

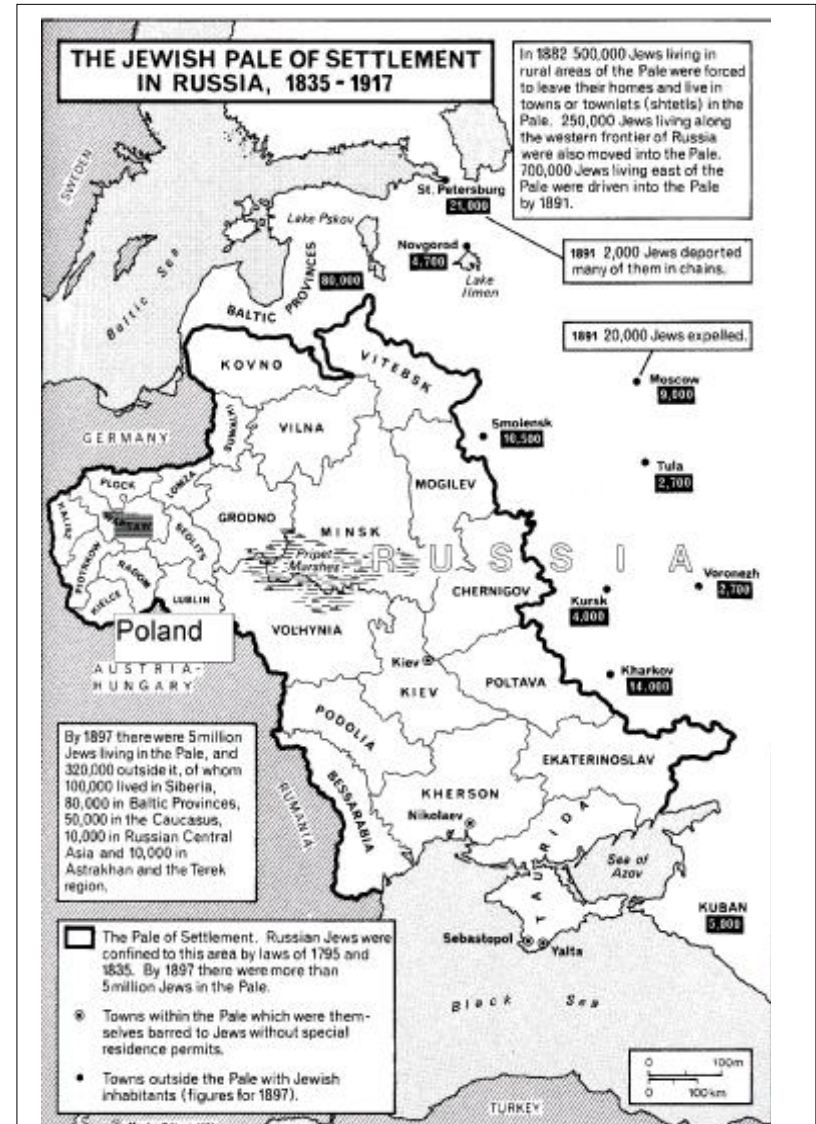
## 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of the **Diamond** family over the years described, say from 1850 to ca 1930, is generally typical of that of 19th century immigrants; a progression from poverty to prosperity, from poor inner-city terraces to a comfortable suburban villa<sup>eg106pp157-160,108</sup>, and eventually in the 20th century the youngest child **Claude** attending university and entering the professional class; the first trades - glazier or dealer (**Suchar**) and turner for the furniture trade (or tailor - **Mark Workman**) were also typical, although Isaac's progress to timber merchant was less usual for an English Jew. Other children sought their fortune overseas.

As to communal life, there was a move from the "stiebels" of the Federation of Synagogues in which the first immigrant **Zyman** was deeply involved, to the respectability of the United Synagogue, and in the next generation there was "marrying out" or membership of a Progressive congregation. I do not know how the couples met, whether any of them employed a *shadchan* or if the bride brought a dowry, as were the customs among the strictly orthodox.

I now give some background to their lives and to the trades which they practiced in London.

