

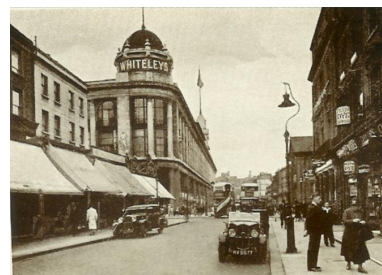
# Bayswater and The New West End Synagogue during World War Two

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## Part One 1930 - 1939: London Endangered From the Air

The 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 is etched in the memory of our older congregants whilst the younger generation have heard reminiscences from parents and grand parents of the Second World War. Much is known on all aspects from books, radio and television programmes, so I am only going to recount a small part of a much wider subject. In effect what was to become known as the Home Front, and relating to the immediate area of our historic synagogue, where many of the members lived. However, I must first pay tribute to all those congregants, men and women, who joined all three Armed Services, and in particular those who did not return. Their names are honoured, with those killed in the First World War, on the right-hand side of the vestibule, as one enters the synagogue.

Bayswater, then in the Borough of Paddington, is a relatively small area lying between the Bayswater Road, Porchester Terrace on the east, Westbourne Park Road, Talbot Road, Ledbury Road, Pembridge Square, and Ossington Street on the western side bordering the Royal Borough of Kensington. Comprising mainly tall Victorian stucco terraces laid out with surrounding garden squares, often as guest and boarding houses; middle class mansion flats and single ownership house. It was served by the main shopping thoroughfares of Westbourne Grove and Queensway including the famous Whiteley's Departmental Store. Living near Kensington High Street many of our members would walk through Kensington Gardens whilst others lived in the fashionable Holland Park, and that part of Notting Hill Gate nearest to the synagogue.



Queen's Road (Queensway)

*As a baby I was brought into these surroundings by my parents in 1930 when father Dr Zellick (Jack) Green and purchased the medical practice from Dr A.J. Cronin, later to become a famous author, at 152, Westbourne Grove on the corner of Needham Road. Father was second generation born in Dublin and mother first generation born over her father's shop in Whitechapel Road London. They had just moved from a practice in Commercial Street, alongside Spitalfields Vegetable Market. 'I was s o pleased to get away from the smell of rotting cabbages' mother was fond of telling me, 'and walking you in the pram through Kensington Gardens' Well she might, and I was indeed fortunate.*

The lives we led in the 1930's were totally different to what it is today for obvious reasons. The most influential difference was not having television in our homes, only the radio and wind up gramophones. Very few motor cars, you could park any where provided you were not causing an obstruction, and one-way systems virtually unheard of, all of Queensway and Kensington Church Street had two-way traffic systems. Only the relative wealthy had central heating in their homes, whilst the majority brought the coal up from the cellar, or using gas and electric fires. As for gadgets in the kitchen - none, except refrigerators were just coming in. Monday was washing day with laundries flourishing. No supermarket, shopping every day with the local shopkeepers and traders serving successive generations. As for communications we wrote letters and post cards, most homes were without a telephone. For entertainment the theatre, opera and classical concerts took place at the Albert Hall and Queens Hall. The cinema extremely popular with new films first having a short run in the West End before being released locally. In the area was the *Coronet* in Notting Hill Gate, *Queen's* and *Roxy* in Westbourne Grove, where in the latter case you had tea and biscuits brought to you on a tray during the afternoon performances. Huge unsegregated good-humoured crowds attended football matches, and in the summer the great names at Lord's and the Oval Cricket Grounds were seen. Playing Card Games such as Bridge and Solo in smoked filled rooms, others enjoying chess and draughts. For the more fortunate a summer holiday by the sea, Brighton Westcliffe and Cliftonville the most popular for Jewish families. The Bank Holidays saw day trips to the coast and the popular Paddle Steamer from Tower Bridge to Southend.

Children within settled families were shielded leading to a happy and contented childhood, but not all were fortunate. You were taught to make do with what you had and generally left to your own devices provided you behaved, otherwise punished. You were taught manners in the home at school and in the synagogue, and from an early age told 'Remember you are Jewish and conduct yourself in a way not to bring discredit on the community'.

