Editors’ Note

A new December has come, the time for a joyful departmental gathering dedicated to Hanukkah—and a fresh newsletter. As was foreshadowed in the previous issue, David is away from the department for his year abroad. Recently, he sent the department a postcard, where he wrote, “[…] I think I’m appreciating everything I miss at UCL even more now that I’m so far away.” This is going to be a common theme in the present newsletter, since this edition is a very special one. Almost exclusively, it consist of articles written by alumni of the department, sharing memories from their time here, telling about their pursuits and successes after the graduation, and addressing current and future students with their words of wisdom. To some readers, this will be a nostalgic journey back in time to meet familiar faces. To others, these names will be names of legendary heroes of the past, and the stories will inspire future achievements. In any case, there is something of value for each of us. The newsletter is concluded by a curious investigation that will give an overview of what kind of people are students at the department.

Enjoy the reading, and Happy Hanukkah!

/Anna Mudrecova

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*the photo on the front cover is from this year’s stay at Cumberland Lodge (the first years and Prof. Stern, Prof. Berkowitz, Dr Guesnet and Dr Anziska)
We would like to extend a warm welcome to:

- **Dr Seth Anziska**, the newly-appointed Lecturer in Jewish-Muslim Relations. Dr Anziska has joined the Department from Columbia University and has made his debut with his signature course is “Jewish-Muslim Relations in Historical Perspective”.

- **Ms. Vanessa Clarke**, the new Departmental Manager. Vanessa has stepped into Lia’s shoes and after her first few months at UCL (and the madness of start of term) is settling in and enjoying her role.

We would also like to wish a hearty congratulations to:

- **Dr Lily Kahn** who has been awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellowship for her research project “The First Hebrew Shakespeare Translations”. Dr Kahn is on research leave in 2015/16 but will be back next year.

- **Prof. Michael Berkowitz** on the publication of his book “Jews and Photography in Britain” – the book was successfully launched last month.

- **Prof. Willem Smelik** who has been promoted to Professor of Aramaic and Hebrew literature.

- **Rahel Fronda** who successfully passed her viva and has completed her Ph.D.! Well done.
A Newsletter dedicated to alumni is an opportunity to reminisce and think fondly of years gone by, and to discover what our students have got up to in the last decades and years. It is also an opportunity to honour our alumni, as members for life of our Department. As a well-known Midrash puts it, if there are no people, there is no king. We are no kings, but we know that our students and alumni are our greatest asset. It is inspiring to see current students and alumni engaged in the production of this issue.

As a UCL alumnus, but not of this Department, I should be assuming a low profile here. My column in this issue will be brief. A few important news items need reporting. Willem Smelik has been appointed Professor – our congratulations, a well-deserved promotion. Michael Berkowitz has published just now his long-awaited monograph on Jews and Photography in Britain (University of Texas Press, 2015); more on this in the next issue of the Newsletter. Neill Lochery has published translations of his books on Lisbon and on Brazil. Lily Kahn has been awarded an AHRC Leadership Fellowship (Early Career Route), for a two-year project on ‘the First Hebrew Shakespeare Translations’; she is away this year pursuing her research, and will be back next year with an exciting performance at the Bloomsbury Theatre. And the indefatigable Belinda has been putting on more concerts of her compositions…

We have had some major staff changes. Lia Kahn-Zajtmann, our Departmental Manager, has retired after 20 years of service at UCL. A goodbye party, packed full of people and emotions, was held in October in the Garden Room, with speeches, presentations, and expressions of admiration and gratitude for her contribution to the Department. You can read more about Lia in her own article, as an alumna,
in this Newsletter. Meanwhile, the Department has welcomed Vanessa Clarke to take over from Lia; she is learning the complex ways of UCL systems, services, and bureaucracy, and already making an impressive mark on the Department.

Seth Anziska, our new Lecturer in Jewish-Muslim Relations, has taken up his position in September and is delivering an inspiring course to BA and MA students on ‘Jewish-Muslim Relations in Historical Perspective’. See more details in the last Newsletter.

