

2 & 3 - Georgian Canterbury

For four hundred years there were no Jews in England, but when Cromwell was Lord Protector they were allowed to return. Canterbury became one of the earliest places of settlement and the tour continues with an exploration of the Jewish community which emerged in Canterbury at the time of Oliver Cromwell. Walk up the High Street and through the West Gate and you will come to St. Dunstan's Street.

2. Here was built a new synagogue for the Jews in 1762. When the state of the undergrowth permits, it is possible to see the foundation stones on railway land just past the point where the railway lines intersect St. Dunstan's Street (on the right hand side facing away from the town). The synagogue was located there for more than 80 years before the coming of the railway.

3. In St. Dunstan's the Jews also established a burial ground which was used by Jewish communities in other East Kent towns as well as by local Canterbury inhabitants. Going up the Whitstable Road from St. Dunstan's Street, just beyond Forty Acres Road, it is possible to reach the Graveyard by a narrow path on the right hand side of the road, (turn right immediately past Hildebrand's, the Removal Firm). The Graveyard is now largely overgrown; the Hebrew inscriptions have faded, and it has been almost submerged by the new housing in Forty Acres Road. But the tall stone slabs still stand, and the number of graves indicates a sizeable 19th century Jewish population.

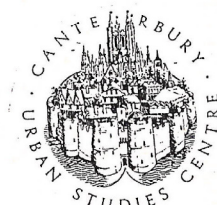


CANTERBURY CITY TRAILS No. 7

Jewish Canterbury

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The Canterbury Urban Studies Centre

The Canterbury Urban Studies Centre is a voluntary organisation and registered charity whose aim is to encourage children and adults to take an active interest in the life and development of their city.

It depends largely on donations and grants and much voluntary help. C.U.S.C. runs the Canterbury Centre which is a multi-purpose educational and community resource in the converted parish church of St. Alphege.

Introduction

Canterbury is known the world over as a place of Christian worship and pilgrimage. The Bell Harry Tower broods over the city; foreign tourists come to admire the medieval buildings, and the Cathedral hierarchy rules supreme in the precincts. Yet, what is not so widely known is that there has also been a strong Jewish community in Canterbury from the Middle Ages. This Jewish trail charts the development of Jewish Canterbury, and provides a guide for the modern pilgrim to the sites of previous Jewish communities in this ancient Cathedral city.

1. Medieval Jewish Canterbury

The walk begins in the High Street outside the County Hotel and the Beany Institute. In medieval times this was the central business area of Canterbury and the site of the Royal Exchange is marked by a worn slab in the pavement of the High Street outside one end of the Beany Institute. It bears the legend "Cambium Regis" and an illegible 12th century date. The Jews, who were exclusively identified with finance, congregated in this area. In this part of the High Street and in nearby Best Lane, Stour Street (where the synagogue was situated), White Horse Lane (until the 17th century known as Jewry Lane), and the alley behind the County Hotel running from White Horse Lane to Stour Street which now alone bears the name Jewry Lane, the houses of the Jews were located. The stone house of the richest of them, Jacob the Jew ("the Rothschild of the Canterbury Jewry"), stood in a commanding position on the corner of the High Street and Stour Street where the County Hotel is now situated.

The only visible signs remaining of this once-thriving community are the name "Jewry Lane" and a slab commemorating another prominent Jewish stone house. This slab is located in the pavement of the High Street opposite Stour Street and bears the legend "Jews stone house" and a 12th century date now only partly legible.

Written evidence of the 12th century suggests that relations between Jew and Gentile were friendly but in the 13th century the small Jewish population was devastated by two pogroms (anti-Jewish attacks) and the general expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 destroyed the community.

The central area of
Canterbury around
AD1200
(from Canterbury
under the Angevin
Kings
by William Urry)

