Invisible in Oxford: Medieval Jewish History in Modern England

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Medieval Anglo-Jewish history has only very recently begun to be included in scholarly histories of England and is still relatively absent unless the history is specifically concerned with the Jews of England. Unfortunately, the relative invisibility of medieval Jewish history in British historical scholarship is mirrored in the semi-scholarly "public face" of British history as it is represented in historical and heritage materials, guidebooks, memorials, and other informational sources for travelers and history in England. While it is often the nature of heritage groups to sanitize and homogenize the past, the degree to which this is done with regard to the medieval Anglo-Jewish past requires response and action, particularly in the context of an alarming world-wide rise in antisemitism. If knowledge is an essential context for understanding and tolerance, more visible and accurate accounts of medieval Jewish history are a necessary first step towards effecting social change.

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

Milan Kundera

In an essay published in 1992, Colin Richmond, sitting in the famed Botanical Gardens of Oxford, details the many ways in which Jews and Jewish history are almost entirely absent from the histories of England.¹ Unless the scholarship is explicitly concerned with "the Jews of London," "the Jews of Medieval

England," or a similar title that indicates the narrow and focused range of study, the word Jew is rarely found in scholarly indexes or texts. Richmond’s concern with the absence of Jewish history in English history was provoked by his realization that he knew that the lovely gardens in which he sat had once been the medieval Jewish cemetery, not from the book Medieval Oxford written by a renowned historian of Oxford, but from Cecil Roth’s The Jews of Medieval Oxford. And although the academic landscape has improved in the decade since Richmond’s essay appeared, a significant invisibility continues to mark medieval Jewish history in the larger context of English history. Not surprisingly, this relative invisibility of Jewish history in British historical scholarship is mirrored in the non-scholarly “public face” of British history as it is represented in historical and heritage sites and materials, guidebooks and other informational sources for travelers and tourists, and in the very memorials themselves that both mark and elide, by codification or a supreme lack of contextualization, the reality of Jewish heritage and history in England. Manufactured for the consumption and edification of foreign tourists and British residents alike, the “public face” of Anglo-Jewish history is a complicated and vexed social production that, in its own fashion, tells us “a great deal about Englishness” and, perhaps, Jewishness—precisely what Richmond claims for the absence of Jewish history in English historical scholarship.

A decade after Richmond sat in Oxford’s Botanical Gardens, I stood at the entrance to Oxford’s Botanical Gardens, unaware of Richmond’s essay but similarly puzzled by the placement and wording of the plaque that tersely marks the historicity of the Gardens. Resident in Oxford, or more specifically at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies some miles away in Yarnton, I learned that the Botanical Gardens had been the Jewish cemetery,
not from any of the many guidebooks I had consulted, nor from the many over-views of historical Oxford I had thumbed through, but from the leader of the Centre. Indeed, in a later survey of the available guidebooks, and there are dozens of them, I found only one that mentioned, almost parenthetically, that the Gardens were on the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery. At the time, though, I was standing in puzzlement because I couldn't find the plaque that I had been told commemorates that historical fact. (Since that time, I've had seven students study abroad in Oxford, and out of the seven, only one was able to find, with some guidance from me, the elusive plaque.) I approached the kiosk of the Gardens where two Botanical guides stand ready to welcome visitors and answer questions and inquired about the plaque. One of the guides responded helpfully, "oh, yes, it's right around the corner there, if you go back outside the entrance, to the other side of the arch, down that small alley—it's even got the original Arabic and everything!"—indeed. I had come to Oxford to study the medieval "other" and discovered that the "other" remained "other" in most every particular. The plaque itself is remarkable not only for its occluded position, but for what it does and, importantly, doesn't say. Beneath three lines of "Arabic"—that is, Hebrew—are the words: This Stone Marks the Site of the Jewish Cemetery Until 1290. That's it. Nothing about what happened in 1290, the first wholesale expulsion of Jews from a country, nothing about the fate of the Oxford Jewish community or even of the bodies themselves that once populated the now hallowed grounds of the Botanical Gardens. After some moments in front of the plaque, I returned to the kiosk and asked the helpful guides if any excavations had ever been undertaken. The response was a horrified "oh, but the plants!"—and with that exclamation I embarked upon a new course of study, related to my work with medieval representations of Jews, but modern in focus and less concerned with scholarship than with public representations of the Anglo-Jewish medieval past. English self-fashioning depends as much upon its public presentation of its medieval past as it does upon its scholarly. Indeed, the "public face" is arguably far more influential, being widely disseminated for specialist and non-specialist, resident and visitor, alike. I call this "Invisible in Oxford" because for all intents and purposes medieval Anglo-Jewish history is invisible in Oxford—but a very visible invisibility is not the only mark of medieval Anglo-Jewish presence. A study of the "public face," the social production of Jewish history in some of the more obvious sites—not only Oxford, but York, Norwich, and Lincoln—all of which are historically significant locations for the medieval Anglo-Jewish past, yields an often disturbing sanitization or simplification of Jewish heritage and history. Yet in ways remarkably similar to my work with medieval narratives, where I argue against long-held assumptions of a monolithic and univocal
anti-Judaism. I also find the “public face” to be varied, nuanced, and complex, ranging as it does from invisibility to spectacle, from absence to cynical public exploitation.4

