

CHAPTER 9

Archives and Online Resources

Introduction

The history of aerial warfare on civilians and urban areas has left us with a vast and diverse range of primary sources. This chapter is essentially a general guide to the most accessible sources further research. Beginning with a summary of the strengths and issues associated with the major types of sources available, it then provides an introduction to the major archival repositories in Britain, Germany, Japan and the United States. Other archives are indicated for cities and towns where significant air raids and civilian casualties occurred.

How to cite this book chapter:

Clapson, M. 2019. *The Blitz Companion*. Pp. 229–224. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/book26.i>. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

Primary Sources

Primary sources are defined by historians as any source generated during the period under study. This includes artefacts such as aeroplanes, bombs and the remnants of air raid shelters or pieces of shrapnel. It covers political documentation such as committee minutes at local and national government levels, or governments reports into morale, surveys of destruction, and of course the various forms of official propaganda. The term 'primary sources' further embraces a wide range of *contemporary* documents including newspapers and magazine articles and reports published at the time, different genres of films and photography made during the historical era under study, radio and sound recordings, maps, and contemporary writings in the form of letters and diaries.

Visual Sources: Documentary Film, Newsreels and Photography

Documentary films on the British Blitz and on other air raids are held at the British Film Institute (BFI). Based in London, the BFI is the major repository of key films and television programmes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Two BFI websites contains links to many free-to-view documentary and propaganda short films about the Blitz and wartime Britain, and also reconstruction. Pay-per-view streaming is available, as is a facility to purchase different genres of film, and also books about the Blitz and air raids during the Second World War.

Four main search categories cover the wartime experience in London and many provincial towns and cities: 'Blitz'; 'Life under Fire'; 'Air raids' and 'Fire damage'. Film content includes instruction about putting on gas masks, ARP, evacuation, anti-aircraft

measures, air raids, secret royal visits to bomb damaged cities, auxiliary and fire services, and reconstruction. Some are silent, some are spoken. Fiction feature films and documentary are prominent: the BFI adjunct website *screenonline.org* contains a wealth of information about the content, actors, producers and directors of wartime films.

Moreover, the BFI also hosts the instruction film *Protect and Survive* (1976) issued to the British public to inform them about protective behaviour in the event of a nuclear attack. Anyone watching will be reminded that the chilling information on the bomb and its effects came from the events in Japan in August 1945. Classic Vietnam War films are among other relevant genres introduced online.

Anyone interested in film and air raids, and in representations of the Blitz, the Home Front, reconstruction and war from the air during the twentieth century, should begin with the BFI Websites: www.bfi.org.uk/education-research and www.screenonline.org.uk

American documentaries are held at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and on a number of online websites, discussed later in this chapter. The context of censorship during wartime needs to be accounted for when understanding the use of films as primary sources. All films were edited, and contain biases. Nonetheless, bias can be very useful for understanding the values of the filmmakers, and of the context in which they were operating. Newsreels were also edited for domestic consumption and often to boost morale as well as inform the public. Two richly varied online archives are www.movietone.com and www.britishpathe.com.

Contemporary photographs can be found in a wide variety of publications, from newspapers and magazines, many of which were censored, many of which were not, to official histories that

utilised photography to record the consequences of air raids. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) was initiated on 3 November 1944 'to establish a basis for evaluating the importance and potential of air power as an instrument of military strategy and for planning the future development of the armed forces.'⁵²⁴ It was wound up in 1947, leaving an incomparable resource for historians of the Allied bombings in Europe and Japan. The USSBS records at the National Archives, College Park, Maryland, hold over 18,000 photographs taken during its operations, providing a visual dimension to the detailed textual descriptions and analyses of the impact of bombing on people, buildings, infrastructure and landscapes. Many of these images along with sections of the survey are available online. Harrowing images of the dead huddled in ineffectual air raid shelters; pictures of survivors picking their way through the rubble; and compelling photographs of huge urban landscapes reduced to smoking ruins by carpet bombing or the atom bomb provide visual evidence of American air power, and by extension of the heart-rending consequences of all air raids. The J. Paul Getty Museum holds many photographs of twentieth-century conflicts, and the Getty Images website also provides a number of Blitz and air raid photographs from the twentieth century: www.gettyimagesgallery.com.

