

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS 1935—1939

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The appearance of the first Zeppelin airship over Britain in December 1914 marked the end of the security which Britain's island status and the Royal Navy were thought to provide. In April 1915 London was bombed by Zeppelins and later by aircraft. Technical limitations prevented these attacks being extended seriously to the North-West — although Bolton received a Zeppelin raid in September 1916.¹ The progress of aviation technology and armaments in the 1920s and 1930s presented an obvious threat to all of Britain's major cities in a future war.

To consider this matter the Committee of Imperial Defence created an Air Raid Precautions (ARP) sub-committee in 1924. The Air Staff were requested to provide forecasts on the effects of aerial bombing on civilians. By 1937 the Air Staff believed there would be 1,800,000 casualties in the first two months of war.² The accuracy of these projections was never properly tested due to inadequate research funding. The bombing of civilians in Manchuria, Abyssinia and Spain led the Air Staff to conclude that every ton of high explosive dropped on a congested district would produce at least seventy casualties. There would also be, it was anticipated, widespread panic, neurosis and a mass exodus from urban areas.³

From 1924 to 1935 these matters were considered in strict secrecy. However, it was obvious that ARP would require great publicity and mass participation. For the government the difficulty was to establish 'how the masses out there beyond Wigan Pier could best be prepared for these coming horrors'.⁴ In July 1935 the Cabinet decided on a tentative announcement of air defence policy. Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister, informed the Commons that confidential ARP work had been done, but it was now time to communicate with local authorities, public utilities and the general public. He did not, needless to say, reveal the projected casualty figures.

An ARP Department of the Home Office was created and a Circular on ARP was issued in July 1935. It invited local authorities and private employers to co-operate in measures against air attack and the public to be conversant with basic protective measures and to volunteer for ARP duties. Central government would offer technical and administrative advice, provide stocks of anti-gas and hospital equipment but would not provide central funding for bombproof public shelters. Protection against blast and splinter damage, it was hoped, could be achieved relatively cheaply.

The Home Office believed that this offered the merits of Treasury control over a locally devolved service which could operate reasonably autonomously if London were isolated in wartime. The ARP Department, however,



Sharston Senior School ARP Shelter, 1939.

unlike its German counterpart, regarded its role as one of encouragement and advice not as a directing agency. This, it was hoped, would avoid the criticisms of central government encroachment into local affairs and charges that the government was 'preparing the people for war' and weakening the already diminishing prospects of general disarmament. For this reason deep shelters, municipal ARP fire schemes, blackouts and evacuation were not discussed.

Nonetheless the introduction of ARP was greeted with criticisms of its implicit 'war-mindedness' or its explicit omissions; a 'passive' civil defence programme not related to 'active' defence measures like fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft weapons was bound to be inadequate. As the 'active' defences were seen to be unsatisfactory a civil defence system would be futile.⁵ Yet as the *Economist* concluded in 1937, 'it may be taken as axiomatic that no offensive-minded Power will in future stop to declare war before launching surprise knock-out blows at his victim's military, industrial and communications centres'.⁶

Within these categories Manchester presented an admirable target. It was of strategic importance as a commercial and manufacturing centre and, since 1894, as a port. Its area constituted one of the world's busiest and most congested railway systems.⁷ The massive industrial complex of neighbouring Trafford Park covered some 1,183 acres, had 200 undertakings with 30,000 employees and was dominated by the great engineering works of Metropolitan Vickers with its eye-catching tower.⁸ In

Newton Heath the Avro aviation works and Mather and Platt's engineering works also provided potential targets.

In 1935 the area controlled by Manchester City Council was 27,255 acres with an estimated population of 776,028 with a density of 28 persons per acre.⁹ Some 486,000 people, mostly working-class, still lived in central and intermediate districts, many in housing so dilapidated that these could not be reinforced from attack.¹⁰ A single high explosive bomb could demolish an entire street. There were 810 miles of streets within the city boundaries which would place obvious strains on the rescue services. 'There are 10,000 people', Councillor John Owen was to remark of Hulme in 1939, 'without the slightest protection in the event of an air raid.'¹¹ Even those who had moved to outer areas like Wythenshawe were also exposed to attack due to the presence of local electronics and light engineering works. It was clear that a more comprehensive system of civil defence would be required for the next war in comparison with the elementary measures involving mainly the regulation of street lighting which the City Council had undertaken during the First World War.¹² On the Air Staff's projection of 70 casualties per ton of high explosive and the possibility of receiving up to 450 tons in the first 72 hours, Manchester could have a casualty rate of 31,500.

