

Cromwell and the 'readmission' of the Jews to England, 1656

by Barbara Coulton

Note: this article first appeared in the 2001 issue of the Journal of the Cromwell Association, Cromwelliana

On 5 February 1906 a banquet was held by the Anglo-Jewish Historical Society at the Hotel Grand Central in London, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Whitehall Conference of December 1655. At that time 4 February was observed, mistakenly, as 'Resettlement Day'. A letter had been received from Theodore Roosevelt who had addressed the sister society in America on the 250th anniversary of Jewish settlement there. A toast to the king was proposed by the chief secretary for Ireland, James Boyce: 'At no time is this toast a mere formality in the Anglo-Jewish community, but tonight this great festival of Religious Liberty invests it with special significance.' Without apparent irony, the loyal toast prefaced speeches in praise of Oliver Cromwell, the saviour of Anglo-Jewry, and the 'great moral awakening' of which the Whitehall Conference was a manifestation. The banquet, the idea of the society's founder Lucien Wolf, was in honour of two men: 'Cromwell, the great-hearted Protector, and Menasseh ben Israel [of Amsterdam], the devoted Jew.' They were 'twin champions of a wronged people, and heralds of a free state'. Speeches by Chief Rabbi Adler and Lord Rothschild followed, Rothschild speaking of 'the Jews who have lived in England and become Englishmen'. Sir Edward Sassoon MP, a Sephardic Jew, paid tribute to 'that sagacious and far-seeing statesman, Cromwell'. Robert Crewe-Milnes, earl of Crewe, a descendant of seventeenth-century London Jews, described Cromwell as 'no doubt part idealist and part man of business'; he praised him for his treatment of the Jews. Another speaker, Dr G.W. Prothero, evoked the image of Cromwell, like the Israelites of yore, going into battle 'with the name of Jehovah on his lips'. J. M. Hillesum of Amsterdam sent a message congratulating the Society, 'from Holland, the classic land of religious liberty'.¹

The Jewish Historical Society of England was inaugurated in 1893 at another eating-place, the rooms of the Maccabeans, a dining club founded two years earlier by Jewish professional men. In an early address Lucien Wolf declared that the tracing of Anglo-Jewish history was a religious and moral task, 'for it stands in the same relation to a community that personal repute does to an individual.' There would also be a search for founding fathers. The Whitehall Conference was assembled by Cromwell to discuss readmission of Jews, which he favoured, hence his role, acclaimed in 1906, as 'saviour'. Numerous modern accounts refer to readmission as

an event of 1656, the consequence of the mission of Rabbi Menasseh, but this version is now in need of revision. In fact, Lucien Wolf's pioneer research revealed the existence and importance of a community of crypto-Jews already in seventeenth-century London: 'they have a right to be honoured as the founders of our Community'. At the same time, Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler paid 'Homage' to Menasseh ben Israel whom he claimed 'as the virtual founder of our London community'. In 1896 the then president of the Society, Joseph Jacobs, commented on Wolf's paper 'The First English Jew': 'Without detracting at all from the high services rendered by the Amsterdam rabbi who was the spiritual founder of the London Hebrew Community, Mr Wolf has shown that Antonio Fernandez Carvajal [a crypto-Jew] must be regarded as its material and actual founder.' Thus were established alternative narratives which will be seen to pervade Anglo-Jewish historiography; these will have to be disentangled.²

Rabbi Adler compared Menasseh to Moses: neither reached the promised land, but this was no failure; he went so far as to claim that Menasseh 'obtained for his brethren the privilege of readmission into England'. This interpretation will be shown to be inaccurate, yet, over a century later, it is still advanced, for example by Amy Sturgis: 'Menasseh ben Israel fought for and won *de facto* Jewish readmission into England'. A major historian in this mode of interpretation, centred on the millenarian ideology of Menasseh ben Israel, is David Katz. Katz has lamented the fact that 'mainstream English historians consistently demonstrate a blind spot about Jewish themes', but his own preoccupation with 'Jewish themes' and with philosemitism has led him to give undue emphasis to that aspect of the 'readmission'. 'It is quite clear that motives of economics or trade had little to do with the readmission of the Jews to England', he has stated; and, 'without the firm basis of philo-Semitism ... the mission of Menasseh ben Israel would have been an utter failure'. This attitude has reinforced what we may call the Menasseh narrative. At a conference on Menasseh in the 1980s some speakers referred to 'our rabbi' with a passion like that of Rabbi Adler in the 1890s. The recent editors of Menasseh's *Hope of Israel* sum up that rabbi's role in a way reminiscent of Rabbi Adler: Menasseh 'led the Jewish people out of their isolation, heralded the imminent coming of a new era, and set out the divine plan for the destiny of the House of Israel which would be one day, according to Isaiah, the light of the world.'³ The year 1656 was indeed an important one for Jews in England, but the other

narrative, that of the crypto-Jews, needs to be reinstated; Cromwell's role must also be considered.

The context for the actions of Cromwell and Menasseh involved Protestant millenarianism and Jewish messianism, religious toleration, and the good of the state. Belief in the millennium and in the Second Coming of Christ was long-standing but received fresh impetus after the Reformation. A leading millenarian in seventeenth-century England was the Cambridge scholar Joseph Mede (1586-1638) whose interpretation of the Book of Revelation traced the historical application of apocalyptic prophecy. Other Biblical works such as Zechariah and Daniel contained passages which Mede applied to the Jews, comparing their expected conversion to that of Paul; their conversion would be a witness to Christ, and a reproof to the church of Rome; it would herald or coincide with the Second Coming. On the other hand, some Jews believed that *their* messiah would appear when they had been scattered throughout the world; they would be gathered again and led to Sion; Menasseh ben Israel held this belief. The return of the Jews to England was important to both sides: the new chosen people, Protestant England, would convert them; their reaching England would help the progress of Jewish messianism. (The two aims were of course incompatible.) Another factor in the acceptance of the Jews was the interest of puritan divines in the Hebrew language and its religious literature. In an extreme form this could lead to 'judaising' practices such as observing the Jewish sabbath; in general it took the form of 'philosemitism', examples of which will be cited.⁴

