

# Our Congregation



News and views from Belsize Square Synagogue

## ISRAEL, FESTIVALS AND SINAI'S PLACE IN HISTORY

### Shalom Chaverim,

Early good wishes for a *Yom Ha'atzma'ut Same'ach* on Israel's 69th anniversary and *Chag Shavuot Same'ach* for God's revelation at Sinai, giving the Torah to Israel.

First, Israel's Independence Day. This is also the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Six Day War from 5-10 June and of the liberation of Jerusalem. As a young teenager, I remember the tense days before that war, our fears when Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled the United Nations peacekeeping troops and mobilised his forces in Sinai, cutting off Israel's access to the Red Sea. As Nasser threatened to end the Jewish State, war seemed imminent.

And then the miracle of Israel's military victory, seemingly invincible and with the apparent promise that this would be the final war, that peace would at last descend on Israel and the entire region.

It did not happen that way. Jordan, though warned against attacking, did so under pressure from Nasser. Israel turned King Hussein's blunder into the liberation of Jerusalem and Jewish holy sites, with control of the "West Bank" – or Judea and Samaria – in the hope of exchanging territory for peace (UN Resolution 242).

Well, Israel is still there and, as a result

of "occupation", Jews in Israel and outside are as divided as ever about how Israel should proceed without a negotiating partner for peace. Liberal Jews point to the seemingly irreversible poison of occupation that destroys Israel's values and erodes each day the promise of peace.

The other side say: "Don't be naive". In every generation, as the Haggadah warns us, there are those out to destroy us. Look at Israel's neighbours: Hezbollah and Assad to the north, Hamas to the south, ISIS to the northeast, Islamic extremism and terror threats everywhere. To the east a moribund Palestine Authority rewards terrorism and "martyrdom", using its media, educational system and international apparatus to promote the demise of Israel, as it calls for boycotts and delegitimising of Israel at the UN.

Two sides of the coin, both with much truth. At Passover we are reminded there are enemies *b'chol dor vador*, in every generation, attempting to destroy us – a clear reference to anti-Semitism. Since the creation of the UN in 1945 only one nation, Iran, has uniquely and consistently called for the utter annihilation of another UN member state, which it terms the "Zionist entity".

No other nation has been so threatened or consistently found so little support from other nations. Iran should have been immediately expelled from the

UN for calling for the destruction of another nation. But...silence.

We have moved from Passover, the story of our liberation from oppression and bondage, fully aware of the threats that have historically hovered over the Jewish people and of the ongoing madness and evil that has taken so many innocent lives, especially in Syria. The Haggadah reminds us not to be naive. Evil exists.

Yet, despite so many battles for survival, we will celebrate Shavuot, the giving of the Torah. Sinai represents our spiritual inheritance, the laws, *mitzvot*, that remind us not to forget the environment we shed when accepting the new values of our ancestors: compassion coupled with love of justice and the sanctity of life. That is our calling which we affirm each year as, with Sefer Torah in hand, we travel towards a better tomorrow.

Let us use this sacred time to strengthen our purpose in our Jewish existence and destiny as we march through the timeless messages of our holy days and historic days between Passover and Shavuot, celebrating the gift of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

May you all have a joyous Shavuot and join us for our annual night of study, our Tikkun Leyl Shavuot, on Tuesday evening 30 May, 6 Sivan 5777.

Shalom always,

Rabbi Altshuler

### SHAVUOT OFFICE CLOSING

The Synagogue Office will close at 12 noon on Tuesday 31 May.

It will re-open at 9.00am on Friday 2 June.

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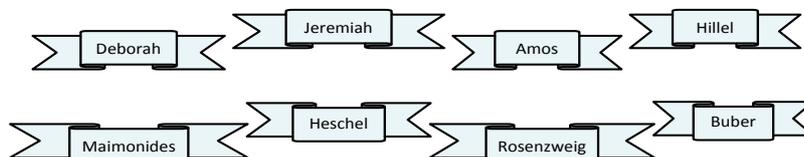
### TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

Tuesday 30th May

From Deborah to Buber

Jewish Prophets and Sages from Bible Times to Today

Experiencing the beating heart of Judaism through their writings



Service: 6.45pm, Tikkun Leil: 7.30pm until 11.00pm

Bring a milky pot luck dinner





# BERLIN CHILDREN'S CHOIR JOINS OUR SINGERS

## Return visit from young choristers of Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue

What a performance, as you might say. All those kids on stage: 15 young visitors from Berlin plus our full complement of 35 youth choristers, vastly outnumbering the eight adult professionals who (no surprise) effortlessly held their own, not to mention our community choir (another six voices). And then there were the outstanding soloists, the cantors of Belsize Square and Pestalozzistrasse Synagogues.

This was a fun night out. The competition came from the different composers, nearly all long since departed to more ethereal musical spheres, who each contributed their two minims' worth, and more, to the Great Jewish Liturgical Songbook. Three versions of *Mah Tov* and four of *Adon Olam* –and that's without the standard "de Sola" *Adon Olam* in the British military band repertoire.

and compere for the evening, told us this piece is usually taken to be Verdi-influenced but I think it more likely that Naumbourg was matey with his fellow countryman and almost exact contemporary, Jacques Offenbach, master of operetta. Not that it really matters. This was just a catchy tune, to put a smile on your face.

A more sombre note was struck by our cantor soloists, Paul Heller and Isaac Sheffer in their offerings, Cantor Sheffer with *Avinu Malkeinu*, in the familiar Janowski version widely popularised by Barbra Streisand; Cantor Heller with *Avinu Shebashamiyim*, written by a contemporary composer, Meir Finkelstein; and both cantors duetting in Lewandowski's *Deutsche Kedushah* as a finale. Cantor Heller was delighted with the inclusion of *Mah Tov* composed by his predecessor at his previous post in Stockholm, Cantor Leo Rosenbluth.

The younger children's repertoire focussed on familiar songs and prayers, with Alyson Denza conducting our children and Regina Yantian in charge of the Berlin children, then all the kids together. It's amazing what one afternoon's serious rehearsal can achieve!

With Michael Cayton's masterful and sympathetic organ accompaniment, as well as his welcoming solo, and the finale's "pop" list developing more and more into a sing-along, this was a truly enjoyable evening.



*Ben Wolf conducts our professional choir*

Thanking the host families and visitors, including Rabbi Jonah Sievers and gabbai'im (wardens) Heinz Rotholtz and Hans Joachim Will, Rabbi Stuart Altshuler said he had dreamed of making this happen. The result was even more memorable than he expected, resulting in an impressive and emotional weekend.



*Mixed childrens' choirs:  
Berlin visitors in red shirts  
Belsize Square kids in white shirts*

There were two versions of *Se'u She'arim*: the Lewandowski composition, familiar to us from services, and a toe-tapping number from Samuel Naumbourg, German-born and trained, who became Chief Cantor of Paris. Ben Wolf, conductor



*Alyson Denza conducts  
Belsize Square Youth Choir*

Chairman Jackie Alexander thanked the "unseen army" who organised the operation. When flowers were presented to the two conductors, Alyson Denza passed hers on to Leah Hurst to thank her for her huge administrative effort. We were all the beneficiaries.

**Ruth Rothenberg**



*The white-shirted Belsize Square Youth Choir and the Red-shirted Pestalozzistrasse Youth Choir*

# PESTALOZZISTRASSE KIDS COME TO BELSIZE SQUARE

Following the very successful and enjoyable visit to Berlin by our youth choir and assorted parents last December, it was agreed to try for a return visit in 2017. The Music at Belsize concert scheduled for Sunday 26 March offered the ideal opportunity to invite the Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue children's choir to come to London.

After much planning, email exchanges, phone calls and organising, a group of 15 children and 12 adults arrived by coach at Belsize Square Synagogue in time for lunch on the preceding Friday, 24 March. After a rapid meal, the kids went into town for some shopping with choirmistress Regina Yantian, before returning for a quick rehearsal and then singing in the Friday night service.

Visitors and host families then shared a communal meal in the hall before going to stay overnight with their host families. Many of the children already knew each other from the December trip and were happy to be staying together again.

After the Shabbat service, where both youth choirs sang, and following a brief detour to collect one last member of the German choir who had originally arrived at Berlin airport with the wrong passport, it was time for the afternoon sightseeing activities.

Simon Cutner and Zoe Cowan, ably assisted by Adam Hurst and Sam Sanders, organised a bus trip round London, including some games in Hyde Park. This was followed by pizza back at Belsize and bowling, after which all the kids (and most of the parents) returned home exhausted but happy.

Sunday saw the visitors attending Cheder, where Jeanie involved them in the week's activities. A free afternoon allowed the host families to have some time with their visitors to show them London or simply have a kickabout at the park. At five o'clock everyone regrouped at shul for a final rehearsal before the evening's concert. The concert itself was wonderful with the two youth choirs, community choir, professional choir and both cantors

performing a variety of music.

The weekend also allowed the adults to create closer ties with our Berlin friends and plans are afoot for further visits in the future. Finally on Monday morning 27 March, after a slightly tense wait for the coach to reappear, we waved off our Berlin guests with promises to stay in touch and visit again soon. It really feels as though this is the start of many firm friendships between our communities.

Many people contributed to the success of the weekend but I wanted to thank specifically the host families, Judith and Patrick Sciamma, Jeff and Lucia Salmon, Caroline and Mickael Loison, Karen and Sam Sanders, Emma and Joe Brookes, and Sophie and Simon Cutner. The kids all had a lovely visit and this is in no small part due to your kindness and hospitality.

**Leah Hurst**

*(who might do it all again but in a year or two)*

## OUR VISIT TO BERLIN

Ben Hurst looks back to the first part of our ground-breaking Youth Choir exchange

On a cold evening on Friday 16 December 2016, members of the Belsize Youth Choir set off to Berlin to sing at the Louis Lewandowski Festival. We were going to sing alongside the Jugendchor Synagoge Pestalozzistrasse, whose members were hosting us during the trip. As our flight landed, we met our hosts who had kindly come to collect us from the airport and were taken back to their homes.

The next day, we had an early start as both choirs were singing in the synagogue service. The service was a good chance to get to know everyone and afterwards we had a rehearsal with Regina, the director of the Berlin choir. As we practised with the accompaniment, there was a coach waiting outside to take us on a tour of Berlin.

After the tour, we arrived at the hotel which was the venue for the festival for some fun activities put on by our youth leaders. We then went back to the homes of our families and had a good night's rest for the performance the next day.

The next afternoon we had a rehearsal in the concert venue with all the other choirs we were performing with. We had some more activities to keep us entertained in between the rehearsal and the performance. In the evening we took our seats, ready to perform. The performance went well and I really enjoyed singing with our new friends. The next morning we said goodbye as we were taken to the airport by coach, ready to return home.

Overall, I thought this was an amazing experience and I hope that we will be able to see our German friends again, either here or in Germany! *(Which we did.)*



## COMMUNITY BABYSITTING REGISTER

The synagogue is aware that Members often need to find a babysitter for a child or grandchild and that this can be quite hard. We would like to create a babysitting register of members (or grandchildren and children of members) aged 15-23 years old who would be interested in babysitting for other members of the community. The list will be kept by the synagogue office and only be given to members who request it. The only information that will be passed on are name, phone numbers and postcodes, so the babysitter can be contacted directly.

Rates and references are negotiated directly and the synagogue will not officially endorse or recommend any individual.

All babysitters must be members or grandchildren/children of members of Belsize Square Synagogue. The synagogue is only introducing people and is not responsible for any arrangements that are made.

If you are aged 15-23 and would like to add your name to the register, please email [office@synagogue.org.uk](mailto:office@synagogue.org.uk) including your contact details, postcode and details of your synagogue connection. If you are under 18 years old, please confirm that your parent or guardian is happy with your joining the list.

We will launch the service as soon as we have created the list but if you are interested in using the service, you can register your interest now.





# TREASURES FROM JEWISH ALSACE ON SHOW IN PARIS

by Josephine Bacon

An exhibition of findings from the genizot (storerooms) of the little Jewish communities of Alsace, abandoned since the 2nd World War, will be on show at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme in the historic Jewish, and now generally trendy, district of the Marais in Paris from 29 June - 28 July.

