

THE BLITZ

Beating the Bombs

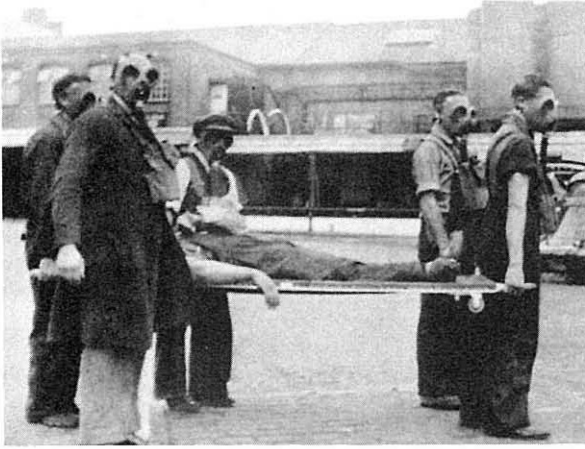
The most obvious threat to the brewing industry during the war came from the skies, from the enemy bombers. The rain of terror was expected – but the most feared weapon never arrived.

Despite a political policy of appeasing Hitler, Britain had been rearming since 1935 to counter the growing military might of Germany. Increasingly more and more resources were poured into building aircraft to match the aerial strength of the Luftwaffe. The Spanish Civil War had demonstrated the punitive power of the German planes. Bombers were the new weapons of mass destruction, as had been starkly shown at Guernica, a Spanish village attacked by German bombers on a crowded market day.

But it was only with the Czechoslovakia crisis of 1938 that the British public woke up to the imminent danger of war. Memories came flooding back of the first Great War, and the miles of muddy, bloodied trenches. Old soldiers recalled the misty menace of gas drifting over the lines. Now it was feared the Germans would drop deadly gas bombs on Britain, wiping out local populations. People began to panic.



GAS DRILL: A gas decontamination team practise cleaning up the yard at George's Brewery in Bristol (*Courage Archive*).



MASKED MEN:
A first-aid team at
Watney's Stag Brewery
in London learn how to
tend the wounded
during a gas attack
(*Courage Archive*).

The Pennant, the glossy house magazine of Benskin's Brewery of Watford, in its April issue in 1938, in the middle of a gentle, jaunty series of articles about the rebuilding of the **Royal Hotel** at Luton, the brewing of old ale in Barnstaple and a workers' holiday snapshot competition, suddenly struck employees with a three-page feature on poison gas. It made chilling reading.

The real menace is from aircraft. Modern aeroplanes can carry bombs weighing from a few ounces to a few tons. Some of these may be comparatively fragile and break up immediately on striking the ground, thus liberating their poisonous contents, or they may be of stouter construction, requiring an explosive charge to open them. A variety of toxic agents may thus be liberated which act on the human body in various ways. Gases such as phosgene and chloropicrin affect the lungs; tear-gases affect the eyes. Organic arsenic compounds exert their irritant action on the breathing passages, whilst others of the blistering type, such as mustard gas and lewisite, will burn the skin and any other part of the body with which they come in contact.

With comforting reports like this, it was little surprise people were beginning to panic. At the height of the Czechoslovakia crisis in September 1938, more than 38 million gas-masks were distributed to regional centres around Britain. At the time the country had just 44 anti-aircraft guns. No wonder many cheered wildly when Chamberlain returned from Munich, waving his piece of paper signed by Hitler and promising peace in our time. But few believed



CRATE ESCAPE:
Simond's
Brewery at
Reading used old
beer crates to
build their air-
raid shelter. Note
the number of
young boys now
working at the
brewery
(*Courage Archive*).

it would last. Men were called up for military training and the Government introduced a Civil Defence Bill outlining the measures necessary for the defence of the population in the event of war.

Breweries, like other factories, did not wait for the details. They began to busy themselves building air-raid shelters for their workers; some unlikely constructions even being made out of old beer crates. Wardens' sand-bagged posts – some using hop sacks filled with dirt – were set up on the roofs. Fire-fighting and first-aid teams were trained. Anti-gas groups formed. Warning hooters were installed in noisy areas like the clattering bottling halls, where it would be difficult to hear the public sirens.

There was another valuable commodity every brewery had to consider during a raid. Never mind the workers, what about the beer? The *Journal of the Incorporated Brewers Guild*, in an article headlined 'Aerial Attack', warned:

Every brewer should ask himself what would happen if an employee ran to cover before taking certain necessary steps to avoid disaster whilst mashing, setting taps, sparging, copper boiling, wort running to collecting vessels etc.

