Chancery Lane, 1913. The street on which the Dublin Metropolitan Police found accommodation for Litvak immigrant Jacob Davis on his arrival in Dublin in the early 1870s. Courtesy of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.
Settling In

Dublin’s Jewish Immigrants of a Century Ago

Cormac Ó Gráda

At what period and by what devious ways the ... settlement came into being, it would be impossible to determine. — Hannah Berman, Litvak novelist

For centuries, Jews have been more urbanized than any other ethnic or religious group. For observant Jews, living close together in clusters was a prerequisite for religious practice: the ten-man minimum needed for communal prayer (the minyan), the requirement that the faithful proceed to shul (synagogue) on foot, and the need to sustain even a part-time rabbi — who might also serve as butcher (shochet) and circumciser (mohel) — presupposed a community of ten or more households for viability. Their urbanization had religious origins, but it had socio-economic effects. The commercial world of the city created and demanded the specialized skills of traders and artisans. By the mid-nineteenth century the Jewish population of Eastern Europe was overwhelmingly shtetl-based, and most of those who emigrated west from the shtetls became town- or city-dwellers.

Housing and Settlement

Virtually all of Ireland’s post-1870 Jewish immigrants settled in urban areas. On the eve of World War I nearly nine in ten lived in the three main cities of Dublin, Belfast, or Cork. There were small settlements too in Limerick (119), Waterford (62), Derry (38), and — most surprisingly — in the Armagh linen town of Lurgan (about 75). While Lurgan’s Jewish presence lasted for several decades, neither Galway nor Kilkenny, both bigger towns, ever sustained a viable community. Most of those who plied their trades outside these cities tended to return before sundown on Fridays for the Sabbath, or at least for the most important of the Jewish holy days.

The newcomers began arriving in the early 1870s. The big rise in the number of Russian-born residents in Ireland in the 1880s (from 198 in 1881 to 1,111 in 1891) was almost matched by the rise of 855 in the 1890s. Thereafter the Jewish population relied on natural increase rather than immigration for further growth, since the number of Russian-born was only marginally higher in 1911 than in 1901. Stricter controls on immigration into the United Kingdom in the 1900s, particularly in the wake of the United Kingdom’s Aliens Act (1906), may be partly responsible for this. The arrival of the Litvaks increased the geographical dispersion of Irish Jewry for a time. Dublin’s share of the all-Ireland total fell from 74.6 per cent in 1881 to 55.6 per cent in 1911, but has increased steadily since then. In 1926 it was 62.5 per cent, in 1936, 64.7 per cent.

The small pre-existing Jewish community did not make the newcomers welcome. The tension between ‘English’ and Litvak Jews, replicated wherever the Litvaks settled, was largely based on class. Ireland’s small ‘English’ community was mainly middle class and English-speaking, its workplaces and residences well dispersed.
across the city. It was inconspicuous, and bent on integration. It regarded the Litvaks as rather ignorant and uncouth, and overzealous in religious orthodoxy. According to novelist Hannah Berman, ‘an old man in Dublin, Davis the glazier, often told father how, soon after he appeared in Dublin carrying his case of glass on his back, he was told by the self-appointed leaders of the community ... [that] he was a disgrace to Jewry, and they offered him the then colossal sum of £40 to betake himself elsewhere, America or wherever he liked, only to vanish from the Dublin horizon.’

What would ‘Davis the glazier’ have looked like? Irish playwright Sean O’Casey (1880–1964) has left a pen-portrait of somebody like him, doing his rounds in Dublin in the late 1880s or early 1890s. His distinctive dress and lowly status would certainly have set him apart from his settled co-religionists:

The Jew was short and stocky; bushy-headed, and a tiny black beard, tinged with grey, blossomed meagrely on his chin. A pair of deep black eyes stared out of a white fat face. Long locks of jet-black hair straggled down his forehead. The trousers of a shabby black suit were well frayed at the bottoms; his boots were well worn down at the heels; his head was rased with a high and hard and shining white collar, set off by a gallant red, green, and yellow patterned tie. The Jew’s arms were held out in front of his body to strengthen the resistance to the heavy weight on his back. His body was so much bent that the back of his head was sunk into the back of his neck to enable him to look to his front and to see any possible need for his services. The sweat was trickling down his cheeks, and glistening patches showed where it had soaked through his clothes near his armpits and the inner parts of his thighs.

