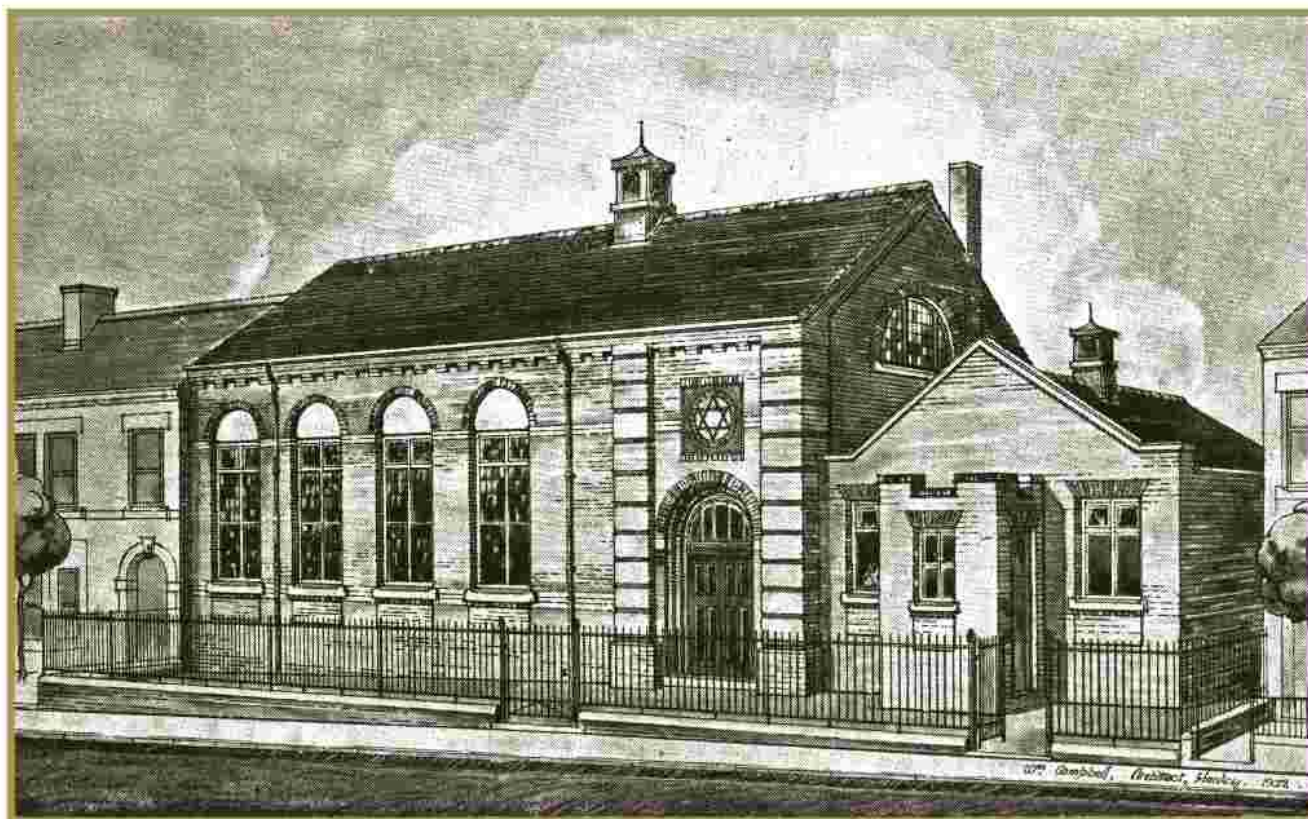


A MODERN HISTORY OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN THE POTTERIES.



Some of the notes I have made are extracts from the old Minute Books of the Congregation, and passages from a dissertation by Ian Down, a Gentile who interviewed me and other members of the community sometime in the late 1970's whilst he was at Keele University preparing his Dissertation entitled "*A Modern History of Jewish Settlement in the Potteries*".

I'll start by reading a quote, which although not at the time directed to the Jewish population of the mid 1800's, in my opinion, should have been.

"If you want to keep out of trouble, there are about five subjects you should never mention in a speech or in print, either in praise or dispraise, or even in natural curiosity. One of them is anything to do with the Jewish culture or the Jewish people." (C.P.Snow in 'Family Ritual' Financial Times 24th February 1972, cited in Holmes, "Anti-Semitism in British Society : 1876 - 1939" London 1979.)

This story is of a small, orthodox, provincial Jewish community, with no particular outstanding features, or special reasons for it's existence. The Synagogue in the Potteries has, since it's establishment, always been situated in Hanley. But had the community settled in any other of the towns, it would not have acquired any different features. Because at no time did the immigrant Jewish community ever become involved with the characteristically regional industries of potting and mining.

Nor can the Hanley community be easily classified in any other way as a particular 'type' of provincial community: a resort such as Brighton; a dormitory town like Southend; a large city, for example Birmingham, or a distinctive manufacturing town such as Manchester.

Manchester, involved as it was with the "rag-trade"; or the purely industrial town like Blackburn, might produce special types of community, but not so Hanley. So it is contended that this community is representative of a typical, unremarkable, Jewish settlement, in so far as it's history has emerged unscathed by major, non-Jewish phenomena.

