



Myer Jacobs, the first Mayor of Taunton; 1877

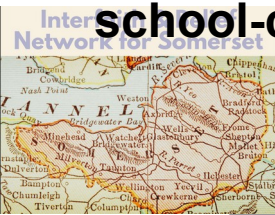
A 21st Century conversation with a Taunton Mayor in-waiting
about the *first* Mayor of Taunton; November 2024

Context

“ As part of the GLADE Centre commitment to supporting teachers and schools better engage with themes and concepts surrounding multi faith dialogue, we invited Taunton’s Mayor-in-waiting to a school-community session where he gave an engaging talk and helped start new conversations around a historical and a contemporary Jewish community in Somerset.

In-conversation, he offered insights into successes and challenges of the Jewish Community in Somerset and the South West, and with the audience, pondered on potential solutions.

This presentation draws on materials used with permission of Jewish Small Communities Network (JSC), Jane Warner (Connecting Small Histories) and is co-owned by GLADE and Martin Strauss, being a snapshot of this in-conversation school-community event. ”



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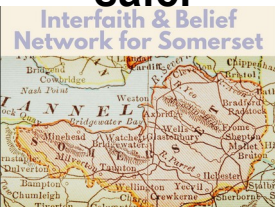


Being respectful of individuals' safety

“Working carefully and safely with members of the Jewish community during these very difficult times is essential - there are an increased number of antisemitic attacks and hate crimes against the Jewish community (see weblinks for some context). The GLADE Centre wants to support members of the Jewish community, always being respectful of their safety. Telling the Myer Jacobs story is a route into teachers and pupils learning more about Judaism in everyday life and the challenges of a very small Jewish Community in Somerset, past and leading into the present.

Some members of the Jewish community are public figures and do not necessarily always portray publicly their Jewish faith - think back to the racist, antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents of summer 2024. That was and still is real and terrifying for some Somerset communities, who are navigating the months since those first attacks.

We hope to re-build confidence in starting safe, new conversations. And build more and trusting relationships with the Somerset Jewish community at a pace that feels right and safe.”



The GLADE Centre; November 2024 3



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School &
community event
held in Taunton,
November
2024

Myer Jacobs, the first Mayor of Taunton

Martin Strauss brings this local story alive with his passion, deep knowledge and respect for Myer Jacobs.

He shares why this story has such local significance and with him, we'll explore how Myer Jacobs can become an area of focus within the taught curriculum, potentially bringing valuable local context to a new Somerset RE syllabus

The late Rabbi Dr Bernard Susser, historian of the Jews of South West England identified in the 1880s there was a mayor of Taunton called Myer Jacobs. He was 'proud to avow himself a member of the Hebrew faith' and during his 3 terms in office did much for Taunton and it's citizens.

You are invited to become part of bringing this Somerset story alive within your curriculum.

Come along to find out more and to consider whether you'd like to help us write materials and activities for the classroom.

Sample feedback from attendees of the session:-

Quality of delivery = 100% rated as excellent
Content = 100% rated as excellent
Techniques/ resources used = 100% rated as excellent or good
Usefulness to my practice = 100% rated as excellent or good

What did you find most useful & why;
personal stories
very good delivery
information to inform teaching
history and culture
conversations
presentation
discussion

Something to do resulting from the session;
develop my own lessons
tell others about it
read up

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Baseline choice 1; before you start...

