

The Cottage: History and Occupants



Description

The cottage is situated to the right of the entrance gates, in the south west corner of the Jewish Burial Ground, forming part of the boundary with Greendown Place. It is a single storey, one room rectangular structure approximately 3.7m by 2.9m constructed of oolitic limestone walls and a pitched roof covered with pantiles. The cottage is entered through a plank door on the north gable end and there is a two/two sash window on the western wall fronting Greendown Place. Internally, a plain stone surround to the fireplace remains on the eastern wall, to the right of a blocked up doorway/window. It is structurally stable but a shell. The footprint of the cottage has changed over the last two hundred years as evidence by historic maps (see below).

Date

On 8th April 1812, a thousand year lease on a narrow strip of “ground and demise” that was part of an adjacent quarry, was agreed between a local quarry owner and four members of the Bath Jewish community. The lease is preserved in the Bath Record Office and has been examined and transcribed by the Friends of the Burial Ground. It contains several references to the “land and demise”. This is evidence the cottage predates the Burial Ground and it is possible that the “demise” was already rented to a quarryman.

Function

Religious Function

It has been assumed that the cottage had a Jewish religious function. The Historic England Listing comments that “*The cemetery is notable for the survival of its Ohel (chapel)*”. The origins of this are twofold. Firstly, Judith Samuel’s *The Jews of Bath* (1985) references a report in *Bath Chronicle* in 1815 of the theft of furniture from the adjacent prayer room. Samuel’s transcription is incorrect. The report of 14 December 1815 is that “*The room adjoining the Jews Burial Ground was on Wednesday night robbed of its furnishings*”.

A second reason for the assumed religious function, which has only recently been discovered, is that when the cottage was partially demolished in 1929, to avoid the payment of rates it was registered as a religious building. This is considered further below.

Cottage for local workers

Recent research has clearly established that the building was a cottage for local workers and their families until its partial demolition in 1929. Research carried out by the Friends some years ago identified that from 1825 the cottage was occupied by a series of poor families and quarry labourers. The BRO is currently closed and it is not possible to examine the rate books prior to 1825. However the rate books from that date, census records and the Bath City Directories clearly evidence that the cottage was the home of a succession of poor labourers and their families. Details are set out in Annex 1.

The Board of Deputies of British (BoD) Jews archives contain a number of supporting documents:

The Bath Synagogue cash book 1891 -1897 contains entries in 1892 for whitewashing the house in the Burial Ground and a new sash window; and entries in 1893,1894 and 1897 for repairs to the cottage at Combe Down. Earlier cash books have not survived.

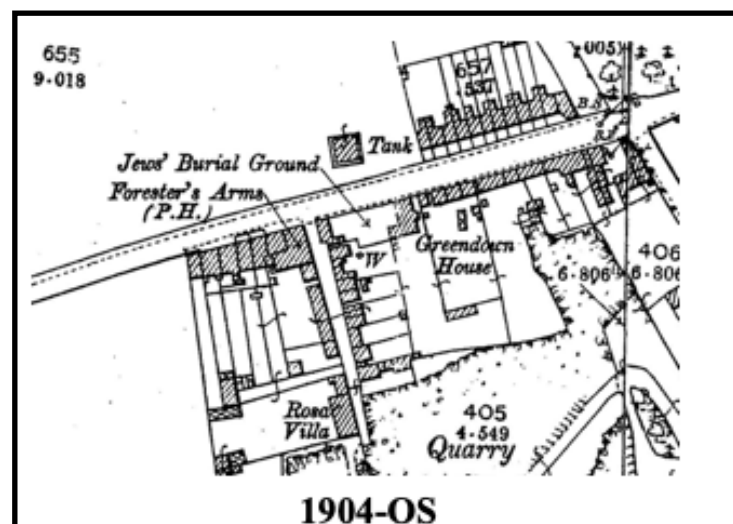
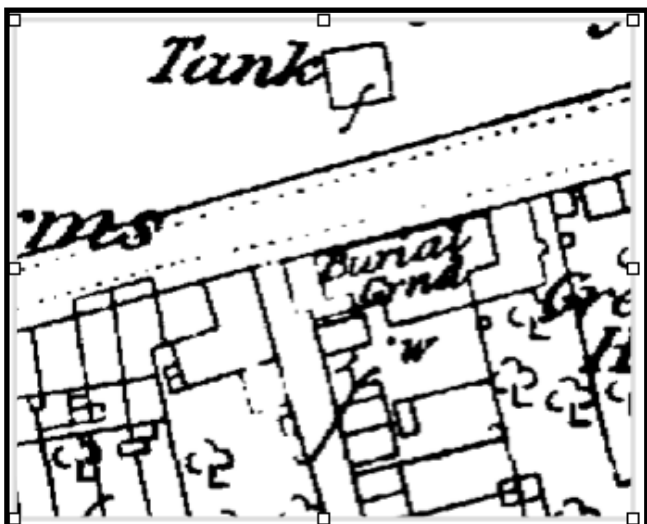
A letter dated November 1911 in the BoD files from the caretaker, John Moore.

