

Hope you are all keeping well. I hope the Friday Night message will continue long after Covid. I think it is a great initiative by Council and enjoy hearing from members and their thoughts. With another lockdown extended I have been looking into the Belfast Jewish community and discovered this remarkable story.

### **How a tiny Jewish community contributed to four decades of Israeli diplomacy and politics.**

Northern Ireland is a small country of 1.8million who have consistently punched above its weight in sporting, literacy and political fields. We have produced countless world champion boxers, two snooker world champions, the greatest footballer ever in George Best, endless poets and writers and even US Presidents with over half of the 46 having Irish ancestry. The small nation has also a strong connection to Israel and a proud Jewish community which sadly has now dwindled to around 76 at the latest estimate. Israel and Northern Ireland share the unique distinction of being the only two countries with a Star of David adorned on their flags.



***Rebitzen Sarah Hillman (Herzog)***



***Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog***

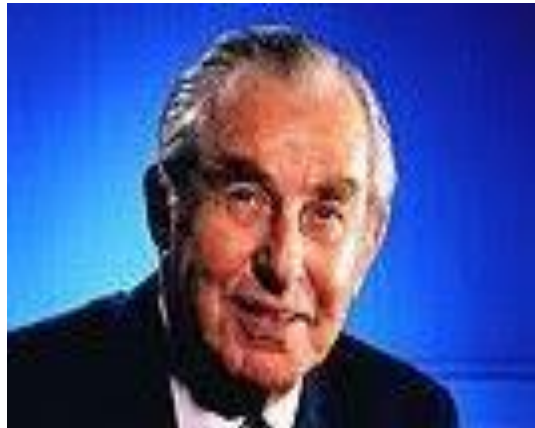
In 1918 the community numbered around 800 but amongst them lived a future Israeli Chief Rabbi, president and foreign minister. Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog came to Belfast, in 1916, from Poland to take up his first post as a Rabbi. He met his wife Sarah Hillman who arrived from Riga a year later and proved a strong and important personality in her own right.

She married Rabbi Herzog whilst still in her teens and gave birth to her first child Chaim in September 1918. Her achievements include developing a psychiatric hospital in Jerusalem which bears her name and forming the World Emunah which has over 180,000 members worldwide. Neve Sarah in Bnei Barak and Sarah Herzog Children's Home in Afula are just two of the projects named after her.

One of the only ten Presidents of the Jewish State hailed from Northern Ireland. Chaim Herzog, the sixth and longest serving President, served ten years from 1983-93 and was born in Clifton Park Avenue, Belfast.

His father Yitzhak was the first Chief Rabbi of Ireland (1922-1935) and of Israel (1936-1959). Chaim's son, Isaac Bugi Herzog was also, in his own right, a highly regarded Labour MK who served in the 16th-20<sup>th</sup> Knesset(im), is the current head of the Jewish Agency since June 2018 and is predicted to be a future Presidential candidate. The Ulster

History Society erected a commemorative plaque at the birthplace of Chaim Herzog in North Belfast.



Chaim Herzog served not only in the Haganah but also in British Army where he participated in the liberation of Bergen Belsen and took part in the interrogation of Heinrich Himmler before leaving the army at the rank of Major. He re-joined the Haganah and then the IDF retiring in 1962 as a Major-General. Perhaps one of Herzog's most famous battles however was as an ambassador to the UN when he fought a campaign to defeat Resolution 3379 that equated Zionism with racism.

During his celebrated speech in 1978 he symbolically tore up the resolution and declared "For us, the Jewish people this resolution is based on hatred, falsehood and arrogance, is devoid of any moral or legal value, for us the Jewish people, this is no more than a piece of paper and we shall treat it as such". This incident mirrored a virtually identical incident almost forty years earlier when his father Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog stood on the steps of the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem and reacting to the British publication of a White Paper restricting Jewish migration into then Palestine declared, "we cannot agree to the White Paper. Just as the prophets did before me, I hereby rip it in two".



At the time of Chaim Herzog's birth there was another young child living in Belfast. His name was Aubrey Solomon who would also become a famous Israeli politician and diplomat. Solomon who would become more famously known as Abba Eban, arrived as a toddler during World War One. He was born in Cape Town but spent much of his

formative years in Belfast, living at Kinnaird Street, close to the Herzog home and years later both men would become firm friends.

Many characteristics were shared by the men, notwithstanding their Belfast connection- they were both well educated, served as Intelligence Officers in the British Army in WW2, both unapologetic Zionists and both represented Israel at the United Nations. While Chaim Herzog became President of Israel, Eban served as foreign secretary for eight years and for a short spell as deputy Prime minister.



***Back L-R: Ronit Herzog, Michael Herzog, Suzy Eban Abba Eban, Isaac Herzog  
Front: Aura Herzog, Chaim Herzog***

These two men were right at the heart of Israeli politics for over four decades and there is another twist – they even married sisters. Eban married Suzy Ambashe from a distinguished Jewish Egyptian family and it was through his former North Belfast neighbour that Chaim Herzog met his would-be wife, Suzy's younger sister Aura. How extraordinary is it that two major figures who played such a prominent and pivotal role in the rebirth of the Jewish state which had disappeared for around 2000 years should have their roots in the tiny Jewish community of Belfast.

**Wishing you all a peaceful and happy Shabbat and Refuah Shlemah to all those unwell at this time. Stephen, Gie, Kacey and Althea.**

Shabbat shalom,

Stephen Haire  
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