

In 1969 Queen Elizabeth II visited Selby Abbey to distribute the Royal Maundy Money, marking the Abbey's 9th Centenary. The Royal Train holed up for the night before in a sidings at Barlow, a little village nestling between Selby and Goole.

The locals twigged that the Royal personage was in their midst, and when the Queen drew back the curtains the next morning, she was faced by scores of eager villagers lining the tracks.

'Good morning, your Majesty,' they chorused.

Her shocked Majesty's mouthed response goes best unrepeated.

Love and a cough cannot be hid, to quote George Herbert.

The Queen has lived her every moment under public scrutiny from birth right up until the present,

her every smile, her every tear, her every cough speculated upon in a myriad newspaper columns – not to mention *The Crown!*

I guess the Queen took her cue for service from her father.

In 1937 the Archbishop of Canterbury met

with George and Elizabeth on the eve of their Coronation.

‘After some talk of the spiritual aspects of the Coronation and of its spiritual meaning for themselves they knelt with me. I prayed for them, their realm and empire and gave them my personal blessing. I was much moved and so were they, indeed there were tears in all our eyes as we rose.’

George and his Queen stood shoulder to shoulder with us when we set ourselves as one nation standing alone against the dark tyranny of Nazi Facism.

After the Fall of France, Marshall Petan sneered,

‘Within three weeks Britain will have her neck wrung like a chicken.’

‘Some neck; some chicken!’ was Winston Churchill’s response.

George VI’s Christmas broadcast in 1939 says it all:

‘I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,

“Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied, “Go out into the darkness

and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light, safer than a known way.’

The Mayor of Coventry, after that devastating Luftwaffe raid which flattened the city and its cathedral, was surprised when King George VI, in simple army uniform, came gently knocking on the back door of his bombed-out home early the next morning: 'Heavens above, it's the King. We'd better look sharp.'

That service, incarnated by King George and Queens Elizabeth, reflects the service of Jesus, the King of Kings, who counted himself as nothing to come amongst us with his Gospel of Peace, Healing, Love and Acceptance.

Our every moment is open to his gaze because love and a cough cannot be hid: Christ cannot be hid.

Long may she reign. Long may He reign:

The Lord God omnipotent reigneth, for ever and ever, Alleluia...

'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars, and unto God the things that are God's,' said Jesus in our Gospel. 'Heavens above, it's the King. We'd better look sharp,' we reply.