Most are familiar with the discovery, well over a century ago, of the Cairo genizah, the astonishing horde of priceless documents found hidden away in the genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat, the old quarter of Cairo, that threw light on many hitherto obscure aspects of Jewish history, such as the fact that the Khazars were not a legend or myth but an actual Jewish community in central Asia.

The contents of the genizot found in the synagogues of the small towns and villages of Alsace come to Paris after being exhibited earlier this year at the Palais Rohan in Strasbourg. While not as sensational as those of Cairo, they are nevertheless extremely illuminating and a deeply poignant record, in view of the disappearance of these communities in the Holocaust.

## The Jews of Alsace

Alsace, on the French-German border, has a chequered Jewish history. Jews probably arrived with the Romans but their presence is not recorded until the early Middle Ages. Both sides of the river Rhine were once part of the Holy Roman Empire and French was the lingua franca. This is the origin of the famous "kehillat SHUM", these being the initials for Strasbourg-Worms-Mayence (Mainz), towns now on either side of the border that gave birth to great rabbinical sages and scholars in the Middle Ages.

Alsace subsequently became part of Germany, only reverting to France through the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. To the chagrin of its citizens, especially its Jewish citizens, it was lost again to France as a result of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and was not returned until 1918.

The Jews of Alsace were persecuted in the Middle Ages, especially during the Black Death (1348-1350). In 1349, the



Jews of Strasbourg were first victims of a pogrom and were subsequently expelled from the city, being forced to live in the surrounding little villages and small towns, such as Colmar and Dambach-La-Ville. The Dambach genizah treasures feature prominently in the exhibition.

Jews were also restricted to certain occupations, such as dealing in cattle and grain, as well as the traditional medieval Jewish occupation of money-lending, since Christians were banned by the church from lending money at interest. No synagogues were permitted to be built in Alsace between the 14th and 18th centuries.

In 1939, there were about 30,000 Jews in Alsace, of whom one third lived in Strasbourg, the rest being scattered in the villages in which these genizot were found. Fortunately, due to the conflicting policies of Vichy France and Nazi Germany, three-quarters of the Jews of Alsace escaped extermination during World War II.

In 1940, the Gauleiter Robert Wagner decided to expel any Jews remaining in Alsace, giving them one hour to pack their bags. Most fled to the unoccupied part of France, many settling in Nîmes and elsewhere in Provence. Some Jews, especially the elderly, never left and some returned; these were deported to concentration camps in 1941. One in four of these deportees did not survive.

## Exhibition Display

The exhibition contains a variety of artefacts that were found when the disused synagogues were rebuilt for other uses. Most date from the 19th and early 20th centuries. They include the sort of items one would expect to find in a genizah, such as damaged prayer books and scrolls of the Torah, but there are also many other items, of which the most typical are the mappot.

The mappah ("tablecloth" in modern Hebrew) is a wrapping around the Torah. It is a specifically Alsatian-Jewish custom to embroider a baby



boy's swaddling binding and donate it to the synagogue on the boy's third birthday, for it to be used to hold together the two wooden poles round which each end of the Torah scroll is wrapped.

Sadly, some of the mappot found are unfinished, probably because the child who wore one did not survive to his third birthday. There are also many other treasured items, such as a letter in French from a little girl to her grandmother for mother's day and fragments of French patriotic decorations.

The Jews of Alsace always favoured France for giving them equal rights with other French citizens after Napoleon applied the egalitarian ideas of the French Revolution to abolish ghettos and discriminatory practices. He was also aiming at their eventual assimilation.

This exhibition of the many artefacts preserved by the Jewish village communities wiped out by the Nazis is another poignant reminder of Jewish life in the heart of Europe that has vanished forever.

*(The museum, popularly known as "mahJ" is located in the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan, 71 Rue du Temple, 75003 Paris. Closed on Mondays.)*



*Not for recycling: Antique fragments from old Alsace communities*

# DRAW-DOWN FUND DRAWS DOWN AND BOWS OUT

## Six Point Foundation closes down

In September 2014, we explained how the Six Point Foundation came into existence through the efforts of our member, Ashley Mitchell, who successfully implemented the transition from 1950s care homes for Holocaust refugees and survivors, funded by German reparations, to a new financial pot supporting the next wave of ageing and needy Holocaust victims in their own homes.

Ashley became chair of "The Bishop's Avenue" group of care homes (OSHA – Otto Schiff Housing Association) in 1996 and saw that they had done their job. A new approach was needed.

Between 2001 and 2011 a sheltered housing block in Highgate, four old-age homes in The Bishop's Avenue and one

in Hampstead were sold for a total of nearly £60 million. A large proportion of this money was distributed to 18 communal welfare charities, including all those involved in the transition, plus three Holocaust-related organisations.

Over £6 million was then allocated to the Six Point Foundation, created in 2012. The title, suggested by the new chair, Susan Grant, referred both to the yellow star that the Nazis forced Jews to wear on their coats and to the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust. The foundation was intended from the start to be a "draw-down" fund with a limited life-span.

Around a third of the money went in grants to individuals for home adaptations, buying wheelchairs etc, a

third to five specific organisations dealing directly with victims of Nazi persecution, and a third to a project (SPF Connect) initiated by Ashley Mitchell, teaching these elderly people how to use computers and go online. This enabled them to keep in touch with each other and keep up to date with relevant developments.

He reckoned that this fund would operate for four years. It has continued for well over a year past the deadline and closed formally in March. Ashley, who stepped down once the Six Point Foundation was established – he believed the new body should be completely independent – said: "Unusually, this organisation did what it set out to do and succeeded as well as I could have hoped."

## SPF CONNECT

### Eve Hersov describes a very special computer service

We are delighted that over a dozen of our older members have shown interest in the SPF Connect programme to help older survivors and refugees use computers. Quite a few congregants now have easy-to-operate computers in their home. These machines are specially designed to assist people to send emails, make video calls and receive livestream services and entertainment.

Any of our older first generation refugee members can have a bespoke computer and software package, together with internet connection and technical support, free of cost until May 2020. Special keyboards are available for people with visual impairment and the equipment is designed to make it easy to use for those with sight, hearing or memory loss.

