



**Henry (Heinz) Kuttner, born 1929 in Berlin, died 2014 in London. Emigrated with his parents and sister to the UK in February 1939 and joined the synagogue the same year.**

**Henry Kuttner was interviewed by Dr Bea Lewkowicz on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2000.**

*Can you please tell me something about the history of Belsize Square Synagogue - whatever you consider relevant?*

The refugees who arrived in London had little English, most of them, some of them were businessmen, some of them were doctors, some were nothing at all. Most of them had left a big family behind. They needed a community, a sense of community, and since there wasn't a community that welcomed them with open arms - they didn't really fit into the English Jewish communities even if they had contacts to them. Because in the case of the non-orthodox, *liberale* communities of Berlin, Frankfurt, Breslau, if they mentioned the word *liberal*, over here that means something quite different. And so, they realised the only way they could have any chance of a Jewish community life they would have to form their own community. So, a handful of them got together and formed an association. They were helped greatly in this project by Lily Montagu and the family Montefiore with whom she was connected. She was and had been for years a very dominant force in non-orthodox Judaism in this country. She was with the St John's Wood Liberal English Synagogue, a wealthy community with the largest non-orthodox community in this country. And I think there were several people including Rabbi Van der Zyl and Rabbi Kokotek, who survived as part of this remnant community, who already knew of her and had met her at

conferences and seminars abroad, so they had this contact. She immediately helped them. I don't know whether financially or with contacts or with help to get accommodation and this sort of thing, the fact is, an association was formed and the word got round. People used to meet in little cafes, called *Cosmo* or *Dorice*, which formerly was the Café Balsam on the Finchley Road. Word quickly got round that there was an association formed. They hired a room in Belsize Park, I think first number 20, and later number 30. Two rooms, and services were held.

*What was the address?*

Belsize Park. Ah, first there was a building in Belsize Park which was also used by – there was a kitchen there. I think it was at number 28. Directly opposite the church. The synagogue didn't hold meetings there, but it was a building where refugees met. I know because Herbert Levy and I – ask Herbert about this – met there in a little canteen. So, there was some Jewish community life there. But in Buckland Crescent number 20 and later number 30 we held services on a Saturday morning. On Friday evenings we were given the use of the Montefiore Hall at the side and the back of St John's Wood Synagogue in St John's Wood Road, opposite Lord's Cricket Ground. And those are some of my most vivid memories. Even during the bombing services would take place on a Friday night. It was a large hall, with an organ, where we could use our own music, had sermons in German, and there was a feeling of togetherness and at-home-ness which was indispensable for people who had everything taken from them except their lives.

*How old were you?*

I was nine. My job in those days was to stand at the side of the doors as a sort of usher, I wouldn't say *Shamash*. That was my first involvement in the synagogue, and there was a tin, I can see it now, in which after the service I was asked, on the Friday nights at the Montefiore Hall, to stand by the door and people would put their pennies and sixpences in if they had any, I don't know where this money was coming from, because we were all poor. I remember distinctly that there were buttons in there every week. Somebody would put a button in. So, I was trusted with this money and helped to count it etc. Every little helped. And I would join in with the singing. I recall there was a choirmaster called Kopf who was the first choirmaster engaged by this association which shortly afterwards, still in 1939, formed itself into a congregation. And in deference to Lily Montagu who didn't know the difference between *liberal* and liberal, we called ourselves The New Liberal Jewish Congregation. And for 40 years we continued with that name until we decided, she was now dead, we could safely change our name, because we realised that we were losing members from amongst those people who would have joined us but for the fact that they thought, 'liberal', that's not for us. We couldn't have called ourselves The New *Liberale*, we had

to call ourselves The New Liberal and it meant nothing. We were attracting the wrong sorts of members. So, that name change to Belsize Square Synagogue - of course I am jumping forward 40 years - is very important.

Going back to 1940, there was a little hunchback tenor who was singing called Raguschanski, he had a wonderful sense of humour, he allowed me at the age of ten to stand next to him and he taught me the tenor line. Although I was singing soprano much of the time. From him I learned the tenor line. Because Kopf, who started conducting, as soon as the bombs started falling, or even the threat of bombs, he scampered. My father was left to conduct the choir. His younger brother Martin also conducted for a few weeks I believe. The Kuttner brothers took over the choir and I think Kopf left shortly before the high holydays. You have got the list of where the high holyday services took place. We started in the Wigmore Hall, heaven only knows how much we paid for that, I don't know. There also I was the *Shamash*, making sure people didn't come in to their seats during the sermon or while the arc was open. So, I got to love the music and to know the music as early as that. Then I got evacuated myself to a farm in Berkshire for a whole year, from about September 1939, although occasionally I came back for the weekend, not very often, once or twice a year, until about a year later. From September 1939 until late summer 1940 I was not in London.

But I carried on where I left off, as far as the synagogue and the choir is concerned. My father sang in the choir, my mother sang in the choir, later my sister sang in the choir, two of my aunts sang in the choir. So did my father's brother and his wife who he had met in the choir and married as a result of meeting her in the choir. And my two daughters were in the choir later. So, at one time altogether there were ten members of my family in the choir. So, you can see, the reason I am now involved with rewriting the music of the synagogue is because I feel very involved with the music. I didn't feel professionally qualified to continue conducting the choir. But I am qualified enough to do the work I am doing. I don't mind doing it, I conducted high holyday time for six, seven years, perhaps eight years.

*Did your father or your parents belong to a 'liberale' community?*

They got married in Fasanenstraße synagogue in Berlin, where Davidson was cantor. But he was absent on the day they married, he never forgave them. Because they did know each other, but they didn't really get to know each other well until they met in London. The reason was, my parents to various synagogues and they sang in various choirs. But to my knowledge, although they were both members of the *Kulturbund*, they did not have membership cards of a community. I cannot explain that, I never asked them about that. They sang in at least two different choirs, and I used to get taken to a little *shtiebel* in Stierstraße in Berlin which is around

the corner from where my father had his surgery. For *Simha Torah* and services like that. I still have the flag which I used to carry, it's now a challah cover. So we went to synagogue, but I do not believe that they were members at that time. And I think they only joined the *Kulturbund* because it seemed to be a form of involvement that might give you some protection after 1933. All the memorabilia from that time of any interest, I've got some things still in photocopies there, I have given to various museums, Imperial War Museum and the Sachsenhausen Jewish Museum. I felt it was not fair to expect my daughters to deal with these things after I had gone, so I found them good homes.

So, my involvement with the choir has been slow and gradual right from the word go. And I have sung under about ten different conductors in my time. My father only gave it up on health grounds and when I then conducted for a while after him, although Eric Goodman took over for 25 years in between, at high holyday time I used to conduct and for a time my father would come and sing under my baton then. Very amusing. And now I am the last member left involved with the choir - of my family. I still feel very involved. I am hoping to finish this musical project. It's taken us a year to complete this work.

