

Work As Usual, 1940. (Mrs Marsh working in a tailor's shop, September 1940, London)

This black and white photograph is taken from inside a tailor's shop with its front window blown in. A woman works at a sewing machine and there are two men on the pavement outside.

It's a narrow frontage, seeming no wider than a domestic living room. Three Singer sewing machines operated by foot treadle are mounted on narrow tables pushed closely together. The woman sits facing us, at the machine furthest from the viewer, on the left-hand side of the photograph. Her dark hair is parted and pinned back, and she wears glasses and a sweater decorated with a round brooch. She's focused on her work, sewing together what appears to be a jacket sleeve of heavy plain fabric, perhaps a uniform. A small Union Jack flag is tucked into a pipe against the wall behind her.

On the the right hand side of the photograph is the frame of the shop window, now open to the street. There are a few jagged sections of glass still in the lower edge of the window frame. These pieces of glass are covered with a layer of blackout paint, unevenly applied. With daylight shining through them from outside, the shards of glass appear like abstract paintings with scumbled textures. The effect is surreal, almost as if patterned sections have been collaged onto the photograph. Another section of glass has fallen right into the shop, resting on a sewing machine table. The rest of the room is plain, with bare bulbs, an exposed fuse box on the wall and a blackout blind hanging askew in front of the space where the window should be.

On the opposite side of the narrow street, there are small shops with shuttered windows. The two men outside wear steel helmets with brims typically worn by Air Raid wardens and ambulance workers. They seem to have paused outside the shop, in the midst of a conversation.