This is an individual service set up to help people who have never used a computer before, or those who have used computers but may be experiencing difficulty with their existing equipment. If you have any queries about this wonderful programme, please contact our Community Care Co-ordinator, Eve Hersov.



*Our member, Ruth Eisenfeld, admires a photo of her grandson on the computer she received through the SPF Connect programme*

## A LETTER TO OUR CHAIRMAN FROM OUR MP

Dear Jackie

Ahead of Pesach, I wanted to take this opportunity to wish you and your family well.

Having grown up amongst the community in Hampstead, some of my fondest memories include evenings spent around the Seder Table. The warm atmosphere I experienced and the lasting symbolism of the Pesach story continues to inform a relationship that I am deeply proud to hold.

I am honoured to represent a community whose contribution to the country's success is so profound. I am determined to highlight this in my visits to Jewish organisations, my interfaith work, and through any relevant speeches in Parliament. Above all else, I see Pesach as a story of Jewish emancipation and in 2017 it serves as a timely reminder for the challenges that lie ahead.

I therefore also wish to mark this holiday season by offering my unreserved commitment to standing up against anti-Semitism, wherever and however it may rear its ugly head. Whether it is violent or non-violent incidents in London or the threat of populist election victories across the Continent, I will be vocal and pro-active in supporting your community.

*Chag kasher v'sameach,*

**Tulip Siddiq MP,**  
*Member of Parliament for Hampstead and Kilburn*





# READING YOUR OWN LIFE IN A CHARITY'S ARCHIVES

## George Summerfield opens his file held by World Jewish Relief

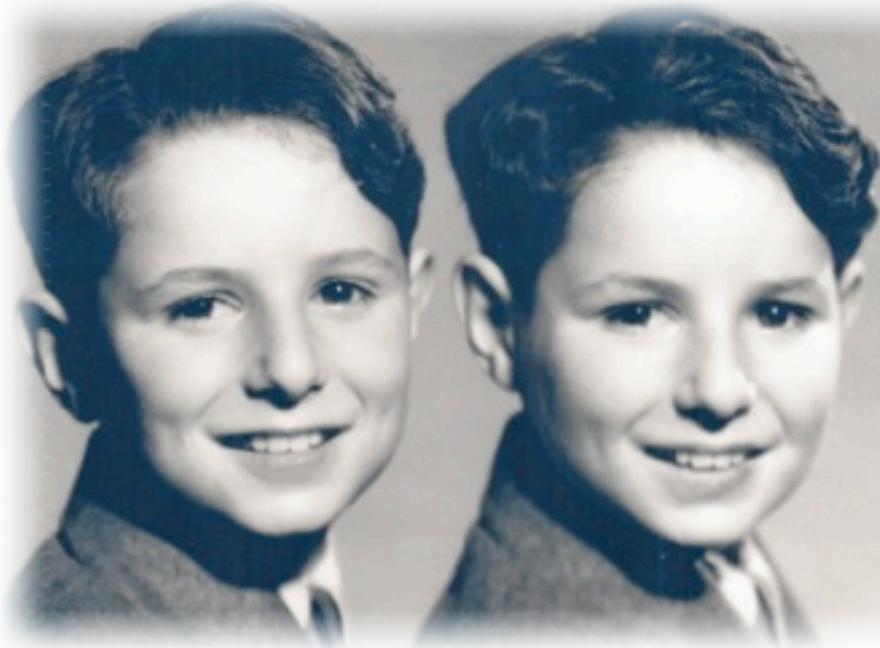
My twin brother Peter and I were six when we arrived in England with our parents on 27 August 1939 – just four days before Hitler invaded Poland. We travelled from Berlin by way of Hook of Holland to board a boat to Harwich, then train to Liverpool Street Station. On arrival we had only our hand luggage as all our possessions were stolen. We had virtually no money and no one to meet us.

We still remember standing at the station, knowing no English and feeling helpless. Eventually, to our relief, we were approached by a member of a Refugee Committee who arranged accommodation for a week at a hotel in Russell Square. We had permission to stay in England in transit en route to the USA, where an uncle had provided us with the affidavit which had enabled us to escape Germany.

In May 1940 our father was interned on the Isle of Man, and we spent six months during the Blitz sleeping every night in Tottenham Court Road underground station. From there our mother regularly visited Bloomsbury House, and we thought that this was to arrange passage to the USA.

What we did not know until a few weeks ago, with the discovery of our archives, is that Bloomsbury House was part of the Central British Fund for German Jewry (CBF) which in 1994 became World Jewish Relief (WJR). We now know that it was this charity that had met us at Liverpool Station, paid for our hotel, provided essential funds, contributed vital help in those early years and kept complete records of our family!

Recently my step-daughter, Tanya Freedman, who works for WJR, told me that she had researched our family archives, held jointly with London Metropolitan Archives. These archives survived by chance and were digitised. The database holds case files for around 35,000 of the 65,000 German



*Identical twins George and Peter Summerfield*

and Austrian Refugees, who arrived in this country between 1933 and 1945. The records include many who were on the Kindertransport and 732 survivors from the concentration camps.

Tanya arranged for Peter and me to have our database folders presented to us while a film unit recorded our reaction. The folders contained 21 pages with a full detailed record of our mother's visits (unsuccessful attempts to travel to the USA), our father's internment and, especially, our financial difficulties.

We were astonished to receive archives which filled in a large number of gaps and made us aware of the difficulties our parents encountered at that time. For example, our guarantor only agreed to hand over a very small amount each month of the money loaned by our family in Palestine. Fortunately the CBF helped out with extra funds to pay for rent and essentials.

Complete records were kept of all

transactions and a note of all the help received. Even recorded was the fact that we received £1 11s 6d (£1.55p) per week from the Unemployed Assistance Board, Kilburn. What brought tears to our eyes was to read that on 12 November 1940 the CBF helped us by providing 1 blanket, 1 suitcase and, for each twin, "2 sox, 2 vests, 2 pants".

Here in these detailed pages was historical evidence of all the problems and tribulations faced by our parents, much of which was kept from us as children. Seventy seven years after arriving as refugees in this country, it felt very emotional to suddenly discover that archives exist with so much detailed information. We now know how much we owe to World Jewish Relief/CBF for all the support and assistance given to our family in those early traumatic years.

