



## COMMUNITY REPORTS: 2019



The pages that follow are the unedited reports, from members and the professional team, for the year ending 31 December 2019.

“ *Services in the sanctuary continue to develop and to reflect the diverse nature of our community.* ”

Once again, we were able to be together as a community for the High Holy Days with a range of services for all ages and interests. We were delighted that there, we were able to accommodate an increased number of congregants in the beauty of our lovely synagogue which continues to be lovingly restored.

Services in the sanctuary continue to develop and to reflect the diverse nature of our community. In particular, the “Combo” service on the second Erev Shabbat of each month continues to attract with its soulful and joyful music. When there are no B’nei Mitzvot, we have held member-led services, including members delivering the sermon. We hope that these will become a regular part of the enhancement of Shabbat morning services.

On Shabbat mornings, ShabbaTots continues to thrive led by their Rabbis and teachers.

For adults, the Explanatory Service, Learn to Lein and Adult BM programmes bring new faces to the Bimah and a greater understanding of our services. Our afternoon B’nei Mitzvot create a very special and personal atmosphere in the sanctuary.

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The beautiful Remembrance Day Shabbat service includes a list of West London members who died in the First and Second World Wars, with the Last Post played on the bugle and the lowering and raising of the AJEX flag. In 2019 we honoured the women in our community who served in those wars.

In March 2019, the theme of the Erev Purim spiel was “The Beatles” and it was a great success. On similar note, great fun was had at the Yom Ha’azmaut Oneg, which saw a record crowd and generations coming together to celebrate the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Israel’s independence, with dancing, song, good food and wine, with music provided by the Shir klezmer band.

“ *...the Wardenship looks forward to another year of service for our wonderful WLS community.* ”

The synagogue is always humming with activity, whether celebrating “Pride”, the European Day of Jewish Culture and Heritage, Yom Ha’Shoah, Open House Shabbat, World Aids Day or Holocaust Memorial Day. Each of these services attracts a broad range of visitors from the wider Jewish and other communities. We are frequently honoured by the attendance of dignitaries, diplomats or the Israeli Ambassador. These, together with private memorial and others services held throughout the year, made for a busy 2019 for the Wardenship, which looks forward to another year of service for our wonderful WLS community.

*Vivien Feather and Oliver Walton  
Co-Senior Wardens*

## BERKELEY LUNCH CLUB

We managed to continue offering the lunch club as usual every Tuesday until just before the 2019 High Holy Days. After a break, a new team has taken over with plans to collaborate with another synagogue.

Volunteer team: Margaret Grossman, Frankie Epstein, Julia Markson, Maureen Albagli, Maureen Phillips and Michael Lewis

*Elaine Jankel and Selina Marks*

## BOARD OF DEPUTIES

In normal times the BOD meets every four weeks and over 200 people attend. The meetings are live streamed so that members throughout the UK can listen in. In fact members come from far and wide to attend, including Scotland. West London Synagogue has five representatives on the Board as well as Marie van de Zyl who is the President.

Not all the Boards' activities may be known. It is a hugely influential organisation that represents every section of Jewish society, except at the moment the Charedi community. The dominating issue in 2019 continuing from the previous year, was the anti-semitism emanating from the Labour party. Marie and the executive exerted enormous pressure in the press and diplomatically to change Labour's attitudes. For sure the BOD has been instrumental in bringing about change in that party.

During the year we heard from amongst others, very interesting talks the Israeli ambassador and the Chief Rabbi. I was privileged to hear Nathan Sharansky talking about his life in the former Soviet Union. The Board is a strongly Zionist minded organisation, pledged to support Israel, although the membership holds many different views. Towards the end of the year Israeli issues came more to the fore and will certainly continue to dominate in 2020.

I cannot emphasise how important the work of the Board is, with talk of a Charedi rabbi joining soon, and the prospect of greater collaboration with the Jewish Leadership Council. But the organisation needs young blood. There will be new elections in 2021, when I hope younger members of our community will consider becoming involved.

*Peter Vogl*



“ *The Board is a strongly Zionist minded organisation, pledged to support Israel, although the membership holds many different views.* ”

As we approach the seventh anniversary of the founding of WLS' Budapest Twinning Initiative, it gives me great pleasure to share with you the rewards of our communal hard work, beyond all our expectations:

After over 40 years of successive efforts by many people, the two Budapest Reform congregations have at last been given Associate Membership of the Hungarian Jewish umbrella body MAZSIHISZ, which finally starts the formal recognition that these communities deserve. Rabbis Katalin Kelemen of Szim Salom, Ferenc Raj of Beit Orim and board members of both congregations, supported by Rabbis David Mitchell, Ariel Pollak and Thomas Salamon, the WLS Twinning Group, European Union Progressive Judaism, Leslie Bergman, Alex Dembitz and pro bono legal adviser Tamas Bellak, as well as President of the MAZSIHISZ Andras Heisler and a group of courageous liberal-leaning Neolog rabbis, have each made important contributions towards this wonderful result. It has been a long journey to reach this point – we salute the faith, perseverance and commitment of all involved.

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*...the two Budapest Reform congregations have at last been given Associate Membership of the Hungarian Jewish umbrella body MAZSIHISZ...*  
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As both Budapest rabbis retire after many decades of dedicated service, the congregations are now poised to enter a new era of collaboration on a range of initiatives, leading to a single rabbinic leader being appointed soon to develop a new progressive umbrella community. Over the next year EUPJ will assist both communities to move towards full MAZSIHISZ membership and support a programme of joint activities. These will be co-sponsored by WLS' Budapest Twinning Initiative in further development of its four year partnership with EUPJ.

Meantime, our partnership with the Milestone Institute goes from strength to strength, this past year including:

- Hosting 25 Milestone alumni studying at UK universities for an informal party in honour of Milestone's President Daniel Lederer's and CFO Peter Palasics's visit to London
- Assisting Milestone to upgrade its safeguarding and child protection policies to international best practice standards, by arranging meetings with WLS's HR Manager and the Halcyon School's Safeguarding Officer
- Approving a further 8 Lyons scholarships for Jewish children in need, enabling them to study at Milestone, this hugely important step – thanks to Milestone's prestige and extraordinary success rate in supporting its students to gain places at the world's top universities – effectively giving them a 'passport to the world'. This brings the total number of scholarships granted by WLS in this 4th and final year of our grant to 43
- Based on the success of this scholarship programme, approving a further £25,000 grant to extend the scheme which started in 2017, by another three years, until 2023
- Inviting a group of current Lyons scholars to visit WLS for a weekend programme hosted by WLS families with similar age children. Although this has had to be postponed due to the Coronavirus, we look forward to rescheduling this trip as soon as possible.

“  
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”

In resounding appreciation of our support and endorsement of our approach:

- The new President of Milestone’s Jewish student club, Efraim Dahlen [age 16] has proactively sought increased dialogue with us to develop the club’s activities together in true partnership
- Milestone’s Head of Teaching and Learning, János Hódsági, and Academic Operations Manager, Tunde Szabo, who transformed the Institute’s entire curriculum to online teaching within a weekend, have generously offered to share with WLS, to support our own transition to online education, their experience using two state of the art remote education management systems
- Milestone’s directors are currently exploring a way of enabling WLS to reach and support Jewish primary school children outside of Budapest through a three-way partnership with themselves and the school run by the Rabbi overseeing their education. This would give the children a pathway to becoming the next crop of Milestone Lyons scholars and expand the WLS Twinning Group’s work organically, to the same high standards and values of integrity, mutual respect and sustainability which we have held since our inception.

Sincere thanks to everyone at WLS and Milestone who has made this partnership such a special, mutually reinforcing symbiotic relationship, based on our shared vision of giving real meaning to Progressive Jewish values in Hungary.

*Rosalind Copisarow  
Chair, Budapest Twinning Initiative*

## CHARITABLE FUND

I am delighted to report that the West London Synagogue Charitable Fund had a relatively promising year. The committee worked hard as usual to raise just over £20,000.

This was achieved by holding several events including a very successful tombola with a difference at Purim and Chanukah where the majority of ticket holders won a prize.

Our quiz in the latter part of the year was again a resounding success. We were able to host about 100 people and it was very competitive!!

We cannot forget the annual raffle organized by Jean Regen that raised over £10,000, which was above the previous year.

It is thanks to the generosity of the community both at WLS and outside that we are able to raise much needed funds not only for our main charities, Children’s Air Ambulance and Eretz/Peace of Mind but also for a large number of other deserving causes. This year we were able to distribute just under £20,000.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT US!

