

Bernard Klisser

Diamond dealer and philanthropist

Bernard Klisser, after whom the Kimberley suburb of Klisserville is named, died in London, England on Valentine's Day (14 February) 1922.

He was born in Amsterdam Netherlands on 8 May 1854 to Samuel Levie Klisser and Rachel Baruch Klisser (nee Perel) one of ten children> He arrived, aged 17 years, on the diamond fields in 1870 with his uncle, Mark Klisser.



They settled initially at Dutoitspan village, and started off as 'kopje wallopers', visiting the individual claims and buying diamonds directly from the diggers before selling them at the Exchange and Auction Mart. When his uncle died, Klisser formed his own diamond buying company and became a wealthy diamond merchant until the diamond crash of the early 1880s when in 1883 he was declared insolvent. He did recover his fortune and when he died in 1922 left £44 000 to the poor and needy of Kimberley. The money was placed in the **Alfred Beit Memorial Fund** and was termed the **Bernard Klisser Bequest**.

Failing eyesight – from the glare of the summer sun of Kimberley – necessitated a move to the cooler climate of England which is where he stayed until his death.

"I wish to let the money I made go back to where it came from, where I have been happy, and where most of my friends are."



He was known locally as "The Great Kimberley Philanthropist" and for many years on the anniversary of his death, the Kimberley Municipality held a civic service in the synagogue and had a wreath laid on his grave in London.

In an interview with the South African Jewish Chronicle of December 1929, **Rev Maurice Konviser** mentioned that in the civic life of Kimberley and the surrounding towns Jews had taken a very active part for many years. He pointed out that they have had many Jewish mayors and deputy mayors and 'the town itself has been very generously treated, not only by the Jewish inhabitants, but by others who lived there in former years. He singled out Mr Bernard Klisser who left a very large sum to charity. He said that an annual service in memory of Mr Klisser takes place in the synagogue under the auspices of the City

Council. (Read Rev Maurice Konviser story on the synagogue page <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Synagogues.html>)

There is a magnificent drawing of Klisser painted by William Timlin in the Kimberley Club (see above). The council also commissioned this bust, below by the distinguished South African sculptor Anton van Wouw which was placed in a niche outside the Public Library.

