

Kimberley Ex-Pats Newsletter #65, February 2025

This Newsletter, the 65th includes some exciting new discoveries about Kimberley's Jewish history that I made on a recent trip to South Africa – in January 2025, after 13 years.



I did not actually visit Kimberley as sadly there is nothing left for me there. And having the virtual cemetery that I can visit any time I want to, is a boon. And in any case more meaningful and beautiful memorial memories for me are visiting places where I used to spend time with my family, such as Muizenberg Beach, African Markets and Chapman's Peak coastal drive, that I managed to do thanks to my cousin David (also born in Kimberley).





Kimberley Community at the South African Jewish Archives

I was pleased to find some material on the Kimberley community that I had not previously known when I visited Beyachad to see the South African Board of Deputies Archive.

The Very First Shul

There was a sketch of a Yom Kippur service in the Kimberley synagogue in 1881.

This showed the only image I have ever seen of the first synagogue built in 1876 – which we understood was a corrugated iron and wooden structure much too small for the over 1000 Jewish males in Kimberley at the time. (It was superseded in 1902 by the opulent Memorial Road Synagogue – which is still in use today).

This sketch (see below) shows a vast interior and drawings of the minister, Rev Meyer Mendelssohn and the other dignitaries at the time: Mr LH Lyons the president, Mr JP Saber, vice president, Mr J Crewell treasurer and Mr J Alexander the Secretary. These are not names I recognise as the early synagogue books and papers are lost – given to the war effort in the 1940s. However, on a tablet in the Memorial Road Synagogue in 1908 erected 'in grateful recognition for zealous services rendered to the 'Glory of God and to the benefit of Jewish Institutions in Kimberley', the name of Joseph Saber is there amongst other past presidents: Louis Goldsmith, Flavian E Lazard, Isaac Stone and Abraham Greenberg. (I don't know anything about these people.)

No. 8.



(The Synagogue, Kimberley, Diamond Fields, South Africa, during service, 1881.)

LEAVES FROM SKIT'S SKETCH BOOK.

THE LATE JEWISH CELEBRATION.

The letter below, describes the Yom Kippur service in Kimberley in 1881 with a densely packed synagogue and the temperature on 4 October of 103 degrees in the shade! It says that 'business

was at a standstill as the diamond market was deserted, showing how strong a hold the Jewish people have succeeded in establishing in Kimberley.'

Whoever wrote it – maybe for the London Jewish Chronicle, warns young men not to set out for Kimberley as the 'place is greatly overstocked' and 'they are likely to fare very badly – except for the capitalists'

KIMBERLEY: YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

On Monday last, the day of Yom Kippur, the syngogue was densely thronged with members and non-members, many of the latter coming very long distances to be present. The service was impressively read by the Rev. M. Mendelsohn, assisted by the Messrs. Lazarus and Wulfsan. It was extremely hot, the thermometer registering 103 degrees in the shade. The Diamond News yesterday, 4th October, says: "The last days have been almost like a couple of successive Sundays in camp, owing to the observance of the Jewish period of fasting. All the house of business were closed and the diamond market was deserted, a proof how strong a hold the Jewish people have succeeded in establishing in Kimberley." I send you a further paragraph from the Diamond News on the subject of employment here. I wish strongly to point out that the place is already greatly overstocked, and to advise young men who may be contemplating a visit here in the hope of meeting with some desirable employment, that they are likely to fair very badly. Many Jewish young men who have arrived can get nothing to do, and are either seen to be hanging idly about the streets, or calling at the various stores in hope of obtaining work. A friend of mine who advertised for a young man last week, received no less than 37 applications for the vacant post, and a great many of the applicants were Jews. The time for making rapid fortunes here has past expect for the capitalists, and it is very difficult even to obtain a living. Moreover, the expense of coming here is so great, with the amount so expended, much good might be done in England. I would specially wish to point this out to the various Jewish Emigration societies. Mechanics can nearly always get employment, and it is a good act to send them here, but the "jack of all trades" and master of none, is frequently schar'd up that he has resourc'd to the gambling table in the hope of winning a meri. The Diamond News says: "Want of employment. - The number of Europeans out of employment in Kimberley is lamentably great and their chances of obtaining it, it is to be feared, is at present very small. It is to be hoped that South African journals, more especially those published at the ports, will unite with our local paper in dissuading all, ~~xxx~~ except handicraftsmen and mechanics, from visiting the Fields ~~xxxx~~ until business improves as such a step is almost certain to involve them in difficulties."

