

# REV. HARRIS ISAACS OF SOUTH AFRICA

Rabbi Zaiden tells the story behind an item of postal stationery



This one penny postal stationery card is illustrated on the back with a large picture of Rev H Isaacs, Minister of the New Synagogue in

full canonicals together with a view of the Interior of the New Synagogue.

Rev. Harris Isaacs was born in London in 1860. He married Bella in London and they were married for over 50 years.

In a most beautiful handwriting Rev Harris records his early positions in London in a diary. He states that he gave "S. Holz Esq. of 73 Greenwood Road Dalston (London) starting August 30th Monday 1886 at £2.2.0 per quarter. Three lessons weekly. Payment due 5th Sept". These are a few of these lessons and I presume that they are to young boys prior to their Bar Mitzvah. The lad would have to be proficient in Hebrew and to recite his portion from the Bible (Torah). Incidentally my wife would walk past Greenwood Road on her way to primary School some 70 years later.

Rev. Isaacs records that I "accepted post of Teacher and Assistant Reader to the South Hackney Synagogue on 30th Sept 1888 at a salary of £25 per annum". Harris Isaacs was also a teacher in Jews College, London.

The Griqualand Hebrew Congregation in Kimberley in the Cape Province South Africa had been without a minister for many years. From time to time some person more or less suitable would conduct the service. There is on record an unscrupulous self-styled rabbi, engaged in the earlier years of the community's existence, who had to be dismissed for behaviour not becoming his profession, and who revenged himself by sitting at the door of his tin habitation near the synagogue and publicly desecrating the Day of Atonement by eating forbidden foods in the sight of the congregation, while he jeered at the worshippers.

The congregation turned out en masse to greet their new minister upon his arrival in Kimberley, South Africa, in 1890 with a three years contract, reported the *Jewish Chronicle* from London. He was also to serve on the Kimberley School Board.

In January 1893 he was appointed Minister of the Park Synagogue, Johannesburg, in the Transvaal Republic, South Africa. He succeeded Rev. P. Wolfers, their first minister, who left to go to Barberton.

In 1888 the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation was founded in Johannesburg. Due to the dissatisfaction with the modernist and reform tendencies of the minister, a split occurred in the community and the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation was formed. The two congregations would join together in May 1915 to form the United Hebrew Congregations in Wolmarands Street, Johannesburg. It must be remembered that one half of the congregation was predominantly English Jews while the other was Jews of German extraction.

Meanwhile, the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation or Park Synagogue was opened with much pomp by President Paul Kruger on 15 September 1892. It is stated in the *Standard & Diggers News* (16 Sept. 1892) that President Kruger was met at Orange Grove by a detachment of the Staats Artillerie and escorted to town. Hyman Morris, President of the Congregation welcomed Kruger. In his address President Kruger told the assembly that the "Jews were the Lord's Ouder Verbond (Old Testament) and that they believed in their religion as much as he did his." Upon entering the synagogue Paul Kruger removed his top hat claiming that when he enters God's house he always removes his hat. Were there a few red faces.

There are a number of stories, maybe myths, of the opening of this building. It is claimed that President Kruger, a very religious man, stated that I "open this building in the name of our God Jesus Christ." It is also claimed that when the community sent a delegation led by Bension Aaron to President Kruger to obtain land to build the synagogue, he only gave half an erf stating that when they accept the other half of the Bible I will give them the other half of land. Four stands (Nos. 99-102) at the corner of Joubert and De Villiers streets facing the Park Station were obtained. The building cost £4,500.

A third congregation was opened by Rev Harris Isaacs that was formed by Jews from Lithuania and Russia in Fox Street, Johannesburg in 1893.

There was continued friction between the Boers and the Uitlanders especially as they were considered alien to the British. The British instigated the Jameson Raid attack on the Transvaal (South Africa Republic) in 1896. The leaders of the Jewish community tried to remain neutral and not get involved in the political problems. Against this background Rev Harris Isaacs was called to a general meeting in February 1896 to explain why he had sent £100 to the Relief Committee of the reformers. Isaacs recalled that during the crisis a number of Jewish families had had to seek public aid. When he noticed that a Relief Fund had been started, he sent a contribution on behalf of the congregation; and this enabled them to get food for some 40 to 50 destitute families. Only later, when the government set up its own Relief Fund, had he realized the real facts; so he decided to send a similar sum to the government's fund. The Chairman and the Committee accepted this explanation.

