

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BRYNMAWR, WALES

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AT one time or another, there have been about 30 Jewish communities in Wales, most of them in South Wales. Broadly, they were located in two geographical lines: those along the coast, from Newport in the east to Llanelli in the west; and those from Brynmawr in the east to Ystalyfera in the west. Brynmawr (in what was then the county of Breconshire) was the most northerly of the southern communities as well as the highest town in Wales (its name in Welsh means 'big hill'). There were three separate Jewish communities very near Brynmawr: at Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, and Abertillery; they were to have close relationships with that of Brynmawr. In other nearby places, there were small numbers of Jews — in Blaina and Beaufort, for example — which did not constitute formal congregations but who were associated with Brynmawr's Jewish activities.

Brynmawr's early development was dependent on local ironworks, at Nantyglo — about a mile south of Brynmawr — and Clydach and Beaufort.¹ They provided employment for its residents and there was local iron-ore, limestone, and bituminous coal-mining to supply the ironworks, with coal being sold also to local residents. Brynmawr was an expanding and prosperous district until the Clydach and Beaufort ironworks closed in 1861 and Nantyglo in the 1870s. As Minchinton put it: 'Brecknock [sc. Breconshire], while it had a charcoal-iron age and a coke-iron age did not have a steel age'.² Instead of acting as a magnet for newcomers, for the time being there was an emigration of population. However, in the later nineteenth century the local coal industry expanded, partly following the extension of the railway to Brynmawr in the 1860s, while some iron-making continued at Nantyglo and Blaina along with tinplate manufacture. Even so, it was a small town; in 1901 the population of Brynmawr Urban District was just under 7,000. However, Brynmawr was affected by the inter-war economic depression of the coal industry, which particularly hit South Wales.

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The migration of Jews to the town was part of the total immigration to South Wales from other parts of Wales and the British Isles as well as from abroad.³ The migrants were attracted by the opportunities of work and business which were a consequence of the industrialisation of the area. Developments on the Continent and adverse experiences by Jews were among the causes of their emigration.⁴ Some Jews had settled in Swansea in the eighteenth century and in Cardiff in the earlier part of the nineteenth, and Jewish communities were established during that century in such valley settlements as Merthyr Tydfil and Pontypridd, but the overwhelming numbers arrived from the 1880s. For various reasons — which included pressure of population and the resulting poor economic livelihood, and also antisemitism (both popular and government-inspired) in Russia where the great majority of European Jewry lived — very large numbers emigrated. Most aimed to go to North America but thousands came to Britain, many using the country as a staging-post, temporarily resting on their way to the New World. Others remained in the United Kingdom. In the latter part of the century a few thousand settled in various places in South Wales, one such settlement being Brynmawr.

However, why did Jews go to live in Brynmawr (and for that matter in neighbouring towns)? They were out-of-the-way places, and were certainly unlikely to be known to people living in far-away Russia. One suggestion for their settlement is that of Hilda Jennings. Brynmawr's location at the head of the valleys and also, according to her, 'the fact that it possessed what was said to be the best hotel in the district... brought to it both private and commercial travellers'. She added, that since the decade of 1870—1880, Brynmawr had been a centre for travelling drapers (she was writing in the 1930s) 'most of whom do a credit trade stretching some distances' into the valleys of Monmouthshire. The first credit draper was a 'Scotchman' (sic) who employed others to expand his business. 'A little later than the Scotch credit drapers came a number of Jewish travelling drapers, who utilised the central position and good road and rail communications to establish a cash trade on similar lines'.⁵ Some became permanent shopkeepers. Jennings stated: 'between 1891 and 1911, it is estimated locally that about fifty Jewish families settled there'.⁶ But she does not say if that figure includes transient families or single men, often the travelling drapers.⁷

It is sometimes said that immigrant Jews tried several places before settling in small, provincial towns. Did this apply to Brynmawr? Table I is based on the Census returns (1871—1901) as well as on the entries in the General Register Office's Births Index. It uses the place and date of birth of children as indications of settlement.

The Table shows that in the Censuses for 1871—1901, 13 of these 14 families had children who were born in Brynmawr. Eight had their first

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Table I.
Birthplaces of Children

Father	Date of Birth	Last Child Born Abroad	Earliest Children Born in UK
Barnett Isaacs	1836	1864	Brynmawr 1868
Coleman Follick	1838	n.a.	Pontypool 1866
Charles	1841	n.a.	Cardiff 1871
Nathan Abrahams	1851	1875	Brynmawr 1890
[Solomon Westerman	1856	1890	In Brynmawr 1891]
Samuel Aronovitz	1861	1886	Abertillery 1893 Nantyglo 1894 Brynmawr 1898
Isaac Goldfoot*	1861	n.a.	Ireland 1890 Brynmawr 1892
Isaac Brest	1863	1885	Brynmawr 1887
Sandal Isaacs	1864	none	Brynmawr 1893
Barnett Simons	1865	none	Brynmawr 1895
Bertha Norvick Married Brynmawr**	1870	n.a.	Rogerstone 1895 Rhondda 1896 In Brynmawr 1901
Getzel Bloch	1871	1899	Brynmawr 1900
Barnett Jenkins	1872	1897	Brynmawr 1901
Abraham Brest Married Cardiff	1872	n.a.	Brynmawr 1893

NOTES

Dates of birth of fathers and the last child born abroad are approximate.

I have listed only the first child born in Brynmawr.

*Wife was born in Liverpool. I have been unable to locate an entry in the Marriage Index for England and Wales.

**Living in Aberystroth when married.

child in Brynmawr and five (including one married in Brynmawr) had children in various places in the UK before they fathered children in Brynmawr. The last child born abroad of one family (Westerman), was recorded as being one year old in the 1891 Brynmawr census and so the family probably went straight to the town on immigration. This sample is small and merely suggests that only some immigrants 'tried' various places.

Who were the Jews who lived in Brynmawr? Only two lists of members have survived (one of 1949 and another for 1952) in the last, declining, years of the community.⁸ However, one can aim to build a database of residents from other sources. Of particular importance is the weekly *Jewish Chronicle* (henceforth *JC*), which printed reports of various events including meetings of the congregation (and of subsidiary organisations) at which named people were elected to office. Names of Jewish residents can be found in details of their contribution to the numerous funds established for various good causes, and there are notices of births, marriages, deaths and *bar-mitzvahs* affecting people in Brynmawr. For the years up to 1901, when

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the most recent Census reports are available for inspection, these names can be used to learn about other members of the households. The entries give addresses, names of the household, beginning with the Head (usually the husband), followed by others and their relation to the Head (Wife, Son, Daughter, Lodger, Visitor, Servant, etc.) Their age, occupation, and place of birth are given. Such details have been used extensively in this article.

Moreover, other (otherwise unknown) Jews can be located in the Census reports. They include those who were temporarily resident between Censuses, when they had moved to another town but the birth of a child in Brynmawr would be recorded in a later Census in the new location; the registration district for Brynmawr was Crickhowell. In general one can be on fairly safe ground in identifying who were Jews, using three criteria: 1) they were born abroad — in the case of Brynmawr especially in Russia and Poland; 2) they had 'Jewish' names and 3) typically immigrant Jewish occupations.⁹

For the years after 1901, in addition to the *JC*, there are such documentary sources as marriages under the auspices of the Brynmawr synagogue (1907–1941), of burials from 1920 at the Brynmawr Jewish cemetery and, before 1920, interments of Brynmawr Jews in Merthyr Tydfil Jewish cemetery.¹⁰ Several of the foreign-born men applied successfully for naturalisation and these records are available at the National Archives. There are also the names mentioned in H.H. Roskin's brief article on the community.¹¹ These can be supplemented by names in the minute book of the congregation, which is in the possession of Judge Anthony J. Morris.

One important consideration is the definition of the Jewish 'community' of Brynmawr. As noted on the first page of the present article, a number of Jews lived in nearby places which did not have organised communities but took part in Brynmawr's activities; I consider these later when I look at the growth of the Jewish population.

Finally, selecting people on the basis, in the first instance, of their name may have caused Jews who had 'ordinary' names and were born in the UK and did not have 'Jewish' occupations, to have been missed. So that any statistics presented here are no more than approximations.

I DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRYNMAWR COMMUNITY UNTIL 1901

Since so much reliance is placed on the information in the decennial Censuses (notably those of 1871–1901), this history may be divided into two parts: before and after 1901. Conveniently, that year saw the opening of the synagogue. A report of 1889 in the *Jewish Chronicle*

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stated that a congregation had been established in Brynmawr in the previous year but had difficulty in finding a suitable location for divine worship. In the meantime a resident, Barnett Isaacs, had placed one of his houses at their disposal and had met the cost of adapting it for use as a synagogue.¹² (This marginally corrects the usual statement that the congregation originated in 1889.) It was reported that at the first religious service on the eve of the Day of Atonement (*Kol Nidrei*) a large number of Christians stood outside the temporary synagogue 'listening in respectful silence'. At its conclusion 'a sympathetic cheer was raised by the non-Jewish listeners'.¹³ It was conducted by Rev. A.D. Resovski(sic) — Aaron David Rosowski who was the *shohet* at Tredegar and who was known as Roskin.¹⁴

Earlier that year another Jewish event in Brynmawr attracted great interest in the town. It was the holding of a Jewish wedding, of Russian-born Michael Ash to Tredegar-born Isabella Harris (it was not unusual for foreign-born Jewish men to choose British-born brides). The 21-year old, Portsea-born Rev. Jacob Phillips of Tredegar officiated, along with Rev. M. Weinstock.¹⁵ In the 1891 Census the 23-year old Jacob Phillips is recorded as a lodger in Tredegar in the household of a non-Jewish widow.

A few Jews had lived in Brynmawr before the congregation was formed in 1888. Indeed, the first useful Census, of 1841, gives the details of three possible Jewish households. Two of them were almost certainly Jewish. One was headed by Jacob Cohen, a furniture broker, with Julia (presumably his wife), and two children (Leopold and Mina) who were both born in Brynmawr, the first Jewish children to be born in the town. The second household consisted of Solomon Jacob, a hawker, born abroad, and a foreign-born Rachel Jacob, no doubt his wife. The third household is less clear: it consisted of three men but the names of two of them are very difficult to read. One was a fifty-year old hawker, and the other was Michael, possibly Marks, who was born abroad; the third was named Isaac Levine.¹⁶ They were apparently transients. The Cohen family, headed by Julia after her husband Jacob committed suicide in 1850, is to be found living in Chelsea in subsequent Censuses, but the others cannot be located. The 1851 Census recorded a visitor, Joseph Linovick, born in Poland, his occupation being 'Pole refugee' (but this appears to have been crossed out). He may have been a Jew. At least three Jewish families were in Brynmawr in the 1860s, as is evidenced by the birth of children there. Sarah Bloom was born in 1860 just before her family, headed by her grandfather (Solomon Bloom, a pawnbroker) went to live in Pontypool. Two other families stayed longer: that of Coleman Follick (another pawnbroker) living there from at least 1868 when a daughter, Esther, was born and

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another child soon after; and Barnett Isaac(s), a painter and glazier, two of whose children were born in the town in the 1860s. Barnett remained in Brynmawr until he died there, aged 82, in 1918. He had provided in about 1888 the first temporary synagogue, and was for many years its president, as well as occupying other official positions. Coleman Follick was the father of Montefiore Follick who, as Dr Mont Follick, was a Labour M.P. after the Second World War. He was a well-known linguist and advocate of simplified English. There is a Mont Follick Professorship in Comparative Philology at the University of Manchester. Although he was *bar-mitzvah* he did not regard himself as Jewish.¹⁷

In addition to the households of Follick and Isaac(s) in Brynmawr in the 1871 Census there were two other Jewish ones. Whereas both Coleman Follick and Barnett Isaac(s) had been born in Poland, Nathan Samuel (a clothier) and his brother (Moses, a pedlar), were English-born, in Liverpool. Barnet Woboff, another hawker, was born in Holland. The Samuels then moved to Rhyl in North Wales and became jewellers. Woboff cannot be traced further.¹⁸

Since the congregation was formed in 1888 the decade of the 1880s must mark a turning point in its history, but there were few resident Jews in the town. In the 1881 Census there were only three Jewish households (those of Coleman Follick and Barnett Isaac(s) being joined by that of German-born Charles Michaelson). He was a painter and glazier with a British-born wife, Sophia, and soon moved to Cardiff where his wife died in 1888. At the 1901 consecration of the new Brynmawr synagogue, it was reported that about 16 years earlier (sc. 1885) there were only two Jewish families in the town; they would have been those of Follick and Isaacs. But at the 1891 Census, in the early years of the formal congregation, there were at least six households together with six lodgers. There was undoubtedly another family in Brynmawr, that of Isaac Brest, as two sons were born there in the late 1880s, but there is no sign of the household in the 1891 Census although the family became long-term residents. There was a resident minister at the 1891 Census, Russian-born Tobias Spivack, aged 24, married with 3 children — probably poorly paid but somehow managing to employ a domestic servant.¹⁹

As mentioned above, there were Jews living not far from Brynmawr. Captain H.H. Roskin stated in 1958: 'In the year 1893, when I was 9 years old, I came to Beaufort with my parents from Tredegar [where he had been born]. Being only a mile away from Brynmawr we joined the Brynmawr Community'.²⁰ Others were mentioned in the *Jewish Chronicle*, such as Goodman Weiner of Nantyglo, Hermann Harris and Moses Samson of Blaina.²¹ The obituary in 1928 of Marks Fine, of Abergavenny, referred to his having been one of the oldest and most esteemed members. For more than 20 years he had

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acted as *Baal Korah* (reader of the *Torah*) as well, as supernumerary *hazan* (cantor) at Brynmawr synagogue.²² Jacob Robinson (in the neighbouring town of Blaenavon) was born in Germany; he was a pawnbroker and jeweller, and his son had his *bar-mitzvah* in the Brynmawr synagogue in 1910. Members of the Robinson family continued to live in Blaenavon and to be associated with the Brynmawr community. Derek Robinson contributed to a Brynmawr-organised collection to a charitable fund in 1938; and another Robinson's *bar-mitzvah* was held in the Brynmawr synagogue in 1940. When a burial ground was proposed for Brynmawr, Abel Myers of Abersychan paid for the land. He (and other members of his family) were in that town in 1891 and 1901 and are legitimately included in the Brynmawr congregation.²³

In summary, there were in Blaina in 1891 three families and three single men and in 1901 four families and two single men. One family, that of Moses Solomon, an outfitter (recorded in the 1891 and 1901 Censuses), was peripatetic, the children being born in three separate places — Blaenavon, Brynmawr, and Blaina. The significance of these extra-Brynmawr residents is that while at the 1891 Census there were 49 Jews living in Brynmawr, there were 40 in Beaufort and Blaina. To these can be added two Jewish households in Abergavenny, totalling 15, a family of seven in Blaenavon, and a family of four in Abersychan; the 'extra' 66 making a total of 115. In 1901 the Jews of Blaina and Beaufort amounted to 38, there was one Jewish household in Abergavenny of nine people, one in Blaenavon of 10, and one in Abersychan of three, a total of 60. When added to the Brynmawr figure of 72, we get a total of 132. (Since I am concerned with the congregation of Brynmawr — which began in the late 1880s — I do not include the few Jews who lived in these other places before the Census of 1891. They include Emanuel Jacobs and his wife in Blaenavon in 1871 and Eleano(sic) Levy, born Russia, in Blaina in 1871.)

The inclusion of these extra-Brynmawr Jews means that the annual population figures, published in the *Jewish Year Book* from 1896, must be regarded with scepticism. For one thing, for many years in the twentieth century, its figures for Brynmawr remained the same, as 30 families and the number of seatholders in the synagogue, as 50. Moreover, they were usually taken as being the Jewish population of the town and sometimes questionable conclusions were based on them. Thus Geoffrey Alderman stated that in 1911 the 135 Jews of 'Brynmawr' represented just over two per cent of that town's population.²⁴ Those 135 undoubtedly included Jews who lived elsewhere; and it is noticeable that the figure of 135 was also given in the *Jewish Year Book* 20 years later, in the 1930s.

In the 1890s the Jewish population had grown sufficiently to be included in the Chief Rabbi's pastoral tour to South Wales. In June

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Table II.
Jewish Population of Brynmawr and District

Census Year	Jewish Population
1841	9(?)
1851	1(?)
1861	Nil
1871	16
1881	20
1891	49*
Extras	66
Total	115*
1901	72
Extras	60
Total	132

NOTES

1. The question marks for 1841 and 1851 reflect the uncertainty of the Jewishness of perhaps one man in each of the Censuses of 1841 and 1851.
2. 'Extras' means Jews living in small, neighbouring places who belonged to the Brynmawr congregation.
3. *These figures might well be increased by five for the family of Isaac Brest. Two sons were born in Brynmawr in the late 1880s, and the next child in 1892. But there is no sign anywhere of the family in the 1891 Census. A check on the relevant sheet of the Census suggests that the Enumerator omitted to include the family's house.

