

British cuppa makes a historic link between our two jubilees

BY MARCUS DYSCH ·

QUEEN ELIZABETH II is only the second British monarch to celebrate a Diamond Jubilee. When Queen Victoria marked her 60 years on the throne in 1897, a Leeds tailor was the recipient of a special memento from his employees to honour his anti-exploitation work on their behalf. David Lubelski was given a magnificent silver tea service, only days after Queen Victoria celebrated her jubilee.

Linking the two anniversaries, Mr Lubelski's great-grandson, Trevor Lyttleton MBE, will attend a Downing Street reception on Sunday on behalf of the charity Contact the Elderly, which uses a silver teapot as its emblem.

Born in Poland in 1851, Mr Lubelski left Warsaw in 1866 and was one of the first Jewish immigrants to arrive in Leeds. He was initially employed as a machinist in the tailoring trade and in 1873 set up his own wholesale business. Mr Lyttleton said relatives had only discovered a couple of years ago why his great-grandfather had been presented with the tea service.

"I learnt from a distant cousin that David Lubelski had campaigned on the steps of Leeds Town Hall on behalf of oppressed workers in the tailoring trade. Later research revealed his significant role in campaigning against corruption and the exploitation of the workers."

Three years ago, and after inheriting the service's silver teapot, Mr Lyttleton discovered a transcript of Mr Lubelski's testimony before a House of Lords Select Committee on July 11, 1889. "It makes riveting reading and was an eye-opener," said Mr Lyttleton. "His voice shines through the text in expressing his deep concern at the abuse and exploitation of workers. "I finally understood why his employees honoured him so generously for his commitment to their cause and for exposing the hardship and corruption to which they were exposed."

The tailor had told the Lords committee: "The workers live very wretchedly and are very poor. I know they often enough come to me, or some of my friends, for help. I must say they have not sufficient work always to keep themselves right. "The long hours are abominable that they work in Leeds; from seven to eight, I think, is too long hours for any man to work."

He complained even more bitterly about the exploitation of women: "The women work from eight to eight, but after eight the middlemen give them work to do in their own houses. I see them frequently carrying the work home, as many as six or eight coats to each girl or one woman; and it is rather too heavy, according to my idea, for any woman to carry so many coats home at night after a day's work."

Mr Lyttleton said his great-grandfather had "risked his livelihood and the welfare of his 10 children" to give the evidence and protect his employees. Mr Lyttleton is chairman and founder of Contact the Elderly and said the visit to Downing Street would allow Mr Lubelski's message to live on at this year's Diamond Jubilee.
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