



Excavation of the Temple on Elephantine Island

Elephantine Island

The History of Plymouth Synagogue

Leonora Cohen - Suffragette

A Trip to Poland

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Westminster Welcomes its New Members

- Danny Strauss & Sunny Iyer**
Pavlo Tymoshenko
Jan Bodnya
Gideon Farrell
Wilfred Woolf
Audrey Francini
Philippa Samii-Resenschein & Ivan McDonald Valledor
Roger Press
Carmela Michals
Sofiya Hodgkinson
Melissa Schindler & Jake Kahane
Michael Seoane
Aaron Banit
Tamara Stanton & Patrick Skipworth
Lenka Bozoganova
Eli & Eve Rosenberg
Felicia Burtscher
Irene & Robert Sandler
Orrin Ezralow & Mariya Liner
Davina Carter
Bianca Gubbay & James Blakebrough
Neil Morris & Elizabeth Nichol



Marriage

Dora Felkai & Aryeh Schwartz on 13th October

Deaths

- Bernard Shire on 4th January**
Geoffrey Helman on 4th January
Leonard Moseley on 25th January

Condolences

We offer sincere condolences to

- Ronda Fogel on the death of her parents**
Angela Harding on the death of her mother
The Harding and Datnow families on the death of their Grandmother
Linda & Max Shire on the death of their husband and father
Melissa Chavin on the death of her mother



People were baffled, but he did make a thought-provoking assertion. In February 1990, Vaclav Havel, two months after becoming the first President of Czechoslovakia, addressed a Joint Session of the US Congress. Among his remarks, he said, 'Consciousness precedes Being and not the other way round, as Marxists claim'.

His press secretary at the time, Michael Zantovsky, recalled that after the speech many of the senators and representatives in Washington wanted to know what he meant. And understandably so! We too may be baffled. He was, in fact, inverting Marx's assertion that 'Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness' - and, actually, in that speech in Washington he did go on to explain:

'Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human modesty, and in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better.'

Perhaps this was not so baffling after all - although rather more sophisticated than the level of political discourse currently emanating from some corridors of power. Not baffling, but thought-provoking: which do you believe in, the ability to shape your world, or the inability to overcome how you have been shaped by it? How can each of us re-grasp our imaginative agency, however much life shapes us?

At this point, I would prefer to reach for the salvation that lies in the human heart; in the power to reflect. As we approach *Pesach*, this enactment of passing from darkness to light, we might recognise that redemption is in part an

imaginative act. We could each reach out to redemption if only we could imagine it, and allow our consciousness to precede everyday routine - and allow our consciousness to be cultivated by more thoughtful routines.

We gear up for the great redemption of *Pesach*, with all of its responsibilities - its shopping and cleaning and reading - but all this is to enable us to achieve the festival's core responsibility - an imaginative one. The *Mishna* tells us: *B'chol dor v'dor, chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mi'mitzrayim*. In every generation a person is obligated to see themselves as if they went out of Egypt. Redemption begins with the obligation to imagine.

So what should we imagine? We might imagine who we could be. Imagining needn't be a fluffy concept. Who or what do you care about, and what are you doing about it? We can imagine ourselves and the world as we should be, and *will* it to be so, working patiently with vision. The obligation to see ourselves as if we personally had left Egypt is both an act of vision and of assertion. We can remind ourselves every day of what we and our world look like at our best. Our capacity to imagine might be built by taking a deep breath. We can focus on self-worth and proactive work, rather than simply reacting or working too hard. We might draw closer to inklings of joy or hurt, to explore them, rather than inuring ourselves to them. We can imagine ourselves and our world as we could be, and work to bridge that gap.

We also have an opportunity to imagine what our community could be. What is the community you dream of? In my first year we put versions of this question to more than one hundred members, face-to-face. We heard recurrently and passionately that we want a community in which people of all ages build valuable relationships; a community of educational and intellectual excellence for families and adults; of varied ritual, and of music which makes you want to sing and sometimes allows you to sit back in awe and reflection; a community of care, in which we call and visit others in times of vulnerability; a community that makes at least a modest difference to the vulnerable, outside our Synagogue.

We shared these foci at a large Synagogue gathering last month, and new volunteer teams have formed to make a tangible difference in some of these areas.

We also heard through these conversations how this community has already fulfilled more than we could have imagined for so many of us: that we are warm, non-judgemental and extremely welcoming; that we have found comfort and inspiration at Kent House; that, through this Synagogue and our leaders, Judaism and community mean more to us than we ever dreamt. These qualities will remain at the heart of Westminster Synagogue as we continue to fulfil our aspirations and imaginings. This process of evolving as a community through face-to-face conversations and the energy of volunteers is one that you are always welcome to be part of. Just get in touch.

At *Pesach*, we imagine a redeemed world. If this sounds like a quietist retreat from the world of politics and action, then I would like to return to what Vaclav Havel can teach us. He was at the heart of a revolution with a vision, a revolution carried on the wings of playwrights for more than twenty years. He spent five years in jail. No wonder he knew the power of inner resistance. No wonder he knew that, in his words, 'the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human modesty, and in human responsibility'. We need to be able to imagine how we can give, in order to act with meaning; we need to be able to see how the world can be full of love in order to bring some of this into practice.

I hope we can take the time to imagine, to live - in these days of redemption - for that could bring us a little closer. Happy *Pesach*!

Rabbi Benji Stanley

This update on our community and reflection on imagination grew out of a Pesach sermon I gave. It wasn't our busiest Shabbat, so for most of you this is completely new, and for those of you who were there, thank you, and I've improved it!

The Jews of Elephantine Island



Bezalel Porten

Elephantine Island is a small island in Upper Egypt, near the city of Aswan. From the air it is the shape of an elephant tusk, but it is only some 1200 metres long and 400 metres at its widest point. The island's greatest claim to fame, as far as Jews are concerned, is the discovery and publication of hundreds of papyri describing the life of a Jewish community who lived on the island in the fifth century BCE. The find, written in Aramaic, compares well with the documents from the Cairo Genizah, though fewer in number, and enables historians and archaeologists to establish much of the daily life - religious, military and domestic - of a very early Jewish settlement.

Bezalel Porten, a professor emeritus at the Department of Jewish History at the Hebrew University in Israel, translated the papyri into English. In his Introduction to the publication he says, 'The sensitive reader is thus able to trace continuity and change in cultural patterns across three millennia'. He confesses that he has taken some liberties to make the translation readable for the average person, but the documents are so lively and colourful that he seems to have achieved his object with little difficulty. He quotes in particular a letter: 'What's wrong? Why haven't you sent me a letter?' And the reply, 'A snake bit me and I was dying and you did not send (to inquire) if I was alive or dead.'

This band of Israelites were descendants of Jews who had voluntarily returned to Egypt after the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in 586 BCE. While elite Jews

were forced into exile in Babylonia, many soldiers and common folk relocated to Egypt, where they established a settlement and a garrison to protect the Egyptian border with Nubia. Some of the papyri discovered during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries relate therefore to military life. Some are at present in the Brooklyn Museum, others found their way to the Bodleian Library at Oxford, while some were retained by the Egyptian authorities in Cairo. In his *The Story of the Jews - 1000 BCE-1492 CE*, Simon Schama describes the find, 'The square-form script, the same elegant style in which Hebrew would be written from the time of the Second Temple to our own, is still crisply legible.'

The Jewish colonists lived in peace with their Egyptian neighbours, and they kept the Jewish laws. In fact, the Persian Emperor Darius II had commanded them to keep the Passover feast in 418 BCE and not to drink beer for seven days afterwards, according to one of the papyri. The area at the time was under Persian control, and the Jewish colony was under Persian jurisdiction. The Jews, who had come to Egypt as refugees, were not allowed to work or to own land as citizens, but could serve as mercenaries.

One of the most striking features ... is the prominent role that women played

The Jews who arrived on Elephantine Island were quick to set about building an essential part of their religion - a temple. This was known from the papyrus records, but its location was a mystery. German, French and Italian archaeological expeditions were mounted to comb the lower stretches of the Island in an effort to find the building. Among other details, the documents describe a shrine standing in an open courtyard, with an altar on which animal sacrifices were offered. It apparently remained standing until about 400 BCE, when the Persians were driven out by the Egyptians. So there was plenty of evidence as to its existence, but no proof as to where it was located. However, in 1967, an archaeological expedition, recording 'pagan' temples,

came across what they called 'the Aramaic village'. This was a series of mud-brick houses, in ruins, that were lined up along two sides of a central site with a plaster surface, and a small building paved in fine tiles. The German team recognized that what they had found were the Jewish houses around the temple site, all as Bezalel Porten had predicted from the documents.

The temple itself had a tiled floor in two layers, indicating that the first had been destroyed and then replaced. It stood in a courtyard of high quality plasterwork, while the houses only had crude mud floors. It was not until 1997 that the final discoveries were made, but they indicated that there had indeed been a small Jewish temple in southern Egypt, built to serve a Jewish colony centuries before.

The Elephantine Island papyri form a fascinating collection; some are legal documents but others are letters from the soldiers to their families and reveal much about the lives of ordinary Jews living in ancient times. They include letters and legal contracts from family and other archives: divorce documents, the manumission of slaves, and other business, and are a valuable source of knowledge about law, society, religion, language and onomastics, the sometimes surprisingly revealing study of names.

One of the most striking features of the papyri is the prominent role that women played on the Island. It is no exaggeration to say that they are everywhere. The first document records a voluntary exchange between the parties, of half of their respective, independently inherited shares, and testifies to the right of women to inherit, hold, and exchange property solely in their own names. The second document is an IOU, apparently following a divorce, in which the man pledges to pay the woman, within five weeks, the balance of her document of wifeness (a sum of two shekels). As in any other debt, failure to pay would render all of his property liable to seizure and to be held as security until payment was made.