#### *Is there a change of music?*

No. Originally the music came how it was, saved from Germany, by Davidson and then later it got put into a separate book for soprano, tenor, bass, separate book for organ, all hand-written, and that's how our high holyday services used to be run. Then the pages got a bit tattered and they were rebound, got tattered again, a different rabbi would come and he would introduce new prayers, then yet a new rabbi would come and a new choirmaster and he would start photocopying sheets, so we started singing from photocopies. And then new pieces of music would be introduced and gradually the numbering system would go completely haywire because page numbers were no longer relevant or in the right order.

Cantor Marshall Stone conducted the choir for several years here, he is still alive and a very useful member of the community who was trained as a cantor and has sung as a cantor in our community, but not as a full-time one. He helps with the old age homes and does cantoral things at Hanukkah and Pesach, he is almost fully employed at the old age homes in Fitzjohns Avenue. When he was choirmaster he saved the congregation quite a lot of money, when he photocopied the high holyday scores for instance, because they were getting too tattered, where pieces were used both in Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, he only photocopied them once and duplicated them. And of course, the page numbers were quite wrong and the item numbers are quite wrong. And if he only photocopied it once, suddenly we had wrong numbers and wrong page numbers, it was a complete mess. When Rabbi Mariner came, he printed his own prayer books, and the

order of service was changed. And these prayers, all in the right order now for the first time, printed in a prayer book which Rabbi Mariner has edited, the first of five or six prayer books, one is in the pipeline still for the minor festivals. As a result of all this, our music really needed to be re-thought. The numbering system, I was very involved because I was writing the schedule each time for the high holydays, nine pages of schedules, so that even non-Jewish singers could easily find their way. They wouldn't be able to read Hebrew and follow the prayerbook, they needed to have some order of service and know which piece was coming next.

*The choir consists also of non-members of the community?*

Yes.

*Are they employed?*

Yes, from the days when it was 10 shillings, back 40 years ago or so, they were being paid seven or 10 shillings a week. Because the synagogue with large enough membership, and the music was important to the tradition of the synagogue, always had been – many people come to our synagogue just for the music, some come just for the sermon – but the musical tradition is very important, the Lewandowski-Sulzer tradition. The congregation has always felt that it is too risky to depend on volunteers to come for the choir, because if they don't, we have no choir. So, the safest thing is to pay them. To begin with it was expenses, you paid them 10 shillings which was in those days, it wasn't taxed, it was just called 10 shillings and the synagogue put it down to expenses. Then the tax man said, 1959, 1960, you will have to declare all this. And the synagogue said to the choir members, you are all going to have to declare your income from the choir. And suddenly we were all asked to pay £50 in arrears to the tax man. And so, I negotiated, although I wasn't yet the choirmaster, with the then treasurer, Fritz Levy, a lovely man. I said this is not fair, these people are having suddenly thrown at them they have to pay £50, they are only earning 10 or 12 shillings a week. I am afraid the synagogue is going to have to bear this cost, and the synagogue bore that cost. That was my first big coup.

*How many members does the choir have?*

The choir used to have eight to twelve members, as the cost grew greater, they insisted that we have only two sopranos, two tenors, two basses and two altos in more recent years. That's in case one is missing, you have still got one of each voice at least. But for high holiday time we have an augmented choir, and it could be anything from twelve to 16, 17 people.

*How many of these people are members and how many are employed?*

Now, of the regular Friday evening choir, two or three members only, the rest are non-members, members elsewhere or non-Jews. High holyday time, and this would be slightly different but for the fact that Sue Heimann left the synagogue officially when her husband decided to leave and she also left. But she still sings in the choir. The fact is, gradually we have come to realise that we are not attracting from the youth choir - we had a very famous youth choir for years and years and years, going back 50 years, I have got a recording there of a youth choir in 1967 which was broadcast, because I helped to arrange it.

*When would the youth choir sing?*

The youth choir, in those days, it always sings traditionally at *Minchah* on *Yom Kippur*, Hanni Lichtenstern will tell you how long ago that started. I don't know the dates for that, but certainly 30 years, possibly more. And at Bar Mitzvahs and anniversaries and Bat Mitzvahs. So, on a Saturday morning they sing, but not every Saturday morning, you couldn't possibly get them to turn out that often. That choir can be anything from - Sue Strauss is the person to ask now, because she has been in charge ever since Hanni Lichtenstern gave up, both of them you should consult on this matter. It's a wonderful thing that they have done. It's always been my contention that too little has been done to encourage the best voices from the youth choir to come and join our choir. There has been the occasional one or two who have sung with us for a few months, but then they go and do their university and we lose them. Sue Heimann and Peter Heimann are really the only ones who have ever officially joined the choir for any length of time. They sang with us for 30 years. So that really is one of the things that I feel sad about that too little has been done. There were choirmasters who actively discouraged the children from joining in, because they didn't know how to cope with it. Whenever I conducted, I encouraged the children to come. But I was fighting a lone battle and the children seemed - there was too much of a generation gap and it is that step when they have got near the senior level of the junior choir, that's when the step has to be taken, please come and join us, they may hate the principle of having to be paid, they may not wish to tie themselves down to come regularly. Nevertheless, for one reason or another we have lost these people, and I think it is a tragedy. But we are lucky to have our non-Jewish singers, some of them are so loyal, and it's wonderful.

*Has that always been the case?*

No. Back in 1948 when I joined the choir, I don't think there was a non-Jewish singer in the choir, possibly one. The organists have always been non-Jewish, with the exception of David Lawrence, when he was old and free enough to come and play for us, but apart from that - Hanni Lichtenstern's husband who was a fine organist and brilliant pianist, if you go to the Oranienburger Straße museum there is a placard showing Paul Lichtenstern in his first piano recital, he was a famous musician. He played the organ for us for 30, 40 years, almost until the day he died. No, mtefnote quite, until David took over. But only on a Friday evening. On a Saturday morning and on *Yomtef* time he was always with the St John's Wood Synagogue, so he was never available for us. And so, my father started engaging organists from wherever he could get them, and they were always non-Jewish organists who could not follow the prayer book, who didn't know any Hebrew, so it was amazing that these people managed to do it. You just said number so and so, now! I was lucky by the time I took over the choir that I had David Lawrence, because I would have found it very hard with a non-Jewish organist. At that time, you had enough on your hands without having somebody who didn't know an A from a B. That would have been hard. But my father managed it, everybody else since has managed it.

