The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840*

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Some ninety-eight years ago, in the days of this Society’s infancy, Hermann Gollancz, the minister of the Bayswater Synagogue, was gathering material for a lecture he was to deliver at one of our meetings. In an apparent excess of scholarly modesty, he entitled his paper ‘A ramble in East Anglia’.¹ Something along those lines might have been considered better suited for the present paper. Local historians, as Gollancz recognized, are all too well aware how limited any single interpretation of their subject matter must be. This is the point at which my debts to two principal sources should be acknowledged: Henry Levine’s booklet of 1961, and Cecil Roth’s presidential addresses of 1941 and 1942, the enduring qualities of which continue to mark them out as masterpieces from the middle period of Anglo-Jewish historiography.² So much for preliminaries.

I was as a child in the habit of fleeing from society (wrote George Borrow in 1851). By nature slow of speech, I took no pleasure in conversation, nor in hearing the voices of my fellow-creatures . . . There was, however, one individual who, in the days of my childhood, was disposed to form a favourable opinion of me. One day a Jew – I have quite forgotten the circumstance, but I was long subsequently informed of it – one day a travelling Jew knocked at the door of a farmhouse in which we had taken apartments; I was near at hand, sitting in the bright sunshine, drawing strange lines on the dust with my fingers, an ape and dog were my companions; the Jew looked at me and asked me some questions, to which, though I was quite able to speak, I returned no answer. On the door being opened, the Jew, after a few words, probably relating to pedlary, demanded who the child was, sitting in the sun; the maid replied that I was her mistress’s youngest son, a child weak here, pointing to her forehead. The Jew looked at me again, and then said, ‘Pon my conscience, my dear, I believe that you must be troubled there yourself to tell me any such thing. It is not my habit to speak to children . . . because they often follow me and fling stones after me; but I no sooner looked at that child than I was forced to speak to it – his not answering me shows his sense, for it has never been the custom of the wise to fling away their words in indifferent talk and conversation; the child is a sweet child, and has all the look of one of our people’s children. Fool, indeed! did I not see his eyes sparkle just now when the monkey seized the dog by the ear? they shone like my own diamonds – does your good lady want any, real and fine? Were it not for what you tell me, I should say it was a prophet’s child. Fool, indeed! he can write already, or I’ll forfeit the box which I carry on my back, and for which I should be loth to take two hundred pounds!’³

This passage is quoted so extensively because it provides, to the best of my knowledge, the only verbal portrait of a Jewish presence in the East Anglian


219
Malcolm Brown

countryside during this period. Obviously a large majority of the pioneers of the four communities, Norwich and King’s Lynn, Yarmouth and Ipswich, earned their livelihood as commercial travellers, and although no record survives of what brought them to East Anglia one possible explanation has to be considered. Peddlars discouraged by prospects in Holland, and other European refugees, would take one of the twice-weekly Post Office packet boats to an East Coast port, say Harwich. The London mail and other coaches were waiting to meet them. There would have been little inclination to wander away from the quayside in search of a friendly house if it was known, as it soon must have been, that Harwich never had a community or a charity box. The poor, who disembarked with the barest essentials, and who at least until 1774 were allowed free passage on the packets, would have been even less likely to stray without first seeing what possibilities lay open to them in the capital. As the 18th century wore on and the East Anglian communities developed, certainly some immigrants did bypass London entirely. But settlement originated, as has often been said, with itinerants simply settling down, and the regional ratebooks show practically no familiar names until about the 1760s. For earlier references to Jewish names, one has to turn to a series of documents at the Corporation of London Record Office, the schedules of debtors confined in the City’s prisons from the late-17th century onwards. Among these are to be found, for instance in the Poultry Compter in 1755, Henry Phillips, formerly of Norwich but more recently of Woolpack Alley, Houndsditch, dealer and chapman, who claimed to be owed £100 for sundry goods supplied to Henry Abraham, formerly of Wells next the Sea and who in 1755 was lodged in another City gaol. In the same year Solomon Jacobs, linendraper and watchmaker of Norwich, and probably the father of another Norwich watchmaker, figures in the bankruptcy courts. Such names and cases could easily be multiplied. At what point a cemetery was obtained in Norwich is not known, but one must have existed before 1776, when a squabble that took place reached the columns of the local press. This was neither the first nor the last time that the Norfolk Chronicle saw fit to describe communal troubles, not that that should give rise to concern. ‘Rough and ready informality’, to borrow Lloyd Gartner’s phrase, was the order of the day, within much of the Jewish world no less than outside. However that may be, the outlines of settlement begin to take firmer shape during the 1780s, when Mr Marks emerges from the crowd of debtors and appears as an upholsterer in Gentleman’s Walk, then going into business on his own account and with a house to let ‘late in the occupation of Mr Bloom’. In Ladies’ Lane at this time lived Levy Isaac, a silversmith, the first of the community of whom the Norfolk Chronicle was eventually to remark that he had been ‘long resident in this city’. The ratebooks reveal a few more in this central area, among them Samuel Goldsmith, an apothecary. Others appear a decade later, for instance the tobacconist Phineas Jacob, who was to spend some time in London after running up huge debts during a dispute with the Admiralty over the ownership of a prize. Against this background should
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

be placed the constant ebb and flow of visitors: in 1782 Mr Benedict, an Aldgate glass manufacturer offering candlesticks, decanters and girandoles; in 1791 Mr Jonas, then a Portsmouth-based prestidigitator who declined to perform on Friday nights, and Dr Leon, a herbal empiric of forty years’ experience, who cited among his successfully cured patients, soldiers in the 11th Dragoons and the East Norfolk militia.12 To these have to be added several miniaturists: Mr Poland ‘from Vienna’, who also worked at Bury St Edmunds, a certain Mr Immanuel, and Benjamin Town of Bond Street, ‘original velvet painter to the Royal Family’, who promised to teach ladies that difficult art ‘in four lessons only’.13 Mention might be made here of an optician, Raphael Lyons, who in 1797 took up residence in Norwich before moving on to Ipswich a few years later, and perhaps a tavern keeper, Joseph Moravia Murry.14

These details serve mostly by way of introduction to the story of Barnett Crawcour, the man responsible for the first post-medieval synagogue built at Norwich.15 He moved there in 1808; the foundations of his house, 14 Magdalen Street, still stand. Barnett Crawcour was not the first Crawcour of Norwich to be a dentist, nor was he the only Jewish dentist to come to Norwich in 1808. Isaiah Jones, the collateral ancestor of many who continue to serve the community, was to be found there that year. At this point reference must be made to a source of significance for all local historians, Dr Hillam’s recent thesis on provincial dental practice.16 Dr Hillam shows as fact what some already apprehended: a considerable number of provincial practitioners did indeed have Jewish names and often played a major role in their communities. Their ambiguous status in the world outside might be illustrated by an episode that occurred at Norwich in 1820.17 Three days before one of the great events in the city’s social calendar, the mayoral banquet, Barnett Crawcour and his wife received an invitation to attend. Crawcour made haste to order a new suit for the occasion, but as ill luck would have it, a practical joker had sent the invitation card. Crawcour took this far too much to heart. The tailor was allowed to finish the clothes, but Crawcour then went to the city sessions in an ill-advised attempt to recover the hundred shillings they had cost. He was awarded damages of only one shilling. A month after the verdict, he was involved in a traffic accident, as the result of which one of his legs had to be amputated.18 He fought back valiantly, continued his practice, and in 1823 issued, on behalf of his congregation, an appeal for funds to build a new place of worship.19 ‘It is estimated’, he wrote, ‘that the expenses attending the [construction] will not exceed £400.’ Five years later the new building, a modest prayer hall, was opened. This top-lit room, which survived until thirty years ago, was notable mostly for its privacy, tucked away as it was at the end of an extremely narrow passage off Tombland (see Plates 1, 2 and 3).20 Responsibility for paying the rates on the building passed in 1830 to Isaiah Jones.

The year 1830 also saw Barnett Crawcour make the discovery that ensures his place in dental history: he invented a ‘mineral succedaneum’ (to use his own
Plate 1  The first of three sketches of the Norwich (1828) Synagogue, disused from 1849, drawn by J. P. Chaplin c. 1951 before its eventual demolition. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Norwich Central Library.) The exterior entrance approach from Tombland Alley.

Plate 2  The interior entrance passage, measuring 2 feet 11 inches at its narrowest.

Plate 3  The sanctuary in use as a coke store, showing the entrance on the right and the site of the Ark. The room measured 18 feet 9 inches by 14 feet.
description) which in effect was a primitive form of amalgam filling.21 The amalgam consisted mostly of mercury combined with silver, coarsely filed from French coins. Its comparative cheapness may have brought much profit. Crawcour had never been shy of publicity, and advertisements now trumpeted his cut-price fillings to all who could read. A few months later, Monsieur Mallan, who operated from a fashionable Bloomsbury address and was himself not inexperienced in publicity, arrived in Norwich.22 There followed an advertising campaign which, while benefiting the Norwich Chronicle no little, must have represented a substantial drain on Crawcour’s resources. Isaiah Jones, who was still acting chairman of the community, stayed above the battle. Not that that saved him from obloquy in the pages of the professional medical press. Jewish names, as we now know, figured prominently among the empirics, and their advertisements were often fancifully extreme. It is accordingly small wonder to find, as Dr Hillam has done, a distinctly unfriendly tone among some of the emerging professionals of the 1830s.23 Jacob Levison, himself one of the strictest of these, warned in an article printed in 1831 that the amalgam was extremely unstable, sometimes resulting in mercury poisoning.24 Levison also pointed out that not every dentist was particularly conscientious about the vital and time-consuming task of preparing the cavities by excavating caries. But we must return to Norwich before exploring more detailed technicalities.

Joel Fox, a furrier who was to become the next leader of the community, announced his arrival there ‘from London’ in 1832. He was then aged 29, and his approximate place of origin is indicated by the name of his premises, Leipsic House (see Plate 4).25 This was situated in a prime position facing the Market Place, in contrast with the properties occupied by other members of the community, for example David Soman, then a shoe-trimming manufacturer in Back Street, or Aaron Sampson, a confectioner in Goat Lane, or Myers Levine, a toyman soon to turn hardware dealer and bracemaker, in Rampant Horse Street.26 Apart from those families occupied (however humbly) with the trade in precious stones and metals, many of the congregation consisted of more obscure figures such as Angel Hart, a tailor at the back of St Peter Mancroft, or Levi Lazarus, an old-clothes man with a suburban base ‘at the sign of the Dismounted Volunteer, Thorpe St Andrew’. Lazarus favoured a humorous style of advertisement, deploring the bad taste of the goods he had to offer (‘overbedizened with lace’) which nevertheless were well ‘worthy the attention of strolling players, fancy ball goers and other mountebanks’.27 The itinerants, of course, passed through in increasing numbers; one of these was an otherwise unrecorded leech importer, L. Friedlander.28 Another peripatetic, a teacher of Hebrew and German named Alexander, it is tempting to identify as either the future Bishop of Jerusalem or Lavengro’s ‘Mousha’, whose linguistic competence failed to satisfy George Borrow’s exacting standards.29 Samuel Isaacs and Company of Norwich, also of Oxford Street, London, first appear as fruiterers and madrepore merchants at 40 London Lane in
1818. Isaacs prospered considerably, eventually opening a ‘sales depot for the fine arts’ at 4 Gentleman’s Walk. The stock here included antique arms and armour, tapestries, Etruscan ware, sculptures said to be by Thorwaldsen and Canova, and a remarkable collection of Dutch old masters, one of which – a Hobbema landscape – was loaned for exhibition at the newly founded Norfolk and Suffolk Institution in 1829. Louisa Isaacs, ‘from Miss Hopton’s, 107 Oxford Street, Hat Maker to her late Majesty Queen Charlotte and the Princesses’, set up her own millinery shop in Davey Place, and was so eager to make space to display the latest fashions that she periodically threatened to destroy her regular stock of Leghorn and Dunstable straw bonnets. At least one of the Isaacs failed, and another is found on several pages of the city sessions books. But no hint of doubtful respectability seems to have attached itself to the activities of Hyman A. Louis, a fancy-goods merchant from the Palais Royal, Paris, also of Cheltenham and Leamington, whose advertisements always ended with a statement of his licensed-hawker’s number.
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

