

Visualizing Wartime Destruction and Postwar Reconstruction: Herbert Mason's Photograph of St. Paul's Reevaluated*

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In the center of the photograph is the dome of St. Paul's, the grey soot-stained building contrasted with the white smoke surrounding it. Below the cathedral in the foreground, the black outline of a row of buildings is discernible. Only the facades remain, the interiors destroyed by fires that now illuminate the spaces where windows were. These are the most prominent features of Herbert Mason's photograph of London during the Blitz, taken on December 29, 1940. For many, a verbal description alone is enough to recall this photograph taken seventy-five years ago. When the Blitz is discussed, the image is frequently reproduced; when the image is discussed, the term "iconic" is usually invoked.

Mason, born in 1903, the son of a commercial photographer, was working for Associated Newspapers at the time. After the Blitz, he became an official photographer in the Royal Navy, sailing to Murmansk with Russian convoys as well as to Malta and Sicily.¹ However, none of Mason's photographs approached the prominence achieved by his depiction of St. Paul's, first published in the *Daily Mail* on December 31, 1940 (fig. 1). Within a month of its creation, it was reproduced in the *Illustrated London News*, the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Life*, and even the journal of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain. Within a year, it had been used in numerous photo-books. Today, looking for an apt cover image, publishers of both popular and scholarly literature on the Blitz frequently reach for Mason's photograph. Most recently, it was the cover image for Lara Feigel's *The Love-Charm of Bombs* (a group biography of prominent authors in

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¹ Information regarding Mason's professional life is scant. These details are derived from conversations with Michael Mason and Jonathan Bain (Daily Mail Library) and from Mason's obituary ("The Cameraman Who Took the Greatest Picture of the Blitz," *Daily Mail*, October 24, 1964). The Photograph Archive of the Imperial War Museum includes over 600 photographs attributed to "Mason, H A (Lt.)" (e.g., Admiralty Official Collection, cat. no. A 14061).

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More Of A Pal Than Ever
SHERLEY'S
TONE AND CONDITION POWDERS

Daily Mail
FOR KING AND EMPIRE

LATE WAR NEWS SPECIAL
Buemelt's
LITON LIGHTS
NEW ELECTRIC

NO. 13,941 TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1940 ONE PENNY

Hitler Planned Monday Swoop

London was to Blaze First
By NOEL MONSIE, Daily Mail Air Correspondent

HITLER meant to start the second Great Fire of London as the prelude to an invasion.

THE FACTS

These are the facts of the air attack on London on Monday night. The attack was planned to start at 11.15 p.m. and was to be a surprise attack. The first wave of bombers was to start at 11.15 p.m. and was to be a surprise attack. The first wave of bombers was to start at 11.15 p.m. and was to be a surprise attack.

WAR'S GREATEST PICTURE: St. Paul's Stands Unharm'd in the Midst of the Burning City



America Moves

BIG ARMS FLOW HAS BEGUN

From Daily Mail Correspondent New York, Monday.
THE United States Defense Commission announced today that they had approved arms contracts worth \$2,000,000,000.

LATEST

MORE U.S. AID FOR GREECE

Washington, Monday. Mr. Warrenton, Secretary of the United States Defense Commission, today announced that the United States Government was making a new decision, including the first grant for manufacturing loans.

ADMIRAL LEAHY REACHES EUROPE

London, Monday. Admiral Leahy, the new American Ambassador to the United Kingdom, today arrived in London on the ship the *Black Prince*.

Churchill Sees London's Ruins

Mr. Churchill, accompanied by Mr. Morrison, today visited the ruins of London after the air attack on Monday night.

Morrison on Radio to-night

Mr. Morrison will broadcast a message to the nation on the radio to-night, announcing the results of the air attack on London.

HAVOC COULD HAVE BEEN SAVED

By Daily Mail Reporter
MANY of Sunday night's fires in the City of London could have been avoided if fire-watching regulations had been properly observed.

Berlin 'All Quiet'

Berlin radio announced today that there was no sign of any military movements in the city.

Four Raiders in Pacific

Four German raiding planes were reported to have been shot down in the Pacific Ocean.

'Sash to Fortify Canary Islands'

The British Government has announced that it will send a sash to the Canary Islands to fortify the region.

100 to 1 Backing for Roosevelt

From Daily Mail Correspondent Washington, Monday.
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT is "unquestionably" backed 100 to 1 in the United States for his decision to pledge more aid to Britain and declared that the Axis could not win the war.

China Seeks U.S. Planes

From Daily Mail Correspondent New York, Monday.
According to a report received today, the Chinese Government is seeking to purchase American-made fighters from the United States.

500 Were Killed in Manchester

A report from Manchester today stated that 500 people were killed in the city during the air attack on Monday night.

LONDON LULLABY



FIG. 1.—"War's Greatest Picture: St. Paul's Stands Unharm'd in the Midst of the Burning City." Cover, *Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940. Photographer: Herbert Mason. Courtesy of Daily Mail and the Museum of London. A color version of this figure is available online.

wartime London), while Richard Overy's *The Bombing War* carries a photograph taken from St. Paul's showing the destruction caused on December 29, 1940.² Mason's photograph, the building, and the bombing raid have become emblematic of both the British Blitz experience and the bombing war in Europe.

Reflecting its wide circulation, copies of Mason's photograph are found today in numerous archives.³ Dating these vintage prints exactly is not possible and Mason's original negative has been lost.⁴ The challenge of tracing this photograph's history, however, goes beyond that of locating an original document or piecing together the story of its creation and initial publication. What remains implicit or unexamined in many uses of the image as visual shorthand is the cultural significance this prominent press photograph has had since its first circulation.⁵ Already a potent symbol prior to the Blitz, as a result of Mason's photograph St. Paul's became a key image in both wartime visual culture and postwar public debate. Combining a depiction of the dome (an architectural icon) with images of the burned-out facades of vernacular buildings (which might be homes or places of work), the photograph facilitates different emphases. This mutability has enabled Mason's photograph to occupy a central position in the visualization of wartime destruction in the 1940s, postwar reconstruction into the 1950s, and subsequent representations and valuations of both.

The objective of this article is twofold: to make the case for a research program connecting photography studies to the historiography of contemporary Europe, and to examine in detail the cultural impact of Mason's photograph in Britain. The first section of the article argues for a sustained and critical engagement with photography as primary material in general before outlining an approach to press photographs for the research and writing of contemporary European history in particular. It proposes an interdisciplinary model of the published photograph,

² Lara Feigel, *The Love-Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London, 2013); Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe, 1939–1945* (London, 2013).

³ A print is held in the Imperial War Museum's Photograph Archive (Ministry of Information, Second World War Press Agency Print Collection, cat. no. HU 36220A), and a copy of the *Daily Mail* from December 31, 1940 is held by the Museum of London (object ID no. 2003.12). Copies of the photograph are also held in the Hulton Archive (London), as well as the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC).

⁴ The loss of the original negative was reported to Brian Stater in an interview with David Shepherd, picture librarian at the *Daily Mail* (June 28, 1996). It was confirmed by Jonathan Bain (Daily Mail Library) in a conversation with me (January 31, 2014).

⁵ This is briefly discussed by Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth, and Popular Memory* (Abingdon, 2000), 80–82; and Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It!: Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow, 2004), 132; Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II*, trans. Lesley Sharpe and Jeremy Noakes (Oxford, 2014), 285–86. See also Iain Borden, "Imaging Architecture: The Uses of Photography in the Practice of Architectural History," *Journal of Architecture* 12 (2007): 57–77, 71.

drawing on insights from photography studies (a developing research area across cognate fields including anthropology, art history, cultural geography, cultural studies, and visual culture) and addressing four key concepts: discourse, agency, visibility, and mobility. Subsequent sections employ this interdisciplinary model in a detailed examination of the publication and appropriation of Mason's photograph. Although the photograph is by itself ambiguous, its repeated publication in various determinate contexts has resulted in a contested significance that illuminates key cultural values at stake in debates about the bombing war, postwar reconstruction, and the social contract in Britain.

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY MODEL OF THE PUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPH

As far as historians of contemporary Europe are concerned, photography is stuck in an intellectual holding pattern. Its imminent arrival has been frequently announced, but a sustained engagement with photographs as primary material in exploring and giving an account of the recent past continues to suffer delays. Innovative historical research has engaged with twentieth-century European photography,⁶ but these contributions have yet to establish photography and its analysis as a mainstream aspect of contemporary European historical writing. What is still lacking, as Raphael Samuel noted twenty years ago, are "the rudiments of an agreed scholarly procedure which would allow photographs to be treated with the high seriousness accorded to much less problematical sources."⁷

Why does this matter? Since its invention in the mid-nineteenth century, photography has infiltrated every aspect of human experience, be it recreation or science, commerce or politics, relations between family members or wars between nations. The medium and its capacity to visualize the world and its inhabitants has thus been intimately woven through the fabric of key phenomena of concern to contemporary history, including propaganda, public relations, the mass media, and everyday life. Photography demands contemporary historians'

⁶ Relevant monographs include Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington, IN, 1997); Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A Cultural History* (Abingdon, 1997); and Kitty Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape, 1927–1951* (Oxford, 2007). See also Jennifer Tucker, ed., "Photography and Historical Interpretation," *History and Theory*, theme issue 48 (2009); Lynn Hunt and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., "The History Issue," *Journal of Visual Culture* 9 (2010). Forthcoming publications include Paul Betts, Jennifer Evans, and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, eds., *The Ethics of Seeing: 20th Century German Documentary Photography Reconsidered* (New York, 2016); and Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, eds., "Professional Photography and Amateur Snapshots: Reconstructing Histories of Influence, Dialogue and Subversion," *Central European History* 49 (2016).

⁷ Raphael Samuel, "The Eye of History," in *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 2012), 330.

attention because social and cultural change of the twentieth century cannot be sufficiently understood without grasping the role played by modes of mass communication that mediated debates and shaped the public sphere.⁸

A prime example of this active role is the use of photography in the press—a practice that became established in the early 1900s following advances in image making, transmission, and printing. Whether reappropriated or taken expressly for publication, whether staged or candid, photographs in newspapers and magazines are, like headlines, succinct and allusive. Although they are ephemeral, press photographs, being topical, can have an incremental impact; new images each day can over weeks or months establish lasting perceptions of a particular issue or event. While most individual press photographs are quickly superseded, the medium can inform the tenor and direction of public debate. Photographs circulating in the press do not simply convey information or “news”; they convey ideas, attitudes, and values with an economy of means that effaces the act of communication they achieve.⁹

Moreover, press photographs reach a considerable audience, constituting a communal aspect of everyday experience. As Benedict Anderson argued, newspapers are among the modern commodities that “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”¹⁰ Anderson hinted at the role of vision in the creation of imagined communities, suggesting that when the newspaper reader observes others around him consuming the same artifact, he or she is “continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.”¹¹ But the importance of vision and visual material goes beyond such observation. As a consequence of press photographs, citizens of industrialized European nations in the twentieth century did not just see each other engaged in the same act of consumption; they had in common specific objects of vision. As Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites argue, “The daily stream of photojournalistic images . . . defines the public through an act of common spectatorship. When the event shown is itself part of national life the public seems to see itself.”¹²

⁸ In contrast to their neglect of photography, historians of contemporary Europe have examined the social and cultural relevance of cinema in detail. Conversely, historical writing focused on nineteenth-century Europe and the twentieth-century United States is more engaged with photography as primary material and the questions of method it raises. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the reasons for these differences.

⁹ As Barthes remarked discussing photography in *Paris-Match*, press images simultaneously picture and categorize their subject: “il désigne et il notifie, il fait comprendre et il impose” (Roland Barthes, “La mythe, aujourd’hui,” *Mythologies* [Paris, 2010], 228).

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 2006), 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

¹² Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, 2007), 42.

In the writing of contemporary European history this process of visual communication—of making meaning—is seldom scrutinized. Press photographs are reproduced as mere illustrations, neither integrated into historical analysis nor interrogated by historical writing. There is a growing literature on the history of photojournalism concerning the technologies, personalities, and companies relevant to its development as a central facet of news culture.¹³ What is largely lacking is a sensitivity to the role of press photographs in public culture and processes of social change—that is, to communal aspects of consuming news images and how they articulate with the formation of collective attitudes.¹⁴

The history of a photograph's production, the nature of its circulation, and the reception of the photograph by its audience are all relevant to such analysis. However, isolating any one of these areas of inquiry restricts what researchers can say about a particular image. Concentrate on production, for instance, and even the most painstaking biographical, technological, or institutional account leaves out what impact the image might have had. Tackling reception, it becomes clear that, as Michael Baxandall recognized, "records of public response" are "disablingly thin": since it is uncommon to put into words the experience of viewing images, "a society's visual practices are, in the nature of things, not all or even mostly represented in verbal records."¹⁵ What is required for the historical analysis of press photography, therefore, is a means of examining the visual record as well as its verbal counterpart; a means of evaluating a photograph's mode of address to its audience. Meeting this challenge demands the integration of visual methodologies into historians' research on contemporary Europe.

To this end, I propose a conceptual model or detailed characterization of the published photograph (whether in a newspaper, magazine, or book) that outlines important facets of its address to its audience and that can be used to analyze photographs in a way germane to the research questions of contemporary European history. Outlining this model or construct of the publicly circulating photograph entails elucidating four key concepts discussed and deployed across a range of fields including intellectual history, historical anthropology, visual studies, and cultural geography. These issues are discourse, agency, visibility, and mobility.

¹³ For example, Bodo von Dewitz and Robert Lebeck, eds., *Kiosk: Eine Geschichte der Fotoreportage, 1839–1973* (Göttingen, 2001); Annette Vowinckle, "German (Jewish) Photojournalists in Exile: A Story of Networks and Success," *German History* 31 (2013): 473–96. See also Tim Gidal, *Modern Photojournalism: Origin and Evolution, 1910–1933* (New York, 1972).

¹⁴ For examples of such an approach, see Thierry Gervais, Christian Delage, and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., "Saisi dans l'action: Repenser l'histoire du photojournalisme," *Études photographiques* 26 (2010); and Jason Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News* (London, 2015).

¹⁵ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1988), 24, 109.

