

Reverend Maurice Konviser

Minister in Kimberley

From 1927 – 1935

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, from information provided by daughter-in-law, Laura Konviser, also of London.

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Rev Maurice Konviser came to Kimberley in 1927, succeeding the much-loved and long-serving Rev Harris Isaacs (who was there for 30 years between 1890 and 1927). Konviser stayed for eight years until 1935. He too was much loved and greatly admired in Kimberley.

I have so enjoyed going through the rich archive of newspaper cuttings the family has preserved. It was brought round to my house by his daughter-in-law Laura Konviser. This has enabled me to bring to life the personality and activities of Rev Konviser, who was by all accounts an exceptional man. He arrived in Kimberley at just 25 years old, invigorated the community and impressed the town with his dedication, his integrity, his oratory, his writings and his all-round ability, charm and desire to take things forward wherever he could.

Early life

Maurice Konviser was born in 1902 in Bialystok, Russia, now Poland. He was one of seven children. A year later the family moved to Paris where they had relatives. As a result, Maurice was fluent in French. In about 1913, they moved again, this time to London, where he attended the Jews Free School. Thereafter, he studied for the rabbinate at Jews College as well as for a BA degree at University College. In 1921 and 22 he led the High Holyday services at Walton-on-the-Naze and from 1922 to 1927 he was an Assistant Reader at the Great Synagogue, Dukes Place, London.

He was personally recommended for the Kimberley post by the British Chief Rabbi, JH Hertz and appointed to the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation under arrangements made by the Jewish War Memorial Council. He was only 25 at the time – one of the youngest ministers in the country. (He could have gone to Dunedin, New Zealand, but they wanted a married minister for that post – so Kimberley and Southern Africa were the beneficiaries).

Communal and Civic Life in Kimberley

By the late 1920s, the Kimberley Jewish Community had diminished to only about 200 families. But they were a vigorous group with some strong characters. Rev Konviser threw himself enthusiastically into his position. He presented stirring sermons, his Rosh Hashanah messages to the community were printed in the local paper. He created and supported many cultural and community activities. He served on municipal boards. He was a prolific writer with articles published in many local and national newspapers and journals, on Jewish

historical matters, religion, Jewish education and on Zionism, all issues he was passionate about.

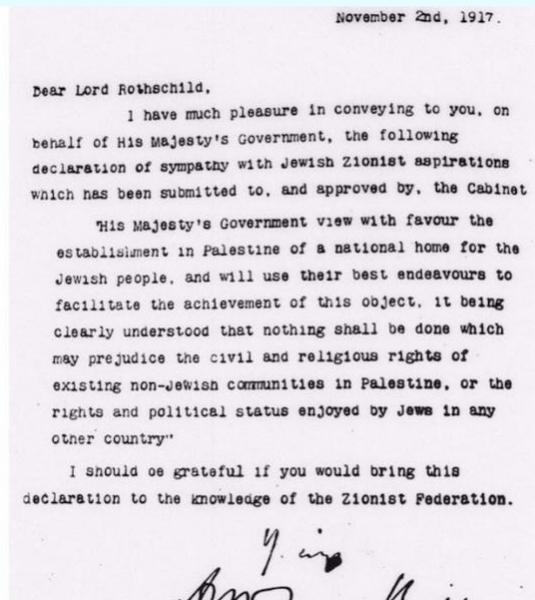
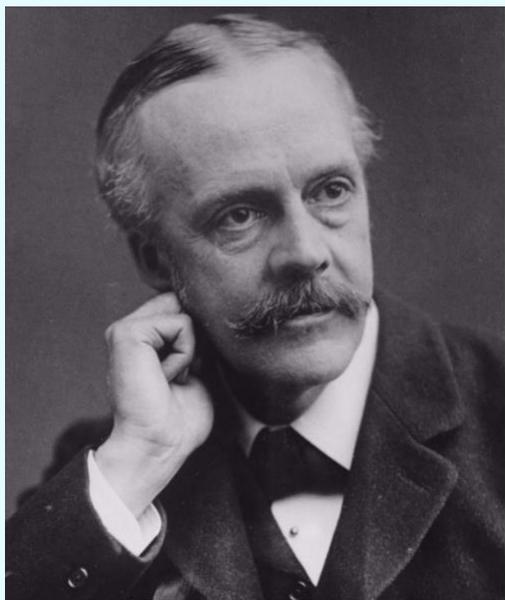
There were several special communal occasions while he served in Kimberley, like the consecration of the New Jewish Cemetery in March 1929.

He led the congregation round the grounds, with the cantor chanting psalms. William Sagar JP, the much admired and long-serving (over 20 years) Congregation President, thanked the Mayor and the City Council for granting the land for the grounds and laid the foundation stone for the new mortuary with a suitably inscribed silver trowel. Four years later, in 1933, Konviser was very sad to have to officiate at William Sagar's internment. (See details of his funeral cortege and oration on page 5 in the story of [Sagar, William and Family](#) on the website.)



