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Jacob's Well, Bristol: Mikveh or Bet Tohorah?

by J. Hillaby and R. Sermon
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Jacob's Well, Bristol: *Mikveh* or *Bet Toborah*?

By JOE HILLABY and RICHARD SERMON

On 31 May 2002 the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, following reinterpretation of the site and the advice of English Heritage, declared Jacob's Well in Bristol to be a Scheduled Ancient Monument, 28881. Only two structures can be confidently associated with the Jewish community which was resident in England for some 200 years until their general expulsion in 1290: the Jew's House in Lincoln and the Music House, now Wensum Lodge, in Norwich.¹ There are a few vestiges: the re-erected chancel arch of the *Domus Conversorum*, founded by Henry III in the year 1232–3 for Jewish converts, in Chancery Lane, London; remnants of the great stone house built c.1200 by Jacob of Canterbury in the High Street of Canterbury; and the Jewish ritual bath, *mikveh* מִקְוֵה, from Milk Street, London, awaiting re-erection at Bevis Marks synagogue.² Moyses's Hall in Bury St. Edmunds and the Jew's Court and Aaron's House in Lincoln are doubtful.³ Scheduled Monument status has formally placed Jacob's Well amongst this tiny group of structures. More importantly, it is a medieval relic unique in this country, and possibly in Europe: a Jewish ritual bath, not a *mikveh* associated with the general *halakic* processes of purification, but one relating specifically to washing the dead, a *bet toborah* בֵּית טוֹבוֹרָה. Use of a *mikveh* for such purpose, however eminent the deceased, was from early times vigorously opposed by the rabbis on account of the malign impact it would have on the use of the *mikveh* by the women-folk.⁴

Long has there been speculation about Jacob's Well but confirmation of its Jewish ancestry was the achievement of the Bristol Temple Local History Group. In 1987 the Group was given permission to explore the site prior to the building of Mr. T. Gardiner's bottling plant, which in 1989 opened for the sale of its spring water in Bristol blue glass. The spring's 'Genuine Superior Aerated Waters' had been renowned a century and a half earlier but by 1889 the building had been taken over by Alfred Davies, bootmaker. It subsequently became the engine house of the Clifton fire brigade and then the bicycle shed for the Clifton division of the Bristol police force whose Brandon Hill station was next door. Today, the building itself is 33 Jacob's Wells Road whilst the spring is under the garden of number 36.⁵

Removal by the Group of a substantial wall in 1987 revealed the springhead (Fig. 1). This consists of a small rock-cut chamber entered by two stone steps and a low rectangular arch measuring 0.8 metres wide and 0.6 metres high above the water line. Situated in the base of a steep-sided valley, the chamber fills with water from the spring, despite being at ground level. Part of a damaged Hebrew inscription was found on the large stone lintel over the entry. This, it has been suggested, reads זֶחָלִים זֶחָלִים *zochalim*, the plural of זֶחָל *zochal*, to flow, with the remaining plaster possibly covering the word מַיִם *mayim* to give the text זֶחָלִים מַיִם *mayim zochalim*, 'flowing water', a term used in the Mishnah, the 'Oral Torah', compiled under the sponsorship of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, the patriarch, c.200 A.D.⁶ From this it has been argued that the inscription was to reassure users that the waters in the chamber were pure and that it marked the site of a ritual bath, *mikveh*.⁷ The sixth and final division of the Mishnah, the tractate Mikva'ot, discussed more fully below, describes both the waters necessary for ritual cleansing and the nature of the ritual bath.



Fig. 1. Springhead at Jacob's Well, Bristol (photograph by Richard Sermon).

Initial doubts as to this interpretation were raised by the unlikely position of the suggested *mikveh* which in the 12th century would have been remote from the town and in a hilly and wooded site.⁸ Also the current low height of both entrance and chamber would have made it very restricted for bathing, although arrangements could have been different in the medieval period. Following a recent re-examination of the inscription by the authors, the reading of the Hebrew letters has been called into question. The inscription occurs towards the right-hand side of the lintel, leaving little space before it, to the right, for the word מַיִם *mayim*, of which no trace could be found. Of the five Hebrew letters of the word זֶחָלִים *zochalim* (read from right to left), the final two letters (י *yod* and מ *mem sophit*) could not be identified. This part of the stone surface having been hacked to provide a key for modern plaster or render (Fig. 2), the third letter (ל *lamed*) could not be identified either, although some of the later damage did superficially resemble the Hebrew letter. In the case of the first two letters (ז *zayin* and ח *chet*) the shape of the *zayin*, if the previous identification is correct, is rather unusual, the top of the letter being off-centre. In contrast the *chet* is very well preserved, being finely cut with a deep 'V' section. Recently it has been suggested that this letter could be a Lombardic 'n' (pers. comm. Bob Jones, Bristol City Archaeologist). However, this seems unlikely given the very square (Hebrew) form of the letter, with the two vertical sides being completely parallel, whereas the Lombardic 'n' has a more cursive top and right-hand side.

Given the position of the site, and the doubts about the reading of the inscription, we should perhaps consider alternatives such as מַיִם טְהוֹרִים *mayim tehorim*, 'pure waters' (Ezekiel 36:25)

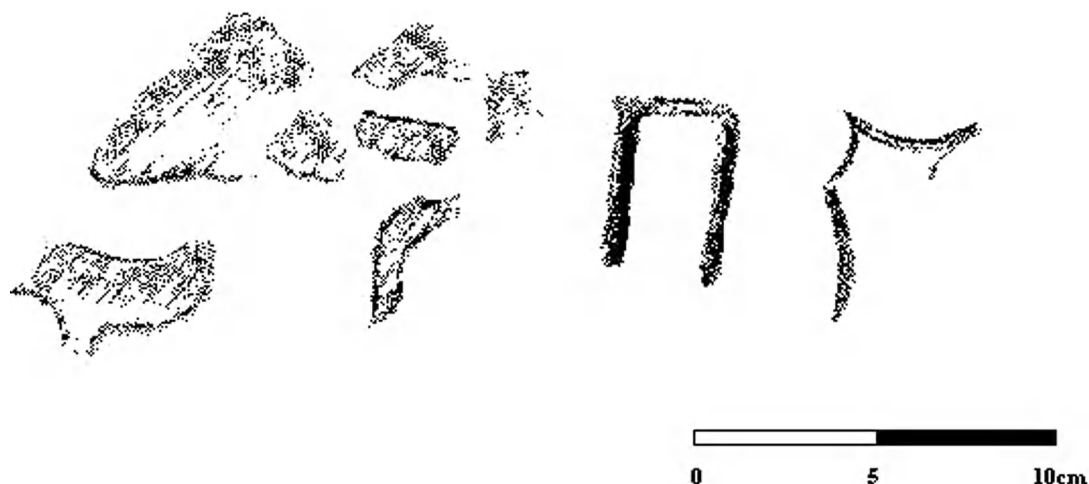


Fig. 2. The Hebrew inscription on the lintel at Jacob's Well, Bristol (drawing by Richard Sermon).

or מים חיים *mayim chayim*, 'living waters' (Leviticus 15:13 and Numbers 19:17). The latter refers to the type of water required to cleanse a person after contact with a corpse. It could be suggested that the doubtful ז *zayin* is more likely to be the remnants of מ *mem-sophit*, the final letter of the word מים *mayim*. The next letter, ח *chet*, is the first letter of the word חיים *chayim*. However, given that only one of the Hebrew letters, ח, can be read with confidence, the precise meaning of the inscription is likely to remain a mystery. This one letter does however provide evidence that this is almost certainly a Jewish monument and, if of medieval date, only the second Hebrew inscription known to have survived in England from that era.⁹ Whilst some non-Jewish scholarship of Hebrew is recorded in medieval England, it was strongly discouraged by the Papacy and was not used in Christian inscriptions until after the Reformation. No medieval pottery was found by the Bristol Temple Local History Group. In the absence of artefact or architectural dating evidence we have to look elsewhere for secure dating of the inscription as medieval.