First, it is necessary to recognize that the published photograph circulates in a dynamic set of relations with words, other images, and ideas that extend beyond the page. The significance or meaning of the individual photograph is shaped by these relationships. The photographic image is—as Michel Foucault said of the book—“a node within a network.”¹⁶ Such networks of reference or discourses constitute a set of conventions that direct the production of photographic representations and their reception.¹⁷ It is within such discourses that the individual image needs to be located to appreciate how photography is part of processes of making meaning in the public sphere. Historical analysis should not aim to see past distortions or inadequacies of photographic representation to a historical past beyond, but rather to understand the photograph as a means by which its subject was made meaningful.¹⁸

Second, it should be acknowledged that the discourses within which a published news photograph circulates are not simply repressive or restrictive, limiting what is shown and how; they are also productive. Visual, verbal, and intellectual conventions cohere to constitute a set of implicit (albeit mutable) rules that regulate the production of other images. Moreover, in the very act of representing, photographs produce ways of seeing and thinking about their subject. The published press photograph performs a point of view (in both a visual and an intellectual sense) that its audience is encouraged to adopt. Photographs are not just images of a scene; they are also about a scene, instantiating a position toward it, whether positive or negative, tragic or comic, surrealist or humanist. Photographs thus possess intention or agency. Moving beyond the limits of histories of production and the scant material for histories of reception, this vital second principle—the agency of the photograph—underpins analysis of the manner in which published images addressed past audiences.¹⁹

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon, 2002), 25–26. Regarding Foucault’s relevance to historical analysis of photographs, see Julia Adeney Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” *History and Theory*, theme issue 48 (2009): 151–68.

¹⁷ Victor Burgin, “Looking at Photographs,” in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (Basingstoke, 1982), 144.

¹⁸ Approaching the photograph as a discursive artifact is not necessarily to reject as philosophically ungrounded other uses of photography (such as the juridical) founded in ideas of a particular causal relation between the world and this mode of image making (photography’s indexicality). Rather, it entails placing questions regarding the truthfulness or otherwise of photographic images in parentheses, while recognizing this may not be sustainable in all cases. For instance, the question of indexicality is pertinent to the study of the Holocaust—one area of historical analysis that has developed a sustained and critical consideration of photographic representation and its role in giving accounts of the past. For a survey of this research, see Sarah Farmer, “Going Visual: Holocaust Representation and Historical Method,” *American Historical Review* 115 (2010): 115–22.

¹⁹ The notion of photographic agency is not anthropomorphism in the sense of attributing consciousness to the image. Rather, the concept of the agency of the image

Third, albeit photographs resemble texts in informative ways, they are visual artifacts, and visibility cannot be left out of historians' approaches to photography. Visibility encompasses the visual experience in its entirety: not just the physiological act of viewing but also the cultural conditioning entailed by any particular instance of viewing.²⁰ To pay attention to visibility in the historical study of a press photograph is to attend to the part played by the visual characteristics of the image (e.g., tone, color, composition) as well as the relevance of any accompanying text to issues of vision (be they efforts to direct viewers' attention or figures of speech playing on the visual). Image and text together shape the photograph's address to its audience.

Finally, the photograph cannot be understood simply at one particular place or moment. Photographs are made and exchanged; they exist both in a network of social interactions and in time. A sophisticated analysis of photography needs to take into account the manner in which individual images derive their importance from the social interactions they facilitate and to recognize that this social context is subject to change. As Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart have argued, it is necessary to write the "social biography" of photographs or, as Gillian Rose terms it, to study photographs "on the move."²¹ Attending to a photograph's mobility enables the contemporary historian to track how the significance of an image circulating in the past shifted. Moreover, in the case of those photographs that achieve iconic status, the social biography of an image allows an assessment of how prominent visualizations of a given phenomenon can shape its significance, facilitating its transition from a news item of immediate concern to a facet of collective memory.

In sum, historical analysis of a photograph must tackle the specific publication and cultural context of ideas, words, and other images that determine its significance at the time of its original and subsequent circulations, shedding light on the shifting value and importance an image may have had in relation to topics of

recognizes the capacity of the photograph—divorced or distinct from the specific intentions of a photographer, a publisher, or a photographic subject—to have effects in the world. Of course, like people, not all images are equally powerful; their agency can be restricted or facilitated. For a parallel discussion of the relevance of material culture and its agency to historical research, see Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110 (2005): 1015–45.

²⁰ Characterizing the distinction between vision and visibility, Foster writes that the terms signal "a difference within the visual—between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations—a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see" (Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visibility*, ed. Hal Foster [New York, 1999], ix).

²¹ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction: Photographs as Objects," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (Abingdon, 2004), 3–6; Gillian Rose, "Spectacle and Spectres: London 7 July 2005," *New Formations* 62 (2007): 45–59, 57.

public debate. Sensitivity to the issues of discourse, agency, visuality, and mobility permits this analysis of the factors that shape a photograph's address to its audience and the value and significance of the subjects depicted. The kernel of the interdisciplinary model I propose is as follows: the historical study of publicly circulating photographs should analyze photographs as discursive and intentional visual objects in use.

On one level, this proposal represents business as usual for historians; it offers a means by which contemporary historians can approach photographic imagery in pursuit of existing research objectives, not a rethinking of those objectives. What, if anything, is novel about this research agenda is the call to move photography from the margins of historical research and writing on contemporary Europe and place it instead at the center of these inquiries. Sophisticated accounts of social and cultural change demand such a move, since throughout the twentieth century photography was a central means of representation constituting the public sphere. In what follows, this model is employed to reevaluate the position of Mason's photograph in public debate and analyze its role in shaping collective attitudes and memories concerning wartime destruction and postwar reconstruction.

FORGING "A SYMBOL IN THE INFERNO"

The Blitz was far from the surprise attack suggested by its sobriquet (derived from the German *Blitzkrieg*, or lightning war). Large-scale urban destruction and fatalities from aerial attack had been anticipated in Britain, as elsewhere, for some decades in the aftermath of air raids during the First World War that resulted in the death of 1,239 British civilians.²² In interwar Europe, both the treatises of military strategists and popular culture ruminated on the prospect of a future air war. The Italian General Giulio Douhet, for instance, advocated "an intense and violent offensive, even at the risk of enduring the same thing from one's enemy,"²³ while William Cameron Menzies's 1936 film *Things to Come* (an adaptation of H. G. Wells's apocalyptic novel) visualized a world laid waste by aerial warfare. Bombing of civilian populations, which had been pursued by colonial powers including Italy and Britain, was infamously perpetrated by the Luftwaffe in support of General Franco's Spanish nationalist forces. The bombing of Guernica in April 1937 was immortalized in Picasso's monochrome painting, exhibited in Paris and England in 1938. In 1939, the Ministry of Health was estimating that

²² Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge, 2012), 21. See also Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908–1941* (Farnham, 2014).

²³ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (London, 1943), 94. Douhet's book was originally published in Italy in 1921.

600,000 British civilians might be killed in future bombing raids.²⁴ There was thus a sense of foreboding when in Britain, on Sunday, September 3, 1939, barely half an hour after the announcement that the country was at war, the first air-raid siren sounded. Winston Churchill recalled seeking refuge in an air-raid shelter for the first time: "My imagination drew pictures of ruin and carnage . . . for had we not all been taught how terrible air raids would be?"²⁵ The choice of terminology ("pictures of ruin and carnage") is noteworthy, suggesting the prominence of visual representations in the anticipation of bombing. In May 1940, as the Germans advanced through Europe, Rotterdam (only 200 miles east of London) was devastated by aerial bombardment. On September 7, 1940, the Blitz on the British capital began in earnest.

From the start, St. Paul's was perfectly suited to being a significant wartime symbol. First, it was a place of worship, and the threat to and destruction of such buildings, as Overy noted, was "an instantly recognizable sacrilege" implying the enemy were godless vandals.²⁶ Second, London's cathedral was an important facet of the visual culture of the British Empire—which, as James Ryan observed, relied on photography in addition to other more traditional media.²⁷ The dominant feature of the city skyline at the time, St. Paul's was not simply an architectural landmark representing London, the capital of Britain; it was a symbol of London as the capital of the world's largest empire.²⁸ Third, the building's own genesis gave impetus to its wartime symbolism. In 1666, the Great Fire destroyed much of the City of London, including the cathedral's predecessor of the same name. Built between 1675 and 1710, Sir Christopher Wren's St. Paul's was thus a phoenix from the ashes. Very quickly, the bombing of London in late 1940 was being referred to as "the Second Great Fire," with St. Paul's an emblem of this conflagration.²⁹

²⁴ Cited in Constantine FitzGibbon, *The Blitz* (London, 1957), 6. The total number of civilians killed in Britain by enemy action during the war was 60,595. Of these, 22,069 died between September 7 and December 31, 1940, with another 19,918 killed in 1941. Around half of British civilian deaths (29,890) occurred in London (Terence H. O'Brien, *Civil Defence* [London, 1955], 677).

²⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, 6 vols. (London, 1948), 1:319.

²⁶ Richard Overy, "Introduction," in *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940–1945*, ed. Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy (London, 2011), 17.

²⁷ James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London, 1997), 218.

²⁸ The imperial symbolism of St. Paul's is exemplified by Niels Lund's painting *The Heart of Empire* (1904). See Iain S. Black, "Rebuilding 'The Heart of the Empire': Bank Headquarters in the City of London, 1919–1939," *Art History* 22 (1999): 593–618.

²⁹ For instance, the bombing raid of December 29, 1940, was reported as follows in the *Daily Herald*: "The first Great Fire of London blazed for days. The second, started by German planes on Sunday night, was well under control yesterday" (Clifford Webb, "St. Paul's Defied Flames," *Daily Herald*, December 31, 1940). Betjeman also drew

The prominence of St. Paul's as symbol in the months prior to the raid of December 29, 1940, is exemplified by a short film made in October of that year. *London Can Take It* (a General Post Office Film Unit production shown widely on the American continent, which was also screened for British audiences under the title *Britain Can Take It*) used an image of St. Paul's as its title screen.³⁰ Toward the end of the film, Wren's cathedral is pictured again as the voice-over by *Collier's Weekly* war correspondent Quentin Reynolds intoned, "It is hard to see five centuries of labor destroyed in five seconds, but London is fighting back." Thus when the Blitz began, St. Paul's was—as Angus Calder noted of the myth of courage and grace under fire—"already to hand" as a multifaceted symbol.³¹ It stood for Christian rectitude, for resilience, for the nation, and for its imperial power. To a British audience, the building was potentially a visual token of nothing short of civilization itself.

Demonstrating the vulnerability of the cathedral in wartime, as well as the sense of importance attached to it, Godfrey Allen established the St. Paul's Watch. Surveyor to the cathedral, he recruited forty volunteers from the Royal Institute of British Architects.³² At night, they patrolled the building, poised to extinguish fires caused by incendiary bombs. Such precautions were not without good cause. On the night of December 29, 1940, alone, twenty-eight incendiaries fell on the cathedral.³³ The same night Herbert Mason took at least three photographs of the City of London, one of which was quickly to become the iconic image of St. Paul's during the Blitz.³⁴ Most likely taken with a Van Neck camera using quarter-plate glass negatives, the exposures were a considerable technological achievement.³⁵ The photograph was published on the front page of the *Daily Mail* two days later (fig. 1).³⁶

parallels between the two events (John Betjeman, "Domine Dirige Nos," *The Listener*, January 9, 1941, 37–39).

³⁰ *London Can Take It*, directed by Humphrey Jennings and Harry Watt, G.P.O. Film Unit, 1940. Available at http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/films/london_take.htm.

³¹ Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1992), 7.

³² *St. Paul's in War and Peace, 1939–1958* (London, 1960), 39.

³³ J. M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London, 1980), 156.

³⁴ In the newspaper on December 31, 1940, the location was described simply as "a city roof." It was only later in an interview published in 1957 that Mason is recorded as saying he was on the roof of the Daily Mail building—Northcliffe House on Tudor Street (FitzGibbon, *The Blitz*, 212).

³⁵ I am grateful to Colin Harding (National Media Museum, Bradford) for identifying the camera from a photograph of Mason. The publication of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain alluded to Mason's achievement in its caption to the image when used on its cover: "The light that was available for an instantaneous exposure is an indication of the fierceness and extent of the fire" (*Photographic Journal* 81 [1941]: 123).

³⁶ It has been suggested that censors delayed the photograph's publication (Max Hastings, "Censored for Days, This Picture Was Finally Published in the Mail," *Daily*

The picture printed by the newspaper was a cropped version of a larger photograph such as the one now held in the Imperial War Museum (fig. 2). The section of the original landscape exposure reproduced in the *Daily Mail* is roughly square. A section of foreground on the right-hand side is obscured by a superimposed advertisement for Horlicks with the title "London Lullaby." The top two-thirds of the image are dominated by the cathedral. The bottom third includes the much less obvious facades of gutted buildings. The relationship between the foreground and background visually suggests that the cathedral stands in a metonymic relation to the capital in which it sits: St. Paul's above represents the city below. The interjection of the advertisement (and, ironically, its title) hints at more nuanced ways in which the organization of space within the frame of the published image offers a particular view of the cathedral. The overlapping advert detracts from or offsets the destruction in the foreground, already minimized through cropping. Likewise, the juxtaposition of the ruins in the foreground (which take up only a small part of the reproduced picture) with the cathedral in the background (which dominates) works to draw attention away from what was destroyed to what remains.

In addition to the significance suggested by the spatial relationship between the cathedral and the gutted buildings within the photograph, details in Mason's picture activate the associations with which Wren's cathedral was already invested. The cross on top of the dome, seemingly lit by the fires, underscores the building's status as a place of worship stressing the notion of a Christian nation facing a barbaric threat, while the billowing smoke evokes the Great Fire. Moreover, the tonal variation in this monochrome image performs a central function in shaping the point of view it promotes to its audience. The burned-out facades of

Mail, December 31, 2010, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1342305/The-Blitzs-iconic-image-On-70th-anniversary-The-Mail-tells-story-picture-St-Pauls.html>). I have not found corroborating evidence for this. If reviewed, Mason's photograph would have been processed by the Photographic Section of the MOI's Press and Censorship Division, led by Hugh Francis. Comprehensive records of the section's work have not been preserved, but a selection of correspondence is held by the National Archives, Kew. A five-page report on the working of the Photographic Section undertaken in May 1941 states that four censors, each working eight-hour shifts, reviewed on average 140 photographs, making an hourly average turnover of seventy photographs (INF 1/184). A series of exchanges regarding the publication of air raid damage photographs is also instructive. The discussion relates to an example including a photograph of a man searching the rubble of his house for his wife and children ("The Searcher: His Family Lies Buried Here," *Daily Mirror*, February 27, 1941). On March 5, 1941, the chief censor, Admiral George Thomson, responded to concerns raised by a regional information officer as follows: "We work on a 50% basis, i.e. if the photograph shews [*sic*] two damaged houses, it must also shew [*sic*] two undamaged. . . . This picture is not censorable—the 'horrific' aspect must be left to the good sense of the Press" (INF 1/184). Mason's photograph easily conforms to this ideal formula.



FIG. 2.—St. Paul's during an air raid, London, December 29, 1940. Photographer: Herbert Mason. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

buildings, although visible, are shrouded in darkness, while the intact cathedral—being better exposed and ringed with bright cloud—is the dominant element of the image, literally over and above the more feeble ruins.

