

# Domestic Dislocations

*Home-loss and the Second World War in Urban Britain*

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## Abbreviations

ARP	Air Raid Precautions
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine
BIPO	British Institute of Public Opinion
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAC	Cumbria Archive Centre
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act(s)
DORR	Defence of the Realm Regulation
DR	Directive Respondent (MO)
DRLC	Defence of the Realm Losses Commission
DS	Day Survey Respondent (MO)
ESRO	East Sussex Record Office
FR	File Report (MO)
HC	House of Commons
HHC	Hull History Centre
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LA	The London Archives
LCC	London County Council
LRO	Liverpool Record Office
MCL	Manchester Central Library
MO	Mass Observation
MOA	Mass Observation Archive
PA	Plymouth Archives
PHM	People's History Museum
RAF	Royal Air Force
RPOA	Requisitioned Property Owners' Association
RVSA	Royal Voluntary Service Archive
TC	Topic Collection (MO)
TNA	The National Archives
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

## Abstract

The urban home in Second World War Britain was a space increasingly exposed to disruption and destruction. Most obviously, this period saw an extension of aerial warfare, which shook domestic lives out of their routines and often threatened to dismantle them entirely. At the same time, emergency powers of requisitioning gave the state unprecedented control over private property and allowed the government to take possession of dwellings, therefore constructing another means for citizens to be dislocated from their homes. This thesis examines how the threat or reality of losing one's home in either – or both – of these ways was understood and navigated by urban citizens between 1914 and 1960.

Antecedent experiences of air raids and requisitioning during the First World War are explored first, highlighting the ways in which this conflict laid the groundwork for later understandings of wartime home-loss. The central chapters of the thesis are concerned with the Second World War itself, considering how the arrival of this conflict disrupted the domestic sphere more broadly; how affective responses to the loss of this site were constructed and policed; and how different experiences of loss were understood in relation to one another. Finally, the postwar legacies of home-loss are traced up to 1960, the point at which requisitioning came to a legal end. Throughout the thesis, emotional and spatial methodologies are employed in order to elucidate the relationship between citizens and their dwellings.

It is argued that the loss of home – whether at the hands of the enemy, or of one's own state – mattered deeply in wartime Britain. Practically, economically, politically, and emotionally, this was an event with significant ramifications for both individuals and wider society. Accordingly, it was also an experience which bled into broader social and political debates, and in particular those that dissected the shifting nature of citizenship. This thesis thus highlights the utility of using the home – and its loss – as an interpretive lens through which to examine the urban experience of war on the British home front. In so doing, it charts a path by which we might better understand how individuals, communities, and governments prepare themselves for the possibility of conflict and violence, and how they navigate the inherent vulnerability of intimate, everyday spaces to modern forms of war.

## Introduction

When Stephen Graham – a former soldier of the Scots Guards, and a journalist and travel writer – returned to the battlefields of France in 1920 to document the effects of the First World War, he found a landscape and society both much scarred by the years of war.<sup>1</sup> In Albert, a town in the Somme region, he reserved a special lament for the impact that this brutal conflict had wrought upon the townspeople's homes:

Oh Albert, what a place of death thou art now, with thy returned children playing hide and seek around the heaps of thy homes. How is it possible to *return* to this place[?] It is not a return: no one can ever return to the Albert of 1914. These that we see are revenants come to look at spectral homes. For Albert is dead. There you can realise that a human home is a living being like the woman who made it. It can prosper and decay. It can go shabby and suffer. It can be wounded or maimed – it can be killed.<sup>2</sup>

The homes lost to the ravages of war were, in Graham's eyes, more than mere structures that could be easily rebuilt: they were places which had hosted and shaped the everyday lives of their inhabitants; and places around which wider ecosystems of community and society had turned.<sup>3</sup> They were, in short, spaces imbued with profound meaning. Under the shadow of another war, some twenty years after Graham wrote his mournful account of Albert's destruction, a report written for the British social research organisation Mass Observation would echo his sentiments on the importance of the home: this space of 'atmosphere and objects and people', it argued, was

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia: The Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2014), p. 155. For more on postwar returns to the battlefields of the Western Front, see Mark Connelly, *Postcards from the Western Front: Pilgrims, Veterans, and Tourists after the Great War* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Graham, *The Challenge of the Dead* (London: Cassell, 1921), p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

‘the intangible fact behind the tangible framework of bricks, mortar, and architectural nicety’.<sup>4</sup> The loss of such a site, as Graham recorded so heartrendingly, had the potential to matter deeply.

It is significant, then, that across the twentieth century and beyond, the home has become increasingly vulnerable to the exigencies of modern warfare. At the time of writing, one needs only look to the brutal wars raging in places like Gaza and Ukraine to see the devastating effects that contemporary conflict can have upon civilian and domestic spaces and the people who inhabit them.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the deliberate targeting of non-combatant spaces certainly continues to provoke controversy and ethical debate. However, it is perhaps true that we have become used to the idea that homes will, one way or another, become embroiled in violence when war does break out, even when they are removed from active battlefields. Yet, it was not always so. If we turn our attentions back to the extended episode of conflict which engulfed much of the world between 1914 and 1945 – to the contexts in which Stephen Graham’s book and Mass Observation’s report were produced – then it is possible to find a time in which such assumptions were much newer, and very much in flux.

The ‘totalisation’ of warfare which characterised this period is well-trodden historical ground; indeed, countless scholars have identified the way in which the First and Second World Wars expanded the scale and scope of warfare.<sup>6</sup> Not only, for example, did these conflicts play out across unprecedentedly diverse and scattered geographic ranges and thus, by extension, require the deployment of exceptionally large fighting forces; the prosecution of war on such a scale also demanded a much wider and deeper mobilisation of the home front. Economy, industry, and

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<sup>4</sup> Mass Observation Archive (hereafter MOA), FR 1593, ‘The Sort of Home the Englishman Wants’, February 1943, p. 2. MOA material in this thesis has been cited with the kind permission of the archive.

<sup>5</sup> On the war in Ukraine and its impact on domestic space and everyday life, for example, see Sven Daniel Wolfe, Olena Denysenko, Dina Krichker, Olga Rebro and Maria Gunko, ‘The Intimate and Everyday Geopolitics of the Russian War Against Ukraine’, *Geopolitics*, 29.4 (2024), 1474-1501. Scholarship on both the present war in Gaza and the wider Israel-Palestine conflict has also consistently returned to the interpretive lens of the home. Many of the themes in this literature – such as displacement, national identities and ‘homelands’, citizenship, and the interplay between destruction and dispossession – chime with those explored in this thesis, despite the vastly different contexts under examination. See, for example, Tovi Fenster, *Home, History and Possession in Israel-Palestine* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Arthur Marwick, Clive Emsley, and Wendy Simpson (eds), *Total War and Historical Change: Europe, 1914-1955* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001). For more on the development of ‘total war’ in earlier conflicts such as the American Civil War and the wars of German reunification, see also: Stig Förster (ed.), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a critique of the term, see Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze, ‘Introduction to Volume III’, in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. III, ed. by Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-18, p. 4.



society at large all needed to be put on a war footing if a belligerent nation was to morally and materially sustain their involvement. However, just as the home front took on an increasingly important role within the war machine, so too did it become a space worth disrupting. Total war thus saw the civilian and military spheres of war melded inextricably together – not only through shared effort, but also through shared vulnerability.

Still, whilst acknowledging that wars did indeed become ‘larger, longer, more dependent on complex machinery, and by nearly every index more costly’, historians like Roger Chickering and Stig Förster rightly remind us to be cautious of overemphasising the unique ‘totality’ of warfare in this period.<sup>7</sup> Even the Second World War, so often seen as the apotheosis of a decades-long process of intensification, did not entirely dispel the boundary between the home and fighting fronts. As Chickering writes, many participants living in the former context continued to lead lives that were markedly ‘more “normal” than the extravagant terms of total war imply’.<sup>8</sup> Yet, this is not to say that the concept or label of ‘total war’ is unhelpful. Used critically, it can help us to better understand both the piercing of the veil between combatant and non-combatant which took place in the early and mid-twentieth century, and the simultaneous shifts in the relationship between wartime citizens and their states.<sup>9</sup> It is within this framework, for example, that we can most closely examine the ways in which civilian spaces like the home came to be entangled so completely in the conflicts of this period, becoming temporarily dislocated from their inhabitants or even lost entirely.

## AIR RAIDS AND REQUISITIONING

The age of total war thus saw the home front endangered as never before. Naturally, dwellings often became incidental casualties in attacks upon industrial and connective tissue, suffering by virtue of their proximity to factories and transport networks; yet, at the same time, they also became

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Chickering, ‘Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept’, in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. by Manfred F. Boemake, Roger Chickering, and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13-28, p. 26; Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, ‘Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War’, in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945*, ed. by Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> Chickering, ‘Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept’, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

targets in their own right. Particularly as civilians came to be seen as the productive joists upon which military efforts depended, their homes were likewise increasingly reckoned as a 'legitimate theatre' of fighting.<sup>10</sup> Between 1939 and 1945, this mode of war would be waged to its greatest extent yet, bringing many millions of homes across the world into the line of fire. In Britain, which this thesis takes as its focus, at least 4 million houses would be damaged by aerial bombardment, representing just over a third of the total housing stock; of these, some 450,000 were recorded as being totally destroyed or rendered uninhabitable.<sup>11</sup> Whilst – among a population of almost 50 million – these figures are not necessarily indicative of a *majority* experience, they do highlight that the experience of losing one's home to enemy action (whether temporarily or permanently) was certainly a *mass* one.<sup>12</sup>

Through various stages of bombing – including the infamous period of the Blitz, and the later coda of the V-1 and V-2 raids – millions of Britons were forced from their dwellings in this way and compelled to seek fresh shelter. Many found it with nearby friends, neighbours, or family; some instead chose to leave their threatened cities and remake their homes in safer locales. However, those without access to such arrangements had to prevail upon the state for aid. Some blitzed citizens only needed to engage with the post-raid welfare apparatus for a short time; for those whose homes needed only 'first aid' repairs, for example, it was often sufficient to spend a few nights in a public rest centre, where they could receive medical attention, food, and a place to sleep.<sup>13</sup> For citizens in direr straits, however, it was necessary to find a more comprehensive solution.

Yet, the widespread destruction and damage of urban housing, coupled with the difficulty of affecting repairs amid shortages in manpower and materials, meant that the options for

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Tatsuya Tsubaki, 'Planners and the Public: British Popular Opinion on Housing during the Second World War', *Contemporary British History*, 14.1 (2000), 81-98, p. 82; Ministry of Reconstruction, 'Housing', Cmd. 6609 (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 2. For some caveats and cautions regarding wartime statistics on housing and damage, see Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 277, n. 1. For further statistics on the total number of houses/dwellings in Britain during this period, see A. E. Holmans, *Historical Statistics of Housing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Fighting with Figures: A Statistical Digest of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> The movements of citizens after being bombed out, and the various post-raid welfare services (including rehousing programmes) which were available to them, are detailed further in Chapter 3.

rehousing citizens who had been completely bombed out were often limited.<sup>14</sup> In such a context – and in that of a society which was more broadly being turned wholeheartedly towards the sustenance of the war effort – it is easy to see how the home itself came to be seized upon as an important resource. As one civil servant wrote in 1942, if Britain was ‘really all out for total war in all phases of [its] war activities’, then houses had to be seen as a ‘tool’ which could be regulated and utilised for the ‘national good’.<sup>15</sup> If this was the motivation, then requisitioning – which empowered the state to commandeer various forms of private property – provided the means through which this control could be achieved.

Most domestic requisitions tended to begin somewhat innocuously, with the delivery of a sparsely worded letter.<sup>16</sup> Here, the owner – and, if they were not the same person, the occupant – was informed that their home was being requisitioned under Regulation 51 of the Defence Regulations of 1939. These regulations, which were instituted through the Emergency Powers (Defence) Acts of 1939 and 1940, made provisions for the state to ‘take possession of any land’ that was needed ‘in the interests of public safety, the defence of the realm or the efficient prosecution of the war, or for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community’.<sup>17</sup> When judged by the number of dwellings affected, the highest concentration of domestic requisitioning was to be found in towns and cities, and most particularly in London. Here, for the duration of the war and for some years afterwards, tens of thousands of privately-owned dwellings – such as flats and small houses – were controlled by the state at any one time. The reasons for which they were held were myriad: the Ministry of Works, for example, took over a number of flat blocks for use as offices, and the Ministry of Home Security requisitioned certain houses for civil defence purposes, such as the establishment of ARP warden posts. The department most commonly involved in the requisitioning of small houses and flats, however, was the Ministry

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<sup>14</sup> The scarcity of housing during the war – a situation exacerbated although not entirely created by wartime exigencies – can be tracked in part by reference to reports on the property market and rental concerns. See, for example, Richard A. Sabatino, ‘Rent Control Policy in Great Britain’, *Land Economics*, 30.1 (1954), 61-64; Ministry of Health and Department of Health for Scotland, ‘Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Rent Control’, Cmd. 6621 (London: HMSO, 1945); Ministry of Health and Department of Health for Scotland, ‘Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Selling Price of Houses’, Cmd. 6670 (London: HMSO, 1945).

<sup>15</sup> The National Archives (hereafter TNA), HLG 7/557, Henry to McCandless, 25 June 1942.

<sup>16</sup> For an example of the letters sent to owners – either directly, or by pinning the notice to the doors of houses deemed to be unoccupied – see Appendix, Figure 1.

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Parliamentary Council, *Defence Regulations* (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 119. The term ‘land’ here is inclusive of built structures and other property.

of Health, which cultivated a large pool of requisitioned dwellings for a less transformative purpose: that of rehousing.<sup>18</sup> Early on in the war, those who had been made homeless by enemy action were the primary beneficiaries of this pool. However, as the war drew on and the housing shortage only mounted, it also became legal to requisition dwellings for the purpose of accommodating the ‘inadequately housed’ – a development which vastly expanded the number of people who could ask for help, and henceforth also led to a dramatic rise in the scale of the requisitioning programme.<sup>19</sup>

Here, then, was not only another way in which the home came to be woven into the fabric of modern warfare, but also yet another means by which citizens might become dislocated from this space. After all, taking over property in order to aid one citizen invariably involved the dispossession of another. Notionally, only unoccupied dwellings were vulnerable to requisition, a distinction which allowed the state to more easily justify its actions by suggesting that it was primarily taking over houses which were unused, unwanted, or otherwise surplus. However, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the reality was often more complicated. Among the properties which were taken over during the war, for example, it is not uncommon to find cases of dwellings which were only left empty after their inhabitants were forced out by bomb damage. Such homes might have been temporarily unoccupied, but they were far from unwanted.

The exact number of homes requisitioned for the purposes of rehousing is difficult to uncover, owing to the fact that this emergency power was exercised not only by multiple government departments, but also, via a system of delegation, by multiple local authorities. This level of decentralisation means that collated statistics, especially during the frenetic years of the war itself, often prove elusive. However, efforts to establish a more holistic picture of the requisitioning landscape after the war show that, much like the encounters with enemy action detailed above, this was an experience which involved a large number of people. A year after the end of the war, for

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<sup>18</sup> The examples listed here pertain only to private domestic requisitions, and is not an exhaustive list of either the departments allowed to requisition property, or the ways in which requisitioning powers were used. For example, the Ministry of Health also requisitioned hotels and other large buildings for the purposes of providing medical stations: see Cumbria Archive Centre (hereafter CAC), WC/C/9/Bag 2/File 5/1, Ministry of Health Circular 1949, ‘Casualty and Government Evacuation Schemes’, 18 January 1940; TNA, ED 138/50/1, M. G. Holmes to E. M. Rich, 25 October 1939. For a short summary of the purposes for which requisitioned properties were generally taken, see John W. Morris, ‘Requisitioning and Compensation’, Cmd. 6313 (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> A summary of the changing reasons for which property could be requisitioned can be found in TNA, HLG 7/1041, ‘Requisitioning’, n.d. The power to requisition property for the purposes of accommodating the ‘inadequately housed’ was conferred in August 1943.

example, we can see that the state retained almost 100,000 requisitioned properties for the purposes of housing.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, whereas no new instances of home-loss by enemy action occurred in Britain after 1945, requisitioning would continue to be utilised for a number of years as the state struggled to wean itself off of this means of meeting housing demand. The number of houses held was thus to remain stubbornly high after 1945, only truly tapering off in the late 1950s.

Between the twin pressures of bombardment and dispossession, British homes (and, above all, urban ones) were thus threatened in multiple, often intersecting, ways by the outbreak of war in 1939. This thesis is concerned with the question of how such dislocations of domestic life were navigated by contemporaries, and of how this experience shaped understandings of what it meant to be a citizen in a nation engaged in total war. It does so by building upon an existing literature which – whilst leaving the experience of home-loss somewhat in the shadows – has provided a rich basis from which to remedy this lacuna.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

### *The ‘People’s War’?*

Within the historiography of the British home front, there is perhaps no concept which casts as long a shadow as that of the ‘people’s war’. This term, which was in use during the war itself, has become a major, and at times controversial, frame through which historians have understood this conflict. As Lucy Noakes has identified, the lens of the ‘people’s war’ is formed by two intertwined meanings, the first of which holds that the war engendered among the British populace a keen sense of unity.<sup>21</sup> Here, it is suggested that the shared experience of the enemy threat (which was made all the more obvious by the targeting of civilians and their homes) worked to transcend divides of class, gender, and political persuasion, ensuring that citizens of all backgrounds could find reasons to contribute to the common task of winning the war. The second meaning embedded within the ‘people’s war’ imaginary is the notion that, in return for this unity, the people needed to be assured that victory would be followed by ‘social, political and economic reform’.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix, Figure 2.

<sup>21</sup> Lucy Noakes, ‘The “People’s War” in Concrete and Stone: Death and the Negotiation of Collective Identity in Second World War Britain’, *English Historical Review*, 138.594-595 (2024), 1118-1142, pp. 1121-1123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1122.

Second World War is thus pictured in sharp contrast to its predecessor, so often positioned as a squandered opportunity for change; this time, citizens' acceptance of their entanglement into the machinery of the war was seen to rely upon certain promises from the state, such as the commitment to address social and material deprivation.<sup>23</sup>

As Mark Connelly has observed, this framing of the war – which emphasises the pulling-together of the British people, and their subsequent success in ushering in postwar welfarism – has been subject to constant readjustments and erosions in the decades since 1945. Yet, at the same time, the essential idea of the 'people's war' has proved to be extraordinarily resilient in both scholarly and public discourse.<sup>24</sup> One reason for this persistence is that the fundamental themes of this narrative were powerfully reinforced by writers of the immediate postwar period. Richard Titmuss' seminal work on Britain's wartime social services, for example, cemented the idea that the war had brought the people together and made them more amenable to radical social changes, thus leading directly to the postwar creation of the welfare state.<sup>25</sup> Processes such as evacuation served in Titmuss' eyes as catalysts, stimulating support for welfare policies by exposing the poor living conditions of urban, working-class evacuees to their rural, middle-class hosts.<sup>26</sup> Titmuss' influential interpretation of the war and its links to postwar welfarism was to hold firm for the next twenty years. As Malcolm Smith has noted, works produced in the immediate postwar period were written in the context of a maturing welfare estate; perhaps it is thus unsurprising that they should have so confirmed the idea that the war had led to significant and permanent changes in the relationship between citizens and the state.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Amy Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 178, 181; David Vincent, *Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), p. 111; David Morgan and Mary Evans, 'The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and the Post-War Reconstruction of Citizenship', in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 48–62, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p. 11; Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1950). For another work which established the war as a turning point in the development of welfarism, see Charles Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: Methuen, 1955).

<sup>26</sup> Harold L. Smith, 'Introduction', in *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), viii–xi, p. viii.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm Smith, 'The Changing Nature of the British State, 1939-59: The Historiography of Consensus', in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 37-47, p. 39.

By the late 1960s, however, this particular aspect of the ‘people’s war’ had started to come under increased scrutiny. Predominant among the critics of this established understanding of the conflict was Angus Calder, whose landmark study, *The People’s War*, drew upon previously neglected Mass Observation material to qualify the image of wartime Britain as a nation characterised by stoicism and unity.<sup>28</sup> Although he argued that the people did pull together, ‘[surging] forward to fight their own war’, Calder acknowledged that the experience did not sweep away pre-existing fractures within British society. Events such as the Blitz may have witnessed numerous examples of bravery and fortitude, but they also involved instances of looting, discrimination, and panic.<sup>29</sup> Whilst revisionist histories published in later decades have claimed such indicators of friction and low morale as evidence that the notion of the ‘people’s war’ is entirely fictitious, Calder’s more nuanced analysis highlighted how displays of disunity could still be integrated into the broader narrative of the ‘people’s war’.<sup>30</sup> This articulation, which emphasised the subtleties and contradictions of wartime society, was echoed by Arthur Marwick in his 1975 study of the British home front.<sup>31</sup> Confirming the significance of Calder’s work, Marwick recognised that invocations of this narrative both at the time and since have often served to obscure or standardise what was, in fact, a profoundly diverse experience for all those involved.<sup>32</sup> However, whilst both Calder and Marwick thus rejected the homogenising tendencies of the ‘people’s war’ concept, they accepted that it contained elements of truth: in particular, both writers agreed that the war had indeed acted as a sort of crucible, inculcating a desire among the people for social and political change.<sup>33</sup>

On the question of whether this desire ever came to fruition, however, Calder and Marwick came to very different conclusions. Calder, for his part, was deeply cynical about the war’s denouement. Reflecting on the policies of the postwar Labour government and their Conservative successors, Calder lamented that:

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<sup>28</sup> Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> For revisionist accounts which have attempted to ‘debunk’ the myth of the ‘people’s war’, see Nicholas Harman, *Dunkirk: The Necessary Myth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981); Clive Ponting, *1940: Myth and Reality* (London: Hamilton, 1990); Stuart Hylton, *Their Darkest Hour: The Hidden History of the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Stroud: Sutton, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Home Front: The British and the Second World War* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*; Calder, *People’s War*, p. 18.

It would seem, for ten years or more, that the war on Beveridge's Five Giants had been completed. Disease, certainly, would lose much of its vitality. Ignorance, for all the limitations of the 1944 Education Act, would continue in steady retreat. But Want, Squalor and Idleness would covertly maintain a grim empire in the midst of increasing affluence.<sup>34</sup>

For Calder, then, the direct line drawn by Titmuss and others between the war and the welfare state was misleading: there had been no fundamental reshaping of society, regardless of public appetite for such a change. Meanwhile, Marwick was generally much more optimistic in his assessment of post-1945 Britain. Although he rejected Titmuss' argument that the war had fostered 'social solidarity and therefore social reform' as overly simplistic, he did accept the basic tenet that the conflict had driven permanent – and, Marwick implied, largely positive – change.<sup>35</sup> In this, he was joined by Paul Addison, who argued in *The Road to 1945* that the war had transformed British politics, as the shared project of the 'people's war' gave rise to a 'massive new middle ground' where figures of most political persuasions could find commonalities.<sup>36</sup> This consensus, Addison claimed, allowed the welfare state to survive beyond the Labour administration which established it.<sup>37</sup>

However, both Addison and Marwick's conclusions have since been problematised. Critics of Addison's consensus thesis, for example, have pointed to the existence of numerous dissenting voices across the political spectrum – both within and beyond the parliamentary parties – as evidence that support for welfare policies may have been less hegemonic than Addison suggested.<sup>38</sup> As Jose Harris has highlighted, support for welfarism was often ambiguous: calls for better social services, for instance, were often accompanied by a concurrent suspicion of increased state power.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, Marwick's insistence that '[t]he majority of the British people were better off after the Second World War than they had been before it' has been called into question by feminist

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<sup>34</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 584. See also William Beveridge, 'Social Insurance and Allied Services', Cmd. 6404 (London: HMSO, 1942).

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'Total War and Social Change: Myths and Misunderstandings', *Social History Newsletter*, 9 (1984), p. 4, cited in Smith, 'Introduction', p. viii; Marwick, *The Home Front*, p. 180-184; Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 3rd edn. (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1994), p. 14, 18, 285.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Marina Mackay, 'Citizenship and the English Novel in 1945', in *Around 1945: Literature, Citizenship, Rights*, ed. by Allen Hepburn (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 29-47; Morgan and Evans, 'The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four'; Rodney Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain Since 1945* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> Jose Harris, "'Contract' and 'Citizenship'", in *The Ideas That Shaped Post-War Britain*, ed. by David Marquand and Anthony Seldon (London: Fontana, 1996), 122-138, p. 135.



historians in particular.<sup>40</sup> Penny Summerfield's work, for example, has demonstrated that British women continued to be constructed primarily as wives and mothers, and were generally expected to return to domestic duties once the war ended. Whilst cautioning against ignoring the fact that, for some women, the war was an experience with 'major personal significance', she thus disparaged the notion that the war was the transformative force that Marwick claimed it to be.<sup>41</sup>

The work done by those such as Harris and Summerfield in the 1990s was followed in the 2000s by further interventions on the subject of the 'people's war'. In particular, Sonya Rose's influential book, *Which People's War?* – which will be considered in greater detail below – opened up a fresh line of enquiry by asking how the eponymous community of 'people' at the heart of this framework were constituted in theory and reality.<sup>42</sup> More recently still, the debate has taken on a self-referential character, as scholars like David Edgerton have begun to call into question the utility of the term 'people's war' itself.<sup>43</sup> Whilst acknowledging that the phrase was in use during the conflict, Edgerton finds a long line of historians – starting with those such as Calder, Marwick, and Addison – who have overseen a flattening of this concept, and who have helped it to become an uncritical shorthand for a very particular 'national-welfarist-reconstructionist' understanding of the war.<sup>44</sup> In his own examination of the wartime uses of the phrase 'people's war', Edgerton identifies a variety of different meanings. He notes, for instance, the existence of an internationalist slant, which saw the term used to describe a broad fight against fascism in which the peoples across the world were engaged.<sup>45</sup> He identifies, too, a 'critical-oppositional' use of the concept, which saw it deployed as a tool to critique the war and its conduct – for example, by suggesting that whilst the war *should* be a 'people's war', it was not one in reality.<sup>46</sup> A 'celebratory' understanding of the

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<sup>40</sup> Marwick, *The Home Front*, p. 184.

<sup>41</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Approaches to Women and Social Change in the Second World War', in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 63-79, p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> David Edgerton, 'The Nationalisation of British History: Historians, Nationalism and the Myths of 1940', *English Historical Review*, 136.581 (2021), 950-985.

<sup>44</sup> David Edgerton, 'A Cliché to be Avoided like the Plague: The "People's War" in the History and Historiography of the British Second World War', *English Historical Review*, 138.594-595 (2024), 1143-1164, p. 1158. Edgerton, 'The Nationalisation of British History', pp. 971-972. Edgerton also cites A. J. P Taylor's work as another source which utilised this framing of the war. See A. J. P Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

<sup>45</sup> Edgerton, 'The Nationalisation of British History', p. 951.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* This interpretation, as I see it, is distinct from that offered by those such as Calder. Whilst Calder suggested that the war *was* a 'people's war', albeit one after which the state reneged on its promises, Edgerton highlights the existence of contemporary belief(s) that the conflict never met the criteria of a 'people's war' in the first place.

Second World War as a ‘people’s war’ may have been extant, but Edgerton thus argues that it was by no means dominant.<sup>47</sup> The most serious charge which he has levelled at other historians of the Second World War, therefore, is that they have fundamentally misrepresented the character of the conflict by suggesting that this was *the* lens through which contemporary Britons themselves understood it – that is to say, that they did in fact believe the war they were fighting to be a ‘people’s war’.<sup>48</sup>

It is fair to say that Edgerton’s arguments have not been without their detractors. In a recent forum hosted by the *English Historical Review*, Lucy Noakes, Jessica Hammett, Henry Irving, Richard Toye, and Sean Dettman each offered trenchant defences of the ‘people’s war’ as a term with enduring value for historians.<sup>49</sup> Of particular relevance here is Hammett and Irving’s article, which investigates the ways in which the terminology of the ‘people’s war’ was embedded into discourses about citizenship, acting as a framework which citizens could define themselves *against* as well as *within*.<sup>50</sup> As they and the other contributors to the forum demonstrate, neither the existence of other ways of thinking about the war, nor critical deployments of the term ‘people’s war’, erase the fact that wartime Britons certainly moved through a cultural milieu which emphasised the importance of unity, and which often drew explicit connections between this and postwar social, economic, and political reforms. The ways in which citizens negotiated such characterisations of the war thus continue to be interesting loci for historical research.

Still, whilst the ‘people’s war’ may be a useful way of encapsulating the above features of wartime society, it remains clear that the term – much like that of ‘total war’ – is best deployed with caution and restraint. Edgerton usefully reminds us, for example, to acknowledge both the historiographical shaping of this concept, and the ways in which one interpretation of it may have become overemphasised. Somewhat ironically, given his conclusion that historians should ‘generally avoid the term’, his labelling of the different registers through which this idea has been expressed – ‘celebratory’, ‘critical-oppositional’ and so forth – may provide historians with a better

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<sup>47</sup> Edgerton, ‘A Cliché to be Avoided like the Plague’, p. 1148.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1145.

<sup>49</sup> Noakes, ‘The “People’s War” in Concrete and Stone’; Jessica Hammett and Henry Irving, ‘Renegotiating Citizenship through the Lens of the “People’s War” in Second World War Britain’, *English Historical Review*, 138.594-595 (2024), 1063-1088; Sean Dettman and Richard Toye, ‘The Discourse of “The People’s War” in Britain and the USA during World War II’, *English Historical Review*, 138.594-595 (2024), 1089-1117.

<sup>50</sup> Hammett and Irving, ‘Renegotiating Citizenship’, pp. 1086-1087.

vocabulary with which to tell the history of the ‘people’s war’.<sup>51</sup> Still, in many cases, it is true that it can be more useful to refer directly to specific ideas and concepts themselves – to speak, for example, of heterogenous notions of community, sacrifice, and service – and to dispense with attempts to hold them all within a single phrase. Whilst this thesis acknowledges that the ‘people’s war’ remains a pertinent framework to invoke in this discussion – and, indeed, makes ample reference to literature that *does* use this term – it thus heeds Edgerton’s call to be cautious in its deployment.

### *Citizenship in Second World War Britain*

Whether under the banner of the ‘people’s war’ or not, the theme of citizenship has been at the heart of many historical analyses of the Second World War. As Matthew Grant has noted, this concept has been a key way of talking about the interactions both between individuals and the state, and between different individuals within society. These relationships have, as Grant identifies, proved particularly interesting to historians of the war and postwar years precisely because this period saw them undergoing a series of shifts.<sup>52</sup> The dynamic nature of citizenship ideals and practices was, for example, clearly foundational to the works produced by those such as Titmuss, Calder, and Marwick, all of whom spoke about the development of new expectations both on the side of the state and on that of the citizenry. For a study of home-loss, this work is valuable for a number of reasons. In particular, understanding what rights citizens believed themselves to have – or deserve – as a result of their wartime service can illuminate how those who lost their homes conceptualised the experience. For those who suffered the complete destruction of their home and were resultantly made homeless, for instance, a belief that citizens should have social as well as legal and political rights would clearly have had the potential to shape their expectations of the state’s response. Beliefs regarding whether or not these rights were actually institutionalised following the war, meanwhile, become important when considering if victims of home-loss viewed their sacrifices as worthwhile in hindsight.

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<sup>51</sup> Edgerton, ‘A Cliché to be Avoided like the Plague’, p. 1162.

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Grant, ‘Historicizing Citizenship in Post-war Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 59.4 (2016), 1187-1206, p. 1187.

However, the focus of these authors on welfarism and legislative reform as the markers of change means that they can only take us so far in the examination of contemporary citizenship discourse. As Grant suggests, ‘citizenship’ only remains useful as a framework if it is recognised as more than a simple denotation of citizens’ rights and obligations as enshrined in law.<sup>53</sup> Sonya Rose, with her aforementioned book *Which People’s War?*, helped to move the discussion forward in the early 2000s. This influential study still considered citizenship as a process which creates legal and political subjects who are seen to have certain rights and responsibilities. However, it also acknowledged a broader ‘discursive framework’ at play; one which defines through a series of inclusions and exclusions who belongs to this community of subjects, and thus who receives the benefits of membership.<sup>54</sup> Within this framework, individuals could further be designated as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ citizens. In wartime Britain, as Rose demonstrates, good citizenship was identified with stoicism and civic-mindedness, qualities which were, in turn, believed to translate naturally into a willingness to make personal sacrifices in the name of the ongoing war effort.<sup>55</sup> As these traits were also held to characterise the British people as a whole, ‘citizenship’ and ‘national identity’ were often seen to be coterminous; as Rose puts it, ‘the nation was believed to be a moral community of good citizens’.<sup>56</sup> However, Rose powerfully shows that this imagined shared identity was a somewhat utopian construction, masking a society fractured along various fault lines, including those of gender, race, geography and class.<sup>57</sup> The mythic image of the ‘people’s war’ might emphasise the British people as unified and alike in nature, but just as Calder had noted in 1969, the people themselves did not necessarily have a commonly held understanding of what it meant to be a British citizen – or, indeed, what it meant to be British at all.<sup>58</sup>

Rose’s work thus illuminates both how citizenship was contested by various sections of wartime society, and how this discourse actively shaped the way in which individuals engaged with the war. However, as Grant argues, it is important to emphasise that whilst citizens were therefore guided by certain ‘cultural scripts’, they maintained a level of agency which allowed them to articulate their own understandings of citizenship, within – or, indeed, against – these scripts.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 1189.

<sup>54</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 15, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 5, 14, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 24.

<sup>58</sup> Calder, *People’s War*, p. 138; Rose, *Which People’s War?*, p. 286.

<sup>59</sup> Grant, ‘Historicizing Citizenship’, pp. 1197-1198.

For example, contemporary codes tended to equate ‘good’ citizenship with ‘active’ citizenship – that is to say, a form wherein individuals contributed actively to wider society in return for the perks of inclusion – and similarly link passivity – the enjoyment of rights without the work of earning them – with ‘bad’ citizenship.<sup>60</sup> But would those who limited their contributions to the payment of their taxes, the care of their immediate family, and the competent undertaking of their job really have seen themselves as ‘bad’ citizens for doing nothing further?<sup>61</sup> As Grant reminds us, we must be careful of conflating the discourse and representation of citizenship with experiences of the same: there was always room for individuals to form their own articulations of citizenship, and to perform these ideas in their own ways.<sup>62</sup>

Especially for historians concerned with the election of the Labour government in 1945 – and the social, economic, and political aftermath of this change – the perceived trend towards ‘passive’ citizenship has itself been a point of interest.<sup>63</sup> Scholars such as Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo have suggested that the British populace after 1945 was increasingly apathetic to matters beyond their own front doorstep, causing them to reject the ideal of ‘active’ citizenship promoted during the war.<sup>64</sup> In doing so, they have offered an inversion of Calder’s classic account: whereas the latter argued that a groundswell of public support for change had been stymied by successive governments content to maintain the status quo, these authors argued that it was, in fact, the public’s own lack of enthusiasm which had prevented the postwar Labour government from implementing change.<sup>65</sup>

This latter view of the postwar citizenry has been prominent within the historiography of reconstruction – and especially so within many of the works which examine plans for the physical reconstruction of Britain’s built landscape after 1945. As Catherine Flinn has noted, plans for

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 1198.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 1202. On the ways in which ‘mundane’ or ‘ordinary’ actions were also integrated into the work of citizenship, see also Hammett and Irving, ‘Renegotiating Citizenship’, p. 1086.

<sup>62</sup> Grant, ‘Historicizing Citizenship’, pp. 1204–1205.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the perceived trend towards “passive” citizenship, see David Marquand, *Decline of the Public: The Hollowing Out of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo, *England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> Fielding, Thompson, and Tiratsoo, *England Arise!*, p. 213.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. For more on public apathy during and after the war, see also Steven Fielding, ‘What Did “the People” Want? The Meaning of the 1945 General Election’, *Historical Journal*, 35.3 (1992), 623–39.

rebuilding had been set in motion during the early years of the war.<sup>66</sup> Catalysed by the violent destruction of the Blitz, planners developed blueprints for redevelopment which did not simply seek to rebuild what had previously existed, but instead to create new environments better suited to the imagined postwar world.<sup>67</sup> Whilst the physical opportunities heralded by the bombing were obvious, contemporaries – leveraging those familiar themes of the ‘people’s war’ myth – suggested that the experience had also created a public who were sympathetic to such radical reforms.<sup>68</sup> However, despite the perception that planners had thus been granted uniquely favourable conditions for their redevelopment schemes, many of them were never to make it beyond the paper they were drawn upon.<sup>69</sup>

The reasons posited by historians for the stagnation of postwar reconstruction plans are numerous. Many, for example, have placed the blame for the failures of rebuilding with the planners, arguing that their visions were utopian and idealist, and that their continued commitment to these visions led them to neglect the wishes of the people whose lives they were seeking to change.<sup>70</sup> Others have pointed to the economic and political realities of postwar Britain, arguing that any scheme of radical reconstruction was bound to come up against difficulties given context of postwar austerity measures.<sup>71</sup> Proponents of the so-called ‘apathy school’ have, however, presented waning public support for reform as the most serious and insurmountable obstacle in planners’ paths.<sup>72</sup> If there had ever existed a true wave of enthusiasm for reconstruction along

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<sup>66</sup> Catherine Flinn, *Rebuilding Britain’s Blitzed Cities: Hopeful Dreams, Stark Realities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Junichi Hasegawa, ‘The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction in 1940s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 10.2 (1999), 137–61, p. 138.

<sup>68</sup> Suzanne Cowan, ‘The People’s Peace: The Myth of Wartime Unity and Public Consent for Town Planning’, in *The Blitz and Its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. by Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 73–86, p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Catherine Flinn, ‘Reconstruction Constraints: Political and Economic Realities’, in *The Blitz and Its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. by Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 87–97, p. 88.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Jerry White, ‘The “Dismemberment of London”: Chamberlain, Abercrombie and the London Plans of 1943–44”, *The London Journal*, 44.3 (2019), 206–26. For a broader argument about the utopian nature of postwar reconstruction, see also Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>71</sup> Flinn, ‘Reconstruction Constraints’; John Stevenson, ‘Planner’s Moon? The Second World War and the Planning Movement’, in *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, ed. by Harold L. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 58–77, p. 75; Frederick Shaw, *The Homes and Homeless of Post-War Britain* (Carnforth: Parthenon, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> The “apathy school” label was first used in James Hinton, ‘1945 and the Apathy School’, *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997), 266–73.

radical lines, Tiratsoo has asserted that it soon evaporated, leaving behind only vague and nebulous ideas which did not translate into concrete support for planning.<sup>73</sup> Instead, the existence of a severe housing shortage, exacerbated by wartime destruction and only worsened by a population boom, meant that the desire for more houses often won out over long-term plans for more radical development.<sup>74</sup> As one contemporary author put it: 'Houses anywhere, at once, were preferred to houses in the right place five years ahead'.<sup>75</sup>

However, the contention that this focus on housing and domestic life, to the detriment of the wider ideals of planning, was indicative of apathy and a slide towards 'passive' citizenship has itself been the subject of significant criticism.<sup>76</sup> James Hinton, for example, has argued that the general conclusions of the 'apathy school' rest upon a chronic mishandling of sources such as polling data and Mass Observation material.<sup>77</sup> Cynicism, Hinton suggests, was real enough; it should not, however, be confused with apathy or indifference.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the tendency to suggest that anxieties about issues such as housing were evidence that the public was interested only in 'trivial' matters comes under fire here for creating a false binary between personal concerns and the 'big issues of the day'.<sup>79</sup> It is one thing to recognise that, following the war, many Britons displayed a desire to refocus on their domestic lives, which had been so dislocated by the experience of war. It is quite another to suggest that this development was incompatible with continuing participation and interest in the wider world. Such a neat division between private and public issues is, as Hinton reminds us, ultimately facile.

To ignore the widespread engagement with the housing problem in favour of declaring apathy is thus to have a very narrow definition of what counts as participation. As Claire

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<sup>73</sup> Nick Tiratsoo, 'The Reconstruction of Blitzed British Cities, 1945-55: Myths and Reality', *Contemporary British History*, 14.1 (2000), 27-44, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> John Stevenson, *British Society, 1914-45* (London: Allen Lane, 1984), p. 230; John R. Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-War Experience* (London: Methuen, 1982); Hasegawa, 'The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction', p. 156.

<sup>75</sup> H. Myles Wright, 'The First Ten Years: Post-War Planning and Development in England', *Town Planning Review*, 26.2 (1955), 73-91, p. 75.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Moss, Nick Clarke, Will Jennings, and Gerry Stoker, 'Golden Age, Apathy or Stealth? Democratic Engagement in Britain, 1945-1950', *Contemporary British History*, 30.4 (2016), 441-62, p. 444. For broad repudiations of the "apathy school" see Peter Sloman, 'Rethinking a Progressive Moment: The Liberal and Labour Parties in the 1945 General Election', *Historical Research*, 84.226 (2011), 722-44; Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat, and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Hinton, 'Apathy School', p. 272. For a deeper examination of Mass Observation material, see James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Hinton, 'Apathy School', p. 270.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

Langhamer's recent work on the broader politics of reconstruction reveals, we can find many ways in which the citizens of postwar Britain carved spaces for themselves in civil society if we consider the growth of 'emotional citizenship' during this period.<sup>80</sup> This form of citizenship, Langhamer argues, elevated the importance of feeling and experience, allowing both to be deployed as legitimate knowledge bases – as ways of 'knowing the world'.<sup>81</sup> Ordinary citizens, in other words, could participate in political debates and processes by articulating their personal experiences and the affective currents that flowed forth from them.

Indeed, this form of participation can be excavated particularly clearly within the context of the postwar housing debate. A significant number of people – not least those who had seen their homes destroyed or requisitioned – had been affected by the housing crisis that followed the war, and many made no bones about their demand for more houses to be built. Statements of feeling about this issue were, then, plentiful and widely apparent, even if they were not always expressed within the contexts analysed by scholars such as Fielding, Tiratsoo, and Thompsom. Above all, for example, respondents to housing surveys were vocal about their desire for the homes of the future to be private spaces.<sup>82</sup> Homes, of course, cannot ever really act as a true refuge from wider social and political discourses; indeed, it is through these very discourses that homes are themselves produced and articulated.<sup>83</sup> However, after the years of war in which the levels of visible encroachment into the home had increased dramatically, it is perhaps no surprise that citizens should have wanted to roll back the exposure of this space – and, in doing so, articulate and contest recent shifts in the relationship between themselves, their homes, and the state.

### *The Home at War*

The ways in which the 'total' wars of the early and mid-twentieth century exposed citizens' homes to exterior pressures has itself been a source of scholarly interest in recent years. James Greenhalgh's work on civil defence and the urban home, for example, has demonstrated how the state's

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<sup>80</sup> Claire Langhamer, "'Astray in a Dark Forest'? The Emotional Politics of Reconstruction Britain', in *Total War: An Emotional History*, ed. by Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes, and Claudia Siebrecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 137–56, pp. 154–159.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>82</sup> See Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes* (London: Curwen, 1943); Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40.2 (2005), 341–62.

<sup>83</sup> Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).



imposition of measures such as the blackout worked to destabilise traditional notions of the home as a private and familiar space.<sup>84</sup> By disrupting household routines, and allowing authorities largely unfettered access to the home, such measures served to strip away many of the things which made homes ‘homely’ in the first place, thus blurring the distinction between the domestic and the public.<sup>85</sup> As Marc Wiggam has similarly shown in his comparative work on the blackout in Britain and Germany, it was regularly impressed upon citizens that this was a project of communal significance. Not only did the blackout require compliance from all citizens in order to function effectively; its effective functioning was also an outcome upon which all those citizens relied. Understandings of the home as an autonomous unit thus faltered as both individual citizens and their homes were imbued with responsibility for the wider urban – and national – collective.<sup>86</sup> In this way, historians such as Greenhalgh and Wiggam have also underscored the particular utility of using the urban home – which was both especially vulnerable to enemy attack, and especially entangled in wartime projects such as civil defence – as a lens for examining shifts in the relationships between citizens and the state.

The examination of civil defence and its impacts upon domestic space has also been taken up by Jessica Hammett, who has detailed some further ways in which homes were put to work within the infrastructure of civil defence. Private dwellings, for example, were often used as posts or depots for citizens working as firewatchers or Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens, thus transporting the work of war into the heart of the home. Whilst some properties were requisitioned, others belonged to the civil defenders themselves, who carved out individual rooms within their homes and dedicated them to this purpose. At the same time, Hammett has identified an inverse process, wherein other kinds of property mobilised for civil defence work – such as shops, warehouses, and schools – were domesticated through decoration, with the aim of making these spaces more ‘homely’ and inviting.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> James Greenhalgh, ‘The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, the Blackout and the Home in Second World War Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 28.2 (2017), 186–208.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201; Bell, *London Was Ours*, p. 113.

<sup>86</sup> Marc Wiggam, ‘The Blackout and the Idea of Community in Britain and Germany’, in *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940-1945*, ed. by Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy (London: Continuum, 2011), 46-60. See also Marc Wiggam, *The Blackout in Britain and Germany, 1939-1945* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>87</sup> Jessica Hammett, *Creating the People’s War: Civil Defence Communities in Second World War Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022) pp. 37-38.

Hammett's identification of this bidirectional process echoes the work of Susan Grayzel, whose cultural history of the air raid in Britain has provided a particularly useful framework for considering such developments. By analysing the ways in which aerial attacks were thought about during the interwar period, Grayzel showcases how this violent facet of modern war came to circle the home in two ways. Firstly, she identifies the ways in which dwellings were 'militarized' by the threat of the air raid as their inhabitants increasingly became the direct targets of enemy action.<sup>88</sup> The growing inevitability of attacks on civilians, however, created a problem for state and society, as the importance of civilian labour to the war effort made any collapse in morale a threatening prospect. As Grayzel shows, cultural and political work thus went into rendering this once unimaginable eventuality a part of everyday life – a normalising process which she describes as the 'domestication' of the air raid.<sup>89</sup> In so doing, Grayzel captures the ambivalent, anxious position of the wartime home, and the extensive effort that went into managing and policing this space and its inhabitants.

Jenny Hartley has similarly pinpointed unease about the shifting shape of the domestic sphere as a prominent theme within contemporary fiction writing – and especially that which was written by women.<sup>90</sup> These authors, she argues, were well attuned to the intricacies and ironies of the role of the wartime home:

The home quickly became the headquarters of the People's War, and of the nation itself as Churchill conceived of 'our island home'. An icon of the war, the home represented what must be defended and protected; but at the same time it was changing its constituent elements and altering its behaviour patterns.<sup>91</sup>

Hartley demonstrates that female writers' responses to this development were often ambivalent. Whilst many hinted that the changing role of the home represented an opportunity for women to gain freedom from restrictive domestic routines, there were still significant anxieties about what

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<sup>88</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-19.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Jenny Hartley, *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1997). Male writers such as Graham Greene and William Sansom also addressed the home in wartime, and are cited in Chapter 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. The point that the wartime home was often idealised as an icon of national identity, whilst simultaneously being disrupted or endangered, has also been made by Catherine Rollet within the context of the First World War. See Catherine Rollet, 'The Home and Family Life', in *Capital Cities at War*, vol. II, ed. by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 315-53.

the ramifications of such a change might be.<sup>92</sup> Kristine Miller has identified such a debate within the wartime writings of Elizabeth Bowen. Metaphors such as the ‘flimsy construction’ of the protagonist’s home in *The Heat of the Day*, for example, are read by Miller as implications of both the futility of trying to separate private and public lives during wartime, and the potential dangers of their enmeshment.<sup>93</sup> Petra Rau, in her own examination of Bowen’s work, picks up a similar thread when she discussed the depiction of homes which had been torn apart by bombs and therefore exposed completely to the outside world.<sup>94</sup> She shows that, for Bowen, the destruction of physical facades was paralleled in a simultaneous erosion of the boundaries of the self: the loss of homes and material possessions, those vessels of family history and hallmarks of class, meant losing that which distinguished one person from another.<sup>95</sup>

Citizens, as we have seen already, were encouraged to respond to and conceptualise these shattering events in a way that aligned to the stoic ideal of wartime citizenship. Yet, as Stephanie Butler has demonstrated in her examination of women’s letter-writing communities during the Second World War, citizens who had undergone traumatic experiences as a result of the war often found ways to circumvent and contest these emotional codes. For example, by studying correspondence between English women – who either feared losing their home, or had in fact lost it already – and their relatives in America, she shows how letters could be characterised by an especially startling degree of emotional honesty when the recipients were not themselves subject to the same call for stoicism.<sup>96</sup> As a literary scholar rather than a historian, Butler is primarily interested in the function of these letter-writing communities; in the way that they operated as a escape valve for difficult emotions; and in the role they played in helping to promote emotional resilience. The actual experience of home-loss itself, then, is ultimately context rather than subject in her work. As we shall see below, this tendency to relegate home-loss to the sidelines – to acknowledge it, but also to obscure it with research questions that, whilst assuredly valuable in

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<sup>92</sup> Hartley, *Millions Like Us*, p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Kristine A. Miller, “‘Even a Shelter’s Not Safe’: The Blitz on Homes in Elizabeth Bowen’s Wartime Writing’, *Twentieth Century British Literature*, 45.2 (1999), 138–58, p. 148.

<sup>94</sup> Petra Rau, ‘The Common Frontier: Fictions of Alterity in Elizabeth Bowen’s “The Heat of the Day” and Graham Greene’s “The Ministry of Fear”’, *Literature & History*, 14.1 (2005), 31–85, p. 50.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50; Elizabeth Bowen, ‘Postscript to The Demon Lover’, in *The Mulberry Tree: Writings of Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Hermione Lee (London: Vintage, 1999), 94–99, p. 97. See also Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 199–200.

<sup>96</sup> Stephanie E. Butler, ‘The Circulation of Grief in English Women’s WWII Correspondence’, *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 42.2 (2016), 45–63, p. 56.

their own right, naturally lead away from a deeper examination of this experience – is one which has played out across the wider historiography of wartime Britain.

### *Histories of Home-loss*

When one begins to explore the requisitioning of homes during the Second World War, it quickly becomes apparent that there is one type of dwelling which has received more attention than others: the country house.<sup>97</sup> The reasons for this primacy are varied. Not only, for example, do these spaces have ongoing contemporary significance as heritage attractions, and as ‘touchstone[s] of national identity’; their wartime lives are also immortalised in culturally significant works such as Evelyn Waugh’s 1945 novel *Brideshead Revisited*, which takes a fictional requisitioned country house, Brideshead Castle, as its eponymous stage.<sup>98</sup> In such a context, it is perhaps unsurprising that such dwellings should have caught the interest of so many writers, both within academic circles and beyond them. Whether as part of a broader history of the country house, or in a more dedicated account of the war years, these writers have tracked the varied reasons why these homes were partially or entirely taken over by the state, illuminating their use as hospitals, storage facilities, and billets for schools or military personnel. Their accounts have tended to fall into one of two categories: anecdotal histories of occupation charting what everyday life was like for those who inhabited these requisitioned properties; and accounts which detail the architectural importance of such houses (and often lament the damage or destruction so often wrought upon them by their wartime inhabitants).<sup>99</sup> Intriguingly, then, the experiences and responses of those who actually

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<sup>97</sup> For a more detailed survey of the history and historiography of requisitioning in rural settings (including country houses, farms, and villages), see Jacinta Mallon, ‘“Tools of War” or “Sacred” Spaces? Requisitioning and Home-loss During and After the Second World War’ (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent, 2019).

<sup>98</sup> On the cultural power and position of the country house (especially vis-à-vis discourses of ‘national heritage’), see Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 28-83; Roy Strong, *Country Life 1897-1997: The English Arcadia* (London: Country Life, 1996), p. 127. Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945). It is also worth noting that these spaces were taken over by the state in the First World War as well. See Jack Davies, ‘A Very Haven of Peace: The Role of the Stately Home Hospital in First World War Britain’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2017).

<sup>99</sup> For an account of wartime requisitioning contextualised within a broader history of the country house, see Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). For histories which focus upon everyday life in the requisitioned country home, see Caroline Seebom, *The Country House: A Wartime History, 1939-45* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989); Julie Summers, *Our Uninvited Guests: The Secret Lives of Britain’s Country Houses, 1939-45* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2018). For accounts which utilise architectural lenses (or which similarly focus upon the material contents of the country house, such as artwork and

owned these houses have often been pushed into the background, with the focus remaining instead upon the fabric of their homes, or upon those who took up residence during the war.

Another strand of the historiography of requisitioning – that which deals with the infamous requisition of whole villages, such as Tyneham in Dorset and Imber in Wiltshire, for use as military training grounds – has placed slightly more emphasis on the ways in which inhabitants understood and interpreted their eviction.<sup>100</sup> Marianna Dudley and Tim Cole, for example, have shown that although the initial requisition of these villages was accepted by most as a wartime necessity, the process was nevertheless a painful one which entailed villagers being ripped away from landscapes and homes to which they had strong emotional connections.<sup>101</sup> After the war – when the Ministry of Defence chose to retain these villages and the surrounding land as part of its estate and it became clear that the villagers’ exile would be more permanent – more serious tensions developed, with many of the former inhabitants claiming that the state had taken advantage of their patriotism and sacrifice. Such work on rural requisitioning clearly makes a valuable contribution to the historiography of home-loss, illuminating how responses can change over time, and how affective connections to place can shape the experience of loss. However, even here, home-loss is not the object of study in itself; instead, for Dudley and Cole, the story of the requisitioned villages is interesting primarily as part of a larger environmental history of militarized landscapes.<sup>102</sup>

Even though this literature does not therefore connect the villagers’ experience of requisitioning to the wider course of wartime home-loss, it is arguably still a much richer vein of the historiography than that which deals with urban settings. Here, the scholarly record becomes extraordinarily quiet – a silence which is made all the more interesting by the fact that, as noted

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furniture), see John Martin Robinson, *The Country House at War* (London: Bodley Head, 1989); John Martin Robinson, *Requisitioned: The British Country House in the Second World War* (London: Aurum, 2014); Giles Worsley, *England’s Lost Houses: From the Archives of Country Life* (London: Aurum, 2002).

<sup>100</sup> This is often a prominent theme within local histories of these villages, such as Patrick Wright, *Tyneham: The Village That Died For England* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995); Rodney Legg, *Tyneham* (Wincanton: Dorset Publishing Company, 2002); Rex Sawyer, *Little Imber on the Down: Salisbury Plain’s Ghost Village* (Salisbury: Hobnob, 2010).

<sup>101</sup> Tim Cole, ‘A Picturesque Ruin? Landscapes of Loss at Tyneham and the Epynt’, in *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain*, ed. by Chris Pearson, Peter Coates, and Tim Cole (London: Continuum, 2010), 95–110; Marianna Dudley, ‘Traces of Conflict: Environment and Eviction in British Military Training Areas, 1943 to Present’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 6.2 (2013), 112–126.

<sup>102</sup> For more on the place of the requisitioned villages within such historiographies, see Marianna Dudley, ‘A Fairy (Shrimp) Tale of Military Environmentalism: The “Greening” of Salisbury Plain’, in *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain*, ed. by Chris Pearson, Peter Coates, and Tim Cole (London: Continuum, 2010), 135–49; Tim Cole, ‘Military Presences, Civilian Absences: Battling Nature at the Sennybridge Training Area, 1940–2008’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 3.2 (2010), 215–35.

earlier in this introduction, towns and cities played host to a requisitioning programme which was in many ways more extensive than that deployed in rural areas. This curious lacuna within the study of wartime dispossession is also noteworthy because urban history more broadly has become an increasingly popular lens through which to examine the impacts of conflict.<sup>103</sup> After all, cities are often understood as places of ‘heightened experience’; as Jay Winter has put it, in wartime, ‘what happened elsewhere, happened in cities too, only more so’.<sup>104</sup> Yet, it is rare to see the requisitioning of urban homes referenced anywhere except in the footnotes of works on housing policy. Where it is mentioned, it is often discussed only in administrative terms, acknowledged as an instrument in the state’s post-raid toolkit, but alienated from questions of experience and meaning: who did these homes belong to? Why were they vulnerable to requisitioning? How was this estrangement of citizen and home understood and navigated?

Air raids, of course, have been the subject of a much larger and deeper historiography.<sup>105</sup> Naturally, the threat of domestic destruction looms large within this field: indeed, in many of the works cited above, such as those by Grayzel, Greenhalgh, and Wiggam, this threat is the substrate out of which the debates they examine emerge. Still, the moment of home-loss, and the personal intricacies of its aftermath, remain tantalizingly out of reach, even as the cultural, social, and political atmospheres in which this experience took place are so brilliantly mapped. In accounts of the Blitz and the bombing war more generally, post-raid environments such as rest centres are often the subject of examination, a focus that again seems to proffer a stage for the bombed-out citizen. Yet, here again, these figures are relegated to the margins; from Titmuss to Calder, to the more recent work of historians like Daniel Todman, the spotlight has tended instead to be upon the administrative development of the post-raid welfare, or upon the broader psychological responses of civilians to fire.<sup>106</sup> The ways in which the experience of domestic dislocation might have shaped citizens’ understanding of the war and their own role with it thus go largely unexamined.

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<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (eds), *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>104</sup> Jay Winter, ‘Conclusion: Metropolitan History and National History in the Age of Total War’, in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (London: Routledge, 2011), 219-224, p. 222.

<sup>105</sup> The scholarship dealing with the development of air power more generally is detailed further in Chapter 1.

<sup>106</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*; Calder, *People’s War*; Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle, 1937-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), pp. 476-485.

Given the historiographical silences that attend both forms of home-loss, it should come as no surprise that the two are rarely conceived of in the same interpretive frame, save for a few passing acknowledgements that bombed-out Britons were sometimes rehoused in requisitioned properties. Still, the brevity of these references belies the extent to which these two wartime phenomena were linked inextricably together. Not only, for example, was the requisitioning of private dwellings made necessary in the first place because air raids had helped to make housing a scarcer resource; as noted above, many of those who were dislocated from their homes by requisitioning had, in fact, only left as a result of the raids. When blitzed citizens were accommodated in requisitioned housing, then, they were contributing to a reciprocal process which was much deeper and more far-reaching than has been previously recognised by scholars.

Although the historiography of home-loss has remained somewhat sparse and scattered, the subject thus clearly offers a number of intriguing possibilities for research. This thesis takes up the gauntlet by asking how urban wartime home-loss was imagined, experienced, and understood in Britain between 1914 and 1960. In approaching this question, it is useful to consider a form of wartime loss which *has* been more extensively considered by historians – that of bereavement. Indeed, in stark contrast to the experience of domestic dislocation, encounters with death and grief have long been recognised as a significant area of study.<sup>107</sup> Most recently, Lucy Noakes' work on death and bereavement in Second World War Britain has highlighted the complex ways in which death intervened in discourses of citizenship and identity.<sup>108</sup> For Noakes, these links have been profitably teased out by focusing on emotions and the manner in which they were constructed and policed. Such an approach has obvious utility for a study of home-loss, given that this was an experience similarly buffeted by the emotional currents of grief, anxiety, and fear – all of which were challenging to manage in the climate of Second World War Britain, where stoicism and fortitude were so valorised. However, in order to apply this framework to the home, it is also important to develop an understanding of this space; to uncover what home meant to wartime

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<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain' in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. by Joachim Whaley (London: Europa, 1981), 187–242; Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

<sup>108</sup> Lucy Noakes, *Dying for the Nation: Death, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

citizens, and to consider why its loss might be so impactful. To do so, we can turn to the methodology of spatial history, which – in tandem with the emotional lens deployed so effectively by Noakes – can thus help to illuminate the experience of home-loss in wartime Britain.

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

As the editors of *Total War: An Emotional History* note, despite the recency of the emotional turn in the humanities and social sciences, the history of emotions is by no means a new field.<sup>109</sup> Nor, indeed, is its connection to the study of war entirely novel: instead, it can be traced back at least as far as the work of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, each of whom wrote about emotion and conflict in ways that were deeply inflected by their own personal experiences of war.<sup>110</sup> Recently, however, buoyed by the work of social and cultural historians in the latter half of the twentieth century, this approach to the history of war has been reinvigorated.<sup>111</sup> Contributors to the volume cited above have thus been able to demonstrate the ongoing significance of emotions at war, drawing attention not only to the experience and influence of grief, fear, and anxiety, but also to what Martin Francis has called ‘secondary emotions’ such as anger, pride, and jealousy.<sup>112</sup>

Certainly, scholars of Britain in the Second World War have, in the past five years, been able to enjoy a number of exciting new works concerned with emotional life. In particular, as alluded to at various points above, Lucy Noakes’ and Claire Langhamer’s respective work has done much to cement the utility of looking at emotions in mid-century Britain. Noakes, for example, has highlighted the significance of concepts such as ‘emotional economy’, which she uses in order to explore the currency attached to specific emotions (and, by extension, the ways in which these valuations were intertwined with citizenship ideals).<sup>113</sup> Langhamer, meanwhile, has emphasised the deepening epistemological significance of feelings and experiences in wartime Britain. Not only

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<sup>109</sup> Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes, and Claudia Siebrecht, ‘Introduction’, in *Total War: An Emotional History*, ed. by Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes, and Claudia Siebrecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1-20, p. 4. On the emotional/affective turn, see David Lemmings and Ann Brooks, ‘The Emotional Turn in the Humanities and Social Sciences’, in *Emotions and Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3-18.

<sup>110</sup> Langhamer, Noakes, and Siebrecht, ‘Introduction’, pp. 4-8.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1; Martin Francis, ‘Wounded Pride and Petty Jealousies: Private Lives and Public Diplomacy in Second World War Cairo’, in *Total War: An Emotional History*, ed. by Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes, and Claudia Siebrecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 98-115, p. 101.

<sup>113</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 12.



were these phenomena subject to investigation by organisations like Mass Observation, which heralded the growing interest in emotional life by consistently asking Britons to narrate their intimate thoughts and feelings; they were also increasingly leveraged by individuals themselves as ways of ‘knowing the world’.<sup>114</sup> Both historians have thus demonstrated how the interior emotional lives of citizens came under greater scrutiny during this period. Whilst acknowledging that with this scrutiny came certain pressures, both also remind us of how important it is to recognise the subjectivity and messiness of emotions, and to acknowledge the ways in which individuals were (and are) engaged constantly in the processes of negotiation and contestation.

When thinking about the construction and performance of certain emotions, and their interactions with larger cultural, social, and political discourses, there is a significant body of scholarship upon which to draw.<sup>115</sup> Historians of emotion have, for example, frequently returned to Peter and Carol Stearns’ seminal 1985 work on ‘emotionology’, which detailed the construction of standards against which emotions and emotional responses are judged.<sup>116</sup> The frameworks offered more recently by William Reddy – who anatomised the expression of emotion with his concept of ‘emotives’ – and Barbara Rosenwein – who introduced the term ‘emotional communities’ into the lexicon of the field – have similarly shaped the literature.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, the cultural theorist Sara Ahmed injected new life into the study of emotion when she entreated her readers to think less about ‘what emotions are’, and instead ask ‘what emotions do’.<sup>118</sup>

Fascinatingly, Ahmed’s appeal to scholars closely echoes that made by the geographer Phil Hubbard in his examination of the contested concepts of space and place.<sup>119</sup> The key question for those studying these ideas, Hubbard suggests, is ‘not what they are but what they do’; how they become entangled in power relations, and how they interact with networks of people, practices,

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<sup>114</sup> Langhamer, “‘Astray in a Dark Forest?’”, p. 156.

<sup>115</sup> For a broader survey of emotion studies, see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Susan J. Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History: Or Doing History from the Inside Out’, *Emotion Review*, 3.1 (2011), 117-124; Thomas Dixon, *The History of Emotions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

<sup>116</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’, *American Historical Review*, 90.4 (1985), 813-836.

<sup>117</sup> William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>118</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> Phil Hubbard, ‘Space/Place’ in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. by David Sibley, Peter Jackson, David Atkinson and Neil Washbourne (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 41-48, p. 41.

languages, and representations.<sup>120</sup> As Courtney Campbell has noted, the rich association between the fields of human geography and history has often allowed these questions to be fruitfully explored in historical research. Cultural historians, in particular, have gained much from the ‘spatial turn’, which has concentrated their attention upon the questions of ‘how spatial meaning is constructed and how space is represented’.<sup>121</sup> As in the case of the history of emotions, there is a healthy theoretical literature to which we can turn in order to tune our thoughts about such questions. Many writers, for example, have used Marxist and materialist approaches to consider the ways in which space is consumed and produced; others, utilising a more humanistic perspective, have explored the relationship between people and places, focusing upon themes of experience, emotion and belonging.<sup>122</sup>

These wider geographic texts about the relationship between people, place, and space have, in a general manner, informed the ways in which the home and its construction have been approached in this thesis. However, more dedicated analyses of domestic space from across the social sciences and humanities have also been utilised. Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, for example, have illuminated the distinctions between notions such as ‘house’ and ‘home’. Whereas the former might only refer to the bricks-and-mortar structure of a dwelling, the latter is a term loaded with far more cultural, emotional, and political meaning. Home, by their definition, is ‘a series of feelings and attachments, some of which, some of the time, and in some places, become connected to a physical structure ... [c]onversely, one can live in a house and yet not feel “at home”’.<sup>123</sup> As historians concerned with broader concepts of domesticity have emphasised, domestic routines and feelings can also be imaginatively or physically cleaved from the traditional home entirely, and mapped instead onto spaces that subvert the ordinary – and often familial –

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>121</sup> Courtney J. Campbell, ‘Space, Place and Scale: Human Geography and Spatial History in *Past and Present*’, *Past and Present*, 239 (2018), 23-45, pp. 28-29

<sup>122</sup> For a summary of these currents of geographic thought, see Hubbard, ‘Space/Place’. The Marxist/materialist approach is perhaps best seen in the work of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja: see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). The humanist perspective, meanwhile, is exemplified by the work of Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph: see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

<sup>123</sup> Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 10. For more on the meanings of ‘home’ and ‘house’, see Kimberly Dovey, ‘Home and Homelessness’, in *Home Environments*, ed. by Irwin Altman and Carol Werner (New York: Plenum, 1985), 33-64.

models of home life.<sup>124</sup> Whilst this thesis is largely concerned with the dwelling proper, such work acts as a reminder of the mutability of domestic practices and concepts. Similarly, and in the same vein as Blunt and Dowling's scholarship, it highlights that the meanings which adhere to spaces of home are not always positive ones; rather, homes can provoke and play host to a series of more ambivalent or negative meanings as well.<sup>125</sup>

The loss of home has itself also been explored. John Porteous and Sandra Smith, for instance, have offered up the term 'domicide' as a means of discussing the forms of home-loss that come, in one way or another, at the hands of others.<sup>126</sup> Their contribution also usefully elucidates the difference between discussions of home-loss or domicile on the one hand, and homelessness on the other: whilst the latter is 'generally conceived of as roofless people sleeping on streets ... [t]he victims of domicile usually obtain a new roof; their issue is that they preferred the old one'.<sup>127</sup> The earlier sociological work of Marc Fried similarly confirmed how place-loss generally, and home-loss specifically, can provoke feelings of grief and despair as individuals and communities attempt to make sense of their dislocation from a place in which they had once been spatially rooted.<sup>128</sup> As historian Peter Read has argued, the process of returning to special places which have been lost in the past can equally be inflected by ambiguous, difficult emotions.<sup>129</sup>

The affinities between spatial and emotional approaches to the subject of home-loss should, then, be clear. As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has written, emotion and place are inexorably bound together: 'the emotion felt among human beings finds expression and anchorage in things and places. It can be said to create things and places to the extent that, in its glow, they acquire extra

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<sup>124</sup> See, for example, Martin Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure, and the Masculine Imagery in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender & History*, 19.1 (2007), 163–85; Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 109-141.

<sup>125</sup> Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, pp. 14-16. For more on the ambiguous meanings attached to home, see: Lorna Fox, 'The Meaning of Home: A Chimerical Concept or a Legal Challenge?', *Journal of Law and Society*, 29.4 (2002), 580-610; Lynne C. Manzo, 'Beyond House and Haven: Toward a Revisioning of Emotional Relationships with Places', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23.1 (2003), 47-61; Jane Darke, 'Women and the Meaning of Home' in *Housing Women*, ed. by Rose Gilroy and Roberta Woods (London: Routledge, 1994), 11-30; Beatriz Muñoz González, 'Topophilia and Topophobia: The Home as an Evocative Place of Contradictory Emotions', *Space and Culture*, 8.2 (2005), 193-213.

<sup>126</sup> John Douglas Porteous and Sandra Eileen Smith, *Domicide: The Global Destruction of Home* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> Marc Fried, 'Grieving for a Lost Home: Psychological Costs of Relocation', in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, ed. by James Q. Wilson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 359–79.

<sup>129</sup> Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

meaning'.<sup>130</sup> Recently, this link has been reaffirmed in the context of urban history by Maya Hultman and Sophie Cooper, who have called upon scholars to consider more holistically 'the relationship between bodies, urban spaces, and emotions'.<sup>131</sup> In this thesis, the twin stars of emotion and space have certainly guided both the nature of the source material used and the questions asked of this material. The methodological contributions of the scholars cited above have served as a reminder to pay heed not only to the ways in which emotions and spaces are constituted and understood, but also – in answer to Ahmed and Hubbard's respective calls – how they ripple outwards into the world. The home, as a space which is often seen to be especially soaked in emotional meaning, provides a particularly good point of departure from which to consider these processes.

Ego-documents – such as letters, diaries, and other forms of life-writing – form one of the most significant source bases for this research. Such material provides us with a unique insight into the lives of wartime Britons, and the ways in which they negotiated the impacts of major events upon their personal, everyday lives. For instance, as noted previously, Stephanie Butler's work on letter-writing communities has shown that correspondence could provide a space for individuals to articulate the effects of the war, often in ways that subverted the dominant emotional codes of the time.<sup>132</sup> Lucy Noakes has similarly argued that, although letters and diaries were not entirely free from the influence of such codes – even in the most secretive of diaries, individuals often continued to police their own responses – they could nevertheless act as 'emotional refuge[s]', allowing difficult feelings to be discussed more openly than was possible in more public fora.<sup>133</sup> Of course, as Joe Moran has noted, there are a number of 'interpretative challenges' inherent in the use of this source material.<sup>134</sup> For example, diaries provide just a snapshot of an individual's life, often raising as many questions as they answer – particularly in the case of 'ordinary' individuals whose lives are otherwise sparsely documented.<sup>135</sup> Yet, as scholars like Amy Bell and Alison Twells

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<sup>130</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective', in *Philosophy in Geography*, ed. by Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson (London: D. Reidel, 1979), 387-427, p. 417.

<sup>131</sup> Maya Hultman and Sophie Cooper, 'Revisiting Space and Emotion: New Ways to Study Buildings and Feelings', *History Compass*, 21.5 (2023), 1-12.

<sup>132</sup> Butler, 'The Circulation of Grief'.

<sup>133</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 222-23.

<sup>134</sup> Joe Moran, 'Private Lives, Public Histories: The Diary in Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015), 138-162, p. 139.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155, 158.

have highlighted within the context of the Second World War, diary sources continue to be some of the richest available: Twells, for example, has shown how even a tiny pocket diary, with daily entries of no more than thirty words, can illuminate the emotional life of its author.<sup>136</sup> As Moran argues, embracing and acknowledging the enigmatic aspects of these texts allows us to make use of their attributes – and thus to better unpick and examine the relationship between individual, everyday life and the collective experience of historical moments.<sup>137</sup>

Many of the same challenges and opportunities attend the use of the material solicited and created by the social research organisation, Mass Observation, between the 1930s and the 1950s. Over the course of this period, MO built a vast cache of material, collecting diaries as well as ‘directive responses’, which saw individuals reply to monthly open-ended questionnaires about a wide array of political and social topics. MO also employed its own investigators to ‘observe’ the public and write reports about their moods, opinions, and feelings. From these two strands, MO often produced their own summary documents and books, which were variously made available to the wartime government and to the wider public. The resulting archive is, as Martin Francis has put it, ‘an unparalleled point of access into the intimate and subjective worlds of the British in this era’.<sup>138</sup> Whilst, naturally, there are peculiarities within MO’s collections which require consideration on the part of the historian, MO’s commitment to studying everyday life – and emotional life – make this archive an invaluable resource.<sup>139</sup>

Fiction provides a similarly rich vein for the study of contemporary experiences and subjectivities. After all, as Marina Mackay has noted, authors at the time often used their writing to record not necessarily how things *were*, but rather ‘how things *felt*’.<sup>140</sup> Lara Feigel has similarly

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<sup>136</sup> Bell, *London Was Ours*; Alison Twells, “‘Went into Raptures’: Reading Emotion in the Ordinary Wartime Diary, 1941-1946”, *Women’s History Review*, 25.1 (2016), 143–60.

<sup>137</sup> Moran, ‘Private Lives, Public Histories’, pp. 160-162. For more on diary-writing in twentieth-century Britain, see also Victoria Stewart, ‘Writing and Reading Diaries in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain’, *Literature and History*, 27.1 (2018), 47-61.

<sup>138</sup> Francis, ‘Wounded Pride and Petty Jealousies’, p. 100.

<sup>139</sup> The literature dealing with the history and treatment of Mass Observation source material is extensive. See, for example: Claire Langhamer, ‘An Archive of Feeling? Mass Observation and the Mid-Century Moment’, *Insights*, 9.4 (2016), 1–15; James Hinton, *The Mass Observers: A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Dorothy Sheridan, ‘Writing to the Archive: Mass Observation as Autobiography’, *Sociology*, 27 (1993), 27-40; Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloom, *Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and Literacy Practices* (Cresskill, NJ; Hampton, 2000).

<sup>140</sup> Marina Mackay, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-10, p. 3. Emphasis is my own.

suggested that the use of specific literary forms helped to record some of the more esoteric elements of wartime life which otherwise proved difficult to capture; the suspensive and surreal dimensions of air raid experiences were, for example, particularly well served by the short story.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps it is no surprise that the home – imbued as it was with a significant degree of ambiguity and uncanniness by the conflict – should have featured so regularly within this literary record.

Sources created after the war years themselves, such as autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories, also provide an important insight into the wartime life and the ways in which understandings of the war were shaped and reshaped over the subsequent decades. Outside of the category of ego-documents and life-writing sources, this thesis also makes use of a variety of other sources, including local and national newspapers, official papers and publications, film, and art. Taken together, the material outlined above helps to provide a rounded and holistic view of wartime home-loss; through such sources, we can track the ways in which this experience was imagined, the contexts in which it occurred, the responses which it evoked, and the legacies it bore. Importantly, the diversity of this material also makes it possible for home-loss to be examined at multiple scales: individual, personal experiences are thus seen alongside – and indeed entangled with – broader social and political understandings of this process.

## SCOPE, STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENTS

This thesis, in keeping with the space that it considers, makes use of a number of blurred margins. It is, for example, a history of home-loss – but it is only very rarely a history of homelessness as one might understand the term today. As Celia Fremlin, an investigator employed by Mass Observation, noted in a 1941 study of bombed-out citizens in London:

“Homeless” of course is a relative term – owing to the length of time since the last bad raids the number of people actually on the streets is practically nil. [I] therefore took the term to apply to people who had been driven out of their real homes by bombing, and are at present living in some kind of temporary or makeshift manner – whether with friends, in furnished rooms, in hastily-acquired alternative houses, etc.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Lara Feigel, “‘The Only Diary I Have Kept’: Visionary Witnessing in the Second World War Short Story’, *Textual Practice*, 29.7 (2015), 1289–1309.

<sup>142</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-E, ‘Interviews with people who have been bombed out’, January 1941, unpaginated.

Whilst this thesis draws upon source material from Britons who found themselves in desperately poor living conditions following the loss of their homes – including those whose experienced spells of being utterly unsheltered – it also utilises testimony from those who were able to return relatively swiftly to reasonably comfortable homes, and from those who had second homes to which they could retreat. Such voices are valuable in a history which seeks to understand how a broad range of citizens understood and articulated the effects of a form of loss that was inextricably linked to the experience of war. Their inclusion, however, ensures that this is not a study of those most marginalised by the precarity or scarcity of housing more generally.

It is also an urban history – one which examines wartime experiences of home-loss in cities and large towns across Britain, and attempts to broaden the fragmentary and London-centric character of the historiography by including ‘provincial’ cities within its analysis. Yet, the focus on these urban places is not complete: those who lost homes in cities and towns, for instance, often narrated their experiences from rural billets; and those who lived in rural or suburban areas often found their understandings of home fundamentally reshaped by the events taking place in more urban localities. In the pages of this thesis, then, the porosity of the city is recognised in much the same way as the porosity of the home itself.

Finally, it is a history of the Second World War; and yet, it begins in 1914, and ends in 1960. Whilst the primary focus of the thesis might be upon the years between 1939 and 1945, the years prior and hence are not included merely as context or coda. Rather, they form an integral part of the narrative, grounding the wartime experience of home-loss within the wider political, economic, social, and emotional currents of the twentieth century. In this way, the thesis builds upon existing scholarship which has sought to expand our temporal framing of the Second World War. Crucially, it also extends this approach – for whereas previous work has tended either to widen the frame only marginally, or to have done so only in one chronological direction, both pre-war and postwar vistas are integrated into the analysis here.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> For example, recent general histories of the Second World War, such as those by Daniel Todman and Alan Allport, have tended to expand the chronological framing of the war by only a few years either side. See: Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*; Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: A New World, 1942-1947* (London: Allen Lane, 2020); Alan Allport, *Britain at Bay: The Epic Story of the Second World War, 1938-1941* (London: Profile, 2020). Similarly, whilst works by Susan Grayzel and Adam Page have been innovative in their placement of the Second World War within broader temporal parameters, their work has tended to be skewed in one chronological direction. See Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*; Adam Page, *Architectures of Survival: Air War and Urbanism in Britain, 1935-52* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

Chapter One thus examines the home-at-war prior to 1939, exploring how this space – and the events of its loss – were constructed and negotiated during the First World War and interwar period. The conflict of 1914 to 1918, for example, saw not only the advent of aerial warfare in Britain, but also the emergence of the state’s first major programme of requisitioning. Each of these developments had far-reaching connotations for the way in which wartime citizens and their homes would be thought about across the next few decades. Literary depictions of future war written during the interwar period, for example, highlighted the growth of anxieties about violent new modes of conflict. A study of state war plans from the 1930s similarly reveals a deep current of concern coalescing around the newfound centrality and vulnerability of citizens on the home front. Dwellings lay at the heart of this discourse: how could these spaces be protected? How should citizens respond to their shifting nature? Given the links made between homes and the wider war effort, what kinds of control might need to be exerted over these sites by the state?

