Scotland’s Jews are a well-integrated minority community, whose origins date back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. The first Jews were mainly merchants and small traders from England, Ireland and Germany who founded the first synagogues in Edinburgh in 1816–1817 and in Glasgow in 1821.

Over the following decades their numbers remained small, reaching around 1,600 in 1881. However, economic pressures and persecution triggered an exodus of Jews from Russia after 1882 and large numbers flowed through Scotland on their way to America and other destinations. After World War I, Jews began entering Scottish universities in significant numbers, achieving professional qualifications, especially in medicine and law. The community peaked at about 20,000 in the 1930s and remained at approximately that level until the 1960s. Since then, numbers have decreased markedly, due mainly to an aging population, emigration to England and abroad, and growing assimilation into the wider society.

While preserving their religious and cultural identity, they are now part and parcel of Scotland. Over the past two centuries they have contributed out of proportion to their numbers to arts and sciences in Scotland, as well as to its social and political life.

The Jewish Experience in Scotland

From Immigration to Integration

When did Jews arrive in Scotland?
Where did they come from?
Where did they settle?
How many Jews are in Scotland today?
What community frameworks did they set up?
Have they become part of Scottish society?

Most settled in Glasgow and Edinburgh, but others spread out and formed small communities in Dundee, Greenock, Ayr, Falkirk, Inverness and Buckhaven.

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Most of these newcomers worked in immigrant occupations. In 1901, for example, a third were peddlers and one fifth were in tailoring. Gradually they opened small shops and went into manufacturing, in some cases developing businesses on a national scale. In parallel they developed a comprehensive communal structure to care for their religious, educational, welfare, social and cultural needs.

About this exhibition

This exhibition is based on a major demographic and genealogical study of Scotland’s Jews. The research was sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund and was supervised by the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem and funded in large part by the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. It was approved by the Chief Rabbi of Scotland for the Chief Rabbi of Scotland and the Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth of the United Kingdom for the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom.

Jewish communities

This map and graph show Jewish community numbers in 1801, their population, date of foundation and dissolution, where relevant.

Estimated numbers of Jews in Scotland 1821–2011

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Origins of Scotland’s Jews

Family tree, courtesy of Michael Tobias.

Mainly post-WW2 with most present at the start of the decade had migrated into its care. The Jewish community took most of them as the Nazi menace grew. Admitted about 700 unaccompanied refugee children (1939) into its care. From 1939 to 1945, around 5000 Jewish children were interned in transports in Germany and died. The Single Light launched his second book of Holocaust memoirs, "Witness to Survival," in commemoration of his mother and others in the Scottish Parliament at the launch of his second book of Holocaust memoirs, "Witness to Survival," in commemoration of his mother and others in the Scottish Parliament at the

Scotland’s first Jews

This map illustrates the origins of Scottish Jews (1841–1901) in their generation, courtesy Michael Tobias.

The early Jewish community in Scotland was mainly post-WW1 with some integrating into Scottish society. In this period, relatively few immigrants arrived in Scotland, and some were not permitted residence status and accommodation to their new life. In this period, relatively few immigrants arrived in Scotland, and some were not permitted residence status and accommodation to their new life.

Immigration

The Jewish Experience in Scotland

Scotlands oldest Jewish families

The Single Light's family, courtesy Michael Tobias.

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Collins cap-making shop

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Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts. He became Chairman of the Council of the Wyndham Ltd, which managed theatres in from 1883. In 1895, he founded Howard &

Bailie Michael Simons (1842–1925)

An outstanding biochemist and clinician, he was to be appointed to a Regius Chair, that of Materia

Vilna (Vilnius) and Riga, was the first Scottish Jew

Supreme Court (2003–2006). Formerly a Sheriff in Scotland and was appointed the Queen's Sculptor

Lady Hazel Cosgrove was born in Glasgow in 1946.

The Rt. Hon. Lady Hazel Cosgrove CBE  (1946–)

Barney Covitz (1913–1997)

Myer Galpern was the first and so far only Jewish

Ronald J. K. Galpern of Shettleston.

'Pony ambassador'. Bloch was for many years the premier whisky in the 1950s was the

Bloch Brothers (Distillers) Ltd. in Glasgow, which

Sir Maurice Bloch (1891-1964) was born in

Sir Isaac Wolfson was born in Glasgow, the son

Sir Isaac Wolfson (1897–1991)

A growing number of Jews settled in the suburbs of Dundee. With his brother Joseph, he founded

Goldberg Stores

Goldberg Stores

Religious & inter-religious leadership

Societies

Business & philanthropy

Art & literature

Academia, civil society & politics

Some of the small, beach-downs developed into a

Cecil P. Taylor was born in Glasgow, into a strongly

C. P. Taylor (1929–1981)

Supreme Court (1999–2003), was an Associate Judge of the High

Rev. Dr. I. K. Cosgrove and Rev. D. McMahon

93rd Boy Scouts

Integration & contribution

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