If these archives are relevant to you or your family, we would encourage you to contact World Jewish Relief. We certainly found it well worthwhile.

## Piece together your family history



In the 1930s and 40s, World Jewish Relief rescued tens of thousands of people from the Nazis. We have the digitised family records of those we helped. Now we want to give them back to you, for free. Find out if we helped your family at: [worldjewishrelief.org/archives](http://worldjewishrelief.org/archives) or call 020 8736 1250

# HOW THE REFUGEE FILES SURVIVED

Due to lack of space at the offices of the Central British Fund for German Jewry in the 1950s, it was proposed to follow the example of many other aid organisations and destroy the Jewish Refugees Committee's records of a now concluded operation. But a few JRC members, who took the long view of history, removed the files and stored them – in a garage at the back of the Heinrich Stahl Home for Aged Refugees in The Bishop's Avenue.

The Jewish Refugees Committee was formed in 1933 to fulfil the Anglo-Jewish community's commitment to the British Government that no German Jewish immigrant should become a charge on the country. The community provided the funds (£3 million, today worth 60 times more) and the JRC helped the immigrants find accommodation and work, as well as help in things like job training, school fees or suitable clothing. Their grants were a life-saver to many a newcomer.

When the cabinets containing the files were rediscovered in the late 1980s, CBF's then director, the late Eva Mitchell, herself a former refugee, was determined to preserve them. With generous help from the late Dame

Simone Prendergast, granddaughter of Marks & Spencer founder Michael Marks, the files were microfilmed and the originals lodged at the Greater London Record Office in Clerkenwell, precursor of the London Metropolitan Archives. The LMA, now run by the City of London Corporation, came into existence in 1997.

With the ability to help individuals fill the gaps in this broken period of their family lives, the JRC used volunteers to answer Holocaust research enquiries. In 1994, CBF was split into two separate organisations, international relief work (World Jewish Relief) and care homes (Otto Schiff Housing Association, which eventually merged with Jewish Care). Eva Mitchell's successor on the WJR side, the late Cheryl Mariner, advertised at Belsize Square Synagogue for a German-speaking volunteer archivist and Lilian Levy answered the call.

Lilian worked for 20 years (1994-2014) helping enquirers. She started at the WJR office in Euston, which moved first to Camden Town and then to its current base in Golders Green. As space there is limited, and given the strong overlap between the subjects of the files and

membership of the Association of Jewish Refugees, she finished up in the AJR office in Stanmore. Since she worked from the microfilms, she rarely needed to visit the LMA to inspect the originals.

Lilian explains that while knowledge of German was rarely needed for these English records – possibly to translate a German document – her understanding of the background enabled her to explain the context to enquirers puzzled by the problems and situations presented. "The work was fascinating," she says.

"When refugees first came to Bloomsbury House they were registered alphabetically and each registration slip was given a number which cross-referenced with a file. When the archive was microfilmed (before I ever worked there) the same numbering and cross-referencing were maintained. Whenever I received tracing or search enquiries, I had to retrieve the registration slip, ascertain the file number, locate the relevant file and decipher the hand-written file notes. It sounds cumbersome but, even with approximately 70,000 registration slips, it somehow worked."

## WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? – HOW THE FILES ARE USED

### Lilian Levy recounts some of her "cases"

The Jewish Refugees Committee was founded in London in May 1933 in response to the Nazi threat of persecution of Jews in Germany and then throughout Europe. Jews were desperately trying to flee and though Hitler was willing to get rid of them to other countries, no country would let them in in sufficient numbers. This included Britain until intense lobbying by influential people ensured that at least some were admitted.

In the end, Britain accepted the most immigrants prior to the outbreak of war in 1939. Approximately 70,000 people entered this country through the auspices of the Jewish Refugees Committee and many of their files are still in existence today, including those of the approximately 700 young people ("The Boys" plus a few girls) brought to England from Theresienstadt and other former concentration camps.

They make very moving reading. There are stories of great loss, whole families being wiped out, with only one member able to flee the Holocaust. The files

also show that the few social workers the Jewish Refugees Committee was able to employ were overwhelmed by their caseloads and therefore not always in a position to comprehend the refugees' trauma and suffering.

The WJR archive was initially used by Holocaust survivors and their descendants when the German and Austrian governments started considering compensation and restitution payments. Many refugees had been unable to bring over family documents so that 30 years later they had great difficulty in proving their identity. The restitution authorities declared the archive to be a valid and authentic record and gave it a quasi-legal status.

So if we were asked by a survivor to let him or her have a "Certificate of Arrival", we were in a position of trust to give accurate information according to our records. This helped many to end their days with some financial security.

We were able to provide crucial

information in a Looted Art case by showing that the pre-war Austrian owner of a contested painting arrived in England in June 1939, long after the March 1938 Anschluss (annexation). This destroyed the museum's argument that the sale had been a normal commercial transaction. It was a forced sale and the museum had to return the valuable painting.

Nowadays the archive gets mostly genealogical enquiries from people searching for old friends from their arrival period in Britain and those who were adopted as babies or toddlers by Christian families. A successful tracing is practically impossible if the enquirer cannot supply a date of birth or surname, which could well have been anglicised later. We do not have current addresses and the files of European Jews assisted by the Jewish Refugees Committee were mostly closed around 1947-48, when they became naturalised British citizens and ceased being refugees.

*(Continued on page 8)*





# HUGO KOPPELMANN GERSCHEL: 1921-2017



Hugo was born in Wilmersdorf, Berlin, on 18 August 1921. His father, Walter, was a businessman in a very large family firm of printers. He adored his mother, Liesl, and had a younger sister, Ursel. The family was well-to-do and observant to very varying degrees before the 1930s.

Hugo was 12 when he was sent to English boarding school in 1933, having got into trouble at school in Berlin for voicing anti-Nazi views. Initially he went to a school in Cambridge and was then moved to Oakham School in Rutland. With little English, he was very lonely at first, especially as he had to stay on at school during holidays. In February 1939, his mother and sister came over and settled in Belsize Park. His father also managed to leave Germany and Hugo's half-brother, Peter, was born in London in 1940, from Walter's second marriage to Anni Fraser.

