

Foundation for
Jewish Heritage

Annual Review 2024



Contents

Introduction	3
Preserving the past, shaping the future	4
Highlights and Achievements	5
Synagogue News	6
Advocacy and Networking	14
Moreshet	16
Operations	17
Communications	18
Organisation	20
Our People	21
Patrons	22
International Advisory Panel	23
Afterword	24





Introduction

You are about to read that the Foundation for Jewish Heritage has made significant strides with our activities this past year.

What continues to surprise the people and organisations that we collaborate with is the simple fact that no one is doing what we do – solely dedicated to working internationally and strategically to preserve Jewish built heritage in danger. Yet this is a compelling cause driven by the shocking and transformational events of the 20th century which saw Jewish life disappear from most of the places where the Jewish people had lived for many centuries. What did we leave behind when a vibrant Jewish life disappeared from Warsaw, Vilnius, and Baghdad?

We are in a race against time to save vulnerable and often orphaned Jewish sites that stand as testimony to this past and can serve today as profound places of education.

We have learnt much since our launch in 2015 and have been building our organisational capacity because we want to accomplish more.

We hope to continue to benefit from your interest and support.

Dame Helen Hyde DBE, Chair of Trustees

Michael Mail, Founder and Chief Executive

Preserving the past, shaping the future

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage works internationally to ensure that important Jewish architectural sites, monuments and places of cultural significance in danger are preserved and re-imagined for a sustainable future.

Our mission is delivered through four pillars:

Research

Creating an inventory of Jewish heritage sites, and identifying those in danger

Advocacy

Making the case for Jewish cultural heritage and promoting specific sites

Expertise

Providing advice and guidance to create sustainable solutions for vulnerable buildings working with local partners, while fostering expertise in Jewish heritage preservation

Resources

Securing funding for Jewish heritage sites at risk to ensure these are preserved, given a contemporary purpose, and saved for the future.



- 17,000 synagogues in Europe in 1939
- 3,347 synagogue buildings remain today*
- Just 736 still function as synagogues
- 770 sites are in danger

*Visit our Historic Synagogues of Europe website www.historicsynagogueurope.org for details.


Highlights and Achievements

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage has continued to make progress in 2024, with highlights including:

- ▶ continuing the Development Phase of the Welsh Jewish Cultural Centre project at the historic Merthyr Tydfil synagogue
- ▶ meeting the Regional Government of Aragon and the Mayor of Híjar to agree to conduct a Feasibility Study as the next stage in the project to create a Sephardi Heritage Centre at the medieval synagogue in Híjar
- ▶ conducting an Options Appraisal to identify a future use for the opulent Middle Street Synagogue in Brighton
- ▶ concluding urgent repairs at the Spanish Synagogue in Venice
- ▶ raising the funds to purchase the historic Primrose Hill House next door to the Merthyr Tydfil synagogue, increasing the project's physical capacity
- ▶ assisting the historic Orla Synagogue in Poland in applying for the Europa Nostra 7 Most Endangered Sites of Europe award, for which it was shortlisted
- ▶ running a seminar in Cardiff bringing together all those involved in Welsh Jewish heritage to discuss the Merthyr Tydfil synagogue project and future collaborations
- ▶ securing funding to enable a Feasibility Study to be conducted for Orla synagogue, which will research the possibility of it becoming an arts and education centre
- ▶ launching a Feasibility Study to test the idea of Sandys Row synagogue incorporating a heritage centre on the legacy of London's Jewish East End
- ▶ establishing a Steering Committee to take forward the cultural centre concept for the former synagogue in Făgăraș, Romania
- ▶ welcoming 500 visitors to an Open Day in Merthyr Tydfil, sharing our plans for the former synagogue
- ▶ maintaining the Moreshet programme, providing events for Jewish heritage professionals working across Europe
- ▶ growing the Foundation's profile and expanding the network of partners, friends, volunteers and donors



Synagogue News



Our unprecedented historic synagogues mapping project, in collaboration with the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, documented the significance and condition of every historic synagogue throughout Europe. This study enabled the Foundation to identify the sites that were of the highest importance and most in need of preservation.

Below are highlights of a number of historic synagogue projects we have been supporting.

Merthyr Tydfil, Wales

The Victorian Grade II listed synagogue in Merthyr Tydfil is the leading Jewish heritage site in Wales. It ceased functioning as an active synagogue in 1983 and has been empty since 2006, its condition in a parlous state.



The Foundation purchased the synagogue with the vision of restoring the building and transforming it into a Welsh Jewish Cultural Centre that will present the 250+ year history of the Welsh Jewish community and promote cross-cultural understanding.

This is now a major project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Welsh Government, and the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. A team of expert consultants is working on various aspects of the Development Phase.

Highlights

- An Open Day was held to present our plans for the project, attracting 500 visitors from Merthyr, across Wales and beyond.
- Finance was secured to start the process of purchasing the Grade II listed Primrose Hill House adjacent to the synagogue, significantly expanding the capacity of the Centre and vital to delivering the full programme.
- At a meeting with the new Merthyr Council leader Brent Carter, he confirmed the continuing full support of the Council for the project.
- We began a recruitment process seeking Trustees to lead the new charity being formed to run the Centre.
- A seminar with university and heritage colleagues across Wales was convened to review the project and explore the potential for collaboration.





Izmir, Turkey

There are nine remarkable historic Sephardi synagogues in the centre of Izmir. The Foundation has been supporting efforts to preserve the oldest – the Etz Hayim synagogue dating back to the 14th century, working collaboratively with the local Jewish community and the Kiriatty Foundation.

The work funded by the Foundation at the Etz Hayim synagogue to expose and preserve its ancient wall murals has been completed. There is a proposal to create a Jewish Cultural Quarter in Izmir with a Museum at its heart.

Highlights

- We have continued to stay in touch with colleagues working on preserving Jewish heritage in Izmir exploring how the wider project might move forward.



Orla, Poland

The striking baroque Orla synagogue in Poland was founded in the 17th century. The Jewish community was tragically extinguished in the Holocaust and the building has languished. In 2010, it was acquired by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ). FODZ and the Foundation for Jewish Heritage collaborated to stage an Arts Festival inspired by the synagogue setting.

Highlights

- The Foundation proposed to FODZ that it apply to the Europa Nostra '7 most Endangered Sites of Europe' programme for 2025 and assisted with the submission.
- Orla has been shortlisted for the Europa Nostra award reaching the final 14.
- The Foundation is working with the Vindobona Trust to support a Feasibility Study to test the vision of transforming the site into an arts and education centre.