Despite the lack of information about Cromwell's early life, the period is not an entire vacuum. John Morrill, in an essay on 'The making of Oliver Cromwell', has identified a preacher referred to in a letter of Cromwell's in 1636: 'Dr Welles, a man for goodness and industry, and ability to do good every way, not short of any I know in England; and I am persuaded that sithence his coming, the Lord hath by him wrought much good amongst us'. This was Dr Walter Welles, preacher at Godmanchester near Huntingdon, who had studied at Leiden and was an acquaintance or friend of two very influential foreigners in England, Samuel Hartlib and John Dury. (Dury's father Robert had been minister to the Scottish church at Leiden; John had studied there and at Sedan.) These reformists had among their patrons Cromwell's kinsman Oliver St John. It was in a letter to Mrs St John in 1638 that Cromwell referred to his own

‘conversion’ (at a date unspecified): ‘I hated godliness, yet God had mercy on me ... pray for me, that he who hath begun a good work would perfect it to the day of Christ’. That last phrase is suggestive of the millenarian beliefs shared by many, including members of the Hartlib-Dury circle. Writing of this group, Hugh Trevor-Roper has pointed out that Cromwell’s intellectual world was largely theirs; while Charles Webster has illustrated Cromwell’s support for the group’s plans for educational reform, particularly the founding of Durham College. Webster also shows the importance of millenarianism to reformers and puritans.⁵

The lawyer John Sadler, closely associated with the Hartlib-Dury circle, was, like Dury, a key figure in the story of his friend Cromwell and the Jews. In his 1649 tract, *Rights of the Kingdom*, he declared his millenarian belief in the fifth monarchy prophesied by Daniel, the reign of Christ:

I did, and still doe, believe there may, and shall, be such a Monarchy ere long, through All the World ... I hope and believe, that God will come, and appear, ere long, to dwell in the World ... I could desire Him rather (if He pleased) in the still quiet Voyce, then in the rushing Wind, or Fire, or Thunder Claps.

Sadler, a noted Hebraist, was associated with the phenomenon of ‘philosemitism’. This was also part of the Hartlib-Dury programme, described by Richard Popkin as aimed at making ‘Christians more aware of what Jews actually believed and practised. This, in turn, would make Christianity “less offensive” to the Jews.’ An Amsterdam rabbi, Menasseh ben Israel, was nominated for a chair at the proposed Jewish college in London (an unfulfilled design), part of a reformed university according to the Hartlib scheme. As Popkin remarks, it seems odd that the rabbi should have considered joining a venture aimed at converting Jews, but he had difficulties with his own synagogue, partly because of his association with Christians. While in Holland in the 1640s Dury, who wished for the conversion of the Jews as well as the reconciliation of all Protestants, met Menasseh; he corresponded with him in 1649 on reports that the legendary ‘lost tribes’ of Israel had been identified in the Americas; this was important to the messianic dream of Menasseh and other Jews. Another philo-semite, the English baptist divine Henry Jessey, addressed his book *The Glory and Salvation of Jehuda and Israel* to the ‘dear’ and ‘eminent’ nation of the Jews, in

particular Menasseh. Jessey drew on rabbinic and kabbalistic prophecies to prove that these authorities supported Christian views about the Messiah; he believed that the Jews would be converted by 1658. He corresponded regularly with Menasseh who sent him a copy of his book *Esperanca de Israel – The Hope of Israel*; this work, also drawing on prophecy, aimed to show ‘that the day of the promised [Jewish] Messiah unto us doth draw near.’ Both books were published in 1650.⁶

Cromwell (guided by ‘providence’) was now a leading figure in national affairs. At a meeting of the General Council of the Army in November 1648 he dwelt on God’s part in current events, with examples from the history of the Jews of the Old Testament. ‘The end is to deliver this nation from oppression and slavery, to accomplish that work that God hath carried us on in, to establish our hopes of an end of justice and righteousness in it.’ That same month he advised his friend and kinsman Colonel Robert Hammond, governor of the Isle of Wight and custodian of the king: ‘seek to know the mind of God in all that chain of providence’. In another letter to Hammond he stated: ‘I have waited for the day to see union and right understanding between the godly people (Scots, English, Jews, Gentiles, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists and all).’ In December 1649, following the regicide and the setting up of a republic, Cromwell wrote from Ireland to his ‘very worthy friend’ John Sadler: ‘That a Divine Presence hath gone along with us in the late great transactions in this nation, I believe most good men are sensible of.’ He hoped for peace and for God’s ‘bringing in that Kingdom of glory and peace which He hath promised.’ (That promise was to be found in the New Testament, echoing Daniel: ‘the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels’.) More apocalyptic prophecies could be found in the Book of Revelation. It was in his 1649 letter that Cromwell offered Sadler the office of Chief Justice of Munster, which he declined; instead, he became master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, in August 1650, a position which would later prove helpful to the Jews in London.⁷

In that year Menasseh dedicated the Latin version of his book, *Spes Israelis*, to the new government of England and to Cromwell: ‘it is made known to me, and to others of our Nation [the Jewish community in Holland], by them who are so happy as near at hand, to observe your apprehensions, that you do vouchsafe to help us, not onely by your prayers’. Dury distributed copies of this Latin version, while an English

translation was made by Moses Wall, millenarian friend of Hartlib. Cromwell's personal involvement is attested later in a petition (on behalf of Menasseh's widow) by John Sadler to Richard Cromwell:

by some letters of your late royall father and others of note in this nation some of their synagogs were encouraged to send hither one of their cheife rabbines, Menasseh Ben Israel, for admittance and some freedome of trade in some of these ilands.

