An Eternal Bond / Lilach Barak

Chapter 1 | The Formative Years

1901–1917

The establishment of the Jewish National Fund \* Zionism in Britain \* Modest beginnings \* The founding of the JNF Committee in England \* Irregularities and reorganisation \* Activity during World War I \* The Balfour Declaration

In December 1901, the exhilarated and exhausted British delegates to the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, made their way home. During the train ride, one of them noticed that their shoes had not been polished in over a week and commented on the matter. In response, Rabbi Jacob Koppel Goldbloom from Stepney in London’s East End, founder of the Ivrith b’lvrith (‘Hebrew in Hebrew’) Talmud Torah (boys’ school), jokingly offered to shine their shoes, provided that the beneficiaries of his service would donate his payment to the new Jewish National Fund. The amused delegates agreed at once and Goldbloom, without further hesitation, took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, pulled out a brush from his case, and began polishing. There were twelve pairs of shoes, and when he was finished, he made sure to charge everyone—one shilling per pair. This marked British Jewry’s first public fundraising for Keren Kayemet L’Israel*,* the Jewish National Fund (hereafter: JNF).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Altogether, twenty-five delegates and guests represented the British Zionists at that Congress, held on 26–30 December 1901 in the Stadtcasino concert hall in Basel, Switzerland. In his keynote speech, the founder and the president of the Jewish national movement, Dr Theodor Herzl, announced his intention of bringing to a plenary vote the delegates’ approval of the establishment of a Jewish national fund. This institution would raise money from Jews throughout the Diaspora and whose purpose would be the purchase of land in Eretz Israel (Palestine) and Syria and the settlement of Jews there.

This was not a new idea. At the First Zionist Congress, convened in the same hall in Basel in 1897, Zvi Hermann Schapira, a professor of mathematics at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, broached the idea of a national fund for land purchases in Palestine. The Congress accepted his proposal in principle but postponed implementation until it could be shaped into a coherent plan with rules, regulations, and a valid legal foundation. Of equal importance was the need for the Zionist movement to create a financial mechanism through which the national fund could raise and manage the donations efficiently without competing with membership dues to the Zionist movement through the sale of ‘Zionist Shekalim’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The First Congress assigned the task of determining the character and legal foundations of the national fund to a smaller Action Committee. While Herzl devoted most of his energy to diplomacy in the effort to obtain a concession (charter) from the Great Powers, the Action Committee had difficulty in making real progress towards formulating a systematic plan. By the Fourth Zionist Congress (1900), some in the movement were expressing concern that the desultory pace of action would cause the momentum to be lost and that the grand expectations for the national fund would wither away. There was no alternative but to set the Action Committee an explicit goal: to bring about a scheme that would be put to a plenary vote at the Fifth Congress. Despite these efforts, the Action Committee failed to generate a comprehensive scheme. However, even though the fund initiative was insufficiently outlined—foremost in terms of legal registration—Herzl was determined to present it for resolution to the Congress as it stood.

During the plenary sessions of the Fifth Congress, a tortuous debate took place over whether it was the right time to formally announce the creation of a national fund. The attorney Dr Max Bodenheimer, who headed the opposition, managed to convince the majority of the delegates to vote against it, and the establishment of the national fund was postponed once again. Herzl, however, found a defect in the voting process and applied all his efforts to convince the delegates to vote again, this time in favour. His exertions bore fruit. In the revote, the establishment of the fund was approved by a majority of 105 to 82, and the recommendations of the Action Committee for the principles of its operation were also adopted. Since the question of the legal establishment of the fund remained unanswered, it was decided to assemble a special legal committee that included Herbert Bentwich, a London lawyer, and a close associate of Herzl’s, among its members. The committee was instructed to undertake the legal registration of the National Fund in a European country.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thus, on the evening of December 29, 1901, to thunderous applause, Herzl announced the establishment of the National Fund. It was immediately followed by a fundraising campaign among the delegates. The first to assent was the industrialist Johann Kremenezky, one of the Fund’s architects, who contributed £10 in honour of Schapira, who had passed away without seeing his vision realised. Herzl was the second donor. Both were inscribed in the first JNF Golden Book to commemorate those individuals and organisations who made significant contributions to the Zionist movement.

A month after the Congress, Kremenezky was elected to head the National Fund with its headquarters in Vienna. He began to formulate the function and principles of the Fund and devised new methods of raising money. In addition to paid inscriptions in the Golden Book, he hit on the idea of selling JNF stamps, priced at the value of the smallest coin in each country’s currency. The idea behind these stamps, which had no postal worth, was to affix them to official Zionist documents as well as personal letters. In addition, Kremenezky happily accepted an offer from Haim Kleinman, a bank clerk from a small town in Galicia, to manufacture a tin box for collecting small coins. These “Blue Boxes” were intended to be distributed in every Jewish house, firm, factory, school, and organisation around the world. They later became the most identifiable symbol of the Jewish National Fund.

In 1903, the basic principles and policy of the Fund were agreed upon: to serve as the arm of the Zionist movement for the purchase of land in Palestine and Syria for Jewish settlement. The lands acquired were to be held in trust by the JNF on behalf of the entire Jewish nation. The Fund would be prohibited from selling these lands and was permitted only to parcel them out by lease for a term of forty-nine years. It was also decided that the Fund would not begin its operations until it had achieved a minimum share capital of £200,000.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Upon the return of the delegates from the Fifth Congress, a large gathering of English Zionists took place in late January 1902, where the British delegates shared their impressions of the Congress. The *Jewish Chronicle*, the principal mouthpiece of British Jewry, also covered the inauguration of the National Fund extensively, and reported on £10 in donations that had already been collected in Britain from the sale of stamps (a half penny per unit). However, the newspaper expressed its doubts whether this measure alone would be sufficient to achieve the necessary capital to finance the Fund’s ambitious goals.[[5]](#footnote-5) This doubt was well-founded. Not only was the fundraising mechanism insufficient, but the broader Jewish community showed scant interest in being involved in Zionism. At this time, the dawn of the twentieth century, the leaders of the community faced enormous challenges, and promoting the Zionist cause was not one of their main priorities.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, tens of thousands of Russian and Eastern European Jews reached British shores, part of a huge wave of emigration of mostly poor Jews fleeing persecution, pogroms, and economic pressures and heading towards the New World. Although their main destination was indeed America, many went to Great Britain, South Africa, Canada, and Argentina in the hope of religious and spiritual freedom and a better economic future for themselves and their families. By the end of the 1870s, the core Jewish community of Great Britain, some 60,000 strong, had grown by the influx of approximately 100,000 refugees who had made Britain their home. The vast majority were destitute and preserved the Jewish ghetto culture in their language, clothing, and religious conduct. They were concentrated mainly in the teeming and impoverished East End of London.

The new immigrants’ arrival shook the community to its foundations and threatened to change its character. Those most anxious about new arrivals came from prominent Jewish families who were linked by complex business and marriage ties. The leadership of the community came from these families, and they were well-versed in British public life, politics, and the economy of the Empire. The members of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which represented the community to the government, largely came from these families. Over the years, greatly due to the efforts of this leadership, the small Jewish community in England had gained the privileges of religious liberties, and equal rights while securing its position in general society.

The main concern of the community leadership was to ensure that the immigrants would not stand out too much and that they would not be an economic burden to the British taxpayer and arouse repressed anti-Semitic feelings in non-Jewish society. In order to solve the “East End problem” the community leaders sought to create a mechanism that would force the newcomers through a rapid process of “Anglicisation,” viz., to help them become proper Englishmen of the Jewish faith, loyal and grateful citizens of Great Britain that had been generous enough to accept them.

When Herzl paid his first visit to London in July 1896, although given a polite and restrained welcome by the community leadership, he soon realised that most of his hosts firmly opposed his ideas on Jewish nationalism and the establishment of Jewish statehood. It was among the immigrants that Herzl found the enthusiastic welcome he had futilely sought from the leadership. Nevertheless, even among the newcomers, his support came to a very small percentage of the community.