*Elizabeth Shrager*

“ We cannot forget the annual raffle organized by Jean Regen that raised over £10,000 which was above the previous year. ”

Not much new to report but our band of committed volunteers is ever diminishing and so if there are any potential new members who would like to join us please do not hesitate to call me on my mobile: 07768080163 and leave a message with your name and number for me to call you back if I do not reply, or contact me by email which has changed to [jkustin2@gmail.com](mailto:jkustin2@gmail.com).

The provision of cake and biscuits with a cup of cafetiere coffee or tea on arrival for morning service on Shabbat does seem appreciated by congregants even if sometimes taken for granted by others...and likewise the kiddush after the service. However we could not provide either of these without the valiant members of the team who volunteer twice each quarter. I must acknowledge and thank everyone on the rota for their support and cooperation and of course Roy and his team of house staff who back up the rota on the ground by providing all the necessary supplies and of course clearing up afterwards! I would like to make special mention of Jack Lowenthal, Denise Lytton and June Treister, who have stepped down after many many years of regular service to the rota.

“ *we could not provide either of these without the valiant members of the team who volunteer twice each quarter.* ”

The coffee team remains indebted to Ken Asch who rarely fails to turn up early on Shabbat mornings and lays out the cups and saucers and glasses, pouring the juices and milk into jugs, filling the sugar bowls and turning on the urn so that is boiling by 10.00am, allowing the coffee team to step right into a complete set up. Thank you, again, Ken...bless you!

Once Covid-19 social isolating is over we hope to be back on duty and so please let me know if you would like to join the team. We all enjoy providing this simple but important mitzvah to our community and there is a special camaraderie to be found in being part of the rota and of course, attending the synagogue services too!

*Dr Joanna Rustin*

## EDUCATION

Education Department Report for 2019 - below is an outline of the programmes we offered in 2019.

### RELIGION SCHOOL

After the Religion School curriculum was completely refreshed in 2017 and updated in 2018, we continued to update it for 2019, following feedback about our curriculum from teachers, parents and students. We also continued with our 'G'sharim' (Bridges) programme which included building bridges between the Religion School community and the wider Synagogue community. Community-building is a big and important part of helping young people feel positive about their Jewish identity and we have made this a core value for our school.

We continued to use the Rosenwasser method for our Hebrew teaching and revised the Hebrew programme and level for each class and age group. This is the third year we are raising the level of our Hebrew teaching. The Hebrew books we have been using this year (from September 2019) are two levels above what we used two years ago when we started this process.

“ *We also continued with our 'G'sharim' (Bridges) programme which included building bridges between the Religion School community and the wider Synagogue community.* ”

As last year, we try to focus on reading and understanding words that are relevant to the students, from blessings and prayers they should get to know through to basic Modern Hebrew sentences.

This year we had a record number of new and existing students, with more than 190 students signed up in the beginning of the school year (September 2019) and the number has gone up even more throughout the academic year.

Between the school year ending in July 2019 and the beginning of the new school year in September 2019, fourteen new families joined WLS in particular because of the strong reputation of our educational provision. We are delighted to welcome them and all our families whom we know have choices to make – we continue to do everything we can to make WLS Religion School the most supportive and educationally sound option for families.

It is clear from the record number of children participating regularly on Sunday, the atmosphere during the day and feedback from families that the programme has improved. This has also been coupled with some significant financial savings for the second year in a row. We are continuously grateful for parents paying their Religion School fees, as, though Synagogue general funds subsidise heavily the cost of Religion School, we are still dependent on this income. Our thanks also go to the anonymous donors who very generously donated to our Religion School Scholarship Fund to assist students whose families were unable to afford the full cost. Between 2018 and 2019, we were able to hold the school fees at the same level, however as the Religion School grows along with rising general costs, we may need to review this in due course.

We continued to update our Parents' Learning Project, with new topics and we now have a core group of parents who are coming to these sessions regularly. This year (from September 2019) we even offered a ten session (spread throughout the year) Hebrew course for parents, based on our successful MiliM Hebrew evening school.

We are particularly proud of our team of teachers and Madrichim (assistant teachers) for their wonderful work and commitment all year long. Some of our teachers have been with us for four years and even more, which is quite rare in the wider synagogue schools landscape and a strength of our school. Four of our teachers are also Young Adult members of our community, which works wonderfully with our goal of bringing the school and community closer together. Knowing that, young people from our community educating the next generations is a great source of proud for us.

## **BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

The programme continued successfully. Our expectations are of a two-year course with a set number of service attendances, participation in family group meetings intended to support the families and guide them through the process. We also had the very successful BM residential, focusing on Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) and on strengthening friendships between the students.

It is the third year that Rabbi Neil and his family (wife and two daughters) have joined us for Shabbat dinner and Kiddush as part of the BM1 residential. Besides being a 'Dugma Ishit' (role model through personal example) more than anything, this creates a strong sense of community and belonging and continues our focus on community-building (thank you to his family for helping prepare the Shabbat dinner like home from home – it was much appreciated by our students!).

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## YOUTH AND TRIPOD

Our teen programme - Tripod, keeps young people involved and engaged in their Judaism and setting an example to future generations. We offer a two years GCSE in Religious Studies course led by Rabbi Sybil Sheridan (teaching Tripod year 2) and the first year is now being taught by Student Rabbis. The third year of our programme is the Hadracha Course, where we prepare the students to become the next young leaders of our community. Once they finish the course, they can start working at our school as Assistant Teachers (each adult teacher at our school, has young assistant who graduated our Hadracha Course).

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Changes in government policy mean that all children must learn about two religions and we have used the opportunity to develop our Peace by Piece programme by connecting young people through their learning for a formal exam (Judaism and Islam). This year, was the third year for our GCSE in Religion Studies Programme and the first year our students took the exam, which they pass with flying colours!

## RELIGION SCHOOL PARENTS ASSOCIATION

They work closely with the staff and this leads to excellent communication between parents and Religion School. The Parents Coffee Table in particular is proving a successful focal point for parents to meet upon dropping off the children.

This year we introduced the Parents Class Ambassadors - a few parents, representatives from each class who help us and the Parents Association communicating with the rest of the parents. Each week, Ambassadors from a different class were in charge of 'hosting' the parents' coffee table on Sunday, which led to more parents getting to know each other and supporting our community-building long term goal.

Parents Ambassadors and the Parents Association have initiated and planned our first all school Friday Night Supper and Shira (November 2019). All Religion School families were invited for a supper at the synagogue and then join the wonderful Shira Service, which was planned to be even more 'family friendly' than usual. More than 80 parents and children took part in the evening which was a great success.

We would like to thank Maggie, Mila, Katie and all the Class Ambassadors for all your support.

## YOUNG ADULTS (YAD) & STUDENTS

We continued with our YAD Friday Shabbat Shira dinners, events centred around Festivals, such as second night Rosh Hashanah supper and study, Purim celebration, YAD Pesach Seder, breaking the Fast, Tu B'Av and others.

We are keen to support our students and keep in touch while they are away. Rabbis visit campuses occasionally taking students out to lunch or dinner, along with some sponsored dinners for students at WLS with professional guest speakers.

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Liav Yaniv, our new YAD and Students Worker began working towards the end of the year and has already had an impact with Dinners, Events and Chevruta (an informal and intimate study and discussion group, led by the wonderful Student Rabbi Elliott Karstadt). Liav has started to work on a yearly programme with multiple events, learning opportunities and Shabbat dinners for our Young Adult & Young Professional members and friends. Liav continued to contact our Student Members and their families in order to organise Rabbis' visits to campuses.

### JPREP (Jewish Preparation)

The conversion JPREP programme continues to be very popular – it is the largest programme in Europe. A visit to the Synagogue on a Wednesday evening demonstrates this to be a hub of activity. We offer a Buddy Programme to welcome candidates to the community and help them integrate.

### ADULT EDUCATION

The Lyons Learning Project - is a separate organisation under the leadership of a group of trustees and Rabbi Neil Janes. During the year the Lyons Learning Project ran many lessons and sessions on different subjects led by different people, masters in their fields. The different sessions are open to everyone and are offered at a fair price.

MiliM Evening Hebrew School - As mentioned in last year's report, at the end of 2018 we established MiliM - our Adults Hebrew School. MiliM is a partnership between WLS Education Department, the ERETZ Programme and the Lyons Learning Project and it keeps growing and evolving. During this year we had three full terms and a special intensive Summer Ulpan. MiliM's first year was a big success, bringing people from all ages, religions and backgrounds to learn Modern Hebrew. Each term lasted ten consecutive weeks and had between two and three classes of different Hebrew levels.

In our very successful Intensive Summer Ulpan we had 25 students divided into four different classes from complete beginners to very advanced. Everyone is welcome to join and WLS Members and YAD Members receive special members' discounts and prices.

