Walking Victorian Spitalfields with Israel Zangwill

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<div align="center">

In memory of
William J. Fishman (1921–2014)
David Cesarani (1956–2015)
Historians of British Jewry

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Overdevelopment, unaffordable housing, and the destruction of historic buildings are provoking an unprecedented flare-up of public protest in London's East End. While anarchists demonstrate in Brick Lane against the destructive effect of property development on local communities, campaigners agitate to preserve treasured icons of public service like the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children, Hackney Road, spaces of Victorian working-class sociability such as the Marquis of Lansdowne pub in Hoxton, or to keep the vista in eighteenth-century Norton Folgate free from office blight.[1] Yet reverence for neglected old buildings has always been uncomfortably (and sometimes comfortably) complicit with gentrification.[2] In the 1970s the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust fought to reimagine Spitalfields 'as a pleasant neighbourhood in which to live', but the developer that it gazumped in its first successful bid to save a pair of Georgian houses from demolition was a housing association, and ten years later the Trust was 'fighting a rearguard action against the commercial forces it ha[d] helped,

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[1] See, for example, Nadia Khomami and Josh Halliday, 'Shoreditch Cereal Killer Cafe Targeted in Anti-Gentrification Protests', *Guardian*, 27 September 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/27/shoreditch-cereal-cafe-targeted-by-anti-gentrification-protesters>; the gentle author, 'Save the Marquis of Lansdowne', <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2012/12/23/save-the-marquis-of-lansdowne/>, and 'Remembering the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children', <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2013/10/21/remembering-the-queen-elizabeth-hospital-for-children/>; Mike Brooke, 'Bulldozers Halted by Tower Hamlets Council after Norton Folgate's "human chain" Protest', *Docklands and East London Advertiser*, 22 July 2015 <http://www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk/news/politics/bulldozers_halted_by_tower_hamlets_council_after_norton_folgate_s_human_chain_protest_1_4163292> [all accessed 20 October 2015].
[2] Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 82; Charlie Forman, *Spitalfields: A Battle for Land* (London: Shipman, 1989), pp. 130–39.

albeit unwillingly, to release'.[3] On the other hand, conservation also has an important role to play in keeping visible in the fabric of the urban landscape the sites where east London's working people lived their lives. Whereas in the 1970s, the spaces where Spitalfields's Victorian population of immigrant Jews worshipped, worked, and studied seemed destined for total erasure, they have now taken up a starring role in the story of the area's spectacular architectural and cultural heritage.[4] Yet it is still far from clear what is at stake in battles over the preservation of the past in the East End. In Zangwill's Spitalfields, a mobile app to be used as a walking guide to the area, I explore how digital technology can open up these questions in new and complex ways. The app, with content written and produced by me, and software development by Soda, uses both visual and aural materials from the Jewish Museum London and other local archives to interpret six of east London's sites of Jewish memory for the twenty-first century.[5]

In 1892, when Israel Zangwill published his groundbreaking novel, *Children of the Ghetto*, a detailed fictional ethnography of Jewish immigrants and their offspring in Spitalfields, the area was also experiencing a period of rapid transformation. Thousands of damp, dilapidated courts and cottages were being torn down to provide modern housing blocks (with rents pitched at working people with a stable income, beyond the reach of the many on casual wages). For Zangwill, echoing his contemporary George Gissing's damning description of the Farringdon Road tenements, this was a loss. 'Instead of the dirty picturesque houses,' he wrote, 'rose an appalling series of artisan's dwellings, monotonous brick barracks, whose dead, dull prose weighed upon the spirits.'[6] His objections were not merely aesthetic: with the crowded slum houses, in Zangwill's view, was disappearing the distinctive drama and disorder of Jewish immigrant life that had been enacted in and around them. Indeed, in the novel's first pages the narrator

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[3] Francis Carnwath, 'Foreword', in Mark Girouard and others, *The Saving of Spitalfields* (London: Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust, 1989), n.p; Raphael Samuel, 'The Pathos of Conservation', in ibid., pp. 134–70 (pp. 168–69).

