

# When Norwich fell victim to the Baedeker Blitz

In one of the most defining episodes of the Second World War on the home front, Norwich found itself in the firing line of a deadly and destructive campaign of terror nearly 80 years ago. As a new book charts the full story of the Baedeker Blitz, **Steve Snelling** relates some of the human experiences unearthed during author Jan Gore's historical odyssey

A compelling and comprehensive new study has been published of the series of air-raids which for thousands of men, women and children were a scarring and scarifying memory of the Second World War in Norfolk.

Written by Jan Gore, a retired government librarian who is fast forging an enviable reputation as one of the country's foremost chroniclers of the conflict waged close to home, *The Terror Raids of 1942: The Baedeker Blitz* presents a graphic portrayal of the Nazis' aerial offensive which deliberately targeted England's most historic and architecturally important cities in revenge for the devastation wrought on Germany by an increasingly powerful RAF Bomber Command.

Based heavily on first-hand accounts, some of them supplied by readers of the EDP and its sister paper, the Evening News who answered her appeal for eyewitness material, the book straddles the entire cycle of destruction that began in the spring with attacks on Exeter and Bath and continued into the summer with raids on Norwich, York and Canterbury and represents something of a personal odyssey.

A connection with two of the

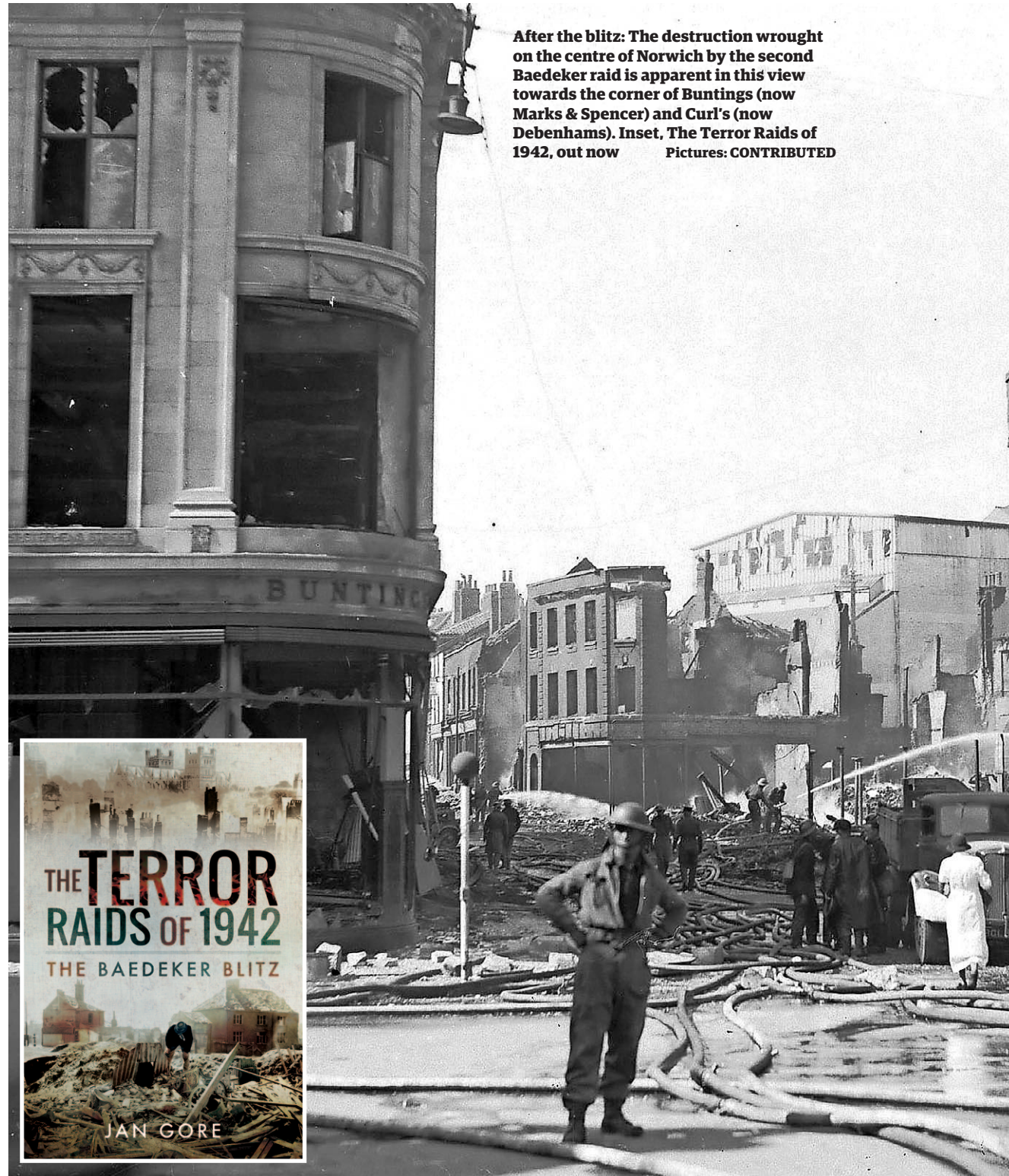
cities - she was a student at Exeter University while her son later studied in Canterbury - had, as she puts it, "piqued" her curiosity about their involvement in the war and led to the discovery that both shared the unwelcome distinction of falling victim to the retaliatory aerial bombardment ordered by Hitler with the specific aim of terrorising the civilian population.

