Great Britain: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief Historical Background

Jewish settlement in Great Britain began in 1066 when a few Jewish financiers and their families followed William the Conqueror. By the mid 12th century, small colonies of Jews could be found in London, Lincoln, Winchester, York, Oxford, Norwich and Bristol. The majority of these settlers were from Northern France, with a few from Germany, Italy, Spain, Russia and Muslim countries. By 1130 the Jews were singled out for discriminatory taxation, and the onset of the Crusades under Richard I gave rise to widespread anti-Jewish riots and massacres. The persecutions climaxed in 1290, when Edward I banished all of England’s Jews, who then fled to France, Flanders and Germany. In 1656, Menasseh Ben Israel, the renowned rabbi and scholar from Amsterdam, persuaded Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews to resettle in England. By 1690 about 400 Jews were living there. In addition, a small Sephardic group was established in Dublin, and Jews also settled in the British colonies of Tangiers, New York, Bombay, Jamaica, Barbados and other parts of the West Indies.

In 1685 Jews were guaranteed freedom of worship, and, in 1698 Parliament officially recognized the practice of Judaism. In the 1700s, Ashkenazi Jews from Amsterdam, Hamburg and other parts of Germany settled in English cities. Some Jews gained prominence, such as the Rothschilds, Goldsmids and Disraelis. In the late 1890s, anti-Semitism in Russia produced an influx of immigrants that swelled the Jewish population from 65,000 at the end of the 1800s to 300,000 Jews in 1914. In the 1930s, prior to World War II, another influx of Jews emigrated from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Italy to Great Britain.

Resources at the Center for Jewish History

In addition to the selected primary records and reference resources listed below, the Center for Jewish History (CJH) has many general histories of Jews in Great Britain, as well as memoirs and synagogue histories. Archival materials concerning refugees to Great Britain during the Holocaust, Yiddish theater in England, and specific synagogues in England can be found in the YIVO Archives, while the Leo Baeck Institute has collections on individual German and Austrian Jews who immigrated to England. To locate these and other U.K. sources, consult the CJH online catalog at http://search.cjh.org

Primary Records

Barnett, Lionel, editor. Bevis Marks Records: Records of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Congregation of London. The Bevis Marks Synagogue is the oldest still existing synagogue in the U.K., built in 1701. Part II of this book includes abstracts of the ketubot, or marriage contracts, of the congregation from earliest times until 1837, with an index. Part III includes abstracts of the ketubot and the civil marriage registers for 1837-1901. AJHS BM 295 .C7 A3


Territorial Collection—England: Includes printed materials from Jewish organizations, including synagogues, Zionist groups, Yiddish cultural organizations, the Council of Polish Jews in Great Britain, and labor groups. Also includes autobiographical essays submitted to a contest titled “My First Year in England.”

YIVO Record Group 116—England

Books


Family History Library

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has microfilmed vital and other records from around the world and placed the microfilms in its Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City. Specifically Jewish records from Great Britain include births and marriages of German Jews in St. Katherine Coleman Parish, 1770-1905; cemetery inscriptions from Rogers Court Jewish Burial Society, Suffolk; births recorded at the New Synagogue, London, 1771-1875, etc. To identify relevant films, access the website at https://familysearch.org, click on “Catalog” choose “Place–names” in the Search box, and type a town’s name in the search string.

LDS films can be borrowed through a loan program at any Family History Center (found in most American cities), or at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute. For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Genealogy Institute, see http://www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm. The Family History Library has been digitizing their collections and, therefore, many records are already available on their site as image only, index only, or both image and index. To browse the digitized collections by country, visit http://familysearch.org/search/collection/list.

Records in Great Britain

Civil registration of vital events such as births, marriages, and deaths began in 1837 in England and Wales, 1855 in Scotland and 1864 in Ireland. Registration was compulsory only for a burial until the Births and Deaths Registration Act of 1874. Starting in 1801, a census was taken every ten years. However, individual names were recorded starting only in 1841, and all census records after 1911 are closed for privacy reasons. These records are housed at government records offices in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Wills, naturalizations, military records, electoral registers, etc., are also available from government archives in Great Britain. (See Internet Resources for internet access to archives and record offices.)
Internet Resources

Directgov, [http://www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk), is a comprehensive website for accessing government services in the U.K. For family history research, from the home page, click on “Government citizens and rights”, then “Registering life events” and “Researching family history”. The site provides general information on family history research and specific information about obtaining vital records from England and Wales from the General Register Office (starting in 1837) and census records from the National Archives. There are separate General Offices for Scotland, [http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk), and Northern Ireland [http://www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk).

The website for the National Archives of the U.K., [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk), contains much information on accessing records of genealogical interest including vital records, incoming and outgoing passenger lists, alien arrivals, census records, military records, etc. Vital records are accessed from General Register Offices (see directgov above). U.K. census records are available every 10 years from 1841 to 1911. Online records are generally available from commercial website partners of the National Archives, such as [http://www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) and [http://www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk). Information is also provided for accessing census records in Scotland and Ireland.

[http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk) is the official Scottish genealogy resource providing information for accessing civil and church vital records, census records, and other government documents.

The website for the National Archives of Ireland is [http://www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie). Click on “research your family tree” to obtain information on genealogy records including online Irish censuses for 1901 and 1911.

JCR-UK, Jewish Communities and Records-United Kingdom, is a joint project of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain (JGSGB) and the Jewish genealogical website [jewishgen](http://www.jewishgen.org). It is intended to provide the largest online database of Jewish U.K. genealogical records. The project has accumulated a wide range of record groups, including birth, marriage, and death records, burial records, and census records. Online access is at [http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk](http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk).

Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain

George Anticoni, Chairman, PO Box 13288
London N3 3WD, ENGLAND
Phone: 44-1923-825-197, Fax: 44-1923-820-323, E-mail: jgsgb@ort.org
[http://www.jgsgb.org.uk](http://www.jgsgb.org.uk)