

Barnerd (Barney) Cohen (1876 – January 31, 1951)

Diamond Man and Mayor of Kimberley



Story compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London August 2021, from texts and photographs supplied by his granddaughter-in-law **Adele Cohen** in Vancouver and information on the family from grandchildren the late **Sheila Grant** and **Raymond, David and Brian Cohen**. Additional information from Laura Konviser in London, daughter in law of Rev Maurice Konviser.

Barnerd (aka Barney) Cohen, (sometimes spelled as Bernard) was born in 1876. He was the son of **Isaac and Pearl (aka Perlie) Cohen**, who had settled in the Kimberley area well before the turn of the twentieth century. Barney spent most of his life in Kimberley. The Diamond Fields Advertiser (DFA), the local Kimberley newspaper confirmed that: 'He [Barney] lived in the district in his youth' and 'in his younger days he was a keen polo player and was instrumental in forming the polo club in Kimberley.'

According to his granddaughter, the late **Sheila Grant**, (who had hoped to compile this story for the website) her great-grandfather **Isaac Cohen** owned a salt pan and was also a farmer and cattle speculator. His death was reported in the DFA of 30 Sept 1897 thus: Died - At Saratoga, Salt Pan, on Monday 27th Inst., after a short illness, Isaac Cohen, in his 53rd year. Barney was 21.

Sheila recalls hearing that Barney took over his father's business at a young age. He had two brothers, the older one **Ben Cohen** and the younger one **John Cohen**. According to Barney's son **Cecil Cohen**, Barney also owned a car dealership, and, together with his brother John, owned the Washington Market Butchery. John and Barney were well known figures around town due to their philanthropic commitments. According to the DFA, dated 25 October 1918, John was the vice president of the Jewish Benevolent Society when he sadly passed away before his time, during the flu epidemic of 1918. Barney was also a **diamond buyer** and, under a licence issued to him on 2 September 1904, acquired a **prospector** licence to dig on the Vooruitzicht Estate.

In 1901, Barney married **Bertha Sophia Pauline Kleinman** in Kimberley. Bertha, together with her five siblings and parents, **Moses Kleinman** and his wife **Leah (née Lewis)**, had arrived in Beaconsfield, adjacent to Kimberley, in 1888. Originally from Lithuania, they first settled in Oudtshoorn. However, when diamonds were discovered in Kimberley, they 'pulled stakes and struck out for the diggings, first at Koffiefontein in the Orange Free State, then on to Kimberley' where they lived for the rest of their lives. Both Moses and Leah Kleinman are buried in Kimberley – Moses in 1934 and Leah ten years later in 1944.

According to the Kimberley Directories and Voters' Lists, Barney and Bertha Cohen's family home was Bella Vista, 4 Lodge Road, Belgravia (Pictured below) It was opposite the Oppenheimer's home at 7 Lodge Road. This is where they brought up their six children **Frances Dagmar** (1904), **Isaac Harold** (1905), **Cecil Meyer** (1907), **Ruth Miriam** (1912), **Eric Abraham** (1915), and **Rhoda Anita** (1917). Brian Cohen (son of Cecil) says 'there is evidence of a seventh child. The register shows a **Wilfred Reginald**, born in 1909, but I have never heard mention of him, and no idea what became of him, but it is a recorded birth – and the gap is there'.

You will be able to read Cecil's story soon on the website under families Cohen Cecil and Jean already you can read about Cecil's (p24) and Eric's (p12) war service, below and also in the article on [Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#)



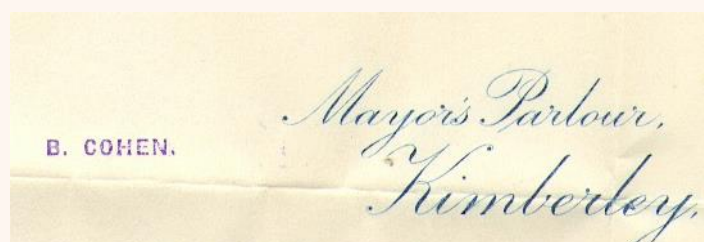
Tragically, while on holiday in Melrose Hall, Muizenberg, Barney's wife Bertha, who was pregnant at the time, succumbed to complications due to the 1918 influenza outbreak. Her youngest child Anita was only 18 months old. Before dying, she asked the children's nanny, Nurse Magrieta Susanna Reyneke, to look after her children. 'Nurse', as she was called by the children, took it literally and devoted her entire life to the six children.

