

NOTES ON THE JEWS OF YARMOUTH.

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It is a remarkable fact that, although this famous seaside resort is so near to Norwich, it is absolutely lacking in all those elements of Jewish historic interest that abound in the cathedral city. No traces of the residence of Jews in Yarmouth during the Pre-Expulsion period have been found. In Mr. Jacobs' "Jews of Angevin England," from among the long list of towns named in the Shetaroth and other contemporary records, whilst many of the smaller English towns are mentioned (see Appendix IX, XI, and XII.,) Yarmouth is absent. Unlike at Norwich or Lynn, the other Norfolk towns of Pre-Expulsion times in which Jews are known to have lived in large numbers, we hear of no persecutions of Yarmouth Jews, and the name of only one Jew who at one time lived in Yarmouth has been preserved. In the volume of *Hebrew Deeds* (Shetaroth) edited by Mr. M. D. Davis (page 173), a "צוקא כייירימא" "Isaac of Yarmouth" is mentioned as residing in Norwich. In the Lansdown MS, 665, under date 1280, this same man is named, in a license to Ursell, the son of Isaac le Eveske, to sell a house in Norwich, as Ysaac de Gerne-mutha (the Latin name for Yarmouth): He lived in Mannecroft Street, in the Parish of St. Peter. Further information has been obtained about this man from the Exchequer Plea Rolls. He appears to have always borne the name of Isaac of Yarmouth [in full, Isaac fil Joce (Joseph)] although every reference to him states that he lived in Norwich. He came to a deplorable end, as he was hanged for tampering with the coin of the realm, and his property was confiscated by the Crown. Beyond these few details, the Pre-Expulsion history of the Jews of Yarmouth is a blank. In all probability, many of the Norwich Jews on their way from the Continent to the more inland town, passed through Yarmouth, but the absence of all local tradition and the silence of the documents and chroniclers prove conclusively that very few of them took up their residence in the seaport town.

There being thus very little of the early history of Yarmouth to interest Jews, we have to look to the present century for a permanent Jewish settlement in this city. At the present day, there exists no organised congregation, but this has not always been the case. In 1847, that is, one year before the Norwich Synagogue was erected, a synagogue was opened in Row 42, near the Market. (In the "Bibliographical Guide to Anglo-Jewish History" by Messrs. Jacobs and Wolf, the date of the opening of the Yarmouth Synagogue (p. 183) is wrongly given as 1842). Every visitor to Yarmouth must have been struck by the large number, 145 in all, of narrow alleys running in between the blocks of houses and shops. It is in one of these Rows, as they are locally called, that the synagogue was built. The foundation-stone was laid in May and the synagogue was consecrated on 31st August, 1847, by the Rev. M. B. Levy, at that time the minister of the Brighton Congregation. Among those present was Sir Francis H. Goldsmid, who was staying in the town awaiting the result of an election petition, he having been defeated in the Liberal interest a few weeks before. Sir Moses Montefiore had also promised to attend, but was prevented. Row 42 has always been called Jews' or Synagogue Row, as the historian of Yarmouth, Mr. C. J. Palmer, in his "Perustration of Great Yarmouth (Vol. I., p. 242), attests. In the appeal for funds, published in the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Voice of Jacob*, the promoters of the synagogue, Messrs. D. L. Cohen, J. Mayers and M. Mitchell, state that "the old synagogue, from its dilapidated state, had been pulled down." The age of this earlier structure is unknown. In a "Statistical Table of the Hebrew Congregations in the British Empire," first issued in the *Voice of Jacob* of the 18th December, 1846, Yarmouth is declared to contain 48 Jewish residents. A little over £100 was all that was collected from the Jewish public in aid of the Building Fund, the Great Synagogue giving the sum of £5 5s. and the Brighton Synagogue £2 2s., whilst the Yarmouth Jews contributed £35 5s. in all. The congregation held together until about 1877, when the number of Jewish residents became sadly reduced, and the building was closed. The names of many of the worshippers at this Synagogue are to be found upon the tombstones in the two cemeteries, that I shall speak of afterwards. The building still exists, and guided by Mr. Lewis, a local Jewish resident, I was enabled to visit it. It consists of a plain rectangular hall, approached through a courtyard. High above the doorway, there remain fixed in the wall two stones containing Hebrew inscriptions. The topmost one reads יצאנו ביום הזה (year 5307—1847) the date of the building of the Synagogue; upon the lower stone is carved the Sacred Name. The building is now used as a Parish Mission Room, it having been bought for a small sum some few years ago by the local Church authorities, and it now bears the title of the "Synagogue Mission House." The caretaker informed me that there had been two windows containing Hebrew writing at the end wall of the building, facing the door. These, that probably bore the Ten Commandments, had been removed, as also had been a small gallery (for the ladies). The cupboard, once no doubt used as the Ark, still remains. Various words in Hebrew, I was told, had been obliterated by painting the walls; and altogether all traces of the Jewish character of the building, with the exception of the two stones, had been destroyed in converting the structure to its present purposes. Attached to the quondam Synagogue, is a small house, in which the beadle or shochet may have resided. The first Minister was probably Rev. I. Cohen whose wife, Esther, lies in the old cemetery, having died 5610—1850. In Mr. Palmer's work on Yarmouth (vol I., p. 243) he mentions that in 1845, a Jewish wedding was held in the Town Hall, at which "the Rabbi, Mr. Cohen, delivered a discourse in English." The second and last Minister was the Rev. Levi Levenberg, who died in 1870, and is buried in the new cemetery. Mr. Levenberg must have been appointed about 1850, according to the statements made to me by the Sexton of the Town Cemetery and an old sailor, with whom I came into contact. The latter informant gave me many particulars concerning Mr. Levenberg, who lived very close to the Tol-house in Middlegate Street and was always a very poor man. My friend the sailor moreover furnished me with many interesting personal recollections, some of which are embodied in these notes.