During 1897 representation was made to the government about special disabilities for Jews by a deputation among whom was Rev. H. Isaacs.

For a period he had acted as Principal, free of remuneration, at the Jewish School in Johannesburg. During his time in Johannesburg he was elected Treasurer and Chaplin to the Jewish Lads Brigade, a youth movement open to boys between the ages of 12 and 17.

After the arrival in Johannesburg of Rabbi Dr J Hertz, future Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire, Rev Harris Isaacs resigned and returned to Kimberley. A grand farewell was given to Rev Isaacs on 14th Jan 1899 in the Jewish School on

# ONE THEME – MANY THEMES

Trevor Fray tackles a theme with wide ramifications

his departure for Kimberley. He had served in Johannesburg for 6 years, was well liked, had an excellent service record and it was hoped that he would return. He was presented with testimonials by the New Hebrew Congregation, Jewish School, Jewish Men's Working Club, Zionist Federation, Hebrew Benevolent Society and many others.

He was succeeded by Rev David Wasserczug and Dr. J. L. Landau. Commenting on his departure, the *Standard and Diggers News* stated that this is the proof that his previous congregation held him in such great confidence and esteem as to offer him his former position.

Rev. Isaacs returned to Kimberley in 1899 and remained in this position until he retired in April 1927. He was a member of the Kimberley School Board and filled the position of Vice-Chairman from 1916 to 1927 with distinction. The Chairman stated at a memorial meeting that Rev Isaacs had worked hard to establish satisfactory buildings for the use of all at school. He had also been a friend of the youth and poor and had no enemies. Rev Harris had taken a keen interest in the Prisoners' Aid Association and Kimberley Hospital. During the Boer War Siege of Kimberley he was mentioned in dispatches.

"A prince of Israel has gone" is how the death of Rev Harris Isaacs in Simonstown Hospital on Sunday May 19, 1935 was announced in Kimberley. He was remembered by the *Diamonds Fields Advertiser* as a person who had taken great interest in welfare of the residents of Kimberley. His many deeds of kindness during his 45 years in the residence in the Diamond Fields were recalled. Both Rev. Harris and Bella Isaacs were members of a number of charitable organisations in Kimberley.

A number of years ago I visited Klerksdorp, and met a gentleman called Harris Isaacs who told me that he was named after his grandfather the Rev Harris Isaacs. He was also kind enough to give me a photocopy of his grandfather's diary. This small book gives some of the information mentioned above. As Rev Isaacs was a mohel (a Rabbi who performed circumcision on Jewish boys at the age of 8 days) there are 47 pages recording all the circumcisions that he performed between 1907 and 1915. He travelled as far as De Aar and Vryberg, Bloembhof and Taung. He records the English and Hebrew dates of birth, the English and Hebrew name of the boy and his father, the date of the circumcission (in Hebrew and English) and the place where it took place. There are family names that are known like Zolty, Skok, Durbaach and Shein to name but a few.

Rev. Harris Isaacs was survived by his wife, Bella, (died 1937), seven sons and three daughters. His daughters were Mrs. Julius Sacks and Miss Ruby Isaacs who lived in Kimberley; Mrs Elhel Yudelma (died 1936) who lived in Cape Town. His sons were Mr Leonard Isaacs of London; Mr. Henry Isaacs from Johannesburg; Mr Seymour Isaacs and Mr Robert Isaacs from Durban; Mr Solly Isaacs and Mr Philip Isaacs of Cape Town and Mr David Isaacs of Beira. Harris also had a brother Sam of Johannesburg. -1

## References

- Herrman, L. (1935) *A History of the Jews in South Africa*  
 Saron & Holz (1955), *The Jews in South Africa*  
*The Diamond Fields Advertiser* 1935 and 1937.  
*Jewish Chronicle* January 13, 1893, June 16 1893, November 25, 1898, January 6 1899, January 14, 1899.  
 Photocopy of Rev Harris's diary.

**A**t a rough estimate, there must be 1,500 different people who were / are Freemasons who are depicted on the world's postage stamps (some of them many times from various countries).

The collector of the Masonic theme, therefore, shares their choice of stamps with other collectors, whichever country or theme that they collect, and it is most likely that without their knowledge they have Freemasons looking out at them from their album pages; and of course, the numbers are being added to with each years' stamp issues.

With this in mind, some of you may like to have this bit of information to add to your biographical write-up of the individuals portrayed in your collections. To share this with you, I list twenty themes and some of the people applicable. Many of those listed could also apply to other themes too, eg. four of the astronauts listed were also boy scouts.

Should you require further details about any of the individuals in the list for write-up purposes, such as name of lodge, date joined etc. I can let you know, if included on my file, most are. I leave my contact details at the end of this article.

Some souvenir and miniature sheets as well as single stamps depict more than one person in the scene, or on other stamps in the sheet, that apply to the same theme, a nice bonus.

In addition to people appearing on the stamp, many stamps can be associated with the Masonic theme; for instance the Penny Black was printed by Jacob Perkins firm, he was a Freemason; the Cape Triangular stamps were designed by a Freemason; Tristan da Cunha has never had a Masonic Lodge on the Island, yet the official F.D.C. for the "life and times of William Glass" set depict his headstone with the square and compass symbol engraved on it, because he joined a lodge during his service in the Cape.

Sorry, but if you collect stamps, you just cannot get away from these Masons.

## ACTORS OF FILM, STAGE ENTERTAINMENT INCLUDING MAGICIANS, COMPOSERS AND SINGERS

ROBERT ALAN MONKHOUSE (1928-2003)

He was a famous British singer, actor of stage and screen, radio, and television. He was born in 1928 in London, and had a first career writing. He was a member of the old lodge No. 3157, the Old Jerusalem, founded on 29 November 1986, raised to 217 in 1998, and 1997, and raised to 217 in 1998. He was a member of the 19th Century 18th Century World Film Festival. He was a member of the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Royal Society of Music. He was a member of the Royal Society of Music, the Royal Society of Music, and the Royal Society of Music.

William "Bud" Abbott, Roy C Acuff, Richard (Eddy) Arnold, Gene Autry, William "count" Basie, Wallace Beery, George Anton Benda, Irvin Berlin, James H Blake, Wojciech Boguslawski, Karl H Bohm, Bernard Bresslaw, Joe E Brown, Chester A Burnett, Eddie Cantor, Thomas F Couper, Harry Corbett, Jules Cowles, Donald Crisp, Cecil B De Mille, Richard Dix, Douglas Fairbanks, Clark Gable, Oliver Hardy, Harry Houdini, Charles G (Buck) Jones, Harry Keller, Emmet Kelly, Harold Lloyd, Tom Mix, Robert A Monkhouse, Audie Murphy, Niccolo Piccini, Chips Rafferty, Paul Robeson, Jimmy Rodgers, Roy Rogers, Peter Sellers, Richard B (Red) Skelton, Howard Thurston, Richard Tucker, John Wayne, Karl A Wettach and Edwin Wynn.

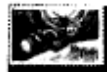


## ARTISTS – PAINTERS

Thomas Cole, Christopher Wilhelm Eckersberg, Eugene Fromentin, Francisco Y Goya, Juan Gris

### MASONIC ASTRONAUTS

On the 29th July 1969 (1970) the first man to set foot on the Moon, Michael F. Smith, was initiated and set on the Moon. FROM ASTRONAUTS, ROYAL MASONS AND ROYAL MASONS. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. THE MASONIC PHILATELIC CLUB. Following the Apollo programme space the first man to set foot on the Moon, Michael F. Smith, was initiated and set on the Moon.



