



**THE STORY OF ENGLAND'S JEWS**

**The First Thousand Years**

**Marcus Roberts**

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**Dedicated to**

**FRANK EDWARD ROBERTS**

**1922 – 2005**

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## Foreword

This book was originally sponsored by B'nai B'rith, 1<sup>st</sup> Lodge, England, in anticipation of the 350 Anniversary of the re-admission of the Jews to England, to provide a general educational resource for all who might want a short account of the history of England's Jews.

This book is intended as an accessible summary and synthesis of the existing histories of the Jews of England as well as the conclusions of my own researches. As I set out writing the book, I wanted to give a complete narrative of the history of England's Jews in the last Millenium, covering both medieval and modern periods in one book. I was also conscious of needing to tell the complete 'story' as succinctly as possible, without sacrificing the facts or resorting to inaccurate generalizations.

I hope that my work succeeds in bringing the history of England's Jews to a wide audience and provides a resource for many purposes, as well as communicating the long and fascinating history of the Jews of this country.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of B'nai B'rith in supporting this project, as well as to all those who have helped my researches past and present and in particular Dr. Michael Jolles. The work naturally owes a real debt to the existing published histories of Anglo-Jewry and I would like to acknowledge the listed authors, in lieu of foot notes, as the major sources of this work.

## The Jews of Medieval England, 1066 to 1290

### 1. The Jews Arrive in England

The Jews of England came to the 'Land of the Isle' in the wake of William of Normandy's

conquest of England of 1066 - 1071. They were entirely a foreign minority and an alien group, who would never be properly integrated, or allowed to be integrated, into English society, socially, economically or religiously. This was to make them permanently vulnerable throughout their time in these shores.

Despite these disadvantages, the medieval Anglo-Jews often prospered until the final decades of their stay in England and in many cases had good relations with their Christian neighbours. They made an important contribution to the local and national economies and to Jewish and even Christian learning of the time. However the growth of Crusading spirit in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century led to Jews being increasingly persecuted and poor, until they were finally expelled from England in 1290. There was to be no official presence of the Jews from then until 1656.

Jews came here soon after the Conquest. There is an apparent reference to a Jew called Manasses in the Domesday Book, which said he had land illegally at Blicestone in Oxfordshire. We know of Jews in London by c.1127 though they had probably been there for some 50 years or more already. It is thought they were probably a small group of French Jews; numbers only grew with Jews fleeing from the Rouen pogrom in 1096, an event linked to the First Crusade.

The first group of Jews was probably a largely French affair – most came from Rouen - a great center of Jewish life in Northern France. They were largely French speakers, the language of the Norman conquerors, and they were linked by language and culture to the knightly ruling class of Europe based in France and Germany. Many of the rich London Jews had property in both London and Rouen until the conquest of Normandy by the French in 1204.

As a group they were in contact with their roots in the Roman Empire, which may explain the superior medical knowledge, hygiene, housing and domestic arrangements of the richest Anglo-Jews. The European Jews are thought to have kept some aspects of the classical culture through the Dark Ages in Europe.

The evidence shows that the French Jews in England were joined by other Jews, mostly from Germany and the Rhineland (who were a part of their cultural area), and that they influenced the Jewish way of life in England. There is evidence that German Jewish styles were important in the architecture of English synagogues and even tombstones.

The Jewish community was the only minority religious community in England, at the time. It was also a very small community, probably never numbering more than about 5,000 in 1200 or about 0.25% of the total population or 1.5% of the urban population.

### **Royal Serfs and Money-lenders**

The Jews who came to England were the property of the King; he owned them and all they had: they were 'feudal Jews' and 'Royal serfs'. The King had the power of life and death over them and he could take any of their money or possessions if he wanted. They did not fit into the usual feudal system that bound everyone together, great or small, in a network of shared obligations that was based on the distribution of land. The feudal system is often pictured as a pyramid of obligations and loyalties, with the serfs at the very bottom and the king (and God) at the top. The Jews did not fit properly into this fabric of life shared by everybody else.

The king brought them over to help him raise extra money for the royal finances, through money-lending, which also meant he was not too reliant on his powerful barons and retainers. This money could be especially helpful with expensive projects like the building of castles and the financing of wars, and their activities were really an extension of the tax system. The barons came to hate the Jewish community as they often had to borrow money from the Jews so that they could pay 'relief' (a substantial inheritance tax) to the king. The king in this case benefited twice.

The Jews got royal protection (when it suited the king) and reported only to him or his representatives. They were given some privileges to help their business; they were largely self-governing, even in matters of law, and in all other matters they were under the law of the king. However, they were liable to pay very large sums to the king whenever he wanted, as levies, taxes and death duties.

Money-lending, or 'usury' was the main occupation of the Jewish community, though not all Jews were money-lenders. While Christians were forbidden to lend, some did and they were often in competition with the Jews to make loans. The Jewish money lenders were required to lend money by the king as their main reason for being in the country. Money was generally lent at interest rates of between  $21 \frac{2}{3} \%$  to  $43 \frac{1}{3} \%$ ; the going rate in Oxford was 43% in 1244. These rates are not so far off modern store cards or credit cards. The high rate of the rates reflects the financial insecurity of the Jewish community.

Most loans were small loans against a security, which could be goods, such as clothes, silver and books, or, for the rich, land and property. The loans usually ran over a fixed period of a year, at which point the security or pledge could be sold off, if necessary, to cover the loan. An interesting example of how money-lending worked came in 1244, when rioting Oxford students claimed, among other things, that all study in the university had stopped as all their books were pawned to Jewish money-lenders!

The Jewish community provided an important service to the community as they were effectively the town bank. They provided much of the hard cash needed to keep the

local economy going, and archaeology shows that they kept good quality coins free of forgeries. Evidence suggests that their coins were kept in special treasury containers designed to hold specific amounts of coin. At this time it could be very difficult to get coinage, something we take for granted today. There is even evidence that they may have issued or helped issue lead trade tokens, to use as a local currency. At one time it is thought that Jews provided 1/3 of local coinage. It is interesting that several big coin hoards have been found buried in Jewish houses in Stamford, Oxford and Colchester.

Most of the customers of the Jews were not of the nobility, or the church. Around 67% of the business was from villagers or the middle section of town society. The trade in the countryside was very important and some Jews actually lived in the country for part of the week to do business. There is evidence that Jews stayed in the countryside in Northamptonshire (for example in the village of Patishall) as they were banned by edict from living outside of the town in 1237.

Jews were not the only money-lenders at the time, even though church law forbade Christians to lend at interest. Christians could use various pretexts (such as penalties on late payments of debts) to avoid the appearance of lending at interest, even if they were. For example, at Bury St Edmund's, the abbey became almost equally and massively indebted, by the sum of over £2,000, to both the Jews of Norwich and Bury St Edmund's, and a local Christian, William Fitz Isabel.

### **The Exchequer of the Jews**

All of the financial dealings of the Jews were recorded and administered by a separate branch of the Exchequer, the Exchequer of the Jews. The Exchequer of the Jews was created after the death of Aaron of Lincoln in 1186. He was so rich and his estate was so huge that a special department of the Exchequer had to be set up to deal with his money. He was worth £15,000, or, to put it in terms of the time, about three quarters of royal revenue in an average year!

The Exchequer of the Jews grew from this, and it became necessary to protect the royal income of the Jews from civil disturbance and war by keeping central records. Following the coronation of Richard I in 1189, there were serious attacks against Jews and their records of debt in 1190, as debtors discovered they could wipe out their Jewish debts by mayhem, murder and fire. The Jewish Exchequer was directed by the 'keepers' or 'justices' of the Jews, who were powerful figures in their own right. It had legal powers in cases concerning Jews and Christians and also helped protect the finances of the Jews.

The system evolved so that there were to be 27 official 'chirograph chests' where official copies of all Jewish transactions were kept. The chests had three separate locks; two separate keys were held by a Jewish and Christian chirographer and the third by the

clerks. In any transaction, the wording of a contract or bond would be made at the top of a piece of vellum or parchment, with a copy below. In the clear space between, the word '*Chirographum*' (copy) would be written and a wavy line would be cut through the vellum and the word, meaning that the copy could always be checked against the original. The top copy would go into the chest and the bottom copy to the lender. Any later payments, alterations to bonds and quittances of debt would be separately recorded by clerks in the presence of Christian and Jewish witnesses. The system was designed to prevent fraud and unauthorised alterations to bonds as all interested parties had to be present to operate the chest.

Debts which had been satisfied were recorded in the form of 'starrs', which were usually legal documents with seals, written in Latin with a Hebrew translation. The surviving documents enable us to see the original signatures of Jews and their personal seals. The seal of Jacob of London, who sold property to the fledgling Merton College in Oxford, was of a fantastical creature of which the famous Oxford antiquarian Woods wrote that it resembled neither fish nor fowl nor beast, nor anything of the earth or sea. Other forms of receipt included a labelled and cleft 'tally' stick, where repaid instalments could be scored off against the master stick labelled with the relevant details.

### **Other Jewish Trades**

The Jews did in reality follow a limited variety of other trades and callings, but were excluded from most because they could not join the town guilds that controlled most trades. Jews traded in unredeemed pledges and may have done small trading. Others are recorded as doctors, workers in metals and goldsmiths. Some were traders in wine, cheese and fish. Trading in wool and corn, and contracts on them, was another activity, but was largely followed after 1275 when Jews were forbidden to lend money, and was probably disguised lending. At Oxford, Jews were landlords to the early students of the university; they provided about 9% of the total student accommodation.

There were of course the religious jobs supported by the community – there were scholars, teachers, writers, rabbis and cemetery caretakers. As for the rest, many would have served the richest members of the community, at home or in business; Aaron of Lincoln, medieval Anglo-Jewry's richest Jew, employed many money-lending agents across England.

There are some more exotic jobs mentioned in the records, such as teaching dancing and sword-fencing. There were also a few Jewish soldiers in specialist military roles working as cross-bow men and 'men at arms'.

### **The Jewish Settlements**

The first Jews probably settled in London in an area called Old Jewry, but then moved around the great market of West Cheap, one of the most important markets in England. There were also smaller satellite communities - a 'poor' Jewry near the Tower of London and one at Southwark across the River Thames.

From about 1130, but perhaps even earlier, Jews started to move out into the provinces and eventually permanently settled in around 20–25 other places, largely in the south and east – though some did head further north, as far as Newcastle, and some made it into Wales and Ireland. Principal communities included Oxford, Cambridge, Stamford, Northampton, Norwich, Canterbury, Lincoln, York and others. There was a significant number of Jewish settlements beyond the permanent urban communities; these tended to be smaller and shorter-lived and were often business bases to serve rural customers. A few communities were also in the lee of great private castles (such as at Castle Rising) or near a local mint (such as Thetford).

The Jews in England did not live in segregated ghettos. They were usually found near the financial and market centre of a town or city. They were grouped together in a smaller area, but often had some Christian neighbours. There would be a group of Jewish homes, with communal buildings such as the synagogue. They were usually quite close to the local royal castle as they were allowed to shelter in the king's castles during riot and unrest. The Jewish communities were small – in Northampton, an important Jewry, there were probably never more than about 80 Jews and 14 main buildings.

## **Jewish Homes**

The medieval Jews were housed according to their means. The poorest Jews lived in simple, small and insubstantial dwellings, with a single room or hall open to the roof. These were built of materials such as wood and wattle with thatched roofs. Houses of this type could be easily pulled down using a hook and rope in order to stop town fires.

The middle strata of Jewish society lived in more permanent and solid dwellings. These were halls with a large wooden frame on a stone base, usually with a kitchen adjoining or separate, to lessen the fire risk. Some of the houses may have had shops, cellars and grounds or gardens. The very largest may have had additional wings or extensions.

The richest Jews lived in houses that were the pinnacle of domestic comfort, refinement and security. It is thought that the Jews brought and adapted this style of housing from France, where it was favoured by the aristocracy. The houses were very well built, often of stone, with tiled or stone roofs. These types of houses are called medieval 'first floor halls'. They had a semi-sunken stone cellar or 'undercroft', with the living accommodation at the upper level over the undercroft, though they were often extended



with additional annexes, chambers and wings. The living quarters was usually reached by an outside stone staircase. Again, the kitchen was usually a lean-to structure for safety. The living space, or 'hall', was a large open hall, open to the roof, which also often had a raised upper level or 'solar' for the family to retire to for sleeping. This sort of house allowed for a more private family life for the richest Jewish families than could be had in an open hall house.

These houses were often attractive in appearance – they were fine pieces of architecture, and remarkably there are several surviving examples at Lincoln and elsewhere. In Northampton, the house of Pictavinus, son of Sampson, was described as a 'good house well appointed and well built' and even by 1504 is called 'Beautiful Front' (*Bello Fronte*).

Inside, the buildings were equally luxurious for their time. They often had stone fireplaces - with chimneys, which were an almost unheard of luxury; even most aristocrats made do with a central open hearth with a smoke-hole in the roof. There was even glass in the windows, when most people only had louvred shutters, or waxed linen or horn window coverings. Jews also had more artificial lighting. For example they used 'cresset stones' – large stones with numerous hollows for wicks and tallow or oil, as well as cresset lamps which had a single bowl.

The cellars were a very important part of these houses and the lives of their Jewish inhabitants. They were strong rooms for valuables; for the Jewish money-lender these cellars were effectively bank-vaults with massive walls, and some even appear to have had stone pigeon-holes to store documents. The house of Jacob the Jew of Canterbury, had walls of stone and rubble nearly 5 feet thick. The cellars also gave storage for the household. Some cellars sometimes connected up with neighbours' cellars, probably to allow escape from attack.

A few cellars also had religious uses. We now know that some of the English Jews had private synagogues in their back cellars. Some rich Jews also had their own ritual bath or *mikveh*, built of stone, in a back cellar. One was discovered in Milk Street in the City of London recently and was made of beautifully worked masonry.

### **Other Jewish Buildings and Facilities**

Apart from the private homes of Jewish families, most communities had other facilities used for Jewish religious life. In the biggest communities there might have been one or more synagogues, a Talmudic Academy for Jewish learning, a Jewish ritual bath or mikveh. There could have also been a hall for communal events and a kosher slaughterhouse, as well as a hostel for Jewish travelers and a bakery (for Passover). Finally, a few

communities had a cemetery, usually outside the town or city gate, which often had a house for a watchman and a building for washing the dead.

Many communities had synagogues, many of which were privately owned, even if used by the whole community. They were often high quality buildings, frequently hidden at the rear of larger properties. Research now shows that they followed French and German styles and were often largely semi-sunken or even almost completely subterranean. This was to give an internal loftiness, thought desirable as well for privacy and safety. Examples of probable sunken synagogues are known from Northampton, Colchester and Guildford. The Guildford example was a fabulously decorated, small, square underground room; a place of assembly, with seating recesses, found at the back of the site of the home of Isaac of Southwark.

The ritual baths are worth further mention. They were largely used to keep the laws of family purity, which involved women bathing in the water after their monthly menstrual cycle. Also scholars might bathe in them to prepare for learning or festivals. Some were used to ritually bathe the dead before burial – a fact not appreciated by the living users.

## **2. The English Jews from the Conquest to 1200**

The history of the medieval Jews of England was generally peaceful and prosperous in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and they played an important role in the local and national economy. It was only after 1200, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, that the community declined because it was less useful to the king and had accidentally made powerful enemies in the barons. This was coupled with sustained anti-Semitism caused by the fall of Jerusalem and the great crusading movement that followed. The Jews were finally expelled from England in the general expulsion of the Jews in 1290, and did not officially come back until 1656. The most intense period of persecution was after 1250.

### **William the Conqueror and William Rufus**

There is little information about the Jews under William the Conqueror and his son, William Rufus. It appears that the Dukes of Normandy were used to protecting Jews in return for financial gain. William Rufus, an irreligious monarch, was well disposed towards them. A story relates that, on one state occasion, he encouraged them to hold a dispute with churchmen at his court, declaring, no doubt tongue in cheek, that, by the 'Holy Face of Lucca', he would convert if they held sway in argument. The Church claimed victory in the subsequent debate, but the Jews claimed they were cheated by fraud.

