

Jewish Built Heritage in Whitechapel

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In 1881 the assassination of the ‘Tsar Liberator’ (of the serfs) Alexander II unleashed waves of violent pogroms against Russia’s Jewish subjects. This dramatic event was the catalyst for the largest ever influx into Britain of Jewish refugees. Immigration had built up steadily throughout the nineteenth century owing both to persecution and economic hardship in Tsarist Russia and other parts of eastern Europe.¹ The estimated 100,000 refugees who made it to Britain between 1881 and 1914 formed only a small part of a westward migration of over two million Jews of whom about three-quarters went to America. In the wider context, these Jews were joining a mass migration, at the time unprecedented in scale, from all over Europe, that embraced not only eastern Europeans but many other nationalities including Germans, Italians and the Irish.

The majority of the Jews who arrived in Britain hailed from the gigantic ghetto known as the Pale of Settlement, first instituted by Catherine the Great following the Partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. The Pale extended along the expanded western borders of the Russian Empire from the Baltic to the Black Sea: it comprised ten provinces of eastern (‘Congress’) Poland including the capital Warsaw, as well as neighbouring Lithuania, Belarus, and much of Ukraine to the south. The only Census held in Russia under the Tsars in 1897 identified over five million Jews in the Russian Empire, at that time the largest Jewish community in the world. Jews accounted for about four percent of the population of Russia and over half of world Jewry at that time.

Whilst the Jewish population of Russia diminished by about twenty percent, immigration doubled the size and was destined to change the face of Britain’s small ‘Anglo-Jewish’ community.² The modern history of British Jewry officially began in 1656 with the ‘Readmission’ or ‘Resettlement’ of the Jews during the Puritan Revolution. Jews began to return to England from Amsterdam in the wake of Dutch Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel’s petition to Oliver Cromwell, during the brief Republic. The earliest arrivals were Sephardi merchants from Holland. They may have augmented a tiny existing community already present in England of *Conversos*

Note on transliteration of Hebrew and Yiddish: names of synagogues mostly follow the spellings used at the time they existed eg *Beth HaMedrash*. General terms follow the Yiddish Ashkenazi form, rather than the standard modern Hebrew, reflecting more closely the pronunciation used by the immigrants themselves eg *Beis HaMedrash*.

¹ Refugees also came from Austrian Galicia (including Cracow/Krakov) and Romania.

² Partly, because Anglo-Jewry is the oldest non-Christian minority in Britain the Jewish community is often ascribed greater significance than the size of its population warrants. In fact, there have never been more than about 450,000 Jews in the country (in the 1950s) and currently the number stands at about 269,000 according to the 2011 Census, less than half of one percent of the total population of the UK.

‘crypto-Jews’ or so-called ‘New Christians’,³ that is, Jews who practised their religion in secret. The Sephardim were refugees from the Spanish Inquisition and the Expulsions from Iberia at the end of the fifteenth century (Spain 1492; Portugal 1496). The Sephardim in England were certainly of Spanish and Portuguese descent as family names such as Rodrigues, Mendes and Da Costa testify. Italian Jews soon followed, including the Montefiore and Disraeli families. Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim followed in increasing numbers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mainly from the Netherlands and Germany, including the British branch of the Rothschild banking family from Frankfurt. Less well understood is that Ashkenazim from eastern Europe were also entering Britain during the nineteenth century. However, it was the wave of immigration at the end of the century that made the Ashkenazim the overwhelmingly dominant group, some eighty-percent of British Jewry.

This immigration also reinforced the preponderance of Jews in London, that has remained roughly at a constant two-thirds of the total ever since. Houndsditch and Aldgate, on the limits of the City, may be considered the cradle of modern British Jewry. Aldgate was once the eastern gateway into the walled City of London. Houndsditch was situated within the Ward of Portsoken just outside the walls, but fell under the jurisdiction of the City fathers. Jews were debarred from owning land or property freehold within the walled Square Mile. Strictly speaking this was not because they were Jews, but because they were classified as ‘aliens’. Thus, Jewish merchants, bankers and traders took up residence as close to the commercial centre as they could get, taking advantage of this legal grey area on the fringes of the City. The earliest synagogues of Anglo-Jewry were situated on leasehold sites around Aldgate and Houndsditch where Britain’s oldest synagogue, Bevis Marks (Joseph Avis 1699-1701) is still in use today.

Jewish settlement gradually radiated eastwards from Aldgate Pump in the eighteenth century to the newly formed streets of Goodman’s Fields and in the nineteenth century along the two chief arteries of the district, the Whitechapel and Commercial Roads, and into their hinterlands. Given its proximity to existing Jewish settlement and to the Port of London, the East End became *the* ‘point of arrival’ for the majority of Jewish immigrants to London.⁴ This project is delimited by the Parish boundaries of Whitechapel. To Jews on the ground, Parish boundaries were completely irrelevant.⁵ By the early decades of the twentieth century, the ‘Jewish East End’ was one contiguous neighbourhood that ranged from Spitalfields in the west, through Whitechapel, to Stepney and Mile End in the east. The Jewish presence was sparser

³ *Marranos* is a less flattering Portuguese term, meaning ‘swine’.

⁴ A similar pattern is discernible amongst migrants to the deprived areas of the northern industrial cities, especially the port cities of Liverpool (Brownlow Hill), and the south sides of Glasgow (the Gorbals) and Dublin (Portobello). In Manchester (Red Bank) and Leeds (the Leylands) the slums were in proximity to the railway termini.

⁵ Parishes were (and still are) perceived by Jews as associated with the Church, whatever the civil functions that they may have undertaken in the past (such as poor relief and law enforcement).

east of New Road/Cannon Street Road, whilst Cable Street formed its southernmost limit.⁶

As in other large western cities that hosted Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, pre-eminently the Lower East Side of New York City, *Hevros* [prayer circles] and Hasidic⁷ *Shtieblekh* [conventicles] proliferated. Local historian Sam Melnick estimated that some 125 Jewish congregations existed in the East End of London from the late eighteenth century down to 1914.⁸ Of these, the present study has identified 38 ‘synagogues’ located specifically within the Parish of Whitechapel; but common characteristics were shared all over the Jewish East End.⁹ The vast majority of first generation immigrants, including those in Whitechapel, worshipped in makeshift synagogues set up in rooms in homes, factories, warehouses and workshops. All that is required to form a traditional *Minyan* [prayer quorum] is ten men over the age of *Bar Mitzvah* [13] and a *Sefer Torah* [scroll] for public reading of the Law.¹⁰ Because of their transient nature, rooms furnished as synagogues, with simple Ark cupboard and reading desk, and a few chairs (or maybe old pews), are notoriously difficult to identify. Often they had alternative names, in Hebrew or Yiddish, which were sometimes translated, accurately or otherwise, into English, or they were known simply by their street address. Shifting memberships and frequent mergers and moves make such congregations difficult to track over time. Informal places of worship rarely figured in official records. Nor were small synagogues often marked on contemporary maps or listed in the Post Office Directories. Moreover, Jewish sources printed in English such as the *Jewish Chronicle* (*JC* 1841) or the *Jewish Year Book* (*JYB* 1896), are of surprisingly limited use. Not all *Hevros* even made it into the *JYB* and even when they did, frequently the house number was omitted, whilst the *JC* rarely differentiated the different *Hevros* by their Hebrew or Yiddish names. The Yiddish press, which was a vibrant force in the East End in this period, may yield more information, but this would be a research project in itself, especially given the fact that it remains un-indexed. Surviving archives, primarily those of the Federation of Synagogues (see below) mainly at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) are patchy even for the larger congregations and buildings.

Given the lacunae in the sources, the account that follows does not presume to be a comprehensive survey of all of the synagogues that ever existed in Whitechapel.

⁶ Evident from a glance at the well known map by G.E. Arkell in C.Russell and H.S.Lewis, *The Jew in London*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1900 for the Trustees of Toynbee Hall.

⁷ *Hosid* (pl. *Hasidim*) Adherents of *Hasidus* (Hasidism), pietistic religious movement founded in eastern Europe in the 18th century and divided into various sects, each following a particular dynastic rabbinical leader or *rebbe* eg Lubavitch, Satmar, Sassov. Adjective (Yiddish): *Hasidish*. As opposed to *Misnaged* (pl. *Misnagdim*) Opponents of *Hasidim*, especially in Lithuania, from the 18th century onwards. Adjective (Yiddish): *Misnagdish*.

