Only a few months after publishing the 400th issue of MEMO our weekly digest of information of relevance to ethnic minorities (see Four Corners issue 43), SCoJeC published the 1000th issue of PAB, the “Political Affairs Brief”, a digest of information relevant to the Jewish community that covers, amongst other things, political activity throughout the UK, in Europe, and at the United Nations, including information relating to antisemitism, community relations, shechitah, Israel, and a wide range of other topics.

Simon Johnson, Jewish Leadership Council Chief Executive:

"With so many issues to stay on top of, the Political Affairs Briefs helpfully collated by SCoJeC has become an invaluable resource to all of us at the JLC. It means that even though we are working on numerous issues in a fast paced environment, nothing slips through the net. We wish them the best of luck in their work and look forward to the next 1000 PABs!"

Vivien Wineman, Board of Deputies president:

"The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities’ (SCoJeC) Political Affairs Briefing is one of the community’s hidden gems. It is a key tool in our monitoring of issues affecting Jews in Britain, Israel and around the world. I congratulate SCoJeC on reaching this milestone. I would give the traditional blessing of ‘Until 120’, but as you have nearly already passed ten times 120 editions, it will have to be 120 years! Thanks again for all that you do for our community."

Ephraim Borowski, SCoJeC Director:

"SCoJeC does not just support and speak for the Jewish Community of Scotland, but also shares its expertise with others. MEMO, our digest of information of relevance to ethnic minorities, has just passed its 400th weekly issue, and now PAB, the Political Affairs Brief, has reached an even more significant milestone: its 1000th edition. We are delighted to collaborate with the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council on this project, and are gratified that they and others find it such a valuable resource."

Expandable Jewish Volunteering

"Brilliant, informative, and highly professional!"

That is what one of the participants said about the first session of a four week course for people who volunteer to represent the Jewish community in Scotland. This ground-breaking innovative course, supported by the Voluntary Action Fund and the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations, has been delivered by the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council in partnership with SCoJeC, and has attracted more than 25 people from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen, with one participant joining the group by video-link.

The four sessions are designed to support volunteers who wish to give talks to schools and other groups, to do interfaith work, or to act as guides for synagogue visits. Each session includes input from an expert speaker, background material about aspects of Jewish life, and a chance to practise presenting that information to different age groups. The programme was planned by a group of experienced volunteers who incorporated what they would have liked to have learned when they started speaking to non-Jewish groups about Judaism.

Presentations on this first round of the course included:

- “The curriculum for excellence – what schools want from a faith speaker”
- Jewish immigration to Scotland
- Presentation Skills
- Interfaith activity

Jewish topics have included festivals, the synagogue, and doing shul visits, the Jewish life cycle, and Jewish food and kashrut.

Zoe Jacobs (pictured top), our new SCVO-funded intern who is organising the course, said: “The course is about increasing knowledge and confidence in conveying Jewish information to a non-Jewish audience. I was impressed by people’s knowledge, enthusiasm, and creative ideas for expressing Jewish culture and history. This is the start of a real volunteering community.”

The funding for this project runs till end of March, but we hope to continue to train and support volunteers to do this important work all over Scotland. Watch this space!

Further information from Zoe Jacobs, zoe@scojec.org, tel: 07504 081219.
Unfortunately antisemitism has been very much in the eye of the media in recent weeks. In the aftermath of the terrorist outrages in Paris and Copenhagen, the rise in antisemitism across Europe that has been highlighted by several recent reports, and the raising of the security threat level in the UK. We celebrate Scotland’s traditionally positive relationship with its Jewish population but understand why events elsewhere can undermine their sense of security, belonging, and well-being, and come together unreservedly to condemn all manifestations of antisemitism in Scotland and to assert Scotland’s warm desire that Jewish people living in Scotland should feel safe, completely at home, and a key part of the multicultural Scottish community.

As political leaders in Scotland, we join together to express sadness and concern about the recent antisemitic terrorist murders in Paris and Copenhagen. We welcome this clear message from politicians and discuss their views of religion and identity. “Being both Scottish and Jewish can feel like being part of a very close family,” one participant said, adding that when someone says “I know someone Scottish and Jewish,” it often turns out to be a relative or friend. Unfortunately, recent events have resulted in less positive experiences, and another Jewish participant who has lived in Scotland for many years, and had always been very open about her judaism, told us she has recently felt “quite fearful” as a result of workplace comments during last summer’s conflict in the Middle East.

