

# The State of Jewish Memory in York and Winchester

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## **Zusammenfassung**

Am Beispiel der englischen Städte York und Winchester wird in diesem Artikel das Konzept der Erinnerung von Pierre Nora untersucht, um die Individualität lokaler Ansätze der Erinnerung an mittelalterliche englische Judenheiten zu veranschaulichen. Allgemein wird in diesem Beitrag aufgezeigt, wie Erinnerung einerseits aus einem Zeitalter anhaltenden Schweigens befreien und andererseits wieder in ein größeres historisches Narrativ integriert werden kann. Vice versa wird ebenfalls untersucht, wie das die jüdische Erinnerung umschließende Schweigen dennoch seine Fortsetzung im scharfen Gegensatz zu diesem neuen Verständnis von Erinnerung findet. Abschließend wird im Artikel die Frage gestellt, warum dieses Schweigen anhält und ob Noras Theorie, dass sich Erinnerung kontinuierlich entwickelt, auf die Erfahrungen jüdischer Erinnerung in York und Winchester angewendet werden kann.

## **Abstract**

This article examines Pierre Nora's concept of memory using the examples of York and Winchester to demonstrate the individuality of local approaches to the memory of medieval Anglo-Jewries. Overall, this paper will highlight how memory can be rescued from a period of prolonged silence and reintegrated back into a wider historical narrative. Conversely it will also examine how in stark contrast to this new attitude of remembering the silence surrounding Jewish memory continues to exist elsewhere. Finally this paper will ask why this silence remains, and question whether Nora's theory that memory is constantly evolving is applicable to the experiences of Jewish memory in York and Winchester.

## **Introduction**

Currently there are two distinctly opposing approaches to Jewish memory in England, namely remembering and forgetting. The co-existence of these two radically different attitudes demonstrates the difficulty of memory work in its complexity. French historian Pierre Nora adequately describes this in stating that memory "remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic

of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being dormant and periodically revived.”<sup>1</sup> The experiences of two cities in England, York and Winchester, illustrate how the treatment of memory can be unique to a specific place and how the omission of entire chapters of history can continue alongside great efforts to reintegrate and remember similar histories elsewhere. Both of these cities had a settled Jewish community at some point during the period between 1066 and 1290, these settlements were significant in their role as financiers to the King and in their contribution to the histories of York and Winchester. Due to space limitations this article does not present a history of these Jewish settlements directly. Instead, the following will assess the experiences of memory, looking at the involvement of academia, local heritage and popular tourism. These aspects will be considered in the context of commemoration, the presence of physical sites of memory and finally academic works and conferences. More specifically, the purposes are to: (1) highlight how York has rescued its medieval Jewish history from total omission and reintegrated it into the city’s wider historical narrative; (2) demonstrate Winchester’s silence surrounding its Jewish past, and question why this silence remains; (3) consider whether Nora’s assessment that memory is constantly evolving is applicable to these two cities, or if the current approaches look set to last. Overall this article will illustrate how the process of forgetting and a period of prolonged silence can be reversed, highlighting York as a positive but not definitive example of remembering England’s medieval Jews.

## **Remembering in York**

The prolonged period of silence surrounding York’s medieval Jews had undeniably ended by 31<sup>st</sup> October 1978. This momentous date witnessed Clifford’s Tower, the commonly accepted site of the 1190 Massacre,<sup>2</sup> officially become a

<sup>1</sup> Nora, P., *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire*. In: *Representations*, 1989 26, pp. 8–9.

<sup>2</sup> In March 1190 nearly all of York’s medieval Jewish population took shelter from Anti-Semitic rioters in the keep of the city’s castle. Rather than be murdered the community took their own lives, setting the keep ablaze. A small number of Jews did not take part in this mass suicide but instead trusted the lies of the rioters outside who promised life in turn for Christian Baptism.

physical site of memory representative of the city's Jewish past. A commemorative event saw the unveiling of a tablet at the foot of steps leading to the tower and finally brought local Jewish history into the public arena. This event was also a display of religious and secular unity in remembering the Jews as it was led by the President of the Jewish Historical Society of England and attended by Chief Rabbi Jakobovits, Archbishop Stuart Blanch of York, the Lord Mayor and Dean of York and many other officials.<sup>3</sup> Leading York historian, Barrie Dobson, describes the significance of the event as a "critical date in the transition from deliberate oblivion to posthumous respect towards the Jews of York"<sup>4</sup> marking the beginning of a new chapter of memory in York.

