



Luis de Torres - contemporary engraving

Luis de Torres - Explorer
Two-Gun Cohen
Queen Alexandra Salome
The Jews of Luxembourg



When does a person grow up?

I remember starting at St Paul's at age thirteen, *schlepping* across town from Belsize Park and feeling nervous and inadequate - not very grown up at all. Everyone in my class seemed so clever! I began to enjoy English Literature - my outstanding teacher, Ms McClaren, introduced me to the play *Pygmalion* - and to feel that literature might help me to reflect, listen and express myself amidst my nerves.

In my enthusiasm (partly to be good at something) I would read the first draft of my essay - creative or critical - to my father, Jack Stanley, whenever I had an assignment. He came from the States to London as the creative director of an advertising firm and had a talent for linguistic clarity. As I read, he sat on the sofa, patiently listening and frequently asking: 'Sorry, Benji, read that bit again; what do you mean by that? Can't you say it more clearly?'.

Although I always initiated this father-son ritual, I almost always got angry, as I felt increasingly criticised, and would often shout some of my own criticism back before possibly storming out. Yet I would then quietly recognise my father's wisdom and get back to work on the essay before reading it to him again, to his great pride. He helped me to get much better marks, but far more than that, my father, who passed away almost exactly a year ago, gave us this invaluable time together, sharing a love of words. I miss him.

In my first piece in this wonderful *Westminster Quarterly*, I want to introduce myself as the Rabbi of this community. The story above may be a risky introduction. After all, your new Rabbi is only in his mid-thirties and has the rather informal name Benji and now he introduces himself with a teenage story!

Let me explain why. Those conversations with my father were, without my knowing, the introduction to what I deeply value in the Jewish community - the capacity to grow up by working together, both to share and to shape each others' lives. Those conversations showed me the power of grappling simultaneously with words and people that you care about - and is that not the business of Westminster Synagogue? Reading together was crucial to the relationship I had with my father. Learning together is the way I met my wife, Rabbi Leah Jordan, now a Chaplain for University Students across the country. The buzz of getting to know people across the generations through Judaism at Westminster Synagogue, is the way in which more than two hundred of us this year enjoyed our new learning day, *Chai*. These conversations are the heart of our community.

I could introduce myself more along the lines of a CV (grew up at Belsize Square Synagogue; St Pauls; English at Oxford; gap year in Israel with Reform Judaism; Director of Youth at Westminster Synagogue; Leo Baeck College; a year of training in Israel and then New York; a Rabbi at West London Synagogue; Rabbi for Young Adults at Reform Judaism. My passions include film, literature, travel and Tottenham Hotspur). Yet I suspect that growing up means not clinging to modest achievements but becoming more open and more honest, recognising that we work on ourselves perennially and miss and need others. Moses Our Teacher - never again will there be a prophet like him - what marks him out? His self-doubt, his impetuosity and his profound commitment to relationships with Ultimacy and people. In the book of Exodus which is read at this time of year, Moses oversees the

process of building the Tabernacle, one to which everyone contributes a unique talent.

I want each of us to contribute to making this community one in which we grow together, forming meaningful relationships; a community to which we can bring our full selves - forming an extended family, sharing in each others' joys, pain and questions. How many of you have formed friendships for life through this community? How many of you have found in one or all of our Rabbis Reinhart, Friedlander, Salamon and our outgoing Chief Executive Renee Salamon, the pillars of an extended family, warm and supportive?

With the introduction of a new Rabbi and a new Chief Executive, the family is changing, but the commitment to warm and transformative relationships will be as strong as ever. I will endeavour within my first year to have conversations with each of you and to help you to have important conversations with each other. If you would like to bring eight or so members or potential members of the community together to eat, learn and talk, then please count me in! We'll find a date that works. If you would like a one-on-one conversation just email me at rabbibenji@westminstersynagogue.org or call Kent House. I look forward to growing together with you all.

Rabbi Benji Stanley

Two-Gun Cohen



Morris Cohen (1887-1970)

I often wonder how many people read obituaries in newspapers. I do, but not because I am looking to read about the death of someone I know but because the people that are written about in these columns have, in the main, led fascinating lives.

Some little while ago I was reading the obituary of an 'old fashioned general reporter' called Brian Cashinella. He provided various stories to three national newspapers and after his retirement from the *Daily Express* he tried to sell a film script about 'Two-Gun' Cohen, a lad from London's East End who ended up becoming a general in the army of Sun Yat Sen in China and lived out his days in Manchester. There were only a few lines about this in the article but I was so intrigued that I had to learn more.

Morris 'Two-Gun' Cohen was born in Poland in 1887. Shortly after his birth his parents fled the pogroms of that country, came to England and settled in the East End. Although he was eventually enrolled at the Jews Free School, he preferred the local streets – and fighting.

He was a stocky boy with a rather large head and at the age of eight, when taunted by Christian boys, he knocked out a twelve-year old. By the time he himself was twelve he was a skilled boxer, fighting under the names of 'Fat Moisha' or 'The Cockney Cohen'. He never fought on a Friday night because he feared the wrath of his father who was not averse to meting out a thrashing.

Cohen was also a fairly skilled pickpocket, recruited by and working for a man called

Harry the *Ganef* (Yiddish for thief). In April 1900 however, Cohen was arrested for pickpocketing and he was sent to an institution called the Hayes Industrial School, a school to train and care for wayward Jewish boys. He remained there for five years.

When he was released his parents borrowed money from relatives and sent him to Canada hoping that he would change his ways. He ended up in a place called Whitewood in Saskatchewan, where he stayed for a year working on a farm. There he learned to shoot a gun with either hand and to play cards well. He left the farm and wandered through the Western Provinces making a living doing various things including being a carnival barker and professional gambler.

One of his favourite pastimes on a Saturday night was to eat in a Chinese restaurant and then go to the rear and gamble. One night in Saskatoon he went into his regular restaurant and found the Chinese owner being held up. He sidled up to the robber and hit him on the head, disarmed him, and threw him out of the restaurant.

At that time, anti-Asiatic (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) feeling in Canada was even greater than its anti-Semitism. He became a hero in the Chinese community and was the only white man admitted to the ranks of the secret Tong-Sun Yat,

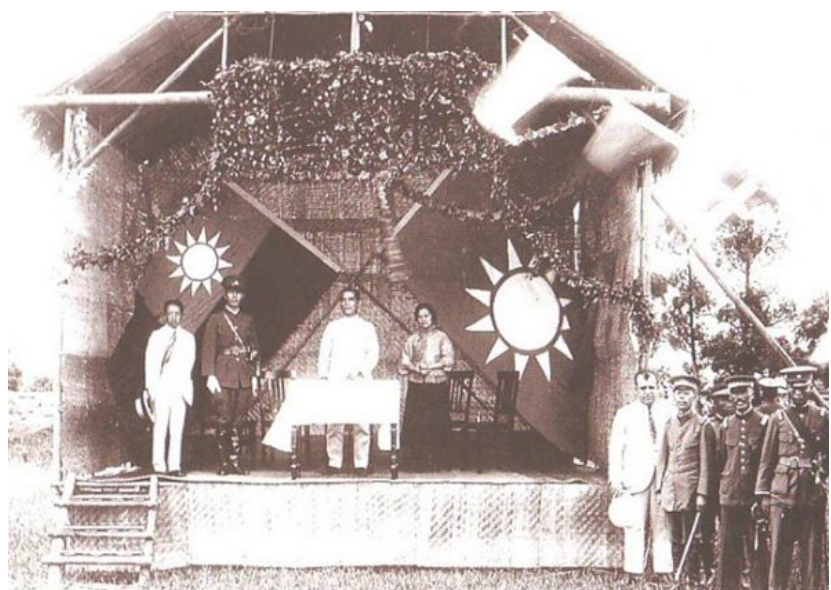
Sen's anti-Manchu organisation. He soon became an advocate for the Chinese.

The first World War saw him fighting with the Canadian Railway Troops where he supervised Chinese labourers, as well as seeing action on the Western Front. After the War he returned to Canada but, because the economy had declined, in 1922 he headed to China intending to work as a railway developer. However, after arriving in Shanghai, he had an interview with Sun's English language Secretary, Eugene Chen, and was hired. In Shanghai and Canton he trained Sun's small armed force to box and shoot and

a skilled boxer, fighting under the names of Fat Moisha or The Cockney Cohen

he told people that he was an acting colonel in Sun's army. He soon became one of Sun's main protectors, shadowing Sun at conferences and in war zones. In addition he lived at Sun's house at 29 Rue Moliere.

Cohen could only speak a few words of Chinese - he spoke a pidgin form of Cantonese at best - but this was not a problem since Sun's wife, Soong Ching-ling, and many of their associates were Western-educated and spoke English.



Morris Cohen, on the right in the white suit, with Chinese President Sun Yat Sen and future President Chiang Kai-Shek

Cohen's colleagues started calling him Ma Kun ('clenched fist').

After one encounter where he fought off three assailants attacking Sun on a train he was nicked by a bullet in his left hand. The wound made him think and he said later 'Supposing it had been my right arm. As soon as we got back to Canton, I got me a second gun, another Smith and Wesson revolver'. Cohen started to wear a second pistol. The Western community, intrigued by Sun's gun-toting escort, began calling him 'Two-Gun Cohen'.

In 1931 Two-Gun was named to command the Chinese 19th Field Army and was gazetted Brigadier General by the Canton government. He led Nationalist troops against both the Japanese and the communist Chinese.

When the Japanese entered World War II in 1941 Cohen was captured in Hong Kong but because he identified himself as a Canadian businessman, he fooled the Japanese and was eventually exchanged in a rare prisoner swap for some important Japanese officials held in the US. He returned to Canada and married, but the marriage did not last.

In 1945 when the United Nations was being formed in San Francisco, he flew there when he learned that a resolution was to be submitted to this new organisation proposing the partitioning of Palestine into two states - one Jewish and the other Arabic - and that the Chinese government proposed to oppose partition. He met with the head of the Chinese delegation and convinced him to abstain. That abstention ultimately helped ensure the passage of the measure partitioning Palestine and thereby allowed the creation of the State of Israel

In the 1950s Cohen returned to England and lived in Manchester with his widowed sister and died there in 1970. He was buried in Blakeley Jewish Cemetery. On his tombstone his name appears in English, Hebrew and Chinese characters. His funeral was attended by representatives from China. The stone was paid for by Sun's widow Soong Ching-ling.

