

From Heim to Home: an exploration of the extent to which the educational experiences of immigrant Jews into London's East End in the late 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to their assimilation into English society

Nina Weiss

Cass School of Education, University of East London

ABSTRACT

The years 1870–1914 saw a significant migration to Britain of poor and often illiterate eastern European Jews. The move from their original 'heim' (home) to a new life and home in England was seen as a potential threat by the long-established middle and upper class Anglo-Jewish community, and as a cause of concern to a British government worried by national issues such as unemployment, poverty and the perceived need to produce a healthier and better educated workforce to serve the Empire. Accounts suggest, however, that despite a brooding climate of anti-Semitism, the newly arrived Jews were keen to assimilate, participating enthusiastically in the developing system of universal compulsory schooling and making the most of the educational opportunities on offer. This article focuses on the Jewish immigrant community in London's East End. It uses a range of life documents to examine the tendencies to assimilation in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, but attempts to understand the process not just from the viewpoint of academics and contemporary establishment figures, but from the perspective of the Jewish immigrants and their London-born children. This auto/biographical methodology challenges a traditional understanding of education as being solely 'formal schooling' and introduces a perspective which recognises the influences on a newly arrived community of other less formal associational spaces such as clubs, societies, centres of entertainment, self-study groups and political organisations. The article ends by exploring the similarities between the experiences of these immigrant Jews and more recently arrived communities to London's East End, raising the question of what actually constitutes 'assimilation'.

INTRODUCTION

This piece of writing explores the educational experiences of Jewish immigrants into London's East End during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the demands and opportunities that came with settlement in a new country and the expectations of assimilation into an English way of life. During this period nearly a quarter of a million Jews gave up their Eastern European 'heim' to find a new life and English 'home'. As Ian Grosvenor (1999) points out, 'The word 'home' is rich in associations. Many of these associations are linked to ideas of nation and belonging, of the nation as home' (p. 279). Grosvenor also points to the fact that historians have identified the period from 1880 to 1950 as 'an age of certainty when [the English] knew 'who' we were' (1999, p. 278). I am interested in the means by which the immigrant Jew was inducted into a notion of 'Englishness' and to what extent s/he subscribed to it.

The lens through which I will explore these changes is ‘education’, but in its broadest sense. Brian Simon (1985) suggests that ‘the *process* of education involves all those formative influences including the family, peer groups, the Church, apprenticeship and the village or civic relations’ (p.144) and using this perspective, this article investigates a range of educational spaces both formal and informal. Grosvenor (1999) also argues for the importance of the classroom in the formation of national identity: ‘As historians we also have to consider the impact of other ‘educational’ sites and spaces ... in shaping and reinforcing identity’ (1999, p.284), Clearly the influence of formal education is strong and this article outlines the formal schooling experiences of the Jewish community, including state elementary schools, self-organised religious schools, scholarship opportunities, evening classes and progression to higher education. In addition, however, I am very interested in the informal education taking place in associational spaces: the boys’ and girls’ clubs; libraries and reading groups; involvement in political movements; cultural and social clubs; and workers’ clubs and societies.

The challenge to use autobiographical writing as a significant element of my research into the history of education in the Jewish East End was not so much a challenge as an endorsement of all the life-stories I had grown up with. Each autobiography I read confirmed the tales I had been told of the early 20th century, second generation immigrant experience in which education, both formal and informal, transformed lives in different ways. These autobiographies, alongside the reading of more conventional academic texts, helped to place the first hand accounts I had heard into a broader perspective and to illuminate a period of history when a largely unschooled and illiterate immigrant community made the most of the educational opportunities available, as well as creating their own informal sites of learning, in order to adapt to their new home and assimilate to a new way of life.

Troublesome Boy by Harold Rosen (1993) is an autobiographical text in which Rosen (who grew up in the Jewish East End during the first half of the 20th century and later became an influential educationalist and teacher educator) outlines his educational experiences as a young boy who won a scholarship to grammar school – the first step on the path to university and academia. He writes:

I had more than one schooling, my elementary school, my grammar school, the university, the Communist Party and, as I slowly came to realise, that vibrant academy, the Jewish East End (1993, p.93).

In his autobiography Rosen recognises the breadth of educational experiences, both formal and informal, which shaped and influenced his intellectual development.

In Joe Jacobs’ *Out of the Ghetto* published in 1978, Joe (the son of eastern European immigrants and a political activist) describes his political education and development against the backdrop of the Jewish East End in the early twentieth century. Harry Blacker’s (1974) *Just Like it Was* is a series of vignettes focusing on the everyday experiences of a boy (again the son of Jewish immigrants) growing up in the Jewish East End during and after the first World War. Finally, Jerry White’s *Rothschild Buildings* (1980) gathers

together the memoirs of the Jewish occupants of one East End tenement block and builds a picture of the lives of the newly arrived and more settled immigrant community.

In addition to these texts, I have also made use of other voices, ranging from the opinions of Board School head teachers involved in the education of Jewish pupils a century ago, to recent online reminiscences of life and learning in the East End drawn from one of the many websites encouraging older Jews to record their thoughts and memories.

