

Text 2: The London Riots (2011)

Paul Lewis describes the civil unrest on a grand scale.

At 1.30am on Sunday, I had returned home assuming the rioting had died out. Then someone sent me a picture of an ALDI supermarket on fire. The BBC and Sky had been ordered out because it was too dangerous, with reports emerging of trouble in Wood Green, two miles west of Tottenham. Around 2.30am I decided to head back, this time wearing a hoodie and riding a
5 bicycle; to blend in, and because no one could have got through in a car. On the approach, roads were blocked with burning barricades. Mostly the streets were filled with bystanders. But in places there were men, some in balaclavas, guarding the streets as shops were looted.

A minicab was driving erratically down a quiet residential street. As it passed, a wide-eyed teenager stared out. He looked 14.

10 The looting on nearby Wood Green's main high street was brazen, and was still going on around sunrise at 5.30am. That Sunday afternoon I toured Tottenham Hale retail park. I found people peering into the smashed stores: Boots, JD Sports, O2, Currys, Argos, Orange, PC World and Comet.

Everyone was asking the same questions. How had police lost control? And was it going to
15 happen again?

It was just before 9pm on Sunday when I saw hundreds of youths head to the G Mantella jewellery store on Enfield high street, six miles north of where the disturbances had begun.

Police had earlier warned residents that the suburb would be on the "frontline" that night and filled a Tesco car park full of police horses in anticipation.

20 By late afternoon, a police car had been attacked in Enfield, and a handful of shop windows broken. The attack on the jewellers was over in seconds.

Minutes later I was stood on a side-street, where young men were knocking down garden walls and collecting bricks to hurl at police. I used my bottled water to wash the bleeding hand of a boy who looked about 12.

25 This was the opening salvo in what would turn into the second night of disturbances. But Sunday was not, as was reported, a night of worsening riots. The disorder in Enfield, Hackney and Brixton was smaller in scale than the previous night, and felt like organised theft.

I was shown the BBM – Blackberry Messenger – broadcast circulated hours earlier, announcing Enfield as a target.

30 It called on everyone in nearby boroughs to "start leaving ur yards" and bring "bags trollys, cars vans, hammers the lott!!!". It warned against passing the message to "snitch boys" (police informants) and said the aim was to "just rob everything".

There was one line – "dead the fires though"; that seemed to discourage arson.

I saw only one fire that night, as I followed in the wake of the looting, through debris-strewn
35 streets.

Text 1: The London Blitz (1938)

This is the story of one London fireman, Frank Hurd, told in his own words.

We were getting a bit fed up with this sort of thing and I think a few of us (I know I did) half-hoped for 'something to happen' & then felt ashamed for letting the monotony 'get us down'.

When we were called to East Ham we all guessed it must be something unusual to send us from Euston on a journey that long.

- 5 What we saw along the confirmed our thoughts. Houses were demolished, roads torn up and a surface shelter had been wrecked. Ambulances and rescue squads were at work as we passed. Fires of varying sizes were visible all round.

10 It was at Beckton Gas Works when I first heard the sound of a bomb. A weird whistling sound and I ducked beside the pump with two more of the crew...then a vivid flash of flame, a column of earth and debris flying into the air, and the ground heaved. I was thrown violently against the side of the appliance. Whilst others ran to get water, we stayed put and I took in my surroundings properly.

15 What a sight. About a mile away to our right was the river front. The whole horizon on that side was a sheet of flame. The docks were afire! On all other sides it was much the same. Fires everywhere. The sky was a vivid orange glow. And all the time the whole area was being mercilessly bombed. The road shuddered with the explosions. A-A [anti-aircraft] shells were bursting overhead. A Royal Navy destroyer berthed in one of the docks was firing her A-A equipment, as were other ships. The shrapnel literally rained down. It was now about midnight and still this incessant racket kept on.

20 It surprised me how quickly we got used to sensing whether a bomb was coming our way or not. At first we all lay flat every time we heard anything but after an hour or so we only dived for it if one came particularly close.

25 At about 3:30 a.m. a canteen van arrived and served us out tea and sandwiches. It was the first bite any of us had had since one o'clock mid-day the day before, fourteen and a half hours ago.

Then, quite suddenly, it ceased. The silence was almost overpowering for a time. Then, about five a.m. the 'All Clear' went. We had been subjected, without any real cover to eight hours' bombing!

30 We stayed there until ten o'clock on Sunday morning when our Sub-officer handed over control to another officer. This officer and his ten pumps, we afterwards found out came from Brighton!