The official title of the pottery community has changed since it's formation. Until 1927 it was called "**The Hanley Hebrew Congregation**", and since that date it has been known as "**The Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation**". The change was agreed at a general meeting of the Congregation on 12th March 1927, as reported in the Minute Books. For convenience and avoidance of confusion, however, the community will be referred to as "**The Hanley Community**" throughout the main text, but all future references will refer to "**The Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation**".

A study of the census-records and enumerator's tables for Hanley, show no substantial proof of the existence of a Jewish boarding house, or even a "Gentile" owned dwelling frequented by Jewish visitors. However, it has been passed down through 'folk-memory' that a privately owned house existed in Marsh Street, where services were held up to the early 1870's. Nor could proof be found for the rumoured existence of a Jewish lodging house in Newcastle-under-Lyme in the 1840's, which suggests that, presuming such a place did exist, it was too evanescent to be recorded by infrequent census records.

However, there is every likelihood that the Potteries formed a useful stepping-stone for Jews travelling between London or Birmingham, and Liverpool or Manchester. One reason is the presumed need for such a stepping-stone and the lack of other suitable West-Midland Jewish communities able to provide this service; Dudley and Wolverhampton, formed in the mid-nineteenth century, were probably not so conveniently situated geographically, and as they only consisted of approximately one hundred people each, were also unlikely to be in a position to provide travellers with a better service, than a lodging house itself capable of forming a "**Minyan**" in the Potteries.

Additionally, there is adequate proof from the census records that various travellers settling in Hanley for temporary periods, (and suspected to be Jews from circumstantial evidence collated by the enumerators in 1881), were in fact part of a more general two-way movement, both North and South, travelling by way of the Potteries.

There are certain factors that assist with the recognition of Jewish names in the Census records. Jewish surnames are often derivations of two religious groups; the "**Cohen's**" (or priests), and the "**Levi's**" which is the next highest group, (often Anglisised to "Levy"). Additionally, many surnames reflect the country of origin, such as Russia, Rumania or Poland, or a country that was attractive to them, such as Germany, (especially in the case of the Pale of Settlement emigrants), although names were often changed a second time upon arrival in England.

The records show that Mark Levy, a lodger aged thirty eight born in Middlesex, London, and described as a "**Commercial Traveller**", with his family, and Samuel Levy, a visitor aged thirty from Poland and married, (possibly waiting to bring his family over to England, once his finances permitted), both lived at number sixty-four New Road, Bucknall in 1881.



Mark Levy's youngest child, Leopold, born in Birmingham in 1880, together with the fact there is no mention of their names (*or those of the children*) in the Synagogue records which commence in the 1890's, suggest that Hanley was an extended staging point for many Jews.

Hanley also attracted hawkers for the different reason that it fell within the "trading orbit" of Manchester and Birmingham, so Fabus Morris (*aged 49*), a 'hawker of drapery' from Macclesfield, may well have originally only visited the Potteries for this purpose, but ended up marrying a girl in Burslem and finally settling in Hanley at 88 Market Street. This pattern of settlement can be seen in other provincial communities, for example in Ireland; Cork was in the "trading orbit" of Dublin, and the modern Jewish community formed there in the 1880's, had mostly settled, having formerly hawked their goods in the vicinity.

It has already been intimated that the early Jewish community in Hanley, attracted settlers from the large group of Jews in England shown not to have settled at the time of the 1851 census returns. However, the early community did not just consist of itinerants who desired to settle. The earliest Jews in the Potteries were not pedlars, but established shopkeepers from as far back as 1825.

The families concerned are very far removed from the nineteenth century immigrants considered up to now. They should be considered as "**English Jews**" representative of the established '*middle classes*', rather than as "**Jewish Immigrants**". Abraham Franks established an Optician's shop in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1825, and George Mayer (*a Jeweller*) set-up in Shelton (*a suburb of Hanley*) in the same year, with his two sons, Saul and Nathan having arrived in England from Warsaw in 1820. The Mayers ceased to figure as a family in the Potteries after 1839, though after this date the sons returned to Manchester and became actively engaged in the politics of the congregation there.

The Frank's family are of particular interest because their history in England extends from the 1760's and the arrival of Isaac Franks (*a Dutch hawker of lenses*) in Norfolk, to Benn Franks, owner of the Hanley branch of the family Optician's business at the beginning of the twentieth century. It took Isaac nearly forty years before establishing an Optician's shop in Manchester in 1798. Prior to this, he had eloped to Dublin in 1781, settled in Liverpool the next year, and sent his elder son, Jacob, (*and brother of Abraham*), with two others to Manchester to buy a plot of land for a graveyard and warehouse rooms for a 'Synagogue', thus forming the setting of the modern Manchester congregation in 1794.