*My earliest recollections are from about 1936 as my parents had already joined the New West End Synagogue, regretfully I never thought of asking why they chose this particular synagogue, but assume it was the nearest to our home. As a Doctor father had status, but*

*like many in the professions, not the income to go with it. He worked long hours, always on call day and night, with evening surgery not finishing until 8.30 p.m. On the north side towards Portobello Road and Westbourne Park Road the housing was run down, and occupied by a number of Irish families attracted by the Roman Catholic Church and School at the rear of our house. I do not think Dad had any difficulties because of being Jewish, but more to his advantage for having been born in Dublin, and he was never slow in accentuating his accent when it suited.*

*To the south, towards Kensington Gardens were the middle class and a source of income as private patients, though it must be mentioned mother had to type some invoices account rendered. Mother was strict with me, whilst father easy going humorous and popular, though they were understandably annoyed when I played football and cricket in the street I attended Kindergartens in Hereford Road and Dawson Place, and then Colet Court preparatory school for St. Paul's Public School in Hammersmith. My brother Melvin, five years older, had already started at St Paul's where he was friendly with Edward Levine youngest son of Reverend Ephraim and Annie Levine. They had four sons and a daughter living at 9, Pembridge Villas, on the corner of Pembridge Place, where I particularly remember their Succah being built in the conservatory.*

Reverend Isaac Goldstein Reader and Secretary who was also Headmaster of the Hebrew and Religion Classes lived alongside the Synagogue, and the Beadle Raphael Roth occupied the top floor flat. Services were conducted with fitting dignity and decorum, in which the New West End prided itself. Reverend Ephraim Levene was an outstanding orator and the prayers conducted with reverential rendering ably supported by the mixed choir under the choirmaster Mister I. Random. Yet, all but a faithful minority paid no heed, except on the High Festivals. To try and attract better attendance a special Friday evening Choral Service with a short address was inaugurated in the autumn of 1936, held at a later hour than the statutory Service which ushered in the Sabbath. This innovation was initially successful mainly because the ancient and traditional melodies were introduced. On New Year and the Day of Atonement special services for the children were held by Mrs Ephraim Levene, which were crowded. Regretfully, for the rest of the year parents seemed indifferent to the needs of their children.

The Synagogue Classes met regularly every Sunday morning from 10 to 12.30 for both sexes, assembled for prayer and a short talk by Reverend Isaac Goldstein on different themes of Jewish life and religion. This was followed by separate lessons within age groups on Hebrew reading, translation of Prayer Book and Pentateuch, Grammar, Biblical History and the ethics of Judaism and its traditional ceremonies. An annual Seder demonstration on the Sunday preceding Passover, and the children taught to cultivate a spirit of charity with regular contributions. During 1937 twelve boys were Bar Mitzvah, including my brother, each presented with the authorised Daily Prayer Book and Companion Notes, after an address and the Priestly Blessing by Reverend Ephraim Levene. Most boys recited a portion from the Torah only and not the Haphtarah. In May 1937 an impressive service was held at the New West End Synagogue under the auspices of the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes for 700 children from all the constituent classes, with both Reverend Ephraim Levene and Isaac Goldstein officiating. During the same year fifteen marriages were solemnized, when it was decided that, except in the case of members, no marriages are solemnized in the Synagogue after 3 p.m. on Sundays, without the sanction of the Wardens.



**Corontet Cinema**

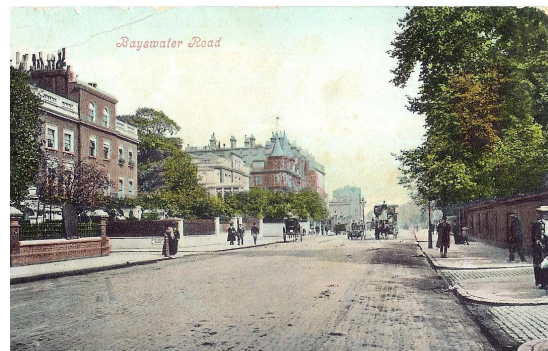
The Ladies Committee came under the Chairmanship of Mrs William Goldstein (wife of one of the Wardens) in 1936 they were mainly concerned with the extension of the Succah in the classrooms at the top of the building. The decorations were always outstanding achieved by considerable help of all the ladies in kind and by donations. The floral decoration of the Synagogue at Pentecost was also effectively carried out by the ladies. Moves were being put forward to the Board of Management of wider participation by the ladies of the community. The League of Social Services to which many members subscribed continued in 1936 in East Stepney and additionally with Notting Hill Jewish Lads Club.