*Let's go back to the early days, what other memories do you have?*

Round about 1941 when I was back from the farm - oh, let's go back - I remember one service where Magnus Davidson, who was always very friendly with my parents, and very good with youngsters, he would say to me: 'Henry, I have forgotten my *Chumash*', so I went off in a taxi back to his house in Belsize Park and came back in a taxi, and I remember the taxi driver coming after me because I had forgotten to pay him because I was in such a rush to get the *Chumash* back to him. I was used as an odd-job man as well.

Back in about 1941 Charles Henry Goodman's mother, who brought up her son on her own because the father had left the family when the child was about two, decided and came to Rabbi Dr Salzberger, who was not here when we first started, he didn't come until April I think that year. And I believe, as the poster that was in the exhibition that we started last year reminds us, that the first service that we had in this country was taken by Rabbi Dr Van der Zyl. Rabbi Dr Salzberger, who was engaged, was approached by Sidoni Goodman, or Ziddy as she was known - a very formidable lady - that she wanted her son to have Bar Mitzvah lessons. He was nearly 13 at the time, he was about twelve, I was about ten and a half, so lessons were started, bible lessons, in Buckland Crescent number 20, and later number 30. Herbert will tell you his version of it, no doubt. We sat on one bench. To begin with it was Norbert Cohen, Charles Henry Goodman and Herbert Levy and a month later, I joined them and Ruth Schmeidler with whom I am still in touch. She lives in America and I had shared a school bench with her in Berlin, by the way. But I didn't know the others until I got here. Norbert had already had his been Bar Mitzvah.

We sat in bible classes on one bench and used to giggle away, mainly giggle at the poor English of the rabbi. Some of it was in German and some in English, but whenever he did speak English, I do not now know how much was in German and how much in English, all I know is Herbert and I would giggle the time away. And when we were in air raid shelters when the bombing started, Herbert and I used to go to the same air raid shelter, we'd keep people awake giggling. They used to tell us off for giggling all day.

*Which air raid shelter?*

Next to Finchley Road Station. We both lived quite near there. He lived in Greencroft Gardens, by this time, 1941, we were living in Compayne Gardens, but that wasn't our first address. These bible lessons, certainly Salzberger's German was poetic, it was a joy to listen to it. Even as a child I remember being enthralled by the beauty of the language. I still have some letters that he wrote, the language is absolutely extraordinary. Only one other person I know who spoke German of such an arresting nature and that was Dr Freyhahn who was the Shakespeare expert and used to give lessons on Shakespeare in German.

*In the synagogue?*

Yes. But Karl Heinz Goodman would be able to tell you that, because I never joined these lessons, but I think Herbert did and Karl Heinz Goodman. Dr Freyhan was an amazing man. His wife survived him and became for many years the chairman of the women's society. He was one of the most unusual people I suppose we ever had as a member and the most talented. And for those of us that wanted the musical side of Bar Mitzvah lessons, we went to Magnus Davidson. He was a much softer, caring person. He would carry his heart on his sleeve more, whereas Salzberger was very straight and stern, what the British would call blood and thunder. He always said '*Ein Rabbiner darf seine Gemeinde nie zum Lachen bringen*'. Tell that today! And one respected him for that. One stood in awe of him, but one also had affection for him. And later on, after he retired, I remember going to his house in Golders Green, because his radio wasn't working and I used to go and fix his radio for him. So, he liked keeping in touch with his students.

*When did Rabbi Salzberger leave?*

You have got the list, I can't remember, but it was the same year that Kokotek arrived.

He absented himself and threw himself into his new life. He wrote his book and started working for the 'Council of Christians and Jews'. Certainly, in Germany, for which later he was given the *Ehrensverdienstkreuz*, he formed bridges with the German community, he went for high holyday services to Germany.

*Did he receive a new position as a rabbi?*

No, he was too old, he would have probably retired anyway after a few years, but who knows how long a rabbi would continue. Rabbi Kokotek had been in Liverpool and his son is a Liverpudlian. And Eric Moonman he was from Liverpool, so he was a friend of the Kokotek family. If you find out that somebody was a friend of the Moonmans or Davis', they will be the Kokotek clan.

*Who is Harry Davis?*

He is the chairman who retired last year or two years ago. He married Kokotek's oldest daughter. From Liverpool, she died of leukaemia about three years ago, two years ago. And the younger Kokotek daughter is the headmistress, Sue Lion, of the school, so the Lions, the Davis' and the Kokoteks are all in one family. Rabbi Kokotek came to London at a time from a relatively small Jewish community to an enormous community because Rabbi Salzberger had left. And a lot of people like Eric Moonman followed him to London and became an MP there, I think because of Kokotek.

*Do you think that Kokotek and Salzberger marked different periods?*

Absolutely, certainly. And each of them would bring with them new types of people and would appeal to different types of people. And in the progress from refugee community to what is now going to be an English-Jewish community, and I am one of the last remnants if you like of those that still speak German. We still got 20, 30 German books, but who is going to read those in the future? Nobody. The English-speaking community of this next generation will take for granted that they have an English-speaking rabbi whether he is Australian or English. But in-between came a period where half of them were German and half of them hardly knew any more German, but someone who spoke both languages, Kokotek, fitted that perfectly. He was one of us, he related to both the German immigrants because he was one himself, and he related to the English, because he was young enough, so he has had enough of his education here. But the next step after him was already broken off, you could not thereafter have somebody who spoke

German anymore. I cannot now remember up to what year our sermons were held in German, but it was quite late, late fifties. And then it would be interspersed, and Salzberger would occasionally ask other people to speak to us and they would speak to us in English. Lily Montagu spoke to us, once, twice a year, and she would speak to us in English of course. And he would introduce her in English, very broken English. I am a bit exaggerating, because he had such an accent - of course he spoke quite good English, but to my ear, to somebody whose English was that of a ten-year old who had learned the hard way it was not very good English. But he managed. But he taught us in German. But Herbert may tell you that half the lessons were in German, I am sorry, I cannot now remember how much was in English and how much was in German.

*You said you laughed about his mistakes, do you remember some of those things?*

Well, he would just mispronounce words, or he would use a German word in the middle of an English sentence because he couldn't find the word. Or if he tried to speak English the construction of the sentence would be just hilarious. Kokotek - I have written down quite a lot of Kokotek's mistakes when I was on the board, or when I was listening to a sermon. To give an example, I have written them all down, I have got them upstairs.

*Why have you written them down?*

Because I thought they were so hilarious. I liked a good laugh. One year, the man who later became our chairman, but died a few years ago on Yom Kippur, Ernest Nathan, whose eldest son Thomas - who I thought was going to be our next chairman, but he obviously can't spare the time, he is the director of Marks and Spencer. Ernest Nathan was then chairman of the Parents and Teachers Association and as was the habit in those days they gathered money for the association. Money was collected for a particular purpose, and on one occasion Rabbi Kokotek announced to the community that 'I have much pleasure in announcing that with the money collected by the Parents and Teachers Association we have now been able to buy for the Sunday school children a 'projectile' which means a rocket, what he meant was a 'projector'. This is hilarious, and he never realised what he said.

