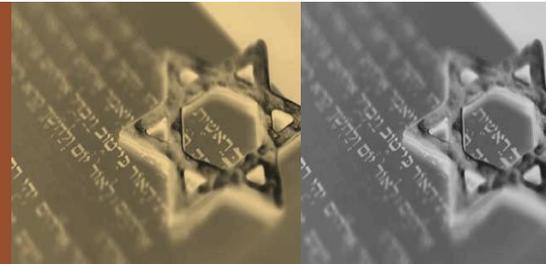


# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:

## COMMUNITY NUMBER NINE AGAIN! THE JEWS OF GREAT BRITAIN



In this chapter we depart from the way that we have presented national communities up till now. Up to this chapter, we have presented a number of contemporary Jewish communities including the community of Great Britain through a series of categories that have aimed to give the student a "handle" on what is happening in each community. In so doing, we have reached into the past to the extent that it has been needed, since it is impossible truly to understand a contemporary community without knowing something about how it got to be what it is today. Nevertheless, deliberately, the accent has always been on the present day community and that has necessarily involved a certain "flattening" of anything in the pre-modern era. We have emphasized the modern at the expense of the historical for good reason. The modern is of the most interest and relevance to the contemporary student of Jewish community life.

However, it should be recognized that this creates a misleading picture of community. Each community grows up slowly and naturally in an organic fashion over long periods of time where transition and change take place against an unspectacular background of some kind of continuity and gradual development. It is this optical illusion that we wish to correct here.

We have decided to illustrate this by taking one of the communities that we have just surveyed, the community of British Jewry and telling its story in an organic, historical way. This can be used to understand both the advantages and the limitations of the approach we have taken up to now and can enable a longer and deeper perspective on the subject of modern Jewish community. We shall indeed arrive at the situation of the contemporary community but we shall do this only after chronicling the build up and the historical development of the community. Thus we shall attempt to sketch briefly, in a few pages, the development of one community, which developed chronologically in an organic fashion, with changes being grafted on to a process of continuous and gradual development. It is hoped that this will provide an additional perspective by which students can assess and appreciate the development of their own communities through a dynamic of continuity and change.

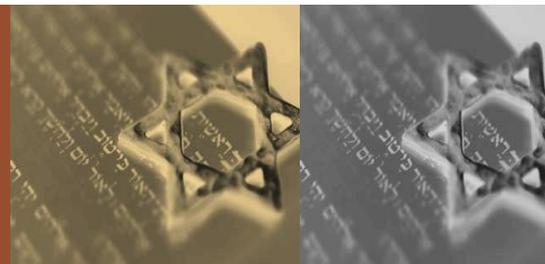
We have chosen the Jews of England or Great Britain (it starts as England and at a certain point develops into Britain) because it is a community which provides precisely this perspective of continuity and change. The contemporary English community is almost 350 years old.



As we shall see, there have been Jews in England in the more distant past, but those previous eras of Jewish settlement have no direct connection with the modern community. The three and a half centuries of the modern Jewish community have been steady and uninterrupted. There have been processes and dynamics which have underscored the entire period. However, at the same time, there have been major turning points in the community story, and a number of major turning points punctuate the story. It is like a sea near a coast where large waves and breakers occasionally punctuate the more stable and unchanging pattern of small waves that mark the sea's behaviour. As such, the mixture of the changing and the unchanging provide an excellent vantage point for the perspective that we want to suggest to the students.



## Prologues to the Community Story



There are one - or even perhaps two - "prologues" which come before the main story of Anglo-Jewry, the story which only starts in the seventeenth century. First of all, there exists the possibility that, as in the case of many other countries in Europe, there was some kind of a small Jewish presence during the Roman period in the early centuries of the Common Era. There are historians who have suggested that this is indeed the case. However, in the absence of clear proof (and so far there is none), this can only be seen as a vague possibility.

The main "prologue", however, is very clear. It takes place in the Middle Ages, where for a period of a little more than two centuries, there is a fair sized Jewish community throughout England. This was a community that starts at a particular time, and leaves at a specific moment, leaving England totally without Jews.

It is interesting to note that the story of this medieval English community is in almost every respect, totally different from the story of the later community. There are many places in Europe where the main story has some kind of a prologue, centuries earlier, and in many of these places, such as Spain for example, there are many parallels between the earlier story and the later story despite the fact there is no direct contact between them. Here, however, the two stories are almost completely opposed to each other and the earlier story had an influence on the later community, only perhaps in this respect: that it served as a historical warning to the later community and made them extra cautious in their community life, and it functioned at times as a kind of shadow over the community.

The earlier story begins in the wake of an invasion of England by a French king from Normandy, William, who conquered England, as every English schoolboy knows, in the year 1066. Having taken over the country with his army, there shortly afterwards followed an influx of people from Normandy, including a number of Jews. This group was followed by others and within a fairly short period, several thousand Jews could be found in England. There is a persistent rumour which may or may not have some historical truth to it, to the effect that William himself invited the Jews to come and join him. Whether or not he did, the reasons for the Jews' presence are very clear. The Jews were valuable. They were an educated and literate group, experienced in trade and banking, urban dwellers who could play a very necessary function in the new Norman administration of the kingdom.