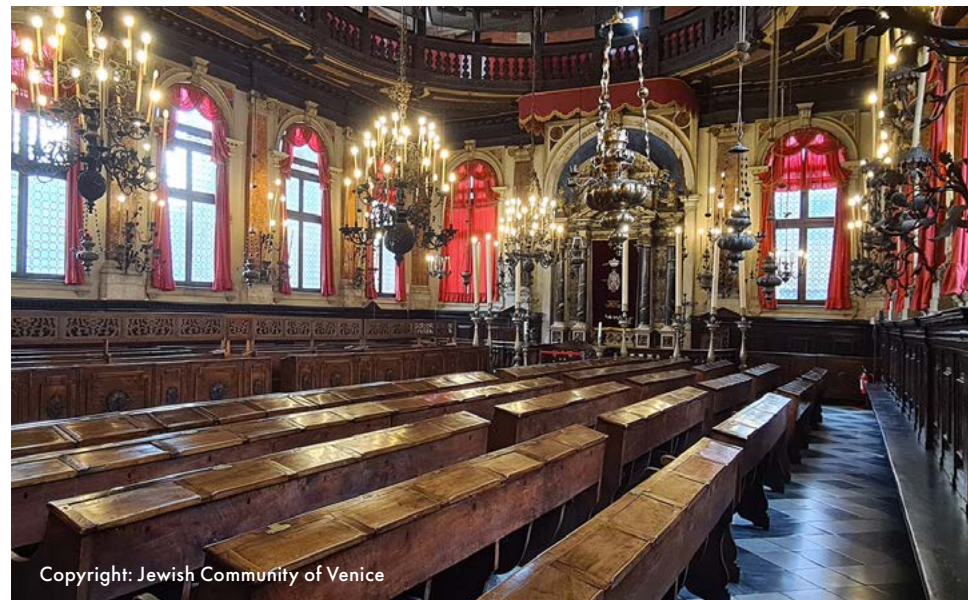


Korneuburg, Austria

The Foundation has been supporting a campaign led by Klaus Kohler, a former Brigadier General in the Austrian army, to save the medieval former synagogue in Korneuburg outside Vienna, one of the oldest synagogue buildings in Europe. The vision is to transform the site into a cultural and educational centre focused on the former Jewish life in the town covering the medieval and modern periods. The building is currently in private hands and the Municipality has been negotiating its purchase.

Highlights

- The project is lobbying the Municipality to complete the purchase of the site which will enable the plans to move forward, and the Foundation for Jewish Heritage remains a part of these conversations.



Copyright: Jewish Community of Venice

Venice, Italy

The sumptuous 16th century Spanish synagogue in Venice is one of the leading synagogues in the former ghetto area of the city.

The site is the largest and best known of the Venetian synagogues. Its construction was started in 1555 but it was entirely rebuilt one century later by Baldassare Longhena, architect of numerous Venetian landmark locations including the Church of the Madonna della Salute.

Highlights

- Repairs were completed on door panels, furniture and an archive room, improving the visitor experience benefitting the Jewish community of Venice and the many tourists who visit the site each year.