During my first residency in Oxford in 2003, I was able, with some trouble, to take a walk of Jewish historical sites guided by a member of the Oxford Jewish Congregation. There is a “Map of Oxford Jewry, Medieval and Modern” conveniently provided in David Lewis’s book The Jews of Oxford, written to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the modern Oxford Jewish Congregation and published by that organization.5 Yet the self-contained nature of this dissemination of Oxford’s medieval Jewish history is emblematic of one of the ways in which history and memory are limited to those intimately concerned with it. When a community at large or the majority culture is uninterested in the specifics of minority history, it becomes incumbent upon the minority culture to represent itself. Unfortunately, the very act of self-representation tends to perpetuate the marginal status of minority history. And while a more balanced historical record would include visible and accurate accounts of all communities, this balanced ideal is rarely achieved, and this seems particularly so with the historical Jewish communities in England. The seeming reluctance of the modern Anglo-Jewish community to participate in a portrayal of its own vexed medieval past only adds to the limitations and sublimations we find.6 Thus in many ways the knowledge of the medieval Oxford Jewish community is confined to (and in some ways constricted by) the modern Jewish community. This is nowhere more evident than in interactions with the Museum of Oxford on St. Aldgate’s street.

The Museum of Oxford is mostly concerned with the town’s history, not the University’s, and on the stone wall that marks the border between street and museum, there is an inscription, dated 1931, that reads:

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6See Note 3 above.
(Tom Tower is the famed tower of Christ's Church.) The inscription thus announces the historicity of the immediate area. Indeed, it is thought that some of the existing Museum structures occupy the sites of medieval Jewish dwellings. Around the corner from the entrance to the Museum of Oxford, down a small lane called Blue Boar Street, there is another plaque on the wall of the museum building itself, dated 1995, that replaced one defaced with antisemitic graffiti. This plaque reads: "This extension to the Townhall stands on land at the centre of the Anglo-Saxon town, later the heart of the Medieval Jewish quarter." Thus the Museum of Oxford is framed on two sides with references to its standing in what was the medieval Jewish section of town.

Nonetheless, if you enter the Museum, which is divided into rooms, each representing a particular period or community in the city of Oxford's history, and ask to be directed to the section that details the history of Jews in Oxford, the docent will tell you that there isn't one—indeed, all three docents I spoke with expressed some surprise that I would ask, oblivious, I suppose, to the plaque which fronts their building. And in the copious literature provided by the Museum, not one mentions, even in passing, the medieval or early modern Anglo-Jewish community. Yet, as the plaques and cemetery indicate, there was a well-established Jewish community in medieval Oxford that played a visible role in the economy and development of the city. The first Jews settled in Oxford in 1075, and the earliest surviving record of Jews in Oxford is a reference to an incident in 1141 in which King Stephen burned the Oxford house of Aaron Isaac and "threatened to burn down the rest of the Jewry, if immediate funds (to support his ongoing civil war against his cousin Matilda) were not forthcoming." Clearly, if threats could be made to burn "the Jewry," the Jewish community was both fairly extensive and established. Indeed, in her Cambridge thesis, Pam Manix "maps" the Jews of medieval Oxford and

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details the considerable dwellings and other buildings owned by the Jews in key mercantile locations in the city. As wards of the King, however, the properties (and the lives) of the Oxford Jews were liable to seizure, which is precisely what happened during the decline of the Jewish community between 1269 and the Expulsion in 1290. Not only are there records of the severe tallages levied against the Jews and Jewish properties, and prohibitions against buying and selling, but the last remaining means by which the Jewish community generated income was outlawed in 1275. From 1275 onwards deed references to Jews “resonate monotonously like a gallows drum,” of confiscated property and executed Jews, usually by hanging. But even earlier there are notable records concerning the medieval Jewish community: in 1210 much of their property was confiscated by King John; in 1222 a University deacon, Robert of Reading, converted to Judaism and married a Jewess. He was burnt alive. Also in 1222 the Council of Oxford ordered the Jews to wear a yellow star on all clothing (one of the first recorded examples of compliance with the edicts of Lateran Four in 1215); in 1244 Jewish homes were attacked and looted by Oxford students. This was hardly an insignificant period or community in the history of Oxford.

Indeed, while it flourished, the medieval Oxford Jewish community owned shops, dwellings, and butcheries; they lived amongst the Christian community, had at least one Synagogue (which was converted into a tavern after the Expulsion and is now part of Christ Church, although at least one porter at the College denies that any portion of the Synagogue is a part of the college), participated in the economic and cultural life of Oxford, and were granted the first Jewish cemetery outside London’s city limits (you can still walk the unmarked Deadman’s Walk that led from the Jewry to the cemetery). After the Expulsion, but even before the Re-Admission under Cromwell, the “first reappearance of Jews in Oxford is connected with the revival of Hebrew studies in England,” as scholars and theologians searched for Jews to teach Hebrew and “assist in the purchase and cataloguing of Hebrew books.”