The woman best known on the Island was Mibtahiah. In 459 she married Jezaniah son of Uriah, who owned a house. In a document running to thirty-four lines, the father bequeathed this house to his

daughter ('in my life and at my death'). In a state of disrepair, the house was probably held by the father for the occasion of his daughter's marriage and the terms of the bequest make it clear that it was to be treated as an estate, perpetuated within the family or among designated heirs. Four more documents reveal the extent of Mibtahiah's wealth. Apparently Jezaniah died leaving her childless and in 449 she married an Egyptian builder, Eshor son of Djeho, subsequently known by the Hebrew name Nathan. Her dowry was worth sixty-five and a half shekels.



A letter amongst the Elephantine Island Papyri, requesting the rebuilding of a Jewish temple

One particularly interesting series is that concerning one Jewish family, providing specific information about the daily lives of a man called Ananiah - a Jewish temple official, his wife, Tamut - an Egyptian slave, and their children, over the course of forty-seven years. Their marriage documents formalized an existing relationship, as Ananiah and Tamut already had a young son when the document was drawn up. Because Tamut was a slave when she married Ananiah, the contract has special conditions. Usually, it was the groom and his father-in-law who made Jewish marriage agreements, but Ananiah made this contract with Tamut's master, Meshullam, who legally was her father. In addition, special provision was made to free the couple's son, also a slave to Meshullam. Future children, however, would still be born slaves.

Nearly twenty-two years after her marriage to Ananiah, Tamut's master released her and her daughter, Yehoishema, from slavery. It was rare for a slave to be freed, and though a slave could marry a free person, their children

usually belonged to the master. Slavery in Egypt at that time differed in some ways from the practice in other cultures. Egyptian slaves retained control over personal property, had professions, and were entitled to compensation. It was not uncommon to sell children, or even oneself, into slavery to pay debts.

One document in the series recounts Ananiah's purchase - twelve years after his marriage - of a house, which he bought from a Persian soldier named Bagazust and his wife, Ubil. The property, in a town on Elephantine Island, was located across the street from the Temple of Yehou and adjacent to the Persian family of Ubil's father. This would seem to suggest that the Egyptians, Jews, and Persians on Elephantine Island all lived among one another. The renovation of the house and its gradual transfers to family members are also related in the collection.

Another fascinating document, now held in the Egyptian Museum of Berlin, is the 'Passover letter' of 419 BCE (discovered in 1907), which gives detailed instructions for properly keeping the Passover.

Although the Elephantine Island woman may not have had the right to witness documents, the many documents in which she appears are ample testimony to the extensive rights which she enjoyed. Rich or poor, free, slave, or emancipated, of Jewish or Egyptian birth, the woman in the Jewish community of Elephantine Island had rights of repudiation equal to those of her husband.

When Persian rule over this part of Egypt came to an end there is yet another mystery concerning the whereabouts of the Jews of Elephantine Island. They could not have remained in enemy territory - nor was escape possible to the north - so if they were not wiped out, they must have gone southward, perhaps to Ethiopia.

Was this another strand in the story of the lost Ark of the Covenant, still believed by some to be in Akum in that country? This was discussed in the July 2018 issue of the *Quarterly*. One theory is that it had been housed in the Temple on Elephantine Island and taken there when the Jews departed.

Philippa Bernard

'Some of our best Jews are poets...'

Through these pale cold days
What dark faces burn
Out of three thousand years,
And their wild eyes yearn,

While underneath their brows
Like waifs their spirits grope
For the pools of Hebron again—
For Lebanon's summer slope
From *Isaac Rosenberg - Selected Poems & Letters*



On *Kippur* Miss Ressitti recited
All her prayers. On the morrow, invited,
She replied in the fashion,
'But I've just had my ration -
Had I not, I should be so delighted'.
Quoted in *Harold Reinhart - A Memorial Volume*



Once more he sees his companions' faces
Livid in the first faint light,
Gray with cement dust,
Nebulous in the mist,
Tinged with death in their uneasy sleep.
At night, under the heavy burden
Of their dreams, their jaws move,
Chewing a non-existent turnip.
From *The Survivor - Primo Levi*



Now speak no more, dear giant, in my
head,
Your words shriek however softly,
Speak no more Samson, you are dead,
And I am punished and alone in Gaza.
From *Delilah - Dannie Abse*



Leonora Cohen OBE Suffragette (1873-1978)



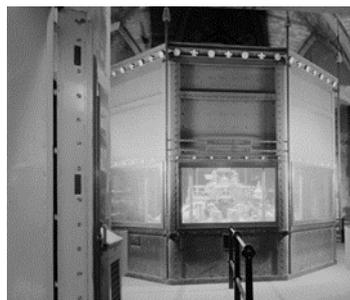
On a chilly day in February 1913, an elegant woman walked behind a crocodile line of schoolchildren and entered the Wakefield Tower at the Tower of London which, at that time, housed the Crown Jewels. By keeping close to the children, she would have given the impression that she was one of their teachers. Inside her coat were concealed two crowbars. Quietly she removed one from its hiding place and hurled it at a showcase containing insignia of the Order of Merit, smashing the glass. As she was very tall, she had no problem in throwing the missile over the heads of the children.

Wrapped around the iron bar was a piece of paper which read: *'Jewel House, Tower of London. My Protest to the Government for its refusal to Enfranchise Women but continues to torture women prisoners – Deeds Not Words. Leonora Cohen'*. On the reverse was written, *'Votes for Women. 100 years of Constitutional Petition, Resolutions, Meetings & Processions have Failed. This is my protest against the Government's treachery to the working women of Great Britain'*. The note clearly summarises why she was willing to sacrifice her comfortable life to defend the rights of women all over Britain. When she acted, Yeomen Warders immediately pushed her to the floor and then arrested her. She was charged with causing unlawful and malicious damage in an amount exceeding £5 and was bailed for trial by jury. By the time Leonora returned home to her husband, Henry and their young son in Leeds, her story was headline news.

In the ensuing court case, her courage and fluency of expression while conducting her

own defence, won her much admiration. She escaped conviction because, with his trade connections, Henry found a craftsman to testify that the damage to the case would cost less to repair than the amount listed in the criminal damage charge against her. This expert witness stated that he would charge only £4 10s to do the work, enabling the jury to acquit her, because it could not be proven that she had caused damage exceeding £5!

The woman's name was Leonora Cohen. She was born in Leeds, in June 1873, the daughter of Canova Throp, a stone carver, who died when she was only five years old. Leonora's life was full of events and people that motivated her to fight for women's right to vote. Firstly, her mother Jane was a big influential factor in her life. Because Jane was a widowed seamstress who raised three children alone, it was obvious to her daughter from a young age that her mother had few rights as a woman living in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Some years later, at an interview, Leonora stated that, *'Life was hard. My mother would say Leonora, if only we women had a say in things, but we hadn't. A drunken lout of a man...had a vote simply because he was a male. I vowed I'd try to change things'*. It was her mother's lack of empowerment, her inability to vote for change, that radicalised the young woman.



The showcase in the Wakefield Tower

Leonora was soon apprenticed to a milliner and was working as a millinery buyer in Bridlington, Yorkshire when she fell in love with a childhood friend, Henry Cohen, a thirty-two years-old watchmaker and jeweller, who was six years her senior. Both families opposed the match. Henry's father, Abraham, born in Warsaw, and his hard-working wife Rosetta, were among the earliest Jewish immigrants to Leeds. Although they quickly prospered, and with their nine children soon moved out of the

Yiddish-speaking enclave in the city, they were still stalwarts of the Jewish community. Abraham was Treasurer of the Board of Guardians and President of the Leeds Synagogue and they wanted their son to marry a Jewish wife. Jane Throp believed that *any* marriage would be an impediment for her daughter, possibly condemning her to the same harsh life which she had endured. Nevertheless, the couple married in Bridlington Registry Office, with none of the parents present to witness the union. Their first child, Rosetta, died at a few months of age. Two years later, their son Reginald was born. For the next nine years, the small family enjoyed a peaceful life; Henry's business as a jeweller flourished and he became a member of the Leeds and County Liberal Club.

At the time of Leonora's first job as a milliner, there was a strong movement by the Leeds campaign for better working conditions for women. This affected her - and her view of the treatment of women in the working world. Her husband, Henry, was very supportive of her passion to fight for women's rights. This all contributed to her desire to step up and take action as a suffragette.

In 1909 she became a member of the Leeds Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the organisation founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903 that believed in direct action. This was the beginning of Leonora's political career. At first, she was a quiet supporter, selling suffragette newspapers and home-made marmalade to raise funds. However, in 1911, as WSPU Branch Secretary, she was so incensed by Herbert Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister and arch anti-suffragist, breaking his commitment to women by announcing a Manhood Suffrage Bill to give all adult males the right to vote, that she was almost overnight seized by a passion for Votes for Women.

Later that year she joined a WSPU deputation to London and in the resulting fracas with the police, threw a stone that smashed a window of a government building. She was sent to Holloway Prison for seven days for malicious damage. Prison only served to harden her resolve. For the next few months she took part in several other protests and meetings. She

believed that damaging private property was wrong but that attacking government or official property in retaliation for what she saw as yet another government betrayal, was fair.

For the next two years, with her son away at boarding school and the unwavering support of her husband, Leonora devoted herself to the suffragettes' cause. Once her suffrage allegiance was known she lost most of her friends, received unpleasant letters and, even worse, her son was persecuted at school.

In January 1913 Asquith again shocked the suffrage campaigners by announcing that the Reform Bill would be dropped. This had been the spur for her attack on the Tower of London. Undaunted by that experience, she continued to attend rallies and in May 1913 addressed an open-air crowd saying that the time had passed for constitutional action: 'We women are outside the constitution. We are outlaws'. Leeds police charged her with disturbing the peace. Her husband Henry paid a surety of £50 for his wife, who agreed to be bound over.

However, her undertaking not to take part in any militant action did not last long. In November 1913, Asquith was addressing a public meeting in Leeds. Leonora, part of a nearby WSPU parade, was among those who threw stones at a local government building. This time she was arrested and charged with wilful damage. She was remanded in custody at Armley Prison. She immediately went on hunger strike and - the much more serious and dramatic - thirst strike. Dangerously ill and weak, she had to be released after a short while, on seven days' licence under the Cat and Mouse Act (which we mentioned in the *Quarterly* of April 2012, in an article entitled *Blackguards in Bonnets*). This act allowed hunger strikers to be temporarily released in order to recover their strength. Henry then wrote to the Home Office declaring that if they re-arrested Leonora, he would not receive her back next time, so that the authorities would be forced to accept responsibility for her death. He also decided it was time for them to move away from Leeds. They settled in Harrogate, where Leonora could regain her health. She ran a Reform Food Boarding Establishment for

vegetarians like herself. Her home was also used as a refuge for women who had been imprisoned for their campaigning.

