



CELEBRATING

Our 85th anniversary

The conclusion of our anniversary year was marked with a packed Shabbat morning service on 1 March, when we were joined by the Mayor of Barnet, Tony Vorou, and the Deputy Mayor of Camden, Eddie Hanson. The following addresses were given by our Chairman and by Rabbi Botnick.

CHAIRMAN JACKIE ALEXANDER



Who would have thought that the Synagogue that was started by a handful of German Jewish refugees would have grown into this wonderful community?

As you will know, we are an independent synagogue. However, we do need to thank the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in

St John's Wood for giving those original refugees a room in which to hold Friday evening services in German, using the *Einheitsgebetbuch* prayer book.

You will have realised by now that we no longer conduct our services in German; we have our own prayer books with English translations. What may not be obvious is that we are a very accommodating congregation; over the years we have become used to understanding the various accents of our Ministers, who have all come from abroad. In total we are fortunate to have had five wonderful Rabbis, including Rabbi Botnick; one from Germany, one born in Poland, one Australian and two Americans. We have had six superb Cantors, including Cantor Heller. They came from such diverse places as Germany, Poland, South Africa, America,

Argentina and now, of course, Colombia via Sweden. As you can imagine the Hebrew always remained the same, but the English pronunciation... well, that is a different story.

For the first twelve years of its existence this community held services at 27 Belsize Park, then we moved to Buckland Crescent and moved again to ... Buckland Crescent but five doors away. Finally, we settled here at the Vicarage at 51 Belsize Square.

Of course, until we redeveloped the synagogue in 2010 there was never enough room for a High Holyday congregation and so we would close our sanctuary on those days and become peripatetic. We took our ark, Sefer Torah and Ner Tamid with us, to turn venues into synagogues. We were the classic Wandering Jews and probably the only synagogue in London that was closed for the High Holydays. I have been a member since I was a child and I can remember High Holyday services held at the Swiss Cottage Odeon, the Odeon cinema in Haverstock Hill and the Kilburn Gaumont cinema; then we changed from cinemas and went to the Grosvenor Rooms in Willesden (where, if the synagogue service was after the weekend, you had to avoid sitting too close to the bar which smelt strongly of beer, and where the carpets were permanently sticky); we went to the Decorium in Wood Green and even into part of Alexandra Palace.

Now we hold all our services here and we have our Hall next door for functions. It was built in 1973 and is still referred to by some as the 'New Hall'. We are fully egalitarian and we have a mixed professional choir, a community choir and a youth choir all accompanied by an organ. We have an Ashkenazi service with a Sephardi pronunciation – how much

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Our 85th Anniversary *continued from page 1*

more independent can you get? However, we proudly stick to our music, which, as Rabbi Botnick wrote in *News from the Square* recently, fully reflects our roots.

You will have gathered that I am proud of what we have become. A building and a service on their own do not make a community, but we make it one with our care for each other as an extended family; the welcome we give to everyone; our respect for our heritage; our desire to learn and to develop and our commitment to being Jewish.

RABBI GABRIEL BOTNICK



Rabbi Botnick started his sermon by referring to a meaningful message within the text of that week's Parsha. The Torah reading had begun a nearly two-month-long narration looking at the description,

building and accounting for the works that went into the Mishkan, the Tabernacle that wandered with the Israelites through the wilderness. David later brought it to Jerusalem and Solomon eventually built a more permanent structure, the Temple. The entire narrative had begun with God instructing Moses to tell the Israelites, 'Make for me a holy space.'

We have all this description of these items, the materials that went into them, and all the various labours that were needed to make them. We spend literally weeks reading about this over and over again. Why? What's so significant about the building of this Mishkan? Why do we spend more time focusing on this rather than on the story of the Exodus or on the story of giving the Torah and the Ten Commandments?

"By actively building a space together, God becomes present in our lives"

Rabbi Botnick spoke of Mordecai Kaplan, probably one of the most influential people in 20th-century Judaism, who had started out in the Orthodox world and founded the Young Israel movement of Orthodox synagogues in the USA. He then developed the concept of the Jewish Community Center, where a synagogue could be a gathering place for more than just prayer. It can be a place where you come together to have meals, learn, have wonderful events, and even work out – a place for Jew to live Jewishly

with one another. He went on to found Reconstructionist Judaism, a relatively small denomination primarily in the United States, but with ideas that are pervasive throughout the Jewish world.