Miles Laddie

Board of Deputies

On 5th September the Board held a training day for a new national initiative to train volunteer ambassadors to bring Judaism to schools and other organisations. The seminar was held at the Jewish Museum under the auspices of Jewish Living, the mobile exhibition sponsored by the Board.

Eighty-five volunteers were present on the crowded study day, which consisted of workshops, lectures and finally a question and answer session.

The Board's Vice-President, Sheila Gewolb, opened the event by welcoming delegates. 'The concept of having an accredited training programme for Outreach Ambassadors,' she said, 'has grown from the increasing demand for Jewish education from non-Jewish schools and other organisations. Our aim is to provide and support a national network of trained ambassadors to meet this demand by providing quality Jewish education.'

After morning coffee, delegates went off to their chosen sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, consisting of:

Jews Play Football Too - Choosing Content and Nurturing Understanding; What is an Artefact and How To Use It; Responding to Challenging Questions; Talking to Tots - delivering early years sessions; Telling the Story - Prioritising and Selecting Topics to Deliver; and The Power of Language.

All the speakers were experts in their field, with long experience of addressing young audiences and explaining the Jewish way of life in simple, graphic terms, with the use - where appropriate - of artefacts used by Jews. These included those for *Shabbat* meals, such as a *challah* and candlesticks, the use of a *kippah* and a *tallit*, and Scrolls.

Several of the lecturers explained the use of stories to illustrate a point, particularly for young children, as well as how to put a point over and to explain clearly what a speaker wished to say.

The session on language (very oversubscribed) was by a representative from the Three Faiths Forum, who spoke on ways to address those whose faith was neither Jewish nor Christian, and that on *Telling the Story* was by the Director of *Pikuach* - the body which inspects Jewish schools - who explained how to keep an audience interested by the use of humour and Jewish tales.

An excellent lunch was provided (though sadly there was insufficient food for all delegates to participate) and the afternoon sessions were all crowded and followed with much interest.

Perhaps the most intriguing session of all was the Question and Answer panel, the panellists being Clive Lawton, Jeffrey Leader, Maureen Kendler, Anne Angel, Steve Miller and Pamela Hartog - all educationalists and academics in their own fields. The questions came thick and fast, all relevant to the subjects studied and it was clear that the session could have gone on longer than the allotted time.

The Board's Chief Executive, Gillian Merron, thanked the session leaders and the delegates, some of whom had come from Wales, Yorkshire and Devon. 'The Board of Deputies,' she said, 'will enable the establishment of a national network of accredited Judaism ambassadors who will promote a proper understanding of the Jewish faith and culture among non-Jewish children and adults.' The delegates left, feeling tired but well satisfied with a hard day's study; most were anxious to take up the idea of becoming ambassadors and explaining Judaism to a wide audience of young people throughout the country.

Philippa Bernard

Deputy representing
Westminster Synagogue

Saul, David & Jonathan - A Modern Tale

The story of David's absence from Saul's banquet, told in the First Book of Samuel, (20, 18-42) when Jonathan secretly communicates to him Saul's reaction and warns him to keep away, has echoes in our daily life, as do so many events in the Bible. Translated into modern idiom, it might have happened like this.

An international corporation needs a strong man as Chairman. For some time the Board had worried about the state of Saul's mind. He was becoming irrational, sounding off at Board meetings and subjecting his fellow directors to conspiracy theories, mostly centred around his son-in-law David whom he suspected of making a bid for control of the company. His son Jonathan, now his CEO, tried to persuade him that David's intentions were based on a straightforward attempt to maintain the high position the business held in the global economic climate. He and David were good friends, in the office as well as at home, meeting for family parties, playing golf together and going off on shooting expeditions into the countryside.

At the Annual General Meeting the Board Room was crowded. Saul sat at the top table, with Jonathan on his right. The chair on his left was empty – David's chair. Saul called the meeting to order and then noticed the empty chair. 'Where's that bloody man got to? He's late again,' he whispered to Jonathan. 'He may be my son-in-law, but he can't take liberties like this.'

'He said he'll be here,' he replied, 'but I think he had to go to a family wedding out of town somewhere. I'm sure he'll turn up.' Saul looked thunderous and the shareholders shuffled their feet in embarrassment. The meeting dragged on, discussing the financial statement and plans for expansion. They broke for lunch, served in the canteen – sandwiches and water, no alcoholic drinks while they were working.

Jonathan slipped out of the building and took out his mobile phone, dialling David's number. 'Where the hell are you? The old man's hopping mad. Look, when we go back I'll text you. If he's reasonable after lunch I'll sign off 'Johnnie', if he's still in a foul temper, I'll make it 'Jonathan'. OK?' David agreed and kept well clear.

The meeting reconvened, Saul watching for David. The chair remained empty. He rounded on Jonathan. 'He's still not here. What on earth is he up to?' Jonathan tried to explain. 'It's probably the traffic – he may be stuck on the motorway. He did ask me if it would be OK to go to this do.'

'You should have said no. You knew this meeting was important. You always take his part. You're my son, aren't you? You're a disloyal, unprincipled lout – I'm ashamed to have you in my family. Get the bastard here – I've had enough. He's out, out of my business and out of my life.'

'Come on, father. What's he done? You don't need to sack him.' By now Saul was seething, incandescent with rage. He swung out at Jonathan who dodged the blow. The meeting resumed in a state of shock. But Jonathan played no part in it, furious with his father for shaming him in public.

As soon as he could he escaped to contact David. He sent a brief text, telling David to keep away, and signing it 'Jonathan'.

That evening he found David where he knew he would be, on a seat by a fountain not far from the city headquarters. He put his arm round his shoulders, no words needed. Their friendship was strong, but what the future held, neither of them knew.



הברו קורנר

Hebrew Corner

In today's Hebrew the word *Avrech* means a married student of a *Yeshivah*. But in the Torah where we find the word for the first time, we read that Joseph was appointed by Pharaoh to become his prime minister. 'And he made him ride in the second chariot which he had: and they cried before him: Avrech and he set him over all the land of Egypt.' (Genesis, 40:43). Some commentators argue that *Avrech* is a kind of word that the Egyptians used as an exclamation - an interjection .

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the word started to be used for a student who excelled in Torah studies. Over the course of that century the word began to mean that all the students who studied Torah on behalf of the community were called *Avrech*. This was the period when the *Yeshivah* became the main institution for learning the Torah and the Talmud.

Among modern Bible commentators the assumption is that the word *Avrech* describes the role of Joseph, and is similar to the Akkadian word for a high clerk. (The Akkadian language was the international tongue in the ancient world until the seventh century BCE when Aramaic took over). Other commentators claim that the word stems from the Hebrew root: *beit reish chaf* making up the word *Berachah* (Blessing). An important man who is blessed by God is called therefore *Avrech*. The truth is that we do not know the meaning of the original word *Avrech* but the transformation and usage of words throughout the centuries is always a fascinating subject.

Ilana Alexander

Our Three Rabbis

Since our inception, we have been blessed to have had three outstanding Rabbonim, each of whom was very different, with different strengths and qualities and each of whom precisely met our requirements and delivered just what the community needed at the time that he took over.



Harold Frederic Reinhart

Harold Reinhart came to England in 1929 as Senior Minister of the West London Synagogue. With the threat of war, Harold Reinhart set about rescuing some of the German ministers and their families, oppressed under the Nazis, many of whom established new Reform synagogues in this country and he helped to give sanctuary to many refugees fleeing Germany. Reinhart celebrated twenty-five years of service at Upper Berkeley Street, but there were tensions arising within the congregation and at a tendentious meeting in 1957, he resigned his post.

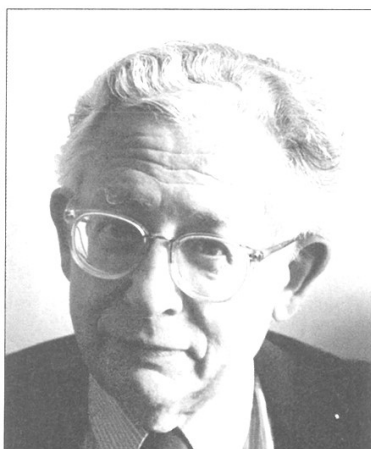
But this was not the end of Harold Reinhart's ministry. Senior members of the congregation discussed the possibility of forming a new synagogue. In July 1957 the New London Jewish Congregation was formed with a nucleus of some eighty families with Reinhart as the Minister.

With the name changed to Westminster Synagogue and a beautiful new home at Kent House, Reinhart continued with all his youthful vigour, his energy renewed by the enthusiasm and affection of his new congregants. He continued to lead them, imbuing them with all the religious and social fervour that was his nature. A talented artist and poet, he designed the

breast plates and most of the mantles for our Torah Scrolls. In 1969 he died peacefully, with his wife and closest friends around him, at the end of a full and happy life of service and love.

Albert Hoschander Friedlander

After the death of Rabbi Reinhart, Westminster Synagogue flourished for some time under its capable and scholarly lay leaders. But clearly it needed a spiritual minister to lead its rapidly growing membership. Albert Friedlander was born in 1927 in Berlin, escaping with his family to Cuba and then to Mississippi, when the Nazis came. He studied at the University of Chicago and then the Hebrew Union College where he was ordained Rabbi in 1952. On a brief visit to London he met his future wife Evelyn and they went back to America where he worked at Columbia University. Returning to London he served as Rabbi at the Wembley Liberal Synagogue.



Westminster was fortunate to have Albert helping out with services and forming a youth group, until he joined the congregation permanently in 1971, living in a newly constructed flat on the second floor of Kent House. By this time he had two daughters, Ariel and Michal, with a third, Noam, born at Kent House.

Albert had other interests outside his ministerial career. He was a fervent supporter of Queens Park Rangers football team, and had a great sense of humour – he loved being teased in the synagogue's annual Purim entertainment. Albert died in 2004. But it was perhaps for his gentle humanity he will be remembered. In the obituary he

wrote for *The Independent*, Rabbi Lionel Blue said, 'But he was more than all his honours because he was one of the kindest human beings I have ever known'.

Thomas Salamon

Rabbi Thomas was born in Czechoslovakia and started training as a Rabbi in Budapest, serving as a student Rabbi in Prague. When the country was taken over by Russia he came to England and entered the Leo Baeck College, improving his English, and was ordained Rabbi in 1972. He served first at the West London Synagogue and then became Executive Director at Norwood. He qualified as a solicitor, with his own law practice, while still serving as a part-time Rabbi.