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9“Jewish Communities prior to 1290 in South East England,” Jewish Communities and Records-UK, www.jewishgen.org/JCR-UK/pre-1290/1290communities/se1290.htm. It is relevant to note that a plaque dedicated to Robert of Reading, erected in 1931 when the other plaques concerned with Oxford’s medieval Jewish Community were installed, is now entirely inaccessible behind wire fencing that protects the renovations of the adjacent church.
1500s “convert” Jews were assisting Sir Thomas Bodley in his collecting and cataloguing of Hebraica (Oxford’s famous Bodleian Library is now considered to have one of the most extensive holdings of Hebrew manuscripts and books in the world, which is, in itself, an interesting paradox in the contrast between famed and collected historical Jewish texts and an invisible historical Jewish community); and by the mid-1600s professing Jews were teaching Hebrew and translating texts in various colleges of Oxford. Given the relative wealth of records and accounts of medieval and early modern Jewish community, we may wonder why, with the exception of plaques that mark without context or historical detail what “was,” there is no public account of medieval Oxford Jewish life in the displays and literature of modern Oxford. Even the Museum of Oxford has no record of its own Jewish History exhibition held in 1992 (a fleeting moment of recognition for the Jewish community that is also unrecorded in the local public library). Enshrined and elided in the pastness of plaques, the medieval Jewish community is otherwise invisible in the city of Oxford.

Expanding upon my Oxford research, I set out to explore the “public face” of medieval Anglo-Jewish history in three other communities. York, Lincoln, and Norwich are key sites in medieval Anglo-Jewish history: York is the site of a massacre of the Jews and the Kiddush ha-Shem of more than a hundred York Jews; Lincoln and Norwich are the sites of ritual murder accusations against the Jewish communities—indeed, Norwich is the site of the first ritual murder accusation in Europe in the medieval period. In their socially produced “public face” of medieval Jewish history, York’s engagement with its Jewish past is the most visible, yet it tends towards a particularly odd kind of historical marketing; Lincoln is clearly bifurcated between celebrating medieval Jewish presence demonstrated in its marking (and marketing) of two Norman buildings, on the one hand, and sanitizing its long history of enshrining ritual murder myths in its memorializing of the young martyr, St. Hugh, on the other; and Norwich is in what can only be called historical denial concerning its medieval Jewish history, with the exception of the Cathedral community, whose response is, at best, vexed and ambivalent.

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12 I include here some portions of Cathedral research from this summer’s research from which I have recently returned. The second phase of this research will include other locations including Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Canterbury, and London.
York had a well-established Jewish community by early in the 12th century, and by mid-century the York community "grew in wealth and numbers and became one of considerable importance," particularly to the crown. Signs identifying Jewbury Road remain to this day, just outside the ancient walls of the city, and mark the boundaries of the medieval Jewish cemetery that was rediscovered in the 1970s when the area was excavated for the construction of a parking garage. The construction continued, notwithstanding the medieval burial ground, but, as a plaque on the parking structure notes, some of the remains were re-interred in the presence of the Chief Rabbi and representatives of the Jewish community in 1984. Unfortunately, the plaque, while clearly visible, is placed where cars, not pedestrians, for the most part, pass. Notwithstanding the problems of plaque placement and the parking structure as a whole being built on the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery, York honors, indeed, it markets, its medieval Jewish history in its retention of street signs testifying to Jewish presence and properties: Jewbury, Jubbergate with its medieval house that may have been a Jewish dwelling, and Finkle and Coney Streets, the latter perhaps being the site of Benedict the Jew's house. (An interesting side note is how Jews are referred to—taking a page from medieval history, they are Benedict the Jew, Isaac the Jew, etc.—a kind of verbal and written marking that establishes "difference" even as it acknowledges presence.) And there is a walking map of York's medieval Jewry available.

York's modern recognition of medieval Jewish presence may be explained, in part, by the place York has in Anglo-Jewish history—it is the site of an infamous massacre of the Jews at Clifford Tower in 1189, so infamous that even Christian chroniclers at the time wrote about it with repulsion. Clifford Tower looms large in the imagination, and its usefulness as spectacle and tourist attraction is fully exploited. Many of the public materials concerning York in general, and Clifford's Tower in particular, mention the massacre—although they do so in a variety of forms and with a variety of emphases that

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14 "Jewish Communities prior to 1290 in Northern England," p. 2.
range from the York City Centre Map that notes that it burnt down when the
city's "Jewish population took refuge from persecution inside," to an English
Heritage handout that proclaims "Bloody massacre," "Royal stronghold," and
"Extensive views" on its cover; the public materials in general vary widely from
those that allude briefly to the massacre to those that ignore the massacre in
favor of the "majestic views" afforded from the tower.

