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#### Article

#### Reflections

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## Reflections

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When I received my doctorate from Harvard in 1976, I did not think of myself as an Anglo-Jewish historian. True, my dissertation, the basis of my first book, *The Jews of Georgian England*, easily qualified me for membership in the small circle of historians working in this area.<sup>1</sup> But I defined myself differently: my field was modern Jewish history more generally. There are two reasons I defined myself this way. First, the five years I spent at Harvard were spent in the company of graduate students studying a variety of areas in modern European history. There was no programme in Jewish history. One of my advisers was the economic historian David Landes. The other was Yosef Yerushalmi, the most talented Jewish historian of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. His specialization, however, was the early modern period, especially the fate of the conversos, so the time we spent together in his office was devoted almost entirely to the early modern period. We rarely discussed Jewish history in the centuries after the French Revolution. In particular, we almost never talked about British Jews, except when he was reading the chapters of my dissertation.

There was also a historiographical reason that I would not have classified myself as an Anglo-Jewish historian: I thought about modern Jewish history in a comparative way. For example, I wanted to know why the Jews of imperial Germany responded to antisemitism one way and their contemporaries in Victorian England another way. Ironically, it was this comparative approach that eventually led me to Anglo-Jewish history. Let me explain. When I began my graduate work, one of the most challenging historiographical questions that exercised modern Jewish historians was the origins of Jewish modernity – when, where, and how the Jews of Europe entered the modern world (a topic that has fallen out of favour in recent decades). Most historians saw the *Berlin Haskalah* as the decisive turning point, emphasizing the birth of novel, self-conscious ways of thinking about Judaism. According to these historians, British

<sup>1</sup> *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

Jews played no role in this story; their absence was conspicuous, at least to me. Given the economic and social “backwardness” of Berlin in the late eighteenth century and the rapidly modernizing character of English society, the choice of Berlin as the fulcrum of Jewish modernity struck me as peculiar. London may not have been the birthplace of the ideological redefinition of Judaism, as Berlin was, but the economic and social toleration that British Jews enjoyed was an even more powerful engine of transformation. In addition, the government showed little interest in monitoring or reforming the Jewish community. In fact, most of the time it took little interest at all in Jews, which was hardly the case in the German states. No one, however, had pursued this comparison (Germany and England) and exploited it to shed light on the histories of both communities. The comparative perspective, whether explicit or implicit, became a hallmark of my work, not just in my first book, but in later publications as well, especially in *Broadening Jewish History* and *Leaving the Jewish Fold*.<sup>2</sup>

*The Jews of Georgian England* was very much a work of social history. It emphasized what Jews did and not what they thought; it privileged the many over the few. I had been exposed to the practices of social history when, as an undergraduate, I spent a year studying at the newly opened University of Warwick and took a seminar on the social impact of the Industrial Revolution taught by the eminent Marxist historian E. P. Thompson. It was a serendipitous experience, however, that cemented my commitment to social history. Initially, I intended to undertake a quantitative, biographical study of the Jewish economic elite in Britain and its impact on Jewish legal and social status in the Georgian period. However, I soon discovered that the ample biographical detail that this would require did not exist. At the same time, while browsing in the stacks of the Widener Library at Harvard, I accidentally discovered a category of under-utilized, even unknown, primary sources. In the stacks, among thousands of books on London, I discovered scores of popular guides to the monuments, districts, and dangers of London that were written for visitors from the provinces or for Londoners in search of titillation. Most of these guides had something to say about the Jews of London, not the financial and commercial elite but the great majority of Jews in the Georgian period – that is, the poor, the uneducated, the undisciplined,

2 *Broadening Jewish History: Towards a Social History of Ordinary Jews* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012); *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

and, frequently, the criminal. It was this encounter that confirmed my commitment to social history.

