

BROMLEY AND DISTRICT REFORM SYNAGOGUE LIMITED

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

held at 28 Highland Road, Bromley on Tuesday 15th March 2016

Present: Joanna Koenigsberg (in the Chair), Sandra Hurley (Treasurer), Anna Sedenu (Secretary), Rabbi Jason Holtz and 21 Synagogue members.

D'var Torah: Rabbi Holtz spoke about the customary blessing before Torah study, 'La'asok be'divrei Torah'. He said the meaning of 'la'asok' is 'to do business with', and the prayer is about thanking God for the instruction to do business in accord with the commands of the Torah. Whilst the business of the Shul is not "business" in the normal sense, we are nevertheless engaging the in the business of the synagogue. The Rabbi then gave the blessing.

- 1. Apologies for Absence:** Sally Rosebery, Adrian Jackson, Dorothy Gee, Lisa Lewis, Judith French, Matthew De Lange, David and Sheila Zerihan
- 2. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting (17 March 2015):** No corrections were advised. The Minutes were accepted by the meeting and signed by the Chairperson.
- 3. Report of the Board to the AGM:** The Chairperson presented the Board's Report. The following is a synopsis. A full copy of the report can be downloaded from the Shul website.¹

The Chairperson said that after last year's very busy Jubilee year, the focus has been different, but there has been a great deal going on, and some new challenges have arisen. She started by summarising the activities of the social group BR5&6.

⇒ **BR5&6 and Friends led by Jean Garelick**

This local social group had another very successful year, holding at least 12 events, including teas at the homes of the Noyeks, the Zerihans, the Garelicks, the Radfords, and Annie Gold. Other activities included a last night of the Proms at Nadia Gilman's house; visiting local garden centres; and Dianne Matthews hosted one of many Chanukah Candle lightings. Whilst this group was set up by members living in BR5 and 6 Post Codes, anyone is more than welcome to join them at an event. It is a fantastic model for other local groups affiliated to the synagogue.

⇒ **SE10 led by Michelle Brooks-Evans**

"SE10 and Beyond" was set up in December 2013, and is for "Jews" rather than shul members. It has grown into a thriving group with 43 members on its mailing list. Most meetings are held in the evening with between 8 to 20 people attending. The format is very informal and usually consists of someone offering their home to hold the next meeting.

Events over the past year 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. Many new friendships have been made.

¹ http://www.bromleyshul.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/AGM_report_5776.pdf

⇒ **Facebook**

This past year, thanks to the enthusiasm of Benjie Butler, there is now a Facebook group named South East London Jewish Community. This is not solely for members of this congregation, but our events are mentioned, as are those of the SE10 and beyond, and there are lively discussions and tidbits of information about the Jewish history of this area.

⇒ **Membership**

This small group met only 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 also supported the setting up of the Facebook group for South East London Jews.

This group is beginning to explore ways of designing a membership fee structure which suits younger members. A synagogue needs members so nurturing these relationships and the developing new ones is a key activity. During the past year we have had welcomed seven single memberships and three family ones. Sadly there were 8 deaths in the same period.

⇒ **Education Committee led by Barbara Kurtz**

The Education Committee's goal is to offer something for everyone, which they have achieved magnificently. The Rabbi has continued his Basic Judaism classes – now entitled "Introduction to Judaism" and moved 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 popular sessions on Maimonides.

Talmud Study classes are ongoing, fortnightly on Thursday mornings, led by the Rabbi; and thanks are due to John Posner for providing Torah Study sessions. The Ed Co is also keen to respond to requests for Hebrew lessons. Currently there are two levels of basic Hebrew on offer – thanks to teachers Sandra Hurley and John Posner.

Two informal discussion sessions took place, one on Kashrut led by John Posner and another on Equilineality explained by the Rabbi. More sessions are planned, and subject suggestions very welcome. A very well attended "Taste of Judaism" course took place in September.

For our Jubilee Lecture this year, our very own Baroness Professor Alison Wolf gave a very illuminating talk entitled "Not Quite Utopia" about improvements in the lives of women in the West and elsewhere. Helen Simmons spoke in September about her journey to be CEO of Nightingale Hammerson, the first non-Jew to take up this post. Other 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. 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.

Marilyn Freeman continues to show groups of children from local schools round our synagogue, giving them a lesson in basic Judaism. 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 four 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.

Barbara would like to thank the Rabbi and all the members of the committee for their hard work over the year. The Chairperson also thanked Barbara for her hard work and attention to detail.

The Ed Co 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 has also taken on the role of Youth leader and a diary of events for our youngsters is already in place.