The Jewish community is not alone in suffering from racism, and a Japanese participant described the racism she had experienced, “not by words but by actions such as the way children look at me, and make slitty-eye signs”. Another participant said that it can sometimes be uncomfortable to talk about your religion in public, but felt that “you have to stand up and be counted”. A member of the Baha’i community had been asked “Are you a Billy or a Dan?” when he went to school. He had answered “I’m Jewish”, to which the other children responded, “Yes, but are you a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?”

The group also discussed the diversity to be found within individual communities, and one participant described his surprise when he visited an area of Glasgow with a large Jewish population and discovered that there were so many different levels of observance. “Enlightening, with a warmth that I really like,” was one participant’s summing up of the event, while another shared her excitement at meeting people of so many different faiths. “A garden is made up of flowers of many different shapes – it would be so dull if they were all the same.”
In Every Generation ...

I’m writing this on Tu b’Shvat, the official beginning of spring in the Jewish agricultural calendar, with an enormous orange full moon low above the frost-encrusted horizon. It might be difficult to believe while parts of Scotland are still closed by snow-drifts, but the next full moon will be Purim, and the one after that Pesach, and then it’s summer!

These are the two festivals that most closely match the stereotype of “they tried to destroy us; they failed, let’s eat!” In some ways it’s Purim that proves the rule that we read in the Pesach Hagadah: “b’chal dor vador omdim aleinu lecheloteinu” – “in every generation, enemies arise to destroy us … but the Holy One, blessed be He, delivers us from their hands”.

Yet, as the commentators note, there is no explicit mention of any divine intervention in Megillat Esther, a fact they explain with a pun on Esther’s name, which can be read as “I will hide”. So the divine hand is hidden within the story, which is part romantic novelette, part thriller, part farce, part disorderly effusion of emotional catharsis.

I’ve always loved the Megillah as a piece of literature – I suppose I learned about dramatic irony from the interruptions for palace intrigue long before I discovered Macbeth’s porter or Hamlet’s Polonius. And the sheer ebullient chaos of the final narrative – “did I already mention that Haman and his sons got their come-uppance?”, “sorry, how often!” – sounds more like a breathless live eye-witness report than measured history, far less holy writ!

But there’s still a serious message for us today. Since last Purim we have seen for ourselves that even in this generation, enemies arise to destroy us, from Hamas, whose “Covenant” includes a commitment to global antisemitic genocide, through the bedroom warriors who befoul the internet, to the targeted terrorism of theological and political zealotry.

However, we are fortunate: neither Edinburgh nor London is Shushan. The rabbinic debate whether King Achashueros in the Megillah was a collaborator with Haman, or just a compliant fool. But even a useful idiot is culpable – all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. So we have reason to be grateful for the strength of the commitment of both the UK and the Scottish authorities to countering these evils. As in the Megillah, the divine hand may not be visible, but we are blessed.

Scots Jews: AN APPRECIATION

The story of Scotland’s Jewish and Catholic communities in recent times seems to follow the same historical narrative. Until the early 19th centuries both were numerically small. That soon changed, however, with an influx of immigration to Scotland from across Europe. From the west and south, Irish and Italian Catholics arrived fleeing poverty. From the east, Slavic Jews arrived fleeing persecution.

The first post-Reformation Catholic Church in Edinburgh, St Mary’s on York Place, was opened in 1814. Two years later the first Jewish congregation in the capital was founded. Indeed, it is often suggested that the increasing Jewish population in my own neighbourhood of Morningside during Victorian times gave rise to the area’s litany of Biblical street names such as Jordan Lane, Canaan Lane, Eden Lane, and Nile Grove.

It was a similar story in Glasgow where Jews and Catholics would often find themselves living cheek-by-jowl in neighbourhoods such as the Gorbals. The city’s first synagogue was opened in the High Street in 1823. Only six years prior, the first Mass had been offered in the newly erected St Andrew’s Chapel on nearby Clyde Street.

Since then, the city’s Jewish community has drifted southwards, initially to areas such as Pollokshields and Queens Park, before settling in more recent decades in Giffnock and Newton Mearns. Similarly, the rise of a Catholic middle class in the 20th century has witnessed many of the descendants of those Irish and Italian immigrants follow an identical geographical path.

