock, and the ‘many little deeds of kindness…quietly done’”. The detailed log kept by the Housewives’ Service recorded, “some afflicted citizens were stoical, others needy”.[982]

The WVS now grew into a valued addition to London’s resources, “one noticeable change since these attacks started is that people realise that they can ask for help from women wearing a WVS badge or an armlet, and our members were touched by the expressions of thanks and appreciation which were made to them by all types of people…”[983] The WVS re-homing scheme became a significant initiative.

> This was designed to get basic household furnishings from parts of Britain that had not been recently destroyed to people in the south-east who had been bombed out of their homes, either permanently or temporarily. These people were in need of many of the basics of life, most of which were by now unobtainable in shops: cutlery, crockery, chairs, tables, wash stands, curtains, towels, bedding, blankets, pots and pans, glassware, teapots, kitchen utensils, brushes, perhaps cleaning materials and a blanket.[984]

Many London boroughs were adopted and sponsored by various cities and counties across the United Kingdom sending a plethora of gifts to help the destitute rebuild their households.[985] Moreover going forward we will see how the presence of WVS mobile food canteens at a number of incidents across the boroughs will be indispensable in augmenting pre-existing communal feeding services.

Little over a week since we last left Hilda Neal in Kensington resisting the thought of seeking subterranean protection we now find her on 6 July having resorted to the communal shelter within the Exhibition Road subway, that ran beneath the borough from South Kensington Underground Station to the Royal Albert Hall, which we first saw used in the main blitz. Her lengthy diary entry for

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[982] Patricia Malcolmson and Robert Malcolmson, *Women at the Ready – The Remarkable Story of the Women’s Voluntary Services on the Home Front* (2013), p.220.
[983] Ibid. p. 256.
[984] Ibid.p.276.
[985] The following snapshot of London boroughs demonstrates the adoption scheme in action: Lambeth received items collected and sent from Somerset; Lewisham from Berkshire; Woolwich from Bournemouth; Streatham from Bath; Wimbledon from Leicestershire; Croydon from Carlisle; Stoke Newington and Fulham from Derbyshire; Greenwich from Buckinghamshire; Beckenham from Staffordshire; West Ham from Cleethorpes; Hornchurch from Bedfordshire, the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Ely, and Norfolk; Ilford from Lancashire; Willesden from Rutland; Wandsworth from Devon; Carshalton from Huddersfield; Coulsdon and Purley from Bedford; and Bexley from Dudley. (Malcolmson and Malcolmson, *Women at the Ready*, p. 277.).

that day provides a first-hand account of the privations she and her varied neighbours were again confronting.

> I slept on a top tier bunk in the Albert Hall shelter tunnel, in a small room with only 7 people. It was rather weird, but not at all uncomfortable. The shelter was crammed; and the Warden said he was distracted to find room for 100 people at least. Lots of the workmen of Onslow Square had come and brought the new bedding provided for the French refugees: They said the basements of all the houses were full to overflowing…The room I occupied at shelter was white-tiled as of old, with huge air-conditioning plant which kept up powerful hum all night, and gas pipes overhead, and the dimmest electric light burning; it was very stuffy, but not unbearable…Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I'd ever sleep under such conditions: with a poor little bombed-out woman and her funny little undersized husband in the bunk underneath her, and another female under me, who prodded my back in the night soon after I had gone to sleep. I was fully dressed in trousers, blouse and shoes, lying on a folded blanket, covered with another, which I'd taken with me. How I longed for my open bedroom window: Left at 7 a.m. Feeling like nothing on earth…The little woman was from Princes Gate Mews, she said. She told me that of 85 houses there only about 2 would be habitable after the bomb which had fallen there on Monday night…It's like living in a constant state of bombardment…Looting is rife everywhere after damage. It's hateful to think of this evil tendency in humans when tragedy is so rampant in the homes of people.[986]

A few days later Hilda herself was very nearly a victim of opportunistic theft when one night she, "…heard a stealthy movement, and very tousled-headed youth, about 18 slid round the door…and I said severely, 'what do <u>you</u> want?'". According to the Warden he must have been a "pinch-thief prowler", leading Hilda to reflect, "As I was alone at the time…near midnight it was unpleasant. Want nerves of steel these days".[987]

In the meantime we have seen how in the past the multitude of railway arches in Bermondsey had provided a means for communal shelter that was often lacking elsewhere in the borough, and regardless of tragic incidents, proved to be popular and well-used refuges. With V1s now falling from the sky local residents turned to them once more such as those located in Linsey Street, which despite being damaged from bombing four years before, were again in use and in need of urgent repair. In a strident letter to LCDR the Borough Surveyor set out how local circumstances demanded the renewed provision of shelter.

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[986] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 6 July 1944.
[987] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 14 July 1944.

> In my opinion this is very necessary in this area, although there are cleared sites in the locality and the population is considerably reduced…Formerly two arches were adapted as shelters. The one over the carriageway has been removed, leaving the one used as a footway for the protection primarily of persons caught in the street. You must realise that the employees of factories in this area, such as Allied Suppliers, Peek Frean, Pearce Duff and Co., use Linsey Street as a short cut through to work; also people shopping in markets use this highway extensively.
>
> It is not intended to place bunks in this shelter, but to use it in the same way as the Spa Rd., Abbey St., Southwark Park Rd. and Rotherhithe New Rd. arches. At the present time, with the new form of bombing, street shelter is exceedingly necessary…My Council feel very strongly on this matter, and whether the work is reimbursed or not, it will be put in hand.[988]

Having considered these specifics LCDR confirmed their willingness to reimburse expenditure for the shelter restoration.[989]

At this time one can constantly detect in the boroughs how the provision and use of public shelters continued to adapt by building upon previous blitz responses. The City Road tube shelter in Finsbury that we first came across during the Little Blitz was by July frequently in use with an average number of shelterers during the day numbering seventy eight adults and seventy six children. During lulls in attack around thirty adults and twelve children remained, and "most of the adults are elderly people who cannot continually climb up and down stairs". [990] Elsewhere in Acton the re-emergence of dormitory shelters across the borough saw the introduction of a ticketing system to cope with increased demand. On 14 July the *Acton Gazette and West London Post* reported, "In a number of shelters, the people who sleep there have elected somebody as a sort of 'father of the chapel' to speak for them when they have complaints or suggestions to make to the Council, or the Chief Warden when he visits the shelter. The system works very well and it is hoped that the other shelters will take it up".[991]

"Back at work once more in 'Doodle-bug Alley', as this neighbourhood is called…", wrote Whiteman and Church-Bliss applying the moniker now awarded to Croydon in honour of the borough's enduring front line status.[992] We return on 17 July to find Elsie and Kathleen spending most nights

[988] TNA, HO 207/996, Bermondsey Metropolitan Borough – Public Shelters.
[989] Ibid.
[990] ILHL, Finsbury Borough Council Minutes 10 July 1944.
[991] *Acton Gazette and West London Post,* 14 July 1944.
[992] Bruley (ed.), *Working for* Victory, p.195.

within their local trench shelter cut into Duppas Hill where the clamour from their fractious neighbours competed with the noise of hurtling projectiles above.