At the centre of the Jewish community were the bankers and the rich merchants. It was through their importance to the country that the community was allowed to come in and settle. It was through the contribution that they made that the community received a charter of rights from William's son, King Henry 1<sup>st</sup> somewhere in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. Never at any time were Rabbis central in the



community although, of course, it was a community that lived totally within the framework of Rabbinic Halacha. This was to be expected: in any community that was tolerated because of the contribution of its richest members, it is almost inevitable that the leaders of the community, those that have the greatest influence and set the social tone of the community, will be those same wealthy men. Nor do we hear of any great institutions of education that characterized the community. It is clear that there were facilities for education but they do not leap off the pages of the history books.

It is perhaps worthwhile mentioning that this community was an outpost of Ashkenazi Jewry based in the German lands and in France, and at this time there were some major institutions of higher Jewish education, Yeshivot, both in France and in Germany. One famous French Jewish scholar, Yom Tov of Joigny made the town of York his home in the last years of his life, but he had made his name in his native France.

With the support of the rulers of the kingdom, who demanded – and received – vast sums of money from the Jews for permission to live and work in the country, the Jews became intimately involved in the economic life of the land. Within a generation or so, they included some of the richest men in the country. Jewish bankers were involved in the financing of huge enterprises, from the building of churches and palaces to the outfitting of armies.

Not surprisingly, increasing wealth brought increasing jealousy. The church, despite the fact that it borrowed money from the Jews, resented and even hated them, and passed on its hostility to the local inhabitants. Acts of violence against the Jews became common. In 1144, the first accusation that the Jews had kidnapped and killed a Christian child in order to use his blood, was leveled against them without any evidence whatsoever to link them to the crime. This was the first case of the infamous "Blood Libel" accusation that would be raised against the Jews in so many different times and places in subsequent years, and cause such terrible suffering. Following this first accusation in the town of Norwich, the accusation, born in England, would spread to dozens of places on the continent of Europe. In England itself there would be four more such accusations in the rest of the 11<sup>th</sup> century alone.

From this time the situation of the Jews of England began to decline and they started down the long road of persecution, humiliation and violence that would ultimately lead to their expulsion in the year 1290. The first large outbreak of violence occurred against the community at the coronation of the famous Crusader king, Richard 1<sup>st</sup>, the Lionheart, in 1189. Many of the Jews of London were murdered and within a few months the violence had spread to the provincial towns where the Jews lived, causing many murderous riots and the complete destruction of some of the smaller communities. In 1190, the violence came to a climax with the murder of the whole Jewish community of York, an important Jewish centre. The Jews there, including the scholarly Yom Tov of Joigny, took their own lives in the tower of the city, into



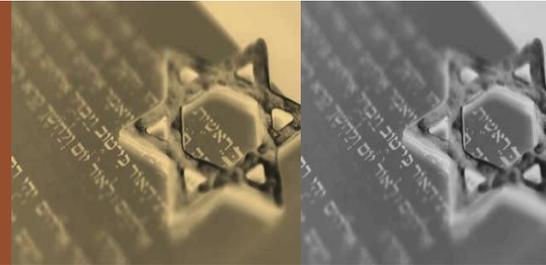
which they had been allowed by the king's representative, trying to save the Jews from death. Those that survived were massacred by the mob the next day.

The Jews remained in England for another century, but their period of prosperity was mostly behind them. That last hundred years is a dreary record of a community desperately trying to survive the greed of the Kings who overtaxed, the fanaticism of the representatives of the Church who embarked, together with their continental counterparts on a systematic programme of dehumanization of the Jews and the hostility of the local populations. Almost all the Jews became impoverished, and predictably, in an age where Jews were on the whole only as desirable to a society as they were valuable, the story came to a tragic end when they were spat out by England in what became the first of the great expulsions of Jews from the Christian states of Europe, in the year 1290. That was the end of the prologue.

And now the curtain rises for the main action, the three hundred and fifty year story of a community still going strong.



## The Community Story: Part One. Origins.



The official beginning of the contemporary Jewish community is dated to the middle of the seventeenth century. Thus for about 350 years there were officially no Jews at all in England. Researchers have shown that here and there we can catch a shadowy glimpse of a few hidden or secret Jews living quietly in some of the intervening years. However, it is clear that although here and there, there might have been a few Jews, there was no real Jewish life as such in this whole period. For that, we indeed need to move to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century at which time England is in a very strange situation which is crucial to our story.

At this time, the monarchy had been toppled and there was no king on the throne of England. In place of the monarchy, the rulers were a revolutionary group of Protestant (non-Catholic) Christians named Puritans. Their leader was Oliver Cromwell, a zealous Christian soldier, who was the de facto ruler of England in the mid-century years after the fall of the monarchy.

It was in these years that a group of secret Marrano Jewish merchants entered the country. These were Jews whose families originated in Spain and who had been forced to convert to Christianity years earlier. Many converted Jews became model Christians but some wished to return to Judaism and with this being forbidden in the countries of Western Europe including England where no Jews were allowed, they entered as Christians and sought to live secretly and unobtrusively as Jews. There had, it seems been some such secret Jews earlier on in the seventeenth century, but they had broken up and no longer appear to have been active in England. However, under Cromwell and the Puritans it was felt that the climate was changing and a feeling of religious toleration was beginning to develop among some groups of the population.

Cromwell and his allies had sympathy for the Jews. They read the Old Testament thoroughly as part of their religious faith and saw the ancient Hebrews as an inspiration. In this climate the secret Jews could afford to reveal themselves a little more and a number of English public figures began to push for the readmission of Jews to England and the recognition of Judaism as a legal religion in England.

