



TREE OF LIFE SYNAGOGUE

STUDENT CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW

The Bradford Tree of Life Synagogue is the third Reform synagogue to be established in England. It is Yorkshire's oldest purpose-built Shul (the Yiddish word for synagogue) and welcomes people of all faiths.

From its completion in 1881 until 1886, it was known as the "Jewish Association", then becoming the Bradford Reform Synagogue. In 2017, it was again named the Bradford Tree of Life Synagogue after the mass shooting at the 'Tree of Life Synagogue' in Pittsburgh, USA.

REFORM JUDAISM IS BUILT ON SOME KEY PRINCIPLES: A THEISTIC GOD, ONGOING REVELATION, AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL RATHER THAN BODY - TO NAME JUST A FEW.



ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES



The synagogue is a Grade II listed Religious Centre, originally designed by The Healey Brothers, who were local church architects during the 19th century. It is a provincial synagogue built in the fashionable style of the era, known as 'Romantic Orientalism', by German immigrants.

The foundation of the building was laid in 1878, and the first stone laid in 1880-1, by leading industrialist of German Jewish descent, Jacob Unna. The façade and interior are unchanged from its original design, featuring stripped brickwork, horseshoe arches and a decorative cornice.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

HOW IS THE SPACE USED BY THE COMMUNITY? WHAT DOES IT SERVE THE COMMUNITY?

In the 1820s, Jewish settlers from western Europe, predominantly from Germany and Denmark, choose Bradford as home as it was considered the wool manufacturing capital at that time. Other groups came later in the 1880s and 1890s from Russia and Poland when Czar Alexander II was assassinated resulting in wide scale anti-Jewish riots.

In the early 19th Century, Bradford had a relatively large Jewish population due to the city's booming textile industry. However, as the years passed and the industry declined, its numbers dwindled. The area in which the synagogue is located is now predominantly Muslim.

Today, key members of the sunagogue include Rudi Leavor, awarded the British Empire Medal, and Richard Strouss, great grandson of Joseph Strauss, who was given the Order of the League of Mercy for his works with Manningham's youth.



USE

HOW HAS THE COMMUNITY USED THE SPACE IN THE PAST, TODAY AND HOW WILL IT BE USED IN THE FUTURE?



PAST

The community was founded by Rabbi Dr. Joseph Strauss, who led the synagogue from 1873 to 1922, and was one of the first reformed rabbis in the UK. Activities taking place in the synagogue included, and still include today, high festivals, dinner events, Shabbat and communal Seder for Passover.

PRESENT

As the synagogue costs about £7,000 a year to maintain, and numbers of those worshipping here have dwindled, they are looking to expand their variety of community uses in order to keep the building maintained.



REFLECTIONS

HOW HAVE COMMUNITIES OF DIVERSE ETHNIC HERITAGE HAD A VOICE IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF SITES THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM?

The Jewish community in the synagogue received a grant from Historic England for renovations, working with local historians to make changes to the building. However, the most impressive example of community interaction was the support from the local Muslim community, when further money was required for the project.

The Jewish community is decreasing in Bradford, with the next generation of many families moving away for other opportunities. This means the Synagogue exists mainly for the older generation. Additionally, there is currently no one to pass the baton onto, meaning the future of the synagogue's role as a religious centre is to be determined. Regardless of the exquisite mantelpiece architecture that many come to visit, there is a lack in variety of use, which would ultimately attract a younger generation. As the Synagogue is open to those of all faiths, opening the building to a wider demographic through community activities would honour the Synagogue's initial intent.