Chapter Two moves the narrative into the war years proper, considering how understandings of the urban home were impacted by the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. With reference to autobiographical and life-writing sources in particular, this chapter explores how citizens navigated a variety domestic disruptions and dislocations which fell short of complete loss. It highlights how the war revealed and exacerbated the uncanny and liminal aspects of the home by engendering incursions by both enemy forces and the British state itself. This revelation of the home’s porosity worked to unsettle traditional – and widely held – conceptualisations of the home as a space of security, comfort, and safety, thus reshaping citizens’ relationships with their domiciles. At the same time, the ambiguity of the home’s margins allowed it to be mapped onto broader debates, including those that attended the body and the nation at war.

Chapter Three acts as the fulcrum of the thesis, exploring the actual moment of home-loss itself as well as its impacts in the short-term. It considers first the ways in which contemporaries drew connections between this experience and the notion of morale – and underscores how, following anxious suggestions that home-loss might undermine the war effort, a specific kind of civil identity (one which emphasised emotional restraint and community-mindedness) was valorised as a means of severing this causative link. The chapter then explores how citizens themselves negotiated the demands of this ‘ideal’ identity whilst attempting to cope with the practical, political, economic, and emotional ramifications of being dislocated from their homes.



Whilst individual stoicism was an important cog in the process of managing this experience, here it will be argued that dispossessed and bombed-out Britons also invested a significant degree of responsibility in both their fellow citizens, and in the state itself.

Chapter Four examines how urban Britons who had lost their homes used wider local, national, and transnational lenses in order to make sense of the events and aftermath of their own dislocation. Although spatial and temporal variations in the process of home-loss will come into focus here, this chapter does not attempt to provide a comparative history of how bombardment or requisition played out in different contexts. Rather, it historicises the work of comparison itself by probing the ways in which contemporaries situated their own experiences in relation to those of others. In doing so, it illuminates the wider ethical and moral frameworks in which wartime home-loss was viewed, and emphasises the ambiguities and contestations at play in discourses about wartime citizenship, shared sacrifice, and stoicism.

Chapter Five charts the tangled postwar legacies of both requisitioning and enemy action, and the interaction of these experiences with debates about reconstruction and the broader transition from war to peace. It highlights how the process of homecoming – whether as a result of rebuilding or derequisitioning – was inextricably linked to a larger set of questions about wartime service and sacrifice, and the altered relationship between citizens and the state. What was the war fought for? What rights and rewards did citizens lay claim to in the aftermath of the conflict? How were political and social shifts which had occurred during the war viewed once peace had been declared? As demonstrated by the controversial use of requisitioning powers even after the war had ended, such questions were far from just philosophical; rather, they continued to be of practical and immediate significance. Extending the chronological frame to 1960 and the legal end of requisitioning therefore makes it possible to see how wartime experiences and policies continued to impact individual and collective lives in the decades after 1945.

In mapping the ways in which urban wartime home-loss was imagined, experienced, and navigated across the early and mid-twentieth century in Britain, this thesis thus recovers an element of Second World War history which has previously remained underexamined. Not only does it push the history of the air raid in new directions by exploring how the destruction of the domestic built environment was understood and managed by contemporaries; it also clarifies how such forms of dislocation existed alongside processes like requisitioning, which came at the hands of the state

rather than the enemy. Naturally, these two forms of home-loss wax and wane throughout the thesis. At times, the stories of the bombed-out and the dispossessed are inextricably intertwined, and at others, they can be examined more separately. However, their inclusion in the same frame makes clear a central argument of this work: that bombing was but one facet of a wider domestic unfixity that characterised wartime Britain.

By interrogating this unfixity, we are able to shed light on a number of wider debates and themes. The subject of citizenship is, of course, of particular concern in the present work. As it will be shown, the threatened, bombed, and requisitioned home offers an especially apposite lens for examining this issue, allowing us to consider contemporary responses to the state's increasingly broad purview over private life, and to chart fluid understandings of what the state owed to its citizens in return for their wartime efforts. More broadly, a study of home-loss further illuminates a variety of wartime myths, and elucidates how contemporaries understood and articulated shifts in the nature of warfare. In sum, by paying closer heed to the home and its loss, we stand to gain a deeper understanding of what it meant to think about and experience war on the home front in twentieth-century Britain.

## Chapter One

### *Envisaging*

In August 1938, as tensions seemed to be coming to a head in the Sudetenland, Mass Observation sent a special directive to its panel of writers asking them for their opinion on the chances of war breaking out afresh. Pam Ashford, a woman living in Glasgow and working for a coal export company, responded that whilst she thought a ‘serious conflagration [was] inevitable’, she believed it would not arrive for some thirty years at least.<sup>144</sup> Not only, she argued, were the various possible belligerents all afflicted by a practical and economic unreadiness; they were also bound by the memory of the last war, which warned of the horrors that might be unleashed in another global conflict. Yet, for Ashford, it was arguably the (supposedly) *novel* horrors of war – rather than those already known – which most fuelled her hope that hostilities could be avoided:

There is a common belief that the next war will involve attacks upon the civil population – air raids, gas, bombardments, etc. That would terrify me, and I should seek to escape ... commit suicide or go mad. Alternatively, I might respond in a way that has happened before when courage is needed ... From practical experience I know that it is possible to “throw” fear out of the consciousness – and one pays the penalty afterwards with weeks of exhaustion, nightmare, dyspepsia, depression, etc.<sup>145</sup>

The further deterioration of the Czechoslovakian situation in September made Ashford briefly fear that war was, contrary to her previous beliefs, imminent.<sup>146</sup> Later, she described how she had at this nadir planned to ready herself and her home for a possible war by burning her papers, storing

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<sup>144</sup> This Mass Observer’s writings have also been anthologised in Simon Garfield’s book, *We Are At War*, where he has given her the pseudonym Pam Ashford. Although my extracts are not drawn from Garfield’s work, I have chosen to utilise the same pseudonym for ease of reading. See Simon Garfield, *We Are At War: The Remarkable Diaries of Five Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* (Reading: Ebury, 2005).

<sup>145</sup> MOA, DS 833, Response to Special Directive, August 1938.

<sup>146</sup> MOA, DS 833, Entry for 24-25 September 1938.

valuables in a deed-box, and arranging clothes for a quick escape. By the eve of the Munich Agreement, she had come full circle, being assured once again that there would be no such outbreak. And yet, under the surface, her fears about the nature of a possible conflict continued to simmer, as evidenced by her account of an office discussion about air raid precautions in October 1938:

[The export manager] explained ... the different methods of destruction. It distressed me terribly and I worked as hard as I could and listened to as little as possible ... The purpose of incendiary bombs, it was said, was to set alight the upper storeys of tall buildings. Several people remembered that my home corresponded to this, and I had to cope with many horrible stories of what was to happen to me. It took every atom of my will to stick to my point that there was not going to be a war.<sup>147</sup>

Ashford's account of the months surrounding the September crisis showcases in vivid detail the uncertainty of this period, and the ways in which the looming threat of air war continued to make itself felt even at times when it seemed to have been averted. It also demonstrates how the anxieties of this experience often came to be expressed through reference to the home: what would be the effect of bombardment upon such spaces, and upon those who lived there? How could, or should, citizens prepare for such attacks, especially when so much was still unknown?

Such questions had reached a fever pitch in the 1930s, buoyed by the flare-up of tensions in Manchuria, Abyssinia and Spain, and the rise to power of the Nazi Party in Germany, all of which seemed to increase the chances of war once again enveloping the world.<sup>148</sup> Yet, at their core was a set of anxieties with a much longer history, stretching back to at least the turn of the century.<sup>149</sup> In Britain, after all, the experience of enemy action on the home front was not an entirely new prospect. Rather, its eventual arrival in the Second World War represented the return and intensification of what had been a more limited, but nevertheless significant, encounter with enemy bombing during the Great War some two decades earlier.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, it is the assonance

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<sup>147</sup> MOA, DS 833, Entry for 1-2 October 1938.

<sup>148</sup> On the impact of these regional crises on the build-up to war, see Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War, 1931-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2021).

<sup>149</sup> On the development of concerns about non-combatants coming under attack before 1914, see Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, pp. 7-11. For an examination of anxieties about threats to the family and the home just before the First World War began, see Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War', *American Historical Review*, 102.3 (1997), 714-747.

<sup>150</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 3.

between these two confrontations with aerial warfare which has helped to drive recent calls to consider the period between 1914 and 1945 more holistically. As scholars like Susan Grayzel have argued, the experiences of the First World War profoundly shaped understandings of both modern warfare and the modern home in the interwar period, even as the spectre of the next conflict reached backwards to do the same.<sup>151</sup> This temporal melding has also been reflected upon by Adam Page in his work on architectural discourse and the air raid. Citing, for example, plans to build underground car parks that could also function as bomb shelters, and debates about how to integrate structural precautions into new houses, Page argues that the interwar period saw a ‘double-mapping’ of the city, wherein ‘everyday’ civilian spaces were consistently tinged with the prospect of violence.<sup>152</sup> Air war thus ‘fundamentally challenged notions of peacetime and wartime’, and thereafter unsettled the markers which have traditionally been used to categorise and separate the First World War, the interwar years, and the Second World War from one another.<sup>153</sup>

This chapter engages with the call to broaden the temporal horizons of our histories by considering how both the wartime home, and the possibility or experience of home-loss, were thought about before 1939. It does so with reference not only to the air raid, but also to the other focus of this thesis: requisitioning. The former has, of course, been the subject of a much broader and deeper historiography. Work upon the rise of air power as a feature of modern war has, for example, been wide ranging, taking in its stride the military and strategic significance of this development alongside more culturally and socially minded lines of enquiry.<sup>154</sup> The home features frequently in this latter strain of the literature, and especially in that which seeks to explore the effects of bombing on civilians before 1918, or to examine the blurring of the divide between ‘home’ and ‘fighting’ fronts which was so obviously encapsulated by the physical destruction of

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>152</sup> Adam Page, ‘Planning Permanent Air Raid Precautions: Architecture, Air War and the Changing Perceptions of British Cities in the Late 1930s’, *Urban History*, 43.1 (2016), 117–34, p. 130, 120-121; Page, *Architectures of Survival*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>153</sup> Page, *Architectures of Survival*, p. 4. For more on the utility of collapsing the binary of the First and Second World Wars, see Martin Francis, ‘Attending to Ghosts: Some Reflections on the Disavowals of British Great War Historiography’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 25.3 (2014), 347-367, pp. 357-360.

<sup>154</sup> On the development of military and political thinking about air power, see Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas About Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); David Ian Hall, *Strategy for Victory: The Development of British Tactical Air Power, 1919-1943* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008); Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power: British Air Policy in the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Michael Paris, *Winged Warfare: The Literature and Theory of Aerial Warfare in Britain, 1859-1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

dwelling places.<sup>155</sup> Yet, whilst our understanding of the wartime and interwar home can be much enhanced by such work, none take this space and its meanings as the primary object of focus. Even in the case of Grayzel's *At Home and Under Fire*, a work which brilliantly dissects both the domestic vulnerabilities which emerged as the divide between the soldier and the civilian collapsed, and the gendered connotations of this process, the question of how the home as a physical and emotional space was conceptualised is rarely lingered upon.<sup>156</sup> In the much sparser historiography of requisitioning, the home remains similarly hidden. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that the dispossession of homeowners was – to an even greater extent than was true in the case of air raid destruction – far more limited in the First World War than it would be in the Second World War. By comparison, commercial and industrial requisitioning were more common and have thus, understandably, garnered more scholarly attention, most notably in the work of legal scholars such as Gerry Rubin.<sup>157</sup> Still, domestic requisitioning was not entirely absent from the landscape of the Great War – and, as this chapter will highlight, the legacies of other types of requisition would themselves come to bear upon the domestic case, finding expression in debates over issues such as compensation.

In order to recover the shape of the wartime home before 1939, this chapter will firstly examine the ways in which the domestic spaces and private lives of British citizens were recast by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. As we shall see, the paradigm shift in the nature of warfare which was ushered in by this conflict was often particularly well represented by the

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<sup>155</sup> On the unsettling of distinctions between the civilian and the soldier by this rise, see Joel Hayward, 'Air Power, Ethics, and Civilian Immunity during the First World War and its Aftermath', *Global War Studies*, 7.2 (2010), 3-31; Amanda Alexander, 'The Genesis of the Civilian', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 20.2 (2007), 359-376. For broader treatments of the fears about air power before 1939, see Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Brett Holman, 'The Shadow of the Airliner: Commercial Bombers and the Rhetorical Destruction of Britain, 1917-35', *Twentieth Century British History*, 24.4 (2013), 495-517; Michele Haapamaki, *The Coming of the Aerial War: Culture and the Fear of Airborne Attack in Inter-war Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); Uri Bialer, *The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics 1932-1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980). On the effects of bombing upon civilians under fire, see Stefanie Caroline Linden, 'When War Came Home: Air-raid Shock in World War I', *History of Psychiatry*, 32.3 (2021), 289-307; Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*. For a more general overview of the 'civilianisation of war' in the twentieth century, see Jay Winter, *The Cultural History of War in the Twentieth Century and After* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 17-23.

<sup>156</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*.

<sup>157</sup> Gerry R. Rubin, *Private Property, Government Requisition and the Constitution, 1914-1927* (London: Hambledon, 1994). A more historically situated analysis of requisitioning can be found in Samuel J. Hurwitz' broader history of economic controls in First World War Britain – see Samuel J. Hurwitz, *State Intervention in Great Britain: A Study of Economic Control and Social Response, 1914-1919* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1949).

dwelling. The increasingly thin divide between the civilian and the soldier was, for example, forcefully illustrated by the advent of aerial bombardment, which allowed the enemy to carry ‘the sharp sword of war into the homes of civilians’ as never before.<sup>158</sup> The unprecedented expansion of state power which occurred during this period could likewise be seen with particular clarity upon the domestic stage: for not only did the state take a much greater interest in how citizens acted in the privacy of their own homes; it also took for itself certain powers, such as those of requisition, which laid the groundwork for it to take direct control of this space.

The next sections of this chapter then move forward to explore the construction of the home-at-war within the context of the interwar period. This subject will firstly be examined through the lens of literature, and more specifically through that of the ‘future war’ fiction written and published during the 1920s and 1930s by authors such as Cicely Hamilton, H. G. Wells, Steven Southwold, George Orwell, and Nevil Shute. Within the pages of these texts, it is possible to excavate a number of anxieties about the effects of new forms of warfare – and most especially, aerial and chemical warfare – upon domestic space. As will be demonstrated with particular reference to Shute’s 1938 novel, *What Happened to the Corbetts*, such sources can offer insight not only into how interwar writers envisaged the ways in which homes might be lost, but also into the ways that citizens might need to respond to this loss.

The third section, meanwhile, considers how the home and its potential loss featured within the less fantastical arena of state planning. Having recognised that air raids would feature prominently in the coming war, and that requisitioning would again be a vital means of oiling the gears of the home front, the state spent considerable time examining both in the run up to 1939. The bombed home, in particular, remained centre stage. In the context of pervasive fears about the impact of bombardment, the state needed to be seen to be involved in the work of shielding citizens and their homes. Whilst much effort was henceforth expended upon publicity campaigns which advised ways of making the dwelling safer, the recognition that complete protection was impossible meant that other avenues – such as evacuation, and the evocation of stoicism – were also at the forefront of this discourse.

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<sup>158</sup> ‘Objects of Hun Raids’, *Dundee Courier*, 9 July 1917.

## LEGACIES OF THE GREAT WAR

On the morning of 16 December 1914, the residents of the coastal towns of Scarborough, Whitby, Hartlepool and West Hartlepool were granted an unenviable distinction: that of being the first British civilian populations to come under the direct – and lethal – fire of the German forces.<sup>159</sup> As one newspaper noted, the naval bombardments which took place in the winter of 1914 interrupted a span of some 250 years in which British shores had been left essentially undisturbed by enemy fleets. The most recent antecedent, by their calculation, was a Dutch raid of the Medway in 1667.<sup>160</sup> And, unlike a toothless and unsuccessful raid at Great Yarmouth which had been attempted some weeks previously, this interruption drew blood. By the time that the German cruisers left, 127 men, women, and children had lost their lives. Many more had been injured; and many buildings, homes among them, had been wrecked and destroyed.<sup>161</sup> In this way, these north-eastern communities became the first in a line of Britons who would, over the course of the next four years, experience the sharp end of war – even as they lived and worked hundreds of miles from the more traditional fighting fronts. By the end of the war, under the fire of naval guns, Zeppelins, and airplanes, some 1,260 British civilians had been killed, and a further 3,490 injured.<sup>162</sup> The material damage wrought by these attacks, meanwhile, was estimated at £3,087,098.<sup>163</sup>

The expressions of outrage and horror which swiftly followed the initial bombardments were, from the outset, intimately connected to both the nature of those killed and the spaces in which their deaths occurred. The dead were mostly – although not exclusively – civilians, and many of them were women and children who continued to be envisioned in exclusively non-combatant roles.<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile, the places in which they lived out their final moments were not only far removed from the battlefields, but were also overwhelmingly quotidian: here, workplaces and homes became sites of death, as did the streets and passages linking them. An inquest into the deaths in Hartlepool thus cited the case of a 25-year-old woman who had been ‘sitting down to breakfast when a shell burst through the ceiling’ and killed her, as well as that of a grandfather who

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<sup>159</sup> The first shells to fall on British soil had in fact been fired at Great Yarmouth some weeks previously, on 3 November 1914, but had landed on the beach and had not resulted in any casualties or extensive damage.

<sup>160</sup> ‘East Coast Bombarded by German Cruisers’, *Western Gazette*, 18 December 1914.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Air and Sea Raids on Great Britain’, *The Times*, 13 January 1919.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 21.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*



had found his son's two children dead in a side alley, 'killed by a shell which [had] struck [his] house'.<sup>165</sup> In Scarborough, meanwhile, it was reported that another shell had 'passed clean through four houses', and that one woman had been 'killed instantly, being blown to pieces in her bed'.<sup>166</sup>

As one interwar account of everyday life on the home front recalled:

Up to the date of [this] occurrence but few of us had realised the war might be fought at home as well as abroad ... It seemed incredible that an English girl at Scarborough should be killed by Germans whilst cleaning the doorstep! That a British family of eight at Hartlepool should every one of them be slaughtered by Germans!<sup>167</sup>

Such events clearly could not help but force a recognition of the shifting boundaries of warfare, which had now expanded to include numerous spaces and persons previously far removed from the physical experience of conflict.

Understandably, this shift prompted a patchwork of different responses. Simmering anxieties about the consequences for civilians at home, for example, existed not only alongside anger and more outright displays of fear, but also alongside expressions of awe and excitement, particularly in response to the phantasmagorical night-time Zeppelin raids.<sup>168</sup> It was also a change which provoked a certain amount of moral posturing; for, even before any raids had actually taken place upon domestic British targets, the topics of bombing generally, and attacks on homes specifically, had begun to be utilised as a means of drawing dividing lines between Britain and her opponents. An October 1914 edition of the *Illustrated London News*, for instance, was keen to draw a distinction between the German forces which had left gutted homes in their wake as they advanced across Belgium, and the supposedly nobler approach of the British. Thus, naval airmen tasked with carrying out raids on Düsseldorf were reported to have actively avoided aiming their bombs 'at churches and private houses where they might kill or injure women or children.'<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> 'Harrowing Stories at Inquest', *Manchester Courier*, 18 December 1914.

<sup>166</sup> 'Woman Blown to Pieces', *Dundee Courier*, 17 December 1914.

<sup>167</sup> C. S. Peel, *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918* (London: Bodley Head, 1929), p. 138.

<sup>168</sup> An interesting showcase of the variation in responses can be found in 'Air Raid Essays', *Daily Mail*, 10 December 1915. For an example of how the Zeppelin raids could elicit awe in those who witnessed them, see "'Like a New Incandescent Gas-Mantle When It is First Lit': The Burning Zeppelin – An Impression", *Illustrated London News*, 9 September 1916. See also Ariela Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 27.3 (2004), 47-62. On expressions of pride in response to the aerial bombardment of the home front, see Stefan Goebel, 'Cities', in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. II, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 358-381, p. 377.

<sup>169</sup> 'War the Moral Test', *Illustrated London News*, 17 October 1914.

When Britain herself actually came under direct attack, the bombed home and civilian only gained further power as symbols of the enemy's barbarism. One recruitment poster, for example, depicted a bombed house in Scarborough, and described the four civilians who had died within its walls, among them two children. As the leading caption – 'Men of Britain! Will you stand this?' – demonstrated, these images were easily co-opted into the task of recruitment, offering as they did a means of communicating a moral justification for the war.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, as Michael Reeve has shown in his work on the north-eastern coastal raids, the symbolic currency of the bombed-out house was such that it was also well-mined through more a variety of less official mediums, such as locally-produced commemorative postcards and photographs. Here, it was again able to perform various functions, working to 'elicit emotional responses', and 'to crystallize an image of the intractable, morally-bankrupt enemy in the minds of civilians'.<sup>171</sup>

The beginning of the air war proper in 1915 provided still further opportunities for the disrupted wartime home to be put to work. After the initial Zeppelin raids of January 1915 on Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn in Norfolk, for instance, the same revelations about the vulnerability of civilian homes that had suffused the coverage of the north-eastern raids continued to horrify and fascinate. Thus, reports about the attack on King's Lynn highlighted the fact that a teenager who had died had been 'asleep in [his] bed'.<sup>172</sup> The recasting of the domestic sphere wrought by its becoming a site of death was emphasised by his mother, whose written statement to the coroner's inquest recalled: 'I saw a bomb fall from the sky and strike the pillow where Percy was lying. I tried to wake him, but he was dead, and then the house fell in.'<sup>173</sup> Meanwhile, the *Illustrated London News* centred the ruined house in its report on the raid on Yarmouth, with the article's leading picture showcasing a home which, despite retaining most of its external walls, had been eerily gutted inside.<sup>174</sup> Such structures would remain powerful iconographic devices

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<sup>170</sup> IWM, Art Department, PST 11531, 'Men of Britain! Will You Stand This?', 1915. For further examples of the Scarborough raids being mobilised in recruitment propaganda, see Imperial War Museum (IWM), Art Department, PST 5109, 'Remember Scarborough!', 1915; IWM Art Department, PST 11472, 'Remember Scarborough!', 1914.

<sup>171</sup> Michael Reeve, "'Are We Downhearted? NO!': Representing War Damage and Destruction Following Bombardment on the First World War "Home Front"', *Critical Military Studies*, 7.4 (2021), 397-417, p. 414.

<sup>172</sup> 'Seven Bombs on King's Lynn: Boy Killed in Bed', *The Times*, 20 January 1915; 'Air Raid on East Coast', *Western Gazette*, 22 January 1915.

<sup>173</sup> 'Divergent Inquest Stories', *The Times*, 22 January 1915.

<sup>174</sup> 'The Bomb-Dropping on the East Coast: Damage at Yarmouth', *Illustrated London News*, 23 January 1915. This echoed its earlier coverage of the Scarborough raid – see 'German Havoc in English Homes: A Scarborough House Wrecked', *Illustrated London News*, 26 December 1914.

throughout the war – a fact further demonstrated when, a year later, the same paper depicted collapsed homes in the Midlands to convey again the ‘wanton barbarism of the Zeppelin’.<sup>175</sup> Just as the shelled dwellings of Scarborough had been mobilised as a tool of recruitment, so too was this new threat against civilian spaces translated into propaganda. One famous poster in which a Zeppelin balloon was shown hovering over the London skyline – with the caption, ‘[i]t is far better to face the bullets than be killed at home by a bomb’ – traded upon the seeming illogicality of remaining at home when this space no longer afforded any guarantee of safety.<sup>176</sup> Of course, such comparisons of the dangers of the home and fighting fronts remained tenuous: whilst the initial experiences of aerial warfare may have prompted fears even among those fighting abroad about the safety of those at home, the reality was that life on the battlefield proper was at all points in the war infinitely more perilous.<sup>177</sup> Yet, the genuine anxieties expressed both by those serving at the front, and those facing the bombs, reflected the way in which the elision – if not necessarily equivalence – of civilian and military spheres served to disturb.

The question of how to respond to this altered landscape of war was a multilayered one, particularly as the famously fallible Zeppelin gave way to more advanced technologies such as the Gotha airplane after 1916.<sup>178</sup> On more than one occasion, discontent was directed at the state on account of its perceived failure to shield citizens from the effects of enemy action at home. The government was, for example, accused of failing to deliver adequate state compensation to those who lost their homes and loved ones in the raids; of being overzealous in their censorship of raid reportage; and of neglecting to provide adequate anti-aircraft defences.<sup>179</sup> Meanwhile, the ignition

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<sup>175</sup> ‘The Wanton Barbarism of the Zeppelin: After an Air Raid’, *Illustrated London News*, 12 February 1916. For further examples of the same rhetoric at work, see: ‘The Zeppelin Raid on Ramsgate: Damage Done by the Bombs’, *Illustrated London News*, 22 May 1915; ‘Germany’s Idea of Military Objectives! Wrecked Suburban Houses’, *Illustrated London News*, 23 October 1915; ‘The Cowardly Zeppelin Raid of Oct. 13’, *Illustrated London News*, 23 Oct 1915.

<sup>176</sup> IWM, Art Department, PST 12052, ‘It is Far Better to Face the Bullets...’, 1915.

<sup>177</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 20.

<sup>178</sup> For an overview of the different raids on Britain in the First World War, and the introduction of aircraft in the later years of the war, see John H. Morrow, ‘The Air War’, in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. I, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 349-375. See also the official history of the air war, written in the 1930s: H. A. Jones, *The War in the Air: Being the Story of the Part Played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force*, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931); H. A. Jones, *The War in the Air: Being the Story of the Part Played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force*, vol. V (Oxford: Clarendon, 1935).

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, G. E. M., ‘Compensation for Air Raids’, *The Times*, 16 November 1917; ‘Last Night’s Raid’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 July 1916; East Coast Correspondent, ‘Zeppelin Raids’, *Sunday Times*, 29 August 1915; A Man in the Street, ‘The Raid on London’, *The Times*, 11 July 1917.

of a hotly contested debate about reprisal raids saw many voice a belief that the only way of protecting those at home would be to 'let our airships have a try'.<sup>180</sup>

Still, whilst the above discourses tended to fix eyes upon the state's responsibilities, the question of how air raids should be responded to was always one with two sides. Citizens themselves were thus exposed to the inverse of their own demands for action, becoming subject to mandates which firmly involved them in the work of their own protection. These included the promotion of specific air raid precautions within and beyond the home, and the encouragement of a broader civil identity steeped in stoicism and voluntary participation. Such calls seemed to find purchase as the war drew on: certainly, whilst private and public outcry about the perceived barbarism of attacks remained ever present, expressions of anxiety and fear were increasingly 'minimised' by those of courage, humour, and quiet acceptance.<sup>181</sup> Crucially, as Susan Grayzel has powerfully argued, the identity which underpinned such reactions was theoretically universal: it offered an ideal mode of response to all citizens alike, regardless of class, gender, or occupation, and thus penetrated the boundaries of the home to enlist the notional non-combatants associated with space.<sup>182</sup> As Grayzel further contends, an important consequence of the blurred divide between the home and fighting fronts was therefore the way in which it enabled – and, indeed, obligated – the state to extend its oversight of both British society generally, and of the home more specifically, all in the name of protecting citizens from the new threats that they faced.<sup>183</sup>

However, whilst the enmeshment of fronts brought about by the advent of the air raid was perhaps one of the most potent drivers of this extension of state power over British homes after 1914, it was not the only factor at work. Pre-1914 assessments of the nature of a future war had often acknowledged the likelihood that the domestic population would play a more important role than ever before in the waging of a major European conflict – and yet, whilst this prediction had certainly given rise to anxieties about the protection of non-combatants, it had also provoked a series of other concerns. As Andre Keil has noted, for example, the increased significance of those at home meant that problems such as industrial unrest also threatened to have an outsized effect upon the war effort, even to the extent that they might force the government into unfavourable or

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<sup>180</sup> 'What About the British Airships?' *Dundee Courier*, 26 August 1916.

<sup>181</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 92.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15, 18.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

premature peace negotiations.<sup>184</sup> As the government sought to avoid such stumbling blocks, the groundwork was laid for legislation – most notably the Defence of the Realm Acts (DORA) – which would allow the state to curtail civil liberties and pervade the private lives of citizens in unprecedented and possibly draconian ways. The first Act was passed just three days after the outbreak of war in August 1914, and at little more than a paragraph long, introduced a relatively small array of new powers. Beyond generally authorising political and military leaders to issue regulations in the name of ‘public safety and the defence of the realm’, it worked to place civilians under the jurisdiction of military courts, to prevent communication with the enemy, and to secure the nation’s railways and ports.<sup>185</sup> Over the course of the war, however, the Act was amended six times, and its contours were further shaped through a number of decrees referred to as Defence of the Realm Regulations (DORRs). Through such means, the state was fashioned with the tools to intervene in matters as varied as alcohol consumption and munitions production.<sup>186</sup>

Whilst this legislative ecosystem thus clearly exposed private life to state eyes in spaces beyond the home as well as within it, this development was perhaps expressed most purely through the DORRs which allowed the state to physically encroach upon private property.<sup>187</sup> For example, Regulation 2, which was first instituted in November 1914, made it lawful for naval or military authorities to ‘take possession of any land ... [and] any buildings or other property’. Upon any requisitioned land, the same authorities were empowered to erect and destroy structures, and more broadly ‘to do any other act involving interference with private rights of property which is necessary for the purpose [of securing public safety and the defence of the Realm].’<sup>188</sup> Further sub-regulations passed over the next months and years extended the parameters of these powers and explicitly brought private dwellings under their banner: Regulations 2A and 2C, for instance, respectively

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<sup>184</sup> Andre Keil, ‘States of Exception: Emergency Government and “Enemies Within” in Britain and Germany during the First World War’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Northumbria University, 2014), p. 91.

<sup>185</sup> *Defence of the Realm Act 1914* (4 & 5 Geo. c. 29) (London: HMSO).

<sup>186</sup> Andrew G. Bone, ‘Beyond the Rule of Law: Aspects of the Defence of the Realm Acts and Regulations, 1914–1918’ (unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University, 1994), pp. 1–2. For a broader exploration of the expansion of state power in Britain and elsewhere during the war, see Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Great War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 344–436.

<sup>187</sup> For an interesting analysis of the depiction of DORA in contemporary cartoons, wherein the Act is often personified as an intrusive ‘matron’, see Pip Gregory, ‘The Funny Side of War: British Cartoons, Visual Humour and the Great War’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2016), p. 64.

<sup>188</sup> *Defence of the Realm Manual*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn, ed. by Alexander Pulling (London: HMSO, 1918), p. 40.

gave the Minister of Munitions and the Board of Trade the ability to take possession of unoccupied premises for the purpose of housing workmen.<sup>189</sup>

Over the course of the war, these powers would be invoked in order to requisition a large pool of property, ranging from the domestic to – more commonly – the industrial and the commercial. As Gerry Rubin has noted, however, these actions were not free of reactions: sites like Turnhouse Aerodrome in Edinburgh, Shoreham Aerodrome in Sussex, and the De Keyser Royal Hotel in London, for example, each became something of a cause célèbre following their requisition.<sup>190</sup> Foreshadowing what was to become one of the hallmarks of requisitioning discourse in twentieth-century Britain, controversy swirled most powerfully around the issue of compensation. During the Great War, this element was dealt with by the Defence of the Realm Losses Commission (DRLC). The Commission worked on an *ex gratia* basis – that is to say, it offered compensation for loss on the understanding that there was, in fact, no obligation to do so – and utilised a somewhat narrow and inconsistent set of metrics and definitions in order to judge the amounts awarded.<sup>191</sup> For example, the Commission offered compensation only for ‘direct loss’, a category which excluded a variety of interferences and consequences from the possibility of redress.<sup>192</sup>

The fallout which resulted from this approach is perhaps best illustrated by the case of the De Keyser Royal Hotel. Requisitioned in May 1916 after a protracted back-and-forth between the directors of the hotel and the government over the issue of remuneration, the hotel had been taken over in order to bring staff from the Military Aeronautics Directorate under one roof.<sup>193</sup> As the hotel was operating at a loss following a catastrophic drop in foreign clientele, the company had refused to leave the issue of compensation up to the DRLC, believing that it would argue there was no ‘direct loss’, and therefore no basis for compensation.<sup>194</sup> When the government requisitioned the hotel anyway, the issue of compensation remained unsolved, with little sign of movement on either side. Consequently, the directors of the hotel filed a petition of right against the Crown which, whilst not questioning the state’s power to expropriate citizens’ property,

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 41, 44.

<sup>190</sup> Rubin, *Private Property*, p. viii.

<sup>191</sup> Leslie Scott and Alfred Hildesley, *The Case of Requisition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), p. 2. On the inconsistency of compensation arrangements made by the state during the war, see Rubin, *Private Property*, p. 246.

<sup>192</sup> Rubin, *Private Property*, p. 245.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-80.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

contested its ability to do so without offering compensation as a matter of right rather than under *ex gratia* arrangements. The government, in response, claimed that both the DORA legislation and the more ancient powers of royal prerogative permitted such an action in order to avert the threat of invasion.<sup>195</sup> The ensuing case of *Attorney-General v. De Keyser's Royal Hotel Ltd.* (1920) was fought all the way up to the House of the Lords, and ended with a landmark constitutional decision in favour of the hotel, working to limit the sweeping prerogative and statutory powers which the state had claimed for itself.<sup>196</sup>

The passage of an Indemnity Bill later that same year nevertheless compelled all those who had not yet received compensation to seek redress in front of the DRLC's successor, the War Compensation Court.<sup>197</sup> Whilst an amendment to the Bill preserved the *De Keyser* ruling that compensation was owed as a matter of right – even when a loss of profit could not be demonstrated – the passage of this legislation also ensured that cases heard before the DRLC during the war could not be reopened.<sup>198</sup> In doing so, the government saved itself from the 'financially crippling prospect' of having to pay out an estimated £700 million in further compensation.<sup>199</sup> Still, even in spite of its somewhat neutered legacy in the short-term, the *De Keyser* judgement illuminated two shifting boundaries. Perhaps most obviously, it showcased a microcosmic tug-of-war between the state and its citizens, in which the question of what powers war conferred upon the former was at stake. Indeed, even as the Indemnity Act dulled the potential ramifications of *De Keyser*, the affirmation of the compensation principle in said Act still helped to define more clearly the rights of citizens in relation to the state, by acknowledging the limitations of executive power even during periods of conflict. More subtly, the *De Keyser* decision clarified the extent of the elision of the spheres of war: for, whilst it was noted that the realm was newly vulnerable in the age of the Zeppelin and the aeroplane, part of the hotel's legal success rested upon the fact that this threat was still deemed insufficient to justify such an extreme application of either prerogative or emergency powers.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>196</sup> 'The De Keyser's Decision', *Economist*, 15 May 1920.

<sup>197</sup> Rubin, *Private Property*, p. 86.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 192, 215.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 192; Hurwitz, *State Intervention*, p. 153.

<sup>200</sup> 'A Great Constitutional Issue', *The Times*, 10 April 1919.

However, whilst *De Keyser* and other cases dealing with commercial and industrial property arguably provided the most consequential critiques of the policy of requisition, this is not to say that domestic property did not similarly foment such discourses.<sup>201</sup> As noted briefly above, dwellings were primarily requisitioned in order to house troops and workers involved in the often ambiguously defined ‘defence of the realm’. In the aftermath of the war, when many such houses continued to be held by the state even in the absence of active hostilities, this was justified as a means of facilitating tasks such as demobilisation.<sup>202</sup> Whilst these spaces were acquired by the state on a much smaller scale than they would be during the Second World War – and those which were taken tended to be genuinely unoccupied, a distinction that would be applied more unevenly after 1939 – the experience of domestic requisition was nevertheless one with important implications for many citizens in First World War Britain.

Again, the sorest issue was often that of compensation. Many dispossessed citizens contended, for example, that the DRLC had refused to ‘pay anything’ in cases where property had been unoccupied at the point of seizure, citing a lack of ‘any definite loss’.<sup>203</sup> Clearly, given the absence of a larger outcry over the issue, most owners did not face quite such dire refusals from the DRLC. Still, when combined with the metric of ‘direct loss’, the dictat that only unoccupied dwellings should be taken over certainly left room for what must have seemed a frustrating paradox: namely that the state, having targeted empty property, could then claim at its own discretion to have caused no discernible loss, and therefore to be exempt from any duties of recompense.

As we have already seen, this potential loophole was later to be at least partially closed by the *De Keyser* ruling. In the meantime, however, the resultant sense of unfairness occasionally threatened to unsettle citizens’ understanding of their broader economic relationship with the state. An owner who had seen no compensation after two years of requisition, for example, thus complained with no shortage of sarcasm that he was:

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<sup>201</sup> I have chosen to focus upon the *De Keyser* ruling here owing to its particularly significant effects upon British constitutional law, and its clear explication of the relationship between wartime citizens and the state. However, other cases which shaped the legal and political application of requisitioning include the aforementioned Turnhouse and Shoreham Aerodrome cases, and the Newcastle and Canon Breweries cases. All of these are detailed in Rubin, *Private Property*.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Commandeered Houses: The Case for the War Office’, *The Times*, 25 April 1919.

<sup>203</sup> W. H. Hodgson, ‘Seizure of Empty Houses’, *The Times*, 22 November 1917.



Deprived of about a quarter of my income by the Government [owing to the requisition]; and the rest, mainly earned, is heavily taxed, presumably to pay for the safety of my person and the fancied security of my property.<sup>204</sup>

As Jon Lawrence has highlighted, such protestations about the economic impacts of the war emergency were not uncommon among the property-owning middle classes, many of whom were facing heretofore ‘alien’ degrees of material hardship.<sup>205</sup> However, perhaps cautious of appearing unwilling to suffer for or ‘pay into’ the nation’s war effort, those expressing their ire over this issue were often keen to emphasise that theirs was a quest for justice rather than exception. ‘It [seems] inequitable’, argued one reader of *The Times*, ‘that the taxpayer whose property is taken should be subject to specific and differential taxation for the public good’.<sup>206</sup> This appraisal of requisitioning echoed one of the judges overseeing the *De Keyser* case, who had pointed to a ‘national sentiment that any burden which was borne for the good of the nation should be distributed over the whole nation’.<sup>207</sup> Those who fought the government on the issue of compensation, it was hence suggested, did not reject the responsibility of the citizen to contribute to the defence of the nation. They did, however, reject the notion that the financial burdens of this task should be made uneven by the denial of what was perceived to be appropriate compensation.

Yet, whilst the remuneration accorded – or not accorded – to owners was therefore a particular point of contention, it was often couched within a wider set of resentments about the justifications for requisitioning, and the treatment of dispossessed owners. One complaint from an owner whose property had been damaged in an air raid, left empty, and subsequently been requisitioned thus decried not only the fact that they had ‘not received a penny rent’, but also that the requisitioning process had been needlessly chaotic.<sup>208</sup> ‘Can nothing be done to loosen the strangle-hold by the military upon property owners?’, asked another dispossessed owner in a letter to *The Times* in April 1919. His myriad complaints included the fact that his property – ‘which happened to be unoccupied when war broke out’ – had been held for four years under DORA, that it had sustained damage during its occupation by the military, and that he had received no offer of rent. His framing of the experience within particular postwar parameters highlighted a

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<sup>204</sup> W. H. Hodgson, ‘Commandeered Houses’, *The Times*, 23 May 1919.

<sup>205</sup> Jon Lawrence, ‘Material Pressures on the Middle Classes’, in *Capital Cities at War*, vol. I, ed. by Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 229-254, p. 252.

<sup>206</sup> Cantab., ‘Commandeered Houses’, *The Times*, 24 April 1919.

<sup>207</sup> ‘State & Private Property: Hotel Owners Win Appeal’, *Lichfield Mercury*, 21 May 1920.

<sup>208</sup> W. H. Devenish, ‘Commandeered Houses’, *The Times*, 4 February 1919.

number of contributing tensions: with the declaration of the armistice, for example, he suggested that there was no longer a reason for his continued dispossession. Meanwhile, he drew emotively upon the context of the postwar housing crisis in order to argue the broader significance of his cause, suggesting that:

Quite apart from the serious loss entailed upon individual property owners, this dog-in-the-manger attitude is extremely serious from the public point of view, owing to the great shortage of houses throughout the country.<sup>209</sup>

Whilst the alleged absence of rent for the house was clearly a major aspect of the man's representations, his wider claims thus foregrounded the fact that disputes over requisitioning could feed into broader debates about the transition from war to peace.

Such responses to the requisitioning of domestic property also exemplified the manner in which complaints rose to the surface more frequently once the war was over. This uptick likely reflected at least two factors: firstly, the greater willingness of citizens to accept constraints on their liberties when the national threat seemed more present; and secondly, the reluctance or inability of the press to publish serious denouncements of these constraints whilst the war was ongoing. Yet, as the War Office noted in a public rebuttal, those who complained about the dearth of compensation had often received none precisely because they had 'declined to accept the terms offered ... under the Defence of the Realm Act'.<sup>210</sup> The refusal of some homeowners to engage with the compensation scheme administered by the DRLC before 1918 points us, then, to an understanding that the practice of domestic requisitioning was being contested – albeit more quietly – during the conflict as well.

The dislocations of domestic space which occurred between 1914 and 1918 – whether at the hands of bombs which exposed the physical vulnerabilities of the home, or at the hands of the state, which drew on emergency powers to make uncertain the tenets of ownership – thus created ample opportunity for contestation and negotiation by citizen and state alike. The experiences of enemy bombardment and dispossession, for example, clearly opened up room for citizens to ruminate upon the accountabilities of the state, and upon the limits of their own responsibilities in wartime. These developments, in turn, made it necessary for the state to invoke certain models

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<sup>209</sup> W. J. Jennings, 'The War Office and Property', *The Times*, 22 April 1919.

<sup>210</sup> 'Commandeered Houses: The Case for the War Office', *The Times*, 25 April 1919. See also D. Du. B. Davidson, 'Commandeered Houses', *The Times*, 8 February 1919.

of citizenship and civil identity which accounted for the fact that the protection of civilians had become infinitely more challenging. As we shall see further in the next chapters of this thesis, the unsettling of home in the First World War thus presaged and rhymed with the events of the Second World War. After 1939, displacement and destruction would only become more widely and more frequently felt among the civilian population – and, accordingly, the discussion about the nature of the relationship between wartime states and those under their control and protection was only destined to grow.

### THE INTERWAR IMAGINATION

Between the years of 1918 and 1939, those in Britain – as in other nations across the world – engaged in the intertwined work of processing one war whilst beginning to consider the next. In light of the emergence of new technologies, tactics, and targets between 1914 and 1918, which seemed to portend a paradigm shift in the nature of warfare, minds inevitably turned to the question of what implications this shift would have for future populations embroiled in conflict. This problem required official and military figures to methodically cast their eyes forward – or, at least, attempt to do so – in order to make concrete plans for how to respond to this altered way of war. Yet, as Brett Holman has highlighted, these relatively grounded discussions existed in lockstep with a more speculative, popular discourse, which was freer to work outside the boundaries of probability in order to examine more catastrophic possibilities.<sup>211</sup> Fiction writing, whilst not alone in working as a substrate for the contemplation of future war, offered one of the richest spaces for this imaginative work.<sup>212</sup> Through such means, writers could both exhibit and explore the most fervent anxieties which were attached to the increasingly direct involvement of civilians in the realm of conflict – including those that swirled around the issue of their response to such experiences.

The subject of ‘future war’ in fiction from this period drew in a number of themes and plot devices, each of which reflected a varied landscape of contemporary concerns. It is telling, for example, that among the works of this type published soon after 1918, revolutionary unrest was

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<sup>211</sup> Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 17.

<sup>212</sup> For more general and extensive overviews of interwar writing about the nature of future conflicts, see: I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); Martin Ceadel, ‘Popular Fiction and the Next War, 1918-39’, in *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, ed. by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 161–84; Paul K. Saint-Amour, ‘Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 42.2 (2005), 130–61.

often depicted alongside aerial warfare as a particularly relevant threat to modern society – a reflection, undoubtedly, of broader pre-occupations with events such as the Russian Revolution.<sup>213</sup> It is clear, however, that it was the macabre possibilities of air power – especially, but not exclusively, when linked to the deployment of chemical weapons like gas – which captured the imagination of those writing about future war most persistently and most intensely throughout the interwar years. One of the earliest texts to mine these twin horrors was the feminist writer Cicely Hamilton’s *Theodore Savage*.<sup>214</sup> Published in 1922, and retitled as *Lest Ye Die* in 1928, this novel was deeply inflected by Hamilton’s own experiences of working under fire as a nurse in France.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, in a display of the continuing and profound influence of the First World War upon the cultural imagination of the air raid, the subtitle of the book was ‘a story of the past or the future’. Hamilton’s work follows an eponymous narrator, whose middle-class, cultured existence as a civil servant is ruptured by the outbreak of an air war. By the end of the novel, Savage’s own descent – to a place where ‘his relations with his fellows – with women – with himself – were not those of humanity civilised’ – mirrors a broader societal collapse into primitivism.<sup>216</sup> This vision of a society reduced to ruins both physically and morally found a strong foothold within the literary field under discussion, highlighting the manner in which aerial warfare was perceived as a threat not only to the built environment, but also to the social bonds embedded therein.

Perhaps the most famous depiction of civilisation brought low by bombing came from H. G. Wells, who, having predicted the use of military airships in his 1908 novel *The War in the Air*, now returned to the aerial theme in his 1933 work, *The Shape of Things to Come*.<sup>217</sup> Like Hamilton, he pictured a world where bombing – and, in this case, the subsequent spread of a deadly plague

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<sup>213</sup> Ceadel, ‘Popular Fiction’, pp. 165-166.

<sup>214</sup> Cicely Hamilton, *Theodore Savage* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1922). For a longer analysis of Hamilton’s work and the depiction of aerial warfare, see Susan R. Grayzel, “‘A Promise of Terror to Come’: Air Power and the Destruction of Cities in British Imagination and Experience, 1908-39”, in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (London: Routledge, 2011), 47–62, pp. 54-57. A further work of interest by Hamilton is her 1919 work, *William – An Englishman*, which depicts the violent intrusion of the First World War into the domestic life of a young couple honeymooning in Belgium. See Cicely Hamilton, *William – An Englishman* (London: Skeffington, 1919).

<sup>215</sup> Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: Temple, 1935), pp. 149-156.

<sup>216</sup> Hamilton, *Theodore Savage*, p. 293.

<sup>217</sup> H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: George Bell, 1908); H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). For a more detailed exploration of ‘future war’ in Wells’ writing, see T. H. E. Travers, ‘Future Warfare: H. G. Wells and British Military Theory, 1895-1916’, in *War and Society: A Yearbook of Military History*, ed. by Brian Bond and Ian Roy (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 67–87.

– had reduced societies all over the globe to shadows of themselves.<sup>218</sup> Whilst Wells did not claim to be offering anything other than a commentary upon one possible future, it is clear that his depictions of the nature of future warfare left a mark. Wells’ name, for example, can be found in Mass Observation’s collections from 1938, when Observers were asked how they had formed their opinions on the nature of the looming war. One went so far as to write: ‘I mainly base my opinions on Wells’ analyses’, and noted the specific influence that *The Shape of Things to Come* had had on his views.<sup>219</sup> Another observer, writing shortly after the outbreak of the war in September 1939, reported his sister’s fears that ‘the war’ll [sic] last for years like it did in H. G. Wells’ book’.<sup>220</sup>

Such works clearly envisaged the effects of bombing with a broad brush, lamenting and fearing the potential destruction of public and private institutions and sites alike. However, homes and houses often occupied a particularly significant place within these visions. After all, dwelling places formed a large proportion of the material built environment which was so threatened by air war, and also occupied an important philosophical and political position in the more intangible fabrics of ‘civilisation’ and ‘society’. Moreover, as we have seen, this space existed at the centre of discussions about the newly blurred divide between civilian and soldier – and it was this blurring which provided the bedrock upon which so many ‘future war’ novels rested. It is no surprise, then, that pervasive fears about the development of new forms of attack, such as aero-chemical warfare, often found particular resonance when framed by the domestic. Take, for instance, Stephen Southwold’s *The Gas War of 1940*, published under the nom de plume “Miles” in 1931, in which the outbreak of the titular gas war is dramatically – and, one might say in hindsight, melodramatically – depicted as swift, violent, and spatially pervasive.<sup>221</sup> Almost immediately after the bombs have begun to be dropped, deadly gas leaks into the very spaces which would have once been furthest from direct conflict, finding civilians ‘in their own homes and gardens’, as well as in other decidedly non-combatant spaces such as churches and schools.<sup>222</sup> Such representations of gas and aerial warfare cultivated an understanding of the home-at-war both as a space which was

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<sup>218</sup> Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*.

<sup>219</sup> MOA, DS 557, Response to Special Directive, August 1938. See also MOA, DS 721, Response to Special Directive, August 1938.

<sup>220</sup> MOA, DR 1630, Response to September 1939 directive.

<sup>221</sup> The original publication of this work was “Miles”, *The Gas War of 1940* (London: William Collins, 1931). The book was later reprinted in 1934 under a new pseudonym, Neil Bell, and with a new title, *Valiant Clay*. See Neil Bell, *Valiant Clay* (Bath: Lythway, 1976).

<sup>222</sup> Bell, *Valiant Clay*, p. 52, 249-251.

symbolic of civilian vulnerability, and also as one which could itself be malevolently altered by conflict. Such was the case in Simpson Stokes' 1935 work *Air-Gods' Parade*, in which a family suffocating in their refuge room during an air raid open the window, only to die horribly after gas seeps into the home.<sup>223</sup> The home, such portrayals suggested, might become a trap as well as a target should a modern air war come to pass.

This breakdown – or betrayal – of the domestic fabric was also frequently depicted as a precursor or sign of something more extreme, again reflecting the link between the home and broader notions of civilised society. For example, an attack on France by Italian airplanes in the early stages of *The Gas War of 1940* sees 'shattered houses' become tinder for the violence which is quickly enveloping the rest of the world: 'flames, fanned by the wind ... made of the ruins vast funeral pyres whose smoke darkened the sky'.<sup>224</sup> When Britain herself comes under fire later on in the book, the home again becomes a catalyst for destruction; a site which, when broken apart, leaves society in shapeless ruin as well. Just as Cicley Hamilton had spoken in *Theodore Savage* of a 'poison-fire [which] swept through the fields and devoured [homes]', leaving the 'homeless ... [to swell] the tide of plunderers and vagrants', so too did Southwold imagine scenes of citizens streaming *en masse* from their ruined homes and into oblivion:<sup>225</sup>

In a dozen parts of London that night, people died in their homes with the familiar walls crashing about them in flames ... they came pouring out of suddenly darkened theatres, picture-houses, public-houses, concert and dance halls, into the dark, congested streets to be crushed or burnt or trodden to death, or to meet a swifter end from bomb, or the rain of broken masonry that killed and buried them at one stroke.<sup>226</sup>

Reflected here, too, was the way in which anxieties about modern warfare and the home were lent a special intensity when related to urban contexts, where the walls of dwelling places – and those of public places like theatres and dance halls – jostled up against one another particularly closely. Indeed, as the threat of air power rose in the aftermath of at least a century of industrialisation and urbanisation, the problem of how to defend cities which were as dense as they were vulnerable was

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<sup>223</sup> Simpson Stokes, *Air-Gods' Parade* (London: Arthur Barron, 1935), quoted in Susan R. Grayzel, 'Domesticating the Horrors of Modern War: Civil Defence and the Wartime British Murder Mystery', in *British Murder Mysteries, 1880-1965*, ed. by Laura E. Nym Mayhall and E. Prevost (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 73-94, p. 79.

<sup>224</sup> Bell, *Valiant Clay*, p. 155.

<sup>225</sup> Hamilton, *Theodore Savage*, p. 88.

<sup>226</sup> Bell, *Valiant Clay*, pp. 238-239.

one which faced societies across the world.<sup>227</sup> In Britain, it was London – the nation’s most populous city, and its premier hub of industry, commerce, culture and politics – which presented the greatest cause for alarm. In Winston Churchill’s words, the capital was the ‘greatest target in the world ... a valuable fat cow tied up to attract the beasts of prey’.<sup>228</sup> The air power theorist J. M. Spaight similarly described it, with reference to the well-known proverb about throwing stones in glass houses, as a ‘veritable Crystal Palace’.<sup>229</sup> Fears about the attractiveness of cities as bombers’ targets were only fuelled by speculation that air power had developed enough to make possible attacks which would be so sudden and devastating that they could level even large metropolises within hours. In this theoretical scenario of the so-called ‘knock-out blow’, civilians’ homes – and the infrastructure which supported them – could be destroyed so thoroughly that morale might collapse overnight.<sup>230</sup>

The symbiotic vulnerability of the home and the city was further explored by George Orwell in his 1939 novel *Coming Up for Air*, published just a few months before the outbreak of war.<sup>231</sup> The book follows George Bowling, a middle-aged man who, discontented with his family life and career, embarks upon a mission to recapture his youth by returning to his childhood hometown, Lower Binfield. This ultimately fruitless mission is carried out in the shadow of an impending war, and throughout the work, Bowling has numerous visions of the destruction which will be wrought upon urban Britain when it arrives:

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<sup>227</sup> Mark Clapson, *The Blitz Companion: Aerial Warfare, Civilians and the City Since 1911* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2019), p. 27. The discourse on the vulnerability of urban places also saw a repackaging of broader urban anxieties, such as that which concerned increased congestion – see Page, ‘Planning Permanent Air Raid Precautions’, pp. 124-125.

<sup>228</sup> Hansard, HC Deb, vol. 292, col. 2368, 30 July 1934.

<sup>229</sup> J. M. Spaight, Review of ‘Glass Houses and Modern War’, *International Affairs*, 17.5 (1938), 723. For more on contemporary anxieties about the particular vulnerability of modern cities to new forms of warfare, see: Marcus Funck and Roger Chickering, ‘Introduction: Endangered Cities’, in *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars*, ed. by Marcus Funck and Roger Chickering (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 1-11; G. J. Ashworth, *War and the City* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 137-140; Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, ‘Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War: An Introduction’, in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (London: Routledge, 2011), 1-46.

<sup>230</sup> Brett Holman, ‘World Police for World Peace: British Internationalism and the Threat of a Knock-out Blow from the Air, 1919-1945’, *War in History*, 17.3 (2010), 313-332, p. 314. A further exploration of how the idea of the ‘knock-out blow’ affected both popular thought and official policy can be found in Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality*, pp. 69-127.

<sup>231</sup> George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1948 [1939]).

Miles and miles of ugly houses, with people living dull decent lives inside them ... The bombs aren't made that could smash it out of existence. And the chaos of it! The privateness of all those lives! John Smith cutting out the football coupons, Bill Williams swapping stories in the barber's, Mrs Jones coming home with the supper beer. Eight million of them! ... It doesn't matter how many of them there are, they're all for it.<sup>232</sup>

With the concentration of the population in modern cities, Bowling's cynical musings suggested, notionally 'private' homes were now massed in such great numbers so as to become more open to attack than ever.

Yet, whilst *Coming Up for Air* thus offered a spectre of urban doom, it also provided a corrective to this very vision. For all of Bowling's violent imaginings, when a bomb actually does drop at the end of the novel it is an anticlimactic event, not least because it is unleashed as part of an RAF training accident rather than by enemy bombers.<sup>233</sup> Finding landfall in Lower Binfield, it '[blows] a greengrocer's shop out of existence' and seriously injures a neighbouring house; otherwise, the impacts are largely confined to smashed windows and roof damage.<sup>234</sup> When an Air Ministry official is dispatched to inspect the site, Orwell darkly depicts him as finding 'the effects of the bomb ... "disappointing"', given that it 'only killed three people'.<sup>235</sup> Still, whilst this representation of the home under fire thus ultimately showcased a more limited kind of destruction, its rendering was still somewhat disturbing. The more seriously damaged dwelling, for example, is described as having been bisected in the manner of a doll's house, leaving its interior open to the eyes of the crowd which swiftly gathers outside. The exposed upper floor reveals an unchanged domestic scene: 'chests-of-drawers, bedroom chairs, faded wallpaper, a bed not yet made ... all exactly as it had been lived in, except that one wall was gone.' The lower floor, on the other hand, displays instead a 'frightful smashed-up mess' in which the fabric of the house melds violently with that of human bodies: chair-legs are jumbled up in the rubble with 'a leg ... with a trouser still on it'; and 'a jar of marmalade ... [rolls] across the floor, leaving a long streak of marmalade behind it', which runs 'side-by-side with ... a ribbon of blood'.<sup>236</sup> In many ways, this portrayal of the bombed home bore a notably closer resemblance to the kinds of scenes which

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 225.



would actually occur in 1940 and afterwards, in that it was brutal but not necessarily cataclysmic. This more measured imaginary may have reflected the fact that Orwell had himself only recently spent time at the sharp end of a modern war, having fought in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>237</sup> However, perhaps more obviously, it was also simply the case that the contours of the looming war – which by the publication of Orwell’s novel was all but certain to break out – were that much clearer to those writing in 1938 than they had been to those writing in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Indeed, the text which arguably came closest to predicting some of the actual problems which would be faced by civilians under fire was also published only shortly before 1939. Nevil Shute’s 1938 book *What Happened to the Corbetts* told the story of an eponymous family of five living in a large, semi-detached Southampton house when war breaks out.<sup>238</sup> Throughout the work, Shute uses a series of domestic spaces to frame the ways in which the war progressively erodes and intrudes upon the family’s lives. In the opening pages of the novel, which take place in the immediate aftermath of the first raid of the imagined war, it is already clear that the Corbetts (comprised of Peter, Joan, and their three children) have experienced the first of several dislocations. We find the Corbetts awaking from a night spent in their wooden garage, a structure which, lying at the ‘remote end’ of the garden, is perceived by Peter to be safer than the brick-and-mortar house.<sup>239</sup> In the event, their home is left largely unharmed in this first raid; a neighbouring house, on the other hand, suffers the same fate as the bisected home in Orwell’s novel when its front wall collapses, ‘exposing dining-room and bedrooms to the air’.<sup>240</sup> The arrival of the long-threatened air raid causes Peter to worry about his lack of preparation for the outbreak of chemical warfare – ‘he knew, vaguely, that he had been advised to make a gas-proof roof, and he knew with certainty that he had done nothing about it’ – but, in the end, this fear is never realised.<sup>241</sup> Instead, the greatest problems faced by the Corbetts over the successive nights of raiding are more mundane: the kettle, for example, cannot be boiled because the electricity supply is disrupted, and a neighbour warns them to conserve their water as the mains have also been damaged.

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<sup>237</sup> Simon W. Goulding, “‘Watch the Skies!’: Guernica, Dresden and the Age of the Bomber in George Orwell and Rex Warner”, in *Aviation in the Literature and Culture of Interwar Britain*, ed. by Michael McCluskey and Luke Seaber (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 319-338, p. 323.

<sup>238</sup> Nevil Shute, *What Happened to the Corbetts* (London: Pan, 1965 [1939]).

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

It is the latter problem which eventually incentivizes the Corbetts to leave Southampton, as the resultant lack of sanitation and the exposure of wastewater leads to a cholera outbreak. Whilst their flight from the city is briefly threatened by a quarantine cordon, they are eventually able to escape to Hamble, a nearby village on the Solent where they have a small yacht moored. Aboard the yacht, the family attempt to refashion a sense of home, and to accept what has befallen them. Leaving the Southampton home for the last time, Peter therefore goes ‘gladly’, reassuring himself:

It did not seem as if it was his own home at all, that house. It was strange and rather unpleasant, a desolate shell where people had once lived a quiet, peaceful life and had been happy. His home, his real home, was on his battered, leaky little yacht. “Home’s where your people are,” he muttered, to himself. “That’s about it.”<sup>242</sup>

Yet, despite their escape, the Corbetts continue to struggle with the increasingly desperate shortages of basic goods – and, in particular, the milk that they need for their youngest child. When the bombs start to reach beyond the boundaries of the city and into the neighbouring countryside, they flee again, casting off for the Isle of Wight. Eventually, forced to look even further, they decide to make their way to the French port of Brest, where Joan and the children will be able to board a ship to Canada. Peter, meanwhile, resolves to return to England in order to enlist in the Navy – and in doing so, makes complete the erosion of their domestic life by the war.

Shute’s novel, like Orwell’s, thus delivered an imaginary of the disrupted wartime home which was markedly more restrained than that envisaged in the works of authors like Southwold or Hamilton. Again, an element of experience was at play: Shute’s day job as an aviation engineer, for example, likely helped him to rein in some of the hyperbole that had attended so many of the depictions of air war.<sup>243</sup> Some hallmarks of these earlier works still shone through, albeit in more muted forms: for instance, the events witnessed by Bowling and the Corbetts still rendered homes unsafe and unstable; and the destruction of domestic infrastructure still threatens to drive a broader social breakdown, as highlighted by Southampton’s cholera outbreak in *What Happened to the Corbetts*. Yet, the focus in these novels is ultimately not upon complete civilisational collapse; rather, each calls attention to the more intimate cataclysms visited upon individuals and their

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>243</sup> For more on the life of Nevil Shute, see Nevil Shute, *Slide Rule: The Autobiography of an Engineer* (London: William Heinemann, 1956).

families by the advent of air war. As Martin Ceadel has written, such depictions proved in many ways to be both ‘more chilling than the exuberant exaggerations of earlier novels, and ... better prediction[s] of what was to come’.<sup>244</sup>

If *What Happened to the Corbetts* therefore painted a more prescient picture, it also presented a clear argument as to how citizens should respond to the return of bombers to British shores. Throughout the text, for example, Peter Corbett seeks to elicit certain responses from his children when they are faced with bombing. During the raids in Southampton, for example, he encourages his son: ‘[b]e a brave soldier and get dressed. Big men like you aren’t frightened of a few little bangs’.<sup>245</sup> Similarly, when his daughter is upset about the inability to bring some possessions with them when they leave the city, he reassures her: ‘big girls don’t take dolls’ houses on boats with them’.<sup>246</sup> Peter and Joan, who are not left untouched by their experiences, themselves attempt to model this stoical response throughout – an effort certainly seen in Peter’s determination to accept the loss of their home and to make do with what they have. This stoical and practical attitude is, however, expressed most purely at the end of the novel, when the Corbetts must part ways, uncertain of when they will be reunited. Before they leave, Joan and Peter talk wistfully – and hopefully – about their lives after the war. Joan expresses her hope that they will be able to go back to their Southampton home – ‘I want to go back just like we were before’ – but Peter, channelling the wider unfixity facing the world, warns her gently that it may not be there when the war is done.<sup>247</sup> Instead, they talk of a new home that they might set up together, and imagine the modern furniture and consumer goods that they might be able to fill it with:

“We could have the radiogram, couldn’t we? Even if we had to get it on the Never-Never.” He pressed her hand. “We’ll have that,” he said, a little huskily. “That’ll be something to look forward to.”<sup>248</sup>

Like many other authors of the interwar fiction which concerned itself with the nature and consequences of future conflicts, Shute thus had a didactic message to impart. Just as some had used sensationalist and catastrophic images of air war in order to argue variously for

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<sup>244</sup> Ceadel, ‘Popular Fiction and the Next War’, p. 181.

<sup>245</sup> Shute, *What Happened to the Corbetts*, p. 54.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

internationalism and peace, or for rearmament, Shute used his story to call citizens to action.<sup>249</sup> He implored them to make themselves and their homes ready; to guard against panic; and perhaps to respond, like Peter, to the military call to duty. If this inducement had not been made clear enough in the main text of *What Happened to the Corbetts*, it was certainly hammered home by Shute's epilogue, in which he entreated officials and the public alike to prepare for 'the terrible things that you, and I, and all the citizens of the cities in this country, may one day have to face together'.<sup>250</sup> It is to this very process of preparation and planning that we can now turn our focus. For, whilst the writers envisaging the shape of future warfare throughout the 1920s and 1930s had left an indelible mark upon cultural understandings of the home-at-war, they were not alone. Rather, they had always existed in conversation with the theorists, planners, politicians, and civil servants whose attempts to interpret this space were expressed not through fiction, but instead through policy.

## PLANNING THE WARTIME HOME

Certain violent fates, as we have thus seen, haunted the interwar imagination. This was particularly true when it was directed toward the question of how homes would be affected by new – or, at any rate, evolved – technologies. The horrors of a gas war delivered from the air, for example, had provoked fearful notions of the impact of modern conflict on civilised society, as had the spectre of the knock-out blow. In the end, neither came to be. Yet, of course, those living without the benefits of hindsight could not have known for sure that the destructive potential of weapons such as gas, which had only a few years prior to 1939 been deployed by the Italians in Abyssinia, would remain caged.<sup>251</sup> And indeed, as Tim Cook has argued, there *were* various moments in the Second World War where, had certain flips of the coin been inverted, gas warfare might yet have been unleashed.<sup>252</sup> The question of how best to guard against such threats therefore remained a pertinent one for the policymakers and war planners of 1930s Britain. The task which thus faced them was

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<sup>249</sup> On the various didactic aims of other authors and works concerned with future warfare, see Ceadel, 'Popular Fiction and the Next War', pp. 170-171, 176-177, 179.

<sup>250</sup> Shute, *What Happened to the Corbetts*, epilogue, unpaginated.

<sup>251</sup> Tim Cook, "Against God-Inspired Conscience": The Perception of Gas Warfare as a Weapon of Mass Destruction, 1915-1939', *War & Society*, 18.1 (2000), 47-69, pp. 66.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69. For more on the development of chemical warfare in the twentieth century, see Ulf Schmidt, *Secret Service: A Century of Poison Warfare and Human Experiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

of dual significance, being both a practical issue and a moral one: practical, because the state clearly needed to minimise the potential loss of life and property if the nation was to continue functioning; and moral, because it needed to be seen to do so.

As Susan Grayzel has shown, the imperative to address the problem of chemical warfare perhaps coalesced most powerfully around the material figure of the gas mask. Whilst this object offered only ‘short-term’ protection of the person, and ‘did nothing to preserve the landscape and environment necessary for survival’, the state needed to participate in such projects or otherwise face being seen as negligent of civilian safety.<sup>253</sup> However, attempts to protect – or, at least, to be seen to try and protect – civilians also extended into the physical space of the home as well. The recommendations of how to alter the domestic sphere in response to the threat of aerial or aero-chemical warfare will be examined further in the next chapter, but it is worth pointing out here that such advice predated the outbreak of war by some time. In 1938, for example, the Home Office published *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids*, a booklet which advised citizens on measures that they could take ‘now’, ‘if there should ever be a war’, and, finally, ‘in an air raid’ itself.<sup>254</sup> In order to protect themselves, their homes, and families against the destructive trifecta of ‘explosive bombs, incendiary bombs, and poison gas’, householders were encouraged to proactively gather certain supplies, and to identify and make secure a refuge room.<sup>255</sup> This refuge, the booklet advised, should be physically strengthened through the use of sandbags and wooden props so that it could withstand the effects of bomb blasts; stocked with materials to prevent and extinguish fires; and exhaustively sealed so that gas could not enter through any cracks in the walls, windows, or doors.<sup>256</sup> These mitigations worked to embroil the domestic sphere into the world of war in multiple ways: not only, after all, did they position the home as part of a defensive infrastructure; they also often did so using ways and means which were inherently domestic in nature. Whilst, for example, the securing of the home inevitably required the sourcing of some new materials, it was

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<sup>253</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Defence Against the Indefensible: The Gas Mask, the State, and British Culture during and after the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 25.3 (2014), 418-434, p. 434. See also the more recent monograph, Susan R. Grayzel, *The Age of the Gas Mask: How British Civilians Faced the Terrors of Total War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>254</sup> Home Office, *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids* (London: HMSO, 1938), p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15, 16-17, 19.

emphasised that citizens could often carry out much of this task using things they already had in their homes.<sup>257</sup>

Lurking underneath such practical solutions, however, was the recognition that such measures offered a veneer rather than a shield, especially in the face of direct hits. Indeed, the government's Committee on Structural Precautions against Air Attack, which submitted its first report in September 1936, had noted as much in its examination of how small houses would be affected by aerial attacks.<sup>258</sup> The committee – which also studied the effects of different bombs upon different structures and materials, the best methods of shelter, and the most effective types of protective device – offered various methods of shoring up existing housing, and of building air raid protections into new houses, many of which are possible to see in later publications like *The Protection of Your Home Against Air Raids*. Yet, alongside these suggestions ran the caveat that they were unable

To recommend *structural* precautionary measures that would afford complete protection to a small house against direct hits from all but the lightest category of incendiary bomb ... It has further to be borne in mind that the structural protective measures against effects other than direct hits which may be possible in the case of buildings of vital importance cannot on account of their expense be recommended for the protection of small houses.<sup>259</sup>

The report thus highlighted how the financial cost that would be incurred were every home to receive the strongest of defences was ultimately untenable. Similarly, the report pointed to the difficulties caused by the fact that the various envisaged threats to the home often demanded adversarial solutions. For instance, whilst a thick, flat concrete roof was suggested as one possible protective measure that could be used in new buildings to guard against incendiary bombing, it was simultaneously noted that such roofs tended to be waterproofed with a substance that, when exposed to mustard gas, was very difficult to decontaminate. As the authors of the report acknowledged elsewhere, these problems were only compounded by a paradox of class and locality:

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 10. Grayzel makes this point in relation to gas masks, noting that the process of creating respirators sought to include filter materials which could be found in the 'ordinary household'. See Grayzel, 'Defence Against the Indefensible', p. 433.

<sup>258</sup> TNA, HO 211/6, 'Committee on Structural Precautions Against Air Attack: First Interim Report', 25 September 1936.

<sup>259</sup> TNA, HO 211/6, 'Committee on Structural Precautions Against Air Attack: First Interim Report', Appendix A: Interim Report of the Small Houses Sub-Committee, July 1936. Original emphasis.

namely, that the very sections of the built environment deemed most vulnerable to aerial attack – densely packed slum districts – were those which housed the citizens least capable of providing for their own protection. Not only were such citizens largely seen to be in no financial position to procure the necessary materials independently; their houses were also likely to be in poor condition, making them even more difficult to retrofit with protective measures.<sup>260</sup>

We might perhaps read a further, veiled anxiety at work in such findings, for just as the built environment occupied by these poorer populations was seen as being especially physically vulnerable to aerial attack, the populations themselves were often depicted as being more morally or psychologically vulnerable to the effects of bombardment.<sup>261</sup> In such a light, it became a doubly important – and doubly challenging – task to find means of insulating these sections of society. The fears attached to the possible fates of the denizens of Britain’s crowded urban centres led some war planners to see mass evacuation – in effect, the complete separation of civilians from the endangered domestic sphere – as the only means of avoiding mass death and social breakdown. The Committee on Structural Precautions, for example, argued for its part that the ‘complete evacuation of [poorer class areas] ... may be the only means of safeguarding the lives of the inhabitants’.<sup>262</sup>

These conclusions were only given further weight by the persistence of highly pessimistic casualty and damage estimates throughout the interwar period, with some suggesting that Britain may see as many as 18,000 deaths on any one day of bombing.<sup>263</sup> The lurking threat of a massive air attack akin to the much-feared ‘knock-out blow’ could often be found between the lines of such estimates, even as it was recognised to be increasingly unlikely. In one report from late 1938, for example, it was noted that 13,000 tons of bombs might be expected in the first three weeks of war, and that each 500 lb. bomb might destroy eight and damage ninety-two houses. If ‘every bomb found a previously undamaged target in a closely built-up area’, then such figures might translate

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<sup>260</sup> TNA, HO 211/6, ‘Committee on Structural Precautions Against Air Attack: First Interim Report’, Appendix A: Interim Report of the Small Houses Sub-Committee, July 1936. On the disconnect between the vulnerability of working-class houses, and the suggestion of precautions which were more appropriate to middle-class homes, see Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 108.

<sup>261</sup> Page, *Architectures of Survival*, p. 212; Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 104.

<sup>262</sup> TNA, HO 211/6, ‘Committee on Structural Precautions Against Air Attack: First Interim Report’, Appendix A: Interim Report of the Small Houses Sub-Committee, July 1936.

<sup>263</sup> CAB 102/755, Anonymous [assumed Richard Titmuss], Housing History Draft, n.d. See also Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 12-16.

to the destruction of nearly half a million houses, and the damage of over five million, in just under a month. Whilst the assumption that every bomb would land in the aforementioned circumstances was acknowledged to be 'extravagant', the inclusion of such statistics at all evoked the *potential* destruction which might be wrought upon British homes and bodies.<sup>264</sup> The figures underpinning these predictions stemmed from the Air Ministry, which was naturally motivated to emphasise both the effectiveness of aerial warfare, and the necessity of Britain rearming and building up her own air force as a defensive measure.<sup>265</sup> Yet, whilst some within Whitehall advanced slightly more cautious estimates as to the effects of bombing, in the absence of any real ability to challenge the Air Ministry's expertise it was often these more extreme predictions which guided approaches to the problem of protecting civilians within the wartime home.

Aside from the suggestion of depopulation, the 1930s also saw the continuation of that impulse which, having developed during the Great War, had then been promoted by Nevil Shute and countless others: the advancement of a model of citizenship, or civil identity, which involved citizens in the project of their own protection. As the decade waned, Britons were surrounded by a set of notions now normalised: that air raids would be a major feature of the coming war; that, although the objective of such raids might be 'ostensibly ... military, the real target [would] be the courage of the people'; and that citizens thus had a duty to make their courage – or, perhaps more broadly, their morale – unshakeable.<sup>266</sup> In February 1939, the establishment of a 'non-profit-earning, non-partisan organisation' called the Air Raid Defence League highlighted this rhetoric with particular sharpness.<sup>267</sup> Launched with the support of a formidable list of public figures, including the Home Secretary, the League professed its task to include the securing of 'effective protection against air attack', and the concentration of 'public interest by every available means'.<sup>268</sup> One such means was the publication of advertisements in various national newspapers, proclaiming that whilst air raids might aim to disorganise, damage, or otherwise paralyse industry, their chief aim was

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<sup>264</sup> CAB 102/738, 'Extracts from Report of Emergency Re-construction Sub-Committee', December 1938.

<sup>265</sup> For other factors influencing the Air Ministry's calculations, including the fact that officials themselves were not immune to the popular fears of aerial apocalypse, see Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 2-11.

<sup>266</sup> 'You Will be Target in Air Raids', *Aberdeen Journal*, 29 January 1938.

<sup>267</sup> 'The Air Raid Defence League', *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1939.

<sup>268</sup> 'Air Raid Defence League', *The Times*, 7 February 1939; 'An Air Raid Defence League', *Manchester Guardian*, 7 February 1939.



[T]o undermine and dissipate ... morale and courage ... Individual foreknowledge and planning alone can prevent this. It is the duty of every adult member of the population to KNOW exactly what is being done and exactly what to do ... when a siren blows.<sup>269</sup>

This construction of the simultaneously vulnerable and responsible civilian was explicitly filtered through the domestic. ‘Some bombers must get through,’ the League’s advertisement continued, ‘What exactly is being DONE about it? Are you PERSONALLY clear how it affects your wife, your children, your home, and yourself?’<sup>270</sup> Whilst this particular intervention emphasised the role of the individual, the Air Raid Defence League elsewhere epitomised the shared nature of civil defence; throughout 1939, for example, the League also regularly demanded that the state commit to building more bomb-proof and deep shelters.<sup>271</sup> In the run up to war, then, it was made clear that the functioning of civil defence depended upon a delicate balancing act: one which saw both a ‘national contribution’, and a ‘personal’ one.<sup>272</sup>

By reflecting upon the above, an interesting element of the pre-war history of home-loss emerges; that is, the manner in which the envisaging of bombardment in official circles skirted remarkably frequently around both the moment of loss itself, and the practicalities of its aftermath. The act of imagining the wartime home instead often remained focused upon the ways that the state could provide protection to civilians and their homes, and the ways in which citizens could, and should, actively participate in this process. In a similar fashion, the 1930s saw the continuation of Britons’ education in a form of emotional orienteering which, steeped in the experiences and legacies of the Great War, sought to shore up minds and morale even as the physical world became ever more ephemeral. Such approaches to the threat of domestic dislocation gave Britons a script for what to do in terms of preparation, and gave them a role that they could embody. By contrast, the plot of what would actually happen, practically speaking, to citizens in the event of loss – where would they go? What reparations and support structures would they be able to access? – remained murky on the eve of war, at least in the realm of public discussion.

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<sup>269</sup> See, for example, ‘The Air Raid Defence League’, *The Times*, 29 March 1939; ‘The Air Raid Defence League’, *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1939.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> ‘Air-Raid Defence League: A Statement of Policy’, *Manchester Guardian*, 1 March 1939. See the various bulletins released by the Air Raid Defence League, as reported in the *Economist*. See ‘The State of Civil Defence’, *Economist*, 19 August 1939; ‘Civil Defence’, *Economist*, 6 May 1939; ‘National Defence’, *Economist*, 15 April 1939.

<sup>272</sup> ‘The Air Raid Defence League’, *The Times*, 29 March 1939; ‘The Air Raid Defence League’, *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1939.

Behind the scenes, wartime planners did devote some attention to factors which would come to bear upon this question. Tasked with considering the issue of emergency reconstruction, for example, the Minister of Health, Walter Elliot, wrote of his concern that a committee under his chairmanship had

[B]een greatly impressed by the realization of the vast amount of damage to domestic, as well as to commercial and industrial property, which would be caused in a major air war and the consequent enormous demands on labour and material necessary to keep even the minimum essential civilian shelter in being ... These needs of the civil population will be vital to the successful prosecution of a war.<sup>273</sup>

The committee's concerns that this 'vital' task would be problematised by the breadth of demand placed upon manpower and materials proved prescient, as did their recognition that repair would have to be prioritised over reconstruction whilst conflict was ongoing. Still, as the committee's use of the inflated figures of destruction discussed above demonstrates, there remained a great deal of uncertainty and guesswork within the state's plans.