The Context: Bristol Jewry's Origins

The first Jews were introduced into this country by William I from Rouen in the later 11th century. The English Jewry, however, stood in marked contrast to that of France. Only in their demesne lands did the Capetian monarchs exercise jurisdiction over the Jewries; elsewhere authority lay with the French nobility. William I, William II and Henry I all maintained tight control over the English Jews whom they regarded as far too valuable a financial asset — in terms not only of resources but also of expertise, especially the handling of credit — to be allowed to fall into baronial hands. The so-called 'Laws of Edward the Confessor', drawn up probably *c.*1136, explain the legal position pithily: 'the Jews themselves and all their possessions are the king's'. Thus no Jew could 'subject himself to any wealthy person, without the king's licence' and 'if some one detains them or their money, the king shall demand them as his own property if he wishes and is able'. In return for rights of residence and royal protection they and their wealth were at his service. The Jewry, on the other hand, fully accepted the Talmudic ruling, *dina de-malkhuta dina דינא דמלכותא דינא* (Aramaic), 'the law of the land is the law'.¹⁰

Although they could travel freely, Jews had to remain domiciled in London during the reigns of the first three Norman kings. Only when royal control broke down, during the anarchy of Stephen's reign, 1135–54, did they manage to establish themselves in provincial centres. It is then that evidence is found of the earliest provincial communities: at Oxford, for example, by 1141, at Norwich and Cambridge before 1144 and Winchester by 1148. Where royal authority was weak they sought the protection of a noble. Thus, although the first firm evidence is a tax list of 1159, it is certain that Jewries were established at Thetford and Bungay during the Anarchy by Hugh Bigod, first earl of Norfolk. Although Henry II rapidly re-established royal control over the realm and its Jews after his accession in 1154, many of the provincial Jewries founded in Stephen's reign were left untouched.¹¹

Valuable information as to their distribution, number and wealth after the end of Stephen's reign is provided by the *donum* or gift, in all but name a tax, which Henry II levied on the Jews in 1159. Ten provincial communities are listed, with details of sums levied from Jewish settlements at Lincoln, Northampton, Gloucester and Worcester in addition to the six already mentioned. London contributed more than a third of the total of £362 6s. 8d. and Norwich and Lincoln some 12% each. The smallest were Gloucester with 1% and Worcester with 0.4%. Bristol, not listed, appears for the first time 35 years later, in the next extant list, the Northampton *donum* of 1194, when £1,742 9s. 2d. was raised from twenty-one Jewries. Ranking thirteenth, Bristol paid merely £22 14s. 2d., 1% of the total, whilst Gloucester, now fifth, provided £116 19s. 4d., 6.5%. By providing a measure of the relative wealth of the two communities at the end of the century, the second *donum* underlines the later foundation of Bristol's Jewry.¹²

Michael Adler, writing some 75 years ago, suggested that the first Jews settled in Bristol before the mid 12th century. This was based on his interpretation of a 'Note' relating to the Fraternity of the Kalendars in the *Little Red Book of Bristol*; resolving 'to win the souls of Jews to the Christian faith' Robert FitzHarding 'established a school for converted Jews, or *Domus Conversorum*, . . . a work (he) entrusted to the Guild of the Kalendars'. Adler may well have been influenced by John Leland, who reported in Henry VIII's reign that in the time of Robert, earl of Gloucester, and Robert FitzHarding 'scholes were ordeyned in Brightstow by them for the conversion of the Jewes and put in the ordre of the Calendris and the Maior'. The term 'convert', however, appears nowhere in the 'Note' of the *Little Red Book*. It merely states that Robert (fitz) Harding founded, with the consent of Henry II and of Robert, earl of Gloucester, a 'school' in Bristol 'for the education of Jewish and other children', which latter must mean Christian.¹³

The late 11th and early 12th centuries had witnessed a number of well-recorded formal disputations between Christians and Jews, such as that c.1090 between Gilbert Crispin, abbot of Westminster, and a French Jew who had studied at the rabbinic schools of Worms. Yet for Jew as for Christian education and religion were inseparable. Both were convinced that theirs was the only true religion. Both faiths were religions of the book. For the Jews this was the Torah, the Mosaic Law embodied in the Pentateuch, and the oral commentaries on it recorded in the Talmud. For Christians, however, the Torah was the Old Law which they held had been abrogated by the coming of Christ and the New Law, as expressed in the New Testament. On the Jewish side, there were the insurmountable barriers between them and the Christians concerning not only the divinity of Christ and the nature of the Godhead but also the covenant between God and Israel. Any hint of interfaith education of children would have been anathema to both Church and the Jews.¹⁴

The 'Note' in the *Little Red Book*, which is of late 15th-century date, represents a misunderstanding of the term *scola iudeorum*. This was used in English medieval records for the synagogue, which was indeed both *bet tefilab*, a house of prayer, and *bet midrash*, a house for the study of Torah and Talmud. The term lived on in the public memory in a number of those towns with Jewish communities prior to the general expulsion of 1290. As late as 1455 Robert Cole, canon

of Llanthony Priory, in his *Rental*, not only referred to certain lands in Gloucester as *in Iudaismo in vico orientali* (Eastgate) but identifies the site of the *scola iudaeorum*. More than four centuries later Richard Johnson, town clerk of Hereford 1832–68, recorded ‘the remembrance of this persecuted race long perpetuated’ in the names of buildings such as the Jew’s Chimney, Babylon Door, as well as their school or synagogue.¹⁵ In German-speaking lands the term *schul* continues in use for medieval synagogues. Thus at Worms the building comprises both *Männer Schule* and *Frauenschule* and in Prague the 13th-century synagogue is still known as *Altneuschul* in contrast to the *Neuschul* and the *Altschul*, demolished in the 1860s.

The site of the *scola iudeorum* was not forgotten at Bristol. William of Worcester mentions it on six occasions in his description of Bristol written *c.* 1480. He prefers however the more biblical term of *templum*. ‘By the old temple of yewys’, he tells us, ‘be grete Vowtes under the highest walle of Bristow and the olde Chyrch of Seynt Gylys was bylded over the Vowtes yn the way goyng by Seynt laurens lane yn to Smalstrete’. On another occasion the synagogue wall is referred to as ‘near the stone entry gate to Small Street’. Elsewhere, describing the head of the quay, he refers to ‘the very start alongside the wall of the Jewish temple’. As late as 1673 Jacob Millerd on his plan of Bristol marked ‘ye Jewerie’ as by ‘ye Key head’, between St. John’s and St. Giles’s gates (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The early Jewry in Bristol: detail from Jacob Millerd’s *Exact Delineation of the Famous City of Bristol* (1673).

