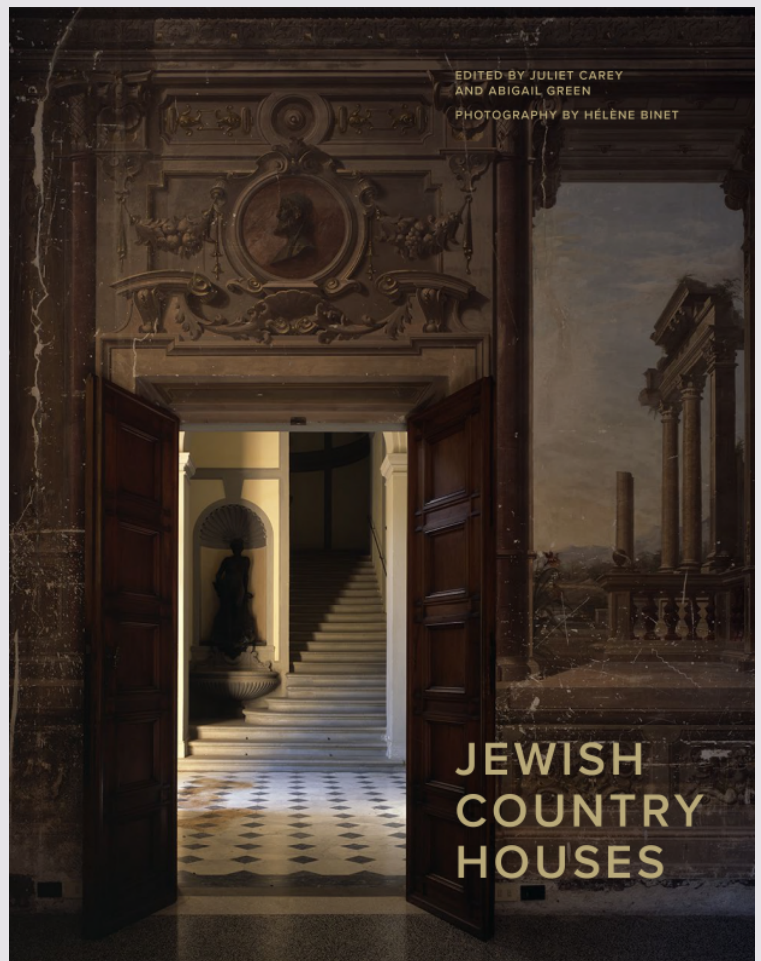




JEWISH COUNTRY HOUSES

and their worlds

ANNUAL
REPORT
2024



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Publication in Focus



Jewish Country Houses

Edited by Juliet Carey and
Abigail Green. Photography by
Hélène Binet.



In November 2024, the project's flagship publication, *Jewish Country Houses*, was published. We knew we wanted to make a book that was path-breaking, scholarly, and beautiful. From the first review in *Country Life* to a picture essay in the *New York Times*, the critical response to *Jewish Country Houses* has surpassed all our expectations. Here are a few of our favourite reviews:

- ◇ 'Jewish Country Houses is a fascinating and thought-provoking book, filled with new ideas and unfamiliar houses'. '...a pioneering work of scholarship.'
Adrian Tinniswood, *Literary Review*
- ◇ 'An utterly absorbing book taking in architecture, art creation, patronage and collecting. It is a triumph of sensitive editing and an expression of compelling intellectual collaboration.'
Timothy Mowl, *Country Life*
- ◇ 'These houses . . . symbolize 'the dream of belonging' held by European Jews, and that moment when it seems possible. But the houses also represent something that is irreparably gone, destroyed by the Holocaust.' *The Forward*
- ◇ 'Jewish Country Houses is a brilliant and beautiful book [it is] multilayered, serving a variety of

purposes. One is an ode to the beautiful homes themselves, hauntingly captured by Binet.'

