

THE NEW WEST END SYNAGOGUE, 1879-2004

An abridged version of the lecture delivered by Elkan Levy BA MHL,
Past President of the United Synagogue and son of the late Rev Raphael Levy,
on Sunday 11th July 2004



It is a somewhat strange and very moving experience for me to speak to you this evening on the history of the New West End Synagogue and actually to do so in this room which for me has a lot of memories. When I was a child, one of my very good friends was Victor Roth. His father was the shamas, he lived upstairs and we used to play cricket together on Shabbat afternoon and if the weather was bad we would play in this room. So it has a number of very curious memories.

There is an old Jewish custom that you can dedicate a talk to "le'illui nishmat" to the memory of certain people and I want to dedicate this talk this evening to the memory of my parents, the Reverend Raphael Henry Levy and Mrs Celia Deborah Levy, who came to this synagogue in 1946, and served it with love and devotion for the rest of their lives.

This synagogue was one of the first really major projects that the United Synagogue undertook. I have used the phrase in the past that the United Synagogue was the Anglican Church, Jewish division. Jews had become fully emancipated; the big struggle of the 19th century was for English Jews to have full civic rights. When Baron Lionel de Rothschild took his seat as the first Jewish MP

in July 1858 it was for the community as if the Messiah had arrived, and they therefore developed a specifically English form of Judaism. That is why even those ministers in the United Synagogue such as Simeon Singer who had rabbinical diplomas were known as "The Reverend." That is why the clergy always wore canonicals, even during the week. That is why they always wore clerical collars. That is why some of them even on occasion appeared in gaiters. It was not an aping of non-Jewish customs; it was a statement with great pride that Judaism had become a socially acceptable religion in late Victorian English society.

Jews were moving to the west of London and there was a real need for a new synagogue on what they described in those days as "the north side of the inhospitable park." The man who picked up this challenge and ran with it was Samuel Montagu, Banker, MP and later a peer of the Realm, monetary theorist, devout Jew, anti Zionist, who took very seriously his religious duties. He took the front row seat in the left hand block nearest the Ark and because he was a large man he had the arm rest in the middle removed so that he could occupy two seats. 125 years later it remains exactly that way.

When the synagogue was opened, they were very particular about whom they were going to appoint as clergy. In November 1878, that is 5 months before the shul opened, a meeting of members resolved to appoint as their preacher and second reader a brilliant English-born minister, aged 33, called Simeon Singer who had then served 12 years as the minister of the Borough Synagogue, south of the Thames. Subsequently Singer took a rabbinical diploma from Vienna, and often sat on the Beth Din as a Dayan, but refused the title Dayan and refused the title of Rabbi. If you look at the title page of the Singers Prayers Book it says The Reverend Simeon Singer on the English page; if you read the Hebrew page it actually says "HaRav".

He was quite an interesting and innovative man. He started by preaching once a fortnight, but he was such a good preacher that at the request of his congregation he started to preach weekly. He developed a system of prison visiting and on at least one if not two occasions actually had the gruesome task of attending Jews who were being executed for murder. He is the one who seems to have instituted the idea of having a sermon under the Chuppah at weddings. He certainly instituted children's' services which as far as I can tell started for Anglo Jewry in this shul, and he also had a reputation for having a very pleasant singing voice and he would often daven Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur.

Singer was a Zionist and it was in his house that Theodore Herzl met the leaders of the London Jewish community when he came to England in 1896. His lasting memorial of course was the Authorized Daily Prayer Book – "Singers", the Englishman's Siddur. It is a remarkable piece of work. The Hebrew text is based largely upon Avodat Yisrael by a continental scholar called Seligman Baer, but the translation is done in the sort of high Anglican English that related to Victorian Jews. If you have ever wondered why Singers prayer book is the size it is, because there is no other siddur anywhere in the world that is that size, and if you have ever wondered why the first edition has a dark blue cover and why it has that red colouring on the edges, the answer is very simple. It was designed deliberately to look like the Book of Common Prayer, because whether the insides were Jewish or Christian, that was what an Englishman's prayer book looked like in 1890. One should also remember that the same period, from about the mid 1890's up to about 1911, saw the development of the Routledge Machzorim, and Routledge was the publishing house that was

owned by the Franklin family who were members of this shul and Herbert Adler who was one of the leading movers in the publication of Routledge was also a member, so the New West End is responsible not only for Singers but also for the Machzorim.

As reader and administrator the members appointed the Reverend Marcus Haines, also a young man who they filched from the Western Synagogue which was then in St Albans Place, just off Tottenham Court Road. Haines was elected as reader and administrator. He had a reputation for being a beautiful Chazan, a good musician and he served from 1879 until his health began to fail in 1892. In 1893 he died.

From the very beginning the director of music was D M Davis. He was a composer, he was responsible for the first edition of what we call the Blue Book which is the United Synagogue manual of synagogue music and he doubled up on Sunday as the organist at St Georges, Hanover Square. There was always a very strong musical tradition at the New West End. The traditional tunes for each festival were scrupulously honoured. The style of Chazanut had to be very restrained. This shul has a musical tradition that in many ways is unique; there are things that are sung by this shul that as far as I can tell are sung nowhere else.

Haines died in 1893 and was succeeded in 1894 by John Lionel Geffen. Geffen had been born in Russia, was a melodious Chazan, also taught Chazanut at Jews College and was very much involved in relief for East European Jewry. When the First World War broke out and they needed chaplains, Geffen was well over military age. Nonetheless he volunteered, went to France and spent most of the war as a chaplain to the Jewish soldiers in France. He had a son, Private Ernest Geffen, who was sent to Palestine with Allenby's force, and was killed outside Jerusalem on the 8th December 1917, the day before Allenby captured the city. When I was a child this used to fascinate me because of the plaque in memory of Private Ernest Geffen in the vestibule; he was the son of the Chazan, and I was the son of the Chazan. Lionel Geffen died very suddenly in 1924 at the age of 55 as he was about to go on a relief mission to Romania.

When the shul was consecrated Humphrey J Phillips was appointed as Beadle, and when Haines died in 1893 he became the secretary as well. He was a man of great efficiency, great dignity, and he was popular among the members.

During the First World War I think he must also have done some of the ministerial and pastoral work because there was a period during the First World War when Hochman had resigned and Geffen was on active service, and this synagogue actually had no ministers in London at all. Humphrey Phillips died very suddenly in April 1918 and Ephraim Levine in a phrase at the end of his Memorial Service encapsulated him. He said "in the morning he attended divine service here as was his custom, in the evening God called him home". He left a bequest which was most imaginative and kept his memory alive. Those of us who grew up in this shul will remember that on Simchat Torah we always got sweets, it was his daughter Mrs Ethel Joseph who gave them to us and they were the Humphrey Phillips bequest. He left money in his will for sweets for the children.

Now let me go into an area about which nothing has been spoken very much and that is the Reverend Dr Joseph Hochman. When Simeon Singer died in 1906 there were a number of people who were interested in the position, including a rabbi from Johannesburg called Joseph Herman Hertz. However they appointed the Reverend Dr Joseph Hochman who must have been brilliant. He was 24. He had his first degree from England and his doctorate from Germany and he was appointed to the pulpit of this synagogue at a time when there were still many of the Grand Dukes active in it including Samuel Montagu. He must have been absolutely outstanding for them to pick him.

Ephraim Levine's history of the synagogue merely says that Hochman retired in the summer of 1916 but this actually masks an extremely colourful history. Joseph Hochman was a young man of very interesting thought patterns, and obviously very much left wing. This began to come to a crisis when on the first day of Rosh Hashanah 1910 he preached a sermon in the synagogue entitled "Orthodoxy and Religious Observance" in which he said orthodoxy has no place in the religion of the modern world. Chief Rabbi Herman Adler wrote to him demanding Hochman retract this statement in his Yom Kippur sermon which had to be submitted to the Chief Rabbi first for approval and if he didn't Herman Adler would come and preach the sermon instead. Hochman retracted. And then in November he published the offending Rosh Hashanah sermon and Adler was quite incandescent but by this stage the decline that was going to lead to his death had set in and he died before anything could be done about it.

After Adler died there was an interregnum of about 18 months before J H Hertz became Chief Rabbi and during this time Hochman called for the reform of the office of the Chief Rabbi. Interestingly enough he also persuaded the members of the community that they should set up a committee to investigate the possibility of shortening the service by following what we call the Triennial Cycle. Very briefly, you read the Torah not once a year but once every three years. It was the old Palestinian custom. It was more or less obsolete by the year 1000. A committee was formed, chaired by Sir Meyer Spielman who was the warden who had appointed him, and they took evidence from the leading scholars of the day. They finally reported that it would be impossible to introduce the triennial cycle because of "the fetters at present imposed by the provisions of the United Synagogue Act and the veto possessed by the ecclesiastical authorities."

Adler died and Hertz was appointed Chief Rabbi. For Hochman this was a disaster. Hertz didn't like Joseph Hochman because Hochman had got the job that Hertz wanted. Things began to get even worse. The Reverend Dr Joseph Hochman liked riding his horse in Rotten Row and would on occasion tie the horse up to the railings in front of the shul and go into take the services, still wearing his jodhpurs – and this in an age when Ministers of the United Synagogue wore canonicals at all services. It caused a tremendous row with the wardens. By the summer of 1915 relations between the Chief Rabbi and Joseph Hochman had become really bad. He was advocating what Hertz regarded as reform and there is actually an allegation that he used to ride to shul on Shabbat on his horse. Finally, one of the wardens of the shul was implicated in a silver scandal. Hochman preached a sermon on the text "every cloud has a silver lining". In 1915 he resigned and went into the trenches and after the war he was called to the Bar and became the legal adviser to the King of Siam.

He was succeeded by Ephraim Levine, who became the minister of this shul in August 1916 at the age of 33. Born in 1885 in Glasgow, his father was the minister of Garnethill synagogue, he was a graduate of Cambridge, he had been the assistant minister of St Johns Wood and his first task on coming to this shul was to try to heal the rift which had been caused by his predecessor's sudden departure. In his first sermon he spoke with humility of Simeon Singer, describing him as the ideal Jewish minister, but the truth is actually that for this shul at that time Ephraim Levine was undoubtedly the ideal minister. Those of us who

were fortunate enough to be active in this shul during his ministry will remember him and his wife with great affection.

In those days it was the business of the ministers to layen week and week about except that from Rosh Hashanah to the end of Succot it was the job of the preacher to do all the laying. Thus when I was a child Ephraim Levine always layened on Simchat Torah, and to hear him layen the death of Moses was an absolutely unforgettable experience. To this day I still have a distinct feeling in the back of my mind that Moses spoke Hebrew with a Scottish accent!

Ephie (as he was universally known) was a great wit. One of his members was Solly Joel, one of the Barnato Joels from South Africa. Solly liked horse racing, and Ephraim Levine was no stranger to it either. Solly Joel once said to him in a fit of irritation "Ephie, why do we have two days Rosh Hashanah?", and Ephie looked at him and said "Solly, why do we have four days Ascot?"

There is a story of a congregant coming up to him very apologetically and said "I am very sorry to tell you Mr Levine, that after a lot of consideration I have decided to leave the New West End and join the Reform Synagogue in Upper Berkeley Street". Ephraim Levine looked at him and said "I don't care which synagogue you don't go to".

The last time Ephraim Levine occupied the pulpit was at Neilah 1966, he was aged 81, his voice was clear, and he filled the synagogue with the dignity of his presence as he always had done.

Ephraim Levine's rapport with the community was enhanced by his remarkable wife, a woman of dignity, grace and serenity. To us in our youth, Annie Levine always appeared a Jewish version of Queen Mary. But Ephraim and Annie Levine together added immeasurably both to the image of the synagogue and to its self perception as the leading congregation in Anglo Jewry.

Ephraim Levine's colleague for many years was the Reverend Isaac Goldston. He was a teacher and a shul secretary and on the death of Humphrey Phillips in 1918 he became the secretary of this shul and he became the Chazan as well when John Lionel Geffen died in 1924. He was a very talented and charismatic teacher. A veteran educationalist, he was significantly responsible for the formation of what became the London Board of Jewish Religious Education after the war.

In 1929 to celebrate its golden jubilee, the shul demolished the two houses, 10 and 12 St Petersburg Place which it owned and built this whole complex. Ephraim Levine lived quite comfortably at the time at 11 Pembridge Villas so Goldston got the flat, and when my parents came in 1946 and my father succeeded him that became our home.

Any survey of the staff of this period cannot be complete without mentioning Raphael Roth. Many of us remember him as the beadle of the synagogue. A man of enormous ability, and great presence, Roth was always punctilious in his appearance, top hat, silk robes, white tie.

One also needs to remember his colleague Mr John Phillips whose real name was Phillip Jerevitch who was assistant shamas and chaplain at Wormwood Scrubs and became somewhat forgetful in his old age.

The inter-war years were years of great prosperity. The membership was well up, there was a waiting list, and the overflow services were so much in demand that for some years the shul rented the Century Theatre in Westbourne Grove. Towards the end of the decade the numbers in the classes were going down and it was clear that whereas the New West End had started as a neighbourhood shul, by this stage people were living quite a distance away. It also saw the death of a number of the founders including the Spielman brothers, but new generations came in including Donald Samuel who was almost single-handedly responsible for the building of the Herbert Samuel Hall. It also saw the first trend towards women's rights. The first woman member of the Board of Deputies was Emily, Lady Spielman who was the wife of Sir Meyer. The first woman to represent a synagogue at the Board of Deputies was Nettie Adler, daughter of Chief Rabbi Herman Adler, and a member of this synagogue.

The synagogue had some very interesting characters. Sir Mathew Nathan who was the very senior civil servant in charge of Dublin Castle during the Easter rising in 1916 was actually a member of this synagogue.

The shul's relationship to Zionism was very strange. The New West End was not pro-Zionist. Samuel Montagu was hostile. Simeon Singer was a supporter of Herzl but not really in favour of political Zionism and yet in the 1930s this synagogue had as its members Herbert Samuel who had been the main protagonist of the Balfour

Declaration in the Cabinet and his cousin Edwin Samuel who had been its main opponent. The second Lord Rothschild to whom the Balfour Declaration was addressed and Chaim Weitzman who became the first President of the State of Israel were members of this shul in the inter-war years, as were Simon Marks and his family who did so much to promote the Zionist cause.

The Second World War brought a lot of problems. First they had to alter the Yom Kippur hours because of the Blitz. There was a shelter under the front lobby for residents of the local streets with Raphael Roth as shelter master. The honorary officers were often away from London which meant recycling old honorary officers. The Reverend Isaac Goldston was 70 in 1943 but there was no talk of him retiring and indeed he was handling a very heavy workload and responsibilities for the education of evacuated Jewish children. Ephraim Levine at the request of the United Synagogue was partly released from his workload here to deal with problems of refugee and evacuated children. Ephraim Levine actually was the legal guardian of every Jewish refugee child that came to this country from Germany.

There were special services of intercession for Jews under Nazi domination. There was a service in 1943 held by Dutch Jews in this synagogue attended by Queen Wilhelmina of Holland for the benefit of Dutch Jews.

The shul took several near misses, the worst of which was the night of Yom Kippur 1940 when the whole shul could have been destroyed. I am not clear whether this was the bomb that cleared the site of the Herbert Samuel Hall, or whether that happened as a result of a V1 in 1944.