What do you already know about:-

Judaism

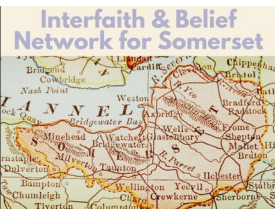
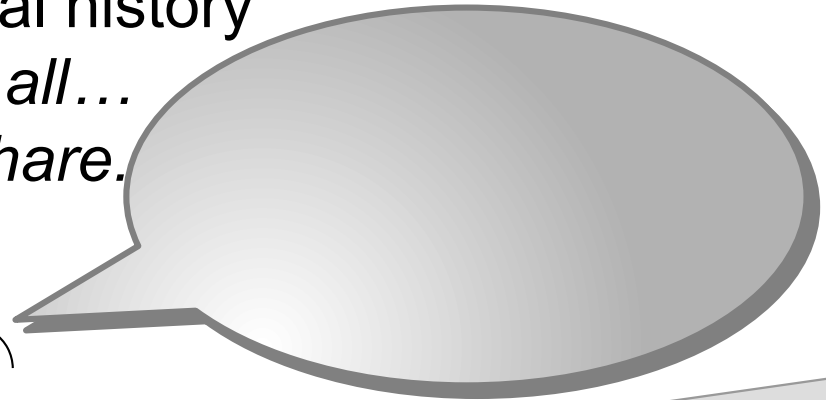
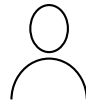
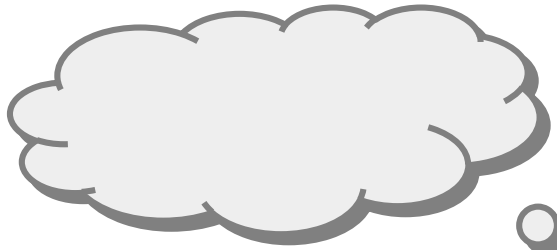
Jewish connections to counties in the South West

and to Somerset

and to some local history

Anything at all...

think-pair-share.



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Baseline choice 2; before you start...

Where do you stand on this line in relation to what you:-
know about Judaism,
know of connections worldwide or to the south west,
have heard about some history,
Choose where you'd stand then...think-pair-share.
Do you need to move again?



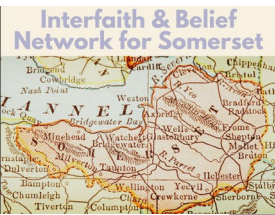
**Not
confident**

**Very
confident**



Questions to consider – then & now

- What if you are Jewish and happen to live in Somerset?
- What successes do you see as a member of the Jewish community?
- What challenges do you face as a member of the Jewish community?



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Connecting
Small Histories
Ensuring Sustainability
in Jewish History
Projects

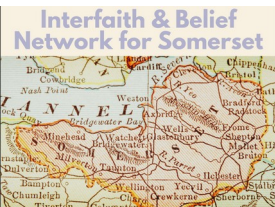
My Somerset Journey with Myer Jacobs

Presented by Jane Warner,
Connecting Small Histories



Slides with a green background used to illustrate Martin's session, are with permission of Jane Warner, Connecting Small Histories; <https://jscn.org.uk/heritage/connectingsmallhistories/>

And Jewish Small Communities Network; <https://jscn.org.uk/jscn/>



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“There was me, and I thought I was the only Jew.”



Historical references to the Jewish community in Somerset

- 1820 Lodging house
- Synagogues in Bristol, Bath, and, during WWII, Minehead, but no synagogue in Taunton
- 1835 –Benjamin Disraeli stood for Parliament in Taunton but was unsuccessful
- Musgrove Park Hospital as 67th General Hospital 1944 –Ward Officer First Lieutenant Stanley A. Isenberg
- Sheila Kitzinger midwife, anthropologist and activist (1929–2015), born 29 March 1929, Taunton



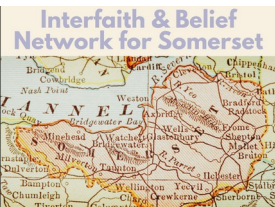
Canterbury, Kent

- Myer Jacobs b.1827
- Two important families called Jacobs at that time, one of whom became Synagogue President.

What was the early 1800's like for families?

What work, travel, living conditions?

What trade took place, locally, nationally & globally?



