

TRADITION VS MODERNITY

JEW'S' FREE SCHOOL, LONDON (JFS)



The National Library of Israel

This is a postcard from the early twentieth century of a busy street scene which, according to the caption on the card, is “Middlesex Street, Jew’s Free School, Petticoat Lane.” Petticoat Lane is in the East End of London and was populated by Jewish immigrants at the time that the photograph was taken. This area, close to the docks, was an industrial area, and many of the Jews worked in the garment industry.

The precursor to the Jews’ Free School (JFS) was a Talmud Torah established in 1732 by wealthy members of the Ashkenazi Great Synagogue as a charity school for fifteen poor orphaned boys. Free public education was not available in London in the eighteenth century, and there was a concern that poor Jewish children would go to the only free primary schools, which were run by Christians according to a Christian missionary curriculum. The Jews’ Free School, which provided a largely secular Anglo-Jewish curriculum, was established in 1817 as a boys’ school; five years later, girls were also accepted. In 1822, the school was relocated to Bell Lane in the heart of the East End where, throughout the nineteenth century it absorbed thousands of immigrant children. The school grew very quickly and by 1900 comprised 4,300 students, making it the largest elementary school in the world.

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JEWES' FREE SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPH



The Jewish Museum London

This is a group photograph of pupils at the Jews' Free School (JFS) taken in 1908. When this photograph was taken, the majority of the children attending JFS in Bell Lane Whitechapel were new immigrants from Eastern Europe. The "Raw Material" (namely, the new arrivals at the school) probably spoke Yiddish at home and not English. JFS was very proud of developing their students' British identity to enable their integration into the wider community. After six or seven years, JFS took a photograph of the same boys, now fluent in English, and called it the "Finished Product." JFS played a key role in anglicising the young immigrants of the East End. It encouraged its pupils to identify with their new country, its traditions and its history. While Hebrew and religious studies were part of the curriculum, speaking Yiddish was strongly discouraged. Children were not to forget that they were Jews; but now they were English Jews.

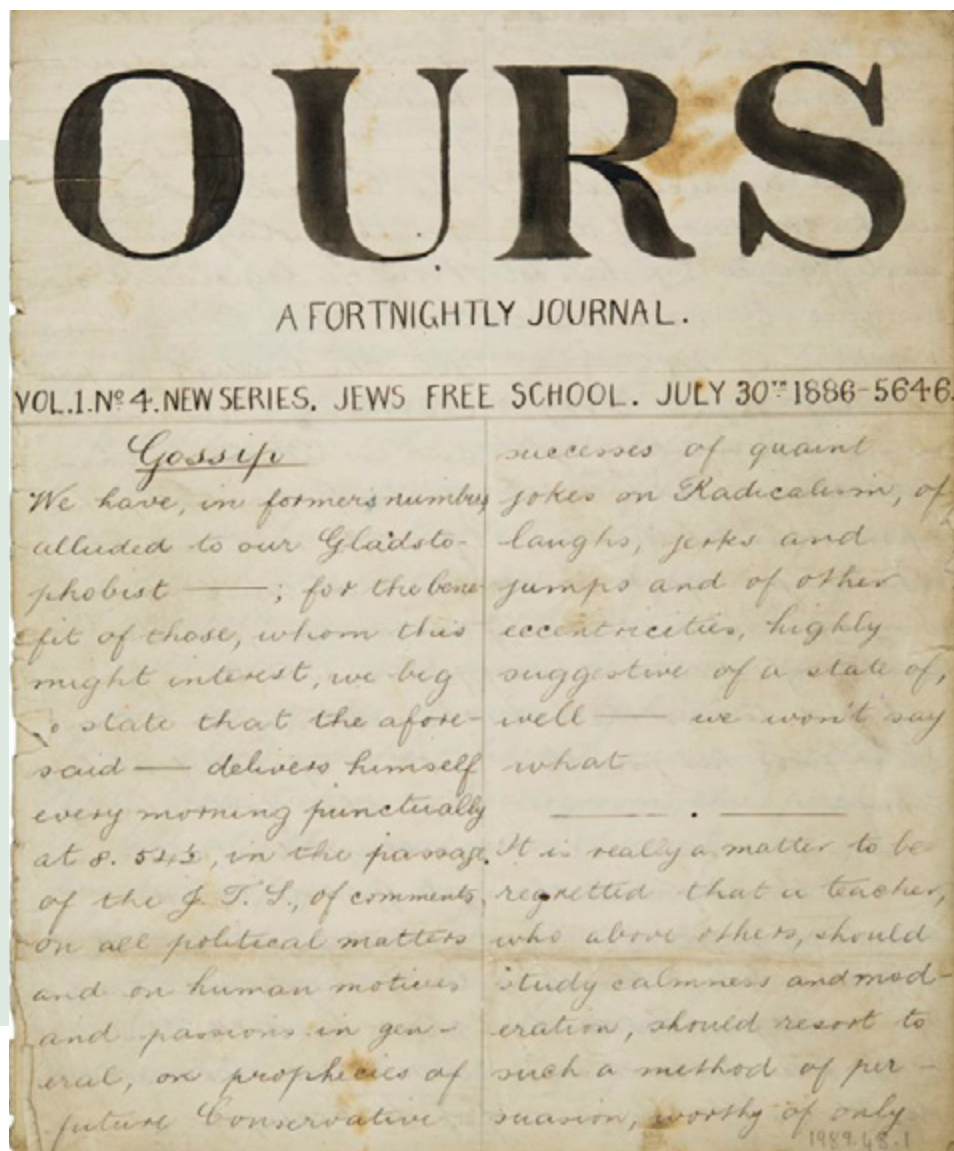
JFS is today a mixed comprehensive school catering for 2000 pupils aged eleven to eighteen. The current school was built in 2002 and is based in Kenton in North London. While JFS was originally set up to anglicise the immigrant community, the majority of British Jewish schoolchildren are today third or even fourth generation immigrants, so this is no longer the school's priority.



