

At an annual meeting, nearly everyone feels amazed at the passage of another year, and the difficulty of summing it up in a few pages. This year is no exception. This has been my second year as Chairman of the Synagogue. After last year's Jubilee year, which was so very busy, I can report that it has been a bit, but not very much calmer. The focus has been different, but there has been a great deal going on, and some new challenges have arisen.

If you were at last year's AGM, you will know I made some glaring omissions, so it is with a view to repairing these that I am going to mention the social group BR5&6 FIRST, and move on from there.

BR5&6

Due to the fact that Jews in this part of London are fairly thinly spread, it was realised about 25 years ago that sometimes a more local group should be set up to enable people living closer to each other than to the Shul to get together socially. The first of these groups was BR5 and 6, established by members living in those two Post Codes. This very successful group is still very much a going concern. Over the past year, as Zena Goodman reports, they held at least 12 events, including teas at the homes of the Noyeks, the Zerihans, the Garelicks, the Radfords, and Annie Gold. They have had a last night of the Proms at Nadia Gilman's house, and visited local garden centres for lunch or craft fairs (and tea, I am guessing!). Dianne Matthews hosted one of the many Chanukah Candle lightings for the Group. Their report stresses that they aren't exclusively for folks in BR5 or 6 – anyone is more than welcome to join them at an event. This group is a fantastic model for other local groups affiliated to the synagogue.

SE10

Another group, but a more recently established one, is the group calling itself "SE10 and Beyond", established in December 2013. Although many of the members are also members here at Bromley, the group is for "Jews" rather than shul members. (so members of Catford shul, and more or less observant people all take part) Under the determined stewardship of Michelle Brookes-Evans, this has grown into a thriving

group with 43 members on its mailing list. Throughout the year most meetings are held in the evening and there can be anywhere from 8 to 20 people attending. The format is very informal and usually consists of someone offering their home to hold the next meeting.

This is a very varied group of people from all walks of life and of all ages, in which the women outnumber the men. In fact, really the only thing group members have in common with the others a strong Jewish bond though and we have learnt a lot from each other. The past year was packed with group events, which included a film night in Blackheath, a book club evening, a Passover Seder, a Chanukah candle lighting, as well as some enjoyable Friday night dinners together. The group bring refreshments to the home of the volunteer host. One meeting we had a map of the world and pinned all the places our ancestors came from before ending up in the UK, and the most recent meeting was memories of festivals where some people brought family memorabilia to share.

One of the most exciting things is that the new friendships made have led to activities within the group - people have gone to the theatre, to concerts, for days out, or just been on hand for a cup of tea and chat.

Michelle comments that she did not know there were so many Jewish people in the SE10 area, and has really enjoyed having an opportunity to meet and get to know them.

FACEBOOK

BR5&6 and SE10 groups can be considered “outreach” of the synagogue, as they extend the relationships between members and with other members of the wider community. It is only natural that in the teen years of the 21st century that virtual outreach has also widened the shul’s sphere of influence. We have had a website and a forum for members online for a few years, but this past year, thanks to the stalwart enthusiasm of Benjie Butler there is now a Facebook group named **South East London Jewish Community**. I strongly suggest you take a look if you haven’t

already. This is not solely for members of this congregation, but our events are mentioned, as are those of the SE10 and beyond, and I see some lively discussions and tidbits of information about the Jewish history of this part of the world, which is not quite the desert those from North London might believe.

MEMBERSHIP

This is a small group which most definitely isn't a committee! It met twice this year, but has managed to get an impressive amount of things done.

There was a family Shabbat hosted in a member's home – held chez de Lange with over 30 people. They'd like to repeat this, if anyone would like to host it.

Helping the Rabbi to run the "I am Jewish, my partner isn't" course.

Reinstating the habit of welcoming new members with a "goody bag".

Arranging the Winter Party

They supported the setting up of the Facebook group for South East London Jews

This group are beginning to explore ways of designing a membership fee structure which suits younger members. This is very much still ongoing.

A synagogue needs members – of course!, so nurturing these relationships and the development of new ones is a key activity.

During the past year we have had the addition of seven single memberships and three family ones. Sadly there have been 8 deaths during the same period.

EDUCATION

Barbara K has furnished me with details of the work of the Education Committee which has been very busy this year. Their goal is to offer something for everyone, and I think they have achieved this magnificently.

