



Wimbledon & District Synagogue 60 Voices



60 YEARS OF MEMORIES
OF
WIMBLEDON & DISTRICT
SYNAGOGUE

1949



2009



WIMBLEDON
& DISTRICT
SYNAGOGUE



During May and June 2009 to help celebrate the 60th anniversary JTrails, worked with members of Wimbledon & District Synagogue to record memories of the Synagogue and its congregation over the past 60 years. Thanks go out to all those who contributed and a special thanks goes to Diane Barnett and Raymond Hart who worked tirelessly to collect stories and encourage members of the community to share their memories, which are presented here.



Wimbledon's job-sharers, Rabbi Sylvia Ruthnickal (left) and Rabbi Sybil Sheridan. Photo: Susan Haines

Notes from synagogue history



- February 1949 - the decision to establish a reform synagogue in Wimbledon is taken at a public meeting at Wimbledon Hill Hotel, chaired by Dr Ernest Abelson in February.
- A Jewish social Group had been started in 1948 and Ernest Abelson was organising and leading Shabbat services in Wimbledon at that time.
- Fifteen months after the inaugural meeting in 1949 membership of the synagogue stands at over 60 families.
- May 1950 - the congregation acquires a site at 44/46 Worple Road at a cost of £2500.
- Sunday 8 April 1951 - the foundation stone is laid by Ernest Abelson and Leonard Montefiore (of West London Synagogue) and the Synagogue is formally opened and dedicated on 25 May 1952 by Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck.



- June 1953 - Rabbi Charles Berg is appointed as minister and religious leader.
- On the retirement in 1956 of Ernest Abelson as the first Chairman of the Council the Synagogue is the spiritual home of more than 130 families.
- During the 1950s and 60s the community grows and religious classes are transferred to

Wimbledon Youth Centre and services for High Holy Days to Marlborough Hall and then Wimbledon Town Hall, as the Synagogue is not large enough to accommodate the whole of the membership on these days.

- In 1964 the Synagogue constitution is revised *'that wives of members be entitled to all the privileges of full members, including the right to be elected to the Synagogue Council'*.



- 15 May 1966 - the Joe Barnett Hall, a multi-purpose building to cater for a variety of social and educational needs of the community, is formally opened by Marcus Bower, Chairman of the Synagogue Council..
- The hall is named after Joe Barnett, Chairman of the Building Committee who sadly died prematurely before the building was completed.
- The building of the Joe Barnett Hall was made possible through generous donations from members of the congregation and tireless fundraising of the Synagogue Council.
- 1977 - the friendly relationship the Synagogue developed with the Merton Borough Council is reinforced in 1977 by a Civic Silver Jubilee service at the Synagogue attended by the Mayor and Mayoress of Merton and the Councillors in their robes of office.

- 1983 & 1984—**Wimbledon 'Centre Court' group** win first prize in the RSGB Youth Talent Competition under the leadership of Robert Braham.
- **Since the 1980's over 10,000 children and 1,000 teachers and parents** have visited the Synagogue from over 40 different schools across South London, Surrey and Kent.

- 1987 - the Synagogue holds a Festival of Music and in 1988 a successful production of Joseph plays for three nights to a packed house.
- January 1988 - Food for Thought an informal meeting group begins providing an opportunity for Rabbis to meet elder congregants and for members to network and keep each other informed of their and others needs.
- 1993 - the Wimbledon community twins with Cherkassy in the Ukraine creating links of **friendship with a community 'poor but rich in its thirst for Jewish knowledge and belonging.**
- February 1994 - Outreach the neighbourhood area group project begins. A project aimed at inclusion for all members and the foundation **for the Synagogues current 'Caring community' programmes.**



- September 1997 - the Synagogue moves to its present site, the former Athlone Hall at Southlands College, Wimbledon Parkside. Although technically in the Borough of Wandsworth, the Synagogue retained its name of Wimbledon and District and following expansion of the building, for the first time in a generation, Religion School and High Holy Day services can take place under a single roof.
- 1st October 2002 - the Synagogue appoints its newest Rabbis - Sylvia Rothschild and Sybil Sheridan. Their appointment marks the first **time in the RSGB movement that a 'job-share' rabbinical appointment has been made.** Described by the Chair of the Council Miriam Kramer as **'one Rabbi with four legs'.**
- May 2004 - a small Sefer Torah of Polish origin, which dates from 1850 and was kept in hiding through the Second World War is

presented to the Synagogue by Anne and Marcus Bower. The Torah is used for **children's services and to enable members to have the mitzvah of hagbah.**



- September 2004 - The Synagogue Library is dedicated as the David Nathan Library in honour of David Nathan.
- Film Club is founded in 2005 and is resounding success over the last 4 years attracting audiences of 50 people.
- Youth Choir is also launched in 2005 under the organisation of Sally-Ann Feldman and Andrew Earis for young people aged 13-20 now perform regularly at High Holydays and special Shabbat Services.
- April 2006 - The first combined concert of the Youth Choir and the Adult Choir is given.
- September 2006 - The Harry Urban Holocaust Memorial Room and Library is dedicated in honour of Harry Urban, whose wartime **experiences were recorded in 'Tovarisch, I am not Dead'.**



- 2007 sees the first ever group visit to Israel by Wimbledon & District Synagogue.
- In 2008 the nursery commenced the **"Shared Futures Project"** linking visits with other local faith schools, an enriching process for children, parents and staff.

- 2009 - Wimbledon Synagogue sweeps the board at MRJ awards ceremony - nine youngsters and two not quite so young won Massuot and Jack Petchey awards recognising outstanding achievements in Reform Jewish Youth Provision.
- March 2009 - The Synagogue Nursery celebrates its 18th birthday with an Art Fair.
- Sunday 7th June 2009 - The Synagogue holds a Dazzling Diamond Anniversary Fundraising Ball.
- Saturday July 11th 2009 - the congregation and invited guests celebrate the 60th anniversary of Wimbledon & District Synagogue at a special service.



Memories of Hilda Sinclair

Meetings [regarding the founding of a synagogue] were held initially at 52 Richmond Road, Raynes Park (the Sinclair's family home) in 1949 and subsequently to discuss the forming of a community in this area of London. Amongst those attending these initial discussion meetings were the Abelson's, Kramer's and others all in their early 30's. Meetings were also held at the Dog and Fox in Wimbledon Village and addressed by Orthodox, Liberal and Reform Rabbis. Rabbi Harold Reinhardt from Upper Berkeley Street was apparently the most convincing because with only two voting against, it was decided to found a community in the Reform tradition.

In the early stages whilst membership was growing and funds being accumulated, the Shabbat services and High Holy days were held at a church Hall in Worple Road, across the road from site of the synagogue. The services were mainly lay with Ernest Abelson being their leader. Membership grew through word of mouth and without a doubt the migration of Jews towards south west London, because the Kingston Orthodox community followed at about the same time. Social functions were held at their home in Richmond Road with a normal attendance of between 20 to 30 people each time.

With a growing community premises became a paramount aim. Fund raising was organised and money loaned from the Reform movement to help purchase the property in Worple Road which became the site of our first synagogue. It was an old detached house with a large overgrown garden. John Sinclair in his role as a Chartered



Surveyor played an important role in arranging the purchase and the planning of the new synagogue buildings. His young daughter Jackie remembers holding a tape measure for her father whilst distances were measured out. The original Worple Road synagogue consisted solely of the lobby, offices and kitchen and the Synagogue Hall itself. The rooms at the back and the large hall were subsequent additions. Mrs Quick was an early Secretary. The furnishing of the synagogue's religious artifacts began with Sefah Torah from Czechoslovakia and Shabbat candle-sticks donated by a Mrs Lever.

With a building and membership growing a permanent Rabbi was required. In the beginning Rabbis would come from outside for High Holy Day services. Reverend Berg, a Holocaust survivor, was appointed from a committee of 3 chaired by Dr Abelson and including John Sinclair and Dr Nat Kramer. A house was provided owned by the synagogue in the New Malden area. Hilda remembers many a bridge party held in her home in Richmond Road. Synagogue balls were held at the Dog and Fox in the Village and also at the Dorchester Hotel in Mayfair.

There were no weddings at the synagogue prior to Rabbi Berg. John was a member of the Council in the early years until about 1953 when he and his family went to live in Aden for a year. Although she was not active in the Ladies guild Hilda was happy to host meetings in their home. The nearest kosher butcher was in Streatham and John who had his office in Balham collected their meat for him to take home.



At the time of the May 2009 interviews Hilda Sinclair, in her 92nd year, the widow of John Sinclair, *FRICS*, Chartered Surveyor, who passed away in 1970, was believed to be the only surviving member of the founder members of Wimbledon and District Synagogue.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE SYNAGOGUE

The hopes and expectations of the last four years were finally realised when, on Sunday, May 25, the Wimbledon and District Synagogue was formally opened by Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck.

A congregation of more than three hundred were present at the Consecration Service which was conducted by Rabbi Dr. H.S. Sussman, Rabbi Dr. W. Van der Kyl, Rabbi Dr. M. Katon, and Rabbi P.S. Goldberg. During the singing of the hundredth psalm, Dr. Leo Baeck symbolically opened the Synagogue by unlocking the Ark with a ceremonial key brought to him by Miss Helen Baegelman. The ner tamid, presented by Mr. J. Bishop and family in memory of Ross Bishop, was then lit by Dr. E.M. Abelson, and whilst the choir sang Lecha Adonai, the scrolls were brought into the Synagogue by Rabbi Dr. I. Haybaum, Rabbi Louis Edgar, Rabbi G.E. Gosnell, Mr. E.L. Mandel, Dr. M. Krausz, Mr. C. Lisek, Mr. A. Murray, and Mr. J.T. Sinclair, and placed in the Ark by Mr. A.L. Hodges, and Mr. G. Hainsbury.

