TOURING JEWISH OXFORD.

Oxford is a highly recommended place for a tour of Jewish heritage, as there are a large number of well documented Jewish sites in Oxford, associated with a fascinating Jewish history. All are within the back-drop of the well preserved medieval colleges, and remnants of the medieval city.

The recommended Jewish tour of Oxford is devised to take in some of the finest sights around the Botanic Gardens, Christ Church Meadow, and the High Street. Additionally the tour is designed to enable the visitor to take in Magdalen, Merton colleges, and Christ Church - some of the finest colleges that Oxford has to offer, and which all have Jewish associations.

Much of the route is well away from Oxford's busy and hazardous roads, taking in open places, which makes the tour very suitable for children, as well as adults.

It is best to take a route, starting at the Botanic Gardens, the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery, and go to St Aldates, the old Jewry, in the very heart of the city centre which will take about 1 ¼ hours at a leisurely pace. The route can then be made circular by then continuing on to Oxford Castle and back up to Broad Street, then finishing further down the High Street, and going for a coffee at Queens Lane Coffee House, which is on the site of Cirques Jobsons Coffee House of 1654. This will also take around a further 1 ¼ hours.

The walk can be comfortably completed by all in around 3 hours, but 20 - 30 minutes should be added for each additional detailed college visit. Those wanting to see the colleges should note most colleges open in the afternoon from 2pm to 5pm, with a few opening earlier on Sunday, and that the absolute maximum size of any group visiting the colleges is 20 persons (10 persons at Merton); 15 is about the optimum number for comfort. Some colleges, including Christ Church, and Magdalen make a charge for entry.

The Botanic Gardens and Magdalen College - the Jewish Cemeteries and Penicillin Commemorative Plinth.

The starting point of the tour, contains the sites of the two medieval Jewish cemeteries. The original cemetery (founded. c. 1190 - 1231) was established on vacant low-laying flood-lands next to the west bank of the river Cherwell, outside the East Gate of the town. The tradition is that a Jewish cemetery should be outside the walls of a walled town. The cemetery covered an area approximate to the extent of the present day medieval buildings of Magdalen College, but the finds of burials this century (1913 and 1976) suggest that the actual graves were confined to the driest south-western side of the cemetery (i.e.; St Johns Quad, and Chaplains' Quad near the tower).

The rest was probably an area planted with trees and shrubs, with - as archeology reveals - some ash and willow, and a profusion of escaped garden herbs, plants, and wild flowers; including black mustard, corn-flowers, strawberry plants, and corn-cockle, bordering the swift clear waters of the Cherwell. Surely a tranquil spot, and one which explains why Jewish cemeteries were called ‘Jews Gardens’ by the Christians.

It is possible that the south-east corner of the site contained a ritual bath (mikveh) for bathing the dead. The 1987 excavation revealed a spring-fed stone culvert, with steps going down into it, in the old Hospital Chapel, which according to ones interpretation of the mason's chisel marks, could date from the time of the cemetery rather than the Hospital. Also, there is evidence from an Oxford antiquarian of a fine stone building on the site during the time of the cemetery. If that is the case, a Jewish ritual bath was reused for Christian purposes, and became integral to a Christian place of worship. The stones from this culvert were taken after the excavation, cut to size and built into the wall of the new Magdalen JCR and Terrace Bar. When they were first built into the wall they were clearly visible, but now they are virtually impossible to discern due to weathering, though they part of the lower courses of stone and are more irregular than the other blocks and have early grafitti on them and other markings.

The Jewish community lost this site in 1231 when the king gave it to the nearby hospital of St John. In compensation the Hospital gave them a smaller site opposite, an area which now closely matches the memorial rose gardens at the front of the Botanic Gardens. A memorial plaque (1931) on the wall to the right of the Danby Gate (i.e. the main entrance) records these facts. At the expulsion the Hospital took over the second cemetery, and it joined the first as a Christian cemetery for the dead of the hospital. Masses of bones were discovered in 1641 on the site of the second cemetery, when the Botanic Gardens were being set up.

The Rose Garden also has a stone commemorative plinth (1951) recalling the discovery of penicillin by the team led by Florey, which gives the site another Jewish association.

Christ Church Meadow and Deadman's Walk - the Path of Jewish funeral processions.

On entering Christ Church Meadow through the gate at Rose Lane, and turning right, the path quickly reaches the old south east corner of the medieval city walls, and follows the wall and the back of Merton College. This path is called Deadman's Walk, and is by tradition the path that Jewish funeral processions took from the Jewry to their 'Jew's Garden'. The tradition is supported by the fact that it is the most direct route to the cemetery from the Jewry, and would have avoided any difficulties presented by processing through the city centre. But against this picturesque tradition, repeated by the historian Cecil Roth, is the fact that they would have had to cross two wide water courses (which I have seen partly excavated) running up to arches in foot of Merton College wall, one of which was big enough for the passage of a rowing boat! Perhaps there were bridges.

Whatever the truth, the name has nothing to do with the Jewish funeral processions, or even the Royalist spies alleged to have been shot against the wall. It is almost certainly an adapted ancient field name, relating to a tumulus (a burial mound) not far off in the Meadow.

Merton College - the Ascension Day Cross, Bek's Hall, and 'the Counting House of Jacob the Jew'.

