Fire Watching and The Blitz

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I recently bought a scrapbook that someone compiled between February and August 1941 during the Second World War and as sometimes happens, it contained a number of leaflets and documents that were either pasted in among the newspaper cuttings or just slipped in loose. Two items relating to Fire Watching were pasted in on the first two pages. Written in ink on the front of the first one *below* was "Fire Watching Instructions."

FIRE WATCHING .

Please note that a Watchers Party has been formed to deal with incendiary bombs and fires which may be caused by enemy action.

During the period of an alarm after dusk, some members of the party will be continuously on duty, and you can rest assured that everything possible will be attempted to save life and property.

The party have considered the best way of dealing with this menace, and recommend the following:-

- 1. Each household to provide dry sand and 2 buckets of water.

 Immediately an alarm has sounded, both back and front
 entrances should be unlocked so as to give quick access
 in case of necessity. A supply of sand and water with
 in case of necessity. A supply of sand the front entrance
 showel should also be placed just inside the front entrance
 or porch. A step ladder in the top room is also
 advisable.
- 2. Bedroom Window. It is advisable to draw the blinds up during the alarm period. In any case the upper windows should not be blacked out when anti-aircraft guns are firing, or incendiary bombs are about. This is to enable watchers from the ground to act quickly if a fire should start in a bedroom through an incendiary bomb penetrating the roof.
- 3. Empty Houses. In the case of a house being left unoccupied after dusk, the key should be left with a neighbour, and one of the fire-watching party informed.
- 4. Gas should be turned off at the meter during an alarm.
- 5. The Watchers will also require to know the number of persons in each house and where they normally shelter in an air raid.
- 6. Access to the backs of houses should be made as easy as possible so that watchers may observe both sides of the houses.
- 7. Should any further equipment be necessary, the cost of purchase will, be divided equally amongst the householders

This appears to be a leaflet created at local level to inform residents of the best way to prepare for and attack and how to help the Fire Watchers and other Civil Defence Services.

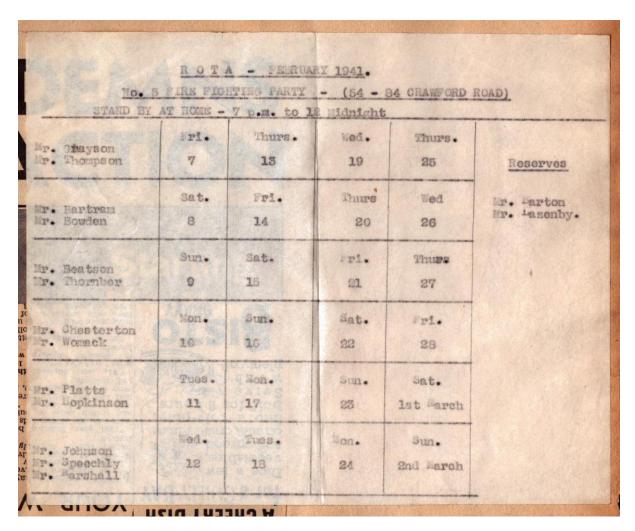


The second document *left and below* is a duty rota. This is headed:

ROTA - FEBRUARY 1941

No. 5 FIRE FIGHTING PARTY – (54 – 84 CRAWFORD ROAD)

STAND BY AT HOME – 7 p.m. to 12 Midnight



The rota contains the names of fifteen people, two of them reserves. In this case they are all men but women often carried out the duties of fire watching.

So, what exactly was fire watching?

Fire watchers, or Guards, were primarily responsible for spotting and extinguishing small fires caused by incendiary bombs, which were a common weapon used by the Luftwaffe during the war.

Initially part of the Air Raid Precautions (ARP) organization, fire watchers were later incorporated

into the Civil Defence organisation. Businesses and communities were encouraged to form fire watch teams, and individuals were trained in the use of stirrup pumps and other fire fighting equipment. Fire watchers patrolled buildings or areas, watching for signs of fire, and tackled small fires using stirrup pumps and sand, or called for assistance from the fire brigade when needed. Stirrup pumps, buckets of water, and sand were common tools used by fire watchers.

Fire watchers played a crucial role in minimizing fire damage during the Blitz and other air raids, helping to protect lives and property. Their efforts were particularly important in the early stages of fires before the arrival of professional fire fighters.

In January 1941, fire watching duties became compulsory for certain businesses and in designated areas, with a requirement for 24-hour coverage.

Fire watchers were often recognized for their bravery and dedication, with some receiving awards for their service.



As we can see from the newspaper article *left*, published on 7th February 1940, a special Fire Watchers helmet was introduced by the Minister of Home Security, Mr. Herbert Morrison, for use while on duty. The person who compiled the scrapbook and who was obviously a member of a fire watchers team, has written at the bottom: "Got mine on 12.9.41." The article reads:

'I tried on one of the new steel helmets for fire-spotters yesterday, and found it light and comfortable. It fits deeper on the head than the Service helmet and gives more protection to the ears and neck.

Mr. Herbert Morrison, Minister of Home Security, introduced them to the Commons yesterday by placing two on the despatchbox during his announcement of their issue.

The new helmet has no straps, but there are slots for a homemade strap if the wearer finds it necessary. It is of a thinner steel than the Service helmet.

Household fire-spotters, enrolled by a local authority and undertaking 48 hours a month duty, will be supplied free.

The helmets will be 5s. 6d. each to employers for the use of their fire-fighting parties.

After these two groups, priority will be given to householders who have formed their own parties. They will buy them for 5s, 6d.

Eventually the Ministry hope to have enough to sell to employers for supply to their staffs for use when travelling to and from work.

Tailpiece: The sale of these helmets commercially will be

forbidden.'

Clarifying Fire-spotters' Position

Some confusion seems to exist in the public mind on the duties and instructions of fire-watchers in "good neighbour" schemes. A number of these fire-watchers are under the impression that new instructions are to be issued.

The situation was thus explained to-day at the Ministry of Home Security to "The Star."

When Mr. Mabane stated in the House of Commons that further instructions would be issued in regard to these schemes he was trying to make clearthe difference between those who had a right to compensation under the Civil Defence Orders and those who had not the same standing.

FULL PRIVILEGES

It was important, it was pointed out by the Ministry official, that a whole area should be covered by those firewatchers who had signed on to do their 48 hours monthly and served in the area in question. They are entitled to the full privileges of the Civil Defence volunteer conditions.

Those who did not sign on for the 48 hours' undertaking, but were willing to do duty in their area would receive equipment area would receive equipment (usually a tin hat) and would receive compensation if injured on such duty.

The point is that the latter fire-watcher is not actually a member of the civil defence organisation. The new instructions have

The new instructions have already been issued in London. So far as the other parts of the country are concerned, that is a matter for the Regional Commissioners to decide.

The article on the *left* was published on 6th April 1941. It was clearing up a point made by the Ministry of Home Security, regarding the difference between people who had signed on for fire watching duties of 48 hours a month, and those who merely expressed a willingness to undertake duties as required and when able. The second group were not recognised as being members of the Civil Defence Services.

'TABLE' SHELTERS WILL BE ISSUED IN SHEFFIELD SOON

Intimation has been received that supplies of the new table type of indoor shelter will be available shortly in Sheffield, and forms of application can be obtained by calling or writing to the City Engineer (A.R.P. Shelt ers), Tudor House, Norfolk

On 8th March 1941 the above headline appeared in the news. These 'Table' shelters below became known as Morrison Shelters and were designed to be used indoors, particularly by those who did not have access to an Anderson shelter in



their garden. Essentially a metal cage, it was designed to protect occupants from the collapse of a house due to bombing. Morrison shelters were also designed to be multi-functional, often doubling as a table during the day.

The story, published in a Sheffield newspaper, went as follows: 'The Government have decided that not more than one shelter shall be issued to any one house. Presumably the reasons for this are the limited supply which is likely to be available and the space taken up in the house by this particular type of shelter.

It will be understood that in those cases where adequate and satisfactory shelter accommodation already exists applications from such persons cannot be entertained.

These shelters will accommodate only two adults and one child, or possibly two small children, and applications must be restricted to such households.

They are not suitable for erection in a cellar or in a room which is over a cellar or similar cavity, and their use is limited to a room on the ground floor.

FREE ISSUE TERMS

The component parts of the shelters will be supplied to the householders, and those capable will be required to erect the shelter themselves. Full information as to the method of erection will be given in a leaflet issued with each shelter.

