



KRISTALLNACHT

Restoration and Remembrance

Cantor Paul Heller officiated at a moving rededication in Austria

Earlier this year, the Government of Lower Austria and the Institute for Jewish History in Austria invited me to participate in the inauguration of the restored synagogue and old cemetery of St. Pölten, about 40 miles west of Vienna, where my paternal family comes from.

Jews have been part of Lower Austria's population for over a millennium. In the Middle Ages, they primarily lived in imperial cities where they found legal and economic protection, enabling the rise of a local Jewish bourgeoisie. However, by the late 15th century, most towns were *judenfrei* due to campaigns of persecution. Only Vienna retained a small Jewish community during the 16th and 17th centuries. In the 18th century, partial toleration policies led to a Jewish return, and by the 19th century, there was renewed immigration, with Jews settling



The beautifully restored synagogue of St. Pölten

in St. Pölten, the capital of Lower Austria, and its surrounding towns, as well as in Vienna.

In March 1938, Austria was incorporated into Germany. The *Anschluss* was greeted enthusiastically by the majority of the population. Persecution of the Jewish population commenced soon afterwards and then came 9 November 1938, *Kristallnacht* ('Night of Broken Glass'), pogroms that were particularly brutal in Austria. Most of the synagogues in Vienna and elsewhere, including St. Pölten, were destroyed and the cemeteries vandalised. The events of that night were not just an attack

on buildings but a devastating blow to a vibrant culture and community that had flourished for centuries.

In the following decades, it became clear that restoration and preservation of Jewish sites in Lower Austria were important to local communities, as well as to the museum sector. A large investment was made by the government of Austria in recognition of the profound tragedy that *Kristallnacht* and subsequent persecution had inflicted upon the Jewish community.

The restored synagogue and memorial at the destroyed cemetery of St. Pölten reverberate with the

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history and heritage of my family and others. As we stood together, participating in their inauguration, we felt that the act of restoration was more than a symbolic gesture. It was a testament to resilience, to the endurance of memory, and to the importance of reclaiming heritage. The ceremonies served as a powerful reminder of the importance of honouring history, especially in places where that history had been so violently interrupted. I was struck by the mixed emotions of the participants, mostly descendants, who came together from across the globe – joy at the revival of sacred spaces, tempered by the sombre remembrance of those who were lost. We were joined by local dignitaries, uniting people of diverse backgrounds, to honour the memory of our ancestors who had faced unimaginable hardships, with presentations that still resound in our minds.

The gathering instilled in all of us a sense of responsibility to preserve the lessons of the past. In this way, the synagogue and cemetery are not just relics; they are living memorials that breathe life into our shared history and identity. The work done by the Institute of the History of Jews of Austria (INJOEST) under Dr Martha Keil has brought to light what would have remained in the archives.

Standing together, the air filled with prayer, reminded us that the roots of prayer and the tradition surrounding it are at least as important as the text itself. We reaffirmed our commitment to tolerance and understanding, for it is vital that we should all learn from our history to prevent the repetition of such atrocities. The legacy of those who endured the horrors of the Holocaust must continue to guide us, reminding us of the importance of fighting against hatred and discrimination in all forms. The Central European experience of antisemitism, directly linked to the history of fascist and socialist regimes, is also linked to post-war amnesia and socio-political negligence. So it will not suffice just to arrive at reconciliation and to open up closed narratives about Jews. The institutions set up to implement the restoration, preservation and conservation of locations where the desecrated synagogues and cemeteries once stood, and the cultural authorities responsible for the protection of monuments, can be used to educate future generations with exhibitions, workshops and cultural events. In Austria, under the guidance of INJOEST, we can hope that with God's will, despite recent worrying political trends, truth and peace will prevail.

SYNAGOGUE SNAPSHOTS

James Rossiter

Director of Communications at the Criminal Bar Association of England and Wales



What's your favourite thing about your job?

