



Jewish Voices



Memories of Leicester
in the 1940s and 50s



Compiled by Rosalind Adam

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*Rosalind Adam
March 2009*

Introduction

Earlier histories of the Leicester Hebrew Congregation have concentrated on the buildings and institutions of the community. This is now the first study of the individuals who in some way or other were members of that community and gave it its existence. It comes at a time when those reminiscences are inevitably becoming history, and without the efforts of Rosalind Adam and her collaborators these memories would have disappeared.

They cover a most interesting period in the history of the community. Before the war it had been stable in size and composition; new families came to Leicester while a few went on elsewhere. Relatively few of the younger generation went to university and in consequence few of them would move elsewhere. But when the war came there were two new developments. A number of refugees from Central Europe – Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia – came to work and live in Leicester; many of them came under the auspices of Max Goldschmidt (later Mac Goldsmith). Not always sympathetically regarded by the community at large, they often found themselves forced to develop their own links and ties.

And a further group came as evacuees from London, often attracted by and into the various textile industries and activities in Leicester. These two groups outnumbered the existing congregation, and there developed tensions amongst them, partly in terms of who could find places in the synagogue during the High Holy Day festivals, partly in terms of membership of societies and committees.

Some of these differences are reflected amongst these reminiscences as are the growth of different religious practices and the degree of religiosity among the Jews of Leicester. And even though the community has declined in numbers over the years echoes of these earlier arguments are still to be heard.

All this is part of community life and its preservation in this volume is to be applauded. Taken together with the formal histories they give a more rounded picture, warts and all.

*Professor Aubrey Newman
December 2008*

A poem for my Great Auntie Lena Cohen
Born in Riga, Latvia, date unknown – Died in Leicester, England, February 1971

*A refugee, she escaped to the East End of London
Unpacking her culture along with her feathered Russian bed,
Was she comforted by the Yiddishkeit¹ that surrounded her?
Or did she feel the sting of black-shirted anti-semitism?
I'll never know because she never said.*

*An evacuee she escaped to Leicester,
To an English world as far from the East End as it was from Riga
Was her heart still in bombed-out London?
Or had it never left Latvia?
Did she fear these Midlanders with their strange accents?
Or did she appreciate the peace of a provincial town?
I'll never know because she never said.*

*In my memory she was always smiling, always cooking,
And I was always at her side,
Watching as she made blintzes with cheese from the hanging muslin,
Kreplach² filled with meat from the silver-metal mincer screwed to the table edge,
Kneidlach³ rolled into balls so swiftly I could hardly see her moving hands,
And my treat, gribenes⁴, glistening in the tin after the schmaltz⁵ had been rendered.*

*Was her life richer for having seen so many ways?
Or poorer for being a stranger in every place?
I'll never know. I never asked and she never said.
I only know that I was her little girl, her shayna Maideleh⁶,
And my life is richer for having been touched by hers.*

It is too late to ask my Great Aunt about her life and so I asked the Leicester Jewish community about theirs. Why had they come to Leicester? What was it like being Jewish in Leicester during the war and the 1950s? This book is their reply. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed compiling it but please remember that it is a book of memories and not a history book.

Rosalind Adam

¹ **Yiddishkeit**
Jewish way of life

² **Kreplach**
Meat-filled dumplings

³ **Kneidlach**
Dumplings

⁴ **Gribenes**
Fried onions and chicken skin left after making schmaltz

⁵ **Schmaltz**
Chicken fat used instead of butter with meat

⁶ **Shayna Maideleh**
Yiddish – pretty young girl

Chapter 1

Wartime Leicester

Arrivals

Surviving the War and Rationing

War-Work

The Social Club

Room and Board

Weddings – From War to Peacetime

Arrivals

'Leicester in the 1940s was like a revolution.
There was a sort of assault on a very
small Jewish community.' *Arno Salem*



'There were only 60 Jewish families
here before the war.' *Stella Louis*

'Many of us would not be here if it wasn't for the war.' *Katherine May*

'We grew to thousands' in the '40s.' *Leo Cohen*

*There are no records of the numbers of Jewish evacuees arriving from London in the 1940s.
It has been reported that many hundreds of families arrived.