The Home Office ARP Circular was first discussed by the City Council on 31 July 1935. It was decided by 73 votes to 56 to establish an ARP sub-committee subordinate to the Council's General and Parliamentary Committee which dealt with Whitehall and Westminster matters. Under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Noton Barclay, it began in August 1935 to co-ordinate draft proposals for air raid precautions which could be forwarded to the Home Office for approval. It was a complex task because the city's ARP scheme was in essence an amalgam of individual departmental schemes dovetailed together and co-ordinated through the ARP Committee. In accordance with the Circular these would only involve anti-gas measures, medical services and structural protection but not evacuation or municipal fire schemes. There also had to be provision for co-operation with neighbouring authorities like Salford and Stretford. Fortunately the inter-war years had witnessed striking developments in joint municipal co-operation, particularly with such bodies as the Manchester and District Town Planning Committee, involving 104 authorities, and the North, Central and South-East Lancashire Advisory Water Committee which could provide a framework for ARP co-operation.

In December 1935 the ARP Committee accepted the recommendations of a joint St. John — Red Cross conference that administratively the area for the ARP scheme should embrace a radius of four square miles from Manchester Town Hall. This would confine the scheme to the main city area, enable a realistic sub-division for medical and rescue services and the establishment of co-operation with neighbouring authorities.

Between August 1935 and October 1936 lists of buildings were compiled for possible requisition, vehicles capable of adaptation to ambulances were noted and attempts were made to co-ordinate medical services between voluntary and municipal hospitals via the Joint Hospitals Advisory Board. The ARP Committee entrusted the peacetime control of ARP to the Town Clerk, F.E. Warbreck Howell, and his successor from July 1938, A.H. Adcock. In wartime Manchester's ARP would be directed by the Chief Constable, Sir John Maxwell.

By the middle of 1936 the ARP Committee recognised that the escalating costs of the contemplated measures — between £40,000 to £100,000 — had made earlier assurances by the Home Office that ARP would involve no appreciable outlay, patently absurd. An extension of existing services like the Cleansing Department for anti-gas decontamination, or the Public Health Department for medical services would inevitably produce a rates increase. There would also be new services like Rescue and Demolition, First Aid volunteers, Air Raid Wardens as well as protection for public buildings and essential services. The Home Office Circular offered only limited financial help in specific areas, and evidently took no account of increasing costs. Manchester, Blackpool and Bury, amongst other authorities, grew increasingly concerned about the financial implications of ARP.

In 1936, however, the international situation deteriorated. Gas bombs were used by the Italians in Abyssinia, Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland in March and in July the Spanish Civil War broke out. Former hypothetical discussions about aerial bombardment now assumed a daily reality. Britain's local authorities were in a dilemma. If they were reluctant about ARP it would appear that they were leaving citizens unprotected; yet to continue would involve great expenditure. 'The war lords stalk abroad', warned the *Manchester City News* in April 1936. 'It now becomes the plain duty of the City Council to go ahead with its £100,000 scheme for gas-proof emergency stations, training units and similar measures'.¹³

In fact, after the first year of ARP, the sub-committee was determined to keep expenditure to about £40,000 until the Home Office clarified the whole question of funding.

The Council debate on ARP in July 1935 raised two important issues. The first was the financial consequence of adopting ARP, and the second was the moral implications of such a decision. During the period of ARP development from 1935 — 1939 Conservatives remained the majority group. There was, however, all party representation on the ARP Committee under its Liberal chairman.

All parties agreed that if there was to be ARP it should be wholly paid for by central government. Conservatives were not otherwise opposed to ARP on principle. The Labour Party had a more ambivalent approach to it. In August 1935 the Labour National Executive Council (NEC), although still opposed to rearmament, gave reluctant approval to the ARP Circular, and advised local authorities to co-operate in order to cope 'with the direst possibilities'.¹⁴ Local Labour councillors like Alice Horan argued that an ARP Committee would be wasting time and merely lull the people into a sense of false security and distract from the government's 'failures in the international field'. In April 1936 the Rusholme Divisional Labour Party, ignoring the NEC recommendation, pledged 'unflinching opposition to air raid precautions because they would lead only to war'.¹⁵ Liberals concluded that ARP was a regrettable necessity, but also a matter of individual conscience. 'The measures are not compulsory and that citizens have every right to co-operate in any way'.¹⁶ Similarly they had every right to oppose 'conscription' into ARP services. It was on the strength of the Conservative-Liberal vote that the Council agreed to establish the ARP sub-committee.

Additionally, in 1935, the city faced two main financial difficulties. The first was the rising cost of unemployment benefit payments. Central government, via the creation of the Unemployment Assistance Board, had agreed to



Air raid shelters in Albert Square.

accept responsibility for this in 1935, but there were delays during which the local authorities were still largely responsible. In January 1935 Manchester's Public Assistance Committee had to request a supplementary estimate of £143,000 — equivalent to 4d in the £ on the rates — in order to continue its functions until central government took over.¹⁷ Although the economy nationally may have been recovering, in Manchester the situation was slower to improve and in 1935 there were some 9,000 adults in receipt of Public Assistance.

The second financial difficulty was the city's declining rate base. Re-housing programmes demolished much older property but new building had scarcely begun. In addition the exemption of most railway property, and uncertainty over how much the General Exchequer Grants was to be, meant that every expenditure was carefully scrutinised.

