Stay Calm - Be Vigilant

The Community Security Trust (CST) has just published its annual report, showing a welcome reduction in the number of antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2008. But ironically this comes at the end of a month that has seen an unprecedented rise in antisemitic activity. We have been fortunate that there has been relatively little serious violence in Britain, and none that we know of in Scotland. However, we cannot ignore the statistics: in the first four weeks of 2009 the CST recorded almost half as many incidents as in the whole of 2008.

In Scotland there have been a significant number of malicious phone calls. Some, purporting to be from a journalist, demanded to know what "you people", or "the Jews", are going to do about the "war crimes" or "holocaust" in Gaza.

How should we react? First, don't panic, but be vigilant. Don't go to ground – ostriches are more, rather than less, exposed, and if we curtail communal activity, the extremists will have won.

In particular, watch out for antisemitic comments in your local paper, schools and colleges, or elsewhere. If you can, challenge them, but make sure of your facts and avoid name-calling.

And report any incidents, first to the police (on 999 if it's an emergency, to the local station otherwise), and then to

SCoJeC 0141-638 6411 or scojec@scojec.org, and the CST 0141-577 8205 or glasgow@thecst.org.uk



The Archbishop and the Rabbi

SISTER ISABEL SMYTH

For some years Archbishop Mario Conti has sent greetings to the Jewish community in Scotland at the festival of Pesach, and the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities recently reciprocated

this act of friendship by inviting the Archbishop, members of the Catholic Committee for Inter-religious Dialogue, and the Council of Christians and Jews to a celebration of Tu biShvat.

The synagogue grounds looked very beautiful in the snow and the warmth of the welcome by the members of SCoJeC to the Christian visitors made up for the cold outside. Walter Sneader, SCoJeC Chair, welcomed us, and Archbishop Conti presented Rabbi Rubin with a basket of fruit, after which we went into the synagogue where Rabbi Rubin pointed out significant features such as the Ark, and Bimah, and explained the significance of the festival. As often happens on such occasions the Archbishop and the other



Thank you to everyone who participated in our meetings about "Jewish Women". We know from these meetings, as well as from phonecalls and e-mails, that Gaza, and the consequences for Jewish people in Scotland, have been on your minds - Ephraim Borowski discusses where SCoJeC should stand.

Why were the Secretary of State and an Archbishop (separately!) in shul? Was a Roman Centurion the first Jew in Scotland? How old is Edinburgh University Jewish Society? What do Londoners and Israelis make of Burns night? And what antics are planned for Purim?

Read on to find out!

Christian visitors commented on the similarities in both faiths – which is not surprising since many of the practices and rituals in Christianity originated from Judaism.

Archbishop Conti spoke of the importance of developing good relations between our two communities. "In a world of increasing secularism", he said, "it is important that the voice of faith is heard, and together that voice can be stronger than if each individual faith speaks only for itself".

For me the whole evening was characterised by friendship. This is a strong foundation on which relations can be developed, and hopefully we will continue to meet to deepen old friendships and create new ones.

ISSUE 21

PURIM 5769

FEBRUARY 2009



The Corners of Scotland

GLASGOW SHERYL: 0141- 577 8200
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SCOTTISH COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES
SCOJEC IS A SCOTTISH CHARITY, NO. SC029438

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE, 222 FENWICK ROAD, GIFFNOCK, GLASGOW G46 6UE TEL: 0141-638 6411 FAX: 0141-577 8202

E-MAIL: SCOJEC@SCOJEC.ORG CONTACT: LEAH GRANAT 07887 488 100

FOUR CORNERS IS PUBLISHED BY SCOJEC, THE UMBRELLA REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATION OF ALL THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND. THE VIEWS EXPRESSED ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHORS, NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF SCOJEC.

JEWISH WOMEN

Looking Backwards ... Looking Forward

The last issue of Four Corners highlighted a consultation project to assess the impact of the Chief Rabbi's 1994 *Review of Women in the Jewish Community*. What impact did its recommendations – on education, synagogue and prayer, social issues, and children – have on Jewish women's lives in 21st Century Scotland?

SCOJeC has now reported to the Board of Deputies on responses gathered during meetings in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, and Lochgilphead with men and women from a variety of backgrounds: from rural to urban; from Liberal to Orthodox; from feminist to traditional. They discussed women's educational, family, and welfare facilities, as well as addressing the topics of Jewish identity and equal opportunities within the Jewish community. Opinions did not always divide along expected lines, and the report occasionally makes surprising reading. For instance, several people commented that Lubavitch is "more accepting, letting you do your own thing" than Reform, which is seen as "quite strict".

Jewish education was thought to be more important in Scotland than in Israel because "there you can feel it in the air ... here you have to work at it." However, sadly, there was general concern that Jewish education for girls has not improved significantly, that most teachers of Judaism and Hebrew have no formal training, and that small communities do not have the resources to provide appropriate training. It was recommended that communities should set up classes that involve both parents and children, and that larger communities should provide support to smaller communities to train teachers and to supply resources for lessons.

Many women still feel that there are significant obstacles to participation in the synagogue, and some members of an Orthodox synagogue expressed regret that the final word on all matters religious is in the hands of men. It was recommended that the role of women must receive urgent reexamination and that men should listen and respond positively.

It was suggested that greater effort is required to involve single people in communal activities in a welcoming way. There was overwhelming agreement about the need for the provision of childcare services, including for special-needs children, but widespread concern that small communities

do not have adequate resources. Jewish Care Scotland and Cosgrove Care, however, were highly praised for their outreach services throughout Scotland.

There was praise, too, for SCoJeC for achieving legislation to discourage parties to a civil divorce from refusing to co-operate in obtaining a Jewish divorce, but it was recommended that the success of the new legal structures should be monitored. There was also strong emphasis on the need for radical improvement in support in the community for women trapped in violent and abusive situations.

Overall, there was a strong impression that planning for the UK community takes too much account of large Jewish centres while ignoring the needs of Jewish people living in isolated and rural areas. It was frequently commented that London-based bodies "don't recognise that there's Jewish life outside the M25, let alone as far away as Scotland".

And the answer to the question "What impact did the 1994 Review have on Jewish women's lives?" – the participants agreed that it had not made any material difference to women in their community either in terms of activities or attitude! Any progress made during the last 15 years was felt to be due to "changes in society," and was not the consequence of the Review.

To see for yourself the full consultation report, please go to http://www.scojec.org/consultations/2009/09i_jewish_women.pdf



Holocaust Memorial Day

Instead of their usual business meeting on 27 January, the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day with a performance of "And Then They Came For Me" by James Still. The play tells the story of Eva Schloss, the step-sister of Anne Frank, and Eva herself attended the performance and answered questions afterwards.

It was produced by Nic Careem who writes: "Eva Schloss's passion for life and humanity inspire all those who meet her, yet in her earlier years she suffered the worst kind of inhumanity and depravity that one human can inflict on another, in the Auschwitz death camp. A third of European Jews, three million Poles, tens of thousands of Romano Gypsies, disabled, black, and mixed race people, homosexuals, communists, and others the Nazis considered inferior or problematic, were murdered. Yet the world has learnt very little from history, and thousands are still being persecuted or murdered every day somewhere in the world, because of their race, belief, or politics. Irrational hate is a destructive emotion, and the busting of it has become a mission.



EVA SCHLOSS (SEATED RIGHT), NIC CAREEM (SEATED LEFT), WITH CAST AND MSPS AT THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

"We live in a country which seemingly on the surface is a safe haven for the oppressed and persecuted, yet we have thousands of young people living in destitute conditions, many more in prison, and even more living a life without hope or opportunity. Not a day goes past when you don't read about one young man killing another for no reason other than "because he ventured into my territory". Such conditions are fertile ground for those groups in our society who pose as saviours, but in truth they promote division and discord between communities, not dissimilar to those evil men from past times. Governments can only do so much. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. The first step to ending hate starts in our own hearts, and then we have to change the hearts of our neighbours."

