Jews in 18th-Century Oxford: Further Observations

By URIEL DANN

SUMMARY

There was no organized Jewish community in Oxford throughout the 18th century. Jews were still overwhelmingly concentrated in London; Oxford, economically stagnant, spiritually in thrall to the University, had less to offer that might attract Jewish settlement than most county towns in England. And yet there were always a few Jewish families settled in the city, and fewer still in the county. None was rich or socially prominent: at best they were 'of the middling sort'. But with all the disabilities, civic and others, which the Jews suffered, they were under no special 'Jew laws'; they were unmolested in the main; and they mixed with the population at large in the pursuit of their livelihood. These notes examine Jewish individuals at Oxford as they emerge from a variety of contemporaneous sources. The resulting picture is unheroic but tranquil enough, as the traditionally held view of English life in the 18th-century – at any rate outside London and the industrial towns developing in the North – would lead us to expect.

The 'further' in the title refers to the previous research of Cecil Roth and David Patterson.[1] For the present study the net of primary sources has been cast wide, with the meshes as small and the dragging as deep as unusually advantageous circumstances allowed. The result must, alas, be regarded as cost-ineffective, for not many Jews surfaced. This said, however, it should also be said that the search was pure joy: University, city and county all sprang to life.

Oxford in the 18th century had no Jewish communal life, not even, so it seems, improvised sabbath services or arrangements for providing *kosher* food for travellers. (A synagogue, the sure sign of a functioning community, was not set up in Oxford until 1841.) If the few Jewish inhabitants did feel the urge to express their Jewishness – and at least respecting circumcision and a Jewish burial it may be assumed that they will have felt that urge – they relied on relatively nearby London.

[1] C. Roth, 'Jews in Oxford after 1290', *Oxoniensia*, xv (1950), 63–80 (henceforth 'Roth'); D. Patterson, 'Hebrew Studies', in *The History of the University of Oxford: the Eighteenth Century* (1986), 535–50 (henceforth 'Patterson'). The chief primary sources are: University and College records; Oxford Town Council minutes; Oxford Council acts; Oxford Court Leets and Hustings records; Oxfordshire Session Rolls; Oxford episcopal visitations; *Jackson's Oxford Journal; The Oxford Sausage; The Gentleman's Magazine*. Guides and synopses by E.H. Cordeaux, E.G. Davies, J. Foster, M. Graham, M.G. Hobson, A.M. Hyamson, W.D. Macray, F. Madan, W.J. Oldfield, H.E. Salter, W.S. Samuel and others were also used. Many have helped me in my work. I am deeply obliged to the staffs of the Bodleian Library, of the Oxford County Local History Library, and of the Oxfordshire County Record Office, among whom I must single out Mr. Carl Boadman, Dr. Malcolm Graham, and Mr. Steven Tomlinson. Dr. J.S.G. Simmons commented on the draft.

It is easy to understand this tardy development. Jews had concentrated in London for generations after the Cromwellian 'return'. It was not until about 1740 that the first Jewish communities were established anywhere in the provinces consisting of individuals who regarded themselves as permanent residents possessed of some status in their respective localities.[2] Oxford was disadvantaged in this respect. In an age of expansion, it was economically stagnant, if not in absolute decline. It was not a port, and did not have the preconditions to benefit from the emerging industrial revolution. Its civic and economic subservience to the University was a handicap; nor could the University itself be a centre of attraction for Jews, conditioned to venerate scholarship though they were. Oxford, statutarily like Cambridge, spiritually even more so, was an Anglican establishment which demanded acceptance of the Thirty-nine Articles from all who joined it in any academic capacity.

One problem for the researcher is identifying a Jew. England had no 'Jew laws' such as were still common on the Continent and which could help to pinpoint Jews by their names, dress, occupation or domicile. Some disabilities indeed were absolute: professing Jews would not have been called Baptist or Maria; they were not knights or yeomen farmers. But caution is indicated: David Salmon might be a Jew, but in Oxfordshire he was more likely to be an Independent. 'Salmons' would be a stronger indication of Judaism, since the possessive often stood for the anglicised *ben*, 'son of', the prefix of many Jewish proto-surnames. On the other hand there were personal names held by Jews only – generally of Hebrew origin but not associated with Biblical personages, such as Haim and Mayer. There were such traditionally Jewish occupations as old-clothesman and pawnbroker, but they were by no means exclusively so. The likelihood that a possibly Jewish trader was indeed a Jew is stronger when that individual resided in a suburb, where the writ of the town council did not run; St. Clements is a good example respecting Oxford. And finally the straight attribution, '*NN* the Jew', needs scrutiny, as it might also refer to a Christian convert. In the last resort the researcher has to rely on cross-indications and some intuition – and he will still be prone to errors of omission and commission.

Though unable to become members of the University, Jews might conceivably be associated with it as 'privileged persons' licensed to do business with, or to be employed by, the University and the colleges, without regard to municipal prohibitions. Yet Foster's compendium contains among about 500 *privilegiati* not a single entry credibly referring to a professing Jew.[3] We must infer that the oath of allegiance to the Established Church officially demanded of 'privileged persons'[4] was indeed exacted – and that University and college authorities found that the occasional Jew in their purview could be used to advantage without the granting of official status.

The only learned capacity in which professing Jews were at all associated with the University was as teachers of Hebrew, sometimes in receipt of a niggardly salary and under the protection of a Fellow of a college.[5] The first of these chronologically is also the most remarkable as a scholar, the Amsterdam-born Isaac Abendana. Strictly speaking it is doubtful whether he falls within the chronological limits of these observations, since he may have left Oxford before 1700. His most significant work,

[2] As itinerant pedlars Jews had for long penetrated into the farthest recesses of England and Wales, so that as an alien type – with beard, gabardine, and barbarous English – the Jew was recognized in Oxfordshire as elsewhere.

[3] J. Foster (ed.), *Alumni Oxonienses 1715–1886* (4 vols., 1887–8).

[4] Thus *The Encyclopedia of Oxford*, eds. C. Hibbert and E. Hibbert (1988), 338.

[5] In this paragraph, I have freely drawn on Roth and Patterson opp. cit. note 1.

Discourses of the Ecclesiastical and Civil Polity of the Jews, 'by a learned Jew . . . who resided many years . . . at Oxford', was, however, published in London in 1706. It is essentially an apologia for Judaism addressed to the tolerant and educated Englishman of his time, but it makes interesting reading on its own account even today. A younger contemporary of Abendana in Oxford was the Prague-born scholar Isaac Bernard, highly esteemed by senior members of the University.[6] He is one of the early Ashkenazi Jews in England who occupied himself with spiritual matters but did not officiate as a rabbi; characteristically, he was also in trade in a small way. Another teacher of Hebrew at Oxford was one Aaron – evidently his surname or proto-surname – 'a Portuguese Jew' who was active in the 1720s and 1730s; he was a wit whom Hearne considered skilled as well as unprincipled.[7]

The most interesting by far among the Jewish teachers of Hebrew at Oxford in the eighteenth century was, however, 'Mark' Moses Vowel, or Vowell, who lived in Oxford for 29 years and died there in 1772; for much of the time, from 1760 at the latest, he occupied a modest house in George Lane (now George Street) in the parish of St. Mary Magdalen.[8] He had the pretensions, and perhaps the qualifications, of a secular scholar. Apart from his Hebrew teaching at Queen's and Magdalen colleges (and possibly others – here as so often our knowledge rests on the accidents of archival survival) he took part in learned controversies; we know of one in the *Gentleman's Magazine* concerning the reading and interpretation of Mosaic texts in the original.[9] After his death in great poverty, Oxford and London booksellers promoted a subscription for the benefit of his family for the printing of 'Critical remarks upon certain passages of the Hebrew Bible, particularly upon Exodus, VI, 3 and 4 . . . The author [Vowell] had prepared a copy for the press, but was unable to bear the expence of the publication, and had not interest enough to solicit a subscription for such purpose.'[10] It is certain that the subscription failed, and I have been unable to trace the manuscript. The verses from Exodus read in the original Authorized Version: 'And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name IEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also established my Covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they are strangers.' 'God Almighty' is a sensible translation of El Shaddai, whereas 'IEHOVAH' is the common English mistransliteration of the Tetragrammaton, the *Shem Meforash*, God's proper name which Jews do not pronounce. The verse in question is a centre-piece of Bible criticism, and we would have liked to know what Moses Vowel made of it. Perhaps his 'notes' will yet turn up; but it is more likely that they are irretrievably lost. No positive proof exists that Vowel was *not* a convert to Christianity. I feel certain that he was not, though he may not have been observant in his life-style. (I admit that 'intuition' does come in.)