According to her obituary in the DFA of 25 October 1918, Bertha (née Kleinman) had taken an active interest in the public life of Kimberley. She had been a tireless worker aiding many war funds as well as the War effort. She had also organised a bazaar in aid of the Russian Jewish War Relief Fund. The Kleinman family sadly lost three daughters and a son-in-law to

the 1918/19 flu epidemic.

Barney becomes one of the six Jewish Mayors of Kimberley

Barney joined the City Council on 24 February 1909. Except for a break from 2 September 1913 until 29 June 1920, he served on the Council. He was initially the Deputy Mayor before becoming the Mayor of Kimberley from September 1931 to September 1933.



When **Barney Cohen** became Mayor of Kimberley for 1931-32. Frances, his oldest daughter, occupied the position of Mayoress (as his wife had died in the 1918 flu) and earned the reputation of being the youngest mayoress in the Union. From a report in the DFA, dated 3 April 1935, she 'won the hearts of all citizens by her exceedingly efficient and charming performance of her duties'.

Barney was one of Kimberley's six Jewish mayors (see them listed on page 13). Rev Konviser, who was the minister of the community at the time, had the official title of '**Mayor's Chaplain**'.

Rev Konviser was very erudite, cultured and a great thinker, writer and orator. He made a big impression on audiences when he officiated at several significant civic events and conducted civic services in the Mayor's place of worship – the synagogue. The first was perhaps the most impressive – the **Mayoral investiture** in the synagogue.

Civic Procession to the Synagogue

When Barney was invested as Mayor in 1931, the Diamond Fields Advertiser wrote a long article describing the procession of civic organisations and leading citizens that accompanied him 'in State' to his place of worship. They said:

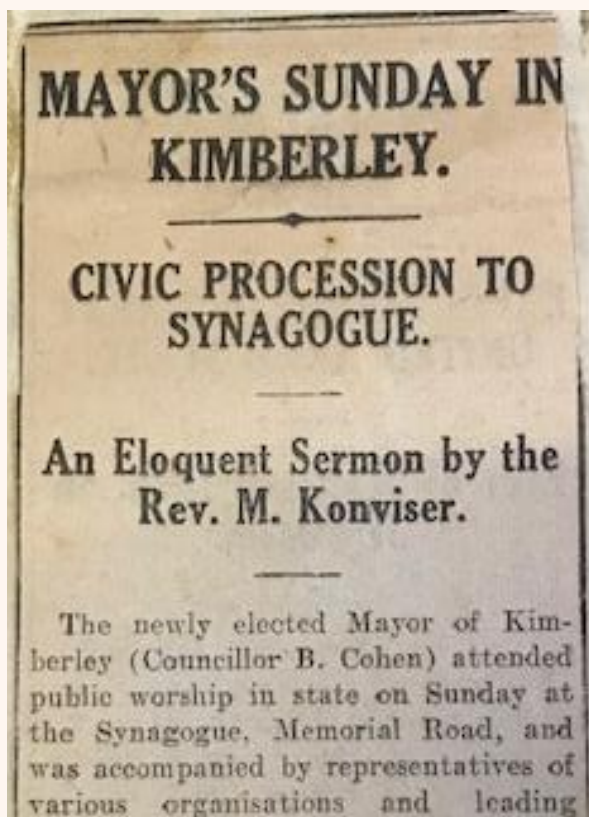
'It is a number of years since such a service was held in the synagogue [William Sagar had been the first Jewish mayor 1906-1908 and Sir Ernest Oppenheimer 1915-1917] and it aroused

widespread interest. It was a dusty and unpleasant day, but that did not detract from the attendance which was both large and representative.