Nic Careem, a Muslim who feels passionately that the Holocaust must not be forgotten, has taken the play into hundreds of schools, prisons, and businesses, in an effort to make people understand the effect the Holocaust had on ordinary people like them, so that they will stand up against the hatred they see around them today.

That message certainly came across to one member of the audience, William Ross from Drummond Community High School, who reflected: "I've been to Auschwitz Birkenau and I feel that it's so important to share what I learned there and today. The people who died in the Holocaust had hopes and dreams just like the rest of us, but they were taken away from them. What happened is unreal, but we can prevent it happening again if we teach the younger generations to fight hatred."

Student Centenary

HARVEY KAPLAN

This year is the centenary of organised Jewish student activity in Scotland. Edinburgh University Jewish Society was set up in January 1909 – the first in Scotland and perhaps one of the oldest in Europe – followed by Glasgow University Jewish Society in 1911.

Edinburgh University has always attracted Jewish students from far and wide. Solomon de Leon from the Carribean island of St Kitts studied at the university as long ago as 1786, and Prussianborn Herman Lion in the 1790s – long before there was a Jewish Society. Before the Second World War, there were a number of South African Jewish students studying in the city, and in 1939, the Jewish Chronicle noted that passengers on the maiden voyage of the Mauritania included a party of 85 American Jewish medical students going home on vacation from their studies at Edinburgh. "They were a very jolly crowd and gained the admiration of all for their courtesy and sportsmanship." Even today, the Jewish Society has an international flavour amongst its membership.

This year's annual Edinburgh Jewish Student Burns Ball marked the society's milestone, and a Facebook group – "I wish Mazal Tov to Edinburgh J-Soc 1909-2009 100 Years Young" – was set up to link present and former members, who have contributed memories and photographs. The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre now plans to interview some of the oldest surviving members of the society in Edinburgh and London in order to preserve their first hand memories.

The Archives Centre has a copy of an Edinburgh University Jewish Society Magazine from March 1923, in which a member writes about the ethos of the society: "Members of the EUJS, ours is a glorious tradition! Let us be loyal to it. Today we are all together. Tomorrow we will again be scattered to the four corners of the earth. Let the EUJS be the bond of eternal union between us all – the bond of David and Jonathan."



If you are a former member of Edinburgh Jewish Student Society, or if you would like more information about the Archives Centre and its new permanent exhibition, *A New Life in Scotland*, check out the website: www.sjac.org.uk or email info@sjac.org.uk.

Purim Drinking

Join SCoJeC for a Megillah Reading &

PORTY

at Dundee synagogue 9 March, 6.45pm

FOR DETAILS CONTACT

scojec@scojec.org 0141 638 6411 TALYA SILVER

Where I live in exile, south of the Border, it's rumoured that the Scots enjoy their whisky.

"Would you like a wee dram?" my host will offer, when I'm out for dinner.

"Goodness, no!" I reply. "I can't stand the stuff. Have you got any chocolate liqueur?"

Too often I receive an astonished or even suspicious look in return, and sometimes aspersions have actually been cast on my Scottish ancestry! Aspersions, I may add, which are quite justified, since my parents only moved to Glasgow when I was eighteen months old.

But all Scottish Jews will enjoy Purim, the festival when imbibing alcohol is actually encouraged. Which, come to think of it, is quite unexpected, if not downright confusing. The lively partying and free-flowing drink contrasts strongly with our traditional image of Judaism; long-bearded rabbis swaying over large tomes, peering through thick glasses at foreign scripts, endlessly straining to decipher the word of G-d. To put it another way, why would a religion which values the intellect and the search for truth, also encourage people to do something which depresses the rational faculties and makes it impossible to think straight?

Well, actually, that's exactly the point.

The only caveat to the intellect is that we must know it has limitations. An analogy I once heard compares our knowledge to an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. The more our knowledge increases and our island swells, the larger the perimeter of coastline grows, showing us more of the ocean – and the more we realise we don't understand.