When the synagogue was closed, the chief Jewish resident was Mr. Michael Mitchell, who died in 1890. This gentleman had originally designed the Synagogue, and after the place of worship had ceased to be used as such, he gathered together other Jews of the town for service, which was held in his house in Market Row. Nearly all his family have disappeared from Yarmouth, and no traces of any minute-books or registers of the congregation could be found.

Next to the disused synagogue, the Old Cemetery claims the attention of the Jewish visitor. Enquiry at the Town Hall enabled me, by the courtesy of the Town Clerk, to inspect the minutes of the Council meeting at which this plot of ground was granted for the purposes of a Jewish Cemetery. Under date 7th April, 1801, the following entry is made: "Grant to the Jews. Upon the petition of Simon Hart, on behalf of the Jews of this town and the report of the Committee of Liberties thereupon,—It is ordered, that they may enclose a piece of ground next the Town Wall, near Mr. Colby's Gates, for a Burial Ground (late

used by Mr. Sholly as a place to lay masts and surrendered up by him) extending from the dwelling-house of — and sloped off to the said Gates, and may continue the same during the pleasure of the Assembly, they paying an annual Quit Rent of ten shillings and sixpence from Michaelmas last."

The Report of the Committee of Liberties has unfortunately been mislaid or lost. The Simon Hart mentioned in the minutes is described by Mr. Palmer as a silversmith, and a very respectable Jew, who had resided in the town for forty years. He was the first one to be buried in the cemetery thus obtained, dying in 1802, as his tombstone testifies. The Town Clerk further showed me the Deed of Conveyance, dated 11th May, 1838, whereby the plot of land granted to Simon Hart was enfeoffed and made freehold to the Jews of Yarmouth, upon a yearly payment of 10s. 6d. The deed conveys the land in question from the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses to Isaac Mordecai, Isaac Mayers and Shreiner Woolf, "all of Great Yarmouth, silversmiths, in fee simple subject to a grant of the same, bearing date 7th day April, 1801, from the said Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses to one Simon Hart, and to be used as a Burial Place for the Jews resident within the Borough of Great Yarmouth at the yearly rent of ten shillings and sixpence." The measurements of the plot are given as follows: "From East to West at the South End thereof 18 feet and 8 inches, and at the North End thereof 15 feet and 4 inches; and from North to South 52 feet and 3 inches, abutting on the road leading to Colby's Gates towards the North End." If this annual rent be not paid by the three Trustees or their heirs, the land is to revert to the Town Council. The signatures of I. Mordecai, I. Mayers and S. Woolf are distinctly written at the foot of this interesting document. The first two signatories lie buried in the cemetery. The annual rent used to be paid by the late Mr. David Falcke, who built Sutherland House on the South Beach, opposite the Wellington Pier, and is now paid regularly by the Trustees of Mr. Falcke's will.

A visit to this disused cemetery demonstrated to the full the necessity of the scheme originated by the Board of Deputies relative to Provincial Cemeteries, being carried out. In 1891, the Board, through the agency of Mr. A. B. Salmon, put the place into proper repair, with the result that on my recent visit, the small "House of Life" presented a well-kept appearance. Five tall trees towered above the cemetery walls, whilst the place was singularly free from rubbish and weeds. The wall on the right hand side of the entrance is part of the old flint Town Wall or Rampart, that once enclosed the whole town, and dates back to the year 1280. The cemetery is thus exactly outside the town boundaries, though included in the suburban district that is rapidly springing up around Yarmouth. The Alma Road, in which it is situated, is within a few minutes' walk from the Beach Gardens, and numbers of our coreligionists must have passed the high wall that hides the graveyard from the public gaze, without knowing that Jewish bodies lie interred therein.