Canadian Jewish News

- ◇ 'What renders *Jewish Country Houses* more than a good, instructive read is its alluring visual personality, a composite of drawings, portraits, vintage photograph albums, postcards, and, most strikingly of all, the photographic artistry of Hélène Binet...Extending well beyond documentation, her images are the book's beating heart.'
- Jewish Review of Books*
- ◇ 'This stimulating book offers a thorough and welcome deconstruction of the Jewish country house'. Clive Aslet, *The Burlington Magazine*
 - ◇ 'Monumental both in content and form ... 352 pages of dense text lavishly illustrated with historical images and sumptuous photographs by ...Hélène Binet. It is a weighty tome, literally and figuratively, combining coffee table looks with serious scholarship'. *The Art Newspaper*

Left to right: Oliver Cox (Chair), Juliet Carey, Abigail Green, H  l  ne Binet, Natalie Livingstone



Our 2024 Conference



The conference group at Waddesdon Manor

Sasha Goldstein Sabbah, University of Groningen

In June 2024, the Jewish Country Houses Project celebrated its tenth anniversary with a conference at Oxford entitled **‘Jewish Philanthropy: Solidarity, Antisemitism, and Cultural Heritage.’**

As always, the programme went well beyond what one might expect from a standard academic gathering. After the first day’s talks, participants travelled from Oxford to Upton House, while the second day’s programme took place entirely at Waddesdon Manor. These settings created a powerful sense of connection between the research themes and the historic environments in which Jewish philanthropy, collecting, and heritage are inextricably intertwined.

A defining feature of JCH conferences is the mix of university researchers and museum professionals—two communities that often operate in separate spheres. Bringing them together has proved remarkably productive. Researchers gain fresh insights into collections and curatorial practices, while museum

professionals can discuss their own challenges with scholars who approach similar questions from different angles. This exchange was especially evident as the conference offered both ample time for informal conversations in addition to a formal curatorial workshop led by Lucy Porten (National Trust) and Dr. Jaclyn Granick (Cardiff University).

One example of the expected connections made at this conference would be for my own work. As a scholar of Jews in the Islamic world, my research might seem somewhat peripheral to the project’s core focus on Jewish country houses, yet these encounters have been unexpectedly fruitful. Conversations with curators and museum administrators have pointed me toward collections on Ottoman Jewry in France and residency programmes that align closely with my research interests.

One particularly memorable moment came during the final evening at Waddesdon, during a working dinner for the European Heritage Network. I was seated next to Ruth Ur of *urKultur*, a renowned curator involved in



major cultural and museum projects. As we discussed our work, Ruth mentioned an exhibition she had curated in Berlin about a German-Jewish doctor who fled to Mandate Palestine in the 1930s. To my surprise, that very doctor had later established a medical practice in Jerusalem well known among the Iraqi Jewish community I described in my first book.

Until that evening, neither of us knew the other part of his story — a serendipitous reminder of how these gatherings continually open new and unexpected paths of discovery and collaboration.

"I have learned a lot today about the complexities of telling these stories which are layered with meaning and experience. These questions raise other questions about how the NT presents all its houses and collections. These I am going away to think about. Underlying all of it is the important connections with personal histories, which make all messages very powerful."

National Trust Curator



Tom Stammers presenting documents from the Bearstead archive to conference delegates, at Upton House, June 2024

This conference was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the National Trust and Waddesdon Manor.

Training and Evaluation

Volunteer and staff training has been a central plank of the JCH project in Britain since 2018.



The training element of the project was initiated by Marcus Roberts of J-Trails, who conducted most of our British training. It has proven to be a really effective approach to shaping the ways in which Jewish stories are understood, contextualised and presented in individual properties. For the beginning, we have combined site-specific training days which require dedicated research, with national training days facilitated by the National Trust that engage a much broader range of sites and staff. Sometimes properties have preferred us to work with small groups; sometimes training has been extended to the entire volunteer corps. Overall, we estimate that our site-specific training reached 500 staff and volunteers, with at least 150 who attended our national training days.

Celia Hughes, Upton House: "Volunteer training with Marcus Roberts has helped the volunteers to feel more confident to talk about the family's Jewish heritage, giving them a language that feels respectful and appropriate".

Much of the feedback in evaluation comments from trainees was appreciative ('insightful and thorough', or a 'fantastic speaker, accessible and engaging,' according to one respondent at Nymans), with lots of emphasis on the interest and freshness of the topic. The data suggests that the training sessions gave attendees fresh perspectives and information to contextualize their property more widely. The appetite for learning more about different elements of Jewish politics and culture was clearly evident: beyond individual family history, some wanted to know more about keeping Kosher and dietary laws (cf. Gunnersbury), whilst others wanted to

know more about Jewish festivals (cf. Upton) or Palestine, Zionism and the Balfour Declaration (cf. Waddesdon).

