

Remembering Laurie Bloom

(1894 - 1978)

An appreciation

by **David Lewis** as a tribute to Laurie Bloom on his 80th birthday and published in the *Oxford Menorah*

THE first appearance of Laurie Bloom in the annals of the Oxford Jewish Congregation is on 1 March, 1942 when he was one of the three representatives of the Cowley and Iffley *Minyan* who came to the vestry room of the old synagogue to discuss the terms of amalgamation of that *Minyan* with the Congregation. He was evidently already active, but no records of that early *Minyan* are known to survive. The Secretary gave up trying to minute the amalgamation meeting after half a page and put two neat lines through what he had already written; no doubt Laurie had had his say. Thereafter we find him engaged in a good deal of wartime troubleshooting; complaining about the state of the Headington Hebrew class and carrying through its amalgamation with that at Cowley; reporting on the first meeting of the Jewish Youth Club; making practical suggestions for replacing the *Shochet*. Some of his functions did not become apparent until he gave them up; how long had he been local correspondent for the Jewish Chronicle?

In 1946 he really took over, as treasurer and Marriage Secretary. Since there was no Chairman he took the Chair as well. There was a brief pause after an illness, but essentially he kept the structure of the Congregation going for 15 years in the difficult period between the return of wartime community to London and the renewed growth of the Jewish population in Oxford. During that period virtually every problem of Jewish organisation was taken to the shop in the Broad, and generally solved. I remember in particular his willing provision of a stove for the vestry when *Pesach* fell in term in 1948; the tiny nucleus round which the undergraduate meals service grew. Towards the end of his time in office, he was grappling with the problems of rebuilding the synagogue. Throughout this period he *was* the Jewish community for everyone, from the Master of Balliol to the Oxford Chamber of Commerce, in which he held all the offices, including that of President. In 1967, for example, it was to his shop that a stream of callers came to express their feelings about the Six Day War.

Professor Herbert Frankel

writes

LAURIE Bloom actually took Ilse and me under his wing when we arrived during the University vacation in the summer of 1946. I was searching for the secretary or warden of the Synagogue and eventually was directed to Laurie's shop in Broad Street. He was most helpful to us and from that time on, I assisted him to the best of my ability to 'rescue' the congregation which had shrunk to a few families. At the first committee meeting of the synagogue I was elected President, and remained so for some years. But of course Laurie did all the work. If it had not been for him the whole show would have folded up. He was greatly respected by the City authorities due to his forthrightness and courageous stand on all matters concerning the Jewish community. I had a deep affection for him because I was keenly aware of the fact that behind this sometimes assumed gruff attitude lay a warm heart for the poor and all those who needed help - the sick, the prisoners, and those who had suffered bereavement.



Laurie Bloom

Obituary

by **Rose and Dan Kemp** and published in the "Oxford Menorah"

THE Oxford Jewish Community has lost one of its leading personalities with the death of Laurie Bloom at the age of 82, only a few weeks after celebrating his Golden Wedding.

Laurie had been involved in communal activities of one kind or other all his life. Having volunteered for military service in the 1914-1918 war, he served in France and was awarded the Mons Star. He also served in Greece. Laurie conducted religious services for his fellow soldiers whenever possible and assisted the Chaplain when he visited the troops.

He was the hon. secretary of the Poets Road Hebrew Classes in London for a number of years before joining the army. Laurie Bloom, came to Oxford together with his family in 1940 to escape the bombings in London. He opened a fur shop in Broad Street which soon became a centre for advice and local Jewish information as the number of Jewish families arriving in Oxford and the surrounding districts increased with the evacuation of London and other large cities. He never turned anyone away: he helped all comers and advised on accommodation, schools, etc. Laurie started to help to organise regular Sabbath and Holy Day Services. He organised a second service in the Cowley area as well as forming Hebrew classes in Oxford and many small outlying villages, small towns in Oxfordshire, North Berkshire and parts of Bucks.

In 1945 with the end of hostilities he became the hon. treasurer of the Congregation, which post he held until 1962. As some of the hon. officers of the wartime community left Oxford, he became even more involved with community affairs, doing his best to hold together the now smaller number of Jews living in the area. He organised social gatherings, drawing in the less committed Jews and in this way held their interest, encouraging them to attend services and to continue to send their children to classes.

When the students returned to the University at the termination of hostilities, Laurie helped organise the daily kosher meals service in the then simple kitchen of the old synagogue. Laurie Bloom resigned as treasurer of the Congregation in 1962 and from then on gave most of his time to the activities of the Oxford Chamber of Commerce, first serving as a committee member, and in 1968 he became the first Jewish President.

The condolences and sympathy of the entire congregation go out to his widow Elsie, his son Anthony and daughters Brenda and Sheila.