Jacob carried on his father's business and a handbill of 1812 suggests that the business was on secure ground:-

"J. Franks - Optician. No.4. Miller's Lane...Makes and Repairs all sorts of Optic Glasses, Telescopes, Microscopes, Reading Glasses, etc:- etc:-With a variety of Spectacles, for all ages, whether concave or convex. Old ones taken in exchange in any of the above articles. Likewise excellent tooth powder will make the blackest teeth the finest white. Also excellent eye-water has cured many almost blind. Excellent Ruburb, Infallible worm powder for destroying worms in human bodeys. (*N.B. Umbrellas made and neatly mended.*)"



Jacob had twenty four children; all but three of the eleven boys became opticians, and his eldest son Abraham (*Aubrey*) took on his father's shop after his death, on Jacob's return to Dublin in 1846. Although Abraham (*from Newcastle-under-Lyme*), was described as a:-

"A non-resident Jewish shopkeeper...who depended on the services of the Manchester Synagogue."

It seems that he became resident sometime in the 1830's with his son, Henry, born in 1824. He probably still relied on the Manchester Congregation for Kosher food and for religious services on the Sabbath. He was registered in at least one local directory amongst the list of local tradesmen.

"Abraham Francks, 34 Hick Street, Optician, Umbrella-maker and clothes dealer."

Henry took on the shop after his father's death in 1848, aged sixty seven, and at some time transferred the premises to Hanley town centre. Henry's son, Benn Franks, may well have been educated at the British School of Newcastle; an educational report for the Potteries in 1861 comments on the attendance of a Jewish child kept at the school by his parents, (*who had recognised that a high standard of education was available*), and this was in spite of the requirement that the boy should attend the reading of "***The Lord's Prayer***". Benn Franks then acquired the shop after Henry's death in 1889 at the age of eighty five. Harry Franks, aged six, was buried in the Jewish cemetery on London Road (*Newcastle-under-Lyme*) in 1887, but after this date there is no record of the Frank's family in the Potteries, suggesting Benn moved on, possibly back to Manchester.

So far, the impression has been given, that neither the early shopkeepers nor itinerant traders who settled in Hanley and formed part of the early community, actually stayed when the modern community evolved due to massive immigration dating from the 1880's (*as will be seen subsequently*). Although this is generally true, there are at least "overlaps", if not clear exceptions; Lewis Goldberg, "*A British Subject***" and "***Financial Agent***" from a small Polish town, apparently arrived in No.2. King Street, Hanley, in 1880.**

He settled with his wife and three children, whose birthplaces show he had visited Wolverhampton, Manchester and Northampton in a matter of ten years or so, (*and so was only just part of the early community*). The minutes of the first recorded General Meeting on 11th August 1889, mention that a "*Goldberg*" was already actively engaged in the congregation's search for a new Synagogue. A subsequent entry in the committee meeting minutes for 29th May 1892 lists "*L. Goldberg*" as President, having obtained this post in 1890 or 1891 from a predecessor named "Goldstone".

The early community was thus a mixing-bowl of different types of poor. Although it was intimated that the Franks family were an exception, having developed lower-middle class aspirations, this needs to be put in context.

It is true that when compared to Jewish itinerant traders in Hanley, the "*Franks*" were very much more "*civilised*", and if then compared to the most recent immigrants of the 1880's the differences became absolute, in terms of social class, dress and economic standing, to name just a few areas.



However, a more balanced comparison is to consider the "Franks" in relation to the "shopocracy" of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and this reveals that Hick Street was a poor area, increasingly notorious for its slums in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The birth of the Hanley Hebrew Congregation, has always been put at 1873, although little else is revealed about the community in general works on provincial settlement. The reason 1873 has been chosen is probably twofold; the purchase of a Methodist chapel at Hanover Street in North Hanley for the purposes of a synagogue, and secondly this date is engraved on the Jewish cemetery gates at London Road in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Although services were conducted in Hanover Street from 1873, (*having formerly been held in a private house in Marsh Street as suggested*), formal consecration did not occur until 1875, because the community's poverty was such a paramount factor in their existence that they could not complete the conversion until this time. So although "size" and "leadership" may have been present, "wealth" certainly was not.

Additionally, the quotation from Williams refers to Halliwell Street Synagogue which was the first to be purpose-built for the Manchester Community, but before that, converted warehouse rooms in Garden Street, Withy Grove, provided synagogue accommodation for many years. As Hanley did not erect the Birch Terrace Synagogue until 1923, it is argued that the taking over of the Hanover Street Chapel did not "mark an important stage" in the development of the Hanley Jewish Community, in the way construction of the Halliwell Street Synagogue marked an important stage in the development of the Manchester Community.

The date on the cemetery gates refers to the acquisition of the synagogue and not the development of the graveyard. This is shown in an extract from the Jewish Chronicle for 26th January 1883:-

"HANLEY - At a meeting of the Stoke Town Council held on the 18th, a letter was read from the Minister of the Hebrew Congregation asking for permission to use a plot of land adjoining the workhouse cemetery purchased from the Duke of Sutherland for a burial ground. On the motion of Messrs. Bilton and Buckley, permission was granted."

