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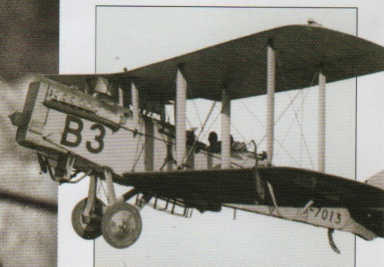
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# *Jewish Bradford:*

## *A city's rich heritage almost forgotten*

The Jewish community has had a major influence on Bradford since immigrants first moved there 200 years ago. **Benjamin Dunn** looks at their story and how you can trace ancestors of the Jewish faith

**W**hen images of Bradford in West Yorkshire are evoked, historic Synagogues and Jewish-owned former textile mills don't immediately spring to mind. Instead, a city struggling with its industrial past and the problematic dilemma of inner city urban segregation is more likely

presented to us. Back in late 2011, the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant to Making Their Mark, a community history project based at the city's Reform Synagogue. Over the next year-and-a-half, research was conducted into Bradford's Jewish past, which produced a series of oral history interviews, a guided heritage trail as well as a booklet that highlighted the

history and achievements of the city's Jewish population.

Since the dawn of the industrial age about 200 years ago, Bradford has been a place which has attracted immigrants. Notably, waves of migrants arrived from Mayo and Sligo in rural Ireland after the potato famine of the mid-1840s. This was a significant immigrant influx which

↔ was seen on a similar scale across many of the North's industrial towns, other places in the UK, and across the world. The sudden arrival of thousands of people became an instant source of labour and manpower for the growing number of industrialists that were involved in textile manufacture.

Much has been said about the Irish migrations, a pattern which came to be repeated a century later, when another set of displaced peoples arrived in Bradford, this time from the Indian Subcontinent.

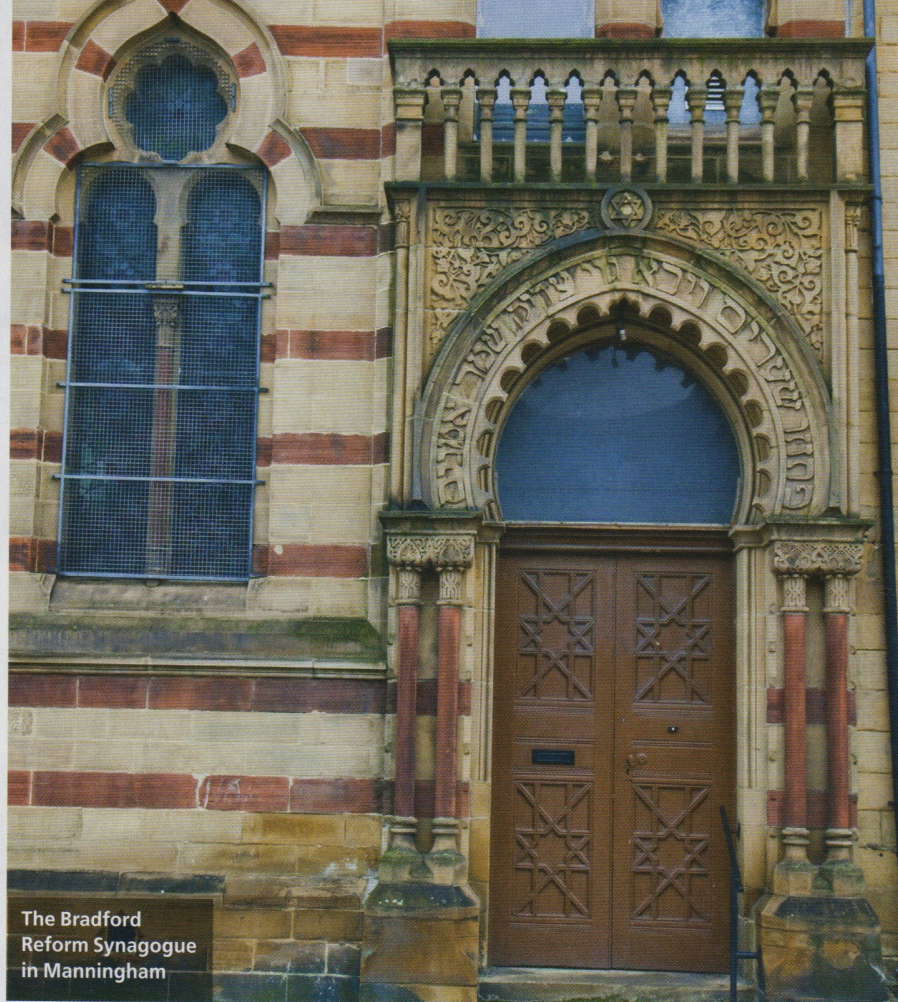
However, long before Bradford became home to Irish and Indian immigrants, it had become the base for a small, but significant number of German Jews.