In his seminal text, 'Judaism as a Civilization', Kaplan tried to rid Judaism of its authoritative concept of a distant, abstract God and make it much more about people. He said that's really what Judaism has always been about anyway – the people. Around the middle of his text, he shares his vision of this new idea of Judaism as a folk religion. He says that the significance of the traditional Jewish religion 'does not derive from the cognitive element of its God idea but from the conduct in which that idea has found expression.' This may not be the easiest concept to follow, but what he was saying, in essence, is that our faith is rooted not in the idea of God as such, but in the rites and customs that we've practised throughout history in acknowledgment of our God.

This is actually echoed by the continuation of that opening verse of the long Mishkan narrative: 'Make for me a holy space, and I, God, will dwell amongst you.' It's by doing something, by actively building a space together, that God then becomes present in our lives. The holy space isn't so much holy because it's where God lives; it's holy because God lives amongst the people. It's the people working together, contributing their money, their precious items, their time, and their skills, as they did for the Mishkan, that make the space holy. God isn't so much present in the Mishkan without us taking the steps to build that Mishkan and to practice our religious observances within it. It doesn't matter at all what you think God is. What matters is that our individual ideas of God have led us to build a beautiful and open community together. God lives in this space because we make this space holy by coming together.

For 85 years, people, originally German Jewish refugees but now from all over the world and many different backgrounds, have come together to make this a truly holy space. This is a unique, special and precious community. Every synagogue talks about being a warm and inviting community, but most of them aren't. We don't say that anywhere in our literature or on the plaques outside, but we truly are. This is a special community, and it's special because of the efforts of every single one of you, whether it is serving on the board as an honorary officer, sitting on a committee, helping run events, volunteering as a greeter or security, singing in the choir, playing the organ for us, or helping with the children. Each and every one of you has played a role in building this holy space, not just so you have a place to encounter the Divine, but so that others can benefit from that work as well. That is what makes this space so special. That is why we come together to congregate in this space – not so much because of God, but because of how we come together to experience something so much bigger than ourselves, which we might call the Divine. Whatever it is, it truly is special. It is a holy space, and it feels as if the Divine is dwelling amongst us because of each and every one of you.



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

BOARD OF DEPUTIES FEBRUARY FUNDRAISER

We would like to thank all who contributed to the Board of Deputies Crowdfunding weekend in February. Over £250,000 was raised for key Board initiatives and every gift was an investment in a brighter future for the Jewish community.

CURRENT BOARD INITIATIVES

The Board of Deputies President, Phil Rosenberg, has been actively seeking to encourage the BBC to change its editorial policy regarding the conflict in Gaza and to remedy the serious deterioration in the health and well-being of Jewish staff in the organisation. He set a deadline of Pesach for the necessary measures to be taken. On a more positive note, the Home Secretary's announcement about measures to protect places of worship under the new Crime and Policing Bill is most welcome and is an excellent outcome of our calls for such legislation.

WHY THE WORLD ZIONIST CONGRESS MATTERS – AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

The first Zionist Congress was held in Basel in 1897 and ever since it has been held every four or five years, with elected delegates from all over the world.

The next Congress will be held in Jerusalem in October this year and the United Kingdom will be sending 19 delegates. That is 19 people who can vote on how the WZC budget of over a \$1 billion of funding annually will be spent – so the delegates' impact is substantial. This is why it is so important that you, your family and friends should register to vote in the elections for the UK delegates. Registration is open until 11 May and online voting is between 8 and 12 June. ***News from the Square* will provide further information including how to register and how to vote.**

If you need any further convincing about the importance of these elections, this extract from a Times of Israel article by Herbert Block, who is organising the elections in the USA, sums it up: *There are parties that want to use funding for religious pluralism, for Haredi institutions, for developing Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria, for a two-state solution, and for just about every viewpoint in the Jewish world ... The vote will influence decisions on everything from Israel's post-October 7 rebuilding, to Zionist education, to security for Jewish institutions in the Diaspora, to supporting vulnerable members of Israeli society. This is the opportunity for people to vote for what they think is important.*

YOUNG MINDS TRIUMPH AT THE SUPPER QUIZ

The ever-popular annual supper quiz, held on 2 March, was a rip-roaring success. The Hall was packed with 12 tables containing over 120 keen quizzers.