Leonora's bold attack on the Crown Jewels gained media prominence and was described rather disparagingly by the *London Illustrated News* as yet another example of tactics used by 'wild women'. Fearing more attacks from the WSPU and against a background of the persistent threat from Irish Republicans, the Tower, Hampton Court and the palaces of Kensington, Kew and Holyrood were all temporarily closed to the public.

When war broke out in 1914, Leonora worked in a munitions factory in Leeds, joined the General and Municipal Workers' Union and eventually organised workers' petitions and a three-day strike. The First World War changed everything and in a short space of time, society's views were modernised immeasurably. After the war in 1918, women over the age of thirty were granted the right to vote.

Leonora remained energetic and active during and after the war, and in the 1920s the family moved back to Leeds, to Clarendon Road where her home is marked by a blue plaque.



In 1923, Leonora became the first woman president of the Yorkshire Federation of Trades Councils and the following year was made a magistrate, one of the first women appointed to the bench. She was a JP for twenty-five years and by the mid-1920s had been awarded an OBE for services to public life. From that point, she seemed to slip totally from public view but in the mid-1970s, as a new wave of feminism took hold, there was a resurgence of interest in the activities of the suffragettes. Her devoted Henry died in 1949 but Leonora Cohen remained a committed feminist throughout her life, acting as a voice for British feminist

movements in the 1960s and 70s and was able to witness the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1970.

Leonora, then aged 101, was much sought after for interviews and appeared on the cover of the *Radio Times* publicising a BBC television series, *Shoulder to Shoulder* based on Sylvia Pankhurst's book *The Suffrage Movement*. What remained in her memory most clearly was not the decades of respectability in Leeds but the two years of direct action when she risked her life for a cause.



Leonora Cohen lived a long and eventful life. In June 1977, *The Times* wrote :- *Mrs Leonora Cohen, the oldest surviving suffragette is 105 today. She will celebrate her birthday at her home for elderly vegetarians in Ross-on-Sea, North Wales.*

She died, aged 105, in September 1978. Before she died, she donated her scrapbook and other memorabilia to Leeds Museum. These include a painting of her as a child. At the time of her death, her obituary in *The Times* fondly referred to her as the 'Tower suffragette' for the damage she did with the iron bar in the Tower of London. It was able to reflect on Leonora's life and to highlight the extraordinary accomplishments of her 105 years. The column mentions her award of an OBE, her job as a personal bodyguard to Mrs. Pankhurst, her imprisonment and her hunger strike. In the obituary, she was clearly remembered for the actions she took to defend the rights of women. She was seen as a regional activist who was willing to die for the cause about which she felt so passionately.

Claire Connick

The History of Plymouth Synagogue



If you were asked to name the oldest Ashkenazi synagogue still existing in the English-speaking world, you would probably not suggest that it might be Plymouth. This ancient Devon town has had links with a Jewish community for many centuries. Francis Drake took with him on his journey round the world, as quarter-master and navigator, one 'Moses the Jew' from Plymouth. The first known traces of a Jewish community in Plymouth date back to about 1745 - most of its members coming from Germany or Holland. The congregation first met in private houses but in 1762 it purchased a plot of land in Catherine Street to build a synagogue - though the deed had to be signed by a Christian, as Jews were not legally allowed to sign a lease. Building began almost at once - a small whitewashed brick and stone construction with a roof of Cornish slate.

The Synagogue itself, listed as Grade II, is uniquely beautiful and is renowned amongst both Jews and non-Jews for its peaceful and spiritual ambience. Like all Georgian synagogues it is quite small and is situated in a very discreet location. The entrance is at the back, and to this day there is nothing on the frontage to Catherine Street that indicates the function or nature of the building.

It closely resembles one of the meeting houses of the growing Protestant Nonconformist chapels of the time and is situated in a side street, perhaps to avoid the possible rioting that frequently took place in the eighteenth century. Parts of the building recall Plymouth's connection with the sea. The joints used in the woodwork of the Synagogue, the panelling, the seating, and the *bimah* are

typical of naval construction of the period and show that it was built by craftsmen from the Devonport Dockyard. It is possible to look at the railings around the *bimah* and imagine that one is looking at the stern of one of Nelson's warships. The supply of uniforms to the ratings was a business with significant Jewish involvement. At one time a large naval outfitter was owned by a member of the Plymouth Jewish community.

The entrance vestibule, which may be of later date, bears a quotation from the Psalms - *O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker*. The Synagogue had a *mikveh* (no longer in use) and nineteenth century renovations included Minton terracotta tiling in the vestibule, and interior stairs to the women's gallery, formerly on the outside of the building.



The Aron Hakodesh

The original plaque bearing the prayer for the royal family is still there; it is in Hebrew and is for George V and Queen Mary - painted over the names of previous monarchs. The elaborate *Aron Hakodesh* rises to the full height of the building. It was built in Holland, transported to Plymouth (an early flatpack?) and rebuilt in the Synagogue, with fluted Corinthian columns, a broken pediment, carved finials and urns in gold. It was restored in 2002 in resplendent gold leaf and white and blue paint.

Much of the information we have about Plymouth Synagogue is due to the research of the non-Jewish caretaker,



Entrance to the ancient cemetery

Jerry Sibley, who shows visitors round the building. He explains that the Synagogue is almost hidden from the rest of the city, as is the ancient Jewish cemetery. Secreted behind an old wooden door and surrounded by high stone walls, this Plymouth cemetery has remained a secret for many years. But after being rediscovered and cleared of vegetation, the Jewish Burial Ground, on the Barbican, has just been granted special status. It has been listed by Historic England in recognition of its incredible and well-recorded history. The Jewish Burial Ground is now Grade II listed as a result of an application made by Plymouth City Council.

Plymouth Synagogue originally had plain glass windows, like most contemporary synagogues, but these were later replaced by beautiful stained-glass panels. They celebrate the Three Pilgrim Festivals; New Year, Day of Atonement and the Sabbath. The two windows on either side of the Holy Ark at the East end were cut into the wall after 1874 and picture well-known symbols of Judaism: the ram's horn, the Ten Commandments, the Shield of David and a Menorah.

Plymouth suffered greatly from German bombing during World War Two. Catherine Street was obliterated and there were only two surviving buildings, the public dispensary and the Synagogue, which was hardly damaged. Jerry Sibley says, 'But if it wasn't for the Jewish community fighting tooth and nail to keep their place of worship during the rebuilding of Plymouth, it would not be there at all.' Plymouth town became a city and on the map the Synagogue was nowhere to be seen. But the community

In the Bible there are many names for God but one name which is the most sacred and which is prohibited from being uttered, is written with the letters *yud, hey, vav* and *hey*. This name appears in the Bible 6,000 times. We do not know for certain how the word was formed, or which was and is the right way to pronounce it. Most of the Hebrew biblical words that have passed from generation to generation were written down in the tenth century with the help of the Tiberius vowel system. But in the case of the name of God, the system of the vowels did not represent the exact pronunciation of the word. Also, we observe the Commandment, 'Thou shall not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain' – as did our ancestors.

Before the destruction of the first Temple, the name of God was uttered loudly during *Yom Kippur*. But after the destruction of the Temple the pronunciation of the word was forgotten. There are many suggestions as to the origin of the sacred name. One of these goes 'When God revealed himself from the burning bush, Moses asked Him 'What shall I say to the people if they ask me to whom I talked?' God's reply was: 'I shall be what I shall be' - in Hebrew, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. Interestingly, God's answer shares the same root as the sacred name itself, namely, *yud, hey, vav, hey*.

Apart from the prohibition of pronouncing the name of God, rabbinical Judaism forbade the writing of it. According to tradition, if the name is written on the page and the page has no more use, it is buried. Prayer books that are no longer in use are buried for the same reason. There are other forms of writing God's name outside the Bible which are abbreviated and are used in our prayer books, such as: *yud, yud*; or just *hey* with an accent. Although we don't pronounce the sacred name, Jews have many other names as a substitute. Here are but a few: *Hashem, Hakadosh Baruch Hou, Adonai, El-Shadai, El* and *Elohim*.

Ilana Alexander

A postscript....

An interesting feature in the history of Plymouth Synagogue lies in the story of the Solomon family. Leon Solomon had come to London in about 1860 from Warsaw and met Rose Joseph from Plymouth, where they married. Leon, already a prosperous young man, paid for an extension to the Synagogue building in the form of a ladies' gallery. In London the Solomons were members of the Western Synagogue to which Leon donated a magnificent *Torah* mantle and paid for the whole Synagogue to be redecorated. The Solomons had twelve children, of whom the seventh child, Ernest Louis, decided in 1873 to go to America where he prospered. He changed his name from Solomon to Simpson, became an American citizen and married Charlotte Gaines.



Ernest Simpson (né Solomon)

Some twenty years after the marriage they had a son, also Ernest. This Ernest Simpson (Solomon) came to England, fought in the Coldstream Guards in the First World War and adopted British nationality. In 1928, in London, Ernest Simpson was married to an American divorcée, Wallis Winfield Spencer. As Wallis Simpson she was destined to be the woman for whom the King of England was to give up his throne!

According to Anne Sebba in her biography of Wallis - *That Woman* - Wallis never knew of her second husband's Jewish background; her admiration for Hitler is well known. However, the book tells of the author's meeting with Ernest's son Aharon who reverted to the name Solomon, acknowledged his Jewish inheritance and lives in Israel. If Ernest had retained his links with Jewish Plymouth the history of England could have been very different!

Philippa Bernard

Thanks to Julia Levy for alerting us to the connection with Ernest Simpson



The window representing the story of Noah - Yom Kippur

fought to retain its building and eventually won its fight for survival.