My first memory of Leicester was steaming into Leicester station from London to escape the buzz-bombs and breathing in the peace of the place. It was a fluke that I came here. My husband was in the army in Palestine when the buzz-bombs came over so I sent a telegram to my sister in Leicester and said, 'Can you put me up for a few weeks?' It was only temporary – I'm still here!

Sarah Page

I came to Leicester in 1941 when I was about six. All my family, my father's brothers and their families, had come to Leicester to get away from the bombing so when we got bombed out we came here too.

Bernard Besbrode

We were bombed out in 1940 in London and so we came to Leicester. This was the first time I ever mixed with non-Jewish people. In the area of London where we lived everyone was Jewish. They were from Russia, Poland, wherever the pogroms were going on. In Leicester we all lived together; Mum, Dad, my three sisters and myself. My parents died before the war was over, my mother on the day after Paris fell. They are both buried in the Gilroes burial ground – I remember that they didn't allow Sunday funerals then. As soon as the war was over we all returned to London leaving my parents behind.

Lily Pela

It was very peculiar for people who lived in a Jewish environment in London like I did and then you come up to Leicester and there's nothing.

Edna Gillson

**Oh we weren't expecting you
until tomorrow and in any case
we don't want you.**

When France fell we were evacuated from London overnight. We were billeted on different homes and when I arrived at my address an old woman opened the door. I was 21 at the time and she was probably only about 60. She said, 'Oh we weren't expecting you until tomorrow and in any case we don't want you.'

That was my greeting on a Sunday and I was already tearful at leaving my family. I went to the synagogue and I said to the Minister, 'Isn't there a Jewish family who would like to have a girl from London?' 'There are not many Jewish families here,' he said. 'But the Chazan⁷ and I live at the Jewish Boarding House on Queens Road.' So I went there and I'm glad I did. It was Mrs Barnett's.

Esther Rowe

⁷ **Chazan**
A cantor/singer
in a synagogue

My parents were evacuated to Leicester from London. Father set up a tailoring business in Brunswick Street and was a fire warden during the war. My parents bought a house here together with my father's sister who came to live with them for the duration of the war and stayed for the next 30 years. [Sue Jacobs](#)

We were evacuated from London in 1940 to a small Leicestershire village, Stanton-under-Bardon. Rural life was still fairly primitive in those days and the residents of one village rarely mixed with those of another. One can therefore imagine the view that villagers had of us strangers and we certainly experienced anti-Semitic incidents. [Sheila Markham](#)

Being evacuated to Great Glen from London in 1941 was a big culture shock. I was billeted to the doctor's house, with caretakers who were childless, so it must have been difficult for them to deal with an unhappy eight-year-old separated from her parents and two sisters who were billeted in separate homes. The couple tried to get me to go to church. I told them I was Jewish and I was let off.

*'Evacuees from London me duck'
They must miss their folks, what rotten luck.
We'll do our bit, make the best of
Their sojourn here with us in Leicester.*
[Sheila Jones](#)

My mother, Esther Lidiker, came from Russia originally. During the war she lived in Dalston but when the doodlebugs were falling she came to Leicester. She arrived with nowhere to stay and so, even though she had never been into a pub before, she bravely went from pub to pub asking for a room. At last somebody offered to help her and it turned out to be Joe Jacobs, the uncle of Shirley, who I later married.

[Doreen Jacobs](#)



Wartime Leicester [Jewish Voices](#)

'Don't worry,' said my father. 'I'm going to make coffee for the returning Jews'.

My earliest memory of Leicester was July 1943, one week after I got married and my new husband left to go into the army. Oh, the loneliness. I didn't like it here. My first reaction of Leicester: not a lot. But if I thought I'd never see it again, I'd be very sad. Leicester is to me like a comfortable pair of shoes I don't want to discard. When I first arrived and made my way into town by bus I thought it very small and even rural. Then I found shops like Marshall and Snelgrove and Simpkins. Oh! The smell of coffee. [Anne Kind](#)

At the age of 15 I was sent away from London on my own. I joined my parents in Leicester in 1940. I was in my last year at grammar school. It was a difficult time. [Gerry Barnett](#)

In 1941, we moved to Leicester from a tiny cottage in a Northants village where we had gone as London evacuees. Those village people had never met Jewish people before, thought we had horns in our heads. [Pauline Estrin](#)

My parents, Judith and Daniel Alcumbre, known in Leicester as Mr and Mrs Daniels for ease, were from Izmir in Turkey. Turkey had a large Jewish Sephardie⁸ community but when the troubles started many travelled to England through Italy. We were very Orthodox. On High Holy Days we used to go to the Sephardie Synagogue in London because we only had the overflow service in Leicester. [Mathilda Applebaum](#)

When we came to Leicester during the war we had to leave a small refugee child behind. A family of five children had come over from Germany. The youngest was a little girl called Ingerborg Holderness who was living with us but when we left Grimsby the Congregation didn't want us to split up the family. Leaving her behind was one of the saddest days. It was like leaving a sister. [Ben Ivell](#)

In Germany my mother said we were like drowning rats with nowhere to go. My parents put me on a train to Holland. 'Don't worry,' said my father. 'I'm going to make coffee for the returning Jews.' Then they came for my mother and father and they never did return. I travelled across Europe to London, finally settling in Leicester with my late husband Harold. Leicester to me means the best years of my life. [Rosemaleen Bucks](#)



Plaque in Leicester
Hebrew Congregation
Synagogue in memory
of Holocaust victims

⁸ Sephardie
Jews originating from
Spain and Portugal

Wartime Leicester [Jewish Voices](#)

I came alone from Germany on a domestic permit. Domestic work was all I was allowed to do at the time. I learnt English in six months. I was thrown out of Germany because I was Jewish and I vowed never to speak, read or write another word of German again. That was how I felt about them. My family went to South America. In 1947 I visited them. My parents had died by then but at least I got to see their graves and I knew they didn't perish in Germany. Apart from a very ill nephew somewhere, I now haven't a single living relative. *Margot Laxton*

You needed money to get out of Germany unless you could go as a domestic. I escaped all this. I was lucky. My father was an exporter in textiles and could get capital out. I've been naturalised now but foreigners were foreigners whatever. I have felt displaced almost for the rest of my life. *Arno Salem*

My father, Wolfie Morrison, had a stall in Leicester Market since before the war. He used to travel down from Sheffield but when petrol became rationed it was difficult to continue doing the journey so in 1941 we moved to Oadby which in those days was a village four miles from Leicester. *Michael Morrison*

In 1940 the removals man who moved us here from London said, 'You'll find a better class of Jewish people in Leicester than in the East End.' Leicester was strange, the way they all spoke. I couldn't understand them, with 'boos' for bus and 'me duck'. We all lived in a small terrace house in Wood Hill, my mother, aunt, Joe and Hilary. The front room was my mother and aunt's dressmaking workshop which meant that living space was tight. *Frances Denning*

I first visited Leicester to see my grandparents and other relations who had come here because of the war. I stayed with my aunt and slept in a table shelter in the lounge. *Katherine May*

London Road Railway Station on a lovely September day – my first glimpse of the beginning of a life which had endless possibilities. I originally came from Germany but had travelled the world, staying for a time in Palestine before coming to England. I learnt English in Baghdad but even so it was a difficult thing to arrive here and not know what it was all about. *Reni Chapman*

