

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Jews in England 1290

Why did Edward I expel the Jews in 1290?

Key Stages 3-4 | Medieval 974-1485

Lesson pack

Introduction

Following almost two centuries of Christians and Jews living alongside each other, King Edward I expelled England's entire Jewish population in the autumn of 1290. As the previous two lessons have shown, Jews had once been prominent in national finance and local trade at key regional centres like York, Lincoln and London, yet by the end of the thirteenth century, Jewish individuals were no longer able to reside 'freely and honourably' in England nor enjoy the same 'liberties and customs' as their predecessors. They were expelled from the realm as perfidious (faithless) men.

The reign of King Edward I (1272-1307) witnessed a heightening of tensions between the Christian and Jewish populations in England. Before relations between the two faiths had been occasionally difficult, subject to prejudice around crusading propaganda and the varying levels of debt owed to Jewish moneylenders but horrific outbursts, such as the attack on York's Jewish population in March 1190, were few and far between. Edward, however, placed new emphasis on the status of Jews in England. The Statute of Jewry c. 1275 outlined that Jews had to live in specific areas of the king's towns; those aged over seven had to wear a badge that visually identified them as being Jewish; all aged over twelve years were to pay a tax of 3 pence each Easter; and Jews could only sell property or negotiate debts with the king's permission. New rules paired with heavy taxation and growing suspicions surrounding the coin-clipping events in the late 1270s led to mounting pressure on Christian-Jewish relations. By the late 1280s, Edward could only secure parliament's grant of further taxation to aid his war with France by making sacrifices. The expulsion of the Jews was the price he agreed to pay.

This lesson explores the worsening relations between Christians and Jews in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Use the sources to investigate the religious, economic, and social factors that led to the Jews being expelled from England in c. 1290. Could this extreme royal tactic have been avoided?

Suitable for:

KS 3 - 4

Time period:

Medieval 974-1485

Connections to the Curriculum:

This lesson fits within the KS3 curriculum for the thematic strand 'The development of Church, State and Society'. In particular, 'Christendom, the importance of religion and the Crusades' and 'Society, economy and culture: religion in daily life'.

Key stage 4:

GCSE Edexcel Migrants in Britain, c800–present

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Contents	Page 3
Teacher's notes	Page 4
Background	Page 7
External links	Page 8
Source 1a	Page 9
Source 1b	Page 11
Source 1c	Page 13
Source 2	Page 15
Source 3	Page 17
Source 4	Page 19

Teacher's notes

This final lesson (3) completes the scheme of learning for England's medieval Jewish communities c. 1066-1290 and continues to develop the path for teachers to integrate a deeper awareness of medieval religions, tolerance and diversity, and religious persecution into the classroom including recommended reading and accessible sources to aid schools, and equip students, with the skills and awareness to challenge misconceptions, tackle adversity and recognise their responsibility as global citizens in the modern world.

It builds chronologically on the previous two lessons to consider the reign of King Edward I and the eventual expulsion of Jews from England in 1290. Through the royal records it reveals how royal legislation tightened the final screw on deteriorating Christian-Jewish relations. It presents several opportunities to reflect back to previous sources and draw comparisons between periods to consider the changing status of Jews in Medieval England.

Learning Objective:

To understand why Jewish people were expelled from England in c. 1290.

Differentiated Learning Outcomes:

- (All) Students will be able to identify new restrictions placed on Jews from c. 1275.
- (Most) Students will be able to explain why Jewish individuals were expelled from England in c. 1290.
- (Some) Students will be able to evaluate whether or not the expulsion of the Jews could have been avoided.

The lesson is focused around three tasks that in turn examine new legislation issued in 1275 that introduced further restrictions on Jewish communities, including the prohibition of usury, Christian sentiments towards Jews, and the eventual expulsion of Jews from England in 1290. These tasks are focused on the governmental documents that survive in The National Archives, including Pleas of the Forest and Close rolls. The notes below discuss the nature of this material and offer advice on how to aid student discussion in each case.

