

# SYNAGOGUE STATISTICS AND THE JEWISH POPULATION OF GREAT BRITAIN, 1900-70

S. J. Prais\*

## 1. *Introduction*

**A**S part of its programme of establishing a basic statistical reporting system for the Anglo-Jewish community, the Research Unit of the Board of Deputies has been compiling information on synagogue membership and synagogue buildings. Much of this information had been gathered with the help of the Board's administrative returns, and in the course of the Unit's earlier work on population statistics;<sup>1</sup> as the value of this source of information became apparent a number of additional inquiries were undertaken in order to prepare the present account.

Synagogues are, of course, the central institution of Jewish life, and changes in their number and character are bound to reflect important developments in the community. In this paper, apart from surveying the number, size, and geographical distribution of synagogues, so providing a synoptic view of the community, we use this source of information in an attempt to cast light on a number of topics of more general interest. First, we have been able to obtain a distribution of the Jewish population among London boroughs on the basis of synagogue membership; from this the density of the Jewish population in the various areas has been calculated. Such knowledge is of obvious value to Jewish synagogal, educational, and welfare organizations; it is also of no little importance to local government authorities who, in making provisions out of general rates and taxation to support Jewish institutions, need to know to what extent the Jewish population within their boundaries justifies separate facilities. Second, our survey provides some indication of how the community as a whole has allocated its capital budget in the past decade to synagogue building as compared,

\* This paper has been prepared with the help of the staff of the Board of Deputies' Statistical and Demographic Research Unit: Mrs. M. Hyman, Miss V. Korn, and Mrs. M. Schmool. Thanks are due to them, and also to Mr. N. Levy (Board of Deputies), Mr. N. Rubin (United Synagogue), and the Board's Research Committee for help and comments on an earlier draft.

for example, with school building. As is known, communal financing of such capital projects is not co-ordinated in the United Kingdom, but is the result of independent decisions by numerous more or less independent committees. It should be of interest both to the student of communal affairs, and to those who participate in those decisions, to see how the total sums are allocated, and how this may relate to communal priorities. Third, we examine the trends in this century of the total number of synagogues; the Registrar General in his annual reports has indicated that the number of synagogues reached a peak in 1952 and has since declined by some 22 per cent. We examine whether this recorded decline is to be relied upon, and whether it can be regarded as indicating a decline in the community's size.

It is hoped to maintain (and to bring up to date) our register of synagogues, their membership and seating capacity, and to issue reports on developments from time to time. This register may also facilitate future analyses of population movements within the country.

## 2. *Number, size, and distribution of synagogues*

According to our inquiries there were 375 synagogues in Britain in 1970, of which 199, or 53 per cent, were in London. About two-thirds of the Jewish population live in London, and since synagogues on average have approximately the same number of seats in London and in the provincial centres, it appears that London has also fewer synagogue seats in relation to its population than have the provincial centres.

While there are a number of very large synagogues—there are a score in Britain with over a thousand seats—the average synagogue has only 337 seats, of which 194 are for men and 143 for women (these are rounded figures). At the other extreme, our inquiries show that there are about a hundred synagogues in Britain with less than a hundred seats each, and that these are predominantly to be found in the provinces. Our records at this lower end are probably not entirely complete in that some of the smaller *minyanim*, which meet mostly in private houses and are situated predominantly in the London area, have not sent in returns; but in our view it is unlikely that more than one per cent of the country's synagogue seating is involved. It has also to be noted that our survey related to the 'seating capacity' of synagogues, and it is conceivable that a more detailed inquiry, in which permanent and temporary seating were distinguished, might yield a slightly different picture.<sup>2</sup>

In London the average synagogue has 337 seats; in the provinces the average is only slightly lower at 335 seats (counting places for men and women together). In terms of membership, London synagogues are nearly twice as large as provincial synagogues; they have an average of 300 male members, compared with 160 in the provinces.

Britain as a whole has 126,000 synagogue seats. In relation to our

## SYNAGOGUE STATISTICS IN GREAT BRITAIN

estimated population total of 410,000, there are seats for only one person in three—if all wished to come at the same time. But that, no doubt, is not a realistic statement; women are not generally regarded as being under a strict obligation to attend, and it may therefore be better to confine the calculation to men and, in addition, to make an allowance for those who are too young or too infirm to attend (say, 15 per cent). But even on this more limited basis, there are male seats for only one man in every  $2\frac{1}{2}$ .