1894, the *JC* editorially reported: 'He visited for the first time the small communities scattered in the townlets and villages perched on the bleak hills of South Wales. The congregations of Aberdare, Tredegar, Brynmawr, Pontypridd, Penycraig, and Tony Pandy(sic), consist almost exclusively of Russian immigrants'.²⁵ At Brynmawr he had been conducted to the Synagogue Chambers where he examined the children. (There was clearly some form of Hebrew and religious education in place, thus predating slightly the statement in the issues of the *Jewish Year Book* [which began publication in 1896] that the Brynmawr Hebrew Classes dated from 1895.) In Brynmawr at the evening service the Chief Rabbi addressed 'a large number' of Jews from Brynmawr, Blaina, Abertillery, Ebbw Vale, and Blaenavon.²⁶

According to H.H. Roskin, when his family joined the Brynmawr congregation in 1893, services were held at Heathcote House. He noted: 'I am informed that, prior to this, they were held in the house next door to Isaac Isaacs'.²⁷ Heathcote House was where Solomon Wolman and Bertha Schulman were married on 29 March 1895. In

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the marriage certificate the place was spelled 'Heath Cock House', the normal pronunciation.

A string of transients ministered to the needs of the congregation. In 1891 there was Tobias Spivack who was followed in 1892 by Rev. Sunlight as *hazan* and *shohet* but who quickly left for a post at Coventry.²⁸ Z. Schulman had been *shohet* but in 1895 he had become ill and a fund was instituted to set him up in business. He was succeeded by Rev. Wolman (variously spelled) who was Schulman's son-in-law.²⁹ After he left and in the run up to the opening of the new synagogue, the community advertised in 1898 for a man for the combined post of *hazan*, *shohet*, *mohel*, and Hebrew teacher. Rev. Getzel Bloch was appointed but as he was a new immigrant and his knowledge of English was poor (or perhaps non-existent), in his first years a temporary teacher was appointed for the Hebrew Classes. This was the teenager, Herman Hyman Roskin who taught until Bloch had learnt sufficient English.

The novelty of a Jewish presence in this Welsh mining town was exemplified by a repetition of the great interest aroused by a Jewish wedding, this time in 1896. The bride was May Isaacs, niece of Mr and Mrs Isaac Isaacs of Brynmawr ('much respected residents') and Ben Cohen of Southampton. (During the First World War Ben Cohen came to live in Brynmawr and became president of the congregation.) The service was conducted by Rev. J. Abelson of Cardiff assisted by the local minister, Rev. Wolman. The *chupah*, of chenille, was specially made and was presented to the Tredegar synagogue. The banquet was attended by 150 guests. In the chair was Dr G.H. Browne JP, and the vice-chairmen were Mr M.J.S. Lyons and Major Will Putts (like Browne, a non-Jew). At the ball which followed there were 400 guests. The food left over was distributed to the poor on the following day at the Market Hall.³⁰

The Chief Rabbi, in the course of another pastoral visit, urged the community to provide a more suitable place for divine worship.³¹ At the opening of the new synagogue in June 1901 it was reported that at the last 'Solemn Festivals' (New Year and Day of Atonement) more than 100 worshippers attended the services at the Old Town Hall. The need for improved accommodation was urgent. Events moved rapidly. The *JC* in June 1901 reported:³²

A Committee, consisting of Messrs. B. Isaacs, A.D. Roskin, I. Isaacs, and H.H. Roskin, was immediately formed with a view to carrying out this recommendation into effect. It was chiefly owing to the unflagging zeal, the indefatigable labour of Mr. A.D. Roskin that the success of the movement was assured. In all stages of the work he has been the guiding spirit; it was he who approached Mr. W. Weeks in the first instance, and induced that broad-minded gentleman to offer a piece of land in Bailey Street for the site of the proposed synagogue.

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Weeks, a cattle-dealer, enters the story for it was next to his premises in Bailey Street that the synagogue was erected. This was signified in a sketch map on an indenture of 23 January 1900 between the Duke of Beaufort (the 'lessor') and four Jews (the 'lessees'), who were the trustees of the synagogue. They were Barnett Isaacs, pawnbroker; Isaac Isaacs, pawnbroker; Isaac Brest, house furnisher; and Isaac Goldfoot, draper. The lease was for 99 years from 29 September 1899. The rent was to be £1 per annum.³³

A first list of contributions to a building fund was printed in the *JC* of 13 July 1900 (the largest amount, of £110.10s. being from 'A Polish Jew' in London). Two weeks later it was announced that a plot of land for the synagogue had been granted 'by a Christian friend' to whom a nominal rent of £1 p.a. was to be paid. Building operations had already begun and it was hoped they would be completed in the next five months. Of the total of £700, so far £400 had been raised.³⁴

It was in fact a year later that the synagogue was completed and on 20 June 1901 it was formally consecrated by the Chief Rabbi and opened by Mr O.E. D'Avigdor-Goldsmid, a member of one of the grand families of Anglo-Jewry. The synagogue was built of local stone with accommodation for 86. There was a ladies' gallery on the west wall beneath which, and opening out of the synagogue, was the classroom.³⁵ The total cost was £800, and there remained a deficit of £200. The architect was Mr W.S. Williams who had designed the Tredegar synagogue. The contractor was the local firm of Messrs Jenkins & Son, Brynmawr. A visiting minister had been appointed, the Rev. B.N. Michaelson.³⁶ He had been born in Middlesbrough and was then minister at Newport. It was not unusual for small provincial communities to have visiting ministers.

II STATISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY UP TO 1901

As noted above, the coincidental opening of the synagogue in 1901 and the Census of that year mark a break in the history of the community. Here we can pause to examine what the Censuses have to tell us. I repeat that in addition to those who were undoubtedly Jews, being taken from Jewish sources, the names extracted from the Census as 'Jewish' are those selected on the basis of names, birthplaces, and occupations. They are thus only approximate figures and moreover give only snapshots at particular dates and do not include any transient inter-censal residents.

Table II showed the growth of population while Table III explores age distribution. The community was a young group, as befits an immigrant generation. The slightly older age-groups were those of

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Table III.
Age Distribution in 1871–1901 Censuses

CENSUS	1–14	15–35	36–50	51+	TOTALS
1871	8	7	1	–	16
1881	12	4	4	–	20
1891	12	24	11	2	49
Extras	28	27	11	–	66
1891 Total	40	51	22	2	115
1901	31	28	11	2	72
Extras	21	26	13	–	60
1901 Total	52	54	24	2	132

NOTE

The figures before 1871 are too small for useful analysis.

immigrants: the majority of those aged 14 and under were born in the United Kingdom. Table IV shows birthplaces. Most of those born abroad were adults, but in three cases at least one parent was born in the United Kingdom. Isaac Isaacs, a long-term resident, was born in Canterbury, and his wife in Poland, an inversion of the usual case of immigrant males marrying British-born brides, as Polish-born Lewis Cohen had done: his wife was born in London. Abraham Lyons, of Abergavenny, was born in Cardiff and his wife in Tredegar. Another long-term member of the Brynmawr congregation — not yet a parent — was Gershon Joel Ballin, who was born in Somerset, son of a Swedish Jew. He married, in 1905, a Russian-born widow.

Birthplaces recorded in the Census are notoriously unreliable. Sometimes the place in one Census is differently stated in the next. One example in Brynmawr is that of Joseph, second son of Barnett Isaac(s). In 1871 Joseph was said to have been born in Poland, where his parents and an older brother were born. In 1881 he is recorded as being born in Brynmawr, where his younger siblings were born. In his case, since no record of a birth in Brynmawr can be found, we can take it that Poland was his country of birth. With this caveat in mind, Table IV gives the birthplaces of Brynmawr residents and also of the ‘Extras’, in other places.

As expected, Jews were mainly in the distributive trades — the particular immigrant Jewish occupations being well represented — clothing; jewellery and watchmaking; pawnbroking (although much fewer than in other South Wales Jewish settlements); hawking; and painting and glazing. The teacher and the chemist’s apprentice were the only ones to indicate a slight degree of acculturation.