At the time when I was a graduate student (the 1970s), there was little academic scholarship on British Jewry, so, for better or worse, I was on my own. The standard introduction was Cecil Roth's *A History of the Jews in England*, then in its third edition, which was of limited utility.<sup>3</sup> It took the story only to the emancipation era, where it ended with a paean to English tolerance (which rings false today) and it displayed all the weaknesses of Roth's writing, especially his celebratory prose and his unsubstantiated conclusions. Perhaps the most rigorous work available was the American Lloyd Gartner's study of Eastern European immigration to England, first published in 1960 and still in print today, but it covered a period much later than I was interested in.<sup>4</sup> In England, the writing of Anglo-Jewish history was alive, but barely. Its home was not the academy but the London-based Jewish Historical Society of England (JHSE), which was founded in 1893. Guiding it was a small circle of amateur historians, largely Londoners, who produced the *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society* and scheduled its more or less monthly public lectures in the Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre at University College London (UCL). This group included civil servants, museum curators, communal leaders, businessmen, and professionals. They were a sedate group, without a strong commitment to expanding the audience for Anglo-Jewish history or establishing working ties with the academy.

When I was a graduate student doing research for my dissertation in London in the mid-1970s, I attended several of their meetings. No one showed the slightest interest in my presence, perhaps wondering what a young American graduate student was doing in their midst. When I attended meetings in the 1980s, after the publication of *The Jews of Georgian England*, little had changed. To its credit, I should add, in the 1960s the society initiated the collection of Anglo-Jewish primary sources – letters, diaries, genealogies, minute books, and so on – with the establishment of Anglo-Jewish Archives. The idea was excellent, but the execution was unsatisfactory. The materials were stored in large drawers in the Mocatta Library/Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre complex. (The Mocatta Library was then independent of UCL and not yet incorporated into its library.) There was no guide to the archives, so it was difficult to know what was there.

3 Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

4 Lloyd Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870–1914*, 2nd edn. (London: Simon Publications, 1973).

Compounding the problem of access was the absence of an archivist and the lack of regular hours. If one wanted to use material in the archives, one had to telephone its nominal caretaker, a Mr. Munk, who lived in north-west London, and arrange a time to meet him and gain access to the collection.

At the time the chief outlet for the publication of Anglo-Jewish history was the *Transactions*. The articles that it published tended to focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, in particular, the lives of wealthy merchants and professional men, especially those who forged relationships with non-Jewish Britons. By and large, these articles failed to investigate Anglo-Jewish history from the mass migration from Eastern Europe up to the present. The tone of these articles was filiopietistic, that is, celebratory and uncritical, venerating the past rather than trying to understand it. Crucially, they took no notice of the histories of Jewish communities elsewhere in Europe and ignored issues with which academic historians more generally were grappling. Another way of saying this was that they failed to situate their subjects in broader contexts. There was no reason for any historian, other than an Anglo-Jewish historian, to read their work. (One exception to this generalization is Isaiah Berlin's presidential lecture to the JHSE in November 1967 on Karl Marx and Benjamin Disraeli.<sup>5</sup>) To their credit, however, they were assiduous researchers and uncovered a wealth of critical data, which later historians utilized. What they uncovered, however, was not relevant to the mass of Jews in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, most of whom were impoverished petty traders who were ignorant of whatever was happening in Jewish intellectual circles.

The question of the extent and character of Jewish intellectual activity in Georgian Britain returns us to the question of how Jews became modern. What was the role of self-conscious reformulations of Judaism in the modernization of British Jewry? Cecil Roth was the first to take up this question.<sup>6</sup> He concluded that there was no Haskalah, a view that I share, if not for exactly the same reasons. When I wrote *The Jews of Georgian England*, I too argued that London lacked coterie of reform-minded intellectuals, like those on the Continent, who advocated Jewish modernization and

5 Isaiah Berlin, "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity", *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 22 (1970): 1–20.

6 Cecil Roth, "The Haskalah in England", in *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz, and I. Finestein, vol. 2 (London: Soncino Press, 1967), 365–76.

acculturation in the belief that Jews were required to mend their ways in order to gain acceptance (by speaking the language of the land, dressing like their neighbours, and abandoning petty trade, which was thought to corrupt their conduct of business.) The question remained dormant until the first decade of this century when David Ruderman, now retired from the University of Pennsylvania, reopened it. A specialist in early modern Jewish history, especially in Italy, he published two books that for the first time systematically examined Anglo-Jewish thought in both Hebrew and English – *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key* and *Connecting the Covenants*.<sup>7</sup> What emerges from his work is a picture of a handful of Jewish thinkers familiar with the larger cultural currents of the time and not hesitant to defend Judaism in print. In reassessing these thinkers, however, Ruderman skirts the issue of whether these thinkers were seeking to rehabilitate and regenerate Jewish life – a defining characteristic of the Haskalah in Central Europe. The figures about whom Ruderman wrote were more often than not writing for Christians and were not concerned with the reformation of Jewish society.

