



The Association of Jewish Refugees

JUBILEE HOUSE, MERRION AVENUE, STANMORE, MIDDX HA7 4RL

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AJR Plaque to Honour Leo Baeck

The Association of Jewish Refugees was delighted to unveil a special commemorative plaque in memory of Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck, the scholar, teacher and theologian who was a prominent leader of Progressive Judaism.

The plaque has been installed at Colmore Court, 283 Watford Way, London NW4 4TQ; Rabbi Baeck lived in a house on this site between 1945 until his death in 1956.

Rabbi Baeck was born in what is today the Polish city of Leszno, near the border with Germany, but at the time of his birth in May 1873 was in the German Province of Posen. After studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and philosophy in Berlin, he served as a rabbi in Oppeln, Düsseldorf and Berlin, where he also taught at the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies. He was later a chaplain in the German Imperial Army during the First World War. His seminal work, *The Essence of Judaism*, was published in 1905 in response to Adolf von Harnack's 'What is Christianity?'

He was President of the Umbrella organisation representing Germany Jewry, the Reich Representation of German Jews (later forcibly renamed as the Reich Association of Jews in Germany) from 1933 until his deportation to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in Czechoslovakia in 1943. Having refused various offers from the US to escape Nazi oppression because he did not wish to abandon his community, he became what has been referred to as the last representative of Jewry in Germany during the Holocaust. He was quoted as saying, "I will go when I am the last Jew alive in Germany".

In Theresienstadt he was the honorary head of the Council of Elders; he gave lectures and was active in the interfaith dialogue between Jews and Christians of Jewish origin and helped look after the younger prisoners.

After the war, Baeck relocated to London, where he accepted the Presidency of the North Western Reform Synagogue in Temple Fortune. He taught at the Hebrew Union College in America, and became Chairman of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. He died on 2 November 1956 in London.



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AJR Trustee Frank Harding, said: “It is an enormous honour for us to commemorate the life of Rabbi Baeck, one of the principle Jewish thinkers of the 20th century whose work has helped shape the British Jewish community.”

Through our plaque scheme we are honouring prominent Jewish émigrés from Nazism who made a significant contribution to their adopted homeland. The plaque honouring Rabbi Baeck will follow the dedications we have already mounted to the biochemist and Nobel Prize winner Sir Hans Krebs and to Sir Ludwig Guttmann, who founded the Paralympics. We have also installed a plaque in memory of the Cosmo restaurant in Swiss Cottage, a famous meeting place for the refugees.

We believe that these commemorative plaques will help form a tangible link between the illustrious earlier residents and the local community as well as fascinating residents and visitors. As well as being instructive and informative, they bring the past into the present, and they perpetuate the memory of the person being honoured.