Wartime Leicester Jewish Voices



Surviving the War and Rationing

A lot of people from where I was stationed in the war were part of D-Day and the Battle of Arnhem. I was on homing. I saw them off but unfortunately many of them didn't come back. I saw lots of sadness. They were sad, sad days but wonderful days because people were so kind. It didn't matter who you were or what you were. You were part of it all. *Rosa Lebens*

It was the 1940s and we were outside British Home Stores by the Clock Tower. I was looking after the pram that held my brother, Alan, while my mother was doing the shopping. The air raid sirens went. I was frightened out of my life. I couldn't see hair nor hide of my mother. I was standing waiting for the bombs to start falling and then she turned up and I said, 'Don't you know there's an air raid?' And my mother said, 'They don't have proper air raids in Leicester!' *Bernard Besbrode*

We arrived, as a family, in Leicester on 19 November 1940. I mention the date because it was exactly one week after the city was hit by a cascade of German bombs, which killed many Jewish London evacuees. *Alan Louis*

So many of us had just come up from London. We were here for two days and the third day they bombed Leicester. *Edna Gillson*

In November 1940 the shul⁹ suffered bomb damage. I was 11 years old and I was sent to retrieve my father's Tallis¹⁰ from his box. I remember noting the chandelier lying on top of the Bimah¹¹. The synagogue was re-opened two years later in the November just before the time of my Bar Mitzvah¹². *Leo Cohen*

When the shul was bombed they said the bombs were meant for Coventry. They damaged the huge tea rooms in Victoria Park. The shul was closed for a long time but by then we had a club just round the corner from the shul where we had meetings. We used the Friends Hall and a hall next to Leah Marks opposite the station for services. Weddings were held at the Trocodero restaurant. *Grace Henig*

⁹ Shul
Synagogue

¹⁰ Tallis
Man's prayer shawl

¹¹ Bimah
Raised section in synagogue from where the Torah is read and prayers are recited

¹² Bar Mitzvah
Service where the boy reads the Torah on his 13th birthday for a coming of age ceremony



In November 1940 when all the bombs were going off I seem to remember that I'd been put in the garage of all places and I could hear all the bangs going on and on. [Pauline Balkin](#)



In the Royal Air Force we used to go on raids over Germany. In the Mess the food was brought to the table and I'd look at the plate and say, 'I can't eat that. I can't eat that.' At the meal table I was a very popular young man because the others would take it in turns to eat my food. I was only 17 and the orderly asked me why I wasn't eating because you couldn't carry out your duties properly if you weren't eating. I told him that it wasn't kosher¹³. He said to have a word with the visiting Rabbi who held a

service once a month on a Friday evening. I spoke to the Rabbi and explained the predicament I was in. He said, 'In a situation like this I'm sure that God will understand that you've got to eat.' When I came home on leave I felt that, in view of what had happened, I couldn't go to the shul any more. A few years later I was informed about the Liberal Jewish Group. I joined them and have been a member ever since. I don't regret it for one minute. [Ben Ivell](#)

When the Americans arrived, members of the 81st Airborne Division were stationed right outside Leicester. There were notices that if they wished to be received by Jewish people for Friday nights that they would be very welcome. A few of us gave our names to the Rabbi and he would sort it out. We were a bit disturbed because the Americans always arrived in a jeep with black drivers who were not allowed to come into the house. I had an au-pair girl, because I had two children and was working in my husband's warehouse, and I let the drivers in and my au-pair would entertain them. [Grace Henig](#)

There wasn't a lot to do in the blackout. We went to the pictures and the Palais de Dance. What could you do? You had to just make the best of it. [Benee Harris](#)

Bomb damage, Highfields 1940 (far left)

¹³ **Kosher/Kashrut**
Jewish dietary laws defining foods that are fit for eating

I had the happiest time of my life in Leicester.