I am not a 'historian' or 'researcher' in any formal sense and the opportunity to use autobiographical texts made the task of researching more accessible and in many ways more personal. What was interesting about the research was that as well as looking back, I found myself considering the present and the future. The 'voices' of my autobiographical subjects reminded me of the voices and aspirations of many of the students and parents I have worked with over the last 25 years in the East End of London where more recent immigrant communities have now settled to bring up their children in a new home.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The years 1870 to 1914 saw a significant migration of Jews to Britain, as a result of anti-Jewish laws and pogroms in Eastern Europe. The census of 1901 recorded almost 95,500 Russians and Poles settled in England. By 1911 (with the additional arrival of German, Austria, Romanian and Dutch Jews) it was estimated that the Jewish population of Britain was 240,000. Well over half of these immigrants settled in the East End of London; an area of poverty, unemployment, overcrowding and crime (Layton-Henry, 1992). Arriving at the Port of London, the immigrant Jews at the turn of the century congregated in a small area around Whitechapel, Mile End and Aldgate. Here, although they tended to group in streets alongside neighbours from their own particular homeland, there was a clear sense of a Jewish community separate from the indigenous population. 'A ghetto has boundaries and ours was no exception. Some of our boundaries would be better described as frontiers' (Jacobs 1978, p.25). Nonetheless, as Anna Davin (1996) points out, whilst there were many differences between Jews and locals, they all shared the poverty and poor housing conditions of the neighbourhood.

Not all Jews in Britain however were poor immigrants. There already existed a long-standing Anglo-Jewish (and established middle class) community who were anxious about the arrival of the newcomers and the possible effect on the reputation of the native Anglicised Jewish community. As a result they were extremely keen that the newcomers be speedily Anglicised and assimilated into British society as soon as possible. In 1885 this Anglo-Jewish elite established the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter in Leman Street (near the docks) to welcome and orientate newcomers just off the boats. The powerful Jewish Board of Guardians provided relief and small loans to the Jewish poor but also, between 1881 and 1906, encouraged and supported the repatriation of 31,000 Jews to Eastern Europe (Feldman, 1989). Lord Rothschild, a member of the Board and of one of the leading elite Anglo-Jewish families, was reported by a contemporary (Walker, 1896) to have said, 'We have now a new Poland on our hands in East London. Our first business is to humanise our Jewish immigrants, and then to Anglicise them'. The implication of this comment is that the

immigrants Jews were not only regarded as (understandably) ignorant of the ways of the 'Englishman' but primarily lacking any form of 'civilisation' or culture.

V.D. Lipman (1990, p.222) comments on 'the grip that the pre-1881 leading families continued to have on the machinery of communal government' and Jerry White (1980) describes the careful efforts of the Anglo-Jewish 'bourgeoisie' to socialise immigrants immediately upon arrival. He says that 'their controls were exercised in the home, at school, in the youth clubs in the administration of poor relief and in the synagogue' (p.257). He also felt that 'They had the benefit of moulding people whose working class culture and defences were still in the making; whose children, eager to learn the ways of their new home, found them defined and limited by both the Jewish voluntary schools and the state schools of the East End' (pp. 257-8). Rosen's (1993) family appealed for funds to provide clothing to support Rosen's continuation at school and his pronouncement on the Jewish Board of Guardians was that it was '... run by Jews who had made it ... well rooted in the establishment ... they looked goyim [non-Jewish] to me ... They modelled themselves on respectable British institutions' (p.90).

The established Jews' desire to 'mould' a community acceptable to the English meant that they lent support to the Aliens Act of 1905 which restricted (formerly automatic) entry to Britain on the basis of poor health, poverty and potential criminality and which resulted in a decline in Jewish immigration into the East End of London. The impetus for the Aliens Act was multi-factorial. A political concern for the consequences of poverty in London and an ensuing weakening at the heart of the Empire; the notion that Jews were responsible for taking away the livelihoods of English workers by undercutting them in a period of unemployment; blame for a perceived perpetration of sweated labour; claims that Britain was being used to plot anarchist terror across Europe (Feldman, 1989); and an opportunist attempt by Conservative politicians to win the hearts and minds of the newly franchised non-Jewish East End working class voters.

Contemporary views of the immigrant Jews placed them firmly in need of the 'civilising' effect of education. As Feldman (1989, p. 72) points out, in the build up to the Aliens Act, a perception of Jews' 'willingness to live beyond the pale of values and practices projected upon the native family played upon ideals and images that crossed class boundaries'. In addition to condemnation of their living and working conditions, the men were viewed as 'inferior' and unmanly - preferring non-manual labour, avoiding trade union organisation and sending their wives out to work. Ironically, however, Fishman (1979, p. 87) describes how the 'tough Jewish Puritanism' drove the local prostitution business out of the area for want of custom – a service for which they were thanked by the Rector of Spitalfields in 1907!

FORMAL EDUCATION

Grosvenor (2005, p.283) states that in the late 19th century 'the modern classroom was invented, together with a teacher, furniture, texts and aids, to produce a designed effect: the 'separation, segmentation and segregation' of childhood and the inculcation of common values and virtues'. The 1870 Elementary Education Act had set up the foundations for a

system of non-denominational universal compulsory schooling (to the age of 13), organised by regional School Boards to run alongside the already established church, private and guild schools. Although local areas across the country were left to create their own School Boards the government took charge in the capital with the creation of the London School Board. 1891 saw the introduction of free education for all children up to the age of 11 and the 1902 Education Act abolished the School Boards and assigned their powers to local authorities. In London the London County Council Education Committee was supported by the Anglo-Jewish elite.