Louis used to take a room (‘the Temple of Fancy’) for a number of weeks, and tempted customers with a profuse variety of articles, alabaster workboxes, Venetian bronzes, Berlin jewellery, American glassware and bottles of Jean Maria Farina’s eau-de-cologne, for which he claimed to be the sole agent. As his period of stay drew to a close, prices on certain goods would be discounted to ‘Paris and Geneva charges, nearly a 50% saving’; in March 1836, one week’s profits were donated to the indigent blind of Norwich. Fancy goods were similarly hawked throughout East Anglia by Adolph Scherman, Harris Rosenberg, Mier Lemberg and Adolphus Siegfried Viener, who had premises at the Steyne, Brighton, the Esplanade, Weymouth, Cheltenham and Windsor, not to mention the Queen’s Bazaar, London. The most flamboyant of these traders was a company known as Barras, Marquois and Mier, whose Cheltenham base at 412 High Street seems to have been next door to that of the dentist Samuel Mosely.

Among names from the stage and concert hall the Norfolk Chronicle made much of a Grand Promenade given by the four celebrated Hungarian Singers of 1837, Messrs Rosen, Kalue, Reich and Leibenstein. ‘The [troupe]’, so ran the report, ‘appeared in this city about six years ago, as four Bohemian brothers, who proved to be four Jewish cigarmakers from Whitechapel, but whether Jews or Christians, English or Bohemians, they played and sang their parts well.’

Before we move on from Norwich, another advertisement should be mentioned. Of all the opticians who visited or settled there, few can have been as importunate as a certain Mr B. Solomons ‘of the Improved Spectacle Manufactory established more than a century, no. 5 Solomons’ Terrace, New Road, St George’s East, London’. Solomons seems to have hit on a novel sales technique for the provinces. In 1830 he announced his intention of sending a circular listing details of his stock to every respectable house in town. ‘If ladies and gentlemen’, the paragraph continued, ‘would be kind enough to request their servants to present them the circular when delivered, it would be serviceable to him and the public, as Mr S. has been informed by several ladies and gentlemen that they have never received the circular, through the neglect of their servants. Mr S. will himself call for an answer to the circular, with a most splendid assortment of his newly improved spectacles . . .’ Although Mr Solomons himself did not appear again at Norwich, several others did so, one of them (with references from the Moorfields Ophthalmic Infirmary) naming among his patrons the famously myopic Duke of Cumberland. Another and most untypical practitioner, H. S. Isaacs, advertised a course of three lectures he was to deliver at the Assembly Rooms, the subject of the first being ‘Spirit and Water’, the second ‘Light and Dark’, and the third ‘Why Moses forbids the Jews to eat swine’. ‘The lecturer’, continues this paragraph, ‘will endeavour to untie the Gordian knot of the Sacred Law, with some original poetry. A history of the optical profession in this country is clearly long overdue.

King’s Lynn, that ‘warehouse on the Wash’ as it has been called, seems to have been scarcely less ancient a community than Norwich, although the articles of
Malcolm Brown

foundation must now be put forward twenty years later than Cecil Roth’s date of 1747.\(^3\) For the names and occupations of early possible members, recourse has to be had again to the London schedules and the Lynn Guildhall plaint books, none of which makes exactly exhilarating reading. In 1777 the Ipswich Journal recorded the case of a hapless pair named Zeman, who had been apprehended at Lynn with £40 in their pockets, having travelled from Newcastle ‘pretending penury due to losses by fire in Poland during the late war’ (a reference presumably to the Haidamak calamities).\(^4\) Six years later Lynn opinion turned momentarily favourable, when Solomon Levi’s son was left senseless a few miles outside town by a sailor who made off with his pack.\(^5\) One of the leading families was that of Moses Groomsfelt, whose son Hart Jones was a High Street watchmaker and silversmith. When his brother Isaiah the dentist came over from Norwich to practise at Lynn, 86 High Street was his address. Of Hart’s three daughters, one married Isaiah Levy, watch and clockmaker of Gainsborough, another Judah Hynes, an Exeter optician who moved to Lynn on his marriage, and a third Emmanuel Levi, an auctioneer at Wells next the Sea.\(^6\) Any distinctive pattern of activity before the communal records begin is hard to detect, although it might be as well to mention here a melancholy incident in 1823, when two Sephardim, Abraham Aloof and his nephew, were mobbed and robbed by a Lynn gang. The Quarter Sessions heard the case, but in the words of the press ‘nothing could be made out, as they could not converse in English’.\(^7\) English, however, and of English parentage, was the senior warden of the congregation in the 1830s, Daniel de Pass.\(^8\) He had married the daughter of Michael Davis, a Lynn sugar merchant, in 1814, and all their nine children were born there. Daniel’s earliest surviving trade card shows that he started commercial life as a pen, quill and pencil maker. He next turned to drapery, but not at first succeeding in this, opened a footwear store, the Golden Boot, at 33 High Street.\(^9\) Periodic sales mention a stock of literally thousands of articles.