The Dublin Metropolitan Police, it seems, found accommodation for some of the earliest arrivals next to the police station in Chancery Lane off Bride Street, about halfway between Dublin Castle and St. Patrick’s Cathedral. They lived ‘in a little square wherein stood the police station, Chancery Lane, joining the other foreigners — Italian organ-grinders, bear-leaders, one-man-band operators, and makers of small, cheap plaster casts of the saints of the Catholic church’. Originally a small but elegant street of three- and four-storey buildings, by the 1870s Chancery Lane was in a state of dilapidation. Two houses on the lane featured on a list of tenements condemned as unfit for human habitation, and therefore closed, between 1879 and 1882.

Some of the first immigrants to arrive can be named. The register of births covering the pre-1880 period records children born to Jacob Davis of 28 Chancery Lane (29 September 1874), Marks Isaacs of 78 Bride Street (10 September 1875), and L. Rosenberg of Moore Street (18 November 1875). The last-mentioned is probably Levin Rosenberg from Tels, who arrived via Edinburgh in 1873. Jacob Davis may well be the ‘old man in Dublin, Davis the glazier’ mentioned by Hannah Berman, or else the glazier’s son. Jacob is listed as a painter in the marriage register of St. Mary’s Abbey, where he married on 2 October 1873, and his father is listed as a glazier. Jacob’s address then was given as 14 Chancery Lane. His next child was born while he was living at 12 Chancery Lane (25 August 1876), but by December 1878 he had moved to Peter Street, a few blocks away. These details corroborate Hannah Berman’s remark that the pioneers moved first to ‘streets and laneways not far from Jervis Street, Mercer Street, and Bridge Street’. Molly Harmel Sayers, whose uncle would become for a time the richest man in the immigrant Jewish community, was born in a tenement house in Jervis Street; ‘a delicate child, [she] survived only because of the tender care bestowed on her by a drunken applewoman’. She is presumably the Miriam Harmel recorded in the Jewish birth register.

Hannah Berman, ‘Berman Story’ (unpublished typescript in the Jessie and Robert Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati), 8
Charles Cameron, Report upon the State of Public Health and the Sanitary Work Performed in Dublin during the Year 1882 (Dublin, 1883); Jacinta Prunty, Dublin Slums 1800–1925: A Study in Urban Geography (Dublin, 1998), 136–37
Louis Hyman, The Jews of Ireland (Shannon, 1972), 146. Louis Wine, also from Lithuania, was another early arrival.

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as having been born on 6 February 1878; if so, her family moved to 20 Upper Mercer Street around this time. Nos. 18 and 19 Upper Mercer Street were among the ‘ruinous, deserted and uninhabitable’ houses listed by the corporation in 1883. Jervis Street was not far from Moore Street where L. Rosenberg lived, or from St. Mary’s Abbey where the city’s only synagogue was located. Perhaps the presence, albeit temporary, of the Rosenbergs and Harmels in the Jervis Street area indicates the drawing power of a place of worship to these very observant Jews. The Church of Ireland national school on Bride Street, next to Chancery Lane, was the first to receive immigrant children. It is reckoned that the Lithuanian Jewish population numbered about twenty-five in the late 1870s.\(^9\)

The newcomers did not remain long in the tenements. The earliest movers to the complex of small streets off Lower Clanbrassil Street and the South Circular Road on the southern edge of the city, where most of the community would soon settle, can be guessed at from Thom’s Directory.\(^10\) The 1881 Directory, referring to tenants resident in the city before the end of 1880, lists two Jewish householders living on Oakfield Place (the highly mobile Jacob Davis at no. 15 and Harris Lipman at no. 16), where there had been none in earlier directories. The 1884 Directory lists only two (at nos. 16 and 17), but there were four by 1886 and six by 1890. Nearby St. Kevin’s Parade contained one Jewish household (Meyer Schindler) by 1882, two by 1886, and four by 1890. These two streets would soon become heavily Jewish. Located in an area populated by semi-skilled and clerical workers, they were particularly favoured by recently arrived ‘greener’, as newcomers were sometimes dubbed. The housing stock, mainly roadside one-storey terraced units, was new or almost new. Most units, however modest, contained outside flush toilets and running water. On streets off Lower Clanbrassil Street such as St. Kevin’s Parade, Peyton’s Cottages, Arbutus Place, and Oakfield Place, dwellings containing three or four small rooms were typical. Lower Clanbrassil Street, which ran north–south, would become the heart of the community; the South Circular Road, which ran from east to west, crossed it at Leonard’s Corner.

