

Jewish Historical Studies

Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England

Bradford's Jewish history: A reconsideration, part one
Grace Idle^{1,*}

How to cite: Idle, G. 'Bradford's Jewish history: A reconsideration, part one.' *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2017, 49(1): 8, pp. 144-161.
<https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2017v49.048>.

Published: 26 March 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright:

© 2017, The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2017v49.048>.

Open Access:

Jewish Historical Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

*Correspondence: grace_idle@live.co.uk

¹ Holocaust Educational Trust

Bradford's Jewish history: A reconsideration, part one

GRACE IDLE

The Jewish presence in Bradford may no longer be felt, but it can be seen everywhere. From the former wool exchange, with Stars of David in the windows, to the sculpture of the dramatist and philosopher Frederick von Schiller above a row of shops which was once the meeting place for Germans in the city known as the Schiller-Verein, and the mezuzah that can be found outside the Carlton Hotel, a remnant of the refugee hostel that it was during the Second World War. The signs of the city's "broken history" and its Jewish heritage are everywhere but they are often overlooked.¹ Indeed, the community has greatly dwindled in size; as of 2011, it is estimated that only 299 Jews remain in Bradford.² This figure continues to decrease as the population grows older and the younger generation moves away from the city.

As a part of Anglo-Jewish history, Bradford is an important city to consider for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a tendency among scholars of Anglo-Jewish history to focus solely on larger centres of Jewish life, namely London and Manchester. There have been efforts in recent years to look at small-town Jewish communities, such as Israel Finestein's study of Jews in Hull during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³ In America too there has been a move towards looking at Jews in rural communities – for example, Lee Shai Weissbach's book *Jewish Life in Small Town America*.⁴ This study should form a wider part of the increase in analysis of small town Jewish communities.

This essay will show how easily the Bradford Jews assimilated into

1 Tamar Yellin, "Kafka in Bronteland", in *Kafka in Bronteland* (London: Toby Press, 2006), 13.

2 Helen Pidd, "Bradford Synagogue saved by City's Muslims", *The Guardian*, 20 December 2013.

3 Israel Finestein, "The Jews in Hull, between 1766 and 1880", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (hereafter, *Transactions*) 35 (1996–8), 31–91.

4 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

English society and how their relationship with Judaism altered over the years. They could be seen as a part of wider trend in the United Kingdom, whereby individuals have shifted away from organized religion over the years, as it is no longer regarded as important, or no longer forms a part of their lives. This “broken history” extends beyond places in the city and goes into the homes of individuals. The relics of their Jewish past exist everywhere, from a Hebrew prayerbook to “an unblest *mezuzah*”, and the relationship between an individual towards such objects has changed rapidly from generation to generation.⁵ Indeed, many modern-day Jews view such items as “nothing but junk” and the Bradford Jews are no different in this respect.⁶ Their attitude and relationship with their religion has changed drastically over the years.

The Jews first came to Bradford from Germany in the 1800s, drawn to the city because of its burgeoning wool trade. They played an important part in establishing the city's reputation as the worsted capital of the world, so much so that this area of Bradford has come to be known as “Little Germany”. Jacob Behrens, whose business is still open today, is a prime example of this. They were also involved in community endeavours: for example, Jacob Moser gave a great deal of time and money to the Zionist movement. He was exceptional in that he was the only German Jew from Bradford who was directly involved in a Jewish cause. This group of German Jews were middle class, well educated, and heavily influenced by the Enlightenment which had swept through their country. As a result, they acculturated quickly to the English way of life, although many still felt a close affinity with their German heritage, as they attended the aforementioned club, the Schiller-Verein. They were detached from Judaism and reluctantly established a Reform congregation in 1873. An Orthodox community soon followed in 1886. Focus will be given to both congregations throughout this article.

During the First World War, anti-German sentiment arose and the Bradford Jews became assimilated further into mainstream society, for example by Anglicizing their German surnames. It was also around this time that the children of immigrants began to move away from Bradford and to distance themselves from Judaism. Many established careers in the arts, such as the artist William Rothenstein and the writer Humbert Wolfe.

5 Yellin, “Kafka in Bronteland”, 13.

6 Ibid.

The outbreak of the Second World War also saw a return of antagonism towards Germans and many were interned in camps in Britain. Bradford became home to twenty-four refugee boys who came from Germany via the Kindertransport and lived in a hostel in the city. Many remain in Bradford today and some became active in the Jewish community.

