

Kimberley Ex-Pats Newsletter #49 20 April 2022

Col Sir David Harris: Rev Bernard Wulf, in Kimberley 1941-1943, on his death & funeral; his life in Kimberley, and his family connections.

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London April 2022

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## **Rev Bernard Wulf in Kimberley – during the War – 1941-1943**



Rev Bernard Wulf served in Kimberley during the war from 1941 to 43. I knew nothing about him – but reading the transcript of an interview from the archives at UCT, I have learned what a forward-thinking and interesting man he was and the special time he served in Kimberley which included being Chaplain to the Air School and also being in post at the death and funeral of Kimberley's most famous son, **Col, Sir David Harris KCMC**

Rev Wulf was a graduate of the famous Ponewyz Yeshiva in Lithuania. He came to South Africa as a very young, qualified Rabbi in 1925. He served smaller congregations like Carnarvon and Victoria West before going to Upington for eight years.

Bernard Wulf married an Upington girl, Mollie Nurick, whose mother Sally Sarah Nurick (née Goldberger) was born in Kimberley. (Sarah's sister Dora Goldberger married Maurice Friedman of Kimberley (parents of Judge Joe Friedman) and her sister Julia Goldberger of

Kimberley married Adolf Friedlander, the brother of my grandmother Amalie Bergman (née Friedlander). Mollie's father Abram Nurick was a well-to-do businessman in Upington. Rev Wulf and Mollie went back to Upington afterwards, where he was also in business with this father-in-law.

### **His time in Kimberley was truly special as he relates:**

He said: 'Kimberley always had ministers provided by England, trained at Jews College. They tried to maintain the same status, the same type of congregation as Cape Town's Gardens Shul, because the original congregants were English pioneers there, the Oppenheims, Harrises, Barnatos and all that history. And then they had an advert in the paper they were looking for somebody with my qualifications. I applied and it turned out to be a temporary position at the time

when a minister that they had brought out from England [Rev Yesorsky] joined the forces and went 'up North' as a Chaplain. I took it on, and we got on very well together. I was the first from Eastern Europe who occupied the pulpit in that shul, beautiful shul [above] the most beautiful shul in South Africa. Somehow, I fitted in with respect.'

### **He describes the situation he found in Kimberley**

'There were three types of Jews in Kimberley. There was still a remnant of Jews who used to talk about Rev Harris Isaacs of 50 years ago and there were the Eastern Europeans, my fellow immigrants from Poland and other parts, older than me of course who came out long before, and there were quite a number of local born. Somehow or other, I managed to fit in with all sections of the community and we got on very well together.' [I wonder if anyone remembers Rev Wulf or has any photographs of him?]

### **Rev Bernard Wulf's adventures as Chaplain to the Air Force**

Rev Wulf describes his time in the Army while in Kimberley: 'There was a big Air Force camp in Kimberley, and I was made the Jewish Chaplain and given the rank of Captain. I organised services and other facilities for the boys there and I got to know them each one and I took a lot of interest in them as well as generally in the city. The army was very cooperative. Every Friday night the Air Force boys used to come in full force to shul and during the week when I used to go there to give services, they were all available and I had good attendances. I used to give the other Chaplains a chance to come to my services, the Methodist ministers and so on ... in this respect I would like to tell you a little incident.



'One evening I arrived for service and there was a YMCA hall which had various rooms. We the Jewish boys were supposed to assemble at a certain room. When I came, I found that most of the congregants were on duty and I only had 3 or 4 Jewish recruits, so we started talking. While we were talking, I noticed a sergeant passing by up and down, eventually he came up to me: I was in uniform, which for me had Mogen Dovid on my cap and epaulettes and he saluted. He said Sir may I speak to you, I said certainly what can I do for you? He said we of the Dutch Reform Church assembled in room so-and-so, but our padre Bekker has not turned up, will you take our service?

'I looked at him and said you realise to what denomination I belong, he says yes, I know, and you know the best attendance you had was from the Afrikaners, so I said to the boys in my room, the 3, 4 boys "Come on" let's see what we can do.

'So, I came into the room, and they all stood up and I introduced myself, I could have done it in Afrikaans but by that time I was quite fluent in English. I had my set service, so I said to them you can sing any of your Psalms that you know and then we will carry on. They sang a Psalm, I read to them another Psalm, I addressed them on the goodwill, the usual address in war years, what we are up to and what we are trying to achieve by doing this, and it turned out to be quite successful evening, half an hour, they all filed by past me and saluted, and thanked me. To take part in inter-denominational services was not uncommon, we often used to come together in services for the soldiers on parade ... but to be directly delivering a non-Jewish service was something else!'

