

ק"ק כנסת ישראל

UNITED SYNAGOGUE.

**History of the  
Hampstead Synagogue  
and  
Order of Service**

ON THE

**FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

OF ITS

**OPENING**

**Sunday, the 24th Ellul, 5702,**

**6th September, 1942.**

## HISTORY OF THE HAMPSTEAD SYNAGOGUE.

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IN 1917 the Hampstead Synagogue celebrated the 25th anniversary of its foundation, at a time when the first World War was reaching its climax. Fate has determined that its Jubilee should likewise occur at a time when the world is again in the midst of War. In normal times this auspicious event would doubtless have been the occasion of some festive celebration. In the prevailing circumstances, however, the Jubilee can only be marked by a solemn Service of Commemoration. The present would also have been an appropriate opportunity to publish a full record of the work of the Hampstead Synagogue during the last 50 years. Such a record would be a reflex of the history of the Anglo-Jewish community for the half century, for the Synagogue has been a predominant influence, at any rate in the London community, throughout this period. But the tragic pre-occupations of the moment prevent full justice being done to such a theme and moreover war conditions would forbid the adequate circulation of a historical brochure of such a scope. It was nevertheless thought that some small scale review of the Synagogue's history should be provided to mark this significant commemoration, instead of the ordinary issue of the bulletin.

It is relevant to this purpose to contrast for a moment the chaotic conditions now prevailing, with the English scene, when the Hampstead congregation sprang into being. The contrast is adequately expressed by the mere statement that the Synagogue was founded in 1892, in those halcyon days of peace, just midway between the golden and diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria. The orientations of the Community at that time may be gathered from two

important events which occurred in Anglo-Jewry in the same year, each of which has a bearing on the history of the Hampstead Synagogue. The one event was the delivery of the Hibbert lectures by Claude Montefiore, and the other was the publication of the "Children of the Ghetto" by Israel Zangwill. The former event exemplified the fundamental issues which were really responsible for the religious restlessness of the community in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Many thought that the salvation of Judaism could be secured by liturgical modifications, and some of the original founders of the Synagogue pinned their faith to this solution of the problem. But the iconoclastic views of Jewish history embodied in the Hibbert lectures, logically and inevitably led to the Liberal Jewish movement in this country. Compromises, such as the Jewish Religious Union, or a Hampstead amalgam of Orthodoxy and Reform, could obviously not meet the situation.

The publication of the "Children of the Ghetto" marked the stabilization in this country of Jewish immigration, which had been proceeding for many years. It also marked an acute phase of the so-called East End problem, which was another serious preoccupation of the community in 1892. From its very inception the Hampstead congregation had developed a strong sense of social service, and conditions in the East End provided the obvious field for its deployment.

Until the Hampstead Synagogue was founded, the Jewish inhabitants of the newly developing West Hampstead district, could only satisfy their needs for public worship, at the St. John's Wood Synagogue. But the increasing Jewish infiltration into the neighbourhood, combined with the craving for a place of worship which was not quite of the United Synagogue type, soon led to the determination to launch a scheme for a Hampstead Synagogue, which should be an institution *sui generis*.

It is interesting to note that it was Mr. Herbert Bentwich, best known as one of the few Anglo-Jewish propagandists of political Zionism, who actually convened the first meeting for the promotion of the new synagogue. This was on May 30th, 1889. The provisional committee then constituted included members of the United Synagogue, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue and the Berkeley Street congregation. Indeed, Mr. Ernest D. Lowy, a prominent member of that congregation, who happily is still with us as an octogenarian, was its Hon. Sec. For some months this Committee endeavoured to work out a scheme of Services for the Synagogue which was in contemplation. The Chief Rabbi then in office (Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler) was unable to give his approval to the proposals, and a somewhat critical position arose. The situation was saved by the late Mr. Frank Lyons, for long affectionately regarded as the father of the congregation. It was resolved on his motion (Nov. 10th, 1889) that further discussion on liturgical and ritual details be suspended, and that proceedings for the erection of the Synagogue be conducted on the understanding that it would be under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi. At this juncture Mr. Lyons became chairman of the canvassing committee, and Mr. Samuel Moses, M.A., whose name is also indelibly associated with the Synagogue, acted as Hon. Sec. But the Chief Rabbi's decision, one of the last of the "responsa" of his long Rabbinate, was necessarily followed by the resignation of several members of the Committee who were anxiously anticipating some far reaching modification in the ritual.