⇒ **Cheder led by Vicki Ashmore**

- Cheder staff currently number 22, excluding the Head Teacher. Of these, 13 are class teachers, with four working as a job share. Two run the Gan Yeladim (kindergarten) and nine 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. This is very promising for the continued existence and success of Beit Or, and it reflects the hard work of the Rabbi and the membership committee in seeking out new members and welcoming those with an interest in joining. Next year we should have a full complement of classes
- The CHAI curriculum, a new Reform curriculum created by the American Reform movement, was used for the first time this year in Kitot Bet through Zayin with very encouraging results.
- Children's Services have been incorporated into the curriculum, with one scheduled to take place each term. This both introduces the children to the Shabbat service and actively encourages our entire congregation to mix.
- 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, and attended by the Mayor of Bromley. The focus of the day was on Deafness and the issues faced by the deaf.
- "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 Chanukah Fair, which raised £1,000 which can go towards the cost of our Security.
- The Rabbi meets children individually while they prepare for their bnei mitzvah, is available to teach classes throughout the year, and often provides cover for sick teachers at short notice.
- 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 Petchey.
- The children raised over £180 in tzedakah collections for the first term this year, which went to support Deaf Access.
- Every year, Kittah 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 Hurley.
- Linked to the Cheder are other youth activities, which are currently being developed. We have started our own monthly youth club for children aged 12 -19. It is currently linking itself to RSY, with the hopes that more of our children will attend their summer camps and trips abroad.

The Chairperson said that 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.

⇒ **Religion and Ritual led by Dan Posner**

The committee has been involved in three key areas: 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. A tremendous amount of work is 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: 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. We are fortunate we 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 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. Joanna added her and the congregation's thanks as well.

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.

There were 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 considering the feasibility of holding Rosh Hashanah services at the Shul rather than in Orpington. Many of the members also provide wardening support throughout the year. Two new members have joined the Committee - Judith French and Michelle Brooke Evans - provided much needed new points of view to meetings. Dan expressed thanks to the Committee for their dedication, hard work, and support provided in his first year as Senior Warden.

The Chairperson gave thanks to 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. She also thanked Dan for taking on the work of this committee so capably

Our shul raised a good sum of money for the Kol Nidre appeal, namely £3,109 for the Hagar school in Beer Sheva, £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. .

During the year we were also able to donate £1,500 to World Jewish relief's Syria appeal, as well as a separate donation of £2,264 for the Board of Deputies. A brief word about the Board of Deputies, at which we are ably represented by Joe Millis. Whilst is not without its frustrations, 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 Committee led by Dr Pauline Jeffree**

A big part of the work of the Caring Community Committee (CCC) is to keep in touch with those members known to us as being housebound, unwell, in hospital, Residential Care or Nursing Homes. Referrals come from the Synagogue office, Rabbi Holtz, members, friends and family. CCC keeps 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. Whilst there are few physical meetings of the group, they stay in close touch via telephones and emails, and there is talk of using SKYPE.

During the past year we have increased telephone visiting with a buddy system. Another significant function is to visit and to write to the bereaved. We have been in discussion with Jewish Care about 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 is involved with Support Community Links, Bromley, and the Bromley Borough branch of Mencap. It is also involved with various health forums. This all helps to form networks and to increase awareness of issues relevant to caring.

- 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.

Finally, the Synagogue's transport fund is being accessed. CCC has also approached Croydon Transport for the Disabled to discuss arranging transport for members.

⇒ **Communications Group – led by Judi Sheffrin**

This group is 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. They can of course 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 elight if you need it.

Pauline has mentioned the use of SKYPE (or similar systems) for CCC meetings. The Board is also 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.

The successful Facebook page is not a Comms Group product, however links are maintained to spread awareness of events, etc. And lastly, we need to thank Bob Symonds who has devoted so much time and effort into the production of Highlight over the past 36 years! Even in this electronic age Highlight is always very popular in its hard copy format.

⇒ **Housing and Building - Graham Harris**

Graham has highlighted several achievements this year:

- We now have a new company servicing our boiler system and they have undertaken several repairs including fitting a new time clock.
- The window on the mezzanine was leaking badly, and has been replaced - which cost about £2000. All our old wooden windows will need renewing over the next few years. Smaller maintenance work has also been undertaken
- 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**

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. 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. See item 10 for separate report.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer presented the Report and Accounts for the year ended 30th November 2015 and the budget for 2016/2017. The following is a brief summary.

The Treasurer informed the meeting that paper copies of the Accounts pack, which run to 22 pages, were available at the meeting but that the pack is also available via email from Janet Burlem in the Synagogue office.