> We were glad to find our space in the shelter was still available for us, though we learnt that we nearly lost it by being away for the night. The 'inimical fascist' Watkins caused another disturbance last night, as Mrs W., at about midnight, suddenly found an earwig and let out a squeal. They made a great fuss chasing after this poor insect…Peace had not long been restored before another row started among the fish and chip family in the next trench. Finally, even they tired and peace reigned once more. Two batches of bombs in the night, fairly noisy, especially in the early morning just as we were preparing to pack up our bedding and return home.[993]

Neighbourly relations had yet to improve later in the week when, "one nice woman sits on our bunk and gossips to K about the inimical Watkins family. Everyone loathes the daughter (Miss Haw-Haw as she is known to the occupants of the next trench – who can hear her piercing la-di-da voice holding forth on art and culture). K had a further passage of arms with her on the subject of the light, and Miss Haw-Haw recounted the whole story to her parents when they arrived, regardless of K lying in her bunk only a few feet away".[994]

Meanwhile at the regional level the sustained pressure placed upon borough shelter provision was being felt.

> The flying-bomb attacks caused large new demands for 'Morrison' shelters. At the outset the stock of these shelters in London was about 68,000 and by the first week in July less than 25,000 of these remained and the daily demand amounted to about 6,000. The Ministry of Home Security was therefore asking other regions to transfer to London any stocks they had in hand, as well as any shelters, including 'Andersons', they could collect from householders prepared to surrender them.[995]

Despite demand beginning to fall by 17 July further orders were placed with manufacturers for an additional 100,000 shelters.[996]

After a month of V1 raiding we can now take stock of the shelter situation across the boroughs and realise how, as with other bombings, a variance in both provision and experience has re-emerged. Trench shelters in Croydon once again came into their own, Finsbury pressed into service the City

[993] Ibid. p. 197.
[994] Ibid. p.198.
[995] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.655.
[996] Ibid.

Road disused tube station, Actonians found themselves slumbering in dormitory shelters, in Kensington people scurried into the warren of the Exhibition Road subway, and of course in Bermondsey railway arch shelters were again a sought after necessity.

Shortly after the commencement of the V1 offensive a Cabinet Committee had reported that civilian morale remained 'wonderfully good' though there were 'unmistakable signs of weariness';[997] from glancing at the headline of the *Stratford Express* on 21 July, "East Ham's Big Exodus", one could be forgiven for calling such sanguineness to account.

> By this week-end, over 6, 000 East Ham persons – more than two-thirds of them children will have been evacuated to distant parts of the country. On Tuesday, the evacuation roll had reached 5, 842 and there had been many more registrations. This figure comprised 1, 583 mothers, 2, 501 school children, 1, 436 children under school age, 21 expectant mothers, 208 aged persons, 79 invalids and 14 blind people.[998]

Whilst an official scheme for evacuation of the especially vulnerable had not started until 3 July there had already been a large amount of privately organised departure, and by the third week of July it was believed that some 530,000 Londoners had made their own arrangements to flee the city. A little over a month later it was estimated that 1, 450, 000 had left[999], a symptom of the renewed pressure being exerted upon the metropolis.

"With the exception of two short intervals London has been under a continuous alert since 1800 hours. 22 FLY[1000] have been reported, 7 North and 15 South of the river, affecting 20 Local authorities", recited the daily LCDR situation report for 22 July. During the alert a V1 hit Finsbury causing significant blast damage at the Bovril factory Old Street, as well as partly demolishing three blocks of the Peabody Buildings with debris blocking Whitecross Street between Old Street and Dufferin Street.[1001] Directly after this incident one can notice an immediate spike in the number of homeless reporting to the nearby Compton Street Rest Centre, on the following day alone 424 people had arrived and during the course of the next seven days an average of 118 residents retreated there each day.[1002] We know that unlike conventional bombs which landed with penetrative force, by contrast the V1 had a tendency to detonate at surface level. The resulting pervasive damage caused by each flying-bomb to homes, "called for speedy action if the need for

[997] Ibid. p.658.
[998] *Stratford Express,* 21 July 1944.
[999] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.655.
[1000] FLY denotes flying-bomb and appears as shorthand reference for V1s in the LCDR situation reports.
[1001] LMA, LCC/CL/CD/2/10, LCDR Situation Reports.
[1002] LMA, LCC/WE/RC/19, Rest Centres Daily Numbers 23rd July 1944 - 22nd August 1944.

providing a vast amount of rest centre accommodation was to be avoided. First aid repair squads were, therefore quickly sent to the perimeter of the damage, and arrangements for furniture removal and storage took an important place in post-raid procedure".[1003]

A markedly bad incident of the period occurred on 28 July when a V1 exploded in Lewisham High Street killing fifty one and injuring 216[1004], by uncanny coincidence later that same day a flying-bomb also landed on Kensington High Street during a raid recounted to us by Vere Hodgson.

> [Saturday 29 July] A spot of excitement. No sooner had I reached my little flat than a Doodle came close in our direction. Roar grew louder. We sat on the stairs. It was losing height – but it passed over us. We took breath – heard the engine stop – and then the explosion. We understood it had cleared Campden Hill and dropped on that unfortunate Kensington High Street. The next moment another came roaring over. Believe it or not – in the space of four minutes, four of these beastly things crossed our roof.[1005]

Taking place during a busy Friday lunchtime local thoroughfares were crowded, forty five were killed, fifty four seriously injured and 116 slightly injured, with some casualties even removed from the scene in open lorries and private vehicles. The homeless were sent to the neighbouring Fox School Rest Centre which received thirty two residents.[1006]

V1 attacks persisted into August and after six weeks of raiding Londoners were showing signs of trauma, Whiteman and Church-Bliss now noticed a recently bombed out family arrive into their Croydon trench shelter, "The Father is a wonder and distressed us very much one night by calling out in his sleep 'Help! Help!' We suppose he was dreaming of all the horrors he has seen".[1007] Towards the west in Kensington Hilda Neal's diary entry for 21 August makes for distressing reading,

> A bad weekend of doodlebugs. Nasty one at 9.10 p.m., just as the News started; fell on those charming old houses in Hereford Square, just off Old Brompton Road, and on a pub. Full of people, too. Horrid mess again; roads roped off. All the glass again smashed of several shop fronts; only just been removed. The whole of Kensington Library's front is out. On Sunday noticed pieces of glass in the gutter in front of every house in some roads. Saw a suspiciously

[1003] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.660.
[1004] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.427.
[1005] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.503.
[1006] Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library, Flying-bomb Incident Reports.
[1007] Bruley (ed.), *Working for* Victory, p.205.

> horrible mess of squashed flesh in road, where the 'buses had gone over it in Old Brompton Road, which I fear I shall always visualize in my mind when I pass that way…very grim.[1008]

Once again there remained a certain inequality of suffering and often the experience of poorer local residents continued to differ to that of their neighbours, a fact noticed by Vere Hodgson. "[Wednesday 23rd August] It was Portland Road, just behind us, on a block of working-class flats. Most of the people were down the Tubes – and so there were only two deaths. Damage to property is awful. The blast extends for half a mile around. You lose your windows, if not your house. Hundreds are homeless as a result, because it is all such tiny property".[1009]

Meanwhile the latest V1 to arrive in the Borough of Bermondsey fell at 7.25 p.m. on 24 August landing on the river foreshore between Enthoven's and Sunderland Wharf, damaging adjacent wharves (but not enough to put them out of action), and blasting Acorn and Silver Walk council flats.[1010] In total thirty V1s hit Bermondsey placing the borough amongst the ranks of other local authorities in LCDR to have received thirty or more flying-bombs.[1011] Of the other metropolitan boroughs studied, Finsbury to the north, and Kensington to the west, are absent from this list (see table 5.7) as both were situated slightly away from the southerly trajectory of V1s making Bermondsey south of the Thames especially vulnerable.