Falafel Feast supplied a delicious supper, providing vital sustenance while the teams contemplated the picture rounds. These featured 50 buildings from around the world to identify, and a series of 'rebus' (picture code) or emoji clues, identifying a list of well-known companies to those who could crack the code.

The subsequent rounds were equally entertaining and challenging, including one of short musical snippets relating to London, a tough sports round and a Clues for the Jews round.

It was a close-run thing for much of the evening but, eventually, long-established team The Cordwainers just lost out to a team of our excellent '20-something' members. As several members of the former team are parents of the latter, pride was maintained and there was much joy at the thought that the intellectual future (or at least trivia quiz mastery) of our shul is in such safe hands!

The quiz was brilliantly written and conducted by Adam Hurst, Simon Cutner and Karen Sanders, with vital support in organising the event from Sophie Cutner, Sam Sanders, the shul office team and on the night from caretaker Mark and security guard Christian. Everyone who enjoyed such a fun evening will be extremely appreciative of the hard work they put in, and of the impressive £1,700 that the event raised for the Synagogue.



Adam Hurst, Karen Sanders and Simon Cutner hard at work running the quiz – with desirable prizes on show behind them!

VE Day at Belsen Concentration Camp

On the 80th anniversary of VE day, David Horwell presents an extract from a letter from his father, Arnold Horwell, to his wife Suse on VE Day 1945. They were very early members of our Synagogue and Arnold was a long-serving member of the Board.



Suse Horwell in 1943



Arnold Horwell in 1944

Born in Berlin in 1914, Arnold was the last Jew in Germany to gain a PhD (in economics) and he escaped to England in 1939. He and my mother Susanne (Suse) were married in our community in 1943 by Rabbi Jacob J Kokotek, temporarily visiting from Liverpool, who later became our Synagogue's rabbi. After internment at the start of World War 2, Arnold had enlisted as one of 'His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'. He progressed through the army ranks to lieutenant and was promoted to captain in 1945. As an officer with a higher degree and interpreter training, he was recruited to 102 Control Section, a small liaison group of officers that was drafted in to manage effective administration in very difficult situations.

Belsen camp in northern Germany was liberated by the British on 15 April 1945. The soldiers discovered scenes of hell, with approximately 60,000 prisoners, Jews, Russian POWs and others, most of them starved and seriously ill, and another 10,000 corpses lying around the camp unburied. The inmates had received no food at all for a week. They continued to die,

initially at a rate of 500 per day. The starving were unable to consume normal food: the soldiers had to be stopped from offering them their rations. The dead were buried in mass graves. In addition to army personnel, major support came from Red Cross and Quaker relief workers, Jewish military chaplains and a Medical Research Council team who introduced special diets to assist the recovery of those who had not already succumbed either to starvation or to disease. Valuable assistance was also given by 100 medical students, recruited from London teaching hospitals.

102 Control Section arrived at Belsen on 29 April, a fortnight after the camp's liberation. Their task was to administer the camp, organise the rehabilitation and relocation of survivors and manage the camp's closure. Arnold became Assistant Camp Commandant. His daily letters to Suse present a vivid picture of his life before, during and after Belsen, but here are extracts from just one letter, on VE day, 8 May 1945.



Burning of the last hut at Belsen on 21 May 1945

VE Day – 8 May 1945

My only dearest darling –

Now, this is VE day, and what a wonderful day it is – sunshine all day, and hardly a cloud in the sky. Just now numerous little clouds are floating over my head – the hundreds of puffs of 54 Bofors guns, firing the victory salute. And the noise – the table was shaking so much that I had to stop writing. Actually I didn't feel so much like VE all day; when I got up this morning, my legs felt so wobbly [from mixing large amounts of alcohol in celebrations the night before] that I went straight to bed again ...