At the end of this immediate run of wall is a gate, at the junction of Merton and Corpus Christi Colleges, giving access to a path - Merton Grove, one of the most picturesque spots in Oxford, which itself gives access to Merton Street, and the entrance of Merton College itself.

On walking along this path there is on the right, and over the railings, an area of grass at the back of the chapel, the site of the former college brew house and latrines, and running down to the Grove building. This was the area on which stood the infamous cross, built after the Ascension Day riot in 1268 when a Jew was accused of attacking a religious procession. The king ordered the Jewish community to pay for an elaborate marble cross to be set up opposite the synagogue. Eventually he decided against this and had it set up in Merton College. It was by all accounts lavish; of marble trimmed in gold with a crucified Jesus, and a representation of the Virgin Mary. There was, at the foot of the cross, an inscription in Latin condemning the 'guilty' Jews. The cross survived for 200 years.

Entering the front quadrangle of the college itself, and turning back to look at the front range of buildings, the building making up staircases 6 and 7, stands on the site of Bek's Hall, an academic residence let out by Jacob of London, a leading Jewish financier of his day. The

original rectangular plot would have stretched south, with the house at the head and would have reached what is now the site of the dining hall.

Bek's Hall was sold to Bishop Walter de Merton, the founder of Merton College, in a historic property deal, which meant that one of Oxford's Jews had participated in the foundation of Oxford's first true college. In 1266/7 the property was sold to the Bishop by an increasingly infirm Jacob. The contract (or *starr*) survives, and is written in both Latin by a scribe, and in Hebrew in the shaky and weak hand of Jacob. It is the oldest collegiate document that survives.

Going through the corner of the front quad, and turning right into the famous Mob Quad, the famous 'counting house' of Jacob the Jew, also known as the Muniment Room of Merton, can be seen.

This is the old college strong room. It has a very unusual steep pitched ashlar roof, containing a stone vaulted security chamber, approached through a stair turret - but the vault is not open to visitors. The building could have conceivably been used by Jacob as a security room, but it is more likely to be a college strong room, as these elsewhere are also on upper floors, whereas Jewish strong rooms where usually fortified stone basements, underneath a dwelling. But just to complicate matters, the stone corner of a 12th-century house is preserved in a pit under the manhole cover just yards away and could potentially be the real source of the tradition. This building, predating Merton College, is angled at about 45 degrees to modern day Mob Quad and the Church behind and indicates a different configuration of early properties on the site altogether. The 14th-century culvert discovered in 1992, in the Grove, about 100 yards away, has a similar orientation suggesting that open water-courses dictated the course of developments.

St Aldates, or Great Jewry Street - the synagogue, Talmudic academy, and Jewish halls.

On leaving Merton, St Aldates and the old Jewry, can be reached by returning to the meadow, and following the wall, and the boundary of Christ Church westward - by far the most pleasant route. Alternatively more rapid progress can be made via Oriel Square, and thence left into Bear Lane and Blue Boar Street.

Going via Christ Church Meadow, St Aldates is reached through the Memorial Gardens. Heading up the street an impression of the former Jewish quarter can be gained. St Aldates stands on the ground rising to Carfax, up from the Norman bridge of Grandpont (the remains of which are incorporated into Folly Bridge) and the former marsh and flood plains of the Thames or Isis. The junction with Brewer Street marks the old South Gate of the city, and indeed the retaining wall of Pembroke College in Brewer Street is part of the original city wall leading away from the gate.

Jewish properties started from here on up the hill, starting with the poorest properties and moving up the hill, with the majority, and the most superior houses (or halls as they were called) being concentrated at the head of the street where Carfax, the old Saxon centre of the city is formed. Other Jewish houses were found in immediately adjacent streets, Pembroke Street (Penny-farthing Street) to the west and on Jury Lane (south of modern day Blue Boar Street) in an associated 'poor Jewry'.

The Medieval Synagogue – Tom Quad, Christ Church

The site of the former synagogue is the first major feature of the Jewry to be reached, as the slight hill is climbed. It was on the right of the street, opposite Pembroke Street, where the North-west corner tower of Christ Church's famous Tom Quad is now sited. It was almost certainly somewhat to the rear of its original street frontage (which was forward of the modern college frontage), it may have been on the site of the modern Cannon's Lodgings on the north side of Tom Quad, described by my former tutor as his 'eight bed-roomed hovel'.

The synagogue was founded in circa 1228 by Copin of Worcester, a wealthy benefactor. It has generally been assumed that it was not a purpose built structure, but rather it was an

existing town house adopted for the purpose. All of these houses in Oxford were long narrow rectangular affairs, with a narrow street fronts.

Cecil Roth thought the synagogue would have been in an upper room at the back, well away from the street, and from unwanted attention. However, recent evidence from other locations suggests that a purpose built cellar or semi-subterranean structure in a similar back street location should also be considered as a possibility.

The street frontage would have had a shop or shops, and the cellar could have been a tavern. The access to the synagogue itself would have been through a narrow passage or entry, archaeological remains of narrow lanes across Tom Quad have been excavated in 2005 and one roughly cobbled example I have seen on the north side of the quad, may well have led to the synagogue and resounded to the sound of Jewish feet. Examples of these types of entries still survive on the south side of the High Street.

After the expulsion the synagogue at the rear of the property became Burnel's Inn (subsequently called the Dolphin and then the Pike), with shops attached to the front half of the property that could be let separately to the inn. While the general position of the synagogue can be surmised its exact position is harder to determine.

However, in a document of 1367, Balliol claimed ownership of a certain wall next to the 'Broadegates … formerly called the synagogue of the Jews', in the parish of St Aldate's. Interestingly, this claim gives us a glimpse of the synagogue, and helps to position the synagogue more exactly. The wall lay between the former synagogue on the south side and the property of Edmund de Ludlow on the north. The wall was 79 ½ feet in length and 1 ½ feet in width and extending, 'even to the higher gable of the said synagogue' and that one end of the wall originated from another tenement held by Balliol, in the parish of St Edward, presumably just to the east.

This enables us to deduce that the end of the synagogue was on the very edge of St Aldate's Parish and less than 80 feet from the adjacent parish of St Edward and could have been on the parish boundary of St Edward's parish itself, depending on where the other end of the wall originated from in St Edward's. Furthermore, it looks likely that the synagogue was not a lofty building on the exterior, as a boundary wall on 1 ½ foot foundations was unlikely to exceed 12-16 feet and could well have been lower. This tends to suggest that the upper room theory is less likely.

In the end the former synagogue was completely swept way, when Wolsey and his men took the former synagogue and its site from Balliol, to make space for his ambitious and grand Cardinal's college. However, the recent excavations in the terrace running around Tom Quad have shown that medieval archeology survives in this raised area as Wolsey's builders had no need to dig it up. This means that there is at least a possibility of some archeological remains of the synagogue being found in the future. Otherwise the only relic of the synagogue is the stained glass given to Balliol in informal compensation for the site.

Moyses Hall.

Opposite and on the left, at 13 Pembroke Street is a 17th-century house (known as 'House Thirteen' to Pembroke graduates) now belonging to Pembroke College. The site of this house is approximate to that of Moyses Hall, which was the home of the first Rabbi Moses who lived in Oxford, and also Jacob of Oxford and Lombard of Cricklade. In its day it was a large property with three shops, with first floor dwelling areas above called solars, and a garden.

There were other Jewish halls in this street, that were let out to students. These included Bull Hall, which belonged to Jacob the Jew (of Merton fame) which is approximately on the site of the St Aldate's Rectory on the north of the street, nearly opposite House Thirteen.

Other well known Jewish halls let to students included Little Jewry Hall in the former 'poor Jewry', Moses Hall which was brought by Oriel in 1362 and possibly Clare Hall which stood somewhere in St Aldate's between Little Jewry Lane and Carfax.

Turning back up St Aldate's there were a number of other Jewish houses on the left hand side of the street, going up the hill. The most important and substantial properties were however at the very top of the street, on either side of the street. These were mostly substantial luxury dwellings of stone, being 'first floor halls'. They had large stone under-crofts or cellars, with the hall living accommodation above, which included an upper solar, or accommodation level where the family could retire.

Jacob's Hall.

At the very top of the street where St Aldate's becomes Carfax, is 121 St Aldates, better known as the Abbey National Building Society. This property the historic site of Jacob's Hall, in its day one of the largest and most luxurious residences in Oxford. The property was L shaped and had a second frontage in adjacent Queen's Street. The property belonged to Jacob of Oxford, and after his death to his son Moses, between 1270 and 1279. Jacob was an important financier, and a patron of Jewish learning. He was a member of Oxford's distinguished line of rabbis and scholars. The balance of evidence is such that if there was a Talmudic academy in Oxford it was probably here.

There were striking subterranean remains of Jacob's Hall until the early 20th century, in the form of substantial Gothic cellars, said to be 'perhaps some of the most curious ranges of cellars in the whole of England'. The cellars were very extensive and contained some elaborate stone work as well as being linked to other cellars in the street. It was possible, until early this century, to cross the street underground, and emerge from other cellars some way further down the other side of St Aldate's! Additionally, there was a strange sub-cellar or passageway, under the main range of cellars. All this could have been for storage of goods and valuables, as well as to provide other means of escape, or passage to other Jewish houses. There is also the possibility that the cellars could have provided a Jewish conventicle, or secretive place of worship, and even a mikveh, as some of the German mikvehs were contained in sub-cellars.

These historical associations, as well as its central location, inspired its choice as the location of the L'Chaim Society, until 1995 and many of its major events were hosted from its first floor rooms.

The Houses of Moses ben Isaac, and David of Oxford (now Oxford Town Hall).

Opposite, and going down St Aldate's, is Oxford Town Hall. The town hall has strong Jewish associations, as it is entirely built on expropriated Jewish property. The upper half of the town hall is built on the house of Moses ben Isaac. His property was taken in 1229 for use as the Yeld Hall or Guild Hall. His house was reconstructed in 1270 by the city.

The lower half of the town hall stands mostly on the property of David of Oxford. David's house apparently had strong associations with Jewish scholarship as he had a large library, of which some 49 books of Jewish Law may have eventually passed to his step-son Benedict of Winchester.