Much of the housing that would constitute Little Jerusalem was built in the 1870s and 1880s. In the late 1870s several small speculative builders were at work in the streets off Clanbrassil Street, building blocks of terraced houses, as few as two or three at a time. Their work is still evident in the streetscapes of St. Kevin’s Parade, Oakfield Place, and Lombard Street West. The minor variations in house types along these streets, a by-product of their builders’ lack of capital, are a pleasing architectural feature.

Just a few years later, the Dublin Artisans Dwelling Company embarked on a substantial building project on the other side of the South Circular Road, in Portobello. The DADC was run by a group of high-minded and energetic citizens interested in improving housing conditions in the city. They married profit and philanthropy, and the weekly cost of a DADC dwelling was high enough: 3s. 6d. to 5s. per week for a single-storey, and 6s. to 8s. for a two-storey unit. As its name implies, the DADC catered for ‘respectable’ households who could be relied upon to pay their rents regularly.\(^11\) Their somewhat genteel reputation would quickly become part of their appeal. The brand-new houses in Portobello came on the market at exactly the right time for clusters of Jewish immigrants ready to pay the 6s. to 8s. weekly rent. Though more aesthetically monotonous than the housing on the other side of the South Circular Road, the DADC housing was of a very high standard. Just a few years later — in 1899-1901 — houses on Dufferin Avenue, north of the South Circular Road, came on the market. They would represent the upper end of the market as far as Little Jerusalem Litvaks were concerned.
The area that would soon come to be known as ‘Little Jerusalem’ included most of the streets between St. Kevin’s Parade and the Grand Canal. At the turn of the century there were two small clusters with very heavy concentrations of Jews: one around St. Kevin’s Parade/Oakfield Place/Lombard Street West, and the other across the South Circular Road, around Kingsland Parade/Walworth Road/Martin Street by the Grand Canal. In the following decades the concentration of Jewish families further west, between Raymond Street and Greenville Terrace, would become much denser. The spread of the community’s small prayer houses or hervoth — Lombard Street West, Oakfield Place, Camden Street, Heytesbury Street, Camden Street, Walworth Road, St. Kevin’s Parade, Greenville Hall on the South Circular Road — offers a good indication of its boundaries. There was a hierarchy of streets within the ghetto: newcomers might opt for a street like Oakfield Place, while on Dufferin Avenue or Longwood Avenue the tone was one of middle-class assurance. William (or Wolve) Nurock and his family thus started off in modest circumstances in Oakfield Place (1892–95), whence they moved to 8 Emorville Avenue (1895–1908), and then to the relative affluence of 79 South Circular Road. These houses were valued at £7 10s., £20, and £34, respectively. Nurock’s different homes, within a short stroll of one another, all doubled up as moneylenders’ premises.

Moneylender Oscar White moved from 1 Kingsland Parade (valuation £15) to 11a St. Kevin’s Road in 1906 (£15), then to 17 Victoria Street (£24) in 1908, and finally across the canal to the upper-middle-class respectability of 57 Kenilworth Square (£46) in 1918. Hyman Barron, who operated a thriving business on Camden Street selling house furnishings on credit, moved from a comfortable house at 7 Emorville Avenue to the more salubrious 38 South Circular Road in 1902–03. Jacob Davis whom we described earlier as starting off in Dublin as an itinerant glazier/painter and living in a tenement house in Chancery Lane, is listed in the 1912 Thom’s Directory as ‘contractor, 8 Wynnefield Road, Rathmines’ (valuation £30). Similarly, Nick Harris’s parents moved from Greenville Terrace to Victoria Street in 1929, and Hannah Berman’s household moved in rapid progression from sharing a small house with the Price family at the corner of Lombard Street West and Oakfield Place, to renting a room in one of the old houses on Upper Clonbrassil Street, to having houses to themselves, first at 25 Arnott Street and then, in 1894, at 37 Lombard Street West. Non-Jewish residents of Greenville Terrace got along well with their Jewish neighbours, but considered those living on nearby Dufferin Avenue ‘a different breed’ and ‘arrogant’ or ‘higher up’. The Jews sensed these class distinctions too. The ‘rather snobbish Peisa Harmel, who was living in great style in Upper Clonbrassil Street’, and who ‘drove behind a prancing horse, a beautiful dapple-grey, in a grand car’, ‘had not much use for [his] naïve unenlightened greenhorn of a brother-in-law’. Peisa and his family were ‘snobbish, uppish, even towards their own relatives’. George Mitrovsky refers to The Eye-Opener, ‘as a scurrilous sheet in which the cream and leaders of the community — whom my mother always dismissed airily as “the rubbish” — were mentioned in blatantly libellous and deliciously scandalous terms’.

