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# Research Project

## What Remains Kings Lynn

We were asked by the *Foundation for Jewish Heritage* to research the historical and archaeological story of the Jewish community in Kings Lynn, Norfolk.

The Foundation has a stellar reputation for researching and identifying sites of interest across Europe and beyond. They aim to identify such sites, educate people and encourage a sense of shared heritage about these unique locations and to find ways of preserving and enhancing them.

## Research

Abrams Archaeology were asked to help with this project, in England, as we have extensive experience in combining documentary research with the identification of archaeological remains. We consulted the local historic environment record to see what was known about archaeological finds and sites in the local area. We also consulted the archive for the region to check maps and other documentary sources. Property deeds and other documents can give vital clues on ownership of land.

We talked with local archaeologists and historical researchers. Much knowledge exists within both amateur and professional circles and consultation and rapport building of this kind is enormously helpful.

It was possible to identify a timescale for the arrival and departure of the Jewish community in Kings Lynn.

## Spatial Location

We worked to identify the small network of streets where the community would have traded and lived. Clues came from many sources, including street names, rental records and the shape of plots of land on maps. Comparisons were made with ports in other parts of Europe and by combining these sources we identified where the probability of remains was highest.

## Depth and character of remains

The location of activity is one consideration and, as important, is the likelihood that remains would have been preserved and if so of what kind. In the case of Kings Lynn, we were able to identify that rich organic remains are preserved to a depth of over 1.5m below the existing street level in parts of the town. Present day Kings Street and Surrey Street are located off the

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Tuesday Market in the north of the town, the Newelond (Newland). These streets are still close to the River Ouse and were even closer in the early Medieval period when this was a thriving, busy port.

## So What Remains?

Castle Rising is around 8km, a couple of hours walk, from Tuesday Market in the Newland area of Kings Lynn. There is a case for considering these two settlements to be linked. Located to the northeast of Kings Lynn, it is also noteworthy that the D'Aubigny family with which this community of Jews were so closely associated, also held the manor (Snettisham) to the north of Kings Lynn. The D'Aubigny family had an interest, and had been granted, permission to trade from the Port (by Henry I). This alignment of interests and geography is notable.

Following the end of the Anarchy (1135-53), King Henry II ordered that the Mint at Rising cease. Perhaps this along with the increasing security in the country led to the establishment of a settlement in the Port of Kings Lynn. Of course, that was away from the former security of the Castle and would bring risk to that community.

The Jews Lane is assumed, in historical accounts, to be the location where Jews settled at some point between 1146 and 1160. Archaeological remains associated with this have not been reported and the connection is one which follows a pattern around the country where the word Jew is attached to a street or building.

From an archaeological perspective we should note this was a community, of mixed ages, of families. To live as a community and commit to a place would mean establishing homes, perhaps one containing a Synagogue, also a scola (school) and a Mikveh (a bath used for the purpose of ritual immersion in Judaism to achieve ritual purity). There are several structures involved here. If Jews Lane is the right location, we may expect for the below ground remains of some of these structures to remain. The Mikveh being an obvious one as it is below ground level and is relatively diagnostic as the quantities of water and the need for steps are predictable.

## Results

As a result of this work the Foundation for Jewish Heritage are now engaged with Historic England and with local organisations in Norfolk and Kings Lynn. There are hopes for signs showing key locations and for storyboards which use some of the above ideas as a springboard for further research.

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