

bimah, was for the rabbi and members of the congregation when they were called upon to read from the *torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures). The *bimah* faced the ark where the *torah* scrolls were kept. During service men and women were separated by a wood or iron grid window. The reason for this was that the women could hear what was going on in the main body of the hall and the men, while praying, should not be distracted by the women. Still today, in orthodox communities, men and women do not sit together. The basic interior design of the first synagogue following re-admission has not changed in over 300 years.

The original building at Creechurch Lane would have been large enough to hold nearly all the community at that time. It was extended in 1674 to hold 250 congregants, when the London community had grown to over 1000 persons; the synagogue was in use until 1701,³ when it became too small for the growing community. After closure it became the parish workhouse until 1857, when the site was demolished. A plaque on the present-day Cunard House in Creechurch Lane marks the site (Fig. 2). There is no archaeological evidence, but conjectural plans, taken from the builders' records in Bevis Marks archive, exist (Fig. 1).

By 1700 the Sephardi community had grown to around 500, and a larger synagogue was opened in 1701 in Bevis Marks, Houndsditch. It is Britain's oldest synagogue (Fig. 3) and until recently was the only synagogue in Britain designated as a Grade 1 Listed Building. The design of Bevis Marks was loosely copied from the main and grand synagogue in Amsterdam. The



Fig. 2: plaque now on Cunard House in Creechurch Lane, City of London, marking the site of the Sephardi synagogue established in 1657 (photo: Ken Marks)

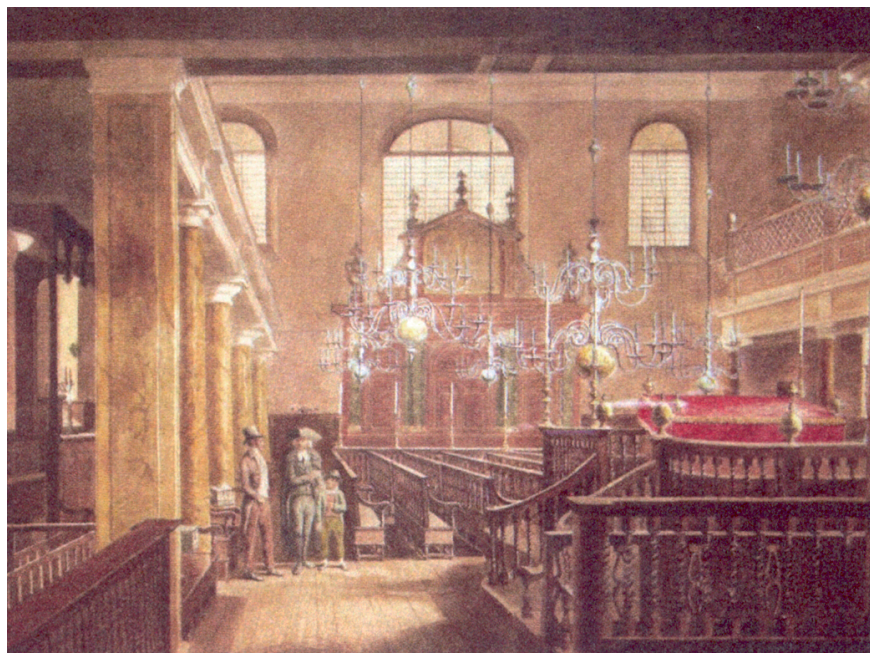


Fig. 3: the interior of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Bevis Marks (1812?) (by Isaac Mendes Belisario, by permission of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation)

chandeliers are still lit with candles. There is a legend (not supported by documents or detailed examination) that an oak beam used in the roof was presented by Princess (later Queen) Anne. It had supposedly come from a ship of the Royal Navy. Wooden benches from the 1657 Creechurch Lane building are still in use.

