

Bayswater and The New West End Synagogue during World War Two

Geoffrey Green

Part 2 'This Is The Time For Everyone To Stand Together And Hold Firm'

Winston Churchill Broadcast to the Nation 11 September 1940

The sirens on the morning of the 3 September were accepted calmly by the population, the majority helping and encouraging others, with several carrying pets on their way to the shelters. Some neighbours just stood watching to see what was going on as the barrage balloons made their ascent, with the air raid wardens on bicycles, shouting "take cover". Just twenty minutes later, the all-clear sounded - a false alarm, but profound relief all round.

Austerity now affected everyone - petrol rationing, transport services diminished, a complete black-out without street lights, clothes and food rationed with price controls, two tons of coal a year per household, and newspapers reduced to six pages. Special considerations were given to the Jewish community by the Ministry of Food, with an extra allowance of butter or margarine granted in lieu of ham and bacon. Sweets were rationed, and children destined not to see oranges and bananas for many a year. "No good grumbling, we are all in it, don't you know there is a war on!"

Differences within the United Synagogue were forgotten with Sir Robert Waley Cohen and his colleagues reinstated. Huge problems faced the Jewish Community; no facilities for the education of evacuated Jewish children; the effect of rationing on the dietary laws; and the dispersal of most London communities resulting in financial difficulties. In the immediate, commencement of the High Holydays were only ten days away. At the New West End Synagogue the Beadle, Raphael Roth, fixed the black-out blinds where necessary, emptied the Ark of all the Sifrei Torah, except for two which were housed in a cupboard in the entrance hall to the Board Room (now the Golda Cohen Room). The remainder were taken for safe-keeping to Liphook, Hampshire with other synagogue valuables including Minute Books and a duplicate set of accounts. The first Board of Management meeting of the Second World War was convened on the 7th September in the vestry with the Minister Reverend Ephraim Levine and Reverend Isaac Goldston, Reader and Secretary present.

St. Petersburg Place.

17 Jonas Lewis
19 Lutz Miss B
21 Sommer Ernest
23 Bartlett Arth. W
25 Cooke Edwd
27 Ayerst Rev. Cecil F.
M.A. [vicar of St.
Matthew's, Bays-
water]
ST. MATTHEW'S CHCH.
31 United Dairies (Lon-
don) Ltd.
31 Mac Andrew Stephen
Lee, solctr.
EAST SIDE.
— Orme la.
NEW WEST END
SYNAGOGUE
10 Goldston Rev. Isaac,
A.K.G. [Jewish]
12 Roth Raphael [beadle
to New West End
Synagogue]
14 Jacobs Samuel

Of important and urgent need for the Board's attention was from the United Synagogue, after consultations with the Chief Rabbi, Dr Joseph Hertz, and the public authorities, arrangements for limited High Holydays Services were agreed:-

New Year

Evenings of 13 and 14 September 6 pm

Mornings of 14 and 15 September 8.30am - 10.30 am (it was felt this could be achieved by omitting all *Piyutim*, replacing *Chazanut* by plain chanting and the sermon to be of a quarter of an hour's length)

Day of Atonement

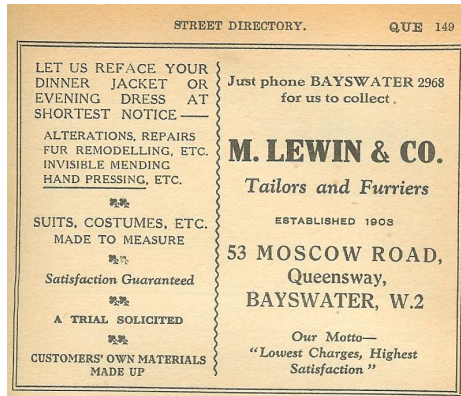
Saturday 23 September 11.30 am to 1 pm (Reading of the Law, Sermon and Mussaph)
5.15p.m. to 6.30 p.m. (Sermon & Neilah)

There was to be no Kol Nidrei Service and the Shofar not sounded at the end of Neilah, as the fast did not end until 7.37 p.m.

The Chief Rabbi directed that old men, women and children should say their prayers at home on the High Holydays. If possible, an Air Raid Warden should be in attendance at the Synagogue with all cloakrooms closed to help facilitate an orderly departure of all worshippers in the event of a raid to the nearest shelters. It was imperative that during the war all evening services must conclude half-an-hour before the time of the official black-out. Congregants were to make sure

that the regulations for the darkening of their windows and lights were properly carried out before leaving home for the Synagogue. Periodically during the services, for the benefit of late comers, the Beadle announced that the Air Raid Shelters were in the Basement of the Synagogue, the Greek Church in Moscow Road, Trench Shelters in Kensington Gardens and Leinster Square Public Shelters.

Time honoured customs and traditions were curtailed - these were unusual times - and symbolically for English Jewry the toll of war meant top hats were not to be worn. It transpired there were no air raid warnings during the High Holydays.



Obviously the United Synagogue was concerned over membership contributions owing to the dispersal of communities, but felt it was for each constituent Synagogue to consider individual cases, particularly those members in the Armed Services. It was suggested half-membership fees should apply in the case of hardship, on the basis that by this means a seat holder would be more likely to take an interest in Synagogue affairs, resulting in the possibility of being prepared to pay full contributions when normality returned, than if he had been allowed to become merely an Assessed Member.

We were now in the period of what became known as the phoney war. The threatened air raids with huge casualties did not materialise, and the Air Raid Wardens were looked upon as pompous nuisances. Children began to drift back to London; everyone was heartened at the sinking of the Graf Spee in December; singing "We Are Going To Hang Up The Washing On The Siegfried Line"; facing the French Maginot Line which we were led to believe was impregnable. The frailty of the real situation was to become only too well aware as on the 9 April 1940, and with amazing speed, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Belgium and France were over-run within a couple of months. Winston Churchill became Prime Minister on the 10 May.

I was unhappy at Danesfield and during November 1939 left Colet Court to live with my aunt, uncle and cousins in Bourne End, joining my brother who had already left St Paul's school. We four boys attended Borlase Grammar School in Marlow, in fact we were the only Jewish boys, and known as the 'London Evacuee'. It was a delight for me to go to school by train on the 'Marlow Donkey' alongside the Thames, and sometimes going up to High Wycombe to watch the trains. My Father would save up his petrol coupons and occasionally come down with Mother on a Sunday. I would walk to meet them, sometimes getting to the A40 about four miles away. I remember seeing the small boats going down the Thames to evacuate the remains of the British Army from the Dunkirk beaches at the end of May 1940. The Battle of Britain was about to begin, alone - with a triumphant Germany just 20 miles away across the Channel. I watched some vapour trails in the sky from 'Dog Fights', but the main actions took place over the skies of the south-east. My uncle was among the first to join the Local Defence Volunteers (later to become the Home Guard). It was then decided we would all return to London, mainly as the two eldest boys needed to further their education.

Colet Court returned to Hammersmith in the spring of 1940 where I continued my schooling under trying conditions for everyone, some lessons taking place in the concrete shelter, built just inside the main archway entrance. In fact about 35% of London schoolchildren had returned. Germany's intention was to destroy the Royal Air Force before attempting an invasion, and thinking this had been virtually achieved decided on an all out attack on London. It was Saturday 7th September.

Memory of those historic days is variable, but I certainly recall going with Mother to her parents at 36 Gresham Gardens, Golders Green. Like most of that Summer it was fine and news had come through of heavy bombing on the Docks and East London. I saw our Hurricane Fighters climb into the sky from Hendon

Aerodrome at about 4.15 p.m. we immediately left for home, Grandfather accompanying us to Golders Green Station for the 28 bus back to Bayswater. As we turned the corner out of Rodborough Road into Finchley Road there was a huge red glow in the sky towards the south-east.

More than three hundred German bombers and six hundred fighters had streamed across the Channel to deliver a crushing blow on London the first wave dropping their loads with devastating effect, in one and half hours over 300 tons of explosives and 13,000 incendiaries. Followed at night by 250 bombers, guided by the immense fires, found the defences virtually powerless, the few night fighters hampered by smoke with airborne radar in its infancy. The anti-aircraft guns were ordered not to open fire until their targets were located for fear of hitting our own fighters, and further impeded by out of date equipment. The Germans ingeniously confounded the detectors echo by running one engine faster than the other of their twin-engine bombers, giving them a particularly recognisable uneven drone. Fires in the Port of London and surrounding residential poor homes on both banks of the Thames were still burning for some days. The Jews of the East End suffered; about 1,000 Londoners lost their lives with many injured, German losses were 63 aircraft, the British 42.

Another large daylight attack was made on the 9th September, the Germans thinking they were in for an easy time, but a devastating defence by the British Fighters broke up the first wave of 100 bombers over Canterbury jettisoning their bombs and heading back to France. The climax came on the 15 September, to become known as Battle of Britain Day, the sky four miles over London was a seething mass of vapour trails. The bombers were badly shot up with many returning to France with crew members killed and wounded. British losses were 35 fighters Germans 80 aircraft - the English weather turned for the worse, an invasion was postponed. "The Few" had won.



The sound of bombs falling now resonated for the first time through Bayswater and the London Boroughs. Some bombs were fitted with pipes to the tail fins causing them to shriek, intending to terrorize the civilian population. The Londoners called them 'screamers' - the incendiaries nearly 2 feet long and weighing about 5 pounds dropped in containers holding of about 50 to open at a pre-determined height, known as 'Molotov Bread Baskets'. No longer any restrictions on the guns, the barrages in the inner London zone increased from 92 to 199 guns, and at times, were like a constant roll of thunder. We certainly heard the battery in Hyde Park opening up with the repeat of the recoils, which cheered us up, as a way of getting back at the enemy. Suddenly *whoosh*, an explosion, a flash, the lights flicker, the earth shakes, the sound of glass breaking; often another then another as the bombs fell in sticks.

On Saturday 7 September at 8.20 pm the first bombs to fall near the New West End Synagogue were outside 82 and 84 Queensway opposite Moscow Road; 30, 32 and 38 Chepstow Place severely damaged with three killed; Moscow Mansions in Moscow Road; 105 Queensway, severe damage to a grocer; 15 Westbourne Grove severe damage to a restaurant; 116-130 Inverness Terrace had eight houses damaged with two firemen injured. The London Blitz had started, it was to go on every night, except three, until the end of the year, then continuing to May 1941 with some breaks. Germany had 700 serviceable bombers, each able to carry over a ton of high explosives, during the first week in September until the middle of November resulting in an average of about a hundred and sixty German bombers nightly over London. For many, familiar comforts gone, lack of sleep, sometimes without food water and heat with the over-riding fear of injury or of extinction. Yet the Londoners stood up to it with unquenchable humour and a new sense of brotherhood between the classes

As the full fury of the air onslaught was about to start Winston Churchill broadcast on 11 September '.... Herr Hitler, this monstrous and wicked man, thinks indiscriminate slaughter and destruction of civilians will terrorize and cow the people of this mighty imperial city. Little does he know the spirit of the British nation, or the tough fibre of the Londoners ...'