By 1275 the Jewish quarter, *placea Judaisme*, and with it the synagogue, was in St. Peter's parish, close to the security offered by the royal castle — probably as a consequence of the disastrous attack by Simon de Montfort's supporters in 1266.¹⁶

Disaster struck the English Jewry sixteen years after the first evidence of a formally recognised community at Bristol in 1194. In April 1210 King John ordered a 'general imprisonment of the Jews', probably only its most substantial members, at Bristol Castle. In addition all their financial records were to be seized.¹⁷ In June, in an attempt to subdue its Anglo-Norman lords, John led an expedition of some 8,000 men to Ireland. His victorious return, two months later, was to Bristol where, as a means of defraying part of the cost of his expedition, he imposed a tallage of £40,000 on the Jewry.¹⁸ By contrast, the largest tallage he levied on the royal boroughs and demesne manors in 1210 was a mere £8,276 and the total yield of all seven such tallages during his reign amounted to only £25,518. Whether or not details of credit facilities in the Jewry's impounded financial records provided the basis for John's demand, it could not be met, for almost all the Jewry's capital was on loan.¹⁹

Even before the 'Bristol tallage' was announced, action against individual Jews had begun. Isaac, leader of the Canterbury community, was hanged but his chattels brought the Crown no more than £30. Isaac of Norwich saved his own life by the promise of a fine of £6,666 but the evidence suggests that the wealthy Londoner Abraham son of Abigail, who was also condemned to death, was not so fortunate. The sufferings of the Jews became legendary, for the monastic chroniclers, themselves subject to royal demands, were no friends of the king. The Margam and Winchester abbey chroniclers actually link the tribulations of the Church and the Jews. Roger of Wendover tells of the Jew imprisoned at Bristol Castle who had one cheek tooth knocked out daily until, on the eighth day, he agreed to pay the £6,666 demanded. The Melrose chronicler reports that John 'pillaged them of nearly everything they possessed and drove them out of their houses; the eyes of some he plucked out, some he starved to death, and all of them he reduced to such an extremity of want that they . . . went from door to door asking food from the Christians in the name of Jesus Christ'. Whatever the truth of such reports, a number of the wealthier Jews died and many of the poorer fled into exile.²⁰

'Entire communities disappeared and a generation of Jewish leaders was wiped out through death, flight or execution', it has been suggested. The 1221 tallage returns do provide some graphic evidence. At Gloucester, apart from the family of a newcomer, Abraham of Warwick, the three major tax payers were Mirabelle, widow of Elias, Judea, widow of Isaac, and Douce, widow of Moses. At Northampton not only was the female to male ratio 2:1 but of the seven women listed at least four were widows. The Bristol Jewry fared much better: seven males, and no widows, are listed.²¹ The death of John at Newark Castle in 1216 brought unexpected relief to the wasted Jewry. Under the leadership of William Marshal, first earl of Pembroke and lord of Striguil (Chepstow) and Leinster, the Council of Regency acting for the nine-year-old Henry III adopted a policy of conciliation and revival which breathed fresh life into the English Jewry. This was due to the Council's sharp appreciation of the benefits such a policy could have, not merely for the royal exchequer but also for the dominant lay group of marcher lords such as Walter de Lacy II, lord of Ludlow, Longtown and Meath.²²

With the resumption of Jewish tallages in 1221 and 1223, comparison of the sums levied on the Bristol and Gloucester communities shows a reversal in their relative prosperity. Gloucester paid 3% of the total on both occasions, ranking first twelfth and then fourteenth, whilst Bristol paid 3.5% and then 5%, ranking eleventh and eighth. However, in 1226, although full figures are not available, it is known that Gloucester paid £15 10s. and ranked eleventh, whilst Bristol paid £10 1s. 5d., ranking fifteenth amongst a total of 21 communities (Table 1). Bristol never became a member of the small group of very wealthy Jewries.²³

Table 1. Bristol and Gloucester contributions to the tallages of 1194, 1221, 1223 and 1226.

	1194		1221		1223		1226	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Bristol	13	1	11	3.5	8	5	15	–
Gloucester	5	6.5	12	3	14	3	11	–
Number of communities	21		17		17		21	

The Mikveh

The use of the Jewish ritual bath, the *mikveh* (plural *mikva'ot*), is based on the Mosaic laws of purification. Leviticus 15 provides the text of the law concerning the ritual uncleanness of men and women arising from their issues, and their cleansing, and 11:36 states 'a spring (*mayan* מַיָּן), cistern or collection (*mikveh* מִקְוֵה) of water shall be clean'. Detailed commentary on their purification came with the codification of Jewish ritual law in the Mishnah (M) of c.200 A.D. Spring, river or rain water, 'in the hands of heaven', was pure or 'valid'. Water carried 'in the hands of man' was 'drawn' and thus invalid.²⁴ The waters of Jacob's Well, in reality a spring, were thus pure, but it is the distance from the medieval town, not the quality of the water, which precluded its use as a *mikveh*.

The Mishnah (Mikva'ot) also treats, in detail, the ways in which persons became ritually unclean: through contact with specific defiling objects, including a corpse, or through an unclean flow from the body, especially menstruation or childbirth. Thus the principal use of the *mikveh*, following Leviticus 15:19–24, was by the women-folk of the community each month. This is developed in Mishnah (Niddah), on 'isolation' or menstrual uncleanness, which enjoins marital abstinence not only during the period but for the seven days following. On the eighth day the woman, *zavah* זָוָה, was to wash herself thoroughly before proceeding to the *mikveh* for *tevilah* טְבִילָה, ritual immersion in undrawn water.

The earliest documentary evidence of a medieval *mikveh* is from Rome, in 1088, when Nathan ben Yehiel, poet and author of the talmudic lexicon, *Aruch*, tells us that he built a ritual bath.²⁵ Apart from this Roman example one has to rely on archaeological evidence from the German-speaking lands for knowledge of early medieval *mikva'ot*. These are of two types, monumental and cellar. The monumental type, reflecting not only wealth but communal pride in the face of great adversity, was a radical departure, in both size and design, from the early tradition in Israel. They are outstanding on account of their depth, varying from 25 metres to water level at Friedberg to less than 10 metres at Speyer, and their staircases. At Andernach 44 steps lead down a diagonal shaft to the pool. The monumental *mikva'ot* took two forms. The first had a single shaft providing access to the bath by a staircase, descending down four sides, as well as air and light.²⁶ The second had an additional, diagonal shaft for less precipitous access, as at Speyer c.1110 and Worms 1185–6.²⁷ All German monumental *mikva'ot* were within the *Judenhof*, the Jewish court, by the synagogue.

Other major medieval *mikva'ot* can be seen in Catalonia at Besalú, where the *mikveh* is a vaulted chamber some 5.5 × 4.5 metres, and in France at Carpentras near Avignon, where 43 steps lead to a ritual bath of 4 square metres, both cut out of the rock. Here, as elsewhere, brides to be were plunged three times into the *mikveh*, legs and arms outstretched. The recently restored Montpellier *mikveh*, adjacent to the former synagogue, has a long staircase leading to the great pool in a large barrel-vaulted bath chamber. A potent rival to the monumental *mikva'ot* of Germany, it probably exemplifies facilities available at other large Jewries.²⁸

The humbler, cellar *mikva'ot*, small subterranean barrel-vaulted chambers with a rectangular stone or rock-cut pool and access usually by stone steps, have been overshadowed by the fame of the Rhenish examples.²⁹ They are more akin to early examples found in Israel: in the Upper City of Jerusalem, built prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D.; at Sepphoris in the 2nd century A.D.; and elsewhere in Israel.³⁰ The *mikva'ot* discovered in London, at 81–7 Gresham Street, formerly Catte Street, in 1986 and 1–6 Milk Street in 2001, are similar in terms of construction and size to the cellar *mikva'ot* of Nuremberg, Rothenburg and Sondershausen.³¹

Profound significance continued to be attached to ritual cleanliness in 15th-century Castile. There, to avoid massacre in 1391, thousands of Jews had accepted baptism. For the Christians they were *conversos* or *marranos*, but for their own people they were *anusim*, 'those who were forced' to convert but, openly or clandestinely, still adhered to most of their rites. Evidence given at an Inquisitor's trial at Ciudad Real in 1483 showed that, despite the great danger, many 'practised immersion in the manner of Jewish women' whilst others used the *mikveh* 'before marriage'. Confirmation that there were *mikva'ot* in private houses, presumably of the cellar type, was also placed before the court.³²