Elsewhere the East Ham Social Welfare Committee noted at its meeting on 30 August that the recent rise in numbers admitted to rest centres was entirely "consequent upon enemy action". The minutes of the meeting went on to record,

> In this connection the Chief Officer of Social Welfare also reported that the Ministry of Health Rehousing Officer, Group 7, and a number of homeless persons had expressed their appreciation of the arrangements at Rest Centres.

Furthermore the committee recommended that, "the Chief Officer of Social Welfare be directed to convey to the staff engaged at Rest Centres the thanks and appreciation of the Council for their loyalty and devotion to duty under difficult circumstances during the recent emergency".[1012]

At this moment it is worth considering that despite the widespread reopening of rest centres across the capital we have not seen any re-surfacing of the issues that plagued homelessness provision

[1008] IWM, War Diaries Hilda Neal 21 August 1944.
[1009] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.520.
[1010] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.41.
[1011] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.525.
[1012] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 30 August 1944.

during previous blitzes. There now appears to be a steady flow through rest centres with any reports of overcrowding, paucity of support, or unavailability conspicuous by their absence.

During August, "there was a general feeling among those responsible for operations that ascendancy was being achieved over this weapon".[1013] Whilst the weight of attack from the enemy had remained constant the development of counter-measures such as anti-aircraft guns, fighter aircraft and balloons were now nullifying the bombardment with only seventeen per cent of reported V1s falling in LCDR, compared to thirty three per cent in July and forty four per cent in June.[1014]

For the County Borough of Croydon the slackening of the offensive was a chance to regroup and take stock.

> Some parts of the Borough suffered more frequently than others although nearly all districts were visited; for example, at Shirley twenty-three fell, some places receiving bombs more than once. Thornton Heath had seventeen, and Norbury Crescent was particularly unfortunate, having three separate incidents as well as being affected by other bombs falling near. On the other side of the London Road, the Pollards Hill area received four and was affected by two others…Croydon proved to be the most fly-bombed area in England, 142 missiles falling in the Borough and twenty on its outskirts…The material damage was very great. In the eighty days of the attack 1, 032 houses were destroyed and 56, 968 were damaged. This is more than the number of houses in the town but it will be understood that many houses were hit, given first aid repairs, and then hit again.[1015]

During this unparalleled period 211 residents were killed, 697 seriously injured and 1, 277 slightly wounded.[1016]

The post-war publication *Croydon Courageous* later remarked,

> The strain upon Croydon's nerves came almost as much from the bombs that went soaring and screaming over our rooftops as from those that actually fell in the borough. It was a grim ordeal; a terrible period of death and destruction that went on day after day; week after week from the middle of June until the end of August 1944; it was an experience that strained nerves and courage practically to breaking point.[1017]

[1013] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.657.
[1014] Ibid.
[1015] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.104.
[1016] *Croydon Times,* 16 September 1944.
[1017] Croydon Times, *Croydon Courageous*.

Yet despite the first and main phase of the V1 attack now drawing to a close, "it was not the end of the flying-bombs".[1018]

During a press conference on 7 September Duncan Sandys MP[1019] declared, "The Battle of London is over, except possibly for a last few shots".[1020] The very next day Vere Hodgson confided in her diary,

> [September 1944] Friday 8th. A whole week I have slept in my own bed…Tonight, however, at a quarter to seven, a terrific explosion rent the air, followed by a low rumble. I nearly leapt out of my skin. No warning on. So it could be not be the new secret weapon. Perhaps it was an explosion at a munitions factory, or a bomb of long delayed action.[1021]

Vere Hodgson was in fact correct in her initial suspicion about a new weapon for what she heard was, "the first rocket…fallen at Chiswick, killing three people and seriously injuring another ten. Sixteen seconds later another rocket fell at Epping but did little damage. During the next ten days rockets arrived at scattered places in south-eastern England at the rate of about two a day".[1022] Furthermore the brief lull in V1 attacks, following the capture of launching sites by Allied forces, soon ended when the enemy found an alternative means of deploying flying-bombs from aircraft, and on 16 September the V1 attack reopened.[1023]

The last of the V-Weapons the V2 rocket (official German designation A4) measured forty six feet in length, had a diameter of five feet at the widest part, weighed nearly fourteen tons, and carried a warhead of approximately one ton of high explosive. [1024]

> The V2…came via the stratosphere and arrived on its target – mainly residential areas of Greater London – without warning. Unlike the winged, pulse-jet powered V1, which was under the control of the Luftwaffe, the V2 was an army operated rocket projectile, but it brought a dimension to air warfare that no air force could match.[1025]

British military intelligence had long feared that the enemy could potentially possess a long-range rocket capability, in fact these concerns predated the advent of the V1 flying-bomb, yet upon receipt of the first V2 authorities were relieved that it was in fact a smaller weapon than had been initially

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[1018] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.658.
[1019] Duncan Sandys MP, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Supply, responsible for the V-Weapon problem, also incidentally son-in-law to Prime Minister Winston Churchill.
[1020] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.665.
[1021] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.528.
[1022] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.665.
[1023] Ibid. p. 657.
[1024] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.445.
[1025] Ibid. p. 377.

feared.[1026] Nevertheless the V2, "…was fast enough and monstrous enough, and it was more destructive than any weapon yet seen. Four V2s which fell on Croydon damaged two thousand houses between them".[1027]

It was the County Borough of Croydon that a MO investigator visited during mid-September, the subsequent report *Croydon Observation*, is useful to replicate at length for it allows us to hear the voices of local residents bearing witness themselves to the plight of their town.

> Arrive in E. Croydon (by Southern Railway) in the heart of Croydon's main shopping centre. Considering that Croydon has a reputation of being one of the most badly blitzed boroughs, Inv. expected to find it one mass of rubble, and was therefore surprised to see the streets thronged with shoppers; the women well-dressed; the shops well stocked with a variety of merchandise and the buildings free from actual bomb damage, and there flashed across Inv.'s mind the thought "it just proves how reports get exaggerated". But Croydon's shopping centre has been lucky to escape bomb damage – it is the network of roads in the rear – the residential quarter – where the damage is greatest.[1028]
>
> The investigator began to interview passers-by,
>
> Female 50: "Oh my dear it's been dreadful. This is one of the most heavily bombed boroughs; we've been bombed 141 times, they told you that number in the paper – and now what with the flying-bombs and those new rockets it's just dreadful. Oh, I'll never forget the last one we had…Have you ever been under a tunnel when the train is passing overhead? Well, that's just how it feels when one of those are coming down. All I could say was when one of these are coming down. All I could say was 'dear God help us to bear it' and when it crashed I said 'Merciful God for having spared us'. They've come down all over the place, but you couldn't get me to go and see the damage, it would turn my stomach to see all those poor people's homes ruined. No, I could never go near, it's bad enough to hear the crash, let alone seeing the damage".[1029]

