



SWANSEA  
HEBREW  
CONGREGATION  
1730 - 1980



## YOUNGER GENERATION

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THE GUILDHALL, SWANSEA SA1 4PA

*It is indeed a privilege for me to write these few words of greeting to the Swansea Hebrew Congregation. A privilege because I am able to say thank you to the community past and present who have played such an important part in the life of our City.*

*In this way, I am also able to extend my good wishes to everyone who has the opportunity of reading this excellent booklet.*

ALAN LLOYD  
Mayor

ב"ה

## *Swansea Hebrew Congregation*

Synagogue, Ffynone, Swansea

*It gives me very great pleasure, on behalf of the Swansea Hebrew Congregation, to place on record our appreciation to all those people and organisations, too numerous to mention by name, who have given so generously of their efforts, time and resources towards the production of this commemorative brochure and to make our 250th Anniversary such a success.*

*Our celebrations will culminate in a Service at the Synagogue followed by a Dinner at our City's beautiful Brangwyn Hall. I am sure that these events, supported by so many of our friends from both within the City and outside, will not only strengthen the existing bonds which have been so pleasantly built up over the last 250 years, but will ensure that our mutual regard and respect will continue to grow.*

MARTIN GLASS  
Chairman,  
Swansea Hebrew Congregation

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## OFFICE OF THE CHIEF RABBI

ADLER HOUSE,

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**MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF RABBI**

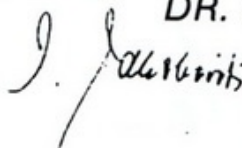
*In anticipation of my visit in November, when I look forward to celebrate with you a notable milestone in the history of your community, I gladly extend my greetings through this Brochure to mark the occasion.*

*Following the brutal destruction of countless Jewish communities in Europe during our lifetime, your record of attaining the 250th Anniversary of continuous Jewish life in Swansea assumes special significance. This eventful quarter-millennium covers the most momentous period in Jewish and human annals, linking the emergence of the Jewish people from medieval oppression, through the Emancipation during the 19th Century, to the convulsive experiences of our own age, culminating in the horror of the Holocaust on the one hand and the triumph of Israel's re-birth on the other.*

*From the seeds of the early beginnings of Jewish settlement in Swansea in 1730, one of the oldest roots of Jewish life in this country - the oldest in Wales - had been struck to nourish a tree of communal achievement which has contributed numerous wonderful fruits of Jewish personalities and Jewish homes to add sustenance and fragrance as well as stability to British Jewry.*

*The Swansea Hebrew Congregation may now count fewer souls than years. This enhances the importance of each one of them in perpetuating the rich traditions of the past and contributing to the enrichment of Jewish life in the future. May the Almighty bless the leaders and members of the Congregation with health and vigour to play a worthy role in these exciting times, bringing added pride to our people, glory to our faith and renewal in our commitment to Torah and Israel.*

DR. IMMANUEL JAKOBOVITS  
Chief Rabbi





# The Board of Deputies of British Jews

WOBURN HOUSE, UPPER WOBURN PLACE, LONDON, WC1H 0EP.

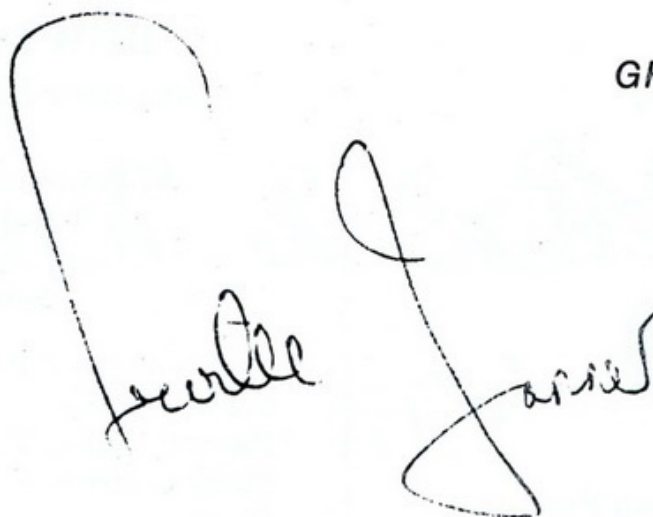
## MESSAGE FROM HON. GREVILLE JANNER, QC., MP., PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

*On behalf of the Board and of our entire Jewish Community, I send to the Swansea Hebrew Congregation warm and affectionate greetings and good wishes. The Board itself is celebrating its 220th Anniversary this year - which makes the venerable pride of the Jews of Swansea and south-west Wales all the more justified.*

*In 1939, I was at school in Pontypool and paid frequent visits to Swansea, Newport and Neath, so I know of the generous hospitality of your own community, of the service it gives not only to the Jewish people but to Wales and to Britain as a whole. I salute with delight an occasion of joy and goodwill shared by your much respected Community with the people of south-west Wales with whom they have so long lived in mutual harmony and acceptance.*

*Shalom - and Cymru am Byth!*

Yours sincerely,  
GREVILLE JANNER

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Greville Janner', written in dark ink. The signature is positioned below the typed name and is written over a large, faint, stylized outline of the letter 'J'.





*Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits with children of the Hebrew School, May 1976.*



Swansea Jewish A.F.C. [1925-1926].



Back Row: H. Cowan [Treasurer], P. Freedman [Trainer], E. Mass, E. Joseph, E. Levi, I. Sokolow, M. Snipper, E. Glick, A. Morris [Swans A.F.C.], M. Berger [Committee]. Front Row: A. Sokolow, J. Cohen [Secretary], M. Baddiel [Captain], I. Silverstone, L. Dennis, A. Joseph [Chairman].



*Jubilee of the Swansea Synagogue, 26th May, 1909.*



Back Row: E. Barnett, A. Rubenstein, M. Jacobs, A. Lyons, I. Seline, M.L. Marks, I.R. Levi, H. Goldberg.  
Front Row: H. Barnett, A. Freedman [Treasurer], Dd. Seline [President], Rev. M. Lubner [Reader], Very Rev. Dr. H. Adler [Chief Rabbi], Miss N. Adler, Rev. H.J. Sandheim [Minister].



## **THE SWANSEA JEWISH COMMUNITY: BEGINNINGS and BECOMINGS**

### **Genesis**

The genesis and development of a community is rather like the development of a human being. At first there are present just a few individual cells which may remain isolated for some time but which eventually interact, multiply and finally organise themselves into that fabric of divine creation called life.

So it was with our Jewish community in Swansea. There were individual Jews in the area more than 250 years ago but where they came from and how they lived are questions to which we have no clear answers. Thus, the 1725 list of lodge members at the Nag's Head and Star, Carmarthen, contains the names of several Jewish freemasons, among them William Samuell, a glover by trade. Then there was Lazarus David who is recorded in the Jewish Encyclopaedia as having been born in Swansea in 1734. Who were his parents and where did they come from? Definitive answers are tantalisingly absent but his subsequent life was certainly of some consequence because he emigrated to Canada in about 1760 to become one of the founders of the Canadian Jewish community, particularly in Montreal where Shearith Israel the Sephardi congregation (Jews of the Spanish and Portuguese tradition) his family helped to found is still flourishing. Further, Cecil Roth in his well-known book 'The Rise of Provincial Jewry', refers to a Solomon Lyons whose business was established in Swansea in 1731. These fragments of information stand out starkly against a dim background whose details we can now only guess at and which awaits careful research.

Notwithstanding this, there are clearly grounds for believing that the raw materials of a Jewish community, namely individual Jews, were in the Swansea area at least 250 years ago. Their numbers were probably small and their interaction negligible. In time, however, further Jewish settlement occurred, a notable case being that of David Michael whose family was later to play a creditable role in the history of Swansea. Born in 1727 in Germany he probably arrived here in 1749 along with Samuel Levi and his brother Moses. Samuel Levi in 1802 was to found a banking business in Haverfordwest. Two other continental immigrants, a Mr. Cohen and a Mr. Joseph, subsequently joined Michael in Swansea and regular meetings for prayer may have begun about this time.