Jewish immigration to Britain from 1800 to 1850 or 1860 was no more than about 200 a year, rising to 300 or 400 a year until 1870; then the numbers increased possibly to 1000 a year, derived from Eastern Europe principally. The largest number of Jews in Europe was in the Pale of Settlement in Russia (including Poland and Lithuania {Kovno}); see the map **Fig. 1-A**. The exodus was impelled by an unsuccessful uprising in Warsaw against Russia in 1863 after political demonstrations in 1861, disasters of famine in Lithuania 1866-69, cholera in Poland in 1869-70, and a pogrom in Odessa in 1871, see Map **1-B**, and general military conscription in Russia in 1874<sup>p207,86 Ch1</sup>



**Figure 1A:** The Russian Pale 1835-1917 [per Gilbert]





**Figure 1-C: Jewish market, goose seller, Warsaw 1899**

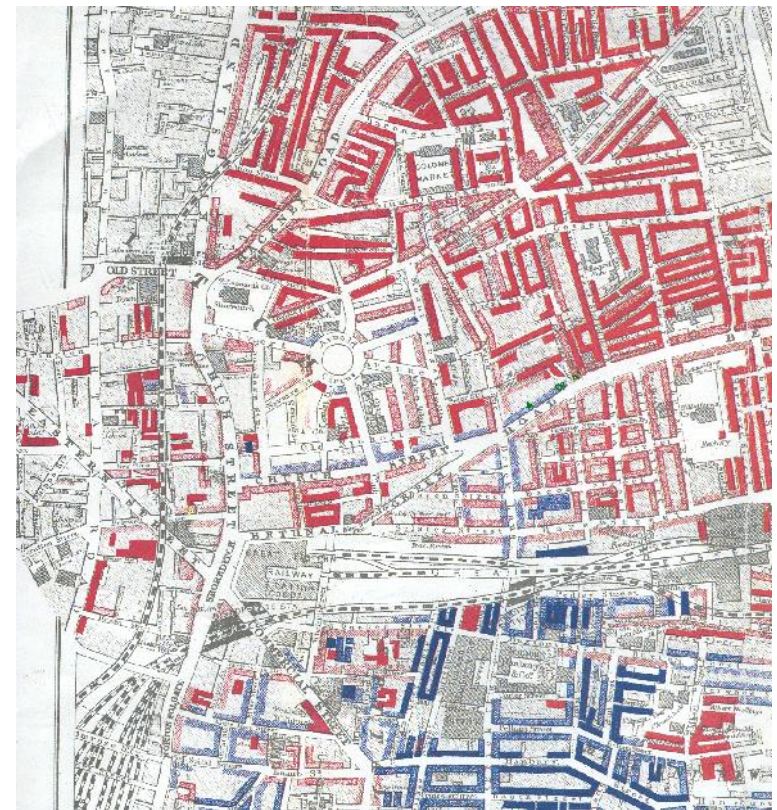
Warsaw (whence Zyman and Isaac came in the 1870s) had a prescribed Jewish quarter

Cf Fig 1-C. The size of the Jewish community increased until it was the largest in Europe, from 16,000 in 1816, 73,000 in 1864, and 130,000 in 1882.

There was much emigration from East Europe to the West from 1860, due to poverty [the principal cause according to Prof. John Klier] and security particularly after pogroms in Russia in 1881. From 1855 under Czar Alexander II, regulations restricting the Jews were relaxed. Emigration was usually from Bremen, Hamburg or Rotterdam to



**Fig. 1-B: Pogroms & persecution in Russia**



**Figure 1-D: From the "Jew in London", Map of relative proportions of Jews in East End, 1899<sup>136</sup>**  
 Streets with the highest Jewish population are coloured dark blue and those with the lowest dark red, as generally in the northern part, Bethnal Green