In 1692 the Ashkenazi (mainly German) community rented a house and opened their first synagogue in Duke's Place, Aldgate, with a membership of 200, less than 300 yards from Bevis Marks. The Ashkenazi community in the main were poor, having come to London from Europe to escape poverty and persecution. They were mainly unskilled, and in order to survive many became street traders or peddlers. By 1790 the London community had grown to around 18,000, and a larger Ashkenazi synagogue was needed. The existing building was pulled down and a larger one was erected in its place (Fig. 4). It was called *The Great Synagogue*, and became the main synagogue of the Ashkenazi community, much as Bevis Marks was the main synagogue of the Sephardim. It was destroyed in a bombing raid on 11th May 1941, and replaced by a temporary hut. After nearly 250 years *The Great Synagogue* ceased to be used, as many of the community had moved away from the

City and the East End to north and north-west London. Nothing remains of this magnificent structure other than a plaque, paintings, photographs, architects' and surveyors' plans, and the childhood memories of the last few surviving members. Unlike Jewish cemeteries, disused synagogue buildings are not considered sacred. Once the community was no longer large enough to support a synagogue and a rabbi, or moved to another part of London, the building would have been redeveloped or sold and put to other uses. Bevis Marks is the only surviving synagogue in London from the 18th century.

The cemeteries

The 17th–18th centuries saw the growth and consolidation of the London Jewish community, which inevitably needed more cemeteries. Combined with the burial records, they give us an historical perspective of Jewish life in London in this period. The archaeology of the Jewish community at this time is almost all based on cemetery evidence. At the end of the 17th century there were about 1000 Jews in London; by the end of the 18th century the total Jewish community in England had grown to about 20,000. The community, particularly the poorer Ashkenazi members, 'had their fair share of vagrants, beggars, the destitute, the

LONDON'S ANGLO-JEWRY

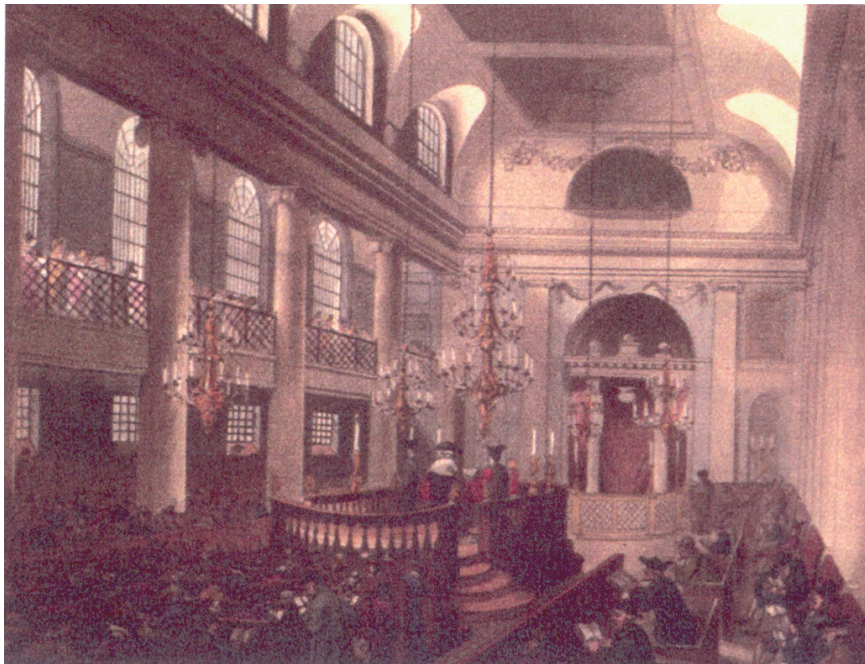


Fig. 4: The Great Synagogue, Duke's Place (1809)

(print by A.W. Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson, by permission of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation)

unemployed and homeless boys and girls roaming the streets'.⁴

As with synagogues, both communities had their separate burial societies and cemeteries near each other in Mile End Road and Alderney Road, Stepney. Both the wealthy founders and the poor of the re-admission community are buried here. In 1656–7 land was leased in Mile End for a Sephardi cemetery. It was extended in 1670 but is no longer used. At that time Mile End was a village, and the land purchased was in a corner of a field outside the furthest limits of the East End. There are two 17th-century cemeteries: one is under the authority of the Spanish and Portuguese (Sephardi) Burial Society, and one now under the United Synagogue Burial Society for the Ashkenazim (mostly Jews from central and eastern Europe). They can be visited by arrangement with the burial societies. It is evident from the ordering of the pathways, rows and placing of the graves that the cemetery was managed. Interestingly, however, others than the Rabbis' tombs, there is no evidence of a ranked society. Rich and poor are buried near each other, as evidenced by the tombstones or by adjacent plots with no markers. When more space was needed for the Ashkenazim, a new cemetery under the authority of the United Synagogue was opened in 1761 in

Brady Street, E1 (Fig. 5).