Furthermore, the famous scholar, Moses of Oxford (died c. 1268) known respectfully, as 'the Mighty One' (also known as Magister Mosseus of London) was possibly born on Town Hall site. Collections of his rabbinical opinions on the *kashrut* (Jewish dietary law), on eggs and on the salting of meat survive.

When Davis of Oxford died in 1228, the Monarch took his property and gave it to the Master of the Rolls in London, and its income was used to help maintain the House of Converts in London. The building itself may have also been used as a *Domus Conversorum*, though there has been some debate over this.

The building survived until 1751, when it was taken down to make way for the classical town hall, which has now been superseded by the Gothic town hall. The drawing of the building shows an old stone built first floor hall dwelling, with a tower inserted at one end at a later date. If this was a house of converts it could be speculated that the tower at the end provides an oratory

or chapel for the converts. Jewish converts were required to reside in their places of maintenance, in a life of strict religious discipline.

Various stone remains of this or adjacent Jewish buildings were discovered when the present Town Hall was being constructed in 1893, and include elaborate stone traceries, with evidence of having contained glass, door ways, capital heads and corbels and an elaborate pillared cresset or lamp stone (c. 1130 - 1160) which may well have provided lighting in David's house or in one of the halls of the wealthiest Jews in Oxford. It is tempting to imagine what scenes of Jewish domestic or scholarly life such a lamp may have lit.

Additionally, near the corner of Blue Boar Street, a bank of triangular stone 'ashtar holes', or pigeon holes, were discovered built into a cellar wall. Were these used by a wealthy Jewish financier to keep his (or her) contracts or *starrim*? This is not an improbable claim as churches, castles and indeed colleges kept their documents, especially accounts, in rolls in recesses in the walls, so why not the Jews of Oxford?

Oxford Castle and the 'Jew's Mount'– Castle Street / New Road

The site of Oxford Castle is important in the Jewish story of Oxford, but until recently you would have had to have been a guest of Her Majesty's Prison Service to have access to the site. The site has now been turned into a heritage centre.

The Castle has very strong links to Oxford Jews and would have been frequented by the Jews on a regular basis and its buildings – especially the Keep and towers - would have been familiar to them, inside and out. Also some of the remaining buildings and features are among the few surviving from the time of Oxford's medieval Jews. The Jews as a group were the literal possessions of the King and under the protection and authority of the King. This authority and protection was usually mediated by the Sheriff and the Constable or Keeper of the Castle. The Sheriff would take overall responsibility for the local Jews and the Constable or Keeper of the Castle would provide physical protection for the Jews. Jews tended to settle in the proximity of royal castles as their major refuge in times of trouble. Many Jewish lives were saved by this recourse to royal castles up and down the country.

The Constable at Oxford was especially important for the Oxford Jews as unusually, he was not just protector, but he took over some of the functions of the Sheriff in managing the Jews of the town. This combination of roles was principally in the reign of Henry III and Imbert Pugeys was a notable Constable in this respect.

Indeed, in recognition of his duties towards the Jews in 1253, Imbert Pugeys, the Constable of the Castle was granted, 'that part of the mills below the Castle of Oxford which belongs to the King, and all the issues of the same part, and the keeping of the King's Jewry in Oxford.' It may also be recalled that the surviving St George's Tower over looked these mills close to the tower and was part of their protection. A mill is depicted in a picture of 1814 as adjoining the tower.

The jurisdiction of the Constable over the Jews was much to the annoyance of the University, as he claimed priority in settling any disputes between Jews and scholars, though later the King was to allow the Chancellor of the University some say in such disputes. It must be remembered that the Jews of Oxford were neither directly under the power of the Town or the University, but the King and his representatives and that they as a group predated the foundation of the University.

It is possible that the Oxford chirograph chest would have been lodged at the Castle as it was a secure location and royal property. The chest was used to administer and lodge all Jewish bonds and transactions and was very important in medieval Jewish life. The Oxford chest was one of the original chirograph chests.

Jews sought the protection of the Constable in 1244, during riots raised against the Jews by students who attacked and robbed Jewish houses. The Constable intervened and threw 45 students in the Town Jail at Bocarda and in the Castle.

It is more than likely that the Jews took refuge in Oxford Castle on a number of occasions. They were almost certainly there in 1141 and 1244 and during the Baron's War. Jews would usually take refuge in the keep, the main stronghold of their local castle. Clifford's Tower at York, for example is infamous for the mass suicide of its Jews in 1190 when they felt that they were unable to hold out. The connection of Jews with the keeps of castles was so strong, that some were even named after them - the keep of Winchester Castle was actually called the 'Jews' Tower' as early as the 13th century. Thus the Jews of Oxford may have been no strangers to the keep on the Castle Mound or other towers and defenses about the site.

If Oxford Jews were accused of breaking the law they would frequently be imprisoned in the Castle. In 1236 the Jewish community removed a child who had been baptised, who was possibly the child of the convert John of Oxford, and spirited him away to Exeter in an effort to keep him in the faith. As a result several Jews were arrested by William le Bretun, Justice of the Jews, and they were made over to the constable of Oxford Castle for imprisonment before trial.

