

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON A.R.P. AND CIVIL DEFENCE

1935—1945

IN June, 1935, H.M. Government called the attention of Local Authorities to the necessity of taking all steps necessary with reference to Air Raid Precautions and a special department of the Home Office was set up for the purpose of giving instruction and advice. At a Meeting of the Court of Common Council in July, 1935, attention was drawn to this matter by the late Deputy Wardlaw-Wardlaw, and he moved that a Ward Committee be set up for this purpose. The Committee was duly formed and met for the first time on July 29th of that year. Alderman Sir Percy Greenaway took the Chair. The Town Clerk had previously delegated this Committee to the care of the Public Health Department of the Corporation, but subsequent events proved this was a mistake, and in view of its future importance the Committee should have been delegated to the Town Clerk's Office.

The Agenda of the first Meeting principally consisted of electing a Chairman, because no one knew what the Committee was to do or deal with at that time. Members and Officers were very much in the dark. There were several candidates for the Chair—four in all—and it is interesting to note that an Alderman was nominated, Sir Frank Bowater, the others being Messrs. Gunton, Wardlaw-Wardlaw and Brundle. The result of the first ballot showed that the Alderman received 3 votes, Gunton 4, Wardlaw-Wardlaw 8 and Brundle 9. On the second ballot Wardlaw-Wardlaw received 13 and Brundle 11; Wardlaw-Wardlaw duly occupied the Chair and Brundle was appointed his deputy.

The Committee then started to function, or failed to function because nothing was done, instructions from the Government were vague, apathy, indifference and even ridicule prevailed. In January, 1937, the Chairman was replaced by the Deputy Chairman, who has been re-elected Chairman each year from that time down to the present. On being elected Chairman, Brundle nominated Humphrey Morris as his Deputy Chairman. Wardlaw-Wardlaw was a man of brilliant ideas and there is undoubtedly due to him alone credit for the establishment of the original A.R.P. Committee, but he was never able to put his ideas effectively into practice. When the writer of these notes took office he determined that the first requirement to put A.R.P. on a proper footing was to try to arouse the help, assistance and enthusiasm of the citizens. He paid visits to nearly every Ward or Ward Club to explain the position and ask for their help and support, which was freely promised and given. Apart from the apathy of the ordinary man in the street, this apathy at first prevailed amongst some of the

officers of the Corporation. A.R.P. was something new to them and they did not take kindly to it, but, luckily, in the year 1937 there were two important changes. Dr. White became M.O.H. and Mr. Forty the new Engineer, and both these officers directed great energy into building up the organization of Civil Defence. It must be remembered that the M.O.H. and the Engineer have been the two key men in all schemes, the Engineer being in charge of Heavy Rescue, the M.O.H. being responsible for Light Rescue and the care of the injured. With the active support of these two officers progress was soon noted: the paper schemes started to become real and decontamination squads, recruited from our own Cleansing Department, were trained, demonstrations were given, first aid classes were held and certificates awarded. In addition, First Aid Posts and deep shelters were sited and negotiations entered into for their use, but during this time we were always asking the Home Office to agree to the steps we were taking, or wanted to take, often without result, and very often even without a reply.

With regard to training in First Aid, the Government at first insisted that this must be done by the St. John Ambulance Brigade and The British Red Cross Society. This was not a success, and after some delay we obtained authority to employ our own Instructors, and many hundreds of citizens were duly trained in all branches of Civil Defence. Most of our difficulties were eventually overcome, but not without a great deal of toil and trouble. Things went ahead, and we could now see some result of the work that had been done. Even at the Munich Crisis the Corporation of London's A.R.P. were in a position to function—not particularly adequately, but we could at least have dealt with casualties and given some shelter protection. We were then particularly short of first aid dressings and equipment: the Authorities were warned and the only consolation we received was authority to buy what we could in City shops. The M.O.H., however, was able to purchase about £400 worth of medical supplies from a firm of wholesale Chemists which were very useful later.

The crisis passed, but it was the turning point in Civil Defence; everybody by this time realised that war was coming, offers of help rolled in, the big Firms and Banks and Institutions in the City offered their help and co-operation to the Corporation.

In April, 1939, the Government requested all Authorities to nominate an A.R.P. Controller and to form an emergency Committee, preferably of not more than three members, to deal with all matters concerning A.R.P. should an emergency arise. The Corporation appointed the Town Clerk as A.R.P. Controller and the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the A.R.P. Committee, as it then was, as the Emergency Committee, with power to nominate a third member when the emergency arose. It was not long before the emergency did arise, and L. C. Beecroft was duly nominated as the third member, and it was left to these three members, in conjunction with certain Officers, to carry out the responsibilities of the Corporation for nearly five years of war.

