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By

## TEMPLE BAILEY

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## Old "City of London" Burned But St. Paul's Cathedral Little Hurt

Article No. 29  
By HUGH TEMPLETON

Last week, I undertook to say something about wartime London to those who have never seen the city might know something of its layout. I didn't get very far, describing only the Thames and a number of the buildings and landmarks close by. Most of the famous parts of London are north of the Thames. I was south of the river only a few times, once driving out past Croydon, the famous airfield to which most of the London traffic came before the war. It was, as you may remember, the first part of the city to be bombed, which was not surprising for many of the German bomber pilots had undoubtedly been commercial pilots before the war and they would know the way to Croydon with their eyes shut. Now the airfield probably isn't used and that district does not show the scars from bombing that some other parts of the city do.

On another day, I went by bus to the East End and Tower bridge, going by way of the Elephant and Castle, probably the name of an old pub in days gone by, but now one of the main traffic centres, with bus routes in five directions. Incidentally, the bus conductors are nearly all ladies in uniform. A stranger must depend on them for help in finding his way around for maps are taboo and the windows of the buses are nearly all covered with material so that one can't see much.

One Sunday afternoon, I took a special train from Waterloo station, which is south of the river, to Hampton Court, which is up the Thames, not far beyond the suburbs of the city. The train passed through industrial districts, with small factories and most of the houses fairly small. Much damage had been done in some places and it looked as though the Germans often dumped their bombs just wherever the notion came to them. At Hampton Court, Argo Craig met me and showed me through the fine old castle which was built by Cardinal Wolsey and taken over by Henry VIII. There are famous gardens still beautiful though obviously not so well kept as in peace time. Mr. Craig, elder son of Mrs. J. J. Craig, of Ferguson, an engineer who stayed in England after the war and works with explosives and weapons of various kinds. His home is at Hampton Court.

**North of the Thames**  
The Canadian editors stayed at the Savoy hotel which is considered the height of luxury. No doubt it is but I am not going into details about the Savoy at present. But it might be added that the very fact that we all had suites in that famous hotel is another proof, if any was needed, that the British Council was treating us as honored guests. The hotel and the Savoy theatre are all in the same block and the hotel is said to have been built out of the profits of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, as played by the Savoyards.

The Savoy faced on an alley off the Strand, one of London's most ancient and notable streets. The back of the hotel, where most of the dining rooms were, looked out over the gardens and the embankment to the Thames. A couple of blocks away to the west were Charing Cross station and Trafalgar Sq., to the east were Waterloo bridge and the old "City of London."

Canadians are often confused by references to the City of London and London. The former appears to have been where the ancient walled city stood and it is in this district that one meets the old streets mentioned in Pepys' Diary and books of that time. It remains, I believe, a separate borough of modern London, and it has certain traditions. For instance, in the centre of the borough is a monument marking the old Temple Bar, a point beyond which the King cannot go without permission from the Lord Mayor. No doubt referring to some hard won ancient right. And only one march through the old City with the bayonets. Our keeps running into such traditions in London.

**The Old City of London**  
It is this district which suffered the most grievously from the bombing. Whole blocks are gone. These were mainly wholesale houses, clerical establishments, business offices. The whole area was cleaned out. It was the most impressive object lesson in bombing that I saw anywhere except at Coventry. And now there is some consolation in knowing that certain German cities probably look as bad.

It was partly the fault of owners of property in this district that it was destroyed. This great "fire blitz" took place on December 29th, 1940, being the holiday week-end between Christmas and New Year's when businesses was more or less suspended and no one was around to do "fire watching" duties or to put out incendiary bombs. It was a sustained attack, first of all with thousands of small incendiary bombs. These burned the whole area in spite of the concentration of firemen and apparatus. It is believed by some people that it was not only an attempt to burn much of the centre of London, but also to wipe out the fire brigades. When the firemen had concentrated in the burning area, the bombers came back again and began dropping high explosives, which were meant to kill since the fire had already finished the buildings. But Providence came to the aid of Britain once again. A heavy mist sprang up over the airfields back in Germany and the big bombers were ordered home for fear they would not be able to land if they delayed their return.

