

APPENDIX A

OXFORD TRADES

1830–1900

The main purpose of this Appendix is to document the shift of trades in the Victorian period. It is heavily dependent on the trades directories of the period, of which there is nothing like a complete series, with some help from the Censuses, and neither source is necessarily very reliable. Both depend ultimately on what the trader himself thought fit to say, and the first can be further distorted by the classification followed by the compiler of the directory. Such compilers were also prone to errors in recording addresses and sometimes made such drastic messes of names as to create ghosts. Only a much fuller search of the advertising material of the period than I have so far made can solidify the picture, and that might still leave much concealed.

As we have seen in the main text, the three families of 1841 were all clothes-dealers. I follow their developments individually.

Wolf Harris, though changing his first name to William, never left 54 St. Ebbe's until he retired to Canterbury towards the end of his life, and he was always connected with clothes. There was a shift towards the retail end of the market, since his directory description changes from 'second-hand' to 'new and second-hand'. He also did a certain amount of making or remaking. In the 1851 Census he had a resident tailor's servant; in 1861 there is no servant, but his daughter Leah, aged 20, is a shopwoman, and Elizabeth aged 19 is a dressmaker. There was only expansion when his son Henry, trained as a working jeweller, began to be an effective partner in the late 1860s; the shop took over no. 55 as well and started to be described as a general dealer's. There are unfortunately so many Henry Harrises that we cannot follow this one's further progress.

Isaiah Woolf did not himself move from 4 New Road and went on being described as a clothes-dealer by the directories until he died in

about 1857, but in the 1851 Census he was a 'general dealer', as was his son Jonas of the same address; in 1853 the directories refine this to 'jewellers and dealers in cigars'. His two sons who remained in Oxford moved to more up-market addresses. Herschell was already a tobacconist (a trade which directories distinguished from the cigar-dealers) in 22 Broad Street by 1851; by 1852 he is a watch and clock maker there as well, and in 1853 the address is also listed as a register office for families and servants; by 1861 he was a jeweller at 5 Magdalen Street, where he remained till 1875. Levi Woolf's first appearance is in 1861 as a cigar merchant and jeweller at 30 1/2 Cornmarket. This venture did not last long. 1863 is the last mention of him there, and the shop was taken over first by J.G. Wangler, one of a group of brothers, all watch and clockmakers from Baden, certainly not Jewish, and then by the firm of Kirner, watchmakers and jewellers, which survived in Queen Street until very recently; I do not know if it had any Jewish origins. It looks very much as if Levi Woolf was the invalid with four motherless children and a wealthy relative in Oxford whom the London Jewish Board of Guardians declined to assist in 1873.<sup>1</sup> The last member of this family traceable in Oxford is perhaps the C. Woolf who was a hairdresser at 29 Walton Street in the 1880s.

Harris Levi seems to have died in 1846 or 1847; a fire in Queen Street in August 1847 did damage to the stock and effects of Widow Levi estimated at upwards of £40.<sup>2</sup> Ann Levi remained in second-hand clothes; she was dealing in them in St. Ebbe's in 1853 and still described as a clothier in the 1861 Census. The original premises at 25 Queen Street passed by 1851 to her son-in-law, described as a jeweller in the 1851 Census. For some years he traded under two names, Solomon Levi and Lewis Solomon, as a cigar-dealer in Queen Street, and by 1852 as a silversmith/jeweller in Cornmarket. Eventually, he was permanently Lewis Solomon, and transferred both activities to adjacent shops at 29 and 29A Cornmarket; in 1871 he has a neat double advertisement as a Masonic Jeweller and a Tobacconist and importer of Foreign Cigars, both for 25 years.<sup>3</sup> He had other ventures as well, including a 'city and county toy and fancy bazaar' at 39 Cornmarket, which a son ran at least for a time. His congregational activities are in the main text. Harris Levi's other son-in-law, Isaac Jacob Cohen, is sufficiently treated in the main text; he was evidently never a genuine business-man.

Of the arrivals of the 1840s Nathan Jacobs the Reader/ *shochet* is never described in the directories more particularly than as a trader. Although he described himself in the 1851 Census as a jeweller and tobacconist, he

may well have been doing the same kind of mixed business as his father was doing when he died. Israel Levi, first described in 1846 as a cigar dealer at 11 Pembroke Street, combined that trade with watch-making and jewellery first at 66 and then at 52 St. Giles without apparent expansion for the remainder of his very long stay in Oxford. It was he who set the pattern for the combination which was followed by Lewis Solomon and the Woolfs.

