Then and Now

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2025

To Commemorate the
150th Anniversary

OXFORD
JEWISH
CONGREGATION
1842–1992

COMPILED BY
FREDA SILVER JACKSON

Published by the Oxford Jewish Congregation,
21 Richmond Road, Oxford OX1 2JL

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ISBN 0 9519253 1 8 hardback

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Designed and produced by
Hunts Lithoprint Limited, Oxford
in conjunction with
Colin Currill Creative Services, Oxford

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO MY GRANDCHILDREN
and
TO ALL THE CHILDREN OF
THE OXFORD JEWISH COMMUNITY

I hope that when the Bicentennial Anniversary
is celebrated in the year 2042
and the "NOW" has become "THEN"
a further volume of Recollections
will be compiled for publication by them.

Freda Silver Jackson
Oxford
January 1992

Foreword

It is with great pride that I present this collection of recollections, a record of Jewish life in Oxford dating back to the early part of this century, onwards to the Second World War and through to the present day. It is intended that this volume of personal experiences will complement David Lewis's history *The Jews of Oxford*. In seeking out so many contributors from all walks of life I have found it particularly interesting to discover how varied their lives have been taking into consideration the one common denominator, their Jewishness. Inevitably, some of these recollections have overlapped, but this is part of the kaleidoscope that has made living in Oxford so fascinating and rewarding.

I have been fortunate in finding so many individuals who have volunteered their recollections and to whom I offer my grateful thanks. Sadly two such contributors, namely Sir Monty Finniston and Edgar Duchin, passed away soon after they had penned their reminiscences.

The year 1992 holds out great promise for the New Europe and whilst we in Oxford have, naturally, gone back 150 years for the purpose of our celebrations, we too can have high hopes for the future. It is interesting to note that whereas many congregations throughout the land are dwindling, the Jewish population in Oxford has grown into a well-established community. It is also noteworthy that our 150th Anniversary coincides with the fusion of a wider European Community. The growth of the Oxford Congregation owes much to the influx of Jews seeking refuge *from* Europe in the 1930's. Added to this came the evacuees escaping the Blitz which also emanated *from* Europe. Many of these people settled here making a significant contribution to the Jewish way of life in Oxford and to the world at large in the sciences and other academic fields.

It will be interesting for those living in the next century to compare the

'then and now' of Europe's attitude to its minorities. The history of the past has been a blot on civilisation - at present there appears to be a break in this 'tradition'. Let us hope that this will lead to a peaceful co-existence for our fellow Jews throughout the united Europe.

We, in Oxford, are doubly fortunate in the quality and quantity of our children which augurs well for the year 2000 and beyond. May the events of 1992 usher in an era of peace and tranquillity for us all.

Freda Silver Jackson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I offer my sincere appreciation to my friend Miriam Kochan
for her assistance in the early stages of this book and to
Tessa Brodetsky for help in proof-reading.

To my daughter Caroline and to Pamela Matheson my gratitude
for their drawings on the dust jacket.

Frances Davis, Stanley Silver and his two daughters and Tibor Reich
have given generous donations towards the cost of this publication.

Finally to my husband Leslie whose patience and understanding
has been a tower of strength throughout the compilation of
this book - his support has proved invaluable.

Greetings

. . . from ***Lord Jakobovits*** *of Regents Park, now Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth*

24th October 1990

It is a very special pleasure to express my warmest greetings to the Oxford Jewish Congregation on the forthcoming celebration of its 150th Anniversary.

Ever since I first visited the community after I assumed my present office in 1967, I developed a particular fondness for what is in many ways a unique Jewish community, principally of course because of its large component of academics and students.

Under the leadership of the late George Silver, the new Synagogue Centre was eventually erected, providing facilities including daily kosher meals for Jewish students in response to a growing demand. Mr Silver's memory will always be honoured.

Oxford is now an important centre of Jewish life, Jewish learning and Jewish scholarship. The Synagogue and its Centre have contributed much to achieve this. The whole of Anglo-Jewry will share the joy and pride to be marked at the milestone reached on the 150th Anniversary, and I wish the Congregation continued success in nurturing intensive Jewish learning and living among congregants and students alike.



Emeritus Chief Rabbi
Lord Jakobovits

Greetings

. . . . from ***Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks****, then Chief Rabbi elect of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth*

31st May 1991

Congratulations and blessings on an occasion of collective celebration: the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Jewish community.

You will receive many well deserved tributes. Let me add mine. I still remember with thanks the warmth and hospitality of the Richmond Road centre during what was, for me, a difficult period. In 1970-71 I had registered as a research student at New College, Oxford. I was newly married, so I sought out somewhere for Elaine and myself to live. There was nowhere. At that time, evidently, research students were expected to live in monastic bachelorhood. As I arrived in the university office dealing with accommodation, the last married quarters - a houseboat on the Isis! - had just been taken. So there was no choice. I had to take single lodgings, Elaine stayed in our flat in Cambridge, and during our first year of marriage we were together only at weekends. It was not what the *Torah* prescribed.

But during the week I found friendship and community in Richmond Road, as so many others have done. The synagogue and centre, its services and kosher meals, its lectures and social occasions became for me a second home. And I was reminded of that extraordinary and penetrating remark of the rabbis, that hospitality - making strangers feel at home - is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. The Oxford Congregation was and is part of that ancient Jewish tradition that begins with Abraham and Sarah and their tent where visitors could always find a welcome, a meal and simple human kindness. That is the true mark of the *Shechinah*, and may it always dwell in your midst.

What is the significance of an anniversary? The Hebrew word for year, *shanah*, contains an unusual dual meaning. *Shanah*, or the verb *leshanot*, means both to repeat and change. It signifies that the passing of the years is never mere repetition - it is also renewal. Each year as Jews we experience the same calendrical cycle. We read the same texts. We celebrate the same festivals. But we strive to find in them something new. Striving, we succeed.

The traditions of the Oxford Congregation are distinguished. It has sustained itself as a viable and active community for a century and a half at a time when the entire Jewish world has undergone momentous change. It has been host to generations of students and visiting academics and it has managed with grace and tact the sometimes difficult relations between town and gown. My deepest wish and blessing is that this singular moment in the community's history be taken not merely as an occasion for reflecting on the past but as a point of rededication to the future. May it be the beginning of new programmes and activities. May the years to come signal not just repetition but also renewal.

After a hundred and twenty years, the *Torah* says of Moses that his eyes were undimmed and his natural energies unabated. As individuals we cannot aspire to such a fate, but as communities we can. May the vision that inspired the founders of the congregation be undimmed, and may your energies be unabated for many years to come.



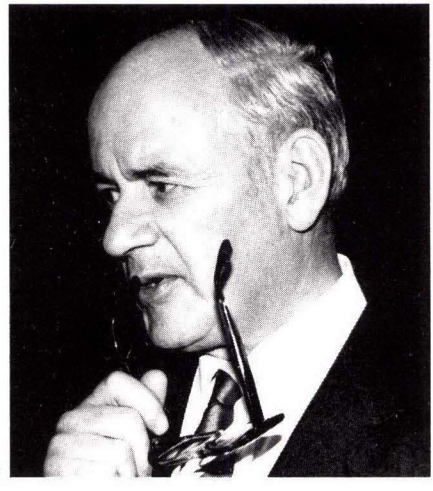
Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks

Greetings

. . . from ***Rabbi John D. Rayner****, Minister Emeritus, Liberal Jewish Synagogue, St. John's Wood, London and Chairman Council of Reform and Liberal Rabbis*

As a Cambridge man, I think it shows a commendable lack of partisanship on my part that I feel an almost equal affection for Oxford! To account for that feeling, I can offer ten reasons: (1) that I like the place; (2) that I have many friends there; (3) that I used to long jump for Emmanuel against Exeter in the days of Roger Bannister; (4) that I appreciate the contribution Oxford scholars have made to human knowledge; (5) that I am aware of the part the city of Oxford has played in Anglo-Jewish history; (6) that I know about the Jewish treasures of the Bodleian; (7) that I admire the Oxford Centre for Post-Graduate Hebrew Studies; (8) that I find the Oxford Synagogue very pleasing; (9) that I have had the honour of being one of its patrons for a number of years; and (10) that it has a unique record of tolerance, in that it has long provided hospitality for a variety of Jewish social, cultural and religious gatherings: Orthodox, Liberal and Reform.

That last point is particularly important during this post-Holocaust age, which makes it a sacred duty to practise inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, and in an increasingly pluralistic community, which demands from us all that we rise to the vision of unity-in-diversity. May the Oxford Jewish Congregation continue to set such an example of generosity of spirit to the Anglo-Jewish Community, and may it flourish for many more centuries in freedom and in peace, in friendship and in creativity.



Rabbi John D. Rayner

Greetings

. . . . from the ***Reverend Malcolm Weisman****, Chaplain to the University of Oxford, visiting Minister to small Communities and National Hillel Counsellor*

I send greetings to all in the Oxford Community, both town and gown, on this very special celebratory occasion. In many other of our smaller Anglo-Jewish Communities, the festivities marking a centenary or bi-centenary, or, as in this case, a sesquicentennial, are often somewhat muted since the community concerned may have seen better days. It may be celebrating an occasion with more of a nostalgic flavour, dominated by depressing fears for the future.

In the case of Oxford, it must surely be right that this great celebration is dominated not by grim forebodings but by optimism based on the most positive evidence of success and spiritual vitality.

My experience of the Oxford Jewish Community goes back to the heady days of the 1950's when the old Synagogue served both as a place of regular prayer and a canteen for students open on *Shabbat* and Festivals only. Special meals sometimes were supplied at "Long John's Restaurant" run by George Silver.

Subsequently we obtained a regular meal service, which expanded into a house next door to the Synagogue and there we stayed until the early 1970's.

During that period, the small local Community, which was often primarily dependent on university undergraduate support for services, grew in size and commitment and became viable enough to be independent of the undergraduates.

Together, however, with the University community, the town Community then developed a broadly-based congregation which was able to provide an opportunity for its members to learn about Judaism in its widest sense.

I had the privilege, in 1974, of consecrating the present building. Since then, the whole community, town and academic, has set a very special example of tolerance and respect for the whole spectrum of the Jewish experience which, regrettably, is not widely followed in Anglo-Jewry as a whole.

The Community is basically traditional in outlook - reflecting the general religious colour of Anglo-Jewry. Yet it affords - under the same roof - facilities for those who have a preference for a less traditional approach.

Thus, Progressive Services and traditional activities, such as "Roots", are held in the same building and speakers on Judaism reflect the different Jewish trends to the full. Nor is the stomach neglected. In spite of the obvious financial difficulties, the student restaurant flourishes, and particularly on *Shabbat* and Festivals, it is an important social focal point.

I am very proud to have had a long association with both the Congregation and students in Oxford and very confident that the next 150 years will see even better and greater Jewish activity here.

I therefore have great pleasure in offering all concerned my heartiest congratulations and a big *mazaltov* for this very special event.



Rev. Malcolm Weisman

The Early Years

Sir Isaiah Berlin recalls

I came up to Oxford in the Michaelmas Term of 1928, and I fear I took no steps to seek out a synagogue or any other Jewish institution (which I imagined did not exist - I was almost right). However, I received a visit from Mr. Chaim Rabinovitch, now known as Chaim Raphael, the well-known writer on Jewish themes, whilst I was at lunch with my (gentile) friends sometime in November of that term. He invited me to come to a meeting of the Adler, or perhaps the Zionist Society (although I am not sure that it was in existence in 1928), and asked me if I wished to join the Jewish congregation. I did so immediately, and went to a service two or three Sabbaths later, and found that the Wardens were both members of eminent *Sephardic* families, one, the future Judge Mocatta, who the other was I am afraid I cannot remember. After that I became a fairly regular attender.

I became interested at that time in the social structure of the Jews at Oxford, of whom there were not too many. I have no idea of their number, but I doubt if there were more than seventy or eighty, if that. Sociologically, the Jewish hierarchy went more or less as follows. At the top were various Maranos - crypto Jews - members of indisputably Jewish families who did not wish to be identified as such in any way. I met two or three undergraduates like that. The *Sephardim*, on the other hand, were perfectly identified Jews. One of my contemporaries at Corpus was a future solicitor called Henriques (his uncle was a friend of the President of my college, and known to his friends as Qs or Queus); he and his cousins took little interest in general Jewish affairs, but were perfectly open and un-selfconscious about their membership of the Jewish community. These were, as it were, the 'grandees'. Below them, came the children of the, mostly German Jewish, middle class - with names like Heinemann, Bensinger, Schwab, etc., whose families tended to be members of the *B'nai B'rith* and prominent figures in the London Jewish community. A life-time friend of mine, now no longer alive, belonged to the 'grandees' and was typical of them, not in the least embarrassed about his Jewish origins

- I mean, the late Sir Henry d'Avigdor Goldsmid, a prominent figure in the literary world at Balliol (I met him quite early in my Oxford life); although he was pretty scathing about the Anglo-Jewish community, whom he looked on as vulgar and ignorant for the most part, and with which he did not much in those days associate, he spoke with pride about his own family, its grandeur in the early nineteenth century greater than that of the Rothchilds - and so on. The middle-class Jews, to whom I suppose I belonged myself, went to the synagogue from time to time, not regularly - rather like Anglicans in Oxford used to go to church. But we were faithful members of the Jewish community, and in my case habitués of the Zionist Society, not the Adler Society, which had a somewhat anti-Zionist tinge. There were two Jewish contemporaries in this university to whom I was close. One was Walter Ettinghausen, now known as Walter Eytan - a prominent Israeli diplomat, ex-Ambassador in Paris and ex-head of the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation; he was pious and anti-Zionist when he came up, but as a result of Hitler and the fate of his relations in Frankfurt (whence his family had come) he made a revolution of a hundred and eighty degrees and turned into a passionate Zionist, and indeed became the unofficial, unpaid head and quasi-rabbi of the Jewish community in Oxford in the thirties. During the war he was a cryptographer at Bletchley and after the war went to Israel and stayed there. My other friend was Wolf Aviram Halpern, whose father was an eminent Zionist leader, head of the Jewish Colonial Trust, which became the Central Israel Bank. Besides these, there were various other schoolfellows of mine from St. Paul's and other friends whom I met at Jewish gatherings.

Below this socially - this was due entirely to levels of income -came the children of Yiddish-speaking Jews up and down England, some of whom were exceedingly brilliant and very attractive, with whom I made friends. For instance, there was Sol Adler, a scholar of New College, who became professor at Harvard, later a Research fellow in Cambridge, and ended up by going to Communist China and staying there as adviser to various Chinese Communist governments. There was an excellent philosopher called Abe Adel, with whom I used to go to lectures, now retired from a Chair in New York - and there were other agreeable people. The children of Yiddish-speaking families, usually rabbis and other synagogue officials, tended to congregate together and did not seem to me to have a great deal of contact with their gentile contemporaries. The gravitational pull of their *Yiddishkeit* was powerful. My best friend among them was Abe Harman, at Wadham, who later became Israel's Ambassador to the United

States, and then President of the Hebrew University and an Honorary Fellow of Wadham College. I do not mean that they spoke Yiddish all the time, but they liked to do so, took great comfort in it, and it created a warm, cohesive feeling among them - I could speak no Yiddish, though I understood a certain amount - nevertheless, I was happy in their company and they were probably not too unhappy in mine. They became rabbis in various congregations in England, and they remained deeply embedded in the affairs of Jewish religious life - and I am sure were among the people who kept it alive and successful through the years. There were Israelis too, for example my friend Akiba Persitz, son of a prominent Jewish family in what was then Palestine, who was at University College. He had nothing to do with the English-speaking Jews but was on very happy terms with his gentile contemporaries and seemed a man from another country, more Israeli than Jewish, which has been increasingly the case ever since, in my opinion.

There were Jewish dons - Herbert Loewe, later Cecil Roth, Walter Ettinghausen who became a lecturer in German at Queens, and one or two others, but no Jewish Fellows of colleges save two. At this point I wish to go back in history. Cecil Roth has established that the first Jewish Fellow of any Oxford College was a famous mathematician, whose name was Sylvester; he taught in Cambridge, but could not get a Fellowship in a college because of the religious Tests. When Gladstone abolished these he was elected to a mathematics Chair in Oxford and thereupon became a Fellow of New College. He stayed for a few years and then went, I think, to some university in Louisiana. After that there was a gap, and the next Jew to obtain a Fellowship was Samuel Alexander, the philosopher, who came from Melbourne to Lincoln College - it is not clear that Lincoln, when they elected him, realised that he was a Jew, but he made no secret of it; he taught philosophy here for a few years, and then went to Manchester as Professor. He wrote an excellent book on Spinoza, was much respected in his day and received the Order of Merit. Then there was another gap. The next Jew was Professor Arthur Goodhart - he came, I believe, from a Fellowship at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge - I don't know how many people in Cambridge knew that he was in fact Jewish - and became Oxford Professor of Jurisprudence in 1931, which carries with it a Fellowship at University College. While he could scarcely conceal his origins, he was not identified, so far as I know, in any way with the Jewish community; neither his wife nor his children were Jews. With the advent of Israel he did develop fairly strong pro-Zionist views, but

that, of course, was a post-war development. The next Jew to be elected to a Fellowship was myself. I became a lecturer in New College in the Michaelmas Term in 1932 and a Fellow of All Souls in the same term, and went on teaching at New College until the war. German refugees were given Chairs; the great Latinist, Professor Frankel at Corpus, physicists like Einstein and Simon were, and certainly two or three other eminent scientists in other colleges. Among non-Fellows, there were classicists and economists and at least one distinguished philosopher - men who did a great deal for both human scholarship and natural science in Oxford during the thirties and during and after the war. Professor Sir Rudolf Peierls is a fine example of these Jews. There were no other Jewish Fellows, so far as I know (I may be mistaken) until Keith Joseph, (now a member of the House of Lords), was elected to All Souls a year or two after the end of the war. Since then, of course, the situation has changed enormously. I can think of no college which does not have Jewish Fellows, at least one if not more. Last spring I counted no fewer than seven heads of colleges who were less or more identifiable Jews. With Lord Goodman, Professor Hart and myself -none of whom could be accused of failing to identify themselves as Jews - they form a *Minyan*. The situation has altered radically, and my amateur statistics no longer apply.

As for the synagogue, it continued to have a perfectly regular attendance before the war, and indeed after. Cecil Roth, who was the *guru* of the community, at one time tried to make it into a University synagogue, as St. Mary's is the University Church. He wanted the university members of it, senior and junior, to wear gowns and academic caps - mortarboards. There were so many excellent people, non-academics, by now, partly as a result of the immigration from the blitz during the war, partly from other attractions of this city, that the idea of discriminating in favour of academics seemed completely unacceptable. Since I was the only established academic in Oxford before the war, I was a Trustee of the synagogue, and was therefore consulted on the matter. Jonathan Cohen at Queen's, David Daube at All Souls, David Lewis at Christ Church, were dead against this so it didn't go through. After that, as you know, the community and the synagogue have grown apace and flourished; there is scarcely room to contain all the congregants on *Yom Kippur*. So it is in general a great success story (the only serious row in my time was over a member who brought his dog into the synagogue on a Sunday afternoon), and I am happy to be able to record that during the sixty-two years during which I have been a member of the Oxford community, no recession, only progress has occurred. Long may this last.

Reminiscences, 1918 - 1930

*by **Judah Benzion Segal**, Emeritus Professor of Semitic Languages, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University*

I first saw Oxford and the dreaming spires in 1918. My family had left Newcastle-upon-Tyne to settle in the South when my father was about to go to Palestine (accompanied by my brother Sam) as member of the international Zionist Commission in the heady months after the Balfour declaration. My parents were familiar with Oxford. They had lived in the shadow of Jacob's Ladder near Hinksey while my father studied at St. Catherine's and ministered to the small Jewish Congregation.

During the war the community had grown; now, with the end of hostilities in sight, most of the Jewish wartime residents abandoned Oxford for the wider opportunities of London. During the Vacation it was not always possible to form a *minyan*. But we were regular attenders at synagogue, although it was a long walk from St. Clements. There was, of course, no kosher butcher in Oxford. My mother would receive her weekly parcel of kosher meat from Barnetts in London. Especially exciting was the fortnight before Passover, when we would study the food catalogue from Selfridges and discuss for days on end the delicacies we would order.

Oxford was on the route for *'schnorrers'* from the Midlands to London, and we would finance them for the next stage southwards as far as Reading. Nowhere did they find a kinder reception that at the house of Herbert Loewe in Beaumont Street. His generosity knew no bounds, for he would literally give his own coat to clothe the ill-clad. On *Shabbat* he held open house for Jewish students.

In the summer of 1925 I celebrated my barmitzvah. My father - who had returned from Palestine and was then Minister at Bristol - had himself delivered barmitzvah sermons to both my elder brothers. But on my barmitzvah *shabbat*, as chance would have it, Dr. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi, was making a pastoral visit to Oxford. Etiquette required that he be invited to preach. 'What is your name?', he inquired of me on his way to

the pulpit. Thereupon he adjured me sternly to be worthy of my name Judah, not to be a weak and vacillating Reuben - as I gazed upwards in wonderment and no little awe at his purple cummerbund. Later, in the privacy of our home, my father shyly read to me the sermon that he had prepared.

In 1927 my mother left Oxford for Jerusalem where my father had been appointed to the Hebrew University. I remained at school in Oxford, and lived for a short while at the house of an elderly Jewish couple in Richmond Road, a few doors away from the Synagogue. Mr. Freedson was a watchmaker, his wife a dressmaker. I remember her kindness, for she was one of the several unsung Jewish heroines who for a pittance, in provincial towns up and down Britain, provided kosher meals for stray Jews. I last saw Mrs. Freedson, widowed and blind, in the geriatric hospital in Cowley Road; the community had deserted her.

I have a memory, before exchanging Oxford for a university career at Cambridge, of a sultry Sunday in 1930 — or was it 1931? - - when a convoy of celebrities, guided by Herbert Loewe, placed plaques at sites of Jewish interest in Oxford. One stands in the Botanical Gardens, another in St. Aldates, a third at Osney. The climax of the afternoon was a tea party at which we were addressed by Dr. Buchler, Principal of Jews' College. It was an occasion that has remained memorable to all who participated.



Herbert Loewe (1882 - 1940)

Raphael Loewe remembers his father

HERBERT Martin James Loewe was appointed to a lectureship in Oriental Languages at Exeter College in 1913, and to a University lectureship in Rabbinics, which he held until his appointment to the Cambridge Readership in Rabbinics in 1931. On his return from war service in India in 1920 together with his wife (Ethel Hyamson who had been born in Oxford in 1887) he made his home in Beaumont Street a focus for Jewish undergraduate activity. It was here that on Sabbaths and Festivals he dispensed a generous hospitality in the tradition which he himself had witnessed, when a student, in Israel Abrahams' home in Cambridge. After Loewe's departure from Oxford, this tradition was maintained over many years by Dr. and Mrs. Cecil Roth. Loewe's spiritual stature, his staunchly observant Jewish practice and his tolerance, meant that his influence both over the Jewish student body and amongst his non-Jewish academic colleagues was marked. Many who subsequently achieved positions of eminence in the orthodox, reform, and liberal sections of the Jewish community, as well as in its lay leadership, remained conscious of the amount that they owed to my father's great religious guidance.

Recollections of Oxford

*by **Walter Eytan**, former Israeli Ambassador in Paris*

THE first I ever heard of the Oxford Jewish Congregation was from my father, who came up to Queen's in 1901. There was then a single Jewish couple living in the city, the Lipsons, in the house next to the Synagogue. They provided kosher meals for undergraduates who wanted them. More than this I never learned about Jewish life at Oxford at that time, but when I went up to Queen's in my turn 27 years later, I found the same Lipsons in the same house, still providing this service. They were elderly by then and hunchbacked, their house smelled musty as if no window were ever opened, and I was not tempted to go there often. The Lipsons also provided caretaking services to the Synagogue, such as sweeping the floors, and held the keys. There was still, to anyone's knowledge, no other Jewish family in the city.

The congregation was always called the Oxford (not the Oxford University) Jewish Congregation, though the Synagogue was run wholly by undergraduates. There were not many of us in my time, but almost always a few who were capable - some more, some less - of leading Friday night and *Shabbat* morning prayers. There were evidently others who were not interested in the Synagogue at all. The Synagogue itself was an unprepossessing building, tucked away, almost invisible behind a wall, in Richmond Road, off Walton Street. You had to look for it to find it, and when you found it, you might easily have taken it for some decaying non-denominational chapel such as existed in those days.

It consisted of the Synagogue proper (which nowadays in America would be called the Sanctuary) and one additional room, a good deal smaller, which opened off it. The Synagogue was too far off the beaten track to serve as anything like a real social centre, but there would be occasional Friday night gatherings for a modest meal, and sometimes a "business meeting" to discuss congregational affairs. The Synagogue was closed during University vacations, and even in term-time little happened there except on the Sabbath. There were a few apostates, ex-Jews and Crypto-

Jews, among the dons who lived in Oxford all year round, but rarely more than one self-confessed Jew (Herbert Loewe in my father's day, Cecil Roth in mine, eccentrics both) who would share in congregational life or show interest in the Jewish undergraduates.

In the late 1930's Jewish refugees from Germany began to arrive. Most of them were academics, brought over by the Oxford Refugee Committee of which Bill (later Sir William) Deakin was chairman. They added little or nothing to the life of the Synagogue. At the same time a London Jew, true son of Cockaigne, called Mr Silk, settled in Oxford with his family and opened a grocer's shop in the Cowley Road, selling not only the standard goods and goodies but a few typically "Jewish" titbits *haimishe* (pickled) herring and the like. I taught his son Hebrew. At the same time we heard of one or two other ex-London families who reportedly had moved to Oxford, but they were not readily apparent.

Everything changed dramatically with the outbreak of war on September 3rd 1939. The doldrums were past. London was being emptied of people whom the Government wanted out of the way of the massive air-raids everyone expected at any moment. Many months passed before London was actually bombed, but in the meantime hundreds of invalids, the sick and the old, women, children, entire families arrived in Oxford. Many of them were Jews. My first intimation of what was afoot came with a phone call, in that first week of September, from the Radcliffe Infirmary (as it was called then). They had a very sick old man, bearded, who spoke a language they did not understand, and who could not understand them. They thought he might be Jewish, and would I come and see? It was vacation time, I was the only Jew in town they knew of, so I went. The poor man was dying, and all he wanted, in simple Yiddish, was a glass of tea. He almost took on a new spell of life when at last someone understood him, he drank his tea eagerly, and a few days later he died.

Other deaths followed, and we had to improvise a *hevra kadisha*. I had once read the rules in a booklet issued by the "Lavadores" of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation in London, and so I knew roughly what had to be done. I found two German refugees (one called Mr Simon and short and stout, the other quite tall) who were ready to help and soon we were conducting our first *tehara* and burial. There was a small Jewish section just inside the entrance to Wolvercote Cemetery: only a few people had been buried there a long time before, but now this plot came to life, (if I may use the expression) and began to fill up. There must be scores of Jewish graves there today. After a while, as the need arose, we had

to organise a women's branch of the *hevra kadisha*. The first volunteer was my mother, who had come to live in Oxford and launched all kinds of activities on behalf of the refugees from Germany.

Other communal needs began to make themselves felt as well. People wanted to get married, especially soldiers stationed near Oxford, far from their own homes. I had myself appointed the Synagogue's "Marriage Secretary" by the Registrar-General at Somerset House and was soon marrying couples who wanted a Jewish wedding and not just a civil registry office affair. I have often wondered how these young people fared in life and hope they lived happily ever after.

By this time communal responsibilities had become more than one person could discharge in his spare time, and the community had grown so large that we began looking round for a full-time professional. He appeared in the shape of the neophyte Reverend Jacob Weinberg, son of a famous East End "rebbe" Jack Weinberg, from the summer of 1940, held the fort (as Marriage Secretary too) until the end of the war, when people began to return to London, and Jack himself was appointed Minister of the Jewish Congregation in Muizenberg, near Cape Town. He had won his spurs in war-time Oxford and rose in due course to be Rabbi Dr. Jacob Weinberg, J.P., serving the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation until his retirement. He died a few years ago.

It was in his hands that I left the community and the Synagogue when I was called up in the autumn of 1940. The community continued to grow, and its needs to expand. As the war went on, I was able from time to time to come home on one-day Sabbath leaves. I found the Synagogue full, never so well attended as during those years. The war saw its heyday - and brought changes: women and men were sitting side by side. Among the congregants were Viscount Samuel, the first High Commissioner of Palestine, and his wife, who never missed a *Shabbat* morning. There was also Rabbi Dr. Louis Rabinowitz (of the Cricklewood Synagogue, later Chief Rabbi of South Africa), an absolutely spell-binding preacher. We had Dr. Israel Brodie too, who was to become Chief Rabbi of the British Empire (or Commonwealth?). Oxford was now "home" to a large, active Jewish community in exile - from London. I had been its first-ever representative on the Board of Deputies in 1939-40: I do not know who succeeded me. After the war I moved to Jerusalem and have no knowledge of what has happened at Oxford since. From the fact that the Congregation is celebrating its 150th anniversary, I gather that the community "flourishes like the green bay-tree", and I wish it well.

Reminiscences, 1928 - 1932

by ***Edgar Duchin***

In the spring of 1928 I won a classical scholarship to Brasenose College, Oxford. I then spent four months at a *yeshivah* in Frankfurt, where I studied Talmud and was immersed in a fairly orthodox community.

When I arrived in Oxford it was to a totally different environment. For the first year and part of the second year however, I maintained my orthodoxy. The chef of the college was very helpful and prepared fish and dairy meals for me, while a Jewish family who lived next door to the synagogue in Richmond Road provided cooked kosher meals for me and other students who kept kosher, on Friday evenings. I remember these included Leon Hertz, a son of the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Hertz. His brother, Samuel Hertz, was also at Oxford at this time.

During the first year I attended the synagogue, sometimes conducting the services. I remember in the beginning of Michaelmas term after the long vacation coincided with *Rosh Hashanah*, I certainly conducted the services then and intended to blow the *shofar*, but unfortunately dropped my *shofar* which cracked.

The wardens of the synagogues at the time came from the elite of Sephardi Jewry, particularly Alan Mocatta, later Judge Sir Alan Mocatta, and Robert Carvalho, later President of the Anglo-Jewish Association.

I had become treasurer of the synagogue (my name appeared on a commemorative tablet which, I am afraid, has disappeared on the building of the new modern synagogue today). When Mocatta and Carvalho were to retire, this was in the spring of 1929, they both asked me to become a warden, their view being that coming from the respectable background of St. Paul's School, I would better represent the community with the gentiles, than the provincial Jewish students from Newcastle or Leeds. However, by that time I had already begun to lose my faith and resisted their blandishments. I did not, however, break with the Jewish community. About that time I was very friendly with Wolf Abiram Halpern, who was

the son of one of the pillars of the Zionist movement. I became an enthusiastic Zionist and eventually chairman of the Oxford University Zionist Society.

Undoubtedly the great Jewish personality of my period was Herbert J. Loewe, then Reader in Rabbinics at Oxford University. He and his wife kept open house in their beautiful residence in Beaumont Street where they lived with their two sons, Raphael and Michael. Though not a great scholar, Herbert had a fine knowledge of Anglo-Jewish history and biblical studies. His great strength however, was his tolerance. He steadfastly refused to listen to the complaints of the more orthodox students and also their parents and insisted that the services should hold a fair balance between the claims of the orthodox and the progressives or liberals. I remember he was particularly annoyed when a group of Jewish mothers, prompted by the *B'nai B'rith* of which they were members, descended once in term-time to check that the arrangements for *kashrut* for their dear sons were satisfactory. Herbert and Mrs. Loewe kept open house especially on Friday evenings and Sabbaths and were careful to invite Jewish students to dinner or lunch in rotation. There was always a very warm and welcoming atmosphere. I have particular cause to remember the Loewes with gratitude because during my second summer term my mother died. I had to lose several weeks of the term. When I returned in the autumn, the Loewes went specially out of their way to invite and comfort me. Herbert also fostered the Jewish Society (then known as the Adler Society). We had as visiting speakers such eminent members of Anglo-Jewry as Claude G. Montefiore, Basil Henriques and Israel Zangwill, and I'm sure there were others.

Memories of the Thirties

by ***Sydney Brookfield****, Retired Head of Mathematics Department at Radley College*

IN 1930, except for a handful of residents, the Oxford Jewish Congregation consisted entirely of undergraduates. On every Sabbath they conducted services, on an agreed compromise between Orthodox and Liberal, in the old Synagogue which resembled a decrepit Methodist chapel.

Their spiritual father was Herbert Loewe, a don of Exeter College, who lived in Beaumont Street with his wife and two small sons, and held open house for all Jewish undergraduates at tea-time every Sabbath of term. In June 1931, Loewe was leaving to take up a Readership at Cambridge. He realised that the year was the centenary of Adolph Neubauer, a famous scholar and fellow of Exeter College, so a special memorial service was arranged with a printed order of service. (A copy is now in the hands of Miriam Kochan who is distantly related to Neubauer.) The congregation in the synagogue that day included the Mayor, the Vice-Chancellor and many dignitaries of the City and the University. The undergraduates formed a choir, especially trained by the organ scholar at Exeter College. After the ceremony all were transported in coaches to the unveiling of memorial tablets: at the entrance to the Botanical Gardens, the site of a Jewish cemetery in the 13th century; at the Town Hall in St. Aldate's, originally called Old Jewry; and in the ruins of Osney Abbey near to where Robert of Reading (Haggai of Oxford) suffered for his faith on 17th April 1222 (4th *Iyyar* 4982 AM).

During the synagogue ceremony, the Oxford Congregation took into its custody the scrolls of the Canterbury Congregation, which was going into abeyance. A formal agreement had been drawn up by Loewe, correctly signed and sealed in the ancient manner. To accommodate the Canterbury scrolls in height, a black box had to be added to the top of the old *Arun Kodesh* (now in the lounge of the Jewish Centre). Mowbrays must have regarded this as a cathedral repair since they charged £25, which in those

days broke the undergraduate budget for several years.

This great occasion was referred to by unfeeling and cynical undergraduates as "Loewe's Goodbye Party". There still exists a copy of the third *Yekum Purkon*, a prayer for the University, written by Loewe, and read every Sabbath morning. It was based on the Aramaic Bidding Prayer recited on behalf of the Colleges of Sura and Pumbeditha in Babylonia during the third century. He must have had great fun translating into Aramaic "The Right Honourable the Chancellor, the Right Worshipful the Vice-Chancellor, the Doctors, the Proctors, the Heads of Houses, Fellows and Scholars, Graduates and Undergraduates."

Undergraduates of those days included Isaiah Berlin; Alan Mocatta; Robert Carvalho; Walter Ettinghausen (later Ambassador in Paris); S. Goldman, later Rabbi in St. John's Wood; S. Weintraub, who joined the Mathematics Staff, Southampton University; Edgar Duchin; Chaim Rabinowitz (Raphael); Sydney Golt; B. Marmorstein; E. Cashdan; Henry Baker; Lucien Harris; A. Shannon; A Portrait, later in Rothschild's Bank; Sam Miller; Ronnie Solomon, who was killed in the war. Ben Segal was then at Magdalen College School. We saw little of a young graduate called Cecil Roth.

Amongst the few residents, Mr. and Mrs. Freedson lived almost next door to the synagogue and provided Kosher meals for undergraduates every Sabbath. Rosa Davies (Mrs. Trendell) managed her father's dress shop in George Street. Mr. Kursbat was a civil engineer with the City, before emigrating to Canada. The Leverton family had a business at Faringdon. Bobbie Silk moved from Banbury to open the first Oxford self-service grocery before going into the property world. The 1930's ended with the tide of refugees from London who formed the nucleus of our present congregation.

Prayer for the University

(Based on the Aramaic Bidding Prayer recited on behalf of the Colleges of ***Sura*** *and* ***Pumbeditha*** *in Babylonia during the third century and on the Hebrew Thanksgiving pronounced after a single lecture or at the completion of a Terminal Course.)*

May salvation from heaven, grace, loving kindness, mercy, long life, ample sustenance, heavenly aid, health of body, a higher enlightenment, and a living and abiding succession of disciples that will not break with truth nor neglect the words of the Law, be vouchsafed unto all the members of this learned University; unto the Right Honourable the Chancellor, the Right Worshipful the Vice-Chancellor, the Doctors, the Proctors, the Head of Houses, Fellows and Scholars, Graduates and Undergraduates; unto all their disciples and unto all the disciples of their disciples; unto all who busy themselves in the Law and unto all who in faith and sincerity come here to learn or to teach all other branches of learning. May the King of the universe bless them, prolong their lives, increase their days and add to their years and may they be saved and delivered from every trouble and mishap. May our Lord Who is in heaven be their help at all times and seasons; and let us say, Amen.

May it be Thy Will, O Lord our God and the God of our fathers, that Thy Law be our occupation in this world and in the world to come. We thank Thee that Thou hast cast our lot among those that study in College; vouchsafe that the words of Thy Law be ever in the mouth of all that fear Thy Name, and even yet of all that loiter at the corners of the streets. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach us Thy statutes.

יְקוּם פּוּרְקָן מִן־שְׁמַיָּא חִנָּא וְחִסְדָּא וְרַחֲמֵי וְחַיֵּי אֲרִיכֵי
וּמְזוֹנֵי רְוִיחֵי וְסַיְעָתָא דִּי־שְׁמַיָּא וּבְרִיוּת גּוּפָא וּנְהוֹרָא מַעֲלְיָא ·
וְרַעְיָא חַיְיָא וְקַיְמָא וַרְעָא דִּי לָא־יִפְסַק וְדִי לָא־יִבְטַל מִפִּתְגְּמֵי
אוֹרַיְתָא · לְמָרָנָן וּלְרַבָּנָן דִּי חֲבוּרְתָּא חַכִּימְתָּא דִּי הָכָא · לְרֵישׁ
מְתִיבְתָּא יְתַגַּדַּל אִיקָרֵיהּ · וּלְתַנְיָנֵיהּ יְסַגֵּי הַדְרֵיהּ · לְמַלְפָּנַיָּא
וּלְדַיָּנֵי דִּי בָבָא · וּלְרֵישֵׁי כַּלֵּי · לְחַבְרַיָּא וּלְאַלּוּפֵי בֵּי מִדְרָשָׁא ·
רַבְרְבַיָּא עִם זְעֵירַיָּא · לְכָל־תַּלְמִידֵיהוֹן וּלְכָל־תַּלְמִידֵי תַלְמִידֵיהוֹן
וּלְכָל־מָן דִּי עָסְקִין בְּאוֹרַיְתָא · וּלְכָל מָן דְּאָתֵין בְּהֵימְנוּתָא
וּבְקוּשְׁטָא לְמֵילַף וּלְאַלָּפָא כָּל מַלֵּי דְחוּכְמְתָא · מַלְכָּא דִּי־עָלְמָא
יְבָרֵךְ יְתְהוֹן יְפֵישׁ חַיֵּיהוֹן וְיַשְׁגֵּא יוֹמֵיהוֹן וְיִתֵּן אַרְכָּה לִשְׁנֵיהוֹן ·
וְיִתְפָּרְקוּן וְיִשְׁתֵּיזְבוּן מִן כָּל־עָקָא וּמִן כָּל־מַרְעִין בִּישִׁין · מָרַן
דִּי בִשְׁמַיָּא יְהֵא בְסַעְדְּהוֹן כָּל־זְמַן וְעִדָּן · וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן ׃

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּהֵא תּוֹרָתְךָ
אוּמָנוּתֵנוּ בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וּבָעוֹלָם הַבָּא ׃ מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָפֶיךָ
שֶׁשַּׂמְתָּ חֶלְקֵנוּ מֵיוֹשְׁבֵי בֵּית הַמִּדְרָשׁ ׃ וְהַעֲרֵב־נָא דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ
בְּפִי כָל־יִרְאֵי שְׁמֶךָ גַּם בְּפִי כָל־יוֹשְׁבֵי קְרָנוֹת ׃ בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה
יְיָ לַמְּדֵנוּ חֻקֶּיךָ ׃



Memorial Plaque displayed in the foyer of the new Synagogue and dedicated to those who fell in the War of 1914 - 1918 and in the Second World War. Photo by courtesy of Ivor Fields

The War Years

Will Lawson

a private in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry, stationed in Oxford, writes

As I was working in Slough in 1939 I registered for military service locally and was duly called up in April '40 to the local regiment - The Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry and reported to Cowley Barracks on the fringe of Oxford.

I had been at Cowley for about three weeks when a notice appeared that all Jewish personnel should report after duty, if available, to the Church Hut the following evening to meet the Jewish Chaplain. I duly did so and found there were about six other Jewish boys in the unit at various stages of training. (The normal training period at Cowley was from eight to twelve weeks, after which you joined a field battalion).

The Chaplain was the Rev Leslie Edgar of the St Johns Wood Liberal Synagogue. We had a brief service and general chat afterwards. Chatting to the boys later I was informed there was a *Shul* in Oxford and there were services on Friday evenings and they would be glad if I would join the following Friday if I wasn't on duty. They also said an invitation to join a family for a meal afterwards would certainly be extended to me. I attended the service and, as forecast by my colleagues, received an invitation to a Friday night meal. The name of the people was Gavourin and they lived in the Slade in a house right opposite the camp down the road from the barracks - the camp was used for advanced training when basic training was completed at the barracks. They were a charming family. Mr and Mrs Gavourin, a daughter of twenty who was a teacher and visited her parents in Oxford when she could get there, and two sons aged about sixteen and fourteen, who lived at home. Mr Gavourin was a schoolteacher whose school had been evacuated to Oxford. I spent a really enjoyable evening, and during the usual probing of background, it transpired Mr Gavourin knew my father. This then resulted in an open invitation to visit them whenever I could get away. I naturally took advantage of the invitation and spent many happy evenings with them. Visits to them and the Shul were at times rather sporadic - the unit was

confined to barracks in July and August due to the paratroop invasion scare and then partially lifted during the Battle of Britain and the start of the Blitz. Then in January and February '41 I was sent on a Signals Course to Yorkshire.

Whilst I was in Oxford we were visited by Rev. "Harry" Levy in May '41. He subsequently became senior Chaplain of the Forces. Apart from the forced acceptance of life in the Army and the constant worry about the family in London during the raids, my stay in Oxford was certainly softened by the contact with these Jewish families.

Recollections

by ***Ivor Fields***

I first came to Oxfordshire in December 1940. My parents, after evacuating my sister Laura and I to Reading in 1939, returned with us a few months later and took a flat in London. My sister went to school and I had a job with a film distributing company in Oxford Street. When the Blitz started my sister was evacuated with her school and after the flat was damaged in an air raid my parents went to join my sister in the tiny village of Over Norton between Oxford and Banbury, and for a week-end in January, I visited them. At Banbury Station there was a shot-up train; I caught a bus and finished my journey across Oxfordshire fields on foot to join my family who were lodging in the thatched farm cottages.

During the Spring of 1941 my parents found accommodation in Morrell Avenue and there was room for me to join them in Oxford. Two years later I was in the R.A.F.

During those early years of the war Oxford's population at least doubled and the Jewish population grew from some 10 or 20 families at most, to many thousands. Most came from London but the armed services brought many from other Jewish centres and in my parochial London way I remember how odd I found it to hear Jews speaking with Yorkshire, Scottish and Irish accents. The main social centre was in what I believe were Y.M.C.A. buildings in Walton Street, almost opposite Walton Well Road, where there is now a small modern block of flats.

The centre was a hive of activity most nights of the week. The large European community organised entertainment and food (mainly of the delicatessen variety) which suited my palate very well and for 6 or 7 pence I would fill my hollow legs. The Oxford Jewish Youth Club met there most nights, run by a committee including the late Alan Silverman and his wife-to-be Terry Posner, the Edelman girls, the Samuel girls, Monty Rose, yours truly and many others. The club was very active in sports and drama pursuits and held the local Oxfordshire Table Tennis Cup. We ran a magazine of similar format to *Menorah* and the pages were sewn together

by my mother on her old Singer treadle machine.

During my pre-R.A.F. days I only attended religious services in the "overflow" hall in Cowley Road in a Church hall near Magdalen Street.

My father had a small workshop in what was Pembroke Street, St Clement's - now Rectory Road - and at the top in Cowley Road was Bobby Silk's grocery shop. There I met Donald and Barbara and I dare say Donald can still remember he and I canoeing in our best clothes down the weirs on the Cherwell "submarine fashion" and sloshing and dripping back home, on the week-end of his *Barmitzvah.*

Because I was so young I don't remember it as a bad time although I'm certain it was for many. I remember carefree rambles with the club, get-together concerts at the centre and a community held together by the tension of war.

After the first Blitz on London ended, families began to drift back and as the War went on the Club members became eligible for military service.

The Oxford I returned to 4 years later in 1947 was very different although there were still many families who had not returned to their original homes. My parents never did go back and although I made one or two feeble attempts to leave, I too stayed. I am glad I did, but I am always grateful for those first 16 years in London - like the Services in Wartime, a big city is a good University of life.

The Berenblums in Oxford 1936 - 1950

by ***Tessa Brodetsky, J.P.***

12 Lathbury Road was the home of the Berenblum family - "Berry", Doris and their two daughters. They gave a warm welcome to many Jewish students and newcomers to Oxford: Natalie Koch, for example, remembered and deeply appreciated their welcome when she first arrived here.

Berry, a distinguished cancer researcher, worked in the Dunn School of Pathology and later became a "Special Fellow" at the National Cancer Institute, Bethesda (U.S.A.), before finally leaving Oxford to become Head of the Department of Experimental Biology at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. He remained there until his retirement in 1971, and is now Professor Emeritus there: during that period, he received many distinguished awards including the Israel Prize for Biology in 1975 and the Gold Medal and Sloan Prize by the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation in 1980.

Berry is a charming man with a great sense of humour and an endless fund of amusing stories; one of his great interests has always been chess and, during his time here, he played for Oxfordshire. Doris's main interest was chamber music. She was a highly accomplished pianist and was for many years the official accompanist for the Bach choir. Her daughter recalls that she collected the blue and white J.N.F. boxes regularly.

Terry, the elder of the two daughters, who has also lived in Rehovot since 1950, writes: "Since Ann and I were in America from 1940 to 1944, we missed a considerable portion of their lives in war-time Oxford. I remember participating (reluctantly!) in Hebrew lessons at the synagogue for a short time. After the war, I took part in *Habonim* activities at the hostel for Jewish refugee boys. For most of my years at the Oxford High School (1938-1940, 1944-1948), I was the only Jewish girl in my class".

The other connection of the Berenblums with more recent Oxford residents is that Berry is Paul Brodetsky's uncle, whilst Doris was my aunt!

Refuge

*by **Else Lawrence**. This article was first published in Oxford's "Menorah" magazine*

OVER the years, dates of various events have been remembered. It is about 55 years since Jewish people started to leave Germany. Perhaps some of them hoped that they would be able to return one day.

As life on the Continent became more and more difficult, many more people wanted to leave. Some managed to find a country that would take them, but there was never a mass exodus. All those who managed to leave Germany (and other Nazi-dominated countries) up to the end of August 1939 and have found refuge in this (and other) sympathetic countries may think back with gratitude that their lives were saved some fifty years ago.

Before 1938 they were able to take some money and possessions with them but that was soon to stop. Then, one was allowed ten Reichsmarks, the equivalent of fifteen shillings, which would nowadays be 75p; and the suitcases one could carry. Some children's transports also arrived in England.

Each one of the refugees would have a story to tell. However, the most important thing was that we were feeling free and could walk about without fear of persecution. The war changed the status somehow. Suddenly some refugees discovered that they lived in a restricted or forbidden area. They had to leave that part of England. That is why quite a number of them came to Oxford. As Oxford is so near to London, a comparatively large number of Jewish evacuees also arrived here during the war. New shops were opened.

There were different religious services. The Orthodox community met at the synagogue; the Liberal group met in the lecture room of Somerville College in Walton Street. Overflow services for the High Holy Days were held in various halls in different parts of Oxford. Rabbi Weinberg was living in Oxford until he left for South Africa after the war.

It was a pity that comparatively few refugees joined the Congregation. A number of them had no religious background. Each one of them had to

build up a new life in new surroundings and environment, It was difficult to forget the trauma of being without means.

There were several places where one could meet. The community, for example, had a social club with a committee, which organised dances and other festivities in the Forum in High Street (now belonging to St. Edmund Hall). The club stopped functioning many years ago. There was a group of the Association of Jewish Refugees (head office in London), which met about once a month, I think. It closed down many years ago.

During the war, there was a hostel for refugee boys in Linton Road. Mr and Mrs Simon were in charge. Blackwell's had a hostel for refuge employees in Longwall Street and Webber's had a similar hostel. There was a canteen which was used by quite a lot of people, in the YMCA hostel in Walton Street (flats have been built there now). There was a refugee club which met at St. Philip and St. James school hall in Leckford Road. Jewish soldiers who were stationed near Oxford also came to these meetings. There was a refugee committee in a house in New Inn Hall Street which would help find lodgings or jobs or give advice when needed. I don't know of any more organised activities, but there were some people who already had houses and they invited their friends.

For those who found it difficult to learn English, there was Mrs Jeanette Franklin-Kohn in Winchester Road. She opened her house once a week for conversation. After the war, these afternoon meetings turned into a sewing-circle. Mrs Franklin-Kohn appealed for clothes; we repaired them or made new garments out of old ones. Eventually, they were dispatched to London or wherever they were needed most.

It should be noted that Ken and Else Lawrence are among some of the most valued and well-loved members of our Community.

The Market Place and other recollections

by ***Joy Watson***

IN the 1940s there was large influx of Jews into Oxford and the surrounding areas. This was made up of evacuees from London, refugees from Europe, service personnel from both American and British forces stationed nearby, plus doctors, scientists and Government employees, for Oxford seemed to be just outside the danger zone. After the war most of the families returned to their original homes, but the families that had established themselves in business remained here. Also post-war, quite a few ex-servicemen and their families were given grants to study in Oxford. Some of these became very active in the community, including a Harry Shapiro (Shepherd) who went on to become a top executive at Marks and Spencer.

To accommodate all these people during the High Holy Day Services, various venues had to be found, so the overflow would go to St James Hall, Cowley Road, a hall in Collins Street (off East Avenue) where they held *Shabbat* services and Hebrew classes. These were taken first by Rev. Gevarim (who promised each boy a sixpence if they learnt the *Shema* by heart) and then by Rabbi Lehman. He was followed by the Rev. Weinberg who stayed for a few years until he took up a post in South Africa. Later on, as the congregation grew, due to the academics coming back to Oxford, the High Holy Day Services were held in Rhodes House and Manchester College. Mr Kaye and Mr Kemp were wardens.

To look after the dietary needs of the community, Bobby Silk, who had two grocery shops, one in Cowley Road and the other by the Old Swan, Cowley, stocked Matzos, matzo meal, pickled herrings and as many products required by the community as he could possibly buy at the time of shortages. So if you went into his shop there was always a hub-bub of conversation going on and sometimes, if Polly wasn't busy, a cup of tea.

The other place for food was the Covered Market. Butterfields and Sons in the 3rd Avenue devoted a section of their shop to kosher meat. This was presided over by a larger than life character, Tom the butcher. He

always had a smile and witty remark and thoroughly enjoyed serving his Jewish customers, especially when the men congregated around him, and they had long discussions about the issues of the day. My own father-in-law, Arnold Watson, seemed always to be in the thick of these meetings.

In 1940 Arnold Watson was the first Jewish trader in the Covered Market with his hosiery business, followed by Mr Glass who had the first delicatessen shop in Oxford, and subsequently sold out to Mr and Mrs Palm, when he went to the USA. Then followed Mr Luck selling materials; the business is still run by his daughter and son-in-law. Later Alf Delcoy opened his travel and leather goods shop. So there has been a little community of its own in the Covered Market for fifty years.

During the war years Oxford was well served for social activities. A favourite place was the Centre in Leckford Road, where one could go to for tea and cakes. It had a special atmosphere and was really like a refuge. People would sit there for hours, especially the evacuees from London who were in temporary accommodation. I think it was run by a Committee of refugee ladies. I always remember the strudel that I had there; I have never tasted better.

Mrs Allin, the dentist's wife, lived in a large house along the Cowley Road and she opened her doors for social evenings to the community. She would play the piano and all the crowd would sing popular songs of the day. These were called Musical Evenings and were attended by many people. In fact, it was the fore-runner of our social evenings in the Forum (a dance hall no longer in being) in the High Street. Each Sunday there was a get-together, which included dancing to a wonderful band from Swindon and their singer, Rosemary Squires, who became well-known. We also had a talented couple called Mark and Pearl Harris who would stage shows very professionally, and the talent was made up from the community. We would rehearse at Bobby Silk's house and had tremendous fun. Other communities, like High Wycombe and Maidenhead, heard about our successful evenings and we would exchange visits. There was never any difficulty filling a coach.

We also had cricket matches, organised by Nat Posner, with these other communities, which, once again, were very well supported. The Youth Club was like everything else in Oxford, a 'do-it-yourself' effort. Bernard Silverman, Henry Posner, Jean Edelman, Brenda Bloom and Barbara Silk were the stalwarts, and we had meetings each week, sometimes twice a week, in various venues, Cowley Road, Walton Street, St. Margaret's

Road, where we played table tennis, danced and listened to music. We also organised trips to the theatre, the Playhouse, and, in the summer lovely punting afternoons on the Isis. It was a very active club and never lacked members. Sometimes parents would also have open house for the Club.

In 1991 there is still a backbone of the old community who are active members of the present synagogue. They include Henry Posner, Alf Delcoy, Danny Kemp, Frank Watson and family, Louis and Ann Braham, Ivor Fields, Ken and Else Lawrence, and many more who were very much part of the Oxford scene. Today Frank Watson is Chairman of the Covered Market Tenants' Association representing over forty businesses.

Letter from the late Mrs. E. Lesheim

As published in "Menorah" July 19, 1974

LIKE most refugees we came over on a domestic permit. Needless to say it was not the happiest time of our life. But that is beyond the point. We did not know a soul here, and how it came about, that we made some kind of friendship, I cannot remember. The first family who opened their home to us and cared about refugees at all, I mean a Jewish family, was Walter Ettinghausen, or rather his wife Vera. Every two weeks on our days off, we gathered for some kind of entertainment. Vera Ettinghausen herself very often played to us on the violin or her mother, Mrs. Schiff, on the piano. These evenings were for some time the most remarkable point in our lives. About 12 or 15 people, only women, gathered there for a couple of hours.

Later on, in New Inn Hall Street, a small group of Austrians did the same sort of thing, both occasions with light refreshments, and it was there I remember several interesting meetings with lectures being held.

Then about 1942 a hall was provided just opposite the Scala. It was called the Centre. There, a very good and cheap lunch was provided each day. On Sundays you could go there and meet other people, musical and other entertainments were provided. By and by, that Centre was also known to the Forces, and, as you can imagine, it was then sometimes a rather noisy affair. The soldiers came from Bicester and the surroundings of Oxford. Ladies served us with the lunches, so we did not have anything to do, as just eat and enjoy it. By then, most of us had finished domestic work and were more or less busy either in our earlier sort of work in Germany or Austria or similar jobs.

I also remember that the Jewish community gave one *Seder* evening in a hall in Woodstock Road.

Sermon

Preached at the Oxford Synagogue, Richmond Road, on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Consecration, on the 30th June, 1943,
by ***Rabbi Dr. Samuel Daiches***

'How lovely are Thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even yearneth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing with joy unto the living God.'

My friends. These words of the Psalmist (Psalm 84, vv. 2-3) come to our mind this morning when we commemorate the consecration of this building as a House of God, as the Synagogue of the Oxford Jewish Congregation, fifty years ago. Although small in numbers, Oxford Jewry has a long history. There were Jews in Oxford as early as 1075, nearly nine hundred years ago. There is a tradition that the Jews in Oxford were exempt from the Expulsion and remained there until they merged in the general population. Medieval Jewry lived east and west of St. Aldate's and their Synagogue was just north of Christ Church. In the period after the Return we find Jews living in Oxford in 1733. But already in 1650 a Jew, Jacob or Jacobs, opened in Oxford what was the first coffee-house in England.

Originally the re-established Oxford Jewry consisted solely of a town population, that is of Jews who were resident in Oxford. In the middle of the nineteenth century there was a Synagogue in Paradise Square in St. Ebbe's. Later the Jews assembled for worship in an upper room in a building not far from the present Synagogue. As Jews began to enter the University, about 1870, Jewish undergraduates began to attend the Synagogue of the Congregation, and gradually the proportion of the town element diminished. From about 1730 to about 1870 Oxford Jewry was entirely a town Jewry, that is a Jewish Community of Oxford, but from 1870 the University Element began to increase. The Synagogue was a synagogue of town Jewry, and members of the University also joined it.

In 1888 Mr. Solomon's, a silversmith and tobacconist in the Cornmarket, was President of the Congregation. Mr. Franks, his son-in-law, a dentist, was treasurer, and Mr. Zacharias, whose business in the Cornmarket still exists, was Honorary Secretary. In that year the son of a member of the Oxford Congregation, who has happily lived here with us to-day, was Barmitzvah in the room which served as a Synagogue in the building nearby. Four years later, the building in which we are now, was acquired as a Synagogue. It was not specially built as one. It was a hall which was adapted as a Synagogue. On January the 29th, 1893, this building was consecrated, and it has served now for fifty years as the place of worship for Oxford Jewry. The President of the Congregation at that time was Mr. Zacharias, who was an uncle of one of the most gifted members in the Anglo-Jewish Community, the present President of the Oxford Congregation - Mr Neville Laski.

For fifty years this building has been a house of prayer, and all who cared to come and pray within its walls found in it spiritual comfort. From time to time eminent Jewish scholars lived in Oxford, as Adolf Neubauer and Herbert Loewe, of blessed memory. Herbert Loewe contributed greatly to the spiritual consolidation of the Synagogue. For some years before Herbert Loewe came to Oxford there was active here as a Minister of the Congregation the Reverend M.H. Segal, who is now Professor of Bible Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

To-day we are happy to count among the members of this Congregation the premier Anglo-Jewish statesman, Viscount Samuel. We have also in our midst the two historians of our Community, one of whom has the Jewish spiritual charge of the Jewish undergraduates of this University. We must not forget to mention the Senior Warden of the Congregation, Mr. B.I. Beckman, who is a former alumnus of Jews' College and a graduate of this University,and for three years was Minister of an important Congregation overseas. As we all know, Mr Beckman is a tower of strength in this Congregation. There are others who deserve honourable mention. But their work speaks for them. We must also remember that we have now a Minister who, although young, is doing justice to a difficult task and carries out his manifold duties with zeal and energy.

If I were asked which was the most brilliant period in the history of the Oxford Synagogue, I would say, without hesitation, the time from the end of the Summer of 1940 till now, especially till the autumn of 1942. Those two years were a period of high spirituality. It was a joy to be in the Synagogue on Sabbaths and Festival-days. One felt the full meaning of the

words 'My heart and my flesh sing with joy unto the living God.' Never in its history has the Oxford Synagogue had so many devout worshippers as during those two years. The High Festivals of 1940 and 1941, and also of 1942, were High Festivals indeed. What was a rivulet became a large flowing river. Instead of ten or twenty worshippers there were hundreds of worshippers. The small hall became a large sanctuary. If the walls of this synagogue could utter speech, they would sing a hymn of thanksgiving for the privilege of having had within them so many Jewish men, women and children pouring out their hearts before God on the holiest day of the year. And we thank God for having witnessed all that religious fervour. In the words of the Psalmist (Psalm 42, v.5), 'These things I remember and pour out my soul within me, how I passed on with a throng and went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping holyday.'

We thank God for this sanctuary. And we pray that its future may be as great as its present. Wherever the Jew lived he longed for a House of God, he longed for the Courts of the Lord. The yearning of the Jew for God and his longing to sing praises unto the Lord are the guarantee for the never-ending bliss of the human soul. Where there is that yearning there is an unceasing fount of love and well of hope, there song is heard and God is revealed. May many Jewish hearts continue to sing with joy unto the living God in this Synagogue of the Oxford Jewish Congregation.

Amen

This Sermon printed in its original form was lent by Mr A.A. Brodtman. It belonged to his father who lived in Minster Lovell during the war years and frequently visited the Oxford Synagogue.



This hand-carved Plaque presented in 1945 by the Jewish personnel of the United States Army hangs in the foyer of the Synagogue Centre. Photo by courtesy of Ivor Fields

Remembering Laurie Bloom

(1894 - 1978)

An appreciation

*by **David Lewis** as a tribute to Laurie Bloom on his 80th birthday and published in the Oxford Menorah*

THE first appearance of Laurie Bloom in the annals of the Oxford Jewish Congregation is on 1 March, 1942 when he was one of the three representatives of the Cowley and Iffley *Minyan* who came to the vestry room of the old synagogue to discuss the terms of amalgamation of that *Minyan* with the Congregation. He was evidently already active, but no records of that early *Minyan* are known to survive. The Secretary gave up trying to minute the amalgamation meeting after half a page and put two neat lines through what he had already written; no doubt Laurie had had his say. Thereafter we find him engaged in a good deal of wartime trouble-shooting; complaining about the state of the Headington Hebrew class and carrying through its amalgamation with that at Cowley; reporting on the first meeting of the Jewish Youth Club; making practical suggestions for replacing the *Shochet*. Some of his functions did not become apparent until he gave them up; how long had he been local correspondent for the Jewish Chronicle?

In 1946 he really took over, as treasurer and Marriage Secretary. Since there was no Chairman he took the Chair as well. There was a brief pause after an illness, but essentially he kept the structure of the Congregation going for 15 years in the difficult period between the return of wartime community to London and the renewed growth of the Jewish population in Oxford. During that period virtually every problem of Jewish organisation was taken to the shop in the Broad, and generally solved. I remember in particular his willing provision of a stove for the vestry when *Pesach* fell in term in 1948; the tiny nucleus round which the undergraduate meals service grew. Towards the end of his time in office, he was grappling with the problems of rebuilding the synagogue. Throughout this period he *was* the Jewish community for everyone, from the Master of Balliol to the Oxford Chamber of Commerce, in which he held all the offices, including that of President. In 1967, for example, it was to his shop that a stream of callers came to express their feelings about the Six Day War.

Professor Herbert Frankel

writes

LAURIE Bloom actually took Ilse and me under his wing when we arrived during the University vacation in the summer of 1946. I was searching for the secretary or warden of the Synagogue and eventually was directed to Laurie's shop in Broad Street. He was most helpful to us and from that time on, I assisted him to the best of my ability to 'rescue' the congregation which had shrunk to a few families. At the first committee meeting of the synagogue I was elected President, and remained so for some years. But of course Laurie did all the work. If it had not been for him the whole show would have folded up. He was greatly respected by the City authorities due to his forthrightness and courageous stand on all matters concerning the Jewish community. I had a deep affection for him because I was keenly aware of the fact that behind this sometimes assumed gruff attitude lay a warm heart for the poor and all those who needed help - the sick, the prisoners, and those who had suffered bereavement.



Laurie Bloom

Obituary

by ***Rose*** *and* ***Dan Kemp*** *and published in the "Oxford Menorah"*

THE Oxford Jewish Community has lost one of its leading personalities with the death of Laurie Bloom at the age of 82, only a few weeks after celebrating his Golden Wedding.

Laurie had been involved in communal activities of one kind or other all his life. Having volunteered for military service in the 1914-1918 war, he served in France and was awarded the Mons Star. He also served in Greece. Laurie conducted religious services for his fellow soldiers whenever possible and assisted the Chaplain when he visited the troops.

He was the hon. secretary of the Poets Road Hebrew Classes in London for a number of years before joining the army. Laurie Bloom, came to Oxford together with his family in 1940 to escape the bombings in London. He opened a fur shop in Broad Street which soon became a centre for advice and local Jewish information as the number of Jewish families arriving in Oxford and the surrounding districts increased with the evacuation of London and other large cities. He never turned anyone away: he helped all comers and advised on accommodation, schools, etc. Laurie started to help to organise regular Sabbath and Holy Day Services. He organised a second service in the Cowley area as well as forming Hebrew classes in Oxford and many small outlying villages, small towns in Oxfordshire, North Berkshire and parts of Bucks.

In 1945 with the end of hostilities he became the hon. treasurer of the Congregation, which post he held until 1962. As some of the hon. officers of the wartime community left Oxford, he became even more involved with community affairs, doing his best to hold together the now smaller number of Jews living in the area. He organised social gatherings, drawing in the less committed Jews and in this way held their interest, encouraging them to attend services and to continue to send their children to classes.

When the students returned to the University at the termination of hostilities, Laurie helped organise the daily kosher meals service in the then simple kitchen of the old synagogue. Laurie Bloom resigned as treasurer of the Congregation in 1962 and from then on gave most of his time to the activities of the Oxford Chamber of Commerce, first serving as a committee member, and in 1968 he became the first Jewish President.

The condolences and sympathy of the entire congregation go out to his widow Elsie, his son Anthony and daughters Brenda and Sheila.

Growing up in Oxford

Sheila Krouse and Brenda Gould (daughters of Laurie Bloom)
recall

At first Hebrew classes were held in the dining room of our house at 116 Divinity Road, Cowley. Subsequently a school-teacher held a *cheder* on *Shabbat* mornings for children in Cowley. Eventually classes were established in the Richmond Road synagogue, with prize givings in the Walton Road Community Centre. Famous people presented the prizes.

As well as the synagogue at Richmond Road there were over-flow synagogues in Headington, Cowley and Iffley. There were huge congregations for the High Holy Days held in church halls. Young people would walk from one to the other of the four services; this took most of the day on *Yom Kippur*! Many of the congregants were very devout. Rhodes House near the Parks was used as an overflow synagogue when the community had shrunk somewhat and those in Iffley, Cowley and Headington were no longer in existence.

The Community Centre in Walton Street was run by the ladies, for example, Lady Samuel, Mrs. Laski and our mother, as a canteen for the community and the forces. There was a kosher kitchen, and lunches were served every day. There was a social club, as well as a canteen, for everyone, and a club for teenagers as well. Here, we played table tennis and there was *Habonim* on Sundays. The Centre was well patronised for all events. Social events were held regularly, particularly the monthly get-together of the whole community in the Forum Dance Hall in the High Street. Frequent gatherings on fine Sundays were also popular around the swimming pool at the Shillingford Bridge Hotel, where tea was served in the garden to a gathering of grandparents, parents and children.

Kosher meat at first was sent down from London and delivered by the postman. It was war-time, and it often arrived putrid and dripping from broken brown-paper parcels. Father then arranged for a shop in the covered market to allow half its space to be used for kosher meat. A

fishmonger on the Plain began to stock the fish required by the congregation: halibut, fish for chopping, etc. Mr. and Mrs. Silk stocked kosher food in their shop in Cowley Road.

Much later, a canteen was made at the back of the synagogue in Richmond Road so that the students and visitors could have kosher meals on Friday night and *Shabbat*. Father arranged it so that at first the ante-room to the *Shul* was used, but when it grew too small, half the synagogue was partitioned, so that it could be re-instated when the congregation was large.

Growing up in Oxford

*by **Eva Loeffler**, (daughter of the late Sir Ludwig Guttman)*

It was in May 1939 that our family, my parents Ludwig and Else Guttman, my brother and I came from Breslau, Germany, to Oxford. Leaving other members of the family like my paternal grandfather, aunts, uncles and cousins was traumatic and so was coming to a strange country where no one spoke my language. As a rather shy and timid 6 year old I felt confused and unhappy.

For the first weeks we stayed in the Master's Lodge at Balliol College as Lord Lindsey had offered us accommodation while we looked for a small house. That we found at 63 Lonsdale Road, a small semi-detached house into which our large pieces of German furniture were squeezed. But it was home for us and Dennis and I soon cheered up and made friends with the milkman who came round with his horse and cart every day.

In the autumn we started school at Greycotes Preparatory School in the Banbury Road. Our parents who were short of money at the time had wanted to send us to the local elementary school but were told that it would not be suitable for the children of professional people, and Mrs. Cunliffe, headmistress of Greycotes, offered to have us free of charge.

The synagogue in Walton Street soon became very important in our lives. In Germany we had belonged to the Reform Synagogue and we were not orthodox. I was told not to tell people that we got the No. 2 bus up the Banbury Road on Saturdays to attend the service. The Rabbi, Dr. Weinberg, was very strict with the children and we did not like him very much. My two friends were Elsie Winter (who was very orthodox indeed) and Sarah Newman.

After the outbreak of war in September 1939 many Jewish families came to live in Oxford from London. The community became very much bigger and the synagogue was full on the High Holy Days and pretty full on Saturdays too.

Gradually my parents made some Jewish friends and we often went to Neville and Cissie Laski to dinner. They had a big house on the

Woodstock Road and a very clever daughter called Marghanita. We also used to see the Berenblums who later emigrated to Israel and the Walter Ettinghausen family who also went to Israel after the war and changed their name to Eytan. The person I most enjoyed visiting was Lady Samuel who lived in Staverton Road in a large house with a lovely garden. She gave us the most delicious tea and sometimes Lord Samuel would join us on the lawn for a game of clock golf. I remember knowing a very beautiful little girl called Miriam Margolyes who lived off the Banbury Road. She is now a famous actress.

The Jewish ladies, including my mother, worked hard at the Jewish Centre in Walton Street. It was a fairly large hall and every day they cooked rather awful kosher lunches. But it was a meeting place for all the displaced people from Germany and also from London and the atmosphere was usually very jolly.

My parents eventually had a large circle of Jewish friends and our house was always full to bursting point, and before D-Day there was an added influx of Jewish soldiers from the USA. We really enjoyed their visits with presents of chewing gum and sweets and tinned foods which we hadn't tasted for years. We always had as many people as there was room for round the table for High Holy Days and *Pesach*, and Lottie Worms always made the *Choroset* for the *Seder*. The synagogue was very much the centre of Jewish life and after the war there were many more Jews than before the war started.

The war years were very exciting, and immediately afterwards nearly all the congregation became very Zionist. Most of the ladies belonged to the WIZO which was first chaired by Dora Goldstein and later by my mother. There were regular lectures and fund-raising events, and the children joined a *Habonim* group.

One of the highlights I remember of those post-war year was that my mother became very friendly with a lovely young couple, George and Freda Silver. I used to baby-sit for Freda's two little boys, Jonathan and Andrew, for 1 shilling (5p) an hour while Freda helped George in his restaurant, Long John's. Freda and I have been close friends ever since and George and Freda's daughter Caroline was my bridesmaid.

In 1951 we left Oxford to move to High Wycombe to be nearer to my father's work at Stoke Mandeville and I started my physiotherapy training in London and although my parents loved their new home, nothing could erase the very fond and happy memories of those years in Oxford.



Children of the Community, probably in 1950, photographed on an outing. Photo loaned by Rita Butler (née Steiman)

"Other towns aren't like Oxford"

by ***Michael Spira***

That phrase seemed to have been repeated throughout my childhood in Oxford.

At various times my parents made first the decision, and then the preliminary actions to move to London in order to achieve the goal of a "proper Jewish environment" in which to raise my sisters and me. In my younger days London was a magical place akin to Utopia where everyone was Jewish and all lived a full and happy life.

At the time I found it difficult to justify my parents' actions, after all I had Jewish friends, we went to the Synagogue regularly - well pretty regularly - and didn't I "have" to attend Hebrew classes; anyway the community had a full religious and social calendar, what more could we need? Reviewing that period in my life, and as with most reminiscences, the better memories always seem to come flooding back and perhaps that is what my childhood in Oxford has become, just a series of events: perceptions altered by time and experience into something to treasure.

Individual memories like the weekly standing in line at Butterfields, in the Covered Market, to buy kosher meat. There were always women, and occasionally men, in the queue that I thought I recognised but always got their names wrong (a character trait I have honed and developed to perfection in later years). The line never seemed to move or get shorter and the noise, the buzz of conversations in German, English and occasionally Yiddish, together with the smell of sawdust, seemed to pervade my whole being. At the end of the line stood Tom, the butcher, and Reverend Sichel from Reading; Tom trying to make sure there was enough meat for all and everyone got a chance of the choice cuts - if not this week then the promise of some kept by, next week. Reverend Sichel did nothing but talk, or so it seemed. Butterfields was a point of contact for a large proportion of the community as indeed was the whole Covered market.

My father worked at Lucks, the fabric stall, and "Uncle Ben" (Walter Benjamin), "Old" Mr Decofsky and "Old" Mr Watson (they were always

"Old" to me) had stalls. There was a shoe shop owned by a Mr Lewis who later moved back to London. A large part of the Congregation at that time were people who had evacuated to Oxford during the war. Some remained, many returned in the fifties. The whole place was like a Jewish shopping arcade to me.

Every week, for all my life it seemed, I *had* to attend Hebrew Classes on Sunday mornings. One of my earliest childhood memories is of Classes at 11 Bullingdon Road, the home of Else and Ken Lawrence. In their front room was a large round table covered with a cloth, chenille I think, which reached down to the floor; I used to hide underneath but the teacher always knew where I was. My father acted as taxi-driver for the Classes and our car was always full of children both there and back. This continued throughout my progression in Classes as did my father's habit of offering hospitality to the parents of children who lived out of Oxford. These people had to spend two hours in Oxford on Sunday mornings because it wasn't worth going home and many people visited with us regularly to the consternation of my mother who, besides having to prepare lunch and do other chores, couldn't stand some of them - usually the people Dad preferred.

Friends were made, and over the years we got to know many people such as the Finnestons when Sir Monty worked at Harwell. Oxford is that sort of town, people pass through and with the passage of time you suddenly find you have friends all over the world.

My life in the Classes progressed when they moved to the Synagogue which, being a one room building plus the vestry, meant all ages were at a table with one teacher. As numbers increased there were other tables, other teachers, and some age-grouping. During term there was a prevailing smell of cooking, either left over from Shabbat, or from the occasional preparing of Sunday lunch. Some years later, a large curtain was put right across the front part of the building to divide the area used for dining from the body of the Synagogue used for worship. The Classes used the dining area until numbers increased and we moved into the Synagogue proper with its hard benches and book rests. We quickly turned these into school-like furniture, as my contemporaries and I carved initials and other designs, usually in inconspicuous places. In later years I used to seek out this graffiti during the more tedious sections of Services.

The *Bimah* in the Old Synagogue was a source of wonder and amazement to me as a child, dominating, of highly polished wood and at its four corners, candle holders which on occasions actually contained lighted

candles. Inside the *Bimah*, on the two longer sides, were hard benches sometimes piled high with books, but used by people to sit with the *Sefer* and others who came to keep them company. I spent many happy minutes hiding under those benches after break at classes but again the teacher always found me - do they give teachers practical training in finding pupils? There was a magic and mystery about the *Bimah*: during Services people came and went; my father always seemed to be there when the *Torah* was being read. Most magical of all was at the end of *Yom Kippur* when the *Bimah* produced a bottle of milk for Laurie Bloom to break his fast; a truly wondrous piece of furniture.

Eventually 1 Nelson Street was purchased for the Meals Service and the Classes spilled into it; the smell of cooking followed. Strange that many of my childhood memories seem to feature food, both at home and at the Synagogue. The occasional *barmitzvah* or *kiddush* seemed to highlight this, especially when *Simchat Torah* and *Chanukah* came along - didn't we hold *Chanukah* parties at the Co-op Hall in Cowley Road?

The highlight of my academic achievement was being banned from Classes (only for a week) by Mrs Rabin because I preferred discussing gangster history, complete with own toy gun, to Biblical history in Class. As I pointed out to a new generation of children at Hebrew Classes when I talked to them shortly after becoming President, it is a tradition of Oxford that they who challenge the "Oxford Way" usually end up helping to sustain it; or put another way, they who mess about in Class stand better chance of becoming President.

Services in the old Synagogue feature in my memories. As a child I was overawed by the size of the building. Either side of the huge black Ark, with the hands and Hebrew letters above, were large chairs occupied by "old" men in bowler hats each wearing a gigantic *tallit*. I was told that these were the President and the Warden of the Synagogue, people who demanded, and got, the respect and obedience of a young child. My father and I always sat on the right hand side of the Synagogue, and so large was the *Bimah* that I couldn't see the other man on the left, except when we stood up - oh, how often did we have to stand up, and for such long periods - and I could just see them through the "portholes" that decorated the sides of the *Bimah*.

I still can't decide whether the building was hot or cold. The large gas heaters suspended from the ceiling always noisily pushed heat down, never quite reaching me in full before drifting back up to fill the V-shape space miles above me. There was always a conflict between the heat coming

down, and the cold seeping in from the windows behind - perhaps that's why we sat in the front row, and probably why Dad had this large wool *tallit* I could snuggle into.

One of my lasting memories in the Old Synagogue was the buzz of conversation that acted as a background noise to the *Chazan*, and sometimes seemed to be designed to intimidate him. At moments like this, book-thumping and loud "*sshh's*" filled the air and the sound level dropped dramatically, only to rise steadily later.

In the row behind us usually sat Nat Posner and Ben Brown, a fortunate combination indeed. At providential moments during the *Yom Kippur* service, when one of Nat's jokes would have been inappropriate, out would come the tin of snuff Ben kept in his pocket to be passed along the rows on our side of the Synagogue -the poor people on the left side never revelled in the pleasure of snuff, introduced to me at a rather earlier than necessary age. After sneezing loudly (more book thumping) we sank back into the tedium only to be roused moments later by the appearance of the ammonia bottle Nat had in his pocket. Of the smells of my childhood those two must be among the most unusual.

The Youth Club was part of my experiences. Who could forget that inaugural meeting held at the Curtis's house in Cowley on a New Year, after one of the heaviest snowfalls in recent years? Just getting there was an experience. Trips to visit other Youth Clubs in Reading and Uxbridge, usually being driven by Alf Delcoy in his Dormobile - how many miles did I travel in that vehicle? Of course there were the illicit visits to the pub in Nelson Street (I was older then) to buy cider for Club meetings in the vestry, not to mention what went on in the cellar under the Wimpy Bar in St Giles - and since I promised not to mention what went on, I won't.

Any one's childhood is dominated by their parents and mine was no exception. My mother Paula was the one who ran the home. Dad was heavily involved in community life, spending many years on the Synagogue Committee. In fact I felt some of the kudos for all his work came to me. After his death in 1968 I was asked to stand for the Committee and I was not sure whether it was out of respect for him or because of my own qualities; in retrospect it was probably a combination of both. It is the legacy of my father's involvement in the Jewish life of Oxford that gave me the example and set me on the path that I have followed most of my adult life. Eventually becoming Warden of the Synagogue, my father was involved at all levels; he was there to help, advise, and run matters social

and religious. His religious knowledge was such that he was a point of reference for many people. My regret is that I failed to get a greater share of his wisdom.

A trip to Shillingford or to Studley Priory was a treat. On a fine summer Sunday (as they inevitably were in one's youth), a proportion of the Oxford Jewish community moved to Shillingford, to be precise the meadow with the swimming pool situated by the Thames across the road from the Shillingford Bridge Hotel. Our friends seemed to be there, and we met people from Reading, and those from London and elsewhere who were visiting children at Carmel College and taking them out for the day. To me, my parents seemed to know everybody.

In seeking to move from Oxford my parents had the welfare of their children at heart, but by failing to do so they gave us the gift of growing up in Oxford, an experience unique, pleasurable (for the most part) and one to be cherished all our lives. If "other towns aren't like Oxford" it is for me an expression, not of regret for missed opportunity, but of thanks that Oxford is what it is.

Caroline Lewis (née Silver)
recalls

MOVING to a new area (i.e. South London) is not as simple as *Alef, Bet, Gimmel.* As careful as one chooses a house and school, so finding the right *shul* is just as important. The rigidity of our local United Synagogue being out of the question, I researched the Reform - friendly, but with an alien atmosphere was all I could feel. My Oxford upbringing had much to do with these feelings. After a while, I discovered a small congregation where I felt quite at home. This new *Masorti* community had the same pioneering spirit, reminiscent of my youth in Oxford. No Rabbi, classes in congregants' homes, and services that are only as good as their contributors - i.e. sing your heart out.

My recollections of the old '*shul*' are vivid. The memories are brighter themselves than the dark drab interior and gabled roof. Gas heaters on chains hung down, heating only the top of one's head. On high holy days it was crowded, hot and stuffy. Arguments frequently broke out as to which window to open, so as not to cause a draught on an elderly congregant. On *Yom Kippur*, a mixture of mothballs and smelling salts, wafted along the rows of the ladies section. The same hats reappeared annually. Chatting was a pastime, but if our corner became too noisy, the Warden would bang loudly on the outside of a closed *Chumash.*

When our small community celebrated *Purim* all the children were given a part in the play and, although fancy dress was less sophisticated that it is nowadays, no less effort went into the frantic preparations. Our *Chanukah* parties were often held in a church hall, sharing our candles with their Christmas decorations. This added much secular confusion to the festivities for us children, but no Christmas carol could ever compete with Natalie Koch's piano accompaniment to *Ma Otzour*, to which everyone joined in with gusto.

As a small child, Sunday mornings meant Hebrew Classes. These were held in the small extension at the rear of our house, adequate for the half a dozen or so children who reluctantly appeared each week to learn their *Alef Bet* from José Patterson. We were of mixed age, ability and behaviour.

Despite this, we all learned our *Shema* and festival stories. Each of us in turn would be sent out for disrupting the class. The kitchen being the only place to go for this "punishment" was always occupied by my mother who, along with her lecture on how to behave in class, supplied biscuits and treats. As the Classes grew we were obliged to move away to No. 1 Nelson Street. On Sunday mornings the students came to clear away their *shabbat* meals, so the clatter of dishes and smell of two-day old boiled chicken which permeated this terraced house accompanied us as we continued learning the *Alef Bet.*

By now the classes had been split into three groups, the oldest (and most serious) were taught by Ron May (Mr May, to us). The younger ones, predominantly female, seemed to drive a succession of teachers away - one even to *Yeshiva.* I have to admit, and I'm sure I don't offend my contemporaries, that we were unteachable. We rushed off to the sweet shop at break, only to saunter back. There seemed no sense of importance - no *Batmitzvah* to look ahead to, no role models to look up to. We found it hard to care and I still don't know my *Alef Bet* properly.

Meanwhile, back at my parents' home, they would be busy preparing for the weekly Open House for Jewish students. We would arrive home from Hebrew classes to hear the sound of high-brow, intellectual conversation. My only contribution to this, however, would be to hand round the chopped liver and peanuts. Although I'm sure they were extremely clever and interesting, as I grew into a teenager of the Sixties, the students seemed a dull lot to me. None had Beatle hair-cuts under their *kippot* and many were smaller than me. Much to my parents' chagrin, they were definitely not "my scene".

More at my level was the Youth Club. This was held in a brick cellar underneath the old Wimpy Bar in St Giles. The walls had silhouette pictures of jiving couples and we played ping-pong to the sound of records on a "Dansette" record player. Occasionally, we would meet up with boys and girls from Reading, or go on a sponsored walk. The Youth Club was never exactly Oxford's hottest social venue, and to add to the tedium, we were always the same dozen or so youngsters. A small *Habonim* group was formed, but that was short-lived for the same reason.

All our parents worked hard at trying to provide that nice Jewish background, so unnatural then in Oxford. Looking at the community now I see how much has changed. Girls, in particular, have much more hope and opportunity. *Bat-Mitzvahs* are assumed, and GCSE has made Hebrew a credible subject and language.

One could use the cliché of how lucky the youth of today are, but will they have such rich and atmospheric memories? Of one thing I am sure, that is that they will learn their *Alef Bet* with greater ease. They will have the pride of having been brought-up and educated in the warm and broadminded community that Oxford continues to offer.

Oxford Jewish Youth Club

*by **Laura Spira** (née Frank)*

In late 1962 Else Lawrence consulted her amazingly comprehensive community card index, identified those families with teenage children and invited those teenagers to a meeting. That meeting at the Lawrence home in Bullingdon Road saw the formation of the Oxford Jewish Youth Club.

My memories of that first evening are vague; some of us already knew each other but there were also new faces - what seems most striking is that such a disparate group of young people responded so positively to the suggestion of a youth club and immediately set about organising themselves so successfully. We were determined to be totally independent - no affiliation to any national organisation and no adult interference! (Just like those Cliff Richard films so popular in the early Sixties where a group of kids use their own resources to tackle some problem, and triumph against all the odds, singing tunefully at twenty minute intervals. We didn't sing. Thank goodness.) We were not, however, reluctant to accept adult support - and we received it in abundance from our own parents and from many members of the community. Our first event - a New Year's Eve party - was proof of this. You may remember that particular winter; the snowfall was heavy and transport very difficult but our parents went to considerable lengths to convey us to the venue and the party was a great success. The venue? The home of a young couple called Margaret and Alan Curtis. These brave people went out to celebrate the arrival of 1963, leaving their home and a sleeping baby in our charge. (For many years I remained amazed at the apparent recklessness of this behaviour, until as the parent of small children I too experienced the difficulties of finding a babysitter on New Year's Eve!)

At some point a constitution was drawn up and a formal committee established, of which I became secretary. I remember producing detailed minutes of lengthy committee meetings which mostly consisted of arguments about the minimum age for membership and other immensely important issues. The arguments were mostly between myself and the

chairman, a very irritating and opinionated Michael Spira. (Reader, - I married him!!)

Meetings took place on Sunday evenings in the vestry of the old synagogue building. Someone donated a table tennis table and a record player and during one school holiday we painted the room a fetching primrose yellow. A small core of regular attenders was augmented by visitors - often American or Israeli teenagers whose families were visiting Oxford. One boy came on several Sundays but refused to join in any activities, preferring to sit quietly in the synagogue. Only recently, watching the play "Shadowlands" did I realise that David was the stepson of C.S. Lewis.

Although OJYC remained fiercely independent of any national organisation, we did make contact with other youth groups and organised exchange visits with a youth club in Ealing. The host group would entertain the visitors to lunch in their own homes and we would then meet up later for a social. We also participated in locally organised youth activities - very successfully as evidenced by the report in the Oxford Times memorably headlined "Jewish Youth excel at indoor games".

Great enjoyment was derived from fund-raising evenings at which we entertained our parents and members of the community with food, slide shows and a variety of games. These experiences honed my organisational and diplomatic skills - it was my job to book the hall, deal with the (invariably) surly caretaker and persuade all ladies attending to wear plastic covers on their shoes to protect the floor from the ravages of the then fashionable stiletto heel!

The generosity of George Silver enabled us to move our regular meeting place from the confines of the vestry to the much more atmospheric cellar beneath the then Wimpy Bar in St Giles (now the Oxfam Bookshop) Again, we decorated; a grand plan to cover the ceiling with egg boxes was only partially successful and a mural was designed but never completed - neither mattered since the dim lighting rendered our surroundings almost invisible!

When I left Oxford in 1964 the club was still thriving and successive waves of teenagers kept it active until the early 1970s when a *Habonim ken* was established to give a new impetus to activities for young people in the Oxford Jewish community. Looking back, I believe that we were right to remain so independent; we gained considerable experience in taking responsibility and in working as a team - and we also had a lot of simple unsophisticated *fun*!

The Cecil Roth Era

Profile - Cecil Roth (1899 - 1970)
by ***Professor Geoffrey Lewis, F.B.A.***

I came up to St. John's as an undergraduate in 1938 with two instructions from my father: to attend the Synagogue on Sabbath mornings and to go to tea with the Roths on Sabbath afternoons. The Roths had come to Oxford only a month or two before, on Cecil's appointment as Reader in Jewish History, a post he held for twenty-five years. Their house in Garford Road was never without guests, particularly on Sabbath afternoons, when anyone who wanted to drop in was welcome. Those tea-parties were an education, thronged as they were with refugee scholars from all over Europe, many of course from Germany, perhaps even more from Italy. It was a novel and rewarding experience to listen to them debating and reminiscing under Cecil's urbane and learned chairmanship and, for the more daring of us, sometimes to put in a word ourselves. As for the Synagogue, the untimely departure of the older undergraduates soon brought me to the dizzy rank of Treasurer. When I myself went off to the war in 1940 I was able to hand over the accounts, showing a credit balance of one halfpenny, to the Senior Treasurer, Walter Ettinghausen of Queen's, who some years later as Walter Eytan, First Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Office. I left Oxford with the Senior Treasurer's congratulations and some words of comfort from Cecil, who had served in the infantry from 1917 to 1919 before coming up to Merton to read History.

On my return to Oxford in 1945, accompanied now by my wife, I happily fell back into the routine of Sabbath afternoon tea at the Roths (in the late 1940s they moved to Charlbury Road), which was no less of a salon than before. In addition, except during one or other's absences abroad we met regularly until 1964, when at the age of 65 he resigned his Readership and left for Israel to edit the Encyclopaedia Judaica. His time there was not as happy as it should have been, for no fault of his own, and he died there in 1970.

To younger members of the Jewish community, Cecil Roth is at best a name familiar from their parents' bookshelves. To those who knew him,

the twenty-one years that have passed since his death have not made his memory any less vivid. In physical appearance he never aged, preserving an almost languid Edwardian style as well as his thick black hair with a centre parting. These, his mournful and droopy expression and his singular voice and pronunciation, especially of the letter *r*, may have begun as undergraduate affectation but became only a mark of his originality in a world of ordinariness.

His devoutness was unmarred by any shadow of bigotry. He thought it a great pity that modern orthodox Jewish practice had crystallized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Eastern Europe, in an age and an environment which brought so many accretions to the pristine simplicity of Judaism. Year after year we attended *Seder* at his house and for us and our children it was one of the highlights of the calendar. As befitted a man who had produced no fewer than six editions of the *Haggadah*, he would add his own comments to the text, some of them worthy to rank with those of the sages whose sayings it embodies. The duty of asking the Four Questions fell to our son who, having spent most of his previous fortnight memorizing or rememorizing them, would be anxiously waiting for me to prod him at the right moment. But there was no need for that; Cecil would turn to him and speak a formula you will not find in the book: "Jonathan, I believe you are waiting to ask us something". I have never known anyone else who could achieve, with perfect dignity and seemliness, the apparent paradox of an informal ritual. Some people see God as a great architect, some as a consummate mathematician. I think that Cecil Roth's God was a kindly old scholar, with infinite learning, infinite compassion for the stumbling young, and an infinite sense of humour.

He seemed never to be oppressed by that feeling of "so much to do, so little done", from which most scholars suffer. Gifted as he was with curiosity about everything and the mental vigour to pursue every line of enquiry and the discipline to finish whatever task he began, he was a man in equilibrium. Anyway, he had done an awful lot; an incomplete list of his publications between 1920 and 1966 records over 572 books and articles.

Oddly, in spite of his enormous output I cannot recall, in all the years of our friendship, ever seeing him working or making work an excuse for turning anyone away from his door. For Cecil Roth, humanity was an inseparable part of being a scholar; it was not an aspect of his personality which could be switched on if time permitted and switched off if he was busy. Some people found him remote; to a large extent that was their own fault, because of their preconception that scholars *are* remote and work in

a rarefied atmosphere and are not readily approachable by those unable to meet them in their own field. All who came to him with their troubles, or with a bee in their bonnet, or with a funny story they thought Cecil would appreciate, as well as those wanting help with some tangled thread of history, would always find him ready to listen and to reach down the relevant book or delve into his mind for the answer.

Yet it is impossible to look at any of his writings without admiring not only the thoroughness of his scholarship but also the sheer vastness of his reading.

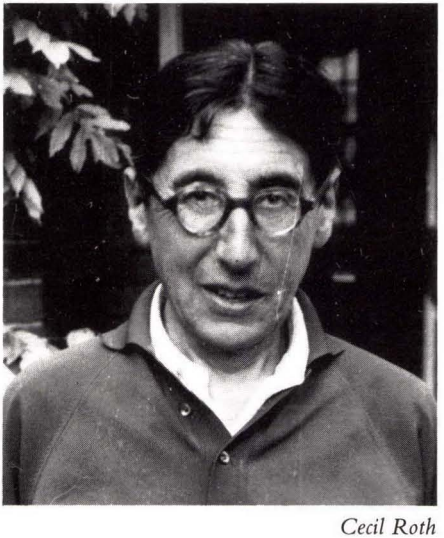
His earliest specialisation was the history of Italy and he maintained a lifelong love affair with that country. His first book, the one in which he took most pride, was *The Last Florentine Republic*, and an item in his collection that gave him most pleasure was the keys of the city of Florence. Then his studies shifted to the history of the Jews in Italy and then to that of Jews in every place and at every time. From the Marranos to the first Jew in Hampstead, he was ready to try his hand at them all. I clearly recall his characteristic remark when he decided to write *The Historical Background of the Dead Sea Scrolls*: "I don't see that it's all that mysterious who the chaps at *Qumran* were: the story's all there in Josephus, you know. It's not my field, but most of the angels have already trodden it, so I may as well rush in."

He was a considerable authority on Jewish art: he wrote many studies of various aspects of it and could tell you the story of every item in his rich and famous collection of *Judaica*. It included some rather peripheral *Judaica*, like the splendid fourteenth-century wooden figure of St. Peter. But he was more interested in people than in things. He said to us one evening, when he had just finished correcting the proofs of *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*, "You know, when I walk down St Aldate's now I feel I know the life-story of every poor little Jew who lived there in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, from the cradle to the gallows." He did his duty by the great names in Jewish history writing on the house of Nasi, noble families among the *Sephardic* Jews, Sassoons, Rothschilds and many more. But he also wrote about ordinary Jews; that, for him, was the real excitement of Jewish history; not writing about the great and wealthy but trying to rescue from oblivion the countless ordinary people who would otherwise be for ever forgotten: a ballad-singer in medieval London, a gardener in Norfolk, a printer in Naples, a bone-setter in Palermo. Not that he romanticized them; he was an historian, not a propagandist. In *A History of the Jews of England,* writing of the time before the expulsion in

1290, he says "Though as a rule the Jews were unable to write in Latin characters, whether French, English, or Latin were in question, they could generally decipher (and, exceptionally, even forge) those languages." The furthest I ever heard him go was when he remarked, "I'd hesitate to say that Jews are better than other people. I *am* sure they're no worse."

With his death, it was not only a great deal of wisdom and learning that went from the world; it was also a great deal of kindness and innocence and fun. It often happened that just as we were taking our leave after dining with the Roths, Irene would insist on my wife's going upstairs with her to inspect some new item in her wardrobe. Having carried on a sleepy conversation for a minute or two, Cecil and I would then lapse into silence until they reappeared. On one such occasion, as they eventually came back into the study, my wife said to Cecil, "And what are *you* wearing to the Vice-Chancellor's garden party?" Cecil replied, "I shall wear my bifurcated trousers." When, on another such occasion, she asked him, "And what are you doing this season to make a new exciting you?", his lugubrious reply was, "I am thinking of having all my teeth extracted." Sometimes, more often in articles than in books, the fun would spill over into his writing; hence such titles as *"Medieval Illustrations of Mouse Traps"* and *"The Messina Synagogue Inscription: or, Alas Poor Zunz!"*

A few years after the move to Jerusalem, he sent us an offprint from *"Remember the days"*, a volume of essays on Anglo-Jewish history. Across the cover he had written, "And remember the Roths". We remember.



Cecil Roth

Michael Pinto-Duschinsky
remembers the Roths

COHORTS of students succeed each other very quickly. There must be dozens of groups of friends who first met at the old J. Soc. before the new buildings were constructed and who share their separate memories. But there is one common link between a quarter century of Jewish undergraduates and postgraduates of the 40's and 50's and early 60's: Cecil and Irene Roth. The name of Cecil Roth would have been known to most Jewish freshmen even before they arrived in Oxford. At that time, there could have been few who had not been given at least one of his works on Jewish history as a *Bar Mitzvah* or *Bat Mitzvah* present.

The first mass encounter with the Roths was the annual bunfight held at their beautiful home at 31 Charlbury Road in the most fashionable part of North Oxford on the first Sunday afternoon of the new academic year. As Irene Roth later wrote in her sparkling memoir *Cecil Roth: Historian Without Tears*, these annual affairs were organised by the Oxford University Jewish Society "who scanned the University's matriculation lists for surnames which sounded as if their bearers would appreciate an invitation to our party."

As many as 200 freshmen would be greeted at the door by a personality, looking more like a Hollywood star than a don's wife and wearing enough bangles to fill a vault ("I put them on as a conversation piece for shy undergraduates," Irene once confided). While Irene enthused, Cecil had a more contained style. Her ebullience was calculated to compensate for the fact that, as she later wrote, "Cecil never found it easy to start a conversation with guests whom he did not know." In appearance, he was no less striking than she was, with an aquiline nose and a remarkable head of hair parted down the middle, with locks falling on each side. It was not surprising that Mané Katz and other leading Jewish artists of the time had asked to paint his portrait.

The bunfight was not only an introduction to the Oxford University Jewish Society but a chance for Cecil and Irene to issue students with an

invitation to their open house held every *Shabbat* afternoon. Almost everyone who was in Oxford until the mid-sixties will have a different story of these events which long remained a central meeting point of Jewish student life.

We never knew whom we would meet at those Saturday afternoon events. Sometimes there was a throng; some weeks (especially towards the end of each academic year, when punts and walks offered rival attractions) the company was more select. The open house was a circus of undergraduates, visitors to Oxford and other friends. In my time, Geoffrey and Raff Lewis were sometimes there with their lovely daughter, Lally, then a sixth-former at the Oxford High School for Girls. She later married Mark Freedland and her early death was one of the Oxford community's tragedies.

If it was one of the quieter Shabbat afternoons, there would be a chance to see some of Cecil's wonderful collection of Jewish books and other treasures - particularly the historic *Ketubot*. There was also a stream of gossip about Jewish and other personalities, many of whom the Roths met in the vacations, mixed with talk about travel, political events and history, much of it delivered in Cecil's exceptionally rich and punning vocabulary.

At a point in the afternoon when Irene felt that most of that day's company had arrived, she would take everyone into a room where tea and sandwiches were set out. Yes, *those* sandwiches. The sandwiches are the common memory that distinguishes *R.* from *post-R.* Oxonians. Only yesterday, I chanced to meet a J. Soc. member I had not seen for some years. When I mentioned that I had been asked to write these pages, he merely exclaimed "*The* Sandwiches!" and "Do you know the story about The Bite?"

Irene was not only hospitable but also practical (given the amount of entertaining she did, she had to be). By the 1960s, she owned one of the earliest deep-freezers in the country. Since she did not know how many people to expect each Saturday, she started the year by preparing an abundance of sandwiches. Any that were not consumed on the first *Shabbat* afternoon of term would be put into the freezer for the following week. The modern discoveries that link re-freezing and food-poisoning had not yet reached North Oxford. The following week, the mature sandwiches were taken out again and the supply was topped up by some new ones. For some reason, the undergraduates chose the new sandwiches in preference to the old. The uneaten sandwiches - mostly the oldest - returned to the deep freeze again. As the academic year wore on, the

contrast between each week's supply of fresh sandwiches and the ones which had now paid an increasing number of visits to the freezer became more pronounced.

This is where that - almost certainly mythical - story about *"The Bite"* comes in. One week, an undergraduate took a single bite out of a sandwich and then left the rest. According to one version, it was a deliberate experiment to test whether it would reappear on the table the next week. Another version is that the student, having taken a taste from one of the old sandwiches, decided to leave the rest. The punchline is that the sandwich with the missing bite re-emerged the following week together with the other deep freeze orphans.

The Saturday afternoon *At Home* was not Cecil's only point of contact with the Jewish students. He was one of a relatively few regulars at Saturday morning services. A friend recalls *Purim* with the Roths and the reading of the *Megillah* at 31 Charlbury Road. Cecil took out some fifteen ancient *megillot*, one for each member of the company: "Who would like this one? It's from Sixteenth Century Venice... Or this one? Eighteenth Century..."

In the summer he frequently invigilated religious students who postponed until Sunday the final examinations due to be taken on Saturday. Irene's book recounts the origins of the invigilation system. When Cecil had completed his own undergraduate studies in 1925, there had been no allowance for absence from Saturday examinations on religious grounds. Cecil himself was forced to miss two of his papers scheduled for *Shabbat*. The fact that he obtained a first class degree without them is testimony to his performance in the remaining papers as well as to his courage. When he returned to Oxford as Reader in Jewish Studies, it was apparently he who persuaded the University authorities to permit Jewish students to postpone examinations scheduled for a Saturday.

In order to prevent cheating, the Jewish student is isolated in the home of an Oxford M.A. from the Saturday morning (when the rest of the finalists sit the paper) until he takes the same examination the following day. This meant that any Jewish student being invigilated by Cecil, had to be locked into a room to prevent contact with the other students at the normal Saturday afternoon *At Home*. Irene recounts the invigilation of David Weitzman:

> On Sunday morning, after breakfast, Cecil donned full academic regalia, scarlet and blue doctoral robes, while the candidate wore formal black and a gown, complete with white bow tie, for the examination

ordeal. Cecil went to his study, instructing David to follow him several minutes later. After Cecil had closed the door behind him, David had to knock on the door and was invited to enter.

"Your name?" he was asked.

"Weitzman," David solemnly replied.

"Your desk is over there," Cecil said with equal solemnity, pointing to what was in fact the only desk in the room.

My final undergraduate year was the last to have the good fortune to know Cecil and Irene and to benefit from their welcome. For many of us, they were like an uncle and aunt. We told Roth jokes because they had made us into an extended family. Cecil retired in 1964 and he settled with Irene in Jerusalem where he had only a few packed years to live.

Looking back, his contribution is even more remarkable than it seemed at the time. He had been appointed to Oxford in 1938. His readership in Jewish Studies had been endowed by Marks and Spencer with the stipulation that he should be the first holder of the position. Undoubtedly, Harry Sacher, who had been instrumental in arranging the endowment, had been influenced by the need to combat the tide of Nazi propaganda. The study of Jewish history would not only expose anti-semitic myths but would also foster among British Jews a sense of their roots and would help to maintain a pride in Jewish traditions.

Cecil therefore assumed the role of the main Jewish standard-bearer in the University at the darkest time in Jewish history, which was also a period when the place of Jews in the University's life was far less secure than it has since become. There were a number of Jewish dons at Oxford (though fewer than today). Whereas others taught and researched in secular subjects, Cecil concentrated on Jewish studies. In the 1990s, when there has been such a notable expansion of these studies, it is difficult to imagine the novelty and the isolation of the subject when Cecil took up his post.

Cecil's everyday life as well as his writings on Jewish history obliged him to confront the catastrophes that were unfolding. In 1936, when he published the first edition of *A Short History of the Jewish People*, he ended the volume with an account of the exodus from Germany in face of Nazi persecution. In a second edition, published in 1943, the extra pages wrote of the intervening years when "anguish was added to anguish", of the German Night of Crystal in 1938, of the revival of the Ghetto in Europe and of the "massacres on a scale of ferocity which former history could not parallel".

The worst was still to come. In the concluding section of the third edition, published shortly after the war, he had to summarise the Holocaust, "incomparably the greatest disaster in Jewish life; the greatest disaster, perhaps, in the life of any people since the dawn of history."