There are in all sixteen tombstones, and one headstone. Two graves near the door are bricked in, but have no tombstones, and from the circumstance that spaces are left between several of the tombstones, it may be inferred that there are other graves, that bear no memorial of the departed. In the tabulated Report of Disused Provincial Cemeteries, drawn up by Mr. Lewis Emanuel in 1893, it is stated that "most of the inscriptions are obliterated." Careful rubbing of the stones with a brush revealed the fact, however, that the date either Hebrew or English, some times both, can be recognised upon fifteen out of the sixteen tombstones, whilst the names, either Hebrew or English, are to be read upon every stone. All the stones, with one exception, stand perfectly erect. This one, which is in memory of Joseph Mayers, who died in 1835, aged 74, has been thrown against a tree that chanced to stand in front of it, by the breaking away of part of the ancient Town Wall. The Town Clerk has, at my instigation, given instructions to have that part of the old wall adjoining the cemetery properly attended to. If this were not done, all the stones on the right hand side would soon be cast on their faces and broken, as the thirteenth century wall against which they stand is gradually tumbling to pieces.

The most interesting and oldest stone is that in the right-hand corner to "Simon the son of Naphtali, who died on Friday, 5th of Shevat, and was buried Sunday, 7th Shevat, 5563." Below this, I could just trace the English name of "Simon Hart" with the date 5563 (= 1802); all the rest is obliterated. This is the Simon Hart, who as mentioned above, obtained the grant of this ground for a burial-place. The other tombstones are in the following order, after Simon Hart's:—

2. "Betsey Micholls, youngest daughter of Simon and Rosey Hyams Remainder of the English inscription gone. The Hebrew inscription is almost complete. "Simcha, the wife of Meir ben Naphtali, died on Sabbath and buried the next day, the first day of Adar Shevi, in the year (5)569 (= 1808), aged 40." There is also a stone at the foot of this grave with the inscription, B.M. 5569.

3. "Henry Michaels. The Hebrew is perfect. "Here lies a man who walked in the good path, a righteous man . . . all his actions were for God's Name, and his soul clave to the living God, הושר Naphtali בן יצחק (Durkheim E. Germany?) who died and was buried on Thursday, the 14th Tammuz (5)575 (= 1815) aged 86."

4. All the English is gone, and the Hebrew is almost obliterated. "Solomon ben Naphtali Baruch, died 13th Nisan and buried Eev Pasach (5)574 (= 1814) aged 33."

5. No English, but Hebrew very distinct. "Reincha the daughter of Menachem the wife of Naphtali ben Meir from the city of דוראם (Durham?), died on Tuesday, buried on Thursday, 7th of Ellul, in the year (5)583 (= 1820) aged 79." Four lines of well-written rhymed verse precede the name.

6. All the Hebrew gone. Of the English only "— Mordecai, Sep. 1835, Aged 58 years," could be made out.

7. Described before. To Joseph Mayers. (Father of No. 9).

8. Hebrew and English fairly legible. "Esti the daughter of יצחק Isaac the Levite, died 22nd of Ellul (5)603 (= 1846)." "Sarah Mayers, died Sept. 17, 1846, aged 80 years." (Mother of No. 9).

9. "Isaac the son of Joseph, died (5)612 (= 1852)." The only part of the English preserved is the name "Isaac Mayers."

10. Almost entirely defaced. All that could be made out is "Isaac Mordecai," and below "Ann Mordecai."

Nos. 9 and 10 are the two signatories to the Deed of Enfeoffment.

On the left-hand side, the stones are as follows:—

1. "Nachman the son of Aaron, died 11th Kislev, and buried 14th Kislev (5) 577 (= 1816)." All the English is gone. This appears to be the grave of a child. At the head of the stone is carved the face of an angel child with wings. I noticed several similar stones in the Parish Churchyard. The appearance of such an emblem in a Jewish Cemetery is certainly strange, it being the sole piece of figure-work in the whole plot.

2. "Joseph the son of Isaac, died Erev Rosh Hodesh Ellul, and buried on Rosh Hodesh Ellul (5)590 (= 1820)." "In memory of George Lee, son of Isaac and Sarah Lee, who departed this life the 9th of August, A.M. 5590