Like today and throughout history, the Jews living in the Persian empire thought they knew what was right and wrong, good and bad, the significance of different events. It made sound political sense to go to the king's feast; a boycott could put the Jews in danger. Everyone grieved at Esther's tragic fate, chained to a power-hungry wife-killer. And who could fail to be indignant at the lack of honour shown to Mordechai after he exposed an assassination plot and saved the king's life?

Yet in reality, attendance at the gluttonous celebration was the spiritual cause of the genocidal decree. The reason for Esther's position in the palace became obvious only several years later, and the king remembered Mordechai's deed at precisely the moment when they needed his gratitude to avert the decree against the Jewish people. Everything they thought they knew, the entire way they understood the world, turned out to be exactly wrong.

Purim Calendar

Ta'anit Esther: Mon 9 March

A fast from sunrise to sunset which commemorates Esther's 3-day fast before she risked her life approaching King Ahasuerous.

Purim: evening Mon 9 March and daytime Tues 10 March

Shushan Purim: Wed 11 March

Purim is celebrated a day later in cities which were walled (as was the city of Shushan) in the times of the Purim story. Just as there's a time to celebrate the intellect, there's a time to celebrate our limitations. By decreasing our reaction times and making our thoughts fuzzier, alcohol reminds us that we are not always in control, we don't know everything. Our understanding, like our selves, may be great but still finite. Acknowledging this before an infinite, omniscient G-d is a humbling and transcendental experience. And that's the spirit we drink in on Purim.

Postscript: for all those nonwhisky lovers like myself – the ideal tipple on Purim is wine. Why? There are all sorts of interesting mystical reasons, but that's for another year.

The First Jew in Scotland?

KENNETH COLLINS

The beginnings of Jewish life in Scotland go back to the first decades of the nineteenth century, when Jewish communities were established, first in Edinburgh and a few years later in Glasgow. Individual Jews had lived and worked in Scotland for some time before the formal setting up of synagogues, and indeed Heyman Lion and his wife were buried in the first Jewish cemetery in Scotland, on Calton Hill in Edinburgh, at the end of the eighteenth century.

While Christian institutions and Scottish kings were often indebted to Jewish financiers in the Middle Ages, there is no evidence that Jews lived in Scotland at the time, and it is likely that such funding came from Jews established in such English towns as York and Lincoln.

There was some interest a number of years ago in the possibility that there might have been Jews in Britain during the Roman occupation. A few Roman coins in circulation in the Eastern Mediterranean have been found in Scotland, though none of these is specifically Jewish. In parts of England there is some slight evidence of Jewish traders making contact with local merchants though this does not exist in Scotland.

One site of interest for those looking for a Jewish link with Roman Scotland is the fort on the Antonine Wall at Auchendavy near Kirkintilloch, just to the north east of Glasgow. The Second Augustan Legion was stationed at Auchendavy where four tombstones have been identified. There has been speculation from some Jewish scholars about one of these stones: that of Salmanes son of Salmanes, as the stone is decorated with a palm tree and rosettes. The name and symbols may be Jewish, although the period of the late second century saw few Jews in the Imperial Roman Army. Was this young soldier the first Jew in Scotland? At a distance of almost two millennia we may never know.



Burns the World O'er

ISRAEL

LONDON

KENNETH COLLINS

FIONA BRODIE



KENNETH COLLINS TOASTS THE LASSIES, AND PIPING IN THE HAGGIS IN ISRAEL

In January, during our recent stay in Israel, we were able to participate in two quite different Burns events organised by Scottish Israelis. On the eve of Robert Burns' 250th birthday, after Shabbat, about 70 people were led in to dinner by a piper in full Highland Dress, much to the delight of a camera crew from Israel Television (who obviously enjoyed the festivities enough to be among the last to leave).

Burns songs were sung and his poetry recited in a mixture of languages. We had Tam O'Shanter in Scots with a Hebrew translation that lost nothing of the style and rhythm of the original. Auld Lang Syne sounded good in Yiddish, and the Immortal Memory and other formal toasts were rendered with much humour and gusto by a trio of former Glaswegians.