The Sephardi cemeteries

The first Sephardi cemetery, known as the *Velho* (Old) in Portuguese, was established in 1657 and used until 1742; the second nearby was established in 1733. On the Mile End Road there is a plaque on the site of the first Jewish hospital established in 1665 for 'the sick, poor, and lying-in women' and continues 'and was located on this site in front of the burial ground of the

Spanish and Portuguese Jews' congregation' (Fig. 6). The Jews buried in this cemetery were the founders of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation in London, which took the name *Gates of Heaven*; that title is inscribed over the entrance to Bevis Marks Synagogue. They formed the origin of the present community in Britain.

In the 1657 cemetery there are around 700 graves. The stones are all horizontal in the Sephardi tradition (Fig. 7), and symbolise that all are equal in death. Most of the limestone gravestones are illegible due to weathering. The one stone that can be read is that of the *Haham* (Sephardi Chief Rabbi) Yehoshua Da Silva. Due to its importance, the stone was renewed 30 years ago by the Sephardi Burial Society. Also of note is the fact that 'amongst the first burials are 21 unknown victims of the Great Plague of 1665'.⁵

Diamond gives full details of the purchase negotiations and burials in the first cemetery, including names and dates of death.⁶ From the burial records and 1695 census for the City of London, he estimates the total Jewish population in London to have grown from around 160 persons in 1657 to c. 1000 in 1711. Not all Jews were buried in this cemetery. Some of the Marranos (Christianised Jews) were buried with their families in non-Jewish burial

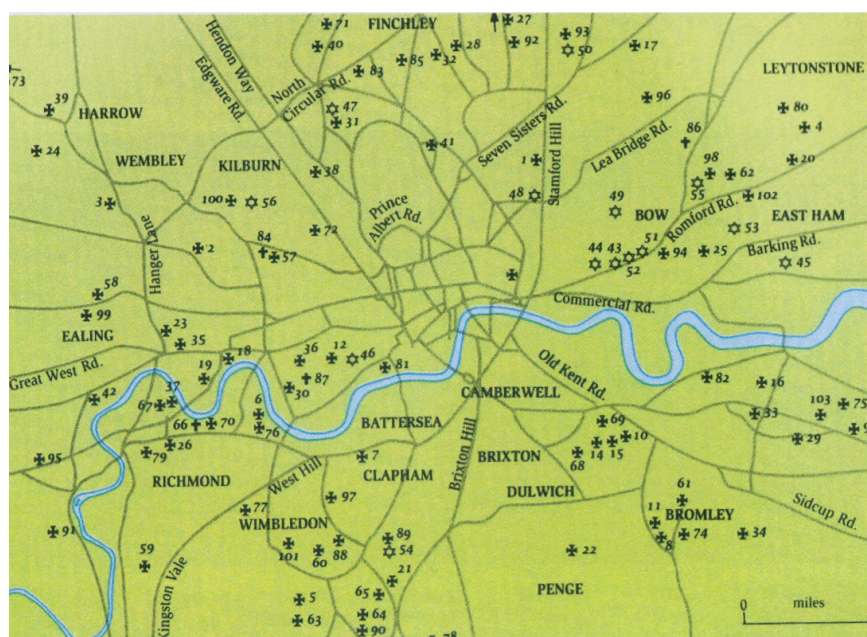


Fig. 5: London's 17th and 18th centuries. Jewish cemeteries (discussed) are nos 43, 44, 45, 52 (H. Clout *History of London* (1991) 166)

