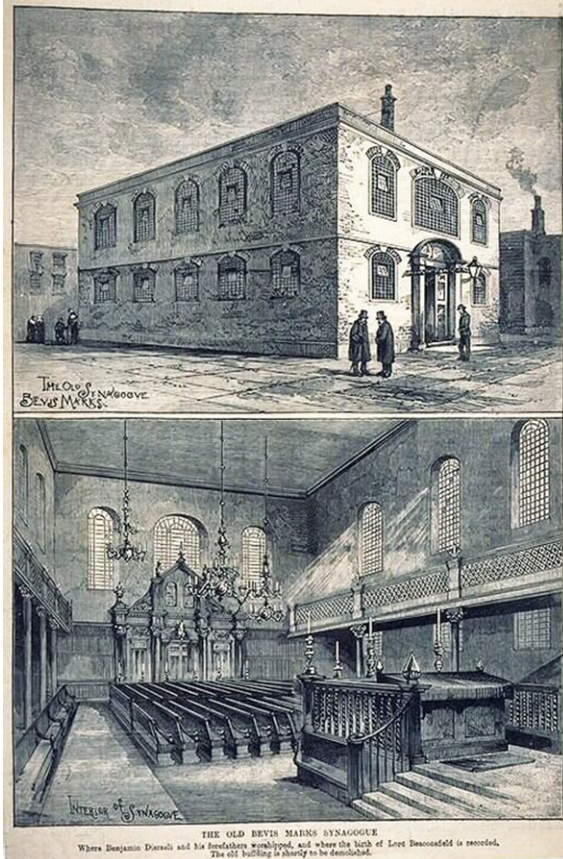




PROPOSED CREECHURCH CONSERVATION AREA

1. I am Professor of Modern European History at the University of Oxford, with a particular interest in British Jewish history and heritage, and extensive experience working with national and international heritage organisations like Historic England, the National Trust, and the European Association for the Preservation and Promotion of Jewish Culture and Heritage. It is in this capacity that I have been asked to produce a report on the Jewish history and heritage of the proposed Creechurch Conservation Area.
2. Jews, and particularly Sephardi Jews, played a critical part in the history of the City of London and in London's role as a global financial and commercial centre at the heart of the British Empire for 300 years. This history is barely understood nowadays, and occupies no place in public memory or the British national narrative which overwhelmingly associates British Jews with the mass-immigration of eastern European Jews and the influx of refugees from Nazi Germany during the 1930s. It is a lost part of our national narrative, one that this initiative promises to help us preserve –perhaps even recover.
3. Beyond Bevis Marks, there is at present little trace of the historic Jewish presence in the City of London. Jewish cultural activity (the Jewish Museum, the Jewish Cultural Centre, the Ben-Uri Gallery) is located elsewhere, closer to current areas of Jewish residence, but unconnected to the deeper Anglo-Jewish past. Any Jewish heritage activity in the City and Whitechapel focuses on the East End and tells the story of its eastern European Jewish immigrants. But the history of Jews in the City was older and far more diverse than this suggests.
4. The Sephardic story – with its global and diasporic dimensions – has clear resonance today. Highlighting the longstanding presence of this little-known element of the British Jewish community underscores the plural nature of all minority groups: something often absent from the way they figure in public discourse, which tends to elide difference into block categories (British Jews/Muslims/Black British people). In tandem with the new heritage centre at Bevis Marks, this conservation area promises to address both the Jewish heritage deficit in the City of London itself, and its particular Sephardic dimensions. More than simply a line on a map, it defines and protects an area that has an intangible coherent force that is the product of its deep Jewish history and continued importance as a site of Jewish worship.
5. The 2003 English Heritage Outreach Strategy document confirms that reclaiming marginalised narratives, like this one, enhances social cohesion by promoting social and cultural understanding. Preserving this area and its Jewish heritage promises important benefits for social cohesion within the local area, and there is the potential to develop more Jewish heritage activity in this area, for example through Jewish heritage trails. In a time of rising antisemitism, Jewish groups and society in general will benefit. There may also be further social and cultural benefits, not just in relation to the management of Jewish heritage, but to the wider understanding and management of minority or marginalised heritages.
6. The Conservation Area Proposal rightly draws attention to the “*historic interest*” of this area, citing in particular “*enduring presence*” of the Jewish community in the area. (Para 4.10) And the “*association with the very highly significant historic, established, and most importantly enduring Jewish community that was concentrated in the City and to the east up until the early 19th century*” (para 4.12).

7. In that context, the Conservation Area Proposal highlights three key sites: the site of the Creechurch Lane synagogue (Para 4.12), of the Great Synagogue on Duke's Place (Para 4.13) and Grade 1 listed Bevis Marks (Para 4.14, 4.18). Only Bevis Marks survives, but all three sites are of great historic significance to the British Jewish community. Collectively, they comprise the City of London's Historic Jewish District, and tell the history of that community from the earliest years after the re-settlement to the present day.