The importance of the Jewish community to Dutch commercial ascendancy in the seventeenth century has been shown by Jonathan Israel; from 1648 they were 'one of the vital components in the imposing edifice of Holland's global commerce.' In the spring of 1651 an important embassy went to Holland, in hopes of effecting a close Protestant alliance. At this time, as Timothy Venning points out, Cromwell was not in full charge of policy, but 'as Commander-in-Chief he had the major responsibility for national security, and was in control of the men who would have to carry out the Rump's decisions.'⁸

The ambassadors to the United Provinces were Walter Strickland, who had been the agent there of the Long Parliament, and Oliver St John, a political lawyer with no experience of foreign affairs. Their secretary was John Thurloe, who had several meetings with Menasseh. The purpose of the embassy, St John told the General Assembly of the States General, was 'to enter into a more intimate alliance, and nearer union, whereby a more real and intrinsic interest of each other may be contracted for their mutual good.' Several historians have stressed economic motives, but Steven Pincus notes that 'those who played the largest role in formulating the Rump's foreign policy at this stage were committed to a godly and republican alliance.' As evidence for the ideological motivation for the mission he comments on the choice of Oliver St John: 'His religious commonplace book, his patronage of Samuel Hartlib, and his letters to Oliver Cromwell leave little doubt that he was a Protestant apocalyptic.' The proposed alliance would bring political and religious as well as commercial benefits. Jonathan Israel comments: 'Everywhere there was debate and discussion over both the economic and religious implications of Jewish admission.' He sets the English initiative in a broader context: 'This was precisely the

time when the influx of Marrano refugees from Spain, and Sephardi exiles from Brazil, into Holland, was at its height and Dutch Sephardi Jewry at its most preoccupied with schemes for Jewish colonization.’⁹ The presence of a Sephardic merchant centre in England would benefit Dutch Jewry; it would also help English commerce – as Cromwell well knew.

Since before 1640 there had been established in London a small colony of Sephardic Jews, *marranos* or crypto-Jews, passing as Spanish merchants. The leader of the London group was Antonio Fernandez Carvajal whose history began with his leaving Portugal, possibly for the Canaries; trading interests brought him to London where he settled in the 1630s. By 1643 he had a position of importance, with a house and warehouse in Leadenhall Street; he traded with his own ships to the East and West Indies, Brazil, and other remote regions; his agents operated in all the mercantile centres of Europe. In 1643 he petitioned the House of Lords for payment for a shipment of gunpowder from Amsterdam; in 1649 he was one of five merchants to whom the Council of State gave the army contract for corn. As well as exotic imports, his trade in British manufactures brought in huge amounts of bullion, at a rate of £100,000 a year; this was particularly attractive to the government. Following S.R. Gardiner (a fellow-member of the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Society), Lucien Wolf commented: ‘It was really the deficiency of bullion in the country which, as early as 1643 ... suggested to Cromwell the desirability of settling Jewish merchants in London.’ The presence of Carvajal and his associates in London, worshipping as Jews in the privacy of their own homes, adds a further dimension to the question of the ‘readmission’ of Jews to England. (When in 1645 Carvajal and his household were denounced for not attending church, proceedings were quashed.)¹⁰

It was possibly at the time of the embassy to Holland that Menasseh was encouraged to draft his ‘Humble Addresses’ for a proposed visit to England. As Lucien Wolf observed, ‘the faithfulness and profitableness of the Jewish people were likely to weigh more with Cromwell than the relation of their dispersion to the Messianic age.’ The case for readmission was argued almost exclusively on grounds of political expediency. Although Cromwell appears to have shared Protestant millenarian hopes, his immediate concern was to legalise Jewish residence in England. That would have come about as a consequence of the proposed alliance with Holland; but negotiations

broke down. Soon after the return of the ambassadors to England the Council of State received a letter from Menasseh, the text of which does not survive. Anti-Dutch propaganda also followed the return; the Orangist support for Charles Stuart was perfidious, but God's mercy was soon evident in Charles's defeat at Worcester on 3 September 1651. Ralph Josselin, an Essex clergyman, wrote in his diary on 21 September: 'The Lord is to be feared for his judgments which he executeth, when the Hollander rejoyced in the false news of our fall, the enemy fell at Worcester ... oh feare, England, and honour god, least he turne the wheele upon thee also'. Only two days earlier he had expressed a millenarian belief (although in no way a radical): 'I am perswaded the present dispensacon is the breaking in pieces the kingdoms of the earth which god is entring on, and some time when this worke is advanced, will the Jewes appeare; and then comes in the happy season of the flocke.' He shared the belief that 1656 might be the apocalyptic year.¹¹

After Worcester, as John Dury explained to a newly-arrived German diplomat in September 1651, Cromwell alone held the direction of political and military affairs. Hermann Mylius, representing the count of Oldenburg, kept a diary while he waited for the Council of State to deal with his affair (renewal of a safeguard of neutrality). He had documents to be translated from Latin, which Dury undertook to do, discreetly so as not to transgress protocol: 'as an Ecclesiastical Person who does not meddle in secular matters, he also avoids affairs of state.' Dury was now in charge of the library at St James's House (Palace), with lodgings there, across the park from Whitehall. Like Hartlib he was part of an unofficial 'secretariat' which helped with translation of official documents. Another visitor to London was Roger Williams, founder of the colony at Providence, Rhode Island, friend of the native American Indians, and a proponent of complete religious toleration, in the hope that non-Christians would be won to participate in God's grace and mercy. Williams was staying near Charing Cross (possibly with his old friend Sir Henry Vane the younger). He wrote in April 1652: 'It hath pleased the Generall himself to send for me and to entertain many Discourses with me at Severall Times'; later he referred to Cromwell's interest in the American Indians. In 1652 Williams was re-working an earlier book, in response to further criticism by John Cotton of Boston. *The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody* reiterated the case for religious freedom. In the preface addressed to the parliament of the commonwealth, Williams cited the case of Holland:

State-necessity compelled the States of Holland to a prudent permission of different consciences ... Those prudent and prosperous States have gone far ... in taking off the yolk from the necks of Dutch and English, French yea, Popish and Jewish consciences. For all which (though but Mercy, though but Justice and humanity to fellow mankind) he that runs may read the truth of Gods never failing Promises, Blessed are the Mercifull for they shall obtain Mercy.

