

The speaker for the Historians meeting on 28th November was Andrew Lound who had come to talk about “When the Lights went out – Birmingham goes to War”. His introduction covered the background to the start of World War II and included a photo of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce who visited Germany before the war to promote trade. One of the results of this was Walsall selling leather coats, bags and saddles to Hitler’s government. Andrew was dressed as an ARP warden and had a number of artefacts from the war, including a gas mask. He talked about the importance of the Home Guard in Birmingham, who were fully trained in medical and contamination matters and helped to protect the many factories in the area, such as Metro-Cammell and Avery. The Air Raid wardens also ran shops and were given the authority to check identity cards, monitor black-outs and reduce the impact of black-market activities. The aerodrome in Castle Bromwich was particularly important, and aircraft built at Vickers were tested here; female pilots delivered military aircraft around the country. Women also took jobs in the local factories. Birmingham was the second most-bombed city in the country, with German aircraft targeting factories but also hitting many houses as well. Canal water was used for emergencies, to put out fires caused during air-raids. During one particular air-raid on 11 December 1940, the city was bombarded for more than 12 hours. Andrew’s use of a variety of media, including music, old photos of Birmingham and sound effects, and his acting out of scenarios, made the conditions in Birmingham during the war, and particularly during an air-raid, come to life.