THE JEWS OF MEDIEVAL YORK AND THE MASSACRE OF MARCH 1190

R. B. DOBSON
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R.B. Dobson

Chirograph Recording Sale of Land Adjacent to the Old Jewish Cemetery to the Commune of the Jews of York, c. 1230 (see Appendix)

By courtesy of York Minster Library.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK
There are few passages of our medieval annals more currently known and believed, or more frequently repeated, than the thrilling story of the Massacre of the Jews of York in the first year of the reign of King Richard I. The comment made by the York antiquary, Robert Davies, almost exactly a century ago is even more valid today than it was then. Yet by an unfortunate irony the most famous of all the provincial Jewries of medieval England has been less well served either by local scholars or national historians than most of its counterparts. Davies’s own remarkable pioneering investigation of ‘The Mediaeval Jews of York’ still remains the only detailed attempt to survey a vast and complicated topic. At the least it would seem worth-while to review that tragic story in the light of the transformation of the history of the medieval English Jewry at the hands of recent scholars.

Needless to say, this brief paper lays no claims to providing a comprehensive history of the medieval Jews of York. Like that history indeed, it falls into three natural parts: an attempt to interpret the extremely fragmentary and often intractable evidence for Jewish activity at York before 1190; a study of the great massacre itself; and a very cursory account, in epilogue form, of the York Jewry redivivus of the thirteenth century. So abundant are the original sources for this later period that it will be many years before its complete history can be written; but it would be surprising if future research should fail to confirm a story of remarkable prosperity followed by lingering decline, itself cut abruptly short by Edward I’s expulsion of all the Jews from England in 1290.

The origins of my interest in the history of the medieval Jews of York derive from the enthusiastically learned teaching of Dr Cecil Roth, to whose published work and that of Mr H. G. Richardson and Professor J. C. Holt this study owes a very obvious debt. Among the many who have generously given me the benefit of their comments and assistance I should like to thank Professor Gerald Aylmer, Mr Bernard Barr, Dr David Palliser, Dr Richard Fletcher and, especially, Dr Paul Hyams. I am also indebted to the staff of the York Reference Library and the Mocatta Library of the Jewish Historical Society. Above all I am grateful to the late Mrs Norah Gurney, Director of the Borthwick Institute, for encouraging me to undergo the sometimes chastening but always interesting process of committing my thoughts about the Jews of York to writing. Norah Gurney’s tragic death while this paper was in the press leaves me sadly unable to do more than express my thanks for the generosity with which she helped not only myself but all other contributors to this series during the last 15 years. Of her many great achievements, the strenuous editorial and administrative work involved in the production of the Borthwick Papers deserves to be remembered at this time.
ABBREVIATIONS

C.Ch.R. Calendar of Charter Rolls.
C.Cl.R. Calendar of Close Rolls.
C.P.R. Calendar of Patent Rolls.
E.H.R. English Historical Review.
Howden Chronica Rogeri de Houedene (Rolls Series, 51, 1868-71): vol. III (A.D. 1189-96) is cited without volume no.
P.R.O. Public Record Office.
Rigg J. M. Rigg, Select Pleas, Stars and Other Records from the rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews, 1220-1284 (Selden Society, vol. XV, 1901).
V.C.H. Victoria County History.
Y.A.J. Yorkshire Archaeological Journal.

N.B.—The Pipe and Memoranda Rolls cited are all published by The Pipe Roll Society, with the exceptions of the Pipe Rolls for 11 Henry I, 2-5 Henry II and 1 Richard I, edited by Joseph Hunter for the Record Commission between 1833 and 1844.

THE JEWS OF MEDIEVAL YORK AND THE MASSACRE OF MARCH 1190

One of the most obvious attractions of the history of the medieval English Jewry is that it presents a story with a definite opening and a definite close, a narrative within the fixed limits of the Norman Conquest of 1066 on the one side and Edward I’s expulsion of the Jews from England on the other. The burden of proof still rests with those who would wish to argue the case for the presence of resident as opposed to itinerant Jews in Anglo-Saxon England; and clear proof, despite many attempts to provide it, remains conspicuously lacking.1 A priori the same argument applies to the possibility of a pre-Conquest settlement of Jews in York itself. All allowances made for the tentative hypothesis (no more than that) of a small Jewish mercantile community in Roman York,8 the chances that the Anglian and Viking city was ever the home of a resident Jewish community seem infinitely remote. The two pieces of highly ambiguous evidence sometimes used to argue the contrary need not in fact detain us for long. Three of the clauses (Nos. 147, 150, 151) included in the collection of church canons traditionally known as the Excerptiones of Archbishop Egbert of York (c.132-66) do indeed forbid Christians from participating in Jewish religious services and from selling their co-religionists into the hands of Jews or pagans; but apart from the complete derivation of these clauses from Canons 29 and 37 of the fourth-century Council of Laodicea, it is now well established that the Excerptiones were compiled many years after Egbert’s death and probably not even in England. More puzzling is the entry in the D version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 952:10 This year King

1 Jacobs, p. 3; Roth, pp. 2-4; Richardson, p. 1. For the earlier polemical view that Jews were settled 'on British soil, long ere Saxon, Dane, or Norman coveted the possession of the British Isles', see M. Margoliouth, The Anglo-Hebrews: Their Past Wrongs and Present Grievances (London, 1856), p. 4; D’Bloisiers Tovey, Anglia Judaica (Oxford, 1738), pp. 1-4.
Jewry began to settle in provincial towns. Admittedly the scarcity of it hazardous to generalise with confidence on this important issue. At a

Edward ordered Archbishop Wulfstan [of York] to be taken into the fortress of Iudanbyrig, because accusations had often been made to the king against him. As Charles Plummer pointed out long ago, the elucidation of the place-name Iudanbyrig is exceptionally difficult; but with breathtaking confidence one recent historian of York argued that 'the solution of a problem which has long puzzled students of history' might lie in its identification with the later Jewbury, a tract of land in the north-eastern suburbs of York recorded from the thirteenth century onwards. The linguistic equivalence of the Iudanbyrig of 952 with 'Le Jeubryr' of 1290 and later is itself somewhat suspect in view of the strong possibilities of textual corruption in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at this point. More generally, and quite apart from the specific difficulty of believing that a tenth-century English monarch would imprison a dissident archbishop of York in the immediate vicinity of his cathedral city, the inherent unlikelihood of there being a Jewish faubourg on the outskirts of any Anglo-Saxon town needs no urging.

Nor is there any evidence that the Norman conquest of England led to an immediate influx of Jews to York. Although William of Malmesbury's statement that it was the Conqueror himself who introduced Jews to England from Rouen has survived the critical scrutiny of modern scholars, many decades appear to have elapsed before members of the London Jewry began to settle in provincial towns. Admittedly the scarcity of governmental records for the reigns of William I and his two sons makes it hazardous to generalise with confidence on this important issue. At a period when the movements and business activities of English Jews were probably subject to much less restriction than in later years, it is certainly not impossible that they visited towns like York. On the other hand, the almost complete absence of references to Jews settled outside the metropolis in chronicles, charters and legal codes before the reign of Henry II is difficult to reconcile with any significant dispersal into the county towns before the middle of the twelfth century. So too is Roger of

Howden's explicit statement that until as late as 1177 'all dead Jews used to be transported to London to be buried'.

5 C. B. Knight, A History of the City of York (York, 1944), pp. 94-6; see below, p. 47. For other attempts to identify Iudanbyrig, ranging from Jedburgh in Roxburghshire and Bede's Ythan castrin in Essex to the more likely Idbury (Ida's burg) in Oxfordshire, see especially Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, A Revised Text, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1902-9), vol. II, pp. 148-9; An Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from British Museum Cotton MS. Tiberius B. IV, ed. E. Classen and F. E. Harmer (Manchester, 1926), p. 146.
7 Genea Henrici (Rolls Series, 49, 1867), vol. I, p. 182; Howden, vol. II, p. 137. For the relationship between these two chronicles see below, p. 21.
8 Pipe Roll 31 Henry I, pp. 146-9; Jacobs, pp. 14-15; Richardson, pp. 8-9.
Both are polemical works, designed to combat the heresy of those 'Salomites' who believed that Salome, the companion of the two Marys in their journey with Jesus to Jerusalem, was in fact a man and the husband of the Virgin's mother, St Anne. As Maurice's ingeniously learned treatise rested its case primarily on the author's ability to distinguish between the various Salomes who appear in the pages of Josephus, he was at elaborate pains to point out his own mastery of the Hebrew language. 'Wishing to follow the example of Jerome and to acquire a knowledge of Hebrew language and letters, I spent three years as a young man in such study; and I wrote out forty psalms in my own hand from the Hebrew psalter according to the copies of Lord Gerard once archbishop of York; and the Jews themselves admired the elegance of my calligraphy.' Passage, it need hardly be said, bristles with uncertainties and ambiguities — not the least of which is that our knowledge of the very existence of a Maurice, prior of the Augustinian house at Kirkham in the East Riding, seems to depend upon this manuscript. However, it would be unduly sceptical not to believe that Maurice (who gives his age as sixty-five years in his letter to Archbishop Roger) may indeed have been a young student, quite probably at York, during the pontificate of Archbishop Gerard (1100-8). Is it possible to make the further inference that the Jews he mentions were themselves resident in the city of York during the first decade of the century? The strongest support for such a view derives from what is known from other sources about the career and intellectual interests of

Archbishop Gerard himself. A distant relative of William the Conqueror, he certainly had close connections with the city of Rouen, an undoubted recruiting ground for the first generations of medieval English Jews, where he served as precentor of the cathedral church before entering the service of William Rufus. More interestingly still, Archbishop Gerard enjoyed a reputation not only as an exceptionally erudite scholar but also as a practitioner of the black arts. As Hebrew letters were often used for casting spells, it has even been argued that the archbishop's possession of Jewish psalters may be due to his interest in 'the cult of Mephistopheles rather than of the Muse'. More probably, Maurice of Kirkham's auto-biographical reminiscences enable us to add the name of Archbishop Gerard of York to a group of cultivated Anglo-Norman prelates (like Abbot Gilbert Crispin of Westminster) known to have been interested in Hebrew scholarship either for its own sake or because of the light it could throw on Christian historical and theological problems. Set against a national background of remarkably harmonious (by later standards) intellectual collaboration, there seems to be no a priori reason to deny that Archbishop Gerard of York may have employed a small group of Jewish scholars at the very beginning of the twelfth century. Historians of the medieval English Jewry, normally condemned to deriving their evidence from administrative and financial records alone, are always in danger of overlooking the possibility that several of the first Jewish immigrants into this country came here to serve the cause of Christian scholarship rather than of economic need. But how far the Jewish scholars known to Maurice of Kirkham were either permanently settled in York or represented the learned fringe of a large Jewish community within the city are very different matters. They are probably best interpreted as exotic members of the large familia of a wealthy Anglo-Norman prelate, protected by their position in Archbishop Gerard's household from the harsh realities of urban life and completely dependent on his patronage for their livelihood. Maurice of Kirkham's diatribe against the Salomites may afford an unexpected glimpse of some of the earliest Jews at York; and in his incidental reference to the slightly inaccurate stress given by his Jewish acquaintances to their customary words of greeting (shalom 'alekhem) he indirectly confirms — what one would expect — that they had come to England from one of the great Jewries of Northern France. But for the
certain emergence of a Jewish community at York organically related to local society, the historian must await the second half of the twelfth century.

According to William fitz Stephen, one of the most famous of Thomas Becket's biographers, the ending of the anarchy of Stephen's reign and the accession of the young Henry II in 1154 was a turning-point in the history of Jewish economic activity within England. 'Peace was everywhere... and there emerged in safety from towns and castles both merchants seeking fairs and Jews looking for creditors.' Thanks to the survival of an uninterrupted sequence of Pipe Rolls from the second year of Henry II, such a generalisation can at last be put to some form of documentary test. By 1159 no less than nine Jewish communities were sufficiently established in English provincial towns to contribute, many of them substantially, to a donum levied by the king. Although Norwich, Lincoln, Winchester, Cambridge, Thetford, Northampton, Bungay, Oxford and Gloucester all figure in this list, York is only conspicuous by its absence. Even more significantly, the Yorkshire sections of Henry II's Pipe Rolls consistently fail to record a single indisputable York Jew ("Iudeus de Everwirch") until as late as 1176-7. It would of course be a dangerous error to treat the Pipe Rolls, informative though they are, as an infallible guide to the distribution of financial wealth and activity within the kingdom. Nevertheless, at a period when various Jews in other English provincial centres (most notably Jurnet of Norwich and Aaron of Lincoln) can be proved to have been engaged in a multiplicity of financial dealings throughout the country, the apparent absence of any counterparts in York inevitably provides matter for speculation. Why was a city later to become the centre of one of the most active Jewries of medieval England apparently so much slower than most other towns to develop a prominent Jewish business community?

Geographical distance, from Normandy as much as London perhaps, no doubt plays its part in explaining the reluctance of English Jews to take up residence in York during the early Angevin period: in the west of England too there is no evidence of substantial Jewish settlement until the last quarter of the century. While too much is often made, in the twelfth

11) Thanks to the interesting coincidence in location of English Jewish provincial communities and the sites of royal mints, that Jews may have played an important role in coinage operations on behalf of the crown.