⁸ Samuel Melnick, ‘Sites of Synagogues in East London 1800-1940’, unpub. Mss. List, n.d. early 1990s Copy in Historic England Archives, Swindon, Survey of the Jewish Built Heritage Archive [SJBH].

⁹ See ch. 10 ‘“East End” Immigrant Synagogues’ and ch. 11 ‘“Architectural Colonisation” of the Jewish East End’ in Sharman Kadish, *The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland: An Architectural and Social History*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2011.

¹⁰ At Sabbath, Festival and weekday services on Monday and Thursday.

Rather, it attempts to highlight patterns of worship, building trends and significant architecture (such as it was) shared by synagogues across the neighbourhood, be they big or small, converted spaces or purpose-built, still extant or now extinct. Whilst most of this essay is devoted to synagogues, some other building types that served the Jewish community are also examined and it concludes with a brief assessment of the legacy of the Jewish built heritage in Whitechapel.

Synagogues

Converted Spaces

For worship space, in the nineteenth century, expanding immigrant congregations graduated from their own front rooms to hired rooms. A suitable space could easily be transformed into a 'synagogue' simply by furnishing it with an Ark and *Bimah* [reading platform], or even just a *Shtender*, a lectern facing the Ark, common in Hasidic circles - although *Hasidim* were a small minority in pre-First World War England. Most immigrants came from the northern parts of the Russian Pale of Settlement, especially from Lithuania, where Hasidism had been strongly resisted by their 'opponents', the *Misnagdim*. If an *Ezras Noshim* [women's section] was required, (which was by no means always the case), a curtain *Mehitzah* [partition] was strung up at the rear of the room, or the women prayed in the neighbouring kitchen or back room. More ambitious *Kehillos* [religious communities] knocked a hole in the ceiling of the room upstairs to create a gallery, at least so that the women could hear the proceedings, if they could not actually see what was going on. An example in Whitechapel of such an informal synagogue was Simcha Beker's Beth HaMedrash at 19 [White] Church Lane (probably in existence by 1879).¹¹ Otherwise known as Simon Cohen (he was a pastry cook, hence the Yiddish epithet), Beker was an enterprising gentleman when it came to founding Jewish institutions (see below). Somewhat unusually, he carried out building work himself in 1895, because Jews, for historical reasons¹², were not often hands-on builders. Moreover, he now secured official permission for 'conversion of dwelling house into synagogue'¹³, from the District Surveyor although it is likely that his home had been used as a *Shul* [synagogue] for years. A sketch giving a good idea of the interior of such a *Beis Medrash*, perhaps Simcha Beker's itself, appeared in the Victorian illustrated press in 1889.¹⁴

¹¹ The date 1879 is cited in Appendix 6:3 'Directory of *Mikvaot* in the UK and Ireland, 1656-1995' in Sharman Kadish, "'Eden in Albion": A History of the *Mikveh* in Britain' in Kadish (ed.) *Building Jerusalem*, pp. 101-154, on p. 146; see below on *Mikvaos*.

¹² In the ghettos and *Shtetls* of Europe Jews were debarred from owning land or property and were generally excluded from the artisan guilds.

¹³ London Metropolitan Archives [LMA], District Surveyor's Returns [DSR].

¹⁴ In an article by Lucien Wolf, 'The Jews in London', *The Graphic*, 16 November 1889, repro. in Anne and Roger Cowen, *Victorian Jews through British Eyes*, Oxford, Littman Library and Oxford University Press, 1988, p.95.

Rear extensions converted existing dwelling houses into larger synagogues. Indeed, tacking an extension onto the back, rather than simply remodelling the interior of a domestic house, to accommodate a *Shul*, represented a further stage in a congregation's development. A number of examples were present in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Whitechapel. The Limcicz Shul, popularly referred to as St Mary Street Synagogue was located at the corner of 147 Whitechapel Road and 3 St Mary Street from at least 1890.¹⁵ In Black Lion Yard, which, by then had become the hub of the Jewish jewellery trade, in 1903 a synagogue, the Chevra Kahal Chasidim,¹⁶ was added behind a house,¹⁷ No.14 on the east side.¹⁸ In 1907 the Austrian Gemilus Chassodim Shul ['Acts of Loving Kindness']¹⁹ or Ostreicher Shul built a two-storey, galleried, synagogue behind a new two-storey building fronted by a house and shop at Nos 85–87 Fieldgate Street. The founder was successful trader Simon Lewis, of Mile End Road and later of Wentworth Street, who was a keen scholar and collector of Hebrew manuscripts. Samuel Lissner (probably Jewish) of Cannon Street Road was the actual builder.²⁰ The shell of this synagogue survives,²¹ as the kitchen of an Asian restaurant (Tayyab's at No.89).

Fieldgate Street became home to a number of *Hevrah* synagogues, perhaps as many as ten, from the 1880s down to the 1930s. Some of these little *Shuls* consisted of members all of whom hailed from the same *Shtetl* [village] or *Shtot* [town] in *Der Heim* [the Old Country]. Such *Landsmanschaften* (regional societies) commonly formed the basis of a *Minyan* amongst immigrant Jews all over the western world. At No. 18 Fieldgate Street was the Chechanover Shul (from Ciechanow, Poland). This *Hevrah* was accommodated in an annexe at the back of a shop cum domestic dwelling house from at least 1904 (and survived until the 1950s).²² No. 18 had formerly been No.23 before Fieldgate Street was renumbered in 1894. We know therefore that this was the same building that had previously been occupied by the Crawcourer [sic] or Cracower Shul before they joined the Federation New Road in 1892 (see below). Founded by 1887, this *Landsmanschaft* from Cracow/Krakov is one of the earliest

¹⁵ However the *JC*, 15 July 1892, p.12 briefly noted that 'MR L SCHAAP, of 9, Ferntower Road, Canonbury is making several vestments for the new St. Mary Street Synagogue, a curtain for the Ark being the gift of Mrs Sakeer.' The 1890 Goad map shows the back part of the building with a skylight and it is labelled 'Shol'. The

¹⁶ *JC*, 5 Feb. 1904, p.26. The Chevra Kahal Chasidim may or may not be identified with previous congregations of that name, based at 5 Old Montague Street (c.1896) or 35 Fieldgate Street (c.1896).

¹⁷ Formerly No. 6 Black Lion Yard; street numbering changed in April 1914.

¹⁸ DSR. Two applications were made in 1902 and 1903, with two different builders, P. Cornish and A.O. Newman of The Minories, respectively. Cornish was only certifying plans in 1902, so he was probably the architect, gearing up for the work carried out by Newman in 1903. Marked 'Syn' on the 1913 OS map of the East End.

¹⁹ Obituary notice in *JC*, 28 July 1916, p.11, where the name of the synagogue is wrongly given as 'Austrian Gemilus Chassidim'.

²⁰ DSR.

²¹ Photographed by SJBH in 1996.

²² Goad map, 1953.

documented *Hevros* in the East End.²³ It is feasible that the ‘illegally constructed synagogue to rear’ of an illegible house number ‘discovered’ in Fieldgate Street in 1888 (the house was three-storeys high) was that of the Cracowers.²⁴ Illegal builds were not uncommon, either through ignorance of the legal requirements on the part of newcomers or, (less charitably), through a desire to avoid paying fees. The fact that the Cracowers vacated their premises in 1890 because these had been ‘condemned... as totally unfit for public worship’²⁵ by the Federation did not seem to deter the Chevra B’nai Wilna. This Lithuanian *Landsmanschaft* bought 23 Fieldgate Street from the Polish Cracowers. Moreover, they ‘cordially’ invited ‘All natives of Wilna’ (Wilna, now Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania) to join them. The *Vilner Shul* was duly consecrated on 1st June.²⁶

Such patterns of worship in adapted spaces continue today in strictly Orthodox communities.

Examples did occur of inappropriate spaces converted into synagogues. An immigrant congregation in Manchester met over a ‘hayshop’ in Cheetham (No.59 Cheetham Hill Road) that sold fodder for horses, and elsewhere there are stories of synagogues over pork pie shops. In the East End, between 1884 and 1894 Bikkur Cholim [and?] Bnai Lodz – ‘Visitors of the Sick’ [and?] ‘Sons of Lodz’, met on the first floor above a pub called The Green Man in Tyne Street. By all accounts, not only was the location unsuitable but also disreputable, given the strong suspicion that gambling took place on the premises.

A better known example is Vine Court Synagogue that was housed in a one-time music hall at the rear of the ‘Royal Oak’ public house, the building still extant at 118–120 Whitechapel Road. As No. 17 Vine Court this was home to two merged *Minyanim*, the Kovner Shul and Jerusalem Hevrah, between 1892 and 1965. The *Kovno Hevrah*, founded in 1874 by a *Landsmanschaft* from Kovno (now Kaunas, Lithuania) had been on the look out for new premises since their existing room over stables in Cock Hill, Middlesex Street (‘Petticoat Lane’) had been condemned.²⁷ Both founding *Hevros* were referred to in the modest signage in Hebrew and English on the front door at Vine Court.²⁸ Generally, such converted spaces eschewed much in the

²³ If one relies upon the Jewish Gen JCR-UK online database at www.jewishgen/jcr-uk/. However, it claims inaccurately that the Cracowers vacated in 1896, presumably because they were not listed in the first *JYB*.

²⁴ DSR.

²⁵ By Lewis Solomon, *JC*, 5 Dec. 1890.’ p.13. See also *JC*, 2 May 1890, p.16.

²⁶ Announcements in *JC*, 9 May 1890, p.3 and 16 May 1890, p.2.

²⁷ This account is according to Gina Glasman who consulted the *Pinkas* [community record book, Hebrew] then in the Federation Archives, title page reproduced in Gina Glasman, *East End Synagogues*, London, Museum of the Jewish East End, 1987, p. 18. Date not visible.

²⁸ Both ‘P.H.[Public House] and the ‘Syn’ behind it are marked on OS 1913. See photograph from *JC* Photographic Library repro. in Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, p.135. Three photographs of Vine Court were scanned for SJBH Image Library, by permission of the *JC*, in 2005.

way of religious symbolism on the exterior of the building, beyond a small written notice or perhaps a discreet *Magen Dovid* [Star (lit: Shield) of David].²⁹

However, inside Vine Court³⁰ the plain timber Ark cabinet, flanked by British Royal family prayer boards, was decorated with a carved, painted and gilded composition consisting of the *Luhot* [Tablets of the Law], topped by a *Keter Torah* [‘Crown of the Law’] flanked by a pair of heraldic winged griffins (a mythical beast, half lion, half eagle), all of which motifs were common in synagogues in eastern Europe.³¹ The Ark was placed on the end south wall under the pair of round-headed windows that are still extant. Before the Ark, the *Duchan* [Ark platform] was accessed by short stairs at either end, between which was an ample ‘wardens’ box’ containing a pew to seat six dignitaries. The gallery on three sides sported a low metal grille *Mehitzah* over panelled fronts. In short, the former pub theatre had been given a suitable ‘make-over’, begun in 1894 and continued in 1924³², in order to turn it into a typical synagogue of the Federation of Synagogues (see below).

The social worker and commentator Beatrice Webb (née Potter, 1858-1943) painted a vivid picture of the atmosphere that pervaded little synagogues in the late nineteenth century. To an outsider, the place was a pungent mixture of the exotic and the squalid:-

And it is a curious and touching sight to enter one of the poorer and more wretched of these places on a Sabbath morning. Probably the one you choose will be situated in a small alley or narrow court, or it may be built out in a back-yard. To reach the entrance you stumble over broken pavement and household debris; possibly you pick your way over the rickety bridge connecting it with the cottage property fronting the street. From the outside it appears a long wooden building surmounted by a skylight, very similar in construction to the ordinary sweater’s workshop. You enter; the heat and odour convince you that the skylight is not used for ventilation. From behind the trellis of the “ladies’ gallery” you see at the far end of the room the richly curtained Ark of the Covenant, wherein are laid attired in gorgeous vestments, the sacred scrolls of the Law. Slightly elevated on a platform in the midst of the congregation, stand[s] the reader or minister.....Scarves of white cashmere

²⁹ For more on signage see Laura Vaughan and Kerstin Sailer, ‘The metropolitan rhythm of street life: a socio-spatial analysis of synagogues and churches in nineteenth century Whitechapel’, in Colin Holmes and Anne Kershen (eds), *An East End Legacy: Essays in Memory of William J. Fishman*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 188–210 and available online at https://urbanformation.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/vaughansailer_eastend_prepublication1.pdf/ accessed 21 Dec. 2017.

³⁰ Scan of photograph (*Bimah* not shown) n.d. [1950s] contributed to SJBH Image Library c.2007 by Mr Dubosky, a member of one of the founding families (see note 32). Supporting documentation (covering letter) in Historic England Archives, Swindon, SJBH Archives.

³¹ See Bracha Yaniv, *The Carved Wooden Arks of Eastern Europe*, Liverpool, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press, 2017, esp on p.169 re the griffin.

³² DSR records an application for ‘alterations’ in 1894, the builder being an Englishman called John Gilbey of 222 Whitechapel Road. A later application in 1924 was made by ‘Mr N.Dubosky of 158 Commercial Road’ for ‘partial rebuilding’. This time the builder was L. Cohen of 103 Mile End Road.

or silk, softly bordered and fringed, are thrown across the shoulders of the men, and relieve the dusty hue and disguise the Western cut of the clothes they wear. A low, monotonous, but musical-toned recital of Hebrew prayers....the swaying to and fro of the bodies of the worshippers... - and you may imagine yourself in a far-off Eastern land. But you are roused from your dreams. Your eye wanders from the men, who form the congregation, to the small body of women who watch behind the trellis. Here, certainly, you have the Western world, in the bright-coloured ostrich feathers, large bustles, and tight-fitting coats of cotton velvet or brocaded satinette. At last you step out, stifled by the heat and dazed by the strange contrast of the old-world memories of a majestic religion and the squalid vulgarity of an East End slum.³³

Besides domestic dwellings and commercial buildings, churches were frequently converted into synagogues by congregations of limited means. Often, the acquisition of a redundant church was the next step in the consolidation of a congregation that had started life as a *Minyan* in a private house. The recycling of religious buildings for use by different denominations and faiths is a common phenomenon in London, as in other big cities. Philpot Street Synagogue, opened in 1908, is a good example of a chapel conversion in the Whitechapel area. Afterwards known as the Philpot Street ‘Great’, this large space could seat a thousand people in ‘a floor area of a thousand feet’ (almost exactly the same as the historic parent Ashkenazi Great Synagogue in Duke’s Place, Aldgate, rebuilt by James Spiller in 1790).³⁴ The capacious gallery could hold about a hundred more women compared with the male seating downstairs. This building was the former Wycliffe Congregationalist (Methodist) Chapel, built in 1830–1. In 1911, the associated Wycliffe Schools (1833, rebuilt 1878 by John Hudson), directly across the road at No.39, were taken over by a Hasidic congregation and became the Philpot Street S[e]phardish Shul.³⁵

Both congregations had started life as *Hevros*, the latter at 1 New Court, Fashion Street, founded in 1896. The former, Shalom VeEmeth, (‘Peace and Truth’), had begun in the 1850s and first met in a private house in Old Castle Street. In 1872, when Shalom VeEmeth joined forces with another *Hevrah*, Gemilus Hasodim (‘Acts of Loving Kindness’), a warehouse in the same street was converted into a synagogue (Cawder, builder of Lewisham). Further rebuilding on the warehouse site took place in 1890–1 (see below), but by the turn of the century the congregation had outgrown even its enlarged Old Castle Street premises, hence the merger into Philpot Street.

The former chapel building, with its classical loggia and a pair of unfluted Doric columns under the portico,³⁶ was, by comparison, a grand affair, its interior painted

³³ Beatrice Potter, ‘The Jewish Community’, in Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London; First Series, Poverty*, (1889), iii, pp. 169-72, quoted in David Englander (ed.), *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920*, Leicester University Press, 1994, p.198.

³⁴ *JC*, 18 Sep. 1908 p. 23.