In each edition he strove to balance hope and faith against despair. In the edition written immediately after the War, he pointed out that England's was the only Jewish community in Europe that "still held some potentialities for the immediate future. Excepting here, there was little left but penury and bitter memories." He warned against the Jewish demoralisation which was a result of the "ceaseless and extravagant" anti-semitic propaganda which was still malevolently alive during the late 1940s, even in England, as in the rest of the Jewish world." Despite these grim realities and the still uncertain position of Palestinian Jewry, he concluded that "The Providence that guides the process of history had ensured that the Jewish future was safe". And the fourth edition ended with the formation of the State of Israel: "The age-old yearnings of a people had resulted, by devious and unexpected ways, in an achievement without parallel in human history."

Cecil's scholarly and popular writings on Jewish history, his passion for Jewish objects and all the paraphernalia and legends of Jewish life, and his and Irene's humour and hospitality were successful acts of resistance against intolerable realities. Anti-semitism, he wrote, fed on Jewish demoralisation. So he and Irene created a centre of regular, lively, if eccentric Jewish activity. The Roths' North Oxford home, the bunfights, and even *those* Shabbat afternoon sandwiches provided a unique experience for hundreds of students and were one major part of Cecil's and Irene's contribution to Judaism's future.

Some of Our Yesterdays

Recollections of the Oxford Community, 1946 - 1958

by ***Sir Monty Finniston***

THE family Finniston, my wife and I, with our son and daughter lived in Abingdon from 1946 to 1958 and attended the synagogue in Oxford during that time. Then it was a hut in Richmond Road which did not succeed in holding the congregation on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the occasions on which extra chairs and accommodation had to be temporarily found. Today of course on the same site as the old hut there has arisen a new synagogue capable of meeting the demands on it, but I have no doubt with the same mix of congregation as obtained then, namely Jewish families resident in Oxford and students from the Oxford Colleges. If there is any change now (and I cannot speak with any direct knowledge), it would be that more girls probably attend than did in the forties and fifties, but that would not be due to the new synagogue!.

My recollections, with the aid of my wife, are of the people whom we knew through going to the synagogue and through buying kosher meat from Tom (whatever was his surname?) at the Oxford market on Thursday mornings. As to the former, we recall in no order of merit or distinction the Blooms and the Kemps, the Roths, the Daubes and Spiras, the Rosenbergs, the Leytons and the Margolyes and of course the Silvers. Of the students we cannot recall the names, although the "leader" was a mature student who always wore a homburg and who could read from the Scroll as to the manner born. What we do remember is that before we began the Sabbath service (which was always late in starting since we had to wait for a *minyan*) we had to clear up the remains of the Friday night meal and rearrange the chairs and seats.

At the market we made friends with the Roses (with whom we still meet in London) and the Woodrows, the menfolk working at Harwell as I did. The *shomer* came from Reading, although his name escapes my memory.

Other lasting memories are that our son Michael was *barmitzvah* at the synagogue and was taught by Shoshana Yaron. The *chazan* was Dr. Rosenberg, the reading was by Professor Daube and the *bocher* was

addressed by Dr. Weiss. My wife would take the children to *Cheder* at the synagogue on a Sunday and I on occasion would read the morning service and even more occasionally have an *aliyah*. The only other claim to fame that I had in the synagogue was that I was once *Chosan Torah*.

If I have missed anybody or left anything out I do it because it all happened a long time ago and memories do not improve as one gets older. Perhaps when we read in due course what others have to say, the memories of past days will flood back.

Reminiscences

by ***Dan Kemp***

I have lived in Oxford since May 1945. At this time there was a very live evacuated community here with all facets of Jewish life and branches in various smaller towns in the county. Gradually those with established roots, mainly in London, returned and the majority who remained were refugees from Central Europe who arrived in the United Kingdom from 1933 onwards.

The Jewish students in the immediate post-war period were mainly older ex-servicemen. The moderately observant children from United Synagogue families and from similar congregations maintained Synagogue services "in the middle of the road fashion" very successfully and the Jewish Society flourished.

Many students attended Saturday afternoons at the home of Dr. Cecil and Mrs. Irene Roth at 31 Charlbury Road; it was for a number of years a fulcrum of Jewish culture and social activity. Unfortunately there were many misunderstandings for a number of years between Town and Gown.

In 1948 Rabbi Weinberg left and the community was by then greatly diminished in numbers. At about this time I had the good fortune to meet my future wife Rosie at Cecil and Irene's home at the party they held for Jewish "Freshers" at the beginning of each academic year.

From 1950 to about 1960 things were at a low ebb, both in membership and Synagogue attendance. There were often no services on Saturdays and Festivals out of Term. I was on the Synagogue Committee and tried to encourage people to attend. Professor David Daube was a regular worshipper willing and able to conduct services.

After Raphael Loewe returned to London, Rosie and I took over the running of the children's services at our home every sabbath morning. We had a good, regular attendance of children of various ages; a few stayed on well into the afternoon. Rose was relief teacher in Hebrew classes for a few years.

When my father died I was elected Synagogue Warden in his place (1959).

At that time discussions started in earnest about a new synagogue and student centre. Professor Herbert Frankel was President and Professor Daube and other eminent scholars were on the Council. I was asked to apply to the Charity Commissioners to get the Synagogue registered as a charity. I was requested to produce a constitution and managed with difficulties to obtain a copy of a Standard Constitution as used by the United Synagogue. This was eventually adapted to suit our needs. It took so long for us to agree about it that I think the Charity Commissioners got suspicious of me!

At around 1960 the overall position began to improve. More Jews were appointed to University positions in all faculties and more professional people started to settle in and around Oxford, mainly young couples with children.

During my years as warden I acted in many different capacities spending many hours learning the weekly portion, which I found difficult as I have no voice and very little knowledge of music. One of my most difficult tasks was when I was called upon to officiate at funerals, especially when the family concerned were very far removed from Judaism.

One Saturday morning in the Spring of 1962 a stranger came into the Synagogue. I was the only one to recognise him as Wing-Commander Segal (ex Labour MP for Preston North). He said "Yes, I am now a high official in the Ministry of Health and am taking up residence in Oxford". He very quickly started taking an interest in communal affairs.

A local Synagogue Building Committee was formed of which I was treasurer. We started to collect donations. It was quickly realised that it would take more than a local effort to raise the amount needed. One adjoining house and cottage were bought to enlarge the site. It was also realised that we could never appoint an architect of international repute such as Arne Jacobsen of Denmark judging how the building costs of St. Catharine's college escalated. So preliminary negotiations were started with David Stern who has designed and supervised the building of several modern Synagogues in the United Kingdom. Through Dr. Segal's influence the Synagogue Trustees and eminent leaders of the Jewish Community and wealthy business community were alerted to the great shortcomings of our old Synagogue building.

Gradually, discord erupted among certain members in the community. Laurie Bloom who was totem factotum in the day-to-day running of the community could not see eye-to-eye with the rest of us. A secret ballot was arranged to be held at an Extraordinary General Meeting in July 1963.

This meeting was very well attended and Sam Segal was elected Synagogue Treasurer in place of Laurie Bloom. Laurie was offered the position of President which he declined and George Silver was elected President of the Community. Soon after this election George Silver with Dr. Segal and Sir Alan Mocatta formed a National Appeal Committee.

I continued to be treasurer of the Building Fund until 1965, when after some difference of opinion, I resigned. Later in the year, owing to my increased business commitments, I also resigned as Synagogue Warden.

There is no doubt that Sam Segal's life peerage and connections in the community at large was a great help in raising the necessary money.

In 1968 George Silver asked me to become Synagogue and Marriage Secretary. I declined both but after much persuasion took on the less onerous position of Marriage Secretary of the United Synagogue. Unfortunately, I have not been overworked but can recall many amusing stories. I was also Jewish Chronicle correspondent for a number of years.

I hope when I retire and have more time I will be able to devote some of my leisure to local communal affairs.

I Remember (1958-91)

by ***Barbara Lewis***

I came to Oxford as a bride in 1958. My clearest memory of the old shul is *Simchat Torah.* It was the morning service and I think there were about 10-15 people in *shul.* The thing I remember most was that after every *aliya* there was a whisky for the congregant doing the *mitzvah.* There was a most convivial spirit. Although I am a non-drinker, I remember feeling, "I rather like this". I was also determined that I would have no part of the Town and Gown rift that had arisen, especially since most of the emergency residents went back. I was, therefore, so pleased when a *B'nai B'rith* Lodge was formed with the specific aim of uniting the Community, a task, I may add, that it did extremely well. Now, no-one thinks of "them and us".

1960's : Coming to *shul* and finding remnants of last night's *shabbat* meal on the table. I looked at this mess in horror, cleared the table and removed the left-overs. That was the moment for *B'nai B'rith* to act. At the very least the meals service must be got out of the *shul* and into a neighbouring house. From that time, the steady improvement began. *Hillel* bought 1, Nelson Street, supervised the improvements to make it usable and then all the activity to create a Building Fund and finally a new building worthy of the community.

Pre-1967, at a garden party, I remember Cecil Roth declaring that the closing of the Straits of Tiran was "Munich", and Israel was being sold down the river - very depressing. It seemed as though all our hopes and dreams were about to end and Hitler would be laughing in his grave.

Emergency meeting on a Thursday evening about the fourth day of the 1967 war to discuss how the Oxford Congregation could help. There had been a huge wave of sympathy for Israel in Oxford. Mr. Bloom's shop in the Broad was known to generations of citizens and he told us how he kept having people come in, not to buy, but to express anxiety and sympathy and often thrusting money into his hand to help. About 8.30 p.m. Margaret Curtis came rushing in: she had just heard on the radio that the

enemy was in retreat and a ceasefire was being arranged. Israel was saved.

May 7th 1970: The most memorable musical evening of my life. A group of Israeli graduate students, with the right connections, arranged a concert at the Town Hall with the darlings of the musical world, Daniel Barenboim and Jacqueline du Pré The Town Hall was packed and there was a real buzz of excitement. Daniel announced that instead of the expected programme of duets he had asked his friend Pinchas (Zukerman), then relatively unknown, to join them and they would play trios. They started to play. My programme tells me that they played Beethoven Trio in G (opus 121a); Trio in E flat major (opus 1 No.1); Trio in D major (opus 70 No.1). It was a hot summer's evening and the audience was in raptures. I remember Daniel Barenboim finally stopping the applause and sending us home because the Town Hall was needed for the counting of the local government elections.

1973: *Yom Kippur*: I took the children home to lunch and casually switched on the news; Syria had invaded from the North, Egypt from the South and the news sounded grave. We went back for *N'ila* with the dilemma to tell or not to tell. I consulted the Committee and they decided to leave the announcement until after *Ma'ariv*. We were all very conscious of numbers of Israelis in the Service which was being held in Rhodes House that year. At the end of the Service the news was formally announced. Some Israelis were very angry at not being told earlier. We took back some visitors who spent the evening trying to phone their Kibbutz in the *Galil* which might have been under attack. The congregation arranged for a coach-load of healthy blood donors to go up to the London Blood Transfusion Centre being held at a synagogue. We were very grateful for the immediate and enthusiastic response we received from the students and the younger, fitter members of the community.

July 4th 1987: After a dreadful summer, a fine week-end and the sun shone for our daughter's wedding in the new building. What greater reward for the time and effort that went into helping to build a community and a new building than that!



This beautifully embroidered tapestry which was probably of Russian (?) origin, was loaned to the Oxford Congregation by Heinz Edgar Kiwi. It served as a ***Chupah*** *for weddings in the old Synagogue and had to be suspended from the ceiling in front of the Ark.*

Photo taken by Ivor Fields at the wedding of Carole & Alan Lester.

Student Life in Oxford

No. 1 Nelson Street 1961 - 1965

by ***Cherry Torrance***

"They have a little synagogue in Nelson Street, on the edge of Jericho and a house beside it with a blue door where kosher meals are served. This unobtrusive centre scarcely represents the confidence of modern Oxford Jewry, but it does evocatively suggest the old separateness of Jewishness, its shuttered pride and its oriental origins".

JAMES Morris did not go beyond the blue door when researching the 1965 book on Oxford from which this extract is taken, yet these few lines with almost uncanny perception opened a world of memories of my student days in the early 1960's; for the house next door to the *Shul* was almost exclusively for the benefit of the Oxford University Jewish Society, where so many of us went daily for lunch and every *Shabbat* for Friday evenings, Saturday lunch and *Seudah Shlishit* in summer.

In 1961 there was an unprecedently high membership of the "JS" (were we the products of a World War II baby boom or just fortunate in having parents who could encourage our university education in Macmillan's post-austerity era?) with the result that for some Friday evenings when we entertained a guest speaker such as Professor David Daube, Gerda Charles or Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs, there were nearly 200 of us squeezed on benches at trestle tables in the downstairs of the house where hall, back and front parlours had been knocked into one room, on the stairs, and dangerously in the upstairs which had been condemned. The house was but an artisan's cottage, converted, with a kitchen extension and a scrapyard of a garden next door to a *Shul* which had been a chapel. It wasn't even a picturesque hovel and for most of us, privileged to come from the comforts of middle-class homes, there was no *"nostalgie de la boue"* or recollections of *shtetl* life, yet we were drawn there daily to eat together, argue, *daven*, conduct romances, bring visiting parents on Sundays and even, on certain weeknights in term, allow the esoteric *Cholent* Society to dine with its carefully nurtured all male mystique! To this day, after more

than 25 years, when many of that undergraduate crop have won the glittering prizes, professorships here in the UK and abroad, "silks", chairmanships of banks and companies, authorial distinctions, I feel an indivisible bond with those I shared the Nelson Street experience with, as if the place had been the scene of some initiation rite for all of us.

In a way it was just that: the phrase *"kosher meals are served"* from the opening quote is of the most ingenuous and ironic. How did these *halachically* prescribed victuals reach us? We, the students, had in nearly every aspect to provide them and organise their continuity. On many a C.V. now there will appear the *gravitas* invoking title "Past President of OUJS"; a sinecure I can assure you. Instead, any personnel manager looking for the ability to produce under stress, on a shoestring for a cafeteria clientele whose gastronomic guru was that redoubtable performer, the Jewish Mother, need go no further than the "S.M.O." — pronunciation dubious - The Senior Meals' Organiser. My first assignment in that capacity was to transform *Shabbat* lunch into a repast fit for Frankie Vaughan then topping the bill at the Playhouse, and expected to knock at our blue door. The invariable custom for *Shabbat* lunch had been cold lamb/mutton, processed peas, leftover potato and for real "Neanderthal cuisine" eye-appeal, sliced beetroot. Maybe the intellectual conversation of the preceding generation had transcended the menu, but we were going to show our ingenuity: in my green and salad days there appeared avocado and Waldorf - oh, sophistication!

Indeed, there were murmurs that we were the soft generation, the first not to have had to do National Service as several of the graduate diners at Nelson Street had endured, and we wanted luxuries. Maybe... we were a fortunate and heterogeneous group bringing the dynamic experiences of the 1960's into our demand for style; travel to Israel, the American Rhodes' scholars in our midst, the Jewish Liverpudlians all of whom of course knew the Beatles (and who was Brian Epstein's cousin?). There was however another force in our lives at Nelson Street - caring, subtly imparting to us an aspiration for refinement in those dingy surroundings and producing meals throughout the week and on Sundays from hulking, antiquated equipment and under budgetary restraints always imposed by the Society's treasurer, at loggerheads with the SMO's spending and dictated too by Hillel House, impecunious in London and unable to subsidise us. Somehow, against all the human odds and the environment, Mrs. Julie Federhofer, 'Mrs. F' our Viennese cook tended lilies of the valley in that dump of a back garden and whisked sponges, especially

chocolate, which was secretly conceded, rivalled any mother's.

She was a short, dumpy lady in her sixties, a non-Jewish refugee from Hitler's Europe who, because of the political sympathies of herself and her brother had had to flee, she losing family and tragically in time her only daughter. 'Mrs F' with her sweet, melancholy smile adopted us all but having, we jealously admitted, a special affection for Liesl Adler and John Goldsmith who spoke to her in proper cultured German as opposed to fractured Yiddish which she charmingly tolerated. In fact she put up with derisory wages, ungrateful tantrums over tinned vegetables and outpourings in her kitchen about love affairs gone wrong. She rarely knew how many would appear each day for lunch or whether the meat sent every week by train from Barnetts in the East End would arrive in time. She was dependent on the SMO's ordering this together with our buying, not always very judiciously, fresh vegetables from Wednesday's cattle market which were transported often damaged in a student's car (then possessed by the very few). Groceries were ordered from wholesalers in Reading who had for a rep. a garrulous and cultured Dublin Jew, whose company 'Mrs F' relished and who talked her into many large tins of macedoine. She was always with us, noting with equally bemused grace the courtly thanks of Sinclair Wynchank for every delicacy she conjured up or the total disregard for the use of knife and fork with her food by a brilliant philosopher. The devotion of 'Mrs F' to our cause was a powerful argument in our struggle for better conditions. We knew that we should have decent facilities, that the Anglo-Jewish community was holding out the promise of a new synagogue complex with a student centre but exactly when, where and how it would be funded were vexed topics. In the meantime, Henry Shaw at Hillel House sympathised with 'Mrs F' - who wouldn't as she laboured in the workhouse kitchen? - but there was little money available from this source. As for the "Confidence of modern Oxford Jewry" perceived by James Morris, it has to be said that it was a little less assertive and in some cases quite ambivalent in resolving the building scheme and our problems. There was much tip-toeing round the subject in academic circles with even the suggestion that any new proposal should not make the Jewish presence too conspicuous. Unequivocal champions of the students were always Cecil Roth and David Patterson among the "Gown". In truth, though, our wholehearted support came from the "Town" in Freda and George Silver who treated us to unstinting hospitality. The entire Jewish Society was invited to the Barmitzvah celebrations of Andrew and Jonathan, and Freda somehow managed to

invite a few of us at a time to superb Sunday lunches so that nearly everyone had a turn at revelling in the home comforts. George with his restaurateur's expertise gave us a life-line with subsidies, equipment and know-how to keep our severely under-resourced kitchen serving the kosher meals which otherwise we would have had to discontinue, and with them the centrality of our Jewish existence in Oxford.

Just as we could not have survived without this help, we would also not have functioned without self-help and that was the basis of the *kashrut* at Nelson Street. We had no supervision and we had to rely on common sense, close scrutiny of all products and the unquestionable orthodoxy of several of the Jewish graduates and undergraduates. At best our arrangements were precarious: *challoth* were posted to us each week from Ostwinds; somehow they always arrived! New utensils were ritually cleansed? by some of our more zealous members in the local canal; we were forever in pursuit of sliced white bread without animal fat. There was little choice in products then, and we had no choice but to question relentlessly and to make do or do without. We adhered to our standards and were not faulted. Indeed the then Chief Rabbi, Israel Brodie, dined with us and stayed throughout Shabbat. Maybe our worst transgression was the ancient gas stove covered in sheets of asbestos for the soup and the urn overnight! Amongst ourselves we were exacting about levels of observance which had to satisfy the most orthodox yet comfortable with each other and not vigilantes. There was however one harbinger of the new ultra-orthodoxy: taking us all by surprise he walked in one *Shabbat* afternoon in *Chassidic* garb, wearing a "Gertel", conversing mostly in Yiddish, disturbing our equanimity and intriguing us. He was the 16 year old David Gresham, stepson of C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman.

Watching "Shadowlands" a few months ago, the story of his mother's marriage to the deeply committed Christian author, the unwritten sub-text to the play, David's reaction to his unhappiness, struck me poignantly. His reversion to the *Chassidic* Judaism of his grandparents was passionate. We were not very understanding towards him, since he made himself hunched, hostile and alien. In our own immaturity we rejected him, but I suspect we did not hurt him more and that his destiny was ineluctable. Our lives and Nelson Street did not impinge. Nonetheless as I wondered in the play's interval where he was now, my thoughts strayed to so many others with whom I have lost contact. Graduates of Oxford indeed and survivors of Nelson Street - could we risk a reunion and venture again across the threshold of that blue door?

Memories of Ruth Deech (née Fraenkel) 1962 - 1965

Principal, St. Anne's College

IT was the early '60s. I had a beehive hairdo, wore white winklepickers with my summer ball dress, and earned an easy entrée into Jewish college party life by teaching others how to do the twist, a skill acquired in my year off after school. Despite what is now said about the youth of the '60s, permissiveness, drugs and rebellion were certainly not our ways. It was an age of social and political innocence - pre-Vietnam, pre-AIDS, pre-Lubavitch and pre-the Six Day War. Women were newly liberated, there seemed to be no antisemitism, and student grants were adequate. We were privileged to be students in an era when one did not have to apologise for being a Zionist in academic circles. We were confident about Israel's future and her popularity, and we were free to be thoroughly secular and proudly Jewish at one and the same time.

The Jewish Society in those days was a haven of warmth and friendship for observant and non-observant students alike, and no-one was ever made to feel that his or her standard of orthodoxy was unacceptable. Thus it attracted, and kept in the fold, lukewarm Jews who might today feel intimidated in the same setting. There were, we knew, many really adventurous Jewish students who preferred to forget their origins once they had arrived in Oxford, and made their names in the wider cultural life of the university, in politics, in journalism and in drama. They were, on the whole, lost to the organised Jewish community in general. Others may have thought that the Jewish Society was *too* cosy, but we who went to Nelson Street felt we had the best of both worlds. We remained active in the community thereafter as well as achieving our goals in the wider sphere.

On my first Friday night in Oxford, having ascertained the whereabouts of the synagogue from an Oxford map, I picked my way down the as yet ungentrified Little Clarendon Street and Walton Crescent with growing disbelief. I lingered for some time outside the working man's cottage before deciding that I had arrived at the right place, and I still vividly remember opening the door straight into the roast chicken-laden atmosphere

of the dining room, with its bright lights and chatter. I had already decided that it contained my destiny. I came from South London and a boarding school and had met scarcely any young Jewish people before that time. I longed to catch up.

I remember very little about the programme of Jewish Society activities, save that I was President in Hilary Term 1965 and invited, *inter alia*, Bernard Kops and Chaim Bermant to speak. They were made to trudge with me, their hostess,from the station where I met them, to the *shul*, as I did not like them to be seen to arrive by taxi after dark. In reality we students went there to meet each other rather than the speakers,to whom belated thanks for their kindness and fortitude. An important element in the sociability was the hospitality of Cecil and Irene Roth, the Silvers, whose housing and generosity grew larger in tandem, and the Segals, though I never did discover how to get to Wytham Abbey on a Sunday by public transport.

In the Jewish Society I met many who are now well-known in academia, the City, the law and in Israel: Stuart Bloom, Nicholas de Lange, Neville Mandel (Israeli Foreign Service), Joel Sanderson, Bernice Fingerhut (now in Hawaii), Anne Summers, Penny Wiseman (25 years a kibbutznik), Jon Seres (solicitor), Vicky Cohen (Civil Service), David Robbins, David Robson (publisher), Daniel Serota (Q.C.) all ex-Carmelis, (Maurice) Victor Blank (banker), Roger Selby (solicitor), Lionel Wollenberg, Susan Carlebach, Martin Stern, Martin Paisner (solicitor), Stanley Burnton (Q.C.), Maurice Mendelson, Peter Susman, Phil Mannheim, Robin Hirsch, Harry Lesser, John Grabinar, Wilf Faust, Cherry Segal, Ian Torrance (solicitor), Judith Bor, John Beckman, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, Naomi Claff, Peta Wiseman, Jo Album, Susan Solomons (barrister) and many others. And there was an American graduate student, whose eccentric demeanour and remarkable eating habits became a feature of Friday nights. I was surprised to learn some years later that he was by then regarded in the U.S.A. as the leading philosopher of his generation.

At our daughter's batmitzvah a quarter of a century later my husband John remarked in his speech that some twenty-five of the guests, among whom we number our closest friends, were from the Oxford Jewish Society in the 1960's. There can be no greater testimonial to the bonding influence of that bastion in Jericho.

Further Recollections

by ***Michael Pinto-Duschinsky***

THE old synagogue was small, dark, spartan and cold. Next door, the kosher canteen had been fitted into a Jericho terrace house with a crude kitchen built on at the back. As undergraduates, we were hardly aware of the local Jewish community or of the gulf which then divided its Town and its Gown members. Our world consisted of the miracles of cooking produced by Mrs F. (Mrs Federhofer) in that cramped kitchen - the huge saucepan of blessedly hot soup and her gooey jam concoctions.

Life was filled with political discussions, with gossip about which parties were to be held after Friday night dinner at Richmond Road, with speculation about next year's Jewish girls, with end-of-*Shabbat* repasts in Phil Mannheim's huge room in New College or Sunday breakfast in John Deech's place at Oriel. Then there were the events with other Jewish societies. One term there was a football match against the Cambridge J. Soc., a weekend debate and party sponsored by the Birmingham J. Soc. (which led to at least one marriage) and even an event organised for Jewish students in December on the shores of Loch Lomond. It was after a Friday evening meal at Richmond Road that news arrived of President Kennedy's assassination and Colin Stolkin was one of the organisers of a dignified, silent demonstration at Radcliffe Square.

Though the number of Jewish residents who impinged on our lives was small, the Oxford congregation included some remarkable personalities who often showed great kindness to the students.

One of the most impressive Oxford names was a school legend who had featured prominently, as had Cecil Roth, on the marble honours boards in the great hall at the City of London School. The senior classics master had reverentially revealed to the upper sixth an ancient exercise book titled *Liber Aureus*. If a student produced an exceptionally brilliant translation into Latin or Greek, he could enter it into this book. There his writing would be immortalised alongside that of the school's most celebrated old boys of the past century, from Asquith onwards. The Liber Aureus celebrated the achievements of the best classicist for many years

named D.M. Lewis. In Oxford, I discovered that David Lewis was Jewish, played a leading role in the synagogue and was not only mortal but very friendly. My most vivid recollection is of a *Shavuot* meal with the Lewis's when they were still living in Old Road Headington, and when Barbara Lewis, surrounded by babies and small girls, included students in the family celebrations. It was the first of a number of such occasions.

Sammy Segal, a Medical Officer of Health, whose father had been a Minister of the Oxford Congregation in earlier times was a major figure in the Synagogue as well as in the outside world. He lived with his wife Molly in a part of the converted abbey at Wytham. I was surprised to be told that he had been a Labour M.P. after the War. He had been one of the staunchest advocates in the House of Commons of Palestinian Jewry. When Labour returned to power in 1964, Harold Wilson made him a life peer. His position as Lord Segal of Wytham, together with his *gravitas*, led students to dub his readings in Synagogue of the Prayer for the Royal Family 'The Lord's Prayer'. His travels sometimes kept him away from Oxford but he had a strong loyalty to the congregation and to the students. Invitations to his home to break the Yom Kippur fast or at other times would sometimes arrive from the House of Lords.

There was a Professor who lived in rooms at All Souls. He combined German and English old-world charm. David Daube was witty, attentive and concerned in his contacts with Jewish and other students. He made each of us feel very special with teas at All Souls, congratulatory notes and career advice. Typical of David was his reaction when undergraduates, for some reason or other, were holding a sit-in demonstration outside the porter's lodge at All Souls. They had picked a spell of freezing weather. After some hours, butlers emerged through the college entrance carrying trays of whisky to keep them warm, courtesy of the Regius Professor of Roman Law.

Daube's skills at rabbinic law were demonstrated in a series of ritual disputations with a younger don, David Patterson. According to the regulations, each officially recognised student society needed the sponsorship of a senior member of the University. At one time, a confusion had arisen as to whether David Daube or David Patterson was the senior member of the *Choolent* Society, a take-off of an "exclusive" dining club which met each term in the proletarian Richmond Road Jewish canteen. At several successive dinners, first one David and then the other would give a discourse, with reference to Talmudic precedents, blasting his opponents claims to the title of 'senior member'. Never was so much learning

displayed so amusingly for so long over such a trifle.

Daube was a consummate actor. The only time I ever saw him annoyed (was he putting it on?) was when a student retold the following "true story" (**all** *Choolent* jokes were required to be old ones, though the rule was occasionally broken and new stories thus slipped into the canon): a candidate for a doctoral degree at Freiburg University placed a bet with a friend that professors never actually read doctoral theses from cover to cover. To prove this, he wrote the first and the last few pages on his subject - an aspect of biochemistry - while the rest was a four hundred-page sprawl about why professors go prematurely bald. The candidate was duly awarded his doctorate and the thesis was placed in the university library. The fraud was discovered twenty five years later when another student decided to tackle a related research topic and became the first person to read the dissertation.

After a pause, Daube rose with a show of indignation. The anecdote was scandalous, he protested. It was all wrong and *he* should know as he had first introduced it to Oxford. After a further pause, he continued - it was wrong because the university in question had not been Freiburg but Heidelburg and the thesis topic had certainly not been biochemistry but physics.

In keeping with convention of the time, the *Choolent* Society excluded ladies. The excuse was that the blue jokes told during the dinners would offend them. In fact, as more and more of the Society's members stayed on at Oxford to take graduate degrees and tended to be married men, it became clear that some of the earthiest tales had - truth be told - come from their wives. At one point a group of wives gathered on the night of a *Choolent* dinner to have a revival joke-telling session which was reported to have been even cruder than that of their mates.

The male chauvinism of the *Choolent* Society was temporarily challenged by a young American wife of Len, a graduate member. It was snowing on the night of that term's *Choolent* dinner, the usual black-tie affair in the Richmond Road canteen. Len seemed preoccupied. From time to time he would step out into the snow and come back a few minutes later. As the evening wore on, his exits became more frequent. Finally someone asked what he was doing. He explained that his wife had driven him to the dinner and she had insisted on spending the evening outside in their car so that she would be waiting to drive him home when the affair was over. Gallantry overcame tradition and a frozen woman was, by agreement, invited to enter.

After this invasion of the male *sanctum*, it was decided to arrange a special ladies' dinner which was held in Mark Freedland's rooms in St. John's. It was a splendid occasion but, alas, a total failure. "What happened to the jokes?" one of the wives complained as we left the dinner. "You were all so polite that it wasn't worth coming. The jokes we tell each other are much better."

One summer, the *Choolent* dinner was just starting when there was a knock at the door. It was a tourist from Israel. His guidebook indicated that kosher meals were available at the canteen: could he eat here? The President invited him in. Faced with the array of black ties and dinner jackets the visitor looked as if he had made a sort of anthropological discovery - which he probably had. He explained that he had just arrived in England and it was his first trip out of Israel. He had been told that Jews were more formal in the Diaspora, but did Oxford students always have to dress like this in order to eat a kosher meal? The President assured him that this was a normal night. There must be some unusual photographs in one Israeli album.

Occasionally, the *Choolent* Society invited a guest speaker. The most memorable was George Silver in the early 1970s. The evening was significant for a reason we did not realise at the time. Among the Society's students and researchers, here was George Silver, a prominent non-academic - and yet no one even noticed the fact. The psychological wall that had previously separated town and gown residents had all but vanished. This development was a tribute to George and Freda Silver's personalities, diplomatic skills and to their years of activity on behalf of the synagogue. George's speech included a series of hilarious shaggy dog stories including the saga of his journey to Malta to fetch a food sample for a laboratory test and of the disbelief of the customs officer at Heathrow who, by insisting on opening the sealed package, made the entire journey useless.

An earlier generation of undergraduates first experienced the Silver family's welcome at the time of their elder son's - Jonathan's - *Barmitzvah*. I went to the synagogue that Shabbat morning with no idea of what the day held in store. Instead of the usual sparsely attended and cold service, the place was packed and hot. It was only years later that I discovered that a special synagogue committee meeting had been held to discuss the heating question - out-of-town guests could not be expected to cope with the Oxford synagogue's normal temperatures. Special heaters were installed for the occasion. What no one realised was that the heaters lacked

thermostats and that *Shabbat* rules made it impossible to turn them off.

After the service, George Silver issued an invitation to the students to join the family celebrations that night in the resplendent Randolph Hotel ballroom. The warm family atmosphere was enlivened by that new and, for some undergraduates, tempting experience - an open bar.

From the 1960s, George's and Freda's homes on the Banbury and Charlbury Roads became the main scene of gatherings of the Jewish community and of students on joyous and solemn occasions. It was at the Silvers that the congregation gathered in October 1973 during the crisis of the Yom Kippur War to discuss a collective response. George was also to play a key part in the building of the new synagogue.

A Yank at Oxford JSOC

by ***Robert J. Littman****, Professor of Classics, University of Hawaii*

FOR generations OUJSOC has served as a meeting place for Jewish students for religion, Zionism and a place to recruit their spouses. As an American on his way to Oxford from New York, my mother was terribly worried about me. "There aren't any Jewish girls in England." I assured her that there were indeed Jews, and that there was even a Jewish Society. During my undergraduate years at Columbia University in New York I wouldn't have been caught dead at Hillel or the Jewish Societies. That was for the *geeks* and the *frummies*. Besides, since 65% of the 25,000 student population was Jewish, and 25% of the population of New York, one was surrounded by Jews - probably almost as much as in Israel. My family traditions were varied. Both my grandfathers had been *Hasidim*. My paternal grandfather turned against the movement, left home at 15 and came to America where he found work as a kosher butcher. My maternal grandfather came to America, shaved his beard, but remained orthodox. My upbringing was American conservative/reform with mixed messages at home - my father echoed his father's contempt for organized religion and my mother her father's positive view. I attended a boarding school, where we were required to go to church - Jewish students were exempt and ran their own services. Since I knew more than the others, the one eyed man, I helped run the religious services.

By the time I reached Oxford, as a classicist and ancient historian, I had also picked up a fair bit of biblical Hebrew and Near Eastern history. I probably would not have made it over to the Jewish Society had I not met a Canadian, Chuck Dalfen, at Wadham my first few days in College. He encouraged me to come along to the JSoc, emphasizing the services (in which I was not very interested) but also the Friday night meals. After a week of College food, another week of pub food, I was ready for a square meal. So one Friday night I wandered over to the JSOC, expecting to meet *frummies* and anaemic looking *yeshiva bochers*. As an athlete and a secularist, these Jews were anathema to me. My heroes were the Jews of Bar Kochba and Massada, where the year before, Yadin had started

excavating. Yadin was to me an exemplar of what a Jew should be - a great scholar and great soldier. I did not expect to find young versions of Yadin, but I walked down to Walton Street anyway, into a small house, where the JSOC was then located. Sure enough, there were a number of *frummies*, but I found there a large number of Jewish young men and women who spanned the gamut of religious background. Many, like me, were there for the company of other Jews and a Friday night meal.

I remember well that first *Shabbat* dinner. It was a cold rainy evening, and the room was warm, not just in temperature, but also in friendship. I remember a good piece of chicken, friendly conversation, and vital and lively people. The room was arranged in benches with not very comfortable wooden chairs. You had to climb over one another to move, and the din of people talking and the odours of cooking from the kitchen permeated the crowded room and created a warm nest for us all.