On the student front, we have entered an exchange agreement with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This opens up fresh opportunities for the Year Abroad programme, as well as enabling us to bring over Israeli students to the Department and to collaborate further, in teaching and in research, with colleagues at the HUJ. Finally, this term has been marked by a number of landmark events, including a conference on ‘Litvak Days: YIVO’s Histories, Contexts, Tensions’, convened by Michael Berkowitz, and an international workshop on ‘Science and Popular Culture in Medieval Jewish Society’, convened by our ERC project on ‘Calendars in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages’. But for the rest of this Newsletter, let the alumni speak.★
Richard Bolchover: Harsh examinations, extremely good teaching

Richard Bolchover graduated in 1983. Here are his fond memories of teachers, highlights and concerns of those days.

I arrived in London from Manchester in 1979 to read for a degree in Jewish History and Hebrew Literature at UCL. I was terrified of the prospect of life in the big metropolis. As it turned out, I need not have worried.

The Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department was small and eclectic. Its Head was Professor Chimen Abramsky, an extraordinary autodidact with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Jewish sources. He spoke with a very strong, if affecting, Russian Jewish accent, was extremely short in stature, and his room was lined with thousands of books. Bizarrely, the ones he seemed to consult most frequently were on the very highest shelves requiring him to clamber on chairs and ladders in order to retrieve them. In addition to his duties at UCL, he was also the main Hebraica specialist for Sothebys, the auction house. This necessitated frequent and unintentionally hilarious conversations and meetings between him and the rather Sloaney women sent to liaise with him.

Lectures by him were somewhat hit and miss affairs but, if on song, as he frequently was, they were masterpieces and often overran the allocated time. I found him extremely solicitous to students, dedicated to transmitting his knowledge to a future generation, possibly tinged with some guilt at his earlier strict loyalty to the Communist Party even as late as 1958. By the time I studied in the department he was a liberal Zionist, and was very keen to promote a rational, scientific and scholarly approach to Jewish studies.

“The lectures were masterpieces.”
The academic and examination life of the department was ruled over by Professor Raphael Loewe, the brilliant, and eccentric, translator of medieval Hebrew literature. He had more than a tinge of regret that he was not teaching at Oxbridge, where his late father had taught. He was the only person at UCL who was occasionally seen in an academic gown. Examination rigour was absolute and harsh, and this accounted for the fact that many students failed at the end of their first and second years, and even at the end of their final examinations. Third class honours and past degrees were also far from unknown under his reign. All this contributed to the fact that the department then held many records in UK university circles. It had the highest teacher to student ratio of any degree course in the UK. It also had the highest failure rate. Nonetheless, those of us who did survive the course thought we had achieved and learnt a lot and had been extremely well taught.

Biblical Hebrew was taught by Dr Michael Weitzman, a gentle man who was in addition a very accomplished mathematician. Tragically he died suddenly a few years after I graduated. His lectures were extremely detailed, and could consequently seem dull, but soon we learnt to borrow his copious...
notes beforehand and using this method, we learnt a great deal from him. He also served as the Students’ Tutor at this time and he provided extremely kind and caring pastoral care.

Professor Ada Rappaport had recently joined the department, straight from her Ph.D. Compared to the rather dowdy male figures in the department, she cut quite a dash in the corridors, with her trademark knee length hair, dungarees and donkey jacket together with a cigarette smoked out of a cigarette holder creating quite an impression. She was too much of a perfectionist at that time and it was only after some years that she developed into the brilliant, sparkling lecturer we know today. Professor Mark Geller was also a lecturer in the department and his specialism at this time was in the area of Incantation Bowls.

Modern, or Israeli, Hebrew was then taught at SOAS, so Hebrew students from the two colleges of the then federal London University mixed. At the outset our teaching was provided by Drs Tudor Parfitt and Lewis Glinert. Dr Parfitt was embarking on his Indiana Jones phase, discovering long lost Judaic tribes. He taught courses on Hebrew literature and he was a good literary critic. Dr Glinert taught Israeli Hebrew grammar and did so in a very precise and expert manner.

Due to the absence of Dr Weitzman on a sabbatical we were fortunate enough to be tutored by Professor Edward Ullendorff, the mighty Professor of Semitics at SOAS, for certain biblical texts. This was an exacting, if magnificent, experience, requiring students to prepare for many hours before the class, but the effort was worth it and the knowledge and skills gained were extensive. Professor Ullendorff was extremely kind to students if they had shown to have put in the effort he thought required, and
frequently hosted us all to lunch. Most importantly it was he who initiated, after our approach, the period abroad spent by students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Professor Loewe had hitherto blocked such a move, as he considered that the Israelis had “bastardised” the holy tongue, and which meant the department was the only language course at UCL where students did not spend time abroad. Ullendorff however heard our plea and with the help of Isaiah Berlin, persuaded Professor Loewe to relent. Armed with letters from Professors Ullendorff and Abramsky, both of whom were alumni of the Hebrew University, we spent our time there taught by Professors Malamat, Rabin and others. Unquestionably our Hebrew language skills improved enormously at a result.