The Parents Learning Project that was introduced last year and is another collaboration between the Lyons Learning Project and WLS Education Department has run 10 Jewish studies sessions, Parenting Sessions and a term of Hebrew for parents (see separately under Religion School) – all on a Sunday morning during the Religion School hours.

Rabbinic Teaching - on a Wednesday evening Rabbi David ran a successful Learn to Lein course, and Rabbi Helen continues to run her popular Parashat Ha'Shavua class on Monday lunchtime.

*Gil Reshef  
Head of Education*



“ *Rabbis visit campuses occasionally taking students out to lunch or dinner along with some sponsored dinners, for students at WLS with professional guest speakers.* ”



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“WLS continued to welcome a diverse range of speakers for our ever popular community Shabbat dinners in 2019.”

WLS continued to welcome a diverse range of speakers for our ever popular community Shabbat dinners in 2019. We welcomed Margaret Hodge, who spoke about her incredible life in politics and her continued struggles within the Labour Party with anti-semitism; the BBC journalist and broadcaster, Jon Sopel gave us a humorous insight into the Trump administration; Karen Armstrong spoke about her journey from Roman Catholic nun to becoming a respected British author and commentator on comparative religion; the hugely likeable and warm, Rose Hudson Wilkin spoke about her life as the first female, black Church of England Bishop and her experience as the Chaplain to the former Speaker of the House Commons, John Bercow. The former Labour MP, Luciana Berger was a hugely popular speaker who spoke about her climb to the top in the Labour Party and her subsequent defection to the Lib Dems and finally, we ended 2019 with the playwright, Alex Bodin Safir in conversation with the Danish Ambassador, Lars Thuesen to commemorate the moving escape of Danish Jews to Sweden during World War II.

Stewart Sether

## EXTERNAL AFFAIRS/COMMUNICATIONS, ERETZ PROGRAMME, CULTURAL AND OTHER EVENTS

### 1. ERETZ AND CULTURAL

2019 was another busy and very successful year. The aim is to entertain and inform existing members, but also to provide an accessible route for non members to become engaged in the community and potentially then to choose to join. We schedule events (and curate our programme of films etc) to correspond to religious and secular calendar dates (such as Pesach, Mental Health Awareness Week, Israeli Elections), and when possible also to highlight other activity within the community (such as Social Action, Social Care) - 'Relational Judaism'.

“...we screened ten films, including the UK premiere of a remastered version of classic Israeli anti war film *Avanti Popolo*, at no charge by kind permission of the Jerusalem Cinematheque.”

**KOLNOA** is our series of monthly screenings, mainly of exceptional Israeli films, but occasionally of others of Jewish interest. The evening has a club atmosphere, sociable and engaging, and it attracts a good crowd of loyal regulars and their friends, and there are always new faces. This year and in 2020 we will benefit from a newly rekindled relationship with the Jerusalem Cinematheque, leading to an invitation to attend (self funded) the Jerusalem Film Festival. At the Festival we can see new Israeli films before they are available commercially, and get to know film Directors and distributors, and negotiate access to selected films at non commercial rates. In 2019 we screened ten films, including the UK premiere of a remastered version of classic Israeli anti war film *Avanti Popolo*, at no charge by kind permission of the Jerusalem Cinematheque. Other notable screenings were of *Remember* (in January, for International Holocaust Remembrance Day), *At Li Layla* (in May, jointly with Social Care, for Mental Health Awareness week), *King Bibi* (in July, for the Israeli Elections), and the first UK general public screening (in November, after the festival circuit) of *God of the Piano*.

**INSIGHT ISRAEL** is our series of occasional events, talks and panel discussions. The usual hugely successful Yom Ha'atzmaut Oneg (dinner and dancing to live music by our Klezmer band SHIR) took place in May. An intimate 'concert with words' entitled Mira Awad Unplugged in November by Israeli Palestinian musician, actor, author, Mira Awad was a delight. Mira is a great friend of the community, and her thoughts during a post concert Q&A were much appreciated. A talk on cannabinoids entitled Need Weed? by Prof. Dedi Meiri of the Technion in October was enlightening and gave rise to many questions.

**ISRAEL TOUR** - The fourth annual tour ran for eight days in March-April with the theme - 100 years of Israeli cultural development. What sets these tours apart from other tours is that they are 100% bespoke, entirely planned and led by volunteers, involve visits behind the scenes that would usually be inaccessible, and designed for a small sociable group, and not-for-profit (budget neutral). The tour's value is to further enhance our knowledge and understanding of Israel, its issues, what really makes it tick. There were 30 participants, but the influence of the tour is much wider than this, as participants return to their families, friends and home communities better able to speak for Israel in a fair and balanced way, correct misconceptions and celebrate this incredible country.

Highlights this year included a studio performance by aspiring singers of the Israeli Opera, a full Opera performance, a celebrity chef lunch, a chamber concert by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, an outdoor contemporary Circus performance, a song-writing workshop, a film screening and discussion, a live music club evening, a tour at Haifa University, a musical show called The Wandering Israeli, an interview with celebrated author A B Yehoshua, a kibbutz lunch, a contemporary dance performance of a piece called Asylum (chiming with our work with asylum seekers at WLS), a movement class in the Gaga technique, and an extraordinary walk in the dark guided by blind people. Many of these were staged specially for us, accompanied by backstage tours, meetings with Directors, or a Q&A.

**PEACE OF MIND** - Part funding from the High Holy Day Appeal, together with strong community support for this remarkable rehabilitation project for Israeli veterans with post traumatic stress disorder, made it possible to run a fourth year. A group of 18 with their therapists from the Herzog Institute in Jerusalem was hosted in members' homes for 8 days, and supported through seven full days of therapy sessions, followed by a social programme in the evenings. Firm friendships were formed, and feedback was that as usual this week in London achieved a step change in participants' rehabilitation, to the delight of themselves and their families back home.

**KISHKUSHIM** (adult Hebrew language classes) continue very successfully, but now on a commercial footing under the dual ERETZ / MILIM banner and managed by the Education team.

**CULTURAL** events - Highlights include an exhibition and concert in July during Srebrenica Remembrance Week, for which we were nominated for the Community Award of the Remembering Srebrenica Board, and a charitable concert by pianist Margaret Fingerhut in November in aid of our Asylum Seeker Drop-In, an after-service concert in December by the London Gay Men's Chorus for World AIDS Day and a first ever collaboration with 7StarArts called Classic Gershwin in April.

“ *What sets these tours apart from other tours is that they are 100% bespoke, entirely planned and led by volunteers, involve visits behind the scenes that would usually be inaccessible, and designed for a small sociable group, and not-for-profit* ”

“ *A group of 18 with their therapists from the Herzog Institute in Jerusalem was hosted in members' homes for 8 days, and supported through seven full days of therapy sessions, followed by a social programme in the evenings.* ”

## 2. EXTERNAL AFFAIRS / COMMS

We continue to represent the community at certain key policy and cultural events by the Embassy of Israel, and to represent WLS on the Board of Remembering Srebrenica.

Work on the new WLS Website was severely delayed as other work took priority for lead staff. Subsequently the 2020 pandemic has put massive pressure on Communications and Digital staff, but work has restarted and a beta version will be released for comment just before the AGM.

“ We continue to represent the community at certain key policy and cultural events by the Embassy of Israel, and to represent WLS on the Board of Remembering Srebrenica. ”

The publication of Up and Coming, and of the WLS quarterly Review with executive editor Gaby Ward Smith, copy editor Martin Phillips, Commissioning Editor myself, is thriving - both publications look wonderful and provide a great read.

External and internal communications activity and issues management in support of the organisation was unusually challenging - proactive and reactive, and time consuming during the difficult Autumn to Winter period, and this continued well into 2020.

### TO CONCLUDE

Many thanks as always to staff, notably Clare Allen, and to those who supported our work financially, and to the volunteers who worked with us, on ERETZ, Cultural events, and Comms in what was a challenging year.

*Jim Fletcher,  
Trustee, and Vice Chair  
Chair, ERETZ Programme  
Lay Leader, Cultural Programme*

## LIBRARIES

The Libraries at WLS, the Bob Shafritz Library (BSL) and the Hugo Gryn Library (HGL), have both had a very good year.