In the years after the war, the Plymouth community was flourishing, but the rebuilding of the city meant that many families moved further out of town. As an orthodox congregation, most felt unable to ride on the Sabbath, and gradually numbers reduced. In 1968 the Rabbi left - the diminishing congregation could not afford to pay him - and from a membership of some 200 families only thirty-four remained.

Today Plymouth still has a very beautiful building, recently renovated with the help of English Heritage; it holds regular services on *Shabbat* and Festivals with lay leaders. It is unable to offer Hebrew classes but welcomes visitors to its services and to visit the Synagogue. The difficulties of a dwindling congregation necessitated the recent sale of some of its historic silver. The leadership says, 'The auction will greatly assist us in paying for rises in utility bills; for those of us working to keep the Synagogue open, there is no danger of us closing'.



The Bimah

Jews in Dubai



The Burj Khalifa tower - Dubai

It may surprise many Westerners to know that there is today in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE, not only a National Tolerance Programme but also a Minister for Tolerance. And that there is a thriving and growing Jewish community.

When Israel was founded in 1948 business relations between Jews and Arabs worsened. Many Jews emigrated or were expelled; some continued to live in Dubai, hiding their religious affiliation. But with a growing threat from Iran, Saudi Arabia in particular - with America's backing - has begun putting out feelers towards Israel. This led to an extraordinary development in Dubai, when in 2015 the small Jewish community opened a Synagogue in a quiet leafy suburb. For years the Jews of the city had been meeting in each other's homes to conduct services. Most of the congregants are ex-patriates, engaged in commerce, finance, law and the diamond trade and they are still cautious in their acknowledgement of their religion, the building being unmarked and unadvertised. Apart from the sanctuary (a *Torah* was donated by an American who has lived in the city for some thirty years), there is now a kosher kitchen and a few bedrooms for those who prefer not to travel on the Sabbath.

The warming of relations between the Dubai government and Israel has encouraged this small community to come in from the cold, though they still ask visitors not to reveal the Synagogue's location. One member said, 'The government's attitude to our community is that they want us to feel comfortable

here, praying here and doing business here.'

There are perhaps 150 members of the Dubai Synagogue, though they still sometimes have difficulty in finding a *minyan*. But numbers are often made up by tourists, students and visiting businessmen. There is no rabbi, so lay members and visiting ministers take the services, which include a prayer for their royal family, 'Bless and protect, guard and assist, exalt, magnify, and uplift the president of the UAE, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, and his deputy, the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, and all the rulers of the other emirates and their crown princes.' *Shabbat* services are usually followed by a *Kiddush*. The velvet cover for the *Torah* bears a gold-embroidered inscription in Arabic, dedicated to Mohammed Alabbar, builder of the Burj Khalifa tower and a good friend to the Jewish community in Dubai.

...even in a country with a long history of suspicion of Judaism, a community can thrive and prosper

One Jewish family who settled in Dubai from America found that they were treated warmly, without any feelings of anti-Semitism. They tell of discovering other Jews in the city, following a mixture of several different Jewish practices, adding some of their own, including 'the Children of the Gulf' with a *Succah* made of palm leaves, and *Chanukah* candles in the desert! To begin with, contact was made with due caution, from school registers perhaps or through business associations. Gradually they marked the festivals, held a *brit milah*, *b'nei mitzvah*, and a *shiva*. They also became aware of cultural events outside the community that were welcome: Arab-Israeli films, traditional cookery and art exhibitions. A *Purim* party was enjoyed by many beyond the Jewish congregation.

The United Arab Emirates is a Federation of seven states consisting of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al Quwain, all of which maintain a large degree of independence. The discovery of oil in the 1960s has brought untold riches to the UAE, and Dubai in particular is known for its spectacular buildings (including the Burj Khalifa tower, the tallest building in the world), enormous shopping centres and extravagant entertainment attractions.

The modern economic climate of Dubai has encouraged huge investment and international finance centres in the country, and inevitably Jewish businessmen have made it their home. The UAE government has often been virulently anti-Semitic in its attitudes, banning Jewish academics and authors from its universities. However, in 2000 the Harvard Business School accepted a donation of two million dollars from the UAE President, Zayed bin Sultan Nahyan, despite a history of anti-Jewish propaganda from an educational centre bearing his name - including an affirmation that it was the Zionists not the Nazis who killed the Jews during the Holocaust - and public opinion demanded that the money be returned.

Not long afterwards the Centre was closed but newspapers and magazines in the country continued to print anti-Semitic and racist articles and cartoons. The Russian newspaper *Pravda* accused the UAE of adopting 'Third Reich policies against Jews' when the Dubai police chief allegedly said that anyone who looks or sounds like a citizen of Israel would be blocked from entering the country.

Recent developments in Dubai have made it clear that with due care and a modest attention to Jewish practice, it is possible that even in a country with a long history of suspicion of Judaism, a community can thrive and prosper.

Philippa Bernard

We are grateful to Ashley Connick, who lives in Dubai, for his help with this article

Josephus C37-100 CE



The 1st-century Roman portrait bust, said to be of Josephus, conserved in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark

It would appear that Josephus was vain, callous, and self-seeking. However, most of what we know of this man is from his own writings. In fact, the works of Josephus are major sources of our understanding of Jewish life and history during the first century CE. He was named Joseph ben Matthias, but this was later Romanised to Flavius Josephus.

Author of several books, Josephus was born in 37-38 CE into one of Jerusalem's elite and wealthy families. His major works are *History of the Jewish War*, *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *Against Apion*. He was the second son of Matthias, a Jewish priest. His mother was an aristocratic woman who descended from the royal, and formerly ruling, Hasmonean dynasty. His father came from the priestly order of the Jehoiarib, which was the first of the twenty-four orders of priests in the Temple in Jerusalem and he was a descendant of the high priest Jonathon.

According to his own account, Josephus was a precocious youth who, by the age of fourteen, was already being consulted by high priests on matters of Jewish law. At sixteen, he went to spend a three-year sojourn in the wilderness with the hermit Bannus, a member of one of the ascetic Jewish sects that flourished in Judaea. He then returned to Jerusalem and joined the

Pharisees, which had a major impact on his later relationship with the Romans. In 64 CE Josephus was sent to Rome to try to secure the release of several Jewish priests who were being held prisoner there. He was fortunate enough to be introduced to Nero's second wife, Poppaea Sabina, and because she liked him, she enabled him to achieve his aim.

Back once more in Jerusalem, he witnessed the beginning of a general revolt against Roman rule. The Jews of Judaea, headed by the Zealots, managed to get rid of the Roman procurator and set up their own government in Jerusalem. Josephus tried to arrange a compromise but eventually he found himself drawn into the rebellion. Despite the fact that he was a moderate, peaceful man, he was appointed military commander of Galilee where, by his own account, he was obstructed in his efforts at peace-making by the enmity of the local partisans. However, he set about fortifying the northern towns against the arrival of the Romans.

Under the command of Vespasian, the Romans arrived in Galilee in 67 CE. Josephus managed to hold the fortress of Jotapata for almost seven weeks, but the city finally fell and Josephus, with some forty of his fellow men, took refuge in a nearby cave. His companions voted to die rather than surrender, much to Josephus' concern. He tried to persuade them that committing suicide was immoral. He suggested that they should kill each other and draw lots to decide the order of their deaths. Somehow, Josephus managed to draw the last lot!

He was brought before Vespasian and claimed to have experienced a divine revelation that Vespasian would soon become Emperor. Vespasian believed him and spared his life, although he was kept prisoner in the Roman camp. Towards the end of 69 CE, Vespasian was indeed proclaimed Emperor by his troops. Impressed that Josephus' prophecy had come to pass, Vespasian freed his prisoner, deciding that he had a divine gift. Josephus wrote that his revelation had taught him three things: that God, the creator of the Jewish people, had decided to 'punish' them; that 'fortune' had been given to the Romans; and that God had

chosen him 'to announce the things that are to come'.

From then on, Josephus attached himself to the Roman cause. He defected to the Roman side and was granted Roman citizenship. He changed his name to Flavius - the family name of Vespasian.

Josephus' first wife had been lost at the siege of Jotapata, and Vespasian arranged for Josephus to marry a captured Jewish woman, whom he later divorced. In about 71 CE, Josephus married an Alexandrian Jewish woman as his third wife. They had three sons, of whom only Flavius Hyrcanus survived childhood. Josephus later divorced her, and in about 75 CE, he married his fourth wife, a Greek Jewish woman from Crete, who was a member of a distinguished family. They had a happy married life and two sons, Flavius Justus and Flavius Simonides Agrippa.

Josephus had joined the Roman forces under the command of Vespasian's son and later successor, Titus, serving as his translator when he led the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE. He tried to act as mediator between the Romans and the rebels, but, hated by the Jews for his apostasy and distrusted by the Romans because he was a Jew, he was unable to accomplish much. Following the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, Josephus took up residence in Rome, where he devoted the remainder of his life to literary pursuits under Imperial patronage.

Josephus remained true to his Pharisee beliefs and whilst far from being a martyr, did what he could for his people. However, his works include useful material for historians about individuals, groups, customs, and geographical places. His writings provide a significant, extra-Biblical account of the post-Exilic period of the Maccabees, the Hasmonean dynasty, and the rise of Herod the Great.

Josephus represents an important source for studies of immediate post-Temple Judaism and the context of early Christianity. He died in the year 100 CE in Rome.

Claire Connick

A Trip to Poland

November 2018

My parents were born in Hungary, my mother, Alice, in a little town called Tolcsva, my father, Karol, in Kosice (where I too was born), which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. They both survived the second world war, met and married in 1947. I was born on 10th May 1948, at the same time as the State of Israel, and three years after Alice was liberated, on 8th May 1945, from the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

My father's liberation came in Budapest, somewhere between 27th January and 13th February 1945. His parents had died a few years before the second world war, and with no siblings to worry about, he left his home town for Budapest, where he felt he had a better chance of avoiding German guards and the Hungarian Arrow members. He told me that he spent his days ducking and diving from one cinema and coffee house to another, and as he could not work, he (and many other Jews) were helped by Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat, to escape.