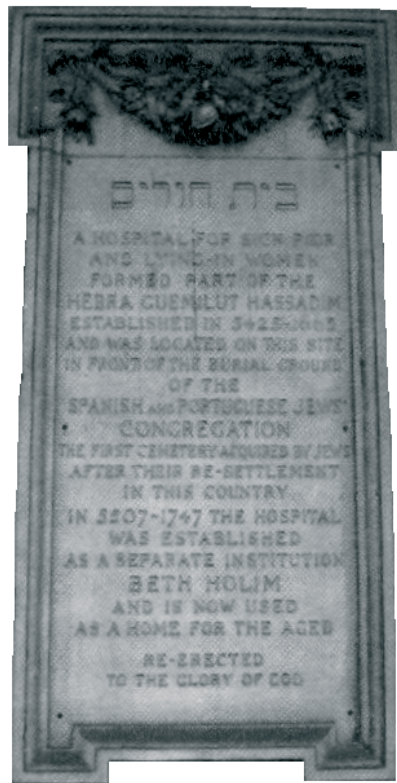


Fig. 6: plaque on the Mile End Road
(photo: Ken Marks)

grounds. In one row there are children's graves, which are half the size of the adults'. He adds that 'the mortality of young infants was so high in this age and burial space so precious, that the community could not give them burial in a six-foot grave with a gravestone'.⁷ Diamond estimates that the mortality rate of infants was as high as 48% of the total average in each year. Near the rear wall are three stone carvings of skull-and-crossbones (Fig. 8). These are also found in the Amsterdam Sephardi cemetery and are representations of mortality. Such carvings are rarely found in Jewish burial grounds as it is against the Jewish tradition to make images of human beings, alive or dead.

The *Nuevo* or New Sephardi Cemetery was established in 1733, and was used until about 1874 (Fig. 9). In 1940 graves were destroyed during the *Blitz*. Part of the land was sold to Queen Mary College in 1974. Around 2000 gravestones remain. It is possible to read some of the inscriptions that are in English, Hebrew or Portuguese. The names indicate the foreign origins of the deceased, such as Abecassis, Castro, Costa, Castello, Mendoza, Mendes, Sassoon and Ramos. There are a number of family plots. Near the centre

is a circular area paved with stone, with a central plinth inscribed with 30 names. This suggests that there were originally 30 graves in this area, the original tombstones having been destroyed, vandalised, broken or lost and not replaced. Few of the resettlement Jews would have been able to afford a granite headstone. These are the only readable names that have survived two or three centuries of English weather. On some graves there are small mounds of stones, which is the traditional way of showing that either members of the deceased's family or close friends had visited the grave to pay their respects and said prayers for the dead. There is no evidence from the location of the graves of anyone other than the *Haham* (Chief Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese community) having a more prominent position, such as being near the front or near a pathway. In the Jewish tradition the deceased, no matter how affluent or prominent, are buried in plain coffins with no grave goods.

The Ashkenazi cemeteries in Alderney Road and Brady Street

Before 1696 London's Ashkenazi Jews were buried in the Sephardi cemetery, but as their numbers increased there was pressure for space. The Ashkenazi community bought a plot of garden land, in what is today Alderney Road. On the site is the caretaker's house, which seems to be nearly as old as the cemetery. By 1753 the Ashkenazi community had increased to about 4000 and the Sephardim about 2000. This cemetery was used until 1853. One is struck by the contrast with the Sephardi grounds. The main difference is that most of the tombstones are vertical, and also some of the more prominent persons have elaborate tombs and chest monuments (Fig. 10). There are two sections: the original area and the early 18th-century extension. The cemetery is no longer used, but it is kept in good condition. However, many of the stones have suffered from London's acid rain, although there are still some interesting features. First,



Fig. 7: view of part of the 1657 Velho (Old) cemetery at Mile End, EI (photo: Ken Marks)



Fig. 8: skull and cross-bones carvings, 1657 Velho (Old) cemetery, Mile End, EI (photo: Ken Marks)