Unquestionably one of additional factors that led to this more positive feeling towards the Jews and the desire, or at least the willingness, to admit them was the fact that the merchants were seen as people who could contribute to the wealth of the country. In this climate, the question became public and although it was never fully recognized under Cromwell, the Marrano community of London successfully



petitioned for a piece of land for a Jewish cemetery in 1656 and a kind of unofficial acceptance of Jews was in place from then on.

When the monarchy was restored a few years later and a new king, Charles 2<sup>nd</sup>, came to the throne in 1660, the situation remained positive for the Jews and the small fledgling community even received guarantees of protection and of freedom of religion from the crown. This then was the origin of the modern community. Unlike the previous Ashkenazi community, an offshoot of the Jewish centre in the Germanic lands of Western Europe, the Jews of the new community were Sephardi Jews whose families originated in the lands of Spain and Portugal.

As time went by more and more Jews came in to enjoy the Christian tolerance of England. Many of them were relatively wealthy merchants from the Sephardi community in Amsterdam or the secret communities in Spain and Portugal. They tended to thrive as a merchant class and created for themselves a respected and well accepted community as merchants in companies within England and throughout the British trading empire abroad. In 1701 they opened a new synagogue building in London, the Bevis Marks synagogue, still existing today, a beautiful building that reflected their wealth and their status.

Meanwhile since Jews were now officially allowed to live in England, other Jews, less wealthy and less desirable from the point of view of English society began to enter the country. These were Ashkenazi Jews who came from the communities of Northern Europe and tried to build a life for themselves in England. They were far less wealthy than their predecessors and though they too tended to take to trade, it was trade of a very different kind. Many of these poorer Jews became peddlers traveling around the English countryside and the market towns of inland England, in which towns they tended to settle their families to whom they returned each Shabbat after a week of wandering and peddling.

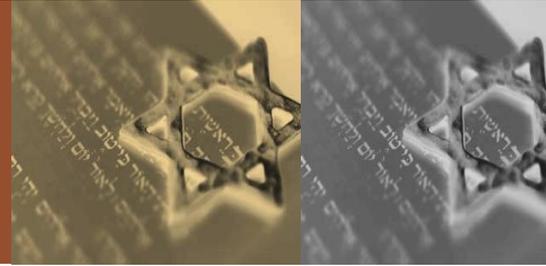
The two very different communities lived side by side with comparatively little interaction between them. Each group had their synagogues and their own community institutions. Throughout the eighteenth century the two communities grew, and this growth in the Jewish population sometimes caused tension between Jews and non-Jews. Partly in order to deal effectively with such tensions, the two communities increased their co-operation in about 1760. Out of this co-operation, the first general leadership institution of the community, the London Committee of Deputies of British Jews was created, and out of this committee the body known as the Board of Deputies of British Jewry emerged, the de facto leadership institution of the whole community until today, emerged.



The name of the organization is significant. These were not "the Jews of England" or of Britain (we have individual Jews or small groups in Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but the first official congregation was in Edinburgh in 1816) – these were British Jews. They saw themselves as Jews unquestionably, but equally unquestionably they saw themselves as British. Indeed the internalization of an English or a British identity has been a feature of the Jewish community from soon after its admission in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. A feeling that Britain had been good to the Jews and a deep identification with - and pride in - the culture of the land has characterized the Jewish community in the deepest way right up till today.



## The Community Story: Part Two. Consolidation.



In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the numbers of the Ashkenazi Jews surpassed their Sephardi co-religionists and leadership of the community as a whole passed increasingly into the hands of the relative newcomers. However this group was no longer solely identified with the poor immigrants of past generations. Quite a few wealthy families were developing among the Ashkenazim. Pride of place went to the Rothschild family who had been relatively well off when they arrived. But enterprising initiatives and hard work had brought a number of other families to the fore as well. The leadership of the community now gravitated increasingly to these large merchant and financial families who often intermarried with each other to create a kind of interlinked community elite.

The main subject on the agenda of the community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the struggle to obtain equal rights – emancipation. The truth is that since the early days of settlement in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Jews had not lived under many restrictions, compared at least with many of the communities on the mainland of the continent. But what few restrictions and limitations that there *were*, were annoying indeed to a community that so identified with the dominant culture and mores of the general population that any restriction on asserting their "Englishness" was seen as humiliating. These were English Jews and they wanted their rights as Englishmen.

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews gradually worked to remove the limitations on their rights as Englishmen. In 1858, the head of the English Rothschilds, Lionel de Rothschild, was finally accepted as the first Jewish Member of Parliament after a number of attempts, although he had been officially elected as early as 1847. It was he who led the struggle for political emancipation for Jews. In 1885, it was Lionel's son, Nathan, who was the first Jew to be elevated to the peerage and not surprisingly he was seen as the leader of Anglo-Jewry. Ultimately, complete equality and emancipation were achieved for the Jewish community in 1890.

Meanwhile the community had been expanding, not only numerically but also in terms of communal structure and power. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there were an estimated 25,000 Jews in Britain. By 1880, there were some 65,000 Jews in the community (out of a total population of about 35,000,000). The great majority of these were Ashkenazi Jews, and the Sephardi element had dwindled to a small, if impressive, minority.



