

REPORTS to the AGM of Sukkat Shalom, 26/2/2017

CHAIRMAN

It has been said that the Chinese have a curse which runs as follows: May you live in interesting times. Whether one regards the past year as an interesting one or not in the life of Sukkat Shalom may be susceptible of a quite subjective perception. For me it has been a year in which changes have been mooted and to some extent put into practice. We will have to wait and see how and whether these changes come fully to fruition in the next and following years. It has been clear that the burden of running the affairs of the Community has fallen upon far too small a group of people and that change is required if they are not to sink beneath the burden. I regard this, however, as a blessing rather than a curse.

Apart from its aims as a driver of ethical change in society at large the core activity of a synagogue is to provide religious services both for the community at large and for the life cycle events of its members. Examination by Council of how these services are provided revealed that far too much has devolved on one person in particular. That person is Nick Silk. Nick provided Council with a list of what he routinely and not so routinely does to ensure that services happen. We were put to shame by its extent, particularly as the last item on the list was effectively anything else that needs doing whether anticipated or not. Efforts have been made to look at the list and try to devolve as many of the items as feasible. Some of this has been put into practice already and other aspects of these changes should be formalised at the AGM. This movement has had the beneficial effect of widening the circle of those involved in the running of the Community. This is undeniably of benefit to us all.

Much of the effort required goes into setting up the various spaces we use as places of worship or study and providing in them the right books, equipment such as glasses for kiddush and the wine and grape juice to go in them at the right time. Chairs and tables need to be set out and cleared away. I shall not carry on listing all the activities involved. Suffice it to say that Nick has often been first in and last out as well as spending much time liaising with various individuals. As chair of religious affairs he has set out the timetable of services and their locations which he has taken upon himself to book. During the Shabbat morning services he has acted as Warden organising the list of people with mitzvot and helping them to carry out their duties. Charlie Raab has volunteered to undertake this role and has received on the job training for it under Nick's eagle eye.

Some of the work required is dependent on the fact that we make use of a number of different premises. During the year Council has looked at the various premises we use and also one we have been offered the use of. This scrutiny has had various aspects, namely cost, convenience for members, security and ambience as a place of worship. It is clear that we need to make up our minds what to do in the future but this is not a matter that can be settled by Council alone. Information will be provided to members so that any decision will be arrived at collectively

I shall not attempt to describe a series of events that have taken place during the course of the year. Readers of Etrog will be familiar with these or have taken part in them themselves. I consider the matters raised in the preceding paragraphs to be of greater significance at the moment. Having said that I will of course mention one event in particular. That is last Yom Kippur when our service was led not by Rabbi Mark but by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein. Without Rabbi Mark we were left to fend for ourselves musically through a long day. This was another example of responsibility being shared more widely. We were fortunate that those of us who had volunteered to form a singing group were given some training by Mich Sampson and ably and expertly led by Sharon Goldstein, Rabbi Andrews wife. We hope to further our efforts to compensate musically for occasions when Rabbi Mark is not with us.

This is the last occasion that I shall write a Chairs report for an AGM. I would like to conclude by thanking all those who have helped me carry out my duties as Chair not only in the past year but also in the preceding years. During this time the Community has grown not only in numbers but also in the richness of its communal life.

Norman Crane February 2017

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

As has been the case for many years now, we once again had a full calendar of services and related activities. We held our regular Shabbat, erev Shabbat and Kabbalat Shabbat services, led by both Rabbi Mark and our lay-readers. We held many festival services, and one of the highlights this year was that we had Rabbi Andrew Goldstein lead our Yom Kippur services, with his wife Sharon joining with our choir in singing the High Holyday melodies. As I mentioned last year, with Rabbi Mark being the Rabbi for ourselves and Leicester shul, it means that we have to share him over the High Holydays. I'm pleased to say that Rabbi Goldstein has already agreed to lead our 5778 Rosh Hashanah services.

Other services of note during 2016 were the Shabbat service led by Rabbi Stephen Fuchs in January, the Shabbat service the following month led by Cantor Gershon Sillins, and the visit by the Alyth Reform Synagogue Youth Choir to our Shabbat service in October. They also gave us a concert after the service, and if you weren't there, you missed a treat. In July we also had our biennial visit to, and service in, Newstead. As ever, Isobel King booked the Newstead village hall for the service and provided us all with lunch after the service, and as ever it was a really nice day.

