

History of the Morris Feinmann Home

The history of the Morris Feinmann Home (MFH) begins with a question. Who was Morris Feinmann? He was a Jew born in the now forgotten city of Königsberg, capital of East Prussia. He was the oldest child of the family and was typical of a large number of Jews who had suffered persecution, torture and slaughter through the ages.

Prussian Jews, as land agents for the indigenous noblemen and peasants, were termed “non useful” and were forced to live in the Pale of Settlement. Russia also persecuted its Jewish population (by way of pogrom) and from that stock came the Feinmann family.

Moritz (Morris), a young man whose school report shows he was an able student (although “not very good” at singing) married Rebecca Zaks in 1913 and decided to come to England the following year when the threat of war became a reality. He was a paper and twine merchant in Cheetham Hill, and active in the Jewish community. Morris had a social conscience and was to become a leading light in the fight to help those less fortunate than himself – both refugees and the elderly, many of whom were the old people who had originally come from the Pale of Settlement.

The words of his obituary give a wonderful insight into the man after whom the home which bears his name was called:

News has just been received (writes a correspondent) of the death of Mr. Morris Feinmann on August 21 in Casablanca where he had been acting in a voluntary capacity at the U.N.R.R.A. North African Refugee Centre since the beginning of this year.

His sudden death after a short illness at the age of 53 comes as a great shock to his many friends. His refugee friends will particularly miss him, for he had devoted himself to their interests from the time when they, the first of Hitler's victims, came to this country.

He started a guarantee scheme by which many of the older people were enabled to escape from Germany, and he concerned himself particularly with their welfare and with that of the younger folk living in hostels set up by the Manchester Jewish Refugees Committee, of which he had acted as chairman since 1939.

The internments of 1940 found him fearless in pressing the authorities to remedy the injustice, which had been done. Many of the young men whose release he was instrumental in obtaining from internment joined the Pioneer Corps, and he did not rest until they were able to join the combatant units and to take their equal place in the struggle against the Nazis. He always urged that they should be given the right to naturalisation, but its

achievement is still to come and will arrive too late for the many who have died in France and on other fronts.

When a call came to the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad for help in staffing the first of the U.N.R.R.A. Refugee Centres Feinmann never hesitated. Important as his work was here, he knew that work for the refugees abroad was still more urgent and would become increasingly great. He thus became the first Jewish relief worker to go abroad. He was always a pioneer, and the spirit which he and his colleagues brought to their work has made the North Africa Refugee Centre a model and pattern on which will be formed the many centres which U.N.R.R.A. will have to operate for refugees and other displaced persons in Europe.

He was one of the early members of the International Club and he was always anxious to foster good relations between Jew and Gentile and between British people and other people from the Dominions and other countries living here. For many years he had been honorary secretary of the Manchester Home for Aged and Needy Jews. It is hoped that one of his early dreams will be realised shortly by the prospect of the transfer of this home from Cheetham Hill to the country. His unselfish example may inspire others to join in carrying on the task to which he had given his life.

Rae Barash, Chairman of the Manchester Jewish Refugee Committee, was one of those inspired by Morris Feinmann, and in 1946, she collected enough money (£1,700) from the refugee community to buy a house, 7, Amherst Road, Fallowfield; this was part funded by the Bochanek family and in part by subscription. The Home was initially for 7 residents and was quickly extended to cater for up to 16. This was followed in 1949 with the further purchase of the house next door, and the numbers increased to 25. These two properties mark the true start of the MFH, which was officially opened by Reverend Felix Carlebach (as he was then) in 1951, after the donors felt that it would be a “success”. The average age of residents was 71.3 years, the fees were £4 and 10 shillings (£4.50) per week and the salary of the matron, Mrs Blumenbach was £7 and 10 shillings (£7.50) per week.

The work continued with the formation of the Morris Feinmann Trust, which was formally established on 15th November 1947 “to provide a home for the lonely, infirm or needy Jewish persons of either sex, who were the victims of Nazi racial or religious persecution”. In 1955, an application to the Central British Fund (see below) for £9,150 was made – it would cater for refurbishment, improved amenities and a reserve fund.

By the late 1950s, the demand had grown hugely and larger premises were needed. In 1958 a budget of £80,000 was made available and the trustees, led by Heinz Kroch, managed to lease a larger house in Didsbury – “Lyndhurst” on Palatine Road.

The funds for the purchase of the house and its maintenance came from The Heirless Property Fund of Germany. This was set up after the Second World War to return

money confiscated by the Nazis to the Jewish people, where there was no relation left to whom it could be returned. Money from this fund was given to countries which had taken in refugees and in England was administered by the Central British Fund for Jewish Relief and Rehabilitation (CBF) – later to become known as the Otto Schiff Housing Association. The question of funding is an interesting one. The founders applied to the Heirless Property Fund of Germany for £36,000 but they refused to help; it required references to ensure that the monies would be used wisely by people who could be trusted. It was Leonard Cohen of “Henry’s Stores” in Market Street, Manchester (along with the good name of Morris Feinmann) who provided those references and on that basis, the Fund bought the property in Didsbury. They let it to the MFH on a peppercorn rent and it was this arrangement which allowed the Home to be established in Palatine Road. The role of Morris Feinmann was relatively small, but the Home continues to this day to bear his name and although Heinz Kroch, the real driving force behind much of the next part of the story could have changed the name, he chose not to.

The Founders

Heinz Kroch was, in fact, one of the most important of the founders. He was an influential figure who came to the UK in 1937 as a chemist in the petrochemical industry. He became a leading figure amongst the Jewish community in Manchester and founded the very successful Lankro Chemicals.

Heinz was passionate about the MFH and looked upon it as “his own”. He devoted a huge amount of his time and energy to it, often spending whole days at a time there, knowing all the staff and residents by name. He was a philanthropist and entrepreneur and although “not really a manager”, he was the leading light behind the MFH for many years, filling the role of the Treasurer of The Board of Trustees. In a moving obituary by Teddy Kingsley, in October 1983, he wrote of how Heinz Kroch had managed the “slender means of the Home with great skill” and of his true dedication to it.

The other founders were Adolph Abel, Gertrude Bochanek, Oscar Leopold Einstein, Rudolph Joshua Falk Freidlander (a private GP who offered his medical services entirely free to residents), Ludwig Karl Sonneborn and Leonard Cohen. With the exception of Leonard Cohen they were all refugees! Indeed, a document prepared for the Management Committee in 1955 talks of the Home’s guiding principle as “a Home run for Refugees by Refugees”. And in the early days, only two of the residents were non-refugees.

This group, as has already been noted, had met initially in 1947 on the initiative of Rae Barash, Chairman of the then Manchester Refugee Committee, to discuss what could be done for those elderly Jewish refugees in Manchester who for reason of age or ill health would be unable to earn a living after the War.

The Morris Feinmann Home, although originally thought to be expressly founded for Holocaust survivors, soon began to take in other elderly and needy Jews from South

Manchester; this was an important part of Heinz Kroch's vision and was an issue that the trustees returned to time and time again – as late, in fact, as 1976. The group of founders foresaw that the lifespan of a Home catering purely for refugees would be limited, and, under Heinz's direction broadened their remit to help "aged and needy" Jews generally.

The trustees, who had full responsibility and legal liabilities for all the activities of the Home, met as often as necessary and at least once per annum in order to deal with matters of policy. The day-to-day running of the Home was in the hands of the Management Committee, many of whom were also trustees. Their aim was to get to know each and every one of the residents and staff so as to ensure that every individual's needs were carefully considered and respected; this aim was substantially achieved.

The Committee met on Sunday mornings and, together with the Matron, dealt with the actual running of the Home. In the early days there was little strategy but the members gelled together well and all had a common purpose. The MFH grew and prospered; it was run by "love, commitment and laughter".

I have named the founder group of trustees but others, like John Simon, Werner Treuherz, Teddy Kingsley and Peter Kurer can also be justifiably counted as founders of MFH. They were all chairmen of the Management Committee and gave hugely and freely of their time and energy from the very beginning. Their commitment was such that not only their lives but also those of their families were part of the Home. Francis, Werner Treuherz's son, remembers Seder nights at the Home – especially the night where the question of "Who was the youngest member who will say Mah Nishtanah" was solved by the youngest member at each table all joining in together to form an "ad hoc" choir (all with their own different tunes!). Another small example of the commitment of these volunteers (and I'm sure there are many) was that Richard, John Simon's son, recalls having piano lessons there under the watchful tuition of Mrs Wallerstein at Amherst Road and then later at Spath Road. For all of these dedicated volunteers, the Morris Feinmann Home was home from home and a huge part of their everyday lives.

The original group of trustees were to number between 5 and 10, and the Management Committee between 5 and 9. However, there were many newcomers and by 1984 there were 19 members of the Management Committee! One such valuable new member was Tony Russell, who was invited onto the Committee to take Minutes and to help fire-fight management issues. He told me the story of one incident where the MFH needed a cook; the decision was between a Jewish cook who had never prepared a meal for more than 4, and an Irish cook, well-qualified to cook for a number of residents and staff. The meeting was lengthy and acrimonious – "lively" – with the Irish cook just about carrying the day. She was a great success and "as good cooks go, she went". This was the sort of thing which the Committee discussed. They were well qualified to do so. They knew and understood the running of the Home first hand, spending an average of half a day each week there; this "hands-on" style is reflected in the Minutes which mention detailed discussions

around adding a telephone line, buying a Brat fryer, a new steamer for the kitchen and even an ice-cream maker!

The Buildings

The physical shape of MFH has changed hugely over the past 65 years, mimicking the changing needs and standards of its residents and the age in which they lived.

A fascinating letter dated 1st April 1955, written to Leonard Cohen in response to his request for funds, shows some of the problems with the early accommodation; it refers to the Central British Fund (CBF) viewing the house as “somewhat shabby”. The robust riposte stated that the reason for the poor condition was an absence of funds! The letter talks of “donations in kind” of furniture, carpets and even food, necessitating good housekeeping which kept food bills at approximately 25 shillings (£1.25) per person per week

The next move, once the Trustees eventually secured some more funding, was to 120 Palatine Road and the purchase of “Lyndhurst”, which had originally been a large family home belonging to the Shasha family. The house had been spacious enough for a family of seven, plus Ossie (the governess and later housekeeper), a cousin, two maids, a cook and a gardener. The substantial grounds of 2,662 sq. yards included a tennis court and a kitchen garden - quite an establishment! Alterations were completed in 1959 and by mid-December all the Amherst Road residents were transferred there and joined by 20 newcomers at an opening ceremony held at the festival of Chanukah.

At this stage, as reported in the Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) magazine for December 1959, the home for 30 residents gave “every consideration to the comfort of old people, who had use not only of the lounges (including a sun and television lounge), dining room and a beautiful well laid out garden”.

The need for accommodation grew and grew. The CBF put more funds into the MFH allowing it to buy a further property, “Jesmond”, next door to the original house; this was demolished to make space for a new wing, which was built to house 25 residents, all in single rooms, and at this stage – 1967 – the MFH catered for 70 residents.

The size of the Home and its location was fully established by 1967, but the quality of accommodation and its facilities changed radically over time. In 1995, each corridor had a small kitchen area with a fridge, kettle, washing machine, tumble dryer and ironing facilities. According to Vera Smith, the idea behind this was so that “when your daughter visits, instead of taking your washing home, she can actually spend time with you!”. In later days, these services were done centrally – no expectations of daughters washing clothes at the MFH.

However, as Peter Kurer told me: “what was acceptable accommodation 50 years ago, like if you went to a hotel, you took a room and then on the corridor was the

loo, 50 years on, everybody wants a bathroom". There was a continuing programme of refurbishment over the lifetime of the Home and attempts to bring it up to five-star standards are well documented.

In modern times, all rooms had ensuite bathrooms, with a special feature of the MFH being that residents were encouraged to bring in their own favourite items of furniture, paintings, photographs and memorabilia from home; this made their rooms feel not only comfortable but also allowed them to put their own stamps of personality and style into their "home".

The next turning point came in 1983, when the Board had only one item on the agenda: "the direction the MFH should take to meet the future". This was prompted by inspectors who came to visit and said that when residents need specialised help due to increasing age and infirmity, (the Minutes refer to 21 geriatrics) they should be sent away from MFH to a nursing home. This led to the difficult decision to change the status and acquire dual registration – for nursing as well as residential. What were the implications of this decision? More responsibility for the doctors, more work for the Board of Management and a larger funding requirement; a nursing home required a qualified nurse to be on duty 24 hours each day, seven days each week!

An interesting piece of research from that same stage in the development of the Home showed that a small subcommittee actually went to Switzerland to look at three Old Age Homes there – in Zurich, Basel and Spital - to compare them to the MFH and to see if they could learn anything useful. The visits took place in 1984, described at the AGM as a "difficult year" and the small committee under Peter Kurer reported back that they had "little to learn". They did, however, bring back some useful ideas and were unanimous in admiring (somewhat enviously) the Zurich Home's brand new facilities. Their belief in the need for dual registration was reinforced, as was the fact they were heading in the right direction.

A further notable stage in the development of the Home was a decision later taken by the MFH Trust to create a centre of excellence for those in need of substantial nursing care and, ultimately, care for dementia. This dementia wing would later be called the "Levy Wing", to which I refer in the chapter "Special Occasions and Celebrations".

The final limb of what Peter Kurer called "the tripod for security" was the building of a block of apartments, Barfield House, next door to the MFH. Initially, this was not much more than a dream – a vision of building apartments for those elderly Jews who wanted to retain their independence but could also use the facilities of the Home as and when they needed to, and "graduate" to actually living in the MFH should the need arise. This was a long-treasured project of Peter Kurer and in 1996, under the dynamic leadership of David Sidi, became a reality.

This dream of building 18 luxury apartments using the facilities of the MFH had begun as far back as 1980, when there had been an opportunity to buy a property

next door to the Home. However, the price tag was too high at £180K and the project was deemed to be too risky by the Board.

Ten years later, the land upon which Barfield House would eventually be built was again up for sale, but at £340K was still far too expensive. However, when three months later, the City Council (which owned the land) reported that the sale had fallen through and was available at £270K, the Board decided to try and raise the money. Barfield House may have been the dream of the Board but it took the dynamism and hard work of David Sidi to turn it into reality. It was under his leadership that the property was finally bought, and 18 flats were eventually built. He had acted as fund raiser, personal guarantor and supervised every aspect of the construction work.

One of the earliest residents was Susie Linton and another was Gretchen Herman (originally Herrmann), who had come over to England as a refugee in 1939; she lived there for over 4 years and then “graduated” to living in the MFH as her age and health meant that she needed a greater degree of care – exactly the rationale behind Barfield House. The aims of the trustees, that there should be companionship and interest in old age, but independence for as long as possible, followed by a seamless move to extended help, had been realised!

There was a co-dependence between Barfield House and the MFH whereby those in Barfield House flats could use nursing and other facilities of the MFH. People could join in with the life of MFH (as exemplified by one flat owner, who had all her meals sent in), and then move into MFH when age rendered independence no longer possible. The fact that MFH also receives a percentage of the sale price is an acknowledgment of the synergy between the two sets of buildings as well as a useful source of income.