TABLE I. *Synagogue seating for men in comparison with the Jewish population, London and main provincial centres, 1970*

	<i>Jewish population<sup>(a)</sup></i>	<i>No. of synagogues</i>	<i>Synagogue seats for men</i>	<i>Seats per 100 men in population<sup>(b)</sup></i>
London	280,000	199	40,476	29
Manchester	36,000	30	7,482	42
Leeds	19,400	10	4,285	44
Glasgow	13,400	11	3,658	55
Liverpool	7,500	9	1,878	50
Brighton and Hove	7,500	5	1,108	30
Birmingham	6,300	5	1,413	45
Southend and Westcliff	4,500	3	908	40
Other provincial centres	35,400	103	11,635	66
<b>Total</b>	<b>410,000</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>72,843</b>	<b>36</b>

Notes: (a) The population estimates are taken from the calculations prepared for our previous paper (Prais and Schmool, *op. cit.*, p. 15).

(b) The male population has been taken as half the total population.

In Table 1 (see last column) we compare the number of seats for men with the estimated male population in the major towns. It appears that at present the provinces are very much better provided with synagogue seating than London is, there being nearly twice as many seats in relation to the population in the provinces as there are in London. No doubt this reflects the declining nature of many provincial communities—especially of the smaller communities which are grouped together in the table as ‘other provincial centres’—for whom synagogues were built many years ago when their Jewish populations were larger; but it also seems likely that London, as any large metropolis, has a higher proportion of unattached persons whose visits to a synagogue are relatively infrequent. Consequently there may be a greater reliance on temporary seating, which has usually not been included in our returns.

The relative paucity of seats in the metropolis and their relative general excess in the provinces appear also in the comparison of seating with *membership* shown in Table 2 (instead of comparing seats with *population*, as in Table 1). In London there are seats for only 67 per cent

of male members; in the smaller towns ('other provincial centres' in Table 2) there are on the contrary more seats than members and, on average, in these towns there are one-and-a-third seats per male member. The larger provincial towns distinguished in the table fall between these extremes: Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, and Liverpool have an excess of seats; Birmingham has a small deficiency, and the two coastal centres in the South-East—Brighton and Southend—have deficiencies of seats in proportions similar to London.<sup>3</sup>

Each town, of course, has individual characteristics and problems which cannot be discussed in detail within the confines of a general survey such as this. The picture is complex, but the following appear to be the main factors to be kept in mind in comparisons of this kind. An excess of seats over membership in some towns indicates a declining

TABLE 2. *Synagogue seating for men in comparison with male synagogue membership, London and main provincial centres, 1970*

	<i>Synagogue seats for men</i>	<i>Male membership</i>	<i>Seats for 100 members</i>
London	40,476	60,066	67
Manchester	7,482	6,702	112
Leeds	4,285	3,817	112
Glasgow	3,658	2,769	132
Liverpool	1,878	1,674	112
Brighton and Hove	1,108	1,704	65
Birmingham	1,413	1,635	87
Southend and Westcliff	908	1,289	70
Other provincial centres	11,635	8,778	133
Total	72,843	88,434	82

community; but elsewhere such an excess may arise following the transfer of an established congregation to a new suburb (the old synagogue having been closed down), with too many seats being provided in the new building in the hope—not always justified—of eventual communal expansion. A deficiency of seating in relation to membership will be recorded where a new congregation has not yet acquired a permanent building or permanent seating, and will generally be accompanied by a reliance on temporary seating during High Holy Days when attendance is fuller. There are some towns where an excess of seating in some congregations is accompanied by a deficiency in others.

The drift of the general population from the rest of the country to London and the South-East in recent decades is one in which the Jewish community has undoubtedly participated; and it would not be surprising if the Jewish population, being traditionally more mobile, has moved more rapidly. In an earlier paper we suggested, on the basis of comparisons of marriages and deaths, that the provincial communities were declining in relation to London;<sup>4</sup> the present com-

## SYNAGOGUE STATISTICS IN GREAT BRITAIN

parisons of synagogue seating and membership, showing a general excess of seating in the provinces and a deficiency in London and in the South-East, are consistent with that view. The argument for emphasizing the London area in planning future communal facilities is thus re-inforced by those latest comparisons; but, of course, the statistics should not be taken as suggesting that the nature of the facilities in the provinces is adequate in all respects.