Probably the first corporate action of the emerging community was the leasing of a plot of land to be used as a burial ground. A Hall Day Minute dated 5th October, 1768 in the City Archives records the agreement of the Burgesses of the then Borough to the lease, and the lease itself is dated 28th November, 1768. It was for 99 years on a plot of land 30 yards by 15 yards which was part of the Town Hill and exists there today. In the lease, David Michael is described as a silversmith and he undertook to pay an annual rent of 10 shillings to the Burgesses in addition to a couple of fat pullets for the Portreeve or Mayor (or 1 shilling in lieu). He was also required to 'enclose the same (plot) with a good and sufficient stone wall with good lime mortar at least 8 feet high and 20 inches thick ...' (In the



same year 1768, but 3000 miles away to the west, a small gathering of Jews in Montreal decided to found what was the first Jewish congregation in Canada, the 'Remnant of Israel'. Included in that remnant was Lazarus David of Swansea).

The next step was the establishment of the first synagogue. It was part of David Michael's house in Wind Street, at the back of his usual sitting room, and could accommodate thirty or forty persons. This served until about 1789 when the congregation, according to a 'week-day preacher' writing much later in 1859 moved to 'a room opposite Mr. Essery's warehouse, in the Strand ... and there the Jews worshipped God with their hats on for thirty years'. The next move was to more spacious accommodation for 60-70 people; it was built on land in Waterloo Street leased in 1818 for 99 years. By this time David Michael had died, aged 70, as had his wife Rachel, aged 90. Their two sons Levi and Jacob were then among the leaders of the still small community and traded as Silversmiths, Jewellers, Milliners and General Furnishers. Levi, like his father, had an active interest in the Port of Swansea and was an original proprietor of the Swansea canal. This came about as a result of an Act of Parliament in 1794 which provided for the making and maintaining of a navigable canal from the Town of Swansea in the County of Glamorgan to the parish of Ystradgynlais in the County of Brecon. Both brothers enjoyed long lives like their parents, Levi dying at the age of 87 in 1841. All their sons were subsequently of note in the business life of Swansea though in time they became divorced from the developing Jewish community. One of Levi's sons, for example, was Francis David Michael, a founder of the Swansea Savings Bank in 1816. And one of Jacob's sons, Michael John Michael, apart from becoming a very successful flour and grain merchant, distinguished himself in local administration over a period of some twenty years from 1836, eighteen of them as an Alderman. Elected Mayor in 1848 and made a J.P. in 1849, he played an important part in fighting the cholera outbreak in the City during the autumn of 1849.

## Victorian Times

By the start of the Victorian era in 1837 then, Jews had been living in Swansea for over a century, and the Synagogue in Waterloo Street was already the third house of prayer in the community. It had 55 seats. The congregation at this time seems to have numbered between 100 and 150, the figure being given as 133 individuals in the Table of Provincial Congregations which appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* in July 1847. This table also gave the number of Swansea ba'ale batim (heads of households) as 9 resident and 2 non-resident and the number of seat holders as 13. Among the congregation was Jacob A. Mosely, a noted watch and clock maker of the City who had premises at various times in High Street, Castle Street and Goat Street. Born in 1769 the son of Rabbi Moses Zelig he is recorded as having repaired the Swansea town clock (Castle tower clock) in 1844 and, more unusual, to have held the rank of Sergeant in the Glamorgan Yeomanry at the time of the Napoleonic invasion scare about 1804. Of the early officiants of the community little is known; one of



them was Meir b. R. Judah who was authorised to practice as Shochet (legally and religiously authorised slaughterer) in 1829.

Mr. Marks, the President in 1837, must have been able to report to the Chief Rabbi on the satisfactory state of the congregation since in a reply in November of that year Rabbi Solomon Hirschell expressed "much pleasure to learn of the peaceable state of your congregation". In the same letter the Chief Rabbi called the President's serious attention to the need for completing without any further delay the mikvah (ritual bath) which then apparently required for completion only the laying of a pipe to the sea. A Lease of land for the erection of the mikvah had been entered into in 1835 when premises in Wellington Road were taken for a period of 50 years at a rent of £2 per annum. This rent still appeared on the Congregation's Balance Sheet in 1879.

In 1845 Swansea was one of twenty provincial congregations with a vote in the election of the new Chief Rabbi. The Laws and Regulations made by Dr. Nathan Adler in 1847 do not appear to have met with universal approval as there were disturbances in the synagogue at Swansea following their introduction.

In 1845 the Swansea congregation was itself in the market for a Shochet/Hazzan (Cantor)/Baal Koreh (Reader of the Law), the advertisement in the *Voice of Jacob* adding that a Mohel (one qualified to circumcise) would be preferred. By the time similar advertisements appeared in 1848 and 1851 they were for a Shochet/Hazzan/Mohel/Baal Koreh. The person chosen as Chazzan/Shochet in 1851 was Rev. I. Piser and his appointment was notified by the President Mr. I. Jacob to the Chief Rabbi. In replying Dr. Adler raised no objection but requested that for future contingencies his sanction should be obtained before any employment was concluded.

In 1848 Mr. I.M. Moses filled the office of Grand Juryman. He was also in that year elected one of the Board of Guardians for Swansea Union being considered the first Jew in the Principality to fill an honorary public office.

In the following year the congregation was called upon to redeem the mortgage on the synagogue and also had the opportunity of buying the freehold. There was resort to the regular practice at that time of advertising in the *Jewish Chronicle* for contributions from the general community.

In 1854/55 the congregation was first represented at the Board of Deputies by Mr. Isaac L. Miers of Houndsditch but the membership appears to have lapsed after this initial appointment.

The next stage in the congregation's development took place in 1857 when at a meeting after the High Holidays it was proposed that a new synagogue be built as many had been prevented from attending worship



on account of lack of space. At this meeting the President for the past seven years, Mr. I. Jacob, gave way to a new President, Mr. Simon Goldberg, who was to prove the leading layman in the congregation for the rest of the century.

A piece of ground suitable for the new building was bought in 1857 and two years later the foundation stone was laid and the building completed. Once again Swansea looked to the wider community for assistance with the building costs by way of advertisements in the *Jewish Chronicle*. These pointed out that the congregation had grown from four or five families when the synagogue had been built 40 years previously to upwards of thirty and that these families "pious, but by no means opulent" had themselves raised £1200 of the required £1700. On ordinary Sabbaths the synagogue did not have enough seats for the resident families while on festival days ladies were compelled to occupy the stairs leading to the gallery and many persons were obliged to absent themselves from public worship for the want of the necessary accommodation. In its editorial columns the *Jewish Chronicle* commented that "It is but rarely that an appeal for a synagogue comes before the community with such strong claims".

The new Synagogue was duly opened in Goat Street on 25th September, 1859 with a service conducted by the Rev. J. Tuchman and a choir led by Mr. George Moore of London. The opening ceremony was to have been performed by the Chief Rabbi Dr. Nathan Marcus Adler but he was prevented by illness from attending. His son, Hermann, preached instead, this being the first sermon of his career. The consecration service was followed by a banquet in the residence of one of the congregants attended by 60 people. Mr. S. Goldberg presided.

The new Synagogue was designed by Henry J. Bayliss of Swansea and built by Mr. Holtam of Bath. It was some 47 ft. 9 ins. long × 25 ft. wide and provided accommodation for 228 persons, that is, 120 men and 108 women. For the initial period after the construction of the new synagogue membership continued at a markedly higher level than previously. Thus while the number of seat holders for the years 1857, 1858 and 1859 was 29, 29 and 32, the corresponding figures for the years 1861, 1862 and 1863 were 43, 45 and 46.

Among notable occasions an old record book of the congregation notes that in September 1866 the Brit (ceremony of circumcision) of Simon the son of Albert Lewis took place in the synagogue on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). There must also have been great rejoicing on 30th March, 1892 when the marriages took place of Sarah and Jessie, daughters of Isaac Seline, the President. Sarah married David Harris a navigation teacher of Swansea while Jessie's groom was Morris Borgenicht a pipe maker from London. There had been a similar occasion in March 1867 when a brother and sister, Lewis and Elizabeth Simmons, were respectively married to Nancy Jacobs and Eleazar Levy but neither of the couples were resident in Swansea and the marriages took place in a private house in Oxford Street. Mr. Simon Goldberg marked the Barmitzvah



(coming of age) celebrations of his two sons by presenting Sifrei Torah (Scrolls of the Law) to the synagogue and a Sefer (Scroll) was also left to the synagogue in memory of Mr. Lewis Lyons who died in 1887.