Through our SOAS connection we were also taught Mishnah by Professor Wansbrough, then Professor of Arabic. Again, an outstanding experience.

A number of visiting academics also taught in the department including Robert Wistrich, Eli Gutwirth and Jonathan Frankel.

I graduated in 1983 after a four year course. I look back on the period with enormous fondness, notwithstanding, or more probably, because of, the eccentricities of the department and its teachers.
It's been a long time since I graduated (1995—I still have the T-shirt), but not so long since I retired as departmental manager from HJS (September 2015) after 20 years (20 years!!). I was a mature student with two small children (4 and 6) when I embarked on my studies, having had already 15 years of working in industry under my belt. It felt like a dream come true. I'm sure I must have been one of those annoying mature students who always handed their work in on time and never skived. I loved being a student, I loved the subject and felt like pinching myself even after 4 years! I couldn’t go on the year abroad at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem because of family commitments, but I did go to the Ulpan (nine weeks in total). I had six weeks on my own and my family came for the three weeks in the middle. It was the first time I had been away from them for so long. The camaraderie I experienced from my fellow students towards me and also my family when in Israel is something I will always treasure. I lived in the Old City with my SOAS friends, which was an amazing experience. This was 1993, and a very exciting time to be in Israel. One of my friends had a Palestinian boyfriend and on the day of the signing of the Oslo Accord by Rabin and Arafat we went through the Old City to New Orient House in East Jerusalem. People were jubilant, everybody was on the streets and it seemed such a wonderfully optimistic time. How things have changed…
When I was doing my finals I was asked by Leah, the then administrator, if I was interested in doing a job-share (I know, I know, it wouldn’t happen like this now!). I immediately jumped at the chance and joined the Department in September 1995. It felt strange for a while to be working with my former teachers who I was totally in awe of. It’s been an amazing experience—we’ve been through many happy times and also some really sad ones. I was also very lucky with my subsequent job-share colleagues (Juliet, Louise, Emma, Belinda). We had a lot of fun and we enjoyed looking after the students. I loved being in an academic environment and I particularly liked being in the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department—it really is one of a kind, which is one of the reasons I stayed so long—the warmth, the noise, the banter, the craziness is all quite unique and I have not seen that in any other department. But please do not think that it was all rosy. I spent a fair amount of time being frustrated with e.g. the clunky computer systems and the seemingly endless, pointless and ever-increasing bureaucracy, but I suppose that’s what happens when you are part of a huge organisation. Funnily enough, since I’ve retired, those frustrations have started to recede in the background and I look back with fondness and gratitude on my time at UCL, both as a student and as a member of staff of the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies.★

“The warmth, the noise, the banter, the craziness is all quite unique...”
Michael Wegier: Degree as the foundation

Michael Wegier obtained a degree in Jewish History and graduated in 1988. Since then, the degree has led him to a successful career.

The career path

I am currently the Chief Executive of UJIA, the UK’s largest Israel-focused charity. I have previously worked in Jewish education, policy planning in Israel, the USA and here in London.

The impact of studies

The degree was extremely impactful on my professional life. I have worked in Jewish education in the UK, USA and Israel over the last 27 years and have frequently drawn upon my studies to inspire and guide how and what I have taught. I am currently more focused on management, policy making and fundraising (for Israel and Jewish education) but I still regard my time at UCL as of fundamental importance.

The books I read and the courses I studied provided a foundation for much of my career in Jewish education since I left UCL. I am very grateful for the education I received there. It exposed me to very different views of Judaism, Jewish History and Zionism from those I had received from school, synagogue and my youth movement. To be clear, I remain a passionate liberal Zionist and Masorti Jew and UCL helped me deepen and broaden the context in which these ideas developed.
Memories that stick out include…

I studied modern Hebrew with Ada Rapoport-Albert. These lessons were a marvellous insight into her idiosyncrasies as well as teaching us a great deal about Hebrew, Israel and Jewish studies.

Very strong and positive memories come from studying Mishna with Prof. John Wansbrough at SOAS. A fellow student who went on to be a well-respected Orthodox Rabbi described Prof. Wansbrough as his best ever Mishna teacher.

