



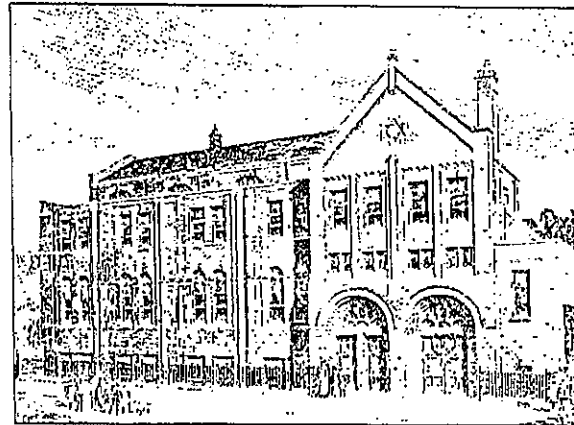
The Hackney and East London Synagogue

A History of the Hackney Synagogue,
Brenthouse Road, (Formerly Devonshire Rd E.9),

to mark the
Centenary of the Congregation
1897 - 1997

Rev: Alan Greenbat
based on an original publication

by the
Rev. Dr. Barnett Joseph
to mark the Diamond Jubilee in 1957



View of the exterior 1897



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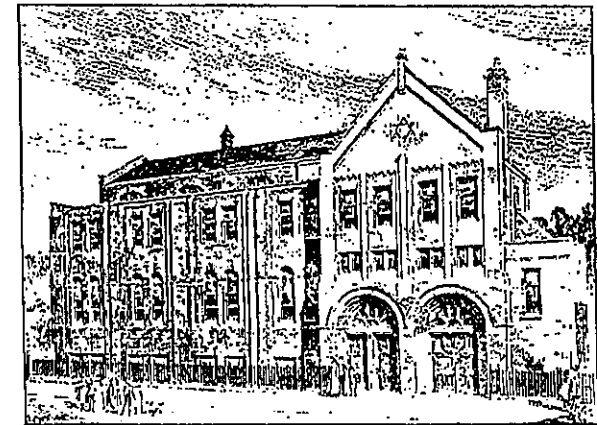
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Rev. Dr. Barnett Joseph, MBE. BA. H.C.F
Minister 1934-1973



View of the exterior 1897

NEW JEWISH SYNAGOGUE FOR HACKNEY

HACKNEY GAZETTE

20th September 1897

The consecration of the new Jewish Synagogue in Devonshire Road, South Hackney, yesterday afternoon, was an event which brought together large numbers of Jews from all parts of the Metropolis. Sixteen years have elapsed since the movement for the establishment of a Synagogue in that district was started, but recently the iron building, in which the services had been conducted for a period of thirteen years, and which was originally intended to serve merely as a temporary structure, was condemned by the London County Council. The site of the Synagogue was nearly two miles from any Jewish place of worship in a locality thickly populated by the better class of Jewish working men, and one of the primary objects of the movement was to relieve the congested districts of the East End by offering religious and educational facilities under more improved conditions of life in the healthier neighbourhood of South Hackney. The total cost of the freehold site and erection of the new synagogue and class-rooms, which will accommodate some 500 congregants and 300 children respectively, is £8,000, towards which £3,350 has been promised by the United Synagogue, but although a liberal response has been made to the committee's appeal there still remains an adverse balance of £500. With the assistance of friends, however, the Committee hope to quickly liquidate the debt. The buildings comprise, on the lower ground floor, a spacious hall, convertible into nine class-rooms and on the ground floor is the main body of the synagogue, whilst the first floor contains the ladies' galleries. There are five exits and two stair-cases and model lavatory accommodation is provided on each level. The synagogue was opened by the Hon. Walter Rothschild, chairman of the Building Fund Committee, with a gold key. The consecration ceremony was performed by the Very Rev. Dr. Hermann Adler, the Chief Rabbi, and the service was conducted by the Revs. E. Spiers and M. J. Heilbron, Mr. Angelo Asher, who presided at the organ, having the direction of the choir.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid expansion for London Jewry. The United Synagogue had been established by Act of Parliament in July 1870 as an amalgamation of the three major city synagogues - the Great (Duke's Place) the Hambro (off Fenchurch Street) and the New (Great St. Helens), together with their branch congregations in the West End - the Central formed by the Great, and the Bayswater jointly established by the Great and the New.

As the century moved towards its close the geographical spread of suburban London Jewry expanded very quickly. In the North and East area alone the United Synagogue was instrumental in setting up congregations in East London (Stepney), North London (Islington), Dalston (Poets Road) and our own synagogue, then known as South Hackney. All these were established before 1900. Poplar and Stoke Newington (Shacklewell Lane) were to follow in the opening years of the 20th century.

In 1881 the Jewish residents of Hackney met regularly for prayer at Darnley Road, E9 and followed orthodox traditions. They were also concerned for the education of their children and the Rev. A.L. Green and A.M. Hyamson, were among the teachers. There were 35 children on the roll but this number was to increase considerably and by 1910 with just under 400 children registered, South Hackney Synagogue had the largest set of classes attached to any synagogue in the United Kingdom.



In 1885 the temporary building previously used by the Dalston Synagogue was bought for £80 and consecrated for worship by the Rev. D. Wasserzug. The opening ceremony was carried out by

Samuel Montagu MP. In 1890 Mr M Heilbron was appointed the first marriage secretary. Mr Gatchell Isaacs, a teacher at the Westminster Jews Free School was employed as reader and teacher. He continued in office until 1928.

In 1896 the congregation was admitted as a constituent of the United Synagogue. The following year the foundation stone of the present synagogue was laid by the Hon. Walter Rothschild and the building was dedicated by the Chief Rabbi Dr Hermann Adler.

Since then every Chief Rabbi has visited the synagogue and addressed the congregation. The present Chief Rabbi spoke at the Annual Civic Service in 1991, less than three months after taking up office, and is due to visit again for the service which will mark the commencement of the congregation's centenary year.

The congregation has had few ministers during its life but they have all given long and devoted service. After the Reverend Gatchell Isaacs, the pulpit was occupied by Rabbi Dr. Louis Rabinowitz who subsequently became the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of South Africa and later on deputy mayor of Jerusalem. He was followed by the Rev. Dr. Barnett Joseph who remained in office until his death in 1973 and who was awarded an MBE for his services to the community. During World War Two when Dr. Joseph was in the Forces on chaplaincy duties, the congregation was led by Rabbi Dr. A. Melinek. After the death of Dr. Joseph the synagogue was unable to afford a full-time minister. In January 1975, the congregation invited Mr Alan Greenbat, the Director of the Victoria Community Centre in Stamford Hill and a visiting minister to the small communities to address a Barmitzvah boy. From that day onwards Rev Greenbat has carried out ministerial duties for the congregation.

The musical traditions of Hackney have been impressive. Its Chazanim, supported by outstandingly competent choristers, have always adhered to the traditional melodies of the United Synagogue and the superb acoustics of the building have enhanced expert rendition.

In 1898, the Rev. S Blachman, reader of the Fieldgate Street Synagogue, was appointed and served with piety and dignity until his retirement in 1935. He was succeeded by the Rev. C Kowalski who came from the Central Hackney Synagogue and who served until his death in 1953. He was followed by the Rev. M Warth who spent a short period with the congregation before returning to Israel.

Following the departure of Rev. Warth, the Rev. Joel Klein became Chazan and remained in post until his retirement in 1979. He and his wife Malka were much loved. Although they have both passed away in Israel their memory still lives in the hearts of the congregation.

Following the Rev. Klein's retirement, continuing financial stringencies did not permit the appointment of a further full-time reader. The congregation has, however, been fortunate to obtain the services of a number of outstanding Chazanim who have served Hackney well before moving on to congregations in other parts of London, the United States and Canada. The Synagogue is proud to have played its part, together with the choir, in assisting them in their cantorial development.

The Choirmasters have also played an important part in the musical life of the congregation and in that connection, whilst acknowledging the debt due to them, we are only too keenly aware of the recent death of Sidney Caplan who led the congregational singing for over thirty years.

Since its inception, the Hackney Synagogue has included among its members people distinguished in both communal and civic life. They occupied themselves in faithfulness with the needs of the congregation. To recall a few at random, we remember M E Waldman, a deputy mayor of Hackney whose daughter Stella married Victor Lucas in our synagogue, and whose husband became President of the United Synagogue. Miss Nettie Adler, niece of Chief Rabbi Adler, represented Hackney on The London County Council, and last year Ronnie Barden was mayor of the London Borough of Redbridge. Bruno Mamorstein, a past honorary officer, became Chairman of Jews' College and Harry Santaub did sterling and prominent work for the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women.

The Silver Jubilee of the synagogue took place in 1923 and the then Chief Rabbi Dr. J H Hertz observed that "the founders of the South Hackney Synagogue have been brave and strong Jews." That has not altered in 100 years.

The congregation has been wonderfully served by its honorary officers and voluntary committees.

Four loyal and long serving officers of the congregation deserve mention. Mr M Aizen, who was secretary from 1929 until 1955. He was chosen by the United Synagogue to represent synagogue secretaries on the commission that laid down the duties of officials in the 1930's. Mr Hyman Gillis was shammas for many years before moving to north-west London during the war. He was succeeded by Mr Sol Caplan who held the post of shammas for over forty years. He retired to Southend and it is always a pleasure to see him when he attends the synagogue on special occasions.

