

CHATHAM MEMORIAL SYNAGOGUE NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2008

Rosh Hashannah 5769

As editor, I am delighted to welcome two new contributors to this newsletter namely Irina Shub and Megan Matthews. Megan is following in the footsteps of her talented sister Eilla and her Halpern family. If you are reading this issue please do let me have your articles or comments for the next publication which will be in time for Pesach. It would be interesting to have profiles of some of the newer members of the community. As an idea to start this process I have reproduced an article from the Jerusalem post regarding one of our former members Cyril Solk, who was active in the community in the 1960's. Happily Cyril is alive and well and in communication with Gabriel Lancaster. I await your articles with anticipation.

L'Shana Tova

Jo Freeman (Hon Editor joeyfied@hotmail.com)

From the Chairman

It is a year since that last newsletter and how the time has flown. I have now been chairman of this wonderful community for 6 years and treasurer for 22 years. I have also been chairman of Jewish Kent since it was formed in 2004. I am very proud of the way our small community has continued to flourish when many others have struggled. We regularly get a minyan at our monthly Shabbat services and on festivals. I am also proud of the way we and our fellow communities in Jewish Kent set an example to the rest of the Jewish World as to how our different communities within different strands of Judaism can work together in a spirit of genuine friendship. It therefore a great pleasure to me that our friend, Rabbi Cliff Cohen of Thanet and District Reform Synagogue was able to participate in our Civic Service on 16 March 2008 together with our mentor, Revd. Malcolm Weisman.

Since the last newsletter, we have held successful High Holydays services, including the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah when our regular Ba'al Tekiah, Gabriel Lancaster called the Shofar notes for Eytan Melamud for the first time. Mazeltov to Eytan and we look forward to hearing him and Gabriel again this year. Simchat Torah, Chanukah and Purim were as always happy occasions enjoyed by young and old alike.

In January 2008, I again represented the Jewish community together with Hazel bishop of KLJC at the Holocaust Memorial Day event in Rochester Cathedral. In March we hosted three mayors at a civic service to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the appointment of Lazarus Magnus as Mayor of Queenborough. In June we hosted 9 young men for a "stag weekend". These were religious young men who wanted to spend the weekend near a nice shul. The best man is a relative of Harry Gamp and the bridegroom is a trained chazzan who conducted our Shabbat services with the help of his friends who formed an impromptu choir. The Kiddush and lunch afterwards were not only in honour of the visit but also to celebrate Hilary Halpern's 80th birthday. Mazeltov to Hilary and to the bridegroom, Jonathan Gilmour. In August we were again joined, as has become a bit of a tradition, by Elkan Levy for Tisha B'Av. Elkan told us of all the tragedies in Jewish history that had occurred on Tisha B'Av. He then mentioned that he had met his wife on Tisha B'Av and that they had been happily married for many years!

No, I have not forgotten the communal Seder. I started off this article by saying how proud I am of our small community. I have felt in recent years that the community is more like a large family. There are 2 particular occasions when this is most noticeable. Firstly on Erev Succot when we are all together in the Succah for Ma'ariv and Kiddush and secondly at the communal Seder which this year particularly felt more like a large family Seder than a typical communal Seder. I would like to thank the Halpern family for donating the new Succah and also David and Joanna Herling for their hard work in preparing the Seder following on from Dalia Halpern Matthews' efforts last year.

I look forward to seeing you over the High Holydays and I wish you and your family a happy, healthy and peaceful year.

Jon Weiner

Please let us have your news to ensure everyone receives the goods wishes they deserve

Social & Personal

Welcome to our new members Hugo Simoes and Eugene Soifertis.

Get Well Wishes to:

Hazel Bishop, chair of KLJC
Harold Regal

Mazeltov to:

Hilary on his 80th birthday celebrated in May
Shaun Shub and Theo Halpern on their forthcoming Barmitzvot

Congratulations to:

Ella Mathews on being accepted as a member of the Kent County Junior Choir
Ella also received the Brenchley Primary School choir club award. The only year 5 pupil ever to have received this trophy.

KOL NIDREI APPEAL 2008

Friends, I have for many many years been your Appeal Chairman and would willingly hand over this job to anyone who is prepared to take on this task providing they give everything to the job. I gave my grandfather a promise a lifetime ago that I would take care of the Synagogue and will continue to do so until a likely candidate presents themselves, either woman or man.

We are all trustees of a wonderful Synagogue that was given to us by Simon Magnus in memory of his son, Captain Lazarus Magnus, and whilst the building is today in good condition, we have to face the fact that within two years the stonework will need attention and could cost in excess of £50,000, which could use up our total wealth, even if you add together the sums of money in the Congregation and Trust Funds. In relation to this, my appeal this year is for the work that we will have to do to the stonework within the foreseeable future. Therefore, I am asking that all of us dig deeply into our pockets and give a sum far greater than last year. The sums that I anticipate we will have to spend are at least that mentioned and could be considerably more, and the likelihood of obtaining grants from English Heritage or the Council is very, very low.

I am aware that we live in troubled times and that it is easy to find reasons for giving only a small sum but this could cause a disaster for which we all would be responsible. We have repaired stonework in the past when it was urgent and lengthened the life of the remaining stonework, but I am talking in terms of a major overhaul in addition to which some of the stonework is now leaning and will have to be removed and re-built. Now there are no other alternatives. As a matter of interest since I retired, I continue to pay my fees as an Architect for only one purpose – the Synagogue; and I have never charged a penny for my services and I have also paid to the community any fees I received from English Heritage or the Council.

I hope you all are delighted to be able to come to the Synagogue which in my view is one of the finest small Synagogues in the world.