Scottish guests had travelled from as far as Nahariya, Mazkeret Batya and the Agur Winery. Any Scottish link was cherished. Some had Scottish family connections, others had good Scottish friends, whilst others just knew someone who had once been to Scotland!

Aberdeen Online

"Welcome to the Aberdeen Hebrew Congregation. We have small services every Friday night at 6pm, and a larger (but still small!) service at 10am on the first Saturday of each month. December 2008 was very eventful, with a visit from Rabbi Rose, a communal dinner, and a Chanukah party as well as our usual Friday night and first-Shabbat-of-month services."

So reads the first entry in the congregation's new blog at http://aberdeenhebrew. blogspot.com/ which will informally report what's happening in the Granite City's Jewish community. If you are thinking of visiting the North East or would like to know more about the problems faced by a small community in maintaining a synagogue and attracting a Rabbi or even to find inspiration for a shiur, the community would welcome your interest.

A couple of weeks later we attended the Third Annual Scottish Shabbaton in Tel Aviv, once again with about 70 participants from all over Israel. Most were originally from Glasgow and Edinburgh, with just a sprinkling from Falkirk and Ayr, and the Scots were joined by some former Bnei Akiva youth leaders who had been in Scotland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Dinner on Friday night took on the form of a Burns Supper. Yet another ex-Glaswegian delivered the Ode to the Haggis and recited an animated dramatic Scots monologue about a drunken farmer and his tattiebogle.

Quite what Scotland's favourite Rabbie would have made of it, A dinna ken!

On 25th January, Finchley Synagogue was the setting for a night of tartan revelry in the best Scottish Jewish tradition, in honour of Rabbie Burns. Six Glasgow expats - Linda Goldberg, Judy Englander, Barbara Kay, Linda Reich, Louise Naftalin and Maureen Benjamin - hosted a Burns Supper, complete with kosher haggis, for 200 people with a Scots connection, and managed to raise a magnificent £10,000 for Jewish charities in Glasgow while they were at it.

The very able Master of Ceremonies for the evening was East Renfrewshire MP and Secretary of State for Scotland, Jim Murphy. Jeremy Freedman travelled down from Glasgow to address the haggis and to accompany another Glaswegian, Howard Brodie, on the guitar. Howard sang some moving and spirited Burns songs – not to mention "I Belong Tae Glasgow" and a rousing version of The Proclaimers' "500 miles"! Actress Maureen Beattie gave a spirited reply to European lawyer Tom Usher's toast to the lassies, and Scots lawyer Ross Harper led the guests on a trip down Glasgow's memory lane.

Despite a full and wholesome Scots repast washed down, of course, with a glass or two of whisky, many of the company managed to round the evening off with some fine Scottish country dancing to the music provided by the London Ceilidh Band.

A braw nicht was had by yin and all! Rabbie wid hae been proud o' us.



Secretary of Israel, Gaza, State MEETS SCOJEC

Jim Murphy, the new Secretary of State for Scotland, recently met leaders of a wide cross-section of communal organisations at Garnethill Synagogue in Glasgow, where he also toured the recently redesigned and refurbished Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. The meeting, which was arranged by SCoJeC, was attended by representatives of welfare, educational, religious, and student organisations from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee.



(LEFT TO RIGHT) GERALD LEVIN (CHAIR, GARNETHILL SYNAGOGUE), EPHRAIM BOROWSKI, AND JIM MURPHY

Unsurprisingly, many of the questions voiced concern about the rise in antisemitic activity and rhetoric during the recently-ended Israeli action in Gaza. SCoJeC Secretary Paul Spicker, who is the Vice-Chair of Dundee Synagogue, reported an atmosphere of apprehension in the Jewish community there. Walter Sneader, Chair of SCoJeC, spoke of the strain in relations between different faith communities, and this was echoed by the students who called for government support to help develop better relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Sadly, those in smaller student communities feel especially vulnerable.