From the immediate postwar years to the present the relationship between the Bradford Jews and their religion has altered. Many of those who attended the Orthodox synagogue have noted a change in their attitude towards Judaism and some have questioned their relationship with the religion. It is also more common now to find individuals raised in the Jewish faith, or of Jewish heritage, who no longer identify with the religion at all. The Orthodox community closed in 2013 and the Reform synagogue has struggled with membership and attendance too. However, the Muslim community have donated money and helped with fundraising, in order to ensure that they are able to remain open. The Jewish community in Bradford has a unique history and this article will show how they and their relationship with Judaism has changed over the years.

*Laying the foundations:
the Jews in Bradford during the Victorian era*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there were 13,264 people living in Bradford. The majority were born and bred there or, if not, in the county of West Yorkshire.⁷ The Industrial Revolution, however, led to a population boom as Bradford became the world leader of the wool industry, so much so that the writer and Bradfordian J. B. Priestley commented that “there is nothing that can be spun and woven that does not come to Bradford.”⁸ Gary Firth notes that the city was able to achieve this because of several “prerequisites”, namely “improved transport facilities, iron manufacturing, retail and marketing improvements, positive entrepreneurial attitudes and appropriate natural resources.”⁹

Furthermore, Aubrey Newman has suggested that this industrial development and the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars brought about closer ties between Britain and Germany, as the latter became the main

7 C. Richardson, *A Geography of Bradford* (Bradford: University of Bradford Press, 1976), 91.

8 J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Heinemann, 1934), 122.

9 Gary Firth, “The Bradford Trade in the Nineteenth Century”, in *Victorian Bradford*, ed. D. G. Wright and J. A. Jowitt (Bradford: City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, 1972), 7.

purchaser of worsted products.¹⁰ Bradford's growing wool trade and the opportunities it could offer attracted many German Jews as they felt they could either set up or expand their own businesses within the city.¹¹

In Germany changes were under way for the Jews. Enlightenment ideals were spreading through the country and Jews were able to enjoy greater social mobility, enabling them to become more secular in their ideals and practices.¹² Todd Endelman has remarked that these German Jews had access to "a secular education, prior experience in large-scale commerce, access to capital, and a broader cultural outlook."¹³ Rabbi Heilbron, a former minister for the Reform community, has noted too that they came "from a background of a Germany where [they] were very much part of the educated group" and consequently "brought with them this culture to Bradford."¹⁴

In 1881, Jews were recorded for the first time on the census as being a presence in the city and made up 0.03% of the total population.¹⁵ Priestley creates the impression that the Jews were integral to the city and that their presence was never questioned. He notes that "they were so much a part of the place when I was a boy that it never occurred to me to ask why they were there."¹⁶ He goes on to comment that although Bradford "was determinedly Yorkshire and provincial . . . some of its suburbs reached as far as 'Frankfurt and Leipzig", such was the presence of Germans in the city.¹⁷

The first German Jew to establish a business is believed to be Leo Schuster. He came to Bradford from Frankfurt in 1836 and his wealth rose quickly.¹⁸ Schuster, and the others that soon followed him, such as Jacob Unna, Charles Semon and Moritz Rothenstein, quickly gained a reputation as being the best in the business and excellent employers. These

10 Aubrey Newman, "German Jews in Britain: A Prologue", in *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*, ed. Werner E. Mosse (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 32.

11 Firth, "Bradford Trade", 12.

12 Newman, "German Jews in Britain", 32.

13 Todd M. Endelman, "German-Jewish Settlement in Victorian England", in Mosse, *Second Chance*, 38.

14 Rabbi M. R. Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford* (Bradford: Bradford Metropolitan District Community Relations Council, 1974), 2.

15 Tony Jowitt, "The Pattern of Religion in Victorian Bradford", in Wright and Jowitt, *Victorian Bradford*, 48.

16 Priestley, *English Journey*, 124.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Alan Hall, *The Story of Bradford* (Stroud: History Press, 2013), 66.

“merchant princes” lacked the technical expertise required in the wool industry, but they had great business acumen and “allied their powers as salesmen to the prowess of their Yorkshire colleagues as craftsmen” in order successfully to “capture the markets of the world.”¹⁹

Two such individuals relevant to this are Jacob Behrens and Jacob Moser, arguably the greatest contributors to the wool industry and to the Bradford community. It was typical of the German Jewish migrant in the nineteenth century to take “an active and often leading part in the civic life of the community” and give “generously of their time and money in building up” their new hometown.²⁰ They made “varied cultural contributions” to the community through, for example, developing educational institutions and taking up political office.²¹ Such work was as important as their business endeavours in the wool industry.