8. Of the three Options now under consideration, Bevis Marks (left) is included in Options 1 and 2 but only Option 3 also includes the sites of the Creechurch Lane and Great Synagogues, although the draft Conservation Area Proposal rightly makes reference to all three. To protect Bevis Marks without conserving these other two sites and the historic hinterland they represent makes little sense: only when read together can the Jewish story of the City of London and the broader history of British Jews be properly understood.

9. Cunard House is the historic location of the 'Synagogue of the Resettlement' (1657-1701), otherwise known as Creechurch Lane Synagogue. As the first synagogue established in Britain after the expulsion of Jews from England by Edward I in 1290, this is a site of pre-eminent historical importance in British Jewish history. Here, Jews prayed when they were first permitted to worship openly by Oliver Cromwell in

1656. The synagogue was a three storey brick merchants house converted into synagogue in 1657. It was located at the limits of City of London because Jews as aliens were barred from owning any property or land freehold. Instead, Creechurch Lane properties were leased by the Jews from the church of St Katherine Free. In 1674 the synagogue was enlarged to accommodate 150 men and 80 women, who could assemble in the north and south galleries. It became one of the sights of 17th-century London. Samuel Pepys visited on the festival of Simchat Torah and wrote about it in his diary, in a celebrated passage that has become one of the most iconic descriptions of Jewish worship in early modern Europe. Princess Anne, too, visited before she became Queen. The current building's modest massing fits in comfortably with the rest of the Conservation area (including St Katherine Cree opposite it) making it appropriate for inclusion in it. A City of London Blue Plaque on the exterior of the current building marks the site where the Creechurch Lane Synagogue once stood. It is only included in Boundary Option 3.

10. The worshippers at this Creechurch Lane Synagogue went on to found the synagogues established at the other two key sites in this conservation area: Bevis Marks Synagogue (1701 - Sephardi) and the Great Synagogue (1690 - Ashkenazi). Pews, religious art, and ritual objects from this synagogue comprise part of the furniture and collection of Bevis Marks Synagogue today.
11. Grade 1 listed Bevis Marks Synagogue is the single most important historic site for British Jews. In the heart of the City, close to the Bank of England and the Mansion House, it speaks to their history since readmission, and to their status as the only significant Jewish community in Europe

with a continuous history of this kind. Designed by Joseph Avis, a Protestant architect who had worked for Christopher Wren, its history speaks to the close relations that existed between different faith communities in the City itself, and to the intimate connection of London's Sephardic community with its parent community in Amsterdam, which probably donated the central chandelier. This is now the oldest, continually-functioning synagogue in Europe. It remains a living religious community, which preserves a unique liturgy. It lies at the heart of the Sephardic diaspora, rendering it a site of global as well as local and national importance. It is unique in the way that British Jewish history is unique, because it did not experience the rupture of the Holocaust. Its courtyard-setting reflects the disabilities Jews experienced in this country even after the resettlement. As the only non-Christian religious site in the City of London it speaks powerfully to the historic diversity of the City over centuries. This is a site of exceptional - even unique - historical importance for London, the UK, Europe and the world.

12. 1 Creechurch Place is the historic location of the Great Synagogue, otherwise known as Duke's Place Synagogue, which existed on this spot for nearly three centuries from when it was founded in 1690, until it was destroyed in the Blitz in 1941. This synagogue is just off Creechurch Lane and again just east of City limits, where restrictions on Jewish landowning still prevailed. It was created partly in response to growing numbers of German, Dutch and Polish migrants after Glorious Revolution and accession of George I. In its early years the Great Synagogue enjoyed patronage of Abraham Franks and Benjamin Levy, the only two Ashkenazim of twelve 'Jew Brokers' permitted to trade on London stock exchange. Levy was an original subscriber to the Bank of England (one of six or seven Jews on the 1694 list) and also contributed generously to Bevis Marks. This is a site of great historic importance. The Great Synagogue was the origin-synagogue of the now-dominant Ashkenazi Jewish community, the seat of the Chief Rabbi, and the foundation place of the United Synagogue (the umbrella organization for mainstream Ashkenazi Judaism), and the London Beth Din (Jewish court) was also part of the Great Synagogue complex. It lies at



the heart of the history of diversity, equality and inclusion in Britain, because both Sir David Salomons and Lionel de Rothschild were members of this synagogue. These were the key protagonists in the campaign for Jewish emancipation, which was fought from and with the support of the City of London.

Salomons was the first Jewish Sheriff of the City (1835) and later the first Jewish Lord Mayor (1855, see left), while Rothschild was elected as one of the four MPs for the City of London in 1847 and fought for ten years for the right to take his seat in parliament – which he finally did in 1858. While the synagogue has not survived, some of its collections are now in the Jewish Museum London, which held an important exhibition in 1949 to commemorate this lost building and its community. Today, a commemorative plaque is affixed to the exterior of the current building marking its historic location. It is only included in Boundary Option 3.

13. The history of these three synagogues/sites is interconnected: they share the same origins; their members married each other with growing frequency; and they testify to the existence of an increasingly important Jewish community that lived within, and just outside, the boundaries of the City of London. Only when treated as a unity can this unique history be effectively preserved.

14. Synagogues never exist in isolation, but only ever in places where there is a significant local Jewish community. This reflects the requirement to pray with a group of at least 10 other Jewish men, and the prohibition on travelling except by foot on the Sabbath and other Jewish holy days. The narrow streets between these three sites, once home to Portuguese and Yiddish speakers, consequently speak to the broader history of Jewish lives lived here over centuries, and to what Historic England term its communal value, that is to say the connection of a people or community with this place over time (see *Historic England, Conservation Principles and Practice* 2015). A recently rediscovered map produced in 1876 shows that the area immediately surrounding Bevis Marks included Jewish infant schools, religious libraries for advanced Jewish learning, a kosher shop, a mikveh (ritual bath) and community offices. Name carvings on the exterior brickyard reflect that Jewish children once ran around these courtyards. Even today, as the Conservation Area Proposal notes, “the area retains a vibrant and diverse community with religious organisations playing an important welfare role in providing a religious focus and social, and educational activities” (Para 4.17), of which Bevis Marks Synagogue is an important element.

15. There are other tangible traces of Jewish presence in this area. Located right by St. Botolph’s at the edge of the area delineated under Option 3, the Frederick David Mocatta Fountain on Aldgate Street (below) reflects the deep history of Sephardic Jews in this area. The Mocattas were among the very earliest Jewish families to settle in London after the readmission in 1656. This was London’s very first public drinking fountain. Decorated with a Star-of-David motif, it was installed in 1909 to honour the memory of the Jewish financier and communal leader, Frederick David Mocatta. The fountain was a huge benefit to all who lived and worked there.



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16. The interior of St. Botolphs Church, just inside the boundary of the area outlined in Option 3, also reflects the close relations between Jews and Christians in this area, as well as the important role of Jews in this area and the City of London more generally. From the time of Sir David Salmons onwards, many Jews represented Portsoken ward. Their names are faithfully recorded alongside those of other Portsoken Aldermen on a plaque in the entrance hall. The church itself features stained glass windows bearing the arms of several of London’s Jewish Lord Mayors, notably Marcus Samuel (1st Viscount Bearsted) who served 1902-3, Sir Bernard Waley-Cohen (1960-61), Lord Peter Levene (1998-99) and Sir Michael Bear (2010-2011).



17. The streets around Houndsditch, which forms one of the boundaries of Option 3, were traditionally a place of settlement for foreigners where non-freemen of the City were allowed to trade. The open street markets here (see left: Houndsditch Sunday Fair, 1855, showing the Great Synagogue behind), and in Petticoat Lane, were a vital lifeline for Jewish traders, especially those

active in the “rag trade” and the sale of old clothes, with which Jews were pre-eminently associated.

18. While many original buildings in this historic Jewish district no longer survive, the majority of 20th century buildings on the streets within the proposed conservation area have been “*designed to a height, scale and massing that is sympathetic with their neighbours*” (Conservation Area proposal, para 6.03). In this way, despite their destruction, something of the feel of the City’s historic Jewish quarter remains.
19. The predominantly low-scale of the area under consideration is “*a major factor in the setting of the high-status listed buildings in the area, particularly the three Grade I places of worship.*” (Conservation Area proposal, para 6.06). It is hoped that preserving the existing scale of the area will “*help to ensure that their setting continues to be protected and provide a buffer against the cluster of tall buildings to the south and west.*” This is a particularly important consideration for Bevis Marks, due to its secluded courtyard location, and the relatively low light levels in the synagogue that have resulted from large-scale post-war development in the area. These pose a threat to the communal value of the synagogue, which is rooted in function as a place of worship and a place of reflection, spirituality and prayer. Importantly, the secluded courtyard, which is protected by law as part of the synagogue’s curtilage, also functions as an extension of the religious use of the synagogue: it too needs protection from further overshadowing and loss of direct light.
20. The building that currently stands at 1 Creechurch Place (former site of the Duke’s Place Synagogue) has already caused substantial harm to morning light levels in Bevis Marks. It is a good example of why the boundary for the Conservation Area needs to be more inclusive. It demonstrates how an inappropriate redevelopment with a tall building can harm the character and function of an entire neighbourhood. In this context, it is worth noting that a sympathetic redevelopment of this building might allow more light into the synagogue.

CONCLUSION

This area represents a unique heritage ensemble, speaking to the intimate connection of religious, civic and commercial institutions in the City of London, and evidence of the Jewish community’s centrality, in spatial terms, to the development of London as a financial capital. The proposed conservation area would be more than a line on a map. It defines an area that has an intangible coherent force that is the product of its deep Jewish history and continued importance as a site of Jewish worship. The proposal represents a very welcome opportunity to preserve, enhance and sustain this heritage, and to write British Jewish history more clearly into the national heritage narrative, something that is especially important at a time of rising antisemitism. If properly drawn by adopting Option 3, the proposed conservation area will also protect Bevis Marks Synagogue from becoming overshadowed, further destroying its historic setting and ability to function both as a communal centre and a place of worship. The Jewish – and specifically Sephardic – dimension of British history and its role in the evolution of the City of London will be better identified, understood, conserved and explained. More people, and a wider range of people, will have an opportunity to engage with Jewish heritage which, as outlined above, promises clear social and cultural benefits.

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