

from: Aubrey Newman (ed), Provincial Jewry in Victorian Britain  
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Bradford

Rabbi M. R. Heilbron

In a paper presented to the J.H.S. in 1948<sup>1</sup> A. R. Rollin described four immigrant families, those of Jacob Behrens, Charles Semon, Jacob Moser and Berthold Reif, and their contribution to the textile industry and to Bradford life. Of these he observed that "Jacob Moser was the only one of the great German Jewish merchants of Bradford who took a direct interest in Jewish affairs". In addition to the work of Rollin a paper by M. Pratt<sup>2</sup> chronicles the achievements of the immigrants in Bradford society. Here I mention only a few areas where Jews were prominent.

The foundation of the Chamber of Commerce was initiated by Jacob Behrens who, in 1882, was knighted for his services to the town and to commerce. Jewish participation in the foundation of the technical college and in the revivication of the Grammar School serve as examples of their activity in the field of education. Jacob Moser was amongst those prominent in the field of health and welfare, contributing handsomely to the Infirmary and numerous other hospitals. In local government two names stand out, those of Charles Semon, the first Jewish mayor of Bradford in 1874 and Jacob Moser, who was Lord Mayor in 1910. The strong music tradition in Bradford, with its close connections with the Halle Orchestra and its subscription concerts owes much, as J. B. Priestley noted, to Jewish support. In a paper about Bradford, textiles should perhaps lie at the top of the list, since this was what impelled Jews to settle in the town. One can only cite the concluding paragraph of Mr. Rollin's paper: "A detailed study of the contribution of the ... Jewish immigrants to the British textile industry ... still awaits the patient efforts of the ... Jewish historian."

M/R, 1984 //

The first Jew for whom record may be found of his arrival in Bradford in modern times is Jacob Behrens,<sup>3</sup> who came to live in the town in 1838 having spent the previous six years in Leeds. From then on there was a steady stream of immigrants, attracted by the growing demand for British textiles. In 1865 there was a sufficiently large community for the then Chief Rabbi to include Bradford in his provincial tour, but only six persons attended a meeting convened to meet him. The Jewish Chronicle notes, with more than a little despair, that there were over 100 children in the community but no facilities for their Jewish education.<sup>4</sup> Four years later the Chief Rabbi had greater success when a further visit resulted in the formation of a committee which raised the sum of 120 guineas.<sup>5</sup>

However the success was limited, for in the following year (1870), when the Jewish population was reported as being between 200 and 300, the only service held was that on Yom Kippur, attended by about 15 persons. No congregation had yet been formed.<sup>6</sup> In 1871 services were held on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and on the latter between 30 and 40 people attended.<sup>7</sup> Part of the reason for the low attendances and the reluctance to form a congregation may have been that many people were members of the communities in Manchester and Leeds.

In 1872 there were moves to establish a "Reform" congregation in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Huddersfield, Leeds and Bradford were considered, the latter being chosen. Subscriptions of over £1,000 were promised<sup>8</sup> and in the following year a request was made to the Grand Rabbi of Stuttgart to assist the congregation in finding a minister. The 28-year-old Rev. Dr. Joseph Strauss, M.A., Ph.D. was appointed. He had been a student in Stuttgart where he obtained his Rabbinic diploma.

Rabbi  
Strauss

On Saturday Eve, October 31st, 1873<sup>9</sup> he was welcomed by a general meeting of the 'Jewish Association', and the next day gave his first sermon. He comments in his memoirs that the older and wealthier Jewish families were indifferent to their religion, a fact attested to by the almost total absence of the early Jewish families from the Bradford community today. Services were held in the Masonic Chapel, Salem Street and later in the Unitarian Chapel, Town Hall Square. In October 1874 Sabbath services were instituted on Friday evenings and Saturdays at 1.30 p.m. The Friday services were soon dropped, but the Saturday services, later retimed to 10.30 a.m., became a permanent feature.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Strauss was active in local as well as Jewish affairs,<sup>11</sup> and it was principally through his exertions that, in 1877, a branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association was formed in which, over the years, he held nearly every office.<sup>12</sup>