On the cultural side, Konviser chaired the Kimberley Jewish Guild which was said to gain 39 new members and enjoy somewhat of a renaissance under his guidance. My uncle Arnold Kretzmar wrote a Mock Parliamentary debate for the literary section in April 1928 where Rev Konviser took his place along with many community members as the Minister of Finance and Matrimonial Affairs. Read more about this in due course on [Shows and Productions](#). During his tenure, in Kimberley, the Kimberley Hebrew Order of David Lodge was consecrated (1931) and named for Louis Isaacson, an admired member who had recently passed away. Konviser was its first President. (On page 14 of this story, are lists from the 1929 Jewish yearbook of all the committees in Kimberley and their officers, where we see that in all of these, Konviser took a leading role.)

His vision went far beyond the Jewish Community of Kimberley. In March 1930, Rev Konviser wrote in a newspaper, perhaps the Zionist Record, a particularly eloquent public **tribute to Lord Balfour** on the occasion of his death.



Being an ardent Zionist, Konviser said that the Jewish people had suffered an incalculable loss of a person who was

the champion of the Jewish people and its ideal cause in Palestine. He went on to say that Balfour was 'the author of the modern charter of Jewish rights and liberties. He said it was

Lord Balfour who 'harangued, allured, won and invested the Jewish cause in Palestine with dignity and strength, and drew to his side, multitudes of our co-religionists and people from the world outside.' He continued, 'It grieves us to reflect that that prodigious brain, has ceased to function, that that warm heart, so responsive to the cause of Israel, and to the cause of humanity beats no more; that the power of his eloquent tongue will no longer enthral millions of men. But we are happy in the thought that men of the type of Lord Balfour never die, for he was not of an age, but for all time'.

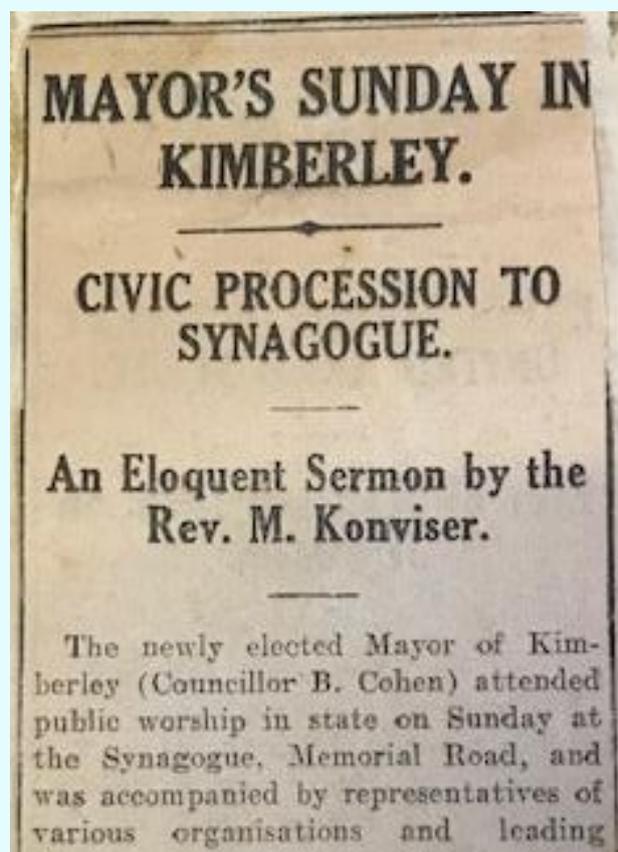
Consulted by national synagogal bodies

Rev Konviser was consulted on many issues concerning the ministry in South Africa and, when asked about the benefits of a federation of synagogues in South Africa, he said that his experience of the benefits seen by English Jewry from the United Synagogue and in America led him feel that the status of the ministry could be improved considerably, if a united body were in existence, as, he said, 'There were many problems that individual ministers found too difficult to solve – particularly the serious question of indiscriminate conversions. It seems that attempting to apply some reasonable standards were nullified by the willingness of some gentlemen, who regardless of the interests of the community at large, were prepared for some reason or other to grant applications for admission to the Faith.'

Chaplain to a Jewish Mayor of Kimberley

Konviser was particularly involved in Civic activity because during his time as minister, Kimberley **Councillor, Barnerd Cohen**, was elected Mayor for 1931-32. (He was one of Kimberley's six Jewish mayors*). Konviser had the official title of '**Mayor's Chaplain**'.

This involved Rev Konviser officiating at several significant civic events and conducting civic services in the mayor's place of worship – ie the synagogue. The first was perhaps the most impressive – the **Mayoral investiture** in the synagogue.



The Diamond Fields Advertiser wrote a long article outlining the procession of civic organisations and leading citizens that accompanied him 'in State' to his place of worship.



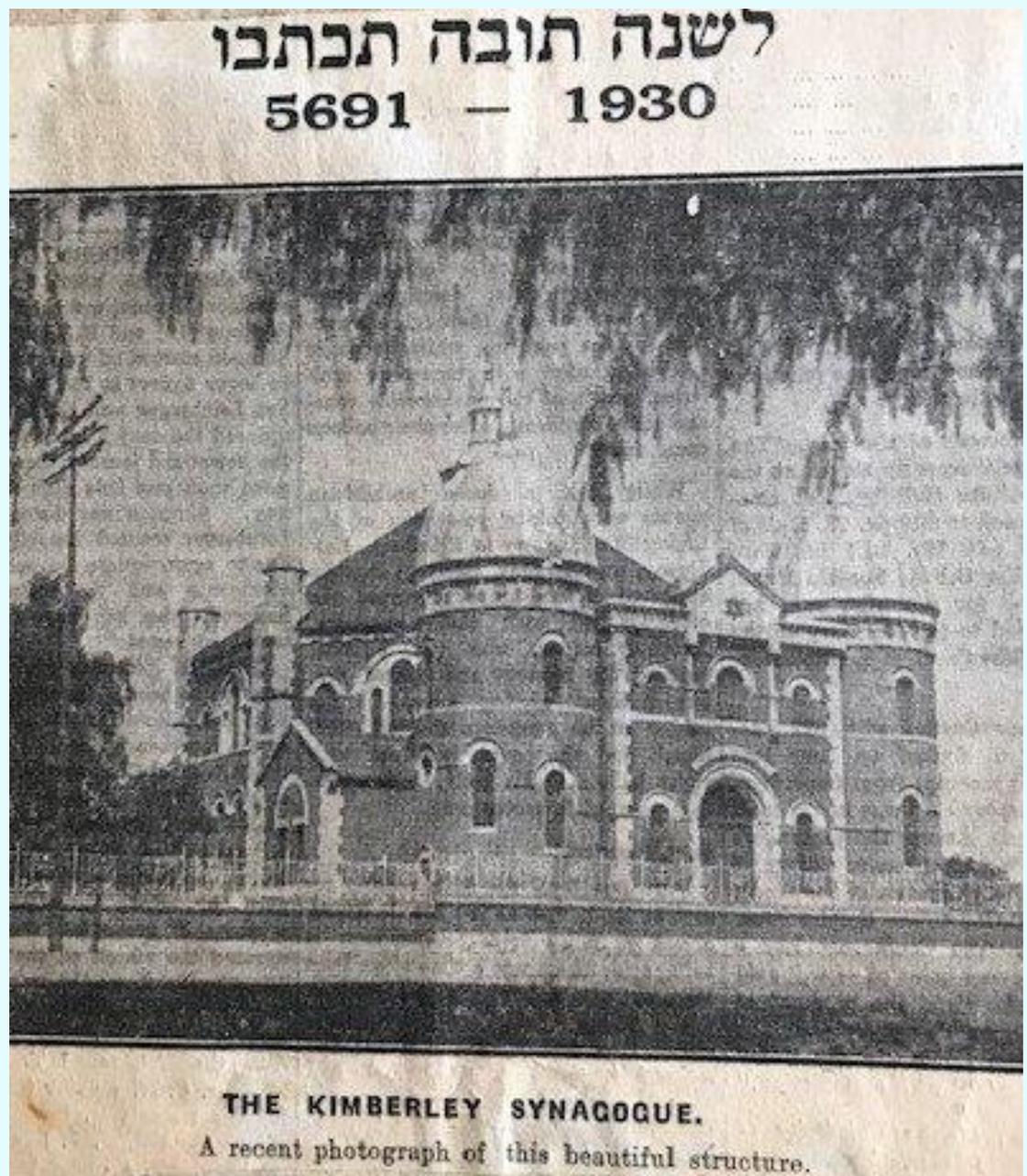
They also printed many long columns going into great detail about actual the service in the synagogue and repeating almost verbatim, the stirring oration of the young minister – aged 29 at the time!

They said, 'It is a number of years since such a service was held in the synagogue 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.'

Civic Procession to the Synagogue

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 (left) wore his scarlet robe and gold chain and was accom-panied by the Town Clerk, Mr AJ Beet.

This picture right, 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 by now in place, but as yet in 1930, the front façade is palm free, 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.](#))

Below is Barnerd Cohen (aka Barney Cohen) in his scarlet robes and gold chain.



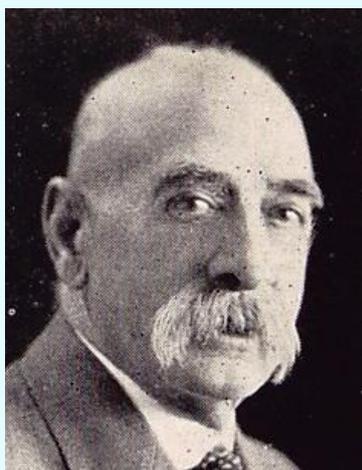
The Lady Mayoress, was Miss Cohen [this was his eldest daughter Frances, as his wife Bertha had sadly passed away in the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918, that had taken away four members of her Kleinman family]. Frances was accompanied by the wives of councillors and other ladies.

'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.'

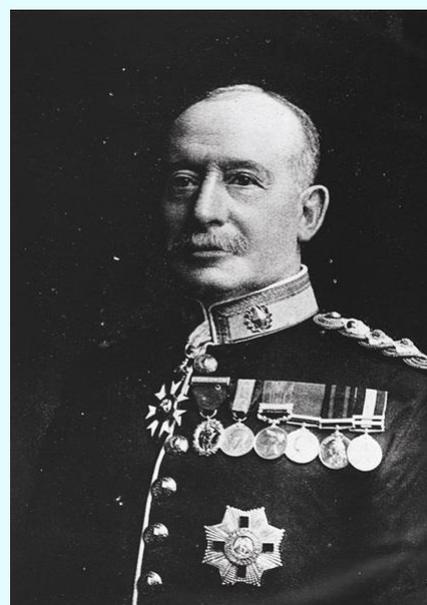
The service – once they were all inside the synagogue

The newspaper cutting – from Konviser’s extensive file, 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, **Sir David Harris** (right) KCMG, https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/David_Harris.html



The Rev W Pescod (Christian), Mr **William Sagar JP** (left) (president of the congregation) Mr GT Belding (ex-Mayor) and others. **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

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?

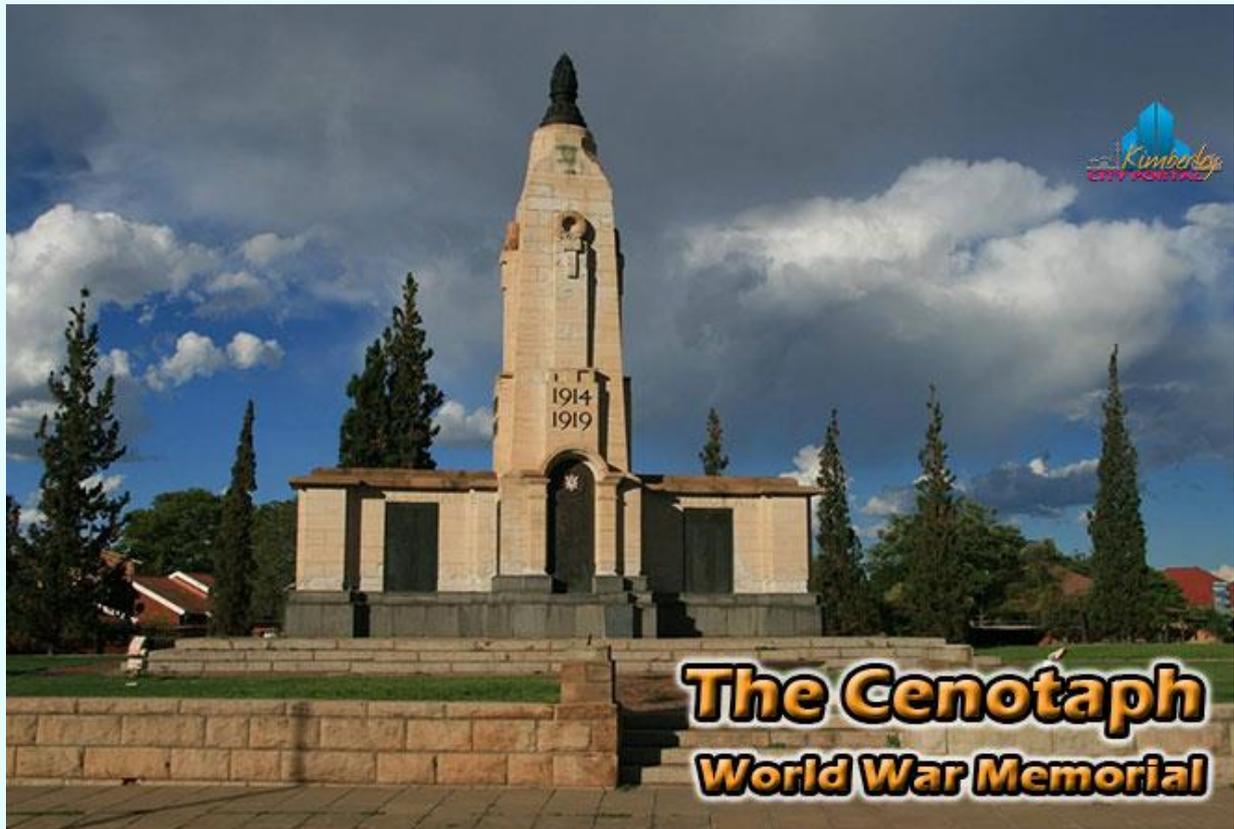
Konviser's blessing for the Mayor of Kimberley:

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. You can read Barney Cohen's family story here [Cohen, Barnerd \(Barney\)](#).

Armistice Day Anniversary

Konviser was called upon again for an important civic occasion on 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. 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.

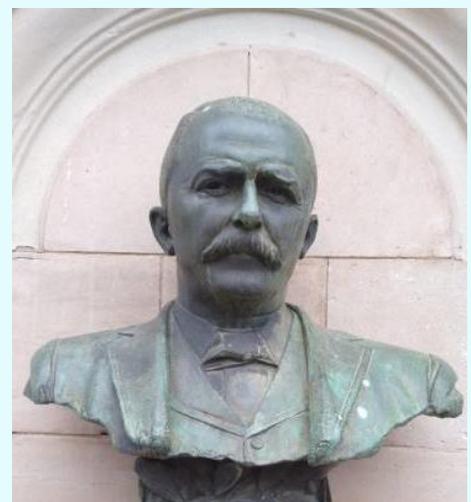
On 17 July 1932 he was once more on the steps of the War Memorial (below) for the sixteenth anniversary of the fallen soldiers and sailors of Kimberley at Delville Wood. (See the sad article on page 17, as to how this war memorial is now being taken down by vandals)



Konviser hosted many national events in Kimberley during his tenure, including the second inter-provincial Young Israel Executive Conference. He officiated at the fourteenth South African Zionist Conference in the Kimberley City Hall in June 1933. In welcoming them, to the city he invoked the guidance of God to help them to advance their aims 'speedily in our day'.