A description of works carried out to the cottage in 1915. The documents are water damaged but include works to the main roof, the sash window, the bedroom and the wash house and WC roof.

A description of the property as a cottage, situated at 1 Greendown Place adjacent to the Burial Ground, is contained in an agreement between Reuben Somers, Trustee of the Bath Hebrew Congregation and lessee John Moore for a two years lease effective from 25 December 1909. It includes keeping the adjoining cemetery in good condition.

A hand written letter to Sir D'avidgor Goldsmid dated 18 November 1927 from E Hayman, the last resident caretaker of the cottage in which he complains about the condition of the cottage, in particular the roof. Interestingly, he also list the names on the missing plaque set into the southern wall: L Rothschild MP, Salmons MP, Goldhill MP and Sir D'avidgor Goldsmid and that there is a "board with the same names fixed outside over the kitchen window".

These descriptions evidence that the property had a larger footprint: a bedroom, kitchen, wash-room and WC. This is the footprint in the OS maps 1888 (below left) and 1904 (below right).



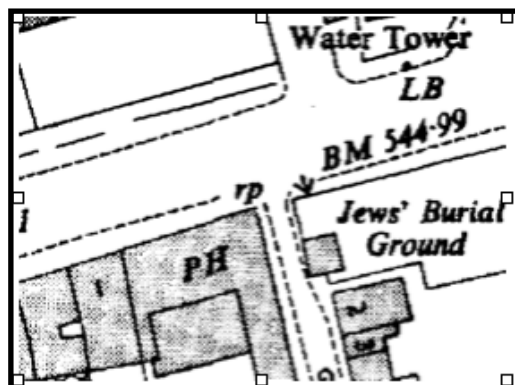
Partial Demolition August 1929

By 1928 the cottage was again in poor repair. In that year Mr Nathan Kerstein, owner of a kosher hotel in Duke Street Bath, made an appeal to the Jewish Community of Bath through the Jewish Chronicle. He called attention to the Burial Grounds neglected condition writing:

“ The outer walls are in danger of collapsing, the cottage where the caretaker resides is sinking, the roof is beginning to fall in. The caretaker has refused to live there, and once all the walls are down cattle would soon trample over the graves”.

The BoD files include documents that evidence that the cottage was altered and partially demolished in August 1929. The City of Bath served a dangerous condition notice about parts of the roof on 6 December 1928. A handwritten schedule of the works subsequently carried out by Mr Dancey, 43 First Avenue, includes: take roof of the entrance part to the building from front wall, pull down chimney stack to gable at the north end to the same level as the existing front wall; take away door and cut wider opening for a pair of iron gates 6ft wide, supply gates 6ft wide with sheet iron attached to back to stop view; take off mortuary roof and supply new roof and timbers and refix the same tiles that are in proper condition; put up new ceiling; take up floor inside entrance to the building back to the cemetery level; pull down and take away the old lavatory and make good all walls at the back of mortuary and point in with ground mortar; and fix Barge boards and fascia boards.

A letter from the BoDs to the Collector of Taxes dated 21 August 1929 states that the cottage has been demolished. A further letter clarifies that this is partial demolition and confirms that after the “alterations” all that is left is “a shelter for mourners in case services are held at a Burial”. The footprint shown on the 1950 OS map show below is that of the building today.



In order to no longer pay rates on the building the BoDs applied in 1929 to the Registrar General for the change of use from dwelling to “a place of meeting for religious worship by a congregation of persons calling themselves the Bath Jewish Congregation”. 1 Greendown Place was registered as “a Jewish Chapel” by the Registrar General in 1931 (Certificate 52705, 26 September 1931). In September 1930 the Treasurer at the Guildhall confirms that the premises are not liable for rates.

It is extremely unlikely that the remaining building was ever used for religious purposes. The last headstone is dated 1921 and by 1929 there were only 2 or 3 Jewish families known to be living in Bath. There is no evidence of burials after 1921, except for oral history from a surviving relative of Reuben Somers, one of the longest standing Jewish residents of Bath. He died in 1941 and the relative believes he is buried in Bath.

The only other surviving report of the Cottage is from the early 1960s when the Combe Down Townswomen's Guild obtained permission to visit the Burial Ground. They describe a "tiny vestry" containing wooden biers, and cards printed with the words of the burial services for use at the graveside, also in Hebrew.

Occupants of the Cottage, Jewish Burial Ground

Rate books

October 1825: Jews Burial Yard. Annual Value 2s.; Rate 1s 6p; resident John Mackmanus, 'poor'

Feb 1826- August 1832: Jack MacKmanus; rates unpaid, listed as poor.

