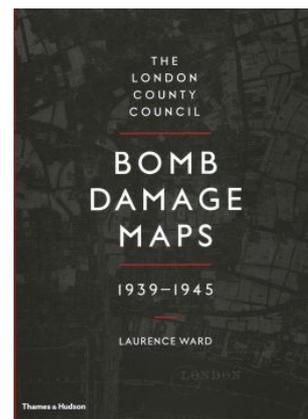


Laurence Ward:
*The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps
1939-1945*

Thames and Hudson (2015) 288pp.

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Maps have always been a ready medium for the imagination, but few have been used to record the truly unimaginable. This collection of 110 maps, published on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war, records the damage inflicted on London's built environment during the Second World War.

Part historical artefact, the formidable job of mapping London's bombed sites began in October 1940 when a staff of surveyors were tasked to compile a survey of damage to buildings and to prepare maps to facilitate future planning. The resulting maps, colour-coded on 1:2500 Ordnance Survey base sheets, go into extraordinary detail, identifying individual buildings and V-weapon impact sites, with a six-colour palette providing a scale of damage. Yellow for minor blast damage, with black on the opposite end of the spectrum for 'total destruction'. By the time the war had ended 110 hand-coloured maps showed a city in places flattened by repeated bombing.

Presented in full in book form for the first time, the effect is kaleidoscopic. In some maps, entire districts are shaded black and purple, their streets either totally destroyed or damaged beyond repair. On map 62, a north-south corridor in the west of the City of London from Finsbury to the Thames is shown raised almost entirely to the ground, and on map 78 large black rectangles mark the sites where warehouses at Rotherhithe docks were turned into rubble.

More than simply a collection of historical artefacts, however, this book is an important social history of life in London during the war, and the teams who documented and mapped the results of five years of aerial bombardment. Compiled by Laurence Ward, a principal archivist at London Metropolitan Archives, incident reports as well as relevant statistics on civilian deaths, the sudden increase in homelessness, debris tonnage and V-weapon impact tallies put into perspective the effort the city's rescue teams faced.

The book is interspersed with historical photographs and an entire chapter is given to a selection of striking images captured by City of London police constables Arthur Cross and Fred Tibbs. The easy stance of many of their human subjects portray an almost nonchalant normality amidst the surrounding devastation. They also provide context to the map classifications. In one dramatic image a building is photographed as it collapses in flame, while in another a man is pulled out of the rubble of a collapsed building by members of a Rescue Service team, their dust matted faces and clothes betraying their fatigue. In a striking image, a hole in its roof sees the interior of St Paul's Cathedral bathed in light, a miraculously light escape when you notice the sea of purple surrounding the cathedral on the map.

Most revealing are the chapters and diary entries of the architects and Rescue Service officers drawn predominantly from the London County Council's (LCC) Architect's Department. In 1939 this unique depart-



Courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives

Figure 1. *Map 62*. The length of purple along the right-hand side shows the near total destruction of the City of London's west side. St Paul's Cathedral can be seen above 'London' on the Thames. © London Metropolitan Archives.

ment of nearly 1,700 men and women were working on hundreds of building and planning projects for new houses, flats, hospitals and schools. flats, hospitals and schools. Their unique skills in relation to dangerous structures and fire precautions, and an additional role putting together drawings, photographs and descriptions of buildings of architectural importance rendered them peculiarly suitable for leading the hazardous job of demolition and rescue work. But it was also the district rescue officers, the 'ruin recorders' as one architect described himself, and the department's office staff who produced much of the information that was recorded on the maps in this book.

The impact of the bombing campaign of London between 1939 and 1945 can still be seen in its urban and social landscapes, but so too can the impacts of the maps themselves, used by the Architect's Department after the war for site clearance and redevelopment, most notably in Patrick Abercrombie and John Henry Forshaw's County of London Plan (1943) and Greater London Plan (1944). They are an invaluable resource for understanding the fabric of London today. It is therefore an omission that there is not more in the book on the individuals who drew the maps. We are told, for example, that the Statutory Branch of the Architect's Department were responsible for adding the information collected by the 'ruin recorders' to the maps and that the branch became significantly depleted by the creation of the Rescue Service, and the transfer of much of its staff. I would have enjoyed reading more on those who remained in the branch, the maps of which are testament to their skill.

The maps are shocking in their origin but stunning in their precision and colour. It is impossible not to admire the attention to detail and determination of those whose job it was to make a record of the desolation that surrounded them. Combined with the information pulled together by Laurence Ward, 'The London County Council Bomb Damage Maps' is an amazing record of the endurance by London and its people.