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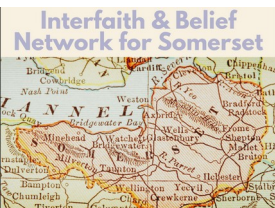
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Web-search ideas for 1800's context in Somerset

- <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/700-year-rise-fall-yeovils-8737983>
- <https://somerset-cat.swheritage.org.uk/guides/trades>



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Matilda
Jacobs (nee
Nathan)
1824 – 1895
Married to
Myer in 1856



M^{RS.} MYER JACOBS



Matilda & Myer



- Irish Genealogical Society
- Not till after 1844 were non-Catholic weddings authorised under license.
- Married 9th January 1856 at bride's parental home, 23 Gardiner Street, Dublin (Synagogue Register)



Myers Journey to Taunton

- 1851 Myer and brother Harry/Henry together
- 1856 Dublin wedding
- 1861 Gloucester, with Harry
- 1871 Myer arrives in Taunton –he and Matilda are found at 23 Fore Street. Entrepreneurial. “The Dustpan”
- Wants to reincorporate Taunton and invigorate this County Town of Somerset.
- 1889 Living at 33 Silver Street.

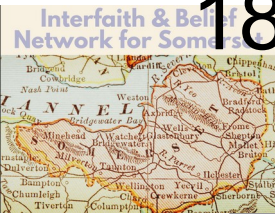


What was Taunton like in the 1860's-70's?

- Transport
- Trade
- Business
- Population
- Compare Census of 1861 & 1871 & 1881

Myer Jacobs ...

- pushes for Taunton to be more self-governing
- was instrumental in getting re-incorporation happening
- tried to gain reform of market practices
- tried to get Taunton markets assigned to public health authorities

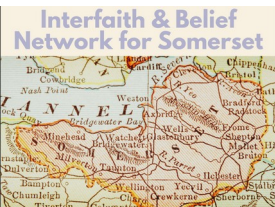


Myer Jacob's stance

At a meeting in 1868 to choose a parliamentary candidate, Myer Jacobs responded to a speaker verbally attacking Disraeli;

“Mr. Disraeli, he's not a traitor, he's not dishonest, he's not a renegade, he's not a disgrace to religion and morality.

- *What might this say about Myer Jacob?*



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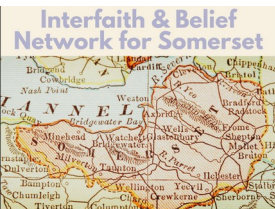
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Myer Jacob's job descriptions have included

- Alderman
 - Furniture maker
 - General dealer
 - Commission agent
 - Retired shopkeeper
- *What can be read into this about Myer's quality of living?*



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TAUNTON
TOWN
COUNCIL



1877-79 Myer Jacobs.
 1879, 1880 Henry Charles Cornish.
 1880, 1882 Peter Taylor.
 1882, 1883 Jonathan Barrett.
 1883, 1886 Thomas Penny.
 1886, 1888 Samuel Farnant.
 1888, 1889 Henry James Spiller.
 1889, 1891 George Saunders (Jnr).
 1891, 1892 William Mungleton Chapman.
 1892, 1893 William Herbert Fowler.
 1893, 1894 Henry Joseph Van Trump.
 1894, 1895 William Herbert Fowler.
 1895, 1896 William Adams.
 1896, 1897 William Lock.
 1897, 1898 William Potter.
 1898, 1899 William Goodland.
 1899, 1901 William Albert Wrenn.
 1901, 1902 Alfred Edward Perkins.
 1902, 1903 James Standfast.
 1903, 1904 Arthur Villar.
 1904, 1905 Josiah Lewis.
 1905, 1906 John Giles Vile.
 1906, 1907 John Pottinger Sibley.
 1907, 1908 Alfred John Spiller.
 1908, 1909 John Gay Price.
 1909, 1910 William Henry Westlake.
 1910, 1911 Henry James Spiller.
 1911, 1912 Walter Frederick Whittingham.
 1912, 1913 Frederick William Penny.
 1913, 1915 George Hinton

