Jewish Residents in Eighteenth-century Twickenham

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This paper is based on research undertaken by the late Paul de Castro and myself, while collecting material for a history of Twickenham in the eighteenth century, as yet unpublished.

Twickenham, on the Middlesex bank of the Thames, was renowned from the earliest days of the century for its fine riverside residences, as we learn from the pages of John Macky and Defoe. Many famous people were attracted by its ‘laughing scene’, in the words of Gray, the poet, and it is not surprising that by the middle of the century we find among its wealthy and fashionable inhabitants members of several well-known Jewish families living there in comfort and repute. The chief names that occur are Franks, Franco, Salvador, Prado, and Nunez. Members of some of these families resided also in the adjacent villages of Teddington and Isleworth, and in Twickenham’s more important neighbour across the river, Richmond in Surrey.

Much of the information about these Jewish residents comes to us from the correspondence of Horace Walpole, to whose entertaining gossip we are deeply indebted. Extracts from his letters show the degree of intimacy which existed between the well-born and somewhat supercilious Walpole and his Jewish neighbours. The memoirs of William Hickey, also a Twickenham resident, provide us with another contemporary, though less reliable, source.

It was not till May, 1747, that Walpole purchased the building which eventually became his “Gothic Castle” of Strawberry Hill. Alexander Pope, whose house was but a short distance away, had then been dead three years. But Walpole’s first mention of a member of the house of Franks is in 1742, five years before he went to live at Twickenham when, in a letter to Sir Horace Mann, he tells how the Princess of Wales, at a masquerade at Norfolk House, “was vastly bejewelled; Franks had lent her forty thousand pounds’ worth, and refused to be paid for the hire, only desiring that she would tell whose they were.” Walpole was probably referring to Aaron Franks of Billiter Square, near Fenchurch Street, for another Twickenham resident, Miss Letitia Hawkins, also relates in her Memoirs an anecdote of Aaron Franks, diamond merchant, told to her father, Sir John Hawkins, by Franks himself. It is likely that Franks had a private house at Isleworth, for in November, 1774, more than thirty years later than his letter to Mann, Walpole wrote from Strawberry Hill to the Earl of Strafford, who also had a Twickenham residence, but was then at his Yorkshire seat: “This morning I was at a very fine concert at old Franks’ at Isleworth, and heard Leoni, who pleased me more than anything I have heard these hundred years.”

Aaron Franks had married a daughter of Moses Hart (1676–1756), the banker, brother of Rabbi Aaron Hart (1670–1756), and benefactor of the Great Synagogue. Moses Hart owned a handsome mansion on the river bank near Railshead ferry, Isleworth, which was said by Macky to be “inferior to few Palaces”. An engraving of “The House of Moses Hart, Esqr. between Twickenham and Isleworth” was published about 1750. An incident concerning Aaron Franks and his father-in-law at Isleworth is related in Picciotto’s “Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History”. Another

1 Paper read before the Jewish Historical Society of England on 19th June, 1947.
of Moses Hart’s daughters, Judith, married Elias Levy, a wealthy Government contractor, and lived in great splendour at her town house in Albemarle Street, and in the house at Richmond now No. 4 Maids of Honour Row. She attained the great age of 97, was famed for her benevolence, and was known as “the Queen of Richmond Green”.

Leoni, the singer, whose performance gave Walpole so much pleasure, was a co-religionist of his Isleworth host. Although known on the operatic stage by an Italian name, he was really Myer Lyon, and was the patron and teacher of the later celebrated John Braham (1774–1856). Braham’s daughter, strangely enough, in after years became connected with the Walpole family, for towards the middle of the nineteenth century she married the seventh Earl Waldegrave, and herself lived at Strawberry Hill.