### The first of the new arrivals

Manningham is a suburb of Bradford where many of these early migrants from South East Asia first settled in the 1950s. It was developed and built in the mid-19th century primarily for the newly-rich, well-to-do people who had benefited from the prospects of woollen and worsted production and export in the city.

Nowadays, the smell of curry dominates the air emanating from open doors in the back streets of the area. If we peel back the layers of time, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the smell of gefilte fish and borscht, foods associated with Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe and Russia may have caught the nose.

From the late 1820s onwards, Jewish businessmen from Germany, Prussia and



The Bradford Reform Synagogue in Manningham

Denmark began to arrive in the city, which was then still a small rural market town. Industrial developments had led to an increase in mills producing textiles and the railway came to town in 1846.

These changes drew textile merchants such as Leo Schuster, thought to be the first German Jewish merchant to set up business

in the town, as far back as 1829. He would later convert to Unitarianism, which was something many assimilating German Jews of the time would do.

Soon to follow were other merchants such as Jacob Behrens, who came to Bradford in 1838 via Manchester and Jacob Unna who arrived in 1844. Behrens' company is still in

## The Making Their Mark project

The Making Their Mark Project website ([bradfordjewish.org.uk](http://bradfordjewish.org.uk)) covers a range of areas which relate to Bradford's Jewish history. These include articles which look into the significant buildings and places around the city with a strong Jewish connection. These sites are featured in a heritage trail which the organisation has put together.

Another crucial topic covered in depth is the people of Jewish Bradford. There are biographies about the men and women who contributed to the success and prosperity of the city. The Lord Mayor Jacob Moser and his wife Florence were philanthropists, who gave much to Bradford in their lifetimes.

An arts section examines those from Bradford's Jewish community who left the city and received accolades and success and, in some cases, fame and fortune by carving careers in art, literature, stage and screen for themselves. William Rothenstein – who painted our picture on page 23 which is owned by Bradford Art Galleries and Museums – and fellow artist brother Albert Rutherford both grew up in Manningham, where



The Making Their Mark Project's website [bradfordjewish.org.uk](http://bradfordjewish.org.uk) was founded in 2011

Bradford's last Synagogue still continues to welcome the remnants of the Jewish community. A friend and contemporary of theirs was the poet and author Humbert Wolfe. Another artist was Ernest Leopold Sichel. The magician David Berglas came from a family who fled Nazi Germany, and he ended up in Bradford after the Second World War. The actors George Layton and Nikolas Simmonds were also both Jewish Bradfordians, the former's family coming from Czechoslovakia before the outbreak of the war, with their original name being Lowy. More recently, the poet Bruce Barnes, whose father was in a mainly German speaking,

Jewish commando regiment during the war, made Bradford his home. Elsewhere on the website, the people who were not so well known get a mention, in the 'Ordinary Folk' section. Drawn from information available in the cemetery register, this looks into the everyday people of the age such as the Bromberg's, a tailoring family who suffered a series of tragic infant mortalities due to the poor health conditions of the age.

existence today, and manufactures luxury bed linen.