On other occasions he would force Jewish converts to Christianity to return to their faith for large bribes. The first historian of Anglo-Jewry, Tovey, relates one story, retold by the Oxford historian Hollingshead, in which the king took money from a distraught father to return his son to the fold. However, upon failing to brow-beat a convert back to the faith of his fathers, and after lambasting him as a 'dung-hill knave' for resisting him, the father asked for his money back as the king had failed. The King said he had tried his best and eventually returned half the money after a long haggle with the boy's father and in order to 'shut the old man up'.

## **Henry I**

Under Henry I (1100-35), more is known. Under Henry, Jews also enjoyed an increasing measure of genuine royal protection and freedom. He issued a charter that provided for the basic rights and protection for Jews that was to be referred to for the next two centuries. Jews were his property and they were to have free movement, without toll or barrier. They were to have access to royal courts, to be accorded freedom from ill treatment and to be given the right to a fair trial. They could hold land as a pledge in the course of their transactions. Henry was notable for regulation of and provision for his Jews. While he clearly used them as a highly profitable resource, he did not exploit them such that their profitability was impaired; but this kind of good will depended on the character of each monarch.

It seems that Henry I was anxious to block any spiritual influence that the Jews might exert over the Christian population. He sent monks to all the main towns occupied by Jews to assert orthodoxy against Judaism.

## **King Stephen and Queen Matilda**

The disputed reign of King Stephen (1135-54) proved to be surprisingly good for the Jewish community. While it was largely responsible for the dispersal of the Jews into the provinces away from London during the 'Great Anarchy', it was fruitful for the London Jews as Stephen's reign allowed trade to flourish and thus opened all sorts of opportunities to provide credit outside of London. King Stephen was also reputed for generally protecting his Jews against others.

This was not to say that Jews did not suffer injustice in the turmoil of this period; on a number of occasions, Jews were levied and counter-levied by both sides as occurred in Oxford in 1141. There, Queen Matilda arrived and demanded a levy from the community; later, when Stephen arrived in her stead, he demanded three and a half times the levy, as the Jews had had the temerity to pay money to Matilda. By this point the community was not disposed to pay up, but it did, once Stephen had burnt one of the houses of the leading Oxford Jews, that of Aaron fil' Isaac.

One portentous event of Stephen's reign was the first English 'blood libel' and indeed the very first of many English and European blood libels – a dubious first for this nation. In 1144, a young boy, William of Norwich, was found dead at Easter. The Jewish community was accused of crucifying him in a mockery of the death of Jesus. The boy was entombed at the monastery and miracles were claimed, and he was later made a saint. As a consequence the community was placed in mortal danger, but on this occasion they took refuge at the castle and were protected by the Sheriff, who had evidently taken the view that the murder allegations did not stand up. St. William was venerated right up to the Reformation and he came to stand for Jewish treachery and evil, an idea that worked its way through Europe and led to the deaths of many Jews over the centuries.

It must be noted that there has never been any evidence for these crimes. They mostly occurred around Easter time, or at other emotional points in the Christian calendar, when religious feelings evidently ran very high, sometimes whipped up by anti-Jewish preaching. Money was also a motive in alleging blood libel; as the historian Tovey said, 'You may also note that the Jews always seem to commit such dastardly crimes when the reigning king is in need of money!' In reality it is likely that some of these boy martyrs were mutilated victims of sex attacks or victims of simple accidents such as falling into cesspits.

## Henry II

In the following reign of Henry II (1154-89), the Jews were again flourishing. Their community, in numbers, locations, and business, expanded as he brought order and peace to the realm, ruled over a great European empire, and needed their services. While they were well exploited by the King, he also gave them increasing rights and protection. He let them run their affairs under Talmudic law. He let them hold property without the duty of military service, and he granted the community the right of establishing cemeteries outside London (1177), the first of which was the cemetery at Oxford. The community often enjoyed excellent and free relations with some of the great religious houses, such as at Canterbury. A contemporary writing of Jewish troubles in 1189-90 relates that in Henry's reign they were 'happy and respected', and even that Henry favoured them more than was right!

The richest Jews, such as Aaron of Lincoln (1125–86), acted as treasury agents, making available large sums of money to the king for all types of expenditure, which would be repaid later, often on the security of local taxation. Aaron's money-lending operations, mentioned earlier, spanned a great swathe of the country, a total of 25 counties. He was the richest man in the country and his annual income rivalled the Crown's.

There were further blood libels during Henry II's reign. A boy, Harold, was

allegedly murdered by the Jews of Gloucester in 1168 at Passover. Then in 1181 a boy, Robert, was killed at Bury St Edmund's, and Tovey relates, 'Naturally, the young victim's body was buried with great public solemnity and the bones continued to work all kinds of amazing miracles for several years afterwards.' Another incident followed at Bristol in 1183. These incidents did not lead to serious repercussions for the Jewish community.

As Henry's reign progressed, the king started to exploit his Jews in a way that would eventually, under later kings, lead to their ruin. He started to take unexpected and arbitrary large sums of money from them, or 'tallages'. The 1188 Saladin Tithe was one of the most serious and was set at a quarter of Jewish property. These types of exaction, once repeated, were ruinous to the financial powers of the community and would render them ultimately useless to the king.

The 'happiness' and 'respect' that the English Jews had enjoyed evaporated with the death of Henry II and the new crusading fervour that swept England. When Jerusalem was lost in 1187 to Saladin, Christians felt they had to reclaim and defend the holy city. The knightly group who went the aid of Jerusalem had to raise funds using their own land. Many of these found themselves in increasing debt to the Jews. Furthermore, influential preachers spread fears that the end of the world was approaching and that Jews were linked to a coming anti-Christ. The combination of crusade, religious hysteria and debt proved to be a fatal one for the Anglo-Jewish community.

## **Richard I**

A key event for the Jews of England – and a catastrophe for the London Jews - came, in 1189, with the coronation day of Richard I, the crusader king. The leaders of the Jewish community in London wanted to get the favour of the king at his coronation by presenting him with rich gifts. This was important, as the Jews knew they were in danger, as crusaders had already attacked Jews at Rouen and in the Rhineland, and the Jews of France had been expelled.

Jews went to Westminster Abbey, and the Palace of Westminster, bearing gifts. But they were barred entry due to traditional superstitious fears about sorcery being conducted at coronations. It appears that, in the melee, some Jews found themselves swept through the doors, which unleashed the fury of the mob. The Jews made their escape back to their homes as best they could, with many casualties and fatalities on the way. One of them was Benedict of York, a leading figure, who was beaten and captured, and was taken to a church where he received baptism, by William, Prior of York Minster, to save his life.

A major riot and attack on the London Jews took place. Jews barred themselves into their houses and repelled several hours of attacks. After dark, a frustrated mob burnt

them out of their houses. Many Jews were killed - some say at least 30 - including their Christian servants, others committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of their tormentors. The main victims were the poorest Jews.

The attack in London was repeated across the country as others, 'evil-minded people in other parts of the country, soon got wind of what treasures could be got by assaulting Jews, and were promptly roused into action.' There were attacks at Lynn, where the massacre is thought to have been total, as well as in Norwich, Stamford, Bury St Edmund's, Lincoln and elsewhere.

At Stamford, in 1190, during the Lent Fair, a band of crusaders bound for Jerusalem set about massacring and plundering the Jews of that town. Their reasoning according to contemporary chroniclers was indignation that the enemies of Christ should prosper, when the crusaders had too little even for their journey to the Holy Land.

The most infamous outrage of all was that at York in 1190. There, the people of the town, instigated and led by the barons, decided to cancel their debts, by attacking and killing their Jewish lenders. The baron's leader was apparently Richard Malebysse, nicknamed 'Evil Beast' by the Jewish community.

The outrage started with the murder of the late Benedict of York's family. The local Jewish population took shelter at the castle, in Clifford's Tower. Soon after everyone in the house of Josce the Jew was killed. The remaining Jews were offered the choice of baptism or death. The Jews in the sanctuary of the castle felt that they might be betrayed by the warden of the castle and would not let him in. He called in the Sheriff and his men to take the tower by force, aided and abetted by the mob.

These events led to the Jews in the tower, under the leadership of Rabbi Jomtob of Joigny, to decide to commit suicide rather than suffer humiliation and death by the torments of the mob. The Jews in the tower cut each other's throats after setting fire to the place and their possessions. The few survivors in the morning were tricked into opening the gates, with the promise of survival if they took baptism. They were killed on the spot. The leaders then went to the cathedral and destroyed all the debts to the Jews that they could find. In all, over 150 Jews died, perhaps many more.

The loss of all these financial records led the king to take action to protect them in the future. He set up, firstly, a national network of official *archae* chests to register all records of debts. Secondly, he set up the Exchequer of the Jews to centrally administer all of the Jews' financial affairs.

Soon after these events King Richard went on crusade, with some success, but during his return was made captive and held to ransom. During his absence the Jewish

community generally had a more peaceful time and indeed, also after his return. Richard died in 1199, of a cross-bow wound in the shoulder sustained at the Siege of Chaluz in France.

### **3. The Jews from 1200 to the General Expulsion in 1290**

#### **King John**

King John's reign started well for the Jewish community. He reaffirmed the Jewish charter of rights in 1201 and, in 1203, strongly supported the London Jews by declaring them under his protection. However, before long the King's greed and need for Jewish money led to increasing exploitation of the community. John managed to exploit his Jews because the *archae* system meant he knew just how much they were actually worth and set his exactions accordingly. The King also used massive tallages and fines that bore little relationship to what could actually be paid, and extracted the money with brutality. He also relieved debtors of some or all of their debts on a large scale when it suited him.

Perhaps the most dangerous development was that the king transferred many Jewish debts direct to the Crown. Many Christian debtors found that they were now being pursued directly by the king for their debts (who was not a sympathetic creditor) with many in threat of or actually losing their land to the king or another creditor. This made Jews a direct target of resentment in the civil disturbances that were to follow, especially from the barons. During the Magna Carta disturbances, Jews and Jewish property were singled out for attack by rebels.

John's pressing financial needs arose from efforts to finance the recovery of Normandy and his lost continental territories, which he had lost by his incompetence in 1204-6. He was also embroiled with conflicts with Ireland, Wales and the barons. The Jews found themselves caught in the conflict, between the king and the barons, suffering at the hands of both.

The worst financial outrage was in 1210 when John, fresh from his Irish campaign, levied the Bristol tallage. This was a vast 66,000 marks, and was implemented in the most brutal fashion – with mass arrests, with eyes and teeth plucked out to persuade the reluctant, and with hangings for the refusers. The extraction of the arrears carried on for several years, until at least 1214. It effectively ruined many of the Jews of London and elsewhere. Many, if not most of, the Jews found themselves imprisoned; large numbers fled back to Rouen and Brittany.

The Bristol tallage was pivotal for Anglo-Jewry as it marked the beginning of the end for the Anglo-Jewish community. Each reign that followed saw erosions of the community under a succession of kings and this was coupled with increasing anti-

Semitism and persecution by the church. In 1213 a house of converts (*Domus Conversorum*) was built near Bermondsey Priory, suggesting the increasing pressures being exerted on the remaining Anglo-Jews.

Things went from desperate to worse when the barons took London in 1215, during the Magna Carta disturbances, and came to attack and kill the Jews. Their occupation of the city led to very severe conditions for Jews and many died or had to escape. Stow relates that '...they broke into the houses of the Jews, and searched their coffers, to stuff their own purses that had long been empty: after this...[they] applied all diligence to repair the walls of the city with the stones of the Jews' broken houses.' A contemporary chronicler also relates that the Jews who were left were reduced to a very bad state as he says that they were left 'prowling about the city like dogs'.

The resentment and enmity of the barons towards the Jews was to prove an important factor in the downfall of the Jews of England. This resentment rested on the fact that the financial assistance given by the Jews to the king, meant that the king was less reliant on them, which reduced their power. Also, many barons were being made poor through their Jewish debts and, more crucially, there was the threat of disinheritance when a baronial debtor died with dependants. When the Magna Carta settled the dispute between the king and barons, it specifically contained clauses restricting the exactions of Jews where a debtor died with dependants.

When John died in 1216, of a fever brought on by a surfeit of peaches and cider, the Jews had a brief respite, even revival, until the tallage of 1221, which resumed the downwards slide that ended in their expulsion from the realm.

### **Henry III**

Henry III came to the throne in 1216, at the age of nine, the start of an exceptionally long reign. Henry's reign was one of mixed fortunes for the Jews. In the beginning they flourished financially, also taking advantage of a prosperous economy. By 1241 they were the richest Jewish community in Europe. However, from 1239, Henry started to milk the community dry of their money, to the point of complete ruination by the end of his life. Furthermore, Henry was a religious man and he supported the church's increasing hostility to the Jews. Thus the Jews suffered increasing religious persecution in his reign. Worst of all, the conflict between the king and his barons dragged in the Jews. The barons were financially exploited by the king and often fell seriously into debt to the Jews as they borrowed to satisfy the king. The barons took revenge on the king and the Jews during the Baron's War, which led to the deaths of many Jews. The end of King Henry's reign left the Jews near bankrupt, financially and institutionally.



## The King's Anti-Semitism

From an early stage, King Henry sympathized with church hostility towards the Jews. In 1215 the Lateran Council in Rome placed serious restrictions on Jews. The Church wanted to segregate and isolate the Jews, who they blamed for a spread of heresy. In 1222 the church in England issued the Edict of Oxford, as their version of the laws of Lateran Council. The measures were so severe that the very existence of the Jews was threatened. Jews were to be prevented from building any more synagogues, they were to pay church tithes, and they were to be forbidden to pass freely through churches and seek shelter for themselves or their goods there. They were to be placed under the power of church courts, and their money-lending activities were to be curbed; gentiles were even to be forbidden any social, and most especially sexual, relations with Jews, and, worst of all, to sell anything to Jews – even food.

The regent immediately stopped the worst aspects of this vile edict, to save the Jews from starvation, as well as the ones that conflicted with royal power and the financial operations of Jews. However, the lesser provisions were kept. Jews had to wear a Jewish badge of white strips worn on the clothes, representing the tablets of the law. The Jewish 'badge of shame' was unfortunately another English innovation, later taken up elsewhere in Europe. Later on, the king allowed the church to take other measures against the Jews, such as book burning in 1240 and the forbidding of Jews to eat meat on Fridays or Lent in 1251. In 1253, in his Statute of Jewry, the King prevented the setting up of any new Jewish communities, and enforced church sanctions.

The king allowed other anti-Semitic measures to be passed during his reign. He set up what may have been a further house of converts in Oxford (1228/1229) as well as one in New Street (now Chancery Lane) in London in 1232. The London house was corruptly administered and its inmates regularly starved. Henry also permitted a large number of towns to expel their Jews, from Newcastle to Newbury. In 1231 Jews were expelled from Leicester, supposedly 'in order that they might no longer mercilessly oppress the Christians by their usury.'

Several blood libels and other charges were raised against the Jews in Henry's reign. In 1234, they were accused of the forced circumcision of a boy who was probably the son of a convert. This led to the execution of several Jews after lengthy trials. In 1244, a Christian boy was found murdered in St Benet's Church Yard in London and allegations were made that cuts on the body were in the form of Hebrew characters. This allegation of ritual murder led to all the Anglo-Jews being savagely fined some 60,000 marks.

In 1255, the infamous 'martyrdom' of Little St Hugh of Lincoln took place. There, just after a major wedding feast of the Jews, a little boy was found dead in a cesspool near a Jew's house – almost certainly the victim of a tragic accident. The Jewish community was

rapidly blamed, and the boy declared a miraculous martyr. A Jew was forced to confess to the ritual killing of the boy under torture. The king, who was nearby, got involved and nearly one hundred Jews were taken off to London for trial; at least 18 were summarily executed after demanding a mixed jury of Christians and Jews. The body of the little saint was venerated at the cathedral until the Reformation and the remains of the tomb can still be found in the cathedral with a penitent notice from the church.