They also printed many long columns with great detail about the actual service in the synagogue and the stirring oration of the young minister – aged 29 at the time! The DFA reported:

'The procession formed in the grounds of Belgravia Junior School and marched up Memorial Road to the synagogue. 'There was a full attendance of the council a strong muster of the British Empire Service League and ex-servicemen and a numerous body of town officials and citizens. 'The mayor wore his scarlet robe and gold chain and was accompanied by the Town Clerk, Mr AJ Beet.

'The Mayoress, Miss Cohen was accompanied by the wives of councillors and other ladies.

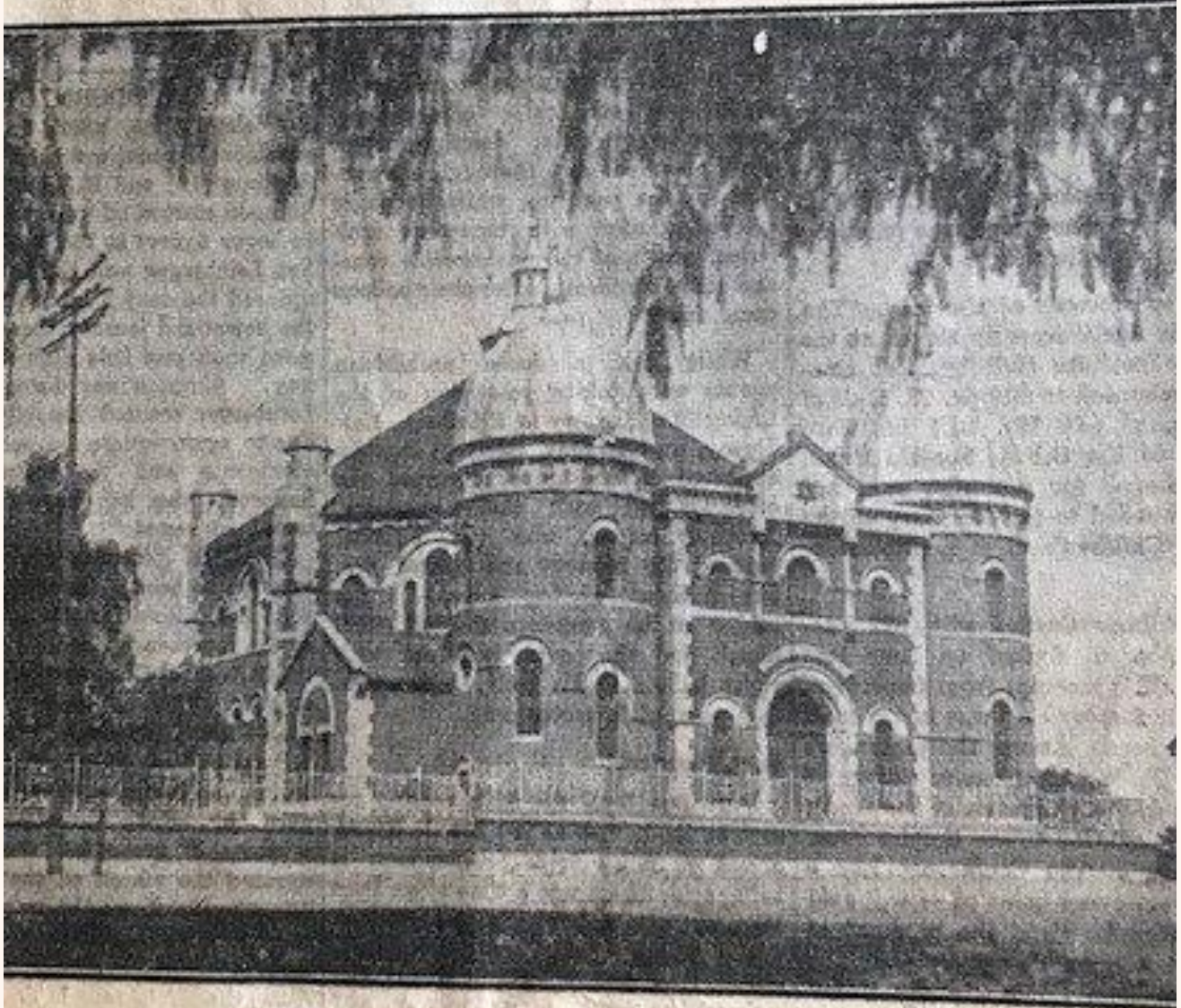


'De Beers Brass Band supplied the music and was followed by a contingent from the Kimberley Regiment, the Fire Brigade, the South African Police, St John's Ambulance Brigade and Nursing Division. In addition, there were big groups of Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and Cadets.'

Here we see Barney Cohen in his splendid scarlet robes and gold chain.



לשנה טובה תכתבו
5691 — 1930



THE KIMBERLEY SYNAGOGUE.
A recent photograph of this beautiful structure.

This picture above is from Rev Konviser's extensive file of cuttings. It shows the Kimberley synagogue in 1930. It had been built during the Boer War and consecrated in 1902 by Rev Harris Isaacs. We see that the fine perimeter railings are now in place, but as yet in 1930, the front façade is unencumbered by palm trees, so you can see the whole building in all its architectural splendour. (You can read about its construction on page six of the story of [Isaacs, Rev Harris](#).)

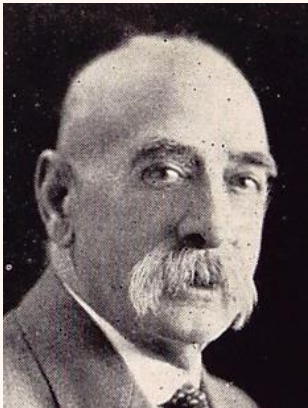
The service – once they were all inside the synagogue

The newspaper cutting on the Mayoral inauguration, goes into great detail about the synagogue service. This is very interesting for us to see now, nearly 100 years later, especially to me, as it

mentioned the music that the cantor used. At that time there was a fine cantor in Kimberley, A Rudy, and also a choir of men and boys. And there was an organ! There is no mention of the choir in this particular service, but the paper did say that the service throughout was beautifully intoned by the cantor and accompanied by the organ. This is how they described it:

'The synagogue was thronged and in the congregation were Mr John Orr MBE (department store owner) The Rev W Pescod, Mr **William Sagar JP** (left) (president of the congregation) Mr GT Belding (ex-Mayor) and **Sir David Harris KCMG**(right), read more about him here:

https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/David_Harris.html others. They continued:



'**The service** was characterised by simplicity and solemnity. It was conducted by the Mayor's Chaplain, Rev M Konviser and Cantor A Rudy.

'*Baruch Habo* (Blessed be he that cometh) an ancient chant set to music by Naumbourg, was sung by the cantor after

which a psalm of thanksgiving was read by Mr Konviser. The solemn opening of the ark then took place, this ceremony being performed by Mr W Sagar, the Cantor meanwhile singing *Ki Mitzion* by Mombach, which recalls that out of Zion cometh forth The Law. The scrolls of the Law were taken out of the Ark and prayers for the Royal Family and the Governor General were read by Mr Konviser. As the Law was carried back to the Ark, the cantor sang *Hodu* (his majesty is above the earth) by Mendelssohn and before the open ark he sang *Uvenucho Yomar* by Sulzer, an old song in celebration of the return of the Law to its resting place within the Ark'.



Rev Konviser's welcoming words – amazement and gratitude

Rev Konviser began: 'As I look around me and observe this congregation, composed as it is of our own co-religionists and non-Jews within this House, reared to the honour of the God of Israel, I can scarcely refrain from the exclamation of mingled amazement and gratitude at the **welcome growth of political and religious toleration** which is being practiced in our country today. Your normal differences notwithstanding, you find yourselves this morning in our Jewish house of prayer to pray for the divine guidance of, and to give honour to a son of Israel who had been raised to the exalted position of chief citizen of our city. In the name of my community, I wish to convey the sincere congratulations and good wishes to His Worship the Mayor and the Mayoress and to express a warm welcome to the City Councillors and the representatives of the various public bodies here this morning. It is a wonderful gesture indeed on behalf of the leaders of a community to recognise the importance of spiritual things and to render thanks and gratitude to God Almighty at the outset of their ministrations.'