Previously the community had been forced to take their dead to Manchester for interment as Hanley Council had opposed their request to have part of the Borough Cemetery set aside for Jewish burials, (***although it is not known why***). In 1881 petitions were made to local Members of Parliament and the Council Authorities in protest against this refusal. The British Board of Deputies itself joined in the suit on the community's behalf. At the height of the struggle the Duke of Sutherland offered to sell the community an acre of land for a "***Pepper-Corn***" sum of £1/00/00d, (*under Jewish law, burial grounds must be bought, not received as a gift*).

The issue obviously attracted national attention in other Jewish Communities, evidenced by the donation of £200:00 by the Rothschilds in London, out of a total of £600:00 spent on converting the land and the building of a modest, eight sided prayer house within the curtilage of the cemetery.



Traditional rumour suggests that the Duke of Sutherland was encouraged in his generous provision by Edward VII, who often stayed at Trentham Park before becoming Sovereign. The first recorded burial was on the 25th May 1884 of Esther Glaff (*probably the wife of the Reverend Moses Glaff who also died in that year, but is not recorded as being buried here and may have been interred in the Manchester graveyard.*)

So it is fairly apparent that the Hanley Community became established over a quite lengthy transition period, starting before 1873 with the Marsh Street meetings, and reaching a more definite state of stability in the 1880's with the acquisition of a local cemetery. From this point, the community achieved consolidation.

Whereas in the early 1880's there was no local minister and the Reverend A. A. Green came up periodically from London, and whilst in 1872 the community had to ask the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Adler, to send them a "**Schochet**", or Kosher Butcher, by 1889 the community was able to hold elections in order to find their own "**Preacher**" and "**Schochet**", thus reflecting a large growth both in the size and consequently the needs of the local community.

The modern immigrants had effectively transformed the early settlement into a significant provincial community. It is interesting that local directories of the time should comment on the community, because they were not a particularly sensitive source of information on such things; a belated entry for 1889-90 comments:-

"For several years past, the number of Jews resident in the Potteries has greatly increased, which has led to the establishment of a Jewish Synagogue, in which 'Divine Service' is celebrated according to the rites of the Jewish people. It is situated in Hanover Street".

The Hanley Jewry settled in and around the town centre, for example in Broad Street, Bucknall New Road, Glass Street, Church Street, Market Street, King Street, Waterloo Road and Portland Street. They did not confine themselves to Hanley alone, however, and housing was taken in outer suburbs as well, for example in Tunstall, Shelton, Bucknall, Stoke, Milton, Longton and Burslem.

In more recent years, the community has since dispersed from Hanley town centre, as members became more confident and wealthy. This outward movement was mirrored by a similar national trend amongst the smaller Jewish provincial communities.

Twentieth century English Jewry found it acceptable and desirable to relax certain Jewish rituals, such as the abstention from working on the Sabbath, which indirectly implied that one must only walk to the synagogue. Settlement further away from the synagogue than required before, was facilitated as a result; for example in 1925 families lived in Burslem, Tunstall and Crewe.

It is presumed that by the time immigrants were ready to settle in Hanley from the 1880's onwards, they had progressed from itinerant trading and were able to set up in business in the town itself.



There were no Jewish manufacturers providing employment on a large scale, unlike Manchester, Leeds or London, where there were strong Jewish interests concerned with the clothing trade. Nor was there any Jewish involvement with the local industries of potting and mining, though this was not because Jews were adverse to working in these industries.

Trades such as Tailoring and Cabinet-making were imported from Lithuania, and the Shilkoff family provide a Hanley example of Cabinet-making. Tailoring, however, was the most popular skill imported by the Hanley Jews, and "*Alexander the Great - Tailors*", was established in Piccadilly, Hanley, as early as 1875, though later moving to the Strand in London, and establishing a nationally successful business, with a chain of shops set up throughout England.

Other tailors who prospered in Hanley, included the Bloom family at number 75 Lichfield Street, Morris Morris (*my grandfather*), A. Savitz, who advertised himself in the 1920's as a "***Ladies & Gents High Class Tailor***" in Burslem, and others including J. Bloom and J. L. Levy who both moved to Manchester. It is interesting to see that most of these tailors seemed to have avoided direct competition with each other, by specialising in different aspects of the trade; for example J. L. Levy made military uniforms, whilst J. Bloom made costumes and mantles. Colman Sumberg was not a tailor, but an "***academic***" of religion as explained earlier; accordingly necessity compelled him to acquire an understanding of his trade by intuition and guesswork, whilst convincing the cutter and work-people employed by him that he was already experienced, in order not to lose their respect.

Jewellers and watch-makers, such as Kirsch of Longton, Abraham Greene and Harry Smith, (*both moving businesses to Manchester at a later date*), and L. Lee with a shop in Hanley, probably assumed the itinerant trade of selling cheap jewellery on their arrival in England, before acquiring their own shops in Hanley. Sam Singer graduated from hawking scrap iron from a horse and cart to a more stable business. Tobacconists may have originally come to this trade by first peddling cigars, for example, or having been employed as one of the notoriously badly treated "*Tobacco Boys*" of London, unless, of course this trade was chosen at random having already settled in Hanley. Though "*Myers of Longton*" and "*P. Cohen, L. Weenan & Co., Tobacconists of London*", (formally of Hanley), are examples of that trade.

