

# **Jewish Education in England, 1944–1988**

Between Integration and Separation



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# Preface

## Overview

Exploring the evolving profile of Jewish education in England provides important clues to Anglo-Jewry's changing sense of identity, and how it chose to project itself to the wider society. As historians of education have amply demonstrated, schools provide a window onto a society's self-understanding. In the case of minorities, attitudes to state education, and parental recourse to other educational options, reflect deeply held views on the preferred relationship with the broader society, the two polar positions being 'integration' and 'separation'. In our context, separation entails social and cultural walls between the Jewish community and the broader society, with interaction limited chiefly to economic activity; integration entails rejection of such walls, merging into the broader society, and maintaining only a nominal or tenuous connection to the Jewish community. Anglo-Jewry overwhelmingly eschews the polar positions, and falls on the continuum between them. Yet the history of Anglo-Jewish education reveals movement along the continuum, first toward the integration pole, then away from it. As we will see, the latter movement does not attest to rejection of integration, but rather reflects a new conception of the broader society, and what membership in that society entails. In multicultural England, many Anglo-Jewish parents are comfortable sending their children to Jewish schools, and do not fear that this stigmatizes them as insular, separatist, 'unEnglish'.

Research into the history of Anglo-Jewish education has until recently focused on the period at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when schools functioned primarily as agents for

anglicizing the new immigrants from Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Apart from some pioneering early studies,<sup>2</sup> only recently have the post-World War II decades begun to receive sustained attention. But little has been written about the entry of the Zionists into the field of day-school education, the notorious 'trust funds controversy', or the impact of the secondary school reorganization. There has been some research into Jewish day-school enrolment statistics.<sup>3</sup> Parental attitudes to Jewish education, however, were not surveyed until the 1960s, and even then, research was piecemeal. Articles and letters published in the Jewish press, and enrolment statistics, offered some clues as to parental thinking. Following the establishment of the Jewish Education Development Trust (JEDT) in 1969, internal studies into the provision of Jewish education were conducted;<sup>4</sup> the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity also began to receive scholarly attention.<sup>5</sup> Specific schools were investigated: there is a history of the Jews' Free School, a short article on Jewish pupils at the Hackney Downs Grammar School,<sup>6</sup> and a study of the founding of the independent modern-Orthodox Immanuel School, which opened in Bushey, Hertfordshire in 1990.<sup>7</sup> Prior to my doctoral

- 1 L. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870–1914* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960); E. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry 1880–1920* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), ch. 4.
- 2 See B. Steinberg, 'Anglo-Jewry and the 1944 Education Act', *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 31 (1989), 81–108 and 'Jewish Education in Great Britain during World War II', *Jewish Social Studies* 29 (1967), 27–60.
- 3 Jacob Braude began this work by compiling records from 1952 to 1977; these statistics were published bi-annually in the *Jewish Chronicle*.
- 4 *Let My People Know* (London: Office of the Chief Rabbi, 1971).
- 5 B. Kosmin and C. Levy, *Jewish Identity in an Anglo-Jewish Community: The Findings of the 1978 Redbridge Survey* (London: Board of Deputies, 1983), S. Miller, 'The Impact of Jewish Education on the Religious Behaviour and Attitudes of British Secondary School Pupils', in J. Aviad (ed.), *Studies in Education* 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 161.
- 6 G. Black, *A History of the Jews' Free School, London, since 1732* (London: Tysder, 1998); G. Black, 'The Jews of Hackney Downs School', in S. Massil (ed.), *The Jewish Yearbook 2001* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001), 53–60.
- 7 S. Caplan, 'Immanuel College: The Beginnings of an Educational Project', in W. Ackerman (ed.), *Studies in Education* 7 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 54–80.

research, however, the overall history of Jewish education in England, and what it reveals about Anglo-Jewish parental priorities with respect to their children's education, had not been studied. Hence the present book fills an important lacuna.

After briefly surveying the history of Jewish schools in Britain before World War II, our journey will begin with the 1944 Education Act, a.k.a. the Butler Act after R. A. Butler (1941–5), the minister popularly credited with its passage. The Education Act affected most aspects of schooling in England and Wales. The principles it set down regarding state funding of denominational schools, the daily act of worship, and religious education, remained unchanged for forty-four years, though the interpretations given to specific clauses of the Act, especially those pertaining to the religious education syllabus and the voluntary-aided sector, evolved considerably. In 1988 another Education Act was passed. Though making no major changes with respect to religious education or denominational schools, it was just as significant as the 1944 Act, in that it reduced the power of the LEA's. The Butler Education Act and its ramifications for Jewish education will be discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 1 also presents a panoramic picture of Anglo-Jewish society at mid-century, and in particular, its access to, and views on, education, both Jewish and secular.

Between 1944 and 1988, Jewish parental preferences vis-à-vis their children's education changed dramatically. In 1944, the vast majority of parents chose non-denominational maintained schools for their children's general education, and part-time Hebrew classes for their Jewish education. Yet by 1988, more children attended Jewish day schools than Hebrew classes, despite a drop in the Jewish population. How and why this transition occurred will be explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. A salient causative factor, I will argue, was the government's decision to wind down selective education, and replace grammar schools with comprehensive schools. This will be analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 2, we will examine the historical roots and operational consequences of the ideological differences between competing organizations involved in provision of day-school and part-time Jewish education, including the United Synagogue, the Zionist Federation and the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. A school's value system is reflected not

merely in its course of studies, but also in more oblique indicators, such as prerequisites for hiring staff, admissions policies, assemblies and summer programs. In Chapters 5 and 6, we will revisit the ideological landscape of Anglo-Jewish education in the wake of the day-school revolution.

