



Jews and Germans in Nineteenth Century Bradford, West Yorkshire – a note for the 25th Anniversary Conference of the Anglo - German Family History Society

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Making their Mark, a Heritage Lottery Funded Project

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Not all Germans who came to Bradford in the nineteenth century, were Jews and not all Jews in nineteenth century Bradford were of German origin, but in popular history the two are intertwined together.

Bradford grew from a village to a town, with its municipal charter and first mayor in 1847 and fifty years later became a city in 1897.

From the 1830s onwards German Jews came to the city to trade in the growing woollen industry that made Bradford into the Wool Capital of the World – Worstedopolis.

My research has been on the Jewish community – the earliest ones who came from Germany to Bradford. For some it was a direct journey, for others such as Jacob Unna it was from Hamburg to Manchester in the early 1820s to Leeds and then to Bradford in the early 1840s.

By 1851 two German Jews, Jacob Unna and Jacob Behrens were founder members of the Chamber of Commerce and in 1863, Charles Semon, a native of Danzig was Mayor of Bradford. In 1910 Jacob Moser, industrialist and philanthropist, a native of Kappeln in Schleswig Holstein, became Lord Mayor of Bradford.

For those interested in family history what help can we offer people whose family have links to Bradford?

We have photographed and indexed the graves at the Jewish Cemetery in Scholemoor, Bradford and these will be available to view on the internet through our website www.bradfordjewish.org.uk .

There is the collection of Jacob Moser's papers in the West Yorkshire Archives. They cover Jacob Moser's life, business dealing and philanthropy. It has been indexed and if there's a researcher out there with a good knowledge of German there's sufficient material for a PhD thesis.

In terms of buildings there is the Bradford Synagogue in Bowland Street a short distance from Bradford City Centre. Opened in 1881, the synagogue was built for the German Jewish merchants and their families. Virtually unchanged since its opening Jewish Heritage UK, rank it as one of Britain's top ten historic synagogues.

Adjacent to Bradford City Centre, is Little Germany, the historic merchant quarter with nearly fifty wool warehouses www.littlegermanyaction.org . These warehouses built in the 1870s housed the German and other merchants who dealt in the city's main product wool.

Near Bradford University is the Deutsche Evangelical Kirche, dating from the 1880s, which was the spiritual home of Bradford's German Lutheran Community.

The Schillerverein, formerly Unity Hall in Rawson Square, Bradford was leased from 1862 until the early 20th century as a drinking and social club for the German Merchants.

Germans came to Bradford from the 1830s onwards so the migration covers a period of over seventy years. There seem to be a number of waves, first the Jews who trickle in throughout the period, then non Jewish German merchants and engineers and finally towards the end of the period a group of German Pork butchers.

The total number of people of German origin in Bradford in the nineteenth century was most probably no more than 1,000 but they had a profound influence on the city.

We know that the majority of the descendants of the immigrants to Bradford left the city to forge careers all round the world. One of Jacob Unna's granddaughter's was Dame Peggy Ashcroft.

In the 1930s with the rise of Nazism, a new group of German, Austrian and Czech Jewish refugees make their way to Bradford, many because of links with textile firms in the city, others who are medics and dentists come to work in the inner city. They settled and made new lives in Bradford, but the vast majority of their children have left the city.

We are able to offer the following:

- (1) Tours of Jewish and German Bradford to groups who are interested in the city's ethnic heritage
- (2) Help in tracing families who lived at some stage in Bradford
- (3) We would be interested to talk to anyone who has ancestors who came from Germany to Bradford to hear their stories.
- (4) We are setting up a programme to train heritage tour guides - if you're interested contact us.

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