It will be remembered that eligibility for free shelter provision has now been extended to include persons who are not compulsorily insured, but whose income does not exceed £350 per annum or £16 14s. 7d. per week.

This limit may be increased by £50 per annum or 19s. 3d. per week for each child not over school age in excess of two. In other words a householder with four children whose income does not exceed £450 per annum is now eligible for free shelter provision appropriate to his household.

AVAILABLE FOR SALE

Householders who have been issued with Anderson steel shelters which are not usable owing to flooding may apply for their shelter to be exchanged for a table shelter, providing the family is limited and the premises suitable as previously explained.

The shelter will also be available for sale to householders who do not satisfy the conditions for free issue. Particulars of price etc. will be announced in the near future.'

Sometimes hiding under the table was not enough.

An article below, published on 4th April 1941.

GERMAN BOMB KILLED

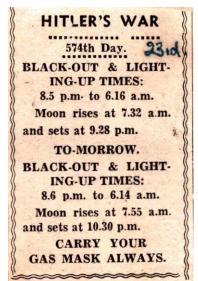
"IT sounds as though the whole German Air Force is over our house. I wish you were here with me. My two aunts are knitting, Mum's just sitting, Dad is smoking, and I am writing to you. I am going to read your letter and see if it will give me a bit of pluck."

Thus 18-year-old Ruth Owen, writing to her boy friend just before a bomb struck the house, killing her, her parents, and two aunts in a Merseyside district.

THE LETTER CONCLUDES: "NINE FORTY-FIVE. I AM NOW LYING UNDER THE TABLE. WE HAVE JUST HAD AN INCENDIARY BOMB IN THE YARD. MY HAND IS SHAKING."

A quarter of an hour later the bomb fell.

The body of Ruth Owen was found wrapped in the tablecloth. The letter was among the debris.



Left, the blackout times published each day in newspapers across the country. This is from an issue dated 23rd April 1941.

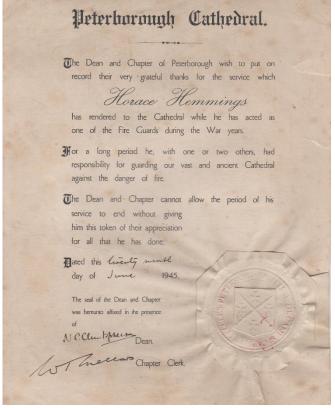
Watching at the Cathedral

Peterborough Cathedral was hugely susceptible to fire bombs crashing through its roof and setting light to its many ancient beams. Fire watchers were on duty at all times when danger threatened. Great efforts were made to protect the Cathedral. The organiser of the Fire Watch rota was Stephen Willson, born 1899 of 33, Westwood Park Road. Good vantage points were identified as the Central Tower and the Bell Tower. A number of ladders were erected for quick access to any part of the roof.

We know that the Peterborough Cathedral was bombed with incendiaries on 10th August 1942. One of the Fire Guards was Horace Archibald Hemmings, of 1, Minster Precincts in the Cathedral grounds. He was born in 1885 and was a verger at the cathedral. He was presented with a certificate in recognition of his work at the Cathedral during the war. He died in 1958.



Above, Horace Archibald Hemmings in 1935, with his Fire Guard Certificate *right*.



Another man identified was Eric Dobson, born 1920, of 103, Thorpe Road. He was a trainee architect and is noted in the 1939 Registry as involved in Cathedral Patrol Work.

Identified as Head Fire Guards/Watchers from 1941 were: -

John W. Scotney, born 1881, of 19, Fletton Avenue. An auctioneer & valuer.

Walter K. Yarnold, born 1892, of 19, Westwood Park Road. A commission agent.

R. S. Matthews.

Robert P. Palmer, born 1904, of 143, Broadway. A chartered accountant.

R. Hill.

Reginald E. Salmen, born 1890, of 56, Waterloo Road. A secretary.

Ernest G. Forbear, born 1879, of 84, Prince's Street. A sorting clerk.



A few years ago I took the tour of the upper levels of the Cathedral and its roof. If you have time to book this tour I thoroughly recommend it, although it would be useful to have a head for heights. While walking around the upper levels inside the roof I came across two steel helmets on top of a small cupboard left. I was informed by the guide they had been left there by the Fire Watchers after their final patrol and have never been taken down. Now, that was worth seeing! Clearly those in charge at the Cathedral were not

prepared to buy proper Fire Watchers helmets as these are standard Service helmets.