During my time at Oxford many amusing and interesting Shabbat dinners followed, often punctuated with talks or lectures from distinguished guests. One *Shabbat* Chief Rabbi Brodie came. Ian Torrance was President of the JSOC, and his fiancée, Cherry, was running the meal service. Cherry was a rather attractive and *zoftig* lady. Ian came late because of a lecture, and by the time he arrived everyone else had eaten the chicken dinner but him. The room fell silent as Rabbi Brodie was about to speak, and suddenly Cherry's voice pierced the quiet from the kitchen "Ian likes breast". The entire room broke into laughter, except Rabbi Brodie, ignorant of Cherry's proportions.

When I wrote my mother that I had been going to the JSOC on Friday night, she was pleased, hoping for a Jewish daughter-in-law. The major function of Hillel and Jewish Societies, as all we parents know, is to provide a place for our Jewish children to meet and wed Jewish spouses. Now that my son is at University, I have made an offer to his Hillel, a $500 contribution if there he finds a steady Jewish girlfriend; $1000 if he finds a Jewish wife, and $5000 when the first Jewish grandchild arrives. My parents, fortunately for their purses, had not made such an offer to OUJSOC. For there, at the end of Hilary term 1965 I met Bernice Fingerhut - it was love at first sight, and a year later we were married. Today, we live in Honolulu, both of us having been President of our synagogue, Congregation *Sof Ma'arav*, me on the national boards of American Friends of Hebrew University, United Jewish Appeal, and shipping in our kosher meat 3000 miles from California. We and our children are living proof of the importance of OUJSOC to Jewish survival.

Choolant (with Tongue in cheek)

The Oxford University Choolant Society: A Short, Totally Unreliable Personal Memoir by ***Lionel Wollenberg***

THE Oxford University *Choolant* Society (henceforth denoted OUCS) was born sometime around 1958, its actual parentage being a bit doubtful. It was conceived in reaction to the various "exclusive" college-based dining societies which then abounded in Oxford. The OUCS was always intended merely as a spoof: it never took itself seriously, a point completely lost on later generations of undergraduates.

From the outset the OUCS was a properly constituted University society, with: a Purpose (educational, of course); Constitution (which was registered with the Proctors); and a Senior Member (who had better remain nameless.) Membership was by invitation, (but who invited original members?), and was restricted to graduates and beyond.

The spelling *"Choolant"* (not *"Cholant"* and not *"Chollent"* and not *"Chollant"*) is now accepted in polite society as being the only correct one, and came about by (divine?) accident: the printer who produced the original OUCS stationery had a poor telephone line.

There were "business" meetings and "dinner" meetings. Since, as is well known, the best day for a *Simchah* is a Tuesday, dinner meetings were traditionally held on Tuesday of seventh week. Over the years they were held at many different venues (eg 1 Nelson Street, various Oxford Colleges, Yarnton Manor, and our own Jewish Centre) and were always quite formal black-tie affairs. We would begin with *Motzi*, and then toast the *Choolant* (Long May It Simmer). At the appropriate time we would handclap in (as at a wedding) the actual *Choolant* itself - never knowingly undercooked. I should point out that the toast was drunk from a large receptacle not normally associated with drinking toasts! Responsibility (both legal and moral) for cooking the *Choolant* and organising the rest of the meal belonged to the President of the *Choolant* Society and his (yes, we were all male) Secretary. Every President tried to devise (and implement) a fancy sounding menu. After an evening devoted to educational matters, with perhaps even a formal talk, we would end with *Bensching*.

The Secretaryship was the stepping stone to the Presidency, and of course the Presidency was the stepping stone to fame, fortune, high society, a good *shidduch* etc, etc. At least, that is what we told people to persuade them to take on the jobs.

There are many tales that could be told: I refer, but only briefly, to a few.

Of the time when the whole *Choolant* Society (about 20 in number) descended unannounced on the late beloved George Silver at his house: he was totally unperturbed, and offered us some particularly good brandy. George was occasionally a guest at dinner meetings, and an especially fine raconteur.

Of the time when an attempt was made to have the *Choolant* Society admit women. Fortunately they were fought off! But yours truly, when President, did hold a Choolant Society Sherry Party at Merton to make amends.

Of the time when, at a dinner meeting held at 1 Nelson Street, an American graduate happened to mention that his wife was waiting for him outside in their car. It was very cold weather, and, as one man, we ejected hubby and welcomed her in. And of course we all behaved impeccably: we almost regretted our male-only rule. So we weren't so bad, were we!

Of the decision to open the *Choolant* Society to undergraduates. To be truthful, in the first instance this was because of the problem of dwindling numbers of potential new members. But one former Senior Member was of the view that the *Choolant* Society had a moral duty to educate the undergraduates in the art(s) of gracious living. It is amusing to reflect that frequently over the years undergraduates, because they took it too seriously, accused the OUCS of elitism.

Of the various entrepreneurial ventures undertaken by the OUCS: we had *Choolant* ties and bowties and *Choolant Kippot*. You can still see some around.

Of the time, when, in a dire lapse, I invited the (non-Jewish) Senior Proctor of the day to a dinner meeting. Fortunately, both for him and for the OUCS, he had to decline my invitation.

Of the abortive attempts (by others) to form similar societies elsewhere:the OUCS is the only society of its kind in the world. To go into greater detail in public about any of these matters, or to name names, would be against the spirit of the OUCS and might be actionable anyway.

I believe that the OUCS is in suspended animation somewhere, waiting to be put on the proverbial low light so that it can simmer again.

Choolant by Degrees

by ***David Weitzman***

CELEBRATION of the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Jewish Community would be less than complete without due mention of a unique student society which, for many years, added spice and flavour to Jewish practices in the city.

Esau's readiness to exchange his birthright for Jacob's pottage of lentils is, we are told, to be construed as indicating the very low value which Esau placed on his first-born rights. But it would be wrong to assume that even the impulsive Esau would trade *all* for a mere bowl of pea soup! Rather, one must deduce that this pottage of lentils was something special, a dish rich and rare - fragrant, succulent and sensually satisfying. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that it was our ancestor Abraham, renowned for his generous hospitality, who had perfected the recipe, that its secret passed from generation to generation, survived the slavery in Egypt, the years in the wilderness, the growth and decay of a nation, dispersal and centuries of wanderings to come down to us as *Choolant* (var. cholant, cholnt). As such, it provides a moving and unbroken link with our Pentateuchal forbears, a link which is surely our duty to preserve and transmit intact.

It was these considerations, coupled with the suspicion that practice of the art and science of *choolant* was no longer universal in Jewish households and lacked a formal focal point, that prompted the late Alan Solomon and myself, both first-year undergraduates, to launch the *Choolant* Society. We were young and full of confidence, hope and ambition and, most importantly, sported sound stomachs and doughty digestions. The first dinner was held on March 6th 1956 and the Society's founding (in November 1955) had been greeted encouragingly by the undergraduate newspaper "Cherwell". "*Choolant* is a traditional Jewish Sabbath dish", it informed its readers, "consisting of meat, potatoes, beans and a pudding, stewed in gravy for at least eighteen hours." "Cherwell" suggested that anti-dyspepsia tablets should be provided for the participants - alas, an example of how our people are constantly underestimated and maligned!

Membership of the Society was to be by election, limited to a maximum

of twelve, and was intended to be restricted to Jews of Lithuanian origin - *"Litvaks"*. (I don't see this restriction being legally acceptable nowadays, Equal Opportunity legislation having sabotaged such sectarianism). In the event, however, this purism was abandoned from the start. The first secretary was an arch *"Yekker"* and the Society pursued a policy of cultural purism that was surely a shining beacon in times of inter-racial tension. Ladies, however, were not admitted to membership - not because of any implied inferiority or digestive deficiency, but rather because the *Choolant* Society, like circumcision, was quintessentially a male affair.

Despite the objections of fundamentalists it proved impracticable to hold *Choolant* Society dinners on *Shabbat*, and a mid-week, once-a-term, occasion became the tradition. The solemnity of the occasion and respect for the *Choolant* demanded the wearing of black tie and dinner suit. In order that members should be in an appropriate state of mind as well as not so ravenous that they would devour the *Choolant* undiscerningly or unappreciatively (let alone run the risk of surrendering their birthrights), a substantial volume of liquor was first imbibed and various preliminary courses enjoyed before the ceremonial entrance of the *pièce de résistance.* We all stood in welcome and raised filled glasses. "The *Choolant* - long may it simmer!", we proclaimed, and then attacked the steaming concoction that lay on the plates before us. As has been said of the manna of the wilderness, it "contained the ingredients of every delicious food, and suited the taste of all who partook thereof" (Hertz). During my time, a variation of this welcoming toast was introduced in which we each quaffed a measure from a wine-filled chamber-pot (one purchased new by me from Woolworth's and not used for any other purpose!). No mean skill, this, and one which instantly distinguishes the *Choolanteer* from lesser mortals.

Generous portions (seconds, too, for the stalwarts), much fine wine, scintillating and witty conversation and a progressively deteriorating standard of humour combined to enrich the evening hours, and the late night would find us bravely downing dessert dishes, liqueurs and other sundries before steadying ourselves to do justice to the *Bensching*. "On this night we all lean" might well be said of Society dinners, though rather by spiritual and physical intoxication than by mere inclination. More liquid refreshment, a customary ritual of well-worn, groan-provoking, stories and we would finally emerge into the early-morning night to make our perilous journeys home, replete for another term in spirit, body and mind.

"Half-a-crown" ($12^1/_2$p) was the termly cost of our membership of this

august fellowship and the first dinner saw each of us the poorer by the princely sum of eighteen shillings and sixpence ($92^{1}/_{2}$p) for the luxurious repast I have described.

So was a tradition started and flourished essentially unchanged for around 30 years, only the cost to members suffering the ravages of time and inflation. The Society's success far surpassed our youthful founding hopes. We never imagined it would survive to challenge three decades of Oxonian intestines. So its current demise is a source of great sorrow to many of us and we can only hope and pray that this will only prove a temporary hiatus before the re-birth of a new era of *Choolant* Society vigour. After all, the past was not entirely without turmoil. The anti-bean revolt of the late 50's comes immediately to mind. A group within the Society urged the exclusion of beans from the *Choolant*, while others, true to the faith, deemed beans to be an irremovable ingredient of the dish. A conflict to tax the wisdom even of Solomon! The ingenuity of *Choolanteers*, however, knows no bounds, and by keeping the beans to the outer regions of the stewpot, and the central region bean-free, honour was satisfied and peace restored. The wind had been taken out of the bean revolt!

Old *Choolanteers* are spread across the globe and have taken their peculiar treasure to the ends of the earth. Flaunting their society ties - a *Choolant* pot surmounted by a crossed knife and fork - they are proud to proclaim their alimentary allegiance.

Avis Weitzman's Recipe for *Choolant* as served to David and her four sons.

Like all the best food, *choolant* is all things to all people. Some make it watery, like a thick soup, some use it as a vegetable with meat or chicken, but the best *Choolant* is served as a main course and a very delicious one ! You can make it from all sorts of good things - you can even make a very satisfactory vegetarian *choolant*. *Sephardim* put in whole eggs and chickpeas but *choolant* is essentially a European dish.

As with other peasant food, quantities are never exact. Did you ever ask your grandmother how to make a cake? She'd say: "Use eggs, flour and sugar" and when you asked "How much?" she'd say "You'll see how much goes in!" It's the same with choolant. Here is a real Ashkenazi recipe.

Ingredients

1 potato per person
1 handful of butter beans }
1 handful of haricot beans } there is no need to soak these
1 handful of pearl barley }
a large piece of chuck steak, flap or stewing steak
large pinch of cinnamon
large pinch of ginger
large pinch of paprika
1 whole onion (peeled)
1 tablespoon of honey
pepper and generous quantity of salt.

Method

Put meat in bottom of large casserole with tight-fitting lid, cover with beans and onion. Add spices, salt, pepper and honey. Cover completely with water (be generous, as the beans and barley will absorb a lot and much will evaporate during the cooking). Cover tightly. Put into a medium hot oven (No. 4 gas; 350° electric) well before *Shabbat* starts. Just before *Shabbat* comes in, turn heat right down ($^1/_4$-$^1/_2$ gas; 100-110° electric) and leave overnight. When you wake up on *Shabbat* morning, the delicious smell will fill the whole house. By lunch-time it will be thick, brown and wonderful.

Betayavon!

Tony Yablon
recalls

I was an undergraduate at Pembroke College from 1959 to 1962. I have fond memories of good camaraderie in the old ramshackle Synagogue building on many Friday evenings.

When Barmitzvahs in the families of Professor Daube and of Freda and George Silver were imminent, we had an opportunity to show our devotion to the old building: we embarked on a last minute painting spree. Many parts of the building were held together more by paint than by normal forms of structure. Alan Yorke, devout Jew and certainly devoted decorator, and I gradually lost all our assistants during the evening but together we painted on right through the night into the next day. I recall then going straight from the Synagogue to Christ Church to hear an open air performance of the 1812 Overture replete with real cannons. We had delayed our painting just as Napoleon delayed his retreat but with, I think, better results.

A few years later I was privileged to serve as a member of the Appeal Committee for the building of the new Synagogue. The raising of the money and the organisation of such a splendid building was a great achievement for a small and transient community. It was brought about by the close co-operation between George Silver, Sir Alan Mocatta and Lord Segal. George, always ebullient, determined, unstoppable. Sir Alan a dignified and most effective chairman of the proceedings. Sam quietly and efficiently organising the details of the finances. All of them using their valuable personal contacts to bring to completion not exactly the third temple but certainly a Synagogue well worthy of the City of Oxford.

An American Jew in Oxford - 1991

by ***Lisa Ann Cohen***

I arrived in Oxford in January 1991. I planned to study international politics at St Anne's College, Oxford University for two terms. I planned to become involved with the politically heated Union Debating Society, to explore Oxford's theatrical and sporting events, and to travel through other parts of England. Ironically, while I had not planned to become involved with Oxford's Jewish Society (JSoc), membership of the Society became my principal non-academic commitment.

Although I was raised in a non-orthodox home, throughout my childhood I had been surrounded by Jewish children. In fact, approximately 50 percent of the students at both my high school in Los Angeles, California, and my college in St Louis, Missouri, were Jewish. The smallness of Oxford's Jewish community, manifested in the fact that my three closest friends were Catholic and most of my college acquaintances were non-Jewish, made me sensitive to my membership of a global minority. Uncomfortable in establishing friendships with only non-Jews, I attended a Sabbath dinner at the Jewish Society three weeks after my arrival in Oxford.

Membership of the Jewish Society provided a fun environment to meet other Jewish students in both religious and social settings. For example, on Friday nights during services I reflected on my relationship with G-d while after dinner I socialized with others in the lounge area of the community centre. Having enjoyed Sabbath dinners, I soon attended weekday speakers, helped organise a "women in Judaism" discussion group, and presented a paper on women in the *Torah* during Pentecost's all-night study session. In JSoc's welcoming atmosphere I gradually became more interested in exploring my Jewish heritage.

Unfortunately during Trinity term all members of the Society were affected by the prospect of an Alternative Jewish Society. Approximately ten of JSoc's one hundred plus active members had become convinced during the holiday after Hilary term that the society lacked an active social

image. These students planned to create an Alternative Jewish Society, a society which would offer many social activities and few religious events. Many JSoc members, myself included, felt it would be much better for dissatisfied students to strengthen the social activities within JSoc rather than abandon JSoc and create a new society. By the end of term the presidents of JSoc and the founders of the Alternative Jewish Society reached a compromise - one of the founders would become JSoc's social chairman the following term. I can only hope that through this compromise the coming year will provide those concerned a better balance between religious and social activities.

Although the Jewish community in Oxford is smaller than those I have been exposed to in the United States, I felt extremely comfortable in the synagogue each week. Continually striving to balance my religious and social involvements with Judaism, during my last week in Oxford I studied women in the *Torah* and attended a finals farewell celebration. I thank members of the Jewish Society for providing me with excellent intellectual and social memories of Oxford and wish the Society much luck in overcoming its future challenges.

Friday Night At The OUJS

The Early 1990's as experienced by ***Beatrice Lang***
(OUJS Co-president Trinity Term 1990)

ONE of my favourite moments at the Oxford University Jewish Society has always been the silence which falls just before *motzi* is made on Friday night. The blessing is pronounced over the huge pile of loaves - which the standard-sized *challah*-cloth had barely covered - and then pandemonium breaks loose as at least one person from each table rushes to claim his share. Friday night dinner the high point of the week at OUJS, is underway, and a few noble-minded students start serving bowls of chicken (or vegetable) soup. Actually, playing the waiter is not such a bad job since it provides a good excuse to go and talk to friends who are not on your table and even to meet some new people: around eighty Jewish students (of a total membership of 450) gather each Friday night during term to share the first meal of the Sabbath. Many, of course, are English (the North London contingent, especially, is there in force), but there are also students from Israel and America, South Africa and Belgium, Australia and, most recently, Eastern Europe. Most are undergraduates, but there are graduate students too, and even a few young people who already have proper jobs. And finally, the whole spectrum of religious views and observance is represented.

The soup bowls are cleared away, and Pat starts serving the main course. Pat has been the cook at the Jewish Centre as long as I have been a student in Oxford, and Friday night would not be the same without her. She knows all the 'regulars' by name and always makes an effort to produce a good meal for the students; on Friday night chicken (*quiche* for the vegetarians) is almost invariably on the menu, accompanied by carrots, a green vegetable, rice and roast potatoes. In winter particularly, Pat has to race the clock to get everything into the oven before nightfall: you can almost tell when *shabbat* came in by the texture of the potatoes! The meal is brought to an end with some variation on apple crumble, followed by announcements.

Announcements. Anyone who has been in *shul* on Friday night during

Term will know how long announcements can go on, but won't perhaps know that all is repeated - and often added to - after supper for the benefit of those who missed them the first time round (and how many people hear them twice and still do not know what is going on?!).

The Presidents of the OUJS always have the first claim on people's attention and announce the events organized by the Society for the coming week: these may include a speaker meeting, a discussion, a party... Speakers range from M.P.'s to journalists to academics, while parties take all shapes and forms, from Häagen Dazs ice-cream party (the latest), to a mini-ball (a feature of Hilary term), to cucumber sandwiches and strawberries and cream on a college lawn (in the summer, of course). Once the Presidents have had their say, it's a free for all as those who have something to sell stand up in turn and tell the assembled masses - a captive audience - just how much is going on. Some do this clearly and succinctly, some try to be witty (a few even succeed!), others just waffle. There is a Soviet Jewry Campaign which has long been active on the part of *refuseniks* and continues to be sensitive to the changing needs of Jews in the Soviet Union. There is the Israel Society which goes through ups and downs and is at present on an up, organizing educational and cultural events and catering for all those who are interested in Israel, not just Jews. There is Oxford Jewish Graduates, a group where graduates are in the majority; Oxford Poly J. Soc., which organizes events independently of the University Jewish Society; Oxford Progressive Jewish Students, which occasionally organizes its own Friday night service and meal and, most recently, Oxford University Jews and Christians - Oxford's student branch of the Council of Christians and Jews. In addition, there are announcements of general interest - a weekly discussion group on the *Sedra*, an event going on at Yarnton - and, on a much larger scale, of events organized by the Union of Jewish Students.

Phew! When that's over everyone can *bench* (fortissimo, in unison), then listen to the Speaker. Recently, OUJS has invited its main speakers on Friday nights to talk on various issues of concern to Jewish students, such as the continuing plight of Soviet Jews or the current rise of Fascism and Holocaust denial. When questions are over the evening is still not finished: 'After Eights' and drinks are served in the lounge - and there is a last opportunity to speak to the people you missed during dinner. Another Friday night at J. Soc. draws to a close, but never fear, there will always be more of the same next week.

Then and Now

by ***The Rt.Hon. Sir Zelman Cowen P.C.***

I

WITHIN a larger, longer Australian life, my wife and I have enjoyed an English life extending in all over thirteen and a half years, all with a base in Oxford. There have been two widely separated periods: the first of five and a half years duration from the end of the war in 1945 to the very end of 1950; the second, from the time I retired from the Governor-Generalship of Australia in mid-1982 until I retired as Provost of Oriel at the end of the 1989-1990 academic year.

In the earlier period, we came to Oxford as students. I was a Rhodes Scholar coming to New College after a delay which was measured by the duration of the war; my wife had the task of completing an unfinished Australian degree, followed by an Oxford diploma in Public and Social Administration. We came with no certain view of when we should return to Australia. My appointment to a Fellowship in Oriel profoundly affected that, and we returned to Australia when the homing instinct grew strong and an attractive professorship offered in Melbourne.

The Oxford experience was a very good one, but we left without expectation that we would return otherwise than for brief visits. Then, unexpectedly, and at a perfect time, the opportunity came more than thirty years later to return as Head of the College I had left as a Fellow at the end of 1950, and of which I had latterly become an Honorary Fellow. Eight very happy and fulfilling years sped by, and I write this note as an academic year has already elapsed since we left Oxford.

I am asked to write about Oxford Jewish and congregational experiences of our Oxford lives. Of the earlier period now forty years and more in the past, memory is not always clear. I suppose that the most vivid remembrance of the Oxford synagogue is of a high Holy Day service at which Viscount Samuel (Herbert Samuel) was present. I was nearby and he appeared to be reading something which was not a prayer book, but one no doubt of an elevated character appropriate to the occasion. My memories of that time are of members of the community who showed us many kindnesses.

There were Neville and Cissie Laski to whom we had an introduction. I remember the long walk to the entrance of the house in which they lived on Woodstock Road, both of us a little shy and uncertain as to how we might be received. From the earliest days we were made welcome by them and their family, and that friendship continued for years. I recall much talk with Neville Laski, over the years, about law and politics, Jewish matters, about his triumphs and his very real disappointments. Then there was the Daiches family, Mrs Franklin Cohn and her family, the Berenblums, who went off to Israel and Ludwig Guttman who was then establishing the reputation for which he was to receive recognition and honour for his work with spinal injuries. Bridging University and Town were Cecil Roth and his wife: a mixture of rich learning and Jewish scholarship, generous hospitality and great prickliness.

Within the University community, I remember the coming of Herbert and Ilse Frankel. I met him first at Oriel High Table, and in the years which followed they showed us much kindness at their Hinksey Hill house. They bridge our two lives at Oxford. When we returned in 1982 they were still there. He had retired from the University Professorship in Economics, but was still very active as Chairman of the Governors of Yarnton to which he had given great service and support since its earliest days. I shall say more about them later. Within the University community, small in Jewish numbers, Isaiah Berlin was there, very special and a celebrity in Oxford and indeed far beyond it. Herbert Hart was a Philosophy don in New College, not yet embarked upon his distinguished occupancy of the Chair of Jurisprudence. This was held then by another Jew, Arthur Goodhart, a famous common lawyer and a kindly man of awesome wealth, who was later to become a very successful Master of University College. I remember meeting Walter Ettinghausen (Eytan) then a don in Queen's who left Oxford for Israel where he became a diplomat and Director General of the Foreign Office.

There were others with whom either in Oxford or elsewhere, we renewed association in later years: Max and Helen Beloff, William Mushin who had family connections in Melbourne which first identified him to us and who had a distinguished career in Anaesthesia for many years in Wales. There were the Wigoders with whom I shared Oriel links. There were others, no doubt, who have not come immediately to memory, but the Oxford University Jewish Community, certainly by the measure of our later time, was a small one. There were, as yet, no Heads of Houses and comparatively few dons.

II

I have a strong and disturbing memory of our first encounter with the Oxford Jewish congregation on our return to Oxford in 1982. *Rosh Hashana* fell shortly after we arrived, and we made our way to the synagogue. I was greatly oppressed by the heavy security and I recall how in advance of the service, David Patterson spoke about steps to be taken, if necessary. I do not question the judgement and the wisdom, but it was a somewhat grim beginning. On that occasion, from Australian Liberal synagogue habit, I sat beside my wife. We were speedily sundered; we were told somewhat sternly by one who worked hard for the community and whom we came to know, that what we did "gave offence". My Jewish predecessor as Governor General of Australia, Sir Isaac Isaacs (whose biographer I was) wrote very critically about separation of the sexes in synagogues and I have to express myself in full agreement. So our second Oxford Jewish life did not begin altogether auspiciously. I have to say that things improved; we did not offend again, at least so egregiously. We became members of the congregation, though not very regular or frequent attenders, and I suppose that that means that we did not closely identify with the community as a whole. That was surely our loss; I admire the great effort on the part of community leaders to build as they have done.

There were however some strong Jewish associations. I was closely associated as a Governor with the Yarnton and post graduate Jewish Study Centre. I have the greatest admiration for what David Patterson has achieved there, in scholarly achievement and standing, in providing a Jewish intellectual and cultural centre in Oxford. Many of the activities in the setting of the lovely manor house remain vivid in my memory and I think that was has been done there has been very significant. I think, too, of very happy social and family associations. We were "adopted" by the Silver-Jackson family and those marvellous second *Seders* in that capacious,warm and friendly house attended by generations of that large family (to which we were given precious entrance) will remain strong and happy in memory for both of us. We established a special friendship there.

The Herbert Frankels, of whom I wrote earlier, celebrated a marvellous sixtieth wedding anniversary, appropriately at Yarnton, and many members of the community shared this great event with them. We saw them very often, as they became virtually housebound in their new and spacious flat, we came each weekend on which it was possible to see them. While they were physically handicapped, they were intellectually strong and we appointed ourselves elderly substitute children, though to be sure, their

own family visited them regularly also. It has been a special friendship stretching over virtually the whole of our Oxford lives. Herbert worked under physical disability to produce his memoirs. When we left Oxford they were approaching completion and they have in fact been finished. I hope that I shall see them; they will surely tell of a very interesting life of a clear-headed man of wide knowledge, experience, humane and sane judgement and good values.

The opportunities for Jews to reach the high places of Oxford academic society have expanded amazingly. Arthur Goodhart was the first Jew to become Head of a House as Master of University College. He was a great benefactor, a wise and well connected man, and he served the college well. He was followed as Master by another Jew, the famous and ubiquitous Arnold Goodman whose seventieth birthday we honoured in company with many others. David Astor's toast was remarkable testimony to the extraordinary place which Lord Goodman has come to occupy in English society. Isaiah Berlin fittingly became the first President of Wolfson College. He is long since retired from that office, but he continues to be a presiding genius in Oxford. His counsel is sought and he remains, withal, a kindly, caring and altogether unique human being. We recall his great eightieth birthday celebration with much pleasure.

At the time of my departure from Oxford there were at least half a dozen Heads of Houses who were Jews, among them the Nobel Laureate, Baruch Blumberg who is Master of Balliol and the second American Jew to occupy a Headship. As Provost of Oriel, I was the first non-Christian in more than six and a half centuries to preach in Oriel Chapel; the Jewish Warden of Wadham, Sir Claus Moser, brought a Rabbi to preach in the chapel of that College. Within the Oxford professoriate and the much larger college Fellowship there are many Jews. I do not suppose that Oxford, like most places, is free of anti-semitism, but the opening up of University and Colleges to Jewish scholars and teachers is truly remarkable. Over the three decades which divided our two periods in Oxford, a great change had been wrought and it is good that it was so. I have spoken of the senior members; there is a lively Jewish student body with a variety of interests reflected in their clubs and societies. In the last year or so of my term, a renewed and at times hyper-active Chabad movement was making its presence felt within the University.

I return, at the end, to the Jewish community of Oxford. Its achievement and vitality was very largely a product of vigorous self help and cooperative activity on the part of Oxford people drawn from Town and Gown who,

as it seemed to me, cooperated effectively and well to provide a range of services for a sizeable Jewish community. It is a community which calls upon its own members to perform most duties; it looks to outside help sparingly. My wife and I were pleased to be part of that community and we have many good friends in it.

The Students and Us

by ***FSJ***

MOST Jewish people are used to attending a synagogue where the service is conducted by a Rabbi, a Cantor, a Warden and other honorary officers. Having left such a community behind and arriving in Oxford in 1947, the first step was to find out what facilities were available for newcomers. Learning that the Synagogue was at No. 21 Richmond Road, a visit one Sabbath morning revealed what could well have been, at one time, a Church Hall with old bench seats on three sides of the room. About twenty young students occupied the seats on the left of the *Bima* while two or three elderly gentlemen occupied seats on the opposite side. The seats behind the *Bima* facing the Ark with its ornately carved wooden doors were for women. Two young girls (hatless!) were already seated there - this presumably, being the 'Ladies gallery'. Surprisingly, the service was being conducted by a succession of students, an entirely new experience - the officiants being so young!

After the Service, enquiries for membership led to a Mr Bloom in Broad Street who introduced himself as "the Chairman, the Secretary *and* the Treasurer of the Oxford Jewish Congregation." He explained that the Jewish population comprised mainly evacuees from wartime London (Town) and a few resident Jewish academics (Gown). After the War access to University was made easier and Jewish students grasped at their new-found opportunities. Like all freshmen they needed guidance and a senior resident member of the University, namely Dr Cecil Roth, took them under his wing. He and his wife were 'at home' to students every Saturday afternoon and Dr. Roth was naturally their counsellor in all matters relating to their Jewish consciousness. It was very apparent that these 'at homes' were exclusively for members of the University and other members of the community were left to their own devices.

The students continued to conduct the Sabbath morning services during term time much to the pleasure of those few townspeople who were regular attenders. What would happen when those particularly knowledgeable

religious students left Oxford? Happily, they were followed by a succession of fresh undergraduates imbued with the same sense of responsibility. As time went on, the number of students and members of the congregation grew to such proportions that it became necessary for better arrangements to be made for kosher meals for students. It was here that the congregation was able to play its full part - thus Town and Gown grew closer. No. 1 Nelson Street was acquired for this purpose and a vivid description of its usage is given elsewhere in this Publication. From that time onwards facilities for Kosher meals for students were available on a regular basis. Different make-shift venues were resorted to when both the Synagogue and No. 1 Nelson Street were demolished to make way for a proposed new Synagogue and Jewish Centre. There was no shortage of private homes where students were welcomed when Passover occasionally fell during term time. Nowadays, there are facilities for a communal *Seder.*

Nearly 45 years on, a newcomer to the Oxford Jewish Community will still find University students conducting the services as in days of yore. The only difference being that thanks to the vision and enduring efforts of a few mature graduates and local residents, No. 21 Richmond Road is now a modern Synagogue and Community Centre with better and expanded facilities for the many Jews in Oxford.

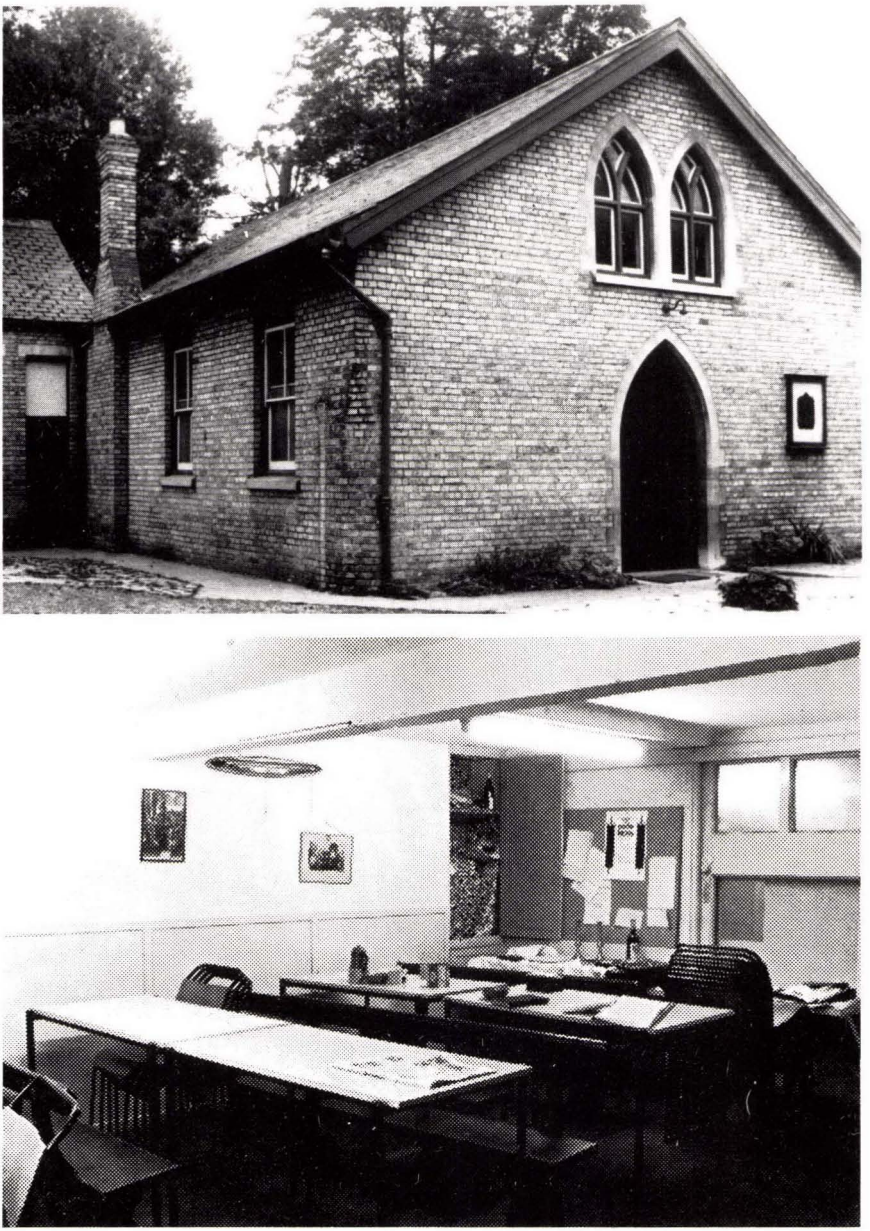
The following is a guide to any Fresher coming to the University. (He/she has learnt from a distraught parent, on enquiry, that there are no kosher 'digs' in Oxford).

1. Student arrives in Oxford and in his/her wisdom joins the Oxford University Jewish Society, (known as OUJS or JSoc).
2. Discovers that most things Jewish take place at the Oxford Synagogue and Jewish Centre in Richmond Road.
3. Visits the aforementioned Centre one Saturday morning to find an Orthodox service in progress in the main Synagogue, conducted as ever by undergraduates. A second service conducted on Progressive lines is being held in the lounge area in front of the old Ark.
4. Can join in an occasional Service held exclusively by women for women. (*Halachically* acceptable).
5. After the Service attends a *kiddush* given and organised by members of the community.
6. Is further fortified by a kosher lunch subsidised and arranged on a regular basis by members of the Congregation.