The importance of education to good community relations was also highlighted by Philip Mason from Edinburgh Synagogue. Developing appropriate educational materials is, however, expensive, and he asked whether any government funding might be available to support this work.

Other matters raised included the funding and regulation of charities, and the effects of the recession on Scotland. Ethne Woldman, Chief Executive of Jewish Care, expressed concern that the government's promise to guarantee a maximum of £50,000 in any one bank is not adequate for large charities to cover their commitments. Mr Murphy undertook to raise the matter at Cabinet level, and to look at the issue of different regulatory requirements in Scotland as compared with the rest of the UK.

Mr Murphy reassured the meeting of his longstanding support for the Jewish community, pledged to look into what resources could be made available for security and education, and said that he would raise the issues with UK Ministers, adding "It's my understanding that, at such times, increased funding is available. ... I don't have a solution, but I know that the only way is to adopt a robust approach to combating extremism, and we'll do whatever is necessary to help, both on and off campus. It should be up to the wider community, not the Jewish community, to tackle antisemitism.'

AND SCOLEC

ScoJeC exists to put forward the views of the Community to Government, the media, public bodies, etc. We do that through responding to consultations of all kinds (see http://www.scojec.org/ consultations/consultations_2008.html and be surprised by the range!), meeting politicians, networking, and so on. We only go public after we have consulted widely - with the leaders of the constituent communities and communal organisations with a particular interest in the topic concerned. If there is a consensus, that is what we report; if there is not, we either report the division of opinion, or simply don't respond.

The war in Gaza is a case in point: although the vast majority of the Scottish Jewish community supports Israel, there is a minority who take a contrary view. Opinions are divided on whether the Israeli action was correct, whether it was wise tactically or strategically, whether it was "proportionate" (not "proportional" - the question is whether it the action was necessary to achieve a legitimate goal, not the ratio of casualties), and even what the facts are (remember Jenin, where the thousands of reported casualties turned out to be 56, of whom most were in uniform).

Because there is no consensus in the community, these are not matters on which SCoJeC can have a view. However, it is our place to express concern at the grossly excessive rhetoric, which does not take care to distinguish what is said about Israel from what is said about Jews, or which replicates ancient antisemitic myths, simply substituting "Zionist" for "Jew". The speaker at a recent meeting of a very major main-stream organisation claimed that "the US media is manipulated by the Jewish voice". Speaking about Barack Obama, she said that "if he steps out of line the Jews will bump him off like they did other people".

A feature of current antisemitism is that the perpetrators claim the right to define it - a senior trade union leader told his conference in 2007 that because Britain had stood against Hitler and had liberated Jewish victims of the Holocaust, "we will not have the Israeli state tell us that the boycott is antisemitic". That is in stark contrast to the principle applied in the context of other racism that if offence is taken, then offence was given.

It is not unreasonable to question the motives of some of Israel's critics - not just the ones who shout "death to all Jews" at rallies, but their more naive fellow-travellers. Why do they only want to stop some wars? Why do they not demonstrate about Kashmir, or Sri Lanka, or Darfur - conflicts in which there have been tens of thousands more casualties than in the Palestinian conflict? Antisemitism is not just physical violence against Jews, but treating Jews differently; it is not just directed against individuals, but collectives too.

So when Jewish organisations in this country and the Jewish state are singled out for criticism when they act just like other organisations and states, that is as much antisemitism as the desecration of a shul. We have an obligation to point that out, just as we must defend the right of the majority who support Israel to do so without being vilified. To uphold the right to take sides is not itself to take sides - and those who think otherwise should pause to consider what that reveals about their motives.

"Riddoch Questions"

THE SCOTTISH MULTIFAITH PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL

with Lesley Riddoch, to be broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland Sunday 8th March 2009

Giffnock Reception Area, Doors open 2pm for 2.30pm

People of seven different faiths lived and learned together - but can our differences be truly interwoven into the fabric of Scottish society?

preceded by SCoJeC Council Meeting in the Glasgow Jewish Community Centre, 12 noon - 2 pm Light lunch available - please book on 638 6411 or fiona@scojec.org