Pleas of the Forest:

These records preserve the legal proceedings from forest eyres; that is, the proceedings that dealt with offences concerning the royal forests. Pleas of the Forest dealt with criminal cases arising in the king's forests, which since the reign of William the Conqueror had a separate legal jurisdiction within the Common Law at the time. The system of forest law and offences were divided into two categories: trespass against the vert (the vegetation of the forest) and the venison (the game). In this lesson, the drawing of Aaron of Colchester is included on the forest roll as the court case beside it concerned the killing of deer. As a result, the case's jurisdiction fell under forest law.

Teacher's notes

Close Rolls:

Letters close were often instructions or orders of a private, personal nature. They were therefore issued folded and 'closed' by the application of the great seal. The Close rolls present an enrolled copy of those letters sent. These records outline matters of varied importance. In some cases, letters are addressed to officials, such as sheriffs, or even foreign rulers. The Close roll entries in this lesson reveal just how important these records can be by presenting the first formal notice of Jewish expulsion.

Some teachers may wish to discuss the sources in turn with the students before they attempt to answer the accompanying questions; especially in Task 1 where the language and content is more complex. Encourage your students to look at the original sources, if possible, although some are more difficult than others, in an attempt to understand the nature of the material and to see if they can pick out any key vocabulary. All documents, however, have been transcribed and a simplified translation is offered in each case to allow students to delve into the subject matter. Definitions are also included for more complex terminology.

Sources

Source 1: Les Estatutz de la Jewerie (The Statute of Jewry, c. 1275) preserved in a compilation book of statutes at The National Archives. Here, Edward I revised the basis for the relationship between the King and the Jews, Catalogue ref: E 164/9, fol. 31d.

Source 2: Drawing of Aaron of Colchester on the forest roll for the tribunal in Essex, c. 1277. Here the tabula badge is depicted stitched to the front of Aaron's clothing, Catalogue ref: E 32/12, m. 3d.

Source 3: Letter from King Edward I to the Sheriff of Gloucester, dated 18th July 1290, Catalogue ref: C 54/107, m. 5.

Source 4: Letter from King Edward I to the Treasurer and Barons of the Exchequer, dated 5th November 1290, Catalogue ref: C 54/107, m. 1.

Select bibliography

Abulafia, A. Sapir. *Christian-Jewish Relations 1000–1300: Jews in the Service of Christendom* (Harlow, 2011).

Bale, A.P. *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (London, 2010).

Brand, P. 'The Jews and the Law in England, 1275-90', *Economic History Review* 115 (2000): 1138–1158.

Teacher's notes

Carpenter, D.A. 'Crucifixion and Conversion: King Henry III and the Jews in 1255', in *Law, Lawyers and Texts: Studies in Medieval Legal History in Honour of Paul Brand*, ed. S. Jenks, J. Rose and C. Whittick (Leiden, 2012): 129–148.

Dobson, R.B. 'The Jews of Medieval York and the Massacre of March 1190', in *The Jewish Communities of Medieval England: the collected essays of R.B. Dobson*, ed. H. Birkett (York, 2010): 1–52.

Hyams, P. 'The Jews in Medieval England, 1066–1290', in *England and Germany in the High Middle Ages*, ed. A. Haverkamp and H. Vollrath (Oxford, 1996): 173–192.

Moore, R.I. *Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 2007).

Mundill, R.R. *The King's Jews: Money, Massacre and Exodus in Medieval England* (London, 2010).

Richardson, H.G. *The English Jewry under Angevin Kings* (London, 1960).

Roth, C. *A History of the Jews in England* (Oxford, 3rd ed., 1964).

Rubin, M. *Gentile Tales: the Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, 1999).

Stacey, R.C. 'Adam of Bristol' and the Tales of Ritual Crucifixion in Medieval England', in *Thirteenth Century England XI: Proceedings of the Gregynog Conference, 2005*, ed. J. Burton, B. Weiler, P. Schofield and K. Stöber (Woodbridge, 2012): 1–15.

Stacey, R.C. 'The English Jews under Henry III', in *Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*, ed. P. Skinner (Woodbridge, 2003): 41–54.

Stacey, R.C. 'The Massacres of 1189–90 and the Origins of the Jewish Exchequer, 1186–1226', in *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*, ed. S. Rees Jones and S. Watson (York, 2013): 106–24.

Tartakoff, P. 'From Conversion to Ritual Murder: Re-Contextualizing the Circumcision Charge', *Medieval Encounters* 24 (2018): 361–362.