[4] See Sharman Kadish, 'Squandered Heritage: Jewish Buildings in Britain', in *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness*, ed. by Tony Kushner (London: Cass, 1992), pp. 147–65; and Tony Kushner, 'The End of the "Anglo-Jewish Progress Show": Representations of the Jewish East End, 1887–1987', in ibid., pp. 78–105.

[5] The majority of the photographs and objects are from the Jewish Museum. Additional material is used courtesy of the Museum of London Picture Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and London School of Economics Archives. The soundtrack was recorded and edited using GarageBand and Audacity. The app is written in HTML5, JavaScript, and CSS3. The iOS and Android versions are delivered using a custom native wrapper written by Soda in Objective-C (for iOS) and Java (for Android).

[6] Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People*, ed. by Meri-Jane Rochelson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 434.

looks back to an eighteenth-century world of street fighting and old clothes sellers, to the 'babel of sound', mud, and crowds that was Petticoat Lane market before the time when 'respectability crept on to freeze the blood of the Orient with its frigid finger, and to blur the vivid tints of the East into the uniform gray of English middle-class life' (p. 67). Zangwill's elegy for the lost vitality of the East End resonates with our attachment today to the physical relics of a London before the disciplinarian architecture of neoliberalism stamped its mark on the urban landscape. Yet, as Tony Kushner argues,

> the idea of the past as an unchanging, unproblematic place which has only to be rediscovered in a sanitized form is at the basis of much of the offerings of the heritage industry. The Jewish East End [. . .] is at particular risk of being distorted today. (p. 97)

But if Zangwill himself was the grandfather of ghetto nostalgia, his novel is much more centrally concerned with the present moment, its drama drawn from the diverse responses of Jews to the social, cultural, and religious changes they were experiencing in contemporary London. The text evokes mobile lives and includes questing protagonists whose questions remain largely unanswered. For this reason it is especially well placed to feature as an intervention into a historiography shaped by a static, mythologized view of the past.

A bestseller in the 1890s, *Children of the Ghetto* is a bold attempt to combine the late-Victorian literary forms of urban ethnography, social satire, and the novel of spiritual struggle. It discusses, without simple resolution, the significance of a religious and ethnic heritage for a generation of Jews born and educated in London. Above all, it documents the dynamics of anglicization in its varied forms, including assimilation, acculturation, and contestation. In Zangwill's Spitalfields I exploit the app's potential for bringing together a range of digital sources with the user's observations of the physical environment as they walk, to produce an experience that is both immersive and multivocal. Zangwill's novel is at the centre of this account, a crucial tool for engaging listeners through its lively prose. However, I don't approach it as a privileged documentary source; rather as a springboard from which to offer reflections on the questions that animated Victorian Londoners — and continue to preoccupy contemporary Londoners — including philanthropy, the acculturation of new immigrants, labour exploitation, housing, the politics of religion, and consumer culture.

Children of the Ghetto was celebrated at the time of its publication as a unique window into the much-discussed but little-known world of immigrant Jewry. The book's exotic 'panopticon of Ghetto scenes and characters'

was widely considered to outweigh a straggly plot: the *Athenaeum*, for example, enthused about 'the vividness and force with which [the author] brings before us the strange and uncouth characters with which he has peopled the book'; and the *Manchester Guardian* deemed it 'the best Jewish novel ever written'.[7] More recently, Patrick Parrinder has hailed *Children of the Ghetto* as the precursor of the post-war novel of immigration, particularly for its focus on 'a highly specific local space'.[8] But the novel was also, crucially, an interpretation of this space, the 'Ghetto' that is, Zangwill insists, 'of voluntary formation', and of the processes of social change that were playing out within its walls (*Children of the Ghetto*, p. 61). Relationships of power are at the heart of the story of the Jewish East End, and discernible in all the sources that the app brings together, from the material objects of everyday life to the detail of the text itself.