Having regard to the great deficiency of seating in London (a deficiency that is both absolutely and relatively great), a further analysis of the London returns has been made according to synagogue grouping. This shows (Table 3) that there is a low seating-ratio for all the groups distinguished, with the exception of right-wing orthodox synagogues.

TABLE 3. *Synagogue seating for men in comparison with male membership in London, by synagogue groups, 1970*

	<i>Synagogue seats for men</i>	<i>Male membership</i>	<i>Seats per 100 members</i>
Central Orthodox			
United Synagogue	21,494	30,111	72
Federation	7,498	10,058	75
Independent	2,011	3,283	61
Right-wing Orthodox	2,971	1,564	190
Sephardi	1,412	2,691	53
Total Orthodox	35,386	47,707	74
Reform	2,320*	7,150	29
Liberal	2,770*	5,209	53
Total Progressive	5,090	12,359	41
<hr/>			
Total London	40,476	60,066	67

Note: \* Male seats taken as half the total number of seats; see text.

As is well known, synagogues in the latter group are well attended not only by heads of families—who are registered members of the synagogue—but also by their children (who, of course, are not registered as members); consequently in those synagogues it is usual to find more seats than there are registered members.

For the progressive synagogues (Reform and Liberal), seating is not segregated by sex; for purposes of comparison with other synagogue groups we show the male membership, and against that figure we show half the total number of seats in the synagogue—on the assumption that men and women are equally provided for. On this basis, there are seats for only 41 per cent of male members. Even if it were thought that in progressive synagogues two-thirds of the seats may be regarded as male seats (for the purposes of the present comparisons), there would still be seats for only 53 per cent of members. Both these proportions

fall below those for the Central Orthodox groups; however, many of the Reform synagogues are relatively new and will not yet have acquired seating for all their members, so contributing to the low average shown for this group.

The Sephardi community is shown as having relatively few seats, and this is to be attributed to the heavy immigration in the past fifteen years. Here, too, a number of new communities have recently established synagogues in temporary premises which as yet have no permanent seating.

### 3. *Density of the Jewish population of London*

Two-thirds of the Jewish community of Great Britain is to be found in the Greater London area, but there is little precise information about where, in that vast area, the community currently resides. In a previous generation there may have been no need to rely on anything other than general impressions: the East End was then the centre of the community (the Great Synagogue, the Beth Din, and other institutions were all to be found there), and the few outlying centres were well known and relatively small. Subsequently, as the community grew and spread, more careful studies have been made of synagogue membership to show the evolution of the London community and its diffusion into 'suburbia';<sup>5</sup> the present paper goes somewhat further and provides current estimates for each of the London boroughs on the basis of synagogue affiliation.

These new estimates, while based on synagogue membership, embody other information as well. First, we have taken into account the fact that not all members today live near the synagogue to which they belong; this is especially true for many East End synagogues, and for some of the larger metropolitan synagogues. Ideally, all synagogue membership lists should be analysed, and any members living outside the synagogue's immediate vicinity should be allocated to their place of residence. Owing to limitation of resources, we were obliged to confine ourselves to a restricted number of such analyses, but we believe we have taken into account most of the synagogues for which this factor is important.<sup>6</sup> In total, we redistributed 19.8 per cent of synagogue members to other boroughs. While we believe our results give a correct overall impression, full geographical accuracy cannot be claimed. This is especially so if a synagogue is near the border between two boroughs; in such cases we have treated the members of both boroughs as if they were resident in that borough in which the synagogue is situated (for example, the synagogue for the Bromley-Lewisham region is situated in Lewisham and, though many members live in Bromley, we have not counted them among those redistributed).

Second, we have transformed these adjusted statistics of synagogue membership in each area into estimates of the total Jewish population

in that area. It should be emphasized that these estimates are approximate, being based on the ratio of population to membership found in an earlier study for London as a whole; but for most planning purposes approximate population figures are more useful than are precise membership figures. The estimated population is intended to include both those who are affiliated to synagogues through 'family membership' and those not affiliated to a synagogue but whose sole attachment to Judaism would be an eventual Jewish burial.<sup>7</sup>