After the war Louis Harris became the secretary and gave loyal and popular service until his retirement. The identification of individuals is a difficult matter and the absence of a particular name or two has no significance except that space is at a premium.

The current membership would however, consider it remiss of the writer if he failed to mention Mrs Lena Barden, now President of the Ladies' Society, who perhaps more than any other current member has been instrumental in maintaining the social fabric of the congregation. The current honorary officers, Jack Tabor, Ben Weinberg and Monty Zielin have between them given well over half a century of loyal and devoted service to the synagogue and its organisations.

Ben Weinberg has been a stalwart of Hackney AJEX and has ensured that the branch continues to be highly regarded at national level.

In the 1970's the hall was refurbished and named in memory of Morris Spiro, an esteemed member of the congregation.

But to return to our history.

In 1935 the much admired building was enlarged after amalgamation with the Central Hackney Congregation and was thenceforth known as "The Hackney Synagogue". With the transfer of members from

Rectory Square, Stepney, in the 1990's, the congregation is now called "The Hackney and East London Synagogue".]

Many members of the congregation made the supreme sacrifice for King and Country in two World Wars. Their names are commemorated on memorial tablets in the vestibule and we await the publication by Martin Sugarman of his forthcoming book "The Hackney Synagogue War Memorials - A Project of Remembrance".

The Rev. Dr. Barnett Joseph was minister at Hackney for forty years. His influence, his learning and his dignity gave stability and prestige to the congregation, both in Jewish and non-Jewish circles. In the Borough of Hackney, the mention of his name still evokes admiration and respect even though he passed away over twenty years ago.

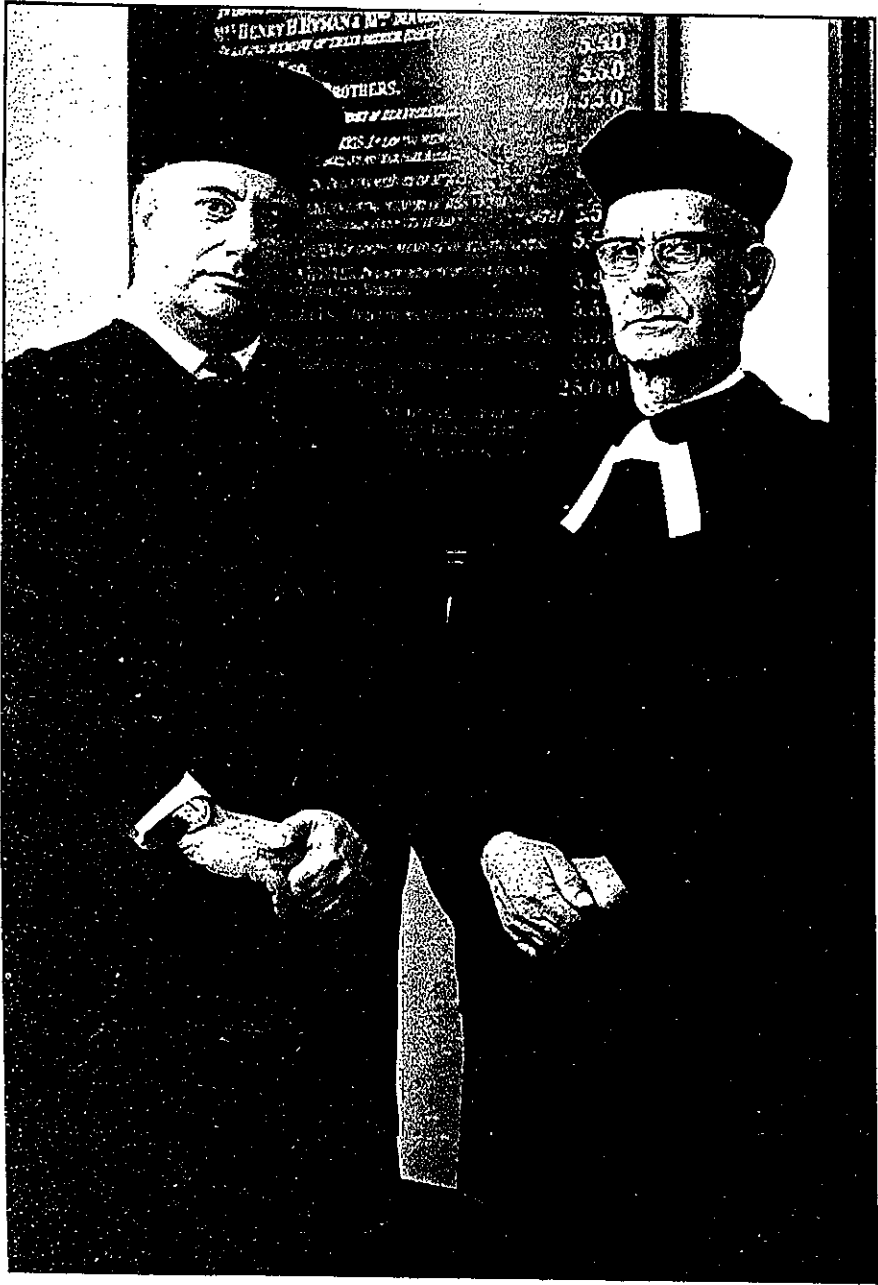
In 1957 on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee he wrote this: "In the past 60 years divine worship has been held regularly on the same sanctified ground. One generation shall laud thy works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts". Conditions in the neighbourhood have changed. In spite of the tendency to move from the area our membership has risen to nearly 1200. At this milestone in our history we pause and thank Him who fashioned us in His glory with sentiments of reflection and retrospection. We are resolved that our future work shall not be found to be unworthy of the piety, zeal and devotion to sacred causes which distinguished the lives of our forbears.

