Jews in Medieval England

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We’ve Been There:
Jewish Communities from Around the World
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The Norman, Angevin, and Early Plantagenet Periods
(1066 – 1290)

Battle of Hastings as portrayed in the
Bayeux Tapestry

Coin of William the Conqueror

Ashkenazi Prayer Book
England c. 1200

Corpus Christi College, MS 133, Oxford

Blank pages at the end,
written by a Sephardi Jew,
recording (in Judeo-Arabic) debts owed to him by a
variety of Christian dignitaries

Corpus Christi College (Oxford), MS 133
List of debtors in Judeo-Arabic

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Seal of Solomon bar Isaac,
found at Arthur’s Seat,
Edinburgh, 1850
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J. R. Tolkien,
*The Hobbit* (1937)

Bilbo Baggins found the ring in the caverns beneath the Misty Mountains

Aaron of Lincoln
(1125 – 1186)

Pipe-roll of 1166: £616 12s 8d
During the reign of Henry II (1154 – 1189)
Financed Lincoln Cathedral, Peterborough Cathedral, and about ten abbeys.
At his death, he was owed 6400 marks.

Sample pipe-roll (1194)

Map of Jewish Communities in Medieval England
12th-century house
Lincoln

Jews House and Jews Court

Lincoln Cathedral
Built 1088 – 1311, with money borrowed from Aaron of Lincoln

Lincoln Cathedral
Tallest building in the world
1311 – 1549
525 feet
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Great Pyramid of Khufu
480 feet

Two clauses in Magna Carta (1215)

10. If anyone who has borrowed from the Jews any amount, large or small, dies before the debt is repaid, it shall not carry interest as long as the heir is under age, of whosoever he holds; and if that debt falls into our hands (if the Jewish creditor dies and the king takes over his bonds), we will take nothing except the principal sum specified in the bond.

11. And if a man dies owing a debt to the Jews, his wife may have her dowry [dowry] and pay nothing of that debt; and if he leaves children under age, their needs shall be met in a manner in keeping with the holding of the deceased, and the debt shall be paid out of the residue, saving the service due to the lords. Debts owing to other than Jews shall be dealt with likewise.

Medieval Latin starr < שְׁטָר
“A legal document, especially one of release or acquittance of debt.”

O.E.D.: 1614 J. Selden Titles of Honor 328
“Whence the word Starrum or Starre for Acquittances or written testimonies of Contracts is vsd.”

Abraham ibn Ezra
1089 – 1168
Spain > North Africa > Egypt > Israel > Italy
> Provence > Normandy > England
(London and Oxford)

Yesod Mora “The Foundation of Fear”
Philosophical Treatise, written for his pupil, Joseph ben Rabbi Jacob of Mandeville
Postscript: "Between Jerusalem and this island there is a difference of four hours as regards the time of sunrise.”

Iggeret Shabbat “Sabbath Epistle”
Both written in London, 1158
Tosafot, writing in northern France, in the 12th century, refer to the “great sages of Norwich, Oxford, and York.”

One is known by name:
Rabbi Isaac of Norwich

Medieval Hawking or Falconry, practiced by kings and aristocrats, and by Rabbi Isaac of Norwich

How did the Jews refer to England in Hebrew?

האי קצה הארץ
הנקראת אינגאלטירה

“The island at the edge of the earth called Angleterra”

How did the Jews refer to England in Hebrew?

אי קצה הארץ
נקרת אינגלטירה

“The island at the edge of the earth called Angleterra”

Valmadonna, no. 1 (MOTB GC 858) – Complete Pentateuch, with Targum, and Five Scrolls
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(MOTB GC 858)
Complete Pentateuch,
with Targum,
and Five Scrolls
fol. 482v
Colophon
with original date and
subsequent various owners

completed on 15 Tammuz 4949 = 2 July 1189

Leviticus 11, with Judeo-French and Anglo-Norman
  glosses for the forbidden birds

Longleat MS 21
Hebrew-Latin-
(French)
Dictionary
Written at
Ramsey Abbey
(Cambridgeshire)
13th century

• 3682 entries
• 1392 verbs
• 2290 nouns
  (plus)
• 1000+ words
glossed in
  Old French
• mentions Rashi
  50+ times

Longleat MS 21
Book of Psalms
Written at
Ramsey Abbey
(Cambridgeshire)
13th century
Longleat M5 21
• Grammatical Tables, appearing both in Hebrew and in Latin transcription

Longleat House
Warminster, Wiltshire
Home of the Marquess of Bath
built 1580

York
Best preserved medieval city in England

Map of Jewish Communities in Medieval England

York, England

Jewbury
On the edge of the city of York, England
Sainsbury’s Supermarket, York

Medieval Jewish Cemetery, York
Excavated during the 1980s
Now the Sainsbury’s Carpark

Jewry Lane, Canterbury

Old Jewry
City of London

Judengasse, Worms, Germany
No Jews in England, 1290 - 1657

Mikveh discovered at the Old Jewry, City of London, 2001

Guildford High Street

Lease of houses, Nottingham, during the reign of Henry III (1216 – 1272), with two Jewish seals affixed.

Muniment Room and Library, Westminster Abbey, 6734.
Lease of houses, Nottingham, during the reign of Henry III (1216 – 1272)

“We the undersigned acknowledge that everything that is written in the Latin tongue in the writing of Raouil Bedah the priest is truly correct. Bonefay ben Barton and Yosi ben Bonefay.”

Fine Roll of January 1252, with record of a writ sent by Henry III to the Sheriff of Hampshire

Mandatum est vicecomiti Suhampton quod inquirat per sacramentum xii. de legalioribus Judeis Winton super rotulam suam utrum Cressus de Stanford Judeus rapuit et asportavit a scola Judeorum eiusdem civitatis pomum et deinde decus et oprobrium communitatis Judeorum Winton vel non. Et si per Inquisitionem illam culpabilis sit de facto illo, tunc statim distingant ipsum Cressum per redditis, domus et catalla sua ad dandum Regi unam marcam auri pro transgressione illa. Teste ut supra, per Regem.

Order to the sheriff of Hampshire to inquire by the oath of twelve of the more law‐worthy Jews of Winchester by their roll whether Cressus of Stamford, Jew, violently seized and took away the apple of Eve from the synagogue of the Jews in the same city to the shame and opprobrium of the Jewish community of Winchester. If, by that inquisition, he shall be found guilty of that deed, then they are to distrain Cressus immediately by his rents, houses and chattels to give one mark of gold to the king for that trespass. Witnessed as above. By the king.

http://frh3.org.uk/content/month/fm‐12‐2011.html

Hebrew tombstone fragment
Northampton

discovered c. 1840,
re‐discovered in the Northampton Museum, 1972
---אַב---
---דָּב---
---שָׁל---

Found by a fisherman in a brook in Suffolk in 1696...ר יחיאל "הנדר יוסף בן הק..."
The vow (which) Joseph son of the Holy Rabbi Yeḥiel...

Map of Jewish Communities in Medieval England

Deed in Latin, recording the sale of land by Jacob the Jew, to Walter de Merton, with summary statement in Hebrew.

Merton College, Oxford, established 1262
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J. R. R. Tolkien, professor at Merton College

Dead Man’s Walk
Alongside the back of Merton College, with Magdalen College Tower in the distance.
Lachrymose History

- Blood libels: Norwich (1144), Lincoln (1255)
- Massacre of the Jews of York (1190)
- Expulsion under Edward I (1290)

No Jews in England: 1290 – 1657

Blood Libel

originates in England, then spreads to rest of Europe

1144 – Norwich
1168 – Gloucester
1171 – Blois (France)
1255 – Lincoln

(mentioned by Chaucer, “Prioress’ Tale,” The Canterbury Tales, c. 1390)
On the night of Friday 16 March 1190, some 150 Jews and Jewesses of York, having sought protection in the royal castle on this site from a mob incited by Richard Malebisse and others, chose to die at each other’s hands rather than renounce their faith.

May they give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands.

1290 – Expulsion of the Jews by Edward I (r. 1272 – 1307)
Jews readmitted 1657

Salo Baron (1895 – 1989)
1290 – Expulsion of the Jews by Edward I (r. 1272 – 1307)

Jews readmitted 1657

And yet Hebrew learning continues and flourishes:
- Ralph Niger, archdeacon of Gloucester (c. 1140 – c. 1217)
- Roger Bacon, polymath (c. 1214 – c. 1292)
- John Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (served 1327 – 1369)
- Adam Easton, Cardinal (1328 – 1397)
- Laurence Holbeach, Benedictine monk (14th century)
- Thomas Gascoigne, Vice-Chancellor, Univ Oxford (1404 – 1458)

Founded 1517, with its biblioteca trilinguis (Erasmus, 1519)

Ashkenazi Prayer Book
England c. 1200
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English Reformation – 16th Century

William Tyndale (1494 – 1536)
Myles Coverdale (1488 – 1569)
The Geneva Bible (1560)

Robert Wakefield (d. 1537)
Thomas Wakefield (d. 1575)

Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge (1540)
Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford (1546)

Antoine Rodolphe Chevallier (1523 – 1572)
Thomas Bodley (1545 – 1613)
Bodleian Library, 1603 – 1624

First Bodleian Library catalogue (1605) includes 58 books and manuscripts with Hebrew titles. Thomas Bodley added his own notations to the catalogue (in Latin), correcting some misprints in the Hebrew.

MS Bodl. Or. 3 – Book of Psalms (c. 1300)

John Selden
(1584 – 1654)

Jurist and scholar of Jewish law

His manuscript collection entered the Bodleian Library in 1659

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah / Code of Jewish Law
(1170 / 1350)

Bodleian MS Arch. Selden A.4

Abraham ibn Ezra, 12th century Commentary on the Torah
MS Pococke 108 / 1411

Book of Exodus
MS Pococke 7, c. 1350

Edward Pococke
(1604 – 1691)

Bust at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford
Chair of Arabic, Regius Professor of Hebrew, 1648–1691, Chaplain to the Levant Company of Aleppo, 1630–1635
Jews readmitted to England under Oliver Cromwell 1657

Pococke plane tree on the grounds of Christ Church College

The Weston Library (opened 2014): across Broad Street from the Old Bodleian Library

Oxford – July 2017