This was evident during the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel. The London-born journalist Jacob de Haas addressed the state of Zionism in the British Jewish community. He remarked that only 3,000 people had registered as members of the various associations affiliated with the Hovevey Zion (Lovers of Zion)[[6]](#footnote-6) and that “the interest of the members in the work of settlement is less than before.”[[7]](#footnote-7) About six months later, on March 6, 1898, Norman Bentwich convened the first national English Zionist conference at Clerkenwell Town Hall, London, where the intention of forming an English Zionist Federation was announced. Herzl, unable to attend the event, sent a congratulatory letter in which he expressed his disappointment at the poor support for Zionism in Great Britain:

At the council hall in Clerkenwell, only members of a single country will gather, and its participation in Zionism is not particularly large. In other countries, the percentage of Jews who participate in our movement is much larger because their political, social, and economic situation surely affects them such that they will become attached to our organisation. There is no other country in the world in which Jews are in such good condition as in the Kingdom of Great Britain; this is the last happy island for modern Jews.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The English Zionist Federation (hereinafter: EZF) indeed came into being several months later to serve as the central umbrella organisation of Zionist activity in Great Britain. The EZF aspired also to be British Zionists’ representative at the World Zionist Federation. Sir Francis Montefiore, a firm supporter of Herzl, agreed to serve as its first president and led the EZF down the path of Herzlian political Zionism, which focused initially on diplomacy. The hope that the EZF would manage to unite the different factions soon proved unfounded. The most bitter conflict the EZF faced was with the Order of Ancient Maccabeans, founded in 1896 by the Zionist novelist and teacher Ephraim Ish-Kishor, which had become the champion of practical Zionism in Britain, advocating practical steps for the advancement of the Jewish community in Palestine.

Despite Herzl’s gloomy expectations, within just a few years, rates of support Zionism doubled. At the Fifth Zionist Congress (in 1901, where the establishment of the Jewish National Fund was announced), it was again de Haas who reported on the state of Zionism in the British Isles. Although he expressed reserved satisfaction with the progress made, he also remarked that only 7,155 women and men, 4.5 percent of a community some 160,000 strong were registered members of the seventy-six different societies that had gathered under the EZF banner. These societies, he said, operated under rather modest conditions, assembling mainly to intensify Jewish education and culture and disseminate Zionist propaganda.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The establishment of the Jewish National Fund breathed a new spirit into those societies. Some of them began to spontaneously organise social events to promote JNF objectives. During the fund’s first years, this activity bore the character of a haphazard and completely voluntary local initiative without any guiding hand. For example, it was local Zionist groups, such as the women’s Zionist society Daughters of Zion from Manchester and Dorshei Zion from the East End, that issued a call to encourage others to hold fundraising initiatives. These urgings received little response and the number of events dedicated to funding the newly established JNF was relatively minor. The few fundraising activities that did take place were in the form of social gatherings. They took place in private homes or a conference hall, initiated by an association or a well-known community personality who invited members of his or her close circle to listen to a lecture by a key speaker. These events were usually accompanied by light refreshments and a piano performance to entertain the guests. The proceeds from the sale of tickets were Britain’s first donations to the National Fund.

Until 1908, the JNF in Britain had been represented by a small committee composed of several members of the EZF. Their activity was limited to encouraging the societies/organisations to appoint designated joint regional committees that would collaborate on promotions and fundraising for the Jewish National Fund. These rather small groups did the actual selling of stamps, distributed the Blue Boxes, and promoted inscriptions in the Golden Books.

The main fundraising activists were typically youth and women who bruited creative ideas to promote the Fund. As a case in point, on “National Fund Day” in the summer of 1903, some 100 youngsters, from several Zionist youth societies, fanned out in the streets of East London and distributed pamphlets. The fruits of their campaign yielded donations in the “respectable” sum of £10.[[10]](#footnote-10) The collectors were instructed to avoid sending the proceeds to the EZF’s office; instead, they were asked to deposit them directly into the JNF account with the Zionist movement’s banking arm, the Jewish Colonial Trust (hereinafter: JCT).[[11]](#footnote-11)

Diaspora Jewry at large did not commit to the cause of the JNF, and the Fund did not succeed in raising substantial sums of money. During its initial years, the JNF Head Office in Vienna concentrated on the statutory character of the Fund and its structure, promotion, and fundraising methods rather than on actual land purchases. It took almost five years until the Head Office was able to establish work processes efficient enough to manage such a complex international organisation as the JNF had become. The very sporadic land purchases that eventually took place included the establishment of a study farm and an agricultural school; settling the orphans that survived the pogrom against the Jews in the Russian town of Kishinev; land purchases in Atlit for the founding of an agricultural experimental station, and so on.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The Anglo-Jewish community’s attitude was no different from that of the rest of the Diaspora. In fact, until 1908, it is difficult to point to any special effort by the EZF to encourage fundraising for the JNF. The EZF financial reports show that in the first month and a half after the establishment of the Fund, the Federation treated the event rather indifferently. No special donations were made; the only source of income came from the inscription of several associations in the Golden Book (at a cost of £20 that could be paid in installments), and the sale of stamps that amounted to the sum of £10 (equivalent to £1,200 today). The EZF bought half of this amount for its own use; a few organisations and ardent Zionists account for the rest.[[13]](#footnote-13) An appeal to synagogue rabbis to dedicate two Sabbath services to aid for the JNF seems to have gone unrequited, as in the following two years revenues from the community remained low, in 1904 amounting to £26.5, obtained solely from the sale of stamps. In the following year, revenues rose to just £97.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This relatively significant-looking increase in income stemmed from activities related to the first National Fund Day, for which the EZF urged all its associated organisations to hold social events and meetings in support of the Fund. Leaflets printed in Yiddish and English were distributed from the Head Office to the public, and articles praising the significance of the Fund were published in the community’s press. An additional source of income that year came from self-taxation (*Selbstbesteuerung*) for the National Fund.[[15]](#footnote-15)

The following year, given the encouraging outcomes of the National Fund Day, the societies and groups were asked to hold similar events on the Purim festival. This time, the EZF agreed to supply several distinguished speakers to leverage the gatherings. Although the Purim events proved to be remarkably successful and lucrative, the annual revenue of the year 1906 came to only £640, revealing once again that the National Fund had not yet gained the desired foothold within the community.

By recommendation of the Legal Committee, the Jewish National Fund was registered on April 8, 1907, under its Hebrew name, Keren Kayemeth Le Jisroel., Ltd.,as a legal entity in England.[[16]](#footnote-16) Its board of directors consisted of representatives of the major Zionist federations in the Diaspora. One of the directors was Herzl’s close associate, the London mining engineer Leopold Kessler, who also co-owned the *Jewish Chronicle*.[[17]](#footnote-17) Kessler was joined on the board by the Lord Mayor of Bradford, Jacob Moser. Once the Fund was legally registered, at the Eighth Zionist Congress in The Hague, Dr Bodenheimer accepted the invitation to serve as the Fund’s second chair and moved its head office from Vienna to Köln. It was at this Congress, that Moser pledged a donation to the construction of premises for the first Hebrew high school in Tel Aviv, which was namedthe Herzliya Gymnasium in honour of Dr Herzl, who had died in 1904.