## Death and Funeral of Colonel Sir David Harris (b London, 1852)

Rev Bernard Wulf related his experience of something else, which he says does not happen to every Jewish minister. He explained: 'Colonel Sir David Harris, KCMG, was a well-accepted Jew in his day, He was a Director of De Beers when it was formed. He was also the Colonel of the Kimberley Regiment and had been in the Parliament.

When I came, he was about 90, paralysed, sitting either in a chair or in bed. I used to visit him very, very often, at least once a week and we became quite friendly. Contrary to other pioneer Jews like the Oppenheims and so forth, he kept to his Jewish faith and remained in Kimberley. [His marriage to Rosa Gabriel had been the first Jewish wedding solemnised in Kimberley in 1873 even before there was a synagogue.] He was very much Jewish in his behaviour and so on and eventually he became very ill.



'One afternoon, the nurse said to me, it looks to me like we are coming to the end. People called me when there was a death any time day or night, so I said to her don't hesitate to call me. 'I was called at about five o'clock the following morning, [23 September 1942]. I actually held his hand while he died, I said a prayer, his daughter was with him, his daughter was married out of faith. She turned round to me and said "Mr. Wulf I married out of faith, but I'd like my father to have a proper Jewish funeral", I said "Certainly".

'Now in all the years of my service I have spoken on all different types of occasions, but I made up my mind from the first day never to prolong a funeral. I never delivered an oration, whoever it is, I looked for opportunities at later dates, maybe the shiva house, maybe at a special memorial service and so on, so I said certainly, I immediately phoned the Chevra Kadisha to make arrangements but everything got stuck, the minute his death was announced – they came.....'

Rev Wulf said: 'I don't know if I was right, it depends on which way you look at it. He was Colonel, pre-Boer War and so on, he was an ex-Member of Parliament a man of great standing and all wanted to give him honour, and they came together, the Mayor from his side, the Army from the other side, they wanted to give him a military and civic funeral.

'I had to think on my feet, how to marry, without offence to either, the Jewish requirements and the honour the military and civic authorities wanted to pay to this great and popular soldier, statesman, politician, financier and Jew.

'Now what does that consist of: the Mayor, the Councillors and so on, in all their robes following the hearse: the military wanted to give a company of soldiers with a band, now this gave me a bit of a shock, I did not know what to do, if it means giving honour to a Jew – and through this perhaps we



can bring together closer the Jewish sections, the Jews and the non-Jews, and they want to honour a Jew, I said all right we will do it. They said, we want three days to organise it, so they were organising this.

I stipulated that from the house, the pall bearers, from the house to the hearse, and from the hearse, I mean the Chevra Kadisha will do their job as usual. I followed the hearse in the car and then followed the military and the Mayor and Civic Dignitaries and the band, all this, down to the cemetery the pall bearers even non-Jews until the gates of the cemetery.

‘Once we arrived at the cemetery gates (left) I insisted the Chevra Kadisha must take over. It was quite an occasion, quite an occasion, and I said to them I am not going to make any oration I do not want to treat Sir David in any other way than any other Jew, but I said to the Mayor, the City Council can organise a memorial

service two weeks later or so, they had a daily newspaper there, advertise as much as you can, and we organised a memorial service two weeks later in the shul, in the synagogue, and there I will deliver my oration. And that is what we did ... this is something maybe a minister of a big congregation will not have this opportunity. As I say it gave me a bit of a sleepless night, I know in certain respects I am not doing right, but I had to weigh the pros and cons. I thought to myself ... it was a very trying time, (1942) we had the Nazis working, we did not know what’s happened to our people and this gave us an opportunity to bring us together.’ What a brave and forward-thinking man. I am sure he did absolutely the right thing.

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Let us look a little closer at his life in Kimberley and his family connections

