

# JEWISH BAKERS IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY GREAT BRITAIN AND SUNDAY BAKING RESTRICTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Jewish business owners, part of the large migrations from the Russian Empire to Great Britain after 1880, faced Sunday closing laws meant to control the behavior of Christians, such as the Sunday Baking Act of 1822, forbidding the baking and sale of bread products on Sundays. Religious Jews who observed the Sabbath on Saturday wanted to bake bread on Sunday and this created a tension that lasted more than fifty years. In the competition for a limited amount of business, Jewish bakers were targeted by Christians in many ways, some underhanded, and legal action was frequently taken against Jews for baking on Sundays. The hostility between Jewish and Christian bakers was never actually a matter of religious principle; rather, it was a consequence of several interrelated economic factors. An increase in the number of Jewish bakers after the Russian new migration threatened the commercial success of Christian bakers, a problem aggravated by the falling price of bread impacting baker incomes. Falling prices resulted from technological changes in the industry, with factories mass-producing bread less expensively than independent artisans. Calm was restored only when British law changed in 1936 and everyone was permitted to bake on Sunday.

When immigrants first arrive in a country there is almost always friction between the host population and the new immigrants over housing, jobs, and culture. This article tells the story of such a clash in Britain in the late nineteenth century, tracing how Jewish bakers ran afoul of Britain's Sundays closing laws, which forbade bakers to bake and bakeries to sell their good on Sundays. In a time when most businesses worked a six-day week, Jewish bakers felt unfairly victimized, since their religion called upon them to close their establishments on Saturday in observance of the Sabbath while Christian bakers were free to bake and sell on Saturday, but the law required all bakers, including Jews, to close on Sunday for the Christian Sabbath. This story is a microcosm of social conflict and social change, and reveals the serious pressures that observant Jewish immigrants faced as they tried to find a place for themselves in British society.

From medieval times, custom and the law in England assumed that Sunday was a day of rest and worship. Sunday observance laws were directed at errant Christians who failed to observe the Sabbath. Renaissance urban growth,

increasing commercial activity, and the turmoil of the Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century all disrupted the habits of Sabbath observance. After the restoration of the monarchy, Parliament sought to restore religion to a central place in British life and to reestablish strict observance of the Sunday Sabbath with respect to the commercial life of the country. It passed the Sunday Observance Act of 1677, an avowedly religious law that was for centuries the foundation of Britain's legal structure on Sabbath observance. The act prohibited work and commerce on Sunday except in some limited instances.<sup>1</sup> It was augmented a century later by the Sunday Observance Act of 1781, which required that the nation's theaters, taverns, libraries, museums, zoos, and retail shops were to be closed on Sundays.<sup>2</sup> However, it was recognized that some businesses such as bakeries and food merchants had to be allowed to work even on Sundays in order to provision the populace.

Medieval England had a small but thriving community of Jews but it was destroyed by the expulsion of Jews in 1290. Under the Tudors, Jews, mainly Spanish Jews, began to trickle back into Britain. The number of Jews continued to grow as British commerce and empire grew and British trade spanned the world. In 1734, there were about 6,000 Jews living in England.<sup>3</sup> The Jewish population of Britain began to rise more rapidly in the nineteenth century as Jews from the German states arrived on British shores. In 1850, the Jewish population was approximately 25,000.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth century a new wave of Jewish immigration, composed largely of Jews from the Russian and Hapsburg Empires in eastern and central Europe, led to a substantial increase in Jewish population. About 120,000 Jews immigrated to Great Britain between 1880 and 1914. The Jewish population of London alone went from 47,000 in 1883 to 150,000 in 1905, which accounted for about three-fourths of the Jewish population in the UK.<sup>5</sup> This influx of new Jewish immigrants, arriving at a time of significant changes in British social and economic life, faced them with—and helped to create—tension with the host population. Nowhere was this tension played out more visibly than in the British baking industry. Jewish bakers wanted to bake on Sunday, the day that was not their Sabbath, and ignore the legal restrictions on Sunday commercial activity. British law forbade that. By the late nineteenth century, there was conflict in the baking industry.

Some legal restrictions on baking connected with Sunday closing existed before the nineteenth century. For instance, a 1794 act obliged bakers to refrain from work on Sunday except for three hours, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.<sup>6</sup> The purpose was not to unburden bakers *per se*, but rather to obtain "better observation of

the Lord's day by persons exercising the trade of Bakers."<sup>7</sup> But the fundamental law at the bottom of the tension in the baking industry was the Bread Act of 1822, which went beyond the 1794 law and prohibited entirely the baking of bread on a Sunday in and around London. Furthermore, on Sunday, bread, rolls, and cakes could not be sold before 9 a.m. nor after 1 p.m. and bread could not be delivered to customers after 1:30 p.m., although bakers were allowed to prepare the "sponge," the starter dough for baking, in anticipation of Monday baking. The 1822 act set out in detail the penalties for violation of the law that prohibited baking on Sunday. For the first offense, the fine was 10 shillings, for the second offense 20 shillings, and for the third and subsequent offenses 40 shillings, as well as having to pay all court costs. In 1836 another Bread Act extended the 1822 act to the entire country.<sup>8</sup> Failure to pay the assessed fines and court costs could result in a jail sentence of a week.<sup>9</sup> However, the courts appear to have had great flexibility in assessing fines, which were often less than the legally prescribed levels but never more.<sup>10</sup>