This ambiguity was reflected across various other strata. As Richard Titmuss has argued, for example, the state's plans for how to manage those affected by bombing in the aftermath of a raid – in terms of first aid care, feeding, and rehoming – were afflicted by overcomplications and misunderstandings which were not remedied until the arrival of the Blitz in 1940 forced them to be.<sup>274</sup> Meanwhile, the ever-sensitive issue of compensation created its own policy quagmire. Whilst, for instance, the anxieties of homeowners about the fates of their houses had been evident in a surge in demand for war damage insurance, both private insurers and the state had refused to countenance any complete scheme prior to the outbreak of war.<sup>275</sup> Cowed by the potentially enormous costs of such a scheme, it was not until the War Damage Act of 1941 that a more concrete vision of how citizens would be compensated for the loss of their homes and possessions was provided – and, even then, limits were placed upon what kinds of compensation could be claimed whilst the war was ongoing.<sup>276</sup> In each case, the absence of finessed plans to deal with the citizens who would lose their homes under fire reflected the twin influences of extent and expense

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<sup>273</sup> TNA, CAB 102/738, 'Extracts from Report of Emergency Re-construction Sub-Committee', December 1938.

<sup>274</sup> For a summary of the development of post-raid welfare in the first years of the war, see Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 251-303.

<sup>275</sup> TNA, CAB 102/755, Anonymous [assumed Richard Titmuss], Housing History Draft, n.d.

<sup>276</sup> 'Summary of New War Damage Act', *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 April 1941.

upon the state's war planning. Perhaps understandably, without the ability to foresee how a bombing campaign might play out in actuality, uncertainties about both the possible extent of destruction and the cost of managing such widespread devastation worked to paralyse planning. After all, it is telling that even in 1939 it was not uncommon for the committees dealing with issues that related to the practicalities of post-raid welfare to profess the 'preliminary' nature of their findings.<sup>277</sup>

Another site of ambiguity could be found in the plans for requisitioning, the practical and financial contours of which remained similarly hazy on the eve of war. This was not a result of a lack of attention throughout the interwar period; indeed, just as the widely feared and anticipated prospect of domestic raiding had prompted the British state to investigate various ways of averting or managing such events, at least two factors had driven it to consider also the problems of property control. Firstly, it was recognised that requisitioning had been both a necessary feature of the last war, and one which had often been poorly managed, as demonstrated by the high-profile legal challenges mounted against the state in response. Secondly, it was acknowledged that, if the next war was to be one of greater 'totality', then the need for efficient requisitioning powers would only be heightened. Interestingly, and in contrast to the discussion of the bombed home, which was regularly carried out in the public sphere, that which concerned the requisitioned home took place overwhelmingly behind the closed doors of government. Of course, this owed much to the fact that air raids had been the subject of a much more fraught and emotive discourse throughout much of the early twentieth century – one which, as we have seen, had frequently been driven and reshaped by popular fears and anxieties. Similarly, the demand for citizens to actively participate in the work of their protection had often forced the issue to be parsed in more public fora.

As Neil Stammers has argued, however, the closeted nature of the state's plans as regarded powers such as requisitioning may also have been a deliberate tactic. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939 had, after all, been in the works for some time. Working from the basis established by DORA over two decades previously, successive committees had been involved in the drafting of legislation which would allow the state to pass defence regulations without the need for parliamentary assent in the event of a new war breaking out.<sup>278</sup> However, despite the fact that

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<sup>277</sup> For example, CAB 102/738, 'Record of Home Defence Measures', January 1939.

<sup>278</sup> Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain during the 2nd World War* (London: St. Martin's, 1983), pp. 7-10.

the 1939 Act was thus the product of lengthy deliberation rather than frenzied haste, it was not until the eve of war that its provisions came under the scrutiny of the wider Parliament. In the atmosphere of urgency created by the imminent declaration of hostilities, the passage of this legislation through Parliament took less than four hours.<sup>279</sup> The Compensation (Defence) Act, which provided an avenue for citizens who had been dispossessed under the new emergency powers to claim restitution, was similarly passed with little critique despite being, in the words of a contemporary constitutional scholar, ‘full of snares and delusions’.<sup>280</sup> In the span of relatively little parliamentary time, then, the state had invested itself with a series of powers which in theory enabled it to place draconian restrictions upon the civil liberties of its citizens. However, whilst the powers of requisition conferred by the new legislation clearly worked, for example, to suspend traditionally conceived notions of property rights, other regulations went further in their reshaping of the legal landscape of citizenship.<sup>281</sup> Perhaps most obviously, the infamous Regulation 18B permitted the internment without trial of anyone who was suspected to have ‘hostile origins or associations’.<sup>282</sup> As Stammers suggests, it is perhaps no surprise that the content of the planned emergency powers legislation was thus kept under wraps until such time as ‘the government could say, and the House of Commons could accept, that the circumstances were so urgent that the Bill could not be properly considered by Parliament’.<sup>283</sup>

Although wartime requisitioning was, therefore, largely absent from the public domain in a way bombing was not, its planning within Whitehall naturally continued apace. A series of governmental reports written in the 1930s, for example, each took for granted that requisitioning would be necessary in a future war, and thus sought to smooth out its workings. In 1927, a committee under the chairmanship of William Francis Kyffin-Taylor – an erstwhile commissioner

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>280</sup> D. W. Logan, ‘Review of Compensation (Defence), Eric Strathon’, *Law Quarterly Review*, 60 (1944), 392-395, p. 393. See also ‘Respite for Revision’, *The Times*, 7 November 1939.

<sup>281</sup> An interesting meditation upon the balance of civil liberties and state power in Britain during this period can be found in Cecil T. Carr, ‘Crisis Legislation in Britain’, *Columbia Law Review*, 40.8 (1940), 1309-1325.

<sup>282</sup> Cornelius P. Cotter, ‘Constitutionalizing Emergency Powers: The British Experience’, *Stanford Law Review*, 5.3 (1953), 382-417, p. 407. For more on this emergency power, see: A. W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Aaron L. Goldman, ‘Defence Regulation 18B: Emergency Internment of Aliens and Political Dissenters in Great Britain during World War II’, *Journal of British Studies*, 12.2 (1973), 120-136. For more on the linkage of the two world wars vis-à-vis this emergency power, see Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 305-306.

<sup>283</sup> Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain*, p. 10, 13.

of the War Compensation Court – had been convened to ‘advise on what principles compensation should be paid for property or business requisitioned, controlled, or otherwise interfered with in time of national emergencies’.<sup>284</sup> Reporting their findings in 1930, the Kyffin-Taylor committee argued that the question of compensation would be ‘much simplified’ if requisitioning powers were concentrated in the hands of just one department (at least for the purposes of civil, as opposed to military, requisitioning). A further committee set up to consider the emergency powers legislation which would underpin a new requisitioning programme concurred with this argument in their 1937 report, albeit with a few procedural caveats.<sup>285</sup> Thus it came to be that, when a dedicated Inter-departmental Committee on the Co-ordination of Requisitioning was established in 1937 under the purview of the Treasury’s Principal Private Secretary Herbert Fass, it was with the assumption that both requisitioning and compensation would be managed through some central authority, most likely the Office of Works.<sup>286</sup>

Some elements of this plan proved uncontroversial. Most departments, for example, seemed happy enough for the Office of Works to take responsibility for large-scale requisitions of properties like hotels and office blocks, which might be used to provide offices and accommodation for government workers.<sup>287</sup> Yet, both the committee’s final report, which was submitted in March 1939, and the feedback it received in August of the same year revealed that a number of cracks remained. For instance, the final report, written in the aftermath of the September crisis of the previous year when Nazi Germany’s incursion into Czechoslovakia had sparked fears of imminent war, noted that many departments had failed to co-ordinate with one another in their rush to earmark property for potential requisition.<sup>288</sup> The comments received in August, meanwhile, revealed that despite the willingness of most departments to leave some aspects of requisitioning

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<sup>284</sup> On Kyffin-Taylor, see ‘Sir W. F. Kyffin Taylor’, *Financial Times*, 11 February 1930; ‘Forty-Five Years a Judge’, *Law Times*, 23 April 1948.

<sup>285</sup> For a summary of the work of these two committees, see TNA, T 161/886/9, Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Co-ordination of Requisitioning, 24 March 1939, pp. 3-4.

<sup>286</sup> The Office of Works was reconstituted as the Ministry of Works in 1940; thus, references elsewhere in this thesis to requisitioning carried out by this body after that date use the latter term.

<sup>287</sup> TNA, T 161/886/9, Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Co-ordination of Requisitioning, 24 March 1939, p. 12.

<sup>288</sup> TNA, T 161/886/9, Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Co-ordination of Requisitioning, 24 March 1939, pp. 2-3.

to the Office of Works, there continued to be disagreements over the wholesale centralisation of these powers.<sup>289</sup>

Moreover, both the report and the subsequent comments highlighted that some specific areas of the future requisitioning programme still remained underexamined – not least those that concerned the requisition of private dwellings. It is telling, for example, that whilst many different types of property were discussed in the report itself – including food, drink, fuel, machinery, transport infrastructure, ships, aircraft and, of course, larger buildings like warehouses, hotels, and offices – housing received scant mention. That which was discussed tended to concern the billeting of department staff, rather than the use of requisitioning powers to accommodate members of the public either made homeless by enemy action, or transferred to a particular area to undertake war work. This blind spot was a curious one, given the established pervasiveness of fears about the destruction of the urban landscape. Perhaps, we might argue, there was an implicit assumption that those being made homeless were highly likely to be killed, therefore ensuring that demands upon the housing stock would remain manageable.<sup>290</sup> Or, in the same vein, we might suggest that such large swathes of the urban population were envisaged as leaving the city that, again, a critical paucity of urban housing was simply not foreseen.<sup>291</sup> More broadly, it may just be said that the shape of the coming war – for all its nervous parsing over the previous decades – was still just about ambiguous enough in early 1939 that those working on the functioning of emergency powers preferred to leave any uncertain issues to the side until such time as they were better illuminated.

Whilst Fass' committee thus, for whatever reason, largely omitted the question of domestic requisitioning, the Ministry of Health's subsequent comments did begin to acknowledge this elephant in the room. It was noted, for example, that the Ministry had requested that local authorities also be 'vested with requisitioning powers' of their own in order to help them deal with the evacuation scheme.<sup>292</sup> Although the need to control property in urban areas was left either unforeseen or undiscussed, this intervention thus raised a related point: that, especially if there was to be a mass exodus from Britain's cities, some means of effectively managing the available

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<sup>289</sup> TNA, T 161/886/9, C. Walker to Parker, 1 August 1939.

<sup>290</sup> On the assumption that the number of deaths would be much higher, see Peter Stansky, "'9/7': The First Day of the London Blitz', in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (London: Routledge, 2011), 63-72, pp. 66-67.

<sup>291</sup> This, for example, is an explanation advanced in CAB 102/755, Anonymous [assumed Richard Titmuss], Housing History Draft, n.d., p. 10.

<sup>292</sup> TNA, T 161/886/9, C. Walker to Parker, 1 August 1939.

accommodation in reception areas would be vital. Still, prescient as such interventions would prove, they only made it clearer that the state's requisitioning plans – especially vis-à-vis the ordinary dwelling-house – were far from finished. In the event, despite the long-held commitment – derived from a desire to rectify the flaws of Great War policies – to the centralisation of requisitioning powers within the hands of one department, the application of these powers would end up being of a more diffuse character. For instance, in keeping with the Ministry of Health's requests, requisitioning powers were given to select councils just before the outbreak of war, allowing them to take possession of dwellings in order to aid evacuation efforts. Over the next year or so, both the purposes for which houses could be taken, and the types of state body which could execute this power, were extended as the nature and effects of the war became clearer. Eventually, in December 1940, requisitioning powers would be extended to all local authorities seeking to manage the pressures of the urban housing landscape wrought by war.<sup>293</sup> In so doing, the stage was set for a requisitioning programme which was not only much broader than the planners of interwar Britain seem to have envisaged, but which also came to bear that much more strongly upon the intimate domestic lives of urban citizens.

## CONCLUSION

The question of what the home-at-war – and indeed, the citizen-at-war who lived therein – would look like was one which had suffused the cultural and political milieu of Britain for some time prior to 1939. To a large extent, the roots of this discourse lay in the experiences of the First World War, which had seen Britons confronted with the knowledge that the home was no longer protected by its distance from the more traditional theatres of conflict. Although this development had been driven most prominently by the advent of aerial warfare, the increased exposure of the home also owed much by the consolidation of emergency powers by the state, which allowed the state to intervene in private life and property as never before. As we have seen, the legacies of these shifts were spun out across the canvas of the interwar years, both in popular discourses on the nature of future warfare, and in official planning for the same. Whilst many of the auguries concerning the next war may have proved imperfect, they therefore tell us a great deal about the

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<sup>293</sup> For a useful summary of the development of requisitioning powers between 1939 and 1941, see CAB 102/755, Anonymous [assumed Richard Titmuss], Housing History Draft, n.d., p. 22.

anxieties and assumptions which attended the increasingly total character of modern war. Moreover, these imperfect attempts to envisage the future had material impacts which shaped the domestic landscape in which the citizens of 1939 found themselves, influencing everything from the types of defensive measures deployed in the home to the administrative minutiae of the new requisitioning programme.

The call to utilise wider temporal lenses when examining this subject matter is thus one which bears fruit, for we can find a myriad of ways in which conceptualisations of the home and its loss were shaped by the experience and anticipation of war before 1939. Yet, it bears remembering that the concerns about the home which developed during this period would play out in ambiguous and uneven ways once war actually broke out afresh, as evidenced by the wartime writings of Pam Ashford, the *Mass Observer* with whose words we began this chapter. We can see, for example, that she certainly continued to worry about the impacts of an air raid on her domestic space, recording how the blackout preyed upon her fear of ‘pitch darkness’, and how she had ‘[turned] out every drawer and cupboard to see there was nothing there that would inconvenience [her] by being blown into the street’.<sup>294</sup> She also noted her anxieties about the effects of war that had featured less strongly in her pre-war mind, including the invasion of this space by other citizens: a rumour that Glasgow’s population would all be forced to host Admiralty officials being evacuated from London was enough to give Ashford a ‘sleepless night’.<sup>295</sup> Yet, we can also read of the fact that she found (as many others did) the first months of war to be something of an anti-climax. For all the strains and fears of the preceding year – or, indeed, years – life seemed to continue largely as normal.<sup>296</sup> When, in March 1941, Glasgow finally experienced a serious bout of bombing, Ashford’s writings paint a picture of relative calm, punctuated only by a small amount of hysteria among some of her colleagues – most of whom she derided for having been out of reach of the bombing anyway.<sup>297</sup> Still, she admitted how, even as she thus ‘utter[ed] brave words’ in her reports to MO, she was rather less unaffected than she seemed. In particular, she noted how the sight of bombed buildings so like her own tenement flat ‘haunts me too and makes me fear horribly’.<sup>298</sup> Whilst Ashford – at least as far as we can tell – seems to have largely succeeded in

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<sup>294</sup> MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 1 September 1939; MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 16 September 1939.

<sup>295</sup> MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 16 September 1939; MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 17 September.

<sup>296</sup> MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 30 September 1939.

<sup>297</sup> MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 20 March 1941.

<sup>298</sup> MOA, Diarist 5390, Entry for 14 March 1941.



modelling the stoical response which had been so pervasively encouraged since the days of the First World War, it is clear that the fears which had plagued her before 1939 had not been entirely dispelled. The legacies of the interwar project of envisaging the home-at-war remained, even if they did so under the surface.

## Chapter Two

### *Delineating & Blurring*

In October 1942, Mass Observation respondents were asked: ‘What does HOME mean to you?’<sup>299</sup> When the social research organisation analysed a sample of their replies, they found that ‘[t]he majority of people ... consider their home of great importance, and many regard it as the centre of their life.’<sup>300</sup> It was noted in the report that the respondents’ characterisations of home often followed similar paths, returning to the same phrases and themes time and again. Home was cited as a place of freedom and comfort; as the place where family and friends resided and relaxed; and as the place where, surrounded by one’s own possessions, a person might feel a sense of belonging. Although the report acknowledged that such favourable understandings of the home were by no means universal, it emphasised that those respondents who felt ‘little or nothing’ about this space were few and far between.<sup>301</sup>

The assertion that wholly apathetic or negative feelings about home were uncommon among the replies was not in itself inaccurate. Nevertheless, the report’s use of the phrase ‘little or nothing’ was somewhat misleading, for this title was also used to denote those for whom home currently held an ‘unhappy association’, and those for whom there was a disconnect between reality and ideal.<sup>302</sup> As Rosemary Marangoly George has argued, home is rarely, if ever, a truly ‘neutral’ place: an unfavourable view of home is as much a statement of feeling as a favourable one.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> MOA, Directive Questionnaire for October 1942.

<sup>300</sup> For more on the nature of Mass Observation as a sociological/anthropological research initiative – and as a social movement – see Penny Summerfield, ‘Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.3 (1985), 439-452.

MOA, FR 1616, ‘Some Psychological Factors in Home-Building’, 3 March 1943, p. i.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>303</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 9. See also Emma Nock, ‘Make Yourself at Home: Home and

Moreover, by separating so completely those who were less enamoured with home from those who were more deeply attached, the report obscured the fact that even some of the most positive meditations on home came with caveats.<sup>304</sup> In particular, Mass Observation's analysis masked the extent to which some of their observers' replies were pervaded by a sense of anxiety, brought on by an uneasy recognition that this was a space that had been endangered – and perhaps already irrevocably 'altered' – by the war.<sup>305</sup> Even for many of those that lauded home as a haven, there was a simultaneous – and somewhat paradoxical – acknowledgement that the wartime home might not be able to live up to this ideal. One respondent, for example, described home as 'a safe anchorage ... a personal refuge', and yet wistfully concluded that it could not actually 'shut out the cares of the outside world ... [for] they force themselves in, these days.'<sup>306</sup> In cases where it was not felt that the imagined boundary between interior and exterior had yet been transgressed, there was still often a sense of precarity, or an admission that danger was nevertheless standing at the threshold; a feeling that 'all these fine things ... hang by a very slender thread'.<sup>307</sup>

This chapter will explore the tensions that were thus alluded to within the replies to the October 1942 directive, and demonstrate the way in which these anxieties found echoes in a variety of other forms of testimony. As James Greenhalgh has argued, it is important to recognise that, although the immediate context of the war was significant, concerns about the heightened liminality of the home also rested in a longer history of trepidation about the growing involvement of the state in citizens' lives during the twentieth century.<sup>308</sup> This process is one which has often been understood through reference to the idea of 'boundaries'; social histories of welfarism, for example, have frequently used this spatialised term to denote the expansive implications of such policies.<sup>309</sup> However, in many of these analyses the concept of the boundary has been deployed primarily as a rhetorical device or metaphor. This chapter instead takes the boundary itself as a

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the Pursuit of Authenticity in the Writing of Graham Greene' (unpublished PhD thesis, Bangor University, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>304</sup> MOA, FR 1616, 'Some Psychological Factors in Home-Building', 3 March 1943, p. 12.

<sup>305</sup> MOA, DR 2038, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>306</sup> MOA, DR 2811, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>307</sup> MOA, DR 2994, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>308</sup> Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', p. 206.

<sup>309</sup> See, for example, Jose Harris, 'Society and the State in Twentieth-Century Britain', in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*, vol. III, ed. by F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63-117; Michael Bentley, "'Boundaries" in Theoretical Language about the British State', in *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, ed. by S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29-56.

subject of study, and argues that probing how Britons understood both the tangible and intangible borders of the home can yield fresh insights into the shifting interface between citizen and state.

In general, as Henriette Steiner and Kristin Veel have argued, the ‘private/public dichotomy’ often mobilised in descriptions of the home tends to be reductive; in reality, the domestic world is never fully insulated from the wider one, but rather constructed and shaped in dialogue with it.<sup>310</sup> Attempts to delineate the home from its surroundings, in other words, are almost always subverted by a process of blurring. Nevertheless, it matters that those living in Second World War Britain were embedded in a cultural landscape in which the home had long been thought of, and celebrated as, private.<sup>311</sup> It was often discussed in terms of its ‘inviolability’ and ‘sovereignty’, words which implied a particular suspicion of outside forces making themselves felt within the inner sanctum. However, as George Behlmer has noted in his study of the Victorian and Edwardian home, the question of what an invasion of this space looked like has long been an unsettled one. Although the old maxim ‘An Englishman’s House is His Castle’ was understood to mean that British citizens should be free of harassment whilst in their own homes, ‘perceptions of harassment varied widely, thereby opening up a fertile field for inter-class and interpersonal conflict’.<sup>312</sup> For example, regulations that were introduced to police the home during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often stemmed from a degree of moral panic over the gulf between domestic ideals of the home as a site of morality and responsibility and the realities of this space.<sup>313</sup> Then, as now, connections were frequently made between the health of the home and the wider community; thus, groups and individuals who engaged in the work of ‘moral improvement’ often presented their efforts as a form of guardianship, rather than an intrusive type of harassment.<sup>314</sup> Yet, as Behlmer shows, reformers who sought to cross the threshold of the home in

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<sup>310</sup> Henriette Steiner and Kristin Veel, ‘Negotiating the Boundaries of the Home: The Making and Breaking of Lived and Imagined Walls’, *Home Cultures*, 14.1 (2017), 1-5, p. 1.

<sup>311</sup> For more on the development of the ‘private’ home more generally, see Stuart Shapiro, ‘Places and Spaces: The Historical Interaction of Technology, Home, and Privacy’, *Information Society*, 14.4 (1998), 275-284; *A History of Private Life*, vol. III, ed. by Phillip Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989); Amanda Vickery, ‘An Englishman’s Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House’, *Past & Present*, 199 (2008), 147-173.

<sup>312</sup> George K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians, 1850-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21, 22.

their attempts to align reality with ideal often encountered stiff resistance, both on an ideological and an individual, practical level.<sup>315</sup>

Although the Second World War falls beyond the scope of Behlmer's analysis, it is clear that there are a number of continuities between the period he focuses upon and that of wartime Britain. In all homes, but perhaps especially in urban ones, there is the familiar story of a space caught between ideal and reality, a contrast which was thrown into particularly stark relief by the circumstances of conflict. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter One, the prospect of total warfare further underlined the notion that the activities and fates of individuals and families within their homes had implications for what happened beyond them. The necessity of universal adherence to civil defence measures such as the blackout spawned a new infrastructure to police such activities, empowering outsiders – and particularly officials of the state – to enter citizens' homes.<sup>316</sup> As this chapter will show, however, this and other instances of intrusion and transgression were not blindly accepted by Britons. The shifting boundaries around the home were instead subject to a process of negotiation, as citizens engaged with the question of what changes they could fairly be asked to accept as a result of the war. This process, as will be demonstrated, was imbued with a particular vitality by the fact that the wartime home was already well established as an arena for wider debates about the effects of the conflict on British society and British citizens themselves.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the variety of ways in which the traditionally imagined boundaries of the home were destabilised by the war. Not only, for example, did the advent of aerial warfare clearly visit various kinds of damage and destruction upon this space; it also engendered an expansion of the state's purview over the home, allowing it to pervade this space as never before in the name of protection. Drawing on the concept of the uncanny, the next section of this chapter will highlight how the war thus focused attentions on the liminality of the home. The emotional attachments that many citizens had to their homes meant that any threat to this space could provoke individual anxieties about dwelling spaces in its own right. However, the newfound – or at least newly revealed – liminality of the home also allowed these anxieties to bleed into much larger debates, which could in turn also feed back into those original tensions that attended the dwelling. The final sections of the chapter will explore this exchange of anxieties,

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>316</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 6.

tracing how domestic fears were writ small and large as citizens reckoned with the effects of disruption in the home on the person and the nation. The interplay between these different entities manifested as a complex blend of metaphorical alignment, transposition, and subsumption. By examining this process, it becomes possible to see not only how anxieties about the home flowed outwards, but also how those that attended the body and the nation could in turn come to shape understandings of the domicile.

Ultimately, this chapter will argue, the wartime home was a space undeniably pervaded by anxiety. Yet, it nevertheless remained for many Britons a space with intrinsic value, not only in an emotional sense, but also in political, economic, and practical terms as well. This, alongside its position as a nexus point for other discourses and debates, imbued it with a significance which ensured its changing character and landscape would be fearfully tracked by citizen and state alike. An understanding of the way in which the boundaries of the wartime home in Britain were perceived at various points to be embattled, eroded, and made elastic by the conflict therefore provides us with two opportunities. On the one hand, it promises a greater insight into what home meant to contemporary Britons; and on the other, it offers us the chance to begin thinking about what it may have meant to lose this space.

## THE DESTABILISATION OF HOME

The urban home in Second World War Britain was certainly not, on the surface, a place that aligned well with the themes of privacy, refuge, and security that were identified by Mass Observation as the key motifs in the answers to their October 1942 questionnaire. The experience of total warfare was one which engulfed citizens and their homes, simultaneously necessitating that they open themselves up and offer their efforts and resources towards a common aim, whilst also refiguring them as legitimate targets of enemy action. Of course, for some, this vulnerability bred value. One Mass Observer, in her reply to the October 1942 directive, thus detailed her experience of living in a wartime city, and stated that '[t]he torture of this experience has made me value my home ten times as much as I did before.'<sup>317</sup> Another noted:

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<sup>317</sup> MOA, DR 3323, Response to October 1942 Directive.

I feel I am fortunate [sic] that in these days when so many peoples' home life is temporarily suspended I still have at least part of my life very much as it was before the war.<sup>318</sup>

Yet, the fact that this value was being created or augmented by the very phenomenon that threatened it demonstrated a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the wartime home. Whilst the war may have heightened the meaning of home for many Britons by emphasising its role as a site of security at a time when these were scarce, this vision of home was built on unstable ground. For although the conflict thus reinforced existing domestic ideals, it also simultaneously undermined them by making home an inherently dangerous place. The same Mass Observer who had stated that home now meant ten times more to her detailed this uneasy paradox, writing that: 'Home today means to me ... A place of relative security ... Even during the worst air raids I always felt safe in my own home – quite an illusion, of course.'<sup>319</sup> Her addendum was telling. Home may have continued to be associated with the tropes of security and relaxation, and many civilians may have felt this to be an accurate association, in spite of the war's effects. However, as these tropes could not actually be guaranteed when civilians came under fire, such an understanding of home was necessarily precarious. As this supposedly stable space thus came to be haunted by events which threatened to reveal this buried deceit, it is not hard to see why it became so capable of fomenting anxieties among wartime Britons.

Being exposed to the home's vulnerability in this way could be a discomfoting experience, and many urban Britons clearly put emotional and psychological labour not only into remaining calm in the face of these dangers, but also into trying to maintain the image of security and safety. One Mass Observer took care to emphasise that the changes she had made to her domestic life as a result of the war were only 'for the duration'.<sup>320</sup> Hazel Edwards, a young mother from London, dealt with her awareness of her home's susceptibility simply by engaging in a degree of denial; she described, for example, how after cleaning her house she 'didn't allow [herself] to consider that a stray enemy bomb could undo [her] handiwork in seconds.'<sup>321</sup> However, not all urban Britons found themselves to be successful in this work of cognitive dissonance. Especially for those who travelled through or lived in areas that had been subjected to heavy bombing, the sight of ruined

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<sup>318</sup> MOA, DR 3110, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>319</sup> MOA, DR 3323, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Hazel Edwards, *War Among the Ruins* (Oxford: Phoenix, 1996), p. 12.

houses often served as a crude but violent reminder not only of the extensive threats to the home, but of the home's relative defencelessness.<sup>322</sup> Stephanie Butler, for instance, has cited the example of one woman who found the destruction of houses in her area 'a great strain on [her] nerves'.<sup>323</sup> Upon returning to her neighbourhood one day to find debris from a recent raid, she 'dreaded to turn into [her road]' for fear of finding her own house levelled.<sup>324</sup> Her extreme anxiety about this potential occurrence seemed to stem, as Butler shows, from her difficulty in reconciling the notion of the home as a central site in one's life with the recognition that – no matter how '[s]ubstantial and well built' it may be – it was not immune from destruction.<sup>325</sup>

Even damage that left the home largely intact, however, could act as a symbol of the physical fragility of the home, reinforcing the message that it had been destabilised and made unsafe by the war. The shattering of windowpanes, for example, was a very common event; as Florence Rollinson noted wryly in her memoir, wartime 'glaziers did a roaring trade'.<sup>326</sup> Barbara Nixon, an Air Raid Precautions warden during the war, marvelled at the way that 'bricks and mortar could stretch like rubber' during raids, forcing the glass to crack and drop out so that the house might 'deflate'.<sup>327</sup> This evidence of the physical malleability of the home acted as a tangible reminder of the war's ability to distort the supposedly solid physical margins of the home, and imbued the space with a sense of unreality that left witnesses feeling as though they might have somehow become unmoored from the known world.

Moreover, damage of this type was easily mobilised as a metaphor for the way in which erosions of the home's boundaries served to expose the interior. This was only underlined by the fact that gaping windows and blown-in doors also left the home vulnerable to other agents of destruction. Esther Baker, from Hull, recalled returning to her flat after a raid to find that a nearby oil tank, pierced during the attack, had rolled down the street churning out 'oily black smoke'.<sup>328</sup> The smoke had then made its way into her home, entering through the freshly shattered windows:

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<sup>322</sup> Katherine E. Fisher, 'Writing (in) the Spaces of the Blitz: Spatial Myths and Memory in Wartime British Literature' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2014), p. 83.

<sup>323</sup> Stephanie E. Butler, 'The Circulation of Grief', p. 55. The correspondence cited in Butler's article is from a private collection that is not publicly available for viewing; I have quoted here from extracts in the work.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>326</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 9402, Papers of F. M. Rollinson, "'Blitz and Pieces': My Life During the Second World War 1939-1945", p. 10.

<sup>327</sup> Barbara Nixon, *Raiders Overhead: A Diary of the London Blitz* (London: Scolar, 1980), p. 26.

<sup>328</sup> Esther Baker, *A City in Flames: A Firewoman's Recollections of the Hull Blitz* (Beverley: Hutton, 1992), p. 23.



The effect was astounding; unlike anything I had seen before or witnessed since. Our flat now resembled the inside of a chimney. Every inch of the interior was coated with a fur of thick, greasy black soot ... The effect was so complete, so total, that I could not properly distinguish a feature of the room, or even define the positions of the furniture; the place had been transformed into a great big box of total blackness.<sup>329</sup>

This experience echoed that of those whose homes had suffered soot damage during the air raids. The force of falling bombs would often blow chimney ash back down the flue and into the rooms below, leaving all that was in them covered in a thick layer of soot. As a number of Hull schoolchildren noted in a 1942 school assignment asking them to describe their experiences during the 1941 blitz on the city, the soot was also frequently mixed with the shards of glass from broken windows, rendering the home not simply visually unfamiliar but also demonstrably dangerous.<sup>330</sup> Eleven-year-old Eileen Moote recalled, for example, that the grime and glass in her home after a heavy raid was ‘inches thick’ covering not only all of the chairs, but also – as she discovered upon being sent to upstairs by her parents whilst they cleared away the glass – her own bed.<sup>331</sup> Another child, Rita Drydale, simply noted that the soot meant that they ‘could not live in [their house]’, forcing her family to instead move in with a relative.<sup>332</sup> This imposition of ash and windowpane glass could therefore clearly disrupt the ability of homes to be homely in the first place. Here, then, was a particularly ironic subversion of the existing fabric of the house, taking a part of that most homely of places – the hearth – and that which had once helped to physically bound the home – the window – and reimbuing them with an invasive and malevolent character.

Experiences such as those catalogued in the Hull schoolchildren’s essays also hinted at the propensity of aerial warfare to alter domestic routines. Of course, these routines had already been affected by the war more generally; the advent of rationing, for example, had obviously had implications for the culinary habits of individuals and families across the country.<sup>333</sup> However, in urban centres, the context of the raids made for more extreme changes, even in the case of the most mundane tasks. Hazel Edwards, for instance, wrote of taking extremely quick baths, an altered habit which owed much to her fear that she would have to be dug out from the rubble unclothed

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Hull History Centre (hereafter HHC), L DEX24, Children’s Recollections of the Blitz.

<sup>331</sup> HHC, L DEX24/19, Children’s Recollections of the Blitz, Eileen Moote, 9 February 1942.

<sup>332</sup> HHC, L DEX24/9, Children’s Recollections of the Blitz, Rita Drydale, 9 February 1942.

<sup>333</sup> Hartley, *Millions Like Us*, p. 53; Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle*, pp. 607-608; Juliet Gardiner, *The Blitz: The British Under Attack* (London: Harper, 2010), pp.160-189.

in the event of a raid.<sup>334</sup> Violet Regan, a Poplar resident, recalled how the attacks had gradually eroded her available living space until she and her husband were finally reduced to a single room in which to perform domestic tasks.<sup>335</sup> Such issues were worsened by the fact that damage was not always repaired with speed; instead, labour and material shortages meant that ad-hoc measures were often implemented in order to keep homes functional, adding yet another layer of disruption. A *Picture Post* article, published in 1944 in the aftermath of a spate of flying bomb attacks, decried this issue as ‘a defeat on the home front’.<sup>336</sup> The images in the report showed individuals and families living with the temporary means of repair: a mother and child, armed with a stack of tins and buckets which are being used to collect water from their leaking roof; a man, adjusting a tarpaulin which covers the front of his house; and another, sleeping with a sheet suspended above him so that the plaster from his damaged ceiling does not fall onto him. These common tribulations again showcased the manner in which bomb damage could fundamentally – and, as the *Picture Post* reminded its readers, protractedly – reorder domestic spaces and routines.

Whilst the more immediate physical aspects of aerial bombardment were thus the most effective reminders that the home had been endangered by the conflict, anxieties about this development also manifested even before any material damage could be done to the home. The sound of the bombing, for example, easily penetrated the walls of urban homes, mounting a sensory invasion of the home which yet again revealed the ways in which its boundaries could be transgressed. The ‘wail’ of the air raid siren, the ‘hum’ of the planes, and the ‘banging’ of the anti-aircraft guns have all become instantly recognisable parts of the soundscape of wartime Britain, precisely because of their ubiquity during heavy raids, and their ability to ‘[strike] fear in the hearts of most’.<sup>337</sup> As Sara Wasson has argued, sound was for many contemporaries the main sense engaged by the bombing, and one of the primary means by which they described and understood

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<sup>334</sup> Edwards, *War Among the Ruins*, p. 6.

<sup>335</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 781, Papers of William B. Regan, Violet Regan, ‘The German Blitzkrieg’, p. 8.

<sup>336</sup> ‘London’s Bombed Homes: A Defeat on the Home Front’, *Picture Post*, 7 October 1944, p. 7.

<sup>337</sup> Gabriel Moshenska, ‘Moaning Minnie and the Doodlebugs: Soundscapes of Air Warfare in Second World War Britain’, in *Modern Conflict and the Senses*, ed. Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 106-22, p. 111, 114, 116; for the latter quote, see Liverpool Record Office (hereafter LRO), 940 PWP/2/3, Transcripts of Reminiscences, ‘1941 – Bombed Out from Crambroune Rd, Wavertree, Liverpool’.

the attacks.<sup>338</sup> This was certainly true for Vivienne Hall, a typist living in London, who recorded in vivid detail the extent of the sonic disruption at the height of the Blitz in late September 1940:

Last night, from before 8 until about 6 this morning heaven and earth went mad with noise. The barrage spat into the air booming and bursting shells and the planes replied with whining bombs and all manner of other horrors. All night long the swish and whistle of things falling from the skies kept us on the alert.<sup>339</sup>

These sounds, for Hall, ushered in a sense of fear by acting as an audible reminder that she and her home might at any moment fall victim to the next bomb. The regularity of the bombing in the autumn and winter of 1940 only worsened this anxiety by breeding a familiarity with the effects of an attack, so that ‘the sinistre [sic] revving up of a diving plane makes your inside wobble in anticipation of the swaying floor’.<sup>340</sup> For Rose Macaulay, the writer, the effects of listening to the ‘thuds’ of the bombs had much the same effect, instilling an ‘anxious expectation’ that the ceiling of her flat would collapse on top of her.<sup>341</sup>

Beyond the way in which this aural onslaught thus seemed to hint perpetually at imminent destruction, one of the worst effects of the cacophony of guns and bombs was the extreme lack of sleep.<sup>342</sup> Although a combination of acclimatisation and reduced bombing after 1941 provided a bit of breathing room, this disruption of one of the activities most associated with the home – the ability to rest uninterrupted – posed yet another challenge to traditional understandings of the space.<sup>343</sup> Indeed, Terence O’Brien, the official historian of civil defence, suggested that even by 1944, when – notwithstanding the novelty of the V-weapons – much of the urban population had already been extensively exposed to aerial attack, ‘sleepless nights account[ed] for much of the increased jitteriness and lowering of morale’.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Sara Wasson, ‘“A Network of Inscrutable Canyons”: Wartime London’s Sensory Landscapes’, in *The Swarming Streets: Twentieth-Century Literary Representations of London*, ed. Lawrence Phillips (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 77-95, p. 88.

<sup>339</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 146.

<sup>340</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 164.

<sup>341</sup> Lara Feigel, *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 66.

<sup>342</sup> Melanie McGrath, *Silvertown: An East End Family Memoir* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003), p. 120.

<sup>343</sup> Robert Mackay, *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain during the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 69-71.

<sup>344</sup> Terence H. O’Brien, *Civil Defence* (London: HMSO, 1955), p. 4.

Aerial bombardment was also an intensely visual experience.<sup>345</sup> The light displays generated by the gunfire, blazing buildings, and searchlights combined to form a spectacle ‘most beautiful and ... horrific’, especially when set against the backdrop of an otherwise lightless city.<sup>346</sup> Many would have watched from their homes, as Vivienne Hall did, and witnessed the ‘red glow’ of fires burning in the aftermath of an attack.<sup>347</sup> However, the visual dimension of aerial warfare did not remain as simple theatre, to be watched unfolding from afar; it also pervaded the home, as Chelsea resident Ivy Haslewood noted when she described her bedroom being bathed in a ‘hideous orange glare’ during a raid.<sup>348</sup> As with the sonic element of the attacks, this visual invasion often bred an uneasy recognition of one’s proximity to danger by reducing the sense of distance between the enemy and the civilian. Indeed, for Margaret Siddall, a child during the war, it was not just the light of the bombs which seemed to transgress the boundaries of the home; it was also the eyes of the bombers themselves. Recalling her family’s move to Swansea during the spring of 1941, Siddall remembered asking her father to find them a house without large windows, lest the ‘Germans ... look in and see us!’<sup>349</sup>

Whilst bombs – or the threat of them – were somewhat unsurprisingly a force with the potential to upset the inner workings of the urban home, it is also evident that the measures instated to protect against them were endowed with the same capacity for distortion. Of course, this ‘friendly fire’ was unevenly applied and felt; whereas any enemy attack on the home naturally seemed invasive and dangerous, the state’s protective policies clearly posed less of an intentional existential threat to the physical fabric of this space. Moreover, such policies could elicit very different responses depending upon individuals’ understanding of their broader relationship with the state. For those who were more wary of the state’s inflated purview over the private lives of its citizens, evidence of its increased presence within the home – even if it was linked to the protection of this space – could be viewed suspiciously. Nevertheless, it would clearly be misleading to suggest that all forms of state intervention into the home were, at all times, seen as representing another insidious threat to the domestic sanctum. Instead, there were certainly urban Britons who found their wartime anxieties to be assuaged rather than amplified by civil defence procedures; in the case

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<sup>345</sup> Bell, *London Was Ours*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>346</sup> Nicolas Bentley, *A Version of the Truth* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1960), p. 102.

<sup>347</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 164.

<sup>348</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 12994, Papers of I. S. Haslewood, Diary entry for 7 September 1940.

<sup>349</sup> Margaret Siddall, *Safe As Houses: Childhood Through the Forties* (Christow: Devonshire House, 1995), p. 28.

of the black-out, for example, there were some who found comfort in the way that it seemed to visually and atmospherically fortify the threatened boundary between the interior and exterior.<sup>350</sup>

However, whilst responses to this measure and others like it were thus shaded in a greater degree of nuance than those that were provoked by enemy action, the black-out was undoubtedly a key focal point for concerns about the way in which state actions could also work to rearrange and disorient the home. In medical circles, for example, concern was voiced over the health effects of this civil defence measure, with one article in the *British Medical Journal* arguing that:

With lengthening darkness the problem of the black-out becomes more oppressive to every citizen. The black-out takes its toll of life and limb in the streets, but indoors it also makes heavy exactions upon health and spirits.<sup>351</sup>

Mass Observation research found that, especially in the early years of the war, the black-out tended to top the list of 'wartime inconveniences', with respondents emphasising problems such as a sense of being 'hemmed in', or the fact that the lack of lighting was 'depressing and irritating'.<sup>352</sup> The lack of ventilation was held to be an especially troubling aspect of the black-out, with many linking the stuffiness of rooms to increased levels of influenza and complaints such as recurrent headaches.<sup>353</sup> Such an atmosphere – whilst perhaps the subject of some exaggeration – clearly ran counter to any notion of the home as a site of safety by reworking it as a place which could actively cause health problems for its inhabitants.

Products such as the 'Colt Blackout Ventilator', which claimed to reintroduce the flow of fresh air whilst maintaining the integrity of the black-out, were advertised as a means of countering this issue.<sup>354</sup> However, the way in which such tools were marketed itself spoke to another sense in which measures like the black-out could further destabilise domestic boundaries. The makers of the 'Colt Blackout Ventilator' argued, for example, that fitting their device was both a 'patriotic and [a] humanitarian endeavour'.<sup>355</sup> Such statements emphasised that citizens' habits could have an impact not only on themselves and the other inhabitants of their own houses, but also on those

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<sup>350</sup> MOA, DR 3323, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>351</sup> Anonymous, 'Ventilation in the Black-Out', *British Medical Journal*, 2.4157 (1940), 334, p. 334.

<sup>352</sup> MOA, FR 545, 'Wartime Inconveniences', 23 January 1941, p. 4; MOA, DR 1087, Response to December 1939 Directive; MOA, DR 1056, Response to December 1939 Directive.

<sup>353</sup> 'To End 'Black-Out Headache'', *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1940.

<sup>354</sup> 'The Colt Blackout Ventilator', *The Times*, 9 October 1941. See also Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', pp. 203-204.

<sup>355</sup> Meg Sweet, 'The Archive of Art and Design', *Journal of Art and Design*, 2.4 (1989), 293-297, p. 296.

for those who lived and worked around them. This reflected a wider message of the black-out, for as Dietmar Süß has pointed out, the process of covering up windows and dimming lights was a ‘ritual that involved every individual in the battle to defend the country’.<sup>356</sup> The blackout thus exemplified the way in which investing householders with responsibility for larger geographical scales – such as the city and nation – could blur the boundaries between them, recasting the individual and their home as mere cogs in a much larger machine.

This was not, however, simply a centrifugal process, wherein actions within the home rippled outwards to affect society at large. As measures such as the black-out entailed the mobilisation of all citizens within their notionally private homes, they also represented a key arena for the state to exert control over citizens, henceforth allowing the process of blurring to move inwards as well.<sup>357</sup> Here, again, the image of the autonomous home was problematised, for although much emphasis was placed on the home as a site which was important to defend, the civil defence measures intended to protect it themselves entailed a more ubiquitous and pervasive state presence within the home. The increased significance of civilians to the project of waging war meant that their private lives inevitably came under the microscope in new and intense ways, resulting in a raft of policies which were designed to police the internal workings of the domestic sphere and ensure that citizens were taking on responsibility for their own safety. The black-out was one such measure, but as an *Illustrated London News* article on the preparation of the home for war demonstrated, there were numerous other policies which recommended – or in some cases demanded – an unprecedented reconfiguration of private space. For example, it was suggested that in order to delay and fight the spread of fire, attics should be cleared of possessions, that all woodwork be coated in limewash, and that basins and bathtubs be kept filled with water.<sup>358</sup> It is undoubtable that there was not universal adherence to precautionary measures like these, not least because many of them were ultimately impractical in day-to-day life. However, by emphasising the general insecurity of the house, such policies nevertheless served to recast the home as a space of inherent danger.

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<sup>356</sup> Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II*, trans. by Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 150.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> ‘Countering the Air Raid Menace: The Protection of Home’, *Illustrated London News*, 6 July 1940.

External shelter options which aimed to preserve some of the protective functions of the private house also helped to redraw the bounds of domesticity. For example, although the iconic Anderson air raid shelter was introduced to perform a largely military role – that of protection from bomb blasts – the propaganda imagery around this structure focused on its domestic attributes as much as its military ones.<sup>359</sup> The Anderson therefore mimicked the idealised role of the house proper, whilst simultaneously subverting traditional home life by suggesting that domestic activity usually performed in the house would need to be relocated as a result of the conflict. As Susan Grayzel's analysis of the Anderson shows, many individuals resisted this transferral of the home to 'a fortified hole in the garden'.<sup>360</sup> Others, however, threw themselves into the project of domesticating the shelter, perhaps motivated by a desire to maintain the essence of home life in the face of the threats to the traditional dwelling.<sup>361</sup> Private shelters thus emerge as yet another area in which the anxieties about the home were on display. As citizens grappled with the effects of war on their homes, some sought to buttress the existing boundaries of this space, whilst others attempted to preserve something of its spirit by remaking it elsewhere.

The questions raised over the issue of civil defence and shelter both within and outside of the urban house also illuminated a wider debate about how far the home needed to be opened up in order to protect it. The necessity of defensive measures was unquestionable, not only on account of the implications that a collapsing house could have for the bodies contained within it, but also because the emotional attachment that many Britons had to their homes made this space an important preserve of morale. Nevertheless, the way in which these measures seemed to challenge the very institution that they sought to protect meant that they were not accepted blindly by citizens. A particular flashpoint, for example, was the establishment of an infrastructure of officials, including ARP wardens, firefighters, and housing officers, whose job involved ensuring that citizens and their homes were acting in concert with state policy. Whilst, as noted at the beginning

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<sup>359</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 284.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> Stephanie E. Butler, 'English Women at Home during the Second World War: Anderson Shelters as Domestic Spaces', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19.1 (2018), 94-107, p. 104. Such attempts to fashion domesticity from ostensibly unhomey spaces was also paralleled in public shelters: see, for example, Geoffrey Field, 'Nights Underground in Darkest London: The Blitz, 1940-1941', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 62.1 (2002), 11-49, pp. 17-18.

of this chapter, the history of the state's entry into the British home in order to police it did not start in 1939, the war certainly saw an unprecedented increase in the scale of this project.<sup>362</sup>

Civil defence workers' jobs often led them to physically cross the threshold of the home, and whilst their presence wasn't always unwelcome – memories abound of friendly wardens poking their heads into cellars and shelters to ask after inhabitants – it could often be the subject of ire.<sup>363</sup> As Greenhalgh's work on the relationship between citizens and the state in the urban wartime home reveals, resentment was sometimes provoked by relatively small events, as in the case of one woman upset by the failure of firemen to wipe their feet before charging upstairs to deal with an incendiary bomb.<sup>364</sup> Such actions, whilst utterly understandable given the context of the work at hand, chafed against ideas about the sanctity of the home and underlined the lack of control that urban residents had over their own space. Certainly after 1940, the importance of the work done by civil defence officials was rarely deprecated by urban Britons; and yet, this did not prevent the discomfort that many felt when faced with an embodied intrusion into their home.<sup>365</sup>

The majority of the domestic distortions that this chapter has explored thus far have largely dealt with the immediate physical impact of enemy bombs, and those more abstract attempts of the state to mediate the effects of these attacks which disturbed understandings of the home by altering its inner workings. Whilst, of course, the entrance of state representatives into the urban home carried none of the violence of the enemy's assault, it was arguably a step beyond the other civil defence measures in terms of its implications for the home. The ability to 'refuse others admission' was, for many, a distinguishing aspect of home, allowing the inhabitants to feel secure in their ability to carry out homemaking activities such as the storing of possessions.<sup>366</sup> Intrusions, even when they were necessary in the conduct of civil defence, could therefore seem to diminish the nature of the home to such an extent that they were sometimes related to – if not actually directly equated with – an invasive enemy force.<sup>367</sup>

Although measures such as the black-out and the establishment of shelters in the domestic arena thus had obvious effects on citizens' understandings of the space, and certainly exposed a loss

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<sup>362</sup> Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', pp. 188-89, 198. For more on the presence of external regulatory forces in the home, see Behlmer, *Friends of the Family*.

<sup>363</sup> For example, Siddall, *Safe As Houses*, p. 32.

<sup>364</sup> Greenhalgh, 'The Threshold of the State', p. 193.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>366</sup> MOA, DR 3246, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>367</sup> MOA, DR 3225, Response to October 1942 Directive.



of control in real terms, they did not necessarily pose a threat to householders' sense that they had a *right* to control over their homes. The work of some state bodies, however, clearly did impinge upon this idea. This was perhaps most true in the case of billeting and requisitioning officers who, for a variety of purposes including the billeting of workers and those made homeless by enemy action, were empowered to conscript private space on an unprecedented scale. It is clear that such powers could upset the traditional rights that were associated with house by thus subordinating private homes to explicit state control in the name of the war effort. This often became a particular issue in cases where the citizens affected were owner-occupiers, crystallising around issues such as compensation. However, concerns about control over private space were not limited to those who owned their home. As Behlmer notes, although the aspiration of home ownership was quickly gathering pace throughout the early twentieth century, renting remained the most common form of occupation, and was still understood to entail certain rights.<sup>368</sup>

The requisition of private space could take multiple forms, the most extreme of which was the seizure of an entire property. Whilst the responses of householders to such total fulfilments of the threat of requisition – which, for many, resulted in a prolonged experience of home-loss – will be explored in more detail in the next chapters, it is worth noting here how even the anticipation of such an event could alter uses and understandings of domestic space. Letters exchanged between Signalman John Gurney and his reluctantly evacuated wife, Eileen, at the height of the V-weapons raids in 1944 exemplify the effects of this threat. Expressing anxieties about the potential requisition of their empty home in London, the couple devised a plan to lower the risk of this eventuality by installing a tenant, evidently deciding that it was better to lose a degree of control over their home than to lose access to it completely.<sup>369</sup> However, whilst they were successful in their attempt to circumvent requisition, even this course of action caused some discomfort for Eileen by introducing a foreign presence into her home; she later described in detail the intensive clean she carried out upon returning to her house after VE day, including wiping every book in the house.<sup>370</sup> The fear of requisition which caused the Gurneys to pursue this plan was not misplaced, for requisitioning authorities did not tend to take into account the reasons why a house

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<sup>368</sup> Behlmer, *Friends of the Family*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>369</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 15658, Papers of J. S. Gurney, Eileen to John Gurney, 28 September 1944; IWM, Department of Documents, 15658, Papers of J. S. Gurney, John to Eileen Gurney, 13 October 1944.

<sup>370</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 15658, Papers of J. S. Gurney, Eileen to John Gurney, 5 May 1945.

might be empty, and hence whether its owner might be planning to return as soon as the danger was over. Moreover, whilst the official procedure notionally gave owners and tenants a chance to make representations against requisition, this was not reliably the case.<sup>371</sup>

The complete requisition of one's home, as a fearful possibility or a difficult actuality, clearly had serious ramifications for any conceptualisation of home that emphasised sanctity and security. However, it is important to note that not all requisitions entailed the commandeering of the home in its entirety; nor did they all involve the supplantation of one family for another. Rather, it was possible for sections of the home to be commandeered by the state, and for multiple families to henceforth share the same billets. Such arrangements, too, had obvious implications for understandings of the wartime home – not only for the original occupants of houses, but also for the billetees themselves. One of the respondents to Mass Observation's October 1942 directive, for example, argued that billets were the 'antithesis' of home; staying in someone else's house rarely afforded one the autonomy and privacy that should, at least ideally, characterise such a place.<sup>372</sup> As Paula Derdiger has noted, questions about the implications of domestic space being shared in this way suffused a number of wartime literary works.<sup>373</sup> Notably, although billeting and the sharing of domestic spaces by multiple families was a common experience in cities and towns, these works tended to focus on rural forms of billeting such as evacuation. However, the themes that Derdiger explores are echoed in in urban as well as rural settings: for example, her argument that making 'every house a potential billet and every individual a potential boarder' seemed to collapse not only the boundaries around the house, but by extension those between individuals and communities, rang true in cities as well.<sup>374</sup> As we will see, her contention that billeting caused such unease because it signified and manifested a threat to other traditional institutions – such as the nuclear family – is also reflected in the way urban homes became connected to other scales of society.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> See, for example, HHC, C TAY/RP/4, Record of requisitioned and subsequently de-requisitioned properties: 40 Albany Street, C. M. Pallard to City Architect, 30 July 1946; Hampshire Record Office (hereafter HRO), 64M76/DDC375/1, Files concerning requisitioning of properties, Herbert Watts to Principal Housing Officer, 12 February 1947.

<sup>372</sup> MOA, DR 3003, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>373</sup> Paula Derdiger, *Reconstruction Fiction: Housing and Realist Literature in Postwar Britain* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2020), p. 44.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

An examination of the wartime British home thus reveals a space which had been disrupted in a number of ways as a result of the conflict. Enemy attacks formed the clearest challenge to understandings of the home. In an immediate sense, air raids could violently warp or destroy the physical fabric of the home; more generally, however, they could disrupt the routines of the home, and so problematise its ability to be homely. Paradoxically, however, the measures put in place to protect this space themselves had the potential to mirror or amplify this distortion of Britons' domestic lives. Either by similarly effecting changes to urban Britons' habits, or by suspending their right to control access to and occupancy of their own space, the actions of the state could further call into question the integrity of the home in the face of total war.

War clearly had the capacity to seriously unsettle a number of the dichotomies that underpinned contemporary understandings of home, and in particular those that drew lines between inside and outside, private and public, and individual and community. The reactions of urban citizens to these changes were complex and often ambiguous. Many urban Britons sought to reinforce the imagined domestic boundary, sometimes through the deliberate cultivation of ignorance, and at other times through acts of resistance. Others, as will be explored further below, accepted the changes to their abodes, and chose to invest their attachments to these places in other scales of home, at least until they could be realigned with the house proper. In the end, however, there were also some who found all such paths challenging – or impossible – to follow, and thus struggled to adjust to the disrupting effects of total warfare on the domestic world.

## THE UNCANNY HOME

For various reasons, then, the war seemed to have pushed the home into a liminal state which was largely at odds with the interior/exterior binary that was so integral to traditional, popular conceptualisations of domesticity in twentieth-century Britain. As Lindsey McCarthy has noted, for home to be demarcated as safe and private, there always has to be some sense of an unfamiliar exterior which is being excluded.<sup>376</sup> However, the violent events that occurred in wartime British cities could expose the arbitrary and porous nature of such a demarcation by demonstrating just how easily this excluded 'other' could seep into the home. Being confronted with evidence of this

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<sup>376</sup> Lindsey McCarthy, '(Re)conceptualising the Boundaries Between Home and Homelessness: The *Unheimlich*', *Housing Studies*, 33.6 (2018), 960-85, p. 963.

fallibility is, according to Maria Kaika, an uncomfortable experience precisely because it thus ‘threatens to tear down the laboriously built and elaborately maintained security and safety of familiar spaces’.<sup>377</sup> Recognising the vulnerability of home can undermine one’s vision of this space, placing uncertainty at the core of something that was supposedly solid and secure.

As Kaika has emphasised, homes can be uncanny spaces even beyond circumstances that amplify the juxtaposition – or, indeed, entanglement – of the familiar and unfamiliar, as is the case in wartime. For example, everyday, mundane issues such as burst pipes or power cuts can shatter the image of the autonomous home by reminding us of the hidden, complex systems which not only link interiors to exteriors, but which also play a vital role in making the interior ‘homely’ in the first place.<sup>378</sup> Crises such as war can, however, more violently and more extensively throw such processes into sharp relief, making it harder to maintain the curated image of domestic security. The author and radio presenter Norman Ellison recorded in his wartime scrapbook, for example, how after a raid he found ‘[n]ot a window or frame in the house, slats all gone, walls cracked – water, gas & electricity cut off & a cold East wind blowing through everything’.<sup>379</sup> In so doing, he demonstrated how such an event could render the home an unfamiliar place in one fell swoop by causing an avalanche of what, separately or on a smaller scale, might otherwise be understood as basic home repair issues.

Kaika, McCarthy, and other scholars of home have related the discomfort of this process to the notion of the uncanny, which was originally expounded upon by the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, but first given full scholarly treatment by Sigmund Freud in the 1919 essay ‘Das Unheimliche’.<sup>380</sup> Examining the etymology of *heimlich* – a word that translates to English as ‘homely’ and is the linguistic opposite of the German word for the unhomely or uncanny, *unheimlich* – Freud noted with interest that there existed two different meanings.<sup>381</sup> The first denoted the domestic and familiar, but the second actually signified that which was ‘hidden,

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<sup>377</sup> Maria Kaika, ‘Interrogating the Geographies of the Familiar: Domesticating Nature and Constructing the Autonomy of the Modern Home’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28.2 (2004), 265-286, p. 276.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>379</sup> LRO, 920 NFE/2/2/1, Papers of Norman F. Ellison, War Diary and Scrapbook, Vol. I, Entry for 21 December 1940.

<sup>380</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

secretive, [and] clandestine'.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, the notion of the homely carried within itself something that was supposedly its opposite, or as Freud put it: '*heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*'.<sup>383</sup> For Freud, then, that which was uncanny provoked feelings of anxiety and fear not simply because it was unfamiliar – for as he noted, not all that is novel is frightening, and nor is the frightening always uncanny – but instead precisely because it was 'secretly all too familiar'.<sup>384</sup>

In the case of the Second World War, this phenomenon was captured well by the author William Sansom, when he wrote that:

It is true that under bombardment life in a city is physically more comfortable than in the field; but against this might be ranged a deeper mental discomfort, for the citizen lives still among familiar things, and over the threatened kitchen and the threatened shops there rests always the reminder of better days. These familiar places are much alienated and chilled in the shadow of war.<sup>385</sup>

The conflict, as Sansom's words suggested, could cause elements of the home to act in unpredictable ways – here, for example, we might recall circumstances such as the soot-covered homes of Hull's schoolchildren, the elastic walls witnessed by Barbara Nixon, or the trembling floor of Vivienne Hall's house during a raid. The resultant estrangement between citizens and their homes worked to prevent this setting from performing its usual role in individuals' lives. In this way, it is possible to see how the co-existence of 'otherness' and familiar domesticity within the same space could function to invert the latter into something more sinister and threatening.

Whilst Freud's analysis of the uncanny was largely linguistic and psychoanalytical in nature, it is thus clear that, as architectural historian Anthony Vidler has argued, the uncanny is a concept with rich interpretative value for spatial questions. The house, for example, has long been one of the most commonly used motifs in literature and art which deals with the uncanny, representing that which is most familiar whilst simultaneously acting as a stage for 'endless representations of haunting, doubling, dismembering, and other terrors'.<sup>386</sup> Indeed, this was

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<sup>382</sup> McCarthy, '(Re)conceptualising the Boundaries Between Home and Homelessness', p. 963.

<sup>383</sup> Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 134.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

<sup>385</sup> William Sansom, *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>386</sup> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. ix. See also Oliver Parken's work on ghosts in wartime London, which touches upon the propensity of domestic spaces to play host to such uncanny phenomena: Oliver Parken, 'Blitz Spirits: Ghosts of London and the Nation in Second World War Britain', *London Journal*, 48.2 (2023), 1-18.

certainly reflected in the literature produced in Britain during the Second World War, with the propensity of the home to become an arena for the unfamiliar being a subject of fascination for a variety of authors. In James Hanley's 1943 novella *No Directions*, for example, a boarding house becomes the setting for a disjointed and disorienting set of events, experienced by a cast of inhabitants who are 'alienated from each other even as they dwell in close proximity'.<sup>387</sup> Entirely set during a single air raid, Hanley's work foregrounded the fears which attended sheltering in a domestic structure, emphasising that even the cellar, ostensibly the safest place in the house, was a bewildering space '[without] meaning'.<sup>388</sup> Although he was not writing during the war years themselves, the Scottish poet George Macbeth would later draw upon his childhood wartime experiences in Sheffield to similarly explore the surreal and disconcerting effects of conflict on domestic space. The 1967 poem *The Land-Mine*, for example, started with the lines: 'It fell when I was sleeping. In my dream / It brought the garden to the house / and let it in.'<sup>389</sup> This image of a house turned inside out was based on a real experience; in Macbeth's biography, he noted how a landmine blast which damaged his home in late 1941 had indeed flung 'shrubs and flowers into all the rooms'.<sup>390</sup> In the poem, however, the description of this experience is distinctly hallucinatory; Macbeth presents an event which has, by blurring the boundary between the garden and the house, also called into question the interface between the real and the imagined. *The Land-Mine* goes on to lament the permanence of this newfound liminality: nothing 'will bring [the] garden back'.<sup>391</sup>

The collapse of boundaries around and within the house, allowing an uncomfortably visible co-mingling of the dangerous and the homely, is also explored in many of Elizabeth Bowen's wartime works. For instance, her 1941 short story 'In the Square' takes as its setting a house which, despite having survived a recent bombing raid, has been left eerie by the experience: 'one got a feeling of functional anarchy, of loose plumbing, of fittings shocked from their place'.<sup>392</sup> Similarly, 'The Demon Lover', published in 1945, opens with the protagonist Kathleen Drover returning to

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<sup>387</sup> Fisher, 'Writing (in) the Spaces of the Blitz', p. 103.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108; James Hanley, *No Directions* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945), p. 18.

<sup>389</sup> George Macbeth, *The Colour of Blood* (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 31-32. I am grateful to Dr James Greenhalgh for bringing Macbeth's work to my attention at the 2022 Urban History Group conference.

<sup>390</sup> George Macbeth, *A Child of the War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), p. 49.

<sup>391</sup> Macbeth, *The Colour of Blood*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>392</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, 'In the Square' [1941], in *Collected Stories* (London: Vintage, 1999), 609-615, p. 610.

her London home to find ‘an unfamiliar queerness silted up’ around its bomb-scarred structure.<sup>393</sup> Threatened by a letter from her eponymous – and supposedly dead – ex-lover, Mrs Drover begins to feel his presence within the house and attempts to escape. Too late, she discovers to her horror that her taxi driver is in fact the one she has been trying to evade; her fate is left unknown as he accelerates away with her ‘into the hinterland of deserted streets’.<sup>394</sup> The uncanny in ‘The Demon Lover’ is thus something which pervades both the domestic and the exterior, enmeshing the two in order to make the margins of private life unclear, and allowing the unfamiliar home to bleed into the equally unfamiliar city. The Demon Lover himself has variously been understood by literary critics as an allegory for war itself – and perhaps, more specifically, the returning spectre of the Great War – and as a figment of Mrs Drover’s own imagination.<sup>395</sup> The events of Bowen’s story, in such interpretations, therefore act as a meditation on the effects of conflict on society and the individual psyche, and serve as a reminder of the way in which the sinister dimensions of warfare might be a returning or inherent force, rather than a novel or extrinsic one.

The ubiquity of uncanny domestic imagery in British wartime writing owed much to the literary tradition of the haunted house, which had come into being long before the advent of the Second World War. As Vidler notes, this was a narrative device well accustomed to being used as a means of expressing anxieties about alien presences.<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that the ‘other’ which haunts the homes of Bowen’s and Hanley’s work is presented as having been, at the very least, triggered or amplified by the war: it does not therefore exist entirely independently of the conflict. As such, the particular questions and themes explored in these writings can certainly illuminate some of the anxieties that were more spatially and temporally specific to the Second World War home. For example, Bowen and contemporaries such as Graham Greene often made discursive connections between wartime domestic uncanniness and the way in which it caused other boundaries – particularly those that supposedly separated the self and the other – to be called into question as well.<sup>397</sup> In this, it is possible to see a broader anxiety about the subsumption of the individual into the wider community that was inherent in much of the discourse about the war

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., p. 661.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p. 666.

<sup>395</sup> Robert L. Calder, “‘A More Sinister Troth’: Elizabeth Bowen’s “The Demon Lover” as Allegory’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 31.1 (1994), 91-97.

<sup>396</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 17.

<sup>397</sup> Rau, ‘The Common Frontier’; Deborah L. Parsons, ‘Souls Astray: Elizabeth Bowen’s Landscape of War’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8.1 (1997), 24–32, p. 27.

effort. Bowen herself lived – and was bombed out – in London during the Blitz, and reflected in a later postscript to ‘The Demon Lover’ on the effect that the destruction of homes had on her personally:

Sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began. The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight, left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt, if not knew each other.<sup>398</sup>

As will be returned to further below, this loss of the individual to the whole was an ambiguous process. The idea of the self as a discrete entity, as something to be maintained and curated, was gaining currency at this time, and such events clearly represented a threat to this notion of individuality.<sup>399</sup> For Bowen, the experience was at once disorienting and exhilarating; her concern about the ramifications of the ‘violent destruction’ of familiar things is clear, as is the sense that this was an invasive process, and yet she hints that the erasure of boundaries might not be entirely negative.

The recasting of civilian homes that lay beyond the traditional battlefield as legitimate military targets had, as we have seen, radical ramifications for established understandings home as they pertained to the dwelling-house. Clearly, both enemy attacks and state actions reshaped this space, altering its inner workings and contracting, expanding, and relocating its margins. However, as the literary works of Bowen and others highlighted, the anxieties about such developments could also be refracted into broader debates about the effects of the war on other scales of British society. What, for example, did domestic unfixity actually mean for the relationship between the individual citizen and the wider community? Did the impact of the conflict on individual homes say something about its impact on other sets of boundaries – particularly those that differentiated bodies, minds, and nations from one another? Was the embattled home merely a poetic parallel, an easily mobilised focal point, for the perceived changes to these other boundaries, or could a more causative element to the process be identified? In other words, was the home understood to have such an integral role in creating and sustaining other boundaries that the alterations wrought upon it could themselves be the one of the most serious threats to British society? It is easy to see

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<sup>398</sup> Bowen, ‘Postscript to The Demon Lover’, p. 95. On the bombing of Bowen’s flat in London, see Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People’s War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 26.

<sup>399</sup> See, for example, Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*.



how, as asserted by Vidler, revelations of the uncanny can thus open up a number of questions about ‘the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis’.<sup>400</sup> As the boundaries of these spaces and entities appear ever more indistinct, fertile ground is created for debates about their roles and the relationships between them.

## BODIES, MINDS, AND HOMES

When Harry Atterbury recollected his experience of being buried under the rubble of his home during a V1 attack in 1944, he suffused his account with a number of visceral descriptions of the effects that such an event could have upon the human body. Following his own miraculous rescue from the ruins, for example, he recalled a macabre image:

Whether it was reality or not, I still remember seeing the head of an old lady who had lived next door lying on top of the ruins of her home and I believe detached from her body.<sup>401</sup>

His words hinted at the manner in which attacks on houses could dislocate minds and bodies as well as bricks and mortar. Not only was there a grimly obvious analogy to be drawn between the physical detachment of body parts and the dismantling of buildings; Atterbury’s precursory questioning of his own perceptions and memories also spoke to the fracturing effects that such traumatic events could have upon the psyche. As the physical walls of the dwelling came down, the minds of their inhabitants also became the subjects of concern.

The common experience of the invasive, explosive effects of total warfare on the dwelling, the body, and the psyche thus facilitated a process wherein each could be remapped onto the others. Some of the parallels that were drawn between these various elements of society were largely confined to the realm of metaphor, acting more as a rhetorical tool than as an invocation of the deeper connection between the fates of spaces and persons. However, the allegorical alignment of homes, bodies, and minds in wartime Britain was not always superficial: often, it spoke to a belief in a more productive relationship between these entities. Whilst domestic space may have been a convenient symbol for the wider impacts of war, it was also recognised that threats to the boundaries of the home could themselves have serious, tangible ramifications for citizens’ bodies

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<sup>400</sup> Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. x.

<sup>401</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 13352, Papers of Harry W. Atterbury, typescript memoir, unpaginated.

and minds as well. As scholarship on the First World War has powerfully shown, the propensity of the body to be injured, destroyed, and otherwise shaped by conflict has historically granted it a central position within wartime discourses.<sup>402</sup> This section will affirm this argument by demonstrating how the effects of enemy violence and state policies on individuals could themselves drive the shift in understandings of the home that has already been explored. An examination of how urban Britons navigated the heightened convergence of the body, the psyche, and the dwelling can thus illuminate both our understanding of why and how the home became so unsettled during the conflict, and the wider effects of this development.

One does not need to look far within the wartime archive to find one of the most obvious examples of the overlapping of buildings and bodies: the humanised edifice.<sup>403</sup> In urban centres, it was often ruins, in particular, which most commonly became invested with bodily characteristics.<sup>404</sup> The recasting of buildings in the image of the human body was not limited to the domestic abode, instead being employed to describe many different types of structure; J. M. Richards' elegiac 1942 book, *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, for example, lamented the loss of historically significant buildings across the country.<sup>405</sup> Richards clearly saw the fate of this architectural heritage as having some impact on the British national identity, but his subtitle, *A Record of Architectural Casualties*, simultaneously intimated at the way in which buildings could be portrayed in similar terms to lost individuals in wartime. This common embodiment of domestic and non-domestic sites could itself also serve as a reinforcement of the idea that homes could no longer be differentiated by their privacy or security. For instance, when John Hayes, a resident of Stratford, recalled leaving a shelter tunnel after a raid, he described an apocalyptic scene, in which 'houses, shops, public houses, were all lying in the middle of the road ... [in] one mass of destruction'.<sup>406</sup> All such sites were indistinguishable in 'death'.

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<sup>402</sup> See, for example, Jay Winter, 'The Body at War', *History and Theory*, 59.2 (2020), 303-7; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996).

<sup>403</sup> There was also an interesting parallel discourse during the postwar period which saw citizens' bodies writ large in the political process of reconstruction: see Julie Anderson, 'The Undefeated: Propaganda, Rehabilitation, and Post-war Britain', in *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media, and Shaping the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Stefan Goebel, and Ulf Schmidt (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 209-227.

<sup>404</sup> For more on contemporary presentations of ruined places, see Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>405</sup> *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties*, ed. by J. M. Richards, with notes by John Summerson (London: Architectural, 1947).

<sup>406</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 21561, John Hayes, Reel 1, 30 July 2001.

The use of biological language to describe architectural damage was, however, arguably at its most overt and poignant when used to portray dwellings that had been caught in or threatened by the raids. William Sansom, in a fictionalised account of his experiences as a firefighter during the Blitz, wrote that in this environment ‘walls and floors are forgotten ... the house is perceived as a skeleton’; William Regan, a rescue squad worker, described walking around his neighbourhood after a raid, and finding houses that looked ‘sick’; Barbara Nixon talked of damaged houses as ‘lacerated creatures patched up with sticking plaster’.<sup>407</sup> Such descriptions of war-torn homes demonstrated that a vernacular of destruction could be shared between the body and the house. On the one hand, architectural language could provide a means of reckoning with the violent effects of war on the former. It has been suggested by Mark Rawlinson that contemporary discourse on the ruination of British cities – and particularly London – often served to obscure the human costs of war by drawing attention to the aesthetic dimension of loss instead.<sup>408</sup> However, the humanising language that was applied to homes seemed in many ways to do the opposite; by mapping the body and the home onto one another, the dismembering effects of violence on citizens themselves could arguably be emphasised – albeit in a sanitised form – rather than concealed. On the other hand, the use of bodily terms to describe the impact of the conflict on homes could allow damage and destruction to be discussed in emotive terms. In this way, it could be recognised that such experiences might provoke similar emotional responses to those that attended bereavement or injury. For contemporary Britons, the mapping of injury onto architectural space was therefore a useful metaphor which provided a way of expressing the difficult emotions that attended the loss of people and places in wartime.

However, other forms of the linguistic personification of houses remind us that fears about the fragility of the body were not only paralleled by anxieties about the home’s boundaries; they were also actively fuelled and shaped by them. Vivienne Hall, for instance, reflected on the fact that she had both arrived at and moved out of her London house during a life-threatening air raid, musing that it ‘had tried to blast [her] out of itself ever since [she had] been there’.<sup>409</sup> Hall’s words endowed her home with an uncanny and malevolent form of consciousness, and hinted at the

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<sup>407</sup> William Sansom, *The Stories of William Sansom* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1963), p. 83; IWM, Department of Documents, 781, Papers of William B. Regan, manuscript fragments, p. 27; Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p. 42.

<sup>408</sup> Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 68.

<sup>409</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 181.

integral role that the domestic built environment played in wartime attacks on civilian bodies. Bombs could wound or kill citizens in a number of ways, and whilst some of them could certainly occur beyond built space – the force of the blast itself, for example, could independently cause internal organs to rupture and haemorrhage – many of the most common causes of injury or death were more directly related to the material environment.<sup>410</sup> As the Ministry of Information's 1942 book on civil defence noted, much of the 'slaughter ... was wreaked by collapsing walls and ceilings ... by flying brick and stone, [and] by swift javelins of splintered glass'.<sup>411</sup> Crush injuries were, in particular, extremely common as citizens became trapped under the ruins of buildings. A Mass Observation study that examined feelings about death in wartime found that one of the most dreaded fates was to be buried alive under the rubble, and as Lucy Noakes has shown, this fear was undoubtedly justified.<sup>412</sup> Even if one escaped the more instantaneous threats of such blunt force upon the body, such as catastrophic blood loss and dismemberment, there remained a further danger; as muscles were crushed, they could release proteins which would eventually result in renal failure.<sup>413</sup> Questions and anxieties about the integrity of the home thus clearly had implications for those about the bodies of urban wartime citizens because, quite simply, the collapse of houses presented one of the greatest threats to those bodies.

The recognition of these intertwined fates of bodies and buildings often led naturally to a shift in understandings of the home and its role in the lives of citizens. Such was the case for Rita Daniel, who wrote to BBC Radio Humberside at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hull Blitz and recalled how she and her family were caught in an air raid shelter blast. The incident resulted in the paralysation and eventual death of her mother, who was crushed under the debris. Ironically, Daniel noted, if they had stayed in their house they might have been safe, as it suffered only broken windows. Even so, this showcase of the destructive effects of falling rubble on the human body corrupted the family's understanding of home by underlining the fragility of bricks-and-mortar spaces in the face of such threats. Unable to return to their house anyway owing to an unexploded bomb, the family thereafter moved into a houseboat in Hessle, 'vowing never to sleep in a building

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<sup>410</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 142.

<sup>411</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line, 1940-41: The Official Story of Civil Defence in Britain* (London: HMSO, 1942), p. 12.

<sup>412</sup> MOA, FR 1315, 'Death and the Supernatural', 18 June 1942, p. 8.

<sup>413</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 143.

... again'.<sup>414</sup> Daniel's recollection serves as a reminder that the threat of the built environment to human bodies was, of course, not limited to domestic sites. Beyond the more traditional air raid shelter, one need only look to one of the most poignant disasters of the British home front – the Balham tube station collapse, which resulted in the deaths of almost seventy people – to see how other sites of shelter could also be inverted into death traps by aerial warfare.<sup>415</sup> Such events could clearly make public spaces feel unsafe and reshape the way in which these sites were thought about. However, places like air raid shelters and tube stations were notably already imbued with dangerous and unfamiliar characteristics. Whilst they might have been overlain with a veneer of safety, either by citizens seeking assurance or by state actors trying to maintain morale, providing evidence of their fallibility did not tend to challenge any deeply rooted or long extant spatial imaginaries. As Daniel's experience reveals, however, their close relation to home – both as wartime proxies for this space, and as places cast from the same materials – meant that this fragility *could* challenge visions of home. Fears about the threat posed by the built environment in general to human bodies thus came to be funnelled, amplified, and expressed through the more specific site of home. For Daniel's family, for example, the attack on the air raid shelter acted to undermine the idea that home was a safe space in which to carry out activities that left the body particularly vulnerable, such as sleeping.

As Noakes has emphasised, in order for the government to manufacture and maintain consent for the continued prosecution of the war, it needed citizens to believe that the state would protect them as far as possible from the violent effects of the conflict.<sup>416</sup> The potential weaponisation of the site where citizens spent much of their day-to-day lives was, as such, a significant area of concern for the state as well as individual Britons. This was particularly true given the high numbers of civilians who – whether because they disliked outdoor or communal shelters, fatalistically believed that nowhere was safe, or continued to invest the home with some vestige of safety – chose to stay in their houses during raids.<sup>417</sup> Whilst it was emphasised that there

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<sup>414</sup> HHC, C DMX/242/4, File of letters, diary extracts and poems containing reminiscences of Hull in the blitz, 1939-1942, R. T. Daniel to Tom Houlton, 15 May 1991.

<sup>415</sup> Allport, *Britain at Bay*, p. 354.

<sup>416</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 7.

<sup>417</sup> In November 1940, a census of shelter use estimated that circa 40% of Londoners were using shelters – whether they were in the underground, or using surface or domestic (mostly Anderson) shelters. Allowing for those who were working, or engaged in war duties, Tom Harrison estimated that this left around half of civilians sheltering at

was no sure way of guarding against a direct hit, a number of measures were thus introduced in order to protect occupants against falling debris and rubble.<sup>418</sup> Some of the policies which aimed to defang the material fabric of dwelling spaces have already been noted, such as the advice that woodwork should be painted with lime to prevent the spread of fire, and that householders should establish refuge rooms if they intended to shelter at home. Other policies which dealt with the threat posed by the built environment included recommending that householders turn their gas supply off during air raids, and that they cover their windows with paste – or better yet, replace them with a ‘flexible glass substitute’ – so as to prevent them from shattering and flying inwards.<sup>419</sup>

However, perhaps the most ambitious prong in the drive to uncouple the fates of buildings and bodies was the indoor shelter, the most common of which was popularly known as the ‘Morrison shelter’ after Herbert Morrison, the Minister of Home Security who oversaw their production and supply.<sup>420</sup> In dense urban areas especially, where many households did not have a garden in which to erect an Anderson shelter, Morrisons were a popular form of at-home shelter.<sup>421</sup> Widely distributed from March 1941, they were free to families with yearly incomes of less than £350 – or slightly more if the family had more than two children – and were otherwise available to buy for just over £7.<sup>422</sup> Two adults and one or two children could squeeze into the Morrison, which was formed of a strong steel frame, flat top, mesh sides, and a mattress ‘floor’.<sup>423</sup> Using this shelter, residents could sleep in the warmth and dryness of their own home, and the flat top design even allowed the Morrison to act as a table and thus to become part of the domestic furniture.<sup>424</sup> Of course, these structures were still no guarantee of bodily safety, for although they certainly mitigated the risks of being crushed, they could not remove it entirely.<sup>425</sup> They also provided little

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home. See Tom Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1976]) p. 111; Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p. 142.