The buildings had undoubtedly moved with the times and developed over the last 70 years – geographically, physically and conceptually. However, there had always been problems with these old buildings and a gallop through the Minutes and other records of the Home reveal costly repairs to the lifts, leaks in the roof, problems with the boiler, hot water, generator, electricity supply and even....pigeons! In March 1986 it was reported that “The pigeon trouble persists and we may have to shoot”. The heritage of old buildings has always created difficulties and huge expense and in its 2004/5 annual strategic plans, the Board of Trustees decided to begin exploring the feasibility of establishing a new purpose-built retirement village facility for the Jewish community of South Manchester.

Meanwhile, the buildings were extensively remodelled and continually refurbished, rather than newly built to 21st century specifications. However, by the end of 2012 it was apparent to the trustees that these buildings with their multiple lifts and stairs, their corridors and open doors meant that the residents with 21st century expectations and standards, many of whom have some sort of dementia or other diseases of advanced old age, could no longer be housed in these original buildings - they were very simply no longer fit for purpose.

The decision to rebuild completely was taken at that point but....more of that later in this history.

Matrons and Managers

Mrs Blumenbach: Housekeeper 1947 - 1961

The first matron at MFH was a German refugee who could be more properly described as a housekeeper, Mrs Blumenbach, otherwise known as Mama Bloom. Interestingly, she had started her connection with MFH as a resident!

Elsa Otto: Matron 1962- 1972

Elsa Otto was a nurse, a non-Jewish German lady. She spoke German to the residents, which was more than useful as there were some refugees whose English did not come easily.

Vera Smith: Matron 1972 - 1987

Vera Smith was the next matron and, now in her 80's, is a sprightly figure, smart and engaging with her twinkly blue eyes.

She had known Peter Kurer at school and, when she saw the advert for the post, decided to apply from her existing job as matron at The Skin Hospital. She lived in Didsbury and thought the move would be suitable for her.

Originally, Vera – although a qualified nurse – found that there was little to do other than care for the elderly, but as the residents became increasingly infirm, real nursing skills were needed; this involved recruitment of nurses, not just carers. At first, one sister was employed...followed by qualified night and other staff.

As time went on, some residents needed more care and time – and so did their relatives and families. Everyone wanted the best for their relative, including long talks about what exactly everyone meant by the best!

Her memories included much about the social life of the Home and she especially enjoyed telling me about outings for the residents. There would normally be about 20 residents, mostly able-bodied although there were 2 in wheelchairs. Vera remembers taking them to The Lake District in a charabanc. The day was a huge success once the driver found the way; both driver and Vera (whose home was originally in The Lakes) felt that they should go through the countryside and they did enjoy the scenery and narrow country lanes but became hopelessly lost. All ended well though, with a great day at Windermere.

Another successful day out was to Southport where the ladies (easily outnumbering the men) insisted on sampling retail pleasures, looking in every shop up and down Lord St, while the men sampled a local drink or two! Matron entered into the spirit of the day and she recalls that everyone had fun.

There was fun too within the Home itself. Winter brought its own enjoyment with parties at Chanukah and Christmas - candles for the former and definitely no tree for the latter, although there "may have been an odd bit of holly". Summer was different – tea in the gardens and music if possible.

Vera worked with various chairmen, including John Simon and Teddy Kingsley. Both spent a lot of their time at the Home - John, coming in every Friday night on his way home from work and Teddy always at the end of a phone. Both chatted with the residents and got to know them well; other members of the Committee were also "hands-on" and were in great demand, especially after Sunday morning meetings when they would be "ambushed" by the residents. Tom Einstein's Sundays, she said, were spent differently – not chatting so much to the residents but more to the plants. He took on the upkeep and much of the work in the gardens and always made sure that the outside spaces were lovely to look at – a real tonic for everyone.

I asked her if there were any real characters. She replied that it was difficult to remember but, amongst others, there was a couple (who will remain nameless) where the husband had an eye for the ladies! She also recollected Flora de Haas who painted and even had her own studio made from the adjoining room, and Mrs Silverman, who wrote a much treasured letter to Vera pointing out how she had raised the standards of the Home and that "no hour was ever too early or late for her" - a fitting appreciation for a Matron who still remembers the Home and holds it dear.

Christine Gorton/Barlow: Matron 1987 – 1997

Christine Gorton took over from Vera Smith and wrote that when she entered MFH it was with some degree of concern "having come from a very different background as a director of nursing in a private acute hospital". She came into an environment where many of the senior staff had been at the Home for over 15 years, and she was concerned as to how they would react to her.

Staff did, in fact, stay for very long periods, including Sister Leary for 23 years, Sister Madden for 21 years and Sister Harkin for over 20 years. That sort of continuity of care and loyalty are not so common today, but even so there were always some members of staff with equally long terms of service; something of a tribute to the Home and a great comfort to its residents!

Christine brought in changes largely driven by new legislation as well as some new ideas of her own, especially in terms of team working. After six years, she reported that, at last, she no longer felt like the "new matron".

By the end of her tenure - in an article for the Newsletter - she reflected on her work and revealed clearly the ethos of the Home. She wrote about the nature of caring and about the interaction between staff, committees, residents and families. Her words to prospective employees at interview were an inspirational statement about the quality of care and the attitude of MFH. She used to say:

“Think carefully about how you would want your own family to be treated and endeavour to fulfil that aim for residents who live here. This is the residents’ home and as such....we must behave as though we were visitors in their home”.

In this spirit of caring and creating a family atmosphere in the Home, she introduced a tactile regime, where she would hug and kiss residents. At first, the response to this was that “a lot of the residents, especially the Germans, were aghast” but in a very short period of time, this became the norm and “Now you find staff with an arm around them or linking arms....it’s about being a part of a family”.

Julie Cooper: Matron 1997 - 2001

Julie Cooper came from London and had been a matron in a hospital environment. She brought many new ideas with her, notably in the field of management. I have been unable to discover a great deal about her other than one member of staff who worked with her and remembers her as somewhat “quirky”!

Tracy Payne: General Manager 2001-2003

The appointment of a non-clinically qualified administrator and general manager marked a sea change in the way the Home was run. The new job title pointed the way to Tracy’s strengths and particular areas of interest and innovation. She was a manager, as opposed to a matron, and looked carefully at the management and administrative structure of the Home. Tracy came from a background in care home administration and had worked previously for CLS. At this time, under the chairmanship of Stephen Lindemann, the Management Board and Board of Trustees were amalgamated and the day-to-day running was given over to Tracy and her staff.

Tracy looked closely at new legislation and worked on policies and procedures in keeping with a more widely accepted care home model. She had to deal with all the many compliance issues the government threw at her and the Home. She was an innovator as far as the MFH was concerned, bringing all her experience in the public sector to bear on its management.

It is a fascinating coincidence and a great tribute to Tracy that she moved from Morris Feinmann to Belong, where her expertise and skill was soon recognised. At the time of writing this history she is the Deputy CEO of Belong, marking an extraordinary ongoing and very human link between the two organisations.

Heather Naylor: General Manager 2003 – 2013

Heather Naylor's background was also in the mainstream care home management and she too was trained at CLS, having a special interest in Human Resources. She continued to use many of the management tools established by her predecessor, and in her first "Meet the Boss" article she talked about striving for "best practice based on the principles of Person Centred Care". She recognised from the beginning the interdependence between residents, staff, families and visitors, which has always been a unique feature of the Home.