The Rabbi has continued his Basic Judaism classes – now entitled "Introduction to Judaism" and moved it from Sunday mornings to Thursday evenings. This opened the way for the Bromley Beit Midrash to take place on Sunday mornings. This started in January with three sessions on Maimonides which left us all asking for more. Check Highlight for the next Topics in this series.

Talmud Study classes are ongoing, fortnightly on Thursday mornings, led by the Rabbi, while John Posner's loyal Torah Study students have when the report was passed to me in early February reached chapter 30 of Deuteronomy and must by the AGM have gone back to Genesis! Thanks again to John.

I know because I am on the ed committee that over the years there have been frequent requests for Hebrew lessons, and the committee is keen to respond. Currently there are two levels of basic Hebrew on offer – thanks to teachers Sandra Hurley and John Posner.

We have held two informal discussion sessions, called Sicha/chot?, one on Kashrut led by John Posner and another on Equilineality explained by the Rabbi. Based on these successes, and an interest in this sort of event mentioned on the wish list after Our Shul, Your Shul , it is hoped to be able to offer more of these. Subject suggestions very welcome.

A further "Taste of Judaism" course took place in September and was very well attended. It is hoped that this now annual event will move out of the synagogue this year to encourage a wider attendance.

For our Jubilee Lecture this year, we were delighted to welcome our very own Baroness Professor Alison Wolf for a very illuminating talk entitled "Not Quite Utopia" in which she spoke about improvements in the lives of women in the West and elsewhere, comparing them. Making use of our home grown talent and expertises was a theme at Our Shul, Your Shul, so we were ahead of the curve with this!

Helen Simmons spoke in September about her journey to be CEO of Nightingale Hammerson, the first non-Jew to take up this post. She assured her listeners that Nightingale continues to thrive.

Other talks arranged by the committee included Rabbi Larry Becker's on the "Temple Mount Sifting Project", the Israeli archaeological work of sifting through piles of

debris removed from the Temple Mount. More home grown talent! 2015 saw the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and Ruth Moshinsky came and spoke on the Nuremberg Trials and their Aftermath. Our thanks to Ruth and Monica Weil who organised her visit for us.

Another Our Shul, your Shul topic considered more use of our shul building, and one type of event which already takes place fairly frequently is school visits. This is admirably managed by Marilyn Freeman who continues to fulfil the ever increasing demands of local schools, showing groups of children round our synagogue, giving them a lesson in basic Judaism which adds context to their school curriculum. Very many thanks to Marilyn and to Sandra Hurley who has helped many a cub scout acquire a faith badge, and to Janet B who fields all the initial requests. In the last year we had 18 school visits, and 4 scouting visits. Demand for visits continues to grow and we are currently looking for other members willing and able to help Marilyn in what is a very important aspect of Beit Midrash, as well as being a valuable PR exercise for the synagogue. (and they pay!)

Barbara writes that she would like to thank the Rabbi and all the members of the committee for their hard work over the year. Planning for future events is well under way – it is never ending, as one excellent event fuels a hunger for another. These include a much anticipated series of talks from Doctor George Stein, shedding psychiatric light on Biblical personages, starting with Job and moving on to Saul. And I would like to thank Barbara for her hard work and attention to detail. Sometimes I don't think she goes home! It gives a chairman confidence when they have a committee run with such élan.

The committee also oversees the cheder, and thanks go Head-Teacher Vicki Ashmore, all the teachers and helpers including those in the ever-growing Gan, for all their efforts over the year. Vicki's own report will tell you of exciting innovations and events of the past year. Vicki has also taken on the role of Youth leader and a diary of events for our youngsters is already in place.

