



Rabbi Isaac Bischofswerder of Penzance (extreme right) with family and friends c 1889. Property of the Victor Bishop Estate

# THE JEWS OF THE WEST COUNTRY

To celebrate the 350th anniversary of the readmission of the Jews to Britain, we are featuring a group of communities that go back to the 18th century and earlier and which illustrate the variety of Jewish life in this land - both then and now.

## *We are different down here...* FRANK GENT

We're different down here in the West Country. We come from different backgrounds, different countries of origins, widely differing levels of observance and very different attitudes to Judaism. What we all share is being Jewish, and that is what makes the mixture work.

We have communities in Exeter, Plymouth, Totnes and Cornwall. We used to have communities in Torquay, Ilfracombe, Falmouth and Penzance. The Plymouth community was always the most important in the West Country. It was the last to employ a Rabbi, Dr Bernard Susser, who became the historian of West Country Jewry. It has the most imposing synagogue, that is also, by a whisker, the oldest, founded in 1762, just before the Exeter Synagogue. It was the community that also stayed the most traditional. It is fortunate in the treasures it has inherited, and is the community which continues to maintain strong links with the descendants of members who have moved away. To us outside Plymouth it also seems to act as a warning of what might happen as communities age and dwindle. It is to its credit that very recently it has begun to

The Exeter community is the one I know best, as I participated in its revival 25 years ago. It was lucky that it retained its historic synagogue, unlike Penzance and Falmouth, thanks to the presence of families such as the Boams, who now represent the only native-born members. All the rest of us – and there are over 100 – are immigrants, except for our own children who were born here. We have come from all over Britain and all over the world, and that is typical of the West Country communities. We no longer live in walking distance of the synagogue, but are scattered far and wide – the Rev. Malcolm Weisman claims that there is a Jew in every parish in the West Country.

Our occupations are tremendously varied – and only a handful of us are 'professionals' or business people as was the case 100 years ago. Education has drawn several. Bookbinder, bookseller, social worker, dentist, plumber, debt collector, electrician, artist, photographer, doctor, farmer, youth worker, accountant, nurse, carpet cleaner, vet and art restorer have all been counted amongst us.

We have always had a big second night communal Seder, and Purim and Chanukah have always been important for children. For the past two years we have conducted our own High Holyday services, and attendances have been so good that there was standing room only. But you don't need a ticket to attend, a policy that has always been more than rewarded by the generous donations we receive afterwards. Perhaps the difference is that in a small community you have to take personal responsibility for making things happen if you want them.

No it's not easy, but the sense of being one family is important, and has helped us overcome difficult problems. We try to make sure that our arguments are for the sake of heaven.

### *In the wide open non-Jewish spaces of the Wild West Country we feel the need for a Jewish haven.*

stir again, but the days of old are unlikely to return – there are just not enough people left to recreate the world of 100 years ago.

The Torquay community was a relative upstart, founded in World War II. There are still a handful of Jewish people in Torquay, but the community no longer has a place of worship. Its *sifrei torah* came to Exeter, as do some of its former members.

Totnes and Cornwall represent something new. Both communities are affiliated to the Reform movement and both have grown up in recent years in response to the need of the increasing numbers of Jewish people living in these areas to celebrate their Jewishness in ways with which they feel comfortable. Some of us might have been happy to have escaped from a claustrophobic Jewish environment in a big city, or might have taken Jewishness for granted, but in the wide open non-Jewish spaces of the Wild West Country we feel the need for a Jewish haven.

Some are in a mixed relationship, some have converted to Judaism, but the chief criterion has always been inclusivity. We use many *siddurim* – this morning it was Singer, next week it will be the Liberal one. And we have always refused to have a *cheder*. The word alone can bring shudders to those who escaped the Jewish world of their childhood because of their unhappy memories.

Because of our changing demography, what we do varies. Recently there has been an increase in young people in the community, to about 20, and monthly activities are taking place called 'Exeter Nitsanim' – the Exeter Young Buds – when over a whole Sunday families will learn about festivals and *shabbat*, in three separate age-groups crowded into various rooms in the synagogue. We are bursting at the seams, which is good news.