The 19<sup>th</sup> century had seen the creation of some important institutions. In 1870, an act of Parliament created an official body uniting the different Ashkenazi synagogues into the powerful United Synagogue, based on a distinctly British brand of liberal Orthodoxy. A number of years earlier, the rabbi of the largest of the Ashkenazi synagogues had been designated de facto Chief Rabbi of Ashkenazi Jewry. Together, the Chief Rabbinate and the United Synagogue emerged as the dominant force in religious organization of British Jewry and to a large extent continue to do so today. Their "secular" parallel was the Board of Deputies which became the main organizational arm of the community on non-theological matters.

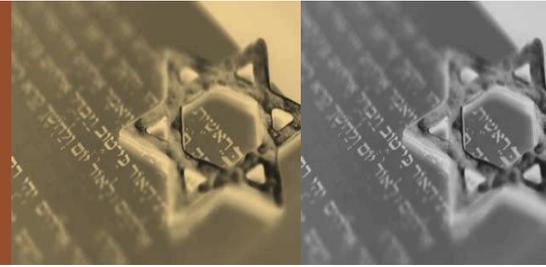
Another important institution which developed in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was the communal newspaper, the Jewish Chronicle which began to be published in 1841 and still goes strong today. A new institute for the training of Orthodox Rabbis, Jews' College, was set up in 1855. The Jewish Board of Guardians, an institution set up to look after the poor and needy within the Jewish community, was also set up in the late 1850's.

Another interesting development from the mid century was the involvement by the Board of Deputies, under its indomitable head, Sir Moses Montefiore, in international Jewish affairs. Up to 1840, the Anglo Jewish community had paralleled the process that had developed in other European communities as it tended to cut itself off from international Jewish affairs. This was seen as necessary in a community intent on proving its loyalty to its "Mother country" of England. To mix in Jewish affairs outside of the country might compromise the claim to be part of the British nation.

But the outrageous Damascus Blood Libel of 1840 caused a marked change in attitude. The Board, seeing itself seemingly as the Jewish reflection of a country, England, which *did* take responsibility for affairs throughout the world, began to assert itself in a parallel role to the British government. It began to take an interest and an active involvement in the affairs of the Jewish community elsewhere, and it did so *as an English institution!* The members of the Board, with Montefiore at their head, increasingly saw that the privileged position that they enjoyed as Jewish leaders of the world's leading nation, required them to take up the cause of less fortunate Jews in different parts of the world. This was the background to Montefiore's remarkable involvement (both as head of the Board and as a private individual) in the affairs of the Jewish community in Eretz Israel.



## The Community Story: Part Three. Expansion.



As in so many other parts of the Jewish world, the early 1880's proved a major turning point in the British community. That was when the great wave of emigrants from Eastern Europe entered Britain, completely transforming the community in the same way that it transformed the American Jewish community and other smaller ones throughout the western world. The riots and pogroms following the assassination of the Russian Tsar, Alexander 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1881, allied to the terrible economic misery and demographic overcrowding of the Jewish community in Eastern Europe, brought millions of Jews to leave Russia and the neighbouring areas and to seek greener pastures in the west. The British Jewish community would increase within just over thirty years, by the outbreak of World War One, from the aforementioned 65,000 to some 300,000, an increase of some 450%! Almost all the newcomers were impoverished Ashkenazi Jews participating in the largest Jewish migration in world history. It was this influx of immigrant Jews that would create the basis for the community as it exists today, building however on the firm foundations that had been established by the Jews of the pre-1880 community, using their leadership and their institutions and, to a large extent, taking their lead regarding the attitude to the new country, its culture and its way of life.

It was not just the absolute numbers of the Jewish immigrants that changed the structure of the community from a demographic point of view. It also affected greatly the distribution of the community in geographic terms. Up to now the overwhelming majority of the community had settled in London and while it is true that the majority of the new immigrants also settled in London, and specifically in the working class immigrant areas of London's "East End", tens of thousands also moved out to other areas of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland – all the countries that comprise Great Britain. The numbers of Jews who had lived in any of these places outside of London had been small before the wave of immigration. Now, however, many of the communities grew considerably, especially the most urbanized areas of the country such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow.

In all of the large towns where Jews now settled, specific Jewish areas in which Jews concentrated, tended to develop. These were typical immigrant areas, intense, Yiddish speaking, with a high percentage of small synagogues, religious schools and other religious institutions. In addition, there was a fledgling socialist movement which saw itself as involved in the working class struggle for a better society.

But there was a counter-tendency developing among the immigrants, as the earlier Jewish community, shocked by the tens (and ultimately hundreds) of thousands of



poor immigrant Jews pouring into the country, tried to exert some influence over the new arrivals. At first, many members of the older community were far from encouraging of the immigration and in some cases showed actual hostility towards the immigrants. This was hardly surprising. To a community that felt it had achieved great success in proving how English it was and how much it belonged to England, the arrival of many tens of thousands of poor Yiddish speaking immigrants, must have been a terrible shock. They felt, quite reasonably from their point of view that they were threatened by the newcomers. Would the British public start a backlash against the foreign immigrants that would act to the detriment of the whole Jewish community, undoing the work of generations? It would have been unreasonable not to fear that such a thing could happen. There were attempts by the "old guard" to stop the tide of Jewish immigrants or at least to divert them to other shores or to repatriate them to Russia.