On the other hand it seems highly unlikely that any activity other than that of money-lending on a massive scale could account for the emergence of a really substantial Jewish community. It is easy to forget that the settlement of medieval Jews in north European urban centres was always the exception rather than the rule. The Jewish community in York itself had no important rival anywhere in northern England. It is hard to resist the somewhat paradoxical conclusion that although the Jews of medieval England were highly concentrated in urban centres, their functions were only marginally urban in any meaningful sense of


15) The likelihood that their expertise in metal-work and as gold- and silversmiths would render some Jews highly qualified for work in royal mints finds occasional support in the records (see the suggestive name of David the moneyer noted by Roth, p. 11, n. 5). It would now seem that Joseph Jacobs (pp. 392-6) may have been unduly sceptical in rejecting the possibility that the moneyers' names inscribed on several of Henry II's pennies (which include that of Iose of Everwirch) were those of Jews. The great majority of the Crown's official monetarii throughout the Angevin period were undoubtedly Christians; but that they employed Jews in the course of their minting operations seems highly probable; thus Nicholas, one of the workers in the Canterbury mint during the 1180s, may have been a converted Jew (Adler, p. 65).

16) To the well-known absence of Jewish settlement in the booming east-coast ports of Angevin England one might add the example of the heavily 'industrialised' county of Flanders, where not a single Jew is recorded throughout the entire course of the middle ages: J. Stengers, Les Juifs dans les Pays-Bas au Moyen Age (Brussels, 1949), pp. 11, 87.

17) For the (more readily understandable) absence of identifiable resident Jews in medieval Scotland and Ireland see Roth, p. 92, and L. Hyman, The Jews of Ireland (Shannon, Ireland, 1972), pp. 3-4.
York's own growing prosperity in the late twelfth century that Jews were landlords. It was not, one may safely speculate, because of the city of within the city of an important royal castle which might (as it just failed persuaded to settle there. Of much greater importance was the existence of that word: their financial services, as will soon be apparent, supported less enterprises of merchants and burgesses than the activities of rural thatnings of this activity is that until the later years of Henry II's reign the difficult problem of the origins of significant Jewish business activity to do in 1190) enable the Jews to protect their lives and enable the royal government to protect its investment in those lives. Of greater importance still was the emergence among the lords, gentry and religious houses of Yorkshire of an appetite for credit which the Jews were best equipped to satisfy.

With these very general considerations in mind, it is time to return to the difficult problem of the origins of significant Jewish business activity in York and its county. Perhaps one explanation for the hesitant beginnings of this activity is that until the later years of Henry II's reign northern landlords could still meet most of their need for credit by having recourse to Christian rather than Jewish usurers. Far from meeting new needs by new methods the Jewish financiers of Angevin England loaned money to clients already familiar with a complex and highly ramified system of credit. That local Christian usurers were at work in Yorkshire itself during Henry II's reign is testified by the case of two such men, Eudo son of Alured and Robert de Hokeswell, usurarii, some of whose chattels escheated to the sheriff of the county in 1178-9. As might be expected however, the most wealthy Christian money-lenders of Angevin England were men not only much more prominent in public affairs but also in close contact with the king, his court and his government. Among the many famous personalities involved in this lucrative business, ranging from William Trentegeruns of Rouen to Gervase of Cornhill, the most notorious is deservedly William Cade of St Omer in Flanders who seems to have died in or shortly before 1166. Of major interest to the historian of the English Jewry are the revelations offered by the roll of debts outstanding to Cade from almost two hundred debtors, a document apparently prepared by clerks of the royal exchequer shortly after his death. Significantly enough the list of Cade's debtors includes many northern landlords, men whose heirs and descendants are known to have borrowed heavily from York Jews in the immediately subsequent generation. Robert de Gant (in debt to Cade for as much as 120 marks), Roger de Mowbray, Bertram de Bulmer and William de Vesci belonged exactly to that group of prominent northern knights and lords whose relations with the Jews of York were soon to be not only so close but so potentially hostile. Equally revealing is the fact that William Cade was engaged in massive credit transactions with at least one of those Yorkshire religious houses whose readiness to borrow money from Jews was to become so notorious a few years later. As early as the mid-1160s the abbot and monks of the Cistercian abbey of Roche in the West Riding, founted only twenty years before, were committed to delivering to Cade 22 pounds of wool and no less than 2,200 fleeces.

The obscure origins of Jewish financial activity in Yorkshire are therefore perhaps best interpreted in terms not of a radically new economic phenomenon but of the replacement of the Christian usurer by his non-Christian equivalent. Such a replacement was no doubt often gradual and never absolutely complete: when the monk obedientiaries of Bury St Edmunds fell into serious debt in the 1170s, their single largest loan (of no less than £1,040) was apparently raised not from Isaac son of Rabbi Josce of London or Benedict of Norwich but from William fitz Isabelle, sheriff of London. Nevertheless the surviving evidence, despite its inadequacies, can leave us in no serious doubt that by the end of Henry II's reign Jews had succeeded Christians as the really substantial providers of private credit to English landlords. Both the exact chronology of this transformation, and the reasons for it, remain extremely mysterious. As credit operations in twelfth-century England may have been highly dependent on the protection and sanctions provided by royal officials and courts, no doubt the king's own initiatives were all-important. The decision of Henry II to turn from Christian to Jewish money-lenders in or very near the year 1164 probably carried in its wake the implication of a vast expansion of Jewish financial activity throughout England. Nor can one avoid a historical explanation familiar at many periods in the long story of the Jewish people: Jews probably replaced Christians less because they were offering a new economic service than because they performed a well-established service more efficiently than their Christian competitors. In particular, the Jews resident in Angevin England enjoyed the inestimable advantage, for the purposes

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of money-lending, of forming a closely integrated minority group ideally qualified for mutual co-operation and organisation in business as well as religious matters. The financial syndicate, consortium or societas, dominated by a few exceptionally wealthy patriarchs, is visible at the very beginning of recorded medieval Jewish financial activity.\textsuperscript{88} Individual Jewish families are in fact extremely unlikely to have settled in York without the backing and often the direct sponsorship of their wealthier compatriots in the south.

Some such hypothesis does at least make the obscure early history of Jewish settlement in York comparatively intelligible. Until the middle years of the reign of Henry II the few Jews whose business activities in Yorkshire were recorded in surviving Pipe Rolls and charters may well have been partners or agents of Jewish financiers south of the Humber: one possible example is the Samson Judeus, whose obligation of 5 marks to the crown 'pro recto de debitis suis' occurs fleetingly in the Yorkshire section of the Pipe Rolls for 1168–70.\textsuperscript{89} Only very gradually and hesitantly do Jews resident in York seem to have amassed great financial power in their own right. The most specific reason for this delay was no doubt the dominance over money-lending throughout the country exerted by the famous Aaron of Lincoln during the twenty years after his first appearance as an important royal creditor in 1166.\textsuperscript{90} When, probably in the early 1170s, the Yorkshire baron William Fossard junior involved himself in debts of more than 1,800 marks to Jews, it was Aaron of Lincoln who 'ad se totum debitem Willilmi trahebat'; and by 1176 the monks of the Cistercian house of Meaux near Beverley were well aware that Aaron 'seemed the first and greatest of the Jews themselves'.\textsuperscript{91} As late as 15 November 1182, it was with Aaron of Lincoln rather than a York Jew that the notorious Richard Malebisse had contracted his 'great debt'.\textsuperscript{92} But the most striking demonstration of Aaron of Lincoln's financial ascendency in the north is of course provided by the lists of his outstanding debts as compiled by royal exchequer officials during the years after his death in 1186. The special membrane added to the 1190–1 Pipe Roll and entitled 'Rotulus de Debitis Aaron Judeus in Lincolle et Everwicher' is not


\textsuperscript{89} Pipe Roll 15 Henry II, p. 36; Pipe Roll 16 Henry II, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{90} The most detailed account of Aaron of Lincoln's career is that provided by J. Jacobs, 'Aaron of Lincoln', T.J.H.S.E., vol. III (1890), pp. 157–79, an article which now stands in need of serious revision.

\textsuperscript{91} Chronica Monastirii de Melia (Rolls Series, 43, 1866–8), vol. I, p. 174.

to 'Joces iudeo filio David' et heredibus suis post eum'. Yet another indication that Jews were now beginning to move north in greater numbers is provided by a cryptic reference in the Pipe Roll for 1178-9 which records the payment of 6s. 1d. 'pro ducendo homine (i.e. to trial) qui retatus est de morte Iudei'. Although the Jew in question was not necessarily a resident of York, the entry is of some interest as the first recorded example of an anti-Jewish crime in northern England.

Much more significant is the emergence during the 1170s of the earliest recorded 'Iudexus de Everwich' in the person of Josce, the leader of the York community at the time of the massacre of March 1190. Josce's name is first mentioned in an undated Jewish bond or starr (the English word is derived from the Hebrew shetar or Latin starrum) of Aaron of Lincoln: in return for 1,260 marks paid to him by the monks of the abbey of Meaux, Aaron acquired William Fossard of all the debts he owed to himself, to Josce of York and to six other Jews 'up to the feast of St Michael in the year 1176'. For reasons already discussed, it seems entirely appropriate that this earliest indisputable reference to money-lending by a York Jew should occur in a document which makes clear that Jew's responsibility to his financial subordination to Aaron of Lincoln. Nevertheless in the following year (1176-7) Josce of York stands revealed as an important financier in his own right when he received payments amounting to 60 marks from the sheriffs of Yorkshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Small though these sums 'in soltis per brevem regis' are by comparison with some of the crown's remittances to the richest Jews of the period (e.g. over £500 'in soltis per brevem regis'), they reveal that Josce had been making personal loans to the king. For the remainder of his life Josce continued to conduct a thriving money-lending business, based no doubt on that substantial York house 'rivaling a noble citadel in the scale and stoutness of its construction' which so caught the attention of his Christian neighbours. Secure enough to offer mortgages on a twenty-year term, by the time of his death he held in seisin important estates or rents at Hessay, Hooton Pagnell, Askern and within York itself.

It was during the years immediately previous to his fatal journey to Richard I's coronation at Westminster in 1189 that York's second 'great usurer', Benedict of York, established himself as a money-lender apparently even more active and wealthy than Josce. The two leaders of the Jewish community on the eve of the massacre of 1190 often worked together in close business co-operation: it was a debt of 41 marks to both Benedict and Josce which apparently persuaded Amfrey de Chauncey to grant a carucate of land in Skirpenbeck, ten miles east of the city, to the Dean and Chapter of York Minster in return for their relieving him of the responsibility for the repayment of the loan. Like Josce, Benedict gradually began to acquire control over various landed tenements in the vicinity of York as a result of his money-lending activities, for example at Turgrimebi (presumably Thorganby on the river Derwent in the East Riding) and within York itself. Slightly further afield, the inability of Ralph son of Aldelin to repay a debt of 80 marks to Benedict the Jew of York led to a complicated settlement in the Curia Regis towards the end of June 1189, whereby Ralph's estate at Aldfield near Ripon was transferred to his brother William. Nor were Benedict's business affairs confined to Yorkshire. He held two messuages in Northampton which escheated to the crown after his death and were later granted by King John to one of his greatest judges, Simon de Pattishall. Many of Benedict's bonds, as well as much of the property pledged to him, also escheated to the king; traffic in these debts, and in others which passed into the hands of his Jewish heirs, continued for at least a decade after his decease and provide a retrospective tribute to the scale of his money-lending. An even greater tribute is the fact that in the months immediately after Benedict's death by violence his sons were prepared or induced to pay the considerable sum of no less than 700

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83 John Rylands Library, Manchester, Latin MS. 220, fo. 100, which must be earlier than 1184, the year in which Clement ceased to be abbot of St Mary's. The temptation to identify this Josce (who had bought the property in question from a certain William fitz William) with the leader of the York martyrs in 1190 must be resisted in view of the frequency of the name and the appearance of a Josce son of David as one of the London Jews subjected to the Guildford taille imposed by Henry II at Christmas 1186 (Pipe Rolls 5 & 6 Richard I, p. 139; Jacobs, p. 89).


85 Early Yorkshire Charters, vol. II, p. 183, datable only between 1180 and 1190; for another example (of a loan of £50 from Josce, £30 from Benedict) see Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus, p. 130.

86 Rotuli Chartarum, ed. T. D. Hardy (Record Commission, 1837), p. 52.

marks 'pro habendis terris patris sui et debitis secundum cartas suas.'