In the years 1862/64 the congregation was again represented on the Board of Deputies, this time by Mr. S.A. Kisch of Lancaster Place, London.

In September 1866 there was an examination of pupils of the Hebrew School. In a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* Mr. H. Worms Jnr. pointed out that this was the first such examination in the history of the community.

In the later 1860's there appears to have been a decline in the congregation and by the end of the decade its affairs reached a low ebb. In 1869 the burial of a child was refused on account of an alleged membership irregularity. Also a person who had been a member for many years was refused admission to the cemetery to place a headstone on his wife's grave. Two other persons who were there at the same time with headstones were compelled to take them back as the authorities feared that if the gates were opened for these two the third would gain admission at the same time. Little wonder that a correspondent to the *Jewish Chronicle* at the time expressed deep anxiety that a congregation constituted by the efforts of many years may not be exposed to disunion or disruption. The quarrels also extended to the arrangement of weddings and a complaint was made to the Board of Deputies that marriage fees of over £10 were demanded. Allegations were also made of spikes being set in synagogue seats.

With the threat of a secession of the disaffected members, peace moves were undertaken by the Chief Rabbi and harmony was re-established in the course of a pastoral visit by Dr. Adler in 1871. Among the measures agreed on was one for the establishment of a new Code of Laws and this was adopted in 1872. It provided that prayers and services should be conducted 'Minhag Poland' (according to the Polish Jewish tradition) and according to regulations laid down by the Chief Rabbi for the time being. Among other provisions of the new rules were that offerings (gifts to the Synagogue) on Shabbat should be not less than 1/- for the Chief Rabbi and honorary officers and 6d each for any additional offering. Any person who was called to the Reading of the Law but refused to go up was to be fined ten shillings and sixpence. There was a revision of the Rules in 1892. These now provided that "Any offering shall not be less than six pence on Sabbaths, nor less than one shilling on Holy days". The penalty for refusing an aliyah (a call) was altered from a pecuniary one to loss of the right to be called up again for six months. However, pride of place must surely be given to the new Rule 23 which began "That Mr. Goldberg officiate as heretofore as Baltifila (Reader) and Baltekea (one who blows the ram's horn) on every occasion as long as he thinks fit, and when he decides to discontinue same, no other private member be allowed to act as Baltifila or Baltekea".



Another matter which brought the Swansea congregation onto the wider communal scene in 1871 arose from a Court case in which Mr. E.F. Moses was involved. A seaman was apprehended on the charge of stealing a pair of stockings and a cap from Mr. Moses. The matter came before the Court on Shabbat and Mr. Moses refused to sign the deposition on the grounds that Jews are precluded from writing on the Sabbath. He asked either that he be allowed to sign in the evening or that the case be adjourned until Monday. The Court refused this request and discharged the prisoner. Mr. Moses wrote to the Chief Rabbi who replied in a letter to the *Western Mail* that the London practice was for the deposition to be signed on the Saturday night or Monday morning. Mr. Moses was also persuaded to refer the matter to the Board of Deputies where there was a debate as to whether the question should be dropped or referred to the Law and Parliamentary Committee. Following a 6 - 6 vote the Chairman by his casting vote ruled that the matter should not be referred and so it was dropped.

In 1874 the Rev. J. Tuchman left Swansea for Sheffield. His stay of fifteen years with the congregation was by far the longest of any of its communal servants up to that time. He was succeeded as Chazan and Shochet by Rev. Lazarus Slevanski from Norwich who in turn was replaced in 1876 by the Rev. Israel Levanton.

The year 1877 again saw dissension in the congregation, this time on account of the plight of two children who were in the workhouse. They were alleged to be relatives of leading members of the community who it was claimed should secure their release. The Chief Rabbi was again involved and the matter was eventually resolved by the despatch of the children to South Africa to be reunited with their mother. Payment of the fare was guaranteed when the children were aboard the boat.

Also in 1877 a Branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association was formed with 36 members but this interest was not long maintained and the affiliation lapsed.

Swansea returned to the appeal columns of the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1878 when on the enlargement of the cemetery there was a deficiency of £125 for the re-building of the boundary wall. Swansea was not, of course, always at the receiving end of appeals. The congregation responded in 1859 and 1864 to appeals by the Board of Deputies for help to alleviate disasters at Bojonowa and Monastir. In 1894 a collection was made on behalf of the Albion Colliery Disaster Fund. There were regular collections for the Swansea Hospital and in 1901 over £200 was raised by the stall of Jewish Ladies at the Grand Bazaar for the Victoria Wing of the Royal Cambrian Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. But perhaps the biggest effort was the £300 raised in 1891 towards the Fund for the Relief of Russian Jewish Fugitives. In this amount was a contribution of £10 from the Mayor and £2.2.0 from the Vicar of Swansea.

The 1880's brought fresh changes in the religious leadership of the congregation. The appointment in 1881 of the Rev. Israel Miron as



Chazan/Shochet was to inaugurate a lengthy tenure of this office. Moreover, following the setting up of the Chief Rabbi's Fund for Provincial Ministers the Rev. Moses Hyamson was in 1884 appointed Minister in Swansea. Not only was the town henceforth to have two ministerial officials but for the first time it had in Rev. Hyamson a graduate of Jews' College who was primarily a preacher as opposed to its previous line of Chazan/Shochetim. These new Ministers began to represent the congregation among the wider community. Thus in March 1887 Rev. Hyamson delivered a lecture to the Royal Institution at Swansea on "The Fall of Jerusalem, its History and Legends".

In October 1884 a silver salver was presented to Mr. Solomon Brown on his retirement due to failing health as baal tephilla in which capacity he had given his services for over 30 years. Three years later Mr. Simon Goldberg also reached the stage of completing 30 years as honorary baal tephilla and in 1889 his two sons donated a pulpit to the Synagogue to commemorate the 50th year of his residence in Swansea. In 1893 a silver salver was presented to Mr. I. Seline who had been President of the Congregation for some years and its Registrar of Marriages for 18 years. He did not in fact resign as Registrar until 1922. The first Swansea Registrar of Marriages had been appointed in 1850. He was Mr. Isaac Jacob of Castle Street.

Rev. Hyamson left Swansea at the end of 1888. The advertisement for his successor sought a Hebrew Teacher and Lecturer at £100 p.a. in addition to which it was anticipated that the Jewish Provincial Ministers' Fund would grant a subvention. Rev. Harris L. Price from Manchester was appointed in December 1888 and took up his post the following month. There were to be three more changes within the next decade. Rev. Price was succeeded in 1891 by the Rev. Jacob Phillips from Tredegar who stayed until 1893 before being appointed Minister in Sunderland. By this time the office was advertised as Minister, teacher and second reader and a salary of £120 p.a. was offered exclusive of a grant from the Provincial Ministers' Fund. Rev. Phillip Wolfers from Hanley was elected and remained until 1899 before going to Cardiff. Rev. S. Fyne from Newport was appointed in his place.

These Ministers continued the outside relationships which had been started by Rev. Hyamson. Rev. Price protested in the local press against attempts being made to convert Jews to Christianity and Rev. Phillips gave a public lecture on "The Rites and Ceremonies of the Jews" and "A Peep into the Talmud". Rev. Phillips was also among those invited by the Mayor and Mayoress to an "At Home" for the members of a Committee who had been instrumental in raising funds and distributing relief to the unemployed of the town.

But apart from the Ministers these were years when recognised members of the community also began to take a greater part in the life of the general community. In 1896 Brahem Freedman was elected in the Victoria Ward as the first Jewish Town Councillor. In 1892 Simon



Goldberg and the Rev. J. Phillips were re-elected members of the Committee of Management of the Swansea General and Eye Hospital.