I must say that, though I was born and bred in London and I loved London, I had the happiest time of my life in Leicester because first of all there weren't many Jewish girls so I was sought after. It was the first time I'd been away from home and I had to stand on my own feet. Apart from one big raid we heard the sirens but you never knew if the aeroplanes were going over Leicester for Coventry. Unfortunately bombs were dropped around the Leicester Jewish quarter and killed several families who had only just come from London the day before. [Esther Rowe](#)

By 1940/41 it was not possible to get spare parts to repair radio sets because materials were being used for the manufacture of equipment for the Armed Services. Even batteries for torches were in very short supply and the public needed to see as every street was in total darkness. [Frank May](#)

I was born in Leicester, 10 August 1940. I can still remember the sound of the sirens that punctuated the air. There was one bombing raid in 1943 when a lone German bomber made it to Leicester LMS station to carry out a bombing on the London-bound train that was reported afterwards

as carrying Winston Churchill. This was a night raid and the bomber made it to the target by means of carrying British roundels on the fuselage. The bombs it carried did not hit the station but dropped close to our house at Upper Conduit Street, situated alongside the railway line, destroying many houses. The windows of all the houses nearby were broken by the blast, ours included. This bomber was shot down over Rutland as it tried to return to occupied France. [Alan Langford](#)

My first memory of Leicester is of the air raids. I remember rushing out of the shelter in the middle of the night when a bomb fell across the road and my parents rushing out to fetch me back in again. We had lots of people staying with us in the war. People used to come up from London and knock on the door. They weren't personal friends of Mum and Dad, just acquaintances. It was terrible. We were all sleeping on top of each other but I can remember quite distinctly that when the house across the road had a direct hit those people all went back to London. [Malcolm Sollofe](#)

Our newsagent was a card-carrying Fascist and my father tackled him because he was only delivering our JC¹⁴ on Friday evenings instead of in the morning. Presumably he read it himself. Where we lived in Leicester few had ever met a Jewish person. [Leo Cohen](#)

¹⁴ **JC**
Jewish Chronicle newspaper

My mother used to go every week to the side of Nicols and get the kosher meat. She always kept a Jewish house, lit the candles every Friday night. She went to the Orthodox Shul and the ladies' social club a few times but didn't like it. She was glad to get back to London when the war was over. [Edna Gillson](#)

In the war there were a lot of Sephardie families in Leicester. Mr and Mrs Benedict were Czech and had arrived from the camp at Buckenwald. As a result he suffered from constant severe back pain. And there was Mr and Mrs Codron whose son, Michael Codron, is now a famous London impresario. In 1947 they all went back to London and I lost all of my friends. [Mathilda Applebaum](#)

During World War II there was not much social life but Hebrew classes were held after services on Saturday mornings, Sunday mornings and each night after school on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. As was customary, the accent was on Hebrew reading. [Leo Cohen](#)

At one point we couldn't go to Cheder¹⁵ because of the blackout so we went to each other's houses – all ages in together, 5 to 12 year olds. [Stella Louis](#)



We continued to have rationing for a long time after the war ended, and there was continual swapping of coupons between friends and neighbours. My mother, as most of her Jewish friends, would swap her bacon and ham coupons for butter, sugar or even materials as she was a professional dressmaker. We had an American base near Leicester and my cousin brought home a nice Jewish GI. He used to give her gifts, especially nylon stockings, and food parcels for the family, and bring us sweets and chewing gum. We were sorry when they stopped seeing each other. [Zadia Schneider](#)

[Knitting for the troops – Ladies Guild Wartime Knitting Circle](#)

¹⁵[Cheder](#)
Hebrew classes for children held mainly on a Sunday morning

War-Work

We used to exchange our bacon coupons for sweets.