The Expenditure Committee had instructions to recommend whatever economies were necessary 'in order to stabilise the rate at 15s for the next five years'. Its chairman was also ironically Alderman Barclay of the ARP Committee. The Expenditure Committee report, published in February 1936, recommended severe economies in every Corporation department, including Public Health, Cleansing and the Police — the departments that would be vital to ARP.¹⁸ It was hardly surprising therefore that the ARP Committee determined to keep its expenditure to about £40,000 until the Home Office clarified the financial position.

Manchester City Council in fact played an important part in obtaining this clarification through its influence in the Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC). In 1937 the chairman of the AMC's General Purposes Committee was Alderman Sir Miles Mitchell of Manchester. This body insisted on demanding complete central government funding for ARP. A 'united front' of local

authorities was established and from March 1937 these authorities, including Manchester, refused to continue with ARP measures until the Home Office provided an equitable and unequivocal settlement of ARP finance.

This largely compelled the government to pass the Air Raid Precautions Act 1937. The Act did not satisfy entirely the local authorities because central government would not finance all ARP, but it did provide a future workable basis. Only certain aspects: ARP training schools, anti-gas and anti-firefighting equipment would receive full grants. Other matters such as the adaptation of buildings for use as decontamination centres, first aid posts or storage depots would receive percentage grants, in some cases up to 80 per cent. The Home Office also agreed, as a result of the delay over funding, to accept ARP schemes 'by instalment' rather than waiting for full municipal schemes.

By June 1938 the Manchester ARP Committee had produced such a scheme embracing anti-gas measures, rescue and demolition and first aid and it was submitted for Home Office approval. Both Barclay, the ARP Committee chairman, and T.M. Larrad, his deputy, were concerned about the lack of air raid shelter provision, but Home Office officials indicated that shelter guidelines would be forthcoming.¹⁹ The approximate cost of the scheme after Home Office provided equipment and grant-related elements would be £203,000 — a charge of £29,000 on the rates. Barclay warned that this referred to provisional arrangements only. There would be 'very substantial additions' before the city's plans were completed.²⁰ Manchester's scheme, the first model ARP scheme to be submitted in the United Kingdom for a major city, was approved by the Home Office on 16 August 1938 — a few weeks before the Czechoslovakian crisis. Apart from shelters there were other significant

omissions from the plan. No municipal fire scheme was yet devised, although discussions continued between Chief Constable Maxwell, David Drummond, the Manchester Chief Fire Officer, and the Home Office. There was no provision for air raid warnings nor for distribution of gas masks and the evacuation of the civil population. Although these were under Home Office consideration and beyond the competence of the Manchester ARP Committee, the city's ARP scheme still received a rough reception.

As a local political 'issue' ARP was slow to develop. It did not figure in the 1935 general election but the question of air raids did preoccupy many local candidates. A Labour pamphlet, *Murder From the Air*, blamed the government for not abolishing military aircraft and all the Labour candidates in the inner city constituencies: Barbara Gould in Hulme, J.G. Henderson, Ardwick, J.R. Clynes, Platting Division and J. Crompton in Gorton roundly condemned the government's treatment of foreign affairs. Conservative candidates like Shackleton Bailey for Gorton and A.G. Fuller for Ardwick, somewhat out of step with the appeasement policy of the leadership, argued that the country's defences were 'lamentably weak'. They believed that ARP was part of national defence and should be centrally funded.

These attitudes were to a large degree transferred to municipal politics, but it was not until 1937 that ARP emerged as a significant local issue. Unemployment, education, health and housing still commanded more attention. After the introductory debates on ARP in 1935 the issue was notably absent in the 1936 municipal elections, earlier critics like Miss Horan and later ones

like John Owen (Medlock Street Ward) and Harry Frankland (Bradford Ward) making no reference to it. However, the publication of the city's ARP scheme in 1937 renewed interest in the matter.

The response of the political parties to ARP was remarkably uniform. Conservative councillor James Kidd (Cheetham) was representative of all in his assertion that 'adequate provision should be made for the protection of the civilian population in case of air raids and consider that this should be a national charge'.²¹ Jack Wolfenden, Labour candidate for Ardwick, insisted that 'the defence of this city from air attack is the absolute responsibility of the Government, and should not be borne by the people of Manchester'.²²

Additionally remarkable was the way in which ARP was presented in the 1937 municipal election. Being regarded as essentially a central government matter, no serious attempt was made to relate it to local conditions. Jim Ellershaw, Labour candidate for St. Marks, was largely the exception in linking the issues of ARP and Public Assistance, arguing that larger government grants were needed to prevent 'rationing' of local authority resources. Local Labour parties in St. George's, Moss Side East and West, All Saints and St. Luke's evidently ignored ARP altogether even though they would obviously be in the 'front line' in the event of war. No candidates in 1937 apparently used local conditions to emphasise the local relevance of ARP, the vulnerability of their districts or the need to expedite measures.