Hugo's Aliens Order Certificate of Registration records that in October 1939 he was exempted from internment as a 'refugee from Nazi

oppression'. Having left school at 18 and joined a printing firm as a trainee machine minder, Hugo tried four times from 1939 – 1943 to join the army or 'do something useful' with the War Office, Home Guard and the Fire Guard, but was repeatedly refused, as a foreign national. He kept all the rejection letters. He was finally accepted into the Territorial Army in 1942 and commissioned in 1946.

By chance, it was noticed that he was a qualified printer with knowledge of lithography and he was transferred to Royal Leicestershire, Field Survey Division, where he spent the rest of his army career printing maps for the British army in Egypt. He rose to the rank of captain before being demobbed in November

1948. He was naturalised in November 1947. Up till only a few years ago, he regularly attended annual reunions at the Imperial War Museum of "His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens".

It was in Egypt in 1947 that he met and married Sheila Elric, a NAAFI secretary and, after their return to London, three children were born: Elizabeth, Peter and Michael. Sadly, he lost his son Peter at 18 in 1969. He and Sheila separated in 1967 and later divorced. Through the Hampstead Conservative Association, of which he was a long-term and active member, he met Erica Rice. They lived very happily together until her death in 2004. Sheila died in 2007: in the last years of her life, Hugo and Sheila were good friends.

Hugo had remained in the printing business until he and Erica set up Rice-Gerschel Import and Export, which involved them in travelling and sales exhibitions all over the world, as agents selling expensive small "business gifts".

After the disruption of his youth, Hugo rediscovered his religion quite late and

started learning Hebrew in his thirties. He joined Belsize Square Synagogue in 1979 and was a regular congregant, sometimes accompanied in the last two decades by his daughter, Liz. He specialised in driving widowed or single ladies of the congregation to shul for services, especially on the High Holydays.

A committed Freemason, he was initiated into Mozart Lodge in 1978 and held high office in that lodge as well as Pilgrim Lodge and Old Oakhamian Lodge, his old school lodge. But ill health and the difficulty of travelling to Rutland forced him to resign there in 2014. His contribution to the caring and welfare side of Masonry, as well as his ever-popular presence, resulted in honorary memberships and enormous respect.

Walking in the woods at Oakham as a teenager gave Hugo a lasting interest in plants and flowers and gardening, which he shared with his daughter. He was fond of travel and spoke German and French fluently until the last two years of his life. His Alzheimer's was first noted in 2012 but with the support of his children he continued to live independently at home until a few months ago. He died in London on 15 March 2017, aged 95, in Boundary Road, in the Swiss Cottage area where he had spent most of his adult life.

Hugo enjoyed debate and was ready to discuss any subject that caught his attention. He had very clear ideas of how things should be done, in a wide range of fields, and frequently shared these with others. This characteristic did not diminish with age, his arguments invariably punctuated with the flexing of his impressively full eyebrows.

He leaves his daughter, son and three grandchildren: Joshua, Nicole (who is in Australia) and Adam; a niece and nephews in Canada, and very many cousins across the world.

**Liz Gerschel**

*(Continued from page 7)*

Yet there are a handful of people who have been able to discover their wider families though our records. Others can be traced if they joined the British Army, since their army number is recorded at the Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow. We were also able to help when

approached by BBC Two's popular series *Who Do You Think You Are?* for family information on David Baddiel and Jerry Springer.

These rare cases of success are very gratifying but it is very painful to think how alone, lonely and unprotected so many of the refugees were – especially

the young girls and boys who arrived without any surviving family.

*This article is taken from a talk given by Lilian Levy to WJR after retiring in 2014 as a volunteer assistant helping with people's enquiries.*

## Dear Fellow Members

At my time of live it is such a pleasure to come away from winter. Here we are now in the darling butts of May und have the hole of summer ahead to saviour. Und by darling butts I don't mean the prime minister. She is still in my bed books for signing the 50 articles und all the time insisting on hard when this is not what most levers want.

I am at the moment having to vend for myself as Mrs Klopstick is in Kenya on high attitude training with Sir Mo Pharaoh. She wants to enter an ultra-marathon in California in July. I am totally against this meshugas und intent to put my foot in it. At her big age she really dozen need to go all this way. There are plenty of ultra-marathons she can run into here on our doormat in Gross Briton.

News has just come threw to me that the arthorities in Israel have given the go sign for a new settlement on the West Bank. This sounds to me like a rag to a red bull. This will unrage the Palestinians und give big ammunition to the many enemies of the state. Perhaps if they built a mosk alongside such settlements this would show the world some Israeli magnomadity.

Something terrible has happened with my tallis. Mrs K told me that it was looking very grabby und I should take it to the specialized yiddish dry laundry in Golders Green, By Mir Bist Du Klean. But this tallis is very pressures to me und I don't like to let it out from my site. We have a communal wash room in Abernein Mansions und I put it in with my shirts und other cloths. It has come out clean but the fringes are completely mingled. I tried to comb them but then the threats started to come out one by one. Now my tallis is partly bald. Can someone be suggestive to me how I can come over this dilemma?



On the first of June will be my eightieth anniversary from my barmitzvah in Fasanstrasse Synagogue, Berlin. Just beforehand I caught a terrible cold witch left me without a voice. So I had to mime my portion while my cousin Horst Pinkelmann sat under the legturn und did the singing for me. Since then I have only been able to mime my parts, but I don't think this wood go down well in Belsize Square, nor would my cousin, especially as he is now bound to a wheel chair in Palm Springs. So for now I keep quite about it.

Und talking from anniversaries, on thirteenth of July Mrs Klopstick will turn up ninety years old. We are planning a big celebration in the gardens from Abernein Mansions. We are having a marquis und barbie queue und expect a large number to appear for this occasion. It is just a pity the Mrs K won't be there because she has entered the senior citizens triathalon in Murmansk on the same day.

I see that Ken Lebensraum is again sprouting off his version of history. It is of cause a complete reversal of the truce. He is the latest in a long line of denyers who will always distract the facts to suit there own endings. He seams incapable of not getting his foot from his mouse every time he opens it.

I was hoping to book a crews for when Mrs K returns from Murmansk as most from our friends who are still self-mobilised are going on this sort of thing. But nothing is farther from my wife's mind. She says that she has never been very good with the elderly und to be stuck with them on bored a ship seeing them rapped in blankets in the baking sun wood drive her to extraction.

