



# BETHNAL GREEN

*Why did the Bethnal Green  
Tube Shelter disaster happen?*

## Source 1

Civil Defence.

Bethnal Green  
Tube Shelter  
Disaster.

Report by  
Mr. Dunne.

(Previous

Reference:

W.M. (43) 38th

Conclusions,

Minute 4.)

6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (43) 137) covering the draft of a White Paper summarising the conclusions of the Enquiry held by Mr. Laurence Dunne into the disaster at a tube shelter in Bethnal Green on the 3rd March.

Doubt was expressed as to the expediency of publishing a summary of Mr. Dunne's findings.

*The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security* said that he had stated in the House of Commons on the 10th March that, subject to security considerations, the conclusions would be published. At the time of the disaster there had been considerable public feeling, particularly among people living in the neighbourhood, and there had been some dissatisfaction that the Enquiry should be held in private. Pressure for a Public Enquiry had been resisted on the basis that, subject to security considerations, the findings would be published, and, if it were now decided that Mr. Dunne's conclusions should not be announced, it would be generally assumed that there was something to hide.

In discussion, there was strong support for the view that the publication of the proposed White Paper would give the incident a disproportionate importance, and might encourage the enemy to make further nuisance raids.

The view of the War Cabinet was that it would be preferable if the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, instead of publishing a summary of the conclusions in a White Paper, made a short oral statement in the House of Commons. Points to be included in such a statement would be that Mr. Dunne's report had been received and considered; that certain suggestions had been made for modifications of existing arrangements which might reduce the risk of a further disaster of this kind, and that action was already being taken to introduce these modifications, not only at this shelter, but at similar shelters elsewhere; and that there was no evidence whatever for the suggestion that the disaster was due to Jewish or Fascist elements among the people taking refuge in the shelter.

*Extract from War Cabinet Minutes referring to the disaster*



# BETHNAL GREEN

*Why did the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter disaster happen?*

Source 2

**THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT**

*Printed for the War Cabinet. April 1943.*

189

MOST SECRET.

Copy No. 33

W.P. (43) 137.

April 3, 1943.

**TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY**

**It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure the secrecy of this document**

WAR CABINET.

TUBE SHELTER INQUIRY.

REPORT BY MR. DUNNE.

MEMORANDUM BY THE HOME SECRETARY AND MINISTER OF HOME SECURITY.

Civil Defence Measures.  
State of Public Opinion.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Civil Defence Committee on the State of Public Opinion as regards Civil Defence Measures (W.P. (G.) (39) 159).

*The Secretary of State for Home Affairs* said that the members of the Civil Defence Committee were concerned at the increasing tendency, reflected in the Press, to regard the Government's policy in regard to Civil Defence measures as unnecessary and even to take the line that there would be no air raids and that the sooner life could return to normal the better. The Committee therefore

*Extract from the Tube Shelter Inquiry Report*



*Source 2 (pg2)*

3

## DRAFT WHITE PAPER.

### TUBE SHELTER INQUIRY.

CONCLUSIONS OF MR. LAURENCE DUNNE, M.C.,  
METROPOLITAN MAGISTRATE.

#### **2. Contributory Causes of the Disaster.**

- (i) A marked popular preference in favour of deep-shelter as opposed to other types, even though much more easily reached.
- (ii) A realisation that current bombing tactics give the shelterer only a short interval to reach cover.
- (iii) A wholesome respect for the dangerous splinters from our own anti-aircraft barrage.
- (iv) An imperfect knowledge of the nature and appearance of various anti-aircraft devices now in use.

*Extract from the Tube Shelter Inquiry Report*



# BETHNAL GREEN

*Why did the Bethnal Green  
Tube Shelter disaster happen?*

## Source 3

SECRET.

To be kept under Lock and Key.

Report of the Inquiry held by Mr. Laurence Dunne into the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter  
disaster.

The Right Honourable  
Herbert S. Morrison, M.P.

Sir,

1. I have the honour to report that in accordance with your written instruction forwarded to me on the 10th March, I opened an Inquiry into the circumstances of an accident at a London tube station shelter on the 11th March, and continued to hear

6. On the 16th January, 1943, the papers published an account of a British raid on Berlin. The shelter was used by a fair number of people on the nights succeeding and particularly during the light German reprisal raid on 17th January. It was noticed that a good many people were in the streets in the neighbourhood of the shelter who did not actually use it. On the 28th February 500 people were checked out of the shelter on the 1st March, 587. News was received on the 2nd March of our heavy raid on Berlin the 1st, and on that night 850 people actually used the shelter. Again many people were seen in the neighbourhood of the shelter in the streets, obviously up to a late hour prepared to use the shelter if an alert was sounded. The general expectation, however, seems from my inquiries to have been that a reprisal attack was far more likely to be launched on the 3rd.

7. The state of mind of the people of the area appeared most clearly during my inquiry. They take a most intelligent interest in the accounts of our bombing of the enemy, particularly remembering what they themselves experienced. They did not miss the optimistic accounts in our Press of the results achieved on this occasion, and had noted the changed nature of bombing tactics and the accounts of the results of the ultra-heavy bombs coming into use. The result was that people had made up their minds that in case an alert it was necessary, or at any rate, wise to get into deep shelter with as little delay as possible. They were a little nervous and apprehensive, though not more so I think than is natural under the circumstances.

*Report of the Inquiry held by Mr. Laurence Dunne into the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter Disaster*



# BETHNAL GREEN

*Why did the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter disaster happen?*

Source 3 (pg2)

	Dead	Injured and detained in hospital.	Discharged by 11th March
Men	27	14	7
Women	84	33	15
Children under 16	62	15	8
	173	62	30

38. Before going on to deal with the main and contributory causes of the disaster I should like at this point to deal with two specific allegations which have received some publicity, and which are without any foundation whatsoever. Each may be dismissed with a very few words:-

- (a) that this was a panic induced by Fascists or criminal persons for nefarious purposes. There were some deaths among men with criminal records. They and their relatives are as much entitled to sympathy as any of the other victims. This story had some local, and I hope limited, circulation. It is an absurdity.
- (b) that this was a Jewish panic. This canard had a much wider circulation and was, I understand, endorsed by the broadcast utterances of a renegade traitor from Germany. Not only is it without foundation, it is demonstrably false. The Jewish attendance at this shelter was, and is, so small as to constitute a hardly calculable percentage.

*Report of the Inquiry held by Mr. Laurence Dunne into the Bethnal Green Tube Shelter Disaster*