Happy to follow in the footsteps of Albert Friedlander, he was appointed Rabbi of Westminster Synagogue in 1997 where he found reciprocal love and affection from his congregation. Under his guidance the synagogue has expanded considerably, renewing its house, and building an extensive programme of cultural and religious events. The religion classes have expanded and many applicants have been accepted into Judaism. The presence of the Czech Memorial Scrolls at Kent House, has been a particular joy to him.

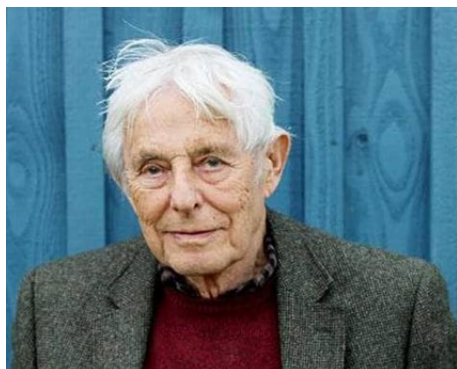
After many years of research Thomas was awarded a doctorate from Budapest University where he studied originally. Thomas, like his predecessor, loves football (though his team is Manchester United) and with his wife Renée and his son Aaron, has made a comfortable religious home for himself and his congregation.



Jewish Poets 1

Dannie Abse

(1923-2014)



Dannie Abse, doctor, poet, novelist, playwright and keen supporter of Cardiff City Football Club, was born in 1923 in Cardiff, to a Jewish family, many of whom achieved distinction in their own fields. His father, Rudolph, was a cinema manager who played the violin. Dannie's love for his family appears often in his poetry and in the several memoirs he wrote about himself. Of his father he said, 'He was a wonderful failure all his life and I loved him. He always backed the wrong horse, and lived vicariously through his sons.' The family, while of modest means, sent all the children to grammar schools and the three boys to university. Dannie's elder brother Leo was a lawyer, Labour Member of Parliament and a gay rights campaigner; he was noted for promoting private member's bills to decriminalise homosexuality, though he himself was married with a family. He often appeared in the House in eighteenth century costume, much to the delight of the press. The other brother, Wilfred, was an eminent psychiatrist, specialising in the treatment of hysteria. Their sister, Huldah, who taught Dannie to dance, was described by him when young, as 'all skin-cream and perfume'. She died in France in her nineties.

This Welsh/Jewish boy was sent to a Catholic school and then on to the University of Wales where, at the suggestion of his brother Wilfred, he studied medicine. He went on to Westminster Hospital Medical School

and then King's College, London. From the age of about eleven, he had begun writing poetry, encouraged by his brother Leo, who was already intrigued by socialist theory and the civil war in Spain. Dannie wrote warmly and evocatively about these times in his brilliant autobiographical novel *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve*, first published in 1954.

Dannie published his first book of poetry, *After Every Green Thing*, in 1949. He was still a medical student at the time, playing football and cricket in between lectures. He later wrote, 'Initially I wanted to write poetry with a political colouration, but later on I just wanted to write good poetry. I've always disliked the word career because I've never thought poetry is a career. I know it sounds romantic, but I think poetry is a destiny, certainly a vocation.' His father, however, was contemptuous of his efforts. After an 'inept' poetry drama was published, Dannie was invited to become a sporadic critic for a theatre magazine. Boasting to his father about this new achievement, he was told, 'Stop wasting your time and get on with studying medicine.' On another occasion when his first play was performed at a leading amateur theatre in Ealing, his father said sadly, 'An amateur theatre! That won't bring the butter home son.'

he was soon acquainted with the horrors of those who had experienced the concentration camps

He settled in the Swiss Cottage area, then a home for many German Jews escaping the Holocaust, many of whom became his friends. 'Sometimes the bus conductor would shout out, "Next stop Tel Aviv".' But the relaxed, cosmopolitan atmosphere was to his liking and he felt that in such a milieu, writing poetry was not so eccentric. He wrote a regular column for the 'Ham and High' – the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*.

However, he was soon acquainted with the horrors of those who had experienced the concentration camps,

which was to colour much of his poetry. He did later offer to go to Belsen to help in the relief, but he was refused, perhaps because he was a Jew. 'But I'm glad I didn't go. We knew it was bad but we didn't realise it was that bad.' Later, he went to Krakow for a poetry festival, and visited Auschwitz. 'Auschwitz made me more of a Jew than Moses did'.

Writing of the Holocaust his poem *A Night Out* tells of a visit to see a Polish film about it:

**We saw the Camp orchestra
assembled,
We heard the solemn gaiety of
Bach,
Scored by the loud arrival of an
engine,
The impotent cry, and its guttural
trucks.
We watched as we munched milk
chocolate,
Trustful children, no older than our
own,
Strolling into the chambers without
fuss,
While smoke, black and curly,
oozed from chimneys.**

In 1950 Dannie qualified as a doctor and the following year he married Joan Mercer who worked for the *Financial Times*. They bought a house in Golders Green where they lived until Joan's death in a car accident in 2005 - their first neighbour was Bob Monkhouse. Joan and Dannie had three children and several grandchildren. Dannie spent some time as a young doctor in the RAF, called up for National Service, and after returning to his profession in London, specialised in chest medicine, while still continuing to write poetry; 'I like to think I'm a poet and Medicine my serious hobby.' He said later 'Medicine has been for me, in some respects, a hobby that has been well paid, whereas poetry has been a central activity paid poorly'. He quoted Chekhov's remark in a letter, 'I feel more confident and more satisfied with myself when I reflect that I have two professions and not one. Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other.' Medicine did indeed enter into his poetry, so did football, his first love.

**Waiting, we recall records,
legendary scores:
Fred Keenor, Hardy, in a royal
blue shirt.
The very names, sad as the old
songs, open doors
Before our time where someone
else was hurt.
Now, like an injured beast, the
great crowd roars.**

One poet who had considerable influence on Abse's work was Dylan Thomas, whom Dannie always admired. They had the same Welsh background, and the lyrical quality of Thomas's work, stemming perhaps from the music of the Welsh valleys, appears often in Abse's.

His medical career flourished; he remained at the Middlesex Hospital, in charge of the chest clinic at the Central Medical Establishment. His was a perceptive view of medicine, often seeking to explore beyond the physical problems of his patients. He wrote of childbirth, noticing the smile on the face of every new mother:

**That agreeable radiant smile
No man can smile it
No man can paint it
As it develops without fail
After the gross, physical, knotted,
granular, bloody endeavour.
Such a pure spirituality from all
that!
It occupies the face
And commands it.**

As well as several volumes of poetry, Abse wrote novels, plays and autobiographical works. *A Strong Dose of Myself*, published in 1983, muses over his early days in Cardiff, his first efforts at poetry, the clinic in London and some of the other poets he encountered, including Robert Graves. He was by now becoming well known as a distinguished poet, and in 1973 was invited to Princeton as Visiting Poet. Abse's marriage to Joan greatly influenced his writing. They edited books together, *Voices in the Gallery* and *The Music Lover's Literary Companion*. When she died in 2005 (Dannie was also injured in the accident), he was devastated; his book *The Presence* - which won the English Language Welsh



With his wife, Joan in 1986

Book of the Year - reflects on his grief, remembering some of the happier times in his married life and his childhood, interspersed with selections of poems both his own and those of other poets. A later selection of his work includes a remembrance of her:

**Behind her a dark mahogany
That once had the girth of a lofty
tree;
A vase of deep red, dropping lovely
things –
Aged tulips – untimely ripped from
the earth;
And by the window a canary caged
Because it sang so beautifully.**

Never an observant Jew, Abse was however a religious man, very much aware of his heritage. Often referred to as The Poet of Golders Green, many of his poems have references to his Judaism. His *Song of a Hebrew* includes:

**You plant in your daughter the spirit
of Israel
You plant in your son the soul of the
desert.**

Dannie Abse died in 2014. His obituary in *The Guardian* gave a clear evaluation of his poetry, 'Abse's poetry is essentially traditional, and it is personal in that it reflects not only the author's preoccupations and aspirations, but because it carries in its rhythms the cadences of his physical voice. Both its strength and weaknesses stem from this individuality of expression. But the best of his poetry merits him a place among the best of contemporary poets. It offers entertainment, deep feeling and thought,

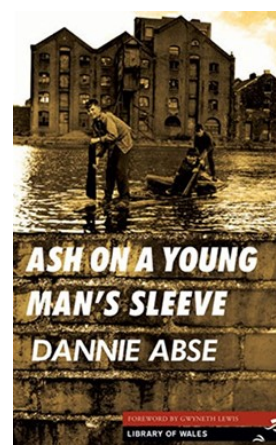
and its own quirky and memorable music.'

He was appointed CBE in 2012. Of poetry, he said: 'I hope to go into a poem sober and come out a little drunk. And if I do then that's a real poem.' He had a great sense of humour which often appears in his poems. This is from *A Doctor's Register*:

**'I found a thing to do,' said the lover
of Porphyria. *Porphyria*? Awake you
add the other pretty names too:
Anuria, Filaria, Leukaemia,
Melanoma, Sarcoma, Euthanasia,
amen.**

Often referred to as one of the most readable poets of his generation, he lived as doctor, poet and happy family man, charming and likeable, not often a manageable achievement.

Philippa Bernard



Otto Schiff (1875-1952)



We are grateful to Hugh Sassoon for the information in this article. Hugh and his late wife Marion were Founder Members of Westminster Synagogue. Marion was the daughter of Otto Schiff's brother Ernst and his wife Betty, also a Founder Member. Otto never married. Hugh was present at the ceremony recounted below.

On 4th July 2017, at 14 Netherhall Gardens in Hampstead, a plaque was unveiled to OTTO SCHIFF (1875-1952). It was placed there by the Association of Jewish Refugees and unveiled by his great-niece, Julia Shelley.

Otto came to London from Germany in 1896 at the age of twenty-one and was followed some time later by his elder brother Ernst (1869-1932). The brothers came from Frankfurt where in the ghetto the Schiff and Rothschild families each had a half of the one building. A Schiff cousin married a New York Warburg (of Kuhn Loeb - the investment bank). This background helped form a tripartite business relationship, the brothers being stockbrokers in London. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, together with their associates, they raised four million pounds sterling for the Japanese and were later awarded the Japanese Imperial Red Cross Society Membership Medal.