³⁵ *JC*, 6 Jan. 1911, p.28. Both synagogues in Philpot Street are clearly marked on OS 1913. On ‘Sephardish’ see note 68 below.

³⁶ A rare photograph taken by its author is preserved in Morris Joseph, ‘Synagogue Architecture: A General Review of the History and Development of the Synagogue from an Architectural Viewpoint

white picked out in gold. The conversion, at a cost of £1,000, was carried out by the builder L. Kazak of Belvedere (who may have been Jewish), under the supervision of Federation architect Lewis Solomon (see below) who also designed the Ark.³⁷ Philpot Street Synagogue was badly damaged in the Blitz in 1940.³⁸

Non-conformist chapels were often built in 'neutral' classical style. Few examples of synagogues housed in former churches with steeples (spires and towers) can be found in Britain. Even so, there are cases from the late nineteenth century onwards, of neo-Gothic Victorian church buildings, usually non-conformist and sometimes Catholic - but rarely Church of England, being taken over for Jewish use. But none of these were to be found in Whitechapel. Nor, at the opposite end of the scale, were there 'tin chapel' synagogues. Occasionally, Jews in provincial towns inherited 'budget' churches made of prefabricated corrugated iron or zinc sections from various Protestant sects but, again, no examples are known from anywhere in the East End.

Purpose-built Synagogues

The Federation of Minor Synagogues was set up in 1887 by the banker Sir Samuel Montagu, afterwards the first Lord Swaythling, (1832-1911),³⁹ as an umbrella organization for the multiplicity of *Hevros* in the East End. Montagu, later M.P. for Whitechapel, was a strictly Orthodox Jew of German-Jewish background, and intended his Federation to appeal to traditionalist-minded elements in the East End. They looked askance at the Anglo-Jewish umbrella body, the United Synagogue that had been created by Act of Parliament in 1870 on the initiative of the established community. To the immigrants in the East End, the United was *Der Englischer Shul* run by upper-crust 'West End' Jews whose personal level of religious observance was highly suspect.

'West End' and 'East End' are slightly misleading labels that are widely used in English-Jewish historiography. In the nineteenth century one finds 'upper class' Jews living in East London, on the edges of the City, including wealthy Sephardim around Goodman's Fields and in Stepney Green; equally 'working class' Jews could be found in the West End, in the back street tailoring workshops of Soho and Tottenham Court Road. The terms are less geographical than social and cultural, roughly analogous to the German *Ostjuden* and *Westjuden*. So-called *Westjuden* living in Central Europe, in Berlin, Vienna, Budapest and Prague, were those Jews, usually of a middle class socio-economic status, who had been exposed to the European Enlightenment (and

with particular reference to London Synagogues', Thesis, Northern Polytechnic, London, 1931, kept at University of Southampton Library, Mss 116/69.

³⁷ The Ark was made by Blackburne, Johnstone & Co. of 78 Wells Street, Oxford Street, W. The Ark must have been inserted into the correctly aligned apsidal east wall of the chapel but no photographs of the interior of the synagogue have come to light. Philpot Street was a member of the Federation of Synagogues, on which see below.

³⁸ A temporary synagogue operated from within the shell of the building from 1943, but the site was eventually cleared for redevelopment.

³⁹ *New Dictionary of National Biography* [*NewDNB*] entry by Edwin Green.

the Jewish *Haskalah*). *Ostjuden*, by contrast, were the poor traditional village Jews from the *Shtetls* of the Russian Pale, Galicia, Hungary and Romania.

Architect Edward Jamilly neatly summed up the mind-set of first-generation Jewish immigrants in England:-

The immigrants in general did not feel at home in the *Englische Shools* [sic] of the Establishment. There they found men called ‘Ministers’, the very name an abomination imported from the church, with shaven chins and wearing canonicals and silken scarves instead of the all-enveloping woollen tallith a man could be buried in; synagogues furthermore, with top-hatted officers, well-heeled congregants listening rather than praying, leaving the vocal work to cantor and choir. There can be no doubt that in its Victorian phase, the United Synagogue succeeded in establishing itself as the church of the Anglican Jew.⁴⁰

The cultural alienation felt by foreign-born Jews was reinforced by economics. In the 1870s, an anonymous ‘poor Jew’ wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* in the following vein:-

I am a poor Jew with a large family (my friends tell me that all poor Jews have large families) and I am a regular attendant at one of our larger synagogues. That is, I am what is styled by some of the petty officials a “squatter”. I occupy, nearly all the year round, the seat of a gentleman who seldom has occasion to pray – I suppose for the ...ample reason that he is already sufficiently blessed....I pray for him - my first prayer on entering the synagogue being that he might not come there that day. For, he once had *Jahrzeit* [anniversary of the death of a parent] on a Festival and I was terribly put out when he ejected me... At the time of *Rosh Hashannah* [New Year] and *Yom Kippur*, of course, I cannot occupy a seat in this fashionable synagogue....I am too poor to rent a seat.....Why, then should I be shut out entirely from publicly joining in the worship of God at the most solemn time of the year merely because I have the double misfortune to be poor and religious?⁴¹

The *Shul* fees set by the Federation of Synagogues were lower than those in the United. Albeit more subtly than the United Synagogue, the Federation did its own bit to Anglicize the immigrants. In 1890 the Federation made a policy decision not to admit existing synagogues, nor to sanction the building of new ones unless they came up to minimum standards of size and sanitation as laid down by their Honorary Architect, Lewis Solomon (1848-1928). Elected early in 1889, his job was to inspect the premises used by *Hevros* that wished to apply for membership of the Federation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Edward Jamilly, ‘Synagogue Art and Architecture’, in Salmond S. Levin (ed.), *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life, 1870-1970*, London, United Synagogue, 1970, pp.75-91, on p. 83.

⁴¹ *JC*, 4 Sep. 1874, p.367.

⁴² *JC* 22 Feb. 1889, p.18. For biographical information and references on Lewis Solomon, see Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, pp.150–2. In 1885–6 he had designed the German Synagogue in Spital Square (later called the Spital Square Poltava) at which the first meeting of the Federation was

Squalid and ill-ventilated rooms were not acceptable. *Hevros* occupying such undesirable premises were encouraged to merge into larger congregations in order to improve conditions for worship. The Federation advanced loans for the renovation, conversion or extension of existing properties. Indeed, Lewis Solomon's most original contribution to synagogue architecture was the creation, whether through conversion or from scratch, of small-scale 'Model Synagogues', the building of which were underwritten by the Federation of Synagogues.

New Road (1892) in Whitechapel was the earliest purpose-built Synagogue designed by Lewis Solomon to which the epithet 'Model Synagogue' was officially applied.⁴³ Nevertheless, a slightly earlier synagogue could claim the title in all but name.⁴⁴ The *Shul* of the Gemilus Hasodim and Shalom VeEmeth *Hevros* was rebuilt in 1890-1 under the aegis of the Federation, with Solomon as architect. The new building went up on the footprint of the former warehouse in Old Castle Street where the two *Hevros* had jointly worshipped since 1872 (see above). Old Castle Street Synagogue was a prototype. The *Jewish Chronicle* approvingly reported upon its opening (on 12 April 1891) that it 'might well serve as a model for any other Chevra in the East End'.⁴⁵ Certainly, Old Castle Street possessed some of the characteristics of Solomon's subsequent 'Model Synagogues', such as a well-appointed vestibule and gallery, and his trade-mark top-lighting (see below).

New Road was described by the *Jewish Chronicle* as 'an unpretending structure'.⁴⁶ Two *Hevros*, the Cracower (as already mentioned) and Beth David, which were both based in Fieldgate Street, were encouraged to join forces to found a new synagogue around the corner in New Road. New Road Synagogue was erected at a cost of £1,350, of which £400 was raised by the *Hevros* themselves, and the balance contributed by the Federation. It opened on 24 May 1892, this date consciously chosen to coincide with Queen Victoria's birthday. Much was made of this orchestrated act of 'loyalty' on the part of the 'foreign' that is, the 'Russian and Polish Jews', who presented the Queen with 'a copy of the Order of Service at the consecration...printed on satin and handsomely bound in crushed morocco, with the Royal Arms and the letters V.R. blocked in gold on the cover'.⁴⁷

held in 1887. Typical examples of his reports accompanied by sketch plans can be viewed on the Jewish Museum London website [JM]: cat. nos. 196. 6 & 7, Beth HaMedrash HaGodal Synagogue, No. 21 Pelham Street, 16 Nov. 1905, letter repro. in Glasman, *East End Synagogues*, p.8; Poltava Synagogue, No. 46 Spital Square, 29 Jan. 1913.

