

A Vicar's Notes on the Blitz

The Reverend Roland Genet Stafford (1870-1953) played a walk-on role in our family history: as vicar of St Andrew's, Malden Road, Kentish Town between 1920 and 1945 he officiated at the marriages of our maternal grandparents and our great aunt Nell and baptised our mother.

Like all parish priests he maintained a register of church services, and in the book for the early 1940s (held at the London Metropolitan Archives, P90/AND/14) he made marginal notes on the war affecting the local area. Our grandmother **Elsie Buss née Wilson** was bringing up a baby in the area, from April 1941 alone as she was widowed, so these notes help recreate the trauma that Londoners must have faced.



23 August 1940 – “Night disturbed by air raid warning”.

25 August 1940 – “Heavy air raid during night. Service shortened owing to risk of raid.”

1 September 1940 – “Today ‘all clear’ sounded 4am. Went to bed, never woke until 10.30 to scramble down to the 11am service. Warning again sounded before we had reached the Creed. Closed service at once with invitation to receive from the reserved sacrament.”

15 September 1940 – “A full service. The Blessing taking place with the warning.”

26 September 1940 – “Last night was the worst night we have ever had, which no one expected to survive.”

1 November 1940 – “The 8am was brought rapidly to a conclusion by a raid.”

6 November 1940 – “Too dark, with bombardment. Must forgo 7am service for the time being.”
Added at 8pm: “Church further damaged. West End windows and roof.”

17 November 1940 – “Raid warning went just as choir and celebrant entering – hymn, communion from reserved sacrament, [] sanctus and blessing only. First service in Lady Chapel, successfully blacked-out, owing to shattered West End window.”

16 April 1941 – “Terrible night of heavy bombing, much local damage + loss of life. Out at 5am, toured the neighbourhood and general committals on victims [] sites.”

11 May 1941 – “Over night south side windows badly blown out. Church inches deep in dust, side chapel very bad. No service possible. [] Communicants, after a sleepless night, set about clearing sanctuary and choir up.”

This marked the end of the main Blitz on London: three years of relative calm followed before the emergence of flying bombs in 1944 (source: *Wartime St Pancras; A London borough defends itself*, Camden History Society).

Fr Stafford wrote this melancholy comment on Christmas Day 1942: “As an expression of thanksgiving for recent successes on our own battle fronts sanction was given by the Government to use bells from 9am to midday. Owing to inability to secure ringers very few peals were rung, but most bells were chimed. Owing to rust, after fruitless efforts, we were not able to even avail ourselves of this privilege.”

Although the flying bomb campaign did not receive the same level of coverage in the register as the earlier Blitz, it was clearly disruptive:

18 June 1944 – “Warnings and raids all night and from 7.30am to 8am, and 8.15am. ‘All clear’ at 10.45. Raid again 11.15. ‘All clear’ 11.45. Raid intermittently all day.”

The end of the war passed without comment, and Fr Stafford appears to have conducted his last service at St Andrew’s on 16 September 1945; the entries for the following two Sundays simply read “No services. Vicar unwell.”