A grandchild of the ghetto, who grew up in Fashion Street off Brick Lane and was schooled across the road in Bell Lane, Zangwill, like his protagonist Esther Ansell, left the East End and had joined the London literary scene by the time he published *Children of the Ghetto*. Nonetheless, it was his intimacy with the institutions, streets, and interiors of Jewish Spitalfields that made his writing, like that of other contemporary urban novelists such as Gissing and Arthur Morrison, a realism of place. The novel's descriptions of the once grand, now dilapidated five-storey terraced house in 'Royal Street', occupied by six households, a synagogue, and a tailoring workshop, or the rich flavours of confectionaries on offer in the market in Wentworth Street, put the sensory and cultural geography of the Jewish East End at the centre of its action. Closely observed local detail is also evident in Zangwill's chapter on labour unrest, which includes an almost verbatim transcription of the demands by workers who assembled in Goulston Street during the 1889 Jewish tailors' strike, as well as the resolution of the dispute (though not its cause) through the intervention of the local MP.[9]

It is this locatedness that led me to experiment with using *Children of the Ghetto* as a walking guide to Spitalfields. Indeed, the first volume of the novel, structured as a series of vignettes, surveys aspects of immigrant social and religious life — the synagogue and the sweatshop, the trades unionists and the philanthropists, the Yiddish actors and the Zionists — as if through the eyes of a roving reporter. Gradually emerging alongside this

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[7] Meri-Jane Rochelson, *A Jew in the Public Arena: The Career of Israel Zangwill* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), pp. 52, 243.

[8] Patrick Parrinder, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 384. See also Nadia Valman, 'The East End *Bildungsroman* from Israel Zangwill to Monica Ali', *Wasafiri*, 24.1 (2009), 3–8.

[9] *Children of the Ghetto*, pp. 262, 269. See Bill Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals 1875–1914* (London: Duckworth, 1995), pp. 170–71.

meandering path, also, is the story of Esther, a London-born 'grandchild of the ghetto', whose movements between soup kitchen and school, attic home and marketplace, and whose route out of and back to Spitalfields, shape the app's narrative arc. Many of the sites where Zangwill stages the drama are still extant, offering a series of physical settings where the app augments extracts from the novel with visual and aural materials relating to the site at the time of its publication.

Hearing *Children of the Ghetto* read aloud brings out the shifting tone of Zangwill's narrator, which alternates between exuberant nostalgia and acerbic social satire. It also highlights the counterpoint between Zangwill's protagonist Esther, who struggles bitterly against the indignities of poverty, and his narrator, whose extravagant prose celebrates the energy of the world she longs to escape. In a key passage the narrator revels in the unruly diversity of a crowd of children swarming down the narrow streets towards the Jews' Free School (*Fig. 1*) in Bell Lane, to 'come and be Anglicised':

> Big children and little children, boys in blackening corduroy, and girls in washed-out cotton; tidy children and ragged children; children in great shapeless boots gaping at the toes; sickly children, and sturdy children, and diseased children; quaint sallow foreign-looking children, and fresh-coloured English-looking children; with great pumpkin heads, with oval heads, with pear-shaped heads; with old men's faces, with cherub's faces, with monkeys' faces; cold and famished children, and warm and well-fed children; children conning their lessons and children romping carelessly; the demure and the anaemic; the boisterous and the blackguardly, the insolent, the idiotic, the vicious, the intelligent, the exemplary, the dull — spawn of all countries — all hastening at the inexorable clang of the big school-bell to be ground in the same great, blind, inexorable Governmental machine. (pp. 95–96)

That the Jews' Free School sought nothing less than a total transformation of its pupils is reflected in another contemporary document included in the app: a late-Victorian album with handwritten captions from the Jewish Museum's photograph collection. One image, of girls in Standard 0, is titled 'As They Enter School', and captioned underneath 'Raw Material: Children arriving from Roumania, Russia, Germany etc, unable to speak English'. A second photograph, showing girls from Standard 7, is titled 'As They Leave School', and captioned 'Finished Article: After several years training in Hebrew, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Literature, Science, Drill, Gymnastics, Needlework, Cookery, Laundry and Sports'.[10] The genre being imitated here is the Barnardo's 'Before' and