Thus, distinct visual characteristics of the photograph as reproduced in the *Daily Mail* work to offer not simply a newsworthy image of a particular building or event but a visualization of complex abstract ideas as well. Through composition, symbolic resonance, and tonal variation, St. Paul's is presented as the image of a higher truth—something general, overarching, and enduring, in contrast to the particular truth of damage in specific locales. The absence of people from the image makes the work of the operative elements of the photograph easier to achieve; it facilitates the assertion of the buildings as symbols by decoupling them from the specificity that representations of particular individuals might imply. In the absence of a depiction of individual suffering, the photograph's offer of general truths is much less problematic than it might otherwise have been.³⁷

³⁷ In the short interval between the taking of this image and its publication, the MOI decided to back away from the stereotypical image of the plucky Londoner brought to the screen in films like *London Can Take It*. McLaine, citing minutes from a planning

Between the choices taken by the photographer about what to include in the frame and the editors' cropping of the image, however, another set of individuals intervened to help produce this picture of St. Paul's. As Brian Stater has argued, Mason's original photograph was altered in postproduction: "All the compelling details of this image are . . . the work of skilled newspaper staff employed to 'strengthen' the photographs by the judicious use of white, black and grey paint."³⁸ A large print was made of the image, to which paint was applied before it was rephotographed. An exact assessment of which elements were altered in this process is not possible; the original negative is lost and there appear to be no extant prints from it.³⁹ Nonetheless, a number of interventions are evident from examination of a vintage print, such as that held by the Imperial War Museum, including alterations to both the dome and the facades of ruined buildings. For instance, inside the windows that remain, as Stater noted, brushstrokes can be seen giving the impression of fire.

Given this alteration, the photograph's claims to veracity require close analysis through reflection on the wartime discourse concerning news photography and on the caption and commentary accompanying Mason's photograph when first published. The notion of photographic truth was repeatedly asserted in the mid-twentieth century. Before 1939, for instance, *Picture Post* championed the photographic visualization of war when it ran a photo-essay of Robert Capa's images from Spain with the title "This Is War!," suggesting that they offered direct access to the conflict.⁴⁰ In wartime, such claims—combined with the showcasing of

committee meeting dated December 30, 1940, notes that "intelligence sources made it quickly apparent . . . that, while the public appreciated due recognition of their resolute qualities, they resented too great an emphasis on the stereotyped image of the Britisher in adversity as a wise-cracking Cockney" (Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* [London, 1979], 125 and 297 n. 85). This aversion to stereotypes may help account for the rapid recirculation of Mason's depopulated image by wartime editors and publishers; so too might the associations with the publishing and newspaper trades of the damaged area around the cathedral. The adjacent Paternoster Row stood for publishers "as the Temple for lawyers and Harley Street for doctors and surgeons" (William Kent, *The Lost Treasures of London* [London, 1947], 36), while Nicholas Hawksmoor's St. Bride's church (gutted by incendiary bombs) was labeled the "Fleet-Street 'Cathedral'" (*Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940; fig. A1, online only).

³⁸ Brian Stater, "How a Wartime Camera Lied about St. Paul's," *Daily Telegraph*, December 29, 2000. Stater's assessment was informed by an interview with Ron Brooker, chief photographer at the Photograph Archive of the Imperial War Museum, who reviewed the print held by the IWM (May 7, 1996). Stater reported that "An expert view is that as much as two thirds of the surface of the picture were treated."

³⁹ Today, the *Daily Mail* uses a digitally "rebuilt" version of Mason's photograph derived from faded or damaged vintage prints in their collection. I am grateful to Jonathan Bain (Daily Mail Library) for this insight.

⁴⁰ "This Is War!" *Picture Post*, December 3, 1938.

photography's contribution to the war effort through reconnaissance—reached an intense pitch. The lead article in the *Photographic Journal* in April 1941 by the president of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain was titled “Photography's Part in the War.” This issue carried Mason's photograph on its cover.⁴¹ In 1944, *National Geographic* spoke of “fighting with photographs”: “Cameras and film have become as essential in this war as guns and bullets.”⁴² As a result of military imagery and photojournalism in magazines like *Picture Post* and *Life*, the Second World War was a global conflict not simply in being a conflict taking place around the world but also in being viewed by audiences around the world through the global reach of photographic magazines.⁴³

In a 1941 book of war-damage photographs, J. B. Priestley highlighted the assumed truthfulness of camera images. Negotiating the conundrum that collected photographs of bomb sites might give the impression of widespread destruction and dejection (rather than simply documenting particular losses), he argued that “though the camera does not lie, its truth is limited to what its eye can see.”⁴⁴ Priestley thus articulated both photography's supposed veracity and its tendency to offer the particular moment as a general truth. It is this dual phenomenon—implied truthfulness and an affinity to generalization—that added weight to the point of view promoted by Mason's image. The photograph's offer of a truthful, unmediated record allows the assertion of a particular way of seeing the subject depicted while simultaneously working to efface the photograph's own visual rhetoric.

It is within this discourse of championing photography's service record in wartime that the caption and accompanying text for Mason's image should be considered. The title given to Mason's image in this six-page edition of the *Daily Mail* also acted as the main headline for the day. It read: “WAR'S GREATEST PICTURE: St. Paul's stands unharmed in the midst of the burning city.” This title asserts the perceived importance of photography in contemporary warfare through the notion of evaluating and valuing such press pictures. Whether prescient or a self-fulfilling prophecy, it also asserts this image as an iconic symbol before it achieved that status. Most important, the title actively manages the potential ambiguity of the photograph: it directs the audience to view the image

⁴¹ F. J. Mortimer, “Photography's Part in the War,” *Photographic Journal* 81 (1941): 124–45.

⁴² F. Barrows Colton, “How We Fight with Photographs,” *National Geographic*, September 1944, 257.

⁴³ These titles employed émigrés who had worked on publications such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* before Hitler's seizure of power. Both born in Hungary, Capa and the editor of *Picture Post*, Stefan Lorant, left Germany in 1933 for Paris and London, respectively.

⁴⁴ J. B. Priestley, “The Truth behind the Pictures,” in *Britain under Fire* (London, 1941), 5–6.

as one of resilience rather than one of endangerment. To the same end, the accompanying commentary repeatedly emphasizes the contrast between the destruction all around and the cathedral's survival. For instance, an anonymous reporter recounts, "The cathedral itself, its cross above the dome calm and aloof above the sea of flames, stood out, an island of God, safe and untouched."⁴⁵ Similar terminology is repeated in the caption to a second image by Mason on the back page that offers a larger panorama (fig. A1; figs. A1–A4 are available in an online appendix).

An account of taking "War's Greatest Picture" is given by Mason on the front page. "I focused at intervals as the great dome loomed up through the smoke. . . . Then a wind sprang up. Suddenly the shining cross, dome and towers stood out like a symbol in the inferno." These glosses on the photograph emphasize the symbolic components of the picture discussed above, directing attention through words in a way that corroborates the image's mode of address to its audience. The photographer's commentary also adds another somewhat paradoxical dimension: it emphasizes the presumed authenticity of the image (by providing a substantiating eyewitness account), but it also (through characterization of the cathedral as "a symbol in the inferno") highlights the manner in which the meaning of the image is derived from cultural associations rather than the indexical relationship between photograph and photographic subject. The image of St. Paul's during the Blitz is thus constructed—visually and verbally—as a true symbol. In other words, the conflicted conception of photography as both a transparent, objective medium and a vehicle of emotional expression facilitates the presentation of the building's survival as both a historical fact and an emblem of the nation's resolve, the latter interpretation being imbued with the certainty of the former event. The welding together of these two seemingly contradictory takes on the act of photographic representation—the indexical and the symbolic—has contributed to the enduring appeal and impact of Mason's photograph in subsequent decades. As a consequence, the question of manipulation of the image remains a contentious one even after many decades.⁴⁶

Crucially, the newspaper—which had circulation figures of around 1,450,000 in 1940⁴⁷—also offers a way of thinking about other viewers of the image which has proved central to the persistent myth of the Blitz and the position of Mason's photograph in it. The accompanying caption includes an invitation to take a form of pleasure from viewing this photograph and the symbol it presents. Readers of the caption are told that this picture is "one that all Britain will cherish—for it

⁴⁵ *Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., a letter following Stater's article: "No less touching for having been touched up," *Telegraph*, November 1, 2001, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/4266576/No-less-touching-for-having-been-touched-up.html>.

⁴⁷ A. P. Wadsworth, "Newspaper Circulations, 1800–1954," *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society* 9 (1955): 1–41, 36.

symbolises the steadiness of London's stand against the enemy: the firmness of Right against Wrong." The moral rectitude and the pleasure offered serve to conjure the idea of a unified audience for this urban spectacle—a readership united in their morality, not merely their morale. The imagined viewing audience invoked here conforms to Barbara Rosenwein's idea of an emotional community.⁴⁸ Mason's image offers a shared way of seeing St. Paul's and feeling about the destruction: an emotional community of a nation under fire, connected to and shaped by its history (as given form by the cathedral), resolute in its moral stand (as emphasized by the caption), even exercising a duty of care to others (as activated by the building's associations with the empire and the *Daily Mail* strap line, "For King and Empire," which appeared above the photograph). Here, the communal act of spectatorship accomplished through press photography is characterized not simply by viewing current events; the press photograph's address to its audience in a given present mobilizes historical references to create emotional bonds.

An invitation to partake in the same imagined emotional community was extended by the caption accompanying Mason's photograph in one of its very first reproductions—in the *Illustrated London News* on January 4, 1941. This weekly magazine, which incorporated the silhouette of St. Paul's into its logo, ran the picture as a full-page reproduction. While the backless facades were clearer than they had been in the *Daily Mail*, key terms were repeated in the accompanying commentary regarding "the barbaric attempt by Nazis to destroy London by fire": "Churches and historic edifices were destroyed, but St. Paul's, ringed with flames, withstood the onslaught . . . and remains a symbol of the indestructible faith of the whole civilised world."⁴⁹ Again, the visual characteristics of the image, in combination with the text accompanying it and the wider allusions or discourses it activated, performed a particular way of viewing the building. Again, the status of this picture as a symbol was asserted. Again, the idea of Britain as a (if not *the*) bastion of the civilized world was invoked. The symbolism of the building was forged and the invitation of shared emotional response extended simultaneously. The same edition of the *Illustrated London News* included a supplement of a photographic portrait by Cecil Beaton of Churchill at his desk. The pairing of these two symbols (the Prime Minister and St. Paul's) suggests a palpable hunger

⁴⁸ Emotional communities "are precisely the same as social communities—families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships—but the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling: what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore" (Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying About Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107 [2002]: 821–45, 842).

⁴⁹ *Illustrated London News*, January 4, 1941, 9.

for powerful and persuasive imagery in early wartime Britain; the deliberate offer of the former as pin-up and the explicit ascription to the latter of symbolic meaning demonstrate a concerted effort to manage wartime attitudes through photographic images.

Yet, the ambiguity of Mason's photograph meant it could serve equally well as an illustration of the Luftwaffe's prowess on the cover of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* with the title, "The City of London Burns" (fig. 3).⁵⁰ When circulated in Germany, Mason's image ran with a caption directing attention to the flames that lit up the night sky rather than to the cathedral. The clouds, rather than wreathing the cathedral, were said to obscure the extensive damage. The domes and spires were described as blackened with soot and smoke. The Great Fire of 1666 was mentioned not to celebrate Wren's cathedral, but as a comparator by which to gauge the destructive impact of the German attack. Where British editors had evoked imperial references by placing the emphasis on the cathedral, the emphasis on the city here stressed its associations with finance. Thus, the editors of the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* effectively inverted almost every one of the reference points used in the *Daily Mail* and the *Illustrated London News* to frame the photograph positively for British audiences and to construct the point of view it offered on St. Paul's in wartime.

RECIRCULATING "WAR'S GREATEST PICTURE"

Reframing of the photograph was not restricted to Germany. In the first twelve months following its original publication, Mason's photograph circulated in a multifaceted network of references in Britain. The social biography of the photograph in that first year—alongside consideration of other publicly circulating photography of St. Paul's—reveals a play of different aesthetic and rhetorical frames which contributed to establishing the iconic status of "War's Greatest Picture."

Mason's photograph was the cover image of *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire*—a photo-book that had six UK print runs totaling 29,527 copies

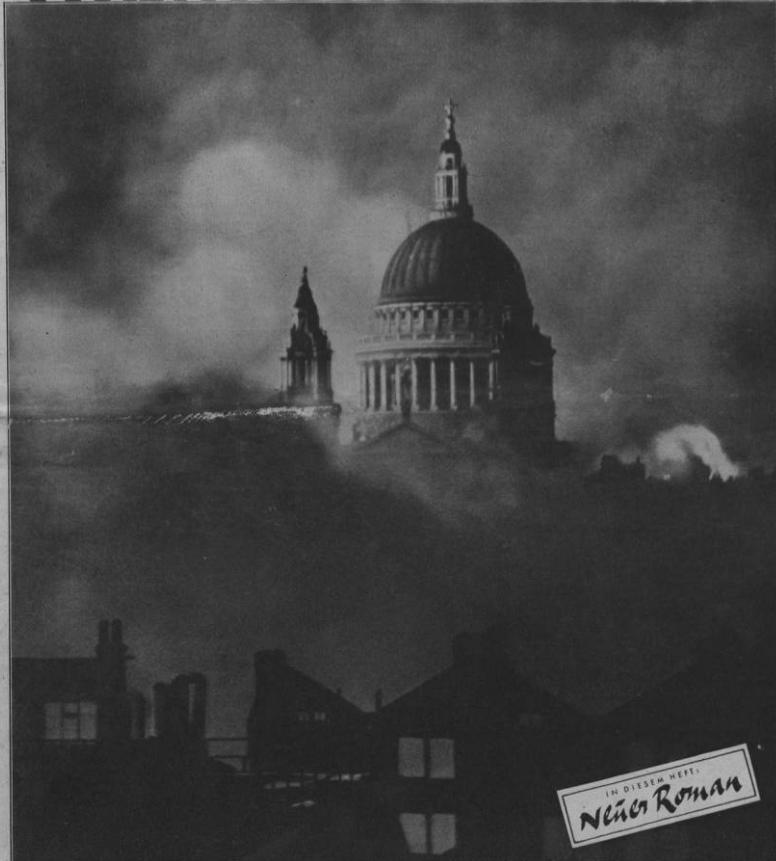
⁵⁰ "Die City von London brennt," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, January 23, 1941, 89. How the editors of the German magazine acquired the photograph is unclear, but there are a number of possibilities. The photograph was published in the United States ("German Incendiary Bombs Gut the Ancient Business Heart of London," *Life*, January 27, 1941, 17) and could have arrived in Berlin via the United States, which had not yet entered the war. Alternatively, copy negatives of two of Mason's photographs were gifted by the *Daily Mail* to Bert Garai (founder of the Keystone Press Agency) following the destruction of the Keystone offices on January 1, 1941 (see Bert Garai, *The Man from Keystone* [London, 1965], 208–9). These negatives—now held by the Hulton Archive, London—are marked "For Foreigns Only" (item nos. Key 1 and Key 1A). Established in Berlin in 1923, the original Keystone office was sold in 1937 when Garai left Germany. It is possible that in 1941 the image arrived in Berlin from London via the Keystone office in Paris. I am grateful to Brian Stater and Sarah McDonald, respectively, for these suggestions.

