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ALONIM

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Summer Issue

Magazine of the Bristol & West
Progressive Jewish Congregation

liberal judaism

The Bristol and West Progressive Jewish Congregation

The NLPS Trust
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ALONIM Contributions & Editorial Policy.
The editorial policy is to encourage contributions from all Synagogue members and ALONIM readers, concerning any aspects of communal and Jewish life, including cultural and communal reviews, information concerning synagogue activities, letters and feedback, and articles of Jewish cultural and religious interest.Typically, contributions of approximately 350 words are preferred,.

The editor will NOT print anonymous or unattributed articles. Contributors are asked to be aware of the need to protect the copyright of others. Opinions expressed in ALONIM do not necessarily reflect those of the synagogue Council or the Editors.

Contributions and communications can be sent directly to the Editor at alonim@bwpjc.org. For postal contributions please contact the editor on 07989 974133. Copy date deadline for submissions is notified below. Submissions after this date cannot be guaranteed to appear in the next issue. If you are intending to send in unsolicited material please let the editor know ahead of the deadline.

ALONIM copy date deadline	
Issue	**Date**
Autumn	31st July 2021

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Front cover photograph:

Midland hawthorn

Photographer:
Erica Canela

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Editorial

Erica Canela

Hello! I have been working behind the scenes on Alonim for a few issues now and I'm delighted to write my first editorial for Alonim. Oh yes, I'm Erica. Hi. Nice to meet you. It's a pleasure to be co-editing this fine magazine. I love the diversity of its articles and the talented contributors who make it all happen – this issue is no exception.

Like many of you, I'm feeling. . . cautiously optimistic about the future, particularly the prospect of seeing everyone at shul again. However, I would like to take editorial privilege and thank everyone for the remarkable work that has taken place over the last 15 months to keep this community together. It's been such a difficult time, but for me, seeing your friendly faces over Zoom has lifted my spirits time and time again. I am so grateful for this community. I have no idea what goes on behind the scenes, but I know a lot of people have worked incredibly hard to keep this all going. From social groups, to adult education and Hebrew lessons, to Shabbat services and holiday services – this has all helped me feel more connected and I hope that you have as well. This community is remarkably resilient and I am so delighted to be a part of it. We are a community of individuals, with our own voices and experiences, and Alonim reflects that. We are proud that it reflects this diversity of ideas and that as a community we respect each other.

Now back to my cautious optimism....

It has been so nice stepping back into 'the new normal' – visiting friends, going out for meals, planning local trips and just enjoying the beautiful weather (although I feel like when you are reading this, it will probably be raining again). I have missed all of those interactions. With that said, it's so hard to predict what will happen next. I remain cautiously optimistic for the future, but I am also going to make the most of every single day. Or try to, at least. יעבור זה גם Gam zeh ya'avor / This too shall pass. This is a phrase that guides my life. The bad times will pass, and the good times will pass. Make the most of the good. I hope to see you all in person soon.

Membership News

Sheila Brill

It's always good when I can start the Membership News with mazeltovs! So I'm going to begin with Nathan Gregory who we can now welcome as a full member of the community.

And mazeltov to Vicki Collinson who has just moved house after a nine-month delay. We wish her and Juliette much happiness in their new home.

We wish long life to Yoav Ben-Shlomo whose mother passed away recently. Also to Ben Nathan whose brother also passed away recently.

We have several new members and friends to welcome:

Havi Carel and Samir Okasha and their children Solomon and Joel.

Adam Kessler and Vikky Le May.

Ray Woolfe and Sarah Bartlett

Adam Wyner and Anna Havinga.

David Flossman

Jade Bloomfield-Utting

Ana McGuiness

Hopefully we will meet them in person sometime soon!

Update from the Chair

Jane Clark

Opening the Building

You will by now have learnt that Council has decided to postpone reopening the building. We realise this is very disappointing. The one ray of hope that I see is that when the pandemic first began to spread in the UK last year, the time for the number of newly infected people to double was around five days. At the height of the trouble, the number of newly infected people was doubling every three days but thankfully that has reduced to about 11 days. So the Delta Variant is not spreading as fast as other variants were.