I eventually became a board member, and I believe I have proved my worth in the community. But there were times, every three years, when you had to come up for re-election because you are only allowed by the constitution to be a board member for three years. Then you have to retire, and you can put yourself forward to election again, but maybe if there are more candidates than there are places you might lose your seat. And so, it was. I never lost my seat in all those 25

years. Obviously, my father's name rubbed off on me and perhaps I have earned some for myself as well, who knows.

*Is family important in the community?*

Yes. There are family groups, very important ones, the Alexander family is the really famous one because they are such a large one and they have inter-married into various other groups naturally over the years. It's an enormously important family and the community exists as it does largely because of these important family groups. But because you get people from Breslau, Frankfurt and Berlin, naturally there are little feelings of, we would rather be with this or with that group.

*As a child, do you remember your parents talking about this?*

Because my father was always independent, he trusted everybody and everybody trusted him, in the sense that if you wanted an independent opinion you came to my father. In a way, that is happening to me as well. We are not part of a faction. Whoever the factions are, we are not part of it. Mainly because we want to think for ourselves.

A togetherness is born of joining in ventures that are of importance and benefit to the community. Nothing else matters.

*Do you think Belsize Square now is still a refugee community?*

No, it's not a refugee community except for the fact that people from the outside impose the label refugee on us, because we are not part of the English establishment and I don't think we ever will be, not in my lifetime anyway, because we use Lewandowsky and Sulzer. And because our founder members were not from here, the very fact that most of the other congregations came at the end of the 19th or at the beginning of the 20th century doesn't occur to them, that's too long for them to remember. So presumably that is going to take another one or two generations before Belsize Square will be considered a part of British Jewry. The fact that we went independent made it worse in my view. But we had to go independent in order to attract the right sort of member who would take us for what we are instead of what they think we are, which was always wrong, because the word liberal was the wrong tag, the wrong label. We are not liberal in the English sense.

*Did the congregation feel because of Lily Montagu...*

Yes, in deference to her we took on the name liberal, she suggested the title, we had to take it on. And she was unaware of the implications of the German *liberal*. She would have needed to speak German fully to understand that.

*Do you think this label, refugee community, was imposed?*

No, we were refugees, there is no doubt about it. If the rabbi speaks German and we are penniless, and it's only when restitution starts that any of us gets any money, of course we are refugees. I used to be ashamed when my parents spoke German aloud in the street. Fortunately for me, I didn't forget all my German, although I had forgotten it, I had to relearn it, because German has been very useful to me, all my life, and still is. But I didn't want it to be spoken during the war out in the street when you go from Cosmo to Dorice and back again. [laughs] I was ashamed. And no doubt many another person whose grandparents were founder members and spoke German wished to have nothing to do with the German aspect. I don't understand it, and that's probably because it's a part of their lives that they want to forget in the sense that it was a dark chapter and anything German must be bad. I mean the fact that Germany was invented before Nazis or anti-Semitism came along doesn't occur to them. I must admit to you it didn't occur to me either, don't forget I never learned Schiller or Goethe or Heine, I was too young to learn this at school. Nor have I read any of them although I had some books. It was not part of my education, but I now realise that it is a beautiful language, although it depends on who is speaking it. I don't enjoy listening to it per se, but the way Salzberger spoke it, it was a beautiful language and so I learned to appreciate that there is more to language than what it stands for in political terms. But I think unless you were born to the language, it's going to mean nothing to you.

*Do you think some of the younger people left the community in order to join a more English one?*

It may well be. They wanted to make a name for themselves, they didn't want to marry into what they saw as a refugee community, they wanted to become English and be accepted.

*Has that been the case?*

I am not conscious of exactly which people it happened to, but I am sure it does happen. You see families where the children are members in other synagogues, I can name several. And there is

another thing, if the fathers or mothers were very important members of the board or something they want to make their own name, and who can blame them? I was quite happy, because I have never been ambitious. I was quite happy living in the shadow of my father, and it was hard because he was a very hard person to live up to. You can't beat such a reputation, there is no better, so I am very happy to have been his son. It never occurred to me to go and make my own bed somewhere else. There are people who might think I want to do my own thing, so those types of people would move elsewhere. Particularly if the parents had positions of importance. They don't want to be thought of as benefiting from nepotism. Yes, people would join sometimes for that reason, sometimes because they have moved away and are living in Wembley and it's more convenient in Wembley or Hendon. Or the children go to Jewish schools and the family then needed a more orthodox environment. I am afraid many people only join synagogues, as I see nearly every week, because their daughter needs to get married, because they haven't got a burial place or because their son needs to have a Bar Mitzvah. Those are the three reasons people join synagogues. We have people who come who love our music, but they don't join.

*Initially, who of the German-Jewish refugees joined the community and who didn't?*

Everybody joined. People from Frankfurt certainly, because they had a rabbi now from Frankfurt and they knew of him, people from Berlin certainly, because Davidson was from Berlin, but there was no alternative for them. If they wanted to be in a community where they were made to feel at home, as Charles Henry says in his article, comparing Nahama to Davidson, it wasn't just the services they came for, it was the sense of community. To begin with, there was no television, they couldn't listen to the radio because they couldn't speak English. So, the only thing they had was communal life in the little room where they met once or twice a week. Then there was a little club in Broadhurst Gardens where Mrs Lechner had a kitchen, and they had dances. My sister used to go dancing there every Saturday night. That was not part of the synagogue, but the same sort of people would go.

*Was the idea of the dances to bring young people together?*

Yes. To bring young people together, and it was the refugee community who was not accepted in the English clubs. There was Bar Kochbah and there was Makkabi, I joined those for table tennis. I also played table tennis at college, that's where I learned it. But for people of my sister's age who were 20 when the war finished, she wasn't yet integrated into English society, and she naturally congregated with people of her own age group and people who spoke with an accent and people who came from the continent. I mentioned German, but there was also Austrian, and Czechoslovakian and even French-speaking people. There was no other refugee community since

the turn of the century. So, it was a natural thing for them to congregate together. If we weren't orthodox enough for them of course then they had to find somewhere else. But the fact is, we have attracted people of extraordinarily wide ranges from the most liberal - in English terms - to really quite orthodox people for whom we are the best thing they have found for one reason or another, because they like the music or the minister, or because their daughter or father is a member. We have had very orthodox people who joined and made themselves very unpopular because their daughter lived here and wanted to become a member here, now their daughter has moved abroad, so they have moved away. We have attracted people from a very wide range from liberal to orthodox. And in order to allow our hall to be available for bookings by orthodox organisations we have introduced *kashrut* into our kitchens, now for 15 years or more. Before we didn't have *kashrut*. There were plenty of members who had *kashrut* in their homes, and Rabbi Mariner issued a leaflet which I have still got on *kashrut*, how it should be and to help people if they wish to do it in their homes as well. The important thing was that people who came into our synagogue had to be sure, for those that needed it, we served kosher food. Every single Friday evening meal that is served is fully kosher and has been so for 20 years or so.