7. On first Sunday in Term attends Fresher's Lunch at the Centre hosted by the Congregation. Messages of welcome will include one from a senior resident University member who will be the student's guide in all things Jewish.
8. Is offered opportunity to partake of a kosher meal served every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening at the Centre, culminating in a Friday night gourmet dining experience with up to 160 like-minded students. Avails him/her self of a communal Seder if in term-time.
9. *Purim* presents an opportunity to hear a splendid rendering of the *Megillah* by Jonathan Webber (ought not to be missed).

Many years later at a charity function in London a resident member of the Oxford Congregation is recognised by a well-known personality who introduces himself as the freshman who came among us to study many years ago and still retains vivid memories of taking the services, partaking of Kosher meals and visiting congregants' homes and enjoying their hospitality. "They were halcyon days", he says, probably echoing the thoughts of so many Jewish Oxford graduates throughout the world.

We in the Oxford Jewish Community greatly appreciate our term-time services conducted by our ever-faithful students. We hope that they in turn enjoy the facilities which our small Community offers them during their student days. It is often said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. May it be ever thus from 1992 onwards into the 21st century.



The Synagogue and Kosher Canteen - "then"

In the Wilderness

Helen May
tells of our two year sojourn

THE Oxford Jewish Congregation didn't wander for forty years, nor did it wander far. It wandered from Richmond Road to Woodstock Road, to St Aloysius Church Hall, and the Congregation stayed there for about two years from 1971 to 1973. The reason for the exodus from the original Synagogue building to a temporary home in St Aloysius Church Hall was the rebuilding of the Synagogue. A momentous occasion for the Oxford Jewish Congregation, as many years of planning, fund-raising, deliberations, and decision-making had gone into this great event. Why St Aloysius Church Hall? A member of the Oxford Jewish Congregation knew that the Hall would become vacant since St Aloysius Primary School, which used it, was moving to new premises at the same time as the building for the new Synagogue was to commence. The Church Hall was convenient both for students and community: it was central and not far from Richmond Road, easy to locate, in fact far easier than the original Synagogue.

Arrangements were made between George Silver (then President of the Congregation) and Dr. David Lewis (then Secretary) on the one hand, and Fr. Costigan, the Parish Priest, on the other, who consulted the Diocesan Council (St. Aloysius is in the Diocese of Birmingham). After much negotiation the Hall was hired for £450 per annum. Adjustments had to be made, such as the discreet covering up of various Christian symbols in place. This had to be done weekly as the Hall was still to be used for various Church events. The Congregation then had to transfer the Ark, Scrolls, prayer-books etc. Places had to be found to store such items when not in use. Some prayer-books, Scrolls, and other appurtenances were stored in members' homes. The Hall was used regularly for Friday evening and *Shabbat* services as well as being used for Hebrew classes on Sunday mornings. Five boys celebrated their Bar-Mitzvah there as well. One Bar-Mitzvah, which might have come to grief, was saved by the boy's observant mother, who, on attending Synagogue one Shabbat close to the due date, noticed an announcement pinned to the door of a jumble sale

to be held in the Church Hall on a Saturday. The date somehow looked familiar. On checking, she found to her horror that it was the date of the Bar-Mitzvah. How could this be? She phoned the Presbytery and was told by Fr. Costigan that it had been arranged that a smaller room was to be used for the Synagogue service that Saturday. Another Community member had said that this was all right because it was out of term and the congregation would be fewer in number. As this does not hold good for a Bar-Mitzvah the mother had to hastily arrange for an alternative venue. Fortunately, many of our members have ecumenical connections, and Lord Segal arranged for Manchester College Hall to be used. Of course, all the religious equipment had to be moved. Alf Delcoy took charge of this, and the Bar-Mitzvah went ahead as planned, the only drawback being that the hall was very cold.

As the Church Hall was not large enough to accommodate the increased numbers of worshippers attending on High Holy Days, arrangements had to be made for other halls to be used. The old Synagogue, in fact, had never been large enough for the Festivals, and it had always been the practice for the Oxford Jewish Congregation to worship in other places at this time, such as Rhodes House, Manchester College, or the Forum. Hence all of these had been used in former years. The new Synagogue was designed to be adaptable so as to accommodate increased numbers, so since 1973 we have worshipped solely in this building.

During this time, and until Fr Costigan died, the Congregation enjoyed very good relations with the St Aloysius community. When the time came for us to leave the St Aloysius Hall the parish members gave the Oxford Jewish Congregation a party in the Hall, going to great lengths to ensure that the food was kosher. When we were established in our brand-new building the Oxford Jewish Congregation reciprocated by inviting members of St Aloysius to a similar event and a tour of the new Synagogue. The Congregation also planted trees in Israel in the name of St Aloysius parish to commemorate the "Wilderness Years" and the unusual experience of worshipping in a Catholic Church Hall.

The New Synagogue and Centre

"SAM" Lord Segal of Wytham 1902-1984

by his daughter, ***Maureen Hadfield***

SAM Segal knew and loved Oxford all his life, and this close association had a profound influence on him. Although born in London, his early years and schooldays were spent in Oxford; in later life he lived first at Wytham Abbey and then in Park Town. In the intervening years he studied at the University and from 1944 to 1949 lived in Headington. Today he and his wife lie buried in the Oxford Jewish Cemetery.

"Who's Who" lists his various achievements and activities in full, many of which were connected with Oxford. In 1919 he went up to Jesus College,Oxford to read medicine. As an undergraduate he was an active member of the Oxford Union, the University Zionist Society and the Oxford University Branch of the League of Nations Union.

His interest in politics, Judaism and Zionism began early. At Oxford in 1922 he organised a public meeting in the Town Hall on behalf of the Oxford University Zionist Society, at which the chief speakers on the subject of "The British Mandate in Palestine" were Chaim Weizmann (President of the World Zionist Organisation), and Sir Alfred Mond M.P. (then Minister of Health, later Baron Melchett). It was, apparently, Dr. Weizmann's first visit to Oxford. Records show that the private dinner for ten persons held at the Randolph Hotel before the meeting, and strictly Kosher, cost a total of £5.6s.3d.! The meeting, widely reported in the national press, was considered an important contribution to the public debate on Palestine.

By the time Sam qualified as a doctor at the Westminster Hospital he was already active in Labour Party politics, and in 1935 contested his first bye-election for the Labour Party at Tynemouth. His second was fought in 1939 at Aston, Birmingham.

During the Second World War Sam served in the Royal Air Force as a doctor. He was based in the Middle East, and for a time stationed in Palestine. The last months of the war were spent in Oxford, where he was stationed at Magdalen College with the Air Ministry Medical Staff. It was

then that he and his family went to live in Headington. His close association with the Oxford Jewish Community was renewed and he regularly attended the Synagogue.

Sam stood as candidate, and was duly elected Member of Parliament for the Lancashire constituency of Preston North at the 1945 General Election, defeating the sitting member Randolph Churchill. However, he, in turn, was narrowly defeated by Julian Amery in the 1950 election, having fought the campaign from a hospital bed. In Parliament his two chief interests were foreign affairs and the birth of Israel, and the introduction of the National Health Service. He worked hard to further both causes for the rest of his life.

His close involvement with Oxford was renewed once more in the early 1960's when he retired to live at Wytham Abbey. He had decided on early retirement from his job at the Ministry of Health and did not anticipate returning to politics, but in 1964 was offered a peerage by the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson. He became Baron Segal of Wytham, and remained a working Labour peer for nearly twenty years, until a stroke forced him to retire. From 1973 he was also a Deputy Speaker of the Lords.

In 1965 he succeeded Lord Longford as Chairman of the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children, and presided over its growth, as MENCAP, into one of the country's major charities.

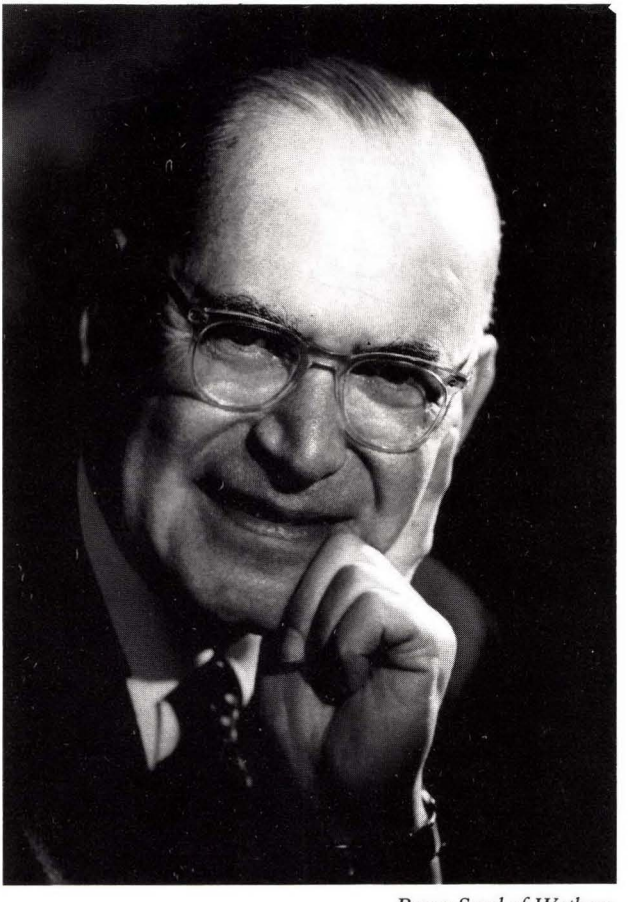
His association with Oxford deepened during these years, indeed he always felt that it was incumbent on him to champion Oxford's cause in the Lords. In 1966 Jesus college made him an Honorary Fellow, an honour which gave him immense pleasure.

In 1934 Sam had married Molly Rolo, whose family lived in Alexandria, Egypt. The contact with Egypt remained a lasting one, and during the seventies a warm friendship developed between Sam and President Anwar Sadat. Indeed Sadat sought Sam's advice on the possibility of a reconciliation between Israel and Egypt. So when Sam asked if he might rescue the scrolls from the synagogue in Alexandria and bring them to England, Sadat agreed. The scrolls are now housed in the Jewish Museum in Birmingham.

Sam's other abiding Oxford interest was the Synagogue. His father had conducted services in Oxford earlier this century, and Sam was grateful for the opportunity to make his mark on the later development of the Jewish community in Oxford. Together with his colleagues - notably George Silver - he was able to pursue a project dear to his heart, the building of

the new Synagogue and Jewish Centre, which was to enhance the lives of Jewish students at Oxford and the ever growing number of the city's residents. Once more Sam worked tirelessly to raise funds needed for the building work, and took a keen interest in the planning, architecture and construction of the Synagogue. When the harmonium in the House of Lords was being removed, he was able to acquire it for the Synagogue, where it is still used for festive occasions.

Sam died on 4th June 1985 at the age of 83. His memory is today kept alive through his contribution to the Oxford congregation in the form of the Synagogue, which stands as a monument to his endeavours and a symbol of his pride in his religion and his fellow Jews. Jewish students at Oxford, in whom he had always shown a great interest, will continue to benefit in a small way from a travelling scholarship endowed in his will.



Baron Segal of Wytham

The Birth of the Oxford Jewish Centre

by ***Don Blenford***

In the late '60's and early '70's a revolution took place in Oxford's Jewish community. The communal facilities in the 1960's were a synagogue (converted from an old chapel), seating a maximum of 100 people, with a small outbuilding for other activities. It was increasingly showing the ravages of time, with rising damp and other unpleasant features associated with old buildings of this kind. Oxford had never had a purpose built centre of worship although it had worshipped in Richmond Road for 100 years.

Adjacent to the synagogue, at no. 1 Nelson Street, there was a small, old two-up-and-two-down end-of-terrace building owned by *B'nai B'rith* Hillel Foundation and used mainly as a student social centre, and a centre for kosher food run wholly by the students.

As it became obvious that the situation had to change, in 1964 it was decided between the Oxford Jewish Community and the Jewish students (OUJS), in conjunction with Hillel, under the direction of Mr. Joe Gilbert, that a new synagogue/Jewish centre be built. The site unfortunately was inadequate, and arrangements were made to purchase an adjacent builders' yard and to try and acquire nos. 2 and 3 Nelson Street. No. 3 Nelson Street was acquired but no. 2 was not yet available and a rethink was necessary. Later it was possible to buy the adjacent property no. 21 Richmond Road, Thus we had a site which encompassed Richmond Road from no. 21 to the builders' yard and the existing synagogue plus no. 1 Nelson Street. Obviously money was needed and for this purpose an appeal committee was formed in London chaired initially by Lord Cohen of Walmer, but mainly run latterly under the chairmanship of the late Sir Alan Mocatta. Actively involved in the appeal committee were many well known figures of Anglo-Jewry both in London and Oxford, with Oxford being represented by the late Lord Segal of Wytham, and the late George Silver who, throughout this period, was President of the Oxford Jewish Congregation.

From that decision in 1964 there followed what could be described as a

nightmare, but really no different from what invariably happens in circumstances where three, or four, or more committees vie with each other for their points of view to be upheld and executed.

In 1965 Professor Jacobsen, the famous Danish architect, was engaged by the London committee to become official architect. He produced a specification at the end of 1966 which was revised in early 1967. But very little was effectively done about this as there were a lot of negative comments about it, particularly its perceived cost. The Oxford end, in relation to the requirements of all those to be served by the new centre, was not fully represented, although strong representations were made by Prof. Lewis and Dr. Ian Grant in particular. At that time there was the Oxford Synagogue Appeal Committee, chaired by Lord Segal; the President of the Oxford Jewish Congregation was George Silver.

The appeal for £125,000 was launched at the beginning of 1970, but the plans for the centre had to be completely reconsidered, particularly when Prof. Jacobsen, the architect, died in April 1970. The situation was also one that required considerable rethinking, and to this end the Oxford community established a building committee in July 1970. I was the Chairman, and Alan Curtis and George Silver were on the committee; Helen May was its secretary. Its purpose was to prepare a detailed specification for the new Oxford Jewish Centre for submission to the new architect and the London Appeal Committee on behalf of the OJC.

Such a project specification was drawn up and submitted in November 1970, and after circulation and comment in Oxford was revised by 27 December, 1970. Consultation took place at all levels with all those involved, particularly members of the active community, and the Oxford Jewish Student Society, who produced their requirements in some detail. The new architect appointed by the London committee in April 1971 was David Stern & Partners of London.

The requirements set for the new centre were quite unusual, bearing in mind not only the restricted site and consciousness of minimising costs, but also that it had to accommodate various additional needs.

Firstly, at High Holy Days the synagogue had to contain up to 400 people, whilst regular services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings would often attract any number between 11 and 120 people, depending on whether there was a coinciding social event, and whether it was in or out of Term. In addition the centre had to accommodate facilities for the students in the form of a meeting room, dining room, and facilities to provide kosher food, that is to say two kitchens to provide such meals on

a daily basis during Term and for special occasions. There also had to be facilities to provide alternative services, parallel to the main service, to accommodate different shades of Judaism when required. Also there were requirements for four *cheder* classes, and other social activities that were to take place at the centre. In view of the location of the centre and feelings in general it was decided early, with some argument, that there was an urgent need to have resident caretakers on the premises. It was therefore decided that no further accommodation could be provided, particulary the sleeping accommodation the students had requested. The architect appointed local builders, Messrs. Symm & Co. The last service in the old synagogue was held on December 4th 1971 and the foundation stone of the new building was laid on the 22nd October 1972 by Lord Cohen of Walmer in the presence of many members of the Congregation and their children. Completion of the new building was targeted for the High Holy Days of 1973.

We had lost our venue for religious services and will always be grateful to the local parish, at that time under the auspices of Father Costigan, and the use of the premises of St Aloysius nearby. Their hospitality and support during the period of 1972 through 1974 was most generous; without it, the community would have become very fragmented.

The new centre was opened in 1974 - a great sigh of relief by everybody! During the course of construction considerable difficulties had arisen and had to be resolved. Also it became clear even before then that the new centre would need administering on a very different basis from earlier days, particularly in view of the fact that it would have to cater not only for the community, but also for student activities, and other events arising from time to time. In view of the costs, it would also be necessary to create some income when the Centre was not being used by students in vacation. To deal with this a management committee was formed, of which I had the honour to be the first chairman. The committee was established to represent all interested parties particularly the community, the Hillel Foundation, the student body, and others. I remained in that position until retiring in 1986. With the enthusiastic help of the committee members it did a remarkable job, bearing in mind that it had to start from scratch. Those were heady days, with decisions having to be made virtually every day to arrive at agreeable compromises, appeasements, etc to ensure that everybody not only had a say in the running of the centre, but that everybody got something, if not everything they required.

At the end of the day we did finish up with a Jewish Centre in Oxford of

which we were, and are, proud, and which met many if not all of the criteria set for it. In no small measure this was due to the commitment of a small band of people in Oxford (of whom George Silver was the leading light) who spent a lot of time and effort in achieving what we now have. The purpose of the centre was clear; to bring together under one roof all the Jewish activities in Oxford. It certainly was a proud moment when the centre was officially opened in 1974 in the presence of the Chief Rabbi.

Unfortunately many of those who participated actively in bringing this dream to realisation are no longer with us, but we all feel sure that they would feel quite happy with the results that now stand as an edifice to their endeavours. Many of the decisions that were hammered out in those early days, particularly regarding resident caretakers etc., have been shown in the light of subsequent events to have been right. However, we still live with some of the problems inherited from other decisions made at that time, not necessarily influenced by those who have to live with the Centre.

The resulting Centre is unique for other reasons. It is owned by The Oxford Synagogue and Jewish Centre Ltd, an independent company, whose Board of Directors is drawn from the Oxford Jewish community and the Hillel Foundation. Funding for the Centre is mainly the responsibility of the Oxford Jewish Community.

[On a personal note I would like to add that my wife and I and our family were very proud indeed that a little while after the new Centre opened our son Jeremy had his Barmitzvah there, a wonderful day for us all.]

The Library

At the rear of the lounge can be found a wealth of books of Jewish interest - books of Prayer; Jewish fiction and non-fiction periodicals; journals and above all books to interest children of all ages. Known as the Beckman library it was donated by Mrs. Hilda Beckman and her three sons in memory of her husband Barney.

Dan Kemp recalls that Barney, a Minister of Religion in South Africa, returned to England before the war where he qualified as a solicitor. Settling in Oxford with his family during the war he closely identified himself with the community serving the synagogue as warden. His deep knowledge of Judaism and of the services endeared him to one and all. The Beckman library, to which in this anniversary year it is proposed to add an attractive new children's section, remains as a living testimonial to his memory.



Lord Cohen of Walmer laying the Foundation Stone of the new Synagogue - 22nd October 1972

The Consecration

*by **Sandra Dwek** - reprinted from the Oxford Menorah 1974*

THE opportunity to witness the consecration of something as large and permanent as a synagogue does not come to the average person more than once or twice in a lifetime, unless you are the Reverend Malcolm Weisman who, so he told us, has become a fairly regular participant in such events, by the nature of his calling.

Those of a more humble calling who were at Richmond Road on Sunday, April 28, 1974 were probably, like me, not at all sure what to expect either by way of a service or of a building. Certainly interest and curiosity were enormous, judging by the large and assorted numbers of us who turned out on that grey, wet morning. There were old members, new members, some of whom had never known the original *shul*, V.I.P's from London, the Very Orthodox (were they shocked by the mixed seating?), the clerical visitors of various denominations of the Christian Church, the frankly Non-Observant, the critics, the Press, children, students and ex-students, future students and mere students of human nature. Not to mention The Architect of all this excitement, and you and me.

Now, if *Menorah* had a fashion page or a gossip column, libel suits no object, there would be appropriate comments here on who wore a new hat, who sat in the reserved seats on the front rows and consequently were privileged to be in the unique position of being able to hear the proceedings which others less fortunate had to take on trust; though of course the comments of the gentleman who walked smack into a plate glass door in the heat of the moment would be less suitable in a family magazine!

Some comments of a more reputable nature heard at the time may be of interest: "This blue wallpaper may be very nice in a bathroom but most unsuitable in a shul." And, "I liked the Ark in the old shul best, because the *Sefer Torahs* didn't lean over" (from small boy). The most typical reaction from those around me though, was: "It's like a miracle that we're actually worshipping in our own synagogue, after thinking about it, talking about it, arguing about it for so long!"

The ceremony itself, however, was a suitable climax to all this watching

and paying (sorry, slip of the pen). The whole building vibrated, I was almost going to say with a sense of religious excitement, but of course that is what it was! A thanksgiving, a relief and a delight in the new Communal Centre, which everyone experienced, down to the smallest child who slept like a charm in his pram right the way through. The swell of voices in the Psalms of David as the *Siffrei Torah* were taken round testified to the general exultancy; the prayers and blessings, the familiar texts recited by various members of the community and University exhorting God's blessing on them and us were more appropriate and moving than usual. All the disappointments and minor frustrations which seem (inevitably) to beset projects of this nature seemed to melt away as the nail was banged into the doorpost and the *Mezuzzah* affixed. The Eternal Light was lighted - electrically, of course - and nonetheless significant for that.

After the exhilarating effect of the ceremony, who needed the added stimulant of sherry (or was it *Kiddush*? I never quite discovered)? Good question. For once I was - by sheer chance I insist - in the right place at the right time. Apologies to the thirsty majority who may not have been. Good will and bonhomie were as thick on the ground as people, who were very thick indeed, and a major gesture to the emotional and physical strain of the occasion was the incredible speed with which the six Speeches which are of course *'de rigeur'* at Consecrations were dispatched. Each speaker outdid the next in his efforts to be brief - 'no Repetition, no Hesitation' - "Just a Minute" was the name of the game. Sir Isaiah Berlin looked a firm favourite at three hundred witty words a minute, but Lord Segal outclassed him in the brevity stakes, with a sentiment which we all approved: *"Shehechiyanu"*. The Speakers rightly confined themselves in the main to thanking God, the Founding Fathers, Reverend Weisman, the various Chairmen, Patrons and Institutions such as George Silver for the luck and longevity we had all enjoyed to stay alive to this minute.

And what can one say but "Amen" to that?



Phograph taken during the Consecration Service. Reproduced from The Oxford Times - 3rd May 1974

Centre Forward

by ***George Silver*** *- as printed in the Oxford Menorah 1974*

THE Oxford Jewish Congregation has surely experienced the most exciting moment in its history. Our University Jewish Centre has been completed, and on April 28 of this year, the Synagogue was consecrated with dignified ceremony. On that day, much was said about the reality of dreams and the completion of a task well done. However, little was said about the problems involved in the fulfilment of the dream.

As with all such undertakings, the task was beset by many such problems. The acquisition of additional land necessitated delicate and protracted negotiation. The requisite needs of undergraduates and community had to be studied, and this was done by a small group of people from the Congregation and the OUJS. Then came the all-important "Appeal" - A Brochure to be compiled, printed and circulated. Three people spent hours acquiring lists of graduates from all over the world, to be tabulated, sifted and sorted. Envelopes were addressed and a personal message (all by hand) was sent to hundreds of would-be donors. All-day informal meetings went on Sunday after Sunday, and local committees also met well into the night. Official meetings necessitated journeys into London, and a great deal of entertaining was done privately in the hope of raising money. Two members of the congregation helped to draft a new constitution. As each problem arose, it was tackled with mounting interest and good humour.

During all this time, the greatest problem of all was undertaken by our own Synagogue Council. Razing our old Synagogue to the ground left us with many difficulties. The building had to be cleared of all our possessions. Temporary premises had to be found and suitable preparations made for holding normal Shabbat services there. Larger premises had to be found for the *Yomtovim*, and this necessitated erecting a temporary Ark in Rhodes House and transporting *Sifrei Torah* and prayer books, etc. backwards and forwards. This was done by volunteer members of the Council three times during our sojourn in the 'wilderness'. The problem of Hebrew Classes

had to be dealt with, and the Education Sub-Committee saw to it that classes were not interrupted.

Whilst everything went on as if by magic, it has been an onerous task for the 'magicians'. But they have given of themselves unstintingly, so that the many young people growing up in this town will have the best possible. Apart from the fact that we are still in debt, most of the problems have been solved and a new Management Committee has been formed to deal with the day-to-day running of the Centre (but not the Synagogue). From now on, there will be fewer problems but many responsibilities will take their place. As you know, we are affiliated to no particular denomination of Judaism - we have no Minister of Religion as other communities have. We shall remain the same do-it-yourself congregation but from now on we shall have better facilities to ease the task, and a Synagogue of which we can be justly proud. It will be up to each and every member of the Congregation to play his part. Parents of children in the community (and other members) will have to take on the responsibility of making sure that the greatest possible advantage is taken of our new Centre and that regular services continue in the Synagogue. Judaism has been kept alive in Oxford by a group of determined residents working against tremendous odds. And now the future is in your hands - may it be blessed with the same tenor of interest and determination as in the past, and may the Congregation prosper.

Keeping Kosher in the Kitchen

*Oh, What a "**Din**"!*

1. 1974: Kosher canteen requires cook Jewish couple hired. (Oh, what a relief.)
2. Student discovers non-kosher ingredient in fridge: We are denounced!
3. *Shomer* from Carmel College called into "exorcise" wrong doing.
4. Cook leaves: Hunt now on for caretaker/cook.
5. Volunteers from the Community now supervise canteen: students approve and agree to help.
6. Friday nights (as well as the rest of the week) take on a new look as new caretakers taken on.
7. One man's *"kosher"* becomes another man's *"tref"*: Carmel College expert consulted again.
8. Palatable food consumed by more and more students, until...
9. Freshers *too* fresh: start a new *"din"*. *Oi Vay!* here we go again.
10. New cooks, new pots, new recipes. Old friends, old arguments, old traditions.

FSJ and Caroline

Never fear, reader dear, all is **K.O.** in this 150th year.



Sir Alan Mocatta Q.C.

Sir Alan Mocatta (1907-1990)

WHEN Sir Alan Mocatta died in November 1990 aged 83, tributes were paid from all sides for his work as a High Court Judge, a leading member of the Anglo-Jewish Community and chairman of the Oxford Appeal for the new Synagogue and Jewish Centre.

Educated at Clifton College and New College, Oxford he officiated at Jewish services as an undergraduate and held the office of Warden, even helping in the solemnisation of a marriage. He went on to be called to the Bar by the Inner Temple in 1930, where he developed an extensive commercial practice, taking Silk in 1951. A distinguished war service saw him appointed to the War Office, where he rose to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in 1942.

As a High Court Judge, from 1961 to 1981, he was widely respected for his talented commitment and attention to detail. Throughout his life he served the Jewish Community tirelessly, particularly as chairman of the Council of Jews' College for sixteen years and as President of the Board of Elders of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation for fifteen.

No less valuable was his contribution to the Oxford Appeal; few today are fully aware of the great debt which the Oxford Jewish Congregation owes him. As a student, he had known the old Synagogue in Richmond Road, Oxford, which remained in continuous service up to the late 1960's. But he was to become involved in a project to raze this old building to the ground and erect a new Synagogue and Jewish Centre. Obviously the dream could not become a reality without the necessary finance. Sir Alan undertook the task of writing hundreds of letters to Oxford graduates and other notable people all over the world. Without his efforts the building of the Centre would have been difficult to achieve. He gave up many Sundays to come to Oxford to discuss the project and was present at the laying of the Foundation stone and later at the opening ceremony in 1974.

We did not see Sir Alan in Oxford, after that, until June 1990. He had come to attend a function at his College and decided to attend Synagogue on the Saturday morning. He sat quietly in his seat, and it was only when he was given an *Aliyah* that he was recognised by a few of the older members of the Congregation. At the *Kiddush* which followed, he was publicly introduced as one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Synagogue and Centre which is used regularly by Jews of all denominations - students, graduates, residents, children's classes and visitors from all over the world.

We are happy that circumstances enabled him to visit Oxford once more before his death and that he was able to see for himself the fruits of his splendid efforts on our behalf. The Oxford Synagogue and Jewish Centre will be a lasting tribute to his memory.



This plaque is fixed near to the entrance of the Synagogue to act as a reminder to future generations of the unique purposes of this House of Worship.



The Synagogue - now - 1992

Photos by courtesy of Ivor Fields

In Memoriam

Richard Koch - (1902 - 1991)

by ***Helen May***

I originally wrote this piece as a profile, hoping to celebrate Richard's entry into his tenth decade. He would have been ninety on 18 May 1992. Now, sadly, I am writing his obituary . . . he died on 1 December 1991, peacefully, in his sleep. He fought to the end to live an independent life, and when he could no longer do so he gave up the fight.

Over the last thirteen years, from the time that his wife Natalie died, Richard came regularly to lunch with Ron and me on *Shabbat* and also spent Friday night with the Faust family.

I learnt something of his family background from Richard himself. He was born in Vienna, one of nine brothers and sisters, of whom one sister was his twin. He came from a traditionally orthodox family. His father was a *yeshiva bocher*, while his mother kept the family shop as well as looking after her large family. Richard retained many fond memories of her, including her making of a large *cholent* for *Shabbat* lunch and then taking it to the baker for him to cook in his oven. He qualified as a lawyer, but in 1938, on *Kristallnach*, he was arrested along with one of his brothers and a brother-in-law and taken to Dachau. He managed to obtain the release of them all, and somehow succeeded in getting exit visas for them, moving, in 1939, to Shanghai, the only place that would accept them. He did not like talking much about either of these experiences other than saying that the living conditions were appalling and there was near-starvation, but Richard's survival instincts were strong and he undertook all kinds of work to keep body and soul together. In 1948, after nine years in Shanghai, Richard managed to obtain a manual labourer's permit which enabled him to come to England, though he hoped he might settle in the United States or in Palestine.

Richard chose to come to Oxford because his twin sister and another one, Ida, were already there. Ida got him a job as a baker for Paines in South Parade. The fact that he knew nothing about baking bread was immaterial. It was there that he met Natalie, the manageress of the shop. Although

Richard's career as a baker did not last long it was long enough for him to woo her with cups of tea . . . what else in a bakery? They were married in 1949, and Harriet, their only child, who was born in 1949, gave them both great joy and pleasure. Harriet herself was married a few months before Natalie died in 1978. She and her husband Arnold have four delightful children who gave Richard great joy. He always spoke lovingly of the things they were doing at school, their participation in synagogue activities, and all the other things that children are involved in and that kept Harriet busy ferrying them to and fro.

After his stint at the bakery Richard turned to other occupations. His manual labourer's permit expired in 1953, by which time he felt his family responsibilities would not permit him to retrain as a lawyer in England. Instead he undertook various business ventures including furniture removals, newspaper salvage, running a garage, decorating, and a travel agency. It was Natalie who rekindled his interest in Jewish affairs and in the Oxford community. Their home was always 'open house' for students, visitors, and newcomers; and scarcely a Friday night, *Shabbat*, or festival went by without someone being offered their warm hospitality.

Richard immersed himself in every aspect of our community life. He was always there to make up a *minyan*-whatever the weather; and even towards the end-however ill he felt. He visited the sick in hospital and at home. He undertook prison visiting, ensuring that any Jewish inmate received whatever he needed to celebrate a particular festival. He conducted funerals with sincerity and dignity, he comforted the bereaved. He also supervised the *kashrut* of our meat supplies. He led our JIA campaign for some years and was a founder member of *B'nai B'rith* in Oxford. For many years he was warden of the synagogue, attending lovingly and meticulously to every detail great or small, of each service. He attended *shul* regularly right up to the end. How he could exasperate us, interrupting, correcting, intoning 'Amen' or the final verse of *kaddish* long after everyone else had finished! How frequently did we listen to his recital of mourner's *kaddish*, whether on behalf of a member of his own family or, if questioned, patiently explaining it was in memory of all who had perished in the Holocaust or on behalf of someone in the community who was unable to recite it himself. At *Shabbat* lunch time he would often grumble that the *Torah* and/or the prayers that morning had been taken at too fast a pace. He could not understand why it should be like that. What he couldn't accept was that he had become slower than the rest of us! He was for many years a member of the synagogue council, and in recognition of his

outstanding services he was elected an honorary life-member of the Congregation. He joined the Council of Christians and Jews, and in the Friendship Club was naturally an active and vocal participant, always striving to jolly up the proceedings.

If Richard hated the loneliness of life without Natalie he loved the company of all people, young and old. He was to be found at every meeting he could get to, always asking questions, joining in conversation, making his presence felt. At *Shabbat* lunch with us, if there was a lull in conversation he would make some outrageous comment with the deliberate aim of working up a lengthy argument. When I used to prod him with, 'Eat up, the meal is getting cold,' he would reply it was the company, the conversation, that was important, not the food! (I understood his priorities and knew he did not mean to be unkind.) He was always considerate of others, asking after my children and my parents. He particularly liked it when they were around for *Shabbat* lunch for he came to regard them as part of his extended family. He was kind and generous to others, particularly to WIZO and the community. The *'Kehilla'* was his life.

I shall miss waiting for him to arrive for lunch on *Shabbat*. Out of the car that brought him back from *shul*, plodding slowly up our driveway (and, latterly, puffingly), greeting me with a wet kiss and a *'Shabbat Shalom'*, not letting me help him off with his coat or jacket. For me, Ron, and the whole community his passing is the end of an era. He will be much missed.

Oration

Delivered during the burial service on the 4th December 1991
by ***Penny Faust***

FOR many of us, Richard's death marks the end of an era -there can be few people in our community who, over the years, have been regarded with so much affection tinged with more than a little exasperation. (Even on an occasion like this one, he would have wanted me to be honest.)

Born one of nine children in Vienna at the beginning of the century - he trained and worked as a lawyer. But in 1938, on Kristallnacht, he was arrested with his brother and brother-in-law and taken to Dachau. Somehow he obtained release for them all and in 1939, they went with another member of the family to Shanghai, the only place open to them. It was a hard life in appalling conditions, one of them died there - and if

he did not already know how to survive then that was then he learned, and he honed that capacity to a fine art, surviving typhoid epidemics and near-starvation.

He came to Oxford to join his sister in 1948 and his first job here was in Paines, the bakery...the job held no real prospects, but it was there that he met Natalie, whom he married in 1949.

Two years later, when Natalie was 44, Harriet was born...Richard never ceased to regard that as a miracle, and their family was established. The job in the bakery did not last long but Richard was a man of many parts and undertook a number of business ventures from furniture removing to running a garage, from decorating to a travel agency. As their financial security grew, Natalie revived Richard's interest in Jewish matters and he became a committed member of the community.