Further exchanges displayed a certain amount of parochial pride distancing the town from the rest of London, "in general the people contacted seemed to gloat over the fact that Croydon had the

[1026] Calder, *People's War*, p.562.
[1027] Ibid.
[1028] Mass Observation Archives, SxMOA 1/2/23/12/E/2, Croydon Observations, Air Raids on London.
[1029] Ibid.

reputation of being one of the most heavily bombed boroughs, and that it had been bombed 141 times".[1030]

> Male 50: "I've lived in Croydon all my life – never been away from it, not even during the blitz, and we've 'ad it bad sometimes. They do say we've 'ad it the worst of all places".
>
> Investigator: "and yet the people seem to look none the worse for it".
>
> Male 50: "So you think, but you don't know them as I do wot's been living 'ere all me life. They're not the same people since the bombing's took place. Course they've got to carry on, what else can they do, but all the same there's a diff'rence I can see that much. And those poor people wot live in Cranmer Road and Fawcett Road, they'ad warning but some of them reckoned they were smart and wouldn't take cover. And what 'appened the bomb came whizzing down and killed them on the spot. Now you don't be too smart Miss, when yer'ears that warning go, take cover till it's all over. Yer can't be too smart with one of them…[1031]

A lady then vehemently maintained, "some parts of London have got off lucky, you can walk for miles and not see a house down. But it's bad round here, you want to walk at the back of these main streets you'd see some dreadful sights…And that's not all. Croydon's a big borough. They've had it bad in Norbury…and I hear that the White Horse in Norwood was laid flat".[1032]

Meanwhile to the north-east the ruinous power of a single V2 rocket was exhibited at the St. Stephen's Road incident in East Ham which took place on 17 September.

> The area was not under the "Alert".[1033] An enemy missile air burst caused the warhead to detonate on 2-storey houses of poor construction on the south side of St. Stephen's Road, causing the demolition of 5 houses. Blast caused damage beyond repair to about 16 3-storey shops and 2-storey dwellings, including St. Stephen's Church on the north side of St. Stephen's Road. The church formed a buffer for blast and damage calling for first aid repairs to about 1, 030 properties (including major damage to 30 properties). Parts of the missile were found in a radius of about 1 mile from the point of impact.[1034]

[1030] Ibid.
[1031] Ibid.
[1032] Ibid.
[1033] In contrast to the V1 flying-bombs and conventional bomber planes the supersonic nature of the V2 rocket effectively ruled out any adequate warning system. "The radar stations set up to detect the firing of rockets from France had not proved effective in plotting the rockets from Holland, and there could be no question of operating a warning system until their techniques had been improved considerably and their deployment changed". (O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.665.).
[1034] The National Archives, HO 186/2384, Incident Reports – East Ham.

In total eight were killed and forty seven injured with one resident missing presumed dead, quite remarkably, "Morrison and Anderson shelters withstood blast and debris satisfactorily". Afterwards a WVS Mobile Canteen was soon in operation at the scene.[1035]

The experience of being on the receiving end of a V2 as it hurtled back towards earth at around 2,500 miles per hour,[1036] has been relayed to us by Terence Nelhams-Wright recollecting his childhood years in Acton, "As the bomb ran out of steam, all that remained was to pray it wouldn't be you. Then, with a sound like a huge iron safe slamming shut, half the next street would disappear in a hurricane of blast and heat". One morning after spending the night undercover in a nearby public shelter the scene awaiting Nelhams-Wright barely resembled the neighbourhood he had left the previous day, "When we came back up out of our safe smelly burrow under the municipal park there was a smoking hole where the houses next door had been. Bits of the innards snaked up out of the wreckage like a row of enormous dragon's teeth".[1037]

A brief lacuna in the assault against the capital was ended on 3 October when V2 launches recommenced at an average of two or three rockets per day. Unlike the V1 much less could be done by active defences to neutralize the attack, it was not possible to intercept V2s by aircraft, guns or balloons, and their firing points were mobile and hard to trace.[1038] Nonetheless in terms of coping with the aftermath there was very little real difference between either V-Weapon.

> Rockets had a greater penetrating power, caused more violent devastation immediately around their point of impact and were more likely to damage public services than flying-bombs. On the other hand the area affected by their blast was smaller. No important new civil defence problems arose; the civil defence services had been able to meet demands made on them, there had been no undue pressure on shelter accommodation and no rush of evacuees out of London.[1039]

Despite well-honed reflexes being capable of withstanding this latest manifestation of aerial warfare there remained a stubborn problem in the metropolis, "the repair of damaged property continued to be a major task…".[1040]

Pre-existing borough services may have been at the ready yet even so some could still be found wanting. The last time we came across the City Road tube shelter during the summer it was in

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[1035] Ibid.
[1036] Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.521.
[1037] Faith, *Acts of Faith*, pps.6-7.
[1038] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.666.
[1039] Ibid. p. 667.
[1040] Ibid.

constant demand being well used by many in Finsbury, by October conditions had deteriorated to such an extent they presented a health hazard to those inside. A public air raid shelter inspection reported,

> Visited at 10 p.m. October 10th. There was a widespread infestation with bugs, affecting bunks and walls; the shelter was dirty and the walls were in a dilapidated condition. Regular spraying with "Omnicide" had failed to arrest the infestation; cleaning was carried out partly by two shelterers on a paid basis (one said that she had swept the floors and dusted, but had not done any scrubbing since the advent of the flying-bomb because of the difficulty with the bedding).[1041]

The MOH inspector arranged, "that Dr. Busine shall, as an experiment, carry out a D.D.T. disinfestation of part or all of this shelter".[1042]

So far the V2 offensive had spared Croydon for "doodle-bug alley" was no longer in the direct line of fire, however this was unlikely to have soothed strained nerves in the county borough as, "the sound of bombs which fell on adjoining districts could be heard up to a distance of twenty miles. Some passed right over the town; the effect being an instantaneous lightning – like a flash of white light, the rocket itself being too high and too swift to be seen".[1043] The town then received its first V2 on 20 October.

> At South Norwood…A crater forty feet or so wide and twenty feet deep had appeared and the damage around was great…It was found that several people were trapped in the ruins, some so deeply that they could not be found. It was necessary to call for the services of a detector dog from Chelsea…when the whole search was completed it was learned that six people had been killed, three of whom were of one family, fourteen seriously injured, were taken to hospital and the First Aid Posts gave treatment to thirty-one with minor hurts.[1044]

Several homes were either destroyed or rendered uninhabitable and fifty nine local homeless trudged towards the Suffolk Road Rest Centre, and as we have seen before in many similar incidents, the WVS were immediately on the scene having established a mobile canteen dispensing food and drinks.[1045]

[1041] TNA, MH 76/585, LCDR Memoranda 11 October 1944 City Road Tunnel Shelter Finsbury M.B.
[1042] Ibid.
[1043] Berwick Sayers, *Croydon and the Second War*, p.112.
[1044] Ibid.
[1045] Ibid.

Returning to Bermondsey we find the railway arches continuing to act as macabre magnets somehow attracting the attention of the enemy, as continued to be the case at 08:37 on 26 October when a V2 landed near the John Bull Arch where the railway crosses Southwark Park Road.[1046] Again the damage to property was far-reaching and by remarkable coincidence the explosion also caught a passing train.