After the war my mother spoke about her horrific experiences in Auschwitz-Birkenau, when she and her family were taken in April 1944, and later from August to March 1945 in Markleberg, near Leipzig, where she worked as a slave labourer in the Junkers aircraft spare-parts factory. She was one of the 'fortunate' few to have been sent there from Auschwitz as it certainly saved her life - although it meant that she was separated from her parents, brother and sister who all perished in the Holocaust.

In 1996, my mother agreed to record her experiences of the Holocaust with the Spielberg organisation which was taking witness testimonies from survivors. From that time, it had been Renée's and my wish to go to Poland, and particularly to Auschwitz, which I visited as a young boy with my mother, and which undoubtedly has left its scars on me, as with many 'second generation' children.

My retirement from full-time work has meant that we have a little more time for



Last remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto wall

personal travel, and so we began to plan for the trip, with an expert travel agent who specialises in these visits. He organised and met all of our requests and we would most certainly recommend him. We were joined by two members of our community who had expressed an interest in our trip and this made it even more meaningful for us.

When we arrived in Warsaw, we were met by our excellent guide, who took us to our hotel, and once we were settled, immediately whisked us off for a tour of the City. Not a minute to be lost! We were surprised at how little there was to see in the Warsaw Ghetto, which was levelled to the ground by the Germans after the Ghetto uprising. There remain a few pieces of the wall that surrounded the Ghetto, and special tile markers - with the inscription in two languages 'Ghetto Wall 1940-1943' in the sidewalks which mark its boundary. Truly it's hard to visualise the hardships endured by the Jews who were forced to live in the Ghetto, although our guide told us many stories which brought tears to our eyes.

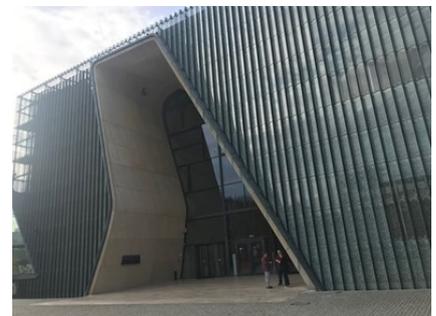
It was only post-war, on finding old plans of the Town, that Warsaw was rebuilt, including some parts of the Jewish quarter. They did a good job and today, only the monstrosities built during the Stalinist period mar the Warsaw skyline.

I am often asked why *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is commemorated on a particular date in the Jewish calendar, most often in April or May. The reason is that in 1951, the Knesset began deliberations to choose a date, and Nisan 27 was fixed in the Hebrew calendar, a week after Passover,

and eight days before Israel's Independence Day, in memory of Ghetto Uprising Day. On 3rd May 1951, the first officially-organised Holocaust Remembrance Day event was held and from the following year, the lighting of six beacons in memory of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis became a standard feature of *Yom HaShoah*.

At the end of our first day, we had a splendid meal in one of the many local restaurants, eating good Jewish/Polish food including *pirogi* and of course chicken soup!

The next day we visited the Warsaw POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, built in 2014, recalling the 1,000-year history of the Jews who lived in Poland. Its architecture is stunning, very light, bright and airy with a combination of audio-visual and written exhibits. Like Warsaw itself, perhaps it lacks sufficient original objects, but this is perfectly understandable.



The Warsaw Jewish Museum

There is a wonderful 'Midrash' attached to the story as to why Jews decided to settle in Poland. The Hebrew word for Poland is pronounced as *Polania* or *Polin* in Hebrew. These names for Poland were interpreted as 'good omens' because *Polania* can be broken down into three Hebrew words: *po* ('here'), *lan* ('dwells'), *ya* ('God'), and *Polin* into two words of: *po* ('here') *lin* ('[you should] dwell'). The 'message' was that Poland was meant to be a good place for the Jews. In later centuries up to 80% of the Jewish world population lived in Poland.

The Museum exhibits are laid out in chronological order and explain how Poland was for years the best place in Europe for the Jews until the late eighteenth century. They were recruited

by kings and nobles to help improve the economy but this connection was to be their eventual downfall. If you would like to know more, I highly recommend a visit to the Museum - or see the Littman Library books on the history of Polish Jews by Anthony Polonsky, which are in our Synagogue library.



Recreation of a pre-war Polish wooden Synagogue in the Warsaw Jewish Museum

From Warsaw we travelled to Krakow by train, about a two-and-a-half-hour journey. Our new guide introduced us to Kazimiers, the old Jewish part of this very beautiful and elegant town. Krakow was not destroyed during the war, as it was here that the German Fascists set up their headquarters and although there are very few Jews living here, there is a distinctly Jewish feeling, with Hebrew signs aplenty and 'Jewish' restaurants and shops offering articles with Jewish symbolism.

We arrived on a Friday and our travel organiser had arranged for us to visit the Jewish Community Centre, where we were invited to attend the evening Service and the communal dinner. Whilst only about thirty people were at the Service, there must have been around 100 people from all parts of the world and of all ages attending the dinner. We really had a most warm welcome from the community and from their recently-appointed young Rabbi, Samuel Rosenberg. He led a beautiful modern and enlightened Friday evening Service, despite the fact that he was ordained by *Chabad* in Israel.

The JCC is headed by Jonathan Ornstein who is distantly related to our Chairman, Jeffrey Ohrenstein, and who visited our Synagogue a few years ago when we co-

sponsored and hosted a visiting Polish photography exhibition with the Polish Embassy and the Galicia Museum.

The JCC also co-operates with other Jewish institutions from all over Poland, such as the Jewish Culture Festival, the Galicia Jewish Museum, and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. They aim at creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, assisting anyone searching for their Jewish identity.

When I asked how many Jews live here today, the answer was about 100 active Jews. However, there is possibly a larger group of non-practising Jews in Krakow. Before the second world war, about twenty-five percent of the city was Jewish - around 60,000 people. Today there are also over a million Jewish tourists to Krakow every year, of which many start their trip to Poland in Warsaw, visiting the Jewish Museum.

On Saturday morning, we had a more extensive visit round the sights of Krakow, which included the fortified hill-top Wawel Castle, built at the behest of King Casimir III the Great, situated around a most beautiful Italian-style main courtyard. In the afternoon, we visited Schindler's Factory, which had been pre-booked for us so there was no waiting - even with the crowds of people visiting.

There is not much of the factory left, but the Museum covers the history of Krakow during the Second World War very well, and there are good exhibits and an excellent film showing some of the Schindler works at the start. There are also survivors' accounts on film which are worth watching. We were thoroughly



Schindler's actual desk. The map behind it is also original. These are probably the few things left of the original factory.

impressed with our tour guide who made the visit really worthwhile and meaningful.

We had an excellent meal in the evening and very much enjoyed drinking Slivovitz, plum brandy, instead of the usual Polish Vodka.

We certainly needed a strong drink before we were driven on Sunday morning to Auschwitz and Birkenau. Nothing really prepared us - not even the memories of what I saw and experienced when I visited with my mother.



Auschwitz barracks

Arriving in this notorious concentration camp was a shock, seeing the barracks, where the prisoners were held, the 'exhibits' of shoes, hair, toys and of course the numerous suitcases of the victims of the Holocaust.

Our pre-booked tickets directed us to an English-speaking group of some twenty people. In front of us was a large board showing the group number, the language and the name of the person leading the group. We were given headphones with a dial to tune into the voice of our guide. Our leader was a young Polish man, certainly not Jewish, who took us around the exhibits and showed us the places where the prisoners slept, were made to stand for hours, were tortured and where numbers were tattooed on their arms.

I appreciated the guide's monotonous voice telling the story and explaining what to look at or what area we were about to see. I felt that this was the right approach - no emotion, just simple but hard-hitting facts.

Walking through the camp for an hour-and-a-half was for me a deeply emotional experience, imagining my mother, her parents, sister and brother there, knowing that they were selected and separated on arrival; the men from the women. Hungarian Jews were some of the last Jews transported on cattle trains in April 1944 via Birkenau, and those who were lucky enough to survive the first selection, then went to Auschwitz.

As I was standing at the train station in Birkenau, seeing the remains of the gas chambers, tears poured down my face thinking of my family and what they went through. What would I have done? Could I have done anything? And the eternal question, which never gets answered. Why? This was the same question I had been asking myself over and over, at the Schindler Factory, and whilst walking in the Ghettoes of Warsaw and Krakow. But in Birkenau, the sheer inhumanity and evilness of it all was overwhelming.



The entrance to Auschwitz

Suddenly, I was flooded with emotion about my parents and I realised that I admired them even more at that moment for wanting to bring me into the world, giving me their love and care, instilling tolerance and compassion. They who went through all of this, still being able to give and cherish life, and particularly not betraying but celebrating their Jewish heritage and passing it on to me, the next generation.

Of course amongst my contemporaries, I know that Judaism is not always



Young Israelis visiting Birkenau

celebrated or observed, but for many of my friends, Judaism was and is, a positive force. I completely understand why for some of them, their judgment of sections of humanity was painful and difficult; causing them to reject Judaism and finding it burdensome.

Toward the end of our visit, what brought joy to my heart and spirit, in that place of such devastating destruction, was the sight of groups of Israeli youngsters, draped in Israeli flags, singing, praying and remembering.

Evil may prevail for some time, but it never wins over goodness. Auschwitz and Birkenau are there to remind us of how cruel people can be but visiting this place and remembering, forces us to realise the importance of being vigilant, and of doing everything possible to prevent such atrocities ever happening again.

Thomas Salamon

Books at Kent House



The Synagogue has been offered a unique collection of Jewish books and in order to make space to accommodate these we have begun the mammoth task of clearing space on the ground floor shelves of the Library. At the same time, we are ensuring that the books which should be there but are at present elsewhere can be restored to their correct places.

For some time now, it has been evident that the Synagogue's libraries are in need of a complete overhaul. We are fortunate to have the beautiful Reinhart Library on the ground floor, as well as books on the first floor (the Rabbinic Library) but others have been tucked into odd corners throughout the building. It has therefore been decided to embark on a thorough examination of all the books in the library, review the catalogue and bring it up to date, collate the contents of the book shelves wherever they may be and remove volumes which we have decided are no longer worth their space. We cannot accommodate paperbacks, or modern novels (with certain exceptions).