The Jews' Mount or Jews' Hill – Bulwarks Alley (off New Road)

The traditional link of the Oxford Jews with Oxford Castle is evidenced in the Jew's Mount which was at the Castle site. The Jews' Mount was apparently a long artificial mound, though Tovey, a famous Oxford historian of the Jews who had first hand knowledge of it, also describes it 'as a small tract of rising ground'. It was also linked or continuous with another artificial mound called Mount Pelham. H. E. Salter, the Oxford topographer, also adds that the term 'mount' actually meant 'mound' and that it was a mound of earth thrown up during the construction of the medieval Castle Ditch and, further, that by the 17th and 18th century all the leases relating to the Jews' Mount, used the word 'mound' to mean 'fence' or 'boundary' rather than a heap of earth and they relate that the Jews' Mount was mounded (i.e bounded) on the north side and was ditched at the south. The Jews' Mount is cited to have been north east of the Castle Hill, in line with the City Wall.

Wood, the Oxford historian, held that it had been made by the local Jews in 1141, under the compulsion of King Stephen. Tovey, however, relates another local tradition that it is named after a number of converted Jews were burnt to death for reverting to Judaism. There is no clear historical evidence for the accuracy of these traditions, though it is now surmised that both mounts were raised during sieges of the Castle, which does link to the King Stephen tradition. Tovey, thought that the name arose out of the *Juis* or pit at the foot of the mount that was used for local ordeals by water. Cecil Roth thought that there may have been a special fortification for the Jews at the site, as was the case at other castles – this is an entirely plausible explanation. Evidence of other local Jewish place name traditions across the country, have frequently proved surprisingly accurate, but not infallible. Therefore it is possible that the site of the Jews' Mount is an important link with Oxford's Jewish heritage.

The Jews' Mount has been supposed by historians to have been destroyed in 1790 to make way for the new canal and its termination at canal basin next to the Castle site in Oxford. Nuffield College is built on the site of the former canal basin. However the site is still easily identifiable.

Part of the Jews' Mount was leased as part of the canal wharf in 1796 and it appears, as far as can be gleaned from the leases it seems that some three properties were on Jews' Mount by the early 19th century. This is proven in a 19th century history of Oxford which states that the Jews' Mount, '…Were afterwards built upon; and the houses in Bullock's Lane, so called from a person of that name who built there in 1588, together with the canal office , stand on part of them.' The 1923 schedule of the property of the Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of Oxford, places everything on a completely certain footing, when it records as one of its entries that the Offices of the Oxford Canal Navigation was at, 'The Jews' Mount, part of site of Offices and House – Bulwarks Alley. This makes it simple to place as 'Canal House' still exists and is now the Master's Lodgings of St Peter's College. Its back door still opens into Bulwarks Alley. The Conservative Club also occupies part of the site.

An examination of the actual site of the Jews' Mount suggests that a possible section of the mount might be preserved under the path of Bulwarks Alley. This is because there is a distinct climb or ramp up to Canal House and then a slight incline down to the steep steps of Bulwark's Alley which then takes one down to street level. The change in level is seen in the fact that the back door of Canal House is actually on first floor level and that the path of Bulwark's Alley is contained behind a very high retaining wall on the Castle side. It is more likely that this odd topography preserves a historic right of way, rather than was constructed in this fashion for Canal House.

The Old Fire-Station - Site of Synagogue of 1878

On exiting Bulwarks Lane, via the cut-through to George Street and turning right to start to walk up the incline back towards the town, the Old Fire Station is quickly reached reached on the left.

The Victorian synagogue of 1878 is thought to have been to the rear of what is now the Old Fire Station. No trace remains, though its back-street location and insalubrious surrounds were typical of many synagogues in smaller communities of the era.

On leaving the Old Fire Station, continue up to the junction of George Street with St Giles and Cornmarket. By making a short detour to the right into Cornmarket, the former 'Zacs' store is reached on the junction of Cornmarket with Ship Street, over-looking St Michael's Church.

Zacharias – 'Zacs for Macs' – Corn Market

'Zacharias' was opened in the 1870s, by Joel Zacharias, the son of a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, Abraham Zacharias, who had already been active in the town since the 1850s as a silversmith and jewellers. The store came to specialize in all manner of waterproof clothing and covers, hence the famous white painted slogan 'Zacs for Macs' which adorned the store and is remembered still by many. The business was taken over by a local non-Jewish family in 1905, when Joel died, but kept the name until it was closed in 1983 and the building was restored and for a time became Laura Ashleys. For older residents and the not as young as they would like to be residents of Oxford, the shop is still know as 'Zacs' and was for long the most visible Jewish landmark in Oxford.

Returning from Zacs to the junction of Broad Street and St Giles, Balliol College is to be found on the left had side of Broad Street at its junction with St Giles.

Balliol College, Basevi Building (1826) and Balliol College Chapel stained Glass - Broad Street

In 1825, the architect, George Basevi, the first cousin of Benjamin Disraeli, designed the new Building on the West Front of Balliol, over-looking Magdalen Street, which was built in 1826 to provide additional student accommodation. This is now known as the Basevi Building and has two very distinctive frontages – it is a mellow Georgian building in sandstone, when seen from within the college; but its street exterior, facing Mary Magdalen Church at the end of St Giles, is ornate in the Classical style with an large classical cornice in pale limestone. It is presently staircases 13 and 14 on the Magdalen Street East curtilage.