No doubt the assumption that the non-affiliated population is geographically distributed in the same way as the affiliated population is not entirely correct, but there is no easy way of improving upon it. It may be thought more realistic to assume that non-affiliated Jews would reside in areas of lower Jewish density, where the scope and social pressure making for affiliation are more limited. On that ground it could be argued that we have over-estimated the Jewish population in the denser areas, and under-estimated it elsewhere. On the other hand, there is an off-setting factor in that family size is likely to be greater among the more affiliated sections of the community,<sup>8</sup> and, since these tend to live in the denser areas, our procedure (of using a common ratio of population to membership) would lead to a relative under-estimate of the population in denser areas. On balance, we suspect the first factor may be more important, but it is clearly not possible to be certain about the matter. We doubt very much whether more precise estimates of the Jewish population by boroughs is possible in the absence of an official census, or of an intensive sample survey of the non-affiliated section of the community which—it hardly needs saying—would be both a difficult and an expensive task.

The results of our calculations are set out in Table 4. The greater part of the Jewish population, it will be noted, lives in the outer London area (158,600 out of the total of 273,000). In this it reflects the distribution of the general population, which has 67 per cent living in outer London; but the Jewish proportion is somewhat lower, at 58 per cent. Thus, notwithstanding the well-known drift of the Jewish population in recent decades towards the suburbs, the Jewish population remains somewhat less 'suburbanized' than the general population.

Certain regions, of course, have a very much heavier concentration of Jews than have others. The greatest Jewish density (taken as the proportion of the Jewish to the general population) is to be found in the borough of Barnet, where it appears that as much as 19 per cent of the population is Jewish. Taken together with the adjacent areas of Brent, Harrow, and Camden, where the densities are about 7 per cent, these 'north-western' boroughs account for an estimated Jewish population of 110,000.

The second densest borough is Hackney (in North London), at 16 per cent, but even with the adjacent boroughs of Islington, Haringey,

S. J. PRAIS

TABLE 4. *Estimated distribution of the Jewish population in relation to the general population of London, by boroughs (in order of density)*

	<i>Estimated Jewish population, 1970</i>	<i>General population, 1967</i>	<i>Proportion Jewish/general</i>
		<i>Thousands</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Inner London</i>			
Hackney*	41,100	249	16.5
Westminster*	24,600	259	9.5
Tower Hamlets and City*	15,700	203	7.7
Camden*	14,400	238	6.1
Kensington and Chelsea*	4,500	213	2.1
Lambeth	5,600	338	1.7
Hammersmith*	2,600	212	1.2
Lewisham	2,100	290	0.7
Wandsworth	1,700	330	0.5
Islington*	1,100	255	0.5
Greenwich	700	231	0.3
Southwark	300	301	0.1
Total (Inner London)	114,400	3,119	3.7
<i>Outer London</i>			
Barnet*	58,900	315	18.6
Redbridge*	18,900	245	7.7
Brent*	20,200	293	6.9
Harrow*	14,400	208	6.9
Enfield*	11,400	267	4.3
Waltham Forest*	8,900	238	3.7
Haringey*	7,600	254	3.0
Newham*	4,200	183	1.6
Kingston	1,400	145	1.0
Ealing*	2,500	303	0.8
Merton	1,900	257	0.7
Richmond	1,300	179	0.7
Havering*	1,600	251	0.6
Barking*	1,100	170	0.6
Hounslow*	800	207	0.6
Sutton	900	165	0.5
Hillingdon*	900	234	0.4
Croydon	1,000	328	0.3
Bromley	700	302	0.2
Bexley	—	215	—
Total (Outer London)	158,600	4,762	3.3
Grand total	273,000	7,811	3.5

\* Boroughs north of river Thames.

and Waltham Forest, the total Jewish population in these North London boroughs amounts to only 59,000. This represents a considerable decline from the estimate made less than twenty years ago of 85,000–100,000 Jews in North London.<sup>9</sup>

The old centre of London Jewry consisting of the East End and its extensions, which at its peak two generations ago had a population of 125,000 Jews,<sup>10</sup> is today to be compared with the population of 39,000 resident in Tower Hamlets, Newham, and Redbridge. Notwithstanding



this sharp decline in numbers, the density in that region remains fairly high, at about 6 per cent.

The only other centre of Jewry with a high density (10 per cent) is Westminster, which includes St. John's Wood and Maida Vale, and has a Jewish population of 25,000.

These four centres—the North-West, North, East, and Westminster—account for 85 per cent of London Jewry; the remaining 15 per cent are spread rather thinly over the other twenty boroughs, with a median density of only about half of one per cent. The low densities south of the river also deserve notice: the average density in all boroughs south of the Thames is no more than half of one per cent, compared with an average of 5 per cent on the north side.

#### 4. *The age of synagogues and the number built in the last decade*

Almost all synagogues (88 per cent) were able to give us the year in which their present building was acquired or built; it appears that half of the synagogue buildings have been acquired or built since the end of the Second World War. In other words, the median age of synagogue buildings in 1970 was twenty-five years. It is curious that in 1851, when the official Census included questions relating to religion and to synagogues, the median age of the fifty-three synagogues then in existence was found to be very similar, at twenty-three years. (Incidentally, five of the synagogue buildings included in the 1851 Census are still in use: Bevis Marks, Plymouth, Exeter, Cheltenham, and Ramsgate.)

The age of the synagogue *building* has to be distinguished from the age of the *congregation* to which the synagogue building belongs. The congregation is generally founded first, but it takes time until its resources are adequate to make proper arrangements for a synagogue. We found that the average congregation was established some twenty years before its present building was acquired (the median year of foundation of the congregations now in existence is 1926). Some of this interval is associated with the post-war restoration of synagogues damaged during the war, and with the postponement of synagogue building during and immediately after the war; but no doubt the general replanning of city centres, and the movement of the population towards the suburbs, have also been significant factors.

No fewer than 67 new synagogues, a fifth of the present number, have been built or acquired in the last decade; they provide seats for 26,000 persons. These new synagogues are on average slightly larger (having 7 per cent more seats) than the older synagogues still in existence. Of the total new seating provided, 85 per cent has been for Orthodox congregations, 11 per cent for Reform congregations, and 4 per cent for Liberal congregations; these proportions are similar to those found previously for the distribution of marriages and population by synagogue group.<sup>11</sup>

For purposes of comparison we collected information on the number of new places provided at Jewish day schools during that period. Our figures included new buildings and extensions which augmented or replaced older buildings; we arrived at a total of 5,100 new places. This is under a fifth of the number of new synagogue seats provided in that period. Nearly half the new school places were provided as substitutes for the older accommodation, and the net increase in school capacity in the decade 1961-71 was only 2,800 places.<sup>12</sup>

It is tempting to convert these figures into money terms but, in the absence of a much more detailed inquiry than we have been able to undertake, only the grossest of comparisons is possible; the figures that follow are therefore quoted with considerable reserve. We understand that the average capital expenditure in providing a 'synagogue seat' (with all that goes with it) in that decade has been roughly in the region of £250; the total cost of providing 26,000 synagogue seats has therefore been some £6½ million, corresponding to an expenditure of about £1.50 for each year in the past decade for each member of the community.

The capital expenditure involved in providing a 'school desk' (with all that goes with it) on average has probably not differed very much from that of providing the average synagogue seat. For schools meeting official standards, the total capital expenditure may well have been higher (perhaps by 50 per cent, or even more in special cases); but for the many private schools (opened in converted houses, etc.) the cost may have been only about half that level. There are great variations, but we suspect that the average was close to £250. The total capital expenditure incurred in the past decade may therefore be estimated to be in the region of £1½-2 million. It must not be forgotten, however, that the government makes substantial grants (at present up to 80 per cent) for those schools that receive its approval, and many of the larger schools fell into that category; the net amount met by the community out of its *own* resources for capital expenditure on day schools (apart, of course, from its contributions by way of general taxation) we therefore think has in all likelihood been under £1 million, or, say, under 25p per person per year.

It must also be kept in mind, if a stricter comparison is to be made, that synagogue buildings often include classrooms and reception halls, and hence the determination of the net expenditure on educational facilities of all types (day schools, synagogue classes, etc.) is not a straightforward matter. Account would also have to be taken, in a fuller calculation, of the payment made for the repair of war damage to synagogue buildings. But in the end we suspect it would hardly be surprising if a detailed calculation showed that the community's net capital expenditure on synagogues in the past decade was between five and ten times that on day schools.

## SYNAGOGUE STATISTICS IN GREAT BRITAIN

For some years there has been a grave shortage of places at Jewish day schools, especially in London. In the light of the above estimates, one can only wonder whether the correct decisions have been taken; and, indeed, whether the authority of the community's central institutions has been adequate to ensure the best use of available resources, and to take full advantage of the opportunities for the creation of day schools under the provisions of the Education Acts.

### 5. *The rise and decline in the number of synagogues*

The number of synagogues in England and Wales apparently reached a peak in the 1940s, but it is difficult today to be sure exactly when the peak occurred and the precise number of synagogues then in existence. We have two sources of information: the first, provided by the Registrar General and relating to buildings certified as synagogues, gives 428

TABLE 5. *Number of synagogues in England and Wales according to the Registrar General and The Jewish Year Book (selected years 1901-71)*

	<i>Registrar General</i>	<i>Year Book</i>
1901	151 <sup>(a)</sup>	142
1911	203	238
1921	259	254 <sup>(b)</sup>
1931	295	305
1941	373	333 <sup>(c)</sup>
1947	410	415
1952	428	392
1957	377	382
1962	400	374
1967	332	373
1968	—	377
1969	—	371
1970	—	368
1971	—	367

Notes: (a) Relates to 1903 (the Registrar General's figure for 1901 appears doubtful to us).

(b) Relates to 1916 (no *Year Book* was published for 1921).

(c) Relates to 1940 (no *Year Book* was published for 1941).

as the highest number of synagogues, and that number was reached in 1952; the second source is provided by the lists of communities and their synagogues in *The Jewish Year Book*, according to which there was a peak of 415 synagogues in 1947.

As will be seen from Table 5, there are considerable discrepancies between the two sources: in some years one source gives a higher figure, and in other years the other. It will, however, be understood that the compilers of these statistics have to rely on returns from synagogues, many of which do not employ secretarial staff, while some have no paid staff at all. Consequently, notification and certification of new synagogues tend to be delayed, in some cases perhaps by several years;

and when a synagogue is closed, often it will not be removed by the compiler from his records until some years have passed without a return having been received. In years when the number of synagogues is increasing (for example, following a period of heavy immigration) both sources will tend to understate the true number; and when the number is declining both will tend to overstate the true number. It is therefore likely that the true peak was reached somewhat earlier than shown by either of the two sources. In our view, the peak probably occurred in the early or mid-1940s and is largely to be attributed to the many temporary communities that were set up following the population dispersion from the main conurbations at the beginning of the war. Most of these communities were subsequently disbanded.

There were some 150 synagogues at the beginning of the century (see Table 5) and the growth in the subsequent half-century parallels in an approximate way what is known of the growth of the Jewish population. For 1901, the total Jewish population of Great Britain was estimated at 230,000,<sup>13</sup> and bore a roughly similar relation to the number of synagogues as does the present population. However, for earlier years, little is known about the size of synagogues and total synagogue seating, and the comparison is not necessarily very meaningful.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Registrar General, the decline in synagogue numbers since 1947 was followed by a short-lived rise in 1962; but we find it difficult to believe that this is more than an aberration in the compilation process to which we have referred. The smoother decline shown by the *Year Book* is more likely to be true.

To cast light on the nature of the decline in the number of synagogues in the last twenty years or so, we compared our list for 1971 with that in the *Year Book* for the peak year 1947. It was found that the net decline of some fifty synagogues between 1947 and 1971 consisted of 140 synagogues that were closed during that period, offset by some ninety new synagogues. A study of the names of the synagogues in the two groups casts a very clear light on the geographical movements of the population in the past generation, and on the changes in the religious complexion of the community. These changes may be summarized as follows.

(a) The great mass of small synagogues in the East End have gone; some forty have closed (mostly affiliated to the Federation of Synagogues). This is the single most substantial change during the period.

(b) Some sixty provincial synagogues have been closed. Many of them were in the 'evacuation areas' (such as Amersham, Chesham, Hinckley, Walsall), but others had been established for longer periods and have suffered from the long-term drift away from the outlying regions (for instance, Durham, Huddersfield, North Shields, and West Hartlepool).

(c) In London the new trends in the community are mirrored by

## SYNAGOGUE STATISTICS IN GREAT BRITAIN

some twenty or so new right-wing orthodox synagogues (mostly in the Stamford Hill area, and generally small), five new Sephardi synagogues, eleven new Reform synagogues, and eight new Liberal synagogues. But the community is still dominated by its traditional Ashkenazi-Central-Orthodox complexion, as is shown by the establishment of twenty new United synagogues (mainly in the Outer London area) and nine new Federation synagogues (partly in North-West London, and partly in Outer London).

(d) In the provinces (outside the Home Counties), the proportion of new progressive congregations is striking. Seventeen new synagogues have appeared and, of these, twelve term themselves Progressive, Reform, or Liberal.

