

Myer Thomas

Myer Tamuz married Emily Belcher, daughter of Harris and Dora, at Singer's Hill Synagogue in 1875, while Simon (Zeman) Tamuz married Emily's sister Betsy three months later.

Many members of the Thomas family were involved in theatrical professions. My grandma Myra's brother Basil (Figure 3) was a playwright, song-writer and manager of the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton.



Figure 3. My grand-uncle, the playwright Basil Thomas.

Basil's plays included *Shooting Star*, *Book of the Month*, *Springtime*, *This Blessed Plot*, *Two of Everything*, and *The Love Birds*, and he also wrote songs for films starring David Niven, Vera Lynn and George Formby. He wrote many songs for Arthur Askey, who described Basil as 'That lovable and witty man'.¹ Like many seemingly witty men, however, Basil suffered from depression, and tragically committed suicide in 1957, aged forty-four. I have heard or read of three causes for his depression. My mother understood that his depression was, at least in part, due to the fact that he and his wife Hedy wanted to emigrate to America, but he believed that he wouldn't be allowed entry because he had suffered from TB. His cousin Derek Salberg, of whom I will write more below, mentions that Basil was depressed by poor notices that critics gave to *The Lovebird*, starring Dora Bryan and Ronald Shiner when it came to Birmingham² (although 'it had a very good run in London of which, very sadly, he was unaware as he died just before it opened'). His daughter Susan moved to America with Basil's widow Hedy, and became Arts Editor of the *Washingtonian Magazine*. In a piece for the *Washington Post*,³ Susan wrote about a revival of *Shooting Star* that she came to watch, and mentioned that her father's depression was due to 'an imbalance in his body chemistry' that nowadays would be treated by medication. She notes that Basil's 'ashes lie on the perimeter of London's Liberal Jewish Cemetery, ostracised because of the Jewish doctrines that cremation is not acceptable and the taking of one's own life, murder'. Susan married the lawyer Daniel Davidson, whose phone was tapped during the Watergate Affair and who was a US delegate at the Paris Peace Conference in 1968.

Another of Basil's plays, *Please Turn Over*, was directed by his second cousin Gerald Thomas (see Figure 4). Gerald worked as a film editor at Denham Studios, editing Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet*, but is best known for producing all thirty of the *Carry On* films. His older brother Ralph was also a producer. 'What his younger brother, Gerald, was to the *Carry On* pictures, Ralph (pronounced Raaf) was to the Doctor series. Starting with *Doctor in the House* (1954), most of them starred Dirk Bogarde, in his matinée idol days, as a shy, young houseman up against his bombastic chief Sir Lancelot Spratt'.⁴ Ralph's son, Jeremy Thomas, was a film producer whose works included producing Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, which won the 1988 Academy Award for Best Picture.

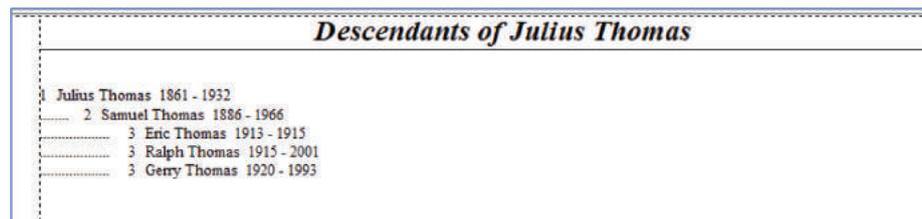


Figure 4. Descendants of Julius Thomas.

Grandma Myra's aunt Janey Thomas married (Jacob) Leon Salberg, a nephew of the first Jewish Mayor of Warsaw.⁵ (This relationship is also mentioned in various newspaper obituaries for Leon, but I haven't been able to corroborate it.) According to Leon's obituary,⁶ his father died when Leon was about ten years old, and he ran away during the shiva period and worked in an embroidery factory. His family eventually recovered him, and they sent him to England