Nummer 4 23. Januar 1941

Berliner

50. Jahrgang Preis 20 Pfennig
Copyright 1941 by Deutscher Verlag, Berlin

Illustrierte Zeitung



Die City von London brennt!

Rund um die St. Pauls Kathedrale proffeln die Flammen zum nächsten Winterhimmel empor. F. F. Bauer
Diese Rauchwolken verhüllen die ungeheuren Gedröckungen, die der Angriff der Luftwaffe auf die City in der Nacht zum 30. Dezember
auslöste. Da war die größte Feuerbrand, die Kirchen teil dem verheerenden Brand der City im Jahre 1666 erlitt. Von den
Wunden, die nicht unter der Macht der Dampfer-Engländer, blieb fast bei allen nur die äußere Schale übrig. Das Bleib der Ruinen
und Trümmer war am nächsten Morgen geschwärtzt bei Rauch und Ruß. Tage nach dem Angriff noch machten Plünderer und Feuerweh-
rsmänner die Ruinenreste sprengen und so die Gassenverfüllung bannen. Die City, der City der heiligen Gedächtnis, brennt wieder.

FIG. 3.—“Die City von London brennt!” [The city of London burns!]. Cover, *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, January 23, 1941. Photographer: Herbert Mason. Courtesy of Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. A color version of this figure is available online.

(fig. 4).⁵¹ Contrasting the painful and the noble, the book's title provides a verbal correlate of the juxtaposition within the photograph of destruction (foreground) and endurance (background). The preface states that the title was devised by American newsman Edward R. Murrow. But this rhetorical twist was prefigured by Churchill, who described the scene in bomb-damaged cities as "alike in its splendour and its devastation."⁵² Edited by Ernestine Carter, an American journalist living in London, *Grim Glory* is dedicated to Churchill. The final image—forming with Mason's cover image a pair of bookends—is of the white cliffs of Dover. A cut-out Churchill is superimposed on this pastoral scene along with a quotation from the Prime Minister's Dunkirk speech of June 1940. As in the *Illustrated London News*, the photographic duet of Churchill and St. Paul's suggests an appetite during the war's early years for symbols that could engender a sense of emotional community. In the case of *Grim Glory* it was a community verified by the view of outsiders, since through Carter's and Murrow's involvement it carried an implicit American endorsement.

While the commentary in *Grim Glory* is deferential to Churchill, the photographs are not conservative. As prominent as Churchill is the name of the principal photographer, Lee Miller, which appears on the title page alongside those of Carter and Murrow.⁵³ The first few photographs are printed in a continuous ribbon, as if on a contact sheet, with the holes used for spooling the film visible. The act of photographic recording is emphasized in this visual trope, as in the prominence of the photographer's name. Yet the visual record offered by Miller frequently eschews realism in favor of surrealism. One example pictures two statues of knights staring at a third, seemingly cut in two in the act of drawing his sword. The photograph's caption suggests that "the Crusaders of the Temple survey with grim detachment a kind of warfare the ages of chivalry never knew."⁵⁴ Image and text together achieve the anthropomorphizing of these archaic models, integrating them incongruously into a very modern battle. In another caption, Carter referred explicitly to such "ironies of war": "The wanton behaviour of explosives and blast occasionally produces effects that are ironical, freakish, beautiful, and sometimes even funny, although the irony is grim and the humour threaded through with pathos."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ernestine Carter, ed., *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire* (London, 1941). Print-run figures are recorded in the Percy Lund Humphries day book (West Yorkshire Archive Service, ref. 56D94/5/15). This photo-book was also published in the United States as *Bloody but Unbowed: Pictures of Britain under Fire* (New York, 1941).

⁵² The comment was made in the House of Commons on November 5, 1940.

⁵³ On Miller's Blitz photography, see Ian Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness, and Documentary Photography* (Manchester, 2007), 150–56.

⁵⁴ *Grim Glory*, n. p.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

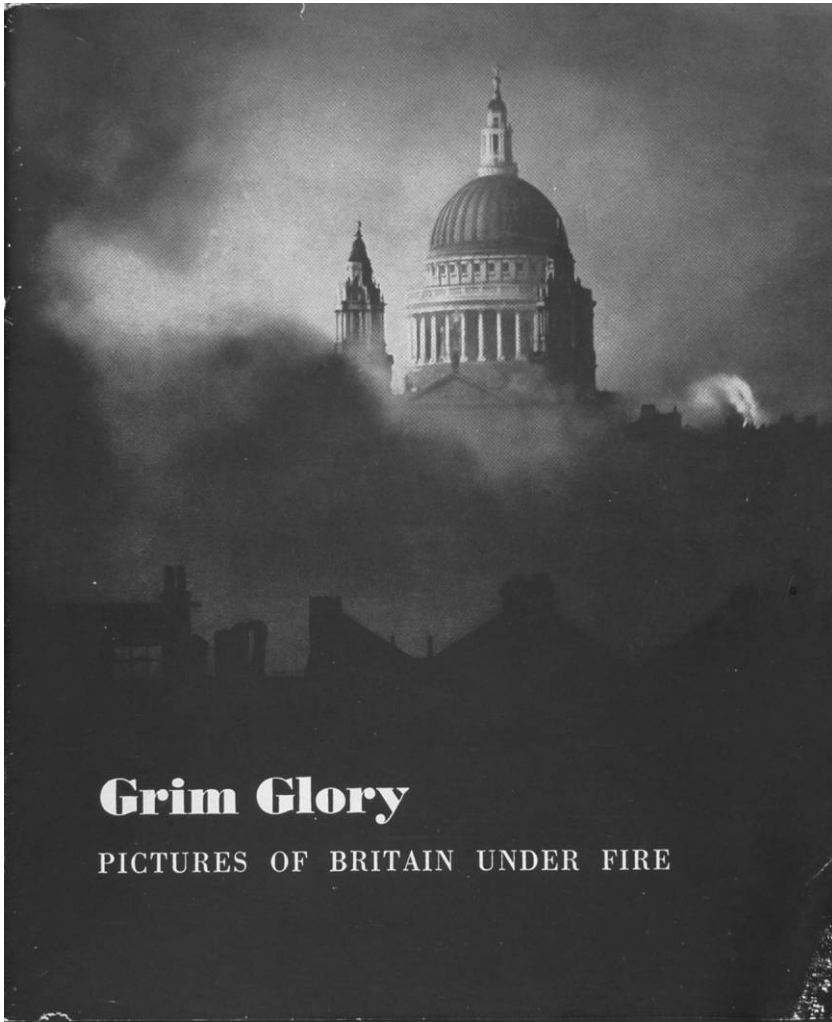


FIG. 4.—Cover, Ernestine Cater, ed., *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire* (London, 1941). Photographer: Herbert Mason. Courtesy of the Lee Miller Archives. A color version of this figure is available online.

While the *Daily Mail* is not now and was not then a natural home for avant-gardism, “War’s Greatest Picture” sat comfortably with such surrealistic attempts to relieve the tragedy of the air war. On the cover of *Grim Glory*, Mason’s image was closely cropped, as it had been when published in the *Daily Mail*. More of the foreground was included on the photo-book cover, but the windows of the

backless facades were filled in rather than being emphasized with brushwork. In a bold, modern font, the white letters of the title were superimposed on the dark buildings—a visual juxtaposition that mirrors the contrasting terms of the title. It was the balancing act of positive and negative that Mason's photograph negotiated so effectively, providing through "the symbol in the inferno" a combined image of what had happened and a positive perspective on it.

The adaptability of Mason's photograph was demonstrated by its use as the cover image for another photo-book published in 1941, Priestley's *Britain under Fire* (fig. 5). The photograph is here used to strike a different tone from that achieved by the cover of *Grim Glory*. The title—in larger, red serif text—hangs over the dome. The same vivid red hue is used to tint the clouds and highlight the burned-out shells of buildings. Here the emphasis is on fire—on peril and endurance, as opposed to irony and stoical humor. In Priestley's terms the objective of this compilation of more prosaic press photographs was to "let the camera tell its twofold story, of a great crime, and of a still greater people."⁵⁶ These two different uses of Mason's photograph highlight how changes in visual details (colorizing, retouching, superimposing text) can subtly shift the way a photograph addresses its audience, affecting the agency of the image through changes in the way in which it presents its subject.

In addition to *Grim Glory* and *Britain under Fire*, a third photo-book of Blitz imagery employed the "under fire" rubric: *History under Fire*. While it did not use Mason's photograph, it demonstrates a third mode of framing the ruins (contrasting with Carter's surrealist bent and Priestley's more solemn tone) relevant to the symbolism of St. Paul's. *History under Fire* was billed explicitly as a book of photographs by Cecil Beaton with a commentary by John Pope-Hennessy, again emphasizing the privileged position of the photographer in capturing war's impact.⁵⁷ Like Miller, Beaton produced surrealistic imagery of the Blitz. But in his published diaries, he spoke of the visual impact of bombs producing both "a doll's house effect" and "romantic Piranesi forms."⁵⁸ For the most part, the ruin pictures in *History under Fire* are imbued with this latter sense of romanticism, presenting war-damaged buildings as objects for aesthetic contemplation. The book's frontispiece photograph, for instance, depicts the western campanili of St. Paul's viewed through a shop front reduced to a decorative screen by a bomb blast (fig. 6). With its classical composition and its omission of both aggressors and victims, this scene of destruction resembles the fragments of some ancient kingdom or the aftermath of a natural disaster. Considering literature of the period, Mark Rawlinson described the "romancing of destruction as a

⁵⁶ Priestley, "The Truth behind the Pictures," 6.

⁵⁷ Cecil Beaton and James Pope-Hennessy, *History under Fire: 52 Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940–41* (London, 1941).

⁵⁸ Cecil Beaton, *The Years Between: Diaries, 1939–44* (London, 1965), 52, 59.

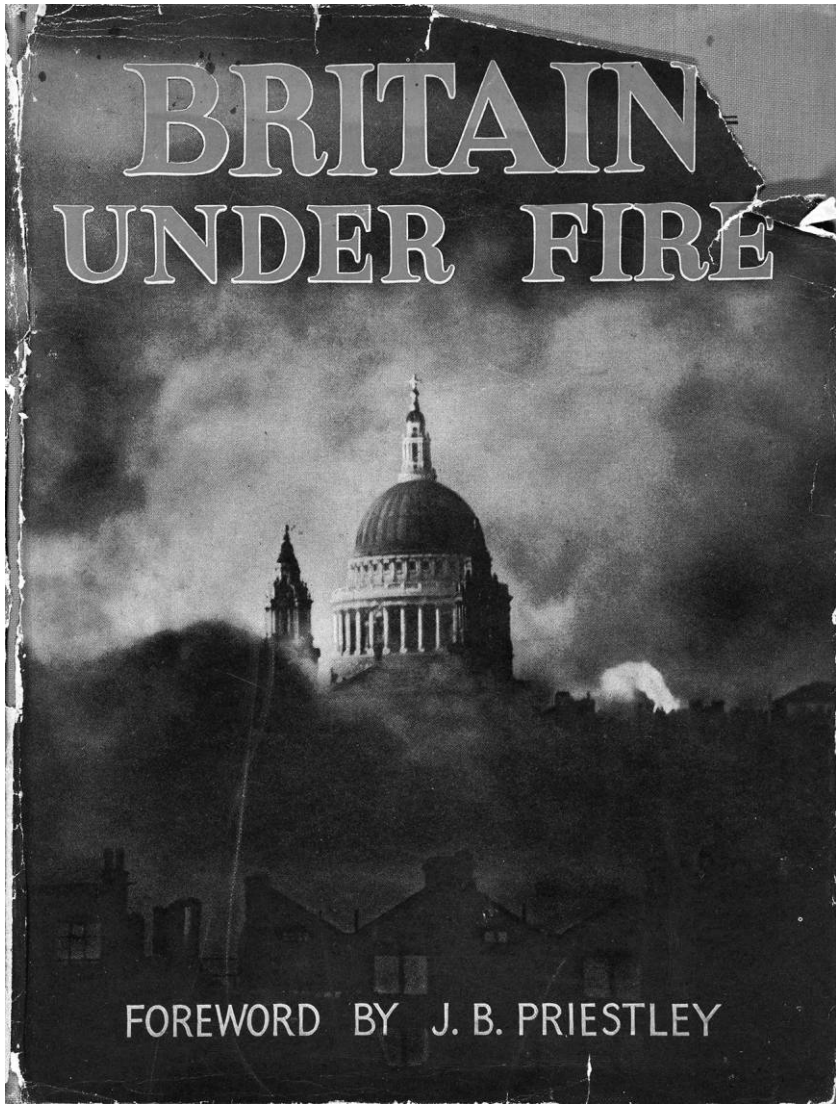


FIG. 5.—Cover, *Britain under Fire* (London, 1941). Photographer: Herbert Mason. A color version of this figure is available online.

