

GLIMPSES of JEWISH LEEDS



Douglas Charing

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by
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One hundred and fifty years ago there was only a small Jewish presence in Leeds, a mere handful of families. Events in Eastern Europe in the 1880s turned Leeds into an important and flourishing centre of Jewish life. Indeed, by 1892 there were three synagogues and ten kosher butcher shops, making Leeds the third largest Jewish community in Britain, a position it still holds. From the close of the 19th century until the first few years of the 20th, Leeds Jewry increased in number from 20 - 25 000.

Leeds Jews and tailoring have become synonymous. In 1888, it was reported that there were 64 Jewish tailoring workshops, and by 1893, this had increased to 98. Jews were also slippermakers and, as the trade directories of the time described them, Passover Cake manufacturers. They worked hard and eagerly integrated into English society without surrendering their religious identity. They created a unique network of religious, cultural, and welfare organisations. They played their part in the social and political life of the city and many volunteered to serve in the Great War, a number sacrificing their lives in that war and in World War II.

This slim volume depicts part of the Jewish experience in Leeds over six decades. It cannot do justice to such a dynamic community which has enriched the entire community. A fuller story remains to be told.

Rabbi Douglas Charing, Director
Jewish Education Bureau
November 1988 Kislev 5749



Workers at Fox & Sons clothing manufacturers c. 1912.

This little book is dedicated to our son, Benjamin, who represents the next generation of Leeds Jewry.

Cover photograph — The Gorsden Family c. 1920.

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The Jewish community settled mainly in the Leylands and along North Street. This is Back Nile Street in 1908 where one of the old synagogues was to be found. Note the printing in English and Yiddish for Freedman, the waggonette and cab proprietor, opening on the right.



Cohen's family grocer's shop in the Leylands at the turn of the century.

Bloomfield and Son's kosher restaurant on North Street. The building is still in use today.

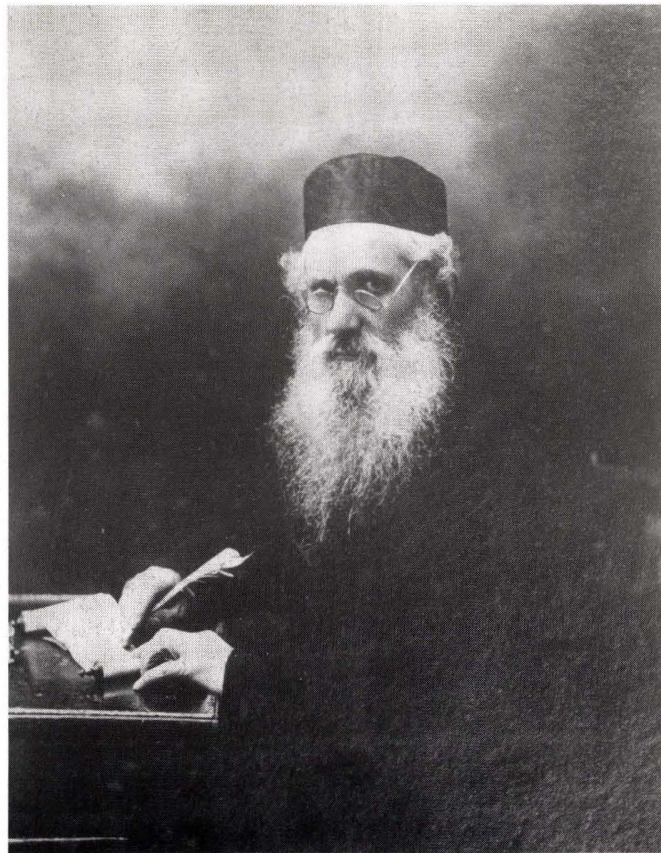




Porton's printers on North Street in the 1920s. Mr Porton is seen standing in the doorway. He later donated a large collection of Jewish books to Leeds City Library, now known as the "Porton Collection". His son, Leslie, carried on the family printing business.



The establishment of a Jewish community in Leeds saw the opening of numerous synagogues. These members of the executive are seen at the opening of the New Briggate Synagogue in the late 1890s.



Jacob Steinberg, an early Leeds scribe, photographed about 1912.



Between 1908 and the 1930s some 17 synagogues were established in Leeds. This one, Hope Street Old Synagogue, is seen about 1908.



The Great Synagogue on Belgrave Street was originally built in 1860. It was rebuilt in 1877 following a fire. At one stage the building was expected to be one of the largest synagogues in England. It was in use up to a few years ago when it was finally demolished.

Celebrating the *Passover Seder* at the Leeds Jewish Shelter in 1907.



The Francis Street Synagogue choir in 1935.



Many Jewish immigrants came from Russia. This particular family, seen about 1890, came to Leeds from St. Petersburg.



The Gordon family of Leeds in 1906. They lived in the Leylands.



The well-known Davidson Family in 1895. Rev. S. Davidson was cantor of the Belgrave Street Synagogue for many years.



Children pre-school; the late Louis Saïpe, historian of Leeds Jewry, as an infant, standing with his sister Raïe.



