

Challenging antisemitism

Reflections for Quakers on recognising and responding to anti-Jewish prejudice

antisemitism

Semitism is hostility to and Jewish people. The extreme right Front promoted anti-semitism.

antiseptic /æntiseptik/

Antiseptic is a substance





A guide to the guide

This guide is intended to be read from beginning to end, with sections following on from the previous one. But if there are particular issues you want to find out quickly, look at the list below.

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1 | A note on language and context

Quakers are not experts on antisemitism, collectively or (in many cases) individually. But, like all forms of racism, it is important that we know how to recognise and work against antisemitism. If we believe that all people are children of God, then we should reject anything that stereotypes and demeans people, or worse inspires hatred and dehumanisation.

In this guide, we cannot give a definitive view on what is, or isn't, antisemitic in every situation. What we can do is say how antisemitism can manifest. We seek to

inform and educate ourselves about this particular oppression, encourage each other to oppose it, and help build a world without it. There are resources and organisations at the end (Appendix 3) where you can learn more.

In this guide, we use the term antisemitism¹ written as one word, without the hyphenation, and we use it to mean specifically a hatred of, or prejudice and insensitivity towards, Jews individually or as a group.

2 | Why do we need this guide?

Just like all other oppressions, antisemitism can be unconscious. Many non-Jews don't know much about Jews or antisemitism. When we don't know much about an oppression, it's easy for us to miss it or, worse, accidentally perpetuate it.

There is a real problem of unrecognised or unchallenged antisemitism among some Quakers and groups we connect with (see appendix 1 for some examples of antisemitism). This is of course counter to our work as a faith community committed to equality and to becoming actively anti-racist. At a time when antisemitism is on the rise in many countries,² perpetuating anti-Jewish oppression or allowing it to continue unchallenged plays into this dangerous trend and risks emboldening those who threaten Jewish communities.

People sometimes think of antisemitism as being mainly or totally about Israel/Palestine. While the violence in Israel and Palestine is a big driver of modern-day antisemitism (times of increased intensity in the region are always accompanied by surges of antisemitism in the UK³), it's a mistake to reduce it to this. Antisemitism exists in Britain and across the world, and has been around for centuries. For those of us in Britain, whose greatest influence is likely on our neighbours and communities in Britain, that should be our focus.

Criticism of Israel is not always, but could well be, intentionally or unconsciously antisemitic. Sometimes,

criticism of Israel is wrongly labelled as antisemitism, due to genuine misunderstandings or deliberate efforts to label all criticism of Israeli policy as antisemitic. But also, criticism of Israel could be disguised antisemitism, either intentionally or unconsciously. Context matters: excessive focus on Israel when other countries are doing similar actions could well make it antisemitic. The person saying it matters: people with stronger connections to Israel (such as by living there or in Israeli-occupied Palestine, or having close personal links with Israel) have greater leeway to speak about the country than those of us elsewhere in the world. (See section 3b for the importance of Israel to many Jews).

It is essential that we challenge antisemitism when it arises and do not unconsciously perpetuate it. To do this, we need to understand and recognise antisemitism and develop our skills at challenging it. Learning about the history of antisemitism and how it is expressed in our society today, is part of our work on becoming an actively anti-racist church. Through this, we can become more aware of how some people expressing support for others, such as Palestinians, can do so (often unconsciously) in a way that is antisemitic. As a faith community which aspires to uphold the rights and humanity of all, we must do everything we can to make sure we are not complicit. We may wish to call out wrongdoing but we must not lose sight of the need for peace in the way we choose to speak out or bear witness.

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1. The root word Semite gives the false impression that antisemitism is directed against all Semitic people. The compound word Antisemitismus ('antisemitism') was first used in print in Germany in 1879 as a scientific-sounding term for Judenhass ('Jew-hatred'), and this has been its common use since then to describe hatred of Jews. More details available at 'How "Anti-Semitism" Replaced "Jew-Hatred" and Why It Shouldn't Have' (2020) Mosaic Magazine <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/history-ideas/2020/05/how-anti-semitism-replaced-jew-hatred-and-why-it-shouldnt-have> (accessed 12 June 2024).
 2. Fundamental Rights Agency (2019), Antisemitism: Overview of data available in the European Union 2008–2018
 3. See for example 'Surge in anti-Semitic incidents in UK over past year: Charity' (2024) Al-Jazeera News www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/2/uk-records-spike-in-anti-semitism-over-past-year-charity (accessed 24 October 2024) and Community Security Trust (2015) Annual Review 2014 <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/4/c/Annual%20Review%202014.1615559190.pdf> (accessed 24 October 2024).

3 | What do I need to know about the history of antisemitism?

Antisemitism can often look different from other forms of racism, which tend to portray oppressed groups as powerless and inferior. Anti-Jewish oppression often portrays Jews as powerful and in control of societal institutions.

This false portrayal of Jewish people as powerful has been used deliberately throughout European history to make them a convenient scapegoat who can be blamed for problems in society. This has often been used to distract attention from those who actually hold the power. For example, in the Middle Ages in northern Europe, Jews were forced by the ruling powers to work as moneylenders and tax-collectors while being excluded from other ways of making a living, which led to their being blamed for the taxes imposed by rulers and subjected to deadly violence as a result.⁴

Much antisemitism has Christian roots, even though many early Christian figures were Jewish themselves. St John the Evangelist criticised Jews and blamed them for the death of Jesus (see section 5 for more on antisemitic stereotypes and myths). Jews in the Rhineland were slaughtered in 1096 by would-be crusaders on their way to the First Crusade,⁵ while in later centuries Jews were expelled from England



(in 1290) and France (in 1306). In late medieval Spain, opposition to Jewish religion moved into a hatred or mistrust of Jewish people, even those who converted to Christianity. Following the expulsion of Spain's Jewish population in 1492, only 'Jews who had converted to Christianity were allowed to remain, and those suspected of continuing to practice Judaism faced persecution in the Spanish Inquisition⁶ or were suspected of having 'tainted blood'.

More generally, antisemitism in Europe has for centuries been cyclical not linear. Periods when Jews can live relatively safely and easily are followed by sudden outbreaks of antisemitism, often involving mass murder, expulsion from their countries and forced conversions to Christianity.⁷ The Nazi Holocaust is the most recent and most extreme example of this in Europe (see section 3a). However, antisemitism continues to this day, and is not something 'left in the past'.

