

OCHJS NEWS BULLETIN NO 33 : JULY 2007

LECTURES ● PATRONS' DINNER ● BURSARIAL NEWS ● MANOR FARM DEVELOPMENT

SPECIAL LECTURES

The 15th Stencl Lecture in Yiddish Studies took place on 10 May in the Taylor Institution under the joint auspices of the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Unit and the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages. Dr Daniela Mantovan, currently a Visiting Fellow at the Centre, spoke on the children's stories of the Soviet Yiddish writer known as Der Nister (1884-1950), touching upon both their historical and linguistic aspects and offering an analysis of the conceptual content. The lecture will appear in the Centre's forthcoming Annual Report.

This year's Bertelsmann Europaeum Visiting Professor was the celebrated Holocaust historian Christopher Browning from the University of North Carolina. Professor Browning delivered a lecture at Yarnton within the series "Remembering Survival" on 31 May. The series was based on the exceptional number of Holocaust survivor testimonies – sometimes gruelling to listen to – from the Jewish community of Wierzbnik south of Warsaw and the nearby factory camp of Starachowice.

On 6 June Dr Ada Rapoport-Albert of University College London delivered in memory of Rabbi Louis Jacobs the first of a re-instated lecture series in his name at Yarnton Manor. Her subject was "From Sabbatean Prophetess to Hasidic Mad Woman: the Displacement of Female Spirituality in the Post-Sabbatean Era". A reception followed. The event attracted a substantial audience from London as well as Oxford.

The summer term also saw the inception of an innovative series of Master Classes, arranged by Dr Piet van Boxel in his capacity as Hebraica and Judaica Librarian of Oxford University. Professor Malachi Beit-Arié, Emeritus Professor in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and currently a Kennedy Leigh Visiting Fellow at the Centre, gave four lectures on Hebrew Codicology, that is, the science of dating manuscripts and determining their provenance. The lectures, held in the basement of the Sheldonian Theatre, focused on a comparison of the medieval Jewish hand-produced book with non-Hebrew manuscripts. Early manuscripts and printed books from the Bodleian Library, precious and fragile material seldom accessible to general view, were displayed.

PATRONS' DINNER

The Centre Patrons' Dinner took place on 3 May, at the Drapers' Hall, London. This year's main speakers were the Rt Hon the Lord Patten of Barnes (Chancellor of Oxford University) and Michael Grade, Executive Chairman of ITV and very much the representative of showbiz. The audience of some 200 participants also included Oxford's Vice-Chancellor Dr John Hood.

BURSARIAL NEWS

Peter Da Costa, the Centre's genial, efficient and unflappable Bursar since 1992, retired at the end of June. He was entertained to lunch in London by the Governors before their meeting on 27 June, and by everybody at Yarnton Manor on the following day, when he and Moira were also presented with parting gifts. He looked back in characteristic fashion on his period of office:

"In the last 15 years life at the Centre has certainly not been dull! It is enormously satisfying that we are now a Recognised Independent Centre of Oxford University and that the Diploma in Jewish Studies has been designated a Master's degree. Supporting the Library changes and seeing its research facilities continue to grow in both the quantity and quality of its holdings has also been a great personal pleasure. The properties and accommodation of the Centre have been transformed. We have contractually agreed space at the Oriental Institute for our Fellows in central Oxford. The Yarnton campus is in good order and the Manor Farm development now complete: the idea of converting the derelict Manor (formerly Mead) Farm buildings first arose around 10 years ago, so it is a real reward for me to see both phases built to budget and on time – a fairly rare occurrence!

In spite of financial worries and occasional scares (my hair has turned white in testimony) the Centre has financially held its own and indeed flourished. As I leave it has some substantial assets, although the perennial challenge remains of raising a sufficient flow of income to meet its annual budget. I am looking forward to my retirement and hope the Centre continues to go from strength to strength."

The Bursar's role is now to be divided between Simon Ryde, the current part-time Deputy Bursar, who will continue with his investment and estate management responsibilities, and Stuart Carroll who joins the Centre likewise on a part-time basis in July. Stuart, whose background is in law, is an Associate Fellow of the Clifford Chance Centre for the Management of Professional Service Firms, based at Oxford's Saïd Business School. His earlier career experience includes both industry and teaching law at Cambridge.

MANOR FARM DEVELOPMENT

As Peter Da Costa observed in his valedictory remarks, the second (concluding) phase of the Manor Farm development is now complete, and ready for occupation this summer. There are five brand new apartments, providing fully furnished, flexible accommodation for visiting academics and their families.

Peter Oppenheimer - President
Sue Forteach - Bulletin Compiler