

Hebrew Tombstones

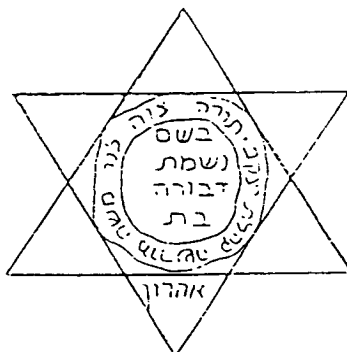
[A] Recording

The Index, published by The Centre for Jewish Art, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, suggests that the Hebrew inscription is written first, followed by the English translation in quotation marks after the Hebrew text.

Order of Lines

The inscription is copied with a description of its location on the object, direction of reading and number of lines. The end of every line should be marked by a vertical line (|) or a slash (/). A break in the continuity of the text, caused by the object's structure or decoration should be marked by a vertical line flanked by two dots (.|.) or a slash flanked by two dots (./.). Where the inscription is written in non-continuous lines, it should be copied in its sequence, mentioning the location of the sections. The translation of the inscription is written in one continuous sequence without the division of lines.

Example:



In the centre of a Star of David is a circle which is inscribed:

תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב

“Moses commanded us a Torah, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4). A dedicatory inscription appears within the circle and

ends in the bottom triangle of the Star:

בשם / נשמת / דבורה / בת / אהרון

“in the name of the soul of Deborah daughter of (in the bottom triangle) Aaron”.

Where letters or words are unclear, a question mark is placed instead of every

unclear letter. Interpretation of unclear or missing letters should be placed in brackets, followed by a question mark: eg,

האשה החזו?ה [החסודה/החשובה] מרת...

and the inscription will be translated: "...the (gracious/important?) woman, Mrs".

Abbreviations

Common abbreviation letters, like R. for Rabbi may be left. Less well known abbreviations should be completed, with the omitted letters in brackets:

מרת [רחל] and translated in full: "Mrs Rachel".

Acronyms

These should be recorded as they appear in the original Hebrew text followed by the complete words in brackets starting with an equals sign (=). The English translation should quote only the deciphered words, stating that the text appears as initial letters.

Examples

ח"ק ש"ש [חברה קדישא שומרי שבת] In translation the whole words should appear: "The holy society of Sabbath observers".

עמ"י עש"ו [עזרי מעם ה' עושה שמים וארץ] "My help cometh from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121:2 in initials)".

Literary references

Standard abbreviations of Jewish books appear in the *Encyclopædia Judaica* and are indicated in brackets at the end of the quotation. Eg

Bible: The abbreviation of the book, chapter number followed by a colon and then the verse number: (Gen. 12:4).

Mishnah: (Mishnah, Avot 4:13).

Babylonian Talmud: (B.T. Ber. 16a).

Transliteration

It is best to try to follow the rules, where they apply, as they appear in the *Encyclopædia Judaica*.

Months

Nisan	March–April
Iyar	April–May
Sivan	May–June
Tamuz	June–July
Av (also known as Menahem Av — Av (the comforter)	July–August
Elul	August–September
Tishri	September–October
Heshvan (also known as MarHeshvan)	October–November

Kislev	November–December
Tevet	December–January
Shevat	January–February
Adar (Adar Rishon, Adar Sheni, often rendered Adar I and Adar I	
.....	February–March

Special days

שבת [ת]שובה	Shabbat Shuvah — The Sabbath between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur;
שבת הגדול	The Great Shabbat — before Passover;
שבת נחמו	Shabbat Nahamu — the Shabbat of Comfort, after the Fast of the 9th of Av.

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Transcription of the tomb of former Chief Rabbi David Tevele Schiff

[B] Abbreviations

These are indicated by dots, scrolls or other ornamental signs above the letters (א̇ or א̈) or by two dashes before the last letter in a sequence (א"), or by one dash after a single letter (א').

These are the most common abbreviations found on Jewish tombstones.