We have found among the contents of the library some surprising volumes and will tell members about some of these as the work progresses. For example, there are many volumes about Jewish communities throughout the world, from China to South America, and of course Israel. There is a comprehensive selection on Jewish history - especially on the Holocaust - as well as sections relating to Jewish food, Jewish humour and art. A special shelf (rapidly filling) is devoted to books by members of the congregation.

Once the work is complete, we will investigate how best to enable members to borrow (and return!) items from this remarkable collection of books of Jewish interest and content.





‘There is a Time...’ Ecclesiastes

Man is born in a given age, religion, culture
 A world defining reality
 A reality defining his identity
 A non-negotiable destiny
 Experienced ‘till the ‘Time to die’.

Driven by instincts
 Emotionally subjected, indoctrinated
 Man is not objective.
 Throughout generations, everywhere
 Different man yet as other men
 Creates different yet same situations
 Resulting in different yet similar conflicts
 Under different yet same sky.

No images contain life, no words describe it
 Transmitted, unsolicited life
 A time of unjustifiable events
 The ground for superstitions
 That for religion through which mortals are immortal
 Time with no beginning, no end
 Time through which life evolves from beginning to end.

What binds terminal life to the wheel of Time?
 Life as ephemeral as man’s dreams
 Man’s dream as eternal as life
 Life in-between ‘a time to be born and a time to die’
 Time-life, an energy capsule transcending eternity.

Colette Littman

Light and Shade in the Czech Republic

In November 2018 I visited the Czech Republic, having been invited to give a lecture (on the early mapping of the British Isles) at the Masaryk University in Brno. Brno, the capital of the province of Moravia, was my mother's home town and Masaryk University was where my father, though he came from Moravska Ostrava, had graduated in medicine in 1930. I know Brno very well, having visited it often since the early 1970s when I was researching in Vienna. I had travelled there to visit my great-aunt, who was effectively my grandmother, but had been trapped in what was then Czechoslovakia when the iron curtain descended after 1947. The invitation was one that I could not turn down. And I enjoyed every minute: not least because the buildings of this Czech Manchester, as my mother used to call it, are now pristine, freed from the brown coal-generated dirt that had long covered its buildings.



A doorway in Kolin

I gave my lecture on the Friday afternoon and spent the afternoon with my hosts and their students. I was delighted to see that, in exactly the days that marked the centennial of the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy, the old cultural milieu was re-establishing itself. One of my Czech hosts had a teaching post in Vienna, while an Austrian academic who was present had a teaching post in Prague, and an Austrian professor had taken the ninety-minute train journey to Brno to hear me. There was also a readiness among the young people to honour the multi-cultural heritage - Czech but also German and

Jewish (the last two, inextricably enmeshed) - that, despite conflicts, had characterised and enriched Brno before 1945, and with which my family had been intimately involved. My great-grandfather, for instance, had been the secretary and interim director of the main opera house until 1918 and after that of the German theatre.



Internal passage in Kolin

I had encountered further evidence of this coming to terms with the past earlier in the day when, while taking a walk from the hotel, I came across a recently re-erected plaque honouring Emperor Joseph II (1765-1790). Until recently all positive mention of the Habsburg dynasty, which had ruled Moravia from 1526 to 1918, had effectively been forbidden. But as well as taking the first, very measured, steps towards emancipating the Jews (at least the wealthier ones), Joseph had also opened what is now Brno's central park to the public. The park was on the edge of the streets which in 1940-1941 had briefly become a ghetto prior to the deportation of the Jewish community, and a traditional Viennese-style coffee house, with a distinctively Jewish character, had opened a few footsteps away from the park. It faces the headquarters of the Brno Jewish community, first established at that address in 1939, and a few doors away from the flat where my great-grandfather lived. I came away with the feeling that Brno was at last at peace with itself after the traumas of the years between 1939 and 1989. The next day I took a train to Kolin, a small town about fifty kilometres east of Prague, where another ancestor had briefly worked as a

private tutor (possibly with additional teaching responsibilities at the *Beth Hamidrash*) in the mid 1840s. Some of 'our' scrolls come from there. Kolin's Jewish community had first been established, along a major trade route, in the late fourteenth century. It had struggled on after the War until about 1970 and the migration to Israel of the bulk of the remaining Jewish population following a burst of officially-supported anti-Semitic attacks in the wake of the Six Day War. The Jewish quarter, bordering the town walls, south-west of the spacious, and picturesque market square, is largely intact. Its three streets are lined by Renaissance, Baroque and neo-classical style buildings. There are still Hebrew inscriptions on at least one house and marks left by *mezuzahs* can be seen beside several doors. The splendid late seventeenth century Baroque Synagogue nestles behind the school house built in 1844/6 - precisely the years when my ancestor was teaching there.

In the last few years the houses have been restored and repainted but I saw many photos showing how shabby the quarter was until very recently. Pretty though the houses now look, evidence of how crowded the quarter had been is easy to see. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before final emancipation between 1848 and 1867, Jews formed a significant percentage of the overall population of the town but were confined to the three lanes. The occupants had to maximise the space available: to visit a rather good restaurant a couple of doors away from the Synagogue, I went through what amounts to a tunnel, with numerous doors lining it opening onto internal staircases which lead upwards and sideways. A short walk away is the Jewish cemetery - one of the oldest and most extensive in the country and rivalling the famous Jewish cemetery in Prague.

On the following day, back in Brno, I visited the Jewish cemetery to check on the state of the family graves, walking there from the centre to retrace the track taken by my great-grandfather's cortège in May 1941. Then, on Monday, I visited the provincial archives (*Moravsky Zemsky Archiv*), which are housed in a modern building in a new academic district that has been created in the

COMMENT



Brno Jewish Cemetery

town's outskirts in recent years. There I looked at some letters of the same ancestor who had taught in Kolin, but dating from the 1850s and 1860s.

I was also allowed to inspect sixty-four hand-drawn plans of Moravian towns and villages of 1727-8 indicating the locations and numbers of Jewish houses. These plans, created in response to legislation restricting Jewish rights and intended to demonstrate how viable the creation of ghettos would be, have recently been declared to be of 'Memory of the World status' (the archival equivalent of World Heritage Sites) by UNESCO, and the originals are no longer available to most scholars. A special exception was made for me however, and I was able to see the plans of the synagogues where several of 'our' scrolls resided until the Second World War. It was a fitting conclusion to a memorable long weekend.



'Separation' plan of Boskovice, 1727
The Jewish houses and synagogues are shown, significantly, in black

Peter Barber

Map reproduced by kind permission of Moravský zemský archiv of Brno

Ref: MZA fund D 22 Collection of maps and plans, signature 1316

What is Manna?

Recently, in our Shabbat Service we read one of the passages from Exodus which mentioned Manna, and I started to wonder, as have many others, what this extraordinary substance, sent by God to sustain the Israelites, could have been.

According to a 1927 *Time* magazine article, Dr. Fritz Bodenheimer, of Hebrew University's Zionist Experimental Agricultural Station, and Oskar Theodor, of the University's Microbiological Institute, visited the Sinai Desert in summer and observed 'the little pills forming as yellow sulphur-like drops on the tamarisk twigs.'



A pine branch with honeydew

Bedouins on the Sinai peninsula continue to harvest and eat the manna, as described in *Torah: A Modern Commentary*, published by the Union for Reform Judaism. The book explains, 'In June the substance falls to ground in little drops and is gathered up before sunrise, for afterward it liquefies again once the sun shines on it. The Arabs preserve the manna in leather gourds and thus save it, like honey, for the future.'

Some scholars have suggested that the word 'manna' comes from the Egyptian term *mennu*, meaning 'food'. At the turn of the twentieth century, Arabs of the Sinai Peninsula were selling resin from the tamarisk tree as *man es-simma*, roughly meaning 'heavenly manna'. Tamarisk trees were once comparatively extensive throughout the southern Sinai, and their resin is similar to wax, melts in the sun, is sweet and aromatic (like honey), and has a dirty-yellow colour,

fitting in somewhat with the Biblical descriptions of Manna.

However, this resin is mostly composed of sugar, so it would be unlikely to provide sufficient nutrition for a population to survive over long periods of time, and it would be very difficult for it to have been compacted into cakes.

Other researchers have believed Manna to be a form of lichen. Known natural aerial falls of various lichens have been described as occurring in accounts separate from those in the Bible.

In the Biblical account, the name Manna is said to derive from the question *man hu?* seemingly meaning 'What is it?'; this is perhaps an Aramaic phrase, not a Hebrew one. *Man* possibly comes from the Arabic term *man*, meaning plant lice, with *man hu* thus meaning 'this is plant lice'. This fits one modern identification of Manna as the crystallized honeydew of certain scale insects. In the environment of a desert, such honeydew rapidly dries due to evaporation, becoming a sticky solid, which later turns a whitish, yellowish, or brownish colour. Honeydew of this form is considered a delicacy in the Middle East and is a good source of carbohydrates. In particular, there is a scale insect that feeds on tamarisk, which is often considered to be the prime candidate for Biblical Manna.

Another type is Turkey Oak Manna, also called Kurdish Manna. It is formed by aphids and appears white. It was common in western Iran, northern Iraq and eastern Turkey. When dried it forms into crystalline lumps which are hard and look like stone. These are pounded before making into breads. Other minority identifications of Manna are that it was a *kosher* species of locust.

Food was not Manna's only use; one classical rabbinical source states that the fragrant odour of Manna was used in an Israelite perfume.

So we may never know for sure the exact nature of Manna - food for the Israelites it may have been - but it is also food for thought.

Claire Connick

Jews' College



Queen's House, Queen's Square

When Judith, Lady Montefiore died in 1862, her husband Sir Moses intended to perpetuate her memory by building a theological college in Jerusalem with ten houses for the students, who would be provided with a library and granted an annual subsistence allowance. However, shortly afterwards he changed his mind and decided to build the Judith, Lady Montefiore College on land adjoining his own country house and Synagogue in Ramsgate. His wish was 'to promote the study of the Holy Law ... as a memorial of his sincere devotion to the Law of God ... and as a token of his love ... for his late wife'.

