

ing a history of the Jewish community of Barbados. Watson later proposed that one of his doctoral students, archaeologist Michael Stoner, excavate the site as the subject of his dissertation. Altman agreed to fund the dig, and Stoner moved into an apartment on the second floor of the new Jewish museum.

In April 2008, Stoner, also a non-Jew, uncovered a series of steps leading down to an elevator-sized chamber half filled with water. As he pondered his discovery, an Israeli tourist passed by. "That's a *mikveh!*" he told Stoner. The young archaeologist had unearthed a *mikveh* (or a *baño*, as the Sephardim called it) dating to the mid-seventeenth century. What Shilstone had assumed was the rabbi's house was in fact the *bañadeira*, the building housing the congregation's ritual bath.

Altman doesn't expect that the spring-fed *mikveh* will be restored for ritual use. The current plan is to maintain the archaeological site as an added point of interest for museum visitors.

"We have preserved our heritage here in perpetuity," Altman declares proudly. "The synagogue, cemetery, and museum are all registered as historical sites. If ever the Jewish community can no longer maintain and operate these institutions, they cannot be sold; they'll become the property of the Barbados National Trust."



During the tourist season, a dozen or so Barbadian Jews are joined each week by scores of visitors from all over the world for Kabbalat Shabbat services at Nidhe Israel—a modern version of the "Scattered of Israel." This name, chosen by its founders, "reflects the aspirations and messianic outlook of the Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition," explains Professor Watson. "In the influential book of the period, *Hope of Israel*, Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (Manoel Dias Soeiro, 1604–1657), the renowned Portuguese-born kabbalist who later moved to the Netherlands, stressed that the dispersion of Jews around the world was a portent of the pending messianic age. Even as late as 1800, this idea of hope and deliverance persisted in Barbados. The wealthiest and most influential Barbadian Jew of the time, Abraham

Rodrigues Brandon, named his plantation 'Hopeland.'"

At services in Nidhe Israel, no prayer captures the experience and mystical yearning of the founders better than the Sabbath hymn *Lecha Dodi* ("Come My Beloved"), composed by the Safed kabbalist Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz (1505–1584). In an extremely rare occurrence, *Lecha Dodi* entered the Jewish liturgy in a Sephardic prayer book published in Venice in 1584 shortly after it was written, and only seventy years before the founding of Nidhe Israel.

Lecha Dodi's uplifting refrain, "Beloved, come to meet the bride; beloved, come to greet the Sabbath," captured the hope of redemption in the hearts of Jews who were still trying to make sense of the expulsion from Spain and Portugal and who continued to be hounded by the Inquisition.

Today, as the worshipers turn to the open door of Nidhe Israel to welcome in the Sabbath bride, one can sense the stirring of the spirits of those buried outside, whose synagogue and legacy have been rescued and redeemed in our own day. □

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