

September 2018

UNITY News



PRESIDENTS' NEWS

Our annual Walter Hoffman outing was to **Willesden Cemetery**, a fascinating and prestigious location. The day of our tour was also the day of the annual AJEX ceremony, which commemorated British Jews, killed in action in WW2 with no known graves. There is a Commonwealth War Graves plot where some 20 soldiers are buried and a pavilion commemorating about 100 British Jews killed in action in South Africa. The service was attended by the local MP, the Mayor of Brent, the Deputy Lieutenant of Middlesex and serving Jewish servicemen and women in uniform. Kaddish and El Moleh Rachamim were said and it was a very moving occasion.

This was followed by our organised tour, which included the graves of a variety of personalities: artists, entertainers, businessmen and women, politicians and famous families. We were led round the cemetery by Corinne Van Colle, a delightful and knowledgeable guide

Pam Fox gave us a very informative and entertaining talk about the history of the Jews of Golders Green. She had researched the early days and how the Underground development facilitated the growth of the community with prime movers such as Rabbi Munk, Martin Sulzbacher (father of our late Brother Max) and Sidney Bloom. Between them they founded a synagogue, a Judaica bookshop and a restaurant, the basic infrastructure for the thriving community of today.

Next, we had a lovely, **sunny, afternoon in the Levins' garden.** They organised a beautiful, summer's day. We all sat outside, Henny had enough shade and even improvised an extra umbrella by using their Washing umbrella covered with a bed sheet held up with washing pegs. The garden looked superb despite the lack of rain and we all enjoyed a delicious tea followed by chocolate ice creams which were very popular. It was lovely to catch up and chat with everyone and Henny provided the sale of homemade jam and chutneys to swell Lodge funds.

Tony Zendle provided us with a fascinating and thought-provoking talk on Ports and Port Jews. The first Jewish merchants were the Radanites who operated in trade between the Christians and Islamic Worlds during 500-1,000 AD. The Port Jews concept describes Jews who were involved in the seafaring and maritime economy of Europe. Jews often arrived in ports as refugees from the Inquisition and expulsion of Jews from Iberia. Later they were joined by the Ashkenazi Jews. They were allowed to settle in port cities as merchants and granted permission to trade in ports such as Amsterdam, London, Trieste and Hamburg etc. Their connections with the Jewish diaspora and their expertise in maritime trade made them of particular interest to trading governments of Europe. Moreover, Jewish family tradition was built upon business, safety and also honesty so they were trusted. The communities also built synagogues in the ports.

In the lively Question Time which followed Tony confidently dealt with a wide range of questions. He has also written a book about the topic.

Thank you to all the hosts and hostesses: Shoshanah Hoffman, Henny and Michael Levin and Hilary and Tony Sinclair

Let me finish by passing on your Board and Council's good wishes for a healthy and Happy New Year and well over the Fast.

Hilary Sinclair and Doreen Natoff

News and Programme from First Unity Lodge

EVA RETKIN A LIFE

Born in Budapest, Hungary on 25 July 1929, Éva Retkin (née Fischer), resolved, at the age of 18, that she would travel to England to learn English.

It was a cold, damp and foggy November day in 1947 when Éva, clutching her newly acquired UK Domestic Permit, landed at Heathrow Airport. Alone and barely able to communicate, had Éva had sufficient funds remaining, she would have taken the next plane home.



By the time Éva had saved enough to return, it was Spring and she found herself in love with all that was London. All the more fortunate as a letter had recently arrived from her father bringing her news of a Communist uprising in Hungary. Éva was told to stay in Eng-

land as it was no longer safe to come home.

At home, having been persecuted by the Nazis for being a Jew, Éva's father was now being hounded by the Communists for being an industrialist. Éva's father, mother and sister were making plans to escape. Leaving Hungary was never going to be easy. It would be another nine years before Éva would see her family again.

Back in London, Éva started working as a hospital orderly at a salary of £4 per week (before tax). To earn a little extra, she took a second job threading pearls. Life became more absorbing when she began working for the restaurateur Madame Prunier and later the model agency Marjory Molyneux.