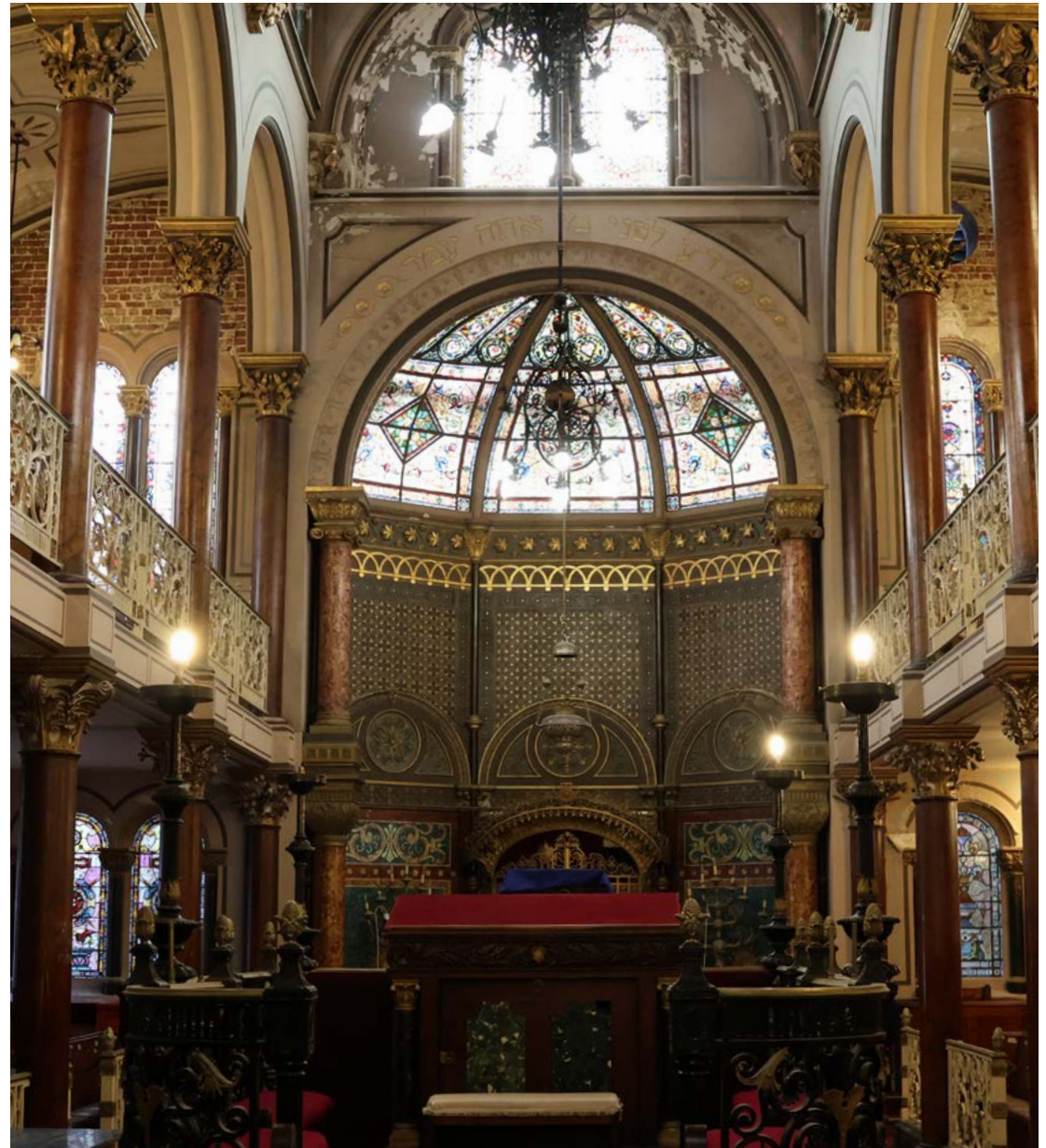
Brighton, England

The opulent Grade II* listed Middle Street synagogue was built in 1875 and is considered one of the most important heritage sites in Brighton. The synagogue is connected to some of the leading Jewish families of the late nineteenth century who made Brighton their home and supported the synagogue. The Jewish community gradually moved to neighbouring Hove and the synagogue ceased holding regular services in 2004.

The Foundation established a partnership with the Brighton and Hove Hebrew Congregation, owners of Middle Street synagogue, to undertake a research study to come up with options for its future use. A proposal to reopen the synagogue as a cultural and educational venue has been approved, and a Business Plan based on this proposition is now being prepared.

Highlights

- A Steering Committee chaired by Michael Rosehill was established to oversee the project.
- Funding was secured from the Architectural Heritage Fund, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Pilgrim Trust to support an Options Appraisal study.
- The Options Appraisal study was carried out and the report proposed that the synagogue be turned into a major new cultural and educational venue.
- A Business Plan is now being prepared to ensure the proposal is financially sustainable.
- Given the importance of the building, Historic England has offered its assistance to the project.



Hijar, Spain

There are very few synagogues that survived following the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain in 1492. The medieval synagogue in Hijar is one of them, and it contains unique wall murals that have been preserved from the period.

The vision of Hijar's Municipality is to turn the synagogue into a Sephardi Heritage Centre that will present the extraordinary story of Spanish Jewry. The Foundation is supporting this effort and, working with local volunteer leader Lucia Conte Aguilar, had prepared a Masterplan to provide a roadmap for the project's future development.

Highlights

- Foundation Chief Executive Michael Mail visited Spain and met with the Mayor of Hijar and the Aragon Regional Government, joined by Lucia Conte Aguilar.
- It was agreed that a Feasibility Study should be undertaken to test and develop the ideas contained within the Masterplan.
- Further archaeological work has been conducted inside the synagogue and this has revealed more of the remarkable medieval wall murals.





Făgăraș, Romania

The Municipality of Făgăraș in the Transylvania region of Romania has taken ownership of the former synagogue in the town built in the mid-19th century. In collaboration with local organisations, the Municipality is considering how the synagogue site could be developed to serve the needs of the local community and surrounding area, while also being a memorial and place of education on the life and contribution of the former Jewish community. The Foundation has visited Făgăraș to help move the process forward.

