

## National Days of Prayer during WW2

*Ann-Marie Parker*

My family of four moved to Hertford the day before war was declared in September 1939. My brother went to Faudel Phillips Infants and I was in the first form at Abel Smith school. My father and mother sent us to Sunday School under Edith Fosdike and we all attended a gas-lit All Saints Church.

Normal life was quickly disturbed in wartime Britain. There was no street lighting and everything was very black, we listened constantly for the air raid warnings and carried gas masks to school. For our Mums it was a day-long struggle as food and clothing were rationed and most other things in short supply or not obtainable. Everyone queued for everything.

Winters were cold and snowy and heating often off at home and school. We could be seen wearing heavy coats, balaclavas, mittens and scarves in classrooms or in air raid shelters. One bonus of the snowy winters was that many of us tobogganed down Gallows Hill! However the great community of spirit was tangible even to an eight year old girl.

Life on the Home Front was nothing compared to life in action, The radio was listened to endlessly and it was obvious that the situation was getting desperate. So bad was it that King George 6<sup>th</sup> called a National Day of Prayer on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1940 when our troops were marooned at Dunkirk.



The very long queue at Westminster Abbey was replicated in every church, chapel and synagogue in the land. Millions went to pray. The King also broadcast to the Nation urging his people to turn back to God in a

spirit of repentance and asked for Divine help.

Two events immediately followed. A storm arose over Dunkirk so rough that it grounded the Luftwaffe who were killing our soldiers on the beach. Then a great calm settled on the channel allowing all those little boats to rescue over 335,000 soldiers.

It is one of my vividest memories as a child of people streaming along the roads and pavements of the Ware Road. All Saints Church was packed with people sitting and standing. Coming out, the churchyard too was full to bursting. As a family we attended all the seven days of prayer that were called, sometimes without my father who was away in a reserved occupation and my brother who was for many months in hospital with polio.

On June 9<sup>th</sup> there was a Day of Thanksgiving. The second day of National Prayer was on August 11<sup>th</sup> 1940 when the Battle of Britain began. The skies over Hertford were covered with little Spitfires and Hurricanes flying to the south coast.

There were further calls for Prayer in 1941. And two more in September 1942. The final call was in the spring of 1944 immediately before the D Day landing when again the rough sea became calm. The war in Europe began to end.

Seven times -the number of spiritual perfection- the King and Parliament called the whole nation to prayer and seven times the nation turned out and filled the churches including many who had never been in a church. The Vicar of All Saints at that time told us that only our Monarch could call the nation to prayer.

Each time God answered by a miracle of deliverance. It is no less important now that we must concentrate on prayer for our nation and our world.

*Psalm 33:12. Ephesians 6:12*