*Was there pressure for children to marry someone Jewish?*

I wasn't conscious of it, my parents were disappointed with me, certainly. And my sister also did it, her first marriage was out. But her second marriage was in, after 25 years she was widowed, and she married a Jewish man. She's been widowed a second time now. I think the independence of which I spoke was important to us, we were independent in many ways, our family, and we didn't like to be herded. I can't tell you the reason why I didn't marry a Jewish girl, except to say that being evacuated and going to non-Jewish schools, after Prinzregentenstraße anyway, I lived a very free life, we never had a kosher household. I suppose my grandfather's household was kosher, but I wasn't part of that, I never knew that. The freedom that we were given left me with too many options, I suppose. No strictures were applied, but I realised how disappointed they were when it happened. But Molly was like a daughter to them, it was just the initial shock of it. And as far as the congregation is concerned, their view I suppose has altered over the years with the fact that they realised that it is not good to exclude couples from inter-faith marriages. Just like the whole Jewish attitude to outreach these days is this very subject, if you are going to cut everybody off, you are going to dwindle. But Moses married out, Abraham married out, so why shouldn't Henry Kuttner?

*So has the policy altered on this issue?*

Well, Molly couldn't become a member because she is not Jewish. She would have to convert. And since we have both chosen cremation that won't be a problem either.

*The official membership policy, can anyone become a member who...?*

Who has Jewish parents, I think so. I think one Jewish parent. I am sure that is the case. And if they wish to be a member of the congregation then they will be allowed to. But and you can confirm that with Judy, but I am sure that is the case, whereas in Jewish Free School they were asked to produce the birth certificate of the grandmother! The attitude must have changed completely over the years, because there is so much of it about. And the whole attitude in the community about inter-faith marriages, not just in the Jewish community has changed. From being a taboo subject, which you can't even talk about, it had become so prevalent and rated so high. The interesting thing is though, and there is a box this full in the archives, of correspondence that Rabbi Kokotek had from requests of people, once it was known that he would help them with conversion.

*Did he help them?*

He did help people, but in almost every case he would say, go away and study and come back in three years' time. Because he didn't want the responsibility of doing the study, but he told them where to go and what to do. And when they were ready, then he would help them. He was not equipped to do it, he had a congregation of 1200 people or whatever it was, at some time more, 1800 I think at the maximum, immense numbers. Now we have 13-1400 members. The number of congregational magazines that are sent out is about 850, but that includes a few abroad and some of those may not even be members. I don't know how many people abroad get it. So yes, of course the attitude has changed. Once Chief Rabbi Brodie was introduced to me, when he was doing a broadcast. They said: 'this is one of our Jewish studio managers'. He asked me to which congregation I go and I answered 'to Belsize Square Synagogue'. 'Oh, the new liberal synagogue'? He told me that he really shouldn't be shaking hands with me. Now I have heard this from somebody else only recently who had the same conversation with him, so he said this to quite a lot of people. With Rabbi Jakobovits I had a different conversation, because my father's mother, the one on the left with me on her lap, her maiden name was Jakobovitz, although probably spelt differently. I said: 'my name is Henry Kuttner, I am proud to tell you that my father's mother was *geborene* Jakobovitz. He said, my father changed his name from Jacob to Jakobovits. I thought afterwards, I could understand him change his name from Jakobovits to Jacob, but from Jacob to Jakobovits? Anyway, that's what he told me and apparently, it's true. Strange. But he came from

Berlin as well. But if somebody says to me, you are not really kosher enough for us, then I say, okay, you take over the work I am doing. [laughs]

*Have your children been active in the synagogue?*

Until they left home, yes. They were both bat mitzvah, in fact, Ruth Schmeidler was the first Bat Mitzvah I think, and then for 20 or 30 years nobody. Both my daughters, Susan and Helen in the same year. Unfortunately, my father didn't live to see this. Both were members of the choir for quite a few years, even the high holiday choir, I think. Susan, on the day the large hall was consecrated, Kokotek was still alive, Hanni Lichtenstern had arranged for a youth choir to sing, but that week Hanni Lichtenstern was ill, Susan conducted the choir, with David Lawrence playing the piano, I remember that well. So yes, they have played their part, and they have been members of the youth group. I have never mentioned youth groups, because my father was the leader of the first youth group, he formed the first youth group, it was called the Claude Montefiore circle, CMC, in deference to Claude Montefiore who had been such a tremendous influence and after whom the Montefiore Hall is named. The whole Montefiore family were the backbone of the liberal Jewish congregation; without whose help we could have never formed the community.

*Where is the Montefiore Hall?*

The Montefiore Hall is that hall in which we held our first services behind the synagogue which has just been rebuilt a year or two ago. At St John's Wood. CMC was the name of our first youth group, and Herbert and Charles and I were members of it and Ruth Schmeidler and there with 20 or 30 other young people. And my dad and Eric Goodman led this group. Then later Charles Henry formed a youth group called the Phoenix, rising from the ashes, and he can talk to you about that and so can Herbert. Then a young man called Graham led the group, who went to Israel. There have been various youth groups, but my father's was the first one. Before he formed that youth group, we had already formed little groups to perform Purim plays and that was in 1943. The war was still on, we were not yet an official youth group, but we met in my parents' house, Charles wrote an article about that in a magazine. The piece he wrote in the early days, and he mentions that. So, this togetherness of the youth, my father was involved in Germany in sport, he had been *Präsident* des SCC [Sport-Club Charlottenburg], in Charlottenburg, the biggest sport club in Germany. He was the only Jew ever to be president and he had arranged the Potsdam Berlin Stafettenlauf. I went to visit the Sport-Club Charlottenburg a couple of years ago and they still have him and his brothers on, they remember them, there is even a plaque with my uncle's name on it, because he fell in the First World War, one plaque was stolen by some football hooligan,

but the one with my uncle's name is still on there. So, the Nazis didn't eradicate all news of Jews. My father was involved with young people, he trained athletes, he was used to working with young people. Not only was he choir master and sang in the choir, he was also a board member and served on the youth committee. He decided to put his actions where his mouth was and formed this youth committee and they always met in my father's flat in Compayne Gardens. Even in the times of rationing, there was always something on the table.