"The glory of this latter house may be found to be even greater than the former."

We repeat the sentiments of our daily liturgy, that we may be worthy to live to witness and inherit happiness and blessing in the years that are yet to come. We are resolved to render yet further service in these days when we have been privileged to see the re-establishment of the State of Israel for the glory of God and the splendour and majesty of Zion and for the future destiny of our people".

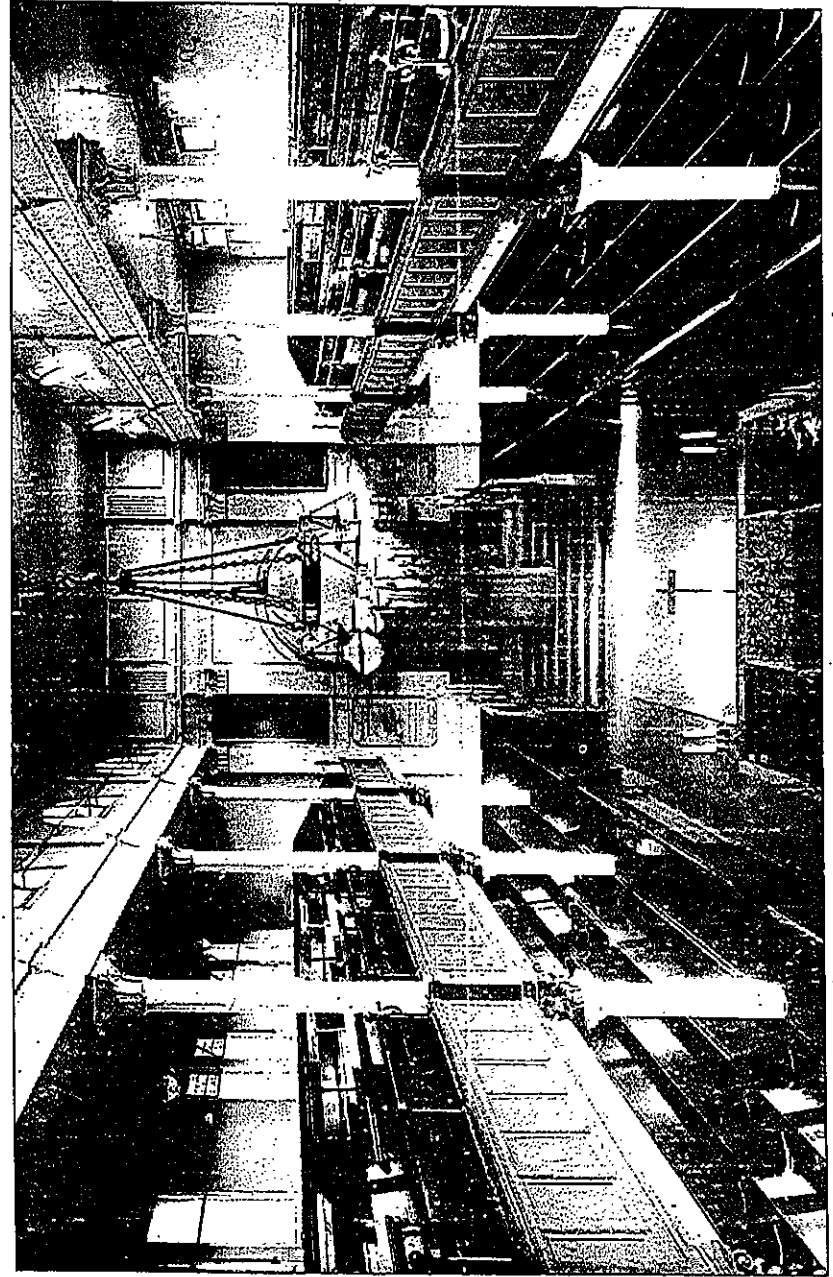
Hackney and East London is the last remaining United Synagogue serving the south of the Borough of Hackney and the Borough of Tower Hamlets. We retain a membership in excess of eight hundred and there is still work to be done.

