



MANCHESTER

Understanding Unexploded
Ordnance (UXO) Risk in
Manchester: Bombing History
and Remaining Threats



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WWII Bombing of Manchester



Its strategic importance made Manchester a prime target for German bombing raids

Greater Manchester was heavily bombed in late 1940 and early 1941 due to its industrial significance. Key targets included docks, railways, power stations, and weapons factories, with the Manchester Ship Canal and Salford Docks being of particular strategic importance. To reduce their aircraft losses, the Luftwaffe shifted from daylight to nighttime raids.

Between July 1940 and July 1942, the region endured repeated attacks. The worst, known as the "Manchester Blitz," took place on 22nd to 24th December 1940, when 441 bombers devastated Manchester, Salford, and Stretford. Fires and high-explosive bombs destroyed over 4,000 homes and severely damaged 12,000 more. In December alone, 467 tonnes of bombs were dropped, killing 684 and injuring 2,364. The government censored images of the destruction to prevent German propaganda.

Two more major raids followed on 9th January and 1st June 1941, adding 208 tonnes of bombs to the devastation. While large-scale attacks decreased after mid-1941, Manchester's industrial sites, city centre, and docks had already suffered severe damage. Sporadic bombings continued into 1942.

In mid-1944, Hitler's V-weapon campaign introduced unmanned flying bombs and rockets. After a two-year lull, several V1s struck Greater Manchester in December, including one in Oldham that killed 27 - the region's final bombing casualties of the war.

Key Facts:

- Over 4,000 houses were destroyed, including 12,000 damaged.
- 684 fatalities were recorded from bombing raids in Manchester.
- The damage to the city was so extensive, that the government ordered a ban on damage photographs being by the media. As such, there are some gaps in the records of bombing.

Military History of Manchester

Being an important centre of industry, Manchester was home to several features that led to contamination from British ordnance.

Manchester was protected by numerous heavy anti-aircraft batteries, supported by mobile guns, all frequently in action against the Luftwaffe.

Home Guard units were stationed across the city, manning defences, patrolling and training for a potential invasion. Pillboxes were strategically built around Greater Manchester, and the area hosted a number of barracks and camps.

Legacy

One of the legacies of this conflict is buried unexploded air-dropped bombs or anti-aircraft projectiles resulting from the failure of a proportion of the weapons to function as designed.

Impact of legacy UXO

It is commonly accepted that the failure rate of these munitions was approximately 10% and, depending on their shape, weight, velocity and ground conditions, many penetrated the ground and came to rest at depth.

Intensive efforts were made during and after the war to locate and render safe all unexploded ordnance (UXO) but, unsurprisingly, not all were found and dealt with. This is evidenced by the regular, on-going discoveries of UXO during construction-related intrusive ground works.

A sample of recent finds:

- 11/24: "Historic shells" found in a house in Altrincham.
- 06/24: Suspected WWII bomb found in a garden in Oldham.
- 09/23: WWII shell found in Salford.
- 02/22: A WWII bomb was found in a garden in Swinton.
- 01/22: More than 1000 explosives found by magnet fishers in Daisy Nook Country Park, Greater Manchester.
- 10/21: WWII bomb found during garden renovations in Swinton, Manchester.
- 10/21: WWII bomb found in a Salford garden in October 2021.



Managing UXO risks with Igne

UXO presents a serious hazard to construction projects, causing delays, safety risks, and financial loss. Igne provides expert UXO risk assessment, detection, and clearance, ensuring projects proceed safely and efficiently.

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