This developing system is one which Simon (1985, p. 147) characterises as ‘intended (and, indeed, carefully designed) to preserve the social structure inviolate’. Purvis (1995) suggests that the introduction of mass compulsory schooling at the beginning of the 20th century served a number of purposes convenient to government: educating boys would provide an educated electorate and improve the workforce, leading to improved international competitiveness; educating girls in domestic crafts would improve child rearing and maternal care, thereby improving the health of the nation and providing suitable recruits to defend the Empire; education could be a force for social control – ‘civilising’ the working classes to reduce crime and anarchy; and education could also prove to be a useful route to impose middle class notions of the family (essentially a male breadwinner with an economically dependent full time wife and mother) on the working classes.

The new system of Board Schools, however, was one to which the immigrant community, with little or no experience of formal education (other than religious instruction, mainly for boys) in their home countries, would now be required to send their children, with fees paid for the poorest. Despite a lack of previous access to formal schooling, there existed a cultural predilection for argument and debate and a valuing of knowledge, as evidenced by the Eastern European religious education in the ‘beder’ (religious school room). In England ‘the native Jewish community had long supported a system of elementary schools which were, by contemporary standards, excellent’ (Gartner 1960, p.220). There was, as a consequence, no hesitation on the part of the immigrant Jews in recognising the opportunities afforded by formal education. Numerous accounts emphasise the Jewish parents’ interest in their children’s education. Joe Jacobs (1978) describes the Jews as ‘great ones for having their children educated’ (p.39) and outlines the ‘supreme effort on the part of parents to further their children’s education’ (p.172). Harry Blacker (1974) explains that older Jews were prepared to make significant sacrifices in order to support their children through their education and describes how his mother kept him hard at work at his homework.

Rosen’s (1993) background was different from many other immigrant Jewish children. His mother had been born in Stepney but had lived for ten of her adult years in America. She was a well-read, articulate and politically active single parent. Rosen’s mother was fiercely supportive and fought battles with the education authorities where she felt that her son was not receiving his entitlement. Mrs Rosen’s fighting spirit was not, however, the norm and many newly arrived Jews, illiterate and non-English speaking, were intimidated and alienated by the education system. Harry Blacker (1974, p. 171) describes the ‘exhaustive means test’ with ‘leading questions’ which confused and baffled parents applying for grants

to keep their children on at school post-14. The parents of the candidates were ‘made nervous by their encounter with the authorities.’

Minutes of evidence from a Royal Commission of 1903 attest to the interest of Jewish parents in their children’s education. Under questioning, F.H. Butcher, head teacher of Christian Street Board School said, ‘I think the [Jewish pupils] will become a credit ... if the parents take the same interest in their welfare after leaving school as they do while attending school’ and ‘they are most particular about their attendance at school’ (cited in Englander 1994, p. 238).

Before the 1870 Act there were already in existence a number of popular and well attended Jewish Schools supported by the Anglo-Jewish aristocracy (such as the Rothschilds). The best known of these was the Jews Free School (JFS) in Bell Lane, Spitalfields, which integrated Jewish and general elementary education and served the overt purpose of Anglicising its Jewish pupils. Gartner (1960, p. 222) describes it as the ‘citadel of Anglicisation’ which at the turn of the century educated about 4,300 children.

In the late 19th century however, following the 1870 Education Act, the responsibility for the education of Jewish children began to shift from the Jewish community to the state, with the result that no more Jewish Day Schools were opened. There was an obvious opening here for the state to take the opportunity to Anglicise their Jewish pupils through both the overt and the hidden curriculum presented to them. Rosen, Blacker and Jacobs all attended state Elementary Schools which despite being run on broadly Christian lines, seem to have been curiously sympathetic to the integration of Jewish culture and customs into the school day. In the East End many Board Schools were effectively Jewish schools and this was further supported by the provision on some premises of after-hours Jewish religious instruction. The appointment of several Jewish head teachers and staff contributed to the view that ‘In practice... Board Schools with very large Jewish proportions on their books were run as ‘Jewish’ schools’ (Gartner 1989, p.17). By 1902 it was estimated that there were around 16 Jewish Board Schools in London. However, due partly to anti-alien sentiments and partly to the Christian allegiance required of Board School teachers, the practice of appointing Jewish head teachers in ‘Jewish’ Board Schools was abandoned around 1902 (see Alderman, 1989). Almost all the teachers mentioned by name by Jacobs, Rosen or Blacker were English. Generally speaking the autobiographical accounts paint the teachers as friendly or at least tolerant of their Jewish pupils.

The records of attendance indicate some interesting features of school organisation. According to Irving Osborne (1981) some head teachers were so concerned by the poor attendance in their schools due to Jewish Holy Days or early Sabbaths in winter that they applied to become a ‘Jewish School’ in order to accommodate this situation. Jerry White (1980, p. 176) describes the position at Commercial Street School where ‘the authorities observed both sets of religious holidays from 1899 onwards’ and made special timetabling provision for early closures on Fridays.

Indeed alongside their attendance at school, most young Jews were also receiving a semi-formal religious education. White (1980) recounts attendance at the one room, overcrowded *cheder*. This was despised by the middle class Anglo-Jewry as representing the deprivation

of the immigrant community, but perhaps also because the medium of instruction was often Yiddish and therefore a barrier to assimilation (see Gartner and Englander). White (1980) mentions that although the better organised Talmud Torah schools were for boys only, many parents took advantage of private religious schools for both sexes where they could send their children in order to get some peace and quiet for themselves! Joe Jacobs attended Hebrew classes until his Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13.