But not so different....The marriage of Naomi Hopkins and Andrew Reiniger at Exeter synagogue 10 March, 2005.

Frank Gent is the education officer at the Royal Albert Museum, Exeter.

## TIMELINE ERICA GORDON

City records show that Jews were living in Exeter from the 11th century, but most Jewish settlement in the West Country came after the return under Cromwell. Especially under the later Stuarts, brokers and bankers flocked to London, but there were few opportunities for those without capital. Retail trade was restricted, while Sabbath observance made for further difficulties in gaining employment. Soon there was a 'Jewish Problem' of crime and vagrancy that alarmed both resident Jews and gentiles. Since there was no restriction on movement, no ghetto, the poorer immigrants became peddlers or settled in market towns as artisans. By the end of the 18th century there were Jews in all the major cities, and an estimated 1,000 Jews lived in the South-West and South, mainly in ports such as Plymouth, Falmouth and Portsmouth.

**EXETER**

**1177** The first record of Jewish settlement. A law permits a cemetery beyond the walls of the city. Before this dead bodies were taken to London. There was also a synagogue.

**1190** Records show the contribution by an Exeter man named Amiot of £1 3s. 3d of the 5,000 marks demanded of the Jews in England toward the release of Richard the Lionheart from a prison in Austria. There are to be many more 'tallages' as the tax was called.

**1216** Exeter Jews who are in arrears of payment of tallage to King John are imprisoned for a time in Bristol castle.

**1241** Exeter provides four of the 109 delegates from 21 Jewish centres at a meeting in Worcestershire, called by King Henry to consider ways of raising more money from the community.

**1275** Having almost exhausted the supply of Jewish money, the king and Parliament enact the Statute de Judaismo, that prohibits Jews from practising usury. Trading in wool and corn is allowed and in Exeter this becomes a profitable industry in which many local Jews engage.

**1287** A synod is summoned by the Bishop of Exeter which renews previous ecclesiastical enactments against the Jews and stresses that Jews and Christians are not to visit each other or join each others' festivities; that a Christian should not take medicine from a Jewish doctor; that on Easter Day, no Jew should appear in the streets of Exeter and should keep his doors and windows closed; that the Jews should pay taxes to the parish clergy and the wearing of the badge of the Tables of the Law was to be strictly enforced.

**1290** All Jews in the country are expelled by the edict of Edward I that drove

16,500 Jews of England into exile. The Exeter community ceases to exist.

**1750s** The Ashkenazi families of Abraham and Benjamin Ezekiel settle in Exeter. They rent a plot for a burial ground, which is still in use today.

**1763** A synagogue is opened in St. Mary Arches Street where it still stands.

**1796** Five Jews have shops in the fashionable shopping area: two silversmiths, an engraver, a pawnbroker and a stationer.

**1810** Sir Menasseh Masseh Lopes becomes Sheriff of Devon.

**1850s** There are at least 30 Jewish families trading in and around central Exeter, numbering around 135 Jews.

**1879** Morris Hart is elected a member of the Town Council of Exeter.

**1940s** WWII The synagogue is slightly damaged by a bomb. Services take place only on festivals. There are estimated to be around 20 Jewish families.

**1999** The synagogue is rededicated after extensive renovation.

**2005** The community numbers more than 100.

**FALMOUTH**

**1740** Falmouth is a thriving port and copper, tin and lead mining centre. Alexander Moses, also known as Zender Falmouth, settles here with his wife Phoebe.

**1750s** Immigrants arrive from Alsace and the German Rhineland.

**1766** Zender Falmouth acquires a sea-front building as a synagogue.

**1780** A cemetery is acquired on a plot of land on the Falmouth-Penryn road.

**1791** Zender dies and his son-in-law takes over the management of the

**HOW PEDDLERS KEPT KOSHER IN 18TH CENTURY FALMOUTH**

The first Jew to settle in Falmouth was Alexander Moses – known as Zender Falmouth – and his wife Phoebe. He set up business as a silversmith about 1740 and gathered around him a group of peddlers.

By 1766 Zender had attracted a number of Jews to Falmouth and acquired a building on the sea front for use as a synagogue.