This gives me some hope that we may not have a third wave similar to the second, but my crystal ball is no better than yours, dear reader.

Mazeltov

I am happy to report that a member of the community went to the Beth Din and was approved as a convert to Judaism. Of course, from the moment that they have had their first Aliyah, they are to be treated as fully Jewish; and the fact that they converted is not to be mentioned again. It is good that Liberal Judaism has been able to support this member and provide the required support in Rabbi Monique's absence. I understand that two more Beth Din hearings for proselytes are scheduled for July and August. Please join me in wishing the candidates the best of luck.

New Officers

Tamar Hodos Lucas and Vicki Collinson have kindly agreed to share the role of Honorary Secretary. Vicki will take meeting minutes, and Tamar will compile agendas. Naturally I am immensely grateful to them. We still need someone to take on the role of Treasurer. This role will be much less burdensome than formerly, as we have a treasury team in place, all except for a trustee to lead it. If you are not already a trustee I am sure that the Council would co-opt you with alacrity. Please get in touch with me if you are willing to do this. Please remember that we are a member-led and run organisation. The more you put into it, the more you get out.

Recording Zoom Events

I receive about one email a week telling me that we have exceeded our storage limit for Zoom recordings. I have asked for this to be raised at the next Council meeting. It is not cost-free to record Zoom meetings and services. If we were to upgrade to the next level of cloud storage it would almost quadruple our Zoom subscription cost. I am therefore asking people to think before they record; and to delete recordings promptly. If people don't do this there is always a risk that someone else will decide which recordings to delete; and you may lose your recording anyway.

Asking after People's Health

One of the great things about a Jewish community is concern for people's well-being. I felt this strongly when my parents died. My astronomy club friends said things like, "Oh your Dad died. Sorry to hear that. Now, where was I?" Not so the Jewish community. My grief was taken much more seriously, and I remain grateful for that. Now, for the first time in my life, I am having to deal with a condition which is not minor and not going away: long Covid. People have been very kind and considerate when I run out of energy and have to stop for a while. The honest answer to, "How are you doing?" is, "Ask me in a year's time." I just don't know when, if ever, I will heal. Since the fatigue comes and goes, asking me every week is a kind but meaningless question. Week-to-week fluctuations don't really tell the story.

As I am sure you know, Rabbi Monique is also making a slow recovery from her troubles, which have been considerably greater than mine. I am sure that when she comes back, everyone will want to ask about her health, but please be mindful that, she may be the rabbi, but she is also a person entitled to dignity and privacy about her health. Please give her the space to tell her story in her own good time; and allow for the fact that she may not know how her recovery will pan out.

Books in need of a new home

Iris has a large number of books in Hebrew, on a variety of topics, including children's books. Also a few books in English about Jews and Judaism.

Contact **alonim@bwpjc.org** for details.

'Keeping in Touch'

What has been going on, and why?!

Isabel Tobias

The Covid pandemic has been a revelation to us all. Who would have thought that in the 21st century fatal illness could spread so rapidly, striking down people we know and carrying off loved ones, leaving us feeling shocked, vulnerable, exposed, frightened? Who would have thought that 21st century governments around the world and our own, would be driven to compel free citizens to stay in their homes, separating us from our loved ones and punishing transgression, disrupting our freedoms and way of life so completely? And who would have imagined that this reign of isolation and fear of serious illness would last for months and months and months, filling our hospitals, exhausting our doctors and nurses and delaying all sorts of other medical care?

Of course, over the past fourteen months lots of people were also motivated to creativity and positive action and, thank goodness we have vaccines, but my guess is that January and February of this year were the lowest point for us all (such long, cold, dark days). The gradual lifting of lockdown and the longer, lighter days are making life easier now, but the ill-effects some people have suffered won't disappear overnight and I think none of us will forget what it has been like.

We have Linda Hurst and David Dwek to thank for the invention of our BWPJC 'Keeping in Touch' efforts during this period. When the pandemic hit in March 2020, it may have been their respective professional experiences that alerted them to the isolation (literal and emotional) that lockdown would cause to many people in our community.