As promised, here are the **Cheder highlights** from Vicki Ashmore:

- First a few numbers: The staff at present numbers 22, excluding the Head Teacher. Of these, 13 are class teachers, with 4 working as a job share. Two run the Gan Yeladim (kindergarten) and 9 are young helpers. They all share a commitment to the children of our community, and Vicki (and all members!) is truly grateful to them!
- Numbers at Cheder have risen this year to 80, including the Gan, which is approximately 10 more than last year. I hope we all realise how very promising this is for the continued existence and success of Beit Or. There is some plain demographic reasons for this, but I think it is mostly due to the hard work of the Rabbi and the membership committee in seeking out new members and welcoming those with an interest in joining. As a result, there should have no problem filling Kitah Aleph next September, so that next year we should have a full complement of classes- Gan Yeladim through Kitah Chet.
- The CHAI curriculum, a new Reform curriculum created by the American Reform movement, was brought in to use for the first time this year in Kitot Bet through Zayin with very encouraging results.
- Children's Services have now been incorporated into the curriculum, with one scheduled to take place each term. This serves the dual purpose of introducing the children to the Shabbat service, as well as actively encouraging our entire congregation to mix. The frequent tendency of the shul to form unwittingly into "silos" who don't mix was noted at Our Shul your Shul, so Vicki is ahead on this one!
- Other congregation-wide events included "Later Cheder" on Simchat Torah, where all were invited to the service and supper in the sukkah, and

Mitzvah Day, run for the first time at BRS under the leadership of Benjie Butler. The focus of the day was on Deafness and the issues faced by the deaf. We all learned some sign language as we welcomed members of the Deaf Community to Bromley and created a quilted banner coordinated by our member, Ann Fried. I understand they plan to use it on any market stalls they set up in the future. Benjie very impressively got my old work colleague, the Mayor of Bromley to attend, which was a wonderful profile raiser, both for Mitzvah Day and for the shul. She confided to me that she felt one up on her neighbouring mayor of Greenwich, as they don't have a synagogue.

- “Hooray Cheder”, our cheder parent group lead by Dani Hall and Michelle Brooks Evans, has coordinated many of the extra curricular events including the vibrant Chanuka Fair, which raised £1000.00 which can go towards the cost of our Security.
- Other events at Cheder included the Chanuka Party and the Tu Bishvat tasting activity, in which every cheder child received a ‘party bag’ full of the seven species of Israel to take home.
- The Rabbi meets children individually while they prepare for their bnei mitzvot. In addition, the Rabbi is available to teach classes throughout the year, and often provides cover for sick teachers at short notice.
- This year, as every other year, the Goldman trust presented a siddur to all members of Kittah Zayin. This gift is a generous tradition and is much appreciated by the Cheder and the entire community.
- Our youngsters' achievements have been recognised by awards from Jack Petchy. These awards include money, which we can spend on such things as the Chanukah party and equipment for our new Youth Group; in fact we must spend it on items closely related to children and youth activities.

- The children raised over £180 in tzedakah collections for the first term this year, which went to support Deaf Access. This next term the chosen charity is Sophie's Appeal, a children's cancer charity.
- Every year, Kitah Chet leads a Shabbat Service for the congregation, celebrating their 'graduation' from Cheder into the adult community. It will take place this year in July under the leadership of Sandra Hurly, and I'm sure we will all be very proud! I myself am often struck by the Kavanah of such services, in which the young people demonstrate the seriousness with which they take the mitsvot they perform.
- Coming up - For Pesach, it has been agreed to host a single Communal Seder this Pesach, with an earlier start time and more family friendly activities to encourage greater participation from families.; A Purim Schpiel for which the children will make Hamentaschen for the congregation. The Gan children will create Shalach Manot, traditional Purim food parcels which will be distributed by them members of our Social Centre.
- Linked to the Cheder are other youth activities, which are currently being developed. For a period our youngsters have been participating in a Maccabi youth group at Catford Shul, but during this year we have started our own, running monthly for children aged 12 -19. The Youth Group is currently linking itself to RSY, with the hopes that more of our children will attend their summer camps and trips abroad. As the Rabbi will tell anyone who will listen, participation in Jewish camps and youth organisations provides the strong immersive experience which inspires continued participation and involvement with the Jewish Community, so we are grateful to Vicki for her efforts in launching this activity, and to the Donor Trust who have agreed to assist with the fees for many of the camp experiences.

R&R - religion and ritual

Dan Posner has provided me with a description of the three key areas the committee has been involved with over the past year: the Festivals, Shabbat Services and the work of the R&R Committee.

Festivals - highlights

The High Holiday services were well attended by both children and adults. Erev Rosh Hashanah was held at the Shul with all other services taking place at the Crofton Halls in Orpington. This year saw a repeat of last year's well received Study Session during Yom Kippur's Mussaf Service as well as a new format and booklet for the Yizkor Service.