In the First World War the brothers ran shelters in London for Belgian refugees, the Poland Street Refuge in Soho and the Manchester Hostel in Aldersgate Street. For this Otto was awarded an OBE and Ernst an MBE, as well as 1914-18 King

Albert Medals by the Belgians. By the time the Nazis came to power Otto was without his brother. He was already involved with the Jews' Temporary Shelter in Mansell Street in the East End whose workers met ships bringing in refugees from the Continent.

Early in 1933 he extended this work by forming the Jewish Refugee Committee. Quickly recognising its limitations and assisted by many distinguished members of the Jewish community, he was instrumental in the formation of the Central British Fund – now renamed World Jewish Relief – which he ran up to the 1940s. The CBF was the prime raiser of money from the Jewish community which enabled Otto, as a frequent visitor to the Home Office, to assure the Government that any Jewish refugee allowed into Britain would not become a charge on the British taxpayer. Some



were helped financially to remain in Britain, whilst others were assisted to move on to other countries. By 1940 this assurance was no longer possible. He was also much involved with arrangements for the Kindertransport. For this work for refugees he was awarded a CBE.

Otto Schiff owned the house in Netherhall Gardens where the plaque was placed. He devoted the building to the housing of Jewish refugees, passing it to the Central British Fund. It was later passed to Jewish Care as a care home. Still later, the residents being rehoused in Golders Green, the house was sold. It has recently been modernised as flats, Otto Schiff House, and the gardens rebuilt as Otto Schiff Mansions.



Hugh Sassoon at the unveiling of the plaque at Otto Schiff House

In February 2014 the *Jewish Chronicle* published an article by Geoffrey Alderman which contained a gratuitous attack on Otto Schiff, decrying the possibility of a memorial in London to Holocaust victims.

In September 2014 David Cameron had announced the establishment of the Commission on the Holocaust. It was this that produced Alderman's anger, calling the membership of the Commission 'a roll-call of establishment names that omitted the wealth of expertise that Anglo-Jewry has to offer on Holocaust education'. He was against the idea of erecting a memorial to those Jews who were denied entry to Britain and died at the hands of the Nazis. He went on to write, 'We might perhaps erect a plaque denouncing the superhuman efforts of the banker Otto Schiff, who as head of the German Jewish Aid Committee, saw to it that as few Jews as possible were given refuge in Great Britain, and that these few were chosen with a view to their readiness to assimilate easily into British society.'

Schiff was defended in the June 2014 issue of the *Journal of the Association of Jewish Refugees*. 'Schiff was personally involved in the rescue of numerous Jews from the Reich', Anthony Grenville wrote, 'and took a direct interest in the provision of assistance to them in Britain. Enjoying the unreserved confidence of the responsible government quarters, his intervention resulted in the admission of innumerable immigrants whose cases he made his own.'

The Jewish Library of Amsterdam



At the time of the Spanish Inquisition, many Jews fled Spain and Portugal to find sanctuary in Holland, a more tolerant country where there was already a flourishing Jewish community. The Library they founded in Amsterdam in 1616, beside the old synagogue, is the world's oldest functioning Jewish Library.

Known as the Livraria Ets Haim, it contains some 30,000 volumes and manuscripts, many of them the documents of those fleeing the persecution of the Inquisition. In 1675 a new building was constructed within the Synagogue complex, allowing a more spacious, well-lit area for those wishing to use it. Since it was dangerous to have open flames in a library, skylights and octagonal openings between the two floors were incorporated into the design to let in natural light for reading. Today, electric lights - including chandeliers - light the rooms, and the bookshelves are floor to ceiling.

The oldest document in the Library, dated to 1282, is a *Mishneh Torah*, written by Maimonides. It shows the destructive marks of the Spanish censor, a converted Jew, who had obliterated passages of the book. He was not the only one to attempt to destroy the Library. When Holland was overrun by the Nazis in 1940, the majority of its Jews were murdered or sent to the camps. However, the Synagogue and its contents were left unharmed, and the books were packed up and sent to Germany. When the war ended the Library's treasures were returned.

Sadly, the decimated Jewish community of Amsterdam was unable to cope with preserving the collection, the Library itself needed considerable restoration, and it was decided to send the books to

Jerusalem until it was possible to renew the building and conserve its contents. By 2000 the Dutch Jews were in a position to ask for the return of the collection. The building was extensively renovated, modern technology was put to good use in conservation and repair of the books and they were returned to Amsterdam, with the purpose of making the Library available to scholars and visitors around the world.

Israel's own National Library cooperated with Ets Haim to digitize the whole collection, so that it can be accessed easily and without cost. This project, started in 2014, will include a vast collection of books and manuscripts from Israeli sources.

The Library itself, using every modern technique to preserve its contents, now consists of a two-storey wooden building with a spiral staircase and octagonal windows in the ceiling to allow in natural light. It is open to visitors on guided tours on only limited occasions, though scholars may use it more frequently.

The original founders of the Library were early academics who worked in the fields of philosophy, medicine, theology and astronomy, and brought their knowledge and scholarship to the Netherlands. As the Library grew, the collection included books on history, on early maritime technology, on Jewish and Bible studies and many other subjects. It also acknowledged interfaith debates between Christians and Jews, discussion on heresy and theological differences, including the works of Spinoza, who had been enrolled at the Ets Haim seminary in Amsterdam.

New discoveries continue to appear in the Library's collection. The Librarian says that digitization 'is one of the possibilities to make our manuscripts accessible to a bigger audience. That can lead to more knowledge. There are many secrets still to be unlocked.'



The Littman Library



Louis Littman - Founder

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation was founded by Louis Littman, a founder member of Westminster Synagogue, in 1965 in memory of his father. Since Louis Littman's death in 1987, his vision has been continued by his family, through a charitable foundation. Their involvement in the Littman Library's work and support for its objectives provide the strong basis upon which Littman builds and develops its founder's legacy and maintains his traditions of quality in publishing. Littman is now registered as a UK charity, in recognition of its role as a publisher of quality books that might not otherwise be commercially viable. Any profits earned from the sale of books are all reinvested in the publication of new titles.

In 2017 the Littman Library formed a publishing partnership with Liverpool University Press, which assumed responsibility for the sales, marketing, and distribution of Littman titles. At the same time the Library entered the field of digital publishing with the launch of its first e-books in the Littman E-Library of Jewish Civilization. Following the initial ninety titles, the programme will eventually include all Littman books.

Rabbi Thomas has recently been made a Trustee of the Library. In the Rabbinic Library on the First Floor of Kent House we hold a complete set of the books published by the Littman Library.

The Jews of Luxembourg

The Duchy of Luxembourg was founded in 963 when Siegfried, Count of Ardennes, acquired Luxembourg Castle around which the town of Luxembourg gradually developed. Three Holy Roman Emperors came from the House of Luxembourg but in 1437 the lack of a male heir to the Duchy led to it becoming a part of the Duchy of Burgundy, and subsequently part of the Hapsburg Netherlands.

The seven northern provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands broke away from Spain to form the Dutch Republic in 1581, while the remaining ten southern provinces (including Luxembourg) remained under Spanish rule until 1714. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Luxembourg was elevated to a Grand Duchy and came under the rule of William I of the Netherlands. The Duchy was partitioned in 1839, with the larger western portion going to Belgium, so that the Grand Duchy then comprised only the smaller eastern portion. The inhabitants of Luxembourg speak mainly French or German, but the native dialect, Luxembourgish, is currently having a revival, particularly in literature and drama.

The presence of Jews in the Duchy of Luxembourg dates from 1276, when Jewish traders established a small community there; many were blamed for the Black Death and were killed or banished. It is recorded that by 1818 some seventy-five Jews lived in Luxembourg, mostly in the city of Luxembourg, with a synagogue and Samuel Hirsch as Chief Rabbi. He was later a leading exponent of the Reform Movement in America. A new synagogue was built in Esch-sur-Alzette in 1899. With the immigration of Jews from Germany in the 1930s, the numbers grew to about 4,000.

On 10th May 1940, Germany invaded the Duchy; some 50,000 Luxembourgers escaped to find shelter in neighbouring countries. Of these some 1,650 were Jews, either finding refuge with Christian neighbours, or helped to find sanctuary

elsewhere assisted by the Resistance. One of these, a Cabinet Minister, Victor Bodson, was later named Righteous Among The Nations. Before the war, over 3,500 Jews lived in Luxembourg. A majority of them had emigrated from eastern Europe. In addition, over 1,000 German Jewish refugees found shelter in the tiny duchy. The Nuremberg Laws were introduced in Luxembourg on September 5, 1940, followed by several other anti-Jewish ordinances. In practice, however, Jews were encouraged to leave the country.

Jewish restrictions followed, including the requirement in September 1941, that all Jews wear a badge with a yellow star with the word 'Jude' on it. This meant that Jews were excluded from citizenship and prohibited from marrying or having



sexual relations with Aryans. The synagogue in Luxembourg City was vandalised and razed to the ground, as was that in Esch. Jewish property was confiscated and by November 1941 all Jewish organisations were terminated and financial operations taken over. Jews discovered sheltering in Belgium and France were sent to concentration camps, nearly 2,000 losing their lives.

After the war, many of the Jews of Luxembourg returned, though some went on to Israel. The old synagogues of Luxembourg City and Esch-sur-Alzette were restored and rebuilt, with many young Jews from France joining them. The new synagogue in Esch is now a Liberal community, constructed in 1954 on Rue du Canal, with an English rabbi, Nathan Alfred. The remnants of the old

synagogue can still be seen, not far away, and the new community is particularly proud of its stained glass windows.

The old Consistoire Israelite in Luxembourg City was re-established in a fine new modern building, with Edmond Marx as its leader, and is constitutionally recognized as the representative body of the Jewish community in Luxembourg. Luxembourg has one kosher grocery store, Boulangerie Philip, which serves some thirty families who observe kashrut. Services at the main synagogue follow modern Orthodox ritual and are conducted in French and Hebrew by Moroccan-born Joseph Sayagh.

Luxembourg is proud of the fact that anti-Semitism is hardly experienced in the Duchy, though there are xenophobic political parties, who concentrate their

venom mainly on immigrants from southern Europe. Its Jewish heritage is strongly maintained by those who live there and by its many visitors. There is also in New York a small but active congregation, composed of Jews who fled their country during the Holocaust. They call their synagogue *Ramat Ora* – mountain of light - or Luxembourg.