In a word, justice. It's a privilege to play a part in trying to keep the idea alive that everyone can get a fair trial if they face a prosecution. That fundamental right is no longer a given. I enjoy building strategies to make this case across all

manner of media imaginable, and with the full spectrum of policymakers.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Helping people to understand that justice is different from vengeance. There's a need for me to be nimble in responding to a new generation of online influencers, many with political sway, who abuse the public conversation about what justice entails. Perhaps this underlines my understanding of being Jewish, and at Belsize Square I feel at home.

If you could do any other job for one day, what would you choose?

I enjoy my work. I can't think what I'd like to do instead. If I could have a year's sabbatical then I'd love to write a book on my family's Sephardic-Ashkenazi story, from 8th- and 9th-century Spain and Portugal to London, by way of a few Inquisitions, with some stopovers in the West Indies. My mother used to say she 'married out', what with my father's Anglo-German Jewish lineage. The story would move from joy to displacement, destruction, survival, revival and back to joy.

How did you come to be a member of Belsize Square?

We went 'shul-hopping' as a young family looking for a stimulating cheder for our children. Our eldest, Josh, then eight years old, had a cheder-taster while my wife Rachel was welcomed into the adult education session. I must have been talking to friendly members – and eating. We all emerged fulfilled, with Josh proudly waving his work on 'How to be a Mensch'. We have been loving the communal 'Menschlichkeit' ever since.

What's your favourite festival?

Pesach – it's that theme again: liberty, the law and what you make of it, but always with food and song. We have always made a special Seder for friends and families, whether in London or Israel.

Where do you like to sit in shul?

Next to my wife and children – to get that little bit closer to Zion.

FAMILY ARCHIVES

Artist, Teacher, Kindertransport child

A brief look at the fascinating life story of member Hanna Nyman, compiled by Alex Antscherl, based on interviews by Eve Hersov and a family history written by nephew Philip Najmann



Hanna, aged 89, is the illustrator of the Rosh Hashanah card sent to older BSS members this year. Her parents Blima and Chuno Najmann were ardent Zionists, of Polish origin. They had a visa to go to British Mandate Palestine in 1935, but with the arrival of Hanna and her twin brother Jochi that year they made the life-changing decision to stay in Germany, planning to make Aliyah later. The Najmanns shared a flat in Breslau with another family, whose daughter Ruth Eisenfeld was Hanna's lifelong friend, also becoming a Belsize Square member. Hanna recalls, 'When the Nazis came to rummage [in] the flat looking for Ruth's father, Ruth was four and wanted to help them [by getting out photos] and her older sister kicked Ruth so that she would understand not to help the Nazis.' Ruth passed away in September this year.

In June 1939, Hanna and Jochi, then aged four, were the youngest children sent via Kindertransport from Breslau to London. Their older brothers, Isaak aged 14 and Herbert aged 10, had already departed on the same route earlier in the year. The

twins were too young to be part of the scheme officially. But with huge bravery and presence of mind, their mother thrust them into the arms of a surprised nine-year-old girl on the train, moments before it departed from the platform.

At the 60th Anniversary of Kindertransport Survivors, that moment was described by the girl in question, Ella Feldman. 'The door was flung open by a woman with tears streaming down her face. With her were two toddlers, a boy and a girl, screaming and howling. She just had time to ask me my name and to [make me] promise to look after the children when the whistle blew and the train pulled out.'

Hanna and her brothers spent the war years in various children's homes, including the Lucy Home in Oxhey, Herts. 'Kids make fun for themselves. [We] managed to have a laugh,' she recalls.

Her father Chuno was murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. Meanwhile, her mother Blima suffered six deportations, from her first incarceration in the Piotrkow Ghetto to three concentration camps, two slave labour camps and a death march. In September 1945, Hanna's eldest brother Isaak, by then a captain in the US Army in Germany, found their mother in a displaced persons' camp near Munich. She attributed her remarkable survival in part to the knowledge that 'my children were safe in England'.

Blima joined her children in England after the war, where Hanna grew up to become a teacher. She went on to lead an unusual and exciting life, living in London, Paris, India and Israel at various times. In her own words, 'Crazy stuff...