Fig. 9: the Nuevo (New) Sephardi cemetery, established 1733, Mile End, EI (photo: Ken Marks)

some of the stones are similar in design, suggesting that the families of the deceased purchased pre-designed stones from stock and then added the deceased's name, birth and death dates and a special dedication. Second, among the funereal motifs are a number with cut trees, curtains and ribbons and traditional Jewish motifs such as priestly hands raised in prayer. This indicates that the deceased was a Cohen, a descendent of the priestly tribe. There are two important graves in this cemetery. The first is Rabbi Hayim Samuel Jacob de Falk (1708–82), who was the most revered Rabbi and teacher of his time. He was a Cabbalist (one associated with mystical interpretations)

and mystic. His grave is still regularly visited and prayers said by the ultra-orthodox community. The other significant grave is that of Rabbi David Tevele Schiff, Chief Rabbi (1765–91). His original stone was replaced in 1997. These gravestones are next to areas where there are no markers. Many of the poor were buried without a headstone.⁸

Brady Street cemetery was founded in 1761 and used until 1858, although there is one more recent grave. By 1830 there were *c.* 20,000 Jews living in London and *c.* 10,000 in the provinces. This burial ground had two important features. Originally with over 3000 tombstones, due to shortage of space

some of the graves are layered on a central mound with the gravestones back-to-back, similar to those in the Prague cemetery. This is one of the few Jewish cemeteries in England with this feature. The Georgian tombstones survive, but most are illegible. There are elaborate tombstones of Nathan Rothschild (d. 1836) and his wife Hannah. He founded the London branch of the banking family, and it was he who brought Prime Minister Lord Liverpool the news of the victory of the Battle of Waterloo before he had received the dispatch from Wellington. The most recent burial is their descendent, also named Nathan, who died in 1990 and is buried alongside them.

Another unusual feature in this cemetery is the bust of Miriam Levy (1801–56) on a square obelisk, decorated with figurative reliefs (Fig. 11). Having a bust on a tombstone is most unusual. It may be because she was so famous for her charity work, starting the first soup kitchen for the poor in Whitechapel. The Brady Street monuments demonstrate the influence of 18th-century Britain and the process of assimilation. The earliest tombstones are only in Hebrew, but from about 1825 both Hebrew and English appear on the stones. Whilst the deceased were



Fig. 10: first Ashkenazi cemetery established 1696, Alderney Road, EI (photo: Ken Marks)



Fig. 11: the obelisk and bust of Miriam Levy in Brady Street cemetery, EI (photo: Ken Marks)

buried according to religious tradition, status was evident from the tombstones, and (in the case of the Rothschilds) elaborate memorials. The richer and more important a person was is shown by these larger and more elaborate tombs and their prominent plot positions. However, as with other cemeteries, the rich and famous were buried alongside the poorest members of the community. There are three other Jewish cemeteries from this period: Lauriston Road (opened 1788), Bancroft Road (opened 1810) and Fulham Road (opened 1815) (Fig. 5, nos 49, 51 and 46). They have not been explored.

17th- to 18th-century artefacts

The finds of 17th- and 18th-century date found in London that can definitely be identified as Jewish comprise an 18th-century delftware plate, inscribed with Hebrew lettering, found in a cesspit during excavations at Mitre Street,⁹ 17th- to 18th-century *kosher* meat seals found in waste heaps,¹⁰ three 17th- to 18th-century kosher lead seals in the Museum of London (perhaps cloth seals) and two *shofar'ot* (rams' horns) in the Jewish Museum, Camden Town, and the Cuming Museum, Southwark.¹¹

Fig. 12: delftware plate with Hebrew inscription (diameter 22 cm) (Museum of London)