Moser was born in 1839 in Schleswig and came to Bradford in 1863. He made his fortune in the wool industry and initially worked for established firms in the trade, but he soon went on to co-found the firm Moser, Edelstein & Co.²² His interests extended beyond textiles: he served as Lord Mayor from 1910 to 1911 and gave about £30,000 to local charities in the Bradford area.²³

Furthermore, Moser “was the only one of the great German Jewish merchants of Bradford who took a direct interest in Jewish affairs”, principally Zionism.²⁴ Surprisingly little has been written about this, perhaps because he enjoyed such a large amount of business and political success in Bradford. Walter Rothschild noted in *The Star*, the newsletter for Bradford Reform Synagogue, that “Tel Aviv and many other projects in Israel owed a great deal” to him.²⁵ He continued: “there is apparently a photograph in the University archives in Jerusalem, and a street is named after him in Tel Aviv.” The question therefore arises as to how a Bradford Jew came to be so

19 “Spice of Adventure”, *Yorkshire Observer* [n.d.], quoted in Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford*, 1.

20 A. R. Rollin, “The Jewish Contribution to the British Textile Industry”, *Transactions* 17 (1951–2), 46.

21 Colin Holmes, “Immigrants and Refugees in Britain”, in Mosse, *Second Chance*, 24.

22 C. C. Aronsfeld, “German Jews in Nineteenth Century Bradford”, Moccatta Bound Pamphlets, University College London Special Collections.

23 Hall, *Story of Bradford*, 68.

24 Rollin, “Jewish Contribution”, 49.

25 Walter Rothschild, “The Unknown Famous Lord Mayor”, *The Star*, September 1982, WYB547, Bradford Reform Synagogue Papers, West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford (hereafter WYA).

respected in Zionist circles. A. R. Rollin suggested that Moser came into contact with a Dr Umanski from Leeds who was heavily involved in Zionist causes. Under his direction, Moser began to conduct his own Zionist work and made visits to Palestine.²⁶ He came to the attention of Chaim Weizmann and the pair corresponded regularly, primarily discussing the work of the Zionists in Palestine. In one letter, dated 4 February 1920, Weizmann comments on his pleasure in learning that Moser plans to visit the country again, noting that he has “more than any Zionist living well-deserved to have another look on the land in its present state.” Weizmann goes on to say that most of his time in Palestine is spent “in the tiresome state of watching and waiting for events to move” and that he and Theodor Herzl intend to return to England in April to “attend the final settlement” regarding “the details of the mandate.”²⁷ This is obviously a source of pain for Moser too, who states that “I wish I were somewhat younger in order to take a more active part . . . in Palestinian matters.”²⁸ At the time of writing Moser would have been eighty years old so the fact that he was still committed to furthering the Zionist cause is remarkable. Being in contact with a prominent Zionist demonstrates his level of involvement and how trusted he was. Although not overtly religious, he was committed to working towards the creation of the Jewish state.

Success in business meant that Moser had a considerable amount of money that he could contribute to the cause. He was particularly concerned with education and was instrumental in the establishment of the Herzliya Gymnasium in Jaffa, giving 80,000 francs towards its creation, and was heavily involved in the operations and further funding of the school throughout his life.²⁹ In a letter to *The Times* in September 1918 he wrote that it “offered educational advantages that compare favourably with those of any great City” and had attracted “a teaching staff that has done much to raise the moral and educational standard in the Holy Land.”³⁰ Weizmann also communicated with Moser about this, informing him of the efforts that were being made to set up a university so that students could remain in Palestine once they had finished their secondary education.³¹ Moser's

26 Rollin, “Jewish Contribution”, 46.

27 Chaim Weizmann, letter to Jacob Moser, 4 Feb. 1920, 33D91/16/15/1, Jacob Moser Documents, WYA.

28 Jacob Moser, letter to Chaim Weizmann, 8 Feb. 1920, 33D91/16/15/2, *ibid.*.

29 Rothschild, “Unknown Famous Lord Mayor”.

30 Jacob Moser, letter to the editor, *The Times*, signed “another Zionist”, 27 Sept. 1918, 33D91/16/11/2, Jacob Moser Documents, WYA.