The popular view of the 15,000 Board School Jewish pupils in the early twentieth century was that they were bright and quick to learn. Englander (1994, p. 214) summarises contemporary accounts and memoirs as suggesting that ‘immigrant children were industrious, attentive, quick to learn and remarkable in their ability to overcome the poverty and deprivation of their environment’. They were also seen to be ripe for Anglicisation. As the head teacher of Deal Street Board School told the 1903 Royal Commission, ‘I am firmly convinced that the Jewish lads who pass through our school will grow up to be intelligent, industrious, temperate and law abiding citizens, and I think will add to the wealth and stability of the British Empire’ (Englander, 1994, p.233). He also commented that ‘the lads have become thoroughly English. They have acquired our language. They take a keen and intelligent interest in all that concerns the welfare of our country. They are proud to be considered English boys’ (Fishman, 1975, p.304).

So how was this Anglicisation achieved? One important factor was the attempt not only to teach English but to discourage the use of the Yiddish mother tongue. The acquisition of English was seen by the communal and educational establishment as central to the Anglicisation of the Jews and they themselves signed up to the process of learning a new language. The downside to the learning of English was the loss of both the communal mother tongue Yiddish, and a sense of a binding Jewish identity. As the young quickly learned English at school and on the street, the ties between generations loosened. According to Bermant (1975) 60,000 Jews were attending evening classes in English at the turn of the century. A Jewish religious leader writing in 1911 said that ‘children are brought up to speak English and to acquire English habits of thought and character ... the forces of Anglicisation are now far stronger than the ties which still bind some of the older generation to Yiddish’ (Lipman 1990, p.109).

Rosen (1993) captures the desire of the young to break with the past and become more English with his youthful view of the many and varied languages spoken by the older Jews as being ‘part of their incurable immigrant backwardness’ (p.59). Yiddish survived as a means of vivid expression however and he recalls how at school teachers were described insultingly in Yiddish, for example the naming of a science teacher as ‘Schloch’. As many immigrants and their teachers have discovered, language could also be used to assert a little power, as when Rosen’s friends in detention used ‘Yiddish obscenities and curses meant to be just heard but not understood’ (p.72).

At Commercial Street School in 1905, one of White’s participants recalls older Jewish children teaching English to new arrivals and another remembers children teaching their parents the English they had picked up at school. White (1980, p. 167) corroborates the idea of language being a force for assimilation and says ‘the breakdown of Yiddish as their main language was the prime task of both state and voluntary schools alike’. A very visible sign

of the decline of Yiddish as a commonly spoken language amongst the second generation immigrants was the waning popularity of the Yiddish theatre and music hall. This had flourished as a form of entertainment and education for fifty years but by the 1930s audience numbers had dropped significantly and in 1936 the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel (once a proud promoter of several shows a night) closed its doors. Few of the children of these second generation immigrants can now speak either Yiddish or their grandparents' languages. English is their mother tongue.

Another means of Anglicising the immigrant population was through the curriculum, environment and events in the school. School textbooks and images presented the children with Anglo-centric images (Davin, 1996). In Blacker's (1974) description of his first day at school he learned traditional English songs and puzzled at the new ways in which the English language was used by his teacher. In 1918 he remembers celebrating the Allied victory with the National Anthem and gifts for the children. Rosen (1993) remembers his terrifying head teacher sitting on a dais backed by a Union Jack and portraits of the King and Queen. Jerry White (1980) comments:

For if the state and Anglo Jewish schools saw their role as the Anglicisation of the immigrant, it was an Anglicisation aimed at moulding raw material into model citizens, steeped in the virtues of the middle-class society the schools represented. 'Cleanliness and order' and punctuality and obedience and gratefulness were all strenuously promoted ... They were all as much a fact of school life as William the Whatever-it-was and 1066 (p.174).

The glory of the British Empire was strongly promoted in the state school. To the English 'home' meant not just England but England's Empire (Grosvenor 2005, p.282) and everyone was expected to celebrate St George's Day and Empire Day. For many, this was undertaken with relish and Jerry White (1980) describes Empire Day 1904 at JFS as a day of patriotic fervour with jingoistic songs and poetry, lessons on patriotism, Cadet Corps marching, the raising of the Union Jack and cheers for the royal family. In an online autobiographical reminiscence, Herman Zeffertt (2004) remembers his schooldays at Stepney Jewish School in the 1930s East End, commenting that 'Everything was done to turn the children into true Englishmen. In Jewish schools the British folk songs were taught, St George's day was celebrated and hymns not mentioning anything specifically Christian were sung' (<http://www.jewisheastend.com/stepney2.html>). Harold Rosen dreaded the Empire Day celebrations at his school. Growing up in a politicised family with instructions not to join in 'the all-day jamboree', the eight year old Harold (1993, p. 30) was torn between an appreciation of his mother's objections to the Empire and the loneliness of 'defying the Empire all by myself'. However, his experiences seem to be the exception to the rule.

