



The Blitz in WW2

The heavy and frequent bombing attacks of London, other cities and surrounding areas were known as The Blitz. Blitz is a shorten form of the German word 'Blitzkrieg.' (lightning war) Night after night German bombers attacking dropping some 5300 tonnes of bombs onto London. One third of London was destroyed.

In Redbridge, The Super Cinema, The Clock Tower and Hippodrome were just a few examples of the casualties suffered by the bombings on Redbridge. Our local communities suffered considerable damage and hundreds of residents were killed and wounded during the bombing campaigns, both V1s, known as "doodlebugs" and the deadlier V2s - which were more silent and often not visible were used.

The start of the Blitz

The Blitz began at around 4 pm on September 7, 1940, when German bomber planes first appeared over London. For 57 nights—until November 2—more than 1 million bombs were dropped on the capital city.

For two hours on the first day, 348 German bombers and 617 fighters blasted London. Later, guided by the fires caused by the first attack, a second group of raiders began another assault that lasted until 4:30 the following morning. Four hundred and thirty people were killed and 1,600 were badly injured.



How did Britain prepare for the bombings?

- Everyone was given a gas mask. It was thought that the bombs might contain poisonous gas and the gas mask would protect the wearer from the deadly fumes.
- Lots of city hospitals were cleared so that they were ready to treat people who had been injured in the air raids.
- Thousands of cardboard coffins were produced.
- Public air raid shelters were constructed and people built their own shelters in their gardens.
- Some men and women were made wardens and given the job of letting people into the shelters when the bombing started.
- Bags were filled with sand and piled up to protect buildings.
- The Blackout was imposed on the British people.



How else did we protect ourselves?

Anti-aircraft guns were used to defend London and large searchlights were used to help the gunners to see the planes in the night sky. **Barrage balloons** were floated above the cities to force the bombers to drop their bombs from a higher altitude, making them less accurate. The people of London started to use the **London Underground** as a giant air raid shelter. At first the government tried to stop this happening, but people forced their way in and, in the end, it became a way of life during the Blitz. About 60,000 slept in the underground tunnels, which soon became cramped and smelly. Volunteers sometimes handed out hot drinks to boost morale. Sometimes even the tunnels of the Underground weren't safe from the German bombs. At least one station was hit directly, killing many of the Londoners who were sheltered inside.

Air Raid Sirens

People were warned of a likely air raid by loud sirens, positioned in different parts of towns and cities. During the blitz, they became an almost daily part of life. The sirens made a very loud and long signal or warning sound. For an alert, the siren sound pitch rose and fell alternately. The All Clear was a continuous sound from the siren. Not every alert brought a raid, and sometimes raids happened when no alert had sounded. When people heard the siren they would stop what they were doing and make for a shelter.

Below is an extract from the instructions given in 1939:

When you hear the warning take cover at once. Remember that most of the injuries in an air raid are caused not by direct hits by bombs but by flying fragments of debris or by bits of shells. Stay under cover until you hear the sirens sounding continuously for two minutes on the same note which is the signal "Raiders Passed".
Air Raid Warnings 1939



What was life like during the Blitz?

Life was very hard during the Blitz and frightening too. London, in particular was very bad as it was bombed nearly every night. People in London spent most nights sleeping in Air Raid Shelters.

No one within any distance of a likely target such as a big city could sleep entirely easy in their beds. Sometimes German bombers made mistakes and dropped their bombs in entirely the wrong areas. At other times, returning from a raid, they would dump the remainder of their explosives at random in order to fly home in greater safety. Many bombs fell on the areas around the cities and in the Kent countryside, known as 'bomb alley' because it lay on the flight path to London.

It was difficult to move around at night time due to the **Blackout** and the problems it causes.

Families were separated with children being in **evacuated**.

Food and clothing were **rationed** and hard to get hold of because of shops being bombed.

