

fresco called “Moses bringing down the Tablets of the Law from Mount Sinai”, which was painted by JR Herbert (between 1858 and 1864). Herbert was actually commissioned to paint the whole room with eight frescos illustrating Justice in Earth. Only the first one was completed, though the Judgement of Daniel was painted by Herbert in oil on canvas and was displayed in the room in 1880.

House of Lords Chamber:

The Lords has existed as a distinct chamber since the 14th century, and was initially composed of members from the Church (Lord Spiritual) and magnates chosen by the King (Lords Temporal). There have been and continue to be a large number of Jewish Peers. The first Jewish Peer was Nathaniel de Rothschild, Lionel's son, who took his seat in the Lords in 1885 as Baron Rothschild.



House of Lords Chamber

There is a significant Jewish presence in the House of Lords today. At the present time the Speaker of the Lords is Baroness Hayman and she is joined by well-known Jewish Peers like Lord Levy and Lord Winston. Baroness Neuberger is the second person to hold the title “Rabbi” to sit in the Lords, after Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits was raised to the peerage in 1987. Their input has complemented the role of the 26 Anglican Bishops who sit permanently in the Upper House.

The Lords chamber has been the scene of some parliamentary episodes of great significance for the Jewish community. The War Crimes Act 1991 was passed after an epic struggle. After the defeat in the Lords, the government decided to apply the Parliament Act, an old procedure allowing them to override the opinion of the Lords, the very first time it had ever been used. The War Crimes Act was eventually passed to enable British courts to try people for crimes committed on Nazi territory, whether they were British citizens at the time or not.



Debate in the Lords Chamber

Members Lobby:

Bust of Benjamin Disraeli (sculpted by Count Gleichen, 1883, marble):

Benjamin Disraeli, first Earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881), who served two terms as Prime Minister (1868 and 1874-80), was the first and only Prime Minister with direct Jewish ancestry. Though his father famously converted to Christianity, Disraeli was proud of his Jewish heritage, once remarking in response to an insulting comment from another parliamentarian Daniel O'Connell: “Yes, I am a Jew and when the ancestors of the right honourable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon.” As well as following a distinguished political career, Disraeli was a prolific writer; probably the most famous of his works were *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil* (1845).

Bust of Harold Wilson (Sculpted by Ian Walters, bronze):

Harold Wilson (1916-1995) was Labour Prime Minister in two spells, from 1964-70 and 1974-76, and enjoyed very cordial relations with the Jewish community. He had a number of Jewish advisers including Lord Goodman, Harold Lever and John Diamond.

Bust of the Earl of Rosebery:

Archibald Philip Primrose, the fifth Earl of Rosebery (1847-1929) was Liberal Prime Minister for 15 months in 1894-5 and was married to a Jewish woman, Hannah de Rothschild, a wealthy heiress. Rosebery's administration was short-lived, and was ended by a vote of censure on military supplies. Whilst they celebrated their wedding at Christ Church in Piccadilly, Lady Rosebery was buried at Willesden Jewish cemetery. Her death in November 1890 was a devastating blow for him and he withdrew from public life for about 18 months.

Statue of Margaret Thatcher:

Margaret Thatcher was MP for Finchley and served as Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. She enjoyed a close affinity with the Jewish community and a special friendship with the Chief Rabbi during this period - Immanuel Jakobovits. Some of her intellectual mentors such as Sir Keith Joseph and Alfred Sherman were Jewish, as were a number of her Cabinet ministers. At one time, Thatcher's government boasted five Jews, prompting Harold Macmillan's famous remark that there were more “old Estonians than old Etonians” in the government.

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Published by the office of Lord Janner with the kind support of the Board of Deputies of British Jews.



The Greville Janner Jewish Tour of Parliament

By Zaki Cooper

As we celebrate 150 years since the first Jewish MP was allowed to opt for a Jewish oath and so take his seat in Parliament, we follow this tour of the Palace of Westminster, which tells the story of the fascinating relationship between the Jewish community and British politics.

The Palace of Westminster is one of the most famous buildings in the world, the “Mother of all Parliaments.” We know the building as the British Parliament but initially it was the main residence of Kings of England from the 11th century. The Lords started meeting in the Palace in the fourteenth century and the Commons moved there in the mid-sixteenth century.



Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1808-1879) introduced in the House of Commons on 26 July 1858 by Lord John Russell and Mr Abel Smith: A painting by Henry Barraud, 1872. Picture kindly supplied by N M Rothschild & Sons.

Introduction: Jews and Politics

As British citizens, Jews have made distinguished contributions to the politics and the public service of the country, ever since Lionel de Rothschild was admitted to Parliament in 1858. Sometimes their Jewish background has helped inform their political outlook, at other times the link has been negligible. But Jewish politicians have been a strong feature of British politics for the last 150 years. Judaism encourages civic engagement and public service, and it is little surprise that many Jews served in politics, both at local and national level, as soon as they were allowed to do so.

When Lionel de Rothschild took his seat in the House of Commons on 26 July 1858, it marked an important advance not only for the Jewish community but also for religious freedom. Before then, elected representatives had to swear a Christian oath but Rothschild, who had been elected in 1847 (as he had been several times before), was able to take his seat in the Commons in 1858 after an intense campaign. Rothschild was the first MP from a non-Christian faith, and opened the door for others to follow soon after. The first MP from the British Asian community was Dadabhai Naoroji, who was Liberal MP for Finsbury Central from 1892 to 1895.