In 1944 Isaac Goldston was relieved of the job of being the administrator of the shul but remained its Chazan for a further two years. In due course he was succeeded in the administration job by Isaac Kaska. Tall and distinguished, he sat in the second row in the middle block and as my father brought the Sefer Torah up to the bimah on Shabbat he would join on the end of the procession and would sit on the bimah and would give the names of the people to be called up. He was a man of enormous dignity, and one cannot mention him without mentioning his wife Bessie.

In 1946 my father was appointed Chazan of this synagogue. He was then aged 29. He had been born in August 1916, 4 months after Ephraim Levine had been appointed to the ministry of this

synagogue and his relationship with Ephie was so close that it was almost as if Ephie had adopted him as his fifth son, so much so that on one occasion in the late 1940s Ephie had a particularly good Ascot and divided his winnings into five, one to each of his four sons and one to my father. I don't believe that any other minister and Chazan anywhere in history have had that sort of warm relationship.

My father wanted this job and had made up his mind that if he didn't get it then he was going to leave the ministry and was going to qualify as a solicitor, but he loved this shul and he loved its traditions. He loved its music, he saw no conflict between his Englishness and his Jewishness and for him this synagogue was something that was very warm and wonderful.

When Ephraim Levine retired in 1954 the Honorary Officers of the shul came to my father and asked him if he would succeed Ephraim Levine as the preacher and they would find another Chazan. My father was an extremely good speaker all his life and he was very proud of the fact that he had a degree in Semitics, an MA and not a musical qualification, but he was afraid to do so and instead he suggested to the honorary officers that they approach a young rabbi from Manchester called Louis Jacobs. Had my father accepted the invitation of the Honorary Officers Jacobs would never have come to this shul and the whole history of Anglo Jewry would have been different! Louis Jacobs was appointed in 1954. He developed the shul but in 1960 he resigned to become tutor at Jews College having (I am absolutely certain) been promised by Chief Rabbi Brodie that he would succeed Rabbi Dr Israel Epstein as Principal. In fact Brodie never made good on the promise and that was to have major effects on the New West End.

The 1950s, if we can pause for a minute were probably the high point of the life of the shul. It had the highest membership in its history, it had the highest roll in its classes, there were full attendances on the Yomim Noraim, there were weddings on every possible occasion. Five weddings on a Sunday afternoon in this shul were by no means unusual. Please remember that some of them were choral, some of them were floral and some of them were choral and floral. If you had a wedding that was floral being followed by one that wasn't, it was often the florist's job to come in at the end of the Chuppah and strip the shul before the next wedding.

What was it like in those days? Shacharit began at 9.15 and stopped at 10. There was then a break between 10 and 10.15 and if you wanted to make small talk with your friends you did it then because nobody talked and nobody arrived after 10.15. A man would not be called to the Torah unless he was wearing a hat. Not a yarmulke but a hat. Ministers of the synagogue walked to shul on Rosh Hashanah in top hats and morning coats, and on Kol Nidre night the Honorary Officers wore evening dress. There were no Kol Nidre cards given out even though this synagogue always topped the Kol Nidre appeal year after year. And there was a very tolerant atmosphere. I remember many Reform Rabbis who used to come to shul here on second day Yom Tov and were called up.

In 1957 the Herbert Samuel Hall's foundation stone was laid by Lady Samuel, but unfortunately she did not live to see the opening. Herbert Samuel had occupied the seat that has a plaque on it since its foundation in 1879. He had married his cousin Beatrice Franklin in this synagogue. His sons had been bar mitzvah in this synagogue and he was very moved that when the shul built its new centre they named it after him.

It is only right to remember Herbert Samuel. He was the first Jewish cabinet minister, he was a Zionist, it had been his idea that England should make the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine one of its First World War aims – had he not done so there would not have been a Balfour Declaration, there would not have been a State of Israel. When he was called up the whole synagogue stood in his honour as he walked to the Almemar. In 1914 when he was a cabinet minister, a group of suffragettes turned up in the ladies gallery on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, chained themselves to the railing and started to shout "votes for women".

Louis Jacobs was succeeded in 1960 by Chaim Pearl who came to the community from Singers Hill Birmingham. He was a Liverpoolian, tall, a man with a very friendly presence, great preacher, and great populariser. He wrote a number of guides to Judaism, some of them which were translated into other languages.

Chaim Pearl reintroduced a number of things that the New West End had done in previous years. He brought back a Bat Mitzvah ceremony which took place on a Shabbat morning at the end of the service.

It was in Chaim Pearl's time that the mixed choir in the synagogue was replaced by a male choir and at the same time the synagogue abandoned its custom of having the short repetition of the Musaf Amidah on Shabbat and Yom Tov. The reason that the change to a male choir was finally made however, had nothing whatsoever to do with doctrine or the spread of orthodoxy; it was a pragmatic decision based on the fact that they simply couldn't get adequate female choristers for a synagogue service.

In November 1963 Chaim Pearl decided to emigrate to New York to become the rabbi of the Riverdale Conservative Synagogue and the Board of Management wanted to reappoint Louis Jacobs. They were however told by the United Synagogue that he no longer had a ministerial practising certificate and could not be appointed. Louis Jacobs had obviously had such consent when he had been appointed in 1954 to succeed Ephraim Levine, but Brodie and the then Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue took the view that a certificate allowed a particular rabbi to occupy a particular pulpit and once he terminated his employment the certificate lapsed.

The Board of Management however, were not prepared to take any notice and they invited Rabbi Dr Louis Jacobs to occupy the pulpit of the New West End and to preach, and in fact he did so on the 11th and the 18th April 1964.

A meeting of the Council of the United Synagogue then removed the Board of Management and Honorary Officers of the New West End leaving the shul under the control of three nominated Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue and Frank Levine. Frank, the son of the Reverend Ephraim Levine was an HO of the shul for many years but did not approve of the action of his colleagues and had strongly and consistently stood out against it.

A large number of members seceded from the synagogue although many of them retained their membership for burial rights and they joined the New London Synagogue which was the organization set up by Louis Jacobs' supporters.

Between 1963 and 1965 which was the period that spanned the Jacobs controversy, the New West End Synagogue lost about 120 male members. Many of them were regular attenders both during the week and on Shabbat, and the loss showed very much in the attendances at services. The continuity of this synagogue was carried on by my parents, by Ephraim Levine and by the dignified

and serene Annie Levine and by their son Frank who probably more than anyone at this stage was responsible for the survival of the New West End.

For my parents it was particularly distressing. The people who went with Louis Jacobs were not just the congregants whom they had served for 18 years; these people were their friends, and many of them stopped speaking to my parents over this controversy.

In 1965 local autonomy was restored to the synagogue and Rabbi Morris Nemeth was appointed as the minister. He was a scholarly man from Liverpool who wrote beautiful sermons in chiselled English and he and his wife presided very graciously over the community.

In December 1966 Ephraim Levine died very suddenly on a Friday evening sitting by his fireside at home shortly before dinner. This was really the end of an era. He had been appointed after the Hochman controversy but in a very real sense was the successor of Simeon Singer whose style he continued. He had seen the synagogue through its greatest days and his name – and wit – will always be associated with the New West End.

In 1975 the building was listed. This happened almost accidentally. The President of the United Synagogue at that time was S S Levin and one evening he mentioned to his brother-in-law that the United Synagogue was wondering about the future of the building and the USHO's were actually considering whether to demolish it. His brother-in-law was Dr Vivian Lipman a prominent member of this synagogue and a well known Anglo-Jewish historian. He was by profession a senior civil servant who happened at that particular juncture in his career to be responsible for listing buildings. Much to Salmond Levin's surprise, not to say downright horror, Vivian Lipman went into the office the next morning and the first thing he did was to list the New West End. The grading has gradually been raised over the years, mainly through the efforts of John Bodie, and at the moment the synagogue is Grade II*.

In 1979 the New West End celebrated its centenary. Within the US the New West End was and is the only synagogue to have celebrated a centenary on its original site and in its original building.