He hosted a gathering of the Mizrachi on 27 May 1933 in the Kimberley synagogue. National and international rabbis and dignitaries at these events included Chief Rabbi Landau, Rabbi Mirvish of Cape Town and Rabbi Frenkel of Johannesburg. (See the notice on page 10).

Tribute to Bernard Klisser Another annual Civic event in the synagogue attended 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. It was added to the **Alfred Beit** Fund. Konviser again made impressive addresses, quoted in the DFA. The City Council for many years had a wreath laid on his grave in London on the anniversary of his death also commissioned a bust by Anton van Wouw, which was placed niche on the front wall of the Kimberley (now the Africana) Library. (right).



Read the story of Bernard Klisser here [Klisser, Bernard](#) – and of Alfred Beit here https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Alfred_Beit.html

Moving on ...

As Konviser had discharged his first post in Southern Africa with such aplomb and operated on such a high national level at conferences and in his writings, he was naturally on the radar of many a larger congregation. (In addition, it seems, that Kimberley in the mid-thirties had hit on hard times with several of the mines closed). In his file are notices of Konviser being invited to lead services and give sermons and talks around the country. He preached in Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. In Johannesburg he was a guest of the Chief Rabbi JL Landau and preached in the Great Synagogue, Wolmarans Street, where 'his words were listened to with deep attention'. He also officiated at services in the Berea and Yeoville Synagogues. He visited Salisbury where he gave a lecture on Bialik, the great Hebrew poet as well as officiating at the Royal Jubilee Thanksgiving Service at the synagogue. Clearly Kimberley could not retain a man of such talents. Eventually in 1935, he accepted the call to become the Rabbi of the Salisbury community in the country to the north, at that time called Rhodesia. Everyone in Kimberley, in the Jewish and also the wider community was very sorry to see him go.

Farewell Reception on leaving Kimberley in June 1935

A farewell reception was given to Rev Maurice Konviser at the prestigious Constance Hall (see more about this hall on page 15) which was reported in the DFA and also in the Zionist Record of July 5, 1935. Many appreciative speeches and several presentations were made, including those by Mr MM Aronson the then president of the GW Hebrew Congregation; **Harry Stoller** for the Zionist Federation; and **Gussie Habermeld** who was the president of the Louis Isaacson Lodge.

Rev William Pescod, for the **School Board** regretted the loss of a most capable member of the Board and of a genial, learned and excellent rabbi. **The Mayor**, Councillor Gasson, **the local MP** Mr William Humphreys and members of the **town and provincial councils** echoed the note of regret at his departure, each stressing the fact that Mr Konviser had played a great part not only in the Jewish, but also in the general life of the city.

Dr [Zweiback, Solomon](#) expressing the community's respect and appreciation of Konviser's integrity and splendid work, 'handed the departing guest, amid prolonged applause, a wallet of money as a token of their esteem and regard.

Master **Shirley Lewis** [Lewis, Coleman and Family](#) on behalf of the pupils the Hebrew school handed him a Kiddush Cup, and an illustrated address expressing regret at his leaving.

Musical offerings included a piano solo by Miss **Ethyl Brenner** and songs by Mrs **Polly Horwitz** accompanied by Mrs **J Benjamin**.

'Mr Konviser, in reply exhorted his people to carry on their holy work and to continue to combine Jewish and civic loyalties.' (Below, is the newspaper report of the farewell party and an invitation in the paper to a synagogue gathering

**A GATHERING OF
THE MIZRACHI**

Under the auspices of the Mizrachi Organisation
of South Africa,
will be held on
Saturday Afternoon, the 27th May
at the
KIMBERLEY SYNAGOGUE.

The subject being "The Mizrachi in the Zionist Organ-
isation and the Mizrachi in the Upbuilding of Palestine."

Mr. Shrire, Chairman of the Hebrew Congregation
of Kimberley, will preside.

Rev. Konviser will then welcome the Delegates.
The Speakers will be:—

Rabbi Mirvish, of Capetown.
Rabbi K. L. Frenkel, of Johannesburg.
Mr. B. Weinronk, of Port Elizabeth, Chairman of
Mizrachi.
Mrs. Meyerowitz, Chairlady of the Mizrachi
Women Council.
Mr. Morris Hoffman, of De Aar.
Rev. Schechter, of Johannesburg.
Advocate Kuper, of Johannesburg.

ALL JEWISH CITIZENS OF KIMBERLEY AND ALL
DELEGATES OF THE CONFERENCE ARE
CORDIALLY INVITED.

with several distinguished speakers.

Rev. M. Konviser

FAREWELL RECEPTION IN KIMBERLEY

A FAREWELL social in honour of Rev. M. Konviser, on the eve of his departure from Kimberley, was held in the Constance Hall, on Tuesday evening, the 25th ult. Mr. M. M. Aronson (president of the G.W. Hebrew congregation) presided.

The Mayor (Councillor W. H. Gasson) eulogised Mr. Konviser's excellent services and on behalf of the community of Kimberley thanked him for all he had done.

Dr. S. Zweiback, expressing the Jewish community's respect and appreciation of the integrity and splendid work of Mr. Konviser, handed to the departing guest, amid prolonged applause, a wallet of money as a token of the community's esteem and regard.

During the evening, too, Master Shirley Lewis, on behalf of the pupils of the Hebrew School, presented to their headmaster, Mr. Konviser, an address expressing regret at his departure and their high regard for his helpful services. They also handed him a suitable gift.

Rev. W. Pescod mentioned Mr. Konviser's untiring efforts to advance the interests of education. He regretted the loss to the School Board of a most capable member, and to the local Jewish community of "a genial, learned and excellent Rabbi."

Mr. H. Stoller (president of the G.W. Zionist Federation) thanked Mr. Konviser for his helpful collaboration during his eight years' stay in Kimberley.

Messrs. W. B. Humphreys, M.P., G. M. H. Barrell, M.P.C., and T. Ericson, M.P.C., echoed the prevalent note of regret at Mr. Konviser's departure, each stressing the fact that Mr. Konviser had played a great part, not only in the Jewish but also in the general life of the city. Mr. G. Haberfeld (president of the Hebrew Order of David, Louis Isaacson Lodge) sincerely thanked Mr. Konviser for the great help he had at all times rendered to the Lodge.

Mr. Konviser, in reply, exhorted his people to carry on their holy work and to continue to combine Jewish and civic loyalties.

Musical items were rendered by Mr. Frantisek Rob on the violin (accompanied by Miss M. Bennie); pianoforte solos given by Miss E. Brenner and exceedingly charming songs rendered by Mrs. B. Horwitz (beautifully accompanied by Mrs. J. Benjamin) greatly added to the enjoyment of the evening.

[Mr. Konviser is spending a few weeks in Johannesburg prior to assuming responsibilities as Minister to the Salisbury Hebrew Congregation.]

The subjects will be: Section (a) "The Importance of the Youth in Zionism;" (b) Shmarya Levin.

Prizes of £3 3s. and £2 2s., to be expended on books at the Zionist Federation, will be awarded in each section.

Entries, to be accompanied by full details of name, age, and address, should be sent before August 15 to Mrs. S. P. Jacobson, 173 Main Street, Kenilworth, Johannesburg.

YIDDISH PLAYS.

Miss Sarah Sylvia, the well-known Yiddish actress, is opening a season of Yiddish plays at His Majesty's Theatre on July 22. Particulars will be announced in the Press.

There were some outstanding testimonials to this exceptional man –

KIMBERLEY SCHOOL BOARD.

Lanyon Terrace,

KIMBERLEY.

5th February, 1935.

It has been a great pleasure to me, and also a privilege to have been associated for upwards of seven years in service with the Reverend M. Konviser. During that time he has proved himself a most worthy and useful citizen. His radiant personality, his genial disposition, and his fine qualities, have gained for him the respect and friendship of every section of the community. As a member of the School Board, his practical business qualifications have been of great assistance in dealing with several difficult questions, and his up-to-date knowledge of educational work has been invaluable.

Mr. Konviser is a gentleman who very soon wins the confidence and respect of those with whom he is associated; and his labours and sympathy are not confined only to his own people. Wherever there is need and whenever there is a call for help in the public life of the city. Mr. Konviser readily and willingly responds. It is rumoured that he may be leaving Kimberley in the near future. I unhesitatingly say that his departure will be a great loss to the city, and will be regretted not only by his own people, but also by the Christian public, as he has proved himself to be a zealous and hard working citizen; and is held in the highest esteem.

(Sgd) WILLIAM RESCOD

CHAIRMAN.

And a heartfelt letter from Kimberley Boys High School where he taught the Jewish boys scripture and modern Hebrew (including the brilliant [Schrire, Velva \(Vaal\)](#)).

Boys High School,
Kimberley.
7th February, 1935.

Rev. M. Konviser,
6 Dalham Road,
KIMBERLEY.

Dear Mr. Konviser,

A rumour has reached my ears, which I would fain believe to be untrue, that you are shortly being transferred to ~~Salisbury~~. I can well believe that, after the fine work you have been doing in Kimberley, bigger centres would have their eyes upon you, but the loss to Kimberley will be so great that one cannot contemplate it without a feeling of depression.

I should like to tell you in the first place how much I have admired your work as a public man. Apart from the work you did as Mayor's Chaplain, you have been called upon to speak on severally very big occasions, and I always felt that Kimberley in general and the Jewish community in particular had great reason to be proud of the way in which you acquitted yourself. Your sermons at the memorial service held annually in honour of the great benefactor, Bernard Klisser, are now regarded as one of the events of Kimberley's year.

On the Kimberley School Board, of which you have been for some time a member, your work on behalf of education has been characterised by a true appreciation of the best aims in modern educational developments and I feel very sorry that you will not be here to see the local branch of the New Education Fellowship successfully launched. In a somewhat difficult community the spirit of fairness in which you carried out your work, earned the respect and esteem of all, as I have heard it expressed on more than one occasion.

Among the Jewish boys connected with the High School your work was untiring. Your self sacrificing

devotion in coming to take scripture classes in this school enabled me to carry out my idea of making provision in religious instruction for all denominations. Your interest in the boys, who lived in the hostel, made them feel that they were truly in a second home, and the really magnificent work which you did with some of the senior boys, who took Hebrew for their examinations, was largely instrumental in placing them at the top of the first class pass list, and bringing to them valuable scholarships and awards. One of your pupils, as a matter of fact, holds the Hebrew Scholarship from the Matriculation Board at present.

For all these reasons, I sincerely trust that the rumours I have heard are ill founded, but, should they prove true, I know that you will carry into your new sphere of work not only the best wishes of the entire community for your continued success and welfare, but a deep and lasting feeling of gratitude for good work honestly done without fear, favour or affection.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

"S.D. STOOPS".

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## The South African Jewish Yearbook of 1929 – showing Rev Konviser's activities.

We have been sent pages from the **South African Jewish yearbook of 1929** by Philip Myers OA, the grandson of Philip Sussman. ([Sussman, Philip and Augusta \(nee Cohen\)](#)) It shows that the community had several committees and that Rev Konviser was active in them all. It's wonderful to have all the names of the people involved in these Kimberley societies.

### **Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation**, established in 1876

The Congregation had 190 members. The office bearers in **1929** were President: **William Sagar JP**. (He served as President for over 20 years!!) Vice President was **Louis Isaacson**.

The Treasurer was Dr **Solomon Zweiback** and the Secretary **Sam Levin** (who served in this capacity for nearly 50 years). The committee included **Philip Sussman, Solomon Apter, N Odes, AN Hoffman, Samuel Schrire, Jack Alter Maresky, Harry Stoller, EL Price**. The minister was **Rev. Maurice Konviser**

The **Helping Hand Jewish Philanthropic Society** established in 1887

175 members: The Acting President was **Samuel Schrire**, Treasurer **I Regal**, Secretary again was **Sam Levin**. The committee included **N Odes, Barney Horwitz, I Senderovitz, Ch Hoffman, Philip Sussman, Ben Zolty** and **Solomon Apter**.

The **Ezrath Zion Association** established in 1904

About 100 members: The president was **A Slosberg**, Vice Presidents, **Rev M Konviser** and **Max Blumenthal**. The treasurer was **Harry Stoller**, and the Secretary **Jack Alter Maresky** the assistant hon Secretary was Miss **Rose Shapiro**, and the committee consisted of **Adv D Cohen, Rev Chaim Goldberg, Raphael Awerbuck, H Damelin, E Bloom, E Talmud, J Shless, Leo Davis**, mesdames **Bessie Stoller, Mrs R Awerbuck, Mrs Ch Goldberg, Mrs Shless** and **Miss D Shapiro, Lily Blumenthal** and **Gertie Brenner**.

The **Kimberley Jewish Guild** established in 1923,

190 members: Its objects were 'To encourage, maintain and cultivate amongst its members, intellectual, physical and artistic pursuits'. The office bearers seem to have been a slightly younger generation. The President was **Harold Sagar**, son of the President of the community **William Sagar JP**. The Chairman was **Rev Maurice Konviser**, Vice president **J Herman**, Treasurer **Benjamin Asherson**. The Secretaries were the **Misses F and G Brenner**, 25 Cape Town Road, Beaconsfield. The committee was **Mrs Bessie Stoller, Mrs Goldstein, Miss P Herman, Mrs Hoffman, Miss S Konviser, Miss M Cohen, Mrs Julie Sagar, And Messrs Phil Price, H Israel, Jack Frank, Arnold Kretzmar** and **Adv D Cohen**.

The **Kimberley Jewish Burial Society**, established in 1886,

170 members. The president was **B Klenerman**, Vice-President **J Naster**, Treasurer **Rev M Konviser**, Secretary **Sam Levin**. The committee: **S Rabinowitz, S Herman, J Klein, Ch Hofman, A Haberfeld** and **E L Price**

## The Constance Hall

This hall, where the community held the farewell to Rev Konviser, was the most prestigious social hall in Kimberley. The Jewish community – as all communities in Kimberley – used this hall for dances and special functions – certainly until 1950, when it built its own communal hall in the grounds of the synagogue.



In this picture from 1968, four ladies of the **Union of Jewish Women** are preparing for the Mini-Maxi Ball which was held at the Constance Hall. The ladies worked for days to produce hundreds of gaily coloured flowers for the decor. Funds raised were in aid of local charities.

The four ladies making flowers are:

Back - left to right:  
**Hellen Benjamin,**  
**Delia Benn**

front: **Doreen Cohen**  
and **Betty Benn**  
You can read on the website

[UJW History of the Kimberley Branch](#)

Originally, in 1889, the Constance Hall was the Boiler Room of the De Beers Mine. After the mine closed in 1908, the then General Manager of De Beers, Alpheus Williams, decided to turn it into a social hall, which was done, opening on 4 August 1911. It was named Constance in honour of Alpheus Williams' wife. Repair work was necessary in the 1950s and extensions were done in 1952 at a cost of £20 000. It was re-opened officially by Mr H.H. Taylor on 5 December 1952 and was utilized as a social hall until the mid-1990s when it became a discotheque.



left: the Constance Hall today

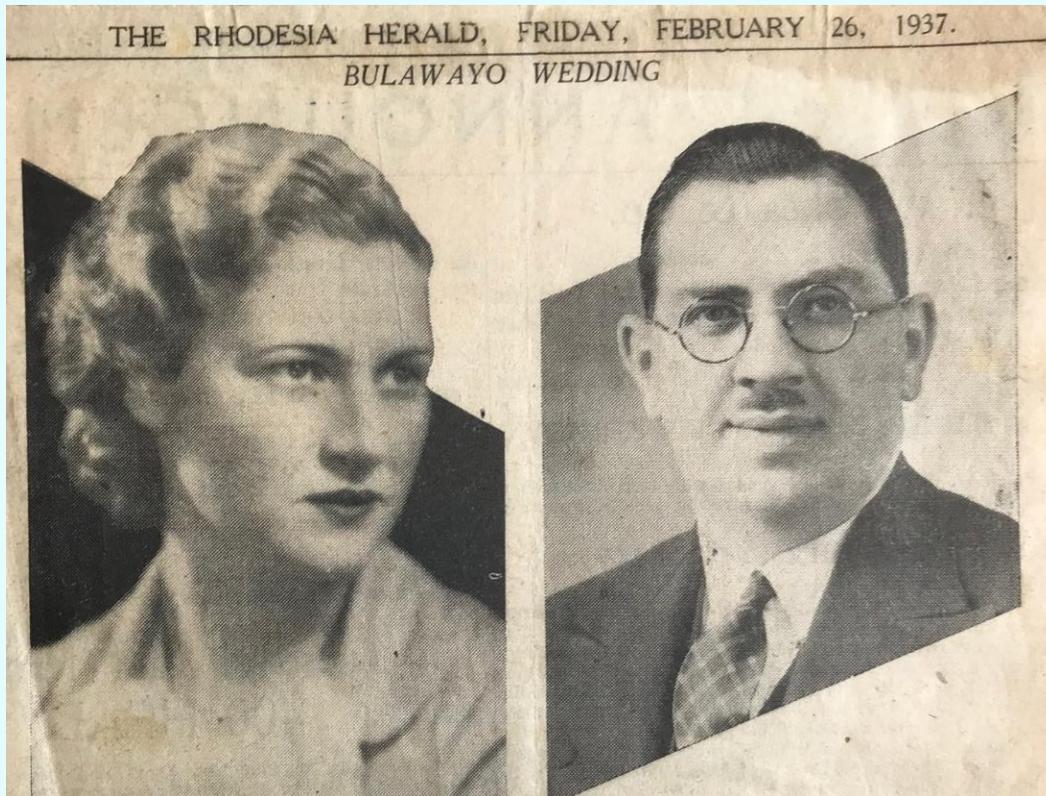
Next door to the Constance Hall is the original Cold Storage Room. The cold storage room was built before the siege of Kimberley in 1899, although the machinery only arrived after the siege had been lifted. Despite this, George Labram, the De Beers engineer, designed and manufactured a temporary

plant that enabled the cold room to be utilized during the siege. The De Beers Company had decided on a cold storage room for three reasons: the recent loss of cattle to rinderpest (in 1897); the risk of insufficient supply to requirements; and to keep down the price of meat. The room measured some 31 152 cubic feet and could hold 6000 sheep carcasses. The plant could also make 5 tonnes of ice daily.

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Rev (later Rabbi) Konviser in Salisbury from 1935 to 1967

It was when Konviser had left Kimberley for Rhodesia, that he met his wife to be, Rachel Sarah Liptz from Bulawayo. They married in February 1937 in Bulawayo on the very day of his parents' Golden Wedding. Rev Konviser's parents had immigrated to South Africa and settled in Johannesburg and were present for the celebrations – which continued when the couple returned to Salisbury.



They had three children, Pauline in 1937, Julian in 1941 (Laura's husband) and Arthur in 1945.

Rev Konviser who later became a Rabbi, and in fact Chief Rabbi of

Rhodesia in an equally impressive tenure in Salisbury until 1967 when he retired after 32 years of dedicated service. A year later, in 1968, he was persuaded to take up a temporary post in Cape Town at the Gardens Synagogue, supposedly for 6 months. He ended up staying there for two years. He received an OBE in 1964 for public services. Rabbi Maurice Konviser finally retired to Johannesburg in 1970, passing away a year later in 1971. The Konviser family has now grown to include five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren spread out all over the world (Toronto, New York, London and Sydney)

Below is a picture of Rabbi Konviser from 1953 at the Consecration of the Gatooma Synagogue.



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.

Reverend Maurice Konviser, in Kimberley (1927 – 1935)

Compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, July 2021 from information and cuttings preserved by the family and loaned by daughter-in-law Laura Konviser, also of London and from other sources. Circulated as Kimberley Ex-Pats Newsletter #43