Selected Feedback from Training Sessions

"I am more confident in my understanding of Jewish history in Britain".

"I can more easily put it in context and understand social issues and prejudice laws".

"It has provided me with a much wider background than I previously had and hopefully will give me confidence to talk to visitors."

2018 Training

Strawberry Hill House | Nymans | Waddesdon Manor | Hughenden Manor | Upton House | National training at Osterley Park

2019 Training

Mottisfont | National Training at Polesden Lacey

2023 Training

Gunnersbury Park | Ightham Mote | National training at Wiener Library 2023

2024 Training

Mottisfont | Bletchley Park | Upton House | Croft Castle

The mobile exhibition 'Country Houses, Jewish Homes', created in partnership with J-Trails and the National Trust, has visited many different locations in 2023 and 2024, supplemented by volunteer training. At Ightham Mote, where the exhibition was enhanced by a site-specific display, 92% of visitors said their understanding of Jewish history and heritage had changed.

At Gunnersbury Park (pictured here), one British-Indian visitor observed it was "really interesting to hear about how other cultures settled in Britain."



A new generation of researchers

"I have recently been appointed Assistant Curator, British Art, 1850-1915, at Tate Britain where, together with Dr Carol Jacobi, I am curating an upcoming exhibition on James McNeill Whistler, examining the influence of his transnationalism upon his artistic decisions.

Before that, I worked as Project Curator on *Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers*, one of the National Gallery's bicentenary exhibitions, after successfully defending my thesis 'Jewish collectors, donors, fundraisers at the National Gallery, 1824-1945'. This was an AHRC-funded project at Durham University, co-supervised by Tom Stammers and Dr Susanna Avery-Quash, at the National Gallery.

Both the funding I received and the opportunity to work collaboratively with the JCH team and National Gallery staff were invaluable in helping me realise my curatorial ambitions. Since completion, I have been able to put my research into practice and shape the public programme of my partner organisation. For example, I was able to put my knowledge of the collection and understanding of cultural philanthropy to good use, emphasising for visitors the historic significance of the gifts of the four Van Goghs in the Gallery's collection by the Unitarian textile manufacturer and philanthropist Samuel Courtauld. The grounding in provenance research I gained from working so closely with JCH researchers was invaluable in delivering this complex, high-profile exhibition project: it became the most successful temporary exhibition in the Gallery's history.

My research into the foundation of the National Art Collections Fund (now Art Fund) and its first Jewish members will be published in *Participation and Engagement*, an open access publication produced with the 3Landesmuseen Braunschweig. More recently, I gave a paper at the National Gallery's Research Forum on 'Jewish Women at the National Gallery, 1890-1950', and contributed on an in-conversation event for



Isobel Muir shares her research into the career of Lillian Browse, exhibition curator and gallerist, with the National Gallery Research Forum.

Women Artists Arts Week at Colnaghi Gallery, London. I am looking forward to sharing my research into the career of the National Gallery's first female curator, Lillian Browse (1906-2005), via the Research pages of the National Gallery's website and an upcoming public conference 'Hidden Histories of the Museum', which will result in a special issue of *Women's History Journal*. I remain very interested in the role of Jews in shaping the British art world."

Isobel Muir

Former AHRC-funded Collaborative
Doctoral Candidate

Current and Former Graduate Students

Colette Bellingham

Constance Booker

Charlotte Canizo

Cynthia Cheloff

Matilde Eriksson

Sietske van der Veen

The JCH and the European Routes of Jewish Heritage

In September 2024 we held the annual training meeting of the European Routes of Jewish Heritage (ERJH) between Oxford, Waddesdon Manor, and London. We were hosted by the Jewish Country Houses project, the developers of our *Palaces, Villas and Country Houses* route. Participants learned about the creation and development of the JCH, considering its conceptualisation, the role of research in developing and building the network, and its programme of dissemination activities. This was presented through contributions from the project team, combined with visits to Waddesdon Manor, Gunnersbury Park & Museum, and Strawberry Hill House.