31 Weizmann, letter to Moser, 4 Feb. 1920, 33D91/16/15/1, *ibid.*

school was integral in ensuring that young Jews had a place to learn “the Hebrew language as their mother tongue” and, most importantly, it gave them “a home in Palestine.”³²

Moser’s work for the Zionist cause was recognized across the globe. A letter from Isaac Carmel, the head of the Zionist Organization of America, on the occasion of Moser’s eightieth birthday in December 1919 congratulates him on this as well as his work in Palestine. Carmel remarks that “when I think of England I must think of our great and noble Jew Jacob Moser, whose work is inspiring us to work so hard.”³³ He adds that he hopes Moser lives “to see our people safely established on the soils of our fathers.”³⁴ Sadly, this was not to be the case, as Moser died two years later in 1922. His contributions to Zionism, civic affairs in Bradford, and of course to the wool industry make him a truly remarkable figure in the history of Bradford.

Behrens is more typical of the German Jews of Bradford during this period, described by one scholar as “the pioneer and principal of all these immigrant merchants.”³⁵ He was born in Bad Pyrmont, in 1806, the son of Nathan Behrens, who owned a successful fabric purchase and distribution company. Behrens learnt the trade by working for his father and developed skills that enabled him to establish his own successful business.³⁶ He was sent to Leeds regularly by his father to visit the factories where fabric was being purchased and, according to various accounts, he became dissatisfied with “the Yorkshire way of finishing and packing goods”, coming to the conclusion that it would be advantageous to expand the company.³⁷ In March 1834, he did just that by building a site which also manufactured textiles and exported them abroad.³⁸ By 1838, Behrens had moved his business to Bradford and many scholars have heralded this move as the moment in which the wool industry truly took off in the city. Rollin claims that “it can be regarded as” bringing “the town to its present position” as the leading worsted manufacturer.³⁹ The business developed

32 Moser, letter to *The Times*, 27 Sept. 1918.

33 Isaac Carmel, letter to Jacob Moser, 30 December 1919, 33D91/16/11/25, Jacob Moser Documents, WYA.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Rollin, “Jewish Contribution”, 45.

36 Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 84.

37 Aronsfeld, “German Jews in Nineteenth Century Bradford”.

38 Williams, *Making of Manchester Jewry*, 84.

39 Rollin, “Jewish Contribution”, 47.

quickly and by 1840, it is estimated, Behrens's business brought in £300,000 a year. By 1889, the year Behrens died, the company was earning £40 million annually, making it one of the most successful in Bradford.⁴⁰

Behrens's prominence in Bradford business circles meant that he was able to wield great power. Indeed, he was one of the founding members of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce, in 1851. The Chamber "functioned as an arbitrator in dispute; it petitioned for improved internal communication services; it worked for clearer codification of commercial law and acted as an important intermediary for government and manufacturer."⁴¹ Behrens took a leading role in the activities of the Chamber for the remainder of his life and was chairman of the Tariff Committee. A foreword to his unpublished memoir describes his tenacity in pushing issues forward. The author writes that he "might urge the Chamber to protest to the Post Office against delays in the delivery of letters or against excessive postage rates to foreign countries."⁴² Many scholars have also noted that Behrens was highly regarded in London, so much so that the Foreign Office and Board of Trade frequently met him to ask for his expertise on issues relating to commerce that were affecting Britain.⁴³

It was through his work with the Chamber of Commerce that Behrens was able to become engaged with civic issues in Bradford. A passionate advocate for education, he was instrumental in the establishment of a sub-committee that sought to create a formal educational institution for the training of the next generation of Bradford merchants and business leaders. This came to fruition in 1879 in the form of Bradford Technical College, which is still open today.⁴⁴ He was also involved with the "transformation" of Bradford Grammar School from a small private school to the renowned institution that it became and remains to this day.⁴⁵

Moser and Behrens, and many others, all contributed to the growth of Bradford's industry, as well as its civic life. One key aspect that needs to be examined, however, is the role that Judaism played in the lives of these individuals and the rest of the Bradford Jewish community as a

40 Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford*, 2.

41 Firth, "Bradford Trade in the Nineteenth Century", 18.

42 "The Memoirs of Sir Jacob Behrens", foreword, <http://behrens.co.uk/media/Memoirs>, accessed 30 July 2015.

43 Ibid.

44 Firth, "Bradford Trade in the Nineteenth Century", 20.

45 Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford*, 2.

whole during this period. This has been assessed to some extent through Moser's involvement with Zionism.

