



A new exhibition at Lord's charts the extensive Jewish involvement in cricket both on and off the field. **Barry Toberman** reports from the home of the game

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CC MEMBERS lucky enough to grab a seat in the Lord's pavilion on Test match days are likely to spot some familiar communal faces, indicative of the high number of Jewish cricket aficionados. But Jewish cricketing heroes are less plentiful, right?

Not so. A new exhibition at the home of the game, reveals a wealth of Jewish involvement both on and off the field.

The exhibition at the MCC Museum is the first ever on Jews and cricket. A collaboration between cricket lovers Zaki Cooper and Daniel Lightman and the MCC heritage and collections department, *The Jewish Community and Cricket* display launches the Community Gallery at the MCC Museum and will run for two years, a decent innings by anyone's standards.

Exhibit subjects range from Jews who have played at Test or one-day international level to grassroots cricket within the community, with JC and Maccabi competitions prominently featured. There is even a photo of Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis in cricketing action during his time as Irish Chief Rabbi, and Rabbi Mirvis and MCC president Stephen Fry will address the official opening on Wednesday. They are also among the many who have filmed videos for the exhibition.

JC columnist Giles Coren, for example, credits cricket as the best way to picture his family's journey from "the shtetls of eastern Ukraine to north London".

Long-time friends Cooper and Lightman had collaborated on a 2009 pictorial book, *Cricket Grounds from the Air*. Beyond the self-explanatory title and an introduction by Lightman's childhood hero, Geoffrey Boycott, the authors "got cricketers to tell stories of their favourite grounds and it was fun", Lightman recalls.

"We ended up obtaining the personal recollections of 105 cricketers. We enjoyed that experience and learned a lot from it.

"We also between us got to know a lot of Jewish cricketers and discovered their stories. This exhibition gives us the opportunity to share them with the wider public."

With the attention to detail one would associate with a King's Counsel, Lightman has amassed a collection of Jewish cricketing memorabilia which accounts for around half the Lord's exhibition.

Cooper, head of a communications consultancy, says the venture gained traction around the time of England's thrilling World Cup victory on home soil four years ago.

"We slightly sheepishly approached the MCC with this idea at the end of 2019 and didn't expect anything to happen. They came back to us in 2020 and said 'we really like the idea, will you write it up as a proposal', which Daniel and I did. And lo and behold, they said 'we want to do an exhibition. We want to set up a new community gallery in the museum and the story of the Jewish community cricket will be the first one.'

"Daniel and I, to coin a phrase, were bowled over. It's the home of cricket and we are huge cricket fans. This was a complete and utter thrill. We were jumping for joy, while also realising that there

'It's a game that requires a lot of strategy and thinking and that plays to a Jewish mindset'



Cricket is very data-heavy. I think Jewish people enjoy all the statistics around it

was a lot of hard work to do to curate it."

The 19th-century clothing entrepreneur Isaac Moses Marsden is among those featured in the exhibition. Having purchased the freehold land on which Lord's is built at auction in 1858 for £5,910, he turned a handsome profit eight years later when the MCC agreed to buy the freehold from him for just over £18,000.

A cricketing favourite of Lightman, Lord Dalmeny, son of Liberal Prime Minister the Earl of Rosebery and Hannah Rothschild, captained Surrey in the early 1900s, combining his sporting life with the duties of an MP, dashing from the Oval to Westminster for parliamentary votes.

Sid O'Linn represented South Africa on the 1960 tour of England, falling just short of a century in the Trent Bridge Test, and also

GRASSROOTS CRICKET, MACCABIAH GAMES & ISRAEL



played football for Charlton Athletic. But O'Linn was no Irishman, having been born Sidney Olinsky, son of a kosher butcher.

A predecessor in the South African team, Norman Gordon, did not disguise his Jewishness. As he ran up to bowl on his debut against England in 1938, a heckler shouted "Here comes the rabbi!". "Fortunately I took five wickets in that innings and that shut him up for the rest of the tour," reminisced Gordon later.

Other exhibits showcase the contributions of Dr Ali Bacher, the South African captain who went on to become an influential cricket administrator, West Indian batsman Ivan Barrow, whose parents

were Sephardi, and Julian Wiener, who played six Tests for Australia in 1979-80.