Participants analysed the JCH route as a transnational case study, comparing it with other experiences within the ERJH network. The training programme was led by Jack Shepherd, postdoctoral researcher at Mid Sweden University, and from Jeremy Leigh, professor at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem and a longstanding member of our Scientific Committee. This year, attendees were split into two groups: one for Routes in the early stages of development and another for more advanced Routes. This innovation allowed for more personalised training, while facilitating exchange of experiences and knowledge accumulated by Route managers. In addition, delegates were able to enjoy a private view of selected Hebrew manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, and a curated guided tour of the many Jewish artefacts in the Ashmolean Museum.

We paid particular attention to the growing complexity of the ERJH community, which increasingly brings



together more diverse needs and interests. The European Institute of the Cultural Routes - the Council of Europe body responsible for regulating the certification of Cultural Routes – is now intensifying its evaluation and monitoring. The final day was therefore an opportunity to address criteria of quality and membership, including the rights and duties of all ERJH members.

The 2024 edition of the ERJH training meeting closed with a strong sense of community and a shared commitment to the future of the Routes. It confirmed that the AEPJ has succeeded in making the European Routes of Jewish Heritage a space for cooperation beyond the narrative connection of heritage. Going forward, we will consider how to adapt the Incubator programme so that it can continue to offer relevant proposals to members and strengthen the cohesion of the network.

The European Routes of Jewish Heritage Incubator event was supported by the University of Oxford's John Fell Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Waddesdon Manor, and with the collaboration of Gunnersbury Park and Museum and Strawberry Hill House.

Victor Sorensen and Marc Francesch Camps

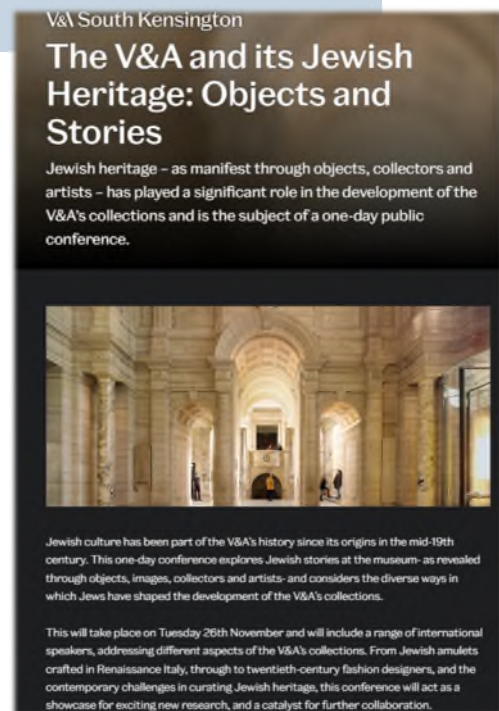
AEPJ Directorate

aepj
jewishheritage

JCH in the UK: working with museums and houses

Arising out of a collaboration with Tom Stammers and Silvia Davoli on the collecting and material culture strand of the project, the **V&A Museum** hosted a landmark conference in November 2024 which explored the profound influence of Jewish heritage on the museum's collections and history. Through carefully curated sessions, international scholars and experts examined Jewish objects, collectors, dealers, and artists who have shaped the V&A since its founding. From Renaissance amulets to post-war fashion, the conference highlighted both well-known and overlooked Jewish narratives within the museum's holdings.

Notable speakers included Professor David Feldman who gave the opening keynote on "The Heritage of Jewish Heritage," and artist Edmund de Waal who chaired a concluding panel discussion on sharing Jewish heritage in public institutions. The conference represented a significant contribution to understanding the rich intersection of Jewish culture and Britain's national collection of art and design.



Read Isobel Muir's report and listen to recordings of the sessions at [The V&A and its Jewish heritage: A day of learning from objects and stories in the V&A's collection • V&A Blog](#)

This year we were delighted to be able to enrich our connection with **Bletchley Park** in Buckinghamshire.

In an episode of their podcast series, '[Before the Codebreakers](#)', Abigail Green discussed the social context of the Leon family who 'made' Bletchley. In the same episode, Research Historian Dr David Kenyon and Head of Content Erica Munro examine how Sir Herbert Leon and his family bought, expanded and lived in the now-familiar Mansion, stamping their individual style on the design of the building and the estate. In addition to the podcast, Marcus Roberts ran a well-attended training session for Bletchley's volunteers in May.