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[10] Jewish Museum London E1991.220 and E1991.221. The photographs are undated but are clearly late Victorian from the evidence of the clothing.
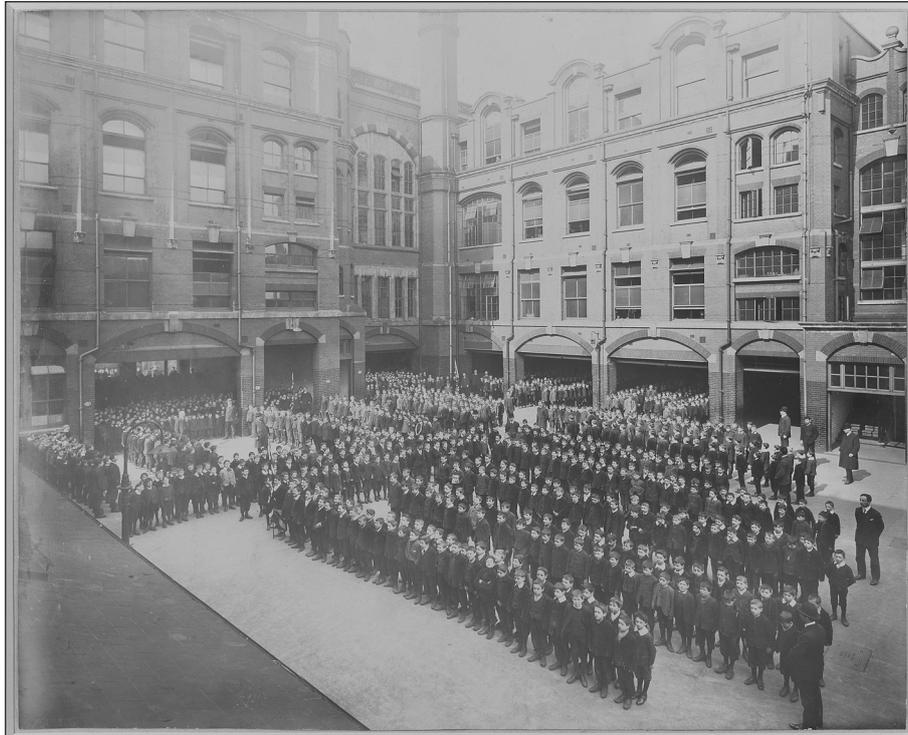
Fig. 1: Jews' Free School, playground assembly, 1909. ©Jews' Free School.
Courtesy of Jewish Museum London.

'After' photographs, but the language is telling. While the school used the same industrial metaphor to trumpet its efficiency, for Zangwill the grinding down of the children's motley disorderliness is cause for lament.

Scholars of Victorian science may have come across the Jews' Free School in the context of the experiments by the anthropologist Francis Galton in composite photography. At the invitation of his student Joseph Jacobs, a friend of Zangwill's, Galton superimposed a number of photographs of boys taken at the school in 1883, when Zangwill was teaching there. The resulting composite images, they both believed, definitively revealed the existence of a Jewish racial type; however, Galton noted in the Jewish eyes 'a cold scanning gaze', while Jacobs saw the face of the 'dreamer and thinker'.[11] Although a number of scholars have discussed Galton's photographs and their interpretation, Zangwill's novel has not been read in

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[11] Joseph Jacobs, 'On the Racial Characteristics of Modern Jews', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 15 (1885), 23–62 (pp. 62, 55).

this context.[12] Yet in his endlessly proliferating list of heterogeneous Jewish schoolchildren, we can hear an insistent rejoinder not only to the standardizing education system but also to the believers in racial science.

Being able to use audio as well as textual sources opened up a wealth of archive material to complement *Children of the Ghetto*. The app puts the novel into dialogue with the oral history sources last used when a pioneering generation of historians first made the everyday life of Jewish immigrants in London a significant subject of investigation.[13] Some of these interviews are preserved in the oral history collection of the Jewish Museum, including a number recorded in the 1980s, with men and women who had grown up in Spitalfields within a decade or so of *Children of the Ghetto*'s publication. While many of the architectural fragments of the historic Jewish East End now look likely to be protected for posterity, aural traces of early twentieth-century human lives survive mainly on fragile cassette tape. Although I did not turn to these sources in order to prove the verisimilitude of Zangwill's fiction, they did sometimes demonstrate that he drew from observation rather than literary melodrama for the novel's plots. Mark Fineman, for example, born in 1904, describes the single-parent family in which he grew up in the Dutch Tenter Ground close to the Jews' Free School, headed by his elderly grandmother who could speak no English, in terms that strongly resemble Esther's unhappy home, similarly racked by severe poverty and intergenerational bafflement (Clip 1).[14]

