



Rabbi retires after 38 years of leadership

By Geoffrey Davies

The lighting of the first candle to mark the Jewish festival of Hanukkah in mid-December also marked the end of nearly four decades of leadership at the New North London Synagogue (NNLS) in East End Road, N3.

The event was the last official duty of Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, who has retired after leading the community since 1987. Planned to be no more than 350 members when founded in 1974, it now numbers more than 3,700 members, a third of whom are under 21.

His retirement was first announced a year ago. "I had always intended to retire at this time when I still had strength," says Rabbi Wittenberg. "I've seen too many rabbis leave it too late." It is a sign of his current strength that he will be running locally using a tracking app on the day of the London Marathon.

Born in Glasgow in 1957 of German-immigrant parents, Rabbi Wittenberg was educated at University College School in

Hampstead and read English at Cambridge University before his religious studies.

While he regards retirement as "unknown territory", he is planning a book on listening and spending more time on his concern for the environment through EcoJudaism, a charity leading community response to the crises in climate and nature. He points out how climate change is a major factor in the movement of refugees.

As well as housing refugees himself, the synagogue has been involved in supporting refugees and contributing locally through FEAST With Us, cooking meals for a homeless shelter in East Finchley, and Homeless Action Barnet.

While retiring from NNLS, Rabbi Wittenberg will continue in his role as the Senior Rabbi of the Masorti Movement, which sits between the United Synagogue, represented by the Chief Rabbi, and the Reform Movement. Masorti Judaism originated after a split within the United Synagogue over the origins of the torah (law).

From The Archer archives ...

By Jane Marsh

**10 years ago:
January 2016**

We reported on the success of the fourth East Finchley Christmas Festival in the High Road. Despite inclement weather, everyone pulled together to keep the event going. Many local traders ran stalls outside their shops and many other attractions braved the strong winds. There was also singing, music, a baking competition and dog show. Sadly, despite its popularity, this event no longer takes place.

**15 years ago:
January 2011**

Our local stationer UOE, now also our Post Office, won the 2010 BOSS Industry Award for Retail Excellence. It was deemed to be the best stationery shop in the UK by judges, and manager Elliot Jacobs was delighted with such recognition when he collected the award during a ceremony at the Royal Lancaster Hotel.

**25 years ago:
January 2001**

We published a report from the Friends of Cherry Tree Wood highlighting the state of the Wood in 2000. It showed that flooding on the main open space was not a new phenomenon: "The park dried out last summer and the ducks left their muddy patch on the Quaggy, the old name for the football ground, where once there were watercress beds."

Tell us the news

Have you got a news story or an interesting photo for us? Our readers are our eyes and ears, and we are always pleased to hear what is going on in East Finchley. Tips, ideas and stories, large or small, are very welcome. Please email news@the-archer.co.uk or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748. Thank you

Car boot sale

The Muswell Hill Indoor Car Boot Sale will be held this month from 10am to 1pm on Saturday 31 January at Hornsey Parish Church Hall, on the corner of Cranley Gardens and Park Road, N10 3AH. Buses W7, W3 and 144 stop nearby. Admission is 50p with refreshments available. Also open between 10am and 1pm is the Basement Bookshop below the hall. More information from 020 7263 7638.



Final duties: Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg at the Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony. Photo Adrian Pope

Special school opens £1million redesign project

Oak Lodge School in East Finchley celebrated a major milestone last month with the official opening of its newly refurbished Walker Building following a £1million project funded by Barnet Council.

The building was named in honour of Lynda Walker, the school's previous headteacher and current CEO, whose leadership steered Oak Lodge School through three consecutive outstanding Ofsted inspections.

Current headteacher Charlotte Charlesworth said the refurbishment demonstrated a



Lynda Walker speaks at the opening ceremony. Photo Mike Coles



Class facilities: One of the new rooms in the refurbished Oak Lodge School building. Photo Mike Coles

shared commitment to providing the highest quality educational environment for students with highly complex needs.

The Walker Building now features two specialist classrooms, a dedicated swing room, and a calming sensory integration space, specifically designed to support students with complex needs. The building also includes upgraded art and music rooms benefiting the entire school community.

In a remarkable feat of project management, the entire refurbishment was completed in just six weeks over the summer holidays, ensuring students returned to enhanced learning spaces without disruption. The

project was led by Alison Dawes and Miladin Stevanovic from the local authority, working in close partnership with Kim Miller, the school's Director of SEND and Inclusion. The building work was completed by Gary Cheek and the team at GRC Maintenance.

Oak Lodge School's leadership team expressed profound gratitude for the local authority's investment. Charlotte Charlesworth said: "The official opening ceremony welcomed members of the local community to celebrate this exciting new chapter in the school's ongoing mission to provide outstanding education for all its students."

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