Of course, schools cannot be discussed in isolation from the communal politics of Jewish education: the ideological disputes and operational interaction between the various organizations that funded, oversaw, or delivered Jewish educational services. This theme is a constant throughout the book, and will be interwoven into every chapter. To what degree were the various groups prepared to cooperate with each other? From 1944 to 1988, attempts were made to establish a community-wide coordinating council that would negotiate with the national and local authorities so as to reduce duplication of effort within the community; none succeeded. In uncovering the reasons for this failure, we will trace the sorry saga of the 'trust funds' controversy, which pitted the London Board of Jewish Religious Education (LBJRE) against Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld's Jewish Secondary Schools Movement (JSSM). Ultimately, the controversy was resolved, allowing for reconstruction of the Jews' Free School (JFS). Another dispute that sheds light on the balance of power within the Jewish community during the 1950s revolved around the entry of the Zionists into the day-school arena. How did the United Synagogue and the Schonfeld community respond to the establishment of Zionist day schools? Did the Zionist Federation Education Trust (ZFET) attempt to adopt a secular and nationalist curriculum along the lines of that taught in Zionist-run schools in Israel? The role played by Chief Rabbis Brodie and Jakobovits, both in regard to specific controversies, and in regard to Jewish education generally, will also be explored. Were they neutral mediators, or did they actively seek to advance a specific agenda? We will track Chief Rabbi Jakobovits's efforts to establish the Jewish Educational Development Trust (JEDT), which was intended to tackle the 'Jewish continuity' crisis. This endeavour challenged other communal priorities, particularly funding for Israel. The response of key community philanthropists to Jakobovits's initiative, we will see, attested to the shifting dynamics of communal authority, and a new assessment of communal priorities.

The book's penultimate chapter will focus on the impact of multiculturalism on Jewish education. From the 1960s to the 1980s, England

underwent a dramatic social, demographic and cultural transformation. Its early stages took place concurrently with the shift to comprehensive secondary schools, a development that, as we will see, precipitated the rise of the day schools. Chapter 6 will discuss the impact of this confluence on Jewish education, vis-à-vis withdrawal classes, the mainstream day schools, and the ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) educational institutions.

This book does not purport to be an exhaustive study of Anglo-Jewish education. Its scope is limited to formal education provided by primary and secondary schools, and part-time Hebrew classes under the aegis of the LBJRE and the Reform and Liberal movements. London is the main focus, given Anglo-Jewry's demographic concentration there, but developments in the provinces will be invoked where relevant.

This account of the vicissitudes of Anglo-Jewish education sheds light not only on developments in the field of Jewish education, but on the mindset and self-understanding of Anglo-Jewry more generally. Although I do not compare Jewish schools in England to their counterparts in other Diaspora communities, there are both parallels and divergences. I invite others to engage in comparative study, which should prove edifying.

## Anglo-Jewry and its institutions

At mid-century, Anglo-Jewry was well on its way to extricating itself from the working class and the inner city. Its socioeconomic profile was increasingly middle-class, and upward mobility within the middle class was ongoing. Its immigrant status and East End beginnings had largely receded into the past; most members of the community were second or third generation Britons. Demographically, the community was fairly homogeneous: the forebears of most were from Russia and Poland, a far smaller group originated in Germany and Holland. A new wave of immigrants arrived in the 1930s and 1940s: refugees fleeing or displaced by World War II, many of them Orthodox.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Anglo-Jewry had gone through a process of acculturation, not only adopting the manners, speech and attire

of the wider society, but also internalizing many of its values. Anglo-Jewish parents sent their children to state schools, where they were very successful at achieving the results needed for entry into selective secondary schools and the universities. The communal leadership was transitioning from an old guard, made up of members of a few preeminent and pedigreed families in England for many generations – the Rothschilds, Samuels, Montefiores, Cohens, Henriques, Goldsmids and Montagus – to a new guard of self-made magnates, many children or grandchildren of immigrants. Though the community was well-integrated, antisemitic prejudice was quite prevalent, and Britain's Jews adopted a defensive and apologetic stance, seeking to mitigate bias by downplaying their particularism and blending in.

Anglo-Jewry's main centres of population were London, Manchester and Leeds. Within these centres, the Jewish populations had, since the 1930s, been moving out of the immigrant neighbourhoods and into the suburbs. This pattern was common to London and the provincial centres. In London, the Jewish population shifted eastward and northward.

Anglo-Jewry's central communal organs included the Board of Deputies, Anglo-Jewry's main representative body; the *Jewish Chronicle* (*JC*), a newspaper that had served the community since 1841 and was widely read; the Chief Rabbi; and the United Synagogue, with which most synagogues were affiliated. Throughout our period, the majority of the community belonged to nominally Orthodox congregations affiliated with the United Synagogue or the much smaller Federation of Synagogues. A small minority of the community attended synagogues affiliated with the Reform and Liberal movements; there was also a growing ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) community.

The major communal institutions of relevance to the provision of Jewish education were the following: