

Reverend Dr Norman Gale

Soft-spoken, self-effacing reverend who lamented the growing polarisation within the Jewish world

November 9, 1929 - January 8, 2021

Reverend Dr Norman Gale, who has died aged 91, was one of the last representatives of that old school of Anglo-Jewish ministers who combined learning and scholarship with all the attributes of pastoral care. The son of Ada and Solly Gale, he studied at Jews' College, gaining a PhD at Leeds University for a thesis on Karaite liturgy.

It was at the college that he met his future wife Goldie Freedman, who was working at the United Synagogue head office. She dedicated herself to supporting Norman in all his synagogue and communal endeavours. In his dealings with people, he was the archetypal gentleman; softly-spoken, self-effacing, profoundly caring, and exuding love of his calling and commitment to the mission of a rabbi, as expressed in Pirkei Avot: (Ethics of the Fathers) 'to love fellow man and to bring them closer to their faith.'

He would leave no stone unturned to help relieve the troubles and burdens of his members, and he and Goldie were held in the highest esteem and affection by the communities of Harrogate (1958-68), Ealing (1968-88), and Hampstead (1988-95) which they jointly served.

He was a hands-on minister, serving on every shul committee, editing the shul magazines, serving as headmaster of the Ealing cheder, helping to erect the shul's succah each year and to cut down branches for the s'chach. He saw his role and calling as to serve and to guide, not to dictate or court honour.

His abounding energy was already displayed in his youth at the Roundhay Grammar School, Leeds, where he excelled at rugby and represented his county in cross country running. That energy he later invested into a host of voluntary offices that he occupied and successfully combined with his synagogue duties. These included, chairmanship of the US Rabbinical Council, chaplain to the American armed services, prison chaplain, honorary director of the Jewish Prison Chaplaincy, honorary chaplain to the National Association of Jewish Friendship Clubs and member of the Chief Rabbi's Cabinet. He also ran assemblies at Latymer Upper School, taught at JFS, and ran the US Inter-Synagogue Quiz for some years.

He and Goldie retired to Stanmore where they played an active part in the community. He was happy to offer his services there and to the Belmont Synagogue, and occasionally preached, led shivah services, and was part of the team of officiants on the High Holy Days. He also regularly attended at the Bet Din, serving as a witness in various proceedings.

Norman was the embodiment of tolerance, and he passionately espoused the philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy that commended itself admirably to the temperament of the Anglo-Jewish communities that he served. He deeply lamented the growing polarisation within world Jewry, and he looked back nostalgically to the by-gone age of his early decades in the ministry when extremism was neither experienced nor tolerated. He is survived by Goldie, their daughter Karen, son in law Jonnie, son Simon, daughter in law Helen, six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

RABBI DR JEFFREY M COHEN