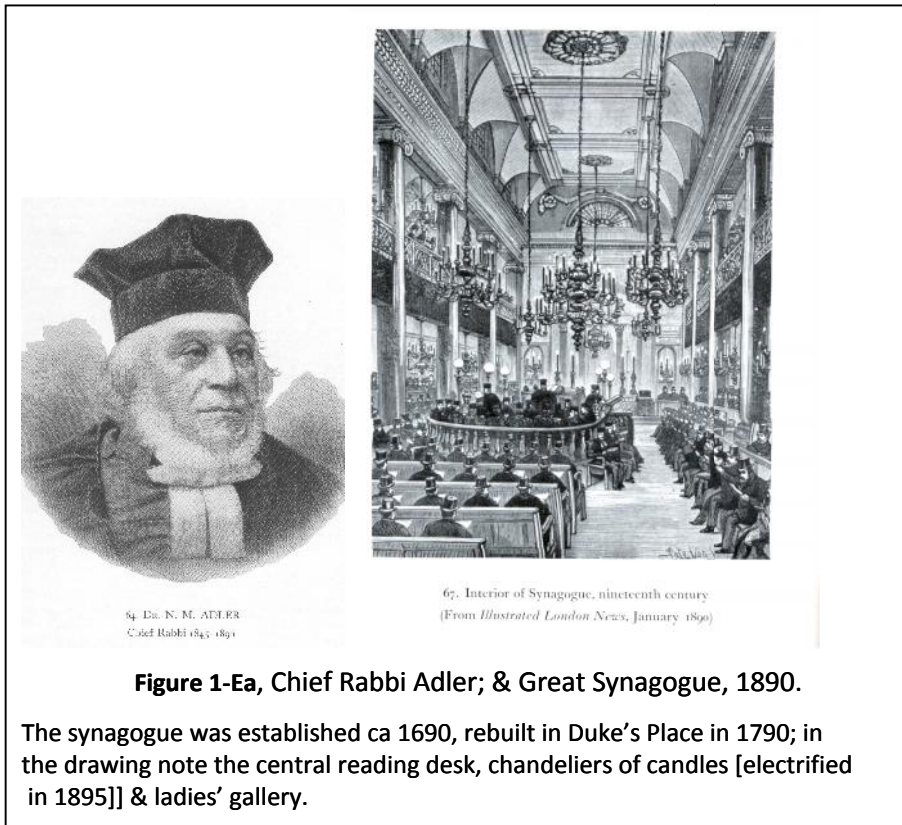
Glasgow  
 W, , ,

Grimsby, Harwich or London xed so that Jews extended their economic activities. Emigration was usually from Bremen, Hamburg or Rotterdam to Glasgow, Grimsby, Harwich or London. Most of the Jews of the East End came (as shown by their birth cities at marriage) from the Poland and Lithuania north-western provinces of Russia. Overcrowding in the field of petty commerce led to a shift to manufacturing occupations [see Englander<sup>160</sup> Ch. 6].



The British Jewish population increased from 25,000 in 1815 to 35,000 in 1851, then by 25,000 to 60,000 in 1880; two thirds of these lived in London; they spread gradually from the East End. Census returns show the numbers of total foreigners, and those born in Russia or Poland as respectively:

1861 101,832 / 5249; 1871 139,445 / 9569; 1881 174,372 / 14,468; 1891 233,008 / 45,674, & 1901 339,436 / 82,844.



**Fig 1-E:** Group chatting outside their door; is a street scene, may be typical of the East End, of Jewesses in "a rare moment of relaxed conviviality".

An estimate of the number in 1882 of Jews in London was 46,000 (35,000 in the East)<sup>105 p76</sup> By 1881 there were about 20,000 East European Jewish immigrants arrived since 1860, more than half of them in London. Until 1825-30 most of the Jews lived in the City or to the east from economic necessity; the poorest near Bishopgate to the Tower, home of street markets & clothes exchanges (coaches stopped at the Royal Exchange). The wealthy began to move west from 1825<sup>108 p80</sup>.

Numerous provincial communities developed in seaports. There was a progressive improvement in prosperity; e.g. the number of old clothes dealers in the streets declined from 1,500 or 1000 in London in 1880 to 500 by 1850. By 1880 hawking and

general dealing [see Chap 5 re Suchar Goldstein] occupied less than a fifth of the London Jews even in the lower-income groups. Mayhew<sup>112</sup> gives a vivid picture of Jewish peddlers and other street traders including in Petticoat Lane in 1850 and the Old Clothes Exchange than a fifth of the London Jews, even in the lower-income groups<sup>87 p60., 105 p80</sup>. The most important restriction on London Jews was removed in 1832<sup>105 p12</sup> when they could become Freemen of the City of London and thus engage in retail trade within the City.

