

New publication shines a light on London life and the city's wartime resilience, captured by artists during the Second World War



Wartime London in Paintings (9 April 2020) is a new publication that takes readers deep into the lives of artists who painted the sites and secrets of wartime London. Drawing on Imperial War Museums' (IWM) rich art collection and archives, it brings lesser-known artists to light alongside household names like Henry Moore, uncovering how a wartime government commissioned the documentation of London during the Second World War.

The 82 paintings featured, reproduced in colour, explore how Britain's capital was transformed during six years of conflict, but also reveal some of the city's curious wartime secrets; from the construction of the 'Mulberry Harbours' in London's docks – instrumental to the successful D-Day landings – to the five-mile section of the Central line that became a secret wartime factory.

Other featured works capture city churches on fire and V1 rockets sweeping past Tower Bridge. They also shed light on the everyday lives of Londoners who, during the Blitz, endured sleepless nights while at the same time working as firemen, nurses and factory workers. Studies by leading artists such as Henry Moore and Edward Ardizzone convey in harrowing detail the plight of Londoners huddled in improvised shelters.

Alongside these central works, which have become part of the cultural inheritance of the Second World War, *Wartime London in Paintings* is unique in shining a light on artists who were not necessarily famous, but who nonetheless made their livelihoods through their work. Female artists in particular are given a prominent place within the publication, with works by Frances Macdonald, Evelyn Dunbar, Anna Zinkeisen and Olga Lehmann highlighted.

At the heart of the book is the correspondence of the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC), an arm of the Ministry of Information chaired by then National Gallery director Sir Kenneth Clark. Its mandate was to compile a documentary record of the war and in so doing it commissioned and acquired over 6,000 works by British artists. The WAAC's secretary, E.M.O'R. Dickey, and his staff were responsible for liaising with these artists, dealing with matters ranging from the allocation of petrol to issues of artistic licence and censorship. This correspondence, part of IWM's collection, is drawn on throughout the book in extended captions to give personal insights to the works of over 40 artists.

Suzanne Bardgett, author of *Wartime London in Paintings* and Head of Research & Academic Partnerships at IWM, says: "In compiling this visual record of the Second World War, I have delved into the stories behind an extraordinary body of works – as varied and captivating as they are informative. The paintings in this book give us a remarkable glimpse of London and its people as they struggled through the city's darkest hour."

Home to the most important and extensive collection of British war art in the world, IWM began commissioning and acquiring art when the museum was first established in 1917. It continues to do so today, telling the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts since the First World War.

Wherever this story appears, it must be accompanied with the following credit line: 'Wartime London in Paintings, published by IWM, will be available to order at www.iwmshop.org.uk from 9 April 2020'

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Notes to editors

Wartime London in Paintings

By Suzanne Bardgett

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Praise for *Wartime London in Paintings*:

'Wartime London in Paintings not only reflects on artistic responses to war, but also illuminates the sensory experiences of millions of Londoners. By visually immersing herself in the art of 1939–1945, Suzanne Bardgett provides an unparalleled account of London life. It is a lavishly illustrated volume, accompanied by insightful historical commentary.' - Joanna Bourke, Professor of History at Birkbeck, University of London, and the editor of *War and Art: A Visual History of Modern Conflict*

'No event so traumatised London as the Blitz. No one observed it so evocatively as its artists. This is a master biography of that era and its people.' - Simon Jenkins, author of *A Short History of London*

'Here are so many valuable recoveries from a great city in crisis. *Wartime London in Paintings* is a portal into a visionary and vanishing past: horrors experienced, endured and celebrated. Crafted images challenge us, as latecomers, to redefine what we think we know about the place where we find ourselves. Actions are frozen. Ruins remember. The dead are alive and busy in their tasks. This book is a notable curation, a sequence of revelations recording acts of modest witness that define a generation.' - Iain Sinclair

'Wartime London in Paintings opens an entirely fresh window on London at war. Never before have we seen the city and its people so vibrantly captured at this moment of London's greatest peril. These extraordinary images, accompanied by Suzanne Bardgett's insightful and informative notes, are indispensable for anyone interested in London's recent past. A brilliant idea, brilliantly executed.' - Jerry White, Professor of Modern London History at Birkbeck, University of London

Images from left-right:

Frank Dobson, *An Escalator in an Underground Factory*, 1944. © IWM (ART LD 4142).

Kenneth Rowntree, *Foreign Service-men in Hyde Park, Early Summer*, 1940. © IWM (ART LD 415).

Leonard Rosoman, *A House Collapsing on Two Firemen, Shoe Lane, EC4*, 1940. © IWM (ART LD 1353).

Henry Carr, *Familiar Silhouettes*, 1942. © IWM (ART LD 1734).

IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches which attract over 2.5 million visitors each year are **IWM London**, IWM's flagship branch that recently transformed with new, permanent and free First World War Galleries alongside new displays across the iconic Atrium to mark the Centenary of the First World War; **IWM North**, housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; **IWM Duxford**, a world renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; **Churchill War Rooms**, housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser **HMS Belfast**.