A last-minute change to a social arrangement one evening led Éva to Maccabi and to her first encounter with her future husband, Harry. It was 1953 and they married that same year. The couple bought their first home in 1955 and had their first child, Brian in 1959, followed a year later by their daughter, Caroline.

Despite looking after two children, Éva forever felt the need to do more. Harry, who lectured in mathematics, suggested teaching, as it would fit in with the school holidays. Unbeknown to her at the time, education and more specifically teaching children to read, would become Éva's passion: something that would come to dominate her life. Éva believed her success in this field - achievements acknowledged by colleagues, school inspectors, the press and even politicians - was due, in part, to her unhappy childhood experiences at school, where she said she had always been made to feel inadequate. As a result, Éva was determined that

the children in her class should be confident and happy. Teaching children to read became so much a part of her life she used to carry her newspaper cuttings around only too pleased to show anyone and everyone who demonstrated even the slightest interest in her "Read in a Week" Scheme.

Éva and Harry became grandparents in 1980 and again in 1982 when Caroline's children, Adam and Emma were born.

Sadly, in March 2003 following a lengthy and exceptionally brave fight, Harry succumbed to cancer. It was a heartbreaking and devastating time for the family. Éva was determined to maintain her energetic, wholehearted and larger than life personality. She remained unstoppable in her desire to see her family succeed.

Éva was fortunate to have many friends. They were an essential part of her life. She constantly looked forward to and enjoyed immeasurably the numerous social events she attended. Gatherings at B'nai B'rith First Unity Lodge, After 8, The Music Group, LJW and the Holocaust Centre to name but a few, gave her life real meaning and purpose. Éva would always speak passionately of the people that she felt she was so fortunate to know.



As the years progressed, Éva found herself a great grandmother to two boys and three girls. Then, on 14 April 2014, Éva became grandmother to Brian's first child, Alexandra. On Valentine's day 2017, Éva, once more became a grandmother as she welcomed the birth of Brian's second child, Harry.

Éva passed away peacefully on 16 June 2018. Beautiful, unique and irreplaceable, she is deeply missed by all her family and friends.

Brian and Caroline

LOCAL GROUP MEETINGS

Pictured here are a few of the members of the regular 'Edgware Group' of First Unity Lodge which is amongst many that we host around our patch of London. It is an intimate affair where group members, some of whom are regulars at main meetings and others who can only attend occasionally, come together, chat around the tea table and enjoy an afternoon or evening in an informal atmosphere.



THANK YOU

I would like to thank everyone in the Lodge who has sent me good wishes either before or after my recent hip operation and for the lovely orchid, which has pride of place on our sideboard.

I am recovering well and will soon, I hope, be back at meetings.
With every good wish,

Jo Bieber

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OUR FAMILY - THE LODGE

To all of our members who have not been well over the last few months, we send you good wishes for a healthier future. We are just a phone call away if there is any help or comfort we, as a Lodge through our Welfare Committee, can help you with.

THIS ENGLAND – THEN AND NOW

We were traveling around the Cotswolds this summer and spent our last day in Woodstock, famous for Blenheim Palace, ancestral home of the Churchill family. It's a lovely town with attractive side streets off the now-busy main road. One can only imagine what it was like before the motor car. Even in 1942, it must have been a quiet, elegant English haven, away from the sounds of war and the shrieking air raid sirens evident in the country's major conurbations, which always give me the shivers when I hear them.

Woodstock is on the edge of the Cotswolds, an area where I was born 76 years ago in the hamlet of Freeland in the Borough of Long Handborough, between Witney and Blenheim Palace.

It may sound strange, even pathetic, but being Jewish, the son of German refugees called Kurt and Edeltraud, I have always been proud of being born in the English countryside, near the Universities of Oxford and the wool trading town of Witney, instead of London, Birmingham, Bradford or Manchester where most children of immigrants were and are born.

Somehow it made me feel more "English" – though of course my German name always counted against me. "Bieber? That's not an English name is it?" A constant refrain in job interviews. "No, my parents came to this country before the war." "Jewish?" "Yes." "Ah." In the end, I was taken on as a trainee, in a famous advertising agency run by a Jewish gentleman, Maurice Napper. I will be eternally grateful to him. Now Justin Bieber has come along, things have changed – just 60 years too late for me! Now its "Are you related to Justin Bieber?" "No, sorry, I'm not!"

