



# London 1945: Life in the Debris of War

*Maureen Waller*

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## **London 1945: Life in the Debris of War** Maureen Waller

London at the outset of World War II in 1939 was the greatest city in the world, the heart of the British Empire. By 1945, it was a drab and exhausted city, beginning the long haul back to recovery.

The defiant capital of England had always been Hitler's prime target. The last months of the Second World War saw the final phase of the battle of London as the enemy unleashed its new vengeance weapons, the flying bombs and rockets. They were terrifying and brought destruction on a vast scale, but fortunately came too late to dent morale seriously.

The people of London were showing the spirit, courage, and resilience that had earned them the admiration of the world during a long siege. In the harshest winter of fifty years, they were living in primitive conditions. Thousands were homeless, living in the Underground and deep shelters. Women lined up for horse meat and were lucky to obtain one egg a month. They besieged emergency coal dumps. Everyone longed for peace.

The bright new world seemed elusive. As the victory celebrations passed into memory, there were severe hardships and all the problems of post-war adjustment. Women lost the independence the war had lent them, husbands and wives had to learn to live together again, and children had a lot of catching up to do.

Yet London's loss has often been its opportunity. Its people had eagerly embraced plans for a modern metropolis and an end to poverty. They voted overwhelmingly for a Labour government and the new, fairer social order that was their reward for all they had endured.

The year of victory, 1945, represents an important chapter in London's---and Britain's---long history. Acclaimed historian Maureen Waller draws on a rich array of primary sources, letting the people tell their own story, to re-create that moment, bringing to it the social insight at which she excels.

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