With the best of intentions

Fritz Klopstick

## Shabbat Candle Lighting

Friday 5 May:	Vivienne Becker
Friday 12 May:	Mary Schiffer
Friday 19 May:	Karen Avramov
Friday 26 May:	Ruth Rothenberg
Tuesday 30 May:	Sarah Benioff
Wednesday 31 May:	Claire Walford

Friday 2 June:	Olivia Fox
Friday 9 June:	Amanda Hellman
Friday 16 June:	Claire Makepeace
Friday 23 June:	Trisha Ward
Friday 30 June:	Hannah Percival

## Tuesday 2 May Erev Yom Ha'atzma'ut

### Come and celebrate Israel's 69th birthday

Great dinner, music, dancing & speaker with appeal for our chosen charities



£45 per head

## BELSIZE ISRAEL TRIP 7 - 13 June

A great opportunity to meet Members of the Knesset, leading rabbinical and Arab figures, visit the Temple Museum, West Bank and settlements, and have a spectacular Shabbat experience

Please let Rabbi Altshuler know if you are interested in joining us



## The Health Insurance Company Health Insurance Specialist for the Over-50s

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## FLAT TO LET - £425 per week plus outgoings

Lovely furnished two double bedroom flat with great views to rent near Heath Extension, NW11.

Two double bedrooms, two bathrooms, reception room & kitchen arranged over first and second floors of sought-after purpose-built block, total area 819 sq.m, conveniently situated within walking distance of Golders Green tube station and Heath Extension.

Comprising communal entrance with entry phone to hallway, communal stairs to first floor & entrance to flat, wooden flooring, doors to both bedrooms, each with fitted wardrobes and en suite bathroom with separate shower area. Internal stairs to upper floor landing, door to main reception with large built-in cupboard and refitted kitchen with integrated appliances. Off-street parking in secure car park.

Please contact Leah Hurst 07528 579182 if interested.



# Community News

## NEW MEMBERS

**We extend a cordial welcome to:**

- Greg Jacobs & Olivia Fox
- Marilyn & Michael Glyn
- Josh Temkin
- Vera Kovacs
- Samuel Freedman
- Ellie Davis
- Louis Cheslaw
- Elaine Bernstein
- Vivienne & Jack Linton
- Selina & Daniel Egerton
- Elliot Schneiderman
- Denise & Gideon Israel
- Lili Neghabani and son Benjamin

## BIRTHS

**Congratulations and best wishes to:**

- Daniel & Michelle Samson on the birth of Aurelia Darcy
- Michael & Daniella Taub on the birth of Georgina Rebecca
- Ricky & Phoebe Cohen on the birth of Rafe
- Susie & Joby Blume on the birth of Ezekiel
- Philip & Sarah Simon on the birth of Cody Martin

## BAR MITZVAH

**Congratulations and best wishes to:**

- Idan Avramov, son of Karen Avramov (27 May)

## BIRTHDAYS

**Congratulations and best wishes to:**

- Mrs O Herman (86) on 12 May
- Mr I Rynhold (88) on 16 May
- Mr C Kissen (87) on 19 May
- Mrs C Fraylich (90) on 25 May
- Mr G Summerfield (84) on 3 June
- Mr P Summerfield (84) on 3 June
- Mrs I Feldstein (91) on 22 June
- Mrs M Smith (102) on 24 June
- Lord P Eden (96) on 27 June
- Mr P Koppel (84) on 29 June
- Mrs M Katz (94) on 30 June

## DEATH

**We regret to announce the passing of:**

- Hugo Gerschel, on 15 March

## STONESETTING

The stonesetting for the late Margot Nathan will take place on Wednesday 14 June at Edgwarebury Cemetery at 10.00am

**Save The Date (Youngsters Only)**  
**THE SKEET WEEKEND - 15-17 September**

## LOCAL LUNCHEON GROUPS

Still running and happy to welcome new members  
Please let us know if you plan to attend

### The NW3 Group

Giacomo, 428 Finchley Road, London NW2 2HY  
**1.00pm on Wednesday 17 May & 21 June**  
Please phone Irene Strauss on 020 7435 3538

### The Edgware Group

EDRS, 118 Stonegrove, Edgware, Middlesex, HA8 8AB  
**1.00pm on Wednesday 9 May & 6 June**  
Please phone Inge Strauss on 020 8958 9414

The copy deadline for the July/August issue of *Our Congregation* is Friday 9 June

## REGULAR SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm  
Saturday mornings at 10.00am

## Kikar Kids

**Saturdays 6 May, 3 June & 1 July at 11am**

Under-5s' Service in the Crèche (Crèche opens 10am)  
Junior Service for 5-9 year-olds in the Library  
11.30am – Kids' Kiddush  
Often followed by a Pot Luck Lunch  
Contact Frank Joseph on 020 7482 2555 to bring a dish

## Religion School

Sunday mornings: 9.30am-12.30pm  
**Half Term: 28 May & 4 June**  
**End of Term: 9 July**

## CANTOR HELLER'S KABBALAT SHABBAT CHAT

An invitation and opportunity for Bar Mitzvah class pupils to make Kiddush, sing Lecha Dodi and learn the lessons of the Parsha.

On the second Friday of the month  
5.30pm in the Library  
**Next sessions: 12 May & 9 June**



## SUNDAY MORNING ADULT DISCUSSION

### 7 May

10.00-12.30: *Settlers*, 2016 documentary film, introduced by Ran Levin. Followed by discussion

### 14 May

10.00-12.30: *Hannah Arendt*, 2012 film on the political theorist who introduced the concept of the "banality of evil", with extracts from her book, *Eichmann and the Holocaust*, read by Claire Walford

### 21 May

10-11.15: Rabbi Altshuler on the Great Philosophers and the Jewish Response  
11.15-12.30: Open Forum

**28 May & 4 June – No session (half term)**

### 11 June

10-11.15: Cantor Heller on the musical career of Louis Lewandowski  
11.15-12.30: TBC

### 18 June

10-11.15: Rabbi Altshuler on The Great Philosophers and the Jewish Response  
11.15-12.30: TBC

### 25 June

10-11.15: Rabbi Altshuler on the Great Philosophers and the Jewish Response  
11.15-12.30: Political analyst Jonathan Paris on The Emerging Trump Doctrine for the Middle East

## ANNUAL PULPIT EXCHANGE

### Saturday 17 June:

Rev Paul Nicholson of St Peter's Church (C. of E.) will address us at Belsize Square Synagogue

### Sunday 18 June:

Rabbi Stuart Altshuler will speak at St Peter's Church

# PURIM CELEBRATIONS

The party started at 5.30 and we had 82 booked in and more trundled in as time went on. Food was provided, as always, by Falafel Feast who go out of their way to help us. Both the kids and their parents made big efforts to dress up and provide a good atmosphere. Dessert was ice creams and toppings for the kids to chose – always successful.