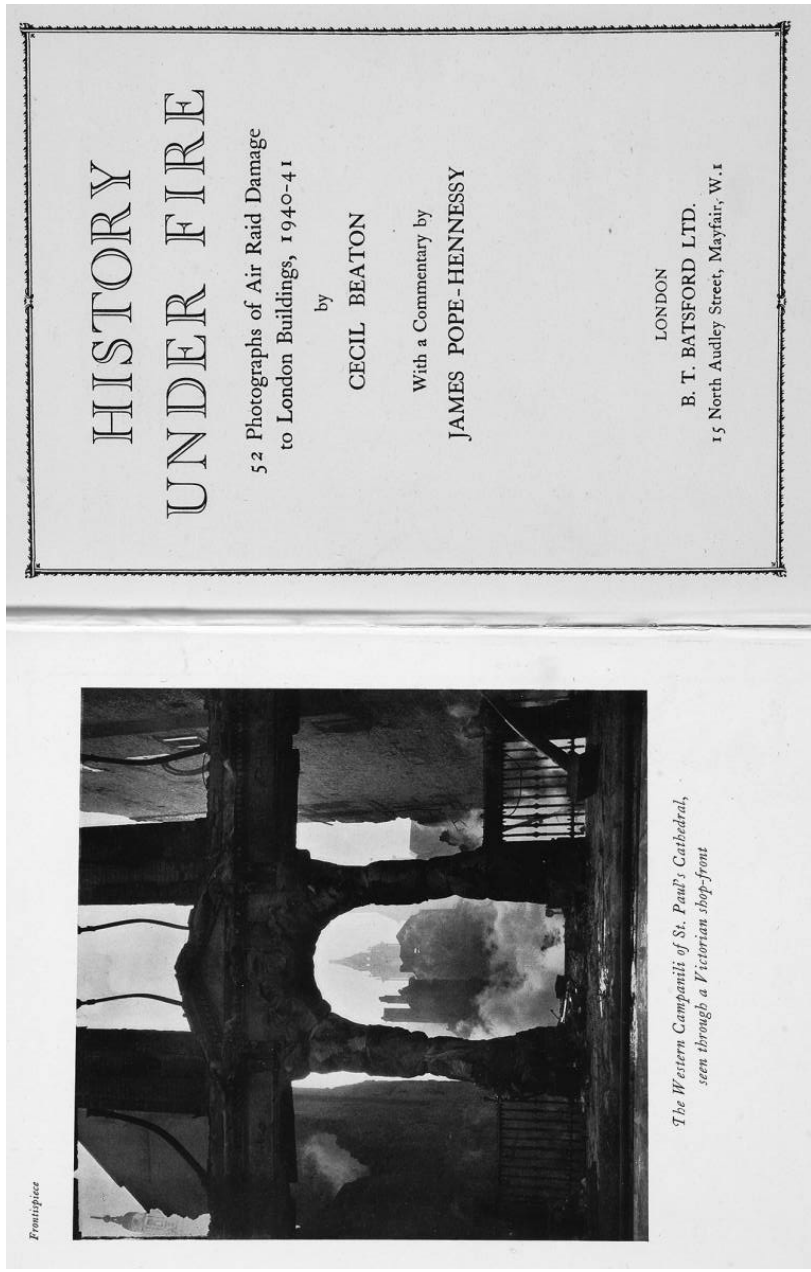


FIG. 6.—“The Western Campanili of St. Paul’s Cathedral, Seen through a Victorian Shop-Front.” Frontispiece, Cecil Beaton and James Pope-Hennessy, *History under Fire: 52 Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940–41* (London, 1941). Photographer: Cecil Beaton.

symbol of transhistorical Englishness.”⁵⁹ This is exactly the effect achieved by Beaton’s photo-book and reflected in its expansive title.⁶⁰

Yet, a romantic perspective on bomb damage was not the sole preserve of the cloth-bound photo-books produced by established photographers and intellectuals; it was an equally viable position in the popular press. *Illustrated London News* reproduced drawings of Wren’s gutted city churches, helping to facilitate the aesthetic appreciation of depopulated scenes of destruction—a key characteristic of the romantic point of view.⁶¹ Likewise, in the *Daily Mail*, one romantically minded reporter recounted that St. Paul’s appeared “strangely lovely” lit by the fires of December 29.⁶² Beaton’s account of photographing St. Paul’s on December 30, 1940—the day after Mason’s nighttime camerawork—highlights not only how the clamor for images played out in the capital’s bomb-damaged streets but also how the popular press promoted this romancing of destruction. Beaton recounted seeing a press photographer observe and later emulate his efforts to photograph the cathedral: “Returning from lunch with my publisher, my morning’s pictures still undeveloped in my overcoat pocket, I found the Press photographer’s picture was already on the front page of the *Evening News*.”⁶³

Hand in hand with this romantic, depopulated view of war damage came the animation of inanimate objects, such as Miller’s anthropomorphized statues. This attitude was present in the original *Daily Mail* commentary, which described St. Paul’s as “calm and aloof.” A subtle anthropomorphism is also found in an official publication produced by J. M. Richards—editor of the *Architectural Review* from 1937, a member of St. Paul’s watch, and an employee of the Ministry of Information (MOI) from 1941. *Front Line, 1940–1941* narrates and depicts the efforts of fire and rescue services and air-raid wardens.⁶⁴ Although the book does not use Mason’s famous image, there is a strikingly similar roof-top

⁵⁹ Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford, 2000), 89. Mason’s detailed account of taking the photograph included his own romantic and transhistorical description of the scene: “After waiting a few hours the smoke parted like the curtain of a theatre and there before me was this wonderful vista, more like a dream, not frightening—there were very few high explosives. It was obvious that this was going to be the second Great Fire of London” (FitzGibbon, *The Blitz*, 212).

⁶⁰ For an alternative assessment, see Neil Matheson, “National Identity and the ‘Melancholy of Ruins’: Cecil Beaton’s Photographs of the London Blitz,” *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 1 (2008): 261–74.

⁶¹ Sketches by Dennis Flanders appeared over three consecutive weeks in June 1941.

⁶² *Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940.

⁶³ Beaton, *The Years Between*, 59. The photograph Beaton refers to is probably the one included in fig. 8; see also n. 77 below. I have only been able to consult a “late extra” edition of the *Evening News* for December 30, 1940, not the lunchtime edition to which Beaton alludes.

⁶⁴ [J. M. Richards, ed.], *Front Line, 1940–1941: The Official Story of the Civil Defence of Britain* (London, 1942).

view of St. Paul's wreathed in smoke (fig. A2). It bears the emotive legend "the stroke at the heart," inviting a particular response from its audience. In addition to this undated image of the cathedral, on the following double-page spread the audience is offered the view from the cathedral (fig. 7). This second photograph (by *Daily Mirror* photographer George Greenwell) is captioned: "The city burns. From the dome of St. Paul's, 29th December 1940."⁶⁵ Included in the picture (bled to all edges) is the silhouette of a window frame, giving the impression of looking out. This device arguably extends the anthropomorphic description of the building, implying that the audience is somehow party to the cathedral's point of view. Viewers are invited to see the destruction of London through the imaginary eyes of St. Paul's; to vicariously inhabit the building and share its implied perspective of Britain under fire, of a grim glory, of the *longue durée*.

Like the publications of 1941 that employed Mason's image, *Front Line* (with its version of Mason's "symbol in the inferno") was both populist and popular. It ends with a quotation from Churchill and had sold 1,300,000 copies by January 1943.⁶⁶ Like Miller's anthropomorphized statues or Beaton's picturesque ruins, *Front Line* contributed to a visual culture of war damage in which "War's Greatest Picture" was able to stand out as the *pièce de résistance*. Whether it was seen from a surrealistic or a romantic perspective or described in the more declarative tones of the press, the image of St. Paul's could be mobilized within different rhetorical frames and alongside divergent ruin imagery. Kitty Hauser has diagnosed such photo-books as "generically somewhat unstable"; they were "uneasily poised between propaganda and a barely disguised aestheticisation of destruction."⁶⁷ At the start of the 1940s, it was possible for photographs like Mason's to migrate from one sort of publication to another, while different registers of language were deployed for discussing ruin imagery, not always in a consistent manner.

Integrating the scenes offered by war-damaged cities into existing aesthetic discourses or cultural templates, the surrealistic, romantic, and declarative approaches share an attempt to mediate aspects of the Blitz experience through visual means. Though aesthetic and rhetorical responses to the Blitz varied (between and within specific publications), they all constituted efforts to enable the ruins to mean something other than death and destruction. The key historical themes activated by the use of the image in the *Daily Mail* (Christianity, empire, the Great Fire) were means to negotiate this problem. Nonetheless, elements of Beatonesque romanticism crept into the commentary. Deployed on the cover of *Grim Glory*, Mason's image complemented the search for surrealistic beauty and humor in the rubble. Depiction of the cathedral in *Front Line* encouraged audiences not only to partake in an emotional community (as the original caption

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16–17, 18–19.

⁶⁶ Sales figures are cited by Overy (*The Bombing War*, 175, 711 n. 191).

⁶⁷ Hauser, *Shadow Sites*, 231.

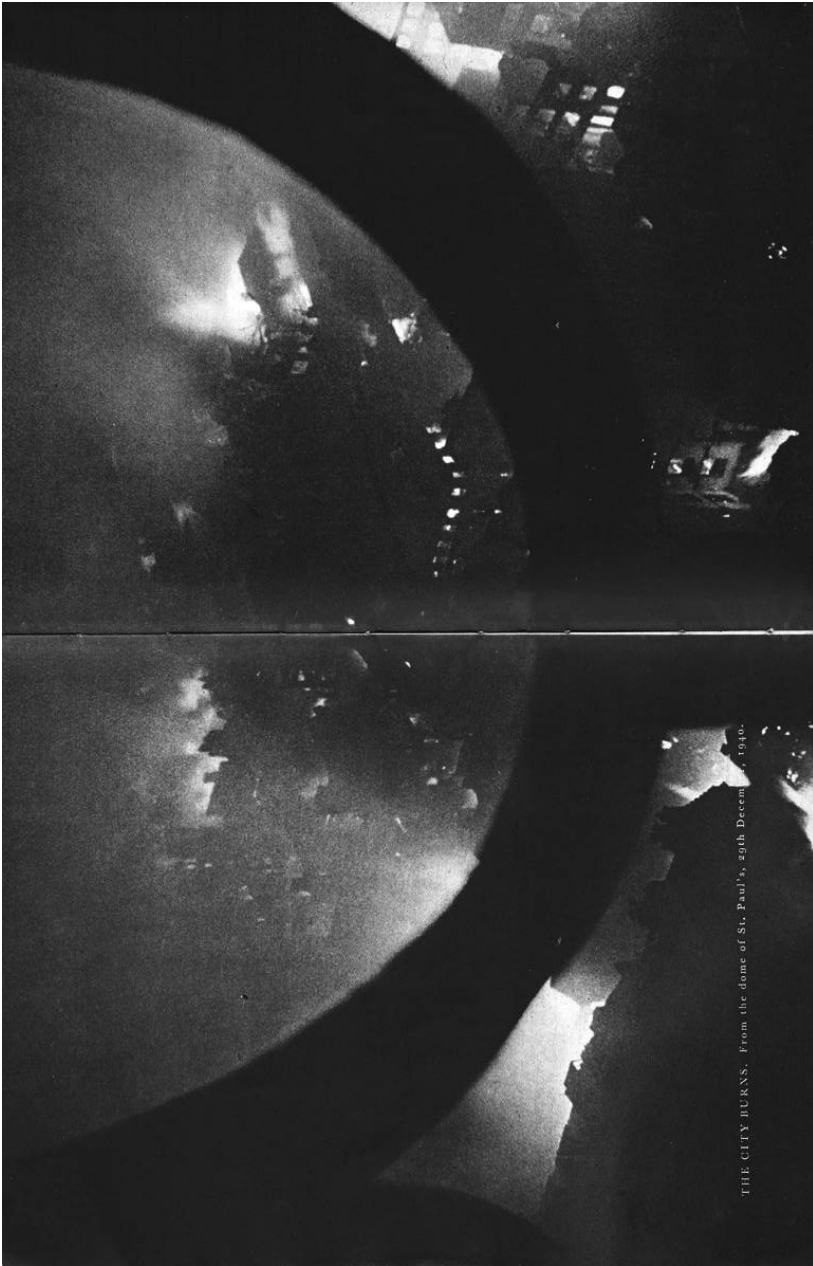


FIG. 7.—“The City Burns. From the dome of St. Paul's, 29th December, 1940.” [J. M. Richards, ed.], *Front Line, 1940–1941: The Official Story of the Civil Defence of Britain* (London, 1942), 18–19. Photographer: George Greenwell. Courtesy of Mirrorpix Photo Archives.

to Mason's photograph had) but also through photography to identify with St. Paul's and its view of the Blitz. Thus, capitalizing on the ambiguity of a range of potential allusions, the image of St. Paul's under fire could be reused in different ways toward similar ends.

The prominent picturing of St. Paul's in wartime was not unproblematic, however, offering as it did a London-centric view of the experience of aerial bombardment. A sense of rivalry between different urban centers, keen for recognition of their endurance, was given photographic expression in *Our Blitz: Red Skies over Manchester*, published by the *Daily Dispatch and Evening Chronicle*.⁶⁸ The cover image of this magazine-format collection of photographs depicts the Manchester city skyline in black and red (fig. A3). Thus, the regional press sought to claim ownership of the home front. Sensitive to accusations of detrimental treatment, the MOI established special procedures for the review of news photographs from the regional press.⁶⁹ Notwithstanding such examples of regionalism, following the bombing of London in 1940 and the publication and rapid recirculation of Mason's photograph of the cathedral, St. Paul's became a crucial part of the visualization and scripting of the Blitz. During the bombardment, as Sonya Rose observed, a "recognition of common jeopardy contributed mightily to making national identity particularly meaningful for individuals."⁷⁰ St. Paul's provided a shared symbol by means of which this common jeopardy might be visualized. The network of references instantiated in the photograph's original publication were frequently repeated and continued to be used in accounts of the Blitz postwar—even when the image was not.⁷¹

Through photography, St. Paul's under fire became a defining image in London, Britain, and beyond for many more people than had seen it with their own eyes. The strength of identification engendered by the building and its repeatedly recirculated image was such that it generated not only a sense of emotional community but also a form of mediated memory. This recalling of representations in public circulation as personal experiences was encapsulated by Robert Hewison: "The collective image has imposed itself on and even erased individual recollections."⁷² Moreover, it was documented by Tom Harrison in an experiment he conducted in which he asked Mass-Observation participants,

⁶⁸ *Our Blitz: Red Sky over Manchester* (Manchester, 1944).

⁶⁹ These measures were outlined in a pamphlet circulated by the Press and Censorship Bureau (*Defence Notices*, rev. ed., 1941, National Archives, T 162/6001941).

⁷⁰ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939–1945* (Oxford, 2003), 11.

⁷¹ For instance, when FitzGibbon published an account of the bombing war in 1957, the first paragraph described "the dome of St. Paul's that presided over it all" (FitzGibbon, *The Blitz*, xi).

⁷² Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939–1945* (London, 1977), 36–37.

years after their original contributions, to rewrite their accounts of living through the Blitz. Results demonstrated a disparity between original interviews and the narratives people had been telling in the intervening decades. Harrison's judgment was that "the process of public glossification in war—practised by Churchill down—is fundamental in assessing the values adopted and the conclusions offered [in accounts of living through the Blitz]."⁷³ Mason's photograph—frequent wartime foil to the Prime Minister's own image—was an active and influential facet of this "public glossification" or image management. The overwriting of individual memory by culturally constructed memory in this sense cannot be credited to Mason's image alone; other contemporaneous accounts made similar allusions.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, Mason's image and its repeated circulation—in newspapers, magazines, and photo-books published by the hundreds of thousands—greatly contributed to producing and popularizing the heavily freighted symbolism of St. Paul's in wartime visual culture.