The principal aim of the 1822 act, as interpreted by the British courts, was to safeguard bakers from working seven days a week and to insure standards of bread purity. But the 1822 act rested on the Sunday Observance Act of 1677, which used avowedly religious reasons to forbid all ordinary business activity on Sunday. The 1677 act and the 1822 act, one explicitly religious, the other implicitly so, became conflated at times and the 1822 Bread Act took on religious overtones.<sup>11</sup> Jewish bakers felt that British law imposed on them a fundamental injustice: their religion obliged them to abstain from work from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday yet they were obliged by the laws of Great Britain to abstain from work on Sunday. The 1822 Bread Act remained the law of the land even when restrictions on Sunday work in other parts of the British economy had been relaxed. For instance, under the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878, Jewish tailors were given a special exemption and allowed to work on Sundays if they observed the Sabbath on Saturday, but this principle did not apply to bakers.<sup>12</sup>

The baking industry was composed of independent businesses operating within a guild-like system, with master bakers and journeymen. Jewish master bakers throughout the entire United Kingdom were represented by a single association, the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society, located in London. Non-Jewish bakers were represented by 42 local or specialized associations throughout Great Britain until 1887 when the National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners was founded as an umbrella organization for all

groups of master bakers except those who were Jews.<sup>13</sup> Toward the end of the nineteenth century there was ongoing tension between Jewish bakers and several of the local associations, especially the Amalgamated Society of Bakers, the Bakers' Operative Union, the Operative Society of Bakers and Confectioners, the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers, and the Journeymen's Bakers Society.<sup>14</sup> There were about 60 Jewish master bakers and about 130 Jewish journeymen bakers in London in the middle of the 1890s.<sup>15</sup> An accurate number for non-Jewish bakers at about this time is harder to come by, but we do know that in 1913, the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners of Great Britain and Ireland had 9,119 members.<sup>16</sup>

Baking bread was difficult work, for Jew and Christian alike. The demand for fresh bread every day led many bakeries to require their workers to work seven days a week. The 1794 act had been memorialized in 1795 in the so-called "baker's halfpenny," which bore the legend "To lessen the slavery of Sunday baking and provide for wants, an Act was passed A.D. 1794."<sup>17</sup> Journeymen bakers often worked in deplorable sanitary conditions—in basements with little ventilation and no drainage—and toiled through the night into the predawn hours.<sup>18</sup> Highly exploitative working conditions existed across the board, including in Jewish bakeries. Accounts vary, but the members of the Journeymen Bakers' Association of Scotland worked 12 hours a day in the 1860s<sup>19</sup> and it appears that the industry standard around the turn of the twentieth century was still a 12-hour work day. Jewish bakers in the East End also worked about 12 hours a day in 1900.<sup>20</sup> There were numerous instances where Jewish bakery workers, who worked for other Jews, charged that they were obliged to work on the Jewish Sabbath.<sup>21</sup> Some claimed that they had to work behind shuttered windows until 2 p.m. on Saturday.<sup>22</sup> In 1893 Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler met with a deputation of Jewish bakers in London who told him they started work at 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening and would work until noon or 1 p.m. the next afternoon.<sup>23</sup>

The 1822 act stood without a legal test for many years. The first prosecution under the act did not take place until 1863 and even then the charges were so trivial that they were dismissed. In 1876 four Jewish bakers were taken to court by the Christian Master Bakers' Association on charges of baking on Sunday. The Jewish bakers pleaded ignorance of the law, promised not to repeat the offence, and the prosecution withdrew the charges. A month later, when one of the defendants was again issued a summons for Sunday baking, he was fined 10 shillings.<sup>24</sup> In the late 1870s, even before the great influx of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe, Jewish bakers began to express their unhappiness over

the Bread Act. It was reported that Benjamin Disraeli was approached in the hope of enlisting his aid in getting the law changed. But this was a short-lived effort and came to naught.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1880s, accusations against Jewish bakers charged with baking on Sunday began to rise. In June 1887, the London District Board of the Operative Bakers, a Christian organization, said that in the previous twelve months, 40 summonses had been issued for violations of the Bread Laws. After this, prosecutions stopped until 1896.<sup>26</sup> But then in the late 1890s charges against Jewish bakers rose precipitously as did vituperative comments. According to historian Lloyd Gartner, some Christians claimed that Jewish shops were "cheap and dirty, lacking in the amenities of retail trade, and kept open all day and most of the night."<sup>27</sup> But it is important to understand that religious charges and ethnic slurs were often a smokescreen. The driving force behind the vituperation as well as the prosecutions was mainly economic and competitive pressures within the baking industry and religious motives were of lesser importance.