Well, dearest, I felt very, very happy last night, which was not only due to champagne or brandy! Darling, it is a great thing that we have survived to see the end of all this – the Hitler regime and all the vileness, cruelty and wickedness it stood for, the war, at home and over here. I was happy in a feeling of overflowing gratitude. And the company around me contributed so much to my happiness, the fact that in this unit, amongst officers of standing and understanding, not one I could not call my friend. There were only two guests in the Mess – [Isaac] Levy and [Leslie] Hardman [the two Jewish army chaplains, who did amazing work]. This mere fact, that one should be happy together in a Mess, where there is no sign of discrimination, on the contrary, where the Jewish padres were the most honoured guests, made me realise it again: it was worthwhile to be in this war, it is an honour and distinction to wear this uniform. [...] And a third thing contributed to my happiness: the fact that the Great Day should be spent by me in this Camp – surrounded by the living proof that thousands of lives were saved, thousands of tormented bodies given comfort and healing. The phrase 'That's what we are fighting for' never had so deep a meaning for me as last night. [...]

[Later he continued] I think we must be the only unit in the British Liberation Army which worked today (and will carry on tomorrow!) ... [They listened to Churchill's speech and then at 6pm they had 'a great Victory Parade, all guns and vehicles'] The procession returned, all vehicles covered with lilac, green branches and flowers by the internees; you could not imagine more moving scenes. [...] There they were leaning out of the windows [of the Hospital Block], men and women, wrapped in their blankets, and throwing flowers as the lorries and guns passed by, tears streaming from their faces. The Russian POWs provided a guard of honour for the Commander. [...]

Tonight I feel in a similar mood to last night's (but I was more careful with drinks!). I listened to the King's speech – it was as painful and breath-taking as ever. Yes, darling, we have won this war! [...] We went over to 'celebrate' with the medical students. My first experience with British young people. We sang a lot of songs... and there were some most talented young lads who recited the most obscene poems I have ever heard in all my life (no wonder, amongst doctors-to-be!) [...] The mess is still full of people. Somebody just brought some more champagne in; I'll refrain myself, bed is my next order. Next to me is sitting Dr Meiklejohn (the chief dietician, who supervises the scientific aspect of our students' activities), he is delightfully tipsy, in a very shy and charming way.

And now good night, dearest.

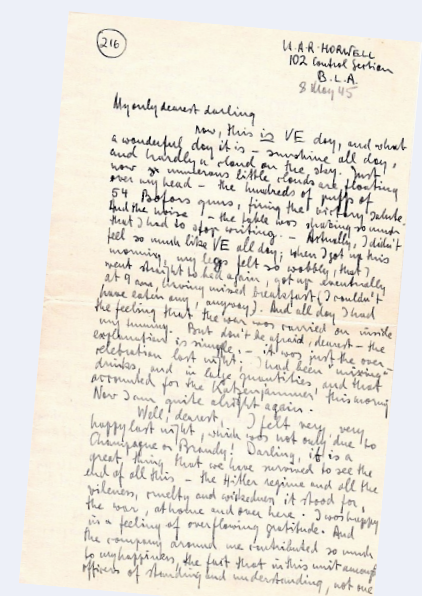
All yours – Arnold

[There is a short addendum, written before the letter was despatched the next morning – expressing love on their engagement anniversary]

AFTER VE DAY

102 Control Section's work of administering the camp and rehabilitating and relocating the inmates continued. On 16 May Arnold wrote 'Col. Bird (Commander) has just been in and congratulated me: "Horwell, great news for us all. Your scheme has been approved by 2nd Army." It was decided to institute a new 'nationality': Stateless. Every Displaced Person, everybody in this Camp, who either does not want to return to his country or, as a Jew, doesn't want to be bundled together with his Polish or German etc. compatriots, will be given the choice to register as 'stateless', and will be taken to special Jewish transit camps [...] I count this as one of the greatest days of my life.'

The evacuation of the Camp continued and because of the risk of spread of typhus and other diseases, it was decided to destroy the whole camp. Between two and six huts per day were demolished and then burned down, or just incinerated as they stood using flamethrowers. The final hut was burned to the ground, with some ceremony, on 21 May and 102 Control Section departed from Belsen Camp towards the end of the month. Almost 30,000 survivors had been re-housed, but 13,000 inmates' lives could not be saved following liberation.