In 1895 Simon Goldberg was elected the first Jewish J.P. in Wales. Commenting on this event the '*Cambrian*' wrote "Mr. Simon Goldberg the only Conservative on the list is the senior partner in the well-known firm of S. Goldberg & Sons, shipowners and coal exporters, and is well-known for the interest he takes in various local charitable and philanthropic movements. He is a director of the Atlantic Patent Fuel Co., Chairman of the Swansea Shipping Co., Chairman of the Glamorganshire Building Societies (Swansea) and a member of the Swansea Hospital Committee. He is, we believe, the only member of the Jewish community who sits on the Commission of the Peace in the Principality and his election may be regarded as a well-deserved, if long delayed, compliment to that body". In the same year Mr. S. Goldberg's son Hyman was appointed by the Queen as Consul for the Republic of Hawaii at Swansea.

During the last decade of the Victorian era there was a marked increase in the size of the congregation and its activities. In 1892 there was inaugurated the Swansea Jewish Mutual Improvement Society and by 1901 there were also Benevolent and Zionist Societies. Between 1892 and 1895 the congregation was again represented on the Board of Deputies this time by a former resident Dr. L. Barnett. Not unexpectedly at first there was little mixing between the older section of the congregation and the newcomers or 'foreigners'. In 1894 a Society was established among the 'foreign' section of the congregation to promote the general study of Hebrew Literature. Its President was Mr. Israel Shatz. The Rev. P. Wolfers started English classes in connection with the Society.

As regards occupations, the ship owning, coal exporting and building society interests of Mr. Simon Goldberg and his family were clearly exceptional. The vast majority of the congregation followed a much more traditional and circumscribed range of trades. In Hunt's *Directory* of 1848 Jewish names appear under the headings of Hardwareman, Drapers, Pawnbrokers, Silversmiths & Jewellers, Clothiers & Outfitters and Watch & Clock makers. This pattern did not change very much in the second half of the century but new fields of activity grew up in furniture and picture dealing and picture frame making and glazing. The occupations of the 37 Swansea bridegrooms married in Swansea between 1840 and 1901 can be summarised as follows:—

Commercial travellers, travelling drapers etc.	11
Picture and picture frame dealers	5
Watchmakers	4
Glaziers	4
Furniture dealers	3
Drapers	2
Merchants	2
Pawnbroker	1
Teacher of Languages	1
Teacher of Navigation	1





*Goat Street Synagogue.*



Tailor	1
Dentist	1
Gentleman	1

Among the older generation Mr. Henry Micholls Jones was a dentist in 1860. An earlier professional was Dr. Douglas Cohen who appears in Matthews' *Swansea Directory* for 1830 as one of five physicians in the town. He had graduated in Edinburgh in 1828 and moved to Liverpool in 1847. Another medical man was Dr. L. Barnett, the son of Mr. Henry Barnett. He practised in Swansea until 1889 when he moved to London. The first Jewish member of the legal profession practising in Swansea appears to have been David Seline who was born in 1867 and became a Solicitor in 1889.

## Modern Times

When the Victorian era ended in 1901 the Swansea Jewish community numbered some 300/400, that is about three times its size at the start of the reign. The indications from the numbers of seat holders are that the increase had not been continuous, for after a rise in the fifties and early sixties the number fell back around 1870 to the figure of the late fifties. There was a gradual increase through the seventies and eighties and a larger increase in the early nineties, but there was a falling off in the later nineties before another large increase at the turn of the century. Perhaps the main explanation for this fluctuation is to be found in the movement of people from Swansea to the many new centres which had sprung up in South Wales during this period. While Swansea was the only organised Welsh congregation at the start of Victoria's reign, the Chief Rabbi's pastoral tour in 1894, besides including Swansea embraced also communities at Newport, Brynmawr, Tredegar, Merthyr, Aberdare, Cardiff and Pontypridd. There were, of course, also Jews settled in many other centres. Llanelli for example, though later to achieve religious distinction, was in 1894 the home of probably less than half a dozen Jews.

Most of the increase in the Jewish population of the Swansea area came from Eastern Europe. The social effects of this influx went beyond the initial failure to mix. A definite split emerged in the community leading in 1906 to the 'foreigners' establishing their own synagogue, the Beth Hamedrash, in Prince of Wales Road. Goat Street was the spiritual home of the Jewish 'establishment'; Prince of Wales Road was the abode of the immigrants, Yiddish speaking, poor at first, but perhaps more orthodox. The relatively small size of the Swansea Jewish community and the inevitable process of anglicisation moderated the seriousness of the split so that in time it became more apparent than real. Nevertheless, the rift was never resolved formally; the Beth Hamedrash simply ceased to function in the early 1950's and the community was united under the already established banner of the Swansea Hebrew Congregation. And in 1955 the community began to enjoy its new and present synagogue in Ffynone, the synagogue whose 25th anniversary we are now celebrating.



It is interesting that the present community contains very few descendants of the original pre-immigrant families; the immigrant take-over seems complete. This is contrary to the fortunes of the two synagogues, at Prince of Wales Road and Goat Street. The former prospered while the immigrants were densely congregated in the Green-hill area, but inevitably in time outward diffusion occurred and there was a steady and continuous transfer of membership to Goat Street. Throughout this turbulent period Rev. Miron remained as a link between the old and the new, finally retiring due to ill-health in 1906 after 25 years service. Rev. Fyne, the last of the five ministers he worked with at one time or another, helped out at the immigrants' synagogue occasionally, and in 1901 even acted as Honorary Secretary of his own synagogue, to say nothing of the proposal that he temporarily assume the offices of President and Treasurer too.

Revs. Miron and Fyne were succeeded in 1906 by Revs. M. Lubner and H.J. Sandheim respectively. They were a contrasting pair and both in the early stages of their careers. Rev. Sandheim, the son of a dentist, is remembered as being anglicised in speech and manner, with ginger hair and beard and a temperament to match. He seems to have been often beset with financial problems. Rev. Lubner by contrast was probably from recent East European immigrant stock and has impressed himself on the memory by virtue of his fine voice. Thus was inaugurated what to some was the golden age of the Swansea community. Over the next ten years its numbers probably reached its maximum ever, about 1000. Smaller, neighbouring communities like Llanelli and Port Talbot were already affiliated (1903) and it is recorded that between September 1909 and October 1910 there were no fewer than 32 births in the Swansea Hebrew Congregation, more than 20 of them requiring the services of Rev. Lubner as Mohel. In his other role as Chazan, Rev. Lubner acquired a fine reputation both within and outside the Jewish community. Rev. Sandheim, though appointed at the early age of 23, also continued the example set by his predecessors frequently speaking to non-Jewish audiences like the Unitarians. During 1908, his relations with the honorary officers were sometimes rather stormy, partly as a result of his request to be relieved of the responsibility of reading the Law. Harmony was restored with his marriage to Miss Ida Neft of Swansea in 1909. He finally resigned at the end of 1913, eventually going to Montreal and forging another link between that City and Swansea. Following his death in 1926 in Asheville, North Carolina, his remains were brought back to Swansea for burial though the reasons for this are not clear. Rev. Lubner meanwhile continued to serve the congregation well, resigning in 1922 to go to Glasgow after 16 years in office.

The major lay figure of the early decades of the century was the autocratic but widely respected Mr. I.R. Levi. A bachelor all his life, he began to take an active interest in congregation affairs in 1903 and held





*Rev. M. Lubner*



*Rev. H.J. Sandheim*



*Rev. H. Fineberg*



*Rev. J. Weintrobe*



office of some kind for most of the next 30 years, often as joint President and Treasurer. In 1919 he was made Honorary Life President and Trustee of the congregation. With many able colleagues, among them the two sons of Simon Goldberg who died in 1906, he guided the community through its period of rapid development and also through the difficult days of the first world war. Several members of the congregation were interned under the Aliens Act at the outbreak of war and the Benevolent Society and the Synagogue were much involved in assisting the families affected as well as in general relief of the poor, among them some families driven from London to Swansea because of air raids on the Capital. Some may recall the events of August 1911 when serious rioting occurred in several of the South Wales valley towns to the east of Swansea. It proved an uncomfortable time to say the least for some of the small Jewish communities of those towns but the records of the Swansea Hebrew Congregation are curiously silent about the affair.