Whatever the ethos of the school, Jewish girls were nonetheless as divided from the boys in terms of curricular subjects as non-Jews. Most autobiographical accounts focus on the education of boys and it would seem that the progression of boys and girls was viewed no differently in the Jewish community to the community at large (see Davin, 1996; Martin 2000). Harry Blacker (1974, p. 171) imitates the voices he heard around him when he says, 'She will get married soon, please God, so why waste her time in education?'

In 1914, Richard Henry Tawney, economic historian, social critic and strong advocate of the rights of the working class to a full education, expressed disappointment with the number of working-class children awarded scholarships to continue their education after the elementary stage and felt that many more could make use of the opportunities offered by continuing education. Provision of funds for free (scholarship) places for pupils to attend grammar schools came from a variety of sources including public money, school bursaries and charitable foundations. Entry was by selective examination at age 11. Aubrey Newman (1981) offers the observation that scholarship exams, often scheduled for Saturdays would have to be rearranged for Mondays to accommodate Jewish children. The head teacher of Deal Street Board School told the 1903 Royal Commission that ‘We have no special facilities for preparing these lads for these scholarships ... Whatever the results obtained it will be largely due to the intelligence of the boys’ (Englander 1994, p.232). In 1908 an East End educationalist, Harold Spender, asked ‘How is it that these Jewish children climb the ladder so quickly, and capturing the scholarships for which all compete, so often passing the Christian children in the race?’ (cited in Bermant 1975, p.203). Perhaps the drive to get to grips with the new country, to make the most of the opportunities given and to get away from the ghetto were all motivating factors, but Lipman (1990) records that by 1938 even though grammar school places were limited, Jews were gaining a higher percentage than the general population.

Of the four autobiographical writers featured, Harold Rosen was the only one to progress to grammar school. He gives a vivid account of an interview at County Hall where his mother endeavoured to persuade the authorities that they were not aliens and thereby entitled to a scholarship. Smith (1990) points out that the Jewish Board of Deputies successfully petitioned the LCC in 1928 to remove the restriction on children of aliens being awarded scholarships. Rosen’s (1993, p. 44) account highlights the importance and benefits of passing the scholarship exams: ‘I had got the message from [my mother] that the scholarship was very, very important ... I did my stuff and there I was, a scholarship boy’. ‘So I left for the grammar school and glory and five years later passed the Matriculation exams’ (p.27). This was a path out of poverty and the East End. Rosen describes Jewish boys in his sixth form who were already practising to ‘pass’ in the wider world with English habits and appearance.

Other autobiographical accounts of access to the advantages provided by the scholarship system can be found on internet web sites. Philip Walker’s mother Leah talks of Central Foundation Girls’ School in the mid 1920s:

Some of the girls were fee paying and the rest were what we called scholarship girls (I was a scholarship girl). The latter were mostly Jewish. Every Monday morning the whole school had a general assembly with prayers in the hall. The rest of the week the Jewish girls had separate morning prayers in the large dining room. Hot lunches were provided at a small cost, but many of us took sandwiches and sat in chairs around the hall. I think going to that school was a turning point in my life. I made new friends and was taught by excellent teachers. My friends were mostly Jewish - this was not deliberate – we just drifted towards each other.

(<http://www.mernick.org.uk/thhol/main.html>)

Similarly, Jack White (2004) remembers how essential the scholarship money was in the 1930s to ensuring he stayed in education:

I went to the Junior Boys' School, from where I managed to get a scholarship to Parmiter's school in Approach Road Bethnal Green. I remember my mother saying to her neighbours "My Jackie won money." This was not the purpose of the scholarship but it did mean that all my books would be paid for and I would get a grant of nine pounds a year to pay for clothing and sports equipment. This increased to fifteen pounds when I reached fourteen and twenty four pounds when I reached sixteen. Paltry sums in these days, but without this grant, I could never have afforded to go to Grammar school.

(<http://www.jewisheastend.com/redmans.html#myLink>)

Joe Jacobs (1978) speaks regretfully of how childhood illness affected his educational progress and by the time he had re-entered the mainstream school system he was too old at 14, although clever, to enter the qualifying exams for a scholarship. Harry Blacker (1984) was offered scholarships for further Art and Technical education. Although drawn to the former, he chose the latter because circumstances demanded progression into guaranteed employment and the chance to support the family. Harry did not have the opportunity to matriculate which he saw as 'the magic key that opened the door to the Law, Accountancy, Medicine and the teaching professions' (1984, p.171).

Founded in 1826, University College London was the first higher education institution in England to admit students of any race, class or religion. It was here that the academically successful Harold Rosen took an English degree. Despite the open access he felt alienated and angered by the unthinking and insensitive assumption that all students were steeped in the Christian religion and mused on the thought that 'maybe English is not a university subject for Jews' (1993, p.65). As in grammar schools however, Jews were significantly represented in higher education and Lipman (1990, p. 212) records that, 'About 2 percent of the 50,000 university students in 1936-7 were Jewish, about three times their proportion in the population' (p.212).

For those not fortunate enough to follow the scholarship route, a popular option was to enrol for evening classes at the end of the working day. The anarchist Rudolph Rocker said of the working Jews:

What amazed me was the thirst for knowledge among those ordinary working people who had received so little general education, yet had so much natural intelligence ... It made me happy to see with what zeal they pursued knowledge (cited in Fishman, 1975, p.241).

