

MS 183

Papers of Rabbi Solomon
Schonfeld (1912-84)

c.1900-88

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The University of Southampton Library is grateful to Dr Jeremy Schonfield and Jonathan Schonfeld for their kind assistance and to Dr C.M.Woolgar for his encouragement and for reading through a draft of the catalogue.

K.Robson
September 2003

(c) University of Southampton
isbn 085432 799 1
issn 0968 7823

ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

This collection described in this catalogue is available for consultation in the archives and manuscript section of the Hartley Library, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ. All visits should be made by prior appointment with The Archivist and Head of Special Collections. Inclusion in this catalogue does not imply that collections will be available for research: intending researchers should always state which collections they wish to use.

Some material in the Schonfeld papers may not be available for research. It is identified in the catalogue by the following conventions:

[C] or [C]** refers to material that is closed.

[U/F] indicates that items are unfit for production.

Those papers marked [M] were microfilmed prior to transfer to Southampton.

Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld (1912-84) was the second son of Dr Avigdor Schonfeld, the founder of the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement (JSSM). Dr Schonfeld died in 1930, when Solomon Schonfeld was eighteen years old and just in the early stages of a law degree. Schonfeld abandoned his law studies and became a yeshiva student in Czechoslovakia and Lithuania, completing a doctorate at Königsberg University. On his return to Great Britain in 1933, Schonfeld succeeded his father as Principal of the JSSM and also became Presiding Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations.

A man of action and boundless zeal, these qualities were particularly apparent from Schonfeld's work with the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council. From its foundation in 1938 until about 1948, Schonfeld was executive director of the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council—an organisation formed under the auspices of his father-in-law, Chief Rabbi J.H.Hertz. Originally formed in July 1938 as the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Fund for German and Austrian Jewry with the aim to assist rabbis in those countries, the name was changed to the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council in December of that year. At the same time a special department was created for the Refugee Committee, in conjunction with the B'nai B'rith Committee for the Care of Refugee Children, to care for the child refugees being brought to Great Britain in the aftermath of Kristallnacht. The CRREC was to be utilised by Rabbi Schonfeld not only to organise rescue work of Jewish refugees, particularly children,¹ but to provide temporary havens for Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe: using the authority of the CRREC Schonfeld helped the Vaad Hatzalah bring 500 teachers and students from Lithuania to make their way overland to Shanghai where they maintained themselves until the end of the war.² The organisation provided support for refugees in Great Britain throughout the wartime period, including setting up synagogues and kosher kitchens in internment camps, and supported the emigration of refugees to other countries after the war. In 1946-7, Schonfeld travelled to Poland, chartering a ship and arranging for a group of Jewish children and teenagers orphaned in the Holocaust to travel to Great Britain. Bureaucratic problems, such as the lack of passports or other travel documents, were resolved with ingenuity by the creation of a special CRREC card for each child on which they could receive their British visa.

The work of the CRREC also encompassed support for British and Allied Jewish service personnel, through the kosher food service, the Passover and Religious Welfare Fund and the Passover Service. Another facet of the CRREC's activities was the equipping of mobile synagogues or synagogue ambulances which were at first used by Jewish chaplains for their work with the Allied Forces, but later were used in liberated Europe. As well as religious equipment, these mobile synagogues carried kosher food stuffs and were equipped with a cooking stove, water tank and sink. They also could be used as ambulances if necessary.

¹ See for instance *Solomon Schonfeld: his page in history* (ed.) David Kranzler and Gertrude Hirschler (New York, 1982) which contains essays by child refugees rescued by Schonfeld.

² See D.Kranzler *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai 1938-45* (Yeshiva University Press, 1994)

Through his work with the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement, Solomon Schonfeld fulfilled a plan for Orthodox Jewish education and Jewish day schools put forward by his father in September 1909, in his inaugural address at the North London Beth Hamedrash. Dr Avigdor Schonfeld saw the first Jewish Secondary School, at Finsbury Park, London, opened in September 1929, before his untimely death at the age of 49, the following year. After succeeding to the office as Principal in 1933, Solomon Schonfeld set about expanding the operations of the JSSM. New premises were acquired for the school in Amhurst Park in 1934-5 and a girls school was opened in 1936 based at the former Northfields School, Stamford Hill. Activities were to move out of London for a while during the Second World War as the staff and pupils were evacuated to Shefford, Stotfold, and surrounding villages in Bedfordshire in 1939. In 1944 property was acquired in Golders Green for a Secondary and Boarding School and in Shirehall Lane for a Preparatory School. The Hasmonean Grammar School opened its doors in January 1945 and the Menorah Primary School also commenced activities in that year. In 1954 another new Hasmonean school was established when the Edgware Hasmonean Preparatory School opened its doors. The JSSM schools have continued to develop, weathering changes in government education policy with the introduction of the comprehensive school system and financial uncertainties. Throughout all of these changes Schonfeld was an indomitable force fighting on behalf of the JSSM.