The Consecration Prayer: Rabbi Dr. W. Van der Kyl read the Royal Prayer and the following Consecration Prayer:

"Our God and the God of our fathers, we beseech Thy gracious blessing upon this house which we have built, for the gathering together of Thy holy congregation, for the study of Thy holy law; and for the worship of Thy Holy Name. Accept this house, O Lord our God, as Thy house, accept in favour all the gifts and all the labour which have created it.

"We know that in truth, O Lord, we can give nothing to Thee. All things come from Thee; and of Thine own do we give Thee. From Thee came the desire and the will to make this Sanctuary; from Thee came whatever of beauty and fitness labours in its plan and its construction; from Thee came the strength and the means to bring the project to its happy completion; from Thee came the insight and appreciation which make this pile of brick and timber our pride and our delight. O Thou Giver of all good, we thank Thee for this good work which now is done; and we thank Thee for each share in the work as has been the privilege of each of us. We praise Thee for permitting us to build this solemn celebration.

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2/5/50

General Meeting Spence Hall. Dr. Abelson in Chair.
Mr. Abelson read minutes of previous General Meeting Wimbledon Hill Hotel.

Dr. Abelson spoke of the 18 months activities of both the Social Circle and of the need for more Social Circle or Synagogue members, and of the important duties of Ritual rights, and that the newly elected Synagogue Committee would see into this matter.

Proposals were now in progress for acquiring site in Worplesden for Synagogue & Community Centre.

Memberships were as follows:-
Social Circle 50 Families
Synagogue 60

Re Divine Services - Dr. Abelson hopes to see a better attendance on Friday Evenings & Saturday mornings, and of the successful Chumash, Parnas services and Childrens parties.

The Ladies service was a success, due mainly to the efforts of the Ladies who held a progress the evening of same.

The Youth Club had approx. 60 members, and of the need of guidance from the Y.B.S.B. in helping to sort out payments.

Consecration of Worples Road Synagogue & Early Minutes

Notes from an interview with Alan and Jill Tyler

Alan and Jill Tyler come from families with a long Reform tradition, their grandfathers having joined the West London Synagogue in the early 1900s. Both their parents were married there in 1921, and they were married there in 1949 so like the Wimbledon Synagogue celebrate their 60th anniversary in the same year.

Alan was brought up in Willesden before becoming a cadet at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth at age 13 and then serving at sea during the Second World War against the Italians, Germans and Japanese. After the war he served in the Mediterranean and Far East, witnessing the independence of both Israel and Malaya, and ending up on the Council of the Hong Kong synagogue with three Sephardi and three Ashkenazi under Lord Kadourie.

Jill was brought up in Finchley, where her family took in and later adopted two sisters from the Kindertransport of whom one Anne Woolf-Skinner is a member of the community. Her family moved south of the river after the war.

Alan was confirmed at West London during the war, as Reform then considered a boy of 13 too young to take on the religious obligations of an adult. Jill was confirmed similarly, and their two older children Mary and David had a joint confirmation at Wimbledon soon after joining. Their younger sons followed two and seven years later before the custom died out.



Alan and Jill settled south of the river after their marriage, but after they finally settled in Surbiton in 1965 decided that the commute to the West London Synagogue was too arduous and joined Wimbledon. This was decided by a trial visit when they fell for the charm of **Charles Berg, the synagogue's first Rabbi**, and the friendliness of the congregation and its three long serving wardens Lou Cohen, Phil Samuel and Danny Diamond.

Within a year Alan was asked to join the Council and served on it for an unbroken 20 years, following his friend Leslie Lawrence as Secretary and then as Chairman, as well as succeeding him as Chairman of the local branch of AJEX - the only branch based on a Reform synagogue. At national level, Alan served as a National Secretary and later Parade Commander for their annual parade and service at the Cenotaph.

The highlight of Alan's chairmanship of the synagogue was the 1977 Queen's Silver Jubilee Service attended by the Mayor and Councillors of Merton in their robes of office.

Alan has always supported interfaith relations and was for several years chairman of the Wimbledon branch of the Council of Christians and Jews, of which he has been a member for over 40 years. He also served for over 20 years as a Wimbledon deputy at the Board of Deputies, and for a number of years on the Reform Synagogues council.

When the Tylers joined, Charles Berg and his wife Esme had already been serving the synagogue for more than a dozen years. Sadly childless, the congregation was truly their family, and they built it up to about its present number of some 800 members, which succeeding Rabbis have maintained despite competition from the newer North West Surrey Reform and Kingston Liberal congregations.

Each new Rabbi introduced new ideas, starting with **Hillel Avidan who introduced children's** birthday blessings each month and participation in local inter-faith groups when Alan was chairman. For continuity we have been fortunate to have had Marcus Bower, chairman in the 1950s and again decades later and now our President, always there with advice and experience. He is a former chairman of our whole movement and of the Leo Baeck rabbinical college.

Jill has devoted her activities outside her family to the general welfare of the community. She and Alan were both active members of the Thursday Activity Group, TAG, chaired by Philip Mishon which met in the evenings and was later succeeded by the Food for Thought lunchtime meetings launched by Willy Wolff.

Jill with Elaine Etherton used to prepare the tables for TAG meetings, and she helped with the Ladies Guild jumble sales which helped refurbish the Worple Road Kitchen. She was treasurer of the South West London branch of The Friends of the Hebrew University, and did work for Norwood. She distributed Meals on Wheels for the local Red Cross for 20 years and helped the

local SSAFA office for 30. However, her chief labour of love has been Nightingale Jewish Home where she ran the shop, staffed chiefly by Wimbledon synagogue volunteers, for some 20 years. She still helps there and now runs its library.

Coming new to the area, many of their friends over the years have come from the Wimbledon congregation of which they are happy still to be members.



AJEX Remembrance Service November 2007 with the Mayor of Wandsworth
"they shall not grow old...."

Notes from an interview with Cecilia Jacobs

Cecilia and her husband were reform Jews from north London and belonged to Upper Berkeley Street before joining our community in 1960 when they moved to the area and Rabbi Berg was the Minister. They loved it as a scattered community in a non-Jewish area. They were married at Upper Berkeley Street with Rabbi Reinhardt officiating at that service.

The couples two sons were bar mitzvah at Worple Road at the age of 13 by Rabbi Berg, with whom they had good relations. Cecilia and Basil come from families who have not regularly attended communal worship but have been involved in others aspects of the synagogues life. On arrival in Wimbledon they were invited to join the synagogue and Cecilia became a member of the Ladies Guild and then Treasurer of it. The Guild used to have fund raising jumble sales at Marlborough Hall, which no longer exists.



These were so busy that the police had to attend to keep the peace. On one occasion she thought she had lost all the proceeds but it transpired that the bank had credited it into the synagogue general funds and it took some three months before that was discovered.

Banks do not seem to change, and apparently it was not handed back voluntarily from the synagogue. Cecilia has helped with synagogue Balls and in doing the table plan. Her husband was an ophthalmic surgeon who did not become involved in the synagogue.

Of their two married sons, one lives in the United States the other in Israel. The elder son married a North London Jewish girl whose family wanted a marriage in the United Synagogue and Stephen, their son, said OK to be married at Rabbi Louis Jacobs' synagogue.

However during his engagement Stephen decided he did not wish that format of wedding. His mother, Cecilia, went to see Louis Jacobs to explain the situation. Louis Jacobs said he would work out a form of service with Rabbi Berg so that he could officiate. Rabbi Louis Jacobs spoke to Rabbi Berg and a compromise was worked out for the two Rabbis to officiate at the wedding **ceremony, Rabbi Berg going to Rabbi Jacobs' synagogue in Maida Vale.** This is believed to be a unique situation.

During the period from 1967 to 2001 the Jacobs family had property in the Algarve and belonged to the Algarve Jewish Community which was a recognised charitable organisation and this met for Seder nights in various venues and organised social/religious functions. This group assisted in the cleaning up the old Faro Jewish cemetery which was then in general disrepair.

Cecilia knows that this was funded by a Portuguese Jewish family now living in North America. A formal ceremony of re-consecration was headed by the Rabbi from Gibraltar and attended by President Soares of Portugal and

well as the Provincial Governor and many other dignitaries and was shown on Portuguese television. The guard of honour was made up by local Faro fire brigade.

The following year, the Portuguese Parliament voted unanimously for the repeal of the act of expulsion of the Jews from Portugal made in the 16th century. There was also an historic invitation for a State visit by Prime Minister Rabin which he accepted.



THE LADIES GUILD of WIMBLEDON SYNAGOGUE
present
A MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT
by
ALEXANDER KNAPP AND FRIENDS
TUESDAY 10th MAY 1988 at 7.30 p.m.

Notes from an interview with Larry Abrahams

Larry first became a member of our community in 1965. He was born, an evacuee from the bombing, in Cambridge during the war. His father could not serve in the military because he suffered from black-outs but worked with the well known jam manufacturer, Chivers of Cambridge for a time, a job he hated and from which he was sacked. He subsequently worked on building runways in that area and was then employed in a company putting wings on Spitfires, during which he managed to indicate how the job could be done in half the time. He ended there as a Chief Riveter.

Larry's great-grand-father named Abraham Franks arrived in England from Russia but the immigration official changed his name to Frank **Abrahams. His mother's family came from Holland** in 1903 but she was born in England. His Dutch grand-parents were named Bloom and their family were in the fur trade.

Larry was brought up in the East End as Jews and his parents belonged to the Sanders Road Synagogue. In 1949 his family moved to Greenford and joined the synagogue there under Dr Banks, they then moved to Harrow retaining their membership at Sanders Road. Due to less than good relations with the synagogue Larry was not Bar Mitzvah at 13 but was eventually Bar mitzvah in Wimbledon.

The family arrived in south London because his father had bought a shop in Cheam Village where for a time Larry worked in the wholesale fruit business, but the father-son relationship in business did not work out on this occasion.

He started then going to Sutton synagogue and helped with the youth group. Larry says that the one person he admired most then was Gordon Saville who had a major influence on him and was a most generous person.

Larry met Susan in a coffee bar in about 1964, as a blind date and there was a mutual attraction. They were married in a civil ceremony in 1966 because Susan was not Jewish. However she started to convert under Rabbi Berg who was fantastic to them and in 1967 her conversion was completed and they then had a religious wedding and baby blessing at the same time.