The HGL had a bunch of construction work which is finally finished and is now housed one big lovely room. When the construction was complete I took every book off the shelves and washed down all of the units, and repaired all damaged books. I also put all of the books back in order so anyone will be able to find books quickly. I would love to separate even further the books for very young children onto a set of shelves separate from the others - but it is always good to have another project to look forward to. There were so many great book donations made to the HGL. I have placed these new books on a separate shelf (they are shiny new books on the bookcase near the door) and a lot of them are about very current topics - books on migration, refugee children, Einstein and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

“ I have placed these new books on a separate shelf and a lot of them are about very current topics - books on migration, refugee children, Einstein and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. ”

The BSL shelves have also been cleaned top to bottom and all new donations labelled and placed on the shelves. The reference section (above the desk) has been re-organised. I was hoping to re-class the Fiction Books and the books classed under Literature (so all the Isaac Bashevis Singer books - and other "great" authors were only in Literature) but this project will need to wait until after "Lockdown" is over.

The Library Hour, every third Saturday, has had a great year. Last summer The Library Hour launched (it's hoped to be) the "Annual Summer Book Talk," where everyone brought in a book they wanted to share and recommend for a holiday read. Orlando Ortega-Medina gave the most fantastic talk on his brand new "page-turner" book *The Death of Baseball* and talked about lead protagonists' characterizations in his new book and in Chaim Potok's and Bashevis Singer's books. Susan Greenberg, a professor of editing and writing, gave a very educational talk on her new book *The Poetics of Editing*. Both of these books are available in the Library.

In October, in conjunction with the Open Day, Zdenka Husserl had a "conversation" with Rabbi Helen about growing up at the Lingfield Children's Home during WWII. WLS was very supportive of the children's home and there were many memories shared with Zdenka and Jackie Gryn. Zdenka was going to return this last March for a screening of the BBC's "This Is Your Life" programme that she was featured on – but we will re-schedule this!

The Library Hour also hosted Adam Sonin who spoke about Naomi Levy's book *Einstein and the Rabbi*, and Rabbi Sybil who gave an inspired talk about women in the Rabbinate. She has edited two different collections of essays (including essays written by Rabbis Helen and Julia) and it was amazing how current these essays still are to today's world.

Alexandra Lloyd, a professor of language at Oxford University, came in to talk about her new translation of the White Rose papers in February. Her talk was very illuminating and included a discussion of how "today's" students related to "yesterday's" students, and the use of various forms of social media. Cai Parry-Jones gave a talk on his new book *The Jews of Wales*. The session was filled with members of the congregation who shared their memories of growing up in Wales. Cai even had, unknowingly, photographs of congregants' family members in his slide presentation!!!

The Library Hour has many great talks on books for when the Synagogue reopens. There are talks scheduled on Alexander Baron (by an Alexander Baron family member), Primo Levi, and Stefan Zweig. Eddy Portnoy will hopefully be able to travel from the United States to discuss his book *Bad Rabbi*, and I have a talk prepared on Sholom Aleichem and the Legacy of "Fiddler." Teddy Sonin, who last year gave a talk on the "Existence of G-d," will be back with a talk on "Geography and Judaism." And Zdenka has assured us that she will return!!

Note: I have the Library computer at my house and I am very happy to try and help any member with any book requests.

*Debbie Sonin*

“ *WLS was very supportive of the children's home and there were many memories shared with Zdenka and Jackie Gryn.* ”

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“ *The Library Hour has many great talks on books for when the Synagogue reopens.* ”

Out & About with WLS is a volunteer led group of members of WLS exploring places of cultural interest with a link to WLS or another loose Jewish connection. London is a rich cultural centre, with many different opportunities to visit. Even if you are alone, a trip with the Out & About group will become one with friends – with time to chat and explore common interests, and connections of course!

“ *Even if you are alone, a trip with the Out & About group will become one with friends – with time to chat and explore common interests, and connections of course!* ”

Out & About with WLS arranges private, often bespoke visits to interesting places, exhibitions and buildings in London during the week. Often there will be a connection to WLS, through a member enabling us to visit places which are not otherwise open to the public or through a link to our heritage - religious or secular! The visits are arranged privately, not vetted by WLS health & safety, and therefore at the participants' own risk. We are a group of friends created by WLS rather than a WLS official visit!

Last year we revisited the Jewish Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, for private tours with curators. At the Jewish Museum we were led through the important exhibition touching, or was it highlighting?, the long history of Antisemitism. Jews, Money, Myth explored the role of money in Jewish life, uncovering the ideas, myths and stereotypes that link Jews and money over the course of 2,000 years across the world.

Using art, film, literature and cultural ephemera from board games and cartoons to costumes and figurines, real and imagined stories of Jews – in finance, commerce and capitalism – presented the topic in a fresh way which attracted the largest number of visitors to the Museum. We were privileged to have the exhibition brought to life for us, and to be able to share our responses. Lunch in the Museum café lasted well into the afternoon for some!



All that glitters was gold when we visited the Goldsmith Fair in the magnificent halls of the Goldsmith Livery Company. Stephanie Souroujon, who had been a librarian for the company, gave a fascinating lecture on Crafting for the Anglo-Jewish Community: The Makers and their Art. After enormous rugelach and coffee, one of the Fair's Ambassadors was on hand to introduce us to makers, explaining and demystifying their specialist techniques.

“ *The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection is one of the most important collections of decorative arts in the world.* ”

I'm getting better at playing the game. As the numbers asking to join the outing grew well past the maximum I had been set, I took a deep breath and set the maximum at double. At the Wallace Collection this meant that Rabbi David had to repeat his talk to a second group, each given as we wandered with him through the rooms, entranced by the art and enthralled by his story-telling skills AND his depth of artistic knowledge. Both groups joined up for a celebratory lunch in the wonderful conservatory, for the launch of the annual Wallace visit!

The double dipping trick was at play again at the Victoria & Albert Museum where this time the tours were simultaneous, with one group setting off with one curator and the other with another swapping half way through; we all got to see and hear both parts, and then nearly 30 of us joined up for lunch at the nearby Ogniski Polish restaurant. The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection is one of the most important collections of decorative arts in the world. Always intended for the public, the collection was donated to Great Britain in 1996, and the V&A has been its home since 2008.

The Gilberts were amongst several major donors with Jewish ancestry who have helped to create the V&A collection. The Gilbert Collection curator shared her research on those collectors and dealers as we wandered through the museum, pointing out many exquisite items, sourced from all over the world. Back at the Collection itself, the first appointed curator of Provenance outside Germany shared his research on the source of the 1,200 pieces in the collection and the stories behind several pieces identified by him as Nazi spoil.

And, for the future? Well, we will be a virtual group for the coming months, using Zoom to go on tours and in our own imagination. We look forward to being able to meet again; may they find a vaccine fast. But this is also a friendship and companionship group so do stay in touch.

If you are interested in being on the mailing list or finding out more about Out & About contact Wendy Pollecoff at [wendy.pollecoff@gmail.com](mailto:wendy.pollecoff@gmail.com)

Wendy Pollecoff

“ we will be a virtual group for the coming months, using Zoom to go on tours and our own imagination. ”

## RABBINIC TEAM

### CO-SENIOR RABBIS HELEN FREEMAN AND DAVID MITCHELL

2019 was a year of transition for West London Synagogue with the announcement that Rabbi Julia Neuberger would step down as our Senior Rabbi and become Rabbi Emerita. It is appropriate in this report to begin by thanking Rabbi Julia for the extraordinary impact she has had on our community during her tenure as Senior Rabbi. From the rebirth of the social action programmes, including the much-appreciated Drop-In Centre, to the Shabbat Dinners with speakers, none of it would have been achieved without Rabbi Julia's energy and enthusiasm.

The core rabbinic work of life cycle events and services has been at the centre of our congregation this year, with a renewed focus on the development of Relational Judaism. Rather than view 'Relational Judaism' as mere jargon, we have dedicated ourselves to strengthen our 180-year-old congregation, one relationship at a time. Towards the end of 2019 our joint appointment as Co-Senior Rabbis was announced. Based on our many years of working together, this new partnership models how Relational Judaism can, symbiotically, build upon our complementary skills to develop a holy community full of deeply interconnected congregants; thereby supporting each other through the rough and the smooth. As you will know, our partnership has weathered a difficult beginning, and yet, as demonstrated by the 650+ people who attended our virtual Seder, we have come through the challenges of the early part of 2020 with a congregation that is even more dedicated to supporting one another in a Covid-19 changed world.

Of course, as rabbis and community builders, it is our happy/sad privilege to officiate at baby namings, b'nei/b'not mitzvah celebrations, weddings, funerals and stone-settings. In all of these key lifecycle moments we strive to connect with our members, just as we seek to engage with people through our Social Care support networks, social events and especially at the moments of celebrating the festivals, such as our well attended Chanukah parties.

