

JEWISH HERITAGE UK

CODE OF PRACTICE

For Recording Synagogues in Imminent Danger of Closure

Our synagogue buildings are physical witness to the Jewish presence in Britain. Sadly, population shifts, urban renewal programmes and economic realities sometimes mean that the future of synagogues, particularly in inner city areas and small provincial communities, is increasingly in doubt. When a synagogue is about to close, it is important, both out of respect for its history and for the sake of future generations, whose heritage it will be, to make a record of its existence.

Jewish Heritage UK seeks the co-operation of synagogue bodies, boards of management and individual congregants in carrying out this task. We are pleased to circulate this Code of Practice for the benefit of us all.

If your synagogue falls within one of the following two categories, please contact us at your earliest opportunity for assistance:

LISTED SYNAGOGUES

Some 40 synagogues nationwide are designated as Listed Buildings on the Statutory Lists. This means that they are regarded by the Department of Culture as being of architectural or historical importance. Others are situated in neighbourhoods declared Conservation Areas. Some other Jewish building types including, for example, soup kitchens, schools and cemetery memorials, are also listed. In such cases, certain legal restrictions apply (Listed Building Control). Legislation (1992) imposed stricter controls over alterations to the interiors of listed ecclesiastical buildings in particular.

Listing offers the possibility of public grant aid for restoration work on major buildings.

Jewish Heritage UK is active in increasing the number of synagogues on the Statutory Lists, given that the Jewish community is under-represented in this area, compared with the Christian denominations. Recently, several historic synagogues have been upgraded from Grade II to Grade II*. One of our functions is to provide advice and make representations on behalf of synagogues and other sites seeking listed status and/or funds for preservation and restoration purposes.

When confronted with the prospect of a redundant listed synagogue, please turn in the first instance to Jewish Heritage UK. We can liaise on your behalf with the relevant Division of English Heritage, Historic Scotland, the Royal Commissions on Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales/Scotland or the Department of the Environment in Belfast, which advise the Department for Culture, Media & Sport in London on protected buildings.

Please alert us at the earliest opportunity. *Failure to comply with statutory law can result in prosecution.*

NON-LISTED SYNAGOGUES

Your soon-to-be-closed synagogue may not be listed. However, it is likely to fall within the remit of the national Survey of the Jewish Built Heritage, which is associated with Jewish Heritage UK. This project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and the Royal Institute of British Architects.

At your earliest opportunity please contact Dr Sharman Kadish, the Project Director, at Jewish Heritage UK (address below), in order to ensure that your synagogue is assigned high priority for professional emergency recording by Survey staff. Arrangements will be made for a team of field workers to visit your synagogue to carry out a full architectural survey including photography.

RECORDING CHECKLIST

We present here a simple checklist of self-help procedures for the guidance of the public. You require no specialist expertise to play a part in preserving our unique Anglo-Jewish heritage!

When a synagogue is about to close:

Photograph the building, both exterior and interior. Snapshots are adequate, but do not be shy to approach Jewish Heritage UK for professional assistance. General conservation agencies, including English Heritage, have photographic departments which may be able to help.

Record the address and exact location of the synagogue. Record also the name of the architect and builder, and the date of construction. This information is often on the foundation stone of the synagogue.

Draw a simple sketch groundplan of the site of the synagogue, showing the location of any adjacent buildings such as rabbi's house, schoolroom, communal hall and *mikveh*. Ideally, a local architect or architectural student may be willing to do a scale groundplan and measured drawings of the existing buildings. Jewish Heritage UK is happy to advise on recording techniques to ensure that they are compatible with the National Monuments Record.

Locate any original architects' plans of the synagogue which may have survived, as well as old title and trust deeds. These may give some information about the history of the building, which may have undergone alterations over time.

