1

London's last traditional brick kiln
Pottery Lane in Notting Hill (1)

2

3

Examples of solid wall London Stock Brick Architecture Georgian Terraces of Bedford Square (2), Sidney Square (3)

Pollution

Initially sandy/yellowish in colour the London Stock Bricks often turned greyish or even black due to air pollution in London during the 19th century. A large contributor of the vast amounts of smog covering the city was the manufacture of bricks. Particularly the final stage, where dried bricks were stacked together and fired using charcoal or coal. This process would take an entire week (continuously, day and night) and emit vast amounts of black smoke, which in turn causes serious environmental pollution and health problems through tonnes of carbon and sulphur dioxide emissions.
Levels of air pollution got significantly less through the introduction of the Clean Air Act in 1956. This policy aimed at reducing the amount of black smoke being emitted from London's industry, brickkilns, chimneys, smokestacks etc. What followed was that burning coal became prohibited around populated areas. Smoke control areas and use of smokeless fuels were introduced. Less smog in London allowed for the cities older buildings to be cleaned and new buildings could retain their natural colour.

Smog pollution in London (https://i.guim.co.uk/img/media)

Burning coal (https://upload.wikimedia.org)

World War II and contamination of ground

London's subterranean medley of infrastructure – underground railway for transport, water pipes, sewage drains and telecommunication cables – not only supports surface social lives and economic activities.

During Wold War II these structures and spaces were converted into deep-level shelter giving refuge and ensuring the lives of the city's civilians.

Hallam Street, London: after the World War II Blitz

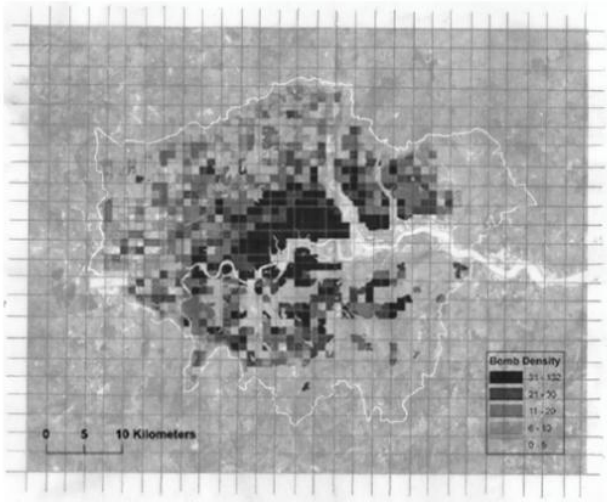
Image - John Wolcott (https://britishheritage.com/history/world-war-ii-survivor-london-blitz/2015)

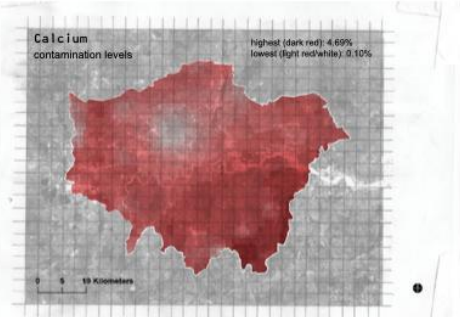
Henry Moore's Tube Shelter Perspective. "I saw hundreds of ...Reclining Figures stretched out along the platforms... Even the train tunnels seemed to be like the holes in my sculpture."

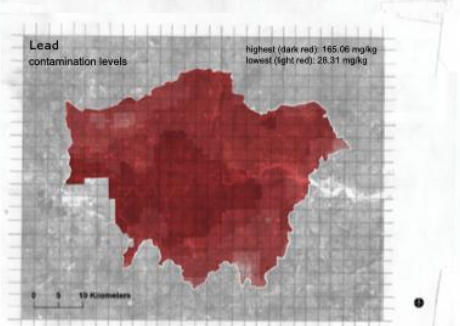
Tube becomes shelter – tracks on the Central line east of Liverpool Street Station filled in with tarmac to accommodate more people.

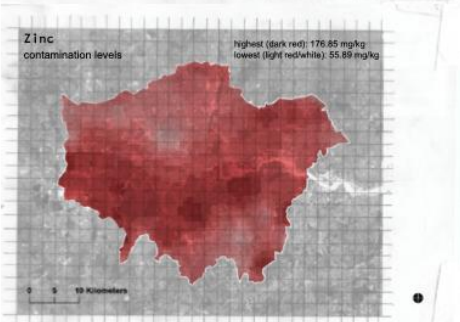
Images - London Under London
A subterranean guide
Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman
John Murray (Publishers) Ltd,
London 1984, p.13

Times of war and conflict led to significant changes of the city's terrestrial environment, particularly in the soil as traces of heavy metal enrichment were found. The British Geological Survey found that in areas of large-scale destruction through the Blitz bombing campaign levels of calcium, lead and zinc levels were particularly high. Reason was polluting elements contained in paints, piping and mortars are components of the destroyed brick buildings spread as dust and debris into the surrounding area.









These discarded bricks are unorthodox in the natural environment, bricks are essentially clays metamorphosed by humans with various admixtures of sand, and heated in kilns to the point of melting. This scale of rapid heating is unusual in nature and so bricks have a distinctive texture and mineralogy compared to other rocks found at the shore.

Evidence of destruction of London Stock Brick houses found at Thames foreshore. "London spuds." London Stock brick becoming part of the nature/landscape of the city.

Images - Secrets of the Thames foreshore (https://londonist.com/2014/05/secrets-of-the-thames-foreshore/2019)