Vincent, N.C. 'Jews, Poitevins, and the Bishop of Winchester, 1231–1234', *Christianity and Judaism, Studies in Church History* 29, ed. D. Wood (Oxford, 1992): 119–132;

Background

The Statute of the Jewry c. 1275 saw a series of new regulations placed upon the Jewish community by King Edward I. Building on the earlier, loosely enforced restrictions issued by his father, Edward placed new, stricter controls on Jewish individuals, most notably outlawing the practice of usury (lending money at interest). The Statute also outlined that Jews had to live in specific areas of the king's towns; those aged over seven had to wear a badge that visually identified them as being Jewish (the double tabula – the shape of stone tablets); all aged over twelve years were to pay a tax of 3 pence each Easter; and Jews could only sell property or negotiate debts with the king's permission. England's Jewish population were entitled to earn a living as tradesmen or farmers, but were not allowed to be part of guilds (groups of craftsmen or merchants) or to own farmland. As a result of these new laws, many Jewish families became poor and the king could no longer collect taxes from them: hundreds were arrested, hanged or imprisoned.

The 1270s also marked escalating tensions elsewhere. The accusation most commonly brought against Jews in court was neither homicide (murder) nor theft, but the act of coin-clipping; trimming pieces of silver off the rims of coins, melting them down, recasting the silver into plates, and selling these to a goldsmiths or other metalworkers for money. Various arrests took place over the course of the thirteenth century, but there was much worse to follow. On 17th November 1278, it was recorded that all the Jews of England were simultaneously arrested "for clipping of money" and imprisoned while their houses were searched. Although Christians were also accused of these crimes, it was clear that England's Jewish community were targeted as the key suspects. Coin-clipping was punishable by death and, by 7th May 1279, it was recorded that 269 Jews had been executed in London.

Just over a decade later, England's Jewish community was unrecognisable compared to its size and so-called 'prosperity' in the early 1200s. By 1290, the gradual deterioration of Christian-Jewish relations in England came to a head when King Edward could only secure parliament's grant of further taxation of his people to aid his war with France by making sacrifices. The expulsion of the Jews was the price he agreed to pay. On 18th July 1290, Edward I issued what came to be called the Edict of Expulsion. The same day that the Edict was proclaimed writs (letters) were sent to his sheriffs advising that all Jews in their counties had until 1st November to leave the realm. Any Jews remaining after this date were liable to be seized and executed. It was also ordered that Jewish houses would be forfeited to the crown, but Jews could take with them what they could carry, including any money and valuables. The letter also urged the sheriffs to protect the Jews and ensure they were not injured in their exit from the kingdom. Not all Jews, however, made the journey safely. One famous account recorded by Walter of Guisborough reveals that Jews sailing from London were persuaded to disembark for a walk on a sandbank while the tide was out, and then left to drown there when the water returned.

Altogether, it is estimated that around 3,000 Jews were forced to leave England. In return for the expulsion of Jews from England, Parliament granted Edward a tax of £116,000. Edward's Edict to banish his Jewish community was followed by his fellow Christian monarch in France, Philip le Bel sixteen years later. It was not until 1656 that Oliver Cromwell allowed Jews back into England. In the interim, Jews were required to obtain a special license to visit the realm, though it seems very likely that some Jews remained or resettled in England while keeping their religion secret.

External links

[Expulsion of Jews from England, the British Library](#)¹

Overview of the Expulsion of the Jews provided by British Library in addition to an illustration from the margins of The Rochester Chronicle, created in 1355.

[Remembering England's Medieval Jews, The National Archives](#)²

Further context to the settlement and situation of Jews in medieval England with further reference to documents that survive in The National Archives.

[Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656](#)³

Article published by the BBC that examines the events leading up to the expulsion and the readmission of Jews in 1656.

