

# The First Blitz



Early on the first night of the London Blitz, 7 September 1940, a Heinkel He 111 bomber is silhouetted against the Thames snaking beneath it, with street layouts and factories plainly visible. The Isle of Dogs is the U bend at middle right of the picture, and the Canary Wharf complex is now at the top left of the U.

It was an unforgettable sight and so bright it was almost daylight. There were barges drifting down the Thames on fire, and away to our left we could see a huge orange glow in the sky. We didn't know it, but it was the buildings around St Paul's going up in flames. There was also a nauseating sickly sweet smell that I have since been told was burning sugar in the warehouses.



On 8 March 1945, only two months before the end of the war, a V2 rocket struck Smithfield Market, killing over a hundred people, many of them women with children who had gone to buy rabbits, which were off-ration, and injuring many hundreds more. The bomb destroyed the market buildings, which collapsed into the railway tunnels below.

A man stands in the ruins of his house, showing the Morrison shelter that had saved his life and those of his wife and lodger. Trials had shown that the apparently flimsy shelters were surprisingly resilient to blast and debris.