> Blast caused the complete demolition of 18 mainly 2 and 3 storey business premises on both sides of Southwark Park Road with living accommodation on the upper floors…major damage to about 250 premises and damage calling for First Aid Repairs to about 350 premises within a radius of about 350 yards from the craters. The down track of the South Bermondsey loop of Southern Railway was blocked with debris and apart from suction waves causing drawing out of the brick parapet to the railway line no major structural damage was apparent. A train passing at the time of the incident received blast damage and some passengers suffered slight injuries.[1047]

Borough Historian James Stewart later remarked, "at that hour in the morning many people were in the streets and many others moving around their homes, but the casualties were less numerous than might be expected in these circumstances. Eight persons were killed; 19 became hospital cases; and about a hundred had more or less slight injuries. Many homeless people were housed at Monnow Road Rest Centre".[1048]

"We get lots of bangs and explosions here every day and night. They seem to be sending us a lot of bombs lately"[1049], wrote Gertrude McMullan of Holland Park, Kensington to her sister in Cambridge on 2 November. It was during November that the scale of attack on London intensified with the average number of V2s rising to four and then six a day.[1050]

> The crashes are terrific sometimes – the whole earth seems to quake, and all the doors and windows rattle. I'm sure you would hate it – I do. The damage all round us is shocking. I wish you could see Kensington High Street. It is perfectly frightening. They are mostly rocket-bombs they have been sending lately. We get no "sirens" with them – they come too fast. We just hear a tremendous crash, and the house trembles!...We had a bad one in the middle

[1046] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.44.
[1047] The National Archives, HO 186/2368, Incident Reports – Bermondsey.
[1048] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.45.
[1049] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 2 November 1944.
[1050] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.666.

> of last night, and have had several today too…they take down whole streets of houses each time, and kill heaps of people! What a life!![1051]

Somewhat counter-intuitively it was at this point many returned to the capital, "anxiety was felt by the Government, not about a disorganised exodus of refugees, but because such large numbers of people were pouring back into London when so many houses, schools, and other buildings had been damaged. In the middle of November, for instance, when the rocket attack was fairly heavy, it was estimated that the population of London was only 8 per cent lower than it had been at the beginning of the flying-bomb attacks".[1052] (See table 5.6).

We find the Kensington Civil Defence Committee on 22 November now preoccupied with the number of homeless on their hands.

> Re-housing owing to extensive damage to residential property by fly-bomb raiding, a considerable number of properties have been requisitioned to provide accommodation for the homeless.
>
> In addition, the Council have, at the request of the Ministry of Health, taken over two blocks previously occupied by refugees, and necessary works of repair, etc, are now being carried out to make the flats available as accommodation for bombed-out families.
>
> The Ministry of Health have now asked the Council to take over 48 large houses in Evelyn Gardens and Brompton Square, previously occupied by Government Departments and carry out standard conversions, as it is considered that this will provide the maximum amount of accommodation in the minimum amount of time.[1053]

Not only was Kensington particularly fortunate to have such properties at the ready, we also see the local authority having the capacity, as we have seen previously, to host others from outside the Royal Borough, as "these premises, together with the two blocks of flats, are intended to provide a pool of accommodation for families throughout the London Region as well as for Kensington residents".[1054]

Within the minutes of the same Civil Defence Committee meeting we can also see that the borough council had at their disposal a novel solution to tackling homelessness.

[1051] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 2 November 1944.
[1052] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* p.667.
[1053] KCLHL, Report of the Civil Defence Committee 22 November 1944.
[1054] Ibid.

> 200 tickets for accommodation in the deep tube shelter at Belsize Park were allocated to Kensington and a number of these were issued. Preference was given to bombed out persons and those for whom there was no other shelter accommodation. Belsize Park Shelter has now been closed to the public and shelterers transferred to the deep shelter at Camden Town.[1055]

What precisely was the committee referring to when it spoke of deep tube shelters?

During the height of the main London blitz in October 1940 the Cabinet had decided that provision of some deep shelters was now necessary and should be provided by a new system of tunnels linked to London Underground stations, and by the end of the year preliminary plans had been made for the LPTB to construct two parallel tunnels underneath the platforms and tunnels at ten tube stations.[1056] Each tunnel would be divided into two decks, include kitchens, first aid posts, sanitation, and accommodate around 9,600 persons. By the end of the main blitz it had become clear that the tunnels were both over budget and behind schedule with the first shelter not ready until March 1942. At the start of the V-Weapon assault authorities had decided to keep the deep tube shelters in "reserve in case of worse things to come", nonetheless by 9 July the first one was opened followed by two more.[1057]

> They were available only to ticket holders, and tickets were issued to existing Tube Shelterers and to local authorities, especially for people made homeless by the raids. The Ministry of Home Security had feared both that the opening of these new deep shelters might cause discontent among those who could not use them and that it might be difficult to get people out of them during the day. However, after six weeks of their use it reported that there was no sign of any 'deep shelter mentality'. By September, space in the deep shelters could be allocated at week-ends as billets to troops on leave, and in October two of the shelters closed.[1058]

Accordingly it was the deep tunnels at Belsize Park and subsequently Camden Town stations where homeless Kensingtonians were able to reside in safety. We should note also that people from

[1055] Ibid.
[1056] The stations were: Clapham North, Clapham South, Chancery Lane, Goodge Street, Camden Town, Oval, Stockwell, Clapham Common, St. Paul's, and Belsize Park. (It was later decided to abandon St.Paul's and Oval stations as suitable sites). (O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 531.).
[1057] O'Brien, *Civil Defence,* pps. 530-656 *passim*.
[1058] Ibid. p. 656.

Bermondsey and Finsbury were also allocated tickets to the deep tube shelters at Clapham South and Camden Town respectively.[1059]

The single worst incident of the V2 campaign occurred at the end of the month when on 25 November at 12:26 a crowded Woolworth's store on New Cross Road, Deptford received a direct hit killing 160 and seriously injuring 108.[1060] By the middle of December the intensity of the V2 barrage began to lessen with four rockets striking London every twenty four hours.[1061]

The arrival of 1945, the sixth and final year of bombings, brought little respite to war torn Londoners and we find Vere Hodgson in Kensington exasperated at the continued sorties of V2s. "[January 1945] Thursday 4th So many rockets falling tonight that I do not feel like going to bed. Never had such a night of them…five in our area. Mr Hillyard keeps comforting me by saying we cannot all get killed. But it is all unnerving. With Doodles I could dive under the table…snow is falling. Great fire in the sky".[1062] A week later nearby resident Gertrude McMullan continued to update her sister on local happenings,

> We had a rest from the bombs for about a week – all through Xmas. They are at us again now. Last night we had 28 – but I didn't hear them all. London is a big place of course. Sometimes we get so many – some quite near that I have felt that I shall like to flee to you again! Today, I have only heard one crash so far.[1063]

On 26 January London withstood thirteen V2s the highest number so far recorded in a single day with the weekly casualty list during this period double that of the previous month.[1064]

Eastwards towards the County Borough of East Ham an account of current V2 activity comes down to us through the diary of ARP Chief Warden Edward J. Carter.

> Wednesday, January 31. Visited Grosvenor Road and Neville Road…a couple of rows of terrace houses and a school were involved (25 killed there). Complete devastation where the rocket fell, and out of the spread of ruin, half a dozen Anderson shelters sprouted from the back gardens like ugly mushrooms.