Other trades practised by Hanley Jews have included a printing firm run by the Friesners, a stationers in Longton owned by W. Ruby and Co., a glass merchant and picture-frame manufacturer (*also in Longton*), set up by the family Rich and two hardware merchants; Solkow and Slann, (*formerly a stall-holder in Longton Market, until setting up a shop in Bucknall New Road*). It is interesting to note that, apart from the Franks family of Opticians, the only other professional occupation taken up by the Hanley Jews was that of Dentistry by Joseph Blain. Although since the mid-twentieth century, the community has produced four General Practitioners of Medicine and one Solicitor, not to mention a Member of Parliament for the Hanley division in Dr. Barnett Stross in 1939. Moreover, a Jewess, Clara Davis established a large enterprise in the gown trade, and is exceptional in the respect that, apart from in the field of Philanthropy, female members of the Congregation have not figured in this study to any large extent.



A community largely composed of self-employed people was presumably vulnerable to fluctuations in trade. Although there is little evidence of any Socialist tendencies amongst the Hanley Jewish community, there was an attempt to cushion the risks of self-employment by the formation of the "*Achei Bris*", or "*Brethren of the Covenant*". This was a Jewish friendly society giving sick benefit to it's members out of a central fund built up by contributions from them. In material terms, Hanley Jewry was not able to demonstrate its economic affluence and social stability until the 1920's with the construction of a new Synagogue in Birch Terrace.

The new site was in a far more socially respectable area than Hanover Street, (*Where the old Synagogue was located in the run-down area behind the old Port Vale football ground*), and was the culmination of thirty years of effort. Plans drafted before the new Synagogue was built, estimated the building alone would cost over **£4,000:00**, which gives you some idea of how laborious the task of raising sufficient capital must have seemed at the outset.

The congregation was already looking for the means to provide a new Synagogue in 1889, and at that time the Congregation found it necessary to use premises in Glass Street for schooling and for occasional meetings, in conjunction with the Hanover Street premises. The old Synagogue did not have a large enough seating capacity for the expanding community of the 1890's, evidenced by the need for alterations made to the Synagogue to allow for extra seating. For these reasons Dr. Adler visited Hanley in May 1901, and at a meeting in the Town Hall, he urged the need for the erection of a new Synagogue, and a building fund was initiated.

In 1903, the Synagogue committee decided to buy a site in Birch Terrace, instead of in Hanover Street, (*which had been formerly occupied by a boys private school, run by a Mr. Mills*). An adjoining site was purchased in 1906, and the combination of the two sites provided the space necessary for a building with a frontage running from East to West. This allowed the "**Ark**" holding the "**Scrolls**" to be placed in the East end of the building facing Jerusalem, whilst still remaining the central point for the congregation. In addition, the size of the joint site, though still modest, allowed a building that was large enough to provide a Synagogue, complete with a "**Ladies Gallery**" and a separate school and study room leading of opposite sides of the entrance hall.

The "*New Synagogue Building Committee*" only really took off after 1912, with the new Chairman, Mr. Adolph Alexander (*the Congregation's appointed representative on the Jewish Board of Deputies, who by now was living in London*), took the opportunity at a special general meeting to encourage greater efforts to be made. Voluntary donations were made that same night, totalling "*Seventy five pounds, seven shillings and sixpence*", from the Building Committee Members alone. From this point any surplus funds to be carried over at the end of each Jewish year, were earmarked for the Building Fund, until enough capital was raised to lay both the foundation stones on 5th October 1922.



The new Synagogue was formally opened by **Messrs. Adolph Alexander** and **Albert Belisha**, (*quite possibly related to the Member of Parliament, Mr. Leslie Hore-Belisha*), on 6th September 1923 and this was followed by the official consecration ceremony, conducted by **Reverend Dr. J. Abelson** (*M.A., D.Litt.*) of Leeds.

At the turn of the century, there was a high level of congregational involvement in Synagogue affairs, which were not merely confined to matters of liturgy, but included a wide range of social interests and pursuits. There was very little activity for the community to be involved with, other than with affairs of the Synagogue, and so this formed a way of life for the Hebrew community in the absence of modern-day diversions.

Another reason for the high level of involvement, was that by the 1890's, the community was well established and still growing in size, due to the fresh influx of immigrants. The community did not begin to be assimilated into its surroundings, until the membership began to decline drastically towards the middle of the twentieth century. This decline, however, had its roots develop in the period before the First World War.

Oral Interviews in Conjunction with Synagogue records, have revealed a communal life which was characterised by some incidents between members which illustrate the atmosphere of the congregation. Really the most significant incident, was the occurrence of a division of interests over the conducting of Synagogue affairs from 1892 to 1901, between a group of dissatisfied members and the rest of the congregation, (*the hard-core of founding families*), who resented any challenge to their control of the Synagogue affairs.

"The new middle-classes, enterprising and resilient in business and socially ambitious, resented a 'select' congregational system, which entrusted the making of laws, the allocation of seats AND 'Mitzvaoth', the levying of taxes, the election of officers, and the future role and status of the community, to those whose only claim to superiority, lay in their earlier arrival".