Wiener is the only known Jewish cricketer to play in an England/Australia Test, although Cooper points out that it "wasn't technically an Ashes Test".

As this summer's Ashes series starts, the launch of the exhibition at Lord's is "brilliant timing for us and we are hoping that Julian will come over".

The curators have also been in contact with an Aussie star of more recent vintage, Michael Klinger, dubbed "the Jewish Bradman". A free-scoring batsman capped by his country at T20 level, he is considered unfortunate not to have been selected for the Test side.

He played with distinction in English domestic cricket and has lent the exhibition a shirt from his time with Gloucestershire, who he captained to one-day glory.

For Neil Robinson, head of MCC heritage and collections, the most fascinating exhibit is the tzitzit

Cricket is the best way to picture my family's journey from the shtetls of Eastern Ukraine to north London

Cover story



Left to right: Michael Klinger; JC columnist Giles Coren; Ali Bacher; Norman Gordon

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES, MCC/JED LEICESTER



The Lord's exhibition covers the cricketing spectrum from the Jewish grassroots game, including JC tournaments, to legends of the sport such as England fast bowling great Fred Trueman, whose belated claim of Jewish heritage is treated with some doubt

worn by Mandy Yachad when representing South Africa in a one-day international against India in 1991. "It's the most obviously Jewish item and such a unique thing. It's been flown in from overseas specifically [lent by Nando's co-founder Robbie Brozin]." Yachad is expected to attend the exhibition launch.

Robinson is "also really pleased that we have a winners' certificate from the Macabiah Games in 1957 which came to us really by chance through one of our tour guides at Lord's, Lionel Frumkin. It's splendid to have objects that tell such a great story about Jewish cricket and Jewish cricketers and helps to give the exhibition an individual flavour."

Cooper has a soft spot for England fast bowling great and commentator Fred Trueman, whose belated revelation of Jewish heritage is disputed — "Don't expect me to stop eating bacon sandwiches," he told the JC at the time.

"As a child I remember him as a favourite of mine on Test

Match Special and I interviewed him for my student newspaper and was thrilled to do it."

The contribution of Jewish women to the game is not ignored, with an exhibit on Netta Rheinberg, a key figure in its development and one of the first ten women to be awarded honorary MCC membership in 1999. Managing the England team on its 1948/49 tour of Australia and New Zealand, she was pressed into action because of injuries, making her sole Test appearance against Australia and recording the unwanted distinction of being the first woman to make a



Good Lord's: Zaki Cooper and Daniel Lightman

pair on debut. Then there's Ruth Buckstein who enjoyed greater success as an Australian international and has lent her baggy green Aussie cap.

And who knew that a Jewish housewife started the tradition of *Test Match Special* listeners dispatching cakes to the commentary team? Little is known about Aileen Cohen other than she was a St John's Wood resident.

On hearing legendary broadcaster Brian Johnston lament that the players were enjoying tea and cake while the TMS team had nothing, "Aileen fired up her oven," taking the finished product to the Grace Gates at Lord's, where in those more innocent times, a steward granted her entry.

She was also admitted to the commentary box and thanked for her gift during the broadcast. As Cooper attests: "What can be more Jewish than bringing food to cricket?"

What can be more Jewish than bringing food to cricket?

Middlesex and England fans among the membership of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue St John's Wood benefit from the shul's location a six hit from the ground, and an exhibit notes that the late LJS minister, Rabbi David Goldberg, would deliver an appreciably shorter sermon on a Test match Shabbat to maximise the amount of play he could watch at his beloved Lord's.

Nowadays for the religiously observant, a multi-faith prayer room opened at the ground by cricket-loving Highgate United Synagogue minister Rabbi Nicky Liss hosts a 5pm Minchah minyan.

Robinson says the exhibition has given him more of an insight into Jewish life.

"I have a little bit of Jewish background many generations back but I have never been involved with anything to do with the Jewish community before. It has been a learning experience for me but what I really hope this exhibition will bring is a sense of commonality between the experiences of different communities in terms of their relationship with cricket."