Colonel Sir David Harris

Grand Old Man of Kimberley

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE,

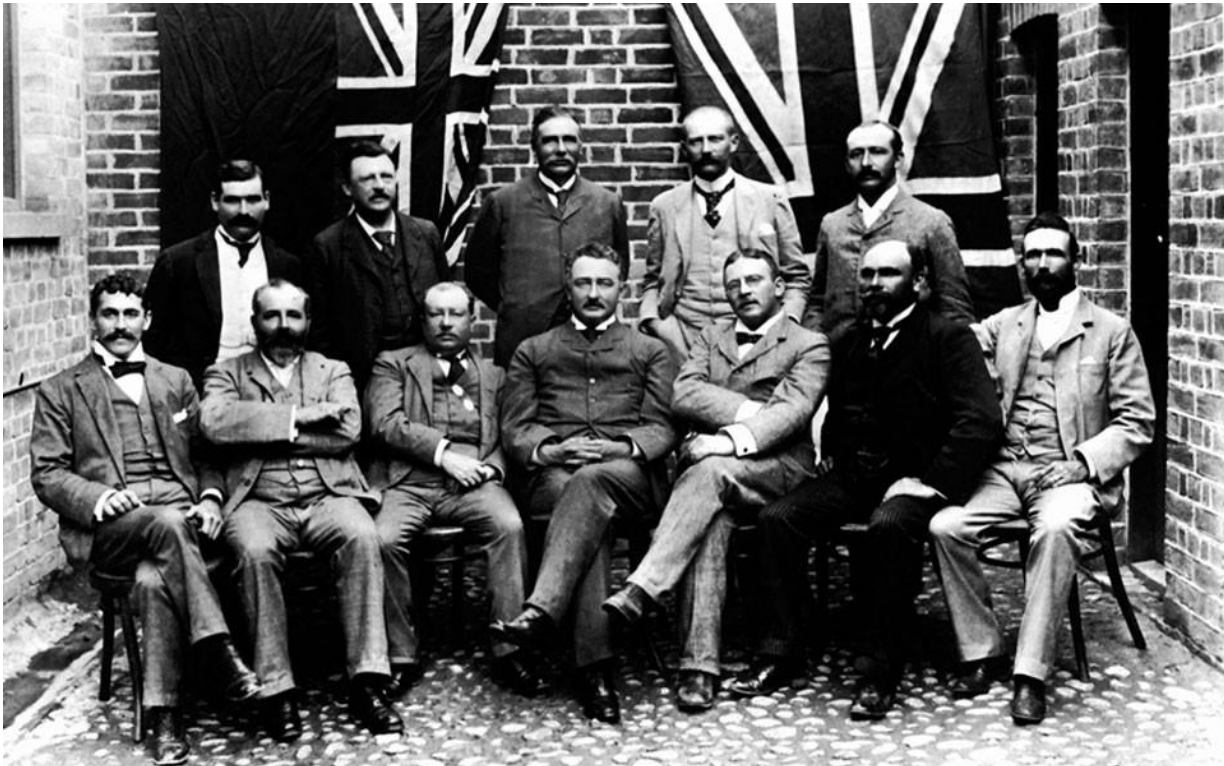
from information from the Kimberley Calls and Recalls Facebook page of Steve Lunderstadt and other information from connected families



David Harris was born in the City of London on 12 July 1852, the son of Woolf Harris and Phoebe Harris (nee Romain). He had four brothers and two sisters, and was educated at Coxford's College, City of London. He was a cousin of Barnett Isaacs, later to be known as Barney Barnato. Both became legends in the diamond saga.

Diamonds

In 1871, at the age of 19 years, he emigrated to South Africa. Making his way (walking for six weeks, next to an oxcart) to the 'diamond fields', he initially invested in a claim in the Dutoitspan Mine, which he worked with moderate success. He also learned the business of diamond buying and became a buyer. He later acquired new claims and became an associate of Cecil John Rhodes. He rose to the very top of the diamond industry and in 1897 was made a director of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. He retired as a director in 1931. (In this picture of the De Beers Consolidated Mines directors of 1893 David Harris is standing on the right).



The others are: Standing: l – r 1. E Bernheim 2. William Craven (Sec) 3. Gardner F. Williams (GM) 4. Ludwig Breitmeyer 5. Lt Col. David Harris. Seated: 1. Woolf Joel 2. Charles Nind 3. Harry Mosenthal 4. Cecil Rhodes 5. Barney Barnato 6. Francis Oates 7. George Compton

He was also a director of the New Jagersfontein Mining and Exploration Company, the South African Diamond Corporation, the Kimberley Diamond Cutting Company, the Premier Diamond Mining Company, the Griqualand West Diamond Mining Company, and the Bultfontein Consolidated Company.

First Jewish wedding in Kimberley

David Harris was married to Rosa Gabriel of Pomerania (Prussia) in November 1873. This was the very first Jewish wedding to take place in Kimberley. It took place even before there was a synagogue in Kimberley. (The first wood and iron synagogue structure was only built in 1875).