*What sort of identity did they want to give to the children?*

To begin with it was doing something communally, so he would write together with Eric Goodman, I still have the script, the Purim play in English. We would help him with the English when necessary. It was staged in Buckland Crescent in 1943, three performances. Lily Montagu was invited and refused, I still have the letter, on the grounds that she thought Purim was a vindictive festival, and she doesn't believe in it. Fair enough. So, she never came to attend it, but everybody else did. The satisfaction from doing something together and from marking a Jewish festival in a typical Jewish manner gave everyone a sense of achievement, and a sense of the knowledge of Judaism. It was educational, it was about friendship and togetherness, and working to one aim. And of course, what led from there was more ambitious plays, and they wrote something called the *Eternal Flame*. By this time, I was evacuated again to Weston-super-Mare with his youngest brother Martin and took my school certificate there away from the flying bombs, this was now 1944. A year after the Purim play *Esther*, they put on the *Eternal Flame* which had one scene representing each festival of the year. Something about Passover, Yom Kippur, and in each case, it adapted it to modern society and modern living, you might be sitting on a station platform or in a waiting room or in a home with no food on the table. Herbert, I am sure, still has the script. I didn't actually take part in it although I drew the posters for it, because I was evacuated myself. So, by this time the group was doing more ambitious things. Then Charles Henry took over leadership of the group and they changed the name of the group and drew in more older people. Later the congregation had something called the under 35s. These were the same people who had been members as 18 or 20 -year-olds, they had now grown up, married perhaps, but they still wanted some form of togetherness.

*Did the youth group always meet on a Sunday?*

I can't remember when they met in my father's house, but certainly Sunday afternoon seems likely. But it might have been occasionally in the week, to rehearse plays, either in the synagogue or in my father's flat, whenever convenient. But you are right, it must have been to begin with

on a Sunday. There were other clubs that we joined, there was a club in Upper Park Road, Herbert Levy knew about this and I joined for a short while.

*Freier Bund Deutscher...*

Could have been.

*I think it's the Freier Deutscher Kulturbund.*

It probably was, I can't remember.

*What were they doing?*

They put on *Midsummer Night's Dream* I recall in English. And I was going to be Othello. But it never went off the ground, I spoke to Herbert about this, he hardly remembered anything about it, of course Herbert was involved with things theatrical all his life. His uncle was an actor, I worked with him in the BBC for 30 years. He came to do school broadcasting, and I did a lot of educational broadcasts as a studio manager. Herbert had great tendency for things theatrical, and he was a wonderful Mordechai - exceptional! He was a whole two grades better an actor than any of us. He really carried that play almost single-handedly. But we sort of rallied around him. What did I know about acting, but you did the best you could, what was I, 13. So he would hardly remember a little incident like this *Midsummer Night's Dream*, whereas for me, it was the only time I have ever been involved with anything about acting really. So, I remember it, it made an impression on me.

*So, it was important for the community to produce cultural events?*

Oh yes. Now Davidson was the one responsible for most of that, because in those early days when we had just the one room in Buckland Crescent, he would arrange these Sunday afternoon concerts. And he would bring Norbert Brainin who had just come back from the Isle of Man or perhaps had not yet even gone to the Isle of Man, who was a violin student. And other artists, famous singers, actors who would quote poetry or something artistic, they would sing duets or trios, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Beethoven, they would put on operettas, *Magic Flute*. He would be the impresario, Magnus Davidson, because he was an *Opernsänger* so he would do this easily. He kept the cultural tempo of the congregation at a very high level. Every single Sunday he would

have a programme. So, he was not only a *Chazzan* and teaching us boys, people also came to cry on his shoulder because he was a very sensitive person who cared about people. But he also cared about the social and cultural activities. He kept them going for years. And then my father and Eric Goodman helped him and Franz Goodman can talk to you about that, although she is now 89 or thereabouts.

*Why do you think the culture was so important?*

To Davidson it was probably important because he had something to give and he wanted to give it. From the congregation's point of view, services were only once or twice a week, they didn't all come to services, but there were people who needed togetherness, and you might as well give them some culture while they were being together. They couldn't yet read English books, there was a library, there were half a dozen books on the shelf there, no doubt. I have one book in the library that is marked, 'New Liberal Congregation, Library' and Dr Freyhahn was the librarian, but I don't think he ever set foot in the library, he perhaps provided the books. People borrowed books, but they needed music, they needed entertainment, they needed to be made to laugh. And my father and Eric Goodman would make up, to music or not to music, verses about the situation they were in. In German. So, they would write about Finchley Road or Swiss Cottage.

And they needed to laugh because they had precious little to laugh in the manner of Goethe or Schiller or Heine or Shakespeare. People would be rolling in the aisles, because it combined what they knew of being the style of the people of their youth, their education, the German culture which they had left behind with the situation they found themselves in. Most had lost all their family, if they had their children with them, they were lucky. Not all had even that. Or in many cases they were children who had left their parents behind. They all needed to be comforted, the young needed a sense of belonging and Davidson gave them that. And from that of course, stemmed all manner of things, from this you got to know who was, you got to know each other, you ate together, you laughed together, you listened to music together. And you got to know how to help each other. Here was a doctor, here was a dentist, here was a plumber, here was a *Schriftsteller*, and the talents were utilised gradually because you found out about each other by being together. But I have never thought about it until you asked me, but I am sure that how it was. But Herbert, who was not evacuated like I was, probably knows it in a less disjointed fashion, because I lost a year when I went to the farm and I lost another year when I went to Weston-super-Mare. Whereas he will have a continuous feeling of togetherness with the community which will be more solid than my memory.

*Were most children in the community evacuated or were you a rare case?*

I think I was quite rare. It was arranged that I should have scripture lessons sent to me by post and these were given to me by the local vicar in the local village, he arranged for me to have these lessons. I obviously did them reasonably well but not completely well. In holiday time I obviously attended one even in person, but the rest was done by post. I worked from a book which we now have in the young person's library called 'Out of the House of Bondage', a wonderful book for young people in large print telling the bible stories. And I would be asked questions about Ruth, Moses and Abraham and I would answer them having studied them. Here I was doing lessons in English, and I had only just learned to speak English, so it was a bit of a struggle for me.

#### *Why were you evacuated?*

My father was not allowed to practice as a dentist, he worked for the refugee committee at Bloomsbury House. His English was quite good. He had come to put his name on the dental register three years earlier when we went to Denmark on a holiday, secretly, he came to England without the Germans knowing, in 1937. Put his name on the dental register where, after five years of residence, if you had once put your name on the dental register, you would be able to practice as a dentist. Whereas other people who didn't do that would have to restudy for an English dental degree, the LDS. He could practice on his DMD, dental medical doctor or whatever it's called. Many of his colleagues had to study here again. As it was, he had to wait until 1948, when the NHS started to open his surgery, because then he could be sure of getting sufficient patients. As somebody unknown, starting from scratch without any history of patients - where would you get patients from. Before that he worked, when he finished working for the refugee committee, earning three pounds a week or something, he couldn't afford to keep me and my sister. So, I was sent to a farm in Berkshire, through Bloomsbury House or Woburn House. We had no money, so how could he keep us? He couldn't practice as a dentist yet. He then went to work in Penge and later in Peckham for the co-operative dental association as a dentist where he had to re-educate the whole British public who all came to him saying, doctor, I want all my teeth out. Why do you want all your teeth out? Because my father had all his out. That was dentistry and he had to teach them, he said, if you want your teeth out, you have to go somewhere else, I won't do this, if you have a bad tooth, I will take it out. I am here to save your teeth. So, he re-educated the whole population. And he gradually earned enough money to be able to afford to keep me, but for a year I was on the farm.

