

The Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies

Yarnton Manor

by **David Patterson**, *President*,

Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies

THE Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies was founded in one room in the Oriental Institute in October 1972, the brainchild of its first President, the proposal was finally confirmed after five years of negotiation with Oxford University. From the beginning, it aimed to be a Centre of Excellence, modelled on the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, but in the fields of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. The University appointed five of its Governors who invited a further six governors from outside the University. Professor S.H. Frankel was invited to become the first Chairman of the Board of Governors, an office which he held with distinction until the November of 1989. Since then the Board of Governors has been considerably augmented, and it currently includes seven Heads or former Heads of Oxford Colleges as well as many distinguished personages from the outside world. The Chairman of the Board is The Rt. Hon. Lord David Young.

In its early years, the Centre was fortunate enough to acquire a long term lease from St. John's College of a Georgian house at 45 St. Giles', Oxford. This house has since become a Centre for research and teaching for Oxford University undergraduates and graduates in many branches of Hebrew, Yiddish and Jewish studies. It has played host to many distinguished academic seminars, and it provides the teaching rooms for many of the Centre's growing band of Fellows.

In 1974, the Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust acquired the Yarnton Manor Estate which it kindly put at the disposal of the Oxford Centre. The splendid facilities have already housed some three hundred distinguished visiting scholars who have come mainly for an academic year or two months in the summer, to pursue their own researches and contribute to the teaching of Jewish studies at Oxford. A bibliography published in 1987 lists more than 130 books and some 600 articles in learned journals which

have been written as a result of scholars coming to the Oxford Centre. Many important works in modern Hebrew literature have been written on the Yarnton Manor Estate by visiting writers from Israel.

The Centre was also fortunate in acquiring the library and archive of the late Mr. G. Kressel and more recently the library of the late Professor G. Elkoshi. The libraries contains some forty thousand volumes, while the Archive has a collection of some four hundred thousand items. Together they form an extremely valuable academic resource for research in many aspects of life in Palestine and Israel over the last sixty years. More recently, the Centre has been able to acquire a complete photographic collection of the materials from Qumran (The Dead Sea Scrolls), which will enable it to become a leading Centre of research in this important field.

Apart from its visiting scholars, the Centre now has fourteen fellows of its own who specialise in various aspects of language, literature, history, religion, social studies and social anthropology, Jewish/Christian and Jewish/Muslim relations, in the ancient, medieval and modern worlds.

Quite apart from its emphasis on Hebrew studies, the Centre has encouraged the growth of Yiddish Studies which over the last ten years, under the inspiration primarily of Dr Dovid Katz have become outstandingly successful. Indeed, Oxford is now one of the leading centres for the academic study of Yiddish in the world.

Over the years, literally thousands of guests, both academic and lay, have been entertained to dinner followed by a lecture at Yarnton Manor hosted by the President and Mrs José Patterson. In addition, there have been scores of individual one and two-day seminars, and many prestigious lectures, such as the outstanding series of Sacks Lectures.

Since its inception, the Fellows of the Centre and the visiting scholars have contributed greatly to the cultural and intellectual life of the Oxford Jewish Community. Their presence provides a source of inspiration, which is constantly being renewed. In turn, members of the community have offered warm hospitality to visiting and resident scholars, a kindness which is deeply appreciated.

By happy coincidence, the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Oxford Community coincides with the 20th Anniversary of the founding of the Oxford Centre. May they both continue to flourish and go from strength to strength!