His Address – Truth, Justice and Peace

Rev Konviser proceeding to speak on the Rabbinic maxim: 'The universe rests on three things, truth, justice and peace' (Zach c8 v16) Konviser said, 'if the world is to be preserved, if a nation is to exist, and if a city is to flourish, it must be based on these three principles of truth, justice and peace. We'll maybe ask ourselves if it is too sanguine a dream for us to cherish that we are moving forward to this ideal.

However, here are the lines upon which we are to work. In the measure in which we follow those lines, in that measure shall we acquit ourselves of our duty as true citizens. ... it would serve to bring into prominence the close connection between the teachings of our religion as represented by the synagogue in its widest sense, and the high ideals of citizenship and social duties typified in the persons of our honoured and distinguished guests. Judaism from its very beginnings and throughout all stages of its development has consistently stressed the social ideal ... and emphasised the sacredness of man's duties and responsibilities to his fellow men.' He also said that 'Judaism declares that love and loyalty to our home city is as sacred as our love and loyalty to our own native land.

In spelling out what he meant by **truth**, Konviser did not pull his punches and made it clear that the leaders of a city needed to recognise things as they were and have a vision for how they ought to be. He pointed to the fact that they had to attend to the happiness and interests of all sections of the society. He said 'we must also understand our duty to safeguard the health of all the inhabitants and to elevate the taste of the masses by improved education, by libraries, museums, gardens and similar agencies.

And further', he said 'it will be a city of **justice** when there will be the recognition that each and every human being is human and therefore is to be respected as such. In seeking a city of **peace**, Konviser showed that politics and religion were intertwined – they have their specific roles but he says 'a shrivelled and pitiful thing is that religion which is only an affair of synagogues and churches, of special times and occasions and nothing else. What is the value of that man's religion whose fellow man is not the better for it, whom it does not impel to do something for the common weal, in whom it does not kindle a zealous spirit to diffuse light and joy in the lives of others?

Konviser's blessing for the Mayor of Kimberley: Konviser concluded that: 'The city of truth, justice and of peace is there where men, not content with serving God in his House, serve Him by serving His children beyond it.

And therefore to you all, as citizens of Kimberley, I would say in all earnestness, let us pray to God Almighty, ***that this year of Mayoral office be one of prosperity and of progress, and may we hope that this city of ours under the wise guidance of our Mayor, will indeed become the city of truth, justice and of peace.***

Finally, *Hatikvah*, the Jewish national anthem, was sung.

The Family Home



The house they lived in at 4 Lodge Road, Belgravia was described in the DFA as follows: 'The home of our popular Mayor (Councillor B Cohen) and Mayoress (Miss Frances Cohen) is a very pretty place, and one of its notable features is the magnificent phoenix palm in the garden on the right of the photo. It is one of our largest and finest palms and gives most glorious shade. Miss Cohen, who is probably the youngest Mayoress Kimberley has ever had, fulfils her many and varied duties in a most capable manner. Since she has been in office, she has presided over a great number of public functions in a charming manner, and has thrown herself with extraordinary zeal and enthusiasm into her duties, which have won for her the admiration of all citizens

Entertaining the Governor-General, Lord Clarendon - hats on hats off!



...ing goods was about £25.

18. They drove up in a taxi driven, 1

A gigantic drive for Empire trade

DEA 6-11-1931



Lord and Lady Clarendon and family and the Mayor and Mayoress (Councillor B. and Miss F. Cohen) on the occasion of the Governor-General's visit to Kimberley.

[Photo by E. Grasiner.]



*In Honour of His Excellency the
Right Honourable the Earl of Clarendon,
P.C., B.C.M.G., Governor-General of the Union of South Africa,
and the Countess of Clarendon.*

*The Mayor and City Councillors
request the pleasure of the company of*

*at a Dinner to be held in the Alexandersfontein
Hotel, Kimberley, on Monday, 2nd November,
1931, at 8 p.m.*

R.S.V.P. TO ASSISTANT TOWN CLERK BY 30TH OCTOBER, 1931.