“ From the rebirth of the social action programmes, including the much-appreciated Drop-In Centre, to the Shabbat Dinners with speakers, none of it would have been achieved without Rabbi Julia's energy and enthusiasm. ”

“ *Our outstanding Social Care team of Jo Michaels and Tirza Waisel, supported by Jenny Browning and Linda Bookman have ensured that, with the help of over 120 volunteers, we are in touch with elderly and isolated members wherever they live.* ”

Our festival and High Holy Day work continues apace. Highlights of 2019 included another successful one-site offering for Yom Kippur, a bursting-at-the-seams communal Seder, a busy Shavuot all-night study event, a Beatles themed Purim which attracted loads of members, and, of course, our ever-beautiful sukkah (this year themed around Welcoming Child Refugees). Special thanks must go to Julian Markson for co-chairing our High Holy Day Working Party, Maya Levy for writing the Purim Spiel, Micky Nathanson for all his hard work across each and every year, and to Monica Jankel for her enthusiastic coordination of our annual Sukkah decoration.

Once more we telephoned all the members before the High Holy Days, delivered Pesach and Rosh Hashanah gifts, visited countless congregants and had telephone trees ready to go in case of bad weather. This telephone tree has really come into its own under Covid-19. Our outstanding Social Care team of Jo Michaels and Tirza Waisel, supported by Jenny Browning and Linda Bookman have ensured that, with the help of over 120 volunteers, we are in touch with elderly and isolated members wherever they live.

West London Synagogue is an acknowledged leader in various fields, not least in the world of interfaith. It has been our privilege to host the first English language service to honour the White Rose Group of students in Nazi Germany who lost their lives fighting fascism. We were delighted to welcome the German and Israeli ambassadors to our special service. We were, again, asked to host the B’nei B’rith day for European Jewish Culture and Heritage. We held a special event focused on non-Jewish visitors and also invited our non-Jewish friends in Westminster and beyond to join us for our Open House Shabbat.

Working with our talented Chris Bowers-Broadbent, Maya Levy, Choir and the Shira musicians, we continued to offer an outstanding array of formal and alternative services. Friday attendance at services has continued to grow, and we know that our community benefits from such a diverse approach to music. Picking just one example, our annual Pride service, with an unforgettable sermon by Sir Terry Etherton, reminded us how we have continued to lead the way as a flagship congregation. None of our diversity work would be possible without the generosity of the Nicholas Berwin Charitable Trust, the support of David Gasperow, and the tireless dedication of our key volunteers, especially Jim Fletcher and Martin Phillips.

“ *Friday attendance at services has continued to grow, and we know that our community benefits from such a diverse approach to music.* ”

Our work around growing our membership has gone from strength to strength, thanks to Ronit Wang, our Membership Coordinator, alongside our New Members’ Team, headed up by Eleanor Angel and Monica Jankel. We concluded 2019 with the largest increase in membership we have seen in many, many years. At the same time, we began exploring new models for how our youngest and oldest members might be able to pay their dues. Andrew Stone, our ever-industrious Board member, along with a team of volunteers, started a very valuable research and decision-making process which will evolve into a membership strategy. Thank you, Andrew, for all your hard work in this and many other areas.

Whilst our twinning work in Budapest has its own report, we wanted to add our thanks to Rosalind Copisarow for her tireless dedication. In spring 2019 over 30 members visited Budapest, led by Rosalind along with Dame Helen Hyde and Rabbi David.

The seeds planted by our Twinning Project have grown into saplings and the Havdalah ceremony with our Milestone partners was a moment that no-one who attended the trip will ever forget. Alongside a visit to Budapest, in November 2019 Rabbi David and Dame Helen led another oversubscribed, action-packed weekend in Amsterdam. These European trips have become a wonderful, relational experience and will return as soon as we are over the worst of Covid-19.

Finding ways to welcome people and bring them together is at the very centre of our work. Our congregation has welcomed Jews by Choice onto our JPrep conversion course for many years. Over the decades, JPrep has provided members and leaders for our own community. We are delighted that JPrep continues to be a core part of our inclusive community alongside lots of other ways to reach out to the membership and beyond.

As ever, we are humbled by the commitment of our volunteers, whether in social care, social action, service provision or other parts of our community that continue to make this a caring congregation.

The rabbis would not be able to do their jobs without the myriad of people who help and volunteer in so many different ways. From wardens to board members, from stewards to security helpers, from parents at religion school to volunteer drivers and hosts and helpers for tea parties, and far, far more, from the library to the synagogue itself, from the Review editors to the telephone helpers... we are blessed with dedicated members who carry out so many different and vital activities. Thank you to all of you, whether in a group listed here or doing something quite different to help us - it is hugely appreciated.

Like 2019, 2020 has proven to be a year of transition. We have said a fond farewell to Rabbi Julia and we will soon be saying goodbye to Rabbi Sybil Sheridan, who has been with us for so many years. Rabbi Sybil has brought to the community her gentle pastoral touch, her humour, commitment to interfaith and her bravery to launch the first online conversion programme, many years before we all realised the benefits of Zoom. Rabbi Sybil had planned to leave at the same time as Rabbi Julia, but with her characteristic generosity of spirit, she agreed to see us through until this summer. On behalf of the whole community, thank you Rabbi Sybil.

Since 2015, Rabbi Neil Janes has brought his love of learning to our young and old alike. His impact on the Religion School has been incredibly positive and he has added so many new ideas from his Lyons Parents' Programme to revamping our kehillot (Religion School assemblies). Working closely with Gil Reshef, our Head of Education, he has overseen an impressive increase in the size of our Religion School. At the same time, Rabbi Neil, working with Nic Schlagman, our Head of Social Action and Interfaith, has developed an ever-growing Social Action programme which was exemplified by the extraordinary work supporting the Grenfell families. On behalf of the whole community, especially his students, thank you Rabbi Neil.

In 2019 WLS has greatly benefited from a soon to be ordained Leo Baeck College rabbinic student. Across the last few years, Student Rabbi Elliott Karstadt has become well known to our JPrep and B'nei mitzvah students. As our official student rabbi, Elliott has worked closely with our Young Adults, Green Team and on our virtual offering during Covid-19. Elliott, mazal tov on your imminent ordination and good luck in your new role.

“ We are delighted that JPrep continues to be a core part of our inclusive community alongside lots of other ways to reach out to the membership and beyond. ”

“ On behalf of the whole community, especially his students, thank you Rabbi Neil. ”

As we go to print, the search is underway for a new Associate Rabbi and we have welcomed a part-time, Interim Rabbi, Gershon Silins, who brings with him a deep love of community work and many years of experience. In the short while has been with us, Rabbi Gershon has jumped right in to building warm and meaningful relationships. It is a pleasure to have him as the newest member of our team.

“ On behalf of the whole congregation we want to thank Patrick for three years of dedication and thoughtful leadership. ”

Finally, there is our most senior volunteer, our Chairman, Patrick Mocatta, and this will be the last Annual Report/AGM, with him at the helm of this flagship. On behalf of the whole congregation we want to thank Patrick for three years of dedication and thoughtful leadership. As Patrick retires, we not only wish him a well-deserved rest, but also want to say to his successor, Hazak, Hazak V'nithazek – be strong, be strong, and, as a unified community, let us strengthen one another.

### **RABBI NEIL JANES**

I continue to be the Rabbinic lead for Education and Social Action in the Synagogue. Board members Maggie Thurer (Education) and Henrietta Hughes (Social Action) continued to play an active part in the work of the synagogue along with Katie Hyman on the Board and Mila Griebel co-chairing the Parents' Association. We have also seen other volunteers become more involved over the course of the year. Our thanks to all of them for what they have helped us achieve.

The professional team over 2019 underwent very few changes and the members of the teams demonstrate outstanding commitment and professionalism. I'm hugely grateful to Jenny Browning who joined the Synagogue as the Rabbinic PA and in the Social Care team. Enormous thanks also to Gil Reshef as Head of Education and Nic Schlagman as Head of Interfaith and Social Action. The Education team includes Adi Ben-Naim, Jane Gough and for the first few months of the year, Or Madmon. Or returned to Israel to pursue her academic studies in the Autumn and we welcomed Liav Yaniv as her replacement. The Education team holds a wonderful array of learning that, under Gil's leadership, has seen year on year increases in enrolment. The Religion School staff, from the madrichim/ot to more experienced teachers, have constantly inspired with their enthusiasm and commitment on a Sunday morning. In July we thanked Linda Stone for more than half a century of teaching our children – it was a sad moment of goodbye to a much-loved member of our team who has nurtured the Jewish lives of countless WLS members. It is wonderful to celebrate our members in this way and we thank Linda once again for her incredible contribution.