I wish you all a happy New Year and well over the Fast

Thank you.

HILARY A. HALPERN (Chairman of the appeal)

A donation form is available at the end of the newsletter

A Batmitzvah Down Under.

Gabriel Lancaster.

August, 2008.

Having received an invitation to the Batmitzvah of the granddaughter of a cousin in Sydney, Australia, I replied with an apology that it was a little too far away for my attendance at my advanced age. However, I was assailed by my sons, who demanded to know why I shouldn't go, while I was still able to move and had a little money in the bank; on asking advice from my daughter in San Francisco, I was told, "I don't think you should go, unless you come here first and pick me up," as she had also received an invitation, to which she had replied as I had!

We hastily cancelled our respective letters, receiving enthusiastic emails from our Australian cousins, with offers of accommodation and set about finding suitable flights, at convenient times and not too expensive. I belong to a very efficient travel club, whose representative, after sending three or four quotations with different airlines, finally settled on a B.A. flight to San Francisco, a Qantas flight to Sydney (with adjacent seats for both my daughter and myself) a return Qantas flight to Los Angeles and a B.A. flight to London. I decided to break my return journey in Los Angeles for a few days with another cousin, from a different side of my family.

On previous visits to Australia I had always found the weather quite warm, so, although I realised it was winter down under, for lightness I packed no cold weather clothing. When I arrived in San Francisco they were in the middle of a heat wave – visiting a friend in a little town, Petaluma, a few miles north of S.F., the temperature at midday was around 43 deg. C. When we arrived in Sydney the air temperature was a few degrees above freezing, so, despite being able to sit out in the garden when the sun was shining, I had to borrow some warm clothes from my cousin and was grateful for a couple of pullovers that my daughter suggested buying at a department store in Petaluma, which was having a summer sale of woollens! July is the coldest month in Sydney and this year was colder than average; the day after I returned home a Skype message from my cousin informed me that they had had a snow (or rather, fine hail) storm, the first since 1876!

This being my daughter's first visit to Australia, she enjoyed greatly the beautiful sights around Sydney, its harbour and the surrounding country and she was overwhelmed by the offers of hospitality and sightseeing from the myriads of cousins, second cousins, cousins once removed, etc. The Australian family was started by the younger brother of my mother, when he went to Sydney in about 1922, so Maurice, his older child and I feel quite close, especially as we are both engineers. I will not detail all the places we visited but must mention an evening at the famous Opera House, when we saw a startling performance of Mozart's opera, "Don Giovanni". Joy, my daughter, was particularly interested in the building, as, before she started her teaching career, she did some film editing and remembered working on a B.B.C. film about Sydney Opera House. Later in our visit she was able to take a guided tour of the building. Getting around in Sydney is fairly easy, as a single public transport ticket took us on all services, bus, train and harbour ferries, for the day.

However, our main reason for our lengthy journeys was the Batmitzvah weekend and what a delightful revelation that was! Having had no expectation more than the pleasure of being with my family for a simcha, I found that the 'performance' of the batmitzvah, Chana (named after my maternal grandmother, a delightful lady) renewed my hope in the Jewish heritage of the coming generations. Despite her diminutive stature (it was difficult to see her nose above the bimah!) she took an active part in the Shabbat services from Friday evening onward and had obviously studied and understood her parsha, "Pinchas", which includes mention of the five daughters of Zelophehad, who were allowed by Moses to become inheritors of their father's property. To my mind, Chana contributed more than most of the bar and batmitzvah youngsters I have seen and certainly gave me great pleasure.

On the Friday evening the rabbi, a very pleasant man, gave Chana a talk based on Pirkei Avot, the Sayings of the Fathers, containing some favourite quotations of mine and, after the service he and his wife very kindly invited the family to join them for the Shabbat meal, when he invited me to make the Kiddush, which was a very welcoming start to the weekend. The synagogue is a fairly plain, modern building, with some beautiful stained glass windows and the Shabbat service and Kiddush, fully choral, with a good choir, was attended by around two hundred people, including a contingent of family from Israel. A celebration reception was held on the Sunday, in the handsome venue of a local golf club, whose dining room had large windows looking out over the beautifully landscaped golf links.

Chana's immediate family is certainly steeped in the traditions of our Jewish heritage; her father, Don, hails from the U.S.A. speaking Hebrew with an Israeli accent and her mother, Lynne, my cousin's younger child, as well as having written a treatise on certain aspects of Judaism for her doctorate, practices calligraphy, particularly for ketubot, marriage documents. Her design for a ketubah was recently adopted as a standard by the Reform synagogues of Australia.

My other first cousins, both female, were also very hospitable, the older one, Joy, living on a road skirting Botany Bay, where Captain Cook first landed – her husband, a retired dentist, had designed their house and swimming pool himself. Joy took us for a tour around the south of Sydney, including a lookout for whales. On another day, Maurice's son, David, took us for a look at the Blue Mountains, a magnificent scenic area.

When my daughter, Joy, and I parted at Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport, we both agreed that our visit had far exceeded our expectations and had been well worth the effort of the long flights. I will certainly long remember Chana's Batmitzvah as a happy augury for the future of our Jewish heritage "**Down Under**"!

" A desire for knowledge for its own sake, a love of justice that borders on fanaticism and a striving for personal independence – these are the aspects of the Jewish peoples' tradition that allow me to regard my belonging to it as a gift of great fortune."

- Albert Einstein.

At a recent meeting, the Synagogue Trustees appointed three new trustees:

Jo Freeman
David Herling
Dalia Halpern Matthews

Two further candidates have been approached to become trustees.