May we be privileged to carry out our duty in strength and in harmony as we optimistically enter our second century.



Rev. Alan Greenbat

Rev. Joel Klein
(CHAZAN)



Interior of the Synagogue after the enlargement following the amalgamation of the South and Central Hackney Congregations.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Article from the J.C. Feb 1897

THE ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the permanent synagogue now in course of erection in Devonshire Road, Mare Street, was performed on Sunday afternoon by the Hon. WALTER ROTHSCHILD, Chairman of the Building Committee, in the presence of some 500 persons, who were accommodated in a spacious marquee erected by Messrs. J. Lyons, Limited. Among those who were present were the Chief Rabbi and Mrs. Adler, the Haham and Mrs. Gaster, Mr. Herbert Robertson, M.P., Mrs. M. Friedländer and Dr. Friedländer (Posen), Mr. Henry Lucas, one of the Vice-Presidents, Mr. Albert M. Woolf, one of the Overseers of the Poor, Mr. Wolf Myers, Chairman of the Building Committee, and Mr. P. Ornstien, the Secretary of the United Synagogue, Rev. Dr. Löwy, Messrs. M. Abrahams, L.C.C., L. L. Alexander, Althaus, S. G. Asher, A. H. Jessel, L. B. Joseph, R. Lazarus, J. Trenner, several of the Ministers and Readers of Constituent Synagogues, and the following gentlemen immediately associated with the movement: Messrs. Herbert Bentwich, L.L.B., Vice-Chairman, Leonard B. Franklin, Treasurer, Isidor Joseph, Hon. Secretary of the Building Committee, Delissa Joseph, Architect, A. B. Salmen and L. Zachariah, Wardens, J. Rosenberg, Treasurer, Sylvain Lion, Hon. Secretary of the Synagogue.

The musical portions of the service were more elaborate than is usually the case at functions of this kind. The choral portions were entrusted to the choir of the Central Synagogue, strengthened for the occasion by a few amateurs, and the instrumental portion to an orchestra organised by Mr. Angelo A. Asher, R.A.M. The local ministers, the Revs. M. J. Heilbron and Gabriel Isaacs, took part in the ordinary afternoon prayers, and the special items of the service were rendered by the Rev. E. Spero, whose fine voice was heard to the best advantage even under canvas. The music of the solos and recitatives (especially a section of Psalm 118) were expressly composed by Mr. Spero, who is a gold medallist and Associate of the London Academy of Music, and were sung by him. Mr. Spero's music was marked by great ability. The orchestra, under Mr. Asher's very capable baton, admirably played the accompaniments, and the choir, which had been trained by Mr. Spero, also performed its share of the programme with credit, notably the singing of Psalm 100, to Salaman's music.

While preparations were being made for the laying of the stone, Mr. H. BENTWICH, in the name of the Building Committee, presented to the Hon. L. W. Rothschild a solid silver trowel with ivory handle. The trowel was enclosed in a white kid case with Mr. Rothschild's arms emblazoned in colours thereon, and bore an inscription commemorating the occasion, and giving the names of the Committee.

Mr. BENTWICH, in making the presentation, said that the present was the first communal work in which the Hon. L. W. Rothschild had taken the leading part. It was mainly through his great interest, his unvarying tact, and untiring energy that difficulties had been overcome. The result was thus entirely due to Mr. Rothschild. The policy of removing Jews from congested districts received its consecration that day, and added another obligation to those which the community lay under to the Chairman's illustrious house. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. ROTHSCHILD then laid the stone, and after the usual tests he declared it to be well and truly laid, an announcement which was received with "hurras." The stone bears the following inscription:—

THIS FOUNDATION STONE
of the
SOUTH HACKNEY SYNAGOGUE AND CLASS ROOMS
was Laid by
THE HON. WALTER ROTHSCHILD,
Chairman of the Building Committee.
14th February, 1897 — 12th Adar I., 5657.

Herbert Bentwich, L.L.B., Vice-Chairman.	} of the Building Committee	A. B. Salmen, Warden	} of the Synagogue.
Leonard B. Franklin, Treasurer.		L. Zachariah, Warden.	
Isidor Joseph, Hon. Secretary.		J. Rosenberg, Treasurer.	
Brown, Son and Blomfield, Builders.		Sylvain Lion, Hon. Secretary.	

