

THE EDINBURGH

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MITZVAH DAY 2016

EDINBURGH JEWISH COMMUNITY DOES ITS BIT

L to R: Gershon Mendick (schlepper), Janet Mundy, John Danzig, Carol Levstein, Stew Green, Lesley Danzig, Bob Lerman (clothes sorters). These doughty volunteers were joined by many others during the course of the day.

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Mitzvah Day 2016 - Janet Mundy

It's 5.30pm on Sunday 27th November – Mitzvah Day, and I've just come back from spending an exhausting, but highly rewarding, day alongside 30 other Jewish volunteers, and many others, sorting and packing clothes and other items to send to refugee camps throughout Europe.

Like Jews all over the UK, the Edinburgh Jewish community got together to donate our time to support a non-Jewish charitable activity in keeping with Tikkun Olam, Gemilut Chasadim and Tzedek. In Edinburgh, we chose to support Re-Act, a not for-profit international humanitarian aid project working to help bring vital supplies and support to displaced refugees across Europe. This is a fantastic organisation with values true to those behind Mitzvah Day. We have a responsibility to help those who are suffering through no fault of their own, and the plight of refugees in the 21st century, particularly at present fleeing Syria, reminds us of the horrors of the 20th century for Jews. Just as Jews were desperate that the world should not turn their back then, so are today's refugees desperate now. We made that link as well for the cheder children, most of whom were too young to volunteer on the day but instead heard from two speakers: Francoise Robertson, who spoke of her experience coming to the UK as a refugee when a baby, and a student, Lydia, who spent a week working at the Calais camp before it closed and talked about how she befriended young refugees to help them learn to speak English.

Re-Act organises collections every month in Edinburgh (and in other Scottish towns and cities) and recruits volunteers to work 3-hour shifts to take in donations and to sort them into different categories for women, men, children and babies plus toiletries, camping equipment, toys etc. It is a never-ending process, for as quickly as the bags are sorted, more donations come in. By half way through the day, we were told that we had already sorted 210 sacks ready for delivery to a camp in Thessalonika, Greece, and there were still nearly 400 to go!

I was delighted that so many Mitzvah Day volunteers joined in, aged from 12 to at least half a century older! Everyone worked really hard, but we were able to snatch conversations with other volunteers as well as family of refugees from Syria, who volunteer with the charity themselves, but also benefit from some of the donations. They were at the heart of what Mitzvah Day, and Re-Act, are all about, and I was very honoured to have been a part of it. I hope some of us will be able to continue to help Re-Act (see www.re-act.scot or follow them on Facebook). In the meantime, many thanks to everyone who volunteered their time on the day, and also those who donated items.

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HANUKAH MESSAGE

We live in interesting and disturbing times. There seems to be a wave of narrow nationalism and xenophobia sweeping the western world. From Brexit to Trump, voters in advanced democracies appear to be rejecting openness and tolerance for closed doors and rejection of the other. At the same time, avaricious authoritarian regimes are challenging the rules that keep us all safe. Not coincidentally, this has been accompanied by a rise in anti-Semitism and especially in the acceptance of anti-Semitic discourse. If you believe in a globalised, open and tolerant world where countries respect the rights of minorities and abide by mutually applicable rules you may be feeling lonely. Especially if you are Jewish. Yet there is hope in the story of Hanukkah. The Hasmoneans, in seeking to stand up for religious freedom and save Judaism, not only faced the mighty Greek empire, they also had to contend with many Jews who sided with the Greeks and actively promoted their agenda. (Some things don't change.) Yet they believed that, despite their small numbers, they could turn the tide. Although they were a minority even among the Jews, they managed to prevail against much larger forces. The small light that they lit expanded and overcame the oppressive darkness that surrounded them. They became a symbol for all generations of the dictum that a little light can dispel much darkness. A few acts of good can overcome much evil. That is a message of hope especially relevant this Hanukkah.

חנוכה שמח

Hanukah Sameach

Rabbi David Rose

RABBI'S BLOG

The last two months have been interesting. After Yom Tov I travelled to Israel for two weeks for a family wedding and meetings with various people. In an amazing fortuity, one of the people I was advised to contact turned out to be a former Shabbat guest of mine in Edinburgh. I ended up spending a lovely Shabbat with them in Haifa and it just shows how the hospitality we show to visitors to Edinburgh can sometimes end up being reciprocated. Back in Scotland I spent a fascinating evening as a guest of the American consulate, meeting members of US-Scottish exchange programmes. This was in consequence of having gone on such a program myself in 2004. I have started kiddushes (biscuits and coffee) on Friday night which, despite the normal scepticism of anything new, have turned out to be a great success. People appreciate a small snack when the services ends around 4pm. The timing of Hanukkah this year unfortunately presents an interesting challenge but I will try to do something on Hanukkah itself, if anyone is interested. There is also an idea of having themed Friday night dinners for which people have shown some enthusiasm. The practicalities of keeping, for example, Chinese food hot on Friday night still need to be worked out, but hopefully something will happen in January. Enjoy the Hanukkah/Winter break, whatever you're doing.



The Star says good bye and rest in peace to Jonathan Kish, who passed away suddenly in November. Jonathan was a great contributor to EHC, attending every possible service and helping to make up the Minyan. He was also a staunch supporter of the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society and an active contributor to the Association of Jewish Refugees. Jonathan is mourned by six children and the whole of our community.