She was responsible for raising standards and achieving recognition in government-led initiatives, such as Star Ratings, Quality Assurance and Dignity in Care. She had overseen various projects including the dementia wing – so much more than just a building. It was up to Heather to ensure adequate staff training and understanding of what continued to become an ever more important part of MFH.

The work of the Manager of MFH had changed hugely over time and is now one where the demands of residents and staff must be balanced with commercial awareness and legislation. Even so, Heather never lost sight of the fact that MFH was different from other care homes and talks of "the warmth and sense of belonging within the Jewish community". She also acknowledged and celebrated the work of volunteers and staff as well as exemplifying a determination to succeed in difficult economic times.

The large complement of staff was a mixture of nurses and carers, housekeepers, kitchen workers, administrators, secretaries etc. Some of the nursing staff and carers were part-time and some were full-time as in any care home, but it is interesting to note that in its earliest days as the founders struggled to pay bills, there were few paid staff, especially in the office. They often used their own administrative staff from their offices or places of work (as did Heinz Kroch who used his LANKRO staff for secretarial work and financial management); indeed, the very first mention of a permanent office was not made until 1981, and the first paid administrator, a Norman Lee, was taken on in 1983.

Of course, the need for qualified nursing and care staff grew with the change in the demographic composition of the Home. In the early years, there were domestic staff and a few nurses, but this was followed by an increased need for staff capable of nursing patients with dementia or palliative care needs. The MFH was run with dedicated and trained carers working alongside registered nurses. Heather Naylor had worked tirelessly to ensure a good mix and established a Care Team Leader role which had helped to deliver good nursing.

Human Resources issues were dealt with on a very professional basis, but in times gone by, problems such as overstaffing, inflexibility of job roles, staff sleeping on the job and similar were more difficult to resolve and had been dealt with in a more "ad hoc" and personal way. In 1990 the Chef was dismissed for being asleep at his post and there was also a question of the missing 6 bottles of Kosher wine.....

How times have changed!

Residents

The letter I have previously referred to (dated 1st April 1955) talks of 26 residents and gives us an interesting insight into them: two were incapacitated and a third “liable hopelessly to drift without the moral support and firm guidance received from the Home”! The MFH changed over time and is now filled with a more general cross-section of the Jewish community, mainly (although not exclusively) from South Manchester. As Vera Smith had reported, this had begun as early as the 1970’s.

Some of the earliest memories of residents can be found in an article in the Jewish Telegraph in 1954 which writes of a couple, Alec Lowe and his wife, who had come from Stuttgart to England in 1938. He was apparently a man of humour who said of his son, Adolph, a professor in America “I called him after Hitler”.

Other stories come from the refugees themselves who wrote about their experiences in the MFH magazine...

Theres Bornstein was one such refugee. She described how, during the war, she became a cleaner and then a “companion” to a lady of 80. They spent much of their time playing dominoes and Theres always let her win. The lady in question was old fashioned and had no phone – a serious problem when she had a heart attack in the middle of the night. After she became naturalised (having spent the necessary five years in England) Theres volunteered for the ATS as a cook. She was undeterred by the fact that she had no training whatsoever but she learnt and watched well enough to acquire the post of cook in the Sergeant’s Mess; according to the CO she made the “best Yorkshire puddings I have ever eaten”. However, her real talent was as a violinist and she played duets with the CO, later relinquishing her post as a cook to become a violin teacher.

Another personal history was that of Ruth Feldheim, who again started life as a domestic servant, there being few other jobs open to refugees; she later became a nurse and then a cook. Unlike Theres she enjoyed her cookery and eventually qualified as a cookery teacher at Hollings College.

Thelma Chadwick, in an article entitled “The Exiles” written in 1997 for the MFH magazine, talked of her early life in England and of the small town she lived in with her family. There were no other Jews there, and her father would be called upon by the police to help if any visiting Jew took ill or was in trouble. One such example was of a Mr Levy who was injured in a railway accident – Thelma’s family were asked if they could visit this man, a complete stranger but a fellow Jew. He apparently asked for some fried fish to help him recover more quickly!

Other residents wrote of their own early memories far from their German or Austrian homes, including Lillian Lever, who described her “sentimental journey” to

England and Mrs Manasse who wrote of her first adventure as a child in Warsaw in 1922.

Bianca (Anka) Fraser entered the MFH in 1990. She had been a refugee from Berlin and had come to England at the age of 31. Her younger sister, Ruth Lee, was already in Manchester and – as with so many of those who fled Nazi Germany – was “in service”. Anka too found work with one of the many English/Jewish families who took in “aliens”. Her first taste of life as a domestic servant ended when one Rosh Hashanah the family went to Synagogue and Anka changed into her best clothes for the Festival. However, unknown to her, she was still expected to work and was summarily sacked for failing to do the ironing that day! Not all families were like that though and she fared much better in her next post, remaining firm friends with the second family until the lady of the house died many years later.

Anka, in many ways, spanned the divide between a Home for refugees and a Home for elderly Jews – she was both. In 1990 when she entered the Home, she used it as a base, driving her own car and enjoying the security of someone always being there at the Home to open the door, however late she returned after a party. The MFH offered her friendship, for she made friends easily in an environment “always alive with chatter”and at the end of her life it offered her nursing and care – “a contented old age”. She had come to England to flee from persecution and died in 2012 in the MFH, at the grand old age of 103!

Culture

The culture of the MFH, its atmosphere and ethos all are based on the idea that this is a “home”, originally for those who were displaced by the Nazis and later for those who are elderly and/or needy. It was never just an “old age home” and certainly never “an institution”; it has grown, changed and developed over its long history.

The strap line for the MFH which appeared on all its literature - “adding life to your years” (originally coined by Rabbi Percy Goldberg in one of his sermons) - encompasses this ethos. For those early refugees who wanted entertainment there were many reminders of home. There would be a lot of music, usually European, classical and fairly highbrow. One example was the visit of the Amati players – a chamber orchestra of 10 players plus a conductor! The mix is now somewhat more eclectic and includes visiting choirs from local Jewish schools, the “Sparklers” and twice weekly live piano sessions...on reflection, the mix was perhaps always eclectic and there is a record of Heather Phoenix appearing in 1993 in “The Marie Lloyd Show”, the same year as David Watkins and Sheila Sharp appearing in “Double Top”!

Another important way of helping the elderly residents to enjoy life (and this has been a long-established one) has always been various outings during the year. The very first outing was a week’s holiday for the refugees in St Annes. Many others followed but none were quite so ambitious!

I have already mentioned some of these, recounted to me during my interview with Vera Smith. The magazines too have been a rich source of information and photographic evidence, recording the work of volunteers from the Social Committee (of which more later) plus members of staff who have given time to take people on outings; these have been far and wide, ranging from Hornsea Pottery to Buxton, from Knowsley Safari Park to a boat trip on the river Dee and the shops of Chester, to Southport with an organist and a “sing-a-long” where the favourite song was “I love to go a wandering...”; to Stapely Water Park in a “coach fit for kings”.....the list is endless. I have included one story in Vera Smith’s recollections and will add just one other, taken from the description of an outing to Tatton Park in 1997:

“Mrs Baruch had come specifically to partake of a cream cake and none was forthcoming, but having made her feelings known, one very quickly made its way to her and it was demolished with great relish!”

Life in the MFH had always been as rewarding and full as possible for its residents. Loneliness was not and never has been an option. Inevitably, as the average age of its residents increased, the options have changed. I suspect in its early days, when many used it as a base for living their own independent lives rather than a residential home for the elderly, its culture was very different. One thing, however, which has remained a constant feature of the Home is its emphasis on its religious background.