Mr. [] accepts the invitation to Dinner on the 2nd November, 1931.

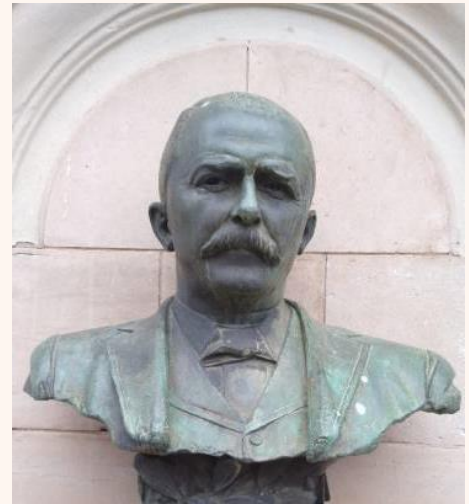
THE ASSISTANT TOWN CLERK,
CITY HALL, KIMBERLEY.

Barney and Frances (centre in these pictures) entertained the Governor General at a ball at Alexandersfontein on 2 November 1931.

Tribute to Bernard Klisser

Another annual Civic event in the synagogue hosted by the Mayor and City Councillors was the special interdenominational service in February each year in tribute to the good works of Bernard Klisser. This Jewish diamond magnate had died in 1922 and had bequeathed a great deal of money to be used for the aged poor of Kimberley – of all colours and creeds. Konviser again made impressive addresses, quoted in the DFA. A memorial bust of Klisser (pictured) was created at some stage and sited in a niche on the front wall of the Kimberley (now the Africana) Library. You can read more about Klisser under families here:

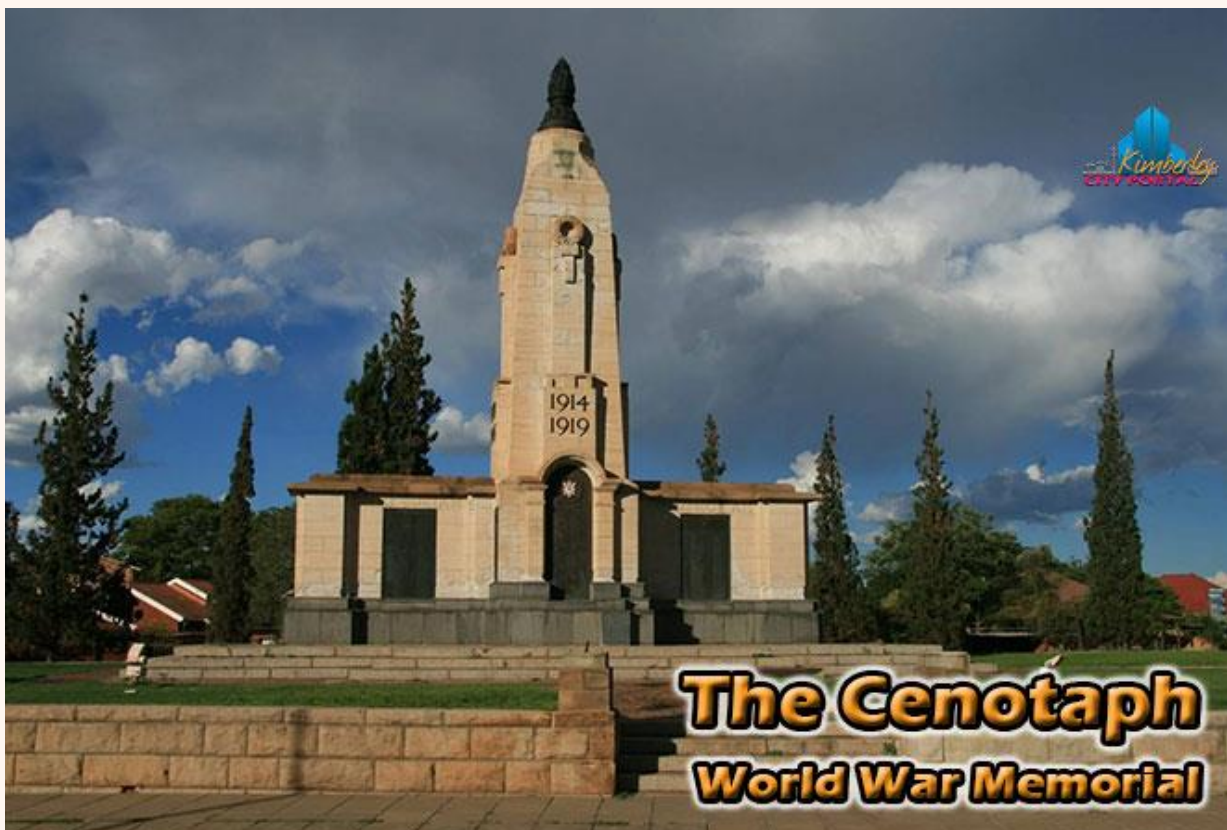
<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Families.html>