At the Tower itself, the Heritage Guides are very informed about the de-
tails of the massacre, and yet one of their placards announces "Bloody Massa-
cre" in a listing that includes "Gift Shop"—a fine adjudication between exploi-
tation and commerce. Yet the English Heritage booklet for sale in the gift shop
contains two pages of detailed history concerning the York Jewish commu-
nity and the massacre, including a photograph of the plaque, placed in 1978,
that memorializes the massacred Jews. And while there is a large measure of
commercialism and spectacle in the "public face" of medieval Jewish history
in York, the citizens of York, both Jewish and non-Jewish, resisted the kind
of commercialism we in the States are accustomed to when, citing historical
concerns, and specifically the memory of the massacre of the York Jews, they
blocked an aggressive attempt to have the area surrounding the Tower devel-
oped into an extensive shopping mall. Today, Clifford's Tower is a reminder of
religious and racial intolerance and is used as an educative force where yearly
Holocaust Memorials take place, in addition to yearly commemorations of the
Anniversary of the massacre.16

The "public face" of medieval Jewish history in Lincoln is diverse and dis-
turbing. Lincoln is the site of one of the numerous Ritual Murder (blood libel)
accusations in medieval England, "little" Hugh supposedly slain by Lincoln
Jews in 1255, and Lincoln Cathedral contained a shrine to "little" Hugh for
centuries that was desecrated in the Reformation, later replaced by a framed
sketch of the shrine, which in turn was removed in the 1950s and replaced by
a small framed piece of paper which alludes to the medieval shrine and ritual
murder accusations and concludes with a prayer for forgiveness that I discuss
below. Lincoln was also the home of Aaron the Jew, as he is called in records,
one of the wealthiest Jews in England, a fact that is mentioned in most of the
public materials that discuss Jewish community—one even notes the amount
of debts owed him at his death.17 Thus medieval Lincoln Jewry is defined by

16www.yorkcastle.com/pages/news.html, pp. 1–2; www.yorkcastle.com/pages/jew-
ish_history.html, p. 1.
17Chris Olney, Lincoln, An Illustrated Walk Down its Famous Hill (Lincoln, UK:
two damaging stereotypes: riches and ritual murder, even if the latter is, in the words of one pamphlet, "now discredited." If many of the public historical materials do not mention Lincoln's medieval Jewish community, those that do, do so in the context of two famous and very visible buildings on Steep Hill (the street that leads to Lincoln Cathedral). The two buildings, dating from the late 1100s, are known as "Jews House" and "Jews Court"—Jewish properties before the expulsion, one a dwelling and the other thought to have been the synagogue. The buildings are admittedly amazing for their Norman architecture, and the effect of coming upon them while climbing the appropriately named Steep Hill is powerful—visible and marked proof of Jewish presence in medieval Lincoln. And yet, the very marking of the buildings, "Jews House," "Jews Court," emphasizes "difference" and "absence" even as it testifies to "past" presence. The marking is part celebratory, part historical, but it resonates uncomfortably with the visible badges that medieval Jews were forced to wear on their clothing. A further complication is provided by "Jews Court" having been marketed in the early 20th century as the site of the crucifixion of Little Hugh, with his body disposed of in a well at "Jews Court" that an enterprising Lincoln citizen dug and sold tickets to view. The fraud was exposed in 1928, but people continued to visit the site for decades; indeed, visitors still ask to see the "well."

Lincoln Cathedral poses another sort of public historical information problem altogether—if the marking of the Steep Hill buildings is vexed, the Cathedral deals with its history as the site of the shrine to the crucified Little Hugh by not dealing with it at all, at least not in any of the publications, maps, and pamphlets available. Little Hugh's status as a Christian martyr ensured that his shrine was a popular pilgrimage destination for centuries, yet Lincoln Cathedral's saint is another Hugh, a 12th century bishop who was, according to one Cathedral publication, "famous for his care of the poor and defence of the Jews"—a nicely orchestrated (yet historically accurate) counterweight to the ritual murder accusation of the "little" Hugh. But in none of the literature, some of which is astonishingly detailed in its description of statuary, choirs,