JTRACKS

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JEWES' FREE SCHOOL JOURNAL COURTESY OF THE JEWISH MUSEUM LONDON



The Jewish Museum London

This is an issue of *Ours*, a biweekly journal which was produced by the Jews' Free School. This handwritten copy dates from 1886 and includes humorous and satirical essays, sketches and songs, and a chess column.

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JFS EXERCISE CLASSES 1900–1910



Courtesy of JFS

These two pictures are of JFS male and female students in physical education classes.

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JFS SEWING LESSON 1900–1910

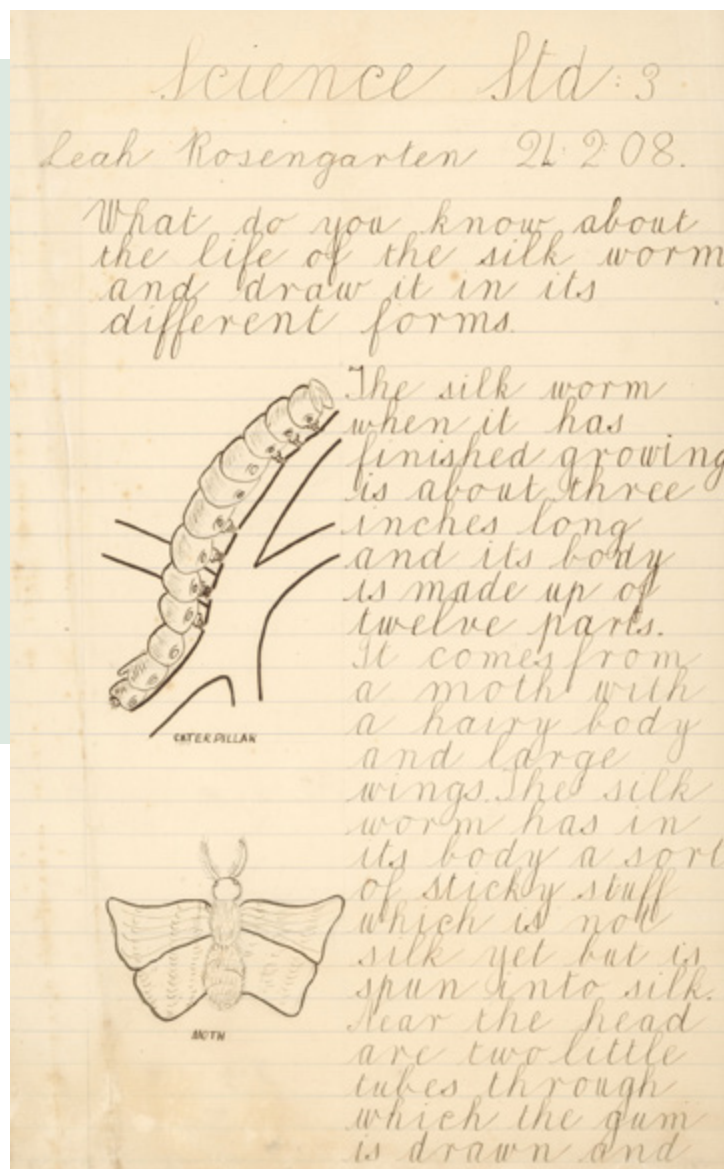


Courtesy of JFS

This is a photograph of a JFS classroom in which students are learning how to make a pinafore. Date unknown.

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JFS SCIENCE WORK



Courtesy of JFS

This photograph is of the science work of JFS student Leah Rosengarten from February 24, 1908.