The social gap between the ‘old’ and most of the ‘new’ Jews was also marked, although some of the more successful among the ‘new’ (such as the Wigoders and the Briscoes) were quick enough to bridge it. It is significant that when the Dublin Hebrew Congregation moved south of the Liffey in 1892, it located its new synagogue outside the Little Jerusalem area, almost a mile away from the poorer Litvaks of the Lower Clonbrassil Street area. Many of the latter continued to worship in their own small hervoth within Little Jerusalem. The

12 Excluding the small synagogue on Lower Ormond Quay, which was ‘used mainly by people who had a business in the area’; see Nick Harris, Dublin’s Little Jerusalem (Dublin, 2002), 119–20.
14 One of the moneylenders in Joseph Edelstein’s The Moneylender is Oscar Whitingstone: see Edelstein, The Moneylender (Dublin, 1908), 110.
15 Interview with Sheila and Carmel Cunningham, 21 Mar. 2003
16 Berman and Zlotover, Zlotover Story, 30; Berman, ‘Berman Story’, 8; Hannah Berman, ‘Zlotover Story’ (unpublished typescript in the Jessie and Robert Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati), 4–5; George Mitrovsky, ‘When Zionism was Slightly Traif’, Nachlibh Dublin (1959–60), 16–17
most upwardly mobile were more than willing to move out and switch to Adelaide Road, however. Though the area north of the South Circular Road contained some middle-class streets, on the whole the Jews who lived there were less well off than those living south of the South Circular Road. Jewish-tenanted houses to the south were roomier, and more likely to contain a domestic servant. Jessie Bloom describes housing conditions in Dublin as follows:

The ... social strata of the children that played on the streets of Dublin might best be described by the type of home in which they lived. The children who lived in a house, and did not share that house with any other family, but had their own backyard and front garden, were on the highest level. Then there were those that lived in the ‘shut-door’ tenement, and the last were those that lived in tenements that always had the front door open.  

In fin de siècle Dublin it was unheard-of for a Jewish family to live in any kind of tenement accommodation, though the poorest lacked a back or front garden. It was also very unusual for a Jewish household to rent lodgings in a house owned by non-Jews. On the other hand, it was not uncommon for poorer Jewish households to keep a Jewish boarder, or for prosperous Jewish households to include a Catholic domestic servant. Only four Jewish households (out of 329) in a database constructed as part of a larger study lived in one-room accommodation in 1911. Three of these were elderly couples and the fourth a recently married brush-maker with one child. The same database suggests that in 1911 Jewish households were
somewhat better-off than their non-Jewish neighbours, by two criteria. First, their houses were less congested; the number of occupants per room in Jewish households was 1.29, compared to 1.63 in Catholic households, and 1.16 in other non-Jewish households. Second, they were much more likely to contain a domestic servant (or a *shikse*, as she was often called in the Jewish community); the respective percentages were 27.7, 9.3, and 15.5.

An indicator of the material progress made by the immigrant community on the eve of World War I was its ability to collect, within a matter of months, over £2,000 in subscriptions towards the purchase of the site of the future Greenville Hall *shul* in 1913–14. Apart from £100 from Lord Rothschild and a few other much smaller foreign contributions, this sum was made up of the subscriptions of 264 members of the *hevra* constituting the United Hebrew Congregation. Subscriptions ranged from a few shillings to three of £100 or over. The median contribution of five guineas, a sizeable sum at the time, is a measure of both the community’s piety and its material progress.22

At the outset the Litvak community was too small to sustain a *kosher* butcher. For a time two Gentile butchers, Byrne’s of Camden Street and McDonnell’s of Wexford Street, paid *shochtim* 10s. to 12s. a week to slaughter livestock and poultry according to Jewish ritual. The *shochtim* were also supposed to attend while Jewish customers were being served. In 1895 the Jewish Meat and Provisions Company opened at 73 Lower Camden Street, but this attempt at founding a co-operative *kosher* butchery failed.23 Then one Naphthali Cristol opened a butcher-shop at 1 Walworth Road c.1900, and soon after Myer Rubinstein and L. Barron opened shops on Lower Clanbrassil Street. By that time Clanbrassil Street had already become Little Jerusalem’s main shopping artery.24

