

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
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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 Barnet 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 ox-cart) 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.

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 was 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'.

The union resulted in seven children, of whom one died at birth. He was the father of Herbert Sextus Harris who became the Commanding Officer of the Kimberley Regiment. Read Sextus story here: [Harris, Colonel Herbert Sextus](#)

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.

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.

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 and telling story he told Percy Fitzpatrick about Rhodes in 'How the Christian beat the Jews'

Read also his entry 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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## 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

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.

In digging around I came across this, and although this is about Rhodes, I thought you might like to read it - gives a personal feel to how things were back then: [http://fletcher-jura-africa.co.za/pages/we\\_went\\_to\\_rhodes\\_funeral.html](http://fletcher-jura-africa.co.za/pages/we_went_to_rhodes_funeral.html)

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

Kind regards  
Sandy