The Chief Rabbi, Dr Hermann Adler delivered the following address:

"This stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

My Dear Friends,—How deep and fervent must be the feelings of gratitude that move your hearts! For at last you are within measurable distance of the fruition of several years of anxious deliberation, of toilsome thought and earnest planning. At last every obstacle has been surmounted, every difficulty overcome. And even as it was on a former memorable crisis in our historic annals, there are heard the clang of the trumpets and the harmony of stringed instruments, and "the people sing together in praising and giving thanks unto God, because the foundation of the house of the Lord is laid."

During fourteen years you worshipped in a temporary structure, which was not merely comfortless, but altogether inadequate to seat the large and continually increasing number of our brethren residing in this district. The tenancy of the iron building was coming to an end; the London County Council could no longer permit you to meet in an unsuitable abode; you were confronted by the danger of the congregation being entirely broken up, when a few zealous and public-spirited members came forward, secured a plot of land, and enlisted the warm sympathy and hearty co-operation of some of those earnest workers who constitute the pride and the stay of our community. The Council of the United Synagogue, faithful to one of the main purposes for which it has been constituted, to "erect, found, and maintain places of worship in London," accorded to you its moral and material support. Residents in all parts of the metropolis contributed to your Building Fund with no niggard hand. Plans were designed, the foundations were digged. And now, at last, your Chairman, who presided over your deliberations with the energy and loyalty characteristic of his house, has laid the headstone amidst the joyous acclaim of the assembled multitude.

And the vow to which our father Jacob gave utterance in a solemn turning point of his life now thrills your hearts. "And this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." This must be your resolve in this sacred hour, in which you witness the laying of the foundation stone of the edifice that is to be reared on this spot, that the house to be erected here shall be truly a house of God, in which you will pour forth your soul to the All-loving Father on High, laying bare before Him every circumstance of your life, your every thought and feeling, and asking Him to purify and elevate them, so that your darkness may be enlightened, your weakness sustained, your harmful passions controlled, so that His inspired words may administer a balm for every woe and a remedy for every disease of the heart and mind, so that you may become good after the

pattern of God's perfect goodness, that you may hew the statute of your little life after His image, unto His likeness, that you may resolve faithfully and loyally to do His will, and to keep aloof from all evil.

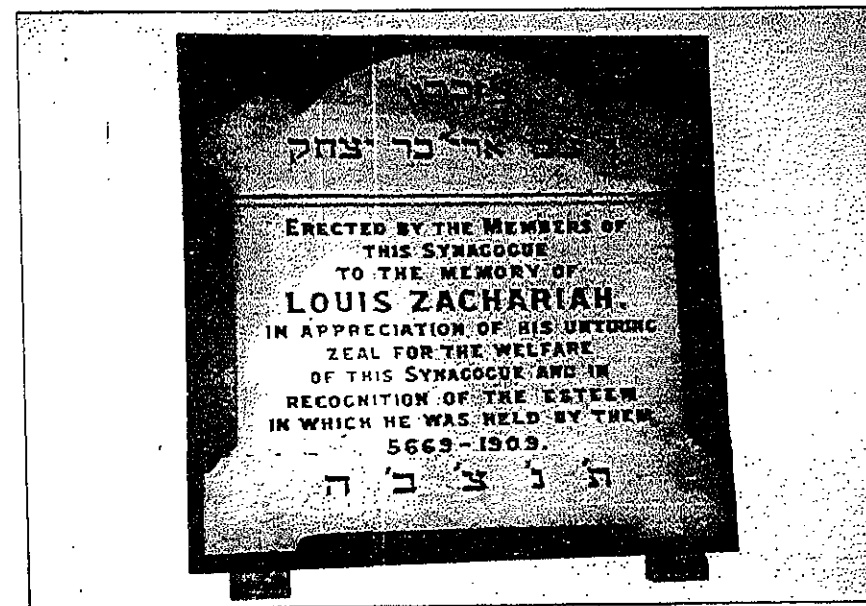
And we joyfully anticipate that on this place there will likewise rise a school-house, in which your children will be taught our hallowed faith and our ancient sacred tongue, where the grandeur and the beauty of the Bible will be revealed to them, showing them how in every part it quivers and throbs and shines with the Divine spirit of Wisdom and Love. Here the truth will, I hope, be impressed upon the hearts of our little ones, that Judaism demands as the first condition of a religious life, purity, self-control and honesty, that no one deserves the title of a good Jew who is not upright, truthful, straightforward, kind and gentle in all his dealings. Greatly do I rejoice to hear that 175 of your children—your jewels—at present attend the classes. Their number will, I am assured, largely and steadily increase.