The history of Jews in other parts of the world has not always been the same. For centuries, Jews in India⁸ and China⁹ lived with very little overt discrimination. Jews in the Islamic world lived as one religious minority among others; there were periods when Jews achieved high status and rank, and periods when they were subjected to persecution and violence,¹⁰ including in the months

4. 'Understanding Antisemitism: An Offering to our Movement', Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (2017) www.jfrej.org/assets/uploads/JFREJ-Understanding-Antisemitism-November-2017-v1-3-2.pdf (accessed 12 June 2024).
5. David Nirenberg, 'The Rhineland Massacres of Jews in the First Crusade: Memories Medieval and Modern' in Althoff, Fried and Geary (eds), *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (2002, 2013), Cambridge University Press
6. 'Anti-semitism in medieval Europe', Encyclopedia Britannica (2024) www.britannica.com/topic/anti-Semitism/Anti-Semitism-in-medieval-Europe (accessed 9 November 2024).
7. For more information, see the Church of England's 2019 report *God's Unfailing Word: Theological and Practical Perspectives on Christian-Jewish Relations*
8. 'India', World Jewish Congress website www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/IN (accessed 12 June 2024).
9. 'Encounters Between Chinese and Jewish Civilizations', Association for Asian Studies (2018) www.asianstudies.org/publications/aaa/archives/encounters-between-chinese-and-jewish-civilizations (accessed 12 June 2024).
10. 'Jews in Islamic Countries: The Treatment of Jews', Jewish Virtual Library website www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-treatment-of-jews-in-arab-islamic-countries (accessed 14 June 2024).



and years after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948,¹¹ so that there are now very few Jews in majority Islamic countries. Historically, the overall frequency and severity of antisemitic violence and persecution was less than in the Christian countries of Northern Europe.¹² We have a particular focus on European antisemitism because it has been spread around the world through colonialism by Britain and other colonial powers, and so now has global influence.

3a. The Holocaust

The Holocaust was the mass-murder by the Nazi regime of Jews.¹³ While other groups deemed 'inferior' were also victims of Nazi persecution, including Gypsies/Roma, Black people, LGBT+ people and those with disabilities,¹⁴ Jews were the most extensively targeted in what is called the 'Shoah' in Hebrew, with the Nazis' aim being total extermination of Jews in Europe. Six million Jews died as a result of these policies, around one-third of all Jews in the world at that time.

(Best practice in Holocaust education is to use the term 'Holocaust' for persecution of Jews, with other groups being victims of 'Nazi persecution'.)

Even for Jews who did not live through the Holocaust, it casts a long shadow. They will have relatives who died, lived in the camps or were refugees; the Holocaust means some have little family in older generations. 'Second (or subsequent) generation' victims very often still feel the vicarious trauma of the genocide.

Some Quakers were involved in supporting Jews both before and after the Holocaust. Some of the most well-known initiatives were the Kindertransport, which took Jewish children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to Britain in 1938-40;¹⁵ work by American Quakers in the late 1930s to resettle refugees not being supported by other groups;¹⁶ and providing health and hygiene at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp after its liberation in 1945.¹⁷ While these are laudable, Quakers should be aware of the roles played by others, including Jewish groups, and that many other Quakers did nothing to support Jews.

3b. The importance of Israel

Why does Israel matter so much to so many Jews? It comes in the context of multi-generational, profound and pervasive antisemitism in western culture. Therefore, having a nation in their ancestral homeland deeply matters to many Jews, a place where they can feel safe from the antisemitism and persecution felt and experienced in the rest of the world. Of course, many British Jews (whether or not they agree with the occupation of Palestine) have complicated feelings about Israel, especially if they have relatives there or have lived in Israel. As in other 'difficult conversations', it is important to listen respectfully and look for 'kinder ground' rather than demand an absolutist or (to you) internally logical position.

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11. Justice for Jews from Arab countries, 'Jewish refugees from Arab countries', deposited in European Parliament at www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/il20062006_07/il20062006_07en.pdf (accessed 22 May 2024)
 12. Mark Cohen (2014) 'The "Golden Age" of Jewish-Muslim Relations: Myth and Reality' in A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations, pp28-30 (accessed at <https://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/p10098.pdf> on 14 June 2024).
 13. 'The Holocaust', Holocaust Memorial Day Trust www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/the-holocaust (accessed 22 May 2024).
 14. 'Nazi persecution of other groups 1933-1945', Holocaust Memorial Day Trust www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-persecution (accessed 22 May 2024).
 15. 'The Kindertransport and Refugees', Holocaust Memorial Day Trust www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/the-holocaust/kindertransport-refugees (accessed 11 June 2024).
 16. 'Work with Refugees' subsection of 'Quakers' page, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/quakers> (accessed 11 June 2024).
 17. 'Friends Relief Service in WWII', Quakers in the World website www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/301/Friends-Relief-Service-in-WWII (accessed 11 June 2024).

4 | What is the state of antisemitism today?

Recorded instances of antisemitism are rising in the UK and many other countries.¹⁸ As has been well-publicised, there was a large upswing in antisemitic incidents in the UK following the 7 October 2023 attacks in Israel by Hamas and the Israeli response attacking Gaza.¹⁹ (There was also a big spike in Islamophobic incidents.²⁰) There are organisations that track cases of antisemitism in the UK and elsewhere; refer to them for the most up-to-date information (see appendix 3).

5 | What should I look out for?

5a. Stereotypes and tropes

Look out for antisemitic stereotypes or tropes – myths about Jews – many of which have deep historical roots. These ideas have been used, in some cases for centuries, to incite mass violence against Jews. So when people use them, intentionally or unintentionally, their wider historical power is felt deeply. Many of the tropes, such as those around power, wealth or a Jewish 'lobby', are readily applied to Israel as well; this is part of why criticism of Israel for these reasons can be seen as antisemitic. They include:

Myths of Jewish power: The idea that Jews hold disproportionate amounts of power or control the banks/media/society/world etc. Examples of this include exaggerated claims about Israel's power and influence in the world and conspiracy theories involving prominent Jews such as the Rothschild family or George Soros. As discussed earlier, this trope has deep roots in European anti-Jewish oppression. Research the history of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (a conspiracy theory), for example, to learn more.



Myths about a Jewish 'lobby': There is no global 'Jewish lobby' – Jews across the world are not engaged in an organised conspiracy to lobby together. Be aware that 'Israeli' and 'Zionist' are sometimes used, intentionally or not, as proxy words instead of 'Jewish' (see below



for more on generalisations and the use of the word 'Zionism').

The myth that Jews are rich: The idea that Jews are rich or good with money, or related myths that Jews are the 'elite', 'intellectuals', or mostly upper- or middle-class. Be aware that these can sometimes express themselves as seemingly 'positive' stereotypes used as a cover for antisemitism e.g. that Jews are 'clever' with money.

The myth that Jews are an underclass: The idea that Jews are an inferior group or underclass, often linked with claims that they are dirty or diseased. This trope can and does exist alongside seemingly contradictory ones about Jewish wealth and power; discrimination doesn't need to be logical or consistent.

