

REV MENDEL ZEFFERTT

(by his son)

Rev Mendel Zeffertt B.A., the successor to Rev Stern, was born in Lubraniec Poland (then subject to the Tsar of Russia) 20.11.1892 and died in London 13.1.1958.

His father, **Simon Zeffertt**, took the family to Liverpool U.K. in 1894, possibly in response to the frequent pogroms and the many restrictions in employment and movement placed on Jews. His mother, **Anna Gertrude (née Brookstein)**, had a great love of learning, and Mendel proved an outstanding scholar, winning a place at the prestigious **Portsmouth Grammar School**, where his name is still to be found among the records of scholastic achievement. He won prizes for modern languages and the classics. During WW2 he still remembered enough of his schoolboy French to be able to converse with French speaking refugees, though he had no opportunity to use it in the intervening years.

After school, he studied for the ministry at **Jews' College, London University** and became Minister at the **Plymouth Synagogue** until 1928, when he was appointed Minister of the **East London Synagogue**, which post he held until his death. Unlike his predecessor, he spent the rest of his life in Rector Square and among his congregation. He was in no way averse to the innovations introduced by Rev Stern, though, not having been brought up in a Yiddish-speaking family, he did acquire sufficient understanding of it in order to communicate with the influx of Jews escaping the rise of Fascism and Nazism throughout Europe.

He acted as **Chaplain** to the nearby **Stepney Jewish School** and the **Jewish Hospital** and ministered to the now defunct **Jewish Orphanage** and **Mental Home** in **Norwood**, South East London, which had been largely financed by his wealthy cousin, **Michael Zeffertt** (1864-1932).

He readily accepted and continued **children's services** in an adjacent hall, as well as the activities of the **mixed choir** and introduced an occasional magazine. In 2004 I met a lady who had been a teacher at the **Stepney Jewish School**, she told me that her abiding memory of my father was to see him arrive at the school through the playground, where crowds of the children would surround him and walk with him, eager to hold his hand.

He remained in the East End throughout WW2, (though I was very surprised to find a record listing him as a member of the Air Raid Precautions, as his extremely bad eyesight and limited hearing probably proved something of a handicap). However, he was offered the post as Minister to the **St John's Wood Synagogue**, but, in spite of the enormous kudos of such an exalted post, after long and careful thought he decided that his place was among the poorer Jews of the East End.

Like his predecessor, he was very keen on inter-faith fraternisation, and had frequent meetings with Rev French, whose rectory opposite the synagogue gave the street its name. The former Bishop of Stepney, **Joost de Blank** (later Archbishop of Cape Town) renowned for his humanity and wit, invited all the local clergy to a multi-faith service at the Church of St George's in the East, asking all to address the congregation. He came up to Rev Zeffertt afterwards and caused him delighted amusement by assuring him that his was the 'most Christian talk of all!' He was still chuckling when he arrived back home.

As the number of Jews in the area began to decline after WW2, he was asked to continue to serve, although he had reached retirement age. That he agreed to, though he was soon stricken with the cancer that led to his death.

Michael Zeffertt

17.12.2018