By the 1860s, Bradford had a significant number of German Jewish citizens, in amongst a greater influx of Germans who'd made the city their home due to industrial expansion and global export opportunities. It may best be summarised as 'Not all Jews were Germans and not all Germans were Jews'. Many other nationalities came to the town, but the easiest way for people at the time to describe many of the foreigners was as Germans, who made up the most

significant number of the European settlers there by far. Though many of them wanted to assimilate into

the commercial life of the then booming town, it was claimed by the national Jewish press at the time that this was not as easily achievable as they had hoped. The *Jewish Chronicle* of August 11 1865 stated: "They do not want to pass for Jews, although every child in Bradford knows them to be Jews".

### Taking up civic office

At this time, Bradford had its first foreign-born and Jewish mayor. Charles Semon was another successful textile exporter who had come to the town in the boom years of the 1840s. With his significant wealth, Semon devoted major amounts of money to charitable causes in the town.

After Semon, Bradford had three more Jewish Lord Mayors up into the 1980s. These included Jacob Moser, who was Lord Mayor during the Coronation year of 1910 when King George V ascended the throne. Moser also gave generously to Bradford, which by now had become a city.

His wife Florence worked hard for women who struggled to juggle childcare with earning a living. She set up a pioneering nursery initiative called The Nest and also established the City Guild of Help, a form of organised help for the poor and distressed, a system which was adopted in many other places on the Bradford model.

Jacob Moser has two streets named in his honour, one in Bradford and the other in Tel Aviv, Israel, such were his links with laying the foundations of the State of Israel through the early Zionist Movement in the early 20th century that he was honoured there. Sadly, the Mosers were never able to have children of their own, which may explain why they could be so generous towards the poor and needy of the town they chose to live in.

Although Jews had been living in Bradford since the 1830s, it took them the best part of half a century before they would officially form themselves into a community.

The first Rabbi, Dr Joseph Strauss, arrived in 1873 from Hamburg via London. The community at the time was not fiercely religious and was more focused on making money than holding fast to rituals and ceremony. However, under the guidance of Rabbi Strauss, momentum and enthusiasm finally began to gather pace.

Several years later, in 1881, a synagogue was built. Unusually for the time, this was a Reform Synagogue, the strand of Judaism which the

majority of German merchants and their families most closely affiliated themselves with. Usually the Reform Community arrives after the Orthodox.

In Bradford, though, this pattern was turned on its head. By the 1880s, political problems in Eastern Europe had caused tens of thousands of Ashkenazi Jews to flee pogroms and persecutions. A number of these refugees found their way to Bradford.

Settling roughly in the same area, though closer to the city centre than the established community, these new arrivals were mostly tailors and tradesmen.

Little was known about them before the onset of the Making Their Mark project (see panel on page 24), but looking through cemetery interment records which were discovered in the Bradford office of the West

Lord Mayor Jacob Moser's wife Florence set up a pioneering nursery initiative in Bradford



## Tracing Jewish roots and lives

### Census records

These will give details of who may have lived in a household at the time of the census and the occupation of the father, and often oldest children, and country of origin, which in many cases with Ashkenazi (German, Russian and Eastern European) Jewish genealogy simply states Russia or Poland. Countries such as Lithuania, Latvia and parts of Poland and Austria-Hungary were in the late 19th and early 20th centuries part of Russia, or frequently may have changed hands between warring empires.

### Headstones

**Jewishgen.org** includes a burial registry with more than two million names and other identifying information. Also, **cemeteryscribes.com** has a good index of headstone inscriptions from UK Jewish cemeteries.

### Synagogue records

Each synagogue keeps a records of its members, dates of weddings and of deaths. The Jewish burial societies keep details of where graves are located. If a synagogue closes, these records are usually taken over by a nearby Synagogue, which most closely resembles the religious outlook of the closing Synagogue.

### Guide books

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, **jgsgb.org.uk** has published a range of books which cover further research on tracing Jewish ancestors from various countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Germany and Austria. It has also published the book *A Guide To Jewish Genealogy in the United Kingdom*.