To understand the increase in litigation and the attacks, we need to look at the way baking bread began to change around 1890 in Great Britain—changes that affected all bakers regardless of their religion. Large-scale, mechanized bread factories had begun to compete with the small, independent bakers.<sup>28</sup> An advertisement placed by a master baker in an 1890 newspaper expressed the dilemma for the individual craftsman. The baker appealed to his customers to understand that his hand-made bread was of higher quality than machine-made factory bread and he could not sell his bread as cheaply as the grocer who sold the factory's bread. The factory, he said, used cheaper, hence inferior, flour and employed nonunion workers.<sup>29</sup> And in fact there was a downward movement of prices for bread, which fell by more than 21 percent between 1873 and 1886.<sup>30</sup> By the mid-1890s bakers were under such economic pressure that they tried to fight back by any means, including attacking the competition, which often led to efforts to prevent Jewish bakers from gaining a competitive advantage by baking on Sunday. The threat felt by Christian bakers was aggravated by the fact that to the extent that Jews observed dietary laws, they were forbidden from buying bread from Christian bakers, but no such constraint existed for Christian consumers, who could buy bread from any baker, Jewish or Christian. Furthermore, the large influx of immigrants from eastern and central Europe represented a large new market that both Christian and Jewish bakers hoped to capture. However, Jews, especially the more recent immigrants, reportedly did not buy bread from Christian bakers because they feared the use of lard in the baking process.<sup>31</sup>

The strains between the Jewish and Christian bakers peaked during the period 1896–1902, when nothing short of a vendetta was carried out by Christian bakers who went after Jewish bakers for baking and delivering bread on Sunday. There was a built-in asymmetry in the situation. Both sides asserted religious reasons driving their claims. But only one side had the law and the apparatus of government on its side. In truth, both sides seemed to skirt the law in varying degrees at different times. Aggravating the problem throughout was the fact that the two sides spoke past each other, if they spoke to each other at all.

It is instructive to look at some of the court cases from the period beginning in 1896 when prosecutions for Sunday baking ballooned. We can see different underlying circumstances, but usually an informant, often a spy, was involved. Moreover, there was often inconsistent enforcement of the law depending on how a particular judge felt about the law or whether he was sympathetic to the Jewish cause. For example, in August, 1896, Jewish baker Julius Louis Meek was taken to court by the London district of the Amalgamated Society of Bakers. Thomas Venters, a Christian baker, testified that at the unlikely hour of 4 a.m. on Sunday morning "he looked into the basement of the defendant's business" and witnessed Meek baking bread. Meek admitted that he had been baking Sunday morning but said that was because he abstained from baking bread on the Jewish Sabbath and thus had to bake bread on Sunday. The judge ruled that Meek was guilty of violating the 1822 act and fined him 10 shillings plus 4 shillings in court costs, and advised him that if he wished to remain in England, he should abide by its laws.<sup>32</sup>

Venters was in fact a paid informer employed by the Christian Master Bakers to spy on Jewish bakers to find those who were baking and selling bread on Sundays. Venters generally took his information to a local magistrate. If he was frustrated at that level because the magistrate refused to hear the case, he went to the Divisional Court.<sup>33</sup> Venters was not the only one spying on Jewish bakers. On July 14, 1897, the London District Board of the Christian Bakers' Operative Union appointed a Watch Committee to identify offenders of the Sunday ban on baking, Jew or gentile, because they did not "wish to prosecute one set of men more than the other."<sup>34</sup> But despite those high-minded words, most of the prosecutions against bakers who worked on Sundays were against Jews, even though there was a lot of circumstantial evidence that gentile bakers often baked on Sundays, too.

By 1897, the legal actions against Jewish bakers took on the coloration of a relentless campaign, in which Venters, identifying himself as a delegate of the

Bakers Operatives' Union, played an active role. The union was behind the issuance in February of another eight summons against Jewish bakers for selling bread within the London city limits.<sup>35</sup> At the urging of Venters, the Operative Society of Bakers and Confectioners took Jewish baker Joseph Bonn to court in February 1897. The prosecution argued that Bonn should be found guilty because the baking trade was unhealthy work and anyone engaged in such work should have at least one day off. Bonn retorted that as a Jew he took the Saturday Sabbath as his day off, but the prosecution insisted that the prohibition against Sunday work had to be applied uniformly across all groups without exception. Bonn's defense was the standard one that if he was not allowed to bake bread on Sunday then Jews would only have stale bread to eat on Monday. The judge expressed sympathy with Bonn, and said that the act imposed a hardship on Jews, yet found the baker guilty. The judge only fined him a token 1 shilling (rather than the 10 shillings stipulated by the law) plus the cost of the summons. Bonn, who admitted his guilt, said that he intended to continue baking on Sundays.<sup>36</sup> Venters was involved in yet another instance of spying on a Jewish baker. At the end of February 1897 he and three others went to the bakery of a Mr. Solomons at 5:15 a.m. and, finding the window of the bakery partly open, pushed it fully open. He saw one worker pulling bread and rolls out of an oven and saw a large pan of buns. But when Venters went to court with the evidence, the judge dismissed the charges because the prosecution could not prove that Solomons was the proprietor of the shop where Venters and his friends were spying.<sup>37</sup>