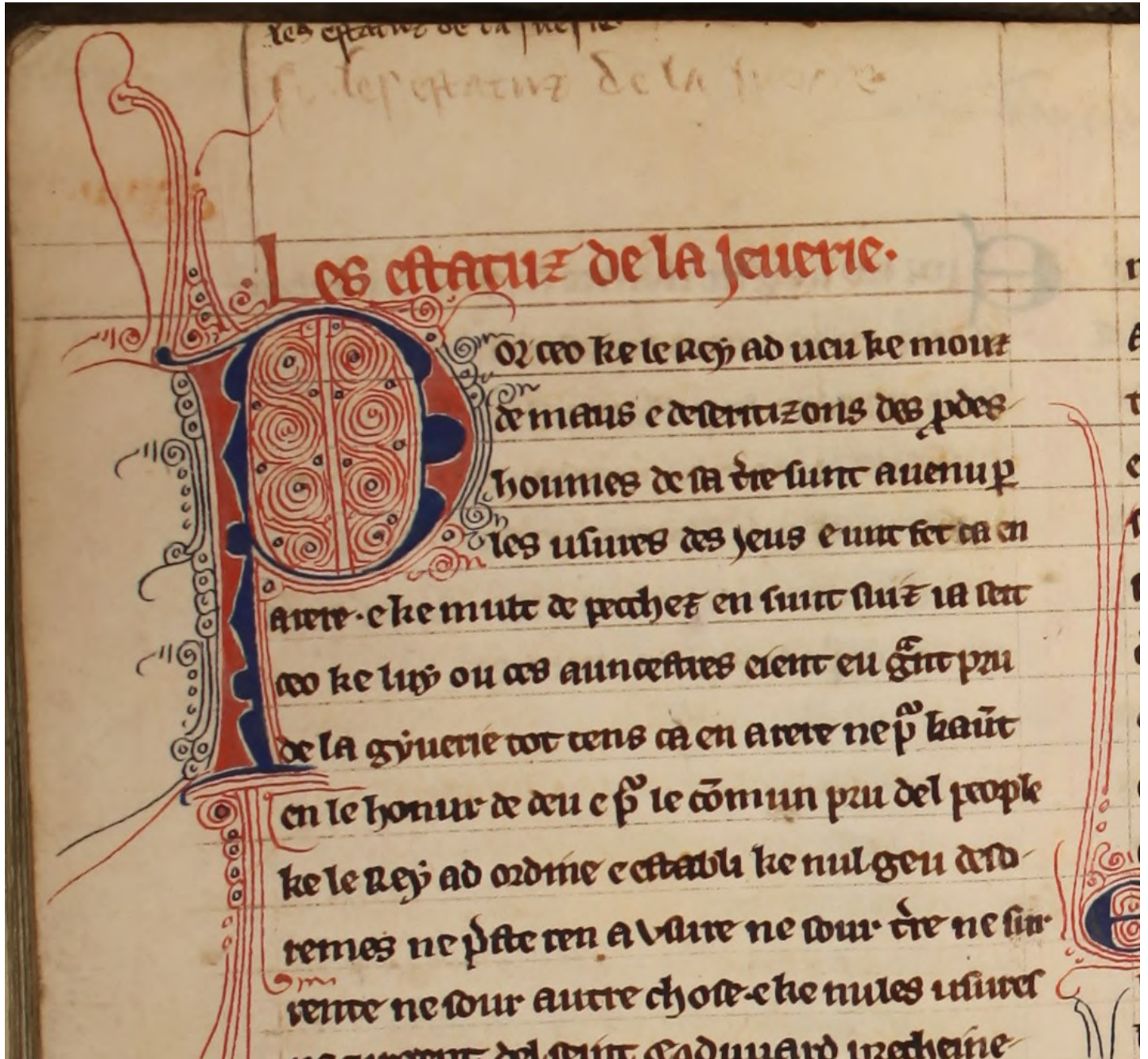
¹ <https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item103483.html>

² <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/remembering-englands-medieval-jews/>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/350.shtml>

Source 1a: Extract (a) of the Statute of Jewry, c.1275

Catalogue Ref: E 164/9, fol. 31d.



Transcript: Source 1a

The Statute is written in Anglo-Norman (a form of the French language).

Anglo-Norman Transcript

Les Estatutz de la Jewerie

Por ceo ke le Rey ad veu mout[z] de maus e deseritizons des p[ro]des houmes de sa t[re]re sunt avenue p[ro] es usures des Jeus e unt fe[i]t ca en arere, e ke mult de pecchez en sunt sui[tz] ja seit ceo ke luy ou ces auncestres eient eu g[aeg]nt pru de la gyuerie tot tens ca en arere, ne p[re] kau[m] t en le honur de deu e p[re] le com[m]un pru del people ke le Rey ad ordine e establi ken ul geu desoremes ne p[re]ste ren a usure ne sour t[re]re ne sur rente ne sour autre chose [...]