Another tribute to Herzl’s memory was launched immediately after his death when the Executive Committee of the Zionist movement initiated a special fundraising campaign for land purchase and the planting of a forest in Herzl’s name. The JNF was tasked with executing the project, which would become its very first endeavour in afforestation. In May 1907, after several years of fundraising, the JNF board drew the contours of the venture: a forest of 100,000 olive trees, planted on 200 hectares in the vicinity of Hulda. To make it operational, the JNF contacted the Olive Tree Fund *(Verein Oelbaumspende)*, headed by the German-Jewish botanist Professor Otto Warburg, in order to use the fruits of the plantation as a source of revenue for Zionist educational and cultural institutions in Palestine.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In accordance with the formalization of the JNF’s legal status and the onset of its initial significant operations in Palestine, the EZF was forced to increase its efforts for the benefit of the Fund. Consequently, in May 1908, it established a Special Committee composed of A. Englander, Jacob Zelkind, and Percy Baker, to deal solely with JNF affairs.[[19]](#footnote-19) These efforts still appeared to be scanty, given that at the semi-annual conference of the EZF, the General Secretary of the Special Committee argued seriously that the National Fund was being neglected in Britain.

The dismal status of the JNF in Britain did not go unnoticed at the Head Office. In September 1908, the Head office decided to intervene and help the EZF to reorganise the Special Committee along the lines of an organisational structure that had proved successful in other Diaspora communities. Thus, the Committee became an independent subcommittee within the EZF under the name **Jewish National Fund Commission for England** (hereinafter: the Commission). By focusing on developing JNF activities and advocacy in Britain, its specific aim was to “make the objectives of the Jewish National Fund known in all parts of the United Kingdom where Jews reside.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Leopold Kessler agreed to serve as the Commission’s first chair and, together with his fellow commissioners (L. Eisen, Mark, Shaffern, and Dr J. Salkind), did so on a volunteer basis. Only one official, the General Secretary, Mr. M. Hart, who also served as a temporary treasurer, was paid for his work. Hart was responsible for general correspondence, coordinating activities with the provincial branches, generating reports, and managing meetings. Since the Commission had no premises of its own at this time, it operated from the JCT office at Brook House in Walbrook, London.

In January 1909, Dr Bodenheimer, Chairman of the JNF, visited London to participate in the first annual conference of the Commission, at which representatives of Zionist societies were also invited. In his speech, he said that he had come to London to acquaint himself with the conditions under which the work on behalf of the Jewish National Fund was being carried out. It was his impression that the Fund had greatly increased in the course of the year, yet there was much left to be desired. He presented statistics showing that not even one halfpenny per year per head of the Jewish population of London had been given towards the Jewish National Fund. He concluded his remarks with a question and a rebuke: “Was it unreasonable to expect of every Jew to contribute at least one halfpenny per week towards one of the most useful institutions connected with the Zionist movement? For months past, not a penny came in from England in aid of their funds.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

The criticism was heard loud and clear. Within just a few months the modest Commission improved its working procedures and became more visible to the public. It held monthly administrative meetings, conducted street-to-street and house-to-house collection campaigns, and frequently published lengthy lists of contributors in the community press. The directors also embraced new creative initiatives to expand the range of fundraising methods. One such initiative came from the General Secretary of theZion Association of East London Zionists, who appealed to members of the community to collect postage stamps and forward them to the Commission so they could be sold to professional collectors. Another Zionist association from Manchester, which had 100 members, managed to raise £10 for the JNF over the course of a year by selling Zionist leaflets and arranging various fundraising events.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In June 1909, the Commission moved to a new location at 150 Whitechapel Road. In October, it moved again to 4 Fulbourne St. Whitechapel, where it would remain for almost a decade. To economise, the Commission was encouraged by the EZF, which sought to centralise Zionist activity in London in one area, to share its office with Zion Association. Thus, the Commission was able to use the office only from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. each day.

By the end of 1909, the Commission was operating twenty-five provincial commissions, and activity for the National Fund in Great Britain plainly increased markedly. Of the several thousand Blue Boxes that the JNF head office in Köln had sent out, half were distributed through Zionist organisations in London and the other half were scattered throughout the provinces. Anyone who showed an interest in having a box was given one, with neither any procedure to track the boxes nor any orderly record of where they were placed or when last emptied, let alone by whom. Unfortunately, many boxes were left neglected, and others were lost or stolen.

Concurrently, the English and Yiddish press gave increasing coverage to JNF activities, and the sums of money collected at the various social events. The most powerful fundraising channel, however—superior to all other methods—appeared to be the detailed lists of donors’ names and contributions that were consistently published in the press. While some fundraising methods were successful, others failed to attract donors. Self-taxation, for example, received little if any response; few in London (and no one in the provinces) committed to it. The total revenue from this source came to £2.2 in 1909 while the Commission’s total income climbed to a record £609.15.[[23]](#footnote-23)

By the fifth anniversary of Herzl’s death, despite many efforts, the Head Office failed to collect a sufficient amount to plant the Herzl Forest. To avoid embarrassment, the Head Office turned to its worldwide commissions, urging them to accelerate their efforts for the promotion of the Olive Tree Fund.[[24]](#footnote-24) Dr J. Salkind, the new honorary treasurer, and Kessler, the chair, felt it necessary to publish a letter in the *Jewish Chronicle* stating that neither the EZF nor any other association took any commission whatsoever and that all funds collected were placed directly in the bank account of the Jewish National Fund.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Although almost a decade had passed since its inception, the JNF continued to struggle to collect substantial amounts of money, not only in Britain but throughout the Diaspora. In an effort to maximise its profits, JNF lawyers petitioned the British income tax and legal authorities in 1910 to change the classification of the National Fund from a Limited Company to a charitable organisation to benefit from the tax exemption. The request was declined on the grounds that the Jewish National Fund was an organisation with a political agenda. Several additional attempts to reclassify the Fund were made over the next two decades; all were rejected for the same reason.[[26]](#footnote-26)

While the JNF tried unsuccessfully to change its statutory status, the Commission decided to pay special tribute to Kremenezky’s sixtieth birthday by inscribing the celebration in the Golden Book. The money for this was collected by the sale of postcards bearing Kremenezky’s portrait, sent from the Head Office. With the steady growth of activity, additional commissions were formed in the provinces, and on Purim 1910, young volunteers headed into the streets of the East End and went from door to door with Blue Boxes. Those youngsters, some of whom were under the age of sixteen, who managed to collect more than half a shilling were awarded a special medal. Donations for the Herzl Forest also continued to stream in as the Commission kept appealing to the public while emphasizing that the forest would yield a permanent annual profit of over £15,000, and already “gives employment to a number of Jews in honest, healthy and remunerative work,” accelerates settlement in the Holy Land, and, as the profit will accrue to Jewish cultural institutions in Palestine, will provide means for the development of Jewish intellectual life there.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Since the Head Office had to rely on funds from the Diaspora to carry out its projects, it made sure that the Diaspora commissions (the term “branches” was also in use) would always be kept abreast of the progress of the projects. The commissions were provided with promotional literature, speakers, and other marketing material to best support their work. One of these creative initiatives was made by the German-Jewish sociologist, economist, and historian Dr Franz Oppenheimer, who presented a scheme to establish a cooperative agricultural colony on JNF-owned land in the Jezreel Valley.

In September 1910, Oppenheimer prepared to visit Britain to further his scheme and raise contributions. Before his arrival, the provincial commissions received a letter from the Commission asking whether they wished to arrange an event and host the esteemed guest—on the condition, however, that they could be certain about receiving generous donations from their communities for the cause. Otherwise, he would not bother to visit.[[28]](#footnote-28) Only Glasgow accepted the challenge and unfortunately, Oppenheimer’s trip was not fruitful. Several months after the visit, the Head Office advised the Commission that contributions from England for Merhavia, the cooperative agricultural colony, were meager. Merhavia did come into being and is a landmark in the history of the Zionist Yishuv.[[29]](#footnote-29)Surprisingly enough, despite the paltry financial support that was received in Glasgow, it turned out the visit did leave its mark: in March 1912, several Hovevey Zion families from the Glasgow Agudas Olei Zion emigrated to Palestine and joined Merhavia.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Such visits were commonplace. Zionist keymen came from the Continent to Britain frequently, Such was the case in November 1910, when one of the Head Office executives attended a meeting of the Commission’s board. Various issues were discussed there, one being an enquiry from a Zionist youth association in Edinburgh about how to handle a request from a Blue Box holder who wanted his own key so that he could send his contributions straight to the Commission in London. After much consideration, the board agreed to give him the key, provided the box was opened in the presence of an official representative of the local commissioners. The General Secretary also tabled for a vote a proposal from the Palestine Wine & Trading Co.,which importedandsold the Palwin brand—the first Palestinian kosher wine. The firm wanted to advertise itself on the back of the JNF receipts book.[[31]](#footnote-31) Although the Commission was inclined to approve this request, Palwin withdrew it later.