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“ The Social Action work which we undertake is a critical role for the community allowing it to look outwards to our local society and wider world to help some of the most vulnerable people... ”

Nic leads a team that includes Rachel Godfrey in Scriptural Reasoning and Liav Yaniv also gives her time to some of the administrative tasks. We also have the benefit of numerous volunteers who regularly give a day a week and more to the synagogue to help with complex projects. The Social Action work which we undertake is a critical role for the community allowing it to look outwards to our local society and wider world to help some of the most vulnerable people – including the homeless, asylum seekers and refugees. Our work with the Drop-In and the Winter Night Shelter under Nic's leadership and with the amazing steering committees has led to West London Synagogue becoming a highly respected centre.

The Lyons Learning Project is a separate charity offering Adult Jewish Education. Over the course of 2019, various programmes benefitted the Synagogue directly including two Melton Courses on Israeli Literature and Kabbalah. In the latter half of the year, courses were offered on Mishnah, Midrash and Well-Being. The Parents Learning Project continued to offer various sessions targeted directly at our religion school families. The Education department also led in a joint programme called 'MiliM' – an Adult Hebrew programme which has thrived and attracted sufficient students to run three levels of class with a brilliant group of teachers.

In addition to the more regular rabbinic work, which is always an honour – whether services, pastoral care, weddings, baby blessings or funerals, some events of note from 2019 include: I appeared on the Radio 4 programme 'Beyond Belief' discussing masculinity in Judaism and I also visited the synagogue archives in Southampton University, where I met Professor Sarah Pearce the head of Humanities at the University and Dr Jennifer Craig-Norton. Dr Craig-Norton and I worked on a programme for Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2020, bringing to life the history and stories of the more than 100 children who were sponsored by the Synagogue's Hospitality Committee before, during and after the Holocaust. I was also invited to Oslo to speak to the families of the Jewish community about how we had enriched the Jewish engagement of our families and models that could work for them. In 2019 I was also able to join the WLS Eretz Israel tour for adults. The tour took in many aspects of culture in Israel from theatre, dance, art, literature, architecture and even circus skills. Martin Phillips and Jim Fletcher create an Israel programme that is the envy of every synagogue in the country and my thanks to them. The Israel Tour this year dovetailed with the Israeli Literature course I was teaching and allowed us to walk through the streets of Jerusalem with the poetry of Yehuda Amichai and discuss the role of the author with the acclaimed author A B Yehoshua who met us in our hotel in Tel Aviv.

## **RABBI SYBIL SHERIDAN**

Peace by Piece: our programme originated as part of Tripod, engaging our post B'nei Mitzvah with the Muslim community through meetings with the Wembley Park Madrassa – and an independent Muslim Sunday school. The change in GCSE Religious studies requirements, which means that two different faiths must be studied, works well for us both and we adapted the programme to meet the syllabus requirements. We arranged visits to both religion schools, a mosque and the synagogue as well as spending a Sunday tracing the immigration and settlement in London's East End. We also visited Willowbank Farm – an eco-farm run along Muslim environmental principles. The planned joint visit to Morocco had to be cancelled because of COVID 19.

We had one student take the GCSE last year and two had planned to sit it this year. A greater number take the course which has great opportunities for the children to explore their faith, moral issues and interfaith relations at a more adult level than is possible in cheder.

In the past three years, the success of Peace by Piece has resulted in an adult version of the same programme. This year we decided to hold the series of talks and visits that make up the programme over one weekend. Though numbers were small, the quality of the encounter was extraordinarily powerful and deep friendships have been forged.

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“ *In the past three years, the success of Peace by Piece has resulted in an adult version of the same programme.* ”

There were plans for visits to the British Library, Cambridge and Morocco, all of which have had to be postponed because of COVID 19. I am deeply grateful to the support of Humerah Khan, who has organised the Muslim side of both the teenage and adult programmes.

“*Daliah Sherrington who has charmed parents and children alike with her gentle Approach - encouraging children to sing, dance and play instruments throughout the service.*”

ShabbaTOTS: our offering for our youngest members took something of a dip after the tragic passing of Avivit Katzil. We rearranged the programme, replacing the Tots café that had been run by Crystal Cowley for many years, with a Shabbatots service weekly during term time. Crystal gave sterling service and she will be fondly remembered by the many children who attended the café – on behalf of the whole congregation, thank you Crystal. Avivit’s role was taken on by Daliah Sherrington who has charmed parents and children alike with her gentle approach - encouraging children to sing, dance and play instruments throughout the service. Thanks to the generosity of members, and of the PJ library, we are now able to give gifts to newborn children and their parents in the name of Shabbatots. Over the year, we have seen a steady increase in families bringing their children, with record attendances on Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. Shabbatots has extended its link to the cheder, with the teacher of the Gan class, Hanne-Marie Braten taking up a role in the programme.

Remembering Srebrenica: for the last three years, with the able support of Jim Fletcher, this synagogue has been in the forefront of the campaign to keep awareness alive of the most recent genocide to take place on European soil; that of the Muslim population in Bosnia during the civil war in former Yugoslavia. As in previous years we held a week of memorial events in July including an art exhibition, a concert, a film and a memorial service where we invited Christian and Muslim clergy representatives to light a candle, and had a survivor speak of her experiences. Jim and I were also able to represent the synagogue at the official memorial event that took place at the Guildhall. Each year, the charity gives awards for the most effective memorial events held in the country. We have won awards in the past two years. This year we had to ask them not to give us an award – but I was invited to speak at the dinner event.

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“*I have loved my time with you all and will certainly miss the challenge and excitement of working for such a vibrant institution.*”

Beit Din Distance Learning Programme: I started this programme at WLS about five years ago to provide teaching online for prospective converts living too far away to attend our weekly JPrep course. It proved so successful that inquiries came through many other Reform synagogues. It made sense therefore to move the programme over to the Beit Din to administer it for the whole Reform Movement. Nevertheless, I continue to run it and the majority of students on the course come from West London Synagogue. Most of the independent enquirers, having to make a choice as to which synagogue to join, opt for WLS because of its open and tolerant reputation. WLS has developed a particular relationship with the synagogue in Exeter as a result, and I was invited to lead Shabbat services there.

I am coming to the end of my time with West London Synagogue and I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their encouragement and support. I have loved my time with you all and will certainly miss the challenge and excitement of working for such a vibrant institution.

## SECURITY

In the current heightened climate of anti-Semitism, in our domestic politics, far-right groups and global terrorists, the Jewish community has yet again, seen a rise of incidents in 2019.

The figures for last year from the Community Security Trust (CST) reveal a record high of 1,805 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2019 - an increase of 7% since our 2018 Report.

Therefore, security, and the protection of our Community, is taken very seriously at West London Synagogue, both visibly in terms of our wonderful building and strategically at Board level.

This is the first full year that Julia Markson and Paul Jaffa have served as WLS Security Officers following Michael Cutter's retirement in late 2018.

Our goal is the protection and security of our members, WLS staff, our community and our choir, Halcyon School and our multi faith visitors. Security is provided for every event at WLS throughout the year, whether it is a religious service, a community lunch or guest dinner, educational classes or visits by distinguished VIPs.

The new security gates installed at the Upper Berkeley Street entrance in 2018 have led to an increase in awareness and confidence in security by the whole Community and the many visitors to the synagogue, who are welcomed by our excellent professional guards and inhouse security volunteers.

We continue to work closely with CST, the Metropolitan Police and First Class, our highly professional guard company. Julia and Paul attend CST's monthly Synagogue Security Management Training courses which are invaluable, and lessons are fed back to WLS.

There has been some implementation of our recommendations from the Security Strategy we provided to the WLS Board - specifically, stronger locks on the doors to the Sanctuary and replacement locks on other doors throughout the building - as part of an ongoing programme of work to upgrade security.

We continue to offer inhouse training sessions led by CST experts, to train security duty volunteers and parents. These help us raise the profile of security and to help us generate valuable ideas to protect.

Once again, we would like to thank everyone concerned with security at West London, particularly Anca Norocel, our professional Head of Security, our excellent professional guards, our wonderful volunteers who help on Shabbat and Holidays, and the WLS staff and the Board - their diligence and awareness of security issues is much appreciated.

*Julia Markson and Paul Jaffa*

“...security, and the protection of our Community, is taken very seriously at West London Synagogue...”

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“We continue to offer inhouse training sessions led by CST experts, to train security duty volunteers and parents.”

Throughout the year we have enjoyed good attendances at our Lunches and have developed a loyal following, drawn by our delicious lunches and speakers who educate and entertain us on a wide variety of subjects.