1915, 1916 Albert Charles Mole.
 1916, 1917 Henry Joseph Van Trump.
 1917, 1920 Alfred John Spiller.
 1920, 1921 William George Potten.
 1921, 1922 Fred Stanley Dodson.
 1922, 1923 Joseph Edward Kingsbury.
 1923, 1924 Frank William Pritchett Brown.
 1924, 1925 John Charles Lane.
 1925, 1926 Joseph Sheriff Scudamore.
 1926, 1928 Howard Westlake.
 1928, 1929 Laurence Checkley Barker.
 1929, 1930 Albert Joseph West.
 1930, 1931 Charles Harold Goodland.
 1931, 1932 William Ewart Maynard.
 1932, 1933 George Henry Stamer.
 1933, 1935 William Brake.
 1935, 1936 John Charles Lane.
 1936, 1937 Frederick Cory Spear.
 1937, 1938 Alfred John Hopkinson Lees.
 1938, 1945 Charles Harold Goodland.
 1945, 1946 Stanley Herbert Payne.
 1946, 1947 Stuart Goodman.
 1947, 1953 Allen Henry Howard Southwell.
 1949, 1950 Arthur William Lees.
 1950, 1951 William Frank Haywood.
 1951, 1952 Frederick George Dowell.
 1952, 1953 Margaret Alice Jenkin.
 1953, 1954 William Robert Maynard.
 1954, 1955 Arthur William Villar.
 1955, 1956 Sidney Wilfred Shepherd.

1956, 1957 Richard Francis Windworth.
 1957, 1958 Richard Francis Windworth.
 1958, 1959 Frederick Sidney Wallis.
 1959, 1960 Anne Roberta Ummack.
 1960, 1961 Ernest James Henry Harnell.
 1961, 1962 Stanley Herbert Payne.
 1962, 1963 Stuart Goodman.
 1963, 1964 William Frank Haywood.
 1964, 1965 Walter Rex Williams.
 1965, 1966 Harold Victor Ellis.
 1966, 1967 Pauline Alice Smith.
 1967, 1968 John Richard Grainger Melkic.
 1968, 1969 Denis Frank George Horwood.
 1969, 1970 Willie Gill.
 1970, 1971 St John H. C. Carow-Fisher.
 1971, 1972 Clifford Stanley Williams.
 1972, 1973 Walter Robert Langdon.
 1973, 1974 David Hartley.
 1974, 1975 Clifford Stanley Williams. ★
 1975, 1976 Gladys Deacon.
 1976, 1977 Richard Holman May.
 1977, 1978 Grahame Wesley Moses.
 1978, 1979 David Gerald Gill.
 1979, 1980 Nora Moyle.
 1980, 1981 Ernest John Warren.
 1981, 1982 Cyril Ernest Bond.
 1982, 1983 Godfrey Percival Clark ac.
 1983, 1984 Rachel Helen Haldane.
 1984, 1985 Lewis Joseph Lane.
 1985, 1986 Jack Hall.

1986, 1987 Cyril Ernest Bond.
 1987, 1988 Reginald Sidney Hutchings.
 1988, 1989 Peter Frederick George Hornford.
 1989, 1990 John Edward Richards.
 1990, 1991 Peter Lee.
 1991, 1992 Norman Philip Cavill.
 1992, 1993 Margaret Dickson.
 1993, 1994 Trevor Graham Smith.
 1994, 1995 David Semple Applegate.
 1995, 1996 Lorna Jean Hole.
 1996, 1997 James George Dunkley ac.
 1997, 1998 Alan Paul.
 1998, 1999 William Edward Softley.
 1999, 2000 James Richard Parrish.
 2000, 2001 Anthony Russell Floyd. ★
 2001, 2002 Mary Frances Whitmarsh.
 2002, 2003 Adrian John Prior-Sankey.
 2003, 2004 Andrew James Govier.
 2004, 2005 Jean Margaret Allgrove.
 2005, 2006 Richard Lees.
 2006, 2007 Christopher Hindley.
 2007, 2008 Ken Hayward.
 2008, 2009 Timothy Joseph Slattery.
 2009, 2010 Robert Bowrah BEM.
 2010, 2011 Jefferson Andrew Horsley.
 2011, 2012 Stephen Arthur Brooks.
 2012, 2013 Terence John Hall.
 2013, 2014 Elizabeth Susan Lisgo MBE.
 2014, 2015 Dave W. Durdan

★ First T.D.B.C. Mayor

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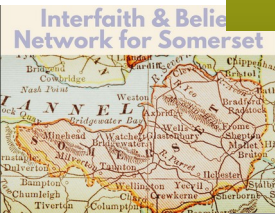
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The Great Controversy

- *“...we had the gratification to announce that Mr. Myer Jacobs, a coreligionist, had been elected the first Mayor of Somerset.”*
- The Rev Frederick Jeremiah Smith, M.A, Vicar of St John’s, Taunton, and Prebendary of the Cathedral Church, Wells, expresses disapproval.
- Fierce debate ensues in support of Myer’s position.