Most of the discussion, however, focused on an alarming downturn in donations. The board explained this as a reflection of the present position of Zionism in the community and also traced it to a substantial fundraising operation earlier in the year by the Order of Ancient Maccabeans. To cut costs, the distinguished guest from the Head Office suggested to the board that the Head Office should assist the Commission with the sum of £200 per year, provided some reorganisation be made and provided the Office move to a less expensive location in order to pay less rent. After trenchant debate, the Commission remained of the opinion that the problem with raising donations lay in the weakness of Zionism in Great Britain and not, as the guest claimed, in their ineffective work. Therefore, the Commission decided that they would remain in their office on Fulbourne Street for the time being while agreeing to establish a subcommittee that would review the Head Office’s proposals.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Two new board members joined the Commission in 1910: Paul Goodman and the son of Herbert Bentwich, Norman Bentwich, who in 1920 became the Attorney General under the Mandatory Government. Both participated in the Commission’s Executive board meeting where the Secretary, Harris Joseph Morgenstern, spoke mostly of the difficulties the Commission was facing – the remote management of the provincial commissions, and, notably, the great effort invested to strengthen British Jewry’s awareness of the work and goals of the Jewish National Fund given the Commission limited resources. He also described the unsuccessful attempts to establish new commissions throughout London and to persuade the provincial commissions to hold Hannukah events. In fact, the only encouraging news the Secretary told the board was of a request that came from a certain Rabbi Morrison to establish a local commission in Southampton. Since the Rabbi had assented to pay for Morgenstern’s invitation as a promoter of Zionism out of his own pocket, it was agreed that he would travel to Southampton to speak at the new commission’s first convention.

The Commission also encountered difficulties in inducing regional Zionist associations to cooperate. Several East End associations approached the Commission and asked for permission to hold fundraising activities for the JNF independently of the Zion Association which was responsible for fundraising in the entire East End. Zion, headed by Rabbi Goldblum, firmly opposed the request, and it was consequently decided that the General Secretary would try to persuade the applicant associations to operate within Zion. If they still insisted on doing things on their own, they would have to demarcate the geographical limits of these activities and undertake to act only within them.

Regarding the need to strengthen the relationship with the provinces, it was decided to establish a committee of three—Rubinstein, Goodman, and Eisen—that would be responsible for distributing summaries of the executive meetings to the provincial commissions and asking them to reciprocate by sending summaries of their internal meetings. It was further resolved that the amounts collected by the local commissions would be published in the press so as to encourage the commissions and inspire them to act more vigorously. The Commission also decided to contact the Head Office with a request to print 3,000 copies of leaflets addressed to women only.

The financial statements disclose that the discussions at the Commission’s board meetings revolved around insignificant sums. Donation income in November and December 1910 amounted to only £119. The expense column showed modest management outlays—office rental, some refreshments, coal for heating the office, and the General Secretary’s salary—adding up to £17 for the two months and consuming about 15 percent of revenues. A grant of £50 to purchase furniture, requested by the Commission from the Head Office, was late in arriving. Instead, the Head Office sent £5 that was used to participate in the expenses of the Zion Association, help the Liverpool Commission reimburse catering expenses, and pay the *Jewish Chronicle* for advertising. To reduce advertising expenses, the Commission decided to ask the editor of the Yiddish-language *Jewish Express* to publish the names of all donors at no charge; otherwise, the Commission would stop publishing in that newspaper.

An important matter that the Commission dealt with had much to do with the handling of the Blue Boxes. In general, it was agreed that paying a salary to those who distributed and emptied the boxes was not desirable; as much of this work as possible should be left to volunteers. The Commission also took up personal matters, such as a request from Mr. Louis Berwitz of Belfast, who had purchased land in Palestine for £10 several years earlier and now offered it as a gift to the JNF in exchange for assistance in obtaining documents confirming his legal claims to additional lands in his possession. The matter was referred directly to the Head Office.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In April 1911, Gunzburg resigned from the Secretaryship of the Commission. His successor,

Isaac Goodman, was also asked to do the secretarial work of the EZF. Not long after, Kessler was forced to announce his resignation as chair of the Commission due to the burdens of his obligations. Kessler, an ardent Zionist and a co-owner of the *Jewish Chronicle,* proved to be a great asset to the Commission as his newspaper provided valuable exposure of the JNF’s achievements. Enterprises like assistance to the settlements in Degania and its surroundings, urban dwellers in Haifa and Jaffa, the Technion in Haifa, the Bezalel Art School in Jerusalem, and of course, the Herzl Forest, were all highlighted in the newspaper that urged the community to send more donations in support of the JNF’s important tasks.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The Commission continued to seek new ways of enhancing awareness of the JNF’s activities. To this end, it turned to Murray Rosenberg, a founding member of the EZF who had just returned from a visit to Palestine. During his stay there, he made what is now known as “the first film to be shot in Palestine,” dedicated to Herzl. By virtue of this accomplishment, the Commission asked Rosenberg to present his films to the community. Rosenberg agreed but conditioned his consent on the Commission bearing all expenses associated with the screenings. The Commission, finding this hard to do, suggested instead that Rosenberg join the Commission; he rejected the offer.[[35]](#footnote-35) Another method of increasing awareness was to spread JNF banners on the eve of Yom Kippur, when the streets of the Jewish neighbourhoods bustled with people rushing to pray in their synagogues and giving alms as a means of atonement. On Yom Kippur 1911, the heads of all the provincial commissions were instructed to hang JNF banners in all synagogues near their homes, and to draft articles for publication in the Yiddish press.

In 1911, the tension between the two main Zionist bodies in Britain reached its peak. The disagreement over the interpretation of Zionism weakened Zionism in Britain, dividing it into two camps. On one side stood the EZF, which advocated operating through diplomatic channels to obtain legal rights for Jews to immigrate and settle in Palestine on a large scale. As the leaders of the political Zionist stream in Britain, they opposed the views and activities of Chovevey Zion. On the other side stood the Order of Ancient Maccabeans, advocates of practical Zionism. They believed that facts must be determined on the ground by encouraging and supporting immediate immigration and settlement of Jews in Palestine and not waiting until – if at all – guarantees of political rights would be received.

The outcome of this bitter battle was reflected in the donations. As a result, the World Zionist Federation leadership had to intervene to reconcile the parties and sent Professor Warburg and Dr Arthur Hantke (a member of the JNF board and chair of the Zionist Federation in Germany) to London in an attempt to find a formula that would allow the two combative bodies to cooperate.