Simplified Translation

Since the king has seen various evils, and the disinheriting of the good men of his land by the usuries (lending money at interest) of Jews made in time past, and that various sins have followed thereafter; [and] although he and his ancestors have received much benefit from the Jewish people in all time past; nevertheless for the honour of God and the common benefit of the people, the king has ordained and established, that from this day forward no Jew shall lend anything at usury, either upon land, or upon rent, or upon other thing [...]

Source 1b: Extract (b) of the Statute of Jewry, c.1275

Catalogue Ref: E 164/9, fol. 31d.

Ehe tuz les gens soient menauns en les
 citez e en les burgs propres le Rey; ou les vil-
 lages citoyennes de geverne soleient estre. et
 cheun gen pus kul aura passe. Sec. anz.
 porte enseine en son souverain garnement
 est a fait en fourme de deux tables jointes
 de feute raine de la longueur de six pouces
 e de la laur de trois pouz. e he cheun pus
 kul aura passe duze anz plus tres ans
 p an de tallage au Rey ky; ser il est a la
 parche e ceo ser entendu ausi ben de feme
 om de homme.

Transcript: Source 1b

The Statute is written in Anglo-Norman (a form of the French language).

Anglo-Norman Transcript

E ke tus les Geus seient menauns en les citez e en les burgs propres les Rey, ou les Whuches
Cirograffes de Geuerie soleient ester: e k[e] checun Geu pus kil avra passee set anz, porte enseine
en son souverain garnement cest assav[et] en fourme de deus tables joyntes de feutre iaune de la
longure de sis poucer[is] e de la laur de treis pou[tz]. E ke checun pus kil aurta passe duzze anz paie
tres den[ers] p[re] an de [taillage] au Rey [ky serf il est] a la Pasche e ceo seit entendu ausi ben de
fem[m]e con de houme.

Simplified Translation

And that all Jews shall stay in the king's own cities and boroughs, where the Chests of Chirographs
of the Jewry are. And that each Jew after he turns seven years old, shall wear a badge on his clothes;
that is to say, in the form of two tables joined, of yellow felt, of the length of six inches, and of
breadth three inches. And that each one, after he shall be twelve years old, pay three pence yearly
at Easter of tax to the king [...]; and this is the same for both women and men [...]

Source 1c: Extract (c) of the Statute of Jewry, c.1275

Catalogue Ref: E 164/9, fol. 31d.

Ele Rey lor entre hul uient de marchau
 dit leaus e p lor labur e hul comuniert
 oue les crestiens p leument marchander
 en uendunt e en echataunt. mes he par
 cest encheon ne p autre nul crestien ne sit
 cochant ne leuant entre eus. e ne uet
 pas le Rey par encheon de lor marchan
 dit hul soient lote ne en estot ne en taitla
 ges o ceus des citez ou des burgs ou il
 meinent de ci cum il sunt taillables al
 Rey come ses serfs e a nul autres. for a Rey.
Par chef le Rey...

Transcript: Source 1c

The Statute is written in Anglo-Norman (a form of the French language).

Anglo-Norman Transcript

E le Rey lor g[aeg]nte kil vivent de marchaundies leaus e p[ro] lor labur e kil co'munient ove les Crestiens p[re] leument marchaunder en endaut e en echataunt. Mes ke par cest encheson ne p[ro] autre nul Crestien ne seit cochaunt ne levaunt entre eus. E ne velt pas le Reys par encheson de lor merchandise kil seient lote ne en escot ne en talliages o ceus des Citez ou des Burgs ou il eminent de ci cum il sunt taillables al Rey come ses serfs e a nul autres, for a Rey [...]