When you attend these services, you might not realise that there is a tremendous amount of work involved in allocating mitzvot, planning the services, schlepping and meeting and greeting. The lay readers, wardens and the Rabbi excelled and the services ran smoothly. As ever, the choir did a fantastic job, singing beautifully and leading the music across all the services including Selichot.

The Scroll was unwound during Simchat Torah accompanied by much singing, dancing, music and of course food. Chanukah saw a myriad of activities including Candle lightings in members' homes around the community and there was a brilliant Children's party.

The Communal Seder was a great success with over 70 participants and there was a pleasing attendance at the Shavuot Tikkun Leyl and Succot events.

Shabbat Services

The Shabbat Services sit at the core of ritual activity. These are led by the Rabbi who changes formats, keeps things fresh and provides great thought-provoking sermons. How fortunate we are in Bromley to have a large number of very capable lay readers who can lead Friday night services when the Rabbi is otherwise engaged. This year, they also led the Saturday morning services and read from the Torah when the Rabbi was away on his first tranche of sabbatical. Dan writes "I would like to thank the

choir, wardens and those who organise and prepare Kiddush and who generally do so much to keep the services running to such a high standard.” And I would add my and the congregation’s thanks to his.

This year the Shul purchased new Children’s Siddurim – a first for the community (published books rather than a photocopied booklet). They are used during our highly successful Children’s services which are led by our Cheder Children. These services along with the Family Services which take place every two months on Friday evenings, see a different demographic to the usual ‘Shabbat crowd’. It is a great testament to the depth and vibrancy of our community.

We also had a number of Bnei Mitzvah this year. The standard attained by young members of the community is extremely high, again thanks to the time and effort expended by the students, as well as their parents and teachers.

Ritual Committee

The Committee continues to organise the festivals and Shabbat services and discuss key ritual matters. For example, we looked at the role of non-Jewish parents during Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, provided a recommendation to the board for the purchase of a new communal Haggadah and are giving consideration to whether it would be possible to hold Rosh Hashanah services at the Shul rather than in Orpington. Many of the members also provide wardening support throughout the year.

Dan writes “I am pleased to report that we have been joined by two new members; Judith French and Michelle Brooke Evans, both of whom have added their voices to the debate and provided much needed new points of view to our meetings. I would like to thank all the members of the Committee for their dedication and hard work and the support they have provided in my first year as Senior Warden.

Finally...

It is of course impossible to do justice to the hard work and dedication shown by all those who organised, bought, cooked, dressed up, travelled to North London, tidied up and generally made all of the services and festivals such a success. My thanks go to them all.

It is also difficult to paint a picture of the great fun to be had by simply coming along and getting stuck in. To get a flavour of what the community really gets up to from a ritual perspective, I commend to you the archives section of the Shul website which provides a great pictorial view of all our events. May future years continue to be as ritually vibrant and action filled as this one just past. I need to thank Dan for taking on the work of this committee so capably. As with the education committee, as Chair I felt confident throughout the year that very little could or would go wrong in the R& R department.

As I just mentioned the High Holidays, I will add here that we raised a good sum of money for the Kol Nidre appeal, namely the Hagar school in Beer Sheva £3,109 , £3,048 for the mental health charity Jami and £2,408 for the work of the Phoenix Centre for children. For our synagogue itself, we received £6,357. This is good going, I think, was it my cleverly worded appeal, or the congregation's natural generosity? Perhaps we'll never find out.

During the year we were also able to donate £1500 to World Jewish relief's Syria appeal, as well as a separate donation of £2264 for the Board of Deputies.

A brief word about the Board of Deputies, at which we are ably represented by Joe Millis. It is not without its frustrations, he reports, but it IS a nationally recognised Jewish Forum. The Board reconfirmed recently that we want the Shul's membership to continue, and Joe has agreed to finish his term, which runs for at least one more year.

Caring Community

Pauline Jeffrey has furnished me with a summation of the work of the caring community committee over the past year.

She explains that a big part of their work is to keep in touch with those members known to us as being housebound, unwell, in hospital, Residential Care or Nursing Homes. We receive referrals from the Synagogue office, Rabbi Holtz, members, friends and family.

They keep in touch through various methods, physical visiting, as well as telephone calls and emails. They also use snail mail, sending cards wishing well, birthday greetings and recognising special occasions.