### **Henry's Financial Exploitation of the Jews**

Henry's reckless spending, once he had taken full control of the country from his regents, led to grievous taxation of the general population. Henry had extravagant tastes and he got involved in a number of expensive foreign wars. The Jews bore the brunt of the taxations in the form of a long series of ruinous tallages and other exactions. In 1239, the turning point in Jewish fortunes was reached, when the king suddenly seized 1/3 of the community's assets. The king seems to have abandoned the traditional role of the Jews, as Crown financial agents, and to have settled on a policy of pure exploitation. This was followed by a great tallage, in 1241, of 20,000 marks as well as in 1244-50 and 1250-58. Over thirty years of personal rule, up to 1259, the king was to tallage the Jewish community by a staggering one quarter of a million marks.

He was ruthless in extracting this money from the Jews and used threats of exile to Ireland, or wholesale confiscations, as a further lever. The exactions of the King meant that the Jews had to be hard on their debtors in recovering debts, especially unresolved long-term debts. This undoubtedly helped fuel anti-Jewish feeling, especially among the barons.

By 1255, Henry had exhausted the immediate usefulness of his Jewish community; they had been squeezed dry. Many Jews converted at this time. Having no immediate further use for them, he mortgaged them off to his brother Richard of Cornwall, as security for a loan of 5,000 marks. In 1262, he was to repeat the exercise to his son Edward, in return for an annual revenue of 3,000 marks. Edward then gave them for some months to their great rivals, the Cahorsin, until they were returned to the king's control in 1263. The king had effectively squandered and bankrupted his major financial resource and by his ruthless exactions on the Jews had become the greatest usurer of all.

### **The Barons' War**

In 1263 to 1267, the barons made war on the king, due to his harsh tax policies dating largely from 1239. Many of the barons were indebted to the Jews or were at risk of losing permanently their land due to debt. Their leader was an anti-Semite and the Jews were seen by the barons to be an important part of the King's financial government and powers. The Jews were single out for attack in virtually every instance by the Barons at which ever town they visited. The Barons felt that they had lost power, money and

especially land due to debts to the King and Jewish money-lenders. They were well aware that much of this land went to the King and his favourites, and the Jews were hated by association.

In 1261, there was an attack on the Jews of Canterbury at the hands of clergy and laity. No lives were lost but many were violently assaulted. In April 1264, there was a serious attack on the London Jewry in which many Jews were killed. Again, in the same year, Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, one of the rebellious barons, captured Canterbury and sacked the Jewish quarter to destroy records of debt. Jews were violently assaulted and some probably killed. Other attacks followed in other towns.

In 1263, a trifling dispute about interest levied on one citizen escalated and led to the barons despoiling the London Jewry and killing around 400 Jews. Later in the same year, the Jews were visited again by the supporters of Simon de Montfort, and many more were killed.

In 1266, in the last phase of the Barons' War, the 'disinherited knights' occupied London with the agreement of Londoners and attacked the Jewry. The Jews took shelter in the Tower of London, which was held by the Papal Legate Ottobini.

Simon de Montfort slowed down the pace of attacks on Jews when he was in charge of the realm in 1264-1265, and attempted to restore some kind of order in the Jewry. The king finally regained control in 1265, but was forced by the knights to make many concessions regarding the conduct and curbing of Jewish debt, before they would allow him to raise new taxes on Christians. The peace following the end of the Barons' War helped the Jews, as this process was continued, but by the restored monarchy, which by 1269 was being ruled by Edward on behalf of his elderly father. However, the Jewish community was largely ruined by this point, and its financial role was largely superseded by the Lombards and Cahorsin.

### **Edward I (1272 – 1307)**

When Edward I ascended the throne, the last days of the Jews in England had begun. Edward continued the religious persecution of the Jews and impoverished them beyond the point of financial return. He even stopped them lending money and encouraged them to become farmers and traders instead in a failed social experiment! At the end, Edward expelled all the Jews of England when he realised that a grateful population would reward him with a massive tax-grant. This was to be the official end of the community until the 1650s.

At the start of his reign, he passed the Provisions of Oxford of 1269, which stopped Jews lending on land as security. This was a shrewd move to build support among the

lesser barons against the power of the greater barons. Essentially it addressed the barons' fear that they would lose land through debt because, if a lesser baron defaulted on a loan, his land would not immediately be resold by the Jewish creditor to a greater baron with spare money, or to the church. In 1271, Jews were also prevented from owning all town property, except their houses. This made an important limit on the size of their loans and was an important limit on their wealth.

Edward had something of the social reformer in him, as he decided to stop the Jews lending money and wanted to make them earn their living instead by wholesome labours. Also, protests by Christians against his general tallage of 1274, due to memories of the Barons' War, caused him to rethink his tax policy. On his return from the Ninth Crusade, Edward passed the Statute of the Jews (*Statutum de Judeismo*) in 1275. This brought an end to official Jewish usury, depriving many of their living. In compensation, Edward permitted Jews to trade, work as artisans and buy houses, as well as to rent farms on leases of up to 10 years. However it also came with new restrictions, as Jews could now only live in Archæ towns and they had to wear the Jewish badge as well as pay a poll tax for the House of Converts. This Edwardian social experiment was unlikely to work given the climate of the time and because it is difficult in the best of circumstances to change vocation overnight. Edward was rewarded by his grateful Christian subjects with a great grant of taxation.

The Jewish community tried to adapt to the new situation. Some were successful, trading in staples such as wool, wheat and oats, and they issued bonds on what was effectively an early futures market. There are even records of Jews with interests in the sale of cattle. One Jew leased land to fuel his expanding trade in fire-wood, another took over the Manor of Kelling near Norwich. There remained some open local lending, but the bulk of business was for commodity repayments.

Many Jews were unable to adapt. Some Jews converted to Christianity, unable to make a living. Some continued to give loans but by using disguised interest. Other Jews may have been forced into illegal coin clipping, where bullion would be shaved off coins and resold. In 1278, there was a general purge against the Jews, when 680 Jews from around the country were imprisoned for coinage offences, in the Tower. Some 280 were executed, though it is not known how many were actually guilty of the offence.

The persecution was to continue. In 1281, the London Jews were limited to living only in the Jewry and they had to listen to conversionist sermons by the Dominicans. In 1283, the Bishop of London had all the synagogues in London closed down, though one was allowed to reopen. In 1287, the whole community was arrested again and fined a huge sum.

By 1290, the Edwardian experiment had also reached the end of the fifteen-year

period when Jews could lease land, and the policy had seemingly failed. The income from the Jews to the Crown had dropped from around one seventh of royal income to one hundredth, and other foreign money agents now provided the Crown with its additional finances. Edward now decided that the community could be disposed of and a final profit could be gained, especially if the previous exceptional grant of tax given by his Christian subjects was anything to go by.

Finally, in 1290 the whole of the Anglo-Jewry – a much-depleted community of around 3,000 souls, was expelled and this was the official end of the Jewry in England. There had already been an expulsion in Gascony in 1287. It is significant that the same officials who organised the Gascony expulsion also helped organise the English expulsion. The English expulsion was in fact the first national expulsion of Jews.

The expulsion was performed in an orderly fashion, over a period of 15 weeks, with safe passages for the Jews, and was not brutally effected by the standards of the day. When the Jews were expelled they were allowed to take their movable assets, but their properties were taken by the king and disposed off as he saw fit to his favorites. Most went to France, but others were spread widely to Germany, Spain, Italy and Venice, Gozo and even Cairo.

Many Jews were robbed or perished during the expulsion due to shipwreck and piracy on the high seas. A large number of Jews, from a group of 1,335 poor Jews, were shipwrecked in the crossing to Wissant on the French Coast. One sea captain murdered all his Jewish passengers off Queenborough, on the Medway. He had allowed the ship to be beached on a sandbank at low tide and he suggested that the Jews should like to pass the time by strolling on the exposed land. When the tide came back in he would not allow them back on board. As they floundered drowning in the incoming waters, he is said to have told them to call on Moses to save them as at the Red Sea. The sea captain was later arrested by the King and executed.

The King profited from this final expulsion, not only by the taking of Jewish assets, but because he was able to ask a grateful public for a massive tax grant. This tax grant was in fact the largest one ever in the medieval period.

The end of the English Jews' first sojourn in the Land of the Isle had come for a variety reasons. The community was broken by the monarchy's protracted greed, and the ill will of the indebted barons, in their power struggles with the king. The anti-Semitism of the church, especially since the Lateran Council of 1215, was especially important, along with its anti-Semitic propaganda. The crusading fervour that swept England in the 13th century had been a radicalising force and had aided the demonisation and destruction of the Jews.

After the expulsion, some Jews remained. There were a number of Jewish converts mostly remaining at the houses of converts. They appear to have led a largely separated religious life in what amounted to a religious institution. Conversion in this period was regarded as a long-term process and there were fears of back-sliding. There is little information as to whether other converted Jews managed to integrate into wider Christian society, except for one baptismal entry in the north of England. There is possible evidence that converted Jews continued in Oxford, producing bibles in Hebrew and Latin for Christian scholars. There is one further remarkable record of a Jew living in Wales in 1386-7. This Jew resided – apparently under royal jurisdiction - at the court of Maenor Deilo, between Cardigan and Llandovery.

### The Jews, 1290 - 1655

#### 4. The Middle Period

During the period of time between 1290 and 1665, England was not completely bereft of Jewish activity. The house of converts in London continued until c.1609, though new inmates did join from abroad. There is evidence from a Spanish historian that there were secret communities of hidden or *murranos* Jews in Dover, York and London, who outwardly lived as Christians. They arrived after the general expulsion of the Spanish Jews in 1492. The Spanish Inquisition was very concerned with the fact that Jews had hidden in England.

In the reign of Henry VIII, there were around 37 Jewish households in London, mostly involved in trade. Alves Lopez was a leading figure of this community and he held secret religious services in his house. In the reign of the Protestant Edward IV there was an additional community in Bristol due to its Spanish trade. This community was not stable. The work of the Inquisition, and the return to Catholicism under Mary (as well as her marriage to Philip II of Spain), caused the community to decline and mostly scatter.

Some Jews visited London from time to time, with the permission of the king and they were given license to practise their religion. These Jews were frequently doctors. In the reign of Henry IV, three were resident in England, and one, a Master Sampson de Mirabeau, treated the wife of the Lord Mayor of London, Richard ('Dick') Whittington, in 1409. During the time of the proposed divorce of Henry VIII, two Jews from Rome and Venice were brought in to give learned opinion on Levitical marriage.

In the reign of Elizabeth I, the fortunes of the London community revived again, especially as she was defiant of Spain. Around 100 Jews were to be found in London and they formed a convenient channel of trade with Spain and Portugal. In 1559, Roderigo Lopez, a Jew, settled in London and was physician to Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester.

He again held services in his house. However he became embroiled in the politics of the time and was accused of treason and attempting to poison the Queen. He was executed for his pains in 1594. In 1578, more evidence of a Jewish presence was provided by the occasion of a Jew called Nathaniel receiving baptism in All Hallows Church, Lombard Street.

Under James I (1603-25), trade with Spain declined, which damaged the usefulness of the community. In 1609 suspicions of Judaising by the Portuguese Jewish merchants were reported to the King, and led to the community being expelled.

However the permanent resettlement of the Jews in England was probably pioneered as early as 1632, when *murrano* Jews fleeing the breakup of the Rouen community settled in London. They were joined by other Jews, direct from Spain and Portugal. These Jews and their 16th century forerunners mostly lived in Hart St, in the parish of St Olaves in the City. The existence of a synagogue in Creechurch Lane (and perhaps another in St Helen's by 1662) was in fact an open secret in this time.

There was a growing community during the reign of Charles I (1625-49). The community wisely allied itself to the Parliamentary and Puritan cause at the start of the Civil War in 1642. Also, leading Jews had made themselves indispensable to Cromwell. The Portuguese Jew Antonio Fernandez Carvajal (1590-1659) had become the leader of the London *murrano*s community and was a prominent trader. He imported bullion, arms and grain, vital supplies for Cromwell. Other Jews also proved themselves loyal and extremely useful to the Commonwealth, especially in providing military intelligence.

## **The Modern Jewish Community, 1655 - 2006**

### **5. The Resettlement**

1655 is a key date in English Jewish history. This is because a Dutch rabbi, Manasseh ben Israel, formally asked Cromwell to allow the official re-entry of the Jews to England and to lift the Edict of Expulsion from 1290. While Manasseh ben Israel never got an official piece of paper, it is clear that an unofficial recognition of the right of Jews to live in England was obtained. In 1657 Cromwell allowed the lease of a burial ground at Mile End Road to the Jewish community for 999 years, which was a crucial act of recognition.

The background to these events lay in changes in Christian religion in England. Protestantism was a return to religious basics and a return to the original words of the Bible. This was good for the Jewish community as Christians now appreciated the importance of the Old Testament, and the Jewish faith in it, for them. The Puritans, who were extreme Protestants, took this even further and were often very positive about Jews and Judaism as the foundations of their own faith. Furthermore, they were particularly

interested in the prophecies of a promised Messiah, whose return, they believed, depended on the Jews, since their final, miraculous conversion would raise the curtain to the second coming.

Also, from the 1600s onwards, Christians had practical contact with Jews and some knowledge of Jewish religion, and knowledge replaced ignorance. For example, Walter Gostelow, a royalist, who believed in the second coming of Christ, announced to Manasseh ben Israel that he had visited several synagogues when he was about 18 years old and found out what Jews actually believed.

Another crucial development was the idea of toleration of different religions. Until this time it was generally thought that inhabitants of a country should have the same religion as their ruler. This changed under the influence of different Protestant groups. There were even arguments put to the king as early of 1614 that Jews should be readmitted to England.

## 6. Cromwell

During the Commonwealth, under the rule of Cromwell, the stage was decisively set for the return of the Jews. This was especially so as there were powerful moves to insert universal religious toleration in the outline constitution, though eventually this was moderated to toleration of all Christians.

At this point the Amsterdam rabbi and scholar, Manasseh ben Israel, intervened. He was listened to because he was a respected scholar known not only to Jews but also to leading English Puritan academics.

To push his arguments forward he published an idealistic book called 'Hope of Israel' (*Spes Israelis*) in 1650, dedicated to the English Parliament. In the book he made a theological argument. He said the dispersal (*Diaspora*) of the Jews across the world seemed to be nearly complete – excepting for England. Therefore, he further claimed that England should re-admit the Jews to help bring about the imminent arrival of the Messiah.

The book made a great impact as it struck a chord with the beliefs of the Puritan leaders of England who began to consider seriously re-admitting the Jews. Serious negotiations took place from 1651, and went up to Cromwell. Eventually in 1654, after interruption by an Anglo-Dutch war, an ill Manasseh sent his son to England as an emissary. Cromwell, as evidence of good will, apparently requested Manasseh's visit in person, which he did in September 1655.

On arrival he gave Cromwell a short pamphlet, called 'The Humble Addresses....'. It



argued for an unqualified re-admission of Jews with full religious and commercial freedom, and even for them to have independent jurisdiction. He said the Jews would make good loyal citizens, respecting the Christian majority and bringing profit to England. He also showed why anti-Semitic myths and slurs were unfounded.

Cromwell acted quickly when he got the petition. Eventually, after delays and consultations, he convened the famous Whitehall Conference to decide the matter. The conference was on 4 December 1655, and Cromwell decided that it should consider whether the return of the Jews was lawful and, if so, on what terms they should be re-admitted. It rapidly agreed that the Edict of Expulsion of 1290 was merely an exercise of the king's prerogative at the time to particular persons and therefore was never binding as the law of the land. As to the rest, there was lengthy discussion and dispute, reaching no conclusion, except perhaps that public opinion was against a free admission of the Jews. Cromwell was forced to dissolve the conference in exasperation.

