

LONDON JEWS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR *We Were There Too*

As an illustrator of many children's books, I occasionally get asked to do some interesting things, by even more interesting people. Researching projects of an historical nature for my books is of a particular interest to me. So you can imagine my delight when I was asked to take a look at these 2 truly extraordinary volumes of work rediscovered in the LJS (Liberal Jewish Synagogue) in London a few years ago.

They date from 1915 – 1916 and were collated and bound by the school at the time. They record work by many pupils, sharing their thoughts and concerns of life back then – Their worries about life and what the future holds is a very clear an underlying theme through many pieces – It is easy to look back at contemporary thoughts of people at key historical timelines, but reminding oneself that these were written without any knowledge of how or when 'The war to end all wars' was ever going to be over, is hugely important.

To know that the wider world will now be able to share in the splendor of these works fills me with joy and I am delighted to say that these volumes have been sympathetically restored and digitized for all to be inspired by.

The first thing that struck me, was the incredible handwriting. They seem to have been lovingly created by hands that were keen to show off their insights and talents to the very best of their abilities. But of course, as an illustrator, it is the wonderful illustrations that hit my eyes immediately. I can see that many of these images have the influences of the 'big names' in illustration at the time – Mabel Lucie Attwell, Edmund Dulac, EH Shepherd and of course, one of my personal favourites Arthur Rackham to name but a few. The steady and careful ink and wash style to many of the illustrations has echoes of all and more of that 'golden age' of illustration.

The next thing that drew my eye was the content and how 'mature' it is. There is everything there from poetry, to illustration, to sheet music and even embroidery. The pupils of the LJS were so talented!

As someone who is passionate about WW1 and the history therein – I am especially drawn to the direct references to the war – "*Kaiser Bill*" by Leslie Israel is a wonderful reflection of thought toward The Kaiser, who makes war with everyone and how he is "*Silly*" for doing so. The poem has an interesting border illustrated with 'sausage dogs', beer and sausages and a dip pen portrait of Kaiser Bill at the top. There are others "*The Judgment day*" shows the Kaiser Grounded By Sin... and how he will have to answer for Gas attacks and the death of Nurse Edith Cavell.

There are drawings of children with a military undertow "*Eyes Right*" as a typical example. "*My Opinion of War*" by Nina Goldstein, is a very poignant piece of writing, highlighting the concerns about Jews on both sides of the conflict fighting

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against each other, how the Turkish Empire has broken up and the hope that after the war the *'Holy land may once again belong to Jewish people'*.

There are images of satirical cartoons showing recruiting officers as Ducks and would be recruits as young ducklings. Accounts of a VC winner and how he won it – shooting down a Zeppelin.

Zeppelins feature more than once, these were a terrifying threat to all of the country at that time, especially London and the East Coast. My own grandmother would tell me stories of her witnessing Zeppelin raids over London and how she saw one shot down. That story has stayed with me always and was one of the catalysts for my personal interest in WW1.

I could go on and on talking about how interesting this most valuable piece of social history is. But, I am delighted to know that everyone will now be able to go online and see for themselves what a remarkable snapshot of history these volumes are.

This is a fitting tribute to those gifted pupils of the LJS and their words and creativity will now be remembered always.

I would like to thank Paula Kitching of *'We Were There Too'* for giving me the opportunity to be able to preview this most unique archive.

Martin Impey
Illustrator