There had been earlier attempts to found a Jewish adult education college in London, instigated by the Sephardi community. Sadly, it was not a success, failing to produce a single qualified candidate for the Jewish community and the project was abandoned. The Ashkenazim, too, started a *Bet Hamidrash* in the early years of the Great Synagogue, but this never achieved the hopes placed in it. However, with the movement among Jews to venture into more modern methods of culture and learning, springing from the Enlightenment on the continent, new centres began to appear in France and Germany, differing from the old *Yeshivot* and resembling more closely a university style of academic study.

The establishment in England of a Jewish progressive movement, with sermons in English and a more professional leadership, coincided with the appointment of a new Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, Nathan Adler. His own education

had embraced some of these more modern secular subjects and foremost among his ideas for Anglo-Jewish education was the foundation of a Jewish theological seminary.

On 25th April 1852 a preliminary meeting of a provisional committee was held to investigate the possibility of achieving such a project, under the chairmanship of Sir Moses. It was attended by representatives of both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, and was held at Sussex Hall, the headquarters of the Jews' and General Literary and Scientific Institution. The proposal was to form a Jews' College, together with a school, to be established in London. This was to 'afford a liberal and useful Hebrew and English education to the sons of respectable parents, and the training of Ministers, Readers and Teachers'. Pupils were to be 'boys between the ages of nine and fifteen years, who can write and read English, and read Hebrew, to be admitted as day scholars'.

Not all the of the Jewish community was happy about the plans

The curriculum was to include, apart from the necessary Jewish, Hebrew and Biblical instruction, classes in English Grammar, Composition and Literature, Ancient and Modern History, Geography, both physical and political, Arithmetic and Bookkeeping, the elements of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, the Latin, French and German languages - a very comprehensive programme indeed for young Jewish pupils of that time. Scholarships were provided for those who could not afford the fees (£10 per annum), and there was to be a system of examinations and diplomas, and if funds permitted, boarding arrangements might later be introduced. Successful pupils would be encouraged to go on to study at University College London, the only university which would take Jewish students at the time.

Not all of the Jewish community was happy about the plans. The proposed school was held by some to be too far

from Jewish tradition to be suitable, the subjects impracticable, and it was decided to concentrate on the College as a seminary for Ministers and for older pupils.

Premises were taken in Finsbury Square, the location of many prosperous Jewish families, and Louis Loewe was appointed Principal. Loewe was a much-travelled scholar, attached to Sir Moses' staff on his journeys. He later edited the Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore. Other staff were appointed (not all of them Jewish) and with excellent premises, a Library and considerable financial support, the new academic institution was on its way.



Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler

Jews' College soon established itself as an institution where high quality rabbinical training was in place, with staff of distinction and very high standards of academic study. The student numbers grew quickly and soon outgrew the premises, which moved in 1881 to a larger house in Tavistock Square near the University. The house had been the home of Charles Dickens until he moved to Doughty Street, not far away and which is now the Dickens Museum.



Tavistock House

Although the College continued to increase both in size and in standing, the school did not do so well, and had to close for lack of support in 1880. At about the same time the College decided to confine its training to those students who wished to enter the Jewish ministry only, rather than to remain as a general centre for higher education. The constitution was changed to read that 'the objects of Jews' College are the educating and training of Ministers, Preachers, Readers and Teachers of Religion for Jewish Congregations whose vernacular is the English language.' Starting between the ages of sixteen to twenty, prospective students had to pass an entrance examination in Jewish subjects and to have matriculated at the University of London.

Fears were expressed that there would be insufficient numbers of qualified students for the college to be viable and arrangements were made for an 'Elementary class' for younger boys to prepare them for admission to the College proper. Entrants, or their parents, had to undertake to follow the profession of Minister (or equivalent) so that no student could take advantage of higher education facilities and then leave to take up another career.

By this time the secular subjects formerly available at the College were discontinued (except in the Preparatory Class), though such subjects were available at University College which was now playing a close part in the structure of Jews' College. A Literary and Debating Society was formed with public lectures by distinguished scholars, including Solomon Schechter, Dr. Moses Gastner, Claude Montefiore and Lucien Wolf, among others.

Not long after the move to Tavistock Square, the College found itself in considerable financial difficulties. It was rescued - perhaps surprisingly, as it was an orthodox establishment - by the West London Synagogue, although some of the College Board of Governors were suspicious of the motives behind the gift. Claude Montefiore, instigator of the Jewish Liberal movement in England, was active in the direction of the College and was anxious for its students to be well versed in English studies as well as Jewish ones. He said, when invited to



Dr Louis Loewe the first Headmaster 1855-58

preside at the Annual Prize Giving, 'A young man of twenty-four who knows his Maimonides but does not know his Aristotle, who knows his Graetz but does not know his Gibbon, is like a doctor who might know something of the ear or throat, but nothing of the human organism as a whole.'

The College did expand its scope, including the teaching of Arabic and Syriac in the syllabus and when it became necessary for another move (Tavistock House was earmarked for demolition), Montefiore wanted it to move to Oxford or Cambridge. However, the close links with University College weighed heavily on maintaining London as its home, and in 1900 the College moved into Queen's House, still in Bloomsbury, with generous gifts from the community, of an improved Library, a Science Laboratory and sports facilities, including tennis courts. Closer links with the Jewish community as a whole were now made possible, with the greater use of the lecture halls and library by the Jewish Historical Society, the United Synagogue, the Union of Jewish Literary Societies and many others. For the first time a Rabbinical Diploma was instituted, and a Ladies' Committee was set up, not - naturally - to offer training for the Ministry to women, but to look after the domestic needs and welfare of the students.

In the 1930s another move seemed to be necessary. This time generous donations indicated the construction of purpose-built premises, large enough to house not only the College but also some of the London Jewish organisations that needed a home. In fact the city was to have a

Communal Centre of its own for the Jewish community. In March 1932 Jews' College transferred to Woburn House, opposite the British Medical Association building in Woburn Place. Its colleagues in the new building included the headquarters of the United Synagogue, the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Memorial Council. They were joined the following year by the new Jewish Museum.

During the Second World War the College continued to function as best it could. The more valuable books in the Library were taken out of London, the College inaugurated a system of social welfare training and extension courses were provided for youth leaders, communal secretaries and relief workers.

In 1954 the College moved again, this time to Montagu Place, and finally, leaving Bloomsbury for the first time since its inception, to Hendon, now under the leadership of Rabbi Dr (now Lord) Jonathan Sacks, and with the financial backing of Stanley Kalms.

In 1998 the University of London terminated the Associated Institute status enjoyed by several small academic organisations, including Jews' College. Without it, the College could not continue to provide degree courses and issue diplomas. Many would-be Rabbis looked to Europe or America for their qualifications, and the College now became the London School of Jewish Studies, offering a wide range of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish learning. Its President is the Chief Rabbi, and it has grown to world-wide status as a centre of Jewish learning, offering - apart from academic study - educational tours, outreach to synagogues and short-term imaginative courses for men and women across the world.

Philippa Bernard

Jews in Mauritius? A little-known memorial in a surprising location

The island of Mauritius lies 1,200 miles off the coast of Africa (some 700 miles east of Madagascar), a green and temperate land, its palm-fringed beaches lapped by the sparkling waves of the Indian Ocean. Originally an uninhabited land, home of the Dodo, it was nevertheless known to Arab sailors in the tenth century, used as a visiting base by the Portuguese from 1507, and in 1638 the Dutch established a short-lived settlement there. Not until 1715 did it become a real colony, under the French, who established sugar plantations and slavery. French language and law took root, and became the basis of the Creole language that predominates today. However in 1810 it was conquered by the British, during the Napoleonic wars. Slavery was abolished in 1835, English law prevailed, but among the large numbers of indentured servants brought from India to labour in the sugar plantations, Creole remained. There is no Jewish community on the island, and there never was a history of Jewish settlement there. So how is it that on our way back from meeting the acting President, just near Beau Bassin, we were able to stop off and visit a Jewish cemetery?



The gates of the Cemetery

Mauritius gained its independence only in 1968, so it was still a British colony during the war when the Mandate authorities in Palestine decided to redirect to its shores one of the contingents of refugees who were trying to land in Haifa. Their arrival was blocked, despite the fact that they had already endured horrendous experiences escaping from Europe. They came from

Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Russia and the then autonomous state of Danzig. Some had papers, some were stateless, none had anything left of the savings they had set out with. The story of their escape is told in *The Mauritian Shekel* by Geneviève Pitot. She describes with precision and empathy the deceptions and brutality perpetrated against the refugees, as more than three thousand tried to make their way down the Danube in the winter of 1940. The river was frozen for long periods, the boats they could bargain for were often leaky craft, poorly manned and without enough fuel - the tale bears more than a little resemblance to what is happening today in the Mediterranean and the English Channel.

Several of their number died along the way - of typhus, of accidental drowning, of suicide, of heart failure. They eventually made their way to Tulcea on the Black Sea and from there down into the Aegean and on to the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, on three boats. Cheated of fuel, the captain was forced to burn parts of the ship for fuel. Eventually they limped into the waters of Haifa, at the end of their nightmare voyage, but the authorities in Palestine refused them permission to land. Two ships were prepared to carry them onwards, some to Mauritius, some to Trinidad, also still a colony, where they would be held as civilian detainees.

As they were being transferred, a Haganah bomb destroyed one of the ships, the *Patria*. A few survivors of the explosion were allowed to stay; the greater number spent a short period in a camp before being crowded into the other ship, to complete the long journey to Mauritius. Depression was widespread, though ironically the physical conditions were now somewhat better than before. 1,527 of them arrived in Mauritius on 26th December 1940: 829 men, 606 women and 92 children.

Perhaps it came as no surprise by the time the refugees reached Mauritius that there were further harsh realities to be endured. Far from being welcomed and treated well, the detainees were ushered into a hastily converted prison. They were not supposed to be maltreated, but there was little food to spare, and the local governor was

concerned that their presence might adversely affect the islanders. So they were kept shut up at first, men strictly separated from women, the men in the stone prison-house, the women in ill-lit, poorly ventilated metal huts, all set in a swampy hollow, swarming with mosquitoes. With no resources there was little for anyone to do. And the beautiful surroundings outside the camp were shut off from them by high fences. Most Mauritians were not even aware of their presence.