Larry though not an ex-serviceman became an associate member of AJEX. Some 36 years later he is still a member and a Standard Bearer, with him and his wife being Treasurer and Secretary of the Wimbledon branch. Following his joining of AJEX he became involved in synagogue security, and he also helped with Sandra and Laurence Lowne in the training of Mixtures (Youth Club). He enjoyed both working with them and the youth work.

Larry was also then was involved in security for the High Holydays. Susan also ran a nursery for the children of teachers at the Cheder as well as helping Chani Smith when she had her twins. Larry has been a member of Council on 2 or 3 different occasions, he enjoyed this. A role he played on Council was looking after the House at Worple Road and mainly at Queensmere Road. He also arranged Kiddushim for Bar mitzvahs and organised contributions to the synagogue. He says now that he has gracefully moved aside for the next generation, but still organises the fancy dress at Purim as he has done for many years.



Interview with Julian Samuels

The Samuels' family have lived in south west London for over 50 years. Julian's father is a Mancunian, supporting Manchester United, while his mother, not born Jewish, was met whilst working at a tobacconist in Epsom. His father left Manchester in the 1930's for first of all the Isle of Man and then to Paris working in a circus erecting the big tops. He then returned to England and met Max Stone, who offered Phil a job at a shop in Newport, South Wales. Phil and Iris were married at a civil wedding in 1940 and they stayed in Newport until after the war and in 1946 they moved to the New Malden area. Sara Lee, Julian's sister was born in 1943 and Julian in 1947. Whilst in Newport Phil was a member of the Newport community

When arriving in New Malden the Samuels' family joined Kingston United Synagogue. Iris was not welcomed there and it was through Lou Cohen, Paul Cohen's late father that the suggestion was made to join the newly formed Wimbledon Reform Congregation. Iris was converted by Rabbi Berg in 1956. At this stage the community had only one Warden Mick Epstein who was becoming a bit elderly and so a request was made to Council for there to be a second warden, which was approved and Phil became a Warden and then Senior Warden, post he held for some 15 years, as well as becoming a Council member. Julian's mother Iris became Chair of the Ladies Guild. **Julian was Bar Mitzvah'd in 1960** and Anne, the future Mrs. Samuels, was Bat Mitzvah'd in 1962.

Julian and Anne Samuels are true children of the Wimbledon community. They were married at the Worple Road synagogue under Rabbi Charles Berg and then lived in the West Hill area. Julian ran the youth club with Paul Cohen, son of Lou Cohen and in the 1960's it had a membership list of 70 to 100 youngsters. Julian served on the YASGB forerunner of RSY for a period of two years. His sister Sara Lee taught the children of Josephine and Harry Urban at the Cheder, she subsequently held positions in Brussels under

NATO and then the European Community.

Their children Emma and Matthew were blessed at birth by Rabbi Berg as Rabbi Emeritus, Rabbi Avidan then being the Rabbi, and had their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs under Rabbi Danny Smith. Emma looked after the crèche at the Cheder for some time and is now married and lives locally with one daughter Millie (another child is expected shortly) and she was blessed at birth by Rabbi Sheridan at the new Queensmere Road synagogue.

After his time with the youth club Julian was not involved until he became a member of the Council for the first time in 1980, but relinquished the position after a year not feeling that he was then ready. After his father Phil died in 1986 Julian became involved again as a warden and



returned back on the Council in 1988 which continued until now with two one year breaks. He has served as Principal Warden, then Senior Warden and was elected Chairman in 1990 for a period of three years, during which time Rabbi Shafritz was introduced to the community, Julian was involved in his selection. He returned for a second term as Chairman in 2001-2.

Julian has held unique roles in our community for having been Senior Warden twice, Chairman twice and vice-President twice. His family has grown and is still growing as the synagogue grows. An equally unique role he has played is in locking, unintentionally, burglars into the Worple Road synagogue. The good news was that the insurance company paid out in full.

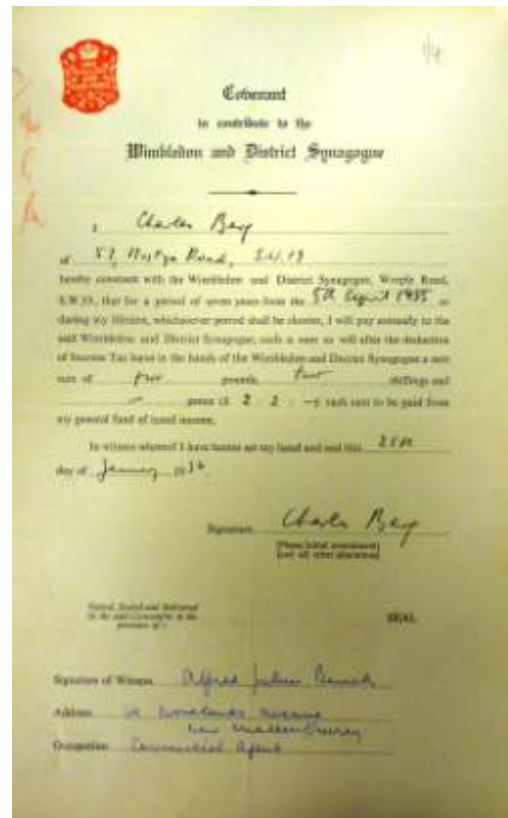
Notes from an interview with Lynne Abrahams and her husband

Lynne Abrahams and her husband joined Wimbledon synagogue in 1953 because they lived in New Malden and they would be able to walk to synagogue which was important for Lynne who came from an orthodox background. She came from Bournemouth and her husband from Willesden. They had a jewellery business in south west London with shops in Wimbledon and Putney. He retired from the business in 1985 when it was sold on.

They remember well Rabbi Berg as a loving and caring man. Both their sons were Bar Mitzvah in Worple Road and the Cheder was then run by Isaac Goldsmith with the Levy's and Rabbi Berg who taught both their boys. One son was married at Wimbledon in 1984 with Rabbi Danny Smith officiating.

When Lynne made her very frequent visits to the synagogue she well remembers Lou Cohen, the Samuels' and Danny Diamond as wardens. She also remembers Patrick Bower in short trousers at Colet Court. She remembers the late Kitty Morris as being a greeter who was always first to say hello to anyone when they came to the synagogue.

Rabbi Berg studying in the Synagogue office in July 1974



My Mother, Kitty Morris!

I always remember she had to be at shul, whether in the small Hall in Worple Road or later in the Synagogue itself, before anyone else so she could 'open up' and get the odour of cats out! She also liked to make cups of tea for early arrivals.

My brother, Lionel, was Barmitvah at Wimbledon, my 21st birthday party (the first to be held at the shul) was held there, Malcolm and I were married there 36 years ago on the 8th July, and my parents held their Golden Wedding celebrations there.

When we moved to Milton Keynes, my Mother put an insertion in the JC to the effect that if anyone was interested in forming a Reform community in Milton Keynes they should contact us. That is another long story but suffice to say that Malcolm and I are founder members of Milton Keynes & District Reform Synagogue.

Maureen Ruskin (nee Morris)

Notes from an interview with Josephine Urban

Josephine, native of the Isle of Wight, met her husband Harry, after whom the Harry Urban Holocaust Library at the synagogue is named, in Caracas, Venezuela. After Harry's death Josephine had sought to give something to the synagogue and the Holocaust Memorial Room was how she wished to honour his memory as a Holocaust survivor and also of the family he lost. She was in Venezuela because she was doing a PhD in geography at Exeter University and her room-mate there was a Venezuelan. At that time Caracas, now a city of some 7 million people had only a 500,000 population.

Harry was a pioneer of rural medicine in the remote state of Apura having wished to start a new life after his terrible experiences in Europe during the war. Their meeting led to romance and marriage and uniquely they had 3 different weddings: a civil wedding in Caracas; an ultra-religious one in New York; and a final one at Wimbledon Synagogue. One could hardly argue that they were not married. On settling in London they approached Kingston United Synagogue and were advised to go to Rabbi Berg in Wimbledon who embraced them as members when they joined in 1965. Their choice of residence in the Wimbledon area was due to having friends in the area.

Harry wrote his autobiography of his wartime experiences in "Tovarisch I am not Dead" a copy of which is in the synagogue Library. An award winning documentary film based on the book was made in 2006, and includes footage of the Urbans travelling to Moscow, Tashkent and the Ukraine. The film had its first showing in the Holocaust Memorial Room at the Synagogue on the day the room was dedicated, September 17th 2006.

Josephine has served on several Synagogue committees. Co-Chair of the Ladies Guild with Elaine Etherton (many members will remember the floral decorations she made on Festivals and especially High Holy Days in the old Wimbledon Town Hall. She has also been on the Dance committee and Ritual committee with amongst others Diane and Neville Barnett. Josephine was volunteer "Captain" of WI ZO's Jewish Women's Week collection for many years and served on the committee of the South West London group of British Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem until its demise. She continues to be an active member and main supporter of the main group of British Friends.

"After the Kiddush a presentation of a siddur was made to Josie Urban (pictured smiling alongside as ever) in recognition of her years of devotion to Ladies Guild and Synagogue tasks, especially the wonderful display of flowers on High Holydays in the Town Hall"
Kol Hadarom of May-June 1988



Josephine and Harry Urban with Rabbi Shafritz at the Coombe Hill Golf Club Synagogue Supper November 1995

Harry and Josephine Urban

Our personal involvement in the Synagogue began in the sixties when we moved with our two sons to the area, neither Harry nor myself having had any roots in Wimbledon or even in London. Harry was born in Poland, and I was born and brought up in the Isle of Wight.

The library in the Harry Urban Holocaust Memorial Room was a project which was inspired by the events of his life, as well as his own wish to contribute toward the new Synagogue building in some way, something he was unable to realize due to illness.