[1059] The National Archives, HO 200/9, Allocation of Tickets for Deep Tube Shelters.
[1060] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.484.
[1061] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.666.
[1062] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.556.
[1063] KCLHL, Letter from Mrs Gertrude McMullan to Miss H. Buckenham 10 January 1945.
[1064] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.667.

> Next one was in the High Street, and shops, a cinema and a church were involved. Huge girders lay around, some having been cut through by the oxyacetylene apparatus, while in one ruin that was once a house, a very battered piano stuck out at an angle. Four killed.
>
> Last one to be visited was right alongside the West Ham Football Ground.[1065] Poor, miserable, dirty little houses, that had vanished in a sea of rubble. Twenty-nine killed, and over a hundred injured here, and not all the bodies recovered yet. Squads still worked on it, aided by a mobile crane. Small factories were involved, and here and there among the household wreckage lay bits of machinery and tools. In the grounds of the Football club, a dozen or more 'buses and Green Line coaches stood with windows shattered and bonnets torn off.
>
> A short little soldier of the Marines, grubbing about in the wreckage of one of the houses, asked that something should be done about a dangerously leaning chimney breast. Six of his relatives had been killed. Another tottery old fellow wondered where he could get a tarpaulin to cover his stripped roof. Calling at the ARP Headquarters a little later, a pathetic couple of women were identifying a few brick-dust covered handbags that had been found.[1066]

Later that week on 2 February another V2 dropped near the Town Hall behind a row of houses on Navarre Road, "completely clearing three sides of a square block of homes. Everything and everybody was covered in red brick dust blown up by the eddying wind, and the houses on the side of the road opposite to the crater were split and shattered and seemed to lean away back from the force of the explosion".[1067]

Returning south of the river to Bermondsey a brief spell free from the attentions of V-Weapons was broken on 3 March.

> A long-range rocket bomb fell in Parkers Row, adjoining Oxley Street, opposite Holy Trinity Church and the Roman Catholic convent buildings. Parkers Row is the continuation of Tooley Street into Jamaica Road, and is part of the main highway from London Bridge to Deptford and Greenwich, and one of the principal traffic routes through Bermondsey. The V2 fell right on the crown of the road which is comparatively narrow at this point…a 36-inch high-pressure water supply main serving Bermondsey, Deptford, Southwark and East London was ruptured; along with a 7-inch supply main and hydraulic power main supplying the riverside

[1065] Then situated in East Ham County Borough.
[1066] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.515.
[1067] Ibid. p. 522.

> wharves and the lifts of the Tower Bridge…All buildings near the explosion suffered either complete demolition or extensive damage, and severe blast effects extended for at least 500 yards around. The blast also travelled through the sewer and caused fractures and road damage for some distance. Nearly all the buildings within the area of blast, including the whole of Oxley Street, had later to be demolished.[1068]

This was followed in the early morning of 4 March when a V2 rocket exploded in mid-air causing significant damage to Braybrooks Tannery in Tyers Gate, twenty four hours later a low-lying V1 appeared from the east over the Surrey Commercial Docks, struck a crane, and exploded between Plough Lane and Grove Street.[1069]

In the last few weeks of aerial bombardment Finsbury played host to a devastating episode when a V2 rocket thundered into Smithfield Market at 11:10 on 8 March.

> The fish, fruit, and vegetable market at the corner of Farringdon Road and Charterhouse Street was hit during morning shopping hours. Over 100 people were killed outright and 123 received injuries, many of them serious. Out of a welter of fallen girders, masonry, glass, and debris came the screams and shouts of the injured and the trapped. Rescue Squads released those who could be got at, but for many hours afterwards the victims went on, and bloodhounds were brought in to help…there was a long queue of women outside Hart's, the butchers. Many of them were victims of the blast and flying debris. Part of the cold stores of the Union Cold Storage Company and of the Port of London Authority were penetrated by the bomb.[1070]

300 injured were dispatched to St. Bartholomew's Hospital whilst seven fatalities had to be handled at a temporary mortuary set up at a nearby railway sidings. In total 115 were killed.[1071]

At the end of the month on 27 March the penultimate V2 of the campaign struck the Hughes Mansions, Vallance Road, Stepney, demolishing two five-storey blocks of flats and badly damaging a third. 134 people were killed, forty seriously injured and forty eight slightly wounded making this one of the deadliest rocket events, second only to the bombing of Woolworth's New Cross we witnessed the previous November.[1072] Later that same day the final V2, "to fall on this country or within sight of shore, fell at Orpington, Kent".[1073] On 28 March the last two V1 flying-bombs to land

[1068] Stewart, *Bermondsey in War*, p.47.
[1069] Lewis Blake, *Bolts from the Blue – S.E. London and Kent under V2 Rocket Attack* (1990), p.67.
[1070] London Evening News, *Hitler Passed This Way*, (1945).
[1071] TNA, HO 186/2388, Incident Reports – Finsbury.
[1072] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.532.
[1073] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.667.

in London Region did so at Chislehurst and Waltham Holy Cross, followed the day after by the final V1s which hit Hertfordshire and Kent, "thereafter there was no further enemy air activity against the United Kingdom".[1074]

In all attacks by V-Weapons lasted from 13 June 1944 to 27 March 1945 with the most intense phase during the weeks of 13 June to 5 September 1944, when 2, 340 flying-bombs reached the target area killing 5, 475 and seriously injuring 15, 918 in London and elsewhere.[1075] The V2 campaign lasted for seven months during which time rockets were received in both London and Norwich with 518 falling inside LCDR, responsible for taking the lives of 2,511 and injuring 5, 869.[1076] Given such suffering it is perhaps not surprising that despite the absence of air raids and relaxation of civil defences, by late spring 1945 Londoners still remained on edge, "[April 1945] Tuesday, 3rd I have been away for a few days. Did not hear bombs for two days before I left, and they are demolishing the street surface shelters. But we must be on our guard about rejoicing too soon".[1077]

Conclusion

We have now followed the six boroughs through the course of the post-blitz period looking at them simultaneously across the combined themes of shelters, homelessness-rest centres and communal feeding.

After the arbitrary Tip and Run assaults of 1943 sustained raiding would soon follow, 1944 would be the year, with the exception of May, which would see the capital continuously under fire. It was a twelve month period quite unlike previous years and we should remember this would befall a population already fatigued from the hardships and violence of five years spent at war.

One notices how the nature of new waves of bombing took a trajectory that affected different boroughs at different times. This is first illustrated in the case of Acton during the Little Blitz when the west London borough, having emerged relatively unscathed from the main blitz, was now brought front and centre directly into the bomb sights of the enemy. Later on we saw how V1s separated Croydon from the rest of the city when the county borough was the bullseye of "doodlebug alley".

A further distinguishing feature of the post-blitz phase is how renewed aerial attack galvanized already tested and readily available local responses. London was now simply much better equipped

[1074] Ramsey, *Blitz Then and Now – Vol. III*, p.532.
[1075] O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p.657.
[1076] Ibid. p. 668.
[1077] Hodgson, *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, p.573.

from previous blitzes to cope and we do not see any repeat of authorities making things up as they went along, the capital's reflexes were well honed.