No time should be lost in working out a scheme whereby nothing can happen whilst everyone is under cover. In some breweries fire posts have been built for fire parties; similar but smaller posts should be built for the key employee who, because of his action in shutting valves and turning off switches, may not have sufficient time to get to the main shelter.

Deeds and company books were just as crucial, many being locked away in safe deposits. John Smith's of Tadcaster in Yorkshire strangely moved their vital papers to London for safe keeping. Important stocks of malt and hops were dispersed around outlying properties.

Some companies planned well ahead. The technical director of Guinness's new Park Royal Brewery in London, Dr John Webb, was sent on a three-week air-raid precautions course early in 1939 to learn about high explosives, gas warfare and fire fighting. At the same time the company built several underground shelters, each capable of housing 50 people with a telephone connection to the brewery exchange. The basement of the central offices was strengthened with steel girders and plates and a control room installed. Look-out posts were established on the roofs and a dormitory provided for the 12 volunteers on duty every night. Dr Webb even had a direct line at his bedside to the Observer Corps, who would ring him up as soon as enemy aircraft crossed the coast. When war came Guinness was well prepared.

Later, when the bombs started to fall, Guinness moved their accounts department to Twyford Abbey, the prized accounting machines being protected by bales of hops. 'The smell was atrocious', recalled one worker, 'and they had a curious soporific effect'.



Conscription ?

" Didn't you hear ' About Turn ' ? "
" No—what about him ? "

OUT OF STEP: Not everyone took the pre-war games seriously.

The local defence volunteers had arms as Ernest Guinness gave them the weapons he carried on his yacht (now safely moored in Seattle) – a tommy gun, a big-game rifle and a shot-gun. After the war, when the Home Guard was disbanded, the police confiscated these weapons.

One macabre move was blocked. A local authority official called at Park Royal to suggest establishing a large-scale mortuary at the brewery to accommodate the many bodies expected from the London air-raids. This was firmly turned down on the grounds that

the brewery was a food factory. However, a fully-equipped 100-bed emergency hospital was established in the basement of Ansell's Brewery in Birmingham, and proved its worth during air-raids in the Midlands, handling hundreds of casualties.

Manchester Corporation suggested to Chester's Brewery early in 1939 that a massive air-raid shelter should be constructed in the Ardwick brewery's cellars, large enough to accommodate 3,000 people. This grandiose scheme was eventually shelved in favour of a more modest and manageable plan. Chester's was not surprised by unusual war-time requests. In the First World War part of the brewery was used for making shell cases.

Other breweries left their preparations late; Watney's Isleworth Brewery only built air-raid tunnels in the allotments alongside the West London plant on the outbreak of war, when concrete rings weighing 2½ tons each were sunk into three 50ft trenches. Each provided seating, lighting, lavatories and running water behind 'gas-proof doors'.

However, Watney's main Stag Brewery in Pimlico, in the heart of the target area of Westminster, geared up early for the death drop from the skies. A trial air-raid was practised in February 1939, using the brewery hooter to send workers scurrying for cover in the cellars. 'Great excitement was caused locally,' recorded the company's *Red Barrel* magazine. In June a new steam whistle was installed to ensure everyone heard the warning. The brewery's fire-fighting and first-aid teams began to practise regularly. Lessons were held in aircraft spotting.

The latter were increasingly important, as in the first jumpy days of war there were many false alarms, disrupting production. Companies like Watney's came to the conclusion that in order to meet demand, they must carry on working during 'alert' periods, and only send their workers to the shelters when their Jerry spotters on the roof positively identified enemy aircraft approaching. Correct identification was vital. The men with the binoculars had to be able to tell a Spitfire from a Stuka at a distance. At night they had to distinguish the engine sound of German raiders. Their colleagues' lives depended on their decision. Some of London's earliest roof spotters were Girl Guides whose keen eyes and ears proved invaluable.

With the introduction of the black-out, windows were painted, screened or boarded up, but this still left the problem of open loading bays, where light would pour out at night or in the early morning



FIRE POWER: A pre-war fire drill (above) at Watney's Stag Brewery looks amateurish compared to the later four-hose team (*Courage Archive*).



gloom. Watney's came up with a bright solution, known as the Palace Street Air Ship. This involved a curtained hood which was lowered onto lorries, allowing them to be loaded after dark without a flicker being revealed outside.