Prof. Raphael Loewe informed us that he had died in 1492 and recognised no Hebrew after that period. He then accused me of studying Hebrew in order to chat up girls in Tel Aviv. A reasonable academic analysis, I thought. I learnt a great deal from studying with Prof. Loewe, although it was frustrating when exams bore no relation to topics studied. Poor Michael Weitzman (of blessed memory) had to sort that mess out!

I loved studying Jewish History with Dr. Eli Lederhandler and Steve Zipperstein. It was rigorous, demanding and enlightening. I have had the pleasure of interacting with them over the decades and it is always great to reconnect. I studied with Eli for my MA in Jerusalem as well.

The student body contained some larger than life characters. I particularly recall a non-Jewish guy who was a self-taught (and brilliant) linguist who took to writing anti-Zionist posters in biblical Hebrew which he put up at SOAS.
When in Rome, don’t do as the Romans do. They are very lively, they look well, they dress well, they eat well and they love well. They live fast and they drive fast but from what one sees in the city, besides the lively living, they focus on the dead. It is a city of grand stone-clad monuments, all very impressive and rather imperial, but in the end all of them focus on some aspects of death. The Romans see life but they also see the end of things, which is death. They realize that life is short, that life is beautiful but they are not completely starry-eyed and they also see that life can be harsh and brutal, and that the end of it all is leading to death. They acknowledge that truth and they incorporate it into their splendid modern and ancient stonework monuments, which are the pride of their capital city. Above all, or rather below all, there are the ancient catacombs. Along the ancient Appian Way, to the south-east of the city, there are the catacombs, the underground graveyards, all very historical and interesting, and certainly worth a visit. There is even a small set of Jewish catacombs, but they are unfortunately not open to the public, except by special appointment, that takes a long time to organize and it is rare to get permission to visit them. The restriction is annoying to a short-term visitor, but it is eminently sensible, to avoid possible antisemitic acts of vandalism and destruction. Easiest to visit are the catacombs of San Callisto, an early Christian martyr, off the Via AppiaAntica. They run underground for dozens of kilometres and contain hundreds of loculli, or niches for the dead, as well as several arcosilia, larger crypts that were used for family interments. One walks along rows
and rows of the loculi in the dark and damp passageways, being careful not to trip and fall and thus not to disturb the last resting places of the dead, though now the remains have all been removed and the spaces are clean, clear and sanitized. But the aura of death remains, it is still a gloomy location and a depressing place as one walks along the hundreds of successive loculi, depressing to think of so many dead bodies that had lain here, so depressing and down-casting that in the end it is a great relief to get past the niches, to see the light and to get back up several staircases and into the fresh air. The intricate alleyways you have walked along are lengthy and random and it is imperative to have an expert guide (to be paid for) to avoid getting lost. For who would want to be lost and wandering unknowingly for long periods in this underground necropolis?

Then there is the Pantheon, one of the most perfectly domed and rounded structures in the world. The dome is a flattened hemisphere and its diameter of 43 metres (142 feet) exceeds that of the nearby St. Peters Cathedral by one metre. Internally it is a vast empty space with plentiful light from a high-level oculus, an open central eye, open to the sky and nine metres (thirty feet) in diameter, which defies the rain because of the warm air rising from the interior. But the seemingly empty Pantheon also houses many unseen and unmarked tombs, that of the first king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel and his son Umberto, and of many artists, such as Baldassari Peruzzi, Annibale Carracci and the most famous of all, Raphael Sanzio, who worked in Florence but was buried here in 1520.
The Termi di Caracalla (Baths of Caracalla) are also splendid even in their ruined state. They were begun by Caracalla in 21 CE and completed twenty years later by Alexander Severus. Water was brought to the site by aqueducts and the baths could accommodate one thousand and six hundred potentially eager bathers. Today we see only the vast brickwork walls and groundworks, but in their heyday they must have impressed all newcomers with their facilities and provided the necessary functional space for their naked bathing bodies. They started by warming up with gymnastics and physical exercises, then took a steam bath in the laconicum to increase perspiration, then a hot bath in the caldarium, followed by a warm bath in the tepiderium. Finally they went to plunge into the cold waters of the frigidarium and then relaxed with long naked strolls in the gardens round about. Everything was shielded from the prying eyes of the public by the high surrounding brick walls and extensively wide lawns, still visible and beautifully manicured today. It seems that some of the clients did not survive the rigorous programme and extensive treatments of the baths, as archaeological excavations on the site in the sixteenth century found several funerary urns and an underground temple to the world of the god Mithras.