In the *Evening Chronicle* of 1908, a journalist commenting on the Jews' attendance at evening classes writes:

I am never prouder of England than when standing in these schools ... Nothing is more pathetic than the desire of these people to be English, to work for England, fight for England. England is the only Western European nation that has been

wholly just to the Jew. And in return England is the only country where the Jew is as proud of his nation as of his race (cited in Bermant, 1975, p.208).

Fine (and somewhat patronising) words, but it was not always possible to attend evening classes. Jerry White's (1980) interviewee Reuben worked a 72½ hour week and exhaustion put an end to his educational aspirations. Harry Blacker (1974) did continue his studies, but hid the fact from his family that he was studying his passion – Art – at evening classes because this was not compatible with the need to learn a trade and earn money. Children, and particularly boys, often had little choice but to leave school early in order to earn a living and whilst, as Bermant (1975, p.203) points out, the Jewish Board of Guardians encouraged them to join one of its apprenticeship schemes, the boys and their families 'wanted and needed quick returns and they entered one of the overmanned Jewish trades, where the hours were long and the pay was low'.

INFORMAL EDUCATION

In addition to, or sometimes as an alternative to, the formal education routes, informal associational spaces provided the immigrants and their families with opportunities for learning. Both Blacker (1974) and Rosen (1993) describe the importance of the free public libraries to their education. In poor households the ability to borrow books and to study in comfortable and spacious surroundings was vital to self-education. Institutions such as the Whitechapel Library provided this opportunity and this particular public space is mentioned in several autobiographical accounts. In her study of the Jewish poet Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), Diana Collecot (1981, p. 273) references the importance of the Whitechapel Library as 'a source of books and reproduction ... a warm and quiet place to work, outside the crowded home, when the only alternative was the street'.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a proliferation of clubs for girls and boys. Examples frequently mentioned in autobiographical accounts include the Brady Club, the Jewish Lads Brigade and the Oxford and St George's. These types of club were set up by various religious, charitable and philanthropic societies but seem to have shared the aim 'to build character, encourage good citizenship and loyalty to king and country' (Englander 1994, p.214). Sometimes the clubs were designed to provide further education for young workers, or in the case of young Jewish women, to keep them off the streets and out of temptation's way!

In his online memoir, Simon Benedictus recalls the Oxford and St George's club which was run as a centre of education and Anglicisation by the Anglo-Jewish Basil Henriques and his wife Rose: 'Basil wanted to create a feeling of responsibility in the boys and he also wanted to import some public school ideas. He had been at Harrow before going to Oxford. He introduced the house system and each club was divided up into 4 houses ... Britons, Danes, Normans and Saxons. This maybe was to make the kids feel they were not only Jews but ENGLISHMEN!' (<http://www.jewisheastend.com/settlement.html>, undated) White's (1980) interviewee Mr R recalls, 'The whole of the East End was full of these boys' clubs, which were marvellous ... They wanted to instil into the boys ambition, the pride in being Jews and the pride in being Englishmen' (p.189).

There were activities such as sports, reading, first aid and summer camps for the boys and dressmaking, letter-writing, drawing and 'Sunday rambles' for the girls. Bermant (1975, p. 207) describes the summer camps as being conducted along traditional English cricket and camp-fire lines and comments that 'the children, while inhabiting the same universe as their parents, came to draw their ideas and feelings from another'. Although the popularity of the clubs suggests that to some extent they were achieving their aim of instilling conservative values and cultural and religious adherence through engaging young people, there were still significant numbers of young Jews who were far more drawn by the secular pleasures of the many and varied entertainment possibilities of the East End and central London.

As mentioned previously, although the younger generation was exposed to Anglicisation through formal education, the older generation, especially the early settlers, clung at first to their familiar culture, some believing they might one day return home. The synagogue, particularly for men, was a space where they could associate and learn in ways which were familiar and comfortable. In Israel Zangwill's 1892 novel *Children of the Ghetto* he expresses the opinion that the synagogue 'was their salon and their lecture hall. It supplied them not only with their religion, but their art and letters, their politics and their public amusement' (quoted in Fishman 1979, p.79). According to Zangwill, the older immigrant could 'never quite comprehend the importance of becoming English. He had a latent feeling that Judaism had flourished before England was invented'. For many of this early, older generation of immigrants, the connection with their original homeland and customs had not yet been superseded by a sense of belonging to their new home in England.

A common feature of all the autobiographies studied is the importance of social clubs and societies to the education of the newly arrived Jews. Fishman describes the impact of the 1906 Jubilee Street Workers' Friends Club on Jewish social and intellectual life in the locality. According to Fishman (1981, p. 245) this project was financed by contributions from workers' salaries and the club played 'a tremendous role in the social and intellectual experience of all East Enders'. One of the most frequently attended clubs was the Workers' Circle, opened in Circle House, Alie Street in 1924. The club functioned on a variety of levels – as a benevolent society, a social centre, a cultural (both Jewish and non-Jewish) centre and an educational facility with lectures, political debate, evening classes, a library and a reading room. Such clubs also offered 'lessons in English and arithmetic, and lectures on scientific and literary subjects such as astronomy and drama' (Feldman, 1994, p.331).

Blacker (1974) describes attending a Sunday evening club where there were literary, musical and political events as well as a chance to play games, eat and socialise with friends and relatives from the old country. Thus both the first and second generation immigrants were able to retire for a while from England and return to the familiarity of their 'heim'. His mother attended lectures on the Suffragettes and he comments that the 'politics, music and other cultural activities added a little colour to the drabness of their lives' (1974, p.149). He vividly recounts concerts in the club's tiny hall with a huge grand piano and the way in which his love of classical music was developed in this setting. Rosen (1993) recalls his friend Manny attending Yiddish literature evening classes at the Workers' Circle, his attendance underlining Manny's father's political commitment to the Yiddish language as a unifying element for working class Jews.

The Workers' Circle and other such clubs were central to the lives of many Jews, contributing both to a celebration of their original culture and to an integration into the culture and politics of English society. The interest engendered in politics, music and culture extended into even more informal spaces, however, where numerous semi-structured groups of young people (many of whom had completed only their elementary education) would meet at each other's houses to debate politics and literature, and listen to records as a means of 'self-education'.

Alongside their cultural activities, the significant role of these clubs and societies in nurturing political education and involvement cannot be ignored. Feldman (1994) highlights the alternative forms of educational activity to be found in such clubs:

Jewish immigrants were presented with more than one vision of Anglicisation. Whereas one project of cultural transformation was pressed on them by the acculturated leaders of native Jewry, radically different visions of cultural and political progress were developed by Jewish anarchists, social democrat and Zionist propagandists in the Jewish East End (p.330).

Joe Jacobs (1978) emphasises the political aspect of the Workers' Circle. 'There were former 'bundists'¹ from Poland, Anarchists and Libertarians from all parts, Socialists and Freethinkers' (p.38). The anarchist Rudolph Rocker himself lectured (in Yiddish) at such clubs and is described by Fishman as 'one of the pioneers of London Adult Education' (1981, p.245).

This alternative form of self-education via politics was popular with many Jews struggling to create a better life for themselves. The East End was already a site of struggle for oppressed groups and was the location in the late 19th and early 20th of strikes by groups such as the match girls, dockers and tailors. Fishman suggests that 'As a postscript to the match girls' strike, the East End was pin-pointed as a pioneering centre for development of the new unionism' (1975, p.169). For many Jews, their introduction to active politics was through the trade unions and during the first half of the twentieth century most Jewish workers were members of general (not Jewish) trades unions - no doubt a significant contribution to assimilation into English political culture. Jacobs (1978) explains how his political activities took him out of the Jewish East End to meet dockers, builders, municipal and transport workers across the whole of east London.

The other major force in the lives and political education of many East End Jews was socialist political parties such as the Labour or Communist Party. These left wing organisations were not specifically Jewish (as they had been in Eastern Europe - see Lipman, 1990) and hence encouraged further assimilation of Jews into English political life. Bermant (1975, p.206) claims that by the 1930's 'the extreme left and militant atheism were winning over large parts of the Jewish East End'.

In 1921, the Young Communist League of Great Britain (YCLGB) was set up under the auspices of the Communist Party and proved an attraction to many young immigrant Jews, with activities in the fields of anti-militarism and international solidarity as well as sporting and cultural events (see Klugman, 1976). Both Rosen (1993) and Jacobs (1978) held

allegiance to Communist principles and for Rosen his lifelong socialism was closely intertwined with his Jewish childhood as he attended May Day marches, read socialist books and pamphlets and absorbed the political discussions in his house. 'Everything I've worked for in education I can trace back to its beginnings in my family and its fierce radicalism and dogged hope which themselves grew out of an East End humming with politics' (Rosen, 1993, p.92). Jacobs (1978) also describes as his 'education' the avid reading of political texts and pamphlets under the guidance of Communist Party comrades. He recalls that unemployment in the 1920s and 30s meant more time for political activity which included listening to street corner speakers and joining the newly formed Left Book Club (publisher Victor Gollancz) in 1936. It should not be ignored however that politically active young Jews made different choices and membership of Zionist organisations was an expression of political belief and commitment for many.

CONCLUSION

What becomes apparent both from academic research and from autobiographical writings is the ease of assimilation of Jewish immigrants (and particularly the second generation children) into British society. Not only did the British (and Anglo-Jewish) establishment desire assimilation but so it would seem did the immigrants, and the English-speaking children were able to take full advantage of the education provided by schools, clubs, societies and political parties. It could be argued that the attempts to "civilise" the children of the poor and to Anglicise foreign children' was evidence of 'racist and imperialist ideology [permeating] the culture both of school and the larger society' (Davin, 1996, p. 215), but evidence suggests little resistance on the part of the majority of the Jewish community, who embraced their new home, revered education and made the most of any opportunities provided. Blacker (1974, p. 109) says, 'The first generation ... slowly assumed the characteristics of the native environment, at the same time, through education and contact, becoming more and more aware of life outside the narrow limits of their neighbourhood'.

As mentioned earlier, there are some interesting parallels between the experience of the immigrant Jews and other immigrant groups (most recently from Bangladesh and Somalia) who have taken their place in the East End over the last fifty years or so. I would not wish to generalise, but from the perspective of an educator working with young people in east London during the last 25 years, there would seem to be a pattern of first generation immigrants remaining closer to their religious practices and culture whilst the younger second generation 'translate' (both literally and metaphorically) and learn to live and succeed in a world very different to the original homeland of their parents. During the first half of the 20th century many young assimilating Jews moved away from strict adherence to religious practices, and synagogue attendance fell. This lack of identification with 'Judaism' did not affect their sense of 'Jewishness' however (see Gartner 1960, p.273). As Jacobs (1978, p.190) points out, 'They would still be Jews and would have to defend themselves from anti-Semitism. But that was not the same as believing in God and going to synagogue.' In the same way, young people today who have been born in the UK to immigrant parents have learned to adapt and function in both the old and the new cultures.