A happier and grand civic occasion was the return visit in 1909 of the Chief Rabbi, Hermann Adler, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Goat Street synagogue he himself had consecrated in 1859. The treasurer of the day seems to have been one of the few with reservations about the occasion, temporarily resigning over the excessive expenditure incurred. The Chief Rabbi's visit lasted three days; on the second he carried out an examination of the Swansea Cheder (Hebrew School), then with over 100 children on the roll and a constant source of problems for the Management Committee. His final function was to consecrate the synagogue of the Llanelli congregation, a synagogue happily still in use. Sadly, only two years later, the Swansea congregation was invited to send a representative to a London conference to consider the appointment of Dr. Adler's successor, Dr. J.H. Hertz, who later made a pastoral visit to the City in 1916.

The war years saw the finances of the Goat Street congregation placed under great strain for other reasons. A fire at the synagogue towards the end of 1914 caused extensive damage, particularly to the schoolrooms, and since these were in any case too small for the numbers of children attending, it was decided in early 1915 to purchase Cornhill House, Christina Street, for conversion into new schoolrooms, a mikvah, and a poultry yard. The building began to be used a little over a year later and was only disposed of in 1956, having served many communal and cultural purposes in the meantime, some of them certainly not anticipated originally but made necessary by enemy action during the second world war. The end of the first war coincided with the completion of plans to extend the burial ground at Townhill.

The plight of Jews in other parts of the world and the general Zionist cause evoked a ready response from the Swansea Jewish community. As early as 1905, the congregation launched an appeal on behalf of the Russo-Jewish Fund to help victims of Russian massacres and in this they were greatly aided by David Davies, the editor of the South Wales Daily Post. At various times too, public meetings were held in the Central Hall and elsewhere, promoting the Zionist cause; prominent visitors included



Dr. Chaim Weizmann (later first President of the State of Israel), Professor Selig Brodetsky, Dr. Olsvanger and the Haham, Dr. Gaster.

The appointment of a minister to succeed Rev. Sandheim was set aside during the war years and for some time after. When help was needed for services, the President sometimes called on Mr. E.M. Levy or Mr. J. Goldston the two head teachers of the Cheder during this period. The latter, from Plymouth, left in late 1920 after 5 years with the community; he had control of a Cheder with about 110 pupils between 1916 and 1919, and a staff of four including Mr. H. Turetsky and Mr. A. Barer. In 1919 Sir Alfred Mond, M.P. and Mr. J.H. Jacobs then of London pledged £100 each towards the salary of a minister and eventually Rev. M.H. Segal of Oxford was appointed in 1921 at a salary of £600 p.a. He stayed only two years before moving to Bristol by which time of course Rev. Lubner the Chazan/Shochet had resigned too. Two more years were to elapse before a new minister was found, Rev. S.J. Goldberg from Grimsby. Those two years however, saw the appointment of no fewer than three gentlemen as Chazan/Shochet/Mohel. The first, Mr. E. Tessler, arrived in unusual circumstances; the congregation was originally invited to appoint a Mr. B. Tessler but at the last moment he found he couldn't come to Swansea and offered to send his brother Emanuel instead. The latter's qualifications were equally satisfactory and he secured the appointment, though staying only a year. His successor, Rev. L. Muscat from Sunderland, was here for an even shorter time. The congregation then secured the valuable services of Rev. H. Fineberg of Kalisz in Poland, who was to stay from 1924 to 1946. His early years were somewhat unsettling in more ways than one. For example, the first Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) service he conducted in the Goat Street synagogue in October 1924 went off with a bang; the Nag's Head Inn adjoining the synagogue was wrecked by a gas explosion and the resulting damage and confusion in the crowded synagogue led to several members of the congregation being injured. The President, Mr. S. Goodman, later commended Rev. Fineberg's courage in continuing the service. In 1927, the community came very close to depriving itself of his services when a motion to replace him because of difficulties in fulfilling his duties as Mohel was lost by 20 votes to 21.

December 1926 saw the appointment of someone who was then probably regarded as a fairly minor official, a synagogue's man of many parts, Shammas (Beadle)/Porger (Assistant Shochet)/Collector/Assistant Reader/Teacher, and all for £5 per week. The man appointed, with rare good judgement and from a sizeable short list, was Mr. J. Freedman of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He went on to give outstanding service to the community for the best part of 40 years until his retirement in 1968, the last four years as Reader/Teacher and Acting Minister.

Rev. S.J. Goldberg's ministry was an unhappy one, marked by frequent discord between him and the honorary officers, and it ended early in 1928. A breathing space then led to the appointment in 1930 of another fine servant of the community, Rev. J. Weintrobe from Jews' College. With Rev. Fineberg he was to guide the religious life of Swansea until





*The severe damage sustained by the Goat Street.Synagogue in the air raids of February 1941.*



after the second world war. And in the last three years of the twenties, the congregation had ambitious plans to build a comprehensive communal centre at Windsor Lodge, on Mount Pleasant Hill. Architects were engaged to prepare sketches and estimates for a scheme comprising a new synagogue (seating, eventually, 330 downstairs and 270 up), schoolrooms, club house etc. These plans were abandoned in June 1929. Nevertheless the community continued to flourish, with a Youth Club, a scout group, a Young Zionists Society, a Jewish Literary and Dramatic Society and many other organised sporting and cultural groups, all against a national background of economic depression and gathering stormclouds on the wider international scene. There's little evidence that the depression caused widespread hardship in the community, no doubt partly due to the prevailing tendency to self-employment. The pattern of occupations had naturally widened however, compared with the list given earlier. There were now butchers and bakers, coalmen and farmers and a noteworthy representation in the entertainment industry. This was the heyday of the cinema of course, and it attracted several well-known members of the community including one of the 'characters' of his time, Mr. Abe Freedman. He took an active interest over many years in the affairs of both the Jewish community and the wider Swansea community and seems to have been the first Jew elected to the Board of Guardians (1913). Almost a lifetime later his service to the Swansea Hebrew Congregation was recognised by his being made Honorary Life President in 1963. The old Swansea Empire claimed one of several musicians in the community, as first violin; another went on to wider pastures with Mantovani's orchestra. The move of the young people into further and higher education and into the professions was for the most part yet to come.

The ominous signs from Germany did not go unrecognised in Swansea. 27th April, 1933 for example, saw representatives from all sections of the city gathered at the Central Hall for a mass meeting to protest against Nazi persecution of the Jews. The Mayor, Councillor Daniel Evans, J.P., presided and others attending included Mr. Lewis Jones, M.P. for Swansea West, the Vicar of Swansea and many other Church leaders. The Jewish community was represented by the President, Mr. I.R. Levi, the Treasurer Mr. L. Palto and others, as well as Rev. Weintrobe; Mr. C.A. Henriques attended on behalf of the British Board of Deputies. At the suggestion of the latter body, a Vigilance Committee was formed early in 1934 to combat the anti-semitic literature finding its way into the country. Professor Brodetsky visited the city in 1935 to speak on the Zionist cause at a meeting attended by civic and religious leaders, and late in the same year another anti-Nazi protest meeting was organised at the Central Hall. It was not all unrelieved gloom however; 4th May, 1935 was the occasion for a special Sabbath and Civic service in the synagogue to offer prayers and thanksgiving on the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary.

The long and distinguished involvement of Mr. I.R. Levi with the synagogue had by then ended; he died in August 1934, but not before there had emerged a worthy successor who was able to hold the congregation together and for whom devoted attention to its welfare was



second nature. Coming to Swansea from Llanelli, Lewis Palto joined the Goat Street synagogue in late 1914 and was first elected to its Management Committee in 1920. His 30 years as a major figure in the community, ending with his death in January 1962, were the expected mixture of good and bad times, as had been the days of I.R. Levi. With many able colleagues, both had to cope with the problems of a war environment but whereas I.R. Levi had presided over a growing and developing community, Lewis Palto was faced with the difficulty of matching the increasingly expensive needs of a Jewish community to a slow but steady decline in its numbers. Between 1912 and 1939 it has been estimated that the Jewish population of Swansea decreased from about 1000 to 565. This trend has continued since the second world war, though perhaps more slowly and with occasional fluctuations. And it has been accompanied by a steadily increasing average age of the remaining residents. To these sociological trends, which only a pessimist would have perceived at the time, there was added the major blow of the destruction of Goat Street synagogue by enemy bombing in February 1941. This took place only a month after Rev. Weintrobe's temporary release to become a Chaplain to the Forces, a clear case of German opportunism. Henceforth, Cornhill House and the Beth Hamedrash were to serve the community's routine needs but special arrangements were necessary for the Festivals. The Unitarian Chapel was the first to offer its facilities after the raid but as time went on services were also held at various other venues such as Henrietta Street Chapel and St. Andrew's Church. The safety of the children was also a matter of concern in 1941 and both the Merthyr and Aberdare congregations were approached about taking up to 30 Swansea children for the duration of the war.