The greatest of all the Roman monuments, in size as well as splendour, is the Colosseo, or Coliseum, built from 72 to 82 CE by Vespasian and his son Titus. Its length is 527 meters (1730 feet). Every visitor thinks he or she must see it and, as a result, one must queue for tickets, queue to get to the actual entrance, queue for the view of the interior and of
course queue for the toilets, even off-season. It is grand in scale and boasts several levels of activity, from the double underground animal cages to the top story of the audience galleries, sheltered from the sun and the rain by suspended canvas awnings. The structure could house forty-six thousand spectators, all of them with an excellent view of the proceedings. It was the classic example and epitome of the Roman sport of bread and circuses. Gladiators were fighting gladiators, and gladiators were fighting common criminals, and gladiators were fighting and wrestling with wild beasts, and wild beasts were attacking other wild beasts, every encounter resulting in the death of the defeated, and every death applauded by the excited and enormous audience. The Coliseum was completed in 80 CE and marked by a festival of one hundred days, organized and overseen by Titus, when five thousand wild beasts were killed and hundreds of gladiators lost their lives.

The bowels of the Coliseum contained many private niches, retiring rooms and private cells where the privileged had their own permanent access before and after the spectacles. In one of them is a very faded fresco of Jerusalem, the picture unrecognizable but the title Gerusalemme clear and unfaded. Beneath it runs a description, a frank and open statement, that the Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus had taken the gold and other precious metal artefacts of the Jerusalem Temple and used them to raise the money to pay for the building of the Coliseum. What an admission, and how true it must have been to extract such a statement. ★

Straight after UCL, I went to Jerusalem and studied a Masters in Internal Relations at the Hebrew University whilst working as a lead researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. My dissertation had been passed on to the center, and the recommendations of the department staff secured the job for me there.

Following this, I served two years as a Press Officer in the IDF Foreign Press Branch before working as director at the World Union of Jewish Students. Learning Hebrew during my degree led to my eventual (very eventual) fluency in the language and I now speak this at home with my (Israeli) husband.

I am now back in London, working as an advisor at the Ministry of Justice.
I chose to study Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL for numerous reasons. I realized during my A levels that I wanted to follow my interests in learning about the Jewish people and learn Hebrew, and my choices of where to study this course were quite limited. I applied to all of my options and was lucky enough to have a variety of them, but UCL immediately became my first choice after the initial interview with Helen Beer. She made me feel comfortable, I felt I would be valued and that this was the right place for me. Very early on in the first year it became clear I had made the right choice. The professors were wonderful and experts in their fields, the subject matter was interesting and challenging and learning Hebrew from scratch may have been one of the most difficult things I have done to date, but it was still very enjoyable. I loved that once the mandatory courses of the first year were complete, I had the choice of focusing my studies on what interested me most. In preparation for the year abroad I wanted to focus my studies on Israel, so I studied Middle Eastern Politics and Israeli literature, and was given the opportunity to study a course at the neighbouring SOAS, which gave me another perspective on things. Furthermore, the facilities at UCL meant I was also able to study Arabic at night school, which complemented my Hebrew learning. The third
year, abroad in Jerusalem, was the ultimate experience for me. I met wonderful people and got to put in context the learning of the past 3 years. Returning back to the UK after my time abroad with all its significance was a difficult transition to me, and I would like to warn people about how difficult that return can be for some.

I am currently working for a children’s charity, Barnardo’s, which I enjoy immensely. I believe that next year I will begin a law conversion course and specialize in constitutional law, but that means many years of study and I don’t particularly want to leave the organization I work for now; which is probably a throwback from studying, I don’t like leaving.

My time studying H&JS taught me many things: the best things in life take a long time to work for, you get out what you put in, and fundamentally it taught me I can, like us all, do anything I want, all it takes is hard work, dedication and time. As a direct consequence of studying Hebrew, I have begun studying two other languages and enjoy the process of learning very much.