Returning to the state of the field, *The Jews of Georgian England*, while well reviewed in both Britain and the United States, did not spark interest in Anglo-Jewry in the Georgian period nor did it spark interest in the path of modernization in Anglo-Jewish life. Furthermore, I obviously did not make sufficiently clear the larger implications (or hidden agenda) of the book, since, with one exception, its many reviewers missed it completely. It was more than an account of British Jewry. It was implicitly a critique of Jacob Katz's influential, Germano-centric, idea-centred *Out of the Ghetto*, which was concerned less with changes in Jewish behaviour than with the genesis of new constructions of Judaism and Jewish identity.<sup>8</sup> In one sense, my book embodied the clash between intellectual and cultural history, on the one hand, and the new social history, on the other. It was also a challenge to the circle of amateurs who had hitherto dominated the writing of Anglo-Jewish history. The late Lionel Kochan, Bearsted Reader in Jewish History at Warwick University from 1969 to 1988, once told me how annoyed some of them were with the book. In the 1990s, the

7 David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); *Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

8 Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973). The subtitle is misleading.

Leo Baeck Institute convened a conference comparing the histories of the British and German communities. At a meeting in London of the old school of Anglo-Jewish historians, called to choose historians to represent the Anglo-Jewish side, Kochan suggested that I might be appropriate, but Vivian Lipman, very much representative of the old school, dismissed my work with the comment that all I wrote about were Jewish criminals (in fact, I devoted less than one chapter, out of ten, to Jewish criminals).

In the late 1980s, the practice of Anglo-Jewish history writing changed dramatically. A fresh generation of university-trained historians emerged in Britain that was independent of and often hostile to the grandees of the JHSE. Leading the charge were Tony Kushner, the late David Cesarani, and David Feldman. Geoffrey Alderman, who belonged to an older cohort of historians, should probably be included among these Young Turks, because it was at this time that he joined the ranks of Anglo-Jewish historians, having previously worked in British political history. Significantly, women were prominent figures in this group, among them Anne Kershen, Louise London, Rickie Burman, Sharman Kadish, and Lara Marks. Not surprisingly, they experienced more difficulty in finding full-time academic positions than their male counterparts.

Three other candidates for inclusion are Bill Williams, Bryan Cheyette, and Nadia Valman. Williams's *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740–1875* was a landmark that more than any other work inspired the new generation of historians.<sup>9</sup> Welsh-born and a lapsed Catholic, Williams was the quintessential outsider whose marginality positioned him to see what insiders failed to see. While head of history at Manchester Polytechnic in the 1970s, he was approached by a group of communal dignitaries to write a history of Manchester Jewry. What he produced was unlike anything else then in print in the field of Anglo-Jewish history. It expanded the arena of the field, embracing the rich, the poor, and everyone in between, questioned the assumptions that undergirded the work of the old guard, and introduced the dynamics of class relations into his analysis. As for Bryan Cheyette, while he was not a historian, his work on representations of the Jew in English literature and his use of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "allosemitism" were hugely influential.<sup>10</sup> His student Nadia Valman,

9 Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740–1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).

10 Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of the Jew in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Zygmunt Bauman, "Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern", in *Modernity, Culture*

like Cheyette a scholar of literature, also contributed to this reassessment of the Jewish experience in Britain.

The key publication in introducing this cohort to readers of Anglo-Jewish history was *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, a collection of essays edited by David Cesarani, then director of studies at the Wiener Library, and published in 1990. Two later collections of essays extended the critique of former ways of narrating Anglo-Jewish history and also took stock of the progress that had been made: *The Jewish Heritage in British History* (1992), edited by Tony Kushner, and *Whatever Happened to British Jewish Studies?* (2002), edited by Tony Kushner and Hannah Ewence.<sup>11</sup>