Simplified Translation

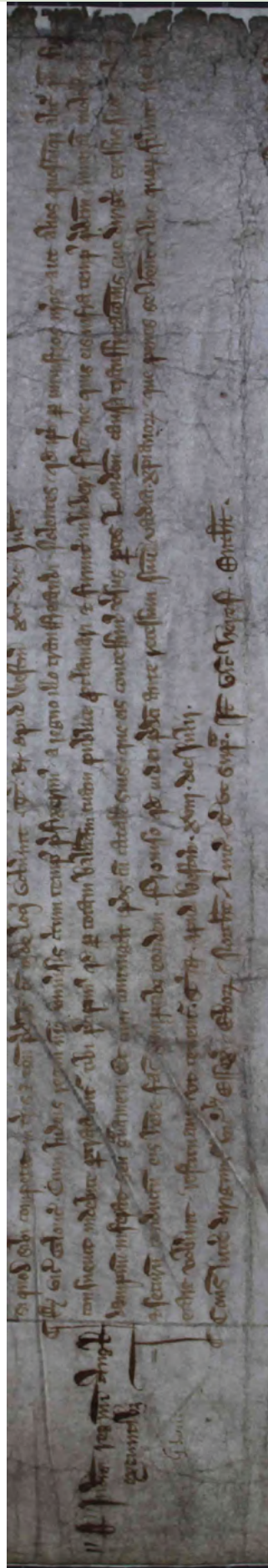
And the king grants to Jews that may earn their living by lawful merchandise and labour; and that they may interact with Christians in order to lawfully trade by buying and selling. But other than this, no Christian should mix with Jewish individuals. And the king wills that they [Jews] shall not by reason of their merchandise be put to scot or lot*, not in taxes with the men of the cities and boroughs where they live; for that they are taxable to the king and to no other but the king [...]

*Scot or Lot – This is a phrase common in the records of English medieval boroughs (towns/districts) that refers to a tax paid to the borough for local or national purposes.

Source 2: Contextual information

This image includes one of the earliest English depictions of the Jewish badge – the piece of yellow taffeta, six fingers long and three broad, cut to represent the shape of the tabula (stone) that recorded the Ten Commandments. The badge was first introduced in England by Pope Honorius III's orders following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, but it was only after the Statute of Jewry c. 1275 that it had to be worn in England by every Jew aged over the age of seven.

Source 3: Letter from King Edward I to the Sheriff of Gloucester, dated 18th July 1290. Catalogue Ref: C54/107, m. 5.