In London, Jewish immigrants settled near the centre, in areas of "decayed respectability" (as in other cities), namely Whitechapel, Spitalfields and St. George's, where Irish and other immigrants had earlier settled to get work; see the map, **Fig. 1-D**, from the coloured original of Arkell's survey<sup>136</sup>. The principal synagogues in 1850 were the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place for the Ashkenazi, see **Fig 1-**

**Ea**, and the Sephardi Bevis Marks<sup>o</sup>. In 1887 the Federation of Synagogues was founded, to assist the tiny *steibels* of the immigrants [see page 21 re Zyman in Ch 2].

Immigrants possessed little by way of skills of use in England, were excluded from unionised skilled trades; they tended to occupations that could be pursued at home, required minimal finance or skill, and carried out in cramped environments commonly in makeshift backroom workshops, especially tailoring e.g <sup>84 pp109-10</sup>.

There was much poverty amongst the immigrant Jews. In 1874 the recipients of relief from the Jewish Board of Guardians were 25% street traders or general dealers and 10% glaziers<sup>106 p35</sup>, a particularly underpaid and overcrowded trade, who earlier walked the streets with panes of glass on their back, a common

form of urban peddling in the 1860-70s<sup>87p60</sup> (cf **Suchar**, a glazier, then "general merchant" Ch 5); see also below, Booth's 1886 occupations. The itinerant glazier was an occupation well suited to the immigrant, needing minimal outlay or skill, no premises and allowing him to work at hours of his choosing<sup>106a p202</sup>.

Wolf<sup>145</sup> gave a general account of London Jewry in 1889, estimating a population then of below 30,000 East End Jews; he mentions their hard work, but also poverty, and the markets and peddling.

**Bethnal Green housing**, excerpt from the Victoria County History<sup>142a</sup> (VCH) with Author's interpolations & emphases:

In 1881 only 872 people in Bethnal Green were Irish and 925 foreign-born. Foreign immigrants formed 0.7 per cent of the population in 1861, 1871, and 1881, 3.6 per cent in 1901, and 6.1 per cent in 1911. Mostly born in Germany, Poland, and, from the 1880s, Russia, they were usually poor Jews who had fled pogroms and whose concentration made them much more prominent than their numbers merited. They spread, as had the Huguenots, from Spitalfields and Whitechapel. In the late 1880s several estates had 'many Polish Jews'. By 1899 Jews formed at least 95 per cent of the population south of Hare Street and 75-95 per cent in Brick Lane and the Boundary Street estate (the former Nichol), but less than 25 per cent and often less than 5 per cent in most of Bethnal Green. Wood Close school near Hare Street [Eastern Bethnal Green] had so small an attendance on Jewish fast and feast days that it applied to the L.C.C. to become a Jewish school. The ghetto, 'full of synagogues, backroom factories, and little grocery stores [one was kept in Whitechapel in 1890 by **Morris Hauser**, grandfather of Claude's wife] reeking of pickled herring, garlic sausage, and onion bread', was occupied by exotic-looking people speaking a strange language. Sweating, overcrowding, and high rents were associated with Jews, as victims and sometimes as perpetrators. Some Jews were middle-class, for example Woolf Goldstein who lived in Vivian Road on the Broomfields estate, and invested in property which they rack-rented {Isaac owned

<sup>o</sup> For more background see Lipman's histories<sup>105-108</sup> and Englander's compendium<sup>84</sup>.



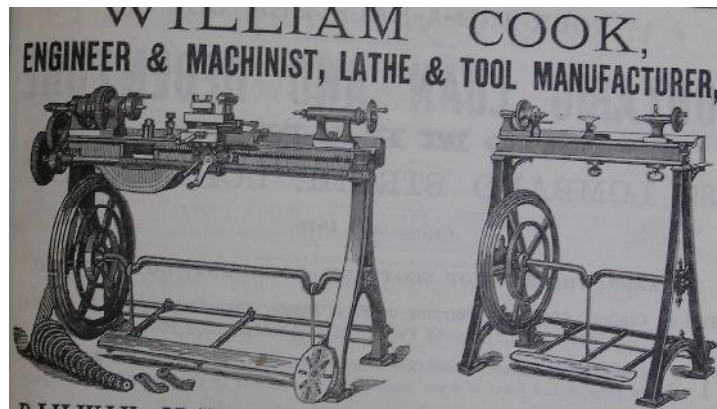
. [numerous properties]. Anti-Jewish feeling, fuelled y the resentment of slum dwellers expelled in clearances, exploded in a revolt against landlords in 1898. One benefit from Jewish settlement, acknowledged by its opponents the [Christian] missionaries, was the decline in drunkenness and, possibly because of that, in infant mortality [but Isaac & Jane lost 8 children aged less than 6 yrs].