Such ambivalence towards the new immigrants, however, ultimately died down, especially after the recurrence of pogroms in the early years of the new century brought it home to the Jewish establishment that the immigrants were really fleeing from an atrocious situation back in Russia. From that point on, they gave everything they could to easing the situation of the new immigrants, both in material terms and in terms of easing their passage into British society and culture.

One of the fascinating things about the way of life that developed among the immigrants is that very quickly they entered into what might be called a "two track existence" in the new country. On the one hand, they lived the intensive Jewish life of all the immigrant communities throughout the western world, maintaining many elements of their former life and culture. They worked on the whole in a small number of professions, either as tailors, shoemakers, furriers or makers of furniture, or in small trades. They continued the same Yiddish speaking urban existence that they had brought from the towns and cities of Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, they quickly attempted to earn a place in their new adopted land. This is where they wanted to stay and they would do everything to succeed in the new land. It was important to them that they – and even more significantly their children – would succeed in moving up the social and economic ladder to the point of acceptance in England. It was at this point that the interests and the concerns of the new arrivals met the interests and concerns of those who had preceded them and had already reached a high degree of acceptance, integration and economic success.

The "English Jews" (i.e. those who had been there prior to the latest immigration) took it on themselves to help the new immigrants. They organized a number of aspects of material help, but no less importantly they took upon themselves the task of beginning the long process of acculturation of the immigrants. The communal leaders organized English classes and helped them access the free Jewish schools that had been developed by the community during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely as a response to activities by Christian missionaries, attempting to influence the Jews through non-Jewish schools. Many young immigrant children were attracted to the



Jewish schools. The Jews' Free School, set up in the East End in 1817, could boast about 3,000 pupils (2,000 boys and 1,000 girls) by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and as such was reputedly the largest Jewish school in Europe and maybe even the whole world, at this time. In addition, much effort was put into developing youth clubs and movements for the youth in the immigrant areas.

All of these were different aspects of a multi-pronged project developed by the community leaders in order to try and Anglicise the foreign immigrant community. Anglicisation worked – and in many ways it worked far more rapidly than its initiators must have believed possible at the outset. It might be said that the "project" worked because the leaders pushed it and the followers (the new immigrants) pulled it. They both wanted it equally. The immigrants were very keen to become part of their new land. They were willing to see it as their home and to try and become part of it. As such they had to show that they belonged and thus they were more than happy to grasp the hand of the communal leadership and to use the Anglicising initiatives as a way to get ahead and be accepted.

This is the background to the extremely rapid transformation that occurred within the immigrant working class. Within the course of a generation, they would work themselves up to a fairly prosperous middle class community, abandoning the intense immigrant working class districts to put down their roots in the suburban areas at the outer edges of the commercial centres of the large towns. Symptomatic of this whole process are the developments in the field of religious observance and congregational membership.

We have mentioned the foundation of the United Synagogue as the organizational framework for the Ashkenazi congregations of London (and ultimately the whole country). The form of Judaism to be found in these synagogues was particularly English. It was Orthodox, but in a very loose, liberal, non-judgmental way. In addition, on a social level, it was the equivalent of the church experience of many of the upper and upper-middle class of England. People wore their best clothes and synagogue attendance had some of the atmosphere of a fashion show. Many of the men – certainly the officials of the community – wore top hats and fine suits, such as were otherwise reserved for fine dances and dinner parties.

The immigrant community would not normally have been expected to buy in to the sort of cultural statements that were being made by the patrons of the United Synagogue and sure enough, in 1887, a new initiative attempted to unite the small immigrant synagogues into an alternative organization, the Federation of Synagogues. This organization has lasted till today but fascinatingly, it was the United Synagogue that succeeded in attracting the majority of the immigrants, and certainly their children. It seems that the English nature of the United Synagogue answered a deep need among the immigrants, to remain Orthodox on the one hand, at least nominally, but to do so as would-be Englishmen and women.

A similar lack of enthusiasm was evinced by the immigrants for non-Orthodox forms of Judaism which did not base themselves on Halachic observance. Reform Judaism

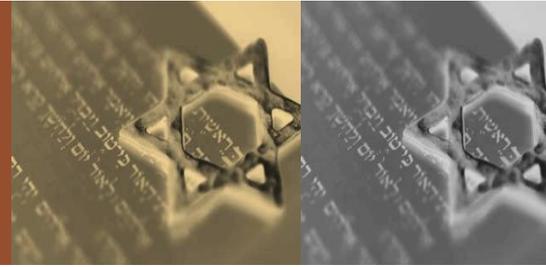


had developed in England already in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century (and had aroused great opposition in so doing) but it had failed to attract many of even the more acculturated English Jews. In addition a new form of even more liberal Judaism, entitled the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, would develop in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, neither of these two forms of non-Orthodox Judaism would attract much of a following among the immigrants and their families. The United Synagogue was identified as the institutional pathway to acceptance as Jews and even Jews who were compromising on halachic observance or even leaving it behind completely but who still had a feeling for "tradition", tended to see the United Synagogue as their place in the community.

The immigrants continued pouring in and despite a small setback with the passing of a law limiting immigration (the Aliens Act) in 1905, accepted by the government after a campaign of considerable strength appealing for such limits, immigration continued strongly down to W.W.1.



## The Community Story: Part Four. Wars and Zionism.



That war saw an important development. British Jews went into the British army in very large numbers, out of all proportion to their part in the population, largely because of the fact that most Jews were in civilian occupations that were not considered essential for the war effort. Some 50,000 Jews took part in the armed forces in the duration of the war, and of these, 1,596 were decorated (including six who got the Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery).