⁴³ In the *JC*, 15 Jan. 1892, p. 15.

⁴⁴ Uncovered in recent research for this project (2018).

⁴⁵ *JC*, 17 April 1891, p. 14.

⁴⁶ *JC*, 27 May 1892, p. 5; Geoffrey Alderman, *The Federation of Synagogues*, London, Federation of Synagogues, 1987, p. 24.

⁴⁷ *JC*, 3 June 1892, Letters, p. 14.

An undated image in the *Jewish Chronicle*'s Photographic Library,⁴⁸ shows a low-key three-story house frontage on the street, with a large shop type view window on the ground floor next to the doorway which probably lit the *Shul* office. A second photograph reveals a partial view of the heavy looking timber Ark. The interior is lit by clear segmental-headed windows on both floors, either side of the Ark. The side galleries are filled with women and children – and some men – presumably for some special occasion, perhaps the reconsecration in September 1955; New Road was badly damaged during the Second World War. Much later photographs of the interior, dating from the 1970s, show racks of clothing stacked in front of the Ark and *Luhot*: the premises were by then being used as a garment warehouse by one of the Bangladeshi manufacturers who followed the Jews into the East End. Today, the interior of the original building has been entirely refitted.⁴⁹

Great Garden Street Synagogue (Lewis Solomon 1895-6), the headquarters synagogue of the Federation, survived until the mid 1990s.⁵⁰ This synagogue started life as a conversion: built into the shell of a pre-existing back extension (1870), used as a bell-foundry, that already possessed a skylight.⁵¹ This may explain why the Ark was not on the east but, bizarrely, on the west wall. Wrong orientation is often a tell-tale sign of adaptation and conversion encountered in some other 'East End' synagogues. Moreover, most of the fixtures and fittings recorded in the 1990s date from the inter-war period.⁵² Nevertheless, in essence, Great Garden Street, which became home to the Federation's head office from 1974-1992, was typical of the Federation Model type. It was a modest building: decoration was kept to a minimum, both inside and out, for the sake of economy. Many of these synagogues were set back behind a nondescript brick street elevation. Internally, the space, usually rectangular in shape, possessed a traditional Ashkenazi floor plan, with centrally placed *Bimah* surrounded by pews and with an upstairs gallery running around three sides, carried on simple iron columns. The stairs to the gallery were discreetly placed in one corner, or in both

⁴⁸ Digitised for SJBH in 2005; JM cat. no. 40.8 shows the interior in use after the Second World War; 1970s photograph repro. in Judy Glasman, 'London Synagogues in the late 19th century: Design in Context', *London Journal* 13, no. 2 (1988), pp. 143-155, on p. 153; photograph by Nicholas Breach, 1978, in William J. Fishman, *The Streets of East London*, London, Duckworth, 1979, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Although the *Survey of London* did find Lewis Solomon's original ornamental timber trusses in the roof space, email and photos from Peter Guillery, 25 April 2018.

⁵⁰ *JC*, 4 Sep. 1896, p.20; three archive photographs in JM cat. nos. 203. 16, 17, 20. For its fate 100 years later, witnessed by the present writer: see *JC*, 6 Sep.1996, p.23; *The Times* 21 Sep.1996, p.11; *Shalom* [London] 16 Oct.1996, pp.4-5. Also Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, London, Granta Books, 2000, pp. 36-41, 168-170.

⁵¹ DSR noted that the builder J.T.Holmes's (of 119 Grafton Street) job would be 'to convert warehouse into Synagogue'.

⁵² The DSR recorded illegal 'partial rebuilding of a public building' in 1914; in 1923 West End architect Frank J. Potter submitted plans for further 'alterations'. This information ties in both with press reports (*JC*, 18 Dec 1914, p.23, 22 Aug, 1924, p.15, 5 Sep. 1924) and the three consecration tablets preserved in the remodelled building. About £8,000 was spent on extensive rebuilding in 1923-4, but this sum proved insufficient to cover costs: 'Our synagogue is nearing completion and in order to get [it] furnished we are very much pressed', (4 February 1924). A second loan from the Federation was turned down. See University of Southampton, MS 248 A830/26/1. The *Bimah* was a gift in 1932, LMA, ACC/2893/297 and Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, pp.154-5.

corners, of the vestibule, perhaps in a separate lobby, and were, if space allowed, reached through a subsidiary entrance, in the traditional manner.⁵³ Frequently, the prayer hall was lit from above by skylights or leylights rather than by many windows, reflecting their often mean placement in a crowded urban environment where light and air were at a premium. Great Garden Street, opened in 1896, boasted both prayer boards for the British Royal family and a pulpit from where sermons could be given in English, items provided by donors anxious to Anglicize the immigrant membership.

The Chevrah Shass [Talmud (study) circle] Synagogue, which began in 1874-5,⁵⁴ had moved to a former warehouse at 42 Old Montague Street (south side) by 1896.⁵⁵ The almost square space lent itself to adaptation, with the addition of a top light and galleries, thus turning it into a Model synagogue of the Federation type, as exemplified by Great Garden Street. The front door was located in a courtyard, closed off by a pair of ornamental gates, salvaged from the West End.⁵⁶

Lewis Solomon was Nathan Solomon Joseph's successor as Architect-Surveyor to the United Synagogue from 1904.⁵⁷ By this time, he had already designed both the New Hambro (1897-9)⁵⁸ and Stoke Newington (1902-3) synagogues for the United. The former occupied a corner site on Union⁵⁹ and Holloway Street, Commercial Road East. The Hambro, as its name suggests, was founded by a group of Jews from Hamburg in about 1707, making it the second oldest Ashkenazi congregation in London. From 1725 to 1892 they occupied a purpose-built synagogue in Magpie Alley, now the area of Fenchurch Street. The successor synagogue was a solid, Edwardian affair, with a red-brick facade and glazed terracotta door cases. It recalled Solomon's Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor in Butler Street (now Brune Street), Spitalfields), which had opened in the previous year (1902). Internally, the New Hambro had a most unusual arrangement; the combined Ark and *Bimah* were raised on a pair of steep stairs reaching six feet above the floor. The reading desk was

⁵³ Nelson Street Synagogue (see below) has both a staircase situated to the rear of the vestibule, with a decorative ironwork balustrade, and an additional staircase leading directly to the gallery from the street at the northwest.

⁵⁴ The *Pinkas* gives the Hebrew year of 5635, repro. in Glasman, *East End Synagogues*, pp. 9–10, then in the Federation Archives.

⁵⁵ Listed in first *JYB* 1896; Marked on OS 1913, being located west of Green Dragon Yard, according to www.jewishgen/jcr-uk/. Photograph of the entrance to the courtyard repro. Glasman, *East End Synagogues*, p.11, courtesy David Jacobs, and of the doors to the synagogue beyond in Sharman Kadish (ed.), *Building Jerusalem: Jewish Architecture in Britain*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1996, p. 16, courtesy LMA.

⁵⁶ *Illustrated London News*, Dec. 1972, pp. 49–50.

⁵⁷ *JC*, 4 Nov. 1904, p. 14.

⁵⁸ *JC*, 11 Aug, 1899, p.13, 1 Sep. 1899, pp.12-13, both illustrated; *The Architect*, 6 Nov. 1903, p.296, repro. in Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, p.153; photographs of exterior in LMA Acc 2717/HBS/12/50 and Joseph, 'Synagogue Architecture' Thesis, 1931.

