

## Lesson 5, Challenge 1

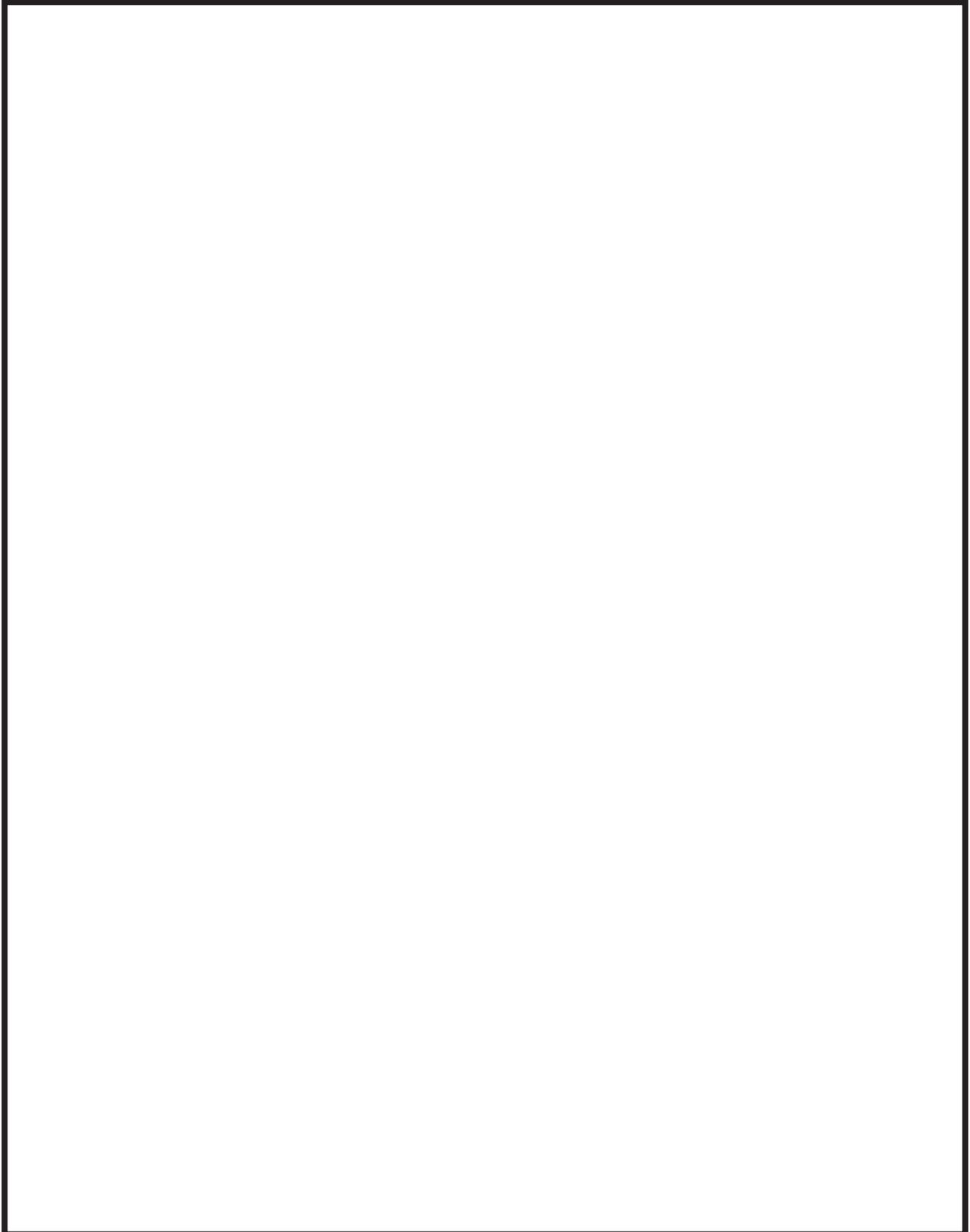
### Requests for improvement of Bethnal Green Station

Bethnal Green Borough Council had a General Emergency Committee which met to discuss urgent matters. In August and September 1941 the Committee wrote some letters to London Regional H.Q., which was run by the Government. They asked for permission to make the shelter safer by replacing the wooden hoarding at the entrance with a brick wall. This is how they described the entrance: 'The iron railings of the Bethnal Green Gardens link up with two newly constructed brick pillars at each side of the entrance to the shelter, and the structure between consists of a double wooden gate and a small wicket gate at the side.' They thought this wooden gate was too flimsy for a shelter that could comfortably accommodate 5,000 people on bunks and another 5,000 if necessary, and they were worried that if there was a particularly severe air raid, a lot more people than normal might try to push their way in, some coming from other, ground-level shelters. The weight of all those extra people might cause the wooden hoarding to collapse so that people could fall through and down the stairs. They pointed out that such improvements had been made in other boroughs. They also mentioned that there was no roof over the entrance stairs, so that they got wet and slippery when it rained. They added that if the Committee's proposals were turned down, the Committee could not be held responsible for any serious consequences.