א"א	one, first; man; Sunday
א"א = אב"א אב"א אב"א	my grandfather/mother
א"א = אברהם אבינו	our father Abraham, a patronymic used for righteous proselytes
אב"ד = אב בית דין	Head of the Beth Din
א"ח = אשת חיל	a woman of worth
א' דר"ח = א' דראש חודש	first day New Moon
א"א = איש ירא אלהים	Godfearing man
א = אל	a composite letter — aleph lamed
ב'	two, second; Monday
ב"ב = בעל הבית	householder, Vestry Member
בדר"ח = ב' דראש חודש	second day New Moon
בה"ר = בן הרב	son of the rabbi
בח' = בחור	the bachelor
ביהמ"ד = בית המדרש	House of Study, college
במו"ה = בן מורינו הרב	the son of Rabbi
בעמ"ח = בעל מחבר	author of
ב"ד = בן רב	the son of Mr
ג'	three, third; Tuesday
גמ"ח = גמילת חסד	the practice of charity
ג"ץ = גבאי צדקה	Treasurer (of Charity)
ד' ד'	four, fourth; Wednesday
ד = ... של	of, belonging to
ד"ת = דין תורה	legal suit at Beth Din
ד"ת = דברי תורה	the words of Torah
ה'	five, fifth, Thursday
ה' = השם	Hashem, ie God
ה"ה = הרב הגדול	the great Rabbi

ה"ה = הערען	Messrs
הוש"ר = הושענה רבה	Hoshana Rabba
הח' = החבר	the (learned) associate
הח' = החשוב	the worthy
הח' = החתן	the bridegroom
המ' = המכונה	known as
המשו"ח = המשובה והחשוב	the praiseworthy and important
המשו"ח = המשכיל והחכם	the learned and wise
הר' = הרב	Rabbi (or just plain Mr)
הרה"ג = הרב הגאון	the Rabbi, the Gaon
ו'	six, sixth, Friday
ו"ו = ו'	six, sixth, Friday
ז"ל = זכרונו/זכרונה לברכה	may his/her memory be for a blessing
זצ"ל = זכר צדיק לברכה	may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing
זצוק"ל = זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה	may the memory of the righteous and saintly be for a blessing
זצוקלה"ה = לחיי העולם הבא	may the... for the life of the World to Come
ח"ק = חברה קדישא	the holy society
חש רץ = ??	This abbreviation appears on a stone in the Alderney Road Cemetery, London. It is not know what it stands for.
י"ד	ten
כ' = כבוד	the honourable (Mr)
כ"ץ = כהן צדק	righteous Priest, ie a Cohen
למב"י = למספר בני ישראל	according to the way Jews count ie the number of the day during the counting of the Omer
לפ"ג = לפרט גדול	according to the major order of counting, ie including the thousands
לפ"ק = לפרט קטן	according to the minor order of counting,

קל	ie excluding the thousands
מוה"ר = מורינו הרב	our Teacher, Rabbi
מוהר"ר = מורינו הרב רבי	our Teacher, the Rabbi, Rabbi
מו"ץ or מו"צ	Rabbi (of a Community)
מוצש"ק = מוצאי שבת קודש	Saturday night after Sabbath
נ"נ = נפטר ונקבד	died and buried
נ"נ = נפטר ונקבד	died and buried
סג"ל = סגן לוי	Levitical excellence, ie a Levi
ע"י = על ידי	by the hand/agency of
ער"ח = ערב ראש חדש	eve of New Moon
עשי"ת = עשרת ימי תשובה	the ten Days of Penitence
עש"ק = ערב שבת קדש	eve of the holy Sabbath ie Friday
פּו"ם = פרנס ומנהיג	President
פ"ט = פה טמונה	Here lies [a female]
פ"נ = פה נטמן	Here lies [a male]
פק"ק = פה קהלה קדושה	here, the holy congregation of
ק"ק = קהלה קדושה	the holy congregation of
ר"ח = ראש חדש	New Moon
ש"ק = שבת קודש	the holy Sabbath
תנ"צ'ב'ה' = תהי נפשו/ה צרור/ה בצרור החיים	may his/her soul be bound up in the bond of life (eternal)
YHDI	This abbreviation appears on a stone in the Alderney Road, London, Cemetery. It is not known what it stands for.

Numbers

Individual

ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
צץ	פף	ע	ס	נן	מם	ל	כך	י
90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10
ת	ש	ר	ק					
400	300	200	100	etc...				

ה'	ד'	ג'	ב'	א'
5,000	4,000	3,000	2,000	1,000

or sometimes the letter is written larger than the others to indicate that it is being used for thousands.

In combination

י"ט	י"ח or ח"י	ט"ז or ז"ט	ט"ז	ט"ו	ט"ד	י"ג	י"ב	י"א
19	18 or 18	17 or 17	16	15	14	13	12	11
תשנ"ה	תקס"ד	קי"א etc		ך"ב or	כ"ב	כ"א		
755	544	111		22	22	21		

As a chronogram

1853 AD = 613 = 3+200+400+10 = בשנת עם לבן גרתי לפ"ק

Gregorian & Jewish equivalents

1740 AD = '500 AM; 1840 AD = '600 AM; 1940 AD = '700 AM

AD = Anno Domini; AM = Anno Mundi (The year of the World, ie counting backwards from now (2002) until biblical times, and then backwards through the Bible until the beginning of the life of Adam you come to the current Jewish year of 5762.