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Table IV.
Birthplaces in 1871-1901 Censuses

Birthplace	1871	1881	1891	Extras	1901	Extras
ABROAD						
East Europe	6	3	28	21	24	17
Austria	-	-	6	-	10	-
Germany	-	1	4	8	6	2
Holland	1	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL ABROAD	7	4	38	29	40	19
WALES						
Aberdare				2		
Abergavenny				1		
Abersychan				1		
Abertillery					1	
Blaenavon				6		9
Blaina				6	1	9
Brynmaur	4	12	4	1	23	2
Cardiff		1		1		1
Maesteg				1		
Merthyr			3	2		
Pontypool	1	1				
Rogerstone					1	
Rhondda					1	
Tredeggar				8		16
TOTAL WALES	5	14	7	29	27	37
REST OF UK						
Birmingham				1		
Bristol	2	1				
Canterbury			1		1	
Cheltenham						1
Liverpool	2				1	
London			2	5	1	2
Manchester			1		1	
North Shields		1				
Somerset				1		1
Staffs Burslem				1		
Ireland					1	
TOTAL REST OF UK	4	2	4	8	5	4
TOTAL	16	20	49	66	72	60

III
AFTER 1901

No Censuses after 1901 are available for study and one cannot therefore use such sources to get any idea of populations. Estimates about the growth and decline of the community must be speculative and subjective. Thus H.H. Roskin stated that in the period 1907-1910,

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Table V.
Occupations in 1841, 1871-1901 Censuses

Occupation	1841	1871	1881	1891	Extras	1901	Extras
CLOTHING							
Clothier		1				2	2
Clothier's Assistant				1			
Clothier and Draper						1	
Clothier and Pawnbroker				1			
Outfitter			1		4		4
Draper						1	
Dressmaker					1		
TOTAL CLOTHING		1	1	2	5	4	6
FURNITURE							
Furniture Broker	1						
Furniture Dealer				1	1		
House Furnisher						2	
Furniture Shop Assistant				1			
TOTAL FURNITURE	1			2	1	2	
JEWELLERY etc							
Jeweller				5		1	
Watchmaker and Jeweller				1			2
Watchmaker					1		
TOTAL JEWELLERY etc				6	1	1	2
PAWNBROKING							
Pawnbroker		1	1	1	4	3	
Pawnbroker and Jeweller							1
Pawnbroker and General Dealer							2
Pawnbroker and Outfitter							1
Assistant Pawnbroker			1	1			
Pawnbroker Manager					1		
TOTAL PAWNBROKING*		1	2	2	5	3	4
PAINTERS ETC.							
Painter and Glazier		1	1				
Glazier				2	2		1
Picture Frame Maker						1	
TOTAL PAINTERS etc		1	1	2	2	1	1
HAWKERS							
Hawker/traveller/pedlar	2**	2		6	2		1
Hawker Jewellery				2		1	
Hawker Drapery						1	2
TOTAL HAWKERS	2**	2		8	2	2	3
MISCELLANEOUS							
Minister				1		1	
Baker Confectioner						1	
Domestic Servant						1***	
Shop Assistant					3		
Teacher/Instructor					1		1
Chemist's Apprentice							1
GRAND TOTALS	3	5	4	23	20	16	18

NOTES

*Excluding the Clothier and Pawnbroker mentioned earlier in the Table.

**This includes the almost illegible Thomas Dempster(?), Hawker.

***This was Bessie Rambach/Ranbach who married Jacob Morris in 1905.

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because of ‘oppression abroad’, there was an influx of 11 named men ‘and many others’.³⁷ Yet one of them, D. Chill, was in fact in Brynmawr in the 1901 Census and contributed earlier (in 1900) to the synagogue building fund.

However, the congregation consolidated and while earning a living must have been a priority for the members, other aspects of life came to be accommodated by the creation of a number of organisations. Unfortunately the *Jewish Chronicle* – the main source of information – carried only occasional reports. Even before the new synagogue opened, there were the Hebrew classes for the growing number of children and a branch of the English Zionist Federation was formed, with 30 members enrolled at the first meeting in February 1900. In 1902 the branch boasted 100 members, was said to meet fortnightly and in April held its first annual Zionist ball, at the Drill Hall. The following year it had become the Brynmawr and Abertillery Zionist Society.³⁸ In the meantime in 1901 there were two reports of the social meetings of the Brynmawr Chovevei Zion Association (*JC* 10 May 1901, p. 29; and 19 July 1901, p. 25). There is a report of a weekly meeting of the Literary and Social Society (*JC* 23 January 1903, p. 30). In the same year there was a report of the annual meeting of the West Monmouthshire and Breconshire Jewish Orphan Aid Society, which raised funds for the Jews’ Hospital and Orphan Asylum, at Norwood, south London. The Society was praised for its success in fund-raising for such a small population, coming fifth among local societies in the UK. There was also a report of the existence of a Brecon & Monmouthshire Ahm(sic) Israel Branch of ITO. ITO was the Jewish Territorial Organisation which broke away from the Zionist organisation’s objective of Jewish settlement in Palestine and, in view of the urgency of dealing with the oppression of Jews, mainly in eastern Europe, advocated Jewish settlement in any available countries.³⁹

A longer-lasting body was created to administer the new burial ground at Brynmawr, which opened in 1920. A piece of land, to the north of the town, was purchased from the Brynmawr Urban District Council and conveyed by a document of 23 October 1919 to five men: Abel Myers, pawnbroker, of Abersychan; Jacob Morris, jeweller, of Brynmawr; Isaac Brest, furniture dealer, of Brynmawr; Joel Ballin, draper, of Brynmawr; and Jacob Myers, clothier, of Nantyglo. The land measured 2 acres, 3 roods, and 3 perches, and the cost was £206.⁴⁰ The following month a conference of the Brynmawr, Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, and Newbridge and District Congregations was held at the Synagogue Schoolrooms, Ebbw Vale. It was decided to form a Joint Burial Board Committee and a Building Committee to formulate rules and plans for the cemetery. Thanks were accorded to Mr Abel Myers of Abersychan for his gift of the plot, valued at £250.⁴¹ This

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clearly suggests that the £206 paid for the plot came personally from Abel Myers.

'Consolidation' in the early years of the twentieth century is one possible description. But there were also dissensions within the community: its members did not fulfil the hope expressed by Rev. B.N. Michaelson, at the opening of the synagogue in 1901, where he referred to 'the unity of purpose which had distinguished them: that same unity and goodwill would surely not be wanting now that there was the greater need for them'.⁴² However, there are no reliable data about the details of the dissensions. Neither the many letters in the *Jewish Chronicle* nor the minutes of the congregation (intermittent, from 1905) are explicit about the difficulties.

Perhaps the first intimation of a problem was an advertisement, repeated in successive issues of the *JC* in November 1904, for the post of *shohet* and *hazan*, which was occupied by Bloch. But very quickly afterwards, in December, a letter headed 'Brynmawr Hebrew Congregation' stated: 'At the request of myself and several of the principal members of the above Congregation, the Rev. G. Bloch remains at Brynmawr. Barnett Isaacs, President'.⁴³ The first congregational minute, of 22 February 1905, refers to a decision by Rev. S. Fyne of Swansea on a dispute which clearly had to do with Rev. Bloch. The decision turned on the application by Mr Bloch to be re-elected as *hazan*, *shohet* and teacher. He was duly re-elected at the meeting whereupon the Treasurer, A.D. Roskin, tendered his resignation.

The work of the congregation continued. The minutes routinely reported the annual election of officers (which were sometimes also reported in the *JC*), along with details of various duties, such as the collection of arrears of subscriptions and the fixing of the rates of contribution. A Mrs Cohen was to be given six shillings every fortnight for cleaning 'everything necessary to the Shool'. A ball was held in 1907 to help liquidate the congregation's debt and Barnett and Isaac Isaacs were thanked for their initial contribution of £10 each towards the debt fund.⁴⁴ In the following year it was agreed that tablets be erected in recognition of the services of these two men, and a formal occasion was held on 16 March 1908, the invitation thanking them for their services in the formation of the synagogue. There was no mention of the earlier reported efforts of A.D. Roskin.

Then suddenly, on 13 June 1909, a committee meeting was held 'to take steps for the peace of the congregation'. Four matters were itemised: 1) there was a complaint from Mrs Cohen about her son. It was agreed that Rev. Bloch should express his regrets for what had occurred; 2) there was a complaint relating to the President, B. Isaacs and the Treasurer, Isaac Brest, but no action was taken; 3) there was reference to threats made by Mr Solomon to Rev. Bloch and the former was instructed to apologise to Rev. Bloch. The fourth

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complaint was by A.D. Roskin who said that a servant of Rev. Bloch had taken a fowl to the butcher to be stamped; that was done but Bloch had not examined it to make sure the bird was kosher and a letter was to be sent to Bloch.

A general meeting of the congregation, at the end of the month, referred to Rev. Bloch being approached for definite answers to the (unspecified) charges against him. The minutes (30 June 1909) recorded: 'Owing to the opposition of the Members it was impossible to carry out the meeting and it was therefore deemed advisable to lay the matter before the Chief Rabbi Dr Adler and also the Rev. A.A. Green'. Three weeks later (21 July 1909) Rev. Green's arbitration was received, which was to be sent to Rev. Bloch — unfortunately with no details. Whatever the decision, Bloch was still there in November 1909 when he is referred to in the minutes. But early in 1910 matters came to a head, and a special meeting was held on 2 February 1910, to 'consider the financial and moral position of the Congregation and to take such steps for the Welfare and dignity of the Officers and any other business necessary'. The chairman gave an explanation of the 'disturbances on Shabbos Jan 29th'. It was resolved 'That a Summons be issued against Mr A.D. Roskin for disturbing the service during the Reading of the Law and also for using insulting language towards the President Mr B. Isaacs and the Reader the Rev. G. Bloch'. The Treasurer stated that owing to the dissension there was a deficiency of 17s 6d a week. It was resolved: 'That all those Members who had ceased paying and by joining an opposition Minyan and therefore depriving the Shool of its support be suspended as members and therefore also deprived of their privileges as Members of the Brynmawr Hebrew Congregation'. Letters were to be sent to the dissentient members that they would be charged one shilling per child for Hebrew and religious instruction, three pence per fowl, and one halfpenny per lb for porging meat 'as recommended by the Rules of the Congregation'.

It seems that the problems had been resolved when, at a special meeting of 27 February (presumably 1910) a letter had been received from the Chief Rabbi and it was agreed to adopt his (unspecified) recommendation. Perhaps it was made clear when the President of the Board of Deputies [D.L. Alexander] announced that he was going to Brynmawr to 'settle some communal differences that have arisen there'.⁴⁵

The award by the President of the Board of Deputies on 20 July 1910 was that the services of Rev. G. Bloch should be dispensed with. This led to a rapid exchange of lengthy letters in the *Jewish Chronicle* from members of the congregation. It also led to great tumult in the community, with brawls in the street, and people saying that they were afraid to walk in case they were abused. The brawls led to summonses being issued and the threat of court cases.

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The correspondence began in the *JC* of 5 August 1910 with a letter from Goodman Weiner, of Nantyglo. He argued that the President of the Board of Deputies [a barrister and King's Counsel] was an unsuitable person to settle disputes in provincial communities; the matter should go to the Beth Din, the religious court. The President's record was not encouraging; he had dealt with a problem in Great Yarmouth but the congregation there had dissolved. In a number of such cases the award had been to remove the paid official and in Brynmawr the *hazan* had been made the scapegoat.⁴⁶

In our own case, a breach of the peace in a public thoroughfare occurred on the very morning of Mr. Alexander's award becoming known, in which a number of our co-religionists were implicated; a batch of police-court summonses is already issued, the direct outcome of the award.

This was answered a week later by Isaac Isaacs, who had lived in Brynmawr since at least 1891 and was to live there all his life. He noted that while Weiner had said that Alexander was not suitable, in fact Weiner was one of the party which had appealed to the Board of Deputies for assistance. The other party (presumably that of Isaacs) had submitted their case to the Chief Rabbi who had advised them to accept the assistance of the Board. This was not a religious dispute but a secular one, and he denied that it was the award which had led to brawls between congregants. Another letter in the same issue from 'NEMO' referred to Bloch as 'conscientious and painstaking'; '... the congregation has not had such an efficient official as teacher and shochet since its formation. He has been in service for twelve years, and no word of complaint has been uttered as regards the performance of his duties'.⁴⁷

Weiner replied exasperatedly to Isaac Isaacs. Three points had been submitted to Alexander: the refusal of the ex-treasurer to hand over funds to his successor; the fact that the friends of Mr Isaacs had broken the locks of the synagogue, thus causing a brawl; and the refusal of Mr Isaacs and friends to contribute to the synagogue's funds for which they were threatened with exclusion. He continued: it baffled 'the comprehension of one who does not possess the legal mind' that Alexander somehow adjudicated on the relations between minister and congregation. He also said that there was no doubt that the disturbances between congregants had been caused directly by the award. He called in evidence the local weekly *The Merthyr Express*, which had prefaced their report: 'Brynmawr Jews fall out. Words lead to blows. Sequel to arbitration proceedings'.⁴⁸

Another letter in the *JC*, from 'MATWAS', gave more details of the outcome of the dispute.⁴⁹

Many a time I have been present when the President — the oldest member of the congregation and a respected citizen of Brynmawr — has been openly insulted and threatened while in the performance of his duties. Even now it

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is impossible to walk from one end of the road to the other without being assailed with insults and mocking abuse from an adherent of the 'opposition party'... Is it not still more scandalous that an official who has served the congregation faithfully for so many years, who has taught our children so ably and so efficiently that they have been a credit to the whole of Wales, should be treated as a mere puppet to be discarded at leisure. No-one can deny his efficiency and competency as a Shochet and teacher, especially his latter capacity, yet the reward for all his services is that he and his family are to be sacrificed as martyrs to the jealousy of a discontented section of the community.

This appeared to be the end of the public reporting of the matter except for a long, satirical, article in the *JC* in August 1910, entitled 'Brynmawring'. Inter alia, the writer introduced a new term: 'To Brynmawr' which 'will mean a state of affairs in a Jewish place of worship where the members indulge in free fights during the service, where the most bitter hatred is nursed by member against member, where wrangles are carried out in the public courts of justice, where the House of God is turned into a cockpit'.⁵⁰

The affair ended early in the next year — although with some difficulty. A general meeting of the congregation was held on 4 January 1911 at which 'The Chairman made appropriate remarks on the hopes of the assimilation of the late conflicting parties and the dawn of a united and peaceful congregation'. This was exemplified by the election of A.D. Roskin as President and Barnett Isaacs as Honorary Life President. Another such meeting on 15 January agreed to mortgage the synagogue for £50; but ominously, a letter was to be sent to Rev. Bloch about his refusal to attend the general meeting.

A summary was given in the *JC* in February. It commented that Alexander's award did not settle things and bring peace: proceedings were instituted in the Chancery Division of the High Court and there were further acts leading to proceedings in the local Police Court. Subsequently the whole matter was referred to the Chief Rabbi who directed that certain named persons:⁵¹

consent to the withdrawal of a Police Court summons... finds the plaintiffs were justified in taking proceedings in the Chancery Division to enforce the award of Mr. Alexander and directs that all proceedings in the action shall cease... He further orders that no proceedings of any kind shall be commenced or prosecuted by any of the persons named in the schedules to the award against any other or others of the persons in respect of any matter or thing relating to the affairs of the congregation or its synagogue or in respect of any disturbances which took place in the synagogue up to the date of the award, except for the purpose of enforcing the award.

Peace appears to have been declared and on 1 March a ball was held in the Drill hall, Brynmawr, under the patronage of D.L. Alexander. Nearly 200 people, resident in the district, attended; another ball,

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again under Alexander's patronage, was held a year later, on 7 February 1912.⁵² In the same month the congregation advertised for a 'teacher-reader and shochet' who was under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi and who 'must be able to translate'.⁵³

This probably meant that Bloch had left the congregation or was in the process of leaving. Although his application for naturalisation of September 1913 gives a Brynmawr address,⁵⁴ a letter of 17 October 5678 [sc. 1917] about Rev. Getzel Bloch, from the Chief Rabbi, was addressed to the President of the Ebbw Vale Hebrew Congregation. It stated that Bloch had 'satisfactorily passed the renewed Examination as *shohet* [in Hebrew]'. He was thus authorised 'to perform, for the members of your Congregation, the duties connected with such office'.⁵⁵ Obviously he was connected with that congregation. He may have been succeeded in Brynmawr by Rev. Aaron Solomon who left the town in 1915 for an appointment in Leicester to be followed by Rev. H.R. Goldwater who stayed for several years.⁵⁶ It is noticeable that a Rev. G. Bloch of Ebbw Vale was appointed *shohet* and teacher at Brynmawr in 1923 and the 1941 obituary of Rev. Getzel Bloch mentioned that he had officiated in both Brynmawr and Ebbw Vale.⁵⁷ Yet in 1924 when he left Brynmawr for the USA, he was thanked for his services to Brynmawr for 25 years.⁵⁸ It may be supposed that if he was in Ebbw Vale between 1911 and 1923 he had also been associated with Brynmawr.

Whether or not the Brynmawr Jews were affected by the great industrial unrest in South Wales in the years before the Great War, notably in coal-mining and the railways, there was something nearer to home to upset them. These were the anti-Jewish disturbances which began in the autumn of 1911, centring on Tredegar, but spreading to other towns. They have been studied at length,⁵⁹ but they hardly touched Brynmawr, despite its nearness to Tredegar. In August 1911 the *JC* reported, of Brynmawr, that on Tuesday 22nd a window in Cohen's jewellery shop was broken but that there were plenty of police and soldiers about.⁶⁰ Later, Hermann H. Roskin, of Beaufort, stated: 'In Beaufort, Brynmawr, and Abertillery it was the citizens themselves who prevented the looters from doing any damage'.⁶¹ More precisely, it was said that the Jewish residents had suffered little and that they attributed that to the actions of Police-sergeant Price who organised a strong body of special constables. A number of Jewish tradesmen presented him with a purse of gold and permission had been granted by the Breconshire Watch Committee for him to accept the gift.⁶²

IV THE COMMUNITY'S LAST YEARS

The title of Hilda Jennings's 1934 work, *Brynmawr, A Study of a Distressed Area*, sums up the economic history of the town between the

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Table VI.
Occupations of Brynmawr residents after 1901

Year	Name	Occupation	Source
1905	Herman Erder	Puddler	Birth of daughter
1905-1919	Abraham Leckerman	Pedlar Drapery	Naturalisation 1919 (i)
1907	Charles Weiner	Draper	Marriage of daughter
1907	Jacob Norvick	Confectioner	Marriage
1907	Marks Shane	Draper	Marriage of daughter
	[Isaac Norvick (deceased)]	Farmer	Marriage of son]
1907	Samuel Samuels	Draper	Marriage of daughter
1908	Switzer Solomon	Hawker (Drapery)	Birth of son
1909	Moses Harris	Draper	Death cert. of wife
1911	Jacob Morris	Jeweller	Naturalisation
[1911	Solomon Cammerman	Glazier [see 1916 and	Birth cert. of son
	Abertillery]	1921]	
1913	[Eli Goldstein (deceased)]	Draper	Marriage of daughter]
1913	[Lewis Cohen (deceased)]	Draper	Marriage of daughter]
1915	Maurice Lionel Stone	Commercial Traveller	Marriage
	[Joseph Stone	General Dealer	Marriage of son]
1915	[Simon Doctorovitch	Glazier	Marriage of daughter]
1916	Simon Cammerman	Coal miner [see 1960]	Marriage
	[Solomon Cammerman	Painter [see 1911 and	Marriage of son]
	(deceased 1911)	1921]	
1916	[Barnett Simons	Draper	Marriage of daughter]
	(deceased)		
1916	Lewis Berenblum	Traveller Drapery	Marriage
	[Abraham Berenblum	Traveller Drapery	Marriage of son]
1916	[Abraham Goldwater	Boot Dealer	Marriage of daughter]
1916	Elias Gibbor	Travelling Draper	Marriage
	[Isiah Gibbor	Butcher	Marriage of son]
1918	Frederick Katz	Tobacconist Fancy Dealer	Marriage
	[Joel Jacob Katz	General Dealer	Marriage of son]
	(deceased)		
1918	Isaac Goldfoot	Draper	Marriage of daughter
1919	Jacob Morris	Jeweller	Burial Ground
			Conveyance
1919	(Gershon) Joel Ballin	Draper	Burial Ground
			Conveyance
1920	Simon Cammerman	Coal Hewer [see 1960]	Birth cert. of son
1920	Abraham Gutentag	Travelling Draper	Marriage
	[Israel Isaac Gutentag	General Dealer	Marriage of son]
1920	[Simon Gutentag	Travelling Draper	Marriage of daughter]
	(deceased)		
1920	Bernard Erlich	Draper	Birth of son
1921	[Solomon Cammerman	General Dealer	Marriage of daughter]
	(deceased 1911)		
1924	[Eli Marks	Travelling Draper	Marriage of daughter]
1926	Isaac Brest	House Furnisher	Kelly's Directory
1926	Leah Cammerman	Fruiterer	Kelly's Directory
1926	Gershon Ballin	Draper	Kelly's Directory

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Table VI.
Continued

Year	Name	Occupation	Source
1928	Simon Cammerman	Coal Hewer [see 1960]	Birth cert. of son
1928	Berhard(sic) Erlich	Travelling Draper	Birth cert. of son
1931	Switzer Solomon	Draper	Marriage of son
1934	Abraham Brest	Jeweller	Burial Ground Deed 1934
1934	Jacob Morris	Jeweller	Burial Ground Deed 1934
1935	Myer David Cohen	Electrical Engineer	Marriage
	[David Myer Cohen	General Dealer	Marriage of son]
1935	Gershon Joel Ballin (deceased)	General dealer	Marriage of daughter
1936	Jacob Cammerman	Fruiterer	Birth cert. of son
1936	Michael Isador Jacobs [Angel Jacobs	Boot & Shoe Salesman Costumier	Marriage Marriage of son]
1939	[Hyman Stone (deceased)	Master Builder	Marriage of daughter]
?1941	Morris Bharier	Manager of cycle stores	Death cert. (ii)
?1944	Benjamin Goldenberg	Warehouseman	Death cert. (iii)
1955	Abraham Brest	Furnisher	Marriage cert. of son
1960	Simon Cammerman	Greengrocer	Death cert.
1968	Abraham Brest	Manag. Director Furniture Co.	Death cert.

NOTES

General: Details of most fathers of grooms/brides are in parentheses if it is not known if they lived in Brynmawr.

(i) Naturalisation papers give a date in 1905 of arrival in Brynmawr and state he had been pedlar in drapery.

(ii) Died Brynmawr. Address given as Middlesbrough.

(iii) Died Brynmawr. Address given as London N5.

two World Wars. Brynmawr was sharing the experience of all the coal-mining and heavy industry districts in Britain, especially in the coal-exporting areas such as South Wales. One remedial effort was by the Society of Friends (Quakers): it created the Coalfields Distress Committee. Part of this was the Brynmawr Experiment, under which the Brynmawr Furniture Makers Ltd was formed but it was on a small scale and came to an end with the Second World War; another was the creation of a boot-making enterprise.

The effects of the depression on the Brynmawr Jewish community are not easy to establish. One would expect that, as shopkeepers, they would face falling trade. Neil Evans commented: 'Contrary to popular belief the pawnshop trade in which they were concentrated [in South Wales] was devastated by the depression and the valley communities never recovered' but this may not have applied to Brynmawr.⁶³ There were few Jewish pawnbrokers in the town and there were some long-term residents; a number had been there before 1914, and remained in Brynmawr until they died. There is evidence

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Table VII.

Professional offspring of Brynmawr residents and their residences

Barnett Abrahams. JC 12.8.1910. 1st class Hons in French. UC Cardiff. (Roskin, MA, in New York)
Mendel Bloch JC 12.4.1935. Inducted Minister & Reader, Borough Syn., London. Attended UC Cardiff
Simon Brest. JC 16.1.1905. Student at UC Cardiff. (Roskin, doctor in London)
Bernard Chill Solicitor, Southampton. (Roskin)
Jack M. Isaacs. JC 21.7.1916 Lawyer, Manitoba
Dr H.D. Isaacs. JC 16.10.1925. Demonstrator in University of Manitoba medical school
Emanuel Marks. Solicitor in Brynmawr & Abertillery. (Roskin)
David Morris. Solicitor in Newport. (Roskin and various references in JC)
Reuben Robinson. Chemist in Cardiff. (Roskin)
J. Solomon. Cardiff UC. Schoolteacher in Middlesbrough then St. Albans. (Roskin)
Abraham Solomon. Cardiff UC. Schoolteacher at Norwood Orphanage. (Roskin)
A. Weiner. 1st Jewish graduate of University of Wales. Taught French at King's College, London. (Roskin)
H.H. Roskin, lawyer in Cardiff

NOTE

'Roskin' refers to Capt. H. H. Roskin, 'The Jewish Communities of South Wales II – The Brynmawr Community', *CAJEX*, vol. 8, no. 3, September 1958, pp. 61–63.

of some newcomers to the congregation: in newspaper reports of congregational meetings there are new names as there were also among the couples who were married under Brynmawr auspices.

