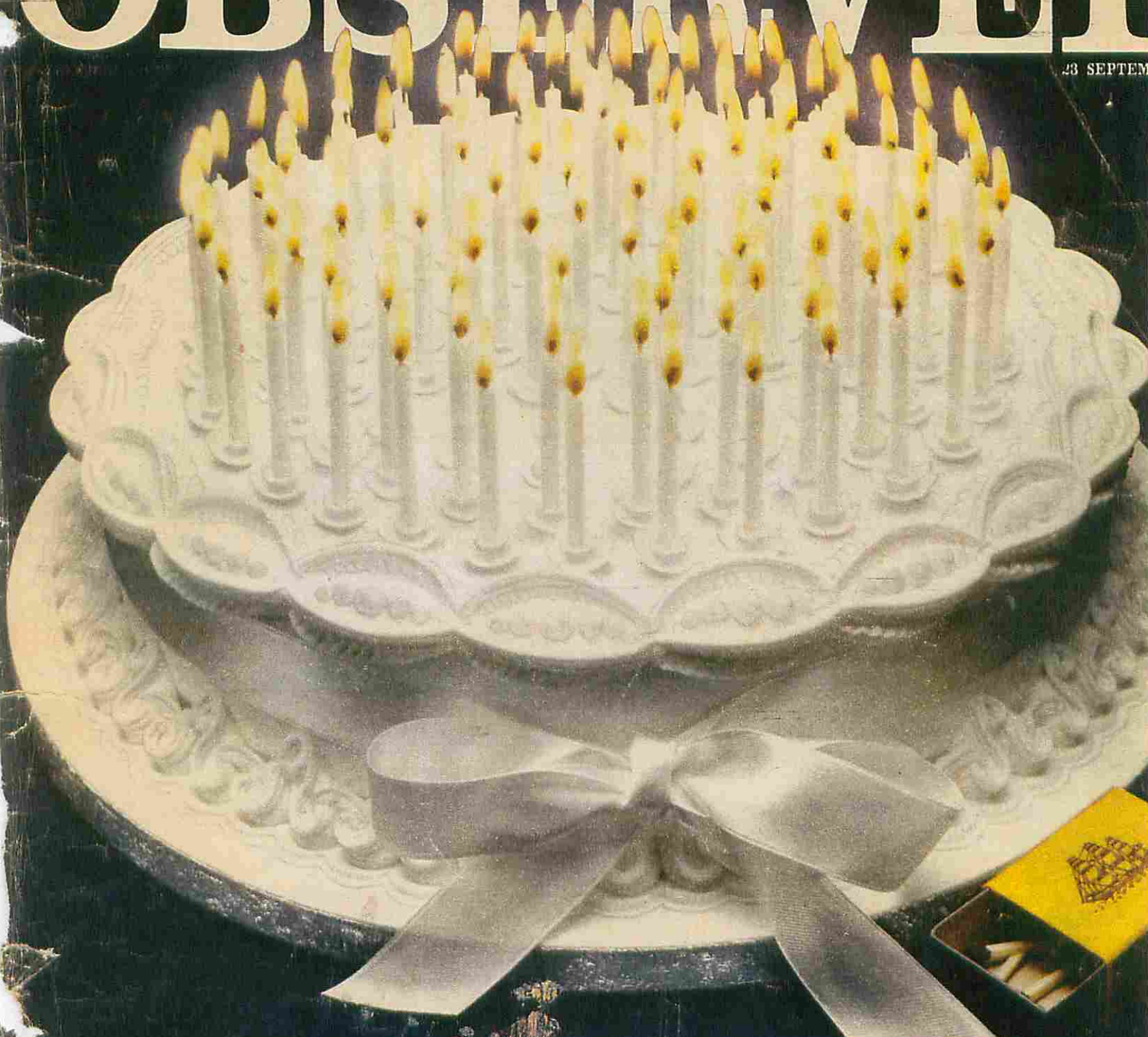


# OBSERVER

23 SEPTEMBER



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# The Jewish Eton

by Chaim Bermant

ON FRIDAY evenings the words ring out across the Berkshire meadows:

*O come, let us sing unto the Lord:  
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our  
salvation.*

*Let us come before his presence with  
thanksgiving:*

*let us shout for joy unto him with  
Psalms.*

*For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods . . .*

The lines, sung in Hebrew, seem strange to their setting and swans on the nearby Thames look up in wonder.