Disloyalty myths: The myth that British Jews have 'dual loyalty' and therefore aren't 'loyal enough', or are 'traitors', to Britain.



18. See report by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency above

19. 'Antisemitic incidents report 2023', Community Security Trust <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/02/15/antisemitic-incidents-report-2023> (accessed 12 June 2024).

20. 'Greatest Rise in Reported Anti-Muslim Hate Cases to Tell MAMA since Oct 7th', Tell MAMA <https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th> (accessed 12 June 2024).



Ideas rooted in Christian anti-Jewish oppression:

These include:

- The idea that Jews are evil or akin to the devil (including the depiction of Jews with 'devil' horns) or that Jews killed Jesus.
- The idea that Judaism is a backward or old-fashioned religion (for example, that the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible is violent and vengeful) or that Christianity has somehow superseded it and rendered it irrelevant (despite the fact that Jesus was Jewish).
- Anything referring to Jews as bloodthirsty, poisoners or murderous.
- The misuse of the theological concept of 'the chosen people' to suggest that Jews think they are special. The theological concept of 'the chosen people' is complex, means different things to different people and for most Jews does not imply superiority.

Visual tropes: Many of these have been used in antisemitic cartoons for centuries. They include:

- Caricatures of Jews e.g. hooked noses, curly hair
- Visuals that imply Jews are controlling people, countries, or even world structures, including depicting them with puppet strings.
- Images associated with known antisemitic tropes e.g. the octopus (often depicted as encircling the world, with close connections to puppeteer tropes).

Denial of antisemitism: The myth that antisemitism doesn't exist and/or is not a problem in our society, or language that plays into this. For example, dismissing work against antisemitism as being automatically about shutting down criticism of Israeli policies, or always part of a concerted 'witch-hunt', or referring to all

concerns raised about antisemitism as 'accusations' – this implies automatic disbelief of all those who call out antisemitism.

5b. Generalisations

Look out for generalisations about Jews.

Generalisations about any group are not helpful and are easily offensive. Generalisations about Jews inevitably play into antisemitism and also often draw on antisemitic tropes. Common generalisations to be aware of and avoid are:

- Anything that lumps Jews together as one amorphous body who think and act the same.
- Using the word 'Jew' or 'Jewish' when you mean 'Israel' or 'Israeli', or generalising about 'the Israelis'. The majority of the world's Jews are not Israeli, not all Israelis are Jewish (there are close to two million Palestinian citizens of Israel, both Christian and Muslim) and not all Israelis think or act the same.
- Equating Jews with Israel, bringing in Israel or Zionism into a conversation with, or about, Jewish people where it isn't relevant, or blaming all Jews for the actions of Israel.
- Making a claim about a 'lobby' unless you define carefully what you mean (e.g. AIPAC is a lobby group advocating pro-Israeli policies to the US government). Name the actual group and their activities, don't generalise.
- Assuming that all Jewish people or



Jewish organisations must have an opinion on Israel/Palestine issues and/or assuming you know what that opinion might be, or assuming that everything Jewish is somehow connected to Israel/Palestine.

- Expecting that British Jews can influence the Israeli government or that they have a 'duty' to do something about the occupation of Palestine.
- Holding up Jews who eg choose to take action on the occupation of Palestine as examples of the 'good' ones – this implies that other Jews are bad.
- Invoking the Holocaust when describing human rights abuses against Palestinians. While specific contexts may influence whether this is antisemitic or not, it inevitably plays into a wider antisemitic discourse and is always inflammatory.
- Assuming that Zionism has only one definition and that people who self-define as Zionist will not be critical of the occupation of Palestine.

- Assuming that all British Jews are white, educated and middle-class, which plays into the 'all Jews are rich and powerful' trope.
- The mistaken assumption that all Jews are white or ethnically European. Whilst not necessarily antisemitic, this is a generalisation and stereotype which is incorrect and oppressive towards Jews of colour around the world.

• 5c. Holding Israel to a different standard

While criticism of the actions of the Israeli state is not inherently antisemitic, if people are repeatedly or prominently criticising Israel but not criticising the same actions by other countries, then it can feel like Israel is being singled out or held to a higher standard than other countries. In the context of the current (2025) world situation, some reviewers of this paper queried why there have been many public demonstrations and statements about the mass killing of civilians in Gaza, but not about mass killings in e.g. Sudan or Myanmar.

6 | Is there consensus about what is antisemitic?

Jewish identity is hugely diverse. Jews come from all over the world and have a huge variety of cultural backgrounds. There are religious Jews from many very different Jewish religious movements, secular Jews, and people with Jewish heritage who are part of other religions, including Quakers. Jews hold the whole range of political views and differ from each other in every way it is possible to differ, as is true of any faith group. This huge diversity naturally means that Jews have different opinions about many or most subjects, including what constitutes antisemitism.

Different Jews also have different life experiences of antisemitism. For example, being more 'visibly Jewish' (for example wearing traditional dress or a religious symbol), or being embedded in a Jewish community, often leads to experiencing more antisemitism than being a person who has Jewish heritage but lives a secular life, who has been raised in another faith, or, though actively Jewish, chooses not to wear distinctively Jewish apparel or symbols.

As the Quaker Council for European Affairs says in its booklet about [race and privilege in Europe](https://www.qcea.org/race-and-privilege-in-europe): "We all have our own truth and lives that are affected by many factors. We cannot assume that every member of any

Antisemitism

[an·ti·sem·i·tism] *n.*

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

group that we perceive to be marginalised feels the same way."²¹

6a. Definitions of antisemitism

Just like the different lived experiences of different Jews, there are a range of attempts to define antisemitism. One of the most well-known and widely supported is the working definition on antisemitism developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)²². It has been adopted by numerous governments and other organisations,

21. *Race and Privilege in Europe*, Quaker Council for European Affairs: www.qcea.org/race-and-privilege-in-europe (accessed 26 November 2025).

22. Working definition of antisemitism, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism> (accessed 1 December 2025).

Antisemitism

[an·ti·sem·i·tism] *n.*

Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish).

Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism

including the UK government²³ and the European Commission²⁴. The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism²⁵ was developed in response to the IHRA working definition, and 'sought to improve on it by offering (a) a clearer core definition and (b) a coherent set of guidelines'.

More than any other part of this guide, the issue of which definition if any to use has divided reviewers. Some have explained that the Jerusalem Declaration is used mainly by politically left-wing groups and that many Jews will immediately suspect a document which promotes it. Some have argued that the IHRA is used to stifle legitimate criticism of Israel and is used as a definitive description in a way that was never intended. Neither the IHRA nor Jerusalem Declaration definitions aim to be politically partisan, and we're here informing readers about them rather than endorsing any particular definition.