By and large, many of the German Jewish merchants were non-observant, and some held great disdain for religion as a whole because it was too rooted in tradition and not in keeping with Enlightenment ideals. Lloyd Gartner has noted that because of this attitude they "did not form a sub community or occupy an immigrant quarter" within the city but were in fact "estranged from the Jewish community" at large.⁴⁶ Behrens, for example, was reluctant to join a synagogue and practise Judaism.⁴⁷ This was in sharp contrast to his family, particularly his brothers, who on moving to Manchester to work at another site of their father's business, immediately became a part of the existing Jewish community.⁴⁸ The Bradford Jews appear to have been more closely aligned with their German heritage. They met other Germans in the Schiller-Verein, "one of the best-known clubs in Bradford", such was its reputation in the city as the meeting place of Bradford's most successful businessmen.⁴⁹ It was a place where they could talk freely in their native language, read German newspapers, and have food and drink from their homeland.⁵⁰ Apart from its popularity, the Schiller-Verein allowed the German Jews to maintain some sort of attachment to their place of origin.

The Enlightenment had a huge impact on Jewry, so much so that Endelman has noted that the German Jews were no longer "segregated socially and culturally from the surrounding society" and were able to take on "Gentile patterns of thought and behaviours", enabling them to "abandon . . . religious customs."⁵¹ They felt that Judaism was a barrier to assimilation and in Bradford they were able quickly to absorb themselves into mainstream society, shaking off any remaining Jewish habits that would distinguish them from their fellow townspeople.

Such behaviour drew the attention of the wider Jewish community. In the *Allgemeine Zeitung de Israelites* (sic as cited in the *Jewish Chronicle* of 1870), one disgruntled journalist wrote that the Bradford Jews "have no congregation, no synagogue, give no religious instructions to their

46 Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870–1914* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1960), 33.

47 Aronsfeld, "German Jews in Nineteenth Century Bradford".

48 Williams, *Making of Manchester Jewry*, 84.

49 Priestley, *English Journey*, 124.

50 Endelman, "German-Jewish Settlement", 40.

51 *Ibid.*, 44.

children, do not have a burial ground” and “in general . . . do not wish to pass as Jews.”⁵² They were such a cause for concern that in the 1860s the Leeds community intervened and attempted to help them form their own congregation. However, this was no avail, largely, one suspects, because of the sheer reluctance of these individuals to embrace anything Jewish.⁵³

Anne J. Kershen has remarked that Bradford Jews “took [their] religion step by step”, which was certainly the case.⁵⁴ There seem to be three definitive steps that were taken. The first occurred on 1 April 1873 when Charles Semon and Charles Calman, both businessmen in the wool industry, met to discuss the possibility of forming a congregation. The meeting resulted in the establishment of the Jewish Association of Bradford, with the intention of “upholding and advancing the cause of Judaism and providing for the religious teaching of the Jewish children.”⁵⁵ This was a significant move for a community that was so detached from Judaism. According to Bradford Orthodox community, Semon had previously spoken with Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler and promised “that he would use his influence to the end that the spiritual leader and congregational worship should be Orthodox.”⁵⁶ It is unclear what led to the decision to establish a Reform congregation over an Orthodox one in the end, but it seems that there had been talk of setting up a Reform community for some time before this meeting. Indeed, *The Jewish Chronicle* reported in November 1872 that steps were being taken to try to establish one in West Yorkshire, preferably in Leeds, Huddersfield or Bradford. One could speculate that Bradford was chosen because it was full of liberal-minded Jews who would be unreceptive to Orthodox Judaism. In this respect the Bradford Jews were unique: it was a rare occurrence for a Reform congregation to be established before an Orthodox one.⁵⁷

The second step in establishing the Jewish community was to find a rabbi to lead the congregation. For this they looked to their homeland, which Newman has noted was typical of German Jewry. They settled

52 Article in *Allgemeine Zeitung de Israelites*, cited in *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 Oct. 1870, quoted in Anne J. Kershen and Jonathan A. Romain, *Tradition and Change: A History of Reform Judaism in Britain 1840–1995* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995), 72.

53 Endelman, “German-Jewish Settlement”, 46.

54 Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 75.

55 *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 March 1881, quoted in *ibid.*, 73.

56 “A Short History of the Bradford Congregation”, in Bradford Hebrew Congregation, “50th Anniversary Celebration Brochure 1906–1956”.

57 Sharman Kadish, *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland: An Architectural and Social History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 119.

on Joseph Strauss who had served as the assistant to the Royal Grand Rabbi of Württemberg. He was known for being well educated and wrote extensively; his *Religion and Morals* (1876) reached five editions.⁵⁸ In his later years his knowledge of Judaism, particularly of the Hebrew language, meant that he was able to take the position of Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Studies at Yorkshire College (now Leeds University).⁵⁹

Strauss gained a reputation among Anglo-Jewry for having radical ideas, in many respects making him ideally suited to the Bradford community. He was keen to develop a strong relationship with the surrounding Christian majority and chose a Christian choir to sing in the consecration ceremony for the Reform Synagogue, and frequently led the services in English.⁶⁰ Given that most of the Jews who attended his services barely knew any Hebrew it is clear why this was necessary and, again, it is telling of the attitude of Bradford Jews towards Judaism. As is typical up to the late twentieth century, the “prayer books are in both Hebrew and English”. Heilbron writes that this is because “the language of . . . daily speech is English” and “many feel, especially in the Reform Movement, that we should also speak to God in English”, showing that the traditions of Strauss’s time persisted even into the late twentieth century.⁶¹ Many scholars regard Strauss’s attitude to Judaism as refreshing and in the long run it worked to his advantage, since over his fifty-year career he came to be regarded as the “elder statesman of Reform”.⁶²

Strauss’s interpretation of Judaism, though, was not radical enough for the Jews of Bradford. This can be ascertained through the problems he encountered with the community, namely a persistent lack of interest in Judaism as a whole. Strauss initially led a Sabbath service on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, but the Friday service was soon dropped because few people came.⁶³ Humbert Wolfe noted that Strauss was not given the respect that a rabbi typically received, so much so that he was “treated as being on a lower social grade than that of his rich parishioners” and they excluded him from their “regular social circle”.⁶⁴ The fact that the Bradford Jews acted in this way is indicative of their

58 Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 78.

59 Aronsfeld, “German Jews in Nineteenth Century Bradford”.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford*, 11–13.

62 Kershen and Romain, *Tradition and Change*, 79.

63 *Ibid.*, 75.

64 Humbert Wolfe, *Now a Stranger* (London: Cassell and Co., 1933), 120.

disdain towards Judaism and its traditions. Strauss was not regarded as being the ultimate authority that he once would have been and instead was treated as a representative of the old, arcane practices of Judaism, which held little value in the lives of the Bradford Jews.

The third and final step in creating a Reform congregation in Bradford was the establishment of the synagogue on Bowland Street, the consecration of which occurred on 29 March 1881. The Constitution of the synagogue states that it was “established as a congregation of persons professing the Jewish religion”, would “provide for the teaching of Judaism”, and “uphold and advance the cause of Reform Judaism.”⁶⁵ Interestingly, it was only the second Reform synagogue to be built in Britain.⁶⁶

The architecture and style of the Bradford Reform Synagogue is unique, much like its congregation. Like many Reform synagogues, the internal layout is somewhat different from the traditional synagogue. The Ark and the *bimah* were both moved from their usual locations to the front, with pews facing them. Sharman Kadish has suggested that this shift was indicative of “the theological downgrading of Jerusalem as a focus for Jewish prayer” in Reform Judaism.⁶⁷ Bradford was one of the first synagogues in the country to institute the move. Scholars have commented on the style of the Ark, with Heilbron remarking that “it is rather ornate and reflects an Oriental influence.”⁶⁸ Kadish has been somewhat more critical, stating that it “owes more to the Taj Mahal and Brighton Pavilion than to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem”, a statement which gives some indication of its bold design.⁶⁹ Either way, it is unique and differs greatly from the traditional style found in other synagogues.

Typically, women sit in a gallery above the main hall of the synagogue where the men sit. This was an integral part of traditional Judaism but the Reform synagogue went against this convention and instead allowed women to sit on one side while men sat on the other. Kadish has been quick to point out that this was not because the Bradford Jews were overtly progressive or “egalitarian”: rather, it was more practical in terms of

65 “Constitution of the Bradford Synagogue”, WYB547, Bradford Reform Synagogue Papers, WYA.

66 Sharman Kadish, ‘The Jewish Built Heritage in the United Kingdom and Ireland: Report on a Survey, 1997–2000’, *European Judaism*, 34, no. 2 (Autumn 2001): 23.

67 Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, 121.

68 Heilbron, *Jews and Judaism in Bradford*, 9.

69 Sharman Kadish, “Constructing Identity: Anglo-Jewry and Synagogue Architecture”, *Architectural History*, 45 (2002): 398.

space.⁷⁰ The Bradford synagogue also features an organ and a gallery for a choir, both of which are forbidden by Orthodox Judaism.