Such evidence as there is indicates that the London *mikva'ot*, like those in the Upper City of Jerusalem, at Sepphoris, and 15th-century Ciudad Real, were domestic, for the personal use of the householder, his family and possibly friends. The returns of Jewish property drawn up at the general expulsion in 1290 show that the Milk Street property, with its *mikveh*, belonged to Moses Crespin. Previously it was owned by his father Jacob, who, with his elder brother Benedict, had been amongst the wealthiest members of the London community.³³ Ease of access was a fundamental requirement for both continental and English medieval *mikva'ot*. All lay within urban settings, in Jewish quarters, and above all, as the archaeological evidence from Germany shows, were closely associated with nearby synagogues. Indeed, the principal German authority states categorically 'medieval *mikva'ot* were always in close proximity to the synagogue'.³⁴ The London discoveries confirm this judgment, for there is ample documentary evidence of synagogues close to the Catte and Milk Street sites.³⁵

The reason for such close proximity is simple. The Jews of the Diaspora lived in alien, often hostile, societies. Women travelling to a *mikveh* beyond the confines of the Jewry would have been extraordinarily vulnerable, for such monthly visits would have aroused highly undesirable attention. A 14th-century Jewish will indicates the standards expected by Ashkenazi society. The women-folk 'must be scrupulous . . . accompanied by trustworthy women lest anyone encounter them. They should cover their eyes while returning home so that they won't see anything unclean'.³⁶

In recent times the majority of English *mikva'ot*, it has been observed, were situated in private, not communal, buildings. However, ever since Jewish Resettlement, the desire for proximity to the synagogue remained a powerful force in the south-west. At Exeter in 1764 the *mikveh* was built in the new synagogue and at Falmouth, where the ruins could still be seen in 1993, it was attached. At Plymouth the attempt in 1910 to part *mikveh* from synagogue was a failure. The city corporation spent £50 on its construction at the public baths but there was a return to the synagogue site. There the *mikveh* remained in the vestry house until the latter was rebuilt, without its ritual bath, in 1975.³⁷

At Bristol Jacob's Well was not merely outside the Jewry but more than a mile's walk beyond the town walls, in open countryside in the medieval period. The women-folk would have had to cross Frome Bridge and then take one of two routes to the far side of Brandon Hill. The southerly route lay along Horsefair to *Froggemerestrete* and Frog Lane, to the north of the precinct of St. Augustine's Abbey and St. Mark's (Gaunt's) Hospital. There they would turn into Brandon Hill by what is now Brandon Steep and follow the path along the southern and western sides of the hill to the well. The alternative, northern route would have been up Queen Street (Christmas Steps)

there was more than one spring along the route in the later 14th century. It will be shown that any spring on the western side could have been developed only after 1205.³⁸

If Jacob's Well had been a communal *mikveh* the women-folk of the Jewry would have been exposed not only to a lengthy but also to a hazardous journey. The top of Brandon Hill was referred to in the Gloucester abbey cartulary at the end of the 12th century as 'waste land at St. Brendan's' and was remote enough to provide the site for an anchorite's cell, to which in the mid 13th century 'the pasture of St. Brendan' was attached. The hill, with its abundant trees and much woodland, as the name *Wodewilles* indicates, was used as rough pasture by the canons of St. Augustine's and other religious houses.³⁹ As late as the mid 19th century a development on Jacob's Wells Road was given the name Woodside Terrace. Such a sequestered site was wholly inappropriate for a ritual bath. Bristol's medieval *mikveh*, like those at London and elsewhere in Europe, would have been located within 'the Jewry'.

The English Medieval Jewish Cemetery

The first priority of any community was the construction of a *mikveh*, for a room in or attached to a private house could serve as a synagogue. Thus at Rome Nathan ben Yehiel built his handsomely furnished synagogue in 1101, thirteen years after his *mikveh*. The establishment of a cemetery was the second priority. In 12th-century England, however, Jewish burials were restricted to the London community's cemetery, and 'for every dead Jew buried in London' the city imposed a toll of 3½d.⁴⁰ Only in 1177 did Henry II grant the provincial Jewries the right to establish their own cemeteries, which were to be outside the town walls.⁴¹ Such formal recognition by Henry II of their independent status may well have been the occasion when he granted them their own 'communities', that is the right to self-government according to their own law 'except in such matters as pertain to our Crown and justice: homicide, unlawful injury, considered assault, burglary, theft, arson and treasure trove'. Such a grant of internal judicial autonomy was but a slight concession, given the Jewry's adherence to the Talmudic principle that 'the law of the state is the law'.⁴²

For the English Jewries the cemetery was *bet 'olam* **בֵּית עוֹלָם**, 'house of eternity', or *bet chayim* **בֵּית חַיִּים**, 'house of life'. To Christians it was *hortus judeorum*, 'the Jews' garden', as at London and Oxford. In the 1290 expulsion returns they were merely *sepultura*. The medieval Jewish cemetery was located outside the town walls, not merely to conform to the terms of Henry II's grant but in obedience to the dictate of the Mishnah that burial should take place more than 50 cubits from human settlement.⁴³ Within these parameters they were sited as close to the Jewry as local circumstances permitted. At Winchester it was only a short distance from Jewry Street, outside the West Gate beyond the castle ditch, and at Oxford just outside the east gate, by the site of the later Botanic Garden. The London cemetery, in local parlance 'Leyrestowe' ('lying place' or place of burial), was by St. Giles, just outside the city walls to the west of Cripplegate. At York, although a considerable distance from the Jewry, it was once more just beyond the city walls, where they ended at the northern bank of the river Foss not far from the present Layerthorpe bridge.⁴⁴ As on the continent the cemeteries were well walled, to prevent the entry of animals and to deter desecration. As late as c.1336 the Jewbury at York is described as 'enclosed with walls and ditches' whilst at Northampton in 1290 the stone of the cemetery walls was valued at £1 10s. 'for carting away'. At least one medieval Provençal community had a charity which specifically directed legacies to the maintenance and repair of the cemetery walls. Illuminated manuscripts from north Italy and Aragon depict funeral processions in such cemeteries, shaded by trees and surrounded by a wall.⁴⁵

Our knowledge of the distribution of English cemeteries is drawn from the valuations of Jewish property and rents completed prior to the expulsion in 1290. These provide details of seventeen

communities, including information on the cemeteries at London, York, Lincoln, Winchester, Northampton and possibly Canterbury, where the community owned a piece of ground valued at 6*d.*⁴⁶ At Northampton a rent of half a mark (6*s.* 8*d.*) was paid for the cemetery just outside the north gate, and at York the Jewbury was worth 20*s.* with 3*s.* outgoings.⁴⁷ The Bristol cemetery is not mentioned but, as will be seen, Margaret Sharp has uncovered some references to it amongst the post-expulsion accounts of the constable of the castle in the National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office).

To bury their dead according to their own traditions the London and provincial communities acquired land, preferably by purchase but if necessary by lease. Frequently such land was granted by the Church. At Winchester it was held of the cathedral for 2*s.* 6*d.* a year; at Northampton rent was paid to the Cluniac priory of St. Andrew's. At York the canons of the minster held the land adjacent to the cemetery and were paid a rent of 2*s.* a year by the Jewry for part of it. In 1230 the subdean was the Jews' intermediary in the purchase of additional land, 'a garden with trees'. Circumstances were similar in London where the dean and chapter of St. Paul's were leasing land to the Jewry as early as 1128. The extensive grounds adjacent to the cemetery, between Red Cross and Aldersgate Streets, belonged to St. Paul's and out of these the Jewish graveyard was probably carved. At Oxford Henry III granted 'the Jews' garden' to St. John's Hospital in 1231, saving a plot of 300 by 90 feet as their place of burial. After 1290 one finds such cemeteries being acquired by the Church. The London graveyard called 'Leyrestowe' was acquired by William Montfort, dean of St. Paul's. At Hereford the suggested site of the Jewish burial ground was granted by the Crown in 1290 to the 'leprous brethren of the hospital of St. Giles'.⁴⁸