Why should England not follow this precedent: 'which may make your faces more to shine ... with a glory far transcending all your fairest neighbours Copies'? It is likely that this issue was touched on in the discourses with Cromwell, since the Dutch ambassadors were then in England and the mission of Menasseh was still under active consideration. In November 1652, with John Thurloe now secretary of state, a pass was issued by the Council 'for Menasseh ben Israel, a Rabbi of the Jewish nation, well reported of for his learning and good affection to the State, to come from Amsterdam'. The failure of the Anglo-Dutch negotiations and the ensuing war delayed the mission.¹²

According to newsletters of July 1653 there were consultations in the new parliament (the Nominated Assembly, nicknamed Barebone's Parliament) 'for bringing the Jews again into England, especially in hopes of converting them.' John Thurloe wrote, on 29 July, that among the motions in the House were some that 'the Jews might be admitted to trade as well as in Holland; ... but there is nothing yet done therein'. This parliament proved a disappointment to those hoping for a godly reformation; it resigned on 12 December. Four days later Cromwell accepted the role and title of Lord Protector; he would still need the approval of a conservative Council of State for measures he wanted to adopt, such as admission of Jews; there was also anti-semitism in London with which he would have to contend. In 1653 James Howell wrote to a friend at Amsterdam: 'touching Judaism, some corners of our city smell as rank of it as doth yours there.' The next move came from Amsterdam Jewry when Manuel Martinez (David Abrabanel) Dormido came to London in the autumn of 1654; he was accompanied by Menasseh's son Samuel. Jonathan Israel describes Dormido as 'an influential figure in the western Sephardic world'. He may already have served

Cromwell by passing intelligence from Amsterdam during the Anglo-Dutch war (which ended in April 1654). Dormido presented two petitions, endorsed by Cromwell: 'His Highnes is pleased in an especiall manner to recommend these ... to the speedy consideracon of the Councell, that the Peticion may receive all due satisfaction, and withall convenient speed.' The endorsements bear the signature of John Sadler, then acting as private secretary to Cromwell. One petition was personal, concerning Dormido's attempt to get compensation for losses in Brazil; the Council declared that it could not act as Dormido was a Dutch national; Cromwell later wrote on his behalf to John IV of Portugal. The second petition was for admission of Jews – Dormido declared himself to be 'of the Hebrew nation' – 'to be dwellers here with the same eaquallnesse and conveniences which your inland subjects doe enjoy'. This was rejected by the Council as unlawful, but Dormido remained in England. Another member of Carvajal's group, Simon de Caceres, helped Cromwell in 1654 in his enterprise in the West Indies, furnishing Thurloe with 'notes on Jamaica' and offering to engage young Jews secretly for an attack on Chile (an offer not taken up). In July 1655 Cromwell granted denizenship to Carvajal and his two sons; that December Carvajal asked the Protector to order his men-of-war to safeguard his ships.¹³

Menasseh arrived in England in September 1655; there is no evidence of contact with Carvajal. With him were his wife, his son Samuel, and certain Dutch Jewish merchants. A contemporary described him as 'of middle stature and inclining to fatness ... his demeanour graceful and comely, his habit plain and decent, he commanded an awful reverence'. The English project was particularly important to him, and he had a sense of destiny to equal Cromwell's: 'the Lord who often works by naturall meanes, might have design'd, and made choice of me, for bringing about this work'. He was given lodgings in the fashionable and expensive Strand (presumably as a guest of the English government) where he received supporters, some of them belonging to the Hartlib circle. John Dury was absent on the continent, but he was kept in touch with events by Hartlib, then living at Charing Cross. John Sadler probably served as intermediary between the rabbi and the Protector. When Menasseh first visited Whitehall, with his 'Humble Addresses', Cromwell was not present; the Council instructed its clerk 'to go forth and receive the said books'; other business was then discussed. But a fortnight later Cromwell brought to the Council a petition 'which had been handed to him by the Jewish Rabbi, in which were set forth

categorically the several “graces and favours” by which it was proposed that the Readmission of the Jewes should be effected.’ As Gardiner pointed out: ‘All that was required for the toleration of the Jews was the laying aside of ill-founded prejudices.’ Cromwell apparently had another conference with Menasseh when a committee of the Council of State and others, mostly divines, were present. It was agreed that Menasseh’s proposals should be taken into consideration.¹⁴

The petition presented in November by Menasseh ‘on behalf of the Hebrew nation’ asked that the Jews be accepted as citizens under the protection of Cromwell; that they be allowed public synagogues, their own cemetery, and the practice of their Mosaic law; that they be granted freedom of trade; that all laws against the Jews be revoked. Cromwell wanted immediate consideration of the petition so seven members of the Council were asked to report, which they did next day. The calendared petition is followed by the ‘report’. Lucien Wolf and Samuel Gardiner, who were both studying the documents in the late 1890s, agreed that the heading was a statement of the motion, not a recommendation: ‘That the Jews deserving it may be admitted into this nation to trade and trafficke and dwel amongst us as providence shall give occasion’. The points of discussion minuted were not promising: Menasseh’s arguments (depending on prophecies of the Jewish messiah) were held to be sinful to Christians; there would be the danger of seducing people in matters of religion; open Jewish worship would be scandalous; Jewish marriage practices, and divorce, were unlawful; trade by native merchants would be harmed. The committee could not in conscience make a favourable decision; *if* the Jews were admitted there would have to be stringent regulations. To advance the discussion, Cromwell ordered the president of the Council, Henry Lawrence, to meet with three other members, those most likely to support him, Lisle, Wolseley and Pickering, to choose ‘a certain number of persons’ to meet with the committee at Whitehall on 4 December: ‘to the intent some proposalls made to his Highness in reference to the nation of the Jewes may be considered’. So the famous Whitehall Conference was convened.¹⁵

There was considerable popular excitement when the Conference met at Whitehall on the first Tuesday in December. The assembly included various members of the Council; Walter Strickland (but not Oliver St John); Chief Justices Sir John Glynne and William Steele; merchant aldermen, and Sir Christopher Pack, a leading

mercantile authority; sixteen divines including Henry Jessey, whose 'Narrative' is our main source of information on the Conference. Despite the presence of many supporters of the Jews, and the attendance of Cromwell, a decision in their favour was not reached, apart from an initial legal ruling by Glynne and Steele: that, since the banishment of 1290 was an exercise of royal prerogative and not an act of parliament, 'there was no law which forbad the Jews' return into England.' The second question formulated by Cromwell was: 'If it be lawful, then upon what terms is it meet to receive them?' There were arguments in favour of readmission: the debt owed by Christians to the Jews, brethren of the same spiritual descent from the patriarchs; common humanity; sympathy for Jews suffering in various countries; the special role of England as a Protestant nation which could be instrumental in converting the Jews. Jessey wrote that some, 'though desiring heartily the Jews conversion', feared that they would subvert many, as the quakers and ranters were doing. During the meetings on 7 and 12 December the feeling of the clergy was apparently against Menasseh; so Cromwell added more Judeophiles, notably Hugh Peters who had advocated the cause of the Jews as early as 1647. At an extra meeting on 18 December, open to the public, some merchants protested against any concessions, fearing that English trade would suffer, but others argued that the possible lowering of prices of commodities to be exported would benefit English manufacture. A newly-drafted tract by the lawyer William Prynne inflamed anti-Jewish feeling. After private discussions were conducted a proposal was made by Jessey that Jews should be admitted only to decayed ports and towns and should pay double customs. If that resolution had been voted in the crypto-Jews of London would be under threat. In Jessey's account, Cromwell 'professed that he had no engagement to the Jews, but only what the Scripture holds forth'. The preachers had not helped him 'as to conscience'; he would do nothing rashly 'and had much need of all their prayers, that the Lord would direct them [Protector and Council], so as may be to his glory, and to the good of the nation.' So the Whitehall Conference was dismissed without coming to a decision.¹⁶

The Conference caused a stir, with information leaking before it ended. John Evelyn's diary entry on 14 December: 'Now were the Jewes admitted', must refer to the legal ruling. An Admiralty commissioner at Portsmouth, Captain Francis Willoughby, wrote on 10 December to a colleague in London: 'I observe the great business of the Jewes is under consideration'; he was concerned 'whether a nation shall be suffered

by a law to live among us to blaspheme Christ.’ On 17 December he wrote: ‘It is a business of no small concern; they are a people to whom many glorious promises are made, but they are as full of blasphemy as any under the sun; a self seeking generation’. On 31 December a royalist intelligencer commented on the latest rumour: ‘The Jews, we hear, will be admitted by way of connivancy, though the generality oppose.’ Ambassadors reported on the issue, Peter Coyet to Charles X in Sweden, for example. On 7 December he wrote of the petition ‘from some Jews, led by Rabbi Ben Israel of Amsterdam ... in the hope that this may lead to their conversion, which is earnestly prayed for.’ On 14 December: ‘The question of giving the Jews liberty to trade has been debated for more than a week by the protector and his council’; and on the 28th: ‘No decision yet about the Jews. The protector proceeds very cautiously: the theologians strongly oppose it, from every pulpit.’ There was evidently concern in Holland that the economy there might be harmed; Menasseh was summoned by the Dutch ambassador Willem Nieupoort who reported home on 31 December that the rabbi had assured him ‘that he doth not desire any thing for the Jews in Holland, but only for such as sit in the inquisition in Spain and Portugal.’ The Tuscan envoy, Francesco Salvetti, seems to have had inside information, possibly from the Livorno Jew Raphael Supino, then in London and probably in contact with the *marrano* group. On 28 January 1656 Salvetti reported to the Grand Duke that the Jews ‘may meet privately in their houses, but they have not yet established a synagogue’. This must refer to the crypto-Jews whose anxiety had doubtless been aroused by the controversy. On 4 February Salvetti reported: ‘It is thought that the Protector will not make any declaration in their favour, but tacitly he will connive at their holding private conventicles, which they already do, in their houses to avoid public scandal.’ (This was later taken to indicate ‘Resettlement’.)¹⁷

Menasseh continued to place his hopes in the Protector, although others lost heart. We learn from his *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, written that spring in answer to Prynne’s *Demurrer*, that the rabbi’s companions had left England:

Insomuch, that as yet, we have had no finall determination from his most Serene Highnesse. Wherefore those few Jewes that were hère, despairing of our expected successe, departed hence. And others who desired to come hither, have quitted their hopes, and betaken themselves some to Italy, some to

Geneva [Genova?], where that Commonwealth hath at this time, most freely granted them many, and great priviledges.

Menasseh prayed that God would influence ‘the mind of the Prince’, the Protector, and the Council to determine what would be best. He quoted Zephaniah, 3: ‘Therefore, wait ye upon me, saith the Lord ... I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly’. He was still faithful to his Jewish messianic dream, but certain Christians had other hopes for the year 1656, calculating according to numbers in Daniel, or from the date of the Flood, 1656 years after Creation. (John Evelyn had a visit from the mathematician William Oughtred in 1655: ‘He had strong apprehensions of some extraordinary event to happen [in 1656] from the Calculation of coincidence with the Diluvian period ... possibly to convert the Jewes by our Saviours visible appearance or to judge the world’.) Jessey wrote of Menasseh’s wait that ‘other great affairs being now in hand [such as war with Spain], and this being a business of very great concernment, no absolute answer is yet returned to him’; he dated his tract ‘vulgarly the first of April ... but, according to the Holy Scripture, the fourteenth or fifteenth of Abib, the first month ... at which time the Jews feast of passover was to be kept’. Menasseh signed his *Vindiciae* on 10 April ‘in the year from the creation 5416, and in the year, according to the vulgar account, 1656’.¹⁸