It was not long before plans to replace the synagogue were being formulated. At a rather poorly attended general meeting in December 1943 it was decided to set up a Building Fund Committee to make preliminary soundings. Its chairman was Mr. L. Palto and Treasurer Mr. B. Baddiel; the latter tragically died in November 1955 only months after the opening of the Ffynone synagogue to the planning of which he contributed so greatly. A war damage claim of about £2000 helped towards the substantial costs of the new project as did a donation of £5 received from the Wardens of Mansel Street A.R.P. Eventually in August 1945 a general meeting of the congregation approved the purchase, for £3000, of a site known as 'Ashleigh' (Parc Wern Schools), Ffynone, this being the site on which the present synagogue stands. It was to be another seven years before building work started, the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Israel Brodie, laying the foundation stone on 30th October, 1952. The Chief Rabbi returned on 28th April, 1955 to consecrate the new synagogue 'to the true service of the Almighty and a strengthening allegiance to the tenets and observances of our ancient faith, which is the Tree of Life and the Length of our Days'. The day before, the Chief Rabbi visited Llanelli to reconsecrate the Synagogue in Queen Victoria Road.

During the period 1945-55, when the hearts and minds and energies of so many were devoted to the Ffynone synagogue project, the day-to-day



religious life of the community had, of course, to be maintained. The prospects for doing this were rudely shaken at two Management Committee meetings in May 1946 which received (unconnected) letters of resignation from Rev. Weintrobe, Rev. Fineberg, Mr. J. Freedman and Mr. C. Weinberg (the Shammass). It took about five years to find settled and satisfactory successors. Rev. C. Bloch was engaged as Minister/Second Reader/Headmaster in August 1946 but left after a year and it was to be many years before another Minister as such was appointed, this being Rev. J. Freedman who was Acting Minister/Reader/Teacher from 1964 to 1968. The intervening appointments were all in the category of Chazan/Shochet/Teacher though the traditional division of synagogue duties was coming to have less and less relevance in a small and diminishing community whose needs could best be met by the admittedly rare official who could adequately fulfil the roles of both Minister/Teacher and Chazan/Shochet. Rev. B. Starr from the Beth Hamedrash helped out as Shochet/Teacher in early 1947 and was replaced by Rev. E. Morris from Edinburgh in March 1948. As Chazan/Shochet/Headteacher/Mohel he worked with Rev. E. Cahn of Hove who was appointed Second Reader/Teacher/Financial Secretary and Collector in early 1949. This was rather a troubled period in the community and ended with Rev. Morris's departure in mid 1950 and Rev. Cahn's just over a year later. Mr. L. Sichel came from Manchester to take Rev. Cahn's post at the beginning of 1952 and stayed for 2½ years before moving to Cardiff. Mr. M. Fine of Swansea carried on this work for a year and then handed over to Mr. J. Freedman who thus re-entered the employment of the community in early 1956. Meanwhile the congregation had secured the services of Rev. A. Brysh from Whitley Bay as Chazan/Shochet/Headmaster. His stay, from 1951 to 1957, is recalled with affection by many members of the present congregation and coincided with the bringing into use of the facilities of the new synagogue.

The sustained efforts of Mr. Palto on behalf of the congregation were recognised in 1950 when he was elected its Honorary Life President. Far from resting on his laurels however, he continued to work for its welfare both in Swansea and outside. In 1956 he represented the congregation at a celebration in London to mark the Tercentenary of the Re-Settlement of Jews in the British Isles. Another centenary in 1958, this time celebrated in Swansea, was that of Jews' College; the Haham, Dr. S. Gaon, visited the city to launch the centenary appeal. Also in 1956, a charity concert at the Swansea Empire resulted in the building fund of the synagogue benefiting by £430. This was one of a series of concerts organised by the Chief Constable's Charity Committee which received much practical assistance from members of the Jewish community involved in the cinema and entertainment business.

Following the departure of Rev. and Mrs. Brysh (for she too took an active interest in the congregation, particularly the young girls) the congregation acquired the services of one of those rare individuals referred to earlier, who was prepared to accept appointment as Minister/Chazan/Shochet/Headteacher. He was Rev. W. Wolfson from Bristol and took up his duties late in 1957, together with his wife who taught in the Cheder.





Goat Street Synagogue.



The counterpart Lease dated 28th November, 1768 granted to David Michael on the plot of land at Townhill and used as a burial ground ever since.



Soon after his arrival he started to edit 'Olomenu' (Our World-the Journal of Swansea Jewry) as a quarterly pamphlet of local notes and news, mixed with more serious matters of Jewish religious interest. This was not the first such publication, for the Swansea Jewish Mirror had for some time carried out a similar function.

Rev. Wolfson remained with the congregation until early 1960. As headmaster he had reported 50 children on the register in June 1959. This was half the number of forty years earlier but then so was the Jewish population of the city. And perhaps more discouraging still, the succeeding twenty years up to the present were to see a further halving of the population and the Cheder roll.

It was against this background that the congregation made efforts to find new stipendiary officials. Rev. D. Lipsidge of Liverpool was appointed Shochet/Porger/Teacher/Reader early in 1961 but left after a year. He was not replaced until mid 1964 when Rev. M. Schwartz joined the congregation from Isleworth. Shechita arrangements in the meantime were made with the nearest large community, Cardiff. The absence of local control over the supply of kosher meat has since become a fact of life for Swansea as for many other small communities. As for religious services and the educational needs of the congregation, Rev. J. Freedman, by now a resident of long standing, admirably filled the breach. When Rev. Schwartz arrived he was by no means a stranger to the congregation. As a young man in 1930 he had come from London to act as Shochet/Reader/Teacher to the Beth Hamedrash in Prince of Wales Road where he succeeded Rev. Litovitch. After about ten years with the 'foreigners' he moved on, only to come full circle again, 24 years later.

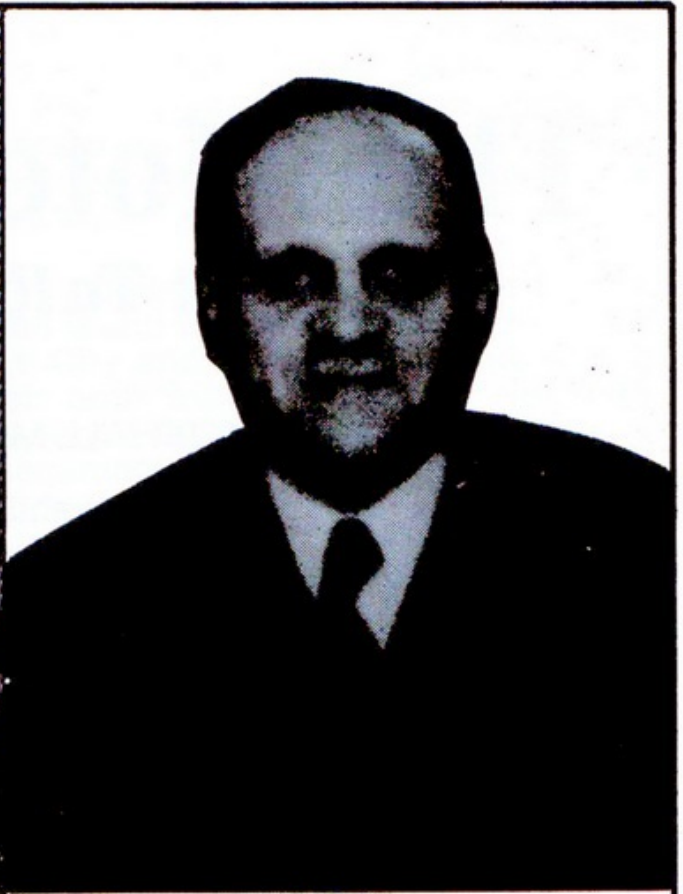
Until 1968 when, as noted earlier, Rev. Freedman retired, the community thus enjoyed the services of an Acting Minister as well as its own Chazan/Shochet. Rev. Schwartz in fact continued his association with the community until 1975 when he moved to Luton. Since then local Shechita facilities have become a fond dream but the community has acquired the services of Rev. M.A. Kibel of London as Minister/Reader/Headteacher. He was appointed in September 1975 and inducted by the present Chief Rabbi in May 1976.