Many of us remember, with gratitude, the warm hospitality of their home on a Friday evening - they kept open house for students, visitors and newcomers alike and to all they accorded friendship and support when it was needed. Richard immersed himself in every aspect of the community's life, from the mundane to the spiritual: he supervised the *Kashrut* of the meat supplies and led the JIA campaign for some years; he visited the sick at home and in hospital and was the community's prison visitor; he conducted funeral services, comforted the bereaved and for many years was joint warden of the Synagogue attending lovingly to every detail of the services.

In 1978 Natalie died and all Richard's talents for survival were put to the test again. He created an independent life for himself, taking an enormous pride in his ability to cope on his own and make new friendships.

Those are the facts, but what about the man?

His commitments to his family and the community, the *kehila*, have been absolute. Family came first - Natalie and Harriet were his pride and joy and in recent years Harriet's marriage to Arnold bringing him, as it did, four grandchildren, gave him enormous happiness. As Harriet's family grew so did his pleasure - he derived real satisfaction from watching her competence as a mother and from the individual talents of all of the children, Naomi, Joshua, Miriam and Sam. I think he felt, in a very real sense, that they were part of his gift to the future.

And he did not limit his grandparenthood to his own grandchildren. for example, my own family, who did not know either of their real grandfathers, regarded him very much as their own and he responded to that, allowing

them the familiarity that comes with love and giving them his interest without expecting anything in return. We owe him much.

As for the community which was the focus of his life in Oxford for so many years, he put the welfare of the *kehila* above his personal needs. How often have we seen him both at the *shul* and here at the cemetery making up the *minyan* whatever the weather or the current state of his health? How often did he stand up to put a viewpoint that was not always popular, or even necessarily right for that particular moment, but always had the welfare of the congregation at heart? How often did we hear him recite mourners *kaddish*, not for himself, he would explain, but for those who perished in the Holocaust and anyone in the congregation who could not do it for themselves?

He was, too, responsible for the acquisition of funds which have given the community its current financial stability. An early participant in inter-faith dialogue, he became an active member of the Council of Christians and Jews. Some years ago the congegation gave him honorary life-membership in recognition of all he had done and that was really appropriate for he was a true servant of the community.

We all have our memories of Richard, in *shul*, at meetings, arguing with anyone who would take him on. For me what stood out was his abiding loyalty, his unending kindness, his insatiable curiosity; his capacity for reaching out across the generations and outside the Jewish community to make friends and communicate with other people. He thrived in company. The last Friday evening he spent in Oxford, less than two weeks ago, he decided to join the students for dinner to hear Lord Goodman speak. He was not well and found even breathing difficult, but the student who sat next to him said that his mind was razor sharp and that he was full of conversation.

I do not think that I know anyone who was so fiercely independent and yet so devoted to family and community; anyone who could be so demanding of attention and yet be so selfless in the face of other people's needs. He was an extraordinary man and a true friend. His presence will be sorely missed.

The Gap

A tribute to Richard by ***Kathy Shock***

THROUGH the gap in our hedge over the brief seven years that we knew him, Richard Koch weekly, sometimes daily, made a short-cut to the main road. His death has created a gap in our lives too. There were so many other aspects of life he touched in his daily determination to keep going and to do things and never to be beaten by ill-health or the weather. No-one who watched such a dogged will and continuous fascination for the minutiae of daily life could fail to be moved or impressed by the fierce commitment he had to everything he did. He often stopped on his way through for tea, coffee or a snack lunch and filled every moment with enquiring comments, musing reminiscence, thoughts on the state of the world. Any visitor at the time would be kindly interrogated and every detail of their life would be retained vividly, and yet it never occurred to him to gossip about anyone. The moment that most forcibly summed up this attitude to life for me was one earlier this year: in painful exhaustion he almost fell onto my kitchen stool, having pushed himself too far that morning, and as he sat he caught sight of my folding trolley. "Tell me, how does that work?" - tiredness forgotten as he talked. Such a life force was an example to us all and one with so rich and kindly a spirit behind it is one that will continue to touch many generations to come.



Richard Koch, photographed by Kathy Shock two weeks before his death

Thoughts from Abroad

From the Brandstetters
in Australia

We, Judith and Alfred (Aharon) and our three boys: Yuval (12), Chaim (7) and Sharon (3), came to Abingdon on September 4, 1969 - on Bank holiday - for a two year period. Abingdon (on Thames) is a nice little town ten kilometres South of Oxford with, in those days, a population of perhaps 20,000 but only a handful of Jewish families, most like ourselves associated with the various Science Research Council Institutes concentrated in this region of South East England.

On the very day of our arrival we phoned the Silvers, whose number had been give us in Tel Aviv by a student from Oxford; and on that very evening we already had dinner at George and Freda's house in Charlbury Road. This is how we were welcomed to the Oxford Jewish Congregation, and initiated for the first time in some of the details of Jewish life in Oxford.

This, together with our introduction to Natalie and Richard Koch - the dedicated all-time Warden of the Oxford Synagogue - also was how our active involvement with the Congregation started. From there on it continued to strengthen, with fairly regular participation at *Shabbat* and *Yom-Tov* services ... and reading the "Oxford *Menorah*". Yes, this is the Community paper, so caringly edited/typed/published by Miriam Kochan. We always loved to browse through it, even when we continued receiving it for a number of years after our return to Israel.

Of the various other activities which we fondly remember, apart from frequent invitations to Congregation members' parties, - usually on Saturday nights - were such marvellous musical events as Daniel Adni's piano recital in the Silvers' "music room", and Daniel Barenboim with Jacqueline duPré and Pinchas Zuckerman giving an unforgettable concert on Israel's Independence Day at the Oxford Town Hall.

In April 1970 we celebrated Yuval's Bar Mitzvah, *Parshat Shemini*, at the Synagogue and on the Shabbat evening at our little cottage in Appleford Drive. What a memorable event this was, to ourselves as well as to the family and the many members of the Congregation who came to participate in our *Simcha*.

In October, last year, twenty-one years after we first came to Oxford, we happened to spend *Yom Kippur* there again, this time in the beautiful Synagogue building, the construction of which had just started when we left in 1971. It was good to meet again so many friends and acquaintances from the old days, including in particular the Lyons's, the Curtis's, the Lewis's, the Kochans and Richard Koch - with all of whom we have kept up personal connections of one sort or another during these twenty-one years.

Epilogue: We now live in Canberra, "down under" - and will stay there for a further two years or so before we return to Israel - and continue the "tradition" of celebrating *"Seder"* every year with our friends of those Oxford days: the Hambergers of Abingdon. Yuval, now father of two is paediatrician at Milwaukee (Wisconsin, U.S.A.) Children's Hospital, and about to take up a position at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Chaim, father of three, is electro-optics engineer in Jerusalem; and Sharon, then the "little *lobbus*" and now graduate of New South Wales University, serves as an officer in the Israel Defence Forces. We all love Oxford and its Jewish Congregation, and we keep comparing Canberra Jewish Community's *"Hamercaz"* with Oxford's *"Menorah"*.

Rosemary Eshel
writes from Israel

ALTHOUGH we're now in Israel, Oxford for us conjures up a wealth of memories - the first welcome from the community, the Freshers coffee morning, the myriad of activities, its special atmosphere, but most of all its people - the warmth and the lasting friendships.

When we arrived in the summer of 1979 with a 3-week old baby we found Oxford and the community a lively, vibrant place. We still return *en famille* every summer, initially it seems unchanged, except for the shrubs and trees we lovingly planted all those years ago, now reaching maturity. It's a time to replenish the batteries, enjoy old pleasures, recapture friendships and forge new links.

Nowadays Oxford begins at Heathrow ... It always evokes that slightly heady feeling of anticipation. It never disappoints.

From Phyllis Lieberman
in America

THINKING back to our Oxford days is not at all a difficult task because it remains not only a clear memory for all of us but it was a time and experience that has had tremendous and positive impact on us. We often wonder how we let it all escape. Perhaps we shouldn't complain. We had three wonderful years, more than most visitors have, and that should have been sufficient...

In the winter of 1982 Ira and I made a trip to England to check out the family-living possibilities in Oxford and Cambridge. Ira having been offered a place at both Universities, we decided the choice would be based on where we felt our family would be most comfortable and find the fullest living experience... We would be leaving New York City as we both approached our fortieth birthdays. Aaron was almost 10 and Michael almost 8 years old. The boys were attending a great school, we were active in a dynamic and provocative reconstructionist synagogue, we lived in a wonderful Park Avenue apartment, Ira was running a major international trading company and I had my own business... we had more than a few criteria to meet!

Little did we know when we went in search of the Jewish Centre in Richmond Road that this little outing would make all our decision-making so easy. While the building was locked up, we were able to take off the announcement board the name and number of one "Freda Silver". That one 'phone call not only satisfied most of my questions, but it armed me with several other names and numbers for further questions. The Jewish Network was alive and well in Oxford, and how lucky we were to be able to tap into it.

In June 1982 we all returned ready to give Oxford a try. Having left Ira and the boys in London (in digs belonging to friends made via a previous Jewish Network experience), I commuted to Oxford to settle housing, schooling, etc . . with the benefit of Freda's tips and "Network Lieutenants", Judy Brown and Angela Baum. After several days, I returned to London to announce I hadn't quite resolved housing or schooling but had

invitations for *Shabbat* dinner, a breakfast, *Rosh Hashonah* dinner, and a WIZO luncheon. Was the system working, you bet!

Eventually all the "nitty gritties" were resolved and we settled down quite easily. With the continual help and friendship of many in the Jewish community, we felt quite at home. Coming into a new community is never totally easy, especially one that sees so many transient people each year. However, we found many open doors and for that we will always be appreciative. People often commented to us during our three years in Oxford that we had a surprising number of friends and acquaintances ... you know, British reserve and all... and we seemed to be involved in so many activities. This always struck me as odd, since it was made so easy for us. But, we came for a full experience and were delighted so many opportunities were available to us.

With two sons pre-Bar Mitzvah, we were obviously quite concerned and involved in what their Jewish/Hebrew school life would be. While the Sunday program was much less demanding than the three day a week program they left in New York, it turned out to be an interesting experience and a chance for them to stay connected with synagogue school life. As Aaron approached his 11th birthday, we went in search of additional tutelage for him. We were led to a young orthodox student, Sasha Stern, who did a marvellous job of reading and studying with Aaron. It was a unique chance for Aaron to study one to one, not just for "his" *Haftorah* and *Torah* portion but to study week by week the portion of the week... the traditional way. This was truly a wonderful opportunity for him and it will remain very special in his Oxford memories.

Having had to change houses each year (thanks to squatters' rights... it was the one annual trauma I grew to detest), we were definitely tested in the resilience and flexibility departments. Amazingly, each year we found an interesting place to live, each different from the one before and each unique in many ways. From the Old Barn in Great Haseley, to a row house in North Oxford, to the Old Vicarage in Headington, we came with our ever increasing number of books, paraphernalia for new sporting endeavours, collected "antiques", and the handful of Jewish objects we had brought over with us that made "vacation rentals" our home. Environments and neighbours changed but on Friday night it was the same. Through each move and change, our Jewish friends were there to celebrate *Shabbat*, the holidays, and life in general—constant reminders of how rich and incredible our tradition is and what a stabilizing force it is no matter where we roam. The Jewish Network works!

Letter from America

Elaine Hyams

OUR visit to Oxford in summer 1991, Deborah's participation in the Liberal service, and the Kiddush we hosted, all reconfirmed my feelings about the 14 years I lived there . . it's home. Of course, in one sense, it isn't any longer, since we are now living in Ithaca. But Deborah said it best, "I have two homes now". It was lovely to see so many of our friends in the Congregation, and to resume conversations where they were just before we left in 1989. Naturally there was news of family and events in the interim, but there was no interruption of the warmth we always felt, with and through the Jewish community in Oxford.

I think back to my arrival there in 1975 . . new to marriage, new to England, and fairly new to Judaism as well. It didn't take me long to learn that proximity to an expert like Miriam or Barbara Lewis helped me to follow along in the *Siddur.* (The realization that more frequent attendance at services would help, too, came somewhat later).

As in most things, I wasn't really drawn into actively participating in the community until Deborah started *cheder.* But the Community accepted that, and I never felt pressurized to join or do or make or bake. I still value that flexibility and tolerance which characterise the Oxford Jewish community.

My only other reference point to English Judaism was the occasional trip to my in-laws up North.

Warmth did not exude from their *shul*; instead, it was hierarchy (designated seats), where external appearances mattered so much, and the values implied thereby. Paul and I used to joke that if he ever took a Chair there it would be grounds for divorce! In-laws aside, the northern Jewish community I saw is one in which I would not have been comfortable.

Anyway, now we're settled into Ithaca. We do miss Oxford's physical beauty. But even more, we miss friends, particularly among the Congregation. Perhaps Penny Faust and I will set up an Ithaca-OJC exchange program for kids! Our new Congregation doesn't do a "talent show" at *Chanukah*,

and for the last two years on the appropriate Sunday, Deborah and I have said to each other, "I wonder who Lizzie has got lined up for this year..." And this year, at second night *Seder*, we recalled the times we'd attended the communal *Seder* in Oxford. So, you aren't forgotten. *Mazel Tov* to the Community in the upcoming celebrations.

Affiliations

The Council of Christians and Jews

by ***Penny Faust***

THE concept of an Oxford branch of the Council of Christians and Jews arose during 1980. A group of people including Archdeacon Carl Witten-Davies, Dr Geza Vermes, Dr David Patterson, Bishop George Appleton, Miss Joan Crewdson, George Silver, Miss Debbie Sweeney and Edmund Weiner came together in late October in rooms at Christchurch and resolved to create a forum for Christian-Jewish dialogue in Oxford; a means by which Jews and Christians could share their experiences, learn more about each other and, in the words of Professor Vermes, "look into the real problems that unite and divide Christians and Jews".

The idea proved very popular and some 150 people attended the inaugural meeting of the Branch at Wolfson College in February 1981. Dr Vermes was elected as the first Chairman, Edmund Weiner as Secretary and George Silver was the branch's first Treasurer. Dr Vermes gave the first talk on 'A Jewish search for the Jesus of History'.

The branch has gone from strength to strength. From the beginning there have always been members of the Jewish community who have recognised the importance of its work. George Silver and David Patterson were the original Jewish members of the committee, soon to be joined by Penny Faust (Chair 1986-89). Other members of the congregation who have served on the committee include Elaine Hyams (secretary 1987-89), Beryl Grant and Naomi Claydon.

Professor Vermes remained in the Chair until 1986, presiding over a rich variety of academic programmes and instituting a new constitution. Elaine Kaye is the current Chairperson. Joan Crewdson has stayed on the committee throughout, generously giving her time and commitment from the earliest days. Current programmes maintain the tradition of stimulating speakers and discussion combined with less formal opportunities for genuine dialogue and making friends.

One of the earliest decisions of the branch was to become part of the wider Council of Christians and Jews and it has become a strong force at national

level, insisting on the importance of local membership in the deliberations of the national organisation. Penny Faust was elected to the national executive in November 1988.

Oxford CCJ has acquired a reputation for lively and informative meetings and has benefited hugely from the rich variety of academics and theologians who reside in or pass through Oxford. Members have also participated in study groups and seminars and have genuinely developed a better comprehension of other perspectives.

It has also been possible to carry the message beyond the actual membership. Events with more popular appeal such as demonstration *Seders* have regularly attracted participation from a wide audience - serving priests, ordinary church members, theological students and schoolchildren. At a grassroots level, members of Oxford CCJ have been called upon to talk to schools and other interested organisations, give radio interviews and, more recently, to lead church study groups. Awareness about dialogue between Jews and Christians and its importance are rarely questioned in Oxford today.

Oxford B'nai B'rith 1960-1990

The Story by ***Margaret*** *and* ***Alan Curtis***

WHEN Oxford *B'nai B'rith* was founded the community was a small congregation with relatively few activities. There were few active senior members of the University, and there was a definite division between Town and Gown. By the time B'nai B'rith was disbanded, to be replaced by the Oxford Menorah Society, the community had grown greatly. It was alive and united, there were a large number of active senior University members, and all divisions between Town and Gown had vanished. Although there were obviously a number of factors which brought about this change, *B'nai B'rith* itself certainly played a major role in it.

B'nai B'rith was started in Oxford because several of the younger members of the community felt the need for a society to which all Jews could belong, irrespective of their political and religious belief, and which had a wide range of activities including educational and charitable objectives. It was also felt that affiliation to a national and international organisation would help us in Oxford to broaden our outlook and contacts. Because of the rules of the international organisation, separate Women's and Men's Lodges were formed initially, and were merged into a Joint Lodge in 1975.

In the early years, fund raising was aimed at collecting money for the purchase of land on which to build the current Jewish Centre, but over the years thousands of pounds have been raised for charities, Jewish and non-Jewish, both in this country and in Israel. The annual charity meeting was a regular fixture throughout.

Relatively early in its existence *B'nai B'rith* set up the Friendship Club for the over-60s, and through the years provided transport for its members and helped organise the meetings. *B'nai B'rith* also gave as much help as it could to the various youth organisations, whose activities varied greatly depending on the number of teenagers in the community. For some years the youth group was in fact a branch of the national *B'nai B'rith* Youth Organisation.

In the early years there was a relatively active educational programme, with four or five talks following a specific theme each year. In later years there have been more meetings with audience participation, for example, a Shakespeare birthday evening and a Valentine evening.

A Communal *Seder* was held in the Jewish Centre on the second night of Pesach in most years from the mid-70s, except when this fell on Saturday.

Rambles on New Year's Day and during *Pesach* were also a regular and popular feature of the programme.

Before the *shidduch* (see below), the Men's Lodge had held regular dinner meetings, with an after-dinner speaker or some similar feature. To conciliate a few who had reservations about the merger, these were continued for a while after the formation of the Joint Lodge, but then died out. They were later revived as full Joint Lodge functions and were highly successful.

Perhaps *B'nai B'rith's* outstanding success has been *"Menorah"*, our communal magazine, which has been produced regularly for over 20 years and which is the envy of many larger communities.

All in all, *B'nai B'rith* has played an important part in the life of the Oxford community, but the time had come for it to be replaced by a new society which will continue many of its activities. For some years the national and international aspects of *B'nai B'rith* had come to seem less relevant to Oxford, and the last straw was a large increase in the capitation fee required by national headquarters.

Some of the highlights

The Shidduch

Perhaps the most momentous event (leaving aside the formation of BB in Oxford) was the "marriage" of the two lodges. The rules of BB in 1960 did not allow mixed lodges; men and women had to form separate lodges (in the USA, the women even formed "chapters" instead of lodges). This separateness was a problem for the Oxford community, and it was difficult to fill two sets of offices from Oxford's modest membership.

At the earliest moment when a change of the rules allowed it, the Oxford lodges applied to become amalgamated into a new joint lodge. This was approved, but unfortunately not quite soon enough for Oxford to be the first in the UK to celebrate such a wedding of Lodges.

The *shidduch* took the form of a May Ball (actually held in May) at the Jewish Centre in 1975. Complete with bride and groom (Miriam Kochan and Paul Brodetsky, Presidents of the two lodges), a toast from David Lewis, and *sheva berachot* composed and sung by Wilfred Faust and David Baum. Extracts from the latter follow, to be sung in a minor key - through the nose!

2. Blessed art thou oh District Grand Lodge who hath commanded us to feed the students every day - if only to stop them fading away, and with their still hungry looks they call on us to balance their books.

3. Blessed art thou oh District Grand Lodge who hath commanded that the Friendship Club regularly meets if only to keep the old folk off the streets - yes the Friendship Club is their saviour from temptations and boisterous behaviour.

6. Blessed art thou oh District Grand Lodge who hath commanded Miriam Kochan to write the Menorah magazine if only to provide her with occupational therapy. We all hope its contents will be kept very, very clean.

8. (?) Blessed art thou oh District Grand Lodge who hath commanded us to *bench* the *Sheva Berachot* above if only to wish the young couple a hearty *Mazeltov - MAZELTOV!!!*

Communal *sedarim*

Usually about 100 people attended the BB Communal *Seder* from three main groups: short-term visitors to Oxford; residents without families; and families who wanted a change after their own *seder* on the first night. This mix, together with the high quality of those who conducted the *sedarim*, made these occasions very successful and popular.

The first Communal *Seder*, in 1975, produced two reports in *"Menorah"* - one from a teenager and one from an older member. The older writer stated that it had fulfilled a hope she had had for many years, for members of the community without families and visitors to Oxford were able to join a *seder* with a warm family feel. The teenager, who had thoroughly enjoyed the first *seder* with his family, felt it had been an evening which everyone had enjoyed and had been both instructive and nourishing.

Rambles

When BB first organised rambles, there were three each year: a "penitential"

ramble, between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*; a New Year's Day ramble on January 1st; and a *matzah* ramble during *Pesach*. The penitential ramble later fell into disuse. The nature of these rambles (as well as the attendance and the weather) varied considerably. Some were "ambles" rather than rambles. Experienced walkers were surprised when a break for refreshments was called after the first mile and a half. On at least one other ramble, transport was hastily arranged to pick up at the halfway point those who could go no further. We have slid round Shotover in the mud and waded through water on Port Meadow. The age range of those taking part was often something like eight months to eighty years, and everybody would rally round to help lift pushchairs over stiles. Once we seriously thought it possible that more people would come back than set out, one of the walkers being well advanced in pregnancy. Among teenage participants, there was sometimes competition to photograph mothers in embarrassing positions on stiles.

Conclusion

We hope these few reminiscences give a flavour of thirty years of active and varied programme, which catered for most sections of the Community.

Oxford Women's Zionist Society

(O.W.Z.S.)

TO-DAY the O.W.Z.S. has a membership of about 100 ladies (and one gentleman) all dedicated to raising funds and organising cultural meetings for educational purposes. It is affiliated to the Women's International Zionist Organisation based in London on which body Oxford is represented. W.I.Z.O supplies OWZS with a welfare project in Israel and suggests an annual quota to support this project. This practice has been in existence in Oxford since the establishment of the State in 1948 when the main welfare project was the Jerusalem Baby Home.

Another project was a centre in a Druze village which was, for the first time, educating young girls in domestic skills, particularly sewing and making clothes. There was a plaque outside this school indicating Oxford's involvement and those of us who were fortunate enough to visit

Israel in those early days made a point of visiting the centre and reporting back on its development.

The OWZS worked diligently and enthusiastically. The Committee comprised many immigrant ladies and our present Hon. President, Mrs. Ilse Frankel, was already a leading light in those days. Mrs. Ada Heineman (now deceased) spent endless hours on her bicycle calling on members in order to collect their subscriptions. She saw to it that no one was in arrears for more than a few weeks and that worthy treasurer pursued that policy for many years. There were others such as our very own Else Lawrence who organised that wonderfully successful good-as-new sale. This fantastic fund-raiser has been a source of revenue year after year and many articles have been written in praise of Else for her good works. There was also a dear lady called Mrs. Frieda Vorhaus who acted as Hon. Secretary for many years and Natalie Koch was appointed to represent us on the National Council and regularly reported back on its proceedings.

As time went on, these splendid workers gave way to a new generation who lacked nothing in enthusiasm as compared with their predecessors.

When Lady Guttman moved away from Oxford she was appointed our first Patron, making way for Mrs. Ilse Frankel who is our President to this day.

Regular fund-raising projects in Oxford are

1. A. *Chanukah* concert originated and organised by Miriam Kochan *for* the children, *by* our children, *for* children in Israel. This event is still undertaken by the children of the Hebrew classes.

2. A *Purim* lunch for children (in fancy dress) and parents of the community.

3. A celebrity concert in Oxford's Holywell Music Room and other social events and cultural meetings in the homes of members.

Great store is laid on educational work and each year brings its own theme such as - "Jews who made British History", "Power Politics in Palestine", "Jerusalem Roots", "The Arab Propaganda Machine", "The Jewish Influence on the Arts", "Israel, Past, Present and Future"; "Jewish Medical Ethics".

Over the years we have been fortunate to draw on many gifted speakers within our own community as well as attracting distinguished personalities to come to Oxford to address us.

It was a matter of immense pride when one of our annual printed programmes was enlarged and exhibited in "headquarters" in Gloucester

Place as a model for other regional societies.

The OWZS has been in existence for over 50 years and nowadays it is as vigorous a group of women as it was in the beginning. Our records go back to 1945 when Beatrice Ettinghausen registered as a member. It is now 1991 and at 89 years of age she still turns up at some of our meetings. We are proud to have her as our most long-standing member.

Addendum:

Since the foregoing was written, Ernest Ettinghausen has presented from his late Mother's papers (Vera Ettinghausen) the original Minute book used at the formation of Oxford WIZO on 23rd May, 1939. The following is a short account of some of the interesting information which it contains. The annual subscription was fixed at ten shillings and sixpence with a sliding scale down to even one penny. Meetings were held every three weeks and topics of Zionist interest were discussed and presented by invited speakers. In July 1939 a resolution was passed to co-operate with The Zionist Society in Oxford thus enabling joint activities. The book records a long list of names of people seeking residential accommodation and work of any kind. There is a schedule of statistical information to be maintained by Citizen's Advice Bureau during war-time including air-raid casualties, prisoners of war etc.

This book which is now in the archives of Oxford WIZO provides a valuable and informative record of the early history of women Zionists in Oxford during the dramatic days of 1939 and 1940 and we are grateful to Ernest Ettinghausen for having presented it to us.

Oxford Committee for Soviet Jewry

by ***Margaret Curtis***

THE Oxford Inter-Denominational Committee for the Release of Soviet Jewry (to give it its full name), which was set up in the early 1970s and is still in existence, has been an example of fruitful cooperation between Jews and non-Jews, and also between members of the town and senior and junior members of the university, in a shared objective of helping Jews to leave the Soviet Union.

Oxford has played a special role in helping several scientist *refuseniks* obtain visas, and the university and its scientists were particularly active on their behalf. One of the most outstanding examples of this was the campaign for Alexander Levich, who was eventually given his exit visa in 1978. University College, Oxford elected Levich to a fellowship in 1975, and a scientific conference on his work was held in Oxford in 1977, to which he was invited but was not allowed to attend. However, the Soviet authorities, who had some respect for academic establishments, were apparently so influenced by these events and by a conference held in Washington that visas were granted to the Levich family. Previously the authorities had said that it would be many years before they were allowed to leave Russia. Other successful campaigns resulted in the granting of visas to the Brailovskys and to Prof. Meiman.

In addition to its specific work for scientists, Oxford over the years has had several adopted families to whom numerous letters of support were sent, and to whom books and other small presents were given. Several of them received visas and were very appreciative of Oxford's efforts on their behalf. At the initiative of the committee, several letters signed by a number of senior members of the university were published in *The Times*, highlighting the plight of Soviet Jewry. For several years the committee had a stall at the Oxford June Fair, whose main objective was to educate the general public about Soviet Jewry. Numerous helium balloons saying "Save Soviet Jewry" were sold from this stall, and floated over the city.

The students have throughout the last twenty years also launched very

imaginative campaigns, including a phone-in to the Russian Embassy and very vigorous letter sending, which certainly helped in the granting of visas for several families. When the Gurfel family arrived in Vienna the first thing their son did was to send a telegram to his Oxford student contact saying "Thank you Oxford".

Throughout the committee's existence the senior patron has been the Bishop of Oxford. One of the most moving campaigns was when a message from the Bishop was read at a Midnight Mass at Christmas in various churches in the diocese, and hundreds of cards were sent by the congregations to our adoptees.

Unfortunately the committee still has to remain in existence, although conditions have improved enormously in the last four years, as there are still some remaining refuseniks, and financial help is also needed for the Soviet *olim* in Israel.

Ecumenism

Progressives' Progress

by ***Michael Cross***

IN 1951 a number of students from Liberal and Reform families established a Progressive Jewish Group with the support and guidance of the Progressive Jewish Chaplaincy. Discussions and services were held from time to time, with occasional visits from a Rabbi. 25 years later, when Pamela and I arrived in Oxford, it was still functioning on an informal basis, meeting every two weeks for a Sabbath Eve service in one of the college rooms, and although they joined their more Orthodox fellows for the evening meal they were not taking advantage of the fact that the Synagogue was available to Jews of any affiliation.

A year or so later, the size of the congregation that came to a service conducted by Rabbi Julia Neuberger encouraged us to find out whether there would be enough support to justify holding services regularly. We were greatly helped - and it was a foretaste of our continuing experience - by David Lewis, the then President of the congregation, who offered to circulate a notice about them with all the other papers that went to the members at *Rosh Hashanah*.

We were surprised at the extent of the response; so together with Alan and Margaret Curtis we embarked on what has since become an institution - regular monthly Liberal services. 'Regular' was at first rather a euphemism; we were without organisation, experience or even Prayer Books! Numbers varied between six and forty, as when we had a visit from a Rabbi and the support of a volunteer choir from London. Gradually difficulties were overcome and we received help from all sorts of directions, most particularly from the Orthodox congregation, who not only ensured that a *Sefer* was available for us, but happily allowed us to use the Synagogue itself when there was an occasion which warranted it. In addition there has been an irregular succession of American Reform Rabbis at Yarnton, who have made time, in spite of their commitments, to conduct our services and even to run a study group for us.

Since our faltering beginnings, we have had a great boost and great

change. The boost was the arrival in 1981 of Jeremy and Gwen Montagu; their experience with the West Central Liberal Synagogue in London meant that our services, previously run on a rather precarious ad-hoc basis, were given stability and consolidation, so that we are now able to offer a Reform as well as a Liberal Service once a month. The change is in the character of the congregation. Our contact with the students is even more tenuous (sadly, because our original motive was to provide services for them) but our 'home-grown' base is expanding and becoming more permanent. There are now several families with children who have made their homes in Oxford and who are becoming the nucleus of a future Progressive congregation. As well as Sabbath services, we have conducted weddings and *Bar-Mitzvah* services, blessed several babies and, alas conducted a few funerals. We have not yet aspired to Holy Day or Festival services, but have managed to provide children's services on those days.

But what has been established, most importantly and perhaps uniquely, is that there is one undivided community in Oxford. This has been in large due to the tolerance and open-mindedness of the congregation from its Presidents and Council to all its members, and to the response of the Progressives to this inclusiveness by welcoming the opportunity to be involved in and to contribute to the Oxford Jewish scene.





This Ark from the old Synagogue is resited in the lounge of the new Centre and is used for regular Progressive Services. The curtain which adorns it was designed and executed by Gwen Montagu in memory of Pamela Cross. Both families are closely identified with the Progressive movement and together with Alan Curtis are mainly responsible for these Services.
Photos by Norman Lipman

The Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies

Yarnton Manor

by ***David Patterson****, President,*
Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies

THE Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies was founded in one room in the Oriental Institute in October 1972, the brainchild of its first President, the proposal was finally confirmed after five years of negotiation with Oxford University. From the beginning, it aimed to be a Centre of Excellence, modelled on the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, but in the fields of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. The University appointed five of its Governors who invited a further six governors from outside the University. Professor S.H. Frankel was invited to become the first Chairman of the Board of Governors, an office which he held with distinction until the November of 1989. Since then the Board of Governors has been considerably augmented, and it currently includes seven Heads or former Heads of Oxford Colleges as well as many distinguished personages from the outside world. The Chairman of the Board is The Rt. Hon. Lord David Young.

In its early years, the Centre was fortunate enough to acquire a long term lease from St. John's College of a Georgian house at 45 St. Giles', Oxford. This house has since become a Centre for research and teaching for Oxford University undergraduates and graduates in many branches of Hebrew, Yiddish and Jewish studies. It has played host to many distinguished academic seminars, and it provides the teaching rooms for many of the Centre's growing band of Fellows.

In 1974, the Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust acquired the Yarnton Manor Estate which it kindly put at the disposal of the Oxford Centre. The splendid facilities have already housed some three hundred distinguished visiting scholars who have come mainly for an academic year or two months in the summer, to pursue their own researches and contribute to the teaching of Jewish studies at Oxford. A bibliography published in 1987 lists more than 130 books and some 600 articles in learned journals which

have been written as a result of scholars coming to the Oxford Centre. Many important works in modern Hebrew literature have been written on the Yarnton Manor Estate by visiting writers from Israel.

The Centre was also fortunate in acquiring the library and archive of the late Mr. G. Kressel and more recently the library of the late Professor G. Elkoshi. The libraries contains some forty thousand volumes, while the Archive has a collection of some four hundred thousand items. Together they form an extremely valuable academic resource for research in many aspects of life in Palestine and Israel over the last sixty years. More recently, the Centre has been able to acquire a complete photographic collection of the materials from Qumran (The Dead Sea Scrolls), which will enable it to become a leading Centre of research in this important field.

Apart from its visiting scholars, the Centre now has fourteen fellows of its own who specialise in various aspects of language, literature, history, religion, social studies and social anthropology, Jewish/Christian and Jewish/Muslim relations, in the ancient, medieval and modern worlds.

Quite apart from its emphasis on Hebrew studies, the Centre has encouraged the growth of Yiddish Studies which over the last ten years, under the inspiration primarily of Dr Dovid Katz have become outstandingly successful. Indeed, Oxford is now one of the leading centres for the academic study of Yiddish in the world.

Over the years, literally thousands of guests, both academic and lay, have been entertained to dinner followed by a lecture at Yarnton Manor hosted by the President and Mrs José Patterson. In addition, there have been scores of individual one and two-day seminars, and many prestigious lectures, such as the outstanding series of Sacks Lectures.

Since its inception, the Fellows of the Centre and the visiting scholars have contributed greatly to the cultural and intellectual life of the Oxford Jewish Community. Their presence provides a source of inspiration, which is constantly being renewed. In turn, members of the community have offered warm hospitality to visiting and resident scholars, a kindness which is deeply appreciated.

By happy coincidence, the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Oxford Community coincides with the 20th Anniversary of the founding of the Oxford Centre. May they both continue to flourish and go from strength to strength!

Women of Worth

Natalie Koch

A tribute to my mother by ***Harriet Cronin***

My mother was an extraordinary lady who, although born in 1906, had very modern ideas.

She grew up in Esslingen near Stuttgart in Germany, one of four siblings, in an extremely cultured household. She was a highly accomplished pianist who, no matter what time she came home, always went straight to the piano. She went away to university in Berlin and Tubingen where she studied Musicology, English and Germanic Studies. After she had gained her degree, she qualified as a teacher.

In 1932 she came (alone) to England, on a one year's teaching programme at The Warren School in Worthing, but when Hitler came to power in 1933 she decided to stay in England. She got a job at Downe House near Newbury, a very academic school, teaching the daughters of the English upper crust and at the same time learnt about the English way of life. Manners and etiquette were very important to her, I believe as a result of this experience.

As war approached, her sisters and mother joined her in England. According to one sister, she made tremendous efforts during the war to rescue as many people from Europe as possible, horrified by the dreadful stories she heard.