I came to know and admire the Young Turks. They offered a breath of fresh air, except to the old guard, who kept them at arm's length and made little effort to welcome them to their ranks. For me, they became essential interlocutors, for in the United States almost no one else worked on Anglo-Jewish history. In America, I had colleagues in many fields – in Russian, German, French, Habsburg, and American Jewish history but not in Anglo-Jewish history. The work of the Young Turks was fresh, provocative, and rarely dull. At the same time, I often dissented from their conclusions, which struck me as too polemical and insufficiently nuanced. In retrospect, I believe that our disagreements were rooted in part in the different political traditions from which we came – in my case, the liberalism of the Democratic Party; in their case, the democratic socialism of the Labour Party. Two issues, in particular, were paramount. One, we argued about whether emancipation in Britain was conditional, as it was in Central Europe, requiring changes in Jewish behaviour and placing Jews in the uncomfortable position of being perpetually on trial. (I was critical of this position.) Two, we disagreed about how antisemitic Britain was and about whether even its liberal traditions were tainted with their own distinctive kind of antisemitism. (I thought they painted too dark a picture.) We differed, in part, because I tended to see Anglo-Jewish history in a comparative context, viewing it in the light of historical change elsewhere, while they viewed prejudice and discrimination in the light of Britain's self-congratulatory, much touted commitment to toleration.

While a diverse group in terms of their background and historical

and "the Jew", ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> David Cesarani, ed., *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Tony Kushner, ed., *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness* (London: Frank Cass, 1992); Tony Kushner and Hannah Ewence, eds., *Whatever Happened to British Jewish Studies?* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2012).

training, this cohort of historians shared some fundamental characteristics. First, they broadened the arena of Anglo-Jewish history to encompass working-class men and women and the very poor. They were not embarrassed by Yiddish-speaking immigrants, their politics (socialist, anarchist, Zionist, and Orthodox), and their frequent ambivalence about anglicization. This was due, in part, to their rejection of the old apologetic “contributions to” approach of Cecil Roth and others, and, in part, to the temper of the times, which were indeed changing, as Bob Dylan sang. There was a downside, however, to their focus on workers and London East Enders. It overlooked middle-class Jews who had worked their way out of poverty and abandoned the East End and its equivalents in the provinces. Indeed, by the end of the twentieth century, if not earlier, there no longer was a Jewish working class. How and why one-time workers and market men became respectable shopkeepers, wholesalers, importers and exporters, and professionals has not found its historians to this day, even though the social history of the anglicized bourgeoisie is just as challenging and potentially interesting as that of immigrant workers.

Second, they rejected the myth of communal harmony and loyalty. In its place, they introduced themes of conflict, struggle, and dissent, which were hallmarks of the history-writing of the time. In addition to acknowledging class conflict, they also exposed conflicts within socio-economic groups, showing how religious and political differences intertwined with other issues. For example, Stuart Cohen’s history of Zionism in Britain in the early twentieth century reveals how the Zionist “conquest” of the Board of Deputies in the wake of the Balfour Declaration was as much an expression of intra-group rivalries as it was of ideological fervour.<sup>12</sup> Resentment of the old elite (the Anglo-Jewish notability) and its control of communal institutions drove the revolt of newcomers, whose roots were in the Central and Eastern European immigrations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Daniel Gutwein’s *The Divided Elite* took this approach one step further, arguing that the notability itself was not an undifferentiated plutocratic oligarchy and that business interests and communal politics were linked.<sup>13</sup> Thus, according to Gutwein, the Rothschild clan, whose wealth derived from merchant banking, and the Samuel/Montagu clan, whose wealth derived from bullion brokerage,

12 Stuart Cohen, *English Zionists and British Jews: The Communal Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1895–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

13 Daniel Gutwein, *The Divided Elite: Economics, Politics and Anglo-Jewry, 1882–1917* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

foreign exchange transactions, and the trade in bills of exchange, pursued rival policies on both communal and political issues. I should add that Gutwein's thesis did not gain much traction.

