

Blitz – The Story of 29th December 1940 by M.J. Gaskin.
Faber and Faber 2005.

Anyone of my generation (born 1956) will have grown up with the story of Churchill's instruction during the Blitz that whatever else happened St Paul's Cathedral had to survive because the blow to national morale of its destruction would be terrible.

Blitz is the story of perhaps the most fateful night of the Blitz, at the end of 1940, and of the horrific destruction that the Luftwaffe rained down on the City of London. It is a story told by the laudably unobtrusive author (the author blurb doesn't even reveal the sex of the writer) with style and an awareness of the drama of events that speak for themselves. Blitz also brings to life the men and women whose lives were transformed by the Blitz, the heroism of fire-fighters, police, and ordinary members of the public and the sacrifice made by so many in the cause of saving their city.

But this is more than a catalogue of events told hour by hour: there is courage, humour, laughter and tears, and a graphic depiction of the insanity that fuelled the Nazi terror machine.

The cover of the book is of the iconic photograph taken by Herbert Mason's from the roof of the Daily Mail building in Fleet Street on the morning of December 30th of the dome of St Paul's standing proud amidst the smoke and ruins of the City, and there is also an appendix listing all those in Greater London who died on that terrible night. The juxtaposition of the two is powerful – and a reminder that though a magnificent building survived, men, women and children who mattered to their families even more did not.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh