

Rabbi Dr Leo Baeck (1873-1956)



In Oppeln, c1905



With Nathalie



Chaplain in WWI

Leo Baeck was born on 23rd May 1873 in Lissa, Germany (which is now Leszno in Poland). He was educated near Breslau (now Wrocław) at the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary and Berlin University, where he was awarded his PhD in 1895. In 1897 was ordained as a Rabbi from the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, having married Nathalie Hamburger the previous year. In 1905 he published *The Essence of Judaism*, a book which made him a famous proponent for the Jewish people and their faith.

In 1897 he was appointed Rabbi in Oppeln, then Düsseldorf in 1907 and in 1912 in Berlin, where he remained for more than 30 years. During the First World War he served as Chaplain. He was appointed Professor at the Hochschule in Midrash and Homiletics and served as President of Bnei Brith. In 1933, after the Nazis seized power, Baeck worked to defend the Jewish community as president of the Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden (Representation of Jews in Germany). In 1943, he was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he was named honorary president of the Ältestenrat or Council of Elders.

After being liberated in 1945, he moved to London, becoming president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism; he also taught occasionally at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. It was during this time he published his second great work, *This People Israel*, which he partially penned during his imprisonment by the Nazis.



From 1946-1956 he was President of North Western Reform Synagogue (Alyth), London. He died on 2nd November 1956, in London. The newly established rabbinic college was renamed in his honour as the Leo Baeck College.