I used to give the shopkeeper my ration book and he kept my bacon and gave me extra butter but we were all very healthy. We didn't have much but we were on a very healthy diet. It was very difficult getting kosher meat in the war, and fish, and I am constantly amazed when I remember the spread my mother could provide for Yom Tovim¹⁶ and particularly Sederim¹⁷. [Stella Louis](#)

We used to exchange our bacon coupons for sweets. [Katherine May](#)

Everything was rationed. If ever you saw a queue in Leicester you got into it. [Lily Pela](#)



When I arrived in Leicester I had to go before a tribunal because I'd walked out on my war-work in London. You didn't just leave war-work in those days. It was so quiet in Leicester and they wanted me to go back to London so I just sat there in the tribunal in front of three of them and said, 'I don't care what you do to me but I'm not going back to London.' They let me off on condition that I got local war-work so I got a job in an engineering firm down East Park Road. [Sarah Page](#)

During the war Dad joined the Auxiliary Fire Service. With his tailoring background he had an idea for refurbishing the firemen's uniforms by turning them inside out and resewing them. This extended the life of the uniform after the outsides became worn. The idea was put to the Home Office and got as far as a trial stage. [Mike Jacobs](#)

I came to Leicester at the tender age of 13. My father was a scientist engineer specialising in aero engines. Leicester was a big area for that so he was transferred from where we lived in Grimsby and made general manager of all the Armstrong Siddeley factories in the area. In 1940 I joined the Air Training Corps, a stepping stone to getting into the Royal Air Force.

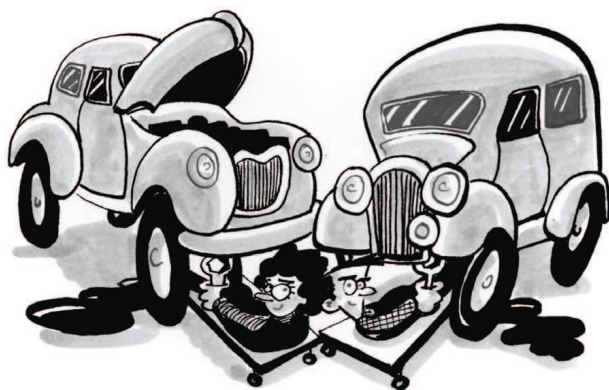
¹⁶[Yom Tovim](#)
High Holy Days

¹⁷[Seder \(plural Sederim\)](#)
Service and meal held in Jewish houses on the first two evenings of the Passover remembering the Exodus from Egypt

I was away during the 1940s but viewed Leicester as home by then. I was demobbed at the end of 1946, joined a motor tyres organisation and have been in the business ever since. *Ben Ivell*

Soon after being evacuated to Leicester I was called up to do war-work. I was sent to a factory making leather jerkins for the soldiers but I was only small and the jerkins were so heavy that I couldn't lift them. They put me on linings but they were still too heavy. So I had to go to the Chilprufe Buildings on East Park Road and I worked in the stores keeping records of communications. *Lily Pela*

When the domestic permit restriction was released there was a general meeting about war-work. They said they had a motor mechanics' class. I put my hand up and said, 'Can girls join?' And they said, 'Why not!' I had six months training as a general engineer with a bit of motor mechanic work too. I was the only girl in the class. They found me a job at Batchelor Bowles on Mayfield Road Corner. I didn't do the very heavy work but I've been on my back on a board under the car. That was how I met my husband. He was working on the car next to me. *Margot Laxton*



My husband, Marcus, and I were married in April 1944 in London and moved to Leicester right away as it was there he found his first job as a mechanical engineer with Metalastik. *Gabriele Horovitz*

The Social Club

On Upper Tichborne Street, a few doors away from the shul, was the social club. My father used to play cards there, namely Klabberjass (Klobiosh), played throughout the world, but a game particularly associated with Jewish culture. *Tony Green*

During the wartime my father was very keen on going to the social club in Highfield Street to play cards and meet with other Jewish people. *Malcolm Sollofe*

The Jewish Social Club served as a hub for the Community as, at the time, we had no other meeting place apart from the School Rooms. The first floor was let to the Maccabi¹⁸ and on the ground floor we had a large room where members would come on any evening except Friday and be able to take part in a game of cards. The food served was exceptionally good although rather limited in choice. The vienna sausages and the saveloys were always a favourite and coupled with chips or latkes and a sweet and sour cucumber one would feel very satisfied. We had a caretaker, Charles, who lived somewhere in the upper regions of the building. One evening I was standing near the kitchen as we were about to close. Charles asked if Lew Cohen, who ran the kitchen, had finished with the large saucepan which had been used during the evening to boil the sausages.

