

**BIRMINGHAM JEWRY 1749-1914**

For a long time many people tended to think of Anglo-Jewry as synonymous with London Jewry. Since the publication, in 1950, of the late Cecil Roth's 'Rise of Provincial Jewry' historians have come increasingly to realise that this is a very distorted and too narrow a view. There has been an upsurge of interest in the stories of the provincial settlements of Anglo-Jewry and recognition that these stories are very much a part of the colourful diversity of Jewish life and of the Jewish contribution made to English life. Bill Williams in Manchester pioneered new techniques of researching the Jewish community there; especially interesting was his attempt to abstract every Jew living in Manchester as recorded in the Census returns of 1851, 1861 and 1871. Since English Censuses never specify religion or ethnic grouping there must always be some room for error both of including non-Jews in and excluding Jews out, but additional methods of checking the lists have probably produced results of a very reasonable degree of accuracy. These techniques have been applied recently and with very good effect in this study of the Birmingham Jewish community. Why Birmingham has never attained the size and importance of other provincial communities is an unsolved historical mystery. It was not on the direct route for European Jews seeking immigration to America. It was a manufacturing town rather than the home of merchants and this seems to have been less attractive to the Jews. There was no textile industry and only the jewellery trade seems to have beckoned them to Birmingham.

Mrs. Zoe Josephs has led a team that have delved most productively into the origins and growth of Birmingham Jewry. This book is amongst the first published fruits of these researches and the text is suitably thorough to cover all important aspects of Jewish life while sprinkled with enough anecdotal material and lighter aspects to give a very human dimension to the subject. The statistics of the Jewish population, the relationships between communal growth and increasing economic prosperity, and other serious historical topics are all carefully analysed and illustrated with tables and maps. Yet the book is also very much about people and the lives of ordinary Jews every one of which is seen as having made an important contribution to his or her environment. Australian readers will also be pleased to note references to connections with Australia; an important consideration for this reviewer.

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