If I were to give any new recruits advice, it would be for those who come to UCL without any Hebrew knowledge as I did: don’t give up! The first two years could make you feel quite low, but the third year when you get to solidify your Hebrew is really worth it! And take up all the opportunities you can! They are invaluable in so many ways. ★
After having turned 29 a week ago (November 23), I got to reflect upon the last decade of my life. It was perhaps the first birthday ever which I did not celebrate at all. Not because I did not want to, but because in-between my deadlines for the local Brooklyn newspaper, writing a blog column for a vodka brand that I had launched a few months ago, running my own branding company and pursuing my creative writing career, I really did not get a chance to plan my birthday. As I recalled major events of my “adult” life and its momentous choices, my time at University College London (UCL) immediately came to mind.

When I think about UCL, I always think of it warmly. Without the intention to sound sentimental, I do reminisce about the remarkable four years at the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department (2005–2009), almost with melancholy. Those were the times when nothing but learning Hebrew and Jewish history interested me. I planned my future while God laughed, though. Since graduating from UCL, I pursued a legal career. After having completed the GDL at BPP Law School, and the LPC at the College of Law (both in London as well), I practiced law for merely a year, but my creativity and desire to live in the capital of contemporary arts was stronger. As a result, I moved to New York.

“When I think about UCL, I always think of it warmly.”

Kala Jerzy: Pursuing dreams

Kala Jerzy graduated from the department in 2009. Her story is one of gratitude for the support and friendliness she experienced during—and after—her studies.
I was always determined to follow the most unrealistic dreams of mine, hence a decision to apply to UCL to commence a Bachelor’s degree in Hebrew and Jewish Studies. I remember feeling really excited and proud to be engaging with such an unusual degree. Still... The first class with Dr. Fiona Blumfield shook me to the core. I just moved to London from Poland, and I must have been so overwhelmed that I barely understood a word she said during that first lecture of Biblical Hebrew—and she was speaking English! Her language was just so poetic and sophisticated, explaining the mind-blowing rules of the ancient language. I was petrified, but so very enchanted. There was also Ms. Dahlia Tracz, the lecturer who taught us (and Madonna’s children!) Modern Hebrew. If it was not for her, I would have never been fluent in Hebrew within a year. And if someone had told me back then that a few years later I would be instructing bankers at Bank Ha’Poalim in Midtown Manhattan, I would not have believed them.

Then, of course, Professor Michael Berkowitz, jumping with excitement while giving the most fascinating (and entertaining!) lectures in Modern Jewish History. His words, “JEWS ARE NOT A RACE!” are still ringing in my
ears. Professor Berkowitz became my mentor and friend. He was the first person I contacted when I decided to abandon my legal career, before even my parents were informed of that change. I will never forget the fact that he never asked me “why,” but rather, provided me with proactive advice and unconditional support. He was also the one who taught me how to think critically, construe and prove an argument; and he showed me how to network in the “real” world.

Having the privilege and honour of studying at UCL helped to build my character. I worked while studying, which trained me how to manage time and prioritize. More importantly, however, being part of the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department made me realize what really matters in life: to pursue your dreams. Everyone I had encountered there, professors and students alike, shared two features in common: passion and individualism. Sadly, I cannot mention all the brilliant and kind people whose paths crossed with mine, but perhaps I can at least express my eternal gratitude to how their presence shaped my life. I have a long way to go ahead of me, but rest assured, studying at the Hebrew and Jewish Studies Department at UCL was one of the best decisions I had made so far.
The concept of leaving HJS very much seems to be open to interpretation! Since graduating in 2009, I have returned to the department to take modules for no other reason than my enjoyment, and stayed in regular and close contact with one of my lecturers. It really isn’t possible—and you don’t want—to break ties when you ‘leave’ UCL.

I focused very much on modern European Jewish history from year two of my Jewish History degree, and the classes on offer were all fascinating to attend. After speaking to other students at the time, and since, I very much appreciate how lucky I am to have had extraordinary teachers in such small classes that enabled us to ask questions, digress, and form a class bond. With Helen’s infectious laugh in some classes, and Michael’s banging on the table shouting “Jews are not a race!” at the top of his voice, attending class was always entertaining as well as educational!

2009 was the year of the first cohort of graduates entering the working world in the economic crisis. That was a bummer, to say the least. But, utilizing contacts (and when your mama kvelled about your graduation to everyone she meet) meant that I found work faster than I had expected, and in a Jewish organisation. Meeting my husband-to-be was a particular

“It really isn’t possible to break ties when you ‘leave’ UCL.”
highlight! This has set the path of my career and volunteer work since. After returning from kibbutz (which I thoroughly recommend to everyone) I managed to land a job at The Guardian, and will always be extremely proud to have worked there and been exposed to so many interesting things and great opportunities. Having a great degree from a high calibre university, along with an unusual degree, certainly makes you stand out in interviews and provides a great conversation starter because your passion really comes across and fools anyone into giving you work! But in all seriousness, my enthusiasm about my time at HJS has continued and really does make employers see that you are passionate, diverse, and interested in things outside of the mainstream which goes far these days.