The religion school was high on the list of priorities and, in 1877, a syllabus was published which raised much controversy because of the "optional" nature of the Hebrew part of the course. There was clearly great resistance by many parents to their children learning Hebrew.<sup>13</sup> A further priority was the provision of a burial ground, and land was purchased from the corporation on Scholemoor and a chapel was erected. The first interment was on May 19th 1877.<sup>14</sup>

Saturday

A step forward was taken in 1878\* when land was promised to the Association by Charles Semon,<sup>15</sup> a promise fulfilled after his death by his partner Bernard Cohen.<sup>16</sup> Two years later J. A. Unna,

1877 - died  
1877/1877 -  
see register.

the oldest member of the congregation, laid the foundation stone for the synagogue which is still in use. In the foundation stone was placed a document recording the progress of the Jewish congregation in Bradford wherein it is stated that many early residents in the city were attached to Leeds or Manchester and that the Jewish Association (the original name of the congregation, changed by 1886 to the Bradford Congregation of British and Foreign Jews<sup>17</sup>) was formed to advance Judaism, to provide religious teaching for Jewish children and to purchase land for a cemetery and erect a chapel.<sup>18</sup> 1880 was also the year in which the congregation formally allied itself to the West London Synagogue of British Jews.

On March 29th, 1881 the Synagogue was consecrated. The Jewish Chronicle report of the event is headed "Bradford Hebrew Congregation" - a designation now used by the orthodox congregation.<sup>19</sup> A full report of the opening, attended by civic and church dignitaries, appeared in the local paper and a lively correspondence was provoked in the Jewish Chronicle whose correspondent objected to the decorum of the service, the use of a christian choir, and too much English in the service.<sup>20</sup>

Two years later Dr. Strauss insisted that a shochet be engaged<sup>21</sup> and Z.T. Jaffe who was appointed described the poor religious conditions in the city.<sup>22</sup>

"Some men from Leeds"<sup>23</sup> formed an orthodox congregation in 1883 and in the following year the Rev. M. Abrahams was appointed visiting minister. A fuller account of its formation and development will have to be included in a later paper, as will the prominent part played by Bradford Jewry, and in particular the Rev. Dr. Strauss and Jacob Moser in the early history of Zionism in Britain.

## NOTES

1. A. R. Rollin, "The Jewish Contribution to the British Textile Industry", Transactions of the J.H.S.E., XVII, pp. 45-52.
2. M. Pratt, "The influence of Germans in Bradford", Thesis for Margaret McMillan College, available in Bradford Central Library.
3. The Jewish Chronicle (J.C.) Supplement of 1st July 1955 gives the name of Martin Herts as having been the first Jew to come to Bradford in 1820. The writer has been unable as yet to find any documentary proof.
4. J.C., August 11, 1865, p.5.
5. J.C., June 18, 1864, p.16.
6. J.C., October 21, 1870, p.8, and October 28, p.5.
7. J.C., October 6, 1871, p.10.
8. J.C., November 22, 1872, p.467.
9. Autobiography of Rabbi Strauss in O. M. Stroud, The Story of the Stroud Family (Bradford 1974, Privately published) p.25. He gives the date as November 2nd, but there is some misrecollection or misprint since November 1st was a Saturday.
10. J.C., February 6, 1880, p.5, and the Autobiography of Dr. Strauss (op. cit.) p.27.
11. For example he became, in 1876, chaplain of the Masonic Lodge of Harmony.
12. J.C., May 4, 1877, p.6.
13. J.C., December 4, 1877, p.12.
14. Register of Interments at the Jewish Cemetery, Scholemoor, Horton.
15. J.C., March 22, 1878, p.6.
16. Autobiography (op. cit.) p.36.
17. Amended Bye-Laws of the Synagogue 1886.
18. Bradford Observer, April 9, 1880.
19. J.C. Supplement, 1955 quoting the Jewish Year Book 1905-6 states (in one place though not elsewhere) that the orthodox congregation preceded the Reform. There appears to be no foundation for this and the confusion may have arisen because of the heading used in this J.C. report.
20. J.C., April 1, 1881, p.4.
21. J.C., November 30, 1883, p.11.
22. J.H.S.E. Transactions Vol. XXIII 1971, p.30.
23. Autobiography (op. cit.) p.50. There were clearly Bradford residents involved as well.