Another important building in Peterborough during the war that certainly needed watching was the telephone exchange in Wentworth Street. I don't think this is used for its original purpose now but it still remains standing and the Fire Watchers Post on the roof can still be clearly seen even from the ground. The picture *below left* shows the roof door and the Fire Watchers Post slightly higher to the



right of it. The close up picture *below right* shows the post in more detail and we can see that the openings where the observations were made are now bricked up. The post has a substantial concrete roof to give those inside more protection.



If There Is A Raid

M ORE than ever before now you must be prepared. Carry your gas mask, look to your blackout, see that everyone in your household knows what to do in the event of a raid. Here is some advice.

Raid Warnings

TAKE shelter at once if you hear an air-raid warning. If you can reach your home within five minutes, go there.

Do not stay in the open. Even if bombs are not dropping, you may be hit by falling pieces of shell from our own guns.

The All Clear

WAIT for the all-clear signal. You may not hear any bombs exploding, but the danger is not over until a steady note has been sounded for two minutes on sirens or hooters.

Poison Gas

RATTLES will warn you if gas has been used Handbells signify "All clear—no poison gas."

Incendiary Bombs

BE ready to deal with incendiary bombs. Clear all lumbe, from your attic. It would help the blaze. If possible get one of the specially made stirrup hand pumps. They are fitted with two nozzles. One produces spray for dealing with the bomb itself, the other emits a jet for tackling the fire.

On no account throw water on the bomb itself or an explosion may result.

Identity Labels

A GOOD plan is to carry about your name and address clearly written on an envelope, card or luggage label. In the case of children, the label should be fastened on their clothes.

For Motorists

STOP your car at a place where you can find shelter if you hear a warning. Do not park where you will get in the way of fire engines or

If you are challenged

SENTRIES now guard all vulnerable If you are challenged, and answer loudly points. stand still and
"Friend." Remain
until told to pass by Remain standing still

Sentries have orders to fire at people who do not answer their challenge.

The information *left* was published in newspapers in 1939, just before the German bombers began their onslaught. What a frightening time it must have been, especially for parents of young children.

The instructions of what to do If there is a Raid talks about gas masks, falling pieces of shell, poison gas, tackling incendiary bombs with stirrup pumps, fitting identity labels (so bodies could be identified) to be fastened on children's clothes. And lastly, knowing how to answer a challenge from sentries who had been ordered to fire at people if they did not give the correct response. Below, If Your Home is Hit (March 1941).



People at home are in the front line today. If your house gets damaged you will get instant assistance. The country is behind you, ready to help you in your difficulties. Read the information given below, so that you know exactly what to do if your home is hit.

HAVE YOUR PLANS READY

You should try to make plans now to go and stay with friends or relations living near, but not too near, in case your house is destroyed. They house is destroyed. They should also arrange now to come to you if their house is knocked out. It's comforting to feel that everything is fixed up, just in case

FOOD AND SHELTER

If you have not been able to make your own arrangements, you will get food and shelter at the emergency Rest Centre. Ask the police or wardens where it is. You will be told how to get clothes, if you've lost your own, clothes, it you we lost your own, and money if you are in need.

If you cannot go home or make your own arrangements, a home will be found for you to go to from the Centre.

THE INJURED

If you or your family are injured, treatment will be given at First Aid Posts and Hospitals, and:—

(a) If your doctor says you are unable to work as a result of a

- "war injury", you may be able to receive an injury allowance. Application should be made immediately to the local office of the Assistance Board and you should take with you, or send, a medical certificate from a doctor or a hospital.
- hospital.

 (b) If you are afterwards found to be suffering from a serious and prolonged disablement you can draw a pension at the same rate as a private soldier who has been wounded.

 (c) Widows' and orphans' pensions and pensions for dependent parents are also being paid.

 Ask at the Post Office for the address of the local branch of the Ministry of Pensions if you have to apply for one of these pensions.

FURNITURE AND OTHER BELONGINGS

If your income is below a certain amount, you can apply to the Assistance Board for

- (a) a grant to enable you to replace essential furniture and essential household articles;
 (b) a grant to replace your clothes or those of your family;
- (c) a grant to replace tools essential to your work.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

Both of the articles below were published in newspapers. The one on the left, 'BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE RAID - No. 3' was one in a series of many that were published giving details on how to behave during a raid. 'What do I do...' below right, is a touchingly quaint request, typical of the 1940's, to be calm and steady and not crack silly jokes.