The local Rabbis of Didsbury, Rabbi Gaguine and, more especially, Rabbi Carlebach, had always been highly influential and revered figures. Rabbi Carlebach was Chaplain to the Home from its earliest Amherst Road days, when he walked the mile or so from his own house twice a week to be with the residents. He had so much in common with those early residents as he himself had come to England to make his home as a refugee from Lúbeck. He helped them to enjoy the Jewish year and started with Passover, where the Seder table was one large table. Residents were encouraged to invite guests but the feeling was always of one family, with Mrs Carlebach reciting Mah Nishtanah and the three Carlebach children standing on chairs and being asked to perform songs for the residents, much in the spirit of “entertaining the troops”!

What of regular observance? Synagogue services rarely took place in the early days of the Home, although there is reference in the Minutes to a room for this use in the basement (where the ark faced the wrong way) to the first floor, where there was apparently a problem with smells from the kitchen! In later years, the twice monthly Shabbat services took place in the beautiful Carlebach room, a multipurpose room with a moveable ark and a fitting memorial to the work and commitment of Rabbi Carlebach.

As far as regular services were concerned, it was Basil Wolman who originally conducted Friday night services and then established twice monthly Shabbat services. The services were conducted by volunteers, Alex Crawford, Harold Weinstock, Howard Sherrington and Tom Einstein, along with Elaine Newman and

others, who play a very important part in the life of MFH. Often the residents, no longer able to read Hebrew, still join in with the familiar tunes remembered from their younger lives.

The Succah in the original Home was always beautifully decorated and just large enough for two residents to sit and enjoy a meal – a truly special way to celebrate this lovely festival. Chanukah was a time for presents, when the Social Committee would work together to buy and wrap individually chosen gifts for every single resident! In recent times this particular job was taken over by a younger generation and it is now the 13th Altrincham Brownies or the children from North Cheshire Jewish Primary School under the baton of Mally Blank, who go to the Home at Chanukah; they give a concert, presents and donuts to the residents.

Originally, the Trustees or a member of the Management Committee would celebrate Friday nights and join the residents for Shabbat lunch, but this ceased in later years. However, Kiddush is always made and the candles lit to welcome Shabbat. The Home had always been “kosher” and had separate milk and meat kitchens, with the supervision and buying of kosher food products being the remit of Arthur Isdale. He ran this part of the Home for many years and his contribution was hugely important. In 2012 Rabbi Shlomo Ellituv took over this particular aspect of the MFH, presiding over the refurbishment of the kitchen equipment and gaining the blessing of the Manchester Beth Din. He also ensures that the religious traditions, from the festivals to the blowing of the Shofar, are maintained and is a frequent and much-loved visitor, following in the footsteps of other Rabbonim of South Manchester and today performing the role of Chaplain and Shomer.

Those residents who are not especially religious can – as they always could – choose to enjoy however much or little as they wish of the Jewish culture of the MFH. Residents are advised, prior to their admittance, of the rules of the house, especially with regard to the food. Vera Smith recalled an incident from the 1970’s, where a resident bought fish and chips from a local “chippy” to his room to eat:

“The odd resident might have taken some liberties – but always outside their bedroom on the window sill!”

Nowadays the rules of Kashrut are strictly adhered to and this is an aspect that is hugely valued by residents and their families. The Home celebrated its Beth Din Kashrut status in 2012 – a huge achievement, which was supervised by Rabbi Ellituv, and in 2017 the bistro at the new village ~~was~~ became fully authorised under the Sephardi Kashrut Authority.

I have mentioned the food in terms of Kashrut, but in the early days there were many and varied problems regarding quality and standards. The Minutes of so many of the trustees’ meetings discuss the food at great length – the choice, the quality etc. One such example is from 1984:

“The fish was beautiful but tasteless, the sauce was tasteless and the French beans were soggy”. Even as late as 1990, a trustee remarked simply “the cottage pie today was revolting”.

Tony Russell’s story was mentioned earlier, but it was apparently the practice to ask volunteers to help in the kitchens during holiday times. Margaret Rose and Mrs Einstein would help so that the regular staff could have holidays; they drew on their own recipes and often cooked favourite middle European dishes like goulash and wiener schnitzels. In the 1970’s Sula Leon was called in to help train some of the kitchen staff in the more traditional aspects of Jewish food and she started by asking residents what they wanted and what they remembered eating at home. The answer was always the ubiquitous chopped liver and chicken soup! As long as they were regularly featured on the menu and were just “like Mother used to make” there were no complaints! Later, Valerie Stratton helped to organise the food and kitchens, followed by Joan Borin.

The various cooks who came and went included Dorothy, who stayed for so many years that *she* felt she was indispensable. She was followed by many others, both male and female, until the food was finally outsourced in 2001 to Sodexo; that solution was no more successful! Today, I can report that the food is one of the things which residents most treasure – but it has been a long road to find the sort of food which lives up to the standards of their Mothers’.

The Jewish way of life (and death) is an integral part of life at the Home, and all staff receive some instruction so that they understand its importance and its part in the day-to-day running of MFH and the lives of its residents. However, this aspect of life is never overplayed, and “respect” is the key to harmony between staff, residents and visitors.

The culture of the Home, its attitude to residents and its Jewish environment had always given the MFH its unique atmosphere. Its facilities always complemented this – not only in terms of the fabric of its buildings (which I have already described), but also in other ways.

Twenty years ago the Home boasted chiropody, dentistry, an optician and the provision of hearing aids, as well as hairdressing and manicures. Two year later handicraft, keep-fit and choir practice were added. To this list, bingo, bridge and kaluki, as well as a tuck shop were also added – not forgetting, of course, the wonderful art classes that were held on a weekly basis in the Zena Shane art room; this was a beautiful facility dedicated by Malcolm and Dawn Rowland, the sculptor, in memory of Dawn’s mother. It provided an ideal environment for art therapy and simple enjoyment of the creative spirit.

This cultural menu was completed by a weekly discussion group (hosted for many years by Rabbi Fox of Menorah and now by various dedicated volunteers), current affairs groups and memory sessions. I am sure that some of these will come and go as years, fashions and interests go by, as well as new ones being added – all a tribute

to members of staff and many willing volunteers who give of themselves and their time to make sure that the residents really do “add life to their years”.

Today, the traditions continue with bridge, computing and a state-of-the-art gym being modern additions.

Special Occasions and Celebrations

The history of the MFH is littered with many special occasions and causes for celebration. Every birthday, which has always been celebrated at the Home with a special cake and tea, every Festival from the Seder table to the Succah and the special blowing of the Shofar (in residents’ rooms if need be) have all been enjoyed with special foods and entertainment, often in the form of a children’s choir.

There have also been coffee mornings, organised by the Social Committee, and the annual garden party or strawberry tea. One such event was recalled fondly by Tom Einstein who talked about his early memories of the MFH. In 1960, his father, returning from a Trustees’ Board Committee meeting, asked Tom if he would help with the gardening, explaining that the maintenance man had been killed in a plane crash. Thereafter, Tom spent many happy hours helping in the main gardens and with individuals’ tubs, troughs or balcony pots outside their rooms. He recalled one lady thanking him by showering him with sweets, and another – Petra Dorman, who pushed her husband round in a wheelchair, often presenting Tom with an ideal plant and a perfect spot into which to put it.