Now London won't be caught like

that again, nor will any other city in Britain. Fire watchers are on the job continually, and extra supplies of water are stored up in concrete foundations of ruined buildings, or in big tanks on the streets.

St. Paul's Cathedral escaped, although buildings are gone around two sides of the big church and damaged on the other two sides. Again, it seems to have been the design of the roof that helped, though no doubt the fire watchers were on the job too. The shape of the great dome shed the incendiaries as they showed down over the City, and they didn't penetrate. I was in St. Paul's and saw only one sign of damage of any extent. A high explosive bomb, apparently fairly small, came through the roof, leaving a hole some three feet in diameter and exploded where the altar used to be. It is being repaired.

I first saw the area behind St. Paul's on the day after I arrived in London. It was a Sunday afternoon, with few people around. The destruction in that area is so thorough as to be beyond belief. The more dangerous walls have been torn down, or were still being demolished. Little things seemed to make more impression than the general destruction. In one pile for instance, were a dozen typewriters, battered beyond recognition. And homey little desk fittings lay amid piles of rubble. I found again and again, that it was these little things that attracted my attention when looking at ruins of houses or other buildings. It might be some child's plaything lying there forlorn, or some article of clothing still hanging on a peg on a wall, although everything else in the room had disappeared.

On the north edge of this big area of ruined buildings there was a plot of green grass, the lawn of an institution. On it a number of men in white trousers were practicing for a cricket match. I was new then to English ways and I did not understand how they had the heart to play a game in such dismal surroundings.

**The Newspaper District**  
The Strand, which ran in front of the hotel, had a church in the centre of the street at its east end, and beyond that, it became Fleet street. The church was one of the beautiful structures designed by St. Christopher Wren after the great fire of London in 1666. It went by the odd name of St. Clement Dane, and its span of life was from one great fire to another, for it is completely ruined now except the spire.

Fleet street is the newspaper area of London—since how they managed to group everything into "areas" in this great city. Along that street, and around corners in the street nearby are, or were, the great newspapers and even such lesser but well-known ones as that boyhood favorite, The Boys Own Paper. Most of them still carry on, but passing Bouverie street, we turned down to see the B.O.P. office. Nothing remains but the bare walls.

I have told in a previous story of the way I spent an evening at the Daily Express office, part of it up on the roof with the fire watchers, while a German plane approached from the East, the only one to get near London during my stay. There's a system of alarms which show only in the A.R.P. offices and the newspaper buildings. As an enemy approaches the coast, a yellow light goes on. When it is definitely headed towards London, a purple light glows. Of these alerts, the public knows nothing. But when the plane reaches the outer defenses of London, a red light shows. It is then that the alarm is sounded in the streets. That night the purple light was on and from the roof I could see the flashes from the anti-aircraft guns down the Thames.

The Daily Express and the Standard are Lord Beaverbrook's papers. He is said to have spent \$750,000 to buy his two buildings and he succeeded. The Standard stands up amid a patch of ruins. The Express is on Fleet street, which is not so badly damaged as a whole.

The London Times is the most famous of all papers, of course. It is larger than the others, usually eight pages to their four, for paper is scarce and rationed. It costs more and unless you're a regular subscriber, it's desperately hard to get a copy of it. During the bombing, every window in the front of the Times building was blown out and much other damage done. But the Times never failed to come out as usual, and other papers have equally good records. They weren't using all their equipment anyway, and they helped each other out, when necessary. It is said that during the height of the blitz, it gave Londoners a comforting feeling to be able to go to the door in the morning, after a night of terror, and find the morning paper and a bottle of milk there as usual. No doubt it would.

The visiting Canadian editors were made members of the Press Club in London. That's something of a distinction, I believe. One night, some of us visited that interesting club. It has upstairs in a short lane somewhere off Fleet Street. We were in the darkest part of the blackout, picking our way over the bricks and rubble in a street that hadn't been cleaned up yet, where a taxi couldn't go. The stairway of the club is bordered with valuable historic pictures and documents and in the library upstairs, I saw some 600 photographs of London, beginning at Trafalgar Square. Next week, I'll take the West End of London, beginning at Trafalgar Square.

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