Third, the new historians were highly critical of the behaviour of Anglo-Jewish leaders in times of crisis, specifically, the immigration debate at the end of the nineteenth century, the attacks of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts in the 1930s, the Nazi persecution of German Jews, the government's refusal to admit more than a token number of refugees before the outbreak of the Second World War, its abandonment of the Balfour Declaration between 1939 and 1948, and its shameful behaviour during the Holocaust. In their view, communal leaders were short-sighted and pusillanimous, more concerned about their own status and security than about the sufferings of less privileged Jews. The reason for their timidity, they argued, was their fear of antisemitism. Challenging the government and publicly agitating for Jewish interests would only generate more hostility to Jews, they believed. Thus, they preferred unpublicized, behind-the-scenes diplomacy. (Their behaviour inspired the historian Lewis Namier to label them "the Order of Trembling Israelites".<sup>14</sup>)

How did the Anglo-Jewish historiographical establishment respond to these new currents? In short, they did not, largely because they could not – that is, they lacked the training and the mindset that would have enabled them to challenge the Young Turks on their own ground. So they carried on as if nothing had happened. The most serious critique of the new Anglo-Jewish history came from the American-born and -trained historian William Rubinstein, who taught at universities in Australia and Wales and served as president of the JHSE from 2002 to 2004 (the first modern Jewish historian to do so). Rubinstein did not start his career as a Jewish historian but as an English historian. His quantitative study of wealth-holding in Britain, which was based on his dissertation, led him to publish a study of Jewish wealth-holding in Britain.<sup>15</sup> From there, it was a short step to writing Anglo-Jewish history more generally. Rubinstein brought to this discussion a right-wing perspective that clashed with the largely left-wing commitments of the new historians and sparked

<sup>14</sup> D. W. Hayton, *Conservative Revolutionary: The Lives of Lewis Namier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 254.

<sup>15</sup> William D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981); "Jews among Top British Wealth Holders, 1857–1969", *Jewish Social Studies* 34 (1972): 73–84.

highly charged exchanges.<sup>16</sup> Resurrecting the once regnant view that the history of Jews in Britain was a success story, Rubinstein challenged the new view that antisemitism was, in his words, “much more significant than yesterday’s historians acknowledged.” As a result, his argument continued, the new historians saw antisemitism “as the primary mode of shaping Anglo-Jewry’s response and image during the past century.”<sup>17</sup>

I was both entertained and taken aback by the stridency of the debate. I found myself in the anodyne position of seeing merit (not necessarily equal merit) on both sides. As an American, my interest in the issues was more professional than personal (insofar as the two can be separated). I was neither a neo-conservative nor a Labourite. So to the extent that politics was driving the debate, I did not have the same stake in the game. In the early 2000s, I found a way to approach the gap between the two positions by turning to the career of Benjamin Disraeli.<sup>18</sup> For those who saw Anglo-Jewish history as a success story, Disraeli’s climb up the greasy pole was evidence of British tolerance and fair play. For those who were less sanguine, the tsunami of anti-Jewish abuse that followed him on the way up was proof that Jew-baiting was deeply embedded in English life. The historiographical problem, then and now, is that both assertions are true. The challenge is how to explain their simultaneous coexistence. This is far more challenging than declaring Anglo-Jewish history a success or a failure. (Parenthetically, let me add that the very terms “success” and “failure” are problematic.) In harmonizing the two views, I suggest that the task of the historian is similar to that of an accomplished multi-tasker, who must keep several activities in motion at the same time. He or she must explain how a society that abused Jews verbally also allowed them to rise to positions of power and prestige.

As this debate was unfolding, the JHSE remained on the sidelines. This allowed other bodies, such as the Wiener Library and the Parkes Institute at the University of Southampton, to take the initiative to provide forums for airing these issues. It is difficult to know how aware the society’s then

16 See e.g. David Cesarani, “The Anti-Jewish Career of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Cabinet Minister”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989): 461–82; William D. Rubinstein, “Recent Anglo-Jewish Historiography and the Myth of Jix’s Antisemitism”, pt. I, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 7, no. 1 (1993): 41–70; pt. II, 7, no. 2 (1993): 25–45; Geoffrey Alderman, “Recent Anglo-Jewish Historiography and the Myth of Jix’s Antisemitism: A Response”, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 8, no. 1 (1994): 112–21.