The initial opening of the Spath Road building presented a chance to celebrate with a Chanukah party, and that spirit of enjoyment and celebration has marked every milestone in the history of the MFH. I have not been able to find out much about very early celebrations but there is, of course, a lot of material concerning more recent special occasions – the visit of Lady Jakobovits, wife of the late Chief Rabbi, on Sunday 25th June 1989 followed on Wednesday 28th June by Her Royal Highness Princess Diana, the Princess of Wales. Princess Diana’s visit was, in fact, a great coup for the Home as she used MFH as her base for visiting Manchester Jewry.

The visit of the Princess of Wales was part of Manchester Jewry’s bicentenary celebrations and the Jewish Telegraph on 30th June 1989 stated;

“Despite Wednesday’s gloom, a smiling but shy young lady brought plenty of sunshine into the hearts of Manchester Jewry”.

Matron Christine Barlow described the visit to the Home in these words:

“It was a really special day, one that MFH will never forget...I remember that the ostensible purpose of her visit was to meet local Jewish dignitaries; the Princess insisted on shaking hands and talking with every single one of our 60 residents...I was touched by the way she connected with former German and

Austrian refugees, chatting to them about music. That was her talent – identifying with people from all walks of life”.

Another very special day in the recent history of the MFH was 20th May 1997: that day marked the culmination of years of planning, when the Chief Rabbi and Sir Sydney Hamburger along with David Sidi and the Levy family, plus many other distinguished guests, came to open the Levy nursing wing, Barfield House and the water garden dedicated to the Quakers.

The Levy nursing wing was financed by the Levy family to provide nursing care and a dedicated space for residents with dementia. Marie Levy, Chairman of the Social Committee for 23 years, had remarked to her husband Jack, Honorary Solicitor and trustee, that those with dementia should have a space of their own – somewhere they could have special care and not disturb the ordinary residents. Jack agreed and simply asked each and every member of his extended family if they could help, by giving whatever they could. They did just as he asked and on a wonderfully sunny day they came from all over the world, from London, Scotland, Israel and elsewhere to enjoy lunch in a beautiful marquee and the very special speeches that marked the opening of the Levy Nursing Wing. Jack dedicated the wing to the memory of his parents, Sydney and Ellen Levy, speaking of them as the “inspiration that dominated our lives”. The Levy Wing answered a very definite and growing need.

Dementia is undoubtedly one of the great challenges for the future. It is interesting to note here that modern thinking has changed and that the current view, espoused by Belong, is that every resident at every stage of their lives should be treated together as part of a family and that the needs of individuals (whatever they may be) are best catered for within the Household community and concept.

That day when the Levy Wing was opened was also a celebration of the opening of Barfield House, the brainchild of Peter Kurer and David Sidi. It was Peter Kurer who was the “driving force” behind the project and David Sidi, who “had the contacts, generosity and heart to do the job”. Barfield House, with its 16 (now expanded to 19) apartments built in the grounds of the MFH, offered independence to flat owners, along with the security of the Home and care on their doorstep, when and if the need arose.

Finally, that day also marked the formal opening of a water garden, dedicated to the Quakers who had played such a significant part in helping many to escape from Nazi Germany. One of those families was that of Peter Kurer and it was he who spoke so warmly of their role in saving so many, by providing guarantees and putting German children onto the *kindertransport* to Liverpool Street station. Another family was the Herrmann family, of whom Danny Herman was looked after by Quakers who fostered him in 1939. He too, like Peter, would later give of his time to help the Home - in his case as one of its Treasurers.

The refurbished MFH, Barfield House and the Levy Suite provided three different but complementary solutions to the differing needs of the elderly, and as the Chief Rabbi, paying tribute to the Manchester community in general and MFH in particular, said

“Only special societies care for their elderly”

That sunny day in May 1997, with over 200 guests and a truly wonderful atmosphere, was indeed an occasion to remember and cherish.

The final celebration that I would like to recall in this part of the history of the Home was in 2006. It was another opening and the result of another gift of tremendous generosity. This gift was inspired by the War and its suffering - so appropriate in the history of a Home built originally to help those whose life had been turned upside down by the Holocaust. It was partly in tribute to their mother, Joyce Bentata, that her children, Jack and David Bentata and Jackie Mesrie made the decision to give money to the Home, which was spent in refurbishing the residents' lounge.

They created a room full of light and life so that those living in the Home could enjoy “new surroundings”. The room was dedicated in 2006 by Joyce Bentata to Linda Besso (nee Bentata) and family. Linda and her whole family had died in the Holocaust and their story – the story of “the lost family”- was carefully researched in France by Jack and Jackie. They decided to remember the family, and to honour their mother Joyce by providing the funds to bring the lounge into the 21st century. The day was celebrated in true Feinmann style with 200 guests, a choir and a moving address by Joyce (then aged 93). Joyce, who said that her final years were amongst her happiest, spoke with great pride and emotion of “this heartbreaking day” where the spirit of the Besso family “will always be remembered”.

This story can never really be finished and there will surely be many “special occasions and celebrations” to come, starting with the official opening of the new belong Morris Feinmann village on November 12th 2017 – just 70 years after its inception - and the visit on February 18th 2018 by the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Mirvis.

Volunteers

I have already peppered this brief history with recollections and notes of interviews from the many volunteers who have given their time and expertise to the MFH. Indeed, the history of the Home is one of dedication by a huge number of volunteers, from its original founders to the present day.

Later Boards and Chairmen have always comprised volunteers, and the inspirational leadership of Heinz Kroch has been followed and joined by others, like Teddy Kingsley, John Simon, Peter Kurer, Stephen Lindemann, Helen Lister, Alan Wilkins and Ian Paul. All have been Chairs of the Board of Trustees and have given hugely of

their time, energy and leadership – many of them visiting on a daily basis, getting to know all the staff and residents and giving a new meaning to the word “dedication”.

The names of the chairmen have, of course changed over time as has the direction of the Home. The founding fathers’ vision has moved on and the need to become more commercially aware has been marked. Inevitably, the very personal reasons of those first refugees for working for the Home have changed, and today the motivation for many (although not all) volunteers is a relative who has been a part of the MFH.

There is no longer a Board of Management, considering day-to-day management issues. Instead, in 2000 under the chairmanship of Stephen Lindemann and on the recommendation of an independent report by CLS, the Board of Management was dissolved and replaced by specialist sub-committees reporting to the Board of Trustees and comprising Finance, Care, Estates, Human Resources, Marketing, Hotel Services and Social Committees. However, looking through past Minute books, it seems as though there is still a lot in common between the founders and the present day. The Board of Trustees was still debating many of the same matters as at the start! In more recent times, there was little talk any more about poor food, menus and what people wanted for Shabbat lunch, but there were still discussions about the lift, the buildings....and, of course, the future.

Hard-working Treasurers of The MFH Trust, now simply known as “The Feinmann Trust”, are still talking about fees and those who can’t afford them, and whether the Trust can afford to support needy members who have run out of resources. There is no longer discussion about helping individuals to claim their tax back or pensions – after all, residents now have families around them who can help. How different it was in the early days when Werner Lachs had to help with those very personal financial problems. Loius Gutterman too, an early Treasurer, had helped individuals with their compensation claims for war reparations and had showed (as successors still do) his humanity and “ability to see both sides of a problem”.

Nevertheless, finances had always been a problem for the Home. Originally, money came from war reparations administered by the Central British Fund, The Heirless Property Fund, and then the Otto Schiff foundation. There were also funds from local authorities, actual fees paid by residents, and donations, both large and small from the wider Jewish community. Some large donations have been described in the section on “Celebrations”, but there have been many others in the history of the Home, as exemplified by the legacy from the Heinz and Anna Kroch Foundation in 1986, that of Elena Perez, which helped to refurbish the Palatine Wing, and the handsome contribution of Lawrence Harris in 2009.