The existing trustees are:
Harry Gamp
Hilary Halpern
Gabriel Lancaster
Jon Weiner

The Trustees meet annually and their duties are outlined in a trust document of 1870 and the Trust Deed of 1987. The Trust is a registered Charity approved by the Charity Commission.

Veterans: From Gillingham, Kent, (in 1970) to Herzliya

Aug. 9, 2007

GLORIA DEUTSCH , THE JERUSALEM POST

When you're approaching 90, as Cyril Solk is, you have to have had an interesting life, and Solk's is interesting by any standards. In World War II he served as a company quartermaster and was mentioned in dispatches. In the 1950s he had a fashionable hair salon in London called Cyrille Pour Dames. In the '60s he owned two beauty salons in an English country town until he made aliya in 1970. In the '70s he ran a catering business in Tel Aviv. When that ended he worked for years in the foreign exchange department of a bank. When he finally reached retirement age, he began volunteer English teaching. He also still caters for charity organizations, is an expert flower arranger and dispenses tips on how to be a wrinkle-free nonagenarian for free. A real charmer who wears his hat at a rakish angle, he has a sprightly 83-year-old lady dentist as a companion and lives to do good works.

BEFORE

ALIYA

His mother died when Solk was 15 and he left school to become an apprentice barber. "I learned to cut, but I also had to go down on my hands and knees and scrub the front step," he recalls. At 17 he was managing a salon and at 20 he married Netta, but had to get his father's permission first as he was underage. When the war broke out, Solk was drafted and became a quartermaster sergeant, responsible for keeping the soldiers well-fed and comfortable. He proudly shows me a letter from King George VI thanking him for his distinguished service. With the war over, he found that hairdressing had changed; new techniques and chemicals were in use for the ubiquitous perms and he had to relearn his trade. Eventually he was so successful that he moved to London and opened his beauty salon there and the beautiful people of the '60s were his clients. He moved to Gillingham in Kent and owned two salons there. His Zionist activity consisted of fund-raising and he did not visit Israel until 1967. Netta was active in WIZO and came as early as 1955, and their daughter Avril had settled here. After his first visit, leaving the sunshine for the ice and fog of England finally convinced him.

"We're going to Israel," said Cyril.

"I thought you'd never make up your mind," said a relieved Netta.

PREPARATION

"I'd been a big shot all my life, employing a large staff, accountants, the works, and I wanted to be a quiet little man with no responsibilities," he says. It took three years to sell up the business and the house.

ARRIVAL

"We were picked up at the airport and after all the Jewish Agency formalities, we were driven to the Borochov Ulpan in Tel Aviv which I'd booked in advance. There were no lights on the roads; it was like being in darkest Africa. I don't know how we managed in that tiny room with all our luggage after living in a mansion in Kent, but my wife never complained. Soon after we arrived, she set up the first English-speaking WIZO in Tel Aviv."

SETTLING IN

As soon as they'd finished the five-month ulpan they moved into their small ground floor apartment in Herzliya. "We had to settle for something modest," Solk says, "but this flat has wonderful memories, and its smallness did not restrict our hospitality."

DAILY LIFE

Through an acquaintance, Solk found out that another Englishman was about to open a restaurant in ZOA House in Tel Aviv. "I'd always loved to cater - I used to make parties for my friends and loved setting a beautiful table for Shabbat and festivals and I soon got into it. I worked very hard - it was like slavery - but we did well. I quickly learned flower-arranging and how to make ice-cream and petits fours for hundreds of people. Eventually we were given notice to leave."

THE REST OF THE STORY

By now it was the late 1970s and Solk, still only 62, was out of a job. "I helped found the local Conservative shul, otherwise I would have gone crazy," he recalls.

Finally he went to the personnel manager at Bank Leumi and asked for a job. "I said I had five languages and they gave me a job dealing with all the foreign correspondence. I was a big shot again with staff under me and a busy office."

In 1988 he and Netta celebrated their golden wedding anniversary and asked their friends not to give presents. "What we haven't got, we have learned to live without," they said, and established 18 scholarships through WIZO in local schools instead.

At 68, Solk began volunteering to teach English and did this five days a week in three schools for 10 years. He took a sabbatical to nurse his wife, who died in 1992, and took years to recover from his loss. "I'm still in love with my wife," he says.

He went back to teaching a few years after she died and still does it. He has catered parties for ESRA and finds it settles his nerves.

OBSTACLES

"I found the driving so terrible. When I came in 1970 I had a maroon car and all the other cars were putty-colored and everyone wanted to buy my car."

BEST THING ABOUT ISRAEL

"Sometimes I get on a bus or drive down to the sea and sit by the shore and reflect about our life here. Yes, there's a lot wrong, politically, socially but we're trying to beat it. I did the smartest thing I ever did when I came to live here because we've had a wonderful life. We both had our own ideas and occupations and we kept busy."

ADVICE TO NEW IMMIGRANTS

"Come with realistic expectations. We came with an idealism that was untrue and unreal. We thought we were coming to utopia, but no place in the world is perfect. If you can become a useful member of the society and have a purpose and can contribute, then this is the nearest place to heaven."

Cyril always took advantage of being the boss of a beauty parlor to have manicures, pedicures and massages. He looks far younger than he really is. For smooth skin, he recommends any cheap all-purpose cream. The main thing is to keep the skin from drying out.

"I also recommend a half a teaspoon of honey every day," he says.