The new Liberal Synagogue

THE WORLD



So many hours already fled have shortened my life-time
So many days that were far ahead are now far behind
So many suns have risen over the great sea
So many clouds have screened sunset light from me
So many leaves have fallen, so many more
Will go and die as the world spins on for evermore

There were those special hours I tried to hold
Back forever those I would have given a life
To keep longer, others that were so dark
Which outlasted their time, so many in number
Others still that never stirred from sleep

But yet, whether too slow or too fast
Those peaceful days so soon past
Those of sadness that lasted
Those suns so quickly vanished, those clouds so white
Those fallen leaves, the moon so bright
The sky so deep, the mountains so high
That whole world so beautiful, so truly mine
Would have left me untouched
Had I not given it - a soul like mine

Colette Littman



Luis de Torres Explorer



It is often suggested that Christopher Columbus was a Jew. It has now been proved that this is not so. However, there were at least two Jews who travelled with him to Hispaniola in 1492. One, Luis de Torres, was born Yosef ben Levi Ha-Ivri in Spain. His knowledge of languages - he spoke Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, as well as Spanish and Portuguese - made him useful to the authorities of Murcia, where he lived among the large Jewish community. When Columbus needed an interpreter to help in his forthcoming voyage to what he imagined to be Asia he chose de Torres. The explorer believed it would be useful to communicate with the Jewish traders he believed he would meet, possibly even descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes. However, in the year of the Spanish Inquisition de Torres faced expulsion from his native country so he converted to Christianity the day before he embarked on the voyage.

On 2nd August 1492 three ships sailed from Palos de la Frontera in Andalusia, the *Nina*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*. It took ten weeks for the expedition to cross the Atlantic. It sighted land at last, an island which Columbus thought was the Indies he was seeking, and whose inhabitants he called 'Indians'. It was in fact the Bahamas, which he called San Salvador and it is believed that, with de Torres the first man ashore to interpret, the first language heard from the Western visitors was Hebrew. A Jew was the first European to set foot in the New World.

Columbus then moved on to Cuba which he reckoned must be China, the Asian land he had been seeking. He sent de Torres to find the Emperor, but instead

Luis came across a large native Taino village. He was greeted in a friendly manner, and found the natives drying and rolling a local leaf, which they then lit, inhaling the smoke – tobacco had come to the Western world. The expedition moved on to Hispaniola (the Spanish name originating from the first written account of the voyage in Latin). The large island was later to become French-speaking Haiti and Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic.

But what of de Torres? Columbus had heard that there was much gold to be had on the island, so he decided that he would leave the crew of his wrecked

goods, arms and artillery. During the following months it was decimated by internal strife and by the marauding tribes whose wives the Spaniards had taken. When Columbus returned at the end of the year he was told that the settlers had spoken disparagingly of the Catholic faith, hardly surprising in view of de Torres's forced conversion. Luis de Torres was dead.

The location and fate of this first European settlement in the New World have mystified scholars ever since. An article in the *New York Times* in 1985 suggests an answer. Archaeologists are almost certain now that they have



The first landing of Christopher Columbus by John Vanderlyn (1775-1852) in the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York

vessel there to make a settlement and gather the promised gold. He ordered the ship dismantled to provide the building materials for a small fortress. 'I have ordered a tower and fortress to be constructed and a large cellar, not because I believe there is any necessity on account of (the natives),' he noted in his journal. 'I am certain the people I have with me could subjugate all this island... as the population are naked and without arms and very cowardly.'

Columbus called the port *Puerto de la Navidad* (Christmas Port), the day he landed there. Those left behind included carpenters, calkers, a physician, a tailor, and a gunner as well as his interpreter, de Torres. Additionally, the settlement was supplied with provisions, trading

discovered the site of the Indian town about ten miles east of Cap Haitien, in the part of Hispaniola that is Haiti today. They believe they could be on the verge of finding the scant remains of *La Navidad* itself. Perhaps the final resting place of Luis de Torres will yet be found.

However, the name of the first Jew to set foot on the American continent is not lost. In Freetown in the Bahamas is the Luis de Torres synagogue. It is the only one in the Bahamas. The synagogue was built in 1972 and is affiliated to the Union for Reform Judaism. It offers regular *Shabbat* services from October to April at 8 pm. Services are also held on *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* and other Holidays. Freeport Hebrew Congregation is a member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Gluck (1895-1978)



*Self
portrait
1942*

My copy of the Oxford dictionary tells me the word 'queer' means *odd, strange, peculiar, eccentric, dubious, counterfeit*. Why then, did the Tate Gallery choose this title for its recent exhibition of works by such fine artists as John Singer Sargent, Dora Carrington and Duncan Grant and feature a huge poster showing a self-portrait by the subject of this article - Gluck? The fact that these artists had differing sexual orientation was apparently the reason to display pieces of their work in one show. I found the title of the exhibition, *Queer British Art 1861-1967* to be vaguely irritating.

Hannah Gluckstein was born on the 13th August 1895. She was the daughter of Joseph Gluckstein - whose brothers Isidore and Montague had founded J. Lyons & Co. - and her mother was Francesca Halle, an American opera singer. Gluck was educated at the St. John's Wood School of Art in London from 1913 to 1916. Her parents provided her with a trust fund as a twenty-first birthday present, despite their disapproval of her artistic ambitions. This allowed young Gluck to live a life of her own choosing. She bought a studio in Lamorna, Cornwall to work with landscape artists of the Newlyn School.

In the 1920s and 30s Gluck became known for portraits and floral paintings, and the interior decorator, Syrie Maugham, used many of her floral works. Her will to define herself by her own standards extended not only to her name, but also to every aspect of her life. Gluck cut her hair short and dressed exclusively in men's attire. She insisted on being known only as Gluck, 'no prefix, suffix, or quotes', and when an art society of which

she was vice president identified her as *Miss Gluck* on its letterhead, she resigned.

She showed her work only in solo exhibitions and it was displayed in special frames which she had designed and patented. This Gluck frame rose from the wall in three tiers; painted or papered to match the wall on which it hung, making her paintings look as though they were part of the architecture of the room.

The women Gluck became close to heavily influenced her art. In 1923, she met American expatriate portrait painter Romaine Brooks, and the two painted portraits of themselves and of each other. Brooks' painting of Gluck, *Peter (a Young English Girl)*, was controversial for its blatant androgyny and was shown in solo exhibitions in Paris, London, and New York.

In 1932 Gluck bought Bolton House in Hampstead and started a relationship with society florist and decorator Constance Spry. The two collaborated on an exhibition of Gluck's work at the Fine Arts Society that featured floral arrangements by Spry in each room of paintings. Spry popularized Gluck's androgynous look into haute couture with fashion designs by her associates Victor Stiebel and Elsa Schiaparelli.



*Medallion
1937*

Gluck's next great love was Nesta Obermer, a socialite married to an American businessman. This union resulted in the famous double portrait called *Medallion* and showed the two of them together. It celebrated what Gluck called her marriage to Nesta on 25th May 1936. Gluck referred to it as the 'YouWe' picture. It was later used as the cover of a Virago Press edition of *The Well of Loneliness*.

Then came World War II. Bolton House was commandeered for government use and Gluck became depressed. She began a pattern of possessive and demanding behaviour with Nesta, who broke off their

relationship in 1944, destroying all artefacts of their life together.

In that year, she began a troubled thirty-year relationship with Edith Shackleton Heald, the first female reporter in the House of Lords. She lived with Edith and her sister Norma in Chantry House, Steyning, Sussex, although the relationship was difficult, owing to her agitated state. She remained with them until Edith's death in 1976.



*Lilies
c.1932-36*

In the 1950s Gluck became dissatisfied with the artist's paints available and began a 'paint war' to increase their quality. Ultimately, she persuaded the British Standards Institution to create a new standard for oil paints; however, the campaign consumed Gluck's time and energy to the exclusion of painting for more than a decade. Gluck rallied in her seventies to return to painting and organized a well-received exhibition of fifty-two works at the Fine Arts Society in 1973, including *Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light*, a work that featured a decaying fish head. She used special handmade paints supplied free by a manufacturer who had taken her exacting standards as a challenge. The exhibition was successful with critics and with buyers. It was her first exhibition since 1937 - and her last. Gluck died at the age of eighty-two on 10th January 1978, having lived a life filled with both art and love.

Claire Connick



Credo (Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light) 1970-73

Women of Worth 2 Queen Alexandra Salome



Queen Alexandra Salome was born in 139 BCE, the sister of the distinguished Pharisee Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach. The year before her birth Simon Maccabeus had established the Hasmonean dynasty to rule over Israel, after a revolt against the oppressive regime of the Seleucid King Antiochus IV. The influence of Greece on the people of Israel was growing and the priestly caste of the Pharisees was in conflict with the wealthy Hellenized Jews, whom they viewed as flouting the Mosaic Law. Simon Maccabeus's successor, Hyrcanus, held the joint offices of prince of the people and of High Priest.

He was succeeded by his son, Judah Aristobulus, the first Hasmonean to call himself King, though he was not descended from King David. His wife was Alexandra Salome. He initiated a repressive regime, putting his own mother in prison, where she starved to death. Three of his brothers, seen as threats to his throne, were also confined in chains. His fourth brother, Antigonus, was his favourite. A fine soldier, he was next in line to the throne, but the Queen suspected he wanted to overthrow Aristobulus. The King invited him to a conference, but in case Alexandra's suspicions were proved true, he warned his soldiers to be present and to kill his brother if he came in armed. But the Queen intercepted the message and ordered him to come armed and in full armour. The guards ambushed him and killed him on the spot.

Queen Alexandra was a woman of strength and determination. Her husband, the King, already unwell, died a painful death; as soon as her husband

died, she released his brothers from prison, and married the eldest, Alexander Jannaeus. This action obeyed the biblical levirate law that a widow without children should be married to her husband's nearest relative, as had happened to Ruth, though the Queen was fifteen years older than her new husband. She made him the new King as well as High Priest.

While Alexander, a clever soldier, like his brother, was away at the wars, he left the control of the kingdom to his wife. Capable and devout, Alexandra ruled her country with benevolence, setting up schools with religious leaders, and removed the Sadducees from the Sanhedrin, leaving religious government in the hands of the Pharisees, led by her brother Rabbi Shimon. Meanwhile Alexander had enlisted the help of Queen Cleopatra of Egypt, whose troops were led by two Jewish generals, Helkias and Ananias. She sent an army against her son Ptolemy who was fighting Alexander in Cyprus; Ptolemy had to withdraw and his mother planned to take Judea but was dissuaded by the influential Jews of Egypt.

