

Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue: The Nineties

In 1994, Rabbi Jackson celebrated fifteen years' service as Rabbi. This coincided with the Diamond Jubilee of the Synagogue. A fortnight of events and celebrations ensued, including a Youth Shabbat, a midnight fireworks display, a Brains Trust and the brilliant revue, *Jubilee Line*, created and produced by Janet and Stephen Kirsch. This formidable duo managed to write witty repartee, enthuse the cast and produce two wonderful evenings of entertainment rooted in local, Suburb humour.

The Celebration Committee, chaired by Bernard Taub, organised a memorable weekend, the focal point of which was a Friday night Communal Dinner, organised by the Jackson family and enhanced by a D'var Torah from the Chief Rabbi. The Shabbat morning service took place in the presence of the Chief Rabbi and Mrs Sacks, Lord Jakobovits, the President of the United Synagogue, Seymour Saideman, and other distinguished guests. The next day, at a Celebration Dinner, hosted by Fred and Della Worms at the Dorchester Hotel, the Guest of Honour was Lord Young of Graffham. No such landmark would have been complete without some Jewish learning and all members were invited to choose a subject for study. A siyum, with Guest Speaker Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, marked the conclusion of this learning programme.

As part of the 125th Anniversary Celebrations of the United Synagogue, the Shul hosted a visit by the Israeli Ambassador who spoke on current developments in the Middle East, and Chanukah candles were lit at a Buffet Supper at the House of Commons, hosted by local MP John Marshall.

Reverend Freilich celebrated his 80th Birthday and Rabbi Menachem Gelley was appointed a Dayan at the London Beth Din. Rabbi Bernstein died having made a considerable impact on the community. He left an indelible memory as a fine orator and a learned and imposing leader.

By early 1994, an Explanatory Shabbat morning service for beginners, led by a lecturer from the Jewish Learning Exchange, was instituted. This model proved highly successful and, fifteen years later, has been extended to High Holy Day services and includes regular talks by gifted lecturers and visiting Rabbis. Both organisations have been instrumental in leading several Poland Heritage trips where congregants could witness, at first hand, scenes of the Holocaust under expert guidance.

The weekly news sheets with times of services, news of congregants and communal events was introduced in 1994. In time, this was supplemented by the website and regular emails bearing tidings both happy and sad. A diary of seasonal events called *Focus* emerged but was soon absorbed within the other information channels.

The May /June 1994 edition of *Focus* gives an indication of the wide range of activities now available to members. For example, there was a choice of several Shiurim each week, an Educational Shabbat and Shabbat services for children in three age groups. There were activities that catered for the widest range of tastes and interests, be it a lecture on the Big Bang, seeing Tosca at the Welsh National Opera or attending an advanced Gemara Shiur.

By 1995, the popular Chazan Avromi Freilich was holding a central role in the life of the shul and its services. He was given the honour of Chazan Bereshit as a mark of appreciation. The untimely death of Moshe Dover was a sad loss locally. Special events during 1995 included a Seudah to mark the 50th Anniversary of VE Day and an AJEX Dinner to mark the anniversary of VJ Day, whilst the United Synagogue celebrated its 125th Anniversary and HGSS held a Friday night Commemorative Dinner in the presence of the Mayor of Barnet and the President of the United Synagogue.

As well as looking back, the community also looked forward and the Youth Centre was upgraded with the installation of new computers, multimedia facilities and satellite TV, as well as a new table tennis set. Among the Shul's most important but unsung heroes have been its caretakers and in Cliff Marshall, whose quiet dignified efficiency was always appreciated. In 1996, after fifteen years of loyal and courteous service, Cliff and his wife, Audrey, retired. His young assistant, Mark Gould, stepped in to fill the vacancy and he has continued the role in an exemplary manner. It is generally felt that Mark knows as much - perhaps more - about Yiddishkeit than most HGSS members. When he wishes you a friendly "*Good Shabbos*" you know he means it and when he was injured in a motorbike accident our regulars were genuinely concerned at his suffering and delighted when he made a speedy recovery.

By the end of 1996, the total membership stood at 2600 and the age profile was getting younger. Nearly 800 were aged under nineteen and a further 860 were under 50 years old. With the community growing and with the exceptional increase in younger members, new organisational strategies were deemed necessary. Accordingly, in 1996, a five-man Executive Team was set up comprising the Chairman, Vice Chairman and three Honorary Officers with the aim of making the myriad tasks in running the shul organisation more effective and spreading the workload.

Rabbi Jackson had given notice of his wish to take early retirement in 1998 and seeking a successor was a major task, not without its difficulties. As ever, it was recognised that many potentially suitable candidates would not wish to advertise their interest as this would undermine their relationship with their existing communities. Suggestions were invited, with candidates invited to address the community albeit sermon

delivery was only one aspect of the job requirement. Rabbi Eliezer Gross was appointed on a part-time basis to assist Rabbi Jackson and Chazan Avromi Freilich undertook intensive instruction from an experienced Chazan in the United States, so further developing his fast growing chazanut skills.

The main synagogue building was now over 40 years old and requiring regular maintenance. As part of a new refurbishment programme air conditioning was installed in the Max Weinbaum Hall and a library and study centre was created at the rear of the Ladies' Gallery. This valuable communal facility houses a wide range of books and encyclopedias as well as CD Rom Computers and printers. All membership income was now retained locally apart from some 20% remitted back to US Headquarters to cover certain charges met centrally.

Highlights of 1996 included a visit by the Chief Rabbi to mark Kerem Shabbat, a pulpit address from the Chief Rabbi of the Ukraine, a celebration of Jerusalem 3000, a Shabbaton address by Eldred Tabatchnik QC, President of the Board of Deputies, and a visit, led by Rabbi and Mrs Jackson, to our twin community of Lvov. The passing of Stanley Frankfurt, Warden of the Synagogue from 1958-1967 and Founder and Life President of Schools, was marked with a Memorial Service in December 1997.

By 1998 the make-up of the community had increasingly included a large number of young, mainly professional, South African families. To recognise this and to mark their welcome, a Friday night dinner for the South African community was held with Rabbi Shlomo Levin as guest speaker. They brought a keen sporting tradition with them and it was, indeed, a foolhardy Anglo Saxon member who challenged them to a competitive game of cricket for what has become the Lvov Cup. Happily, the competition has always been held in an atmosphere of good humour and good sportsmanship.

By April 1998, the search for a candidate to replace Rabbi Jackson was over and the community was advised by the appointments committee that it was able to recommend that Rabbi Reuben Livingstone be appointed to the position and at an emotional Shabbaton, on 9 January 1999, the community said farewell to Rabbi Eddie and Frankie Jackson.