Fishman (1979, p.88) comments on the settlement of West Indian, Indian and Pakistani communities in the 1950s and 60s, saying that, 'An economic recession, when it came, would provide the opportunity for the racists to project themselves, convincingly, as sole defenders of British homes and jobs against the alien 'predator''. In his 1968 Birmingham speech, Enoch Powell's controversial opinions on the willingness of immigrant groups to integrate with the native population, recalled the arguments of the Aliens Act supporters some 70 years earlier:

The other dangerous delusion from which those who are wilfully or otherwise blind to realities suffer, is summed up in the word "integration." To be integrated into a population means to become for all practical purposes indistinguishable from its other members ... There are among the Commonwealth immigrants who have come to live here in the last fifteen years or so, many thousands whose wish and purpose is to be integrated and whose every thought and endeavour is bent in that direction. But to imagine that such a thing enters the heads of a great and growing majority of immigrants and their descendants is a ludicrous misconception, and a dangerous one. (<http://www.enochpowell.net/index.html>)

In Powell's 1968 Eastbourne Speech he questioned the ability of an immigrant to ever become 'English':

The West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still ... he will by the very nature of things have lost one country without gaining another, lost one nationality without acquiring a new one. (<http://www.enochpowell.net/index.html>)

This type of forcefully made argument against the settlement of immigrant groups is one with which successive communities of newly arrived peoples have had to contend. In the early part of the 21st century there are deep concerns that economic recession will herald a rise of the far right who are still very vocal and indeed successful in some electoral areas to the east of London. As happened in the immigrant Jewish community, one contemporary response to this is political education and action.

Roy Lowe (1998) presents some very interesting debates on the relationship between education and social mobility, but for many Jews, education was the route to involvement in a wider sphere of British life and eventually out of the East End 'ghetto'. After the bombings of the 2nd world war, prompted partly by the search for better housing and a less urban existence, many Jews left the East End. Popular routes were to travel eastwards into Essex or via Clapton and Stoke Newington to north or north-west London. Between 1939 and 1946 the population of Stepney decreased from 197,000 to 95,000 (Holmes, 1978). Grammar school scholarship, technical training and apprenticeships were encouraged as a way to become socially mobile and the Jews recognised this very clearly. As a result, the geographical Jewish East End of the late 19th and early 20th centuries has all but disappeared and it would appear that the descendants of the original settlers form an almost invisible and wholly integrated element of contemporary British society.

But are the Jews assimilated? There is a case for a questioning stance. Whilst in many ways this group may now appear indistinguishable from non-Jewish members of the British population, Harold Rosen, in a recent conversation (2008), contested this conclusion, insisting that there are still ways in which Jews gather as a distinct community today. These spaces include: geographical spaces (largely different now of course to the East End); cultural and social groups; specialist food shops and restaurants; educational spaces such as faith schools (including the Jews Free School) and museums; and a shared readership of literature such as the Jewish Chronicle. Reminders of the charitable Anglo Jewish organisations of the late 19th and 20th century exist in organisations such as Jewish Care, and the London Committee of Deputies of British Jews (est. 1760) which still exists as the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Most crucially perhaps, and significant in the light of comments earlier in this piece, Harold Rosen also felt strongly that Jews can never be truly 'assimilated' as long as anti-Semitism still exists in Britain. All of which suggests that assimilation is dependent not only on the education, desires and attitudes of the immigrant population but, vitally, on the education and attitudes prevailing in the country where they have made their new home.

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Correspondence

Nina Weiss, n.weiss@uel.ac.uk

APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

KEY LEGISLATION

1833 Factory Act

Compulsory 2 hours of schooling a day for children working in factories

1867 Second Reform Act

Extension of franchise to all male householders and male lodgers paying £10 for furnished rooms effectively doubled the electorate.

1870 Elementary Education Act

Introduction of School Boards to be set up by local areas with power to create new schools and pay fees of poorest children. London School Board set up by government.

1880 Education Act

Education made compulsory for all children from ages 5-10.

1891 Elementary Education Act

Grants made available to all schools to enable them to cease charging for basic elementary education.

1893 Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act

School leaving age raised to 11 years

1899 Elementary Education (School Attendance) Act (1893) Amendment Act

School leaving age raised to 12 years.

1902 Education Act

School Boards abolished and LEAs created to employ teaching staff, organise funding and allocate school places. London County Council (LCC) Education Committee created to oversee schooling in London.

1905 Aliens Act

Entry to the UK made discretionary rather than automatic. Exclusion of destitute, sick or criminal migrants with exceptions made for asylum seekers.
Act also provided for expulsion of undesirable immigrants.

1918 Education Act

School leaving age raised to 14 years.

Provision of additional school services such as medical inspections, nurseries, support for children with special needs

1919 Aliens Restrictions Act

Civil and employment rights of aliens already resident in Britain restricted.

¹ The 'Bund' was a socialist, Jewish workers' organisation which evolved in late nineteenth century eastern Europe. Bundists were anti-Zionist and promoted Jewish culture and use of the Yiddish language.