Alexander returned to face his wife the Queen, disliking her devout regime and her scholarly leaders. He turned to the Sadducees for support, enemies of the ruling Pharisee hierarchy, disturbing the prayers of the crowds of worshippers at *Succot*. They attacked him with their *Lulavs* and *Etrogs*, and he came down strongly against the Pharisees, regardless of the Queen's sympathies, and her brother, their leader, had to leave the country. When the King's troops attacked the Pharisee stronghold, some eight hundred scholarly Jews were killed. However, when he died, in spite of their disagreements, he left his kingdom to his wife, Queen Alexandra Salome. At the time the Judean forces were besieging the fort at Ragaba (in Jordan) but Alexandra withheld news of the King's death until the fort was taken.

Again, the country began to enjoy a time of peace, prosperity and piety. Alexandra freed many of the prisoners, allowed the return of those in exile, including her brother, and set the Pharisees back to rule, with her eldest son, Hyrcanus II, as High Priest. They formed a High Court to

administer justice and religious matters, the old Sanhedrin being revived, to care for the poor and the sick, those homeless after the wars, and the orphan children, according to the Torah. Jerusalem was the spiritual centre of the country.

Alexandra reigned for only nine years, but during her peaceful and fruitful reign it was said that 'the grains of wheat grew as large as kidney beans, oats as large as olives, and lentils as large as gold coins; it only rained on Friday evenings so that the farmers never lost a day's work.'

In spite of all this growth and prosperity, the Queen did not lose sight of the enemy beyond. She strengthened the defences, built fortresses and trained troops to guard them, using only those men she could trust for her commands. Sadly, her younger son, Aristobulus, was as ambitious and ruthless as his father had been. He began plotting with the Sadducees to gain power, and no sooner had his mother died than he fought with his elder brother, Hyrcanus, for power. He did eventually become King while Hyrcanus retained the position of High Priest. The land suffered tragic civil wars and was finally conquered by the Romans, bringing King Herod to power.

Alexandra Salome was one of only three women to rule over an integrated Israel. The first was Athalia, wife of King Jehoram who seized the throne as Queen of Judah, and used her power to establish the worship of Baal in her country. After Queen Alexandra the only other woman to rule Israel was Golda Meir.

The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* speaks of Alexandra as accomplishing what all the military genius of her husband had failed to effect; namely, to make Judea respected abroad. She combined her strength of will with something of that same military genius and political acumen unusual in a woman of that time – she is often compared to her contemporary Cleopatra – and a regard for the teachings of the Torah.

Alexandra lived to be seventy-three years old. When she died, her son Aristobulus took the throne, only to bring his country back to war and turmoil; the Queen did not live to see her work come to naught.

Philippa Bernard

Immanuel Tremellius (1510-1580)



Contemporary engraving

Although there were no Jews - officially - in England in the sixteenth century, the nation was now a Protestant country and very interested in its Biblical heritage, especially the Old Testament. Several scholars with a Jewish background were working on Hebrew studies and assisting Christian academics in their work.

One such was Johannes Immanuel Tremellius, born to Jewish parents in Ferrara, where there was a large Jewish community. He received a Jewish education learning Hebrew, and then Latin and Greek at the University of Padua. Among those he met there were the future Pope Paul III, then Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and the English Cardinal Reginald Pole. Pole was to be Catholic adviser to Queen Mary, whose aim, without success, was to bring England back to Catholicism, and Mary hoped that Pole might accede to the Papacy. Tremellius was much influenced by the beliefs of these strongly Catholic churchmen and in 1540 he was baptised, with Pole as his godfather.

Another important figure in Tremellius's life was a man to whom he had given Hebrew lessons, Pietro Vermigli. He had set up a monastic school in Lucca and invited Immanuel to join him. Here the two were intrigued by the Reform movement of Protestantism and fled the inevitable persecution of the Catholic Church to Strasbourg. Immanuel found a post teaching Hebrew and met John

Calvin, a leading protagonist of the Protestant cause.

As Strasbourg began to move back to Catholicism, Tremellius and Vermigli found themselves under suspicion and felt they should leave to pursue their work elsewhere.

In England, now a Protestant country under the young King Edward VI, Thomas Cranmer, then Archbishop of Canterbury, welcomed them, giving them both accommodation at Lambeth Palace. Johannes was by now married to a French widow, with a daughter (together they had two more children). While still in Lucca he had published his first book *Meditamenta*, and now began a major work, a commentary on the book of *Hosea*. He found the relaxed and tolerant atmosphere in England much to his taste, particularly when he was appointed King's Reader in Hebrew at Cambridge University.

He found the relaxed and tolerant atmosphere in England much to his taste

At Cambridge he was introduced to the future Queen Elizabeth, as well as two of her tutors, Matthew Parker, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and Anthony Chevallier, who married Immanuel's stepdaughter. He was in his element in the scholarly surroundings of the university, teaching, writing and translating into Hebrew some of the works which he hoped would encourage other Jews to convert to Christianity!

When King Edward died in 1553 his sister Mary, a staunch Catholic, succeeded to the throne of England, bringing with her the persecutions and burnings which earned her the name of Bloody Mary. Protestant scholars feared for their lives. Tremellius fled with his family back to Strasbourg, no longer able to count on the protection of his sponsor, Cardinal Pole. He was unable to find an academic post until in Geneva he was helped by Calvin to find work in Germany. No longer was he the renowned scholar, just a lowly tutor to the children of Count

Palatine Wolfgang, Duke of Zweibrücken. However he was highly esteemed for his scholarship, and the Duke appointed him Headmaster of a school he had established in Hornbach.

His reputation as a Hebrew scholar and leading teacher of Bible studies brought him the offer of a position at the University of Heidelberg, which enabled him to obtain a doctorate in divinity, and from there his career soared. He was twice appointed Rector of the University, was much admired for his teaching, and published the work on Hosea he had started in England.

Further works followed: an Aramaic and Syriac Grammar, a translation of the Syriac New Testament (dedicated to the newly enthroned Queen Elizabeth of England) and a translation into Latin of the whole of the Old Testament. This was published in Frankfurt between 1575 and 1579 in five volumes. The work, with new interpretations of the Rabbinical Hebrew, had considerable bearing on the Authorised Version (King James's Bible) of 1611, for which Thomas Cranmer was largely responsible.

The Academy of Sedan, in the Ardennes, founded in 1579 by Huguenots, had a distinguished history of academic achievement and Tremellius was appointed Professor of Hebrew there, adding to its reputation as a leading school of oriental languages. The Academy was suppressed in 1681. Tremellius lived out his life in Sedan, dying there in 1580. In spite of his chequered religious life, from Judaism, through Catholicism to Protestantism, Immanuel Tremellius remained devoted to his Hebrew ancestry and tradition, contributing to the study of the Hebrew language and the Old Testament, which made his name synonymous with the Jewish veneration of learning and education. In Kenneth Austin's book about Tremellius, *From Judaism to Calvinism*, the author says that there are two areas which are illuminated by Tremellius's experiences: 'The Jewish contribution to the culture of the sixteenth century and the incredibly complex issue of Judaeo-Christian relations in the early modern period.'

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov: The Inextinguishable Fire

Most Jews do not go in for saints, sages, cults or even rabbis; we are not that keen on displaying reverence to fellow mortals. In some respects this healthy scepticism about assumed importance is a good thing, promoting free-thinking. On the other hand it can lead to a closed mind and therefore a loss of opportunity to share experiences and insights of others. But, occasionally, one encounters, either in reading or in person, an individual who makes a lasting impression; this could be an outstanding scholar or a person of enormous moral authority. One such man, in my opinion, stands out as worthy of our admiration, and that is the mystic, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.

He was born in 1772, was the founder of the Breslov Chasidic Movement, a revivalist sect that engendered hope and excitement at the prospect of the Messianic Age; a counter to despair and persecution that was experienced by many Jews living in Eastern Europe. He was a great grandson of Israel Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Chasidic Movement in the Ukraine, but by the time Nachman was born Chasidism was in danger of become too rigid, lacking spontaneity; this was his impetus to breathe fire into a life-affirming variety of Judaism. His words of wisdom, the joy for life he spread among his followers and his emphasis on meditation and extemporised prayer have had a profound influence on all branches of Judaism - his insights into man's relationship with God transcends sectarian differences. He made no claims to be superior to others, believing that any man could strive to become closer to God. Nachman, unlike many other prayer leaders, had the ability to communicate with ordinary people, to talk with peasants about spiritual matters without condescension.

The core of his teaching (*hitbodedut*) centred on getting closer to God through a process of purging oneself of negative

thoughts and emotions and entering into a dialogue with the Infinite. Many of his aphorisms read like a conversation between good friends, and that in essence is how Nachman viewed God - as one's best friend! It is through *mitzvot* that we gain greater access to God's presence and love. Nachman's theology was simple but exacting: to reach for the skies, to gain dominion over the angels, to continue to rise higher and higher through devotion to God and realise His presence in the world, and to be aware of how easy it is to lose sight of one's responsibility on Earth. He sums it up thus: 'For the sake of one small pleasure lasting a mere quarter of an hour, a person can lose the whole of this world together with the world to come!' How often have we heard and read of those who squandered their talents on materialism, losing not just positions of influence that gave the potential for changes that would benefit many people, but also loss of self-respect and public esteem.

His words of wisdom, the joy for life he spread among his followers and his emphasis on meditation and extemporised prayer have had a profound influence on all

The name *Nachman* means comforter, and throughout his life he showed considerable understanding of human frailty and how easy it was for any of us to fall short of our full spiritual potential. He was a dedicated *Kabbalist*, observing the rigours of ablutions and fasting, and by the time he was thirteen he was married - not unusual for this period - had one disciple and was predicted to become the greatest of the *tzaddikim*.

The fully developed *tzaddik*, it is believed, has worked out his relationship with the Divine and is empowered, through teaching and example, to help others to find their way to God; it is a mystical partnership between the God, *tzaddik* and followers. *Tzaddikim* means more than

just righteous men; their merits support the world, and Creation was undertaken for their sake; this partnership between God and the righteous is an important concept in Chasidism. It is believed that such men have an element of the soul of Moses. This claim gave the leaders of communities in Eastern Europe great power and influence; questioning their authority was regarded as tantamount to rebellion. Nachman was different: he actively encouraged his followers to question and challenge not just himself but God.