The interior of the Synagogue, much like the outside, is decorated in an Islamic style, featuring the Star of David prominently throughout. Indeed, Wolfe has described the ceiling as a “blue heaven painted with stars.”⁷¹ It is a spacious, rectangular hall and contains many historical artefacts, such as paintings from the Bezalel School of Art which were given to Moser, after he donated money to the institution.

The exterior of the Synagogue is the most interesting aspect. Many scholars have argued that in order to avoid drawing attention to their Jewish heritage, several communities, particularly the provincial ones, would choose a rather plain and inconspicuous exterior for their synagogue, to avoid persecution and also to enable easier assimilation into the British way of doing things. Kadish has suggested that the “level of acculturation and assimilation achieved by a community” is apparent in the style of a synagogue and notes too that choice of architecture is generally a reflection of the Jewish community’s perception of “their sense of belonging”.⁷² If this is the case then it seems that the Reform Jews of Bradford were well integrated into society and did not feel the need to hide their Jewish heritage whatsoever. Although they did not embrace Judaism wholeheartedly, they were comfortable to choose an unabashedly Middle Eastern style; the question arises, however, as to how they landed on such a bold design.

As there were no Jewish architects at this time in Britain, Jewish communities were forced to employ Gentiles working in the trade. Edward Jamilly has noted that the Jews were “exceptional in having to rely on men of other faiths to interpret [their] ancient ceremonies and provide them with fitting surroundings.”⁷³ In this case, Thomas and Francis Healey were employed as the architects for the Reform Synagogue. They were known to “specialise in ecclesiastical work” and built many churches across West Yorkshire.⁷⁴ The Reform Synagogue is the only one of their designs built in a “distinctive . . . eclectic Islamic revival style.”⁷⁵ It features

70 Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, 126.

71 Wolfe, *Now a Stranger*, 118.

72 Kadish, “Constructing Identity”, 387–9.

73 Edward Jamilly, “Anglo-Jewish Architects and Architecture in the 18th and 19th Centuries”, *Transactions*, 18 (1953–5): 127.

74 Derek Linstrum, *West Yorkshire Architects and Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1978), 377–8.

75 Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, 119.

“cusped and lobed arches inspired by Moorish Spain”, as well as “Mamluk *ablaq* stripes”, typical in Egyptian buildings, in alternating shades of white and sienna.⁷⁶ It also features domed archways and an inscription in Hebrew above the entryway, as can be seen in the illustration. Oriental style had grown in popularity across Europe and is seen to be a reflection of Jewish Emancipation that had occurred across the Continent.⁷⁷ Others have suggested that this style was “the Eastern relative of Gothic”, a style which the Jews were reluctant to embrace because of its close connections with Christianity.⁷⁸



1 Bradford Reform Synagogue. *Photograph Grace Idle*

The Bradford Jews were so well assimilated into society that they had no need to worry about the possible implications of choosing a design that was different from traditional European styles. They were free to highlight their Jewish heritage and, unlike many provincial communities at the time, felt secure among their Christian neighbours, unafraid that such a design would be a cause for concern. On this issue, Carole Hershelle-Krinsky noted that “Islamic styling showed that some Jews felt secure enough to proclaim their difference from the Christians by using Moorish forms outside”, enabling them comfortably to highlight their

76 Kadish, “Constructing Identity”, 398.

77 Jamilly, “Anglo-Jewish Architects”, 129.

78 Carole Hershelle-Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 82.

cultural differences.⁷⁹ Kadish backs up this claim by stating that such a style “made a confident statement of the Jews’ . . . eastern origins.”⁸⁰ While they may have been happy to show their heritage in a building, they were not willing to participate fully in the rituals of Judaism, as can be seen in their reluctance to attend services at the Synagogue.

An Orthodox community soon followed the Reform one. Two separate strands of the Orthodox developed but they soon amalgamated into the Bradford Hebrew Congregation. Much the same as the Reform community, the Orthodox Jews had no established place of worship for some time. They were based at 22 Houghton Place for twenty years and then settled into a purpose-built synagogue in Spring Gardens. The Orthodox congregation was eventually dissolved, the implications of which will be discussed in the next *Transactions*. In his address for the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the synagogue, in 1956, the Reverend J. Israelstam remarked that the Orthodox congregation was founded as an alternative to the growth of Reform. It was said that their founders’ “strong . . . loyalty to Judaism” led them “to resist . . . the attraction of the ways of worship favoured by fashionable folk” and their “ways [of] diverging from ancestral tradition”, meaning of course the Reform community.⁸¹ Their attitude to religion was wildly different from their Orthodox counterparts.