Documentary evidence provides clues as to the ways in which these cemeteries were administered and in which funds were raised for their maintenance. At London overall responsibility lay with a group headed by the chief warden, an office held in 1257–8 as *Ab Bet Din* by Master Elias. Himself a remarkable scholar and noted medical practitioner, he was the eldest son of another great scholar, the grammarian and lexicographer Master Moses, whose powerful family had just stage-managed a coup to depose the Eveske archpresbyter, Elias, and replace him with Moses' second son, Hagin.⁴⁹ Funding came from a range of sources. On the one hand there are references to handsome donations. Abraham Motun gave a house in the parish of St. Michael, Wood Street, 'to the place in which the Jews are buried'. Money also came from legal penalties. At Norwich Josce ben Solomon covenanted 'in the event of any proven dishonesty' on his part to pay a forfeit of one gold mark (£6) to the Crown and one silver mark (13*s.* 4*d.*) to the London burial ground. The community had the power to impose its will on members who had not met their obligations 'for the maintenance of their cemetery'. In 1250 Henry III granted 'the Master of Laws of the said Jewry' that he might publish sentence of excommunication on such defaulters, but the ultimate penalty was seizure of their property by the Crown.⁵⁰

More important than matters of general administration was the warden's responsibility for ensuring the observation of appropriate burial rituals. This was the right of all, *damnatos et non damnatos*. Thus, when in 1236 the prominent Winchester Jew, Abraham Pinch, was condemned on what was evidently the trumped up charge of murdering a year-old boy, his community sought and obtained the right to bury him, with due rites, under the gallows on which he had been hanged.⁵¹ Only apostates were excluded, and for them no mourning was permitted. The most famous was the magnate Benedict of York. Having failed to keep ahead of his pursuers during the attack by the mob on the London Jewry at the time of Richard I's coronation in September 1189, to escape death he accepted baptism. Although Benedict revoked this act the following day, when he died at Northampton shortly after he was denied burial according to Jewish rites.⁵²

Tombstones

On the numerous tombstones of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. found in the Jewish catacombs at Rome, 78% of the inscriptions were in Greek, the remainder in Latin. Only two include any Hebrew characters. 'Timidly', it has been said, 'Hebrew overcame Greek and Latin'. The apparent harbinger of this revival is an inscription wholly in Hebrew on a tombstone of 818 at Venosa. On the Via Appia, between Capua and Brindisi and thus on the principal land route, by the Via Egnatia, to Constantinople this Jewish settlement flourished between the 4th and 9th centuries.⁵³ The Sephardic tombstones of the Iberian peninsula and southern France lay flat on the ground, conforming to the edict of the Khalif al-Mutawakkil (847–61), who wished to prevent confusion between the tombs of the faithful and the infidel.⁵⁴ The medieval gravestones of the Ashkenazi communities of Germany and northern France, on the other hand, were upright. The largest collection, and earliest examples, stand in the Worms cemetery (Fig. 5). Inscribed with square Hebrew characters, most were rectangular in form. A framed square area bore the inscription and a 'foot' beneath secured it in the ground, as illustrated by the photograph of the Cologne gravestone of רחל בת ר שניאור 'Rachel daughter of Rabbi Schneior', of 1323 (Fig. 6).

There have been partial excavations at the London, York and Winchester cemeteries. No bodies were found at London but at York almost 500 undisturbed bodies were recovered. At Winchester 89 further burials were located at Crowder Terrace in 1995. Yet no trace of any tombstone was found at any of these sites.⁵⁵ Fragments of six Jewish gravestones were discovered in London's medieval wall and gatehouses. Although all were subsequently lost, there are facsimiles of the



Fig. 5. Jewish Cemetery at Worms (photograph by Joe Hillaby).



Fig. 6. Medieval Jewish tombstone from Cologne (photograph by Joe Hillaby).

fragmentary Hebrew inscriptions.⁵⁶ The only extant fragment of a medieval Jewish tombstone in this country was rediscovered at Northampton Central Museum in 1987 (Fig. 7). What remains is the top right-hand corner with the frame and part of the inscription. This occupies four lines, of which the first can be read with some degree of confidence as ... של (מה) ... הח (בר) ... (מ צבת) זאת מ (atzevat) ... hac (aver) ... Sbl (omob) ... ('This is the tombstone of ... the fellow ... Solomon'), opening words that were commonly used amongst the Ashkanazi.⁵⁷ Also in its simplicity of design and projecting frame, it bears a strong resemblance to the type common in the Rhenish cemeteries from the 11th century.⁵⁸ Several gravestones were discovered in Cambridge when the Guildhall foundations were being built, one having part of a Hebrew inscription, translated '... the sepulchral stone of Israel ... who died ...' but Stokes' doubts about the use of this name in the 12th or 13th century were well founded. 'Sbalom 'al Israel' על ישראל is found on early tombstones in Italy but as a personal name Israel does not appear in any of the stars and Jewish charters preserved in the British Library nor in the plea rolls of the exchequer of the Jews.⁵⁹

The Bristol Cemetery and its Tombstones

Although not referred to in either the Bristol expulsion returns or William of Worcester's topographical descriptions, there remained a strong tradition of a Jewish cemetery outside the city. When the trustees of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital resolved in October 1842 to move their school from Christmas Street to a new site, the land they purchased on the north-western slope of Brandon Hill was called 'the Jews' churchyard'. Construction of the new premises began in 1844. Here Jewish tombstones were encountered. George Pryce recorded in 1861 that on digging the



Fig. 7. Medieval Jewish tombstone from Northampton (by courtesy of Northampton Museum and Art Gallery).

foundations ‘a number of gravestones were found, with inscriptions in Hebrew characters’. He adds, ‘The tombstones were, however, thoughtlessly used in the building, and thus, probably, some interesting discoveries in our local history were lost forever to the antiquary’. This mature assessment stands in marked contrast to the levity of the comments by the city’s two librarians, Nicholls and Taylor, in 1881: ‘Our Wits assert that whatever else the boys lacked they would always have a good Hebrew foundation’.⁶⁰

As gravestones had remained it is highly unlikely that any bodies had been disturbed. Bearing in mind the delays associated with a coroner’s intervention, there was a strong incentive to rebury both stones and bodies as expeditiously and quietly as possible. No gravestones were found at the London, York or Winchester cemeteries and the fragments discovered at Cambridge and Northampton, like those in the City of London, had been re-used in later structures. The Brandon Hill cemetery is therefore the only place where Jewish tombstones have so far been encountered *in situ*. No doubt the remoteness of its location is the explanation.

There is no reference to a Jewish cemetery in St. Augustine’s cartulary. The first documentary evidence was published in 1933 by Veale, in the first part of his text of the *Great Red Book of Bristol*. This records an annual rent due to the Crown from a certain Josce of Reigny *pro Cimiterio iudeorum iuxta Montem sancti Brandani* of half a mark (6s. 8d.) but no date is given.⁶¹ Josce is listed in the Bristol landgable rental of 1295 living in the All Saints quarter of the town, in deeds of 1294 and 1296 relating to the will of Egidius de Berneleby, and as a witness to a deed of 1315.⁶² Josce cannot have taken possession of the cemetery before 1304 for the accounts of the constable of Bristol Castle, the Crown’s agent in all matters relating to the Bristol Jewry, record receipt of 2s. in 1291, and 3s. 4d. in 1295, 1296 and 1301, from the sale of herbage ‘from a certain cemetery of the Jews’, and of 5s. in 1303 for ‘the farm of the former Jewish cemetery’. Elsewhere values tended to be higher, probably because the lands were much closer to the town. None of these sources indicates the site of the cemetery but the records of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital for 1325–6 refer to ‘one croft at Clifton against the Jews’ cemetery’.⁶³