Nachman used parables and allegories to illustrate mystical ideas. One example is of a great treasure one wishes to reach but the way is blocked by a mountain of fire. You have no choice but to reach the treasure. In many ways the challenge of doing something holy is like passing through a fire; you are uncertain what to do, trying to decide the right course of action. Barriers appear to spring up, preventing you from doing what your soul commands. Nachman's answer to this dilemma was to cry out to God, indeed to 'silently scream' to our Father, as a child does to his parent, pouring out thoughts, fears and complaints. God, like any loving parent, will listen. Speak to God, argue with Him, allow time each day for conversation with God; you will surely be worthy of finding Him. The language one uses is not prescriptive; Nachman used *Yiddish*, your native tongue will do, the idiot may babble - all the same to God!

Nachman was not a conventional *rebbe*, preferring to walk with his followers in the fields and hills. He taught his followers to meditate, to be at one with Nature: 'When summer approaches seclude yourself and meditate in the meadow, outside the city'. Prayer and the revival of life in the fields after winter are partners, both feeding on each other to proclaim God's love for His Creation. Nature, whether it be a blade of grass or Man himself, 'sings out' to God. But, Nachman proclaimed, you don't need to be in the open; spending time in a quiet room to pray and study is equally beneficial. I remember the late David Jacobs, broadcaster, saying how he found respite from the demands of his job, travelling and preparing to go on air, by finding a Friends Meeting house where he

could sit quietly and meditate. Nachman urged his followers and those seeking answers to the great questions of existence to ask 'what?'. To every condition of life, ask 'what?'...

In 1798, in a state of near poverty, Rabbi Nachman, accompanied by a single companion, went to *Eretz Yisrael*. It took five months to get there. He felt that he imbibed holiness from his visit but within a year he was back in Russia. In 1802 he settled in Breslov where he spent most of the remainder of his life. From 1806 he began to tell his wonderful stories - thirteen of his long stories are extant. The telling of stories was, as he stated, an acknowledgement that conventional teaching had failed to communicate his message, so through using parables he sought to share with his followers the wisdom he had accumulated; but also stories were a vehicle to express truths that ordinary, functional language was inadequate to convey. These stories or allegories are rich in symbolism, and many of us are familiar with the representation of God as King and a different aspect of the Divine as His daughter; it is She, the beautiful princess, who lives in the world. This essay is not the place to recount these stories but I recommend them to the reader. In 1802 Nachman went to Uman where, 30 years before, thousands of Jews had been massacred. He visited the cemetery where the dead had been laid to rest and commented he wished to be buried there.

Five years later Nachman contracted TB, and in 1810 he relocated to Uman, dying in the autumn of the same year, at the age of thirty-eight.

What is his legacy? Whether Rabbi Nachman would approve of the Hasidic cult that has developed over the last two hundred and fifty years and the vast number of pilgrims who visit his graveside each year, I would not venture an answer; but his life, wisdom and writings have inspired many generations of Jews to look more deeply into themselves and to the world that is part of their inheritance. Nachman transcends definable movements within Judaism. Whether you be Chasid, mainstream Orthodox or Progressive, there is something about the man that touches a deep well of ancestral longing in all of us. The non-Jewish world may dabble in *Kabbala*, *a la* Madonna, in search of esoteric answers but ultimately, Nachman's message was look in, look out; see God's presence in all creation; make time to find that divine spark in yourself and fulfil your purpose in this world by rescuing 'the lost Princess' - what we call *tikkun olam*; and the fire that lit up the world two and a half centuries ago still burns brightly, as a beacon for all humanity.

Peter Beyfus



Gravesite of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in Uman, Ukraine.

Jobs People Do - Keep Fit Instructor



I was very fortunate to have been able to teach at Kensington and Chelsea College for most of my working life. Teaching adults 'How to Keep Fit' was rewarding work and my classes were always very well attended. One of the reasons for this was my ability to identify with the age range of my students. As they got older, so did I, and therefore I was able to understand what the body is physically capable of performing as one matures.

My classes also had an important social aspect. There was always an 'end of term' party or a meal in an inexpensive restaurant. There are many lonely people in London and the social side of the meetings created friendship between many of my students. They were always able to come to me to discuss, in complete confidence, any of their problems.

Why is it important to keep fit? Firstly, to watch one's diet - without going mad! Secondly, to keep the body flexible by exercise and thirdly, in relaxation session to rid the body of everyday tensions and stress. This is a philosophy which we need to observe for all of our lives.

In this age of high achievement, many of us can begin to feel inadequate. Aiming to keep ourselves fit is a personal goal towards our own capacity of physical ability within our age range. It can produce great satisfaction - so get out there and get moving!

Angela Charatan

The Story of Kent House



*Prince Edward Duke of Kent
(1761-1820)*

In the eighteenth century the hamlet of Knightsbridge lay at the very edge of the most desirable part of London. The royal palace of Kensington was just across the park and wealthy families were building or buying large houses within reach of the court, the clubs of St. James's and the fashionable areas of town.

King George III's fourth son, Prince Edward, was born in 1761 in Buckingham House. As he grew older his relationship with his parents became contentious. Lonely and unloved, the Prince went to Hanover for military training and then to Geneva where he was given a very inadequate allowance. He was always incompetent with money, never having been used to managing his own financial affairs, and remained in debt for the rest of his life.

In 1790 Prince Edward was sent to the garrison at Gibraltar in an attempt to curb both his erratic behaviour and his debts. Here he straightened out his affairs, though he was still lonely and entrusted to his staff the task of finding him a suitable companion. The lady was found in Marseilles and agreed to come to meet him in Gibraltar. Mme Julie de St Laurent was to remain his beloved mistress for twenty-seven years, and there can be no doubt that they stayed closely attached to each other until, for reasons of state, they had to part.

Julie was well bred, elegant and educated and refused to be bought off when the Prince's entourage tried to disentangle him from the liaison. She accompanied him to Quebec when the King sent him there on a mission of state, and their establishment there was much like that of any other rather staid but affectionate married couple. Edward was anxious that his position should be regularised and was much concerned about Julie's future. Eventually he was recalled to London where he was received warmly by the Royal Family, though of course without Madame.

The Prince had a suite of rooms at Kensington Palace but Julie could not join him there. However across Hyde Park, close to where the new Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks were being built, was a small but handsome house fronting the main road with extensive gardens stretching back to Montpelier Street. The Prince, still with a very inadequate income, took the house and Julie was happily installed in a fine home where she and her Prince could relax in private. He was created Duke of Kent, with an increased income, and named the house after his title.

The Kent House estate was considerably larger than it is today. Rutland Gardens did not exist, but several large houses stood on South Place. When reproached by his brother for his rather public liaison, the Prince said that he felt a total loss of parental affection. 'This motive alone induced me to establish Mme de St. Laurent in a residence altogether separate from mine where she was attended by a distinct set of servants.'

In Julie's time the main building stretched from Knightsbridge halfway down what is now Rutland Gardens. The main entrance was on the east with a long carriage drive running round the house down to the stables at the end on the west. There was a large semi-circular conservatory jutting out into the extensive gardens, with flower beds and gravel drives, with fruit trees and a kitchen garden at the far end. When the house was eventually sold it was described in *The Times* as 'a modern, uniform and substantial mansion, suitable for a family of distinction.'

When no legitimate heir to the throne was

forthcoming from George III's eighteen children, it fell to Prince Edward to do his duty to his country. His beloved Julie – a commoner – was not considered suitable, so he married the widowed Princess Victoire of Leiningen. They moved into Kensington Palace, where their daughter, Victoria, became Queen of England at the age of eighteen. Julie, after occupying a house in Ealing for some time, moved to Paris.

For some sixty years Kent House was one of Victorian London's most prominent centres of political, artistic and social life. It was taken by the Earl of Morley and occupied by the Earl and his family with his sister who married George Villiers. The house was split down the middle to accommodate both families with a large number of children. A door between the two halves allowed them to visit each other while retaining their privacy. One of the Villiers, Theresa, married George Cornwall Lewis, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Another Villiers descendant, also Theresa, is MP for Chipping Barnet. The Crystal Palace, built for the Great Exhibition of 1851, stood opposite the house in Hyde Park.

Prince Edward's house was demolished in 1870 when the area was developed, and the land where it stood was bought by Louisa, Lady Ashburton. Like most of the chatelaines of Kent House, Louisa was intelligent and well read, but with a streak of eccentricity. She was descended from a Sephardi Jew, Ephraim Baron D'Aguilar who lived in London. His mental health deteriorated and he was so cruel to his family that they deserted him. He bought a small farm in Islington, known as Starvation Farm because of the way he treated his animals. Louisa, his great granddaughter, married into a Scottish baronial family and came to London with her little daughter Maysie when her husband died. She was extravagant and tempestuous – a friend called her 'generous, violent, rash and impulsive, ever swayed by the impression of the moment.'

Among her friends were artists and writers, including Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and Florence Nightingale. She was notoriously compulsive, slow to pay her

bills – which were many – and unable to keep servants. She was living in Berkeley Square, with a large house in the country, but tiring of her London home she chose to buy the Kent House site in Knightsbridge and appointed Henry Clutton as her architect. Her country home was destroyed by fire and she brought many of its treasures to Kent House. Louisa ignored all advice on her extravagance, buying great quantities of works of art, including paintings by Turner. She moved into her new house with Maysie, asking for ever more additions and amendments to the building. Louisa's home was very like Kent House as it is today, with visiting carriages stopping under the porch to allow their passengers to descend, before continuing on to the new stable block at the end of the road. Inside, the entrance led straight into what is now the Reinhart Library, with a door into the Marble Hall, a perfect cube. The Dining Room (now the Friedlander Room) had as its fireplace the great black and gold feature which is now the Holy Ark. It was taken upstairs when the congregation moved up to the present Sanctuary. Above it, then, were the words *Eat to Live and Live to Serve*.

The offices, of which Louisa was so proud – and which were very up-to-date for the time – consisted of the butler's pantry, kitchen, scullery and butler's bedroom. They lay at the back of the house, but the housekeeper's room and the servants' hall were in the basement. Family and guest bedrooms were on the second floor, with a small mahogany hinged table outside each for shaving water and breakfast trays, still there when Westminster Synagogue bought the house. All the other doors were of mahogany fitting back into the wide walls, as they do to this day. Louisa continued to spend with no thought for the future and when she died in 1903 the house had to be sold to pay her debts.

