

## Zygfred Klipstein (1922-2014)

Zygfred Klipstein, an important figure in the last decades of the Bradford Orthodox Jewish Community, passed away on 2<sup>nd</sup> Adar I, 5774, at the age of 91. For the last 26 years of his life, Zygfred lived with his wife Berta in Leeds, where they decided to move in 1988, becoming members of the Shadwell Lane Synagogue.

Zygfred arrived in Bradford in 1952, where he joined George Garnett and Sons, a manufacturer of fine woollen and worsted cloth in Apperley Bridge. He quickly rose to the position of Chief Designer, and the Company won a Queen's Award for Industry in 1977. Unfortunately, like most other mills of its type, Garnett's was forced to close down in 1980, due to fierce foreign competition. Zygfred learned his profession in Bielsko-Biala, a textile town in southern Poland, not far from the Czech border. The story of how he ended up in Bradford is one of adventure, danger and narrow escapes, and begins when he was 17, at the outbreak of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.



During the second week of the War, the train in which Zygfred and his family were fleeing east was overtaken by the Wehrmacht, near the German-Russian front. The Jews were separated from the other travelers, and were initially imprisoned in the Synagogue in Łańcut. Later they were released because the German Army, as opposed to the SS, did not yet have a clear idea of what to do with them. Sensing the danger of staying within German occupied Poland, it was decided that Zygfred,

as the oldest boy, should try to escape into Russian occupied Poland, across the River San. Over the next few weeks, the rest of the family managed to follow and all were reunited in the town of Lvov. A relative helped them find accommodation and work but in June 1940, the next part of his long journey began. Zygfryd and the other members of his family were herded into cattle trucks and transported with many other Polish refugees, into the heart of Siberia. The Russians would not allow them to stay in Lvov, because they had refused to take Russian citizenship.

The period in Siberia was similar to that described in Menachem Begin's autobiography, "the Revolt". Overcrowded barges, lumberjacking in temperatures of minus 50 degrees Centigrade, frostbite in shoes made of birch tree bark, were just some of the privations that prisoners had to face. At one point Zygfryd fell into the ice cold river and had to have his clothes cut off with an ice pick. On another occasion, when logs broke loose from a railway truck, a knot in one of them jammed against another log and prevented Zygfryd from being crushed. Somehow the family survived on forest berries, nettles and a few meager rations. By the end of the first year they even managed to grow potatoes.

A brief respite came when the Ribbentrop pact between Russia and Germany collapsed. As a result, General Sikorski, the leader of the Polish Army in exile, was eventually able to negotiate the release of Polish prisoners in the Siberian labour camps. Many ex-prisoners, including Zygfryd and family, made their way to warmer climes, namely Uzbekistan in Soviet Central Asia. At first Uzbekistan seemed like a hospitable and easy place of refuge, but after a few months the population swelled as thousands of Russian refugees arrived, fleeing the war torn areas further west and bringing disease and famine in their wake. Accommodation was primitive and Zygfryd's family rented a windowless room at the back of a mud hut in the town of Samarkand. These huts often collapsed in the winter rains, killing many of the inhabitants trapped inside. Zygfryd found work in a textile factory owned by a Bucharian Jew, but suffered many trials including a stint in prison for continuing to refuse Russian citizenship, sickness from scarlet fever, and two months in a coma after contracting typhus. After the typhus coma, food was scarce and the convalescence was long. Zygfryd was weak and almost unable to walk for several months. Eventually, the Russians relented and allowed the Poles to form their own units to fight alongside those of the Russian army. In 1943, Zygfryd's brother, Chaim travelled to Palestine via Teheran with the Polish army of General Anders. There, he was to become one of the founders of Kibbutz Hazerim, in the Negev. Zygfryd joined another unit of the Polish army and contributed to the drive to push the Germans back West. His unit passed through the German death camp of Majdanek, two weeks after it had been liberated, and Zygfryd saw many of the Nazi atrocities at first hand.

When the war ended, Zygfryd made his way back to Bielsko-Biala where the family house had been occupied by Volksdeutsche Germans, who were made to leave. He was able to complete his studies and during this time he met his wife to be, Berta Bienenstock. Berta left for England in 1946, on one of the ships organized by Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld to bring European children to England. Meanwhile, Zygfryd and his mother made their way into Austria and joined a camp of displaced persons in Salzburg. There, Zygfryd's sister, Selma, met and married a doctor and emigrated to America. Meanwhile, Zygfryd and his mother crossed the Alps illegally, in order to get to Italy and join groups waiting for Aliyah

Bet, which would take them to Israel. In the event Zygfyrd and his mother remained in Italy for the next four years, living as stateless persons, and working in a number of jobs, Zygfyrd in textiles (weaving talitot) and typewriter mechanics (which he had learned in an ORT College in Rome), and his mother in catering.

By 1951 Berta had obtained a degree in Mathematics and Chemistry from London University, when Zygfyrd joined her in England on a two week entry permit. They were married by Rabbi Dr. Schonfeld in Stoke Newington Shul with a minyan of one friend and nine strangers. At the same time his mother moved to America, to join his sister who was now established in New York. Initially, Zygfyrd was not able to obtain an official extension of his permit to stay in England, but fortunately the authorities made it clear that he would not be deported. After some months, Zygfyrd was able to take up the position in Yorkshire with George Garnett and Sons, and after five more years he finally obtained his naturalization papers. The months preceding the move up North were hard, Berta working days as a Chemist at the Tate and Lyle sugar factory, and Zygfyrd working nights under difficult conditions in a number of jobs, including textiles and plastics.

In Bradford, Berta and Zygfyrd at last found a haven where they could settle and build a family. They bought a house in Shipley Fields Road, where their sons, Richard and Philip were born. A car was added in 1963 and one year later, they moved to Nab Wood, their home for the next 24 years until the move to Leeds. Zygfyrd was very active in the Bradford Hebrew Congregation and served in several official roles including President, Head of the Education Committee and Head of the Chevra Kaddisha. Richard's Barmitzvah was one of the last in the Spring Gardens Shul in Bradford, while Philip's was one of the first in the new Springhurst Road Shul in Shipley. Sadly, the Springhurst Road Shul was officially closed by Rabbi Gilbert of Leeds a few months ago, due to dwindling of the community to an unviably small number. After the move to Leeds, Zygfyrd was a popular member of the Shadwell Lane Shul Choir under the leadership of the late Jack Fixman. This was a fitting continuation of his career as a chorister, which had begun before he was 13 years old, in the Grand Neo Romanesque Synagogue of Bielsko-Biała, built in 1881 and destroyed by the Nazis in 1939.

Zygfyrd is survived by his dear wife, Berta, his two sons Richard and Philip, and his five grandchildren, Yishai, Amichai, Noa, Gilad and Hanit, all of whom live in Israel. B'Ezrat HaShem, Gilad will celebrate his Barmitzvah in March, on the same date that Zygfyrd would have turned 92!