“A JOURNEY”

A few weeks ago Marie, Adam and I were spending a long weekend at our house in Cassel, a little hilltop town in Northern France. On the Sunday afternoon, we had a leisurely country drive in our Saab (an automatic) and stopped at a nearby town, Hazebroucke, for a late lunch and a stroll, having parked in the main square. After a time, we returned to the car and were considering which way to continue – but no! the car would not start. I pressed the starter but the car only coughed, not a loud cough, but nevertheless a cough! I tried a few things – spoke nicely to it, swore in Yiddish, and I even went round the back and gave it a kick (when Marie and Adam were not looking). All to no avail, so we ‘phoned the AA and 20 minutes later a little man with a breakdown truck arrived, placed the car on the back and us in the cab, and off we went to a Citroen Garage in a village. Unfortunately there was only the driver and the AA on the phone trying to find help: i.e. a Saab garage and a hire car for us.

About 2 hours later I rang the AA again – “what is happening”? Only to be told they are thinking about it but, as it is Sunday evening they can’t arrange anything with Saab, or a hire car, but will send a taxi to return us to Cassel, and then continue with arrangements in the morning. That was 9.30 p.m., the 1st day.

Monday morning (Bank Holiday in UK) the AA rang – Saab, Lille, could collect the car late morning (they would look at it on Tuesday, diagnose the problem Wednesday and repair as and when e.g. the next day or week? – they are fully booked and have staff on holiday) – we could stay on in France or return to UK car-less and have to return to collect the repaired car. We could have a hire-car from Dunkerque but it would be illegal to take this to the UK – we could change this in Calais for a hire car which could go to the UK

It was becoming very complicated! Marie asked where they were – “in Lyon (South France!) – and did they have a map of our area? – “no!” We already knew we would not be returning via Eurotunnel on Monday afternoon as booked!

At this point, I asked if we could take our car to be repaired in the UK? YES! They’ll arrange it So Monday was a quiet day – moins car. The 2nd day.

Tuesday a.m. the AA rang: it’s all arranged and we are to be ready to leave at 11.00 a.m. Hurrah! On the dot, we were ready and the same breakdown truck arrived with our car on the back. Our luggage went into the boot; we went into the cab and off we went to the Car Ferry terminal at Calais.

After a few hitches, we’d collected our tickets and were deposited with the car in an empty lane on the dock side and the truck left immediately. It was a lovely day, we opened the windows (which were slower than usual?) and awaited the 2.10 boat, which had not yet arrived. We were early! The other lanes filled up and eventually emptied as the boat had arrived – and still we waited – sitting in our marooned car, like a beached whale on the now empty and vast tarmac. Meanwhile we discovered that the battery was flat – the car couldn’t even cough now – the gear was in “park” and could not be moved without power, but it needed to be in “neutral” or “drive” for the car to be towed!

Marie’s mobile phone was our only communication point and the UK driver phoned “Where are you?” as he waited in vain when the 2.10 ferry docked at 2.25 p.m. UK time! We were still in Calais!

Eventually a little tow truck appeared – we made the driver understand that the battery had died – he told us we’d have to wait for the 3.30 p.m. boat, the other had left! and he went away !..... We were helpless! When he returned with jump leads, we were towed into the boat – the

last car in, among the juggernauts on the lowest vehicle deck, with the great door closing behind us and the tow truck gone.

The crossing was pleasant and we were pleased to have a late lunch! Back in the car, we waited again – the boat docked and unloaded – the lorries went, and we sat isolated on the deserted deck! The mobile rang again – “Where are you?” “Still on board and now maybe going back to Calais?” as re-loading had commenced and juggernauts were parking near us! But no! the little tow truck finally turned up, with the jump leads, and we were towed out to the dockside and left there. And here was the UK recovery vehicle to our rescue (and with more jump leads) and a more comfortable cab!

We finally reached Saab, Maidstone, and on to Rochester (having almost forgotten to retrieve our luggage from the car.....) after 6.00 p.m. – the 3rd day.

P.S. The car was repaired 2 weeks later.

Hilary & Marie Halpern
23 September 2008

A Stag Weekend in Our Synagogue.

Members of our Synagogue enjoyed an unusual event in June, when we were hosts to a group of young men who were intent on celebrating the forthcoming marriage of one of their number, by having a weekend together, away from home but within reach of a synagogue for the Shabbat services.

The event was arranged by Charles Daniels, together with Jon Weiner, our Chairman, to celebrate the anticipated marriage of Jonathan Gilmour, a solicitor, of Brighton, to Sharon Addlestone, of Leeds, which was to take place in Harrogate, on 22nd. June. The two young men were joined for the weekend by seven of their friends from North-west London, the Chatan being kept in the dark about the arrangements, only being told to get to the St. George Hotel, in Chatham before Shabbat. After the Friday evening service the visitors sat down to a supper in the Centenary Hall, to which they had kindly invited Jon Weiner and the writer and which made the rafters ring with Shabbat table songs.

Synagogue officers handed over the conduct of the services to the visitors, as the bridegroom is a trained cantor, with a melodious and strong voice, who was backed by his friends, making an impromptu choir. Jonathan commented later on the superb acoustics of our beautiful, listed building, which allowed him to make the most of his singing of the lovely melodies of the Shabbat liturgy.

During the Shabbat service Charles Daniels sat in a seat where, much to his amazement, he noticed a name scratched on the ledge in front of him, which he recognised as that of his great uncle, Monty Wilson, who had spent his boyhood in the area during the 1930's! This led to the realisation that he was related to our own Harry Gamp, whose aunt was a member of the Wilson family.

After the service, the young men were entertained to a Kiddush and buffet lunch, jointly provided by them and the family of our former chairman, Hilary Halpern, who was celebrating his eightieth birthday that weekend.