Highlights

- A project Steering Committee has been established.
- A local Institute is considering creating a Jewish Studies programme and the Foundation has assisted by making introductions to other such programmes in other countries.
- The Municipality is currently resolving the 'ownership' of the project within its structures.
- A summer volunteer project was run based on preserving and recording the historic Jewish cemetery.



Hamburg, Germany

The Foundation is a supporter of the campaign to preserve and repurpose the Tempel synagogue in Poolstrasse in Hamburg. It was built in the 1840s and served a community that was one of the leading centres of the Reform Movement in Germany.

Hamburg City Council bought the site from a private owner, and is considering the building's future.

Highlights

- A Feasibility Study conducted by the City was completed. There is a debate as to the future ownership of the site which is currently being resolved.
- The safeguarding of the site has continued under the Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments.
- A georadar scan was carried out to examine the grounds and an architect was commissioned to conduct a survey to assess the condition of the interior.
- Moves have begun to make the site more visible to the public.

Sandys Row, England

Sandys Row synagogue is the oldest surviving Ashkenazi synagogue in London. The historic Grade II listed Georgian building was acquired and adapted by a group of immigrant Dutch Jews in the mid-19th century.

The East End was to become the centre of the largest Jewish community in the UK with at one time over 50 synagogues. Jews progressively moved out of the East End and today Sandys Row is one of only two functioning synagogues that remain; a legacy of a once vibrant Jewish life that has become largely forgotten in the area.

While Sandys Row's membership has declined, the synagogue remains buoyant, benefiting from being close to the City of London, hosting a busy weekday lunchtime service for local workers.


The synagogue also receives increasing numbers of visitors including many school groups wanting to learn about the East End and its various immigrant communities.

Highlights

- We plan to launch a Feasibility Study to test the idea of Sandys Row synagogue incorporating a heritage centre, which would present the legacy of London's Jewish East End.



Advocacy and Networking

A photograph of two men standing in the center of a large, ornate synagogue. The man on the left is older, balding, and wearing a dark suit over a dark sweater. The man on the right is younger, has a beard, and is wearing a dark suit over a red sweater. They are standing in front of a wooden altar. The synagogue has high ceilings with blue and white painted sections, large white columns, and many ornate chandeliers. The pews are made of dark wood, and a red carpet runs down the center aisle. Stained glass windows are visible on the sides.

The Foundation routinely meets with a range of European Union, governmental, heritage and civil society organisations to promote the cause of Jewish heritage preservation, mobilising interest and support.

Moreshet

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage is a founder of Moreshet, a network of professionals from across Europe working on Jewish heritage preservation which was initiated with funding from the European Union.

Embracing public bodies, local municipalities and heritage organisations, Moreshet supports professional development, providing a forum for the sharing of ideas, best practice and the challenges of working in the sector.

The project is run by a consortium of partners from Poland, Spain, Italy and Germany which meets regularly to maintain and develop the programme.

The Foundation continued to support Moreshet, recognising that it is a valuable source of information on developments in the sector and a useful networking vehicle for Jewish heritage professionals.

Recent activity has included a presentation on an emerging programme focused on the life of Rashi in Troyes in France, and a discussion on a documentary film presenting the history and contemporary experience of the Xuetas, the hidden Jews of Majorca.

The Moreshet partners have started to consider the long term goals of the project and how it might collaborate more closely with umbrella organisations with similar aims.



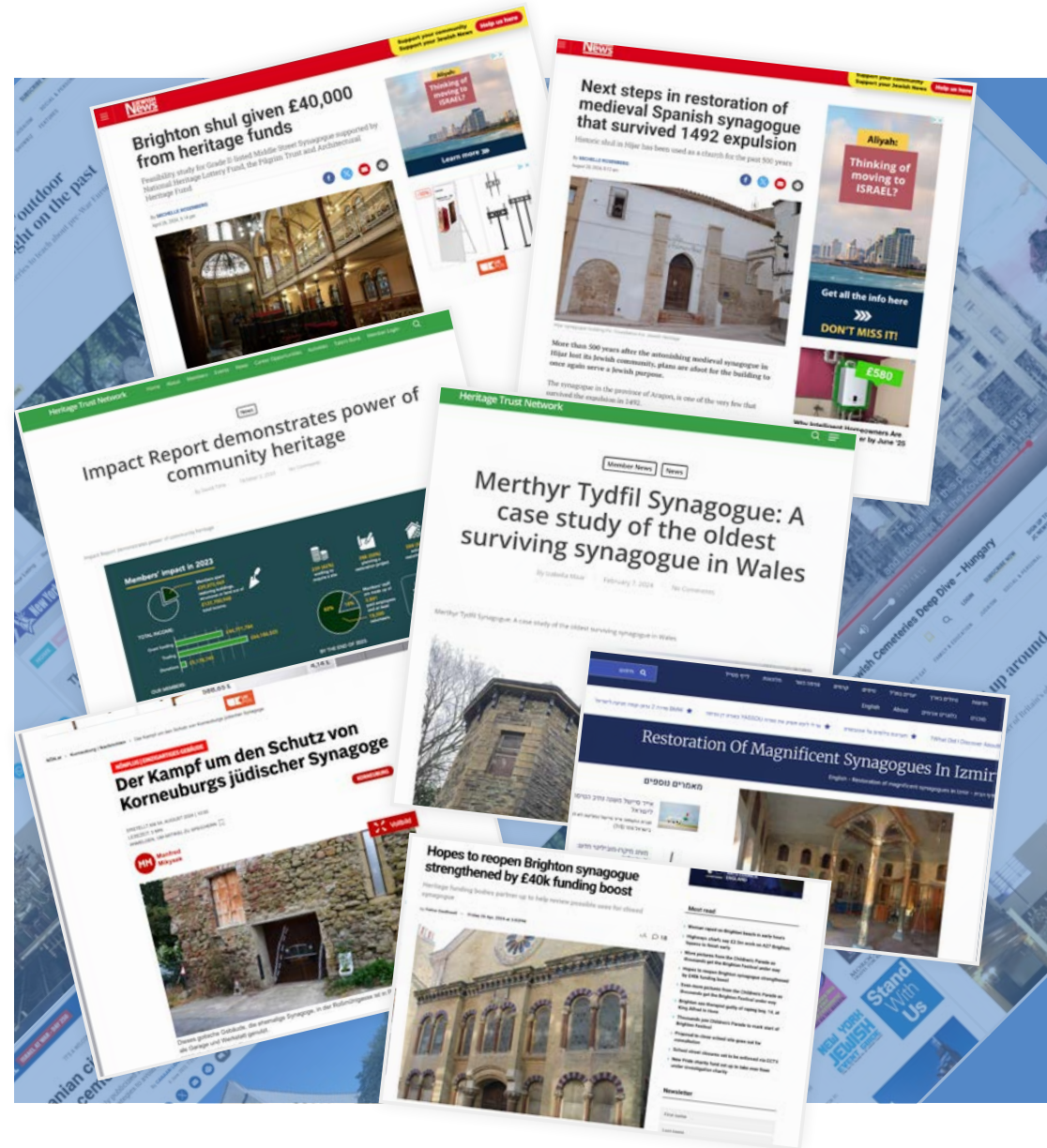
Operations

Given the unique nature of the programme of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage, the demands on the organisation are substantial. We have recognised the need to ensure that we work effectively, and that we have the capacity to deliver fully on our mission. This has been another year of progress as we seek to improve the Foundation's operational side.

Communications






The Foundation for Jewish Heritage continues to develop its communications, highlighting its work and promoting its cause.

- We launched our Case for Support document – presenting the argument as to why our work is vital and the various ways of getting involved.
- We reviewed the format of our email marketing, refreshing the way we send out our subscriber communications.
- We have worked with external advisors to review our data management, assessing the tools we are using to capture information, which will help us to streamline our communications.
- We maintain close contact with the media and have regularly sent out press releases highlighting significant developments relating to our projects that have been widely picked up.
- We have been increasing the number of stories on our projects circulated via our social media channels.
- We are building a picture of our digital footprint, creating a reporting template to capture all of our marketing metrics which will help to improve our communications strategy.