The service itself was a formal Anglo Jewish high church occasion which had once been common, indeed the sort of formality to which Anglo Jewish

communities had aspired. The guest of honour was the Duke of Gloucester, an appropriate choice as he was President of the Victorian Society. The Chief Rabbi Dr Jakobovits gave the address. Formal dress and top hats were very much in evidence and for a while it seemed that the great days of the synagogue had been recreated.

The truth however was that the centenary briefly masked what appeared to be a terminal decline in the fortunes of the synagogue. Reading the board minutes of this period it is actually quite sad; they show an unwillingness – perhaps even an inability – to comprehend what was going on.

In 1980 Rabbi Nemeth retired and the United Synagogue invited my father to succeed him as preacher as well as reader. My father then did what he should have done in 1954, and for the first time ever occupied the pulpit of the synagogue on Shabbat Lech Lecha in 1980.

My father reached his 65th birthday in the summer of 1981 but was reluctant to retire; indeed he saw no reason to do so, but he finally retired in October 1984. He had by then celebrated over 50 years in the Anglo-Jewish ministry, and had served the Synagogue for 38 years. He had gradually come to personify the traditions of the New West End, of which he was very proud. The dignity of the services, and the correct Nusach and music for each season of the year, were fully maintained in all their splendour. He died exactly a year after he retired.

He was succeeded by Rabbi Dr Morris Turetsky, who had previously been the Minister of the Western Synagogue in Crawford Place. He was a scholar of considerable note. He combined his ministry of the Synagogue with teaching at Jews College, where he took the course for Rabbinical Ordination. His pupils adored him and held both him and his scholarship in the very highest respect.

He was succeeded by Rabbi Yisroel Roll, a Canadian lawyer who had come to religion and the Rabbinate late in life. To begin with, he took the Synagogue to great heights and it seemed to have undergone a complete change of fortunes, but it could not be sustained and his involvement with the "Encounter" movement led to a distancing of relations between him and the NWE which ultimately led to a parting of the ways.

Rabbi Butler and his wife Penny served this synagogue with great friendship, and I believe stabilised matters at a difficult juncture in its history.

In due course Josh Butler opted to leave the ministry and go into law.

Geoffrey and Anne Shisler then came to this community. In the 125 years of its existence the New West End has been served by many great ministers and their wives, and I believe that the present incumbents are clearly among the greatest. I do not think that I need to say anything else except that my affection for them and my admiration of what they are doing are unbounded.

Ladies and gentlemen I have tried to give you a picture of a most remarkable community. Given that the pattern of Jewish history is that synagogues rarely last beyond a century, the vigour of this community in its 126th year is truly astonishing.

I do not claim to have given you an unbiased or disinterested view, especially of events that had and continue to have a very direct effect upon my life and that of my wife, the lives of my parents, and indeed the lives of my children. I am a child of the New West End. I had my bar mitzvah here, we were married here, and in a very real sense this community is home. The most inspiring Rosh Hashanah that I have spent since I left the New West End was the Rosh Hashanah that I spent here a few years ago. The services still have a

dignity and an inspiration that is unchallenged anywhere.

But the thing that I would hope has come through to you is the love that I and so many of us have for the New West End. When I spoke at the dedication of the plaque in memory of my father that stands in the vestibule of the synagogue, I said that my father loved the New West End, he loved its traditions, he loved its dignity and majesty, he loved every stone of the building.

I believe that I share that love - and not only me. I believe that it is shared by Geoffrey and Anne Shisler, and by my father's distinguished successor Jeremy Lawson, and all who work here. I believe that it is shared by so many of us here today. I believe that it was shared by Morris Nemeth, by Isaac Kaska, by Isaac Goldston, by Raphael Roth, by Ephraim Levine, by John Lionel Geffen and Marcus Haines and Humphrey J. Phillips and by the great Simeon Singer who set the traditions of this community and started this synagogue, unique in Anglo Jewry, unique in world Jewish history.

So long as this institution can continue to command and engender such love, so long will its future be glorious.