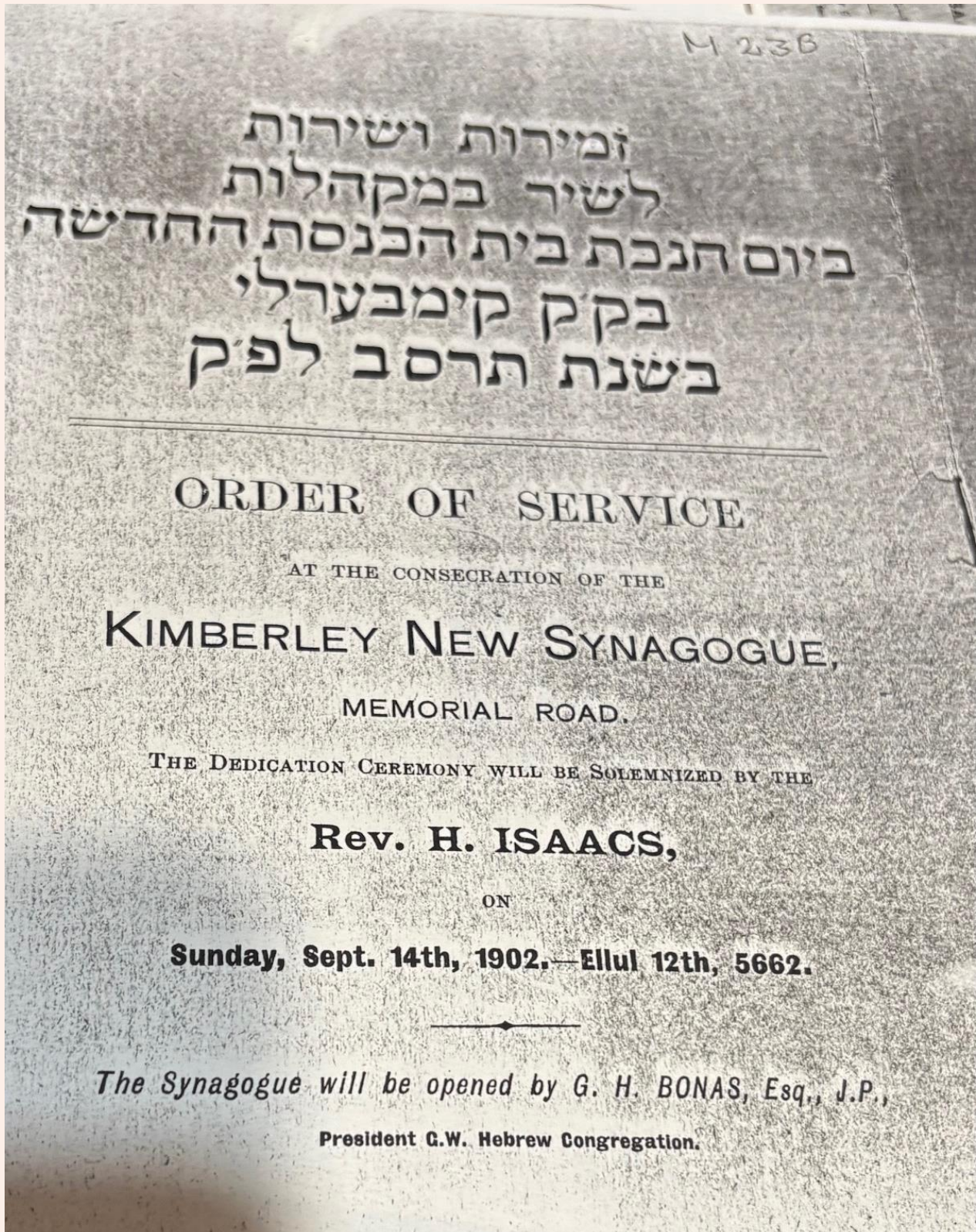
*1882 66, 67, 68 omitted: 20-1-82 Page 6 Col 2, + Page 7 Col 1
13-2-82 " 7 Col 1 + 3-3-82 page 6 Col 2*