Throughout the last twenty years, the community has maintained several active social and cultural groups, even if the membership lists are remarkably similar for each. A thriving WIZO group continues to raise substantial sums for Israel while as always a devoted Ladies Guild underpins many synagogue functions. In 1962 a local branch of the Council of Christians and Jews was formed and seven years later there re-emerged a Swansea Lodge of B'nai B'rith (Children of the Covenant) attracting to its membership many Jewish residents with long and notable associations with freemasonry in the City. A Civic Service was held in the synagogue on 1st April, 1963 attended by the Mayor, Alderman Mrs. Rose Cross, J.P. and other city leaders, and was another reminder of the good relations that have always existed between the city and its Jewish community. Lewis Palto's devoted work for the congregation was

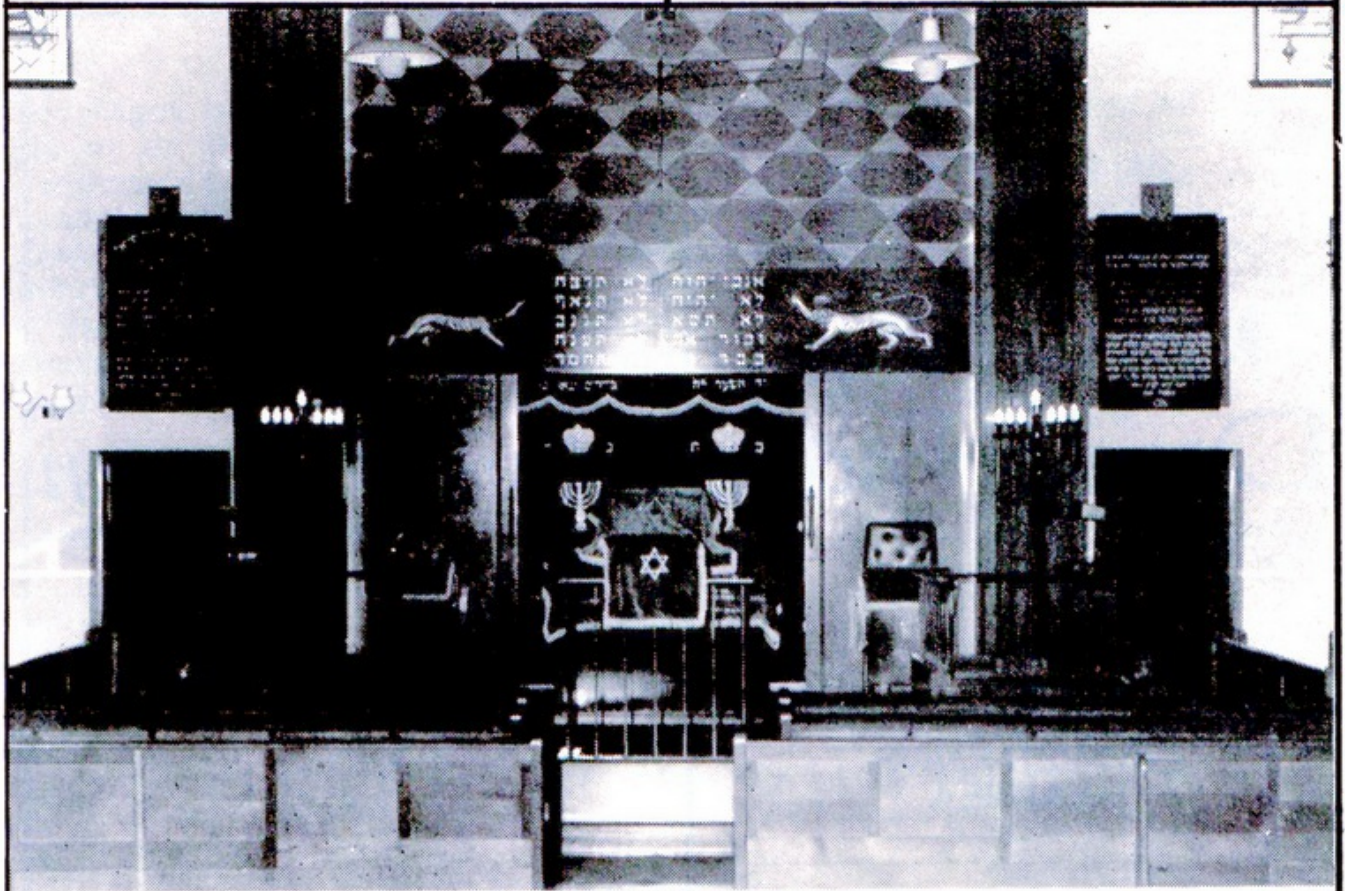




*I.R. Levi*



*L. Palto*



*The Ffynone Synagogue.*



enshrined in bricks and mortar in the shape of the Lewis Palto Memorial Hall, opened in November 1966 by his widow Mrs. Laura Palto. This in fact has been the only addition to the Ffynone synagogue since its completion in 1955. At one time, there were plans for building a more elaborate synagogue on top of the present structure but the realities of the present community have decreed otherwise.

And so we return to the theme introduced at the beginning of this journey through time. The congregation is still very much alive. There are still between 200 and 250 Jews in the City and they are still interacting more or less strongly to proclaim their faith with confidence. Not until they have all gone or have ceased to interact together will the community have died. In the Minutes of a Management Committee meeting called for 12th September, 1900, the President Mr. A. Lyons sadly records 'Not a single member put in an appearance ...' That clearly was not the death of the Swansea Hebrew Congregation but a challenge for the next 80 years.

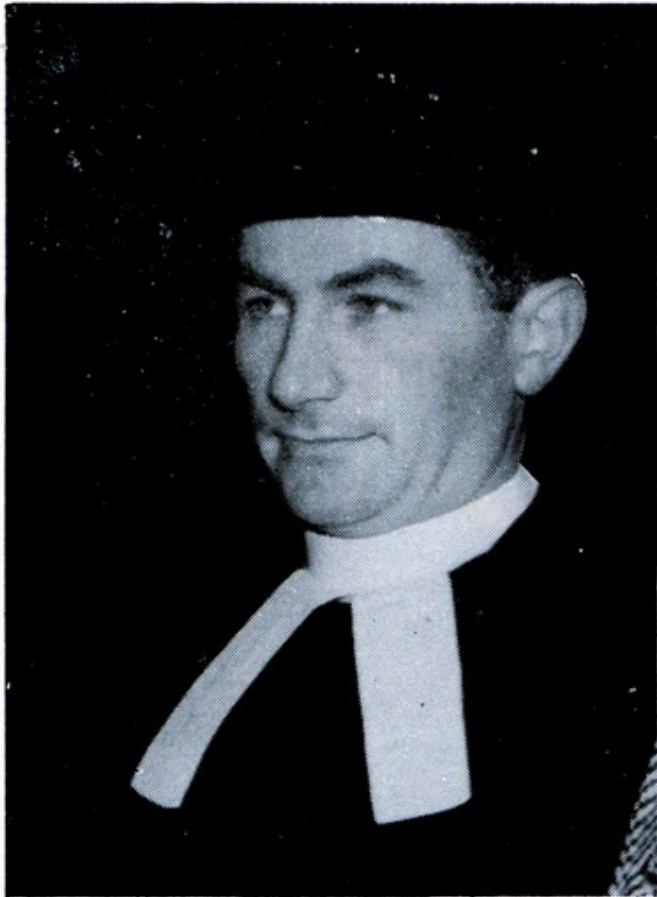
Long may it be so.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many people have generously assisted in the preparation of this brief survey of the history of the Swansea Jewish community. It would be invidious to single out particular individuals but to all who have made available to me documents, papers, photographs etc., or who have simply given me their valuable time, I express my thanks. A major source of information has been the paper by Bernard Goldblum in the proceedings of the conference on 'Provincial Jewry in Victorian Britain' convened by the Jewish Historical Society of England in July 1975; this paper has been quoted *in extenso* and due acknowledgement is here made.