At this time, war with Spain forced many Jews to be open about their Jewish identity as otherwise they would be in danger of having their goods seized as enemy aliens. In the case of Antonio Robles, the Council of State agreed to recognize him and others not as a Spaniard, but as of the 'Hebrew nation and religion,' and let them be.

Manasseh ben Israel was disappointed by this failure to get the permission he was seeking. At this point, he decided to speak to his fellow Jews in London, whom he had neglected before, and pitched in his lot with them. He and six leaders of the community in London made a more modest and practical request asking for recognition of their freedom to worship as Jews and additionally to have a Jewish cemetery. Later, in 1655, the Council appears to have responded positively to this petition by Manasseh, even if no public pronouncement was ever made.

In December 1655, the community was able to rent a house in Creechurch Street as a synagogue and acquire a lease on a cemetery in Mile End in February 1657. Additionally, the appointment of Samuel Dormindo as the first Jewish member of the Royal Exchange, without the need for the Christian oath, is more evidence of a quiet deal with the State – a classic English arrangement. This understanding was the basis on which the modern Jewish community was built.

Manasseh ben Israel died by 1657, in some poverty, believing that his mission to make England a major refuge for Jews had largely failed. In reality, without realising it he had succeeded brilliantly, as he had helped win important recognition for Jews, and the lack of a formal declaration or law meant that there was no future target for resentments or tensions in the Christian community. Over the next decades, the Anglo-Jews were to enjoy more practical freedoms than elsewhere in Europe. The Jews were to be free in most areas of economic and domestic life.

The major bar they suffered was that they could not enter Parliament, most universities and the professions, such as the law, because they could not take what was called the Christological oath (i.e. a formal oath or undertaking in the name of Jesus Christ), or the sacrament, to show their loyalty to the established church and state. This was not troubling at the time, but by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Jewish community was very well established, it was to become a major issue and the main issue of the emancipation movement.

In 1658, Cromwell died and there was a reaction against his Commonwealth, which was subsequently to be sealed with the restoration of the monarchy in the form of the Stuarts. Soon after Cromwell's death, in 1659, there were attempts by Thomas Violet to attack the Jewish community by trying to get the judiciary to declare Jewish worship heretical. This move was firmly resisted by the judiciary. Violet's schemes illustrated the fact that, despite its prejudices that would emerge from time to time, English society was to be largely tolerant and peaceful towards its Jewish population

## **7. Charles II (1660-85)**

Under Charles II (1660-85), the position of the Jews was officially recognized. Charles had been helped with loans from Dutch Jews in the 1650s and he was well disposed to Jews. By 1660 there were about thirty-five Jewish families in the City and they traded largely with the Mediterranean, the colonies and the Caribbean. The City of London was opposed to the Jews, but Charles would not support it. In 1660, the City petitioned the king to uphold the edict of expulsion in 1290, but he refused them. In 1664, the king affirmed the right of Jews to worship when the Conventicle Act threatened to make Jewish worship illegal, along with all forms of non-Anglican worship. Even when the threat was revived later, Charles exercised a royal prerogative to put a stop to the matter.

On several successive occasions, the City attempted to use laws to suppress the Jewish community. In 1673-74, Charles was obliged to cancel his Declaration of Indulgence by Parliament. The Indulgence had allowed Roman Catholics and Dissenters the right to public worship. The City brought an action against the Jews on the basis that they were breaking the law. The king was again forced to rebuff this attack by the Jews' rivals.

## **8. James II (1685-88)**

Charles died in 1685 and was succeeded by James II. In the same year, more attempts were made to prosecute Jews using laws designed to prevent Catholic recusancy; again, the

action was stopped by direct intervention of the King. James protected the Jews because as a defender of Catholicism, it was much in his interest to protect religious minorities. He also affirmed all the patents of endenization (as opposed to full naturalisation, or becoming a full citizen) that had been made by his brother. The patents of endenization conferred some important benefits, especially the right to trade in the colonies. In these circumstances, the community continued to grow to some one hundred families, but was tightly bound to the immediate vicinity of the synagogue. James abdicated in 1688 after he attempted to declare the free exercise of all forms of worship. Parliament invited the king's daughter Mary and her consort William of Orange to ascend to the throne.

### **9. William of Orange (1688 - 1702)**

William III's reign saw further expansion of the Jewry; the accession of William of Orange of Holland led to many Spanish and Portuguese coming in from Holland. In 1684, there had been 414 Sephardim; by 1695, there were 499. William was well disposed towards the Jews as William's expedition to England had been largely financed and provisioned by Jewish loans and contractors. Despite this, William had been tempted to raise extraordinary taxes on the community on two occasions, but circumstances had meant that he could not follow through with it. The rights of Jews were further bolstered by the Blasphemy Act of 1698, which specifically excluded Jews from its powers.

By this time the financial usefulness of the Jews was clear, which provided further protection to the Jewish position in this country. While the London merchants saw them as competition, it seems that they arrived at the position that the Jewish community was overall more beneficial to the trading interests of the city than not. The Jews had excellent trading contacts with the Spanish and Portuguese colonies and the Levant. They were also very important in the importation of bullion to England. These factors led to the involvement of the Jewish traders on the Royal Exchange. In 1697, 12 Jews were allowed officially to trade on the Exchange. It was decided to admit a total of 100 English traders and 12 other aliens; thus the city Jews actually had a high proportion of the places considering the size of the community.

The Sephardic community built itself up throughout this period and established a wide variety of institutions and charities. These included a synagogue, schools, orphanages, hospitals, and charities for dowries, among many. The Sephardic Jews were, it is said, assisted at every stage of their life, from birth through to death. It is claimed that this high level of assistance may well have resulted in a long-term pauperising effect among the community. A very high level of charitable giving has been important throughout modern Jewish history in England.

Everything centered on the synagogue of Bevis Marks (1702), which replaced the

earlier synagogues, and its adjoining schools and yeshiva. Importantly the first rule of their constitution or *Ascama* (1663), which was medieval in its outlook, forbade them from forming any new congregation without the consent of the elders or *Mahamad*, or even holding quorate religious meetings of ten men (*minyanim*), except for special purposes. This prevented the dispersal of the Sephardim outside of London. Also, the head of the community, the ruling committee of three, had powers over community members that would make a totalitarian blush.

The community had its internal troubles, due to the fact that many of the former murranos, or New Christian, members knew little of Judaism. This meant that many were not circumcised, which led to disputes on several occasions. In one case, Raphael da Costa was circumcised only a week before his wedding in 1746, which would have rendered initial marital duties somewhat fraught. The lack of Jewish knowledge also meant that others found it difficult to take on a fully observant life as they were not used to this. It is not surprising that the Sephardim were, as time wore on, increasingly to find that members were marrying out and assimilating as many of them were used to mainstream society and its thinking, theology and philosophy. As a group, they were ripe for Anglicization, though until the emancipation of the Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century they were barred by religious tests from virtually all public offices, many professions as well as the major institutions of public life, such as the universities.

By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, the trade and wealth of the community had grown considerably and the leading families were very wealthy indeed, though most were of more modest means. Trade by this time centered on West and East Indies as well as Jamaica. They were involved in the import and export of a wide range of goods – sugar, wine, linen, diamonds and other precious stones, and brazil wood. The trade in bullion continued to be important. Not all the Sephardim were merchants; some were jewellers, brokers and retail merchants, and some were poor, working as pedlars and other less reputable callings.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century and indeed into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Jewish settlement was concentrated in a very small area of about 35 acres. This area was a triangle defined by St Mary's Axe, Bevis Marks, and Duke Street and Leadenhall Street. The Minories also had a Jewish population, as did the area along Houndsditch just to the east of the city. The community had come to this area in the first instance because it was traditionally a place of settlement for foreigners and one where non-freemen of the City were allowed to trade. Also, for the poorer members of the community it was close to the established and bustling markets of the East End and the large working class population they served.

## 10. The Ashkenazim and the Sephardim

The Sephardic make-up of the Jewish community was soon challenged with the increasing immigration of Ashkenazi Jews. These Jews came from Western Europe, centering on Germany, with Holland and Poland. They arrived via the ports of Amsterdam and Hamburg. The Sephardim looked down on the *Tudescos* as inferiors in every respect.

While many of the Ashkenazim were poor and disadvantaged, some of their number were very rich economic migrants, arriving from Europe starting around 1670. Some were not lone interests, but often representing the interests of a family firm in Germany. As a group, they specialized in finance, as loan contractors and commodity and stockbrokers; others were merchants, as well as dealers in precious stones. Benjamin Levy, an early 'Jew Broker', is a prominent early name in this group, later to include Nathan Rothschild (1777-1836).

While they shared facilities with the Sephardim to start with, due to their small numbers, the differences in language, outlook, wealth and ritual, meant that when their numbers were sufficient, they set up their own congregation. This happened in 1690 with an early synagogue in Duke's Place in 1692 and a burial ground by 1696. Moses Hart built the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place in 1722 and this was to remain the spiritual headquarters of the Ashkenazi community until its destruction by fire during bombing in 1941.

Initially, the Ashkenazim settled close to the Sephardim. However, from a relatively early date, some upper class and middle class Jews, from both communities, flowed outwards and settled in nearby better areas quite close to Duke's Place. Eventually this was to involve very large numbers. This desire to move to better areas has been a hallmark of Jewish life ever since. For example, Goodman's Fields was such a location from 1720. A few took more prestigious town houses in areas like Albemarle Street in the West End.

Some of the upper class Sephardim and indeed Ashkenazim started taking summer residences in the countryside and villages adjacent to London, and the richest started acquiring minor country seats there as well. Richmond and its spa was particularly popular, as like most spas it was fashionable and the etiquette of social mixing was more relaxed – ideal for the socially ambitious. The first Jew in Richmond was Solomon Medina in 1697, and he got a knighthood by 1700. Other Jews in the area were to make aristocratic marriages or to convert out of Judaism all together. This was the first Jewish move outside London. This move was due to social climbing and increasing assimilation - and the need to escape noxious conditions in the City. These Jews traveled to their country seats by boat, often by moonlight, and later by the turnpike.

## Communal Splits

The community suffered some acrimonious splits at an early date. In 1706, the Hamburg Jew, Marcus Moses separated from the parent body with his supporters; part of the dispute rested on Marcus Moses wishing to follow the practices of the Hamburg synagogue. Moses firstly opened a synagogue in Magpye Alley close to Dukes Place. By 1726 he had built the Hambro' Synagogue in Church Row, Fenchurch Street. By 1899 it had moved into Whitechapel - in Union Street, off Commercial Road.

Another dispute among the Ashkenazim led to the creation of the New Synagogue in 1761, which was sited at Bricklayers Hall in Leadenhall Street. This collection of synagogues, the Great, the Hambro' and the New, not forgetting the Spanish and Portuguese, formed the sum of London synagogues into the 19th century, though a collection of informal congregations (*minyanim* and *heverot*) were set up by very devout Ashkenazim who disliked the often lax ways of Jewish life and worship elsewhere. The Ashkenazim were ultimately to settle their differences so in 1870 they formed the United Synagogue to represent their collective interests.

### 11. The 'Jew Bill', 1753

One of the most notable political events to affect the Anglo-Jews in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the passing and, later, rapid repealing of the so-called 'Jew Bill', or Jewish Naturalisation Bill. The background to the Bill was the fact that foreign-born Jews trading in England were at some great disadvantages compared to native-born Jews. They could not own land and they suffered all sorts of commercial discrimination. The Sephardic hierarchy wanted to correct this situation, which would then have benefited a few dozen traders. Already Parliament, in 1740, had passed the Plantation Act, a bill allowing foreign-born Jews who had lived in the American colonies for seven years to become naturalised citizens.

The Sephardi leaders called in favours due to them by the government to get a Bill to Parliament, which was duly passed, with opposition, in 1753. It provided that if a Jew had been resident in England for three years he could apply to Parliament for naturalisation without having to take the sacrament. There was almost immediately a great public outcry against the bill, and an outbreak of considerable hostility and prejudice to the Jews. The motives were largely Christian prejudices and business opposition to Jews.

There was a vigorous pamphlet war, Jews were insulted on the streets, graffiti was daubed, excessive and outrageous claims were made about the Jews' motives and the consequences of the act, but largely to the effect that Jews would take over. Patriotic fervour broke out; English men showed their patriotism by holding great hog feasts and

proposing patriotic toasts. All of the old lies and libels were paraded again in public; the Archbishop of Canterbury even feared a pogrom would take place. The government felt that there was no option but to repeal the act which they did in 1753.

With the repeal, the public outcry died down almost immediately. Attempts to repeal the Plantation Act straight after fell flat, as Parliament had no will to embark on further anti-Semitic legislation. Little serious violence attended the protests against the bill, nor were there any ill after-effects. The episode showed how Jews were generally tolerated in England, and in any case attempts to naturalise foreign Protestants had met with real opposition. This is not to say that they did not suffer from day-to-day prejudice, as it was only with the success and feats of the celebrated Jewish boxer, Daniel Mendoza, that street thugs and bullies desisted from casual assaults on Jews.

## **12. The Ashkenazim are ascendant**

By 1800, the Ashkenazim had become the most important Jewish group in London and England. The Sephardic population was only around two thousand in number out of a total Jewish population of twelve to fifteen thousand Jews. This was because there was a constant Ashkenazi immigration, driven by shrinking economic opportunities in Germany and Central Europe. However, many of them were very poor, with few skills or education, and were principally involved in hawking and small trading, much of this in tat and small cheap goods such as jewellery and watches. In London, they sold small items such as oranges, lemons, rhubarb, pencils, slippers, sponges and small items. Most of these goods were made by other members of their class, the more skilled grouping of Jewish artisans, or through items imported by other Jewish merchants and traders and their special trade links

The Jewish authorities encouraged this hawking and peddling, and brought licenses for would be peddlars, as a solution to Jewish poverty. The trade in old clothes was the other major Jewish profession, in an era when it was necessary to recycle expensive hand-produced garments down through the layers of English society.

Jews were accused of being responsible for much petty crime. Some of the Ashkenazim came from bands of Jewish beggars and petty thieves who wandered Europe. Also, the second-hand trade was a natural channel for dubious or stolen goods. The Ashkenazi community saw that it was important to help and educate their poor to prevent these evils. The eventual creation of the Westminster Jews' Free School and the Jews' Free School came out of these initiatives. Much later the creation of the Jewish Board of Guardians, a sort of Jewish social security, came out of these needs.

The Sephardim were not without their own separate problems. They were very

rigidly organized. Every aspect of communal and religious life was directed by the *Ascama* (the laws of the community), as well as by the elders of the congregation, who were very powerful. While this was all right when the community was founded, it had not altered to fit the times. As a result, the Sephardic community lost its vigor and its primacy. It increasingly became a more minor part of Anglo-Jewish life.

As a result, there was dissent in the ranks, seen in indecorous behavior and open disputes. There was even a minor riot in Bevis Marks synagogue in 1783. Isaac Mendes Furtado fell out with the elders over the raucous celebrations of Purim that took place in the synagogue. The Elders decided to enforce decent behaviour and even brought constables into the synagogue to force compliance. He refused to back down and departed the synagogue and Judaism, building 'Purim Place' in the East End as a celebration of the incident.

It seems that some of the significant members of the community became alienated, and some even left the congregation after disputes. It is to one such dispute that we owe the eventual rise of Benjamin D'Israeli to become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. D'Israeli's father refused to become a warden of the synagogue when asked, and, on being levied a stiff fine for his refusal, decided to leave the congregation. He later agreed to having Benjamin baptised and D'Israeli was later to become one of our most famous Prime Ministers.

The richer Sephardim had their own problems. Many of the richest were very well integrated into the higher reaches of society and were well educated, which in many cases also had a bad effect on their morals as they took on the lax attitudes of the aristocracy they mixed with. A good many went on to completely assimilate and even to convert to Christianity to allow marriage into the English aristocracy.