The varied and important financial transactions of Benedict and Josce are the only aspect of Jewish life at York before 1190 to be fully illuminated by surviving records. Otherwise our ignorance as to the composition of that community would be almost total were it not for the survival on the Pipe Rolls from 1191 onwards of a list of the still outstanding debts of York Jews to Aaron of Lincoln, a list appended to the much longer schedule of debts of Christians in Yorkshire to the same famous creditor. Any precise interpretation of the reasons for large-scale borrowing by Jews from other Jews is bound to be a matter for hazardous speculation. The York evidence does not appear to substantiate H. G. Richardson's suggestion that such loans 'seem to have been made largely to people in poor circumstances'. On the contrary it may be suggested that at York Aaron of Lincoln's outstanding credits, often in the form of unredeemed bonds, were held by the most enterprising members of the Hebrew community there. Approximately a dozen York Jews appear in the 1190–1 and subsequent Pipe Rolls as debtors of Aaron of Lincoln. The heaviest obligations were those of Benedict, who owed three separate amounts of 185 marks, 20 marks and 50, as well as another 30 marks on behalf of his three brothers. By comparison the recorded debts of Josce of York to Aaron of Lincoln totalled less than 50 marks, including 124 marks for a silver vessel ('de vessella argentea') which he was presumably holding in pledge. In addition to Benedict and Josce, the York Jews in debt to Aaron included several Samuels (not all to be identified with one another), Isaac son of Mosse, Dieudonné son of Aaron, Meir brother of Benedict as well as Cresse and Samson of Doncaster. Isaac and Dieudonné were expressly stated to have acted as Aaron of Lincoln's attorneys; while one of the York Samuels was identified as a partner or socius of Benedict. The final impression left by this brief glimpse of the Jewish settlement at York before its temporary extinction in 1190 is therefore of a community dominated by a small and closely integrated élite of money-lenders and dealers in bonds. To this impression the Jewish sources for the massacre of 1190 enable us to add one additional and especially interesting element. No doubt as a consequence of its new prosperity the York community appears to have 'developed into a relatively important centre of Jewish studies'. The most notable Jewish author attracted to York towards the end of Henry II's reign was clearly Rabbi Yomtob of Joigny, that 'famous doctor of the law . . . who is said to have come from parts beyond the sea to teach the English Jews'. Among the other victims of the 1190 massacre were the scholars Rabbi Elijah, cited as an authority in the Tosaphoth, a certain Mosce, and even Joseph or Josce of York himself — the last of whom received a warm tribute on the orthodoxy of his learning: 'Whether he taught by mouth or book he was not among those who err'.

By the date of Richard I's accession, the Jewish community at York was therefore displaying signs of unusual scholarly as well as financial activity. But the total size of the Jewry presided over by Josce, Benedict and their fellows remains almost completely a matter for conjecture. According to Ephraim of Bonn, approximately 150 men and women lost their lives in March 1190, an estimate certainly to be preferred to the 500 males, 'exceptis mulieribus et parvis', mentioned by Roger of Howden. Taken as an estimate of the total Jewish population of the city, the figure of 150 may not indeed be too widely off the mark and is certainly in line with the almost equally speculative assessments recently made in the case of other English provincial towns. It would be surprising if there were ever more than twenty to forty Jewish households in the medieval city. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that these limited numbers sufficed to establish the York community as the sole substantial English Jewry north of Lincoln. Indeed the only other urban centre in the north which ever showed clear signs of developing a regular Jewish community at all was Newcastle-upon-Tyne, perhaps the greatest of all twelfth-century English 'boom towns'. Even there a Jewish settlement was slow to emerge and quick to disappear. The first recorded Jew of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a certain Samuel, is mentioned as late as 1190; and within little more than
a generation — in 1234 — Jews were expelled from the city for ever. 87

Elsewhere in northern England the only indication of Jewish associations with places outside York derives from the highly problematic evidence of ‘surnames’. The appearance of a Cresse and Samson of Doncaster among the York Jews of the early 1180s has already been mentioned; and at various dates throughout the next century there are references to a Solomon and Isaac of Beverley, a Jeremiah of Grimsby, a Manasser of Bradford, an Amiot and Vives of Pontefract, a Miles of Rotherham, a Vives of Wakefield, a Leo of Scarborough, a Manasser of Yarm as well as a Hugh and Christina of Kendal, two inmates of the London Domus Conversorum who were still alive as late as 1308. 88 As in southern England, where a similar pattern emerges from a study of Jewish second names, the problem presented by these toponymies defies easy solution. It seems scarcely possible that such names bear retrospective witness to a harmonious period in the history of Anglo-Jewish relations when individual Hebrew families found it economically and socially practicable to settle in small towns; and it would seem wiser to consider H. G. Richardson’s alternative suggestion that the Jews whose names associate them with places outside the large county towns were those who had an occasional rather than permanently sedentary connection with the place in question. All in all, it seems much more likely that some York-based Jews regularly travelled to towns like Pontefract, Wakefield and Yarm in pursuit of business than that these boroughs ever possessed a community, however small, of resident Jews themselves. Admittedly Richardson’s explanation of these intriguing Jewish second names is less than completely convincing; but then nomenclature expressed in terms of toponymics has always been an erratic guide to the geographical origins and distribution of medieval Englishmen. In the case of the medieval Jews it seems at present safest to conclude that a few individuals may indeed have sometimes established temporary business agencies within a few of the smaller northern towns; but only at York and, to a much lesser extent, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne was there a more permanent settlement.


single most famous incident in the history of the medieval English Jewry. There are certainly few episodes which remind us more forcefully of the dangers of discussing the fortunes of the Jews of York in purely local terms. An isolated and extraordinary catastrophe as regards the history of York, the pogrom of 1190 has only too many analogies elsewhere in England and Europe. Indeed the violent persecution of the Jews in the period immediately after Richard I's coronation belongs to that large category of phenomena which point to one of the central paradoxes of medieval public and political life: the way in which social communities so much more localised in their needs and aspirations than our own were nevertheless even more likely than their modern counterparts to be stirred into violent demonstrations of feeling as a result of national and even international movements. Admittedly the English Jews, no doubt because of their then numerical insignificance, had been spared the atrocities suffered by the Jewries of northern France and the Rhineland in the 1090s and 1140s. But the preparations for the Third Crusade, not only led by Richard I but with massive English participation, obviously created an unprecedented problem now that sizeable Jewish communities had emerged in several provincial towns. There is no need to stress the two most obvious dangers; that in 1189-90 both the English government and, to a lesser extent, the English Jews themselves were taken unawares owing to their lack of previous experience of mass assaults on Jewish communities; and that there was a direct correlation between crusading propaganda against the external Moslem pagan and active hostility to the internal Jewish 'infidel'. As we shall see, the tragic story of the York Jews in the spring of 1190 is a specific commentary on these two themes - governmental inexperience on the one side, and the deliberate exploitation of mass hysteria on the other.

Although the massacres of the Jewish communities at York and elsewhere during early 1190 were unquestionably the product of the peculiar political and emotional tensions released by Richard I's departure on the Third Crusade, such violent demonstrations of feeling were at the same time the consequence of a rising tide of anti-Jewish sentiment during previous decades. Although such changes in the climate of opinion are notoriously difficult to evaluate, most of the available evidence suggests that the rapid expansion of Jewish activity during the later years of Henry III's reign had begun to evoke a strongly critical reaction. Here again developments in York must be set within a national and indeed international context. The official exponents of clerical doctrine in the late twelfth century may have continued to expound the traditional Bernardine view that the Jews should be preserved as living symbols of the Passion, to be converted and not destroyed; but there is no doubt that the pontificate of Alexander III (1159-81), and the Third Lateran Council over which he presided in 1179, marked an increasing papal obsession with the dangers to Christian souls of intercourse with the Jews.41 Ten years before the great catastrophe of 1190 a long letter from Alexander III instructed Hugh du Puiset, the bishop of Durham whose associates were later involved in the York massacre, to take stringent precautions against the contagious effects of Jewish superstition and perfidia.42 Even more alarming than hardening papal attitudes was the increase in the number of violent assaults on the northern French Jews from the massacre of Blois (26 May 1171) onwards. In retrospect the series of savage acts of persecution against Jewish communities in northern France for the ensuing twenty years (until at least the atrocity at Bray-sur-Seine in March 1191) seem to represent a particularly significant and sinister development in the history of European anti-semitism. The effect within England of these gratuitously sadistic massacres, at a period in this country's history when relations with the north of France were unusually close, is bound to have been considerable. Not only is there impressionistic evidence of an unusually large influx of French Jews into England (including the arrival in York of the famous Rabbi Yomtob of Joigny): the English Jews themselves may have become increasingly conscious that - like the thirty-one martyrs of Blois whom they mourned in their own 'Isles' - they too might be called upon to 'sacrifice themselves in honour of Unity'.44

Within England also, although less dramatically than in northern France, there is evidence of growing hostility towards the Jews during the 1170s and 1180s. Most spectacular was the rapid propagation of ritual murder accusations in the wake of the 'terrible precedent' set by the case during early 1190 were unquestionably the product of the peculiar political and emotional tensions released by Richard I's departure on the Third Crusade, such violent demonstrations of feeling were at the same time the consequence of a rising tide of anti-Jewish sentiment during previous decades. Although such changes in the climate of opinion are notoriously difficult to evaluate, most of the available evidence suggests that the rapid expansion of Jewish activity during the later years of Henry III's reign had begun to evoke a strongly critical reaction. Here again developments in York must be set within a national and indeed international context. The official exponents of clerical doctrine in the late twelfth century may have continued to expound the traditional Bernardine view that the Jews should be preserved as living symbols of the Passion, to be converted and not destroyed; but there is no doubt that the pontificate of Alexander III (1159-81), and the Third Lateran Council over which he presided in 1179, marked an increasing papal obsession with the dangers to Christian souls of intercourse with the Jews.41 Ten years before the great catastrophe of 1190 a long letter from Alexander III instructed Hugh du Puiset, the bishop of Durham whose associates were later involved in the York massacre, to take stringent precautions against the contagious effects of Jewish superstition and perfidia.42 Even more alarming than hardening papal attitudes was the increase in the number of violent assaults on the northern French Jews from the massacre of Blois (26 May 1171) onwards. In retrospect the series of savage acts of persecution against Jewish communities in northern France for the ensuing twenty years (until at least the atrocity at Bray-sur-Seine in March 1191) seem to represent a particularly significant and sinister development in the history of European anti-semitism. The effect within England of these gratuitously sadistic massacres, at a period in this country's history when relations with the north of France were unusually close, is bound to have been considerable. Not only is there impressionistic evidence of an unusually large influx of French Jews into England (including the arrival in York of the famous Rabbi Yomtob of Joigny): the English Jews themselves may have become increasingly conscious that - like the thirty-one martyrs of Blois whom they mourned in their own 'Isles' - they too might be called upon to 'sacrifice themselves in honour of Unity'.44

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45 The English as well as the French Jews commemorated the Blois martyrs by a day of mourning; and it was in their memory, ironically enough, that Rabbi Yomtob of Joigny and York composed an elegy (Jacobs, pp. 265; Roth, Intellectual Activities, p. 22).
unconvinced that the boy found dead in Thorpe Wood on 24 March 1144 had indeed been killed by the Jews. But within a generation, and largely as a result of the propaganda produced by such interested clerical parties as Thomas of Monmouth himself and his bishop, William Turbe, it seems likely that large sections of the English population had been predisposed to accept ritual murder accusations at their face value. During the reign of Henry II three new Christian 'boy-martyrs' at the hands of the Jews had emerged in the persons of St Harold of Gloucester (1168), St Robert of Bury St Edmunds (1181) and the particularly incredible Adam of Bristol (by 1183). The long-term effects of the establishment of such cults for such reasons on the way in which Christians viewed Jews everywhere must have been incalculable. Nor can York have been at all isolated from their pernicious influence. Not so many years before the massacre of 1190 a crippled inhabitant of the city, Thomas Eboracensis, made a long and painful journey to the tomb of St William at Norwich 'and receiving the remedy he hoped for, he left his crutches there as a token of his cure'. But there is even more direct witness to the increasing tide of anti-semitism in late twelfth-century Yorkshire. The northern chroniclers of the period not only took pains to record blood libel allegations from all parts of the country but wrote of the Jews in a manner which reveals their complete commitment to the classic medieval Christian stereotype of the blaspheming and sacrilegious enemy of Christ. Equally revealing of increasing hostility to the Jews is the way in which the oldest known manuscript copy of the Use of York, probably written at Whitby Abbey in the 1190s, was amended to prohibit the bending of the knees during the recitation of the famous Good Friday prayer pro perfidis Jtidaeis. By the end of the twelfth century it would seem that even in the midst of its formal devotions the church of York had forgotten, as Robert Fawtier put it, 'the gospel of forgiveness'.