A copy of the original letter

SYNAGOGUE SNAPSHOTS

Simon Cutner

*Executive recruitment director, squash club chairman
and former volunteer counsellor for Childline*



What's your favourite thing about your work?

The most rewarding part of my work, by far, is giving the good news to a candidate that they have been successful in the role they've been interviewing for. A permanent role is such an important part of someone's identity and life. It's a

fantastic feeling to contribute and have a positive impact on their journey.

In addition to my professional role, I spend many hours a week as the Chair of Southgate Squash and Racketball Club, my local club, where I've applied the blueprint of my years on Belsize Square's board to create a transparent and inclusive environment, where members have the opportunity to lead or assist on various projects, ensuring everyone feels valued and involved. It's rewarding to foster an environment where people can perform well and get involved both in the game and in the club activities.

For six years from 2017, I volunteered as a Childline counsellor for at least one shift a week at the NSPCC Head Office in London. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, where I had the opportunity to provide support and a listening ear to young people during challenging moments in their lives. I continued as a key worker through the particularly difficult lockdown period, ensuring this vital service remained available when it was needed most. It's a role I look back on with pride and I have no doubt that I'll return to Childline at some point in the future, bringing the same commitment to making a difference.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Easy! It's having to let a candidate know that they haven't been successful – that's always tough. Delivering bad news is never easy, especially when someone has put in so much effort. However, being able to offer constructive feedback can help them improve and get closer to their goal next time, which is always a silver lining.

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

Football VAR operator! I'd spend that whole day dramatically rewinding plays, zooming in unnecessarily and taking extra-long to make decisions just to build suspense. Also, I'd randomly overturn a goal just to see the manager lose his mind on the sideline. Pure entertainment! Oh wait – hang on – that's what happens already!

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

My wife Sophie was a member when we first met and I started coming to services with her. Being from an orthodox shul background, not having to park around the corner and walk the last bit was strange at first! However, I quickly grew to love the egalitarian attitude, the music (especially the organ) and the overall warmth and friendliness of the community. Once we decided to marry, Belsize was the natural choice – it felt like home.

What's your favourite festival?

Pesach. I love the tradition of the Seder nights, gathering with family and friends, singing, eating and drinking together. What's not to love about a festival that combines good food, great company and meaningful tradition?

Where do you like to sit in shul?

Looking towards the bimah, I prefer to sit on the right wing, middle-ish – just like Arsenal's Saka!

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF RETURNS

The Regent' Park Open Air Theatre production of *Fiddler on the Roof* triumphed at the 2025 Olivier Awards, with 13 nominations in total and wins for Best Musical Revival, Best Set Design and Best Sound Design. Now the production is returning for eight weeks at the Barbican Theatre, from 24 May to 19 July – with no risk of the audience

getting soaked by rain! Adam Dannheisser, nominated for the Olivier Best Actor award and cousin of two Belsize members, will be returning to star as Tevye. Seats are selling fast – if you missed *Fiddler* last summer, or if you want to enjoy the five-star experience again, book soon!



Photo by Marc Brenner

NEWS FROM ABERNEIN MANSIONS NW.3.

Dear Fellow Members

It never ceases to amaze me how time passes so repeatedly. For me the hole year is flying away. Vile you will be reading these worts in Mai, I am riding them in the Eyes of Marsh. I just hope there have bean no erse-scattering news in the meantime. Eggttually, I have stopped washing the news be course I sink much off it has bean infatuated by IA und miss-presented by most off the mediums. In this respect Mrs Klopstick is a pie-on-ear. She became so discustard with the baised news reports, she wowed not to wash oder reed it ever again, und that was in 1987.

I on my other hand, knead to keep my figure on the pulse off world advents. This must be the jounalismus in me. Unfortunaytely, it is all so very deep pressing. I feel so sorry for the jungsters of today, who will have to put up with this much longer then us olders hear in the mansions.

On the brider side, we are looking now forward to Schavuos. Those who are not going to synagogue will be glood to our big screen watching Belsize Life. Then we will have our diary meal. This year we will have a long scheese bored, off scheeses from all und sunday. Mrs Klagenheim is going to re-introduce us to her fontdue. Last year she put the boiling scheeses into a shina bowel witch split down the middle und the hot scheese schpilt over the dining table und onto the lounge flour.

