



Fig. 1: schematic plot showing distribution of the DUA sites, the finds records of which were considered in this report. The line of the City wall is shown, and the general extent of the reclaimed land on the waterfront is indicated. Site 1, Guildhall Art Gallery; Site 2, 81-7 Gresham Street; Site 3, 52 Gresham Street, Site 4, 24-5 Ironmonger Lane; Site 5, Rangoon Street.

An archaeology of the Jewry in medieval London

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ALTHOUGH historical sources inform us that London had the largest population of Jews in medieval England¹, no serious archaeological study of its Jewry has been attempted. This is perhaps surprising, given the considerable archaeological evidence recovered from the City. This short paper is an attempt to encourage such research, and is a summary of a dissertation prepared for the Medieval Department of University College London Institute of Archaeology by the author².

The London Jewry 1128-1290

The Anglo-Jewry was established in 1066, immediately after the Norman Conquest. Although Jews were forbidden by Christian law to engage in trade or industry, they were allowed to lend money for interest (usury), which Christians were not. Much

of the hatred which was inflicted upon the Jews in this period had its roots in this fact. The English community was increased by refugees from the Rouen pogrom in 1096³, and yet the first reference to the London Jewry is as late as 1128⁴. This community survived in spite of the pogroms of 1182 and 1215⁵.

The events of 1182 were described by William of Newbury thus: "... these houses were besieged by the roaring people, and were stoutly besieged from nine o'clock till sunset, and as they could not be broken into owing to their strong build, and because the madmen had not tools, fire was thrown on the roof, and a terrible fire quickly broke out."⁶ The comments of Pollock and Maitland sum up the station of the Jews in English society "... the Jew

1. H Richardson *The English Jewry under the Angevin Kings* (1960) 9.
2. G Pepper *Anglo-Jewish Archaeology* (1992), unpublished BA dissertation, University College London Institute of Archaeology.

3. *Op cit* fn 1, 6.
4. *Ibid* 7.
5. *Ibid* 36.
6. J Jacobs *The Jews of Angevin England* (1893) 294.

can have nothing that is their own, for whatever he acquires, he acquires not for himself but for the king; for the Jews lived not for themselves but for others.⁷ When usury was forbidden the community in England was stripped of its *raison d'être*, its entire position of legality and its very being.⁸ Thus the community's sad expulsion in 1290 was in some ways a predictable eventuality.

The sources collected by Jacob⁹ suggested that the London Jewry was concentrated along the streets known as Old Jewry and part of Gresham Street as far west as the church of St. Lawrence (see Fig. 1). However, not all the Jewish houses in a town need be located in the Jewry street, as Crummy has shown in Colchester¹⁰. Indeed, Lipman has calcu-

7. B Ovrut 'Edward I and the Expulsion of the Jews' *Jewish Quarterly Rev* 67 (1977) 224.

8. *Ibid* 227.

9. *Op cit* fn 6.

10. P Crummy *Aspects of Anglo Saxon & Norman Colchester* CBA 39 (1981) 69-70.

11. V Lipman 'The Anatomy of medieval Anglo-Jewry' *Jewish Hist Soc of England* 21 (1968) 65.

12. Site 1: Guildhall Art Gallery (GAG87) N Bateman *Excavations at Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Yard* EC2, unpublished archive report, Museum of London (1989).

lated there were 1500-2000 Jews living in London¹¹, which suggests that the area of Jewish occupation may have been more extensive than just on those two streets.

Ritual bath or strong room?

Although there have been four major excavations in the vicinity of the London Jewry¹² (Fig. 1, Sites 1 to 4), there have been few reports of finds that can be positively identified as Jewish. A notable exception is a masonry feature found on Site 2 (GDH85). This was initially thought to represent a strong room, but Richard Sermon subsequently suggested that it may be a *mikveh* (ritual bath)¹³, which seems to have been contemporary with a 12th-century building with chalk foundations. The rectangular

Site 2: 81-87 Gresham Street (GDH85) K Steedman *Excavations at 87-8 Gresham Street, EC2*, unpublished archive report, Museum of London (1990).

Site 3: 52 Gresham Street (GAM88) T Mackinder *Excavations at 52 Gresham Street, EC2*, unpublished archive report, Museum of London (1990).

Site 4: 24-25 Ironmonger Lane (IRO85) J Norton *Excavations at 24-5 Ironmonger Lane, EC2*, unpublished archive report, Museum of London (1990).

13. R Sermon 'A medieval mikveh or strong room?' *DUA September Newsletter* (1990) 12-14.



Fig. 2: a ritual bath or *mikveh* Masonry structure excavated on Site 2, 81-7 Gresham Street (GDH85), looking west.

feature measured 1.65m by 1.15m (5ft 5in by 3ft 9in) internally and was constructed of Greensand blocks with two steps leading into it on the western side (Figs. 2, 3). Sermon argues that the area of the excavations comprised four properties in 1290, of which the three fronting Gresham Street were owned by Jews, while the one to the rear was a Synagogue. Such a location would be appropriate for a *mikveh*. A similar structure recorded in Jacob's Well Road, Bristol in 1987 bore a Hebrew inscription *Zachlim*, meaning 'flowing'. However, no such inscription or any characteristically Jewish artefacts were associated with the London structure: neither were any recovered from this or other excavations in the area.

Jewish artefacts

This apparent lack of Jewish material from the heart of the London Jewry raises the question of what is a Jewish artefact? Are they solely those artefacts bearing Hebrew inscriptions, such as the inscribed tombstone found reused in the City wall in 1752¹⁴? This paper suggests that it is possible to identify a range of artefacts, none of which is

14. M Honeybourne 'The pre-expulsion cemetery of the Jews in England' *Jewish Hist Soc of England* (1959-60) 150.

inscribed, but which when found in association with each other might signify a Jewish presence. To test this suggestion, the presence of various classes of artefact from the medieval levels of Site 1 (GAG87) was compared with the material from many other recent excavations in the City. This would help to establish whether the distribution of any particular items might be confined to the Jewry area, and therefore might be considered to be of Jewish origin. To undertake this work, extensive use was made of the (then) Department of Urban Archaeology's¹⁵ computerised archive records in the summer of 1991; the help of the Archive Officer, Cath Maloney, is gratefully acknowledged.

Five artefact types were selected for the initial distribution survey: — counters, scales, lead tokens, lamps and louvres. The first three all relate to money-lending activities, the lamps may have been of ritual significance to the Jews, and the louvres represent the presence of stone houses, which were not infrequently owned by Jews, since they afforded more protection than timber buildings.

15. Now part of the Museum of London Archaeology Service.



Fig. 3: the possible *mikveh* from Site 2 after removal of the stone floor (cf Fig. 2), looking north-east.

| Artefact type | % on Jewry sites | % on waterfront sites | % on other sites |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| counters | 15 | 59 | 26 |
| scales | 15 | 81 | 4 |
| lead tokens | 0.5 | 99.5 | 0 |
| lamps | 16.5 | 16.5 | 67 |
| louvres | 5.5 | 86 | 8.5 |

Table 1: percentages of selected artefact types recovered from sites in the Jewry compared with other sites in the City of London.

A simple chart was drawn up showing the percentages of these types of artefacts recorded from all excavations in the City up to June 1991 (Table 1). This showed that the majority of the artefacts had been recovered not from occupation sites but from the riverside reclamation dumps which incorporate extensive quantities of refuse now known to have been collected from middens all over the City. However, once these redeposited waterfront artefacts were excluded from the calculations, a much clearer picture evolved (Table 2). All the lead tokens, 73% of the scales, 65% of the louvres, 58% of the counters and 25% of the lamps come from just four sites in the City (Fig. 1, Sites 1 to 4). These are clearly statistically significant proportions. With certain provisos, such combinations of artefacts may thus be argued to represent a Jewish presence.

Conclusions

The study summarised here has tried to show that a pattern of artefact distribution can be identified which seems to signify the presence of a Jewish community. If this is accepted, then similar patterns can be looked for elsewhere, in the hope of determining the location and extent of less well documented Jewish quarters. Such a pattern is

16. H Wheatley (ed) *Stow's Survey of London* (1956) 135.

(continued from p. 7).

permeable geotextile and filled with chemically inert sand, and the excavated areas covered with geotextile and a further protective layer of sand. It is hoped that this technique will best protect the remains from deterioration.

Given the area of the site, the density of investigated burials, and the observed level of survival, it has been estimated that up to 104 to 206 Anglo-Saxon interments might be encountered if full excavation takes place. It must be stressed that this is a maximum figure, but even half of the lower estimate would represent a highly significant sample, given the period and context of the material. At the time of writing, the exact nature of the redevelopment is uncertain, but it is vital that any activity on the site takes into account its regional and national impor-

| Artefact type | % on four sites in the Jewry | % on all other London sites, excluding the waterfront |
|---------------|------------------------------|---|
| counters | 58 | 42 |
| scales | 73 | 27 |
| lead tokens | 100 | 0 |
| lamps | 25 | 75 |
| louvres | 65 | 35 |

Table 2: percentages of selected artefact types recovered from sites in the Jewry compared with other sites in the City of London, but excluding the waterfront excavations

indicated at Rangoon Street, for example (Fig. 1, Site 5), where the presence of several lamps suggests the location of the Poor Jewry recorded by Stow in the Aldgate ward¹⁶. Indeed, preliminary studies of finds distributions in other towns¹⁷ have helped to locate the Jewry in Mary-le-Port and Peter Street in Bristol, as well as Maylord Street in Hereford. The archaeology of the medieval Anglo-Jewry is in its infancy; hopefully studies such as the one reported here may stimulate more detailed research into this neglected theme.

Acknowledgements

The photographs were taken by the Photographic Section of the Department of Urban Archaeology, and printed by the Museum of London Archaeology Service. Many people kindly provided information for my dissertation or assistance with this summary, but I would like to offer particular thanks to Cath Maloney and Chrissie Milne (Museum of London Archaeology Service), John Clark (Museum of London) as well as Professor James Graham-Campbell, Clive Orton, Dr Martin Welch (University College London Institute of Archaeology), and Gustav Milne (London Archaeological Research Facility).

17. *Op cit* fn 2.

tance as an intact portion of an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery, as well as the local significance of the prehistoric material.

Opportunities to carry out controlled archaeological investigation on parallel sites both in the Wandle valley and Greater London areas, particularly with the benefit of modern techniques, have been limited. The chance to do so at the Park Lane site is now assured through the good offices of the London Borough of Croydon and the developers Axa, Equity and Law, who funded the evaluation. Such investigation may or may not take place in the immediate future, but the cooperation of the Museum of London Archaeology Service and English Heritage has ensured a level of protection guaranteeing that the potential for such significant work is maintained.