"And of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." I hope that many of you will evince your joy in this day's ceremonial by cheerfully realising the duty of giving. I hear that close upon a thousand pounds are still needed to complete the school-house and to equip it with the necessary fittings. The enthusiasm which has marked your action from the beginning will surely not fail you this day.

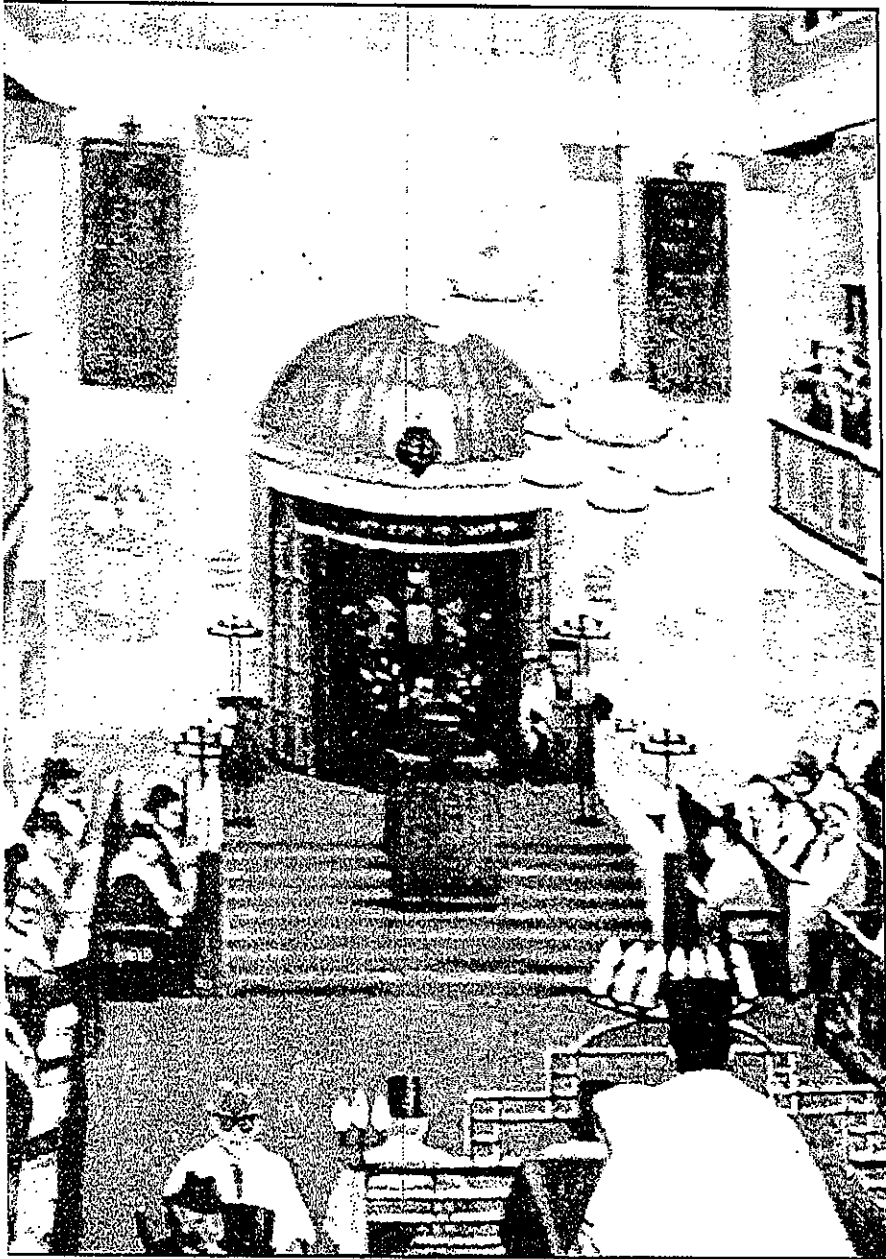
But we must understand these words in a higher sense. For the service of God more is needed than gifts of money. We must give ourselves, a goodly portion of our time, our thought, our intellect to the service of our God, our faith and our fellow-men.

The fourteenth link, has this day been forged in the golden chain of houses of prayer which bind our brethren in the metropolis who owe allegiance to the United Synagogue.