Many British Parliamentarians, both Jewish and non-Jewish, have been supporters of Israel. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 expressed the British government's support for a national homeland for the Jewish people, and since the State of Israel's foundation in 1948, it has continued to attract support from MPs and Peers.

In the twentieth century, Jews, with varying degrees of religious observance and community involvement, have made major contributions to all the mainstream political parties. They have reached almost every significant office in state, including Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary. Whilst we have not had a Jewish Prime Minister, one PM's wife (Lady Rosebery) was a Jewess, whilst another, Disraeli, who had been converted to Christianity as a child, was famously very proud of his Jewish ancestry.

British Prime-Ministers have been well-disposed to the Jewish community, and both had a number of Jewish advisers and colleagues. The Jewish community continues to play an active role in British politics, as voters, activists, local councillors and national politicians.

Westminster Hall:

This is the oldest part of the Palace of Westminster, and it can be traced to the original construction which was completed in 1099. It was used for many purposes, including banquets and meetings of the Royal Council of Bishops, which evolved into the House of Lords. At that time, there was a small Jewish community in England, many of whom had come from France after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Following an increase in prejudice and attacks, the Jewish community was expelled by a decree of King Edward I (1239-1307) in 1290 (between 4,000 and 16,000 Jews were expelled). There was then no active Jewish life in the UK for almost 400 years. Ironically, it was also under Edward's reign that the role of Parliament was extended, with the introduction of the right to petition.



Westminster Hall

It was in Westminster Hall that the trial of King Charles I took place, which led to his execution and the rule of Oliver Cromwell, who played a significant part in the history of the Jewish community in Britain as it was under his charge that active Jewish life resumed in 1656. This followed a campaign led by a Dutch Rabbi, Manasseh Ben Israel. In 1661, Charles II resisted a plan by a deputation from the City of London to expel the Jews again, which effectively granted them permission to live in Britain. By 1690, about 300 Jews had settled in England. Now, the number of Jews in England is estimated to be around 300,000.

There is a statue of Oliver Cromwell outside Parliament.

Chapel of the Palace of Westminster:

The Chapel, not usually a place of interest for a Jewish tour, includes murals of Noah in the Ark and of Moses with the Ten Commandments. It is open only to MPs and Peers and their guests.

St Stephen's:

The Commons met in St Stephen's Chapel from 1547, until 1834, when part of the Palace was destroyed in a fire. Over the next 30 years the present building was constructed by the architect Sir Charles Barry and his assistant, Augustus Pugin, and the Commons chamber was moved to its present location.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Jewish community grew steadily but it was still impossible for a Jew to take his seat in Parliament affirming his religion. The Naturalisation of Jews Act 1753 was designed to enable wealthy foreign-born Jews to take British citizenship, but it was soon repealed following fierce opposition.

House of Commons Chamber:

The present Commons Chamber was rebuilt following the Second World War, but it first moved there in 1834. It was here that Lionel de Rothschild (1808-1879) in 1858 won the right to take an oath of his choice (and not the Christian one) in 1858. He had first been elected to Parliament in 1847, and after a momentous battle lasting 11 years, finally took his seat as a Jew.

The nineteenth century, which had witnessed the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, also saw a number of moves towards the granting of civil and political rights to Jews:

- Following Lionel de Rothschild taking his Commons seat in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Bill was passed in 1859. It marked an important step in the granting of political rights to Jews.

- The Act of Parliament establishing the United Synagogue was adopted in 1870.

- In 1871 the Universities Tests Act was passed, which opened Oxford and Cambridge to members of all faiths.

By 1890, nearly 50,000 Jews lived in England and the previous decades, had seen almost total emancipation of the Jewish community.

The Commons chamber was destroyed in the Second World War in 1941, and the new chamber was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and completed in 1950.

Plaque for Kindertransport (off Central Lobby):

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War and the Holocaust, 10,000 Jewish children were transported to Britain from countries such as Germany, Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia. To commemorate this, a plaque was unveiled by Commons Speaker Betty Boothroyd in June 1999. It reads: "In deep gratitude to the people and Parliament of the United Kingdom for saving the lives of 10,000 Jewish and other children who fled to this country from Nazi persecution on the Kindertransport, 1938-39."

Committee Corridor:

As well as the drama of party leadership ballots, the committee rooms have in recent years also witnessed a number of inquiries and hearings affecting the interests of the Jewish community and other faith communities. These include investigations into the medical ethics issues (such as the Assisted Dying Bill), religious slaughter and Shechita and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism (2006).

Bust of Emanuel Shinwell (Lower Waiting Hall, near the bottom of the Committee steps):

This was sculpted in 2005 by Oscar Nemon, who also sculpted the statue of Churchill in the Commons Lobby by the entrance to the Chamber. Emanuel Shinwell (1884-1986) was a Jewish Labour MP with socialist principles who served in Parliament for over half a century. He was first elected as an MP in the 1922 general election, and served in the governments of Ramsay MacDonald and Clement Attlee and enjoyed a spell as Chairman of the Labour party. He was responsible for writing the manifesto for the Labour Party's victory in 1945 and the creation of the Welfare State.

The Moses Room:

This room is one of the most extravagant of the Palace and is the venue for Grand Committees of the House of Lords. As its name suggests, it contains a very large

Debate in the Commons Chamber



St Stephens Entrance and Building



House of Commons Chamber



The Moses Room