The many demands on the community’s charitable impulses can be illustrated by the evidence of an appeal to Lynn from the ‘directors, overseers and treasurers of the Holy Land residing in Amsterdam and The Hague’, one of a number of identical letters circulated simultaneously from Holland in 1828.\(^10\) A glance at the Lynn charity register reveals that scarcely a month went by without some claim. Among the beneficiaries were a boy who was ill in South Lynn with a sore foot, whose medical expenses were defrayed and who was then accompanied to London in a van, a sponge dealer, poor people en route to Boston and Hull, a Russian, a Pole and his son, several Hamburgers, many pedlars collecting for their licences, and a prisoner in the Swaffham Bridewell. The Walsingham Bridewell at this time housed several Jewish prisoners for whom Lynn provided kosher meat. When the Norwich community appealed to Lynn for assistance in obtaining counsel for a man held at Walsingham in 1837, the secretary was asked to make a minute of the fact that when Lynn had applied to Norwich and Hull in a similar case, no answer

226
had been received. On this occasion, fortunately, Lynn did contribute ten shillings.

Incoming payments included, for instance in 1833, three guineas from a Mr Salmon of Cambridge, and in 1834 ten guineas for family burial rights from Mr Emanuel of Peterborough. In 1841, when the community raised £2 10s towards the Montefiore Endowment Fund, the Lynn treasurer must have been pleasantly surprised when Sir Moses, with his customary generosity, returned by cheque one fifth of their contribution. The synagogue building, it should be said, survived until about 1930 and stood in Armes’ Yard, near a corner of what is now Debenham’s. The most frequent outgoings represent Rabbi Simon Nurenberg’s monthly salary.47 Outside the synagogue, members took some part in Lynn life, one of them serving as a constable of the medievally named Jews Ward.48 Among the furriers in town was the Berlin-born Carl Cohnstaidt, apparently a dentist at Ipswich in 1834, but by 1839 at High Street, Lynn, in a branch of Joel Fox’s Leipsic Fur Warehouse.49

By this date de Pass’s other High Street shop, the London Clothes, Cloth and Hat Warehouse (otherwise known simply as the Lynn Mart) was being successfully managed by Maurice Kisch. Affairs at the Golden Boot, on the other hand, had taken a turn for the worse. A stock-clearance sale was accompanied by an announcement that the firm would close in Lynn, but would retain the wholesale premises at 40 Cateaton Street, Cheapside, and a branch at 6 High Street, Wisbech.50 Two of de Pass’s sons left Lynn, the eldest eventually becoming prominent at the Cape.51 Those who stayed at home must have witnessed a community steadily dwindling, as railway development deprived Lynn of its ancient geographical advantages.

The first Jewish settlers at the coastal harbour town of Yarmouth arrived in the 1760s and may partly have originated from Norwich, whose chief port and holiday resort it then was. All that one might add to previous accounts of the early years here is the story of the Corporation, anxious to install the latest heating equipment at their traditional meeting place, the Tollhouse Hall, selling £20 worth of dismounted cannon to cover the cost of one of Solomon Buzaglo’s famous stoves.52 In 1811, during the long Napoleonic blockade, a rare ray of light from the world of high finance shone upon Yarmouth.53 One of the principal shipowners had written to enquire of Nathan Rothschild whether he had any return goods that might be carried on a vessel bound for Heligoland. Six months later, New Court commissioned Henry Micholls (father of a future warden of the community) and Isaac Lee to forward to Mr Lucas of 15 Haydon Square, London, two sealed parcels from Heligoland, insured for £290. The excitement that surrounded any movement of specie made the need for confidentiality paramount, so no more is heard of the matter. Some ten years later, Nathan Rothschild received an invitation from another part of East Anglia. An ADC to King George IV, Count Linsingen, wishing to negotiate a personal mortgage with New Court, informed Rothschild of the pleasure it would give him to be his host at Birkfield Lodge, his
Malcolm Brown

house outside Ipswich, should the baron decide to travel to Yarmouth en route for St Petersburg. ‘You generally will meet a German or two [here],’ continued Linsingen, ‘this being a sort of rallying point for most of them who reside in England.’ No reply to this letter has survived.

To return to the more communal chronicle: Isaiah Jones included Yarmouth almost as frequently as King’s Lynn on his dental circuit, as he was able to lodge there with another of his brothers, David, at least until David Jones moved to Liverpool in 1825. Isaac Stone, a ‘wreck merchant’, is listed at Yarmouth in 1830. David Leyser Cohen, who was to have a share of the honours at the new synagogue foundation-stonelaying ceremony in 1847, first features in the directories as a fruit importer located on Market Place. He then went into partnership with a grocer nearby, and this shop, at Market Row (see Plate 5), is likely to have been the only outlet in East Anglia for the sale of Alexander’s Pressburger Zwieback wine biscuits. For those with money to spend and a taste for the good things of life another grocery, that of Messrs Mordecai and Mayer, offered still further choice, such as the firm’s own brand of original cheese spread, retailed in 1s 3d and half-crown pots. Two more notables were Jacob Falcke, in 1823 the first shochet to be appointed at Yarmouth, and his kinsman David Falcke, whose new home (Sutherland House, South Bay) was consecrated at a ceremony conducted by Dr David Marks of the West London Reform congregation.