During the past year we have increased telephone visiting with a sort of buddy system - members having specific Shul members with whom they keep in touch. These buddies can then pass status reports on to the CCC.

Another significant function is to visit and to write to the bereaved.

We have been in discussion with Jewish Care during the year with regard to setting up Tea Parties and conversation for our members who are isolated and alone.

An important additional function is the recording of Talking Highlight, which is currently sent to 20 members in CD format.

The CCC represents the synagogue at local Age UK meetings, and are involved with Support Community Links, Bromley, and the Bromley Borough branch of Mencap. They are also involved with a number of health forums, and attend a South London one at Nightingale Hammerson House. This all helps to form networks and to increase awareness of any and all relevant issues to caring.

Meetings:

- There are few physical meetings of the group, but they stay in close touch through the use of telephones and emails. Now they are getting ambitious and there is talk of using SKYPE for simultaneous meetings.
- As you can imagine, confidentiality is key in this sort of work. Generally speaking, only CC members, Chair of the Synagogue, Rabbi Holtz, and the Synagogue Administrator hear the full details of someone, and sometimes not even then. Members known to the CCC can also be confident that their details do not reach other members, agencies or organisations.
- CCC has representation on the Board, as Pauline, who chairs it, attends meetings through SKYPE, and other members are on the Board too.
- **The Wider Community:**
- CCC often works closely with Social Centre members and helpers. They worked together on the Shul Calendar, you can see some of their work on the July page.

- The knitting and nattering has continued this year, making outfits and blankets for very tiny babies, teddy bears and chicks for charities such as Deaf Access. They are also making slippers and two piece jumpers for children with cancer.
- The CCC assisted in arranging the Macmillan coffee morning, which raised £664.97 this year.

And finally,

The Synagogue's transport fund is being accessed. Further on this topic, CCC have approached Croydon Transport for the Disabled to discuss arranging transport for members.

COMMUNICATION:

Bromley has a communications Group, (another non-committee) made up of some very busy people who still find the time to oversee things like Highlight, e-light and our website. They work hard to ensure that publicity for events makes it to all the relevant places.

Judi Sheffrin mentions in her report that they can only publicise things if they know about them, and that the best way to do that is to write to the group's email address, rather than a member's personal address. It's on e-light if you need it.

Pauline mentioned the use of SKPE (should I say other VOIP systems are available) for the CCC meetings. The Board are exploring use of this technology both for Board meetings, and use of a similar technology to stream services to those who are unable to attend. Looking into this is in the early stages, but it's an interesting concept I hope we'll be able to make use of soon. Investigating this topic and others like it slightly stretches communication into technology, but they seem to have the skills to handle this creeping of their remit.

Judi also mentioned the Facebook page, which is so successful. It's not a Comms Group product, but links are maintained to spread awareness of events, etc.

And lastly, we need to bring up the fact that Bob Symonds has devoted so much time and effort into the production of Highlight over the past – can it be 36 years? Wow.

Thank you Bob – even in this electronic age Highlight is always very popular in its hard copy format. There is a modern school of thought which seems to believe that something hasn't actually happened unless a photograph has been taken of it. If so, you are helping to prove that Bromley activities really have happened!

Housing

Graham Harris reports about housing:

Several things have been accomplished this year. These include:

- The boiler; we now have a new company servicing our boiler system and they have undertaken several repairs including fitting a new time clock.
- You might have noticed the window on the mezzanine was leaking badly. We have had to replace it – which cost about£2000. This was a reminder that all our old wooden windows need renewing over the next few years.
- Smaller maintenance work has included renewing the lift and getting a new contract for the water pump. Also Relocation of the loft entrance and a new ladder (for health & safety reasons).
- We are awaiting a quote to renew some of the fencing and replace the gate at the front of the synagogue, and also to make new area for our waste bins. This is both a maintenance and a security issue.

Security and Safeguarding

I mentioned that this year has brought its own challenges. The greatest challenge, which is ongoing, very unfortunately, has been that of security. The two unforgettable days in Paris in January and again in November 2015 meant that London had to reassess all security arrangements.

Graham Harris will report later in this meeting about how the Shul has reacted and will react to this type of threats. Be assured that the Board take it all extremely seriously, and have been liaising frequently both with the Metropolitan Police and the Community Safety Trust.