Children at school; Victor and Geoffrey Biber of Lovell Road School in 1935. Although not a Jewish school, note the *magen david* (Star of David) on the caps. The school ties were in the "Jewish" colours, blue and white.



Darley Street School 1923. This was one of the Leeds Education Committee schools that had a large Jewish population.



Cowper Street School 1932. Maxwell Abrahams, later to become a doctor and *mohel* (circumciser) in Bradford, can be seen on the third row, fourth from the right.



Schools took part in many outdoor activities. Here May Day is being celebrated at Roundhay High School in 1929.



The Bar Mitzvah of Jack Berwin in 1916. Note his prayer book and prayer shawl.

Hannah and Levi Niman on their wedding day c. 1860. Hannah was to die when she was only 36, on 21 December 1870. Her husband, Levi, died ten days later. He was 37.





Ceremonies continue but styles change! This wedding group, taken in the early 1920s, is an interesting comparison with the Victorian wedding couple on the previous page. Note the short skirt of the young bridesmaid and the bridegroom's spats.



The vast majority of Jews settling in the city worked as tailors. In 1889 there were some 3000 Jewish tailors in Leeds. These three are seen at work c. 1900. Note the tailor's goose or smoothing iron.



Others set up stalls as market traders. This Leeds bazaar in the 1880 s may well have been in competition with Michael Marks!



Some were employed in the leather industry as shoemakers. This is the Jewish Shoemakers' Society c. 1905.



Fund raising has always been an important activity. This Leeds Jewish Women's Sewing Circle are seen at work during World War II.

An annual fund raising event is the Jewish Bazaar. Top right is the opening of the first one which took place at Leeds Town Hall in 1921. On the right can be seen Mrs Gertrude Lubelski, Chairman of the Bazaar, and Victor Lightman J.P., President of the Leeds Jewish Board of Guardians. Lord Rothschild who opened the bazaar, is in the centre.

Outings to the west grew in popularity. This group are seen at Blackpool in 1929.



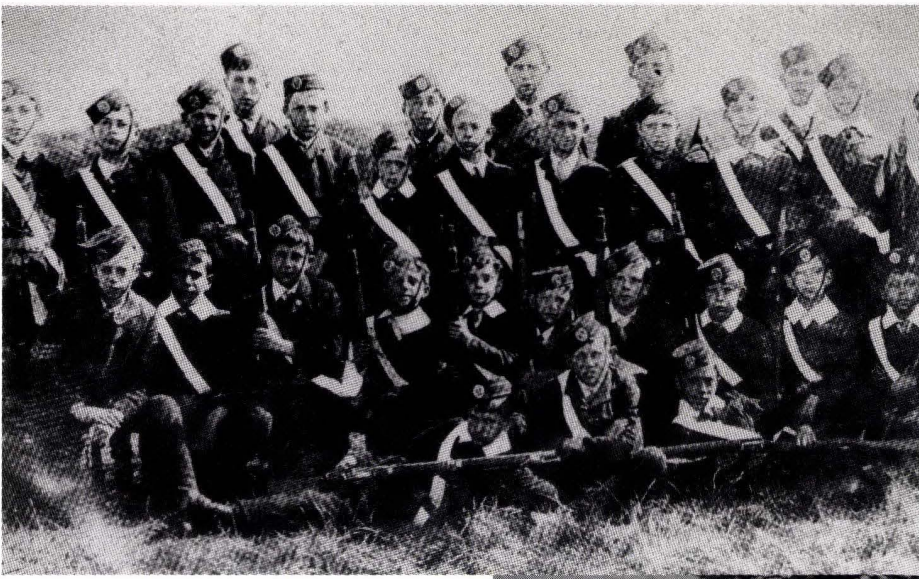


Jews have always shown a keen interest in entertainment. Here can be seen Francis Laidler's Sunbeams at the Theatre Royal c. 1911 and the Zs, a Zionist concert party, c. 1930 - 31.





The Jewish community created many social and cultural organisations. This is the Poale Zion-Labour Zionist Group founded in Leeds in 1904. It is the oldest continuous surviving Zionist society in the world.



Another popular organisation was the Jewish Lads' Brigade. Here is a company in 1905 wearing pillbox hats and carrying rifles. The photograph of the Brigade at camp in 1922 includes, among the adults, Dr Julius Friend, the first Jewish doctor to qualify in Leeds.





Youth Week 1943. The Judean Company of the G.T.C. march down the Headrow in Leeds.

