

Great Britain: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief Historical Background

Jewish settlement in Great Britain began in 1066 when a few Jewish financiers and their families followed William the Conqueror. By the mid 12th century, small colonies of Jews could be found in London, Lincoln, Winchester, York, Oxford, Norwich and Bristol. The majority of these settlers were from Northern France, with a few from Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia and Muslim countries. By 1130 the Jews were singled out for discriminatory taxation, and the onset of the Crusades under Richard I gave rise to widespread anti-Jewish riots and massacres. The persecutions climaxed in 1290 when Edward I banished all of England's Jews who then fled to France, Flanders and Germany. In 1665, Manessah Ben Israel obtained official recognition for the Jews from Oliver Cromwell. A small Sephardic group was established in Dublin, and Jews also settled in British colonies of Tangiers, New York, Bombay, Jamaica, Barbados and other parts of the West Indies

In 1685 Jews were guaranteed freedom of worship, and in 1698 Parliament officially recognized the practice of Judaism. In the 1700's, Ashkenazis from Amsterdam, Hamburg and other parts of Germany settled in English cities. Some Ashkenazi Jews gained prominence, such as the Rothschilds, Goldsmids and Disraelis. In the late 1890's, anti-Semitism in Russia produced an influx of immigrants that swelled the Jewish population from 65,000 at the end of the 1800's to 300,000 Jews in 1914. In the 1930's, prior to World War II, another influx of Jews emigrated from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Italy to Great Britain.

Primary Records

In addition to the selected primary records listed below, the Center for Jewish History partners have many general histories of Jews in Great Britain, as well as memoirs and synagogue histories. Archival materials concerning refugees to Great Britain during the Holocaust, Yiddish theater in England, and specific synagogues in England can be found in the YIVO Archives, while the Leo Baeck Institute has collections on individual German and Austrian Jews who immigrated to England. To locate these sources, consult the CJH online catalog at <http://search.cjh.org>.

Records at the Center for Jewish History

Barnett, Lionel, editor. *Bevis Marks Records: Records of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation of London*. Part II includes abstracts of the ketubot, or marriage contracts, of the congregation from earliest times until 1837, with index. Part III includes abstracts of the ketubot and the civil marriage registers for 1837-1901. **AJHS BM 295 .C7 A3**

Berger, Doreen. *The Jewish Victorian: Genealogical Information from the Jewish Newspapers, 1871-1880*. Witney, Oxfordshire: Robert Boyd, 1999. **YIVO /106473**

Roth, Cecil. *Records of the Western Synagogue 1761-1932*. London: Edward Goldstone, 1932. A history of the synagogue, including an inventory of vital records but no actual records or abstracts. **AJHS BM 295 .W4 R4**

Jews in England Collection: Includes records of people who passed through Jews' Temporary Shelter in London (founded 1885). **LBI AR 3761 and AR 6114**

Kindertransport Collection: Includes 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 Directory of the Kindertransport Association. **LBI AR 6992**

Territorial Collection—England: Includes printed materials from Jewish organizations, including synagogues, Zionist groups, Yiddish cultural organizations, the Council of Polish Jews in Great Britain, and labor groups. Also includes autobiographical essays submitted to a contest titled "My First Year in England."

YIVO Record Group 116—England

Family History Library

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has microfilmed vital and other records from around the world and placed the microfilms in its Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City. Records from Great Britain include births and marriages of German Jews in St. Katherine Coleman Parish, 1770-1905; cemetery inscriptions from Rogers Court Jewish Burial Society, Suffolk; births recorded at the New Synagogue, London, 1771-1875, etc.

These films can be accessed through a loan program at any Family History Center (found in most American cities), or at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute. To identify the relevant films do a “Place Search” at <https://familysearch.org/#form=catalog>. Choose Place –names in the Search box, and type the town’s name in the search string. For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Genealogy Institute, see www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm.

Records in Great Britain

Civil registration of vital events such as births, marriages, and deaths began in 1837 in England and Wales, 1855 in Scotland and 1864 in Ireland. Registration was compulsory only for a burial until the Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1874. Starting in 1801, a census was taken every ten years. However, individual names were included starting only in 1841, and all census records after 1901 are closed for privacy reasons. These records are housed at federal government records offices in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Wills, naturalizations, military records and electoral registers, etc., are also available from government archives in Great Britain.

References

Books

Alderman, Geoffrey. *Modern British Jewry*. Oxford University Press, 1992. **YIVO /85413**

Cesarani, David, editor. *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*. B. Blackwell. **YIVO /87253**

Herber, Mark D. *Ancestral Trails: the Complete Guide to British Genealogy and Family History*. Genealogical Publishing Co., 2000. **Genealogy Institute CS 414 .H47 2000**

Katz, David S. *The Jews in the History of England, 1485-1850*. Oxford University Press, 1994. **YIVO /87055**

Pelling, George. *Beginning Your Family History in Great Britain*. Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987. **Genealogy Institute CS 5414 .P45**

Wenzerul, Rosemary. *Jewish Ancestors? A Beginner’s Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Great Britain*. JGS of Great Britain, 2000. **Genealogy Institute DS 135 .E5 B3**

Internet

Directgov (Family history and research):

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Registeringlifeevents/index.htm>

National Archives of the U.K.: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

National Archives of Ireland: www.nationalarchives.ie.

National Archives of Scotland: www.nas.gov.uk/

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain has a searchable database of more than 20,000 Jews who were living in Great Britain in 1851. The source is primarily the 1851 census located at <http://www.jewishdatasearch.co.uk/1851/>. The database covers mainly England, Wales and Scotland with a few additions from Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It is estimated that more than half the Jewish population at that time is represented.