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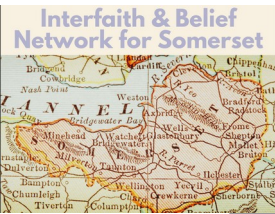
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Time passes...



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Myer Jacobs dies, 2 July 1901

“In the absence of a Jewish Minister, the late Mr. Myer Jacobs (who was three times Mayor of Taunton, and did much to secure its incorporation in 1877), was buried on Friday in the Church of England portion of the cemetery, the service being read by a Unitarian minister. The mourners were chiefly Jews.”



DEATH OF THE FIRST MAYOR OF TAUNTON. MR. MYER JACOBS.

By WEDNESDAY 10 JUL 1901

PAGE 5 COLUMN 5

Mr. Myer JACOBS, whose death we regret to record, passed away after a long illness, on Tuesday afternoon, at his residence, Mansfield House, Taunton. The deceased gentleman was about 75 years of age, and some time before his death it was known to Dr. Edward LIDDON, his medical attendant, that his end could not be far off. Mr. JACOBS made his last public appearance at a meeting held in the Municipal Hall about 18 months ago in support of the Taunton Corporation Bill, and on that occasion he spoke warmly in favour of the measure.

Newspaper article; Death Of Myer Jacobs 1901; https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~sarahhawkins/genealogy/Newspaper_Articles_Somerset/taunton_courier_1901_10_jul_death_of_the_first_mayor_of_taunton_mr_myer_jacobs_at_mansfield_house_taunton.htm