While in principle the Sunday closing laws did not give judges flexibility, in fact in a number of instances they used their own discretion. As a result, there was great unevenness in the application of the law. Moreover, by the early years of the new century, there was clear evidence that some members of the British establishment doubted the validity of the Sunday laws as they pertained to the baking industry. In 1897, Sir Joseph Dimsdale, who had served as the sheriff of London and was now a judge, was highly sympathetic to the idea of repealing the 1822 act, found a Jewish baker guilty of violating the letter of the law, but Dimsdale fined the defendant only a single shilling with another 2 shillings in court costs.<sup>38</sup> In 1901 a judge refused to fine a Jewish baker for baking bread on a Sunday, although at about the same time, five other Jewish bakers were found guilty of baking on Sunday and each was assessed the 10 shilling fine plus 10 shillings court costs.<sup>39</sup> But another judge dismissed a case against a baker because he thought the offense "was of a trivial nature."<sup>40</sup> In yet another case that year, a magistrate tried a case against a Jewish baker for working on Sunday.



After inquiring whether the man baked on Saturday, the magistrate dismissed the case, saying "nobody should have to eat stale bread for breakfast on Sunday."<sup>41</sup>

Christian bakers often charged that some Jewish bakers violated their own Sabbath by baking on Saturday, often behind closed doors, and then also baked on Sunday, claiming that they were being denied the right to make a living if they were brought to court for working on Sunday. A newspaper reporter said that one Saturday in 1897, he passed an East End bakery whose Jewish owner was not a member of the Jewish Master Bakers' Association. The bakery's gate was locked and the blinds drawn but when he looked in he saw the shop filled with bread.<sup>42</sup> In another case that year, an informer named Thomas Burrows, himself a baker, went to the shop of a Mr. Kutchinsky at 7:45 a.m. on a Sunday, well before the 9 a.m. hour when Jews were allowed to sell bread. Burrows gave money to a girl to buy bread and she purchased two "smoking hot" loaves of bread, sufficient evidence, Burrows believed, to bring a charge against Kutchinsky. Burrows entered the bakery and told Kutchinsky he was going to take him to court. Baker Kutchinsky's angry response was to curse and throw bread at him.<sup>43</sup>

It should be recognized that if East End Jewish bakers violated the Sabbath by baking bread on Saturday, they must have expected that there were Jewish customers who would buy the bread, thereby also breaking Sabbath strictures.<sup>44</sup> By the same token, a number of Christian bakeries were open on Sunday, and therefore we must surmise that there were Christian customers to buy from them.<sup>45</sup> Certainly it was the view of many Jewish bakers that German bakers and other non-Jewish bakeries in Soho routinely worked seven days a week.<sup>46</sup> There was at least one case of a Christian baker who was prosecuted for selling bread on Sunday in violation of the Bread Act, although such a prosecution was rare.<sup>47</sup>

Labor issues also played a role in the litigation over Sunday baking. The London-based Journeymen's Bakers' Society instituted several cases during this period against Jewish bakers for doing business on Sunday. The society contended that Jews should not be allowed to bake on Sundays because this would force the Christian bakers who employed journeymen to do so as well in order to keep their customers.<sup>48</sup> Jewish bakers disputed this argument. In both London and Manchester, Jewish bakers said they sold only to Jewish customers, not to non-Jews, and thus their work on Sundays did not constitute a threat to Christian bakers.<sup>49</sup>

Jewish bakers shifted back and forth in their public stance regarding Sunday baking. At times they were forceful in asserting their right to bake on



Sundays because they abstained from work on Saturday. At other times they made efforts to be conciliatory and work out a compromise with Christian bakers. In February 1897, in the middle of legal proceedings against several Jewish bakers, the attorney representing the Association of Jewish Master Bakers negotiated a deal with the prosecution in which the Jewish group promised not to violate the Sunday law. As a result, the summonses were withdrawn.<sup>50</sup> In March 1897 the Jewish Masters Bakers' Association asked their members to keep their shops closed on Sundays until the legally established hour of 9 a.m. and apparently there was general compliance. A correspondent for the Orthodox *Jewish Chronicle* walked the East End and, with the exception of one bakery, found them closed, in accordance with the request of the association and the law.<sup>51</sup>

Another act of conciliation came in April 1897, when the Association of Jewish Master Bakers membership voted not to bake early on Sunday morning.<sup>52</sup> When one of their members, S. Solomons, ignored the agreement, the Jewish Association took him to court as an act of self-protection against complaints by Christian bakers. The association gave Solomons the opportunity to say he would submit to the agreement, but he refused.<sup>53</sup>

But the issues in the conflict within the baking industry were changing. In 1902 the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers brought charges against five Jewish bakers, not only for baking and delivering bread on Sunday to fellow Jews in the East End, but also for selling to large restaurants in the West End, a market previously dominated by Christian bakers. While the law limited Jewish bakers to selling over the counter between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Sunday, these bakers were all caught delivering bread by the cartload or with wheel barrows. Two of the bakers were repeat offenders and were therefore fined more heavily (20 shillings plus 2 shillings in court costs) than the first time offenders (5 shillings and 2 shillings in costs).<sup>54</sup> This was not the only time that Jewish bakers were brought to court for delivering bread to a customer "otherwise than in his shop" on a Sunday. For instance, Joseph Bonn, who was active in the Jewish bakers employers union, was charged at least three times with this offense.<sup>55</sup>

There were enough repeat offenders to suggest that while the fines were high, Jewish bakers continued to risk being caught because they had no choice; they could not afford not to work. Moreover, it seems likely that not all bakers breaking the law were caught every week since only a few bakeries could be visited or spied upon at any given time. The vigilance of non-Jewish bakers was itself probably limited if only because they were themselves small businessmen with finite financial resources to spend spying on Jewish bakers and the costs

could easily have exceeded the benefits. Thus, there was probably a reasonable expectation among Jewish bakers that one could get away with selling bread illegally most of the time. London Jewish newspapers never carried a report of a Jewish baker receiving a prison sentence.

At the end of 1896, the London Master Bakers' Protection Society wrote to Lord Salisbury, the Conservative prime minister, asking him to oppose any effort that would eliminate the prohibition on Sunday baking. Their reasoning was that such legislation would result in Sunday becoming a day of work instead of a day of rest and the Christian bakers said the public would not support this. Moreover, the society argued that if Jewish bakers were allowed to bake on Sundays, Christian bakers would be obliged to bake bread as a matter of self-protection.<sup>56</sup>

Responding to the pressure of the ceaseless prosecutions, Jewish bakers sought to organize. A meeting was held on August 31, 1896 to discuss the prosecutions. A letter from the Chief Rabbi suggested that the bakers voice their case before the London Board of Deputies, the principal representative body for British Jews since 1760. The Board of Deputies took up the case of the bakers and petitioned Parliament in the fall to amend the Bread Act so that those Jewish bakers who honored their Sabbath by not working would be allowed to work on Sundays. The effort to modify the law was supported by a number of prominent people, including the Prime Minister, Lord Rosebury, Baron De Worms, and even the Bishop of London, third in seniority in the Church of England.<sup>57</sup> Six weeks later, on October 13, a meeting of bakers attracted only fourteen people in spite of the important matters to be discussed. An effort to get more bakers to the next meeting paid off.<sup>58</sup> When the Hebrew Master Baker's Association met November 1, 1896, thirty bakers showed up. The group sent a petition to the Chief Rabbi that read: "We, the undersigned hereby declare that we keep the Sabbath and do not pursue our calling as bakers on Saturday. We, therefore, beg and petition the Board of Deputies to obtain for us a modification of the existing law, so that we may be at liberty to bake on Sundays and send our bread to our customers on that day." The President of the Hebrew Master Baker's Association promised that if it became essential to bake on Saturday, Jews would not be employed to do the work.<sup>59</sup> Jewish bakers also conducted something of a public relations campaign, occasionally writing letters to the editor in an effort to make their case to be allowed to work on Sundays because they honored their own Sabbath day.<sup>60</sup>

In the next few years, even while the Christian bakers were increasingly bringing charges in court against Jewish bakers, there were several efforts at

the political level to change the Bread Act. In 1901, Stuart M. Samuel, a Jewish Member of Parliament for Whitechapel in the heart of the Jewish East End of London, introduced an amendment to the law that would have allowed Jewish bakers to work on Sundays provided they abstained from work on Saturday, but because of an apparent lack of support, the amendment was withdrawn.<sup>61</sup> In the spring of 1902, the Board of Deputies Law and Parliamentary Committee issued a report on the various offenses with which Jewish bakers had been charged. The Board of Deputies charged that Christian bakers worked seven days a week and then sanctimoniously charged Jewish bakers with plying their trade on Sunday. The board therefore petitioned the Home Secretary to introduce a bill that would remediate the uneven application of the law between Jewish and Christian bakers and allow Jews an uncontested right to bake Sundays.<sup>62</sup>