N.H. SAUNDERS  
August, 1980





*Rev. A. Brysh*



*Rev. J. Freedman*



*Rev. M. Schwartz*



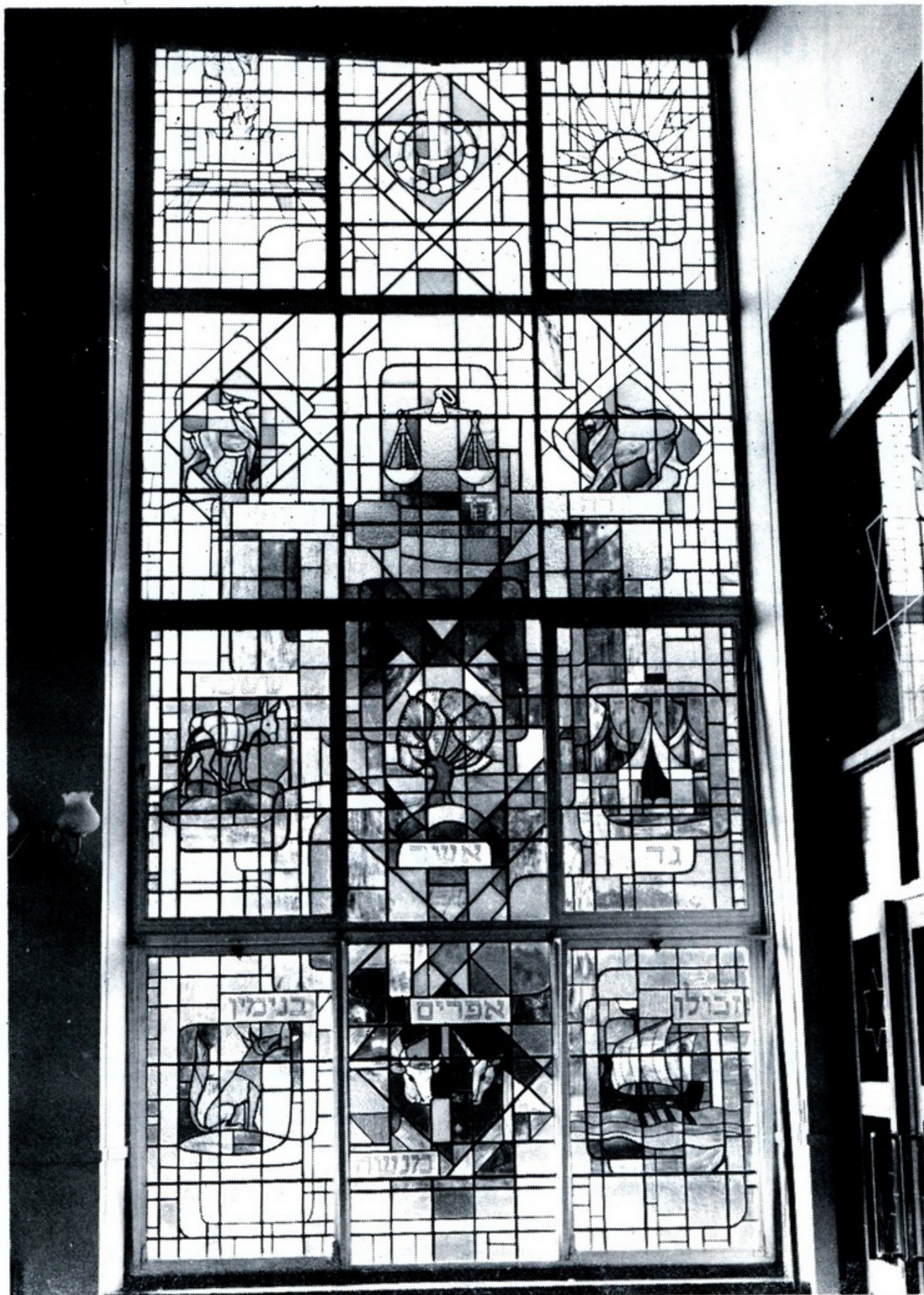
*Rev. M. Kibel*





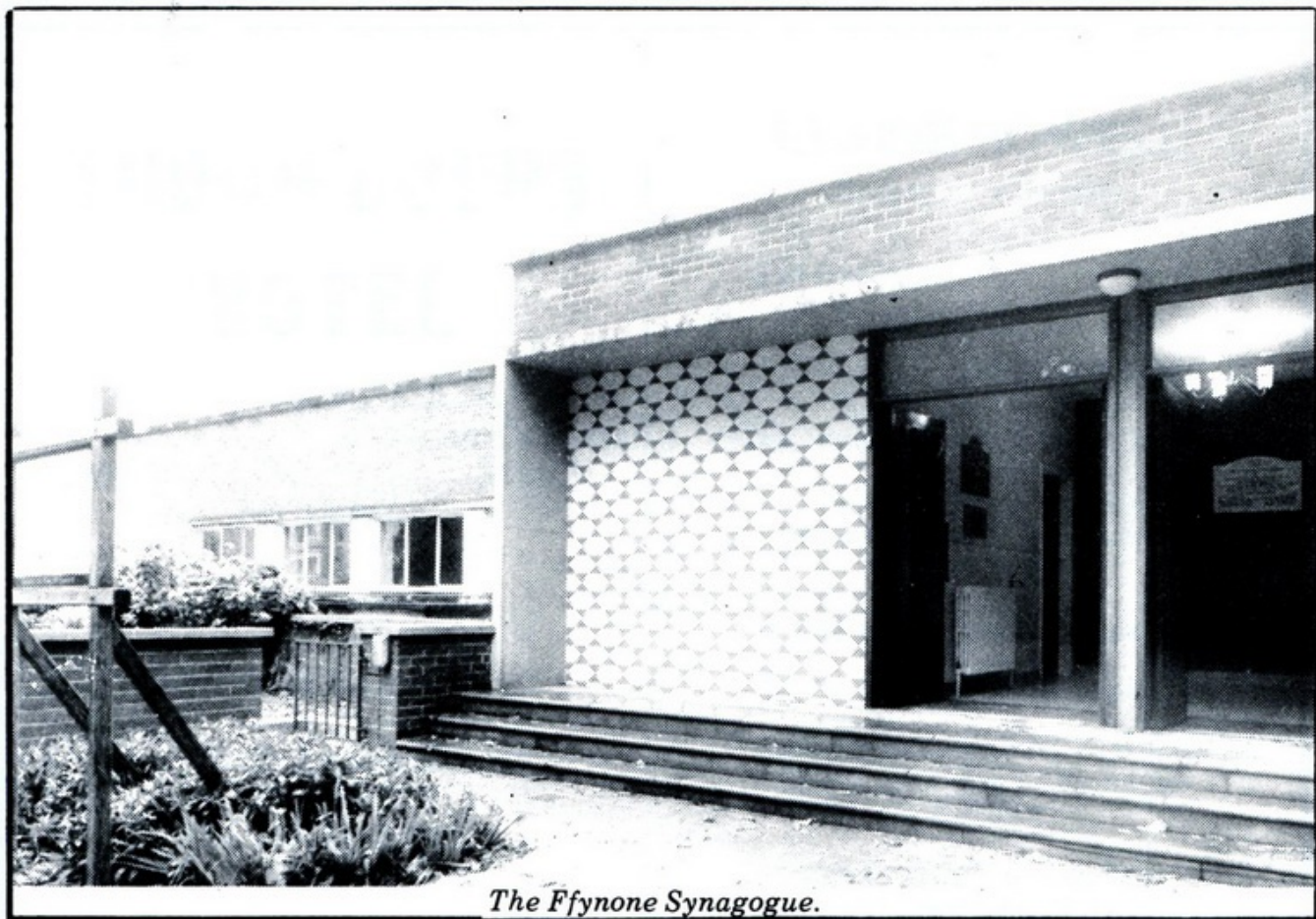
*Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie laying the foundation stone of the Ffynone Synagogue, October 1952.*





*Stained glass window in the Ffynone Synagogue, depicting the twelve sons of Jacob.*





*The Ffynone Synagogue.*