Nevertheless, as there is no record of the date of the Brandon Hill tombstones, it might be argued that they belonged to the period following the readmission of Jews in the mid 17th century. The history of Bristol’s modern community is, however, well recorded. The first synagogue was

established in 1756 in the 'Stone Kitchen', Temple Street, formerly 'a noted Ale House . . . in which the great Ale Drinkers of the city spent most of their evenings'. The community's coming of age was marked by the conversion of the Weavers' Hall on the opposite side of Temple Street, to a 'neat and expensive' synagogue in 1786. This was the work of Lazarus Jacobs, manufacturer of the much favoured Bristol blue glass, who led the congregation in procession across the street to their new synagogue after the ceremonial annulment of its predecessor. Well over a quarter of a century earlier a cemetery had been established in Barton Road, for a notice by Thomas Iles, a mason, in *Felix Farley's Journal* in 1759 refers to 'a BRICKYARD in the parish of St. Philip and Jacob' with 'the Jews' Burying Ground . . . in the said YARD'. A second cemetery was founded in Rose Street in 1811 by Lazarus's son Isaac, 'Glass Manufacturer to His Majesty', and 24 years later he was buried there. There are no grounds therefore for assuming the tombstones discovered in the 1840s relate to the early years of the resettlement. Had there been any such burials, plans for construction on the site would have been vigorously opposed by Aaron Levy Green and his congregation. Neither can the Jacob's Well inscription relate to a *mikveh* of that period for, though Bristol was one of the five largest provincial communities, as it replied to the Chief Rabbi's enquiry of 1845 it had no *mikveh*.⁶⁴

Burial Procedures

In the 1st century A.D. Josephus reported 'all who pass by when one is buried must accompany the funeral and join in the lamentation'. The Babylonian Talmud refers obliquely to the traditional duty of stopping work in order to participate in a funeral.⁶⁵ At Beth She'arim necropolis in Lower Galilee, a major cemetery for Jews of both Israel and the Diaspora from the burial there of the patriarch Judah in 217A.D. until well in to the 5th century, inscriptions refer to burial societies. Their role however was limited to the commercial management of the site, development and sale of catacombs. Purchasing the site, preparation of the tomb, as well as the supplying of the coffin, shrouds, flute-players and wailing women was the responsibility of the family. The forms of Diaspora tombs, such as the catacomb, followed local Gentile fashion.⁶⁶

In the medieval Diaspora burial of the dead, as with provision and maintenance of the cemetery, was a communal responsibility in which the leaders played the major role. For example, in the 13th century questions were raised in the English Jewry as to whether or not mourning should take place on the day of Purim. Rabbi Moses of London, the father of Master Elias, determined that it should. Another English rabbi, Meir, was the author of a treatise entitled *The Law of Mourning*.⁶⁷ In the post-medieval period proper burial of the dead, *chesed shel emet* חסד של אמת, 'the act of true loving kindness', was, and still is, carried out according to such traditional rites by local fraternities, *chevra kadisha* חברה קדישה (Aramaic), 'holy brotherhood'. First evidence of such fraternities comes from Rabbi Joseph Hahn (1570–1637) of Frankfurt am Main, who records in the *Yosef Omez* that in the previous generation the entire congregation had attended funerals but this had now been abandoned owing to the Jewry's growth in population. Once established amongst the large communities of cities such as Frankfurt and Prague, foundation of such *chevra kadisha* spread quickly to smaller communities.⁶⁸

As to the preparation of the body for burial, the Torah makes no reference but Genesis 3:19, 'for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return', has been taken to mean the body should be returned to the earth as rapidly as possible after death.' Acts 9:37, referring to the death of Tabitha, the disciple of Joppa who was full of good works, tells us that 'when they had washed (her), they laid her in an upper chamber'. Archaeological evidence from the principal Jewish catacomb on the Appian Way may provide some hint of practice at Rome in the first half of the 2nd century. This had a spacious atrium with elegant function rooms, decorated with mosaic, for burial and memorial services. In one a well was found which was most probably used for ritual purification of the corpses.⁶⁹

No tractate in the Mishnah deals specifically with laws or customs relating to burial. The Mishnah (Shabbat 23:5) merely informs us: 'They (should) prepare all that is needed for a corpse. They anoint it and rinse it, on condition that they not move any limb of the corpse. They remove the mattress from under it. And they put it on (cool) sand so that it will keep. They tie the chin, not so that it will go up but so that it will not droop (further).' Additional evidence is found at Beth She'arim where a plaque records that two rabbis were held in high regard for their work in the purification of corpses. Although details as to burial and mourning are found in the external treatise, *Semahot*, a number of these were no longer observed during the Middle Ages.⁷⁰

Medieval evidence from the Diaspora gives more guidance as to the preparation of the body for burial. A *responsum*, an answer to a question on Jewish law, of Rabbi Judah the Pious (d. 1217) refers to the whole body being washed in heated water. More specific is the will of Eleazar of Mainz (d. 1357), who commanded his sons that they should wash between his fingers and toes, wash his rear, wash his hair and comb it and cut his nails so that he should come clean and pure to his eternal rest just as he came to the synagogue every Sabbath. Burial procedures for the Sephardic Jews are to be found in Joseph Caro of Safed's *Shulchan Aruch, The Prepared Table*, a brief digest of 1567 of the halakic principles of the Sephardic sages. In *Mappah, The Tablecloth*, the Krakow rabbi Moses Isserles (d. 1572) provided supplementary notes to record Ashkenazi custom where he believed it conflicted with Sephardic procedure as recorded by Caro.⁷¹ In the records of the trials of the *conversos* of Ciudad Real held between 1483 and 1485 there is scarce a case in which death is referred to without details of the washing of the corpse by the women-folk, who also sewed the shrouds. The bodies were washed on top of a table, '*vaa r ençima de una tabla*'. Such tables, it must be assumed, were of stone for, as Maimonides wrote in the 12th century, 'utensils from . . . stone . . . are not susceptible to uncleanness'.⁷² This evidence is particularly helpful in interpreting medieval English practice.

In northern Europe there are examples of the little building, *bet toborah*, in or close to the cemetery, where preparation of the dead took place. At Worms the *Leichenwasch-häuschen*, 'little house for washing the corpse', built in 1624 at the gates of the Jewish cemetery can still be seen. Buildings of a somewhat later date used for ritual purification of the corpse have been preserved, with their stone tables, in a number of places in Bohemia and Moravia: at Turnov in the český ráj, still a centre for jewellery and semi-precious stone, and at the small settlements of Dražkov and Jestřebnice. It has been suggested that a medieval structure recorded at Heilbronn in 1932 was a *Totenwaschraim*, 'room for washing the dead'. Here ten steps led down to a vaulted chamber, linked by an underground passage to the former synagogue in Judengasse. Two stone baths were built into this chamber, at floor level. They were just under 2 metres in external length, 2.47 and 1.07 metres wide and, originally, with sides 1.36 metres high. There is no sign of an interconnecting pipe, as found for example in the two-pool *mikva'ot* dug by the Zealots at Masada, but not all the upright wall between the two remains to its original height. This Heilbronn building seems far from the small structures where the corpses were washed at the cemetery, as found in Worms. Nor is there any hint of a stone table, as still seen in Bohemia and Moravia and as recorded in documentary sources from 15th-century Castile and 13th-century England.⁷³

The 1290 expulsion records of York, Northampton, London and Winchester cemeteries hint that the English communities used similar structures and burial procedures. At York three post-expulsion documents, of 1290, 1291 and 1301, refer to 'a house' or 'building' as being near or adjacent to the Jewbury. Records relating to Northampton mention the cemetery and 'building belonging to that place'. The suggested use of such buildings as houses for cemetery keepers would have contravened the dictate of the Mishnah that burial should take place more than 50 cubits from a town or building. At Winchester records of Jewish property made at the expulsion refer not only to the cemetery but to 'a stone on which the Jews washed bodies prior to burial'. This laving stone was valued at 4s.