The anti-semitism of contemporary Christian observers is inevitably one of the greatest obstacles to a proper understanding of the pogroms of 1189-90. To the general rule that we are unable to witness the oppression of the York Jews from the viewpoint of the persecuted there are however some important exceptions. Indeed, and as Dr Roth has pointed out, the York massacre is virtually the only episode in the history of the medieval English Jewry to have been recorded in some detail by contemporary or near-contemporary Hebrew sources. Apart from its appearance in the sefer zekhira or martyrology of the Second and Third Crusades composed by Ephraim ben Jacob of Bonn, the tragedy was the subject of no less than three separate Hebrew elegies, one by Joseph of Chartres and two by Menahem ben Jacob of Worms. Although Rabbi Menahem, who died at Worms in 1203, may have met some survivors of the York massacre, neither of his poetic lamentations is at all historically specific. The best known, a kinnah of thirty stanzas 'On the martyrs of the Isles of the Sea in the year 4950 (A.D. 1190)' certainly succeeds, even in translation, in conveying an atmosphere of grief-stricken horror: 'Sword, wherefore turnest thou in all directions, consuming all around thee?'. But Rabbi Menahem fails to locate the catastrophe he laments in any particular part of England; and an attempt to suggest that in stanzas 4-7 he alluded not only to the fame of the York martyrs as exponents of the Torah but also to the violent death of Richard I ('He wrought his own doom') seems to be based on an over-literature interpretation of the conventional formulas of this type of synagogue poetry. Much more informative is the elegy rediscovered at Munich thirty years ago and written by the French contemporary of Rabbi Menahem, Joseph ben Asher of Chartres. Joseph's bitter hostility, like that of Menahem, to 'the King of the Isles' seems to derive from the erroneous impression that Richard I was directly responsible for shedding the 'blood of innocent souls'; but his statement that the Jews 'were gathered together to the Fortress' may well allude to the royal castle at York just as his reference to their assailants as 'shepherds' could reveal his knowledge of rural participation in the massacre.

Ephraim of Bonn's account of the massacre is however unquestionably the most valuable of all the Hebrew sources to survive. In the space of a few lines, the author conveys a comparatively detailed if no doubt slightly garbled description of the catastrophe which ensued when 'the Wanderers came upon the people of the Lord in the city of Evoric in

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45 Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Cloucestriae (Roths Series, 33, 1865-7), vol. I, pp. 20-1; Adlers, pp. 184-6; Jacobs, pp. 45-7; 75; Roth, p. 1.
46 Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich, p. 271.
47 Perhaps the most interesting example, because it emanates from a monastery geographically remote yet under heavy obligations to the services of Jewish financiers, is afforded by Chronica Monasterii de Melis, ed. vol. I, p. 244.
48 R. Fawtier, 'The Jews in the Use of York', Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, vol. V (1918-20), pp. 381-5; the crucial addition is that of a 'non' to the instruction 'Hic perficat genius' on fo. 30 of the MS. For a guide to the voluminous literature about the implications of the prayer pro perfidis Jtidaeis, only removed from the Roman Good Friday liturgy by Pope John XXIII, see Synan, Popes and Jews, pp. 175-6.
England on the Great Sabbath. Of the 150 Jewish men and women alleged to have lost their lives, either by slaughter or by being burnt alive, 60 are said to have been killed by Rabbi Yomtob himself. Although these figures would appear to be more plausible than those provided by contemporary English chroniclers, one cannot of course be sure that the sources of Ephraim's information were absolutely reliable: he seems to have been under the impression that the butchery took place in the York synagogue or 'house of prayer', a belief demonstrably at odds with the most important Christian accounts. Living where he did, Ephraim is much more likely to have been correct in his account of the fate of the Hebrew manuscripts written by the York community. 'Their houses moreover they destroyed, and they despoiled their gold and silver and the splendid books which they had written in great number, precious as gold and as much fine gold, there being none like them for their beauty and splendour. These they brought to Cologne and to other places, where they sold them to the Jews.' As always, it would be wise to remember that Ephraim's purpose was the commemoration of martyrs rather than an explanation of the reasons for martyrdom. To varying degrees, all the Jewish sources for the 1190 massacre must be set within the context of the great Hebraic literary tradition of lamentation which stretches back to the figures would appear to be more plausible than those provided by contemporary English chroniclers, one cannot of course be sure that the sources of Ephraim's information were absolutely reliable: he seems to have been under the impression that the butchery took place in the York synagogue or 'house of prayer', a belief demonstrably at odds with the most important Christian accounts. Living where he did, Ephraim is much more likely to have been correct in his account of the fate of the Hebrew manuscripts written by the York community. 'Their houses moreover they destroyed, and they despoiled their gold and silver and the splendid books which they had written in great number, precious as gold and as much fine gold, there being none like them for their beauty and splendour. These they brought to Cologne and to other places, where they sold them to the Jews'. As always, it would be wise to remember that Ephraim's purpose was the commemoration of martyrs rather than an explanation of the reasons for martyrdom. To varying degrees, all the Jewish sources for the 1190 massacre must be set within the context of the great Hebraic literary tradition of lamentation which stretches back to Masada and the Psalms. But as that tradition has never been purely literary, as it has influenced action as well as thought, the work of Menahem of Worms, Joseph of Chartres and Ephraim of Bonn should not be unduly discounted: it provides us with our best opportunity to recapture, however fragmentarily, the thought processes of the persecuted rather than the persecutors.

Nevertheless it is to the English chroniclers of the late twelfth century that our detailed knowledge of the massacre of 1190 is almost completely indebted. As the accession of Richard I coincides with what is perhaps the most prolific of all periods in the history of chronicle writing in this country, the modern student of the anti-Jewish atrocities of 1189-90 is in the unusually fortunate position of being able to check several sources against each other. Despite various inconsistencies and a number of still unsolved textual problems, the famous story the chroniclers have to tell is unduly discounted: it provides us with our best opportunity to recapture, however fragmentarily, the thought processes of the persecuted rather than the persecutors.
the city, where he died shortly before the end of the century. William of Newburgh’s treatment of the York riots shows him at his very considerable best: well-informed and emotionally involved, he was yet sufficiently detached from the atrocities to provide a comparatively impartial and well-balanced if sometimes over-calculated story. Like all modern narratives of the York massacre the one that follows will inevitably pursue the path he was the first to tread.

So complex is the course of events during the ‘annus confusionis’ which began the reign of Richard I that no attempt can be made here to trace those events except in outline. To all intents and purposes the story begins with the removal from the scene of the most formidable of all royal protectors of the English Jews in the person of Henry II, who died at Chinon on 6 July 1189. Five weeks later the arrival in England of his eldest surviving son was accompanied by general popular enthusiasm for the presence of the already famous new king, for the crusading cause to which he had by then been fully committed for nearly two years, and for the prospects of a new and milder departure in English governmental policy. Leading Jews as well as Christian prelates and magnates gathered at Westminster for the king’s coronation on 3 September. Although prohibited from attending the official ceremonies, several Jews tried to make their way into Westminster Palace during the coronation banquet: a fracas at the gate led to a full-scale anti-Jewish riot which eventually resulted in the burning of the London Jewry and the loss of at least thirty lives. Of all the incidents of that turbulent day, the one which most caught the attention of both William of Newburgh and Roger of Howden was the fate which befall Benedict of York, who had travelled south to the coronation with his colleague Josce. Although the latter escaped the wrath of the London mob and returned safely to York, the severely wounded Benedict was in such despair that he accepted Christian baptism in the nearby church of the Innocents at the hands of a monk from his own city — William, prior of St Mary’s, York. But when summoned before Richard I on the following day, Benedict recanted and was caught the attention of both William of Newburgh and Roger of Howden who, had travelled south to the coronation with his colleague Josce. Although the latter escaped the wrath of the London mob and returned safely to York, the severely wounded Benedict was in such despair that he accepted Christian baptism in the nearby church of the Innocents at the hands of a monk from his own city — William, prior of St Mary’s, York. But when summoned before Richard I on the following day, Benedict recanted and was contemptuously dismissed by Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury (‘if he will not be a Christian, let him be the Devil’s man’). According to Roger of Howden, Benedict accordingly suffered the unenviable fate of the lapsed convert; when he died at Northampton a little later his body could find burial in neither the Jewish nor the Christian cemetery there.

The danger that the coronation riots of 3 September 1189 might provoke an immediate series of nationwide assaults on provincial English Jews was sufficiently real to induce Richard I to send messengers and letters throughout his kingdom ordering that they should be left in peace. Any prospect that this order could be permanently enforced was certainly put at risk by the king’s own departure from Dover on 14 December. Richard’s absence in northern France throughout the subsequent six months, at exactly the period when crusading detachments were slowly assembling in his English kingdom, was guaranteed to produce an emotionally charged and inflammatory situation. As so often in the history of medieval anti-Semitism, the heightening of religious passions during the season of Lent seems to have been the pre-condition for converting anti-Jewish intent into brutal action. The first outbreaks took place in East Anglia, at King’s Lynn and Norwich, during the first week of February 1190. These initial riots then sparked off a series of explosions which passed from town to town according to an intelligible, if badly documented, geographical and chronological sequence. Ralph de Diceto and William of Newburgh testify to other mass onslaughts at Stamford (7 March), Bury St Edmunds (18 March) and Lincoln; and the Pipe Rolls refer to serious assaults on Jews, probably during the same spring months of 1190, at Colchester, Thetford and Ospringe in Kent.

Attacks on provincial English Jews were indeed sufficiently universal to enable the caustic Richard of Devizes to engage in heavy sarcasm at the expense of the prudent citizens of Winchester who ‘alone spared their worms’. Although the riots were precipitated in a number of different ways, they clearly all conform to the classic stereotype of anti-Semitic demonstration. A phase of vindictive Jew-baiting led almost inevitably to murder and then to a concerted attempt by the mob at the complete extermination, usually by arson, of the urban Jewries: the Jews themselves had no defence but hurried flight to the local royal castle.

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82 Although the details of Benedict’s sad end are to be found only in Howden (pp. 12-13) and, more briefly, in the Cesta Ricardi (pp. 83-4), William of Newburgh’s allusion (p. 313) to his ‘cursed fate’ makes it probable that he too knew the full story.
83 The massacre of Stamford took place at the Lent Fair itself, that at Bury St Edmunds on Palm Sunday. For the coincidence of medieval anti-Jewish atrocities everywhere with the season of Lent, see the chronological index of C. Roth, A Jewish Book of Days (London, 1931), p. 313.
85 Chronicle of Richard of Devizes, p. 4.
To this general pattern the great York massacre was clearly no exception; but it owes its enduring fame as the locus classicus of medieval English anti-semitism to three other features:— the remarkable savagery with which the persecution was conducted, the unusual detail in which it was recorded by contemporary chroniclers, and William of Newburgh's allegation that the massacre was the product not only of misguided religious zeal but also of a calculated conspiracy on the part of impoverished local notables intent on liquidating their debts to the Jews by force. One stormy night, probably at the beginning of March, a band of armed conspirators took advantage of the confusion caused by a fire they may themselves have started to break into the York house of the recently deceased Benedict. After killing all its inhabitants, including Benedict's widow and children, they set the roof ablaze and carried off the treasure they found there. The next day the York Jews, under the leadership of Benedict's colleague, Josce, took the natural step of seeking protection from the royal constable of York castle: all but a few members of the community were in fact firmly entrenched behind the castle walls when another night attack, this time on Josce's own strongly-built house, occurred a few days later. On this second occasion popular emotion was so thoroughly aroused that rioting and plunder continued after day broke and was accompanied by the hounding of the few Jews still at large in the city: they were offered the alternative of Christian baptism, accepted by some, or death. 'But while all this was happening, the multitude who had escaped into the castle seemed to be in safety'.

At this point, and under the pressure of indiscriminate looting and killing in the city, the critical links of confidence between Jews and royal constable finally snapped. Secured enscénd in the keep of the castle but nervously anticipating treachery on the part of its custodian, the Jews refused to re-admit him after he went out on business. Equally understandably, the constable appealed for help to John Marshall, the sheriff of Yorkshire, who happened — perhaps not altogether coincidentally — to be in the vicinity with a large force of county milites. John Marshall's impetuous decision to eject the Jews from the castle by force was undoubtedly the most fatal of the many errors of judgement made at York during these turbulent days. As William of Newburgh makes clear, the sheriff's order to besiege the castle deluded 'all the workers and young men in the town as well as a large crowd of countrymen and many milites' into the belief that an onslaught on the Jews would have royal approval. By the time the sheriff had rescinded his order it was too late: the mob clustered around the foot of the castle keep was now in the grip of religious frenzy and a ready prey to the hysterical ravings of a maverick

white-robed 'hermit from a Premonstratensian canonry'. This hermit, crushed by a stone rolling down from the wall of the keep, was the only Christian casualty throughout the entire siege. According to William of Newburgh, the Jews were able to defend themselves successfully for several days, a tribute not only to the courage they found in desperation but also to the impregnability of the late twelfth-century English castle. Only when the specially prepared siege machines were finally moved into position on Friday 16 March did it become obvious to Christian and Jew alike that 'the fatal hour was imminent'.

It was that evening — two days before Palm Sunday and on the eve of the Jewish 'great Sabbath' before Passover — that the tragic denouement occurred. Rabbi Yomtob of Joigny, the spiritual leader of the community, called on his co-religionists to anticipate their certain death in the heroic fashion hallowed by Hebrew tradition. The tragic confusion which followed seems faithfully reflected in the three most detailed accounts of the mass-suicide. William of Newburgh, Roger of Howden and Ephraim of Bonn produced discordant descriptions of the tragedy, but all are agreed that a very considerable number of the Jews did decide to carry Yomtob's proposal into effect. Josce allegedly set the first example by
cutting the throats of his wife, Anna, and of his sons. The terrible responsibility for killing the women and children then seems to have fallen to the fathers of each Jewish household in turn. The latter probably met their own fate by the knife of Rabbi Yomtob, who appears to have ended the slaughter by taking Josce's life just before his own. This mass self-destruction took place to the accompaniment of a raging fire — probably started on the instructions of Rabbi Yomtob — which consumed the valuables and bodies of many of the victims before imperilling the lives of the survivors. The epilogue was almost as dramatic and even more horrifying. At daybreak on the following morning the 'wretched remnants of the Jews' appealed for mercy in return for Christian baptism; but as they left the castle under a calculatedly insincere promise of clemency, the 'cruel butchers' who followed Richard Malebise and the other leaders of the pogrom massacred them all. Even William of Newburgh loses his customary poise in a vigorous denunciation of the execrable cruelty of murderers who despised 'men seeking Christian grace'.