Moreover, the fact that there are different attempts to define antisemitism shouldn't be used to deny the experience of a Jewish person who feels the victim of antisemitism. We should treat a complaint of antisemitism the way we treat (for example) someone saying they've been the victim of anti-Black racism, rather than challenge them because it doesn't fit with a preferred definition of antisemitism.

6b. Zionism

Zionism is often used and misunderstood. It can often come into discussions of antisemitism when people try to draw a distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, for example by saying they are anti-Zionist but not antisemitic.

Zionism can mean various things linked to the idea of a homeland for Jewish people: reviewers of this document have described it as 'the national liberation movement of the Jewish people', as 'a religious/spiritual concept about reviving a profound Biblical ideal of a homeland grounded in justice and peace', and as 'support for the state of Israel'. Israel is recognised by most Jews, even those who criticise its policies and government, as the historic homeland of the Jewish people. Around 44% of the world's Jews live in Israel;²⁶ 59% of British Jews define themselves as Zionist, and 90% support Israel's existence as a Jewish state.²⁷

Because Zionism has various meanings and is often used, intentionally or deliberately, to mean something else (including disguised antisemitic abuse), then consider very carefully whether it is the most appropriate word to use. If you can use a word that is clearer or more universally understood, then use that.

Minute 30, Yearly Meeting 2025

We acknowledge the history and present day reality of anti-Jewish hatred in the UK, a hatred that was exported worldwide by British and other European colonial powers.

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23. UK Government's adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, House of Commons Library: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/uk-governments-adoption-of-the-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism> (accessed 1 December 2025).
24. Definition of antisemitism, European Commission https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-antisemitism/definition-antisemitism_en (accessed 1 December 2025).
25. Text from preamble to Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, at <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org> (accessed 7 May 2024).
26. 'Countries with largest Jewish population 2022', Statista website (2022) www.statista.com/statistics/1351079/jewish-pop-by-country (accessed 11 November 2024).
27. 'Are the majority of British Jews Zionists?', Full Fact website (2018) <https://fullfact.org/news/are-majority-british-jews-zionists> (accessed 9 November 2024).

7 | What role can I play in actively challenging antisemitism?

Communities who have been on the receiving end of antisemitism will be aware of the deliberate use of tropes and myths about Jews throughout history, and today. Seeing them shared and perpetuated will cause pain and fear for many. This pain and fear is added to when those who are not subject to the oppression fail to spot or challenge these tropes or actively collude with their use. And, in the same way as with other forms of racism, using these tropes does not just cause hurt feelings, but can also embolden those who wish to threaten Jews today.

So, we all need to learn to recognise antisemitism. The list in section 4 above isn't an exhaustive list of antisemitic ideas, but it should be a good start for learning to spot antisemitism. There is more information in Appendix 3 and there is lots of further information online (though much of it is inflammatory).

Consider how you'd respond to antisemitism when it arises. You may want to directly challenge it yourself, you may want to engage with the perpetrator later if you think that will be more successful, you may want to report it to someone else who can do something, and you may want to support the victim. Consider how you'd respond if you saw other types of racism and as a starting point do the same here. We do not want Jews to be the only ones who notice or oppose antisemitism. As with all oppressions the silence of those not directly affected only perpetuates it.



Many people simply do not know about antisemitic tropes, and reproduce them without thinking. We can play our part in correcting misconceptions and helping others to learn.

Our advice is to:

- **Listen respectfully** to everyone, including all Jews, and take any opportunities which arise to learn more about the wide variety of different Jewish perspectives on these issues – not only those Jewish voices which you feel you will agree with.
- **Repetition** – do not assume that because a Jewish person has said something, it is necessarily OK for you to say it too. Remember, oppressed groups sometimes have the right to express themselves in ways which are not acceptable when used by people who are not part of that group.
- **Avoid tokenism** – for example, holding out the views of particular Jews you agree with as the 'correct' or 'good' ones.
- **Tone** – be careful with 'tone'. Even if the actual words you say or write may not be antisemitic in themselves, sometimes the tone you use can change how they're understood by those experiencing oppression.
- **Continue to learn** about antisemitism, for example by seeking support and advice from others, or through websites, books, films or plays. Consider how you engage with other forms of racism and do the same for antisemitism.

8 | Responding to accusations of antisemitism

There may be times when you are told you have said or done something antisemitic. Here are some tips for how to reflect and respond to this:

- Be willing to listen to what people accuse you of, considering that you may be mistaken. You may feel defensive, but do not automatically dismiss what the person is saying out of hand.
- Try to remain calm and unemotional.
- If you realise that you did (even unintentionally) perpetuate antisemitism, you can apologise and let the person know that you will learn from this. While it may feel uncomfortable to acknowledge this, remember that everyone can make mistakes, in this as in everything else. The best way to rectify mistakes is to take the opportunity to learn from them.
- You may not be able to think clearly about the suggestion in the heat of the moment. If you're in a private setting and it feels appropriate to do so, you may be able to talk through the suggestion with the person who felt you were being antisemitic, then or at a later time. If you are in a public setting such as a speaking engagement, consider whether it is better to acknowledge an error (perhaps because you are in a prominent position like being a speaker, or because the audience may not be around to hear a later reflection) or to say something like: "Thank you for sharing your thoughts. I take them very seriously and will reflect on them later". You could also ask to speak about it personally to the challenger later, if they wish.
- Remember that antisemitism is a form of racism, so also consider how you would and should respond if accused of racism in other circumstances.

This can be a hard and painful experience. It may help to bear in mind that antisemitism has a very long history in Britain, as well as in many other countries, and is embedded in our society, just as other forms of racism, sexism and oppression are. We are all responsible for learning to recognise and challenge them. We are all better advocates for human rights if we do this. The best way you will be able to assess if this is happening to you is to educate yourself as fully as possible about antisemitism and its history.

Good intentions are important, but well-intentioned words and actions can still hurt. Apologies can often help, but if we are just saying words that are not felt in the heart, these are not acts of authentic faith. Our aim should be to use the situation, and the discomfort it brings, to inwardly transform ourselves.

9 | An invitation to a continuing journey

Ultimately, a good goal is to have enough understanding of antisemitism to be able to have an informed opinion about whether or not something is antisemitic, and, if we need to, to discuss this respectfully with people who may not agree with us. However, we understand that when we are not used to thinking about antisemitism, it can feel complicated and difficult to understand at first, and that point may feel difficult or impossible to reach. That is why we have produced this guide.