Critical response to the first instalment of Manchester's ARP scheme in July - August 1938 reflected a more realistic awareness of the matter, induced no doubt by events in Spain. Councillor Harry Frankland who had just returned from Barcelona described harrowing scenes to a silent council chamber in July and concluded that Manchester's scheme was 'merely brown paper protection'.²³

In August 1938 Manchester Labour Party produced their own alternative to the official ARP scheme in a pamphlet, *Manchester at War*. Some 10,000 were issued. It urged a network of deep tunnels under the city, the utilisation of vast areas of Cheshire for evacuation purposes, rural medical facilities and a democratically controlled air warden's organisation. This, it was argued, would cost Manchester, after a 75 per cent government grant, £1,890,000 — a possible loss of 8.5 per cent of the city's assets. 'Less than half the value of the Ford Madox Brown frescoes in the Town Hall'.²⁴ The Manchester Communist Party in their 'Bulletin No. 1', 18 August 1938, put the matter more bluntly: 'It is clear that the Tory majority is concerning itself only with first aid and fire-fighting organisation instead of building shelters which will prevent casualties from taking place'.²⁵

There was substance in these charges, but all the major omissions in Manchester's scheme were largely the result of delays or prohibitions imposed by the Home Office. The government, for instance, strongly opposed deep shelters, believing that people would refuse to leave them or, if experiencing a direct hit, could produce appalling casualties. It favoured instead a policy of 'dispersal'. Arguably within their sphere of competence the Manchester ARP planners had done their best. As the Town Clerk, Warbreck Howell, pointed out in June 1938, this was only the first instalment in a scheme which would 'take months to complete' as more government guidance was received. 'There is only one thing we are lacking', he added significantly, 'We need thousands more ARP recruits'.²⁶



Sandbagging the railway arches.

Howell had identified the greatest weakness of Manchester's ARP defences. This was the resolute refusal of the public to volunteer for ARP duties. Early public lectures on ARP in the city were attended by a diverse audience of trade union officials, plumbers, window cleaners, businessmen, commercial travellers and grocers, but in general the public remained uninterested. Throughout 1937 the ARP Committee strove in vain to break public apathy. Leaflets were distributed in the main railway stations and to public libraries. Copies were sent to householders via School Attendance Officers. Posters were put up in public buildings and at the city's Exhibition Hall where the Brighter Homes Exhibition was in progress. The political parties were asked to co-operate. Yet, by July, only 500 people had enrolled out of an estimated 5,000 required.²⁷ A combination of the holiday season and the coronation of George VI in May 1937 were thought to have slowed down recruitment. In the spring of 1938 another recruitment drive was launched, this time incorporating a short ARP film at local cinemas and an ARP exhibition at the City Hall, Deansgate. A letter was also sent by the Lord Mayor to the 196,000 householders in the city exhorting them to join the ARP services. A similar appeal was also made to over 1,700 employers asking them to encourage staff to volunteer.

This appeal did meet with some success. Some 2,268 Air Raid Wardens enlisted out of the then requirement of 4,000 and 1,424 Auxiliary Firemen out of 2,500.²⁸ Once again, by July 1938 the momentum slowed. ARP officials found themselves subordinated to the Corporation's Centenary Celebrations and unable to utilise numerous offices which were being used by the organisers of the Centenary Pageant. Much time was also devoted to the prestigious opening of the new Town Hall Extension by the King in May. It had proved impossible once again to obtain adequate ARP recruits.

Before considering the possible reasons for the failure of these recruitment drives it might be useful first to consider their implications during the Czechoslovakian crisis of August-September 1938.

As Hitler's intransigence made war seemingly inevitable the Manchester ARP Committee assembled in the Town Hall on the 16 September to accelerate civil defence measures. They estimated that ARP recruitment was by this point some 14,000 in arrears. Nonetheless comprehensive steps had to be taken.

The City Architect, Noel Hill, reported that Air Raid District Depots would be ready immediately and that First Aid Parties, Police, Fire Brigade and anti-gas decontamination squads were almost ready. Hill added that 200 public shelters were earmarked and 80 or 90 railway arches could be improvised as shelters. The City Engineer, F.E. Button, urged the immediate excavation of shelter trenches in the main parks — Platt Fields, Whitworth, Alexander, Chorlton, Crumpsall and Cheetham. The Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries, J. Richardson, reported on the disposal of bodies. These would be based on three main cemeteries — Gorton, Philip's Park and Southern. In each a separate plot would be set aside with a marquee for use as a temporary mortuary.²⁹

In terms of anti-aircraft measures Manchester in 1938 was totally unprotected. In fact anti-aircraft guns were not deployed around the city until July 1940 when the 4th A.A. Division established twenty guns for the city and four for Ringway. Similarly only in July 1940 was a flight from 264 Defiant Squadron attached to Ringway. The



Gas mask drill at a Manchester school.

first barrage balloons were also deployed at the same time.³⁰

Considering that the employment of poison gas was widely anticipated in a possible attack, Manchester's position was by no means satisfactory. The city required some 800,000 gas masks. By 28 September 1938 699,000 were available.³¹ However, many were unsuitable because, in spite of exhortation over previous months, the public had neglected to inform the ARP authorities of their gas mask requirements in order to obtain the correct sizes. This poor response had prompted the authorities to undertake a house-to-house census. As the city centre contained almost 200,000 houses, the progress of the census before Munich can be imagined. When the emergency developed Chief Constable Maxwell was forced to order respirator consignments on the rudimentary basis of large ones for men, medium for women and small for children — none had yet been devised for babies. Consequently when long queues appeared at the fitting centres many people were unable to obtain a suitable mask.

The blackout and early warning systems were also incomplete at the time of the Munich crisis. On purely technical grounds the blacking out of Manchester was a formidable undertaking. Quite apart from industrial and commercial installations, there were some 20,000 street gas lights and 10,000 electric lights. All the electric and about 1,000 of the gas lights could be extinguished at once; but the remaining street gas lights had to be put out by hand, taking about half an hour.³² The anticipated early warning period, without a fully developed radar system, was estimated to be seven minutes.

Lack of Home Office guidance had held up Manchester's blackout tests. To be effective these tests often had to involve a whole region. Many authorities were concerned about possible litigation if persons or property were damaged during a blackout. Both trade unions and employers protested about disruption and the beginning of an IRA bombing campaign in Britain in 1939 had made authorities reluctant to plunge towns into darkness. The first blackout test in Manchester was on 29 September 1938. It involved a partial blackout of the Oxford Street, All Saints and St. Peter's Square area and was regarded as having been quite successful. However, later tests were marred by bright moonlight or heavy rain which washed away the white guidance lines for traffic.

The air raid warning position was slightly better. Manchester Police had conducted six air raid warning

tests during August and the start of the Czechoslovakian crisis in September. These tests illustrated the difficulty of alerting a modern industrial and commercial centre to attack. A powerful siren in the city centre, for example, was heard in Rochdale over eight miles away, but was not audible in Deansgate, Ancoats and Miles Platting, or in tramcars within a mile of the siren.³³ This failure prompted the Chief Constable to employ a combination of high powered compressed air sirens with a fluctuating signal and ARP personnel using whistles, rattles and hand bells.³⁴

There was in Manchester no sign of the predicted mass panic and neurosis as war seemingly approached in September 1938. The only reported disturbance occurred at a respirator fitting centre at Miles Platting where a crowd burst down the door and surged into the hall. But this was evidently more the result of impatience not panic and a police sergeant restored order without difficulty.³⁵

It might also be expected that the Munich crisis would have produced a significant increase in ARP volunteers. This does not seem to have happened. The Chief Constable estimated that the emergency produced about 2,500 volunteers.³⁶ This was still an inadequate response when the requirement had been revised to 14,000.

The conclusion of the Munich Agreement did remove the immediate prospect of war, but the emergency had exposed nationally the weakness of Britain's civilian defence with 'new confessions of failure from all quarters'.³⁷ As a result Sir John Anderson, the Lord Privy Seal, was given special responsibility for civil defence. In April 1939 Anderson introduced a new Civil Defence Bill which became law in July. Its title suggested a broader concept of defence relating more to people rather than the narrower aspects of structural precautions. The Act gave local authorities greater powers regarding the requisition of property and surface shelter provision. Employers were now statutorily obliged to provide shelters for employees. Exchequer grants and additional materials would be provided by the government.

In 1939 a new Civil Defence Regional Headquarters was opened at Arkwright House in Manchester. It housed the offices of the Regional Commissioner, Sir Warren Fisher, and his deputy, J.R. Hobhouse who were empowered to take over the administration of the region should it become isolated from London during wartime. In peacetime, however, they were to observe 'a maximum of contact with a minimum of interference'.

By January 1939 Manchester City Council was anxious to complete a programme of trench, surface and basement shelters. It was estimated that some 20,000 of the new steel 'Anderson' domestic shelters were required on Corporation housing estates and 14,000 for private dwellings.³⁸ When war was declared the city had 32,625 'Andersons' and a further 1,300 were received in the following weeks. Workmen erected them at a rate of 800 per day in the priority areas of Gorton, Openshaw, Newton Heath, Bradford and Harpurhey. There was, however, still a waiting list of some 5,000. As with respirators, the public were slow to make known their requirements until the last moment. Free shelters were in fact available to those whose income was below £250 per year. Many households, however, were seemingly reluctant to advertise this fact by applying for one. 'Their shyness or snobbery is understandable — but foolish', remarked a City Surveyor's official.³⁹

From February 1939 the City Architect's, City Engineer's and City Surveyor's Departments worked at full stretch to

determine the extent of the basement shelters and requisite brick surface shelters. Shelter trenches would also have to be provided alongside the main arterial roads in the event of an attack at a peak travelling period. Many of the city's landmarks — the Refuge Assurance Building, Northcliffe House and the Rylands Building did have capacious basements and good shelter potential. However, shelter provision did place unprecedented strains on Corporation staff and resources. In September 1938 the City Architect noted, 'at present staff are unable to cope without working very late hours'.⁴⁰ In April 1939 the City Treasurer, John Bray, urged the ARP Committee to recognise that 'the time has arrived when extra assistance becomes imperative'.⁴¹

The protection of a major industrial city, still largely Victorian in character, from the evils of modern bombing was indeed a formidable task. But that, on the eve of war, there was still a need for another 500 public shelters and possibly a further 20,000 basement shelters reflected the scale of the problem in spite of the efforts made by the departments. They had faced the architectural legacy of Manchester's past, the apparent indifference of many of its citizens and the continuing financial uncertainties which Munich had produced. The emergency had cost Manchester £110,599 and central government was not forthcoming about how much could be reclaimed.

Elsewhere positive progress was made in Manchester's civil defence measures from January to September 1939. In January the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer finalised the city's Emergency Fire Brigade Scheme. Additional equipment, including three fire boats were ordered, but great difficulty was experienced due to the lack of standardisation of pumps and standpipes.⁴² The scheme cost £10,000 and was primarily concerned with the provision of water supplies, the requisite equipment and manpower. It did not really distinguish between different types of attack, explosives or incendiaries which would require a different response, nor did it provide for what actually occurred in December 1940, namely the demolition of buildings to serve as fire breaks. Nonetheless the city now had a workable fire scheme which it did not have throughout the Munich emergency.

Similarly there had been only a rudimentary evacuation plan in September 1938. From January 1939 developing a proper scheme became a priority of civil defence. In the event of war, evacuation, which was voluntary, was to be staged over two days, preferably before the outbreak of hostilities. It would involve priority classes only — school children, the physically and mentally handicapped, babies, infants and expectant mothers. As far as practical, hospital patients would be transferred. The Town Clerk, R.H. Adcock, had responsibility as Evacuation Officer to prepare the city's scheme.

As in other authorities the resources of the Education Department were used to publicise and co-ordinate the scheme. It was estimated that the priority classes in Manchester comprised 190,000 and that overall, some 300,000 would have to be moved to the relative safety of Derbyshire, Cheshire and rural Lancashire.⁴³ By July 1939 the evacuation scheme was well in hand. Confidential travel details had been issued to relevant departments. The schools were only to receive details when the emergency began. The progress of the scheme had depended to a large degree on the energy of the Director of Education, W.O. Lester Smith, and on the public who, at least in this aspect of civil defence, had been forthcoming in registering for evacuation.



Delivery of an Anderson shelter.

By the end of March 1939 the police, by employing a 25hp Parmeko master siren and a number of smaller sirens across the city, had finally achieved a reasonably effective warning system. At the same time the Chief Constable had established a network of Report and Control Centres throughout the city. An efficient blackout system was never really perfected. The last major blackout test before the war on the 16 May 1939 was the best that could be achieved. By this time too most Corporation staff had been trained in anti-gas measures at the Cleansing Department's Anti-Gas School in Water Street.

Finally, on 8 April 1939, in accordance with Home Office instructions, the City Council appointed an Emergency Committee to co-ordinate ARP measures in wartime. Three councillors were chosen from the main political parties: Sir Robert Noton Barclay, its chairman, representing the Liberals; Douglas Gosling, also the city's Chief Air Raid Warden, for the Conservatives, and William Johnson, 'a cool warm-hearted Labour man'.⁴⁴

Thus, by the outbreak of war, Manchester had considerably improved its civil defence whose weaknesses Munich had exposed. Yet the plans of both Manchester and neighbouring Salford remained enfeebled by the lack of ARP volunteers. Indeed in a league table of civil defence recruitment in North-West towns in March 1939 Manchester and Salford, even making allowances for different forms of compilation, were bottom of the list. Overall, in August 1939 Manchester had a deficiency on its current requirement of 10,301 men and 3,637 women.⁴⁵

The lack of public response mystified many ARP planners, and is still puzzling. Broadly the same methods of publicity were employed in all these towns. They were, in rank order, Burnley, Bury, Wigan, Blackpool, Chester, Preston, Oldham, Southport, Wallasey, Rochdale, Bolton, Bootle, Blackburn, Liverpool, Warrington, St. Helens, Stockport, Birkenhead and Barrow-in-Furness. Yet Manchester and Salford remained unresponsive despite their potential danger from attack.

As previously remarked, even the Czechoslovakian crisis did not appreciably increase ARP recruitment, but it did increase political interest in the matter. Manchester Labour Party's pamphlet *Your Manchester* produced at the end of October 1938 presented an emotive and class-conscious approach: 'The wealthy can afford to buy efficient masks. They give the workers masks which let

the smoke through. They give the worker's children — tiny tots under 4 — Nothing!'⁴⁶ Labour candidates like Frank Walker in Longsight and Clifford Lamb in Blackley demanded that central government implement Labour's proposals for deep shelters, but once again it was rare to see ARP being related directly to local conditions. When discussed locally it was seen as a 'political' matter rather than as one of safety. 'The Socialist Party', a Conservative candidate warned, 'wants to gain control of the Air Warden's Scheme for political purposes'.⁴⁷ All parties continued to look to central government who, in the phrase of James Simmonds the Fascist candidate for South Gorton, should 'shoulder the cost' of civil defence.

For this reason ARP did not 'breakthrough' into municipal politics. It was still largely overshadowed by the staple local issues of housing, health and employment. It appears to have had little impact on the local election results in 1938, with the Conservatives gaining four wards and Labour holding steady at 52. ARP had two great disadvantages. First, it was seen as a central government responsibility. Local politicians felt there were more pressing problems and ARP-related rate increases were unacceptable. Second, if ARP was projected as a municipal issue, which the 1935 Home Office Circular attempted to do, it then suffered the resounding apathy which Manchester's municipal activities seemed to experience. In local elections from 1935 to 1938 average turnout was about 40 per cent and there were regular lamentations about 'Manchester apathy'.⁴⁸

However, municipal indifference was not unique to Manchester or Salford and why their citizens did not respond actively to ARP requires further study. At the outset of ARP in 1935 there was an often stated belief that Manchester was geographically protected from air attack by the 'dreaded natural barrage of the Pennines', and would be, as Joseph Nall the M.P. for Hulme remarked in November 1935, 'one of the safest industrial areas in the country'.⁴⁹ How far this influenced public opinion on ARP, if at all, is difficult to estimate. So too is the influence of the activity of the various peace groups in the city in the immediate pre-war years. They did attend ARP exercises to demonstrate polite opposition and hand out literature. 'Peace seems to be Manchester's best-seller at the moment', the *City News* remarked in March 1937, 'Every meeting on the subject being packed to the doors'.⁵⁰ Again, how far these activities impinged upon ARP recruitment requires further examination.



Assembling an Anderson shelter.



Filling of sandbags at Manchester Grammar School, 1939.

Similar analysis could also be directed to the social structure of Manchester itself. Unlike Liverpool with its obvious coastal vulnerability and perhaps closer knit community, Manchester's response to ARP was diverse and in essence a series of local responses rather than a 'city' ethos. Bodies like the Benchill Residents' Association, the Barlow Moor Tenants' Association, the Burnage Residents' Association and similar groups in Higher Blackley all articulated their demands or petitions as separate bodies.⁵¹ There seemed to be little attempt to put a 'city view' to the ARP planners, nor did the planners co-opt any representatives of residents' or tenants' associations onto the ARP Committee.

When ARP received local press coverage it was either whimsical or condemnatory. An ARP exercise was mounted in Platt Fields in July 1938 which produced the observation that 'it would have been long and pointless even without the failure of one bomb to co-operate with the show'.⁵² The closure of public baths to adapt them for ARP needs, led to regular irritation at a time when many homes lacked their own baths. The work of the ARP Committee was rarely praised. In a leader of July 1937, 'A City Unprepared', the *Manchester Evening News* dismissed the ARP preparations as 'a few lectures' and 'a few volunteers'.⁵³ This certainly was an undervaluing of what had been done. Inevitably, however, the basis of ARP was its voluntarism. Under normal conditions any form of conscription would have been unacceptable. Psychologically, to enlist for ARP seemed to imply that peace was evaporating. Indeed to prepare for the contingency of bombing, it was argued, might invite that contingency.

While the tragedy of Poland was unfolding in August 1939 Manchester's civil defence, like those of other cities, was placed on a war footing. On the 24 August Adcock put his

staff at the Town Hall on twenty-four hour working. Corporation buildings were sandbagged and a frenzied struggle began to bring the Report and Control Centres, Wardens, Posts, Air Raid District Depots and First Aid Posts to readiness. Frantic work continued on shelter trenches and the conversion of a section of the Manchester and Salford Canal under Camp Street to a large shelter. More ominously mortuaries were equipped and the purchase of wood for coffins authorised.

On 31 August Adcock received a coded telegram from the Home Office indicating that war was imminent and that all pre-arranged measures must now be taken. The Emergency Committee now became operative and, with Maxwell and Adcock, moved with commendable speed to implement the city's ARP plans. Three thousand patients were transferred from Manchester's hospitals either to their homes or other centres. The evacuation plan proceeded with remarkable smoothness, and no sign of panic. On 1 September 61,000 persons were removed, involving the use of 114 trains, 150 buses and the closure of 268 schools.⁵⁴ This was truly a great administrative achievement involving as it did, vast co-ordination for an unprecedented venture.