World War One to a large extent was the event that cemented the relationship between the Jewish community as a whole and the English motherland. It is true that in the early period of the war, there was some anti-Jewish agitation that developed out of the general reaction against all things German (the enemy) and by extension, all things foreign and all people with accents. Nevertheless, the Jews came out of the War feeling ever more English. However, there was another, almost incidental outcome of the war that could have taken the community in different directions. This was Zionism.

The Zionist movement had started in England in the mid-1880's and it had been well accepted by many of the immigrant masses. In contrast, the leaders of the official Jewish community and the constituency that they represented, tended to stand against Zionism. They saw Zionism, in the same way that many of them had initially seen the new immigrants, as a threat to their claim to be good loyal English Jews. If one of the claims of Zionism was that the Jewish People had a land of their own in Eretz Israel, would not non-Jewish society start to question the loyalty of Jews to their precious England? Even worse: would not this provide the basis for all sorts of anti-Semites to start demanding the ousting of the "disloyal" English Jews? Great tension thus surrounded the appearance of Zionism in its initial Herzlian manifestation.

At the end of the First World War, the tension became even stronger because of two new developments. The British army entered Palestine in autumn 1917 and began to conquer it from the Ottoman Turks who had ruled there for four centuries, and in the middle of the campaign, the government published the Balfour Declaration, which became seen as the foundation document of the international community promising recognition of a Jewish state. The masses of English Jews tended to get very excited in response to these events but the Anglo Jewish establishment was extremely distressed and indeed tried to prevent the publication of the Declaration, applying a strong lobby to try and change the government decision.



In the end, the fight over Zionism was won by the supporters of the movement, which was centred for much of the next period of time in England. However, despite the appearance in the 1930's of Zionist youth movements in Britain which enthused not inconsiderable numbers of British youth and ultimately directed many of them towards Aliyah to Palestine and Israel, most British Jews who supported the movement, did so precisely as that, as *British Jews*. Thus the specter of disloyalty which so worried the Anglo Jewish establishment, never played out according to their worst fears.

Official leadership of the community passed to supporters of the Zionist Movement in 1938 when a strong campaign brought control of the Board of Deputies into the hands of pro-Zionist circles. In general the late 1920's and 1930's were difficult years for English Jews – and especially Zionists – in one related respect. British policy in Palestine which was seen as working increasingly in favour of the Arabs and against the Jews, created a difficult situation for Britain's Jews. On the one hand they saw themselves as grateful to their motherland of England (the first country that had recognized the rights of the Jews to a homeland of their own). On the one hand they did not like the specific policies of the governments of the times towards the "question of Palestine". The tensions engendered by these events caused considerable friction between different groups within the community.

The interwar period continued to see the familiar tendency towards upwards mobility in social and economic terms. Many Jews were taking themselves into the ranks of the self-employed, and opening up their own businesses. Some were doing extremely well, and using initiative to make commercial breakthroughs which started to produce a small stratum of the very rich among the new immigrants or their children. We also start to see, in these years, the growth of a professional class among the children of the immigrants. Many still went into trade and business, but increasingly we see the younger generation beginning to leave those fields and to go into the liberal professions, something which often necessitated a university education.

Two other developments should be mentioned for this period. We get a renewal of large scale immigration from the early 1930's, something that had dropped away since the Great War. The 60,000 Jewish immigrants of the 1930's came on the whole from Germany and Central Europe rather than from Eastern Europe. They included a large proportion of Jews from the most advanced cities of Europe many of whom were highly educated and had professional qualifications. Educated and ambitious, they would form an important addition to the Jewish community. The immigrants would include some 10,000 children, brought out of Europe without their families in the framework of what was known as the *Kinder transport*.

Another development was the rise of the British Union of Fascists, under their leader Sir Oswald Mosley. In actual fact, objectively, Mosley had very little support within England as a whole, but he was seen as a threat by the Jewish community who mobilized to deal with him under the leadership of the Board of Deputies. The "Stop the Fascists" movement came to a head at the famous East End "Battle of Cable

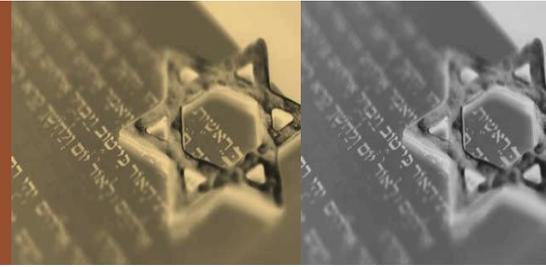


Street", in 1936, an event which passed into the folklore of the community for the next generation as the time when British Jews stopped the Fascists.

The Second World War had a number of effects on the community. Once again many Jews were enlisted in the armed forces and many of these were decorated. The children and many of the women of the East End community were evacuated out of London to rural areas because those areas were dangerous. Indeed most of the old Jewish East End was destroyed in the German blitz on London and in the post-war period far fewer Jews were concentrated in the old areas. The trend towards suburbanization of the Jewish community continued. Some refugees from Europe arrived in the immediate post-war period and these would be joined in the next decade by a number of different groups of Jews from Europe and from the Arab lands, the latter group reinforcing the non Ashkenazi section of the population.



## The Community Story: Part Five. The Holocaust Effect.



The news of the Holocaust of course shocked the Jews of England. The sight of British troops entering the Death Camps was unforgettable. It seems true to say as a generalization that the war, and more specifically the Holocaust, had a terrible dampening effect on the Jewish community of the next generation. The twenty post-war years were, on the whole, quiet years of numerical growth but seemingly little vitality. A few significant events can be mentioned. These *were* years of growth for non-Orthodox Judaism. Finally the two non-Orthodox movements came into their own. They remained always in the minority as the majority stuck to the United Synagogue but they attracted larger numbers among the Jewish population, as the United Synagogue itself itself appeared mired in mediocrity and colourlessness. The Reform movement opened its own rabbinical college, Leo Baeck College, training Rabbis ultimately for both of the liberal movements.

The trend towards the professions continued as did the push towards a university education for the grandchildren and great grandchildren of the immigrants. University education began to appear as a norm for the younger generation of British Jews, and Jews started to appear in a broader and broader range of professions.

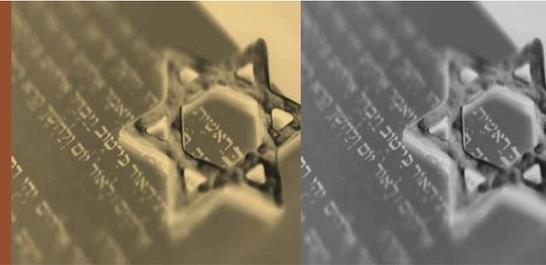
One event that punctured the relative calm of the community was the "Jacobs affair", a two stage scandal over a number of years in which one of the greatest (and only?) Jewish scholars of the Anglo Jewish community, Rabbi Louis Jacobs, was pushed out of the Orthodox movement because of certain questions that he had raised regarding issues of divinity of parts of the Torah. In pushing him out in the early 1960's, (his synagogue redefined itself as an independent synagogue), the Orthodox establishment with the Chief Rabbi at its head, acted in a very atypical way for an Anglo Jewish community which was never known for its interest in theological or doctrinal questions. Ultimately this scandal would pave the way for the emergence of a new religious movement, the Masorti movement, (parallel to American Conservatism), many years later.



The subdued nature of post-war community life led many spectators, and a number of Jewish writers and intellectuals, to issue damning critiques of the community on account of what they perceived as an irreversible conformity, materialism and mediocrity. Unlike the American Jewish community that managed to find a place for its intellectuals and to create what was often a relatively sparkling and stimulating intellectual and cultural discourse, Anglo Jewry failed in this. The writers and artists that the community produced tended to cut themselves off from community life, taking a stance of alienation from the community. A number of highly critical novels by Anglo Jewish writers such as Brian Glanville, Gerda Charles and Frederick Raphael, caused a breath of scandal to enter into the community, but the reaction was usually a self-righteous condemnation of these critics. There was little if any real attempt at self-examination.



## The Community Story: Part Six. The Six Day War and After.



The Six Day war in 1967 changed much of the dynamic: if Anglo Jewry had appeared to be firmly stuck in a rut, the war changed that. Firstly it brought unprecedented excitement to a community which for decades had displayed precious little enthusiasm. The concern for Israel's fate in the lead up to the war also brought back a large number of "lost sons and daughters" among the alienated intellectuals to a relationship with the Jewish community. It is noteworthy that in the first damning critique by a novelist, of the mediocrity and materialism of the community, Brian Glanville's 1958 book "The Bankrupts", Israel had been held up as the polar opposite to the "dead" Anglo Jewry. Israel there was presented as a Jewish society of great vitality and creativity. It seemed now, in the run up to the war, that that particular image struck a very deep chord.

The aftermath of the successful war was even stronger. A general jubilation broke out within the community as a whole. Jews seemed to walk taller, fortified by the "David-and-Goliath" victory of Israel over its enemies. It was as if the shame and humiliation of the Holocaust had been wiped out. An enormous sense of Jewish pride hit the whole community. To be a British Jew in the period following the Six Day War was a very different experience than it had been in previous years.

The following years saw other causes influencing and enthusing the community. Chief among these, together with Zionism, was the Soviet Jewry campaign of the early 1970's, which brought many thousands of Jews together to campaign actively for the release of the Prisoners of Zion, Jews whose only crime was that they wanted to leave Soviet Russia for Israel. Here are there, at the fringes of the community, there were some interesting activities by young Jews who initiated a number of social and political groups, socialist groups, feminist groups, cultural Jewish groups and the like. Most of these were short lived and they never received any sort of support from the community as a whole. The result was usually the decline of these groups after a relatively short period of time and the marginalization of those who had been involved.

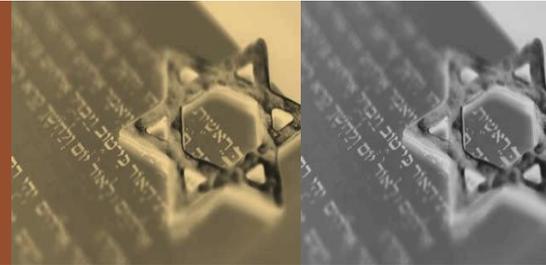
With time Zionism itself became less of a popular cause. Criticisms of Israeli policy within the general British society found strong echoes among many young Jews. The euphoric enthusiasm that had characterized the community in the late 60's tended to give place to a much more reserved attitude. Many Jews now felt that they could not support many of the policies of Israeli governments, and the sense of great pride tended to fade, despite the fact that general Zionist support for Israel was still strong in most parts of the community. This ambivalence towards Israel has remained till today. The Al Aqsa intifada has certainly brought more Jews to vocally support Israel, especially given the general hostility towards Israel (which is often felt to cross



over a line into hostility towards Jews as Jews). However, there remains a deep stratum of discomfort with certain aspects of Israel and its policies, that the attacks on Israeli civilians have not eradicated.



