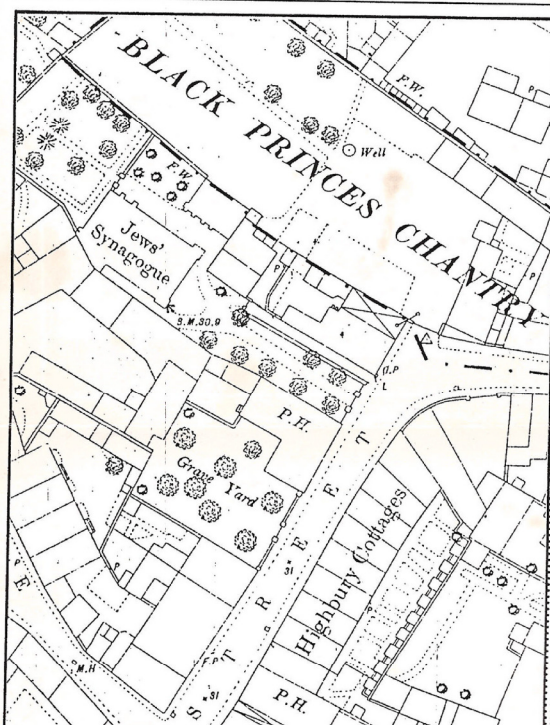
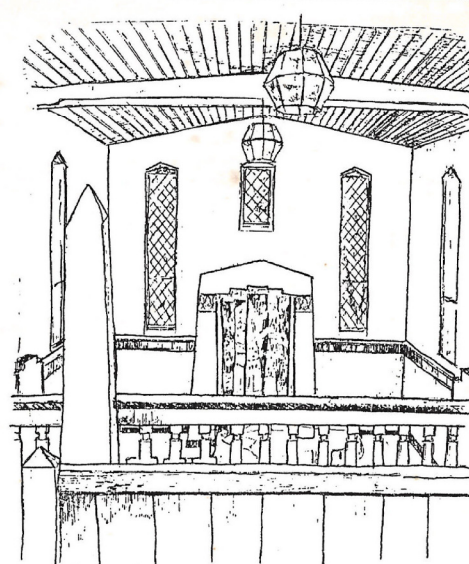
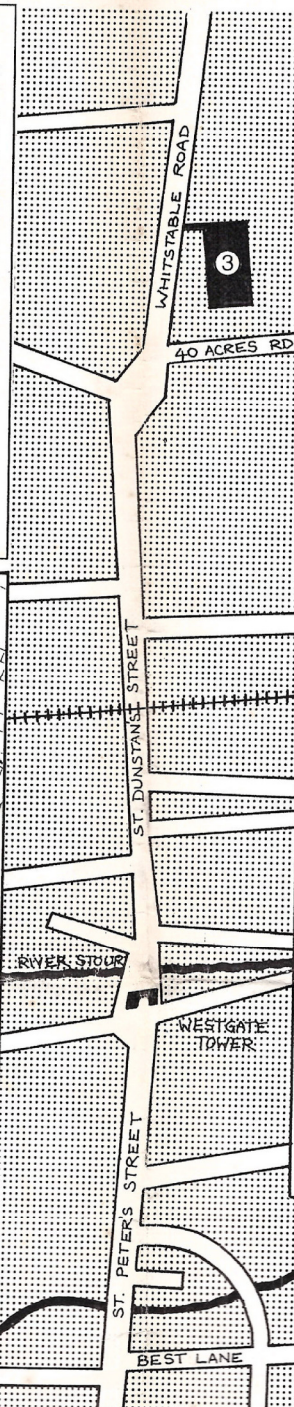


4. The King Street Synagogue

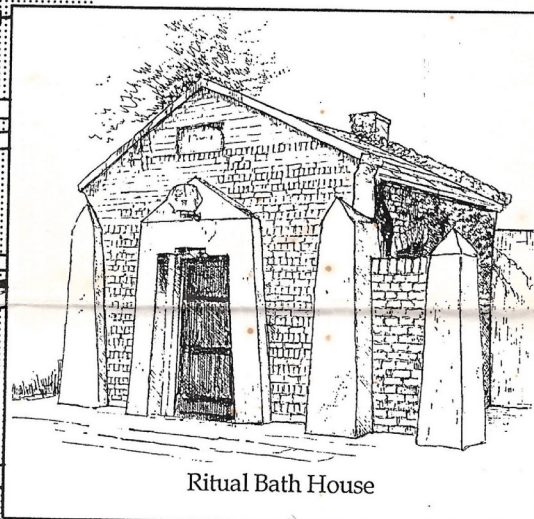
Returning towards the city centre, proceed to King Street where the Old Synagogue can be found. In the 19th century when Canterbury West Station was built, the land where the Georgian synagogue stood was needed for the railway. The synagogue was demolished, and a new site was sought. The community bought land in King Street, near the Blackfriars and close to the Cathedral. There is a full record of the laying of the foundation stone by Sir Moses Montefiore in 1847. The final building which still stands was consecrated by the then Chief Rabbi. It has an original Egyptian design, because according to the Secretary of the congregation, the Gothic style was rejected: "Our every tradition," he wrote, "associates it with recollections of persecution." Of course it must be that they forgot the most ancient of all Jewish persecutions: that of slavery in Egypt from which they were liberated by Moses after the Ten Plagues! The building is in the Egyptian style with enormous columns decorating the facade. The women's gallery is supported by obelisks, and the columns are decorated with lotus leaves. Next to the main building is a small brick hut which was the ritual bath. It was used by all Orthodox women to cleanse themselves after their monthly period and was also used for the occasional baptism of Jewish converts.



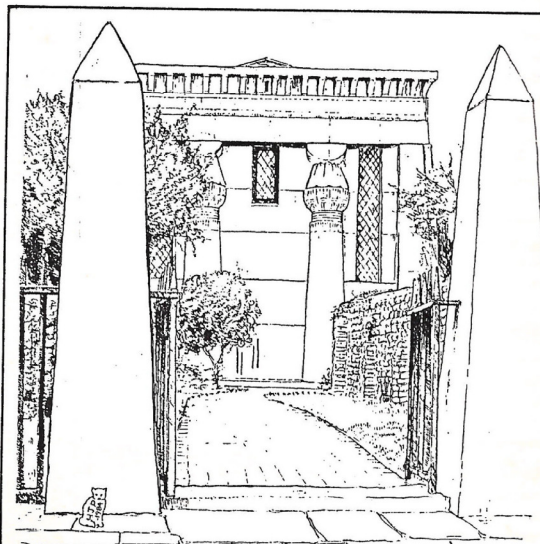
Location of King Street Synagogue from the Ordnance Survey First Edition (1874)



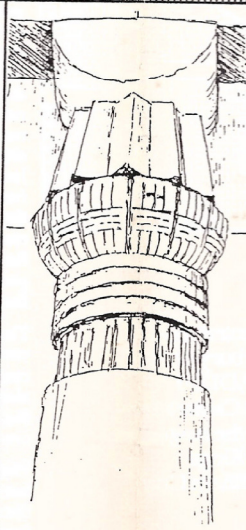
Interior of King Street Synagogue



Ritual Bath House



Exterior of King Street Synagogue



Detail of Column

The Decline of the Jewish Community

This Synagogue was in use for over eighty years, and it had some distinguished members: Alderman Hart who was three times Mayor of Canterbury is the most notable. However, the congregation dwindled, and finally the Scrolls of the Law which used to be read every Sabbath were given away to the Jewish community in Oxford, and the building was sold. At first it was used as a Hall for the nearby Church of St. Alphege; then it was sold to King's School who restored the building and now use it for musical recitals. It is also used for occasional community lectures, particularly during the annual Canterbury Festival.

The Revival of the Jewish Community

Although the Jewish community ceased to be in existence for forty years once the synagogue was closed, it has recently had a new lease of life. The opening of the new University revitalized Jewish life in Canterbury. Jewish students at the University get together at a Jewish Society on campus, and local Jewish residents have formed a Canterbury Jewish community which meets regularly. Since its foundation the new community has gone from strength to strength, and it is much to be hoped that this new episode will be another memorable chapter in the history of the Jews of Canterbury.