The oral history recordings also provide counter-narratives to Zangwill's text. Zangwill, writing with the perspective of a former agent — and a critic — of anglicization, warns the reader that children enter the Jews' Free School 'all [. . .] to be ground in the same great, blind, inexorable Governmental machine', the children's response to the school's grim authoritarianism exemplified by the 'sullen wild-eyed mite in petticoats [. . .] being dragged along, screaming, towards distasteful durance' (pp. 95, 96). Former pupils of the school in the early twentieth century, meanwhile, articulate different memories of its policy of suppressing their Yiddish mother tongue. Heimi Lipschitz, born in 1906, would never forget the red lines that slashed cruelly through his schoolwork as he struggled to write

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[12] Mitchell Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Daniel Novak, *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 97–102; and David Feldman, 'Conceiving Difference: Religion, Race and the Jews in Britain, c.1750–1900', *History Workshop Journal*, 76 (2013), 160–86.

[13] Jerry White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block 1887–1920*, new edn (London: Pimlico, 2003); and Lara Marks, *Model Mothers*: *Jewish Mothers and Maternity Provision in East London, 1870–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[14] Jewish Museum oral history collection tape 50.

Clip 1: Mark Fineman, b. 1904, Whitechapel. Jewish Museum oral history collection, tape 50. Courtesy of Jewish Museum, London.

Clip 2: Heimi Lipschitz, b. 1906, Cannon Street Road, Stepney. Jewish Museum oral history collection, tape 04. Courtesy of Jewish Museum London.

in English (Clip 2).[15] On the other hand, the laughing voice of Stella Vine, born in 1902 in Falticne, Romania, recalls in her interview the pleasure of impressing the teacher on her first day at school as a new immigrant with her knowledge of the English alphabet.[16] This collage of voices, images, and texts suggests a range of responses to anglicization in the Jewish East End.

Material traces that survive both in the street and in archives also provide additional sources for contextualizing Zangwill's interpretation of the power relations that shaped East End Jewish life. *Children of the Ghetto*

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[15] Jewish Museum oral history collection tape 04.
[16] Jewish Museum oral history collection tape 466.

opens at the Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor, setting the tone for the novel with a sharp satire on Spitalfields humbug:

> The President addressed the meeting at considerable length, striving to impress upon the clergymen and other philanthropists present that charity was a virtue, and appealing to the Bible, the Koran, and even the Vedas, for confirmation of his proposition. Early in his speech the sliding door that separated the cattle-pen from the kitchen proper had to be closed, because the jostling crowd jabbered so much and inconsiderate infants squalled, and there did not seem to be any general desire to hear the President's ethical views. (p. 76)

Using the free indirect style of Dickensian narration, Zangwill displays a Dickensian contempt for the pompous narcissism of the charity's well-fed officials, and their indifference to the desperation of the hungry crowd. My commentary, on the other hand, sketches the broader politics of Victorian Jewish philanthropy. Welfare provision to Jewish immigrants by wealthy Jews from the West End, as historians of Anglo-Jewry have argued, was driven not only by their sense of religious obligation but also their anxiety that if immigrant Jews became a burden on the ratepayer, public hostility to all Jews would rise.[17]

The first site on the app's itinerary is the Soup Kitchen in Brune Street (*Fig. 2*), where it relocated to purpose-built premises in 1902 (and is now privately owned apartments). Standing outside the building, the user is directed to examine the detail of its elaborate facade. It is striking how far the dynamics of East End philanthropy, as Zangwill analyses them, are visible also in the state-of-the-art ostentatiousness of the building. The Soup Kitchen was designed by Lewis Solomon, the architect of a number of new synagogues built around east London at the turn of the century as the centralizing authority of the United Synagogue began to supplant the small informal congregations that had previously worshipped in converted domestic spaces in Spitalfields.[18] It has an air of fashion, built in brick and terracotta and decorated in Arts and Crafts style with flamboyant lettering above the doors. The date of establishment appears alongside the Hebrew date, but this is the only Judaic sign on the building, except perhaps that the entry is on the right and the exit on the left, following the convention for reading Hebrew from right to left. The design, though, is full of classical references, the balanced pattern of columns and arches suggesting

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[17] Eugene C. Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880–1920* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 157–93; David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840–1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 291–311.
[18] For further details, see Sharman Kadish, *Jewish Heritage in England: An Architectural Guide* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2006), pp. 11–12.