Benjamin Disraeli's mother was a Basevi from Hove and the Basevis along with the Lindos, were leading members of the Sephardic community, a number of who accepted baptism to advance their place in society.

George Basevi was baptised secretly at 17 years old, along with his family, and he was additionally able to pass himself off as Italian: this helped him to have a successful career as a society architect, who designed many fashionable houses for the rich. His commissions included Bromsberrow Place, Gatcombe Park (Glouc.) and Titness Park (Berks) and Beechwood, in Highgate Village, London, the latter designed for his brother Nathaniel. He was also commissioned by the Jewish financiers of the Haldimand syndicate to design

Belgrave Square in London. After his death he was commemorated with a brass plaque in Ely Cathedral.

The Jewish connections of the Basevi building appears to have been over-looked by previous historians and this building must count as one of the most significant extant buildings in Oxford with a Jewish provenance.

Balliol Chapel

As mentioned earlier, the chapel is of Jewish interest, as much of the stained glass in the chapel (including the east window of 1529) was given to Balliol in informal compensation by Deans of Cardinal College, starting with Dean John Higdon, for the loss of the former synagogue of the Jews in Oxford to Wolsey.

One of the panels of stained glass in the north side of the chapel carries the date of 1536, which was shortly after the synagogue was taken without payment and has the name of the master of the college at the time.

Moses Montefiore's visit to Oxford - **The King's Head, Broad Street**

In 1825 Moses Montefiore, who was the towering Jewish personality of the 19th century, came to visit to Oxford and stayed in the then Kings Head Inn, which was a reputable coaching inn. In events recorded in his wife Judith's diary, he went to visit New College as a tourist the next day.

Einstein's Blackboard - The Hooke Museum of Science – Broad Street

A quick foray in to the basement of the Hooke Museum of Science in Broad Street (next to the Sheldonian Theatre) provides a view of two significant Jewish exhibits. Einstein's blackboard is hung on the west wall of the basement and close by is an exhibition case devoted to the discovery of the therapeutic uses of penicillin, by Florey, Chain, et al. The penicillin display is full of the improvised equipment used to culture the original penicillin, including an old sheep-dip tin.

Sir Isaiah Berlin's Study - All Souls College, High Street

On walking across the Radcliffe Square, via Catte Street, All Souls College is reached on the left hand side. The college uniquely comprises only elected fellows, with no students and is the home to many distinguished scholars and a very comfortable existence. Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909 – 1997) was for many decades the most distinguished of all its number and regarded as an Oxford institution himself. His study or 'set' was on the first floor on the corner of the junction of Catte Street with the High Street and can be seen from the street below (there is no public access to his former rooms).

Sir Isaiah was hailed as one of the most significant and influential of modern liberal and political thinkers, and was a historian of ideas, even though he published very little over the course of a long academic career. He argued for the freedom and a plural society, and the tolerance that must come with a plural society, in terms that have now percolated through into the popular consciousness. This anomaly between his reputation and his publication list was rapidly resolved by any one having personal contact with Sir Isaiah – he had the most remarkable and luminous mind, embracing a vast culture with exceptional critical faculties and he was ready to talk with people he met on the train or the street without pomp or self-importance.

Sir Isaiah's career encompassed a childhood in pre-revolutionary Riga, Latvia and he was one of the few living relatives of the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and a descendant of the founding Chabad rabbis. His grandparents were also members of the Lubavitch movement. He was until his death the possessor of the *tefillin* of Rebbe DovBer, the second Rebbe – an item of near grail status for the Chassidic. As Sir Isaiah himself stated in a letter, '…my grandparents were members of the movement and I know about its history and doctrines from, as it were, 'the inside''.

Following his early years in Riga he had an early escape to England, and was schooled at St Paul's, studied at Corpus Christi College, teaching Philosophy at New College, elected a fellow of All Souls and later the first President of Wolfson College and the subject of many awards and honours, including a knighthood and an Order of Merit.

Sir Isaiah recalled the circumstances of his election to his fellowship to me in a meeting in 1995. He said that a Bishop H-- in the college had given a speech opposing his election on the grounds that All Souls was a Christian college and that a Jew should not be appointed. However, Sir Isaiah added that he thought the speech had helped his cause as this one vote of opposition had won him five others!

Jacob's Coffee Houses, High Street

The circuit of Jewish Oxford can be continued by turning left into into the famous High Street (i.e. downhill), and continuing down past the Queen's College, to the junction with Queen's Lane. Here is the Queen's Lane Coffee House, and almost directly opposite is 84 High Street, formerly famous as Cooper's Marmalade, and more recently, a teddy bear shop and now the Grand Café.

Both are sites of Jewish coffee houses. In 84 High Street it is recorded on a marble plaque (to be seen on the right high up on the wall as one walks in the shop), that in 1651 one Jacob set up a coffee shop, the first in England, on the site. It was established in what was then the Angel Inn, one of the principal coaching inns in Oxford.

In 1654 Cirques Jobson (who may be our Jacob) set up shop across the street, on what is now the site of the Queen's Lane Coffee House. It might be appropriate to complete ones Jewish tour here with a celebratory coffee, remembering, contrary to the advertising on the canopy, that it is an exaggeration to claim that there has been a coffee shop on the site since 1654.