The Honorary Offices and Board of Management were concerned at the lack of interest displayed by many members in the Synagogue and exhorted the community to pay more regard and enthusiasm for the congregation. They felt during these difficult days for World Jewry, with many of our brethren victims of hatred and persecution, let alone ominous happenings in this country, that by closer adherence to congregational life, our debt as English Jews to this Country should show it by more adherence to our Jewish obligations.

Air Raid Precautions were now being taken seriously after a slow start. Not until May 1938 did the Paddington Borough Council make an extensive survey of some 184 buildings suitable as shelters for the Public caught in the streets during Raids. Primarily those with large basements and easily converted at reasonable cost and quickly brought into service. Just sixteen properties were initially converted including the New West End Synagogue, Greek Church Moscow Road, Bayswater Synagogue Westbourne Park Crescent and the Queen's Cinema Bishop's Bridge Road. The Survey at the New West End Synagogue was carried out on the 1 June 1938, allowing 450 square feet for the shelter, after taking account of the Porter's accommodation of two rooms and scullery. The entrance to the shelter for up to thirty members of the public was through the main door of the Synagogue in St Petersburg Place into the Vestry and down through the existing toilets, but certain strengthening work was carried out and additional lighting at an estimated cost of £50.0.0. An alternative exit in an emergency was through the Porter's accommodation, and up the steps into Orme Lane. The Borough Surveyor recommended that conversion into a shelter be approved as although the space available very small, the property was in good condition and the locality poorly-provided with possible shelters. The Greek Church holding accommodation for fifty and Queen's Cinema forty.

Small residential houses on two floors would be provided outside in the rear garden of corrugated steel sheeting 6 feet high 4 feet 6 inches long and 5 feet long, let into the ground, with the excavated earth used to cover the shelter. Distribution started to the London Boroughs in February 1939, supplied free to those compulsorily insured under the National Health Insurance Act. Otherwise, most properties in the vicinity of the Synagogue with basements or on the ground floor had them strengthened with a standard steel light frame.

The large Hospitals like St. Mary's in Praed Street near Paddington Station, with medical and surgical facilities were to take the seriously injured, holding at least a month supply of drugs and dressings. Father was Medical Officer to the First Aid Post under Bradleys, the well-known furriers, on the corner of Westbourne Grove and Chepstow Place, specially adapted for the purpose at a cost of £1,200. Paddington had 1,200 Ambulances allocated driven by volunteers, and often women.



Orme Square and Orme Court from Bayswater

Everyone was encouraged to prepare - equipping your refuge room to include tinned food, torch and wireless set; seeing all windows and openings taped against blast, and blacked out; your gas mask always carried in a cardboard box. Issued free, the civilian gas mask consisted of a rubber face-piece attached by means of a rubber band to a metal box containing filters, fitted by adjustable web straps. 'Mickey Mouse' gas masks issued to very young children and gas helmets for babies in which their mothers' pumped air. Fire-Watching posts were set up on the roofs of suitable buildings, one being at Elliot's shoe shop at 112, Westbourne Grove on the corner of Chepstow Road. Rescue teams made up in the main from building workers; a small fire station was in Queensway at the northern end near the Porchester Baths; the Police and controlling the shelters and black out the ubiquitous Air Raid Wardens.

It was possible to rent an unfurnished flat of three rooms, kitchen and bathroom for £78 per annum exclusive in Ladbrooke Square and similarly in Holland Park Avenue for £65. Unfurnished flats occupied by some Jewish Refugees from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia in Queensway let unfurnished from £95 to £230 per annum depending on the size of the accommodation. There was still the air of normality, trying to hide the feeling that war was inevitable. At a Board meeting of the New West Synagogue on 5 May 1938 nothing was mentioned of the threat of hostilities or the precautions which should be taken. Instead an indication of the direction in which the community was intending to move. Among the resolutions discussed included - Sabbath Morning Service should commence at 11:00 am concluding an hour and a half later; the Services too prolonged and the chanting although tuneful and reverential might be curtailed; the Sermons losing much of their effect being inaudible to many congregants, and that the acoustics could and should be improved without delay. Suggestions emerged from a lively discussion - The order of Service to be more varied with Musaf practically dispensed with, and Kaddish recited less frequently; Reading of the Law altered to triennially ; more English interspersed in the Reading of the prayers, and opportunities taken in reading from the Prophets, thus inducing a greater knowledge of the Bible; the advocacy of the desirability of families sitting together during Divine Service; and to recommend to the Union of Jewish Women the urgency, of once again, making an attempt to obtain the Franchise for women.