### **13. The Ashkenazim move into the Provinces**

While the Sephardim were tied to the Bevis Marks synagogue, and places of residence accessible to it, the Ashkenazim were free to move much as they wanted. The spread of the Ashkenazim across England was greatly aided by the activities of Jewish hawkers and pedlars, who could travel considerable distances and would go to remote places, selling their wares. They sold small goods that people needed in an era when easy access to goods and shops was not universal. They tended to congregate at lodgings at a particular location to restock and make accounts as well as to celebrate the Jewish Sabbath each week.

Out of this, new communities could form around the weekly gathering of Jews if the spot were favourable. Some individual Jews might found a community by settling



long-term in promising locations. This would occur if they had saved enough from their travels, and if, for example, they wanted to curtail their wanderings and settle down to marry and start a family. In due course, other Jews would join them forming the nucleus of a community. Jews would naturally move up in their professional circumstances, if given the opportunity; thus it was natural for a pedlar or hawker to open a shop, or a pawnbroker to become a jeweller and such like.

This move outwards seems to have taken place after 1700, probably largely from the 1740s onwards. There is a pattern of Jews seeking the best opportunities available at the time, usually at major markets, naval ports, or places with large militias, spas and tourist resorts and, latterly, industrial centres. The great economic growth of Britain as a world power and a fast-expanding home consumer market, from the mid-eighteenth century, was the background for the spread of many Jews to the provinces.

The Jews in these communities largely worked as shopkeepers, small-traders, or the richest as commodity merchants. There was an early specialisation in silversmithing and pawnbroking businesses, watch and clock-making, jewellery, old clothes trading, and tailoring, with, later on, the selling of hardware and furniture, military outfitting, fancy goods, engraving, bookbinding, curiosity shops, selling of shells and snake oil, tobacco, and insurance. There were even Jewish publicans. Jews entered the medical professions, especially dentistry. They became coach-booking agents as well as language teachers, and ran boarding academies. Some Jews worked as chapmen and salesmen for the richer Jews. Jews also worked as coal factors and merchants, such as at Chatham.

The Napoleonic Wars were very important for the provincial Jewish communities, and did much to help them to expand and prosper, especially those around the ports, which in any case had seen long-term investment by a series of governments. Much of the Jews' trade in the ports was in providing 'slop' or the basic seamen's kit and other necessities. This would involve in some cases going out to warships in small boats (nick-named 'Tailors' Cutters') to sell to pressed sailors. The richest Jews worked as registered naval agents, who provided sailors with advances on their wages, which largely came through 'prize money' at the end of a voyage, and exchanged foreign currency.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews went to the new emerging industrial centres and trade centres, attracted by work in the new industries or the economic opportunities that went with it. In several cases they were linked with a specific manufacturer and factory, who, whether Jewish or Christian, became founder of a community. Places with non-conformist traditions were also favoured for their religious tolerance.

The Jewish community was to enjoy considerable growth throughout the provinces, from the 1750s through to the 1840s. Over time, many of these Jewish communities became socially and commercially diverse. Successful communities would

eventually have members of their community involved in a wide range of callings and also saw the rise of their own middle and even gentlemanly class. From an early period, Jews sought to be involved in civic life and to contribute to their communities, especially once emancipation occurred.

An outstanding example of this, in Chatham, is the career of Lazarus Simon Magnus, a much beloved member of his community. He was a successful and wealthy coal merchant, an early railway pioneer and a leader of his community and a patriot. He became the first Jewish provincial Mayor in England and the second in Europe when he was elected the Mayor of Queenborough three times in 1858, 1859 and 1862 for saving the town by bringing the railway to then dying port.

A number of stable communities were founded, along with what must have been a distinctive and stable provincial Jewish style of life. Generally, Jews in the provinces were regarded as more lax in their religious observance than in London. Sabbath breaking was not uncommon. In Portsmouth, Jews would sometimes go out to boats to do business on the Sabbath and also eat non-kosher food if out of town. There was a general lack of attendance by women at the ritual bath or mikveh to fulfil the laws of family purity.

Sadly, this stability was not to last. Some Jews emigrated, depleting their communities. In the 1820s, many leading Jews emigrated from Canterbury, to St Helena and South Africa. The coming of the railways in the 1840s led to the decline and extinction of many provincial Jewish communities. It damaged some of the distinctive trading advantages offered by the provinces and helped draw Jews to the major urban centres, which is where most Anglo-Jews live today. For a few, such as Brighton, it was in fact a great impetus to growth, but this was an exception. The historian Cecil Roth calculated that at least half of these provincial communities no longer exist, most of which had gone by 1880.

## **14. Jewish Emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **The Setting**

At the opening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were about 20,000 – 30,000 Jews in England, most of whom were poor immigrants or second generation immigrants and were viewed as low status and foreign. The Jews in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were mainly poor artisans and tradesmen. Poverty was widespread, and synagogues and Jewish charities provided some help for the Jewish destitute. For example, the Jewish Board of Guardians was set-up in 1859 by the Great Synagogue as a more efficient means of poor relief.

As the century progressed more and more Jews were English-born and increasingly more affluent and better educated, with a large proportion becoming middle class. By 1880, there were approximately 60,000 English Jews, with about two-thirds based in London. They had also assimilated to the extent that they saw themselves as English citizens and were increasingly respectable. However their legal status as citizens of this country had not changed from the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These well-established Jewish middle and upper classes pressed for the final barriers for them to fully participate in national life to be taken down. While many Jews did not want to join the ranks of the establishment, what really mattered for them was they wished to be considered as full and legal equals to all other Englishmen.

At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were barred from a number of institutions and professions that formed the English establishment, largely by the need to take Christian oaths or to take the sacrament to attain such office. They could not undertake any office of the Crown, civic government or work in any legal profession. For example Jews could not enter Parliament, or attend Oxford or Cambridge universities, be freemen in the City of London, or practise as barristers.

The Jewish community was supported in these aspirations by political and social liberals, supported by the new middle class. Reform, and even revolution, from America and France, was increasingly in the air. They backed the removal of civil disabilities not only to the Jews but also to Roman Catholics, and Protestant non-conformists. Other help came from sections of the church and other political parties. The City of London was probably the most urgent supporter of reform and emancipation of all these groups, and saw most clearly the need for Jews to be allowed the rights of all other citizens.

The progress towards emancipation was slow but steadily realised over a number of decades. In 1818, synagogues were recognised as legal entities able to sue for withheld dues. In 1826, Parliament allowed naturalisation without requiring Anglican communion. This attained all the objectives of the Jew Bill, without the slightest murmur of dissent from the public. In 1828, the quota on the number of Jew Brokers was removed. In 1830, Baron Lionel de Rothschild was elected an MP by the City of London, though he could not take his seat due to the religious test of the Parliamentary oath. In 1831, Jews were allowed the Freedom of the City as they no longer had to take an oath on the New Testament. This was a very important concession, which allowed them to carry on retail trade in the City for the first time. In 1833, Jews became free to become barristers, when Lincoln's Inn set the precedent of waiving the customary conclusion of the oath. In 1837, University College was founded, with the assistance of Isaac Lyon Goldsmid. It was a non-sectarian college, which admitted Jews, and thus for the first time professing Jews could get a degree from a university in England, though they had been able to attend Scottish universities.

In the provinces, Jews had also been pressing the cause of emancipation. 'Citizen' Joseph Salvadores, a revolutionary who lived in Tooting in South London in the 1750s, became heavily involved in local church and parish matters, despite immense prejudice. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were being elected to municipal positions without the oath. For example, in Devonport, Phineas Levi had been elected to the local Board of Commission by 1830. Many other elections and appointments followed in the provinces over the next decades, for Jewish burgesses, city councillors, aldermen, mayors, and high sheriffs.

## **The Struggle**

The main struggle for emancipation of the Jews came after the non-conformists and Catholics were emancipated by Parliament in 1828 and 1829 respectively. This meant that Jews were left as the only group suffering from civil disabilities – an intolerable situation. Efforts were made to put reforming bills before Parliament. The first was introduced in 1830, but was defeated in the Commons on second reading. This was followed in 1833 with another attempt, but this time Tory interests in the Lords grounded the bill and they were to prove a continued stumbling block to the progress of bills on a further nine occasions from 1834 – 1857.

David Salomons' career became crucial in helping secure Jewish emancipation. He was one of the founders of the London and Westminster Bank. In 1835, he was elected the first Jewish Sheriff of the City after Parliament approved the passing of the Sheriff's Declaration Act to allow him to take office without the Christian oath. In the same year, he was also made alderman, but was debarred due to religion, and a legal challenge mounted by him failed as well. In 1844 Salomons was elected Alderman for the Portsoken Ward, but was barred from taking office. In 1845, after sustained protests about the 1844 election by Salomons to the Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor, the Jewish Municipal Relief Act was passed, which meant that Jews could hold all municipal offices without having to take the oath 'on the true faith of a Christian'. In 1847, Salomons became the first Jewish alderman, having succeeded in getting past a Bill in Parliament to allow Jewish aldermen in the City. In 1854 and 1856 the passing of the Oxford and Cambridge Reform Acts allowed Jews to study at the two institutions, though, for a considerable period of time after, few Jews took up this possibility due to official fears of assimilation. In 1856, Salomons became the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London.

This left one final barrier to overcome – the bar on Jews becoming members of Parliament. Salomons and his supporters found that Parliament would not move on this issue. They decided the only way to succeed was to be elected as MPs by the democratic vote, even if they were to be refused their seats in the House because of oath they could not swear. They reasoned correctly that eventually Parliament would not be able to resist the will of the people. The Times had aptly summed up the situation in 1845, when it

stated 'laws in collision with facts, laws in spite of opinion...cannot be maintained long in a free country.'

During the period of 1835 and onwards, Salomons and four other Jews kept standing for Parliament. Baron Rothschild was elected to Parliament on four occasions from 1847, and Salomons was elected in 1851, but both were prevented from taking their seats by the statutory oath. Great pressure was mounted by the City and other supporters to force Parliament to sway.

Victory was obtained in 1858 with the Jewish Relief Act, which removed the requirement for the religious oath to enter Parliament. Baron Lionel de Rothschild finally took his seat in the Commons on 26 July 1858. The enabling act was confirmed in 1860 as a continuing standing order. It was not until 1866 that the oath for assuming an office of the Crown was removed as well as the oath for entry into the House of Lords. Nathaniel Rothschild was not created a peer until 1885, when he entered the Upper House. In the universities, Jews were finally allowed academic fellowships in 1871 when the requirement to be a cleric was lifted. Jews were equal citizens of Britain at last.

After the emancipation, there was a golden period of 30 to 40 years for Anglo-Jewry. They reached the pinnacle of social acceptance and approval in this time, and were regarded as patriotic and English. By the 1860s and 1870s Jews occupied a variety of high offices, including Sir George Jessel who became an M.P., Solicitor General and the first Jewish Master of the Rolls in 1873.

## **15. Sir Moses Montefiori**

Sir Moses Montefiori (1784-1885) was a Jew who represented the values of the Emancipation and rose to the highest esteem in Britain. Much of his life was to be a tireless fight against discrimination and anti-Semitism, and his willingness to use his money and influence was to be the hallmark of a long, productive and highly charitable life of 101 years.

Sir Moses was a Jew Broker and then an important stockbroker, and was involved in helping found the Alliance Assurance Company with N. M. Rothschild and other figures. He did this as a reaction to insurance companies which discriminated against Jews. Montefiore went on to make a fortune, retiring at the age of forty in 1824, having previously decided in 1822 to settle in the seaside town of Ramsgate, where he was to build a synagogue and a Jewish college.

He then devoted himself to the welfare of fellow Jews, travelling the world, in which capacity he was regarded as a representative of the British Government. He encouraged Jews and Jewish settlement in Palestine, and he made many missions to

intervene on behalf of oppressed Jews in Russia, Morocco, Italy and Romania. His most famous feat was to persuade the Sultan of Damascus to lift the charge of blood libel from the Damascus Jewish community in 1840.

Sir Moses revived the Board of Deputies of the British Jews from 1835. Though it had been founded in 1760 to represent the interests of the Jewish community, it was generally ineffective. He reconstituted it into an effective organisation, which still represents Jewish interests to the wider community today.

He was honoured and feted by both Jewish and Christian society, and achieved an iconic status as a symbol of Jewish emancipation and the cause of freedom. He was made Sheriff of London in 1837 and in 1838 was knighted by Queen Victoria, who held him in the utmost esteem. Sir Moses was created a baronet in 1846 for his humanitarian work. His hundredth birthday was the cause of international celebrations among Jewish communities.

## 16. Jewish Religious Reforms

The liberalising of religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century not only affected the Christian church, but the Jewish denominations as well. Many Jews felt that Judaism could and should be improved. They wanted lengthy and repetitious prayer books and rituals to be reformed and more English rather than Hebrew. They wanted more decorous and decent behaviour in services. There were moves to introduce musical instruments and choirs into synagogues. There was a questioning of the divine authority of the oral law. Some of the changes were motivated by a desire to look more like the Church of England.

The Sephardic community made some reforms. These included the translation of the *Ascamot* into English in 1819, and the introduction of sermons in English rather than Spanish. However, they refused to allow any new congregation within six miles of Bevis Marks and vetoed the building of a new synagogue in the West End, though they did eventually allow one in 1853.

Therefore, in 1840 the Reform movement was established, when the West London Synagogue was established near Marble Arch along with a reformed book of prayer. The break was established by a group of Sephardim with some Ashkenazim.

The Ashkenazim introduced more decorum, shortened the lengthy *Misheberach* prayer and the ending of the sale of ritual honours.

There is evidence of increasing assimilation and inter-marriage. As early as 1858, the Rev. Ewald, one of the Christian missionaries to the Jews, noted that many Jews were familiar with the New Testament (and often owned a copy) and understood the main

Christian doctrines. He also believed that most Jewish families by this point had at least a few converts among their relatives. He additionally related that there were 11 converted Jews who were ordained Ministers of the Church in London alone.

## **17. The Golden Era – the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

By 1880 the majority of London Jews were middle class (perhaps as much as 60%) and Anglo-Jews had risen to influence and achievement in many quarters of English society, and continued to do so, though the achievements of many have now been, sadly, forgotten. The scale of achievement can be enumerated; before 1914, there had been over fifty Jews upon whom knighthoods had been conferred. Between 1837 and 1914, there had been 54 Jews elected to the House of Commons. Before 1901, there had been 21 Jews elected and often re-elected, as provincial mayors.

Jews were represented in many of the professions, and fields of activity, such as in business, banking, economics, insurance, medicine, the law, science and engineering, the military and navy, architecture, education, charity and welfare, learned societies, exploration, arts, music and literature, and even sports and diplomacy. There were even pioneers in conservation, the advent of the motor car and domestic electricity! English Jews were also active in the administration of colonies and empire, and English transmigrants frequently became influential in their new countries.

In the 1880s, the most significant Jewish professions in London were stock exchange brokerage, general merchandising and tailoring. Also of considerable importance were clothiers, boot-makers, diamond-cutting, furniture-brokering and watch-making. Jews also had dominated speciality trades in coconuts, oranges, canes and umbrellas, meerschaum pipes and Valentine cards.

The emancipation had greatly encouraged the large-scale movement of Jews out of their traditional quarter in the City. The upper classes tended to move into the West End and the middle classes favoured destinations like Islington, Maida Vale, Bayswater, Hammersmith, St John's Wood and Hampstead, where they could buy fashionable suburban villas. New branch synagogues were built to serve their needs. This all tended to leave the poorer Jews still in the City and in the immediate East End. This was the end of a social era which was recalled with nostalgia, when the different classes worshipped together and had social contact with each other.

## **18. The Cousinhood**

One important element of Anglo-Jewish society, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and

throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was the existence of what has aptly been named the 'Cousinhood'. This was a small band of rich and powerful Jewish families linked by marriage and business. It included the greatest names of Anglo-Jewry, the Cohens, Goldsmids, Montefiores, Samuels and Rothschilds, with the addition of other families like the Beddingtons, Montagus, Franklins and Sassoons. Together they largely ran Anglo-Jewry and were massively influential.