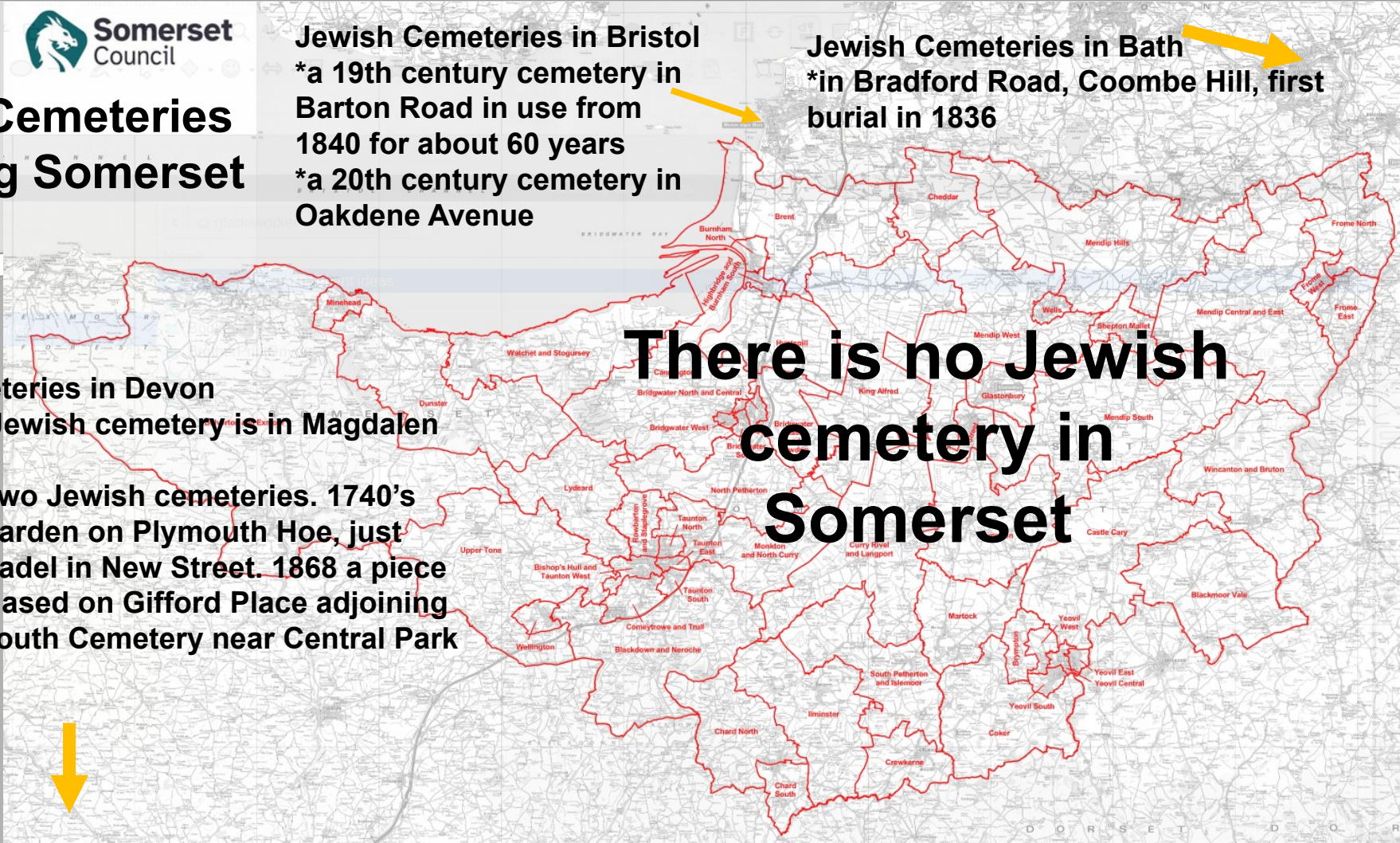
Jewish Cemeteries bordering Somerset

Jewish Cemeteries in Devon

- *Exeter; the Jewish cemetery is in Magdalen Street
- * Plymouth; two Jewish cemeteries. 1740's started in a garden on Plymouth Hoe, just below the Citadel in New Street. 1868 a piece of land purchased on Gifford Place adjoining the Old Plymouth Cemetery near Central Park

- Jewish Cemeteries in Bristol
 - *a 19th century cemetery in Barton Road in use from 1840 for about 60 years
 - *a 20th century cemetery in Oakdene Avenue

- Jewish Cemeteries in Bath
 - *in Bradford Road, Coombe Hill, first burial in 1836



**There is no Jewish
cemetery in
Somerset**

<https://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/jewcemwest.htm>

Synagogues bordering Somerset

Bristol:- Park Row Synagogue is Bristol's oldest and newest Jewish community.

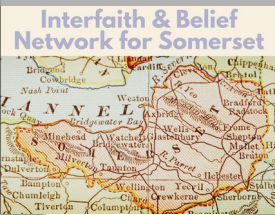
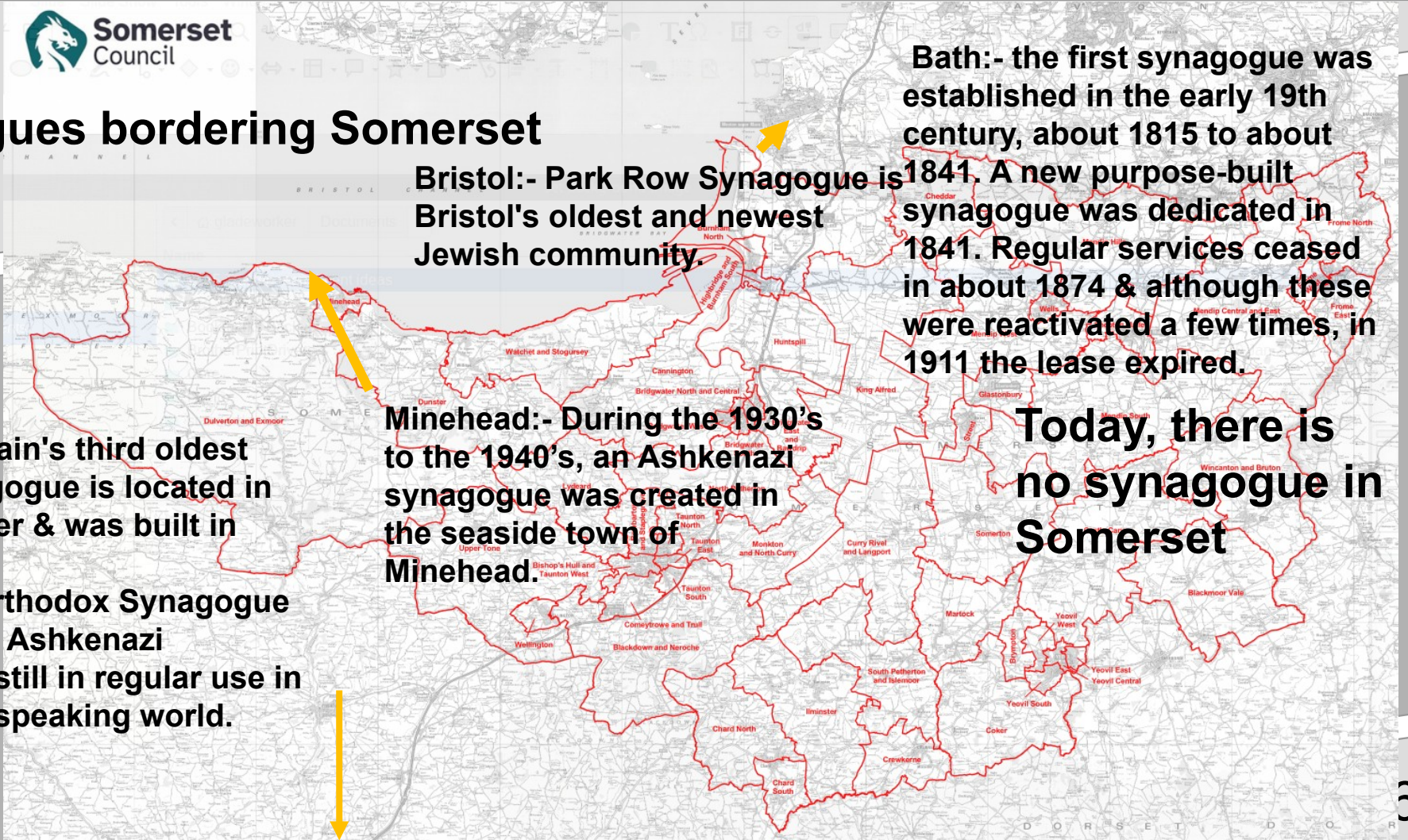
Bath:- the first synagogue was established in the early 19th century, about 1815 to about 1841. A new purpose-built synagogue was dedicated in 1841. Regular services ceased in about 1874 & although these were reactivated a few times, in 1911 the lease expired.

Exeter:- Britain's third oldest active synagogue is located in central Exeter & was built in 1763.

Minehead:- During the 1930's to the 1940's, an Ashkenazi synagogue was created in the seaside town of Minehead.

Today, there is no synagogue in Somerset

Plymouth Orthodox Synagogue is the oldest Ashkenazi Synagogue still in regular use in the English speaking world.



Meet the second Jewish Mayor of Taunton

Councillor Martin Straus makes history in Somerset, whose last Jewish mayor served in 1877

By MICHELLE ROSENBERG
May 16, 2025, 2:38 pm



Mayor Straus, Taunton, Somerset

A town in Somerset elected its second Jewish mayor in 148 years on Tuesday evening.

Clr Martin Straus takes on the role in Taunton last occupied by Jewish candidate Myer Jacobs in 1877.

<https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/meet-the-second-jewish-mayor-of-taunton/>

Mayor of Taunton



(Photo taken outside Taunton Minster following the Annual Meeting of Taunton Town Council and Mayor Making Ceremony on Tuesday, 6 May 2025)

<https://www.taunton-tc.gov.uk/the-council/council-information/the-mayor/>

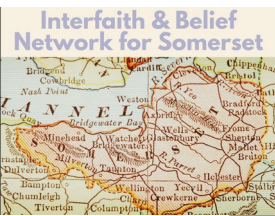


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