In addition, four or five names of teachers and scholars in Hebrew are known who converted from Judaism, or who may have been of Jewish extraction, but who were not professing Jews when they were active in Oxford during our period. As this essay deals

[6] Patterson op. cit. note 1, 543.

[7] *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, xi, ed. H.E. Salter (O.H.S. . . . , 1921), 246–7, 461 (for 1735).

[8] *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (henceforth *JOJ*), 10 May 1760; H.E. Salter (ed.), *Survey of Oxford in 1772* (1912), 37.

[9] *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxi (July 1751), 317–18. There is strong internal evidence that contributions by 'Phileleutheros' in the January (pp. 11–12) and April (pp. 157–58) issues are Vowel's too. Not all his controversies were learned: in 1749 he was bound over for assaulting 'Ann Wells, spinster' (cf. Oxford City Archives, 0.2.8, *Dockquet Book*, Sessions, Tr. 1745–Tr. 1750, p. 66).

[10] *JOJ*, 9 May 1772.

with the beginnings of a Jewish continuum they do not concern us here.[11] On the periphery of academe we hear of a Jewish calligrapher, one Salomon Israel, who was active in the middle of the century.[12]

There were a few Jews scattered through the town (there was no cluster of 'Jew houses' such as medieval Oxford had in what is now St. Aldate's) who were unconnected with the University in a scholarly capacity. Their number may have grown as the century advanced but it does not seem to have reached a dozen householders at any time.[13] Apart from their Jewishness they had nothing in common except their utter commonplaceness – which, paradoxically if you will, brings them to life as real people. None belonged to the Great and the Good. Some can be classified as 'of the middling sort'; others were less than that – and much less. None was 'free' of the city and thus entitled to follow a trade without hindrance. The reason is not, as is often stated, a Christological element in the freemen's oath (Fig. 1): that was neutral in religious terms, at Oxford as elsewhere in 18th-century England, except for the appeal to God.[14] It was the custom of administering this and similar declarations on a copy of the New Testament which excluded Jews – unless the custom was waived. However, in 1739 Sir Robert Raymond, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, declared the custom to be inviolable when it appertained to admittance to privileges. (In cases of sworn legal evidence, where the state had a plain interest in having witnesses bind their conscience, Jews were permitted to swear on the Law of Moses.)[15] Nevertheless, the chief reason for the absence of Jews from the Roll of Freemen in Oxford is probably no more than their lack of qualifications as individuals, together with the general unwillingness of the town council to admit additional sharers in whatever the shrinking economy had to offer. The freedom of the city could indeed be bought or conferred as an honour – but here, too, Jews did not qualify as yet.

The *Survey of Oxford in 1772*, edited by Salter with important manuscript annotations by W.P. Ellis,[16] mentions three householders of whom two were almost certainly Jews while the third – for a reason which will become apparent – is referred to as 'a Jew' outright. Moses Vowel has been dealt with above. Another person, in his way as colourful as Vowel and yet worlds apart, was Mayer Lewis, a dentist, at first in Penny-farthing Lane and later of High Street where he occupied a respectable house, now No. 107, opposite Brasenose College. In 1774 he moved to London – evidently an advance socially and economically – but he returned to Oxford for brief periods 'at the request of many of my friends.' He was an assiduous advertiser in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, where he promoted himself within a few years from perfumer to 'perfumer and operator for the teeth' to plain dentist.[17] In 1772, while still in Oxford, he published an *Essay on the*

[11] They are: Philip Levy, a younger contemporary of Isaac Abendana who published a *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1705); Philip Museli, David Francisco Lattes, and a shadowy 'Wratislavia' who also taught other languages – all three being active in the 1770s; and the Bodley cataloguer Johannes Uri later in the century.