Although South Africa and particularly Ireland have produced their fair share of top-level cricketers, why have there been fewer in England?

"I suppose for some Shabbat would be an issue," suggests Lightman, who in his younger playing days was threatened with expulsion from University College School for refusing to turn out for its team on Shabbat. [He was reprieved after an intervention by the Bishop of Southampton but was subsequently banned from representing UCS at any sport.]

"Cricket is nurtured in boarding schools, where few Jews attend. Maybe the environment is not conducive and there's also a lack of role models."

As for cricket's substantial Jewish fan base, Cooper reasons that "it is a game that requires a lot of strategy and thinking and that plays to a Jewish mindset. It's also very data-heavy so I think Jewish people enjoy all the statistics around it."

"Whenever Daniel and I are at Lords, we see a lot of people from the community."



Who are the snowflakes? It's the touchy boomers

EVERY EVENING before bed, I like to spend somewhere between 45 minutes and five hours mindlessly scrolling on TikTok. You see all sorts there: dancing teenagers, recipes, antisemitism - the usual internetty stuff. But recently I found something slightly novel.

It was a clip of the show *House of Cards* (the good version, not the dull British one from 50 million years ago) with Kevin Spacey, former artistic director at the Old Vic theatre and alleged sexual harasser. Now, from what the media tell me about young people and their cancel culture, their intolerance, and their 'woke' tendencies, I expected the comments to be a bonfire of screams and for TikTok to ban him. And not just Kevin Spacey himself. I expected TikTok to cancel all AI variants thereof and for the act of watching one of his films to be deemed worthy of the death penalty. But the reality was very different.

There were hundreds of comments saying how great Spacey was, how "fire his performance" was, how he "truly be GOATED fr fr" (ask your kids to translate) and little to nothing attempting to "cancel" him for the dodgy stuff of which he has been accused.

And it's not just Spacey. Elsewhere on TikTok, I've seen people grapple with the challenge of separating the art from the artist with everyone from Jerry Seinfeld (dated a teenager when he was in his 30s) to Kanye West (raging mentally ill antisemite) in a much more nuanced way than people decades their senior.

Far from being the sort of cancel-happy snowflakes that puce men like Piers Morgan claim them to be, maybe the Zoomers of today are actually better at drawing

lines around people who make great stuff, but who also say problematic things? Perhaps when you've grown up amid Twitter mobs and people getting fired in the heat of the moment, you have a better understanding of the consequences of these actions. Boomers, who discovered the power to cancel late in life, after decades of getting their own way, now

expect everything with which they disagree to be banned as quickly as sending a tweet.

Call me old-fashioned, but unless creative expression directly puts people in harm's way, I think it should be allowed to exist even if people disagree with it. Not a hugely controversial statement you might think, but for a certain generation, especially when it comes to touchy issues, all nuance goes out the window and statements of condemnation must be made as fast as they can be typed.

Which brings us to Roger Waters. Personally, I don't care about Pink Floyd or the several albums they've pumped out and I think it's pretty clear that Waters' views towards Israel spill over into antisemitism more often than not. I can be honest about the fact that I'd rather he didn't play every arena in the UK, but would probably feel icky if he was totally banned.

It's fine to say you want someone to be cancelled, but it shouldn't always happen.

But in the absence of his cancellation, we've seen something much more peculiar happen with the middle-aged men who have written about his concerts. In a few reviews in major newspapers, critics have bent over backwards to avoid saying what everyone can see: he's a nasty man who happens to make music that some people like. By downplaying his actions, by minimising crude and ill-thought-out gestures like diminishing the memory of Anne Frank, what they're doing is harmful. It makes those views more palatable in polite society. If something's made acceptable in the pages of *The Times* then that filters through to the real world.

Unlike TikTok teens who can say, yes, that's a bad person, they're clearly bad but I like their work, Baby boomers feel compelled to merge the two and make the art a reflection of the artist. If we can all accept that bad people can make great art, it avoids downplaying the harm that can come from the bad things that they say, and stops this confusing muddling of the two where you have to pretend that their views are acceptable, just to enjoy their art.

Happily for me, I don't like Waters' views or his music.



Roger Waters: bad people can make great art

PHOTO: ALAMY