For thirty years Linda worked as a volunteer providing telephone support to people in Bristol experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness, depression and anxiety. David Dwek has worked for an equivalent amount of time with vulnerable children who are unable to attend school. They had already stepped up to help offer pastoral care during Rabbi Monique's sabbatical, but when the pandemic hit, they immediately realised something further would be needed and so they began to enlist volunteers for what has become known as the KIT team. This year, Sheila Brill and I have joined as additional organisers. Sheila knows many of the community members quite well. She has experience working as an online tutor for foster carers looking after vulnerable children, as well as many years in teaching. And I have spent my career in education.

It is wonderful to be led by two such sensitive and empathic people as David and Linda, who always have the best interests of others at heart. If you

have had a call or an email from one of them then you know what I mean. The other side of this of course is that it is very rewarding to be in touch with lots of people throughout our community and to learn more about individuals with whom, in the past, we may only have exchanged pleasantries in the minutes before a Shabbat service or during a quick Kiddish. Those of us involved in KIT have definitely learnt a lot from the people we chat to, and we are enriched too.

The guidance to support those who are emotionally fragile is obviously a Jewish teaching: Bikur Cholim, though the translation 'The Sick Visit' is more specific than our current understanding of all the vulnerabilities we can, at different times, need support through. I like to think that the stigma surrounding anxiety, feeling isolated or depressed is largely dispelled these days and that it is widely understood that, at times these can amount to serious illness. We know that anyone can be affected, but that doesn't mean we necessarily know what to do about it when it hits us or our friends.

The KIT approach is simple: to be friendly, to enquire and to listen. That is sometimes counter intuitive as it can be easier to talk about ourselves, than to give people the space to share how they are really feeling. But that is what we try to do: take time, listen. We are not therapists and do not try to solve anything. But we hope to bring a smile to someone's face so they can experience the warmth and reassurance of human contact.

The KIT team are all members of our community; the recipients of our calls are all members of community. The positive effect of a call or a text message every few weeks works both ways and everyone feels better. Believe me! And we also reach out to new members. Being restricted to zoom services and online learning is hard for everyone but we want new members to feel something of the warmth they will receive when they are able, finally, to come to shul in person.

If you would like to join us on the KIT team, or if you know of someone who would benefit from a KIT call, please contact one of the organisers (and it goes without saying that people can opt out of receiving calls too; just let us know) by contacting membership@bwpjc.org

KIT team

David Dwek

Linda Hurst

Sheila Brill

Isabel Tobias

Alternative facts...

Blaire Palmer

One of the major challenges of being a parent today is surely how to navigate all of the sources of information our children have access to. From the BBC News to TikTok kids are flooded with stories about what is going on in the world with very little concept of which sources can be trusted and which are pure clickbait (or worse - genuine attempts to warp the truth).

As a home educator this presents a huge challenge. Ivy can be online all day with little supervision. She often joins me for lunch with the phrase "Did you know..." and proceeds to tell me something which 1) I did not know 2) Is not true 3) Sounds completely believable.

Even conventional media isn't neutral (I say this as a former BBC Journalist) so the ability to fact check and to use good judgement when it comes to sifting through the noise is crucial.

Of course, sometimes something that seems unbelievable turns out to be true. My incredulity becomes humility (something Ivy enjoys very much. It's always fun when Mum is wrong!) which, itself, is a good lesson for a child.

I'm curious about how other parents help their children get to the truth (if such a thing exists). With so much popping up on her Instagram and TikTok feeds recently about Israel, the Palestinians and subtle or overt antisemitism it was important we talked both about how to gain a greater understanding and how to respond.

We found a range of simple but legitimate articles from writers who came from a perspective of peace. We tried to look at the situation from a variety of angles. We acknowledged that we didn't really know enough to have a strong opinion other than wanting peace in the region. And we realised that very few of those filling up their social media feed with hashtags knew even as little as we did, let alone enough to make such bold pronouncements.

Having a flavour of the history, the issues for different parties and focusing on understanding rather than opinion-forming prevented us being drawn in to taking sides. It also helped us have a less emotional response to the uninformed or extreme opinions of the hashtag-chasers.

In a world divided about what is true, where we cannot trust our media (mainstream or social) to give us reliable information, the ability to

dig a little might be one of the most important skills our young people can learn.

Rebuilding Bodies and Souls: The Story of the Guinea Pig Club

Ruth Newman

Noel and Ruth Newman were founding members of our synagogue. This is their story of how Noel became a member of the remarkable Guinea Pig Club.

In 1941, Noel was already a medical doctor when he joined the RAF. At the end of the war, in 1945, he was sent to a station in the Middle East and on the way there the plane crashed.

He survived but was very badly burned, especially on his hands and fingers. He was taken to Ward 3 at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, Sussex, where he was seen by Archibald McIndoe.

McIndoe was a surgeon who had come over from New Zealand. He soon found a newer and better way of dealing with burns than the norm and became a pioneer in plastic surgery. In fact this was the start of plastic and cosmetic surgery and was very experimental.

treatment

McIndoe was amazing in that he cared for the whole body and not just the wounds. He looked after the many lads who came under his care, and he wouldn't let them out of hospital until he was absolutely sure that they were capable of looking after themselves, getting a job and being totally okay in the world. His attitude was to make them and everyone else feel normal.

Noel (circled) with Archie (sitting) and the lads

Some of the disfigurements of the boys' faces were really horrific. Thankfully most of their wives welcomed back their husbands, but sadly just a few couldn't cope. With the help of some friends, McIndoe managed to get the townsfolk of East Grinstead to invite some of the lads into their homes in an effort to rehabilitate them. As a result East Grinstead got used to the young patients walking around in various stages of reconstruction and became known as 'the town that didn't stare'.

649 young lads went through McIndoe's hands from all over the world, Noel being one of the older ones.

"When you are first injured, and if in pain, you hope to die. As soon as the drugs become effective or the pain eases, you hope to live. The smallest things become something to live for." Noel Newman

There were a lot of Polish, Canadians, Russian, American, French etc. There was an amazingly warm camaraderie feeling amongst the lads and McIndoe became affectionately known as Archie. He had a wonderful way of making the aircrew feel normal, and not different, and he fought for the lads to wear their usual uniform rather than hospital clothes.

On Sunday 20th July in 1941 a group of airmen, with a glass of sherry and all recovering from surgery, decided to set up a drinking Club for all those who had undergone surgery at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead. They decided to call it The Guinea Pig Club. There was great humour between them all, and their choice of administration showed this. For example, they chose, for the club's secretary, a lad with badly burned fingers, which meant that he was excused from writing lengthy letters. They chose Peter Wilkes as treasurer because he had badly burned legs which meant that he couldn't run off with the money. Archie was appointed Life President.

To qualify for the Club, they would have to be a member of any allied aircrew who had undergone at least two operations at the Queen Victoria Hospital. A membership fee of two shillings and sixpence a year was decided upon. Women were not able to be members but could come to the yearly get-togethers and some special ladies' evenings.

Noel was kept in hospital for three years before Archie was happy enough with his recovery to allow him out. During his time in hospital

and because he could no longer practise as a GP, Noel studied for a Public Health Diploma. After the war he became the Deputy Medical Officer in Bath looking after the welfare side of everything, including school children. Noel and Ruth's two daughters were very amused by their father because he hadn't got a surgery. Jane called him "a funny doctor" because, as a family, they only had thirty nine fingers instead of forty.

Every year all the members of the Guinea Pig Club would reunite together. There was tremendous warmth and comradeship, and if they needed anything medical they were given it.

The Club was originally intended to be disbanded at the end of the war but it continued on, going from strength to strength. Ruth and Noel joined them every year until Noel died.

Noel and Ruth representing the Guinea Pig Club at a garden party

Archibald McIndoe was honoured for his work and was knighted in 1947. In 1960 Sir Archibald died at the early age of 59, and the Duke of Edinburgh took on the role of President. He was absolutely brilliant with the lads.

The Guinea Pig Club celebrated its 75th anniversary on 2nd November 2016. It was held in the National Arboretum, Staffordshire, where each Club and Society is represented. Ruth attended and said it was a very emotional occasion. A friend commented that there was such "courage, comradeship and humour" amongst those who had suffered such trauma.

The Duke of Edinburgh unveiled a memorial honouring the lads and Sir Archibald McIndoe. It was in the form of a sculpture depicting a crashed Hurricane, the wing of which showed a faint image of McIndoe's face, with the inscription "Out of the flames came inspiration"

"It is the 649 members of the Club that are the main focus of the Memorial but the subtle inclusion of the profile of Sir Archibald McIndoe remembers the magnificent work that he carried out."

For more information, check out www.eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk/guinea-pig-club

Miriam in the Torah

Molly Burn

Much of what we read about Miriam in the Torah, and in the literature, paints her in a negative light. She is often read as a rebel, one who transgresses, as is seen in Numbers 12 when she is afflicted with a skin disease for her discriminatory and racist views of the Cushite woman. She is never spoken of again in the Torah after her disgrace, and is actually referred to in Deuteronomy as a cautionary tale.

Whilst accountability for racism and discrimination is integral, as a liberal and feminist Jew, it is disheartenning to see Miriam punished when Aaron is not, despite both being culpable. The Torah holds Miriam to a higher degree of scrutiny than it does her male counterpart. This is emblematic of the ways in which a patriarchal society allows for, and largely forgives, the poor behaviour of men whilst it punishes women.

When Miriam's death is reported, there is no ceremony or mourning. However when Aaron dies, the people mourn for 30 days. His memory is honoured, and he is remembered appropriately. As a man who was flawed, but who was an important part of our story, and who had redeeming qualities. Miriam is not. Our lasting memory of Miriam is her shame.

Yes, Miriam displayed racist attitudes, and yes, she should be held accountable. But so should Aaron.

What can we take from this reading? We can become more actively aware of this disparity. We can reflect on how we ourselves may have held girls accountable, but not boys, or how we as children were socialised in gendered ways. How does this socialisation affect our attitudes and behaviours as adults?

This framework can be applied to all intersections of privileged identity. Ask yourself - in what ways have I been allowed or taught to shirk responsibility? How can I make more of an effort to notice when I am held to separate standards as my non-white/ black/ LGBTQ+*/ disabled/ neuro diverse / non Ashkenazi/ female/ immigrant/ refugee friends and colleagues? And if in fact you look around and notice that none of the people in your life have different identities to you, reflect on why that is.

Miriam is a cautionary tale. Don't be racist. But I would like to add, speak

up if a woman is shamed and isolated when a man in her position is offered redemption and community.

https://www.thetorah.com/article/re-encountering-miriam

Excavating the Jews of Medieval Oxford

Tamar Hodos Lucas

A few months ago, a colleague in Bristol University's Organic Geochemistry Unit asked if I could advise her research team on aspects of Jewish dietary laws for an article they were preparing for publication.* It is possible that you have seen this discussed in the media recently, as it has garnered international interest, particularly in Jewish interest quarters. Recent excavations in the centre of Oxford undertaken by a commercial contract archaeology company had uncovered an area known from documentary evidence to have been part of the Jewish quarter prior to Edward I's expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. The presence of pottery and animal bones in pre-1290 contexts in two buildings provided an opportunity to investigate whether a Jewish diet could be identified from the remains.

The two properties in question fronted onto what is now St Aldates, the southern route that extends from Oxford's acknowledged centre at Carfax (see Figure 1). Previously Fish Street, during the Medieval period the road was called Great Jewry Street. One substantial house on this road was owned by Jacob of Oxford, an important Jewish financier of his day. After his death in 1277, Edward I and Queen Eleanor of Castile seized Jacob's house and goods, a circumstance that was far from unique for Jews at this time and which in this case is well-documented. The second property was owned by Elekin son of Bassina. This building was confiscated in 1279 by the royal family, and the Queen granted it to her cook. Several years later, Elekin was accused of real estate and tallage payment fraud. He was hanged in 1285.