Aaron Franks died in 1777 aged 85. One of his nephews, David Franks, of Philadelphia, who died in 1794, also spent his later years at Isleworth. Another nephew, Moses Franks, who was born in New York in 1718, married his cousin, a daughter of Aaron Franks, and lived at Teddington. It is probably to him that Walpole refers in a letter written from Strawberry Hill in 1779, when he tells us of a great storm during which the garden wall of Mr. Franks “here” was blown down. The word “here” is ambiguous, but on a rare map of the Brentford Turnpike Roads dated 1769, to which Mr. S. W. Dutton of Twickenham has drawn my attention, the first large house within the boundary of Teddington parish, where it adjoins Twickenham, is lettered: “Mr. Franks.” A sentence in another of Walpole’s letters, written two years later, must also refer to this neighbour: “I did not see the Clive last night as she was gone to Mr. Franks.” Walpole’s friend, Kitty Clive, the famous actress, was then living at “Little Strawberry Hill”, which he had given her—“Cliveden”, as he sometimes called it—and it was but a few steps from there to the home of Moses Franks. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted a portrait of Moses Franks, who was a handsome man. His wife, who is said to have been a great beauty, was also painted by Reynolds, and by Gainsborough. Moses Franks died at Teddington in 1789.

On Tuesday, 6th June, 1780, Walpole made an interesting reference to a member of the Franco family: “We had an exceedingly pretty firework last night on the bank of the Thames,” he wrote to Lady Ossory, “at that most beautiful of all spots that was Mr. Giles’s, and is now one Franco’s, a Jew, who gave the entertainment in honour of the day.” The occasion of this celebration was the King’s birthday, which fell on the previous Sunday, 4th June, and the house where it took place was Little Marble Hill, or Marble Hill Cottage, as it was sometimes called. This house, which subsequently had associations with many well-known people, among whom was another of Walpole’s friends, Lady Diana Beauclerk, no longer exists. Franco’s predecessor, Daniel Giles, bank director and silk merchant in New Bond Street, is credited with enlarging and improving the house and its gardens, which now form part of the Marble Hill estate; but after the death of his wife in November, 1778, Giles left Twickenham. The Rev. Richard Cobbett in his “Memorials of Twickenham”, tells us that the next occupant of Little Marble Hill was David Franco; but the only David who has so far been traced died in Fenchurch Street in May, 1778. The Isleworth Rate Books in 1778 give the name of Ralph Franco as the occupant of Lacy House. This must have been Raphael Franco, of the firm of Jacob, Moses, and Raphael Franco, City merchants of Fenchurch Street. Lacy House, which stood
on the river bank just above the house of Moses Hart, had been built by James Lacy, co-patentee with Garrick of Drury Lane Theatre. After Lacy's death in 1774, it was occupied by his son, Willoughby Lacy, who was soon in financial difficulties and glad, no doubt, to let the house. But Franco appears to have leased it for only one year, and it seems probable that when Little Marble Hill was vacated by Giles at the end of 1778, Raphael Franco moved there from Isleworth.

A fine portrait of Raphael Franco, with a glimpse of St. Paul's Cathedral in the background, was painted by Gainsborough in 1780, the year of the birthday celebration at Little Marble Hill. At that time Franco's reputation as a successful city merchant of great wealth and power must have stood very high, but unfortunately he died the following year, leaving a widow and a numerous family. The names of three of his sons, Jacob, aged 13, Ephraim, aged 8, and Joseph, aged 5, occur in a list of original subscribers to the "Free-masons Tontine" in 1775. When Raphael Franco's portrait was sold at Christie's, 130 years after his death, for 6,200 guineas, a record price for a man's portrait by Gainsborough, some account of the Franco family was published in The Morning Post, 9th July, 1910. Raphael's brother, Moses Franco, married a daughter of Francis Daniel Salvador, and we are thus introduced to another important Jewish family residing in Twickenham.