Plate 5 Trade card of David Leyser Cohen, showing the Nelson Monument, Yarmouth, c. 1840.
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

Nothing has yet been said about those living at some distance from the synagogues. A handful at Diss, for example, included Samuel Moses, who married a Miss Wiseman of the same place in 1804, and his kinsman Emanuel Moses, who, at the age of 84 and still on his rounds between Eye and Brome, was robbed of his watch and thirty shillings in 1839. Moss Lemon, Polish born but then living in Lakenham with his wife Golda and their daughter Juterlecar, was a Norwich member in 1838; another was the grocer Simon Salkind, of the Butchery, North Walsham, whose brother is likely to have been the Saul Salkind, watchmaker, recorded at the Market Place there. Israel Michael, a respectable inhabitant of Wymondham for 53 years, died there in 1851; while in 1803 at Swaffham, then enjoying a brief reputation as a place for genteel retirement, Mr M. Levi, a miniaturist, offered to take likenesses from his apartment next door to the White Hart. Lastly, mention should be made of a handful at Wells next the Sea, once a fairly prosperous port. At least one Jewish chapman was there in 1755, and a few years later three more from Wells were in debt to Jacob Harry of King’s Lynn for sundry jewellery goods. For thirty years from 1790 the principal auctioneer in Wells and its neighbourhood was Jacob Levi, who lived with his family of four in a house in the High Street. It was under his hammer that in 1803 the Ship Inn, Brancaster Staithe, together with the Brancaster harbour dues, were sold, likewise a brigantine of 101 tons burden, The Greenwood, in 1818. For the disposal of any lot that failed to find a bidder Levi kept a shop; his successor Immanuel Levi was additionally a skilled cabinet maker.

In the county of Suffolk the Jewish community centred solely on the town of Ipswich, where a synagogue that was built in 1792 survived until 1877. The centenarian born as Sarah Ezekiel in Holland in 1704 is traditionally thought to have been the earliest inhabitant, although the ratebooks give no support to this assumption. Undoubtedly one of the first settlers was the Hamburg-born Simon Hyam, who from 1773 to 1785 occupied a moderately large house in Fore Street. In July 1776 he placed a paragraph in the press concerning a pedlar, Benjamin Isaac, whose walk (in Hyam’s words) was usually about Yoxford to Aldeburgh, Southwold, Dunwich and the neighbouring villages. Isaac was described as wearing a cinnamon-coloured greatcoat and a red-plush waistcoat, and had left Ipswich over a month before. If, as is not unlikely, Hyam was Isaac’s supplier, his anxiety is understandable. A tiny community depended for minyan on every male available, and only two other names are evident in the ratebooks of this period. If the usual estimates of the proportion of those living in rented accommodation compared with those leasing or owning their own property are applied, a total of between thirty and forty heads of households a few years later suggests the minimum necessary before a benefactor would consider providing the funds to build a synagogue. This certainly appears to have been the case at Ipswich. A site was chosen in a newly developing area of the town and the architect (possibly George Gooding, brother of the ground landlord) devised a small building in the
Gothic style and made of local brick. One day, within a few months of the opening ceremony, a ladder belonging to the synagogue was ‘borrowed’ by friends of a prisoner in the Borough Gaol nearby, who shortly afterwards was a prisoner no more.

Simon Hyam’s son Henry (otherwise known as Hyam) first appears as a watchmaker independently of his father in 1803. At Brook Street, and from 1823 also at Colchester, he diversified as a draper, tailor and hatter, advertising that the premises were not open for business during the hours of Sabbath. His son Lawrence set up in 1826 a large warehouse for ready-made clothing at the Buttermarket, Bury St Edmunds, where his confidential assistant was Mr S. Hendricks (Henriques). Others prominent in Ipswich must include the minister, Harris Isaacs, whom a local antiquarian towards the end of the century remembered ‘marking the meat’ at Canham’s in Upper Brook Street, and a number of Sarah Lyon’s descendants, among them the Ansell family. Much mystery surrounds the identity of Sarah’s son the Revd Isaac Titterman, who is clearly not to be confused with Richard Tydeman of the ratebooks whose range of parish responsibilities it would have been beyond the capacity of any professing Jew to discharge. Another of Sarah’s sons, the ‘old Mr Abrams’ of John Constable’s correspondence, occasionally officiated at weddings and failed to reach his century by only a few years.

‘The Jews [of Ipswich],’ wrote the town’s historian in 1830, ‘are not numerous and do not increase in numbers, few or none of them having been engaged in the higher walks of mercantile transactions. It is impossible to verify the story that the Town Council, aghast at the threat to good order in face of hostile scenes outside the synagogue in the 1790s, decided to change the market day from Saturday to Tuesday, but there could have been such a causal connection. The change seems to have done little enough for communal morale. In a particularly sorry case in 1831, the Consistory Court of Norwich was called on to arbitrate between the Levy brothers, who had exchanged insults in public about their wives. The court sentenced Michael Levy to perform the penance of retraction at St Margaret’s, Ipswich, a penance that ended with the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. It must have needed considerable stamina for a small congregation to pull together again after such foolishness. Ipswich functioned fitfully in the 1850s, but it is doubtful whether the hundred synagogue seats were ever very full.

