SOURCE A

Accident Investigation for

The Shelter in Latham Street, Poplar

31st July 1941

Dear Gowers,

In Latham Street it is the old story of surface shelters which collapsed. The walls were a brick and a half thick and the breadth of the shelter was 7ft. 6ins. to 8 ft. with the usual 5 or 6 inches reinforced concrete roof. The walls collapsed and the roof killed the people inside. There was no attempt at any strutting or baffle walls inside. You will remember that months ago we asked for ~~it~~ strutting in these shelters and I am quite certain that until we get it, either in the form of a wooden or steel arch at intervals or at the least of transverse walls, we shall get these unfortunate incidents. Whether or not they mean heavy casualties, depends of course on the number of people sheltering, but even if there is no one there they undermine confidence in the surface shelters, which I think you will agree is most undesirable if we have got to face another winter's bombing.

Strutting (reinforcement)

I looked at a good many other surface shelters about and found them all of the same pattern - nothing to support the roof if the walls give way.

Yours ever,

Philip Game

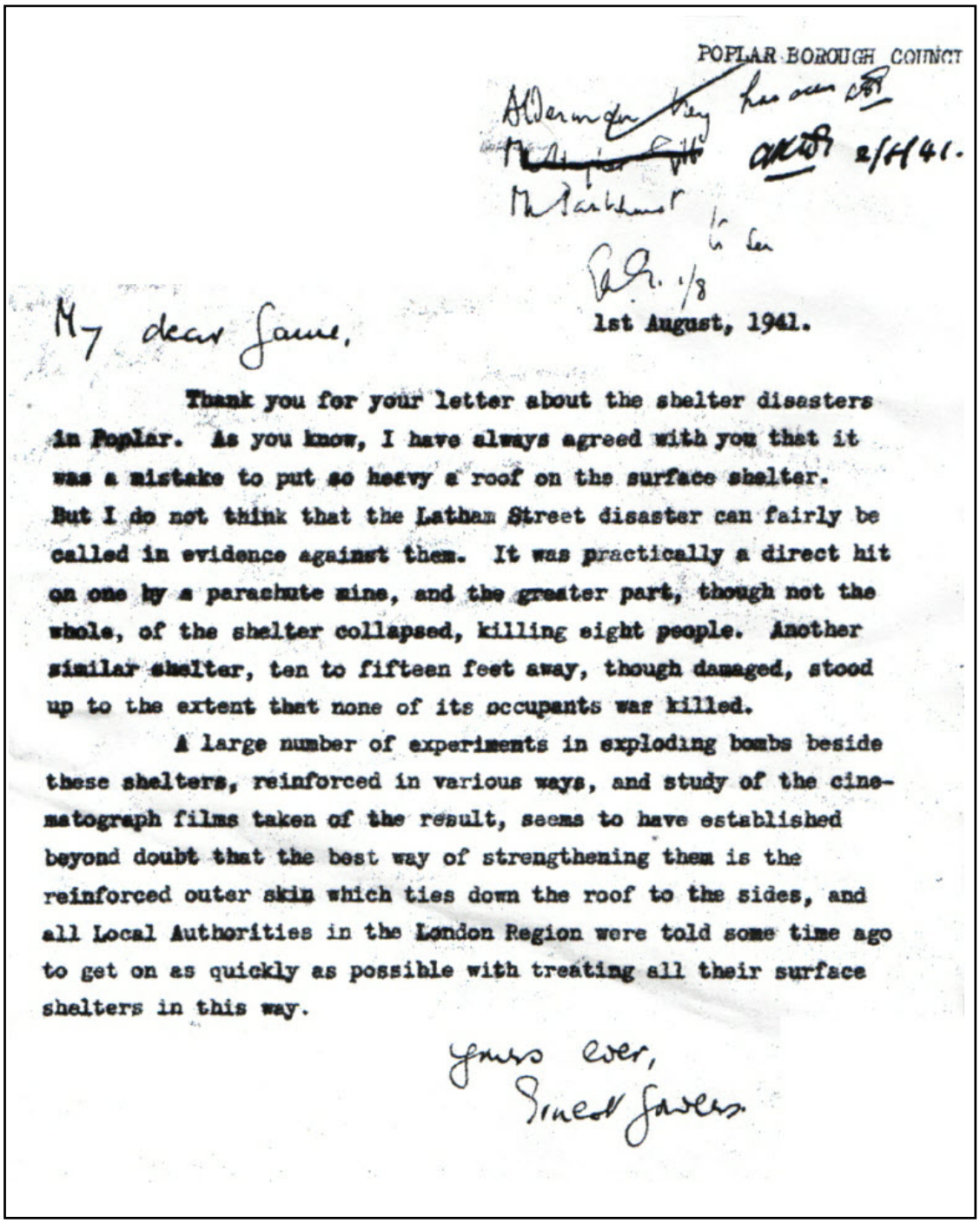
Source A: Letter from Sir Philip Game, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, to Sir Ernest Gowers of Poplar District Council (HO 207/986 The National Archives)