It is perhaps this shared living history of arriving, surviving and thriving that makes me warm so readily towards Judah Passow’s new photographic essay, Scots Jews, with its introductory essay by Michael Mail. Page by page, photograph by photograph, the reader is afforded an insight into the life of the Jewish community in contemporary Scotland with a clarity, vivacity and eloquence that the written word could struggle to encapsulate. I therefore have no hesitation in commending both Michael for initiating this imaginative project and photographer Judah Passow for executing that vision with such boldness and beauty.

There is, of course, a further, deeper connection between Scotland’s Catholic and Jewish communities. As Pope John Paul II observed during a visit to Rome’s synagogue in 1986: “You are our beloved brothers ... you are our elder brothers” in the faith of Abraham. In recognition of this, I offer all Scots Jews my respectful good wishes and prayers.

For information about the book and where to obtain it, see www.tartanarts.com/book.php.

LEO CUSHLEY, ARCHBISHOP OF ST ANDREWS AND EDINBURGH (PICTURED ABOVE WITH MICHAEL MAIL)

SPEARING CALENDAR

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<td>Pesach</td>
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EPHRAIM BOROWSKI
Finding out about Judaism in Dundee

Paul Spicker & Elena Nicol

We all frequently get queries from people who want to learn something more about Judaism, and promoting public understanding is an important task for Jewish communities everywhere. So Tayside and Fife Jewish Community arranged a question-and-answer session in the Dundee shul for interested enquirers. People came from all walks of life and even corners of the world – old folk, younger people, Scottish mostly, but we even had a South African! There were around 10 people, all of them very participative, interested, and a lot of questions were asked! Without advance notice, we did our best to convey the variety of opinions that Jewish people have about a wide variety of issues, including what makes a Jew, Israel, the Torah, the Messiah, the Talmud, life after death, sin, and antisemitism. It was hard at times to stay away from politics, and it is so difficult to address these topics accurately, but is good that people wanted to talk about it and ask.

One participant commented, "It was an amazing day! It was a success because people were asking! without advance notice, we did our best to convey the variety of opinions that Jewish people have about a wide variety of issues, including what makes a Jew, Israel, the Torah, the Messiah, the Talmud, life after death, sin, and antisemitism. It was hard at times to stay away from politics, and it is so difficult to address these topics accurately, but is good that people wanted to talk about it and ask." This was an experiment, but it seemed to go well and to be appreciated by the small, diverse group of people who were there, so we may do something like it again soon.

Registering a Death – New Regulations

From mid May, new regulations relating to death registration will come into force that will require a sample of death certificates to be checked by a "Medical Reviewer". There have been concerns that these would result in delays to burial, and, since Jewish law and custom is for burial to take place as soon after death as possible, SCoJeC, which is a member of the Scottish Government advisory committee on the legislation, has been working, with some success, to mitigate the impact on the community. A member of the Scottish Government advisory committee on the legislation, has been asked! Without advance notice, we did our best to convey the variety of opinions that Jewish people have about a wide variety of issues, including what makes a Jew, Israel, the Torah, the Messiah, the Talmud, life after death, sin, and antisemitism. It was hard at times to stay away from politics, and it is so difficult to address these topics accurately, but is good that people wanted to talk about it and ask.

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Chanukah came to Fort William and Inverness with a blaze of candles, oily food, and song, as people from many miles around came together for SCoJeC’s latest parties. Old and young enjoyed superb Chanukah story-telling sessions, the story heard every year and yet still totally magical, and after everyone lit candles together, and joined in singing Ma’oz Tzur, there was a hard-fought dreidel contest! The buffets of course included the traditional Chanukah fare of latkes and doughnuts, as well as bagels and lox, and a range of other delicacies.

It was a great opportunity to make new friendships and connections. Asking “Where are you from?” – “... and before that?” – “... and the family?” provided a lesson in recent Jewish history. “New York – and before that Germany”; “London East End – and before that Poland”; “Israel – and before that Hungary”; “all over the Far East – but before that the family were in Hull after arriving from Latvia”. And so it goes: no matter how dispersed geographically our ancestors became, and no matter how open or otherwise we might be about our Jewishness, we still hold our heritage dear, and gather together as one family in celebration and commemoration of our joint past. Opportunities to come together are particularly important for small groups outside the central belt, who not only live a long way from Scotland’s larger Jewish communities, but even from any other Jewish people.

... and Alloa, of all places!