The delftware Hebrew plate

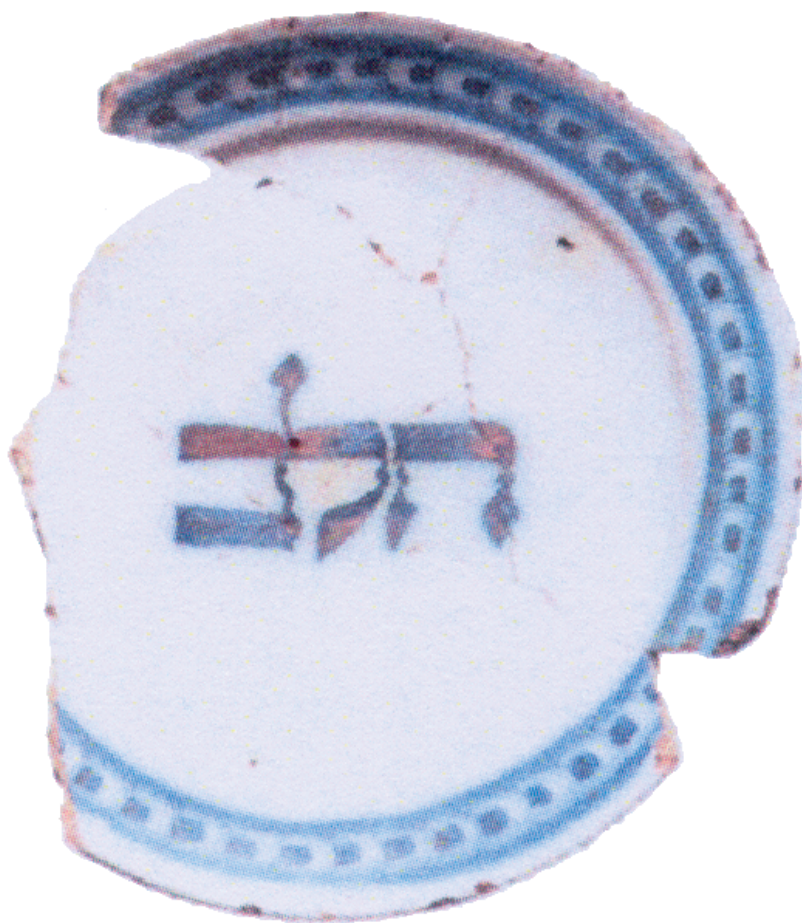
This rare plate (Fig. 12) is 'datable on stylistic grounds to the 1720s'¹² and was found on the site of 12–14 Mitre Street in 1984. Mitre Street is not far from Duke's Place, which is the area identified as that inhabited by both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in the 17th and 18th centuries. 'All the pieces from Mitre Street date from the late 17th or first half of the 18th centuries, and were probably made in London, at factories in Lambeth and Southwark.'¹³ The Hebrew plate is '... a find without parallel in excavated material from London.'¹⁴ Its significance was only established after re-examination in 1995.

The dating is based on the border pattern and shape of the plate; later plates tend to have a foot ring or cavetto base.¹⁵ The plate was found in a cesspit with other pottery of the same period, and is almost complete. It is 22 cm in diameter, painted in dark and pale blue with the Hebrew inscription *chalav* (milk). Orthodox Jews have separate utensils for milk and meat dishes, and do not eat dairy products and meat together. Plates and dishes

used for meat would have been inscribed with the Hebrew word *basar* (meat), so that there was no danger of the household getting the dishes mixed. There is an unprovenanced *basar* plate of similar design in the Jewish Museum in Camden Town.

The plate could have come from a Sephardi or Ashkenazi home, but the writing style is more in the Ashkenazi tradition than the Sephardi. The family using it would have been wealthy, as it is most likely to have been specially commissioned. 'Since it is highly unlikely that any Hebrew-speaking painters were employed in the Lambeth factories, templates for the inscription would need to have been provided at the time of ordering.'¹⁶

It is important not to come to cultural conclusions on the basis of one plate. However, it is significant for the following reasons: first, it is the only 17th- to 18th-century Hebrew delftware plate found in London to be scientifically excavated; second, it provides further evidence of Jews living in the City of London at that time; third, it could only come from an observant household who practised the dietary