[12] Roth op. cit. note 1, 72.

[13] The frequent recurrence of the same names in differing primary sources is one indicator.

[14] See Fig. 1 for the oath of admittance to the Freedom of Oxford under George II. Under George III the formula was the same, except that the deflating 'and so forth' is omitted after 'so help me God', and the mayor's paltry perquisites go unmentioned: signs of growing public refinement. I am obliged to Dr. Malcolm Graham for permission to reproduce the oath here, apparently for the first time.

[15] Henry S.Q. Henriques, *The Jews and the English Law* (1908), 199.

[16] Now kept at the Bodleian in Duke Humfrey's Library.

[17] My Oxford dentist, Mr. F.G. Fabian, has made the interesting suggestion that Lewis's original trade of perfumer may have taught him the anaesthetic properties of his goods, and thus put him on the road to dentistry. There is no doubt that Lewis *was* observant and professionally ambitious.

City of Oxford.

The Oath of every Free-man of the City of OXFORD.

City of } To Wit.
OXFORD. }

YOU ſhall Swear, that you ſhall be faithful and true to our Sovereign Lord King *George* the II^d, and to his Heirs and Lawful Succeſſors, Kings and Queens of this Realm of *Great-Britain*. You ſhall be obedient and ready to the *Mayor*, *Aldermen* and *Bayliffs*; *Miniſters*, and *Keepers* of this City, (Officers under the King's Majeſty) and to their Lawful Commandments. The *Franchiſes*, *Liberties*, and *Cuſtoms* of this City, you ſhall keep and maintain to your Power; and in as much as in you is, you ſhall ſave this City harmleſs. You ſhall be Partner of all manner of Charges touching this City; as in *Summons*, *Contributions*, *Watches*, *Taxes*, *Tallages*, as another Man of the ſame City is. You ſhall avow no Foreign Goods as your own, whereby the King may loſe his Cuſtom. You ſhall take no Apprentice for leſs time than for Seven Years; and you ſhall cauſe him to be Enrolled within the firſt Year of his Apprentiſhip; and if he ſerve you well and truly, ſo ſhall you certify at his out-going. You ſhall not take, nor receive, nor conſent to the taking or receipt of any Incorporation, or Fellowſhip; nor of any Books, or Confirmation of Acts, or Ordinances for any Fellowſhip, Company, or Fraternity within this City, or the Franchiſes, or Suburbs of the ſame, without the ſpecial aſſent, conſent, and agreement of the *Mayor* and *Bayliffs*, and of the *Counſel* of this City thereunto firſt eſpecially had and obtain'd. You ſhall know no Foreign Merchant in this City, that uſeth any Craft, Buying, or Selling, but you ſhall warn the *Chamberlains*, or elſe the *Mayor*'s Serjeant thereof. You ſhall not Withdraw, Purloin, or Withhold, nor conſent to the Withdrawing, Purloyning, or Withholding of any of the *Charters*, *Writings*, *Evidences*, *Eſcripts*, or *Muniments* appertaining, or which of right ought to appertain to this City; but you ſhall do your beſt endeavour to ſee them brought in, and deliver'd to the uſe of this City. You ſhall Implead no Perſon of theſe *Franchiſes*, and Guild, out of this Court, if that you may have Right within this Court; neither ſhall you Challenge, Claim, or take the Priviledge of any other Court or Courts, in any Action or Suit, here Commenced, by any Perſon that is free of this *Guild*, except the ſame Priviledge be allowable by the Common Laws of this Realm: And in all things you ſhall be juſtified by the *Mayor* of this City, and his Counſel, as a true and obedient Citizen ought to be. You ſhall not conſent to the Decreaſe of a Coffer call'd, Dame *Margaret Northen*, and *Ciſſeley Haberfield*; nor to the Decreaſe of another Coffer under five Locks, without the aſſent of the *Mayor*, and of his Council; and the Council of this City you ſhall truly keep. Theſe Points, and all other touching the *Franchiſes*, *Liberties*, and *Cuſtoms* of this City, or any of them, you ſhall keep and maintain to the uttermoſt of your Power. *So help you God, and ſo forth.*