The success of 1978 was excelled by the events held to commemorate the octocentenary of the 1190 Massacre held in March 1990. Dobson commended these events, commenting that the "Jews of medieval York can never have been mourned so eloquently before as in a series of cantatas and litanies, all especially composed 'as pleas for tolerance in an unstable world'."<sup>5</sup> The scale of this commemoration demonstrated the notable increase in public interest towards York's Jewish history, and the success of the focus towards Clifford's Tower as a specific site of memory. This association between place and memory allows for a physical connection to be created with this chapter of medieval history. The identification of a site of memory has been effective in raising public interest and awareness, but perhaps most interesting is how the tower does more than just represent this almost forgotten past. It is in fact a representation of itself in that what currently stands there is a limestone reconstruction of the original wood tower that burnt down during the massacre.<sup>6</sup> The fact that this is not an exact replica alludes to the interpretation of this site that is being presented to its visitors, one that is further enhanced by Hugh Doherty's suggestion that the tower may not even be the actual site of the massacre.<sup>7</sup>

They too were massacred. Jews later resettled in York but this devastating event has since characterised much of York's remembered Jewish history.

<sup>3</sup> Traumatic Histories: The Case of Jewish York', <http://www.york.ac.uk/ipup/projects/york/1190-shadow.html>, accessed 09/01/2012.

<sup>4</sup> Dobson, B: *The Jewish Communities of Medieval England*. York 2010, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Kadish, S: *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural History*. Swindon 2006, p. 175.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Doherty suggests that the massacre could have in fact taken place not at Clifford's Tower but nearby, as commented at the March 2010 York 1190 Conference.

The construction of Clifford's Tower as a site of memory and in turn a representation of York's Jewish history is not uncommon in the field of memory work. Pierre Nora's work 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire' describes how lieux de memoire, or sites of memory, are created because there are no longer milieux de memoire, or real environments of memory.<sup>8</sup> Nora explains that place is a natural location for memory but that it is made artificial in the efforts to remember. That is not to say that what is being depicted at Clifford's Tower is by any means artificial, more that the many layers of its representation are understandable and even expected when there has been a lack of generational and physical continuity as well as consistency in the city's approach to remembering the Jews preceding 1978.

From the rise of popular interest and the creation of sites of memory, a new found public respect for York's Jewish history has emerged. Alongside these developments, a desire for rectification of past ignorance has been demonstrated, specifically with regards to the site of the medieval Jewish cemetery known as Jewbury. In 1983 the burial ground was discovered during routine excavations for a supermarket car park. Despite the importance of the find the building works continued and all that remained to provide any indication of the site's historical significance was a plaque on the parking structure.<sup>9</sup> By the year 2000 public attitudes had radically changed and York's 'The Press' announced that "Sainsbury's have now promised to clean up the plaque commemorating the cemetery, containing 500 bodies".<sup>10</sup> The article continued on to ask "why was a car-park allowed to be built there in the first place?"<sup>11</sup> This public questioning of the construction of the car park shows concern over the city's treatment of its history. This reformed attitude and the power invoked by the public of York demonstrated itself again in the same year when local people "blocked an aggressive attempt to have the area surrounding the Tower developed into an extensive shopping mall".<sup>12</sup>

Inevitably, where there is a substantial amount of public interest there is an opportunity for financial gain. This has already been demonstrated here with

<sup>8</sup> Nora, pp. 8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Narin van Court, E: *Invisible in Oxford: The 'Public Face' of Medieval Jewish History in Modern England*. In: *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 2008 26:3, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Why Jews Plead to Preserve the Tower*. In: *The Press*, 7 September 2000.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Why Jews Plead to Preserve the Tower*. In: *The Press*, 7 September 2000.

the description of the proposal in York to build an extensive shopping mall. Although this proposal was rejected it exemplifies efforts to exploit the area due to its popularity with tourists. On an even more cynical note, the role of English Heritage could be considered. Visitors to the Clifford's Tower find themselves confronted with an admission fee, established and regulated by English Heritage arguably in order to maintain and aid the preservation of the site, but this is shortly followed by directional placards announcing "Bloody Massacre" alongside "Gift Shop".<sup>13</sup> Though this could be an effort to perhaps make York's Jewish history palatable to all, as English Heritage have been very successful at doing in this context elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> this juxtaposition is also described by Erin Narin van Court as a "fine adjudication between exploitation and commerce".<sup>15</sup> It is obvious that the suggestion that part of the motives for English Heritage to be involved with remembering York's Jews is to achieve some level of financial gain, may be offensive. However, the cynical assertion that popular interest is exploited by tourism is not a unique one and in today's economic climate such actions are not totally un-understandable.

Beyond histories and heritage sites produced in the context of tourism, there can be found significant work in production from the academic world. As previously mentioned the research of Barrie Dobson has been substantial, fellow academic Patricia Skinner's description of Dobson's contribution states that "over a period of three decades [he] has done more than any other to integrate medieval English and Jewish history".<sup>16</sup> In addition to research and publications there has also been the great achievement of the first major international conference to discuss the theme 'York 1190: Jews and Others in the Wake of Massacre'. This remarkable event was the first of its kind to be held in the city and is indicative of the progress that has been made in remembering York's medieval Jewry. Dobson adequately describes the significance of the conference through his recollection of an interview with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of York, proclaiming "nothing would have startled me more than to envisage a high calibre international conference on

<sup>13</sup> Visit to Clifford's Tower, March 2010.

<sup>14</sup> The 2006 English Heritage publication: *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* makes for very interesting reading and makes Jewish history very accessible to a wider audience.

<sup>15</sup> Narin van Court, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Kushner, T: *Anglo-Jewry Since 1066: Place, Locality and Memory*. Manchester 2009, p. 10.

Jewish history which would bring so many scholars to York twelve centuries after the most notorious anti-Jewish atrocity in English history”.<sup>17</sup> The success of the conference drew attention from national Jewish press, including articles in the *Jewish News* and the *Jewish Chronicle*, and mention of the conference was also made in *The Independent*.<sup>18</sup> A blog page<sup>19</sup> was also set up so that conversations may continue. With these results, the attendance from academics across the world, and the promise from leading historian Joe Hillaby that it was “the prologue rather than climax of Jewish history York”<sup>20</sup> does well to articulate that this is a positive beginning for remembering York’s Jews and that memory has a future in that city.

## **Forgetting in Winchester**

The experiences of medieval Jewish memory in Winchester are quite different to those of York. Generally, there is no approach towards recognition or reintegration, nor are there any identifiable acts of remembering or commemoration. There remains a silence in this city that exists in stark contrast to the actions and attitudes of local heritage, tourism and popular interest that can be found in York. Winchester’s contemporary approach to its historiography seems to predominantly focus on the positive histories that compliment the city, although in the past there have been fleeting moments of recognition of events such as the 1265 siege of the castle by Simon de Montfort which had disastrous results for the Jews. Additionally there have also been instances where ‘Jewry Street’ has been mentioned in tour guides, however these can fairly be described as anomalies which has left the primary advocates of Jewish memory in Winchester as the academics that have strived in recent years to keep this history alive.

Academic interest and involvement of preserving Winchester’s Jewish past uphold Nora’s theory of memory as being constantly evolving. The experiences of academia in this context have been subject to a cycle of forgetting and re-

<sup>17</sup> Dobson, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Traumatic Histories: The Case of Jewish York’, <http://www.york.ac.uk/ipup/projects/york/1190-shadow.html>, accessed 09/01/2012.

<sup>19</sup> ‘York 1190 in 2010’, <http://york1190.blogspot.com/>, accessed 10/01/2012.

<sup>20</sup> York 1190: Jews and Others in the Wake of Massacre Conference, 22/03/2010.



remembering since 1290. The first period of recognition began in the 1950s and lasted until the early 1990s. The academic responsible for this was Barbara Carpenter Turner who has since been described as “probably the most important figure in the Winchester heritage and history world after 1945”.<sup>21</sup> Carpenter Turner was Winchester’s first archivist and published the most extensive treatment of Winchester Jewry until the late-twelfth century. As a result she represents the first, albeit temporary, turning of the tide in the historical treatment of Winchester’s Jewish past. Carpenter Turner is also representative of the central role of academia in preservation of memory in Winchester, as for the most part Jewish history has been omitted from tour guides, and the heritage world’s approach to presenting the city’s past to the public and more generally.

Since the work of Carpenter Turner and the period of silence that followed there has been another surge in remembering. Academics such as Tony Kushner, Sue Bartlett and Derek Keene have all published significant works that have contributed enormously to remembering Winchester’s Jewry. Sue Bartlett’s book ‘Licoricia of Winchester: Marriage, Motherhood and Murder in the Medieval Anglo-Jewish Community’, was published in 2009 and can accurately be described as the first works that have brought to life the Anglo-Jewish experience in the context of Winchester. Licoricia is demonstrative of an innovative change in the academic world towards Winchester’s Jewry, as it is a micro-history of a prominent Jewish medieval businesswomen and her family. Simultaneously this work also draws attention to the remaining silence of the local heritage world around the same topic.

The continuing absence of Jewish history from Winchester’s heritage industry is made more vivid by Tony Kushner’s 2009 publication ‘Anglo-Jewry Since 1066: Place, Locality and Memory’. Kushner highlights the construction of memory, or indeed lack thereof, in an intensely detailed chapter entitled ‘Winchester: Constructing the City of Memories’. By so clearly demonstrating Winchester’s inability to incorporate Jewish memory into local memory as “a major failure of imagination in the ‘city of memories’ and the triumph of a form of localism defined by parochialism and exclusivity”,<sup>22</sup> Kushner highlights the gap that exists between the works and approaches of academia and local heritage. As academics strive to remember in more detail, the heritage

<sup>21</sup> Kushner, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Kushner, p. 110.

world continues to forget which raises the question why? The great achievements of memory work resulting from the team work of leading academics and the city's museums and archives is adequately shown in York as they continue to sustain the complete turn-around in the treatment of local Jewish history. However, Winchester demonstrates all too clearly, how the lack of cooperation and unity among academics and the museum and heritage world can have hindering effects.

Winchester's Great Hall has a panelled exhibition illustrating the history of the Castle. This site has relevance to the city's Jewish past as previously mentioned in 1265 the castle came under siege by barons under Simon de Montfort which had devastating results for the Jews. Additionally the castle had a tower known as the Jews' tower and it has been suggested that this tower might have been where the local archa was kept, and where local cases involving Jews were heard.<sup>23</sup> Despite this significance the medieval Jewry is not mentioned. Notably, however the 1265 siege is mentioned, but focuses wholly on a positive interpretation, complimenting Henry III's work on the castle stating that the "immense strengthening of the fortifications was a visible reinforcement of royal authority and enabled the Castle to resist siege by the rebellious barons under Simon de Montfort in 1265".<sup>24</sup> The exhibition is over a decade old and in explanation of the absence of any mention of the Jews a Hampshire Records representative has said that it "was not designed to be a comprehensive history...but to provide a very brief account of some aspects of the Castle's history".<sup>25</sup> Additionally, this omission has been explained in the context of physical limitations in the accommodation of the Long Gallery, financial constraints and "the perception that most people do not welcome long captions".<sup>26</sup>

The omission of Jewish history is evident elsewhere in Winchester's current heritage sites, notably the City Museum. Explanations however have differed considerably in comparison to The Great Hall. A representative reassuringly confirmed that "Medieval Jewry certainly forms a major part of the city's hi-

<sup>23</sup> *Medieval English Jews and Royal Officials: Entries of Jewish Interest in the English Memoranda Rolls, 1266–1293*. Ed. by Z. Rokeah. Jerusalem 2000, pp.77–78.

<sup>24</sup> Visit to The Great Hall 20/08/10.

<sup>25</sup> Personal correspondence with representatives from The City Museum 10/06/2010.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



historical narrative”.<sup>27</sup> Reasons for not including this significant part of the city’s history were described as being due to under representation in Winchester’s archive collections and thus therefore in the museum displays.<sup>28</sup> The museum is essentially archaeological in content and as a result centres on the display of objects. The museum representative went on to explain “that in the last 40 years, no excavations have occurred on any known medieval tenement held or occupied by Jews”<sup>29</sup> and although the site identified as a medieval Jewish cemetery has been excavated, nothing of displayable quality was recovered. The latter exposes a fundamental difference between York and Winchester. Any focus on the cemetery in Winchester has been neglected due a lack of artefacts and a distinct omission of any desire to commemorate the remains that are there. Conversely York has honoured their site with a plaque and in recent years observed a respectful upkeep of said plaque.

Winchester’s apparent requirement for displayable objects in order to remember its Jewry is not a lost cause. The museum’s representative mentioned a lead disc with a Hebrew inscription that is believed to be held by the Winchester Excavations Committee based in Oxford.<sup>30</sup> With the existence of this artefact there is hope that the medieval Jewish community may one day in the future feature in the City Museums archaeological displays, or at least gain a step closer to any kind of recognition in this context. This in combination with the acknowledgement of gaps in the exhibition is encouraging to a degree and shows that there is perhaps some room for progress in the local heritage’s journey to publicly remembering.

Whilst academics strive to keep Winchester’s Jewish history alive and the museum services fail to reintegrate it back into the wider narrative of the city there are physical indicators that remain, silently standing testament to the medieval Jewish community that once was. The most prominent is Jewry Street. This remnant of the Jews has a significant responsibility as a vehicle of memory and though it is currently ignored in tour guides to the city, it has featured intermittently in the past even as early as the 1530s when the itinerary of John Leland Antiquary Royal recorded “Ther is a streate in Winchester that leadeth right from the High-strete to the Northgate, caullid the Jury, by

<sup>27</sup> Personal correspondence with representatives from The Great Hall 29/07/2010.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Personal correspondence with representatives from The Great Hall 29/07/2010.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

cause the Jues did inhabit it, and had their Synagoge ther.”<sup>31</sup> Kushner highlights the importance of the street’s role in remembering, or more accurately in preventing forgetting, in writing “without the stimulation provided by the street name itself, it is certain that medieval Winchester Jewry would have been subject to even greater obscurity.”<sup>32</sup>

The preservation of Jewry Street is an interesting topic, for it has served a great purpose in the memory of the medieval Winchester Jewry, through its existence it works alongside academia in highlighting the absence of Jewish history elsewhere in the city. However, despite its omissions from current tour guides and the generalised silence surrounding its past inhabitants, the street has kept remarkably kept its name. Notably there was a period where the name was changed but it was reinstated in 1830 and in 1856 the paving commissioner voted against renaming the street.<sup>33</sup> These efforts across time to preserve a street name that’s historical significance has otherwise largely been ignored is interesting. Such actions can indeed be attributed to the safeguarding of familiarity, rather than of history, yet nonetheless it remains a significant act that has had allowed the continual existence of a place that has the potential to become a site of memory for the Jewry of medieval Winchester.

## Conclusions

The present condition of memory in York and Winchester highlight that work in this context is difficult and complex. The approaches and attitudes to memory can be individual to a specific place and thus the two extremes shown in this article of remembering and forgetting can co-exist simultaneously. The historiography of these approaches to Jewish memory demonstrate the dialectic of remembering and forgetting as described by Pierre Nora. Since the medieval Jews were expelled from England the journey to remembering their contributions to local and regional histories has been slow and remained relatively uneventful until the recent several decades. The successes of reintegration and

<sup>31</sup> Mood, H: Hampshire Three Hundred Years Ago Transcribed from the Itinerary of John Leland Antiquary Royal. Winchester 1868, p.7.

<sup>32</sup> Kushner, p. 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 94.

recognition of a Jewish past in York has exposed Winchester's remaining silence surrounding a similar past. The difference in approach to Jewish history is part of a wider contrast in approach to history more generally, with York focussing on negative histories and in turn embracing its Jewish heritage along with the 1190 massacre, and Winchester focussing on more positive histories, choosing to look at how the Castle resisted a siege in 1265 but ignoring the consequences the event had for the Jews of the time.

Though both cities have experienced a period of forgetting, York represents the possibilities in Winchester's future through the radical change in attitude that has led to its local heritage organisations working hand-in-hand with academia to bring about a new period of remembering. The unified approach demonstrated in York has been successful in its efforts to reintegrate the Jews back into the wider historical narrative. This unification appears to be a requirement for such achievements and still lacks in Winchester with academia apparently working alone in preserving the memory of the medieval Jewry. Conversely, in the face of the progress made by York and the success of this reintegration, as reflected in areas such as public interest and tourist publications, Winchester may well have been influenced. Examples such as York, and the works of academia could all be contributing to a slow changing of attitude. This in addition to the presence of physical sites of memory already present in the city and the existence of displayable artefacts could all be part of the beginnings to a journey of remembering. This may just be false hope, but nonetheless it is worth mentioning as a possibility.

The experiences of York and the hopes and theories associated with Winchester that can be produced as a result of the evidence of this article all adequately support the assertion from Nora that memory is in a state of permanent evolution. It is in light of this that this article cannot be finished on a final note, for the journeys of remembering and perhaps forgetting in these two cities have not yet concluded, nor if Nora is right, will they ever. With this in mind there is more to explore and there is potential for these arguments and evaluations to be developed further, assessing precisely where, when and how the Jews have been remembered since their expulsion in 1290. Additionally, there is also the opportunity to assess, in the periods of forgetting, what has been remembered in their place. All of these aspects should be considered alongside historical accounts of what made these Jewish settlements so significant and evidence of their establishment within

the wider communities of York and Winchester. Although this article is not a suitable place to begin these deeper explorations into Jewish memory, they would undoubtedly aid the study into the 'State of Memory in York and Winchester'.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> This will be considered in my PhD thesis, which will begin in September 2012 and will also consider the example of Jewish memory in Norwich.