One other Suffolk town had a small Jewish presence, Bury St Edmunds. Pasco Aronson, inventor of a curious dental electuary at Cambridge, whose brother Lewis was a jeweller at Sudbury, opened a surgery there before moving on to Birmingham. Mitchell Myers, who came from Norwich to Bury in 1826, started as a clothier and pawnbroker but developed a sideline in the antique porcelain trade. China, too, was among the many goods sold by Henry Juda during his periodical visits to the town in the 1830s. Ladies deprived for too long of Indian bracelets or French fur-pelisse buckles, gentlemen denied the widest imaginable
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

choice of snuff-boxes and anybody eager for the latest curiosity, a Chinese shower fountain, might have found just what they wanted at Mr Juda’s Grecian and Turkish bazaar. This was pitched on the corner of the Market Square for a week or two only, the proprietor being obliged to return to his head office, a house next to Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, before term began. Further out in the countryside one or two names are found at Bungay, where Moses Samuel had a store for fifteen years from 1792. When he moved to Ipswich his nephew Simon Aaron (later of Elm Hill, Norwich) was sent to mind the shop. Finally John Messina, in 1824 ‘of Stowmarket’, married at the Hambro Synagogue that year Rachel, daughter of Abraham Gomes of Bury Street.

The period under discussion was one during which contacts with the host community could often prove morally damaging. Two years after his appointment to Yarmouth, Rabbi Gabriel Hyams (later Pieritz) allowed himself to be drawn into controversy with an apostate. When the congregation threatened to dismiss him, Hyams wrote a letter of protest to the editor of the East Anglian. Declining to print the letter, the editor nevertheless made it a pretext for argument against legislation designed to annul Jewish civil disabilities. The bishop of Jerusalem already mentioned, Michael Samuel Alexander, was described in one conversionist journal as ‘formerly rabbi at Norwich and Plymouth’ although at Norwich he is more likely to have acted as no more than hazan and/or shochet in the early 1820s. This was when St Andrew’s Hall regularly echoed to elaborate appeals from members of the well-funded London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews, whose organ was the Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel. On the sixth anniversary of the founding of the local auxiliary branch of the Society, the journal reported a ‘great interest excited in several of the sermons by a number of Jews, who heard with respectful attention and lively interest what was delivered . . . respecting their nation. Some had previously applied for the publications of the Society and evidently appeared concerned for their spiritual welfare. They must have felt particular concern had they heard the Revd Lewis Way recall an anecdote of King John, who ‘sent down to Norwich to extort 10,000 marks from a single Jew. [Way] would only add that he hoped Norwich would pay the debt in some form or other. At Bury St Edmunds in 1817, ‘the Jews’, it was reported, were again ‘affectionately invited’ to hear a sermon: ‘some few were at church and listened with apparent attention’. Henry Samuel Joseph, once officiant at the tiny synagogue in Bedford, issued at Norwich in 1830 his Reasons for renouncing Judaism and embracing Christianity, which today reads as a depressing attempt at self-exculpation from somebody reduced to a subsistence level as an unsuccessful teacher of Hebrew, and which reveals that in a contemplated career change when Joseph had set his sights on a post in the East India Company office, it was pointed out to him that his religion might debar him from a ‘public situation’. Solomon Herschell, frequently criticized for being out of touch with contemporary realities, knew exactly how to deal with the conversionists. The Revd C. J. Smyth, a minor
Malcolm Brown

canon of Norwich Cathedral speaking at St Andrew’s Hall in 1817, explained that he had written to Herschell asking for a statement of the most forcible objections Jews had to embracing the Christian religion. ‘I mentioned to the Bishop of London’, continued Smyth, ‘that I flattered myself that the High Priest would return me an answer, but I received none . . . Do I hate a Jew? God forbid. Will anyone present get up and say he believes a moral and religious Jew will be damned? I wait for an answer.’

‘It is all amongst the fraternity’, observed the commissioner discharging Schreiner Woolf of Yarmouth from bankruptcy in 1841. Historians give a number of reasons for the decline of prosperity in Victorian East Anglia, the most obvious being a general unwillingness to adapt to new industrial methods. King’s Lynn, as already mentioned, suffered severely from early railway development, and Yarmouth was harmed by the improved access to London made possible by steam navigation. Norfolk and Suffolk had to bear rates of poor relief that were among the highest in the country, both before and after Poor Law reform in 1834. It was poverty that delayed the building of the Norwich synagogue until five years after Crawcour’s appeal for funds: to quote him again, ‘our brethren are principally of such limited means that they can spare little or nothing to contribute towards the furtherance of the object in view.’ But it was not material poverty alone that undermined the communities. Their eventual collapse (and the near-collapse of Norwich in 1837) must be attributed to several factors, perhaps chief among them the decay of local loyalties brought about by easier mobility, and the consequent decline in the number of family concerns carried on from one generation to the next. Together with this went what can only be described as a certain poverty of public spirit, or to use the exact phrase of the return that Yarmouth made to the Chief Rabbi’s questionnaire in 1845, ‘a want of union’. More than this would take us into the realm of speculation. At the back of every historian’s mind lingers the doubt voiced by a Norwich man three centuries ago, ‘whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered in the known account of time’. Only local specialists can be expected to find answers to Sir Thomas Browne’s question, and this paper is presented as an encouragement to their continuing research.

NOTES

1 Trans JHSE II (1896) 106–40.
4 H. Robinson, Britain’s Post Office (Oxford 1953) 75, n. 2.

5 Corporation of London Record Office (hereafter CLRO) DS/16/8, DS/15/3 and DS/16/5.

6 R. Noel-Hill, ‘The clock and watchmakers of Norfolk and Norwich’ (a three-volume MS at Norwich Central Library, Local Studies section) I, 171.

7 The list of burials at the Quaker Lane Cemetery recorded by Benjamin Samuel in 1872 and printed by Levine (see n. 2) should be sup-
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

plemented by details that are available at the Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO) COL/8/71 (C) T 130 C, compiled under the auspices of the Society for Preserving the Memorials of the Dead, 1883-5.


9 Norfolk Chronicle (hereafter NC) 24 June 1780. Doubt persists as to any specifically Jewish identity in this instance: compare the similarity to other names given in e.g. the Norwich directory of 1783.