The Salvadors had originally come from Holland, possessed of great wealth, but in later years they suffered financial losses, and most of their European property disappeared. As they owned territory in America, Francis Daniel Salvador, of Twickenham, resolved to travel there in an effort to retrieve the family fortunes. His expedition ended in tragedy, for not long after his arrival in the New World, his family received news that he had been scalped in battle with Indians in Carolina. He left a widow, Sarah, his first cousin, a daughter of Joseph Salvador.¹ Four years later, in June, 1780, she and three of her children were baptized at Twickenham Parish Church. It has never been explained why Mrs. Salvador took this step, and I should like to suggest a possible motive. In June, 1780, the Gordon Riots were disorganizing the life of the capital and causing much consternation. They had their origin in the "No Popery" cry of Lord George Gordon, the fanatical President of the Protestant Association. The unruly elements of the populace, seeing a chance of law-breaking and indulgence in looting, joined with Gordon in his march against Roman Catholic property. Details will be found in The Gordon Riots by J. Paul de Castro, from which it is clear that news of the destruction of property by fire and violence soon reached Twickenham and other out-lying districts of London. Moreover, many citizens were seriously alarmed, thinking that they might be the next victims of fanaticism; and it was reported that the terror-stricken Jews in Houndsditch and Duke's Place, Aldgate, sought to protect themselves by chalking on their doors the words: "This house is a true Protestant." In the circumstances it seems possible that on 6th June, the very day when the riots were at their height, a widowed Jewess in Twickenham may have been frightened into adopting the Protestant religion. The names of her son and two daughters who were baptized on the following day, 7th June, were John Lovell, Esther Anne, and Leonora Mary Salvador.

Although it has no direct bearing on Twickenham history, one may perhaps recall the ironical fact that six or seven years after the riots, Lord George Gordon

¹ Otherwise Joseph Jessurun Rodrigues (1716–1766).
became a convert to Judaism, taking the name of "Israel Abraham Gordon". He grew a long beard, and his last moments are said to have been embittered by the knowledge that he could not be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Walpole only once mentions the name of Salvador, in 1762, when he relates how "two rich Jewesses, Mrs. Salvador and Mrs. Mendez" (probably Mrs. Mendes da Costa, Mrs. Salvador's sister) made inquiries after the Queen's health on the birth of the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV). We find a contemporary reference to the family, however, in Hickey's memoirs. About 1758 Hickey's father, Joseph Hickey, the well-known lawyer, had built himself a house at Cross Deep, Twickenham, and it was there that William spent his boyhood. In 1769 at the age of twenty he went on his first voyage to India, and on his return early in June, 1780, landed at Amsterdam. "On going into the coffee room of the hotel," he writes, "I found a number of English assembled, conversing upon the subject of alarming riots that had occurred, and still subsisted in London, of which the most extraordinary and alarming accounts had just reached them. In the company was a gentleman whose face seemed familiar to me, and who I observed looking earnestly at me. In a few minutes he addressed me saying: "If not greatly mistaken, I am speaking to an old Twickenham acquaintance named William Hickey." I directly recognized him as the youngest Salvador with whose family mine had been intimate for many years. He told me he was settled at Amsterdam, and should be happy to show me every attention. He immediately introduced me to some of the first people of the city, from whom I received invitations enough to fill up a month had I been able to remain so long in Holland. I spent the second day with a gay party at Salvador's."

It is rather difficult to reconcile this story of "the youngest Salvador" with the facts of our narrative. Hickey at this date was about thirty years old, and young Salvador must have been at least in his twenties. If he was indeed the youngest son of Francis and Sarah Salvador, Sarah’s three elder children must have been grown-up when they were baptized that same year. But there is no reason to doubt Hickey's account of this meeting. The Salvador's house, known in later times as "The Lodge", was situated near Twickenham Common, little more than half a mile from Cross Deep. The railway now cuts through that part of the district, but in the eighteenth century only gardens and open country lay between the homes of the two families.