The company had another problem. It still delivered much of its beer by traditional drays. As one of the largest owners of horses in London, Watney's helped the RSPCA organise air-raid precaution procedures for working animals. A leading drayman advised: 'If an air-raid came along, I should make for the nearest side turning, scotch up my wheels, put the bag on the horse and stand by it.' He had no time for drivers who put their own safety first when the bombs fell. 'It is a poor man who can't stand by and hold his horse.'

In the Stag Brewery stables, Watney's put their faith – in goats. There was a belief that these belligerent creatures acted as a calming influence on horses, and that the gentle giants would follow them in time of crisis. The belief was misplaced. Mr C W Benner of the company's solicitors' department recorded that when the bombs dropped: 'The goats, which were thought to pacify alarmed horses, were found scared stiff in a corner, whilst the horses seemed as placid as if nothing was amiss.'

Watney's came to regret locking horns with these voracious animals. One proved almost as destructive as the bombs:

Billy the goat caused some anxiety at times because it was never known what he'd do next; he disappeared for some days, until he was found by a gateman in the wastepaper store having a good feed of old cheques and accounts. Then again he wandered to the engineers' department and removed and ate the time cards. . . .

And everywhere in this new unreal world, strange squads of men in rubber suits and gas-masks began to practise scrubbing down the brewery yard as part of their decontamination drill after a gas attack. Everyone had to carry their own personal box, containing their own gas-mask. 'Don't be caught without it,' warned the authorities. 'Your first time could be your last.' Budgies and canaries became popular pets as it was believed they would provide an early warning of gas in the air.

Guinness at Park Royal initiated gas-mask working periods, when brewery and office staff were required to wear their masks for 15 minutes while carrying on their duties – much to the alarm of unsuspecting visitors from their Dublin brewery. In towns and cities gas detectors were set up in the streets.

IN CASE OF AIR RAID

The ground floor of the Bottling Store is recommended as the safest place.

Take your Gas Masks and bring torches if possible.

BOXING CLEVER: Breweries reminded their staff to always carry their gas-mask boxes (left), but not everyone used them for the correct purpose. Some kept cards there (Courage Archive).



Warning!

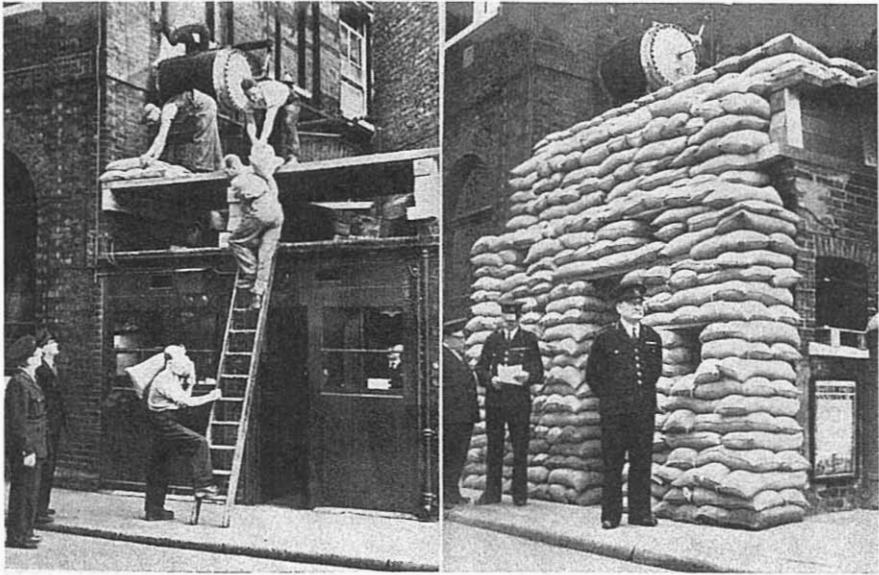
Take cover!
So that's what the little box is for!

All clear!

The Ministry of Food issued a booklet entitled 'Food and its Protection Against Poison Gas.' Gas identification officers, usually qualified chemists, were appointed in every district. Their job in the event of a raid was to visit affected sites, quickly identify the gas and advise what action must be taken.

If beer has been contaminated, for example, in an open fermenting vessel by droplets of mustard gas or any similar blister gas, it would have to be condemned. Again for beer stored in casks, where the outsides have been heavily contaminated by mustard gas, there is a risk of the gas being absorbed by the wood and ultimately reaching the contents.

Yet the seeping terror never came – but all the other precautions proved vital. The gas bombs did not fall but in their place came thousands of high-explosives and fierce incendiaries which caused widespread destruction. Flying bombs and rockets followed later in the war.



BAGGING UP: The gatehouse at Watney's Stag Brewery in Pimlico disappears beneath sand bags at the outbreak of war (*Courage Archive*).

One extreme temperance campaigner, the Rev. J Norton at the Chester and Warrington Methodist Synod, said all the brewery fire and sand-bag precautions were unnecessary. He claimed that German airmen would not bomb breweries and maltings in Britain 'because Hitler knows that if Britons go on drinking at the present rate we shall lose the war.' Some Luftwaffe pilots obviously ignored the Fuehrer's instructions, though it was claimed that the Hull Brewery survived the bombing because its tall chimney provided a useful landmark for German planes approaching the east coast.

Devenish's Weymouth brewery was put out of action for two years following a blitz on the Dorset seaside town, close to the Portland naval base, on 11 August, 1940. 'The brewery has been severely damaged in a vital part, the structure of the brewhouse; the copper room, hop-back and under-back all suffering heavily, whilst the main portion of the front office is completely demolished.' The Devenish directors were informed: 'It will not be possible to rebuild or to brew for some considerable time.'

Many south coast ports, particularly those with naval bases like Plymouth and Portsmouth, were badly hit. In Southampton Cooper's East Street Brewery was severely damaged, but brewer Stephen Clarke devised a special 'pressure fermentation' system to enable

brewing to continue. Later in the war crippled Cooper's was taken over by Watney's. Bristol and South Wales were also heavily attacked.

The more distant North-West did not avoid punishment. Liverpool was plastered. Bent's Brewery was put out of action and many bottling stores in the docks destroyed, including those of Guinness and Wrexham Lager. Mr Price, the head brewer of the Birkenhead Brewery, was killed in the blitz.

Manchester did not escape the dark shadow of the bombers, either. On 22 December, 1940, the peace of the last Sunday before Christmas was shattered by a heavy air raid. A large bomb exploded in Wilburn Street outside Groves & Whitnall's Salford brewery, damaging the cooperage, cask-washing plant and garage. The blast also blew off the roof of the main buildings.

The assault on the city was relentless. The next night a landmine, dropped by parachute, hit the brewery offices. 'Nothing was left of that fine range of buildings . . . except a great crater and a pile of debris strewn across Regent Road,' recalled the chairman, Keith Groves. Two people were killed in the blast, the caretaker and a member of the works' fire brigade. A blaze raged after the main explosion and the debris smouldered for more than a week. Regent Road was impassable for three days.

The destruction of the offices meant that the company lost all its trading books and records. Many of these were eventually recovered from the debris over a period of several weeks. Some, however, were totally destroyed and others badly damaged. It took many months of painstaking work to decipher the remains and build up missing details. Keith Groves explained:



WRECKED:
Groves and
Whitnall's Brewery
in Salford after it was
bombed out of action
in December 1940.

Fortunately the concrete and steel wing of the Globe Works, new in 1939, withstood the shock, thus saving much of the bottling plant and machinery. Incendiary bombs, however, struck this building and the adjoining wine and spirit stores, starting many fires, all of which were put out by the Globe Works Fire Brigade, who stuck to their task until well into the following day and prevented still greater loss.

Luckily, all the brewing plant remained intact and Groves & Whitnall were brewing their 'Red Rose' ales and stout again by 17 January, 1941. Local residents were particularly glad that they lived near the brewery – several hundred sheltered in the cellars during the bombing.

Another Manchester brewery was less fortunate. Boddingtons' Strangeways Brewery was severely damaged by incendiary bombs in the same Christmas blitz in 1940, and put out of action for a long period. The steel city of Sheffield suffered even worse, with a double blow. Rawson's Pond Street Brewery and Tomlinson's Anchor Brewery were both flattened in air raids in 1940. In Sunderland, Robsons was bombed out of brewing the following year.

Sometimes the brewers themselves were to blame for the explosions. Many had neglected their plant during the depressed years of the 1930s and the strain of the war proved too much for some ancient equipment. In 1937 Bill Kitchen, head brewer of the Tower Brewery at Tadcaster in Yorkshire, had warned his directors that all three boiling coppers were obsolete and dangerous. In May 1944, his worst fears were realised. The No.3 copper blew up without any assistance from enemy aircraft.

Yet, despite the widespread destruction, morale-raising beer supplies were maintained, as breweries rolled out the barrels to support their stricken fellows. In Weymouth, near neighbours John Groves & Sons and Dorset brewers Eldridge Pope supplied Devenish's pubs while its brewery was out of action. Eldridge Pope was repaying an old debt. Devenish had helped them out almost two decades before when their Dorchester brewery was destroyed by fire in 1922. Later the Devenish directors presented the John Groves board with a silver salver 'in appreciation of services kindly rendered during 1940-1942.'

Elsewhere emergency arrangements were put into action. Across the country, brewers agreed to aid each other in a crisis, supplying each other's pubs if their plant was put out of action. Old rivalries were put aside and everyone worked for the common good to

overcome tremendous difficulties. Often it was not just the question of brewing enough beer which proved a problem, but other issues like transport or cask washing which were the weakest links in the chain.

Mr F A Simonds, chairman of Simonds of Reading, praised the new mood of help-your-neighbour at the company's annual shareholders' meeting at the end of 1941. He recounted that in the spring his southern brewing group was badly affected when their Devonport brewery in Plymouth was partially destroyed in an air-raid.

We were unable to meet the full requirements of our customers, but fortunately a number of brewery firms – no fewer than 14 in all – came to our aid and are still helping us. They quite voluntarily supplied us with a weekly barrelage or placed their brewery at our disposal for one or two brews a week, and thus did much to relieve our embarrassment.

Sometimes the arrangements became permanent. In Sheffield Henry Tomlinson's wrecked Anchor Brewery in Bramall Lane was supplied with beer by local neighbours Carter, Milner & Bird of the Hope Brewery. In 1942 they merged to form Hope & Anchor Breweries Ltd. This war-time creation became a potent force after the conflict when it marketed its popular Jubilee Stout across the country.

In Manchester the story was the same, with a total of 22 local rivals rallying round to supply Boddingtons' houses for many months. Groves & Whitnall also benefited from this new spirit of co-operation, as Keith Groves recalled:

A few days after the 'Blitz' a meeting was held of all Manchester, Salford and neighbouring brewers, who arranged that help should be given to firms which had suffered. Nine other breweries supplied us until we were again in full production. In later bombings other local breweries were damaged and we, in our turn, supplied them with part of their requirements.

The morale of all the staff and employees, throughout this difficult period, was beyond praise. During the following days many of them, in intervals of searching the still smouldering ruins, took turns in relieving the fire service on the hoses.

For several months in bitter weather, the men and girls of the bottling works carried on their task of producing the firm's bottled goods under the most severe conditions. About one-

third of them worked totally in the open air, with their only comfort the doubtful warmth of coke braziers; the remainder in roofless and windowless buildings.

When Bent's Brewery in Liverpool was severely damaged in an air raid in 1941, the company was fortunate in having taken over Gartside's Brewery of Ashton-under-Lyne just before the war broke out. All brewing was transferred there. Morgan's Brewery in Norwich was also destroyed by enemy action in June 1942, but the company was able to continue brewing as it owned Eyre's Brewery at King's Lynn.

The distinctive flavour of Morgan's East Anglian ales was not lost, as the day before the bombers burnt down the company's Old Brewery in King Street, Norwich, a small Suffolk brewery had called to pick up a supply of yeast. The brewery was Adnams of Southwold – which continues to use Morgan's yeast in their famous beers to this day.

Some previously unwanted plants were rushed back into production. When the Cornbrook Brewery in Manchester received a direct hit and was put out of action for two years late in 1940 – much to the annoyance of the company which had just completed a new bottling hall a year before – the firm early in 1941 leased the Royal Oak Brewery in Stockport from Walker & Homfrays of Salford. Later in 1943 this same site was let to London brewers Whitbread.

This tale of fighting against the odds was nowhere repeated to more dramatic effect than in London. The capital city was menaced by wave after wave of bombers, being hit for 76 nights in a row from 7 September, 1940, and then bombed more sporadically for a further six months.

On 1 October, 1940, a 1,000lb bomb hit Barclay's historic brewery in Southwark, exploding right in the heart of the brewhouse and wrecking three out of the five coppers and mash tuns. Altogether eight high-explosive bombs and on 32 occasions incendiaries fell on the buildings, the brewery fire brigade having to put out 18 fires.

The neighbouring Courage brewery, next to Tower Bridge, had its roof blown off and river wall shattered. 'But the Victorian builders had done their job well and the old structure held the waters of the Thames,' declared the company's historian, John Pudney, in *A Draught of Contentment*. Only two days production were lost and the company expanded its brewing capacity later in the war by buying Hodgson's Kingston Brewery in 1943.

Over the river at Whitbread's Chiswell Street premises, the hectic,