For washing the bodies not only a building and stone table but also a source of ritually pure water was required. The London cemetery, Marjorie Honeybourne points out, was always described in post-expulsion deeds as 'a garden, with a pond and dovecote'. 'There can be little doubt', she says, 'that the dovecote was the old cemetery building and that the rivulets had been used for Jewish burial ritual'. The source of the water, she suggests, was a pond at the north-western angle of the city walls where, according to a charter of William the Conqueror of 1067, 'a rivulet of springs near thereto flows'. In all probability it was one of these springs, later called Crowder's Well, lying at the centre of the cemetery's eastern boundary, some 200 feet beyond the west end of St. Giles' church, which provided the pure water. Stow, writing in 1603 when the cemetery had been turned into 'faire garden plots and summer houses for pleasure', refers to 'a fayre poole of cleare water near unto the parsonage on the west side . . . which was filled up in the raigne of Edward the sixth, the spring was coaped in and arched over with hard stone, and staires of stone to goe down to the spring; on the banke of the Towne ditch' by the executors of Richard Whittington (d. 1423).⁷⁴

The position of Winchester's cemetery is analogous. Its eastern boundary also lay alongside the city ditch, considerably enlarged at this point to serve as the external moat of the castle. Godson's plan of 1750 shows the site as fields, totally undeveloped. Was there a similar vaulted structure at Winchester? Development came only in the 19th century when a street was built across the site, parallel to the castle moat. This was named Crowder Terrace. Here the Jewish cemetery was excavated in 1974–5 and 1995. The term 'crowd' or '*crudde*', associated with the Old French *crute*, *crote*, Provençale *crota* and Italian *grotta*, was used to describe an underground vault or a crypt. Thus a will of 1501 refers to the testator's wish to be buried 'in the Crowde of the church of St. John the Baptist in Bristow'. At St. Mary de Crypt in Gloucester, an inn under the church first recorded in 1576 was known as 'the crowd tavern'. In London the crypt chapel of St. Faith was 'the Crowdes of the cathedral church of Paul's'. Although all other examples of the term in the Oxford English Dictionary are also in this ecclesiastical context of crypt, there is a Bristol example where the form *crute* describes a well. The meadow just outside Lawford's Gate was called *Crutewelle* in 1394, recalling Stow's description, 'coaped in and arched over with hard stone, and staires of stone to goe down to the spring'.⁷⁵

The use of the term at the site of both London and Winchester cemeteries seems more than an extraordinary coincidence. Is the explanation that the building referred to in the expulsion and other records at London housed such an underground vaulted chamber, linked to a spring or well in which the bodies of Jewish dead could be washed according to the appropriate rites on a stone table? If so it would have been well known to the provincial communities who, prior to 1177, were obliged to use the London Leyrestowe to bury their dead and would have offered a ready model when they came to found their own burial grounds. Cemetery buildings are also recorded at Winchester, York and Northampton. At York, as in London and Winchester, ritually pure water was available, for here the river Foss formed the eastern boundary of the cemetery, as did the Cherwell at Oxford. It is significant that in all four cases the cemetery was adjacent to running, that is ritually pure, water.

A Bristol Bet Tohorah?

An abundant supply of ritually pure water to the west of Brandon Hill probably explains the choice of this remote site for the Bristol cemetery. Soon after the dedication of St. Augustine's William, earl of Gloucester, had granted the canons 'the place called Billeswick where the abbey had been founded, with the marsh to the south'.⁷⁶ The first reference to a well in this area is in a charter of 1148 × 1183, probably before 1171, in which Earl William granted an (*h*)*ortus*, garden or grounds, to the canons of St. Augustine's 'in the upper part of the way towards *Wedewelle*'. A further

charter, of Roger, lord of Clifton, c.1205 × 1235, indicates that by that time, and in all probability considerably earlier, the canons had a water conduit at Wood Well. Roger granted them all the springs and water-courses rising firstly in the croft once held by Adam the reeve, secondly between that croft and Adam's house as far as the hill, and thirdly 'all springs which are above the conduit of the aforesaid canons at *Wdewelle* over against the hill'. This confirms that the conduit lay on the east side of the lane and that 'the Dean and Chapter's Conduit' marked by William Halfpenny on his plan of 1742 is on the original site (Fig. 8). Roger further granted stone from his Clifton quarries for any building within the gates of the monastery. As there was only one major building project at this time, the Early English Elder Lady Chapel, it may help to pin down the date of Roger's grant more closely, for two letters from Abbot David, dated 1218–22, relate to its construction.⁷⁷

Bristol's great charter of 1373 describes the bounds of the new county as following the ancient bounds of the manors of Clifton and Billeswick. The description begins at the great stone fixed upon the water of Avon, on the east of a certain rivulet called *Wodewelleslake*. This rivulet is described as *Sanbroc*, the Sand brook, in Prince John's 1188 charter of liberties for the burgesses of Bristol

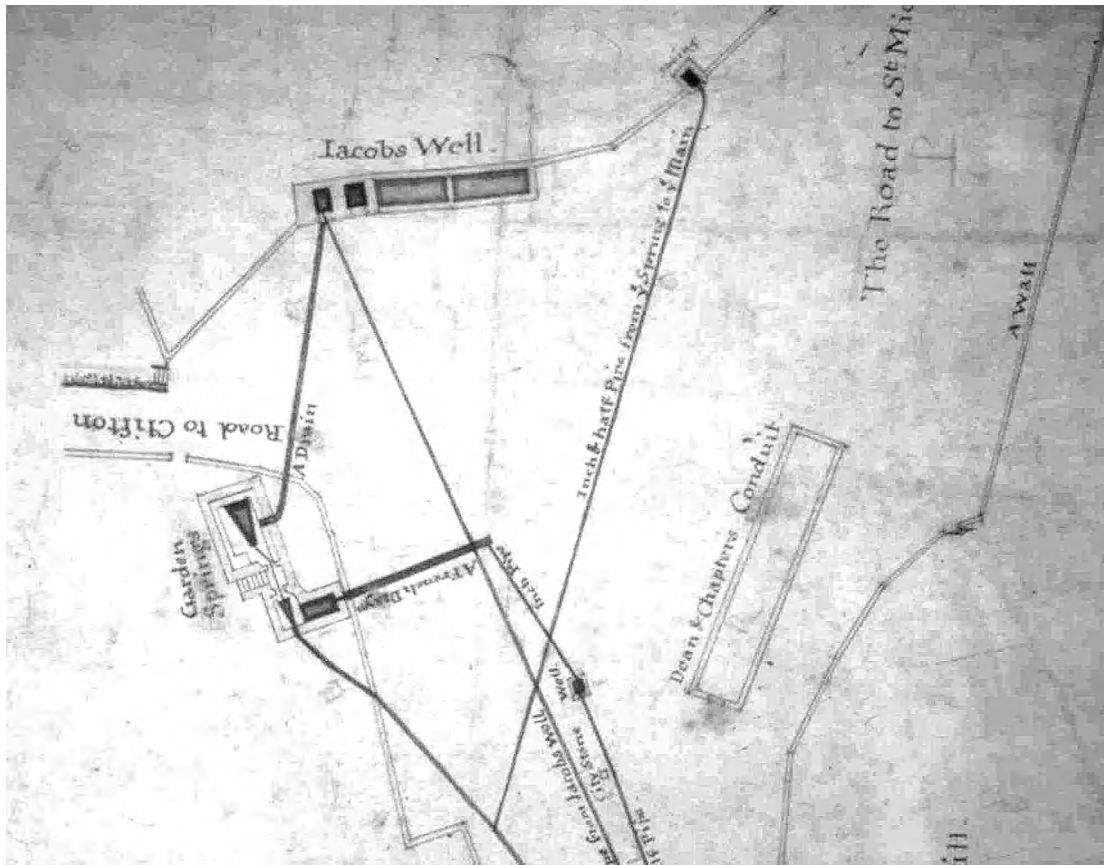


Fig. 8. William Halfpenny's plan of 1742 showing Jacob's Well and the dean and chapter's conduit (by courtesy of Bristol Record Office).