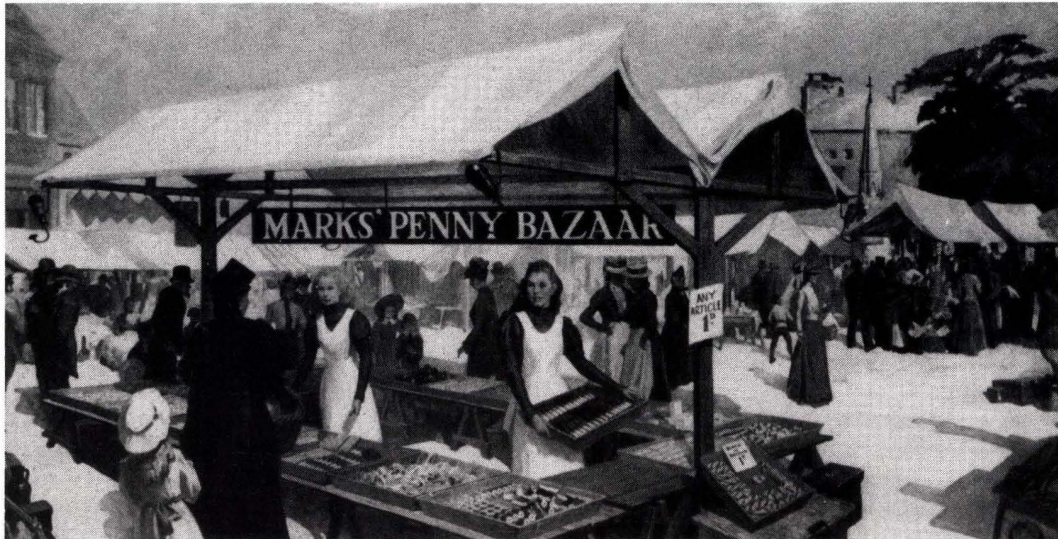


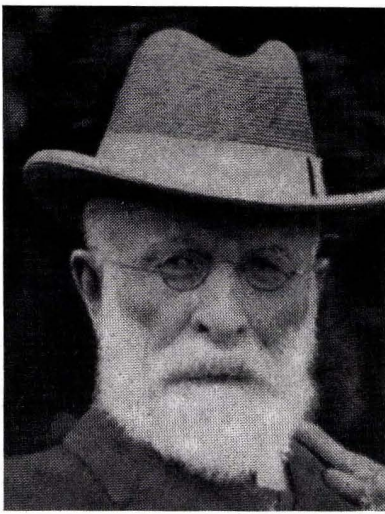
Many Leeds Jews volunteered for service during World War I.

In World War II, Leeds Jews played their part in combating the threat of Nazism. This is the Army Cadet Battalion (Judean Platoon) of the West Yorkshire Regiment.



Leeds Jewry provided the country with some remarkable innovators. The most famous was probably Michael Marks. In 1884 he opened his Penny Bazaar in Leeds Market and founded what was to become Marks and Spencer. When he died in 1907, the firm already had 61 branches.





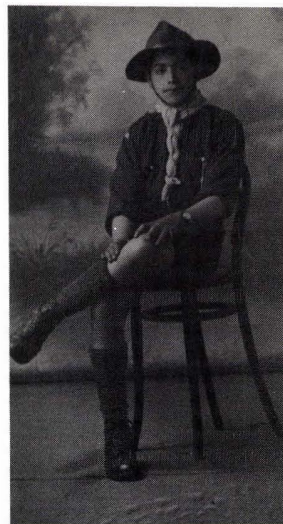
Jewish influence was considerable in the ready-made clothing industry. Above is Herman Friend who helped John Barran develop the trade. Top right is Sir Montague Burton, founder of Burton's Tailors. In 1921 he bought a site in Hudson Road for his factory and by 1927 when his business became a public company, it was worth £4 million.

Jews were also active in the Labour and trade union movements. Aaron R. Rollin was a labour leader, historian and cultural worker.





But not all Jews became nationally renowned. Most lived simple humdrum lives like these workers at “Ginger” Davis Joseph’s Sky works off Camp Road c. 1905.



This publication would never have seen the light of day had it not been for a number of people who responded to my request for old photographs. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include all of them. Firstly, one was limited to the final number which could be printed; secondly, the quality of originals was paramount, and thirdly, there was a problem of duplicating some themes, for example, school groups. I apologise in advance if I have inadvertently omitted the name of any person whose photograph has been included. Should there be a second edition this will be rectified. Those whose photographs were selected include; G Biber; B Bloom; Mrs A Davis; L Dante; M Feldman; F Friend; D Gibbs; W Gilmore; D Gloan; L Gorsden; S Gordon; G Lyttleton (London); Mrs M Marks (Sheffield); D Mostyn; A Niman; Mrs R Rigg (London); Dr Rollin (Surrey); J Saville; Mrs R Silver; M Stevens; Mrs D Suckall. B. Abis, Executive Officer, Leeds Jewish Representative Council.

I am indebted to David Morris, Chief Reporter of the *Jewish Telegraph* where some of these photographs were originally published.

Thanks are also due to the following for permission to reproduce; The Burton Group plc; Leeds Local History Library; Manchester Jewish Museum; Marks and Spencer plc; J Roberts & Co (Leeds) Ltd.

My grateful thanks to my publishers David and June Thornton, for their personal interest in this project.

Should this publication encourage readers to search for other photographs of Jewish Leeds, I would suggest they contact me c/o the publishers, so that we may see a further volume in the near future.