Not far from the Salvador's house lived Abraham Prado, with whom Walpole was on friendly terms. Writing to Lady Ossory in September, 1774, he says: "The Strawberry Gazette is very barren of news. The greatest event I know was a present I received last Sunday, just as I was going to dine at Lady Blandford's, to whom I sacrificed it. It was a bunch of grapes. In good truth, this bunch weighed three pounds and a half, and was sent to me by my neighbour Prado, of the tribe of Issachar. I carried it to the Marchioness, but gave it to the maître d'hôtel with injunctions to conceal it till the dessert. At the end of dinner Lady Blandford said she had heard of three immense bunches of grapes at Mr. Prado's at a dinner he had made for Mr. Ellis. I said those things were always exaggerated. She cried, Oh! but Mrs. Ellis told it, and it weighed I don't know how many pounds, and the Duke of Argyle had been to see the hot-house, and she wondered, as it was so near, I would not go and see it. 'Not I, indeed,' said I, 'I dare to say there is no curiosity in it.' Just then entered the gigantic bunch. Everybody screamed. 'There,' said I, 'I will be shot if Mr. Prado has such a bunch as yours.'"
"Mr. Ellis," who dined with the Prados, was Welbore Ellis, afterwards Lord Mendip, who was living in the house that had been Pope's. The Duke of Argyle had a seat at Whitton, not far away. Ironside in his "Antiquities of Twickenham" confirms Prado's horticultural skill: "Mr. Prado's knowledge of gardening was extensive, and he was a celebrated cultivator of the vine. He imported the large white and red Syriac grape, which have produced some bunches weighing fourteen pounds."

Ironside includes Prado's name among the inhabitants of Twickenham Common in 1789, in a house formerly belonging to John Green, but at that date Prado had been dead seven years, for in another letter to Lady Osory written on 4th August, 1782, Walpole mentions, among items of Twickenham news, the recent death of Mr. Prado. His widow continued to live in the same house, and when, in 1785, Walpole lost his friend Kitty Clive, and Kitty's brother, James Raftor, who had been living with her at Little Strawberry Hill, was inconsolable, it was good-natured Mrs. Prado who insisted on his coming to stay at her house until after her sister's funeral. The site of Prado's house is known, for it stood next to Gifford Lodge which still exists. Both houses are shown in a view of Twickenham Common published by Boydell in 1753, the name "— Green, Esq." being engraved against the house which later became Prado's. A house called "Willow Grange" now stands on that site and may possibly incorporate part of the older building. By his Will, Abraham Prado left £50 to the poor of Twickenham parish, and on her death his widow left a similar bequest. One would like to learn more of this amiable and worthy couple.

My paper ends on a note of tragedy. Walpole and Hickey had yet another Jewish neighbour in the earlier part of the century. His name was Nunez, and his story is told by Hickey and also by Walpole's friend and correspondent, the Reverend William Cole. Hickey dates the incident in 1768, six years later than it actually occurred: "I accompanied my father to Twickenham," he writes, "and . . . a few minutes after our arrival, the valet of Mr. Nunez, an opulent Jew, who lived near our house, called to say his master had come from town that afternoon quite alone, appearing much indisposed, but would not let any medical person be sent for. He therefore entreated my father would visit his master, and endeavour to learn what was the matter. We accordingly went directly and found him in a most dejected state. He at first attempted to rally, declaring he had nothing more than a slight headache, but soon sunk into silence and despondency. My father who knew his propensity to gamble, observed that if he had been out of luck, he had many friends ready and willing to come forward with pecuniary aid, and that he was amongst the number. He then, though with some difficulty, prevailed upon Mr. Nunez to return and sit with us until bedtime. At supper he ate an egg and drank several glasses of 'Bishop', which he seemed to enjoy, and at ten o'clock he wished us good night. . . . The next morning my father called me between six and seven, and I was but just dressed when the same valet came running in, and with horror most strongly depicted in his countenance, exclaimed: 'Oh, sir, my poor master is dead.' My father and I instantly returned with the servant, and found Mr. Nunez a shocking spectacle indeed. He had risen before six, and hastily putting on his clothes, the moment the day broke he said he would go and walk in the garden, which was on the opposite side of the road to the house, and went with a gentle slope to the Thames. His valet, alarmed at his appearance, and his rising so much earlier than usual, watched him, and seeing that after a few turns on the lawn he went into the summer house, he
hoped all was well. In less than five minutes he was terrified at the report of a pistol, whereupon he flew across the road, rushed into the summer house, and there saw his master . . . quite dead. Mr. Nunez was only thirty years of age, a remarkably handsome man, and of most engaging manners. I never afterwards passed that fatal summer house, either by land or water, without a sensation of misery and regret. My father learnt that Mr. Nunez had the night previous to our seeing him at Twickenham, lost near ten thousand pounds at White’s in St. James’s Street, which, following close upon other serious losses induced him to commit suicide."