10th March, 1882. p. 5, col 2.

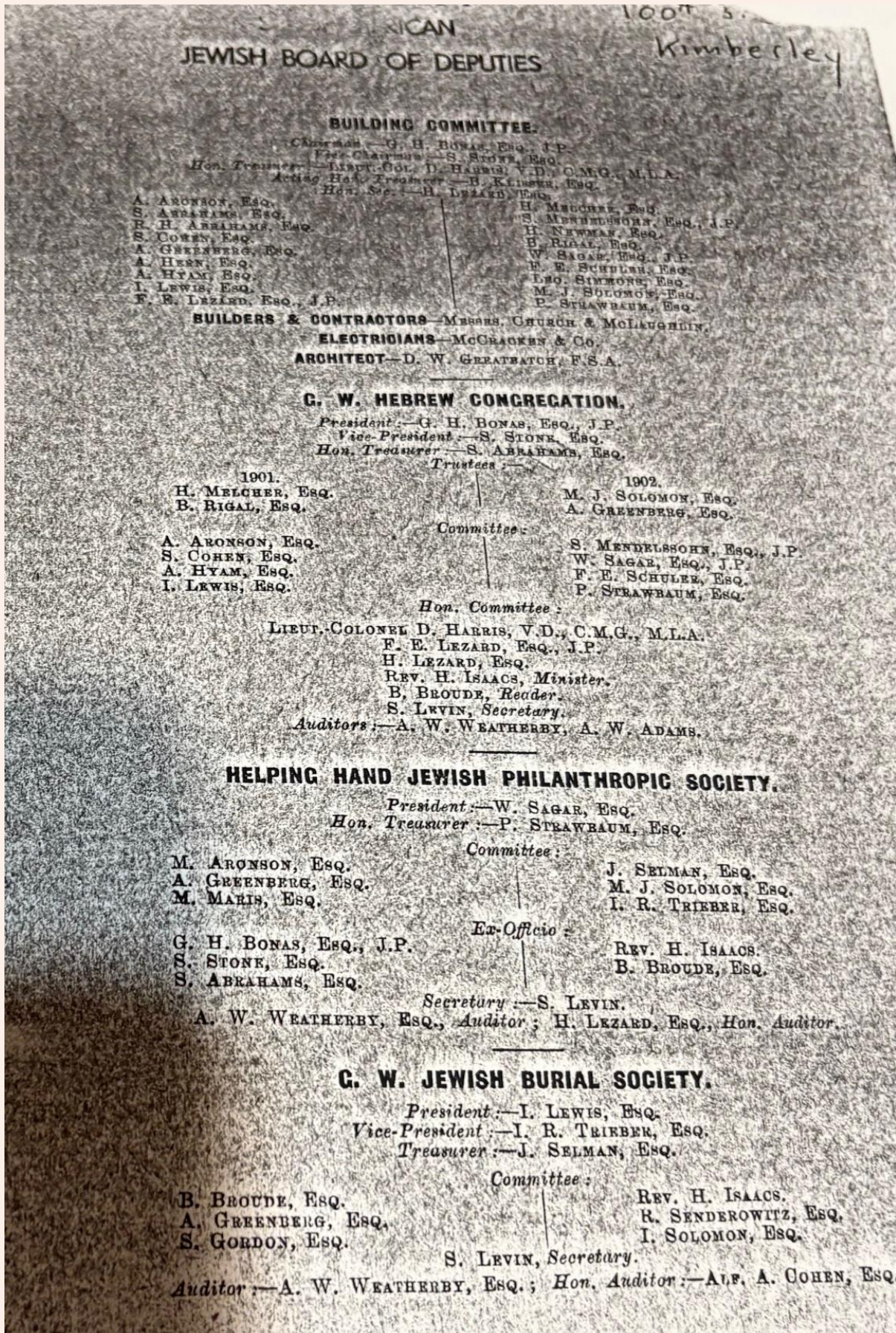
CAPEX

Opening ceremony of the Memorial Road Synagogue – September 1902

I also found a copy of the opening ceremony of the **Memorial Road Synagogue** on 14 September 1902. It was built on land and with money donated by De Beers – with whom many of the 'machers' were connected. Building began as soon as the Siege of Kimberley was over, while the Boer War was still raging and the military had to approve all the building materials. **Gustave Bonas** who was the President of the Congregation and who had masterminded the whole process was Chair of the Building committee and was to open the synagogue. Rev **Harris Isaacs** was to 'solemnise the ceremony'.



From this document we learn about other notable people at the time: The Vice Chair was Samuel Stone. The hon Treasurer was Lieut. Col David Harris with lots of letters after his name. The acting treasurer was Bernard Klisser and the secretary H Lezard. You can probably make out the other names on this fuzzy photocopy.



The Baronial Street Shul – 1908 picture

There was also a picture of the 1908 plan for the **Baronial Street Synagogue** that looked ever so grand. It never got to be built quite so fancy, though it is clearly recognisable.



Other items I found included:

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Kimberley
Hebrew Cong.



Mr. Mark Lewis (right), Rabbi O. M. Werner (centre) and Mr. Goldberg beside the foundation stone of the Jewish Synagogue in Memorial Road. The 60th anniversary of the laying of the stone will be commemorated today.

DFA

August

1961

Saw stone-laying 60 years ago — he'll be at anniversary tonight

MR. Mark Lewis, aged 67, claims to be Kimberley's only surviving member of the congregation which saw the foundation stone laying of the Jewish Synagogue in Memorial Road. His father was responsible for the stonework inscription above the doorway.

The 60th anniversary of the stone-laying ceremony performed on July 31, 1901, by Mr. G. H. Bonas president of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation at the time, will be commemorated at a service to be conducted by Rabbi O. M. Werner this evening.

Many members of the Hebrew congregation, which comprises more than 150 city families, will attend. Three past presidents, Mr. Bernard Goldberg, Mr. Noel Kretzmar and Mr. G. B. Haberfeld, will also be present.

The decision to build the new synagogue was made at a meeting of Jews in the vestry of the old synagogue, where Rhodes' Monument stands today, in April of the same year.

RHODES'S GIFT

It is not known generally that Cecil John Rhodes was among the first to give money toward the new building. His contribution was £500 (R1,000). He was approached by one of his fellow directors Sir David Harris, an enthusiastic member of the congregation's building fund.

At the same time as Rhodes's gift, De Beers Company made a grant of the new site in Memorial Road and allowed the committee to sell the old site in Victoria Crescent.

Since the synagogue was opened in 1902 it has had six ministers. The first was the Rev. Harris Isaacs. The present minister, Rabbi Werner, has been in Kimberley for four years.

Centenary of the community 1973

In 1973 the community held a large civic gathering at the William Humphries Art Gallery to celebrate the centenary of the community – established in 1873 just six years after diamonds were first discovered in a piece of dry barren veld.



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Jewish centen

THE PRESIDENT of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation, Mr N. Cohen (left) with Mrs E. Davis a former mayoress, and J. Frank and Mr A. Pollen (a trustee of the congregation).

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The last Batmitzvah?