The influx of Jews aggravated poverty and overcrowding. The number of houses reached 17,283 in 1881 and 17,354 in 1891, a density of 23 houses to an acre, after which numbers appeared to decrease. . There were 28,209 tenements in 1901 and 27,693 in 1911, compared with 10,975 'ordinary houses'. Most people (76 per cent in 1901 and 79 per cent in 1911) lived in tenements of fewer than five rooms and nearly a third of those in two rooms. Overcrowding was made worse by the loss of gardens to workshops and warehouses [as Isaac's], although sanitation improved.

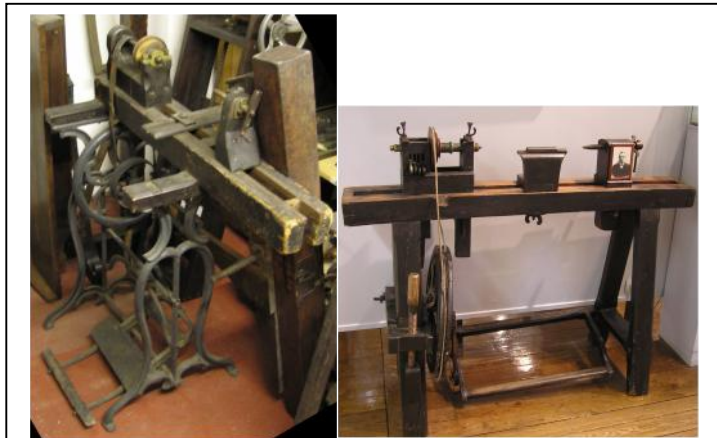
Overcrowding was caused by poverty, since the poor could not afford more space and needed to stay near their work, whether or not they moved within the area. In the late 1880s the largest category of the population, 39.86 per cent., was 'comfortable', with standard earnings, mostly artisans in the furniture trade or regular labourers. Although St. George-in-the-East [see Chap 5] possessed the poorest district, Bethnal Green had the highest proportion, 44.6 per cent, of poor and very poor, mostly casual labourers and people under-employed in the furniture and dress trades.

### Furniture & Timber trades

Of occupations of Aliens reported in 1903 by the Royal Commission, cabinetmakers were the 5<sup>th</sup> most numerous<sup>87p43n19</sup>;



**Fig 1-F:** Lathes with foot treadles, advert in Business Directory of London, 1886. Manufacturer in Lambeth



**Figure 1-Fa :19c Lathes, English (Geffyre Mus) & French**

similarly the censuses show the cabinetmakers in the Russians and Poles in E London as the 6% in 1891 rising to 11% in 1901<sup>86p63</sup>.

**Bethnal Green Furniture making** [from the VCH<sup>142b</sup> with Author's interpolations]:

With regard to the system of production, valuable information is afforded in Charles Booth's Life and Labour of the People in London (1889). The districts comprise Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Hackney, and the Tower Hamlets. The Curtain Road district in Shoreditch is the chief market of the trade and the centre of its distribution. 'From the East-end workshops,' says Mr. Booth, 'produce goes out of every description, from the richly inlaid cabinet that may be sold for £100 or the carved chair that can be made to pass as rare "antique" workmanship, down to the gypsy tables that the maker sells for 9sh. a dozen or the cheap bedroom suites and duchesse tables that are now flooding the market.' The producers fall into four main groups; The first class, that of the factories, forms but an insignificant portion of the trade, there being not more than three or four large factories with elaborate machinery, where from about 50 to 190 men are employed. They supply the large dealers in the Tottenham Court Road [Morris

[Ruben sold to Heals] The second class, that of

. the larger workshops, comprises shops in which from 15 to 25 men are generally employed. Here the best East-end furniture is made, but the number of first-class shops is very small, many good firms having been obliged to give up altogether in recent years through the prevailing demand for cheapness. In the third class are the small makers, masters who employ from 4 to 8 men in small workshops, either built behind the house or away from it, sometimes even in the houses themselves. 'As a general rule the larger shops turn out the better work. But even among the small men excellent work is done, in the same way that large shops often turn out cheap and inferior goods.' These small men sell at the nearest market, that is, Curtain Road and its district; here they can be sure of getting cash, whilst the West-end shops and the provincial trade take credit, which the small maker can rarely afford to give.

In a fourth class are the independent workers. These are mostly found among the turners, carvers [Zyman's trades], fret-cutters, and sawyers, and are not a large class. Other special classes are chair makers, looking-glass frame makers, french polishers, and upholsterers.

### Bethnal Green Industry

Many factory workers affected by the decline of silk weaving in the 1820s and 1830s were absorbed into home- or workshop-based industries. The chief manufactures, lacking the monopoly position of silk, were furniture, clothing, and shoemaking.

From 1820 the furniture industry developed rapidly, making cheap furniture with imported brought by the Regent's canal. As the traditional cabinet makers, 'society men' based mostly in Clerkenwell, declined in status in the 1830s, Bethnal Green, with its competitive "garret-masters", began to take



**Figure 1-G** Cabinetmakers M Doctors & Sons from Odessa, in Bacon St., Bethnal Green, with samples cabinets

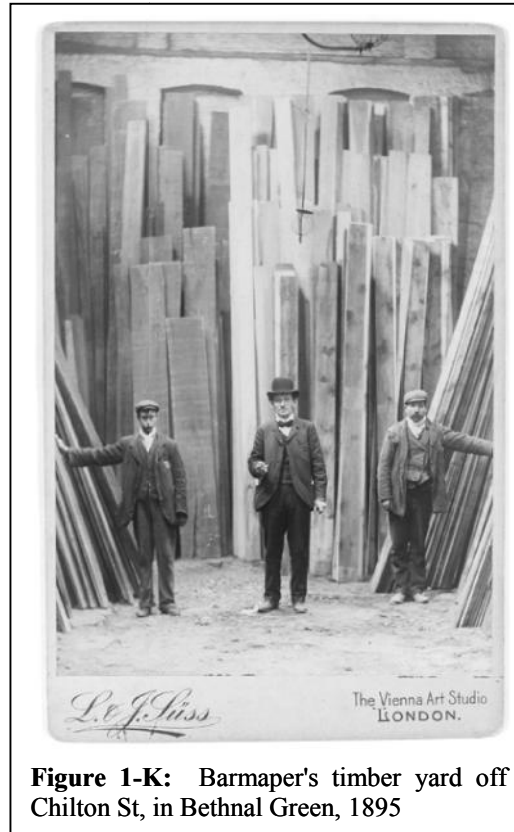


**Figure 1-H:** An immigrant timber merchant's shop in 1910; table & turned chair legs are stacked in front, and doors.

over. In the early 1830s it had two timber dealers, at least one timber merchant, five chair makers, and ten cabinet makers, all except one dealer to the west of Cambridge Road and most along Hackney Road. Numbers multiplied, to 26 cabinet making, chair making, and upholstering establishments by 1846, 84 by 1859, and 121 by 1872. Steam saw-mills fostered the expansion and by 1851 the industry had spread east of Cambridge Road to the canal. Production was still thickest, however, in the west, especially around the Nichol [next to Zyman when in Club Row, v Ch 2]. Although cabinet and chair makers were the most numerous, there were many specialists to make other articles of furniture, frames, or boxes, besides carvers and upholsterers, japanners, and french polishers. The industry was small-scale, in homes or workshops; a chair maker in Clarence Place who employed 8 men was exceptional and there was apparently only one furniture factory, in Hope Street. There were still no large establishments in 1861, when 2,563 people worked in furniture making. By 1872 [Zyman was in London] nearly 700 addresses in Bethnal Green were connected with the industry, compared with 85 in Hackney and 659 in Shoreditch.