The occupational and settlement profiles of Dublin’s Jewish immigrants on the eve of World War I imply that they were in better circumstances than their co-religionists in London’s East End. Many East Enders had also arrived penniless. Unlike their Dublin brethren, however, they had chosen one of the poorest parts of their adopted city to live in.25 Their occupational profile was also different: many were employed as wage-workers in the sweated trades of tailoring and shoemaking. A factory inspector described conditions in the East End in 1903 thus:

The alien is imprisoned day and night and kept in a semi-nude state for a semi-starvation allowance. Family and all sleep in the same room ... The effect of this is found in the anaemic and lifeless state of the workers.26

Though peddling remained an option, fewer than one in three of the immigrant labour force earned their living as small traders. There was also more social differentiation within East London Jewry than in Dublin’s Little Jerusalem.27 These factors may help explain why left-wing political activism was more characteristic of London’s Jews.

Dublin’s immigrants were also relatively well off when compared with the city’s large underclass of casual unskilled labourers and

Dufferin Avenue. A prosperous middle-class street; the Mirrelsons lived at no. 25.

Greenville Terrace. Author Nick Harris grew up here in no. 14.

17 In Glasgow the tension between the ‘old’ community, focused on Garnethill *shul*, which was consecrated in 1879, and the ‘new’ based in the Gorbals, was analogous. There were no organized daily prayers at Garnethill, it being left up to groups who wanted to pray to provide their own *minyan*, whereas in the new *hevra* daily services were standard. See Kenneth E. Collins, *Second City Jewry: The Jews of Glasgow in the Age of Expansion* (Glasgow, 1990), 48–56, 134.

18 Jessie Bloom, ‘Dublin Notes’, untitled typescript on childhood in Dublin, American Jewish Archives, Jacob Rader Marcus Center: Cincinnati (undated, but probably 1953–54)

19 Berman, ‘Berman Story’, 12–13; Bloom, ‘Dublin Notes’, 27; see too Duffy, ‘A Socio-Economic Analysis of Dublin’s Jewish Community’, 47–48. Perhaps there was something cultural in this penchant for domestic servants: a local history of the US city of Wilmington, Delaware, describes most Russian Jewish households as having black maids: ‘anyone could afford one — they only cost three or four dollars a week’, and in a large sample of Jewish households constructed by the US Census Bureau in 1890 over three-fifths of
households had one or more servants. See David Goldberg, 'An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738–1925' (in Lucy Davidowitz, Papers, American Jewish Historical Society, Box 2/1); US Census Bulletin No. 19 (30 Dec. 1890), 'Vital statistics of the Jews in the US'.

20 Cormac Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the Age of Joyce: A Social Science History* (forthcoming). The database consists of households containing a married couple, and living on a street with a Jewish presence in the Clonbrassil Street–Portobello area in 1911.

21 The elite of the Jewish community lived south of the canal in Rathmines or Rathgar. In the 1900s few of the socially exclusive council of the Adelaide Road shul lived in Little Jerusalem proper.

22 Irish Jewish Museum, *Minutes of the United Hebrew Congregation*, 1914

23 *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 Apr. 1893


26 Cited in Marks, *Model Mothers*, 22

their families. As Thomas Finlay SJ noted in 1893: 'nor are they given to the occupations of the “sweated” Jew of London. They are respectable in their way, well dressed and well fed, not at all likely to compete with our poor tradesmen for the “jobs” on which they depend for a livelihood'. Even within Little Jerusalem, as we shall see, they had the edge economically on their Gentile neighbours. The same was true in Belfast and Cork.

Little Jerusalem was always a compact area. To the south it was bordered by the Grand Canal, which separated the city proper from the municipality of Rathmines and Rathgar. The rectangle defined by Camden Street to the east, Donore Avenue to the west, and Kevin Street to the north, contained virtually all the streets that were, to a greater or lesser extent, Jewish between the 1890s and 1930s. Most of the streets within this rectangle are included in our database. As noted earlier, some were almost completely Jewish at one point, while others never contained more than a minimal Jewish presence.