The discussions on this matter continued into the Eleventh Zionist Congress in Basel in August 1911. There, the ideological struggle between advocates of political Zionism and those of practical Zionism was brought to an end by the passage of a resolution to merge the two approaches into “synthetic Zionism.” Another decision of the Congress was to permit independent associations *(Sonderverband)* which had a membership of at least 3,000 shekel-payers to pursue a special aim within the organisation and to form federations apart from the national federation that would be represented in the World Zionist movement. Despite the EZF’s opposition, the Ancient Maccabeansreceived this special status on the condition that a Joint Zionist Council, comprising representatives of both the Order of Ancient Maccabeans and the EZF, be established in Britain.[[36]](#footnote-36) In February 1912, the parties reached an agreement to set up the Council*.*[[37]](#footnote-37)

The income of the Commission in 1911 amounted to only £465, drastically down from the previous year. Paul Goodman, the General Secretary of the Commission, went to a meeting with the Head Office in Köln in early 1912 to seek advice because there was no obvious satisfactory explanation why, a decade after the Commission had been founded in Britain, its income was failing to increase. It was especially disturbing since the Commission seemed to be well-organised, and had expanded to include twenty-five provincial commissions,[[38]](#footnote-38)in addition, the Commission did not splurge on office expenses and its office inventory seemed quite modest: as of mid-1912, it owned a large table, a counter, two desks, two armchairs, twenty-nine ordinary chairs, a duplicating machine, a large blackboard, twenty-nine Blue Boxes, some bookshelves, a stock notices and leaflets for Purim, Hanukkah, and Herzl Memorial Day, appeal for women, and several booklets on “The Zionist Work in Palestine.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

At the request of the Head Office, Goodman prepared a report on the Commission’s work. His comprehensive report correctly reflected the National Fund’s position in Great Britain and illustrated its many weaknesses explaining clearly why the Commission failed to generate significant revenue. Pressing his point, Goodman claimed that donations were made by individuals on special occasions such as weddings, bar mitzvahs, wedding anniversaries and sometimes spontaneously and independently for no particular reason. He also remarked that voluntary collections took place on Jewish festivals when dozens of volunteers, notably teenagers and women, were deployed in the densely populated Jewish immigrants’ neighbourhoods. The 3,500 Blue Boxes received from the Head Office for distribution were handed out haphazardly, without proper registration, management, or mechanisms of control. Even when the boxes were emptied, their holders were not given receipts for the contents. Although each box had a serial number stamped on the tin and a special key, the Commission failed to maintain lists of these numbers and the addresses of those to whom they had been given, let alone records of keys and when the boxes had last been emptied. It was no wonder that many boxes were lost, stolen, or simply forgotten. Under these newly discovered circumstances, Goodman promised the Head Office to put in place a procedure to handle the Blue Boxes, fill in the missing records, and at least two or three times a year to hold special events—during the Passover, Yom Kippur, and Purim festivals.

In addition to supplying Blue Boxes and promotional materials, the Head Office also sent the Commission visual aids for lecturers’ use and participated in some of the office expenses, including the General Secretary’s salary. The involvement of the Head Office in the activities of the Commission also manifested itself in the establishment of a uniform method for raising donations in the Fund’s traditional ways while encouraging local originality and listening to the communities for suggestions of what might be more to their taste. In Britain, the Golden Book subscription for £10 proved to be a very effective fundraising method for organisations and individuals. The Blue Boxes became very popular, but the ‘No letter without a Jewish National Fund stamp’ campaign, was less successful. Over the years, the Head office perfected these measures and added new ones—upgrading the stamps to a series that carried portraits and Eretz Israel landscapes and adding the sale of artistically designed telegram forms.

The Head Office also established and perfected dedicated funds for the promotion of a variety of initiatives. Those contributing six shillings to the Olive Tree Fund, enough to plant and nurture one tree, received a small certificate. A donation of a guinea for planting five trees received a gaudier certificate with the donor’s name in Hebrew and English. Most of the publicity around the donations to the Olive Tree Fund focused on the anniversary of Herzl’s death; for this occasion, the Head Office produced and distributed a special leaflet in Yiddish and English. It also promoted a new initiative, the Landesfond, in which for a single donation of £2 individuals were invited to redeem (purchase) a plot of land measuring a hundredth of a hectare on which an olive tree would be planted. Another dedicated fund was aimed at supporting the Merchavia cooperative settlement. All these donations allowed donors to have their names published in the community press and receive a ceremonial certificate from the Head office.

The Commission ordinarily preferred that donations be deposited directly into the JNF bank account with the JCT. Generally, this rule was followed but occasionally money was sent to the Commission’s office; in such instances, a receipt was issued. Every fortnight, the London branch of the JCT sent the General Secretary of the Commission an account-status report that contained donors’ names and donation sums, from which lists of donors for publication in the press were prepared. The total sums were sent to the Head office for publication in the Zionist movement’s newspaper, *Die Welt*.

In June 1912, Goodman announced his resignation in favour of a much-desired post in South Africa. The Joint Zionist Council saw this as an opportunity to reform the leadership of the Commission which would now consist of an equal number of representatives from the EZF and the Ancient Maccabeans. Joseph David Jacobs was elected chairman and Elijah Wolf Rabbinowice became the treasurer, both from the Ancient Maccabeans. Leonard Stein and Yaakov Kopel Goldblum were vice-chairmen, both from the EZF. Shmuel Lifshitz was elected as the new General Secretary.

The two new deputy chairs were asked to prepare a comprehensive report that pointed out additional failures in previous activities of the Commission, including irregularities in the records of the sale of stamps, and the distribution of Blue Boxes. They also discovered that no orderly record had been made of funds deposited in the JNF’s bank account, that deposits had been made with considerable delay, and that the publication of donors’ names in the press, which was supposed to have taken place immediately, were often delayed or not published at all—a matter that led to many grievances on donors’ part and drastically affected continued contributions.

It was also noted that Commission meetings were held haphazardly, and minutes were not taken. Books sent from the Head Office for sale had disappeared without a trace and the absence of essential information in the financial statements presented a picture that did not reflect the Commission’s financial situation; in fact, expenses were exceeding its income. This situation left no choice but for the new Commission’s management to pay from their own pockets to cover the debts that their predecessors had left so that the Commission’s activity in Britain could continue. The JNF Head Office also sent money to help cover the losses.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Joseph David Jacobs’s arrival injected energy into the organisation in the UK. The commission’s first year of work in its new structure focused on regulating work procedures, covering debts, and updating records, and less on fundraising activities. Jacobs established a reduced board of directors and urged other Zionist associations to collaborate in fundraising for the JNF and to deepen Zionist consciousness among the community by appealing to a new target group - the children.

One of Jacobs’s first actions was to mark the first day of the week of Hanukkah—the festival of the Maccabeans—as National JNF Day, and he appealed to all provincial commissions to organise festive events.[[41]](#footnote-41) A special proclamation addressed children in language designed to appeal to them, encouraging them to convince their parents and relatives to pray for Eretz Israel and the need to redeem its land by building a home there for their needy brothers in distant lands— and maybe even for themselves.

In October 1913, after a challenging year, the Commission turned out its first annual report for the years 1912–1913, highlighting the initiatives on which fundraising had focused. Efforts to market the Olive Tree Fund for ongoing planting in the Herzl Forest continued, even though the fund was engulfed in crisis due to the under-calculation of the costs of planting, the unrealistic forecasts of profits, the wrong choice of tree saplings (only 3,000 took root), and the excessive expenses incurred in building the workers’ farmhouse.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Another fund that the Head Office established was reserved for the support of the Bezalel colony at Beit Arif, made up of Yemenite-Jewish artists and craftspersons who worked at the Bezalel school in Jerusalem. Several fundraising events in Great Britain for this cause yielded £109. Here, too, it became clear over time that these donations had not been successfully invested and this settlement experiment ended in failure in January 1914.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The new efforts brought the Commission back on track. Board meetings were now arranged to be held weekly or at least fortnightly. It was also agreed to divide the Commission’s board into subcommittees, each assuming responsibility for a different aspect of its activities. Special attention was given to locating and documenting the 2,500 Blue Boxes distributed by the previous Commission; it was found that 1,650 boxes had been distributed in the provinces but that only 1,250 of them had been located, resulting in revenues of £59.[[44]](#footnote-44) In London, 850 Blue Boxes had been distributed, of which only 650 had been located and their total proceeds were £43. The Commission, which had begun to hire someone to empty the boxes in London, issued a new procedure for emptying the boxes on a regular quarterly basis or, if the box holder so requested, earlier. Another important procedure saw to it that donors’ names would be published in the community press, a highly-effective practice that created excitement, anticipation, and pride among donors and encouraged them to donate more.