<sup>418</sup> Ministry of Home Security, *Shelter at Home* (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 3.

<sup>419</sup> IWM, Department of Art, PST 13872, ‘In An Air Raid ... If You Are At Home’, n.d.; Ministry of Home Security, *Shelter at Home*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>420</sup> Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle*, p. 514. There were a few other indoor shelter types available, including commercially made steel framed table shelters, and home-made timber frameworks following a Ministry of Home Security design. See Ministry of Home Security, *Shelter at Home*.

<sup>421</sup> Herbert Morrison, *Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography* (London: Odhams, 1960), p. 186.

<sup>422</sup> ‘New Indoor Shelters’, *The Times*, 31 March 1941; Stephen Wade, *Air-Raid Shelters of World War II: Family Stories of Survival in the Blitz* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011), p. 25.

<sup>423</sup> Ministry of Home Security, *Air Raids: What You Must Know, What You Must Do* (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 25.

<sup>424</sup> Gardiner, *The Blitz*, p. 61.

<sup>425</sup> There were numerous reports of the effectiveness of Morrison shelters in protecting citizens sheltering at home. See, for example, ‘Lives Saved By Table Shelters’, *The Times*, 26 May 1942; ‘“Morrison’s” Life-Savers’, *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 May 1942. Morrisons proved to be particularly effective during the V-weapons raids of 1944-45, as they

in the way of lateral protection from flying debris.<sup>426</sup> In other areas, the risks of harm were even increased; Morrison himself would later note that indoor shelters were more likely to expose citizens to the dangers of fire than other shelter options.<sup>427</sup> Crucially, however, whilst outdoor shelters like the Anderson – or, indeed, communal surface or deep shelters – entailed removing the body from the home in order to protect it, Morrison shelters offered a way of preserving some of the comforts of home whilst shielding inhabitants from the latent dangers of this space.

Fears about the integrity of the home certainly gave form and direction to those about the body. However, protective tools such as indoor shelters exemplify how, in turn, worries about the body lay at the heart of official attempts to reorganise the material space of home. In this way, it is possible to see how anxieties around the body and the home flowed into and shaped one another. In many ways, the interaction of the two entities performed a soothing role: by protecting the body, for example, indoor shelters seemed in many ways to restabilise the home by allowing it to continue performing its traditional role in the lives of citizens.<sup>428</sup> Yet, at the same time, they were inherently involved in the process of altering this space. Although table shelters were, for example, intended to perform a domestic role during the all-clear, many recollections focus on the way in which these large and unsightly cages instead got in the way of home life.<sup>429</sup> Moreover, the aura of stability provided by such shelters was itself fragile and elastic; when a warning was sounded, it was of course subject to a sudden, urgent contraction, leaving the home that lay beyond the shelter dangerous again.<sup>430</sup> Latent anxieties about the home, in such circumstances, were often catalysed rather than calmed.

However, the physical body was not the only subject of such concern: the more intangible minds of Britons, too, were frequently and anxiously connected to the disrupted domestic sphere. As noted in Chapter 1, the psychological effects of life under fire had long been a focal point for

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provided an easily accessible option for shelter when there was very little warning of an impending raid. See, for example, Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 130. However, as previously noted, official guidance was careful to emphasise the impossibility of guaranteeing survival in the face of air raids. In tests of the effectiveness of the indoor shelter, there were still some instances of death, and cases of Morrison shelter fatalities were still reported on during the war. See Ministry of Home Security, *Shelter at Home*, p. 3; 'Three Killed in Indoor Shelter', *Dundee Courier*, 13 March 1944.

<sup>426</sup> O'Brien, *Civil Defence*, p. 527.

<sup>427</sup> Morrison, *An Autobiography*, p. 186.

<sup>428</sup> Sansom, *The Blitz*, p. 134.

<sup>429</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 34419, Audrey Parsons, Reel 1, April 2012.

<sup>430</sup> Siddall, *Safe As Houses*, p. 87.

anxieties about total warfare. However, whilst the tenor of Britons' responses to the chaotic and violent aspects of this experience have been hotly debated by historians, it is largely accepted that widespread fears about the potential for mass hysteria among civilians proved to be unfounded.<sup>431</sup> Nevertheless, as one contemporary psychologist acknowledged, the fortitude that was displayed in response to the death and destruction incurred in British cities during the war signalled 'a certain amount of repression, by social attitudes or by the ego-ideal'.<sup>432</sup> As Lucy Noakes warns us, the successful maintenance of composure in the face of distressing or difficult events should not be confused with a lack of feeling or impact.<sup>433</sup>

Indeed, as the case of Harry Atterbury exemplifies, civilians did not have to descend into out-and-out panic in order to be shaken and disturbed by wartime experiences such as those which attended the disrupted home. His testimony makes clear that the intermingling of bodies and buildings in air raids created an environment in which one could not be sure what was real and what was not. This slippery grasp of reality could – by thus rendering the lines between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known and the unknown, so fragile – provoke distress. This was most plainly revealed by Atterbury's haunting, but perhaps hallucinogenic, recollection of his decapitated neighbour. However, another of his vignettes further demonstrated how the inability to disentangle that which was artificial from that which was real, alive, or authentic could unsettle and upset:

[A] couple of the rescuers removed the boots from two legs that were protruding from the chaos of broken bricks with the intention of putting them on me. I did not know the legs were artificial and belonged to a man who had still not been recovered ... knowledge that would not have made the situation any easier for me.<sup>434</sup>

By thus imbuing the buried man's prosthetics with an uncanny vitality, Atterbury demonstrated that such a substitution of bodies and objects, which was both provoked by the destruction of the domestic built environment and staged within its remains, could work to destabilise other

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<sup>431</sup> Mackay, *Half the Battle*, pp. 3-9.

<sup>432</sup> P. E. Vernon, 'Psychological Effects of Air-Raids', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 36 (1941), 457-476, p. 460.

<sup>433</sup> Lucy Noakes, 'Gender, Grief and Bereavement in Second World War Britain', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 8.1 (2015), 72-85, pp. 83-84.

<sup>434</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 13352, Papers of Harry W. Atterbury, typescript memoir, unpaginated.



boundaries. In the ruins of Atterbury's house, it is not only the interior and exterior which seem to bleed into one another; here, the lines between life and death, and the real and the unreal, also seemed to wear particularly thin.

Whether physically collapsed, or simply made more obviously porous, the interruption of boundaries around the home thus had clear consequences for the bodies and minds of urban citizens. For citizens and state alike, this link between the fates of dwelling and the person was a source of anxiety, leading not only to changing understandings of domestic space, but also to concerted attempts to remake this site in order to recover its association with safety.

### HOME AS NATION, NATION AS HOME

In October 1940, the Conservative MP for Chislehurst, Sir Waldron Smithers, authored a memorandum on the morale of Londoners who had been made homeless by enemy bombing. In it, he raised a number of concerns about the care of these citizens, noting their difficulty both in finding shelter and in securing help with the salvage of their belongings. For Smithers, this was a worrying situation. However, this was not merely – and not even primarily – because those who had found themselves expelled from their homes had been left in potentially unsafe and exposed conditions; rather, it was because they had been left vulnerable to the machinations of communists. The Communist Party, Smithers wrote, were stepping into the space left by the absent state, 'offering practical help with their propaganda' and promoting dangerously anti-war views. Homeless women, he alleged, were particular targets of the communists, who encouraged them to consider the fact that many German women were facing the same trials and told them that the war was in fact 'being waged to destroy the working classes'.<sup>435</sup> Although the Communist Party of Great Britain was indeed strongly opposed to the war prior to the Soviets' entry on the allied side in 1941 – and certainly tried to draw political capital from citizens' dissatisfactions – Smithers' own stridently anti-Communist views undoubtedly account for much of the anxiety in his perceptions of this propaganda campaign.<sup>436</sup> Moreover, it is worth noting that Smithers was, by all accounts, on the extreme right wing of the Conservative party, and his often eccentric and reactionary

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<sup>435</sup> TNA, HO 199/419, Waldron Smithers, 'The effect of enemy bombing on the morale of the homeless in London and its neighbouring boroughs', 23 October 1940.

<sup>436</sup> Angus Calder, *The People's War*, p. 58; Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle*, pp. 490-491.

political opinions were ‘seldom taken seriously’ even by his own colleagues.<sup>437</sup> However, his comments on the susceptibility of those who had lost the protections of their homes nevertheless reflected a current of fear that existed at the centre of British politics and society as well as at the fringe; one which identified the destabilised home as a potential weak point in the armour of the nation.

Smithers’ observations indicate how anxieties about the nation and the home – just like those of the home and the body – did not simply exist in parallel, but instead intersected with and impacted on one another. This interplay between home and nation was, in many ways, made simpler by the similarities in their conceptual construction. Like the home, the nation is an entity which evades simple definition; just as home and house are not always absolutely aligned, neither are nations and states. Broadly, however, whilst the nation was once considered to be the ‘determinate product of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion’, most modern definitions of this entity now instead tend to follow – at least in essence – the words of Benedict Anderson.<sup>438</sup> By famously describing the nation as an ‘imagined community’, Anderson emphasised that this was not an innate or inevitable entity that just *was*: rather, it was one which had to be actively thought into being.<sup>439</sup> Further to this, Anderson argued that such a community was inherently ‘limited’. Whilst the boundaries of the nation might not necessarily be static, they were undeniably finite: ‘no nation imagines itself [to be] coterminous with mankind’.<sup>440</sup> Thus, although the imagined community of a nation might be constructed through references to the ties that bind a group together – be that a shared language, culture, history, or blood – it is also implicitly shaped by ‘what it is not’.<sup>441</sup> As Peter Sahlins has put it, ‘imagining oneself a member of a community or nation [means] perceiving a significant difference between oneself and the other

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<sup>437</sup> Iain Wilton, “‘Continuous Abuse’ or ‘a Unanimous Blessing’? Reassessing the Conservative Party’s Stance on the 1951 Festival of Britain”, *Contemporary British History*, 31.4 (2017), 546-567, p. 557.

<sup>438</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 4; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Anderson’s broader arguments about the origins and nature of nationalism(s) have been the subject of some significant critique since its original publication in 1983. However, the notion of the ‘imagined community’ has continued to be an important scholarly touchstone within the field. See Max Bergholz, ‘Thinking the Nation’, *American Historical Review*, 123.2 (2018), 518-528; Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 4-6; George M. Wilson, ‘Imagined Communities’, *American Historical Review*, 90.4 (1985), 903-904.

<sup>439</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>441</sup> Linda Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness: An Argument’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31.4 (1992), 309-329, p. 311.

across the boundary'.<sup>442</sup> The fact that it is easier to draw such lines in theory than in practice, however, makes this a troubled process. This much was certainly true in Second World War Britain, for as scholars such as Sonya Rose and Wendy Webster have emphasised, the quest to delineate the borders the British wartime nation usually served only to highlight the ambiguity of its margins.<sup>443</sup>

The process of imagining the nation, then, is not so very different from the process of imagining the home. Indeed, they are sometimes one and the same; nations, after all, are frequently thought of as conceptual spaces where members of a particular community are at home. Even at the specific scale of the dwelling, however, the similarities are clear. In both cases, there is a concerted attempt to draw a within and a without – and a mutual anxiety when the impossibility of doing so is realised. Moreover, each draws upon similar themes in order to shape themselves: family, community, and belonging all loom large in constructions of both nation and dwelling. Yet, as the geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling remind us, these two scales are not merely bound together by similarity; instead, each acts as a theatre for the other.<sup>444</sup> Anxieties about nation are articulated and contested in the dwelling, and in turn, domestic questions are reproduced and negotiated at the national level. This process, as it occurred in Second World War Britain, will be examined here. Wartime anxieties about the boundaries of the domestic sphere were, it will be argued, profoundly shaped by their interactions with concerns about the integrity of the nation. Exploring this interplay therefore enhances our image of the home at war, unveiling further the undercurrents that influenced urban Britons' understanding and experience of home.

We can return again to the work of Elizabeth Bowen for a useful contemporary example of the home being used as a prism through which the questions and anxieties of the wartime nation could be articulated and negotiated. In her 1949 novel, *The Heat of the Day*, for instance, homes are active participants in the discourses of national identity and patriotism, working not only as stages and symbols, but also as catalysts.<sup>445</sup> This is especially true in the case of Robert Kelway – the protagonist Stella's lover – who is gradually revealed to have been working as a spy for the

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<sup>442</sup> Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>443</sup> Rose, *Which People's War*; Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945-64* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

<sup>444</sup> Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 142.

<sup>445</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape, 1949).

Nazis. Domestic space plays a number of roles both in Kelway's motivation, and in his practice, of treason. His resistance to the stifling, authoritarian environment of his childhood home, for example, is presented as one of the primary reasons behind his rejection of national fealty (although, as Kristine Miller notes, his attempt to act as a free agent is misguided, leading him to support 'the very fascism he despises').<sup>446</sup> Meanwhile, Stella's rented London flat is a space which harbours, enables, and obscures Kelway's activities as a fifth columnist. When he finally confesses his actions to Stella, he justifies them by describing the private domestic environment as a place which has primacy over the nation: 'What country have you and I beyond this room?'<sup>447</sup> Bowen's novel thus explicitly considered the more uneasy elements of the convergence of home and nation. She again invoked the uncanny to characterise this sphere, presenting it as a worryingly shadowy, liminal space which is both a vulnerable pressure point – a weak point of access to the national interior – and a place from which danger can itself spring, with potentially serious ramifications for the wider nation.

This fixation with private homes as unknown spaces which might harbour or produce dangers to the nation was not, however, limited to the pages of fictional texts. Anxieties around the presence of immigrant 'aliens' in Britain, for example, often coalesced around and were expressed through domestic spaces.<sup>448</sup> The dwelling formed a central pillar of attempts to map and track the location and movements of these migrants, the majority of whom were required to register themselves and their address with the local police station.<sup>449</sup> They faced a number of restrictions on their movements beyond the home – if they wished to spend a night or longer away from their primary place of residence, for instance, both they and their host had to notify the police in the

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<sup>446</sup> Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 46.

<sup>447</sup> Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, p. 258.

<sup>448</sup> For more on the history of anti-alienism in wartime British society prior to the 1939-1945 conflict discussed here, see Panikos Panayi, *Enemy in our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991); Daniela L. Caglioti, 'Subjects, Citizens, and Aliens in a Time of Upheaval: Naturalizing and Denaturalizing in Europe during the First World War', *Journal of Modern History*, 89.3 (2017), 495-530. For more on the ways in which anti-alien sentiment was channelled through the issue of property rights (including those which attended houses), see Daniela L. Caglioti, 'Property Rights in Time of War: Sequestration and Liquidation of Enemy Aliens' Assets in Western Europe during the First World War', *Journal of Modern European History*, 12.4 (2014), 523-545.

<sup>449</sup> 'Aliens' in Britain at the outbreak of war were subject to a complex system of categorisation, which determined whether they would be interned, subjected to restrictions, or allowed to remain at liberty. This designation was temporally inconsistent, with some foreign nationals starting the war in one of the latter two categories, and later being interned regardless. For more on the categorisation of 'aliens' during the Second World War, see Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others* (Harlow: Longman, 1994), pp. 101-105.

reception area as well.<sup>450</sup> The policing of these measures was strict, with charges even occasionally levied against individuals who left their homes for reasons such as seeking shelter during air raids.<sup>451</sup> However, even such an austere system could not fully assuage concerns about the movements of ‘aliens’, as no plausible amount of mapping and tracking could make all homes completely knowable spaces. This anxious preoccupation was reflected in the case of a Hull woman who was fined in 1940 for hosting an ‘alien’ seaman overnight without registering his presence. ‘It is bad enough having aliens ashore when we don’t want them’, commented the overseeing magistrate, ‘but it’s still worse having them tucked away in people’s homes.’<sup>452</sup> Despite the state’s best efforts to illuminate these places, the insidious threat of the *unheimlich* within the *heimlich* remained.

Fears about the vulnerability of the home were also marked in coverage of immigrants when they were fully interned, a process which affected thousands of ‘aliens’ in the first few years of the war. Reporters tended to specifically note the use of British homes for accommodation, and often did so in language heavily weighted with implications of occupation and replacement. Commenting on the use of a north-western housing estate as an internment camp for 800 ‘enemy aliens’, one *Daily Mail* reporter noted that ‘if war had not come [the housing estate] would have provided homes for scores of working men and their families’.<sup>453</sup> The idea that immigrants were an invasive and displacing force – whether intentionally or not – was also very much on show in smaller scale cases of requisitioning. The eviction of British nationals from blocks of flats in Fulham in 1940 and 1941 so that they could be used instead to house refugees from Gibraltar, for example, caused consternation among the residents and was reported on in a number of press outlets.<sup>454</sup> One of the evicted Britons, Maurice Headlam, wrote to *The Times* on more than one occasion decrying the removal of sitting tenants, and detailing his belief that the decision to house refugees in places already occupied by citizens was part of a broader process of preferential treatment.<sup>455</sup> Such reactions to the presence of migrants were not limited to the early years of the war, when invasion fears stoked anti-alienism particularly strongly. In the 1945 election, for example, the issues of

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<sup>450</sup> ‘Curfew for All Aliens’, *The Times*, 30 May 1940.

<sup>451</sup> ‘Alien in Air Raid Shelter’, *The Times*, 10 July 1940.

<sup>452</sup> ‘Hull Woman Fined on Aliens Charge’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 June 1940.

<sup>453</sup> Daily Mail Reporter, ‘Housing Estate is Aliens’ Camp’, *Daily Mail*, 22 May 1940.

<sup>454</sup> For example, see ‘Homes for Refugees from Gibraltar’, *The Times*, 6 August 1940; ‘Fewer Flats for Refugees’, *Daily Mail*, 19 June 1941.

<sup>455</sup> Maurice Headlam, ‘Commandeered Flats’, *The Times*, 23 May 1941; Maurice Headlam, ‘Flats for Refugees’, *The Times*, 18 June 1941.

refugees and housing again came to be the subject of an ‘emotive conflation’, with migrant groups being portrayed by some as a threat to the domestic rights of ‘true’ British citizens.<sup>456</sup>

It is worth noting that the uneasy reactions to refugees and foreigners were not always clear-cut: even alongside resistance to their presence, there was often at least an outward claim of sympathy towards those who had fled persecutive regimes and conflict in mainland Europe. Headlam, for his part, was keen to stress that he did not believe the Gibraltarian refugees to be undeserving of empathy or assistance; rather he simply rejected what he perceived as their predominance over British civilians, whom he felt should be the true priority. Instead, he suggested, refugees could be put up in the ‘notorious’ empty houses of London, where they would not be infringing on the rights of settled citizens.<sup>457</sup> It is also important to note that the press played no small part in fanning the flames of the furore over ‘aliens’ and fifth columnists, and that the strength of anti-alien sentiment which existed in some wings of this establishment was not typically reflected in wider society.<sup>458</sup> However, viewing the interplay of the ‘foreign’ and the British through the lens of domestic space demonstrates how the presence or arrival of the ‘other’ could provoke visible anxiety even among those were – or at least claimed to be – sympathetic. Again, it is possible to see how anxieties about different sets of boundaries flowed into and impacted one another. Concerns about the boundaries of the dwelling gave foment to anxieties about the integrity of the wartime nation; in particular, its potential to act as a harbour for nefarious entities was clearly a source of concern for the state. Attempts to mediate this threat in many ways only served to underline the shadowy credentials of domestic spaces which caused such concerns in the first place. In turn, questions that attended the project of nation-imagining were clearly reproduced and contested within the space of the individual dwelling: who belonged in this space, and who did not? Who should reap the benefits of belonging? As the nation thus came to be transposed directly onto the home, real or perceived invasions of this space seemed that much more significant and consequential.

That the home provided such an apposite theatre for these concerns to play out was not, however, due only to the elastic natures of home and nation, which allowed for such easy

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<sup>456</sup> Graham D. Macklin, “‘A Quite Natural and Moderate Defensive Feeling’? The 1945 Hampstead “Anti-Alien” Petition’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 37.3 (2003), 277-300, p. 280.

<sup>457</sup> Maurice Headlam, ‘Flats for Refugees’, *The Times*, 18 June 1941.

<sup>458</sup> See, for example, Macklin, “‘A Quite Natural and Moderate Defensive Feeling’?”.

transposition and metaphorisation. It also owed much to the fact that the home had long occupied an important place within Britons' imagination of themselves. Deborah Cohen has suggested that '[i]n no other country was domesticity so celebrated and studiously cultivated' as it was in Britain.<sup>459</sup> As Behlmer observes, British claims to a monopoly on domestic attachment were, in fact, rather suspect: house-pride was a feature of many other European countries beyond just the British Isles. However, of note here is the fact that a love for home and the process of home-making had nevertheless been *seen* since at least the nineteenth-century as an intrinsic – and, indeed, unique – part of the national psyche.<sup>460</sup> More than just a key site within which Britishness was performed or expressed, however, this was a space which was seen as integral to the *production* of national identity. As a result, threats to this space were ripe for construction as threats to the very character and existence of the British nation. In a 1924 speech to the Royal Society of St. George, an organisation notably concerned with the preservation of 'Englishness', the Labour politician – and later premier – Stanley Baldwin had exemplified such sentiments when he argued that:

[The] love of home, one of the strongest features of our race ... is that that makes our race seek its new home in the Dominions overseas ... It is that power of making homes, almost peculiar to our people, and it is one of the sources of their greatness.<sup>461</sup>

Baldwin – unsurprisingly, given the nature of his audience – was focused on the English context, but his comments echoed those of others who were somewhat less exclusive of the other constituent countries in Britain. King George V, for example, had not distinguished between the different nations in the union when he declared in 1910 that:

The foundations of the national glory are set in the homes of the people. They will only remain unshaken while the family life of our race and nation is strong, simple, and pure.<sup>462</sup>

Baldwin and the king's comments, whilst deviating slightly in their geographic emphasis, each demonstrated how the home had come to be clearly identified as a root of national – and by

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<sup>459</sup> Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. x.

<sup>460</sup> Behlmer, *Friends of the Family*, p. 6, 16-17.

<sup>461</sup> Stanley Baldwin, *On England and Other Addresses* (London: Phillip Allan, 1926), p. 8. For more on the Royal Society of St. George, see Lesley Clare Robinson, 'Englishness in England and the "Near Diaspora": Organisation, Influence and Expression, 1880s-1970s' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ulster, 2014).

<sup>462</sup> 'The King on Home Life', *Hull Daily Mail*, 9 July 1910.

extension, imperial – greatness. The natural corollary of positioning home in this way was that this space became invested with the responsibility for the fates of these larger scales. The implied antithesis of the king’s words, then, hung heavy in the air: if the domestic lives of the British were shaken, so too would all that had flowered from this environment.

It is notable, then, that both men’s speeches were set against a backdrop of concern about Britain’s place in the world. As homes were thus understood as outposts of state or national power in the empire, the gradual slip of Britain’s control over her colonial holdings meant that this institution naturally came under the microscope.<sup>463</sup> The result, as the above quotations show, was often a redoubled focus on the goings-on of the domestic interior, manifesting in increased handwringing about the sanctity and character of this space. Come the beginnings of the Second World War in Britain, this milieu of imperial anxiety was still very much in force, and there were certainly those who implicitly or explicitly connected their fears about the impact of the war on the home to the broader questions of empire and national ‘greatness’.<sup>464</sup> However, this positioning of dwelling space – as a central source of Britishness, as an indicator of the health of the nation, and as a key factor in the achievement of national aims – also ensured that it would be a site of concern with regards to more particular wartime issues as well. Whilst the home may have continued to be linked to doubts about Britain’s ability to project her power abroad, it also came to frame fears about the more immediate ability of the nation to survive an attack on its core in the British Isles.

In *Front Line*, an official account of the British experiences of aerial attack in 1940 and 1941, the notion that the nation’s character was contained within individual homes was explicitly detailed. In one image a block of flats is shown, its outer walls having been ripped away by a bomb to expose a cross-section of living spaces within. The caption evocatively reads: ‘THE BLITZ WAS AIMED AT THE PEOPLE’.<sup>465</sup> The contemporary understanding that the home thus had an especially significant role to play in the protection and survival of the nation was also one which was regularly reinforced by the wartime state. We have already seen, for example, how civil defence measures such as the blackout blurred the lines of nation and home by emphasising how private

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<sup>463</sup> For more on the positionings of imperial homes as outposts of national power, see Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, pp. 143-159.

<sup>464</sup> See, for example, Bishop Pollock, ‘Home’, *The Times*, 4 October 1942.

<sup>465</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, p. 24.



actions could impact upon the wider community. In *Front Line*, this rhetoric was again at the surface, with the actions of citizens within their homes being a key focal point in its imaging of a community stoically carrying on in the midst of war.

However, the casting of homes in such an important role was a process fraught with risk. Although the state was clearly keen to harness citizens' emotional connections to their own homes – to transmute fear and anxiety into a 'desire to do something' – it nevertheless had to be careful not to imbue this space with too much importance.<sup>466</sup> For, as the government itself was sure to emphasise, it was utterly impossible to guarantee the survival or integrity of these individual homes.<sup>467</sup> These spaces could be destroyed, damaged, or commandeered; or, as we have seen, altered and distorted in more intangible ways. As Jenny Hartley has written, the home may have been a symbol of 'what must be defended and protected', but the fact that it had been subject to such alterations made this position a difficult one.<sup>468</sup> As well as rendering the dwelling as a microcosmic version of the nation, presentations of the wartime home therefore also worked to expand the borders of this space outwards as well. Measures such as the anti-aircraft defences, for example, were described as forming a 'roof over Britain', conjuring a picture of the nation as a home, and the community within it as a family.<sup>469</sup> Portraying the nation as a dwelling space in its own right in this way offered the possibility of limiting the impact of individual losses by reassuring citizens that their 'true' home remained strong and intact.

It is clear that the state actively participated in an ambiguous construction of home, at once emphasising the value of individual dwellings, and dissolving them within the broader nation. However, whilst understandings of the boundaries of the home were thus undoubtedly cultivated and manufactured in the upper echelons of British society, this was not only an elite construction. As scholars concerned with the myth-making process have reminded us, the grand narratives of the British home front were often highly aspirational in nature.<sup>470</sup> For some Britons, this conceptualisation of the home as a place ultimately subordinate to the nation was a source of comfort. Tapping into other mythic currents through its emphasis on stoicism, duty, and the

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<sup>466</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, p. 127.

<sup>467</sup> Ministry of Home Security, *Shelter at Home*, p. 3.

<sup>468</sup> Hartley, *Millions Like Us*, p. 54.

<sup>469</sup> Ministry of Information, *Roof Over Britain: The Official Story of Britain's Anti-Aircraft Defences 1939-1942* (London: HMSO, 1943).

<sup>470</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It*, pp. 8-9.

common good, it promised not only that the alterations to citizens' homes were worthwhile in the name of a higher good, but that such a sacrifice would itself ensure that the spirit of this space would survive.

This was a powerful image. For some Britons, the rhetoric of nation as home, or nation over dwelling, resulted in the attachment to their own home being largely subsumed, at least in their outward proclamations. One Mass Observer, in his reply to the October 1942 directive, detailed this prioritisation of the nation when he stated that:

I cannot say that [my own] home would be a motive foremost in my mind if I went to fight. I should be prepared to die more consciously for Christian civilisation and for the institution of home and family generally than for my particular home and family.<sup>471</sup>

For this Mass Observer, home was not meaningless – indeed, elsewhere in his response, he wrote at length about his desire to have a place to belong, and a place to which he could return. Yet, whilst he was prepared to 'give up something to conserve' this private space, he claimed to be willing to sacrifice it entirely in the name of British society and values, and a more broadly defined national home.<sup>472</sup>

This remapping of home and nation was not, however, accepted by all. Instead, following in the words of Blunt and Dowling (who remind us that domestic spaces host the contestation as well as the reproduction of national discourses), many Britons responded to this conflation in a more ambiguous fashion. Another Mass Observer, for example, rebuffed the alignment of nation and home in no uncertain terms, stating: 'My home demands my first loyalty. To me it comes before my job, my country, the Empire or anything else at all.'<sup>473</sup> The boundaries of home, for this respondent, thus clung resolutely to the dwelling place. Whilst the accepted mode of wartime citizenship was one which demanded the prioritisation of the communal over the individual, home here acted as a medium for this demand to be tempered or rejected.

Such complete dismissals of the idea of nation as home were, nevertheless, relatively rare. More common were those who instead expressed feelings of unease and dissonance at this elision of spaces and concepts. For example, it is clear that some found the close connection between home

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<sup>471</sup> MOA, DR 2841, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> MOA, DR 2734, Response to October 1942 Directive.

and nation to be inherently problematised by the fact that nation and state were similarly hard to disentangle from one another. It was recognised that the state posed its own challenge to the boundaries of the home, an issue which was brought to the surface during the war as the state developed greater influence over the Britons' interior lives. In another response to the October 1942 directive, it was made evident how a concern over the state's ability to disrupt the home could prevent the boundaries of home being expanded to align with the nation: 'Home means almost everything to me. I would resist entry by troops in an invasion whether British, Allied, or Enemy.'<sup>474</sup> Whilst British forces could not be involved in an 'invasion' of the country in the same way that enemy troops could be, such comments recognised that the circumstances of war *had* empowered them to enter and occupy individual homes – not least through measures like requisitioning. In such circumstances, the conflation of nation and home appeared a little weaker; rather than seeing only the mutual threat from enemy powers, citizens' protective instincts were here instead refocused on the threats that came from within their own national community as well.

An exploration of the interaction of home with broader geographical scales thus reveals the centrality of the national to constructions of the domestic in wartime Britain. Unease about the home often flowed directly from national discourses, with concerns about identity, citizenship, and belonging frequently being reproduced in the theatre of the dwelling. However, an inverse process was also at play; as the varied responses of citizens to the alignment of nation and home illustrate, personal feelings about the home could also come to shape Britons' relationship with the nation.

## CONCLUSION

The transgression of boundaries both within and around domestic space has often been a source of fascination in modern society. As Christine McCarthy has noted, although such boundaries are superficially thought of as solid and enclosing, they are often simultaneously cast as 'point[s] of transit' which can both transport inhabitants of the interior to the places that lie beyond it, and perhaps import something of the outside into the enclosed space in return. McCarthy cites, for example, the iconic literary images of C. S. Lewis' magical wardrobe and Lewis Carroll's looking

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<sup>474</sup> MOA, DR 3225, Response to October 1942 Directive.

glass, both of which respectively acted as interfaces between the familiar, known world and the magical, sometimes surreal worlds of Narnia and Wonderland.<sup>475</sup> However, as we have seen, war could make the transitive qualities of domestic boundaries fearful rather than fantastical. Although the boundaries of the home have also been the subject of considerable concern in times of peace, these anxieties were undoubtedly amplified and made more visible by the context of conflict.

The replies to Mass Observation's October 1942 question – 'what does HOME mean to you?' – exemplify this fact, demonstrating how the disruptive effects of the war on the home were the subject of an anxious preoccupation for many Britons. In twentieth-century Britain, this was a space deeply associated with the ideals of privacy, autonomy, and safety, all of which were thrown into disarray by the exigencies of the conflict. As the war created or revealed the home as a space which thus struggled to live up to the ideals with which it was so intimately linked, some citizens found their understanding of home to be fundamentally changed. For the poet George Macbeth, reflecting in his 1987 autobiography on his experiences in the raids on Sheffield in late 1941, this was a permanent and traumatic shift:

It was one thing to go out and fight, and come back to a safe home for tea ... It was another to have the very core of safety torn out and thrown away, and shown to be vulnerable like the skin of one's own body. Until that night in December 1940, home had been synonymous with safety. It would never be so again.<sup>476</sup>

Yet, the October 1942 directive further revealed how – even for those whose experiences seemed to fundamentally undermine such notions – the traditional vision of home remained a potent one. The anxieties about the home's vulnerability or liminality were, at their heart, often predicated on a desire to maintain, return to, or manifest this ideal. Even when absent or altered, the idea of home thus remained an important emotional and political touchstone.

Exploring the physical and conceptual interactions between home and other scales, such as the nation and the body, demonstrates the power of this touchstone in shaping other debates. In turn, the interplay between home and these other entities worked to foster citizens' fears about the fate of the dwelling by highlighting that alterations to this space had existential consequences for both individual Britons and the British at large. The recognition of this link itself also led to

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<sup>475</sup> Christine McCarthy, 'Toward a Definition of Interiority', *Space and Culture*, 8.2 (2005), 112–125, p. 115.

<sup>476</sup> Macbeth, *A Child of the War*, p. 58.

attempts to rework the material and imaginative space of home, as both citizen and state attempted to ward against the dangerous or unfamiliar properties of domestic space whilst preserving its more benevolent aspects.

The home can thus act as a prism, illuminating not only the way in which periods of war tend to see renewed efforts to codify borders and boundaries, but also how conflict simultaneously and paradoxically works to demonstrate instead their shifting nature. It is unsurprising that reckoning with such a process was an anxious experience for most Britons; at a time when many sought the stability and surety of known things, revelations of the uncanny and the unfamiliar were usually as unwelcome as they were inevitable. As we have seen, an examination of how urban Britons negotiated this unfixity within their dwelling spaces can help us to understand how homes were shaped by the wartime experience. Perhaps even more importantly, however, exploring the responses to the altered domestic sphere allows us to consider the reverse: how the home came to impact upon the broader understanding of what it meant to be a citizen in wartime Britain.

## Chapter Three

### *Coping & Losing*

When Esther Baker, a young housewife living in Hull, returned home from the shelter after a raid in 1941, she found a sight which caused her to ‘burst into tears on the spot’. Doors had been ripped off, windows blown in, and the interior was coated in a thick layer of oily soot; the flat which Baker shared with her husband had been the victim of a nearby bomb blast. The shock of finding her home in such a state placed Baker into a ‘daze’ from which she only emerged after being found by her neighbour, who plied her with ‘the standard cure for a crisis: a good cup of tea’.<sup>477</sup> Luckily, the damage was actually rather less serious than it appeared, and the Bakers were able to move back in after less than a month. Life resumed, and Esther Baker took up voluntary work as a firewoman, working through the violent May Blitz on the city.<sup>478</sup>

Over a year later, as Baker returned to her home after a shift at the fire station, she trod the ‘now familiar jumble of glass shards, splintered tiles and broken brickwork’ which littered her street. She did not yet realise just how familiar this rubble was: as she approached the flat, she found that much of it had once formed the fabric of her home. This time, the damage was unreparable. Whilst the outer walls still stood, little else remained. However, despite the severity of the destruction, Baker recalls that she did not cry. As she later pondered this numb reaction, so far removed from her previous experience of a raid, Baker suggested that it owed something to ‘sheer disbelief’ at this ‘abrupt and brutal end’ to an era of her home life.<sup>479</sup> Above all, however, Baker linked her response to her experiences and service as a firewoman:

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<sup>477</sup> Baker, *A City in Flames*, p. 23.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-36.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

For too many nights now I had written down messages which described, in the terse, unemotional language of Brigade communications, the destruction of people's homes and beloved possessions. Now I was experiencing the heartbreaking reality which lay behind those messages, and I couldn't cry for myself and Albert without crying for the whole suffering city.<sup>480</sup>

In Baker's recollection of home-loss, the experience is thus constructed as a testing ground for a particular kind of wartime civil identity. The ability to display emotional restraint, as numerous scholars of the Second World War have emphasised, was central to understandings of both what it meant to be a good citizen and what it meant to be British during the conflict. Indeed, as Sonya Rose has argued, in wartime these identities effectively converged as the nation increasingly came to be viewed as a 'moral community of good citizens', bound together by a shared duty of defence.<sup>481</sup> In her first brush with domestic destruction, Baker briefly failed to meet the demands of this brand of citizenship; by the time she came face-to-face with her second test, however, she had been tempered by her experiences as a volunteer firewoman, and she did not teeter on the brink in the same way. It is clear from her recollection that the damage was no less distressing for her, and certainly no less 'felt'. And yet, she coped, drawing upon her belief not only that this anguish was communal, but that to surrender to it would somehow betray this community of suffering. Here, home was thus once again connected with the broader scales of city and nation – this time at the moment of its loss.

The question of how – or, indeed, whether – wartime citizens coped with difficult or traumatic events such as that faced by Esther Baker is one which has suffused the historiographical landscape of the Second World War for decades. In many ways, this reflects the central position that it held prior to and during the conflict itself, when the developing notion of total war ensured that concerns about 'morale' and the fortitude of the civilian population remained at the forefront of both official and public minds. However, by contemporaries then and historians since, this concept of morale has been acknowledged as an extraordinarily 'woolly' one: ascertaining the state of civilian morale, and understanding how it was influenced, have been endeavours long complicated by debates over how it should be classified and measured, as well as what factors

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>481</sup> Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 20.

worked to shape it.<sup>482</sup> As Ian McLaine and Robert Mackay have each noted, a broad working definition of morale did nevertheless develop over the course of the war, based on rough notions of what high and low morale might look like.<sup>483</sup> An early attempt at definition by Mass Observation, for example, suggested that good morale involved being interested in the war, and feeling that it was a worthwhile endeavour.<sup>484</sup> A year later, they expanded their definition, clarifying that good morale did not rely only upon positive thoughts, but also upon positive deeds: a ‘determination to carry on with the utmost energy’ was crucial, but so too was a resultant commitment to ‘hard and persistent work’.<sup>485</sup> This approach, which thus emphasised the importance of feeling being transmuted into action, was one echoed within the offices of state which were most concerned with civilian morale, such as the Ministry of Information and the Home Office. As the director of the former’s Home Intelligence Division put it, morale was to be ‘measured not by what a person thinks or says, but by what he does and how he does it.’<sup>486</sup> In this way, participation was constructed as both an indicator of good morale, and the reason why good morale was so vital to maintain. If civilian spirits were broken, they could not be relied upon to perform the roles in industry and society that were so vital to the continued prosecution of the war.

Of course, much has been written on the subject of whether Britons exhibited the characteristics of high morale. The traditional British narrative of the Second World War, with its emphasis on the ‘Dunkirk spirit’ and upon the tropes of humour, stoicism and civic duty, naturally holds that they did, and this is the rendering of wartime Britain which has held most sway within the popular imagination. Writers such as Angus Calder and Tom Harrisson cast doubt in the 1970s upon the unanimity of this narrative, pointing to evidence of post-raid panic, of looting, and of black-market activity. Yet, as both authors stressed, adopting a more nuanced view of the myth did

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<sup>482</sup> Mackay, *Half the Battle*, p. 1; Addison, *The Road to 1945*, p. 121. See also Edgar Jones, Robin Woolven, Bill Durodié, and Simon Wessely, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War: Responses to Air Raids Re-Examined’, *Social History of Medicine*, 17.3 (2004), 463–479, and Juliet Gardiner, ‘The Blitz Experience in British Society 1940-1941’, in *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940-1945*, ed. by Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy (London: Continuum, 2011), 171-183, pp. 172-175.

<sup>483</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 8-9; Mackay, *Half the Battle*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>484</sup> Mackay, *Half the Battle*, p. 1.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>486</sup> McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p. 9. See also Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (eds.), *The Spirit of the Blitz: Home Intelligence and British Morale September 1940-June 1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).



not necessarily mean that its primary message was rendered untrue.<sup>487</sup> Acknowledging that there was contrary evidence did not negate the fact that the British war effort never broke under pressure, or that there was never a serious protest movement against the continuation of hostilities. Barring the interventions of a few more vociferous revisionists, this overarching understanding of wartime morale – as something which was vexed and imperfect, but ultimately unbroken – is one which has become a generally settled stance within the historiography.<sup>488</sup>

The more granular details of this national effort to cope with the traumas and frustrations of wartime life have, however, continued to fascinate. In recent years, the focus of historians has increasingly been drawn to the question of how this process of coping was constructed and thought about by state and society. One question within this field is that of *how* Britons – as individuals and communities – managed during the war: by which mechanisms and methods were they able to do so, and what obstacles did they have to navigate along the way? The place of religious and spiritual beliefs, for example, has been the subject of recent attention, as has the function of participant roles created in areas such as civil defence.<sup>489</sup> More broadly, scholars such as Carol Acton and Lucy Noakes have mapped the role of Britain’s particular emotional landscape, demonstrating that the reverence for affective traits such as stoicism, serenity and self-sacrifice was not merely evidence of a population successfully managing to weather the war, but rather a key driver of their ability to do so as well.<sup>490</sup> These emphases, as we have seen already, did not appear from nowhere on the eve of the Second World War. Rather, through a variety of literary and visual mediums, Britons had long been exposed to this model of emotional behaviour and had seen the promotion of various methods for emulating it. Thus, when war broke out afresh in 1939, Britons had both the experience and memory of the First World War and an emotional toolbox stocked with twenty years of advice and aspirational examples upon which to draw. A further area of

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<sup>487</sup> Calder, *People’s War*; Tom Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>488</sup> On the role of revisionist historians in discussions about wartime morale, see Connelly, *We Can Take It*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>489</sup> On belief systems and coping in wartime, see Vanessa Chambers, “‘Defend us from all Perils and Dangers of This Night’: Coping with Bombing in Britain during the Second World War”, in *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940-1945*, ed. by Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy (London: Continuum, 2011), 154-167; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, pp. 101-120; Oliver Parken, ‘Belief and the People’s War: Heterodoxy in Second World War Britain’. On participant roles and civil defence, see Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*; Jessica Hammett, “‘The Invisible Chain by Which All Are Bound to Each Other’: Civil Defence Magazines and the Development of Community During the Second World War”, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 11.2 (2018), 117-135.

<sup>490</sup> Acton, *Grief in Wartime*; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*.

enquiry within this field has consequently been the issue of how Britons engaged with this approved model of coping, which encouraged citizens to suppress emotions such as grief, anxiety, and fear and redirect their energy instead to the war effort. Although, as we shall see below, many Britons successfully internalised and utilised this model, this was often done to different extents, in different ways, and with different results.

This chapter will situate experiences and understandings of home-loss within this historiographical context. Much of the current literature on the management of loss in wartime Britain focuses upon phenomena such as death and bereavement, or takes a much broader lens to examine how (or if) Britons coped with the privations of war more generally. Here, however, it will be argued that the dwelling – particularly at the point of its loss – also deserves attention in the debate over the intertwined questions of morale, collective trauma, and emotional management. Contemporary discourse on these issues often explicitly demonstrated a belief that the home was a crucial interlocutor in the process of not only morale-making, but also morale-breaking. Just as anxiety developed over the changing boundaries of the home, so too did state and society express unease over the potential impacts of home-loss on citizens, and thereafter attempt to reckon with the realities of this experience.

The first section of this chapter will thus outline how the relationship between housing, home, and morale was constructed in official and public circles during the war, and explore the ways in which the various actors in British society attempted to ameliorate and interrupt this potential flashpoint. The central section of this chapter, meanwhile, will seek to examine how citizens sought to navigate the reality of this experience within this constructed cultural and emotional landscape. In other words: how did citizens' own encounters with the events of home-loss map onto the visions of domestic dislocation that had been so fearfully visioned by state, society, and media; and how did they frame the nature and impact of this phenomenon? In order to address these questions, three key themes within the narratives of the bombed-out and dispossessed – people, places, and possessions – will be examined. Finally, the chapter will examine how the roles of the various sections of society were figured within discourse on home-loss and 'coping'. The focus on stoicism frequently placed the onus upon the individual, and this was certainly a powerful notion which was policed and reinforced by citizens themselves. However, the responsibility for nursing Britons through the difficulties of domestic dislocation was also placed

with neighbours, friends, voluntary organisations, and the state as well; and, as we shall see, the ability of these entities to respond to the crisis in a manner that was perceived to be appropriate was as much under the microscope as that of the individual citizens. By exploring how the experience and management of home-loss was conceptualised by the various parts of wartime British society, it becomes possible to see how understandings of home-loss evolved in the space between fears and ideals on the one hand, and lived experience on the other – and, moreover, how the mismatches between these different layers resulted yet again in the fertilisation of debates over the rights, responsibilities, and roles of citizens in urban Second World War Britain.

### HOME-LOSS AND MORALE

In March 1942, Frederick Lindemann – Churchill’s chief scientific advisor, later created Viscount Cherwell – submitted his (in)famous ‘dehousing’ paper, in which he argued that ‘having one’s house demolished is most damaging ... People seem to mind it more than having their friends or even relatives killed’. His statements regarding the impact of bombing were based on an analysis of the effect of Luftwaffe assaults on the citizens of Birmingham and Hull, where he argued that the ‘signs of strain’ had been readily apparent. If the Allies were able to mount an attack on major German towns and cities using 10,000 bombers, then he anticipated that they would be able to destroy at least one-third of German homes; ‘there seems little doubt’, Lindemann argued, ‘that this would break the spirit of the people’.<sup>491</sup> Lindemann’s predictions were themselves subject to significant criticism, not least as other scientific advisors attached to government suggested that he had overestimated the number of houses which could be destroyed by as much as 600 per cent.<sup>492</sup> Moreover, the link he drew between housing, bombing, and morale itself proved to be highly controversial. The original authors of the analysis on Hull and Birmingham, for example, would later deride his conclusions about the effects of bombardment as being ‘almost the reverse’ of their own report.<sup>493</sup> Whilst they had indeed concluded that ‘the factor most affecting the population is the destruction of houses’, they had also stated that there was ‘no evidence’ of a sustained or fully-

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<sup>491</sup> Lord Cherwell to Winston Churchill, 30 March 1942, cited in Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945*, vol. I (London: HMSO, 1961), pp. 331-332.

<sup>492</sup> Paul Crook, ‘The Case Against Area Bombing’, in *Patrick Blackett: Sailor, Scientist, Socialist*, ed. by Peter Hore (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 167-187, p. 171; see also Paul Crook, ‘Science and War: Radical Scientists and the Tizard-Cherwell Area Bombing Debate in Britain’, *War & Society*, 12.2 (1994), 69-101, p. 81.

<sup>493</sup> Solly Zuckerman, *From Apes to Warlords* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 143.

fledged breakdown in morale in the cities which they examined.<sup>494</sup> Lindemann's memo would – despite these not inconsequential misgivings – ultimately go on to form the basis for the continued promotion of divisive area bombing policies, delineating and solidifying, if not necessarily generating, support for this strategy.<sup>495</sup> The ethics and efficacy of the area bombing policy applied by the British in Germany have been hotly debated within and beyond the writings of historians, and will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.<sup>496</sup> However, the tangled understandings of the relationship between morale and home-loss which plagued the deliberations over this policy were also in evidence closer to home, as Lindemann's (mis)use of the Hull and Birmingham data demonstrated.

In Mass Observation's early research into the impact of the air raids on civilian morale during the autumn of 1940, the more direct connection between housing and morale was regularly problematised. In their first of a series of weekly intelligence reports produced for the Ministry of Information, the organisation suggested that destruction could, in fact, have a somewhat liberating effect when compared with repairable damage:

When a house is destroyed, people are left in the air with the roots of their old life destroyed. They do not therefore find so much difficulty in readjustment as they would if they expected their old habits to continue.<sup>497</sup>

In their next report, Mass Observation doubled down on this depiction of those made homeless by enemy action, noting that their recent fieldwork in and around London 'strongly suggest[ed] that those whose homes are completely destroyed ... are much more optimistic than those who have only had their windows broken'.<sup>498</sup>

However, whilst these reports thus called into question the more immediate, direct link between home-loss and morale, Mass Observation's wider work drew more nuanced connections between the experiences of Britons who had lost their homes and their ability to function well as

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>495</sup> Richard Overy, *The Bombing War* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 288-289.

<sup>496</sup> See, for example, Richard Overy, 'Constructing Space for Dissent in War: The Bombing Restriction Committee, 1941-1945', *English Historical Review*, 131.550 (2016), 596-622; Donald Bloxham, 'Dresden as a War Crime', in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden, 1945*, ed. by Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (London: Pimlico, 2006), 181-208; Mark Connelly, 'The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign Against Germany, 1939-45', *Contemporary British History*, 16.2 (2002), 39-58.

<sup>497</sup> MOA, FR 439, 'First Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', 4 October 1940, p. 11.

<sup>498</sup> MOA, FR 449, 'Second Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', 11 October 1940, p. 13.

wartime citizens. Reports on morale in Britain's blitzed cities and towns regularly focused upon the ramifications of domestic disruptions, noting how factors such as the salvage of furniture and building repairs could shape the attitudes of those caught in the maelstrom.<sup>499</sup> Throughout the war, these were issues which would continue to hold the attention of those invested in the state of civilian morale. The Ministry of Information, for example, regularly sent missives to local authorities notifying them of reports of unduly slow salvage operations or inadequate storage of goods and chattels in their area – and often pointedly highlighted that they would continue to monitor the management of these problems.<sup>500</sup> Whilst not all the monitors of morale were sure, then, that the loss of homes itself inevitably precipitated a decline in civilians' psychological or emotional states, they were often clear that the subsequent management of this event by the state could nevertheless provide a breeding ground for wider discontentments.

Beyond the social research reports of government and state-affiliated bodies, another arena in which the relationship between housing, bombing, and civilian fortitude was regularly parsed was within the pages of medical and psychiatric journals. Whilst in the more traditional medical publications the focus of raid analyses was understandably most often upon the physical injuries sustained by those who were impacted by the bombing, and the various means of treating them, there was nevertheless the occasional foray into discussions about 'war neuroses' among the those who endured the raids. Here, civilian resilience could again be placed under the microscope, refracted through a lens which designated 'neurotic' reactions such as panic, depression and stupor as symptoms or catalysts of poor morale.<sup>501</sup> Doctors and psychiatrists publishing their work in journals during the war often came to similar conclusions about the state of civilian morale and psychological wellbeing – namely that it had been less affected by the onset of the bombing than had been expected. However, whilst the mass hysteria predicted by so many before the war did

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<sup>499</sup> See, for example, MOA, FR 493, 'Seventh Weekly Report for Home Intelligence', 15 November 1940, p. 3; FR 722, 'Social Welfare & Blitz Towns', 3 June 1941, pp. 1-5.

<sup>500</sup> See, for example, TNA, MH 76/441, Anonymous to S. C. Payne, 7 November 1940; TNA, MH 76/441, J. W. Raison to Secretary of the Local Information Committee, Peckham, 10 December 1940; TNA, MH 76/441, A. S. Marre to Bentwich, 14 December 1940.

<sup>501</sup> On the history – and amorphous meaning – of the term 'war neurosis', see Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen, 'A Weak Spot in the Personality? Conceptualising "War Neurosis" in the British Medical Literature of the Second World War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 58.3 (2012), 408-420. For more on psychiatric practices in wartime, see Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), and Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).

not, in fact, come to pass, this did not mean that there were no instances of strain or breakdown among the population. Those working in psychiatric and medical capacities in blitzed areas thus still attempted to use this opportunity in order to ascertain the common factors and circumstances which seemed to make or break citizens' ability to remain on an even keel.

As one author stressed in the *Lancet* in 1942, this was a fraught task: both the air raids and the wider conflict represented an accumulation of stresses for the civilian, which could not always be unpicked from one another. Tracing 'neurotic' symptoms back to their isolated roots was, therefore, something of an impossibility.<sup>502</sup> However, in so far as the generic and intersecting driving forces of wartime breakdowns in the morale and mental health of the population could be distinguished, the author suggested that – alongside other factors such as bereavement and personal injury – one of them was the loss of home.<sup>503</sup> Others delved into this perceived connection more deeply: in his 1941 study on the effects of air raids on the civilian population, for example, the psychologist P. E. Vernon made specific mention of the role of the dwelling in mediating and shaping this experience. Noting that 'people whose houses have been demolished ... very often regress for a time', he concluded that domestic space was an important factor in the preservation of 'mental stability' for citizens under fire.<sup>504</sup> Home-loss, Vernon argued, was disruptive both because the absence of this space resulted in practical difficulties, and because it entailed the dislocation of a key space for processing wartime experiences. Without it, it was 'difficult to see how things [could] ever again return to normal'.<sup>505</sup> The psychoanalyst Edward Glover echoed such arguments when, in 1942, he noted that civilians had to contend with the fact that an attack could also 'destroy their goods and chattels ... [and] disrupt completely their domestic and environmental setting'.<sup>506</sup> Not only did this result in severe economic and practical consequences which made the work of post-raid recovery that much harder; the 'extensive dislocation of [the] domestic and social environment' was also again perceived as one of the key factors in adverse psychological responses to the bombing.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Aubrey Lewis, 'Incidence of Neurosis in England Under War Conditions', *Lancet*, 240.6207 (1942), 175-183, p. 183.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>504</sup> Vernon, 'Psychological Effects of Air Raids', p. 460, 475.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>506</sup> Edward Glover, 'Notes on the Psychological Effects of War Conditions on the Civilian Population (III. The Blitz)', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 23 (1942), 17-37, pp. 21-22.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20, 28.

The particular interest of the researchers such as those in Mass Observation and government, and psychological professionals like Glover and Vernon, in the effects of aerial bombardment reflected the fact that the death and destruction wrought by this phenomenon had long been thought of as a potential flashpoint for breakdowns in civilian morale. In comparison, the connection between requisitioning and morale had been subject to a lesser degree of both attention and anxiety. However, whilst the early years of war thus saw fewer attempts to unpick the relationship between state requisitioning policies and citizens' support for the war, there was certainly an acknowledgement that the sundering of citizens and their homes in this way was nevertheless a process which had to be similarly carefully managed, lest it have undesirable consequences for the war effort. As John Morris, a prominent barrister and King's Counsel, wrote in his September 1941 report on requisitioning and compensation,

The healthy reluctance of the British public to tolerate any government encroachments upon private liberties is tempered in wartime by a willingness to co-operate to secure the necessities of national defence. It would be a calamity if this goodwill were in any measure dissipated and threatened. The fair and smooth working of the machinery of requisitioning is therefore all-important.<sup>508</sup>

Morris' argument was clear: the loss of homes in such a way needed to be borne, and in his opinion could be, just so long as the government ensured that its own conduct was unimpeachable. Hence, here again the link between the separation of citizen from home on the one hand, and threats to morale on the other, was made directly dependent upon the state's own policies and actions.

Thus, whilst the relationship between housing, homes, and civilian fortitude may have been a somewhat vexed one within wartime discourse on morale, it was nevertheless seen as extant – and as worth worrying about. Given the impossibility of protecting all homes from the effects of war, this issue occupied the minds and anxieties of both the state, and wider sections of society, each of whom attempted to find ways that the potentially disruptive effects of loss, damage, and dislocation could be mediated. Propaganda material produced by both official and more public sources, to this end, regularly presented images and examples of the expected conduct for those who had experienced the loss of their home. As it will become clear, these outputs largely ignored the strains of dispossession, a fact which likely reflected both the less destructive nature of this

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<sup>508</sup> Morris, 'Requisitioning and Compensation', p. 3.

experience and the (often misleading) argument that only unoccupied houses were requisitioned – thereby negating the same need for emotional and political triage. However, it is nevertheless instructive to explore this material with both the bombed and the dispossessed in mind. These experiences, after all, were often intertwined: they were experienced in the same cultural landscape, and, indeed, sometimes by the same citizens; and, whilst it may have been less prominently presented within sources such as those examined below, the victims of requisitioning were certainly also subject to the same expectations of sacrifice and stoicism.

In some cases, propagandistic material attempted to deal with the issue of home-loss and morale before it actually happened. Posters dealing with the theme of homes under fire, for example, sought to insulate urban citizens from the worst of the experience by encouraging them to plan for the possibility that they might be made homeless. Thus, a Ministry of Health poster produced in 1940 had appealed to Britons to ‘Fix Things Up Now’ by making mutual arrangements with their friends and relatives in which each agreed to put the other up if they lost their home.<sup>509</sup> For those who were unable to make such plans, there were other prints which outlined other options, such as going to a local rest centre.<sup>510</sup> Such campaigns clearly had a practical function, in that they provided information on the possible paths that the bombed-out could take. However, they also served to portray home-loss as something which was routine and ultimately manageable, especially if those affected themselves actively participated in the efforts to make it so.

Meanwhile, other forms of propaganda served as a source of aspirational imagery, demonstrating the appropriate responses to bombardment. For example, the Ministry of Information paperback, *Front Line*, painted the blitzed urban populace in a stereotypically defiant light. The anonymised editor, J. M. Richards, argued of the Ministry of Information’s paperback series more generally that they were ‘seriously done: history while it was being made rather than patriotic propaganda’.<sup>511</sup> However, whilst it is true that *Front Line* was remarkably honest about the difficulties faced by these citizens – not least as a result of the state’s own inadequate planning vis-à-vis post raid care – it also lauded their ability to withstand them, and drew on mythic tropes in order to do so. Anecdotes of stoicism, both individual and communal, thus abound within the

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<sup>509</sup> IWM, Art Department, PST 13889, ‘Fix Things Up Now’, 1940. For representations of the same themes in film, see also the newsreels *Just in Case* (Ministry of Home Security, 1941) and *Blitz Pacts* (Ministry of Home Security, Spectator, 1943).

<sup>510</sup> IWM, Art Department, PST 13871, ‘If You Are Bombed Out’, 1939.

<sup>511</sup> J. M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London: Faber & Faber, 2013 [1980]) p. 159.



pages of *Front Line*. There is the woman who, despite having lost her nearest kin, refuses to leave London and her ‘smashed’ house: ‘[s]he almost yielded, but then, with an angry lift of her shoulder, said, “No. W’y should I let ‘Itler drive me out of Poplar?”’<sup>512</sup> Praised here too is a young boy from Cardiff, who was rescued from the ruins of his bombed home, and found quicker on account of his hearty rendition of “God Save the King”.<sup>513</sup> Readers of *Front Line* heard that the people of Clydebanks, where the bombing destroyed a particularly large percentage of the housing stock, faced the raids with a ‘quiet, tough resolution that impressed observers, skilled and unskilled alike’; and that those in Sheffield, amid the ‘dust [and] soot’ of their wrecked city, displayed a ‘spontaneous and heart-felt friendliness’.<sup>514</sup> Although Richards was justified in his suggestion that the HMSO series did not ignore entirely the more unsavoury aspects of the post-raid atmosphere, such a narrative necessarily glossed over many of these aspects with a patriotic and stoical varnish. Yet, it is worth noting that *Front Line* proved to be one of the most popular HMSO imprints of the war, quickly selling out of its initial print run of 120,000.<sup>515</sup> Its narratives of everyday bravery may have been undeniably curated, but this was clearly a depiction of wartime society which resonated with the British public.

Films produced by the Ministry of Information were also rich sources of examples of Britons stoically coping with the effects of the bombing.<sup>516</sup> Such films regularly used narratives about the bombed-out in order to argue that this fortitude persisted even in the worst of circumstances, and in so doing, continued to construct and promote a ‘normal’ response to loss. In the 1941 feature *London Can Take It!*, for example, the self-avowed ‘neutral’ narrator describes how Londoners remained stoical in the face of home-loss:

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<sup>512</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, p. 70. The anonymised author of the text is in fact C. R. Leslie, of the Ministry of Home Security.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118, 102.

<sup>515</sup> Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella*, p. 160.

<sup>516</sup> See also James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda, 1939-1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998). For more on the depiction of these themes in commercial cinema, see Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Grayzel’s analysis of *Mrs Miniver*, a film which depicted an archetype of feminine stoicism in the face of domestic disruption but which arguably resonated more with an American audience than a British one, is also instructive: Susan R. Grayzel, “‘Fighting for the Idea of Home Life’: Mrs Miniver and Anglo-American Representations of Domestic Morale”, in *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain*, ed. by Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 139-156.

I have watched them stand by their homes; I have seen them made homeless; I have seen them move to new homes. And I can assure you, there is no panic, no fear, no despair in London town; there is nothing but determination, confidence, and high courage.<sup>517</sup>

Rather than 'look[ing] down upon the ruins of its houses, upon those made homeless, upon the remains of churches, hospitals, workers flats', Londoners are instead depicted as looked forward to the new day: the emotions that attend their loss are thus put to work.<sup>518</sup>

*Neighbours Under Fire*, a 1940 short film which declared itself to be 'a record of human kindness under fire', is similarly bursting at the seams with depictions of ordinary Britons who refuse to buckle even when their homes are torn apart. Alongside the fortitude of the bombed out themselves, the success of volunteers in smoothing out the post-raid experience is applauded. These citizens, we are told, stepped 'into the breach blasted by the bombers', venturing 'to the shattered homes of the people and [bringing] them to the ... rest centres'. In such a vision, the destroyed homes of blitzed Britons are immediately reincarnated in a communal body, represented not only by spaces like rest centres, but also by the civilians who staff and inhabit them. Here, then, was another demonstration of the way in which the state attempted to harness the mutable boundaries of the wartime home to their advantage. Rather than obliterating domestic life, the enemy's bombs are instead shown to open it up, allowing the nation to become home. This message was underlined by narration that emphasised the dissolution of boundaries between individual citizens: 'in the days of peace, all of them, volunteers and homeless alike, were neighbours. In these days of war, they are one big family'.<sup>519</sup>

This imagery was echoed in *Ordinary People* (1942), which also gave significant attention to the behaviour of the bombed-out. This picture followed the lives of a selection of Londoners over the course of 24 hours, all of whom are united by their mutual use of a particular deep shelter. Two of these Londoners, Mr and Mrs Payne, are shown returning to their street the morning after the raid to find that a neighbours' house has been destroyed; their own home has survived, although the windows have been blown in, and the kitchen covered in fallen plaster. They patch up the

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<sup>517</sup> *London Can Take It!*, dir. by Humphrey Jennings (Crown Film Unit, Ministry of Information, 1940).

<sup>518</sup> For a more detailed examination of Humphrey Jennings' directorial projects for the Crown Film Unit, many of which mobilised similar ideas about national unity/identity and stoicism, see Keith Beattie, *Humphrey Jennings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

<sup>519</sup> *Neighbours Under Fire*, dir. by Ralph Bond (Strand Film Company, Ministry of Information, 1940).

damage, and whilst Mr Payne goes to work in a munitions factory, Mrs Payne invites the bombed-out neighbours – one Mrs Finch and her daughter, Doris – over for a cup of tea. Both are calm, although not necessarily left unaffected by their experience. Doris, in particular, appears visibly shaken; when the air raid siren sounds later, Mrs Finch has to clasp her daughter's hand to soothe her. As Mr Payne leaves for an ARP shift, Mrs Payne takes the neighbours to the shelter. Here, the bombed-out mother and daughter are welcomed and supported, and the closing frames fade out to the sound of the shelter residents singing together. *Ordinary People* thus further exemplifies the state's efforts to provide a practical and emotional blueprint not only for how citizens should respond to the loss of their own home, but also for how citizens should respond to the loss of others' homes. Indeed, the notion that these two processes were inherently linked is neatly encapsulated by Mr Payne's reply to Mrs Finch's expression of gratitude: 'forget it – it may be our turn next.'<sup>520</sup>

Whilst state propaganda – whether it took artistic, cinematic, or written form – furnished Britons with some of the most obvious examples of stoicism and fortitude, it is also important to note that the valorisation of such responses did not occur exclusively within openly official channels. The wartime press, for example, provided another important arena within which the proper response to home-loss could be constructed. In the aftermath of raids, reportage often focused upon the stories of those who had followed the adage of 'keeping calm and carrying on', and ensured that these individuals were given the proper plaudits. Echoing the messages of *Neighbours Under Fire* and *Ordinary People*, coverage often extolled both the endurance of the homeless, and the work of the voluntary services in facilitating this fortitude. Indeed, one piece in the *Manchester Guardian* made sure to note that these emotional efforts were sometimes one and the same: 'the WVS workers, many of them bombed out or time-bombed out like their charges' are portrayed as crucial factors in the ability of others to cope with the bombing. 'Their action on the kitchen front does not make spectacular history,' the author wrote, 'but their job has been as real as any that are hailed as heroic'.<sup>521</sup>

In other printed forms, too, stoicism was regularly reinforced as the right and proper response to wartime traumas such as home-loss. Women's magazines, in particular, were suffused

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<sup>520</sup> *Ordinary People*, dir. by Jack Holmes and Jack Lee (Crown Film Unit, Ministry of Information, 1942).

<sup>521</sup> M. R. H., 'Homeless Neighbours: Women in Voluntary Service', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1940.

by examples of female fortitude, as well as advice for achieving this emotional state.<sup>522</sup> An essay by Elizabeth Bowen, published in *Homes and Gardens* in 1942, thus urged readers whose homes had been destroyed or otherwise ‘given up’ to respond by looking outwards to their family and community rather than by pondering their own material losses for too long. In turn, those whose homes remained intact were encouraged to open them up: ‘one’s home is one’s castle – yes. But must this mean a castle defensively guarded, with drawbridge always raised?’<sup>523</sup> Given the highly gendered nature of the emotional economy of wartime Britain, which often saw women as particularly susceptible to the effects of difficult emotions, it is perhaps no surprise that cultural texts with a predominantly female readership should be so likely to commission and print such material.<sup>524</sup>

Published mediums such as newspapers and magazines were, of course, not free of state influence – the restrictions of censorship, for example, necessarily shaped the tone and content of wartime reportage. However, as Guy Hodgson and Rachel Matthews have emphasised, press outlets were not neutral, passive mouthpieces for the state, either; instead, they often acted as ‘co-creators’ of propaganda, shaping the presentation of themes like those explored above in their own right.<sup>525</sup> Janice Winship, in her work on the wartime messaging of *Women’s Own*, demonstrated how this process of co-production could often be formalised when she noted that the magazine’s editors acted in close – albeit sometimes strained – concert with the Ministry of Information in order to ensure that the publication was contributing to the war effort.<sup>526</sup> Yet, as we shall see further below, the agency of the fourth estate in this process of shaping the emotional status quo went both ways, for the pages of the press also often played host to subtle negotiations over the expected

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<sup>522</sup> For more on women’s literature, particularly as a medium for prescribing certain modes of emotional citizenship during the war, see Janice Winship, ‘Women’s Magazines: Times of War and Management of the Self in Women’s Own’, in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 127-139; Becky E. Conekin, ‘“Magazines Are Essentially About the Here and Now. And This Was Wartime”: British *Vogue’s* Responses to the Second World War’, in *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain*, ed. by Philippa Levine and Susan R. Grayzel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 116-138; Jane Weller and Michael Vaughan-Rees, *Women in Wartime: The Role of Women’s Magazines 1939-1945* (London: Macdonald Optima, 1987), pp. 34-39.

<sup>523</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, ‘The Christmas Toast is Home’ [1942], in *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 128-131, p. 130.

<sup>524</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 53.

<sup>525</sup> Guy Hodgson and Rachel Matthews, ‘Never Failed? The Local Reporting of the Blitzes in Coventry and Liverpool in 1940 and 1941’, *Media History*, 27.2 (2021), 162-176, p. 173.

<sup>526</sup> Winship, ‘Women’s Magazines’, p. 127. See also Pat Kirkham, ‘Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up the (Home) Front’, in *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two*, ed. by Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 13-28.

response of wartime Britons to home-loss. In outlets such as the *Picture Post*, for example, depictions of citizens who continued doggedly onwards were run almost simultaneously with pieces in which citizens complained of post-raid hardships worsened by state inaction.<sup>527</sup> In *The Times*, meanwhile, the difficulty faced by those who had lost their homes to requisitioning was given extensive attention through the medium of letters to the editor, thereby opening up the notion of unquestioning sacrifice to critique.<sup>528</sup> The prescriptive function of the press was thus deeply ambiguous: whilst its coverage of homeless citizens certainly played a part in the co-creation of the mythic image of stoic Britain, it also provided a space in which this image could be questioned and re-worked.

It is largely impossible to make any concrete assertions about the specific affective results of these various sources of stoic imagery upon individual citizens, regardless of whether their loss was akin to that portrayed in this material, or resulted from the shadowy parallel of dispossession.<sup>529</sup> Among those whose experiences of home-loss are referenced in this thesis, for example, none make any sort of direct mention in their wartime or postwar testimonies about the impact of official propaganda campaigns on their understanding of this process. However, an exploration of these sources *can* tell us something about the anxiety which built up around the phenomenon of home-loss, and the resultant attempts of state and society to manage and direct this process. Moreover, this material can serve to demonstrate the way in which wartime Britons who faced the loss of their home were surrounded by the call to master their emotional lives.

Indeed, it is worth remembering here as well that the reinforcement of this response was also undertaken at a grassroots, interpersonal level, through interactions between ordinary citizens. One Mass Observer from East Ham, for example, recorded how she had encouraged a bombed-out friend to remain stoic, and recorded her somewhat unsympathetic feeling that they were 'letting the war get on top of them ... It's upset their easy way of life and they don't like it'.<sup>530</sup> Another

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<sup>527</sup> 'East End at War', *Picture Post*, 28 September 1940; 'Bombed-Out', *Picture Post*, 12 October 1940.

<sup>528</sup> See, for example, James Railton, 'High-Handed Officials', *The Times*, 16 May 1941; J. E. Mac Swiney, 'Requisition of Flats', *The Times*, 8 July 1941.

<sup>529</sup> Aside from the obvious methodological issues with ascertaining the impact of propaganda on individuals, there is also the problem that it is often difficult to ascertain the viewership of these propaganda materials in the first place. Alan James Harding, for example, has noted that the Ministry of Information's short films were shown in a wide array of contexts, including but not limited to the traditional cinema, meaning it is difficult to keep track of the exact audience. See Alan James Harding, 'Evaluating the Importance of the Crown Film Unit, 1940-1952' (unpublished PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University and Southampton Solent University, 2017), p. 26.

<sup>530</sup> MOA, Diarist 5321, Entry for 20 October 1941.

woman, living in Fulham, told a Mass Observation interviewer that she herself was ‘quite unafraid of the raids’ and determined to remain in the city. However, when speaking about her niece, a young mother who had recently been bombed out and subsequently evacuated to the county, she was much more disparaging: ‘[i]t’s no use her being up here ... she goes all trembling and nervy when the warning goes even.’<sup>531</sup> The example of home-loss thus neatly demonstrates that the dictum of ‘carrying on’ was one which was reinforced from all sides; wartime Britons were encouraged to display this trait before they ever became estranged from their homes, and when this event came to pass, their responses continued to be tracked by those around them. Whilst we may be generally unable to delineate the effects of particular pieces of propaganda upon individual citizens, we might thus note that the widespread proliferation and reinforcement of guidance meant that those undergoing the experience of home-loss would have been in no doubt as to the expected response.

#### THE FRAMING OF HOME-LOSS

Whilst various elements of British society had thus fearfully constructed the events of home-loss as a potential ‘weak point’ within the national armour, and had sought to establish responses characterised by stoicism and silence as the ‘proper’ means of coping, the reality when it occurred was – as ever – more complex.<sup>532</sup> On the most basic level, the practical experience itself was subject to a high degree of nuance: naturally, therefore, whilst notions such as stoicism and self-sacrifice proved appropriate in some situations, in others they did not. There was a clear distinction, for example, between the phenomenon of being bombed-out versus that of being requisitioned. For one thing, the immediate source of the loss was different. In the former case, it was a belligerent enemy, whose destructive air war was easily – although arguably hypocritically – presented in barbaric terms, and as a reason to participate in the work of defeating them; in the latter, however, it was a force closer to home, whose actions resisted such a broad brush. At play, too, was the fact that bombardment was inherently a more violent and sudden form of loss, and one not infrequently attended by the grief of bereavement. Within these broader distinctions, there were still more subtle shades of difference: for example, between those whose homes were damaged and

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<sup>531</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-B, ‘Interviews in Hilmer Street and Fairholme Street, Fulham’, unpaginated.

<sup>532</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, p. 74.

those whose were destroyed, and between those who were dispossessed in absentia and those who were actively evicted. And, of course, we should remember that some experiences ranged across this varied terrain; a number of requisitions, for example, concerned properties which had been temporarily vacated as a result of enemy action.

This section will explore how, within this diverse landscape of experiences, urban Britons framed the process of losing their domestic space. With reference to three distinct but often intertwined themes – people, places, and possessions – it will examine how the loss of these different dimensions of home affected urban citizens, rippling through their practical, financial, emotional, and political lives. As we shall see, these ripples could be far-ranging. From the loss of loved ones, to that of valued places or of the smallest and most quotidian of domestic objects, the initial and consequential events of dispossession and bombardment could profoundly shape how citizens located themselves and their experiences within the more collective experience of war on the British home front.

### *People*

Within the accounts of the bombed-out, the loss of human life was naturally one of the aspects of a raid which most preoccupied those who survived. Indeed, in some cases, the extent or nature of the bereavement meant that this dimension eclipsed all else. This much was certainly true for Alice Bunt, a young mother from Plymouth, whose experience of being bombed out in 1941 was one utterly consumed by the loss not only of her mother, but also of her two eldest children. Her third child Maureen, not yet one-and-a-half years old, was injured in the blast and sent to the City Hospital; a month later, the children's ward was bombed, and Maureen was killed. Thereafter, Bunt had to spend an extended period of recuperation in a facility at Sampford Spiney, a village north of the city. This, then, was not a case in which the widely lauded brand of stoicism detailed above proved adequate as a coping mechanism. Bunt's recollections do include small flashes of the other effects of the raid on her life, including her bemusement at the absence of suitable shelter options beyond the staircase which had proved so inadequate, and her sadness at the wider destruction of Plymouth. However, the totality of her bereavement meant that her description of being bombed-out was framed principally through the destructive effects that this event had upon

her family's bodies.<sup>533</sup> Bunt's retelling of her wartime experience does not extend beyond the temporal confines of 1941, making it impossible to know how her life was practically affected by this tragedy throughout the remainder of the war, to say nothing of the years which followed. What we can know, however, is that when she came to recount her story in 1971, her understanding of the event was irrevocably seen through the lens of the people she lost, rather than that of place or possessions.

Bunt was not alone in this privileging of persons over structures, landscapes, and objects. Even for those whose loss was more isolated, or more removed from one's immediate household, it could still be a defining aspect: thus John William Sykes, who was bombed out in London, noted that the most distressing aspect of the raid was the death of his cousin's baby daughter who lived on the same road.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, Raymond Edwards, a young boy whose family was bombed out of two different houses in Hull, remembered how the death of his grandmother during their second raid experience had been 'the most abiding memory and sadness'.<sup>535</sup> Meanwhile, for Rhoda and Ada McGuire, two sisters whose home in Merseyside was made uninhabitable by a bomb in March 1941, the impact of bombing on members of their household was less immediate but nevertheless keenly felt. The health of their elderly and infirm mother had deteriorated after their experience, and when she died in early 1943, Ada made no bones about the effects of their raid experience, writing: 'she was never the same since we were bombed out'.<sup>536</sup>

Within the testimonies of the dispossessed, meanwhile, the spectre of bereavement was decidedly less present. In cases of rural dispossession – where the form of requisitioning was often decidedly different – there were tales of citizens for whom the experience proved shocking to the point of severe illness and death; among urban citizens, however, this discursive link was rarely made.<sup>537</sup> However, whilst understandings of dispossession in towns and cities might have been less

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<sup>533</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 2781, Alice Gwendoline Bunt, Reel 1, 2 December 1971.

<sup>534</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 20850, John William Sykes, Reel 1, 14 October 2002.

<sup>535</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22169, Raymond Edwards, Reel 1, 10 September 2001.

<sup>536</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Ada McGuire to Eve Grandison, 23 May 1943.

<sup>537</sup> Jacinta Mallon, "Tools of War" or "Sacred" Spaces? Requisitioning and Home-loss During and After the Second World War' (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent, 2019), pp. 29-30. In cases of rural requisition where whole villages were suddenly uprooted, for example, there were reports of suicide and illnesses like pneumonia which were attributed to the shock of eviction: see Samuel Walls and Howard Williams, 'Death and Memory on the Home Front: Second World War Commemoration in the South Hams, Devon', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 20.1 (2010), 49-66, p. 52; Wright, *Tyneham*, p. 209. In the parallel form of rural dispossession, which involved the



immediately affected by the loss of loved ones, there were other ways in which this experience was inflected through the lens of these persons. Alice Truman's recollections of her evacuation from Gosport after her house was requisitioned in late 1940, for example, demonstrate the way in which understandings of home-loss could be framed by longer-term impacts upon the health of oneself and one's family. Whilst Truman had proved initially accepting – if not approving – of her dispossession, this changed when her young son became seriously ill with scarlet fever, which later gave rise to a bad bout of rheumatic fever. As he slowly recovered, Truman decided that the best place for him would be their home in Gosport, and in 1944 she embarked upon a campaign for derequisition which resulted finally in a physical stand-off with their local billeting officer. Reflecting on the experience, Truman noted: 'I tried not to be bitter about the war, I just did what any loving mother would do, and looked after my children.'<sup>538</sup>

The physical wellbeing of children often acted as a similar catalyst in cases where citizens had been rendered homeless by the bombing. Grace Foakes, for example, wrote of how her young daughter had required daily hospital treatment after developing an abscess in her neck as a result of the shock of being bombed out.<sup>539</sup> She recalled the experience of returning from one such hospital visit to their inadequate billets, only to find that their (reluctant) hosts had eaten all the food:

Kathleen ran up the path, pushed open the letter-box and stood there, smelling stew. "Oh Mummy! Lovely stew," she said. I could have wept when the relative said "Yes, we had stew," but that, being hungry, they had eaten it all up. It was then that I made my mind up: I would fight, and go on fighting, for somehow I must find a home for my family, so that we could all be happy again.<sup>540</sup>

When Foakes recounted her attempts with her husband Reuben to lobby the local council for fresh lodgings, she noted some of the ways in which they must have seemed to be less than ideal wartime citizens: 'Reuben lost his temper and said many things which are best left unwritten ... [and] I felt like a beggar'. However, like Truman, Foakes justified their campaign by returning to the notion

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ignominious eviction of farmers believed to be underperforming, there were also similar tales: see, for example, J. Wentworth Day, *Harvest Adventure* (London: George G. Harrap, 1946), p. 274.