Digital Statistics

- Over **20,000** actions were taken on our website – from link clicks to form submissions.
- **91%** of the visitors to our site were new visitors.
- The Foundation generated **473,561** impressions on Google.
- Over **10,000** pages were viewed on our website.

-  1,165 followers.
-  823 followers.
-  259 followers.
-  9,356 followers.
-  1,223 subscribers.

- 30% of our Facebook followers are based in the US.
- 37% of our Instagram followers are based in the UK.
- Our email marketing open rates are around 30% higher than the benchmarking average.
- Our email click through rates are three times higher than the expected average.



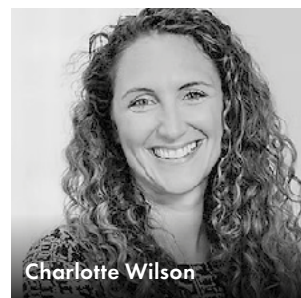
Organisation

Personnel

The Foundation continues to expand the professional team.

- Charlotte Wilson, a partner at Mishcon de Reya, is our new Honorary Solicitor taking over from Anthony Julius whom we warmly thank.
- Our new Bookkeeper is qualified accountant Vandna Malhotra.
- Amanda Newman was appointed Projects Director in the summer.
- Lauren Webb joined us in early 2024 as our Marketing Manager.
- Two senior heritage specialists are now part of the team as Heritage Advisers, Marilyn Scott and Sophia Mirchandani.

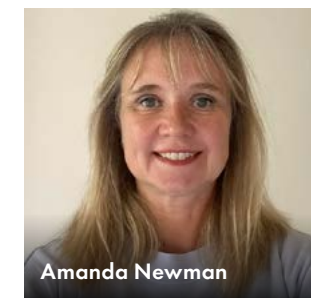
These appointments have significantly added to the capacity of the Foundation.



Charlotte Wilson



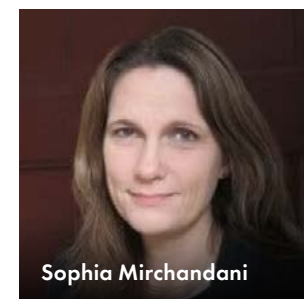
Vandna Malhotra



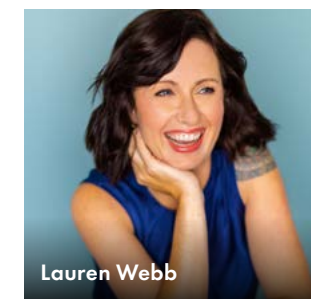
Amanda Newman



Marilyn Scott



Sophia Mirchandani



Lauren Webb

Fundraising

The Foundation has managed to increase its funding this year despite a challenging climate. We are deeply grateful to all our generous financial supporters who have ensured that the work of the Foundation has been able to progress – thank you!

USA and Canadian Friends

We are starting to raise the profile of the USA and Canadian Friends groups, bringing our work to North America with the aim of increasing engagement.



Our People

Trustees

David Bearman
Lord Daniel Finkelstein OBE
Stephen Goldman
Dame Helen Hyde DBE
Prof David Latchman CBE
Simon Sebag Montefiore
Rt Hon Jim Murphy
Daniel Peltz OBE
Esther Robinson Wild
Stuart Roden
Sir Simon Schama CBE

Honorary Solicitor

Charlotte Wilson

Staff

Michael Mail, Founder & Chief Executive
Amanda Newman, Projects Director
Neil Richardson, Project Manager
Lauren Webb, Marketing Manager
Vandna Malhotra, Bookkeeper
Marilyn Scott, Heritage Adviser
Sophia Mirchandani, Heritage Adviser

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Rt Hon Lord Pickles
Steven Pinker
Lord Sassoon
Timothy Snyder
Debbie Wiseman MBE
Jimmy Wales
Rt Hon Lord Young (z''l)

Patrons

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage is incredibly grateful to the following individuals and organisations who have supported our work through their generous financial contribution.