Subsequently, Jon received a letter of thanks from the group, saying how much they had enjoyed the weekend and offering a handsome donation towards the repair of some of our Torah scrolls.

An enjoyable and rewarding experience for our little community!

Gabriel Lancaster.

ONE VOICE FIRST BRITISH CHAPTER ESTABLISHED AT GLASGOW UNIVERSITY
Laurence Freeman Press & Publicity officer

OneVoice is an international movement of Americans, Palestinians, Israelis, Europeans, Muslims, Jews and Christians who are fed up with the ongoing conflict and who are ready and eager to support a serious process, leading to a comprehensive agreement that will fulfill the hopes and aspirations of both the Palestinian and the Israeli people for a two-state solution.

While the needs and concerns of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples are different - Israelis wish to end terror and the existential threat to Israel; Palestinians wish to end the occupation and achieve an independent Palestinian state - the vast majority on each side agrees that these goals are achievable only by reaching a two-state solution. What remains is to demonstrate to the elected leadership on each side that Israelis & Palestinians want a negotiated two state agreement, and overwhelmingly support immediate negotiations toward that goal. Mobilizing civil society to this effect is OneVoice's aim.

One Voice does not propose any solutions but it believes in the power of the people to create a historic change, to take part in the decision making process and to help bringing an end to the conflict through an uninterrupted negotiations that will lead to a final, fair and comprehensive peace agreement.

To implement its mission, OneVoice utilizes a four-pronged approach: recruitment, citizen negotiations, youth leadership, and mobilization. Our activities are coordinated from our regional offices in Tel Aviv, Ramallah, and Gaza City, with international headquarters in New York.

College campuses worldwide are becoming increasingly polarized. Student groups outside of the Middle East are developing views that are often more entrenched than those within the Region. Frustration at their presumed inability to effect change deters students from the paths of moderation and cooperation. Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim groups are not working together nearly enough; they are divided and increasingly ignorant of, and antagonistic to, the views of 'the other'. This leaves campuses susceptible to extremist infiltration as groups draw battle-lines against each other and as voices of moderation are lost.

By introducing OneVoice Youth Leaders to divided campuses, we aim to bring opposing groups together and to deliver a message of unity. We will offer student groups a common cause and focus for their endeavors, which will enable them create a positive and effective joint force. Replicating our Middle East methodology, OneVoice will demonstrate to student groups that their views and goals overlap more than they realize and that a united message and efforts can help build sustainable peace.

During week-long speaking tours, Youth Leaders: address large audiences; meet with student and community leaders; and exchange best practices in combating challenges that arise from the conflict in their own communities. In the process, we bring opposing groups to the table, expose them to voices from the Middle East living with the conflict daily, and inspire coordination among the many campus and community stakeholders.

Building on the IEP's successful track-record, OneVoice has also been working to strengthen and deepen the impact on campuses by holding follow-up Leadership Training Seminars and cultivating Sustainable Networks that will identify challenges in their own communities and design initiatives to address them. Active networks throughout North America and the UK have already coordinated a series of simultaneous "Mobilization Days" designed to raise awareness in their own communities and amply the calls for an end to conflict in Israel and Palestine.

Please note the views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Board of Management of the Synagogue

The Chatham Scrolls

David Herling

What actually lies behind the magnificent wooden doors of our aron kodesh, the ark at the far end of the synagogue? The scrolls of the law, of course. We are so accustomed to glimpsing them at regular intervals, they are so central to Judaism, and our tradition teaches us to regard them with such reverence, that perhaps we do not often stop to wonder what these objects really are, and where they came from.

Earlier this year, I had the immense treat of welcoming Bernard Benarroch, an expert sofer (Jewish scribe) to the shul, and the excitement of knowing that I was certainly about to learn some hard facts about our six sifrei torah. Bernard's visit was arranged by our friend Elkan Levy of the Office for the Small Communities, and the two of them were accompanied by Bernard's young son, Zak. We placed a table in front of the ark, and one by one the scrolls were brought out and examined.

This in itself was something which could not have happened in the absence of a professional, because we ourselves never move or touch the oldest and most fragile sefer. Bernard, however, took a quick look at it, and concluded that it was rather less fragile than we had thought. It was taken from the ark, undressed, and rolled open. There, on parchment made of goat skin and darkened by age, was the most elegant and accomplished of Sefardi scripts. This sefer is about 250 years old, and was written either in Morocco or Tunisia.

At the back of any synagogue official's mind as an expert goes through the community's sifrei torah, must be the question "is he going to say they're unkosher?" To be fit for ritual use, a sefer torah must be exactly that - a faithful and perfect text of the Torah. If even single letters become cracked or otherwise damaged, the scroll is no longer kosher (though it may well be possible to repair the damage). But as the examination proceeded and I became accustomed to Bernard's approach, it became clear that he was not going to slight the scroll by simply pronouncing it unfit. Technically it is not kosher, but Bernard preferred to describe it as "so well used that it will never be perfect". He also recommends that it can be brought out of the ark on Simchat Torah and other ceremonial occasions.

It was clear to me that he regards sifrei torah almost as living things which should be treated not just with respect but with feeling. He told me that he had only once had to bury a scroll (this is what is done with any Jewish sacred text which has become so damaged as to be unusable). Nothing had prepared me for the relief he clearly intended to communicate at the fact that this had happened to him only once, or his pain even at that one occasion.