Draw up an inventory of the contents of the synagogue, giving a brief description of each item. These will include both movable objects and fixtures and fittings, for example:

Sifrei Torah and Ritual Silver: breastplates, *rimonim*, pointers and mantles; *Havdalah* boxes, *kiddush* cups, candlesticks, *menorot*

Furniture: Ark, *Bimah*, *Shtender*, pulpit, pews, chairs, tables, cupboards, *sandek*/Elijah/bridal chair

Hung plaques: Memorial/donor/Roll of Honour/Royal Family boards, *Shiviti* boards, paintings, photographs, *Omer* calendars, clocks

Textiles: carpets, *huppah*, *parokhet*, pulpit fall, *talesim*

Manuscript and Printed material: Scrolls e.g. *Megillot Esther*, *tefillin*, *mezuzot*, *seforim*

Stained or Coloured Glass

Metal and Brasswork: chandeliers, lamp standards, bookrests, circumcision instruments

Congregational Records: *Pinkasim*, minute books, burial registers, leases, correspondence files, etc.

Take steps to ensure that items removed from the premises are *properly stored* to prevent theft or deterioration. Recommended repositories include:

Sifrei Torah, Ritual silver: Secure bank vault or with parent synagogue organisation in London. Rare pieces may be loaned or donated to the Jewish Museums in London or Manchester.

Paintings, rare *seforim*, textiles, *Shiviti* boards: with parent synagogue organisation in London or Jewish Museums.

Memorial Tablets, Roll of Honour Boards: Removal and reconsecration at local Jewish cemetery, usually inside the *Ohel*. N.B. Memorials cemented to the walls and foundation stones may NOT be removed from listed buildings without permission from the listing authority (see above note on Listed Synagogues).

Stained Glass: Removal to the London Stained Glass Repository or equivalent outside the capital to prevent vandalism, which often affects unused ecclesiastical buildings. N.B. Stained glass may NOT be removed from listed buildings without permission from the listing (see above note on Listed Synagogues).

Archives and old photographs: Place in a public repository, where they may be correctly stored, catalogued and made available for inspection on written application. Judaica collections of national importance are held at the London Metropolitan Archives (London material only) and at Anglo-Jewish Archives at the Hartley Library, University of Southampton. Local Record Offices are usually keen to acquire material relating to minority communities in their area. Deposit on a loan basis and guaranteed access for the depositing body can generally be arranged. The Jewish Museum, the Manchester Jewish Museum and the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre in Glasgow also collect material, photographs and all kinds of memorabilia and artifacts other than documents.

Marriage Registers of defunct congregations MUST be handed over to the Board of Deputies in London. *This is a statutory requirement.* They must at all times be kept in a damp-proof and fireproof safe.

Original Architects' plans: Ideally, deposit with the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects in London (RIBA) or the local Record Office. This may be arranged *via* Jewish Heritage UK. Even where deposit is either not desired or not possible please contact Jewish Heritage UK to arrange for photographic copies to be made.

Remove all *talesim*, *tefillin*, *mezuzot*, prayer books and other *seforim* on vacation of the building. Any such items which are in poor condition should be deposited in a *genizah* or buried. Contact your burial society for advice. Label books (*except* rare books - see above) in good condition, to identify the synagogue which they came from, as a sign of continuity with its former congregation.

The Manchester Jewish Representative Council Heritage Committee will be pleased to give advice for northern communities.

CONCLUDING INSTRUCTIONS

At a later date, items in store may be recycled in a new synagogue building. When this happens, it is important to have an accurate record of where they came from originally (their provenance). Jewish Heritage UK wishes to encourage the creation of a central inventory of Jewish artifacts. Such an inventory would ensure the safekeeping of valuable artifacts and would be a considerable aid to art historians. Please help by sending copies of your Inventory to the Director for filing in a secure place, accessible to *bona fide* researchers by written permission only.

Remember to send copies of your completed survey and photographs to Jewish Heritage UK, which will ensure that they are deposited with the National Monuments Record.

Consider affixing a plaque to the exterior wall of the vacated building, indicating that it was formerly a synagogue. English Heritage and its equivalent bodies in Scotland, Wales, N. Ireland as well as Local Authorities and Local Amenity Societies such as the Victorian Society, can help here. Jewish Heritage UK will be happy to approach the relevant body on your behalf.

For further information, please contact:

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