Armistice Day Anniversary

An important civic occasion for the Mayor of Kimberley was the Anniversary of Armistice Day, on 11 November 1931, when a solemn service was conducted by the Mayor's Chaplain at the steps of the War Memorial (pictured below). Many wreathes were laid and Konviser's prayer was printed in full in the DFA. There was also a special civic service in the synagogue.

On 17 July 1932, the Mayor and his Chaplain were once more on the steps of the War Memorial (above) for the sixteenth anniversary of the fallen soldiers and sailors of Kimberley at **Delville Wood**. (Read on page 13 of the sad vandalization of this fine civic monument to victims of two world wars).



Public life

During his life, Barney was a member of many public bodies. He was both a steward and a judge at the local racecourse, a keen bowler, and according to his granddaughter Sheila, the grandchildren called Barney "Paddy" and recalled that he played water polo until the age of 65.

Barney later married Matilda (aka Tilly) Maisels and moved to Johannesburg. He passed away at the age of 75 while on holiday in Muizenberg on January 31 1951 and was buried in a row behind his first wife Bertha. An aside Adele writes: in the book *Reminiscences of Kimberley* by Louis Cohen (published in 1911) he writes: *'To my mind, the Lord only sent four good Teutons to South Africa - Harry Sacke, Schlickman, "Paddy" Cohen, and Sammy Marks. The remainder the devil sent to teach men how to sin, and I know his Satanic Majesty will get them back with interest'*. It would be interesting to know if the "Paddy Cohen" mentioned here is our Paddy Cohen?

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### The Family

Barney and Bertha, as we have seen had six children all born in Kimberley (that we know about) before Bertha sadly passed away in 1918 from complications of the flu epidemic, when her youngest child, Anita, was not yet two years old. Sheila Grant wrote: They were **Frances Dagmar** (1904) **Kryn** (who was mayoress when Barney was Mayor of Kimberley), **Harold Cohen** (who had 3 children - Doreen, Valerie and Douglas), **Cecil Cohen**, **Ruth Broude** (Barbara's mother), **Eric Cohen** (who later changed his surname to "Conlyn"), and **Anita Frank** (my mother). As Uncle Harold's first wife died very young, and his second wife did not welcome the children, Douglas says he knows nothing about his father's wartime history, but I have an idea he also served in some capacity. (you can read the war story of Cecil page 24 and Eric page 12 of [Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#))

### Barney's son Cecil and his wife Jean Cohen

Milton Jawno writes: '**Cecil Cohen**, was a friend of the great Sir Ernest Oppenheimer. He worked De Beers in Kimberley at Diamond House. Cecil was sent to Sierra Leone to crack a diamond smuggling syndicate. And, for very special services Sir Ernest awarded Cecil with a diamond 'sight' and great fame and fortune. Cecil Cohen's wife was called Jean and he was the uncle of our dear late friends Jeff Frank (and Sheila Grant). Jeff's mother **Anita Frank** (who married Masel Frank) was a sister of Cecil Cohen' Read Sheila Grants story of the Frank Family in Kimberley here in [Frank, Masel and Nita and family](#)



In this picture above right from 1955, we see Beryl Kretzmar, the new Chairman of the Union of Jewish Women (left) and Pearl Toooh, the secretary on the right. Next to Pearl in the floral dress and white gloves and handbag, is **Jean Cohen**, identified by her son **Brian**. Jean became the next Chair of UJW in February 1957 – before moving to Johannesburg).