MISCELLANEOUS SIGHTS.
Other sites worth seeing in and around Oxford include:-

1. In **St Mary's Church** on the High Street, there is a very discreet plaque which records that 'During the Nazi regime in Germany and Austria a large number of refugees came to Oxford. Many were of Jewish origins but members of a Lutheran or Reformed church. They wished to attend services in their own language and tradition…' It is to be found on the left hand side of the Chancel arch, under the organ loft.

2. At **Brasenose College Chapel** is an interesting depiction in a stained glass window of St Hugh of Lincoln, holding a distinctive pink model of Lincoln Cathedral. St Hugh was an enlightened and compassionate man, and a saviour of whole communities of English Jews. In the Middle Ages, Oxford was part of the Bishopric of Lincoln. The figure of St Hugh is a main panel, on the very right hand side of the window, situated on the south side of the ante-chapel.

3. The most difficult Jewish sight to find in Oxford is the ruined entrance of the former **Osney Abbey**, near Osney Island in Oxford. The entrance was reputedly the place where Robert of Reading met his death at the stake in 1222. A plaque set up in 1931, to the left of the entrance records this fact, and reads: "Near this stone in Osney Abbey Robert of Reading otherwise Haggai of Oxford suffered for his faith on Sunday 17th April 1222 AD corresponding to 4 Iyyar 4982 A.M." when I first saw it it was a sad, derelict, and paradoxically atmospheric and picturesque spot, set before the burnt out remains of Osney Mill, and accumulated iron junk. It is on private property - a barge mooring - at the end of Mill Street, which is left off the Botley road, just between the railway station and the canal, before the turning to Osney Island. When I revisited, it was still as difficult to find and some redevelopment had taken place around it and at the time of writing it appears to be undergoing preservation.

4. In **The Bodleian Library** there is one of the finest collections of Hebrew manuscripts in the world, including the first volume of the *Mishnah Torah* complete with Maimonides' signature. The collection also includes some significant medieval Anglo-Jewish manuscripts, including some

that originate from Oxford. Hebrew manuscripts are frequently on display in the newly refurbished exhibition room in the Old Schools quadrangle of the Old Bodleian Library (open daily, except Saturday afternoons, and all Sunday). Bona fide scholars can get temporary readers permits, and call up most manuscripts from the main catalogue, as they desire and they are now being increasingly digitized and available on the web.

5. The **Ashmolean Museum**, on Beaumont Street is host to one of the most important, and enigmatic, Anglo-Jewish relics, the so called **Bodleian Bowl**. This bronze three legged pot, with a Hebrew inscription around its middle, is though to have come from the Colchester Jewry. It may be a gift from one of the sons of the great Rabbi Yehiel of Paris, to the Colchester community, and has a religious, perhaps funereal use.

6. The **Wolvercote Cemetery** (1894), off the head of the Banbury Road, at the edge of town, has a modest and well kept Jewish section, founded by Joel Zacharias, which is bounded by hedges. It has been enlarged twice in its history, once in the War, planning for casualties in case of air attack and again in 2000. The burial ground does not segregate the sexes though there are margins out-side the boundary hedges which appear to contain some interments of non-Jewish partners, though this was not possible to confirm by context. There is no *ohel*, but the unconsecrated general prayer hall is now used – once it was realized it was not consecrated for Christian worship. The cemetery includes the graves of many notable Oxford academics (and town's people), including Sir Isaiah Berlin. There is also one war grave to a Jewish navigator in the RAF, killed on duty and there is also an inscription for Lieutenant Victor Jessel, killed in action in France in 1917. There are some to Holocaust survivors who went on to make a new lives for themselves in Oxford. The cemetery is an attractive and decent place, close to the entrance to the cemetery and is either side of the path near to the entrance lodge. One of its most distinguishing features is the exceptional numbers of memorials recalling the places of births for many or its residents from all over pre-war Jewish Europe. This testifies to the fact that the refugee element of the community was exceptionally important to the post war make-up of the Oxford Jewry. The cemetery contains little funereal imagery, apart from some Kohanic hands (e.g. for Lionel Kochan) such as may be found in other Jewish cemeteries, but the inscriptions are often individual and personalized, which is not the case in some other cemeteries where stricter formulae are enforced. The community organize and conduct the funeral services and interments. Overall the cemetery is evocative of the distinctive Jewish life of Oxford and is well worth a detailed visit.

7. **Yarnton Manor (The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies) – Church Lane, Yarnton** The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies was established by Dr David Patterson at the Oriental Institute in 1972 and then moved to 45 St Giles in Oxford. It is now an international centre for the study of Hebrew and Jewish studies and a recognized independent centre of Oxford University (2006). The OCHJS has a small number of students and a number of resident and visiting international scholars. The main building is an attractive restored Jacobean manor house in Cotswold stone with a number of ancilliary buildings.

The centre includes the Leopold Muller library which as an extensive collection of manuscripts and printed books, including an Anglo-Jewish section. The personal libraries of the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn and Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs are important collections, as well as the Foyle-Montefiore collection, which comprises the former library of the Judith Montefiore Theological College at Ramsgate and comprises 4,000 books and pamphlets mainly of a theological nature. The Shandel/Lipson Collection, amplifies the Foyle-Montefiore Collections as it contains some of Montefiore's salvaged personal papers, and other documents and material relevant to Montefiore's life. Its most significant items are two diaries of Lady Judith Montefiore. It is anticipated that a number of very significant items relating to Sir Moses, which at the time of writing are in Switzerland, will be brought to Oxford by c. 2009.