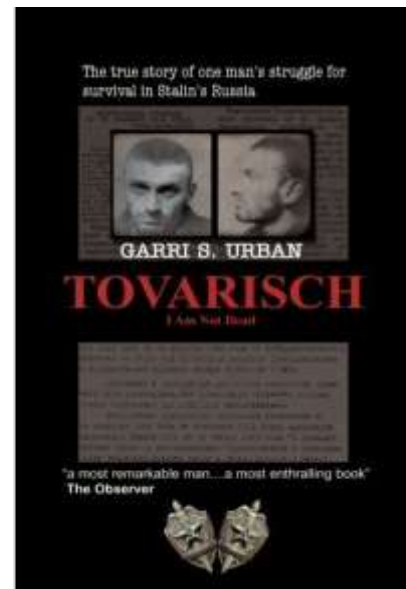
Harry's early life was inevitably caught up in the march of history of the 20th century. He fled the Nazi invasion, only to find himself in a Soviet labour camp near Murmansk where he worked as a doctor until he escaped, first to Moscow, then to Tashkent where he was arrested and tortured. Such was the need for doctors that he resumed work, and was appointed Chief of Rural Medicine in Sofievka in the Ukraine where a typhoid epidemic was raging in the wake of the German retreat.

At the end of the war he returned to his home town, Stanislavov (now known as Ivano Frankovsk) to discover that no member of his family had survived the Holocaust. From there he proceeded to cross frontiers illegally and reached the American occupied zone of southern Germany in 1946. There he was employed by the United Nations Relief Organization UNRRA to care for large numbers of Jewish displaced persons in the towns of Pegnitz and Creussen.

After clashes with local authorities over the poor treatment of the Jews he went to Belgium, then to Venezuela, contracted to work in the most remote regions of the Orinoco.

We met in Venezuela at the end of 1954. The story of Harry's wartime experiences are related in his book 'Tovarisch, I

am Not Dead' by Garri S. Urban, published in 1980 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. In 1964 he discovered that his youngest brother, Menachem, survived the war in the Soviet Union, and had emigrated to Israel where he fought in the Palmach in the War of Independence



Josephine Urban.

Notes from an interview with Neville and Diane Barnett

We have a couple here with long English Jewish traditions. **Diane's maternal great, great, great, great** grand father founded the Borough synagogue in the late 1700's in what was then known as Danzic Street (latterly known as Market Street). It sadly no longer exists and is beneath the site of the South Bank University. Although at one stage members left and founded a rival, Synagogue Chief Rabbi Adler had faith in **the community. Diane's family lived in the area** until the 1850s. Later in the 1930's Neville's father decided not to help fund a new synagogue on that site as he correctly realised that the community was leaving the area.

Diane's paternal; family arrived from Germany in the early 1800s and finally settled in Hull although she was born in London in Harrow, a reverse evacuee from Hull to London. Neville is a genuine south Londoner having been born in the Old Kent Road in the years before the second World War.

During the war like many Londoners his family was moved around through Bognor, Brighton, and similar south coast salubrious places. His family were members of the orthodox Brixton synagogue and but Neville joined the Reform movement. After studying at Dulwich Preparatory School, Neville ended up at Highgate school in 1947. His family had come from Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His father was the 9th of 10 (2 daughters and 8 sons) who worked in the wine trade, and was involved in the social life of Manor Place Baths and knew the boxing promoter Jack Solomons. Neville is a keen supporter of the Surrey County Cricket Club and has been a member at the Oval, where a cousin of his, Bernie Coleman, was an important organiser.

The young Diane, resident of Kingston-upon-Hull, was a top pupil at the Cheder there and came to London to expand her horizons training at John Lewis and making a social life at Upper Berkeley Street. She met Neville, then studying law at the London School of Economics, during that time. Neville had passed his National Service as a sergeant in the Education Corps.



Neville Barnett Chair of Wimbledon & District Synagogue in 1988

The romance flowered and the couple were married in 1962 at Upper Berkeley Street and are in their 48th year of marriage. They initially lived in Wembley and had two children Andrew and Harriet.

Diane and Neville moved to Wimbledon in 1975 and at that time a number of member of the community including Rabbi Berg met each morning at the Kardomah cafe at Ely's in Wimbledon when it was suggested Diane join the Ladies Guild. However Diane did not feel this was what she wanted. Meanwhile Rabbi Berg prompted Neville to become a warden of the Synagogue continuing a role he had followed at Middlesex New Synagogue. He then became Senior Warden, Council member, vice-Chairman and then Chairman of Council.

Diane concentrated on bringing up their children **and qualified as a Citizen's Advice Bureau advisor.** In 1989 Trudy Gold asked Neville and Diane to conduct a model Seder at the Cheder. As a result of her input to the Seder Trudy asked Diane to become a teacher. She then took Foundation Course for Heder teachers followed by Advanced courses and has been teaching and running the administration of the Cheder ever since.

Professionally, Diane developed both the paper and Internet versions of a directory of rare medical disorders. She pioneered the movement to develop guidelines for identifying quality medical information on the Internet with the University of Northumbria. Diane obtained Chai award for 18 years of teaching at the Cheder. Diane is currently the Cheder Administrator and Librarian and Neville is an assiduous service attendee and studies Modern Hebrew. They have two grand-children. Both are now retired. Neville and Diane volunteer at Nightingale and Diane is studying history at Birkbeck College as well as leading the library team at the Synagogue.

Neville's educational career followed from a degree in law from London School of Economics in 1955 and then qualifying as a Solicitor. He



chaired the Junior Membership at West London Synagogue and in that capacity was on the Council there at the time of the Reinhardt schism. He also worked with the World Union of Progressive Jewish Youth and attended three different European camps. His practice was first in the City and then he went into partnership in Wimbledon before opening his own practice. He was a teacher at the Cheder as well as being a Bar Mitzvah teacher. Neville was very involved with the Youth Association of Synagogue of Great Britain, the fore runner of RSY, as chairman and later president as part of this he was asked to start the youth group at Worple Road in 1956/7 never realising that twenty years later he would move to Wimbledon and join the Synagogue.

Without people such as this couple who have played and more importantly continue to play a major role behind the scenes this community would not be as successful as it has been.





Food for Thought

Hilary Leek

In January 1998 Rabbi Willy Wolff had the idea that, to replace a dying Friendship Club, a monthly lunch club should take its place with a variety of speakers and a simple but nourishing lunch. The reason for a simple lunch was that the synagogue was a building site and the kitchen non-existent so those of us organising the first Food for Thought had to use our own kitchens to prepare the sandwich lunch.

Back at the end of the last century, we sometimes had upward of fifty people attending, all enjoying the opportunity to socialise with old friends, meet new people and, above all, have the stimulation of interesting speakers. **Today, well into the "noughties", sadly the attendance has diminished to not many more than single figures.**

Inevitably, life takes over and regular 'Food for Thoughters' have dropped by the wayside through sickness and sadly also through death. So the regular team of organizers has now decided that it is time for Food for Thought to come to a natural end and, hopefully, new and younger members of the community will be able to start another group. The regular Food for Thought team of organizers is hoping to continue their annual garden and Chanukah parties for senior members of the community.



Craft Fair and Music Festival

Under the guidance of Chani Smith, there was a very successful art and craft fair and a Festival of Music in Worple Road in the late 1980s/early 90s.



Removal of synagogue to Queensmere Road

Our first upheaval since the first synagogue was built, we moved from Worple Road to Queensmere Road in September 1997 and two weeks later hosted the induction of Rabbi Willy Wolff in our new, but not yet refurbished building.

Synagogue Newsletter

James Leek became editor of the Newsletter which was gradually computerized and encouraged the community to suggest new names for it. Hence Kol Hadarom - Voice of the South. This has recently been changed to Kehillah, meaning Community.



Notes from an interview with Jonathan Oppenheimer

Jonathan is Wimbledon Synagogue's current Chairman and his 3 year term of office ends in December 2009. His family background indicated little religious activity. His father was born in Berlin of secular parents and his grand-father was a militant atheist but a Zionist. Only his paternal grand-mother came from a religious orthodox family. His mother was not Jewish but a daughter of the Raj with Huguenot, Scottish and Liverpudlian antecedents. His parents met during his father's wartime service in REME (after the Pioneer Corps).

As a 6-year-old, Jonathan remembers choosing his identity. He looked at his **parents' very** different families; his mother's was very stiff-upper-lipped, whilst his father's **was, in his own words: "loud, chaotic, interesting and fun".** At primary school in Mill Hill a Jewish girl proudly described **her family's visit to Israel, which sounded** incredibly exotic. This prompted Jonathan to ask his paternal grand-mother for assurance that he was Jewish, her wise reply, in spite of her own orthodox upbringing, was that if you feel Jewish and want to be Jewish then you are.



At boarding school in Dorset he witnessed minor anti-Semitic incidents, mainly verbal abuse of other Jewish boys. Defending one of these he fought one of the school toughs and although he came off worse he earned respect and the abuse petered out. He discussed the issue of identity with his artist grandfather, who knew a lot about Israel although sadly he never went there, and prior to University at Cambridge, in 1965 Jonathan spent a gap year on a kibbutz (Kfar Hanassi, in the **Upper Galilee, the most "English" of them!**). He returned to the same Kibbutz in summer 1966 and again just prior to the 6 day war after he had helped organise the only El Al plane to reach Israel before hostilities, with volunteers from Cambridge University, Manchester and London. They departed from Heathrow in May 1967, seen off with a blessing and a Tanach by the Israeli Ambassador in London.

On arrival in Israel they were met by trucks from Kfar Hanassi and Kibbutz Almagor, both by then **preparing for war. Because all the Kfar Hanassi's** drivers and all but one of its tractors had been taken by the army and Jonathan had an international driving license, he ended up driving the remaining tractor next to the Syrian border, giving lifts to soldiers rushing to reach their units. On the morning before war broke out he **nearly strayed onto the "Geshet Bnot Yaakov"** Bailey bridge leading into Syria. The next day was WAR. The kibbutz was shelled for the first two or three days, during most of which time Jonathan and others were in shelters. His job was delivery man for cigarettes and loo rolls but they had no tin hats and improvised with saucepans; this omission was soon rectified when General David Elazar, IDF northern commander, saw these youngsters with saucepans on their heads, which were then rapidly replaced with proper helmets.