Jean and Cecil had three sons, **Raymond, David and Brian Cohen**. **Adele Cohen** who is married to David, had done much family research. They live in Vancouver and also in Melbourne, Raymond is in Vancouver. **Brian Cohen** lives in Guildford UK. Brian says: 'I recognise many of the names you mention, in the UJW story [UJW History of the Kimberley Branch](#) eg ,Marie Datnow, Lily Jawno, Pearl Toooh and the others, my mother talked of them often, and as a small boy I heard all this, and still recall. I am 67 now. My mother was certainly active in Kimberley with the community there.

Her father was **Jimmy (James) Callis** married to **Bessie**. They both moved to Johannesburg later in life, after we had moved there. My other grandfather **Barney Cohen**, I sadly never knew. We are related to the Frank family, Adele will clue you in, if you need to know anything, she has done the research on our family'. (Watch out for the story of Cecil and Jean and their sons compiled by Adele, coming soon on families) Brian continued, 'We left Kimberley as a family in about 1958 for Johannesburg, when my father was set up in his new venture, courtesy of Sir Ernest. My mother seemed to fall ill soon after, and never really recovered. She has serious eye problems, and was in effect blind for many years, then she later contracted bone marrow cancer, which finally took her in 1979.

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The Six Jewish Mayors of Kimberley

Kimberley Jewish citizens identified themselves from the very beginning not only with their own community, but also with every facet of civic life - local and national. Many joined the divisional regional and town councils. Some were MPs and six members of the Jewish Community became Mayors of Kimberley. They were:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. William Sagar 1906 – 1908 | Mayor's Chaplain: Rev Harris Isaacs |
| 2. Ernest Oppenheimer 1915 – 1917 | Rev Harris Isaacs |
| 3. Barnerd Cohen 1931 – 1932 | Rev Maurice Konviser |
| 4. Gustave Habermeld 1953 – 1955 | (Rabbi Bloch) and 1965 – 1967 (Rabbi Werner) |
| 5. Lionel Jawno 1959 – 1961 | (Rabbi Werner) |
| 6. Cecil Sussman 1964 – 1965 | (Rabbi Werner) |



In this picture are three former **Jewish mayoresses of Kimberley** at a civic reception for the Israeli Ambassador Michael Michael.

Left to right: Mrs Lily Jawno, Mrs Anne Habermeld and Mrs Natalie Sussman with Mrs Michael.

Kimberley War Memorial being carried away stone by stone, plate by plate by our Crime Correspondent February 1, 2021 (<https://mainnews.net/>)

At the war memorial in Kimberley, bronze metal plates are being carried away and sold for scrap on a daily basis. Vagrants are sleeping at the monument and leaving a mess. Dr David Morris of the McGregor Museum is fighting a losing battle to stop the destruction of the monument. He tries to visit the monument every day to see what else is missing and then places photos on Facebook. He has also been informing Police and Government authorities. Last Friday somebody saw that a few people were pushing a trolley with a heavy bronze plate containing the names of soldiers who died in the First and Second World War. He informed the Police who recovered the plate. But Dr Morris says he is fighting a losing battle. Everyday something else is missing from the memorial.



The memorial was erected in 1928 and contains the names of 400 men hailing from Kimberley who died in the First World War. It was unveiled by 4 women who either lost 2 sons in the war or a son and a husband – 28000 people attended the unveiling. More names of men who died in the Second World War were added at a later stage.

Remember the memorial is in honor of men who gave their life to basically defend England and allies. All of whom founded the liberal western political system, the same system which has forsaken the white minority in South Africa as if we never existed. Did all these men die for nothing? That is the question.

~~~~~ **Barnerd (Barney) Cohen and family**

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, August 2021 from texts and pictures sent by **Adele Cohen** Grandson David's wife, Vancouver and **Brian Cohen** London, (sons of Cecil) and collected from the late **Sheila Grant** (Daughter of Anita) and from the Konviser files.