The thousands [we are now in 5,000] are generally omitted when writing Hebrew dates. When they are omitted, the three Hebrew letters , or a composite letter incorporating all three letters, is generally placed after the date.

Verses used as chronograms are sometimes an indication of the activities of the deceased.

[The following advice is taken largely from Jeremy Jones, *How to Record Graveyards* (3rd edn. London, 1984).]

Geological Identification of the Tomb

Note whether the stone is Granite, York, Limestone, Slate, Marble or a combination, or made of another material.

Types of Monument

Note whether it is: Headstone, Coped stone, Coffin or body stone, Chest tomb (with panelled sides), Altar tomb (with brick sides), Pedestal tomb (square in section), Kerbstones, Open book, broken column, Artificial mound, Obelisk. Is it enclosed with railings? Is it a family plot?

Note any symbolic features: skull and crossbones, hearts, hourglasses, arrows or darts, lamps, scythes, spades, pick axes, snakes (often with tails in mouth), trees (?mutilated), trumpets, books, pens. Particularly Jewish features include: Star of David palms of hands with thumbs touching (a Kohen); a ewer pouring out water, sometimes on to the hands of a Kohen (a Levi); two candlesticks for a pious woman, a broken candlestick for a pious woman who died young; twin pillars of Jachin and Boaz; a scroll of the Torah or five Books of Moses; a crown (representing the crown of Torah or a good name); a menorah; lions guarding the Torah.

On Rumanian Jewish stones the pelican (which according to ancient belief fed its young with the blood of its breast — see the pelicans in the room in Jerusalem where the Last Supper is said to have occurred) is used as a symbol for women.

In central Europe surnames are sometimes reflected in artistic decoration: In Speyer (Rhine Valley) a 1365 stone for a woman Blume bat Jacob has a flower. David Gans (d. 1613) has a goose on his stone in the Prague cemetery, there is a mouse for a Maisl family, a lion for a Judah Lob (= Lowe = a lion), a fish for the Karpelis family. Issacher Teller (d. 1697) in Prague has a bear (cf Gen. 49:14 where Issacher is compared to an ass which 'bears' a burden), as well as a medical instrument reflecting his profession as a doctor. In Mikulov, Czech Republic, is a stone with a hand holding a collecting box — the deceased was a Charity Treasurer.

Symbols for the house in which the deceased lived appear on stones in Hanau. *Zum Schwaben*, at the Swabian Building, is indicated with a man and a German inscription in Hebrew characters, another has a Palm Tree, another has a horse, with the inscriptions *Zum Palmenboim* and *Zum goldenem Ross*. Coats of arms, where the owner was entitled to them, or at least thought he was, also appear [For the information in the three preceding paragraphs I am indebted to Hannalore Kunzl, 'Symbolism in the Art of Jewish Gravestones in Europe', *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1985), Divi-

sion D, vol II, Art, Folklore, Theatre, Music; and to Dr Sharman Kadish, Jerusalem, who brought it to my attention.]

On Isaac Gompertz's (d. 1836) stone in Exeter was incised a passage from his poetic work, *Devon*. Watch out for acrostics on the deceased's name in inscriptions.

Photographs

Any good camera suffices. Relatively slow film is best, and a small stop, often necessitating a tripod.

Best results will often (but not always) be obtained with a directional light source, such as direct or diffused sunlight, or a source of artificial light. Where possible the light should come from top left. In the case of a very worn inscription there may only be fifteen minutes when the sun strikes at an optimum angle.

Skilful use of flash, not frontally but obliquely, may give good results. It may then be best to wait for darkness, but be sure to let everyone around know that you are there with the best of intentions, or you may arouse sinister suspicions! Monochrome film is best, but if it is a multicoloured stone then you will want colour film.

Cleaning

Do not use metal objects for cleaning away earth which has banked up at the foot of the stone. If necessary, clean the stone with a dry brush.



Errors

The opportunities for errors are legion. To begin with, the mason was possibly a gentile who knew neither the Hebrew alphabet nor the meaning of the words he was incising. Even if the inscription was correctly written it may not have been cut deeply and consequently weathered poorly after many decades. Acid rain and atmospheric pollution, even in non-industrial areas, has worked havoc on many stones.

The letters which are most likely to be misread are:

א for ע when the bottom right hand shank of the ע is worn away.