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18 Olney, Lincoln, An Illustrated Walk, p. 23.
21 "Welcome to Lincoln Cathedral," pamphlet from Lincolnshire County Council.
vaults, stained glass, and carvings, is there any mention of the centuries-old shrine to “little” martyred St. Hugh. The shrine itself was destroyed in the Civil War (although it was still intact in 1641 when the antiquarian Sir William Dugdale commissioned a tracing of it) and was later replaced by a 19th-century framed copy of Dugdale’s tracing. The tracing was originally accompanied by a short prayer, “Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers,” which in turn was replaced by “Lord, forgive what we have been, amend what we are, and direct what we shall be.” This prayer is presented with explanatory text on a small, insubstantially framed piece of ordinary paper, to the right of the original shrine, and its appearance is both incomprehensively tacky in contrast to the glories of the Cathedral’s grand interior and entirely out of place, looking as if it should say, “this exhibition closed for renovation.” Indeed, the site looks as if it is under renovation, the base of the shrine with its marked and scarred marble as visible, in some ways, as its presence must have been. In addition to the prayer, the small piece of paper contains an illustration of the shrine that was there and a disclaimer concerning “trumped up stories of ritual murders of Christian boys by Jewish communities,” written by a Dean of Lincoln in 1959. The text notes that ritual murder accusations were “common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages” and that these “fictions cost many innocent Jews their lives.” The marker continues, Lincoln “had its own legend; and the alleged victim was buried in the Cathedral in 1255.” Yet the gestures of this inadequate and seemingly temporary framed piece of paper are vexed: on the one hand, ritual murder stories are “fictions” and cost Jewish lives; on the other hand, the particular Jewish lives lost to the Lincoln ritual murder charge are never mentioned. And it is both the generality of the notice and the sentence preceding the concluding prayer that “such stories do not redound to the credit of Christendom,” that complicates what should be, but is not, a more unambiguous representation of medieval Anglo-Jewish history. The medieval presence of the shrine, the ritual murder accusation itself, seems, finally, to be more about Christian community than it is about Jewish. And while it is certainly accurate to note that such stories and commemorations of little boys “martyred” by Jews are testimony to ignorance and antisemitism (and wording more emphatic than “does not redound to the credit of Christendom” would be more appropriate), what transpired from this particular accusation is missing. This scar on the otherwise elegant interior of Lincoln Cathedral is a fit metaphor for the ritual murder accusation itself. And I should note that it is almost invariably within the context

22Dr. Nicholas Bennett, Vice Chancellor and Librarian, Lincoln Cathedral.
of the ritual murder accusation that Lincoln Jews are mentioned at all in the literature of Lincoln, a disturbingly limited discourse made emphatic with legendary overtones and a context that suggests these tales were, as the booklet "Historic Lincoln" claims (echoing the Cathedral marker) "common to many cities throughout Europe." More significant still, none of the public materials, including this framed piece of paper, mention the outcome of the ritual murder charge: ninety Jews were arrested, tortured, and held in the Tower of London, charged with involvement in the ritual murder, and nineteen were hanged in the first judicial execution for ritual murder.\textsuperscript{23}

The consequences of deleting this part of the story are a serious and disturbing attenuation of history, a partial "record" that encourages ignorance, as has been recently demonstrated in something as consequential as Jilly Cooper's defense of her unthinking reference to "Little St. Hugh" while promoting her book \textit{Wicked} at the Lincoln Festival. Looking to make connections between the town and literary "giants," Cooper noted the Chaucerian connection to the story of "Little St. Hugh" and later defended her \textit{faux pas} by writing in response to a piece in the \textit{Jewish Chronicle} that "I'm afraid I had no idea about the 18 Jews that were murdered as a result of this. Nor was I aware of any offence being caused because no one in the audience pointed it out to me."\textsuperscript{24} That a British-born author could both make the connection with Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale" and remain ignorant of the full story is distressing testimony to the literal lacunae of full and accurate public representations of medieval Jewish history. The Cathedral community attempts to contextualize the remnants of the shrine of little St. Hugh, but its well intentioned efforts fail through their refusal to more accurately represent either the part the Christian community of Lincoln played in the ritual murder accusation and the establishment of


\textsuperscript{24}Jilly Cooper, "Jilly Cooper explains," \textit{Jewish Chronicle}, June 23, 2006, p. 29. In the final stanza of Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale," the Prioress alludes to "yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also / With cursed Jewes" (684–85), as a way to "historicize" her own version of a ritual murder narrative in which a young Christian boy is supposedly murdered by the Jewish community. This tale of Chaucer's poses an enormous problem for medievalists and Chaucerians who have conducted a decades-long debate over whether or not Chaucer was antisemitic. That Cooper would allude to Chaucer's invocation of Lincoln in the tale, and not be aware of its textual or historical contexts is almost unfathomable, and very disturbing.
the shrine, or the consequences attendant upon the accusation for the Jewish community in medieval Lincoln. The Cathedral community's commitment to interfaith dialogue is exemplified in its invitation to Dr. Edward Kessler, Director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge, to deliver the annual Grosseteste Lecture in 2005 to mark the 750th anniversary of the death of "Little St. Hugh." Dr. Kessler's talk was an eloquent and profoundly informed discussion of ritual murder, Christian antisemitism, and the need for interfaith dialogue. Yet, what remains for public consumption and contemplation are Jews, ritual murder, and "Little St. Hugh." The discomfiting bifurcated gestures of Lincoln's public face vis-à-vis its medieval Jewish community clearly needs more research, and we need a more complete understanding of the Cathedral community's attempts to deal with the legacy of "Little" St. Hugh. Nonetheless, the "public face" of medieval Jewish history in Lincoln is, in part, highly visible, but the visibility itself is a complicated social production that invites scrutiny, as does the city's acknowledgment of its ritual murder accusation that tends to reinscribe the myth of Jewish ritual murder without detailing the historically "real" outcome for the Jewish community.