From a complicated narrative stretching over 1943, 1944 and 1945, we are now in a position to summarise how increased shelter use continued to see a variation in provision and experience across the six boroughs. How post-raid services, now put under less strain than before due to the number of Londoners leaving the city, created less demand helping to facilitate an easier processing of the homeless, and witnessed the use of on-site canteens in preference to the herding of survivors into centres, with the mobile services of the WVS more than adequately complimenting pre-existing British Restaurants.

When we stand back and consider the demographic fluctuations of this time we notice how for the Londoner who remained, the wartime metropolis changed around them. In the six boroughs we can pause and look more closely at the precise moment residents first took flight from flying-bombs. The greatest decrease was seen in Bermondsey with the number of residents leaving representing fifty eight per cent of the pre-war total, closely followed by Finsbury fifty six per cent, Kensington forty two per cent, East Ham thirty five per cent, Croydon thirty four per cent, and finally Acton at twenty six per cent.

Furthermore if we compare the boroughs from the total average of the post-blitz phase against the main blitz period we can notice a slight alteration in the order of local authorities by population percentage reduction. During the main blitz the boroughs ranked in order of greatest population decline were Bermondsey (fifty three per cent), Finsbury (forty eight per cent), Kensington (forty three per cent), East Ham (thirty eight per cent), Acton (thirty one per cent) and lastly Croydon (twenty eight per cent). After post-blitz raiding the sequence is initially unchanged, Bermondsey, Finsbury, Kensington and East Ham. There is now a tie for fifth place between Acton and Croydon as the county borough has now drawn level, reflecting the ceaseless battering it took from V1 flying-bombs.

In a challenge to the standard blitz trope London now looks and feels fractured, we saw the despair of Gertrude McMullan at the start of the Little Blitz, the local snobbery in East Ham against resettled refugees from Poplar, bristling tensions between nationalities beneath the streets of Kensington, public spats amongst trench shelterers in Croydon, and overheard conversations with resentful and boastful Croydonians directed against their fellow Londoners. We see again how the agency of locality allows us to more fully appreciate other determining variables, such as when Hilda Neal spoke of widespread looting and is herself nearly robbed at night, illustrative of how London could be very far from any stoic heroic ideal, a place where women could feel especially vulnerable.

The post-blitz years are worthy of consideration alongside the predominant main London blitz as again one cannot fail to comprehend how the experience of being under fire continued to conform to the diversity of the capital.

Chapter Six: Local Response – Conclusions

"Lord, put beneath Thy special care one-eighty-nine Cadogan Square".[1078] Written during the blitz these words from *In Westminster Abbey* by John Betjeman serve to remind us that what really mattered most was where the bombs happened to fall.

> Even in London the distribution of risk was highly uneven. Essentially, the closer you lived to London Bridge during the Blitz, the likelier it was that the Germans were going to kill you. Four miles from the bridge, the bomb density per acre was half at the epicentre. At ten miles, it was one eighth. There were twenty-three casualties per thousand residents in the borough of Poplar, six per thousand in Fulham.[1079]

For whilst there exists a commonplace understanding that parts of the capital were bombed more than others, we have now witnessed a matching inequality in blitz experience.

From 18 June 1940 to 27 March 1945, a period of 1, 743 days, London was either bombed or lived under the threat of bombardment. When one looks at the broad canvass of London history we see the blitz listed alongside the Great Plague and Great Fire as major epochs in the development of the capital. The very duration of sustained bombing against London, if not its intensity, perhaps sets it apart from any other European city during the Second Word War. London has become a totemic icon, and how Londoners saw themselves, and others saw them, has been defined by the period. Given this significance it is more important than ever before to fully comprehend and appreciate the London blitzkrieg.

Yet such a task is incomplete for the historiography too often sees the London blitz as a monolith, a single uniform event, with a prevalent approach over emphasising the city-wide view requiring recalibration. By introducing the agency of locality, a previously overlooked factor, we have seen that for the Londoner where you lived helped to shape the lived experience of bombing. For if it were somehow possible to travel back in time and converse with a wartime Londoner, we would hear them speak of locality, the division between East and West, and how their neighbourhood fared amongst the bombing of the wider metropolis.

We have seen how blitz chronicles continue to dominate and impose upon popular imaginations a notion of hardy collective spirit. The historiography has in turn reacted with a noticeable swing of the pendulum towards histories that seek to revise and exorcise any misplaced valiant orthodoxy. Varied and often contradictory responses, for too long obscured by a 'myth of the blitz', have come

[1078] John Betjeman, '*In Westminster Abbey', Old Lights for New Chancels* (1940), p. 56.
[1079] Allport, *Britain at Bay*, p.359.

to light. And whilst an attempt has been made towards locality we are nonetheless ultimately left having travelled only so far on the journey.

> Events in any town are qualified by the peculiar history underlying it – by the class of people forming the majority of its population, by its characteristic type of building, and its civic history. Problems of the future evoked by raids will need solutions adjusted to each locality, even while the experience of every locality helps to illumine problems confronting the whole country.[1080]

We recall these words here again for they stand out as such a rare example from the historiography, especially a blitz chronicle, of the fundamental need to be aware of the very city in which the blitz took place, and it encapsulates our approach.

This has led us towards conducting for the first time a local area analysis of six London boroughs, Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury, Metropolitan Borough of Bermondsey, Royal Borough of Kensington, County Borough of East Ham, County Borough of Croydon, and Municipal Borough of Acton. A sample chosen, not so much as to offer a comprehensive snap shot of London, but instead to serve as indicative and representative case studies of wide-ranging and distinctive metropolitan settlements. The six boroughs have highlighted the geography, size, population, social conditions, economic status and administrative arrangements all in existence at the time the first air raid siren sounded.

The themes through which we have viewed the blitz on the boroughs, air raids, shelters, homelessness-rest centres and communal feeding have all shown vulnerability to local variation. Air raids took on an assorted parochial nature setting the blitz within a truer context, shelter provision was based upon affordability, space, necessity and geographic environment, rest centres aptly demonstrated varying realities, and the need for and provision of communal feeding drew out conditions peculiar to locality.

The publication on 9 July 1935 of the first Home Office Air Raid Precautions circular, later reinforced by the 1937 ARP Act, imposing responsibilities upon regional and local government provided the first instance of local deviation. This call to action was interpreted in accordance with diverse influences resulting in an uneven patchwork of preparations, so for instance, the Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury set itself upon a direct collision course with central government over air raid shelter provision, whose exasperation should once again be restated.

[1080] Idle, *War Over West Ham*, p.9.

> This is a difficult borough in that they are obsessed with the deep shelter complex and have consistently held up their shelter programme in efforts to obtain shelters of a more elaborate and expensive description than the types sanctioned from time to time by government.[1081]

When the bombs began to fall this partisan fixation would prove to be a matter of life and death.

From East Ham and Croydon we saw the need to tailor shelter arrangements to fit the special requirements of two commercial centres drawing in people from far and wide who themselves would need protection if caught out in a raid. Local streets presented local difficulties, requiring and creating local solutions, such as the formation in East Ham of the Mutual Aid for Good Neighbours Association a resource enhancing shelter provision along the suburban streets. In Acton the collapse of the Middlesex County Council civil defence scheme added to the obstacles the local council had to overcome, and the establishment of the Acton Campaign for Better Shelters Committee suggests they were not wholly successful.