At this stage Jonathan's friendship with David Zefaniah, a white-haired veteran of the Irgun who worked as a mounted guard on the kibbutz, led to him becoming a Jewish cowboy, rounding up stray cattle on the Golan, as part of a project based in a former Syrian army base. This later became Kibbutz Merom Golan. Within weeks the Jewish cowboy found himself in charge of a team of four and a herd of several hundred cattle. Eventually a real Jewish cowboy arrived from Colorado to help them.

Jonathan nearly did not return to Cambridge where he was studying archaeology and anthropology, but sense prevailed and he returned to complete his degree and commence his post-graduate studies at the LSE, where he took an active part in the protests of 1969. His Head of Department who was Jewish wanted him expelled but relented when he realised Jonathan was about to return to Israel to do fieldwork in Druze settlements. He went first to a residential Hebrew Ulpan in Jerusalem and studied spoken Arabic in the Old City and then lived in the Druze village of Beit Jann for 18 months. At the Ulpan he met his first wife Irma, a Czech refugee, and they were married in a civil ceremony in the UK in 1971.

Next came a year teaching sociology at Bristol University, after which Jonathan & Irma left for Haifa where he helped to establish a new MA Anthropology course at Haifa University. This was a time when the Shalit Case had created a window of opportunity enabling those who considered themselves Jewish but were not religious and/or were not halachically Jewish to make aliyah and register themselves with the **Ministry of the Interior as "of Jewish nationality and no religion". The Oppenheimers were among the many who took advantage of this. Jonathan's** military service was deferred at the request of the University and then again by the Yom Kippur War and the birth of their daughter Maya in Jan 1974, after which he was immediately conscripted into the Engineers. In November 1975 their second child, Noam, was born but in 1976 the couple separated. Jonathan met his second wife, Merav, in June 1977 just before leaving for a sabbatical year at Cambridge. Merav spent that year teaching Hebrew in London at a Jewish school where she had previously taught for two years.

Merav and Jonathan returned to Haifa in 1978, but a year later Irma said she wanted to take the children to live in London. Jonathan relinquished his post in Haifa in 1980 and found employment in England and his ex-wife and children had been found a flat in Kew by Jonathan's father. However when dropping Jonathan at Ben Gurion airport his ex-wife dropped the bombshell that she had changed her mind and was not leaving Israel (The dropping off place at Tel Aviv airport is not somewhere one can have long discussions!).

Merav completed her BA at Haifa in 1981 and joined Jonathan, who had bought a house in Brixton. They were married in 1985. He was still un-interested in rabbinic Judaism at that time and did not feel that a certificate from a rabbi could make him more Jewish than he already felt, but Merav had come from an orthodox Sephardi Moroccan background and after their son Joe was born she wanted to join a synagogue community.



Her best friend was a friend of Judith Ish-Horowicz who introduced her to Rabbi Danny Smith and he asked to meet Jonathan, who was so impressed by the rabbi that he started attending services at Worple Road. He was introduced to Daniel Borin who quickly made him realise how little he knew about Jewish religion and took him to some of Louis Jacobs' services.

In discussion with Rabbi Smith about his Jewish status, the rabbi pointed out that in our Reform movement if one can demonstrate that one has **lived consistently as a Jew, one's Jewish status** can be confirmed. Jonathan duly appeared before the Reform Beth Din, which determined that he was Jewish.

Having been introduced to the synagogue by Judith, like many, Jonathan's arm was eventually twisted by the then Chairman, Patrick Bower, to become an assistant warden, then to join Council, **where after holding the 'House' portfolio for** some years and a year as Vice-Chair he was elected Chairman in December 2006. Highlights of his term have been efforts to improve the **synagogue's finances, including encouraging** increased contributions to the Maimonides Fund and Kol Nidre Appeal and the establishment of the Community Growth Fund, preparing for the **Rabbis' absence on sabbatical leave,** encouragement of the Local Networks Project, **and the synagogue's 60th** anniversary celebrations.

Notes from an interview with Marcelle Jay



At the age of 9 in May/June 1940 the young Marcelle Byre, only child of elderly parents, escaped with them from the clutches of the Nazi occupation of France via Bordeaux. They were in France because her father had been working in France for MGM in film sales at the time war broke out. Her youth in France and natural talents led to Marcelle being a very accomplished linguist.

On arrival in England in 1940 the family first went to Paignton, Devon and then came to the Mount Royal Hotel in London and she remembers well the Blitz. The family were then evacuated to Alderley Edge in Cheshire (long before footballers chanced on living there) and generally moved around a lot during the war.

Soon after war's end Marcelle was admitted to University College, London in 1949 for a BSc (general) degree. Whilst a student she met Barrie Jay in Hampstead and he was introduced as a nice young Jewish man and two years later in 1952 they were married. Barrie did his National Service at Shorncliffe near Folkestone and served as a Captain in the RAMC. They first lived in Bayswater under Rabbi Louis Jacobs and when looking for a permanent home for their family loved the chestnut trees on Parkside so much that they moved to Beltane Drive, this was when the synagogue was in Worple Road.

Their son Robert was Barmitzvah at Sutton United Synagogue. Marcelle became involved in our community through education. Barrie had an extremely busy career life as a surgeon and was very interested in the Wolfson Foundation. Leonard Wolfson was the best man at their wedding.

Barrie suffered his first coronary at the age of 38 in 1971 and was told to ease up and at that stage became interested in philately which hobby he graced by becoming President of the Royal Philatelic Society. Because of his illness he had asked Marcelle to help with his professional work as she already held a 1st M.B from the Sorbonne in Paris. Marcelle developed a special interest in genetics and the movement of population. She feels that this occurred because of her somewhat nomadic life.

Barrie wished for her to be pushed as hard as was possible and to that extent sent her to the man who had taught him his doctorate. Although she was told that she would not get her PhD based as an external student at University College, London she persevered and worked out her own card coding systems and devised alpha numeric codes. She became an MPhil in 1975 and a PhD in 1981; hence her correct title is Dr Marcelle Jay. She was one of the first women scientists and jointly won with her husband, Barrie, the European Paediatric Ophthalmology Award. Marcelle knows she had a wonderful marriage, and a true partnership

The synagogue means a lot to Marcelle; her husband came from a religious family. Her eldest son has married and lives in Hampstead and their younger son is also married.

Prior to Diane Barnett, Marcelle was the Synagogue Librarian and she likes the community here in Wimbledon which she considers to be learned and studious. She herself is not a philatelist like her husband but she does keep letters and postcards from the occupation of the Channel Islands.

Notes from Sir Michael Burton

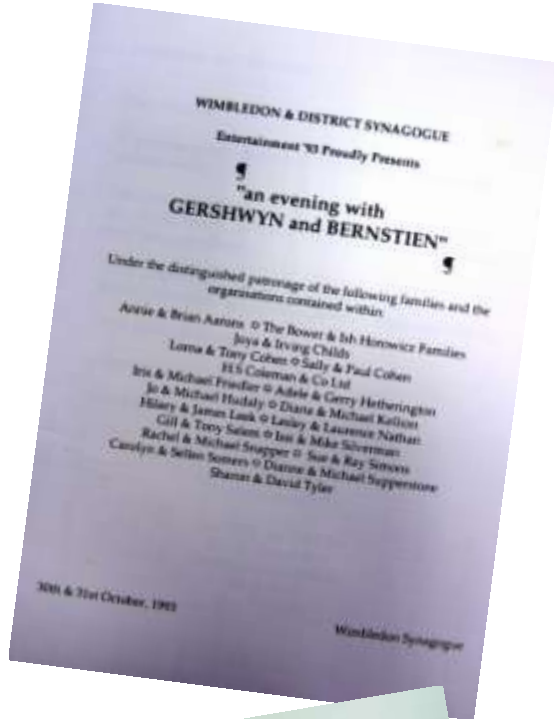
My family and I have been members of Wimbledon Synagogue since the late 1970s, when we moved to Putney and thence in **1989 on to Wimbledon. Corinne's father was a doyen of the old Putney Synagogue above the Chinese Restaurant (particularly difficult for the congregation - aroma-wise - on Yom Kippur), but we were delighted to join the vigorous (and aroma-free) Wimbledon community instead. We have had the four bat mitzvahs of Josephine, Isabel, Genevieve and Henrietta, under the auspices of successive Rabbis, Danny Smith, Bob Shafritz and Willie Woolf, and in addition a poignant event when there was a massive gathering for the dedication of the Corinne Burton Hall, in Corinne's memory after her death in 1992.**

I would like to say that my keen memories of the Synagogue - old and new - have been atavistic religious ones (or perhaps the **odd political highlight, in my nine years as the community's representative on the Board of Deputies**), but I am afraid I must confess they are largely thespian! The most exhilarating **time was the production of the Wimbledon Synagogue's very own full-scale musical, when we put on Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat.**

I was lucky enough to be Pharaoh, and I particularly recall the opening of the Second Act, when I am discovered sitting in silent grandeur on the throne in centre stage, and before the action started, in the deadly hush of expectation the small voice of my then very young daughter Henrietta suddenly piped **up from the audience, "That's my Daddy!"**

I also treasure particularly a show in which four of us - Diana Kelion, Colin Manning, Corinne and I - performed a **G & S pastiche, which I had written, called "Into the Market we shall go". Other spectacles throng through my mind - Victorian music halls, the witty dramatisation of an 18th century case about Jewish marriage in the English courts (one in which I was egocentric enough to play the judge!), Koshers Kapers, Purim shows, Noel Coward, Gershwin, Bernstein, Sondheim, G & S, Lerner and Loewe - Coren, Plummer(s), Kelion, Aarons, Conn(s), Manning(s), Child, Salem, u.s.w. How lucky we are to have a building - thanks to the enormous efforts of those responsible - in which we can have so many splendid and fulfilling celebrations - religious, social and dramatic. 60 years?**

Bis hundertundzwanzig, as they say!