Our lovely evening with well over 3 dozen participants – in Alloa of all places! who knew?! – was prefaced by my own special day with SCoJeC’s Voluntary Ambassador for the Highlands and Islands, Linda Martin, who arrived on Day 2 of her Chanukah Party Marathon Relay Event with what looked like a mini kosher mart in the back of her car, and much in need of a restorative cup of tea.

in my ‘previous life’ before moving to Scotland 14 years ago, i owned a couple of restaurants in Canada, and i love cooking for people, so was very excited and honoured to help prepare for this celebration. After discussing how many were coming – we figured around 16 – i was in charge of making the latkes to my special recipe. With many years of experience in catering and running events, i have learned one thing: when it comes to catering events where numbers are vague, it is always better to have more than enough than not enough. so we were prepared for the onslaught! however, i think that 36 people was more than either of us was expecting!

So, all latted up, and platters ready to go, and we set off to the Alloa Hall. The room was large, comfortable – but i was still wondering, ‘Who will turn up? And wouldn’t it be awesome if this space was actually filled? Were there going to be any new Jewish people i hadn’t already met in the area?’ Well, that room was filled to brimming! After a brief retelling of the Chanukah story, we lit the menorah, which was placed in the ‘fire and safety containment area’ (otherwise known as a fish tank.)

A good time was had by all – laughing, mingling, enjoying the food, and getting to meet new, local, interesting people. One of the children who participated in playing the dreidel really scored with loads of chocolate gelt AND a box of chocolates as the prize for the winner!

if it wasn’t for SCoJeC, i know that i would feel even more isolated than I am – and i am truly thankful for the work that they continue to do in bringing our Jewish community scattered across the wilds of Scotland together.
One Million and Counting!

What links St Andrews, Edinburgh, Shetland, Glasgow, Burnham-on-Sea, Ipswich, Preston, Dublin, Brooklyn, Tel Aviv, Beijing, and Oslo? Well, those were just a few of the places where people were looking at SCoJeC’s website during a single hour last month! As a result of that interest, our site received well over a million hits during 2014. The trend has been continuously upwards since we launched the site in 2006, but the sudden 63% leap from 677,800 in 2013 to 1,103,312 in 2014 took us by surprise.

Sadly, some of that increase seems to result not from good news stories, but from widespread concern at the surge in antisemitic incidents in Scotland during August and September. However, the same upward trend was seen on the many resources available on the website, from the Being Jewish in Scotland report and Jewish Way of Life teaching resource to MEMO, our weekly digest of press and politics for on matters of interest to minority communities, which recently passed its 400th issue.

So thank you to all our interested readers, and please help continue the upwards trend in 2015!

SCoJeC SUPPORTS THE Board of Deputies

The Jewish Living Experience (JLE) is an interactive touring presented by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. It is aimed at primary school children aged 8-10 years, but visitors of all ages have also been fascinated by the vast amount of information it provides about Jewish customs and practices.

When the exhibition visits an area, it is usually staffed by members of the local Jewish community, but there is no local community in Carlisle, where it was on display in December, so SCoJeC’s “Expanding Jewish Volunteering” project stepped into the breach.

During its fortnight in Carlisle, 700 schoolchildren aged 5-11 years from 17 schools visited the exhibition where they learned about Jewish festivals, kashrut, and Shabbat – the exhibition includes a table fully laid for Shabbat, and another set out as if for the Pesach Seder. They were also able to try on kippot and tallitot, spin the Chanukah dreidel, dress up and act out the Purim story, and even sample fresh challah and matzah!

Sheila Gewolb, who organised the visit for the Board, said: “The success of this exhibition was totally due to Fiona Frank’s team of volunteers. It could not have visited Carlisle without their help. Their knowledge and experience ensured that the children and their teachers now understand about our vibrant, family orientated religion, and dispelled many myths and misconceptions that could lead to prejudice and negative stereotypes.

Once again SCoJeC – a huge Thank You!”

Board of Deputies Vice-President Jonathan Arkush, said at the opening of the exhibition: “Prejudice is often based on ignorance, and the exhibition helps to counter ignorance and breaks down prejudice. The Board is grateful to SCoJeC for their dedicated volunteers who travelled long distances to staff the exhibition and conduct visitors round. They played a crucial part in the success of the JLE’s visit to the north of England.”

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SCoJeC currently discussing the possibility of bringing the Jewish Living Experience to Scotland, and would like to hear from any school, education authority, or other body interested in hosting the exhibition – contact scojec@scojec.org for more information.

Above: Howard and Fiona Brodie beside the Shabbat table.