17 Rubinstein, “Recent Anglo-Jewish Historiography,” pt. I, 44–5.

18 Todd M. Endelman, *England – Good or Bad for the Jews?*, Jubilee Parkes Lecture, May 2002, Parkes Institute Pamphlet No. 3 (Southampton: James Parkes Institute, 2003), 20–21.

leadership was of the changing landscape of the field. Only in the mid-1990s did the society slowly begin to broaden the make-up of its council. In 1993, for example, David Cesarani, Tony Kushner, Anne Kershen, and Sharman Kadish joined. However, they were ignored and kept off the executive committee. Only with the appointment of Michael Berkowitz as editor of the society's journal in 2012 and his introduction of professional standards did the complexion of the society decisively change. When the well-known medieval historian Miri Rubin became president of the society in 2020, the transformation was complete. The amateurs remained on the scene, however, continuing to publish and lecture. Over time their ranks changed as newcomers took the place of the ailing and the deceased. To this day they continue to write biographies of chief rabbis and histories of communal institutions and provincial communities. This body of work, on the whole, is conceptually weak and lacking in any outward-looking contextual framework. One retired business magnate has been exceptionally industrious, publishing more than ten books since 2007. One has to admire the enthusiasm and discipline that sustain this work, but one must also recognize that this phenomenon has a downside. Gresham's law has it that bad money drives out good. Poor scholarship undermines good scholarship. It lowers standards, reinforces myths, and potentially misleads readers unfamiliar with the field. It also forecloses further work on the subject. What graduate student today would undertake writing a dissertation on the history of the Board of Deputies in the wake of the publication of Raphael Langham's commissioned history, *250 Years of Convention and Contention*?<sup>19</sup> I do not know who reads the amateurs' books, which, in any case, have not left a mark on serious scholarship.

The themes that the new historians introduced in the 1980s and 1990s no longer energize the work of Anglo-Jewish historians in this century. The Young Turks are no longer young; their vision of how Anglo-Jewish history should be written has won the day. I can think of only one monograph published in the last ten years that addresses a major concern of the new historians – the response of the communal leadership to threats from outside. Daniel Tilles's *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses* demolished the accepted view that the Board of Deputies was timid in responding to British fascists by comparison with the militancy of Jewish

19 Raphael Langham, *250 Years of Convention and Contention: A History of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, 1760–2010* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010).

workers and Communists.<sup>20</sup> Using primary sources that were unavailable or under-utilized earlier, Tilles found that the Board's response was anything but timid. It and its president Neville Laski worked actively to counter the Blackshirts, but often quietly and behind the scenes. Perhaps the most startling discovery that Tilles made was that beginning in 1936 the Board successfully placed moles in various fascist groups and that it used the covert information it gathered to influence government officials.

While the themes of the 1980s and 1990s no longer animate the writing of Anglo-Jewish history, it is still possible to identify some patterns that have emerged in the last quarter century. The most obvious is the turn towards social history, that is, the history of the lived experience of "ordinary" Jews. This approach to history writing was already well established in the academy more generally when some Anglo-Jewish historians took it up. (One characteristic of Jewish historical scholarship everywhere is its belatedness.) I had taken a social history approach in my first book, *The Jews of Georgian England*, in 1979, as well as in subsequent books and articles, but they failed to inspire others to follow suit at the time. An example of the subsequent turn to social history is David Dee's *Sport and British Jewry: Integration, Ethnicity and Antisemitism*.<sup>21</sup> As its subtitle makes clear this is not a celebratory book about notable Jewish athletes and their contribution to British sport. It is, rather, an examination of the ways in which sport has shaped British Jews, interacting with their acculturation and integration. It also focuses on the exclusion of Jews from some sporting circles, thus offering concrete examples of how antisemitism impinged on the lives of "ordinary" Jews (as opposed to examining antisemitic rhetoric, which cannot illuminate the extent and depth of anti-Jewish bias and the ways in which it affected the day-to-day activities of Jews). Alys Levene's *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Charity, Community and Religion, 1830–1880*, despite its colourless title, broke new ground as well in its employment of computer-generated quantitative data to answer questions about the occupational structure, household arrangements, and charity practices of Jews in northern provincial towns.<sup>22</sup> These and other social history

20 Daniel Tilles, *British Fascist Antisemitism and Jewish Responses, 1932–40* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

21 David Dee, *Sport and British Jewry: Integration, Ethnicity and Anti-Semitism, 1890–1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013). Dee's second book, *The "Estranged" Generation? Social and Generational Change in Interwar British Jewry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), also has a social history approach.