The immigrants' settlement patterns are of interest. Their determination to live close together is hardly surprising: ghettos have always been a key feature of immigrant life. Though the long-run economic advantages of ethnic neighbourhoods or ghettos are debatable, in the short run they confer several advantages on the recent immigrant. They reduce the costs of adjusting to life in a setting very different from home by providing less expensive lodging, friendship, and recreation. They offer better opportunities of finding work or starting a business quickly, and some security against prejudice and crime. In addition, living close to places of worship and scriptural learning would have weighed heavily with many in a very religious community like the Litvaks. All these factors influenced the choices made by Dublin's Litvaks. Because the community was relatively small and lived in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood, clustering did not retard host language acquisition.

**Six Streets in Little Jerusalem**

As noted earlier, the newcomers selected where to settle wisely. When they began to move into the little streets and lanes off the South Circular Road and Lower Clonbrassil Street in the early and mid-1880s, most of the housing stock in the area was newly or very recently built. Its quality was good; most units, however modest, had running water and an outside toilet. Moreover, the housing varied in size and cost, allowing the poor, the less poor, and the comfortably off to be part of the same community. Another crucial factor was the high turnover of tenancies in the early 1880s.

Here I focus first on the settlement of Jewish immigrants on six streets in the Little Jerusalem area: Oakfield Place, St. Kevin's Parade, Greenville Terrace, St. Kevin's Road, Longwood Avenue, and Dufferin Avenue. These streets housed a broad cross-section of the immigrants and their descendants. Four are located north of the South Circular Road, two to the south of it. All six streets still contained significant, if already declining, Jewish populations on the eve of World War II. To some extent our choice of streets was constrained by the information given in *Thom's Directory*: since *Thom's* usually did not report the names of individual householders on streets where the average house valuation was less than £7 or so, this ruled out heavily Jewish streets such as Peyton's Buildings and Arbutus Place.

[1] Oakfield Place. This compact cul-de-sac of twenty small single-storey units is where some of the earliest immigrants settled. Built in the mid-1870s, it was the most modest of the six streets selected. As far as can be ascertained, it was the first street in the
future Little Jerusalem to house immigrants. The first Litvaks, Jacob Davis and Harris Lipman, settled there in 1880, living next door to each other in nos. 15 and 16. Before long Oakfield Place would become one of the most Jewish streets in Dublin, favoured in particular by recent arrivals. The average valuation of houses — a useful guide to their relative size and comfort — was just over £9. Each unit, terraced and fronting on to the street, contained three or four rooms. In the early 1890s Wolve Nurock ran a moneylending business from no. 20; in the early 1900s ‘Barron and Green’ operated as rebolesaleniks from no. 1A. In 1911 the Jewish male householders present on Oakfield Place included three tailors, a labourer, a cap presser, a traveller for a draper, a huckster, a dairyman, an illiterate antique dealer, two general dealers, a bootmaker, and a draper. In addition three husbands were away from home on census night, presumably ‘travelling’ either on their own account or for someone else. Several household heads would have been wage earners. Several households supplemented family income by taking in boarders. The Jewish presence on Oakfield Place remained considerable until the 1940s; today only one of its houses remains in Jewish hands. In mid-2004 the front window of no. 3, which had been occupied by Jews for nearly eight decades, contained a poster supporting a boycott on Israeli produce.

[2] St. Kevin’s Parade is a labyrinth of twenty-five modest terraced houses, mostly single-storey, linking Lower Clonbrassil Street and Lombard Street West. A century ago all units on the parade were valued at between £13 and £15, except for nos. 10 and 11 (valued at £9 and £8, respectively) and no. 19 (£28). The typical house, again fronting on to the street, contained five rooms. The street’s occupational profile in 1911 reflected its somewhat better housing relative to nearby Oakfield Place. On the eve of the Great War three-quarters of those living on the street were Jewish. Jewish male household heads included two Hebrew teachers and a rabbi; two butchers; two retired peddlers; a ‘general marine dealer’; a coal merchant; a bookseller; two tailors; and a traveller for a draper. The last three of these would have been wage earners. The street and several Jewish residents are mentioned in Ulysses. Moses Herzog, the one-eyed, bibulous peddler who features in the ‘Cyclops’ episode, lived at no. 13 between 1894 and 1906. In Episode 4 (‘Calypso’) Bloom muses about pleasant evenings in the company of ‘poor Citron’ in St. Kevin’s Parade, with Molly Bloom seated in Citron’s basket-chair. Louis Hyman identified ‘Citron’ as Israel Citron, a peddler who lived at no. 17 between 1904 and 1908. His next-door neighbour in no. 16 was Philip Maslansky, identified by Louis Hyman with ‘Mastiansky [sic] with the old cither’ in the same passage in ‘Calypso’. ‘Maslansky’ was incorrectly rendered as ‘Mastiansky’ in Thom’s Directory, and Joyce perpetuated the error. The first southside shul was established there at no. 7 St. Kevin’s Parade in 1883, at the instigation of Robert Bradlaw, Peisa Harmel, and some others. Harmel was its president ‘for many years’, and ‘was presented with a silver snuffbox by the congregation when he was leaving for South Africa’. This was where in 1890 some representatives of the long-established Mary’s Abbey community ‘found about two hundred persons assembled in a room in the upper part of a house, not more than 250 feet square, and of a height not exceeding eight or nine feet’.