The overall collection had not previously been sorted or catalogued, although some of the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council material had been microfilmed prior to its arrival at Southampton. The papers of Chief Rabbi Herman Hertz and other members of the Hertz family found here probably belonged to Judith Schonfeld (née Hertz). Some of the Polish material which has been collected with the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council papers may have originally come from a separate source, but as there was overlap in the work of relief organisations, this is not clear. Additional material collected by Jonathan Schonfeld and Dr Jeremy Schonfeld, mainly related to the Jewish Secondary School Movement, has been incorporated into the collection.

The archive contains personal and family papers, material relating to Schonfeld's publications and papers relating to his offices. The archive catalogue has divided the papers into seven sections drawing together different strands of focus or activity.

Amongst the family papers in Section A is material for Schonfeld and his second wife Judith (née Hertz) as well as for both sets of parents. The papers for Schonfeld's mother, Rachel Leah Schonfeld, relate to her will and to the disposition of her estate; those of his father, Dr Avigdor Schonfeld, include his correspondence, 1909-30, with a minute book of the Chevra Ben Zakkai, 1918-23 (MS 183/829/2).³ The Hertz family papers include some material relating to Joseph Herman Hertz's career, partly while as Chief Rabbi,⁴ but also contains papers of Emmanuel Hertz, 1880-1929, and correspondence between Joseph Herman Hertz and his wife Rose (née Freed), and between Rose and her parents.⁴

Section B is composed of semi-official papers of Solomon Schonfeld: papers as Presiding Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, 1946-80, including minutes of the Council of the Presiding Rabbi, 1971-9, papers about shechita and the preparation of food, 1938-79; papers relating to congregations including the Adath Yisrael Synagogue, the Amhurst Park Synagogue, Edgware Adath Yisroel Synagogue, Hampstead Synagogue,

³ Further papers of Dr Avigdor Schonfeld, together with some of Dr Solomon Schonfeld's papers, form MS 192.

⁴ There is material relating to Hertz at the London Metropolitan Archives in the papers of the Office of Chief Rabbi Acc 2805/1-48, and in the archives of the United Synagogue Acc 2721.

⁴ The private papers of Chief Rabbi Joseph Herman Hertz form University of Southampton Library MS 175.

Hendon Adath Yisroel Synagogue, Letchworth Hebrew Congregation and Southfields Synagogue, 1944-80; correspondence and papers relating to the European Union of Orthodox Communities, 1957-63; files of correspondence relating to charities, organisations and appeals, 1943-77, including the Jewish Welfare Board, Jews' Temporary Shelter, London, and the Community Centres for Israel Organisation; Conference on Jewish material claims against Germany correspondence and papers, 1945-75.

Section C contains general correspondence files and newspaper material, 1920-91, together with papers relating to legal matters, including the trusteeship of the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement.

Within Section D are a series of notes, working papers and proofs for publications by Solomon Schonfeld, 1916-82, including *A new-old rendering of the psalms*, *Standard siddur prayer book*, and *The uniby and their universalist code*. This is complemented by a series of publications, c.1893-1983, collected by Schonfeld on aspects of Judaism and education.

Section E contains photographic, film, audio and print material, together with maps and artifacts. The films are publicity material produced by the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council in period around 1947 and relate to the arrival of refugees, the work for Jewish youth, the mobile synagogues and food distribution.

By far the two most substantial sections of the archive are Sections F and G relating to the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council and the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement respectively.

The papers of the CRREC provide one of the most extensive surviving collections in Great Britain reflecting the work of a refugee organisation and particularly that working with Jewish child refugees in the period around the Second World War. The CRREC material, 1938-49, includes minutes of the executive committee, 1938-47, reports of activities, 1938-48, a considerable series of correspondence files, which contains case papers, papers relating to immigration, internment of aliens in Great Britain,⁵ refugees from Eastern Europe, Germany and Austria, appeals and donations, financial papers, Assistance Board papers, papers relating to children, the search for missing relations, Jewish servicemen's organisations, charitable and welfare committees and the Polish Jewish Refugee Fund. There are a range of lists of names and travel documents relating to refugees brought to Great Britain by the CRREC: these lists of names have been transcribed in the catalogue with the spelling of the names used in the documents.

In Section G, the Jewish Secondary Schools Movement papers reflect the growth and development of the organisation. They are composed of minutes and committee papers, 1934-79, large series of correspondence files, 1929-81, financial papers, papers relating to publications, papers concerning staff and pupils, 1944-83, and attendance registers, 1943-87.

⁵ Solomon Schonfeld personally visited internees in internment camps across Great Britain: a copy of his report on the camps on the Isle of Man is in MS 183/153/2.