The work procedures vis-à-vis the provincial commissions were also designed to improve efficiency and ensure supervisory control and communication between the provincial commissions and the Commission’s office in London. As most of the commission’s activities in London and the provinces were conducted by volunteers, it was necessary to ensure that all income would be deposited in the bank at least once a quarter and that all donors get receipts for their donations. Another aspect of the receipt handling was to ensure that the receipt books held by the different commissions be checked at least once every six months by an external auditor to make sure that all amounts indicated in the receipt books were reconciled with the deposits in the bank.

The weakest link in the Commission’s work appears to have been its slipshod relations with the provincial commissions. The new Commission concluded that a branch must not represent only one Zionist organisation (in most cases, it was the local branch of the Ancient Maccabeans, which had approximately 2,000 members in networks throughout Britain) but must represent at least two, and both should participate in managing the local commission. If this was impossible and there was only one organisation in the community, it was determined that the local commission head would be elected only if he was known to be trustworthy. In such cases, the Commission became responsible for matching that person with other representatives of Zionist organisations. The local commission’s heads were also required to prepare orderly lists of donors with the sums of their donations signed by two officials in order to improve control of the income. The Commission demanded a commitment to comply with these new procedures, which were then printed up and distributed as circulars to all commissions. The inducement offered to them in return was an opportunity to post a representative to the Commission’s board meetings. The Commission also promised the provincial commissions to make the utmost efforts to send representatives from time to time to join the provincial commission board meetings.

The actions of the new Commission laid the foundations for proper administration, supervision, and control of the organisation. The Commission aimed to expand further and open new small commissions in every city and area where there was a Zionist organisation or society, with special attention to areas where no JNF activity was in evidence. But not only provincial activity was considered: London also required special attention because until then most activity had focused on the East End. Consequently, the Commission decided to breach this framework and operate in neighbourhoods in western, southwestern, and northern London.

The new procedures and the regulation of relations with the provinces proved their effectiveness in an increase of donation proceeds. From January 1913 onward, the ending of the crisis and the recovery were manifest in revenue increases each month. The largest improvement was in the small provincial centres. Thus, Swansea, Sunderland, Glasgow, Belfast, and Liverpool brought in a third of the total income while the larger communities of Manchester and London lagged behind. The Commission’s average income was about £80 per month.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In local terms, this was a dramatic improvement. During this challenging year, the new Commission managed to hold collections all over the UK on the eve of Yom Kippur by deploying stations in the streets for this purpose. In addition, the provincial heads were instructed to contact synagogue rabbis and present them with bowls designated for receiving donations to the National Fund. Some 20,000 leaflets in Yiddish and English were printed and distributed and promotions were placed in the Yiddish press. On Hanukkah, posters were printed in English and Hebrew and distributed to synagogue rabbis and informational meetings were held all over the country. Various events on Purim and Herzl Memorial Day brought in revenue, and inscriptions in the Golden Book were made once a month on average.

The Head Office sought creative ways to increase fundraising; one of them, in 1913, was to examine the legal implications of establishing a framework for donations in wills and legacies. The Commission also disseminated more promotional materials, intensified the connection with the Head Office, and improved the transparency of its operations. With these confident steps, the Commission seemed to have gone on the high road, proof of which was the success of the first Flower Day (October 19, 1913), on which seventy-five volunteers circulated in the streets of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Swansea, and Nottingham, bringing in handsome revenues by selling blue-and-white roses. The *Jewish Chronicle* praised the refreshing initiative: “There is nothing inappropriate in promoting initiatives for Jewish affairs only. Experience has shown that flowers will do what the past methods of pleading letters and desk top-ups did in the past, but which have almost lost their power. There is no reason why the Jews should not advance in the spirit of the times.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Indeed, following its success, it was decided to make Flower Day an annual event. The year 1913 ended with a record gross donation of £1,000, collected in twenty-four different cities. After offsetting local expenses, £850 was deposited into the JNF’s bank account.

The year 1914 opened with several festive events—a concert organised by the East London Council, to which a band from St. Petersburg was invited to play and sing from its repertoire of Jewish folk songs, Jewish national music, and operatic arias. The violinist Margery Bentwich, daughter of Herbert Bentwich, also consented to take part in the concert, to which all the women who had volunteered on Flower Day were invited. In January, the North London commission organised a dance dedicated to collections for the Herzl Forest and the Yemenite Fund.

These promising signs did not go unnoticed by the Head Office, which agreed to consider favourably the Commission’s request to finance the move to a larger office. For the Head Office, this was an opportunity to anchor its relationship in an official agreement with the Commission for the first time. In response to the Commission’s request, Bodenheimer advised the Commission that given Britain’s special importance, the Head Office was willing to approve funding the costs of an office, including the salary of a General Secretary, on the assumption that, the Commission would be able to bring in at least £1,500 a year[[47]](#footnote-47) This was despite the fact that the Head Office’s policy was to bear these costs only in countries where annual income exceeded £2,000.

In return for this generous gesture, the Head office asked for more control of the Commission’s budget and for it to adhere from now to strict organisational protocols. Until then, given the dynamics of the relationship between the Head Office and the Commission and due to shared interests and visions, there had been consultations accompanied by recommendations to optimise the work of the Commission and preparation of the budget. However, the Commission went about its work quite independently, unencumbered by having to meet financial goals, conditions on its activities, or any obligation regarding financial statements or the submission of regular management reports.

This did not mean that the Commission treated the Head Office as devoid of professional authority. Bodenheimer’s letter illustrates that the Commission submitted its budget proposal for the following year’s activities to the Head Office and that Bodenheimer responded with his own proposals to amend several sections of the budget. For example, he recommended increasing the budget for printing and mailing due to the importance that the Head Office saw in expanding its propaganda. He also proposed a different way of distributing the expenses on this £300 budget line. The expenses of the local office (salaries, rent, printing, mailing, and travel) were projected to 20 percent of foreseen income. These, however, were only recommendations. Bodenheimer attached to his proposal a draft framework for a standard agreement made with other countries in which the JNF had, what they referred as “Agencies”, adapted to Great Britain, in which the following conditions were specified:

1. The National Fund office to be established in Britain would be a branch of the Head Office. It would receive instructions from the Head Office and execute them accordingly.

2. The supervision and management of this British Commission shall be entrusted to the JNF board in Britain, which shall be elected by the organisations in Britain and approved by the National Fund board.

3. The work of the Commission shall be divided into various departments and each member of the Commission will be given a defined role. The treasurer will be a member of the Commission and will not be allowed to serve as General Secretary.

4. The Commission members shall appoint one or two external auditors who shall be approved by the board of directors of the Head Office.

5. Minutes of meetings of Commission members shall be documented and archived. Commission meetings shall be held at least twice monthly. Copies of meeting summaries shall be sent to the Head Office.

6. All income of the Commission shall be backed by receipts and registered as income of the National Fund. The income list shall be published internally once a week.

7. The maintenance expenses of the Commission’s office shall be as shown in the proposed budget and set at £300. Total income shall amount to £1,500.

8. The General Secretary’s salary shall be £150, that of the assistant £35, printing and mailing expenses £70, office rent £25, and reimbursement of travel expenses, £20—all annually.

9. The auditor shall declare and sign the financial statements and send them to the Head Office.

10. Commission employees shall be employed exclusively by the Head Office. Commission members shall be appointed as follows: the General Secretary by the board of directors of the Head Office and the members of the Commission jointly. The other Commission members shall be chosen by the Commission members themselves, provided the General Secretary approves the appointments.