I'd like to once again thank everyone who has helped in ensuring that our services run smoothly. That's not just those who lead the services but everyone else who is involved, from opening up and setting up the hall, tidying up afterwards, and making challah and bringing food for our communal events, particularly where we provide a 'nice kiddush' for visitors. As you may know, I'm stepping down from my Religious Affairs duties, but I'm sure that those who are taking over from me will ensure that the services continue to run just as smoothly, if not more so, than before.

Nick Silk January 2017

MEMBERSHIP

Our membership numbers have remained pretty stable during the year, with just over 100 members as well as a large group of members' children. We are most grateful to Sharon Goldwater maintains our membership database and email lists for us.

Gillian Raab February 2017

CHEDER

At the beginning of the year, that is just after last year's AGM little did I imagine that this year would see my last Cheder report. It became evident the end of the summer term would see great changes in Cheder staff. Of the five of us who had been teaching together for some time only ~~four~~ **one** would return in the autumn. Joanna Bleau would be starting a demanding academic and professional course which would make great demands on her time. Nancy Lynner's day job was also making increasing demands on her time. Wendy and I felt that after a good many years involved in running and teaching in cheders it was time to retire and pass the baton on to younger people. At first we were worried about the lack of response we encountered when we tried to identify our successors. I made it clear that if we did not find any volunteers there would be a strong possibility that Cheder would fold. All of us, parents, teachers and members of Council regarded that possibility as an unmitigated disaster. Appeals were made to parents and others to come forward to avert this possibility. In the end of course our appeals were successful and a potential team put together. You will read of the success of this team in Dan Hershon's continuation of this report. As far as the children were concerned it was business as usual. Hebrew reading capabilities were acquired if but slowly, festivals celebrated, Jewish values learned about and activities enjoyed. I would like to record my thanks to my colleagues who worked unstintingly to ensure that Cheder was something that the children looked forward to. It was very gratifying at the end of the year to be very warmly thanked by parents for what we had achieved together. Now it was over to Dan....

In September 2016, having previously been teaching one of the younger classes at Sukkat Shalom Cheder, I found myself running Cheder and teaching the top barmitzvah- age class. I was only able to do all this because

I had been handed a thriving and well run organisation by the previous incumbents, Norman and Wendy Crane. I also found myself being, in Norman's words, the last one standing, as sadly all the other existing teachers, for various professional and personal reasons, retired from Cheder at the same time as Norman and Wendy: I miss them all, and take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you for all that Norman, Wendy, Nancy Lynner and Joanna Bleau have done for Cheder during their time teaching classes Aleph, Gimmel, Daled and Hay respectively. Incidentally, I am delighted that Joanna's daughter, Sophie, has generously volunteered to help out at Cheder and carry on her mum's good work.)

Thanks to Norman and Council's prompt and thorough search for new teachers, I am happy to say that their replacements could not have been more appropriate and successful. Katy Bromberg and Rebecca Wober have already established themselves teaching the youngest class, newly renamed Kita Echad (I was feeling more numerical than alphabetical) and in particular they have helped provide some excellent craft and story based activities for the two younger classes. My old class, now Kita Shtayim, has not strayed too far family-wise as I have been replaced by my wife, Lorraine, who has quickly established a warm and fun learning environment. We are delighted that Yonatan and Melissa Eisenberg have taken on Kita Shalosh, and it has been a particular treat for the children in their class that Yonatan is a native speaker of Ivrit, and also a mean fryer of *latkes* for our very successful Chanukah session. Kita Arbah has been hit by the whirlwind of energy, knowledge and fun that is Dr Adam Budd and I have been particularly grateful for the way he is able to step in and take control of Cheder activities such as snacktime and festival celebrations with such panache when required. I feel that it has not been a chore taking on Cheder (aside from the long journeys from Northumberland!!) thanks to the warmth, enthusiasm and supportiveness of this marvellous new group of teachers, and in this respect I must not omit to mention our stand-in teachers, Gillian Raab and Louise Primrose, who have stepped into the breach magnificently when called upon. Gillian, in particular, has been a fount of wisdom and advice when I have needed it, and it goes without saying that Norman and Wendy Crane likewise continue to support and advise me whenever I need it.

