

St Alban's Review

Rachel Kolsky and Roslyn Rawson have written a guidebook on everything from kosher restaurants to synagogues, writes Rosy Moorhead

By Rosy Moorhead

Thursday 12th April 2012

If you've ever wished there was just one book that listed all of London's kosher restaurants and shops, gave information on historic Jewish Londoners and places, and provided walking tours of historic Jewish areas, then wish no more.

Local authors Rachel Kolsky and Roslyn Rawson have put together the definitive guidebook for Jewish tourists and Londoners alike - *Jewish London*, out this month from New Holland Publishers.

The book is one of a kind. "We couldn't believe there was no other book on the market," says Rachel, from East Finchley. "Well, there was one - self-published back in the 1980s with no pictures! People have been writing to say how glad they are there's finally a Jewish guidebook."

Packed with fascinating and practical information, *Jewish London* is broadly divided into two parts: historic Jewish London and present. The section on the past gives an overview of Jewish migration to and within the UK and details ten walking tours of areas of historical interest, including one of Jewish Hampstead. It also profiles the Jewish Museum and Holocaust memorials in the capital and informs about important Jewish Londoners - what they did, where they lived and where they are buried.

The second section focuses on Jewish London today - "Where to stay, eat, shop, pray!" Rachel laughs. This chapter contains a large section on north-west London, where there is a large Jewish population and a wide range of kosher facilities. This chapter lists cafes, restaurants, shops, hotels and synagogues, Jewish cultural and heritage organisations, ritual baths and important Jewish centres and dates.

Rachel's work as a prize-winning Blue Badge Guide running Go London Tours helped enormously. "I do a lot of Jewish tours," she explains, "so for the book I was able to talk to the people I've met on my journeys - the ones who open up the synagogues and cemeteries and people like that."

"It was hard work but really fun, and a fascinating project. You're writing about things you're passionate about. It's not a history book, it's not academic, it's not a religious book - it's about going round London and looking at things. It's a book for everyone."

As well as the helpful listings of kosher shops and restaurants and the shabbat facilities of hotels, the book uncovers a different side of London that residents may not have been aware of.

"We've been getting emails from people who didn't know there was Jewish life outside of Golders Green!" says Rachel. "I lead a tour round the National Portrait Gallery of Jewish artists and pictures of Jewish people - it's one of my most popular tours. The book is a chance for Londoners to revisit much-loved places with different eyes - the British Museum, the British Library, the V&A."

Rachel and Rosyln, from Belsize Park, spent two years researching the book and putting it together and, says Rachel, put all their passion into it. "We never stopped learning, there were always new things. To be honest, we could have written a book twice the size."

Jewish London is out now from New Holland Publishers. The authors will be giving a talk on the book at Waterstones North Finchley on April 26 and Waterstones Hampstead on July 18. Details: www.newhollandpublishers.com.