Dr. Barbara Glaser

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2024 Calendar

January

Country Houses, Jewish Homes exhibition at the University of Chester and Hughenden Manor

February



National Trust—Jewish Country Houses
Awayday at Willesden Jewish Cemetery

"In all countries political power goes with property"

Jewish country houses had more than symbolic importance. They were key to unlocking equality for all British Jews.

Jewish interest in politics was limited before the Victorian era. Most poor Jews focused on getting by.

Like Jews, Protestant dissenters and Catholics once lacked civil and political rights. After Catholic emancipation (1829), Jews, Muslims and atheists were barred from holding public office by the need to swear an oath "upon the true faith of a Christian".



Leading City bankers and stockbrokers like Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, David Salomons, Moses Montefiore and his nephew Lionel de Rothschild led the campaign for Jewish rights. Despite the legal complexities, all bought country estates: it was very

difficult and risky. It was also a long process. The Rothschilds, for example, did not buy their first country house until 1840. By 1850, however, they had acquired a large estate in the Cotswolds. This was a significant achievement, as it was the first time a Jewish family had owned a country house in England.

April

Jewish Country Houses training at Mottisfont, Hampshire
led by Marcus Roberts

Bletchley Park 'Before the Codebreakers' Podcast:
Abigail Green discusses the Leon family



May

Jewish Country Houses training at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire, led by Marcus Roberts

June

International Conference on 'Jewish Philanthropy: Solidarity, Antisemitism and Cultural Heritage'

Jewish Country Houses training at Croft Castle, Herefordshire, led by Marcus Roberts

September

Launch of the exhibition at Strawberry Hill House:
'Discovering Jewish Country Houses: Photographs by Hélène Binet'



November



Publication of *Jewish Country Houses* (Profile Books/Brandeis University Press)

Conference: 'The V&A and its Jewish Heritage: Objects and Stories'

Project Timeline

2015 | Jewish Country Houses was conceived and launched by a team led by the University of Oxford in partnership with Waddesdon Manor.

2017 | A Knowledge Exchange Fellowship awarded to Professor Abigail Green supported the development of the project to establish the Jewish country house as a focus for scholarly research, a site of European memory and a significant aspect of European Jewish Heritage.

March 2018 | The first conference on the Jewish Country House was held at the University of Oxford in partnership with the National Trust and Historic England. The conference focused on the development of the intellectual framework and resources of the project.

May 2019 | A second Knowledge Exchange Fellowship awarded to Abigail Green supported the second conference on the Jewish Country House which was held at the Villa Kérylos in France, and aimed to expand the European direction of the work, in collaboration with the AEPJ and the Centre des Monuments Nationaux. The Fellowship also supported training for staff and volunteers at relevant properties in the UK and work on a new resource pack.

October 2019 | The UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council awarded the research grant - Jewish Country Houses - objects, networks, people (2019 - 2024). Project partners included the AEPJ, Strawberry Hill House, the National Trust, J-Trails, Waddesdon Manor, the CMN, and the universities of Durham and Cardiff.

2021 | A Knowledge Exchange Seed Fund grant was awarded to carry out a pilot project, 'Teaching the Holocaust through the Jewish Country House' in partnership with The Holocaust Educational Trust and J-Trails.

2022 | A new grant from the Claims Conference supported the Holocaust dimension of the project. Further funding was received from the Martin J Gross Family Foundation and TORCH to enable the commission of new photography by Hélène Binet for the project's new book about Jewish country houses. The project also added a new dimension - an artistic commission at Schloss Freienwalde in Germany, in collaboration with urKultur and funding support from TORCH.

September 2024 | The Jewish Country Houses team successfully secured a two-year grant from the University of Oxford's John Fell Fund to ensure the legacy of its work. 'Beyond Jewish Country Houses' will support the development of new grant applications and a new framework for maintaining our organisation and synergies with the heritage sector.

<https://jch.history.ox.ac.uk>

In 2024, this work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/S006656/1] and by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany. The project team would also like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Martin J Gross Family Foundation, Waddesdon Manor and the National Trust.