I don't like taking risks but I had opportunities.'

In Paris, Hanna says, 'I had the craziest love interest. I was mad. What a waste of a life – the Parisian man. I was young.' It is thought that her French *amour* was Guy Béart, Sephardi singer and TV presenter, father of actress Emanuelle Béart.

Later, Hanna spent time in India 'because of the man I was with', living in an ashram run by Bhagwan Rajneesh or, as Hanna calls him, 'the naughty one. He had a tremendous influence. I liked the guru.'

In the 1970s she lived in Israel. Working as a teacher of English, one of her more notable pupils was actor Topol. 'He was interested in getting the right accent. So, I was trying to teach him English pronunciation... He was a lovely man. He was special but what I liked was when he said that I wasn't very pretty but then in time he said, "You seem to be getting prettier" – this was when his English improved. He meant it. It's true. He was surrounded by beautiful women.'

Hanna has a great effect on everyone who meets her. 'I met [King] Charles – all the Kindertransport did. I gave him a Holocaust book; a woodcut book. He was very sweet.'

The impact of the Najmann family on Shoah education is wider still. Isaak (later known as John) was shocked by the lack of education about the Holocaust in Israeli schools and set up an educational achievement award to recognise good practice in this field in 1998. Following his death, his widow and children endowed the John Najmann Chair of Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem.



MEMORIES

Rabbi Rodney Mariner



Antony Godfrey was asked to give one of the addresses at the Shloshim service for Rabbi Mariner at Highgate Synagogue, marking the completion of 30 days of mourning. His words, summarised here, beautifully summed up the feelings of so many Belsize members.

All of us, hopefully, have friends and acquaintances, but much rarer are real pals. Those with whom we can share our intimate thoughts, our beliefs, our concerns, our controversial views and shortcomings, without judgement or disdain. For me, Rodney was that pal. He was part of my life, whether in joy or in sadness.

I must confess that when I went to shul it was principally to hear and relish his sermons. They were never disappointing – uplifting, informative, illuminating, amusing and not over-long. Rodney was not only tall in stature, but immense in so many other respects. He knew how to give comfort and solace to the sick, the dying and the bereaved. He had genuine compassion for all.

I consider it an enormous and humbling privilege that Rodney was not just my mentor, but such a close personal friend. But he would not forgive me if I didn't mention Sue. She has, quite simply, been remarkable, an absolute tower of strength throughout his final illness. Her devotion and support for him was constant and unwavering. What she was expected to undertake towards the end almost amounted to her becoming a trained paramedic. She undertook it nevertheless.

Some words that I wrote a few days after Rodney's funeral sum up how I felt then, and they remain the way I feel now.

- I miss my friend
- I miss his humour, his knowledge
- His acceptance
- I miss his warmth, his assurance
- His presence
- I miss his wisdom
- His smile, his welcome
- I miss his naughtiness
- And lack of haughtiness
- His humanity
- His calmness and vivacity
- I miss his charity
- And remarkable clarity
- I miss my friend
- I will miss him till my end

Naomi Stadlen shares her appreciation of our late Rabbi's humour

One reason why some of us love Rodney so much is because he made us laugh. His jokes were never antisemitic, although many 'Jewish' jokes are, he told us. Anthony, my husband, invited him to give a seminar on Jewish jokes at a meeting of psychotherapists. Rodney read through Sigmund Freud's book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and was shocked to find that many of Freud's jokes were anti-Semitic. However, Rodney's jokes weren't light or sentimental. Underlying them was his passionate fury at our failings. Something in his tone of voice worked to induce in us both guilt and a sense of his love, so he both challenged and encouraged us.