Bakers from both sides came together in 1901 to talk face to face about the Sunday baking question when the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society met with a group from the Christian Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners.<sup>63</sup> The Assistant Secretary of the Union charged that both large and small Jewish bakeries were baking and delivering bread on Sundays. In response, the Jewish group assured the Amalgamated Union that no member of the association would supply bread to any non-Jewish business. However, they also said that because their religion required them not to bake on Saturday, they felt obliged to bake on Saturday night after the Sabbath had ended to provide bread for their Jewish customers on Sunday and that they could not refuse to sell bread to any non-Jew who entered one of their bakeries. They promised that they would assist the Amalgamated Union in prosecuting any Jewish baker who baked seven days a week.<sup>64</sup> This meeting took place against a backdrop of the widespread belief on the part of Jewish bakers that Christian bakers actually worked on Sundays, since it would have been impossible for them to have bread for sale by 6 a.m. on Monday morning without working on Sunday.<sup>65</sup> In their eyes, Christian bakers were regarded as breaking the Sunday law as much as Jewish bakers.<sup>66</sup> Several months after the meeting, the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society sent a letter to the Christian London Master Bakers' Protection Society asking the group not to oppose the right of Jews to bake and sell on Sunday if they abstained from baking on the Jewish Sabbath. The London Master Bakers refused to enter into such an agreement.<sup>67</sup> With the law already on their side, it appears they did not believe they needed to make any concession to Jewish bakers.

But in mid-December 1902, the London Master Bakers' Protection Society voted to end the Sunday baking prosecutions and Jewish bakers were no longer targeted. The impetus for the vote was a letter that year from W. Neave Hill, a Trustee of the National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners, who argued that all bakers should accept, and even embrace, the value of baking on Sunday, as on other days of the week. The National Association had voted 47–40 in 1892 in favor of the total repeal of the Bread Laws. But because the organization was so split on the matter, it decided not to put forth any effort on behalf of repeal.<sup>68</sup> Hill said that in 1902 the Bread Acts were out of date and that it was "childish to close one's eyes to the fact that the Puritanical observance of Sunday, at least so far as England is concerned, is a thing of the past." If Christian bakers did not bake bread on Sunday, he said, then hotels and restaurants would do it themselves and take business away from them in London.<sup>69</sup> While Hill's letter was clearly not meant as a gesture towards Jewish bakers, one of its effects was to turn attention away from the perceived damage that Jewish baking on Sunday did to Christian bakers and thus it amounted to a victory for Jewish bakers. An agreement was reached between Venters and Jenkins, representing the Amalgamated Union of Bakers, and Tobias Bonn, representing the Jewish master bakers, that Christian bakers would take no action against any Jewish baker who worked on Sunday, provided it could be verified that he only worked six days a week.<sup>70</sup> The agreement was confined to London bakeries.

But even with this understanding, the tension did not end. The old accusations soon began to resurface. The president of the London Master Bakers' Protection Society claimed in 1905 that some Jewish bakers, while not themselves working on Saturday, hired Christians to do their work on the Jewish Sabbath and then the Jews worked on Sunday.<sup>71</sup> However, a year later, one of Manchester's Jewish bakers testified before a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Sunday Trading that there was not a single Jew who baked on Saturday. Thus, he said, there was no fresh bread available on Saturday after the Sabbath ended and, unless Jews were allowed to bake on Sunday, the Jewish community would be without fresh bread for two days, a claim that offered possible confirmation that many Jews generally bought only from Jewish bakeries.<sup>72</sup>

Among Jewish bakers, it was long believed that the ongoing prosecutions, some of which had been initiated by the Christian Union informers, were at bottom acts of antisemitism because the spies never turned in the Christian bakers who were baking on Sundays.<sup>73</sup> On occasion, hostility toward Jewish bakers morphed into public antisemitic slurs. A London Christian periodical wrote in

1899: "When, some eighteen months ago, the racial thirst for gain led [Jewish bakers] to begin seven days a week work, the Bakers' Protection Societies instituted proceedings and several were convicted."<sup>74</sup> And many felt that the persistent efforts at the turn of the century by parliamentarian Sir John Lubbock to legislate Sunday closing bordered on antisemitism. As late as 1936 antisemitic views were still openly expressed by some British leaders. For example, the new president of the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers, H. J. Keen, said in his presidential address: "I would be lacking in my duty if I did not offer to the Jewish community in the baking industry a very grave warning as to the effects of grabbing for trade irrespective of our English bakers and customs."<sup>75</sup> He warned Jewish bakers that there was already enough antisemitism in England without Jewish bakers adding to it by what Keen called forcing union bakers to work on Sundays. Keeping Jewish bakeries open on Sunday was "engendering ill will against Jews among British workers."<sup>76</sup>