10 NC 17 August 1811; as chapman and hawker, NRO Quarter Sessions Books, 18 October 1780 and 2 May 1783.

11 He is included in the Universal British Directory (1793-8); CLRO, DS/15/45.

12 NC 14 December 1782, 16 and 23 August 1783 (S. Benedict); NC 9 and 16 July 1791 and A. Rubens in Trans JHSE XXIV (1974) 165-8 (Jona); NC 15 June 1782 (Leon).

13 Bury and Norwich Post (hereafter BNP) 17 January 1787 and NC 5 May 1787 (Poland); NC 15 June 1793 (Immanuel); BNP 20 May 1818 (Town) and A. Rubens in Trans JHSE XVIII (1958) 93 for an earlier visit.

14 For Lyons as an itinerant, NC 7 November 1795 and as a resident NC 4 February 1797; at Ipswich, see Ipswich Journal (hereafter IJ) 10 November 1804, St Margaret's ratebooks until May 1815 and IJ 20 January 1816 (sale of stock in trade); Murry (despite the patronymic) together with Solomon Barnard, a Whitechapel innkeeper, Alexander Barnard, a Norwich haberdasher, and Abraham Phillips, a Norwich tailor, was involved in a breach of the peace (NRO, Quarter Sessions book 19, April 1802).


17 Reported fully in BNP 20 August 1821.

18 NC 29 September 1821: a fellow-passenger in his phaeton was Dr Jordan, patentee of the widely puffed Cordial Balm of Rakasiri.


20 NRO, MS. 20674, Cab. II; these sketches were used to illustrate an article in Eastern Daily Press 22 September 1951.

21 J. Menzies Campbell, 'The Crawcours', The Dental Practitioner and Dental Record VIII-4 (December 1957) 108-9, places the amalgam controversy in its historical context.

22 NC 21 March 1831: Mallan's claim to the same discovery was alleged to be 'sanctioned by the faculty of London and Paris'.

23 Hillam (see n. 16) 12. Doctor Solomon of Liverpool, the originator of Anglo-Jewish medical advertising, is reputed to have said that £100 so spent brought in a profit of £2000: see L. London, 'The vile race of quacks . . . ' in W. F. Bynum and R. Porter (eds) Medical Fringe and Medical Orthodoxy (London 1986) 126, n. 23.

24 The Lancet 10 September 1831, 764-6: 'Exposure of quackeries in dental surgery'; compare the Purland MS at the Wellcome Inst Lib., f. 112 (1840).

25 NC 12 October 1832. He was born in Prussian Lissa (now Leszno, Poland); for his descendants, see L. Fox, E. Phillips Fox and his family (Sydney 1985).

26 W. L. Sparks, The Story of Shoemaking in Norwich (Norwich 1949) 102-4 and R. Stedman, 'Vox Populi' (unpub. thesis, Library Association 1971) 289-91 (David and Philip Soman); BNP 6 March 1833 (Sampson); NC 17 August 1833 (Myer Levi).

27 Pigot's Directory, 1830 (Hart); BNP 2 January 1828 (Lazarus).

28 The 1841 Norwich census returns show a lodging house in Pottergate occupied by eight Jewish commercial travellers; Friedlander's source of supply was Hamburg: NC 12 February 1834 and BNP 12 July 1837.

29 NC 6 July and 28 December 1822; for 'Mousha', see chapter XXIII of note 3, and W. L. Knapp, The Life and Writings . . . of Borrow I (London 1899) 70.

30 Norwich, Yarmouth and Lynn Courier 21 February 1818; NC 6 July 1839.

31 NC 31 October 1829 (exhibition review).

32 NC 5 June 1824, 7 May 1825, 6 May 1826, 7 March 1829.

33 BNP 22 and 29 May 1833; NC 15 February, 22 and 29 March and 5 April 1834; Alfred Lewis's boutique opposite the Great White Horse Tavern, Ipswich, was named 'Le Petit Palais Royal': IJ 23 December 1826.

