

The York Jewish History Trail

Track 1: Introduction

Welcome to the York Jewish heritage audio trail. This exploration of Jewish life in York, both in medieval times and the more contemporary past, is the product of a research project by University of York postgraduate students in conjunction with the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past.

Our journey is narrated by York City Archaeologist John Oxley. The trail begins at the Visitor Information Centre on Museum Street with a brief introduction to York's Jewish history.

The history of Jewish communities in England is a long and complex one, and the Jews of York have a special place in this story.

While the massacre at Clifford's Tower in 1190 is the most famous episode of York's Jewish history it is only one part of a vibrant and fascinating story that begins nearly a thousand years ago. Jewish communities first came to Britain in significant numbers with William the Conquerors' Norman invasion of 1066. Jews, unlike the rest of the English population, were made direct subjects of the king; they had no feudal or financial loyalty to local landowners. This special relationship gave the king major financial benefits and, as we shall see, had a serious impact on York's Jewish community.

It is important to remember that in stark contrast to modern attitudes charging interest on loans, or 'usury', was considered a serious sin in the Middle Ages and was forbidden by the Church. This meant that, although there were a small number of Christian money-lenders, Christians were not supposed to lend money for profit. However, Judaism does not include this rule so Jews were free to act as moneylenders and did so, both in York and elsewhere. By making Jews his direct subjects the king had full access to this wealth and, as we shall see, made great use of it in the form of taxes levied on the Jewish population.

Anti-Semitism was widespread in medieval Europe and it is important to know that while York has a special place in Jewish history it is not alone. The discovery of the bodies of 17 Jews in a well in Norwich, thought to have been murdered in the thirteenth century, show that the massacre at Clifford's Tower was not an isolated act of anti-Semitic violence in medieval England. In 1218 a decree made it a legal requirement that Jews wear a badge identifying

themselves as Jewish. England was the first, but certainly not the last European nation, to institute such a law. In 1290 Edward I expelled the entire Jewish population of England. All Jewish property was seized by the crown and all outstanding debts were made payable to the king. The expulsion of the Jews was a popular policy and transferred vast sums to money to the Treasury.

The Jewish population in England at the time was relatively small. While population estimates vary, there was probably about 5000 Jews, that is less than 1% of England's overall population in the thirteenth century.

Jews were not able to return to England until 1655 but some people were given special permission to remain in the kingdom. A famous example is Rodrigo Lopez, physician to Elizabeth I.

During the seventeenth century ideas in Britain began to change and commercial and colonial interests developed. In an effort to benefit from Dutch Jewish trading interests Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, tried to attract Jews back to England. However, Cromwell only gave informal permission for the Jews to return to England in the 1650s, he failed to lift the ban on Jews residing in England but tried to make it clear it would no longer be enforced. However, Jewish communities did not return to England in significant numbers until the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century.

Despite the decline of anti-Semitism in Britain and the widespread participation of Jews in British commercial and public life throughout the nineteenth century, Jews only gained legal equality with most of the British population in 1890; a stark reminder of the all too recent intolerance and inequality of British society.

Track 2: The Norman House

We are now going to head to our first stop; Norman House. Please refer to the map included in your brochure for the route. The courtyard containing the remains of the Norman House is accessed via a doorway on Stonegate marked with a plaque above the door. If the door is locked, a key can be obtained from the office of the church of St. Michael-le-Belfry. This is located on Deangate, opposite the entrance to York Minster's gift shop. Once in the courtyard stop to listen about the Norman House and the early Jewish community in York.

In a city as ancient and rich in heritage as York, the remains of any building that claims to be the oldest of its kind is always impressive. But it is only in the last century that the remains of the oldest house in York is having its time in the sun- literally, as for hundreds of years these ancient stones had been hidden away, their existence forgotten to everyone. This house was built between 1170-1180, it is also in this period that we have the first evidence of Jewish settlers in York.

As the only surviving example of Norman domestic stonework that remains in its original location, this building is hugely significant. It is all that now remains in York of the late twelfth century boom in stone construction amongst the burgeoning merchant and administrative classes. This social category would have included the wealthy members of the Jewish community in York who were enjoying a period of growing prosperity under the reign of Henry II. In this period, the wealthy were building in stone on a scale unseen before. Stone was at the top of the building material hierarchy, being the most expensive. As it is often said, 'stone meant status'. Stone houses such as this were built with a large hall on the first floor, the floor level of which you can still see in the line of red stone remaining on the right hand wall. This was used as living quarters, whilst an undercroft below was used for storage.