The Treasurer thanked our Independent Examiners Harris & Trotter as well as Thornton Springer. (It had come to light that due to a conflict of interest, Hugh Lask, Shul member and Partner at Harris & Trotter, could no longer continue to examine our accounts, as his partner Shane Lask became a Board member in 2015; therefore Thornton Springer had stepped in to examine the accounts prepared). The Treasurer confirmed that the 2015 Accounts Pack was ready to be submitted to Companies House.

The Treasurer presented to the meeting the Management Accounts. She demonstrated that these management accounts reconciled to the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) from the Account pack.

The Treasurer explained that she would focus on variance between budget forecast and actuals, but would be happy to answer questions at the end of her presentation.

Total Income less Expenditure for the Unrestricted Accounts shows an excess of expense over income of £841, which was broadly in line with expectations.

Incoming Resources

Subscription Related Income

Subscription income was £1,792 over budget. The Treasurer thanked Janet Posner and Janet Burlem for all their work to get Subscriptions in.

Non-Subscription Related Income

This included a legacy gift of £1000; as per normal practice, we do not budget for this income category.

The unbudgeted cost of Cheder security and building costs relating to Highland Road were covered by income from subscriptions and a legacy gift, as already highlighted.

Expenditure

For 2015, the Synagogue's overall Unrestricted expenditure was £169,297 versus a budget of £166,118.

The Treasurer drew attention to the categories that have a variance to budget of more than £600:

- **Cheder related.** This category is £2,770 over budget. SQR Ltd security services commenced providing a professional security service in February 2015. One of the most pressing issues for the Board was ensuring the security of our premises and our volunteers. The Treasurer noted that the cost of professional security could have been much higher. This financial year, we will be able to recoup 87% of these security costs via a grant from the Community Security Trust (CST). If the grant were to be extended, it will cover all of the costs for the year, estimated at £3.3k.
- **28 Highland Road.** This category is £1,662 over budget. Utilities were £794 over budget. Problems with the heating timer had contributed to this overspend; hopefully engineers would be able to resolve this issue. Maintenance and upkeep was £785 over budget, largely due the necessary replacement of a mezzanine window which had cost £2,144. Whilst we had a maintenance programme, it was not possible to foresee all repairs that would be needed.
- **Religion & Ritual.** This was £820 lower than budgeted; sales of HHD tickets were higher than budgeted; hire costs of Crofton Halls were lower than budgeted; and the purchase of Kiddush wine had been delayed until December 2015.

Budget 2016 – Subscription Rate

In setting the subscription rate for this year, the Board had been mindful that we cannot rely on legacies, or a continuing influx of new members. Therefore after careful consideration, the Board proposed a small increase of £5 for a single membership and £10 for a family membership.

The Treasurer recommended that the AGM accept the report and accounts for the Financial Year 2015 and the Subscription rate for 2016. The meeting adopted the Treasurer's report and accounts on the proposal of Janet Posner, seconded by Elka Carr. Hugh Lask commended the Treasurer on behalf of the community for the brilliant budgeting work that she had delivered.

The Treasurer invited questions.

- Hugh Lask asked how the MRJ levy was predicted exactly on target; the Treasurer explained that it was based on the previous year's levy, therefore would always be exactly on target, unless the MRJ changed the rate.
- Dan Posner queried the reasons for including figures for depreciation of assets, asking what these related to. The Treasurer explained that it was standard accounting practice to depreciate assets using a 'straight line' approach. She clarified that depreciation was not equivalent to revaluation - it did not imply that 28 Highland Road was falling in value. Overall, we are in relatively good shape in terms of our cash flow position.

5. Donor's Charitable Trust

Hugh Lask, as one of the trustees of the Donor's Trust, presented the accounts to the meeting. There had been a total spend of £2,793, of which the majority (£2,750) was spent on bursaries to allow our children to attend RSY tours of Israel. The remaining £43 was spent on a

membership drive. He clarified that allocations of funds was decided by the Board, who instructed himself and Matthew de Lange, joint trustees, how monies were to be allocated.

The Chairperson thanked Hugh and Matthew for this report, and for looking after the Trust so ably.

6. Rabbi's Report

The Rabbi commented that one important 'takeaway' from our Chairperson's report is that our synagogue is a busy place. However he wanted to talk about not what we/I do, but why we do it. This synagogue started out from noticing that sizeable families were 'schlepping' across to North London. It grew out of interest in starting a local Cheder, and education was key. Whilst it was also about providing full synagogue services, education and the Cheder are one of the most important things we provide.

