

# **BROMLEY AND DISTRICT REFORM SYNAGOGUE LIMITED**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2019**

### **REPORT OF THE BOARD**

The Board had a full complement of elected members and met nine times in the past year. The Executive also met by tele/video-conferences on several occasions, as needed.

#### **Rabbi**

Early in 2018 Rabbi Jason Holtz gave notice that he would be resigning his rabbinical post at BRS and would be returning with his family to the USA. A steering group was established under the chairmanship of Kieron Hyams to manage the advertising and selection of a new rabbi. The position was advertised early in April 2018 and Rabbi Holtz finished his term of employment at the end of June 2018. Rabbi Chava Koster, a very experienced rabbi of a community located in New York submitted an application and was interviewed initially by videoconference. She was invited to spend a weekend at the synagogue which she did in September. Following the visit, the position was offered to Rabbi Koster and I am delighted to say she was pleased to accept. She took up her position in January 2019 and is already well ensconced. I thank Kieron and his team for the great job they did as a steering group for this appointment.

#### **Lay leadership at Shabbat morning services**

In the 6 months we were without a rabbi, our Shabbat services were conducted by lay members of the shul. I would like to thank all who provided such leadership, which was of a consistently high quality. I would also like to thank the choir and wardens who contribute so much to our services.

#### **Senior Warden**

After many years of commitment to the demanding post of senior warden, Dan Posner handed over the role to Stephanie Alberti in November 2018. We are extremely grateful for all the work Dan has done for our Shabbat and Festival services particularly for the meaningful High Holydays, which once again ran smoothly and with decorum. We are delighted that Stephanie Albert has taken on this essential role and she is already very involved with the work of the Religion and Ritual Committee and with Rabbi Koster.

#### **Kol Nidre Appeal**

As always the Board selected three charities in addition to the shul for our Kol Nidre Appeal. The sums raised exceeded the previous year's total by a considerable margin, which itself was the previous highest on record. For Myisrael the sum raised was £5,756.00, for Freedom from Torture £3,912.00, for the Jewish Deaf Association £3,711.00 and for the Shul, £7,384.75. The sum for the Shul does not include gift aid. I believe our community can be congratulated for its generosity.

#### **Streaming of educational sessions (led by Rabbi Holtz)**

Rabbi Holtz did a great job setting up everything required to stream talks. To stream services however, Rabbi Holtz recommended employing some degree of professional help. It would be useful to speak to other shuls who had such a system, but it was usually the case that they had a member with experience in such technology and many actually had an audio-visual room from which everything was operated.

#### **Recycling**

The Board held discussions about recycling and agreed that since paper plates and much plastic cutlery cannot be recycled, events involving catering should use glass and china crockery and metal cutlery which can be washed in our new dishwasher.

## **Implementation of General Data protection Regulation (GDPR)**

The Board expressed its commitment to comply with GDPR, which came into force on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Jon Woolf, who has undergone training in GDPR was appointed Data Protection Officer and carried out an audit for the Board. There were quite extensive discussions on the manner in which we do our business and communicate with our members, It was recognized that this would be a process taking several months involving the way we store and manage information. Actions taken so far include:

- A mailing to all members asking for permission to hold the details of their families as required by the synagogue and JJBS and asking for their agreement to be included in various operational correspondence by post or email;
- Reorganization of files containing personal information in the synagogue office with storage in locked cabinets;
- Introduction of dropbox for all synagogue data with the requirement that all data management be through dropbox and deletion of synagogue data from personal computers;
- Very restricted access to personal details of synagogue members with the main database for these data being retained securely by the administrator. Details would not be shared with any organization other than JJBS. Any data provided to organisations such as MRJ is always blind and anonymised;
- The Information Commission has been informed that we are processing data – collecting, storing, sharing and deleting data relating to a living person.
- Education of members to use bcc routinely for emails to more than a very few members
- A GDPR policy statement was prepared and its final version was approved by the Board in November. It will be reviewed annually or more frequently if needed.

Introduction of a client relationship management system to keep personal details about members is also under consideration.

## **Cemetery**

The Board has given consideration to finding a cemetery closer to Bromley than the Western Cemetery at Cheshunt. A new cemetery with a non-denominational chapel and a garden of remembrance opened at Kemnal Park near Chislehurst in 2013. It would be possible for BRS to lease a section of the grounds exclusively for our use. We have given consideration to leasing sufficient for 50 double depth graves within the cemetery and extensive discussions have taken place but the limiting factor is the cost. JJBS would contribute £2,450 for each burial but this would be considerably less than required for undertaker and digging fees. The Board has not dismissed the proposal and is considering various options. No decision will be made without consulting the membership

## **Reform Covenant**

Matthew de Lange has participated in an ongoing working party of the RJ discussing the content of a Reform Covenant. The final version of this document is likely to be approved this summer at Chagigah.

## **Board of Deputies**

Joe Millis has been highly active as our Deputy and I thank him for his commitment to this important role. One proposal that we (the BRS Board) were asked to support related to the lack of criticism of Israel by the BoD in a statement referring to the Quakers' disinvestment from companies that profit from investment in the settlements, adding to their existing boycott of produce from the West Bank. Members of the Board spoke frankly about their personal views on the current Israeli government and the occupied territories, the Peace Now movement and the UN's anti-Israel stance. It was felt that criticism of the BoD was not appropriate since Board members are elected to run the synagogue not to express political views, particularly on a complex subject about which there are such a variety of opinions. However, very recently the Board has written a critical letter to the President of the BoD because of her refusal to criticise the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Likud forming an alliance with the racist, extreme right wing party Otzma Yehudit.

## **REPORTS FROM THE COMMITTEES AND GROUPS**

### **Religion and Ritual (led by Dan Posner and recently by Stephanie Alberti)**

Attendance was generally good on Saturday mornings during the period we were without a rabbi but it was decided to discontinue Friday night services temporarily. Attendance on Friday nights has been very poor for some years but we are looking forward to their rejuvenation in the coming months under the leadership of our new rabbi. Rabbi Barbara Borts officiated at Rosh Hashanah and Rabbi Deborah Kahn Harris over Yom Kippur. We are extremely grateful for their excellent leadership and inspiration. Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner also led a Shabbat morning service. In the past few months we have benefited from the contribution of an LBC 4<sup>th</sup> year rabbinical student, Anna Posner, who has led excellent services about once-a-month.

The Committee worked hard to organise the festivals and Shabbat services and provide wardening support throughout the year. Dan and Stephanie 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.

The Communal Seder was fully booked, attended by all ages and was a great success. Thanks were given to Harriet Posner for her excellent organisation.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur children services were well attended. Rabbi Kahn Harris' study session during the Mussaf service was well attended and received. The lay readers, wardens and the Rabbi excelled and the services ran smoothly, and the choir performed beautifully.

A highly successful Chanukah fair was enjoyed by all and raised much needed funds.

Jonathan Woolf has become a warden and joined the RRC. Ronnie Goldberg, warden and long-standing secretary of the RRC, retired from the committee. We minuted our thanks to him with particular note of Ronnie's many years of supporting the Committee with his expertise and advice. Judith French has also retired from the Committee and we thank her for her valuable contribution. The Committee would welcome new recruits to the team of wardens and anyone who would like to become a warden should contact Stephanie.

### **Caring Community (led by Pauline Jeffree)**

Pauline thanks all the members of the Committee for their hard work, wonderful care and all kinds of support. Members are visited directly or by telephone, e-mail, Skype, Face-time and post. Committee members also visit the bereaved, housebound, those in hospital, in care or nursing homes. Greeting cards are sent to the elderly, to the bereaved and to any member who has any news they would like to share. Each month a small group of us record *Talking Highlight*, an audio version of *Highlight*, and, after editing, discs / sticks are sent to those needing this support.

Bromley's Knitters, Stitchers and Natterers continue to meet regularly at Park Court, Pauline's home (anyone is welcome). Some of the group are not known to us. Our youngest knitter is 9 years of age; our oldest is well into her 90s. We have a wide remit but it is a joy and a privilege to be helping the tiny, sick babies and neonates in the Intensive Care Unit and their families at King's College Hospital. Several of us have visited the KCH Unit and met staff and parents and senior staff have joined our group.

Tea Parties for those on their own are held at Park Court every four weeks. Volunteers from the Synagogue help not only by making tea and cakes but importantly by spending time talking to invited guests. Those known to Caring Community receive personal invitations and any non-attendees are followed up. Transport is offered to any who might need such help; this support is through the Synagogue Transport Fund. The Tea Parties are run in conjunction with Jewish Care who provide training, initiate police checks for volunteers and also provide Insurance Cover. We are now in our fourth year.

At our Macmillan Coffee Morning we raised £843:00p.

### **Social Centre (led by Dianne Matthew)**

The Social Centre has continued to meet regularly during the past year with members enjoying their exercise sessions with Andreas and occasional musical entertainments. Numbers have increased, with 20 -25 attending regularly. Dianne thanked all the helpers.

