

In London, a Jewish Ritual Fence Is Becoming a Thorn Bush

By JOHN DARTON
Special to The New York Times

LONDON, Feb. 21 — The names conjure up the leafy preserve and suburban uniformity of northwest London — Hendon, Golders Green, Hampstead, Child's Hill, East Finchley.

But the people who live in the neat rows of brick houses and cottages tucked behind hedged gardens are heterogeneous. They include thousands of Jews who have blended in discreetly for generations — until now.

A proposal to establish an eruv, an area within which Orthodox Jews may relax their Sabbath restrictions, has opened deep divisions. The plan relies largely on symbolic boundaries already in place but because it requires construction of some poles strung with wire, it has to go before local planning authorities. A vote by the 20-member Barnet Council planning committee is set for Wednesday.

Division and Anger

The controversy has divided the Jewish residents, aroused bewilderment and anger among non-Jews and, some say, raised the ugly specter of thinly veiled anti-Semitism.

"That is the saddest aspect of it," said Rabbi Alan Kimche, of the Ner Yisrael congregation, who began campaigning for the eruv six years ago. "On the surface England is a multi-ethnic society with all kinds of freedom. But once we wanted to put up a demonstrable sign that said, 'Here live some Orthodox Jews,' it touched a raw nerve."

Others disagree, vehemently. They see the eruv as divisive, as if it would break an unwritten law to keep religious artifacts in the background for communal harmony. They are not anti-Semitic, they assert. They object to what they view as an attempt by one group to stake out the whole territory. "It's a rotten idea," said Lord McGregor, who resigned as head of a historic preservation area because of the dispute. He said Jews "have affronted every other sect by insisting on imposing a series of poles and wires" on an area that includes a preservation district. "We've had for a century in this country a tradition of religious tolerance," he said. "It is based on the proposition that no one sect ever behaves in a manner to affront another." What is going to come next, he asked — "totem poles?"

Common Elsewhere

Eruvs are common in other countries, from Australia to the United States, but this would be the first in Greater London, which has 215,000 Jews. It would cover a six-square-mile area with a population of more than 100,000. Although the figures are in

Judaism's special enclaves are common in other countries.

dispute, its supporters say the area has 10,000 Orthodox Jews and perhaps 4,000 other Jews.

Because Orthodox Jews are not permitted to carry anything outside their homes on the Sabbath, for example, an eruv provides greater freedom of movement by extending the notion of a "home" to an entire neighborhood. If the eruv is constructed, the most practical effect would be to make the Sabbath easier for young mothers and fathers, who would be allowed to push baby carriages.

But the eruv must be within definable boundaries. In this case the existing boundaries include stretches of the M-1 highway and train tracks, but elsewhere defining the boundaries would require construction of about 85 poles from which barely visible fishing wire would be strung at a height of about 21 feet to form symbolic "gates."

Supporters say it would be scarcely noticeable among the roughly 50,000 poles and millions of yards of overhead wire in the area. But opponents say it would stick out and become a target for anti-Semitic vandals.

A Grim Reminder

A widely circulated letter from an elderly Jewish couple whose family perished at Auschwitz says in part, "If the posts and wires as proposed are erected, every time we look out of our living room or bedroom window or leave the house, we will be faced with this reminder of concentration camp posts and wire."

Barbara Cohen, a 32-year-old speech therapist, is housebound on Saturdays with her 16-month-old son, Adam. She and her husband take turns going to synagogue, but they do not visit friends. "I'm blessed with children who don't start walking until they're close to two," she said, laughing.

The opposition worried her. "I'm not saying everyone opposed to it is anti-Semitic," she said. "It's just that here in England, I have the feeling that ethnic groups are accepted provided they blend in — or if they do keep their own characteristics, they do so quietly. The idea of helping an ethnic group with a weird and wonderful custom — it just leads to a lot of unease."

She said she was particularly disturbed that many Jews opposed it. "They feel they're accepted now," she said, "and I think they're worried that they're going to be seen again as Jews. They're afraid that the whole we're-ever-so-English sense of who they are will be destroyed."

A Planning Issue

Frank Davis, a retired magistrate and one of five or six Jewish members of the Barnet planning committee, has already announced that he opposes the eruv as a blight upon the preservation area. He does not see it as a religious issue.

Mr. Davis does not hide his background. As a boy of 15, he fought anti-

Semitic Black Shirts in the East End of London. Almost single-handedly he forced the Finchley Golf Club to end a ban on Jews in 1963, and for years he served on the Jewish Defense Committee of the Board of Deputies, a national organization of Jews.

"If you're good enough, your religion doesn't count," he said. The controversy over the eruv may have "fanned the flames" of anti-Semitism but it was "not overt" he insisted, although he had received some anonymous telephone insults — "bloody Jew boy, that sort of thing."

Roy Shutz, who is leader of the Barnet Council and a member of the North

Western Reform Synagogue, also opposes the eruv, on planning grounds but also as a matter of majority rule. "Most of the letters I've received are from people who are against it," he said. "The opposition is significantly Jewish."

He acknowledged receiving a few anonymous letters along the lines, "Why are all you Jewish councilors voting for this?"