Partner in Heritage Preservation

Cadw
Muriel and Gershon Coren Charitable Foundation
Graham Edwards
European Union
The Diane and Guilford Glazer Foundation
Government of Wales
Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, GRoW @ Annenberg
Thomas S Kaplan and Daphne Recanti Kaplan family
Philip King Charitable Trust
Phillip Leonian and Edith Rosenbaum Leonian Charitable Trust
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
National Lottery Heritage Fund

The Pilgrim Trust
The Polonsky Foundation
Roden family
The Salamanca Foundation
Vindobona Stiftung
Jonathan Symons (z"l)

Guardian of Heritage
David & Kate Bearman
Ray Bloom
Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union
J Isaacs Charitable Trust
Cecil Kaplinsky
Rosemarie Nathanson Charitable Trust
Elizabeth & Daniel Peltz OBE
Daniel Seal
The Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation

Heritage Custodian

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Julian Bloom
Bernard Howard
Ezra Mehlman
Steven Parnes
Cecil Rosen Foundation
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Heritage Champion

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Beri Goldenberg
Jewish Joint Burial Society
The Jigsaw Network
Natasha Kaplinsky OBE
Raphael & Catherine Kaplinsky
Simon & Deborah Kaplinsky
Ralph Levy Charitable Company Ltd
James Lieber
The Phillips family
Rosetrees Trust
Paul Sassieni
Scott Saunders
Karen & Mark Smith
Derek Spitz
Nicholas Springer
Taube Philanthropies

International Advisory Panel

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage has assembled an International Advisory Panel to support its work comprised of leading experts in Jewish heritage and historic building conservation.

Joe Abrams	Susan Denyer	Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett	Stuart MacDonald	Ilia Rodov
Lucia Conte Aguilar	William Filmer-Sankey	Baron Julien Klener	Miroslav Malinovic	Jonathan D. Sarna
Peter Aiers	Mohammad Gharipour	Rudolf Klein	Vesna Marjanovic	Edwin Shuker
Renato Athias	Alex Goldberg	Uwe Koch	Joanna Michlic	Neil Silberman
Luca Baraldi	Marc Grellert	Tomas Kraus	Fiyaz Mughal OBE	Benedicte Selfslag
Marjetka Bedrač	Ruth Ellen Gruber	Sergey Kravtsov	Alec Nacamuli	Oddbjørn Sørmoen
Graham Bell	Richard Halsey MBE	Tony Kushner	David Palterer	Crispin Truman OBE
Eleonora Bergman	Jennie Hawks	Eric Langham	Peter Phillips	Susanne Urban
Michael Berkowitz	Maciej Hofman	Aaron Lawton	Dan Press	Jouetta Van Der Ploeg
Herbert Block	Tharik Hussain	Deborah Lazarus	Ferenc Olti	Jurgita Verbickiene
Maros Borsky	Bente Kahan	Helise Lieberman	Antony Polonsky	Annette Weber
Rickie Burman	Edward Kessler MBE	Vladimir Levin	Max Polonovski	Roger White
Miranda Crowds	Alexander von Kienlin	Rachel Lichtenstein	Piotr Puchta	Tomasz Włodarski

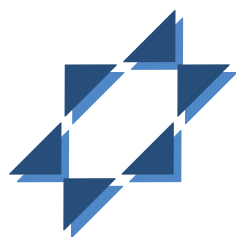
Afterword

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage is saving historic and vulnerable Jewish sites as a means to an end – and that end is **education**.

We want to impact the Jewish world, helping the Jewish people understand their past in order to inform their present and future. We also want to impact wider contemporary society – explaining the Jewish life and contribution, building understanding and empathy while combatting ignorance and prejudice.

These are challenging times, which makes our work today all the more important.





Foundation for
Jewish Heritage

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