



## The Fate of the Mission Hospital in Safed, Palestine Founded by Dr WH Anderson

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### Commentary

Dr Walter Henry Anderson, my maternal grandfather, was brought up in Burton on Trent, in the south of England, with a family background rich in service to the church and colonial service. His grandfather and one uncle were clergy, another uncle helped start a newspaper in Nairobi, a third was an engineer on the Cape to Cairo Railway, and his father, Humphrey Gilbee Anderson, after prospecting for gold in New Zealand and Victoria became a guard on Cobb and Co. coaches servicing the goldfields. Thus, in the family tradition W H Anderson was a man of vision and determination, unafraid to take on the burden of infectious disease faced by the Jewish immigrants that were beginning to arrive in Palestine, and willing to bring up his family there. The mission hospital of the London Jews Society (LJS) that he founded in Safed, Palestine and directed from 1904 to 1915 has been described elsewhere [1,2]. Abandoned after invasion by the Turks at the start of World War I, the hospital was assessed by Dr Anderson on his return from England after the war to be in poor repair with its role superseded by another hospital built nearby using funds from the Rothschild foundation. The LJS hospital was used briefly by a Sottish mission and then passed to the government. Through many vicissitudes, its majestic sandstone buildings have survived to become part of the campus of the Zefat (Eng: Safed) Academic College.

The present communication describes my family's interaction with the Mission Hospital, Safed, in the years from 1946 to 2014. The chronology of visits from London, Sydney and New York is as follows: (1) 1946, by Dr Harold Anderson, son of WH Anderson; (2) 1968, by myself, his grandchild, during a trip to Israel attending a cardiology congress; (3) 2008, by my wife Toni and myself during a tour of the Middle East; (4) February 2014 by my son, Robert Stokes, M.P. when he made an semi-official visit to the Zefat Academic College (5) May 2014 by my cousin, Michael Anderson and his wife Linda when they set up a scholarship at the College.

In 1946 Dr Harold Anderson visited Safed as Medical Secretary of the Church Missionary Society of England during a tour of CMS mission stations worldwide in the aftermath of World War II [3]. He took excellent black and white photographs of the LJS Hospital's buildings and commented that little had changed since his boyhood growing up there.

In 1968, after attending the congress in Tel Aviv, I took a bus from Haifa up a winding road to the massive concrete bus terminal of Safed. Without a map, and bewildered by expansion of the little town my mother who grew up in the Anderson family of Safed had told me about, into a bustling metropolis, I tried to find someone speaking English that could help me find the old LJS Mission. An immigrant postman from Australia became my guide. He took my faded my Uncle Harold's 1946 photograph of the Mission Hospital in hand, examined it closely, and said "I think this is where I went to school as a teenager".

Excited, he took me through the busy streets of modern Safed, right through the gates and scenic gardens of what had been the LJS Mission, and then to his old school. The Gatehouse, Dispensary and Hospital were gloriously intact, and little had changed from the old photographs. The Hospital building had lost the clock from its façade. A new building had been added just above, but separate from the old Residence. As I took all this in, the postman re-appeared with a little wizened man of the locality, who looked at me closely and spoke to the postman in Hebrew. "What is he saying?" I asked. "He says that you look like your grandfather, but taller!" With the telescoped memory of the aged, he seemed to readily recall Dr Anderson from some 50-60 years earlier. My next call was to the Hotel Hertzlia of Safed, to buy a postcard. There I met the proprietor, Mr. Moshe Pearl, a man of perhaps 60, and his wife Hannah. As we chatted, he recalled that his mother had told him that he nearly died from typhoid fever at the age of two, but Dr Anderson had saved his life.

In May, 2008, I travelled to Israel a second time, accompanied by my wife. In the 40 years since my previous visit, much had changed. In the town of Zichron-Yaakov, we met up with Yaron Perry and Efraim Lev, Israeli historians and joint authors of a paper about WHA 2. They took us to Safed to see what remained of the LJS Mission buildings. Despite Dr Perry's warning about what to expect, I was in for a shock. We were appalled to find the buildings in a state of total dereliction, and seriously damaged. At the time of my 1968 visit, the buildings had been magnificent examples of period architecture in cut stone. They were in good repair, well-utilised, and surrounded with well-kept gardens. Subsequently, they were acquired by the government, and sold to a private developer. Demolition was begun, to be halted only because of the resolute objections of Dr Perry and the national heritage body. However, the interiors of all the buildings were entirely stripped and fire-damaged, so that only the walls would have been salvageable. We were aghast that this had happened. Here, in the centre of the holy city of Safed, sat the neglected remnant of an important era in the development of northern Palestine.

In 2013, news came that the Zefat Academic College had purchased the entire historic compound and its buildings. The plan was to restore to the buildings as part of the main campus of the College. It was opportune that my son, Robert Stokes was to attend an international conference on city planning in Tel Aviv early in 2014 and could visit Zefat (Eng: Safed). He was given an official welcome at the College and presented with a mounted photograph of the restored buildings. A few months later my cousin Michael Anderson and his wife visited the College to set up a scholarship in memory of Michael's second son, Fergus who died prematurely. This seemed a fitting conclusion to the involvement of the descendents of Dr HG Anderson in the preservation of his life's work.

## References

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