To this day, I am so happy that I decided to study something out of pure interest rather than a vocational subject. What I studied has come in useful in areas I could not have predicted, but it means that it is what I studied, and that the department of HJS is the most memorable part of my university experience.★
Jemima Jarman graduated in 2013 with a BA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies. Here, she offers a little snapshot of where the life has taken her since. Who knows, maybe we will meet her once again at the department?

Leaving the department was pretty tough. I loved studying my degree program so much; and really felt I could have carried on for another 4 years! Especially after having worked on a dissertation in my final year. I had got a taste for the wondrous fun of independent research and had so many ideas for other essay topics. Alas, continuing education wasn’t an option financially, and so off I went into workplace.

The first year after graduating I was working a full time job AND a part time job which I certainly wouldn’t recommend! I continued to work a second job, because my full time work was depressing and I wanted experience in the field of librarianship, which I could only find part time. Anyway, it all paid off and after a year I started working as a Graduate Trainee Librarian at Brunel University which I really enjoyed! This Graduate Traineeship is part of a larger scheme meant to prepare graduates to enter “library school” and get a professional qualification in librarianship. Admittedly, this wasn’t something I had thought about at all. I just wanted a job I didn’t hate… However, life took me down this path and I went with it!
My employers encouraged me to apply for an MA in Library and Information Science (as this was the ultimate point of the traineeship) and while I doubted I’d secure the finances to do so, I gave it a try anyway. As I wrote my application to UCL, I began to think properly about a “library career” and how I might be able to combine my love of Yiddish and Jewish history with library work. However, I tried not to set my heart on it too much, as I wasn’t sure if I’d secure funding. Happily, thanks to the support of the H&J department; mainly Helen Beer for writing me such wonderful references and being a constant support, I received the UCL Alumni Scholarship and started my MA this September (2015).

Being back at UCL, but not in the department is strange and I often find myself straying to the Mocatta section of the Main Library rather than the Information Studies room; and I mostly manage to twist all my coursework to relate to Jewish history, but it’s going very well on the whole, and I know so much of it is down to starting out as a HJS girl.

Although I doubted having any “transferrable skills,” it turns out my undergraduate degree was, and is, useful in finding employment. Having a UCL degree on your job applications has weighting, regardless of the degree topic,
as does the mention of any awards you may have been given in the department. If you get asked to volunteer in any capacity, as editor of this newsletter, a mentor in the department, or on some ongoing project, I recommend taking it! It really does help bulk out applications when you are going for your first job.

Also, when you are studying, just enjoy it. Like, really properly enjoy it. Be sure to value your time here, the resources provided and the people around you. You’ll really miss it when it’s gone. Okay, I feel old now I’m giving out advice!

The department helped me discover what I was passionate about and supported me in pursuing it. Even after graduating I was looked out for, and encouraged. The special relationships you create here don’t disappear when you leave and I have felt so blessed being part of the HJS departmental family. My real dream is to return as a Ph.D. student, but I shall have to wait and see what the future holds. Meanwhile, I continue to study and research in the field in my free time (when I can grasp at some!) so I’m all ready to jump straight into dissertation writing if I get the chance. I hope to return to you soon, HJS department! ★
The Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London (UCL) is unique in the United Kingdom for the breadth of subjects it teaches: Ancient and Modern Jewish History, Yiddish, Classical and Modern Hebrew, Aramaic, Talmud, Middle East Politics, Hassidism, Judaism and the Origins of Christianity. It has approximately 80 undergraduate and graduate students studying for BA, MA, MPhil, and PhD, and 15 Jewish and non-Jewish full and part time staff.

David Kimberley and Stuart Stanton are BA and continuous education students respectively in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. We were curious about the students’ backgrounds and why they chose their subjects. Many students were non-Jewish and we wondered about the reasons for their choice of modules. Thirtythree students, including us, participated in the survey which was conducted in 2013–14. The objectives were indicated by the following questions which we hoped would relate their studies and backgrounds.