They were also aware of their duty to give charity and were often extremely generous. The Rothschilds virtually bank-rolled Anglo-Jewry, giving on a grand scale and working on all manner of organising committees. The Rothschild's charities are still active and important today.

The Cousinhood also ensured that the community had an extensive system of internal welfare, through such organizations as the Jewish Board of Guardians. They improved housing and sanitation, for example through the Four Percent Industrial Dwellings Society Limited Housing Company. They also organized Jewish education, for example through the Jews' Free School and they were active in many areas of synagogue life, building and supporting synagogues.

The Cousinhood followed Jewish values of giving. However, they were also working to make sure that an unruly and undisciplined mass of the Jewish poor would not create political problems and damage hard-won British tolerance towards the Jews. Much of their giving was also aimed at reforming and making the poor respectable. Unfortunately, the Cousinhood rejected the foreign paupers, the co-called 'outcast poor,' and suspected they were charity tourists.

They could also be hostile to working class charities, interfering with their work and even taking them over after opposing them. As one historian has observed 'the Cousinhood were capable of passing seamlessly from opposition to support, and of taking over the reins of control'. This happened to two famous working class Jewish charities which served the 'outcast poor' – the Jews' Temporary Shelter, founded by Simon Cohen in 1879 for newly arrived immigrants, and the Jewish Workhouse, founded in 1871 by the redoubtable Solomon A. Green (1830-99) for the aged poor.

The Cousinhood eventually declined in its influence. This was due to the decline in aristocratic influence in general and the mass Eastern European immigration. Also, there were many rich newcomers and 'new men', who gradually took over and often challenged the undemocratic Jewish establishment. However, the traditional families were still playing a role in communal management into the 1950s and many are still active.



## 19. The Great Immigration and the East End, 1881 – 1914

In 1881 the assassination of Alexander II allowed a storm of anti-Semitism in Russia. This released a human tide of 3,000,000 Jews seeking refuge in other countries, including England, that did not relent until the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Some 100,000 – 150,000 Russian and Polish Jews came to London, and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere. Many of the immigrants also came as economic migrants, due to a serious economic decline in Eastern Europe.

Foreign Jews also went to Manchester; between 1880 and 1900, the numbers there went from 5,000 to 25,000. Leeds was also significant, as its population went from 3,000 to 15,000, along with Glasgow, which had a Jewish population of 12,000 by 1914.

From this time, most Jews in England went to live in the large cities and the provinces declined. By 1914, 80% of English Jews lived in London, Manchester and Leeds, (and to a lesser extent, Liverpool, Glasgow and Birmingham), a pattern that is largely good for today. A few new communities were set up in mining and industrial areas and around major immigration ports.

The largest proportion of these refugee Jews went to settle in the East End, where there was an existing and established Jewish community, and it became the largest grouping of Jews in the British Isles. London was the first city to have a large Jewish industrial proletariat, either in the Old or New Worlds, and its Jewish 'ghetto' was directly comparable with those in New York and Chicago.

The East End became a classic 'area of first settlement' characterised by its inner-suburban decay and a population who were ultimately destined to leave to other inner-residential areas or places of 'second settlement', such as Hackney, Dalston and Canonbury. In fact the Jewish East End was transient; it started to decline from as early as World War One, when mass immigration ceased, and it was finished off by the Second World War, which dispersed most of the Jews and destroyed much of the housing stock.

The Jews of the East End came from a wide variety of backgrounds. There were the established, native-born Jews and also the well-established Moroccan Jews and the Dutch Jews (nick-named 'Chootsies'). Other foreign Jews included Polish, Russian, Rumanian and German Jews, and the other new eastern European émigrés, (they were all nicknamed 'Pullawkim'). There was considerable competition between the groups, and resentments. Some were very traditional and religious; others, secular, radical, and even atheistic and revolutionary. Yiddish was spoken by many and was very important to the life of the East End Jewry.

Most of the immigrants first settled in the East End, just east of the City, which already had established Jewish populations. Spitalfields became almost exclusively Jewish, and the local churches and vicars lost their local congregations. In time they spread further eastwards, along the main roads, with Stepney being especially favoured. Eventually Jews would spread as far as Bethnal Green and Poplar, Bromley and Bow after 1900. The Jewish East End was never a fixed area and while it was often called the East End 'Ghetto', it was never a ghetto either.

The new arrivals were largely very poor and were unfamiliar with the ways and language of the host Jewish and Christian community. They were often involved in tailoring, cabinet-making, shoe-making and hawking and trading on the streets and markets. Many were exploited, often by other Jews in 'sweated labour,' which became in time a national scandal. This was characterised by terrible work conditions, insanely long hours of work for periods of time, lay-offs, and exploitation by the master of the workshops. They frequently lived (and worshipped) in crowded and insanitary conditions and paid excessive rents, often to other Jewish landlords in order to live in Jewish areas. The East End was notable above all for its grinding poverty. Most Jewish East Enders wanted to set themselves up in business and to move on and out at the first opportunity. The new arrivals, or 'greeners', were largely law-abiding and were very hard working. Most believed that they could work their way up and had this optimism amidst all the poverty.

The Jewish clothing industry is an area of special note as one of the main Jewish employments. The Jews made this industry their own by the radical subdivision and specialisation of labour and the extensive use of machines. A large number of different workers would all work on different parts of the same garment; no one worker would make and assemble all the parts of one garment, and most were specialists. This tactic enabled affordable garments of a reasonable, if not exceptional quality, to be mass-produced. It also meant that the new immigrant could readily learn a means by which to make his way.

Cabinet- and furniture-making was another trade that became popular with Jews, but much less so than tailoring. There was a growth in the manufacture of cheap furniture in the late 19th century, some based in Bethnal Green and also Shoreditch. The trade bore little resemblance to the traditional craftsmanship of old. Instead masters brought ready-cut timber, which was rapidly knocked into furniture by workers. The workers were often organised into teams of four who essentially raced against each other to assemble identical pieces of furniture. This hardly increased quality and led to the furniture makers leaving their work totally exhausted at the end of the day.

The East End Jews were also very family oriented and loved children. Family life

was helped by the fact that alcohol was not a problem in the Jewish community – there were no Jewish drunks to be seen on the streets. Alcohol abuse and its attendant social problems, was very prevalent at the time among the rest of the poor of the East End. The main Jewish vice of the time was gambling, and petty crime. Booth, the social observer, found that the Jews could also be raucous and quarrelsome, with some dirty habits, but admitted their love of the family and the fact that, overall, they tended to raise the quality of a neighbourhood.

There was in fact considerable antagonism between the new arrivals and the established community, who feared that they would upset the political *status quo* and cause intolerance and anti-Semitism. The established community did not like their poverty, or the fact that they spoke Yiddish in preference to English. The fact that they often wanted to keep some of their old ways of life from the old country, and worship in their own ramshackle and unsanitary synagogues of their own making, the *Cheveras*, with their kinsmen, did not endear them to the Jewish establishment.

The Jewish establishment aimed to anglicise the new immigrants, to ensure that the immigrants learned to speak English and thus were able to adopt 'decent' and 'English' standards and worship in ways acceptable to Anglo-Jewish practice. They also wanted them to avoid social isolation from both the Jewish community and the wider community. In this respect, education became very important and the Jewish community worked hard to ensure that the immigrants received a proper education adapted to their needs.

There were specifically Jewish voluntary schools, like the Jews' Free School, and the community also worked hard to ensure that the local state schools, or Board Schools, established after 1870, were sympathetic to the needs of their Jewish students. Some of these schools had Jewish headmasters and provided Jewish religion classes. There were longer term plans by the Jewish establishment to break up the 'ghetto' and to disperse the new immigrants to the suburbs at as early a stage as possible, as such a large mass of immigrants could only otherwise excite criticism and problems.

Many East End pupils received their Jewish education through private Jewish religious education schools. The *chederim* ran in the evenings, had varying standards of teaching and were often unsanitary. One had an entrance that was often mistaken for a neighbouring toilet! The Jewish establishment regarded them as regressive.

The founding of the Federation of Synagogues by Sir Samuel Montague in 1887 was significant. It was designed to include the religion of the newcomers into the Anglo-Jewish mainstream, and to allow them to be represented in communal bodies, as well as to regulate it. Montague closed the worst synagogues and ensured minimum standards in the buildings. The Federation was formed with 16 constituent members and helped tie many immigrants into national Jewish life who would otherwise have been cut off.

The Jewish establishment also sought to contain the excesses of poverty of the ghetto and provide for its Jewish inhabitants by, for example, providing urgently-needed housing with decent sanitation. This was done for humanitarian and political reasons. The level of intervention by the community is indicated by the fact that between 1869-1882, the Jewish Board of Guardians helped about 8,000 Jews each year, or up to a quarter of the entire London Jewish population. In terms of the housing projects, one company, the East End Dwellings Company, provided housing for no less than 7,000 people in the period up to 1935.

There was also an extensive network of charities that took the edge off some of the most pressing poverty. There were laying-in charities for women in confinement, educational charities such as the Jews' Free School, facilities for orphans at the Jews' Hospital and Orphan Asylum, and poor relief from a wide variety sources, the best known of which was the Jewish Board of Guardians. There were soup kitchens to feed the hungry, medical provisions, homes for orphans. There were recreational charities, with many youth movements and clubs. There was provision for apprenticeships, through the Board of Guardians. There were charities to provide dowries for brides, there were charities for the sick, old people's homes and relief, and finally charities to tend to the needs of the dead and their relatives.

The East End Jewry – despite the poverty - was notable for its vibrant religious, social, cultural and political life. Other than the social and religious life offered around the synagogues, there was much else to divert the East End Jew. There was much theatre; Yiddish theatre was a speciality. The Whitechapel and Bancroft Road Libraries were very widely used; many Jews greatly advanced their education and prospects through its generous provision. There were dancing clubs, and numerous social and political clubs. There were even clubs for women as well.

The Jewish press was very lively in the East End. There were at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a surprising number of Jewish periodicals and papers in English, Yiddish and Hebrew. In 1884, the first ever socialist journal, the *Poilsche Yidl* (The Little Polish Jew) was published at 137 Commercial Street and was designed to help 'greeners' and to inform them politically. This publication was replaced in 1885 by the *Arbeter Frait* (Worker's Friend). There was also a stream of political pamphlets and publications in Yiddish for Jewish workers helping to agitate for social and economic change.

## **20. Key Historical Events in the East End**

The Jewish East End was periodically the focus of events and movements of national importance. The East End was of vital importance as a centre of agitation for social,

economic and political reform. It was of considerable significance in stimulating a real awareness of the need for public health measures and the regulation of industries, and the need for government involvement in such matters.

Health and sanitary issues were the subject of many investigations, by parliament and other public and private agencies. The Lancet sanitary report in 1884 was a famous, if sensationalist, account of conditions, and gave impetus to real change. Early social scientists, like Beatrice Webb, made the East End the subject of intensive social investigation, which made effective reforms and public policy possible.

Webb's investigation into sweated labour in the tailoring industry was notable. It showed that general reforms needed to be applied to the whole industry. It also exploded the stereotype that 'sweating' was due to unscrupulous Jewish middlemen and endless chains of sub-contractors.

The East End was of importance in the growth of organised union labour. There were a number of impressive large-scale strikes in the East End that genuinely united whole cross-sections of workers against employers and helped create a new class consciousness. The tailors' strike was notable in 1889 as it affected 10,000 garment workers in London; also, in 1912, Rocker united 13,000 workers behind an effective West End tailors' strike. Eleanor Marx, along with Will Thorne, are celebrated for their rapid formation of a powerful Gas Workers' Union which won its demands in 1889.

Unfortunately, the East End did not provide a good environment for the sustained organisation of labour. The strikes and growth of unions tended to respond to specific situations and crises, and union organisation then died off after the moment of need had passed.

## **21. The Ripper Case and the Jews**

One infamous episode that is still known across the English-speaking world is the 'Whitechapel murders' of 1888. During 1888, 'Jack the Ripper' murdered at least five women, mostly prostitutes, in frenzied and horrific circumstances in the East End.

The murders triggered powerful prejudices against the Jews of the East End. The Police, and then the gutter press, rapidly assumed the murderer was Jewish. The national press joined in, with *The Times* even linking the 'Ripper' blood libel case of Poland in 1884 to the Whitechapel murders.

Jack the Ripper, for his part, sought to manipulate the press and the public against the Jews, though his motives in doing this are not clear. The Ripper murdered most of his

victims in Jewish areas and locations with specific Jewish links or during Jewish festivals. He even left evidence to implicate the Jewish community. A leather apron was left after one murder to feed media speculations about a supposed Jewish suspect nick-named 'Leather Apron'. After his fourth murder, he went to the Goulston Rents and left a portion of a blood-stained apron from his fourth victim, along with the chalked graffiti message, 'The Juwes are not The men That Will be Blamed for nothing.'

These events led to the Ripper Riots of 1888 when Jews and Jewish properties were attacked in the East End. It was also feared that there might be a full-scale pogrom against the Jews, but fortunately this did not materialise.

The Ripper of course was never found. But what was revealed were the continuing dangers of anti-Semitism, and the grave social crisis in the East End caused by gross poverty, neglect and deprivation. The Ripper case touched the Victorian public conscience and it was accepted that something had to be done. The Jews had in reality been made a lightning rod for all sorts of serious social tensions.

## **22. The Anti-Alien Movement**

The worries of the establishment about the effects of mass Jewish immigration on the political climate were partly well founded. This mass and unchecked immigration led to tensions between the host nation and the Jewish community. People felt overwhelmed by the scale of immigration, and there were fears about the lack of assimilation threatening English ways.

The Jewish communal leaders vigorously discouraged immigration and they encouraged migrants to go to America and elsewhere. They even voluntarily repatriated up to 50,000 of the most abject, would-be immigrants between 1880 and 1914.

There was an up-welling of anti-Semitism in this country which gave rise to an anti-alien movement that operated at a popular level and in Parliament. For example, there were Christian political agitators who wanted to make political capital out of Jewish social problems in the East End. There were also powerful anti-alien groupings in Parliament, and there were crude anti-Semitic rabble-rousers such as the British Brothers League (1900). While Jewish leaders wanted to curb immigration, they had to resist the anti-alien movement because it could be a gateway to an attack on the rest of Anglo-Jewry.

Parliament spent between 1902 and 1905 considering these issues and decided that Jews had not taken English jobs and that it was best to keep out the most abject and poorest Jewish immigrants. Some of the proposals to deal with the problem were extreme, but fortunately they were watered down. All of this was to contribute to the

1905 Aliens Act that restricted immigration.

The bill was also very important as it introduced an appeal system and a recognition of a right of asylum for refugees from religious or political persecution. A further 50,000 immigrants arrived between 1905 and 1914 and the regulations were interpreted leniently, probably because the government was broadly sympathetic to the suffering of the Russian Jews, even if good relations with their Russian ally were paramount. The advent of World War One effectively solved the immigration problem as the flow of immigrants virtually stopped.

### **23. World War One**

The First World War was historically very important for the Anglo-Jewish community. Jews came forward in large numbers to play their part in the conflict and served honourably and with distinction. More than 50,000 Jews served in the British Army (out of a total Jewish population in 1914 of around 275,000) of whom 10,000 were volunteers. There were three battalions of the 'Judeans' and they mainly fought the Turks. An inspection of the great war cemeteries in France show a surprising number of Jewish tombstones scattered among the serried ranks of the fallen for their country, when it is considered how small a proportion the Jews formed of the general population.

In the East End, the general response among East End Jews was equally patriotic. At the start of the war several hundred Jews enlisted at enlisting stations and some 300 old JFS students joined up. An additional number of Jewish rallies in the East End pulled in a further crop of recruits for the army. These constituted a disproportionately large number of Jewish recruits compared to the general population. A separate Jewish regiment, the Judean, was raised and sent out to battle in 1918.

However, this left a proportion of immigrants who were unwilling to enlist and fight. This unwillingness was particularly evident among the Russian Jews. Also about half of the Jews were ineligible to enlist because of their nationality. Many of the Russians had originally fled to this country to evade the evil of Russian Army conscription and were frightened to enlist. Others resisted on religious grounds or the possibility of having to fight other Jews, or were unconcerned.