⁵⁹ Union Street was renamed Adler Street in 1913, in memory of the Chief Rabbis Adler, father and son, who dominated the religious life of Anglo-Jewry in the Victorian period.

portable, a clever device which Lewis Solomon copied from Delissa Joseph's prototype at Hampstead (1892-1901) where it enabled 'the Reader to face East or West'.⁶⁰ Although there were separate entrances for men and women, part of the gallery close to the Ark seems to have been reserved for overflow male seating, accessed via the Ark stairs, which also served the choir gallery over the Ark. In 1905 the New Hambro was extended around the corner into Mulberry Street and Holloway Street to house the courtroom, library and offices of the London Beth Din, the ecclesiastical court of the Chief Rabbi.⁶¹ This new development also included a house and back garden for a *Dayan* [judge]. 'Mulberry Street' was a red-brick and stone building, three-storeys high and seven bays deep on the long walls. It had a lantern on the roof. The interior was fitted up with tiled dados on the staircases, high quality oak benches in the courtroom and fourteen electric chandeliers in the 'lofty' upstairs library (78 by 28 feet). Natural daylight was provided by generous segmental-headed, deeply set windows on both floors. Solidly Edwardian, this was one of the last projects of Delissa's uncle Nathan [N.S.] Joseph. The builders were Ashby & Horner of Aldgate. The complex was bombed in 1941.

Although it possessed the official Hebrew name of Sha'ar Ya'akov ['Gate of Jacob'], this synagogue became known as Fieldgate Street 'Great' Synagogue to distinguish it from all the other small *Shuls* that once existed in the same street (see above). Indeed, Fieldgate Street 'Great' was built in 1898-9 to take the place of three small synagogues which were 'condemned as being altogether unsuitable for public worship'.⁶² The clientele, of the 'artisan class', raised £700 towards the cost of the building; the Federation advanced £500 and Samuel Montagu offered a personal donation of £200 before a public appeal was made. The 520-seat building cost around £3,500. Like many East End synagogues, Fieldgate Street suffered damage in the Second World War. During the Blitz, Grodzinski's original kosher bakery next door (No.31) took a direct hit. The synagogue was re-constructed in 1947-59. Few original fixtures and fittings survived, save the white marble consecration stone in the vestibule made by Harris & Son and the slender iron Corinthian columns, paired and in two tiers, that supported the gallery, one of which was embossed on its base with the name of the engineers H.Young & Co. A rare sketch of the façade appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle*'s report of the consecration ceremony that took place on 17 July 1899.⁶³ This showed a plain three-storey end-of-terrace with a ground floor that looked much like a shop front (reminiscent of New Road). There were two entrances on the street side, the main one into the synagogue (at right) sported a large archway. The two storeys above contained a caretaker's flat on the first floor and a committee room on the top floor, under the parapet and a chimneystack. The *Chronicle* noted

⁶⁰ *JC*, 11 Aug, 1899, p.13.

⁶¹ *JC* 23 June 1905, p.13, 15 Dec. 1905, pp. 26-27; Philip Ornstien, *Historical Sketch of the Beth Hamedrash*, London, United Synagogue, 1905, included sketches of the exterior and interior, repro. in Peter Renton, *The Lost Synagogues of London*, London, Tynsder Publishing, 2000, p. 60.

⁶² Appeal placed by the Federation of Synagogues in *JC*, 23 June 1899, p.2 and for several weeks thereafter.

⁶³ *JC*, 21 July 1899, pp.18-19, illustration on p.18. DSR named the builder as J.S.Voak of 9 Tredegar Road. A photograph of the original exterior shows that, in building, the facade looked much the same as in the sketch, see in Joseph, 'Synagogue Architecture', Thesis 1931.

‘the seven-sided semi-polygonal roof’, the precise appearance of which, over the ‘long and narrow’ prayer hall, can now be gauged from the architect’s newly discovered original plans.⁶⁴ The only known photograph of the original appearance of the interior was published in *London at the Opening of the 20th Century* in *Pike’s New Century Series* in 1905, which also carried some particulars about the little-known City architect called William Whiddington who designed this synagogue.⁶⁵

Whiddington (1849–1905?) had a successful if unexciting practice building shops and offices, factories and warehouses mostly in the West End and in suburban locations. He specialised in ‘dilapidations, light and air cases’.⁶⁶ It is not known how he landed his sole ecclesiastical commission for a synagogue. It is interesting to note that both of his offices were located in the same streets (28 Finsbury Pavement, then 71 Queen Street, Cheapside) as those of the United Synagogue architect N.S. Joseph. However, as a small congregation, it is unlikely that Fieldgate Street could have afforded the fees charged by Joseph. Moreover, it seems that the colour-wash plans drawn up by Whiddington were deemed acceptable because Federation architect Lewis Solomon does not seem to have been involved with this particular project either.

Unusually in a purpose-built synagogue, the Ark was not placed on the east or south-east wall towards Jerusalem. The constraints of the long, thin urban plot with access from the south made correct internal orientation of the Ark very challenging: Whiddington placed it on the opposite, north wall. The original Ark had a tall upper tier featuring large *Luhot* flanked by a pair of Lions of Judah and topped by a half-dome. In post-war rebuilding, the Ark was much reduced in height although the symbolism was retained. The seating capacity shrank from 520 to 150. For many years Fieldgate Street Synagogue was increasingly isolated in the predominantly Muslim neighbourhood that has grown up around it, overshadowed by the dome and minaret of the East London Mosque and by the London Muslim Centre in front of it on Whitechapel Road. In 2009 it closed its doors for the last time and was finally sold to the mosque in 2015.

A late example of a Federation ‘Model synagogue’ and the only one that still survives in Whitechapel is East London Central Synagogue at 30-40 Nelson Street.⁶⁷ NELSON STREET SFARDISH SYNAGOGUE, as it says over the doorway, began life as an immigrant *Hevrah*, a *Landsmanschaft* from Berdichev in Poland. The congregation

⁶⁴ Amongst previously uncatalogued Building Control records now in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives (now file 40634). The ceiling is not visible in the photograph in Charles Welch, (ed) W.T.Pike, *London at the Opening of the 20th Century* (*Pike’s New Century Series*), Brighton, W.T.Pike & Co., 1905, p. 205.

⁶⁵ Collection of leases dating back to 1801 inspected at the synagogue on 9 Sep. 1996, now untraced. Whiddington was named as the architect in *JC*, 21 July 1899, p.18; BAL Biog. File; Pike (ed.), *London at the Opening of the 20th Century*, pp. 205, 298; Alison Felstead and Jonathan Franklin, *Directory of British Architects, 1834-1914*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic/Continuum, 2001 [DBA]

⁶⁶ Pike (ed.) , *London at the Opening of the 20th Century*, p.298.

⁶⁷ LMA Federation Archives Acc 2893/313 and 314 Agreement for loans; *JC*, 24 Aug.1923, p.22; Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, pp.69, 83; Sharman Kadish, ‘The Federation’s sad heartland’, *HaMaor* Journal of the Federation of Synagogues, Passover 5750/1990, pp.26-28.

still worships according to *Nusach Sephard*,⁶⁸ also suggesting Hasidic origins. Current members still have Belz and Ruzhin antecedents. This synagogue was designed in 1922-3 by Lewis Solomon's son Digby Lewis Solomon (1884-1962), who succeeded his father as Honorary Architect to the Federation. Digby carried on the practice as Lewis Solomon & Son after his father's death.⁶⁹ In 1928, Lewis Solomon, aged 79, was 'knocked down by a motor-car while crossing Maida Vale.'⁷⁰ He died a wealthy man, leaving more than £20,000 in his will.⁷¹

Digby was in all probability named after Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt who had done so much to advance Solomon senior's career. Whether or not influenced by his namesake, in his work for the Federation throughout the 1920s Digby favoured the Italianate. Nelson Street is representative of his unadventurous style. Its unassuming plain red-brick façade belies a modest but dignified neo-classical interior, now painted in the ubiquitous pastel blue and white favoured by both the United Synagogue and the Federation after the establishment of the State of Israel. Edward Jamilly once described such Federation interiors as possessing 'a tinselly feel'⁷² with their crudely painted and gilded columns and, over the Ark, timber or metal Lion of Judah cut-outs flanking the *Luhot*.⁷³ At Nelson Street the unfluted giant Ionic columns under the gallery are hollow, concealing iron shafts. The Ark is set in an apse within a simplified Palladian arch. Natural light enters from large round-headed windows filled with plain glass, and from clerestory fanlights, cut into the coved ceiling above a deep moulded cornice – all features derived from Spiller's Great Synagogue.