1. Which modules are you studying and why?
2. If Hebrew—outline your reasons.
3. Is this part of a career path—please enlarge?
4. Have you been to or do you plan to visit Israel?
5. What languages do you speak?
6. Do you have any Jewish family roots?

We found the following: A total of 24 modules were studied. Three students had additional modules at Kings College London (KCL), London School of Economics (LSE), and School of Oriental and African Studies.
(SOAS). Students studied between one to eight modules; the most popular module was Modern Hebrew (20), Arab-Israel Conflict (11), European Jews and the Holocaust (7), Jews in Poland (6), Jews in English Speaking Lands (6), Biblical/Classical Hebrew (5).

The reasons for studying Hebrew were as follows: a total of 27 students studied Hebrew. The commonest was to spend time in Israel (10), followed by studying Jewish history (7), liking Hebrew (6), and learning another language (6).

Concerning careers, 14 students had not decided finally about their careers. Of the remainder, seven chose academia and five chose teaching. Other choices included media (2), translation (2), politics (1), architecture (1), and journalism (1).

We asked how many had visited Israel: 19 students had visited Israel and a further 11 planned to visit. Four had not visited or planned to visit.

The students were a polyglot mix: 18 spoke three or more languages, including English. French was the most common language spoken by 11, followed by Hebrew (9), Spanish (7), German (6), and Italian (6). Within the group, 22 languages were spoken of which 16 were European.

More than half the students had Jewish family roots. 13 students said both parents were Jewish, four had Jewish fathers, four had Jewish grandparents or ancestors, two had Jewish ancestors but were no longer Jewish. Ten had no Jewish connections.
The wide range of subjects offered by the department is mirrored by the extensive background of the students. Thirty-one modules are offered and our students studied over two thirds at UCL, with three students at KCL, LSE, and SOAS. Modern Hebrew was the favourite choice reflecting the students’ interest in Israel and the Middle East and the popularity of those teaching it. Other languages included Classical Hebrew (5) and Yiddish (4).

There was a broad interest in history, with a focus on the Holocaust. Jewish history from 1800, History of Ancient Judea, Modern Israel Politics, the Peace Process and the Arab-Israel Conflict (including the West Bank) were prominent, reflecting perhaps future career ideas.

The choice of Hebrew for many was associated with spending time in Israel, but six students enjoyed Hebrew for its language and linguistic qualities, with one student in particular describing it as “a beautiful language—distant from English.” Others studied for a greater insight into Jewish history, Middle East politics and Jewish culture. The grading of Modern Hebrew into beginner, higher and lower intermediate, and advance levels was very helpful. There were frequent “class exams” which contributed towards a final BA or MA score and were usually a positive stimulus.

Career plans were vague for many; the most popular were academic and teaching professions, but 17 had no definite career plans at the time of the survey. The plans of five potential academics were not specified,
seven wanted to teach with one wanting to teach Yiddish, one to teach in Israel, and one to teach in a Jewish school; their subjects were not specified.

Visits to Israel were insightful. Nineteen had visited or lived there or planned to live in Israel (2). Ten hoped to visit, most within a gap year. Four had no plans to visit Israel, one had a nationality difficulty which prohibited a visit, although nowadays Israel does not stamp the passport so facilitating travel for many. None of these four students had Jewish roots. For many, the course was seen as a stimulus to visiting Israel. It is difficult to assess how much current antipathy to Israel’s government and the Middle East strife was behind the decision not to visit Israel—but the importance of the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies lay in promoting an interest.

The range and number of languages spoken was striking. All students spoke English, although only 17 included this amongst their languages. European, Russian, Middle East and Far East languages were spoken—eight had different scripts! No particular pattern emerged for the six students not studying Hebrew. Four had visited Israel and had Jewish roots, the remaining two did not have Jewish roots but planned to visit Israel.

For us the authors, one of the stimuli for this survey was to find out why non-Jewish students felt sufficiently interested to enrol in the Department. Three had never visited nor had plans to visit Israel, three will visit and three have visited. One has passport difficulties. The majority were interested in Jewish history, languages and teaching. Politics
was not enquired about but this would have been an interesting line to pursue.

In conclusion, the ability of this Department to attract Jewish and non-Jewish students from a wide variety of backgrounds and languages is confirmed. The host of modules and teaching abilities are underlying strengths of the Department. Visiting Israel for many is part of the course and allows a natural linguistic sequel. ★

happy hanukkah