The Japanese public broadcasting channel NHK also hosts an online archive with photographs about the bombing of Japan: www.nhk.or.jp/peace/english/chrono/chrono_08.html.

National Archives and Libraries

Thanks to the internet we now have almost instantaneous access to nothing less than an online global archive covering the history of air wars. Myriad examples of all of the primary source formats

given above can be found on the internet, but not everything is posted online. Many other sets of materials are still un-digitized: they are in hard copy formats, and stored in libraries, museums and archives. All of the key libraries, museums and archives get around this access issue by providing websites which offer samples of the riches contained there, and content summaries of their in-house collections which the interested historian or member of the public can peruse prior to their research visit. Other websites authored by historians also offer contemporary sources alongside secondary interpretations of the history of air raids in particular, and of aerial warfare in general.

Deutsches Historisches Museum (Germany)

The website of the Deutsches Historisches Museum holds eyewitness accounts of Germans who lived through the Second World War, including testimonies of those who experienced bombing raids. Many photographs of damage and destruction are available, along with wartime posters, images of artefacts, biographies of both important and 'ordinary' Germans. The website has a prominent and easy-to-use search engine. Try typing in 'Dresden' or 'weltkreis' and many fascinating results become available. Website: [www.dhm.de/fileadmin/lemo/suche/search/index.php?q=*%&f\[\]=seitentyp:Zeitzeuge&f\[\]=epoche:Zweiter%20Weltkrieg](http://www.dhm.de/fileadmin/lemo/suche/search/index.php?q=*%&f[]=seitentyp:Zeitzeuge&f[]=epoche:Zweiter%20Weltkrieg)

Imperial War Museum (IWM)

The IWM is based on a number of sites in Britain, the largest at Kennington in South London. While not strictly a repository of printed materials, it does house the instruments of total war. Visitors to the IWM in Kennington can see at first hand some of the

fighter and bomber planes that terrorised cities across Europe, the V1 flying bomb and the V2 flying rocket, and many other military artefacts. The IWM also places considerable emphasis on everyday life during the Second World War. Domestic interiors, air raid shelters, and the experiences of war work are represented through contemporary paraphernalia, photographs, newspaper cuttings, artwork, maps and models. Website: www.iwm.org.uk/

The IWM at Duxford in Cambridgeshire hosts many materials on the Battle of Britain that preceded and overlapped with the onset of the Blitz. Fighter and bomber planes are a core element of the conservation project at Duxford, along with photographs and materials relating to planes, pilots and stories of bravery and heroism. The IWM at Duxford also holds a permanent American Air Museum (AAM) exhibition. Both the AAM and its website present key aspects of the American history of flight, the US contribution to the winning of the Second World War, notably the bomb groups and squadrons, and the pilots, that played a vital role in the defeat of Germany and the liberation of Europe from fascism. The website includes interactive maps depicting the American presence in Britain and Europe, including military sites, cemeteries and crash sites. Websites: www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-duxford; www.americanairmuseum.com

Mass Observation Archive, 'The Keep', University of Sussex, Brighton

Mass Observation (MO) was established in 1937 by the social anthropologist Tom Harrisson and the social scientist Charles Madge. The movement attracted many middle-class people who fancied themselves as writers and observers of popular culture

and everyday life in ‘mass society’. Volunteer personal writers kept diaries, while investigators made detailed observations in everyday situation, noted ‘overheards’ and recorded responses from questionnaires. These all went into the ‘file reports’ held at the MO archives, and formed the raw materials for Mass Observation publications.