Stew Green has continued to carry out the bookings of Marchmont St Giles and the other Cheder venues, and when I have been feeling at my most befuddled and overwhelmed by the intricacies of planning the Cheder calendar, he has kept me sane; also, Gail Potts continues to be enormously helpful in updating our webpage and the snack rota, and, lastly, Maurice Naftalin has been of great help in guiding me through the use of the Cheder email list and successfully migrating it to a new server (although I was a bit worried when two weeks after this was done I received an email from the new provider announcing it was closing down its service- I hope I misinterpreted this!).

When I took over in July, I looked very carefully at the curriculum and materials used in each class, and while I made no major changes to how we had worked before, I decided to build more continuity into the text books used at each level to ensure that Hebrew learning was as structured as possible, and by ensuring the teachers had copies of all support material such as Teacher's Books and Class/Homework workbooks to make their task as easy as possible. Hence I have implemented a set of primers and follow-up Hebrew text books which follow on up through the classes to the top two classes, where we are using the *Hineni* and *Journeys Through The Siddur* series of books, as well as our own Kabbalat Shabbat booklets and *Siddur Lev Chadash* to ensure that the children are as familiar as possible with the Hebrew and liturgy of the Shabbat service if they are intending to be bar or bat-mitzvahed, and that they feel the Hebrew they have learned and continue to improve on has immediate practical value, and I have been helped and encouraged greatly by Adam Budd in extending this approach to the top classes. I am grateful to our usual book supplier, Janet Elf of the Jewish Book Service, who, as always, has been very kind and helpful and provided an excellent service, whether it be the prompt ordering of books from the States, or the provision of wooden dreidels for our Chanukah session!

All in all, I feel Cheder has made a successful transition to its new team of teachers in building on all that Norman, Wendy and the others have achieved. I hope I can say, at the very least, that we aim to provide an atmosphere where all the children enjoy coming to Cheder for both the learning, the Jewish atmosphere

and the socialisation with other Jewish children, which, given that all our Cheder children naturally attend non-Jewish schools, is very valuable.

Most of all, I have been bowled over by the support, praise, generosity and goodwill of all the families who currently attend Cheder- we have around 27 children on the books, and are adding new ones all the time- and, as I constantly remind them, the parents, cheder *talmidim*, siblings, teachers, administrators and snack providers are all a vital part of the cheder community, a community within a community, and we could not function in this respect without each and every one of them. By the time this is distributed at the Sukkat Shalom AGM, our Rabbi, Mark Solomon will have attended Cheder to lead a Tu b'Shevat session with the children, and I think this shows how valued our Cheder is within Sukkat Shalom as a whole.

Norman Crane and Daniel Hershon, February 2017

BURIALS

Sukkayon the 10th of February in memory of Joy.

On November 16th 2016 I contacted Dean Secretary Ian.J.Gourlay to confirm our interest in the 25 plots provided for our community. This is done on a three yearly basis. No written confirmation needed. On November 24th 2016 I had a meeting with Dean Cemetery Superintendent John Duffy. A report of this meeting has been sent to council. One of the discussions brought up at the meeting was the availability of new plots if needed. We continue to have good relationships with both William Purves Funeral Directors and the Dean cemetery.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those on the burial committee for their continued assistance over the last year.

Ricky Hogg. Chairman of the burial committee.

COMMUNICATIONS

Most of our communication with members is by e-mail. Regular communications consist of a two-weekly reminder and our newsletter. Reminders usually go out a few days before our monthly Shabbat morning service and also before our Erev Shabbat service (not the short Kabbalat Shabbat ones) and include other events of Jewish interest as well as our own.

Early in 2016 Catherine Lyons, the editor of our newsletter (Lulav) resigned. Many thanks to Catherine for her very professional work on Lulav. The challenge this ~~this~~ left us with was taken up by a few of us ~~small group of us~~ who formed a newsletter group to produce our re-named Etrog collaboratively. Etrog goes out bi-monthly as an email via the Mailchimp system, rather than as an attached pdf- Printed copies still posted to those members who have requested this.

Etrog has now celebrated its first birthday, with the production of six issues and we'd like to thank everyone who, during its first year has contributed news, pictures and articles. We would be very pleased to have feedback and suggestions on any of this at the AGM and also to hear from anyone who would like to join the team.

Sukkat Shalom newsletter team February 2017