#### *And your sister?*

My sister went to a convent in Wales, where they tried to convert her. Then she left there, and she lived with a Christian family and got very friendly with the boy there. And when she came back to London, we heard that he was killed by a flying bomb that fell on his house, or one of our planes crashed, fell on his house. So, she had a tough time, too. Neither of us spoke a word of English when we came, or half a dozen words. Doing bible lessons in English was quite tough.

*So that differentiated you from the other children?*

Yes, I don't know how many were evacuated then, but I am fairly sure that none of us, which accounts for Herbert still speaking with a slight accent, and Charles Henry, and Norbert, whereas my accent is not nearly so pronounced. At the age of nine I went to a farm in Berkshire, and I learnt to speak all the swear words before I learned anything else.

I have got all my *Zeugnisse* here from Prinzregentenstraße, and here is a picture of Ruth Schmeidler with whom I sat on a bench in Berlin, but I am not on that photograph because I was ill that day. And that was my teacher Fräulein Marx. I am still in touch with two or three people on this photograph. One is in Wales, Dinemann, he was a senior librarian in Aberystwyth for 30 years. We have lunch together, I got in touch with him recently. He knows of one other person on there, but we think all the others perished.

*You briefly mentioned the topic of restitution. Can you tell me how important that was for the community?*

Absolutely vital. Because without it, to talk of today and the last 20 years, the legacies that the congregation gets in regular intervals from its members who die, and without which we would not only be in the red each year and would have to double our membership fees, but the building work that has gone on or the attempt that we made to move our whole lock, stock and barrel to Mill Hill - in the end it didn't come to anything because they wanted to make a garden centre here instead - the building progress of building our own new synagogue and then a hall would have been impossible without the legacies of many people.

*Did the community receive any money?*

No, not that I know of. If it did, I am not aware of it.

*When was the turning point from a sort of insecure situation...*

I think it happened gradually because- don't forget the refugee community stood on their own feet gradually and got jobs in the days before there was lots of unemployment. In the days of full employment everybody got a job, everybody did well, they needed to do well. They certainly became ambitious in the sense of needing to start again. Most people managed to put some money away and their children got degrees and gradually people became, if not affluent, at least comfortable. But the restitution has made the difference of making them affluent. In some cases that affluence - here I am just as an example, my aunts left me some money, what am I doing with the money, I am paying and financing this music project. It's going to cost me perhaps £10,000, I don't know. But that is a good use for the money. There are other people who give money in similar ways, people who buy Torah scrolls, who pay for the reconstruction and people who stay anonymous. So, a lot of good is done. Without this restitution money I am sure we would not be where we are today. We are a comfortable community. We will never be as wealthy as the communities who have been here for hundreds of years, we cannot be.

*Concluding, general questions. What role did Belsize Square play in your life, how would you summarise that?*

I have to go back to the fact that when my father was in Sachsenhausen concentration camp, he said a little prayer. And he promised the Lord that if he got out of there alive, he would devote the rest of his life to the Jewish community. And the Lord kept his end of the bargain and so did my father. The example that I had in my father and mother of commitment to their community - it was a lovely feeling of community life- those beginnings really did help one to forget. The most important feeling was, we are alive, and we are safe and we have escaped. We have left some family behind, but we have been spared, and it was not so much important to say, 'spared from', but 'spared for what'. We were spared for the purpose of doing something with our lives. And in following my parents' footsteps, I have got involved with the life of Belsize Square to the point that it takes up a large chunk of my life. As I said to somebody the other day, if I could go to the place where we have our time share, in Torquay, and live there all the year round, I would have to take Belsize Square Synagogue with me. It's that important. Not just the services, not just the people, not just the work I do, it's all, everything together. I feel I am continuing in the work that my parents started. And since I am the last one of the Kuttners who is going to be able to do this, or likely to be doing it, I want to do it for as long as possible, at least finish the things that I have set myself to do. The trouble is, I keep taking on other things. But at least I retired from the board, the committee that you sit on, is the only one I have now agreed to sit on, because although I quite like committee work, it's too time consuming. I used to go down to the synagogue two or three evenings a week, the youth committee, the library committee, the board, the liturgical

committee, the communications committee, it's too much. I like to talk, but I also like to actually do something.

*Why did you resign from the board?*

Purely because I thought I put my money where my mouth is, in the sense that I have in the days when I was too young to be on the board or couldn't get on the board because my father was still on it, the average age of the board was about 70. Now the average age of the board is 50 or thereabouts. The average age has gone down 20 years, and as a result, I felt as someone approaching 68 years old, two years ago, it was time I gave others the example that you should make room for younger people. And at the same time, I had taken on other projects, and my health - I still didn't have my pacemaker - I needed to look after my health a little, although I enjoyed being involved as I was, I felt my youthfulness could be enhanced by actually concentrating on the things that I do practically, with the music and the library and the archives, rather than waste my time on talking all the time. So, I thought it was a practical situation to ease my health problems, because I used to crawl on the pavement every day when I suddenly got these breathlessness attacks and giddy attack, literally crawl on the pavement. It took them a long, long time to realise that I needed a pacemaker. I got it 18 months ago. It made a big difference to my life, but I still have problems, but they are not so severe. But unless you have got something else to do in life, you hang on to what you are doing, and not enough people seem to make way for young people. But in spite of that, the average age on the board has come down and I am very pleased about that. So, yes, Belsize Square plays an enormous role in my life and if you find anybody else who says that, well, there won't be many, because there aren't many people who combine the opportunity that I have had with the talents that I have. In other words, having been involved from boyhood on, not everybody had that opportunity, having had an example like my parents, not everybody had that opportunity, being involved with the music for all this time, nobody can possibly have that opportunity. It's difficult to find parallels, there are people who have been involved with the bazaar for 20, 30 years, so that is the nearest aspect that you will get.