This led to real prejudice, discrimination and attacks against the community. It was felt that Jews were benefiting financially through the war. Also, any Jews who had German names were mistaken for 'enemy aliens'. In 1914, some Jews had their shops vandalised and looted. After the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, there were even more serious outbreaks of violence against Austrian and German Jewish businesses. In this case the shops were looted to the extent that only the walls remained.

The government acted against the refusers and rounded up and temporarily detained the 600 to 4,000 men concerned. A tiny number were later handed over to the Army for military service. Finally, the Aliens Military Service Bill of July 1917 allowed the deportation of offenders, but, cruelly, without their families. Half of the Russian men returned to Russia. Ten thousand of the remaining men applied to the Special Tribunal to be exempted war service. The situation was never fully resolved.

There was popular anger over the issue against the Jews in the East End. This boiled over into serious rioting in Bethnal Green in September. There was a street battle in Blythe Street and Teesdale Street, involving up to three thousand Jewish and Gentile rioters.

#### **24. Fascism and Anti-Semitism, 1919 - 1945**

After the end of the First World War there was a growth in anti-Semitism for a variety of reasons, in England generally, and in the East End specifically. This was also linked to the general rise of fascism and intolerance across Europe, and the general popularity of racial and Darwinistic evolutionary theories in Europe and England.

Nationally, Jews were increasingly lower middle and middle class and they were moving into non-Jewish neighbourhoods. They were also moving into non-traditional Jewish professions, such as office and shop work, commercial travelling and other service industries. This meant that many people were having sustained social contact with Jews for the first time and dealt with Jews from the basis of any Jewish prejudices and stereotypes that they might have had, and a sense of invasion. This led to distressing, casual, but not universal, low-level discrimination. There was much Jewish stereotyping, specific job discrimination, problems in accessing education, and social discrimination.

More seriously there were rising fascist movements in England, which fed off existing racial tensions, in particular Sir Oswald Mosley and his 'Blackshirts', founded as the British Union of Fascists in 1932. Mosley and others held mass rallies in London and the provinces, which often entailed intimidating and harassing the Jewish community in the manner of Nazi storm-troopers. The British laws on free speech, and public order laws, tended to aid the fascists. The defining moment - and indeed the turning point - came when the Jewish community and anti-fascists forced back a mass march by Oswald Mosley and the Blackshirts - the so-called Battle of Cable Street. On the 4 October 1936, fascists had marched up Dock Street but were turned back at its junction with Cable Street by a gathering of 100,000 Jews and anti-fascists and the cry of 'They shall not pass!'

The fascist movement waned after Cable Street and the War defused support for



fascism in this country, though this did not prevent it attempting to re-established itself immediately after the War. However, this met with firm resistance, not least from returning Jewish servicemen (and particularly the '43 Group') who physically broke up street corner meetings and at last forced the police to curb fascist rallies due to fears of loss of public order.

## 25. Zionism

Zionism was to prove an important force among England's Jews from the 1880's and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The history of the state of Israel, once it was founded, has proved important for the history of the Jews of England, right up to the present. The Zionist movement was popularised and developed by Theodor Herzl of Austria. He saw the anti-Semitism in his native Austria, as well as France, Germany and Russia and concluded that Jews would only be safe if they had their own homeland. He then worked to popularise these ideas among European leaders and he also convened Zionist congresses to further the work.

In England, Zionism was first popularised in the East End in 1887. In 1891, the *Choveve Zion* Association was formed to co-ordinate English efforts. It supported Jewish settlement in Palestine, the promotion of Hebrew and the encouragement of the Jewish national idea.

It was different from Herzlian Zionism, as it did not have such a fervent nationalist vision. A split developed between the two sides when the First Zionist Congress in 1897 proposed 'a home in Palestine secured by public law', for the Jewish people.

*Choveve Zion* fizzled out in 1900 and the followers of Herzl formed the new English Zionist Federation in 1899. Herzl personally sought to build support in England, as he felt the British government would, as a nation of freedom, understand his ideas. Accordingly, he made overtures to the British government to bring forward his plans.

The British government were sympathetic and offered Herzl territory in East Africa in 1903. They turned the offer down, because it was felt that the Zionist dream could only be realised in Palestine. However, it was a defining moment, as a great power had for the first time recognised the Jewish people as an entity and their collective aspirations.

A large grouping of Jews rejected the Palestine-only option and joined the Jewish Territorial Organization that sought to secure a Jewish homeland wherever it might become reasonably available. The British Jewish establishment thought of Herzl's Palestinian plans as impractical, or politically dangerous.

After Herzl's early death in 1904, Chaim Weizmann came to the forefront of Zionist affairs, became President of the British Zionist Federation, and settled in Manchester. There he developed the direction and force of Zionism, in political and practical spheres, that was to prove to be most influential. The Zionist cause was most fervently supported by East End immigrant Jews and the lower middle classes.

In an attempt to help mediate the two sides, the First British lodge of the B'nai B'rith, was set up in 1910. It was largely Zionist and its two leading proposers were Herbert Bentwich of Bedford – an important English Zionist figure – and the *Haham* Moses Gaster. B'nai B'rith also tended to support or promote causes that were neglected by the established communal bodies. This included legally aiding aliens refused entry to this country or defending Jewish interests in the Slaughter of Animals Bill. They tended to challenge the Jewish establishment and clash with official bodies like the Board of Deputies who thought them irresponsible.

During the First World War a decisive event occurred. The British Army took over Palestine, ending four hundred years of Turkish rule. Then in 1917, the later Lord Balfour made his famous 'Balfour Declaration' in favour of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which effectively heralded the birth of the modern state of Israel. At the end of the First World War, the British were given the formal Mandate to administer Palestine by the League of Nations, which was to last until 1948 when they relinquished the Mandate.

Between the wars, Jews from around the world and from Britain continued to migrate (otherwise known as making *aliya*) to Palestine and to advance Jewish settlement there. By 1939 the number of Jews in Palestine had grown to 500,000. During the period of the Mandate, British Jews occupied significant positions in the running of the country and British Zionists were important in the political direction of the Zionist movement.

During the Second World War, Hitler perpetrated the Holocaust in which some 6,000,000 Jews were killed, due to his policy of anti-Semitism and genocide. This wiped out and displaced most of Western, Central and Eastern European Jewry. At the end of the War many of the Jewish Displaced Persons sought to make *aliya* to Palestine and the remaining Jews were in a profound state of shock.

By this time, the Arab nations had decided to resist any further Jewish settlement and the British authorities, under pressure from the Arabs, turned back many would be Jewish immigrants in what were heart-rending scenes. The British found themselves attacked by both sides – the Jews and Arabs – with multiple acts of terrorism. Two Jewish terrorist atrocities against the British, the Bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and the hanging and booby trapping of two British sergeants, by the *Ergun* group, shocked British public opinion and led to an anti-Semitic backlash against English Jews.

The British called for a two-state solution to the situation, which was rejected by the Arabs. Finally despairing of their position in Palestine, the British turned to the United Nations. The U.N. affirmed a two-state solution, but the British were unwilling to enforce it. As they finally pulled out of Palestine in May 1948, David Ben Gurion read out the Declaration of Independence, forming the modern state of Israel, on 14 May, 1948. With this, all-out war ensued with the Arab States, which the new State of Israel won.

The result for Anglo-Jewry was profound and gave Anglo-Jews a new sense of identity. Virtually all of the Anglo-Jews supported the new country of Israel and the support of Israel became central to Anglo-Jewry, along with the memorialisation of the Holocaust.

The almost universal support for Israel reached its height during the Six Day War in 1967. Events since then have eroded this near-universal support among Jews for Israel and in the more recent time Israel has been transformed from heroic status to virtual pariah status in the press and media, as it has been increasingly perceived as an oppressor. Also many Jews found it difficult to make a ready public defence of Israel due to a perceived, pervasive and strong anti-Zionism, which in some cases has been seen to have shifted from legitimate criticism of a State to what is all too often a thinly disguised anti-Semitism.

For all the support of Anglo-Jewry for Israel, there had not been a substantial migration to Israel by British Jews, even if the numbers are not inconsequential. From 1948 to 2000, about 40,000 - 50,000 Jews have made *aliya* to Israel. Most Anglo-Jews seem happy with the proposition that a full Jewish life is possible without living in Israel and that Anglo-Jewry has not been superseded by the establishment of Israel.

## 26. World War II

Before the outbreak of the war, the Jewish community was involved in early resistance to the Nazi threat and indeed some in the community correctly predicted the grave danger presented by Hitler as early as 1933. In 1933, they helped organise the boycott of German goods as Hitler started repressing Jews. However, the Jewish establishment, represented by the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association, would not support the moves and rather backed the government's chosen policy of appeasement.

As Nazi repression increased more and more, Jews fled Germany and sought sanctuary in Great Britain and the States. The British and U.S. governments were restricting entry of refugees, with Britain also preventing Jewish entry to Palestine. However, the community negotiated with the government to let in more Jews than they had planned to, by promising to guarantee their financial support and to help in the selection of the most suitable. By the time of the outbreak of war, around 55,000

refugees had been admitted, many of them after *Kristallnacht*. Interestingly, it was the British government who had opened the floodgates at the eleventh hour, against the wishes of the Jewish community, which felt this would overwhelm its resources.

Many talented German Jews, including Einstein, came to the country, even if many wanted to move on to the United States at the first opportunity. My father knew one notable German leather chemist who fled to England and became important in the Northampton leather industry. He got his money out of Germany by having a brand new chemical assay set made for him - out of solid platinum. He knew that Nazi regulations allowed scientists to take scientific apparatus out of Germany, and even though the officials knew what he was doing, they had to let him go with his apparatus. With this he founded his new business in England.

At the outbreak of hostilities, and in the months that followed, English Jews volunteered or were mobilised with the rest of the population to all areas of the services at air, land and sea and in all the major theatres of conflict across the globe. About 70,000 Jews served in the forces with distinction. Many were mentioned in dispatches and a wide variety of medals were awarded included three Victoria Crosses, the ultimate award for valour.

Some Jews also worked in the Special Services and specialist intelligence services, such as SOE and at Bletchley Park code-breaking centre. Lieutenant Marcus Bloom was one Jewish hero of the SOE. He worked behind enemy lines in France, engaged in helping the Resistance, operating a secret wireless, and conducting sabotage. He was eventually betrayed to the SS, handed over to the Gestapo and shot at the infamous Mauthausen Concentration Camp quarry.

There were about 85 British Jews at Bletchley Park, a significant fact in so far as the Bletchley Park code-breaking centre is generally thought to have changed the course of the war.

Additionally, about 10,000 Jewish refugees, were at first enlisted in Alien Pioneer companies. Many of these went on to serve with distinction, in other combat units, including the Commandos and the Paratroopers. Palestine Jews also served in the forces – in Europe, Greece, Crete and in the Western Desert. Polish Jews also featured in the Army and RAF.

There was also the Jewish Infantry Brigade Group, commanded by Brigadier E.F. Benjamin C.B.E. This group fought in Italy, and the AJEX organisation has recorded that they merited 4 MCs, 7MMs, 2 OBEs, 4 MBEs, 2 American awards, and 72 Mentions in Dispatches.

British Jewish service personnel losses in the war were calculated in the latest AJEX figures in 2006 as 2956 British Jews and 694 Palestinian Jews.

## **The Home Front**

At home, early after the outbreak of war, many of the German refugees were interned as enemy aliens, even though they had fled Hitler. Some were interned in camps on the Isle of Man and in other camps. Some were even deported to Canada and Australia and were treated badly in transit. Eventually, the government saw sense and released most of the internees by 1941.

Many of those fit for active service served in the British forces, though often in the Pioneer Corps. My father, as an early member of REME, at the Ingliss Barracks at Mill Hill in North London, came across large numbers of Jews in the barracks, actively serving their new country. There also appears to have been a policy of adding refugee recruits to Scottish regiments and giving them Scottish names, as their accents would be less likely to give them away as Jews, if captured, among broad Scottish voices.

The great entry of Jewish refugees into this country, and large movements of troops and evacuees, revived many provincial communities, albeit briefly. Some provincial towns saw their Jewish residents swelled into the thousands, and previously empty or closed synagogues were filled to bursting point. For example, in Oxford, the Jewish population was massively increased to about 3,000 by refugees and evacuees, and a home was set up at Linton Road for *'kindertransport'* children. However, virtually all of these new Jewish residents had gone within five years of the end of the war.

A great many Jewish children and adults were evacuated from major towns and cities. Their experiences were mixed. For some, especially children being sent out on their own, they encountered prejudice, anti-Semitism, isolation and sometimes outright exploitation. Many preferred to return to their parents in the midst of the Blitz, than carry on away from home.

For others, there was the delightful discovery of an entirely different life, and often the delights of the country, and kind and sympathetic strangers that would have a life-long impact. Whole schools were often evacuated; the accounts, given by the Jewish Free School boys evacuated to Soham, in East Anglia, are nothing short of bucolic, though their teacher were very careful to cultivate good relations with the locals.

One effect of the movement of Jewish population was that Jews settled temporarily in places that had often never seen Jews before. Within my own area, some twelve Jewish families formed a small community in Brackley, Northamptonshire, with others staying in outlying villages. Presently, there are only three Jewish families, or families of Jewish

origin, in the small town, who moved there recently.

## **27. After World War II**

World War II and its aftermath was a crucial turning point for the Anglo-Jewish community. Jews served whole-heartedly and with distinction, in all arenas of the conflict at home and abroad. The war was the effective conclusion of the old Jewish East End, for decades the major centre of Jewish population. After the war, the former large Jewish working class largely disappeared from urban areas. Today most Jews are relatively affluent, middle class and suburban, living in the main in London and Manchester. Some 72% of all Jews live in London; Manchester is in decline. The provincial communities are now largely, if not exclusively, in decline, with some unlikely to survive.

The war also had another effect – it changed the outlook of British people in general and completed what had started in the First World War, the breaking down of old patterns of thought, social mores and class structures. These proved to be favourable to the Jewish community, as they removed most remaining barriers to Jewish life and indeed work, in this country, but have encouraged assimilation in the long term.

The Holocaust and the subsequent foundation of the modern state of Israel transformed the way British Jews saw themselves, and was for a long period a key uniting factor. Community efforts to support Israel were to some extent a substitute for a religious or traditional Jewish identity. The Six Day War of 1967, as mentioned earlier, was perhaps the high point of this feeling when Anglo-Jewry rallied to the cause. The campaign to support and free Russian Jewry, so they could emigrate to Israel, from the 1960s until the end of the former Soviet Union in 1991, had a similar unifying effect.

However, the overwhelming fact of Anglo-Jewish life since the Second World War has been serious numerical decline, from around 450,000 in 1945 to some 270,000 in 2001, depending on which statistics are used. The Jewish community in England has been the only English-speaking Jewish community to show a serious decline worldwide. It is not clearly understood why this decline has taken place, though almost complete social integration has encouraged assimilation. Many Jewish men are marrying out of the community, leaving behind many Jewish women who would like to marry in, and if not, not to marry at all. Divorce may well have been a factor as anecdotal evidence suggests that families split by divorce may lose contact with the Jewish community, whether, it is because the 'ex' wife or husband continues to attend a particular synagogue, or through perceived communal disapproval, or financial hardship and being unable to afford synagogue membership.

Furthermore, there has been a fragmentation and polarisation of the Jewish community. Relations between some sections of the community have become poor and tensions have become public. This may be due to the fact that Israel is no longer the unifying factor it was. Also, the community may be the victim of powerful social forces that has caused social and political fragmentation internationally since the 1990s. The community has overall become much less observant, and secular, even if synagogue membership has not markedly declined. However, the Orthodox have tended at the same time to become more orthodox.