They had full power to act and to spend, something this ancient Corporation has never granted to three individuals before. In the five years of the existence of this Emergency Committee several hundred meetings were held, at first practically every day and later regularly every week. This Emergency Committee made full and detailed reports of its activities to the Court every six months. The preparation of these reports occupied a considerable amount of time. It is not thought necessary to recapitulate in these notes any of the contents of these reports; it is sufficient to say that they were received by the Court with great interest and usually with satisfaction and approval. In March, 1944, the Court, jealous of its rights and privileges, felt that the time had come when the Emergency Committee should be disbanded and the work of Civil Defence taken over by the Ward Committee, and monthly meetings were resumed.

It was nearly twelve months after the outbreak of war before a bomb fell in the City. This respite was a blessing, because an enormous amount of work was put into the shelter question, and by the time the first bomb fell on August 25th, 1940, shelter accommodation had been provided for all persons working in the City. In addition, surface shelters were being increased in number, but these were never popular and were never used in the City as intended. From then onwards the City was repeatedly bombed: 417 high-explosive bombs, 13 parachute mines, 24 oil bombs, many thousands of incendiaries and, later, 14 flying bombs fell on the City, but there were no rockets in the Square Mile, although the one that fell in Smithfield was so near to the boundary that the Regional Commissioners requested the City to take over the incident.

The number of people killed was approximately 230, and 1,750 injured—766 seriously. Nearly half of those killed lost their lives on the night of January 10/11th, 1941, when three bombs fell—one at the Bank Tube Station, one in Bishopsgate and one at the top of Cheapside. Probably the most destructive raid was that on December 29/30th, 1940, when Guildhall and most of the Fore Street and Cripplegate area were destroyed. This was entirely a fire raid and no high-explosive bombs were dropped. The failure of the water supply was very evident on this night, but the provision of fire fighting was outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation. It was in this raid that the Control Room underneath the Engineer's Offices at Guildhall was completely destroyed, but a reserve Control Room had been previously fitted up in the Basement of Lloyds Building, and this came into operation at once and continued to function until the new permanent Control Room was established at 55/61, Moorgate; and those who have inspected this new Control Room will realise that it contained many improvements on the original one at Guildhall. There was only one occasion when bombs fell in the City in daylight, and that was on January 30th, 1941, when a few incendiaries fell in Finsbury Circus. The raid on May 10/11th, 1941, was very destructive; large areas in Cannon

Street and elsewhere and many of the old City Halls were obliterated.

In spite of the damage done to the City it yielded a good return in the way of salvage—the total cost of recovery amounted to no less than £1,580,000, but this was more than set off by the value of material recovered. No less than

110,000 Tons of Steel,
18,000 Tons of Timber,
1,180 Tons of Non-ferrous Metals,
7 $\frac{3}{4}$ Million Bricks,
560,000 Tons of Hard Core, were recovered.

The cost of salvage did not fall upon the Corporation and they received no benefit from the values received.

There were many other duties attached to Civil Defence, namely, mortuary accommodation, care of the homeless, storage of bombed furniture, advice and assistance to those who had lost their homes.

After the disastrous fire raid in December, 1940, the Government took active steps to create a Fire Guard organization. Various orders were made; the first was the Business Premises Order, whereby the occupier was made responsible for giving effective watch to his premises. Later this Order was replaced by the City of London Fire Guard Order, which gave the Corporation authority to direct individuals to other premises than those in which they worked. Fire watch duties or, to use a much better description, Fire Guard was never popular in the City or anywhere else. Whilst the ordinary man in the street was prepared to do what he could in the wider sphere of Civil Defence, he was never keen on guarding someone's else's premises, overlooking the fact that by doing this he may have been the means of saving his own. In consequence, there were many appeals for exemption which the Emergency Committee had to deal with, except those on medical grounds. These were dealt with by the Regional Commissioners direct, and this led to a great deal of dissatisfaction. There is no doubt that many people obtained exemption on medical grounds by this system, which did not require a personal attendance but only the forwarding of a medical certificate. The Fire Guard organization became one of the most troublesome duties of the Emergency Committee. The number of people enrolled was approximately 40,000, and a large staff had to be employed to deal with the various duties incurred. The average watch in the City per night was 3,000.

At the peak period of war some 2,000 people (apart from the Fire Guard) were employed on Civil Defence in the City, but as the risk of raids became less and the system of mutual aid became more general, the numbers were gradually reduced, and when the order to stand down came at the end of April, 1945, the number had fallen to approximately 150. The final dispersal took place on July 1st, and with the exception of re-instating Basement Shelters and the removal of surface shelters, all Civil Defence in the City of London came to an end.

In looking back, it can be safely recorded that the Corporation of London carried out every duty placed upon them in connection with Civil Defence in the right, correct and proper manner as it always has done in all its undertakings. No better tribute could be paid than that of the Senior Regional Commissioner, Sir Ernest Gowers, who at a review of Civil Defence in July, 1944, at the Guildhall, said that the Corporation of London had built up a Civil Defence Organization which was second to none and a model of how such things should be.