[3] Longwood Avenue is located south of the arterial South Circular Road. Its fifty houses, built between the late 1840s and the late 1850s, ranged in rateable value from £12 to £26, but most were valued at about £20. Longwood Avenue was a relatively affluent place. Its houses had gardens to the front and rear. More than half of its Jewish householders had domestic servants in 1911, whereas none on Oakfield Place had one. The first Jewish resident of Longwood...

27 Todd M. Endelman, The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000 (Berkeley, 2002), 130–32. The occupational profile of Dublin’s Jews closely mirrored that of Liverpool. According to Bill Williams (‘History of Liverpool’s Jewish Community’, (http://www.jgs.org/Documents/Bill-Williams1.html)), downloaded 24 Jan. 2003, undated), ‘A majority of [Liverpool’s] newcomers took to some form of peddling, which underwent a marked revival in the city, to Scotch Drapery (that is, the sale of domestic textiles from house to house on a weekly-payment basis), or to itinerant glazierly, carrying panes of glass in frames strapped to their backs in search of broken windows.’


Avenue, Israel Leventon, was a representative of the ‘old’ community. Originally rabbi to the St. Mary’s Abbey congregation, he moved south to minister to the newcomers, occupying no. 43 Longwood Avenue in 1889. The first Litvak tenant, Israel Ellis, settled on the street in 1895; he made his living as a draper. Louis Levitt followed in 1896, and Louis Mendelson, M. Copman, and T. Fridjohn in the following year. Joseph Zlotover, one of the leaders of the Litvak community, lived at no. 42. By 1911 over one in four of Longwood Avenue’s inhabitants was Jewish. The occupational profile of Longwood Avenue’s Jews in 1911 reflected its better housing stock. They included five drapers and two travellers; a merchant, a financier (i.e. moneylender) (Michael Mosovitz), and a furniture dealer, the rabbi in charge of Adelaide Road shul (Abraham Gudansky), a musician (Marks Rosenberg, one of several talented musical brothers), and a housepainter (37-year-old Isaac Rubin).

Greenville Terrace is off the South Circular Road across from Portobello Barracks. It is another street of modest one-storey terraced houses, but with small railled-in front and more substantial rear gardens. It was built in the 1870s. This is where Nick Harris, author of Dublin’s Little Jerusalem, grew up. The Solomons took over no. 14 from the Harrises in 1928. The Solomons were poor; neighbours remember representatives of the Jewish Board of Guardians (the Jewish ‘Saint Vincent de Paul’) calling to their house. Mrs. Solomons supplemented family income by putting cloth covering on buttons. Mr. and Mrs. Solomons later died tragically, from accidental gas poisoning. Jewish occupants in Greenville Terrace in 1911 included a cabinetmaker, three tailors, two ‘general dealers’, four drapers, two commercial travellers, a painter, a Hebrew teacher, a dry cleaner, and a painter. They included Abraham Eppel, a draper, and Joseph Eppel, a ‘general dealer’.

[5] St. Kevin’s Road is located next to the Portobello complex of streets constructed by the DADC in the 1880s, close by the Grand Canal, and about half a mile from the original core settlement area around St. Kevin’s Parade and Oakfield Terrace. The
housing on St. Kevin’s Road consisted of thirty-five mostly identical on-street terraced two-storey units. Litvaks began settling on the road in the 1900s. Here too they were mainly self-employed in 1911: travelling salesmen (4), drapers (3), tailors (3), ordealers (4), but they also included another Hebrew teacher and a cap manufacturer. Henry Gilbert at no. 9 was listed as an auctioneer.