ב and כ at any time

ד and ר are easily confused

ה may be misread as a ד or ר if its left foot is eroded, or as a ק if the foot is extended

ה may be taken for ח if its foot is extended upwards, and vice versa

ו and ז are easily confused

ט can be read as יי or as a ש

י can be read as an abbreviation mark, or lost altogether

ך can be mistaken for ד or ר

ל can be read as כ or ב or ק or ר or ד when the top of the ל is worn away

ם and ס are easily confused at the end of a word

ן can be taken for ו or ד

פ can be taken for כ or ב

צ sometimes looks like a ע

ק if it loses its leg can look like a ל or כ or פ or ב

ר is easily confused with ד, or if the head of a ל reaches up into an upper line, then ר and ד can be misread as a ה or ק

ש when eroded can look like an ע, or double יי

ת can easily be taken for ח or ה

Of the ninety-five inscriptions which the Rev. Dr M. Berlin noted in the Plymouth Hoe Jewish Cemetery forty five had totally disappeared within seventy years.

Bibliography

M. Jolles, *The Northampton Jewish Cemetery* (Jolles Publications, London, 1994).
The Jewish Burial Ground at Jewbury, eds J. M. Lilley, G. Stroud, D. R. Brothwell,
M. H. Williamson (Council for British Archaeology, York, 1994).

In addition, Mr Charles Tucker, Archivist at the Chief Rabbi's Office, has produced a two-page Bibliography on Jewish Cemeteries, from which the following are extracted.

Legal History

M.R. Russel Davies, *The Law of Burial, Cremation and Exhumation* (5th edn Shaw, London, 1982).

Gazetteers

Meller Hughes, *London Cemeteries* (2nd edn, Gregg International, 1985), pp. 166–181, Jewish burial grounds within the North and South Circular Roads.

Histories of Particular Cemeteries

Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society:

vol 2 (1894), Jews' Burial Ground at Ipswich

vol 10 (1924), Old Sephardi Cemetery, rear 243 Mile End Road, E1.

vol 11 (1928), The Jewish Cemetery at Ballybough in Dublin.

vol 19 (1960), The Cemetery of the Resettlement.

vol 20 (1964), Pre-Expulsion Jewish Cemetery of London.

vol 29 (1988), The Jews of Bath.

Issacher Ben-Ami, 'Death, Burial and Mourning Customs among Sephardic Jews in London', *Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews in England* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Folklore Research Centre Studies, 5, 1975), pp. 11-35. Between pp 32–33 there are sixty photographs of the Velho (Old), Nuevo (New) and Golders Green Cemeteries.

Henry Levine, *The Norwich Hebrew Congregation* (Norwich, 1961).

Lewis Olsover, *The Jewish Communities of North-East England* (1975).

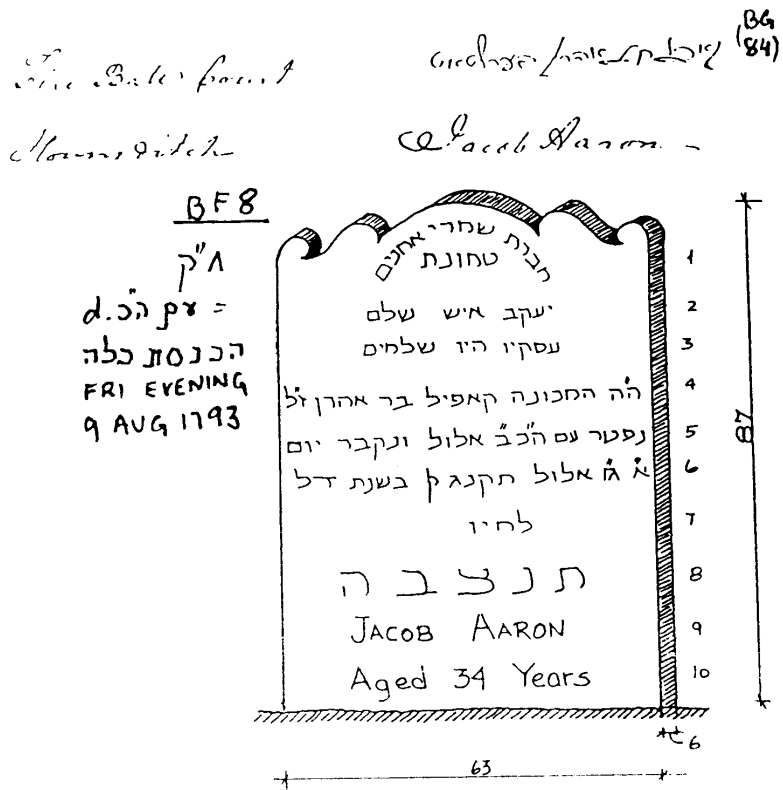
Arnold Levy, *Sunderland Jewish Community* (London, 1956).