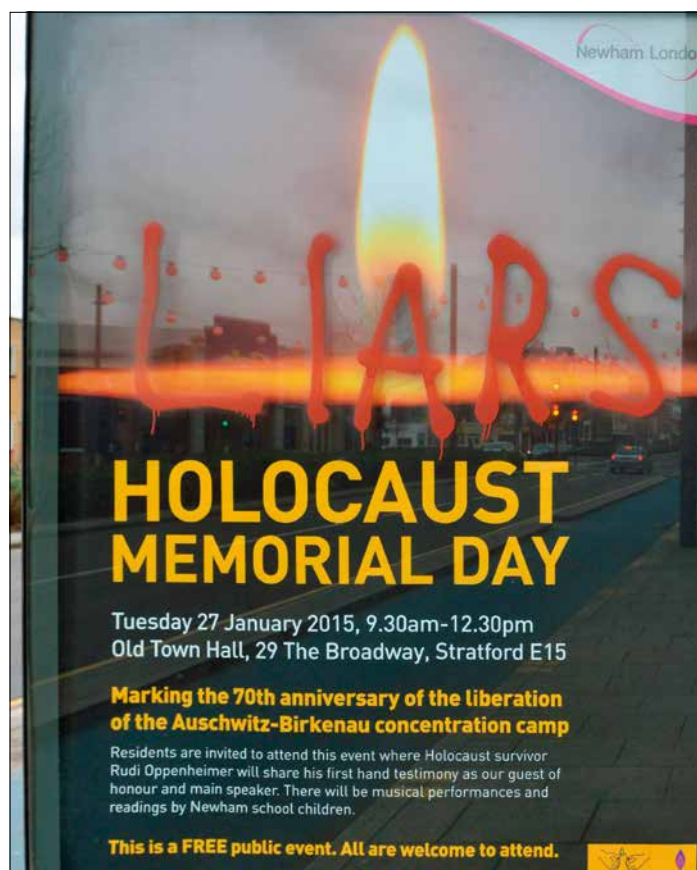
We are reminded of the words from *Advices & queries* 17

When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

Appendix 1 | Examples of antisemitism

Here are some recent examples of antisemitism that writers and reviewers of this document have experienced.

- Someone attending an event describing the fact that his nearby Jewish community have their own security group as “scary”, likening them to settler security firms in the West Bank, and adding “I don’t know how much persecution Jews really face”.
- People describing Jews travelling to Israel from the UK as having a “bolthole” there, implying a lack of loyalty to Britain.
- Trainer refers to a Jewish research organisation, questioning the “agenda” they may have on Israel-Palestine and that it might not be neutral, offering no evidence other than the fact they are Jewish.
- A contact stating that “I boycott Israel and so did not allow someone with a Jewish name to stay in my B&B”.
- Suggestions that a watchdog dropped an investigation into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party while continuing an investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party because the head of the watchdog was Jewish.
- A person describing a politician as “Jewish but nice” – which is greeted by laughter.
- Christians who denounce the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”) as a violent text made irrelevant through Jesus.
- Generalisations about Jews including that they do not have empathy since the trauma of the Holocaust.



- Treatment of Holocaust Memorial Day events as automatically suspect: for example, complaining that it takes attention away from other genocides or suggesting even that they might “support the occupation” despite no evidence to suggest that. Or (in Quakers specifically) arguing that we shouldn’t mark Holocaust Memorial Day because we have a testimony against times and seasons.²⁸
- When a British politician publicly spoke out against a specific antisemitic attack against a group of Jewish people in the UK, someone publicly asking the politician on social media why they don’t also speak out about Palestinians being attacked by the Israeli military and settlers.
- Writing anti-occupation graffiti on the walls of a synagogue in the UK: Jewish places of worship are not connected with the occupation.
- Stating that there has been no serious antisemitism in Britain since the 1950s.
- Expecting a Jewish person to have an opinion on the Israel/Palestine conflict or to want to talk about it.
- Thoughtlessly calling anything you don’t like a Holocaust or a person a Nazi.

28. The testimony against times and seasons is about treating every day as spiritually equal – no day is more holy than another.

Appendix 2 | Basic information about Jews in the UK and Ireland

Being Jewish is not just about the religion, Judaism. It is also about a race/ethnicity, a culture and a history. There are many secular Jews and Jews with non-Jewish partners. They may identify just as much as Jewish as people who belong to a synagogue. This makes it harder to establish population figures. However, the 2021 UK census recorded 287,000 people identifying as Jewish, around 0.5% of the resident UK population. In Ireland, the 2016 census found that there were 2,557 Jews by religion, or 0.05% of the population.

To put this into a global context, the number of Jews in the world was estimated to be 16.3 million in 2022²⁹ (although different counting methods can give higher numbers) – or about 0.2% of the world population.

Jews live in 70% of countries around the world, but by far the largest populations are in Israel (7.2 million, or 44% of Jews worldwide) and the USA (7.3 million, or 45% of Jews worldwide). 1.8% of Jews worldwide live in the UK, making it the country with the fifth greatest population of Jews in the world (after the USA, Israel, France and Canada).

Jews in the UK and Ireland have a variety of cultural backgrounds. The Jewish population in the UK includes Ashkenazim (Jews of Central and Eastern European origin), Sephardim (Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin) and Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern and North African origin), as well as many Jews with mixed heritages and people of all backgrounds who have chosen to become Jewish.

Jewish religious denominations in the UK and Ireland include:

- Haredi (also spelled Charedi): traditional Judaism which observes Jewish law strictly and rejects modern secular culture. Haredi Jews are sometimes referred to as “ultra-Orthodox”, although some people consider this term pejorative.
- Central Orthodox: traditional Judaism which combines the observance of Jewish law with the secular, modern world. In the UK, Central Orthodoxy is largely represented by the United Synagogue.
- Progressive: This tradition emphasises the evolving nature of Judaism and regards some aspects of Jewish law as non-binding. It includes both Reform and Liberal groups, which completed a merger in 2025 to form Progressive Judaism.
- Masorti: can be understood as falling between Orthodox and progressive Judaism; it views Jewish law as both binding and subject to historical development.

A report in 2016 found that around half of all households with at least one Jew are members of one of the 454 synagogues in the UK. Of these, 53% of households were Central Orthodox, around 20% were Reform and 8% Liberal, 14% were Haredi or similar, and 3% were Masorti. In the Republic of Ireland, there are a small number of synagogues, from the Orthodox and Progressive (including Liberal and Reform) branches.

The names of Jewish movements differ in different countries. A Reform synagogue in Haifa that has connections to some British Quakers is part of the same worldwide movement as what was Liberal Judaism in the UK. In the USA, Masorti Judaism is known as Conservative.

For more information about Jews in the UK, look at the resources from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. Their research aims to provide a better understanding of who Jews are and what they feel, think and do. Their reports are available at: www.jpr.org.uk.



29. 'Countries with largest Jewish population 2022', Statista website (2022) www.statista.com/statistics/1351079/jewish-pop-by-country (accessed 11 November 2024).

Appendix 3 | Links for further reading

Books

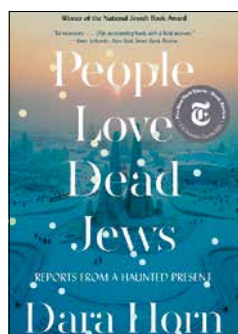
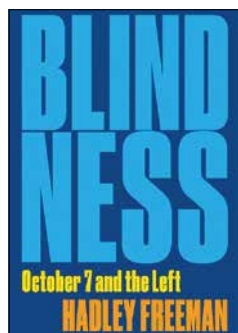
Jews don't count by David Baddiel is a popular and readable introduction to antisemitism.

Antisemitism: What it is. What it isn't. Why it matters. by Julia Neuberger is another introduction to antisemitism, described as readable and nuanced.

Everyday hate: how antisemitism is built into our world and how you can change it by Dave Rich has a broad sweep of history showing the path to the present day.

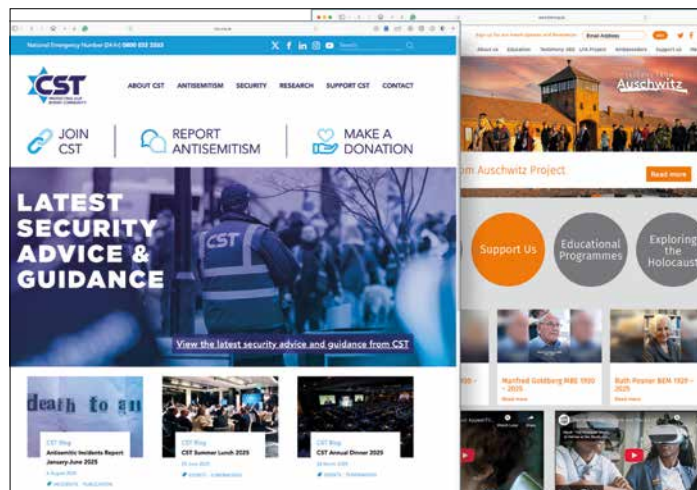
Blindness: October 7 and the Left by Hadley Freeman is an extended essay expressing how many Jews in Britain feel since the 7 October attacks. Takes about an hour to read.

People love dead Jews by Dara Horn is a very readable series of American essays about different Jewish communities, antisemitism, and the experience of being a Jew today.



The **Antisemitism Policy Trust** seeks to educate parliamentarians and policymakers to address antisemitism. They deliver training and policy briefings, and have produced short videos about antisemitism in a comedy format. www.antisemitism.org.uk/videos.

The **Diaspora Alliance** works to 'disrupt and dismantle antisemitism while enhancing civil society, human rights and justice for all'. It does this through research, workshops, campaigning and supporting progressive Jewish networks. <https://diasporaalliance.co>.

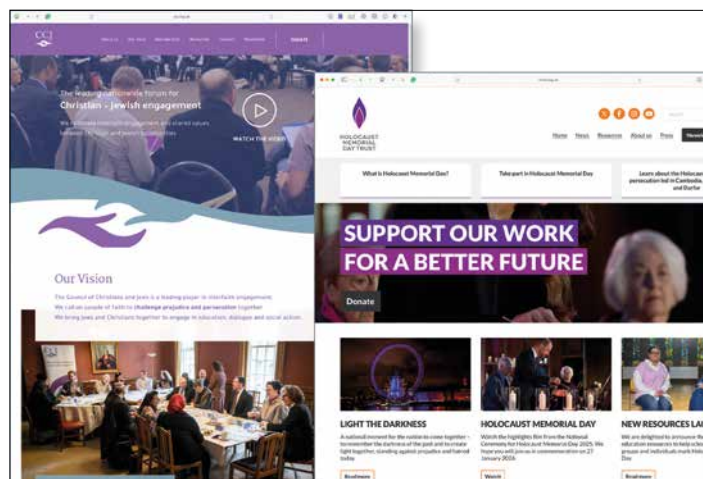


The **Council of Christians and Jews** brings together members of Christian and Jewish communities for learning and events. Its resources focus especially on interfaith understanding, locally and nationally. <https://ccj.org.uk>.

Websites

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust oversees Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK, supports local Holocaust memorial events and does education work about the Holocaust and other genocides. www.hmd.org.uk.

Solutions Not Sides supports respectful listening and dialogue to discuss issues related to Israel-Palestine in schools. <https://solutionsnotsides.co.uk>.



The **Community Security Trust** records and works on cases of antisemitism in Britain; they have the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on antisemitic incidents across the country. <https://cst.org.uk>.

The **Holocaust Education Trust** seeks to educate the British public specifically about the Holocaust, including through school events and resources, and visits to Auschwitz concentration camp. www.het.org.uk.

Parallel Histories works with schools to look at conflicts and contested histories in an evidence-led way. <https://parallelhistories.org.uk>.



Yad Vashem (the Holocaust museum and remembrance centre in Jerusalem) runs a free online course, *Antisemitism: From its origins to the present* www.yadvashem.org/education/online-courses/antisemitism.html.

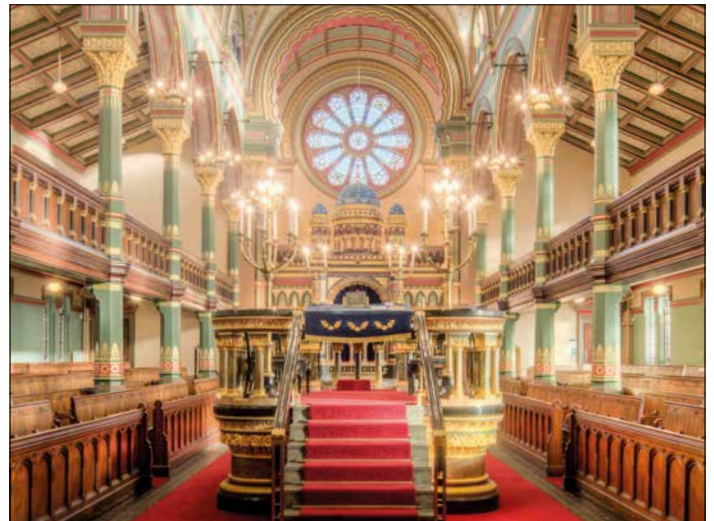


Places to visit

Manchester Jewish Museum is housed in a 19th century synagogue and runs courses and workshops alongside permanent exhibitions about the Jewish community in Manchester. www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com.