*May 1939 was my tenth birthday - how we all longed to get to 'double figures' - And of course knew nothing of how the Synagogue was managed or little about the dire situations of the Jews in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Hitler's rantings were heard on the wireless and I knew about the fascists spouting on the corner of Queensway and Westbourne Grove. One's childhood was orderly, Synagogue most Sabbath mornings, and Cheder Sunday mornings, though I seem to remember the numbers falling. There was a lot going on to keep a young boy intrigued, for instance trying on Gas Masks, which must have upset father, as he had seen the effect of mustard gas in the First World War. Mother always had difficulty with streaming eyes when chopping strong Onions in the making of chopped liver, so she found the perfect antidote by putting on her gas mask. Seeing the battery of four anti-aircraft guns in Hyde Park near Marble Arch, and the digging of trenches for air raid shelters just inside Kensington Gardens through the Orme Square Gate in the Bayswater Road*

*Exercising searchlights at night and the Barrage Balloons about sixty-two feet long and twenty-five in diameter known as blimps, with nicknames locally in Chelsea of Flossie and Blossom designed to fly up to about 5000 feet in order to make bomb aiming more difficult. On the 14 August 1938, excited over the Queen Mary recapturing the Blue Riband by completing the fastest eastbound Atlantic crossing in three days and 22 hours averaging 31.69 knots. Ten days later England beat Australia at the Oval, my first Test Match. The threat of war began to register, nothing more so, than our basement rear room being reinforced with stout wooden beams, the window boarded up, and a brick blast wall erected outside in the rear yard as added protection. Evacuation loomed, childhood days were nearly over, 'The Farewell Generation' was about to begin.*

On the 16 August 1939 the United Synagogue had at last written to the Paddington Borough Engineer agreeing to the basement at the New West Synagogue being partially converted for use as a shelter. A proviso was made that the cost was to be at the Council's expense, and made available for the use of officials and staff attached to the Synagogue, also any worshippers who may be on the premises during an air raid. Followed on the 24 August by an urgent notification from Head Office to all Synagogues, under the jurisdiction of the United Synagogue, relating to Air Raid Precautions. Bringing attention to the possibility of a complete black out being called for when it would be necessary to close the Synagogue by dusk at latest, without artificial lights being brought into use. It was essential to see that in no circumstances were lights showing from any of the Synagogue buildings, and to strictly comply with the Government's requirements. It transpired on the previous 17 July Sir Robert Waley Cohen and his colleagues had resigned over a dispute relating to special services for refugees which accounted for the delays.

Politically the tipping point came on the 23 August with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, the mood changed in the House of Commons after threats against Poland, Britain would stand by the Poles. On 25 August an Anglo-Polish Treaty of mutual assistance was signed. To no avail German troops crossed the Polish Border on Friday 1 September. Plans for the evacuation of children from Britain's big Cities were put into effect. More than 600,000 school children left London out of a total of one and a half million to include preschool children and babies with their mothers. There they were with a small case, haversack, gas masks, and a label tied to their coats, just name and school. Assembled at their schools and led through the Gates accompanied by Teachers to the Railway Stations. The Mums' lining the streets outside, the children slowly passing holding each others hand, shouts of 'Don't forget to write, wash behind your ears'. Seeing the photographs of the tearful farewells upsets me to this day. It was my generation.

Initially the evacuation was conducted in a feeling of haste and confusion, exact destinations being kept secret, resulting in long and tedious railway journeys. Children arriving tired frightened and lonely with billeting arrangements sometimes chaotic. Some of the older children looked upon it as an exciting adventure, but others put on a brave front. Bayswater school children were taken to Notting Hill Gate Underground Station for Ealing Broadway the main starting point for West London children with the Great Western Railway scheduling 64 extra trains, leaving at 9-minute intervals.

Those evacuated each have their own individual experiences to recount and in my case father took me by car to Danesfield, near Medmenham on Friday the 1 September. Colet Court had arranged evacuation of the school to a 650-acre Country House in the Chilterns, between Henley-on-Thames and Marlow. It was like staying at a Boarding School, among the boys was Cyril Hodes, one of our current Synagogue members.

On Sunday 3 September at 11.15 am Neville Chamberlain broadcast to the nation, that Hitler not having given an undertaking to the earlier ultimatum, this country was now at War with Germany. At 11.27 am the high and low wail of the air raid siren sounding the alert was heard from the roof of Notting Hill Gate Police Station, near the corner of Holland Park Avenue and Ladbrooke Grove