<sup>538</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 12365, Alice Kathleen Truman, Reels 1 and 2, 4 December 1991.

<sup>539</sup> Grace Foakes, *My Life With Reuben* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1975), p. 68.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

that their loss was itself unjustifiable on account of the impact on her children: ‘we were fighting for our children and would go on fighting until we won’.<sup>541</sup>

Truman and Foakes, albeit in different circumstances, thus both further exemplified the way in which human bodies, and human relationships, could frame understandings of home-loss. Unlike Alice Bunt, the connections which they drew between their domestic dislocation and the health of their loved ones did not consume their narrative of home-loss; yet, nevertheless, the impact upon their family was a key factor in shaping their actions in the aftermath of this event. As each witnessed their children experience illness and hardship, both women co-opted the language of the national war effort – the notions of fighting for a greater good, and of displaying a gritty determination to achieve one’s goal – in order to carve out a space for responses which did not always match the ‘approved’ methods of coping with home-loss.

### *Places*

As any good scholar of home is keen to remind, the home and the house are related but not necessarily interchangeable concepts. Whereas the latter is tangible, and largely static, home can range over multiple scales: as Chapter 2 exemplified, its boundaries can be made coterminous with bodies and nations as well as dwellings themselves; and as we shall see below, it can be contained even within the smaller, individual items which make up the domestic interior. However, whilst the notion of home thus resists containment within the bricks-and-mortar boundary of the house, this is not to say that the dwelling itself did not occupy the anxieties and attentions of wartime Britons who experienced its loss.

Indeed, particularly in the case of dispossession, the physical site and structure of the home were in fact central to narratives of home-loss. This dimension of home, for example, was naturally a focal point for concerns about the potential for damage, such as that which might be inflicted by the billetees who came to occupy the space instead. This was especially evident in cases where the new occupants were military personnel. Although requisitioning for such a purpose was often seen as one of the more justifiable ways of exercising this power, armed forces were also seen as being especially prone to leaving dwellings in poor order, either as a result of wanton destruction or

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

simple over-occupation.<sup>542</sup> Yet, whilst anxieties about the treatment of houses by billetees were certainly common, the bones of the dwelling were perhaps most prominent within narratives of home-loss when mobilised as a symbol of the political effects of dispossession, such as the suspension of citizens' right to property. After all, whilst these bones may have served as a page upon which the emotional lives of citizens could be inscribed, they were also the economic essence of a home, the place in which the bulk of one's capital might be invested.

On one level, then, concerns about the physical house often demonstrated the way in which home-loss rippled into citizens' financial and practical lives – owners of requisitioned property, for example, were often keen to emphasise that dispossession affected not only their right to use their property, but also their right to rent or sell.<sup>543</sup> As a result, dispossession also fundamentally restricted citizens' ability to take actions such as moving permanently to a new area, or to react to financial troubles – which, in some cases, were precipitated by the events of dispossession in the first place – by leveraging their property.<sup>544</sup> The loss of control over this dimension of home therefore not only estranged citizens from a site which was often both emotionally and economically valuable, but also sometimes prevented them from re-making it elsewhere. Equally, however, concerns over the physical house represented a key avenue through which the process of dispossession could be contested. Whilst the broader concept of home might include an accumulation of intangible, unquantifiable, and subjective meanings, physical property is by contrast tangible; it can more easily be assigned a universal (monetary) value, and it can be legally allotted to particular citizens, upon whom are conferred the rights of ownership.<sup>545</sup> The dwelling proper, then, perhaps occupied such a prominent place within the testimony of the dispossessed because this was the element of home which had the most defined place within the legal and political frameworks of citizenship. Whereas the array of emotional meanings which were attached to the home, its context, and its contents were certainly important, their currency within these

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<sup>542</sup> On understandings about the necessity of requisitioning for housing military personnel, see: Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 413, col. 1086, 24 August 1945. For an example of the anxieties and complaints about damage done by these billetees see: 'Damage by the Army', *The Times*, 22 March 1941; Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 383, col. 1320-1328, 7 October 1942; Manchester Central Library (hereafter MCL), GB 127.M77/1, Manchester Information Committee, minutes for 25 November 1942.

<sup>543</sup> For example, Plymouth Archives (hereafter PA), 1561/3, "B. H. Turner" to Colin Campbell, 2 October 1945. The names of private individuals cited from this archive have been pseudonymised at the archive's request.

<sup>544</sup> For example, PA, 1561/3, "D. G. Dodds" to Colin Campbell, 17 September 1945.

<sup>545</sup> For more on the balance between home and house as socio-cultural and legal-political concepts, see Fox, 'The Meaning of Home'.

frameworks was not always guaranteed. In other words, in the property-owning society of wartime Britain, the argument that citizens had certain rights to places to which they were emotionally attached carried rather less weight than that which asserted their rights to places with which they had a legal and financial connection.

As will be explored further below, for those who had lost their home in the bombing, the house as a legal and financial asset tended to feature primarily in debates about compensation rather than in discussions over the broader political and legal implications of this experience. However, the domestic structure could intervene in different ways as well: the scarred or ruined physical structure, for example, could also play a central role in narratives of loss as an incontrovertible symbol of the way in which war violently and suddenly turned the lives of citizens upside down. One Hull resident who was bombed out of the terraced house he shared with his parents and brothers found this sight to be one characterised by a distinct disjointedness: ‘the still warm mound of bricks and plaster ... seemed to be so small for what had been quite a large house’.<sup>546</sup> Meanwhile, Jack Wright, a student living with his parents in southeast London, would later remember how shaken he had been by the knowledge that ‘the environment of [his] boyhood and youth ... had been physically obliterated.’ Reminiscing about the lost architecture of his childhood home, he mourned the way in which it had all been razed by the ‘cataclysmic insult’ of the bombing.<sup>547</sup>

Whilst Jack Wright’s recollections thus demonstrated how the destruction of the physical home could be framed as a loss of personal history and heritage, his story also exemplified the way in which this event could act as a cipher for the effects of the conflict on one’s broader domestic life. He had found, for example, that the image of his mother acting out one final performance of homely routine had pervaded his last memories of their bombed home. Her ‘impulse to replace the little china milk jug on its tray and mop up its spilt milk,’ he wrote, was ‘an intimate and instinctive gesture checked by her unavoidable recognition of the scale of the upheaval, so instantaneous as to be almost unbelievable’.<sup>548</sup> Florence Rollinson, whose family was bombed out in London, similarly depicted a vignette of domestic routine and tradition interrupted when she recalled how her own mother had picked up a broom and swept their bombed house until the

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<sup>546</sup> HHC, C DMX/242/4, Bill Walsh to Tom Houlton, 8 May 1990.

<sup>547</sup> Peter Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

family protested that the house was ‘finished’. Writing with the distance of some 60 years, Rollinson noted that only since making a home of her own did she truly understand this surreal – and inherently unsatisfiable – desire to put the damaged dwelling back in order.<sup>549</sup>

The way in which the loss of a physical site could thus threaten to interrupt the traditions and habits which underpinned domestic life was only emphasised by the attempts of some citizens to continue using their ruined or endangered homes to carry out such routines. Margaret Heffernan spoke in hindsight, for example, of how her mother had returned to their London home regularly after the family was initially bombed out in order to cook meals for her two daughters who worked in a munitions factory. Heffernan is clear that her mother’s determination to persist with this chore helped them to deal with the otherwise uncomfortable experience of staying in their local rest centre, and to therefore continue their war work. It was only when a patrolling policeman informed Margaret’s mother that there a time-bomb under the ruined staircase – ‘you’ve never seen anyone move so quick’, Margaret noted wryly – that she stopped returning to perform this task.<sup>550</sup>

This disruption of domestic routine often provoked wider anxieties, and did so particularly with regards to the gendered implications of such changes. One rehousing scheme for bombed-out families in Hull, for example, was keen to note that the provision of homes was important not only because it could help bombed civilians to ‘regain a little mental balance and be brought back to themselves’, but also because it allowed families to settle back into their traditional roles:

[T]he woman immediately had her mind occupied with the care of a home and a family, a husband was back at work looking forward to coming home at night to his meal as usual, and they had time to settle down and give some thought as to how they were to tackle their future.<sup>551</sup>

However, as Kristine Miller has pointed out, such anxieties over the ruination and transformation of domestic space and life were not unanimous, for the disruption of the power structures embedded in the material fabric of the home was certainly not a process universally feared. Indeed, some even conceptualised the bombing of homes – even their own – as a kind of radical, but

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<sup>549</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 9402, Papers of F. M. Rollinson, “‘Blitz and Pieces’: My Life During the Second World War 1939-1945”, p. 18.

<sup>550</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 33273, Margaret Heffernan, Reel 1, 22 August 2010.

<sup>551</sup> TNA, HO 192/1283, Chief ARP Warden, ‘Origin of the Warden’s Furnished Houses’, 12 December 1941.

ultimately welcome, intervention. Miller quotes, for example, the case of one young woman who, having been bombed out, finds herself neither shocked nor upset, but rather ‘indescribably happy and triumphant’ at the interruption of her normal life.<sup>552</sup> Somewhat less philosophically, some of those who faced the destruction of their home found that this process was freeing in a different way, in that it allowed for the release of the anxiety which accompanied the *potential* event of home-loss. Florence Rollinson, for example, noted that her own overriding feeling after her family’s home was destroyed was one of relief, prompting her to think: ‘Well, it’s all gone now, there’s nothing more to worry about’.<sup>553</sup>

Nevertheless, for those whose living arrangements in the aftermath of home-loss were less than comfortable, the importance of the dwelling – whether as a place of comfort, as a place where one could have privacy (or, indeed, where one could be with their loved ones) or as a place where one could recover from wartime traumas – was often only emphasised.<sup>554</sup> Brenda Watkinson, for instance, recalled how her family had initially slept on the floors of the rest centre after being bombed out in 1944, before she was temporarily placed in an ‘appalling’ children’s home. Here, she noted, she had been able to see her mother only once a week, for two hours on a Wednesday, and was fed very poorly; looking back, she theorised that the children’s home had been trading the food on the black market.<sup>555</sup> Meanwhile, Doreen Walker, whose family were bombed out of their home in Hull, wrote later of how they had been filtered through a series of post-raid spaces, including one large but ‘dark and dirty’ house which they had to share with two other families.<sup>556</sup> As the stories of Walker and Watkinson each demonstrate, the loss of the house itself could place citizens in uncomfortable proximity to one another, or put distance between those who had once shared a home, thus reshaping domestic lives in both emotional and practical terms.

Yet, whilst the physical bricks and mortar of home therefore had a prominent place within the narratives of the victims of home-loss – whether as a result of its emotional and economic value, or its role in enshrining certain social hierarchies and norms – the same was also true of other scales

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<sup>552</sup> Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, p. 82; Miller, “Even a Shelter’s Not Safe”, p. 141.

<sup>553</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 9402, Papers of F. M. Rollinson, “Blitz and Pieces”: My Life During the Second World War 1939-1945’, p. 18.

<sup>554</sup> On the role of homes as a space of healing, especially with relation to wartime trauma, see also Julie Anderson, “Homes Away from Home” and “Happy Prisoners”: Disabled Veterans, Space, and Masculinity in Britain, 1944-1950’, *Journal of Social History*, 53.3 (2020), 698–715.

<sup>555</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 26784, Brenda Watkinson, Reel 1, 12 July 2010.

<sup>556</sup> HHC, C DMX/242/6, Doreen Walker to Tom Houlton, n.d.

of place. As Barbara Nixon argued, although the connection between Britons and the rural landscape was oft noted, attachment to one's wider environment was clearly not the preserve of countrymen alone.<sup>557</sup> Indeed, whilst protests against requisitioning in rural settings were arguably more famously framed in terms of personal links to place, it is interesting to note that representations made by the urban dispossessed occasionally made use of similar rhetoric.<sup>558</sup> Requisitioned property owners, for example, were frequently at pains to note their history of residence in, and thus connection to, a particular area. Especially among those who had been forced out of the city as a result of their dispossession, this information was often deployed in order to argue that requisitioning had dislocated them not only from their particular dwelling, but also from their hometown and community for generally.<sup>559</sup> Whilst such representations often traded upon the emotional impact of enforced geographic exile in order to request derequisition – or, at least, help in securing alternative accommodation – there was again an intertwined financial dimension at play here as well. Many victims of requisitioning, for example, argued forcefully that the precarity of their living situations had made it challenging to find or sustain work, given the difficulty and expense of securing new housing in the sparse markets of blitz cities.<sup>560</sup>

The importance of the larger scales of home was also in evidence in bombing narratives as well. Nixon, for example, cited the case of an elderly woman who had been so attached to her street that she refused to leave even after the road was flattened and she was 'bombed out utterly and completely'. Despite Nixon's attempts to persuade her to seek new accommodation, she had to leave the woman 'searching for a room just round the corner, so that she would be on the spot when rebuilding should start.'<sup>561</sup> Similarly, a London County Council report on the rest centre service in Marylebone recorded the tale of an elderly Irish woman, who refused to be evacuated away to the country after her house was destroyed, and whose attachment to a specific street fused personal history with a defiant stubbornness: 'The bailiff's done his best to shift me out of Bell

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<sup>557</sup> Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p. 62.

<sup>558</sup> Jacinta Mallon, "Tools of War" or "Sacred" Spaces? Requisitioning and Home-loss During and After the Second World War', (unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent, 2019), pp. 31-34.

<sup>559</sup> See, for example, PA, 1561/3, "W. Palmer" to Colin Campbell, 13 October 1945.

<sup>560</sup> For example, HRO, 64M76/DDC375/1, Baker to Herbert Watts, 23 October 1944. This was also echoed in cases of bombardment: see, for example, PA, 1561/1, "A. S. Thompson" to Colin Campbell, 14 January 1943, which describes one case where a man whose home had been destroyed is described as feeling that his inability to return to the city has impacted his ability to return to work after an injury.

<sup>561</sup> Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p. 62.

Street for the last 20 years, fine up-standin' man that he is, an' if he can't do it, I'm damned if THAT MAN's going to.'<sup>562</sup>

Whilst not all urban Britons were quite so committed to individual streets, it was not uncommon for the bombed out to resist being rehoused in new, occasionally distant areas of the urban landscape. Sometimes, there was a sense that one could be bombed wherever they were, and that there was therefore little point in leaving neighbourhoods and communities behind. A Mass Observation survey of post-raid services in September 1940 found that in the heavily bombed Stepney, for example, there were several cases of evacuated persons who had 'been bombed in their new billets ... [coming] back to the East End, preferring ... to be bombed among friends'.<sup>563</sup> Such instances also highlighted the way in which undercurrents of class feeling could shape the experience of home-loss; one intelligence report thus argued that decamping bombed out East Enders to the west of the capital had proved difficult because it entailed placing them in an area where the prices of food and other goods would be higher than they could afford.<sup>564</sup> This much was echoed by Henry Willink, the special commissioner for the homeless in London, who noted that the unwillingness of bombed out persons in areas like Stepney to be rehoused in Hampstead or Hammersmith was one of the main difficulties he faced in his efforts to clear the backlog of homeless Londoners.<sup>565</sup>

The loss of place – whether at the level of the dwelling, or at that of the street or neighbourhood – thus came to bear upon the way in which the experience of home-loss was understood and responded to in a number of ways. The monetary value of the physical dwelling, for example, often acted as a means through which the wider financial impacts of home-loss were interpreted and expressed by those who lost their home to requisitioning in particular. The practical functions of this space similarly underlined the disruptive effects of the conflict upon urban citizens, and did so especially in cases where they were thrust thereafter into vastly different living situations. Those more intangible aspects of spatial meaning, such as emotional attachments

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<sup>562</sup> The London Archives (hereafter LA), LCC/PUB/06/007, 'St. Marylebone', n.d.

<sup>563</sup> MOA, FR 431, 'Survey of Activities of Official and Voluntary Bodies in the East End during the Intensive Bombing', September 1940, p. 19.

<sup>564</sup> TNA, HO 199/437, 'London Report', 18 September 1940.

<sup>565</sup> 'Rehousing the Homeless', *The Times*, 1 October 1940. See also claims made in Parliament by Malcolm Macdonald, the Minister for Health, during the London Blitz that the homelessness problem was being worsened by the reluctance of the bombed out to move to other neighbourhoods: Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 365, col. 411, 9 October 1940.



to particular dwellings or communities, also allowed these places to act as substrates for a variety of responses: Rollinson's relief, the Marylebone woman's defiance, and Jack Wright's grief all found their something of their genesis in the loss of place. This dimension of home-loss therefore profoundly shaped citizens' movements after the event itself, as these emotional, practical, and financial attachments compelled them to reject the prospect of leaving, to fight to return, or to protest their treatment throughout this experience.

### *Possessions*

The visibility of raid-related death and injury, whether immediate or delayed, rendered it unsurprising that those who survived home-loss as a result of enemy action often professed that they were simply glad that they and their loved ones had escaped with their lives. For instance, John Begley, whose home in Liverpool was bombed in May 1941, admitted that upon finding out the scale of death caused by that month's blitz his family had simply 'counted [themselves] lucky to be alive.'<sup>566</sup> Similarly, whilst she lingered over the injuries sustained by her parents, and the loss of 'everything' she owned, one woman who was bombed out in Catford bookended these laments with the insistence that 'we must thank God for taking great care of us'.<sup>567</sup> Grace Foakes, who saw 'everything [she] possessed' disappear into a 'large gaping hole' in November 1940, likewise wrote that 'at the time this did not seem to matter, for we had all escaped and would find another home'.<sup>568</sup>

Yet, as one Mass Observer put it in October 1942, 'while persons counted for more than houses or furniture, continuity of surroundings counted for a great deal.'<sup>569</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that both the quotidian and the treasured items which made up much of these surroundings should have long loomed large in the imagination of home-loss. For example, one man had written to *The Times* in 1940 upon the news that the authorities had been empowered to requisition possessions and other property to express his concern that, '[i]f authorities are able to walk into any house and take what they like at their own price, valued heirlooms may be well lost to owners forever.'<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> LRO, 940 PWP/2/3, John Begley, '1941 – Bombed Out from Crambourne Rd, Wavertree, Liverpool', 2004.

<sup>567</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 1578, Papers of G. M. Davies, Mother of Ethel Davies to Ethel and G. M. Davies, n.d.

<sup>568</sup> Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, p. 66.

<sup>569</sup> MOA, DR 1056, Response to October 1942 Directive.

<sup>570</sup> Robert Gower, 'Rehousing the Homeless', *The Times*, 30 October 1940.

Meanwhile, in a set of Mass Observation interviews held in London in early 1941, women were asked what their feelings would be if they found their house had been bombed. The loss of possessions was commonly identified as a particular source of potential angst and sadness, with many of the interviewees stating their belief that the worst thing about being bombed-out would be 'losing possessions one has had for years'.<sup>571</sup> For one 55-year-old woman, the threat of losing her belongings was a far sadder prospect than the ruination of the physical house, a possibility that she claimed would not disturb her very much.<sup>572</sup>

This prioritisation of individual possessions over the dwelling structure itself was far from unique. The ARP warden Barbara Nixon recalled in her memoir, for example, the case of a woman who had begged her not to call the fire station when the top of her house caught fire during a raid: she 'preferred the top storey to burn out rather than have all her furniture swamped'.<sup>573</sup> Such concern was often borne out of the fact that items could have significant practical value; their sudden absence from life was thus a shock to the system. Many of those who had been bombed out, for example, recalled being left with only the clothes they were wearing at the time of the raid. In some instances, raid victims were able to procure spare clothing free of charge via charitable schemes or at their local rest centre.<sup>574</sup> Similarly, it was possible to apply to the state for coupons which could be exchanged in a shop for spare clothes. In both cases, the garments provided were often second-hand, and few in number: Margaret Heffernan, a munitions worker in London, recalled how the coupons she received furnished her with only 'one coat, one set of underclothes, [and] one pair of shoes'.<sup>575</sup> Similar schemes existed to furnish bombed-out Britons with essential pieces of furniture, but again the supply of such items was heavily restricted, this time on account of shortages of resources such as timber.<sup>576</sup> In parallel, the exiled residents of requisitioned properties often had to deal without furniture which had been placed in storage or left in situ at the moment of requisition. Whilst this issue bred political discontent, as many objected more

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<sup>571</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-F, 'Indirect Interviews with Women, February 1941', unpaginated; MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-G, 'Assorted Preliminary Interviews, January-February 1941'.

<sup>572</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-F, 'Indirect Interviews with Women, February 1941', unpaginated.

<sup>573</sup> Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p. 36.

<sup>574</sup> TNA, CAB 102/741, Ministry of Health 'Care of the Homeless' Booklet, November 1941, pp. 34-35.

<sup>575</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 33273, Margaret Heffernan, Reel 2, 22 August 2010.

<sup>576</sup> See, for example, Philip Pinch and Suzanne Reimer, 'Nationalising Local Sustainability: Lessons from the British Wartime Utility Furniture Scheme', *Geoforum*, 65 (2015), 86-95; Suzanne Reimer and Philip Pinch, 'Refurnishing Homes in a Bombed City: Moral Geographies of the Utility Furniture Scheme in London', *London Journal*, 46.1 (2021), 26-46.

strongly to the requisitioning of furnished properties, it also had clear practical consequences for the domestic lives of the dispossessed.<sup>577</sup> Alice Truman, for example, recalled having to furnish her new rooms in Yorkshire with threadbare mats as she was unable to get her rugs and carpets sent up from her own house in Gosport.<sup>578</sup>

However, the widespread tendency to conceptualise home-loss primarily through the lens of lost possessions also owed much to the fact that there had been a deeper importance attached to material possessions in Britain and beyond since at least the mid-nineteenth century. These items were given greater meaning and value as a result of the development of consumer society, held up as markers of individual and class identity, and recognised for the part that they played in creating and shaping both 'home' and 'self'.<sup>579</sup> Indeed, for those who had been dislocated from homes which they did not own, it was in these items that the principal sum of economic and emotional energy was invested.<sup>580</sup> One woman from Kilburn, for example, wistfully noted when discussing her experience of being bombed out of a rented flat that although they had not been owner-occupiers,

[I]t was all our own furniture. It's terrible, isn't it, [to] lose all that you've collected. Twenty-four years of married life, we'd got some lovely things ... we brought a few bits along we got out, but ... they broke to [pieces] as we brought them along.<sup>581</sup>

As Leora Auslander has argued with Tara Zahra, objects are often reconfigured or enriched by war: it threatens them with destruction, and yet makes them ever more vital; and when most are lost, '[t]he rescued remnants take on new meaning ... [as all that] is left of a formerly much larger array of the stuff of everyday life'.<sup>582</sup> To put it another way, in the words of Jeroen

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<sup>577</sup> See, for example, Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 382, col. WA207, 23 July 1942.

<sup>578</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 12365, Alice Kathleen Truman, Reel 1, 4 December 1991.

<sup>579</sup> Russell W. Belk, 'Attachment to Possessions', in *Place Attachment*, ed. by Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum, 1992), 37–62, p. 37; Cohen, *Household Gods*. For more on the role of possessions and consumer objects in shaping personal and domestic identities, see: Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998); Rachel Hurdley, 'Dismantling Mantlepieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home', *Sociology*, 40.4 (2006), 717–733; Suzanne Reimer and Deborah Leslie, 'Identity, Consumption and the Home', *Home Cultures*, 1.2 (2004), 187–210; and Judy Giles, 'A Home of One's Own: Women and Domesticity in England 1918–1950', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16.3 (1993), 239–253.

<sup>580</sup> In mid-twentieth century Britain, homeowners were still in the minority, making up just over a third of the populace. See Peter Saunders, *A Nation of Home Owners* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 14.

<sup>581</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-E, 'Interviews with people who have been bombed out', January 1941, unpaginated.

<sup>582</sup> Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra, 'The Things They Carried: War, Mobility, and Material Culture', in *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*, ed. by Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 1–21, p. 4. Whilst it deals with a notably different context, Auslander's work on the

Kemperman and Hinke Piersma, these items become increasingly important as ‘memory-maps’ when displacement and destruction have removed other interfaces with the past.<sup>583</sup> Unsalvageable domestic objects, whether they were treasured heirlooms or mundane items which had previously been endowed with little sentimental value, often performed this mnemonic purpose one final, bittersweet time. Barbara Nixon demonstrated, for example, how objects left in the wreckage could act as an ephemeral and transitory reminder of what had been lost, when she described the ‘intimate desolation’ of a wrecked street:

A child’s toy caught on the twisted railings, a perambulator hurled into a fantastic position, a cooking-stove hanging in mid-air, supported apparently only by the gas-pipe, a chair with a man’s Sunday suit neatly folded over the back, balancing on the edge of a severed upper floor, the patchwork of different coloured wall-papers on the exposed walls; it all showed the ruin of so many personal lives.<sup>584</sup>

Raymond Edwards, a young boy living in central Hull during the war, similarly recalled later how the image of a ‘little red peddle car with yellow wheels’ sticking out of the rubble of his family’s bombed home in 1941 had become lodged in his memories of the experience. It had been one of his Christmas presents from the previous year, but as he had been too small to reach its peddles, he had not yet been able to ride in it. Now, although it had not been destroyed, it had been rendered unusable. In Edwards’ account of the bombing, the little peddle car took on an allegorical role, acting as a symbol of all that had been lost in the raid – it was not only a home, but also a particular set of childhood experiences, which had been reduced to rubble.<sup>585</sup> It is possible to see, in this way, how the significance of lost possessions thus often lay in their ability to act as a poignant cipher for the loss of something more intangible; for the damage done to domestic and familial lives more broadly.

However, whilst objects which had been left extant – albeit in a damaged or warped state – often functioned particularly well as symbols for the loss of domestic routines and histories, those

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expropriation of Jewish property in occupied Europe – in which she argues that the loss of possessions (whether dwellings or smaller belongings) functioned as a key vehicle for the erosion of Jewish citizenship – is also of interest within this discussion about the role of material goods in wartime: see Leora Auslander, ‘Coming Home? Jews in Postwar Paris’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40.2 (2005), 237-259.

<sup>583</sup> Jeroen Kemperman and Hinke Piersma, ‘Robbed and Dispossessed: The Emotional Impact of Property Loss during the German Occupations of the Netherlands, 1940-1945’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 20.2 (2022), 183-198, p. 197.

<sup>584</sup> Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*, p. 142.

<sup>585</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22169, Raymond Edwards, Reel 1, 10 September 2001.

that had disappeared completely could also be put to work in this way. One Londoner wrote of how she had found herself crying and unable to eat after being bombed out, and attributed it to ‘the shock of the night before’, during which she had lost her ‘house, furniture, garden [and] clothes’. This material world, she noted, was her ‘whole background’.<sup>586</sup> Meanwhile, when Raymond Edwards recalled his family’s second experience of being bombed out three months after the first, he noted that although the death of his grandmother was his most ‘abiding memory’ of that event, the ‘saddest part of the loss’ after this bereavement was the fact that the raid had completely destroyed all of their family photographs. In this way, he argued, the war had ‘robbed [him] ... of part of [his] family heritage’.<sup>587</sup> This loss was not only a cause for grief on account of the fact that it had severed another link to the familial past; it also owed something to the fact that cameras remained a rarity in working-class households such as his, and so photographs were to be particularly cherished.<sup>588</sup> For Edwards, the loss of these possessions, of his grandmother, and of his house each served to shape his understanding of the conflict in a profound way, at least during the war itself. Describing a visit to the ruins of their second house, for example, he noted how the damage had provoked in him a ‘sense of anger ... an absolute and outright hatred for Germans and everything that was German’.<sup>589</sup>

Bill Regan, a rescue worker in the Isle of Dogs, similarly wrote in his diary of how, after being bombed out, his wife Violet had been particularly concerned by the disappearance of a chiming clock that they had spent months paying off. However, whereas Edwards’ distress at losing belongings which were thus invested with economic as well as emotional value was directed at the enemy bombers, the loss of the clock seems to have garnered particular frustration for the Regans because they believed that it had been looted by one of the firemen rather than destroyed in the

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<sup>586</sup> BBC People’s War Archive, Eileen Essam, 5 July 2005, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/10/a4368710.shtml> [last accessed: 25 November 2022]

<sup>587</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22169, Raymond Edwards, Reel 1, 10 September 2001. For more on the importance of possessions in constructing familial identities and histories, see Anna Woodham, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blair, ‘We Are What We Keep: The “Family Archive”, Identity and Public/Private Heritage’, *Heritage & Society*, 10.3 (2017), 203-220; Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, Laura King, and Anna Woodham, ‘The Ties That Bind: Materiality, Identity, and the Life Course in the “Things” Families Keep’, *Journal of Family History*, 43.2 (2018), 157-176.

<sup>588</sup> For a further example of the limited access of working-class families to photographic technologies, and the roles that they could play in creating and documenting family life, see Janet Hamlett, ‘Mothering in the Archive: Care and the Creation of Family Papers and Photographs in Twentieth-Century Southern England’, *Past and Present*, 246.15 (2020), 186-214. Similarly, see Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>589</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22169, Raymond Edwards, Reel 1, 10 September 2001.

raid.<sup>590</sup> Similarly, Ruth Moore, from Lambeth, recalled later how she ‘went berserk’ upon returning home to find that her house had been destroyed by a direct hit. She had lost all of her possessions, including her wedding presents and her furniture, and suspected that some of this was the result of looting by the demolition squad. Her distress over these events was only compounded by the fact that she was unable to secure compensation for these lost items, she claimed, for the furniture had been on hire purchase, and she had been unable to prove ownership of the gifts as she had not bought them herself. The effects of this loss were long-lasting: having moved away to Chichester to recuperate, she was soon beset by nervous paralysis, which saw her spend the next three years in hospital. This response was one which she connected innately to her grief over the loss of her home and belongings.<sup>591</sup>

Even for those who were less acutely affected in the long-term, it is clear that the experience of losing one’s things – especially when compounded by the knowledge or suspicion that it had not been the work only of the enemy – could still alter the way in which home-loss was understood and framed. For example, Brenda Watkinson, a child living in London during the Blitz, remembered how her ruined family home had been ‘looted even before [they] got out of the shelter’; among other things, her brother’s camera, for which he had ‘carefully saved up’, was gone. Watkinson’s memory of this experience is one tinged with incredulity: ‘It’s amazing to me that people can do that when the house has just been bombed out’.<sup>592</sup> This loss was not a cause of sadness only because of the economic cost involved, nor simply because the loss of ‘homely’ things threatened to distort one’s wider understanding of the domestic sphere. Rather, it is apparent that the experience of looting problematised Watkinson’s ability to frame the destruction of her family home in terms of notions such as shared sacrifice and community.

Whether inaccessible, unsalvageable, damaged, or lost to either bombs or those scavenging the ruins, possessions thus occupied a particularly prominent place within the narratives of those who lost their homes during wartime. Dispossession provoked fears over the treatment of these items, and threatened to estrange citizens from their belongings; meanwhile, in cases of bombardment, where material loss was usually more violent, more sudden, and more complete, destroyed and damaged objects could act as ciphers for the loss of self, and for the disruptive effects

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<sup>590</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 781, Papers of William B. Regan, manuscript fragments, p. 50.

<sup>591</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22130, Ruth Moore, Reel 1, 18 September 2001.

<sup>592</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 26784, Brenda Watkinson, Reel 1, 12 July 2010.

of war on one's practical and emotional domestic life. As with people and places, the loss of these items could shape understandings of home-loss in a myriad of different ways, which often ambiguously intersected with one another. Thus, just as the loss of possessions could underline the sacrifice made by the dispossessed and blitzed, so too could this experience emphasise the ways in which this sacrifice was undermined, through circumstances such as looting; and, just as the anger and grief over lost possessions could be successfully channelled against the enemy, so too could it come to be directed at those closer to home.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF COPING

In April 1941, the writer and presenter Norman F. Ellison described in his journal how his home had been scattered in the aftermath of the raiding on Liverpool: 'I need no reminder but I'll just make a note here', he wrote, 'that I have no home; my furniture is stored in no less than five different addresses'. The absence of his wife, who was away nursing an elderly relative, only made this estrangement harder. Yet, Ellison closed his entry with a rallying stance, arguing that he was 'as cheerful as possible for I am fully determined not to allow this insane war to get me down.'<sup>593</sup> State and society worked hard, as we have already seen, to ensure that measured responses like this were established as the normal, ideal reaction to wartime difficulties. Indeed, even in cases where stoicism threatened to tip over into something more counterproductive, the response itself was spoken of in admiring terms. One LCC official thus recalled in a report on the rest centre services in Woolwich and Greenwich the story of an elderly woman who refused to leave her bombed home, in which she had lived for ninety-five years: 'she stayed there, in the one wrecked room, for some weeks ... until the Borough Council pulled the house down around her'. Despite the fact that the woman's actions clearly complicated the work of making the ruined site safe, the official noted that her 'spirit' was nevertheless appreciated.<sup>594</sup>

However, it is undeniable that the importance of personal fortitude within certain discourses – such as those that interrogated what constituted 'Britishness', or good citizenship – placed a difficult burden on wartime Britons, which not all were able to shoulder. The difficulties of responding in the manner valorised by state and society, especially in the immediate aftermath

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<sup>593</sup> LRO, 920 NFE/2/2/1, Papers of Norman F. Ellison, War Diary and Scrapbook, Vol. I, Entry for 25 April 1941.

<sup>594</sup> LA, LCC/PUB/06/007, Ronald E. Duffield, 'London County Council Rest Centre Service, Area X', n.d.

of a traumatic and physically violent event such as bombardment, for example, are evidenced by stories such as that of Albert Wilkins, who recalled how his younger sister had lost her voice and been paralysed after their home Walthamstow was ‘flattened’ in 1940.<sup>595</sup> Or, that of Leslie Higgins, who was buried under the wreckage of his home in Ilford by a V1 rocket for several hours, convinced he would be set ablaze by the leaking gas or drowned by the broken water pipes, and who recalled the area in which he was trapped glowing with a ghostly blue light.<sup>596</sup> Len Jones, a young man from Poplar, likewise told of how his own mental state had been profoundly disrupted by his experiences on the first day of the London Blitz, during which he had returned to find his own home and the surrounding houses wrecked. The amalgam of corpses and rubble prompted a sort of horrified madness, as he repeatedly tried to burn himself with a match to ‘see if [he] was still alive’.<sup>597</sup>

Although – as demonstrated by Jones’ admission that his memories of the ‘red, sheer hot, blood[y]’ world of the bombed city had haunted him for forty years, and Higgins’ acknowledgement that the experience of being buried had left him with lifelong claustrophobia – scars were often left behind by these experiences, such states of extreme shock usually receded as time went on.<sup>598</sup> In such instances, narratives of individual stoicism were often able to reassert themselves, drawing on notions of mental adaptability if not necessarily unbroken bravery. However, it also bears remembering that, for some, the impacts of these experiences were such that recovery proved impossible. Londoner Harry Atterbury, for example, recalled how the destruction of the family home had particularly affected his older brother, who had only just returned on sick leave after being injured during the Normandy Landings:

When he emerged from the underground station at Essex Road, he witnessed a sight of flattened and destroyed streets where his home had once been. One shock on top of another so weakened his health that he never again regained his vigour and health; this resulted in his early death just five years after the war’s end.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 19902, Albert Joseph Wilkins, Reel 1, 24 November 1999.

<sup>596</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 31430, Leslie Higgins, Reel 2, August 2008.

<sup>597</sup> Joanna Mack and Steve Humphries, *The Making of London 1939-1945: London at War* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), p. 43.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*; IWM, Sound Archive, 31430, Leslie Higgins, Reel 2, August 2008.

<sup>599</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 13352, Papers of Harry W. Atterbury, typescript memoir, unpaginated.



Another instance, in which a brother and sister were found dead after gassing themselves in another family's garage, was even more closely linked to their recent experience of being bombed out.<sup>600</sup> In another case, a woman named Agnes Vernon was found to have taken her own life after being bombed out. Of course, the reality is that such tragedies – especially when viewed in hindsight, and through the accounts of contemporaries rather than the individual themselves – ultimately resist any attempts to clarify their causation. However, it is nevertheless striking that there was a clear connection drawn between these suicidal acts and home-loss in these cases. Vernon's husband, for example, argued at the inquest into her death that she 'had never been ill in her life until they were bombed out of their home'. The experience itself had reportedly upset her deeply, triggering a depressive episode which was only worsened by their subsequent move to Dagenham, an area with which she was unfamiliar and where she had no friends.<sup>601</sup> Such severe circumstances were surely rare; yet, they nevertheless illustrated the way in which the legacies of home-loss were perceived to ripple through the lives of those who faced this fate in ways that could not be resolved by reference to inner fortitude.

Yet, whilst the demand placed upon individuals to display personal fortitude was clearly not sufficient or appropriate in all circumstances, it is nevertheless evident that many Britons saw value in at least attempting to demonstrate this trait. This was in evidence, for example, in cases where the victims of home-loss hid their experience from family members serving in the forces, lest it damage their morale. By thus helping to limit the impact of war on their loved ones, it was possible to lend meaning and purpose to both the event of home-loss, and to the difficulty of managing the difficult emotions that arose as a result. Celia Fremlin, a *Mass Observer* who conducted a number of interviews with bombed-out persons in London, recording asking one woman whether she had told her son – who was serving in Egypt – about the fact that she had been bombed out of her home in Willesden. 'No,' the woman replied; 'I didn't tell him, I didn't want to worry him ... it would have upset him terrible. He's never lived [anywhere] else.'<sup>602</sup> The press regularly grasped upon these tales: in October 1943, several newspapers all reported the same story about a Londoner who, having been bombed out thrice, had at no point written to tell her

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<sup>600</sup> 'Bombed-Out Couple Dead in Car', *Dundee Courier*, 16 April 1941.

<sup>601</sup> 'The Tragedy of a Bombed-Out Wife', *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 29 November 1940.

<sup>602</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-E, 'Interviews with people who have been bombed out', January 1941, unpaginated.

soldier husband.<sup>603</sup> Such attention again served to confirm publicly the value that was ascribed to such actions, but also emphasised the manner in which the process of coping was often presented as a pursuit for which the individual bore significant responsibility.

As noted previously, requisitioning did not feature in the discourse around morale and home-loss in the same way that the air raid threat did; nor did it occupy quite the same place in resultant efforts to uncouple these concepts and experiences. Nevertheless, the dispossessed existed in the same political and cultural landscape, and were still encouraged in subtle ways to frame their experiences in terms of wartime sacrifice – as something accepted by the individual for the good of the whole nation. As debates over requisitioning in arenas such as Parliament demonstrated, those who responded without complaint were therefore often praised as ‘good citizens’, echoing the treatment of those who bore the experience of being bombed out. Meanwhile, those who sought the return of their homes were often reminded that their properties had been requisitioned in the name of the war effort. The town clerk for Plymouth, for example, replied to one such request for derequisition noting that the house had been requisitioned in order to house those who had been made homeless as a result of enemy action. Many of these persons, the clerk pointedly noted, were ‘in even more difficult circumstances’ than the recipient.<sup>604</sup> Given this rhetorical construction of dispossession as a worthy and sacrificial act, it is unsurprising that many of those who were dispossessed also attempted to adopt a stoical and uncomplaining approach to their experience. Following the requisition of her Gosport home, for example, Alice Truman described how her first months away in Yorkshire had been dominated by attempts to accept her wartime lot as the ‘law of the land’, and to remake her life in her new environment.<sup>605</sup> Whilst Truman would later come to protest her treatment, her testimony makes clear that conceptualising her dispossession as being for the good of the war effort was initially a successful tactic, which allowed her to conceive of her loss as meaningful and justifiable, if difficult.

However, whilst such personal attempts at stoicism were therefore the subject of public praise, and often a pursuit which helped those trying to navigate the process of home-loss, conceptualisations of wartime coping did not place all of the burden upon the individual. Rather,

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<sup>603</sup> ‘Bombed Out Three Times’, *Evening Telegraph*, 21 October 1943; ‘Bombed Out Three Times’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1943; “No Point in Worrying Him”, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 21 October 1943.

<sup>604</sup> PA, 1561/4, Colin Campbell to “B. K. Allen”, 19 December 1944.

<sup>605</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 12365, Alice Kathleen Truman, Reel 1, 4 December 1991.

neighbours, friends, and family were all invested with a degree of responsibility. As we have already seen, the role of these persons was a key theme in many of the state's propaganda outputs regarding home-loss. From the posters which recommended mutual arrangements, to *Neighbours Under Fire* and *Front Line*, it is clear that such material sought to depict the ideal responses not only of those in need of support, but also of those who might be providing said support. In the testimonies of those who actually underwent the experience of home-loss, this theme again came under scrutiny as citizens described the effectiveness – or, indeed, ineffectiveness – of mutual aid. In many instances, the aid of one's fellow citizens was one depicted as critically important: for example, for Ada and Rhoda McGuire, two sisters bombed-out from their home in Wallasey, it was their neighbour who took in their elderly mother, and a friend who helped them to find alternative accommodation. Without this help, Rhoda noted in a letter to her other sister, an expatriate living in America, 'we might have been very much worse off'.<sup>606</sup> For others, the experience was more ambivalent. Thus, Grace Foakes recalled her gratitude to a neighbour's relative who had accommodated Foakes' family in the immediate aftermath of their loss; and yet, simultaneously, she noted all the ways in which her hosts' lack of warmth had complicated her family's recovery from their experience and provoked her drive to fight for better treatment by the state.<sup>607</sup>

However, as the example of dispossession shows, the importance of one's fellow citizens could actually become most evident precisely in such circumstances, when the process of coping entailed some degree of contestation. It is notable, for example, that among the calls for help by the dispossessed, it was not uncommon for there to be an intermediary involved. Particularly where the process of requisitioning was held to have caused or worsened personal and health issues, or where the affected individuals were elderly or otherwise frail, representations often came via a friend, a family member, or on occasion a local figure of authority.<sup>608</sup> The process of navigating dispossession, and indeed protesting the nature of this process, was therefore inherently shaped by the actions of these third parties.

The role of fellow Britons was also made evident by references to coping mechanisms which relied not upon individual willpower or fortitude, but upon interactions between citizens.

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<sup>606</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Rhoda McGuire to Eve Grandison, 13 April 1941.

<sup>607</sup> Foakes, *My Life With Reuben*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>608</sup> For example, PA, 1561/3, "W. Palmer" to Colin Campbell, 13 October 1945; PA, 1561/53, "C. F. Summers" to Campbell, 4 August 1941; PA, 1561/1, "A. S. Thompson" to Colin Campbell, 14 January 1943.

Humour, for example, was often described as another core means through which emotional equilibrium could be maintained, particularly for those who had lost their homes in an air raid.<sup>609</sup> As opposed to the struggle to command one's own emotions, humour was a device that inherently depended upon the sharing of one's experiences. Florence Rollinson recalled, for example, how her family had joked about the accuracy of the hit on their house when they saw that an incendiary bomb had been dropped right down the chimney: "What a shot," we said. "Give that man a cigar!" Similarly, she remembered how her father had penned a poem for the postman and placed it among the ruins of their bombed home in London after they were rehoused in the next street: 'We are bombed but far from beat / 'Cos we only live in Ridgedale Street / (at no 18)'. As the cherry on top of this stoical cake, he had also planted a Union Jack in the rubble to accompany the poem. These actions, Rollinson wrote, were 'corny' but 'effective'.<sup>610</sup> Just as their jokes had helped to frame their loss in less cataclysmic terms in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, humour also acted here as a foil to the practical difficulties of being bombed-out in the days that followed.

The healing effects of shared humour were also noted by a Women's Voluntary Service Bulletin in December 1944, which carried a short article about volunteers who were staffing a mobile canteen.<sup>611</sup> The author noted that they had been

Struck by the amazing fortitude of some of the people whose homes are in ruins. They can still grin and crack a joke. One man came up to us at a particularly bad site of devastation, smiled, and said with a shrug, "And they call this an Incident. I calls it a ruddy calamity."<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> For more on constructions of humour and courage within a British wartime context, see Juliette Pattinson and Linsey Robb (eds), *British Humour and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023); Edward Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combatant Courage, 1914-1918', *War in History*, 20.1 (2013), 76-98. For an interesting observation on the way in which humour might also have been conceptualised as 'arrogance' or 'a cowardly denial of reality' instead of a positive expression of bravery, see Lola Serraf, 'Supporting and Resisting the Myth of the Blitz: Ambiguity in Susan Ertz's *Anger in the Sky* (1943)', in *British Women's Writing, 1930 to 1960: Between the Waves*, ed. by Sue Kennedy and Jane Thomas (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 91-108, pp. 100-101.

<sup>610</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 9402, Papers of F. M. Rollinson, "Blitz and Pieces": My Life During the Second World War 1939-1945', pp. 18-19.

<sup>611</sup> For more on the emotional work done by WVS workers, see Charlotte Tomlinson, 'A Million Forgotten Women: Voluntarism, Citizenship, and the Women's Voluntary Services in Second World War Britain' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2021), pp. 92-100.

<sup>612</sup> Royal Voluntary Service Archive (hereafter RVSA), WRVS/HQ/PUB/BUL, WVS Bulletin No. 62, December 1944, Article entitled 'A London Mobile Canteen', p. 6.

Communal spaces, represented here by the mobile canteen, were thus presented as an important site in which the bombed-out could relax, laugh, and expel the ‘pent-up feelings’ which resulted from being made homeless.<sup>613</sup> In such spaces, the difficult emotions which often attended domestic loss – such as grief, anxiety, or fear – could be felt and expressed in acceptable ways, allowing them thereafter to be controlled and managed. As touched upon at the beginning of this chapter, such an understanding of the factors which might facilitate the recovery of the bombed-out was reflected elsewhere, too: for example, in *Front Line*, the 1942 booklet published by the Ministry of Information, the author had written:

There were two universal solaces for those suffering from strain of any degree, whether it was a sleepless night in bed at home or being bombed out and losing one’s possessions or one’s kinsfolk. These two were Tea, and Telling about it.<sup>614</sup>

Each of these ‘solaces’ revolved around community. The act of sharing one’s experiences was naturally an activity that involved neighbours, friends, and those who staffed post-raid spaces; tea, meanwhile, was a stalwart of the post-raid scene which tended to arrive on stage in the hands of a friendly neighbour, or a helpful volunteer like those that manned the WVS canteen. *Front Line*, as a piece of state propaganda invested in the image of Britain as a kind of stoic bastion against Nazism, certainly had reason to emphasise the communal spirit that underpinned these coping mechanisms. However, although the notion of ‘Tea, and Telling about it’ might have been regularly deployed in propagandistic contexts, this is not to say that it was not a genuine feature of wartime life which helped Britons to manage loss. For example, we might remember here Esther Baker, whom we met at the outset of this chapter, and whose morale was so bolstered by the arrival of her neighbour with the quintessential brew.

Civil defence publications like the *ARP News*, a commercial magazine established in 1938, regularly ran articles which underlined the idea that citizens and communities had a duty to support one another in this way during wartime.<sup>615</sup> Whilst the everyday actions of individuals acting only in the role of neighbour or friend were also praised, these publications unsurprisingly

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, p. 70.

<sup>615</sup> Jessica Hammett and Henry Irving, ‘A Place for Everyone, and Everyone Must Find the Right Place’: Recruitment to British Civil Defence, 1937-44’, in *Propaganda and Public Relations in Military Recruitment: Promoting Military Service in the Twentieth Century and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Brendan Maartens and Thomas Bivins (Routledge: Abingdon, 2020), 96-113, p. 104.

promoted formalised civil defence roles as one of the best means of meeting this responsibility.<sup>616</sup> One account of the rest centre experience in Swansea published in April 1941, for example, emphasised that the duty of officials was to create ‘an atmosphere ... which will help to restore tranquillity of mind to the folk taking refuge’. Such renderings of the role of civil defenders also implicitly argued that this support was necessary because citizens who had just lost their homes were particularly vulnerable, having only just ‘undergone one of the most confidence-destroying experiences which can overtake a community of human beings’.<sup>617</sup> The restorative – or, indeed, transformative – function of rest centres was similarly emphasised by an LCC report on a centre in St. Pancras, which told of a bombed-out woman who had been admitted in October 1940 in an ‘unbilletable’ state – drunken, ‘abusive’, and unsanitary – but who had ‘walked out ... an almost normal, clean woman, to a normal home’.<sup>618</sup> Through such accounts, post-raid spaces – and particularly those staffed by volunteers – were constructed as vital cogs in the machine which facilitated the recovery and sanitisation (both literal and figurative) of Britons who had experienced wartime traumas.

Some voices within the pages of civil defence journals did nevertheless critique the functioning of post-raid services. For instance, one *ARP News* article in October 1941 detailed the author’s surprise that ‘our blitzed people – bombed-out, bewildered, and battered – had managed to stand up to the barbarism’ in the face of a post-raid welfare apparatus that the author viewed as overly convoluted and difficult to access. The conclusion of the article argued that a simplification of post-blitz services would be ‘essential’ if the integrity of the system was to be assured.<sup>619</sup> Whilst such expressions of anxiety questioned how well the task at hand was being fulfilled, they thus still underlined the belief in the importance of these services in the first place. Moreover, they served to reinforce the idea that the responsibility for the equilibrium of those who were experiencing the worst hardships of urban wartime life lay not only with victims themselves, but also with their fellow citizens. In other words: all those in wartime society had a role to play in the process of nursing Britons through such experiences.

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<sup>616</sup> ‘The Good Neighbour Policy’, *ARP and AFS Review*, 1 February 1945.

<sup>617</sup> ‘Experience in Swansea’, *ARP News*, 1 April 1941.

<sup>618</sup> LA, LCC/PUB/06/007, ‘St. Pancras’, n.d.

<sup>619</sup> ‘Service for the Bombed Out’ *ARP News*, 1 October 1941, p. 13.

Inherent in such articles was also a debate over just how much responsibility could be laid at the door of the citizenry, whether they themselves were in need of support or were instead acting in support of others. For example, one letter from a reader signing themselves as ‘A Travelling Warden’ in November 1941 applauded the work of WVS members in rest centres, yet questioned not only whether ‘these ladies were adequate for staffing the centre’, but also whether ‘their relations with the bombed out ... [had] always been of the happiest’.<sup>620</sup> The notion that voluntary workers – for all that one might commend their commitment to civic participation, and accept the importance of their roles – should augment rather than form the backbone of tasks such as post-raid care was also expressed in other circles. One Home Intelligence Report at the end of September 1940, during which the London Blitz had placed great pressure upon the post-raid apparatus, similarly noted how a contact in Marylebone had observed

[A] general feeling ... that the time was now past for homeless people to be helped through what is equivalent to charity by voluntary workers who, although excellent, have naturally a different attitude towards their work. Paid workers with regular hours should be in charge of the various sites of the work arising out of raids, as many of the people concerned are beginning to resent anything savouring of charity.<sup>621</sup>

As this contact was sure to note, however, such criticism was ‘always against the Government, not against the workers, whose worth they recognise’.<sup>622</sup> Contemporaries, then, did not have to reject the importance of community action in order to suggest that the ultimate responsibility for supporting citizens through hardship lay in the lap of the state.

In the eyes of some wartime Britons, the necessity of state support lay at least partially in the recognition – or, one might suggest, pessimistic fear – that stoicism was simply not always a realistic expectation. One Mass Observer thus wrote in her diary in September 1940 of her belief that the ‘[government] must get these poor bombed and homeless people food and warmth and covering at once – or they will panic; they couldn’t help it.’<sup>623</sup> Similarly, those who acknowledged that friends and neighbours could not feasibly be expected to absorb without complaint whole households who had been dispossessed or bombed-out often contrasted this with the state’s power

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<sup>620</sup> ‘A Travelling Warden’, ‘The Rest Centre Problem Needs Attention’, *ARP News*, 1 November 1941.

<sup>621</sup> TNA, HO 199/437, ‘Material for London Report’, 28 September 1940.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>623</sup> MOA, Diarist 5296, Entry for 25 September 1940.

to make more of an effective impact. However, beyond such practical reasons, this belief in the significance of state policy in the process of managing home-loss also stemmed from a variety of overlapping ideas about the moral and practical relationship between state and citizen. As Lucy Noakes has noted, Britain's status as a democratic country lent a particular significance to the task of supporting the populace through hardship, as consent for the war relied upon citizens feeling assured that the state would protect them as far as possible, and that it would honour and compensate them should the worst happen.<sup>624</sup> Whilst Noakes' argument pertains primarily to death and bereavement, her assertions often ring true in the case of home-loss as well. Britons similarly needed to feel that their homes were protected from destruction as far as possible, and when they were hit, that this could not reasonably have been prevented; similarly, those who were dispossessed – and particularly those who were actively evicted – needed to feel that the requisition of their home had been a necessary and unavoidable action. In both cases, citizens also had to believe that their loss was being appropriately recognised by the state.

In such a context, the actions of the state within areas of material aid such as post-raid welfare, compensation, and the provision of new housing mattered deeply – a fact that, as we noted earlier, was recognised by the various actors within state and society who had probed the connections between morale and home-loss. However, as Richard Titmuss argued in 1950, the state's success in each of these categories was inconsistent, inflected by spatial and temporal nuances. As a general rule, for example, post-raid services during the first months of the London Blitz can be described as disorganised, under-resourced, and deeply dependent on the work of charitable and voluntary organisations.<sup>625</sup> Despite the efforts of such bodies, bureaucratic and legal issues – such as a dogged commitment to providing these services under the auspices of the old poor laws, and a convoluted system of financial responsibility which tried to draw impossible distinctions between borough 'natives' and 'refugees' – plagued even the most basic of tasks.<sup>626</sup> Whilst welfare arrangements are generally accepted to have improved by the spring of 1941 – a result of both hard-won experience and the breathing space provided as the bombing became less intensive – this was not everywhere the same. Jerry White points out, for example, that certain

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<sup>624</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 8, 13.

<sup>625</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 261; MOA, FR 437, 'A Test for Democratic Institutions', 3 October 1940, p. 2.

<sup>626</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 252.



boroughs still struggled with aspects of post-raid care, despite general improvements across the city as a whole.<sup>627</sup> In the provinces, too, these variations were replicated within and between cities, as uneven preparations and circumstances again shaped the experience of bombardment.<sup>628</sup>

To be sure, among those using the immediate contact points of the post-raid apparatus, such as rest centres and other spaces for those made temporarily homeless, there were many who spoke of their experience in positive terms. Even at a point when such services remained under strain, for example, one bombed-out citizen reported on the comfort of their time at a rest centre, noting both the kindness of the workers there and the generous provision of the material aid.<sup>629</sup> Nevertheless, it is also clear that the inadequacies of this service could sometimes provide fertile ground for tensions to yet again bubble up, highlighting both the cracks within urban communities and the rifts between citizens and the wartime state. In such a way, the spaces in which the state's welfare programme operated could function as crossroads, at which citizens either developed resentful or accepting perceptions of their own treatment. A Stepney rest centre officer recollected, for example, how in September 1940 overcrowding at the Redman's Road centre – in which several members from an area of Stepney noted as a stronghold of the British Union of Fascists were sheltering – had facilitated a febrile atmosphere in which the centre staff were accused of giving preferential treatment to Jewish families.<sup>630</sup> Another officer in Hammersmith, meanwhile, recalled how delays in moving the homeless onwards to billets in reception areas had created a 'very nasty atmosphere, and many threats of marching to Downing Street, etc.'<sup>631</sup>

The propensity of post-raid services to become a flashpoint for disagreements between citizens and the state over the responsibilities of the latter was also in evidence within less prominent aspects of the welfare apparatus. In particular, the salvage and storage of furniture and other goods from bombed houses – one of the core responsibilities of local authorities – was often another key point of discontent.<sup>632</sup> This is particularly well exemplified by the case of Mary Crane, an erstwhile resident of Plymouth who had evacuated away to Essex after the lodging house which she owned and resided in was seriously damaged by enemy action. Over the course of the winter

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<sup>627</sup> Jerry White, *The Battle of London 1939-1945: Endurance, Heroism and Frailty Under Fire* (London: Bodley Head, 2021), p. 119.

<sup>628</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 316-317. These variations in locality are explored further in Chapter 4.

<sup>629</sup> MOA, Diarist 5295, Entry for 31 December 1940.

<sup>630</sup> TNA, CAB 102/740, 'Extract from Reports of Temporary Welfare Officers', n.d.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>632</sup> Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, p. 288.

of 1941, Crane engaged in a furious back-and-forth with the council over the return of her furniture, in which she accused the authority of overseeing the looting of her possessions.<sup>633</sup> Like many of those whose experience with the loss of possessions we have already explored, Crane mobilised these items as objects of both emotional *and* financial value in order to protest her treatment. The council, for their part, were rather scathing in their responses, commenting in internal correspondence that her complaints about damage ‘appear to be based on the unwarranted assumption that, although her house is rendered unfit by enemy action, the furniture etc. was undamaged’.<sup>634</sup> In a letter to Crane, meanwhile, the stores officer pointedly argued that the storage of her furniture by the local authorities was ‘a privilege and not a right’.<sup>635</sup> However, Crane’s letters demonstrate that this represented a fundamental clash between different conceptions of the state’s responsibilities. She noted example, that she had

Loaned and gave ... to the homeless nearly £200 worth of furniture and utensils, only to find that all my home is taken from me and drawers etc. looted, we are in a terrible plight my husband being a disabled officer of the last war, hundred per cent.<sup>636</sup>

By claiming a history of personal charity and noting the status of her husband as a disabled ex-serviceman, and indignantly contrasting these factors with her treatment, Crane thus constructed this post-raid service not only as a right, but as one which the authorities had not delivered upon.

Whilst Crane was more forceful in such assertions than most, her case was indicative of the way in which state services in the aftermath of home-loss could become sites for citizens to contest the meaning and consequences of this loss. Indeed, this discontent was also to be found in analogous services for those whose initial experience of domestic dislocation stemmed from requisition rather than bombardment. Whilst these citizens were not entitled to the same forms of state aid that the bombed-out were, local authorities’ still bore responsibility for storing goods and chattels that had been left in the houses which they had requisitioned, and protest often arose around the treatment of these items. One Plymouth resident, for example, protested that her home had been requisitioned (although, as she noted, it appeared empty), and that much of her furniture

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<sup>633</sup> PA, 1561/160, “M. Crane” to Minister of Health, 10 November 1941; PA, 1561/60, “M. Crane” to Minister of Home Security, 2 December 1941.

<sup>634</sup> PA, 1561/160, Anonymous to the Ministry of Home Security, 18 December 1941.

<sup>635</sup> PA, 1561/160, Stores Officer to “M. Crane”, 20 December 1941.

<sup>636</sup> PA, 1561/160, “M. Crane” to Minister of Health, 10 November 1941

had been taken away, forcing her to track it down herself.<sup>637</sup> Another complained that the storage facilities used for property taken from requisitioned homes were often inadequate, meaning that the furniture was vulnerable to decay and deterioration; in such instances, these possessions could be of as little practical use as those which had been lost in a raid.<sup>638</sup>

The process of compensation similarly looms large within the narratives of wartime home-loss as an area in which the state was felt to have not always lived up to its end of the bargain. As we already seen, two of the key concerns raised by those who underwent this experience were the loss of the material structure of the home, and the loss of possessions, each of which were invested with economic as well as cultural and emotional importance. Compensation was a major avenue through which these losses were addressed, although the method of doing so differed depending upon the nature and extent of any damage. For example, as the majority of requisitions allowed for the state to take possession of the unfurnished premises only, compensation payments to dispossessed citizens were primarily made to reimburse them for the sustained loss of the dwelling itself – although, of course, when furniture *did* form part of the requisition order, it was also included in the compensation costs. For those who were bombed out, meanwhile, compensation was more regularly made for the loss of both dwellings and possessions, although in some cases the actual payment (such as that promised in return for the complete ruin of a property, as opposed to that promised for repairs) were delayed until after the war.<sup>639</sup> Whilst, as Grace Foakes wrote, ‘[putting] a price on the things that made a home’ was no small task, financial restitution – or the promise of it, at the very least – thus went some way in alleviating the loss or destruction of these elements of home.<sup>640</sup> As one 1942 article in the *Economist* argued,

War cares nothing about life and property. It strikes blindly, singling out victims at random. Some have to forfeit their lives, others lose their possessions, and yet more their incomes. It is the community’s duty, as far as is practicable, to mitigate the effects of these haphazard blows by spreading their burden. The agency upon whom the ultimate responsibility must fall for protecting individuals against indiscriminate hardship is the Government; and the chief instrument to hand is money.<sup>641</sup>

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<sup>637</sup> PA, 1561/160, “B. Irving” to Colin Campbell, 3 November 1941.

<sup>638</sup> PA, 1561/3, “W. Palmer” to Colin Campbell, 13 October 1945.

<sup>639</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>640</sup> Foakes, *My Life with Reuben*, p. 70.

<sup>641</sup> ‘Compensation in War’, *Economist*, 12 September 1942.

When the amount of compensation – and the method of its distribution – was perceived to be appropriate, this could be an area in which the narratives of state and citizen converged. Foakes' experience of claiming restitution, for example, was relatively smooth, and she praised not only the helpfulness of the local council, but also the way in which this task harmonised well with the work of charities who donated domestic items in the interim.<sup>642</sup> Similarly, another woman who was bombed out in Catford in early 1941 recounted in a letter to her daughter that she had been to lodge a claim for her lost possessions, and had been aided by 'a very nice gentleman ... [who] was very helpful'. Whilst an initial offer of £20 as compensation had proved unsatisfactory, the official had encouraged her to consider any other items she may have lost: 'I thought of a few more things,' she wrote, 'and then it amounted up to £31 [and 19 shillings]'.<sup>643</sup> Here, again, the process of managing home-loss had played out according to the approved scripts: the citizen had calmly made a list of what she had lost, and notwithstanding some minor haggling, had left the claims office satisfied that the state had fulfilled its responsibilities to her.

The case of one Mr Cartwright – an elderly Plymouth resident who had suffered the double burden of being bombed-out and then dispossessed – further exemplifies the way in which compensation could act as a critical juncture in citizens' support for the state's wartime actions. Cartwright had been forced to leave his house after it was badly damaged during a raid, and had then not been informed when it was repaired and subsequently requisitioned as an 'empty' property; a letter written on his behalf to the city council demonstrated that he had, furthermore, not been contacted about compensatory rent after the dispossession. The author of the letter made clear that the rectification of this failure was a point upon which Cartwright's understanding of the event would turn: if he was offered suitable restitution, he would 'be only too pleased to accept'; if not, he intended to 'go further' to protest the loss of what was, after all, 'his own property'.<sup>644</sup>

Cartwright's story also demonstrated how the early years of war had fomented an especially tense relationship between citizens and the government over this issue of recompense. Complaints were often made, for example, over the fact that the compensation received after requisition often amounted to less than the mortgage payments due on the property, meaning that citizens

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<sup>642</sup> Foakes, *My Life with Reuben*, p. 70.

<sup>643</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 15758, Papers of G. M. Davies, Mother of Ethel Davies to Ethel and G. M. Davies, n.d. [c. 1941].

<sup>644</sup> PA, 1561/53, C. F. Summers to Campbell 4 August 1941.

effectively ended up paying not only for their new accommodation, but also for the property they could no longer occupy.<sup>645</sup> In Parliament, meanwhile, cases were often raised regarding individuals who were facing hardship on account of the drawn-out process of determining and processing these claims.<sup>646</sup> Similarly, this first period of war saw a particularly strong outpouring of grievance from those who had suffered the loss of their homes in the Blitz, and who felt that they had not been adequately compensated. Mass Observation and the Ministry of Information each recorded in the autumn of 1940, for example, public anger at the ‘inadequacy of compensation of wrecked and burnt-out houses’.<sup>647</sup> In Stepney, one MO report noted that distress was being caused not only by the amount of compensation being received, which was often argued to be insufficient for what had been lost, but also by the confusing process of submitting a claim.<sup>648</sup> Others protested the readily apparent holes in the system, such as the fact that those who stayed with friends and family after a raid – as, indeed, they had been encouraged to by the state – did not at this point receive a compensatory billeting allowance to pay their hosts.<sup>649</sup> As members of the Special Joint Emergency Committee in Birmingham noted, this was an especially counterproductive policy, which caused not only ‘dissatisfaction’ but also a redoubling of the burden upon the state’s resources, as the bombed out thence tended to ‘declare that they [had] no friends or relatives’ to stay with and so required their own billets.<sup>650</sup>

As the war drew on, the state became more sensitive to the impact that these kinds of inconsistencies and failures could have on citizens, leading to the institution of some changes which attempted to streamline the process. For example, whereas the government’s stance at the beginning of the war had been to tie the availability of compensation to household income thresholds, this decision was abandoned in the face of increased raiding and subsequent fears about morale.<sup>651</sup> Meanwhile, the compensation process itself was made subject to clarification by fresh

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<sup>645</sup> See, for example, IWM, Sound Archive, 12365, Alice Kathleen Truman, Reel 1, 4 December 1991.

<sup>646</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 371, col. 240, 24 April 1941.

<sup>647</sup> TNA, HO 199/437, ‘London’, 10 September 1940.

<sup>648</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-C, ‘Interviews in Stepney and Kilburn, Conversation in 21 Commodore Street’, 5 April 1941.

<sup>649</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-C, ‘Interviews in Stepney and Kilburn, Conversation in 21 Commodore Street’, 5 April 1941.

<sup>650</sup> TNA, HO 192/1243, Minutes of a meeting of the Special Joint Emergency Committee, 24 October 1940.

<sup>651</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*, p. 157.

legislation in the form of the 1941 War Damages Act.<sup>652</sup> Similarly, a review into the process of compensation for the dispossessed, undertaken by John Morris KC over the summer of 1941, both acknowledged the extent of financial hardships faced by those whose homes had been requisitioned and, as noted in the first section of this chapter, argued that the state must be conscious of its responsibility to ensure that these citizens were being treated with the due respect.<sup>653</sup> The state subsequently reformed the legislation around requisitioning and compensation according largely to Morris' recommendations, thus alleviating some of the flaws in this process in theory and law, if not necessarily always in practice.

Such measures went some way in stemming, if not halting, the tide of complaints regarding this issue. Nevertheless, we can see that compensation was a prominent arena in which the question of what the state owed to its citizens – and especially to those who had suffered particular hardship and loss in the name of the war effort – was parsed. Many of those who experienced home-loss bridled at the slippage between promise and reality that issues such as compensation often unveiled; as an Exeter dentist seeking compensation after being bombed-out in 1942 pointedly wrote, 'what the government say they will do and how they do it is a different thing'.<sup>654</sup> Moreover, as demonstrated by the case of Ruth Moore, whose story of going 'berserk' after losing her possessions and being denied compensation has already been visited, inconsistencies between the expectations and realities of assistance could have a serious impact not only upon the ability of the citizen to cope with loss, and also upon their understanding of what this process *meant*.<sup>655</sup> In Moore's case, the inadequacy of the state's support was presented as a form of injustice: in such a context, home-loss quickly lost power as a symbol of self-sacrificial citizenship, instead appearing as a betrayal of the contract between state and individual. As the *Economist* piece on compensation presciently predicted, the knotty nature of the debates around how compensation should be assessed and meted out – attended as they were by larger questions of the wartime citizenship – meant that this was an issue which would persist well into the postwar period.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., pp. 192-193. See also Augustus Uthwatt, 'War Damage to Property: Government Compensation Scheme', Cmd. 6136 (London: HMSO, 1939).

<sup>653</sup> Morris, 'Requisitioning and Compensation'.

<sup>654</sup> MCL, GB 127.M77/6, W. G. Fry, 'Public Opinion', 20 July 1942.

<sup>655</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22130, Ruth Moore, Reel 1, 18 September 2001.

<sup>656</sup> 'Compensation in War', *Economist*, 12 September 1942.

As the final chapters of this thesis will demonstrate in greater detail, this much was also true of the looming spectre of housing provision, the inadequacies of which haunted both state and citizen for decades to come. Indeed, as we shall see, the ramifications of the housing shortage were arguably most politically visible *after* the war, as the pressures of a depleted housing stock, years of depressed building programmes, and fluctuating population levels all came to a head. The genesis of this crisis, however, could clearly be seen during the war itself, and was most keenly felt by those who experienced either bombardment or dispossession, and who invariably found themselves thrust into a market in which the only easily available accommodation was poor-quality or overly expensive. For one Mr Baker of Portchester in Hampshire, for example, the dispossession of his home had led him first to lodge his family with his wife's father; however, after the death of his father-in-law, the family had been forced instead to rent furnished rooms in Chichester, some distance from his workplace in Gosport.<sup>657</sup> His discontent with these circumstances was worsened by the circumstances of the requisition, in which the notion of 'unoccupied' had again been somewhat stretched: the Bakers had only been absent from their home in the first place as a result of a time-bomb.<sup>658</sup>

Similarly, a social worker in Chelsea reported to home intelligence how, during the early days of the London blitz, the fraught search for accommodation had been a serious cause for discontent: they cited as an example the case of a young couple and their baby, who had been compelled to take a prohibitively expensive room after being 'time-bombed' and then forced to stay there after their flat was later destroyed completely. The social worker underlined their opinion here that such situations were evidence that the state was unfairly delegating – or even ignoring – its responsibilities to citizens: 'people who have been rendered homeless by bombs should get new billets as a matter of *right* and not as *charity*.'<sup>659</sup> Such sentiments were far from uncommon in pleas for official help, and as the war drew on and the difficulties of providing those made homeless by enemy action with new accommodation only grew, this issue naturally became more significant as a symbolic site for such philosophical and political discontent.

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<sup>657</sup> HRO, 64M76/DDC375/1, Baker to Herbert Watts, 23 October 1944; HRO, 64M76/DDC375/1, Herbert Watts to Principal Housing Officer, 12 February 1947.

<sup>658</sup> HRO, 64M76/DDC375/1, Herbert Watts to Southsea Re-housing Officer, 27 June 1945.

<sup>659</sup> TNA, HO 199/437, 'London Report', 18 September 1940.

It is evident, then, that the responsibility for coping and managing with home-loss was one which was divided between a number of different scales of society. Individuals were certainly aware of the need to display personal fortitude and resourcefulness when faced with the privations of home-loss, and although not all found such traits adequate as a means of navigating loss, many clearly found them to be useful, whether in aspirational or practical senses. Nevertheless, individual responsibility formed only one part of the architecture of coping in wartime Britain. Wider communities – those comprised of the overlapping groups of neighbours, families, friends, and voluntary organisations – were also constructed as vital interlocutors, particularly in the immediate aftermath of home-loss, and in cases of bombardment.

In the end, however, as criticism regarding the perceived imbalance of official and voluntary efforts in spaces such as rest centres demonstrated, it was the state which tended to be invested with the highest degree of responsibility for citizens' capacity for coping with home-loss. The propensity of certain issues – such as compensation, post-raid care, furniture storage and salvage, and housing provision – to become flashpoints for protest demonstrated the significance of material measures. This support, which could only be provided on a mass scale by the state, was foundational to citizens' ability to cope on a personal level, practically, financially, and emotionally; indeed, we might point out here that it was far easier to be stoic if one's basic needs were being met. Just as importantly, however, this support was a vital factor in another dimension of morale: that which related to one's broader support for the war. The wartime state, cognizant of these facts and the need to maintain popular consent, clearly sank effort into ensuring that citizens felt that their domestic losses were being appropriately recognised. Yet, as many of the examples above demonstrate, this was often a delicate balancing act, tempered in particular by the realities of war and governance. There was no simple solution, after all, to the circumstantial housing shortage; no fool-proof defence against the loss of persons, possessions, or places; no unlimited pot of resources through which it could be ensured that all losses could be equally and adequately addressed. An exploration of how the architecture of coping was visualised and negotiated by both state and citizen henceforth reveals a number of fissures in their respective conceptualisations of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship – and, often, a bubbling up of discontent when the ideal of this relationship was felt to be unmatched by the reality.



## CONCLUSION

As state and society had feared and acknowledged, encounters with home-loss thus represented a critical juncture within citizens' broader experience of the Second World War in urban Britain. The effects of this loss, as this chapter has explored, were often profound, reverberating through practical, financial, and emotional lives, and refiguring Britons' relationships with each other and with the wartime state. Yet, the impacts of this experience were not felt evenly across British society. Richard Overy has argued of the response to the bombing raids more generally that '[t]here was no simple linear pattern of social and psychological response ... but instead a vast patchwork of responses determined by a rich array of situational and dispositional factors'.<sup>660</sup> As we have seen, the same assessment can be made of responses to home-loss. Attempts to weather the loss of both the tangible and intangible aspects which made up the home were inherently complicated by a wide array of factors, including the cause, timing, and location of this loss, but also bereavement, physical and psychological injury, financial hardship, and rehousing difficulties. Many of those who suffered the loss of their home found that their ability to navigate the events of home-loss was inherently stultified by such circumstances. Others, however, were more able to internalise ideas about stoicism and self-sacrifice; more able to access crucial sources of support; and more able to find meaning in this process.

It bears remembering too that this experience was rarely either static or linear. Some citizens who lost their home made their peace with most elements of this situation, but protested others. Some initially accepted the experience in a manner that aligned with the 'status quo', only to alter their conceptualisations of this event as circumstances changed. The letters of Ada and Rhoda McGuire, whom we have met intermittently throughout in this chapter, demonstrate this fact particularly well. Rhoda and Ada's initial report to their expatriate sister Eve in March emphasised the chaos of the attack that had severely damaged their home, detailing their frantic attempts to find temporary accommodation for their mother, and the serious impact that the whole 'alarming experience' had had on Ada's own health. Their anger was directed squarely at the enemy bombers, and more broadly at the 'evil men in Germany and Italy'.<sup>661</sup> This candid account, which was

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<sup>660</sup> Overy, *Bombing War*, p. 177.

<sup>661</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Ada McGuire to Eve Grandison, 30 March 1941.

ultimately returned by the censor, was followed in April by a missive from Rhoda marking ‘a month today since our tragedy’, and noting the difficulties of dealing with their experience. Nevertheless, she rallied, noting that the aid of their friends and neighbours had placed them in much better circumstances than might have been the case. ‘My heart is very heavy at times’, Rhoda wrote, ‘but I feel that all will be well eventually’.<sup>662</sup>

Whilst the McGuires’ home was ultimately designated as repairable, their correspondence with Eve from the autumn of 1941 and beyond demonstrated an increasing desire to stay away from Wallasey. Even prior to the attack on their home, they had observed with sadness the impact that mass departures from the area were having on their neighbourhood. Now, as Rhoda returned weekly to fetch their rations, she noted that the area now appeared run down, and declared that she was ‘not at all keen on returning’.<sup>663</sup> This was, however, easier said than done. Unable to sell the house in its damaged state, and financially unable to sustain their residence elsewhere due to the delayed nature of their compensation, they were forced to wait as the house was repaired; no easy task given the shortages of materials and labour in the wartime building industry.<sup>664</sup> Over eighteen months after their initial expulsion from Wallasey, Rhoda wrote to Eve to complain that the house remained ‘a continual worry’, not only financially, but also as a result of regular looting.<sup>665</sup>

Rhoda and Ada’s letters thus highlight how the process of coping could, in the messy reality which lay beyond idealised or propagandistic representations of home-loss, be both highly mutable and deeply ambiguous. The McGuires’ initial experience with and response to home-loss was, in many ways, textbook: stoical; soothed by the emotional and practical work of neighbours and friends; and resulting in a renewed determination to fight against the enemy. As time wore on, however, their understandings of this event became muddier. Marred by issues such as delayed compensation, looting, and the death of their mother, the loss of their home took on a different patina; one which did not align so neatly with the discourses of stoicism and sacrifice. Just as importantly, Rhoda and Ada McGuire’s correspondence with Eve also captures the manner in

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<sup>662</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Rhoda McGuire to Eve Grandison, 13 April 1941.

<sup>663</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Rhoda McGuire to Eve Grandison, 2 May 1942.

<sup>664</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 5593, Papers of Rhoda and Ada McGuire, Rhoda McGuire to Eve Grandison, 24 November 1942.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*

which understandings of home-loss could turn upon the actions not only of other citizens, but of the state as well. The involvement of these different entities within the process of managing and coping with home-loss allowed the relationship between them to come under scrutiny; and, as we have seen, those citizens who had been blitzed or dispossessed often found the image under the microscope to be well worth contesting.

## Chapter Four

### *Comparing*

In his response to an August 1945 directive issued by Mass Observation, in which the national panel were asked about their opinions on the recently elected Labour government, one man noted that he had been tracking their response to the housing problem.<sup>666</sup> He had a special interest in this topic as his own home in Worthing had been requisitioned in March 1940 for use as a hospital depot by the military. Accordingly, he was especially attentive to reports that the new government would be allowing requisitioned properties to be transferred more easily between government departments, circumventing the need to ask owners if they required the property before its use was continued. In the context of a widely reported upon housing crisis, and with the knowledge that the military would likely have little use for smaller properties in peacetime, the respondent was aware that his home might pass in this way to the Ministry of Health. Yet, unlike many of his peers, he was remarkably sanguine about this possibility:

Such action without giving notice seems a little hard on the owner, but it is a small thing in comparison with the plight of a homeless person. If the house is requisitioned by the Ministry of Health, it may remain so for three years. But, though it is not good for the property, I should be very willing that my house should be so used.<sup>667</sup>

This particular observer had noted in April 1943 that he had already sold much of his furniture, and that he had found relatively comfortable lodgings elsewhere – facts which likely contributed both to his ability to accept his continued dislocation so calmly, and to his readiness to acknowledge his relative prosperity.<sup>668</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, not all citizens buffeted by the

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<sup>666</sup> MOA, Directive Questionnaire for August 1945.

<sup>667</sup> MOA, DR 2703, Response to August 1945 Directive.