Having already explored a tragic incident during the V1 assault on London, it "seemed time to look at what happened in the spring of 1942". Her 'Baedeker' quest had begun.

"Of course," she explains, "I knew that London had suffered worst of all from German air raids, but for periods people living in so many other cities had also had to endure their share of attacks and I wanted to highlight those experiences which have been overshadowed by the greater Blitz for so long."

It was a self-ordained mission of remembrance which combined two of her greatest passions - family history research and an abiding fascination with the lives of civilians during the Second World War.

"Looking back," she says, "I think my interest stems in part from my grandparents and



After the blitz: The destruction wrought on the centre of Norwich by the second Baedeker raid is apparent in this view towards the corner of Buntings (now Marks & Spencer) and Curl's (now Debenhams). Inset, The Terror Raids of 1942, out now Pictures: CONTRIBUTED

parents having lived through those times. Not that they ever spoke much about it which, I think, was telling in itself.

"I'm passionate about the importance of recording the memories of ordinary people caught up in these extraordinary events before it's too late, but just as important is understanding what they endured. And the more I read their accounts I can't help thinking, 'wow, how on earth did they live through that? How did they cope? It must have been genuinely terrifying."

"It does rather annoy me when people talk of the 'Blitz Spirit'. It's so broad brush. There's a sense of 'oh, wasn't everyone brave'. Well, yes, lots of people were, but if you look at the truth behind the propaganda you discover that among those who survived the raids there were quite a few people who suffered mental health problems or worse still committed suicide because they couldn't cope any more."

The more she found out about

people's experiences during the Baedeker raids the less surprised she was by such discoveries. "It wasn't just having to endure the bombing, though goodness knows that would have been dreadful enough, it was the strain of living with that fearful uncertainty of what the night would bring. You never knew when you went to bed whether you would have to get up in a couple of hours in an effort to try to reach your Anderson shelter before the bombs started falling."

"It's a bit like when you have a new baby and you're woken repeatedly in the night. You're not too sure what's going on beyond the fact there's a very loud noise which you have to stop. That kind of complete disorientation would be happening night after night after night."

## Target Norwich

Nowhere was that nagging fear more intensely felt during the Luftwaffe's 1942 aerial offensive than in Norwich. Of all those

ancient cities raided that spring summer none suffered a longer or more punishing ordeal than the Norfolk city which was the objective for no fewer than seven attacks between April and August of that year.

There were no specific sites targeted. Born out of pure vengeance following a devastating 'fire-storm' assault on the Hanseatic city of Lubeck, the aim was to deliver a similar wave of terror to the doors of British civilians. The cities selected for aerial bombardment were those with a comparable heritage that also boasted a wealth of historic buildings. In the words of the now notorious, albeit slightly erroneous, statement issued by the German Foreign Ministry, the Luftwaffe was "to go all out to bomb every building in Britain marked with three stars in the Baedeker [travel] guide".

It scarcely mattered that the guide-book's highest rating was, in fact, only two stars. The reference was sufficient for Karl

HOLDER'S DESCRIPTION	HOLDER'S PHOTOGRAPH
Sex... MALE. Height... 5'4½"	
Eyes... BLUE. Hair... FAIR.	
Date of Birth... 14. 4. 21.	
Visible Distinguishing Marks.....	
DECLARATION - I DECLARE that I have personal knowledge, extending over... 12... years (months) of the person to whom this Identity Card relates, that the signature within is his (her) true signature, that he (she) possesses the above physical characteristics and has stated to me the above date of his (her) birth:	
(★) and that the photograph above signed by me is a true likeness of that person.	
Signed... <i>[Signature]</i>	Date... 26-6-43
Service or Employment of Declarant... <i>Naval Civil Defence Messenger</i>	
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In the firing line: Eric Jarrold witnessed the Baedeker blitz as a Civil Defence messenger while still a schoolboy