'Yes, but what are you going to do with the saucepan?' asked Lew. 'I always take the saucepan upstairs and drink the water,' replied Charles. The water was now very pink after its evening toils and we could not stop laughing. The kitchen was eventually taken over by Mr and Mrs Zeid and the menu was enlarged to include Mrs Zeid's excellent home cooking. It was a sad day when the LJSC closed its doors. *Alan Louis*

I used to socialise in the club in Highfield Street. Small functions were held in the room upstairs. Adults played cards and there was a sort of restaurant. I was at a function there when a GI bride, Joyce Citron, got a message that her husband had just arrived back from fighting. I'll never forget how she shot out of the room to go home to him!

Stella Louis

¹⁸ Maccabi
Jewish youth club



Reproduced courtesy
of Leicester Mercury

Room and Board

I believe that the first available kosher food in Leicester was found early in the 1940s. The Barnett family had a boarding house in Queens Road where kosher food was available and, in fact, this was where our Chazan, Reverend Zucker, was living. At the same time the Goldman family had similar facilities in St James Road where our Minister, Reverend Unterman, was residing. *Alan Louis*

Every soldier who wanted would come for a meal.

I was in Leicester for three years and they were very, very happy years indeed. Wartime life at the Barnett's was wonderful. Everyone was welcome and every soldier who wanted could come for a meal. They were a lovely family who had come from South Wales. They had a really lovely daughter who had a non-Jewish friend called Dillis. Dillis was dark haired and I was much fairer. Some of the guests would start to speak in Yiddish thinking I was the non-Jewish friend and wouldn't understand what they were saying – but I did. The Barnetts' son was in the army. He was a prisoner of war in Burma and came back when the war was finished a skeleton. It was very sad to see him like that. *Esther Rowe*

Shortly after the Barnetts closed their boarding house Mrs Rosenthal opened The Rowans, a large house on London Road. This was a fairly high class establishment

and was frequented by many well known stage personalities. I used to eat there regularly. I remember once meeting the famous Tex Ritter who had visited for Sunday lunch. I was sitting in the lounge and suddenly he walked in from the dining room and called out, 'Anybody here from Texas?' He was a charming character who was to perform later that day at the De Montfort Hall. The food at The Rowans was nothing spectacular and consisted of traditional Eastern European Jewish dishes. My attraction at the time was probably more to do with Rhoda (the daughter of the owner) than the quality of the food. There was a constant flow of entertainers who would be performing at the Palace Theatre and would come to The Rowans to eat as the restaurant facilities in Leicester were practically non-existent. The food was the usual – chicken soup, chopped liver, sweet and sour cucumbers. *Alan Louis*

My grandmother, Esther Silverman, came from the East End just before the blitz. Mother found her a house in Westcotes and she stayed until she died in 1958. She took in Jewish students and lodgers, some who had come from the Holocaust. One in particular who had arrived from the camps was called Paul Karpeles and my clearest memory of him is that he loved sardines and was always eating them. She did all the cooking herself, koshered all the meat, everything. *Pauline Balkin*

Weddings – From War to Peacetime

Mark Henig, my late husband, was born in Leicester. I met him in London in 1938. We were introduced to one another. I think that the person who introduced us had 'a view'. He started to write to me. I went to Leicester for a weekend and by then it was assumed we would get engaged. We got married in 1939. *Grace Henig*

I had a wartime wedding at the synagogue on 3 January 1943. We braved London for a week for our honeymoon and stayed at the Cumberland Hotel and thank goodness no bombs fell while we were there. My husband, Joe, hadn't been called up yet because he was working on optical instruments for the war at Taylor Taylor Hobson. It was secret, all hush hush. *Frances Denning*