*What is the most important aspect of Belsize Square for you today?*

The music. Everything else is nothing compared to the music. Because that will last. I am proud of being a part of it, by putting it on computer and making it possible to alter one note or change one word, add this prayer, change the page numbers, all on computer and just print it out again - for the next 20, 30 years it's going to be taken care of, whereas we have been struggling with *Fetzen*. My being able to do it, my being free to do it, my having the money to pay for it to be

done, and the availability of the software and the computer technology happens to coincide and so I happen to be the right person at the right place at the right time - so I am very fortunate and I just hope - and the pacemaker has given me the extra strength without which I couldn't have undertaken it, it's going to take several years. Although it's going to be slightly faster now because we have taken the first hurdle I believe.

*That's a big contribution.*

Well, at every Jewish funeral you hear the phrase, 'establish thou the work of my hands'. Everybody, if possible, would like to leave something behind that will have been worthwhile doing. And this work with the music, I think is worthwhile doing. And I think my parents and grandparents would be quite pleased. And again, without restitution money which my aunts were able to save up and leave me, I couldn't have done it either, because I wouldn't have had the money to spare to pay for that sort of project.

*How do you envisage the future of the community?*

There are two different aspects to it. One would be how I would hope, and the other one is how I think it more likely to be. I would hope that the traditions of this community will be upheld for the foreseeable future, that people will know from where they came. And that it will mean something to them. Whether they will remember who Henry Kuttner was, is not important, what I want them to remember is that but for the tenacity of a handful of people such a community could never have evolved. What they make of it of course, the very fact that we have an American Chazzan and an Australian rabbi proves that we are going to change irrevocably. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as they don't completely forget. The phrase keeps coming up 'and then came the pharaoh who knew not Joseph'. That would be a shame, because we are different. Jews are different, but we are even more different - and that difference is something to be proud of. On the other hand, the practicality of it is such that the children will come, and new members will come who have no ancestry even from within this community, so in 20 years' time that will have changed. By the time I die, the place will be unrecognisable. Whoever is then responsible for a library will throw out the German-language books, because there won't be anybody to read them, German-Jewish history - irrelevant. Things are going to change. The music may stay a little longer, because they won't realise the implications. I mean you can enjoy the music or not, and there are people who love our music and people who actually don't like it. This orthodox man said to me one day, I don't like that music, so I said to him: 'Walter, this is not the right synagogue for you, don't try and change us the way you want us to be, either you join us and you become part of us, but don't try and make us something we are not'. So, when the majority makes that

sort of decision, well, then we will be unrecognisable. I am not a cynic by nature, although I can be cynical of course, I am an optimist by nature, but I am also a realist, so I am a mixture of realism and optimism. The optimist in me says one thing, the realist says, *après moi le deluge*. Shame. So why am I doing this? To keep the deluge at bay a little longer. [laughs]

*We have covered many, many things, is there anything else you would like to mention?*

Yes. One of the important aspects that proves whether people are committed to our community or not, when you think back to the communities of the *shtetls* from which our ancestors came. Their whole community life evolved within half a mile of where they lived. Even in Berlin they would go in most cases to the synagogue that was nearest to them, there were enough synagogues in Berlin for you to choose to live near where you wanted to be, that's if you wanted to be in a synagogue. When we first moved to Hampstead, Hendon, Golders Green, and our community naturally grew up where people lived, we again were only a stone throw from the place, and it would have been no great achievement if 30 years later people are still going to the same community. But because of the prices of property and because families grew and couldn't afford to live in Hampstead, and there wasn't enough space anyway. As the congregation grew, they had to move further and further away, Hendon, Edgware, Stanmore, and to the South, and to the West and to the East, Ealing. You have probably seen and if not, ask Judy to show you where the demography is. It's amazing. They had to go into this to start to think, now where, if anywhere, shall we have a branch service and they wanted to do one in Wembley shortly, but the first one is up in Badgers Graft, perhaps I will take you. I used to go every Friday evening, again, for the same reason, until my heart, or my age said, you have had enough. For the first three and a half years I went every Shabbat after choir there, service started at 6.30 here, 8 o'clock there. And I would get home by half past 9. And sing the same service again, and sometimes conduct, but it got too much for me. And in the end, I retired from the choir officially although I still sing when they need me. But it's just too much, I just cannot do it all. And the point being this, you'll find out which are the committed people, because they continue coming to the synagogue even though they live in Hendon, Stanmore, and since 1958 we have lived here, we took our girls to Sunday school every Sunday from Edgware and collected them again. Now, my parents lived in Hampstead so we would spend the morning with my parents, so we'd get them to Sunday school and spend a couple of hours with my parents and then collect them again. Some people go down there and take part in the Talmud lessons whilst the kids are at school or they helped with security, they made themselves useful. But the committed ones they don't mind travelling 15 miles to get to the synagogue. And there can't be many communities in London that are based on that ethos. Most people join for convenience's sake the synagogue that happens to be near them, so if people come to us from far and wide there must be some reason why they

come and stay. And it's either they like the music or they like the rabbi or they like the atmosphere or because their parents did it or because they have been there since they were children or because the whole gamut of facilities that we provide is second to none for value for money. The infant school, our educational facility that we now have under Sue Leon- I know of Jewish parents who stand at bus stops, I know because I have heard the conversations, Ludwig, who helps me in the library, his wife is Spanish-Catholic. She has heard people speak at the bus stops in Hampstead, which is the best infant school, which is the best junior school? Belsize Square Synagogue. They'd send their children there because it's the best school in the whole district. The best school in Camden for Jewish or non-Jewish, black or white children. Yes, I don't mind them learning Israeli songs, say the parents, because it is such a good school - fantastic! You talk to Sue Leon about this. Or to the parents of children who are obviously not Jewish, who come to the school.

*BL: Anything else?*

So, I feel the commitment - apropos the question, what does Belsize Square mean to you, whomever you ask it of, it will be irrelevant if they are members, and dependent on how active they are as to how far away they live. Since very few people live within a stone throw as we used to from the synagogue, this is an amazing factor. I mean there are one or two other synagogues perhaps of whom it is true, St John's Wood Synagogue, they can't live all within a mile of St John's Woods Synagogue or West London Synagogue, but it is not the norm. So, you go to where you think you fit in best, and each person will have a different reason. But I know that you are going to talk to people who do this or that for the synagogue, or some that used to but can't anymore, or don't anymore, but the fact is, there aren't enough people doing things for the synagogue, not nearly enough. There are dozens of jobs that need doing. I know because I was member of a committee starting three or four years ago, talking about Belsize 2000, which was where should the synagogue be going. One of the things that came out of that was, people's likes and people's dislikes, where they thought we were going, where they think we should go, what changes would we like, how can we keep the young or attract younger people, how do we get people involved, isn't it a pity that so few people are involved etc. All these things came out in Belsize 2000. So, since it was only done, completed, two or three years ago this project, I don't know what happened to it since because I am no longer on the board, but if you speak to somebody about Belsize 2000, you will get answers.

Thank you very much for being such a good interviewer.