In 1909 the house was bought by Sir Saxton Noble and his wife Celia. She was the granddaughter of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and a fine pianist. They had four children: Humphrey, who wrote a book about his life in Kent House, Marc, who died at the battle of Ypres, Cynthia, who married Gladwyn Jebb the diplomat, and Marjorie, who later became a friend of Flora Reinhart, wife of our first minister.

Three of the children were married from Kent House, and three of the grandchildren were born there.

The Nobles made many changes to the house with their architect Reginald Blomfield: balconies to the bedrooms and to the rooms on the first floor, a skylight fitted to the raised ceiling above the stairs, and the two reception rooms turned into one L-shaped room as a music room and ballroom.

The Nobles brought music to Kent House, and invited the Catalan artist, José-Maria



The Marble Hall

Sert to fill the walls of the room with a huge mural in whatever style he thought best. The painting comprised a huge magical landscape, with canals and bridges, elephants and camels, strange birds and flowers. Fireworks and rockets were being let off and classical temples, kings and queens and every other possible imaginative creation covered the walls to the ceiling.

Great musicians visited Kent House to play amid the splendour, among them Pablo Casals, Donald Tovey, Myra Hess, Irene Scharrer and many more, who performed before a splendid audience in full evening dress. Diaghilev brought his ballet company to attend. The supper room faced out over Knightsbridge, where a fine meal was served, with the help of the twelve live-in servants.

When war broke out the Nobles left London to live in Bath. The guests at their last dinner party at Kent House included

the Marchioness of Reading, Colonel and Mrs. Bowes-Lyon, Harold Nicolson, Countess Jellicoe and the Japanese Ambassador and Mme Yoshida. The house was not to see such glory again until the days of Westminster Synagogue's glittering fund-raising dinners. Saxton died in 1942 but Celia lived on in Bath until 1962, when her funeral was held at Bath Abbey. They offered the house to the Red Cross and towards the end of the war it was taken over by Telephone Rentals, who dug holes in the marble hall for office partitions, while the Nobles' chauffeur lived on in the basement.

The Sert murals are now believed to be in Spain, perhaps in a bank, but no one seems to know where. When Westminster Synagogue bought the house (for £85,000) it was in a sorry state. But under the guidance of Mrs. Reinhart it did not take long for willing volunteers to clean it up. The Rabbi's wife herself got down on hands and knees to clean the fireplaces, while the Rabbi climbed ladders to replace light bulbs and put up curtains. The house has been visited by descendants of the Noble family. They were delighted to know the use to which it has been put.



The Marble Hall. Just visible on the right is the magnificent fireplace which was removed, adapted and installed on the first floor as our Aron Hakodesh (Holy Ark)

This article is adapted from Philippa Bernard's book, *The History of Westminster Synagogue*.



Oil painting of Kent House by late member J.W. Benson

So we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of our coming into being! How lucky we were to acquire this beautiful building, shortly after deciding to form a new congregation.

So much has changed over the years, commencing with the refurbishment of the first floor of Kent House, enabling us to move upstairs and take with us the enormous fireplace - from what is now the Friedlander Room - adapted for its sacred use as the Holy Ark (ארון הקודש).

Then, we ceased the practice of requiring the Wardens to wear Morning Dress to Services. Three Wardens were elected to serve for three years, as Junior, Middle and finally Senior Warden in turn. In those days, the Senior Warden was solely responsible for organising the *Mitzvot* and, together with the Rabbi, for the running of the *Shabbat* and High Holyday Services.

All the women wore hats - a custom which, to a large extent, finished after the death of Mrs Flora Reinhart.

Flowers were always placed on both sides of the steps to the Ark at *Shavuot* - another one of the tasks undertaken by the members.

According to the *Daily Mail*, 1957 was the happiest year of the twentieth century! Harold MacMillan declared, 'We have never had it so good.' For many of us, it was certainly one of the happiest, because in that year Westminster Synagogue was founded. But what else happened in that year, we wondered? Here are some highlights:-

JANUARY- Israel withdrew from the Egyptian territories, precipitating the Suez crisis; Humphrey Bogart died

FEBRUARY - Norwich City Council was the first to install a computer; the average weekly wage was £7.50

MARCH - Ghana became the first British African colony to gain independence; it was the warmest March on record

APRIL - The BBC pulled off one of the most notorious April Fools' Day hoaxes when Richard Dimbleby gave a three-minute report on the spaghetti harvest in Switzerland! First performance of *The Entertainer* with Laurence Olivier

MAY - Britain dropped its first H-Bomb; end of petrol rationing; John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* published

JUNE - The first Premium Bond winners were announced; a link was shown between tobacco smoking and lung cancer

JULY - Stirling Moss won the British Grand Prix; bus strike by members of the TGWU - violence on the streets

AUGUST - England won the 5th Test Match and the series against the West Indies

SEPTEMBER - Troops ended the Little Rock school crisis, allowing black children into white schools

OCTOBER - Sputnik I was launched; publication of *Which?* the magazine by the Consumers Association

NOVEMBER - Sputnik 2 launched with a dog on board; number 1 hit – Elvis Presley with *Jailhouse Rock*

DECEMBER - Ninety people were killed in the Lewisham train disaster; her first Christmas message was broadcast by the Queen on television

Education



by
**Nick
Young**
*Head of
Education*

During my years as a Middle School teacher in Hungary, one of my favourite topics to teach was the Crusades. Aside from examining the history and the moral and ethical discussions, we would watch the film, 'Kingdom of Heaven'. This film, featuring a stellar cast including Orlando Bloom among others, is the epic saga of a young knight who is drawn from his parochial life as a blacksmith in France into joining the Crusades and defending the 'Kingdom of Heaven', in other words Jerusalem, from the Muslim armies of Saladin.

One of the most memorable moments of what is an imperfect, historically flawed but I think highly watchable film, is when Orlando Bloom's character, Balian, rides out to the middle of the desert to parlay with the great Saladin himself after a three-day siege of Jerusalem in order to agree terms for surrender. Balian then asks Saladin the question, 'What is Jerusalem worth?', which Saladin considers, shrugs and says '...nothing', leaving Balian baffled. Then, moments later, as Balian looks up again he sees Saladin turn back towards him, smiling, and clasping both fists together, he says: 'Everything!'

Jerusalem may not be the world's most beautiful city in purely aesthetic terms. It is dusty, overcrowded in places, inhospitable at times, not so easy to reach, and the people, as Israelis will tell you, are not the most friendly in the country, but its symbolism, aura and significance outshine almost any other city on earth especially to the three Abrahamic faiths. Hence the term, 'Kingdom of Heaven', or for the Jewish people, *Yerushalayim shel zahav* (Jerusalem the golden).

I was reminded of this twice in recent months. In June, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to travel to Jerusalem to retrieve a Torah Scroll. The Scroll, known as MST#1179 was written in the late 18th century, and had belonged to the Jewish community of Pisek-Strakonice in what is now the Czech Republic. The Scroll had been sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague in 1942 and was one of the 1564 Scrolls that had been purchased in 1964 by WS member Ralph Yablon and cared for by the Memorial Scrolls Trust (MST). Many of those Scrolls have since been repaired and are serving communities throughout the world. Over time, however, some of the Scrolls had been passed around without the knowledge of the Trust, and so the MST devotes significant time trying to locate Scrolls that have dropped off the radar.

Scroll #1179 was one such Scroll which recently emerged - in Jerusalem of all places. I was planning a short trip to Israel to take my wife there for the first time, but was very happy to add further resonance to our holiday and build it around the collection of the Scroll which was handed over to us by a Torah Scribe at our hotel.

Something we discovered was that Jerusalem itself, especially the Old City, doesn't sleep, with worship taking place twenty four hours a day. We walked through the modern parts of the town by day, and by the time we reached the Old City it was late at night. We lingered around the compound of the Western Wall, meandered through the streets of the Jewish quarter, reached the Muslim Quarter as the shutters were being closed for the night, (not quickly enough to stop my wife from finding a way to spend more money than either of us had intended!), took in the Armenian quarter and, eventually found our way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It is hard to imagine how such a busy place could maintain such serenity with people milling around, and Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and Catholic services among those taking place. Finally, as daylight approached, we picked our way out of the Old City somewhat dazed by the spiritual vapours that we'd been

'inhaling' over the past few hours, and carried ourselves back up the hill to our hotel where a 300 year old Torah Scroll was waiting for us! Only in Jerusalem!

Then, in August, I found myself in a very prominent United Synagogue in North London. The Rabbi, highly respected by his peers, spoke about a *Bar Mitzvah* that he'd attended in Jerusalem earlier that month. The ceremony itself took place at a multi-denominational prayer space beside the Western Wall. Men and women had been standing side by side before the Torah, it had been an egalitarian service, and at a time when we hear increasingly about divisions between the different strands of Judaism, I'd expected this Rabbi, whom I hadn't previously known, to pronounce critically about what he'd seen. What he said was quite the opposite. With a room full of *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* children (the girls were upstairs) young families as well as older members of the community, he told us all how wonderful he had found it that all Jews, of every denomination, find their spiritual home in Jerusalem. He said how important it was that no one group should lay claim and set rules that exclude others from our most holy sites. because to do so would lead to further fragmentation of the Jewish community. As in the words of Saladin in the film, 'Kingdom of Heaven', Jerusalem is worth 'everything'. I was stunned - and delighted!

The Jerusalem that fires the imagination and stirs the emotions, *Yerushalayim shel zahav*, must surely not be a place of fanaticism and exclusion but of peace, coexistence, tolerance and harmony - among the finest values of humanity.

Let us hope that in the new year more voices like those of that Rabbi are heard, - and let them be an inspiration to all of us in 2018.

MST Scroll #1179 can now be found in the Czech Scroll Museum which tells the fascinating story of the whole collection. It is on the 3rd floor of the Westminster Synagogue building. Please contact the MST at info@mst.org to organise a tour.



Westminster Quarterly

Planning Your Diary

Erev Tu B'Shevat

Tuesday 30th January

Tu B'Shevat

Wednesday 31st January

Erev Purim

Wednesday 28th February

Purim

Thursday 1st March

Seder Night

Friday 30th March

First Day Pesach

Saturday 31st March

Seventh Day Pesach

Friday 6th April

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Please send letters, articles, photographs or other items of interest for publication in the Westminster Synagogue Quarterly directly to the Synagogue office or e-mail to editor@westminstersynagogue.org