The rest of William of Newburgh's story can be confirmed, in most of its important details, by both the narratives of Roger of Howden as well as various references in the Pipe Rolls for this and succeeding exchequer years. Immediately after the massacre the conspirators ('conjurati') made their way to York Minster where they extracted from the terrified custodians the Jewish bonds deposited there and burned them in the middle of the church. They then dispersed, some across the sea to participate in the Third Crusade, others to the country where they awaited the results of the inevitable royal enquiry. They did not have to wait for long. On Easter Monday (26 March), little more than a week after the massacre, a messenger was already on his way from London to Normandy to inform the new Chancellor of England, William de Longchamp, of the York atrocities. Longchamp, together with Bishop Hugh du Puiset, his associate and rival as royal Justiciar, were apparently with King Richard himself at Lyons-la-Forêt in eastern Normandy when the news reached them. Justifiably incensed at the insult to his dignity as well as the injury to his revenues, the king dispatched Longchamp to England with orders to punish the rebels as they deserved. Pausing in London long enough to assemble a large and expensive force of royal militie under the command of his brother Henry, William de Longchamp arrived in York about Ascension Day (3 May). By the time he reached the city, the leading perpetrators of the massacre had fled — to Scotland, according to William of Newburgh — leaving many of their lands and chattels temporarily at the Chancellor's mercy. As a matter of course, William de Longchamp dismissed the sheriff of Yorkshire and the constable of York castle summarily from their offices, replacing them by another brother, Osbert, and by Philip Puintell respectively. Otherwise the Chancellor found it impossible to single out particular individuals for punishment. In the nature of things 'the promiscuous and numberless mob could not be called or brought to justice'; and in the face of the York citizens' obdurate claim that they had not been involved themselves, Longchamp imposed on them a series of heavy fines based on individual wealth rather than culpability.

A more interesting indication of the gravity with which the Chancellor and royal government regarded the York massacre was the taking of 'a hundred hostages from the citizens of the city, so that the latter should preserve their fealty and peace towards the king and kingdom and should stand trial in the court of the lord king concerning the death of the Jews'. It seems clear enough that no formal trial ever did take place; writing seven or eight years later, William of Newburgh noted that no one had yet been brought to punishment for the slaughter of the York Jews. Reasons for such apparent leniency are not hard to suggest and must certainly include the unpopularity which would be incurred by any medieval ruler prepared to take extreme measures against Christian persecutors of the Jews as well as the unusually turbulent and insecure state of English national politics which preceded Richard I's return from Syrian crusade and German imprisonment in March 1194. By the autumn of that year the newly appointed Justiciar, Archbishop Hubert Walter, was to demonstrate that the lessons of the massacres of 1190 had been well digested by the English government. When the justices on eyre were dispatched through the English shires in September 1194 they were instructed to make a detailed report on the goods of the victims as well

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81 Roger of Howden refers to deliberate cremation and omits Newburgh's suspiciously macabre account of the throwing down of Jewish corpses to the mob on the following morning. The Meaux chronicle (vol. I, p. 251) makes no mention of the fire and adds that the Jews threw their money into the muddy water (? the moat) below.

82 Newburgh, p. 322. It seems a little doubtful whether the reference to 'fannmis sollemitibus' justifies the inference of 'kindling the flames from the light on the High Altar' (Roth, p. 23).

as the names of their murderers; and at about the same time a series of
detailed ordinances called for the compulsory registration of all Jewish
bonds and chattels in a few fixed urban centres, the critical step in the
complete reorganisation of royal control over the English Jewry.** The
York massacre was not only a tragedy but an influential tragedy: it helped
to promote the closest relationship between state and Jewry yet seen in
western Europe and to bring about a decisive transformation in the
constitutional position of the medieval English Jews.

The novelty and sophistication of the policy adopted towards the Jews
by Hubert Walter and his colleagues is itself an indication of the severe
financial losses suffered by the crown in 1190. The extent of the damage
causd to the king’s own castle of York is, in particular, corroborated quite
specifically by the royal Pipe Rolls. Somewhat surprisingly in view of its
importance, the castle originally built in the angle between the rivers Ouse
and Foss on the orders of William the Conqueror remained a timber
rather than a stone structure until the expensive building operations of the
period 1245-62.** The Pipe Rolls of the three Angevin kings, great castle-
builders throughout all their dominions, rarely record an expenditure
of more than a few shillings a year on the upkeep of their castle at York.
All the more striking therefore is the unparalleled expenditure of
£247 8s. 5d. on York between 1190 and 1194, a total unsurpassed during
these years at any of Richard’s English castles except Dover and the
Tower of London.* This figure, which includes an outlay of over £190
on castle-works at York within six months of the massacre, amply
confirms Roger of Howden’s statement that before he left the city in the
spring of 1190 William de Longchamp had ordered ‘the castle in the old
castellary (castellum in veteri castellario) which William Rufus had built there’ to be strengthened (firmari). There can be no reasonable doubt that
the ‘castellum’ in question was the wooden keep on the site of what is now
called Clifford’s Tower, and even less that it was in this keep, situated on
the top of a high motte, that the Jews of York met their martyrdom.**

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** Howden, p. 34. York antiquarians have surely made unnecessarily heavy work of
Francis Drake’s inherently unlikely identification of Roger of Howden’s ‘old castle’ with the

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Some of the charred timbers encountered twelve feet below the surface of
the present mound during an excavation in 1902-3 may conceivably be
the most enduring of all memorials to the tragic night of 16 March
1190.**

There remains for final discussion the most intriguing of all the
problems raised by the great York massacre — the identity and motives
of the perpetrators themselves. Even in twentieth-century conditions it
has often been notoriously difficult to trace those responsible for anti-
semitic atrocities; and the single most remarkable feature of William of
Newburgh’s narrative is the confidence with which he relates not only
how the York Jews were martyred but also for what reasons and at
whose hands. How far can his statements be substantiated? There is, in
the first place, no doubt whatsoever that during March 1190 both the city and
the county of York must have been suffering from a quite exceptional
‘crisis of authority’: not only the king and archbishop of Canterbury but
also the most formidable northern prelate, Hugh du Puiset, and the most
powerful Yorkshire magnate, Nigel de Mowbray, were absent abroad.**

Since William of Aumale, allegedly ‘the real King of the regions beyond
the Humber under Stephen’ had been compulsorily retired by the young
Henry II, it seems to have been a cardinal point of Angevin policy not to
allow the emergence there of an all-powerful magnate.** Such reluctance
to permit the accumulation of authority in local hands is understandable
enough, but clearly had particular dangers at a time when there had not
ever been an architect of York for ten years. Richard I’s ill-judged
decision to have his illegitimate brother Geoffrey ‘elected’ to the York
see in August 1189 immediately provoked a violent struggle between
various vested interests, already fully under way at the time of the
massacre of the Jews. The fact that the strong hand of Rannulf Glanville
as sheriff of Yorkshire had only recently (Michaelmas 1189) been
removed can only have added to the opportunities of those who wished
to exploit the general insecurity.

As always at times of popular disturbance, the ‘large and anonymous
mob’ itself defies analysis; but there seems no reason to doubt the claim
that it comprised a large number of country-dwellers in addition to the
labouring classes, and especially the young men, of the city. More

** G. Benson and H. M. Platnauer, ‘Notes on Clifford’s Tower’, Annual Report of the
Yorkshire Philosophical Society for 1902 (York, 1903), pp. 68-74; G. Benson, Late Medieval

** Charters of the Honour of Mowbray, 1107-1191, ed. D. E. Greenway (British Academy,

** English Historical Documents, vol. II, ed. Douglas, p. 324; cf. Roger of Howden’s extra-
ordinary story that Richard I offered the county of York to Otto of Saxony in 1190
(Howden, p. 86).
interesting is William of Newburgh's allegation that many clergymen participated in the riot, a charge most likely to be valid in the case of the poorer and unbenefted priests of the city. Apart from the rabble-rousing Premonstratensian canon mentioned by William of Newburgh, members of the religious orders and the York clerical establishment probably remained aloof from the atrocities. As has been seen, Jewish bonds were actually in the custody of the Minster clergy during the massacre; and there is a strong presumption that the leading York ecclesiastics would not be likely to prejudice their relations with either Jews or king by direct participation in the pogrom.\footnote{Quite apart from the dealing of religious houses like St Mary's, York, in bonds, it seems probable that a certain amount of important Jewish business was actually transacted in the precincts of the Minster and other ecclesiastical establishments within the city; see Curia Regis Rolls, vol. I, p. 391, for a complicated transaction which took place in the camera of the archbishop of York ten years after the massacre.} The same argument almost certainly applies to the wealthier York citizens too. In an important and undeservedly neglected sentence William of Newburgh informs us that the nobilitas et cives graviorum of the town, fearing the dangers of the king's reaction, cautiously declined to take part in such madness. Admittedly a detailed list of no less than 59 individuals 'merced for the Jews' in the city of York does survive on the Pipe Rolls of Michaelmas 1190 and later; but it would certainly be illegitimate to suppose that all, or indeed any, of these men were personally guilty in view of the chronicler's explicit statement that William de Longchamp's punishment of the city had taken the form of a fine on each citizen according to his fortune. An analysis of the individuals listed and of their amercements (ranging from the 100 marks levied on William son of Sirich to the half-mark imposed on Thurstan Galien) leaves one in no doubt that the list preserves something perhaps even more valuable than the names of the city's anti-semites: it provides the first reasonably comprehensive survey of York's richest inhabitants to survive.\footnote{Pipe Roll 2 Richard I, pp. 68-70; Pipe Rolls 3 & 4 Richard I, pp. 69-70, 215-16. More than half of the 59 York citizens named figure as either holders of urban property or as witenesses to the charters printed in Early Yorkshire Charters, vol. I, pp. 174-249. They include, for example, a future mayor (Thomas Palmer) as well as a supervisor of the York castle-works (Warin de Cuningestreta) among their numbers (Early Yorkshire Charters, vol. I, pp. 177, 200; Pipe Rolls 3 & 4 Richard I, p. 61).} At Michaelmas 1194, four years later and long before most of the original 59 citizens had completed their payments, Henry de Fissergate and five other new names appear on the exchequer accounts charged with heavy debts 'pro habenda pace sua de interfectione Judeorum Ebor.'\footnote{Pipe Roll 6 Richard I, p. 161. Henry of Fishergate had recently been the lesee of the mill under York castle (Charters of the Honour of Mowbray, p. 184).} But in these cases too it seems more likely that the culprits were being penalised for tax-evasion four years previously, perhaps revealed by Hubert Walter's justices on eyre in the autumn of 1194, than for acts of violence against the Jews. Faced with such a financially painful demonstration of the effects of Angevin wrath, probably only a minority of the richer citizens of York are likely to have given 'their approval, counsel or aid' to the massacre of the Jews resident in their town.

Such scruples did not deter a prominent group of local Yorkshire nobles from being the real villains of March 1190. Once more the Pipe Rolls of Richard I's reign provide detailed substantiation for William of Newburgh's allegation that the massacre of the York Jews was carried through from beginning to end by a conspiracy of indebted and pitiless landlords. To the only one of these men identified by William of Newburgh himself, 'Richard rightly called Mala-Bestia', the Meaux chronicle adds the names of three others, William Percy, Marmaduke Darell and Philip de Fauconberg, as well as that of the sheriff of Yorkshire, John Marshall.\footnote{Newburgh, p. 321; Chronica Monasterii de Melio, vol. I, p. 351.} Unfortunately the Pipe Rolls for Michaelmas 1190 and 1191 record only the sheriff of Yorkshire's profits (\£74 10s. 7d. and \£18 11s. 3d.) from the lands and goods of those who fled 'pro assultu Judeorum' and not the names of the fugitives themselves. All the more valuable therefore is the record on the 1192 Pipe Roll of the fines levied on the three outstanding culprits by the new royal Justiciar, Walter de Coutances - in return for licence to take up their lands again until the return of Richard I to England. Richard Malebisse was fined 20 marks on his own account and on behalf of a certain Walter de Carton' as well as his esquire, Richard de Kukenea or Cuckney; William de Percy a similar amount for his two esquires, Pikot and Roger de Ripum, as well as himself; and Alan Malekake owed only 5 marks 'pro rehabenda terra sua'.\footnote{Pipe Roll 2 Richard I, pp. 74-5; Pipe Rolls 3 & 4 Richard I, pp. 77, 221.} To this handful of names Robert Davies added, on rather tenuous grounds, two others - those of Robert de Gant and of Robert de Turnham or Thornham. The latter, a famous royal curialis and knight from Kent who played a swashbuckling role on the Third Crusade and later filled the office of seneschal of Gascony for Richard I and John, shows no signs of Yorkshire associations until his marriage to the Fossard heiress in the mid-1190s.\footnote{Early Yorkshire Charters, vol. III, p. 328; Rotuli of Obitales et Finibus, p. 461; Chronica Monasterii de Melio, vol. I, pp. 105, 220, 231, 260; J. S. Sanders, English Barons: A Study of their origin and descent, 1088-1327 (Oxford, 1959), pp. 67; J. C. Holt, The Northerners: A Study in the Reign of King John (Oxford, 1963), pp. 75, 105, 234. The fact that in 1199 Robert de 'Turnham paid 5 marks 'pro habenda feudo ipsius quod captum fuit occasione judaeorum' (Rotuli of Obitales et Finibus, p. 25) seems to have been misinterpreted by Davies.}
northern baronage before his death in 1191, presents more of a problem. Despite his very considerable holdings of Yorkshire fees, there is no doubt that he was heavily indebted to the Jews and had often been on unhappy terms with the Angevin government. On the other hand, Davies’s belief that he fled from York after the killing of the Jews was evidently based on a mis-reading of the 1190 Pipe Roll and there survives no direct proof of his involvement in the massacre.  

The list of Yorkshire knights certainly known to have been implicated in the killing of the York Jews can therefore only be a short one. Nevertheless, sufficient information about Richard Malebisse, William Percy, Alan Malekakc, Marmaduke Darell and Philip de Fauconberg survives to allow some speculation as to the motives for their violent anti-semitism. In the first place these men belonged to the middle rather than the higher levels of the Yorkshire baronage of their day; both in wealth and status they were surpassed by the leaders of county society, the Lacies, the Stutevilles, the Rooses, the Paynells, the Bruce — families closely involved in the local operations of the Angevin government and apparently not implicated in the 1190 massacre. Even the William Percy who assisted the Jews in 1190 was only the head of a junior line (of Bolton Percy and Carnaby) of a still ‘mildly distinguished Anglo-Norman house’, not yet the great dynasty it was later to become.  

Although not great magnates by the standards of southern England, William Percy and his fellows were nevertheless important landlords throughout their county; most can be proved to have held estates in the immediate vicinity of York itself, a city they must have known well. More significantly still, they appear to have been closely bound together by ties of acquaintance—ship. Thus Marmaduke Darell was a tenant of the Percy fee at Sawley and Fountains; similarly the Fauconbergs and Cuckneys were related to one another as well as being associated with the foundation of Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire.  

Alan Malekakc not only witnessed the charters whereby the Malebisse family endowed Whirby’s Benedictine cell at Middlesbrough but also several bequests by Bishop Hugh du Puiset of Durham: one of his fellow-witnesses on these occasions was Picot de Percy who testified to the authenticity of other Puiset charters in the company of Richard Malebisse.  

The exceptionally turbulent and well-recorded career of Richard Malebisse, the most notorious of the persecutors of the York Jews, calls for more detailed comment: it was Malebisse’s readiness to resort to violence, his ‘audacity’ (to use William of Newburgh’s word), which best enables us to appreciate the severity of the social and political tensions among the Yorkshire baronage at the end of the twelfth century. By 1190 Richard Malebisse, of Acaster Malbis and Copmanthorpe near York, had recently succeeded his father William — who probably died on crusade in the Mediterranean — as the senior member of an extensive family connection. Despite his family’s possession of substantial estates in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, for example at Beningbrough and Little Aytton, he was heavily indebted to Aaron of Lincoln by at least 1182. On the fringes of influential governmental circles from an early date, he never received the financial security afforded by a really important royal office. Threatened with the deprivation of his keepership of Galtres Forest north of York on the accession of Richard I, he thereafter continually fell foul of the erratic processes of Angevin law and order. Soon after the partial forfeiture of his estates for his leading role in the York massacre of 1190, he became deeply involved in John’s conspiracy against his absent brother, an offence for which he was excommunicated in December 1191 and had to pay the heavy sum of 300 marks three years later. Only on John’s accession to the throne in 1199 was he allowed to proffer a fine of £700, two morris-hawks (musculeus Norenses), two leashes of harriers (leias leporarium) and four palfreys in order to recover his full rights over the extensive properties of which he had been dispossessed because of his participation in the 1190 massacre and John’s own rebellion. A year later Richard Malebisse’s attempts to convert his residence at Wheldrake into a regular castle, for the fortification of which he illegally purloined 250 oak trees from the royal forest of Galtres, justifiably aroused the fears
and suspicions of the citizens of York. Under constant threat of royal amercement, Malebisse continued to be both an unruly and a heavily indebted baron until the very end of his troubled career in 1210. The 'Evil Beast' of Jewish memory stands confirmed in governmental records as the recalcitrant nobleman, 'oppressed by the exactions of the royal treasury', revealed to us by William of Newburgh.

Nor were Richard Malebisse's discontents, admittedly extreme, unrepresentative of the grievances felt by the other members of the Yorkshire baronage with whom he enjoyed close bonds of acquaintance or of kindred. Most intriguing of all these relationships are the ones which connect him not only with the Percy family but with the great Bishop Hugh du Puiset of Durham. Since the death of the head of the house, William, in 1175, the dominating figures in the Percy family had been his three daughters, Maud, Agnes and Adeliz. Maud and Agnes are known to have been aunts of Richard Malebisse, while Adeliz was no less a person than the bishop's erstwhile mistress and the mother of his child. The existence of this unexpectedly close connection inevitably raises the suspicion that the massacre of the York Jews may have been only the most dramatic manifestation of what was potentially a political conspiracy on the grand scale. Perhaps a group of Yorkshire knights, relying on the sympathy if not the open support of Bishop Puiset, seized the opportunity of Richard I's absence from England to make a deliberately violent protest against the financial oppression of the Angevin government. Such a hypothesis would certainly make it easier to explain the severity of the measures taken by Chancellor William de Longchamp against Puiset as well as the Yorkshire milites in May 1190; and easier also to explain why the conspirators were only restored to their estates after Longchamp had been supplanted as royal vice-gerent by Archbishop Walter de Coutances. Like the rebellion against King John in 1212–15 or Robert Thweng's obscure attack on wealthy Italian clerks in the early 1100s, the massacre of the York Jews might be seen as a deliberate reaction on the part of discontented northerners against what they regarded, with some justification, as victimisation at the hands of a Westminster government which refused to take them into partnership.

In the last resort, however, the element of long-term calculation in the minds of the Yorkshire barons of 1190 must always remain conjectural. One can only agree with Bishop Stubbs's characteristically judicious statement of the possibilities: 'I should not like to accuse the Puiset and Percy connexion of a deliberate attempt to get rid of the evidence of their debts on this occasion, but so it may have been.' To this conclusion one need only add that the precise level of political consciousness on the part of the baronial conspirators of March 1190 is of less importance than their undoubted economic vulnerability. Richard Malebisse and his fellows formed a smaller and less well-documented group than the famous 'northerners' of 1213; but there is no doubt that they too belonged to that class of 'habitual litigants' and 'speculative gamblers' revealed to us a generation later by Professor Holt. Like their immediate heirs and descendants, the 'declining gentry' of late twelfth-century Yorkshire were well aware of the dire consequences of permanent exclusion from royal patronage: they were equally conscious that 'the Jews are known to be the royal usurers' and that a debt to a Jew was always in danger of being converted into a debt to the crown. The massacre of the York Jews in 1190, like Magna Carta itself, was at least in part the product of a rebellion by the king's debtors. As so often in the future, not least at the time of their final expulsion from England in 1290, it was the Jews who had to pay the harshest price for the unpopularity of the royal government whose purposes they served.

III

'A blacker page in English history than this I do not know.' So dramatic and awe-inspiring is the catastrophe of March 1190 that antiquaries and historians have always been in danger of forgetting that no less than a century intervened between the temporary and the permanent

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113 Nothing Bishop Puiset is alleged by the chroniclers to have done seems to quite account for his sudden and sensational arrest by William de Longchamp at Tickhill or Southwell in May 1190 (Gesta Ricardi, p. 195; Howden, p. 53).
114 For the inordinately heavy taxation of the late 1180s, including the Saladin Tithe, see The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury (Rolls Series, 73, 1879–80), vol. I, pp. 325, 422; F. A. Cazel, Jr., 'The Tax of 1185 in Aid of the Holy Land', Speculum, vol. XXX (1955), pp. 385–92. The best impression of the profits to be made from royal office-holding in the north is conveyed by Rannulf Glanvill's great fortune in 1189, and by the willingness of William de Stuteville to pay 1,500 marks for the shirefdom of Yorkshire in 1200 (Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus, p. 109).
115 Stubbs, Historical Introductions to the Rolls Series, p. 219, n. 8.
117 Newburgh, p. 323.
extinction of the medieval Jewish community at York. Yet in most ways the massacre of Shabbat ha-Gadol should be seen as the prologue rather than the climax of the drama of the Jews of York. According to the accepted view, 'It was many years before any community was re-established at York, and it never again attained the importance which it had enjoyed before that fiery night'. In fact nearly all the evidence at our disposal points to a very different conclusion. Not only did Jews return to the city very soon after the massacre but they then proceeded to play a more prominent role in almost every sphere (except that of scholarship) than their martyred predecessors. The history of the thirteenth-century Jewish community at York is a subject which demands thorough investigation in its own right. Apart from a few scraps of often misleading factual information assembled by Robert Davies and an important but very uncrucial study of the great Aaron of York by Michael Adler, it is a story which as yet remains completely untold. This is certainly not the place to tell it in the detail that the wealth of published and unpublished sources demands. On the other hand, no account of the massacre of 1190 can properly stop abruptly short at 1190 itself. At the very least it is essential to point out that, like most resorts to violence and murder at most times, the York pogrom resolved nothing and altered little that was fundamental. The very combination of royal and local financial needs which had brought the Jews to York in the late twelfth century survived to ensure their renewed prosperity for many more years to come.

In the first place those Christians who may have hoped that the York massacre would put a permanent end to the presence of both Jews and Jewish business in the city must have been rapidly disillusioned. The destruction of an unascertainable number of bonds in the Minster and elsewhere during March 1190 did not prevent both Jews and royal government from continuing to enforce debts and mortgages incurred before that month. Nor must one discount the possibility that several Jewish lives as well as many Jewish bonds escaped the holocaust: within a few months of the disaster the sons of the murdered Benedict of York were already sufficiently optimistic about their future prospects to undertake a payment of no less than 700 marks for the inheritance of their father's landed property and debts. Admittedly the Meaux chronicler, writing much later, explicitly states that for many years after the massacre.

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114 Roth, p. 24.
116 E.g., Memoranda Roll 1 John, pp. 15, 24; Pipe Roll 3 John, pp. 159-60; Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus, pp. 122, 130.
117 See above, pp. 13-14.
century, and especially in the middle years of Henry III's reign, York was the centre of an unusually flourishing money-lending business. Although the financial activities of the York Jews have left no record so informatively revealing as the so-called Day Book Rolls of their Norwich counterparts, sufficient evidence survives in published or unpublished form to reveal the main features of their operations. All allowances made for a situation in which unredeemed debts and mortgages leave much less trace in the records than those which were speedily liquidated, it is clear that Jewish capital was in constant demand by a very large and variegated section of northern society. Most of the loans recorded in the York shetaroth of this period were for amounts of between 5 and 25 marks and seem to have been subject to the then standard interest rate of twopence in the pound per week. The techniques of money-lending, still basically those employed by Josce and Benedict of York in the late twelfth century, are perhaps best illustrated by the simplest possible example, a starr endorsed by the most famous of all thirteenth-century Jews, Aaron of York. On 17 June 1237 Thomas the Serjeant of (North) Allerton undertook to repay a debt of £6 to Aaron by the end of that month; if he failed to do so he would be subjected to interest at the rate of twopence 'for every pound for each week', his lands, rents and chattels to remain in mortgage to Aaron until both principal and interest had been discharged. The way in which countless transactions of this type could rapidly lead to the impoverishment of the borrower, the profit of the Jew and the emergence of a vast and sophisticated traffic in bonds between Jews and Christians needs no particular urging.

Needless to say the single most important economic effect of such an extensive market in bonds, encumbered estates and property rents was the transfer of landed wealth from a wide variety of declining' families to more prosperous social groups, and particularly to those with influence at the royal court. Although the copious source material still needs to be properly assessed, it seems clear enough that the great majority of the loans made by the York Jews in their most active period (c. 1220-c. 1258) were to the lesser gentry and free tenants of the north — and indeed of the south too. On the whole, advances of capital by York Jews to the greater magnates, lay and ecclesiastical, seem to be less in evidence than during the days of Aaron of Lincoln. Moreover, by the reign of Henry III religious houses in northern England were apparently profiting more than ever before from their business connections with the Jews. Those ecclesiastical corporations which needed to borrow money for purposes of consumption or capital expenditure are considerably outnumbered in the surviving records by those which bought up unredeemed Jewish bonds at a discount in order to augment their estates. The quite unsubstantiated legend that the famous north transept window ('The Five Sisters') of York Minster was directly financed by the York Jews is not absolutely incredible; but it must be said that a loan for such a purpose would be against the historical probabilities of the early thirteenth century.

A highly profitable money-lending business was of course the sine quam of a Jewish settlement in thirteenth-century York; the inescapable corollary was inordinately heavy financial exploitation by the English government. Not surprisingly therefore, royal taxation records provide much the most striking testimony to the extraordinary wealth of the York community under Henry III. Before the end of John's reign and during the early years of Henry III, various unpublished 'rotuli juceorum' among the exchequer records already reveal the manner in which numerous Christian borrowers were being compelled to repay at least part of their obligations to the York Jews whenever the latter were tallaged. By 1219 Leo Episcopus of York and his son-in-law Aaron were classed for taxation purposes among England's six richest Jews. Two years later York actually headed the list of the 17 communities which contributed to the so-called auxilia (in effect a tallage) paid toward the dowry of the

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189 The grievance ventilated at the Oxford parliament of 1238 was not that the Jews lent money usurersly but that 'they hand over their debts and lands mortgaged to them to the magnates and most powerful men in the realm, who thereby enter into the lands of lesser men': W. Stubbs, Select Charters (9th edn., Oxford, 1913), p. 377. Despite Professor Postan's important speculations on these developments (The Medieval Economy and Society, London, 1972, pp. 164-5), the York evidence would suggest that it was the lesser squirearchy and the peasant free-tenants, rather than the 'knighthly class' as a whole, which suffered most severely from this process.

190 See the important lists of the numerous cyrographs of Aaron and Leo of York as well as of many other Jews deposited in the Cambridge archa during the reign of Henry III: Stokes, Studies in Anglo-Jewish History, pp. 252-75.

191 For examples from the three very different northern monasteries of Durham, Malton and Meaux, see Muniments of Dean and Chapter of Durham, 4,13, Spec., no. 35; Feodarium Prioratus Dunelmensis, pp. 135, 175; Richardson, pp. 281-4; Chronica Monasterii de Meli, vol. II, pp. 12, 55, 109, 115-16.

192 P.R.O., E. 401/1564 (a Rotulus Juseorum of 14 and 15 John which contains three lists of 34, 38 and 27 names respectively under an Eboracum heading); E. 401/3b (a Rotulus Juseorum of 4 Henry III with a list of 23 names under the Eboracum heading). I am grateful to Mr Charles Kightly for his help in transcribing the York sections of these important rolls, the full implications of which will require detailed discussion after their eventual publication.
king’s sister. Of a total payment of £564 3s. 5½d., York was charged with no less than £164 10s. od., more than twice as much as the Jews of London. Historians have sometimes been reluctant to accept the possibility that the York community had developed, despite the catastrophe of its earlier history, into the wealthiest in the country. Yet as late as 1255 it was still being assessed for tallages at a higher rate than any other provincial English Jewry. Only after that year, at exactly the time when there is clear evidence that Henry III had taxed the great Aaron of York beyond the point of recovery, did the financial history of the York Jews enter its final stage of rapid and pathetic decay. Perhaps the most revealing symptom of this decline is the readiness of York Jews to sell off their property within the city itself to Christian purchasers, often the leading citizens of the town. The final survey of their holdings, made on the very eve of their final expulsion in 1290, records the names of only six Jewish property-holders in the city; of these Bonamicus alone, who later settled in Paris under the protection of King Philip the Fair, was at all prominent. A handful of houses and urban rents worth little more than £15 in all were a sad comment on how a particularly mighty community had fallen.

The remarkable financial ascendancy of the York Jewry in the first half of the thirteenth century had been a reflection of the wealth of its greatest figures rather than of the community as a whole. The exceptional dominance of medieval Jewish society by a handful of very powerful patriarchs, a dominance encouraged for its own purposes by the royal government, may still be insufficiently appreciated. Perhaps no social group in medieval England provides a better justification for Carlyle’s view that history ‘is but the biography of great men’. There is certainly no doubt that the history of the thirteenth-century York Jewry will eventually have to be written in terms of biography. The task of reconstructing the genealogical relationships of medieval English Jews is still in its infancy; but despite the complications caused by a mobile population, frequent name-changes and a very limited repertoire of Hebrew first names, such a study may one day transform our understanding of Jewish history in thirteenth-century England. Clearly the exceptional prominence of the York Jewry under Henry III owed nearly everything to the presence within the city of the two richest Jews of their age. Leo Episcopius or Le Eveske, active in most branches of Jewish life from at least 1219 until his death in 1244, lived through the halcyon years which coincided with the first half of Henry III’s reign; after his decease, his son Samuel was required to pay a relief to the king of no less than 7,000 marks, which the highest recorded figure for any medieval English Jew. But even Leo’s great wealth was overshadowed by that of his son-in-law, Aaron of York, at first the most powerful and influential and later the most ruthlessly taxed Jew in English history. Although Aaron’s most active and wealthy years coincided with those (1236-43) in which he held the office of Arch-Presbyter of the English Jews, he showed remarkable financial resilience until crushed under the weight of the savage heavy royal tallages of the 1250s. Even the normally unsympathetic Matthew Paris was moved to something close to pity at the spectacle of the deliberate extinction of such a fabulous fortune, evaporated long before Aaron’s death in 1268. Aaron of York’s career will always be remembered as the locus classicus of the instability of Jewish fortunes and indeed of Jewish life in medieval England. Although his widow Henna remained quietly active in the York community her husband had adorned until the last decade of its existence, Jewish wealth had passed to other hands in other places.

The readiness to migrate from one community to another at short notice has always been a characteristic of Jewish history, a characteristic to which thirteenth-century England was certainly no exception. Far
from being, as is usually thought, the son of the Josce of York who had been martyred in March 1190, the great Aaron de Eboraco himself had moved to the city from Lincoln several years after the massacre. Similarly many of York's own resident Jews went elsewhere in the lean years of the 1250s and later. Like the great capitalist enterprises of the twentieth century, the financial dealings of the medieval English Jews defy understanding until it is appreciated that they operated at a national rather than local level: the history of any one community, York not excepted, can never be studied in isolation. To the very end indeed the Jewish community at York was an exotic and largely artificial growth in the city's history. What the Christian inhabitants of the thirteenth-century town thought of their Hebrew neighbours was no doubt largely conditioned by that inescapable fact. Isolated acts of anti-semitism, like Simon of Naburn's mysterious 'assault on the Jews in the water of the Ouse' in 1208, certainly did occur; and the fact that — as far as we know — the York Jewish community was spared the blood libels and mob violence encountered elsewhere in Henry III's England probably owes more to fear of royal anger than regret for the atrocity of 1190. On the other hand, many members of the city's governing class not only came to know Jews well and perhaps even to a prevailing atmosphere of passive tolerance: at one time or another York Jews are known to have held tenements in Coney Street, Micklegate, Hungate, Fossgate, Bretgate, Patrick Pool, Walmgate, Pavement, Castlegate, St Saviourgate and Peleergayle.

Although the medieval Jewry, at York as elsewhere, therefore bore no approximation to the later eastern European ghetto, it is evident that there was a particularly heavy concentration of Jewish residential property in Coney Street. Of the seven urban messuages still held by the York Jews at the time of their expulsion in 1290, four — including the dwelling of Bonamicus himself — were located in that street, then as now in the heart of the city. It is possible to be even more precise: although the numerous references to Jewish property in thirteenth-century Patent Rolls and other sources are usually regrettably vague, a Fountains Abbey charter of c. 1210 reveals that only one tenement separated the house of Aaron of York from the church of St Martin's, Coney Street. Immediately adjacent to Aaron's houses in Contingestrete lay those of his nephew, Josce le Jovene, who was hanged for felony committed at London in the late 1270s; these in turn adjoined a piece of land 'with buildings and appurtenances, and with a school (schola) built thereon, and with steps to the entrance of the said land' which lay in November 1279 — between Coney Street and the Ouse. It is hard to resist the cumulative impression that in the thirteenth century at least the side of central Coney Street facing the river was the location not only of the dwellings of York's richest Jews but of its synagogue too. How far Robert Davies was justified in claiming — on the evidence of a now unidentifiable charter, William of Newburgh's allusion to 'in medio civitatis', and some mysterious and no doubt undatable 'fragments of massive stone walls' — that the twelfth-century house of Josce of York also stood on this site must remain an open question. But there can be no reasonable doubt that the modern shoppers at Leak and Thorp's, like their countless predecessors who lodged at the famous 'George Inn', are as close as anyone can now be to the geographical centre of the medieval York Jewry.
Jou- prefix (which makes its first recorded appearance at more or less have understandably baffled a long caused some minor stir in Victorian antiquarian circles; but in the when old Layerthorpe Postern and Bridge were demolished in 1829-30
Admittedly the discovery of memorials to the medieval Jews of York."
complete absence of any scholarly examination of this intriguing medal-
lion, which takes the classic cabbalistic form of a talisman inscribed with magic Hebraic numbers and an invocation to Jupiter, it may be wisest to doubt whether it is of medieval provenance at all."
early medieval history, names have proved to be more enduring than objects: the most permanent legacies of the medieval York Jewry to the modern city are a couple of remarkable street names. One of these, the Jubbergate now bathetically designated Market Street, is unquestionably the most problematic of all York's place-names. The difficulties presented by the -bret element in the early spellings of this important street (Jubrettage, Jeubretgatge, Jubretogate) have understandably baffled a long line of York historians and antiquaries as well as place-name scholars; but it is fortunately a good deal simpler to conclude that the Ju-, Jew-, Jou- prefix (which makes its first recorded appearance at more or less exactly the time when the Jews were expelled in 1290) must derive from the Middle English Jewe. The existence of two different Bretgates in the medieval city probably provides the explanation of why the Jou- prefix was frequently added to a street where Jews did in fact hold property and which led into Coney Street at a point not far away from the site of the synagogue and the houses of Aaron, Leo, and Bonamicius of York.155

155 The time-hallowed view that medieval Jews were the pioneers of urban domestic building in stone ought perhaps to be approached with some caution in the light of recent research and the considered suggestion that at York itself stone chambers and halls may have been 'normal amongst the more wealthy merchants of the 12th and 13th centuries': Inventory of Historical Monuments in the City of York, vol. III (1972), South-West of the Ouse, p. 161.
153 I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Cameron for his confirmation of this derivation and for his helpful comments on the problems. The most important attempts to grapple with the name 'Jubrettagate', neither completely convincing, are by H. Lindkvist, 'A Study on Early Medieval York', Anglia, vol. 50 (1926), p. 365; and A. H. Smith, The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York (English Place-Name Society, vol. XIV, 1937), p. 291; see (cont. on p. 47)

159 The city's second Jewish place-name, the street called Jewbury immediately outside its north-eastern walls, is a good deal less ambiguous. Resisting the temptation to make unduly heavy weather of the -bury suffix, one can only be grateful for a contemporaneously precise identification of 'Le Jeubry' with a plot of land used by the Jews as their cemetery in the years before 1290. There can be little doubt that the burial-ground of the medieval York Jews had always been on this site, one which conforms exactly to the general pattern of extra-mural Jewish cemeteries encountered elsewhere in the country.18 In a deservedly famous charter of c. 1230, John le Romeyn, then Subdean of York Minster, recorded the sale to the commune of the York Jews of a plot of land in Barkergate adjacent to what was already antiquum cimiterium Indorum.116 It is therefore on that site, immediately west of the river Foss and now under the tarmac of an unusually unsightly civic car park, that archaeologists will no doubt one day disturb the posthumous tranquility of Jews who can have rarely been completely tranquil while alive. Even then the myth will surely be more potent than the facts. The absence of a sizeable Jewish community in the Victorian and twentieth-century city has a good deal more to do with York's failure to foster a thriving modern textile industry than with official ostracism on the part of the Jews themselves;18 but this is still a story to ensure, in Isaac
D’Israeli’s words, that ‘our heart however expands with sentiment’. One can understand why even today a handful of Orthodox Jews still actively discourage their children from coming to settle — or even to study — in a city which brought their predecessors so much pain as well as no little profit.


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**Appendix**

**Chirograph Recording the Sale of Land Adjacent to the Old Jewish Cemetery to the Commune of the Jews of York, c.1230**

(see Frontispiece, and above page 47, note 157)

Of all the surviving original documents relating to the history of the medieval York Jewry, the following (York Minster Library: Vicars Choral Deeds, no. 22) is unquestionably the most revealing. Master John le Romeyn the elder, who sold the land in question to the York Jews, had become the first recorded Subdean of York Minster in or about 1228; and the names of the York mayor and bailiffs (or reeves) who appear as witnesses make it clear that this chirograph dates from the very early 1230s. The distinction of the witnesses testifies to the close supervision of the Jewish community by both the ecclesiastical and civic authorities in York. Nor can there be much doubt that the York Jews bought the land specified below in order to extend their existing cemetery, itself a comment on their numerical growth at this period.