Apart from the puddler (presumably in the iron works), the coal miner, who became a greengrocer, the master builder (if in Brynmawr), and the electrical engineer, it is noticeable that the trades of those remaining in Brynmawr were the characteristic 'Jewish' immigrant ones, one being a travelling draper as late as 1928. They were immigrants or the sons of immigrants, who were born early in the immigration period. But other (male) children went to university and usually moved away from the area.

There were others who moved from Brynmawr. Asher Cohen, who was born in Brynmawr in 1893, died in Kensington (London) in 1939. Occasional examples like this can be supplemented by the trend of marriages. Ruth Brest (the only daughter of Abraham Brest) married Dr Cecil Sandler in London in 1943. Dr Sandler is listed in 1949 and in the list of 1952 as a member of Brynmawr congregation but his residence is given as Hounslow in London. However, only a few of their subsequent addresses have been found and certainly some of the families settled in Brynmawr. Yudle Sidle of the village of Cwm married Edith Cammerman in Brynmawr in 1921 and their names are in the 1949 and 1952 membership lists as E. Siddle in 1949 and Y. Siddle in 1952.⁶⁴ Abraham Brest of Brynmawr married Henrietta Woolf in Hammersmith in 1922 but lived in Brynmawr for

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the rest of his life. In 1933 Leslie Dayan of Bootle married Minnie Abrahams of Ebbw Vale (where the wedding took place but under Brynmawr auspices. In fact Leslie Dayan had been born in 1906 in Monmouthshire). A child, Anthony, was born in 1935 in Liverpool, yet a 'Mrs C. Dayan, Brynmawr' contributed to a fund in 1936 and 'Mrs Dayan' to another in 1938⁶⁵ and in the 1949 list of members a C. Dayan is included.

The two post-Second World War lists, mentioned above, provide solid evidence of the size of the congregation. In that of 1949 there were 33 names of which 17 were from Brynmawr. The remaining 16 were as follows: six, Ebbw Vale; four, Blaenavon; four, Abertillery; and two, Blaina. Three years later in 1952, the total number had gone down to 18. The decline of the Brynmawr community mirrored that of other South Wales Jewish communities and not just of numbers. In July 1949 at a meeting of representatives of small South Wales communities complaints were made that they were interested only in electing as minister a qualified *shohet* and were not interested in his ability as teacher or preacher. Mr I. Morris of Brynmawr 'spoke bitterly of the neglected children in his small community, and said they eagerly awaited a scheme that would provide a Hebrew education'.⁶⁶ An article in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1962, entitled 'Fewer Jews in Wales', reported that 'there are still in each of the ghost communities, such as Bridgend, Brynmawr, Aberdare, Port Talbot, Pontypridd and Porthcawl, small groups who are trying to keep alive traditional Judaism'.⁶⁷ It did not last long in Brynmawr. On 21 November 1963, Abraham Brest, the elderly honorary secretary of the community — who had been born in Brynmawr in 1889 and died there in 1968 aged 78 — wrote to the clerk to the Board of Deputies, enclosing the annual subscription of three guineas, and adding: 'I regret to say that in view of the fact that our membership has depleted to just a few we have ceased to exist'⁶⁸ and the congregation amalgamated with that of Newport.⁶⁹

One thing had to be settled, the disposition of the marriage register and there was correspondence between David Morris (of Newport, the Brynmawr congregation's Secretary for Marriages) and the General Register Office about it. The GRO wanted to end his position and for him to surrender the register. Morris explained that although the last wedding had taken place in 1941, he wished to retain his position as Marriage Secretary because there were still families living in the district and the absence of Marriage Secretary would mean that there could be no local weddings. Moreover, the cost of celebrations at Newport or Cardiff would be considerably higher.⁷⁰ A year later the Clerk to the Board of Deputies concluded the matter. He strongly recommended that the Registrar-General's request be acceded to, and added: 'Your former objection that marriages, if any, would

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have to be held in Newport or Cardiff can also be overcome because Merthyr has a Secretary (for Marriages)'. Morris agreed and surrendered the register.⁷¹

V

CONCLUSION

The history of the Jewish community of Brynmawr was typical of many provincial settlements which came into existence mainly as a result of the East European immigration of the late nineteenth century. Among the features were the arguments leading to the establishment of an opposition congregation; and the payment of low salaries to ministers which led to their lasting only for short periods. This was because the communities were small and at the start tended to be composed of people with low incomes. Nevertheless, Brynmawr was able to build a new synagogue although not from its own resources: most of the money came from outside. Two particular features are worth mentioning. Despite the fact that in South Wales pawnbroking was a major Jewish activity, this was not the case in Brynmawr. And, as mentioned, despite the nearness of the town to Tredegar, the centre of the 1911 riots, Brynmawr was more or less untouched.

What about relationships between Jews and non-Jews? On the one hand, there is the story told by David Morris, and quoted by Ursula Henriques that 'the *cheder* (religious school) had a fighting team led by a stout lad called Lennie Myers which used to fight with a well-known Christian gang called the J.C.Gs'.⁷² Anthony Morris, a son of David Morris, said: 'Father also used to talk of the regular *cheder* outing to Cardiff to beat up the Cardiff boys. They were a belligerent lot from what I was told'.⁷³ On the other hand, an indication of relationships with non-Jews can be gauged from the fact that when David Morris (born 1908) was at the *cheder* — presumably during and just after the First World War — there were 11 boys there who formed cricket and football teams which played the local chapels (but not on Saturdays).⁷⁴ And, more generally, the views of a number of people associated with the town, as residents or their children, said that relationships were cordial. Bailey Street, the location of both Heachcote House and the synagogue, was popularly called 'Jew Street' — because of the number of Jewish businesses there — but in a non-pejorative sense.

The good relationships may have been one of the reasons why Brynmawr was not affected by the 1911 riots, notably the reported preventative deeds of the local citizens. Another were the actions of the authorities. I mentioned above the role of the local Police-sergeant. And the second-hand account by Anthony Morris suggests that his activities reflected those at the top. Anthony Morris wrote:⁷⁵

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My Father told me that he remembered the incident. He was 3 at the time and he recalled all the Jewish owned shops being boarded up and the children being sent to stay with the maids in their houses. The soldiers filled the Market Square and the Chief Constable of Breconshire stood under the Bridge on the boundary between Monmouthshire and Breconshire and as the rioters came up the valley he said to them that so long as they were on the Monmouthshire side of the bridge he could not touch them but as they crossed over the boundary he would hit each of them back into Monmouthshire.

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NOTES

¹ For the industrial history of Brynmawr, see Hilda Jennings, *Brynmawr, A Study of a Distressed Area*, 1934 and W.E. Minchinton, 'The place of Brecknock in the industrialization of South Wales', *Brycheiniog*, Vol. VII, 1961, pp. 1-70.

² Minchinton in Note 1, p. 29.

³ See, inter alia, Neil Evans, 'Immigrants and Minorities in Wales, 1840-1990: a comparative perspective', *Llafur*, Vol. 5, no. 4, 1991, pp. 5-26; Owen Roberts, 'Bibliographical Review: Migrating Into the Mainstream of Welsh History; The Irish and Others in Modern Wales', *Llafur*, Vol. 9, no. 1, 2004, pp. 107-115.

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⁴ Anthony Glaser and Ursula R.Q. Henriques, 'The valleys communities', in Ursula R.Q. Henriques, *The Jews of South Wales. Historical Studies*, 1993, pp. 45–67.

⁵ Jennings, in Note 1 above, pp. 102–3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.

⁷ Strangely, Gerry R. Rubin, 'From packmen, tallymen and "perambulating Scotchmen" to credit drapers' associations, c.1840–1914', *Business History*, Vol. 28, no. 2, April 1986, pp. 206–25, despite noting the numerous terms used to describe such people, does not include 'travelling drapers'.

⁸ London Metropolitan Archives (henceforth LMA), ACC/33121/10/02/018, 25 May 1949, 18 May 1952.

⁹ For a more detailed discussion of these matters see my article, 'The Jewish Community of North Shields', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 49, nos. 1 and 2, 2007, pp. 49–50.

¹⁰ They can be traced in www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/wales.htm. (Accessed 25 September 2007.) See also *Monumental Inscriptions. Jewish Cemetery, Cefn Coed Y Cymmer, Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorgan*, Glamorgan Family History Society, 2004.

¹¹ Capt. H.H. Roskin, 'The Jewish Communities of South Wales II — The Brynmawr Community', *CAJEX*, Vol. 8, no. 3, September 1958, pp. 61–3.