Abraham Davis, also first listed in 1846, was then a jeweller, in St. Clements, far away from the nucleus of the community. He rapidly moved to the High Street, and evidently rose to prosperity very rapidly, with a mixture of watches, jewellery and silver, retail and wholesale. In 1871 he was the only Jew listed as a land-owner, with two acres bringing in a rent of £47. He was, it seems, rather detached from the Jewish community, and it was proposed in 1881 that, if he did join the Congregation, to which some objected, he should pay twice as large a subscription as anyone else. He apparently did not join, but, when he died in 1888, he left £1,800 for setting up a synagogue and school in Jerusalem. He made a mess of his will in this respect, but, in the legal proceedings which followed, his widow, a second wife with a much more Jewish name than the first, declared that it was the testator's great wish that, by means of the fund, his name should be perpetuated in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

Like Abraham Davis, the other first appearance of 1846, Abraham Zacharias, never went in for cigars. Originally listed as a hardwareman at 68 St. Aldate's, he went through a bewildering series of trade addresses in St. Aldate's and the High Street before finally settling in two shops at 2 and 27 Cornmarket. The range of trades with which he is listed is scarcely less confusing, watches and clocks, Birmingham and Sheffield warehouse, jewellery, china and glass. No doubt he changed the thrust of his activities from time to time, but eventually 2 Cornmarket was for watches and jewellery, 27 was for china and glass. It was the latter which was taken over by his son Joel in the 1870s and eventually transformed by him after his marriage into the waterproofs business which shot him so spectacularly to the heights of his congregational and civic career.

A less established figure, the Dutchman Simon Praag, is always listed at 5 1/2 Castle Street, that is, the *Blucher's Head*. He is listed from 1842 to 1852 as a cigar dealer, but in 1842 also as a Birmingham and Sheffield ware dealer; in the 1851 Census he described himself as a general dealer and stationer. It seems that he had no regular premises and probably worked the markets of the area.

As far as I have yet discovered, the Oxford combination of cigar-trading with jewellery is unique among provincial Jewish communities, and can only be accounted for by the desirability of having two strings to one's bow in a relatively small town. That Jews were prominent in the cigar-trade from the 1840s is easily accounted for; cigar-making both on a small scale and in gradually increasing concentration was a major feature of London Jewish life of the period,<sup>5</sup> and it would be easy for Oxford Jews to establish relations with suppliers. One possible intermediary may be suggested. Although Melchor Lopez does not appear in the 1851 Census, he is frequently listed in Oxford directories of the early 1850s as a cigar-dealer at 117 High Street and 3 Turl Street; a London address, 3 Bays Yard, Bucklersbury, is once added, and he may have been a wholesaler for the Oxford traders.

That, by the time of Mansell's 1861 Directory, most of the jewellers in Oxford were Jewish raises more complex questions. Much is to be attributed to the fact that this, together with the closely allied trade in watches and clocks, was not well established in Oxford, so that there were fewer entrenched interests than in many other fields. There was surely not much actual manufacture going on in Oxford. 'Watchmaker' and 'clockmaker' are likely to be misleading descriptions, and only one, just possibly two, Oxford Jews are described as 'working jewellers'. Where the goods were actually coming from is likely to remain unclear. Though there was an ample choice of Jewish manufacturers, jewellery manufacture was nothing like a Jewish monopoly.

The more interesting question is the relationship of the Oxford Jewish residents to the very large number of travelling Jews who were in Oxford on the Census-night, a Sunday, 30 March 1851. It is surely clear that the resident Nathan Marcks, 'itinerant jeweller', and his two lodgers, simply described as 'travellers in jewellery', were working local markets. They could have been dependent on Abraham Davis, still specifically described this year as 'Wholesale dealer in jewellery, etc.', or one of the others with shops. Greater uncertainty attaches to the six lodgers described as 'dealers in jewellery' at the *Blucher's Head* and the three travellers described as 'jewellers' at the *Three Horseshoes*. Were they too using Oxford as a base for operations elsewhere, or are they wholesale suppliers who would do the rounds of the local shops next day? Even after the coming of the railways the first weekday train from London did not get to Oxford until 11.10 a.m. The choice of Sunday trains was limited by cost. Only the morning train (London 8.00 – Oxford 11.45) had third class seats at four shillings and sixpence. It looks as if these travellers were spending at least a long Sunday in Oxford.

The thought may suggest itself that trading in jewellery and indeed in second-hand clothes could easily be combined with pawnbroking. It can only be said that, although Jewish pawnbrokers are attested as near as Banbury in the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century, I have so far found no suggestion of the trade for any Oxford Jew after Lewis Isaacs moved to Cheltenham around 1823. But Oxford directories are sparing about listing pawnbroking as a trade; there seem to be none at all until the 1860s and those who do appear are not Jewish.

There is no great point in pursuing this investigation in detail after 1870. Of those who arrived after that year, there are some jewellers, but the spread of trades is now much wider, extending even to a sponge-seller in the 1890s. Prominent parts in the Congregation were played by furniture-dealers in St. Clements, Emanuel Harris, the Treasurer of 1881, and Louis Crook, who succeeded him about 1894. There is some trend to more 'professional' occupations. The Slapoffski family who were 'professors' of music and kept music warehouses arrived in the 1870s, and in 1881 Baron Franks, surgeon-dentist, renewed the succession to Mayer Lewis, whom we saw in the 1770s.<sup>6</sup>