There are different types of archaeological evidence used to assess diets in the past. A main source is animal bones, which are found abundantly on almost every archaeological site. The bones tell us what species were around at the time, and cut marks may indicate butchery methods. Seeds, usually recovered from samples of soil, can help us understand what plants

were consumed. These do not survive well in the archaeological record unless they are burnt or desiccated. Therefore, soil samples to recover seeds are usually taken from a discrete context, like a hearth. Finally, fats from the animals and plants can be absorbed by unglazed pottery during food preparation and cooking. These lipids can be identified by a method known as organic residue analysis, which requires sophisticated chemistry. These sources, especially when considered alongside documentary and visual evidence, create a powerful combination to tell us about what and how people made and ate the things they did. In the case of the Oxford site, only the animal bone and organic residue analyses have been completed so far, but in comparison with documentary evidence, they clarify culinary life in Medieval Oxford.

Animal bones and ceramics were analysed from contexts associated with Jacob and Elekin's properties, as well as pottery from earlier, Saxon, phases, so before Jews were welcomed to England by William the Conqueror after 1066. Evidence from the Jewish-associated contexts was also compared with contemporary material from nearby areas in Oxford not associated with Jewish occupation.

The excavation's Saxon levels were dominated by the bones of domestic cattle, sheep and goat, and pig; bones from domestic fowl and wild species, although present, were found in such small numbers as to be statistically negligible. A primary interest in cattle, sheep and goat, with secondary taste for pig, and significantly less so for poultry, is typical of Saxon and Medieval towns. From the Jewish-owned phase, however, there was a complete absence of pig specimens. Instead, the animal bone assemblage is dominated by domestic fowl and goose, permitted birds under the laws of kashrut. There are substantially fewer cattle, sheep and goat bones proportionally. It is speculated that the decrease in the bones of these four-legged species may relate to the unpermitted status of hindquarters.

By comparison, contemporary animal bone assemblages from similar contexts outside Oxford's Jewry confines were dominated by sheep and goat bones, with half as many cattle bones, and half again of pig bones, with minor evidence of domestic fowl consumption.

Oyster shells and eel bones were also found in levels pre-dating the Jewish occupation level and in contemporary contexts outside the Jewry, alongside evidence of other fish consumption. With the exception of a single oyster shell

fragment, no shellfish or eel remains were found in the contexts associated with Jacob and Elekin, although bones of kosher salt- and freshwater fish were recovered.

The lipid residue results from the Jewish occupation contexts reveal that pottery from this level was used solely to process ruminants, i.e. cattle, sheep and goat (not pig). This contrasts with pottery from the Saxon levels and the contemporary material from outside the Jewry, where most vessels were used to process both ruminant and non-ruminant products.

Therefore, it appears that Jacob and Elekin did not use their ceramic pots to cook chicken, either (birds are also not ruminants). They may have preferred their poultry roasted rather than stewed. Perhaps the tradition of roast chicken for Shabbat is a longer-standing one than we appreciate (does anyone want me to look into this for a future column?).

In addition, the organic residue analysis reveals a near absence of dairy not only from the material recovered from Jacob and Elekin's holdings, but also from other phases, as well as from the contemporary comparative material. This means that hardly any vessel was used to heat milk or produce butter, cream or cheese from milk in Saxon or early Medieval Oxford. This may say more about Oxford's urban nature, though. Saxon and Medieval rural sites often show substantial evidence of dairy processing, and it is known that dairy products, which were salted to improve preservation, were transported from the countryside to towns for sale. It is worth noting, therefore, that there was only one ceramic vessel from the Oxford Jewry context used to process dairy, and it was used for dairy only. This may be reflective of kashrut's separation of milk and meat. Wooden bowls, rather than ceramic ones, may have been used for dairy goods more generally in urban Oxford.