Bernard Susser, *Plymouth Hoe Jewish Cemetery* (2nd edn, 1995).

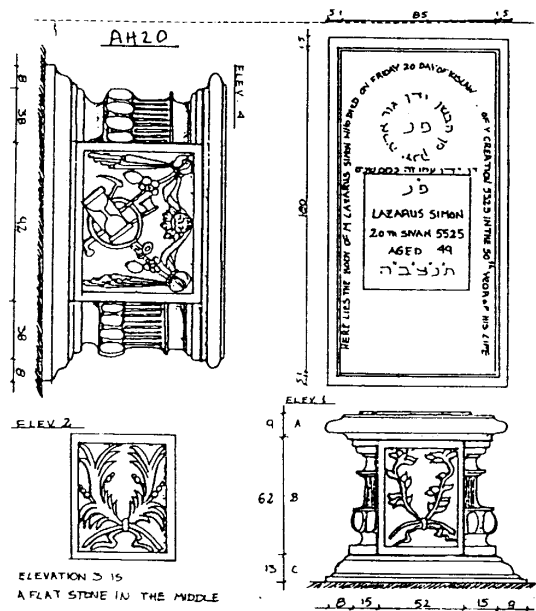
Brian Torode, *The Hebrew Community of Cheltenham, Gloucester and Stroud* (Gloucester, 1989).

Bernard Susser is also publishing during 1995 the tombstone inscriptions in the Jewish cemeteries of Exeter, Falmouth, Penzance and Plymouth (Gifford Place) as one volume in the six volume series of Anglo-Jewish Studies in the South-West of England.

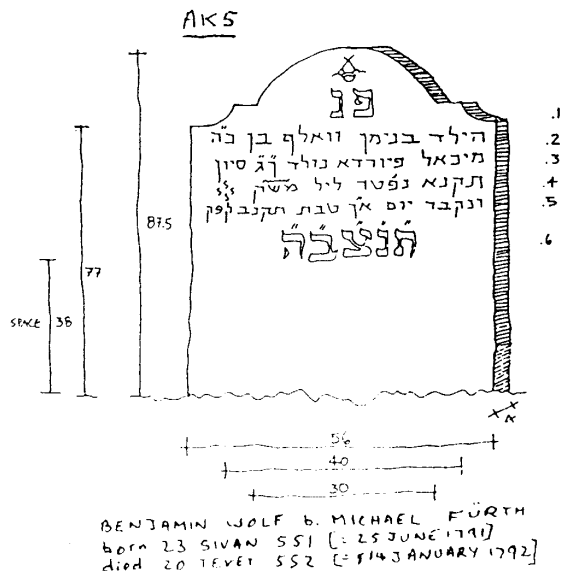
The hand drawn illustrations are of tombstones and inscriptions in the Alderney Road Cemetery, Mile End, London. They were done in 1993 by Paula Palombo and Yael Turner, who were on a student exchange scheme organised by ICOMOS UK/Israel and the Working Party on Jewish Monuments UK and Ireland. They were supervised by Dr Sharman Kadish and Mr Charles Tucker. The reference numbers to the illustrations are the numbers in their transcriptions. The photographs are of tombstones in the Alderney Road cemetery.



Record and transcription of the tomb of Jacob Aaron, 1793, with a facsimile of the entry from the record book of the Great Synagogue



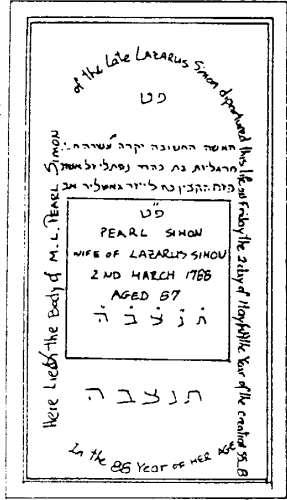
ELEVATION 3 IS A FLAT STONE IN THE MIDDLE



Record of the tomb of Benjamin Wolf, son of Michael Fürth, 1792.

AH 21

זא עטרה
ז מרת
ז פוח
א ז



Record of the tomb of Pearl Simon, 1788



Tomb of Alexander Alexander, Exeter



Tomb of XX, Plymouth



Tomb of XX, Plymouth