In Hanley, the established congregational leaders made various attempts to force the group which significantly soon came to be known as "*The Opposition*", to desist from establishing a rival Synagogue in Glass Street; the Chief Rabbi was asked to issue an order to the opposition forbidding them to kill for meat, so they would remain dependent on the Congregational's "*Schochet*"; the threat of withdrawing "*Mikweh*" or both privileges was made, and various other attempts were made to force "*The Opposition*" to disband.

Eventually, the Chief Rabbi visited Hanley and drew up a scheme for reconciliation that was quite effective. Very few of the threats made by the parent body were actually carried out, or, if they were carried out, then often they were easily rescinded. The congregation leaders' threats lacked conviction, partly because of the unwelcome revelation of the congregation's aristocratic structure, which was in sharp contrast to its increasingly democratic surroundings, but also because the community was too small to survive for long if divided, as is shown by an entry in the minute books of **29th May 1892.**



THE GLASS STREET SPLIT.

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

Committee Meeting - Minute Books : 29th May 1892.

The Committee agreed to ask Dr. Hermann Adler, (*Chief Rabbi from 1891, having succeeded his father, Chief Rabbi Nathan Marus Adler*), to send an order to "**The Opposition**" as soon as they began to kill animals for food.

*(Presumably this was deemed to be necessary for "The Opposition" because the congregation had stopped supplying them with Kosher meat). The threat of expulsion was to be made to any member supporting "**The Opposition**", or attending any House of Prayer connected with them. Disagreement occurred very frequently between separate individuals and The Synagogue Committee, and the most extreme incident resulting from a difference of opinion was when a Mr. J. Bandell (*possibly a member of "The Opposition"*), who interrupted a general meeting on 16th April 1893 by... (*and I quote*):-*

"...producing a revolver and pointing it into the body of the meeting, threatening anyone connected with the congregation."

No record of this has been found in any of the local papers, and after the committee agreed to consult their solicitor, the incident was presumably kept intentionally quiet. However, the history of conflict surrounding one important member, the Reverend Samuel Sumberg, is probably more generally representative of disagreement within the community. In 1896, he is the subject of complaints from members of the congregation, which were answered by his resignation and defection to "**The Opposition.**" The complaints were that:-

"Mr. Sumberg works himself up sometimes in a great temper during the service that causes distraction to the worshippers."

A General Congregational Meeting banned him from becoming "**Chazan**", (*Lay Minister*) for the community indefinitely in June 1897, but by July 1901 he was reinstated as "**Chazan**" again. Shortly before Samuel Sumberg left Hanley for America in 1907, he was again in conflict with the committee, after he was deprived of his job as a Hebrew teacher, and his immediate reaction was to sue the congregation for damages.

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

Committee Meeting - Minute Books : 20th December 1896.

"The Committee passed a resolution : Withholding Bath privileges from parties who do not pay to the Congregation and belong to The Opposition. Five shillings was to be charged each time The Opposition used the "**Mikveh**" (*Bath*), and a charge exacted of three pence per head of poultry killed by the Shochet for them."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

Committee Meeting - Minute Books : 17th January 1897.

"All the resolutions of 20th December 1896, were rescinded after an application from The Opposition."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

General Meeting - Minute Books : 20th June 1897.

"1.) That The Chief Rabbi's scheme drawn up by him on his last visit to this congregation for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation between this congregation (*and*) the dissidents, be accepted in its entirety."



"2.) That the Reverend Mr. Bernec remain at his post until his successor shall be enrolled in his place."

"3.) That for the future of The Congregation, Mr. Samuel Sumberg shall not be eligible for candidate of Chazan - Shochet - Teacher."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

General Meeting - Minute Books : 20th February 1898.

"A.) To consider the reconciliation with The Opposition...

That The Congregation shall take over the place in Glass Street from The Opposition including : fixtures, utensils, and the whole of the facilities, which shall not exceed thirty pounds, and in consideration of above... the Opposition shall hand over the deeds (*or lease*) to The Congregation; The Congregation shall also undertake not to break the place up in Glass Street until such lease expires."

"B.) We accept only those members of The Opposition that are unmarried and pay not less than one shilling per week... (*An amendment*)... that we accept only such as were previous members, and those that were eligible to be members, including Mr. S. Sumberg. (*Carried by one vote*)."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

Committee Meeting - Minute Books : 5th March 1899.

"The Opposition were to be ordered to hand over the Glass Street 'Bet Haimdrash' (*House of Study*), in order that it be... '...open for meetings as a Hebrew school, and for other special and benevolent purposes'."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

General Meeting - Minute Books : 16th April 1899.

"The charge of Burial by The Congregation to members of The Opposition, fixed by The Chief Rabbi, be rescinded as regards the amount chargeable and in future it be left to the officers of The Congregation to charge according to the nature and circumstances of individual cases. Also that at any funeral ceremony, no other person except the minister of The Congregation, shall be given to The Opposition to consider the acceptance of the terms decided upon by this meeting."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

General Meeting - Minute Books : 9th July 1899.

"Letters were received from Dr. Adler and Mr. Blain, (*Presumably gentleman from The Opposition*), concerning the proposed reunion with The Opposition. Mr. Greenberg, Mr. Rotenberg, Mr. Epstein and Mr. Rich were elected as delegates to meet The Opposition delegates."

Stoke-on-Trent Hebrew Congregation.

General Meeting - Minute Books : 13th January 1901.

"That the arrangement come to, by the delegates for the amalgamation of the 'Bet Haimdrash' Glass Street, with The Congregation be adopted." Additionally The Congregation agreed to pay the outstanding liabilities of twenty five pounds and in return it would use the top part for commercial purposes, such as a schoolroom, a meeting room, a place of learning and a club."

There are numerous other incidents of interest arising from such disagreements; after a dispute in 1923, probably arising merely due to a clash of personality, Mr. Rich attempted to prevent Mr. Colman Sumberg from attending the Synagogue for divine service, by hiring two constables to stand on duty outside the entrance to bar Mr. Sumberg's entry into the building.



A note in the Minute Books of the time, reads :-

“11th September 1923 : From The Chief Constables Office, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, requested the sum of one pound, four shillings and sixpence for the services of two police constables.” The attempt failed when the two constables left straight after the beginning of the service and Mr. Sumberg had arrived late, still unaware of the attempts made to prevent his attendance.

The obviously high spirit of independence of the leading members of The Congregation was more often than not put to constructive use, rather than wasted on the unproductive disagreements illustrated. The construction of the Birch Terrace Synagogue was a praiseworthy achievement for such a small, poor community. Additionally, the community’s philanthropic work was singularly impressive, not only because the community looked after its own members, but because it was often involved with local, non-Jewish charitable causes, and frequently supported Jewish fund-raising events at a national level in aid of persecuted Jews in other countries.

The leaders of The Congregation had to ensure that the normal, Jewish, everyday demands of the community were met. This included appointing a satisfactory **‘Schochet’** to provide the community with Kosher food, and a **‘Chazan’** to conduct services and hold Hebrew classes, as an integral part of every Jewish child’s upbringing. Additionally, there were administrative matters to deal with, such as the collection of subscriptions, organisation of elections and maintenance of the Synagogue and burial ground.

In all provincial Jewish communities it is notable that poor relief was given to destitute Jews, regardless of whether they were members of the community or not; most quickly formed welfare organisations even though they had barely achieved sufficient level of economic stability themselves. The same is true of the Hanley Hebrew Congregation, “Our members were our best customers.”

The first official record of the Hanley congregation giving hand-outs, was in 1901, when a Mr. Goldman received £3:00 from the **“Jewish Benefit Society”** in order to support himself. Before that the Synagogue Committee had arranged for several Jewish orphan boys to be apprenticed in the district on behalf of the **“Jewish Orphan Asylum”** in London. Although the committee was obliged to ask the orphanage for a weekly subscription to pay for the apprenticeships, revealing how economically insecure Hanley Jewry still was, in comparison to other provincial Jewish communities. It was in 1903 that the **“Hanley Hebrew Philanthropic Society”** was formed to:-

“a.) Relieve the poor of the community by free grants of money, also loans, free of all interest.”

“b.) Relief of (sic) casual poor.”

Further stipulations were made in respect of the above conditions; six months residence was required before an individual was to be found eligible for a loan, and a maximum grant of three shillings and six pence in respect of b.) Was to be made at the President’s discretion.



Local charitable causes that have received pecuniary aid from the congregation include relieving sufferers from the National Coal Strike of 1912. It is evident that such involvement was probably with the underlying motive of preserving the good name of the community amongst its working class Gentile neighbours, many of whom would have been directly affected by such a strike.

"Mr. Shilkoff was successful in collecting in one day the sum of five pounds ten shillings, thereby raising the prestige of the Hanley Hebrew Community in the estimation of the citizens of the pottery district."

It was in this sphere that the female members of the community took the lead where previously they had remained supportive in other areas. Mrs. Shilkoff was chosen as the community's representative for the "*Hanley Nursing Society Committee*" and the other fund-raising was organised by female congregation members.

As well as the participation of individual members of the congregation in the Great War and the Second World War, specific funds were initiated to aid European Jews who had fallen victim to persecution during the wars. In December 1915, the congregation then received an official request from C.E. Sebag Montefiore, Honorary Secretary of the "*Fund for the Relief of the Jewish Victims of the War in Russia*", to form a local committee as part of the national effort.

By 1926, the Hanley Congregation was still supporting the national fund, now specifically intending to aid Polish Jewry, but by 1923, a "*Fund for the Relief of German Jewry*" had replaced the former Polish Fund. The 1933 Fund however was intended to assist German Jews in emigrating, mainly to Palestine.

The subject of charity for Jewry oppressed by Nazism, inevitably leads to the question of whether the community became more involved than the English population generally, and as involved as the main body of English Jewry in early and sympathetic action on behalf of their co-religionists. It seems there was no hesitation in this community's decision to make a stand and to achieve this in part, by raising funds, as was discussed at a meeting in July 1933.

Its aims were:- "*...to consider what local action should be taken with reference to the 'Oppression of the Jews in Germany by the Hitler regime', and also to formulate a scheme to raise a fund which was to be subscribed to the 'Central British Fund for German Jewry'.*"

The first appeal raised ninety four pounds, five shillings and six pence in Hanley, and subsequent appeals also received a very positive response, but there is no record of any public protest meetings held in the Potteries, although the idea was discussed.

There was no specific animosity from Hanley Jewry due to Sir Oswald Mosely having lived in the Potteries; because firstly, he did not form the "*British Fascist Party*" until moving to the south, and secondly his former wife (Lady Cynthia Mosely), was a popular Labour Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent, until she died at the end of the 1920's.



The main charitable action taken in the Potteries during the Second World War by Hanley Jewry, apart from fund-raising, was the assistance given to the "*Stoke-on-Trent Refugee Committee*" in providing some extra hostel accommodation for refugees from Nazism. After the Second World War, a Jewish sub-committee of the "*Stoke-on-Trent Refugee Committee*" was then formed, including J. Sumberg, Professor S. Fine and Harold Burton, plus several Jewish war refugees, cared for by the sub-committee, who were staying with the Jewish community.

The mundane considerations of the congregation, arguably provide the most important, and certainly the most frequent source of work for the Synagogue Committee, rather than other areas under their jurisdiction. Enactment of the "*Jewish Dietary Laws*" required constant supervision of the 'Shechita', to make sure 'clean' animals only were sold, and that they were ritually slaughtered within the permitted hours.

Universally, observance of such religious laws has always been of prime importance to Jews, and the Hanley Congregation have fully endorsed this tradition. The nature of such laws has ensured that assimilation into the surrounding Gentile population has been avoided, and it is this factor that has kept the Hanley community alive to the present, in the opinions of Colman Sumberg and Joshua Sumberg, both of whom both of whom had been the lay-head of the community for a majority of years in the twentieth century.

The Synagogue Committee did not hesitate to use their control over the provision of religiously acceptable foodstuffs, to assist with controlling the congregation, by ensuring that members who failed to pay their subscriptions were not supplied. Those members who were known as "The Opposition" were victims of this policy as well.

By 1906, the Congregation had acquired their own stall in the Bethesda Street Abatoir in Hanley, in order to slaughter cattle in accordance with the "**Shechita**" laws, and so they no longer required meat to be sent from Manchester. This stall was called a "**Weinberg Pen**", it trapped the animal and levered it onto its back, so that the throat could be slit and the blood allowed to drain from the carcass. The pen was made by Cyril Pickin at Clayton Street, Longton, for the Jewish Community, and is evidence of the high degree of the community's religious orthodoxy and confidence in practising their faith openly.

Supervision of children's education was another area in which much importance has been attached by Jewry throughout the world, and education has a very broad concept extending from specifically religious classes where Hebrew is taught, to the education that offspring receive from their parents in everyday life. Girls were taught fundamentally, with the intention of preparing them for a supportive role in life, and Jewish boys have often taken precedence over girls in acquiring an academic education, or a knowledge of a trade. Once again, the Hanley Congregation closely followed this pattern.

An example of the particularly high regard held for academic knowledge was given with the history of the Sumberg family. Colman Sumberg was brought up with the purpose of studying religion, his family supported him and Joshua (his son), was taught to hold an equally high regard for education.



On his Barmitzvah, Joshua received literary works by William Shakespeare and Alfred Lord Tennyson, rather than other works more normally directed towards boys of that age. The community displayed a common cultural interest and a keen "*Literary and Social Society*" demonstrated this.

There was never a Jewish school in Hanley, as such, but ministers were engaged to give weekly religious and Hebrew lessons, with the assistance of a £50:00 grant from 1893 onwards, given by the "*Provincial Ministers Fund*", in order to pay the wages. Classes were held on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings generally, and supplemented the education children from the Jewish community received at ordinary local schools.

The Hanley Jews apparently thought little of sending their children to non-Jewish schools, not being in a position to choose an entirely Jewish education, and there is little evidence of any discrimination, either from the schools or by other children, although a certain amount of "teasing" was experienced.

So it is clear that the Congregation served a very much wider purpose for Hanley Jewry than solely as a means for practising the Jewish religion. There was probably no other type of organisation in England, that covered as many facets of communal life, and perhaps this was both Hanley Congregation's biggest strength and weakness at the same time. Although the sense of security must initially have been to its advantage, it seems inevitable that as the members of the Jewish Community developed English, middle-class aspirations, with time they would gradually find it unnecessary to look to the Congregation for social and political inspiration as well as religious guidance. Consequently the comfort of security may have changed to frustration at the invasion of privacy.

In conclusion, one must say that there are so many un-answered questions that arise when reading through the old Minute Books. One of course, is why did the Hanley Borough Council reject the fledgling community's attempt to acquire part of the Hanley cemetery back in the early 1880's?

Another question is, what was the real reason for the split in the community all those years ago, which caused the infamous formation of "*The Opposition?*"

Still another query is, why did the Chief Rabbi of the time, **NOT** offer more help, advice and assistance to a new congregation, struggling to come to terms with the best way forward for a poor and insecure community?

I suppose that we will never really know the answers, but it certainly would make an interesting story.