and so it appears on Ellis's plan (Fig. 4). From *Wodewelleslake* the bounds ascended due north along the eastern side of this rivulet to another great stone fixed on the western part of St. Augustine's conduit at Woodwell. Thence the county limits ascended the western side of *Wodewelleslane* to a stone near *Langcrofteswall*. The boundary between Billeswick and Clifton thus lay on the east side of the rivulet, *Wodewelleslake*, but on the western side of *Wodewelleslane*, evidently built by the canons, on their own ground, to give access to their conduit. Facing water shortages in the early 13th century, the canons undertook to offer up prayers of intercession for the souls of Roger, his parents and ancestors in return for free access to his springs and watercourses on the Clifton, that is the *western* side, of Woodwell Lane. The use of the singular in Roger's early 13th-century charter but the plural in the 1373 charter, as well as another of 1337–40, demonstrates the development of the water resources granted to the canons on the Clifton side of Woodwell Lane.⁷⁸

Although the upper reaches of the Sand brook, and therefore the site of Jacob's Well, had both been within Roger's manor of Clifton, his charter to the canons contained no exclusion clause safeguarding the rights of a third party to water from any well. Thus the Bristol Jewry could have acquired right of access to Jacob's Well only after the granting of the charter. No reference can be found in St. Augustine's cartulary to a grant to the Bristol community of the land known as Jews' Acre, or the right to use the well, but, given the abbey's interest in the area, one can be confident that these rights were acquired from the canons. Similar grants had been made, as already noted, by the cathedrals at York and Winchester and the Cluniac priory of St. Andrew's at Northampton.

Bearing in mind the late foundation of the Bristol Jewry and its vicissitudes during John's reign, a date as late as 1218 × 1222 for such a grant should not surprise. Honeybourne has shown that communities shared burial facilities after 1177, if only on a temporary basis: Lincoln with York and Northampton probably with London. At Stamford certain houses paid a total of 4s. a year to the Northampton cemetery. If, as appears to be the case, the Bristol community was an off-shoot of the old-established Oxford Jewry, it may well have had to rely on Oxford's cemetery until it had both the resources, and the opportunity, to acquire its own, sometime after 1220.

Excavation alone can reveal whether the structure at Jacob's Well offered adequate space for the ritual washing of bodies prior to burial across Woodwell Lane at Jews' Acre. Certainly it would have provided ideal facilities for the ritual purification of those who had come into contact with the corpses. About corpse uncleanness and the law relating to the process of purification Numbers 19:11–12 states: 'Whosoever touches a dead body is unclean with the uncleanness of seven (days) and a man who touches him is unclean with the uncleanness (that passes at) evening. He shall purify himself and wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and shall be clean at evening. But the man that shall be unclean and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly (congregation), because he hath defiled the Sanctuary of the Eternal'. Indeed, so great was the desire to avoid corpse impurity in the era of the Second Temple that its courts, which were built on natural rock, had a hollow space beneath them, lest there might be a grave in their depths, and a causeway was made 'from the Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives, arches upon arches, an arch directly above each pair because of the graves in the depths . . .'.⁷⁹ The Mishnah (Ohalot 'Tents') deals with the law relating to ritual uncleanness through contact with the dead, whether by touch, carrying or overshadowing, thus developing Numbers 19:11–22. By the late 12th century such was the importance attached by Jewish society to purification following corpse uncleanness, in both his native Spain and adopted homeland of Egypt, that Maimonides devoted the whole of his first treatise in the *Book of Cleanness*, Book 10 of his *Code*, to 'Corpse Uncleanness'.⁸⁰ Thus at Bristol there would have been an additional need for a source of pure water after the *toborah* process had been completed. For such a purpose Jacob's Well would have been ideal, with the 'living waters' (Numbers 19:17) from a spring or *mayan* being considered ideal to cleanse a person after contact with a corpse.

Further Work

The granting of Scheduled Ancient Monument status in May 2002 has given legal protection to Jacob's Well and provides the opportunity for a more detailed investigation of the site. Such an investigation would need to include a stone by stone survey to determine the structural sequence of the monument; exploratory excavation to reveal the full extent, depth and date of the monument; and a complete topographical survey of the surrounding area. Only then may we hope to answer many of the questions raised by this paper, and possibly to establish how far, if at all, Jacob's Well conformed to Stow's description of the vaulted chamber over Crowder's Well in London.

Notes

1. Francis Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (1948), 234–5 (quoting B.L. Abrahams, 'Condition of the Jews of England at the Time of their Expulsion in 1290', *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of Eng.* 2 (1896), 94–5). See also *Abbreviatio Rotulorum Originalium*, ed. H. Playford and J. Caley (Rec. Com., 1805–10), I, 74; V.D. Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich* (1967), 27–32; E.A. Kent, 'Isaac's Hall or the Music House, Norwich', *Norfolk Archaeol.* 28 (1945), 30–7.
2. S. Bradley and N. Pevsner, *London 1: The City of London* (The Buildings of England, 2002), 328; *Fifty-Seventh Deputy Keeper's Report* (Public Record Office, 1896) provides plans of the *Domus* (later Rolls Chapel); W. Urry, *Canterbury under the Angevin Kings* (1967), 150–2, 193–4, 424–7; J. Newman, *North East and East Kent* (The Buildings of England, 1969), 242; M. Wood, *The English Medieval House* (1965), 4–5; R. Sermon, 'The Guildhall House "Strong Room" or Ritual Bath?', *Department of Urban Archaeology Newsletter* (September 1990) 12–14; I. Blair, J. Hillaby, I. Howell, R. Sermon and B. Watson, 'The discovery of two medieval *mikva'ot* in London', *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of Eng.* 37 (2002), 15–40; idem, 'Two medieval Jewish ritual baths, *mikva'ot*, found at Gresham and Milk Street in London', *London & Middlesex Archaeol. Soc. Trans.* 52 (2001), 127–37; idem, 'The Milk Street Mikveh', *Current Archaeology* 190 (2004), 456–61.
3. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln*, 221 (quoting *Rotulorum Hundredorum*, ed. W. Illingworth (Rec. Com., 1812–18), I, 322 and 237); C. Johnson and A. Vince, 'The South Bail Gates of Lincoln', *Lincs. Hist. & Archaeol.* 27 (1992), 14–15; H. Rosenau, 'Note on the relationship of Jews' Court and the Lincoln Synagogue', *Archaeol. Jnl.* 93 (1936), 51–6; The National Archives, formerly the Public Record Office (PRO), E101/249/27, no. 39; C.P.C. Johnson, 'A Second Jewish *Scola* in Lincoln' *Lincs. Hist. & Archaeol.* 13 (1978), 36 (quoting Lincoln Archives Office, D&CA/1/8, no. 346).
4. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 11 (Jerusalem, 1971), 1534–44.
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69. Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, 57; Williams, 'The Organisation of Jewish Burials', 173, 178 n. 89, 180 n. 108.
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- 151 and n. 1, 146 and nn. 7 and 8 (quoting A.J. Kempe, *St Martin-le-Grand* (1825), 12; A.S. Foord, *Springs, Streams and Spas of London* (1910), 107; and H. Harben, *A Dictionary of London* (1918), 184, 619). For 'crowd' as underground vault or crypt, see *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn., 1989). F.W. Potto Hicks, 'Original Documents relating to Bristol', *Trans. B.G.A.S.* 57 (1935), 142. GRO, P 154/11/CW 2/1: see *Victoria History of the County of Gloucester* 4, 301. See above, n. 55.
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