There were at least three sawmills and 16 timber-yards in the early 1870s, of which 8 yards were in Bethnal Green Road and 4 in Gosset Street [just north of Isaac's from 1885]. Numbers in the industry reached 4,326 in 1881 and 4,766 c. 1890, more than half of them described as cabinetmakers and upholsterers. Although Curtain Road in Shoreditch was the centre of the trade, Gosset Street was the manufacturing centre. When the 15 acres. of the Nichol came to be cleared in 1890, its occupiers included 120 cabinet makers, 74 chair makers, and 24 woodcutters and sawyers. The small workshop remained the standard unit of production, with yards and saw mills interspersed. Mills often let space and steam power to up to 20 specialist workers. [Zyman was described at his death as "turner at saw mills".] Increasing mechanization brought cheaper products, carvers for example being replaced by machine mouldings [perhaps why Isaac was not a carver after 1885?]. A tendency towards larger premises gave rise to three with more than 100 employees by c. 1900, but individuals continued to make and hawk single items. The intense competition and many small workshops which eluded inspection encouraged "sweating", which was exacerbated by Jewish immigration. In 1888 Brick Lane was notorious for boy labour, many garret masters worked people until 11.30 p.m. By 1901 7,874 men and 1,167 women (mostly french polishers) worked in the wood and furniture industry, 3,729 of them as cabinetmakers. There were 7,632 men and 1,125 women workers in 1911 [when Zyman & Isaac had stopped work, Morris Ruben's factory continued] when there were 377 cabinet or chair making and upholstery



**Figure 1-K:** Barmaper's timber yard off Chilton St, in Bethnal Green, 1895



**Figure 1-J:** Cabinetmaker's tools, 19<sup>th</sup> cent., from Jewish Museum, London

firms. Few firms were long lived, White Bros. in Church Street from 1831 to 1911 being an exception and bankrupt ones being replaced, as little capital was needed to set up a workshop. After a slight decline during the First World War, the industry expanded, to 439 cabinet and chair making and upholstery establishments by 1939, the highest concentration in the country and employing 5,961 people in 968 factories. Retailers were supplied directly and some of the larger ones ran their own factories. Many hand-made furniture and french polishing workshops closed. The move towards larger premises was reinforced by the need for more space for electrically driven machinery. Larger firms were sited along the Regent's canal or its eastward branch, where rents were lower than in the west. In 1938, in the northern area between the canal and Vyner Street, there were four firms with 10-25 employees and two with 26-99. To the east one firm had more than 100 employees, 3 had 26-99, and one had 10-25.

Slum clearance and bombing reduced their numbers, as did shortage of timber after 1945. ([Later history omitted.] There was diversification into other materials like plastics.<sup>142b</sup>

The Regent's Canal Dock connects the Canal with the Thames at Limehouse: The narrow west quay had always been given over to the Baltic timber trade, after coal the second most important trade of the dock. The many furniture makers in Shoreditch and elsewhere took much timber up the canal for use. There were several timber yards on the opposite side of Branch Road. The location of the furniture industry was related to the import of timber at the docks, where saw mills were present early and timber merchants, also in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, less than a mile south of the canal<sup>123 p26</sup>. Figs **1-H** & **1-K** show rare photos of timber merchants' premises.

Booth<sup>ibid</sup> wrote: "Whitechapel was the place of the Jews, tailors, boot-makers and tobacco workers, Bethnal Green of the artisan.

From East London History.<sup>35c</sup> – East End furniture makers:

The boom started with the opening of the East India and West India Docks and a new, plentiful supply of cheap timber. The building of the canals brought the timber inland, with sawmills setting up business alongside, and hundreds of small workshops sprung up in Bethnal Green, Shoreditch and Hoxton to produce cheap furniture. It was easy to set up on your own, the workers needed only enough cash to buy wood to work on one piece at a time. The 'small master' system took root, with craftsmen working from tiny rooms or garrets, and so they became known as "garret masters". While the skilled West End masters put off marriage and children to dedicate themselves to their trade, the garret masters planned to have as many as possible. Families of six or more were not unusual, with all taking up an unpaid duty with the master, maybe as young as six.. Unfed..  
Soon, many of the Jewish immigrants were flooding into the trade and by the turn of the century owned many of the firms. Lobovitch, Hyman, Galinsky and Dolnisky around the Whitechapel Road became famous names.