In 1975, the revaluation of the Deutschmark helped as did the sale of a property in Berlin which had been left to the Trust, but these were throwbacks and new ways of funding the Home have had to be found. One notable source of fundraising was the 365 Club initiated by Stephen Lindemann, which asked 365 members of the community to donate £1,000 each, which would pay to run the Home for one day.

Another way of funding the Home has been the Friends of the Morris Feinmann Home who fundraise and provide funds both generally and specifically for those who can no longer afford to pay the fees – a growing problem as people live longer and longer. Finally, in this long and by no means exhaustive list, is the funds raised by the sale of flats at Barfield House.

Today, fundraising is still ongoing, and is needed to help “poor and needy” Jews pay for care in an age of continued government cuts and ever-decreasing Local Authority funding.

Money has always been, and no doubt always will be, a problem but there has never been a shortage of volunteers or committees. The names of the volunteering committees have changed – there is no longer a “Ladies’ Committee” as when Marie Levy was Chair; Marie remembers working with Eileen Webber to buy individual Chanukah presents, arranging bowls of flowers on each table in the dining room and taking residents on outings. Jackie Mesrie succeeded her, continuing the good work of the committee under a new name – the “Social Activities Committee”. Along with her band of helpers she started the idea of coffee every Monday (normally a bleak day at the start of the week) and fundraised by way of an annual bridge luncheon amongst other events. There were cookery demonstrations and “tea at the Ritz” in Thelma Hardy’s lounge, outings to art galleries and the Bridgewater Hall. Jackie’s philosophy was that if someone wanted to do something, the Committee would find a way! One gentleman wanted to go to Club Thursday – so the Committee paid for him to go in a taxi every week - job done! It is interesting to note that now Club Thursday has come to Belong Morris Feinmann using The Venue to host its weekly speakers.

Other fundraising events were the annual strawberry tea and a joint coffee morning with WIZO.

Jackie Mesrie was succeeded by Ann Samuels who carried on the good work for many years with a new team, running a shop with Ruth Berger and Adele Rose, taking residents out for coffee as well as continuing the weekly Monday coffee morning at the Home and organising entertainment. She worked closely with staff at the Home and told me of a huge list of activities. The Committee have changed some of the activities and now there is less classical music (although still some), and there were new ideas, like reading newspapers and hand massage. She reflected the concerns of today by saying how she would like to welcome more young volunteers, and she laments the fact that so many residents come to the Home at a very advanced stage of old age, which does impact on their ability to enjoy life.

This thought was echoed by one of the younger volunteers, Roxanne Stross, who said that only a few years ago she (along with others) would play chess with residents after dinner, but that now, few go to the main lounge after 7:00 p.m. preferring to stay in their households and go their rooms.

However, Ann added that people from all sections of the community are still always going in to help – unsung and unnamed volunteers. They play bridge, read stories, help with birthday parties or simply talk to people. All invaluable!

The next Chair of the Social Committee, Viv Alexander, had new challenges to contend with. The first was in 2013 when the original Morris Feinmann was closed and its residents moved to Allingham House. She had to encourage the existing volunteers to work under new circumstances in a new environment in order to maintain a Jewish culture. She and her team worked alongside the Trustees and Rabbi Ellituv to ensure that funds were still raised, and the residents could still enjoy a Jewish way of life.

The next challenge for the Trustees and the Social Committee will be to continue its work both at Allingham House (whilst there are still Jewish residents there) and – more excitingly – in the new Belong Morris Feinmann village in Didsbury.

From its very earliest days, specific dedicated volunteers dealt with the fabric of the buildings, overseeing and working together with professionals. The first person to help with the buildings was Walter Kay, a volunteer recruited by Heinz Kroch.

Walter, a refugee who had come to England in 1939, had originally worked as a display assistant and window dresser, and had risen at Henry's Stores to become the Maintenance and Equipment Manager. He used his knowledge and technical expertise, as well as his keen eye for a bargain – he knew where to get the best prices on any item of equipment – to refit the Home as he had used it to refit Henry's Stores. There were always repairs to make, new bathrooms to fit, and facilities to install, even in the 1950s; even then, the issue was, to some extent, "that the Home was filled with old furniture". Until 2012, there was a constant programme of upgrading and replacement, as the trustees and every Chairman since Heinz Kroch strived to provide a "five star" environment. This new "five star" facility – a brand new building - will be the subject of a later chapter.

The formation of a "Hotel Services Committee", run by Helen Lister, was also part of the commitment to continuing improvement and quality. Helen always ensured that every new chair, picture and carpet was in keeping with these ideals. It was her eye for detail that has been used in the new Belong Morris Feinmann village, during the design of which she worked alongside their interior designer to make sure it was beautified with some amazing artwork, some of which was the work of Cecile Elstein. What a fitting link from the past to the future!

There were volunteers who helped with everything from marketing and public relations, to Human Resources issues. All were prepared to share their professional skills and time with others for the benefit of the Home. Long gone are the days when there was no need to employ professional marketing help or outsource HR; it is no longer appropriate to advertise for refugees in The Jewish Chronicle or The Jewish Telegraph, nor to rely on word-of-mouth for new residents, or to have a quiet (or

not-so-quiet) word with a new cook who failed to understand the way to make good chicken soup.

Another contribution made by volunteers has been in the regular production of an in-house magazine. This has had various names and incarnations from the “MFH Magazine” to “Grapevine” and (until the Home became part of the Belong group) was still written and run by volunteers – as it always had been! The skills of Carol Shields and Viv Alexander were greatly valued, as were those of Peter Kay who started it and was its editor for many years. The in-house magazine was and still is a superb way of marketing, recording and showing an inside view of life at the Home; it has merely changed its title and staff, now being written centrally by a professional marketing team at Belong.

Yet another important area in which volunteers played a huge part was the “Care Committee”. The people on this Committee had a medical background and were at the forefront of individual resident’s wellbeing. Amongst Past Chairmen was Professor Elstein who committed himself to spending days of his time shadowing the nursing staff, so as to help with day-to-day issues. More recently Amanda Lurie, a clinical psychologist, helped in many ways, including the vital question of certification of death so as to help with adherence to Jewish burial laws.

There were other important areas too in which volunteers were key. I have mentioned the field of finance, in which the current Treasurer, an accountant by profession (as they always have been from the earliest days of Louis Goodman and Werner Lachs, to Gerald Wolf, Danny Herman, Jonathan Sugarman and now Alan Hyams) puts in many hours of dedicated hard work. In fact Danny Herman told me that he visited the Home every single day (partly to see his mother, but also partly to oversee the finances). At Board meetings and monthly finance meetings they would wrestle with the figures – as indeed they still do. Personal help is now required less for individual residents whose first language is not English, to make sense of tax returns or insurance: the main concern now is to help those unable to help themselves to pay to go into the village – or for those who simply run out of money for fees, as they reach ever greater (and often unplanned for) age. Current Trustees always strive to make the best use of charitable donations and invest them wisely, although interest rates of 14.75% as referred to Minute books from years ago seem very remote today!

The spirit of volunteering is still strong, and there are too many in the selfless army of helpers to single individuals out by name. However, I would be truly remiss if I failed to mention Sylvia Conway.

Sylvia enjoyed a life-long commitment to social concerns. She had been an experienced teacher, social worker and a governor of Delamere Forest School for 23 years. It was natural that when she came to live at Barfield House she became the Chairman and used her talents in many and varied ways. She established a monthly book club for residents, contributed to the social committee by organising activities for the residents, and also served as the lay member of the Care Committee. She was

followed by Sheila Sugarman, a truly amazing person whose blindness never stopped her from being an effective spokesman for the Barfield residents and helping to smooth the transition from living next door to the original MFH to the new Belong village.

Volunteers have always given their time and their skills to help others to enjoy their lives at the Home – and they still do. The common feelings are best expressed by Jackie Mesrie:

“I always had a marvellous time. I always got back more than I put in!”

And by Ann Samuels:

“I feel the Home is an integral part of the Jewish community in South Manchester....and I am another cog in the wheel of that community...”

I have not been able to list every person who plays their part, although each part is tremendously important and everyone’s contribution vital. In fact, the history of the Home is testament to those volunteers, and it is not an empty statement to say that without those volunteers it could not have existed in the past nor can it flourish in its new guise in the future.

I would like to pinpoint the contribution of some of those who have played the part of Chairman of the Board of trustees or Management Committee and pay a brief tribute to them. They all work hard – that goes without saying, but I wonder how many of the public realise what a hugely time-consuming job it is? All give of their time, their energy and their love in the cause and belief of the MFH. It is a vital part of the Jewish community in South Manchester.

The original MFH was the inspiration of the Founders, led by Heinz Kroch, and I have talked of him and his vision; he was followed by Teddy Kingsley, part of the original Bochanek family, who worked closely with Werner Treuherz, John Simon and Peter Kurer. This group worked extremely hard for the Home and felt very close to the refugees and elderly with whose lives they seemed to have been so intimately connected. They were an integral part of the Home and visited most Friday nights with their families - they were almost part of the furniture! Their role was very personal and, as has been noted, very much hands-on. Under Peter’s leadership they (like Heinz Kroch) also had a vision for the Home. Peter wanted to create what he called a “tripod for security”. He realised that people wanted to keep control of their own lives – be independent – and yet to have security and not be a burden on their families. He saw that the apartments of Barfield House, the residential part of MFH and a nursing home would provide all three elements. He worked tirelessly and dedicated a large part of his life and time as Chairman to achieving these aims. He stressed the synergy of these different parts of the Home and achieved his aims with the help of volunteers who gave their time and – in the cases of a few individuals to whom I have already paid tribute - substantial donations. His dream became a reality

and he gave the Home its direction for over ten years, his work being recognised by his appointment as Honorary President.

He was followed in 2000 by Stephen Lindemann, who brought his commercial knowledge and acumen to the Home. His ideas, presented in November 2000 at the AGM, marked a watershed in the history of the Home. He came when it was in dire financial straits and real difficulties: he spoke of “rocking the boat” and, whilst paying tribute to work which had been done before, he made sweeping changes both financially and managerially. He spoke of the need to provide value for money, to improve standards, to reduce staff turnover, to implement a planned maintenance programme and to enhance communication between staff, residents, relatives and volunteers. To a large extent, he created the structure and feel of the Home up until 2013. Stephen, like all Chairmen, built on the achievements of those who had gone before him, and working with a number of individuals who shared his philosophy, left as his legacy a better financial footing for the Home and modern ways of working.

In 2004, Helen Lister, the first woman Chair of the Home, followed and developed the ideas of her predecessors. She brought her own personality, skills and experience to the role. Her particular gift was to fuse her natural sympathy and empathy for both residents and staff with the commercial lessons taught to her by her predecessor, along with her own commercial experience gleaned over many years of running her own pharmacy business. She has also left evidence of her warmth in the very tangible form of her elegant choice of décor, furnishings and paintings.

The next Chairman was Alan Wilkins, and he brought new people in to work with him. It was under his leadership that a strategy for the 21st century was put in place. His was a vision of a brand new MFH with a new building, discussed so many years earlier. He recognised that the existing building was ever closer to reaching the end of its useful life and that rapidly evolving demands could not be satisfied for much longer. Alan was faced not just with the difficulties of caring for residents with far more complex needs, but with the financial challenge of paying for that care. Alan realised that a new approach was needed and recruited Ian Paul and, shortly afterwards, Jonathan Engler to bring new ideas to the Trustees. Following Alan's resignation as Chair in 2016, when he was succeeded by Ian, he was appointed non-executive President of the newly named Feinmann Trust.

The new beginning

Ian and Jonathan recognised that the cost of building a new state of the art facility was beyond the reach of the Community. They looked for a partner who not only had the resources and professional ability to assist, but also had the will. That name from the past, CLS Care Services, later to be known as “Belong”, was the perfect organisation. They were judged to be ideal for bringing much needed expertise, with a tried and tested track record along with a range and depth of experience, all encompassed in a culture of charity and caring, which chimed so well with the

original aims of the Morris Feinmann Homes Trust. Indeed, it was apparent from the very first conversations in 2013 between Belong and Ian and Jonathan, that the two organisations would work very well together.

What of Belong? What sort of an organisation is it? It is a pioneering care provider in the not-for-profit sector, and the architect of the community care village model for people with dementia. Its first Belong village opened in Macclesfield in 2007 and since then it has continued to develop and refine its services and buildings, winning a number of awards and accolades along the way.

The organisation is committed to promoting independence and choice through a range of services designed to support people on their journey with dementia, and to provide a “home for life” as their needs change. These range from independent living apartments, through household living and nursing care, up to end of life care. A key tenet of Belong’s approach is inclusion of the wider community – in this case especially the Jewish community – who are welcomed into the village centre to enjoy a wide range of facilities, events and activities. Belong also offer outreach services, including home care (Belong at Home) and a specialist day care service, known as Experience Days.

In the interim, between pulling down the existing Home and creating a brand new state of the art facility, the Board had to tackle the very difficult question of housing the elderly residents who had been cared for so well in Didsbury. The building may have been judged to be “not fit for purpose” in the context of 21st century expectations and regulations but its residents still needed care.

As I have alluded to previously, a solution was found in Allingham House, a newly erected care home in Timperley, Cheshire, with – as yet – no residents. So, a deal was struck with the owners, and in December 2012, the residents moved to Allingham House where Kosher kitchens had been built by the Trust in anticipation of their arrival. The Social Committee and the Board both played their part in ensuring a Jewish atmosphere in the Home, with Friday night candles, Shabbat services and celebrations for all the festivals.

Over the next few years, the Trustees of the Morris Feinmann Homes Trust and the Board of CLS Care Services worked closely together to build the new Belong Morris Feinmann Village on the Didsbury site. It opened its doors on June 20th 2017. It was opened on time, on budget and exceeded all the expectations of the Board and the Jewish community – a truly fantastic state of the art building with a fully supervised kosher kitchen under the Sephardi Kashrut Authority, a synagogue, gym, bistro to name just some of its facilities

The new Chair, Ian Paul, together with the trustees, have promised to work to keep all the best traditions and Jewish identity of the original Home, and combine them with the expertise of an organisation which is at the forefront of care of the elderly

in the North of England. Belong and the MFH joined together as Belong Morris Feinmann, to look after its residents in a village setting, where small groups of people live together, enjoying each other's company and sharing the best possible nursing and caring staff. The wider Jewish community can benefit from using the Village as a community hub for social activities and enjoyment, from bridge to exercise, from music and film to beauty therapy.

This is the next chapter, not in the history of the Home, but in the ongoing story of what is now the Belong Morris Feinmann village. The story began 70 years ago when a modest house was purchased in Amherst Rd, Didsbury, to care for 7 survivors of the Holocaust; this has now become a 72-bed modern building – the Belong Morris Feinmann village. The construction may be new but its objective remains the same: “to ensure the comfort and well-being of old and needy persons of the Jewish faith, particularly for such of them who were refugees from racial or religious persecution”. This wonderful new facility is the latest part of this ever changing, constantly developing story.