### **Education (led by Barbara Kurtz)**

Rabbi Holtz' last course was on Modern and Post-Modern Jewish Thought and Judaism Today and Tomorrow. The twice monthly Talmud class continued right up to his departure and was much appreciated by his students. Our Jubilee Lecturer was Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko, Director of the Council of Christians and Jews who spoke about 75 years of the CCJ and how her experiences of living for 23 years in Jerusalem changed her understanding of the Middle East.

The Committee has had a relatively quiet year in the absence of a rabbi but has lots of plans for the future with Rabbi Koster. Thank you to the members of the committee for their help last year and their ongoing support as we start afresh now.

Once again Marilyn Freeman has been busy with schools showing 22 groups of local school children round the Shul with a lesson in basic Judaism to meet the requirements of their curriculum. Nine more schools have already made bookings for this year. Sandra Hurley meanwhile helped two groups of Cubs obtain the appropriate badge when they visited. Our thanks to both.

The Education Committee also oversees the Cheder and I would like to thank Vicki Ashmore and her teachers and helpers for all their hard work. Sue Bowyer and Heidi Small work hard with the youngest pupils in the Gan, while at the other end of the age range thanks go to Hayley Preston and her successor Lili Evans for their efforts with the Youth Group.

Bromley Three Faiths Forum, which Rabbi Holtz was involved in setting up, continues with its aim of educating the three faiths in the beliefs and traditions of the others. Representatives from a group of 15 "assorted" churches, the Keston Mosque and our Synagogue get together at various venues over the year. Rabbi Holtz and Dr Omar Taha from the Al-Emaan Centre Mosque in Keston spoke about the two faiths' views on Abraham in March. At the end of the year three sessions looked at texts from the scriptures of all three faiths, at meetings held at the Mosque, St John's Church and our Shul, introductory talks being followed by lively discussions. Rabbi Koster will be meeting members of the churches and the mosque shortly and we look forward to future events.

### **Cheder (led by Vicki Ashmore)**

The staff at present numbers 12, excluding the Head Teacher. Of these, two are working as a job share and two run the Gan Yeladim (kindergarten). We have 11 young helpers and a (grand) parent volunteer to work as a one-to-one remedial Hebrew teacher. Seventy-nine children are enrolled in our cheder, including the Gan and helpers. We expect to have a full complement of classes next year.

The CHAI curriculum is used to teach Jewish Studies in Kittot Bet through Zayin while Kittot Aleph and Chet remain on the older syllabus. Vicki has been working with Heidi Small and Sue Bowyer to create a new curriculum for the Gan Yeladim.

To encourage our children to mix with the rest of the congregation, our cheder has held various shul-wide events, including the annual Chanukah party, a Purim Celebration Day, a Yom HaShoah service and hopefully a Youth Club table at the Communal Seder. Last November, Lili Evans co-ordinated a "Tea and Games Afternoon" to bring the Cheder and the older members of our community together.

Last year, the children raised Tzedakah money for Bliss, a charity which supports premature babies, and The Eagle Heights Wildlife Foundation, which supports endangered species. To thank us, Eagle Heights gave us 2 family tickets to their centre, which were auctioned at the Chanukah Fair to raise money for the Cheder.

“Hooray Cheder”, our cheder parent group, is now running under the leadership of Amanda Penn and Sonia Hyams. They have helped with many of the extra-curricular events which happen during Cheder hours, including the Chanukah Fair.

The Youth Group continues under the leadership of Lilinaz Evans, who has run monthly events in the synagogue as well as trips to Sadeh Farm and the Imperial War Museum. Lili is also working with RSY to bring our older children in contact with other Jewish children around London.

Each year our cheder children in Kittah Zayin receive a siddur of their own from the Goldman Trust. We are so very grateful for the continued generosity of the Trust.

Currently Vicki is working with the Rabbi to bring more music to both the children and the rest of the members of the synagogue. Plans include a dedicated Music Teacher to run classes during cheder and create a musical curriculum, and a Shul klezmer band.

The Cheder is only able to run because of the commitment and participation of our teachers, parents and helpers. Vicki is truly grateful for each and every one of them. She also states that she is honoured to have been involved in Cheder for the past 16 years, (10 as a teacher and 6 as Head) and is excited to be working with Rabbi Koster for the foreseeable future.

#### **Comms Group (led by Judi Sheffrin)**

The synagogue continues to communicate with members and potential members/event attenders through the website, e-light, Highlight and our social media presence. Once again, thanks are due to the ever-watchful Kieron Hyams for his custodianship of our on-line presence and various members, especially Michelle Brooks Evans and Alison Scammell, for regular Facebook posts. Ronnie Goldberg has continued to ensure that e-light and e-light extra appear each week and Bob Symonds is entering his 40th year as editor of Highlight with undiminished enthusiasm. Heidi Small has also made arrangements for the website to be regularly updated.