Finally, if Lincoln's representations are deeply problematic and ambivalent, those in the town of Norwich are virtually and literally invisible. In a country of infamous firsts concerning Jewish persecution—the first known compliance (in Oxford) with Lateran Four's edict that Jews wear distinguishing badges or patches on their clothing; the first wholesale expulsion of the Jews from a country—Norwich holds the dubious distinction of being the site of the first ritual murder accusation in medieval Europe. Young William of Norwich is the Christian boy supposedly crucified by Norwich Jews in March 1144, and this first ritual murder accusation is historicized in Thomas of Monmouth's Vita et Passio—life and passion of William of Norwich.


I undertook another research trip to Lincoln in the summer of 2007, where I had been invited to give a lecture at Lincoln Cathedral concerning the Cathedral's representation of the medieval Anglo-Jewish community, history, and the ritual murder accusation. I intend to continue to pursue a deeper understanding of the basis for the Cathedral community's particular forms of representation and elision, even as I focus on the nascent Lincoln Jewish community (who hold services in Jews' Court every other Saturday) and the lack of dialogue between Jewish and Cathedral communities regarding the representation of the shrine to little St. Hugh.

Thomas of Monmouth, The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth, edited by A. Jessop and M. R. James (Cambridge, 1896). For a comprehen-
account was written almost five years after the supposed crucifixion, based upon heresy and "unlimited credulity," yet the circumstances of its "creation" did not impede the establishment of a popular cult of William, whose ostensible martyrdom leads to visions and miracles in Norwich. The myth is varied in its tellings and retellings, and the subsequent visions and miracles assure the Cathedral's status as a pilgrimage destination for centuries. In other words, the tale of young William, related orally and inscribed in a passion narrative, brings what we could call "pious notoriety" to the city of Norwich and plays a role in its religious life and development. Importantly, the possession of a pilgrimage shrine, especially one with "relics" or particularly dedicated to a Christian boy "martyred" by Jews, provided economic resources for church and Cathedral, and there was a fair amount of competition for the pilgrimage "trade." On the basis of the mythic narrative several Norwich Jews, including one of the leaders of the community, were murdered.

Notwithstanding the popularity and historical significance of this medieval atrocity, Norwich's enormous, multi-million dollar, multi-media and interactive Museum "Origins," which details 2000 years of Norwich history and is located in the center of the city in the "Forum," along with the Millennium Library and the Tourist Information and Visitor Centre, is absolutely silent on the subject of William, ritual murder, and the medieval Jewish community. Comprehensive and thorough in its coverage of Roman artifacts, Saxons, Angles and Jutes, Danes, Normans, Dutch, and even Americans, "Origins" is mum about its homegrown cult of William and the charges that led to his being memorialized as a Christian martyr. In response to my inquiry about young William, one of the assistants at "Origins" said, "oh, you mean the little boy who was crucified in the woods by the Jews—no, I don't think we have anything here about that"—an astounding and unthinking testimony to centuries of bigotry and credulity; equally disturbing was my interaction with one of the Research and Reference Librarians in the Millennium Library who was...

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30 www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/pre-1290/1290communities/east1290.htm, p. 4.

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unable to tell me anything about the Cathedral shrine to William (although he knew the story of the "martyred" boy), and who explained the thundering silence in "Origins" by saying that consultants were mostly responsible for the contents. In a comprehensive museum display intended to represent 2000 years of Norwich history both to residents and visitors, medieval Jewish history is entirely elided in a stunning act of historical erasure.

If the central public displays in Norwich are silent concerning Jewish history, ritual murder, and antisemitism, the Cathedral community is not. Indeed, Norwich Cathedral continues to grapple with the problem of its purported "saint," the shrine, and the ritual murder story, but the results are, in their own way, as disturbing as invisibility or silence. Young William's "martyrdom" at the hands of the Jews was contested even in its origins; nonetheless, his body is first buried outside the Cathedral, then later moved into the Cathedral, first to the Chapter House, then into a space on the south side of the high altar, then into the northeast chapel, what is now called the Jesus Chapel. The altar of St. William was situated on the north side of the pulpitum and his Chapel was near by (the piscina of the altar is still in place). Although the shrine was destroyed at the Reformation, "until recently there was on view in the cathedral a delicately carved wooden hand, silvered on the back, possibly part of the shrine of St. William." In an attempt to correct the misrepresentations of the past, the Chapel of St. William was renamed the Chapel of the Holy Innocents and re-dedicated on the Feast of Epiphany in 1997. The 1996 guide celebrating 900 years of Norwich Cathedral and Diocese claims that the story of St. William "probably owes more to legend than to fact," and the following year's renaming and rededication of the Chapel seems to bear this out (notwithstanding the qualified "probably"). And yet, the complex and ambivalent gestures in the Chapel itself confound the visitor. If, on the one hand, St. William is no longer a "martyr," then why rename the Chapel after the Holy Innocents, martyrs all, slain by Herod? More disturbing still is the text on the altar of the Chapel that notes the Chapel is "reserved for quiet prayer and for