Fig. 2: Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor, Brune Street. © Nadia Valman.

harmony and discipline. The building's structure shows an intention to control its disorderly clients by firmly steering their movement through it — in one side and out of the other. As an architectural example of social control that also flatters the taste and status of its sponsors, the Soup Kitchen is an exemplary site of class tension in the nineteenth-century immigrant community (*Fig. 3*).

Included also are digital objects linked to the Soup Kitchen site. Users can see, for example, the tally board used by the kitchen in later years to identify those authorized to receive food (*Fig. 4*). Mobile digital technology is thus able to remediate objects from the museum's social history collection, currently on display some distance away in its Camden Town galleries. Reconfigured with other archive and newspaper sources, the tally board can be interpreted as well as described — as evidence of the institution's desire to systematize its operations. Users can also see pages from the minute book of the kitchen's Investigating and Distributing Committee, one of its several committees, now housed by the London Metropolitan Archives. It is a meticulously inscribed volume, recording in neat columns the cases considered at each weekly committee meeting: the number of new and old applicants, the number of those issued with a kettle (for collecting their allocation of soup), the number of those requiring further

Fig. 3: Distributing Bread, from 'They that Hunger of Bread', cutting in 'Men and Women of Mark in Judea' album of newspaper cuttings compiled by E. de Haas (1902–04), Jewish Museum C 1997.1.p176. Courtesy of Jewish Museum London.

investigation, and the cumulative number of applications for the year. The regularity and care with which these statistics are recorded appears to attest to the sort of soulless officiousness that Zangwill critiques in the Soup Kitchen scene in *Children of the Ghetto*. Yet on closer inspection the figures show that, in the 1890s, around 80 per cent of cases were not subjected to further investigation; indeed, the Soup Kitchen came under pressure for its refusal to institute modern methods of intrusive scrutiny (Black, pp. 180–81). Its printed laws, also reproduced as part of the app, state that

> The Investigating and Distributing Committee, or any one member thereof, shall receive all applications for relief at appointed times and places. When an application for relief is received, the Distributing Committee, or any one member thereof, shall have power to grant an order for relief at once.

In a later copy of the laws the last two words of this clause have been amended by hand to 'after investigation', indicating the committee's eventual capitulation to stricter methods of administering aid.[19] In this case the visual sources reveal a more subtle reading of East End philanthropy than Zangwill's text alone indicates. For as long as it could, the historical Soup Kitchen prioritized feeding the needy rather than procedural correctness;

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[19] Laws of the Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/2942-06.

Fig. 4: Soup Kitchen Tally Board, undated, Jewish Museum 1991.105.5. Courtesy of Jewish Museum London.

for Zangwill, on the other hand, this site offered an opportunity to play the Jewish Dickens, producing a diatribe against hypocritical bourgeois do-gooding.

The soundtrack of the app draws on photographic and journalistic sources as well as descriptive commentary in a close analysis of the facades and interiors of the sites, to explore how Zangwill used these locations for their social and political resonance. Esther lives in Royal Street, a thinly disguised Princelet Street (formerly Princes Street), where Zangwill compresses the domestic, religious, and commercial activities that took place in the street in the 1880s and 90s into a single building. At 19 Princelet Street, the site of the first and last surviving of the many synagogues built into domestic buildings, first rescued from dereliction in 1980 by the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust and now once again well known,

I direct the listener's gaze to the building's exterior, considering how it would have appeared in Zangwill's time. In 1892 the synagogue was newly refurbished to meet the needs of its congregants, with grand arches over the windows and a wide, welcoming door, reflecting their improving social and economic status, and setting this building apart from its dilapidated neighbours.[20] Today, when the restored exteriors of the Princelet Street houses present a more or less uniform face of cream and taupe paintwork and repointed bricks, these details emerge into visibility through the app's commentary (*Fig. 5*).

The app also takes the listener into the interior of 19 Princelet Street through the voice of the social investigator Beatrice Potter, who very probably visited the Princes Street synagogue in 1887 as part of the research for her essay 'The Jewish Community' for the first edition of Charles Booth's study of east London poverty, *Life and Labour of the People* (1889–91). The cult status of the site today (stimulated by the success of *Rodinsky's Room*, Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair's meditation on the building's last inhabitant) contrasts with Potter's bewilderment at how Jews behaved in the space they apparently held sacred:[21]

> They were all sitting as if at ease, some in twos and threes chatting in undertones, one now again wd offer his neighbour snuff [. . .]. With the exception of an occasional burst of monotonous chanting fr. the congregation, there was ~~no~~ little sign of attention, & to my mind, in the whole service there was no suspicion of devotional feeling.[22]

This critical response to the informality and lack of emotion in Jewish worship was commonplace in the nineteenth century and had influenced the drive by communal leaders to improve decorum in West End synagogues. But Potter recast her observations in a more philo-semitic vein when she came to compose her essay. She wrote that it was 'a curious and touching sight to enter one of the poorer and more wretched of these places on a Sabbath morning', and noted the 'low, monotonous, but musical-toned recital of Hebrew prayers' and the 'rhythmical cadence of numerous voices' that made her imagine herself 'in a far-off Eastern land', overlaying her romantic belief in the exotic and ancient character of Jewishness that she had not noticed at the time of her visit.[23]

[20] Samuel C. Melnick, *A Giant Among Giants: A History of Rabbi Shmuel Kalman Melnick and the Princelet Street Synagogue* (Durham: Pentland Press, 1994), p. 74.

[21] Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room* (Cambridge: Granta, 1999).

[22] Beatrice Potter, 22 October 1887, 'Wholesale Clothing Trade, 1887' notebook, Passfield Collection, LSE Library, Passfield 7/1/8:5, 8:5^v.

[23] [Beatrice Potter], 'The Jewish Community', in *Life and Labour of the People in London*, ed. by Charles Booth, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1892), III: *Blocks of Buildings, Schools, and Immigration*, pp. 166–92 (p. 171).

Fig. 5: Princelet Street, Spitalfields. © Nadia Valman.

Further investigation of the manuscript notebooks for Booth's study revealed the wider economic activity of the street, which I incorporated into the app's commentary. Less well known than number 19 is the building next door, number 17, where Mark Moses ran a tailoring workshop similar to the one Zangwill describes on the floor below Esther's in Royal Street.[24] In *Children of the Ghetto*, Zangwill intervenes in current discussions of sweated labour in the East End through the figure of Bear Belcovitch, the master tailor.[25] Belcovitch, who arrived in England with nothing and still lives austerely, employing his whole family in his workshop,

> was called a 'sweater', and the comic papers pictured him with
> a protuberant paunch and a greasy smile, but he had not the
> remotest idea that he was other than a God-fearing, industri-
> ous, and even philanthropic citizen [. . .]. He saw no reason
> why immigrant paupers should not live on a crown a week

[24] Interviews at Mark Moses' workshop, 20 February 1888 and 6 March 1888, LSE Library (LSE), Booth Collection, Booth/A/19, pp. 87–90.

[25] See David Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 47–79.

> while he taught them how to handle a press-iron or work a
> sewing machine. They were much better off than in Poland.
> (p. 84)

The narrator ventriloquizes Belcovitch's perspective, according to which
the sweatshop benevolently offers employment opportunities to unskilled
new immigrants. But the detail that Zangwill includes here of apprentices'
wages — five shillings a week — exposes the harshness of the sweatshop
economy for those at the bottom, very far indeed from Booth's notional
'poverty line' of eighteen shillings. A more expansive account of the con-
ditions of employment from the worker's point of view can be found in
Booth's notebooks, which include interviews with both Mark Moses and
'Rachel', a buttonhole maker in his workshop, whose voice I reconstructed
from these sources.[26] Zangwill's emphasis on Belcovitch's continuing hard
work and frugality, meanwhile, is designed to refute contemporary accusa-
tions of a Jewish racial aptitude for enterprise and to suggest the ongoing
insecurity felt by masters as well as workers (Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*,
pp. 239–51). The plight of the petty entrepreneur in this unstable economy
is recorded in a case documented by David Schloss for Booth's study: a
tailor in Busby Street, Brick Lane,