[6] Dufferin Avenue, at the western end of Little Jerusalem, was the most middle-class street north of the South Circular Road to be settled by Litvaks. The first Litvak family to settle there were the Weiners in 1901; Levi Berman followed in 1902. The street was almost brand-new then. The Jewish households living in its six-roomed homes on the night of the 1911 census wereprospering: over half had a domestic servant (compared to two out of twenty-seven non-Jewish households). The seventeen Jewish male household heads included seven drapers, three general dealers, a master tailor, two tailors, a jeweller, a factory manager, a commercial traveller, and a capmaker. Talmudic scholar and able businessman Myer Joel Wigoder lived for a time at no. 53. The name ‘Wigoder’ would soon become synonymous in Dublin with wallpaper and interior decoration; in due course two other Jewish families also well known in the broader community — the Mirrelsons (at no. 25) for their cab service and gambling shops, the Mushatts (at no. 8) for their pharmaceutical remedies — settled in the avenue.

Within-Street Clustering

Only fleetingly, once or twice, did the Jewish community have a whole street to itself. What of within-street clustering? Here, using data taken from Thom’s Directory, I describe settlement patterns on three streets in Little Jerusalem between the 1880s and the 1960s. These streets represent a socio-economic and geographic spread. On St. Kevin’s Parade, among the first to house Litvaks, the housing stock was very modest. Longwood Avenue was affluent by comparison, while Lombard Street West occupied an intermediate position.

Panel I describes the density of Jewish settlement from the late nineteenth- to mid-twentieth century. The Jewish presence was strongest on St. Kevin’s Parade, where it topped 80 per cent for a time. Panel II compares the actual proportions of Jewish households having a Jewish next-door neighbour in each year, with the expected proportions if Jewish households had been randomly distributed on the street. This is a crude measure: for example, comparing the actual and expected proportions living within two houses of another Jewish household would almost certainly accentuate the clustering. (There is also evidence of such clustering in Cork, at least in the early days. Half of the Jewish-occupied houses in Hibernian Buildings in 1893 were numbered between 79 and 93.35 Jewish households also lived in nos. 30, 32, and 34.) For households used to living in an exclusively Jewish environment in the shtetls, this is only natural. But in assessing claims of mutual friendship and neighbourliness from both sides, this should be borne in mind.

Houses on these three streets changed tenants quite often, particularly in the early years. In the early 1880s, around the time when the first Jewish families moved in, about one house in four on St. Kevin’s Parade changed tenants every year. Houses were rarely vacant for long. In this fluid market it was easy for the immigrants to make their mark in a relatively short time. Neither landlords nor existing tenants seem to have resisted the arrival of the Litvaks, and immigrant families already in residence kept an eye out for vacant properties on behalf of friends and relations.

36 Harris, Dublin’s Little Jerusalem, 23
37 Interview with Sheila and Carmel Cunningham, 21 Mar. 2003
Panel I  Settlement Density

ST. KEVIN'S PARADE

LOMBARD STREET WEST

LONGWOOD AVENUE
Panel II  Expected and Actual Proportions with Jewish Next-Door Neighbours

ST. KEVIN’S PARADE

LOMBARD STREET WEST

LONGWOOD AVENUE
When a sitting tenant decided to move on, custom dictated that he had the right to select the incoming tenant.36 This urban version of ‘tenant right’ inevitably led to offers and payments of key money. However, when Nick Harris’s parents passed their house on Greenville Terrace to the Solomons, they took no key-money because the Solomons were poor. Shifts in tenancies in Little Jerusalem, as reflected in Thom’s Directory, clearly indicate that Jewish tenants gave first call to co-religionists. When a Jewish-occupied house became vacant, the incoming tenant was very likely to be also Jewish. In many cases, the new arrivals were related to a family already on the street: for example, three of the Jewish families living in Greenville Terrace in the 1920s and 1930s (the Whites, the Orkins, and the Gudkins) were related by marriage, as were several of the families living on Martin Street.37 The rapid turnover of tenancies on Oakfield Place and St. Kevin’s Parade in the pre-1914 era is another indication of Jewish upward mobility. Over half of the Jewish households settling in either of these streets before 1914 stayed four years at most.

Little Jerusalem was in its heyday between the 1890s and the 1920s. By 1930 or so the upwardly mobile in the Jewish community were already moving south across the Grand Canal — ‘across the bridge’ — to Rathmines and Rathgar in numbers, leaving behind the elderly and the less well off. Both for their descendents and for most current residents of the old neighbourhood (now almost exclusively non-Jewish), the Litvak ethos of Little Jerusalem and the hustle of Lower Clanbrassil Street once the Sabbath was ‘out’ are but distant, mostly vicarious memories.