22 Alys Levene, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Charity, Community and Religion, 1830–1880* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

works, such as Anne Summers's *Christian and Jewish Women in Britain, 1880–1914*, helped to correct the absence of women (other than the wives and daughters of the very wealthy) in Anglo-Jewish historiography.<sup>23</sup>

Recent historical writing also includes accounts of Judaism as such (its theology and practices) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While historians had focused previously on religious institutions, such as Jews' College, the Federation of Synagogues, and the United Synagogue, or individual synagogues, they now began to consider Anglo-Judaism *qua* religion. The impetus for this turn was, I suggest, contemporary communal strife. Early in this century, debate (not always civil in tone) flared about the character of the chief rabbinate, the institutions of mainstream Orthodoxy, the chief rabbi's Beth Din, and the views of Chief Rabbis Nathan Adler, Hermann Adler, and Joseph Hertz. While intra-communal religious controversy was not a novelty in Anglo-Jewry, the use of historical research and writing to advance a religious agenda was. During the chief rabbinate of Jonathan Sacks (1991–2013), books and articles on past battles multiplied, a reflection surely of the discord that Sacks's policies and pronouncements provoked. (Ironically, Sacks presented himself as a champion of intra-communal toleration and harmony.) Chief examples of this trend are Miri Freud-Kandel's *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913*, Benjamin Elton's *Britain's Chief Rabbis and the Religious Character of Anglo-Jewry*, and Meir Persoff's *Faith against Reason*.<sup>24</sup> A question running through this body of work was whether the United Synagogue, the chief rabbi, and the Beth Din had abandoned what has been called *minhag anglia* (moderate, tolerant traditionalism) and moved towards the right, adopting the standards of the Ultra-Orthodox. Elton, for example, challenges the view that the chief rabbinate shifted to the right after Hertz's tenure of the office (1913–46) and that Hertz himself, a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, was, in effect, a Conservative Jew. Needless to say, the Jacobs Affair of the early 1960s re-emerged in these discussions. Central to this controversy was the question of who was empowered to define the boundaries of Orthodox

23 Anne Summers, *Christian and Jewish Women in Britain, 1880–1914: Living with Difference* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

24 Miri Freud-Kandel, *Orthodox Judaism in Britain since 1913: An Ideology Forsaken* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006); Benjamin Elton, *Britain's Chief Rabbis and the Religious Character of Anglo-Jewry, 1880–1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Meir Persoff, *Faith against Reason: Religious Reform and the British Chief Rabbinate, 1840–1990* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008).

belief and practice. In social terms, it was a struggle between the old, native-born communal elite and the new Eastern European immigrants and their descendants.

Were I to summarize in one word the development of Anglo-Jewish history-writing in the last half century, it would be professionalization. As a scholarly project it is now rooted in the academy. The work of its practitioners is judged by the same standards used in other fields of history. It is no longer the handmaiden of ethnic pride. Whether it is fully integrated into the history curriculum is another matter. Many historians in Britain still regard it as an exercise in minority group cheerleading, despite the changes of the last half century, and do not accord it the weight that it merits. Nonetheless, the evidence of its maturity is abundant. Two scholarly journals in Britain regularly publish articles on Anglo-Jewish history – *Jewish Historical Studies* and *Jewish History and Culture*. Conferences, symposia, and lectures fill the calendar. An especially striking sign of maturation is the care expended on the collection and archiving of records and other primary sources. Trained staff at the London Metropolitan Archives, the Rothschild Archives, and the Hartley Library, University of Southampton, catalogue the materials and – this is especially critical – provide access to them at regularly scheduled times. This was not the situation when I was doing research for my dissertation fifty years ago. One last anecdote to illustrate the unprofessional way in which primary materials were stored and made available early in my career: at the time the records of the oldest Ashkenazi synagogues languished in the office of the chief rabbi at Woburn House, central London. After I was given permission to use them, I was seated at a table in a large closet in the office where they were stored. Once there, I had unsupervised access to whichever records I wanted to use. Another bonus of this arrangement was that I was served tea from the office tea trolley twice a day. Of necessity, I put my cup down on the same table on which the record books rested. If my memory is accurate, I never spilled it.