We now have 80 children in our Cheder, and if you add all the adults, we are almost overflowing. The Rabbi saw this as an indication of the health and vibrancy of our learning programme. Some weeks, there may be as many as five different groups meeting. We have a lot going on in terms of learning – "something for everyone, and not all taught by me!" He said that success in Jewish learning is not just about numbers. It is about igniting curiosity in people for life, the world, and our place in it. It is about making learning engaging, and offering variety.

Of course we're not just a school. A major part of synagogue life is prayer, which provides a space for people to remember losses. It offers a chance for contemplation, to walk away feeling a bit better. Also much of what we do as a community is done by our members, volunteering. We're much better off thanks to our volunteers. An example of this was the vibrant discussions at the 'Our Shul, Your Shul' community event, held in January. Some of the ideas generated are already taking place, such as Sunday morning cookery sessions, and making language more accessible.

We are in a good position in terms of membership, with 367 individual adult members (not counting non-Jewish members or children). Of these, 53 have joined in the last three years; that equates to 15% of the whole Shul. People join for a variety of reasons, and lots of them come because we make an effort to reach out. We are also doing more. The Gan has grown to 20 children; introductory classes to Judaism run frequently; and we make it a point to be welcoming to mixed faith families and people who are interested in conversion. In the course of one year, 15 people have converted, and more are due to appear before the Beth Din

However numbers aren't the only way of measuring success; it is also important to look at relationships, impact and meaning. On relationships; whilst we are now a bit too big for everyone to know everyone in our community, he hoped that everyone knows someone – someone who cares. Impact is about: whether people behave a bit differently as a result of something at synagogue. Meaning is about enrichment; whether people understand something differently. The Rabbi said that overall, we are doing pretty well on all these metrics.

Finally, he gave his my personal thanks to our Chairperson Joanna, for being our Chair for over two years: "Our synagogue has done very well with your leadership, and you also helped to welcome me to the community."

The Chairperson thanked the Rabbi for his report. Janet Posner commended the Rabbi on the high standard of his adult teaching over the past year.

7. Election of the Executive Officers

The following Executive Officers were returned unopposed:

Chairperson – John Posner
Vice-Chairmen – Kieron Hyams
Secretary - Anna Sedenu
Treasurer - Sandra Hurley

8. Election of other Members of the Board:

The following persons were elected unopposed:

Elka Carr, Marilyn Freeman, Judith French, Graham Harris, Adrian Jackson, Pauline Jeffree, Joanna Koenigsberg, Barbara Kurtz, Matthew De Lange, Shane Lask, Lisa Lewis, Daniel Posner, Ruth Rolle

9. Election of the Independent Examiner

The Treasurer said that, as explained earlier, Harris & Trotter could no longer continue to act as our Independent Examiner due to a conflict of interests hence Thornton Springer had stepped in to verify our accounts. Nigel Springer had already done a long stint as our independent examiner, so we were looking for someone else to come forward. However there had been no response as yet to an advert posted in 'Highlight'. Given the lack of alternatives at the current time, the meeting duly elected Thornton & Springer as our Independent Examiners, on the proposal of Hugh Lask, seconded by John Posner.

10. Update on Security Issues

Graham Harris, Chair of Security and Safeguarding Committee, gave an update on security. He explained that he had been asked by the Board to set up a committee to deal with security, and had secured a representative from each of the shul's existing committees. The major issue to address had been the funding of Cheder security. Using volunteers to provide security on Sunday mornings had continued to present problems, with volunteers sometimes forgetting or failing to turn up, therefore funding professional security needed to continue. This year, it had happily turned out to be possible to reclaim security costs back from the government, and according to reports in the JC, this funding would continue. CST funding was also available for physical items such as security gates and security filming of windows. Elsewhere, Graham said that there were plans to arrange security training, provided via the CST, with dates currently being discussed.

11. Review of 'My Shul, Our Shul' community conversation held in January 2016

Unfortunately Matthew De Lange had sent his apologies, due to illness. A report had already been published in 'Highlight' regarding this event. The Chairperson said that she would ask Matthew if he could prepare a further progress update for 'Highlight'.

12. Any Other Business

- Dan provided further detail about the efforts to examine the feasibility of holding Rosh Hashanah services at the Shul rather than in Orpington; these were focusing on the option of holding two shorter back-to-back services with a short break in between
- Judi said that the idea for a new 'adult youth club' come about quite spontaneously, as adult members were keen to use the new equipment such as table tennis that had been purchased for youth activities. Details of session would be publicized in 'Highlight'

The meeting ended at approximately 9:45 pm.