

Jewish Historical Studies

Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England

Review:

The Jewish Community of Golders Green: A Social History,
Pam Fox
Michael Jolles¹

How to cite: Jolles, M. 'The Jewish Community of Golders Green: A Social History, Pam Fox.' *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2017, 49(1): 15, pp. 230-231. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2017v49.055>

Published: 30 March 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright:

© 2017, The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2017v49.055>

Open Access:

Jewish Historical Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

¹ Independent scholar

The Jewish Community of Golders Green: A Social History, Pam Fox (Stroud: History Press, 2016), ISBN 978-0-7509-6587-3, pp. 256, £16.99.

Pam Fox, the biographer of Rabbi Israel Mattuck and author of *A Place to Call My Jewish Home: Memories of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, 1911–2011*, has published the first historical monograph on the century-old Golders Green Jewish community in north London. The first third of the book outlines the growth and development of Golders Green, describing each wave of newcomers, their origins, reception, difficulties, adaptation, status, attitudes, values, aspirations, and customs. The rest of the book is divided into well-researched chapters which cover the local synagogues, shopping, recreation, education, and occupation. Each chapter proceeds chronologically. Viewpoints both from secular individuals and from members of Golders Green Synagogue (United Synagogue), North Western Reform Synagogue, Golders Green Beth Hamedrash (Orthodox), and various Haredi shuls (Orthodox) punctuate the narrative in an even-handed manner.

Golders Green's first Jewish resident arrived some 125 years ago, but Jews only arrived in numbers after the opening of the underground railway (1907) and the availability of new suburban housing. After Jews had begun to become affluent enough to leave the East End in particular and afford houses further out, for example in St John's Wood (1870s), Hampstead (1890s), and Brondesbury (1900s), the new housing in peaceful semi-rural Golders Green became available at the right time and price. Fox describes how a Jewish identity and infrastructure evolved, but not immediately: one could not buy kosher bread locally until the 1930s, the first strictly Orthodox *shtiebl* did not open until 1932, and the first Sephardi synagogue only in 1958. The success and sustainability of Golders Green as a vibrant Jewish area, she maintains, is due to housing factors, the multi-layered Jewish infrastructure, community solidarity, adaptability to newcomers, and a generally good relationship with the non-Jewish neighbourhood which has become increasingly multicultural.

With different waves of Jewish immigrants – those from Germany and Austria, the Arab states, India, Egypt, Aden, Yemen, South Africa, Iraq and Israel, and, more recently, members of the Haredi community and Francophones – and with different religious groupings, the Jewish

“community”, really an amalgam of sub-communities, remained inherently ill-defined. The development of the three larger synagogues is described, and the prime movers of twenty-nine *shtieblech*, shuls, and Sephardi synagogues in the area are identified, along with their affiliations, mergers, and secessionist congregations.

Further chapters include a century’s history of local Jewish shops, restaurants, and services, presented chronologically and by business type (tailoring, delicatessen, fashion, and others), and an account of the multifarious ways in which local Jews engaged in leisure pursuits, both formally and informally. Long-lost clubs, activity groups, and institutions are covered in a lively way, drawing on telling quotations and impressions from oral interviewees, more than a hundred of whom provided testimony for the book. The origins and intricate development of the local Jewish schools are teased out, and the blossoming field of adult Jewish learning is discussed. The chapter entitled “Earning a Living” provides valuable information about the occupation of the earlier residents as well as an analysis of vocational preferences of specific groups (Jews from the East End, refugees from various countries, the Haredi, women, and so on). The book is rounded off by a helpful appendix outlining Anglo-Jewish religious denominations, a glossary, thirty-five photographs and maps, and some particularly attractive illustrations by the artist Beverley-Jane Stewart.

Fox might have done more to position her account within the extant literature on other Anglo-Jewish communities but, as a social history of Golders Green, this thoroughly researched, informative, and scholarly book is of such a high standard that it is unlikely to be superseded any time soon.

Michael Jolles