And by the ſame Oath, you ſhall give Mr. Mayor *the Wine and Spice, when it is ask'd of you.*

Wm Gardner, Son of Thos
Gardner Boatmaker
was admitted into the Liberties of this City the
4th Day of February — *in the time*
of John Knibb — — *Eſq.* Mayor *of*
the ſaid City. 1733

So it is, *William Chettle* Gent. Clarke of the Com. of the City of *OXON.*

Fig. 1

URIEL DANN

AN

ESSAY

ON THE

FORMATION, STRUCTURE, AND USE

OF THE

TEETH.

WITH A

SUPPLEMENT,

CONTAINING

The neceſſary Directions and Inſtructions for cleaning and preſerving them.

WHEREIN

The Opinions of ſome ancient and modern Writers on the Subject, will be impartially conſidered.

BY MAYER LEWIS, K
OPERATOR FOR THE TEETH IN OXFORD.

Dedicated to the GENTLEMEN of that Univerſity.

LONDON:

Printed for the AUTHOR, and ſold by J. WHEELE, in Pater-noſter-Row; WILLIAM JACKSON, at Oxford; and Meſſ. FLETCHER and HODGSON, at Cambridge.

M DCC LXXII.

Fig. 2

Formation, Structure and Use of the Teeth (Fig. 2), which has the distinction of being the first work on a mundane subject to be published by a Jewish resident of Oxford.[18]

After the Jewish scholar and the Jewish professional there was the Jewish man of business, who characteristically resided outside the city limits in the high street of St. Clement's parish (now St. Clement's road). This was Marcus Wolfe, or Woolfe, who four years prior to the *Survey* had been 'by decree of Convocation interdicted all commerce with the gentlemen of the University, for various offences greatly prejudicial to the youth of this place, and injurious to the good order and discipline of the University' – that is, he was 'discommoned', as the official term had it.[19] It was a heavy punishment indeed, especially for someone like Marcus Wolfe who did not enjoy a freeman's separate status. The story of the interdiction, as it appears in the proceedings in the Vice-Chancellor's Court, bears retelling:[20]

> Thomas Cox, Student of Christ Church in this University, deposeth and saith: That on or about the Third of October last Marcus Wolfe, a Jew, an inhabitant of St. Clements in Oxford, came to his rooms in Christ Church aforesaid, and after some little conversation relative to money [!] he told him that it was in his power to oblige him the said Wolfe exceedingly by taking up eight, nine or more pound of sugar at his grocers at eight pence or nine pence per pound for which, he, the said Wolfe would give him six pence ready money. And upon his, the deponent's refusal, the said Wolfe said, if he did lose two-pence or so in a shilling, what was that to a gentleman. This deponent further saith that the said Wolfe at another time asked him and another gentleman if they would buy any chocolate, and being asked how he came by chocolate, he answered that a gentleman indebted to him had paid him in chocolate. And further the said Thomas Cox deposeth that he heard the said Wolfe declare that he could not afford to give above fifteen or eighteen shillings for a suit of cloaths tho they should be very little worn, nay almost new, although the prime cost might have been five pounds.

Then followed, *proponente Domino Vice-Cancellario*, the discommoning of Wolfe. A vignette of 18th-century Oxford in which the Christ Church undergraduate seems more out of character than the Jew trader.[21]

We know of another Jewish householder in Oxford, Hyam (i.e. Haim) Levy in the parish of St. Peter in the East, who is not mentioned in the *Survey* (in 1772 he was no longer alive). Roth mentions the circumcision of three of his sons between 1739 and 1750 by a *mohel* from London.[22] Oxford sources – Roth quotes from London synagogue registers – show Haim Levy as somewhat unlucky in his relations with the local courts. There was a 'presentation' – details unknown – pending against him at the Sessions of the Peace held at Oxford on 14 April 1743 which the Court ordered to 'be discharged for incertainty.' Five years later, on 20 October 1748, the mayor's Court Leet fined Haim Levy 2*s*. 6*d*. 'for not repairing the paving' before his door. (He was in good company, among others Merton College.)[23] Small matters, to be sure; and yet they show in their different ways that Jewish householders of no special consequence could expect even-handed justice from the local courts – by no means a foregone conclusion.

[18] The copy in the British Library, used for the present illustration, is the only one known to me.

[19] *JOJ*, 17 Dec. 1768. One would expect Wolfe to have been a *privilegiatus* of the University before his discommoning, but Foster does not list him.

[20] University Archives, *Convocation Bi 36, 1766–1776*, pp. 80–81.

[21] Thomas Cox was then eighteen years old, according to Foster, and had just matriculated. In the 18th century even undergraduates at Christ Church were referred to as 'students' – an appellation now reserved for dons. I am obliged for this information to Mrs. June Wells, the Christ Church archivist.

[22] Roth, op. cit. note 1, 71.

[23] City Archives, 0.2.7., *Dockquet Book*, Sessions, Tr. 1735–Tr. 1745, p. 69. City Archives, 0.5. 18, *Court Leets Proceedings 1746–1833*.

Our last representatives of a notional Jewish middle class in Oxford appear towards the end of the century: Henry Isaacs, formerly of London, then at The Eagle and Child in St. Giles (still prominent), and ultimately at 'his son's house on the Gravel Walk, near Magdalen College.' They were both traders – though the son had advanced further on the road to respectability. In 1784 Henry Isaacs informed 'his friends and the public' in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* that, though having moved, '. . . he continues to buy Ladies' and Gentlemen's cast-off clothes of all kinds'. His son, on the same occasion, is described as trading 'with all kinds of foreign fruit . . . as cheap as in London'.[24] Their path was not smooth, either. As late as 1797 the Town Council ordered its solicitor 'to write to Mr. Isaacs, sen., and his son, the Jews, to cease carrying on any sort of trade within the liberties of the city. . . '.[25] In contrast to Wolfe (discussed above), the Isaacs were not in all probability charged with any 'offence prejudicious' to anyone in particular; it was one of the Town Council's periodic outbursts in its perennial struggle against outsiders, and times were hard. The Isaacs do not seem to have suffered irretrievable harm, and Mr. Isaacs senior died at Oxford in 1812, to be buried in London.[26]

Mere probability suggests that there was a lower class of Jews in Oxford, though their emergence from obscurity is more accidental than is that of their betters. A curious case in the latter half of the century is that of the Manuel (also Manell and Emanuel) 'family' in business near Gloucester Green who seem to have specialized in the care of lost or strayed dogs and horses, and their return to their owners for a consideration; perhaps 'lower middle class' would be more appropriate.[27] It would be less than gracious to suggest that the Manuels' dealings were not strictly legal. This does, however, emphatically apply to three other Jews, or bearers of indisputably Jewish names, who appear at this time in the reports in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, all of whom, if not actual fences, were at least considered capable of receiving stolen goods. One is worthy of special mention: Moses Cohan who gave evidence against two thieves, later hanged, who had offered him silver plate belonging to Magdalen College and Christ Church.[28] (We are not told whether Cohan was commended from the Bench for his honesty, or at any rate for his prudence.) It is not surprising that this sample of lower-class Jews should cluster on the criminal fringe: Jews, in an economically stagnant place like Oxford, would be unlikely to share in the usual occupations of the poor – casual labour above all. They might be found as chapmen of the meanest sort, but as such they would be based on relatively nearby London. Obviously we must assume that there were additional Jewish residents in Oxford of this social and economic order (who through good luck or honesty do not figure in print). But there cannot have been more than a few: Oxford was small, Jews visible, and their turning up as identifiable individuals in any of the sources scanned here is a reasonable likelihood.