- What does Game say killed the people in the shelter?
- What does he suggest as a cure for this problem?
- As well as deaths what does Game believe will be the effect of doing nothing to the shelters?
- Why might it be that Game does not recommend the complete replacement of these shelters with another type entirely?

SOURCE B

Accident Investigation for

The Shelter in Latham Street, Poplar



POPLAR BOROUGH COUNCIL

Alderman Key has seen [illegible]

[illegible] 2/8/41.

Mr Parkhurst

to see

[illegible] 1/8

My dear Game,

1st August, 1941.

Thank you for your letter about the shelter disasters in Poplar. As you know, I have always agreed with you that it was a mistake to put so heavy a roof on the surface shelter. But I do not think that the Latham Street disaster can fairly be called in evidence against them. It was practically a direct hit on one by a parachute mine, and the greater part, though not the whole, of the shelter collapsed, killing eight people. Another similar shelter, ten to fifteen feet away, though damaged, stood up to the extent that none of its occupants was killed.

A large number of experiments in exploding bombs beside these shelters, reinforced in various ways, and study of the cinematograph films taken of the result, seems to have established beyond doubt that the best way of strengthening them is the reinforced outer skin which ties down the roof to the sides, and all Local Authorities in the London Region were told some time ago to get on as quickly as possible with treating all their surface shelters in this way.

Yours ever,

Ernest Gowers.

Source B: Reply written by Sir Ernest Gowers (Head of Poplar Council) to Sir Philip Game (HO 207/986 The National Archives)

- Identify one point in the letter where Gowers agrees with Game's view (Source A).
- Is there any part of the letter where Gowers expresses disagreement with Game? If there is, identify it.
- Overall, how far does Gowers' letter suggest that he is happy with this type of shelter design?

SOURCE C

Accident Investigation for

The Shelter in Latham Street, Poplar

With regard to Sir Philip Game's suggestion that strutting in the form of wooden or steel arch or a traverse wall would have prevented the collapse, Mr. Kerr is of opinion that such measures would have been practically useless. The present scheme for strengthening these brick surface shelters by means of a reinforced skin which will tie down the roof to the walls is the most effective way of strengthening shelters which has yet been devised and proved by experiment.