What actually happened in 1656 was more prosaic, although some might have interpreted events as the work of providence. The crypto-Jewish group had tacit permission from Cromwell to worship privately, but their public persona was that of Spanish merchants – and England was at war with Spain, so their goods could be forfeit. An informer brought a case against one of the group, Antonio Robles, who declared: ‘I am a Portuguese Jew’, in a petition in March for restitution of his goods; this was granted by the Council in May. Investigations revealed that over twenty Jewish families lived in London, many of them resident for years. In view of the Robles affair, Carvajal and other leaders of the community, in conjunction for once with Menasseh, presented a second petition to the Protector, from the ‘Hebrews at Present Residing in this citty of London’; Abraham Israel Carvajal, Jahacob de Caceres, and four others signed, after Menasseh ben Israel. Although this has been claimed as the rabbi’s petition it did not echo that of November 1655; it was, rather, a formal request by the crypto-Jewish group who thanked Cromwell for the favour

already granted, to worship privately in their own homes; they now prayed for protection in writing; they also wished to acquire their own burial place outside the city. Cromwell endorsed the Jews' petition on 24 March, and again on 26 June, but there is no record of written permission. Nevertheless, events prove that two privileges were granted to the London group: permission for a religious meeting-place and for a burial ground. A large house in Creechurch Lane became a private synagogue; Carvajal was a leading ratepayer in the parish of St Katherine Cree; the 'superior landlord' was the master of Magdalene College, Cambridge – John Sadler. The use to which the house was to be put was known to the parish authorities who mentioned in their accounts for 1656 work 'in building the Jewes Synagogue'. Carvajal brought over from Hamburg a cousin, Moses Athias, to be chief minister or *hazan*. By the beginning of 1657 Carvajal and Caceres (as wardens or *parnassim* of the synagogue) had taken out a lease for a burial ground at Mile End. Apparently, Menasseh had no role in this community; he came to feel friendless among strangers. Some scholars have speculated about his personality. Cecil Roth described him as 'the self-important, erudite, quarrelsome Amsterdam Rabbi'. S.R. Gardiner was more moderate in his description of the 'enthusiastic but somewhat dreamy Amsterdam rabbi and physician who took the cause of all Judaism upon his shoulders'; he described Menasseh as being insensitive 'to the danger of challenging public opinion by undue demonstrativeness.'¹⁹

The failure of Menasseh's campaign leads to a consideration of the term 'readmission': the rabbi's petition of November 1655 asked for admission of Jews on an equal footing with native English citizens, public synagogues, rights to their own law code, and freedom to trade. Jews from various parts of the world, especially those subject to persecution, were meant to benefit. Following this definition we must concede that readmission was not achieved. This has been acknowledged by certain historians since Lucien Wolf. Albert Hyamson wrote in 1928 that 'the goal to which Menasseh ben Israel ... had directed his efforts ... was unattained'. In 1957 Israel Finestein's judgement was that the 'readmission' of the Jews 'took the form of an acknowledgement ... and an authorisation of their Jewish worship ... There was no "recall" of the Jews'. The authorisation was granted, as we have seen, to the existing crypto-Jewish community. Two modern London rabbis sum up events following the Whitehall Conference: Cromwell 'gave *de facto* permission to the existing *marrano*

community ... to continue undisturbed with its mode of worship. In this pragmatic way recognition of Jewish settlement was granted'. This narrative of Anglo-Jewry, beginning with the pragmatic Lucien Wolf, corrects the 'Menasseh version'.²⁰

To pick up a vital thread in the pattern of events we must return to December 1655. For five years Cromwell had shown a favourable attitude towards the Jews, recognising the mercantile advantages of their presence as well as religious reasons for welcoming them. Carvajal had been endenized, and was at this time asking for protection for his ship coming from the Canaries – there is no suggestion that he allied himself to Menasseh. Cromwell's responsibilities as head of state were augmented by his sense of being an agent of God's will, and many people looked to 1656 as a year of apocalyptic importance. The divines at the Whitehall Conference proved unhelpful, but one divine was absent: John Dury. Early in 1654, Cromwell had sent him to the leaders of the Swiss cantons to continue his lifelong efforts at 'procuring harmony and fraternal union in the profession of the truth'. Cromwell described him, in the papers of credence, as 'that devout and learned man ... minister of God's word and dear to us'. Dury was now in Hesse, where he received from Samuel Hartlib a letter asking his views on the questions posed by Cromwell: was it lawful to admit Jews into a Christian state, and if so on what terms? Dury replied from 'Cassel, in haste, Jan. 8th, 1656'; a second letter followed. Dury addressed Cromwell's questions: 'I know none of the reformed churches or divines, who make their admission to be unlawful; but it is a work which the civil magistrate takes wholly into his consideration'. He cited Paul's first letter to the Corinthians at length, concerning lawful and expedient actions. He concluded that Jews could be admitted into a Christian commonwealth, but restraints should be imposed. Dury added a significant postscript: 'Our state doth wisely to go warily, and by degrees, in the business of receiving them. Menasseh Ben Israel's demands are great, and the use, which they [the Jews] make of great privileges, is not much to their commendation here [in Germany], and elsewhere.'²¹