In Oxfordshire outside the city, we come across the occasional mention of a Jewish traveller, whether as a trekking pedlar or a respectable coach passenger; as we might expect, we hear of him when he comes to grief from highwaymen or worse.[29] Jewish

[24] *JOJ*, 6 Nov. 1784.

[25] M.G. Hobson (ed.), *Oxford Council Acts: 1752–1801* (O.H.S. n.s. xv, 1962), 251.

[26] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1812, 401.

[27] *JOJ*, 27 July 1765, 14 Sept. 1782, 2 May 1789, 27 Mar. 1790. I am obliged to Mr. John Hicks, London, for drawing my attention to these people.

[28] *JOJ*, 5 Feb. 1780.

[29] Canon W.J. Oldfield's *Quarter Sessions Rolls 1687–1830*, eleven volumes of manuscript kept at the Oxfordshire County Record Office, are an astonishing labour of love and indispensable for the researcher into this field.

residents there seem to have been none before the last decades of the century. Those few of whom we hear at that time were all watchmakers and jewellers, eminently Jewish trades, if for no other reason than that they were not usually under guild control. (An additional reason why we should hear of them is that they were more likely to advertise.) At Witney, one Barnard Moses Levi of Northampton opened his shop in the Market Place in April 1770 and, being evidently of an enterprising disposition, at Woodstock six months later, also in the Market Place.[30] At Banbury there were at one time two Jewish jewellers. In 1785 Wolf Benjamin became bankrupt and his assets 'in the jeweller and silversmith's business' were auctioned off at the Red Lion Inn. He must have been in his prosperity a considerable man, for the auctioneer, Mr. Hawtyn of Oxford, promised the public catalogues 'in due time'. And as one man's misfortune is another's opportunity, two years later a Solomon Abraham, silversmith and pawnbroker, also of Banbury, gave notice that he was closing down his pawnbroking business 'to concentrate on stock of silver, jewellery . . . and Sheffield goods'.[31]

In summary, there were Jews in Oxford in the 18th century. They were few, but it seems that their number gradually increased. They had no communal organization or communal institutions whatever throughout the century; they even seem to have taken little notice of each other socially (though the nature of the sources utilized here may suppress 'purely Jewish' aspects). Their material prosperity seems to have been below that of general Oxford town standards, modest though these were; there certainly were no resident 'rich Jews'. There was a peripheral connection with the University at the academic level: Jews were occasionally employed as teachers of Hebrew, but they were badly paid and, of course, had no official status. Jews were outsiders, but not outcasts. No manifestations of mob anti-Semitism are known, and their treatment by the city authorities seems to have been equitable enough – always remembering that they were in no way 'citizens'.[32] They did not interest the Established Church and its servants.[33]

In Jewish history, the Jews in 18th-century Oxford and Oxfordshire represent no glorious or pioneering chapter. But their tale was not tragic or nerve-racking – which in Jewish history anywhere, at any time, may be considered as commendation. As part of the history of 18th-century Oxford, its Jews blend into the picture at its margins, but without disharmony.

[30] *JOJ*, 27 Jan., 28 Apr., 20 Oct. 1770.

[31] *JOJ*, 24 Sept., 8 Oct. 1785; 1 Dec. 1787.

[32] It is remarkable that the Jew-Bill agitation of 1753 and the general elections of 1754, both particularly tense in Oxford, did not produce there a single anti-Jewish incident that has been registered. On this, see also: R.J. Robson, *The Oxfordshire Election of 1754* (1949); Thomas W. Perry, *Public Opinion, Propaganda and Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

[33] The answers to the episcopal enquiries since 1738, that mine of detailed information on almost every aspect of society, do not mention Jews in any context until 1808.