London Regional H.Q. sent a technical adviser to inspect the entrance together with the Deputy Borough Surveyor. The adviser then reported to London Regional H.Q.: 'I am still of the opinion that it would be a waste of money to build up a wall round the steps to prevent the crowd from forcing their way into the shelter; the existing fence with a little stiffening with salvaged timber could be made very much stronger than the gate. If anything is at all likely to be forced, it is the gate which I agree might be stiffened with advantage.' However, he did recommend that a roof should be erected over the entrance and staircase, which it was a few months later. Handrails were also fitted, but only to the walls of the staircase.

## Lesson 5, Challenge 1

**Re-design Bethnal Green Station, remembering to label any improvements you have made.**



**Lesson 5, challenge 2: Information for the mock inquest**

**Question sheet (Questions that they will be asked by the magistrate)**

<b>SHELTER STAFF (INFORMATION SHEET 1)</b>	
Where were you stationed?	
What did you see?	
How did you try and help?	
Were there enough staff present and in the correct place?	

<b>POLICE (INFORMATION SHEET 2)</b>	
When did you arrive at the scene?	
What did you see?	
What did you do?	
How did you deal with the incident after it had happened?	
Did you arrive quickly enough?	

<b>BOROUGH SURVEYOR (INFORMATION SHEET 3)</b>	
Should you have replaced the fence with a brick wall? Why not?	
Would this have stopped the disaster? Why not?	

<b>BOROUGH EMERGENCY COMMITTEE (INFORMATION SHEET 3)</b>	
What improvements did you ask for at the station?	
Would these have prevented the disaster?	
What should you have been asked for?	
Should you have visited the site with the Borough Engineer to discuss the improvements you wanted	

<b>CIVILIANS (CONSIDER PREVIOUS SOURCES USED)</b>	
What did you see at the station?	
What do you think caused the disaster?	
Did you lose any members of your family?	

## Lesson 5, challenge 2: Information for the mock inquest

### Information sheet 1

#### The shelter staff

While the shelter was filling and during the alert on the 3rd March there was one warden officially on duty between the main gate and the bottom of the stairs—he was in fact down in the booking hall when the accident happened; two wardens were passing the people from the booking hall down the escalators; and one was on duty near a watertight door close to the office. He was also in the booking hall at the time of the accident. There were no wardens on duty in the street outside the shelter at that time.

When the Chief Shelter Warden got the first message by telephone from the booking hall he immediately rang up the police, and followed this up with a second message a few minutes later saying that assistance was badly needed at the entrance to the shelter. His first message to the Control Room in the Town Hall was at 8.40 p.m. precisely. From then on Control took charge of the situation and dealt with the matters of ambulances, rescue parties, etc., while the police were trying to restore order at the shelter entrance.

The whole of the shelter staff of wardens on duty were at the time of the accident below street level, and did what they could to extract casualties from below, which was at first almost impossible. Apart from one woman, no casualties were dealt with by the qualified nurse on duty in the shelter until after half an hour after the accident, and then only a very few. It appears from her evidence that it was only after the ‘all clear’ at 9.43 p.m. that any real progress was made in getting out casualties from the bottom of the steps. The great majority were in fact removed from the upper level and taken to hospitals.

### Information sheet 2

#### The police

At the exact time when the trouble at the tube shelter started, at 8.27 p.m., there was no policeman present. Any policeman patrolling the streets in the immediate area had instructions to go to the tube shelter as soon as there was an air-raid siren warning, to take up duty there within five minutes of the alert. Police Constable John Henderson was five minutes walk away when the alert sounded, but did not reach the shelter until ten minutes later because he was held up by having to stop people using torches carelessly in the street.

On arrival he saw no other policemen, only air-raid wardens desperately trying to pull a huge crowd of shouting people back from the shelter entrance. Henderson managed to pull some people away and got onto the top of the steps but was soon jammed tight. He managed to twist himself around and turned back to tell people to go to other shelters, but they were completely out of control. He started running to the police station for help.

The Chief Shelter Warden had already phoned the police, so halfway to the station Henderson met three other police officers, one of whom he sent back to the police station to get much more help, then he and the other two returned to the shelter.

Gradually, and with the help of more policemen who arrived, they managed to get people to pull back and go to other shelters. Sometimes they had to use brute force because people were desperately trying to reach their friends and relatives in front of them in the crush.

## Lesson 5, challenge 2: Information for the mock inquest

### Information sheet 3

#### **The Borough Emergency Committee and the Deputy Borough Surveyor**

Bethnal Green Borough Council had a General Emergency Committee which met to discuss urgent matters. In August and September 1941 the Committee wrote some letters to London Regional H.Q., which was run by the Government. They asked for permission to make the shelter safer by replacing the wooden hoarding at the entrance with a brick wall.

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However, he did recommend that a roof should be erected over the entrance and staircase, which it was a few months later. Handrails were also fitted, but only to the walls of the staircase.

It was unfortunate that members of the Borough Emergency Committee never went to inspect the shelter entrance together with the Deputy Borough Surveyor, to see and discuss what improvements really were needed. They would have seen that London Regional H.Q.'s proposals were quite inadequate. They might also have noticed other things that could have been improved: better lighting and a central handrail, for instance.