But this festival is not only about sticky carparts, it is off cause ware we celebrate the decent from the mountain off Moses bringing the Ten Commendments. I hope that in my live I have managed to obey them all at won time oder another. Certainly, I have never covered my neighbours wive und I am heppy to rewheel that, as far as I know, no won has yet covered Mrs Klopstick.

With the best of intentions
Fritz Klopstick

ASK FRITZ

In reasoned weeks my post back has been full with people's warries. Many are frightful for what the future will bring. I say change the future und take a leave from Mrs Klopstick's book und positively do some sing. My wive is at this concise moment on her neinth hour bouncing on a trampoline for a green sharity. She wants to do twentyfore non stopping. More should follow in her footsteps.

Remembering Rabbi Rodney J Mariner z"l

*An evening of memories and reminiscences
in words and music*



Sunday 22nd June, 7.30pm
followed by refreshments

Belsize Square Synagogue, NW3 4HX

RABBI PREVEZER'S PARSHA CLASS

Join Belsize Square's new in-person class with Rabbi Rose Prevezer, taking a magnifying glass to the weekly Torah portion. This term we'll be going on a wild literary ride through the books of Bemidbar and Devarim. Plagues! Talking donkeys! The sisterhood of the traveling Israelites! All this and so much more.



Each week we will examine sections of the Torah text alongside supplementary sources from the Jewish canon including classical and modern rabbinic commentaries, midrash, Talmud, and hasidic philosophy.

All levels welcome. No previous experience or Hebrew knowledge is required. Drop in; join when you can.

Wednesday evenings from 7-9pm
– in person at the synagogue

SERVICES

Friday evenings at 6.45pm
Saturday mornings at 10.00am

Kikar Kids – Junior Shabbat Service

Saturday 3 May, 7 June, 5 July
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

SHAVUOT

1st Eve: Sunday 1 June 6.45pm
1st Day: Monday 2 June 10.00am
2nd Eve: Monday 2 June 6.45pm
2nd Day: Tuesday 3 June 10.00am including Yizkor

CHEDER AND BEIT MITZVAH

Sunday mornings 9.30am–12.30pm

Enquiries to Head: Caroline Loison
caroline@synagogue.org.uk

Start of term Sunday 27 April
Half Term Sundays 25 May & 1 June
End of Term Sunday 6 July

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP

Meetings take place on Sunday mornings in term-time.

Programme and Zoom joining details for each meeting 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:
Hannah Steinmaz | Maya Golan with daughter Alex
Madeleine Somer | Noah Libson | Max Cutner
Isabelle Jacobson | William Gee | Aleksina Kallunki
Jonathan Prevezer | Venita Eden | Marika Cobbold
Alexander Simon | Elizabeth Simun-Janson
Benjamin Hurst

BNEI MITZVAH

Mazal tov to:

Orly Orbach on the Bar Mitzvah
of her son Leon on 10 May 2025
Sarah Roeder & Richard Wald on the Bar Mitzvah
of their son Max on 17 May 2025
Eve & Julian Harris on the Bat Mitzvah
of their daughter Rosie on 7 June 2025
Daniella Peled on the Bar Mitzvah
of her son Adam on 14 June 2025
Jessica & Simon Wantman on the Bat Mitzvah
of their daughter Isla on 28 June 2025

SYNAGOGUE HELP LINES

BELSIZE SQUARE SYNAGOGUE

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SYNAGOGUE OFFICE HOURS

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

SHAVUOT OFFICE HOURS

The Office will be closed
on Monday 2 June and
Tuesday 3 June

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
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FUNERALS

During Synagogue office
hours phone Synagogue

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

OUR CONGREGATION

Editor: Alex Antscherl
Associate Editor:
David Horwell

Copy date for the
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9 June 2025
Contributions to
alexantscherl@me.com or
the Synagogue office

DEATHS

Marion Stenham on 12 February
Ian Rosenfeld on 21 February
George Summerfield on 31 March
Ernest Kochmann on 12 April
Hanna Nyman on 13 April



STONE SETTING

The stone setting for
Rabbi Rodney Mariner
will take place at
Edgwarebury Lane Cemetery
on Sunday 13 July at 2.30pm