'A story is told...' he used to begin, and immediately the congregation, however large, was still. He would build up these stories with detailed character descriptions – we almost saw them as he spoke. This is an example, though it will seem flat on the printed page, without the tension in his voice. 'There was once a very unhappy king. His groans could be heard all over the palace. His courtiers wondered what to do. Nothing they thought of could make their king happy. So they called in a wise man and asked him if he could help. "The king needs a shirt," said the wise man. "If he can put on a shirt belonging to a really happy man, it will cure him from being unhappy." So the courtiers went round the kingdom, looking for a really happy man. They searched from the east of the kingdom to the west, and made their enquiries. They were told of a happy man here, and another there, and they went to visit each, but – mmmm! – when they got there and interviewed these happy men they always found something wanting. Then, after a year, they were told about a very happy man. He lived in the middle of a large forest, at the far end of the kingdom. They went to look for him, and in the end they found him. They could see at once how happy he was. He was a poor man with very few possessions, but he said the forest had everything he needed. So the courtiers told him about their quest, and he was very sympathetic. But of course he hadn't got a shirt.'

Rodney took over a congregation that was steeped in the atrocities of the Shoah. Rodney said he thought he had shocked some older members by showing that it was all right for them to laugh. He surely convinced old and young. Sue said that Rodney wanted us to remember him with a smile on our faces and I definitely do.

FAMILY HISTORY

Our emotional visit to Germany

Annette Nathan describes a special multi-generational trip

Following the atrocities committed on 7 October, there was a desire within the younger members of the Nathan family to rekindle knowledge of their roots and heritage. So on 19 August 2024, three generations of Nathans went for a 24-hour trip to the small town of Langenberg, now part of the city of Velbert, 45 minutes from Dusseldorf, Germany. There we were able to visit Nathan-Platz (Nathan Square), which was renamed 35 years ago to honour the memory of Betty and Adolf Nathan, grandparents of Tom and Dennis.

teacher, historian and friend of the family Wilfried Schmidt, gave a slide presentation of photographs and information about 8 generations of Nathans who had lived in Langenberg since 1797. Mannes Nathan, the first of the line, was a butcher, like most of the subsequent generations.

The following morning, there was a special ceremony in the square that was attended by Velbert's Mayor Dirk Lukrafka, members of various groups working for inclusion and against antisemitism, and the local press. Mayor Lukrafka said that

the town will always remember Betty and Adolf Nathan, and their sons Ernst and Walter who were fine, upstanding Germans. Adolf served in the First World War and Betty is remembered for her charity in giving milk from their cattle to the

sick every Friday. Betty and Adolf were murdered by the Nazis but their sons returned to their former homeland in 1945 as British soldiers: 'Overshadowed by the loss of their parents, the Langenberg of their childhood no longer existed. It is up to us to always keep the memory of them in mind.' The Mayor thanked us for our visit: 'You have chosen the path of remembrance and dialogue



Jacob Nathan with the Stolpersteine for his great-great-grandparents

to deal with the past – a dialogue with each other, but also with the people of the region of Velbert today.'

Tom spoke, in German, about the sadness that his grandparents never got to know their grandchildren, and how it was especially poignant that he and Dennis had returned with Adolf and Betty's great-grandchildren, and with Jacob, who is their great-great-grandson. Tom mentioned with pride that there are now more Nathans thriving today in Israel, the UK and the USA than prior to the Nazi regime.

The granddaughter of Annegret Bluhm, a good friend of Betty Nathan's, spoke about how her grandmother had taken Betty's prayer book and Kiddush cups for safekeeping before her deportation, and was able to return them to Ernst and Walter after the war. Dr Christian Wagner-Birmes from the group *Zeitlos* (Timeless) recounted the story of a 92-year-old woman from Langenberg, who as a small child had often visited Betty Nathan with her mother and admired a glass bowl in the Nathans' home. Betty gave the bowl to the little girl and it still sits on the windowsill in the nursing home where she now lives. Dennis spoke for us all when he said that none of us had expected such great interest in the history of the Nathan family eight decades after the tragic end of their grandparents. We all left Germany proud to be Jews and proud to be Nathans.



Front row: Tom, Annette, Jacob, Adam, Rosie, Dennis, Marion
Back row: Aimee, Daniel, Benji, Melanie

We intended to have a low-key, private visit. However, such is the love and respect for the family, that it was so much more than we had expected.

On the evening we arrived, we were hosted by a representative of the Mayor's Office and the local 'Active Against Antisemitism' alliance, who warmly welcomed us with a dinner. During the dinner,

NEWS FROM ABERNEIN MANSIONS N.W.3.

Dear Fellow Members

With the compression of festivals in October now well and truly in our posterior, the next big sing in Belsize Square is the Chanukah Market, then followed by Chanukah itself, going from Jeweltide into two Southend und Twenty Fife. Here in Abernein Mansions, we all look foreword to Chanukah. It is the high eightus of our year. At this time Mrs Klopstick likes to throw herself into the kitchen to make latkes und doeknuts. Unfortunately, they both taste the same, of potato, onions und jam, und require pliers to pull apart.

Once Chanukah is bypast we are well und trucefully in the New Year. I have already made big planes for January. Apart from tending to my button collection, I will be riding a book I have long been ponding. The title will be 'The Soho Trimming Industry, Past und Before'. I am expecting it to be a best-cellar despite Mrs Klopstick's disencouragement.

Nevertheless, I am relieved that my wife has decided not uptake snow sports this winter. Instead, she is going to spent time in the jim developing her speed-climbing skills. For this she needs to be very limbo und has to billed up the mussels in her legs, arms und figures. Sankfully, she is very much against taking stair-rods. Instead she is plumping up the iron.

It seems that Gross Britannia is on a downward squirrel into a black whole. I hope that the measurements taken by Surkia Starmer und Reechel Raves can upturn this declention. When I am riding this article I don't yet know what is going to be in the autumn bucket. Many inmates here are up in the arms in the taking away of their winter fewel allotment. But I keep telling them that with global warning just round the bend, they soon won't need heating any more.

With the best of intentions
Fritz Klopstick

ASK FRITZ

I have bean asked what I sink about the large reflux of immigration. We can never remember that we were refugees wons. So we have not the rite to deny the same statue to others. Some elderly inmates who are a bit vermarbled are asking if they will be imported. This is despite them being fully naturised since 70 years. I hope that they have excepted my personal insurance that they have nothing to fear, especially as those flights to Romania have been out ruled wons und four all.

SPORT

Realising a young footballer's dream

A sports scholarship funded by late Belsize Square member Lothar Weiss enabled a young footballer to attend the 2024 European Maccabi Youth Games. **Sophie Tabor** has written to thank the Synagogue.

I joined the Under 18 Maccabi girls football team late, yet was welcomed by all the girls with open arms and even wider smiles. I have made friends and memories that will last a lifetime. Representing Team GB with this amazing group of girls was an honour and an incredible experience.

The games started with a 2-0 win for Team GB against Team Netherlands. We had a tough loss in our game against the USA but our penultimate and final matches were close games with only one goal in it. We powered through and managed to bring home a bronze medal. Feeling elated would be an understatement and seeing how proud all our families, friends, and managers were of us was extremely rewarding and worth all the training we had put in.



I would like to give a huge thank you to the unbelievable management team who ensured that each player knew their important role and gave us a constant reminder of why football is called the beautiful game.

As much as these games were about the sports, the off-the-pitch moments were just as memorable. We had Shabbat and Havdalah services at the Lilleshall National Sports Centre and appreciated the greatness of a united Jewish community. We were able to honour and remember those taken hostage in Gaza with an empty table during Shabbat dinner and by carrying their photos on posters and flags. All of us are praying for their families and the safe return home of those remaining in captivity.

It was amazing to see so many young Jewish athletes from all over the world come together. Being part of Team GB was a privilege and I want to say a massive thank you to the Belsize Square Synagogue Trustees whose support allowed me to represent my country in the sport I love and have the best experience of my life.