From the mid-1980s archivists at the MO collection at the University of Sussex set about increasing awareness of the materials there and accessibility to them. A number of booklets for secondary schools were produced on the Blitz in Britain, still available on the MO website: www.massobs.org.uk/images/booklets/Blitz.pdf

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA; United States)

Based in College Park, Maryland, the National Archives II building holds records of the USAAF/USAF and wider sets of materials on the two world wars, and American involvement in other conflicts during the twentieth century, notably the Korean and Vietnamese Wars. The NARA website has a very easy-to-use search engine. Record Group 243 (RG243) holds the extensive collection of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey from 1944–6 so is an invaluable resource for the Allied bombings of Europe and Japan: www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/243.html. A sense of the depth and range of materials on the Korean War can be found here: www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/military/korean-war.html while a search for ‘Vietnam War bombings’ produced not only materials held at NARA but also at the presidential libraries: <https://search.archives.gov/search?query=vietnam+war+bombings&submit=&utf8=&affilia>

te=national-archives. Further records on American involvement in Vietnam can be found at www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war. Additionally, USAAF/USAF records are listed here: www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force. Some materials are digitised hence available online. Students can spend many hours pursuing the NARA website, just to gain a sense of the richness of the materials held there. Website: www.archives.gov/research

The National Archives, Kew, London (TNA)

Wartime records form a significant part of the twentieth century materials held at the British National Archives. These can be searched using key terms in the catalogue 'Discovery', while other web pages for TNA provide information and links to many of the important aspects of the air raids and the Home Front, including teacher's notes. Online webpages provide useful introductions to the zeppelin and Gotha raids, for example. The materials on the Second World War however are naturally more extensive, and include bomb census maps, air raid damage files, records of the civilian war dead including names of individual casualties, sources for the National Fire Service and ARP, and records from the key government ministries. The files on the Ministry of Home Security and Ministry of Information are invaluable sources for the historical study of morale and of the official importance of monitoring it. TNA holds home intelligence reports for wartime Britain but also for Germany from 1945, as it was defeated and became occupied. Propaganda, illustrations and artistes collectively labelled as 'the Art of War' form part of the Ministry of Information deposits, while the Ministry of Supply records detail the practical problems and solutions facing the government from aircraft production to the delivery of essential goods for wartime

production. The website also contains links to local and regional collections held elsewhere in the UK, and to websites dealing with air raids in specific towns and cities. Some government records of British RAF and army operations since 1945, notably the Korean War and the air attacks in the Falklands War, are also held at Kew.

The National Archives also hold materials on post-war reconstruction in the Housing and Local Government (HLG) record group, incorporating many records from the Home Front. Other record groups contain materials on health, military operations, etc. Website: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

National Diet Library, Japan

The National Library of Japan, based in Tokyo, contains repatriated materials, and also records of the American ‘occupation’ of Japan from 1945–52, which will be valuable to historians of reconstruction. Leading newspapers such as the *Asahi Shinbun* are also held there. Some of these materials are digitised and available online. Website: www.ndl.go.jp/en

Royal Air Force Museums in London and Cosford, Shropshire

The RAF museums hold over 100 aircraft from the previous century, and hundreds of thousands of objects drawn from over a century of aerial warfare. The RAF museum website offers some fascinating exhibitions on the First and Second World Wars in the skies above Britain. Naturally, the ‘finest hour’ of the RAF, namely the Battle of Britain, features prominently on the website, which prefaces web pages on the Blitz and air defences. It is good to see the brave and often neglected contribution of the Polish

Air Force to the defeat of the Luftwaffe. Women in the history of the RAF and the contribution of the USA to the aerial defence of the United Kingdom are also featured. Website: www.rafmuseum.org.uk

The Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington DC

The Smithsonian is the oldest research and museum complex in the world, and the National Air and Space Museum is one of nineteen museums and galleries in the Washington DC Metro area. The website is very user-friendly, and the collections, exhibitions and artefacts it links to mostly covers the history of flight and technological progress that enabled the exploration of space. Yet using the search engine to type in relevant key words can yield some fascinating results on air campaigns from the point of view of the USAF and its personnel. These include the Second World War, and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. Website: www.si.edu/Museums/air-and-space-museum and <https://airandspace.si.edu>