What makes these results particularly exciting is that this is the first time organic residue analysis has been used to identify specific religious dietary practices in Medieval Britain. It is also only the third identification of kashrut in Medieval Europe from zooarchaeological remains (the other two sites being in Catalonia, Spain, and Buda, Hungary). Above all, these results, in conjunction with the documentary evidence of Oxford's Jews prior to 1290, allow us to gain a richer appreciation of the lived experiences of Jacob, Elekin and their contemporaries. They certainly make me appreciate my own lived experience today.

Future archaeologists examining the 20th and 21st centuries will have less success in working out what I ate and how I cooked it. This is because organic residue analysis only works on surfaces in which the silicates in the clay have not fused together to create a glassy surface.

The surfaces of our pots and plates today are sealed intentionally, so the residues do not seep into the fabric of the vessels. Instead, future scholars will have to analyse our bones to work out what we ate. That is a very different research project.

* Dunne, J. *et al.* 2021. Finding Oxford's medieval Jewry using organic residue analysis, faunal records and historical documents. *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s12520-021-01282-8

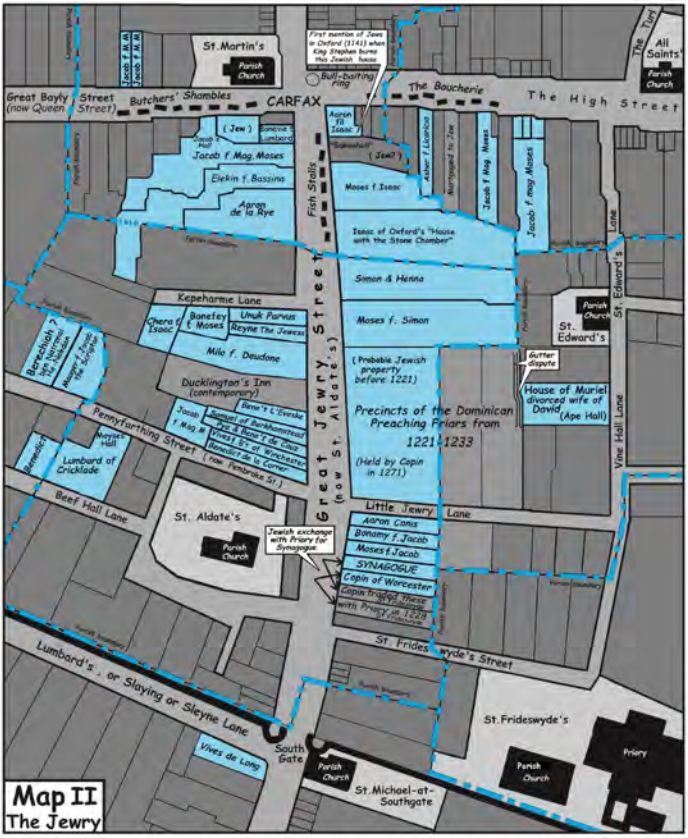

Figure 1: Map of the early Medieval Jewish quarter in Oxford, showing the properties of Jacob and Elekin. Adapted from Dunne *et al* 2021, Figure 2.

Map of the medieval Jewish quarter in Oxford, showing the properties of Jacob f. mag. Moses and Elekin f. Bassina

The Tent Service

Valerie Russell Emmott

The Tent service on a Friday evening was introduced by Liberal Judaism in 1995 to be a more relaxed and informal style of service, with its own set of folky melodies and an emphasis on the ruach/spirit of the service. The following is a poem I wrote the night before Donovan and I were due to offer the monthly Tent service for May since I didn't find a poem online or in my poetry collection that expressed what was on my mind.

Reflecting on the Tent

A tent is
A cosy resting place
A shelter from gusty wind and Being sheltered
Yet still feeling fully outdoors
Alive and vibrant in the fresh cool air
All around you
The sounds of nature through just this thin skin
A tent is a haven from city living and permanent dwellings
But, of course, much more durable than a Sukkah!
pelting raindrops
Somewhere you can gather yourself
Maybe in solitude, maybe with a few friends

Being sheltered
Yet still feeling fully outdoors
Alive and vibrant in the fresh cool air
All around you
The sounds of nature through just this thin skin
A tent is a haven from city living and permanent dwellings
But, of course, much more durable than a Sukkah!

