

Community Chronicle

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Orthodox divided over eruv as inquiry ends

By Lee Levitt

The strictly Orthodox community is deeply divided over the planned North-West London eruv, it emerged this week.

Prominent members of two synagogues affiliated to the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (Adath) have come out openly against its rabbinat's opposition to the proposed pole-and-wire enclosure being sought by the United Synagogue eruv committee.

And members of at least one other Adath synagogue within the planned eruv's 11-mile perimeter are believed to be at odds with the rabbinat's stance.

The divisions in the Adath — which represents several thousand strictly Orthodox families — came to light shortly before the public inquiry into the planned eruv closed on Monday.

During the inquiry into Barnet council's refusal of two applications for an eruv to cover NW4, NW11 and adjoining areas, the Adath rabbinat submitted a statement to inspector David Bushby, claiming an eruv would damage the sanctity of the Sabbath and, if erected, would be declared invalid by the Adath.

Matters flared up at Hendon Adath Yisroel Synagogue — the largest shul affiliated to the Adath — where many members are reportedly at odds with Rabbi Pinchas Roberts's anti-eruv position.

Honorary officers posted a letter on the notice-board dissociating themselves from the Adath stance. And as members gathered for the Friday night service, two congregants mounted the bimah to vent their conflicting opinions.

Menny Klausner, a Hendon Adath past president and board life member, said: "A lot of people would be in favour [of the eruv], providing the rabbi agrees it is in order." Rabbi Roberts declined to comment.

Meanwhile, Garden Suburb Beth Hamedrash president Leo Grahame sent a letter to Mr Bushby saying that the shitehl had not been consulted by the Adath rabbinat, and dissociating its 40 members from the statement.

Members are also said to be divided at the 150-family North Hendon Adath. Rabbi David Cooper has not referred to the matter in synagogue. But according to warden Brian Gedalla: "If the eruv were ever to be constructed I have no doubt members would seek his views in private."

As the public inquiry drew to its

close, controversy flared briefly when eruv opponent and Board of Deputies member Monty Miller tried to seize a tape of his evidence which had been recorded by Benji Schreiber, son of eruv committee member David Schreiber.

In his closing submission, John Steel, QC, representing the eruv committee, said his cross-examination of some eruv opponents had revealed "outright and downright prejudice — not necessarily against Jews, but against Orthodox Jews."

Turning to claims that the eruv

would fracture social harmony, he contended: "Common decency in this country rejects all those arguments."

Mr Steel added: "There will be a substantial increase in freedom for those who choose to be bound by their religious convictions, and there is no harm in that in a free society."

Alistair McGregor, representing the Barnet eruv objectors' group, asked the inspector to reject the appeals, saying the planned eruv catered not for "a need," but for "personal convenience" and that it would also create social disharmony.

Masorti accuses the Chief Rabbi's office over wedding 'scare tactics'

By Jack Shamash

The Assembly of Masorti Synagogues has accused the Chief Rabbi's office of unfair tactics in a dispute over marriage ceremonies.

Claims were made at Masorti's Bournemouth conference that young people were being discouraged from marrying in Masorti synagogues. The Chief Rabbi's office was accused of warning that the children of such marriages might encounter practical difficulties in later life.

Rabbi Dr Louis Jacobs — who heads the movement, formed in the wake of his departure from the United Synagogue almost 30 years ago — told Community Chronicle: "There have been a handful of incidents in the last few months. It's very upsetting for the families involved. The Chief Rabbi's office seems to be suggesting that our marriages are in some way not kosher."

He cited two recent cases where a young woman from the Masorti community wanted to marry a man from a United Synagogue congregation.

In each case, Dr Jacobs claimed, the Chief Rabbi's office had suggested that if the ceremony were held at a Masorti synagogue, the children of those marriages might not be able to attend Jewish schools or marry in Orthodox synagogues.

In both cases, the ceremonies were eventually held in United synagogues.

Rabbi Jacobs added that he himself had been refused permission to take part in a United Synagogue wedding ceremony, something he had done many times in the past.

"The Chief Rabbi's office is throwing obstacles in my path," he complained. "I'm sure that they're not giving any clear grounds for their actions."

Jonathan Kestenbaum, director of the Chief Rabbi's office, denied any wrongdoing. "As far as we're concerned, there is definitely no dirty tricks campaign."

Nonetheless, Rabbi Jacobs is demanding a statement from the Chief Rabbi to clarify the marriage issue.

"I want a declaration that the children of Masorti marriages are Jewish. The current confusion is causing a great deal of distress."

Movement members are also upset at the attitude of the JFS School in Camden Town, which many children from Masorti families attend.

At a recent fair, designed to encourage pupils to go to Israel for study programmes, the Masorti community was not invited. When a Masorti educational adviser turned up at the event, he was told that he was not welcome.

Masorti members were particularly aggrieved, they said, as the JFS had invited secular organisations such as Hahonim.

JFS head of Jewish studies Mark Kampf told Community Chronicle: "We welcome pupils from a full range of Jewish backgrounds."

"However, we are under the authority of the Chief Rabbi in all religious matters."

He added that he had agreed to meet Masorti representatives to discuss the issue.

United Synagogue women set for breakthrough on management role

By Simon Rocker

Women are poised to break into the policy-making bodies of the United Synagogue.

and I can see enormous changes in the future."

The May elections will enable women to join the council during the present three-year term rather than management — and in equal numbers.

The council is restructured in 1996. Local elections will also enable women to become, for the first time, members of synagogue boards of