Other building types in Whitechapel

Mikvaos and Bathhouses

The *Mikveh* [ritual bath] may be regarded as a fundamentally Jewish building type, arguably the only quintessentially Jewish building type, with roots in the ancient world. Strictly, according to Jewish law, *Halakhah*, the construction of a *Mikveh*⁷⁴ actually takes precedence over the opening of a synagogue. Observant newcomers to the East

⁶⁸ A variant form of the Ashkenazi liturgy, *not* Sephardi.

⁶⁹ A brother was killed in action during the First World War; BAL Biog. File; RIBA Nom. Paps. A v17, p.92, F no.1902 [microfiche reel 16]; *Who's Who in Architecture 1914, 1926*; *JYB*; *RIBA Journal*, Aug. 1953, p.427; *The Builder*, 1 June 1962, p.1138; *JC*, 1 June 1962, p.41, 16 Nov.1962, p.46 (will); *DBA 1934-1914*.

⁷⁰ *JC*, 17 Feb. 1928, p.10. His wife, aged 61, survived the accident.

⁷¹ Digby left over £220,000 in his will in 1962 (*JC*, 16 Nov.1962, p.46). He also lost an only son, a navigator in the RAF during World War Two.

⁷² Edward Jamilly, 'Synagogue Bodies: Building Policy and Conservation Issues', in Kadish (ed.), *Building Jerusalem*, pp.84-100, on p.90.

⁷³ See Yaniv, *Carved Wooden Arks of Eastern Europe*.

⁷⁴ Sharman Kadish, "'Eden in Albion": A History of the *Mikveh* in Britain' in Kadish (ed.) *Building Jerusalem*, pp. 101-154; Kadish, *Monument Class Description: Mikvaot* unpub. Mss., English Heritage, 2003.

End of London initially had recourse to the facilities offered by the historic Sephardi synagogue at Bevis Marks (1701) and the Ashkenazi Great Synagogue at Duke's Place, both situated close to Aldgate. Neither of these *Mikvaos* was integral to the architecture of the respective synagogue, but were located in private houses next door or around the back. Several independent *Mikvaos*, also in private houses, were in existence in the Aldgate area by the mid-nineteenth century. This was in contrast to the Continental model where, in the ghettos of Europe, *Mikvaos* were often constructed in the basement of synagogue buildings, in order to make use of existing groundwater or underground wells for the immersion pool. Basement *Mikvaos* were also concealed from hostile Gentile authorities. By contrast, most *Mikvaos* in Britain were, and still are, purpose-built and fed by rainwater (plentiful in the temperate climate), collected and channelled down from the roof of the building.

In Whitechapel, the earliest known *Mikveh* was to be found on *Shul* premises, on the ground floor of Simcha Beker's all-purpose Beth HaMedrash, probably from 1879. As the number of *Mikvaos* rose to cope with demand, generated by a growing Jewish population, the vast majority were constructed in converted dwelling houses and were run by women. The *Jewish Year Book* yields several such private bathing establishments in Whitechapel: the most enduring of these being located at what is now 30 Osborn Street. An application 'to fit up Baths' is recorded in the District Surveyor's Returns in 1892.⁷⁵ The builder was R.F. Brown of 130 Devonshire Street, Mile End. Other private *Mikvaos* were at 17 Little Alie Street, extant between 1897 and 1916, at 9 Buckle Street (1929 to c.1940)⁷⁶ and 133 Oxford Street (afterwards Stepney Way, 1929 to c.1945).⁷⁷ Many ceased to operate or were bombed out during the Second World War. The last *Mikveh* constructed in greater Whitechapel and indeed throughout the Jewish East End, was in the appropriately named Dunk Street (at No.32), next door to the Austrian Dzhikower Shul (at No.30, opened 1914). Although this project was undertaken by the short-lived umbrella London Board of Mikvaot (1946-1949), during its entire life from 1949 to 1961, the Dunk Street *Mikveh* was largely subsidised by the Federation.⁷⁸ All of the East End *Mikvaos* have disappeared completely and, in the absence of archaeology, are difficult to identify from archival sources.

The Russian Vapour Baths were located in a tenement house on 86-88 Brick Lane. The frontage was given an orientalist 'make-over' (ogee window heads and canopy) that was at the time deemed appropriate for 'Turkish' baths.⁷⁹ The Russian baths were constructed in 1897 for Revd B. Schewzik, the builder also being Jewish, by the

⁷⁵ The Osborne Street *Mikveh* disappeared from *JYB* after 1935. It had been listed under its old address of 14 & 14A Osborne Street, a bank building before 1892.

⁷⁶ In a house that was built in 1883 according to DSR.

⁷⁷ See Appendix 6.3 'Directory of *Mikvaot* in the UK and Ireland, 1656-1995', in Kadish, 'History of the *Mikveh*', p.146. Subsequent research (including the current work) has added to and, in a few cases, corrected information included in this pioneering list.

⁷⁸ See Kadish, 'History of the *Mikveh*', pp.126-7 and sources cited there.

⁷⁹ See Malcolm Shifrin, *Victorian Turkish Baths*, Swindon, Historic England 2015 and his website www.victorianturkishbath.org/.

name of Finkelstein.⁸⁰ ‘Schewzik’s’ became an important cultural institution in the East End: it served as inspiration for David Bomberg’s painting *The Mud Bath* (1914).⁸¹ From oral testimony it seems that Schewzik’s also contained a *Mikveh*, presumably for use by men.⁸²

It is germane to mention here an English bathing establishment that catered to the Jewish public in Whitechapel. Following (‘Dukinfield’s’) Public Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846, the first truly ‘Model Baths’ in the country were opened in Goulston Square (later Goulston Street) in Whitechapel (Price Prichard Baly 1847).⁸³ Subsequently, in a number of provincial towns and cities, the opening of the public baths provided an opportunity, perhaps peculiar to the British, for the creation of a ‘Kosher Bathhouse’ within.⁸⁴ However, Goulston Street, whilst certainly heavily used by Whitechapel Jews, never incorporated a *Mikveh*, presumably because of the choice of commercial establishments then becoming available in the East End.

Some Secular Buildings

Typically, the multitude of Jewish communal, educational, charitable and self-help institutions that were based in Whitechapel were housed in converted premises, or moved through a series of converted premises. Occasionally a purpose-built facility was erected, if not immediately.

Around 1880 a rudimentary refuge to house *grinners* [lit. ‘greeners’, *i.e.* new arrivals off the boat] was in existence, established by the redoubtable Simcha Beker at his *Shul* premises ‘At 19, Church Lane, Whitechapel’⁸⁵. However, this facility proved woefully inadequate, and in the following year the ‘West End’ stepped in, in the persons of Hermann Landau (himself a Polish immigrant ‘made good’ in banking and stock-broking) and the Federation’s Samuel Montagu; and, as so often, the Rothschild family provided cash. A three-storey brick house with attic was leased at 84 Leman Street in the heart of Whitechapel, was remodelled by Lewis Solomon and opened as

⁸⁰ DSR; photograph of Schewzik’s facade in Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archive, repro. in Kadish, ‘History of the *Mikveh*’, p. 118 and available online. A rival ‘Russian baths’ was built in 1899–1901. The initiator was ‘J. Silverman, proprietor’, whose Vapour Baths occupied a long thin site that linked 25 Whitechapel Road to 18 Old Montague Street (DSR: LMA, GLC/AR/BR/22/020992).

⁸¹ Richard Cork, *David Bomberg*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, ch.4, esp. pp.79-80. where he quoted oral testimony. However, Schewzik’s was not listed in the *Jewish Year Book* under *Mikvaos*.

⁸² Gathered by Richard Cork in the 1980s, *ibid* and his footnotes.

⁸³ The Old Castle Street facade survives.

⁸⁴ Apparently, there was no equivalent in Germany, see Georg Heuberger (ed.), *Mikwe: Geschichte und Architektur jüdischer Ritualbäder in Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt Jewish Museum, 1992.