Notes from an interview with Miriam Kramer

Miriam Kramer, daughter of German Jewish refugees from Friedberg and Frankfurt-am-Main, was born in London. She was taken to New York at the very young age of 4 as her father, born in 1895, like many German Jews a loyal soldier of the Kaiser in WW1, had been sent to New York with a view to checking the market for the shoe business in the United States. Her parents decided that the United States was the land of the future and moved there in 1953. They lived in the US until the early 1970's when her father semi-retired and her parents moved to Switzerland whilst she remained in New York.

In 1974 Miriam returned to England, never having held US citizenship, although the possessor of a Green Card. Her grand-mother, not a member of any synagogue, lived in Twickenham as did **Stephen, her future husband's, parents.** They were friends of Miriam's grand-mother and aunt. Miriam first met Stephen when she was 10 and he was 12. They met again some 17 years and were married in 1978 at Worple Road with Rabbi Avidan officiating and Rabbi Emeritus Charles Berg in attendance. About this time Stephen had entered on a short lived political career before returning to the law which he graces today as a Q.C. and Judge.

Whilst in New York Miriam had been involved with conservative synagogues but moved away from Judaism at university. When marriage was in the offing she agreed to marry at the Worple Road Synagogue. At that stage Miriam did not even attend shul for Yomtovim.

However when their daughter Joanna was 3, she came home one day with a tale about baby Jesus **which to quote Miriam "flipped her mind".** The Kramer's then lived in the Vineyard, Richmond Hill in which street they have continued to live. The result of this reverse of "Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus" so to speak, was that the family attended a baby and toddler Chanukah

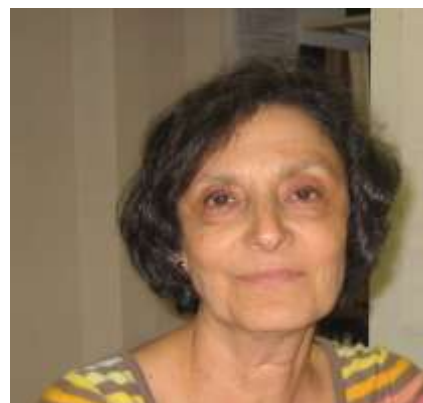
party and within 12 months Miriam was involved in the community.

Together with Sharon Tyler and Yvette Ball, Miriam took services for the 4 to 7 year olds and was involved in the PTA, Education Committee, Senior Warden at the current site under Rabbi Wolff, Chairman and currently Vice-President until December 2009.

Miriam devised the Selection Committee for the replacement Rabbis after Rabbi Wolff and was Chair of the Selection Committee for our current Rabbis: Sybil Sheridan and Sylvia Rothschild: who had applied in what was then a unique situation for job share, as a single application.

Stephen's role was and is supportive, although at the end of Miriam's chairmanship he did thank the community for returning his wife to him. Their children Joanna and Robert went through the whole process, Baby/Toddler, Cheder, Bneimitzvot, assistants at Cheder and both of them remain involved in communal activities: Joanna at Wimbledon and Robert all around.

Among Miriam's many achievements, a freelance journalist specialising in art and antiquities, have been membership of the RSGB Board for many years until 2006, and the first woman to chair the Governors of Leo Baeck College, to which she had been introduced through Rabbi Jonathan Magonet in 2003. In 2007 Rabbi Magonet asked Miriam to chair the College's 50th Anniversary Committee; form an events committee and take-up the Chairmanship of the College which began in January 2007.



Rabbi Sybil Sheridan



Rabbi Sybil Sheridan was born in Bolton to refugee parents from Nazi Germany. Her grandfather had the dubious honour of being the first official Jewish victim of the new Nazi regime when he was kidnapped in 1933. The family subsequently sold up and went to Brazil. While her father who had completed a year of Law at Heidelberg University before Jews were expelled, came to Manchester to study textile technology with a view to joining the rest of the family in Brazil later. However the war intervened, and he **met Sybil's mother, who had been brought to England as a child and was raised by her mother's cousin in Surrey, and stayed.**

The fourth generation of Reform Jews on both sides of the family, Sybil had no thoughts of becoming a Rabbi as she grew up as there were no women Rabbis, nor it seemed would there be. She was, however deeply interested in theology and took a degree in Theology and Religious Studies at Cambridge - the first non-Christian to do so - along with Rabbi Walter Rothschild - **Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild's brother.**

The first evening there changed her life. It was Kol Nidrei 1973, the start of the Yom Kippur War. It meant that very quickly the new Jewish students found each other and the Jewish Society and spent the first days actively engaged in giving blood, and demonstrating in support of Israel.

Sybil spent much of her time in Cambridge involved in J Soc, and helping to run the

Progressive Jewish Society. Her original plan on graduating had been to teach in a secular school, but increasing involvement in the Jewish life in Cambridge led her to want to work within the Jewish community.

Teaching Religious Studies in a Jewish school at that time was not possible as a non-male, non-Orthodox person and she wondered what else she could do when by chance one day, she opened up the paper and saw a picture of Jackie Tabick who had just been ordained as the first woman Rabbi in this country. That was the answer! Being a Rabbi meant teaching and working within a Jewish community, just as she had wanted.

She wrote to Rabbi Tabick and met Rabbi Julia Neuberger and very quickly made the decision to apply to the Leo Baeck College. Her five years at Leo Baeck included two years study in Jerusalem and a stint as student Rabbi to the small Reform community in Beer Sheva. It was at Leo Baeck College that Rabbi Sheridan met her husband, Rabbi Jonathan Romain. They married on July 12th 1981, two weeks after she was ordained and **they settled in Maidenhead with Rabbi Romain's congregation.**

Sybil worked at the Ealing Liberal Synagogue for four years during which time their two eldest sons, Jamie and Matthew were born. She then took extended maternity leave - for eleven years - during which time she had two more sons, Benedict and Timothy, wrote a book and worked for a brief time with the Swindon Jewish community. When Tim was at nursery, Sybil went back to work part time at the Thames Valley Progressive Jewish Community in Reading where she stayed for eight years.

The job application for Wimbledon and District Synagogue was a joint one with Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild. The first time such an idea has been put forward. It is to the credit of the Wimbledon community that they were prepared to try this unusual arrangement.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says, 'Two are better than one, and a threefold chord cannot be broken.' Two Rabbis, they argue are better than one as each can focus on the areas they do best. The threefold chord suggests the two Rabbis plus the congregation, - a strong bond that has now (2009) been in place for seven years.

Wimbledon & District Synagogue provides a range of educational and community services: including adult education and Heder (Sunday School) one of the most important and high **profile parts of the Synagogue's** community work.

Adult Hebrew Class at the Synagogue 2009



Notes from an interview with Rabbi Cohen

Rabbi Cliff Cohen has twice played a role in the life of the Wimbledon community, firstly during Rabbi Rothschild's maternity leave some 5 years ago and currently during the sabbatical of our Rabbis.

On both occasions he was briefed by the Chairmen of council, Miriam Kramer in the first instance and currently Jonathan Oppenheimer of what was required of him, which was primarily pastoral work and in particular to keep in contact with those unable to attend the synagogue.

This is a role that is easier for Cliff to fulfil as a stand-in Rabbi because he does not make the contribution to MRJ work which our Rabbis do. He has not been involved much in Shabbat services but involved in mid-week services on festivals.

During his time with Wimbledon Cliff, who lives in Ramsgate, has been staying locally with friends to avoid the 100 mile each way journey. Although currently living in Ramsgate he grew up in Croydon the son of a working class family. His father had had to leave school at the age of 14 because of his father's death and the 5 younger sisters he had. The family were active members of the South London Liberal Congregation and Cliff has fond memories and thanks to Rabbis John Rayner and David Goldstein.

From school Cliff became the first member of his family to go to University and studied Sociology at Leicester University with no thought then of the Rabbinate. He had an association with the Leicester Liberal community whilst at University.

Many of the things included in his university course such as existentialism and logical positivism were all new to him and a feeling developed that at that stage of his life he did not know enough about Judaism. He contacted Rabbi Goldstein who suggested that the Leo Baeck College might be a suitable place for him for an adult Jewish education.

Cliff was privileged there to have such eminent teachers as Rabbis Hugo Gryn, Louis Jacobs and Lionel Blue. For a number of years after graduation he became a Rabbi of a north London community, before deciding that the full time rabbinate was not for him.



Cliff Cohen – a much appreciated visiting Rabbi

Notes from an Interview with Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild

Rabbi Sylvia's **father's family** was from a German liberal Jewish tradition. Her maternal family had originated from Vitebsk, Belarus and from Riga, Latvia. Her father was born in Hannover and had connections with Baden-Baden in southern Germany.

He arrived in Bradford from Germany. Her grand-father in the early days of Hitler was imprisoned in Dachau but fortunately was able to get away from there and reach Switzerland.

Bradford was the choice of arrival because there had been links between that city and Baden-Baden.

Bradford proudly possesses the third oldest Reform synagogue in England and many teachers from Baden-Baden were welcomed in Bradford because of a relationship between Bradford Grammar School and the Baden-Baden Gymnasium and situations found there for them.

The Bradford synagogue had a hostel for young men and Sylvia's father was found a place there. Later he joined the R.A.F. and served for a time in India. He was at times the Treasurer, Secretary and Chairman of the Bradford Reform community.

Sylvia's parents were married in the early 1950's at Bradford synagogue. Her siblings include older brother Walter (who had a role in the introduction of our two Rabbis to each other) and who is now the Landes-Rabbiner for Schleswig-Holstein in northern Germany.

The library at his synagogue is named after him. Her younger sister is a music inspector operating in the West Midlands and sings at the Birmingham Liberal Synagogue. Sylvia was a pupil at Bradford Girls Grammar School one of only 5 Jewish girls and experienced the kind of reaction that many have seen at English places of education, not anti-semitism but probably

ignorance of who or what Jewish people are.

The synagogue and community in Bradford was quite small without a resident Rabbi and the whole Rothschild family usually took the services.