In 1940 she gave up teaching and moved with her mother to Kingston Road in Oxford. She wanted to contribute to the war effort and, as she had already passed her driving test in 1936, she volunteered to drive ambulances part time and drove a bread delivery van for Paines the bakers to earn her living. She had never been particularly happy teaching and this new life was far more exciting and sociable.

At the end of the war, she was asked to manage the bakery office. Here she met my father, who arrived in Oxford as a refugee from Vienna, via Dachau and Shanghai, in 1948 and claimed experience as a baker in order to get work on his Manual Labourer's Permit. Needless to say, with his "expertise" the job lasted only a few days, but their friendship blossomed

and endured and they married in 1949.

I was born in 1951, when my mother was 44 years old. Apparently she insisted on finishing the bakery accounts that night before going in to the Radcliffe to give birth.

As my father gradually was able to establish himself financially, my mother involved herself with the Oxford Jewish Community and drew my lapsed father back into Jewish life. They both became totally committed to the community.

My mother was a very warm hostess, particularly to newcomers, and in turn involved them in the community as quickly as she could. She would introduce herself to any unfamiliar person at *shul* and frequently we would have visitors at home which, as an only child, thrilled me. The spare bed was always ready for anyone who might need it, and people literally turned up from all over the world.

She was not a very good cook (though she baked delicious cakes) and, being used to preparing meals for only three people, the visitors would often have to wait rather long for their food, but she was a marvellous conversationalist with such a wide range of interests and such vast knowledge that the time would seem to pass very quickly. She taught me how to put people at ease in our home and how to show interest in others. Her foot was always ready to kick my father under the table whenever he became boring!

Foreign travel was very important to my mother broadening her horizons and discovering new places as well as revisiting favourite old ones. She returned to Germany only once, to visit her father's grave. By 1960, I had already been to France, Switzerland, the United States, and Israel amongst others. Of course, all I wanted to do was to spend two weeks in a hotel in Bournemouth or Torquay like most other people did at this time, rather than touring interesting places, but it was never important to my mother to be like everyone else.

She fell in love with Israel on the very first visit, but felt that she and my father were unfortunately at a stage in life where they could not uproot themselves again. Instead, they visited as often as they could, and this culminated with the decision to spend part of every year there in a flat in Netanya.

Now that I have a family of my own, we still visit people I met on those trips, and of course we are in touch with so many of those people who passed through Oxford.

She became very active in Wizo, serving later as chairman for many years as well as being elected to the National Council. She was a founder member of Oxford *B'nai B'rith* and later was on the National Council of that too.

When it came to collecting money for Jewish Women's Week, she was most adept at sniffing out people pretending not to be Jewish, though possibly it was Rufus her little dog who was the great persuader.

Sometimes I would accompany my mother to Tom the occasional kosher butcher in the market. There she would encourage me to collect money for Jewish Child's Day from all her friends, instead of only from the immediate family which most other children were doing. This required great bravery and *chutzpah*, but it was a practice that has stood me in good stead.

She also took me on her frequent visits to the elderly and lonely people she knew, deciding that they needed to see children sometimes. At that time, of course, there were still so many people without families. Visiting the sick was done on her own.

During the 1960's she started teaching again, and later became the Jewish community's first emissary to schools in the city and surroundings. She would explain Judaism enthusiastically, with just a few notes and props, and as a result of the most positive reaction this became an established custom in Oxford.

Music was a great source of pleasure to her. At the age of nineteen she had auditioned at the piano with Wilhelm Kempff who told her she would be ready to perform publicly within a year. She chose to go to university instead, but in the late 1960's she started taking piano lessons again and soon returned to her previous standard. My father being hard of hearing (as well as tone deaf) did enhance her concert visits to the Sheldonian with his snoring, but she felt that I was probably a more receptive audience. She would explain every piece of music to me and truly brought it to life, though I do remember being very embarrassed when other members of the audience would listen to her. At home she would carry a radio with her, and would encourage me to identify composers. She loved opera, and especially loved her annual visits to Glyndebourne which she saved so hard for.

Where other parents were protective, my mother always encouraged my independence, reassuring me that doing things alone can be just as rewarding as being a part of another unit. She encouraged me to have

independent means of transport; she encouraged me to travel, she encouraged me to live away from home; but most of all she encouraged me to think independently.

Sadly, my mother died in 1978 after many years of illness. She clung to life until a few weeks after I married. On the day of my wedding she expressed deep sorrow that she would never see her grandchildren, but she has left a fine set of values and a tremendous wealth of culture for them to absorb.

I am very grateful to her.

Miriam

an appreciation by ***Sandra Dwek***

In 1964 I found myself in Oxford, newly arrived, newly married and straight from Manchester. It was a heady sense of freedom, fresh air and novelty which hit me on my first meeting with the Jewish community here, and I enjoyed meeting many interesting and varied individuals of town and gown who comprised this close-knit community.

Miriam Kochan arrived a few years later in January 1969 as a wife accompanying her husband Lionel, who was to take up an appointment at Warwick University, with their three children. They found a house on Woodstock Road and turned it into a charming clutter of antique chess sets, uncomfortable sofas, typewriters, knitting wool, cats, coffee and cigarettes. (I expect the latter were needed by Miriam as aids to tranquillity and calm against the background of constant telephone and doorbell ringing).

The most notable feature of the house, however, was the books. Books were everywhere. Many were loaned out to friends as a matter of course. Friends and poppers-in were always adding to the clutter and were welcomed as members of the family, despite this being a very busy working environment for both Lionel and Miriam.

Miriam's hobby is people and the Jewish community, and her work is writing about them, as well as translating the works of others from French into English, and she usually has at least one book on the go even while running family and communal affairs.

To go back to 1969. The Oxford community little knew what bombshell was about to stir its sleepy existence when this deceptively ordinary *haimische* Jewish mother decided to "help out". Being a good mother was probably part of the motivation, I imagine. Unlike me Miriam did not seem to expect the various services such as a *Cheder*, a youth club and all the infrastructure of Jewish life to be automatically on tap, and because she cared that her children and other Jewish children should learn and be proud of their heritage, she set about using her unique skills to make this

possible in Oxford.

If Oxford had a struggling youth club, which might at any moment fall apart, the answer was why not have a weekly play-reading group for young people, led by Miriam in the Kochans house. This proved for several years to be a resounding success.

The next and most significant area of concern for Miriam was Jewish education. If asked, Miriam will tell you she has no training as a teacher and that she is a complete amateur! I have not met a teacher in my own career who has more of an instinct than Miriam for educating and who enjoys watching her pupils' success in learning. Certainly, when I watch Miriam teach, either as a colleague or as a parent, I see the genuine relationships she forges with the children.

Miriam clearly likes the children even those who would try the patience of a saint. And Miriam is no saint. I have seen her patience severely tried, and seen her deal tactfully and humorously with brats, prima donnas, and the Oxford brand of "little professors", winning them over more often than not with no loss of dignity on either side.

Yes, Miriam has taught at the *Cheder* for over twenty years. Her role as headteacher gave her much responsibility. She also innovated the *batmitzvah* ceremony in 1970, with the first group batmitzvah in Oxford of five girls, including her own daughter, Anna. No girl was pressurised to take part in the two-year course devised and taught by Miriam, but those who did gained in confidence, in Jewish knowledge and involvement, and in making good friends within the group and with Miriam. I think the atmosphere of the Oxford *Cheder* is unique and characterised by a feeling that everyone takes it seriously and ideally wants the children to enjoy a morning's work which challenges them in the same way as weekday schoolwork does. The culmination of this philosophy is that Miriam believed that the same rigorous standards which prove their academic achievements in school should be the goal of the weekly two-hour *Cheder* session, and from 1973 through to the time of writing, the top age-group is encouraged to take the GCSE Jewish Studies exam, and most have passed it very creditably.

How to unify a geographically, religiously and ethnically mixed and disparate group from as far afield as the outlying Oxfordshire villages and Oxford city has been a constant problem. The answer devised by a new *B'nai B'rith* committee formed in 1970 was partly provided in two ways, in both of which Miriam took a leading role, and which were inspired by her flair and intuition. The first of these innovations was to be a bi-

monthly communal magazine "for children and their parents" and Miriam was to be a member of its editorial board. The new infant was born in May, 1970, not knowing whether it would survive its difficult birth or not. Its circulation was to all children in the community, and the contributions and readership were aimed at them. Every child who could hold a pencil, or dictate a story, joke, puzzle or fun item was exhorted to come up with something for the brand new magazine. Everyone who read "Menorah" combed the pages and columns for word of his or her offsprings' doings, or reviews and recordings of their own or their friends' *simchas* and news. "Menorah" also became a focal point for communal grouses and controversial views. Steering a course which reflected the differing needs of young and older people, Oxford-born and visitors, took an editor with strong stamina, with a sense of fun and yet firm control, without undue censorship. A task on which Miriam thrived as did the magazine. Contributions usually flowed in, but Miriam managed to cajole the lazier among us to produce something. As in the real world, these material productions cost money too. Some was raised by the "Menorah" cookbook, which was compiled from recipes contributed from "Menorah" readers. Miriam and her team of volunteers have over the years, typed, licked labels and delivered *Menorah* to past and present community members and well-wishers far and wide.

The second B'nai B'rith innovation was aimed at bringing in adults to participate in what was to be called a "Study Group". Several names, I remember, were put forward for steering the new sub-committee to launch this project; one was mine, and the others, from the Men's Lodge, were Paul Brodetsky and Norman Lawrence. There needed to be a second member from the Women's Lodge, and it was proposed after some debate that Margaret Curtis would invite her new neighbour to fill this slot. I know that I felt quite nervous at the idea of being involved in such unaccustomed cerebral activities and I though this was going to be a very serious Oxford-type of activity. My very first impression of Miriam when I was introduced at a coffee morning was that she looked very well equipped for the task ahead.

First impressions are often notoriously unreliable but Miriam was extremely capable in having ideas. But what I hadn't expected was that working in this team with her would be such fun. As we drove to meetings and made plans, talking non-stop, Miriam would put her faith in my ability to arrive at strange venues on dark evenings. Often her confidence proved quite misplaced, as my own sense of direction away from my own patch of

Oxford, was quite unreliable, and we would wander for miles hopelessly lost. Miriam's first impression of the Women's Lodge Study Group idea apparently was that the ladies would study Jewish cookery, which rather alarmed her, I think.

The general idea was to provide a theme loosely connected with Jewish history, work out a reading list, persuade one of the members to introduce each book, first having publicised the hope that members would obtain a copy and read the work, then have some general discussion. This proved to be a great draw: it attracted new participants who maybe never came to anything else. The Study Group ran for several years, took place in members' homes and introduced us to books and people we might never otherwise have met.

The Study Group also prepared the ground for the idea that having separate lodges for men and women was not for us in Oxford, and that a natural mix of sexes was potentially the way forward for a thriving social group, something which Miriam felt strongly about.

The catalogue of Miriam's contributions to the community does not end here, long and comprehensive as it may appear. She has always had a hand in encouraging, working with and supporting the Jewish Friendship Club. She was President of the synagogue for two years, giving commitment and time which the job requires. She has chaired or been secretary of all the vital Oxford communal organisations that I can remember (except perhaps the Choolent Society) and this includes the Management Committee and the original B'nai B'rith joint lodge. Miriam was a brilliant chairman of Oxford WIZO for whom she originated and produced the long-running, very successful annual Children's Chanukah Concert, together with its fund-raising brochure.

Miriam and Lionel have given the community a great deal. As you will recognise, behind every great and successful woman is a supportive husband. They do get together occasionally I understand, and play a passable game of bridge, and Miriam is no mean Scrabble player. Of course, I nearly forgot the Oxford Scrabble championships that Miriam also launched. It was played in people's homes throughout the region and brought us all into contact with other players and would-be champions. That it also raised some funds, some excitement and a lot of laughs goes without saying.

In writing this brief view of Miriam Kochan's contribution to the Oxford Jewish community, I have been brought to realise more than once that life

here over the last twenty years or so might have been very different, less interesting and much poorer, if fate or destiny had not brought Miriam and her family to Oxford. On a personal level, I would not have wished it any differently. In the life of the community, Miriam's role has been a cohesive and driving force, the benefits of which will be reaped by many future generations.

Equal opportunities for women in a Jewish Community

IT was 1981 when a predominantly male committee of the Oxford Jewish Congregation proposed and unanimously elected their first lady President. The person in question was one of two ladies already serving on the Committee. This commendable foresight on the part of our hard-working volunteer men-folk in the community was the forerunner of a splendid joint male/female effort to keep the highest possible standard in the running of the Congregation. The Community comprises a mixed group of Jews both resident and transient, of different denominations, all under one roof - and no Rabbi! This equality in Jewish religious affairs has produced an atmosphere of tolerance and respect.

Now women are proving their worth as members of the Synagogue Council; Education Officer; teaching in the Hebrew classes; arranging *shabbat* children's services; members of the Religious Affairs committee; caring for the vestments and adornments; organising *Kiddushim*; serving on the Management Committee; representing Oxford at the Board of Deputies; acting as librarian; organising the Friendship Club; Hospital and elderly visitation; organising a *Playshul* for our toddlers.

Most of our women are well versed in the tenets of Judaism and are highly qualified to assist our menfolk in serving our community. They are indeed the 'Women of Worth' as depicted in the book of Proverbs, who at the same time follow their own careers and yet find time to devote to their community. They are too numerous to be mentioned by name - we salute them all.

FSJ

The Bodleian Library

The Hebrew Connection

by ***Ron May****, formerly senior assistant librarian*

THE part played by Oxford's Jewish residents as custodians of the Bodleian Library's Hebrew books and manuscripts in the last one-hundred and fifty years furnishes yet another piece to the complete mosaic. The first, and easily the most distinguished of these residents was Adolf Neubauer (an uncle of Miriam Kochan's grandfather Adolf Büchler, sometime Principal of Jews' College). Neubauer, whose name is included among Oxford's worthies in one of our *Yizkor* prayers, was engaged in 1868 to catalogue the Hebrew manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and the college libraries, and eventually resigned as senior sub-librarian in 1899 through ill-health. He was a considerable scholar who published extensively, and the catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts in the Bodleian Library when it appeared in 1886, received immediate acclaim as an indispensable reference work for all time. A second volume of the catalogue, compiled in collaboration with Arthur Cowley, appeared in 1906. Neubauer did not involve himself in communal affairs, the *Dictionary of National Biography* drily observing that "he did not practise Jewish observances". Moses Lutzki came to the Bodleian Library in 1932 and left around 1939. He was an able scholar who identified autograph works of Maimonides deposited in the libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, and New York, publishing them in learned vehicles. He also recorded valuable notes and corrections to Neubauer's catalogue. It is not known whether he took part in communal activities, but the fact that one of his addresses while working in the Bodleian was 20 Richmond Road seems to be a pointer. After leaving Oxford he continued his career in America. Otto Lehmann was appointed an assistant in the newly formed Department of Oriental Books in 1947. With a strong interest in Biblical and Aramaic manuscripts, his post was no doubt of mutual benefit, and he too added his findings to Lutzki's. He left the Library in 1956 and was subsequently appointed Curator of Rare Books at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. He is now retired, and at the time of writing still visits the Bodleian annually to pursue his researches. While in Oxford he identified with the community, and was

among the early members of the newly formed *B'nai B'rith* Oxford Lodge. I came to Oxford in 1956 to join the University Press and was soon drawn into the community, successively acting as Hebrew classes teacher, conductor of children's services on *Shabbat*, *Bar-mitzvah* teacher, and Synagogue warden. In 1964 I transferred to the Bodleian Library, retiring in 1984 as senior assistant librarian. I am too modest/honest to characterize my tenure as anything more than "minding the shop", but it was a period of great expansion in the acquisition of Hebrew books and in the use made of the Hebrew collections by international - and above all, Israeli - scholars. Shortly before my retirement the Library authorities decided the time had come to revise Neubauer's catalogue. An Israeli team was assembled to carry out the revision and I was invited to spend part of my retirement editing their contributions and seeing the work through the press. The revision of Neubauer's catalogue is due to be published by the Oxford University Press in 1992.

The following anecdote, though not strictly relevant, may pardonably find a place here on the grounds that otherwise it might be lost forever. The source is our own Naky Doniach, who recalls that during the difficult days of the First World War, when London was an uncomfortable place because of enemy action, a certain Jew was told that the Bodleian Library held every book ever printed (a myth which refuses to lie down and die). He decided that Oxford was a good place to be in. One Saturday morning he presented himself to the porter on duty at the Bodleian and asked for a *Vilna Shas* (the best edition of the *Talmud*). As the porter had no idea what a *Vilna Shas* was he directed him to Arthur Cowley. Cowley politely pointed out that books could not be taken out of the Library but could be consulted on filling out an order form. The Jew excused himself by saying he couldn't write. "That's all right," said Cowley, "I'll fill in the form, you just sign it." On which the Jew, in some embarrassment, admitted that he couldn't even sign it because of the Sabbath. Cowley, ever the gentleman but an erudite Rabbinic scholar as well, quoted the Talmudic maxim, *Anus, rachamana patreh* (the Law exempts a person acting under duress). A delighted smile broke out on the Jew's face as he exclaimed, *"Ach, du bist oich a Yud!"* (Oh, so you're a Jew too!)

Teaching It Diligently To Our Children - Then

No Ordinary *Cheder*

by ***José Patterson***

WAS it some strange coincidence that in 1958, a year after we arrived in Oxford, I heard that a *Cheder* teacher was required? I am sure I did not volunteer to fill the vacancy. With two little children, no teaching experience, and a couple of years' residence in Israel my only relevant qualification - I was a most unlikely candidate. Perhaps I was asked to help out and accepted from altruistic motives, for the token salary could hardly have been an incentive! The truth of the matter was that the parents were desperate, and I agreed to give it a go. Thus, a small group of determined Mums and Dads decided to offer up their reluctant children for two hours every Sunday morning in return for a taste - a mere morsel of Jewish education!

That was no ordinary *Cheder.* Since the tiny Synagogue had no suitable accommodation, the ever resourceful and generous Freda Silver offered crêche facilities and a room at No. 331 Banbury Road. Every Sunday morning, rain or shine, the routine was the same. The "teacher", pushing a pram brimful of Patterson girls, arrived to a warm welcome. One child was placed in a play-pen, the other carefully supervised.

The class comprised about a dozen pupils who ranged in age from 6 to 12 years old. They were the children of the Silver, Braham, Brown, Spira and Koch families and others whose names I cannot recall. The attendance was good except during warm weather when the tenets of their Jewish Heritage were temporarily abandoned for the more obvious pleasures of swimming in the Thames at Shillingford!

Coping with the demands of a wide range of ability with only an eclectic collection of dull, dog-eared Hebrew readers inherited from my predecessors, was, understandably, difficult. There were no additional teaching resources or educational diversions, but I think it fair comment to say that what I lacked in teaching skills, I made up in enthusiasm! My poor young guinea-pigs submitted, not without protest, to the grind of the basics of Hebrew reading and writing, interspersed with Bible stories, songs and stories of

the Jewish Festivals. But every class has its *'agents provocateurs'* and looking back with hindsight I was fair game for the trouble-makers. I regularly rose to the bait and banished them without a thought for the consequences of my actions! Alas, this was no great punishment. On the contrary, the culprits headed for the kitchen next door where Freda, busy preparing Sunday dinner, kept them quiet with orange juice and biscuits! A 're-entry pass' was a cursory apology and a promise to mend their ways.

Come to think of it, Freda's culinary activities were a great distraction. From 11.30am onwards, we imbibed, like the *'Bisto Kids'*, the delectable aromas of fried onions or beef stews, and the delicious smell of chicken soup made us salivate like Pavlov's dog!

That period was highlighted with a song version of the *'Ma Nishtana'* - commonplace now, but a musical 'hit' in those days. We rehearsed with gusto until the children were word perfect and even the resident au-pair girl and the cleaning lady were overheard humming along. After *Pesach* the 'feed-back' flowed with *nachas*! From then on *Seder* nights in Oxford sparkled with my pupils' rendering of 'The Four Questions' - Top of the Jewish Pops.

Later we moved to No. 1 Nelson St., a crumbling terraced house next to the Synagogue. Three Hebrew classes used the upper rooms, and there was a canteen for Jewish students below. Mrs. Federhoffer's student menu of boiled beef and cabbage was a far cry from the savoury smells at 331 Banbury Road! Two incidents of that era are indelibly marked in my memory. It was my custom to end the lesson with the class reciting the *'Shema'*. I must have been on 'auto pilot' on that occasion, for after the class had finished I heard a disembodied voice continuing, "God Bless Mummy, Daddy, Grandma..." It was only at the end of the list of relatives that I 'came to' much to the amusement of pupils! On a second occasion, also during the recital of the *Shema*, at the very moment when we pronounced the words *"Adonai Echad"*, the sash window dropped down with a great bang!! Perhaps it was a sign! It was time to go. Besides the children were unofficially coining a phrase for my pregnant condition and I was known as "Fatty Ma Patty"! It was the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

My pupils were especially fortunate. They grew up to share the pride, excitement and the tremendous efforts of our small Jewish community who succeeded in building a new Synagogue - an independent Synagogue whose policy for visitors is still, "Pray first, pay later" (virtually unknown

anywhere else) and where, on High Days and Holy Days, a public announcement is always made to welcome newcomers and offer them hospitality.

Whereas subsequent generations of Jewish pupils are educated by a fine team of dedicated teachers, and enjoy excellent facilities, our experience was very much trial and error. Nevertheless whenever I see my old pupils bringing their children to Oxford to celebrate the Jewish Festivals with their families, it makes me realise the strength and loyalty of our little community. That really was no ordinary *Cheder*!

Teaching It Diligently To Our Children - Now

Miriam Kochan

It was Paul Brodetsky who was responsible for bringing me into the Hebrew Classes 21 years ago. He collared me when I was waiting for a bus outside Woolworth's at Carfax. (Where else would you conduct congregational business? Where else would the Chairman of the Education Committee engage new staff?). However, it was no big deal: I was only to stand in for a couple of weeks while a teacher (Yochi Geiger) took brief maternity leave. My teaching experience was well-nigh non-existent and my knowledge of Hebrew negligible. But two weeks? Anyone could cope with two weeks. In any case Yochi briefed me beforehand, running through the relevant pages of the very elementary textbook with me. Anyone could cope? Within the first five minutes of my first lesson I watched helpless as two of my little pupils collapsed in floods of tears. They were both called Helen. I wonder if they remember that morning, or why they were crying.

The teaching conditions were enough to make anyone cry. My classroom was at the top of a rickety flight of wooden stairs in the house next door to the old synagogue. The smell was unbelievable: boiled cabbage? dead rat? Certainly not mouth-watering cooking smells from the kitchen downstairs where student meals were prepared on weekdays. I took to bringing a floral aerosol spray in my handbag on Sunday mornings and squirting the room for two minutes before I entered it. That way, it smelt more like a brothel than a scene of an ancient crime.

"Break" was spent in the concrete yard in front of the old synagogue. I remember threading my way through fighting children, chatting to Yochi, smoking the thin brown cigarettes she favoured (Yes, Yochi did come back after her baby was born).

Despite the conditions, there was much that was good about Oxford *Cheder*. Some of the teachers were outstanding, particularly a dedicated Scottish post-graduate student, Arlene Wilson, who ran an impressive Classes' Assembly in the synagogue to begin the morning. She got the

children singing beautifully and created a genuinely spiritual atmosphere. Oxford *Cheder's* musical expertise advanced a further stage with the arrival not so long afterwards of Renée Aronson with her lovely voice and fund of songs.

What was not good was that the pupils left when they were *barmitzvah* - or when they were twelve in the case of the girls. It was the desire to end this situation as well as to placate my daughter Anna, that forced me nervously to broach the subject of *batmitzvah* at a meeting of the education committee. They did not exactly create difficulties, but it was sticky. After all it had never been done in Oxford before and I was a relative newcomer to the community. I spent long hours with Ron May, religious *guru* of the congregation at the time (1970), hammering out a syllabus for *batmitzvah* teaching, a suitable exam to set at the end of the course and finally, an appropriate ceremony to crown the occasion.

Eventually I started teaching my class of five girls (one of whom was Anna) in the synagogue itself, the only space available. This sort of teaching was fun: the pupils actually wanted to come, and we crouched on chairs in the aisle working through our syllabus, relatively conscientiously, though one of the girls was obsessed by the fact that I had not yet succumbed to the new fashion of wearing tights and punctuated my lessons with delighted screams of "I can see your knickers, Miss"! (Was it also the year of the mini-skirt?)

We had Oxford's first *batmitzvah* ceremony on a blazing Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1971 in the old synagogue, packed to capacity, standing room only. The reception afterwards was in the Randolph and memorable for our hasty attempts to remove the caviare sandwiches before anyone saw them.

Batmitzvah had come to stay in Oxford, but not the old shul. Was this the first and last *batmitzvah* in the old synagogue? I can't remember, because shortly after this we moved part and parcel to St. Aloysius: synagogue, *cheder*, my *batmitzvah* class, the lot. I taught in a delicious little room in the lodge of the church, my classes enlivened by visits from an aged monk who seemed to find us irresistible. And then we moved again (why?), this time to a private school in North Oxford, which had the great advantage of real classrooms and a garden. The children could actually play outside on grass at break and I could indulge in interminable wonderful conversations with Judy Brown, who had by then joined the teaching strength.

The professional cheder we have today really began when Raymond

Dwek became Chairman of the Education Committee and when we moved into the new Centre: I can still remember the glorious day when we marched the children down from St. Aloysius to Richmond Road to see Lord Cohen lay the foundation stone. Suddenly, we were paid real salaries, had paid helpers at our disposal and were making the first feeble attempts at constructing a syllabus. We even had a real coffee percolator (generously donated by Henry Posner).

We did not have real classrooms, at least I didn't. My *batmitzvah* class was conducted in the cloakroom, the one by the men's *loos*, until it moved to the foyer by the coffee bar and participated in all the conversations and comings and goings that take place in that area. A few problems had also appeared in relation to my class: First, once *batmitzvahed*, the girls were showing a marked reluctance to stop learning, in other words, they kept on coming to Classes! What to teach them? Secondly, Oxford's demographic shape has always been problematic; suddenly we were getting boys, yes, boys, in the *batmitzvah* class.

It didn't make sense, which was why I humbly suggested another *meshugas* which I had been hankering after for a long time. I wanted to put the children in for a public examination irrespective of their sex, in other words, the old "O" level in Religious Studies. Raymond was wonderful. O.K. the kids were too young (14). O.K. they only came to Classes for a couple of hours once a week, but if I thought I could do it, we'd give it a whirl. His confidence faltered when one of my first two candidates gained an "F" (or was it a "G"?) in the first exam we tackled. But the other one had got a "B", and damn it, we'd persevere. Raymond even entrusted his own elder daughter to me and then, with mounting confidence, all the rest of his talented offspring.

We have persevered - even when the "O" level was abolished and the much more demanding GCSE brought in - which brings me to the highly professional *Cheder* created by Pat Yudkin we are all so very proud of today...

A Tribute to George

by ***Ian Grant FRS***

"WHAT A BIG MAN!" My first sighting of George Silver at a college ball that he catered in 1950 came back forcibly when I returned to Oxford to rejoin the Oxford Jewish Community in 1964. This was at the first of many memorable occasions at which George and Freda played host to the Oxford Jewish Community at large, a farewell party for Cecil and Irene Roth when they left Oxford to go on Aliyah. It was the beginning of that exhilarating period culminating in the rebuilding of the Synagogue, in which George and Freda were the pivot around which Oxford Jewish Community business revolved. Those of us who were active participants at the time got to know their dining room intimately. The Congregation's Committee, then as now, held passionate debates which, under George's patient chairmanship, were somehow cajoled into consensus. The Committee of the Appeal for the projected Synagogue and Centre met there when it came to Oxford, and plotted how to approach donors and whether to approve the architect's latest proposals. Usually it was Lord Segal and George who were sent away to take executive action on the Appeal side, whilst the more technical details relating to the building were debated by Don Blenford's *ad hoc* committee. The Silvers' huge ballroom was the scene of many communal parties, assemblies and concerts. I expect most of us remember the electric atmosphere of the meeting to raise money for Israel at the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The Oxford Jewish Community turned out in force and displayed remarkable generosity and unity of purpose. Of course, this set back plans for the proposed Appeal, which had to be laid on ice for some 3 years. It was a great relief when the Appeal finally got under way, and the project was too far advanced to be set back again by the war in 1973. The completion of the present Synagogue and Jewish Centre in May 1974 was a matter for rejoicing all round.

George and Freda were generous of their time and their resources on behalf of the Community in other ways. The regular Sunday morning gatherings at Charlbury Road were an opportunity for us to get to know

undergraduates, new members of the Congregation and overseas visitors of all shapes and sizes, many of whom later became our friends. It was indeed to ensure that the large numbers of Jewish visitors and students in Oxford were catered for properly that George involved himself in communal affairs in the first place. George put a rarely used food preparation room below his Ship Street offices at the disposal of the Oxford University Jewish Society for nearly 2 years after the old *Kosher* Canteen in 1 Nelson Street was demolished to make way for the new Centre. This space is more or less that now occupied by the Souvenir Shop of the 'Oxford Story'.

He was warm, humane and a good practical man of business - he got things done, but he was no intellectual. He was not a *shul-goer* by temperament, and it was not uncommon to see him sleep peacefully through parts of a long Service, something that excited envy in many of us. Of course, he had to sit in the front row, and there were many occasions when Freda commanded one of us to "Sit somewhere where you can poke George if he nods off." This was not always easy to do in a way that would not be noticed by the speaker, as on the occasion when loud snores accompanied the Chief Rabbi's discourse on Medical Ethics one evening in Worcester College, whilst Freda perched embarrassed, well out of reach three rows back, on the edge of her seat.

George's resignation in 1975 to make way for a younger person as President of the Oxford Jewish Congregation after some 12 years in office came as quite a shock. He had become so much of an institution as its head that it seemed that things could never be quite the same again. The Congregation then decided that nobody should be expected to commit themselves to communal office for so long a time, and no President has since held office for more than 2 years.

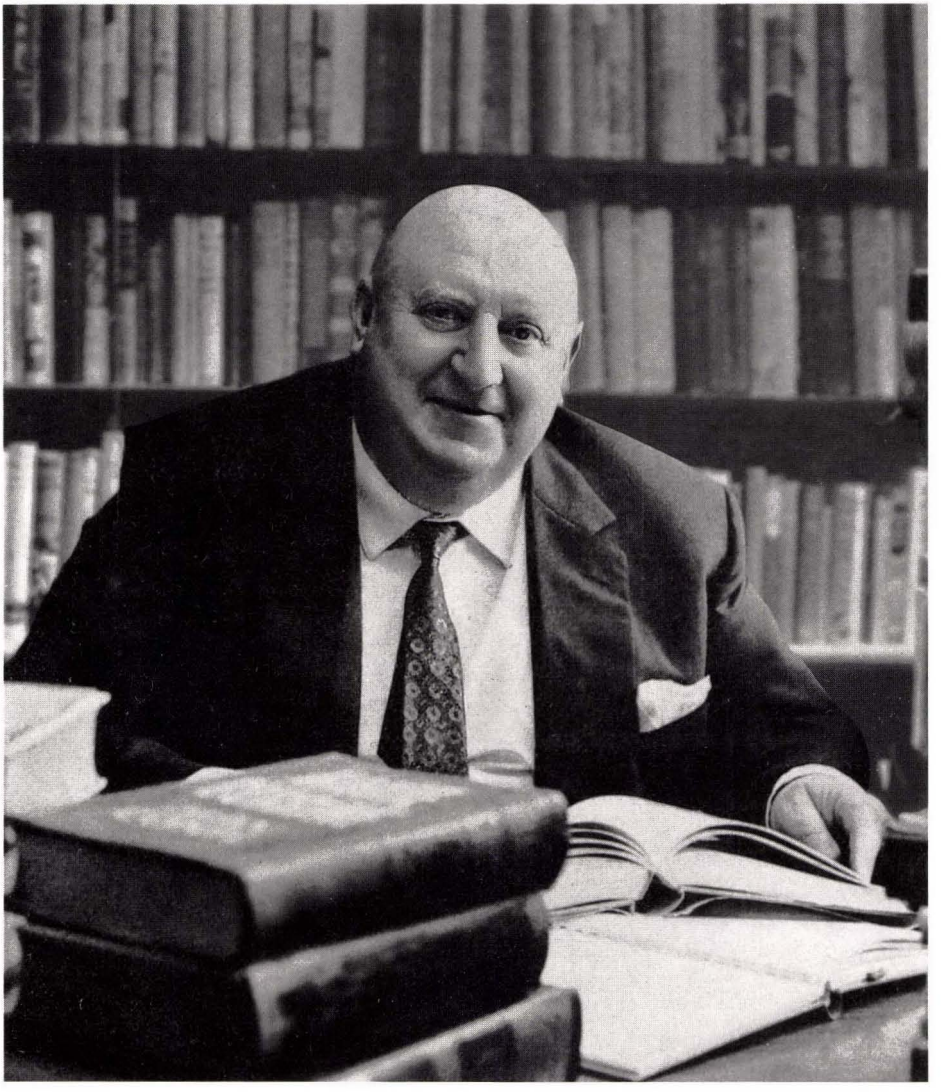
Resignation left George with more time to spare for his hobbies and enthusiasms. He was a great man for gadgets. Guests at Charlbury Road were quite likely to find themselves the target of his latest camera or, in the course of time, of his video-recorder. The results were always fun, even if they were not always technically perfect. He embarked on a new career in films. He took great delight in relating the story of how he was intimidatingly shadowed on the streets of Liverpool by talent scouts looking for someone of his size to play the villain in a new film. A substantial part as the drug-taking "heavy" in "Gumshoe", starring Albert Finney, was the result. This was followed by many other roles, including some in James Bond films and in "Murder on the Orient Express", in

which he was the chef on the train. I am told there were a number of commercials although I never saw one myself. The part I best remember was in a television play by Colin Welland called "Leeds United". This was about a rag trade strike and George played one of the bosses. His unwanted appearance on the platform at a union strike meeting, saying "I appeal to you..." was cut short when he was picked up by several burly strikers and carried out of the hall protesting volubly. Memories of long-forgotten *shul* AGMs came irresistibly to mind!

George was a great family man. He always seemed in his element at parties and I particularly treasure the image of George among his grandchildren. What a lot to remember... Yes, he was a big man.

George passed away suddenly on 4th June 1984. His headstone in Wolvercote Cemetery bears the tribute from one of his many friends -

"Nature made him - then broke the mould".



'George'

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