This feeling of "Englishness," despite an unconscious uneasiness that somehow I didn't belong, was thrown into sharp relief when I read about the latest Labour take on anti-Semitism, whereby criticising Jews for dual loyalties would not be considered anti-Semitic. Really? What planet do these people live on?

How did my mother get to Freeland? Well, during the War, Queen Mary's Maternity Home in Hampstead was evacuated to Freeland House, donated to the state by the daughter of Lord and Lady Stonehaven and her husband, a mega rich former Australian sheep farmer. My mother traveled there by coach, together with other expectant mums. It must have been quite an adventure for them all.

Jo and I visited Freeland House this summer as it was on the way to Woodstock. Whilst I was taking pictures of the frontage, from the 100 metre driveway, a security man asked if he could help. "I was born here I said". "Well, come on inside" he replied "and I'll show you around". So in we went, up stone steps, through an imposing doorway and into a beautiful wood-paneled hall with a magnificent staircase. What my mother must have thought when she arrived there, coming from a one bedroom furnished flat off the

Finchley Road, to this Gothic Revival stately home, goodness knows. The rooms on the first and second floors were equally, elegantly impressive. Wow – I was born here, I thought. Amazing!

We then had a look at the grounds surrounding the house. It must have been a real pleasure, sitting in those gardens, with the June sun beating down, the buzz of the bees, the fresh smell of the English countryside replacing the smoke and grime of London. No sirens, no bombs, just peace and quiet far away from the reality of a war-torn city. An English idyll. My birthplace.

Freeland House is now a nursing and residential care home "a beautiful place to call home a period residence set in beautiful gardens" according to the brochure. I could well go there to see out my final days. It would be idyllic: but would I want to?

The emergence of the hard left, neo-Marxist Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn and advised by the deeply anti Israel Seamus Milne has led me to re-assess my situation. My "Englishness". Seamus Milne incidentally, is on record as saying that he supports the "East German Model". A government that shot citizens trying to escape and where, on the streets of East Berlin, you could hear the constant noise of loudspeakers spouting anti-Zionist propaganda. If, according to Labour, it is not anti-Semitic to accuse me of dual loyalty (which is plainly nonsense) is this country, England, somewhere I want to continue to live in if these people ever actually formed a Government?

Mesut Özil, the Arsenal and German-born international Moslem footballer, has accused the German football authorities of racism and has also been the recipient of vicious hate mail since Germany got knocked out of the World Cup. He has remarked that "If we win I am German. If we lose, I am an immigrant".

He's right. The same principle applies to the Jews. Except that we never win. I don't think I want to live in a country ruled by Jeremy Corbyn's mob. And, if anyone thinks this is a political point of view which shouldn't be aired in a Lodge magazine, I beg to differ. It's simply a matter of morality and basic decency.

Whatever has become of this country, this England, which I have always considered home? Well, it's not really home, is it. It's just a place I happened to be born in and just happen to live in.....for the time being at least.

Charles Bieber

OUR ANNUAL SUMMER PARTY

A party with no agenda just sunshine, hot and cold drinks, cake and fruit and, of course, chit-chat was enjoyed by 26 of our members in the lovely heat parched garden of the Levins.





B'nai B'rith First Unity Lodge



Joint Presidents: The Quartet. email: firstunity@hotmail.co.uk

The Unity Lecture

given by

Jeremy Havardi

Director BBUK London Bureau of International Affairs

Venue:

London NW11

Sunday 18 November 2018

8.00pm

Jeremy will focus on the plight of many religious communities across the Middle East, Kurds, Copts, Baha'i, Ahmadis, Jews in Iran, Christians in Iraq and PA controlled areas and others.

They are united by facing discrimination, persecution and violence. What better symbol of unity than to invite some representative groups of these faiths to attend the lecture, as they are united by a common desire to highlight the issues that their communities are facing.

Supporting minorities is also part of B'nai B'rith's remit.

Members and friends of First Unity and other B'nai B'rith Lodges are most welcome to join us for this special event. Entrance is free. Refreshments will be served.

Please book your places with Marion Summerfield: