

## **Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia**

### Article 2

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### **Mordekhai Zev (Max) Bull**

The origins of the Bull family are unclear. The earliest records in Latvia show them in the town Lewenhoff (now Livani) in the Dvinsk/Denaburg (now Daugavpils) district. There was a Bull family living in Nikolsburg, Moravia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with later generations living in Amsterdam, Holland. It is known that a ship bearing Jews from Holland, who were on their way to settle in Lithuania, sunk off the Baltic coast in 1692. This may account for the movement of Dutch Jews to Lithuania and Latvia, including perhaps ancestors of the Bull family.

The earliest Bull recorded in Lewenhoff was Ruven Bull, born about 1760. His son Zev-Wulf Bull was the father of Nakhum-Dov

The 1858 Revision List in Dvinsk records him as Nokhem Wulfovitch Bull aged 36. In his household appear his brothers Efraim (drafted 1849), Wulf aged 30 (name must be an error as he could not have borne the same name as his father), and Aba aged 20 (with his wife Lea aged 22), his wife Rokhlya aged 37, his daughter Hanna.

The 1875 Family List of Dvinsk records him as Nakhman Wulfovitch Bull. He also appears in 1872 in the Hebrew newspaper Hamagid as a donor in a list of Jews living in the 'Alt Plan' part of Dvinsk as 'Ber Bull'. In the same list appears 'Yehuda Leib Bull' who may have been his brother.

Nakhum-Dov was the father of of Mordekhai-Zev-Wulf Bull.

According to the 1889 list of Jews who settled in rural areas of Ludza district, Mordekhai was born in Levenhoff, moved to Dinaburg (Dvinsk, Daugavpils), then moved to Korsovka (Karsava) in 1881. His age recorded in Latvian records conflicts with the 1901 London census and the age on his tombstone which states that he was aged eighty three at his death in 1931. That would mean he was born in 1848 whereas the Latvian records indicate he was born in 1854



Mordekhai-Zev Bull, London 1922.

Mordekhai-Zev was a Chabad Chassid who combined the spiritualism of the Lubavich tradition with a strong Litvak leaning to study. His grandson Rabbi Arthur-Saul Super described him as “a Chassid with the heart of a Litvak”. He was one of the first Chabad Chassidim to settle in London at the beginning of the twentieth century. There he was associated with another Chabadnik, Rabbi Moshe-Avigdor Chaiken in many communal endeavors.

The Bulls were soundly established in London, both communally and economically. Their home in 73 Evering Road, Stoke Newington was renowned as a centre of scholarship and the leaders of the ultra-orthodox community frequently visited to study with Mordekhai-Zev. Grandpa Bull as he was known to the family played the role of the strict patriarch. He was an imposing figure, immaculately dressed in a frock coat and high black Yarmulka (skullcap). He and his wife Rivka brought up their family in the joyous tradition of Lubavich, while insisting on devotion to study by his sons. His tombstone refers to him as “Mimetzuyanei Chasidei Chabad” (one of the excellent Chabad Chassidim). But he lived very much in the modern world and engaged in the fur trade with his sons as “M. Bull and Sons, furriers” in Kingsford Road, London.

Mordekhai’s wife was Rivka (Rebecca), was born in 1852 to David Halevy and Keila-Tsirel Dimantshetin from Korsovka. See separate article about the Dimantshtein family.



Rivka Bull (nee Dimantshtein), London 1922.

Rivka Bull was a matriarchal figure, She was very active in communal affairs, as recorded on her tombstone. She was a founder of the Stepney Jewish Hospital and supported many charities in England and in Eretz Yisrael. Whilst being very religious she had many modern practices: she often rebelled against wearing a Sheitel, wore lipstick and smoked a pipe! Rumour had it that she wanted to be an opera singer since she had a beautiful voice. Her parents were horrified at the suggestion and quickly arranged the match with the Talmudic student Mordekhai-Zev Bull. Relations between them were strained throughout their marriage. But they hosted their many children and grandchildren on many joyous occasions such as their Golden Wedding in 1922 and often sixty relatives sat down to Seder on Pesach.

The Bulls had ten children:

Yehudah-Leib (Leon) (1873-1955) who was the first of the family to settle in London about 1894.

Haska (Sarah) (1876-1975) who married Elias Germain and lived in New York.

Avraham (Ephraim) (1877-1974).

Mendel (Emanuel) (c.1881-1871).

Leah (Lena)(1881-1945) who married Rabbi Yitskhak-Yaakov Super and lived in Melbourne, Australia (see separate article).

Chaya (Annie) (1883-1972) who married David Gold.

Elka ( Alice) (1884-1969 who married John Felkov.

Eliezer (Laurie) (1889-1974).

Devorah (Dora)( 1892-1985) who married Maurice Sagon.

Moshe (Maurice) (1895-1980).



Leon and Emanuel Bull



Sarah And Elias Germain



Lena (nee Bull) and Rabbi Yitskhak Yaakov Super, Evercreech, England c. 1914.

On the death of Mordekhai-Zev Bull, 10<sup>th</sup> Kislev 5692 (19<sup>th</sup> November 1931). His grandson Arthur Saul Super (later Rabbi) wrote to his parents in Melbourne:

“He died like a grand old Jewish gentleman, full of years and honour. An hour before he died he discussed where certain words we were using appeared in the Bible. The funeral was a wonderful tribute to the man and his influence. He was taken to the Montague Road Shool

where the Talmud Torah pupils were all drawn up as a guard of honour. Rabbi Abraham Witkind from a town in Latvia delivered a Hespel. During the week of Shiva the Gedolei Dor paid him honour, including Dayan Milman, the Trische Rebbe, Rabbi Kirsner, Rabbi Witkind, Rabbi Jacob Rabinovich”.

An obituary published in the Jewish Chronicle stated:

“North London Jewry has sustained a severe loss by the death of Mr. Marks Bull on Friday last. The deceased was a man of great learning and charm, and his life was one of unflinching loyalty to Orthodox Judaism. A number of institutions, particularly the Dalston Talmud Torah, owe much to his active support. He was one of the founders of the Old Castle Street Synagogue and retained his membership to the end. He enjoyed the intimate friendship of the late Dayan A. Chaikin with whom he was associated in many a worthy endeavour.”

A classroom was donated by the family to the Talmud Torah in Amhurst Road and Dayan Dr. A. Feldman spoke at the dedication.

Rivka Bull died on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan, 5695, 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1934. Her tombstone at the Federation Cemetery, Montague Road, next to her husband reads:

“Many wrought valiantly and you rose higher than them all. In many institutions of Torah and Prayer, charity and care, you acquired for yourself a name and a memorial in the country and outside it. This is the pious, intellectual, and generous of spirit and heart, doer of good deeds for the maintenance of Yeshivot, Talmud Torahs, synagogues and Study Houses, institutions of charity and care overseas and in the Holy land”.