### Jewish newspapers

The *Jewish Chronicle* (**thejc.com**) the national newspaper of the Jewish community, has an online archive section of the newspaper going as far back as 1841. In the North, the *Jewish Telegraph*, although not yet digitised, also has an archive of their newspaper, which was founded in 1950. However, it does feature a 'Roots' section, which is now also available online at **jewishtelegraph.com/roots.html** where appeals for information on family history queries can be placed.



A tram makes its way down Manningham Lane in Bradford in the early 1900s

Yorkshire Archives Service, small glimpses into their lives could be gleaned. The 99-name cemetery register is now available as a free download from the Making Their Mark website which is found at [bradfordjewish.org.uk/other-publications](http://bradfordjewish.org.uk/other-publications). A synagogue was built in 1906, which is now being used as a Muslim primary school.

Jewish immigrants from Nazi-occupied Germany began to arrive in the city in 1935. The Reform Synagogue's current President, Rudi Leavor arrived with his parents and younger sister in 1938.

His sister Winnie, would go on to marry a language lecturer, Gerald Fleming, born Gerhardt Flehinger. He, too, arrived in Bradford as a refugee in 1935, aged 14.

He would later write a definitive book on the Holocaust, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, finding his nemesis in discredited historian and holocaust denier, David Irving.

Among other Jewish refugees coming to Bradford in this period were the 24 boys who were brought there as part of the Kindertransport Programme.

They would live in a purpose-bought hostel in Manningham, which became the subject of a TV documentary in 1989, 50 years on. This is now available for viewing on YouTube at [bit.ly/18BOcGn](http://bit.ly/18BOcGn). Albert Waxman, last president of the Bradford

Hebrew Congregation (which closed last November after 140 years), was one of those boys, and he organised the reunion.

After the war, the achievements of the Bradford Jewish community seemed to have reached their peak in the 1950s. The *Jewish Chronicle* of 1 July 1955 published a special feature on the community, *Bradford Supplement*, which highlighted various crowning points of this small, but very significant populace.

After this, however, as more and more young people went to university, and entered the professions, the population saw a decline. The textile trade also saw a decline, which made it less attractive for the descendants of those who had played their part in building it up to follow in their footsteps.

Gradually people left the area, some going to London, where they could become high achievers, others moving up the road to nearby Leeds, with its comparatively larger Jewish community. Others still went to America and Israel. There were also those who stayed behind in Bradford, but married out of the religion and culture of Judaism.

Only now in this age of information discovery, with ready access to family history archives, are people able to begin to discover their seemingly forgotten about Jewish roots, delving further beyond than just a mere inherited whisper. ■

## USEFUL SOURCES

### USEFUL WEBSITES

➔ **The Bradford Jewish Project, Making Their Mark**  
[bradfordjewish.org.uk](http://bradfordjewish.org.uk)  
 Covers a wide range of history about the Jewish community in Bradford.

➔ **Jewish Gen**  
[jewishgen.org/jgff](http://jewishgen.org/jgff)  
 The JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF) is a database of ancestral towns and surnames currently being researched by Jewish genealogists worldwide.

➔ **Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain**  
[jsgsb.org.uk](http://jsgsb.org.uk)  
 Encourages the research into, and sharing of, information about Jewish genealogy.

➔ **JewFAQ**  
[jewfaq.org/ml/genealogy.htm](http://jewfaq.org/ml/genealogy.htm)  
 Includes recommendations and tips for Jewish genealogical research.

### USEFUL BOOKS

➔ **The Bradford Jewish Heritage Trail**  
 Nigel Grizzard and Benjamin Dunn, 2013.  
 Download from [bradfordjewish.org.uk](http://bradfordjewish.org.uk).

➔ **Jewish Ancestors Series: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in the United Kingdom**  
 Rosemary Wenzel, The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, revised 2011.

➔ **Finding Our Fathers: A Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy**  
 Genealogical Publishing Company, Dan Rottenberg & Malcolm H Stern, 2009.

➔ **Jewish Society in Victorian England**  
 Israel Finestein, Vallentine Mitchell & Co Ltd, 1993.