ST. PAUL'S AND POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION

Mason's photograph is not principally an image of war damage; it is the dome in the center of the picture that is the dominant element. Nonetheless, within the frame of the photograph, St. Paul's relied for its meaning on the depiction of ruins in the foreground. Likewise, other representations of the cathedral in the visual culture of wartime and the postwar moment were frequently reproduced in a dynamic relationship with ruin imagery. Depictions of the Blitz in general and the destruction of December 29, 1940, in particular (as invoked by Mason's photograph, other images of the cathedral, and photographs of other Wren buildings) were central to the discussion of postwar reconstruction. Moreover, as I will argue, this verbal and visual representation of the nation's rebuilding was intertwined with calls for a progressive reform of the social contract in Britain. Mason's photograph was not simply "War's Greatest Picture"; it was also a prominent symbol in the debate about postwar reconstruction that continued into the 1950s.

This phenomenon is exemplified by a photo-book of ruin imagery edited by J. M. Richards during the first years of the war and expanded and reissued in 1947. *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*—a compilation of press photographs and pictures commissioned for the National Buildings Record—was mainly devoid of images featuring individuals (which might suggest the human cost of the air war), favoring instead a romantic reading of the ruins (suggested by

⁷³ Tom Harrison, *Living through the Blitz* (London, 1976), 324.

⁷⁴ For instance, of the bombing on December 29, 1940, BBC radio correspondent Robin Duff reported the next day: "St. Paul's Cathedral was the pivot of the main fire. All around it the flames were leaping up into the sky. There the cathedral stood, magnificently firm, untouched in the very centre of all this destruction."

repeated references in Richards's foreword to "the aesthetic of destruction" and the ruins' "romantic appeal").⁷⁵ The verbal rhetoric employed by Richards—self-styled "connoisseur of the ruins"⁷⁶—is complemented by the selection of visual material. This included the press photograph of St. Paul's viewed through a bomb-blasted shop front allegedly cribbed from Beaton, placed opposite a drawing on the title page by John Piper of a ruined house (fig. 8).⁷⁷

This notion of the ruin's appeal to a romantic sensibility was extensively voiced and visualized in wartime. For instance, in a pamphlet titled *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, architect Hugh Casson lobbied for preserving war ruins, arguing that their "strange beauty" was an eloquent reminder of "the ordeal through which we passed."⁷⁸ In *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, however, Richards went further. He argued that just as the ruins of preceding eras gave expression to civilizations now lost, the same would be true of war ruins for future generations: "To posterity they will effectually represent the dissolution of our pre-war civilisation as Fountains Abbey does the dissolution of the monasteries."⁷⁹ Richards's argument for preserving ruins entailed not a benign nostalgia for a lost past, but a directive and urgent interest in creating an alternative future. The photo-book presented the ruins as aesthetic objects, enabling a critical distance that allowed viewers to imagine—and even align themselves with—the perspective of future generations. Thus, Richards simultaneously invoked the "presence of the past" and the "future made present," as Reinhart Koselleck put it.⁸⁰

Unsurprisingly, public debate about the future figured prominently throughout the 1940s.⁸¹ An appetite for change was keenly felt as a result of the decade

⁷⁵ J. M. Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: Second Edition, Recording the Architectural Casualties Suffered during the Whole Period of Air Bombardment, 1940–45* (London, 1947). The publication includes captions by John Summerson, architectural historian and coordinator of photographic records, made for the National Buildings Record established in 1941.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁷ The photograph featured in fig. 8 was taken by H. P. Andrews, an American photographer with the Planet News press agency. I am grateful to Hilary Roberts (research curator of photography, Imperial War Museum) for this insight. A similar photograph of St. Paul's through the same shop front was taken by Hans Wild, a photographer working for *Life*, in January 1941.

⁷⁸ Hugh Casson, "Ruins for Remembrance," in *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* (Cheam, 1945). This pamphlet elaborated on an idea outlined in a letter to *The Times* in August 1944 by Kenneth Clark, T. S. Eliot, John Maynard Keynes, H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, and others.

⁷⁹ Richards, *Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 7.

⁸⁰ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York, 2004), 260, 259.

⁸¹ Churchill did not necessarily endorse public debate about building a better future. For instance, he recalled Abram Games's "Your Britain: Fight for It Now" poster juxtaposing run-down tenements with Maxwell Fry's multistory Kensal House block of flats

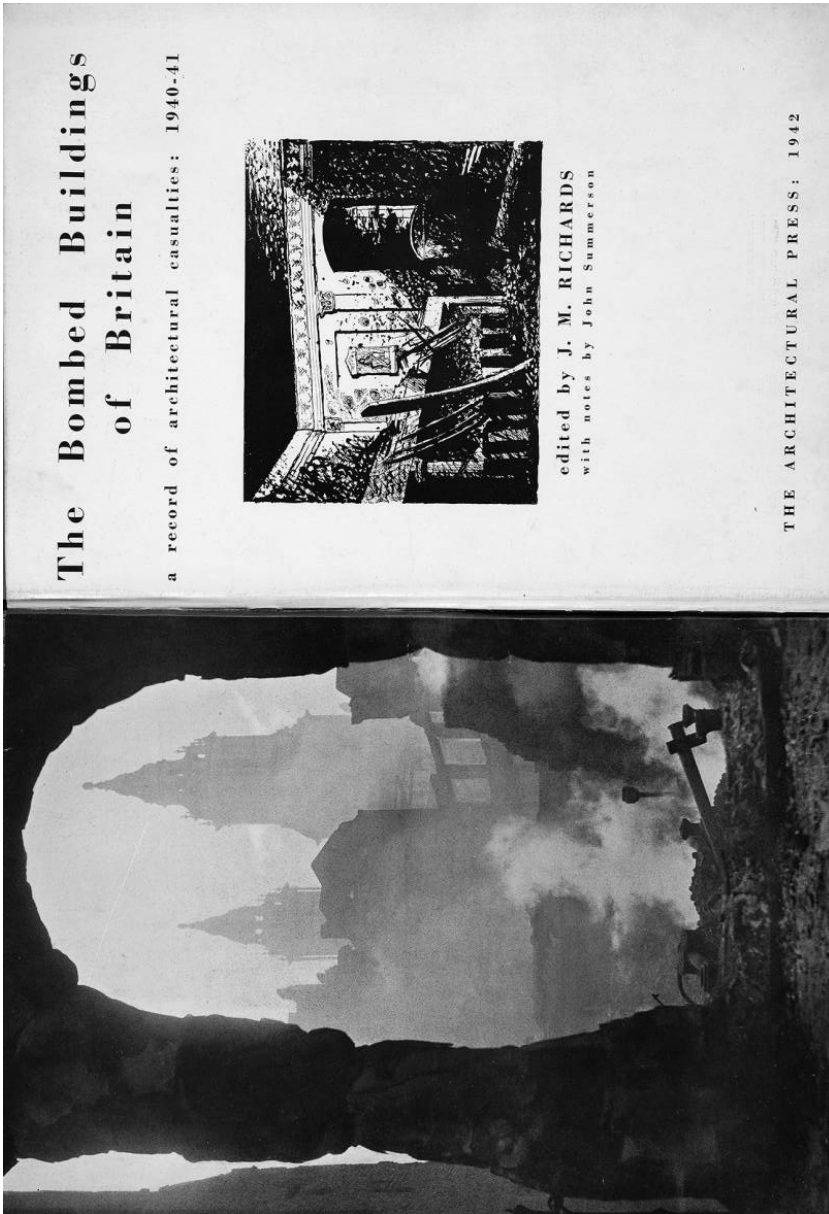


FIG. 8.—St. Paul's viewed through a ruined shop-front, London, December 30, 1940. Frontispiece, J. M. Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties, 1940-41*. Photographer: H. P. Andrews.

of economic hardship that followed the crash of 1929, but while future-oriented discourse predated the war, it intensified during the conflict and continued after it, in part fueled by the material and social impact of the air war. A Mass-Observation report, originally published in 1940, argued that “the expectation of enemy aeroplanes had already, before the war started, begun to change the social structure of Britain; the structure of the family, through evacuation; the structure of leisure and sex and shopping, through the black-out; the structure of the home, through incendiary bomb and gas preparations; the structure of civil authority, through A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions].”⁸² The impact of wartime experience and the scale of the postwar challenge were reflected in the self-identifying “progressive” Labour manifesto of 1945 (“Let Us Face the Future”), which proclaimed: “We need the spirit of Dunkirk and of the Blitz sustained over a period of years.”⁸³

In this future-focused public debate, photography was widely and persuasively used. A notable example was a special issue of *Picture Post*—a weekly photomagazine launched in October 1938 that achieved circulation figures of 1,350,000 within four months.⁸⁴ On January 4, 1941 (the same day as the *Illustrated London News* reprinted Mason’s photograph), *Picture Post* published “A Plan for Britain” outlining an agenda of postwar reform. Describing the interwar period as “the tragic tale that must not be repeated,” it covered a raft of issues. An essay by architect Maxwell Fry declared that “The New Britain Must Be Planned” and visualized an alternative future through photography of architectural projects, such as housing and infrastructure.⁸⁵ As Tony Judt observed, planning was “the political religion of post-war Europe.”⁸⁶ Within this debate, town planning and architectural vision were lauded solutions, taking a central place in envisioning the postwar world.

In a subsequent letter to *Picture Post*, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (architect of the Bankside Power Station opposite St. Paul’s) gave a rare voice to the central role of photography in selling this new vision of Britain. “If papers like *Picture Post* will keep showing photographs of good and bad work side by side,” Scott argued, “the general public will come to realise what this grand Britain must be, and then

from 1938 (see Elizabeth Darling, *Re-Forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction* [Abingdon, 2007], 209; and David Redhead, “Abrams and the Bombshell,” *Sunday Telegraph*, July 3, 1994).

⁸² Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, eds., *War Begins at Home* (London, 1940), 43.

⁸³ *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation* (London, 1945), 3. The authors also inverted Churchillian rhetoric to characterize the interwar period: “Just think back over the depressions of the 20 years between the wars. . . . Never was so much injury done to so many by so few” (*ibid.*, 2).

⁸⁴ Tom Hopkinson, ed., *Picture Post, 1938–50* (Harmondsworth, 1970), 11.

⁸⁵ *Picture Post*, January 4, 1941.

⁸⁶ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2007), 67.

will come the will and determination to have it.”⁸⁷ Scott highlights the manner in which photographs in the press exist in a dynamic relation with one another—a process akin to film montage whereby two juxtaposed images create an emotional response and a third meaning. This creative juxtaposition of photo-essays and articles—appearing in the same or subsequent issues of photo-magazines like *Picture Post*—engendered a dialogue between the imagery of the destruction of buildings and of the rebuilding of Britain that made the public debate about reconstruction particularly potent.

Two weeks after “A Plan for Britain” hit newsstands, *Picture Post* published responses to the proposals in a series of (predominantly positive) letters from the public and known commentators. In the same issue were photographs of damage from December 29, 1940, under the title “One Night of Fire.”⁸⁸ Nine pairs of photographs depicting churches before and after the bombing were presented on a double-page spread with a black background. While St. Paul’s was not pictured, six of the churches featured were attributed to Wren in captions that also made reference to the Great Fire of 1666. Thus, visualization of the damage of December 29, 1940, was spliced with an orchestrated public debate about planning for the postwar period. This montaged discussion and depiction of destruction and reconstruction helped generate a powerful sense of possibility regarding a different social order. There was, as Juliet Gardiner explained, “a persistent feeling, which surfaces in Home Intelligence reports, Mass-Observation surveys and the letters and diaries of individuals, that the Blitz was at one and the same time a terminus and an opportunity: it was a terrible, cleansing, purifying experience that was cathartic in some ways in its destructiveness—a kind of revenge on the previous decade that had to become an atonement.”⁸⁹ The widely circulating photography of destruction and visualizations of reconstruction were a dynamic and productive means by which this “persistent feeling” was created and sustained.⁹⁰

Moreover, specific deployments of Mason’s image sought to capitalize on its prominence, drawing on allusions to Wren and the Great Fire to fashion parallels with the postwar challenge. Published in 1942, Ralph Tubbs’s Penguin paperback

⁸⁷ *Picture Post*, February 1, 1940.

⁸⁸ *Picture Post*, January 25, 1940.

⁸⁹ Juliet Gardiner, “The Blitz Experience in British Society, 1940–1941,” in *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe, 1940–1945*, ed. Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp, and Richard Overy (London, 2011), 181.

⁹⁰ This feeling was documented in a report produced by the Home Intelligence Division of the MOI covering the week from December 24, 1940: “For the first time there are signs that the ordinary people are beginning to take an interest in the question of town-planning. As the acute effects of being blitzed have worn off, many Bristolians are looking forward to a new Bristol” (“Weekly Report by Home Intelligence—No. 13,” INF 1/292). This feeling was also promoted by the MOI, as Taylor argues, through photography of individuals and their line of sight (e.g., the A.R.P. warden on the cover of *Front Line*): “In the official record ‘Britain’ had its eyes steadfastly trained on the brighter, peaceful

Living in Cities sold 134,000 copies.⁹¹ Tubbs not only suggested parallels between the Blitz and the fire of 1666; he also compared the opportunity to replan London in the seventeenth century (for which Wren drew up an unrealized master plan) with the chance to reshape the city following the Blitz. Tubbs asserted that hasty (i.e., market-driven or “unplanned”) rebuilding would result in mistakes akin to those made after the Great Fire. To illustrate his discussion, he employed Mason’s photograph and captioned it “The New Opportunity” (fig. A4). Unlike the *Daily Mail*’s cropped image, Tubbs’s reproduction of an uncropped photograph gave equal prominence to St. Paul’s and the burned-out facades. The caption works to imbue the task of planning with grandeur and respectability: “This opportunity must be taken. But planning must not be limited to damaged areas. The necessity for planning exists without bombing and every town must have its growth controlled. We shall have the same difficulties as in the time of Wren—divided authority, vested interests both in individual sites and systems of ownership, and the urgency for speed. To carry out a plan will need both faith and trust, and preparation now.”⁹²

Through Mason’s image of Wren’s building, Tubbs drew on what Calder termed the “enhanced credit” imbued by the Blitz in “institutions representing Nation and Empire, Democracy and Tradition.”⁹³ Gaining tangible momentum, the idea of reconstruction was made applicable to all urban areas, not simply those damaged by bombing. Complementing this, the cover of Tubbs’s publication used photography to construct a particular temporal framework that served to add credence to Tubbs’s proposals. Four contrasting photographs show, from left to right, Salisbury Cathedral seen from the air (captioned “Long Ago”), the industrialized and polluted Potteries (“Yesterday”), a bomb-damaged street (“Today”), and an architect’s hands at work (“To-morrow?”). There is an implied progression or continuity from past to future (left to right); but, as David Matless pointed out, the cathedral spire and the architect’s set square also mirror each other, visually connecting the respectability of the time-honored building to the future-focused aspirations of architects and planners.⁹⁴ The vision for the new Britain accommodated both traditional architecture and modernist monuments envisaged for the postwar renaissance. As noted above, Tubbs also mobilized

future. The eyes of the nation were trained upwards anticipating a victorious end to the war” (John Taylor, *Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* [Manchester, 1994], 207).