These manifold changes indicate that the community's institutions in the last twenty years have adapted in a lively way to changing circumstances. While there has been a net decline in the number of synagogues, those which have been closed have probably been of smaller average size than those which have been opened.<sup>15</sup> In terms of seating capacity, if there has been a change in the post-war period, it seems probable that it has not been very great.

### 6. Conclusions

The main conclusions of this survey are as follows.

- (a) There were 375 synagogues in Great Britain in 1970 with, on average, 240 male members and 337 seats (of which 194 were for men and 143 for women).
- (b) London has relatively fewer synagogue seats in relation to its Jewish population than have the provincial centres. In relation to male membership, London has fewer seats than male members, whereas in the provincial centres there are generally more male seats than male members. This pattern is consistent with a general reduction in the size of provincial communities, and with the long-term general drift of the population towards London and the South-East.
- (c) On the basis of the addresses of synagogue members, estimates have been prepared of the distribution of the London community according to boroughs. The North-Western boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Harrow, and Camden now account for the largest concentration of the community (an estimated 110,000 out of 280,000 in the Greater London area); the proportion of Jews to the general population is highest in the borough of Barnet, where it is estimated to be 19 per cent.
- (d) Half the synagogue buildings now in use have been built since the war ended. In the last decade 67 new synagogues have been built; the capital expenditure on these by the community was many times greater than that on Jewish day schools.

- (e) While the total number of synagogues has declined in the past twenty years, many of those closed were either in evacuation areas or in the East End of London, and were probably of smaller size than the new synagogues opened during that period. The total number of synagogue seats has therefore probably not changed very much.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The main results have been published in earlier issues of *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*. See, especially, S. J. Prais and Marlena Schmool, 'The Size and Structure of the Anglo-Jewish Population, 1960-65', vol. X, no. 1, June 1968.

<sup>2</sup> The synagogue with the largest permanent seating capacity in London is St. John's Wood Synagogue with 1,500 seats; but Edgware may claim a larger total of 1,900 if temporary seating under the same roof is included. The largest synagogue in the provinces is the Holy Law Synagogue in Manchester with 1,300 seats.

<sup>3</sup> No account has been taken in this inquiry of the small degree of multiple membership that is known to exist; but it is not thought to be of substantial dimensions (perhaps 5 per cent) and is unlikely to affect the argument.

<sup>4</sup> Prais and Schmool, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> See V. D. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England, 1850-1950*, London, 1954; and his 'The Rise of Jewish Suburbia', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, vol. XXI, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> The membership of the following synagogues was analysed and redistributed: Liberal Synagogue (St. John's Wood); West London Synagogue (Reform); Bevis Marks and Lauderdale Road (Sephardi); Central and New West End (United); and New London (Central Orthodox). In addition, the membership of fourteen Central Orthodox synagogues in the East End (Tower Hamlets) was redistributed on the basis of the membership of five of them. The basis for redistribution was the postal district given against the member's address.

<sup>7</sup> These matters are discussed more fully in an earlier paper (Prais and

Schmool, op. cit., pp. 6, 19); the ratio of population to synagogue membership was there found to be 4.6.

<sup>8</sup> This is confirmed by the preliminary results of a study in progress in the London region of Jewish fertility by religious grouping.

<sup>9</sup> See Lipman, *Social History . . .*, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> See Prais and Schmool, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. J. Braude's figures in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 July 1971.

<sup>13</sup> See S. Rosenbaum, 'A contribution to the study of vital and other statistics of the Jews in the United Kingdom', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol. 68, 1905, p. 526.

<sup>14</sup> Returns of synagogue membership made to the Board of Deputies at the beginning of each session are available from the middle of the nineteenth century, but are not helpful for our present purposes since (a) not all synagogues were affiliated to the Board; and (b) the practice of being a seat-holder or member was not so widespread in earlier days, many free seats being normally provided for the poorer members of the community. Thus in 1901 only 108 synagogues were affiliated out of 142 recorded in the *Year Book*; the average membership for these synagogues was only 150, which may be compared with a present-day average male membership of 230. For the reasons given, it cannot be concluded that synagogues were smaller at the beginning of the century, but equally, that possibility cannot be rejected.

<sup>15</sup> No statistics are available on the seating capacity of the synagogues that have closed in this period, and no precise comparison is possible.