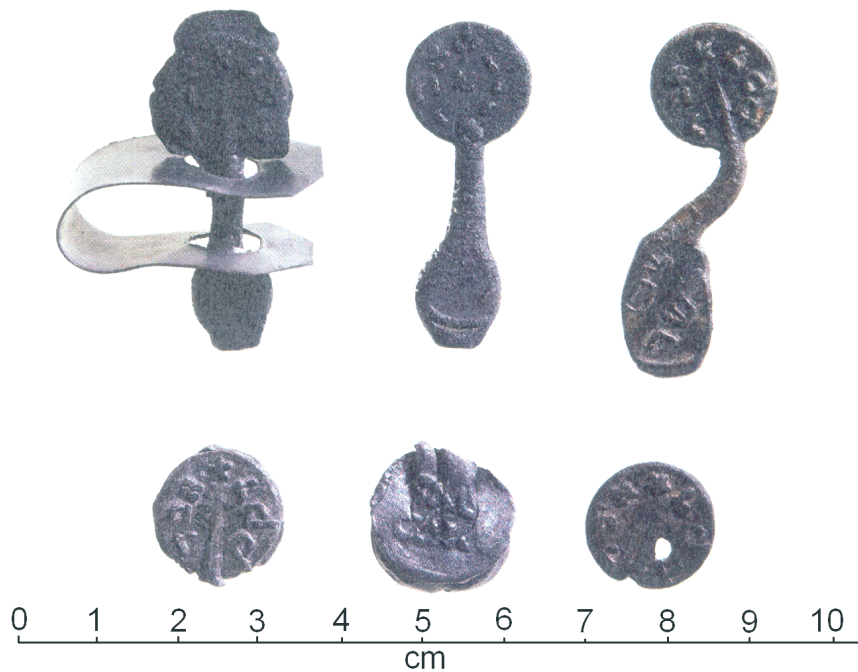


Fig. 13: kosher meat seals in the British Museum (photo: The British Museum)

laws of the separation of milk from meat.

Kosher meat seals

Orthodox Jewish communities will only eat meat that has been slaughtered according to the religious law. There are six kosher lead seals in the Prehistory and Europe Department of The British Museum. They have two lettered discs riveted and connected by a bar, which would have been used to connect the seal to the meat or chicken (Fig. 13). Similar seals have been found in the City of London and two on Hampstead Heath (now in the Museum of London). According to the British Museum, the seals may be dated to the 17th–18th centuries; some may be later. Unfortunately, none of them come from archaeologically excavated contexts. Although they are difficult to read, it is possible to obtain useful information from them. First, kosher in Hebrew is on all of them. Second, one bears the name Meyer Shur, whom Geoff Egan speculates was the ritual slaughterer.¹⁷

These lead meat seals, even though so few have survived, confirm that in the 17th–18th centuries there were ritual slaughterers who prepared meat for the orthodox community in London.

Shofar'ot (rams' horns)

A *shofar* is the only Hebrew biblical instrument to have survived until now. It is blown in the synagogue, particularly as a symbol of the New Year and at the end of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). Of the *shofar'ot* in the Jewish Museum, only one can be considered as archaeological; it was found during redevelopment in Leadenhall Street in 1855. A second *shofar* was found in the Thames at Vauxhall in 1850, and is now in the Cuming Museum. These two *shofar'ot* have recently been dated to the 18th century and discussed.¹⁸

Conclusion

There is little remaining archaeological evidence for the Jewish community in

London in this period, which makes what has been found even more significant. Seven cemeteries remain, of which four have been discussed. Although closed long ago, they are open to visitors by appointment. Where they exist, the burial registers of these cemeteries and grave stones enable us to understand the different burial traditions and origins between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.

The 1701 Bevis Marks Synagogue is the only surviving 18th-century synagogue and still functions. All other building evidence of the 17th- to 18th-century Jewry was destroyed either by the Great Fire in 1666, the *Blitz* in 1940–41 or by time and redevelopment.

The only archaeological artefacts from 17th–18th century London that can definitely be identified as Jewish are the lead kosher seals, the *chalav* (milk) plate, found in waste heaps or cess pits. The two *shofar'ot* are highly significant in Jewish ritual, and the reasons for their discard needs further research.

Acknowledgements

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I also wish to thank my dissertation supervisor, Clive Orton, and Dr Yoav Alon, who made some very useful comments and suggestions on the draft of the dissertation, as did my son Daniel. My son Jonathan helped me with scanning. I couldn't have managed without them.

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8. According to the curator who lives in the house on the grounds (2007).

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