

# Lights out

## The Second World War

In September 1939 the PCC agreed to the vicar's desire to hold Evensong after 5.30p.m. When the church was newly built the Sunday afternoon service was by far the best attended but Fr East felt it could not be considered Evensong at 3.30p.m.

The timing was duly changed. Within a few months it was clear it was not working. The street lamps of the county roads were turned off. Not even a peep of candlelight was visible, bicycles were forbidden to have lights. The church had to black out all its windows.

By the end of winter, 1940 Fr East was almost on his own. Evensong was moved back to 3.30 p.m.

Finchley Council, meanwhile, requisitioned the parish hall. Air raid shelters were built in the church grounds and in 1943 the railings at the front of the church disappeared overnight. The council did not even tell the church the metal was going to be seized for the war effort.

East Finchley escaped the worst of the blitz but Market Place was hit, so too were houses on Fortis Green road. A flying bomb damaged properties on both sides of the road. You can see its impact today, there are one or two shops, opposite the old Alexandra Pub, missing. The block of flats called The Copse was for years a bombsite playground for the neighbourhood's children. And it was at the end of Bedford Road that first aiders helped bandage the injured after another stray bomb landed.

At the beginning of the war some schools shut down and teaching continued in houses. A number of children were sent to the countryside, others arrived in the area after their homes were bombed out. Men were called up and mothers went to work. The settled rhythms and habits of church going were disrupted.

All Saints', unlike St James in Muswell Hill, escaped with only minor damage to its roof but the perfunctory nature of the PCC minutes through these years suggest a church that was just about ticking along with Fr East coming to the end of his long period in charge.

The arrival of his replacement Revd Percy Rushmer in 1946 heralded a new era.