I had known for a while that we had one ancient Sefardi scroll, but the second one examined proved also to be from North Africa, albeit not as old as the first. The fact that not one but two of our scrolls are of this exotic provenance is fascinating for the light it sheds on the early history of our community, and gives food for thought for a long time to come. Actually one of our two smaller scrolls is also Sefardi, although probably from Amsterdam or possibly Italy. Thus, our six scrolls divide evenly between Judaism's two great traditions, the Sefardi and the Ashkenazi.

Of the three Ashkenazi scrolls, it seems that two were written either in Germany or Bohemia, while the third (the scroll we use regularly) is from Eastern Europe. All would benefit from restoration work, but Bernard was emphatic that the small Sefardi scroll was a fitting priority, because its size and light weight make it a particular asset. It happens also to require the least amount of work and expense, and the Synagogue's Management Committee has decided to arrange its restoration as soon as the funds can be raised. The entire inspection visit and written report, it should be noted, were carried out for no payment.

As the examination continued, two things happened. The first was that Bernard began to carry out straightforward repairs on the spot, glueing together an etz chaim (stave) that had become detached, re-sewing a seam in our regular sefer (the one at the end of the Rosh Hashanah readings, in fact), explaining some of the simplest techniques that apparently we could even carry out ourselves. The second was that Bernard's son Zak, a very accomplished singer, finally did as Elkan was prompting him to, and took the opportunity to try out the shul's notable acoustics. The rest of us joined in, quietly, from memory, as the repair work continued. In a covering letter accompanying the report he sent me after the visit, Bernard said that his son was still talking about it, and that it would stay with him for a very long time.

I can say the same. About the scrolls, I have still more questions than before, although they are now more focused ones. Who came here with two North African sifrei torah? Did that person perhaps lead our services, and what would they have been like then? What did these scrolls look like when they were still mounted in their traditional Sefardi-style cases? But perhaps more than the facts which solicit those and so many more enquiries, I was deeply struck by Bernard's attitude to the seforim. And not only that. As we chatted about the nature of this community, and Zak asked me question after question about it, I tried to explain its character, the way it differs from the big metropolitan communities, and the way in which we adapt and evolve our customs to try to cater to everybody who crosses our threshold. Bernard and Elkan, each the product of a far more orthodox world than ours, simultaneously and emphatically approved.

To make you smile!

A good Hassidic family is most concerned that their 30 year old son is unmarried.

So, they call a marriage broker and ask him to find their son a good wife.

The broker comes over to their house and spends a long time asking questions of the son and his parents as to what they want in a wife/daughter-in-law. They give him a long shopping list of requirements.

The marriage broker takes a long time looking and finally asks to visit the family again. He then tells them of a wonderful woman he has found. He says she's just the right age for the son...she is a wonderful cook... she keeps a kosher home...she regularly attends synagogue and knows the prayers by heart...she loves children and wants a large family. And, to crown it all off, she's gorgeous.

After hearing all this, the family is very impressed and begins to get excited about the prospects of a wedding in the near future.

But the son pauses and asks inappropriately: 'Is she also good in bed?'

The marriage broker answers, 'Some say yes...some say no.'

Not Forgotten*
By Irina Shub, Local Studies Librarian
Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre

One day a print-out from a local newspaper appeared on my desk. The title of one of the articles was "Lieut. Albert Isaacs", and it reported on the funeral of the lieutenant, describing him as a "victim of the Old Brompton tragedy". The funeral had taken place at the cemetery of the "Jewish Synagogue, High Street Rochester". There was neither a date, nor the name of the newspaper. My professional curiosity was aroused – I was collecting material on the Jewish community in Medway, which includes Rochester; and the unravelling of this intriguing story began.

One clue that gave away the period, when the article was published, lay in name of the Rabbi officiating at the funeral – Rev. Fenton was the resident rabbi in the area between 1903 and 1919. Further, the presence of the Middlesex regiment at the funeral, pointed to 1914-1918 when the Medway Towns served as a base for various regiments during the Great War. However, Lieutenant Isaacs wasn't mentioned in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database for casualties, nor did he have a Medal Index card (National Archives website); he was not commemorated in *Roll of Honour* in the *British Jewry Book of Honour***, nor was he mentioned in the list of officers who died in the Great War 1914-1918 (HMSO 1917). His name seemed to have been obliterated from most of the primary sources of the Great War, and my visit to the National Archives produced a negative result - there seems to be no information on Isaacs' war records. Nevertheless, in conjunction with Martin Sugarman, Harold Pollins and Saul Issroff, I managed to piece together the sad story of a bright man who was eager to help the country yet who was only too hurt and felt a deep sense of rejection. This feeling played so much on his mind that the only way he saw of redeeming himself was to sacrifice his life, to end it by his own hands by shooting himself. The purpose of this article is to commemorate Lt. Albert Isaacs, whose name and life have been forgotten for 90 years though he served in several British military campaigns and became a victim of the Great War.

His death certificate disclosed that Albert Isaacs, 37 years old, from the 5th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, died on the 2 September 1917. A burial register for the Jewish cemetery states that his burial, attended by his relatives, members of the Middlesex Regiment and several South African officers took place on the 6 September.

* This article would have not been written without the indispensable help of Martin Sugarman, the Archivist of Jewish Military Museum of AJEX; Dr. Saul Issroff, an Hon Vice President of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Great Britain, and Harold Pollins, a retired Senior Tutor of Ruskin College, Oxford.

** In the *British Jewry Book of Honour* in the list of those who served in the Middlesex Regiment there is a mention of Lt. Isaacs, A. as a survivor. It is impossible to establish whether it was the same person.

However, there is no extant headstone on Isaacs' grave in the synagogue cemetery. I checked the local newspapers, and the *Chatham Observer* and *Chatham News*, both dated the 8th September, revealed a full report of the inquest into the death of the Lieutenant.