Finally, **visit your local synagogue**. You can call to ask about visiting; some synagogues have open days for the general public. Some Jewish congregations are based in Quaker meeting houses, which makes connecting even easier.



Appendix 4 | Notes on some of the images in this booklet

Below are some notes on the images used in this booklet, including, what they show and why they were chosen. Some images used in the booklet needed to be cropped for aesthetic, design or layout reasons.

All the images and photographs below, however, appear in their original uncropped form. Dates either reference the item creation date or, where an incident is mentioned, the date that it happened.

Page 3 – Burning Jews woodcut, 1493



A woodcut depicting Jews being burned alive after accusations of host desecration in Deggendorf, Bavaria, in 1338. The image appears in the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, an illustrated encyclopedia combining world history with biblical narratives, published in 1493. From Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burning_Jews.jpg.

Page 3 – Francisco de Goya - Escena de Inquisición, 1808-1812



Painting by Francisco de Goya depicting an auto-da-fé, an act of public penance imposed by the Inquisition on condemned heretics, apostates and Jews from the 15th century onwards. From Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francisco_de_Goya_-_Escena_de_Inquisición_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

Page 4 – Drobytsky Yar prisoner uniform with Jewish star, 1941



Detail of Jewish star on padded jacket, at the Drobytsky Yar Holocaust Memorial outside Kharkiv, Ukraine. Drobytsky Yar, was a ravine and the site of Nazi massacres during the Holocaust. From December 1941, 15,000 Jews in Kharkiv were relocated to the outskirts of the city and shot. Children were thrown into pits alive to save bullets, in the expectation that they would quickly freeze to death. Image – Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drobytsky_Yar.

Page 5 – *The Secrets of the Wise Men of Zion* book cover, 1920



The Secrets of the Wise Men of Zion (later referred to as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). This 1920 German edition was the first published version outside Russia. The book is antisemitic propaganda asserting the existence of an international Jewish conspiracy. From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>.

Page 5 – Image from journalist Amichai Stein, 2019



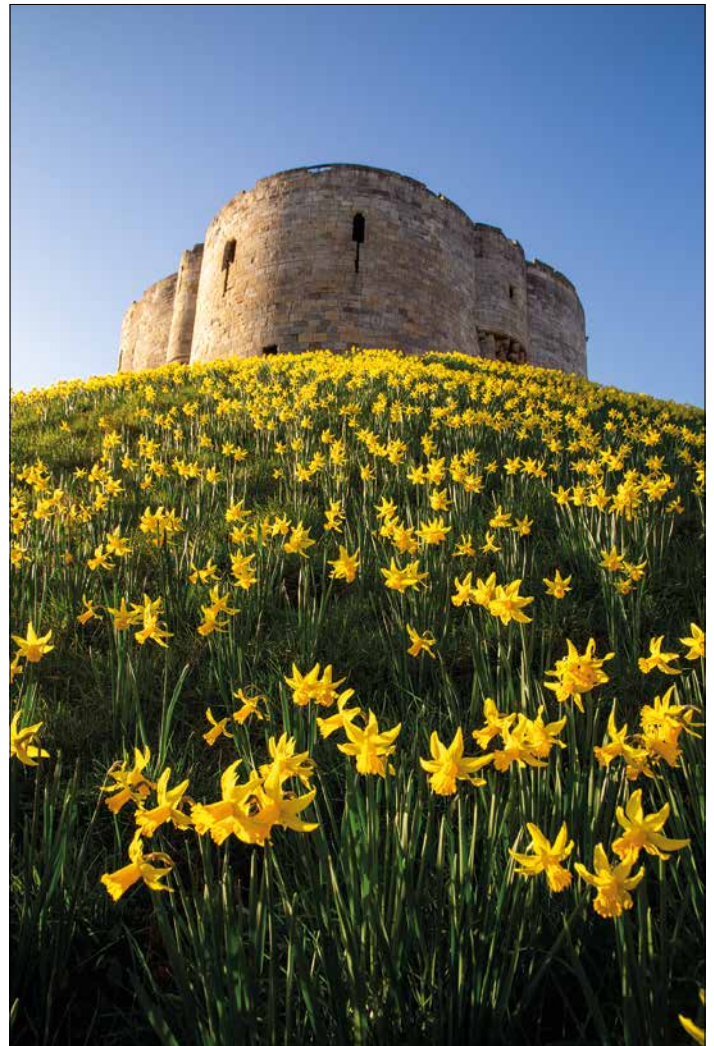
Antisemitic graffiti in Hampstead, West London, that appeared on 29 December 2019, posted online by Amichai Stein (i24news diplomatic correspondent, Jerusalem Post contributor): <https://x.com/AmichaiStein/status/1211227010246303744>.

Page 5 – Slovak anti-Jewish poster, 1941-42



Text reads: Slovaks, read and spread educational literature "Slovakia in Transition" from the Propaganda Bureau. The first issue will introduce you to Judaism." The attacking man shouts "Get out of Slovakia!" From: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antisemitická_Propaganda_na_Slovensku.jpg

Page 6 – Clifford's Tower, York, 1190



In 1190 York Castle was the site of one of medieval England's worst pogroms. Anti-Jewish hostility, inflamed by crusading fervour and encouraged by debtors, forced York's Jewish community, led by Joseus of York, to seek refuge in the wooden keep. Fearing betrayal, they prevented the constable from entering, provoking a siege. On 16 March, rather than be killed or forcibly converted, most chose collective suicide and set the keep alight, while those who surrendered were killed. Around 150 Jews died. The keep was later rebuilt. Daffodils, whose six-pointed shape recalls the Star of David, are planted annually as a memorial.

From Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City_of_York_-_Clifford%27s_Tower_-_20220319075108.jpg. Also see: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/cliffords-tower-york/history-and-stories/massacre-of-the-jews>.

Page 6 – Wake Up Americans! antisemitic poster, 1939



An antisemitic poster produced in the USA equating Jews with communism and calling for the boycotting of Jewish interests. From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/photo/antisemitic-poster-in-the-united-states>.

Page 6 – Vichy Regime propaganda Poster, 1940-42



A poster produced by the Vichy Regime, in Nazi-occupied France, intended to stigmatize the Third Republic, supposedly riddled with capitalism, communism, corruption, Jews, and Freemasons. From Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revolution_Nationale_propaganda_poster.jpg.

Page 9 – Our love is stronger than your hate, 2024



A handmade sign at the Unity Rally, a march against antisemitism in San Francisco: <https://unsplash.com/photos/a-person-holding-a-sign-that-says-our-love-is-stronger-than-your-hate-A0P0Pj7S0uU>.