War was declared on the 3 September 1939 and its reality proved in the end to be the major factor for ARP recruitment. Within the first two weeks of war 12,000 persons volunteered for civil defence work in Manchester.⁵⁵ Throughout the city at the beginning of September there were amazing scenes as hundreds of volunteers helped fill sandbags to protect the buildings in which they worked. Far from fleeing the city in panic, citizens besieged the Town Hall to enlist in the ARP services or as Special Constables. Peacetime ARP recruitment tended to reflect a middle-class bias towards the 'clerical' or non-manual side of ARP. New recruits



Air Raid Wardens in Moston.

now applied for all aspects of the service.

Obviously the bulk of the volunteers were untrained and it was fortunate that they were not put to the test immediately. Such indeed were the vagaries of public opinion that, in the anti-climax of the 'phoney war' the augmented civil defences now seemed anomalous and were castigated for 'getting good pay for doing nothing'.⁵⁶ Throughout 1940 the ARP service was to experience further criticism and even cuts in personnel. It was only with the preliminary air raids on Manchester beginning in August 1940 and culminating in the major attacks on the city in December and January 1941 that the civil defence services were finally accepted.

The performance of Manchester's ARP services in wartime cannot be discussed here. It is difficult to state precisely how many lives or how much property was saved due to ARP. Thankfully the scale of the attacks never approached their dreadful projections, although 554 Mancunians were to be killed by bombing in the war. By September 1939 Manchester had a workable network of ARP services and a fire-fighting capacity which was to stand it in good stead in December 1940. The 'phoney war' had provided a valuable breathing space which the Manchester ARP planners had used to advantage. Wartime, however, did expose further weaknesses in the city's ARP, particularly in the welfare of the bombed out and homeless.⁵⁷ To this degree the criticisms that the city's ARP had always been too property orientated rather than 'people-centred' were correct. However, this criticism has also been applied to other major cities under fire.⁵⁸

This study has attempted to assess the development of Manchester City Council's ARP policies within four main restraints. The first was the divided responsibility for the service between central and local government which produced an acrimonious dialogue already embittered by the dispute over the costs of unemployment relief. Manchester, through its influence on the Association of Municipal Corporations, helped move the government

towards ARP legislation and then become the first city in the country under that legislation to have its ARP scheme approved. Secondly, there was the inevitable discord over finance both at central and local level in a period of municipal retrenchment. In this context the decision to appoint an ARP Committee and commence planning was perhaps remarkable given the uniform reservations expressed about it. Thirdly, was this lack of consensus which made ARP unique in the history of local government services. Education, health and housing had all produced controversy, but usually the debate tended to centre on means or resources rather than the principle or existence of the service itself. For many individuals, ARP was both financially and morally unacceptable. For every political party in Manchester — Conservatives, Labour, Liberal, Communist and Fascist — it was a central government matter, if it had to be introduced at all. Finally there was the rock of public apathy which made Manchester and Salford unique in the region. It was with these restraints that Manchester ARP planners had to contend.

Much regional research remains to be done to put Manchester City Council's ARP services into perspective, but a few tentative observations may be made regarding the neighbouring authorities, to indicate that Manchester's ARP work was by no means insignificant in spite of its weak recruitment.

County Councils, under the ARP Act 1937, were the supreme scheme-making authorities. They were obliged to devise scheme preparations with their subordinate municipal boroughs, urban and rural districts. By May 1938 Cheshire County Council was locked in an angry correspondence with Sale Borough Council which was bitterly angry about the Cheshire Chief Constable's 'interference' in their affairs.⁵⁹ Macclesfield Rural Council joined in this dispute, and by October 1938 Cheshire's ARP schemes were described as 'chaotic'.⁶⁰ In contrast to Manchester, Rochdale seems to have only augmented its police force to form an ARP Department after Munich.⁶¹

Set against this background, Manchester had made admirable progress in ARP. It had the advantage of being a unitary scheme-making authority with numerous officials like the Town Clerks Warbreck Howell and A.H. Adcock and the Chief Constable, John Maxwell, who, whatever their reservations, pressed ahead to construct an adequate ARP framework. Politically, credit too must be paid to Sir Robert Noton Barclay whose contribution to civil defence continued throughout the war; and to Douglas Gosling the energetic Chief Air Raid Warden.

Labour politicians like T.M. Larrad and William Johnson had the unenviable task of implementing a policy which many in their party opposed, but which they now came to accept as necessary. As previously remarked, ARP measures can never be fully measured but it seems reasonable to conclude that without the labours of these people operating in a hostile and apathetic climate, the consequences for Manchester in December 1940 would have been much worse.

NOTES

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20. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1938
21. Kidd Pamphlet, *Municipal Election Propaganda*, (M.E.P.) Box 1937, Manchester Central Library
22. Wolfenden Pamphlet, *M.E.P.*, Box 1937
23. *Manchester City News*, 20 July 1938
24. *Daily Dispatch*, 9 Sept. 1938
25. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Aug. 1938
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