Further towards the centre London Underground stations came into their own as air raid shelters and residents of Kensington were fortunate enough to have had several at hand in Notting Hill Gate, Holland Park, Earl's Court, Gloucester Road and South Kensington. Comparing favourably to Finsbury with no underground station and Bermondsey where only London Bridge station could be used, Kensingtonians nevertheless had to share their underground stations, as the relatively unscathed borough provided sanctuary for people in need of adequate shelter fleeing from more devastated areas. Frequently we saw references made, often withering ones, towards the poorer type of Londoner who headed down the underground steps, reminding us that the agency of locality helps to further unlock other determinate agencies such as class.

The dense urban environment of Bermondsey built upon water-logged terrain necessitated a variety of shelters more likely than not to be above ground placed in wharf buildings, on housing estates, over waste ground, inside factories and most notably underneath railway arches. We have seen them dotted across the metropolitan borough at places such as Druid Street, Maltby Street, Stanworth Street, Stainer Street, White's Grounds, Abbey Street, Spa Road, Linsey Street, 'John Bull Arch' Southwark Park Road and Raymouth Road. During the main blitz period within just a few weeks several railway arch shelters received direct hits, Druid Street on 25 October 1940, Galleywell Road, Rotherhithe New Road, and 'John Bull Arch' Southwark Park Road all struck on 29 October, Linsey Street 15 November and 'John Bull Arch' hit a second time on 8 December. We of course

[1081] TNA, MH 76/585, Public Air Raid Shelter Inspections 7 July 1941.

witnessed the single worst incident of this type taking place on 17 February 1941 when a high explosive bomb pierced the fragile crown of Stainer Street railway arch detonating amongst the shelterers inside killing sixty eight and injuring 175. In spite of such tragedies these vulnerable shelters continued to be used, for not only were they dictated by local circumstances, they were a means whereby members of this closely knit community could seek refuge together and mourn the loss of their own.

We saw in East Ham the local response to just two days of severe bombing was so stunned that homeless residents traipsed towards Epping Forest to make camp alongside other displaced East Enders. One can however better judge the overall effectiveness of East Ham Council when we compare its performance alongside that of its immediate neighbour West Ham. For whilst both County Boroughs withstood a pummelling during that first week in September 1940 their recovery soon began to take divergent paths. We remember the report of the Senior Regional Officer that despite early difficulties the situation in East Ham soon began to improve as the local authority came to terms with their homeless, whilst by stark contrast West Ham (having seen a procession of four successive ARP controllers come and go) were threatened with being taken over by London Region. Bringing in the atypical case of West Ham, although not one of our six boroughs, as a comparator helps to highlight such asymmetries and draw out the agency of locality.

In Bermondsey we observed most acutely the phenomena of bombed out Londoners piling up in rest centres in the borough with some often residing there for weeks as the local gravitational pull resisted any efforts to move on. Once again we can see here how locality helps us to become aware of class as a co-determinate agency, we cannot fail to recall those matchless words from the minutes of East Ham Council, "there has even been some evidence of a feeling that persons from Silvertown are not the class to put into polite suburbs".[1082] The case is best summed up for us by Richard Titmuss in *Problems of Social Policy.*

> Homeless people were reluctant to move from familiar places; they clung to their 'villages' in London. Similarly, local authorities did not want to help each other by billeting or rehousing people who lived outside their dominions. They tried to hold fast to the sovereignty of local boundaries. They were abetted in this by individual insularity, and by the way in which class distinctions coloured people's attitudes to a new home. The transfer of homeless families from the East to the West End of London did not work, partly for this reason. Nor did, for instance, the late inhabitants of Rye Lane feel at home in Dulwich. Moreover, many people had to live near their work because they could not afford the extra travelling costs. Some

[1082] NLHL, County Borough of East Ham Minutes and Reports 17 September 1940.

> districts were even rejected by homeless people because of the absence of street markets and 'cut-price' shops. Some people would not take accommodation which did not provide for their animal pets as well as themselves. A more difficult problem still was the resource-less isolation of the aged, bombed out of their dingy crannies in London and clinging, sentimentally, to the well-loved sticks of furniture.[1083]

In East Ham we heard local snobbery directed against resettled refugees from Poplar, detected bristling tensions within communal shelters in Croydon and Kensington, all suggestive of a fractious fragmented metropolis where one could react with aversion to living anywhere other than one's own neighbourhood.

Those living in Kensington already had a head start over other London boroughs when it came to the vital service of communal feeding, as months before the first bombs disrupted amenities, we followed residents in need of a ready meal to the Dalgarno Way Kitchen. Within London County the Londoners'' Meals Service provided a base line upon which we noted local authorities developing their own bespoke initiatives, reminiscent of local instruments gradually joining the wider orchestra conducted by London County Council. Yet as the blitz wore on it was the Kensington Communal Services Committee of pioneers Mayor Jenkins and Flora Solomon that towered over all other communal feeding schemes in London, attracting admirers and imitators from across the capital and country, testament to the vagaries of philanthropy, dynamism, and activism peculiar to this one locality.

Looking at local responses to renewed attack during the post-blitz period gave us the chance to encompass the broader picture of London under fire from 1940 to 1945. We noticed the evolution of a 'something must be done' improvisation under fire during the main blitz, maturing to the reactivation of timeworn and tested procedures in the face of the Little Blitz and V-Weapons. Now towards the end of five years of bombing the predominant trend became one of patch-up and repair.

> The V1 and V2 attacks left no doubt that housing was the most urgent of post-war priorities: since 14 June something like a million houses had been destroyed or damaged, most of them in London…A force of 28,000 men already engaged on repairing earlier air-raid damage was raised to 60,000 by August, and to 130,000 by the end of 1944. The Ministry of Labour not only had to find men and get them to London, but to take over the responsibility for housing them, no small task in a city where accommodation had been drastically reduced by

[1083] Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p.281.

> the damage they were called in to repair…by early 1945 the Ministry had brought in no less than 40 per cent of all the building labour in the country into the London area.[1084]

All this occurred amongst the heaving demographic fluctuations of the time, for as labourers entered, they were met by Londoners travelling the other way emptying the boroughs to varying degrees.

How far was blitz experience for Londoners shaped and defined by local circumstances? To answer this research question we first had to realise that historians have not always been asking the right questions. For too long blitz history has not been so much a prism, but a prison in which we have been trapped forced to look at events in limited ways. Our use of the agency of locality has offered a fresh optic through which we can better see what was really going on down there beneath the bombs in London.

This has not been an attempt to disappear down the rabbit hole of individual London boroughs. Instead, by immersing ourselves within them, we can appreciate that locality was determinate of how the blitz was experienced by the Londoner. For it is from the constituent boroughs that we understand that the London blitz was the sum of its parts. The agency of locality is of key importance. We need to realise that not only did the blitz shape London's history, it was itself shaped by London's history, and any history of the London blitz must acknowledge that it was an experience reflective of a varied metropolis.

[1084] Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin – Volume 2 – Minister of Labour 1940-1945* (1967), p. 330.

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Abbreviations

CLHL Croydon Local History Library

ELHL Ealing Local History Library

ILHL Islington Local History Library

IWM Imperial War Museum

KCLHL Kensington and Chelsea Local History Library

LMA London Metropolitan Archives

MOA Mass Observation Archives

NLHL Newham Local History Library

SLHL Southwark Local History Library

TNA The National Archives

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