Local Archives in the United Kingdom

Beyond the national libraries and archives, a great many town and city libraries and archives host valuable sources for historians of the Blitz. In London for example, the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) based in Finsbury holds London County Council (LCC) records and borough council records of the air raids, and of wartime planning and post-war reconstruction schemes. These are in the form of committee minutes, for example, the Housing and Town Planning committee and the Architect's Department

of the LCC, in addition to the borough council committee minutes held at the LMA. The archive also holds bomb damage maps for London, photographs and art works depicting bomb damage, and plans for reconstruction schemes at borough level. Website: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/london-metropolitan-archives/Pages/search.aspx

The City of London suffered heavy damage during the Blitz of 1940–1, although it mostly escaped the V1 and V2 attacks towards the end of the war. Many records of the Blitz are held there. During the conflict a large-scale plan for the reconstruction of the City was drawn up by Charles Holden and William Holford, and published in 1947. The City was not part of the LCC administrative area, however, being governed by the Corporation of London. Photographs, Corporation records of bomb damage and destruction and primary materials relating the reconstruction plans are held at the Guildhall Library near Liverpool Street Station in Bethnal Green. Website: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/guildhall-library/Pages/default.aspx

The City of Westminster Archives in Victoria, South London, possesses some fascinating sources from the air raids on Westminster between 1940 and 1945. An impressive bomb survey map for almost all the bombing events on Westminster is held there, but is also available along with any photographs and accompanying descriptions, on the www.westendatwar.org.uk website. This provides an excellent online introduction to the materials available at the City of Westminster Archives, which in addition to many photographs and artworks includes contemporary artefacts from the Battle for London, for example ARP materials, including a helmet and gas masks, along with incendiary devices and collections of wartime photographs and correspondence.

Across Britain, almost all cities and large towns with a local history library hold some information on the air raids of the Second World War. Many records also held in County Records Offices. There are too many to list here but the examples of two provincial cities will suffice. For Manchester in north-west England the following link provides a clear introduction to local materials held at the Manchester Central Library and the University of Manchester: <https://manchesterarchiveplus.wordpress.com/2012/12/14/manchester-blitz/>. Manchester Central Library holds photographs, correspondence and oral history collections on the Manchester Blitz. Websites: www.manchester.gov.uk and www.gmlives.org.uk.

In Belfast the **Public Record Office of Northern Ireland** (PRONI) is a great example of the richness of archives beyond London. Its extensive collection on one of the last air raids during the Blitz of 1940–1 includes many files of the Ministry of Public Security on air raids the bombing of the shipyards, the waterside complexes and nearby housing areas; the Public Security War Room War Diary which contains warning messages about bombings; a Ministry of Home Affairs files on publicity surrounding the war effort, and on Civil Defence; records on Civil Defence organisations and ARP; the WVS; a record of the damage to Harland and Wolff and Short and Harland ship-builders; Ministry of Public Service intelligence summaries of air raids on Belfast; casualty lists, and collections of contemporary photographs and diaries of the Belfast Blitz. PRONI also contains records of the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, one of the government-funded agencies established in 1945 to address the housing shortage in Belfast and other towns and cities in the Six Counties. The Housing Trust was a major provider of social housing during Reconstruction. Website: www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni

Taking Care with Online Searches and Their Results

Countless websites about air raids and their consequences can be found online. They vary hugely in the quality of their presentation and user-friendliness. Some are academically quite rigorous and cite information given, others less so. Many such as www.westen-datwar.org.uk/ and www.bombsight.org are fully researched and presented by professional archivists or historians. A plethora of websites offered by amateur enthusiasts is also available, and can be useful for images, sounds and film clips. A good example is www.flyingbombsandrockets.com/ on the V1 and V2 attacks on London from 1944–5. All such websites should have their details checked if used in essays or research-based work.