<sup>668</sup> MOA, DR 2703, Response to April 1943 Directive.

winds of housing precarity in wartime Britain were able – or willing – to be so sympathetic when they balanced their own experiences against those of others. Indeed, this much was made clear in the case of another man who, in 1943, was seeking housing in Plymouth. A dockyard worker, he had been transferred from Chatham to Devonport – a naval base in the west of the city – in late 1941, and had thereafter struggled, as many others did, to find appropriate accommodation. Such workers often appealed to the local council for help securing housing, but tended to be roundly rebuffed owing to the fact that they had not experienced the loss of their own homes to enemy action, and therefore did not meet the criteria to be given one of the precious few available homes.<sup>669</sup> The necessity of some kind of method for distinguishing between housing applications was, of course, clear; but as the letters written by Chatham transferee highlight, they could be source of intense bitterness. Following their refusal to offer him billets, he wrote to accuse the council of misbalancing their priorities, arguing that their decision had put him ‘in a worse position than bombed out people’. ‘It is not my fault’, he continued, ‘that I was not bombed out, and yet it appears I am to suffer because of this’.<sup>670</sup>

The dockyard worker and the Mass Observer thus each opened up a series of familiar questions about home-loss and its meanings: who was most affected by this experience? How did factors such as the method of loss shape one’s entitlement to aid from the state, and to sympathy from one’s fellow citizens? What greater purpose – such as the alleviation of another citizen’s direr need – might be served by the acceptance of loss as an ordinary part of war? The case of the dockyard worker illustrates particularly clearly that, although these questions echoed a broader set of debates about wartime citizenship, they took on a distinct urgency in contexts where citizens sought to satisfy practical and immediate housing needs. This chapter will therefore explore the ways in which urban wartime Britons, and particularly those who had themselves been dislocated from the home, navigated such debates. In doing so, it will examine a variety of fault lines drawn by those who sought to distinguish particular experiences from one another, and demonstrate the ways in which these rifts were inflected by issues of locality, temporality, morality, and identity. Such themes have often been the bread and butter of comparative historians; however, this chapter

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<sup>669</sup> PA, 1561/1, Evacuation and Billeting Officer to Senior Regional Officer, 9 March 1943; PA, 1561/1, Chief Billeting Officer to Colin Campbell, 16 February 1943; PA, 1561/1, Colin Campbell to “S. C. Davidson”, 18 February 1943.

<sup>670</sup> PA, 1561/1, “S. C. Davidson” to Colin Campbell, 11 February 1943.

does not seek to present a comparative history of home-loss so much as it attempts to historicise the work of comparison done by contemporary Britons.

Locality, of course, is a line of enquiry which builds upon a rich, if somewhat fragmentary, historiography. Particularly in the literature of the bombing raids, for example, local history features strongly; almost every city, town, suburb and borough seems to have its wartime experiences eulogised in text, whether in the format of memoir, popular history, or more traditional academic scholarship.<sup>671</sup> As Darren Bryant has noted, some localities have taken on special significance within this field; well-cited memoirs such as Barbara Nixon's *Raiders Overhead* and William Sansom's *Westminster at War*, for instance, have respectively brought Finsbury and Westminster to the forefront of London-centric histories of the raids – and have occasionally led to the elision of other boroughs where experiences diverged.<sup>672</sup> Still, when taken as a sum, this literature can surely help us to access a more holistic and nuanced picture of life across wartime Britain. Yet, whilst useful as a means of patinating our image of the nation as a whole, it remains true that this research is generally concerned with how experience varied, rather than with how contemporaries understood and navigated such variations. Although this chapter thus draws upon this sphere of work – and upholds its call to consider how local factors shaped experience – it ultimately focuses to a greater degree upon the conceptualisation of locality, rather than its mechanics.

Similarly, exploring the influence of temporality upon events such as home-loss sometimes requires us to piece together different strands of historiography. For example, the history of the Blitz proper – and especially the London Blitz – often occupies its own distinct strand, as does scholarship concerned with the later V-weapons raids.<sup>673</sup> However, the various periods of bombing

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<sup>671</sup> Place-specific memoirs can, for example, be found cited throughout this thesis. The list of academic and popular histories written partially or wholly about the wartime experiences of specific cities is expansive, but see, for instance White, *The Battle of London*; Philip Ziegler, *London at War, 1939-1945* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995); Bell, *London Was Ours*; I. M. M. MacPhail, *The Clydebank Blitz* (Clydebank: Clydebank Town Council, 1974); Philip Graystone, *The Blitz on Hull, 1940-45* (Hull: Lampada, 1991); John Van der Kiste, *Plymouth: A City at War, 1914-45* (Stroud: History, 2014); John Stedman, *Portsmouth Reborn: Destruction & Reconstruction, 1939-1974* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Council, 1995).

<sup>672</sup> Darren Bryant, 'London Blitz – The Agency of Locality: An Examination into Diversity of Experience Across the Localities of London', p. 11, 15; Nixon, *Raiders Overhead*; Sansom, *Westminster at War*.

<sup>673</sup> For just a few examples of the proliferation of popular and academic works about the Blitz, see: Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Blitz* (London: Allan Wingate, 1957); Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*; Gardiner, *The Blitz*; Stansky, *The First Day of the Blitz*. On the history of the V-weapons raids, see: Robin Woolven, 'London and the V Weapons, 1943-1945', *RUSI Journal*, 147 (2002), 53-59; Charlie Hall, "'Flying Gas Mains": Rumour, Secrecy, and Morale during the V-2 Bombardment of Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 33.1 (2022), 52-79; Norman

in Britain are also often united in a single analysis – particularly in more general histories of the war, and in place-specific histories like those cited above. Amy Bell’s work on wartime London, for instance, considers the different impacts of raiding at the beginning and end of the bombing campaign, and also briefly discusses the ways in which Londoners conceived of these two periods in tandem.<sup>674</sup> Such texts provide an excellent basis for the current work, which aims to utilise the lens of home-loss in order to provide a further insight into this process.

The last historiographical sun around which this chapter orbits concerns a more distant subject: the experience of home-loss in Germany, and more specifically, that which was wrought by the British armed forces. Here, as will be noted in further detail below, there is an extensive literature to mine. Scholarship on the subject of the Allied bombing of German cities has been particularly wide-ranging, and has – through works by historians like Dietmar Süß and Richard Overy – often brought this theatre of the air war into dialogue with its British counterpart.<sup>675</sup> Intriguingly, the topic of requisitioning in Germany has also received a healthy amount of historical attention, largely under the purview of those writing about the Cold War era.<sup>676</sup> However, unlike the subject of air raids, the experiences of dispossessed Germans and Britons have rarely been viewed within the same frame.

This chapter seeks to build upon the above literature by exploring how the dispossessed and bombed out negotiated this diverse landscape of experience: how did they carve out their own spaces within it, and how did they conceptualise the broader local, national, and even transnational, fields in which they now existed? The first section takes the city as its frame, exploring how blitzed and dispossessed urban Britons observed and responded to spatial, moral, and temporal variations of experience within their more immediate communities. For example, the identification of classed geographies of home-loss, and of the migratory post-raid practices of some citizens, allowed those

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Longmate, *The Doodlebugs: The Story of the Flying Bombs* (London: Hutchinson, 1981); Norman Longmate, *Hitler’s Rockets: The Story of the V-2s* (London: Hutchinson, 1985); O’Brien, *Civil Defence*, pp. 645-669.

<sup>674</sup> Amy Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear: Wartime London, 1939-1945’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48.1 (2009), pp. 153–175. See also Bell, *London Was Ours*.

<sup>675</sup> Süß, *Death from the Skies*; Overy, *The Bombing War*.

<sup>676</sup> See, for example, Bettina Blum, ‘“My Home, Your Castle”: British Requisitioning of German Homes in Westphalia’, in *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945-55*, ed. by Camilo Erlichman and Christopher Knowles (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 115-132; Peter Speiser, ‘The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans (1948-1957): From Enemies to Partners’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Westminster, 2012); Frances A. Rosenfeld, ‘The Anglo-German Encounter in Occupied Hamburg, 1945-1950’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2006), pp. 108-158.

who had lost their homes to contest some of the prevalent narratives that attended wartime loss, including that of shared sacrifice. Meanwhile, the marking of temporal shifts across the six years of war provided urban Britons with an opportunity to reflect upon the ways in which broader strategic, technological, and bureaucratic developments came to impact upon the experience of home-loss. The next part of the chapter expands the spatial scope in order to consider how this work of comparison, juxtaposition, and contextualisation played out between different urban areas across the country. Here, again, it will be possible to see how citizens frequently used the perceived and actual experiences of others as a means of articulating and understanding the wider meanings of home-loss in wartime Britain. By focusing upon the currents of feeling stirred by this experience – including those of pride, of anger and resentment, and of sympathy – we can again gain an insight into how citizens contested and created larger stories of national unity and sacrifice.

Our geographic lens will then be widened once more, allowing us to explore the ways in which these citizens, by casting their eyes still further afield, elevated this comparative discourse to the level of the transnational. Here, the place of British experiences of home-loss within discussion about two continental analogues – the strategic bombing campaign in Germany, and the postwar requisitioning programme implemented in the British occupation zone – will be examined. In particular, it will ask: what details about British citizens' understandings of home-loss on a grand scale – its ethics, its effects, and its role within modern war - can be gleaned from their engagement with debates about the loss which was being inflicted abroad by their own state? As we shall see, the debate over the bombing campaign offers a rich interpretive space for such questions; and yet, as will be illustrated by the study of British requisitioning abroad, such processes of comparison clearly had their limits.

## HOME-LOSS AND THE CITY

London, as Mark Connelly has argued, is undoubtedly '*the* city of the Blitz'.<sup>677</sup> In both the contemporary milieu of Second World War Britain and in our own modern memory, the capital lived – and lives – large, playing host to many of the most archetypal images of British stoicism and courage in the face of enemy fire. Whether it is through films such as Humphrey Jennings'

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<sup>677</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p. 132.



1940 *London Can Take It*, propaganda booklets like the 1942 *Front Line*, or photographs such as the famous *Daily Mail* shot of St. Paul's Cathedral wreathed in smoke, we are regularly provided with a vision of a city – and a people – united by the shared experience of adversity.<sup>678</sup> As Connelly and others have further emphasised, many contemporary Britons consumed and celebrated this mythic image and, indeed, participated in its construction themselves, recording and epitomising it within the pages of their diaries, letters, and memoirs.<sup>679</sup>

Still, it remains true that this depiction of London has always been irrevocably intertwined with a reality which was more nuanced, and more disjointed. For starters, the sheer size of the capital made it possible for one part of the city to suffer heavily under bombs which were neither seen, heard, nor felt in another borough, thus complicating the notion of a shared experience. A uniquely complex system of local government similarly worked to fracture the experiential landscape: the inner core of London, for example, was controlled by the London County Council, but was also subdivided into a total of 28 metropolitan boroughs; this core, in turn, was bordered by a patchwork of municipal and county boroughs, which despite forming part of the contiguous urban sprawl of the capital actually fell within the administrative boundaries of counties such as Kent, Middlesex, and Essex. Each borough prepared itself differently for the threat of bombardment, and each found itself in a different state of readiness when the bombs actually arrived.<sup>680</sup> As Darren Bryant has argued, this multiplicity was only magnified in the latter years of the war, when the arrival of the V-weapons raids heralded a form of bombing which was simultaneously more destructive and more localised.<sup>681</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that in their explorations of the responses to the bombing of the capital during the Second World War, numerous writers have written of the existence of 'many ... blitzes' within the much mythologised London Blitz.<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> *London Can Take It!*, dir. by Humphrey Jennings (Crown Film Unit, Ministry of Information, 1940); 'War's Greatest Picture: St Paul's Stands Unharmed in the Midst of the Burning City', *Daily Mail*, 31 December 1940; Ministry of Information, *Front Line*. For more on the image of St Paul's in particular, see Tom Albeson, 'Visualizing Wartime Destruction and Postwar Reconstruction: Herbert Mason's Photograph of St. Paul's Reevaluated', *Journal of Modern History*, 87 (2015), 532-578.

<sup>679</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It*, pp. 145-146. An excellent account of how contemporary Londoners contributed to the construction of the Blitz myth can also be found in Bell, *London Was Ours*.

<sup>680</sup> See also Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy*, pp. 203-235.

<sup>681</sup> Bryant, 'The Agency of Locality', pp. 225-251.

<sup>682</sup> Bryant, 'The Agency of Locality', p. 1. The argument about the different levels of preparedness and the different impacts of the bombing across the various London boroughs is also made throughout White, *The Battle of London*.

London henceforth provides us with a particularly apposite case study for thinking about the ways in which urban wartime experiences – including that of home-loss – could become textured by factors such as locality and temporality. Yet, it was not the only city in which such fault lines were present: across Britain, enemy fire and the subsequent responses of the state left uneven marks, which were thereafter identified, mobilised, and manipulated by citizens themselves. For example, efforts to manage the aftermath of raiding in Plymouth – where the housing situation was described by the Town Clerk as ‘overwhelming’ – saw citizens leveraging and contesting a variety of perceived divergences in order to demonstrate their own entitlement to recognition or recompense.<sup>683</sup> Especially after the local authorities in Plymouth embarked upon a sustained campaign of requisitioning, acts of comparison became rife; dispossessed residents of the blitzed port city, for instance, could frequently be found engaging in a debate about the identity the ‘homeless’ populations that the council was trying to rehouse. Whilst this label was broadly used as a descriptor for those who had lost their homes in the raids, citizens who had seen their homes requisitioned were wont to argue that they were, in fact, just ‘as homeless as the [bombed-out people] referred to’, and that they should therefore be given just as much consideration.<sup>684</sup>

The overflowing pigeonholes of Plymouth’s wartime housing officers also prove useful as a microcosmic example of how the intracity work of comparison relied heavily upon certain ideals of citizenship. Numerous applicants to the billeting officer and town clerk, for example, traded upon current or past associations with the military in order to make their cases.<sup>685</sup> Similarly, many of those who sought to return to the city after being bombed out or dispossessed were keen to emphasise that they had only left their homes when they had become uninhabitable – and thus had stoically stuck it out in the blitzed city for as long as possible.<sup>686</sup> At the same time, a converse form of positioning existed, wherein those who sought housing used the perceived failures of other citizens in order to bolster their own claims. For example, the dockyard worker with whom we

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See also Todman, *Britain’s War: Into Battle*, p. 477; Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of the Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 24-25.

<sup>683</sup> PA, 1561/2, Colin Campbell to “F. R. Kirkby”, 22 January 1945.

<sup>684</sup> PA, 1561/3, “B. K. Allen” to Colin Campbell, 30 December 1944; PA, 1561/3, “J. L. Ellis” to Colin Campbell, 21 September 1945.

<sup>685</sup> See, for example, PA, 1561/1, “P. F. Stevens” to Colin Campbell, 12 July 1942; PA, 1561/3, “R. Shepherd” to Plymouth Town Council.

<sup>686</sup> PA, 1561/1, “N. H. Webb” to Chief Billeting Officer, n.d.; PA, 1561/3, “W. Palmer” to Colin Campbell, 13 October 1945; PA, 1561/3, “L. Collins” to “E. Briers”, 21 June 1945.

began this chapter, and who had complained about the prioritisation of the bombed out, was at pains to point out that he had accepted his transfer to the city at the height of the Plymouth Blitz – and that he ‘came here, and not like a lot of people, ran away’.<sup>687</sup>

Such arguments tapped into a broader discourse about citizens’ movements within and beyond the blitzed city, which saw many of those who fled the threat or reality of enemy action denigrated for doing so. Whilst some citizens – and particularly those whose homes had already sustained damage – left for longer stretches of time, others engaged in nightly ‘trekking’, sleeping rough or finding billets in rural areas, and returning to the city daily for work. As Home Intelligence reports on the post-raid climates of Liverpool, Portsmouth, and Plymouth demonstrate, these migratory practices were often viewed with intense unease. The movement to the country was said to ‘encourage panic’; meanwhile, those who participated in this flight were described as representing a ‘weaker’ section of the population ‘which either from age, fatigue, or poor mental constitution feels it can [not] ... endure “another night of it”’.<sup>688</sup> As the report from Portsmouth highlighted, the act of trekking could prompt opprobrium from all sides: ‘trekkers’, it was written, ‘are known as the “Yellow Brigade” by people who remain in Portsmouth and as “those dreadful blitzers” by the country folk’.<sup>689</sup>

However, whilst trekking was often perceived anxiously, the decision taken by those who had lost their homes to flee was not always depicted so unsympathetically. Researchers employed by the government to investigate the impact of air raids upon morale, for example, noted the prevalence of nightly trekking by citizens in Hull, but concluded that this was a ‘rational response to the destructiveness of [the raids]’.<sup>690</sup> Meanwhile, in one account of Plymouth’s wartime experiences, the exodus of bombed citizens was similarly recognised as a natural response to the material conditions of the raids, and indeed the inadequacies of the state’s post-raid support:

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<sup>687</sup> PA, 1561/1, “S. C. Davidson” to Colin Campbell, 11 February 1943.

<sup>688</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Special Report on Conditions in Merseyside, June 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465687667680/>> [last accessed: 24 May 2024]; TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 30, 31 April 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465679632912/>> [last accessed: 24 May 2024]; TNA, INF 1/292, Report on Conditions in Plymouth Following the Severe Raids, May 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465682196768/>> [last accessed: 24 May 2024].

<sup>689</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Special Report on Conditions in Portsmouth, May 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465679449584/>> [last accessed: 24 May 2024].

<sup>690</sup> Jones et al, ‘Civilian Morale During the Second World War’, p. 472.

[T]he vast proportion of them were driven out because their homes were destroyed, and there was no alternative accommodation within the city ... These “refugees”, if I might be forgiven for so calling them, poured over the surrounding district, into town, village and hamlet, like a human flood. They had no alternative ... their weary feet could not go on forever.<sup>691</sup>

Nevertheless, the insinuation that leaving the besieged city was an act which contravened contemporary ideals of citizenship can still be seen at work, not only in comments such as those contained in the Home Intelligence reports cited above, but also in the words of those who had themselves left. In particular, for the citizens who had been dispossessed during their absence from the city and who later sought to return either through derequisition or billeting, there was clearly an implicit imperative to justify their actions. As noted above, most emphasised that they had only left when their homes had become uninhabitable, thus drawing a subtle line between themselves and those accused of fleeing at the first sign of danger.<sup>692</sup>

The concern among requisitioned property owners who had been forced to leave that they would be unfavourably compared to fellow citizens who had undergone the same experiences was not, it must be said, entirely misplaced. A regional officer for the Ministry of Health, for example, wrote to Plymouth’s Town Clerk in early 1943 to remind him that anyone who had left ‘through fear of enemy attack’ would not be eligible to be rehoused in a requisitioned property, even if ‘their home ... has been subsequently destroyed’.<sup>693</sup> Correspondence within the Ministry’s Midlands office likewise promoted the idea that those who had left their home had often done so out of fear, and suggested that they were therefore poor candidates for the state’s ‘consideration’:

As to the man who left his house to go away and now wants it back I would say one of two things. Either he ran from the bombing (often the case) and now things are quiet wants to come back, or let the house for a nice fat rental, or he was evacuated owing to the war, and is now returning. In the former case he deserves little consideration, and was probably only too glad for the local authority to take his house over, at the time. In the latter case he is just unlucky[.]<sup>694</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> H. P. Twyford, *It Came to Our Door: Plymouth in the World War* (Underhill: Plymouth, 1946), p. 18.

<sup>692</sup> See, for example, PA, 1561/1, “N. H. Webb” to Chief Billeting Officer, n.d.; PA, 1561/2, “V. Murray” to Colin Campbell, 2 October 1944.

<sup>693</sup> PA, 1561/1, Senior Regional Officer to Colin Campbell, 23 February 1943.

<sup>694</sup> TNA, HLG 7/557, Henry to McCandless, 25 June 1942.

Such arguments highlighted the ways in which requisitioning policy could become entangled with a certain kind of moral discourse – one which tied the process of housing distribution to the indices of wartime citizenship in the name of the ‘national good’.<sup>695</sup>

For those who found themselves on the losing side of this equation, however, the notion that state intervention in the housing landscape was unaffected by its own ethical shortcomings was ripe for contestation. Class feeling, for example, was readily apparent within wartime discussions about the kinds of homes being stockpiled into the state’s collection of requisitioned dwellings – a pool which, in urban settings, was dominated by small houses and flats. Just as the issue of trekking had been linked to a wider discourse about morale, discontentment over this trend was fed by a broader current of concern about wartime sacrifice, and the ways in which it was seen to be mapped unevenly onto the urban built environment. In London, the geographic dispersal of the bombing had lent a particular fuel to this fire, for whilst the generally affluent West End boroughs did not remain untouched by the bombing, they could be favourably compared to its poorer central and eastern neighbours on a number of metrics.<sup>696</sup> By and large, those in the west of the city received fewer bombs and suffered fewer casualties per 1000 of the population; similarly, boroughs such as Hampstead, Kensington, and Hammersmith recorded much lower figures of post-raid homelessness compared to those seen in areas like Bethnal Green and Bermondsey in the east.<sup>697</sup> For all of the mythic rhetoric emphasising London’s unity in the face of the Luftwaffe’s bombs, such imbalances seemed to many to lend credence to the idea that the work of ‘taking it’ was being borne unequally across the city.

In such a context, it is perhaps no surprise that the greater vulnerability of smaller dwellings to the fate of requisition prompted at times a furious response from dispossessed owners, who pointed to the ‘rows of large houses ... already standing empty’ in London’s wealthier boroughs.<sup>698</sup> These protestations reached a peak in 1941, when an uptick in the requisitioning of blocks of flats for use as government offices pushed this trend to the fore. The government, for its part, argued that it was necessary for its departments to be housed in modern buildings which were as ‘safe as possible’, lest they be dislocated by enemy action. The supposedly ‘scattered’ nature of the empty

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid.

<sup>696</sup> White, *Battle of London*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>697</sup> Bryant, ‘The Agency of Locality’, pp. 188-191, 127-129.

<sup>698</sup> ‘Requisitioning’, *The Times*, 14 June 1941.

mansions was also discussed, with it being suggested that these houses ‘provide[d] neither the space nor [the] facilities for housing large staffs’.<sup>699</sup> This response was received with a fair amount of scepticism. ‘A walk through any of the great squares in the neighbourhood of the Government quarter is sufficient to reveal whole blocks of large contiguous vacant houses’, one editorial in *The Times* reported; a reader similarly wrote in to protest that the ‘masses of empty houses ... in the South Kensington region’ were, in fact, ‘very accessible from the point of view of Whitehall’.<sup>700</sup> The socioeconomic rift between those who were perceived to be receiving favourable treatment, and those who were not, was often explicitly highlighted: the editorial in *The Times*, for example, was keen to draw a distinction between the requisition of ‘small flats, occupied for the most part by war workers’, and that of large houses and mansions, unoccupied by their wealthy owners who were clearly not tied to work in London.<sup>701</sup> Whilst the Ministry of Works, which had carried out the requisitions of the flats, claimed that it was doing the ‘utmost to minimize inconvenience and hardship’, rebuttals thus accused them of protecting ‘the houses of the rich’.<sup>702</sup> Still, as the reference to the same spectre of London’s ‘empty mansions’ by the residents of a block of luxury flats in ‘a famous West End square’ also threatened with requisition in 1941 showcased, these classed geographies of requisitioning could be blurred and manipulated.<sup>703</sup> In such cases, the work of comparison played out not between the somewhat caricatured extremes of the working-class war worker and the wealthy absentee, but rather within the ranks of the upper classes themselves. Indeed, it is worth noting here that, by virtue of owning property at all, most dispossessed owners would not have fallen into the former – infinitely more sympathetic – category anyway.

It is possible to see, then, how citizens read and mobilised a variety of fault lines in order to articulate their own experiences within and against the context of the wider urban whole. These lines, which were at once spatial and interpersonal, allowed individuals who had been dislocated to create their own taxonomies of loss, and served to draw distinctions not only between the locations and types of losses incurred, but also between the locations and types of citizens involved. Yet, as alluded to above, these were not the only points of variation at work within the wartime city; experiences concertinaed and diverged along a temporal axis as well. Most obviously, the same

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<sup>699</sup> George Hicks, ‘Eviction for Offices’, *The Times*, 10 June 1941.

<sup>700</sup> ‘Requisitioning’, *The Times*, 14 June 1941; ‘Eviction for Offices’, *The Times*, 13 June 1941.

<sup>701</sup> ‘Requisitioning’, *The Times*, 14 June 1941.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> Charles Grave, ‘I See Life’, *Daily Mail*, 24 March 1941.

person, living in the same city, could experience multiple instances of home-loss at different points and in different ways across the six years of war. Naturally, the fact that others escaped this fate entirely led to one of the largest experiential rifts, as commented upon sympathetically by one *Mass Observer* in March 1944:

We heard today that the Fenns ... who were bombed out early in the 'blitz, losing their mother ... were bombed in a nearby road on Wednesday night, and have gone to the country to recover – amazing how bad-luck follows them around.<sup>704</sup>

At the same time, however, this uneven concentration of experience invited comparison between the instances themselves. For instance, John Sykes, whose family was bombed out from houses on the outskirts of London a total of three times, would later muse that the first time had been most terrifying; meanwhile Alan Maybury, who was bombed out twice in Fulham, recalled being particularly 'petrified' on the second occasion.<sup>705</sup> Those who had encountered both enemy action and requisitioning also, unsurprisingly, engaged in juxtaposition, often citing an earlier, model response to home-loss in order to contest a later grievance.

The majority of Britons, it should be noted, were not as unfortunate as the Fenns, the Sykes', or the Mayburys; most of those who were bombed out were not thereafter dispossessed; and many of those who lost their homes to requisition had not also been bombed out. However, one did not have to experience multiple counts of home-loss in order to draw upon temporality as a means of framing this event. Especially for those whose domestic dislocations came at the hands of the bomber, the particular point in time at which the loss occurred could be a crucial mitigating factor. The main blitzes of 1940 and 1941, the tip-and-run raids of 1942 and 1943, the Baby Blitz of early 1944, and the V-weapons raids of 1944 and 1945 each presented, after all, different contexts for home-loss, inflected as they were by variations in strategy, technology, and geography.<sup>706</sup> Moreover, as these foregrounds shifted, there were also changes in the wider backdrop of the home front: military progress and setbacks abroad, and political developments at

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<sup>704</sup> MOA, Diarist 5443, entry for 5 March 1944.

<sup>705</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 20850, John William Sykes, Reel 1, 14 October 2002; IWM, Sound Archive, 22123, Alan Bradley Maybury, Reel 1, 13 August 2001.

<sup>706</sup> An overview of the different periods of raiding can be found in O'Brien, *Civil Defence*.

home, such as improvements in post-raid welfare, all helped to further reshape the material and emotional environments in which home-loss occurred.

The act of comparing these different stages was, unsurprisingly, most prominent towards the end of the war; this period offered the benefit of hindsight, but also played host, with the arrival of the pilotless V1 and V2 weapons, to one of the more fundamental shifts in the nature of the bombing. After all, even for those who did not suffer the loss of their home, this new phase of the bombing war brought with it no small amount of anxiety and fear. It began in June 1944, when the first V1s – also known as ‘flying bombs’, or ‘doodlebugs’ – landed on London and south-east England. Whilst the V1 was not a particularly accurate weapon, it was certainly a destructive one: over the course of the next nine months, V1 missiles would be responsible for the deaths of nearly 6000 Britons, and the destruction or serious damage of over 75,000 buildings.<sup>707</sup> It was also a weapon which played havoc with the senses, possessed as it was of a ‘distinctive sonic signature’ – a buzzing noise which stopped when the pulse-jet engine cut out, giving any unfortunate persons on the earth below just a few seconds warning that the bomb was about to drop.<sup>708</sup> Still, although this suspensive aural experience was the cause of much anxiety, some found the auditory qualities of the V1’s more powerful successor even more disconcerting. The V2, which crashed into London for the first time in September 1944, travelled at supersonic speed; consequently, a rocket could only be heard after it had already arrived and exploded.<sup>709</sup>

The sonic peculiarities of the two V-weapons helped to mark this period of raiding as distinctive from that which had come before, altering as they did the established systems of air raid warnings and shelter habits. For some, there was a little comfort to be derived from such things. Patricia FitzGerald, for example, would later describe her relief at the absence of the sirens, suggesting that it gave her ‘control of [herself]’ by allowing her to better continue with her ‘daily life’.<sup>710</sup> However, for others – and particularly those who actually had their own direct experiences with these new weapons – the lack of warning contributed to a heightened and more permanent sense of vulnerability. One young woman, for example, reported to Mass Observation how she

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<sup>707</sup> Bell, ‘Landscapes of Fear’, p. 162.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid; Clapson, *The Blitz Companion*, p. 73.

<sup>709</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 183

<sup>710</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 9829, Patricia Jean FitzGerald, Reel 3, 29 June 1987.



had been unsettled by the suddenness of two V2 raids on her home, and compared this experience unfavourably to previous kinds of bombing:

We've been bombed out twice by these things. I didn't mind them half as much as the others before it happened to us. That's the thing, you don't till they touch you ... It's a funny thing, you don't hear any noise with them. Just the lights went out and everything fell in on us.<sup>711</sup>

Whilst the absence or truncation of any warning therefore helped to distinguish the experience of home-loss in 1944 or 1945 from that in, say, 1940, the completeness of the devastation which the newer weapons were capable of delivering was also a clear dividing line. The more sophisticated and powerful V2 was especially injurious to the built environment; whilst this weapon actually killed fewer Britons than its technological precursors, it destroyed some 20,000 houses, and damaged hundreds of thousands more.<sup>712</sup> This raw potential often served to horrify. One woman living in London, for example, was particularly disturbed by the 'clean' destruction wrought by the missiles, which threatened not only to wreck homes, but to obliterate them entirely.<sup>713</sup> Still, although the damage caused by individual 'doodlebugs' and rockets was clearly more intense than that caused by the high-explosive bombs used in earlier blitzes, it was also in many ways more localised. Mass Observation's report on the V2 raids in south-east London, for instance, noted that whilst destruction on the main roads was 'noticeable, [and] talked about', that which occurred in side streets could instead remain largely isolated and concealed. The result was a further atomisation of experience: as one of MO's interviewees noted with unease, it was now – in marked contrast to previous bombings – possible to be unaware of 'what's happened even in your own district'.<sup>714</sup>

It was significant, too, that these changes took place some five years into the war. Ronald McGill, whose family departed London for Blackpool after their dislocation by a V1 rocket, recalled the way in which many of those who had made it through the earlier raids now found their emotional and physical reserves depleted:

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<sup>711</sup> MOA, FR 2207, 'V2 Bombs – Report on SE London', 19 February 1945, p. 4.

<sup>712</sup> Hall, "Flying Gas Mains", p. 54.

<sup>713</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 29894, Elisabeth Small, Reel 6, 17 January 2007.

<sup>714</sup> MOA, FR 2207, 'V2 Bombs – Report on SE London', 19 February 1945, p. 2.

I remember ... the despair of parents when this started ... it was probably their lowest point of the war. It was for our people and the other bombed out mums and dads as well. They'd been through the Blitz and come back, and then they couldn't believe it was starting again ... they were in this environment again in the fourth year of the war. And that was their low ebb, they really couldn't take it anymore.<sup>715</sup>

For McGill, this fearful experience was one exacerbated by the government's initial instinct to suppress and manipulate reportage on the raids – a tactic which was designed principally to limit Germany's ability to judge the accuracy of their attacks.<sup>716</sup> He noted, for example, that propaganda on the subject of the bombs often focused upon the success of anti-missile defences in 'knocking [the V1s] down'. Such depictions gelled uneasily with what McGill and his family were seeing on the ground: 'all around us, we could see houses coming down'.<sup>717</sup>

Beyond the issue of war weariness, there was also the simple fact that Allied victory seemed in 1944 to be a more certain – if as yet indeterminate – conclusion. As Amy Bell has observed, the fortitude which had been so vital in the dark and uncertain atmosphere of 1940 now seemed to have little 'redeeming military or ideological value', in much the same way as the attacks themselves yielded little strategic advantage to the increasingly desperate Third Reich.<sup>718</sup> In such a context, it became increasingly difficult, although not impossible, to reconcile both the event of home-loss itself and the much-vaunted stoic ideal with some form of higher meaning. Of course, in the end, we know that there was no catastrophic breakdown in the morale of the population who experienced the V-weapons raids; most, then, seemed ultimately able to cope in one way or another. Still, for those whose homes had escaped any serious harm throughout the previous raids, the experience of being 'caught at the finish' could undoubtedly be one soaked in a certain amount of irony.<sup>719</sup>

Various points of comparison, then, were available to those who had been dislocated from their homes during the Second World War. And, as we have seen, it was often the articulation of these chronological, geographic, and interpersonal disparities in experience – whether real or perceived – which allowed citizens to engage in a discussion about the place of both home-loss and

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<sup>715</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 6221, Ronald William McGill, Reel 4, 1982.

<sup>716</sup> For more on the censorship of the V-weapons raids, and particularly the V2 attacks, see Hall, "Flying Gas Mains".

<sup>717</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 6221, Ronald William McGill, Reel 4, 1982.

<sup>718</sup> Bell, 'Landscapes of Fear', p. 164.

<sup>719</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 30646, Alan Campbell, Reel 2, March 2008.

the homeless within the war more broadly. The identification of temporal – and often, by extension, technological – shifts, for instance, highlighted the very different contexts in which Britons were asked to display stoicism. Meanwhile, by drawing attention to the temporary or permanent departures made by some citizens, and to the classed geographies of bombing and requisitioning, urban Britons were able to contest the narratives of shared sacrifice which were so often used to frame experiences of loss. Of course, this means of processing home-loss and its ramifications was not contained within the bounds of the city; rather, just as there were variations in circumstances and experience within individual cities, so too did divergences exist between them as well. Likewise, just as citizens' own mobilisation of these differences hinted at a more fragmentary reality lying underneath the image of the united city, so too did they muddy the waters of a more national analogue when they looked beyond their own locales – a process which this chapter will now go on to examine more closely.

## NEGOTIATING THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY

The work of comparing different urban areas and their experiences of – or, perhaps more precisely, their responses to – home-loss and other wartime hardships had begun early on in the war. Morale surveys carried out by social research organisations like Mass Observation and government bodies such as the Ministry of Information's Home Intelligence division, for example, often compared cities and towns with one another in their attempts to discern how localised factors affected the popular mood.<sup>720</sup> The topography of the built environment itself, as well as the type and location of the damage, were often focal points for these investigations; both the density of a town or city and the position of housing relative to industrial and commercial infrastructure, for instance, were seen as key influences upon the reactions of bombed citizens. When Home Intelligence's report on Coventry in November 1940 thus recorded that the shock in that town was 'greater ... than in the East End or any other bombed area previously studied', it attributed this finding to the 'concentrated nature of the damage' and 'the small size of the town'.<sup>721</sup> Official publications, such

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<sup>720</sup> For more on this comparative work – and its limitations – see Brad Beaven and David Thoms, 'The Blitz and Civilian Morale in Three Northern Cities, 1940-1942', *Northern History*, 32.1 (1996), 195-203.

<sup>721</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Summary of Special Report on Coventry, 16 November 1940, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/inf-1292-weekly-reports-1940/idm140465680489200/>> [last accessed: 1 June 2024]

as the 1942 *Front Line* booklet documenting the civil defence effort, similarly acknowledged the ways in which scale affected experience: whereas the metropolis of London attracted a larger number of bombs, provincial cities were seen to be more ‘fearfully exposed’.<sup>722</sup> Their smaller size and secondary status might invite fewer attacks, but when it was caused, damage could not be absorbed in the same way; instead, it was possible for the bombs to batter ‘the very contours of the city ... out of recognition’.<sup>723</sup> The significance of the material post-raid context was also highlighted within the morale reports, with the importance of a well-oiled welfare and rehousing system being frequently commented upon.<sup>724</sup>

Naturally, the discernment of the different factors affecting morale was not of particularly great concern to the blitzed and bombed-out who were actually the subject of such investigations, and who tended to face more immediate, practical problems. However, this is not to say that they did not also engage in this process of comparison. Rather, it is clear that juxtaposition, association, and differentiation all continued to be important tools used by these citizens in order to articulate and contextualise their own experiences. Whether by making statements of feeling about the relative levels of suffering and damage, by protesting perceived divergences in treatment and coverage, or by drawing attention to a broader commonality of cause and experience, these citizens worked to both constitute and contest the image of the nation at war. Of course, one did not have to lose their home in order to participate in this process; and yet, as we shall see, there continued to be a number of points where the work of comparison crystallised particularly clearly around the image of the homeless citizen, who often stood so clearly as a symbol of the worst effects of the war.

Just as certain citizens lived large within the comparative landscape of blitzed Britain, so too did certain cities. Mass Observation investigators reporting from Southampton shortly after the winter 1940 raids on the city, for example, pointed to the widespread use of Coventry as a blitz benchmark against which citizens measured their own encounters.<sup>725</sup> Here, as local headlines from Plymouth – which declared the city to have suffered ‘worse than Coventry’, whilst also claiming

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<sup>722</sup> Ministry of Information, *Front Line*, p. 84.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

<sup>724</sup> See, for example, MOA FR 495, ‘Coventry’, November 1940, p. 3; TNA, INF 1/292, Special Report on Conditions in Merseyside, June 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465687667680/>> [last accessed: 1 June 2024]. For more on the importance of these factors, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>725</sup> MOA, FR 516, ‘Southampton’, 4 December 1940, p. 4.

to have assumed its heroic mantle – demonstrated, the Sotonians were not alone.<sup>726</sup> Undoubtedly, this owed much to the way in which the Coventry raids had been reported upon and depicted – for whilst London may have remained, as noted above, ‘*the city of the Blitz*’, Coventry took a definitive second place.<sup>727</sup> Indeed, this ‘special status’ had been cemented early on by the addition of a new word to the lexicon of the bombing in the aftermath of the devastating November raid: ‘coventration’.<sup>728</sup> As Stefan Goebel has demonstrated, the coining of this term by the Germans as an expression of the Luftwaffe’s destructive power helped to set the city apart within bombing and reconstruction discourses for decades to come.<sup>729</sup> Still, whilst the ubiquitous comparisons with the Midlands city were thus to be expected, its use as a yardstick was fluid. As the Mass Observation report on Southampton identified, for instance, initial comments that Southampton had not fared as badly as Coventry soon shifted in the days following the raiding, with many later suggesting that the Sotonians’ experience was on par with, or perhaps even worse than, that of the Coventrians. One 55-year old man interviewed by the investigators even went another – certainly hyperbolic – step further, suggesting that Southampton’s plight was worse than that of Pompeii.<sup>730</sup>

As Mass Observation’s local blitz reports capture, this comparative process could be filtered through variety of different emotional registers. In Southampton, for instance, MO argued that the suggestion that the port city may have suffered more harshly than Coventry often resulted in ‘expression[s] of pride, [and] in an actual feeling of encouragement and elevation’.<sup>731</sup> In Worcester, meanwhile, an investigator found that the raids of October 1940 were being conceived of as a watershed moment in which the town had finally joined ‘the front line’; this development was said to have given rise to a ‘certain pride’, as citizens now had ‘bombs of their own to talk about’.<sup>732</sup> As the cases of both Southampton and Worcester highlight, however, these prideful comparisons could be highly ambiguous. Whilst the citizens of Worcester, for example, may have felt a grim satisfaction as a result of the notion that they were playing a more immediate part in the war, the

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<sup>726</sup> Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, p. 123. See also Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p. 146.

<sup>727</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p. 147.

<sup>728</sup> Stefan Goebel, ‘Commemorative Cosmopolis: Transnational Networks of Remembrance in Post-War Coventry’, in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (London: Routledge, 2011), 163-183, p. 165.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>730</sup> MOA, FR 517, ‘Southampton’, 4 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>731</sup> MOA, FR 516, ‘Southampton’, 4 December 1940, p. 4.

<sup>732</sup> MOA, FR 441, ‘Local Morale Reports’, October 1940, p. 1.

shattering of their previous sense of immunity ushered other emotions in as well. This was noted by MO's investigator, who reported how the sight of bombers now provoked a very different set of reactions: 'for the first time, one could see anxiety and fear on their faces [where] previously there had only been pity at what they had heard about the horrors of bombings'.<sup>733</sup> The sense of pride evoked by Southampton's comparisons with Coventry was similarly seen to be inflected by duality. On the one hand, there was something to be said for the way in which this juxtaposition placed both cities in the same club; after all, there was pride to be found in drawing parallels with the much reported upon Midlands blitz precisely because that raid, and the people whom it had affected, had come to be so venerated in the annals of the bombing. Comparison in this way functioned to establish a sort of commonality, identifying as it did urban populations who were suffering under the same bombs. Yet, at the same time, the use of exceptionalist language which sought to pinpoint who was 'taking it' the hardest often disrupted this notion of a shared experience, and threatened to arouse resentment.

Such antipathies were often made particularly clear within the context of the media coverage of the raids. Whilst the press, for example, may have done as much as any institution to build the narrative of unity and fortitude which lay at the heart of the Blitz mythos, certain silences and nuances within its pages simultaneously sowed the seeds for the disruption of this very imaginary. Indeed, the potential of this forum to host and provoke such contestations can be illustrated by returning again to the case of Southampton, where Mass Observation found that there was a certain amount of 'annoyance at the papers', which 'had not made so much fuss about the Southampton raid as the Coventry one'.<sup>734</sup> Notably, however, this grumble was echoed across Britain, and most particularly so across the provincial realm; Home Intelligence reported, for instance, that those in Liverpool resented being referred to as a 'North West town' in the papers, especially when the raids on London were being described in greater detail.<sup>735</sup> In Bristol, meanwhile, it was said that the people were 'disappointed in the way the news was handled, [and] that their raids [had] not been given the same publicity as Coventry'; in Hull, there were rumoured complaints about the censorship which led the city to be described by the BBC only as a 'north-

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<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> MOA, FR 517, 'Southampton', 4 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>735</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Special Report on Conditions in Merseyside, June 1941, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-weekly-reports-inf-1-292-1-1/idm140465687667680/>> [last accessed: 3 June 2024].

east coastal town'; and in Clydebank, where roughly three-quarters of the housing stock had been left uninhabitable, the state's reticence to release details about the damage and death inflicted by the raiders was acknowledged as a key area of unrest.<sup>736</sup> There was, of course, sound strategic reasoning behind the government's reluctance to reveal details of the bombers' successes, not least the avoidance of confirming that they had hit their intended targets. Still, such complaints reflected the fact that press coverage of the raids and their aftermath was, indeed, a powerful space in which blitzed citizens could see their difficulties recognised and appreciated.

This was perhaps best exemplified by one of the most important vehicles for the delivery of recognition: the reportage which followed royal visits to blitzed areas. Over the course of the initial period of bombing in 1940 and 1941, the King – often but not always accompanied by the Queen – inspected the damage in almost every bombed city between Plymouth and Hull.<sup>737</sup> The propaganda potential of a royal visit was enormous, not least because multiple fault lines could be collapsed and remoulded within the coverage of the royal tours, including those which divided civilian from soldier, those which underlaid the hierarchies of class, and those which separated Britain's cities from one another. Widely published visuals of the King dressed in military garb and conducting 'inspections' of bombed areas, for example, could easily be read as a symbol of the increasingly militarised civilian sphere of war – and, by extension, of the common sympathy which could now unite the home and fighting fronts.<sup>738</sup> In Bristol, it was openly declared that a visit from the King had 'revived [a] sensation in thousands of breasts' that blitzed civilians were now just as much 'in the fray' as the soldiers on the fighting front.<sup>739</sup> Meanwhile, much was made – not least by the monarchy itself – of the fact that Buckingham Palace had been bombed. For example, replying to a woman in Hull who had told him that all her windows were shattered, the King was said to have responded that the same thing had happened to his own home.<sup>740</sup> Such statements

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<sup>736</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 10, 11 December 1940, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/inf-1292-weekly-reports-1940/idm140465680878352/>> [last accessed: 3 June 2024]; Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz*, p. 263; Brodie J. Crawford, "A War of Their Own" – Home Front Morale Assessment and Scottish Ideological Need in Glasgow, 1939-1941' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000), pp. 57-58.

<sup>737</sup> Between 1940 and 1941 alone, for example, the King and/or the Queen toured a large number of blitzed areas, including those in Plymouth, Bristol, Bath, Southampton, Portsmouth, London, Coventry, Cardiff, Swansea, Merseyside, Manchester, and Hull.

<sup>738</sup> For examples of press reports which noted the King's military dress, see: 'Their Majesties Inspect Hull Bomb Damage', *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 August 1941; 'King Sees "Blitzed" Southampton', *Dundee Courier*, 6 December 1940.

<sup>739</sup> 'The King in Bristol', *Western Daily Press*, 17 December 1940.

<sup>740</sup> 'Their Majesties Inspect Hull Bomb Damage', *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 August 1941.

were primed to establish the sovereign at the centre of what one local press report called a ‘community of feeling’.<sup>741</sup> Under this banner, citizens ‘high and low’ were theoretically banded together by a shared experience and character which – as the attack on the Palace was plainly used to argue – notionally neutralised the socioeconomic rifts which normally characterised British society.<sup>742</sup>

Whilst the royal tours shone an approving light upon this ‘community of feeling’ generally, the bombed-out tended to be singled out for their particular bravery. It was made clear that this distinction was being actively conferred by the King and Queen themselves, who were said to have ‘repeatedly asked [for] those who had been “bombed out” [to] be presented’.<sup>743</sup> The King, for example, was said to have ‘smiled’ at the determination in the voice of a man who had lost his home in Sheffield.<sup>744</sup> In the East End, press releases similarly described how he ‘shook hands warmly’ with a twice bombed-out woman who was nevertheless determined to ‘stick it’ out in London and told her, “That’s the spirit.”<sup>745</sup> The Queen, on the other hand, provided an example of how even visible grief could – when appropriately articulated – reify the currency of stoicism. After hearing the case of a 73 year-old woman who had ‘lost everything’ in Merseyside, for example, it was reported that the Queen could ‘scarcely restrain her own tears’; meanwhile, in both South Wales and Sheffield, it was the sight of the bombed-out cheerfully getting on with their lives that ‘moved [her] almost to tears’.<sup>746</sup>

However, whilst the responses of both the King and the Queen thus worked to establish the common fortitude of all those under enemy fire, and particularly those who had suffered its worst excesses, it is also evident that their visits could become flashpoints in their own right. Indeed, resentments occasionally arose even before the monarch could arrive: the bitterness reported by Home Intelligence in Bristol over the lack of press coverage, for instance, was found to have been

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<sup>741</sup> ‘The King in Bristol’, *Western Daily Press*, 17 December 1940. The relationship between the monarchy and the people in wartime is explored further – albeit with reference to the First World War, rather than the Second World War – in Heather Jones, *For King and Country: The British Monarchy and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See also Jennifer J. Purcell and Fiona Courage (eds), *Reflections on British Royalty: Mass Observation and the Monarchy, 1937-2022* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

<sup>742</sup> ‘The King in Bristol’, *Western Daily Press*, 17 December 1940.

<sup>743</sup> ‘Royal Visit to Wales’, *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 March 1941.

<sup>744</sup> ‘Queen Praises Bulldog Spirit’, *Western Daily Press*, 7 January 1941.

<sup>745</sup> ‘Royal Visit to East End’, *The Times*, 24 April 1941.

<sup>746</sup> ‘Crowd Tells King “We Can Take It”’, *Dundee Courier*, 7 November 1940; ‘Queen Praises Bulldog Spirit’, *Western Daily Press*, 7 January 1941; ‘Royal Visit to Wales’, *Aberdeen Journal*, 20 March 1941. On the history of tears, see Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).



exacerbated by an announcement that the city would not be receiving a visit from the King.<sup>747</sup> Although Bristol would, in the event, be toured by the King and Queen less than a week after Home Intelligence's report, the initial response reflected the significance of the royal tours as a tool for ensuring that different cities felt that their experiences were being appropriately recognised.<sup>748</sup> Meanwhile, a visit to Hull in August 1941, during which the 'sad-eyed' Queen was reported to have said whilst looking upon its 'devastated' homes that the city was 'one of the worst blitzed' in Britain, demonstrated how these tours could further feed into the contentious discourse of comparison.<sup>749</sup>

During the early years of the war, as we have seen, this discourse was one with a spatially diffuse collection of participants. In 1940 and 1941, after all, although cities like London and Coventry may have come in for a particular dose of fame, most of the provincial cities also had their chance to face down the Luftwaffe's bombs – and, crucially, to be seen to do so in the appropriate manner. However, come 1944, and the arrival of the much more geographically focused V1 and V2 raids, the nature of this comparative landscape shifted, becoming refocused upon the seemingly dichotomous relationship between the capital and the provinces. Vivienne Hall, a young woman whose Putney flat was damaged numerous times by V1s – and, in the end, made uninhabitable by one – was, for example, clearly aware of the geographic chasm of experience when it came to the V-weapons raids, and made frequent reference to it when recording her feelings about life under fire. At once, she was envious of those living in areas where the bombing threat had receded, and who could therefore 'get on with their lives'; in August 1944, shortly after a V1 finally 'severed' her from her flat, she wistfully wrote of how she wished that she lived 'in Manchester or Bath, or Liverpool or Edinburgh'.<sup>750</sup> Yet, it is clear that Hall was also scathing of citizens who were, in this way, removed from the challenges of this new phase of bombing. In particular, she resented the ways in which this removal made it possible for some to minimise and underestimate the difficulties of living with the constant threat of losing one's home or life. 'Those

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<sup>747</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 10, 11 December 1940, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/inf-1292-weekly-reports-1940/idm140465680878352/>> [last accessed: 3 June 2024].

<sup>748</sup> 'The King in Bristol', *Western Daily Press*, 17 December 1940.

<sup>749</sup> 'Their Majesties Inspect Hull Bomb Damage', *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 August 1941.

<sup>750</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 183, 181.

of us alive to listen', she complained in June 1944, 'will doubtless hear many a person in a safe area expounding his views on the stupid nervous strain caused by these flying bombs'.<sup>751</sup>

The sense that those in the provinces had no real idea of what it was like to undergo a fresh round of bombing even prompted, in some quarters, a clandestine desire that the Luftwaffe's campaign actually be expanded once again. One Mass Observer who recorded her experience of the V1 attacks in her diary, for instance, confessed to feeling this way whilst sheltering from a 'terrible' daytime raid in August 1944:

I felt once or twice this evening that people from the provinces ought to go through a few nights like tonight, then they might have a little sympathy for the evacuees, and bombed out folk.<sup>752</sup>

This feeling, the diarist acknowledged, had been triggered by a phone conversation she had overheard between one of her fellow shelter-mates and his wife in Bolton, who had reported that 'the sun was shining brightly up there, and that she was sunbathing'.<sup>753</sup> An article published in the *Derby Daily Telegraph* – by chance, just four days after this Mass Observer wrote her entry – highlighted that such resentments were common enough to be discussed in public forums as well as within the pages of private diaries. The article's pseudonymous author, a 'Derbyshire Man' who described how he had been raised in Derbyshire but now lived in the south, used his article to lament the bitterness felt by his friends and neighbours towards those who remained removed from this new stage of the conflict. Many of his friends, he emphasised, were 'bombed-out Londoners' who had been unable to 'undress for weeks', and who lived in fear of further raids; such a life existed in stark contrast with that of the provincial citizen, who had 'time and energy to spare to criticise leaders, to argue, and to air grievances'. If this chasm was to be bridged, the 'Derbyshire Man' argued, his northern countrymen had to remember 'that a terrible, bloody war is still near his doorstep, and that much ... blood is being spilled daily for [them]'.<sup>754</sup>

Still, despite the sincerity of the resentments that were expressed by some of those whose doorsteps had, in fact, been crossed afresh, it is clear that the pleas of the 'Derbyshire Man' did not always fall on ears deafened by their distance from the action. Indeed, for all of the jostling which

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<sup>751</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 3989, Papers of Vivienne Hall, typescript diary, p. 176.

<sup>752</sup> MOA, Diarist 5443, entry for 24 August 1944.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> 'We Have Been Spared: The South Has Suffered', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 1944.

occurred within and between urban populations, it would be absurd to suggest that the attempts to forge and reify the broader national community proved entirely fruitless. Even during the earlier years of the Blitz, it is possible to see how the experience of bombardment could generate displays of sympathy just as surely as it could provoke more ambiguous expressions of pride and anger. For example, Mass Observation's report on Worcester found that the arrival of the bombs allowed citizens to empathise more strongly with embattled populations elsewhere. When talk extended beyond the local effects, it was therefore found that the people of Worcester, 'no longer feeling immune from danger, feel very compassionate about the sufferings of the Londoners'.<sup>755</sup>

In the context of the raids of 1944 and 1945, of course, there was no common suffering to engender this empathy. Yet, whilst those beyond London and the 'Bomb Alley' of south-east England tended to lack direct experience with these novel weapons – and thus often found themselves the target of ire from those less fortunate – appearances of disregard could be deceiving. Home Intelligence reported throughout the summer of 1944, for example, that whilst some of those in protected areas 'were inclined to wash their hands' of the V1 reports, many more expressed sympathy and admiration for the plight of those in the embattled southern region.<sup>756</sup> For one thing, despite the prevalence of binaries and dichotomies within the discourse of comparison, the boundaries of urban areas were, of course, porous; countless citizens living elsewhere in Britain had friends, family, and loved ones living in threatened area, ensuring the existence of affective bonds which transcended the localisation of experience.<sup>757</sup> More broadly, the spread of rumours which visualised London in ruin, full of 'people wandering round, homes totally destroyed' was said to have driven a special wave of sympathy.<sup>758</sup> Interestingly, the most exaggerated rumours were directly attributed by Home Intelligence to evacuees who had fled the capital, and who now faced the challenge of finding accommodation in the saturated reception areas.<sup>759</sup> Whilst it was entirely

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<sup>755</sup> MOA, FR 441, 'Local Morale Reports', October 1940, p. 1.

<sup>756</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 194, 20 June 1944, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465680645184/>> [last accessed: 19 June 2024].

<sup>757</sup> Ibid.

<sup>758</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 197, 11 July 1944, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465681050448/>> [last accessed: 19 June 2024]. On rumour in wartime, see Jo Fox, 'Confronting Lord Haw-Haw: Rumour and Britain's Wartime Anti-Lies Bureau', *Journal of Modern History*, 91.1 (2019), 74-108.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid. See also TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 198, 18 July 1944, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465683214048/>> [last accessed: 19 June 2024].

natural that rumour flourished in the atmosphere of secrecy and censorship which surrounded the arrival of the V-weapons, it takes little imagination to see how this opportunity for the elicitation of sympathy might serve those who had been forced to leave their homes particularly well.

Perhaps the most public evidence of provincial sympathies, however, could be found in forms such as the Women's Voluntary Service's 'Good Neighbour' project. Set up in 1944, this venture saw various cities and counties across Britain each 'adopt' a London borough: Aberdeen and the north-east counties, for example, were paired with the much-blitzed Stepney; the West Scotland region with Ilford and Walthamstow; Shropshire with Hackney, and so on.<sup>760</sup> Local WVS committees spearheaded donation drives, collecting household goods and other items such as clothing which were then supplied to bombed out families via their local rehousing officers.<sup>761</sup> Such schemes saw an explicit recognition of the geographic disparities which developed – or, in some ways, re-emerged – during the latter years of the war, and offered a space in which these rifts might be remedied.<sup>762</sup>

Although morale reports from the same period continued to find persistent discontent among the blitzed and bombed out vis-à-vis the subject of recognition, it is thus clear that the images and stories which emerged from the target areas did function effectively to impress the shared nature of the war effort upon provincial citizens. It is also possible to see how, yet again, this narrative often coalesced particularly strongly around the image of the 'de-housed' citizen. This figure, having suffered a substantial loss which nevertheless fell short of death, was in many ways the ideal object of sympathy – being both self-evidently worthy and, unlike those who had made the ultimate sacrifice, alive to benefit from and appreciate expressions of gratitude. Yet, as earlier passages of this chapter have demonstrated, the project of establishing the blitzed Briton in such a vaunted role was one fraught with risk, often threatening the unity of the very same national community that it sought to uphold. After all, the rubric of recognition was often inherently relative; many of those dislocated by enemy action only felt that their sacrifice was being appropriately respected when they saw their travails more extensively or favourably catalogued than that of their fellow countrymen. In such an environment, it is perhaps neither surprising that

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<sup>760</sup> 'Stepney Grateful to North-East', *Aberdeen Journal*, 4 May 1945; 'Christmas Gifts for Bombed-out', *Evening Telegraph*, 16 December 1944; White, *Battle of London*, p. 271.

<sup>761</sup> 'The Store Where Everything is Free', *Picture Post*, 3 March 1945.

<sup>762</sup> Examples of other charitable schemes launched in response to the V1 and V2 raids can be found in White, *Battle of London*, pp. 269-270.

citizens who had faced the bombs should have so persistently framed their own encounters in relation to the (perceived) actions, opinions, and experiences of others across the nation – nor that they did so in ways which highlighted difference as much as they did commonality.

## REPRISALS AND REFLECTIONS

So far, this chapter has explored the ways in which those who had lost their homes articulated and positioned their own experiences through reference to that of other Britons, whether they be neighbours or strangers. The final section of this chapter will extend this approach onto the transnational stage by examining how Britons' own encounters with home-loss featured – or, indeed, did not feature – when eyes and minds turned toward the German experience. Through reference primarily to the Allied strategic bombing of Germany, but also to the requisitioning programme implemented by the British forces in the postwar occupation zone, it will ask how debates about such analogues might act as another means of accessing opinions and understandings of what it meant to lose one's home in wartime.

Of course, the former case – that of the Allied bombing campaign – is already the topic of a rich, and at times controversial, historiography. Within the broader memory and history of the war in the air, this facet has often been elided, edged out by the mythic and symbolic behemoth that is the domestic Blitz. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, the destructive possibilities of air power had been a source of discussion and anxiety for many years prior to 1939, and whilst the outbreak of war put paid to some of the more apocalyptic predictions of the interwar period, the sense of significance that had been attached to the bomber remained. Pervasive fears about eventualities such as the knock-out blow were, as Brett Holman has thus argued, often redirected rather than dispelled entirely; for even as Germany's efforts in the air failed to produce results, many in Britain began to wonder if the RAF could deliver a more effective blow of its own.<sup>763</sup> Such prospects, as Mark Connelly has reminded us, were granted an extra measure of urgency during the earlier stages of the war, as a series of military defeats abroad helped to build a picture of Axis ascendancy and British impotence.<sup>764</sup> Yet, inevitably, the question of what it meant to carry out rather than simply

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<sup>763</sup> Brett Holman, “Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard”: Debating Reprisals during the Blitz’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 8 (2012), 394-407, p. 395.

<sup>764</sup> Mark Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars: A New History of Bomber Command in the World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), p. 120.

receive such attacks was one plagued with its own set of ambiguities and dilemmas. Both contemporaneously, and within subsequent historical analyses of this period, several uncertainties became the subject of hot debate: for example, to what extent did the British people truly support the aerial bombardment of Germany by the RAF? Among those who supported this path, what was the perceived purpose of a bombing campaign? Who – or what – should be the target of the bombers?<sup>765</sup>

In seeking the answers to these questions, contemporaries were naturally required to probe another, related query: what factors shaped citizens' judgements upon the above questions? Scholars, too, have been concerned with this line of inquiry, and have noted that skewed depictions of the military significance of the bomber often seemed to mould attitudes towards the Allied campaign. Both Holman and Connelly have pointed out, for instance, that official and press depictions of Bomber Command's efforts over Germany persistently exaggerated the abilities and accuracy of the force, intimating that crews were able to pinpoint and attack military and industrial targets to a much greater degree than was actually feasible.<sup>766</sup> Such rhetoric acted as a fig leaf for the realities of the campaign. At the very least, technological limitations precluded any true precision bombing, ensuring that German civilians would come under fire regardless of the target. And, as comments made by Bomber Command's leader Arthur Harris highlighted, such limitations were indeed far from the only reason that these civilians were included in the sphere of vulnerability: 'the destruction of houses, public utilities, transport and lives ... are accepted and intended aims of our bombing policy. They are not by-products of attempts to hit factories'.<sup>767</sup> As Connelly has demonstrated, these actualities were submerged within, rather than omitted from, the coverage of Allied raiding, allowing a careful balancing act to develop. The British state could claim to be prosecuting war from the moral high ground, whilst still hinting 'at the righteous destruction of German lives and property'; and although the morality of the strategic bombing

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<sup>765</sup> For a broader examination of the various debates which attended the strategic bombing campaigns of the Second World War, see: Overy, *The Bombing War*, pp. 609-633; Peter W. Gray, 'The Gloves Will Have to Come Off: A Reappraisal of the Legitimacy of the RAF Bomber Offensive Against Germany', *RAF Air Power Review*, 13.3 (2010), 10-40; Connelly, *Reaching for the Stars*; C. S. Maier, 'Targeting the City: Debates and Silences about the Aerial Bombing of World War II', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87.859 (2005), 429-443.

<sup>766</sup> Holman, "Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard", p. 400; Connelly, 'The British People, the Press, and the Strategic Air Campaign', p. 45.

<sup>767</sup> Connelly, 'The British People, the Press, and the Strategic Air Campaign', p. 53. See also Robert G. Moeller, 'On the History of Man-Made Destruction: Loss, Death, Memory, and Germany in the Bombing War', *History Workshop Journal*, 61 (2006), 103-134, p. 107.

campaign continued to be debated, British citizens could choose to believe this, ‘taking comfort in the ambiguities of the reportage’.<sup>768</sup>

At the time, further nuances and silences within the reportage on the British bombing of Germany certainly ignited the particular ire and interest of Mass Observation’s Tom Harrisson. In a May 1941 article authored for the *Cambridge Review*, for example, Harrisson railed against the claims made by various journalists and newspapers that the populations of blitzed British towns were ‘clamouring’ for reprisals.<sup>769</sup> Singling out Hilde Marchant’s November 1940 article for the *Daily Express*, which had declared that ‘all of Coventry was crying “BOMB BACK AND BOMB HARD”’, he argued that such statements were entirely at odds with both the findings of MO investigators and his own observations of post-raid Coventry.<sup>770</sup> Whilst not denying the existence of ‘reprisal feeling’, Harrisson saw the press as the purveyors of a distorted view – one which drew a unduly positive correlation between the experience of bombardment and the level of support for reciprocal bombing.<sup>771</sup> For Harrisson, the true picture was in fact the very inverse; citing a BIPO survey of opinion published just over a week prior, he suggested that the loudest voices in support of reprisal raiding came not from the ‘blitztowns’, but rather from surrounding areas which had remained relatively untouched.<sup>772</sup>

This view of the link between personal experiences of bombardment and support for the bombing of Germany was, indeed, reflected in some – although, as we shall see, not all – of Mass Observation’s studies of post-raid morale. In Coventry, for example, it was declared that the raids had tended to induce a degree of myopia, causing citizens to become focused on ‘personal and local’ issues to the exclusion of the ‘war as a whole’; accordingly, there was said to be ‘little feeling’ in favour of external events such as reprisals.<sup>773</sup> An analysis of diary entries in the aftermath of the Coventry raid similarly found that ‘the feeling of tragedy overwhelmed all other feelings’ among those who were near to the bombing, to the extent that even ‘pre-existing desires for reprisal-revenge’ were dulled.<sup>774</sup> Observers in Southampton, meanwhile, reported that the whilst the

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<sup>768</sup> Connelly, ‘The British People, the Press, and the Strategic Air Campaign’, p. 53, 54.

<sup>769</sup> MOA, FR 694, ‘A Public Demand for Reprisals?’, 13 May 1941, p. 1, 3.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid. For more on the Hilde Marchant article, see Holman, “‘Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard’”, p. 394.

<sup>771</sup> The term ‘reprisal feeling’ was used by MO in various other studies – see, for example, MOA, TC Air Raids, 23-12-A, ‘Reprisals’, 12 March 1942.

<sup>772</sup> MOA, FR 694, ‘A Public Demand for Reprisals?’, 13 May 1941, pp. 4-6.

<sup>773</sup> MOA, FR 495, ‘Coventry’, November 1940, p. 3.

<sup>774</sup> MOA, FR 523A, ‘War in M-O Diaries’, 10 December 1940, p. 3.

‘bitterness’ of the situation in the city had ‘made people unready to favour any sort of indiscriminate bombing’, a greater swell of support for ‘violent reprisals’ could be found in the outlying villages.<sup>775</sup>

Yet, the stance outlined by Harrison and his investigators was not without its problems. For one thing, as the Southampton report unveiled, there were issues of definition and purpose to be considered. A reticence to support ‘indiscriminate bombing’ did not, for instance, preclude support for (notionally) more targeted reprisal raids; and, for that matter, an aversion to the idea of a bombing campaign framed by vengeance did not necessarily indicate a repudiation of bombing as a strategic device more broadly. The evidentiary basis upon which such claims were founded was also far more uncertain than acknowledged. The same opinion poll which Harrison used to back up his arguments in May 1941 had, for example, found higher levels of reprisal feeling in the much bombed areas of Glasgow, Clydeside, and the Midlands, thus unsettling his core correlation. Similarly, his statement that MO investigators had not recorded any ‘spontaneous’ or ‘conspicuous’ calls for reprisal raiding was patently untrue: observers in Stepney and Clydeside, for example, had reported hearing pro-reprisal comments, and in Worcester it had been specifically noted that ‘the real demand for the bombing of [German] civilians comes from those who have been bombed themselves’.<sup>776</sup> In Hull, meanwhile, the following exchange between two men – one of whom had been bombed out – was heard:

M40D: ‘We were blasted out three times, an’ the last time we were blasted right out.’

M70D: ‘Well, ‘e’s getting it now. R.A.F.’s giving it to ‘im worse than what we ‘ad it.’

M40D: ‘Yes, it’s every night now they go over they go over there. ‘E won’t be able to stand it like we did.’<sup>777</sup>

Such sentiments – which seemed to reflect support not just for the bombing of Germany, but more specifically for the retributive bombing of civilians – are also to be found beyond MO’s

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<sup>775</sup> MOA, FR 516, ‘Southampton’, 4 December 1940, p. 3.

<sup>776</sup> MOA, FR 694, ‘A Public Demand for Reprisals?’, 13 May 1941, pp. 3-4; Holman, “Bomb Back, and Bomb Hard”, p. 404; MOA, FR 441, ‘Local Morale Reports’, 5 October 1940, p. 6.

<sup>777</sup> MOA, FR 844, ‘Hull’, August 1941, pp. 5-6. The codes of M40D and M70D refer to a 40 year-old man and a 70 year-old man respectively.



wartime reports, in the testimony of others who had been dislocated by the Luftwaffe's raids. For example, Raymond Edwards, who was bombed out of two houses in Hull as a small boy, would later recall how the sight of the second home in ruins had ignited a 'sense of anger', 'an absolute and outright hatred for Germans and everything that was German', and a belief that 'the sooner the war was ended and the Germans were crushed', the better.<sup>778</sup> Another, more ambiguous case in which personal experience came to chime with the discourse on Allied bombing can be found in the remembrances of Sam Lipfriend, whose family was forced to leave their home after landmine damage in 1940.<sup>779</sup> Just a few years later, Lipfriend would himself participate in the infamously destructive raids on Dresden as a member of a Bomber Command crew; in his notes at the time, he would write that there had been a complete 'wipe out of [the] city ... Similar fires will never be seen again.' Recalling these events some fifty years later, in the context of a decades-long – and somewhat cynical, given that many Britons *did* at least tacitly support it during the war itself – repudiation of the Allied bombing campaign, Lipfriend was fiercely defensive of a course of action which he argued had truncated the war and thus saved 'thousands and thousands' of lives.<sup>780</sup> Whilst he did not draw a simple line between his own experiences in 1940 and his deeply held belief in the legitimacy of the Allied bombing campaign, Lipfriend made it clear that the latter was certainly connected to his broader view of the attacks on civilian spaces in Britain:

The Germans started the war ... I will never forget the pictures of London's fires on the city. That stays very, very strongly in my mind. And also, our people who used to go down the shelter, and some of them didn't come up again. I'm not the slightest bit upset about bombing Germany.<sup>781</sup>

In different ways, then, both Lipfriend and Edwards' testimonies highlight the ways in which those who had been dislocated from their homes by enemy action in Britain could – directly or indirectly – mobilise these experiences in their discussion of events abroad.

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<sup>778</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 22169, Raymond Edwards, Reel 2, 10 September 2001.

<sup>779</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 31462, Sam Lipfriend, Reel 1, 2008.

<sup>780</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 31462, Sam Lipfriend, Reel 5, 2008. For more on contemporary attempts to figure the Allied bombing campaign within wider cultural narratives of 'the flyer', see Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 153-180. For a discussion of this tension in post-war memoir, see Frances Houghton, *The Veterans' Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 254-262.

<sup>781</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 31462, Sam Lipfriend, Reel 5, 2008.

Indeed, we can see that this link was also articulated by those who expressed either less supportive, or simply more equivocal, opinions on the subject of British raids on German civilians. For Lilian Barton, who was bombed out of her home in Birkenhead during the war, the experience of losing her home seemed to eclipse any sense of anger or hatred towards the enemy themselves: '[h]ate them? I don't think you thought of it like that ... You just thought you were lucky that you'd escaped to tell the tale.'<sup>782</sup> Meanwhile, for Hazel Edwards, whose London home was damaged – albeit never lost completely – during the war, news of the RAF's exploits brought little comfort, not least because of her 'awful suspicion' that British reprisals would only provoke their own reciprocation in turn.<sup>783</sup> Here, the bombed home occupied a grey area, pulling Edwards in two directions; she felt that her 'morale [should have been] boosted, knowing that our bombs were raining down on the German capital', but her fear of ramifications fundamentally inhibited such feelings.<sup>784</sup> This greyness was, for some, similarly reflected in the knowledge that reprisals would not necessarily result in reparations. As one woman whose home had been wrecked in the London Blitz noted in an interview with the *Picture Post*, bombing may have seemed the only option open to Britain in the nadir of 1940 – '[b]ut that don't bring our blinkin' homes back'.<sup>785</sup>

Whilst the experience or possibility of home-loss thus often worked as a crucial interlocutor in the formation and expression of feelings around reprisals and strategic bombing, it is evident that there was no single, straightforward direction in which this experience drove opinion. The breadth of feeling about this subject was further captured in a series of interviews with bombed out Londoners conducted in early 1941 by Celia Fremlin, a paid investigator working for Mass Observation. Clearly seizing upon the sense that the loss of one's home might reshape one's opinions about the wartime world, Fremlin asked her interviewees a range of questions, including whether they were 'angry with the German airmen who did it', and whether they thought 'we ought to retaliate on Berlin'. She concluded that only a 'slight' desire for reprisals existed among this group of citizens. This inference was, as a generalisation of her discussions, largely fair. Still, the answers themselves told a more textured and uncertain story; two of the respondents, for example, expressed themselves as being roundly against retaliation, stating that they had 'never felt

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<sup>782</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 13948, Lilian Barton, Reel 1, 13 April 1994.

<sup>783</sup> Edwards, *War Among the Ruins*, p. 61.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> 'East End at War', *Picture Post*, 28 September 1940.

angry with the German people, airmen or otherwise', and that such a strategy would simply be a 'waste of bombs'. Others were more unsure. A quote from one woman who had lost all of her possessions in the bombing of her home, for instance, highlighted the challenge of balancing questions of morality and effectiveness: '[o]h, I don't know, I don't know that it'll help ... I don't see why people should suffer like this'. Meanwhile, whilst acknowledging that she was 'not an expert', another respondent positioned herself a little further along the scale of support, replying that she would be in favour of reprisals 'if [they] would do any good'.<sup>786</sup>

This decidedly broad and indistinct church of opinion on the question of whether – and if so, how and why – the RAF should itself mete out the same fate as had befallen British homes and citizens only persisted as the contours of such a campaign became sharper. In December 1943, for example, Mass Observation asked its panel of volunteer writers to describe their feelings 'about the recent bombing of Germany', and received a similarly kaleidoscopic set of responses – many of which came from those who had already experienced domestic dislocation themselves.<sup>787</sup> In some quarters, it was clear that the bombing of German cities was seen as a cause for optimism, or even celebration; one respondent, for instance, stated that they were 'quite pleased' about the campaign, although they 'mourn[ed] the loss of ... [the] boys doing the flying'.<sup>788</sup> Others stopped short of such bellicosity, but nevertheless declared broad support for the British bombing policy – most often on the grounds that Germany, both morally and strategically, should not be allowed to 'escape the smashing-up that war has brought to so many other countries'.<sup>789</sup> This was the stance of one woman who had been bombed out twice in London, and thereafter forced to move to a smaller home in Sussex with her family. She noted that, 'having experienced London, one can ... visualise the havoc', but that she nevertheless felt 'sure' the bombing was necessary: '[u]ntil the German people know and experience war at its worst', she argued, 'we shall not be rid of war'.<sup>790</sup>

For others, the perceived necessity of the campaign rested upon the sense that this was the best, and perhaps only, way of bringing the war to a close – a belief that, as we have already seen, had certainly been encouraged and inculcated by figures within the military, the government, and

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<sup>786</sup> MOA, TC Housing, 1-2-E, 'Interviews with people who have been bombed out', 26 January 1941, unpaginated.

<sup>787</sup> MOA, Directive Questionnaire for December 1943.

<sup>788</sup> MOA, DR 2165, Response to December 1943 directive.

<sup>789</sup> MOA, DR 2852, Response to December 1943 directive; MOA, DR 3418, Response to December 1943 directive.

<sup>790</sup> MOA, DR 3463, Response to June 1943 directive; MOA, DR 3463, Response to December 1943 directive.

the press. One blitzed Edinburgh resident, for example, wrote of how her distaste for the idea of ‘merciless bombing’ was outweighed by her ‘feeling that it will shorten the war very considerably [and] is thus justified.’ Similarly, a Londoner who had been bombed out of her home in the autumn of 1940 – and who had written to MO to describe how she was having to cobble together a new home ‘out of bits and pieces of furniture’ – responded to the December 1943 directive with a suggestion that the bombing of Germany may be justified ‘if it brings war to [a] quicker close and acts as a deterrent’.<sup>791</sup> Notably, her own experiences of the bombing and its aftermath clearly worked to shape her feelings on the matter somewhat differently, even if they did not change her ultimate opinion:

The bombing news makes me feel very sick inside. I hate it. It seems to me to be a revolting necessity of war ... I’ve had too much bombing myself. Our own fancy work on German towns makes me feel very grim inside, gives me a tearing feeling of physical strain in the solar plexus region.<sup>792</sup>

And yet, as she concluded; ‘[t]o think of all this agony coming to an end would be wonderful’.

These more ambiguous – but often tacitly supportive – responses comprised the largest grouping both within the replies to the December 1943 directive as a whole, and within the subset which had previously written for Mass Observation about their own experiences with home-loss. Naturally, however, there were also voices in these groups which took a far more hostile stance in response to the directive’s question. For an Observer who had lost his home in March 1940 – albeit to requisition rather than enemy action – the Allied bombing campaign was ‘nothing but a hideous piece of wickedness’, regardless of whether it could shorten the war or not.<sup>793</sup> For another, who believed that bombing Germany *would* shorten the war, the whole campaign was nevertheless a source of national shame. Recalling a film he had seen recently, which had contrasted scenes of damage in London and Coventry set to ‘sad background music’ with the devastation that had been wrought since upon German cities, the writer documented his revulsion: ‘[t]he film was triumphant, it was proud, it made me sick’.<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>791</sup> MOA, DR 1039, Response to December 1940 directive; MOA, DR 1039, Response to December 1943 directive.

<sup>792</sup> MOA, DR 1039, Response to December 1943 directive.

<sup>793</sup> MOA, DR 2703, Response to April 1943 directive; MOA, DR 2703, Response to December 1943 directive.

<sup>794</sup> MOA, DR 3501, Response to December 1943 directive.

Whilst it is interesting to ponder, as contemporaries like Celia Fremlin evidently did, how the experience of losing one's home in wartime may have impacted upon the contentious debate about Britain's own bombing ambitions, we must surely come to a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion: namely, that home-loss did not fundamentally reshape opinions on this matter – or, at least, not to the extent that this opinion diverged from the somewhat amorphous general trend. This is not to say, however, that the link between the two issues must therefore prove uninteresting or unfruitful. It is, for instance, of note that home-loss became linked to the reprisals issue in much the same way as it had been tied to questions about morale. It is also true that, for those who had themselves come under direct fire, and especially for those who had lost their homes as a result, the strategic bombing debate offered another discursive space in which one might process and articulate their understandings of what this experience *meant*, and of how it had made them feel. Perhaps most crucially, though, an examination of this discourse allows us to see how citizens conceived of home-loss not only as a personal experience, but also as an increasingly common eventuality of war. Some went further than others in acknowledging this much broader ethical context, as was the case for one of the other respondents to Mass Observation's December 1943 directive, who had been dislocated from her London home by a time bomb in September 1940:<sup>795</sup>

I feel terrible about our bombing of Germany. Of course, war is terrible, and I see no reason why civilians should not share its horrors; but the indiscriminate bombing of towns inflicts unimaginable horrors ... We thought that the German was a Hun to bomb our cities. We might at least be honest enough to admit that in war there is neither right nor wrong; either side will do anything to win.<sup>796</sup>

Whether self-consciously or not, then, even as numerous urban Britons couched their own experiences within the dual frameworks of British stoicism and good character, and German barbarity, many ultimately – and simultaneously – accepted the targeting of civilians and their homes as an inevitable and normal aspect of modern warfare.

Given the utility of thus studying the British experience of home-loss through the lens of a continental analogue, it is natural that we should also turn our eyes in the direction of another, murkier parallel – one which captured the echoes of requisitioning rather than air raids. To do so, we must make a temporal leap to the beginnings of the postwar period, and to the occupation of

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<sup>795</sup> MOA, Diarist 5402, Entry for 21 September 1940.

<sup>796</sup> MOA, DR 1056, Response to December 1943 directive.

Germany after May 1945 by the victorious Allied forces. The situation in the defeated nation at the start of this period was a desperate one, characterised by mass human displacement, paralysis of key utilities, networks and industries, and critical shortages of food and housing.<sup>797</sup> The latter had been decisively driven by the twin onslaughts of bombing and, in some areas, more traditional forms of conflict as the Allies had made ground advances towards Berlin, and the result was destruction to a degree which dwarfed that seen in Britain. Cologne, to take just one example, had seen some two-thirds of its housing stock destroyed, a figure which rose to a shocking 98% in the centre of the city.<sup>798</sup> Although Germany had been divided by its occupiers into four, functionally independent zones – of which Britain presided over the most north-westerly, comprising the areas of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and the city-state of Hamburg – there was a common element in their responses: the use of requisitioning.<sup>799</sup> Just as domestic dispossession remained a significant aspect in the postwar housing landscape in Britain, so too was this policy a pervasive and enduring feature of German society during the years of occupation; come 1951, for instance, some 60,000 buildings still remained under Allied requisition.<sup>800</sup> In stark contrast to the British experience of requisitioning, however, the use of this tool in Germany has recently been increasingly well-mined by historians.<sup>801</sup> Their work reveals that the expropriation of German citizens' possessions and land by the various occupying forces proved in many areas to be a lightning rod for contestation and protest, dredging up and fuelling questions about German sovereignty, Allied war conduct, and the nature of the postwar world that was under construction.

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<sup>797</sup> Christopher Knowles, 'The British Occupation of Germany, 1945-49: A Case Study in Post-Conflict Reconstruction', *RUSI Journal*, 158.6 (2013), 84-91, p. 85.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.; Adam R. Seipp, "'This Land Remains German': Requisitioning, Society, and the US Army, 1945-1956', *Central European History*, 52 (2019), 476-495, p. 482.

<sup>799</sup> Knowles, 'The British Occupation of Germany', p. 85.

<sup>800</sup> Peter Speiser, 'The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans (1948-1957): From Enemies to Partners' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Westminster, 2012), p. 114. The postwar experience of requisitioning in Britain is covered in further depth in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>801</sup> On requisitioning in the British Zone, see Blum, "'My Home, Your Castle'"; Speiser, *The British Army of the Rhine*; Rosenfeld, 'The Anglo-German Encounter in Occupied Hamburg', pp. 108-158. On the American Zone, see Seipp, "'This Land Remains German'". On the Soviet use of requisitioning, see Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 156-162; the requisitioning of other property, such as food, is also explored in Filip Slaveski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany: Hunger, Mass Violence and the Struggle for Peace, 1945-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 19-20, 28-30. On requisitioning in the French Zone, see K. H. Adler, 'Selling France to the French: The French Zone of Occupation in Western Germany, 1945-c.1955', *Contemporary European History*, 21.4 (2012), 575-595, p. 580, 594.

In the British Zone, such contentious issues were certainly at the foreground. With the establishment of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), the military body tasked with overseeing this zone, the region saw the arrival of tens of thousands of servicemen – and, controversially, their families – all of whom needed to be provided with housing and facilities.<sup>802</sup> The strains of the resultant programme of dispossession were felt unevenly across the zone, with some regions seeing a much more concentrated use of this policy. For example, the town of Bad Oeynhausen, which hosted the headquarters of the BAOR until 1954, saw some 10,000 residents evicted from their homes; initial plans for a new headquarters for the Military Government in Hamburg, meanwhile, meant that this city found itself subject to a similarly vigorous wave of requisitioning between 1945 and 1947.<sup>803</sup> In the context of a housing landscape marked by extreme scarcity, such developments naturally attracted the ire of the local populations, who frequently protested at the economic and political implications of such widespread dispossessions. As time wore on, and the slow speed of any derequisitioning also came to take its toll, tensions occasionally bubbled over into direct action.<sup>804</sup> For example, the town of Herford saw a group of ‘desperate’ German families attempt to illegally reoccupy their still requisitioned homes in early 1952; their efforts would be echoed elsewhere, with a number of comparable cases being reported upon as late as 1955. To make matters worse, the scheme of requisitioning in the British zone was persistently afflicted by allegations of corruption and theft. Some BAOR figures, for example, were accused not just of temporarily dispossessing German citizens, but of actively stealing from them. One RAF officer was even said to have taken valuables – including substantial quantities of silver – from a large estate held under requisition in Lower Saxony, and to have sent them to his own villa in Cannes.<sup>805</sup>

Given such controversies, it is perhaps of little surprise that the issue of requisitioning in the occupation zone should have elicited significant interest and debate in the British press at home. In *The Times*, for instance, the case of one Herr Quadbeck, whose Hanover home had been

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<sup>802</sup> Speiser, ‘The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans’, p. 1. For more on the reunification of British military families in occupied Germany, see Grace Huxford, “‘There is No Icebreaker like a Tiny Child’: Reuniting British Military Families in Cold War Germany”, *Contemporary European History*, 32 (2023), 203-220.

<sup>803</sup> Speiser, ‘The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans’, p. 120; Blum, “‘My Home, Your Castle’”, p. 116; Rosenfeld, ‘The Anglo-German Encounter in Occupied Hamburg’, pp. 108-158.

<sup>804</sup> Speiser, ‘The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans’, p. 116.

<sup>805</sup> This case, which concerned Sir Arthur Coningham and *Schloss Bückeberg* – a requisitioned castle – is recorded in Christopher Knowles, *Winning the Peace: The British in Occupied Germany, 1945-1948* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 55-56.

requisitioned by British troops in 1945, spurred a flurry of letters in which the contentious contours of this policy were placed in the spotlight. Writing to the newspaper in early 1947 in order to ‘appeal ... to the sense of justice of the British people’, Quadbeck lamented the seizure of his home and the removal of his possessions to a different property. Furthermore, he contrasted the treatment of his family – none of whom, he was keen to qualify, had ‘ever been a Nazi’ – with ‘prominent and leading Nazis in this town who are allowed to remain in their homes’.<sup>806</sup> Some *Times* readers wrote to express their sympathy and shock about the ‘ruthlessness’ of the British requisitioning project; others proved more cynical, as in the case of one reply which accused Quadbeck of having ‘maintained [a fine house] all through the Nazi regime’, and of now wishing ‘to remain prosperous under the new conditions’.<sup>807</sup> Stories of BAOR requisitioners evicting Germans from their homes in order to create luxurious and isolated enclaves – even as the local population faced homelessness and overcrowding – also prompted a wave of articles by a variety of British progressives, including William Beveridge, Victor Gollancz, and the Bishop of Derby.<sup>808</sup> The key argument made by such writers was that Europe could not afford to oversee once again a Germany in which bitterness and resentment was allowed to fester; yet their protestations also occasionally intimated that there was somehow something un-British about the practice of taking over valued and very much wanted homes.<sup>809</sup>

The raising of such questions about ethics and identity is all the more interesting in light of the fact that, as we shall see in the next chapter, the situation at home in Britain offered many parallels. Of course, the contexts in which dispossession occurred were vastly different, not only on account of the greater degree of destruction in Germany, but also owing to the particular dynamic which attended the relationship of the occupier and the occupied – and, indeed, the victorious and the defeated. Still, numerous echoes and analogues were at play. It is thus striking that, unlike the subject of retaliative bombing, where British efforts abroad were repeatedly placed

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<sup>806</sup> W. Quadbeck, ‘A German’s Complaint’, *The Times*, 31 January 1947.

<sup>807</sup> B. K. Blount, ‘A German’s Complaint’, *The Times*, 7 February 1947; L. W. Dunford, ‘A German’s Complaint’, *The Times*, 3 April 1947; George T. Anstell, ‘A German’s Complaint’, *The Times*, 4 February 1947.

<sup>808</sup> Rosenfeld, ‘The Anglo-German Encounter in Occupied Hamburg’, pp. 138-141. See also Lord Beveridge, ‘Outlook in Germany’, *The Times*, 30 August 1946; ‘British Behaviour in Germany’, *Evening Telegraph*, 30 October 1946.

<sup>809</sup> R. R. Stokes, ‘Outlook in Germany’, *The Times*, 3 October 1946. See also ‘Europe Cannot Afford This Germany’, *Picture Post*, 31 August 1946; ‘Tory MPs Visit Germany: Slate British Policy’, *Union Jack*, 24 December 1946.



in a feedback loop with experiences at home, the two spheres of British requisitioning seem to have remained largely siloed from one another in public discourse. The comparable experiences of dispossessed Germans do not, for instance, appear to have featured in the representations of those Britons who, in seeking to secure the derequisition of their own homes, made familiar arguments about the morality and legality of the state's actions. Nor did press coverage of these domestic protests ever meld with discussions about the situation abroad. A wave of squatting which unfolded across Britain in the summer of 1946 – igniting a conversation about requisitioning and its role in postwar society as it went – may have thus shared space on the newspaper stand with reports on requisitioning controversies in Germany, but a link between them was, apparently, never offered in print.<sup>810</sup> This is, incidentally, a separation which has been carried forward into the historiography of this topic. Within analyses of the BAOR's activities, for example, there exists almost no reference to fact that British civil and military departments had been applying requisitioning powers to private dwellings on the home front throughout the war, nor to the fact that they continued to do so after 1945. Arguably, Peter Speiser's work on the BAOR comes closest to identifying a link between dispossessed Germans and Britons, in that he notes a resemblance between the British squatting movement of 1946 and German efforts to forcibly reoccupy homes in the early 1950s.<sup>811</sup> And yet, even here, a closer parallel is elided – for as Chapter 5 will highlight, 1950s Britain also witnessed its own well-publicised campaign of reoccupation by dispossessed citizens.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the positioning of one's own encounters relative to others' was a process which lay at the heart of wartime home-loss. By articulating their experiences in such a way, British citizens were able to establish – and, indeed, contest – the meanings of this event. Many were also able to use their personal experience, and the feelings it aroused, as a knowledge basis from which to engage in wider political and social discourses, such

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<sup>810</sup> The squatting movement of 1946, for example, was widely reported upon in August and October 1946 – see Chapter 5 of this thesis. Meanwhile, the same period saw a number of reports on requisitioning woes in Germany: see, for example, Lord Saltoun, 'This Is What I Found in Germany', *Aberdeen Journal*, 30 August 1946; 'Europe Cannot Afford This Germany', *Picture Post*, 31 August 1946; Lord Beveridge, 'Outlook in Germany', *The Times*, 30 August 1946; 'British Wives in Germany', *The Times*, 10 October 1946. 'British Behaviour in Germany', *Evening Telegraph*, 30 October 1946.

<sup>811</sup> Speiser, 'The British Army of the Rhine and the Germans', p. 118.

as that which attended the issue of reprisals.<sup>812</sup> The absence of visible comparisons made by contemporary Britons on the subject of requisitioning at home and abroad was therefore a curious exception. It is also one for which the reasons remain frustratingly unclear; after all, in each country, the postwar requisitioned home came to be at the centre of highly comparable debates about the ethical limits of state power, and about the temporal limits of the war. In both contexts, this space also acted as the stage for a particular set of responses, including the outbreak of physical protests in forms such as squatting and counter-occupation. An exploration of why requisitioning should have thus demonstrated the limits of comparison – even in light of these distinctive points of interconnectedness – requires more space and attention than is possible within the pages of this thesis. The next chapter, however, will dive more deeply into the question of how the debates highlighted above played out in the arena of postwar British society. In doing so, it can perhaps lay the groundwork for a fuller analysis of requisitioning as a transnational response to the pressures of the postwar in Germany, Britain, and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

An interesting feature of wartime home-loss is that, although concrete variations in experience clearly existed – mediated not only by one’s locality and the temporal circumstances of loss, but also by factors such as socioeconomic status and personal character – the causes for complaint remained much the same across the nation. As previous chapters have highlighted, whether one was bombed out in Hull, Glasgow, or Bristol – or, indeed, dispossessed in London, Plymouth, or Liverpool – the core foci of protest almost always tended to be upon issues like compensation, the state of defences against enemy attack, and the (in)efficiency of welfare and rehousing services. In many ways, then, despite the differences that attended individual encounters with home-loss, there was a great deal of commonality to be found within the wider experiential whole.

Yet, it remains true that Britons who underwent this ordeal tended to be as apt to seize upon real and perceived divergences as they were to identify affinities. To some extent, this was driven by the practical needs of dispossessed and bombed out citizens; in fraught circumstances where access to housing, compensation, and other forms of aid was often limited, it quite literally

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<sup>812</sup> On the power of experience and feeling as a means of ‘knowing the world’ in postwar Britain, see Langhamer, “Astray in a Dark Forest”.

paid to participate in comparative discourses that offered the possibility of being deemed particularly deserving. In working to establish these hierarchies of home-loss, and to position themselves advantageously within them, citizens naturally turned to broader narratives about citizenship and wartime loss; here, they found an existing rubric of deservedness which emphasised a particular set of responses and characteristics. In turn, it is possible to see how this idealised form of citizenship itself relied on debates such as this as an avenue for expression. After all, in order for this framework to be upheld, citizens who embodied it needed to see themselves recognised and rewarded, whether through public praise and sympathy or through more tangible forms of aid – including the provision of housing and compensation. However, as we have seen, citizens' judgements as to whether they felt their efforts were being adequately acknowledged were highly relational; the discourse of comparison, therefore, was propelled ever forward.

A study of how dislocated citizens navigated and negotiated this ambiguous, shifting process thus tells us much – not only about the ways in which they understood their own, personal experiences, but also about how they conceived of the broad frameworks within which this experience was embedded. In particular, it highlights how certain mythic and propagandic images – such as that of the unified city or nation, sharing in a common experience of suffering, sacrifice and stoicism - were constantly in flux, being constituted, contested, and circumvented by citizens themselves. When dislocated Britons turned their attentions to the experience of home-loss in Germany, their conceptions of the ethical frameworks within which home-loss sat were similarly elucidated. Here, as citizens marshalled their own experiences in order to participate in a debate about home-loss more broadly, they again crafted a lens from which we might now also fashion a mirror.

## Chapter Five

### *Rebuilding & Returning*

In an essay for the British edition of *Vogue* in 1945, the author Elizabeth Bowen – who was, as we have seen already, ever attuned to and fascinated by the shifting sands of the wartime home – wrote of houses which had been ‘occupied by strangers, put to uses one could not have foreseen, mounting up, all the time, bewildered lives of their own, stories that will be guessed at but never told’.<sup>813</sup> As Bowen made clear, these uncanny, liminal spaces acted as both stage and mirror for the wider project of transitioning from war to peace. Just as the nation sought to reckon with the effects of six years of conflict, Bowen asked of the home:

[Is it] altered, a little strange? Or have we changed? Or is there no change at all? Dare one hope that? Can one pick up, now here, from the point at which one left off? The marker waits in the half-read book – a blade of grass of the summer of 1939.<sup>814</sup>

In the end, as Bowen wistfully concluded: ‘[n]othing undoes the years’. Whilst the act of homecoming offered an interface with the past, allowing whispers of 1939 to reverberate through to 1945 – echoes of a tune ‘quite forgotten ... [which] must have been waiting here, on the air’ – those returning were simultaneously faced with incontrovertible evidence of the passage of the past six years.<sup>815</sup> Not only were their own lives altered by war; so too was that of their home, which carried now the ‘ghostly indentations’ of unknown wartime occupants: ‘rings left by glasses ...

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<sup>813</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, ‘Opening Up the House’ [1945], in *People, Places, Things: Essays by Elizabeth Bowen*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 131–35, p. 132.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*

dinges in the springs of armchairs and sofas ... books displaced or upside down in the shelves'.<sup>816</sup> Neither citizens nor their homes could return to the place and time marked by the blade of grass.

It is notable that the dwelling described in Bowen's essay was one disturbed only by 'subtle traces of "other" occupations'; and, moreover, that it is one to which, at the close of war, the rightful occupants are permitted to return. As she herself observed, the inhabitants of such homes were fortunate: others might return to find more 'drastic rearrangement', or even to discover that 'what was there before' was there no longer.<sup>817</sup> However, regardless of whether the home had been left merely with haunted traces or had become something of a spectre itself, this space clearly encapsulated questions which went to the heart of the nation's wartime experience: what did it mean to have lived through such a conflict? And, as Britain and the British looked forward to the world that lay *beyond* the war, how did they seek to reconcile desires to return to 'normal' with the anxieties and possibilities of a society much changed and scarred by so many years of violence?<sup>818</sup> As this chapter will illustrate, the dwellings of citizens continued to offer a material and imaginative space within which such debates could be realised and negotiated.

Of course, the British home was not unique in sitting at the centre of such discourses. Housing crises enveloped much of the globe after 1945, with governments and peoples across the world struggling to cope with a potent blend of complicating factors. Not only, for example, did a number of countries have to re-absorb and house those who had been away fighting in the war; many also had to grapple with significant numbers of displaced persons, all of whom also needed to be found homes.<sup>819</sup> To make matters worse, these tasks often had to be accomplished both in housing landscapes which had been disfigured by war – and, for some, occupation – and in deeply challenging economic circumstances.<sup>820</sup> Another layer of complexity was added by the fluidity (or, indeed, abrogation) of property rights during the conflict; in Britain, for example, policies such as requisitioning ensured that a number of dwellings needed to be placed back in the hands of their

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<sup>816</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>818</sup> The theme of 'normality' is one which is explored more broadly in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, 'Introduction: Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe', in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-13.

<sup>819</sup> For an example of how displaced populations were often held to be inflaming housing pressures, see Macklin, "A Quite Natural and Moderate Defensive Feeling".

<sup>820</sup> Minayo Nasiali, 'Citizens, Squatters, and Asocials: The Right to Housing and the Politics of Difference in Post-Liberation France', *American Historical Review*, 119.2 (2014), 434-459, p. 439.

owners before they could play host to a homecoming. Such processes of property restitution were inherently and intimately tied up with questions of citizenship.<sup>821</sup> Debates about how, when, why – and if – property was returned, for example, were framed by broader discourses about the place of certain groups in postwar societies, and the approaches of these societies to perceived wartime injustice and hardship.

The broad project of reconstruction was, then, one attended by a number of practical and ideological ambiguities. In the British context, scholars have often probed this unfixity and its social and political ramifications by examining processes such as the development of the welfare state, and the physical rebuilding and replanning of British cities.<sup>822</sup> In the latter historiography, in particular, housing has been a prevalent feature. This work has often gone to the heart of some of the issues which will be touched upon in this chapter, asking what kind of houses citizens wanted or felt they deserved after the war, and what challenges problematised the delivery of these spaces. Even so, it is true that – just as it privileges the subject of housing over a broader investigation of the home and its meanings – this scholarship has tended to focus only superficially upon the citizens who would inhabit these spaces. Instead, the limelight has often remained upon architects, planners, and politicians. Similarly, whilst the extensive field of literature looking at rebuilding has tended to concentrate primarily upon the efforts to fashion new built environments, it can certainly be said that the subject of reconstruction invites a wider lens. If we consider the term ‘reconstruction’ to hint at both the creation of ‘something new’ *and* ‘the return of something already past’, then new dwellings must be seen alongside estranged ones to which a return is sought, and old ones in need of repair.<sup>823</sup>

Indeed, this temporal ambiguity has been commented upon by Nicholas Bullock, who has argued that attempts to envision the homes of ‘the future’ were invariably ‘mingled with a desire

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<sup>821</sup> This link has been most extensively discussed within continental European histories. See, for example Leora Auslander, ‘Coming Home?’; Shannon L. Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Anna Koch, *Home After Fascism: Italian and German Jews After the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023).

<sup>822</sup> On the development of the welfare state, see Pat Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State* (Harlow: Longman, 1982). On housing and the welfare state, in particular, see Brian Lund, Ian Greener, and Martin Powell, ‘The Beveridge Report 80 Years On: “Squalor” and Housing – “A True Goliath”’, *Social Policy & Administration*, 56.2 (2022), 284-298; Peter Malpass, ‘The Wobbly Pillar? Housing and the British Postwar Welfare State’, *Journal of Social Policy*, 32.4 (2003), 589-606. On housing and reconstruction, see, for example, Tsubaki, ‘Planners and the Public’; Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 151-167, 199-218.

<sup>823</sup> Derdiger, *Reconstruction Fiction*, p. 195.

for continuity with the past', ensuring that this space acted as a meeting point of the prewar, the wartime, and the postwar.<sup>824</sup> Claire Langhamer has similarly reminded us that even as meanings of the home in this period came to be inflected by postwar developments – such as the expansion of access to various domestic consumer goods – they were also being shaped by domestic fantasies formed prior to the war.<sup>825</sup> As Langhamer further notes, the homes which developed in this milieu were the subject of some contestation, not least because the visions of modern domesticity which underpinned them often 'failed to deliver what [they] promised'.<sup>826</sup> Home thus sat at a difficult – but dynamic - intersection. Although peace and the postwar home seemed to offer 'the prospect of a return to 'normality'', this return was complex and, at times, illusory and disenchanting – a fact which nowhere clearer than when home had been physically lost or dislocated by war.<sup>827</sup>

In order to highlight and explore further this ambiguous construction of home, this chapter will first focus upon some of the anxieties which swirled around the home in 1945. As a space which was traditionally conceived of in terms of peacefulness and stability, and which would physically host those returning from wartime lives, the home was easily mobilised as a central pillar of the transition from war to peace. However, the power of home to fulfil this role, both practically and symbolically, was complicated by a number of factors – not least the severe shortage of housing which faced British society after the war, and a broader unease regarding the effects of the war on the home and its occupants. The second portion of this chapter examines more closely the physical rebuilding in postwar Britain, including the ways in which those who had experienced home-loss featured in and were affected by this process. The bombed-out, for example, were often envisaged as a group which was particularly deserving of a new and better world after the war; and yet, as this section will highlight, this world was to prove extraordinarily challenging to bring into being. The theme of sacrifice and reward will be picked up further in the next section, where the claims of various groups to both new and existing homes will be examined. Finally, the chapter will turn more specifically to the question of requisitioning, in order to explore how the postwar afterlife of this notionally wartime power unfolded. As a case study of the Requisitioned Property Owners' Association (RPOA) will highlight, the persistence of requisitioning in British cities remained a

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<sup>824</sup> Bullock, *Building the Post-War World*, p. 6.

<sup>825</sup> Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain', p. 361.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>827</sup> Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home After World War Two*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 3.

source of contention for some time after the war. The experience of domestic dislocation was one which thus continued well beyond 1945, with potent legacies for both individual citizens, and for British society as a whole.

## POSTWAR ANXIETIES

On 23 March 1945, as the end of the war took shape on the horizon, politicians gathered in the Commons to debate ‘a national emergency comparable to the war emergency’: the housing problem.<sup>828</sup> Over the course of the six-hour debate, MPs considered a huge range of issues relating to the postwar direction of housing policy, including the form, function, and extent of any rebuilding programme; the hardships faced both by those who had been made homeless by enemy action, and those who owned requisitioned property; and the challenges posed by demobilisation and demographic developments. Each of the speeches made clear that this complex problem was the subject of significant anxiety for the policymakers of mid-1940s Britain. Take Sir Percy Harris, whose constituency in Bethnal Green was one of the most badly blitzed areas of London, and who warned the House in no uncertain terms of his opinion that housing, if poorly managed, had the potential to become a political storm:

Our people are not unreasonable, and providing we all do our best, and can show that nothing has been neglected, the bulk of them will put up with things for the time being, but if they see ... anything ... standing in the way of their getting their homes in a reasonable time, there will be a row, and the whole House knows it.<sup>829</sup>

Harris, like many of the other politicians who spoke, was particularly concerned by the question of how returning servicemen would respond to any perceived failure of housing policy: ‘[w]hat will be the feeling of such men’, Harris questioned, ‘when they come home and find their houses have been blown down and it is impossible to get accommodation of any kind?’<sup>830</sup> For Sir Thomas Crook, the MP for Norfolk North, the answer to this question served to demonstrate the moral and political crossroads at which Britain now found herself:

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<sup>828</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 409, col. 1160, 23 March 1945.

<sup>829</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 409, col. 1230, 23 March 1945.

<sup>830</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 409, col. 1229, 23 March 1945.



The average man's outlook on life is based on his home surroundings. If his accommodation is bad or indifferent, he feels the country is letting him down; he becomes discontented, and tends automatically to become an enemy of the State. But give that same man a decent home, and he will soon appreciate his responsibilities, and life for him will become worth while.<sup>831</sup>

Harris and Crook's fearful prognostications reflected the fact that Britain's housing position in 1945 was, to be sure, a thorny one.<sup>832</sup> Even before the war, the urban housing stock had long been recognised as needing political and economic attention. The aging nature of the market, for example, was a key issue; despite improvements in the interwar years, a worryingly large percentage of Britain's housing remained several decades or even centuries old. As Frederick Shaw has noted, these homes 'had been built to meet the needs of bygone ages and not those which existed at the end of the Second World War.'<sup>833</sup> The related problem of slum neighbourhoods had similarly been marked as an area of concern for some time. However, whilst slum clearance programmes had gotten underway in the 1930s – and, despite the natural suspension of official efforts during the war, been continued in blunter fashion by the Luftwaffe's bombs – there was still a substantial amount of work to be done, both in terms of rebuilding and relocating those who had lived in the cleared areas.<sup>834</sup> This was no easy task, for the hole in the housing stock caused by dwellings destroyed and seriously damaged during the war – a figure of some half a million, to say nothing of those that received other degrees of injury – had been unavoidably left to grow as building programmes starved of manpower and materials stagnated.<sup>835</sup> Meanwhile, just as the availability of housing had thus contracted, Britain's population had grown by a million, and there had been a sharp rise in the marriage rate.<sup>836</sup>

All this is to say, then, that Britain in 1945 faced a severe dearth of housing at the same time as it experienced significant growth in the number of individual households. As we have seen, the state utilised the powers of requisitioning throughout the war in order to balance the demand

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<sup>831</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 409, col. 1169, 23 March 1945.

<sup>832</sup> On the history of housing in postwar Britain, see: Short, *Housing in Britain*; Alison Ravetz and Richard Turkington, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: E & FN Spon, 1995); Shaw, *The Homes and Homeless of Post-War Britain*.

<sup>833</sup> Frederick Shaw, *The Homes and Homeless of Post-War Britain* (Carnforth: Parthenon, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>834</sup> Hasegawa, 'The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction', p. 141; White, 'The "Dismemberment of London"', p. 216.

<sup>835</sup> Tsubaki, 'Planners and the Public', p. 82; Ministry of Reconstruction, 'Housing', Cmd. 6609 (London: HMSO, 1945), p. 2.

<sup>836</sup> Central Statistical Office, *Fighting with Figures*, p. 4, 10.

for housing with its relative scarcity; and yet, this policy had itself often served to muddy the waters still further, precipitating a series of domestic migrations which now had to be addressed or reversed in some way. Servicemen, civil servants, and war workers whose homes had been requisitioned in their absence, for example, were now being demobilised and were keen to return to their homes, as were those whose property had been requisitioned following bomb damage. The fact that some of those who had been displaced by requisitioning were themselves living in billets similarly functioned to further complicate the chains of residence.

It is not difficult to see why, as Britain faced the notion and reality of the postwar, housing thus emerged as one of the most pressing and discussed social and political issues. For many Britons, this was a problem with significant personal impact – a fact made evident in Home Intelligence reports produced in the latter half of 1944, which were packed with references to the housing crisis and its lived and feared effects. In June 1944, for example, it was reported that the profound shortage of accommodation was ‘the dominant interest and worry of many’, and the cause of much ‘resentment’ among the population.<sup>837</sup> The extent of these anxieties was compounded by a widely held belief that these issues would be endemic for years after the end of the war; as one report from October 1944 suggested, ‘[g]loom and despair are widespread, and people now think it will be years before everyone is adequately housed’.<sup>838</sup> However, whilst there was certainly evidence of a disconnect between popular hopes and expectations regarding postwar homes, we might note here that this did not prevent housing from remaining at or near the top of contemporary priority lists.<sup>839</sup> Cynicism about the practicalities of reform, in other words, did not stop housing from remaining a personally pressing issue for many Britons – no matter how pervasive, pessimism was not equal to an abandonment of the notion that the citizenry deserved better housing after the war.

Yet, although it bears remembering that this crisis clearly played out most immediately and oppressively at the level of the personal, placing individual citizens in circumstances which were practically, financially, and emotionally challenging, the sheer scale of those affected ensured that

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<sup>837</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 194, 20 June 1944, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465680645184/>> [last accessed: 7 June 2023].

<sup>838</sup> TNA, INF 1/292, Weekly Report No. 210, 12 October 1944, <<https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-reports-inf-1-292-2-c/idm140465711869536/>> [last accessed: 7 June 2023].

<sup>839</sup> Brian Lund, *Housing Politics in the United Kingdom: Power, Planning and Protest* (Bristol: Policy, 2016), p. 1.

this was also perceived as a problem of national proportions. This was something explicitly emphasised in July 1945 in the pages of the *Picture Post*, where the shortage was argued to be ‘more than a personal problem, it is a problem of the nation’.<sup>840</sup> Such an argument both reflected and underpinned the central role which homes and housing occupied within contemporary visions of reconstruction. Whilst, for example, domestic space naturally featured strongly within debates about the physical and environmental reconstruction of Britain, discussions of how the economy would be revitalised, and how the moral and social life of the country would be rebuilt, were also deeply inflected by – and communicated through – the spatial medium of the home.<sup>841</sup> Indeed, this multi-layered role was also acknowledged within the *Picture Post* article, where it was argued that the nation’s economic recovery relied upon Britain taking ‘her place as a competitive producer and exporter’, and that doing so would require ‘a large and healthy population’.<sup>842</sup> This mission, however, was seen to be threatened by two factors relating to housing: a declining birth rate, linked to a lack of ‘suitable accommodation’ for families; and the dilapidated nature of the housing stock, which represented ‘a danger to the country’s health and, therefore, to the productive capacity of the individual worker’.<sup>843</sup> An anecdote about the struggles of an ex-serviceman trying to find a home for himself and his young family, meanwhile, served to highlight the home’s interrelated social role in postwar Britain; here was a space where that which had been separated or broken could be reunited and mended.<sup>844</sup>

This centrality was certainly not without precedent: if, for instance, we cast our minds back to Chapter 2, and to King George V’s comments in 1910 about the home and ‘family life’ as the ‘foundations of ... national glory’, it should become clear that the dwelling had long been constructed as core to the health of the nation.<sup>845</sup> It was logical, then, that at a time when the

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<sup>840</sup> ‘How to Get the Houses: The Outline of a Plan’, *Picture Post*, 14 July 1945.

<sup>841</sup> On the role of housing within debates about economic reconstruction – and most particularly the problem of absorbing demobilised servicemen into the labour force – see Malpass, ‘The Wobbly Pillar?’, p. 596. On home and social reconstruction, see Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, ‘Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-59’, in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne, 1944-88*, ed. by David Clark (London: Routledge, 1991), 6–27.

<sup>842</sup> ‘How to Get the Houses: The Outline of a Plan’, *Picture Post*, 14 July 1945.

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>844</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>845</sup> ‘The King on Home Life’, *Hull Daily Mail*, 9 July 1910. See also Deborah S. Ryan, ‘“All the World and Her Husband”: The *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition, 1908-1939’, in *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, ed. by Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (Cassell: London, 2000), 10-22, p. 11.

nation was felt by so many to be in desperate need of healing, the home and its inhabitants came to be represented ‘as the symbolic, and actual, centre of postwar reconstruction’.<sup>846</sup> And, just as the King had emphasised the familial functions of the home in his statement, in 1940s Britain the family was frequently envisaged again as the underlying justification for the home’s place at the centre. This much was evident within representations of the postwar home produced throughout the war, where the rearing of children and maintenance of family was often depicted as the prime purpose of this space.<sup>847</sup> Moreover, whilst family lay at the heart of the postwar housing debate in part because plans needed to provide these vaunted spaces for those currently in need of accommodation, it was also recognised that the homes of the future would also naturally shape the families of the future as well. As Mass Observation thus noted in a 1944 report: ‘if houses are built for families of one or two, we may expect families of one or two to be planned increasingly’.<sup>848</sup>

However, the positioning of home and family as a central pillar of postwar reconstruction was, in some corners, dualistic and deeply ambiguous.<sup>849</sup> Not only was the familial home seen by many as a *vehicle* for achieving the aims of reconstruction, whether these were perceived as change or as a return to the past; it was also often understood as a key *object* of this process – as something which was itself in need of reform.<sup>850</sup> Nowhere was the inherent tension between these positionings of domestic space more evident than in representations of the home as a centre for social reconstruction. For the editor of *Women’s Own*, for example, the home was the blueprint upon which the wider project of reconstruction should be based. In an issue published just after VE day, in May 1945, she thus wrote that this was an occasion for ‘quiet, deep thankfulness, a festival of home’ – for it was in this space, she argued, that both ‘victory and reconstruction’ began.<sup>851</sup> Notably, the vision of home which underpinned this argument was highly gendered and rather conservative in nature, emphasising both the inherent femininity of the domestic sphere, and

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<sup>846</sup> Langhamer, ‘The Meanings of Home’, p. 341-2.

<sup>847</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth E. Halton, ‘B. W. P. 9: The Home of the Citizen’, in *The British Way and Purpose*, ed. by Directorate of Army Education (s.l.: Directorate of Army Education, 1944), 263-292, p. 292, 264; MOA, FR 1651, ‘People’s Homes’, April 1943, p. 8.

<sup>848</sup> MOA, TC Family Planning 1944-1949, 3-2-L, ‘Empty Quivers’, n.d.

<sup>849</sup> See also Pat Thane, ‘Family Life and “Normality” in Postwar British Culture’, in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 193-210.

<sup>850</sup> For more on this dual construction of the home and the family, see Teri Chettiar, *The Intimate State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 3-4.

<sup>851</sup> ‘Between You and Me’, *Women’s Own*, 11 May 1945.

women's roles as homemakers and mothers. However, as the magazine's interventions on the topic of home and reconstruction over the next months made clear, this vision left little room for wartime developments such as married women's increased presence in workplaces beyond the home – and, indeed, actively protested such changes.<sup>852</sup>

This ambiguous treatment of home was also in evidence within public interventions made by members of the country's religious establishment throughout the war. Just as the editor of *Women's Own* had valorised the traditional home, so too did those such as the Reverend F. Boreham, who wrote in 1940 of the home as 'the factory where character is made and the furnace in which it is tested', and encouraged readers to focus their thoughts of the future on 'a foundation of Christian homes'.<sup>853</sup> Likewise, in a 1942 issue of the *Sunday Times*, the Bishop of Norwich had warned of focusing too much on external communities when considering the process of reconstruction: 'we must not set about [this work] with an idea that we can find in clubs, social or educational centres, and welfare schemes anything to rival the spell of home'.<sup>854</sup> Yet, even as home was again depicted as the moral centre of the postwar, religious leaders were lamenting its perceived degradation: thus, in 1944, the Bishop of Derby argued that 'the greatest tragedy of the war was the break-up of home life'; and in 1947, two years into the postwar period, the Reverend Matthew Urie Baird similarly voiced his concerns over the 'disintegration of the home and family life'.<sup>855</sup>

Naturally, though, this moral panic over the effects of the war on the institutions of home and family was not present in all corners of British society. Among the women whose sexual and economic lives were placed under scrutiny within such discourses, for example, there were certainly many who were reticent to return to the vision of domesticity put forth by the editor of *Women's Own*.<sup>856</sup> Similarly, as Martin Francis has shown, although the domestic ideals of 'companionate marriage' and the 'family man' were being widely promoted to men in the period surrounding the end of the war, male responses to these calls to home could be highly ambivalent.<sup>857</sup> Not all, then,

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<sup>852</sup> See, for example, 'Between You and Me', *Women's Own*, 10 August 1945; 'Between You and Me', *Women's Own*, 13 July 1945.

<sup>853</sup> Rev. F. Boreham, 'The Homes of England', *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 November 1940.

<sup>854</sup> Bishop Pollock, 'Home', *Sunday Times*, 4 October 1942.

<sup>855</sup> Bishop of Derby, 'Home-makers Must Play Part as Citizens After War', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 26 October 1944; Rev. Matthew Urie Baird, 'The Home – A Convenience or a Necessity?', *Aberdeen Journal*, 12 June 1947.

<sup>856</sup> On ambivalent relationships between women and visions of domesticity, see, for example: Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain, 1945-1968* (London: Tavistock, 1980); Giles, 'A Home of One's Own'.

<sup>857</sup> Francis, 'A Flight from Commitment?', p. 164.

saw a return or move toward a home-centred society – insofar as this was framed by marriage, family, and children – as a straightforward ideal. Conversely, it bears remembering that one did not have to be worried more generally about a supposed moral decline in order to hope desperately for the re-establishment of home and family life. For Londoner Hazel Edwards, for example, the return of her husband Frank from the forces in December 1945 was the moment at which she perceived the home into which she had moved with their young daughter during the war as finally becoming complete.<sup>858</sup> Similarly, for those who had been themselves separated from home by the war – whether as a result of war work, military service, evacuation, or requisition and bombardment – the desire to return home arguably owed much to a personal wish to draw a line under this experience, and to take up again their peacetime lives. Such groups and persons may have tapped into anxieties about the home in order to make a case for their return – for example, by drawing attention to the familial nature of the space – but the individual pull to return was often tempered rather than driven by such factors.

## DESTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Given the prominence of the home as a symbolic site of the transition from wartime to peacetime, it is understandable that when Britons made their way to the ballot box in July 1945, they did so in the shadow of a campaign where the issues of housing and rebuilding had been highly visible. Whilst citizens were often deeply pessimistic about the realities of postwar reconstruction – a problem which was only heightened in heavily raided areas – this clearly did not prevent housing from remaining an issue about which those same citizens were highly vocal.<sup>859</sup> Thus, one correspondent for *The Times* wrote of their visit to a Conservative election rally in Battersea town hall in June, and noted how the speakers' voices had been drowned out by cries of 'We Want Houses'. As the author remarked, Battersea was one of many urban areas at the sharp end of housing problem, beleaguered by a preponderance of slum housing and still reeling from wartime

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<sup>858</sup> Edwards, *War Among the Ruins*, p. 162.

<sup>859</sup> See David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 43.

destruction.<sup>860</sup> As speakers at other election campaign events in blitzed areas could testify, such demonstrations of feeling over the issue of the postwar dwelling were far from uncommon.<sup>861</sup>

In line with such attitudes, both the Labour Party and the Conservatives had given the housing problem a prominent – if not necessarily expansive – space in their manifestos. ‘The provision of homes will be the greatest domestic task’, argued the latter; but, said the former, ‘[o]nly the Labour Party is ready to take the necessary steps’.<sup>862</sup> As Mass Observation reported, this was an argument which seemed to have currency among voters, with many of those who intended to vote for Labour in the election citing a belief that this was the only party with a serious and coherent housing policy.<sup>863</sup> Notably, as David Howell has argued, Labour statements on housing were in fact rather abstract; although they, and the Conservatives alike, had promised to build hundreds of thousands of new homes, neither really fully expounded upon the questions of how or where this would be done.<sup>864</sup>

However, Labour had certainly spent more time publicizing their commitment to housebuilding.<sup>865</sup> Laura Beers’ work on Labour’s publicity campaigns in the run-up to July 1945, for example, points to the party’s commission of a series of posters from the *Daily Mirror* cartoonist Phillip Zec as evidence of their efforts to focus attention upon housing provision.<sup>866</sup> These posters highlighted the need to rebuild quickly after the war, and deftly linked this task to certain demographic groups. One poster thus showed an ordinary woman, and captioned this picture with the words: ‘She can’t make a home till she gets one ... A vote for Labour means a full national effort for housing’.<sup>867</sup> Another depicted a soldier, an airman, and a seaman, and was emblazoned with a call which explicitly countered Conservative appeals to help Churchill ‘finish the job’: ‘Help them finish their job! Give them homes and work!’<sup>868</sup> Such campaigns underlined the contemporary recognition that housing was a predominant concern of many groups within society

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<sup>860</sup> ‘Londoners and Housing’, *The Times*, 22 June 1945.

<sup>861</sup> For example, ‘Mr Foot Heckled On Housing’, *Dundee Courier*, 27 June 1945; ‘Hecklers Hold Up the Speeches’, *Daily Mail*, 29 June 1945.

<sup>862</sup> ‘Mr Churchill Declares his Aims to Electors’, *Sunday Times*, 10 June 1945; *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997*, ed. by Iain Dale (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 57.

<sup>863</sup> MOA, File Report 2268, ‘A Report on the General Election, June-July 1945’, October 1945, pp. 109-110.

<sup>864</sup> David Howell, *British Social Democracy: A Study in Development and Decay* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 81.

<sup>865</sup> Laura Beers, ‘Labour’s Britain, Fight for It Now!’, *The Historical Journal*, 52.3 (2009), 667-695, p. 684.

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 688-690. As Beers notes, the Philip Zec series reflected a wider focus upon housing in Labour’s other poster productions.

<sup>867</sup> People’s History Museum (hereafter PHM), NMLH.1995.39.94. ‘She Can’t Make a Home Till She Gets One’.

<sup>868</sup> PHM, NMLH.1995.39.97, ‘Help Them Finish Their Job!’. Todman, *Britain’s War: A New World*, p. 755.

– including women, many of whom had been involved in war work, and those who had served in the Forces. Whilst politicians on all sides, then, had given housebuilding and reconstruction central positions within their campaigns, Labour had done so particularly successfully. Indeed, for historians such as Angus Calder, housing was not merely a policy battleground won by Labour, but rather one of the core points upon which their eventual election victory turned.<sup>869</sup> And yet, as the Labour administration under Clement Attlee was to find, the political, economic and emotive contexts of reconstruction meant that living up to their election promises in this domain was no easy task.<sup>870</sup>

The figure of the bombed-out citizen was one around which the debates about postwar housing invariably coalesced. For example, in both the plans for postwar urban places themselves, and the broader representations of these schemes, the image of citizens who had lost their homes was often at work. On one level, it is clear that considerations of this demographic group actively shaped ideas about the form and purpose of postwar rebuilding: many of the city plans, for example, naturally made reference to the bombed-out when discussing the types and location of new housing required.<sup>871</sup> Even on a smaller scale, as Rosamund Lily West has shown in her work on sculptures commissioned by the LCC for postwar housing estates, the image of the blitzed Briton was clearly present within the minds of the planners and artists involved in the rebuilding of urban Britain. In Lambeth, for instance, certain sculptural reliefs designed by the artist Peter Laszlo Peri for the new estates specifically responded to the experiences of the Blitz and the separation and destruction suffered by families during the war.<sup>872</sup> The installation of such artworks helped to position these sites both as a reward for wartime hardship, and as a means of ameliorating and healing these traumas.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>869</sup> Calder, *The People's War*, p. 585.

<sup>870</sup> For example, on the debates over what forms post-war redevelopments and housing should take, see: Nicholas Bullock, 'Plans for Post-War Housing in the UK: The Case for Mixed Development and the Flat', *Planning Perspectives*, 2.1 (1987), 71-98, pp. 81-82. See also Mark Clapson, 'Destruction and Dispersal: The Blitz and the "Break-Up" of Wartime London', in *The Blitz and Its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. by Mark Clapson and Peter J. Larkham (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 99–112; Cowan, 'The People's Peace', p. 73; Mass Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*.

<sup>871</sup> For example, John Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie, *County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan, 1943) p. 74.

<sup>872</sup> Rosamund Lily West, "I Am Convinced I Shall Achieve Something Valuable If I Can Brighten the Lives of the People Here": Bombsites, Housing and Art in Lambeth', *The London Journal*, 46.1 (2021), 6-25, p. 19.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.



In a similar manner, those who had lost their homes also became visible in reconstruction and planning discourse on account of their utility as a symbol. Here, after all, was a group which could be mobilised particularly effectively to evoke not only the *moral* case for a ‘New Britain’ rising from the ashes of the ruins, but also a pressing *material* one. In visual and cinematic representations of the various replanning initiatives, the figure of the bombed-out Briton was thus highly visible, albeit not always explicitly central.<sup>874</sup> In many films, this figure was leveraged alongside others closely associated with sacrifice as a means of justifying more radical forms of reconstruction. For example, in the 1945 film *A City Reborn*, which chronicled Coventry’s efforts to rebuild after the devastating blitz on the city in the spring of 1941, the list of those who ‘must have houses’ included: ‘[p]eople coming back from the war, the bombed-out, the people newly married, and the people of Coventry’.<sup>875</sup> Moreover, one of the central characters in the film, the girlfriend of a soldier returning home on leave, lives with her partner’s parents. Whilst it is not much lingered upon, we are told that she lost her own parents in the bombing, and – one way or another – we can imagine that she lost her home at the same time. This loss of family and home lends emotional weight to the young couple’s dream of a house of their own, where they hope to build a family after the war. The sacrifice and fortitude of those who had suffered, lost, and persisted during the war, the film argued, demanded the provision of spaces in which such dreams could be realised: spaces ‘worthy of their courage’.

In *The Way We Live*, a 1946 documentary directed by Jill Craigie on the subject of Plymouth’s rebuilding plans, those who have lost their homes were placed at the centre of the story to an even greater degree.<sup>876</sup> The film utilised three different storylines in order to depict the various viewpoints of the plan. The first, which introduces the primary narrator, follows a recently demobilised serviceman who, returning to his career as a journalist, goes to Plymouth to cover the story of their reconstruction efforts. The second tracks the efforts and ideas of the plan’s architects

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<sup>874</sup> For a fascinating and thorough account of the films produced about housing and reconstruction during this period, including those discussed in this chapter, see Toby Haggith, “Castles in the Air”: British Film and the Reconstruction of the Built Environment, 1939-51’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1998).

<sup>875</sup> *A City Reborn*, dir. by John Eldridge (Ministry of Information, 1945). The script for this film was written by Dylan Thomas; see Richard Taylor, “False Hopes and Airy Visions?” Dylan Thomas and British Film Propaganda in the Second World War’, in *Propaganda and Conflict: War, Media, and Shaping the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Mark Connelly, Jo Fox, Stefan Goebel, and Ulf Schmidt (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 99-113.

<sup>876</sup> *The Way We Live*, dir. by Jill Craigie (Two Cities Films, 1946). For more on the Plymouth reconstruction plan, see Jeremy Gould, *Plymouth: Vision of a Modern City* (Swindon: Historic England, 2010).

– Patrick Abercrombie, a renowned town planner, and James Paton Watson, the City Engineer – as they formulate and communicate their plans to the local people. The third frame, which is woven throughout the film, portrays the fictional Copperwheat family, who are introduced shortly after losing their home, of which ‘not a stick’ is left. We follow them as they are billeted in far-flung rooms carved from someone else’s home, which Mr Copperwheat laments as being frustratingly far from his work in the dockyard. Here, they must alter their domestic routines not only out of consideration for their host, but also to make way for each other. Their tour of a prefabricated house yields some praise (the designers of the space ‘seem to have thought quite a lot about it’, says Mrs Copperwheat) but it is made evident that this space nevertheless falls short of their needs as a family. Above all, they criticise the lack of bedrooms and other private spaces within the home. We see clearly how the Copperwheats struggle with this issue in their current billets: whilst each desires in their own way the space and opportunity to live out an individual life within and beyond the collective familial one, the loss of their home – and the absence of suitable places to remake it – renders such pursuits increasingly difficult. Whilst Abercrombie and Paton Watson’s plan is proposed as a solution to this suffocation of everyday life, the film also depicts the threat of perceived apathy and financial timidity to its implementation. Even Mr Copperwheat, for whom the plan offers so much, is both cautious and somewhat pessimistic: ‘Who’s going to pay for it? It’s worth it ... *if* we get it’.

Whilst the first two frames provide a broad overview of the city’s reconstruction, as seen through the eyes of the planner and the outsider, the Copperwheat story grounds the Plan for Plymouth in the lives of the ordinary citizens who will be affected by it. This lens was amplified by the fact that, with the exception of the main narrator, none of the characters in the film were played by professional actors; rather, they were all real Plymothians. As Hollie Price has noted, publicity for the film had particularly emphasised that the actors playing the Copperwheat family had themselves been blitzed, bombed-out and billeted; and, like their characters, they were ‘waiting for the new houses they hope the plan will provide’.<sup>877</sup> Just as we are left in no doubt as to the importance of new housing to the Copperwheats, this blurring of the documentary world with the one off-screen thus points to the real-life significance of the plan, particularly for those who had

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<sup>877</sup> Hollie Price, ‘Post-war Girlhoods: Jill Craigie, British Social Realism and Local Stardom’, *Screen*, 63.1 (2022), 22-46, p. 31.

lost their homes in the bombing. And, just as the optimistic ending of the film – in which the youth of Plymouth emerge as active campaigners for the plan – portrays the significance of public engagement with the planning process, so too does it make the same call upon the viewer.

Indeed, not only did these kinds of cultural texts aim to stimulate dialogue between the public and the planners; as Rosamund Lily West has argued, they often went further, encouraging viewers to believe in the importance of replanning to such an extent that they were willing to countenance further destruction and hardship along the way.<sup>878</sup> Even – or, perhaps, especially – in areas that had been heavily bombed, the propaganda of planning worked to normalise the idea that Britons might yet have to see their homes pulled down in the name of urban renewal and replanning, or that they might have to wait longer for a home in order to ensure that it was a considered one rather than one with all of the faults of prewar dwellings. Their commitment to this task, it was thus suggested, would result in better homes and in better communities – both scales of home which were, as we have seen already, frequently discursively connected to the wider health of the nation as well. It is thus possible to see how home-loss and responses to it continued to be policed even after the war: those who had lost their homes might have been represented as one of the key groups most deserving of this ideal future, but they were simultaneously being asked to give still more in its name.

As examples such as Craigie's film demonstrate, both the urban reconstruction plans produced in the mid-1940s and the material made to disseminate and promote these schemes thus helped to imagine particular postwar worlds for those who had lost their home to the destruction of the war. In such visions, the bombed-out were mobilised as a group inherently worthy of a better built environment, and utilised as a means of communicating the merits of rebuilding in specific ways. Just as the plight and fortitude of those who had suffered under the bombs of 1940 had helped to germinate wartime discussions about rebuilding, so too did these figures thus sit at the centre of the postwar reconstructive zeitgeist. However, in the end, many of the glittering imaginaries constructed under this banner remained unfulfilled, brought down by the harsh economic and political realities of the postwar period. With the notable exception of Plymouth, where the plan produced by Abercrombie and Paton Watson did, in fact, bear a remarkable

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<sup>878</sup> West, 'Bombsites, Housing and Art in Lambeth', p. 10

similarity to what became of the city, most major urban areas saw their plans abandoned or stripped down.<sup>879</sup>

As numerous scholars working on reconstruction have highlighted, these larger scale plans, which sought to rebuild and reorganise residential, civic, and commercial infrastructure in a more holistic manner, were often passed over in favour of satisfying a broader and more basic desire for houses.<sup>880</sup> In one aspect of the reconstruction process, the funnelling of the limited supply of funds and labour towards housing rather than grander replanning projects did pay dividends: the repair of existing, bomb-damaged housing. This task, which had presented a huge challenge at the war's end, quickly gathered pace in peacetime, with almost 90% of repairs being completed by the end of 1946.<sup>881</sup> A Mass Observation directive on housing in November 1945 revealed that, although many citizens continued to lament the progress on repairs as being too slow, a growing number were beginning to write more favourably of such efforts in their areas.<sup>882</sup> For those who saw their homes repaired – a process which either made a homecoming possible, or restored a barely habitable space back into something 'homely' – the experience was naturally one of relief and happiness.<sup>883</sup>

Yet, as Angus Calder notes, the state continued to struggle to construct the all-important *new* houses in the quantities needed in order to address the shortage and assuage citizens.<sup>884</sup> In the

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<sup>879</sup> Sam Wetherell, *Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 60

<sup>880</sup> There is a distinct, and at times controversial, field of work dedicated to understanding why reconstructive efforts after the war panned out the way that they did. For works which critically discuss the role of the planners themselves, see: Abigail Beach and Nick Tiratsoo, 'The Planners and the Public', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. III, ed. by Martin Daunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 525–50, p. 525; Barnett, *The Audit of War*, pp. 244–245; White, 'The "Dismemberment of London"'. For works which instead emphasise public apathy to broader planning reforms, see: Tiratsoo, 'The Reconstruction of Blitzed British Cities'; Tsubaki, 'Planners and the Public'; Hasegawa, 'The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction'. For works which focus upon the existence of financial and political constraints, see: Flinn, *Rebuilding Britain's Blitzed Cities*; Flinn, 'Reconstruction Constraints'; Nicholas Bullock, 'Ideals, Priorities, and Harsh Realities: Reconstruction and the LCC, 1945–51', *Planning Perspectives*, 9.1 (1994), 87–101.

<sup>881</sup> Nicholas Bullock, 'Re-assessing the Post-War Housing Achievement: The Impact of War-Damage Repairs on the New Housing Programme in London', *Twentieth Century British History*, 16.3 (2005), 256–282, p. 272.

<sup>882</sup> For complaints about the progress of repairs, see for example: MOA, DR 3674, Response to November 1945 Directive; MOA, DR 3119, Response to November 1945 Directive; MOA, DR 2892, Response to November 1945 Directive. For more positive assessments of the repair programme, see: MOA, DR 1216, Response to November 1945 Directive; MOA, DR 2776, Response to November 1945 Directive; MOA, DR 1635, Response to November 1945 Directive.

<sup>883</sup> See, for example, 'Bombed-out: Now Back in New Home, *Bexhill-on-Sea Observer*, 24 May 1947.

<sup>884</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 585. For an interesting critique of the use of quantity as a measure of success in postwar housebuilding, see John Robert Temple, 'A Radical and Progressive Legacy: Labour's Housing Record, 1945–1951', *Labour History Review*, 87.1 (2022), 65–89.

capital, for example, even the controversial movement of responsibility for housing from the City Architect to the City Valuer resulted in less than stellar returns; whilst the latter had argued that he would be able to provide 50,000 houses by the end of 1947, the reality was that by the autumn of 1949, the sum total of completed houses amounted to well under half this number.<sup>885</sup> Temporary solutions such as prefabricated housing helped somewhat to fill the gap – and, indeed, played a longer and more popular role than had been initially intended – but the building rate of permanent housing continued to languish for much of the rest of the 1940s.<sup>886</sup> At the beginning of the next decade, the estimated shortfall in dwellings remained somewhere between one and two million houses.<sup>887</sup>

Just as housing had formed one of the key policy arenas of the 1945 election, so too did it thus come to be of prime importance in the elections of 1950 and 1951. In early 1949, for instance, a Gallup poll recorded that 61% of Britons were dissatisfied with the progress made under Labour, and polling by the British Institute of Public Opinion in 1950 saw housing again come out on top as the issue considered most important in an election.<sup>888</sup> Of course, the slow progress made on the housing problem in the immediate aftermath of war may not have been entirely within Labour's power to alter; challenges such as the shortages of materials and manpower, for example would have haunted any postwar government. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the issue from continuing to spark discontent. One man from Hull, interviewed by Mass Observation in 1948 at the mid-point of Attlee's premiership, indicated as much when he complained:

I think I'll be Conservative. Sod ... Labour. Never did me any f-----g good. They promised a lot but you aren't any better off than in the war. Can't get f-----g houses. All this waste land (indicates bombed site).<sup>889</sup>

As the next sections of this chapter will delve into further, the persistence of the housing shortage over the course of the first postwar decade thus ensured that domestic space would remain a

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<sup>885</sup> Bullock, 'Ideals, Priorities, and Harsh Realities', p. 95.

<sup>886</sup> Short, *Housing in Britain*, pp. 42-43. For an interesting account of the lasting attachment of some individuals and communities to 'prefab' estates, see Belle Vale Prefab Project, *Prefab Days: A Community Remembers* (Liverpool: Enterprise Marketing and Publishing, 2006); Belle Vale Prefab Project, *More Prefab Days: Belle Vale Remembers* (Liverpool: Enterprise Marketing and Publishing, 2008).

<sup>887</sup> Calder, *People's War*, p. 585.

<sup>888</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, p. 330; Samuel J. Eldersveld, 'British Polls and the 1950 General Election', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15.1 (1951), 115-132, p. 130.

<sup>889</sup> MOA, FR 3000, 'Report on Daylight Cinema Van Campaign, Kingston-Upon-Hull, May 1948-June 1948', p. 22.

prominent arena within British society and politics – one in which citizens would continue to scrutinise their relationship with the state and, indeed, with one another.

### STATE, SERVICE, AND SACRIFICE

Whether in political manifestos, in reconstruction plans and their associated propaganda, or in the responses of those who had lost homes in the war themselves, we can see that a major constellation within postwar housing discourse was that which considered the intersection of sacrifice, service, and the responsibilities of the state. Each, naturally, drew a different emphasis. The planners of postwar Britain, for example, may have depicted the wartime sacrifices of ordinary Britons as a key justification for their schemes, and pinpointed the particularly deserving nature of those such as servicemen and the blitzed and bombed-out; simultaneously, however, they also sought to place significant responsibility with citizens themselves, who were called to ensure that the plans actually came to fruition. Meanwhile, those personally affected by the paucity of housing frequently mobilised the language of wartime service in order to evoke instead the idea of sacrifice unrewarded – or even betrayed.

The actual or potential embitterment of those who were perceived to have underpinned the nation's ability to fight and win the war was, clearly, a source of concern among policymakers and wider sections of postwar British society. And, as the March 1945 Commons debate on housing – the anxiously charged contents of which were quoted earlier in this chapter – demonstrated, a group whose homecoming was particularly dissected and discussed was that of ex-servicemen. The task of demobilisation, which involved ensuring that adequate housing was available, was an undeniably challenging one. The return of this group was one of the most significant demographic shifts facing British society in the first months and years following 1945: over 5 million Britons – most of them men, and most of whom had been serving since at least 1941 – were in the Forces come June 1945, and most were clear that their service was only for the duration.<sup>890</sup> A minority were stationed in Britain, albeit usually 'billeted or bivouacked far from everyone and everything familiar'; many more were scattered across the theatres of war both in Europe and in more far-flung lands.<sup>891</sup> As historians such as Alan Allport and Julie Anderson have

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<sup>890</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*, p. 3.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*

shown, demobilising this large section of the populace was a process which often proved disenchanting.<sup>892</sup> On a purely logistical level, the reabsorption of ex-servicemen into the civilian labour force was a task plagued with complexities – a fact to which the stubborn memories of mass unemployment after the last war attested.<sup>893</sup> However, in a broader sense, it mattered also that a great deal had changed during the war: in most cases, neither those returning home nor the home they returned to had been left untouched by the conflict. The former were usually changed by their experiences, whether physically or psychologically; and their homecomings brought them not only to landscapes much altered and scarred, but also to families and loved ones who had grown, lived, and lost in their own right during their absence.<sup>894</sup>

Domestic environments, in keeping with the broader trend discussed in the first section of this chapter, were seen to play an important part in the task of smoothing this vexed transition from war to peace. However, the imagined shape of this environment was usually somewhat unclear. Whilst, in many corners, the conversation about postwar housing for soldiers orbited the issues of reconstruction and rebuilding – of how appropriate, new homes could be built – there remained a tension between this prospect and the perceived importance of continuity and tradition. Thus, in some quarters, the homes which would provide a conduit for the reintegration of returning service personnel were nostalgically envisioned as the unchanged and familiar homes of one's pre-war, or at least pre-deployment, life. For example, in the pages of *Women's Own*, readers were warned against changing their homes in preparation for family members returning from service. One reader's letter, published in late June 1945, encapsulated this argument:

One person told me the other day that she meant to have Andy's room freshly painted in a different shade, and the furniture changed about for his return. But I couldn't help feeling that she was wrong. After all, won't that room have been one of Andy's most vital links with home? He probably recollects the exact position of every object in the room; the old wicker chair; the china dog, etc. Why not let him have it that way a little while longer? It will be hard enough for him to adjust himself to a new life.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*; Julie Anderson, "Homes Away from Home".

<sup>893</sup> See, for example, Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 97-127.

<sup>894</sup> For more on the impacts of the war on servicemen personally, and particularly the impact of injury and disability, see Anderson, "Homes Away from Home".

<sup>895</sup> 'Reader's Say...', *Women's Own*, 22 June 1945.

The preserved home, in such interpretations, could act as a touchstone, allowing those who had been absent to slip easily back into civilian life.<sup>896</sup>

Whilst they may have formed a particularly overt example, such texts again demonstrate how the familial home could lie at the centre of wider trends of reconstruction. Here, for example, we can see evidence of the argument, made by scholars such as Julie Anderson, that discourses of demobilisation broadly tended to underline the importance of men being able to re-establish themselves within traditional masculine roles; as providers and breadwinners, and as heads-of-households.<sup>897</sup> And, similarly, we can see how women were encouraged to undertake labour – both emotional and physical – which made this reintegration possible. However, as the wider anxieties about the reestablishment of family life at the end of the war discussed previously demonstrated, all such visions of postwar domestic roles meant little if they had no stage upon which to be acted. Although the tensions and entanglements between different understandings of homecoming – a return to the extant and familiar, or a celebratory promise of something newer – signified the unsettled nature of the path from war to peace, ultimately both required *some* form of home to be made widely accessible.

Yet, as the housing crisis continued to bite, even this was not guaranteed. For those serving abroad, service journals formed a key space in which the development and management of this situation could be followed. Reflecting the wider importance accorded to this issue, these publications gave regular column space to both policy developments and personal stories from the home front relating to housing. For example, at the *Union Jack*, a paper serving the Eighth Army, a special correspondent was tasked with bringing readers a ‘regular review of the housing situation’, in which he covered political developments and gave practical advice on how demobilised servicemen and their families could secure housing.<sup>898</sup> Beyond the aim of simply communicating domestic political events to the forces, journals like the *Union Jack* also served a clear morale purpose, as seen by the frequent articles which attempted to reassure readers that there would be homes available for those who needed them in postwar Britain – including, and indeed especially, for returning servicemen. Hence, events such as an announcement from the then Minister for

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<sup>896</sup> See also Leonie Mason, ‘I’ll Be Home on the First’, *Women’s Own*, 1 June 1945.

<sup>897</sup> Anderson, “‘Homes Away from Home’”, pp. 707-708.

<sup>898</sup> For example, ‘Your Home’, *Union Jack*, 1 September 1945; ‘Permanent Houses to Come First’, *Union Jack*, 3 October 1945.



Health, Henry Willink, in July 1944 that ex-servicemen ‘must have first claim on new housing’ were given particular space.<sup>899</sup> Similarly, later reports that local housing schemes would utilise a points-based system to allocate homes – and that ex-Forces personnel and their families would get ‘bonus’ points – were widely and approvingly reported in the service newspapers.<sup>900</sup> Such coverage worked to underline the notion that those who had served their country on the fighting front were particularly deserving of prioritisation.

Those who had both provided such service, and whose families had suffered the additional difficulties of being bombed-out, were often singled out for a higher level of special treatment still. For example, in October 1945, the *Eighth Army News* reported the story of 28 servicemen’s families in Northolt, all whom had been bombed-out, but who had now been given a ‘new lease of life’ by being rehoused in their ‘dream’ homes: prefabricated steel houses with ‘modern installations and fittings ... washing machines, two-way electric switches and built-in cupboards’, which were reported in the journals as being designed specifically with the ex-serviceman and his family in mind.<sup>901</sup> However, as *Union Jack* noted in its report on Northolt families, these kinds of stories often only told half the tale: ‘[t]wenty-eight families re-housed and happy is a good start, but it’s only a beginning’, given that ‘2,000 new houses a day are needed’.<sup>902</sup> And indeed, the incompleteness of the narrative presented in service journals during the years either side of 1945 was itself a source of anger, as one letter written to *Eighth Army News* by a Private with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps revealed in no uncertain terms:

As long ago as 1943 one could read glowing reports in the Army newspapers of the planning and erection of temporary houses ... How disillusioning this display of ill-timed propaganda will turn out to be is already becoming evident ... Perhaps, instead of publishing photos of these non-existent homes you could print a few of the waiting lists for them. At least it would be more to the point and would show this farce in its true perspective.<sup>903</sup>

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<sup>899</sup> ‘Ex-Servicemen Have First Claim in Houses’, *Basrah Times*, 21 July 1944.

<sup>900</sup> For example, “Points” for Wembley’s Post-war Homes: Servicemen’s Priority’, *Eighth Army News*, 13 February 1945.

<sup>901</sup> ‘Mrs. Bean Dreamed of the This Kind of Home’, *Eighth Army News*, 19 October 1945. See also A Service Correspondent, ‘500,000 Post-War Homes’, *Royal Air Force Journal*, 1 July 1944.

<sup>902</sup> ‘Bombed Out – Now Live in Dream Houses’, *Union Jack*, 17 October 1945.

<sup>903</sup> A. R. Fordham, ‘Opinion’, *Eighth Army News*, 14 December 1945.

As the editor noted in their reply, it was perhaps unfair to ‘credit Army newspapers with second sight in knowing that many schemes, which looked so good on paper, would not be fulfilled’.<sup>904</sup> Yet, nevertheless, the letter demonstrated the ways in which texts like service newspapers could fuel resentment among soldiers who felt that the vision of home they had been promised was not being provided.

The tensions which, although arising ultimately from the housing situation back in Britain, were amplified and shaped by coverage in these service newspapers, were also apparent when it came to requisitioning. As in the popular press at home, there were many who fixed on requisitioning as the cure-all for the crisis, and thus advocated strongly for its widespread use as a tool: ‘[w]hy are there any empty houses at all?’, asked one reader, adding that ‘nothing should prevent the local authorities from requisitioning ALL’ such properties.<sup>905</sup> The direct action of groups like the Harry Cowley-led Brighton ‘Vigilantes’, whose efforts to illegally install servicemen’s families in empty houses were part of a broader campaign in favour of increased requisitioning, was also the subject of reasonably sympathetic coverage.<sup>906</sup>

At the same time, however, it was clearly recognised within the pages of these newspapers that there were individuals among their readers who would themselves be negatively affected by such a policy, or who were already experiencing difficulties in this regard. Indeed, for some, anxiety was bred not by stories about a lack of housing so much as it was by coverage of the push for more requisitioning, and the arguments against returning houses to their owners if they were absent. For example, one soldier serving in India, who wrote frequently to his wife regarding their requisitioned home in Croydon (‘153’) and their difficulties in securing its return, noted in October 1945: ‘[t]here are lots of cases in “Union Jack” of soldiers having trouble to re-obtain “requisitioned” houses – I often wonder about 153.’<sup>907</sup> The need to balance between such groups meant that, alongside calls for the greater application of requisitioning, there were also nods to an inverse position – albeit only when those who were under threat of distress were themselves servicemen or the families of servicemen. Thus, the ‘reprieve’ of a serviceman’s wife in Bristol whose home had

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid.

<sup>905</sup> Barrie R. Johnson, ‘Why Are There ANY Empty Houses?’, *Union Jack*, 23 August 1946.

<sup>906</sup> See, for example ‘Sailor’s Wife is “Moved In” to Empty House’, *SEAC: The Daily Newspaper of South East Asia Command*, 9 July 1945; ‘“Vigilantes” Found Her a Home’, *Union Jack*, 10 July 1945.

<sup>907</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, 2603, Papers of A. G. Lawrence, A. G. Lawrence to M. Lawrence, 31 October 1945.

been under threat of requisition was lauded, with coverage noting that the housing department had decided to take no further action after learning that her husband was serving overseas.<sup>908</sup> And in July 1945, *Union Jack* captured the ‘uneasiness’ with which requisitioning could be viewed:

The rights of Servicemen abroad, who have been waiting for many years to occupy their own houses, or the man who has been living in lodgings throughout the war while evacuees lived in the house, which now de-requisitioned is promptly requisitioned again, do not appear to be clearly defined as against the requisitioning authorities.<sup>909</sup>

The same issue was also raised in the domestic press, which provided a space for servicemen who had seen their homes requisitioned to express their resentment in a more public forum. In June 1945, for example, one ex-serviceman wrote to *The Times* to voice his bitter feelings on the subject, professing his surprise and anger that his home had been taken over whilst he was on active service. Worse still, he argued, was the proposition that – owing to the need for replacement accommodation to be found for the current occupants, who had been bombed-out during the war – the house would not be released until the ‘housing programme [had] sufficiently advanced’.<sup>910</sup> A few months later, in September 1945, an airman based in Germany wrote to the *Picture Post*, expressing a similar sense that servicemen were not being given due priority in the postwar housing crush. These servicemen, he argued, had ‘suffered and sacrificed enough, and should, in the name of justice, get their homes back as completely as when they left them’. Whereas the individual who wrote to *The Times* had remained more pared back in his comparison of the needs of ex-servicemen and bombed civilians, the airman was explicit in his belief that those who had served with the Forces should be given greater deference when it came to housing: ‘[a] civilian tenant of a Serviceman’s home ... should endeavour to get out gracefully, saying “thank you” for the temporary convenience’.<sup>911</sup>

Such debates over the issue of requisitioning and housing provision made clear that, although there was naturally a sense that those who had been serving with the forces during the war deserved a better postwar than the last generation of soldiers, what this looked like in practice remained unclear, and even sometimes actively antithetical. The subjects of demobilisation were

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<sup>908</sup> ““Reprieve” For Soldier’s Wife’, *Union Jack*, 24 September 1945.

<sup>909</sup> ‘First Shots Fired in “Battle of the Houses”’, *Union Jack*, 27 July 1945.

<sup>910</sup> R. E., ‘The Service Man’s Home’, *The Times*, 25 June 1945.

<sup>911</sup> L. A. C. Maxwell, ‘Service Men Want Their Homes Back’, *Picture Post*, 8 September 1945.

not monolithic, and nor were their homes – and the resulting variations in their experiences further complicated a landscape already made murky by the elision of prewar familiarity and postwar modernity in visions of postwar housing.

It is no surprise, given both the size and political significance of ex-service personnel as a demographic group, and their well-established link to the language of sacrifice, that they should have been the subject of such particular attention – nor that they should have themselves traded upon these things as a response to the housing shortage. However, whilst those being demobilised from the forces were thus the subject of a particular anxiety and planning, there was a tension inherent in claims that this group should have precedence on account of their war service. Unlike the last war, in which the experiential division between the home and fighting fronts had been seen as at least somewhat more distinct, this time the lines had been less sharply drawn. Not only had the home front been subjected to direct action by enemy forces to an extent unseen in the previous conflict; there had also been a much deeper level of civilian mobilisation into industries and organisations involved in aspects of the war effort. As one MP in the March 1945 Commons housing debate cautioned, it was no longer clear that service could solely be defined through reference to military endeavour: ‘[a]ny man who has served the national interest in providing the wherewithal for the Serviceman to have the tools to do the job, is himself a Serviceman’.<sup>912</sup> No matter how much citizens agreed that this group deserved better than the veterans of the First World War, he suggested that calls to give priority to the demobilised serviceman ultimately ignored broader conceptions of a national war effort, and henceforth threatened to divide rather than unite:

When we say, “By all means give the ex-Serviceman first priority” ... we are going to make division among our own people ... [L]et us remember the children of the people who are not ex-Servicemen who may be—God Forbid—the children that we shall need later to save the country.<sup>913</sup>

Indeed, it is clear that other groups who had been estranged from their homes during the course of the war also sought to lay claim to the priority given by wartime service, broadly defined. One such group consisted of civil servants, many of whom had been evacuated out of London at the

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<sup>912</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 409, col. 1193, 23 March 1945.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid.

outbreak of war as the government sought to move essential infrastructure that was not necessarily tied to the capital away from danger. Thus, for example, a number of departments of the Ministry of Health had been removed to Blackpool; the Board of Inland Revenue and sections of the Treasury had moved to Llandudno in Wales; and parts of the Air Ministry had been sent to Harrogate.<sup>914</sup> This dispersal of the civil service had been met with much protest from the outset, with mandarins complaining about an enforced move to billets which could be unsuitable, crowded, or unsanitary.<sup>915</sup> Another key sticking point was the fact that the enforced move often took them away from their loved ones – and, in the case of married civil servants, necessitated the upkeep of two residences if their families wanted to stay in their own homes.<sup>916</sup> Whilst such complaints were acknowledged by the government, the policy continued to be reaffirmed by the argument that it was ‘necessary in the public interest’ to ensure that the vital workings of the civil service would not be disturbed by aerial attack.<sup>917</sup>

Given this temporally specific justification, it was natural that many assumed that the cessation of hostilities would herald a return home.<sup>918</sup> Yet, as the *Economist* noted five months before VE day, in January 1945, it soon became clear that the ‘wartime exile of civil servants’ would not necessarily end with the close of the war. Whilst some departments would be able to return slowly, housed if necessary in the outer reaches of the city, others were destined to be permanently relocated much further away. Whilst the principle of dispersal had been discussed prior to the war, in practice this decision owed less to ‘any deliberate policy of decentralisation’ than it did to the acute housing shortage, which precluded the mass return of civil servants to Whitehall.<sup>919</sup> The response to the news of decentralisation was, at times, exceedingly hostile: the president of the National Association of Women Civil Servants reportedly went so far as to argue that ‘there was little difference between civil servants being packed off to Newcastle willy-nilly and the way in

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<sup>914</sup> ‘Evacuated to Blackpool’, *Illustrated London News*, 20 January 1940; ‘Civil Servants’ Demand’, *The Times*, 27 August 1945; BBC People’s War Archive, Joan Tyler, ‘A Civil Servant Evacuee’, 30 May 2005, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/19/a4131019.shtml> [last accessed: 2 July 2023]

<sup>915</sup> For example, see ‘Demands of Evacuated Civil Servants’, *The Times*, 31 January 1942; ‘5 Years of Misery’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 June 1945.

<sup>916</sup> ‘Civil Servants Evacuated’, *The Times*, 4 January 1940.

<sup>917</sup> ‘Evacuated Civil Servants’, *The Times*, 2 January 1940.

<sup>918</sup> For examples of arguments which implied a ‘promise’ of return after the war, see ‘Difficulties of Admiralty Staff’, *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 19 February 1949; L. B. Whiteman, ‘Dangers of Industrial Dispersion’, *Listener*, 23 December 1948; Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 432, col. 725-728, 27 January 1947.

<sup>919</sup> ‘Civil Service Dispersal’, *The Times*, 6 February 1947; ‘Civil Servants in Exile’, *Economist*, 27 January 1945.

which Hitler had moved his enslaved workers all over Europe.<sup>920</sup> Wider modes of framing the situation did not tend to be quite so extreme, but it was undeniable that the policy of dispersal was unpopular in many quarters. Ironically, as the general secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association noted, whilst the housing landscape was particularly vexed in the capital, the fact that it was also much strained elsewhere in the country meant that decentralisation did not even necessarily bring affected civil servants to areas in which appropriate or abundant housing awaited.<sup>921</sup>

However, for those whose departments *did* return to the capital, offering the chance of a return to homes left behind years thence, it is clear that the process was particularly challenging. It was also one which demonstrated the complex and sometimes contradictory drives of the state's postwar bureaucratic machinery, as the Ministry of Health's responsibility for overseeing the requisition (and derequisition) of most domestic properties often worked against the efforts of other departments to return to London. For example, in 1946, civil servants at the Ministry of Labour and National Service engaged in a back-and-forth with the Ministry of Health, in which they argued strongly for the derequisition of colleagues' homes in London which had been taken over in order to accommodate bombed-out persons. These men, one of the advocates pointedly noted, had lost their homes not because they had left the city willingly, but because their jobs with the government had mandated it; 'they therefore', the author argued, 'have a very special claim to exceptional treatment'.<sup>922</sup> Yet, initial enquiries about derequisition had been met with a flat refusal from the local authorities.<sup>923</sup> Whilst their contact at the Ministry of Health was sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the dispossessed civil servants, and sought to put in a word with the relevant town clerks, he affirmed that there was little that could be done to release the houses, given the desperation of the housing situation.<sup>924</sup> In the case of the Ministry of Labour's employees, the best that could be offered was alternative, and usually smaller, accommodation – a solution of which, one of their superiors noted, the dispossessed individuals took a 'pretty dim view'.<sup>925</sup> Whilst this was an improvement on the response many regular citizens who pleaded for housing help received,

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<sup>920</sup> 'Women Civil Servants Up in Arms', *Dundee Courier*, 12 June 1945.

<sup>921</sup> 'Shock for Civil Servants', *Daily Mail*, 4 February 1947.

<sup>922</sup> TNA, HLG 7/603, N. L. Bicknell to J. O'Gara, 18 April 1946.

<sup>923</sup> TNA, HLG 7/603, Arthur Priestley to C. L. Franklin, 30 March 1946.

<sup>924</sup> TNA, HLG 7/603, J. O'Gara to C. Church, 2 May 1946.

<sup>925</sup> TNA, HLG 7/603, N. L. Bicknell to J. O'Gara, 18 April 1946. See also TNA, HLG 7/603, A. Pulleng to J. O'Gara, 12 July 1946.

it still represented a disconnect between what those who laid claim to wartime service felt they were owed, and the material realities that they faced. In the case of one affected mandarin, a Mr Franklin, the Ministry of Health contact noted the particular difficulties of granting special treatment in a field of claimants who could all assert themselves as exceptional cases:

His house is at present occupied by a homeless family whose own property was destroyed ... There are ... 11 families in Rest Centres, 9 in half-way houses and 25 Court Orders for eviction known to be pending; 15 other owners whose circumstances are somewhat similar to Mr Franklin's are pressing for release of their premises. Mr Franklin's case will, of course, be treated with priority but of course he will have to get into the queue.<sup>926</sup>

The paradoxical phrasing of his last line thus demonstrated, in particularly overt terms, the problems of precedence facing requisitioning officers in postwar Britain: 'priority' could be given in theory to those who had served the nation, or to those perceived to be in dire personal circumstances; but in practice, it meant little. As one civil servant, a *Mass Observer* who recorded her accommodation difficulties for the organisation in September 1945, this situation could be bluntly summarised: '[I]t seems that compulsorily evacuated Government employees can get no backing ... we must take pot luck with those who chose to evacuate and are now returning. This is unjust.'<sup>927</sup>

As various letters and articles published in the pages of the press made clear across the second half of the 1940s, the problem presented by the prolonged dispersal of the civil service persisted for quite some time. One letter to *Picture Post* in the autumn of 1946 thus complained that the civil servants 'wrenched [from home] by war' were now below servicemen, munition workers, civilian evacuees and even German prisoners-of-war in the homecoming queue. Now that this last group were being released and returned, the writer argued, 'evacuated civil servants will ... become the only "displaced persons" about whom nobody is concerned'.<sup>928</sup> By the end of the decade, this extended exile continued to heap its effects upon some individuals, whose jobs may have been settled elsewhere, but who were nevertheless left in a kind of personal limbo. A woman writing to the *Daily Mail* in 1950, for instance, told of how her civil servant husband had been evacuated to Harrogate at the outbreak of the war, and of how, after she had followed suit when

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<sup>926</sup> Ibid.