Page 9 – Naomi Blake sculpture, Friends House, Euston



A sculpture at Friends House created by Naomi Blake (1924–2018, Czechoslovakia-born sculptor and Holocaust survivor) which honours Bertha Bracey (1893–1899). Blake created the piece in recognition of Bracey's courageous leadership. Between 1933-1948, Bracey – as a member of the Quakers – oversaw the rescue and resettlement of thousands of Nazi victims and lone children through the Kindertransport and other relief efforts. The sculpture stands as a tribute to both Bracey's humanitarian work and Blake's own dedication to memory and resilience.

Photo: Michael Preston for Quakers in Britain

Page 11 – Image from journalist Amichai Stein, 2019



Antisemitic graffiti in Hampstead, West London, that appeared on 29 December 2019, posted online by Amichai Stein (i24news diplomatic correspondent, Jerusalem Post contributor): <https://x.com/AmichaiStein/status/1211227010246303744>.

Page 14 – Ohel Yizkor, Yad Vashem



The Ohel Yizkor (Hall of Remembrance) is the principal memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, erected to honour Holocaust victims who lost their families and have no graves to visit. The mausoleum bears the names of the concentration and extermination camps, encloses an eternal flame, and shelters a symbolic grave with the ashes of anonymous victims. Designed in 1961 by architects Arie El-Hanani, Arie Sharon, and Benjamin Idelson, it stands as a solemn testament to memory and loss.

From Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohel_Yizkor.

Page 11 – “Liars” antisemitic graffiti, 2015



Antisemitic graffiti sprayed on a Holocaust Memorial Day poster, Stratford High Street, Newham, London. Photo: [Matthew Chattle/Alamy Live News](#)

Page 14 – Manchester Jewish Museum



The Manchester Jewish Museum, housed in the former 1874 Moorish-Revival synagogue on Cheetham Hill Road, preserves over 200 years of Jewish history in the city. Once the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, it functioned as a place of worship until 1984, before reopening as a museum. Following a major refurbishment completed in 2021, it now combines restored historic architecture with contemporary galleries exploring migration, community life and Jewish heritage, offering a vivid account of Jewish experience in Manchester.

Image from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester_Jewish_Museum.

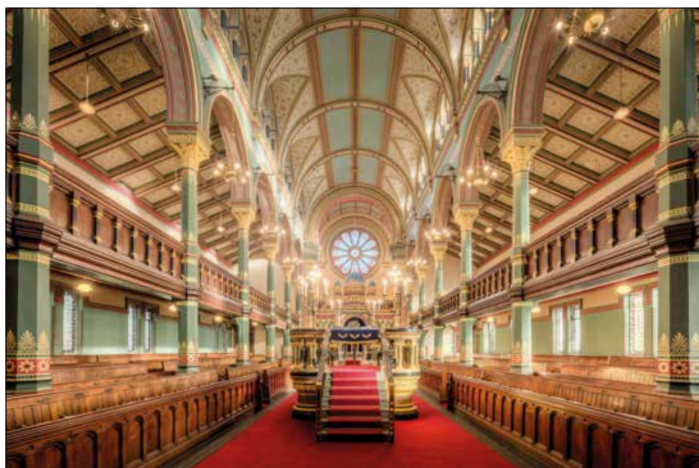
P12 & 14 – United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld stained glass memorial, 1964



A large free-standing stained glass panel by Russian–French Jewish artist Marc Chagall stands in the lobby of the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York City. Created in memory of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and fifteen other UN staff who died in the 1961 plane crash in Ndola while on a peace mission, the work symbolises hope, unity and the pursuit of peace. Chagall's vibrant colours and visionary style evoke a vision of international solidarity and enduring remembrance.

Photo: UN Photo/Lois Conner – www.un.org/ungifts/peace-window.

Page 14 – Princes Road Synagogue, Liverpool



The Princes Road Synagogue, officially Liverpool Old Hebrew Congregation, completed in 1874 for the city's Orthodox community, is one of the finest examples of Moorish Revival synagogue architecture in the United Kingdom. Designed by William James Audsley and George Ashdown Audsley, it features a basilica-style nave, a striking Moorish façade with a wheel window, and a richly decorated interior of wood, marble and gilding. Image from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princes_Road_Synagogue.

Page 20 – Reading the Megillah



A Hebrew text of the book of Esther, which tells the story of a young Jewish woman who saves her community by uncovering a plot. Grouped with the other Megillot or Scrolls, it is an important book of the Hebrew Bible and read aloud during the festival of Purim. From Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Megilat_ester.jpg.

Challenging antisemitism

Word meanings from the Hebrew cover graphic

The cover of this guide includes several Hebrew words arranged in a multicoloured word cloud graphic. We chose words that resonate with both Quaker and Jewish community values, reflecting ideas of peace, understanding and harmony among people of different backgrounds.



שָׁלוֹם

Peace (Shalom)

רַחֲמָנוּת

Compassion (Rachamanut)

כָּשֵׁר

Kosher

אי-אלימות

Nonviolence (I-Alimot)

יְדִידוּת

Friendship (Yedidut)

אֲמִפְתִּיָּה

Empathy (Am'phatiya)

אֲנִתִּשְׁמִיּוֹת

Antisemitism (Antishmiot)

סוֹבְלָנוּת

Tolerance (Sov'lanut)

פִּיּוּס

Reconciliation (Peeyus)

צֶדֶק

Justice (Tzedek)

How this guide came about

This guide was originally based on advice for ecumenical accompaniers, who spend three months at a time accompanying Israelis and Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank and then return to their home countries to tell the public and policymakers about their experiences. It was drafted by Quakers in Britain staff.

Over several drafts, this guide has changed substantially to make it more suitable for Quakers based in Britain rather than people talking about Israel and Palestine. Many thanks to the individuals and groups who responded to various versions and made suggestions for improvement, in particular those Quakers and others with lived experience of antisemitism.

You'll find some words in the printed version of this document like [this](#). In the electronic version these are [hyperlinks](#) leading to additional information online. If you would like to view this, it can be found here: www.quaker.org.uk/documents/antisemitism-guide.

שָׁלוֹם עָלֵיכֶם

Peace be upon you (Shalom aleichem)



Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Quaker unity is based on shared understanding and a shared practice of silent worship – a communal stillness.

Quakers seek to experience God directly – internally, in relationships with others, and in the world. Local meetings for worship are open to all who wish to attend.

Quakers try to live with honesty and integrity. This means speaking truth to all, including people in positions of power. The Quaker commitment to peace arises from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are unique and equal.

This leads Quakers to put faith into action by working locally and globally to change the systems that cause injustice and violent conflict.

Accessible versions of this document are available. Please contact the publications manager at **publications@quaker.org.uk** or call 020 7663 1162.

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