

desk.times@KRNmedia.co.uk
 nes canterburytimes.co.uk

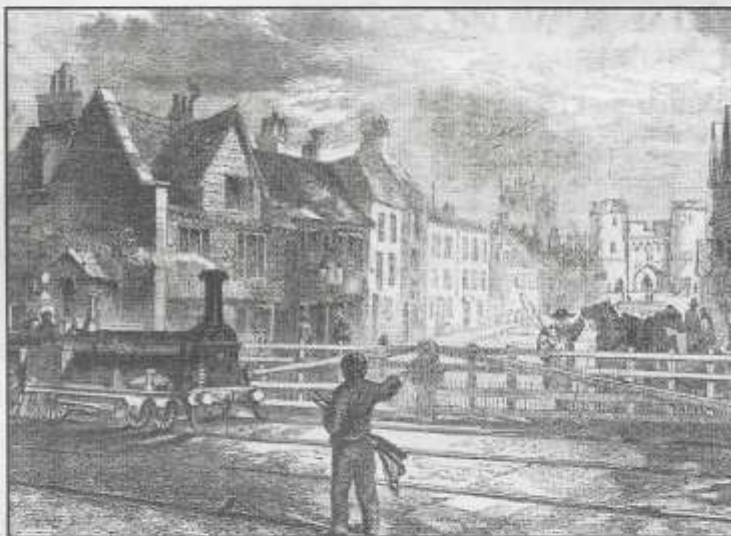
St Dunstan story of 18th century Jew community

THESE IMAGES of St Dunstan's represent the street a bit before and a bit after the arrival of the railway line to London (1846).

One, with chickens running in the street, looks peaceful, rural, dozy and rather dilapidated. The other shows the impact of the busy railway age. One victim of the change was a small synagogue which stood on St Dunstan's (on what is today the Canterbury West side) for over 80 years. Built in the early 1760s, it was acquired by the South Eastern Railway Company in 1845 to construct the level crossing which still operates today. The main synagogue fittings (ark, seats, chandelier etc) were kept for the replacement synagogue, and the remainder went at auction for £25. The new synagogue in King Street was opened in 1847, and still stands – now part of the King's School. No images of the St Dunstan's synagogue have survived, perhaps as it was described as 'not very substantial' and approached from St Dunstan's by 'a low and miserably narrow and dark passage'.

We know little of the Canterbury Jewish community of the late 18th century, but two brothers, offspring of Meneham Mona (cantor at St Dunstan's synagogue), both born in the city in the early 1790s, went on to some fame in their own musical fields. The story of Isaac Nathan (1790-1864) has recently been recorded by local researcher Brian Hogben, and can be read on the CHAS web site. To whet your appetite, Isaac's life touches on royalty, Lord Byron, spying, Australian opera (he wrote the first), Aboriginal music, and the first tram death in the southern hemisphere.

His brother, Barnett Nathan, was born in Canterbury in 1793 and enjoyed moderate success as a dance instructor, master of ceremonies, entertainer and impresario. In his early career as a dancing teacher he moved to Kennington near Lambeth. Here he adopted a new name 'Baron Nathan', partly to impress but partly to mimic the well-known Baron Nathan Rothschild. By



SAFETY FIRST: St Dunstan's new level crossing in 1846



IDYLIC: St Dunstan's before the railway level crossing



EGG-CITING: Baron Nathan attempts the egg hornpipe

Courtesy of Jewish Museum London

1834 he was leading the dancing at the recently opened Tivoli Gardens in Margate. In 1841, now 48 years old, he made a career move to one of the largest and most popular Victorian pleasure gardens, the Rosherville Gardens, Gravesend, where he

spent every summer until his death from a stroke in 1856. Barnett brought two major skills to his work. One was the ability to get shy members of the opposite sex to participate in the new polka and waltz dance steps, despite objections from attending Roman Catholic priests who 'tabooed such dances as dangerous to the morals of the rising generation'. His second skill lay in performance of the 'egg hornpipe'. This involved dancing over a layout of several dozen raw eggs, without breaking any of them. Not content with this, the Baron showed he was able to complete the challenge while wearing a blindfold. Beyond this, the act degenerated as members of the public stole his eggs, to leave the Baron dancing intricately up and down the stage over eggs that were no longer there. The things we did before we had television!

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