David had met Rosa on board ship on a return journey from England in 1872 and they married the following year. They chose to continue to live in Kimberley (when many wealthy contemporaries had built palaces on Park Lane in London). David's love of the country, of his Jewish heritage, and in particular of Kimberley and its people, was shared by his wife Rosa who became as widely known in the town as her husband, beloved for her 'charming courteous personality, entirely free from affectation' and her tireless efforts for charitable causes with 'her ever active desire to be of some assistance to the poor and the distressed'.



They lived at 136 Dutoitspan Road. At the front was an iron railing and garden. (Paved over for car parking in this Picture).

The union resulted in seven children, of whom one died at birth. One of their sons was Herbert Sextus Harris who became the Commanding Officer of the Kimberley Regiment. Read

Sextus story here: [Harris, Colonel Herbert Sextus](#)

Their other children were [Violet Alberta Gielqud](#); [Phoebe \(Kenzie\) Harris](#); [Baby Harris](#); [Elise Gabrielle Harris](#); [Wilfred Solomon Harris](#); [Harold Victor Harris](#) David was the Brother of [Henry Harris](#); [Alexander Harris](#); [Barnett 'Barney' Harris](#); [John \(Jacob\) Harris](#); [Hannah 'Anna' Speelman](#)

At the back of the house was a beautiful ballroom with ornately panelled walls and a stage for the dance band. In later years when I (Geraldine Auerbach) was growing up it was the dance studio of Joyce Hooper that I and friends happily danced in each week, not realising its historic significance. Still later it was moved lock stock and barrel to the Big Hole Museum. Here is a picture of my daughter Loren in this dance hall at the Big Hole Museum in 1998. You can still see the holes in the wall where the barre was attached for the Ballet School.

Rosa passed away in 1911 (David died in 1942).



Politician

Harris was elected a member for Beaconsfield in the Cape Colonial Legislative Assembly in 1897. He was re-elected in 1904 and retained his seat at the Union in 1910. He retired in 1929 as the longest serving member having served for 32 years.

Soldier

He was a keen and long serving Volunteer Soldier. In 1876 he answered a call for volunteers for the 9th Frontier War, became a Sergeant in the Dutoitspan Hussars and went on active service with them. He became Paymaster and Quartermaster in the Diamond Fields Horse in 1877, and a Lieutenant in 1878, serving as Adjutant under Sir Charles Warren.

He was mentioned in despatches and was awarded the South Africa Medal 1877-79 with a clasp for the Gaika-Gcaleka campaign. He subsequently took part in the Griqualand West campaign of 1878. On 13 August 1888, Captain Harris became the Commanding Officer of the Victoria Rifles, until he resigned in October 1890. In December 1890 he became Commanding Officer with the rank of Major, of the Kimberley Rifles. He was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in May 1894 and remained Commanding Officer until December 1895. In January 1896 he became commander of the Griqualand West Brigade and took part in the suppression of the Langeberg Uprising 1896-97, for which he was awarded the Cape of Good



Hope General Service Medal with one clasp. Lieutenant-Colonel Harris was awarded the Volunteer Decoration, this notified in the Cape of Good Hope Gazette of 8 December 1896. Harris took part in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 when he served as Commanding Officer of the Kimberley Town Guard. For his services he was mentioned in Lord Robert's despatch (London Gazette 19 April 1901), was appointed a CMG (1900), and was awarded the Queen's Medal with one clasp and the King's Medal with two. On 1 January 1903 he was appointed Honorary Colonel of the Kimberley Regiment and remained such until his death. Colonel Harris was appointed a KCMG in the Coronation Honours of 1911. (This Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George is a British order of chivalry founded on 28 April 1818 by George, Prince Regent, later King George IV, while he was acting as regent for his father, King George III. It is named in honour of two military saints, St Michael and St George and given at the monarch's pleasure)

Coming to England to be knighted in 1911, he stayed at the Carlton Hotel. On 11 August 1911 there was a serious fire in which he only just escaped with his life but one in which **most of his medals were lost**. In later life. Harris wrote his autobiography, Pioneer, Soldier and Politician, published in 1931. He died in Kimberley on 23 September 1942 and is buried in the Jewish cemetery of Kimberley.



In the foyer of the Memorial Road Synagogue Kimberley is this plaque:

It was erected by the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation in grateful memory of the life and achievements of Co. Sir David Harris KCMC, VD Pioneer, Soldier and Statesman – and his wife Rosa. At the time of the design and building of the Memorial Road Synagogue in 1902, Sir David was the alternating President with Gustave Bonas and together they were largely responsible for erecting such a beautiful synagogue in Kimberley. His wife Rosa predeceased him by 31 years.

Family connections to Sir David Harris

Beverly Solsky and Grant Immelman

Beverly Solsky wrote to the Immelmans

Dear Sandy & Grant

It is with intrigue that I read the email from Geraldine in which she said that Sir David Harris was a relative of yours. Sir David Harris was my great-great-uncle! Let me explain:

My paternal grandfather Benjamin Buirski married **Daisy Speelman** who was Sir David's niece in July 1902, my great grandmother Hannah was Sir David's sister. What brought my grandmother to South Africa was because her mom and her two sisters came out from England to see their brother and uncle.

My childhood was peppered with stories of "Uncle Dave" as they referred to him. The family used to go backwards and forwards to London where they resided and then purchased an apartment above the Odeon Cinema in Sea Point on the Main Road where they lived for many years. Out of the three nieces only my grandmother married, and the two sisters lived out their lives in the flat dying at the ages of 92 and 94. My sister and I were very close to them and as children we used to visit them every week.

I spent part of my childhood in Kimberley and only a few weeks ago I became connected and learnt about the Website which Geraldine has been instrumental in creating. She has done an amazing job together with Eli Rabinowitz.

The website has ignited so many memories for me and I am delighted that Sir David is included he was from all accounts an extraordinary individual. I have read his memoirs – my sister has a copy of the book she lives in Cape Town. My family and I have been in Sydney since 1987.

I would be delighted to hear from you and hear your side of the story.

Fond regards, Beverly

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Sandy Immelman wrote back

Hi Beverly

Thank you so much for your lovely email! It is amazing when one starts going back through history to see all the connections and to try and link them.

My connection is rather tenuous, so I am cc-ing in my mother-in-law's family in the hopes that they have more information about Sir David. Basically, my husband's grandmother married David McKenzie who was the son of Phoebe née Harris, Sir David's daughter.

I have so enjoyed reading some of the info from the website as well as the information on the Facebook page. I look forward to tracking down a copy of Sir David's book - am hoping someone in the family will have one for us to read.

Thank you for sharing your memories – I hope we will be able to reciprocate.

Kind regards, Sandy

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Read more about this colourful character in the [Newsletter #32 December 2020](#) featuring Jews and Diamonds in Kimberley. Specially see in this Newsletter the lovely story he told Percy Fitzpatrick about Rhodes in 'How the Christian beat the Jews'

Read also his retirement from his directorships in 1931 in the Kimberley website Pioneers page here: https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/David_Harris.html

And especially recommended is that you read the true story of how it was and the part played by Barney Barnato David Harris and Rhodes in the early years, in my monograph of the key player: **Alfred Beit** https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Alfred_Beit.html

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## Pre-Pesach Zoom 10 April 2022



Here are a few words about our latest Zoom: Barney spoke to us about Pesach in Kimberley. He opens the shul every Friday night. Sometimes there are 3 people, occasionally 5. On Purim they invited several guests of the civic and faith communities in Kimberley and the 'brocha' with hamantaschen supervised by Maud was devoured eagerly. Well done, Barney! It is sad to hear that one of Barney's key allies, Barry Katz is about to leave – or indeed has already left – for Cape Town.

Mark Horwitz in California spoke about ladies' fashion in Kimberley. We all fondly remember Mi-Lady's and recalled the 'boy' coming round on his bike with a box of dresses 'on Appro'.

We had a plethora of Toubes on the Zoom, from both Kimberley and Bulawayo. The Toubes of Bulawayo are in some way related to the Bergmans or the Hendlers. Yvonne (Jawitz) is my age and I remember her and her family stopping by in Kimberley on their way to Muizenberg. Her bother Mervyn Toube was also on the Zoom. Their parents were Phil and Ann Toube of Bulawayo.

Other Toubes on the Zoom were Trevor and Daphne (Gillis) as well as Hilton Toube born in Kimberley in 1949 son of Louis and Gerty Toube. Louis was Abie Toubes brother. To confuse matters further Hilton has a brother who is also Mervyn Toube (who was not there) who was born in Kimberley in 1947. (You can read about these Toubes here [Toube, Louis, Gerty & Family](#)). Also on the zoom were David and Shirley Allen (Kimberley), Michelle Walt (Toronto, David Levinsohn, and his sister Norma and Milton Friedman (Los Angeles) Cyril Salkinder (Cape Town) Jonathan Joseph (London) and Eli Rabinowitz (our webmaster from Perth Australia)

If you missed it or want to catch up, you can see the Zoom session on this Video link:  
<https://youtu.be/ZFtFHa7FpjQ>

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[Also notes on our Kimberley zoom on April 10](#)

[Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London April 2022](#)

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