Albert Isaacs was born in 1880, a son to Pauline, 27, a German national, and Samuel Isaacs, who was Jewish. The family lived in the agricultural town of Vryburg, situated in the North West Province of South Africa halfway between Kimberley (capital of the Northern Cape Province) and Mafekeng (capital of the North West Province) and famous for its diamond mine Du Toits Pan. There was no Jewish community in Vryburg at the time, so in order to perform a circumcision according to Jewish custom, the family either travelled to Kimberley or invited a *mohel* to Vryburg. Unfortunately, Pauline died the following year when Albert was just 1 year old. His father soon remarried, and the boy was brought up in the Jewish tradition by his father and step-mother. Later Albert became a member of the Johannesburg Stock exchange, and went on to become their chief book-keeper. As a young man he took part in the Second Boer War (1899-1902).

At the outbreak of the First World War in summer 1914, both the South African and British governments were aware of the importance of South Africa's border with adjoining German-controlled territory. Therefore, it was crucial to invade German South-West Africa (Namibia). The invasion however was delayed, as South Africa experienced a considerable degree of sympathy for the German cause among the Boer population due to German support for their national independence during the Second Boer War twelve years earlier. Lt. Col. Maritz, Head of commando forces, together with several other high ranking officers rapidly raised about 12,000 rebels ready to fight for a "Free and Independent South Africa, free from British control", which became known as the Maritz or Boer Revolt. The government under the command of Generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts declared martial law in October 1914 and the rebellion was successfully suppressed by early 1915.

In January 1915 several forces were raised and made ready to attack German South-West Africa. The Eastern Force under command of Col. Berange was concentrated in Vryburg. Albert Isaacs joined one of its units – Cullinan's Horse brigade. *

It is unclear whether he joined the unit as a Lieutenant, or got promoted through merit. He participated in the invasion of the German South-West African colony, the second largest. Cullinan's Horse were meant to surprise the Germans from the east, across the Kalahari desert from Vryburg through Rietfontein on the way up through Keetmanshoop and Windhuk to Luderitz. According to the memoirs of one of the soldiers who took part in the same campaign, the physical conditions of the troops were challenging: the heat during most hours of the day was pretty unbearable, while water supplies were scarce – "a wash is a luxury, and washing clothes is an impossibility. . . . Another trying thing is fine sand and dust. The hot wind that blows from about noon till 7 or 8 sends it in clouds so thick that tents only 20 or 30 yards away are blotted out of sight. This sand gets into the tents and smothers everything, including the food and water. . . . During the afternoon winds the dirt gets caked thick on you, and anyone with an ounce or two of water left for a wash is considered a lucky dog. We're quite in a desert, and as far as one can see right to the distant hills, there is nothing but sand and stones."

The operation ended on 9 July 1915 with the capitulation of the last commander of the Schutztruppe – Franke. It was the only campaign in the First World War, which was planned, executed and successfully completed by a British dominion.

During the action Isaacs established himself as a translator, having cooperated with the Intelligence Staff, and rendered most valuable assistance, using his first language to translate captured German papers into English. In 1917, he applied to the War Office for a position as an interpreter, and was commissioned to join the army with the rank of Lieutenant.

According to the *Supplement to the London Gazette* for the 27 August 1917 and the *Army List for September* 1917, Lt. Albert Isaacs, together with a group of another six officers from the South African Defence Force, joined the 12th Battalion* of the Middlesex Regiment on 24 June 1917. He arrived to England on the 27 July, and was drafted to the regiment on the 23 August 1917. On a temporary basis he was attached to the 5th Reserve Battalion of the same regiment, which was stationed in Gillingham, one of the Medway Towns in Kent.

* 12th (Service) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment was formed in Mill Hill, London in August 1914 as part of the Second Kitchener's army. In September 1914 it was attached to the 54th Brigade of the 18th Eastern Division, which served on the Western Front from spring 1915, taking part in most of the significant actions in France. In total, the Division suffered more than 46,500 casualties during the Great War, of whom 13,727 died. The 12th Battalion was disbanded in France on 13 February 1918.

At the beginning of the war, the Middlesex Regiment was stationed in the Barnsole Road School, but very soon compulsory billeting was introduced, and the men were distributed among the local population. Members of the regiment were billeted in the same neighbourhood, so each morning after breakfast they could assemble for drills in the nearby streets. "They would march off to training grounds outside the town." (Baldwin, p281)

During those last days of August Isaacs took drills, which he found awful. He attended two or three interviews in London, but was turned down due (in his own mind at least, and perhaps in fact) to his family origins. Baldwin also states that the war created many local spy scares – Medway was known for its naval and military bases. Quite frequently those scares involved innocent people, whose foreign-sounding names or known foreign descent put them under suspicion. Isaacs clearly fell within the second category: his mother was German, and he spoke German better than English. Isaacs brooded over his rejections. He tried to resolve the situation by speaking to one of the training instructors of the officer's class, and explaining himself. He stated that he felt he was in a false position, although he was an interpreter and knew German better than English, he was repeatedly being turned down, because his mother was German. He knew nothing about infantry work, and felt that he was more inefficient in it than even the rawest recruit. He was offered a job as a miner, listening out for German miners and tunnellers in the trenches, but that position did not attract him. Isaacs wanted to be an interpreter. The instructor suggested persevering, which did not ease the situation. Every day Isaacs became more and more agitated and complained a lot about not being able to get away from infantry life. The army clearly wasn't interested in utilising his best skills. On 1 September he wrote several letters, which he stamped but did not post. In a letter to his father Albert wrote that things "turned out so differently to my expectations".

