

MERSEYSIDE BLITZED

Neil Holmes

LIVERPOOL IS THE HEART of Merseyside, but surrounding the city on both banks of the Mersey are major towns such as Birkenhead, Bootle and Wallasey that have a proud history and identity of their own. Although their fate was and remains entwined with that of their larger neighbour people often unfairly overlook them.

Their experiences during World War Two should not act as a footnote to the events in Liverpool. The bombs that fell on these towns were not dropped by accident as they contained docks, shipyards and vital industries of their own. Between them these areas suffered over 1,200 deaths due to the air raids. They also refused to bow to the pressure put upon them, carrying on despite the terrible impact the raids were having on their family, friends, homes and places of work.

Like Liverpool the faces of Wallasey, Birkenhead and especially Bootle were dramatically altered by the raids. Today's generation have little to remind them of the scars that the Luftwaffe left. By comparing the wartime image to the modern viewpoint this book gives the reader a link to the region's experiences that mere statistics can never convey. It completes the story begun in *Liverpool Blitzed*, and inspires anyone to reflect on the sacrifice and bravery of the whole region.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

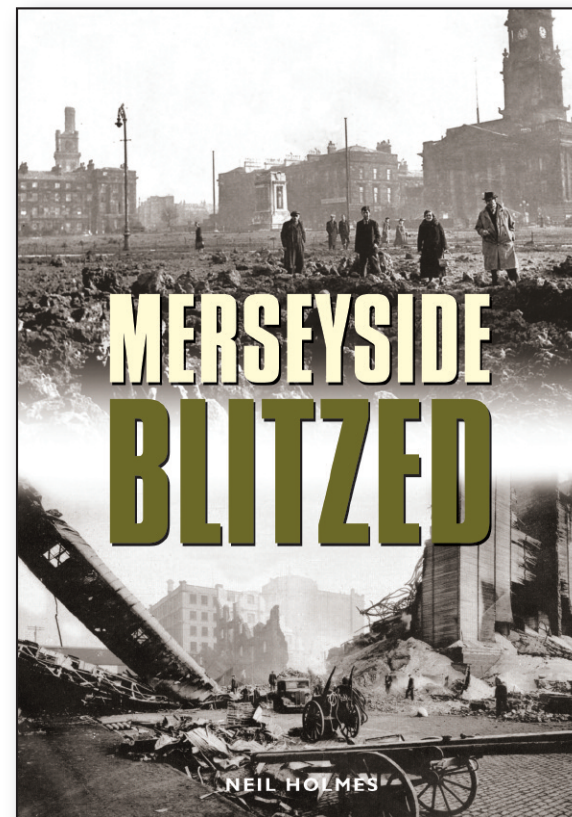
Neil Holmes was born on the Wirral in 1979 but now lives in Liverpool where he also works as a civil servant. He has studied military history for fifteen years and the history of the Merseyside region for six. His interest in local history and photography led him to research Liverpool's wartime experiences, culminating in the publication of *Liverpool Blitzed: 70 Years On* in 2011. He has spent the last year in the local archives, collecting wartime images and travelling around the region taking modern photographs for this second book.

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This image showing damage to Wallasey Town Hall appeared in the Liverpool Echo on 2 September 1940.

Left: This gaping hole is in the canal bridge where Stanley Road crosses over the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. The damage was caused by a high explosive bomb on the night of 21 October 1940.



Birkenhead. This photograph shows the premises of Hubbard and Martin, a firm of bakers which stood on Pilgrim Street close to its junction with Chester Street. The damage seen here was done on the night of 12/13 March 1941



This photograph appeared in the Daily Post on 23 December 1940 and shows number 32 Beaufort Road in Seacombe. Clearly the house suffered a near miss which cratered the road and threw a nearby motor car over the front wall and up against the house. Fortunately most of the damage seems slight, although it will no doubt be a little while before the car can be removed and the road repaired. No-one seems to have been killed in the road that night and the biggest problem will probably be the damaged main pipe that is causing the flooding in the foreground.

Number 32 seems to have suffered no ill effect from the wartime damage and is still standing today.



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On the night of 31 August/1 September 1940 bombs landed in Brighton Street, damaging buildings and centering the road. This was only the third raid on Wallasey, but the work of the wardens in the area had already brought praise from local controllers and further afield. Although they had barely had a taste of what was in store for the region in the coming year or so, the fact that there were relatively few casualties in an area of dense terraced housing was at least in part down to the wardens' hard work, even if it did owe something on occasion to luck.

The large building second from the right is the Brighton Hotel, which is on the corner of Brighton Street and Buchanan Road. The premises on the left were occupied by (left to right) a grocer, tobacconist and chemist. Just across the road from here is Wallasey Town Hall, which received its own hammering on the same night. In this area one person was killed and another three were injured that night. A heavy barricade has been erected and men are already at work repairing the damage. The surrounding roads were also damaged as Wallasey bore the brunt of that night's raids.



Since the war two of the three premises on the left have been demolished and replaced by a car park, but the Brighton Hotel remains and is still open for business today.

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The building in the centre of this photograph is the remains of Birkenhead Park Station. The damage occurred during the night of 12/13 March 1941

Example of a double-page spread.