RECENT EVENTS

7 OCTOBER HYDE PARK MEMORIAL



Many Belsize Square members joined thousands at the moving October 7 Memorial Event in Hyde Park on Sunday 6 October. The group leaving from the Synagogue included Rabbi Botnick and was led by Carol Cohen, our Head of Security, accompanied by Freya for canine support

SCHUBERT AND FRIENDS CONCERT



Ben Wolf conducting the Belsize Square professional choir and soloist Cesar Rodriguez Duran, accompanied by organist Mike Clayton

85TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT



Soprano Shira Karmon with the Wallace Ensemble conducted by Philip Keller at the Vienna Fin de Siècle concert on 22 September

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11.45AM - 4.00PM

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Sunday 10 November 7.30pm

Belsize Square Synagogue

Tickets: £15 including refreshments
Optional £5 for fish & chips

Tickets from the Synagogue Office
adam@synagogue.org.uk

SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm
Kristallnacht Service Friday 8 November at 6.45pm
Address by Eve Kugler BEM

Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids – Junior Shabbat Service
Saturday 2 November, 7 December & 4 January 2025
11.00am in the crèche for under 5s Service
11.00am in the library for 5–9-year-olds
11.30am Kids Kiddush

Often followed by a potluck lunch

Contact Richard on rgpollins@gmail.com
for more information

CHEDER AND BEIT MITZVAH

Sunday mornings 9.30am–12.30pm
Enquiries to Head: Caroline Loison
caroline@synagogue.org.uk

Half Term Sunday 3 November
End of Term Sunday 15 December

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP

Meetings take place on Sunday mornings in term-time. Programme will be in the News from the Square emails every Thursday. For further information, please contact Claire Walford claire.walford@yahoo.com

COMMUNITY NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

We extend a cordial welcome to: Juliette Bearman with son Harry | Hannah Bird | Elizabeth & Oliver Finegold with children Lottie & Jacob | Tania Kendall | Anthony Surkes | Susan Raingold | Michelle Grant | Ben Woolgar with daughter Charlotte | Elliot Smith | Lauren Smith Poppy Cohen | Asher Kenton & Tor Marie

BNEI MITZVAH

Mazal tov to: Laura Binns and Paul Epstein on Isobel's Bat Mitzvah which will take place on 7 December

DEATHS

We regret to announce the passing of:
Dudley Friedman on 29 August
Ruth Eisenfeld on 26 September

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

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SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

Mon–Thu: 9.00am–5.30pm
Friday: 9.00am–2.00pm

The office will be closed from 12.00pm on:

Wed 2 Oct to Mon 7 Oct
Fri 11 Oct to Mon 14 Oct
Wed 16 Oct to Mon 21 Oct
Wed 23 Oct to Mon 28 Oct

SYNAGOGUE LIBRARY

Open to members during office hours

RABBI

Rabbi Gabriel Botnick
rabbi@synagogue.org.uk

To book an in-person, video or telephone appointment with Rabbi Botnick, please email his PA Claire Austin:
claire@synagogue.org.uk

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During Synagogue office hours phone Synagogue

Evenings/weekends phone Calo's (Undertakers)
020 8958 2112

OUR CONGREGATION

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Congratulations are due to our BSS deputy Deborah Cohen, who was recently elected to the Board's Communities and Education Division. This division has a wide remit, working to engage Jewish communities in the UK on issues of social action, education and heritage, including providing resources on Israel and Judaism for use in schools across the country. Deborah pledged in her manifesto to promote

Our regular report from our Board of Deputies representatives **Deborah Cohen, Peter Strauss** and **Dilys Tausz**

the Disability Rights Commission and work more closely with health and social care charities, both those who are members of the BoD and those within the wider community. In these difficult times it is heartening to know that with the news of increasing flooding and famine, she will also be promoting interfaith work on the climate emergency with EcoPeace Middle East: www.ecopeaceme.org

Deborah will also continue on the Social Justice Committee, which she will chair during the coming triennium. It is good to have a member of our synagogue playing such an active role, both as a representative of the progressive movement on the BoD and as a woman at a time when the Executive is composed entirely of male Vice-Presidents. This is an opportune time to have a chat with Deborah if you have any concerns in areas covered by the Communities and Education Division.