I was a GI bride. Saul was stationed about 30 miles from Leicester. He was in charge of the supplies. I met him at the Officers' Club at a dance. They used to send transport for girls for their dances. They needed partners. There were a lot of Jewish GIs there and we were the only two Jewish girls so we had lots of dances but when I saw Saul it was love at first sight. We got married in '45. We married on

a Tuesday and Saul had to go back on Thursday so we had two days together and then I didn't see him again for nine months. *Benee Harris*

I got married on embarkation leave. Dave was stationed near Nottingham. I went up there for a few days. We went to the NAFFI and shared a bar of Cadbury's ration chocolate. *Lily Pela*

I got married two days after VE Day – May 10th 1945. My wedding was the first wedding in the shul after the war. My mother was so against me getting married in uniform that she found me a wedding dress and even a bouquet, and the lady next door, who was Egyptian, leant me a veil. The wedding was arranged all in about five minutes. Eddie came home on Monday night. Tuesday was VE Day and we got married on Thursday. How it happened I don't know. The only person we could get hold of was a man called Mr Sunshine – but sunshine he was not. He was so uncooperative. So Eddie said, 'My father is President of the Congregation in Leicester and if you can't get the licence we'll get married in a registry office.' Mr Sunshine got the licence and the wedding was lovely. *Rosa Lebens*

GI Bride
Wedding of Benee
and GI Saul Harris
(far left)

Rosa Lebens changes
out of uniform for her
wedding day
(below)



Joe and Frances
Denning (below)



Wartime Leicester Jewish Voices

I met my future husband, Frank, in 1948. He was demobbed from the army, saw my photo on my aunt's mantelpiece and was waiting to meet me. On 9 January 1949 the Leicester Synagogue celebrated its Jubilee with the Chief Rabbi, Israel Brodie, coming from London. It so happened that on that very day we were celebrating our engagement, Frank and myself, and as my future father-in-law was President of the shul, the Chief Rabbi came to the house and joined our engagement party. We were very happy to have him share our Simcha¹⁹. *Katherine May*

I remember Reverend Teichmann delivering the address in his broken English with his hands shaking as he held his notes.

When I married in 1950 we didn't have a minister, only Reverend Teichmann, who had recently come to Leicester from the concentration camp. I remember Reverend Teichmann delivering the address in his broken English with his hands shaking as he held his notes as this was his first wedding. Abe (Tiny) Goldberg was the only lay man with authority to perform marriages so he performed our ceremony

and sang with his beautiful voice. The shul management committee, feeling sorry for Geoffrey and I not having a Minister to officiate at our wedding, organised a choir under the direction of David David so ours was the first choral wedding. Most weddings after ours had 'the choir' for at least the next 30 years or more. *Stella Louis*

I joined the shul choir around post-Bar Mitzvah time which was trained and conducted by Mr David. I sang at many weddings with David Simons and Geoffrey Goldstein, and was rewarded with the princely sum of 10/- per wedding. *Alan Langford*

My brother Geoffrey and I were both members of the choir. After David H David left the choir was led by Joe Kay. *Alan Louis*

There were lots of weddings in 1950. I was married to Frank May whose family had been in Leicester for about 150 years. The Leicester weddings were wonderful. We had lovely singers in the community. All the ladies were very beautifully dressed with wonderful hats but it was difficult getting food for the weddings as rationing was still around. *Katherine May*



In 1950 Stella and Geoffrey Louis have the first choral wedding

¹⁹ Simcha
Happy time/
celebration

Chapter 2

Creating a Community in Post-War Leicester

Not Easy Being Jewish in Leicester

School Assemblies

A Way of Life

Speaking Yiddish

Food – Lockshen and Bubbling Blintzes

Committees – A Social Way of Life

The Communal Hall

A Shrinking Community