<sup>927</sup> MOA, Diarist 5243, Entry for 11 – 13 September 1945.

<sup>928</sup> J. F., 'Still Evacuated', *Picture Post*, 12 October 1946.

the bombing began, their home had been requisitioned. At the end of the war, he was asked to return to London, but was unable to secure the release of the house; subsequently, he was posted permanently – and at a lower salary – in the ‘provinces’. ‘It is nearly eleven years since we left,’ the woman wrote, ‘and chances of resettling in our own house seem even more remote than those whose homes were demolished’.<sup>929</sup>

The problems of both returning civil servants and returning service personnel exemplified particularly starkly the ways in which the postwar housing shortage facilitated citizens’ unpicking of the connections between the home, wartime service and sacrifice, and state provision. Yet, they were far from alone in engaging in this process. Indeed, the framing of the Second World War as one which directly affected and involved a much greater cross-section of society than any other modern conflict ensured that even citizens who had been involved in less ‘official’ or ‘active’ capacities could also participate in this debate. Thus, whilst many of those who had experienced home-loss may have *also* traded upon wartime service (military or otherwise) in order to advocate for themselves in the postwar world, those without such connections were not without rhetorical fuel when they sought to contest their circumstances.

In Plymouth, for instance, one woman who had been bombed-out during the war wrote furiously to the council in 1948 to complain about the lack of help she had received with billeting and other costs after her initial experience – ‘I think it’s disgusting to think I lost so much and got nothing for it’ – and to demand help in the present.<sup>930</sup> For another man who had lost his home to enemy action, the experience of both this initial loss, and then a subsequent mishandling of the site, provided ample opportunity for the critique of state actions in both the past and the present moment:

I consider my case is one which should be on the top of any priority list. I wish to emphasize that I was bombed-out of my property & was not given any opportunity of returning & although we kept on going to see the property did not know the repairs were completed. Imagine our surprise to know there were people living there.<sup>931</sup>

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<sup>929</sup> Mrs E. F., ‘Without Roots’, *Daily Mail*, 12 July 1950.

<sup>930</sup> PA, 1561/2, “E. Hunter” to Colin Campbell, 30 August 1948.

<sup>931</sup> PA, 1561/2, “A. H. Norton” to Colin Campbell, 18 September 1945.



Such framings made clear the ways in which the flames at the contentious intersection of housing, sacrifice, and the state were further fanned by the expansion of what counted as service to the nation. Whilst, for example, the notion of the ‘equality of sacrifice’ was often the very thing which provided Britons beyond the traditional realms of wartime service with a means to make claim to the rewards of victory, it is evident that many of those who made such claims did so precisely by emphasising their own exceptionalism. However ironic, such a situation was in many ways unsurprising. For, among those who had seen their homes destroyed or taken over – and who had perhaps received inadequate help during the war – it must surely have seemed that this was more than enough to qualify for some kind of restitution now that the conflict had ended.

In an attempt to manage the different demands and arguments of the various groups calling for housing, the end of the war had seen many of the committees and officials in charge of municipal housing stock implement points-based systems. Such actions revealed the authorities’ desire to recognise – and be seen to recognise – groups which laid special claim to housing, whether through service, suffering, or need. In Lewisham, for example, the council instituted a complex system wherein a number of different conditions and circumstances were taken into account, including an additional 40 points for being bombed-out, 35 for membership of the armed forces, and 10 points for married couples forced to live apart.<sup>932</sup> Numerous other councils across the country utilised similar systems, with many of them giving the biggest points boosts to ex-servicemen and those who had already lost a home.<sup>933</sup> Most developed even more detailed lists in order to measure specific criteria more minutely – for example, to ascertain the precise degree to which a person’s living conditions were inadequate, they might be asked how many people they shared their bathroom or kitchen with, whether they had a hot water supply, and so on.<sup>934</sup> Yet, as the Lewisham Housing Committee noted, no list could ever hope to categorise and place in hierarchy every kind of hardship; the point system thus, by necessity, acted as a guide rather than a strict set of rules.<sup>935</sup> Inevitably, then, there was also a certain amount of grumbling directed at councils who were either seen to have given special treatment to a less ‘deserving’ group beyond

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<sup>932</sup> ‘A “Points” Plan for Housing’, *Lewisham Borough News*, 4 December 1945.

<sup>933</sup> See, for example, ‘Points Plan for City Housing’, *Liverpool Evening Express*, 1 June 1945; ‘Houses on Points Planned’, *Manchester Evening News*, 21 April 1945.

<sup>934</sup> Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over* (London: BBC and Jonathan Cape, 1985), p. 64.

<sup>935</sup> ‘A “Points” Plan for Housing’, *Lewisham Borough News*, 4 December 1945. See also ‘Housing – Points System Defended’, *Western Daily Press*, 28 June 1949.

the confines of the priority list – or, conversely, to have stuck too closely to said list.<sup>936</sup> How, some asked, could it be justified to give priority to a single returning soldier with no wife or children over a family who, despite having no ex-servicemen in their ranks, were housed in deeply inadequate conditions?<sup>937</sup> Notably, the rubric applied to housing lists did shift as the 1940s progressed, with considerations of living conditions gaining greater importance over individuals' wartime background.<sup>938</sup> Nevertheless, the predominance of certain groups connected to service and sacrifice within the initial calculations spoke to the way in which housing was viewed as a vital site for reassuring citizens that their efforts during the conflict were being recognised.

Simultaneously, however, we can see how the difficulties of implementing this ethos in practice could serve not to reassure but to embitter. Those searching for home in postwar Britain were myriad: there were those who had actively lost a home to enemy action or requisition, but also many who, despite not having lost a home because of the war, were nevertheless victims of the shortage that it had compounded. Within this varied crowd, there were those who had served in the traditional military sense, and who could lay claim to the language of sacrifice which adhered so closely to this experience; those who had served the state in other official capacities, such as within the machinery of government; and many more who, despite having no claim to these particular forms of service, could nevertheless utilise egalitarian rhetoric in order to position themselves within the discourse of sacrifice and reward. As has been made clear, this heterogeneity certainly made the work of Britain's housing managers much more difficult, as the necessity of finding a standardised means of allocating housing meant that many citizens' whose living situations were legitimately challenging had to be turned away. However, it was not only against such officials – nor the state that they represented – that ire was directed as a result of this scramble for priority. Instead, as responses to the points-based systems highlighted, citizens invariably ended up drawing lines between themselves as well.

One Plymothian, whose house had been requisitioned after the bombing of his firm's offices had compelled him to move to Totnes in 1941, exemplified this when he wrote to the

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<sup>936</sup> 'The Housing Queue', *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 11 March 1947; 'Council House Allocation', *Staffordshire Newsletter*, 15 March 1947; 'Tunstall Soldier's Wife, 'Ex-Servicemen's Houses', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 22 September 1947; 'Heated Debate on Housing of Ex-Servicemen', *Lewisham Borough News*, 4 October 1949.

<sup>937</sup> See, for example, J.B., 'Points From Letters', *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 24 September 1947; J. E. Keen, 'Points for Houses', *Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser*, 24 May 1947.

<sup>938</sup> See, for example, 'Coalville's New Points Plan for Housing', *Leicester Evening Mail*, 7 September 1949; 'Points Plan for Housing Queue', *Birkenhead News*, 7 October 1950.

Ministry of Health protesting his inability to secure the release of his home upon the firm's return to the city. In his desperate situation, he stated, he had even been willing to accept the derequisition of a single room for himself and his wife; however, the incumbent licensees, who had been bombed-out in 1940, reportedly refused to accept this compromise. The dispossessed owner was incensed, noting that '[t]he occupant of the house is in an excellent business position and he himself informed me that ... he was in a position to buy [a house], even at to-day's high prices'. Whilst he also voiced his frustrations at the local council – which he argued had 'intentionally shelved' the matter – his representation to the Ministry made a particularly clear moral judgement upon the licensees:

[T]he occupants of the house are well-to-do people and are enjoying all the advantages of a lovely house in a good locality, whereas my wife and I, the owners, are confined to two rooms in Totnes and I have to travel 50 miles a day to business.<sup>939</sup>

Another resident of Plymouth, who contacted the local authorities in 1945 after being given notice to quit by her landlord, similarly made inter-personal comparisons in order to make a case for her family. Having only ended up in these particular rented rooms after being bombed-out earlier in the war, she complained of the landlord's effort 'to claim hardship greater than ours'.<sup>940</sup>

This kind of self-positioning – of drawing not only on one's personal experience of hardship in order to claim priority, but also of contrasting this experience with the perceived lesser worthiness of others – was by no means novel. Indeed, as Chapter 4 highlighted, this was very much a feature of the housing landscape during the war as well. Yet, in the postwar years, it became increasingly common – and increasingly transparent – as the housing shortage forced greater numbers of citizens into competition with one another. Examining the currents of these competing claims allows us to see how, even as many contemporaries continued to espouse the notion of a nation united by war, the pressures exerted by the scarcity of housing revealed and exacerbated fractures in Britain's social fabric. In the febrile, uncertain atmosphere of later 1940s, as Britain and the wider world attempted to untangle the legacies of war – including destruction, mass loss, and population displacement – these fault lines were laid bare than ever.

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<sup>939</sup> PA, 1561/2, "B. R. Ennis" to Ministry of Health, 7 September 1945.

<sup>940</sup> PA, 1561/2, "G. W. Russell" to Colin Campbell, 10 June 1945.

## THE LONG ROAD HOME

As John Short and other scholars of housing have shown, the Conservative government which was elected in 1951 under the leadership of a returning Winston Churchill placed significantly more focus upon home ownership than their Labour predecessors had done.<sup>941</sup> Whilst, for example, the housing programme run under Aneurin Bevan at the Ministry of Health had focused above all else on the provision of local authority housing, that presided over by Harold Macmillan at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government – formed in 1951 – instead privileged private sector building.<sup>942</sup> Whilst the construction of council houses still continued apace for much of the Conservative's first term in power, the removal of restrictions for private builders ensured that as the 1950s progressed, the balance of building had shifted decisively away from the local authorities.<sup>943</sup> As Peter Saunders notes in his work on the rise of home ownership in Britain, the expansion of this kind of building did not result in a return to the historical prevalence of private renting; rather, it contributed to the rapid growth in the category of owner-occupation.<sup>944</sup> The economic conditions of Britain in the fifties and sixties – characterised by low interest charges, low inflation, a rise in real and disposable income, and an increase in dual incomes as more women entered work outside the home – also facilitated this development, making home ownership a possibility for a greater number of households.<sup>945</sup>

Whereas in 1951 some 29% of households owned the home they lived in, by the end of the decade this number had thus risen to 44%.<sup>946</sup> Defending the decision to open up the housing drive to private builders once more – a policy decried by Bevan, among others, as a prioritisation of profit over need – Macmillan appealed to an old adage: 'a home of one's own has been the people's dream, and if we can do anything to make that dream come true for some, without injuring the rest, we shall be content'.<sup>947</sup> Yet, just as that heartfelt maxim – that widely and deeply expressed desire for 'a home of one's own' – had chafed in wartime against the realities of destruction and dislocation, so too did it here rest uneasily against certain elements of the postwar

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<sup>941</sup> See Harriet Jones, "'This is Magnificent!': 300,000 Houses a Year and the Tory Revival after 1945', *Contemporary British History*, 14.1 (2000), 99-121.

<sup>942</sup> Short, *Housing in Britain*, pp. 44-49.

<sup>943</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>944</sup> Saunders, *Home Owners*, p. 28.

<sup>945</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>946</sup> Short, *Housing in Britain*, p. 50; Saunders, *Home Owners*, p. 28.

<sup>947</sup> Hansard, HC Deb., vol. 494, col. 2252, 4 December 1951.

housing landscape. For many, one such element was the continued practice of requisitioning. As one summary of the government's stance on the matter thus emphasised:

The Government is obviously anxious to end a situation based on wartime regulations, which is costly to the taxpayer. It is not a natural situation, and the earliest possible restoration of the normal operation of the law of supply and demand appears most desirable. Nor should it be overlooked that when a property is released from requisition it is not lost to the general pool of housing, though it may be lost to the local pool and may not house the family with the greatest need.<sup>948</sup>

Even under the Labour government, the tides of political and public opinion had already begun to turn against requisitioning, with Hugh Dalton (Bevan's successor on the housing brief, after this area was carved out of the Ministry of Health) directing local authorities to reduce – although not completely halt – future requisitioning.<sup>949</sup> However, on the grounds laid out above, the state after 1951 made more of a definite movement towards ending the reliance upon requisitioning not only by ceasing new dispossessions, but also by divesting those currently under their control.

This was, by all measures, a mammoth task. Internal correspondence within the Ministry of Health both during and after the war demonstrated a recognition that, although requisitioned property still only represented a relatively small proportion of the country's total housing stock, the potential pitfalls of failing to take action on it might be significant. As one report thus suggested, '[r]equisitioning throws up individual problems in which a good deal of political feeling, both local and general, is manifest and we can assume that public interest in requisitioned properties will be disproportionate to the number of properties.'<sup>950</sup> Moreover, it is clear that the state was keenly aware of the potential for requisitioning – left unchecked – to become a 'permanent element in the country's housing system.'<sup>951</sup> Anxieties about this eventuality became especially salient after 1943, the point at which councils were empowered to take over property in order to billet the 'inadequately housed' as well as war workers, evacuees, and those recently made homeless by enemy action.<sup>952</sup> As civil servants noted at the time, the subsequent attractiveness of

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<sup>948</sup> TNA, HLG 101/851, 'The Future of Requisitioned Property in London', notes for address at the London Branch of the Institute of Housing on 7 November 1952.

<sup>949</sup> TNA, HLG 101/543, Parker Morris to Ministry of Local Government and Planning, 14 February 1951.

<sup>950</sup> TNA, HLG 7/1032, Dudley Ward, J. Hauff, and S. Mayne, 'Post-War Housing Problems', 1 October 1943.

<sup>951</sup> TNA, HLG 101/519, 'Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing', 18 November [c. 1952].

<sup>952</sup> TNA, HLG 7/1041, List of circulars pertaining to requisitioning, n.d.

requisitioning as a tool for meeting housing needs meant that local authorities would have precious little motivation to bring this practice to an end unless they were made to by the national government.<sup>953</sup>

Such claims were prescient. The rate of derequisitioning proved, for many, to be painfully slow – and particularly so in the case of smaller dwellings held by the Ministry of Health, as opposed to larger requisitions such as hotels and schools, which were held by the Ministry of Works.<sup>954</sup> In Hull, for instance, a list compiled in 1948 showed a total of 626 properties which remained under requisition in the city. Five years later, in 1953, some 70% of these remained in the hands of the authorities. As was the case across the country, the rate of derequisition sped up in the later 1950s; yet, even ten years after the list was compiled, in 1958, there remained over 100 properties which had not been released.<sup>955</sup> Still, the situation in smaller towns and cities such as Hull paled in comparison to that in London; for although requisitioning continued to be a feature of the housing landscape across Britain after the war, it was undeniably at its most prevalent in the capital. In every year after the war, the total number of requisitioned properties in London was far in excess of that in the rest of the country combined. This divide only worsened as provincial cities gradually began to divest their requisitioned housing stock, reducing the number of properties under their control by about 20% between 1946 and 1952; in London, by contrast, the total number of requisitioned properties only decreased by about 1000, or 2%, in the same time frame. Ironically, however, even as the quantity of properties under state control decreased – albeit by a very small amount – the sum of families accommodated in these properties jumped sharply. In 1952, there were almost 20,000 more families relying upon requisitioned housing in the capital than there had been in 1946. The number of families accommodated in requisitioned property in provincial areas, meanwhile, decreased slowly but steadily, falling by about 7,000 over this period. All of this came at a significant cost to the Exchequer, with the costs of housing citizens in requisitioned properties running to over £11 million at its peak in 1947, and still amounting to some £7 million by 1952.<sup>956</sup>

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<sup>953</sup> TNA, HLG 7/1032, Dudley Ward, J. Hauff, and S. Mayne, 'Post-War Housing Problems', 1 October 1943.

<sup>954</sup> TNA, HLG 7/1041, Co-ordinating Committee on the Release of Requisitioned Houses, Minutes of the Twenty-Second Meeting, 27 November 1946.

<sup>955</sup> HHC, C TAY/RP/1, 'Requisitioned Properties', list originally compiled c. 24 August 1948.

<sup>956</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, 'Statement [showing] the numbers of requisitioned premises and camps in England and Wales', May 1952. For the full list of figures, see Appendix, Figure 2.

To make matters worse, the glacial pace of derequisitioning both in the capital and elsewhere was exacerbated by the fact that, for some years after the war, fresh requisitions had continued to take place in many of Britain's urban regions.<sup>957</sup> Indeed, in the case of Hull, a significant number of the properties listed as being held by the authorities in 1948 appear to have been among those requisitioned *after* 1945.<sup>958</sup> Such practices were a symptom of the housing crisis, highlighting as they did the challenges of rebuilding at speed. In many quarters, they were also a solution to this crisis: those in need of a new home, for example, were on balance less likely to critique the means by which it was provided; meanwhile, those faced with the immense task of accommodating citizens in need often saw these powers as a means of making the available housing stock more malleable. However, for some, the continued exercise of requisitioning after the end of the war served to catalyse another dimension of discontent around housing, not least because the peacetime use of a power which had been underpinned by wartime emergency legislation proved to be a dissonance many refused to accept. For these groups and individuals, the move towards ending this practice was, by 1951, long overdue.

Yet, as hinted to above, this was certainly not an approach favoured by all. Indeed, this much had been apparent from the outset of the postwar period, when requisitioning had come to be mooted more widely as a potential panacea for the housing crisis. Nowhere was this more evident than within the milieu of the postwar squatting movement, where the notionally 'natural' rights of private property were called into question as those in search of home took matters into their own hands. The movement had begun in earnest in the summer of 1946, when thousands of Britons – many of whom were incentivised by their deplorable former living conditions, if indeed they had accommodation at all – seized upon empty military camps and quite literally domesticated them.<sup>959</sup> As one column in the trade journal *The Builder* demonstrated, the focus on the desire of the squatters, most of whom were young adults, to simply make a home for themselves and their families served to throw the state's perceived in(action) on housing into the limelight: '[The

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<sup>957</sup> This practice was more common in some areas than others. For example, no new requisitioning applications were approved by the Department of Health for Scotland after 1949. See TNA, HLG 101/850, Craig Mitchell to S. F. Wilkinson, 23 February 1952.

<sup>958</sup> HHC, C TAY/RP/1, 'Requisitioned Properties', list originally compiled c. 24 August 1948.

<sup>959</sup> James Hinton, 'Self-Help and Socialism: The Squatters' Movement of 1946', *History Workshop*, 25 (1988), 100-126, p. 100. For more on the postwar history of squatting, see Don Watson, *Squatting in Britain, 1945-1955: Housing, Politics and Direct Action* (London: Merlin, 2016)

government] urge the “squatters” to return to their homes. They cannot appreciate, it seems that the people would not choose to move into hutments had they better homes to go to.’<sup>960</sup>

It helped too, that many of those who participated in the camp squatting movement of 1946 could carve a space for themselves within this narrative through reference to the forms of service and sacrifice which were discussed in the previous section.<sup>961</sup> Press coverage often drew particular attention to this fact, focusing upon ex-servicemen and their families, and also often those who had previously been bombed-out – and, indeed, upon some who fell into both of these categories. In one camp at Southborough in Kent, for example, the first to move in were the Beesleys. Whilst Mr Beesley had been a member of the Merchant Navy – and had later been conscripted for work as a ‘Bevin boy’ – his wife had been bombed-out twice from Portsmouth, and subsequently forced to take inadequate rooms in Liverpool with their three children.<sup>962</sup>

In the end, the government would allow many of the citizens who had squatted in the disused camps to remain there for some years to come – recognising, it seems, that this was a relatively pain-free means of alleviating housing pressures.<sup>963</sup> However, this was not where the squatting movement ended. Instead, in September 1946, attention turned to the occupation of private flats and houses, including most famously the Duchess of Bedford House, a block of luxury flats in Kensington which had been requisitioned and used to house Gibraltarian refugees during the war, but which was now being handed back to its owners.<sup>964</sup> This was an endeavour which – although not necessarily reflecting the ideological positions of the squatters themselves – was visibly aided and organised by members of the Communist Party.<sup>965</sup> A blueprint existed for such a campaign in the form of the ‘Vigilantes’ movement which, led by Harry Cowley, had spear-headed throughout the previous year several high-profile occupations of property in Brighton.<sup>966</sup>

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<sup>960</sup> ‘Notes and News: The Squatter’s Rights’, *The Builder*, 23 August 1946.

<sup>961</sup> Howard Webber, ‘A Domestic Rebellion: The Squatters’ Movement of 1946’, *Ex Historia*, 4 (2012), 125-146, p. 142.

<sup>962</sup> “‘Squatters’ Move in at Southborough’, *Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 23 August 1946.

<sup>963</sup> Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 68.

<sup>964</sup> Hinton, ‘Self-Help and Socialism’, p. 111.

<sup>965</sup> Webber, ‘A Domestic Rebellion’, p. 141.

<sup>966</sup> Note also some more isolated examples of squatting during the war itself, as seen in ‘Greenock’s Bombed Out Squatters’, *Daily Record*, 6 June 1941. For more on the ‘Vigilantes’, see QueenSpark Collective, *Who Was Harry Cowley?* (Brighton: QueenSpark Books, 1984), pp. 24-29. Notably, Cowley’s group had first formed in the aftermath of the First World War, and had then been involved in a similar campaign of occupation – see Stephanie Grohmann, ‘The Ethics of Space: Homelessness, Squatting and the Spatial Self’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2015), p. 9.



Defending in court his involvement in the occupation of one requisitioned house which had lain empty whilst awaiting repairs, Cowley argued that the Vigilante movement had resulted in the housing of many homeless families, and had forced the local authorities to requisition further housing more proactively and more effectively.<sup>967</sup> This latter claim prefigured the arguments made across the country when squatters again temporarily took over private property *en masse*. In Birmingham, for example, squatters declared: '[i]f all the empty houses [in the city] are now requisitioned and tenanted, our main purpose will have been served and a great victory will have been won'.<sup>968</sup> Such statements positioned requisitioning not as an emergency power, but instead as a tool for addressing deeper inequalities – one which had just as much relevance and necessity outside of the conflict as it had during it.

However, whilst the squatting movement did force some councils to step up the speed of their requisitioning, as well as the pace at which this stock was thereafter put into circulation – James Hinton writes, for example, of authorities which encouraged licensees to move in even prior to repairs being made – the success of the squatters' rhetoric elsewhere was more ambivalent.<sup>969</sup> In particular, whereas the national government had proved itself to be reasonably receptive to the camp squatting movement, the far more 'subversive' occupation of private dwellings proved a step too far.<sup>970</sup> When taken with the more overt involvement of the Communist Party, it resulted in a harsher response from the Labour administration, which took steps to prosecute the Communist Party organisers, and – having initially threatened to bump them to the bottom of the housing list, and then instead offered them alternative accommodation – induced the squatters to vacate.<sup>971</sup> In public quarters, too, the actions of the squatters garnered mixed reactions. Mass Observation's investigation into the matter, for example, found that whilst there was often sympathy for the plight of those who were unable to find accommodation, there were also fears – galvanised by the shifting of the squatters from camps to 'proper' dwellings – that the movement might spiral into the occupation of inhabited homes left temporarily empty. Similarly, whilst some expressed their sense of the squatters' moral high ground - '[w]hy should some people have two or three house[s]

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<sup>967</sup> East Sussex Record Office (hereafter ESRO), DB/B/393/10/559-1, Testimony of Harry Cowley in the case of Joseph Gardner Drew vs. Alfred E. Richardson and Harry Cowley, n.d. [April or May 1946].

<sup>968</sup> Hinton, 'Self-Help and Socialism', p. 114.

<sup>969</sup> Ibid.

<sup>970</sup> Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 69.

<sup>971</sup> Hinton, 'Self-Help and Socialism', p. 114-115; Addison, *Now the War is Over*, p. 69; TNA, HLG 7/597, 'Unauthorised Possession of Premises', 17 September 1946.

while others have none?', asked one man – others argued that squatting only encouraged queue jumping, thus making the task of addressing housing needs that much messier.<sup>972</sup>

Ultimately, although spaces like the camps continued to be occupied, the squatting movement faded remarkably quickly from the public eye which it had, for some months, held so keenly. Nevertheless, the arguments which had attended and shaped this cultural moment – including the promotion of requisitioning as a means of evening out social and economic inequalities, rather than a power which was justified principally by reference to the wartime emergency – persisted into the 1950s, and saw a particular resurgence as requisitioning began to be wound down in earnest. However, as we will see, these ideas remained contentious, with different levels of the state apparatus, and various publics and individuals each continuing to hold very different views on the place of requisitioning in postwar society.

Whilst, for example, the national government became increasingly wary of requisitioning becoming entrenched within Britain's housing landscape – not least on account of the costs of this policy – the same could not be said at the local level. Local authorities – particularly, and unsurprisingly, those which comprised the Metropolitan Boroughs, where the requisitioning burden was at its highest – were instead among the most trenchant defenders of requisitioning. Their concerns were often practical, given the persistence of housing pressures and the high reliance upon requisitioning as a means of maintaining housing pools. Sir Parker Morris, then Town Clerk for Westminster and, in 1951, the clerk of the Metropolitan Boroughs' Standing Joint Committee, thus wrote to the government to express the Committee's collective dismay at the restriction of requisitioning powers. Called upon to use avenues other than these powers to secure housing, Morris noted that 'the Metropolitan Boroughs are experiencing embarrassment and meeting with severe difficulties in operating the Minister's suggestions', and argued for a full restoration of their ability to requisition property.<sup>973</sup> Many authorities also leveraged the language of wartime sacrifice in their representations: some noted, for example, that there was a publicity trap inherent in pressing ahead with the derequisitioning of houses used to accommodate, among others, those who had already been blitzed from their homes. Whilst the hardships of some requisitioned property owners had – as predicted by the civil servants of 1943 – generated a not insignificant amount of

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<sup>972</sup> MOA, TC Squatting 1946, 48-1-A, 'Informals on Squatters', 9 September 1946.

<sup>973</sup> TNA, HLG 101/543, Parker Morris to Ministry of Local Government and Planning, 14 February 1951.

press attention, the image of the bombed-out being made homeless once again was one with emotional heft. Writing in 1952, the Town Clerk of Hackney Borough Council warned of the consequences of ignoring this image and implementing derequisitioning policy too swiftly: '[i]t is obvious that if any bombed-out ... families are made homeless as a result of [derequisitioning] ... there will be a public outcry'.<sup>974</sup>

Joining the local authorities in opposition to the relaxation of requisitioning powers were the voices of trade unionists and socialists. From the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, organisations from all over the country wrote to the central government to express their disapproval. Trades councils in Middlesbrough and Brighton, for example, were among those to notify the government of motions that they had passed protesting the policy of withdrawing the powers of requisition from local authorities; similarly, unions like the Plumbers' Trade Union and the Clerical & Administrative Workers' Union wrote to voice their conclusions that 'all suitable empty accommodation' should remain eligible for requisition.<sup>975</sup> The line of argument deployed within these calls was, essentially, that the great public need for housing continued to ethically, politically, and practically outweigh the principles of private property which had in wartime been suspended. Particularly in the aftermath of the Conservatives' return to government, such arguments were also the subject of considerable column space in the socialist press, which decried the divestment of requisitioned property 'so long as a housing waiting list remains'.<sup>976</sup> The defences of requisitioning mounted in such spaces thus highlighted again that, for some, this *was* a viable long-term part of housing policy, and should be expanded rather than retired: '[t]here is in fact no real shortage of housing in this country', wrote one columnist in *Socialist Outlook*. 'If we really intended to house our people under moderately reasonable conditions we could do it without building a single additional house or flat'.<sup>977</sup>

This approach clearly resonated with a wider section of society as well, with the government continuing to receive letters in favour of requisitioning from members of the public on the subject. 'Why haven't the Government requisitioned [empty houses] till this terrible shortage ... is at an

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<sup>974</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Dudley Sorrell, 'Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing', 10 July 1952.

<sup>975</sup> TNA, HLG 101/543, E. A. Easey to Aneurin Bevan, 23 September 1949; TNA, HLG 101/543, Gordon H. Cree to Aneurin Bevan, 30 July 1950; TNA, HLG 101/543, Fred C. Woods to Aneurin Bevan, 18 September 1950; TNA, HLG 101/543, Harry Tout to Aneurin Bevan, 23 October 1948.

<sup>976</sup> Andrew Kirkby, 'Operation "Chuck-Out"', *Socialist Outlook*, 12 March 1954

<sup>977</sup> Tom Braddock, 'A Glaring Injustice', *Socialist Outlook*, 14 November 1952.

end[?]', one letter thus demanded.<sup>978</sup> Others were more forceful still: one man who wrote to press the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on the issue of requisitioning pointedly noted that this was 'not just a matter of comment to be noted, but more a matter of national importance to myself and other people.' Writing from the much-bombed area around the Portsmouth dockyards, he urged the Ministry to take 'full advantage of [its] powers, instead of playing a game of push and shove among yourselves [sic]'.<sup>979</sup> Mass Observation's collections similarly show that, from the end of the war until at least the turn of the decade, there continued to be popular voices in favour of requisitioning. Some responses to a November 1945 directive on housing, for example, favourably discussed requisitioning as a means of housing ex-servicemen and the bombed-out, in particular.<sup>980</sup> Some four years later, in July 1949, another Mass Observer continued to note their belief in the moral necessity of this policy: '[o]n the Continent ... I understand unused room[s] are requisitioned, and rightly so. Why not here?'<sup>981</sup>

However, it is significant that most of these arguments in favour of the continuation of requisitioning often focused on exactly this: the requisitioning of unoccupied, unused, and unneeded property. Naturally, this was a call which many found persuasive. After all, why *should* so many be denied the chance to have a home if surplus property existed? Yet, we can turn again to Mass Observation's November 1945 directive to see that popular attitudes to this policy were not always seduced by this argument. In particular, responses to the directive revealed concerns about the manner in which sustained policies of requisitioning might end up disadvantaging ordinary citizens. For example, one cited the case of a friend who wanted to sell his house and move: '[e]very house offered to an Agent has to be reported to the Council and the Council immediately requisitions it ... In other words, everyone is compelled to be glued like limpets to their houses unless they can manage a sale in secrecy'.<sup>982</sup> Whilst the proponents of requisitioning frequently used the image of duplicitous and opportunistic owners to justify retaining and requisitioning further properties, their opponents thus countered with the argument that preventing citizens who owned their house from moving to another – for fear that their purchasing

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<sup>978</sup> TNA, HLG 101/543, G. Taft to High Dalton, 14 August 1951.

<sup>979</sup> TNA, HLG 101/543, H. L. Smith to Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 4 March 1952.

<sup>980</sup> MOA, DR 3644, Response to November 1945 Directive; MOA, DR 1075, Response to November 1945 Directive.

<sup>981</sup> MOA, DR 4313, Response to July 1949 Directive.

<sup>982</sup> MOA, DR 3388, Response to November 1945 Directive.

power would be eroded by the loss of vacant possession in the property they wanted to sell – was also unconscionably unjust. Moreover, there were anxieties about the manner in which the notion of ‘unused’ property was subject to interpretation. One writer, for instance, reported that their local billeting officer had attempted to requisition a set of houses which, on the verge of being fully repaired, had already been let to tenants who were simply awaiting the go-ahead to move in.<sup>983</sup> Similarly, another noted that a colleague of his was being forced to live ‘in digs’, able only to see his family on weekends, due to the occupation of his home by licensees.<sup>984</sup> These homes, like many of those requisitioned during the war itself, were clearly neither unwanted, nor unneeded.

In 1950, as the end of the war drew further into the past, the case of those who were thus struggling under requisitioning was taken up more prominently under the auspices of the newly established Requisitioned Property Owners’ Association (RPOA).<sup>985</sup> Whilst the RPOA’s official membership figures totalled around 550 persons by 1952, the organisation claimed to speak for all those who had been dispossessed of homes – a figure of many thousands more. Yet, within this broad class of the dispossessed, the exact type of citizen represented by the RPOA was somewhat indistinct. Geographically, for example, the group spoke of the problem of requisitioning as a national one; and yet, it also admitted its preoccupation with London, the statistical centre of requisitioned housing, and the direction of the group was clearly driven by members of the Association’s branches in the capital.<sup>986</sup> More significantly, there was also some vagueness about the financial relationship of the RPOA’s members to their property. In the press, for example, reports on the Association’s activities sometimes referred to it as a landlord interest group – and official affiliations with the Property Owners’ Protection Association and the National Federation of Property Owners, each of them bodies which *were* more explicitly involved in advocacy for dispossessed landlords and large scale land owners, did little to dispel this characterisation.<sup>987</sup> At the very least, it is clear that the RPOA’s interests overlapped with these affiliates; and it also seems apparent that the RPOA actively used their association with such groups to bolster their reach. This position at times restricted their ability to separate themselves from the trope of the ‘wicked

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<sup>983</sup> MOA, Diarist 5283, Entry for 30 September 1945.

<sup>984</sup> MOA, DR 3230, Response to November 1945 Directive.

<sup>985</sup> TNA, HLG 101/545, Malcolm E. Brunton to Clement Attlee, 18 March 1950.

<sup>986</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, ‘Working Party on Requisitioned Property in Use For Housing: Minutes of the Fifth Meeting’, 15 September 1952.

<sup>987</sup> ‘Pick a New Home to Free an Old One’, *Daily Mail*, 22 July 1952.

landlord' which, as we have seen, was often mobilised by those calling for an extension of requisitioning.<sup>988</sup> However, even as it thus cultivated such links, the RPOA remained keen to establish its credentials as an organisation concerned primarily with dispossessed owner-occupiers and other 'hardship' cases, rather than 'wicked landlords' who wished to see their property returned only in order to profit from it.

Whilst, in light of their connection with other groups outside of this cause, this risked being seen as a cynical front, for many of those who held leadership positions in the RPOA between 1950 and 1955, it was anything but: indeed, the problem was nothing if not a personal one. For example, John Holder, the chairman of the Association from 1952, often cited his own hardships under requisitioning, relating how he had returned from fighting in Burma to find his home in Erith had been taken over. His attempt to occupy the house whilst it was having a course of repairs led to the local council evicting and suing him as a trespasser, resulting in legal fees amounting to £250.<sup>989</sup> Whilst he was later able to secure accommodation in a requisitioned flat in nearby Woolwich, the situation only highlighted for him the absurdity and bureaucracy of the requisitioning system. It seemed 'crazy', he argued, that he should receive £52 a year from his requisitioned house, only to spend the same amount on the flat he now occupied, when he could instead be living in his own home.<sup>990</sup> The Association's treasurer, Edward Pinks, had faced a similarly difficult experience. An ex-policeman, Pinks' house in Greenwich had been requisitioned in 1941 whilst, as he noted pointedly, he had been serving as a civil defence volunteer in the Royal Observer Corps. In the mid-1950s, as he approached 70 years of age, his home remained under requisition, well over a decade after the initial dispossession. Writing to *The Times* in November 1953, he spoke of the effect that this had had on his wife: 'she has been ill, and become full of nerves and irritable because of the worry and financial burden we have borne and still bear'. His closing plea made clear that, for Pinks, the issue was one of the state failing to uphold the rights of its citizens: '[s]urely the Minister of Housing will stop this wicked exploitation of little people who

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<sup>988</sup> '14,000 Want Their Homes Back', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 October 1952. On the affiliation of the RPOA with the noted organisations, see TNA, HLG 101/850, J. R. Holder to J. H. Stone, 10 July 1952. For examples of the noted organisations' advocacy for landlords, see 'Injustices to Landlords', *The Times*, 31 March 1949; 'Property Owners Demand Redress', *Dundee Courier*, 11 July 1947; 'Property Owners Appeal to Bevan', *Evening Telegraph*, 5 July 1950.

<sup>989</sup> '80,000 Cannot Live In Own Homes', *Daily Mail*, 17 August 1953.

<sup>990</sup> 'I Was "A Trespasser In My Own House"', *Daily Express*, 22 July 1952.

want their own houses?’<sup>991</sup> Six months later, his case was profiled in a *Daily Express* article on requisitioning hardships, and here Pinks added another layer to this argument – it was all well and good, he suggested, for such a suspension of rights to occur in wartime; but ‘as the war ended for the nations in 1945, it is time the war ended for the Pinkses in 1954.’<sup>992</sup> Meanwhile, Ida Chisholm Clarke, the RPOA’s original secretary, represented the difficulties of those whose homes were part-requisitioned. Whilst, unlike Holder and Pinks, she was successful in regaining full possession of her home in 1952, she emphasised that her living situation prior to this had been difficult, as the house had not been divided into self-contained flats.<sup>993</sup> As others whose homes were carved up by requisitioning attested, the experience of being compelled to share domestic space with ‘strangers [one] had no hand in selecting’ was one few relished.<sup>994</sup>

These personal experiences of requisitioning were among those leveraged when, in July 1952, the Association was asked to give evidence to the Working Party on Requisitioned Property in Use for Housing, which had been convened earlier that year under the chairmanship of S. F. Wilkinson of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.<sup>995</sup> The RPOA’s evidence, which was principally provided by Holder and Frank Rivers (a member who would become the group’s secretary in later years), laid out a litany of hardships faced by those who had lost their homes to requisitioning.<sup>996</sup> Among the rest of RPOA’s lengthy list of grievances there were some rather melodramatic examples – cited cases of owners had who had ‘died of frustration’ waiting for the release of their homes, for instance, were clearly impossible to verify. Such references notwithstanding, however, much of the RPOA’s evidence focused more convincingly upon the everyday difficulties and hardships faced by those who had been dispossessed. Notably, particular attention was drawn to the stories of those whose property had been requisitioned during the war: servicemen whose homes had been empty only on account of their absence with the Forces; evacuated civil servants who now found their return blocked by the very state which had compelled them to leave; and those who had lost their home once to bombing only to lose it again to an

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<sup>991</sup> E. J. Pinks, ‘Requisitioned Houses’, *The Times*, 7 November 1953.

<sup>992</sup> Cyril Aynsley, ‘HOMELESS – Yet They Own Their Homes’, *Daily Express*, 20 May 1954.

<sup>993</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Ida Chisholm Clarke to J. H. Stone, 24 August 1952.

<sup>994</sup> D. Maclean, ‘Requisitioned Houses’, *The Times*, 7 November 1953.

<sup>995</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, J. R. Holder to J. H. Stone, 10 July 1952.

<sup>996</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing, Minutes of Fourth Meeting, 21 July 1952.

opportunistic local authority.<sup>997</sup> As we have already seen in this and previous chapters, these were not isolated issues suffered only by a few of the RPOA's members; here, the group's evidence certainly reflected problems experienced on a much broader scale. And, just as those who had complained directly to their local authorities had often expressed a belief that their continued dispossession functioned as a betrayal – of sacrifice and service in wartime, and of their right to exercise control over their own homes – the RPOA's arguments were similarly underpinned by the notion that the continuation of requisitioning unacceptably undermined the rights of citizens. The solution which they advocated to the Working Party thus aimed to secure the speediest possible release of all requisitioned property, in order that the 'sanctity of personal ownership and citizens rights' might be observed once more.<sup>998</sup> If one in three newly erected houses in London – that most intractable centre of requisitioning – was allocated to rehouse those living in requisitioned property, they suggested that hardship cases might be dealt with in a year, and that all other cases could be concluded within three.<sup>999</sup>

In the first years of its advocacy the RPOA had made clear its desire to be heard by and to engage in dialogue with the state bodies responsible for implementing and managing requisitioning, recognising the necessity of getting policymakers onside.<sup>1000</sup> The ability to meet the body charged with reducing authorities' reliance on requisitioned property, to advocate their case and to offer their own solution, was thus a clear move forward for the RPOA's agenda. Yet, even as they had sought out such audiences, the group had remained deeply suspicious of the state's commitment – both at the local and national level – when it came to the project of derequisitioning. This lack of trust was apparent from the outset of their meeting with the Working Party, with immediate tensions over the timeline and form of any publicisation of the RPOA's contributions. It was agreed, in the end, that the Association would release a summary of their evidence to the press only after a period of at least a week and a half had passed.<sup>1001</sup> However, lo and behold, its summary appeared the very next morning, in the pages of the *Daily Mail*.<sup>1002</sup> As

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<sup>997</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Constitution and Evidence of the National Requisitioned Property Owners' Association, c. July 1952.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid.

<sup>999</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1000</sup> For example, see TNA, HLG 101/545, Ida Chisholm Clarke to Clement Attlee, 20 July 1950.

<sup>1001</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing, Minutes of Fourth Meeting, 21 July 1952.

<sup>1002</sup> 'Pick a New Home to Free an Old One', *Daily Mail*, 22 July 1952.



Frank Rivers had noted in the opening discussion with the Working Party, the Association saw itself principally as a ‘propagandist organisation’; ultimately, it was not content to let the discussions of derequisitioning remain behind closed doors.<sup>1003</sup>

Beyond the tensions inherent in the RPOA’s publicity and experience driven approach versus the government’s more bureaucratic process, it is worth noting also that the Working Party’s remit was ‘to report on the measures necessary for relieving the central government from financial responsibility for the housing of families in requisitioned premises at an early date’.<sup>1004</sup> The primary concern of the state in this area was thus the ongoing (and significant) financial burden of requisitioning upon the Exchequer, rather than any notion of citizens’ property rights or the personal difficulties inflicted.<sup>1005</sup> This approach to the problem – so far removed from RPOA’s proclaimed focus upon hardship cases, to say nothing of the committee’s own experiences – goes further in explaining why the meeting between the RPOA and the Working Party proved to be largely unfruitful. Indeed, this chasm was acknowledged explicitly in the Working Party’s interim report, completed in August and published in October 1952. Reflecting upon the RPOA’s recommendation that the most severe hardship cases – including those who wished to occupy their own property, those suffering acute financial difficulties on account of requisitioning, and those who had been dispossessed for ten years or more – should be a priority for release, the Working Party wrote:

We have a good deal of sympathy with these representations. On the other hand it seems to us important that the properties which for one reason or another impose the heaviest burden on the Exchequer should be given the highest priority ... the second priority being accorded to the owner occupier who is suffering hardship.<sup>1006</sup>

The Working Party’s acceptance and promotion of the idea that councils could, and should, encourage the owners of requisitioned homes to accept licensees as statutory tenants – a policy designed to reduce the Exchequer’s burden whilst ensuring that the already stretched housing market was not flooded by those evicted from requisitioned property – proved a particular point

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<sup>1003</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing, Minutes of Fourth Meeting, 21 July 1952.

<sup>1004</sup> TNA, HLG 101/850, S. F. Wilkinson, ‘Premises Requisitioned for Housing: Memorandum for the Conduction of the Working Party’, May 1952.

<sup>1005</sup> TNA, HLG 101/890, ‘Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing: Interim Report’, 1952.

<sup>1006</sup> Ibid.

of contention. In the view of the RPOA, such measures offered owners an illusion of choice, and were seen to be problematically overshadowed by the threat of compulsory purchase for those who refused to take on tenants.<sup>1007</sup> The RPOA's response to the second interim report, published the following year, was even more scathing, with Holder accusing the Working Party of being 'composed largely of people with vested interests in continuing to hold houses under requisitioning'.<sup>1008</sup>

Yet, in spite of the RPOA's dissatisfaction with the Working Party's paper, it is clear that their work represented another turning point in the (de-)requisitioning debate. The final report of the Working Party was published in 1954, and was followed shortly thereafter by the Requisitioned Houses and Housing (Amendment) Act in 1955.<sup>1009</sup> Whilst Wilkinson's committee had proposed that authorities should try to release most requisitioned properties under their control by the end of 1957 – they suggested that councils with particularly high concentrations of such property should 'take all practicable measures', but did not recommend a terminal date – the 1955 Act instead instituted a final end date of 31 March 1960.<sup>1010</sup> By this date, authorities holding requisitioned housing were compelled to have released this property to owners either with vacant possession, or with tenants rather than licensees. This timeline, naturally, was still viewed by the RPOA as much too lengthy: Frank Rivers, for example, expressed outrage at the prospect of property owners waiting 'five years to get back houses of which they had been deprived in some cases for 15 years.'<sup>1011</sup> Moreover, the prospect of compulsory purchase being used by councils who could neither relocate licensees into municipal housing nor convince owners to take them on as tenants continued to be a source of tension. Clearly, the exact provisions of the 1955 Act did not live up to the RPOA's hopes – although, of course, we might note here that their desire for an expedited derequisitioning process, whilst understandable, did not always leave room to recognise the genuine difficulties facing councils whose housing lists had ballooned during and after the war.

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<sup>1007</sup> TNA, HLG 101/890, 'Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing: Second Interim Report', 1953; 'House Owners To Protest', *The Times*, 14 October 1952.

<sup>1008</sup> 'Requisitioned Houses', *Financial Times*, 2 November 1953.

<sup>1009</sup> TNA, HLG 101/890, 'Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing: Third and Final Report', 1954; *Requisitioned Houses and Housing (Amendment) Act 1955* (3 & 4 Eliz, c. 24) (London: HMSO).

<sup>1010</sup> TNA, HLG 101/890, 'Working Party on Requisitioned Properties in Use for Housing: Second Interim Report', 1953.

<sup>1011</sup> 'Requisitioned Houses To Be Free In Under Five Years', *Liverpool Echo*, 3 February 1955.

However, the Act *did*, finally, bring the legal termination to requisitioning into view, thus promising an end to the limbo in which many citizens had been caught since the war itself.

In this way, and even as they were received ambivalently by key figures within the RPOA, the developments which took place between 1952 and 1955 brought the future of the Association into question: what was the purpose of this group now that the death knell of requisitioning had been sounded, but not yet fulfilled? What should their methods be, now that their early tactics of seeking fora with local and national state bodies (albeit with a somewhat wary stance) had reached their logical conclusion? Aside from a short-lived plan to field candidates at the 1955 General Election, this period ultimately saw the RPOA increasingly turn towards direct action in order to publicise cases of dispossessed Britons.<sup>1012</sup> In particular, the group engaged in a number of so-called ‘sieges’ of requisitioned property in order to try and expedite their release, an act which echoed the tactics of those who, almost a decade earlier, had used squatting as a tool to pressure councils into the opposite course of action (and, indeed, chimed even more closely with the events in Germany discussed in the previous chapter).<sup>1013</sup> One of the first of these sieges, taking place in December 1953, saw a couple whose home in Blackheath had been part-requisitioned since 1941 changing the locks to the ground floor of their house, and barricading themselves inside. The RPOA was actively involved in the demonstration; a picture of an Association meeting was pinned to the front door of the house, and the Greenwich branch set up a rota of members to stay with the owners throughout daylight hours.<sup>1014</sup> A later protest, which was reported in both local and national press outlets, involved RPOA members supporting an occupation in Battersea by physically blocking local authorities and the prospective licensees from entering.<sup>1015</sup> Whilst the rhetoric of those involved in these acts of protest was not directed at the licensees, whose difficulty in finding houses was usually framed empathetically, both the RPOA and the dispossessed owners stressed that they did not believe this hardship should supersede either their own difficulties or their property rights. For example, the Boddingtons, who owned the Battersea house and sought the derequisition of the top floor in order to accommodate two other family members, were clear in their justifications:

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<sup>1012</sup> ‘Requisitioned Property Owners’ “Crusade”, *The Times*, 2 February 1955; ‘Election Items’, *Liverpool Echo*, 11 May 1955.

<sup>1013</sup> ‘Property Owners Explain the Boddington Siege’, *South Western Star*, 13 January 1956.

<sup>1014</sup> ‘They Won’t Open the Front Door’, *Lewisham Borough News*, 15 December 1953.

<sup>1015</sup> ‘Pickets Keep Family From Flat’, *Daily Herald*, 19 October 1954; Harold Brett, ‘Mrs. B. and Co. Stand Fast At Her Door’, *Daily Express*, 19 October 1954.

Frank Boddington thus declared ‘[a]n Englishman’s home is his castle, and believe me I am fighting for mine’.<sup>1016</sup> His wife, meanwhile, noted that she felt ‘sorry for [the proposed licensees]’, a young family of three who had been living in a basement room, ‘but no-one is going to have the top flat’.<sup>1017</sup> For the RPOA, the strategy of occupation was further portrayed – again, with echoes of the past – as a form of citizen justice, in which the process of derequisition was removed from the hands of bureaucrats and delivered instead by those who had themselves thus far been failed.<sup>1018</sup> Such methods, as the Boddington’s case and others proved, were not entirely ineffective: the Battersea house was officially derequisitioned nine months later, after the local council’s appeal to the Minister of Housing for retention failed; and another man whose occupation was supported by the RPOA in 1955 wrote to the local newspaper to thank the group for their help, and to report that their siege had ended in ‘victory’.<sup>1019</sup>

Yet, the Association’s drift toward a more militant approach was itself the source of some division within the organisation. Whilst some were in favour of adopting ‘suffragette tactics’, others were cautious of going too far. Thus, whilst one member, Irene Croydon, had a rogue policy of painting yellow crosses on the doors of requisitioned houses in her local area under cover of night, these actions were roundly criticised by Frank Rivers.<sup>1020</sup> The RPOA, he argued, was willing to support demonstrations (even those that were a ‘little illegal’), but drew the line at those which risked harm to others; in this case, he feared that the secretive marking of doors would serve only to frighten licensees, whom the RPOA generally perceived as blameless.<sup>1021</sup> Similarly, whilst an earlier demonstration by Croydon – in which she had thrown leaflets from the public gallery at the House Commons – appears to have been sanctioned by the RPOA’s leadership, a proposal in 1954 by some ‘extremist’ members to next shower MPs with leaflets by ‘exploding a device over their heads’ was swiftly shut down by the leadership.<sup>1022</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> ‘Family Keeps Out the New Tenant’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1954.

<sup>1017</sup> ‘Pickets Keep Family From Flat’, *Daily Herald*, 19 October 1954.

<sup>1018</sup> For example, see ‘The Siege of Bolan St.’, *South Western Star*, 22 October 1954; ‘Property Owners Explain the Boddington Siege’, *South Western Star*, 13 January 1956.

<sup>1019</sup> ‘Opinion’, *South Western Star*, 8 July 1955; ‘Siege Thanks’, *South London Observer*, 10 February 1955.

<sup>1020</sup> ‘Phantom Painter Speaks’, *Daily Express*, 6 February 1954.

<sup>1021</sup> ‘The Woman in the Gallery’, *Daily News*, 27 October 1953; ‘Police Keep Night Watch for the “Yellow Cross” Raiders’, *South London Observer*, 28 January 1954.

<sup>1022</sup> ‘Plot to Shower Leaflets on M.P.s Revealed’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 4 April 1960.

It is telling that the RPOA's public activities from around 1954 onwards were thus marked also by internal divisions, resulting at one point in a dramatic attempted coup by the original secretary, Ida Chisholm Clarke, and others – among them Bob Darke, a Hackney councillor who had acted as the Association's 'national organiser'.<sup>1023</sup> Darke was most famed as an ex-Communist Party member who had serialised for the *Picture Post* the 'inside picture' of his time with the party; ironically, however, the unfavourable light in which he portrayed the Party did not prevent his bid for the chairmanship being denounced as 'communistic'.<sup>1024</sup> In the end, the coup attempt seems to have been abortive – at least, any activities undertaken by the dissident committee failed to generate interest in the press, whereas the pre-existing committee's work continued to be reported upon for a little while longer. Yet, despite the apparent failure of this bid for power, the schism that it laid bare betrayed the broader disunity of the RPOA. Whilst the group had been for some time the foremost source of organised protest against requisitioning in Britain, this purpose had clearly, and ironically, been problematised by the promise of the 1960 deadline. In the absence of a clear campaign or goal into which the energies of those still angered by the lingering presence of requisitioning could be poured, it is perhaps no surprise that there should have been a splintering of the group – and, thereafter, a fading from public prominence.

The RPOA, to be sure, did not have the ability to speak for the views of all those in the varied crowd of the wartime and postwar dispossessed. Nevertheless, its activities in the early and mid-1950s, which were largely recorded more completely than the solitary efforts of those who negotiated with the authorities in private, provide a key insight into some of the methods and arguments being deployed by those seeking possession of their homes at this time. In particular, the work of the group highlighted the bitterness and sense of injustice which attended the continued requisition of homes not only many years after the emergency powers had first made this possible, but also, more importantly, many years after the emergency itself was felt to have ended.

As we have seen, many of those working on the other side of the housing crisis resisted the stripping back of requisitioning powers, fearing for their ability to meet demands for

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<sup>1023</sup> 'A Requisitioning Split: Dissident Owners Meet', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 August 1954; 'Requisitioned Property Owners' Dispute', *The Times*, 12 August 1954; 'Requisitioned Property Owners' Militant Mood', *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 October 1953.

<sup>1024</sup> Herbert Morrison, 'It Happens Here', *Sunday Times*, 18 January 1953; 'A Requisitioning Split: Dissident Owners Meet', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 August 1954.

accommodation. Similarly, there were those who more broadly believed that this wartime power had a more permanent role to play: just as it had been used in wartime to redistribute the hardships of bombardment and displacement, so too might it be used to level out postwar inequalities. However, in the end, the 1950s saw a gradual turning of the tide against this practice. Sir Thomas Sheepshanks, who was in 1953 the top-ranking civil servant within the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, referred to requisitioning in one letter to Harold Macmillan as a ‘terribly intractable problem’.<sup>1025</sup> Macmillan himself would later similarly refer to the issue as a ‘tiresome question ... a relic of war conditions’.<sup>1026</sup> Despite the best efforts of those who saw requisitioning as a significant solution to the nation’s persistent housing issues after the war, this view of the policy as one which had overstayed its welcome – as one which was too expensive to maintain, and impossible to sustain justification for – was that which won out. Come 1960, the vast majority of the domestic properties requisitioned during and after the war had been returned. A scant few failed to be divested in time, and had to be granted brief extensions until 1961, and, as the RPOA had predicted, some houses were subjected to compulsory purchase by the authorities and thus never returned to their owners.<sup>1027</sup> Yet, such loose ends notwithstanding, the programme of requisitioning begun in 1939 was largely, finally – after some two decades – at an end.

## CONCLUSION

In the autumn of 1945, a man named Edward Bailey wrote to Colin Campbell, the Town Clerk of Plymouth, to advocate for the full return of his home in the St Budeaux area of the city. The house had been held under requisition since June 1941, and it was not until September 1945 that Bailey had regained access to the property. Even then, the house was only partially derequisitioned: the first floor, comprising a double bedroom, one a smaller bedroom, a boxroom, and a lavatory and bathroom, was released; the ground floor, meanwhile, remained occupied by the licensees

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<sup>1025</sup> TNA, HLG 101/890, Sheepshanks to Macmillan, 18 May 1953.

<sup>1026</sup> Harold Macmillan, *Tides of Fortune: 1945-1955* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 459.

<sup>1027</sup> It should be noted that a number of requisitioned property owners who were not occupiers accepted this outcome with less complaint: see, for example, ‘Compulsory Purchase Inquiry’, *Streatham News*, 30 October 1959. However, on the subject of compulsory purchase and owner opposition, see: ‘Property Owners Frightened & Angry’, *South Western Star*, 24 October 1958; Arthur H. Moorton, ‘Requisitioned Houses’, *Financial Times*, 25 October 1958. On the extensions granted to a handful of local authorities, see TNA, HLG 101/885, ‘Central Housing Advisory Committee: Housing Progress Report’, January 1961.

whom the council had installed during the war.<sup>1028</sup> Bailey's letters detailed a catalogue of complaints regarding the requisitioning process and the council's conduct. The garage, he alleged, had not been included in the initial requisition order, and yet the new occupants of his house had been allowed to gain access 'via broken locks and windows rendered insecure' to use this space 'as a coal-house and a dump'. The garden, meanwhile, had been allowed to 'grow wild' with brambles, and a burst pipe which had been left unmended in March 1942 for some days had caused damp and flood damage to the ground floor.<sup>1029</sup> Bailey was keen to note that he had for some time been willing to bear these frustrations – or at least, would be, if given the proper compensation for repairs – as well as the extra cost and difficulties that had come with finding alternative accommodation for himself and his wife. Now, however, he emphasised that their situation had changed. Bailey's tenancy at another house had ended, leaving them to board with his wife's sister 'at great inconvenience to both parties'. To add to the problem, he had one daughter returning home following her demobilisation from in the Middle East who would need to live with them, and a further two daughters who wished to stay with the family whilst on leave. Accommodating them, Bailey argued, would require the whole house to be released.<sup>1030</sup> Whilst Bailey's letters were certainly far from unique – both in the context of Plymouth and of urban Britain more broadly – in making the case for derequisition, he was in some ways unusually forthcoming in his warnings about the effects of this experience. Summing up his case, he wrote:

You will observe that I am not reluctant to suffer some sacrifice for the common good, but the callous indifference shown to every amenity of my home together with the clerical effort necessary to get matters righted, does not encourage generous citizenship.<sup>1031</sup>

In his letter, Bailey thus demonstrated that the wartime tradition of home as a space of negotiation and contestation remained alive and well as citizens moved forward to navigate the muddy waters of the postwar world. Just as the process of *losing* home had so often proved to be a key arena for these citizens to critique or exemplify citizenship norms, so too did the process of *returning* - or, indeed, *remaking* – home.

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<sup>1028</sup> PA, 1561/2, "Edward Bailey" to Colin Campbell, 29 September 1945.

<sup>1029</sup> PA, 1561/2, "Edward Bailey" to Colin Campbell, 6 October 1945.

<sup>1030</sup> PA, 1561/2, "Edward Bailey" to Colin Campbell, 29 September 1945.

<sup>1031</sup> PA, 1561/2, "Edward Bailey" to Colin Campbell, 6 October 1945.

As we have seen in this chapter, the home's ability to thus act as a vehicle for broader discussions was precisely what helped to position this space as a significant arena for discussions about issues like reconstruction. This debate saw citizens and state alike grapple with questions about the meanings and effects of the war, about the responsibilities of the state to its citizens in the aftermath, and about the best way to recover from the conflict as individuals and as a nation. The home and its loss offered a particularly apposite lens through which these questions could be filtered, thus cementing the status of this space as a rich interpretive vein for historians interested in shifting conceptions of citizenship during and after the war.

An examination of the place of home-loss within the discourse on reconstruction, for example, reveals something of the moral, practical, and economic character of this debate, and helps to explain why particular paths of rebuilding were taken. The responses of the dispossessed and bombed-out to shortage of housing also exposed the ways in which wartime rhetoric about the 'equality of sacrifice' was mobilised and fragmented, as different groups sought to position themselves as particularly deserving of housing, and as the state sought to distinguish between them. As Sonya Rose has argued, even as this oft-quoted slogan was being deployed during the war in order to conjure images of unity and common effort, the phrase itself was already becoming a site for contestation.<sup>1032</sup> An examination of how the housing landscape was navigated after the war by Britons – and especially by those whose understandings of this space had been shaped by wartime loss – demonstrates that, in the years after 1945, this framing of the war remained as contentious as ever.

Indeed, this only became more pronounced as the 1940s waned, as the much-delayed homecomings of those whose homes remained under state requisition highlighted. Whereas, at the beginning of the postwar period, the policy of requisitioning had often been justified precisely by reference to ideas about equality and the sharing of burdens, this argument was clearly beginning to take on water as the decade turned. Whilst housing difficulties remained, the use of a power which had been controversial even in wartime became increasingly untenable as a means of addressing these issues. And yet, the persistence of this policy even up to 1960 acts as a particularly potent reminder of the long shadow cast by the Second World War upon the domestic lives of many Britons. In so doing, it serves to underline the fact that, although we might use the term

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<sup>1032</sup> Rose, *Which People's War*, p. 8.



‘postwar’ to describe the years after 1945, the boundary between the ‘before’ of war and the ‘after’ of peace was rarely, if ever, distinct.<sup>1033</sup> In the first chapter of this thesis, we saw how the conceptualisation and experience of home-loss in the Second World War rested upon a framework some twenty years or more in the making. Here, we can see that these experiences of home-loss during the war also persisted in multiple ways after the official cessation of hostilities, weaving tangled legacies which provided nothing if not space for citizens to reassess their understandings of the war and the world which emerged in its wake.

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<sup>1033</sup> See Marco Mondini, ‘Transitions from War to Peace: Demobilization and Homecomings in Twentieth-Century Europe’, in *The Historiography of Transition: Critical Phases in the Development of Modernity (1494-1973)*, ed. by Paolo Pombeni (New York: Routledge, 2015), 155-167, p. 156.

## Conclusion

In 2009, the modern Mass Observation project asked its national panel of writers to reflect upon the Second World War. What memories of the war, it asked, were most prevalent within the writers' families? What was spoken of, and what was left unsaid? What feelings did family recollections of the war evoke? Notably, a number of the replies emphasised experiences of domestic dislocation, whether their own or those of family members.<sup>1034</sup> Many exemplified how events such as being bombed-out could be seen as key junctures; as axes around which wider narratives of the war turned; and as dividing points which sorted the conflict into a series of 'befores' and 'afters'. It was also made clear by some writers that such experiences had not been contained by the end of the war. One respondent, for example, wrote that:

The Second World War was something which was definitely talked about at home as a child as both my parents had grown up during the war. It has affected my mother most profoundly as she had been bombed out three times ... She was claustrophobic (which she attributed to sleeping in the top bunk of an Anderson shelter) and thunder upset her greatly. We have few pre-war items from her side of the family ... as a result of bombing and looting.<sup>1035</sup>

Home-loss, then, continued to make itself felt, shaping individual, familial and collective lives in tangible and intangible ways, and influencing the manner in which the war was remembered.

This thesis has explored how urban wartime home-loss came to occupy such a consequential role in the experience and understanding of the Second World War. As Chapter

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<sup>1034</sup> For examples of Mass Observation Project responses from Spring 2009 which noted experiences of being bombed-out, see: MOA, DR H1845, Response to Spring 2009 Directive; MOA, DR A4127, Response to Spring 2009 Directive; MOA, DR B3886, Response to Spring 2009 Directive; MOA, DR P1009, Response to Spring 2009 Directive. It is also possible to find references to the ongoing impact of home-loss, including both bombardment and requisitioning, upon understandings of the Second World War in the responses to other modern directives. See, for example: MOA, DR M1956, Response to Summer 1988 Directive; MOA, DR D2092, Response to Spring 1994 Directive; MOA, DR 2092, Response to Autumn/Winter 1995 Directive; MOA, DR P1282, Response to Autumn/Winter 1995 Directive; MOA, DR B1771, Response to Summer 2008 Directive.

<sup>1035</sup> MOA, DR T3129, Response to Spring 2009 Directive.

One highlighted, the groundwork for this eventuality was being laid well before 1939. Most obviously, the weaponisation of air power in the First World War thrust the dwelling into the spotlight, casting this space as a tangible symbol of the ways in which modern warfare could violently envelop civilian spaces. The moral and industrial importance of the home front to the wider war effort forced the state to find ways of ameliorating and normalising this threat – not least through the cultivation of a civil identity which emphasised personal stoicism and the subordination of the individual to the collective. This part had to be acted out within the home as well as beyond it; accordingly, the private sphere became increasingly exposed to the concerned eyes of the state and wider society. In other ways, too, the necessity of managing the home front more closely resulted in the dislocation of the domestic sphere – the establishment of a large-scale requisitioning programme, in particular, worked to disrupt the legal and political tie between citizens and their homes. As the interwar period progressed, and the memories of the Great War melded with speculative discourses about the nature of wars to come, the home was to remain at the forefront of the popular and official imagination alike.

The central three chapters of the thesis considered how citizens reckoned with the altered home after war had been declared. As Chapter Two demonstrated, even the threat of loss reshaped understandings of this space, drawing out its ultimately liminal and uncanny character. Such revelations often had ramifications of a deeply personal nature, in that they unsettled a space within which individuals' private, everyday lives were deeply embedded. At the same time, however, the ambiguous contours of the home also came to be refracted more widely, acting as both a catalyst and a canvas for debates about the body and the nation at war. The interplay between intimate feelings and experiences on the one hand, and public discourses and anxieties on the other, was a theme continued in Chapter Three. Here, the moment of home-loss itself was examined, enabling us to identify the different framings of this event, and to uncover the tensions between individual experiences and more idealised social and political constructions of loss. Similarly, this chapter explored the various ways in which responses to loss were policed and tracked, and investigated how home-loss was seen to intervene in the relationship between citizen, state, and wider society. Chapter Four carried this question forward still further, reflecting upon the ways that home-loss encouraged citizens to think comparatively about their wartime experiences. Both dispossession and bombardment offered urban Britons the opportunity to contest and reify the link between

themselves and their fellow citizens that had supposedly been forged through their shared experiences. Finally, this chapter explored the wider ethical and moral frameworks of wartime home-loss by focusing upon the reprisals debate, and Britain's use of requisitioning in occupied Germany after the war. In doing so, it highlighted how – even as the perpetration of home-loss away from the fighting fronts continued to be variously perceived as barbaric, tragic, and unjust – it was now also regularly understood as a normal aspect of modern warfare.

Finally, Chapter Five traced the postwar legacies of home-loss. In much the same way as the home had existed at the heart of attempts to envisage the impacts of future wars, so too did this space occupy a central position within imaginaries of peace. This was true of homes which had remained physically intact and attached to their inhabitants, as contemporaries anxiously considered the role of the dwelling and the family in the transition back to an ambiguously defined 'normality'. Yet, as ever, bombed-out and requisitioned dwellings were the spaces around which the currents of debate flowed most strongly. After all, such sites slotted particularly easily into discourses about the distribution of scarce resources, and the physical reconstruction of Britain's cities after six years of war. They also acted as apposite symbols of wartime sacrifice and service, thus giving citizens an accepted epistemological – and perhaps moral – base from which to engage in these broader discussions. As shown by the travails of dispossessed owners in the first fifteen years of peace, the link that was therefore drawn between wartime experience and postwar legacy was one which continued to hold power long after the official cessation of hostilities.

By charting the ways in which home-loss was experienced and negotiated before, during, and after the Second World War, this thesis has thus asserted the utility of deploying home-loss as an interpretative frame. At the most basic level, focusing upon the disruption and destruction of urban dwellings helps us to push beyond the statistical veneer of address changes and housing damage during the war in order to see what the experience of home-loss actually entailed. How was it wrought, and who by? Where did those who had lost their homes as a direct result of the war emergency go? Were they able to return, and how long did this process of dislocation last? Attention to such questions exposes a slew of emotional, practical, financial, and political ramifications that followed in the wake of home-loss – and, in turn, a state and society which was deeply anxious about how these impacts might make themselves felt. In examining this issue, then, we are able to pick up the threads laid down by scholars such as Susan Grayzel, who have recognised

the home – but not necessarily its destruction or dislocation – as an important point of access for historians interested in war and society in mid-twentieth century Britain.

A further contribution of the present work lies in its emphasis that the climate of domestic unfixity which characterised wartime Britain was by no means the result of enemy action alone, despite the dominance of this element within both scholarly and public circles. Requisitioning, too, was a pervasive feature of the urban home front – one which was inextricably linked to the air raid, and one which similarly came to bear upon citizens and their homes in myriad, ambiguous, and important ways. In a general historiographical sense, the integration of requisitioning into the story of Britain’s home front brings this field in line with continental European studies which have better acknowledged the significance of dispossession as a subject of study.<sup>1036</sup> More specifically, exploring bombardment and requisitioning within the same frame allows us to examine the overlapping pressures that wartime urban Britons had to navigate in their intimate, everyday lives. Not only were they required to come to terms with their own newfound vulnerability to attack; they also needed to contend with a concurrent growth in state power and purview, which often threatened the imagined sanctity of the home just as assuredly as the bombs.

The illumination of this previously neglected aspect of the British home front offers us, then, an excellent medium through which to interrogate broader social, political, and economic shifts. Perhaps most obviously, the paths of those who lost their homes to enemy action or dispossession form a case study of how individuals, communities and governments attempted to weather the arrival of new paradigms of war. In particular, such a lens reveals how this process relied on a series of delicate balancing acts. For example, although the dwelling was constructed as a space which must be protected now that it was exposed to enemy fire, it was simultaneously made clear that urban homes, in particular, could not be shielded entirely. The cultivation of an emotional economy which reified stoicism was an important prong of the efforts to address this contradiction whilst sustaining the war effort. Here, however, yet another piece of irony lurked. For even as urban Britons were encouraged to see the destruction of homes as a sign of the enemy’s

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<sup>1036</sup> On requisitioning and dispossession in France, see: Auslander, ‘Coming Home’; Shannon L. Fogg, ‘Home as a Site of Exclusion: The Nazi Occupation, Housing Shortages and the Holocaust in France’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 20.2 (2022), 167-182; Fogg, *Stealing Home*. On Italy and Germany, see Koch, *Home After Fascism*. On the Netherlands, see Kemperman and Peirisma, ‘Robbed and Dispossessed’. On Norway, see Maria Fritsche, “‘Correct German Conduct?’ German Requisition Practices and their Impact on Norwegian Society during World War II”, *Journal of Modern European History*, 20.2 (2022), 199-217.

The historiography of requisitioning in Germany after the war is detailed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

barbarism, and as which they could overcome by virtue of their innate grit, they were simultaneously asked to see it as an unavoidable aspect of war – and as one which, when perpetrated by their own government, might be the key to a long-awaited victory.

If attempts to reckon with development of the dwelling as a *target* thus required a sort of juggling act, its concurrent importance as a *resource* on the home front only added another ball to the mix. As this thesis has stressed, the home was regularly perceived as an important site in the cultivation of national identity, and as the bedrock upon which the nation's global status was founded. In the context of war, it was also figured as a space in which citizens could anchor themselves, allowing them to shore up their morale and thus their ability to contribute to the war effort. Of course, this function was one of the reasons why the protection of the home was deemed so vital the first place; and yet, investing the home with such value had paradoxical consequences. The task of ensuring that the citizens upon whom the war effort relied were accommodated, for instance, relied heavily upon the use of requisitioning powers, and thus necessarily involved the dispossession of others. Such systems were undoubtedly vital to the continued operation of the home front – but their maintenance and justification required a healthy injection of cognitive dissonance.

Another, interlinked, discourse which can be fruitfully examined through the lens of home-loss is that of citizenship. Indeed, this theme has been a prevalent one in the present study, existing at the core of questions about how powerful emotional experiences were understood and managed during wartime. As alluded to above, the encouragement of a particular model of citizenship – which envisaged the 'ideal' British citizen as one who displayed emotional fortitude, civic-mindedness, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices in the name of the collective – was an important part of the process. This ideal, as other historians have noted, had been under construction for some time by 1939, having been catalysed by the Great War and thereafter cultivated during the interwar period. The attempts of dispossessed and bombed-out citizens to navigate their experiences under the auspices of such an ideal, however, help to uncover the ambivalence with which it was viewed by contemporaries. For some, the role of the stoic, outward-looking citizen was one easily slipped into, at least during the war itself. This model offered, after all, the opportunity to find purpose and meaning in one's loss, and gave many individuals a reason to weather the effects of experiences which would have been unthinkable outside of wartime.

Elsewhere, it was precisely the grim novelty of such experiences which made urban Britons reluctant to accept their normalisation – and thus unwilling to emulate an ideal which was predicated on this acceptance. Most citizens, however, seemed to fall into a greyer category. Oscillation between acceptance and rejection of these citizenship norms was common, as was a form of cherry-picking which allowed individuals to isolate particular aspects of this ideal and deploy them in a manner which suited them. Those who mobilised the rhetoric of sacrifice and service whilst articulating their experiences, for example, often did so in ways that cut against the grain, drawing upon the emotive image of the collective in order to make a case for the individual. In such a way, it is possible to see how those faced with the loss of home could carve out spaces for their own feelings, opinions, and experiences within and beyond the myths and grand narratives of the British home front.

It is clear, too, how these variations in response owed much to the actions of the figure on the other side of the citizenship equation: the state. The recurrent compensation problem, for instance, highlights how the limits of citizens' ability to accept and cope with dispossession or destruction were often explicitly and self-consciously linked to the levels of remuneration which they received in return. Once the war was over, the transactional facets of this relationship were further exposed, as those who had borne the strains of loss in the name of the war effort began to ask how these efforts would be addressed now that they had achieved victory. Tracking these shifts can inform our understanding of the vexed transition from war to peace, showcasing how pressures which had been (largely) accepted during the conflict came under the microscope in its aftermath. The debate which raged over the continued use of requisitioning powers, for example, serves to illustrate a core tension that attended the project of postwar reconstruction. On the one hand, there were those who felt that certain wartime shifts – which had seen citizens forgive certain incursions upon their rights, ostensibly to ensure that national objectives could be achieved, and that the resultant burdens could be shared more equitably – should be preserved. On the other hand, however, there was a faction which insisted that some such trade-offs were impossible to justify in the absence of an existential threat. The experience of home-loss was thus at the heart of the discourse about what a postwar society should look like – and about how far wartime experiences should shape this world.

Such findings serve to demonstrate the utility of using a broader temporal frame when thinking and writing about the Second World War. This thesis thus supports and extends the recent arguments of scholars who have underlined the importance of bringing this conflict into dialogue with the First World War, interwar, and postwar periods.<sup>1037</sup> Here, certainly, it has been argued that we need to look beyond 1939 and 1945 if we are to understand urban wartime homelessness and its impacts on British society and politics. Such an approach also helps to identify the wider historiographies in which a study of domestic dislocation might intervene. For example, just as this research has taken up the threads laid down by Grayzel's work on the physical and habitual changes made to the home in order to prepare it for air war, so too does it, in turn, inform cognate studies of the Cold War and beyond. The interplay between domestic space and nuclear shelter policy, for example, can clearly be elucidated by reference to antecedent discourses about the Second World War home. Taken together, these histories can help us to uncover how individuals and societies prepare themselves for the possibility of conflict and violence, and how they navigate the inherent vulnerability of intimate, everyday spaces to modern weapons.

In the context of Second World War Britain, we can find that home-loss, to borrow Lucy Noakes' argument about death and bereavement, mattered deeply.<sup>1038</sup> Whilst the home was not always perceived positively – especially in the midst of a war which worked to reveal its uncanny and uncomfortable aspects – it was a space which was undoubtedly consequential to lose. For many, the experience of loss was evidently attended by no small amount of grief and sadness, severing or disrupting as it did connections to the possessions, people, and places which formed the stuff of everyday life. Practically, financially, and politically, too, the effects of dispossession, damage, and destruction could be profound. It is no wonder that the task of reckoning with these ramifications should have been so drawn out, nor that it should have involved citizens in such a constellation of broader discourses.

Stephen Graham, with whose words this thesis began, described the wartime and war-torn home as a 'living being' – one which could 'prosper or decay', be 'wounded or maimed', or, in the end, 'be killed'.<sup>1039</sup> As this thesis has demonstrated, one does not have to be sentimental about the

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<sup>1037</sup> Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire*, pp. 1-19; Page, *Architectures of Survival*, pp. 4-5; Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 14; Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home', p. 362; Francis, 'Attending to Ghosts', pp. 357-360.

<sup>1038</sup> Noakes, *Dying for the Nation*, p. 13.

<sup>1039</sup> Graham, *Challenge of the Dead*, p. 90.



home to find ample evidence of its agency and significance in Second World War Britain. In myriad ways – not least at the moment of its loss – it worked to shape understandings of what it meant to be an urban citizen in a nation which was fighting a modern war of ‘total’ proportions. Now, in the hands of the historian, it can serve as a lens through which we might better understand this experience and its legacies.

# Appendix

Figure 1: Requisition order for property in Portchester (Source: HRO, 64M76/DDC375/1, 20 March 1941.)

Reqn. No. B. 17.

URBAN DISTRICT OF FAREHAM.

Form C.S.4.

REQUISITION NOTICE.

TAKE NOTICE that in exercise of the powers delegated to me by the Minister of Health under and by virtue of Regulation 51 of the Defence Regulations, 1939, I have this day taken possession of the premises known as

[REDACTED]  
Portchester.

Signed *N. W. B.*  
.....  
Clerk to the Council.

To .....  
Mrs. White,  
.....  
PORTCHESTER.

As Agents for and on behalf of the Owner of the above-mentioned premises.

Westbury Manor,  
FAREHAM, Hants.

Date .. 20th March, 1941.

Owner now - [REDACTED] Phillips,  
Bath.

**Figure 2:** ‘Statement [showing] the numbers of requisitioned premises and camps in England and Wales’. (Source: TNA, HLG 101/850, May 1952.)

Year	Requisitioned premises – England and Wales						Camps – England and Wales						Net charge to Exchequer (£)
	No. of properties			No. of families			No. of camps			No. of families			
	London	Provinces	Total	London	Provinces	Total	London	Provinces	Total	London	Provinces	Total	
1946 - 47	58,298	36,290	94,588	79,569	42,396	121,965	28	410	438	364	13,960	14,324	10,475,459
1947 - 48	61,151	36,789	97,940	91,319	46,656	137,975	77	913	990	1,001	20,178	21,179	11,756,537
1948 - 49	61,069	35,691	96,760	94,638	47,648	142,286	90	1,114	1,204	1,170	25,776	26,946	9,871,841
1949 - 50	60,437	33,045	93,482	95,127	46,233	141,360	97	1,188	1,285	1,261	28,977	30,238	9,215,312
1950 - 51	58,892	30,920	89,812	99,096	38,508	137,604	100	1,257	1,357	1,309	29,248	30,557	8,310,725
1951 - 52	57,172	28,964	86,136	96,049	35,915	131,964	103	1,282	1,385	1,339	29,830	31,169	6,900,312

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