> employs 4 girls, [. . .] the machinist gets 18/- a week, the shop
> girl 7/6 a week & the buttonhole hand told me (Mr Schloss)
> that she could make 12/6 a week. The machinist is on weekly
> wages & the buttonholer on piece work. The man's wife (who
> helps) said that they often only made 15/- a week for them-
> selves. Most miserable looking people, far more miserable
> than their own hands.[27]

Mobile digital technology has made possible the juxtaposition of different
media focused on a single space at a single historical moment to create a
multilayered account of key social questions raised by *Children of the Ghetto*.
It has provided, too, a new interpretive context for objects from the Jewish
Museum's collection, and animated enigmatic local monuments, such as
the remaining entrance arch from the Four Per Cent Industrial Dwellings
in Wentworth Street, as sites of controversy and struggle. And it has ena-
bled me to experiment with the ways we experience literary texts — not
only by restoring a thick descriptive context to *Children of the Ghetto* in the
commentary, but also by using the novel to read the contemporary East

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[26] Interview at Mark Moses' workshop, 6 March 1888, LSE, Booth Collection,
Booth/A/19, p. 90.
[27] Interview with tailor at Busby Street, Brick Lane. Notes by Mr Schloss, July 1888,
LSE, Booth Collection, Booth/A/19, p. 144.

End observed by the users as they walk. One of the novel's most resonant passages describes a service at the tiny, cramped Sons of the Covenant synagogue in Royal Street, at once the object of the narrator's comic satire and the opportunity for a flight of lyricism:

> They prayed metaphysics, acrostics, angelology, Cabalah, history, exegetics, Talmudical controversies, *menus*, recipes, priestly prescriptions, the canonical books, psalms, love-poems, an undigested hotch-potch of exalted and questionable sentiments, of communal and egoistic aspirations of the highest order. It was a wonderful liturgy, as grotesque as it was beautiful — like an old cathedral in all styles of architecture, stored with shabby antiquities and side-shows and overgrown with moss and lichen — a heterogeneous blend of historical strata of all periods, in which gems of poetry and pathos and spiritual fervour glittered and pitiful records of ancient persecution lay petrified. (p. 183)

It is not surprising that the narrator compares the orthodox liturgy, a miscellany of accreted sources, to an architectural landscape layered with 'historical strata of all periods'. Much more visibly than today, this was Zangwill's Spitalfields, a haphazard, unharmonious mix of ancient and modern, glorious and mundane, adapted and reused. Although *Children of the Ghetto* is so frequently punctuated by laments for a lost past, this moment stands out in contrast, not so much because the congregants are in touch with the ancient provenance of their traditions, but because their living religious practice holds together textually many different moments in time.

Twenty-first century research has uncovered the other histories of immigration that are layered beneath and over Victorian Jewish Spitalfields, much of which has already been obliterated or still remains undocumented.[28] But, as Raphael Samuel argued in 1989,

> the character of a district is determined not by its buildings, but by the ensemble of different uses to which they have been put, and above all by the character of the users and occupants [. . .]. Conservation, if it is to make any sense at all [. . .] must be concerned with protecting the whole environment, warts and all. ('Pathos of Conservation', p. 169)

Digital technology offers a new way to capture and preserve these many competing pasts while remaining in immediate contact with present lives. In Princelet Street, as we listen to Zangwill's rhapsody among the Georgian

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[28] See Anne J. Kershen, *Strangers, Aliens and Asians: Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields 1660–2000* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Fig. 6: Brick Lane and Princelet Street. © Nadia Valman.

restorations and the sixties warehouses, the curry restaurants and the galleries, in the shadow of Christ Church at one end and the minaret of the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid at the other, *Children of the Ghetto* brings Spitalfields into focus as a unique but increasingly precarious palimpsest (*Fig. 6*).

Acknowledgements