Oct 1832-1836: Listed as no rates paid; no resident listed

Census Records and Post Office Directories

Note: Greendown Place was known locally as the Jews Burial Ground Place

6 June 1841: Jews Burial Ground, Combe Down

The 1841 Census only recorded street names and did not record house numbers. 13 inhabited dwellings are recorded for Jews Burial Ground. Occupations are listed as agricultural labourer, Mason, quarryman, gardener and laundress. Working on the assumption that the enumerator worked his way south to north up Jews Burial Ground/Greendown Place and then turned west along the Bradford Rd to Greendown House (the next house listed), the occupants of the cottage were:

Harriett Vennell aged 60, Laundress

Elizabeth Vennell aged 20

Harriett Vennell aged 15

Sarah Vennell aged 15

John Vennell aged 12, Agricultural Labourer

George Vennell 7 months

All born in Somerset

Note: James Hillier and his family (Mary, Arthur, Sarah and Elizabeth are also recorded as living in a house in the Jews Burial Ground)

30 March 1851 Census

There are still no house numbers. The enumerator records the number of the householders schedule. He records working his way west along the south side of Bradford Road. He records household 36 Greendown cottages, 37 Jews Burial Ground, and 38 Green Down House

Household 37: Jews Burying Ground, Lyncombe & Widcombe Parish, Bath

James Hillyer, married, aged 46, Quarry Labourer, b. Hants, Upham

Mary Ann Hillyer, wife, aged 38, b. Langdon, Somerset

Arthur, son, aged 22, Quarry Labourer

Sarah daughter, aged 14, b Somerset, Widcombe

Elizabeth, daughter aged 10, b Somerset, Widcombe

James, son aged 6, b Somerset, Widcombe

David, son, aged 1, b Somerset, Widcombe

7 April 1861 Census

1 Jews Burial Ground, Coombe Down, Lyncombe & Widcombe Parish, Bath

James Hillyar, Head, aged 55, labourer farm b. indeciperable
Mary A Hillyar, wife, Laundress, aged 47, b. London
Sarah daughter, aged 24, laundress, b. Somerset, Widcombe
Elizabeth, daughter aged 20, laundress, b. Somerset, Widcombe
James, son aged 16, Farm labourer b Somerset, Widcombe
David, son, aged 11, scholar, b. Somerset, Widcombe
Emily, daughter, aged 9, b. Widcombe Somerset

PO Directory 1870/71: 1 Greendown Place. Slingo, Solomon, mason

2 April 1871 Census

1 Greendown Place, Lyncombe & Widcombe Parish, Bath

James Hellier, head, married, quarryman, aged 66, b. Hampshire, Waltham
Mary Ann Hellier, wife, married, aged 52, Laundress, b. Middlesex London
Elizabeth, daughter, unmarried, aged 31, b. Somerset, Combe Down
David, son, unmarried, aged 21, quarryman, b. Somerset, Combe Down
Emily, daughter, unmarried, aged 20, b. Somerset, Combe Down
Unnamed, daughter, unmarried 2 months, b. Somerset, Combe Down

3 April 1881

1 Greendown Place

William Jones, Head, married, aged 33, Miner, b.1848 Corsham
Mary Jones, wife, aged 29, b. Bath
John Williams, border, aged 1, nurse child, b. Bath

PO Directory 1884-5: 1 Greendown Place, John Williams, Quarryman

PO Directory 1890-91: 1 Greendown Place. Slingo, Solomon, mason

5 April 1891

Jews Cemetery Lodge

Henry Onslow, head, married, aged 41 House Painter, b. London Paddington
Emily Onslow, wife, married, aged 30, dressmaker, Sussex, Linfield
Edith, Daughter, aged 4, b Somerset Warleigh
Amy, daughter aged 2, b. Conkwell, Somerset
Arthur, son, aged 1, b.Somerset Bath
Number of rooms occupied: 2

31 March 1901 Census

1 Greendown Place

John Moore, head, married, aged 6, General Labourer, b. Kilmersdon
Emma Moore, wife, aged 59, Laundress, aged 59, b. Paulton
Number of rooms occupied: 2

PO Directory 1895: 1 Greendown Place John Moore, Quarryman

PO Directory 1900: 1 Greendown Place John Moore, Caretaker Jewish Burial Ground

PO Directory 1911: 1 Greendown Place John Moore, Caretaker Jewish Burial Ground

2 April 1911 Census

1 Greendown Place

John Moore , Head, aged 69, married 35 years, no children born, Jobbing Gardener crossed out with worker written over, b.1842 Kilmersdon

Emma Moore, wife, aged 68, Laundress crossed out with own account at home written over, b.1843 Cardiff Wales

1911 forms are signed by the house-holder – John’s writing is a careful, neat copperplate script BoD Files. John Moore letter to Mr Bunford Samuel thanking him for the money he has sent him

PO Directory 1916: 1 Greendown Place John Moore, Caretaker Jewish Burial Ground

PO Directory 1921: 1 Greendown Place John Moore, Caretaker Jewish Burial Ground

PO Directory 1927-8: Edgar Hayman, 1 Greendown Place

BoD files: E Hayman writes to Mr Goldsmid November 1927 about the condition of the cottage