Dury's letters would have helped Cromwell: they would have reinforced his caution about Menasseh, while the advice about the lawfulness of admission with restraints would also have reassured Cromwell that his favours to the crypto-Jews were justified since Carvajal and his associates were discreet and unlikely to cause trouble. Dury advised that there should be no blasphemy of Christ, nor attempts at proselytising, nor

dishonouring of any of the ordinances of Christianity. If this were achieved, ‘then the first rule of expediency will be observed’. There should also be instruction of the Jews in the Christian religion, but this issue seems in practice to have been sidestepped. This treatment of the Jews would be a mark of Christian love and serve to the glory of God. For their part, the Jews should live by themselves and worship in their own tongue; and ‘insolencies’ from both sides should be prevented by laws and special orders. The matter of trade Dury was content to leave to the wisdom of the state. The substance of his letters was edited into a pamphlet by Hartlib, and published in June 1656. None of this would be of any consolation to Menasseh who had been hoping all spring for a favourable response to his own petition – especially as the postscript referring to him was published. The rabbi himself was now a forlorn figure. A petition to Cromwell (of 1656 or 1657) reveals him as ill and in need of money: ‘I make moan to your Highnesse, as the alone succourer of my life, in this land of strangers ... havinge had great experience of your greatnesse in compassion as well as in majestie’. Cromwell ordered the grant of a pension of £100 a year, part of which was paid before another petition was presented by the rabbi in September 1657: his son Samuel had died and had wished to be buried in Holland; Menasseh asked for £300, offering to surrender his pension seal. A grant of £200 was authorised, as we see from John Sadler’s petition to Richard Cromwell on behalf of Menasseh’s widow. Sadler described the rabbi’s disillusioned state of mind at the end of his stay in England: ‘at length with his heart ever broken with grieffe on losing heer his only sonne and his presious time with all his hopes in this iland’, he reached Middelburg with his son’s body, and himself died there in November 1657 (Kislev 5418). He was buried at Amsterdam with an epitaph in Spanish to ‘the honoured Hebrew’.²²

Cromwell was the saviour of the first modern Anglo-Jewish community in London at a time when their legal position was anomalous; there was no ghetto, but unless they were endenized they had no political status. Under Cromwell’s protection the synagogue in Creechurch Lane became, in Lucien Wolf’s analysis, ‘a duly organised public body’, increasing by 1660 to thirty-five families. Its officials included Rabbi Moses Athias. Their accounts were kept in Portuguese by the treasurer; the surviving *Libro*, from 1663, was probably not the first. Their activities in the City were indicated by the membership of the Exchange granted in 1657 to Solomon Dormido. A visitor to the synagogue in 1662 was told that ‘one year in Oliver’s time, they did

build booths on the other side of the Thames, and keep the Feast of Tabernacles in them'. (This was a kind of harvest festival, a joyous week-long celebration.) The importance of Cromwell's protection is attested by events as soon as he was dead. Thomas Violet laid a case against the Jews in 1659; the City Corporation also presented a petition against the Jews in 1660. Amid all the accusations against the Jews were some against Cromwell, 'the late Usurper', for admitting them to a free habitation and trading, and allowing them liberty to practise their religion 'to the great dishonour of Christianity and public scandal of the Protestant religion'. In 1660 the Jews held a meeting at the house of Senora Carvajal to draw up a petition to the king for protection. Charles II had his own commitment to Jews who had helped him in exile, so he asked the privy council to consider the community's protection. When the Jews in London had to petition again for protection in 1664, the king minuted the document himself: that 'they may enjoy the same favour as before, as long as they demean themselves peaceably and obey the laws'. The Cromwellian privileges were preserved. It was, wrote James Parkes, 'surely the simplest charter of settlement in all Jewish history.'²³ Ultimately, it was the policy of Cromwell and the discretion of the Jewish community in London which established this settlement, rather than the mission of Menasseh ben Israel.

Barbara Coulton, Lancaster University

¹ *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* [hereafter *JHSE*], V(1908), pp. 276-98. The Jews had been expelled from England in 1290.

² *JHSE*, I (1893-94), pp. 1-7, 47, 66-7, 160-1; *JHSE*, III, p. 13 (Joseph Jacobs's address).

³ A. Sturgis, 'Prophecies and Politics: Millenarians, Rabbis and the Jewish Indian Theory', *The Seventeenth Century XIV* (1999), p. 21; D. Katz, in Tony Kushner (ed.), *The Jewish Heritage in British History* (London, 1992), p. 61; D. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 109, 114; Y. Kaplan, H. Mechoulam and R.H Popkin (eds), *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World* (Leiden, 1989); Henry Mechoulam and Gerard Nahon, *Menasseh Ben Israel. The Hope of Israel* (Oxford, 1987), p. 95.

-
- ⁴ R.G. Clouse, 'The Rebirth of Millenarianism', in Peter Toon (ed.), *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 56-65; *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* (12 vols, New York, 1901-6), under 'Messiah' and 'Manasseh [sic] ben Israel'; D. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603-1655* (Oxford, 1982).
- ⁵ John Morrill (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (Harlow, 1990), pp. 38-40, 34; W.C. Abbott (ed.), *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (4 vols, Cambridge, Mass., 1937-47), I, 80-81, 96-7; *Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *DNB*], 'Robert Durie', 'John Durie', 'Hartlib'; R.L. Greaves and R. Zaller (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (3 vols, Brighton, 1982-84), 'Dury', 'Hartlib'; H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (2nd edn, London, 1972), p. 281; Webster, *The Great Instauration* (London, 1975), pp. 233, 19-31.
- ⁶ John Sadler, *Rights of the Kingdom* (1649), p. 49; Richard H. Popkin, 'Hartlib, Dury and the Jews', in M. Greengrass, M. Leslie and T. Raylor (eds), *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 119, 123-5; E.G.E. Van Der Wall, 'A Philo-Semitic Millenarian ... Henry Jessey', in D. Katz and J. Israel (eds), *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 161-84; D. Katz, 'Henry Jessey and the Jews', in Kaplan et al, *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, pp. 117-38; Lucien Wolf (ed.), *Menasseh Ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1901), xvii, xxvi.
- ⁷ Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman* (London, 1970), pp. 220-8; Abbott, *Writings and Speeches*, I, 540-51, 696-9; II, 186-7; *DNB* and Greaves and Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary*, 'Sadler'.
- ⁸ Wolf, *Menasseh's Mission*, xxvii, lxxxvii, p. 4; Mechoulam and Nahon (eds), *The Hope of Israel*; Jonathan I. Israel, *Empires and Entrepots. The Dutch, the Spanish Monarchy and the Jews, 1585-1713* (London, 1990), 418; Timothy Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 38-9.
- ⁹ *DNB* and Greaves and Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary*, 'Strickland', 'St John', 'Thurloe'; Steven C.A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 24-5; Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550-1750* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 154, 158-9: this author differentiates between 'New Christian'