Carmel College has school houses and school colours and a school song and housemasters and prefects and boating fives and cricket elevens and rugby fifteens and bad food and most of the usual appurtenances of a public school, but it does not quite look like one. It is celebrating its silver jubilee this year and is perhaps too young to have acquired the trappings of even mock antiquity. It has no pinnacled chapel, no cloistered walks, no creep of ivy, no quads, no flop of tassel, no flap of gown. Its central building, which houses the library and offices, was once a family mansion, and is entirely of this century. Its dining-hall is a large, crumbling nissen hut reminiscent of an ill-kept Naafi canteen, and meals are eaten *con brio* to get in and out of the dreadful place as soon as possible.

Over all, the school looks like a recent endowment of the glaziers company. There is glass everywhere, glass classrooms, glass laboratories, glass dormitories, glass sanatorium. The synagogue, with its soaring glass walls, looks like an elaborate greenhouse, and the pupils at prayer, with their purple blazers and long hair, like a species of exotic vegetation. They are building a splendid new dining-hall and it, too, is predictably of glass. One feels that boys brought up in such surroundings will never throw stones.

There is one building, designed by Sir Basil Spence, that is decidedly concrete. It looks like a finned pyramid, stands as empty as a ransacked tomb, could, in an

continued



Co-education at Carmel College proved happier (top) than an earlier project for a sister college and achieved the same object: improving what the founder saw as 'shamefully neglected' Jewish women's education. English public school emphasis on athletics, games and the team spirit was adopted

also as a corrective of a deficiency in Jewish education, though rowing and cricket both suffer from a ban on fixtures on the Sabbath. Below: Specially for those going on to rabbinical college, Rabbi Baruch Epstein's Yeshiva (Talmud) class. (All boys wear the kipah cap in class.)



Photographs by David Newell Smith



View from the sunken garden of the back of the college, with Sir Basil Spence's pyramid-shaped building, designed as a concert hall and now empty, on the left.

emergency, serve as a fall-out shelter, was intended initially as an exhibition hall and functions mainly as a talking-point.

There is, on the other hand, a superbly designed music building ringed with individual, sound-proof studios and incorporating a bandstand, a magnificent gymnasium replete with Olympic-size swimming-pool, and playing-fields and sports facilities to out-Eton Eton.

But nothing becomes the college so much as the setting, the trees, the ponds, the river, the meadows and lawns and, to do justice to the planners, it may be that the buildings were kept subdued in tribute to the beauty of the surroundings. They may not always blend with the setting, but neither do they obscure or overawe it. Here is England at its most essentially English, a foreigner's dream of tranquillity.

Rabbi Kopul Rosen, the school's founder, was not foreign. He was born in Notting Hill, but his parents were Russian and he received much of his education in the Yeshivoth (Talmudical Colleges) of Lithuania and Poland. Tall, improbably athletic, handsome, bearded, he looked like a well-kempt prophet, and there was a grave resonance to his utterances that made one feel

that he was invoking the very authority of heaven. In an earlier age he could have been a Jewish Booth. He might, but for the grace of God, have been Chief Rabbi, but he was thought to be too independent, too alien, too thrusting, too much of a young-man-in-a-hurry, and he was passed over. And he was young – 35 – and he was in a hurry, as if urged on by premonitions of an early death. He turned his attention to Carmel College instead, and died of leukaemia 13 years later aged 48.

He would have founded the college even if he had been Chief Rabbi, it was his one long-term aim.

As Jewish immigrants rose from the ghetto they began clamouring for a place in the public schools, undeterred by the fact that these schools were Christian foundations. They wanted the best for their sons and to that end were, so to speak, prepared to go the whole hog. Others were more hesitant and to cater for them Jewish houses were opened at Harrow, Cheltenham, the Perse School and Clifton. These houses were in no sense a blending of two cultures, but were intended to help Jews into the mainstream of English life. They possibly succeeded too well, for the product of Jewish

houses rarely sent their sons to them, and one after another they closed. Clifton alone now has a Jewish house.