11. This agreement shall be valid for one year, from March 1, 1914, to March 1, 1915.[[48]](#footnote-48)

There is no evidence as to whether the Commission signed this agreement or whether there may have been negotiations to amend some of its clauses. The bottom line was that the Commission failed to raise more than £1,000 in 1914. There had been promising signs during the first half of the year, the volume of the Commission’s activity increasing significantly until it was decided that the General Secretary, should work full-time.[[49]](#footnote-49) In addition, the external financial auditor, Herman Newman of the JCT, praised the committee’s achievements in making much satisfactory progress in its activities both in organisational terms and in a significant increase in donations. He also pointed out that given the increase in the volume of activity, it would not be possible for the next audit to require the employment of a paid external auditor.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Later in the year, in June 1914, as the clouds of the First World War began to darken the skies of Europe, Flower Day was held again. The flowers were sold in twelve different cities, including the western and northern neighbourhoods of London, which until then had not been bastions of support for Zionism but which yielded the sum of £75. In the Commission’s view, Flower Day was a resounding success. Eight hundred girls and women had responded to calls from the press to volunteer for this project in almost every significant Jewish centre throughout the British Isles. Overall, 95,000 blue-and-white roses were sold. East End neighbourhoods generated the largest donations and surprisingly, it was not only Jews who bought the flowers but also non-Jews who came to visit the busy Petticoat Lane market. Flower Day generated £408 in revenue and, offsetting expenses, a net profit of £335, a third of the year’s total revenue and twice as much as on the previous Flower Day. The far-reaching exposure of JNF in the streets, however, also elicited less desirable reactions. Donors encountered condescending comments from non-Jews and volunteers in Hampstead reported Jews telling them that “[they] are not in the National Fund and have no intention of returning to Palestine.”[[51]](#footnote-51) The many volunteers received a festive medal for their exertions.

Just as the Commission’s activity seemed to be taking off at last, the Great War stepped in. Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, because Germany had invaded Belgium, the independence of which Britain had promised to maintain in the Treaty of London of 1839. This was just Britain’s opening shot ahead of its declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, together with France, on November 5, 1914—bringing the empires into a global conflict and turning Palestine into a war zone.

The Head Office responded to the events by relocating at once to the neutral The Hague, and by setting new priorities. The main effort was placed now to accommodate the alarming situation of unemployment and hunger among the Jewish population in Palestine. The Head Office prioritised support for those working for the Zionist enterprise, by paying the salaries of workers who cultivated JNF land, providing them with emergency or voluntary jobs, and arranging housing for them. Despite its feverish efforts to raise donations for these emergency plans, the Head Office encountered considerable difficulty in initiating urgent works, let alone preparing construction plans. For example, an area that the JNF had intended to develop near Jaffa for 100 workers and their families was placed off-limits by the Ottoman authorities for military reasons, building materials were in short supply countrywide, and available materials were costly. Thus, only with difficulty did the JNF manage to fund the construction of twenty residential buildings in Merhavia and around the Sea of Galilee.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The war impacted the activities of the Commission in Britain, which now struggled mightily to raise money. During the war, appeals were made in personal letters to potential donors to help those living in Palestine. Volunteer fundraisers were assigned to social events, synagogues, and various community gatherings; their messaging referred to the duty of every Jew, large or small, to contribute to the National Fund because a dire emergency was at hand: “We will always be persecuted,” “We must join forces to build a home for our people in the Land of Israel,” and “Anyone who feels that he is a true son of our people must donate his money to the National Fund.” [[53]](#footnote-53)

These messages gained little traction in the community. Only £286 was collected in Britain in 1915. Even though Britain considered Ottoman-ruled Palestine enemy territory, H.M. Government allowed the transfer of money to its Jewish residents on humanitarian grounds. The transfer was made in cooperation with the American Jewish Relief Committee Foundation.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Although the Commission’s activities slowed almost to a standstill due to the war, the number of provincial commissions increased to twenty-eight by March 1916. The Commission struggled to maintain a routine as far as possible, with house-to-house collections, more Blue Boxes placed in synagogues, and the sale of Jewish yearbooks. Additional solicitations took place during the holidays, mainly Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, Passover, and Purim, when various gatherings were organised. The proceeds, however, were scant. Subscriptions in the Golden Book became the main source of income and the Blue Boxes continued to reap adequate revenues.

During the years of the war, the Commission’s fundraising messages shifted from land redemption to the need to build houses for workers, help Yemenite Jews, and plant trees.[[55]](#footnote-55) Promotional material was decorated with pictures of settlements on JNF land, Yemenite Jews at work, the development of the city of Tel Aviv, and the Bezalel building. From The Hague, the JNF Head Office continued to produce catchy phrases such as “No Jewish home without a Blue Box,” which would become so associated with the JNF.[[56]](#footnote-56)

In March 1916, General Secretary George Liverman resigned and was replaced by Reuben Hyman Feinblum.[[57]](#footnote-57) Feinblum’s tenure was also short and lasted only about two years.[[58]](#footnote-58) Despite the grim national mood, the activity of the committee recovered. This was expressed in the amounts donated: surprisingly, despite the strong increase in emergency relief and charity for Jewish conscripts, war victims, and so on, donation revenue in 1916 climbed to £787.

In February 1917, Dr Chaim Weizmann, then a lecturer in biochemistry at Manchester University, was elected to head the EZF. Weizmann infused fresh energy into the Zionist activity among the community. Under his leadership, the EZF established a Public Relations Committee that arranged for drawing-room meetings and press releases in addition to its work with communal rabbis to dedicate a sermon on one of the Passover holidays to the promotion of Zionism and support for the JNF.[[59]](#footnote-59) None of these efforts, however, budged the community from its apathy to raising donations for the National Fund.

The Balfour Declaration was issued on November 2, 1917, after long and stressful political efforts by Weizmann and his associates to obtain an official document supporting Zionist aspirations. The Declaration – addressed to Lord Lionel Rothschild, and signed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord James Arthur Balfour, stated that His Majesty’s Government “views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.” The declaration was received with great enthusiasm and relief especially after Weizmann faced firm opposition to such a declaration from non-Zionist Jewish leaders who feared that the declaration could result in increased anti-Semitism and could cast a heavy shadow on the Jewish community in England and the charge of dual loyalty.

Concurrently, the agronomist Jacob Ettinger, representative of the JNF Head office in The Hague, was sent to England to review the Commission’s work closely and instigate the changes that he knew were needed. His visit produced additional restructuring in the Commission; this time the Commission was enlarged to have twenty board members. Ettinger encouraged the Commission to strive for greater objectives – “not to be satisfied with the sale of stamps, but to try and sell Dunams of Land, not to confine our sellers to offering trees, but also pushing the sale of ‘Nahlahs’ (estates) and creating a big Pioneer Fund”.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The impact of these organisational changes was felt immediately. Two Yiddish-language newspapers (*Zeit* and *Express*) published the donations lists regularly, while the *Zionist Review*, with which Kessler, a member of the JNF board of directors, was also involved, limited publication to donations of ten shillings and above.

Since the police prohibited the events planned for Flower Day, the Commission discovered a new source of income and promotions. Two successful bazaars were held, one in Liverpool by the Young Ladies Zionist Circle, and the other in West London; both raised over £200. Public functions were held by Rabbi Goldbloom in Manchester and Glasgow and at other cities.

However, not everything was rosy. There were still communities throughout Britain where the idea of the importance of supporting the National Fund’s goals had failed to take root even though appeals had been made to its leaders. During the first annual conference of the Commission, held on August 4, 1918, some delegates criticised the Commission for working on a small scale and contenting itself with just a small number of actions that brought in annual revenues of just some hundreds of pounds for land redemption. They pointed out that other relief and charity funds for the old Yishuv institutions succeeded in attracting donations five or six times higher than those of the National Fund without any special effort.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Table 1: Donation revenue in selected provincial communities, 1916–1917.[[62]](#footnote-62)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Location | Jewish Population | 1916 | 1917 |
| London | 160,000 | £352 | £615 |
| Manchester | 30,000 | £66 | £165 |
| Leeds | 25,000 | £152 | £171 |
| Liverpool | 7,000 | £48 | £92 |
| Glasgow | 8,000 | £19 | £14 |

By the end of 1917, the JNF’s total gross income from its all Diaspora commissions amounted to £380,000, netting £259,300 after the deduction of the Commissions’ expenses, currency exchange losses, and various administrative expenses of the Head Office.[[63]](#footnote-63) We do not have exact figures for amounts donated in Great Britain between 1902 and 1908; they ranged from a few tens of pounds to several hundred. The year 1917 ended with a record sum of, £1,400. This, however, did not dramatically change the total percentage that British Jewry contributed to the Jewish National Fund from its inception until the end of 1917, which was only about 3 percent of its total revenue.