Yet it was also in 1936 that the Sunday closing issue was finally put to rest once and for all when the Sunday Observance Act of 1677 was superseded by the Shops (Sunday Trading Restrictions) Act. The Shops Act negated the 1677 Act, which was unenforceable and rarely observed, and whose continued existence stood as a striking example of hypocrisy in a world where alcohol and tobacco were legally sold and concerts were performed on Sundays. The act allowed Jews (and any other groups observing Saturday as their Sabbath) to do business on Sunday. Employees were granted compensatory days off for the Sundays they worked and the number of Sundays any given employee worked was limited. But the die was cast. Jews, including bakers, as well as other Britons were now allowed to ply their trade on Sundays.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Sunday closing laws of Britain had their origin in efforts to ensure that Christians honored the Sabbath. As British society became more diverse with the immigration of various peoples from abroad, Sunday observance mandates imposed hardships on Jews. Jews tended to see the laws as religiously motivated efforts to restrict their observance of the requirements of their religion and thus to restrict their faith. In some cases that was true and it is demonstrable that antisemitism existed and was expressed in Great Britain well into the twentieth century. But we suggest that matters were more complex, as shown by the example of Jewish bakers. The hostility between Jewish and Christian bakers was never simply a matter of religious principle, with Christians driven by re-

ligious motives to defend the purity of their faith. It was also entwined with several economic factors.

The waves of Jewish immigrants to Britain during the nineteenth century settled in cities and towns. These people needed to buy bread and the baking business expanded to meet the demand. The fluidity of urban life led to increased interactions among religious and social groups and expanded markets and thus competition among the small scale producers of the baking industry. Most of the newly arrived Jewish immigrants in Britain were poor and so desperately in need of work that they did whatever it took to earn a living for themselves and their families, even when it required them to work on their own Sabbath. Driven by the same pressures of economic need, Jewish bakers might break Britain's Sunday Observance laws by baking and selling on Sundays.

As competition increased, relations between Jewish and Christian bakers became strained and economic competition tended to be talked about in religious terms. Tense relations between communities were aggravated by the falling price of bread in the last third of the nineteenth century, which squeezed bakers' incomes. These falling prices were in part the result of technological changes in the industry: factories mass-produced cheaper bread that they could sell for lower prices than the small artisanal bakeries. As Christian and Jewish bakers struggled to hold on to their share of the market, Christian owners of small bakeries often blamed their troubles on their Jewish competitors rather than on the mass-production factories. Groping for weapons, the Christian bakers' organizations began to invoke Britain's Sunday observance laws against their competition. The first effort to use these laws to restrict Jewish bakers came in the 1860s, but a full-fledged campaign developed only later, particularly in the 1890s and the early 1900s. It often involved the use of Christian spies to ferret out Jewish bakers who might be breaking the law, and court cases rose markedly. In the tense relations between Jewish and Christian bakers, calm was restored only when British law caught up with the realities of urban life, the commercial world, and modern religious life. The Sunday observance laws were abandoned.

## NOTES

1. Stephen Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 86. For more on the subject, see, John Cannon, ed., *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 831.

2. Christopher Lane, "On the Victorian Afterlife of the 1781 Observance Act," *BRANCH: Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (2016), <http://www>

.branchcollective.org/?ps\_articles=christopher-lane-on-the-victorian-afterlife-of-the-1781-sunday-observance-act.

3. Shira Schoenberg, "United Kingdom," *Jewish Virtual Library*, n.d., <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/England.html>.

4. Sarah Abrahamson, David Graham, and Jonathan Boyd, "Key Trends in the British Jewish Community: A Review of Data on Poverty, the Elderly and Children," *Institute for Jewish Policy Research* (April 2011), 11, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=13248>.

5. David Feldman, "Was the Nineteenth Century a Golden Age for Immigrants," in *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World*, edited by Andrew Fahrmeir, Olivier Faron, and Patrick Weil (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 170–71.

6. *Northampton Mercury*, March 8, 1794, 3.

7. *Stamford Mercury*, May 30, 1794, 1.

8. George K. Rickards, *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: His Majesty's Statute and Law Printers, 1807–1869), 76: 210–21. Ten shillings in 1900 is the equivalent of £47 or \$58 in 2016.

9. *The Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 8 (London: George Eyre and Andrew Strahan, 1908), 1040.

10. See, for example, *Jewish Chronicle* (*JC* hereafter), February 12, 1897, 22; *JC*, March 12, 1897, 43; and *Sussex Agricultural Express*, July 13, 1901, 4.

11. Edward William Cox, *Cox's Magistrates Cases*, vol. 20 (London: Horace Cox, 1866), 605–07.

12. *JC*, February 12, 1897, 22.

13. National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners (Great Britain), *Twenty-One Years' History of the National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners* (n.p.: 1908), 12, 38.

14. See, for example, *Hull Daily Mail*, February 8, 1897, 1; *Reynold's Newspaper*, March 28, 1897, 5.; *Portsmouth Evening News*, April 18, 1901, 3.; and *JC*, September 12, 1902, 24.

15. *JC*, August 28, 1896, 6–7; *JC*, September 24, 1897, 2.

16. House of Commons. *Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1913*, 63, 65.

17. *Bradford Evening Star and the Bradford Daily Record*, March 2, 1940, 14.