¹² *JC*, 4 October 1889, p. 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1889, p. 11.

¹⁴ The National Archives, Naturalisation Certificate, HO 144/1452/310799; *London Gazette*, 1 December 1916, p. 11,752. In small communities the sole religious functionary was one who often combined the roles of *shohet*, *hazan*, *mohel*, and teacher, and would be called 'Reverend'.

¹⁵ *JC*, 6 September 1889, p. 13.

¹⁶ See 'The 1841 Census of Brynmawr Breconshire, Wales. A Transcription and Commentary by Jeffrey L. Thomas in www.thomasgenweb.com/Brynmawr_1841.html (Accessed 26 September 2007).

¹⁷ *JC*, 12 December 1958 page 36, obituary of Mont Follick.

¹⁸ The 1871 Census of Brynmawr has been transcribed by the Powys Family History Society (Cymdeithas Hanes Teuluoedd). The most useful section for our purposes is *1871 Census Brecknock, Enumeration District of CRICKHOWELL Sub-District of LLANELLY Parish of BRYNMAWR [RG10:5588] Part Two SURNAME INDEX*, 2003. In this Census the name Follick was spelled Follock.

¹⁹ For the 1881 Census see M.E. MacSorley, *Brynmawr. A Transcription, Surname Index and Strays Index to the 1881 Census*, 1995. However, this transcription is limited to RG11/5464 and 5466, and does not include 5465. For that of 1901 see *1901 Census of Brecknock: Town and Parish of BRYNMAWR, RG 13:5174*, Powys Family History Society (Cymdeithas Hanes Teuluoedd), CD-Rom, 2002. Despite some misreadings these transcriptions are useful, as they include surname indexes and are easy to manipulate. However, they have been supplemented by recourse to a sight of the facsimiles of the original Censuses.

²⁰ Roskin, in Note 11 above, p. 61.

²¹ *JC*, 18 December 1903, p. 30.

²² *Ibid.*, 23 March 1928, p.12.

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²³ Robinson (1910), *JC*, 23 September 1910, p. 1; Robinson (1938), *ibid.*, 22 July 1938, p. 14; Robinson (1940), *ibid.*, 2 May 1940, p. 20; Myers, *ibid.*, 13 August 1920, p. 20.

²⁴ G. Alderman, 'The anti-Jewish riots of August 1911 in South Wales', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 6, December 1972, p. 191. The similarity of my total of 132 in 1901 to the *Jewish Year Book's* 135 in 1911 is coincidental. The *JYB* figure is that of the supposed population of Brynmawr; mine includes members of the Brynmawr community who lived outside the borough.

²⁵ *JC*, 1 June 1894, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1894, p. 16.

²⁷ Roskin, in Note 11 above, p. 61.

²⁸ *JC*, 25 March 1892, p. 18, election of Sunlight; *ibid.*, 31 March 1893, p. 19, Sunlight candidate for Coventry.

²⁹ Schulman, *JC*, 15 February 1895, p. 2; *ibid.*, 13 March 1895, p. 22, Wolman officiated at a wedding in Brynmawr.

³⁰ *JC*, 13 March 1896, p. 22. Jennings, in Note 1 above, p. 52, referred to the interest aroused in a wedding in 1894, possibly an error for 1896.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12 May 1899, p. 23.

³² *Ibid.*, 21 June 1901, p. 19, opening of synagogue. In the obituary of Aaron David Roskin it was stated that he had founded the synagogues in Tredegar, Ebbw Vale, and Brynmawr. He was said to be indefatigable in his activities within the local Jewish communities. He was incidentally a relation of the writer Mendele Mocher Seforim: *JC*, 19 August 1927, p. 8.

³³ Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS 177/AJ277.

³⁴ *JC*, 27 July 1900, p. 2.

³⁵ The contemporary description does not refer to *mikveh* but the congregation's minutes, 22 February 1905, refer to its being repaired. I understand from Judge Anthony Morris that his father told him that it was in a shed attached to the synagogue.

³⁶ *JC*, 21 June, 1901, p. 19; *ibid.*, 28 June 1901, p. 23; Hartley Library, MS 177/AJ277 A12, *Order of Service at the Consecration of the Brynmawr Synagogue on Thursday, June 20th 5661-1901*.

³⁷ Roskin, in Note 11 above, p. 61.

³⁸ Formation: *JC*, 2 March 1900, p. 19; 100 members, meeting fortnightly, *ibid.*, 3 January 1902, p. 34; Zionist ball, *ibid.*, 4 April 1902, p. 27; wider Zionist Society, *ibid.*, 18 September 1903, p. 34.

³⁹ Orphan Aid: *JC*, 6 November 1903, p. 31; ITO, *ibid.*, 3 July 1908, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Hartley Library, AJ/277/13/1. Roods and perches are traditional measures of land. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines rood as 'A superficial measure of land, properly containing 40 square poles or perches, but varying locally'. Perch is defined as 'Standard Measure = 5½ yards, but varying locally'. This last agrees with another *OED* definition of perch as being 1/160th of an acre.

⁴¹ *JC*, 14 November 1919, p. 32.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28 June 1901, p. 23.

⁴³ Advertisement, *JC*, 11, 18 November 1904, p. 2 in each case; Isaacs letter, *ibid.*, 9 December 1904, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Mrs Cohen, Minutes 14 August 1907; thanks to Isaacs, *ibid.*, 15 December 1907.

⁴⁵ *JC*, 4 March 1910, page 14.

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- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 5 August 1910, p. 15.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 12 August 1910, p. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 19 August 1910, p. 20.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 19 August 1910, p. 20.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 26 August 1910, p. 7.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., 17 February 1911, p. 13.
- ⁵² 1911 ball, *JC*, 10 March 1911, p. 14; 1912 ball, *ibid.*, 16 February 1912, p. 31.
- ⁵³ *JC*, 10 March 1911, p. 2.
- ⁵⁴ National Archives HO144/8581.
- ⁵⁵ Hartley Library AJ/277/C/6. I am grateful to the United Synagogue for permission to quote from this document.
- ⁵⁶ Appointment of Solomon: *JC*, 15 January 1915, p. 27; appointment of Goldwater: *ibid.*, 21 May 1915, p. 19.
- ⁵⁷ Appointment of Bloch: *ibid.*, 28 September 1923, p. 25; 1941 obituary: *ibid.*, 25 July 1941, p. 21.
- ⁵⁸ *JC*, 13 June 1924, p. 26.
- ⁵⁹ Alderman, in Note 24; *idem.*, 'The Settlement and Reception of Jews in South Wales before 1914', *Trans. Jewish Hist. Soc. of England*, Vol. 26, 1974, pp. 62–70; *idem.*, 'Into the Vortex: South Wales Jewry before 1914', in Aubrey Newman, compiler, *Provincial Jewry in Victorian England*, Jewish Historical Society of England, 1975; A.M. Weiner, 'Tredegar Riots', *CAJEX*, Vol. 26, no. 1, 1976, pp. 15–26; Neil Evans, 'The South Wales riots of 1911', *Llafur*, Vol. 3, 1980, pp. 5–29; Cohn Holmes, 'The Tredegar riots of 1911', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 11, December 1982, pp. 214–55; Anthony Glaser, 'The Tredegar Riots of August 1911', in Henriques, in Note 4 above, pp. 151–176; William D. Rubinstein, 'The anti-Jewish riots of 1911 in South Wales: a re-examination', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 18, December 1997; Geoffrey Alderman, 'The anti-Jewish riots of August 1911 in South Wales: a response', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 20, June 2001.
- ⁶⁰ *JC*, 25 August 1911, p. 10.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8 September 1911, p. 13.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 20 October 1911, p. 15.
- ⁶³ Evans in Note 3 above, p. 15.
- ⁶⁴ LMA, in Note 8, 25 May 1949 and 26 May 1952.
- ⁶⁵ *JC*, 4 September 1936, p. 18; 22 July 1938, p. 14.
- ⁶⁶ *JC*, 29 July 1949, p. 12.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 August 1962, p. 11.
- ⁶⁸ LMA, in Note 8, 21 November 1963.
- ⁶⁹ *JC*, 14 January 1966, p. 17.
- ⁷⁰ LMA, in Note 8, 26 February 1964.
- ⁷¹ LMA, in Note 8, 18 February 1965; 19 February 1965.
- ⁷² Henriques, in Note 4 above, p. 7.
- ⁷³ Anthony Morris to H. Pollins, 28 January 2008.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*