The making of the cheaper type of furniture for working and middle class buyers developed in the now E1 postal district, including much of Stepney and adjacent streets in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green; by 1846 there were 59 establishments and 88 in 1859 and 1872, including more than one in Sclater Street from 1846, when there were 88 in the Curtain Road area, EC2, and they were found in Bacon Street, Bethnal Green Road (4 of them) and Gibraltar Walk<sup>123</sup> p38, Table. Numbers decreased slowly after 1872. There was much specialisation of labour, e.g. some workers made only chair legs<sup>102</sup>, although these could also be bought from timber merchants<sup>98</sup> p26.

To make turned wood parts, turners used a treadle lathe with a crank and flywheel; see Figs **1-F/Fa**, gouges for rough finishing and then scrapers, gouges, chisels, or V-tools. A Book of Trades in 1818 describes the turner's art as being of great importance to the architect and instrument-maker. Tools were earlier made by the turner himself, or used ones were purchased from another worker. Turners were tenants of Bethnal Green sawmills in which steam power and bench room were let out<sup>79</sup>. IVp169/123p30, there

were 20 such mills in the East End, per Booth<sup>79</sup> p167, who wrote that turners mostly worked in saw mills and in cabinet workshops. Saw mills would cut timber to size for piece masters, and turned or fretted it for workshop masters<sup>161</sup>p194. A foot treadle could easily be replaced by an overhead drive, e.g. from a gas engine of a small sawmill<sup>64</sup>. The lathes were similar in construction for wood as for metalworking; they carried a carry a "T-rest" to steady a hand tool, or a more elaborate holder for automatic repetition. They carried a "T-rest" to steady a hand tool, or a more elaborate holder for automatic repetition.

The "Book of Trades" published in 1804 described the wood turner's craft as being of great importance in a variety of trades both useful and ornamental; a foot treadle lathe is illustrated. A journeyman then earned a guinea and a half a week, and for work on toys and small articles much more.

The trades of wood turners and carvers were amongst those to which the Jewish Board of Guardians arranged apprenticeships in the 1880s.

Booth's Survey<sup>79</sup>. I, III, IV., Smith<sup>161</sup> re the cabinet makers and the author's JHSE paper<sup>83</sup> give more detail on the furniture trade and timber merchants in 1880-1900. There was a preponderance of Jews among foreign cabinetmakers in 1900; and by 1889 Jewish trade unions<sup>106</sup> p117, <sup>123</sup> p167. A high proportion of names in the furniture and timber trades in east and north London from 1850 were said to be "obviously Jewish"<sup>99</sup> p26; but this was not apparent for the period 1878-1901 to the present author<sup>83</sup> p 261.

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<sup>b</sup>Illustrations of lathes are given in catalogues at the Museum of London, e.g. of Ransome & Co<sup>128</sup>, Chelsea, 1891, p 149, priced from £27. Actual turners' lathes are in the basement of the Geffyre Museum .Shoreditch, and a museum of trades in Tours, as photos **3-F** above



Proportions of E. End Jews in these trades varied with population sample, ca 10% but less of poorer Jews. Many Russian-Polish immigrants were helped by the Board of Guardians to become cabinet-makers between 1880 and 1900 as a better livelihood than hawking; it could be done at home. Booth<sup>79</sup>Vol II p64 listed among East End occupations (from his 1886 survey):

<u>Percentages in 1886 in:</u>	Shore-	Bethnal	White-	St
George	ditch	Green	chapel	in East
<b>Furniture &amp; woodworking</b>	13.2	14.6	2.5	2.9
Building Work	6.9	4.4	1.8	2.4
General Dealers	0.7	0.9	4.1	0.8
Dressmaking	7.9	9.9	18.2	9.4

Biblical timber provision: from **Chronicles II**, Chap 2:

Solomon sent this message to Hiram King of Tyre:

*I am building a house for my God.... send me From Lebanon cedar wood, juniper and aljummim; prepare an ample supply of timber for me. Hiram replied: we will fell all the wood you need from Lebanon, and float it as rafts to Joppa for you to convey to...*