

CALL FOR PAPERS: Jews, Liberalism and the Land 1850-1940

June 9 - 11, 2025. Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti, Villa Montesca, Italy.

Convened by Professor Tobias Brinkmann (Penn State University), Professor Abigail Green (Oxford), Dr. Luisa Levi d'Ancona Modena (Oxford), Dr. Silvia Davoli (Oxford), Dr. Fabrizio Boldrini (Hallgarten-Franchetti Foundation), Maria Rita Bracchini, (Hallgarten-Franchetti Foundation)

This conference takes the Jewish country house – an important manifestation of Jewish emancipation in many different parts of Europe - as a starting point for reconsidering the relationship between Jews, politics, economy and the land during the 19th and 20th centuries. In some countries, the countryside could be an incubator for antisemitic politics, in others it was an investment opportunity, and everywhere landownership held a social aspect for members of the Jewish economic elite seeking status, influence, and integration. This conference will explore those tensions.

Historians have tended to understand the relationship between Jews, politics and the land in terms of productivization, colonialism, and Zionism, with a particular focus on Eastern Europe and Palestine. By contrast, this conference will explore the role of Jews, particularly Jewish landowners - both men and women - in the modernization and stewardship of the countryside and rural communities: activities that were driven not by a preoccupation with the Jewish future, but rather by concern for the future of the rural worlds, landscapes and societies in which Jewish landowners now situated themselves.

This was the liberal integrationism of the countryside and we are particularly interested in proposals that speak to economically peripheral agricultural locations and geographies, for example Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Galicia, Palestine, the American West, and South Africa. In such places – and there were surely others like them - the challenges of rural poverty and modernizing the countryside were particularly acute.

Educational reform was also central to this agenda, from a variety of perspectives. In some cases, specific local experiences with innovative educational initiatives that targeted the poorer categories of children in a given locality also acted as a spur for broader ambitions aiming at the profound renovation of educational systems, with national and international impacts.

Finally, we also hope to explore the role of Jewish actors, networks and ideologies both in science and nature conservation, and in agricultural and social innovation at the local, national and international level. In this way, the conference aims to connect with phenomena like Zionism from an unfamiliar angle. Possible themes include: Country houses and estates as a site of Jewish liberal politics, whether as a base for political entertaining or electioneering.

- Rural antisemitism and Jewish landownership
- Jewish country houses as incubators for progressive educational approaches and visions, sometimes as part of a broader reform agenda.

- Promoting traditional handicrafts and fostering the education and work of women.
- Stewardship, hunting, and nature conservation
- The role of Jewish landowners, activists and rural communities in agricultural innovation and reform and/or education at the local, national and international level.
- Science, nature, and agriculture
- Land management, including agriculture, forestry (eg Austria), stud farms (eg Hungary)
- Progressive reform in the countryside, including model farms, agricultural education and cooperative banking.
- The role of Jewish actors, concerns and ideologies in constructing the landscape, both literally and metaphorically
- Innovation and exchange within and between a variety of international networks and institutions, whether Jewish (JCA, Zionism) or non-Jewish (the FAO in Rome).
- The interface between European and colonial agricultural practices, innovation and land management, in Palestine and elsewhere.
- Local memory cultures and heritage activity

The conference will take place at the Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti in Villa Montesca, the Umbrian home of Leopoldo Franchetti, a Jewish parliamentarian best known for his work on agricultural reform, and his wife Alice Hallgarten-Franchetti, a key patron of Maria Montessori, educational reform and rural handicrafts. We will gather in Perugia on the evening of Sunday 8 June 2025 and travel early the next day to the Villa, returning to Perugia on 11 June in good time for participants to continue their onward journey home that day. The built heritage of the Villa and the Franchettis' local legacies will form an integral part of the conference.

We are now inviting abstracts for 20-minute individual research papers to be presented within panels, which will feed into a significant publication (either a book or a journal special issue). Confirmed speakers include the organisers, Tullia Catalan, Tom Stammers and Sietske van der Veen. We are interested in hearing from academic researchers in a variety of career stages, as well as nature conservationists and heritage professionals, with different kinds of affiliations and home locations. We will contribute substantially to travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs, but expect participants to seek additional and alternative funding wherever possible.

Researchers, please submit your proposal with title, abstract of no more than 300 words, and a short bio/CV in one pdf/doc to jewishcountryhouses@history.ox.ac.uk by **30 September, 2024**.

This is an event of the Jewish Country Houses project <https://jch.history.ox.ac.uk/home>, funded by the University of Oxford John Fell Fund in partnership with Penn State University and the Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti.

Previous conferences have focused on Jewish Dealers and the European Art Market c.1850-1930; Jewish Collectors and Patterns of Taste c.1850-1930; Jewish Business Dynasties: Family, Power, Vulnerability 1850-1950; Jewish Country Houses and the Holocaust in History and Memory; Jewish Philanthropy: Solidarity, Antisemitism and Cultural Heritage.