remembering the suffering of all innocent victims, particularly the young. It is also a place of prayer for reconciliation between people of different faiths, remembering especially all victims of Christian-Jewish persecution.” In a vexed and puzzling gesture of inclusion, all victims of “Christian-Jewish persecution” are to be remembered, but doesn’t this resurrect William as boy-martyr and victim of persecution? Or does the text mean to refer to the Jews who were murdered on the basis of the accusation? It doesn’t say. Indeed, the text neglects to mention the local and specific consequences for the Norwich Jewish community, noting instead that “various groups . . . tried to blame the Jews for the murder; sadly, such anti-semitism was fairly common in mediaeval England.” Then in a rhetorical move that is almost incomprehensible in its offensiveness, the prayer text chooses global over local, and transfers Norwich’s violence against the Jews to the consummate (and distanced) reality of the Holocaust. The text briefly outlines the William story and then invokes the problem of continued religious intolerance and the need for “understanding between faiths.” Again there is some confusion over who is victim or martyr, whose religious intolerance is being invoked. But it is the second side of the text that is most disturbing: centered on the page is “A prayer found written on a piece of wrapping paper in Ravensbruck, the largest of the concentration camps for women in Nazi Germany.” The theme of the prayer is remembrance and forgiveness, and with this textual “memento” of the Holocaust the visitor is thoroughly confused—is William being conflated with victims of the Holocaust? Although we can, perhaps, intuit what the Cathedral attempts in this Chapel, the gestures are so ambivalent and vexed, the references and parallels so entirely confused (and offensive), that we are left, finally, with William as innocent victim (of the Jews) as a parallel to or figure of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. I understand the difficulties inherent in representing and “correcting” the past, but for an accurate account of medieval Anglo-Jewish history, clarity of vision and purpose should guide our individual and collective decisions. The impropriety of using a poem from the Holocaust to re-present the renamed space that was originally a shrine for a boy “martyr” seems to have escaped the Norwich Cathedral community, whose attempts at historical retraction are an unthinking testimony to a disturbing neutralizing and sanitizing of the historical record demonstrated repeatedly in English representations of its medieval Jewish past.

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35See printed text on altar of the Chapel of the Innocents, Norwich Cathedral.

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What are we to make of the varied "public face" of medieval Anglo-Jewry in modern England? I cannot claim a centuries-old antisemitism peculiar to England alone, although as Todd Endelman notes, if overt and violent antisemitism is relatively rare after the early modern period, there is a particularly English response to Jewishness expressed in "humorous asides and off-hand comments," "light-hearted sneers," and a "subtle and diffuse" pressure to become more "English." Nor is England alone in its vexed marketing of its Jewish history. As Ruth Ellen Gruber notes in her recent book, Virtually Jewish, in countries across Europe where Jews, if they are present at all, make up a tiny fraction of the population, Jewish culture and history is being recreated, enacted, and marketed. Not all of these virtually Jewish recreations are motivated by commercial exploitation, but there is a "troubling ambivalence" in the way history and memory are resurrected in the public market place to satisfy local and political agendas. In England, the "public face" of medieval Anglo-Jewry, that complicated social production that varies from invisibility to what Barrie Dobson calls "the simplified language of English Heritage and modern mass tourism," is troubling in what it says and even more troubling in what it doesn't say. The elision of historical memory, the sanitizing of a disturbing historical record, is particularly troubling in the light of a BBC poll taken in 2004 which found that forty-five percent of the four thousand English respondents, and sixty percent of women and young people, did not know what Auschwitz was. Troubling, also, in the wake of recent attempts by trade unions in British universities to impose a boycott on Israeli universities and professors. And most troubling in the context of the very recent report released by a cross-party group of British Members of Parliament that comprehensively detailed the alarming rise in antisemitism and antisemitic attacks in Britain.

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41 British Broadcasting Corporation News/UK, http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk, September 7, 2006. The Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Semitism was "set up in 2005 to investigate the nature and extent of contemporary anti-Semitism" and among its findings was that "a
At a time when we are witnessing a world-wide resurgence of antisemitism, when a head of state openly denies the historicity of the Holocaust, even as his country hosts a conference whose central purpose is to support Holocaust denial, a time when the spurious “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” is a bestselling text, and, most disturbing, ritual murder accusations against Jews are revived and widely disseminated in a popular 30-part television mini-series, it is our responsibility and a moral imperative to insist that medieval Jewish history be accurately represented both in scholarship and in the “public face,” the Heritage and historical markers and materials of Britain and elsewhere. If, as has been recently argued, the virulent antisemitism we find throughout the Arab and Islamic world, where overt hatred of Jews is a commonplace of mainstream thinking and media, originates in part from European models of antisemitic stereotypes and prejudice, it is essential that history and memory be resurrected and represented in the public market place in ways that acknowledge the complexities of the medieval Jewish past and the ways in which misrepresentations, either through invisibility, spectacle, or truncated and sanitized historical “accounts,” encourage and reify modern prejudices. We cannot adequately fight antisemitism or educate the public without an accurate account of the historical persecution of the Jewish community and the role the Jewish community played in the larger context of British history. The combination of complacency and ignorance contributed to “steadily rising anti-Semitic attacks which reached a peak of more than 530 incidents ... in 2004,” and yet there is not “a requirement for all police forces to record anti-Semitic incidents” and “fewer than one in ten incidents resulted in prosecution.”