If you are sleeping in an Anderson or brick surface shelter, every extra bit of immediate comfort and convenience that you can arrange in your shelter makes it easier for you to stand up to the bombing. Here are some hints taken from leaflets which are being issued to all shelterers by local authorities.

THE EARLY EVENING

For reading or knitting, a good light is necessary. Try a candle-lamp or nightlights. These are good for the eyes. Oil lamps are dangerous, as they may get spilled by shock from bombs. They make the air foul, too. If you do use one, be sure to put it out before going to sleep.

HEATING

Never have a coke or other brazier in the shelter. They give off dangerous fumes. Oil stoves are also a source of danger, as they use up the oxygen which you need for breathing. A candle heater is useful. Put the candle in a flowerpot, and then
put a second flowerpot over
the top. Raise the lower pot
slightly from the ground. Try
a hot water bottle or a hot
brick in the bed. Heat the brick in the oven for two hours first and wrap it up.

GETTING TO SLEEP

A warm drink helps, particularly with children. Remember that when you are not sleeping on a thick mattress you need as much underneath ou as on top. Have a good nick layer of newspapers or

brown paper to lie on. Paper is draught proof.

It is most important that bedding should be thoroughly aired every day.

IN THE NIGHT

Have something to eat with you, in case you get peckish in the night. Keep plenty of warm outdoor clothes beside you, in case you have to go out of the shelter. If you feel a draught, hang a curtain in front of the bunk. Wear your ear plugs.

AFTER THE RAID

Have your plans made Have your plans made
Make plans now to go and stay
with friends living near, but
not too near, in case your house
is destroyed. They should also
arrange now to come to you if
their house is knocked out. It's
comforting to feel that everything is fixed up, just in case.

Heln is ready

Help is ready

Help is ready

If your home is damaged, there is a great deal of help ready for you. Full arrangements have been made to give you food and shelter, clothes and money if necessary, and to find you somewhere to live. If you have not been able to make arrangements with friends on a traight to the with friends, go straight to the emergency Rest Centre. The wardens and police know where it is. Ask them.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

What do

if a raid catches me in the street and I have to go to a public shelter?

I say to myself: This is where I keep quite calm and steady. It's human to be a bit nervous, but if I am, I'm not going to show it. I do not talk loudly, nor crack silly jokes, because that does not help others. And, much as I want to, I do not smokebecause it would make the shelter stuffy.

HOW TO ACT IF THE RAIDERS COME

IR raid instructions broadcast in a notice from Sir John Anderson's office yesterday stated:

WARNING of a threatened air raid will be given by short intermittent blasts or a warbling note on sirens or hooters or by short blasts on police whistles.

No hooter or siren may be sounded except on the instructions of the police.

When you hear any of these sounds— TAKE SHELTER, Stay there until the "Raiders passed" signal.

ALL CLEAR will be sounded by a con-

tinuous note on sirens or hooters lasting two minutes.

GAS attacks will be signalled by hand RATTLES. When the gas danger is over hand BELLS will be sounded.

Always carry your gas mask with you. London Tube stations are not available as shelters.

Keep off the streets as much as possible.

People are asked not to crowd together in public places unnecessarily.
Sew an identity label, giving name and address, on your children's clothing.

Always carry with you something showing your own identity.

Left, 'If the Raiders Come.'

Below, Autumn 1941. The Ministry of Home Security commissioned artist Fritz Rosen to produce posters which reassured the public about the Blitz, the German bomb campaign of 1940-1941. Rosen created a cartoon character known as 'Firebomb Fritz' that was shaped like a German incendiary bomb with an angry looking face so the propaganda also appealed to children.



Finally, two pages showing a few items you might want to buy to make life a little more comfortable during the bombing. Particularly interesting are **Parnells Anti-concussion Bandeau** and **Shaws Air Raid Fright Powders** for dogs and cats.



Below, we can see the **Belling Bomb Snuffer**, **Killshaws Anti-Sweat Lining for Shelters** and **Pontings Anti-Blast Washable Net Cutains!**