⁹¹ Ralph Tubbs, *Living in Cities* (Harmondsworth, 1942). The book resulted from a touring exhibition for the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (“Tubbs, Ralph Sydney (1912–1996),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64071>).

⁹² Tubbs, *Living in Cities*, 21.

⁹³ Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 250.

⁹⁴ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), 210.

Mason's image—reused and reframed within the discourse of postwar hopes—to achieve this synthesis.⁹⁵ Thus, the cathedral came to symbolize more than (as the original *Daily Mail* caption proclaimed) “the firmness of Right [Britain] against Wrong [Germany].” St. Paul's also accrued specific national or domestic referents. The recent past was cast as “wrong,” while the distant past pointed the way to a “right” future. Tubbs's book contributed to a discourse that sought preemptively to validate postwar reconstruction architecture—to create a vision of the future drawing authority from the past.

Moreover, the cathedral was not just employed as a legitimating image in publications that visualized the reconstruction; key projects during the reconstruction were also saturated with visualizations of it. This included that central public spectacle of the early postwar years, the Festival of Britain, which aimed to celebrate what Herbert Morrison termed “the British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future.”⁹⁶ The festival entailed a redevelopment of London's bomb-damaged South Bank characterized by striking modern architecture (such as Powell and Moya's steel sculpture, the Skylon). Suggested in 1945 by Gerald Barry, managing editor of *News Chronicle*, the idea was given the go-ahead in 1947 by Clement Attlee's Labour Government. The main site opened in May 1951, roughly ten years after the worst of the Blitz, and received eight and a half million visitors before closing in September. Tubbs (like Richards, a member of the St. Paul's Watch) designed one of the central structures of the site, the Dome of Discovery. A single-span aluminum dome with a circumference of 365 feet, it matched exactly the height of the dome of St. Paul's.⁹⁷ Over and above such incidental connections, the cathedral was deliberately knitted into festival celebrations and the idea of national renaissance it aimed to articulate. The festival was opened by the king from the steps outside St. Paul's, and a ceremony of dedication inside the cathedral was led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Exemplifying the purposeful connection of the cathedral and the festival, a photographic souvenir published by *News Chronicle* was bookended by pictures of Tubbs's dome and of the opening ceremony on the cathedral steps.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ This debate was not confined to the UK, nor was the use of Mason's image. Cohen has remarked on the currency of the term “reconstruction” in the United States (Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* [Montreal, 2011], 372). Mason's image was used by architect José Luis Sert in promoting modern architecture as advocated by the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (José Luis Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive? An ABC of Urban Problems, Their Analysis, Their Solutions* [Cambridge, MA, 1944], 231).

⁹⁶ Cited by Becky E. Conekin, “*The Autobiography of a Nation*”: *The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003), 28, 39 n. 8.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Tubbs et al., *Dome: Ralph Tubbs and the Festival of Britain* (London, 2012).

⁹⁸ *Festival of Britain: Souvenir in Pictures* (London, 1951).

Similarly, photo-magazines of the moment trumpeted the cathedral as a pertinent symbol of a community-minded postwar ethos. A special edition of the weekly photo-magazine *Illustrated*, for instance, carried a photo-essay by Henri Cartier-Bresson. It was accompanied by a commentary explicitly connecting the building, the festival, the people, and their future, using terms reminiscent of the many wartime descriptions that evoked Mason's photograph:

We, more than any of the peoples of our history, have seen in St. Paul's a shrine of rewarding courage, for after the dark tumult of bombing nights we returned to find its great dome triumphant against the smoke that filled the morning sky. . . . Therefore it is fitting that from those twenty-four steps this week we shall hear the King declare the beginning of a Festival which has been designed to show Faith in our present, Trust in the future, and Determination to live as a free people, skilled in the arts and industries.⁹⁹

While the text threaded together the wartime symbolism of the cathedral and the postwar vision of a modern, future-ready Britain represented by the festival, Cartier-Bresson's two dozen photographs depicted comings and goings on the cathedral steps as a humanistic tableau of everyday city life (fig. 9). Together, text and image offered St. Paul's as a domesticated and personal symbol, a place to have lunch and to meet as much as to worship.

Like Churchill and St. Paul's in wartime, the Dome of Discovery and St. Paul's became dual symbols in the national self-representation that the festival sought to achieve. Cartier-Bresson's photo-essay attempted to reframe the image of the cathedral, articulating a quotidian and community-minded way of looking at (and, indeed, using) the building. But such ways of viewing St. Paul's were neither comprehensive nor definitive. The cathedral's symbolism within the visual culture of the festival was equivocal. The festival constituted an attempt to represent a reconfigured relationship between Britain and the wider world—a transition enacted by the procession from historic St. Paul's to the modern South Bank site during the official opening ceremony. Yet, the festival was still closely associated with imperial notions, not least through explicit connections made by organizers to the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851. Thus, the prominence of St. Paul's in the visual culture of the festival cannot be taken as suggesting a uniform or dominant symbolism for the cathedral vis-à-vis the reconstruction debate in Britain. Rather, it highlights a tension between social democratic hopes for a postwar Britain and anxieties concerning the empire's dissolution and the nation's changing status on the world stage—the photographically illustrated press being an important public forum in which this tension was exorcised.

The foregoing is not an exhaustive catalog of the use of photography of St. Paul's in the public debate about postwar reconstruction; many other examples exist. A special issue of the *Architectural Review* (titled "Destruction and

⁹⁹ John Prebble, "The Steps of St. Paul's," *Illustrated*, May 5, 1951, 11, 15.



FIG. 9.—Nine photographs of people on the steps of St. Paul's and in the surrounding area. John Prebble, "The Steps of St. Paul's," *Illustrated*, May 5, 1951, 12–13. Photographer: Henri Cartier-Bresson. Courtesy of Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson and the National Library of Scotland. A color version of this figure is available online.



Watches The Bustle



Efficient officers in spottier breeches must arrange it all beforehand. Your fellows will be over there, Major!



Even deans' hats may be blown off. Dr. Matthews will keep a tight hand till he's in shelter.



All Americans have just got to see St. Paul's. I mean to say, that building's really odd!



City men in pin-stripes, girls in corduroys and plaid. They are all St. Paul's children



Twenty-four steps to the heart of an Empire and jolly good fun if you're young enough to enjoy it, or if you've not just had lunch

send out their paeon to its architectural glories. *Baldachino, ciborium, Reredos and baptistry. Arcade, nave, triforium, Choir, crypt and clerestory.*

And throughout the little churches of the City other bells seem to be calling the roll of the Deans who have watched over their cathedral for thirteen hundred years.

Walslan, Langford, Baldock, Ley, Radcliffe, Coler, Inge and May.

Or, if you have no patience with such picturesque twists of the imagination, just sit there on the steps of St. Paul's without thought as the bells let loose their mighty rush of music about your ears.

We know St. Paul's as we know none of our older cathedrals. We know the names of its architect and mason. We know of the jobbers and speculators who sprawled greedily across the great plans before the ink was dry. We know them because the cathedral has outlived their

hunger and triumphed over their material minds. We know that despite them the cathedral grew and was twenty-five years growing, and that before it was finished men turned naturally to it as a fitting place for thanksgiving.

Motherly Queen Anne went there seven times to thank God for the deliverance of her country. George III went in thanks for the release of his unhappy mind from darkness. Victoria, Edward and George V on the fine May morning of his Jubilee. Bayonets in the churchyard, sand on Ludgate Hill, bunting, cheers and psalms, and a great dose resonant with triumphant hymn.

But those were days when St. Paul's fulfilled a major destiny. There are quieter days when it stands erect in a moving city, its doors open to the devout and the doubters, the humble, the tourist, the gawkers and the gapper. Twenty-four steps up and twenty-four down is all they need to climb to seek what they need.

St. Paul's, parish church of an Empire, embraced by the arms of Fleet Street, Aldergate and Cheapside, held by the fingers of Creed Lane,

OVER

FIG. 9.— (Continued)

Reconstruction” from September 1941) featured the cathedral viewed through a bomb-damaged building on its cover. Likewise, the garden city advocate C. B. Purdom illustrated the concluding chapter of *How Should We Rebuild London?* with a drawing of a technocrat (waistcoat on, sleeves rolled up) rubbing out city suburbs on a map to make way for tidy, zoned areas. Below this figure transforming the image of the city is the silhouette of the London skyline; St. Paul’s inviolate is just off center, jagged outlines beside it, wreathed in smoke.¹⁰⁰ As this illustration highlights, progressive though this public debate claimed to be, many of the proposed solutions were also patriarchal and paternalist in nature, handed down from the drawing boards and writing desks of male experts rather than stemming from consultation with the inhabitants of the cities of tomorrow. In *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival*, Charles Holden and William Holford (making extensive use of photography) set out in detail their prescription for the rebuilding of the area around St. Paul’s.¹⁰¹ Saturated with photographic imagery, the public sphere of Britain in the 1940s and early 1950s included repeated visual constructions of the future through the deployment of innumerable photographs. As a consequence, the visions of postwar Britain promoted at the time were not simply ideas; they were ideas in which visual material and visual culture were deeply implicated. Revealingly, the illustration used by Purdom was titled simply, “Vision.”

In the visual economy of Britain in the 1940s and early 1950s, Wren’s cathedral as depicted in Mason’s photograph was a multivalent symbol—a status made possible by the image’s ambiguity, which allowed different uses to play on different allusions to strike different emphases.¹⁰² Just as Mason’s photograph was offered as visual support to divergent interpretations of wartime destruction in the *Daily Mail* and the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, it facilitated different deployments within Britain, speaking both to audiences about national resilience and to a public concerned with reconstruction and the reimagined social contract that the people’s war came to imply.¹⁰³ It could represent not only the spirit of the

¹⁰⁰ C. B. Purdom, *How Should We Rebuild London?*, 2nd ed. (London, 1946), 174. The illustration was by “Bat” (Oswald Barrett).

¹⁰¹ C. H. Holden and W. G. Holford, *The City of London: A Record of Destruction and Survival* (London, 1951).

¹⁰² Poole used the term “visual economy” to characterize how the significance, value, or currency of images shift as they move from one context to another (Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* [Princeton, NJ, 1997]).

¹⁰³ Mason’s photograph also had a notable afterlife in postwar visual culture outside the UK, including in the work of the newly established United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. The photograph appeared in an exhibition promoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Paris in 1949 (W. E. Williams, “UNESCO Portrays History of Human Rights,” *Museum* 4 [1949]: 201–5, 204) and in UNESCO’s photomagazine, illustrating a discussion of the organization’s tenth anniversary (“UNESCO’s

Blitz (through the resilient dome) but also what has been termed “the Spirit of ‘45” (through the ruined buildings and the postwar hopes they kindled).¹⁰⁴ For a short while, at least, Mason’s photograph was associated with the future-focused thinking exemplified by Richards’s plea for the dissolution of prewar civilization and *Picture Post*’s “Plan for Britain”—with a broadly cast “reconstruction” debate encompassing both a new social contract and the town planning and architectural projects that were to make visible this future Britain. Tracing different uses of Mason’s photograph entails tracking changes in its symbolism by evaluating its role in giving powerful visual form to key historical ideas regarding the postwar moment, such as “opportunity,” “planning,” and “the future.” These unstable valences characterize a process of reuse and shifting meaning that continued through the latter decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

MASON’S ST. PAUL’S AFTER THE 1950S

Like the cathedral in wartime, the Dome of Discovery suffered its own onslaught when the Conservative Party was returned to power in October 1951, led by Churchill. Minister of Works David Eccles oversaw the demolition of the South Bank site, save for the Royal Festival Hall. The symbols of modern Britain—the Skylon and Dome of Discovery—were sold for scrap.¹⁰⁵ This act of iconoclasm by the incoming government is indicative of a continuing tug-of-war over wartime and postwar icons including St. Paul’s. Exemplified by the (unsuccessful) campaign to recreate the Skylon and mark the festival’s sixtieth anniversary, this battle of symbols concerns memorialization and cultural value—that is, the question of how to commemorate wartime experiences and postwar ambitions.

The Prince of Wales entered the fray on December 1, 1987, recalling Mason’s now-historic image in an address to the annual dinner of the Corporation of London Planning and Communication Committee at Mansion House: “The dramatic photograph of the great black dome standing out against the swirling smoke and flames is something that most of us today know about. Then it gave new

First Ten Years,” *UNESCO Courier*, December 1956, 3–5). Valderrama’s history of UNESCO suggests a further use of Mason’s photograph by the organization: an illustration claims to depict the cover of the original signed constitution that carries Mason’s image (Fernando Valderrama, *A History of UNESCO* [Paris, 1995], 9). It has not been possible to confirm this; the original signed constitution is held by the Treaty Section of the UK government’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but it is not illustrated. The image used on the continent was frequently attributed to Keystone and appears to derive from a second negative made by Mason on December 29, 1940 (see n. 49 above). Although taken from the same position, the cloud formation in this alternative version is noticeably different, obscuring more of the dome while giving a clearer view of other elements.

¹⁰⁴ *The Spirit of ‘45*, directed by Ken Loach, Sixteen Films, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Harriet Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain: A Land and Its People* (London, 2012), 188–93.

meaning to the cathedral as a symbol of faith and a monument to Britain's resolve. . . . You have, Ladies and Gentleman, to give this much to the *Luftwaffe*: when it knocked down our buildings, it didn't replace them with anything more offensive than rubble. We did that."¹⁰⁶ The prince's discussion of St. Paul's as symbol was resolutely decoupled from any progressive postwar agenda. Indeed, it debunked the pretensions of the vision of postwar Britain. The specific target was Holden and Holford's reconstructed area of Paternoster Square. Completed in the mid-1950s, it replaced the ruins of Paternoster Row, victim of the raid on December 29, 1940. The prince's speech echoed the sentiments of numerous critics of postwar urban development. Indeed, it explicitly referenced Colin Amery and Dan Cruickshank's *The Rape of Britain*, which asserted that "More of the City of London stands devastated or is doomed now than was destroyed during the Blitz."¹⁰⁷

Patrick Wright has termed this lamenting of postwar urbanism "a revivalist fable." In sharp contrast to the idea of a postwar reconstruction that seized the opportunity to right interwar wrongs, such critiques posit a narrative of decline: "First there was the war, recalled here as the last moment of national greatness, a trial by fire from which the nation emerged purified and triumphant like Wren's cathedral. Then came the peace, which quickly betrayed the promises of war and degenerated into a forty-year period of destructive modernization."¹⁰⁸ The solution, on this model, is to be found in the revival of traditional cultural (specifically, architectural) values.