Although construction in stone increased throughout this period, the vast majority of urban dwellings would have still been built in timber, and so considerably sized stone houses such as this would have stood out as grand, impressive buildings belonging to an individual of some status. As such, stone houses belonging to Jewish owners often became the focus of Anti-Semitic aggression. Chroniclers speak of angry mobs in Westminster being 'Unable to penetrate into their [the Jews] strongly fortified stone houses...' so they set fire to their straw roofs. Some scholars now think that perhaps Jewish housing has tended to be associated with stone because of the protection it afforded its inhabitants. Meanwhile, in York the 1190 attacks on the Jewish community began with an attack on and torching of the leading Jew Benedict's house on Spen Lane. The chronicler William of Newburgh records of Benedict and Jocus that '...with profuse expense they had built houses of the largest extent in the midst of the city, which might be compared to royal palaces; and there they lived in abundance and luxury almost regal, like two princes of their own people...' It is clear in accounts such as these that the luxurious living quarters of the leading members of the Jewish community became a site of resentment for anti-Semitic prejudice.

Although not all Jews could afford to live in such grand stone houses, Jewish housing was nonetheless exclusively urban in the medieval period. The Jewish community in York consisted of around 150-200 people in the late twelfth century, who all lived close to the principal commercial areas of the city that provided their income. We can see from records that the Jewish community was carrying out a whole range of different jobs and tasks in York. Occupations such as pawnbroking, peddling, physicians, landlords, money-lenders, scholars and coin minters.

Our main source of evidence from the Jewish community in the twelfth century comes from the national taxation records, the Pipe Rolls. The first mention of a Jewish community in York comes in 1176 to 1177.

We know the York community of the later twelfth century had very, very strong links with the Jewish community in Lincoln, in fact York's Jewish community probably started as an outpost of the Lincoln community. These close links can be seen in the career of Aaron of Lincoln, who between 1166 and 1186, was one of the dominant figures in the Jewish community in England. In 1170 we can see two individuals, Benedict and Joceus, working in York on Aaron's behalf. It is only on Aaron's death in 1186 that these two individuals emerge from his shadow to become the major financiers and moneylenders in the North of England.

There are also architectural links between the two cities, the nearest surviving counterpart to the Norman House is that of the so-called 'Jew's House' in Lincoln which has been linked to medieval Jewish ownership. The surviving window of the Norman House is almost identical to that in Lincoln, and both houses were built around the same time. It would seem like the type of housing enjoyed by Benedict and Joceus in York.

So the twelfth century was a period of growing prosperity for the Jewish community, not only in York but in the other cities that they settled in. The fact that we have records of Jewish housing widely scattered throughout the city of York might suggest a lack of tension with the wider community. Jews lived, for example, in Coney Street, Walmgate, and Pavement.

Although 'The Norman House' is in fact likely to have belonged to the Church, its position near the Minster supports this, it still provides an impression of the housing that would have belonged to leading Jewish individuals, attesting to the growing prosperity of the community in twelfth century York.

Track 3: Jewbury Cemetery

It is now time to move to our next destination; Jewbury Cemetery. Referring to your map, exit the courtyard and head to the medieval gate of Monkbar. To the right of Monkbar steps lead up on to the city walls. If you or one of your party has limited mobility please follow the alternate route marked on your map.

Once on the walls, continue until you reach a Star of David embedded in the walkway. From here you can look through the break in the wall to see the plaque marking the site of Jewbury Cemetery. Stop here, or further on along the walls where there is more space, to learn more about the Jewish cemetery.

In 1984 archaeologists from the York Archaeological Trust discovered the "lost" cemetery of York's medieval Jews at the site of what is now the multi-level car park at Sainsbury's. As one of only ten known Jewish cemeteries in medieval England and the only to be extensively excavated, the cemetery in Jewbury offered a tantalizing glimpse into the lives and deaths within this enigmatic community.

The presence of a medieval Jewish cemetery in the Jewbury area has long been known from documentary evidence. In 1230, a sub-dean of York Minster, John le Romeyn, was recorded as having sold a parcel of land adjacent to the already existing cemetery to the Jewish community – in all likelihood to expand the cemetery beyond its previous bounds.

When the area suspected of being the cemetery was scheduled for development by Sainsbury's, the York Archaeological Trust was hired to conduct trial excavations to ascertain if in fact there were burials on-site. The then Chief Rabbi of England was also consulted about the possibility of uncovering Jewish burials. While the initial excavations brought to light the expected graves, there were discrepancies between the Jewbury burials and current Jewish burial practice. For instance, the bodies were found to be interred in coffins that were constructed with iron nails, which is contrary to the tradition that iron nails should be avoided and wooden pegs used instead. Given the conflicting evidence, the issue was referred to the London Beth Din, who ruled that there was "no positive grounds that this the actual site of the Jewish cemetery or that the human remains found on this site are positively of Jewish origin". The York Archaeological Trust was then given leave to investigate the site as they would other non-Jewish cemeteries, but with a requirement to reinter the bodies within a year. However, once excavations and scientific analysis of the

remains was underway, it became clear that the burials were almost certainly that of the medieval Jewish community. In keeping with Jewish beliefs regarding treatment of the dead, the Chief Rabbi insisted upon the halt of further study of the excavated remains despite the arguments made by the archaeologists about the knowledge which could be gained. The bodies were transferred to the custody of the Manchester Beth Din and held at the Jewish mortuary in Manchester until they could be reburied in Jewbury. The excavated skeletons from Jewbury cemetery were reinterred in a nearby area on July 8, 1984. The reburial was overseen by Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits and members of York's modern Jewish community. An unobtrusive plaque on the side of the carpark commemorates the event. The remaining 500 plus burials of the cemetery continue to lie undisturbed under the Sainsbury's parking area.

The cemetery was in use from around 1177 AD until the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290. Prior to that time, Roger of Howden noted that Jews from York were transported to London for burial. After 1177, Jews were permitted by the king to purchase land outside the city walls to bury their dead. It is possible that Jews from Lincoln were buried in Jewbury as well. While it existed in 1190, it does not appear that any of the victims of the massacre at Clifford's Tower were buried there.

Nearly 500 skeletons were excavated, but it is estimated that the entire cemetery contained over 1,000 burials. Archaeologists only excavated parts of the cemetery that were threatened by the car park construction. As previously mentioned, most of the burials were in simple rectangular wood coffins with iron nails. The skeletons predominantly were positioned with their arms at their sides, some with evidence of having been shrouded. This uniformity tends to indicate that there were very specific burial customs and that great care was taken when preparing individuals for burial. Also, there were few personal items found within the graves-this is in keeping with Jewish tradition of simple burials. Surprisingly, burials were aligned roughly north-south, unlike the modern Jewish practice of orienting cemeteries east-west towards Jerusalem. Unlike the haphazard burials in York's medieval Christian cemeteries with graves inter-cutting one another, the Jewbury graves were evenly spaced. This may be a result of the Jewish tradition of reverence for the dead and the desire not to disturb existing burials. From the spacing, it is clear that graves must have been marked in some way, however there is no evidence of tombstones or other grave markers.

Contemporary accounts of medieval Jewish cemeteries describe them as "Jew's Gardens" and it is likely that the Jewbury cemetery would have contained trees and shrubs as well.

While not discovered during the excavations, there was probably also a building used for the ritual washing and preparation of bodies for burial.

While scientific analysis of the recovered remains was cut short, the York Archaeological Trust was able to report some interesting findings. Compared with their medieval Christian counterparts in York, particularly from the cemetery at St. Helen-on-the-walls, the individuals from Jewbury were slightly shorter on average. The Jewish women also had a greater chance of surviving the perils of their childbearing years to reach old age. Like the rest of York's population, the Jews suffered from ailments such as anemia, tuberculosis, and sinus infections – which can all leave tell-tale traces on bone. In general, the Jewish population seems to have fewer instances of traumatic injuries. Interestingly, one man (approx. 20-30 years old) shows evidence of surgery in response to a deep wound to the front of his skull. Unfortunately, his injury was too severe and the man did not live long after the procedure. From the number of burials in the cemetery and the length of time it was used for, the archaeologists have estimated that the median population of Jews in York was 260 individuals. However, it is very likely that the population fluctuated over time with the highest number of individuals in the first half of the 13th century and then rapidly declining in the years prior to expulsion in 1290.

It's clear that with more time for analysis that the York Archaeological Trust could have shed more light on the medieval Jewish community. However, in his letter to the York Archaeological Trust requesting immediate reburial, the Chief Rabbi eloquently states that “dignity shown to human remains, even centuries after death, could contribute more than any scientific inquiry to human civilization”. The issues raised about respect for the dead, the quest for knowledge, and the appropriateness of development are not unique to Jewbury or to sites associated with Jewish history. It's likely to be a controversy again in the future though when the Jewbury area next faces new construction or re-development is unknown.

[Track 4: Aldwark Synagogue](#)

[We will now make our way to the next stop, the Aldwark Synagogue. Continue along the wall and descend the steps leading down to Peasholme Green. Follow the route on your map to the building with bright blue doors housing the Royal Air Forces Association in Aldwark. The rear of this building, best seen from the nearby gated driveway, was the site of York's synagogue during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Stop here to listen to more about the synagogue and the revival of York's Jewish community.](#)

Though on first impressions we appear to be standing at a fairly unremarkable location, this site is actually one of the most important in the modern Jewish history of York. As recently as 1975 it was here that the Jewish population of York maintained their synagogue. Whilst we may think of religious devotion being carried out in more official, purpose-built locations, actually for a synagogue the building is less important and worship can take place anywhere where there exists a group of Jewish individuals.

Located behind this former joiner's shop the synagogue and its community were founded in 1886 at a time when Jews were finally beginning to return to York in numbers, reaching 124 individuals by 1903. It seems to have had quite a close relationship with the joiner's shop. Originally work would stop here when a service was held as the joiner's wife was a Jewish woman, and when the joiner's shop closed in 1975 so did the synagogue. York's Jewish community has hereafter been closely linked to those in Leeds when providing official services.

This site also helps to understand one of the famous ideas or myths about York's Jewish history. Some believe there was a Jewish curse or *Cherem* placed on the city and that Jews cannot eat or spend the night in York. The origins of this are very mysterious and no early reference to the Cherem can be found. Nevertheless, it has been attributed to the massacre of York's Jews in 1190. Some people have used this idea of a Cherem to explain why Jews never really returned to York in sufficient numbers.

However the Jewish community was substantial in the early 1200s which is evidenced through property documents and through the large number of bodies from the Jewish families that were settled in the period after 1190. Also, there could be another, less mysterious, explanation as to why there was not a large Jewish community in more recent times. In between the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 and the time of the major Jewish immigration to England in the nineteenth century the social and economic landscape of Britain had been radically transformed. York was no longer the important political and economic centre it had once been. For anyone coming to Britain in the nineteenth century, there was no real incentive to live in York. For an overwhelmingly urban community whose livelihood depended on trade and commerce this will be particularly true. In this light it is easier to understand why it is only in 1886 that York's first post-medieval synagogue is opened and why the Jewish population of York was so small. It also explains why Jewish communities

did reestablish themselves in cities like London, Leeds and Manchester, but not York. It is unlikely the massacre of 1190 has had any real influence on later Jewish settlement.

Though the Jewish population has fluctuated in the 20th century, dropping to as low as 20 in 1955, it has seen a remarkable growth recently and according to the 2001 census the population numbered nearly 200.

During the Second World War refugees, including many Jews, were brought to the city by the York Refugee Committee. New research carried out by Victoria Hoyle at York's City Archives is revealing for the first time the contribution the residents of York made to the efforts to help people escape Nazi persecution. Formed in November 1938 and staffed by volunteers, the Committee helped settle refugees in the city with great success. By the May of 1939 there were 118 refugees here. After the war many of these refugees chose to stay in York, a lasting testament to the success of the Committee.

[Track 5: Jubbergate](#)

[We next move to stop four; Jubbergate. Retrace your steps along Aldwark taking the first right along St. Andrewsgate. Along the way you will pass by Spen Lane, the location of Benedict's palatial residence. Continue on past The Shambles and the Newgate Market stalls until you reach the large open Parliament Street.](#)

[You have just walked along Jubbergate and the street name is on the wall near the market sign. Find a place near the fountain or under one of the shady trees and hear more about the relevance of Jubbergate to the history of Jewish York.](#)

This lane is called Jubbergate and though well travelled by visitors to York it receives little notice amid the masses of shoppers and sightseers that use Jubbergate in walking between Parliament Street and The Shambles. Though the buildings standing here now are of much later construction, thirteenth century deeds for property along Jubbergate are still held by York Minster, the Merchant Adventurers' Hall and York City Archives. The earliest of these deeds, dating to around 1249, refers to Jubbergate by its earlier name; Bretgate. However, Bretgate was also used as a street name elsewhere in York. The confusion this may have caused could partially account for the street's name change in later deeds. In a deed of 1280 it is called Jewe Bretgate, with a slightly different version, Jewe Bretagata, appearing in deeds of 1287 and 1302. The name Bretgata was formed by joining two separate words; 'Bret'

comes from the Old English and Old Norse words meaning Britons while 'gata' is the Old Norse word for street or road. You may have noticed that York has several streets with the ending 'gata' or 'gate'. Many of these date back to Scandinavian rule in York. Bretgata literally meant 'street of the Britons'. The street's name was changed sometime between 1249 and 1280 with the addition of a Middle English prefix 'Jewe'. The added prefix would indicate that Jewish homes and businesses were once prominent here.

Although we have no other surviving evidence of Jewish occupation along Jubbergate, the added 'Jewe' prefix strongly suggests that this was the case. Furthermore, Jubbergate would have been a convenient location for York's medieval Jewish community. The medieval street originally extended to Coney Street where could be found the community's synagogue as well as the homes of other twelfth and thirteenth century Jews. Were Jewish residents of York working and living along Jubbergate at the time of the Jewish massacre in 1190? Did surviving or newly arrived Jews occupy this lane in the thirteenth century when the street name was changed from Bretgate to Jewe Bretgate? Or was the name change based on local memories about Jews who had once lived in the neighbourhood? Without textual or archaeological evidence we can only speculate. Perhaps someday new evidence may arise that tells us more about Jubbergate and its place in the lives of medieval York's Jewish community.

[Track 6: The Medieval Synagogue](#)

[It is now time to make our way onto the next stop on the trail; the medieval synagogue. Follow the route on your map to Coney Street. The building containing the clothing store Next is where the Jewish synagogue and residences were located. You can pause by St. Martin's church, marked by a distinctive clock hanging over the street to avoid the hustle and bustle of this busy commercial area, there you can learn more about the fortunes of the medieval Jewish community.](#)

Coney Street today is one of York's busiest shopping streets and in the Middle Ages it played a similar role as one of the city's most prominent areas to live and conduct business. The earliest record of Coney Street's name is in 1213 when it was called Cuningstreta, deriving from the Viking words for King and Street. It is particularly appropriate then that the street had a concentration of properties owned by Jews in the 13th century as the Jews were under

the direct protection of the crown. Unfortunately, for the Jewish community, this protection came hand in hand with considerable exploitation in the form of taxes and other levies.

From medieval deeds and other property records, we can ascertain that the modern building on Coney Street that houses the Next store stands on the site of what was a “schola” or synagogue, a Jewish place of worship, during the 13th century. It’s not known what this building would have looked like, as both past and modern synagogues do not follow a particular architectural style. However, it is likely that the medieval Jews of York would have built their synagogue in similar style to other buildings in town. Perhaps not unlike the Norman House we visited earlier.

What’s really very interesting is that by the time we get to the thirteenth century we can see York’s Jewish community not only re-establishing itself but growing much stronger, much more lively, and it is playing a really important role in the life of the city.

Near the schola were the homes of several prominent Jews in York, and in all of England for that matter. Aaron of York and his father-in-law, Leo Episcopus, were considered in 1219 to be amongst the six richest Jews in England. Aaron in particular flourished between 1236 and 1243 and during that time he was appointed as the Arch-presbyter of the English Jews; the preeminent Jew in England.

What we can see in the thirteenth century is the continued need amongst the gentry, amongst traders, for credit and for cash and the Jewish community really is at the centre of a flourishing financial business. In the thirteenth century that business begins to change and is being conducted less with the aristocracy than perhaps we can see in the twelfth century and more with small and medium businesses.

But as the thirteenth century wore on the taxes paid to the king became heavier and heavier. When Aaron’s father-in-law Leo Episcopus died, his son Samuel had to pay 7,000 marks to the king to be able to take over the affairs of his father. 7,000 marks was an unprecedented sum of money, the modern equivalent of about 2.5 million pounds. The severity of the taxes that were levied on individuals such as Aaron was so great that he died in poverty in York in 1268.

By the 1270s, York’s Jewish community was in serious decline and Jews in England were facing significant anti-Semitism under the rule of Edward I. We know that the property next to Aaron’s house was owned by his nephew, Josce, who was hanged in London in the late

1270s. Many Jews were executed during this time for the crimes of coin forging and clipping – likely a pretense to confiscate their wealth. In an indication of how diminished York’s Jewish community was at this point, Henry III’s widow Queen Eleanor granted the area around the schola to two non-Jewish citizens of York in 1279. At the time of the 1290 expulsion, only six Jewish households remained in York, including one on Coney Street, which was the home of a Jewish man named Bonamicus.

In later years, this area of Coney Street became the site of the medieval coaching inn, the George Inn. There’s a plaque on the wall recording the site of the Inn, but there’s no mention of the site’s relevance to Jewish history in the city. But there is no doubt that this was the heart of the medieval Jewish community of York.

[Track 7: Clifford’s Tower](#)

[We will now head to the final stop on our journey; Clifford’s Tower. Your map will guide you to the stone keep overlooking the city. A plaque commemorating the 1190 massacre of the Jews of York lies next to the steps leading up to the tower. Stop here to listen to more about the 1190 massacre and the ways in which the event is remembered today.](#)

At the foot of Clifford’s Tower this plaque marks the darkest chapter in the history of York’s Jewish community. On March 16th 1190 a wave of anti-Semitic riots culminated in the massacre of an estimated 150 Jews – almost the entire Jewish community of York – who had taken refuge in the wooden keep of the royal castle, where stone structure now stands. The chronicler William of Newburgh described the rioters as acting “without any scruple of Christian conscientiousness” in wiping out the Jewish community. And William was not the only chronicler to record these lamentable acts, as both the Chronicles of the Abbey of Meaux, in East Yorkshire, and Roger of Howden include accounts.

The massacre in York is fuelled by prejudice and it is important to know who chronicled the event and why. A team of experts, led by Dr Sarah Rees-Jones of the University of York's Centre for Medieval Studies, are examining all the narratives of the time and with the publication of this work we will have a better idea of the impact of this event.

Anti-Semitic feeling was running high throughout Western Europe in the twelfth century, stoked by the Christian fervour of the Crusades, that directed aggression against Jews across England, France and Germany, as well as against Muslims in the Holy Land. England’s new king, Richard I, was about to set off on Crusade himself. Rioting had spread throughout

England since prominent Jews, including Benedict of York, had been denied entry to King Richard I's coronation banquet in 1189. Benedict was the wealthiest Jew of York and he was mortally wounded in the rioting at Westminster. After rioting had engulfed the towns of Norwich, Stamford and Lincoln they began in York with a mob attempting to burn down Benedict's palatial house. The Jews were officially protected by the King as his feudal vassals and sought protection in the royal castle, barricading themselves into the wooden fortification. The rioters, meanwhile, were egged on by members of the local gentry, Richard Malebisse, William Percy, Marmeduke Darell and Philip de Fauconberg. These men saw the riots as an opportunity to wipe out the extensive debts they owed to Jewish money-lenders in the city. They had borrowed heavily from Jewish money-lenders but had failed to secure lucrative royal Appointments and so could not afford to repay their debts. Indeed, after the massacre they proceeded to burn records of their debts held in the Minster so absolving themselves from repayment to the King, who would acquire the property and debts owed to the murdered Jews.

The Jews in the keep, fearing treachery, locked out the royal constable, who then demanded the castle be captured by force. Unfortunately, when the riot first started, both the royal sheriff and the constable were out of town, and this lapse in royal protection was to take a terrible toll on the Jewish Community under their protection. As a group of knights arrived to attack the castle, supported by siege engines a fiery hermit who had been inciting the mob was killed by a falling stone. This event further incensed the angry crowd, baying for Jewish blood.

Many of the chroniclers state that seeing no way out to safety most of the Jews chose to commit suicide in the keep. The alternatives were to renounce their faith and surrender to forced baptism or death at the hands of the mob. They were led by the wealthy Jew, Josce and Rabbi Yomtob, a noted scholar, who had come to York from Joigny in France. It is not possible to corroborate what exactly happened, but what we do know, is that whether by suicide or by violence from the mob, almost all members of Jewish families were killed.

The blackened remains of the fire were uncovered in excavations at Clifford's Tower in the 20th century. From the ashes of that fire the present stone keep of Clifford's Tower was erected in the mid-thirteenth century.

The events at York were an affront to the dignity and authority of King Richard and so a royal inquest was held soon afterwards. This resulted in the city receiving a heavy fine, but

by that time the instigators had escaped and no individuals were ever punished for the crimes committed on that fateful night. Probably some of them joined the King himself on crusade, as he was by then en route to the Holy Land through France.

The massacre of 1190 was a horrific catalogue of violence and murder driven by religious intolerance and the greed of those who owed the leading Jewish money-lenders money. And it was sadly only one of countless incidents of mob-violence against Jewish communities across England and Western Europe in the Middle Ages.

This is the end of our tour. We hope you have found this journey through York's Jewish heritage to be an interesting and enjoyable one. As part of the learning experience we welcome your feedback. Please visit the trail's web page on the History of York website for more information.