#### **Council of Christians and Jews SE London (led by Stephen Weil)**

CCJ SE London has had several meetings over the past year. In April we discussed “What is the religious meaning of Jerusalem?” The panel included Rabbi Jason Holtz, who dated the Jewish commitment to living in Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, as distinct from the Christian idea of pilgrimage, to the text of Deuteronomy. In July the Shul’s Jubilee Lecture was delivered by the Director of CCJ, Elizabeth Harris-Sawczenko (see Education Committee above). Despite all the turmoil over the period, it was encouraging that Elizabeth remains hopeful that young people will demand better solutions than those achieved by their past and present leaders. In October a panel of Christians and Jews discussed how to achieve the spirit of the Sabbath in contemporary London. For the Jewish Panellists, the 25 hours of the Sabbath represented a different space and time from the working week. Most recently, in January 2019, we discussed the “Importance of Trees in the Bible and in SE London” in the context of the Jewish New Year for Trees (Tu B’Shvat) with a Panel that included John Posner. The geographical context ranged from the Land of Israel and the Amazon forest to Sydenham Hill Woods. Thank you to St Stephen’s Church, Dulwich; Catford and Bromley Shul; and our own Shul for hosting.

#### **Housing and Building (led by Graham Harris):**

Highlights this year included fitting new sash windows in the sanctuary, conversion of the cloakroom into an office for the Head of Cheder, installation of a new shed in the front garden to store youth club equipment, repair of a leak in the synagogue roof, carrying out the 5-year

electrical testing and carrying out updates of some fittings including some new cabling and sockets and new outside lights. A new dishwasher was also bought and installed in the kitchen. Regular servicing was undertaken for the boiler and heating system (annually), the emergency lights and PAT testing (annually) fire extinguishers (annually), the fire and intruder alarms (6 monthly) and the lift (3 monthly).

### **Security and Safeguarding (led by Graham Harris)**

Once again, the Community Security Trust has reported a substantial increase in security incidents in the UK over the past year. We consider the security of our members and children to be of paramount importance. Security for Saturday morning services is provided by a dedicated and reliable team of about 25 members. We have revamped our procedures in line with the advice of the CST for Shabbat and are also trying to get a training course booked so we can train more volunteers. Security for our Social Centre every fortnight is provided by Tom Thelander. Cheder requires the services of a professional security officer, complemented by parent volunteers and this has been providing the standard of care we need. We thank all the members who have reliably provided security over the past year.

### **SE10 and Beyond (led by Michelle Brookes-Evans)**

The group has continued to meet every 4 to 6 weeks with evenings usually attended by between 8 and 15 members and always with some sort of Jewish theme. The past year has included a poetry evening, a session talking about Jewish paintings and pictures, a Chanukah candle lighting, a picnic in Greenwich in the summer and a discussion about what we want from a Jewish community. The group stays active and has had new members from outside the shul. On behalf of the group, Michelle invites all shul members to join the group which has fostered personal friendships resulting in trips to the theatre, dinners, quick coffees and chats.

### **BR5 and 6 (led by Nadia Gilman)**

Our activities this year have remained similar to those of last year, with coffee mornings, lunches and afternoon teas in various local cafes restaurants and garden centres and get togethers in one another's homes with delicious shared food. We did have a particularly memorable occasion at one of these gatherings when, during a game of charades, one of our members, who shall remain nameless, gave some outstanding performances and had us all almost falling off our seats with laughter.

We all contribute in various ways to the group and our main focus has always been the friendship, care and support we have continued to give and receive from each other. It is thus this year, so very sadly, we have lost one of our most dedicated members, Zena Goodman, a founder member, who is and always will be so missed by us all. We all hope to embrace her attitude to life and her advice and 'get on with it'.

### **Finally**

I thank my fellow officers Lisa (secretary), Michelle and Kieron (Vice Chairs) and Sandra (Treasurer) for all their hard work. I also thank the wardens and lay readers who have participated in running our services, the committee chairs and members who have made things happen and also those who do things that are not necessarily visible but contribute so much. In particular I thank all the members who so generously give of their time to visit the sick and lonely and who carry out acts of chesed (loving kindness) to other people without seeking any recognition or thanks. This is what a Jewish community is all about. I also thank our superb administrator Janet Burlem and finally, I would like to thank Gilly Shulman of the RJ for the support of our community during the period we were without a rabbi.