Many websites aimed at school students and university undergraduates contain pages on the Blitz and other air raids of the twentieth century. A good example is www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ set up by a highly-respected history teacher, whose untimely death led to his family maintaining the site online. Based on the History Channel, www.history.com has both American and British websites, with some fascinating and useful articles on both countries at war. The www.bbc.co.uk learning websites can be searched for useful information on the Blitz and other air raids. Intended for school students, they are also useful as a way-in for the general reader, but not really academically extensive enough to amount to more than a few references in a thoroughly-researched essay.

There is also the question of bias: many websites are simply online portals for highly tendentious or politically warped interpretations of air raids during the twentieth century and since. Using websites during the course of research should be undertaken with as much, possibly more, critical awareness than when consulting primary sources of historical information. What

follows is not an exhaustive coverage, but a focus on a couple of websites to serve as a kind of health warning to users.

Take the strident anti-Allied bombing campaign website www.revisionist.net, established under another name by the now deceased Linda Schaitberger, a right-wing German-American Republican. Prior to her death the site was taken over, revised and is now maintained online by her enthusiastic successor Simon Sheppard who has been convicted of several race-related offences. The historical perspective of revisionist is straightforward: Germany was the traumatised and historically persecuted victim of the First World War, hence the Second World War was caused by the mistreatment of the Fatherland, when the Germans were bombed into submission by the American, British and Soviet forces. Subsequently a successful post-war *kulturkampf* reduced German history and identity to a deracinated condition of shame and guilt for the two world wars of the last century. 'It does not disturb the modern German', states the introduction to the website:

that his homeland was bombed into rubble. [It] makes them uncomfortable to realize that their families, as civilians, were intentionally burned alive in violent, unnecessary residential fire bombings, or fiendishly drowned by the thousands when dams were calculatedly destroyed, or purposely shot at when they were running for their lives.⁵²⁵

While [revisionist.net](http://www.revisionist.net) does contain some comparative Allied and German bombing statistics, the glaring absence of the airborne atrocities committed by the Luftwaffe, combined with a wilful silence on German war crimes and the Holocaust, reveals the specious and unreliable content of the website.

Many similarly dubious websites were created in the aftermath of 9/11. For example, www.911truth.org is a forum for the so-called 'truthers' who claim that terrorism was not to blame for the airborne destruction of the Twin Towers and the death of 3,000 people on that terrible day. Many Americans believe that 9/11 was brought upon the USA by itself, either as an inside job by a maniacal President Bush and his cadre of crazies, or as divine retribution for secular degeneration. While it appears to have scholarly credentials, and links to articles in respected publications, the site mostly draws its strength from the view that President Bush and Vice President Cheney were culpable in a terrible conspiracy to demonise Islam and provide justification for a violent phase of American intervention in the Middle East. Conspiracy theories permeate much of the content, including the view that Osama Bin Laden was dead long before the US Navy Seals took him out in 2013. An anti-Israeli perspective fuels many articles while veiled hints about Jewish involvement in 9/11 are not far from the surface in some pieces. This Jewish conspiracy trope reeks of the long-standing historical fabrication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Many Islamist websites, in common with Nazi-inspired sites, sadly perpetuate both the lie that Israel and the American Jewish lobby have blood on their hands within the wider context of a global Jewish conspiracy. Even adversaries such as A. C. Grayling and Christopher Hitchens agree that 9/11 was indubitably a terror attack on civilians with similar intentions to the area bombing of cities during the twentieth century. Yet those air campaigns were conducted by states that had declared war on each other, while the attack on the Twin Towers was by a religious fundamentalist organisation seeking a global caliphate.⁵²⁶

As for secondary sources ...

Finally, a useful way to grasp the extent and the fascinating historiography of air raids is to go to www.history.ac.uk, the website of the Institute of Historical Research (UK), and enter your search terms, from 'Blitz' to 'Korean War' to 'Vietnam' to take but three examples. You will then be presented with pages of reviews of books which highlight key themes in the historiography of your chosen subject within the broader history of air raids. While relying on reviews is no substitute for reading the books themselves, looking at reviews also gives you a fascinating and wide-ranging insight into how historians see their work, and those of others.