In the camp workshop

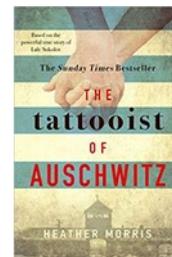
In 1942, a group of Czech Jews of military age were allowed to leave as volunteers for the British Army. On the way, they stopped in South Africa, where they were able to give a first-hand account of living conditions in the camps. The South African Jewish community began to send aid, and gradually conditions improved. There were more materials for workshops, whose products could be sent back and sold in Johannesburg. Parcels started to arrive through the Red Cross; education for the children improved, including art classes, and at one point there was even an expedition to the beach. More importantly, children began to be born, as living arrangements were relaxed, allowing married couples to be together, and a number of new marriages took place.



*'Production line' weddings.
A cartoon by Fritz Haendel*

Book Review

The Tattooist of Auschwitz
by
Heather Morris



Published by Zaffre
2018

I have lost count of the number of books on the Holocaust and its survivors and there is no doubt that there are many more that I have never heard of, let alone read. However, I have just finished reading a story that had me in tears several times – not through the terrible cruelty, which still has the power to shock, but because of the sheer beauty of the way in which the tale gradually unfolds. It stands out amongst the rest as a rare beacon of hope and belief.

The book is *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* and is based on the true story of Lale Sokolov, who because of his command of several languages, was forced to become a tattooist, marking the arms of fellow victims, in that place of brutality and squalor.

Recounted, during a series of harrowing interviews by the author Heather Morris, a non-Jew, it is, incongruously, a love story. It is heart-breaking in its intensity but also life-affirming - a tale of courage, strength and of an indomitable spirit.

It is moving and uplifting - even while reading through the passages of evil and vicious behaviour of those in charge of the infamous camp. It features romance in a place of misery, degradation and hopelessness in such a way that it left me totally amazed at the ability of human beings to overcome their worst experiences in pursuit of love.

I urge you to read it.

Claire Connick



A camp Synagogue - Rabbi Meier Bieler from Danzig taking the Services

Orthodox and Reform *minyans* coexisted peaceably, and the four Christians in their number met regularly with Anglican priests. Many who had been purely secular Jews at home now knew much more about their religious heritage.

The great majority of the detainees were held right through to the end of the war, and their deprivations were not over: in January 1945, a terrible cyclone hit the island, destroying many of the buildings and knocking out the electricity supply for several months. From February 1945, when it was announced that the detainees (now graced with the title 'émigrés') would

be allowed to enter Palestine, many of the camp restrictions were lifted, and in August of that year the surviving detainees set sail for Haifa. However, 127 failed to survive those four years, and they are buried at Beau Bassin, in an exclusively Jewish cemetery alongside the Christian one.

In 2014 a Memorial centre was also set up there in their honour. Displays show this almost forgotten episode through pictures and accounts of the time. The curator, Vanessa, was originally sent here from the National Museum as semi-retirement, on account of heart problems. However, as she began to explore the materials and follow things up, it gave her a whole new lease of life and a HUGE heart! Our warmest thanks to Vanessa for a most moving and appropriate visit.



Vanessa & Valery

A handsome booklet was compiled by the African Jewish Congress in November 2016: *The Beau Bassin Jewish Detainees (Mauritius): A Brief History with Illustrations.*



General view of the cemetery - and two of the gravestones



Valery Rees

Fitness training

In line with the Government's push for the reduction of obesity and the promotion of general health, it is proposed that a number of members of this Synagogue should be formed into a rowing team, with a view, once the necessary training has been put in place, to purchasing a small vessel to row across the Atlantic, enabling the crew to meet up in New York with friends from a Temple 'across the pond'. The close proximity of Kent House to the river would make training reasonably easy, probably on Friday evenings after the service.

The team will be led by Gary and both Ministers, together with all Honorary Officers. The majority of the Council is committed to the project. Two congregants have agreed to sponsor the boat and once it has been acquired, the first meeting will take place (date to be announced) on the north bank of the Thames at Albert Bridge. We are fortunate in having secured the services of the international coach, OLAF LOPRI to lead the training. All those interested in participating in this exciting venture are asked to contact him, via Jon Zecharia, jon@westminstersynagogue.org

A Soldier's Tale

In a recent edition of the Anglo-Israel Association's magazine a story appeared which was so touching that we reproduce it here.

A young soldier tells the tale. He was housed in an eight-storey building with no lift and with three of the floors being below street level. The stairways were dark and the poor immigrants who mainly occupied the house would take the lightbulbs for their own homes when theirs burned out, making things worse.

The soldier, who had originally moved to Israel from California, felt a huge cultural and mental distance between the other immigrants and himself. They were from Georgia and spoke little or no Hebrew.

He was returning from fighting in the Yom Kippur war and saw to his intense annoyance that his mailbox was painted red. His was the only one so marked. Even some of the letters in the box were glued together with red paint.

He was understandably angry and spoke to the old man who usually sat in the doorway of the building, wearing a beautiful *kippah*, and who seemed to be the caretaker. The lad demanded to know what his neighbours had against him. The old man told him that, far from being against him, they had wanted to protect him. To this end, knowing that he was fighting for Israel and the Jewish people, they had painted his mailbox red so that the Angel of Death would pass over his home - just as in the *Pesach* story when our ancestors painted the doorposts red so that the Angel of Death would pass them by.

The soldier said, 'It was at that moment that I realised that the blood flowing in the veins of these new immigrants, whose mentality I could not understand, was the same Jewish blood that flowed through mine. In that one moment my whole attitude started to change and I began to establish unlikely friendships with some of those neighbours. I understood their love for their fellow Jew and their love of the Land of Israel. This was my lesson in not judging others, based on superficial things.'

Education Report



Nick Young
Head of Education

Purim has just passed, and we are moving closer to the festival of *Pesach*. An element that the two Jewish festivals have in common is freedom from oppression, and we are reminded, particularly at *Pesach*, that though we may live in a free society, there are many others in the world who are less fortunate. As a people who have suffered historically as we have, in biblical times and more recently, we have a particular understanding and sensitivity towards the downtrodden - but it is also an innate part of our ethical principles as Jews to work for freedom. Indeed, human rights are innate to Jewish values and to the collective Jewish experience.

From our earliest experiences as a people, the values of justice, freedom and equality have been part of what it means to be Jewish. Values such as *b'tzelem Elohim*; that each person is crafted in the image of God and each life is sacred, and lines of *Torah* such as: *Tzedek, tzedek tirdof*: צדק צדק יתיר צדק Justice, justice thou shalt pursue. (*Deuteronomy 16:20*), make our obligations as Jews quite clear. Rabbi Jonathan Kligler writes, 'Over the millennia, a deeply thoughtful, detailed, and sensitive discussion emerged as generations of Jewish thinkers expanded and expounded upon the question of what it means to treat people justly and fairly.'

Last December marked the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UDHR is a historic document which outlines the rights and freedoms everyone is entitled to.

It was the first international agreement on the basic principles of human rights.

The document is celebrated as a collective statement of faith in the human family and of hope for its future. That faith and that hope laid the foundations and shone the light for future generations of human rights commitments.

The primary architect of the UHDR was René Cassin, a French Jew who was profoundly influenced by Jewish philosophy. Born on 5th October 1887 in Bayonne, France, he was particularly marked in his childhood by the verdict in the Dreyfus Affair that rocked and divided France from 1894 until its resolution in 1906. The affair is often seen as a modern and universal symbol of injustice, and it remains one of the most notable examples of a complex miscarriage of justice and of anti-Semitism. Cassin trained as a lawyer and, having served in the French army with distinction during the First World War, became a Professor of Law at the University of Aix-en-Provence and then the University of Paris. He was a French delegate to the League of Nations from 1924 to 1938 where he campaigned ardently for disarmament and the development of institutions to facilitate the resolution of international conflicts.

After World War II, he was determined to work against tyranny and towards a framework of human rights to prevent history repeating itself. He was a delegate to the UN Commission of Inquiry into War Crimes (1943-1945) and regularly served as a delegate for the French Government to the UN General Assembly and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Cassin then became president of the Hague Court of Arbitration from 1950-1960.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Cassin was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968. Upon hearing that he was to receive the Prize, he commented, 'I am very happy. It is not given to every man to have the luck to learn law, to teach it, to make it as a judge and promote it internationally as an international judge'.

He added 'I would be happier if there were a little more justice in the world'.

We are very fortunate to have relatives of René Cassin as members of our community, and were very grateful for their support in enabling us to hold a Human Rights *Shabbat* in December, which included a talk by Mia Hasenson-Gross, the Executive Director of the René Cassin charity. The charity, which describes itself as being the Jewish voice for human rights state that their mission is to bring 'a little more justice' to the world in René Cassin's name.

At this time in particular, let us contemplate and try to appreciate the value and the obligation of our own freedom. May we acknowledge that it is a part of Judaism to take responsibility and to help others who are oppressed. We are aware of human trafficking and slavery, of millions living in poverty, and those suffering under oppressive regimes in a world that we know is far from perfect. Let us be inspired by René Cassin and others such as Raphael Lemkin (who coined the term *genocide* and was the moving force behind the Genocide Convention), Hersch Lauterpacht (who brought crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression into modern international law, via the Nuremberg Charter), whose Judaism has informed their work in promoting justice and human rights, and has been at the core of landmark ethical and historical statements. There are many organisations working to support human rights, but by clicking <http://www.renecassin.org/get-involved>, one can find out about ways to get involved in the work of the René Cassin charity.

As René Cassin said, 'There will never be peace on this planet as long as human rights are being violated in any part of the world'. This is a call to action that resonates resoundingly at this time.



Planning Your Diary

Seder Night

Friday 19th April

Pesach 1st Day

Saturday 20th April

Pesach Last Day

Friday 26th April

Erev Shavuot

Saturday 8th June

Shavuot

Sunday 9th June

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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