Soon after the canvass of the district began, *i.e.* in 1890, a series of Sabbath Afternoon Services was initiated at the West Hampstead Town Hall. To analyse the precise relationship of these Services to the movement which was now on foot for the establishment of a Synagogue, would be merely to raise the dust of past controversy. It may

however be put on record that an official letter appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* on May 9th, 1890, expressing the good-will of the organizers of these Sabbath Afternoon Services towards the new Synagogue, and their desire not to clash with its promotion in any way. One of the signatories of this letter was the late Rev. Morris Joseph who was the officiating minister at these services. Whatever may have been the relationship between the two movements, it is clear that in the minds of the promoters of the new Synagogue the Rev. Morris Joseph was designated to be its first Minister.

The new movement was in due course admitted as a constituent of the U.S., and the building fund soon amounted to £13,000 including the advance of £5,000 provided by the Council. The Bazaar and Fancy Fair, held at the Portman Rooms in aid of the funds, early in May, 1891, is worth recalling, because it assumed the character of a fashionable communal function, which excited an extraordinary amount of interest and attracted over 6,000 visitors. The site acquired for the building was at the corner of West End Lane and Dennington Park Road, and the original design provided for the frontage in West End Lane. This scheme was however modified, and the plans for the present frontage were adopted. The site had been occupied by Lauriston Lodge, and religion classes were started in this house two years before the opening of the Synagogue. The laying of the foundation stone on the Feast of Purim (March 13th, 1892) was a unique ceremony because Haham Dr. Gaster and the Rev. Professor Marks of the Berkeley Street Synagogue took part therein, with Dr. Hermann Adler, who had succeeded his father as Chief Rabbi in 1891. This participation of the religious leaders of the three sections of the Community was intended to convey a symbolic significance. In some quarters a strong desire manifested itself that the accession of Dr. Hermann Adler should be signalized by some form of

union of the religious sections of Anglo-Jewry, and the founders of the Hampstead Synagogue had not completely abandoned this ideal. Some of the earliest preoccupations of Dr. Adler on assuming office was to deal with the demands for more or less moderate reform, with which he was assailed. He vetoed the proposal for a mixed choir at the ornate musical ceremony which was arranged for the laying of the Foundation Stone. After the opening of the Synagogue, some concessions were made which facilitated the employment of such a choir. But a more serious predicament arose when the provisional committee invited the Rev. Morris Joseph to become the minister of the Hampstead Synagogue. The Chief Rabbi felt called upon to inhibit this appointment. The justification for this decision was made evident later on, when Mr. Joseph accepted the position of Senior Minister to the Berkeley Street Congregation. In this impasse, the task of making another selection fell upon the Committee, and after considerable deliberations, the Rev. A. A. Green, who was then a young minister at Sunderland, was offered the position, and he began his duties on Sep. 1st, 1892, a few days before the consecration of the Synagogue, which took place on the 18th of that month. From the moment of his assuming office until his retirement at the age of 70, his long period of service was characterized by a conspicuously harmonious co-operation with the congregation, so that the career of Mr. Green and the history of the Hampstead Synagogue are more or less identical. The Rev. S. Manne was elected Reader but his tenure of office was brief, and he was subsequently appointed to the Johannesburg Synagogue.

The opening of the Synagogue revealed a very unfamiliar architectural design. The architect, Mr. Delissa Joseph, imparted the form of an amphitheatre to the interior, so that the body of the building, with its large central vacant area, presented an unusual appearance for a synagogue.

But the rapid growth of the membership from its original number of 80, soon necessitated an enlargement of the building. The Synagogue was enlarged to its utmost capacity in 1901 and the central empty area was filled in with rows of seats. But before this extension took place it was found necessary to provide adequate accommodation for the religion classes and a special building was erected for this purpose at the side of the Synagogue in 1897. The welfare of the classes was a matter of deep concern to Mr. Frank Lyons and he worked for them with phenomenal energy. He subsequently adopted the idea of the co-ordination of all the Synagogue religion classes in London, and at a conference held at the Hampstead Synagogue in 1908 the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes was formed under his presidency, which he held for very many years. Subsequently Mr. Lyons also became president of the Jewish Religious Education Board.

The social services of the Synagogue began, without delay, with the establishment of the Ladies' Guild. The Butler Street Girls' Club, one of the largest and brightest clubs of the kind in London was the direct outcome of the work of the guild members. The nucleus of this club is to be sought in the two rooms in Old Montagu Street provided by the late Mr. Abraham Davis, who was an Hon. Officer of the Synagogue from 1903-1908. It is interesting in the circumstances of the moment, when there appear to be no recruits for this vocation, to note that the question of domestic service claimed the attention of the Guild's early workers. Thus arose the Domestic Training Home for the preparation of Jewish girls for domestic service. The Home was first established in Hemstal Road, it subsequently moved to Adelaide Road and eventually found excellent quarters in Highbury Grove. But beyond these direct offshoots of the Synagogue, its membership rallied to the ranks of workers in all branches of social work in the East End of London, in connection with the Club movement,

Schools Care Committees, the Jewish Lads' Brigade, the Children's Country Holiday Fund and the various beneficent functions of the Jewish Board of Guardians, the Orphan Asylum and other institutions. The establishment of the Home of Rest, later on, owed much to the initiative and support which came from Hampstead.

But the Hampstead Synagogue had the opportunity of serving in a much wider sphere of Jewish work. This it did in the person of Carl Stettauer who was an Hon. Officer from 1901-1907. He was a conspicuous example of the power of the Synagogue to evoke Jewish sympathies and stimulate them to action. He had high intellectual endowments, was a keen student of men and affairs and possessed an extremely amiable character. In 1905 the sufferings of the Jews in Russia aroused the deepest emotions of the Anglo-Jewish community. It became necessary to obtain first-hand knowledge of the true conditions and to arrange for the wise disposal of relief funds. Mr. Stettauer was asked to undertake this responsible task and he assumed it without hesitation, proceeding to Russia in November of that year, at great self-sacrifice and at no little personal risk. His mission was an immediate success, and was thus recognized not only in London but in Berlin, St. Petersburg and New York. He became chairman of the Russo-Jewish Committee and held in his hands the intricate threads of the Jewish position throughout the world. Incidentally, he became treasurer of the United Synagogue, and he maintained intimate contact with Hampstead until his death in 1913.

And thus the Synagogue proceeded from strength unto strength. Indeed, to be a seatholder at Hampstead was something of a distinction, and newcomers to the district sought its membership as if it were some exclusive circle. Indeed, some applicants who could not be accommodated with seats, and were referred to other local Synagogues, regarded this as a rebuff, which they accepted with

but little equanimity. At this time, much of the congregational zeal was sublimated into activities for the beautification of the Synagogue, which, except for the stained glass windows, remained barren of ornamentation. The outbreak of the 1914-1918 War necessarily postponed the realization of this project, and it was not until April 6th, 1924, that the present marble Ark and Almemar were consecrated. This handsome structure which adds so much to the dignity of the Synagogue is an abiding testimony to the devotion of those who rendered its erection possible. The late Mr. Emil Kahn (Hon. Officer 1907-1913) was particularly indefatigable in this cause.

But while this aesthetic embellishment of the Synagogue was in contemplation, another more essential piece of work had been carried out. The accommodation for the Religion Classes had become inadequate, and Mr. Frank Lyons was able to acquire a site adjoining the Synagogue for the erection of new classrooms. The cost of the new building, including that of the land was £9,500. It was formally opened on March 19th, 1921, and it also provided accommodation for a large hall for public functions for the use of the Literary Society and for overflow services when necessary. This is now the Samuel Moses Memorial Hall. It is however significant that in the Annual Report for 1923 the Board of Management stated that it would "welcome the increase of pupils for which there is such ample accommodation". It was about this time that the Classes obtained some publicity or notoriety in the Jewish press, because of a series of lectures, which were given to the older pupils of the Senior Class—based on the New Testament—to explain the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. Much unnecessary misapprehension was entertained concerning this experiment, and it aroused considerable antagonism. Mr. S. T. Cohn (Hon. Officer 1919-1925), as Chairman of the Classes, succeeded in calming the storm which had arisen, by a judicious letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*. It is perhaps

timely to recall this incident just now, when writers and speakers are so constantly insisting upon morals and ethics as if they were the exclusive concepts of Christianity. It certainly suggests that the instruction of Jewish youth in the fundamental differences between Judaism and Christianity is not misapplied energy.

Throughout the whole history of the Synagogue the authorities were contriving ways and means to improve the Jewish education of the youth of the congregation. Periodically this urgent need was brought to the notice of parents. Endeavours to arrange extra sessions of the Classes met with scant response. Incidentally it should be recorded that the West Hampstead Jewish Day School began its career in 1927 in the class rooms of the Hampstead Synagogue. This preparatory school was designed for young children and it was intended that they should begin their school life in an environment wherein Hebrew and Religion formed a natural part of the curriculum. In 1925 a new approach to this matter was made by the initiation of Services for adolescents. Under ideal conditions, of course, the place for the adolescents is at the side of their parents. Under the actual conditions, it is just when the synagogue is full that the adolescents are crowded out. It was therefore decided, in the first place, to arrange for these services to be held on the High Festivals, and the experiment, which was original in its conception, amply justified itself. It must be emphasized that these were not the usual Children's Services; in form and in substance they followed the lines of the ordinary adult service. One may anticipate somewhat here, by stating that the provision made for special services for young people developed in 1934 into a permanent Junior synagogue, which is suitably furnished and properly equipped for the purpose. This was one of the first fruits of the work of Rabbi Dayan Gollop on behalf of the congregation.

From the inception of the congregation it was determined that the rendering of the services should be conducted along

the traditional lines of the best Synagogue Chazanuth. This is evident from the first selection of Reader. When this appointment was terminated, there was a feeling in some quarters that the type of continental Cantor might well be dispensed with at Hampstead, and replaced by a Reader with a Jews' College training and versed in Chazanuth as taught in that institution. This view however did not prevail, and search was made for a Reader who in addition to other qualifications possessed vocal attainments of a high order. There were however many difficulties in prosecuting this search for a sweet singer in Israel, to a successful issue. Meanwhile, the Rev. W. Stoloff was chosen as temporary Reader, and eventually he was appointed permanently. For thirty-two years he served the Synagogue faithfully and assiduously, never sparing himself in the performance of his duties. Mr. Stoloff retired in 1931 and in the following year the Rev. G. Boyars (of Birmingham) was appointed, and in him the Synagogue has attained its *beau ideal* of a Chazan. The association of Mr. Boyars with so talented a musician as Mr. Alman, who succeeded Mr. Freeman as Choirmaster in 1915, has been a happy combination. The first choirmaster was Mr. Algernon Lindo. It is quite intelligible that, in the somewhat contentious atmosphere in which the Hampstead choir was formed, its development should have been a matter of critical interest to the congregation. A choir committee has been in more or less constant session for the last 50 years to exercise vigilant surveillance over it.

The appointment of Mr. Boyars was the last of a series of changes in the official personnel of the Synagogue. Mr. Charles Abrahams who had been Beadle since its foundation and who had won general esteem, retired in 1930. In the same year Mr. B. M. Woolf who had been Secretary for 20 years—and much more than Secretary—was appointed to a similar position at the West London Synagogue, Upper Berkeley Street. These positions were filled by the election of Mr. J. Bernstein and Mr. N. Lionel Herman respectively.