18. The sweated labor conditions in a Russian bakery is described in Maxim Gorky's 1899 short story, "Twenty Six Men and a Girl," in *A Treasury of Great Russian Short Stories: Pushkin to Gorky*, edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), 974–87.

19. *Trades' Societies and Strikes* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1860), 295–96.

20. *JC*, January 12, 1900, 8. While some accounts claim extraordinarily long work weeks, as much as 118 to 126 hours a week, which would mean about 19–21 hours a day for a six-day week, this appears to have been an exaggeration.

21. *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, September 8, 1893, 2; *Dundee Courier*, September 12, 1893, 4.

22. *Grantham Journal*, September 9, 1893, 7.



23. *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, September 8, 1893, 2; *Dundee Courier*, September 12, 1893, 4.
24. *JC*, April 30, 1897, 22.
25. *Edinburgh Evening News*, August 29, 1896, 4. The precise date of the approach to Disraeli is unclear. He was Prime Minister from 1874–1880, so the effort to seek his help may have occurred while he was in office.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Lloyd P. Gartner, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870–1914* (London: Simon Publications, 1973), 62.
28. G. Als and N. Krog, "Emulsifiers as Food Processing Aids," in *World Conference on Oleochemicals into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Thomas H. Applewhite (Champaign, IL: AOCS Press, 1991), 69.
29. *Dundee Advertiser*, February 27, 1890, 8.
30. W. W. Rostow, *British Economy of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1948), 97.
31. *Aberdeen Journal*, June 19, 1906, 5.
32. *Reynold's Newspaper*, August 16, 1896, 1; *JC*, August 21, 1896, 5.
33. Charles H. L. Emanuel, *A Century and a Half of Jewish History* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1910), 152–53.
34. *JC*, April 30, 1897, 22.
35. *Edinburgh Evening News*, February 10, 1897, 6.
36. *London Daily News*, February 6, 1897, 3.
37. *JC*, March 12, 1897, 13.
38. *JC*, February 12, 1897, 22.
39. *Sussex Agricultural Express*, July 13, 1901, 4.
40. *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, November 20, 1901, 8.
41. *JC*, August 9, 1901, 11.
42. *JC*, April 26, 1897, 20.
43. *JC*, March 5, 1897, 5.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Reynold's Newspapers*, March 28, 1897, 5.
46. *JC*, August 28, 1896, 6–7.
47. *Reynold's Newspapers*, March 28, 1897, 5.
48. *London Standard*, February 18, 1897, 6.
49. *JC*, March 15, 1901, p. 21; *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, June 1, 1906, 17.
50. *London Standard*, February 18, 1897, 6.
51. *JC*, March 12, 1897, 13.
52. *JC*, April 26, 1897, 20.
53. *JC*, April 26, 1897, 25.
54. *JC*, September 12, 1902, 24.
55. *JC*, February 5, 1897, 17.
56. *York Herald*, December 16, 1896, 4. Perhaps one reason the Christian bakers wrote to the Prime Minister was that he had on multiple occasions expressed his belief in

writing that Jewish bakers should not be prosecuted for baking on Sundays and he also said that the community at large was not opposed to Sunday baking.

57. *JC*, September 4, 1896, 21.
58. *JC*, October 16, 1896, 7.
59. *JC*, November 6, 1896, 9.
60. See, for example, letter from Tobias J. Bonn, the Honorable Secretary of the Jewish Master Bakers' Association in the *London Standard* February 10, 1897, 3, and to the *Jewish Chronicle* on September 5, 1902, 7–8.
61. *JC*, August 2, 1901, 12.
62. Emanuel, 156.
63. Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons, *Papers by Command*, vol. 96 (London: Darling & Son, 1902), 27–28.
64. *JC*, May 3, 1901, 25.
65. *JC*, October 16, 1896, 7.
66. *JC*, April 30, 1897, 22; *JC*, July 19, 1901, 16.
67. *Nottingham Evening Post*, September 9, 1901, 2.
68. National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners (Great Britain), *Twenty-One Years' History of the National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners* (n.p.: 1908), 12, 38.
69. *JC*, December 12, 1902, 19.
70. *Ibid.* *JC*, December 12, 1902, 19.
71. *Western Daily Press*, May 22, 1905, 7.
72. *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, June 1, 1906, 17.
73. *JC*, March 12, 1897, 13.
74. *The Church Weekly* (London), June 9, 1899, 3.
75. *Hull Daily Mail*, August 17, 1936, 6.
76. *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* (Milwaukee), August 28, 1936, 6.
77. "Shops (Sunday Restriction) Act, 1936, by George Binns, M. S. I. A., Chief Sanitary Inspector, Liverpool. (Fellow)," *Perspectives in Public Health* vol. 58, no. 7 (1937): 436–47; *Nottingham Evening Post*, July 20, 1901, 4.

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