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## ASTRONAUTS

Edwin E Aldrin (also a boy scout), Neil Armstrong (also a boy scout), Leroy G Cooper, Don F Eisele, John H Glenn (also a boy scout), Virgil I Grissom, Edgar Mitchell, Walter M Schirra, (also a boy scout) and Thomas B Stafford,

## AUTHORS (LITERARY) AND JOURNALISTS

Francisco Acuna de Figueroa, Alfredo Alexander – Jordan, Jaramillo Alvarado, Amos Anderson, Jose G Barrenechea, Francisco Bilbao, Manuel Bocage, James Brown (also a politician), Robert Burns, Samuel L Clemens (Mark Twain), Sir Arthur C Doyle (also medicine), Herman Fried (also a Nobel Prize recipient), Maxim Gorky, Bernhard Ingeman, Ferenc Kazinczy, Rudyard Kipling (also a Nobel Prize recipient), Joseph Perkonig, Jeramillo Pio (also a politician), Sir Walter Scott, and Anthony Trollop.

## AVIATORS

Sir Arthur W Brown, Ramon B Franco (also a politician), Charles A Lindbergh, Reginald Mitchell (also military), Edward V Rickenbacker (also military).

## ENGINEERS

Sir Sanford Fleming, Octave Chanute, John L Mc Adam and Frantisek Krizik.

## EXPLORERS

Joseph Banks, Sir Richard Burton, Richard E Byrd, William Clark, Meriwether Lewis, Robert E Peary, Robert F Scott and Ernest H Shackleton.

## FIREMAN AND LIONS INTERNATIONAL

Jose M Claza; Edward G Barry and Melvin Jones

## MEDICINE

Dr. Jaime F Clua, Sir Edward Dunlop, Sir Alexander Fleming (also a Nobel Prize recipient), Catalino Gavino, Edward Jenner, Dr. Crawford Long and Sir Neville Howse.

## MILITARY

### PETER ROBINSON (1959-)

Peter Robinson was the last marine in the line marching through the Falkland Islands with the Union Flag in 1982. Known as the "Yonker" he is pictured on this Guernsey stamp issued to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Battle of the Falklands. He was initiated on 2nd January 1987, passed 4th January 1988, and raised 7th March 1988; he was installed WM in December 1993, in Lodge St John no: 70, Plymouth. He resigned in 1996 to be moving away from the team.



Omar N Bradley, Raymon Castilla and Peter Robinson

## MOTOR CYCLES AND MOTORING

Joseph Dunlop; Henry Ford and Donald Campbell

## POLITICANS

Sir Winston Churchill, (Nobel Prize winner, Artist, Journalist etc), Davy Crocket, (of Alamo fame), Thomas C Douglas, Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta and Robert G Menzies.

## ROTARY

Paul Harris, William Jenson, Khalid Khan, Harry L Ruggles, Silvester Shiele, Amu Shah. Both Khan and Shah are depicted on Tanzania S.G.2433, left and centre respectively.

## ROYALTY

There are too many Royal Masons for me to list in the space available, so I just list British Monarchs, who reigned after the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England. George 4<sup>th</sup>, William 4<sup>th</sup>, Edward 7<sup>th</sup>, Edward 8<sup>th</sup> and George 6<sup>th</sup>.

## SPORT

Donald Bradman, Colin Cowdrey, Jack Dempsey, Len Hutton, Sir Thomas Lipton, "sugar" Ray Robinson and Brian J Statham.

There are many more including U.S. Baseball players, see my notes at the end.

## U.S. PRESIDENTS

George Washington, James Monroe Andrew Jackson, James K Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James A Garfield, William Mc Kinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William H Taft, Warren G Harding, Franklin D Roosevelt, Harry S Truman and Gerald R Ford.

Note: if your country or theme is not mentioned, or further information is required, please contact me. Trevor Fray, 76 Merrivale Road, Beacon Park, Plymouth PL2 2RP. 01752-559244. e mail [tmfray@talktalk.net](mailto:tmfray@talktalk.net) And the Masonic Philatelic Club is at <http://www.masonicphilatelicclub.org.uk/>