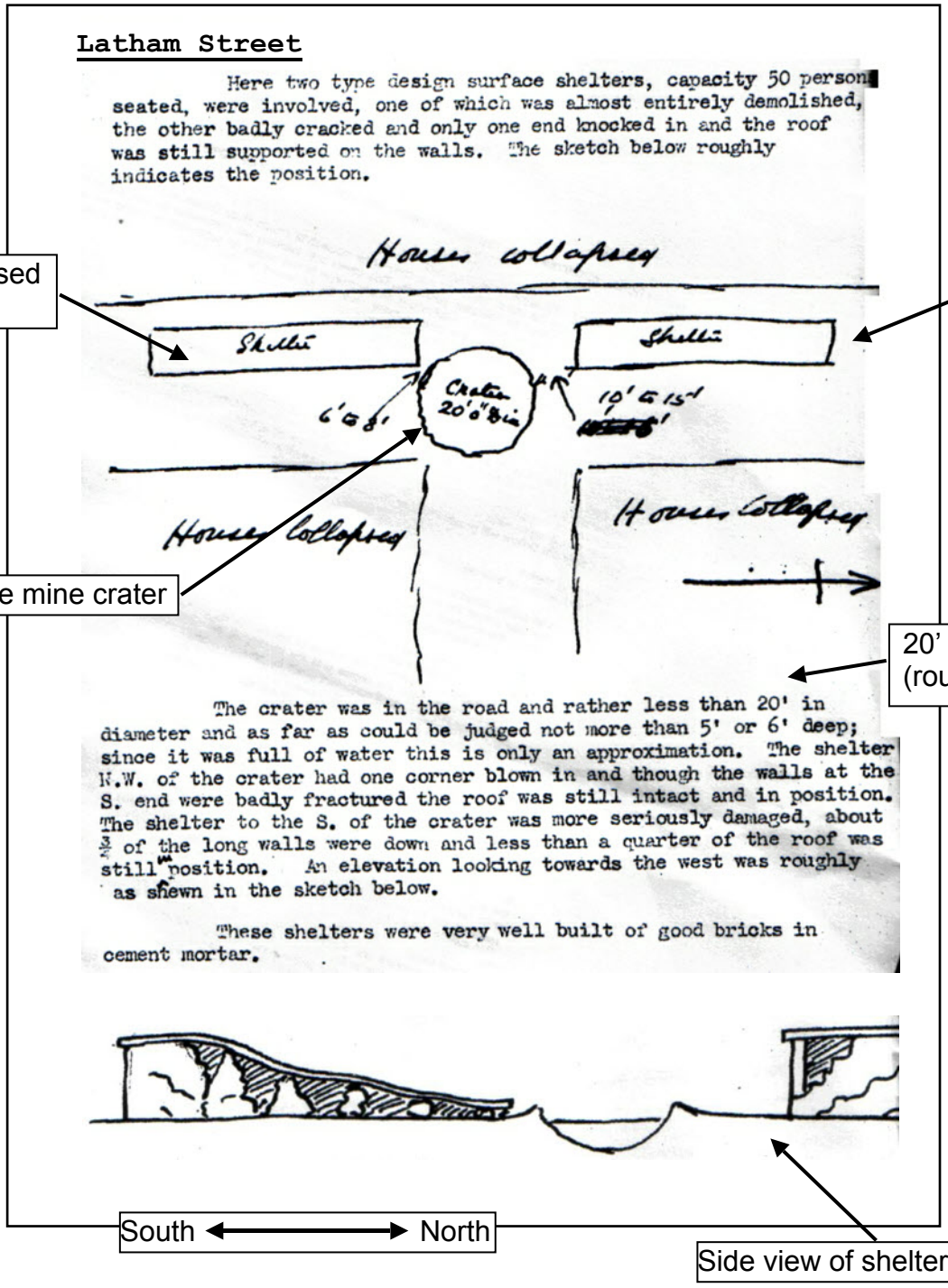
Source C: Engineer's report presented to Poplar Council July 1941
(HO 207/986 The National Archives)

- Which two methods of strengthening the shelter does the report consider?
- Which method does it recommend and why?
- Does Source C agree more with the views expressed in Source A or Source B?

SOURCE D

Accident Investigation for

The Shelter in Latham Street, Poplar



Source D: Evidence Presented at a meeting of Poplar Council 31st July 1941 (HO 207/986 The National Archives)

- How much of the roof of the southern shelter remained in place?
- What had happened to the roof of the northern shelter?
- Does the evidence in Source D offer support more for Game (Source A) or Gowers (Source B)?

SOURCE E

Accident Investigation for

The Shelter in Latham Street, Poplar

The Warden in charge of this area actually saw from his post the reflection of the explosions in the sky and he said that he was of opinion that one bomb had dropped here in addition and almost simultaneously with the mine, since about 30 seconds before the explosion of the mine he saw and heard an explosion which shot a vertical flame into the sky and quite distinct from the glare of the mine explosion. I give this opinion for what it is worth. If it is correct, however, it would certainly explain the appearance of the crater which had a decided lip all round it as if it had been made by a small bomb. This would also in a measure explain the difference in the extent of the damage which had been caused to the two shelters.

Source E: Report of Regional Technical Advisor
(HO 207/986 The National Archives)

Look at sources D and E.

- Does the survival of the completely identical northern shelter <u>prove</u> that this design of shelter is not at fault?