⁸⁵ First mentioned in the *JC* 27 March 1885, p.6. Dubbed ‘A Refuge for foreign Jews’, it was misunderstood to be for the unemployed, and was condemned accordingly in the Anglo-Jewish press; Aubrey Newman, ‘The Poor Jews’ Temporary Shelter: an episode in migration studies’, *Jewish Historical Studies*, Vol. 40 (2005), pp. 141–155, on pp.143–4.

the 'Poor Jews Temporary Shelter'. After the turn of the century the Shelter surrendered the lease to No. 84 in favour of the vacant premises next door at No. 82. In July 1906 a new four-storey building with attic was opened on this site.⁸⁶ The architect was Henry David Davis (1839-1915), the surviving partner of leading synagogue architects Davis & Emanuel;⁸⁷ the builder, also City based, was C.G. Hill. The Shelter served as reception centre for thousands of immigrants and transmigrants, bound especially for America and South Africa in the peak period before the First World War. The lease of Leman Street 'expired midsummer 1929', so 'A new building had to be erected'.⁸⁸ This time a freehold site was acquired. In 1929-30 a purpose-built four-storey, four bay house with an attic was erected further west at 63 Mansell Street on the Aldgate border. Outwardly, the style was conservative Georgian Revival with a rusticated ground floor, but this belied a modern steel-framed construction. The new building was probably designed by Lewis Solomon & Son [Digby] and it was built by Bovis.⁸⁹ Still extant, it served the charity until they moved out of the East End altogether in the 1970s.⁹⁰

Catering for the children of the immigrants were schools and youth clubs. Traditional religious education for Jewish boys was given in a private *Heder*, literally a 'room' in a synagogue or at the teacher's own home where they would be taught the rudiments of Hebrew language and to recite their prayers. From *Heder* the boys would graduate to the *Talmud Torah* (roughly primary level religious school). Only one such is documented in Whitechapel, attached to Settles Street Synagogue, at No. 34 Settles Street, nor were there any *Yeshivos* [secondary school/advanced seminaries where Talmud is taught] in the immediate area. For their secular education in the English language, the majority of Jewish children (girls as well as boys) attended neighbourhood state 'Board Schools', some of which had a very high percentage of Jewish pupils. Although slightly 'over the border' in Stepney, the writer's mother recalls that her old elementary school in Christian Street, 'was 99 percent Jewish', despite its name.⁹¹

By the 1930s a surprising number of Jewish youth clubs enjoyed purpose-built facilities, largely due to the efforts of Ernest Martin Joseph (1877-1960). He was one of United Synagogue architect Nathan (N.S.) Joseph's sons who carried on the family

⁸⁶ In 1905 DCR stated intention 'to erect Jews' Shelter'; LMA/4184/02/04; *JC* 13 July 1906, pp.8-9. Image, unsourced, on www.jewisheastend.com, accessed 3 September 2018.

⁸⁷ See Kadish, *Synagogues of Britain and Ireland*, pp. 118-19.

⁸⁸ A full page appeal for £50,000 in order to open free of debt, included a photograph of the facade, *JC*, 11 April 1930, p.15.

⁸⁹ DSR names only the builders. No direct evidence for online attribution of the design to Digby Solomon has yet been found in primary sources. The foundation stone was laid the previous January, and Digby Solomon was present at the ceremony, suggesting that he was indeed responsible, *JC* 17 January 1930, p. 12.

⁹⁰ To Mapesbury Road, Kilburn, 1973; closed in the 1990s.

⁹¹ Renee Kadish, née Shapiro (b.1928). She remembers that Sunday and after school religious instruction was available at the Commercial Road ['Christian Street'] Talmud Torah on the opposite side of the road (1934), Nos 9-11, corner Pinchin Street).

architectural practice. A defector to the Liberal Synagogue, Ernest was active in Jewish youth work, especially in the Jewish Lads Brigade⁹² and the Brady Street Clubs, with the aim of Anglicizing the British-born children of the immigrants. He designed several clubhouses in the East End, the first of which was the Brigade's headquarters Camperdown House (1913) in Half Moon Passage, Aldgate.⁹³ The Brady Boys' Club was the only one that fell strictly within the boundaries of Whitechapel. The 'Brady Street Club for Working Boys' was founded in Durward Street in 1896. In 1905 extensions were made in an Arts & Crafts style funded by the Four Percent Industrial Dwellings Society (see below) to the tune of £650.⁹⁴ Ernest Joseph's purpose-built clubhouse (1936-8) at the corner of Brady and Durward Streets, was opened by the Duke of Gloucester in March 1938.⁹⁵ The cost was about £12,000. By the 1930s, under the influence of Central European refugee architects, Ernest's style had shifted from Arts & Crafts to a more streamlined modernism. His clubhouses were functionalist rectangular buildings, featuring period metal-framed windows of the 'Crittall' type.

Although not strictly 'communal' Brady Street Dwellings deserve a mention before we conclude. This project was the only representative in Whitechapel of the social housing put up by the Jewish-owned Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings Company (1886) which was heavily subsidised by the West End Jewish elite. This organisation was inspired by the East End Dwellings Company founded by Revd Samuel Barnett (of the Settlement at Toynbee Hall) two years earlier, in 1884.⁹⁶ Nathan Joseph, who had a strong sense of what today we might deem rather patrician social responsibility, designed a series of fairly grim workers blocks for the Four Per Cent, starting with Charlotte de Rothschild Buildings in Spitalfields (1886). Brady Street Buildings was put up in 1889-90. It contained 286 densely packed flats in twelve four-storey and attic blocks. By contrast, Brady Street Mansions adjoining (H.H.Collins 1898-9) was a purely speculative development, put up by the best-known family of Jewish builders in the East End, the numerous Davis Bros.⁹⁷

⁹² See Sharman Kadish, *A Good Jew and a Good Englishman: The Jewish Lads' and Girls' Brigade 1895-1995*, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1995.

⁹³ Ernest Joseph was responsible both for the original Brady [Girls'] Club & Settlement in Hanbury Street, E1 (1935) and for extending and updating it as the Brady Centre, opened by Prince Philip in May 1960. The architect died that September. This building still exists as the Brady Arts Centre.

⁹⁴ *JC*, 1 May 1896, p.16, 16 Feb.1906, p.33, drawing of old Durward Street premises, original in THLHLA partly reproduced in Gerry Black, *Jewish London: An Illustrated History*, London, Tymesder, 2007, p. 115.

⁹⁵ DSR, the builders were a West End firm, Gee, Walker & Slater Ltd.; *JC* 11 March 1938, p.43.

⁹⁶ Lesley Fraser, '“Four Per Cent Philanthropy”: Social Architecture for East London Jewry, 1850-1914' in Kadish (ed.), *Building Jerusalem*, pp.166-192.

⁹⁷ Watson, Isobel, 'Rebuilding London: Abraham Davis and his brothers, 1881-1924', *London Journal* 29, no. 1 (2004), pp.62-84.

Legacy?

The East End took the brunt of the bombing during the German Blitzkrieg due to its proximity to the London Docks. The Beth HaMedrash on Mulberry Street was badly damaged as well as numerous lesser synagogues in the East End, including, in Whitechapel itself; Fieldgate Street Great, New Road, Nelson Street and Philpot Street.⁹⁸ Jewish children were evacuated alongside their Gentile neighbours. The exodus to the suburbs, discernible well before the war, in the following decades became irreversible. Jewish families who returned, or never left found themselves in a neighbourhood much reduced in terms of people and denuded of Jewish facilities. From the 1960s Bangladeshi Muslims arrived in increasing numbers and superseded the Jewish presence, even replicating it in its patterns of mosque-building and in dominance of the rag trade.

Since the 1980s much of what was left of the 'Jewish' East End has been rendered unrecognisable or swept away altogether in the redevelopment of the neighbourhood. With an influx of global capital, the City of London has gradually encroached eastwards and regeneration projects, including the 2012 Olympics and the building of the Elizabeth Underground Line, have driven land and property prices sky high. Of all of the buildings of Jewish heritage in Whitechapel discussed above, Nelson Street Synagogue alone stands, largely unaltered and still in use for its original purpose. But given the poor condition of its fabric and its tiny congregation, its future must be in doubt.⁹⁹

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⁹⁸ See Alderman, *Federation of Synagogues*, p.69; Renton, *Lost Synagogues of London*, pp.179-80.

⁹⁹ See *Synagogues At Risk?* two surveys carried out by the author for English Heritage and Jewish Heritage UK in 2010 and 2015, available in PDF format at www.historicengland.org.uk and at www.jewish-heritage-uk.org respectively (2018).