The Orthodox synagogue was also built in an Oriental style and was designed by the architect of Hull Synagogue, B. S. Jacobs.⁸² Built in “coursed sandstone and ashlar”, it features a domed “octagonal tower and a lead covered dome over the entrance”. However, it is not as imposing as the Reform Synagogue.⁸³ Its interior differed somewhat from the traditional synagogue layout: for example, the *almemar* was moved from the centre of the synagogue to the Ark, in order to allow more seating to be put in to accommodate the growing congregation.⁸⁴ The Orthodox congregation was established in 1886 and its synagogue opened its doors in 1906, remaining there until 1970, after which it moved to another

79 *Ibid.*, 84.

80 Sharman Kadish, “The ‘Cathedral Synagogues’ of England”, *Transactions*, 39 (2004): 58.

81 The Reverend J. Israelstam, “Introducing the Jubilee”, in Bradford Hebrew Congregation, “50th Anniversary Celebration Brochure”.

82 “Short History of the Bradford Congregation”.

83 Sharman Kadish, *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006), 168.

84 “Short History of the Bradford Congregation”.

location about a mile away. The new building was much more modern in design, demonstrating this shift in architectural tastes.

The Reform cemetery tells a similar story to the synagogue. It is located in Scholemoor Cemetery, just outside the centre of Bradford, and contains an *ohel*, described by Kadish as being “slightly Gothic”.⁸⁵



2 *Ohel* in the cemetery of the Bradford Reform Jewish community.
Photograph Grace Idle

Kadish states that it was quite common for this style to be used in cemeteries because of its close association with death and the macabre, which is perhaps why the Jews of Bradford favoured it. Like the synagogues of the time, only Christians designed cemeteries, including Scholemoor, so it was natural that the Gothic style, popular in the nineteenth century, should feature in the Reform section.⁸⁶ The Bradford *ohel* offers a large, circular window on both the front and back with a Star of David built into it. The tombstones are particularly interesting and are indicative of the relationship of the Bradford Jews to Jewish culture and tradition. Those from the Victorian period are striking, particularly those belonging to the German Jewish merchants. The tombstone of Charles Semon is impressive in stature and is by far the largest in the Reform section. It features two classical pillars on each side and a classical pediment above.

⁸⁵ Kadish, *Jewish Heritage in England*, 168.

⁸⁶ Sharman Kadish, ‘Jewish Funerary Architecture in Britain and Ireland since 1656’, *Transactions*, 43 (2011): 76.

The inscription simply gives Semon's dates of birth and death and features the proverb "the memory of the just is blessed". There is no reference to his Jewish heritage whatsoever. The minimal design is certainly a contrast to the formidable tombstone itself. "Elaborate memorials" in Jewish cemeteries, such as Semon's, were common in the Victorian period, and were influenced by the fashions of the day; the fact that such styles were Christian in origin did not seem to matter.⁸⁷ The size of Semon's tombstone is also indicative of his social stature in the Bradford community as a whole: indeed, not only was he a successful merchant but he was also the first German Jewish mayor of the city in 1864–5. Like their Christian counterparts, the Jews were influenced by the trend of giving a large tombstone to those who were prominent within their community, which was certainly the case for Semon.



3, 4 Charles Semon's tombstone (left) and Rabbi Strauss's tombstone (right), Bradford Jewish Reform Cemetery. *Photographs Grace Idle*

Rabbi Strauss's tombstone is also distinctive. It is a granite cylinder and, in keeping with the Victorian style of the time, features an urn on the top, commonly used on the graves of Christians. Given that Strauss was a rabbi it is interesting that the congregation were comfortable in using such a feature. However, considering Strauss's liberal attitude towards

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

Judaism, it is not surprising that his tombstone would reflect this and therefore was considered to be appropriate. The inscription refers to his work as a rabbi in Bradford, although it features no Hebrew. This is again reflective of Strauss's liberal nature as well as that of his congregation.

The Bradford Jews in the Victorian period were unique in their relationship with Judaism and set a precedent for the generations that followed. They were an integral part of the city and were responsible for Bradford's rise to prominence in the wool trade. Their relationship with Judaism continued to change, however, and they came to be further integrated into English, and Christian, culture, which will be explored in greater depth in the next installment of this article.