However
The tents our Biblical ancestors dwelled in were
Their actual and ongoing homes
Their living rooms/lounges, dining spaces
Sleeping quarters
Place of amusement, argument, and anguish

We know that Abraham and Sarah were eager to receive
Three mysterious, possibly angelic, visitors into their tent (in Hebrew an Ohel)
We recite and sing 'Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov...'
Paying homage that our ancestor Yaakov and his extended family 'dwelt in tents'
And recall how Dinah and our foremothers gathered monthly in
Their red tent of rest and refuge

And then there was a special, set-apart one
The Tent of Meeting (Ohel Mo'ed or Mishkan)
Serving as the portable earthly dwelling place of the Divine
The place of Sanctuary and Connection
[For 440 years until the Temple of Solomon]

This was where prayers and connection with
The great Oneness
Echad
Could take place
Collectively

So when we come together as a community to pray
As we enter our unique Tent of Meeting
Let us rededicate ourselves to our ancestors' values of
Hospitality and welcome
To community

May our tent this evening now and always be a place of comfort
Whether that's to get away from it all whatever 'it' is for you
Or perhaps to get closer to what you need
Or your soul needs
This evening

My working life

Ariel Chapman

Great to meet you! I'm Ariel and my working life is pretty hectic, varied, frustrating and wonderful all at the same time as an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager at the University of Plymouth plus a part-time lecturer in Education Studies. I also host an LGBT+ podcast called 'When Did You Know?' and was Plymouth's first-ever EatWith.com host!

So what does my job entail? It's pretty varied and different every day to be honest and (most of the time) I love it. I am responsible for making sure that all of our staff and students feel they can bring their whole selves to campus and that they shouldn't have to hide any aspect of who they are. Sometimes this can mean making sure our staff and student policies support people in addressing inappropriate behaviour or ensuring our family leave policies reflect our diverse community. It can also be providing advice and guidance to our teaching staff in diversifying their curriculum or helping students to launch new societies (Plymouth's first ever JSoc launched last year!).

The fun part of the job often leads to me hosting University information

stands at Pride and Respect festivals across Devon and Cornwall each year or organising community events such as film screenings or the fabulous fashion show hosted by our local refugee community in 2019.

There are lots of occasions when work in this field can be tough such as when I am supporting staff and students who have been subject to abuse but it's worth it when I see our community walk around campus unafraid to be themselves.

Whilst my full-time job gives me oversight across the whole University, I am particularly passionate about my part-time role as an Associate Lecturer in Education Studies. In this role I deliver seminars to future education professionals on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in education as well as the damage of gender stereotyping and the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on British education. I ended up teaching on this degree programme after being a student on it myself before completing research in Israel and the Palestinian Territories on peace education initiatives. The power of education, regardless of the country and the students involved, should never be underestimated.

As a young gay boy growing up, school was hard. But the constant bullying left an imprint on my life; it made me want to ensure that nobody felt they couldn't be their authentic self wherever they may be. Whilst this led me to a job that helps staff and students on campus it also led me to my podcast, 'When Did You Know?'. Each week I interview an LGBT+ person about the moment they realised they were 'different' and what it was like growing up in a heterosexual world. Over the past year I've chatted to MP's, Great British Bake Off Stars, comedians and just some genuinely wonderful human-beings and it's been such a privilege to get to know them all. Most recently I interviewed the Jewish activist, Ben Freeman on how the LGBT+ Pride movement helped him to embrace Jewish Pride.

When I'm not doing the above (and before Covid-19) I was Plymouth's first host for Eatwith.com and had the opportunity to host visitors and locals for dining experiences in the home I share with my partner, Yordan. Cooking is how I relax and how I celebrate so it only felt natural to share this with people visiting our city. With a Bulgarian partner and my love of Israeli and Jewish cuisine our meals are always a rather eclectic mix of foods which (I hope) work together!

It's such a joy to be part of this community and I hope this little introduction has made me seem less

of a stranger to some of you. You can find my podcast, dining experiences, professional profile and lots more by visiting my LinkTree here: https://linktr.ee/Arielbchapman

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