But the change which constituted a veritable turning point in the history of the Synagogue occurred when the Rev. A. A. Green retired on completing his 70th year, just three years before his death in 1933. A retrospect of work of the Hampstead Synagogue might justifiably resolve itself into a life history of its late Minister, but the exigencies of the moment forbid any attempt at such a biography. It must however be said that what the Synagogue has been able to achieve in the past was mainly due to the remarkable personality and strong characteristics of Mr. Green. It is difficult to say whether he excelled as a preacher in the pulpit or an extempore speaker in debate ; but he certainly regarded the preparation of his sermon as the main task of his week's work. His manuscripts underwent ample revision indicating how meticulous he was over the choice of his words and construction of his sentences. He was, par excellence, a typical representative of the Anglo-Jewish ministry, and some future historian will doubtless assess the influence of this form of ministry on the fortunes of Anglo-Jewry. Meanwhile the prospect of his retirement aroused the Synagogue authorities to a sense of anxiety and responsibility in regard to the selection of a successor. The special committee appointed for this purpose had, however, no difficulty in arriving at a decision when it was known that Rabbi Dayan Gollop, B.A., of the Bayswater Synagogue was willing to accept the post, and he was duly appointed in September, 1930. This succession was important enough on personal grounds, but it was all the more significant in that it brought to the Hampstead pulpit an ordained Rabbi who was actually a member of the London Beth Din. The enthusiasm and energy with which Dayan Gollop threw himself into the work of the congregation soon showed how he harmonized the position of Rabbi with the office of an Anglo-Jewish minister. A new chapter was indeed opening in the history of the Synagogue. A series of Sunday morning " Talks " was inaugurated ; they dealt with the perplexities

and doubts of the average congregant, and at first they attracted large audiences. Informal Talmudic addresses were given, throughout the summer, prior to the service at the termination of the Sabbath. Since the appointment of Dayan Gollop a Pilpul has been delivered by him on the Sabbaths before Passover and the Day of Atonement and the traditional *Sium* has been held on Passover eve. The pious founders of the Synagogue certainly could not envisage the Hampstead pulpit as the vehicle for the delivery of these Rabbinical dialectics. But *pari passu* with these activities the social aspects of congregational life were cultivated, more particularly in relation to the young people, and the Hampstead Young People's Association was formed in the interests of the youth over 16 years of age; and this was followed by the establishment of the Conjoint Cultural Committee which was responsible for many interesting literary gatherings. The Jewish Literary Society had, however, long been an important feature at Hampstead. The Society which was founded in 1902 functioned almost uninterruptedly for nearly forty years, and many of its meetings were of outstanding interest. For long it held a premier position in the Literary Society movement.

After 1933 the course of the congregation history was considerably deflected from its normal path by the impact of events in the Jewish communities of central Europe. In common with other congregations Hampstead devoted much energy to the problem which arose from Jewish immigration into this country. From the purely Synagogal standpoint, one of the most conspicuous results of the calamity which has overwhelmed so much of European Jewry has been the aspect of the assemblies at the Services. The congregations often presented an exotic appearance owing to the gradually increasing attendance of German and Austrian co-religionists who were welcomed with cordiality and deep sympathy. Indeed, the Synagogue may well be grateful for this attendance, for it has in some measure compensated for the

absence of the members of the congregation who left London at the outbreak of War.

Since September, 1939, the normal Synagogal activities, except those for public worship, have necessarily been in a state of suspended animation. The whole time of the Minister is absorbed in his duties as Senior Chaplain, and it is only on rare occasions that the Synagogue can avail itself of his services. It is fortunate that for some years the Synagogue has co-operated in the Student-Minister movement, of which it was the pioneer, so that now in the year of its Jubilee, it has the advantage of the capable assistance of the Rev. E. Nemeth in that capacity.

This cursory sketch of the history of the Hampstead Synagogue must conclude with one significant observation. Naturally, after a lapse of 50 years the present congregation consists of a new generation. But it is not one, mainly in lineal descent from the former generation. In the implications of this fact, there is much making—or unmaking—of Anglo-Jewish history; and this suggests a train of thought which raises grave concern for the future. It constitutes the great post-war problem for the Synagogue in general. There could be no better Jubilee resolution for the Hampstead Synagogue, with its past tradition of service, than to determine to make its own contribution to the solution.