In 1983 there was another Bat Mitzvah ceremony conducted by the Coppermans. Mrs Copperman taught the girls, and Rev Copperman conducted the service. The girls in question were Justine Benn, Marie Rohloff, Debbie Datnow, Jenny Haberfeld, Sharla Cohen, Lorin Bayer and Marilyn Cohen. I wonder if this was the last such ceremony in Kimberley?



I wonder if there is anyone who could write a profile of the Coppermans for the website – and does anyone have any copies of

'Don't be Farieble'

As it would be great to have those digitized too

South African Jewish Museum (SAJM)



I enjoyed a trip to the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM) (where the silver replica of the Kimberley synagogue – as presented to the President and main instigator of the splendid synagogue at the time, Gustave Bonas, is safely displayed)

The Silver model of the Kimberley synagogue, presented to GH Bonas in October 1902 – that had an adventurous path before landing up here.

My Kimberley-related visit to South Africa, ended with a lovely afternoon tea hosted by **Daphne Gillis (née Toube)** with Kimberley folks at her home in Sea Point. Thank you, Daphne and Kimberley friends, for this lovely sendoff.



Left to right in this picture:

David Diamond, Geraldine Auerbach, Laura Radomsky (née Sussman, daughter of **Natalie and Cecil**) seated in front of her Marion Lewis (née Schild) Lauren Gillis (Daphne's daughter-in-law) and Daphne Gillis

Kimberley Virtual Cemetery

It's a new year and a new opportunity for you to visit the Kimberley Virtual cemetery. To be honest I am disappointed in the small number of people who have visited this wonderful facility. It costs you nothing to leave a stone on a graveside to show that you have visited. And if you buy some leaves on a tree of life, the money will get to Barney to look after the graves. Maybe you have a picture to upload on a grave? I have put several pictures on the dedicated pages. If you click these names below you can see them.

Recent Profile Pictures

In Memory of

[Celine HEYDENREICH](#)

[Hinda CVI](#)

[Sarah GOLDBERG](#)

Date

12 October 2024

13 September 2024

22 July 2024

Recent Profile Pictures

In Memory of

	Date
<u>Anne HABERFELD</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Cyril Bowman HABERFELD</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Gustave Bowman HABERFELD</u>	22 July 2024
<u>William SAGAR</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Ithmore GOLDRING</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Vernon GOLDMAN</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Bernard GOLDBERG</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Maxwell Kenneth CAPON</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Leon CAPON</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Victoria CAPON</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Joe BRENNER</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Annie MILUNSKY</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Louis MILUNSKY</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Aaron SENDEROVITZ</u>	22 July 2024
<u>David BERGMAN</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Anna Dika BERGMAN</u>	22 July 2024
<u>Solomon APTER</u>	22 July 2024

If you go to the homepage of the Kimberley Virtual Cemetery you can search for your friend or family member. <https://kimberley.jewishcemetery.net/>

It took a lot of time and effort and also money from several individuals to create this amazing facility, and as I say, I am very disappointed in how little it is visited. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help you visit the virtual cemetery. Do make a visit now and leave your mark.

The purpose of the Kimberley Ex-Pats Newsletters is to direct you to the **Kimberley Jewish Community website**. Do you ever look at the website? That is where all the goodies are.

Further readings about people mentioned (and highlighted) in this Newsletter, that you might enjoy reading about on the website are: (just click the names to go straight there)

- [Isaacs, Rev Harris](#) Minister from 1890 - 1927
- [Harris Col Sir David](#) parliamentarian, director of De Beers and soldier
- [Klisser, Bernard](#) Philanthropist
- [Bonas, Gustav](#) chair of the building committee of the Memorial Road Synagogue
- [Memorial Road and Baronial Street Synagogues](#) History and tours of the synagogues
- [Cyril Haberfeld's History of the community 1973](#) Centenary Publication
- [Gillis \(nee Toubé\), Daphne Rose](#) (who hosted the tea party)
- [Sussman Cecil and Natalie](#) premier meat supply and farming + Mayor of Kimberley.

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Kimberley Newsletter #65, compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, February 2025  
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