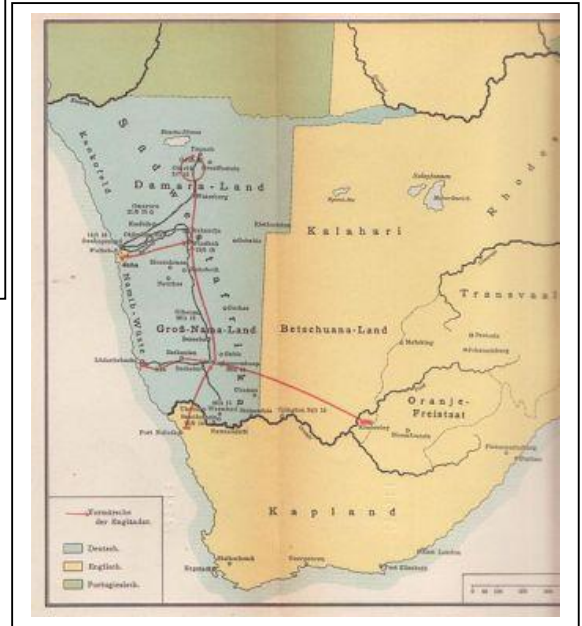
On Sunday 2 September Isaacs arrived to the Queen's Head Hotel at 1:45pm for his lunch. It was his third visit to the Hotel - their cooking was definitely better than in many other places. He quickly had his meal and left the place before 2:30. At 6:30pm he returned for his dinner. In the bar he had half a bitter and dry ginger and then proceeded to a private room where he ate his meal in solitude while reading. At five minutes to nine Isaacs asked the manageress of the Hotel whether he could have a wash and was shown to the bathroom on the first floor. To everyone who saw him that evening he looked normal though rather quiet. It was not obvious that under this pretended quietness and calmness Isaacs was deeply suffering from immense stress and a combination of emotions – being rejected and wasted in the army, hurt, feeling under suspicion on account of his excellent knowledge of German, his detestation of infantry work and a sense of total helplessness in the situation. Unable to find a satisfying solution at 9:30pm Isaacs fired 3 shots into his chest through an opening in the front of his tunic. He was found still conscious by an officer from a neighbouring regiment. As the latter rushed out to call for a doctor, yet another black thought descended upon Albert – he was a failure, incapable even of killing himself. What had he done? There was no future. The officer had not seen the revolver, and Lt Albert Isaacs fired 2 more shots through the same wound. The death certificate states the cause of death as "shooting himself during temporary insanity"; the inquest verdict "suicide during temporary insanity".

I was unable to find any statistical data on cases like this among soldiers in general and among Jewish soldiers in particular. The reason is that according to the Army Act 1881, sec. 38, the attempt to commit suicide was treated as a criminal act. As a result, suicides were covered up by the officials – the deceased were declared temporarily insane, thus automatically being excluded from the official, mainstream statistics. An interesting fact is that records of this and similar cases did not survive. Were they destroyed deliberately or is it just a coincidence? Whatever the reason is, these cases need special attention – people don't take their lives on a casual whim. From my research into two of such individual stories, the people concerned endured unbearable stress, personal trauma of high intensity, and the world seemed so bleak that the only way out appeared to be suicide. We celebrate heroes and remember them, but we forget those unusual ones, who were also casualties of the war. They should be remembered; not let slip through the net to be ignored and forgotten. This year as we commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Armistice, I am very pleased that we can obtain closure in one more case – that of Lt. Albert Isaacs.



Postscript.

An e-mail from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission from 19th May 2008 advised that Lt. Albert Isaacs had been added to the list of casualties of the Great War. A new headstone will be erected in the cemetery of the Chatham Memorial Synagogue, Rochester, Kent.



SMOOTH

By Megan Matthews Age 6

As smooth as the swans
floating on the lake,
As smooth as the waterfalls
As smooth as someone
swimming in a stream,
As smooth as a lonely stranger
who walks and walks without any wings
These are all the smooth things
there are



The Annual Garden Party
31 August 2008
Report and Pictures courtesy of Gabriel Lancaster



Despite the somewhat inclement weather, members and friends of Chatham Memorial Synagogue enjoyed a Garden Party at the historic home of members Hilary and Marie Halpern, adjacent to Rochester Castle,. The intermittent rain was defeated by taking advantage of the large hall at the rear of the house, which had been made into a roller skating rink from an open tennis court, in the 1920's by the then owners.

Entertainment was given to the adults by Ismini, a lady with a beautiful mezzo soprano voice, who sang Mozart arias and Israeli songs, the children being catered for by Ari Phillips, a Synagogue member, whose accomplished magic tricks caused rapt attention, even amongst the grownups!



Visitors included Dr. Grabinar, chairman of Catford Synagogue, with his wife, and Juliette Kaplan, the well-known actor from B.B.C. 1's "Last of the Summer Wine," who said how much she enjoyed visiting the lively Medway Jewish community.

Proceeds from the Garden Party, nearly £200, will go to Magen David Adom. Mr. and Mrs. Halpern were thanked by synagogue chairman, Jon Weiner, for their excellent hosting of this annual event.

I/We wish to donate to the Chatham Memorial Synagogue Kol Nidrei Appeal 2008

Name.....

Address

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E-mail:

Tel. No.

I/We enclose a cheque for £..... made payable to "Chatham Memorial Synagogue"

Please send to:

Hilary Halpern

Boley Hill House, Boley Hill, Rochester, Kent, ME1 1TE