The Rev. John Wainwright, vicar of All Saints Church on Church Walk, is helping to collect petitions against the eruv to counter a petition with 3,450 names in favor of it. He stared out the window at his garden as he phrased his

thoughts carefully: "What worries me is not that Jews live here but that it becomes a Jewish area. I'm all for people being different — Jews being Jews — but there is another side. The community has to live together."

The petition he is circulating warned that the eruv could turn the area into an Orthodox Jewish "domain."

"The thing I worry about is this brings out the anti-Semitism in people," he continued. "I think it's in everyone. You rub a liberal and you find it's underneath. Once you put up marks and boundaries, it's going to do no good. It's going to backfire on the Jewish community."

One person working closely with Mr. Wainwright is Ruth Elliot, whose family fled here from Nazi Europe. She collected 500 signatures.

"I call it, knit your own ghetto," she said scathingly as she walked down Lyndale Avenue and gestured with a cane toward a house. "That's what started the opposition right there, the Siegals. Look, one of those posts would go right next to their house. Fence them in. Increase the risk of burglary. And look at that across the street. That's a Church of England school playground. They actually want to put a pole right next to that. The whole idea is beneath contempt."

"In America, people live in cohesive groups. You don't get that in this country, and that's what's wonderful about it. People mix — socially, culturally, in

all sorts of ways. "My God!" she exclaimed, summoning a vision of Orthodox neighborhoods in Brooklyn. "What do they want here? A Williamsburg?"

In part, the dispute among Jews comes from a generational divide. Younger ones, such as Rabbi Kimche, want to assert their Jewishness. Older ones want to minimize it.

The rabbi, a bear of a man, sipped coffee in his book-lined study as he mulled over the differences.

"I'm 41," he said. "I was born post-war. We didn't experience the Holocaust directly. These older people, they have an attitude of: be yourself, be Jewish but don't make a high profile of it. Why should we hide ourselves? Why shouldn't more Jews move in? We're good for the neighborhood!"



PURCHASE YOUR NORTHWEST TICKETS BY FEBRUARY 26TH* AND SAVE UP TO 40% ON U.S. TRAVEL AND UP TO 26% TO EUROPE.

SAMPLE SPRING SALE DESTINATIONS

Albuquerque	\$169	Reno	\$159
Dallas/Ft. Worth	\$129	Salt Lake City	\$169
Detroit	\$79	San Diego	\$189
Honolulu	\$279	San Francisco	\$169
Las Vegas	\$179	Seattle/Tacoma	\$189
Milwaukee	\$59		
Minneapolis/St. Paul	\$89	EUROPE	
New Orleans	\$109	Amsterdam	\$309
Oakland, CA	\$169	Frankfurt	\$309
Phoenix	\$179	London	\$259
Portland, OR	\$159	Paris	\$309

Fares each way based on roundtrip travel.

If you're feeling the squeeze, a vacation on Northwest is the perfect solution. We're reducing fares up to 40% on spring travel to nearly 200 destinations throughout the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii.

And up to 26% on selected European destinations. For U.S. travel, simply purchase your tickets by

February 26, for travel between March 7 and May 31, 1993. *For European travel, purchase your tickets by March 5 (March 31 for Amsterdam) for travel between April 1

and May 31, 1993. Plus, take advantage of

dozens of special WorldVacations™ pack-

ages on the #1 on-time airline†. Surely you

can loosen your schedule to squeeze one in.



NORTHWEST AIRLINES
Some People Just Know How To Fly.

CALL YOUR TRAVEL AGENT OR NORTHWEST

1-800-225-2525

†Based on D.O.T. Consumer Reports for the seven largest carriers for the years 1990, 1991 and 1992. U.S. Fares: Fares listed are each way based on roundtrip travel. All fares require at least a 14 day advance reservation. Tickets must be purchased within 24 hours after reservations are made or at least 14 days prior to departure, whichever comes first, but not later than 2/26/93. Fares shown are valid for travel on Monday through Thursday, fares for travel other days of the week may be slightly higher. All travel must be completed by 5/31/93. Fares to most destinations require a Saturday night stay. Tickets are non-refundable. Changes may be made prior to scheduled flights for a \$50 administrative service fee. However, any change must meet the conditions of the new fare purchased. Passenger Facility Charges of \$1 to \$3 per airport may apply, up to a maximum of \$12 round trip per person. Seats are limited and may not be available. Fares are not valid with any other discount/coupon/certificate/bonus or promotional offer/tickets. Fares are subject to change. Other restrictions may apply. International Fares: Fares are each way based on roundtrip travel. Fares are valid for travel Monday through Thursday and apply from April 1 until May 31, 1993 (until June 15, 1993 for London). Fares are slightly higher for weekend travel. All tickets must be purchased within 72 hours of reservation being made. Saturday night stay required. Prior to departure, changes to itineraries are permitted only to Amsterdam and at a \$75 fee. After departure, changes are permitted to the return flight for \$75. Complete ticket cancellations are 100% non-refundable. Advertised fares do not include: up to \$38 for US Transportation Tax/the Security Charge/the Customs and Immigration Charges and foreign departure taxes; and Passenger Facility Charges from \$1 to \$3 per airport up to \$12 depending upon itinerary. Seats are limited and may not be available. Fares are subject to change. Other conditions may apply. ©1993 Northwest Airlines.