The year started with Wendy Max giving a talk titled 'Accidentally on Purpose – How I became a Cello Teacher'. Originally destined to study law, she changed her mind and chose music instead – a fortuitous decision which led to her eventually becoming a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music and an outstanding teacher, with the gift of drawing out the talent in her devoted pupils.

With the challenging title 'Can America Turn Up Trumps?', Kevin Coyne, an American, formerly Dean of the International Students Union, now part-time Dean of the Paris Dauphine Université, London, left us in no doubt of his opinion of Donald Trump. It was only during the Q and A that a few of Trump's more positive roles were given an airing

Roger Rose, a freelance legal consultant, spoke to us on 'The Making of an Autobiography', entertaining us with fascinating stories about his varied career, which has spanned the Crown Prosecution Service and the drafting of legislation across the Commonwealth, having lived in Central and Eastern Africa for ten years.

In her talk on the French Impressionists and their Jewish Patrons, art historian, Dr Vera Grodzinski, explained how the misunderstood French Impressionists were originally launched by Jewish art critics and dealers who commissioned portraits of their families and held independent exhibitions of paintings rejected by the Paris Salon. She gave us an enthralling slide presentation showing many of the much-loved Impressionist paintings, putting them into the historical, social and cultural restraints of the era before the First World War.

Dr Malcolm Singer who has played such an important role in Jewish musical life in this country, posed the question: 'Yehudi Menuhin: Jewish Musician?' which he traced through a slide illustrated talk of Menuhin's life from child prodigy to becoming one of the leading violin virtuosos of the 20th century. Though conscious of his Jewish roots, Menuhin was more humanist than Jewish, though he did become President of the Jewish Music Institute of which he was very supportive. Amongst his many interests he was passionate about developing the talent of promising young music students and in 1963 founded the Yehudi Menuhin School of Music, of which Dr Singer is the former Director.

In conversation with Valerie Bello, Lili Loeb (Todes), answered questions about her book 'Don't Ask Me Where I Come From', where she describes the story of her life from her arrival in England from Nazi Germany with her parents as a child refugee and how through her talent as a journalist she became a UN correspondent for Newsweek chronicling major world events and meeting leading politicians of the day, including President Kennedy, as well as witnessing at first hand small African countries gaining their independence.



“ Roger Rose, a freelance legal consultant, spoke to us on 'The Making of an Autobiography', entertaining us with fascinating stories about his varied career... ”

A former Wing Commander with a distinguished career in the RAF, Stephen Griffiths held our attention as he told us about his exploits as a spy in the RAF whilst stationed in Germany after the Second World War, when his role was to gather information about Russian manoeuvres around a Russian air base not far from where he himself was stationed.

Our penultimate speaker of the year was the ever-popular David Jacobs, former Director of Synagogue Partnership of the Reform Movement, on a return visit to the Seymour Group. Being an archivist, he stressed the importance of telling our families about our own backgrounds before it is too late! He reminisced about his – and our – days in the YASGB (predecessor of RSY Netzer) and also shared with us some intriguing stories about synagogue constitutions and cemeteries, in which he has a particular interest.

Our year ended on a high note when Suzanne Piggott, curator at the Wallace Collection, spoke about the extraordinary life of Sir Richard Wallace, whom she described as “the most fortunate man of his day – connoisseur, collector and philanthropist”, illustrating her talk with slides featuring some of the outstanding examples from this magnificent collection. Richard Wallace, allegedly the illegitimate son of the 4th Marquess of Hertford, in 1870 out of the blue inherited a great fortune and an outstanding art collection which was eventually bequeathed to the British nation by his son’s wife.

Our special thanks must go to Jack Lynes, who captures so skilfully the essence of our talks in his reports in ‘the Synagogue quarterly Review’.

*Valerie Bello and Jill Leuw*

“Our year ended on a high note when Suzanne Piggott, curator at the Wallace Collection, spoke about the extraordinary life of Sir Richard Wallace...”

## SOCIAL ACTION

‘Social Action’ at WLS can be defined as hands-on work that helps the vulnerable and the disadvantaged in the wider community beyond our doors, while at the same time helping us create stronger bonds among our community.

The past year has been very successful and almost all our projects have seen continued growth in beneficiaries, numbers of volunteers, contact hours, and donations. Please find a short write up of our core projects below and then a further section on the work we are doing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Drop-In Centre serving destitute asylum seekers with young families experienced further growth, taking place at WLS once a month on a Sunday afternoon. We continued to provide our clients with a hot meal, clothes, toiletries, nappies, grocery vouchers, a play area for the children, social work support and advocacy - up until the March 2020 Drop-In.

We supported 340 families on a regular basis in 2019, a 17% increase on the year before. We can attribute this extra capacity to additional funds secured from the Rothschild Foundation as well as changes to our systems which increased the number of guests we supported. In addition, 143 people volunteered directly with the project (and attended on average four times, with 20 volunteers coming 8 times or more) and many more brought along donations of clothes, food and other items. The project cost £75,000 to run last year, a 32% increase.

“We can attribute this extra capacity to additional funds secured from the Rothschild Foundation as well as changes to our systems which increased the number of guests we supported.”

This is in line with the increase in beneficiaries as well as with our taking on a part time administrator to support the project. The Drop-In carried over £51,000 from the previous year and brought in £55,000 from donations. We carried over £32,000 for the start of 2020.

“ *Significant successes of the past year include significant support for two young asylum seekers with their preparations to apply for medical school...* ”

Significant successes of the past year include significant support for two young asylum seekers with their preparations to apply for medical school; a regular volunteer training programme which was well attended; streamlining services, particularly in how we deal with new guests, allowing us to open up more space from our waiting list; and securing long term support from the Rothschild Foundation.

The Winter Night Shelter ran for its seventh year. This project is an initiative with Westminster City Council (WCC), St Mungo’s, twelve local churches and one mosque. We provided a healthy homecooked meal, a friendly atmosphere, accommodation, and breakfast to 15 homeless guests on-site at WLS every Saturday night from December until mid-March 2020.

We engaged 118 volunteers in 2019 and had a full complement of guests on almost every week. The project cost us £13,500 and we have raised £22,000 from our supper quiz, foundations, major donors, and small donors.



In September 2019 we unexpectedly learned that the West London Mission, who had held the Westminster Night Shelter since its inception had decided to leave the project. WLS spearheaded a team of core venues to successfully engage WCC and St Mungo’s to step in to take over the guest referrals and key working. Taking a leadership role, alongside All Souls, Langham Place and St Patricks, Soho Square we put in place a strong working group with our new partners, regular coordinators meetings, additional support for the guests, and support for smaller and newer venues.

“ *Our team of fifteen volunteers supports this family with their housing, employment, health, cultural orientation and educational needs.* ”

The Community Sponsorship project has seen us support a family of three from Aleppo, Syria. We resettled them into a flat in Lambeth and are supporting them with a team of volunteers. Our team of fifteen volunteers supports this family with their housing, employment, health, cultural orientation and educational needs. This team is made up of WLS members, members of South London Liberal Synagogue, and other volunteers from local faith communities. The project has run very smoothly so far. The child (aged 3) enrolled in a local nursery and is already speaking rudimentary English and socialising well with his peers. The mother is learning English at a local college and is able to converse comfortably in English with our volunteer team. She has also done so volunteering in a local nursery and a charity shop. She is confident using local shops and transport. The husband has unfortunately suffered with ill health for most of the past year and has not been able to make consistent progression with his acclimatisation. We will continue to support the family in a limited way, and according to their needs, until April 2021. They are faring well during the COVID pandemic and remain healthy and in regular contact with our volunteers.

There are a few projects that straddle the line between interfaith and social action – and whose goals are driven by both departments.

Feeding Folk is a project that brings together Jews and Muslims to prepare and then deliver healthy home cooked food to rough sleepers in central London. It has continued at the same levels at 2018 and solidified its volunteer and support base.

We have prepared and delivered between 100-200 meals at each session and meet once or twice a month. We have engaged 55 volunteers and the project has cost us £9,500. This increase is mostly due to extra staff costs associated with scaling up the project. We have received £12,000 in donations from our supper quiz, one new major donor, and numerous small donors.

The Grenfell Kids Day Camp was set up in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire. We have now run four five-day activity camps for 30-40 kids affected by the fire. Each camp engages a team of Jewish and Muslim youth leaders to provide a fun activity filled day camp for the kids. We plan to run more day camps in December 2020 and on into 2021. Each camp costs £7000 and Al Manaar mosque, our partner, provides £2000 of the funds as well as the venue for the camp. 2019 programming was funded by one donation from a synagogue member.