34 NC 20 and 27 February, 5, 12 and 26 March 1836 (Scherman); NC 12 May 1837 (Rosenberg); Suffolk Chronicle (hereafter SC) 23 May 1835 (Viener).
35 NC 15 March 1834.
36 NC 10 June 1836; at Ipswich, IF 5 June 1830 and 22 April 1837.
37 NC 9 January and (on circuit) 30 January 1830.
38 NC 16 February 1839.
39 GLRO, Acc. 2712/VI/7 and 8 are the King’s Lynn minute book (KL/599/0/20). I am grateful to Steven Greff of the Museum for much advice about Lynn.
40 IF 25 January 1777.
41 NC 7 June 1783; Jonas Levi’s trade poster, dated 1780, is in the Lynn Museum (KL/599/0/20). I am grateful to Steven Greff of the Museum for much advice about Lynn.
42 Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury 19 January 1816. Levy became a meshumad: Jewish Repository VI (1840) 123–4; for Hynes, BNP 23 February 1825 and NC 28 May 1831.
43 NC 8 February 1823 (two Turks); compare W. Armes’ description of four Jewish hawker at the old February mart (‘sturdy men in cloaks and turbans’) in Lynn Advertiser 20 April 1872.
44 I am indebted to Mrs Phoebe Walker of Eydon for many details about the de Pass family.
45 NC 25 November 1826 and 15 October 1831. For his local suppliers, see P. Richards, King’s Lynn (Chichester 1990) 105.
46 I am grateful to Mr A. Schischa for drawing my attention to this hectograph.
47 West Norfolk Local History Society Journal 1-3 (1979) 13; J. D. Thew, Personal Recollections ... (King’s Lynn 1891) 59–61; Nuremberg was aged 26 in 1841 (census return).
49 IF 20 September 1834; Robson’s Directory, 1840.
50 East Anglian 14 February and 8 May 1832; NC 15 October 1836; Norwich Mercury 18 February 1837, but the Lynn branch remained open (1846 Directory).
51 For a family tree and details of Daniel’s descendants, see J. A. S. Phillips, Deutsch-Englische Komödie der Irrungen von Sudwestafrika (Pfaffenhofen 1986).
52 C. J. Palmer, The Perurbation ... II (Yarmouth 1874) 264. It is not known whether the road running along the west side of Bradwell crematorium was named Jews Lane.
53 Rothschild Archives (London) XI/112/32B and 33; XI/112/52B.
54 R. Noel-Hill (see n. 6) I, 174; NC 22 June 1805 and 25 June 1818. I owe the Liverpool reference to Mr J. Wolfman, archivist to the Merseyside Jewish Representative Council.
55 Norwich Mercury 21 December 1839; the trade card is among those in the Colman collection held at Norwich Central Library, Local Studies section.
56 NC 31 March 1838. Mavers started as a silversmith and became a furniture broker; Mordecai is first recorded as a silversmith.
57 BNP 27 August 1823; C. J. Palmer (see n. 52) I (Yarmouth 1872) 242–3.
58 BNP 12 December 1804, 25 September 1839 and 15 February 1840.
59 1841 census returns (Lemon and Simon Salkind); R. Noel-Hill (see n. 6) II, 292.
60 BNP 1 May 1799; NC 2 January 1841 (Michael); NRO, Duleep Singh Papers MC 109/135 (Levi).
61 GLRO, DS 15/17. Mr R. F. Gerken tells me that the traditional name for the busiest part of Wells was once Jewtown.
62 I am grateful to the Revd W. Sayer for permission to study a copy of Horsfall’s MS Census of Wells, 1793.
63 BNP 15 June 1823; NC 29 August 1818.
64 NC 8 February, 20 March and 28 October 1820; BNP 31 January 1821.
65 Jewish Chronicle 6 and 13 April 1877. Suffolk Record Office (hereafter SufRO) B 106/13/1, a register of Friendly Societies, refers to the Ipswich Hebrew Society in 1822 but the rulebook is missing from the QS records.
66 SufRO, St Clement’s ratebooks; from 1789 he lived in Carr Street, next door to a house belonging to John Gooding.
67 IF 31 July 1776. 25 years earlier, Isaac had been robbed of four gold rings at Harwich: Essex Assize records, Lent 1761.
68 The directories all mention its pointed windows; for Gooding, see J. Wodderspoon, Memorials of Ipswich (Ipswich 1850) 11.
69 IF 2 February 1793. BL, Add. MS. 31232, N3, shows the proximity of the two buildings.
70 IF 29 January, 12 February and 15 October 1803; Colchester Gazette 15 October 1825; J. Booker, Essex and the Industrial Revolution (Chelmsford 1974) 53.
72 SufRO, MS. S Ips. 283; Ansell Ansell’s house in St Helen’s was occupied by six males.
The Jews of Norfolk and Suffolk before 1840

and two females in 1811 (SufRO, FB 98/G7/2); if 26 August 1815 (Joshua Ansell).

73 Titterman's portrait is in a private collection in Victoria (Australia); the authorities at the Ipswich Museum are uncertain (despite the Hebrew inscription) whether John Constable or George Frost was the artist.


75 G. R. Clarke, The History and Description of ... Ipswich (Ipswich 1830) 319.

76 J. Glyde, The ... Condition of Ipswich (Ipswich 1861) 17 states that the change of day did not occur until the 1830s, in view of which (pace Mr Oliver Sebag-Montefiore) there seems little basis for the story.

77 NRO, CON/128; NC 24 December 1831: Moses Levy should not be confused with a man of the same name who was baptized (BNP 25 June 1817) but he may have been the addressee of two letters from Herschell in 1838 (JTSA, Mic 3619, ff. 248b and 254a).

78 BNP 26 March 1806; Hillam (see n. 16) Appendix 2.1; BNP 7 April 1841.

79 NC 6 August 1825 and BNP 24 May 1826.

80 BNP 16 October 1833.

81 A. L. Haggar and L. F. Miller, Suffolk Clocks and Clockmakers (Ramsgate 1974) 134, but it is difficult to reconcile their dates with the 1841 census return (Ipswich, Upper Brook Street); compare BNP 15 July 1807 and if 24 August 1811; for Aaron, BNP 10 January 1807.

82 Microfilm of Hambro Synagogue marriage register, Hyde Park Family History Centre.

83 East Anglian 20 November 1831; NC 12 May 1832; Jewish Intelligence I (1835) 227–30.

84 Jewish Repository VI (1840) 240.


86 NC 14 August 1819.

87 Jewish Expositor II (1817) 426.


89 Hirschell's only surviving copy letter to East Anglia on halachic matters (JTSA, Mic 3610, f. 142b) concerns the conditions under which an Ipswich shopkeeper, who had previously worked on Sabbath, might be permitted to make up minyan.

90 C. J. Smyth, A Speech ... intended to be delivered at St Andrew's Hall ... (Norwich 1817) 3–5. A hitherto overlooked source (SufRO, HA 11/B 17/1) lists petitions opposed to the admission of Jews to Parliament.

91 Norfolk and Norwich Monitor and Police Gazette 1 August 1841.

92 See note 19.

93 B. Susser, Statistical Accounts of all the Congregations ... in A. Newman (ed.) (see note 6).

94 Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial; or a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk (1658; Everyman edition 1966) 135. Masonic source material at NRO remains largely unexplored.