



Fig. 7 Lamplighter at work on one of the large chandeliers in front of the *hechal*

Metalwork at the Portuguese Synagogue

As well as the fascinating woodwork described elsewhere, the Portuguese Synagogue contains many interesting examples of metal furnishings. The most obvious of these are the four magnificent 17th-century brass chandeliers hanging low over the main body of the synagogue. These three-tiered giants stand some 8 to 10 feet high and are supplemented by a dozen similar but smaller chandeliers together with countless wall sconces and fixed candlesticks around the building. Extra lighting is supplied by candleholders similar to chambersticks. These are of sheet brass with large pan shaped bases but instead of handles they have cone-shaped spikes underneath which fit into holes on the top of the pews.

The candle store within the Synagogue complex has a display of the various candleholders used and an interesting selection of spare parts for the chandeliers. It is still in daily use; at one point during our visit we watched the man responsible for lighting replace one of the candles in the chandelier before the *hechal*.

There is no electric light so important evening and night-time services involve lighting almost 1000 candles, a job that takes about three hours! Tucked away in a corner we noticed a very long pole with a taper holder on the end for lighting the chandeliers, together with a cone-shaped 'snuffer' for extinguishing them.

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Fig. 8 (left) Part of the lamp-room display.

Fig. 9 (above) One of the smaller brass chandeliers



Fig. 10 Detail of the bench-seat candleholders. The long, tapered ends drop into sockets drilled into the back of the benches