

JEWISH LONDON:

A Comprehensive Guidebook for Visitors and Londoners

A REVIEW by Carol Novis

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By Rachel Kolsky and Roslyn Rawson / 2012. New Holland Publishers.

Jewish tourists in London often pay some vague attention to the city's Jewish presence. That usually means dropping in on, say, a deli in Golders Green or the Western Marble Arch Synagogue (conveniently around the corner from Marks & Spencer), in between visits to the *real* sites of London, like the Tower of London.

But the British capital, with its Jewish population of some 280,000, has a rich Jewish history and heritage which is well worth delving into. ***Jewish London***, a lavishly-illustrated guidebook of a convenient size to schlep around, covers not only the better known sites, but is also a compendium of fascinating, little known information about this community which has existed since the 11th century.

Who knew, for example, that London has had 10 Jewish Lord Mayors? Or that Portobello Market was largely run by Jewish stall holders during the first half of the 20th century? Or that there is an Israeli connection: the home where David Ben Gurion lived for a time in W9, as well as one that Chaim Weizmann inhabited, marked by a blue plaque, in Addison Road?

The book was written by two friends from Belsize Park who spent two years researching and writing the book. Kolsky is a prize-winning London Blue Badge Guide who has led tours of Jewish London for more than 10 years.

In addition to the expected maps and list of synagogues and restaurants, a large part of the book consists of suggested walking routes. One of the richest areas in local Jewish history is the historical East End where Bevis Marks synagogue, dating from 1710, is the oldest still-operating synagogue in the UK. Kolsky and Rawson quote 17th century diarist Samuel Pepys, who wrote about a service he attended in the Creechurch Lane synagogue: "But Lord! To see the disorder, laughing, sporting and no attention, but confusion in all their service...." So much for famed British synagogue decorum!

Bevis Marks, by the way, was the synagogue that Benjamin Disraeli's family belonged to. Alas, in his barmitzvah year, after his father fought with synagogue officials, young Benjamin was baptized as a Christian.

Another walk tells the story of the radicals and revolutionaries of the East End and includes the headquarters of the Jewish anarchist movement and the Jewish Socialist Club, where Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky all attended meetings. A huge mural in Cable Street commemorates the successful efforts to stop the march of Oswald Mosley and his group of Fascists through the East End in 1936.

Other walks include Disraeli's London; the City of London, where a medieval mikveh was discovered in 2001; and Fitzrovia and Soho - home of the Fitzroy Tavern where Dylan Thomas hung out, run by the Kleinfeld family, and also home to Ronnie Scott's (formerly Ronald Schatt) famed jazz club and to Karl Marx.

There are many museums and memorials of Jewish interest in London, including the Jewish Museum in Camden Town, the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum which tells the story of the rescue of 1,564 Czech Torah Scrolls in 1942, and they are all described in some detail.

Even non-Jewish museums often have a Jewish link and the book takes readers on a tour of the works of Jewish artists at the Tate Britain, Tate Modern and National Portrait Gallery, among others.

This wonderful book will make you want to visit London again, even if you've been there many times before. And its list of Jewish events and when they take place will help you decide exactly when you want to visit. Here's a hint: the annual Gefiltefest, which celebrates Jewish food, takes place in May.