Before Cantor Paul made a lovely Havdalah, we had the fancy dress parade in the hall and all the kids got a Purim bag (choir got theirs later). At 6.45 everyone trooped into the shul for the Megillah readings. We must have been about 100 by then and everyone stayed!! Individuals read sections of the Megillah and the choir sang explanatory Purim songs specially written for us by our member Matthew Kentridge.

Sections were also sung by soloists using puppets to explain who they were. Lyrics were provided by our member Matthew Kentridge while Alyson Denza put everything to music, using familiar tunes from our services. She trained the kids, while Ben Wolf accompanied on piano. "Haman" elicited loud rattlings and boos from parents and kids.

We were finished by 8.00. All in all, it seemed to me that we had a good atmosphere and a lot of participation. It shows yet again what Belsize can do....especially with the youth service the previous week.



*Adam and Victoria Freudenheim in congregation*



*Queen Esther (centre) plans her menu and strategy for the crucial banquet with the King*

**Pat Hirschovits**



*The Unrecognisable Four (left to right): Paul Trijbits, Justyn Trenner, Emma Brookes, Joe Brookes*



*Jeanie Horowitz as yellow bird head*



*Persia's beauty queens get ready for the Empire Crown Contest*

## Purim Lunch

Nearly 40 congregants gathered for a festive Purim Lunch on Sunday 12 March. The crowd featured new and older members of the congregation who, along with the Rabbi and Cantor, celebrated together with food, song and lovely Purim baskets created specially for them by our Cheder children.

*Picture shows Marion Goldberg (centre front, in pink) facing her visiting daughter from Israel, Eli the Spring Green (or Leprechaun if you prefer).*





## WILL YOU HELP US BRING LIGHT INTO THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE LIKE RITA?

Last summer, Rita lost her beloved husband of 67 years. Almost all her friends have passed away. Rita was finding the loneliness terrible. Then she heard about Jewish Care's tea parties. Now she's making new friends. Our tea parties welcome in people like Rita who need companionship, a chat and support. They help make the darkness go away.

We touch the lives of 10,000 people like Rita every week. But it's not a miracle. It's thanks to 3,000 dedicated volunteers, 1,500 professional staff and the generosity of our Jewish community. Will you please help bring light to more people's lives?

Call 020 8922 2600 or visit [jewishcare.org/donate](http://jewishcare.org/donate)

Charity Reg No. 802559



## THE WIENER LIBRARY

You've heard the name.

Now come and find out what it is and does.

**Sunday 4 June at 7.30pm at the Synagogue**

The Belsize Members Group hosts a talk given by our member, Frank Harding, a trustee of the Library, together with its chairman Anthony Spiro and director Ben Barkow.

A fascinating glimpse into a world-class institution, which started life as a personal initiative and has such resonance for our community. Don't miss it!

*Coffee and Cake in the Kiddush Room.*

Notice is hereby given that the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE will be held in the Synagogue Hall, 51 Belsize Square, London NW3 on Tuesday 6 JUNE 2017 at 8.00pm (followed by refreshments)

### AGENDA

1. Introduction and Report by the Chairmen
2. Financial Report
3. Appointment of Auditors
4. Election of members to the Board
5. Discussion on Annual Reports
6. Any Other Business

Candidates for Election to the Board

\*Adam Davis, \*Pat Hirschovits, \*Freddy Lehmann, \*Adam Nathan, \*Elizabeth Nisbet, \*Rob Nothman, Sarah Percival, David Pollins, \*Anthony Stadlen, \*Claire Walford

\* members of the present Board

Under clause 17(c) of the Constitution, every member of the Synagogue not being in arrears with more than one year's subscription shall be entitled to attend and vote at the AGM. Voting is by secret ballot of those present at the AGM and entitled to vote.

## SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

### THE BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

51 Belsize Square, London, NW3 4HX  
Tel: 020 7794 3949

Email: [office@synagogue.org.uk](mailto:office@synagogue.org.uk)

SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

9.00am - 5.30pm

Fridays: 9.00am-2.00pm

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Lee Taylor - 020 7794 3949

BELSIZE MEMBERS' GROUP

Co-chairs: Marion Nathan - 020 8361 2443

and Dilys Tausz - 020 7435 5996

CHEVRA KADISHA

Chairman: Rabbi Stuart Altshuler

Joint Vice Chairs: Helen Grunberg - 020 8450 8533

Cantor Dr Paul Heller

COMMUNITY CARE CO-ORDINATOR &

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Contact Eve Hersov on 020 7435 7129

or email [eve@synagogue.org.uk](mailto:eve@synagogue.org.uk)

or call the Synagogue Office for a leaflet

FUNERALS

During Synagogue Office hours phone 020 7794 3949.

Evenings/weekends phone Calo's (Undertakers)

020 8958 2112

JUDAICA SHOP

Open during office hours and on Sunday morning during

term time only

KIDDUSH

Rota enquiries to Jennifer Saul in the Synagogue Office

(not Thursdays or Fridays)

LIBRARY

Open Wednesdays 10am - 12 noon

At other times please check first with the office

CHEDER

Enquiries to the Head, Jeanie Horowitz, in the Synagogue

Office, or email [jeanie@synagogue.org.uk](mailto:jeanie@synagogue.org.uk)

PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Chairperson: Mandy Brass - 020 8452 6936

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Email the Youth Workers, Melanie Nathan & Zoe Cowan

[youth@synagogue.org.uk](mailto:youth@synagogue.org.uk)

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