Cole’s account of a visit to Strawberry Hill on 30th October, 1762, printed in the Yale edition of Walpole’s Correspondence,1 contains the following passage: "From the garden you discover the elegant Chinese Temple, being the last building on the bank of the Thames, and close to my Lord Radnor’s house or garden wall—though the house belonging to it is on the other side of the road, and is the last house on that side next to Strawberry Hill, and is an handsome new square building—I say, from the garden of Mr. Walpole, you discover the Chinese summer house in which about last August, Mr. Isaac Fernandez Nunez, a Jew, shot himself through the head, on the loss of the Hermione, a rich French ship which he had insured and by that means ruined his fortune and family. His house and furniture were sold by auction while I was at Strawberry Hill, and I was at the sale for a few minutes."

The Hermione was a Spanish register ship, not a French ship, as Cole thought. She was bound from Lima to Cadiz, when she was captured off Cape St. Vincent on 21st May, 1762, by the English frigates Active and Favourite, and taken to Gibraltar. The value of her cargo was variously reported as £500,000, £800,000, or even more. The news of her capture was given in the Gazette on 6th July, 1762, and in The Gentleman’s Magazine of the same date. Lloyd’s Evening Post reported that the prize reached England on 27th July. It is a curious circumstance that although Walpole himself makes no mention in his correspondence of this tragic affair so close to his own door in Twickenham, writing from London on 12th August, 1762, he tells Sir Horace Mann that he had seen twenty-one waggons containing the treasure of the Hermione pass the end of Arlington Street that morning.

Although the explanations given by Cole and by Hickey of the losses suffered by Nunez appear to differ, they are not inconsistent. Nunez had probably received a very high premium for taking the risk of insuring the ship in war-time, and finding his liabilities to the assured far beyond his resources, he may have gambled at White’s in the desperate hope of reimbursing himself; for in those days a debtor was liable to imprisonment.

Nothing is known of his personal history, but Hickey’s unfortunate neighbour must surely have been related to another "Isaac Fernandez Nunez, an eminent Jew", whose obituary notice appeared in The Gentleman’s Magazine in 1732. Mr. Alfred Rubens in Anglo-Jewish Portraits suggests that a caricature in his collection drawn by Peter Tillemans (d. 1734) and inscribed: "Mr. Nunez the Jew," may represent this earlier Isaac Fernandez Nunez. But it is possible that the portrait caricatures a humbler member of the community, who was described somewhat contemptuously by George Vertue, the engraver and art historian, in 1729, as "Nunez the Jew—a little ugly fellow, a picture jobber". This person was evidently known to the artists of his day, and it seems unlikely that he was connected with the wealthy and influential members of the Nunez family.

Cole’s description of the Nunez mansion at Twickenham as “an handsome new square building” on the other side of the road, “the last house on that side next to Strawberry Hill,” leaves no doubt that he is referring to the large house afterwards known as “Cross Deep House”. But he was wrong in assuming that the Chinese summer house, a landmark on the river bank in those days, belonged to Nunez. This Chinese Temple stood in the garden of Radnor House; but on the lawn where Nunez walked on that fateful morning was a summer house built in Gothic style, and placed against the wall dividing his garden from Lord Radnor’s. It must have been in this small Gothic house that the tragedy was enacted.

Cross Deep House, after passing through the hands of successive owners, of whom the best-known in later times was Sir Vernon Harcourt, was pulled down only a few years before the Second World War. But the lawn, gently sloping towards the river, and the summer house, remain to-day in the public recreation ground known as Radnor House Gardens.

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