Kopul Rosen admired the English public school. It laid stress on those areas where Jewish education was most deficient: athletics, games, the team spirit. There was also an area in which it was entirely at one with Jewish teaching, elitism, a bad word now, but not then, the feeling that some men are born to lead and others to be led. In Jewish belief it might be summed up as the devout man's burden – 'and thou shalt be a light unto the heathens', but Rosen was not so much concerned to improve England as the English Jew. He was a Yeshiva Jew, a Talmudist who, in spite of the Talmudic injunctions against alien cultures as dangerous and profane, loved classical music and painting and English literature, enjoyed Milton as he enjoyed the Psalms, and admired the relaxed mood and small courtesies, the patient nature of English life, but he was not blind to English or Jewish deficiencies and he felt that as Jews assimilated they often lost what was best in their own culture and acquired what was worst in the English culture and the result was the moneyed philistine. And where

they did not assimilate they tended to creep backwards into the ghetto, with its suspicion of outside influences, its constant harking back to the past, its narrowness, its bigotry.

Rosen saw in Carmel an antidote to both, but died before he could see his hopes fulfilled.

Jeremy, his eldest son and present headmaster, is almost an embodiment of the Jewish belief that where a man has sons he is immortal, for he is the father all over again, the same build, the same voice, the same resonance, the same goodhumoured glint in his glasses, the same manners, the same flamboyance, the same reckless self-assurance. He had a better start than his father and his energy is more contained. Where his father received his secular education by external degrees, he went to Cambridge, joined fully, perhaps excessively, in the social life of the university, played soccer for his college and would have been a blue but for the fact that he couldn't play on Saturdays.

He is also a rather trendy young man so hirsute that his handsome features are almost lost to view, with a wardrobe full of Italianate suits (the influence of his attractive, wealthy, fashion-conscious Italian wife), but these are minor



From unruly pupil to Head: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen, now 30, with wife Vera.

details. One doesn't know if he consciously modelled himself on his father, but to anyone who knew his father, he is Kopul Rosen, Mark II.

When he came down from Cambridge (with a second in Moral Sciences) he turned to Jewish studies and spent six intensive years in Yeshivoh in Israel, then, after serving briefly as a rabbi in Glasgow, he was invited to become headmaster of Carmel. The appointment caused a sensation. He had no formal training in or experience of teaching. He was only 28 and some of the teachers who recalled him as

an unruly pupil did not welcome his reincarnation as headmaster. There were upheavals and intrigues and the school threatened to split into factions.

Rosen experienced a baptism by chaos, but survived with aplomb. He secured the resignation of some teachers and governors, mollified others, and there was a gradual return to normal. He now enters upon his third year as headmaster, and his supporters can feel that their choice has been utterly vindicated.

Roland Franklin, a managing director of the bankers Keyser Ullmann, a brisk dynamo of a man who is chairman of the governors, went to Oundle but sends his own sons to Carmel.

'It was a chance thing. My wife, who is more Orthodox than I am, pushed me to have a look at the place. I was very taken with it. I liked the atmosphere, the people. It's warm, Jewish, relaxed.'

Most of the pupils are from non-Orthodox homes and one gets the occasional parent who will draw the headmaster aside to explain that while he wants his children to remain Jewish, he does not want them to become rabbis.

There is little danger of that. Carmel's Jewishness does not affect its capacity to offer a first-class, all-round secular education. Staff are carefully selected and highly qualified; classes are small; facilities are superb, and the school has obtained marvellous results with what has at times been indifferent material: 75 per cent of the pupils pass up to the sixth forms; 90 per cent of the sixth-formers get into university. Carmel is possibly the last redoubt of the swot and the very industriousness and application of most of the boys almost gives the place a period flavour. No visitor to the college, especially when A and O level exams are in prospect, can fail to get the impression that it is an earnest workaday place. There is no whiff of cannabis in the air.

Rabbi Rosen sighs at the conservatism of the older boys, and one suspects he would welcome the challenge of the occasional revolutionary. At the same time he does not apologise for the stress on old attitudes and old, some would say outmoded, virtues. The twin mentors of the school are perhaps Moses and Baden Powell (with more than a touch of Kipling) and it is in the circumstances not surprising that it attracts numerous non-Jewish dayboys from the surrounding

continued



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