Zender kept a stock of buckles, small cutlery, jewellery and watches to supply the hawkers, and gave credit to young men, where necessary, advancing them money to obtain the hawker's licence. They for their part undertook to return to Falmouth every Friday in time to act as one of the *minyán*. On Sundays they would do the week's tally with Zender and receive fresh stock before resuming their travels.

On their travels, the peddlers would stay at inns that provided them with a special cupboard for kosher utensils, which was kept locked when not in use. As a group they would allocate a day's hire for one of them to arrive early enough on Friday to slaughter an animal or provide fish and cook it in time for the Sabbath.

Moses Jacob, Zender's son-in-law, took over the congregation on his death. He was so Orthodox that he never omitted midday prayers and even trained his horse to stand still while he said the *Amidah*, then to take the customary three steps back. His wife Sarah is said to have laid *tephillin* and to have presided at services as warden if her husband was absent.

community, which numbers about 12 families.

**Early 1800s** With the Napoleonic Wars, activity in Falmouth increases. The locally born generation of Jews get involved in the business of seafaring. There are Jewish chandlers and owners of 'tailors cutters' - small boats that go out to trade with the incoming sailors.

**1808** The community builds a new larger synagogue in a prominent position overlooking the harbour.

**Mid 19th century** The Jews of Falmouth take part in the activities of the wider society, the freemasons being the first to welcome them on equal terms.

**1878** The coming of the telegraph and the expansion of the railway reduce the importance of shipping and the community begins to depart. Only three families remain.

**1880** Samuel Jacob, whose family had been a mainstay of the community for four generations, moves to London, signalling the end of the Falmouth community.

**2005** With the synagogue and cemetery sold there are no reminders of Jewish life in Falmouth.

## PENZANCE

**1720** The Hart family, from Rhineland, settle in Penzance.

**1807** First records of a synagogue and burial ground. There were six householders and various itinerant peddlers. The earliest members were almost all Polish and rites were Polish in style.

**1854** Isaac Bischofwerder is appointed rabbi and brings with him a large family, giving the community a new lease of life.

**1892** The last Jewish wedding. One son of Rev. Bischofwerder remains, and alone opens the synagogue on High Holy Days.

**1913** The last Bischofwerder moves away. The Synagogue is sold and becomes a Plymouth Brethren Meeting House.

**2005** All that is now left is the burial ground.

Falmouth and Penzance represented only two of the small Jewish communities which have since disappeared. There were others at **TRURO, TORQUAY, BARNSTAPLE** and **BIDEFORD**.

## PLYMOUTH

**1577** Sir Francis Drake's log shows his navigator as Moses the Jew from the Barbican, Plymouth.

**1745** The first date at which Jews appear in Plymouth city records.

**1758** A plot of land in Plymouth is leased to Jewish merchants for use for burial.

**1762** A lease on a garden in St Catherine's Lane, where the Jews were using a spring for ritual washing, is granted and the synagogue is built.

**1779** Founding of the Machinath Nefesh friendly society whose activities included a splendid annual supper and lottery. In the coming years many strong communal organisations are formed.

**1803** An alien's register compiled by Joseph Joseph includes 12 silversmiths, one goldsmith, one jeweller, two opticians, 5 spectacle makers, one pencutter, five shopkeepers, dealers in pens, hardware, groceries, a clothier, an umbrella maker, a box maker and a hatter. The have come mainly from central Europe.

**1796-1836** The synagogue minute book gives a picture of a carefully organised and respected community, with stringent rules for shul attendance and decorum (enforced by a system of fines) and considerable provision for support for the needy. The rite is Ashkenazi.

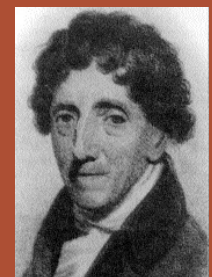
**1864** The ladies' gallery is extended, the only major alteration since the synagogue was built.

**1914-18** Servicemen from home and abroad come to worship and find hospitality within the congregation.

**1940-44** Much of Plymouth is razed by wartime bombs but the synagogue is spared. The congregation is again boosted by servicemen. Alderman Arthur Goldberg is inaugurated as the first Jewish Lord Mayor of Plymouth.

**From mid 60s** The community declines as prominent families move to Bournemouth and London, mainly in search of larger communities for the sake of their children – though they

## A RUM TALE



Portrait of Lemon Hart, Courtesy of Allied Domecq

The Hart family, from Weinheim in the Rhineland, were the first Jews to settle in Penzance. Originally a gold and silversmith, when trade with the West Indies started in the South West, Abraham Hart started importing rum. The business soon grew and began to encompass shipping as well. Lemon Hart took over the business on his father's death in 1803.

Lemon played an active role both as president of the new synagogue and in the wider society of Penzance. He served as an officer in several volunteer forces established when an invasion from France was feared.

His business affairs flourished and he was appointed victualler to the Royal Navy. He set up a branch in London with his nephew and grandson and in mid-1811 left Penzance for London where he moved his company to the West India Docks.

To ensure the survival of the community in Penzance he made himself responsible for the payment of the rent of the synagogue and burial ground and donated to the synagogue much of the family collection of Judaica.

Lemon Hart and his wife eventually retired to Brighton, where he died in 1845. His son David carried on the business and by 1849 the Royal Navy was taking 100,000 gallons of rum per annum. It is still produced under its own label today. EG

give continued support to the Plymouth synagogue.

**2005** The synagogue undergoes major refurbishment, funded by supporters, aided by English Heritage.

The conducting of *shabbat* services relies on Jack Cohen, whose grandparents arrived in Plymouth in the 19th century and relative newcomer Aaron Fadida from Israel and there is rarely a *minyán*. A *cheder* is started. The trustees vote not to change the Orthodox status of the synagogue in pursuit of new members.

Israel Levin, jeweller, Market Jew Street, Penzance c.1880



# PLYMOUTH SYNAGOGUE second oldest in the UK

Plymouth Synagogue is a jewel. With the exception of the extension to the ladies' gallery (below right) in 1864, the building has hardly been changed since it was built in 1762. The gallery leads to an indoor *succah* (with sliding roof).

In the vestibule is fixed a small silver shield (below left) with the names of the vestry members who, in 1784, were apparently responsible for the completion of the synagogue's interior furnishings and repayments of the mortgage.

The eight brass candlesticks (above right) featured in the original mortgage deed along with the building, the Ark and the *bimah*.

The window pictured, among many fine windows, mostly installed in the 20th century, is in memory of members of the Fredman family, one of the most prominent of the community. The window illustrated on the front cover was installed in 1964 in memory of Harris and Ellen Goodman.

The synagogue is lovingly cared for by both its present members and those that have moved away.



Photos: Peter Lee and John Mitchell, Courtesy of Plymouth Synagogue

## A tribute to Benny Greenberg

ANTHONY AGGISS

Coming to Plymouth as a sailor, Benny became one of the main stalwarts of the 20th century community

Benny Greenberg, President and pillar of Plymouth Hebrew Congregation sadly died this year on 22 April 2005. He was exceptionally dedicated to the congregation and the synagogue he loved so much.

Benny was born in Sheffield in September 1922 to immigrant parents from Kovno, Lithuania. They had been on their way to America but just 'stopped over' in Sheffield for a while. Tragically, his father left his mother and she died when Benny was just six years old. Benny then went to live in Norwood Children's Home and an uncle bought him a coat which he still wore when he left at fourteen! He then went to live with his beloved grandmother.

In 1939, Benny joined the Royal Navy, being based in Australia and Colombo on Pacific duty. Towards the end of the war he served on the minesweepers in Plymouth, keeping the shipping lanes open at this crucial stage. He was in the crew of *The Hood* on its last voyage before it was sunk.

In 1944 he met and fell in love with Minnie Gordon, whom

he married in 1948. He went into the family greengrocery business with his brother-in-law, Sonny Gordon.

In the community he served on the Chevra Kadisha committee for 30 years, and became President in 1996. He was acclaimed for inspired talks on synagogue history, going right back to the times of Oliver Cromwell and Menashe ben Israel. He was a self-educated man with great knowledge of Torah and the Jewish way of life. His motto was, "If you haven't got faith, you haven't got anything." His trust in G-d was simple and profound.

He gave wonderful hospitality in both his home and the synagogue, regularly welcoming visitors with a meal. Although he had no family, Minnie's family (the Gordons and Richmans) became his and they loved him in return as brother and uncle.

Benny was a man of great faith, warmth and humour who always thought the best of people. We are the poorer for his passing, but heaven is the richer. His final destination was never in doubt.

# Intellectuals invade Ilfracombe

HELEN FRY evokes an unexpected aspect of World War II life in North Devon

In the North Devon town of Barnstaple in the 1750s there were enough Jewish men to form a *minyan* in the home of Abraham Ralph, a silversmith. Services were held regularly at his house for over 40 years. After his death in 1805, the Jewish presence in North Devon remained tiny until a major influx during the Second World War. Described by Viennese-born refugee Meir Weiss as his ‘Garden of Eden’, North Devon became a temporary haven for over 3,000 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution as well as evacuees from Britain’s cities. The secluded coastal seaside towns of Westward Ho! and Ilfracombe provided a welcome oasis from the realities of war.

The vast majority came to enlist in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, a non-combatant unit of the British Army, the only part of the British Forces open to enemy aliens at that time. These ‘refugees in uniform’ brought with them a distinctly Central European intellectual ferment.

For a period of nearly two years Ilfracombe became a microcosm of German and Austrian cultural society. Top Berliner and Viennese musicians, actors and tenors graced the Ilfracombe stage to entertain the troops and local population. Coco the Clown (Russian born Nicolai Poliakov) late of Bertram Mills Circus and also enlisted into the Pioneers, entertained the men when they were transferred from Kitchener Camp near Sandwich in Kent to the damp foggy moors of Dartmoor. Morale was low but he lifted their spirits with his numerous shows in the NAAFI tent.

Religious and cultural activities were in abundance. A synagogue was housed in a hotel for the duration of the war, founded by the Fainlight and Schneider families. Over High Holy Days the local theatre was hired to accommodate over 1,000 participants. A meeting in aid of The Jewish National Fund in Ilfracombe’s Garrison Theatre was addressed by none

other than Teddy Kollek, later Mayor of Jerusalem. The continental orchestra, under the conductorship of Sgt Strietzel performed concerts to raise money for local charities.

The Pioneer Corps traditionally had a reputation for taking the dregs of the army but here were German and Austrian doctors, dentists, lawyers, architects and artists. Arthur Koestler enlisted in Ilfracombe, as did the Viennese lawyer Martin Freud, the eldest son of Sigmund Freud. Having left Vienna two weeks before his parents, he travelled through Paris and came to England with his son Anton. Like many others who joined the Corps, Martin and his son had previously been interned, Martin on the Isle of Man and Anton in Australia. Like many of the Pioneers, who wanted to be fighting Hitler personally, Martin disliked the tasks allotted to him. He writes, “my chief occupation was peeling potatoes when I was not scrubbing the kitchen floor.” When at the end of 1942 Pioneers were permitted to transfer to fighting units, his son Anton joined SOE (Special Operations Executive) and was parachuted back into Austria to take the strategic Zeltweg airfield.

Within the ranks of the two Czech companies formed at Ilfracombe was the newspaper tycoon Robert Maxwell, then serving under his original name Abraham Lajbi Hoch. Having enlisted into the Czech army-in-exile in France, he fought at the Battle of the Loire before reaching the safety of England. His later distinguished wartime career earned him the Military Cross from General Montgomery.

Twelve miles away, near the hamlet of Swimbridge, a derelict Georgian house provided shelter for 80-90 youngsters. They had arrived as refugees with the Kindertransport, with Zionist Youth Groups or on one of Sir Nicholas Winton’s transports. They worked the land, often for long hours, at a time when labour was in short supply. Their aim at Bydown House, and its



Ilfracombe Harbour 1940

offshoot at Braunton, was to train for a new kibbutz life in Palestine after the war.

The Jewish population in North Devon also included evacuees from the blitzed cities of London, Exeter and Bristol. Highgate School was evacuated to Westward Ho! and Hartland Abbey between 1939-1943. It was here that the Jewish boys founded The Jewish Circle to provide religious and cultural continuity with their roots. Ilfracombe became the temporary childhood home of Hollywood actress Joan Collins and her sister Jackie. The novelist and script writer Frederic Raphael tells of his exploits in his autobiography, *A Spoilt Boy*, when evacuated with Charterhouse School to the village of Lee, near Ilfracombe.

Ilfracombe had a more deep rooted influence on the comedian and actor Peter Sellers, born of a Sephardi mother. It was here that he discovered his passion for playing the drums, taught by Fred Leeding who was a refugee in the Pioneer Corps. The distinctively Victorian character of the town is said to have provided the backdrop to much of his work, including *The Goons* and *The Ladykillers*.

By 1945 the majority of refugees and evacuees had left North Devon and the traces of their presence have gone – except in photographs, newspapers and letters which it has been my pleasure to unearth and study.

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Helen Fry is a historian specialising in Anglo-Jewry. Her lavishly illustrated book *Jews in North Devon* has recently been published by Halsgrove, tel: 01884 243242.



Pioneers 1941 In the white shirt is Robert Maxwell

## Tu BeShevat in Totnes

THENA KENDALL founder of the Jewish community of Totnes, talks to MATTHEW ROSEN MARSH

We came to Totnes as a result of my husband's interest in environmental issues. He is a sociologist and was organising seminars in London on topics such as setting up credit unions. He was keen to move to a place where there was a better chance to put academic discussion into practice.

We moved in October 1994 and by coincidence another couple who also belonged to Finchley Reform Synagogue had settled in Totnes a few weeks earlier. They had young children and also knew another young family – and when it came to Chanukah they wanted to have some kind of celebration. We booked a hall on the nearby Dartington estate and posters were put up advertising a Chanukah party. Forty-four people turned up – someone later pointed out that this was the same number as the candles lit over Chanukah. People of all ages came – from families with young people to some elderly people who had originally come to England with the kindertransport. Most of them had had no connection with any established Jewish community for many years.

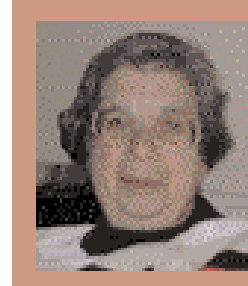
From then on the Jewish community grew like topsy. In spring 1995 Michael and I invited people to join us for a Pesach Seder, and tried unsuccessfully to borrow Haggadot. Someone suggested that I ring the Board of Deputies – but they asked why we could not just go to a seder in a synagogue. When I explained we were in Totnes the response was “isn't that near Bournemouth?”

So I decided to compile our own *Haggadah*. I remembered what I had learnt from Barbara Borts who had been the rabbi of the Hampstead Reform Synagogue to which we belonged when our children were young. Hampstead was then a very small community, meeting in members' homes – very much like Totnes. I had worked with Barbara to compile a *Haggadah* that combined the traditional text with commentaries drawn from a variety of Jewish teachers,

including the American Jewish renewal movement and the Chassidic rabbis. Later I had belonged to a group led by Rabbi Jeffrey Newman of Finchley Reform in which we discussed the stories of the Chassidic masters as related by Martin Buber and their relevance to our own lives. This was an experience from which I learnt that we were entitled to bring our modern experience and understanding to build on traditional teaching. It was a breakthrough for someone like me brought up in a strictly Orthodox community. I did not want to lose touch with my Jewish roots but did not feel comfortable within rigid immutable rules.

I went on to create other services for the Totnes community. I don't agree with people saying words whose meanings they do not understand. There is no point in expecting people unused even to an ordinary Shabbat service to cope with the usual three-hour marathon of Rosh Hashana so I put together an hour-long service – based on the RSGB *machzor*, but with explanations and interpretations from a variety of Jewish teachers. We also started the tradition that the readings of our services were shared in turn by all present – made easier because in restricted space of the Quaker meeting house we had to sit in a circle.

We are fortunate to have a lot of creative people living here and try to harness their talents. For example I knew a Jewish puppeteer and tried to persuade him to put on a Purim show. Initially he was reluctant – like many people here, he had not been inside a synagogue since his Bar Mitzvah. But eventually he agreed. The day-long puppet show was the most effective re-telling of the Megillah I have ever witnessed, and the 17 children who



Thena Kendall, niece of the great 20th century rabbi and theologian, Abraham Joshua Heschel, was formerly Thena Heshel, a producer with BBC Radio 4. Her programmes included *If You Think You've got Problems* on which Wendy Greengross was the first radio agony aunt.

came were so enthralled that they could hardly be persuaded to break for lunch! We also try to put on events that show how Judaism relates to people's everyday concerns. People who were not interested in a Yom Kippur service were really keen to attend a Tu BeShevat Seder because of its environmental theme.

I think a lot of Jewish people in this area have felt excluded from more conventional communities. Some are married to non Jewish partners and others are the children of mixed marriages. But many of them are really interested to find out more about their Jewish heritage and we try to be as open and inclusive as possible. It has always concerned me that so many creative and idealistic people feel that they cannot fit in with established communities, I suppose I can identify with some of their sentiments having grown up in a traditional community where I felt there was then no place for an intelligent and enquiring young woman.

I have probably learnt more about Jewish people and Judaism since living here than all the time I lived in London. Often people who have had little contact with Judaism have a fresh perspective on our traditions and ask really challenging questions. I know that we cannot meet all the needs of a Jewish community – we have no rabbi or synagogue and I encourage people to also participate in more established communities. But we do offer something special – an intimate, supportive way for people to explore their Judaism.



Matthew Rosen Marsh lives in Exeter and works with young offenders

Members of the community performing the Tashlich ceremony on Rosh Hashana

Photo: Thena Kendall

**SOLOMON  
ALEXANDER  
HART RA**

Born in Plymouth in 1808, Solomon Alexander Hart was the first Jewish artist to achieve renown and to be elected to the Royal Academy. He painted historical scenes, scenes of Jewish interest such as *The Feast of the Rejoicing of the Law* and many portraits. He moved to London in 1820, but remained very proud of his native town, donating one of his major works to it in 1879, and leaving £1000 to the Jewish congregation there. In 1854 he was appointed Professor of Painting at the R.A. He was fiercely critical of the Pre-Raphaelites. His funeral in 1881 was attended by both eminent Jews and RAs, including the then president, Sir Frederick Leighton.



Self-Portrait, Solomon Alexander Hart RA (1808-1881), c. 1835, oil on canvas  
© Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter

**FIND OUT MORE**

**PUBLICATIONS**

*The Lost Jews of Cornwall*, Eds Keith Pearce and Helen Fry, Redcliffe, 2000. Extremely detailed history including transcriptions of all headstones  
*The Plymouth Synagogue 1761-1961*, Doris Black Available from the synagogue  
*The Jews of Devon and Cornwall* Catalogue of Exhibition Ed. Evelyn Friedlander, The Hidden Legacy Foundation, 2002  
*Jews in North Devon*, Helen Fry, Halsgrove, 2005

**SYNAGOGUES AND OTHER COMMUNITIES**

All welcome visitors

**Exeter Synagogue**

Mary Arches Street, EX4 3BA, 01392 251529  
[www.exetersynagogue.co.uk](http://www.exetersynagogue.co.uk)

**Plymouth Hebrew Congregation**

Catherine Street, PL1 2AD, 01752 263162  
[www.plymouthsynagogue.com](http://www.plymouthsynagogue.com)

**Totnes Reform Jewish Group**

01803 867461

**Kehillat Kernow** Jewish Community in Cornwall

01872 240086  
[hkurzfield@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hkurzfield@yahoo.co.uk)  
[www.kehillatkernow.com](http://www.kehillatkernow.com)

**CEMETERIES**

**Falmouth Jewish Cemetery**

On main Penryn Road  
For keys phone 01326 372011

**Penzance Jewish Cemetery**

A historic walled Georgian cemetery, with approximately 50 headstones. Accessed by a passageway between 19 and 20 Leskinnick Terrace. For keys phone 01736 368778.



The grave of Lewis Falkson, 1787-1852, in the Falmouth Jewish Cemetery Photo: Rachel Berg

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