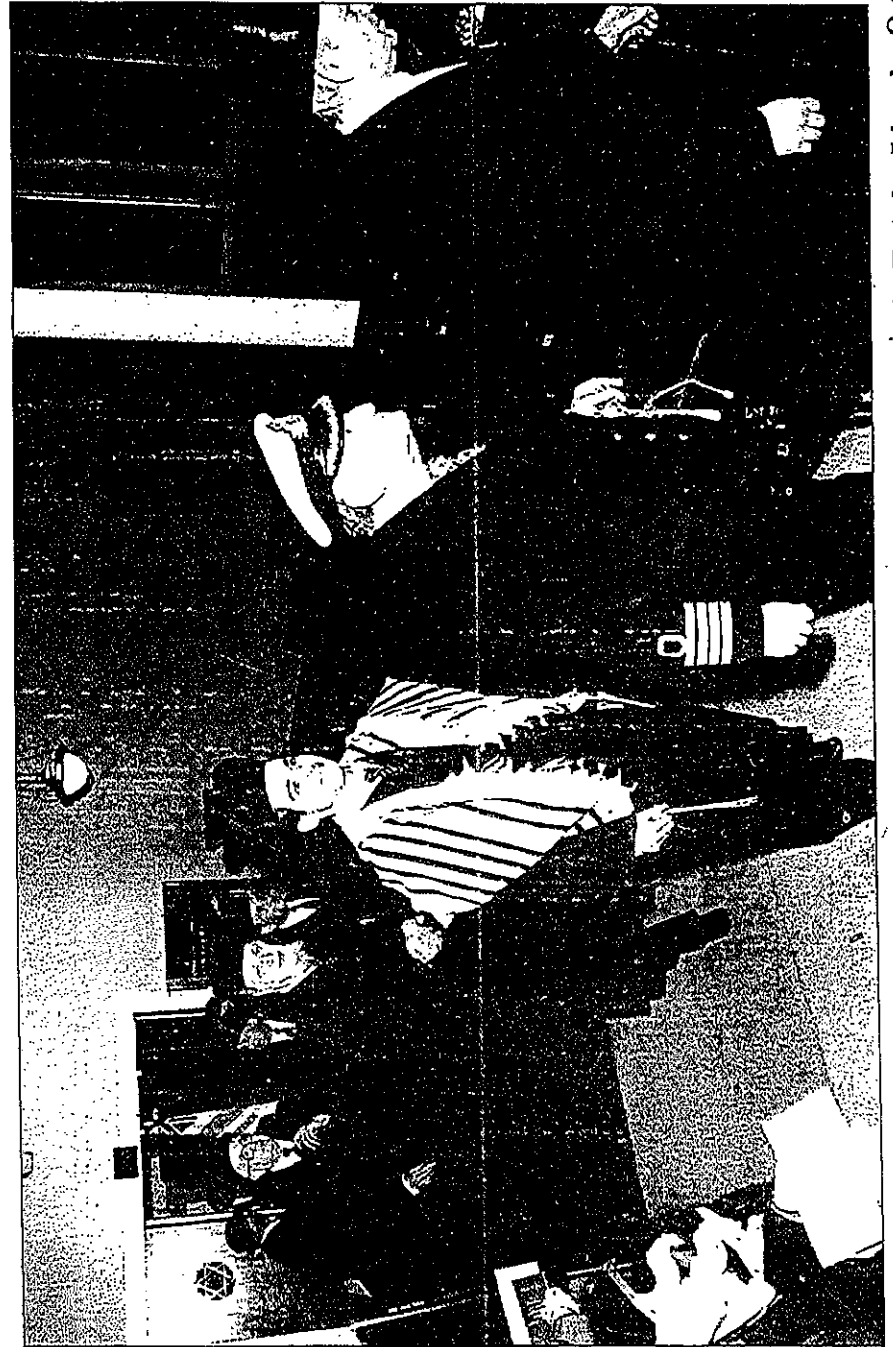
Interior of the Synagogue 1897



Founders of the synagogue



Hackney Synagogue 1990
Painting by Min Tabor



Mr Alf Dunitz, Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits, Rev. Mark Goldman and Captain F. Ashe Lincoln Q.C.
1987.



The Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks with Rev. M. Lester and Rev. A. Greenbat 1991



The Chief Rabbi with (far left) Lord Clinton-Davis, Harry Farbey z"l, Rev. M. Lester MA (Chazan), Cllr G. Ross (Mayor of Hackney), Rev. A. Greenbat, Capt. F. Ashe Lincoln, DSc, A. A. Dunitz 1991.



His Worship the Mayor of Hackney, Cllr K Tallentyre MA & Rev D. Kerbel (Chazan), Civic Service at Hackney and East London Synagogue 1994.



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Civic Service 1987, with Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits

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SYNAGOGUE QUIZ TEAM

We would like to express our gratitude to the following donors who have helped with the production of this booklet.

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(In memory of her late parents Paula & Joe Squirsky)
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Ernest Weinstein

Printed by L.A.C. Print. Tel: 0181-985 4211