The synagogues of the United Synagogue, which represent mainstream orthodoxy in England, have tended to move to the religious right. Traditionally, they formed a wide umbrella organisation with which many Jews could identify. They followed a very British form of orthodoxy, which emphasised both Jewish tradition and being British, and combined them together in an unsystematic way. This was ended with the appointment of Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, as Chief Rabbi in 1967, who thought that the way of *minhag Anglia*, ('English custom') was not sustainable and compromised Jewish values, and moved the United Synagogue from being inclusive.

The English Reform and Liberal movements have been successful and increasingly confident in the last 50 years. The Reform movement was aided post-war by an influx of German refugees including the head of the former German Jewry, Leo Baeck. A new movement, the Masorti Movement, was also created by Rabbi Louis Jacobs in 1962-4, when he and his followers broke away from the United Synagogue movement, as it had become less theologically tolerant. The cause of the split was Rabbi Jacobs' questioning of aspects of the traditional idea of the Divine inspiration of the Torah. The movement he created was a modern orthodoxy, similar to the American Conservative Movement. The movement has had its greatest success in north London, but has not spread widely outside the capital.

Unfortunately, the Orthodox and Reform and Liberal sectors of the community have found it almost impossible to find any religious accord. When Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks was appointed in 1990, it was thought that he might be a bridge-builder between the communities. However, it has been made clear that the United Synagogue hierarchy refuses to accept the religious validity of the Reform synagogue and will not participate in any Reform (or Liberal) services, or religious act, though they will co-operate on non-religious communal matters.

The issue of 'who is a Jew?' has also been pushed to the fore in the last decade. The United Synagogue now prides itself on having the most stringent standards of religious conversion in the Jewish world, and undergoing conversion by the United Synagogue is an often lengthy, costly and potentially stressful procedure for individuals

prepared to embrace the highest level of religious commitment. This is in an era when much of the rest of Anglo-Jewry are considering ways of counting more people in than out, as part of national Jewish survival, and many Jews recognise a secular and cultural Jewish identity.

There have also been very public cases of the United Synagogue rejecting conversions made in Israel by otherwise respected Jewish courts of religious law, or of rejecting very long-standing members of the community when a question has arisen as to their Jewish status. The whole issue of proving one's Jewish identity to the satisfaction of the United Synagogue appears to have become more doctrinaire and paper-based, even though, post-Holocaust, many Jews may find it practically difficult to prove their Jewish identity.

Ultra-orthodoxy has also become a force in Anglo-Jewish life, not least as these Jews have managed to grow considerably through having large families. Some of the most Jewish areas in England are now Charedi. The ultra-orthodox communities are more or less closed communities, keeping to themselves, except for the needs of commerce. There is a possibility that the future of Anglo-Jewry will be a Charedi one, as the rest of the community is failing to even reproduce themselves.

The Lubavitch-Chabad is another significant Jewish movement, with its roots in eastern European popular Jewish mysticism. It was formally established in England in 1948 by Rabbi Szemtov, not long after being released from a Siberian Gulag. The Lubavitch is an outward-looking ultra-orthodox group, which has a mission to help Jews return to their roots and increase their observance of Judaism. Their network of Chabad Houses has been effective in encouraging Jewish identity and observance and delivering Jewish education, without insisting that one becomes a Lubavitcher. In Oxford, for example, the work of the Chabad House since 1987 has reached several thousand students and other community members, and has created long-term loyalties with former students as they have moved on into their professional careers.

Many Jews are now essentially secular and their attachments to being Jewish are largely cultural rather religious. Then there is the final fact that many have completely assimilated and left Judaism behind.

There is a discussion about 'lost' Jews who have disappeared from the community. While some have emigrated and there has been population decline, many of the lost Jews are simply thought to have been absorbed into the wider community, through inter-marriage and drift. One frequently comes across individuals who have had a Jewish forebear, often grandparents or even a parent, but the family has lost its sense of being Jewish; being Jewish can become a mere fact of ancestry, unless an event rekindles the sense of connection. Some estimates have claimed there may be up to



some 700,000 people in England who have Jewish ancestry, which is likely to be a conservative estimate of the reality.

## 28. Post War Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism continued in differing guises after the war, though generally it did not involve extreme violence and any extremes were usually short-lived. Anti-Semitism has generally been of two kinds: the ancestral anti-Semitism resident over the centuries in the English population (and which has not generally increased), and a newer anti-Semitism wrapped up with the anti-Zionism and Middle Eastern politics. The latter seems to be of a far more difficult and dangerous variety.

In 1946-8, Jewish terrorism in Palestine associated with the struggle for the formation of Israel, led to a powerful anti-Semitic reaction. The hanging and booby-trapping of two British sergeants in Jerusalem, led to riot and looting in several cities, and much anti-Semitic graffiti. The British government would not officially recognise Israel until 1950, though relations warmed greatly after Suez and up to the high point in 1967 during the Six Day War.

Anti-Semitism continued in the 1950s and 60s. Some of it was to be found in public schools, clubs, businesses and other institutions, as well as in the provision of services. In the 50s, Jews were barred from working in many commercial organisations, such as banks and large multiple stores. The ban from membership of Golf and other sporting clubs was widespread. In 1950s Brighton, Jews could only join the municipal golf club in the town and a major conflict ensued when it was discovered that a local squash club was systematically black-balling Jewish membership. The squash club eventually changed its policy when the matter was taken up by the *Observer* newspaper and the name of the club got out.

Various anti-Semitic groups were involved in desecrations of Jewish property and burnings. Nationalist and racist groups such as the League of Empire Loyalists (1954) continued to be created and to evolve. The National Front and the British National Party (1967) sought to unite all these groups. By 1973 the National Front was the most successful of these groups, with 15,000 members; its electoral candidates in General Elections could in some localities secure nearly 10% of the vote, if no seats.

From 1982 the BNP took pre-eminence over the National Front, which sharply declined to a mere rump. The anti-Semitism of these groups was increasingly diverted by a preoccupation with newer and more 'ethnically visible' immigrants. They have realised that confronting 'Islamofascism' is now where their political pay-dirt is to be found. The BNP has now officially declared, 'Our party no longer denies the Holocaust,

an obvious historical fact' and that it is no longer 'obsessed with the Jewish question'.

Holocaust denial, the claim that the Holocaust never happened, or has been grossly exaggerated, became another feature of post-war anti-Semitism. The formerly respected historian of the Third Reich, David Irving, became a Holocaust denier, and denied the existence of the gas chambers. In the early 1990s he was invited to speak to the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS), a very right-wing grouping of students at Reading University. The visit caused complete uproar among the student body, leading to near unanimous vote for a 'no-platform' for racism and a mass demonstration.

It is of significance that Britain passed a War Crimes Act in 1991 to enable prosecutions of war criminals sheltering in this country. The reality has been that it has been too late to secure effective prosecutions.

The fact of the Holocaust has continued to create a greater climate of sympathy towards Jews, an effect that seems to have grown rather than waned. The recent national institution of an act of Holocaust remembrance is remarkable recent evidence of this and, despite some scepticism in the Jewish community, has proven to be both meaningful and moving.

Perhaps more significantly, there had long been a growing tide of anti-Zionism among the left, partly emanating from Africa and the developing world, from the 1950s onwards. In 1975 these influences, and events in the Middle East, led the United Nations to equate Zionism with racism. This led to Arab, Palestinian and pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian groups finding support for anti-Semitism disguised as anti-Zionism. They were notably joined by opportunist and more extreme left-wing and Socialist groups, especially Socialist student radicals. Jewish students suffered high levels of anti-Semitism on Campus, from 1974 to 1983, and in a number of cases Jewish student groups, such as the Union of Jewish Students, found them selves banned from campus as a result of particularly nasty propaganda, and student union policies ostensibly supporting the Palestinian cause.

Anti-Semitism in recent decades has continued to be linked to the political situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian cause, though an added element has been an increasing general Muslim anti-Semitism which feeds off the politics of the Middle East. When there have been severe tensions in the Middle East, this has tended to result in increased anti-Semitism and attacks in England by Muslims or Muslim sympathisers, and it seems that Middle Eastern politics has been imported into Britain. For example, after the Hebron Massacre in 1982, the house of the Chabad rabbi in Oxford was petrol-bombed, apparently in retaliation by a sympathiser.

The spread of this sort of anti-Semitism has been encouraged by the growth in news media and the web, giving detailed access to events and propagandist news outlets in the Muslim world and the widespread use of imported propaganda videos, which appear to have been influential on young Muslims. There is a current debate as to whether anti-Semitism in this country has increased recently as has been claimed by the Community Security Trust, and the matter has been the subject of a report in Parliament supported by both Jewish and non-Jewish MPs. Many Jews would agree that being Jewish has become less comfortable due to the implied association between being Jewish and the status of Israel and Jews in the Middle East.

The British media, and specifically the BBC, has tended to follow a long-term pro-Arab bias in its reportage. A BBC correspondent noted this fact in a lecture in Oxford in the early 1990s. It seems that the bias is not institutional or universal, but down to the world-view and background of the individual programme makers and there are journalists in the BBC who work with objectivity in Middle-Eastern reporting. The bias of the BBC has been increasingly identified and criticised in recent times, but the Jewish community was still somewhat unhappy to see a BBC reporter weeping, to camera, at the death of Yasser Arafat of the PLO and the report that a kidnapped BBC Journalist has been widely termed a, 'friend of the Palestinian people'.

## **29. Jews and Politics**

In terms of politics, the Jewish community has played a significant role in national and local politics since the war. In terms of political allegiance the community has performed a significant political shift over the last half-century. Originally the Jewish community was largely leftwards leaning, especially those who came from Eastern Europe. This was aided by the fact that socialists were originally pro-Zionist.

However, after the war, and particularly with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, younger socialists, who had not lived through the fascist era and the Holocaust, lost sympathy with Israel and became increasingly pro-Palestinian and actively anti-Zionist. In more recent decades, the community has inclined more to the right and the Jewish involvement in the government and cabinet of Margaret Thatcher was notable. This shift was aided by the increasing wealth of the community and the fact that Conservatives were increasingly supportive of Israel. Also, Margaret Thatcher found the Jewish ethic of hard work, self-help and personal responsibility chimed with her Conservative vision and she could not help but admire the pluck and success of the country of Israel against all the odds.

Richard Savinson, a long-time member and communal figure of the South London community and B'nai B'rith member, has observed these changes and writes of them:

'At that time, the Jewish Community, especially those of Eastern European origin, were mainly left wing. The only Communist Member of Parliament, Phil Piratin, elected in England in 1945, sat for Stepney. There were several prominent Jewish Labour backbenchers – Leo Abse, Barnett Janner, Maurice Edelman, Sidney Silverman and David Weizman... Sidney Silverman sponsored a private members' bill to abolish the death penalty. It passed into law in October 1965 for a trial period of five years and the abolition was made permanent in 1969. Leo Abse introduced a bill to decriminalise homosexuality. This was passed into law in 1967. He was responsible for more private members' legislation than any other M.P.

There were two important Jewish Ministers in the Labour Government. Lewis Silkin, who took through Parliament the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. This was a landmark piece of legislation creating for the first time a comprehensive system of regulation of land use. The other was Emanuel (Manny) Shinwell. He was Minister of Fuel and Power when the coal mines, the gas industry and the electricity industries were nationalised. He later became War Minister. In addition Lord Nathan was a Minister of Civil Aviation.

Harold Laski, a Professor at the London School of Economics, influenced Labour thinking prior to the 1945 election and was Labour Chairman in 1945/6. A confirmed socialist, he was a controversial figure especially due to his strong views and outspokenness.

Although there had been prominent Jews in the Conservative Party, for example Leslie Hore Belisha, a leading Minister in the 1930s, in general ordinary Jews tended to regard the Conservative Party as not for them. The grass roots of that party were, rightly or wrongly, perceived as being in a polite way anti-Semitic. By the time Margaret Thatcher became leader, all this changed. After the 1967 war between Israel and its neighbours and the subsequent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the left wing became pro-Palestinian. This, combined with the increased affluence of the Jewish community, encouraged Jews to join the Conservative Party. This was helped by Thatcher including some prominent Jews in her inner circle. Her constituency, Finchley, had a large Jewish population so she came into contact with many leaders of the Jewish community. Thus, when she came to power, several of her Cabinet were Jewish – Sir Keith Joseph, Leon Brittan, Michael Howard, Sir Malcolm Rivkin and Nigel Lawson.

Sir Keith Joseph was one of the most influential politicians of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He provided the philosophical basis for 'Thatcherism'. David Owen, a political opponent of Joseph, in the fifth Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture

described him as follows: 'A highly strung, deeply sensitive intellectual with the social awareness and concern that is often found in the leaders of the Jewish community'.

Jewish politicians have been less prominent since the beginning of the 1990s, although one of the current leading thinkers of the Conservative Party is Oliver Letwin, who is in many ways like Sir Keith Joseph.

One of the accusations made against Jews is that there is a Jewish conspiracy. The story of Jews in Parliament in the last 60 years illustrates the opposite. There has been no identity of view. You could not get two more opposing views than those of Harold Laski and Keith Joseph.

### **31. The Future of Anglo-Jewry**

Even though the reality is of decline in the community, the Anglo-Jewish community continues to participate visibly and successfully in virtually all sectors of national life. Since the war, Jews have moved through all the professions and have had conspicuous presence in the media, arts, literature, sciences, academia, politics, industry, finance and commerce as well as property development, among many other areas. There has been much 'new' money in the community, exemplified in such figures as Sir Charles Clore, overtaking the traditional families of the 'Cousinhood,' and Jews consistently form ten to fifteen percent of modern 'Rich Lists'.

Jewish involvement in charitable giving is still a major force. An examination of the list of grant-making trusts and charities suggests that at least a third or more are Jewish. The Jewish community also still supports an extensive network of charities supporting the Jewish community, with charities such as Jewish Care being among the most prominent. Organisations, like Nightingale, the Jewish old people's home, are a matter of communal pride. Nightingale is the largest Jewish old-age home in Europe and has exemplary and innovative standards of care widely admired and copied across the world.

The community is now more self-confident in being seen to be Jewish and more outward-looking. Until more recent decades, many Jews felt it to better not to draw attention to their Jewishness. Conspicuous organisations and internationally renowned organisations such as the Oxford Centre for Jewish and Hebrew Studies at Oxford University, founded in 1971, now belie such perceptions. In the same vein, the Oxford University L'Chaim Society, of which I was one of the founders, was one of the most publicity-seeking Jewish organisations of recent years and enjoyed a membership of nearly 2,000 students and community members (many of who were not Jewish), regularly hosting debates with major international figures in partnership with the Oxford Union Society, and

was, for a period, the talk of the town.

What the future may hold is a matter of debate. The decline in numbers of Anglo-Jews threatens to make the community unviable, and there is a real possibility that the community will fail. However, the community seems to be gradually responding by looking more to whom they can count into the community, rather than count out, as well as to retaining existing Jews. Furthermore, the mobility of labour in Europe could well bring more Jews into the country and many Jews are temporarily resident in the country for weeks, months or years and can and do participate in the community.

There are also efforts to give part-Jews, lapsed Jews, or 'lost' Jews a way back into the community and Jewish identity, though for some this will be a secular or cultural identity rather than a religious identity. The Spiro Institute, a Jewish historical and cultural organization, and its successor the Spiro Ark have used the teaching of Jewish history and culture as an entry point for this grouping, among other objectives. It may be that by being a more open community, there will be a future. It is probably premature to say that this is the last chapter of Anglo-Jewish life, even if the future as yet is uncertain.

However, the community can look back with pride at its achievements. The community has overall been a considerable success. It managed to establish itself in this country in a period when there were no equal opportunities or Social Security, and when there was more general prejudice and discrimination. It did it through self-belief, using the education available to it, hard work, self-reliance, all under-pinned with Jewish values. The Jewish community has both successfully and patriotically assimilated to the British way of life and yet made its own distinctive British Jewish identity. The community has distinguished itself in many fields of endeavour and has made important contributions to the life of the nation. It has received hospitality in England and has repaid it with interest to the host nation and it still may be that the predicted demise of the community will turn out to have been greatly exaggerated.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY