

Hanukah party December 2012

This year we invited members and those non members who supported our community throughout the past year. Once hot drinks were served the audience of around 50 people settled to listen to Fiona Frank, who presented findings from the 'Being Jewish in Scotland' study. More information about this fascinating project, which she conducted earlier in the year, is available at http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12vii_bjis/bjis.html

Harvey Kaplan of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC) www.sjac.org.uk addressed the community and offered a humorous insight to the history of the Dundee Hebrew Congregation. His presentation suggested that the first Jews came to Dundee in the early 19th century and the main content of his presentation is noted below:

From about 1840, Jewish agents from Hamburg and elsewhere in the German states came to Dundee to purchase cheap linens and packing cloths and the first Jews to settle in the city were flax, linen and jute merchants. They quickly integrated and assimilated.

The community grew in the late 19th century with the arrival of East European immigrants and established 2 congregations in late 1880s – small prayer room in Ward Street opened by Lithuanian Jewish immigrants – and another offshoot in Bank Street. Both Ward St and Bank St congregations petitioned the Chief Rabbi in London to send them a schochet in 1883 – he sent Hirsch Levi to the Ward St congregation – he fell out with them and defected to the Bank St congregation – case went to the small debtors court -but the 2 congregations eventually merged. By 1885, there were about 50 Jewish families in Dundee.

In 1889, 10-month-old Isabella Nathan became the first Jew to be buried in the Eastern Cemetery in Arbroath Road, which has served as the Jewish cemetery up to the present day. SJAC has list of 163 Jewish burials in Dundee, 1889-2012 – also set of about 110 photos taken of individual Jewish tombstones c2001

In 1901, there were around 130 Jews in Dundee, and the synagogue had 30 seatholders. The synagogue Hebrew School (established in 1893) had 29 scholars: 22 boys, two girls and five infants. In 1920, the Dundee synagogue was moved to 13 Meadow Street. The premises, which accommodated 70-100 people, were gifted by Sir Maurice Bloch. The future Prime Minister Winston Churchill, then a Dundee MP, had been one of the contributors to the Synagogue Building Fund in 1919.

It is estimated that there were 20 to 30 Jewish families in Dundee in the 1930s and there was a cheder under Rev Franks. In 1938, when the minister was Rev. M Isaacs, a Dundee Zionist Society was formed. The community was at its peak after the Second World War, with about 35 to 40 families and a minister, Rev. M Segal. In the late 1940s, the tiny community still boasted a burial society, a Benevolent Society, the Ladies' Holy Vestment Society, Bnei Akiva, WIZO and JNF.

By 1970, there were only 30 to 40 Jews left in Dundee. The synagogue was demolished in 1973 because of the redevelopment of that area of the city centre, and the city council paid for the erection of a new building, opened in 1978. Dr Albert Jacob, who now lives in Beersheba, Israel, was leader of the Dundee Jewish community in the

1970s/80s has written his story of the political difficulties of that period – twinning with Nablus/ anti-semitic daubings on the synagogue etc . His book entitled “The Day It Hit the Fan – Memoirs of a Reluctant Politician is available on Amazon <http://www.amazon.com/The-Day-Hit-Fan-Politician/dp/097485249X>



Both Harvey and Fiona gave people an opportunity to ask further questions before Bill Shackman, the Chair of Tayside and Fife Jewish Community offered a personal reflection on the meaning of the festival to Jews in Scotland and elsewhere.

It was after this concluding note that we all moved to the main hall to light the candles and enjoy the kosher latkes and donuts, which were brought especially from Glasgow.



We want to thank all those who helped us to make our party a successful, informative and extremely tasty event. Special thanks to ScoJec and SJAC for their specific input and contribution.