Amongst the many articles, editorials, and essays written on this subject, the most comprehensive account is the film “Anti-Semitism in the 21st Century: The Resurgence,” written, produced, and directed by Andrew Goldberg in association with Oregon Public Broadcasting (Two Cats Productions, 2006), which premiered in January 2007. The film’s research and detailing of contemporary antisemitism includes the alarming fact that “worldwide, since the year 2000, major violent acts against Jews and Jewish institutions have nearly doubled since 1990s levels.”

I refer to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and the Holocaust Conference in Tehran, Iran, in December 2006, an event that attracted participants from 58 countries. For the revival of interest in and the popularity of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” see Marc Levin’s film, The Protocols of Zion (ThrinkFilm and Blowback Productions, 2004). For detailed accounts of contemporary ritual murder accusations see the above mentioned films, Anti-Semitism in the 21st Century and Protocols of Zion.


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necessary contexts of history and memory are the essential means by which national, religious, and individual identities are fashioned, and the lack of a visible and detailed account of medieval Jewish history in England encourages mythological misrepresentations that, in turn, invite misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and calculated stereotyping. And the consequences of misrepresentation are a pressing historical and cultural issue in England itself, even as they resonate far beyond the boundaries of that country. Further research and a thorough analysis needs to be brought to bear on the “public face” of medieval Jewish history in modern England, which, in conjunction with an understanding of Jewish community response, may allow us to move forward into a future historical representation that makes visible that which is virtually, and dangerously, invisible or partial in modern England. Until that occurs, we are left to wonder at the implications of invisible in Oxford and marked in Yorkshire, with the understanding that the modern response is a reflection and continuation of medieval English response to its Jewish population—varied, ambivalent, and disturbing in many of its manifestations.

Afterword

I returned to England in Summer 2007 to give an invited lecture at Lincoln Cathedral and to continue my research, and was able to see (and participate in) the first fruits of this project. In Oxford I met with Jesmond Blumenfeld (former president of the Oxford Jewish Community) and other members of the Oxford Jewish Community with whom Blumenfeld had shared my initial Oxford research, and who had, under the direction of Blumenfeld, created the nascent Oxford Heritage Committee whose purpose is to make “visible” the “invisible” medieval Anglo-Jewish past. The Committee was at that time in the process of discussions with Oxford museums and the Botanical Gardens to revise their representation of medieval Jewry, and had organized a “Memory Day” for the town of Oxford to bring the medieval Anglo-Jewish past into the present. In Lincoln, I presented my research in a lecture at Lincoln Cathedral, with a particular focus on Lincoln’s medieval Anglo-Jewish history, the ritual murder accusation, and the modern Cathedral response. The talk was “challenging” for many in the audience, composed of members of the Cathedral, Christian, and Jewish Communities, but it also resulted in the leaders of the Jewish and the Cathedral Communities joining together to consider ways to “revise” the representation of the story of “Little St. Hugh,” including the remains of his shrine in the Cathedral, and to develop materials for the Cathedral to disseminate concerning ritual murder accusations and their consequences for the medieval Jewish communities. I have been invited to contribute suggestions for rewording the printed explanation that accompanies the remains.
of the shrine and for the Cathedral materials concerned with Lincoln's ritual murder narrative and the medieval Jewish Community. Accustomed as I am to the somewhat closed world of scholarship, the opportunity to participate in active social transformation has effected an equally dramatic transformation in my scholarly focus and purpose.

This article is part of a larger work-in-progress whose focus is research and analysis of the public sources of medieval Jewish history in modern England. Versions of this paper have been presented at the Western Jewish Studies Association Conference in Long Beach, March 2006, and at the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo, May 2006. I am deeply indebted to the many individuals who generously gave their time, knowledge, expertise, and thoughtful responses to this on-going project, and most especially I am grateful to Irv Resnick and the National Endowment for the Humanities whose 2003 Summer Institute at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, "Representations of the 'Other': Jews in Medieval Christendom," introduced me to issues concerning medieval Jewish history in modern England; Jesmond Blumenfeld of the Oxford Jewish Congregation and the nascent Oxford Heritage Committee; Robert Stacey of the University of Washington; Dr. Nicholas Bennett, Vice Chancellor and Librarian of Lincoln Cathedral, and his wife, Dr. Carole Bennett of Lincoln Cathedral; Dr. Edward Kessler, Director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge University; Mrs. Gudrun Warren, Norwich Cathedral Librarian; Richard Dale, Chairman of the Lincoln Jewish Community; Father Lawrence Frizzell, Academy for Jewish-Christian Studies, Seton Hall University; Colin Richmond, Tony Kushner, and Anthony Bale, whose work inspires and informs my own; and most particularly, Kenneth Stow, for his wisdom, advice, and scholarly generosity.