The OCHJS is also home to the National Anglo-Jewish Heritage Trail (jtrails) (2006)

8. **The Home of Robert Maxwell - Maxwell as Samson and his Plaque - Headington Hill Hall** Headington Hill was home to two of the leading Jewish figures of the 20th century in Oxford, both Jewish refugees by origin, though the differences between Maxwell and Berlin and their principles and out-look, invites a comparison between the 'Gods and the Giants' of

the Greek myth, especially as Maxwell had himself portrayed as Samson in stained glass at the Hall.

Maxwell moved into Headington Hall in 1959 and restored the house including moving an old fireplace from his old offices in London to his new headquarters. He apparently put cinema screens in many of the rooms. He also replaced a damaged stained glass window on the stairs of the house with a new one on the theme of Samson at the gates of Gaza, by an Israeli artist. Maxwell is the model for this Samson and there is a reference to Greek myth as Maxwell's Samson has a pendant with a portrait of Penelope. Shortly before his death, in 1991, he sold Pergamon to Elsevier, though Pergamon still has some interests on the site.

While much of the Hall is out of view to the public, there is an unintended memorial plaque to Maxwell in a flower-bed, at the entrance to Headington Hall. However the sentiments and wording were not of his choosing and relate to his bitter conflict with the journalists and print unions. For several years one could see a grey and motley huddle of union activists picketing the entrance to the Hall in all weathers.

The plaque reads:

At this site, between May 1989
and September 1992, 23 members
of the National Union of Journalists
mounted a continuous and united
picket in defence of union rights
at Robert Maxwell's Pergamon Press

His empire collapsed, the union lives on.

9. **The Home of Sir Isaiah Berlin - Headington House, Old High Street, Headington** Sir Isaiah Berlin lived at Headington House from 1956 when he married Mrs Aline Halban, (who had two sons) and moved into her home. He lived there for the next 41 years until his death. **Headington House** is a fine Georgian mansion built in 1783 and formerly stood in extensive grounds. The house cannot be seen from the road. There are currently plans to have a blue plaque placed at the property to celebrate its most famous inhabitant.

10. The Home of Herbert Loewe – 29 Beaumont Street

Herbert Loewe lived in a Georgian Terraced house close to the Oriental Institute, where he held court for Oxford Jewish society from c. 1920, when he returned from war service in India, to 1931, when he left for Cambridge. His sons, including Lionel (1891-1987) and Michael (b.1922), both went on to distinguish themselves as Enigma code-breakers and linguists, at Bletchely Park, during the Second World War. Raphael, (b. Calcutta, 1919) became a distinguished Jewish historian and a president of the Jewish Historical Society of England.

11. The Home of Rev. Moses Hirsch Segal – 6 Tackley Place

The Rev. Segal was perhaps the first rabbi to the Oxford congregation in modern times and in 1907 he was listed as living at the above address which is off the Woodstock Road, between the Warnborough and Kingston Roads, though he also lived near Hinksey.

12. **The Homes of Cecil Roth – 1 Garford Road and 31 Charlbury Road**

Cecil Roth first settled in a house in 1 Garford Road, until at least the early 1940s but then moved to Charlbury Road, where his traditional of Saturday afternoon teas continued, until his retirement from Oxford in 1965 and his move to edit the Encyclopedia Judaica in Jerusalem. Roth also held a vast annual fresher's tea party, having worked through the matriculation lists and picked out likely sounding names to invite.

13. The Wartime home of Walter Eytan - 149d, Banbury Road

Walter Eytan (b. 1910 - 2001) (originally Walter George Ettinghausen) came from a German Jewish family settled in Oxford in the early 20th century, his father had in fact first come up to Oxford as a student at Queen's in 1901. During the war, Ettinghausen was a don at Queen's and was engaged in secret work, then he was called to the Enigma code breaking centre at Bletchley Park in 1941, where he led the Hut 4 team with distinction. Hut 4 provided immediate translations of codes just broken by Hut 8 - Alan Turing's hut. Ettinghausen encouraged the Zionists among the Jewish decoders and went to Israel as soon as the war ended, where he rose to Director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry for 11 years and was latterly the Israeli ambassador to France.

14. Commemorative Plaque to Arthur Lehman Goodhart – Logic Lane, University College.

If a visitor walks down the cobbled public right or way through University College, connecting High Street and Merton Street, there is a commemorative plaque to Professor Goodhart (1891-1978) set into the new building on the sharp turn in the lane. Goodhart was the first Jew to become head of house in Oxford when he became master of University College in 1951. He was a famous common lawyer and was made the Professor of Jurisprudence in 1931, (which gave a fellowship on University College) and which he held until his appointment as Master. He was the third Jew to have a fellowship in Oxford, just preceding Berlin. Goodhart was an American citizen and his father was a millionaire stock-broker. Goodhart was succeeded as Master by Lord Goodman another notable Oxford Jewish academic.