COMMUNITY CENTRE WALK – 30 OCTOBER 2016



Reported by Harriet Lyall



Traprain Law is a “whale-backed” eminence extruded by glacial action from the surrounding alluvial plains. Its flanks are deeply gouged by quarrying, which has left sheer walls of stone, now used recreationally by climbers. The circuit began with a short, steep clamber through woods, before picking carefully along a path of tussocks, partly trampled and grazed by the resident Exmoor ponies. From the summit of the Law, the fields are a patchwork of browns and yellows, with a line of trees marking the course of the River Tyne towards North Berwick. Turning around, we looked across the valley to Whittingehame House, half-hidden by trees, nestling in a fold of the land.

I arrived last at the summit, huffing and puffing, albeit much encouraged by the other walkers. The Sperbers, Danzigs, Rifkinds and Levstein Griffins, Betsy, Janet, Suzie Kelpie and the whippet Rupert were all already there, calmly taking the air as if the taxing perpendicular ascent they had just achieved were a mere bagatelle. The ponies had assembled on the Law’s flat top, where they stood in a circle, perhaps hoping to scrounge titbits. Nearby sat Jonathan Danzig, gazing out over the immemorial landscape steeped in history and immersed in the deep silence of the countryside...a pony sidled nearer and nearer to him and suddenly turned and licked the back of his head! Jonathan executed a double somersault out of sheer surprise, while the pony ambled away, its eye glinting mischievously and a subtle smile playing round its lips. We feasted on a picnic lunch of sandwiches, scrumptious lemon cake and chocolate brownies, apples, brambles, pomegranates and tangerines as befits the season, before driving back home along the tree-lined country lanes of Haddington and across the Lammermuirs in their exquisite autumnal tints.

SHABBAT UK

Shabbat UK is a recent innovation by Chief Rabbi Mirvis, and it has been a resounding success all around the UK. In Edinburgh, on 10 November, we again had a mass Challah baking night for the community and for the JSoc, led by Rabbi and Rebbetsin Bodenheim. The actual Shabbat UK was led by Rabbi Samuel de Beck Spitzer, who conducted Friday night and Shabbat Services and learned with the community. There was a Friday night dinner and a lunch, as well as a Seudah Shlishit. On Saturday night, Rabbi Spitzer, who is also an opera singer, gave a recital of many famous pieces, from classical operas to contemporary musicals. This amazing institution is set to go from strength to strength.



Mass Challah baking 10 November.



Rabbi Bodenheim takes a break with the bakers.



The audience enjoying the singing Rabbi.



Rabbi de Beck Spitzer with accompanist Hannah Harnest.

The Star gives a hearty thank you to our patrons.

**Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation
Sukkat Shalom**

Mr and Mrs Peter Bennett

Mr and Mrs Sidney Caplan

Mr John & Lady Hazel Cosgrove

Mr & Mrs Mickey Cowen

Mr & Mrs John Donne

Mrs Zena Eunson

Mr & Mrs Alick Glass

Mr & Mrs Edward Green

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REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

The annual Remembrance Sunday service took place on 13 November at EHC, followed by the annual tea. Raymond Taylor, Chair of EHC, referred to the bequest from the late Violet Oppenheim which had founded the tea, and thanked all who attended and all who had helped.



Standard Bearers Sidney Caplan and Philip Oppenheim.



Members and visitors take tea in the Marian Oppenheim Hall.

EDINBURGH JEWISH LITERARY SOCIETY AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL PURSUITS



The 'Lit' season opened on 30 October with Jeremy, Lord Beecham, speaking about his experiences as a Jewish Peer. He has a local government background and has been in the Lords for about 7 years. He had many amusing anecdotes and a few serious messages about the importance of the Second Chamber but also the need for reform. The meeting was chaired by Sue Lieberman and the vote of thanks was given by Charlie Raab.

On 27 November the Lit again held a 'double bill' which is almost a Limmud session, with two speakers at one event, separated by a buffet supper. The first speaker was Rabbi Michael Harris, whose book 'Faith without Fear' debates some of the outstanding problems facing modern orthodoxy. One of these issues is the role of women. Rabbi Harris talked about how some laws on the status of women and men are immutable from the Torah while others reflect the times and can be changed as the norms of society change. The exact boundary between these two categories is a matter of debate by modern orthodox halachists. Rabbi Harris was not phased by questions on partnership minyanim and women rabbis, the answer to the first being cautious 'no' and the second a surprising 'yes'. This session was chaired by Jane Ansell and the vote of thanks was given by Rabbi Rose.

The session after supper had Ellen Galford talking about how Yiddish figured in her New Jersey childhood and featured readings from her moving but hilarious book, 'Eavesdropping on the Ancestors'. Yiddish can be used to discuss a wide range of issues, from food and cooking to micromanaging the cosmos, where superstition features large. The session was chaired by Heather Valencia and the vote of thanks was given by Elaine Samuel.



Ladies are learning together in Edinburgh and on 21 November, medical student Sarah Levy talked about Jewish medical ethics at a session at the home of Elaine Samuel. This was most enjoyable and educational. Thanks to Sarah, we did it ourselves without any Rabbi present.

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