## The Community Story: Towards the Present.



The last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw some very interesting and important developments. We pick out just a few of them here. One thing to notice is the numerical decline of the community. From a height of some 450,000 in the mid-1950's, the number today is nearer 285,000. While there is disagreement over various aspects of these statistics, one thing is clear. The number of people who consider themselves as Jews or who consider being Jewish to be meaningful to them is in steep decline. There is especial concern about the younger generation, many of whom seem quite prepared to drop out of any contact with the community.

These numbers are undoubtedly cause for concern and for deep soul searching. However, together with this, while twenty years ago, there were many who were quite prepared to characterize the community as "on the way to extinction" (in the words of one famous, involved, Jewish intellectual), there are other signs today that give more cause for hope.

Jewish education which had largely wallowed in the same mediocrity that had characterized the community as a whole for many years, has started to revive in recent decades, both in terms of numbers and in terms of quality and vitality. Increasing numbers of parents have decided to send their children to Jewish schools and the day school movement that was never particularly popular (unlike the situation in the United States or Australia for example) has started to undergo a renaissance. A great deal of this has come from within the Orthodox and Haredi sections of the population which have expanded greatly but new streams (Reform Judaism, Zionism) have also entered the world of the day school. Most significant, it can be suggested is the entry of the Reform movement into the world of day school education. Traditional opponents of separation of Jews from the rest of the society, it is most indicative of a change of climate that the movement now supports its own group of Reform Jewish day schools.

Together with that, more universities have begun to offer degrees in one or other aspect of Jewish Studies. If up to now, Jewish academics tended to turn away from involvement in Jewish subjects, now we see something of a revival. A new generation of Anglo Jewish writers has appeared, seemingly more at ease with their Judaism. Adult Jewish education has begun to develop, drawing thousands of eager students to its classes on Judaism, Jewish history and culture. The peak of this activity is the Limmud movement, a movement for Jewish learning and celebration that started in 1980, and has organized an annual conference where people can learn about all aspects of Judaism and Jewish culture, and perhaps more important, can celebrate the idea of being Jewish. These conferences attract thousands annually and have created an atmosphere of vibrancy and enthusiasm that have galvanized many in the once tired and seemingly "depressed" community. More



recently, the movement has started to organize many regional seminars and activities, which, on the whole, have been greeted with much enthusiasm.

Politically too, there have been changes. Jews were once overwhelmingly identified with liberal or socialist politics, but with the rise in wealth and status, a change has become apparent. Jews have increasingly been drawn towards the Conservative party and this was showed most clearly by the fact that in the Thatcher years of the 1980's and early 90's, there were many Jews involved in the governing structures. At one point there were as many as five Jewish ministers in the Thatcher cabinet. Nowadays, Jews tend to vote for all the parties, perhaps suggesting a yet higher degree of assimilation of British social and political norms.

It is true to say that many of the central aspects of Jewish communal life have been revamped in the last two decades. Let us mention two examples here. Welfare work, for example, has been transformed by the amalgamation of a number of smaller welfare agencies to create the huge Jewish Care organization, which began its life as an organization in 1990 and has gone from strength to strength since then. With a professional staff in the thousands, it has improved greatly the quality of welfare work inside a community which has an increasing proportion of elderly and needy people, expanding its agenda from traditional welfare activities to those which focus on the quality of life in the needy parts of the Jewish population.

Similarly, the Joint Israel Appeal, the traditional arm of the Zionist movement which concerned itself almost exclusively with the collection of money to aid Israel, has transformed itself into the United Joint Israel Appeal. It has redefined and widened its role to include the rejuvenation of the British Jewish Community as a whole, providing an institution of policy making and analysis which has contributed greatly to the stimulation of the community in a number of spheres. Direct financial aid and developing the connection between British Jewry and Israel is still the main aim of the U.J.I.A. but the subject of maintaining Jewish continuity in Britain is clearly on its agenda and a great deal of work is being invested in this direction.

All of these phenomena suggest a residual strength that did not appear to exist in the community of the nineteen fifties and early sixties or (following the temporary excitement of the post Six Day war years), the nineteen seventies.

However, a less positive aspect of the last decades has been the increasing polarization of the community. Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy have undergone a renaissance of their own (involving, among other trends, a large movement of *hazara betshuva* –in which non-Orthodox Jews have "returned" to traditional Judaism). While this can be seen as additional examples of the community's increasing vibrancy, and as such must be seen as positive, what causes concern is the increasing animosity that characterizes the relations between the different sections of the community. This is especially noteworthy in a community in which the peculiarly British art of compromise and understatement tended to play a major part in community development. The generosity of spirit that can be seen to have played a major part in the story of the community, seems to have given way to a certain



harshness of spirit in which winning a dispute with your "enemies" inside the community is more important than getting along. It remains to be seen whether this is a mere hiatus or if in fact the old community has sailed forth in a new direction.