*Text*

Text: Sciant presentes et futuri Quod ego Johannes Romanus Subdecanus Ecclesie Sancti Petri Ebor’ vendidi Commune Iudeorum Ebor’ et aliorum Iudeorum Anglie, pro quadam certa summa pecunie quam michi dederunt, Totam illam terram meam Cum pertinenccis in Barkergate in Suburbio Ebor’ quam emi a Galfrido Brun sicuti iacet in longitudine et in latitudine inter terram quam ego tenui de Communa Canoniceorum Ebor’ Ecclesie et antiquum Cimiterium Iudeorum; Habendam et Tenendam dictis iudeis et eorum assignatis imperpetuum de me et assignatis meis in feodo et hereditate libere Quiete et integre, Cum omnibus pertinenccis et aisiamentis suis sine omni retenemento; Redendo inde annuatim michi in tota vita mea duos solidos sterlingorum, medietatem ad festum Sancti Martini in hyeme ct medietatem ad Pentecost”; Et post decessum meum vicariis Ebor’ ecclesie ad eosdem terminos sicuti mei assignatis imperpetuum, et domino Regi Hungablium suum pro omni seruicio. Et ego Johannes et assignati mei Warnitzhumus dicte Commune Iudeorum prefaatam terram cum omnibus pertinenccis suis per predictum servicium contra omnes gentes et eorum hereditibus et assignatis imperpetuum; et ut hec vendicio Rata et stabilis sine fine permaneat, huic Carte in modum Cy(r)ographaT confectc sigillum meum apposui. Hiis Testibus: Rogero decano beati Petri Ebor’, Willelmo de Redefend tunc Thessauro eiusdem Ecclesie, Galfrido de Norewyc tunc presbytero predicte Ecclesie, Ricardo de Norcie Walays tunc Cancelario, Hugone de Selehy tunc maiore Ebor’. Johanne de Wartwhil, Alexandro filio Radulphi, Nicholau Winemer, Roberto de Cardoil, Thome Spervi, tunc prepositis; Ramulpho filio Yoonis, Walterlo Clerico, tunc Cyrographarhis Ebor’, Thome filio Ace, et multis alius Christianis; et iudeis, Ysac de Norhamton’, Leon’ episcopo, Aron filio Yocey, Benedicto episcopo, Yoceo de Kent, Samuel filio Yocey, et multis alius iudeis. (On the next line are added — in Hebrew script — the signatures of five Jewish witnesses, viz. Isaac of Northampton, Samuel Cohen, Samuel son of Josce, Josce of Kent, Josce nephew of Aaron.)
Let those present and to come know that I, John Romanus, Subdean of the church of St Peter of York, have sold to the commune of the Jews of York and of the other Jews of England, for a certain sum of money which they have given to me, of St Peter of York, which I bought from Geoffrey Brun:— as it lies in length and breadth between the land which I have held from the commons of the canons of the church of York and the ancient cemetery of the Jews. To be had and to be held by the said Jews and their assigns for ever, from me and my assigns, in fee and inheritance, freely, quietly and intact, with all its appurtenances and easements, without any withholding whatsoever. To be rendered to me from that land, yearly for all my life, two shillings sterling, one moiety at the feast of St Martin in the winter and the other moiety at Whitsuntide; and, after my death, these sums are to be rendered to the vicars of the church of York, as my assigns, for ever at the same terms, as well as his houseable to the lord king for all service. And I, John, and my assigns will warrant to the said commune of the Jews the aforesaid land with all its appurtenances, because of the aforesaid service, against all people, their heirs and their assigns for ever. And in order that this sale may remain eternally valid and established, to this charter, made in the manner of a chirograph, I have affixed my seal. These being witnesses: Roger, Dean of the church of the Blessed Peter of York; William of Redefend, then Treasurer of the same church; Geoffrey of Norwich, then Precentor of the said church; Richard of Norcie Walays, then Chancellor (of the said church); Hugh of Selby, then Mayor of York; John of Warthill, Alexander son of Ralph, Nicholas Winemer, Robert of Cardoil, Thomas Sperri, then reeves; Ranulph son of Ivo, Walter clerk, then Chirographers of York; Thomas son of Ace, and many other Christians. And Jews, Isaac of Northampton, Leo episcopus, Aaron son of Josce, Benedict episopus, Josce of Kent, Samuel son of Josce, and many other Jews. (For a previous printed edition and translation of this deed, see Adler, pp. 164-7. Four other Vicars Choral Deeds of York Minster Library (nos. 52, 63, 85, 298) also relate to property transactions involving thirteenth-century York Jews: they have now been printed in E. Brunskill, 'The Jews in Medieval York', T.J.H.S.E. vol. XX (1964), pp. 239-45.)

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1 Master John le Romeyn the elder was Subdean of York Minster by June 1228: see York Minster Fasti (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, vols. CXXIII, CXXIV, 1958-9), vol. I, p. 30.
2 For these four dignitaries of York Minster, see York Minster Fasti, vol. I, pp. 3, 13, 18-19, 23.
3 The bailiffs of the city of York (alternatively known as 'reeves' at this early date) were Thomas le Graunt, Nicholas Winemer and Robert de Kethel in 1230, replaced by Thomas Sperri, John of Warthill and Alexander (for Ralph in 1231-2: R. H. Staille, 'Civic Officials and Parliamentary Representatives of York' (MS. in York City Reference Library), vol. III, p. 879.
4 All six of these Jews contributed to the royal auxilium paid by the York Jewry in 1221: see H. M. Chew, 'A Jewish Aid to Marry, A.D. 1221', T.J.H.S.E. vol. XI (1928), pp. 106-7. 'Aaron son of Josce' can be safely identified with the famous Aaron of York.

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Postscript (1995)

Readers of this Borthwick Paper, first published twenty-one years ago, may well suppose that it is already beginning to show signs of its considerable age. Perhaps so: but to the author's own relief, nearly all he wrote about this harrowing and perennially fascinating subject in 1974 is what he would still write now. Contemporary attitudes towards the medieval York Jew and the massacre of 1190 have admittedly changed a great deal during the last two decades: but this transformation owes much less to the work of professional historians than to the dramatic rise of interest in the medieval English Jewry among modern Christians and Jews alike. Ironically enough, it was only after the small eighty-year-old Hebrew Synagogue in Aldwark finally closed its doors in 1975 that the massacre of the York Jews on Shabbat ha-Gadol finally came to fulfill its present symbolic role as the supreme English example of the evils of anti-Semitism and of the need for reconciliation between Christians and Jews. Perhaps the critical date in this transition was 31 October 1978, when a memorial tablet to the York martyrs of March 1190 was unveiled at the foot of Clifford's Tower in the presence of the Archbishop of York and of the Chief Rabbi of England. Thereafter, and especially since the octocentenary of 'Clifford's Tower Commemoration' between 15 and 18 March 1990, the massacre has become — what was certainly much less the case in 1974 — the focus for choral music, poetry and a new form of ecumenical pilgrimage. After centuries during which the York atrocities of March 1190 were deliberately remembered as infrequently as possible, they have at least found a significant place within whatever the 'English Heritage' is supposed to be.

Such far-reaching developments were not at all anticipated when this paper was written in the early 1970s: but in some ways it is even more curious that one of its rather casual concluding prophecies was to prove true with something of a vengeance. When supposing, in 1974, that it would be 'under the tarmac of an unusually unsightly civic car park that archaeologists

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1 Although prepared with the co-operation of the Ancient Monuments Division of the then Department of the Environment, the creation of this memorial tablet was due to an initiative from the Jewish Historical Society of England.
2 Clifford's Tower Commemoration, York, 15-18 March 1990: A Programme and Handbook (York, 1990), passim; but also see Jon Salkin's earlier impressive poems on the massacre in his The Principle of Water (London, 1974).
will no doubt one day disturb the posthumous tranquillity of Jews who can rarely have been completely tranquil while alive, it would have been impossible to predict that proposals to develop the medieval Jewish burial ground at York were in fact to be brought before the City Council as early as July 1980. But so they were: and as the long awaited and authoritative account of the resulting if incomplete archaeological investigation makes clear, the now famous Jewbury excavation of 1982-83 took almost everyone by surprise. One possibility mooted at the time was the creation of a memorial garden on the site, but in the event the demands of modern capitalism (the need for a multi-storey car park over the cemetery to serve Sainsbury's then new store on Foss Bank) triumphed over all other considerations. The York Archaeological Trust only had time to investigate approximately half of the burial ground: and now the solitary memorial to the Jews of medieval York at Jewbury itself is a plaque briefly visible to those who drive into a car park perhaps only a little less unsightly than the one it has replaced.

No attempt can be made here to do justice to the complexities of the York Archaeological Trust's elaborate Jewbury excavation report, now essential reading for the history of medieval Jewry not only in York but in England and indeed western Christendom as a whole. In many ways this impressive piece of collaborative scholarship carries all the greater conviction because it is careful not to try to prove too much: it already seems absolutely clear that the Jewbury excavation of 1982-83 is much more important for the questions it raises than those it answers. Apart from the familiar difficulties involved in trying to relate medieval archaeological to documentary evidence, the principal problem facing members of the York Archaeological Trust when attempting to assess the significance of the 475 inhumations so scrupulously examined at Jewbury was the lack of other comparable large-scale excavated medieval Jewish cemeteries. That said, it seems to be one of the most important consequences of the Jewbury excavation that it has dispelled the previously pervasive myth of uniformity in Jewish burial custom throughout medieval Christendom. Much more disappointing for the study of the medieval York Jewry was the complete absence of tombstones and grave goods at the Jewbury site. However the latter is to be explained, the inevitable result is to make the detailed scientific study of the skeletons themselves much the most significant part of the archaeological investigation. Here again the evidence can often prove less than clear cut: but minute study of the physical, and especially dental, features of the human remains at Jewbury raises the tantalising possibility that the thirteenth-century Jewish population of York may indeed have been distinctive in a variety of ways, not least in practising a dietary regime different from that of their Christian neighbours.

More relevant to the traditional concerns of medieval Jewish historians is the ingenious use made of the Jewbury burial statistics to suggest that the probable average total size of the Jewish population in thirteenth-century York was 260, with a possible life-expectancy at birth within that population of some 24 years. Such calculations, undoubtedly tentative, are not altogether impossible to reconcile with this author's earlier and equally hazardous supposition that 'it seems unlikely that there can have been more than 150 or so Jews in York at the accession of Edward I'. That particular estimate was made within the context of a detailed - but certainly not comprehensive - discussion of the declining fortunes and ultimate extinction of the thirteenth-century York Jewry, a discussion in which I attempted to expand and elaborate upon the third section of this Borthwick Paper.

On the evidence of royal tallages and other sources it proved possible to confirm that the remarkable prosperity of the York Jewry during the halcyon years of Aaron of York was brought to an end by its remorseless and sustained taxation at the hands of Henry III in the 1240s and 1250s. Whether or not, as seems likely, the year 1255 marked the critical watershed in the fortunes of the York Jewry, thereafter (and long after Aaron's own death in 1268), the history of the community presents a locus classicus of a religious minority...

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8 M. H. Williamson, 'The Size of the medieval Jewish population in York', in Jewish Burial Ground at Jewbury, pp. 526-38. These calculations naturally depend on estimates (not at all easy to make) of the total size of the Jewbury cemetery and of the extent to which Jews not resident in York were interred there at different periods between the 1170s and 1280s.

under relentless and increasingly irreversible pressure. Whatever may have been the case in thirteenth-century England's other provincial Jewries, the Jews of York could clearly find little consolation from Edward I's novel experiments in controlling the business activities of his only significant religious minority. According to all the available evidence, the Jews of York had lost almost all their economic significance well before 1 November 1290, the day on which the community there joined the fate of all English Jews in being condemned to a perpetual exile and without hope of remaining.

However, one of the more familiar paradoxes of the history of medieval English Jewry is that it tends to be most fully documented in its final and declining years. It is therefore hardly surprising that since this paper was first published, some new insights into the melancholy state of the York Jews during the reign of Edward I have appeared in the most recent volume of the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews and various other sources. As many more relevant judicial and financial records in the Public Record Office still wait to be edited and assessed, it need hardly be said that this account of the Jews of Medieval York still remains a preliminary foray into an almost inexhaustibly fascinating subject. Indeed during the last two decades the most important contributions to our understanding of the Jews of medieval York have tended to emerge from scholars not primarily interested in York at all. Much more research on various aspects of medieval Anglo-Jewry is currently in progress than was the case in 1974; but it is already clear that recent investigation of themes as diverse as Jewish marriage customs, royal tallas and the contradictory currents of thirteenth-century Christian ideology have raised questions highly applicable to the Jews of medieval

10 R. R. Mundill, 'Anglo-Jewry under Edward I: credit agents and their clients', T.J.H.S.E., vol. xxxi (1990), pp. 1-21. The wealth of Bonamy of York, the most important Jewish property-holder in the city at the time of the Expulsion in 1290 and perhaps the last great financier in the history of the medieval English Jewry, certainly seems to have been based on money-lending (Dobson, 'Decline and Expulsion', pp. 44-46).

11 What little remained of the once remarkable wealth of the Jews of thirteenth-century York was used to subsidise such personal royal enterprises as the construction of the life-size bronze effigy of Henry III still at Westminster Abbey (Dobson, 'Decline and Expulsion', p. 48).


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