Table 2: Donation revenue, 1908–1917.[[64]](#footnote-64)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | 1908 | 1909 | 1910 | 1911 | 1912 | 1913 | 1914 | 1915 | 1916 | 1917 |
| Revenue | £640 | £640 | £750 | £465 | £618 | £850 | £912 | £286 | £787 | £1,400 |

There are many interrelated reasons for the JNF’s failure to win the hearts of the community. Public indifference to the Fund’s goals (and Zionism in general) was the main stumbling block, augmented by struggles for prestige within the Zionist organisations and an unsound organisational structure that made it difficult to keep in close touch with communities far from the British capital.

This indifference faded away following the Balfour Declaration. A few days later, southern Palestine was conquered under the leadership of Field Marshal Edmund Allenby. On December 11, 1917, Allenby and his officers entered Jerusalem on foot through Jaffa Gate, inaugurating the era of British military rule in Palestine. Diaspora Jews, led by British Jewry, were filled with hope for a new era and aspired to contribute to the development and prosperity of the Land of Israel as the Jewish National Home.

1. *JC*, 28 Oct. 1955. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shiloni, *The Jewish National Fund*, 5–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 6–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Katz, *The Battle for the Land*, 13; Shiloni, *The Jewish National Fund*, 7. The value of £1 in 1900 is equivalent to ~£120 today. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *JC*, 24 Jan. 1902. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hovevey Zion, also known as Hibbat Zion, was a variety of groups established in 1881 in East European countries with the aim of promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine and advancing Jewish agricultural settlement there. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Quoted in Oren, *Chibat Zion in Britain*, 137–143. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Herzl’s letters, on the *Project Ben-Yehuda* website. Translated from the Hebrew by the author. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *JC*, January 3, 1902—de Haas’s speech at the Fifth Zionist Congress*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *JC*, July 3, 1903. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Jewish Colonial Trust was the first Zionist bank. It was founded at the Second Zionist Congress and incorporated in London in 1899. The JCT was intended to be the financial instrument of the Zionist Organization and was to obtain capital and credit to help attain a charter for Palestine. In 1902, JCT formed the Anglo-Palestine Company (APC) as a subsidiary and APC opened its first branch in Jaffa in 1903 under the management of Zalman David Levontin. In 1950, the bank became Bank Leumi Le-Israel (National Bank of Israel). See Nakdimon, *The Bank*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Shiloni, *Jewish National Fund*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. CZA, A61/122. EZF balance-sheet, February 15, 1902. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., balance sheet for 1905. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. At the Seventh Congress, “Self-taxation” (*Selbstbesteuerung*), was proclaimed as a paramount duty of every Zionist or Zionist sympathiser who cares about the Jewish National Fund. This involved each person contributing a fixed percentage of his or her income to the Fund, payable monthly. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Company number 92825. In January 1926, the name was revised to *Keren Kayemeth Leisrael, Ltd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kessler was one of the chief architects of the 1902–1903 El Arish Plan, envisioning negotiations with the British Government for Jewish colonisation in the Sinai Peninsula. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. On the emergence of the idea of afforestation in the Zionist Movement and the saga of the planting of the Herzl Forest, see Shiloni, *Jewish National Fund,* 71–96. On the Olive Tree Fund, see Bein*, Toldot ha-hityashvut*, 40–41. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *JC,* May 15, 1908. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. CZA, A61/69, from a brochure produced in 1912 by the General Secretary of the Commission, reviewing the history of the Commission in England since its formation. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *JC*, January 29, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *JC*, May 21, 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. CZA, A61/58, financial statement for 1909. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. CZA, A61/69, leaflet printed in 1909 calling for promoting the Herzl Forest. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *JC,* April 15, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Sandberg, From JNF to Viva Palestina, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *JC*, July 15,1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. CZA, A61/69, from Gunzburg (General Secretary) to provincial commissions, September 13, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The term used for the Jewish community in Palestine preceding the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gutman, *The Story of a Dream.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In 1898 the Rishon Lezion and Zichron Ya’akov wineries, founded by Baron Benjamin Edmond de Rothschild, decided to distribute their kosher wines (later under the Carmel Mizrahi brand and today Carmel) in Britain, too, and the products were an immediate success. Palwin has become one of the most recognized Israeli brands in the community. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. CZA, KKL1/606, meeting minutes, November 3, 1910. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. CZA, KKL1/606, meeting minutes, December 31, 1910. The land in question, owned by Berwitz, was in Hadera. In his 1926 will, Berwitz bequeathed £500 to the Fund. See: CZA, KH4/20571. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *JC,* May 26, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. KKL1/606, meeting minutes, September 3, 1911. Link to Rosenberg’s film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35MemIqQDeA> [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *JC,* October 27, 1911. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. National Library, PV 6047 1:1918: historical overview of the state of Zionism in Britain from the report of the first annual meeting of the Commission. August 1918. See also Cohen*, English Zionist and British Jews*, p. 119. In the 1930s, the Ancient Maccabeans lost the special status they had been given. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Among them Belfast, Bradford, Cardiff, Dublin, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds Liverpool, Limerick, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Southampton, Sunderland, Swansea, and Tredegar. KKL1/670, from reports prepared for the 11th Zionist Congress on the activities of JNF commissions in the Diaspora. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. CZA, A61/69, from the report on the review of the commission’s activities in 1912 produced by the General Secretary, Isaac Goodman. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. CZA, A61/69, private and confidential report, October 7, 1912. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., circular from new executive committee to heads of provincial commissions, November 8, 1912, and *JC*, November 15, 1912. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Shiloni, *Jewish National Fund*, pp. 92–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. On the colony in detail, see Gideon Ofrat, *The Artists’ Colony in Ben Shemen*. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. According to a memorandum distributed by former General Secretary Isaac Goldblum on the state of activity (apparently in the first half of 1912), 3,500 Blue Boxes were distributed in Great Britain. See CZA, A61/69 (undated). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. CZA, A61/69, First annual report of the Commission for the years 1912–1913. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *JC,* October 10, 1913. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. CZA, A61/69, Bodenheimer to the Commission, January 23, 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *JC*, April 4, 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. CZA, A61/69, audit report for the nine months of activity of the Commission by Herman Newman, June 5, 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *JC,* June 5, 1914. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. CZA, A61/69, letter from Head Office in The Hague to national commissions, March 3, 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid., Circular from the end of the First World War (No date). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., details from a personal address to the donor, January 29, 1915. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid.,report of donations and activity for 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., Head Office in The Hague to the national commissions, March 3, 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *JC*, March 3, 1916. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. In 1924, immediately after Feinblum’s wedding, the young couple settled in Jerusalem, where he became an official in the Mandate Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. CZA, A61/59, Declaration, Passover 1917. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. This visit is mentioned in the *JC*, October 26, 1917. The re-organization brought about by Ettinger may also be adduced from the speech of the Commission’s chair, at the report of the first annual conference of the Commission in August 1918. National Library, PV 6047 1:1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *JC*, December 28, 1917. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. National Library, PV 6047 1:1918, report of the first Annual Conference of the JNF Commission for England, August 4, 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Elitzur, *The National Capital and the Building of the Nation*, 124–125. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. National Library, PV 6047 1:1918; CZA, A61/69. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)