Under the rubric of the revivalist fable, the city is defined by its visual characteristics. It is not the realm of everyday life, but a historical work of art devalued by modern interventions. In the prince's view, planners, architects, and developers "wrecked the London skyline," losing St. Paul's in "a jostling scrum of office buildings, . . . like a basketball team standing shoulder-to-shoulder between you and the Mona Lisa."¹⁰⁹ The prince's reference not simply to the cathedral but also to St. Paul's as depicted in Mason's iconic photograph is telling. With its intimate connection to a time always and forever past, a photograph (in the words of Lynn Hunt and Vanessa Schwartz) is "the perfect vehicle for the production of nostalgia."¹¹⁰ And nostalgia—an emotional attachment to a past perceived as

¹⁰⁶ The Prince of Wales, December 1, 1987, *UK Web Archive*, available at http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20120405232447/http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speechesandarticles/a_speech_by_hrh_the_prince_of_wales_at_the_corporation_of_lo_161336965.html.

¹⁰⁷ Colin Amery and Dan Cruickshank, *The Rape of Britain* (London, 1975), 128.

¹⁰⁸ Patrick Wright, *A Journey through Ruins: The Last Days of London*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2009), 307.

¹⁰⁹ Prince of Wales, December 1, 1987.

¹¹⁰ Lynn Hunt and Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment: Images and Eye-witnessing in History," *Journal of Visual Culture* 9 (2010): 259–71, 267.

preferable—is central to the revivalist fable, its critique of future-focused postwar reconstruction efforts and its call for an urgent return to historical values and traditional architecture. In this fashion during the final years of the twentieth century, the prince and others elided the wartime destruction and the postwar reconstruction, framing the latter as a continuation of the former.

Yet to many in the immediate postwar moment, the reconstruction represented neither a decline nor merely the continuation of urbanization and modernization. It constituted a war memorial in its own right, as José Harris has demonstrated; Mass-Observation interviews suggest that the relatively fast progress from the end of the First World War to the beginning of the second precipitated a loss of faith in the sort of memorials built after 1918. Public buildings such as schools and hospitals were deemed to be a more fitting legacy of or memorial to the sacrifices made in wartime.¹¹¹ They too were viewed as a monument to Britain's wartime resolve, as the prince described St. Paul's. The monumental architecture of the reconstruction was posited as the symbolic articulation of a watershed moment in British social history, of the new social contract articulated in the Beveridge Report.¹¹² But the symbolism of what John Gillis termed "living memorials" proved fragile.¹¹³

In 1960, the liberal *News Chronicle* (whose managing director, Gerald Barry, had been the festival's director-general) was taken over by the *Daily Mail*—a transaction which (like the demolition of the South Bank site by the returning Conservative government) presaged the late twentieth-century critique of both reconstruction architecture and the establishment of the welfare state. This critique went hand-in-hand with the erosion of the memorial significance of the architecture of the new postwar Britain and the reduction of Mason's image to particular aspects of the multivalent value it originally had in the visual economy of Britain in the 1940s and early 1950s. As Wright expressed it, "while the revivalist fable treats St. Paul's as a timeless and enduring icon of the national spirit, we only have to compare the meaning that it holds now with that which it

¹¹¹ José Harris, "'War Socialism' and Its Aftermath: Debates About a New Social and Economic Order in Britain, 1945–1950," in *The Postwar Challenge: Cultural, Social, and Political Change in Western Europe, 1945–1958*, ed. Dominik Geppert (Oxford, 2003).

¹¹² In 1942, the coalition government published a report entitled "Social Insurance and Allied Services" that became known as the Beveridge Report. Advocating a system of social security to ensure a minimum standard of living for all citizens, it recommended insurance contributions be paid to the state by working people and that benefits be paid to the unemployed, retired, widowed, and sick by the state. This proposal—a universal system catering to the citizen's needs "from the cradle to the grave" and superseding the existing fragmentary collection of private and cooperative schemes—met with popular support and became known as the "welfare state."

¹¹³ John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 13.

achieved during the war, to suspect that the fable has actually reduced Wren's cathedral to a brittle polemical device."¹¹⁴

Different appropriations of Mason's photograph (and through it Wren's cathedral) concern the trumpeting of either historically minded continuity or future-focused opportunity, the preservation of something peculiarly and historically British or the modernization of Britain. The prince suggested that something had survived the destruction of the war and the "rape" of the postwar reconstruction. He considered that the architecture of reconstruction lacked the appropriate aesthetic to match the splendor of St. Paul's, drawing on Mason's image to make that point. In contrast, Ritchie Calder (writing during the war) suggested that the Blitz had sounded a death knell. He saw in the image of toppled Victorian and Edwardian buildings (like those in the foreground of Mason's image) the end of an epoch of vested interests and governmental mismanagement.¹¹⁵ The prince equated Holden and Holford with the Luftwaffe; Calder, just as audaciously, compared the Blitz with Bastille Day. Of course, Calder's wartime vision of the nation renewed was not to be realized; a British Revolution was never imminent. As Hewison observed looking back to the coronation of 1953, "The socialist's 'New Britain' had hardly time to establish itself when it was replaced by the 'New Elizabethan Age.'"¹¹⁶ Latterly, as the prince urged, the area around St. Paul's was again razed and rebuilt (albeit not in the ersatz-classical style he advocated).¹¹⁷ Completed in 2004, Paternoster Square is now home to the London Stock Exchange.

The dominant symbolism or cultural value of Mason's photograph no longer accommodates the postwar ambitions regarding a new social contract. "What it represents," Joe Kerr has asserted, "is an abstraction of officially endorsed sentiment, wholly in the manner of a traditional memorial: no people, no suffering, no death. What remains is simply the image of the city, posed in defiance against an unprecedented offensive."¹¹⁸ Mason's St. Paul's is most often mobilized to generate a nostalgic faith in past achievements rather than evoking creative potential for the future. It readily conjures the notion of Blitz spirit and alludes also to what the prince termed "the greatest trading empire the world has ever seen," but the social democratic associations with which St. Paul's was invested have largely fallen away. The living memorials of the postwar years have

¹¹⁴ Wright, *A Journey through Ruins*, 312.

¹¹⁵ Ritchie Calder, *The Lesson of London* (London, 1941), 125.

¹¹⁶ Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London, 1995), 66.

¹¹⁷ The Prince of Wales, *A Vision of Britain: A Personal View of Architecture* (London, 1989), 68–74.

¹¹⁸ Joe Kerr, "The Uncompleted Monument: London, War, and the Architecture of Remembrance," in *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, ed. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr and Jane Rendell (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 78.

been stripped of any cultural value they had as monuments for a new Britain and have been replaced by Mason's image as a photographic monument.

As a result of this simplification of the photograph's symbolism, and reducing its associations further still, the image is now uncritically recycled in support of various expressions of indignation. For instance, it appeared in coverage regarding the 2011 Occupy protests outside the cathedral. Barred from entering Pater-noster Square (which is private property), protestors set up camp in front of the steps of St. Paul's. *Daily Mail* coverage used the Mason photograph to strike a contrast between past and present under the headline: "Surrender of St. Paul's: Protest rabble force the cathedral to close, a feat that Hitler could barely manage."¹¹⁹ Throughout 1941, the photograph offered its audience an image of right against wrong and the optimistic prospect of rebirth, as conjured by allusions to the Second Great Fire. In 1951, Cartier-Bresson depicted everyday life on the cathedral steps as the epitome of an egalitarian and democratic populace. In 2011, the reappropriation of the image and the emotive comparison of public dissent with the Nazi bombing of London work to cast the protestors as a present national enemy. It is an irony, unacknowledged in such redeployments of the image to chastise a contemporary reform movement, that Mason's photograph had previously helped construct the progressive postwar agenda of improved social provision for all.

Just as the building's proprietors, the Church of England, were at first sympathetic to the Occupy protestors, St. Paul's as a symbol can still accommodate alternative responses.¹²⁰ In the main, however, such perspectives are all but lost. On the crowd-sourced website Wikipedia, the photograph has been given the title, "St. Paul's Survives." Likewise, on the Getty Images website its title is "Standing Proud."¹²¹ Such concision is symptomatic of the twenty-first-century circulation

¹¹⁹ Tom Kelly, Steve Doughty, and Nichola Jones, "Surrender of St. Paul's: Protest Rabble Force the Cathedral to Close, a Feat That Hitler Could Barely Manage," *Daily Mail*, October 22, 2011, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2051901/St-Pauls-Cathedral-shuts-doors-time-living-memory.html>.

¹²⁰ For instance, a former member of St. Paul's Watch expressed a different way of looking at the cathedral and the cultural values with which it might be associated in the wake of the global financial crisis: "We were a friendly, intergenerational and democratic lot, and we loved the cathedral. . . . It has been heart-warming to see it becoming once more a symbol of resistance against tyranny: in those stirring days the tyranny of Hitler; today the tyranny of the banking industry" (Robin Boyd, "Heart-Warming Watch on St. Paul's," *Guardian*, November 4, 2011, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/nov/04/heartwarming-watch-on-st-pauls>).

¹²¹ When accessioned into a commercial database like Getty Images, historic photographs do not usually carry the captions used at the time of their creation or original publication. Titles are assigned by staff responsible for generating search terms or keywords. Mason's photograph was probably thus captioned in the mid-1990s. I am grateful to Sarah McDonald (curator, Hulton Archive) for this insight.

of Mason's photograph, which more often than not works to complete a process begun in December 1940 when it was first developed, retouched, captioned, and set on the page—that is, the negotiating of ambiguity to secure and promote a preferred meaning.¹²²

CONCLUSION

Mark Connelly has asserted that “the Blitz is very definitely a visual memory.”¹²³ But how are we to understand such a declaration in relation to these different uses and associations of Mason's photograph? All too frequently, discussion of memory (like photography) is undertheorized or conceptually vague. Except for the remaining few who experienced it directly, the Blitz is a cultural memory in the sense defined by Aleida Assmann. It is not an individual phenomenon (characterized by experience at one point in time and recollection in another) but a collective one (entailing representation and communication).¹²⁴ Cultural memory is constructed through representational forms, through artifacts that represent aspects of and attitudes toward the past. It marks the interface between individuals and collectives. The Blitz as an aspect of British culture is most helpfully (if wordily) characterized as a cultural memory in the construction of which visual material including photography is particularly prominent.

This cultural memory is not fixed, albeit many of its salient images endure. It is mutable, reaffirmed or contested by various reiterations, including the numerous instances of reframing and recirculating Mason's photograph—from the historical allusions it activated when first published, to its associations with the future-focused reconstruction debate, to its later nostalgic deployments. By addressing the photograph as a discursive and intentional visual object in use, it is possible to grasp the dynamic role of vision and visual material in this culturally constructed, politically instrumental and contested collective memory. Of course, a photograph such as Mason's is not itself a necessary and sufficient cause accounting for wartime solidarity, postwar attitudes toward reconstruction, or revivalist ideologies. I argue rather that photography was an influential factor in public debates about reconstruction, memorialization, architectural

¹²² Robert Bevan suggested that Mason's photograph was also used in a British tabloid after the London bombings on July 7, 2005 (Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* [London, 2006], 81). I have not been able to confirm this, but if correct it merits analysis.

¹²³ Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 131.

¹²⁴ “Individual and social memory cling to and abide with human beings and their embodied interaction; political and cultural memory, on the other hand, are based on the more durable carriers of symbols and material representations” (Aleida Assmann, “Four Formats of Memory: From Individual to Collective Constructions of the Past,” in *Cultural Memory and Historical Consciousness in the German-Speaking World since 1500*, ed. Christian Emden and David Midgley [Oxford, 2004], 25).

style, and the social contract in Britain. Reevaluating Mason's photograph of St. Paul's highlights the cultural values at stake in the visualization of the bombing war and its aftermath from wartime and into the twenty-first century.

The reevaluation of Mason's photograph is just one instance of a broader research agenda with significant implications for the writing of contemporary European history. The interdisciplinary model of the published photograph employed here offers a way to break out of the intellectual holding pattern in which photography has been stuck. A similar reevaluation could be carried out for other iconic images of the Second World War, as well as for other key events and phenomena of the twentieth century that were subjects of public debate following the widespread uptake and circulation of photography in the public sphere.¹²⁵ Iconic photographs should be a pressing concern for historians of contemporary Europe since they are deeply embedded in both popular and scholarly discourse—a trend set to be furthered by the increasing number of digital platforms demanding visual content. “The more collective memory is constructed through the visual media,” Hariman and Lucaites note, “the more likely it is that the iconic photos will be used to mark, frame, and otherwise set the tone for later generations’ understanding of public life in the twentieth century.”¹²⁶

The approach offered here opens up a relatively untapped field of primary material for analysis in exploring and giving accounts of the recent past. Such material may be ambiguous, but it is not unique among primary sources in that respect. Faced with the ambiguity or complexity of the photograph, it is necessary neither to accept the image at face value nor to reject it as having no value at all. Moreover, to examine the operative role played by photography in shaping ways of seeing and thinking in the last century is not to downplay the importance of political issues, social histories, economic factors, or any other facet of historical experience or the archival record. Nor is it to minimize the experiences of individuals, such as those who died on December 29, 1940.¹²⁷ It is rather to

¹²⁵ Attention has focused here on an iconic photograph, but the approach outlined is not inimical to the analysis of photographic genres. Addressing archives comprising 55,000 photographs by 1,000 individuals, Edwards's work on architectural imagery from the English survey movement provides an alternative model for approaching larger bodies of material and the social and intellectual dimensions of the photographic practice that produced them (Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* [Durham, NC, 2013]).

¹²⁶ Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, 11.

¹²⁷ The dead are listed in Margaret Gaskin, *Blitz: The Story of 29th December 1940* (London, 2005), 329–50. The poet Ruthven Todd critiqued how the press and photography masked the Blitz's human cost. Considering “the proud headlines of the papers’ story” and the “million photographs [that] record the works of Wren,” Todd highlighted what such representations failed to capture: “The impertinence of death, ignoring tears / That smashed the house and left untouched the Dome” (Ruthven Todd, “These Are Facts,” *Until Now* [London, 1941], 52).

examine the way in which images may work to shape (or even efface or occlude) the perception of such issues—how meanings accrue, how media obscure as well as reveal, how histories of people and of representations are intertwined. Undoubtedly, thorny issues remain to be worked through in developing this research agenda. The concept of the public sphere, for instance, requires greater conceptual scrutiny and methodological reflection than has been possible here. Similarly, the transnational circulation of Mason's photograph merits further attention. Nonetheless, opening out research to questions of the published photograph's address (in addition to the study of its production and reception) provides a crucial alternative to the recycling of iconic images as mere illustrations. It allows historians of contemporary Europe to examine the ways in which images are as much agents of history as are ideas, institutions, and individuals.