FoodCycle is a national charity that turns supermarket food waste into healthy meals for vulnerable communities. Marylebone FoodCycle is run jointly by WLS and St Paul's church in Lisson Grove. Halcyon School is also actively involved. We meet weekly and prepare 50 meals in the WLS kitchens and then transport the food to the church where we serve a community meal to families living on the local estate. FoodCycle has very little overheads as all the food is donated and the church picks up the costs of incidentals.

WLS is extremely grateful to the many people who make our social action work possible; those who have donated funds, those who have donated clothes and food, and all the volunteers who have given their time, energy and commitment. Thank you.

Since the middle of March 2020 we have significantly changed our activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All activities in the synagogue have stopped for now.

We have become an integral partner of the Westminster City Council response for rough sleepers. In the past six weeks we have sourced accommodation for rough sleepers, helping WCC build its capacity; arranged over 500 care packages of clothes, toiletries, and basic food essentials for hostels and hotels housing rough sleepers including collecting prepared packs from donors and delivering them to hotels and donation hubs; arranged thousands of meals to be delivered to these accommodations; provided new underwear to guests; sourced a donation of 400 litres of hand sanitizer to be distributed to guests; and purchased battery packs to help keep guests connected and online. To do this we have mobilised hundreds of volunteers to prepare and pack items and raised £9,000 from supporters from within and outside the community.

Our approach has been to support and fill gaps. At our best we have been nimble and pro active and filled short term gaps whilst WCC arranges statutory funding to provide more durable and long-lasting solutions.

“ We meet weekly and prepare 50 meals in the WLS kitchens and then transport the food to the church where we serve a community meal to families living on the local estate. ”

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“ ...we have mobilised hundreds of volunteers to prepare and pack items and raised £9,000 from supporters from within and outside the community. ”

“ We continue to support the Drop-In guests by sending each family supermarket vouchers by registered post to their home addresses. ”

We have often responded to requests within hours and have marshalled our amazing team of existing volunteers and the strong reputation we have in the local community. In particular Meredith Radke, who coordinates our Community Sponsorship project, Sue Holston, our night shelter coordinator, and Saima Ahmed deserve praise for their dedication and cool heads.

With the situation changing weekly it is hard to anticipate how this work will look in even one month from now, but it seems our core supporters remain determined to play a helpful role in supporting this vulnerable population.

We continue to support the Drop-In guests by sending each family supermarket vouchers by registered post to their home addresses. They are suffering significantly at this time as most projects have shut down, but all the synagogue Drop-Ins continue to support the families they work with in similar ways to us.

If these projects inspire you to get involved with Social Action at WLS through volunteering and/or making a donation, please do get in touch with Nic Schlagman via [nic.schlagman@wls.org.uk](mailto:nic.schlagman@wls.org.uk) or on 0207 535 0270. We would love to include you as part of the team.

*Nic Schlagman - Head of Social Action  
Henrietta Hughes - Board Member for Social Action*

## SOCIAL CARE

Caring for the community is central to the life of any synagogue and West London Synagogue is no different. As in previous years, 2019 has been a very busy time for the Social Care team. Members, both young and old, face many different problems, typically family pressures, mental or physical health issues, bereavement, major illness and sometimes domestic violence and drug and alcohol issues. Increasingly too, with many of our older members living into their nineties, loneliness and isolation has become more of an issue as their loved ones, partners and even children die before them.

“ The social care team know where to find the support that is needed through their contact with government agencies, local authorities and charities such as Jewish Care, Norwood and JAMI. ”

Our social care team with two part-time qualified social workers are always in demand and often severely stretched. In addition to the rabbinic team, this is often the only support our members have. These are challenging times and the team is able to support members through the bureaucratic maze of systems and procedures that face them when they themselves are in crisis, struggling or distressed.

The Social Care team knows where to find the support that is needed through its contact with government agencies, local authorities and charities such as Jewish Care, Norwood and JAMI. It directs members towards the appropriate organisation and to people who offer specialist advice. We also help members access financial support and benefits such as attendance or carers' allowances taking account of people's sensitivities to asking for such help. The Social Care team could not fulfil all the work it undertakes without a loyal and enthusiastic team of volunteers, themselves often in their seventies or eighties but happily, increasingly, a younger generation of members and their families.

Volunteers cannot deal with some of the issues already described but do valuable work delivering the Pesach and High Holy days parcels, hosting and transporting members to the monthly tea parties (now regularly 2 each month) and volunteering to visit and support members with community visits.

We continue to organize the following support groups: -

- Cancer Support Group
- Bereavement Support Group
- Carers' Support Group
- Bereavement Visitors Group
- CBT café
- Parkinson's Support Group
- Berkeley Lunch Group

These groups continue to be very successful in offering peer support, particularly to people who are long term carers or who have a terminal illness. Dealing with these issues can sometimes seem overwhelming and isolating and, without support, can take a toll on individuals. The informal support networks that develop through the groups are amazing to see, with members often supporting each other with minor household issues, hospital appointments etc. This peer support can strengthen people's ability to cope and can make a real difference.

The CBT Café (which means Cake Before Therapy), started in 2017 continues to provide a place for those with lived experience of mental health, whether in their own lives or with family or friends, to come and share experiences, meet new people and help dissolve the stigma too often associated with mental health issues.

The small team of bereavement visitors continue to give "a listening ear", support and advice to those who have been bereaved. They are well received, be it for a single telephone call or, more often, a visit or a sustained series of visits and chats, sometimes lasting months or occasionally years. However once again we report that the team is over-stretched, and we sorely need more members to volunteer to train and work in this vital area.

The following training and events took place in 2019: -

- 2 April 2019 Grief Works – Rabbi Julia Neuberger in conversation with Julia Samuel
- 8 April 2019 Volunteer Training
- 23 May 2019 West London Synagogue hosted Reform Judaism's Communities that Care – Mental Health & Wellbeing Conference
- 3 September 2019 – Bereavement Training
- 6 November 2019 – Unconscious Bias Training
- 12 November 2019 – Bereavement Training

The Berkeley Lunch Club continued until September 2019 when it was decided to close, due to the scarcity of members attending. However, plans were made to re-launch a New Berkeley Lunch Club in February 2020. More will be reported next year but suffice to say that the first two meetings were held on the second Tuesday in January and February and were a great success with a new team of volunteers, delicious lunch provided by Jewish Care, chair-based exercises, new activities being introduced and a healthy attendance.

“ The informal support networks that develop through the groups are amazing to see, with members often supporting each other with minor household issues, hospital appointments etc. ”

“ Indeed, numbers have increased so on the first Sunday each month, two tea parties have been held, each hosted by a member. ”

Our monthly tea parties have continued to be a popular event for some of our older members. Indeed, numbers have increased so on the first Sunday each month, two tea parties have been held, each hosted by a member. It is the chance to meet up with friends in the welcoming environment of a member's home, to enjoy delicious homemade cakes and sandwiches and to exchange news and memories.

Once again, for the sixth year running, Lady Jane Rayne opened her lovely garden to host a summer tea party in the magnificent marquee with tables beautifully decorated with stunning floral arrangements and laden with delicious food.

As ever, for this hardworking team, the key challenge is to balance the time between crisis response work and planned work because responding to crises takes priority and is very time consuming. This is made more challenging by hospitals wishing to discharge patients home, prior to appropriate care packages being put in place.

“ As ever, the social care team is anxious to recruit more volunteers, for social events such as driving for the tea parties, community visiting and care calls. ”

As ever, the social care team is anxious to recruit more volunteers, for social events such as driving for the tea parties, community visiting and care calls. We are also looking to expand our team of bereavement visitors so if you are interested in this kind of work, do contact Jo Michaels, Head of Social Care to discuss what it entails, whether you might be suited to fulfil the role and what training is available.

During 2019 we have provided pastoral care services to approximately 500 members of WLS. Many of these are now attending support groups and activities organised by the team and its volunteers. As ever, we are keen to continue this vital work for the WLS community.

This last Winter, the clement weather meant that we did not have to embark on the programme of Wintercare calls. Although not strictly within the remit of this report for 2019, it would be remiss not to refer to the way that the Wintercare process has come into its own during the COVID 19 crisis. Even more volunteers, over a hundred, have provided elderly and often lonely members' link to the outside world during the restrictions. They check that members have enough food and have access to shopping; they check that carer support is functioning and, most important of all, being a friendly and sympathetic person to talk to during the lonely hours of the lockdown. Social distancing has forced us to look for new ways of contacting people and we are becoming much more at ease with technology, using zoom meetings and telephone conferencing to keep in contact with members and volunteers alike.

We take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers and look forward to a more congenial and sociable environment in which to provide our support and care to the WLS community post COVID 19.

*Jo Michaels – Head of Social Care  
Joan Arnold – Board Member for Social Care*





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