Transcript: Source 3

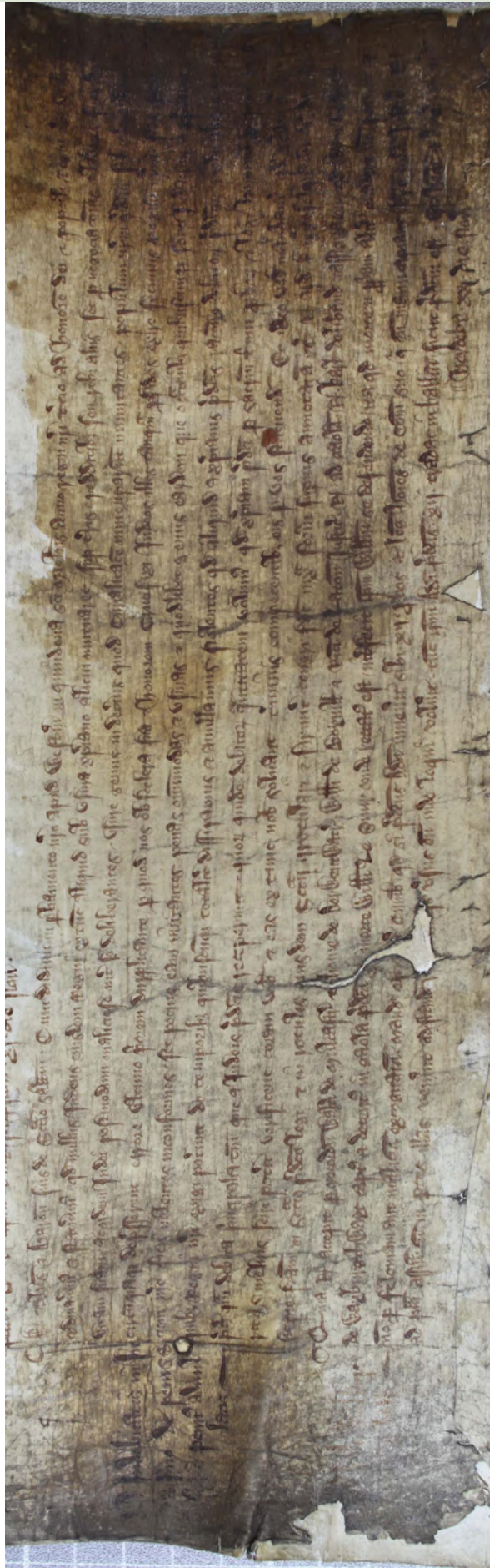
Latin Transcript

Rex vicecomiti Gloucestriae etc. cum Judaeis regni nostri universis certum tempus praefixerimus a regno illo transfretandi; Nolentes quod ipsi per ministros nostros, aut alios quoscunque, aliter fieri consuevit, indebite pertractentur, tibi praecipimus, quod per totam ballivam tuam publice proclamari, et firmiter inhiberi facias, ne quis eis intra terminum praedictum, injuriam, molestiam, aut dampnum inferat seu gravamen. Et cum contingat ipso cum catallis suis, quae, dirige regressus suos, salvum et securum conductum eis habere facias, sumptibus eorum. Proviso, quod Judaei, ante recessum suum, vadia Christianorum, quae penes se habent, illis quorum fuerint, si ea acquietare voluerint, restituant, ut tenentur. Teste Rege apud Westm. 18 die Julii. Confimiles Literae diriguntur vicecomitibus Essexiae, Eboraci, Northamptoniae, Lincolniae, Herefordiae, et Southamptoniae.

Simplified Translation

The King to the sheriff of Gloucester etc. Whereas the king has prefixed to all the Jews of his realm a certain time to pass out of the realm; he wills that they shall not be treated by his ministers or others otherwise than has been customary. He orders the sheriff to cause proclamation to be made throughout his bailiwick prohibiting any one from injuring or wronging the Jews within the said time. He is ordered to cause the Jew to have safe conduct at their cost when they, with their chattels, which the king has granted to them, direct their steps towards London in order to cross the sea, provided that before they leave they restore the pledges of Christians in their possession to those to whom they belong. Witness the king at Westminster, 18th July. The like to the sheriffs of Essex, York, Northampton, Lincoln, Hereford and Southampton.

Source 4: Letter from King Edward I to the Treasurer and Barons of the Exchequer, 5th November 1290. Catalogue Ref: C54/107, m. 1



Transcript: Source 4

Latin Transcript

Edwardus, etc. Thesaurario et Baronibus de Scaccario salutem. Cum dudum in Parlamento nostro apud Westmonasterium in quindena S. Michaelis anno regni nostri tercio, ad honorem Dei et populi regni nostri utilitatem, ordinaverimus et statuerimus quod nullus Judeus ejusdem regni extunc aliquid sub usura Christiano alicui mutuaret super terris, redditibus seu rebus aliis, set per negotiationes et labores suos ducerent vitam suam; ao idem Judei, postmodum malicious inter se deliberantes, usure genus indeterius quod curialitatem nuncuparunt inmutantes, populum nostrum predictum sub colore hujusmodi circumquaque depresserint, errore ultimo priorem duplicante; per quod Nos ob scelera sua et honorem Crucifixi Judeos illos tamquam perfidos exire fecimus regnum nostrum [...]

Simplified Translation

Edward, etc. To the Treasurer and Barons of the Exchequer, greeting. Whereas the king in his parliament at Westminster at the quinzaine of Michaelmas in the third year of his reign, ordained that no Jew of the realm should thenceforth lend anything in usury to any Christian upon lands, rents or other things, but should earn his living by trade and labour, and the Jews afterwards, maliciously* discussing amongst themselves, changed the kind of usury into a worse kind, which they called courtesy*, and oppressed the king's people twice as bad as before; as a result the king, for this reason and for the honour of Christ, has caused the Jews to leave his realm as perfidious* men [...]

*Perfidious – Faithless and untrustworthy.

*Maliciously – Wanting to cause harm.

*Courtesy – Doing somebody a favour/something nice.



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

Find out more:

[🌐 nationalarchives.gov.uk/education](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/education)

[✉️ education@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:education@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService

twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu