

WWII Story Sheet:

London and the Blitz.

During the War:

The Blitz, from the term Blitzkrieg ('Lightning War' in German), took place throughout WWII in Britain but London was intensely targeted from 7th September 1940 until 11th May 1941.

For all neighbourhoods across London, life at this time was frightening and difficult. Londoners knew their homes, businesses and community buildings were under threat and that the air raids came both night and day.

The people had to quickly take shelter in tube stations or purpose built shelters when they heard the Air Raid Siren warning of the oncoming strikes.

Adding to the challenge of changes for society during the war was the Black Out, complete darkness in the streets at night, meaning having all the lights off outside and light from windows 'blacked out'. This was so that the city buildings could not be seen. The German planes sent incendiary bombs instead, to light the way with fire so they could drop the explosive bombs to have the most devastating impact.

The central area of London was targeted because of the commercial businesses and warehouses along the river and as it is the financial centre for the country. As a result, St Paul's Cathedral was in great danger. Many people referred to the Blitz time as the second Great Fire of London because of the terrible destruction.

The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, understood that Londoners' bravery, emotional strength and resilience could also be damaged and so he instructed that *'St Paul's Cathedral must be saved at all costs, as the damage will sap the morale of the people'*.

At the time, the dome of St Paul's was the tallest building in London. Churchill believed it stood as a symbol of strength and hope for Londoners and that if it was destroyed, the people's feelings could quickly turn from bravery to despair. A team of volunteers was recruited to protect the Cathedral, they were called St Paul's Watch. Every night they patrolled the building to detect and extinguish the incendiary bombs that fell, hundreds of which were dropped on the City to light the way for the German planes. Although there were 2 direct hits, causing damage, the Cathedral was not destroyed. These brave people are just one example of the selfless service of many at the time.

The community of London faced many other emotional and physical challenges. Most families experienced their men going to fight overseas, children being evacuated away to other parts of the country away from their parents, women taking on challenging work roles in factories and businesses, whilst everyone had to cope with food shortages and rationing of other household needs.

The Aftermath:

These difficulties continued for the 6 years of the war and also for several years after.

Of course, there were traumas and losses that had a permanent effect on Londoners' lives. But together as a community they had supported one another through the hardship and were full of hope that a stronger and better London could be rebuilt from the rubble.

At this time, the population of London expanded to include new residents, invited by the Government from overseas to help with the plan to re-start the economic and social structures that were needed.

In particular, citizens from across the Commonwealth were welcomed to participate in the new construction and transportation plans and to work in education and healthcare professions.

London began a new chapter with people of many different cultures working together.

