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### The Jewish burial plot at Belfast City Cemetery

In the mid-1860s the Belfast Corporation began to give serious consideration to acquiring a site for a new burial ground to accommodate the needs of a rapidly expanding industrial city. A site adjoining the Falls Road was acquired from Thomas Sinclair and on 1 August 1869 the new cemetery was opened. The small Jewish community in Belfast watched the unfolding events with some interest and came to the realisation that this was their opportunity to acquire a burial plot for their own people. Early in 1870 the first representations were made to the Corporation by the Belfast Jews. The minutes of the Cemetery Committee of Belfast Corporation for 18 May 1870 include the following item: 'Resolved that Mr Jaffe be informed his application for a portion of the cemetery to be allotted for the Jewish Community be considered at a special meeting of this committee on this day fortnight.'<sup>6</sup> However, no record of this special meeting – if it ever did take place – has survived. The matter was again taken up in September of that year when at a special meeting on 8 September 1870 it was decided that the Mayor, the Chairman of the Cemetery Committee, and a Mr Gaffikin discuss the proposal for a Jewish plot at the City Cemetery with Martin Jaffe, Honorary Secretary of the Hebrew Congregation, the following morning. At this meeting a solicitor explained to those present the conditions under which a portion of the cemetery might be set apart. To help clarify matters it was agreed that the solicitor should have a separate meeting with the leading members of the Jewish community. The discussions would appear to have been a success and soon afterwards Martin Jaffe wrote the following brief letter to the Cemetery Committee:

Dears Sirs, Having acquainted the principal resident Jews of the terms upon which you believe that the plot of ground asked for on the 16th May might be granted, it gives me much pleasure to state that my co-religionists are quite agreeable to accept thereof with the alterations suggested by you. The town council would confer a great boon upon our community by procuring for them at the earliest opportunity the ground sought for.

In response to this the Cemetery Committee 'resolved that Mr Jaffe be requested on behalf of the Jewish persuasion to submit to this committee a drawing showing the nature of the enclosure which they propose to put round the ground to be allocated to their use.' The drawing was submitted and approved by the Cemetery Committee on 16 January 1871. It was also agreed that the charge for each interment be £2. With an agreement having been reached between the Corporation and the Jewish community for a burial plot at the City Cemetery it merely required the approval of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for the proposal to be put into effect. This was forthcoming on 27 July 1871.

Soon afterwards a section of the City Cemetery was walled, and a small mortuary chapel in which to perform the Taharah<sup>7</sup> and other ceremonies was built. Only the foundations of this building remain today. The names and addresses of those who purchased graves can still be accessed in the records at the City Cemetery office, and these are a useful indication of the geographical spread of many of the first Jewish immigrants. Burial within the Jewish community in Northern Ireland was regulated and overseen by the chevra kadisha (the burial society or Holy Brotherhood). The chevra kadisha at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth were independent of the Belfast Hebrew congregation, and they ensured that Jewish

burials were conducted in keeping with often complex prescribed rules in the Torah and Talmud. In 1916 the chevra kadisha successfully negotiated with the Corporation for an extension to the Jewish plot at City Cemetery to allow for more burials.

## Carrmoney Jewish Cemetery

The expansion of the Jewish population in Belfast by the early twentieth century created a need for a second cemetery. With a large proportion of the Jewish community living in the north of the city, consideration was given to acquiring a plot of land for a burial ground in this area. In 1909 an application for a cemetery in the Rural District of Carrmoney was made to Belfast Rural District Council. At a meeting to discuss this application, held on 8 September of that year, a letter of objection was read from the Reverend R. J. Clarke, rector of the parish of Carrmoney. Clarke argued that another cemetery in the area, which he described as 'one of the prettiest suburbs of Belfast with sites most desirable for good houses', was unwelcome. After deliberations the Council decided to raise no objections to this proposal.<sup>8</sup>

Soon afterwards a site in Carrmoney was purchased by Samuel Freeman and Maurice Goldring. Freeman was house furnisher in York Street, while Goldring was a financier in Donegall Street. The site was then placed in the hands of trustees nominated on behalf of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation. In addition to Freeman and Goldring, the trustees included Sir Otto Jaffe, Luis Berwitz, a house furnisher in York Street, and David Levinson of Clones, County Monaghan, a merchant.

The new cemetery extended to nearly four acres and was situated in Carrmoney townland, not far from Carrmoney Church of Ireland church. At this time the chevra kadisha and the Belfast Hebrew Congregation quarrelled over ownership of the cemetery (and other religious matters), but the dispute was eventually resolved through the arbitration of the Chief Rabbi in London. Now the community found itself with two cemeteries, with Carrmoney being the more convenient to a large proportion of Jews who had settled in north Belfast and offering more space. The Jewish cemetery at Carrmoney was first used c.1914. After this, the Jewish plot at the City Cemetery was used far less frequently. I date the last burial in the Jewish quarter of the City Cemetery to 12 October 1957 (the burial was of Joseph Myers aged 61, formerly of 49 Donegall Place and 21 Strangford Avenue Belfast). But by this time the cemetery had grown increasingly disused with the number of internments there dropping off very considerably by around 1920.

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### The Jaffe graves and memorials

It is difficult not to devote a disproportionate amount of this study to one family in particular. The wealth of sources available to anyone researching the Jaffe family tree is remarkable. Perhaps the most famous, they were also the first German Jewish linen merchants to settle and trade in the city, and certainly the most successful. For anyone wishing to undertake even a little research into Belfast's Jewish community, the Jaffe family is a good place to begin as it opens avenues into records of Jewish participation in trade, industry, commerce, politics, charity work, education, local government and the arts. Both Louis Hyman and Bernard Shillman give excellent accounts of the family's beginnings in and departure from Ireland. <sup>10</sup> The Jewish quarter of the City Cemetery is the final resting place of the founder and organizer of the city's Jewish congregation – Daniel Joseph Jaffe. Born in Hamburg on 19 August 1809, Daniel Joseph owned a substantial mercantile business in Hamburg and in 1845 visited Belfast to open a linen house and shipped linen products back to his other firms in Europe and America.. Daniel Joseph's son Martin held the first Jewish services in Northern Ireland in his Holywood home under the auspices of the British chief Rabbi, but it was his father who, on 7 July 1871, laid the foundation stone of the synagogue in Great Victoria Street, with a Hebrew congregation of no more than 55 people.



**The Jaffe monument in Belfast City Cemetery**

The commerce generated by the Jaffe family's enterprise has yet to be calculated has yet to be calculated, but we surmise that with Daniel Joseph leaving effects in the UK of alone of £140 000 in 1874 it was certainly a remarkable contribution to Belfast's textile trade. Daniel Joseph Jaffe died in Niece on 21 January but was buried in Belfast thanks to his son Martin's success in securing the plot of land in City Cemetery which was to become the Jewish Cemetery. Daniel Joseph is buried there with his wife Fredrike and other family members. However, the Jaffe history in what is now Northern Ireland is indeed a history without headstones. The exact site of Daniel Joseph's grave is not apparent to anyone visiting the cemetery today because the English and Hebrew inscriptions along with the Magen Davids are chipped off. Whether vandalized, removed or buried for protection we are unsure because of poor record keeping.



**The Jaffe monument**

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