The weekend after her Bat mitzvah Sylvia along with a few other families in the community was left in charge of the Shabbat service. She acquired 7 A levels during her secondary education before going to Manchester University for a course in Psychology, where she ran the Progressive Jewish Students Society during her time there.

On leaving University her thoughts turned to clinical psychology and she did one year working in a Therapeutic Community in Coventry with **disturbed adolescents**. At this time Sylvia's friendship with Martin (whom she met at University) developed and she followed him to London to do social work in Islington.

They belonged to the West Hampstead Jewish Community. Martin worked then for World Orton Union, having studied at LSE. He came from an orthodox background and a year after meeting they became engaged and were married in 1982 at the Bradford Reform synagogue with the officiate being her brother Rabbi Walter Rothschild. Her father was Registrar at the wedding and her sister was the Choir.

At this time she realised an interest in the Rabbinate, her brother was a friend of Rabbi Sheridan. He suggested that Sylvia come to courses at the college then functioning at Marble Arch. Sylvia combined this with psychiatric social work for a time before applying to the college Rabbinic programme.

Sybil Sheridan was ordained six years before Sylvia, having left college just before Sylvia joined. Sybil is the 3rd and Sylvia the 8th woman Rabbi to be ordained by the Leo Baeck College, which then ordained for European Rabbinate.

In February 1987 young Charlotte arrived and with Sylvia being ordained five months later in July 1987. In her own words a tough year. She started as Rabbi at Bromley for the High Holy Days in 1987. Two more additions came to Sylvia and Martin, Raphael in 1993 and Zachariah in 2003.

As is well known when there was a Rabbinic vacancy at Wimbledon these two ladies, Sylvia and Sybil put in a joint application as one person for the post of Rabbi. They had worked together writing and editing the Women Rabbis second **book 'Taking Up The Timbrel' so knew they could work together.**

Both selected and appointed under the Chairmanship of Miriam Kramer. Of Sylvia's family Charlotte is now at Oxford studying History and Politics, Raphael is entering sixth form and at the time of this interview Zachariah is finishing reception year. Martin worked for the King's Fund for 15 years after leaving ORT and has now moved on to running his own company.

Our two Rabbis have a common purpose and equally each has her speciality. Sylvia deals more with the pastoral field because she has had Counsellor training. She deals with young adults, proselytes, the Beth Din and outreach. Sybil has her field in education for all age groups from the youngest to the extremely old.

Sylvia has been the Chairman of the Assembly of Rabbis for 5 years a post which Rabbi Jonathan Romain has also held.

Her feelings for our community are that we are an amazing community with very many active people and she cites as examples those who helped on Mitzvah Day, help externally at Nightingale home and the amount of activities that go on in the synagogue during the daytime and which many members do not see or know enough about.



Flory Solomon the much loved,
gracious and smiling Administrator
of Wimbledon & District
Synagogue
for 13 years (1988-2001) who
passed away
in October 2006 aged 70.



Notes from an interview with Alan Etherton

Alan came from Essex and joined our synagogue in 1959. During the Second World War he saw service in the Royal Navy joining as a Boy Telegraphist. He served for 3 years and was at HMS Malabar in Bermuda (the transmitting station for the West Indies Fleet) and returned with the rank of Petty Officer (Radio Mechanic). Alan married at the age of 21 to his wife Elaine, sadly now no longer with us.

Both of them came from the Orthodox tradition with his wife being the grand-daughter of Elkan Maccoby the brother of Chaim Zudel Maccoby, the Karmenitzer Maggid (1858-1916). They have 4 children 3 sons and a daughter. One son is the Rt. Hon Sir Terence Etherton an Appeal Court Judge and Alan's daughter is a senior barrister. They met Rabbi Berg and joined our community.

Alan served on the Council under Rabbis Berg, Avidan and Smith and was Chairman of the Thursday Activity Group, Israel Committee and Youth. Under his chairmanship the youth

committee had its first and last football team including the two daughters of Josie Murname. Elaine also served as Chairman of the Ladies Guild and she became the first woman Vice-President of our community.

At one stage in his career Alan undertook a course in International Style Architecture and the subject of his examination thesis was the Worples Road synagogue. The architect was a Czech Jewish refugee Ervin Katona RIBA, in the 1948/9 period. Amongst many of the documents that Alan has loaned to the synagogue is an acceptance of a price of £ 2750 for the land in Worples Road (they had actually offered £2000 originally but had to raise the offer).

Alan's thesis also shows that the building cost was £ 10,000 meaning that the total cost of the new Worples Road synagogue was some £ 12,500. It is important to note that the building of that synagogue was done in the Bauhaus style and was one of the only examples of Bauhaus architecture in south west London.

Alan has been a member of AJEX for a very long time and has been National Hon. Secretary and Chairman of SAJEX, and also is a past Vice-President of the local branch which at one time had over 200 member as well as five other branches in south west London. These are all now amalgamated into one branch.

For the past 14 years Alan has been married to Shoshana, an Israeli Sabra. She was born in Israel, when it was still Palestine. She served in the I.D.F. as an intelligence officer and has two daughters one living in London and one in Israel.





The Worple Road Synagogue designed by the architect Ervin Katona RIBA, a Czech Jewish refugee, who worked on the Bauhaus style.

The Worple Road building (which was sadly not preserved) was probably the only example of the Bauhaus style in south west London.



Brigadier Samuel Janikoun
OBE, FRCS, QHS
March 12th 1913- December 15th 2008



Sam Janikoun was one of few Jews of recent immigrant stock who rose to high rank in the British Army. His high technical competence was allied to an unshakable imperturbability and total reliability.

After he graduated in medicine he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in World War II with whom he saw frontline service in North Africa and Italy, and in France after D-Day on June 6, 1944.

In later service he was based in Singapore with a wide remit throughout the Army serving in the Far East. Janikoun was seen in the Army as particularly successful in his close liaison with the other forces.

As a medical practitioner, he acquired a special skill in handling and fitting artificial limbs, which he developed that in his latter years in the Army. In the 1960s when he was the moving spirit of what is now the Lewis National Rehabilitation Unit at Tel Hashomer Hospital, Israel, which rehabilitates, and provides prosthetic limbs to accident and war-injured Israeli citizens. He was also involved in the selection of Israeli doctors for training in the UK, both projects treating Jew and Arab alike. Janikoun continued his work at Roehampton Hospital, in South West London.

His wife, Magali, who was a dental student when they met, predeceased him after nearly 60 years of marriage. He is survived by two sons and two daughters.

For about 15 years he was a stalwart of Wimbledon Synagogue, which he attended until just before his death.

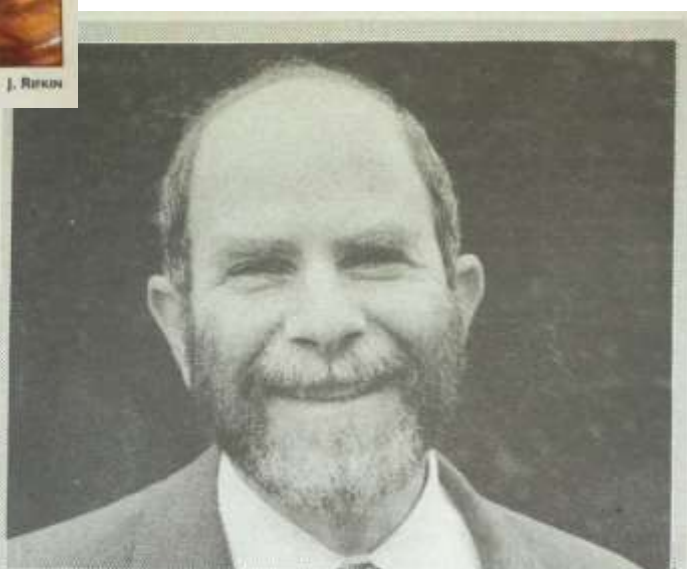
Information from AJEX Obituary and TimesOnline



The Duchess of Gloucester looks on as Rabbi Daniel Smith and Channi Smith read from a Torah scroll J. REKUN

Rabbi Daniel Smith,
Rabbi at Wimbledon
1982-1993

Rabbi Robert F. Shafritz who served
as Rabbi from October 1993 until his
untimely death on Tuesday 23 July
1996



Synagogue welcomes new rabbi

WIMBLEDON has a new rabbi to serve one of the largest Jewish populations in Surrey.

American-born Bob Shafritz was officially welcomed to the Wimbledon and District Synagogue in Worple Road at a special ceremony on Sunday attended by around 300 people.

Mr Shafritz, 48, was born in Philadelphia and has spent time in France and Iran before coming to Britain in 1977. He trained as a rabbi at the Leo Baeck College and took up his first appointment at the West London Synagogue.

The Wimbledon synagogue has 850 subscribing members and belongs to the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, a less orthodox group than United Synagogues.