-
- descendants of medieval Iberian Jews, and ‘Marranos’ – ostensible Christians who were crypto-Jews: *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- ¹⁰ Lucien Wolf, ‘The First English Jew’, *JHSE*, II (1894-5), pp. 14-23; Wolf, ‘Cromwell’s Jewish Intelligencers’, in Cecil Roth (ed.), *Essays in Jewish History* (London, 1934), p. 104; Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism*, pp. 26-8.
- ¹¹ S.R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate* (4 vols, London, 1903), I, 329; Wolf, *Menasseh’s Mission*, xxx-xl; Alan Macfarlane (ed.), *The Diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-1683* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 257, 360.
- ¹² Leo Miller, *John Milton and the Oldenburg Safeguard* (New York, 1985), pp. 49-54; *DNB*, ‘Williams’, ‘Vane’; *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (7 vols, New York, 1963), III, 92-4, IV, 8-10; G.W. La Fantasie et al., (eds), *The Correspondence of Roger Williams* (2 vols, 1988), I, 358, II, 409; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic [hereafter CSPD] 1652-53*, p. 38.
- ¹³ ‘Memoranda concerning the Resettlement of the Jews in England’, *JHSE*, I, p. 47; Wolf, ‘Crypto-Jews Under the Commonwealth’, *ibid.*, p. 56; Jonathan Israel, ‘The Dutch Sephardic Colonization Movement’, in Kaplan et al, *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, pp. 154-60; *CSPD 1654*, pp. 393, 407; Wolf, *Menasseh’s Mission*, xxxvi, and ‘The First English Jew’, *JHSE*, II, p. 45; *CSPD 1661-62*, p. 214; T. Birch (ed.), *Collection of State Papers of John Thurloe* (7 vols, London, 1742), IV, 61-2; *CSPD 1655-56*, pp. 60, 161.
- ¹⁴ Rev. Dr Adler, ‘A Homage to Menasseh Ben Israel’, *JHSE*, I (1893-4), pp. 25-42; Cecil Roth, ‘New Light on the Resettlement’, *ibid.*, XI, p. 119 and n. 8; Wolf, ‘Menasseh Ben Israel’s Study in London’, *JHSE*, III (1896-8), pp. 144-50; Popkin, ‘Hartlib, Dury and the Jews’, p. 128; Wolf, *Menasseh’s Mission*, xxix, xliv, p. 38; Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate* IV, 18; II, 3; Abbott, *Writings and Speeches*, IV, 45.
- ¹⁵ *CSPD 1655-56*, pp. 15-16; Wolf, *Menasseh’s Mission*, xlvi, lxxxiv-v; Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate* IV, 13-14.
- ¹⁶ [Henry Jessey], *A Narrative of the late Proceedings at Whitehall concerning the Jews* (reprinted in *Harleian Miscellany* VI, (London, 1810), pp. 445-53); Wolf, *Menasseh’s Mission*, xlvi-liv; *DNB*, ‘Hugh Peters’; Albert M. Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England* (2nd ed., London, 1928), pp. 149-61; Katz, *Jews in the History of England*, pp. 119-27.

-
- ¹⁷ E.S.de Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Oxford, 1959), p. 365; *CSPD 1655-56*, pp. 51, 57-8, 82; Michael Roberts (ed.), *Swedish Diplomats at Cromwell's Court 1655-1656* (Camden Society, 4th ser., XXXVI, 1988), pp. 215-24; Roth, 'New Light on the Resettlement', *JHSE*, XI, pp. 120-4.
- ¹⁸ D. Katz, 'Henry Jessey and the Jews', in Kaplan et al, *Menasseh and His World*, pp. 126-7; Jessey, *Narrative*, p. 451; William Prynne, *A Short Demurrer to the Jews long discontinued Remitter into England* (1656); Menasseh Ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (1656), reprinted in Wolf, *Menasseh's Mission*, pp. 144-5; de Beer, *Diary of John Evelyn*, p. 362.
- ¹⁹ Wolf, *Menasseh's Mission*, lx-lxviii, lxxxv-vi (petition of *marranos*), and 'Crypto-Jews', *JHSE*, I, pp. 61-8; *CSPD 1655-56*, pp. 227, 247, 274, 316, 325-6; A.M. Hyamson, *The Sephardim of England 1492-1951* (London, 1951), pp. 12-19 (including a contemporary account of the synagogue); Roth, 'The Resettlement of the Jews', in V.D. Lipman (ed.), *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 1-25; S.R. Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate IV*, 12-16.
- ²⁰ Hyamson, *A History of the Jews in England*, p. 166; I. Finestein, *A Short History of Anglo-Jewry* (London, 1957), p. 45; David J. Goldberg and John D. Rayner, *The Jewish People* (London, 1989), p. 123.
- ²¹ Abbott, *Writings and Speeches*, III, 236-8; S. Levy, 'John Dury and the English Jewry', *JHSE*, IV, pp. 76-82; *A Case of Conscience, Whether it be lawful to admit Jews into a christian commonwealth?* Resolved by Mr. John Dury: written to Samuel Hartlib, esq., in *Harleian Miscellany*, VI, 438-444.
- ²² *A Case of Conscience*, pp. 441-4; *JHSE*, V, pp. 280-1; Wolf, *Menasseh's Mission*, lxxxvi-viii; Nathan Adler, 'Homage to Menasseh', *JHSE*, I, p. 39.
- ²³ Wolf, 'Status of the Jews in England after the Re-Settlement', *JHSE*, IV, 177-93 (including texts of petitions against Jews), and 'The Jewry of the Restoration 1660-1664', *JHSE*, V, pp. 5-33; Lionel D. Barnett (ed.), *El Libro de los Acuerdos 1663 to 1681* (Oxford, 1931), viii; Hyamson, *Sephardim of England*, p. 19; *CSPD 1663-64*, p. 672; James Parkes, 'Jewish-Christian Relations in England', in Lipman, *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History*, p. 157.