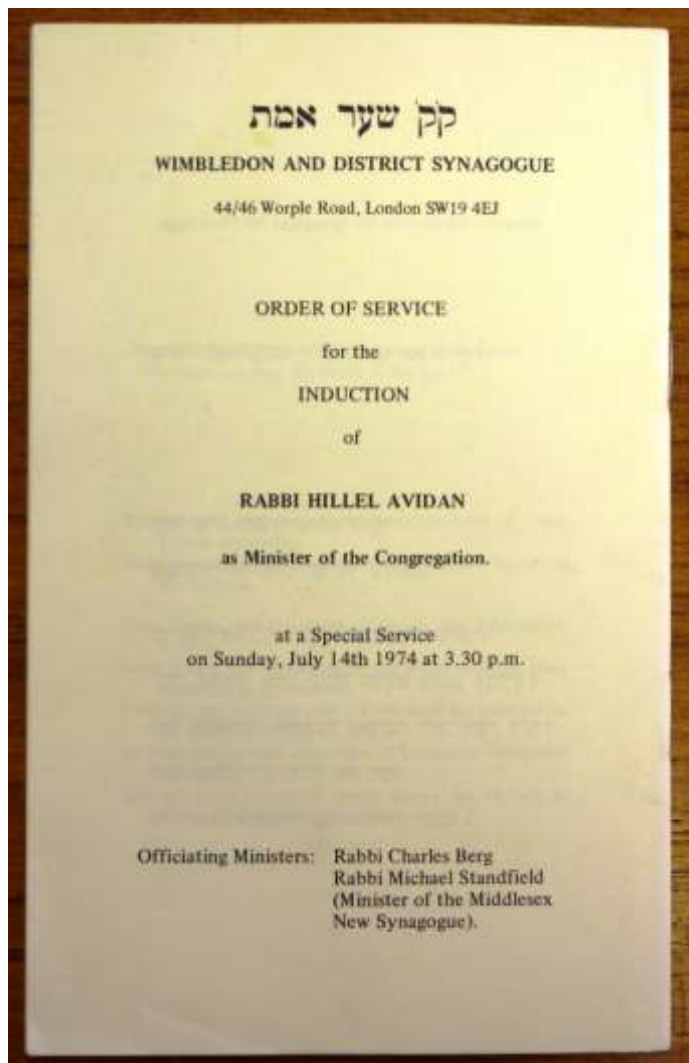
Rabbi Willy Wolff,
Rabbi at Wimbledon
1997-2002

Notes from Rabbi Hillel Avidan

I served as rabbi of the Wimbledon and District Synagogue from June 1974 till August 1981 (the inscription near the synagogue entrance has 1980 which is incorrect). During these 7 years I dealt with many wonderful people, some of whom are still around though most have left this life for the eternal tranquility of Ha-olam Ha-ba.

In 1974 the congregation included many Central European refugees from Nazism and of course my predecessor, Rabbi Charles Berg, was himself a refugee from Germany. By 1981 the proportion of young British born Jews was much higher and in our Religion School we had 180 pupils. That included a dozen or so post bar and bat mitzvah students of whom the majority remained with me till entering university. In 1976 I took my post bar and bat mitzvah group on a study tour of Amsterdam and in 1978 to Prague.

Wimbledon was and still is the finest synagogue south of the Thames.



Warm regards
HILLEL



Rabbi Avidan with study tour group en route to Amsterdam

Notes from an interview with Judith Ish-Horowicz

Judith is married to Patrick Bower, son of Marcus, and both of whom have been Chairmen of Council amongst their many other and extended roles in our community and Reform Judaism. He is a true child of the community.

Judith's father born in Poland was very learned in Judaism and went to Palestine in 1936 and studied at the Technion whilst her mother moved to live in Jerusalem in 1925. Her parents were married in Palestine and came to England where her father gained his MSc in Civil Engineering at Manchester University. In his retirement and at the age of 70 he studied and obtained his doctorate in Theodicy (how could God let it all happen?) and was a stalwart of the Manchester Reform community. Judith had her Bat Mitzvah in Manchester at the same time as Rabbi Sybil Sheridan. Judith and Patrick were also married there.

Judith and Patrick's meeting came through music and the playing of the clarinet. Judith took her degree at Leeds University and then became Head of Music at an inner city Comprehensive school. They became first and second clarinet in the Ben Yuri orchestra and Patrick qualified as a doctor. They have had four daughters including twins with at one stage all under 5. Now they are respectively doctor, teacher and the youngest two being students of medicine and history.

After marriage they lived in Streatham and joined the synagogue when their children were born. The children went to the baby/toddler group and Judith became involved there both as a

parent and also a potential teacher and re-trained to do Early Years teaching. She now has an MA in Early Childhood Studies. She then thought of a Jewish nursery group and this opened in 1991 becoming as now known "Apples



and Honey" in 2004.

It is registered for 24 pupils and is now over-subscribed and with a waiting list. It is open to everyone with a priority for Jewish families. It is well staffed and with a strong support team. The Ofsted report stated "Outstanding education" and "good care".



**Marcus Bower father-in-law and
former Synagogue Chairman from
1956-1966**

IMAGES

Page 2 - *inside front cover* - Rabbis Sylvia Rothschild and Sybil Sheridan—**Wimbledon & District Synagogue's** job-share Rabbis.

Page 3 Opening of the Worple Road building in May 1952.

-Worple Road Synagogue foundation stone 8 April 1951.
-Interior of Worple Road Synagogue.

Page 4 The Dog & Fox, Wimbledon where meetings regarding the founding of a synagogue were held in 1949.
-Annual Dinner & Dance Souvenir Brochure 1980.
-Foundation stone of the new synagogue at Parkside 6th December 1998.

Page 5 60th Anniversary Ball invitation, menu, and brochure 7 June 2009.

Page 6 Photograph from the opening ceremony of Worple Road building 1952.
-Order of Service for the consecration of the Worple Road Synagogue May 1952.

Page 7 Copy of the consecration prayer for Worple Road.
-Synagogue Minutes 1950.

Page 8 Photographs from the opening ceremony of Worple Road Synagogue 1952.

Page 9 AJEX Remembrance Service November 2009.
-Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem invitation to a Jonathan Miller evening at W&DS.

Page 10 Ladies Guild Musical event leaflet May 1988.

Page 11 High Holyday Services times of services at Wimbledon Town Hall 1981-5742.

Page 12 Opening Service at new Synagogue Parkside 1997.

Page 13 Portrait of Rabbi Berg 1974.
-Rabbi Berg covenant with W&DS 5 April 1955.

Page 14 Josephine & Harry Urban.

Page 15 Portrait of Harry Urban.
-Letter of appointment of Harry Urban as a UNRRA doctor 1946.
-Cover of the book *Tovarisch I am not dead*.

-**Promotion for the film of Harry Urban's book at the Palm Beach Film Festival.**

Page 16 Neville Barnett at new synagogue celebrations 1997.

Page 17 Diane Barnett & Raymond Hart in the W&DS library.
-Harriett Barnett with her painting of Joseph & Brothers with the Mayor of Merton & Chani Smith—Artfest 1986.

Page 18 Kehillah—W&DS Community Magazine April 2009.

-W&DS Festival of Music brochure 1987.
-the move to the new synagogue 1997.
-W&DS magazine Jan-Feb 2003.

Page 19 Worple Road Lamp.

Page 20 Aerial photograph of Athlone Hall, Queensmere Road, 1997.

Page 21 Portrait of Marcelle Jay.

Page 22 W&DS Entertainment Souvenir Brochures.

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Page 24 Rabbi Sybil Sheridan with former chair Marcus Bower.

Page 25 Portrait of Rabbi Cliff Cohen.

Page 26 Portrait of Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild.

Page 27 Portrait of Flory Solomon.

Page 28 Planning permission for Worple Road, May 1949
-Interior of Worple Road.

Page 29 Worple Road exterior & interior.

Page 30 Portrait of Brigadier Samuel Janikoun.

Page 31 Portrait of Rabbi Daniel Smith.
-Portrait of Rabbi Robert Shafritz.
-Portrait of Rabbi William Wolff.

Page 32 Service booklet for induction of Rabbi Avidan.
-Rabbi Avidan with his study group.

Page 33 18th Birthday party of the W&DS nursery—March 2009.
-Marcus Bower - former chair.

Page 34 Bet class at 2009 W&DS Tzedakah Fair.

Page 35 Opening ceremony of Worple Road Synagogue 1952.

Page 36 - *back cover* - 40th Anniversary Gala Dinner & Ball brochure.
-Annual Hanukah Party invitation 7 December 1972.
-Kosher Kapers souvenir brochure March 1986.
-MRJ W&DS Award winners 2009.



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| | 5710 | | |
| 1950's | ↓ | 1949 | Foundation of Synagogue |
| | | 1949-1956 | Chairman Ernest Ableson |
| | | 1952 | Consecration of Worple Road building |
| 1960's | | 1953-1974 | Rabbi Charles Berg |
| | | 1956-1966 | Chairman Marcus Bower |
| | | 1966-1969 | Chairman Clarence de Wolfe and completion of Joe Barnett Hall |
| 1970's | | 1969-1981 | Chairman Aryan Kahane |
| | | 1971-1973 | Chairman Philip Mishon |
| | | 1974-1975 | Chairman Leslie Lawrence |
| | | 1974-1981 | Rabbi Hillel Avidan |
| | | 1976-1978 | Chairman Alan Tyler |
| 1980's | | 1977 | Silver Jubilee, Civic Service |
| | | 1979-1980 | Chairman Jo Shaerf |
| | | 1981 | Chairman Alexander Knapp |
| | | 1982-1983 | Chairman Sheila Sowby |
| | | 1982-1993 | Rabbi Daniel Smith |
| | | 1984-1985 | Chairman Kurt Gottschalk |
| | | 1984 | Refurbishment of Joe Barnett Hall |
| | | 1986-1987 | Chairman Irving Childs |
| | | 1988 | Chairman Neville Barnett |
| | 1989-1990 | Chairman Gordon Saville | |
| | 1989 | 40 th Anniversary, Civic Service | |
| 1990's | 1991-1992 | Chairman Marcus Bower | |
| | 1991 | Wimbledon Jewish Nursery established | |
| | 1993-1996 | Rabbi Robert F. Shafritz | |
| | 1993-1995 | Chairman Julian Samuels | |
| | 1996-1998 | Chairman Stella Mason | |
| | 1997-2002 | Rabbi William Wolff | |
| | 1997 | Move to Parkside building | |
| | 1999-2001 | Chairman Patrick Bower | |
| | 1999 | Golden Jubilee and dedication of new building | |
| 2000's | 2002 | Rabbis Sylvia Rothschild and Sybil Sheridan | |
| | 2002-2004 | Chairman Miriam Kramer | |
| | 2004 | 55 th Emerald Anniversary | |
| | 2005-2006 | Chairman Julian Samuels | |
| | 2007 | Chairman Jonathan Oppenheimer | |
| | 2009 | 60 th Diamond Anniversary | |
| | 5770 | | |





WIMBLEDON
& DISTRICT
SYNAGOGUE



Wimbledon & District Synagogue 60 Voices