

CURRIE & DISTRICT
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
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Currie Toll 1897

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Hello Friends,

As I write this introduction to the current “Chronicle” in early March M.P.s in the House of Commons are facing a number of crucial votes on BREXIT. So roll on 29th March!!

However CDLHS Committee and members have a much more important matter to consider over the next year. How do we celebrate the Society being 50 years old on 16th of June 2020.

The Committee would therefore welcome ideas from members over the next few months on how to go about ways of acknowledging this momentous occasion. So please get your thinking caps on and come up with some ideas (contact the President, Secretary or any of the Committee Members).

In early December 2018 Eddie Shaw (our Technical Sound Engineer) gave us a stimulating talk on the “History of the Jewish Settlement in Edinburgh”. I have made a synopsis of Eddie’s talk from his notes so you can read them at your leisure. (See over).

Ronnie Dickson – Chronicle Editor

JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN EDINBURGH

The first firm evidence of Jews in Scotland dates back to the mid-17th Century, when some converted European Jews were to be found teaching at Scottish universities. Julius Conradus Otto from Vienna became Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Tongues at Edinburgh in 1641.

In 1691, David Brown became the first openly –practicing Jew permitted to reside and trade in the city.

Throughout the 18th Century , other Jews arrived in small numbers. There were Jewish medical students at Edinburgh University as early as 1767. For example, Joseph Hart Myers from New York graduated MD at Edinburgh University in 1779. In 1788 Herman Lyon, from Prussia, was a dentist and Chiropodist in the Canongate.

Background to Movement of Jews to Scotland

The first Jewish congregation gathered for worship in Edinburgh in 1816 and a second synagogue was founded in Glasgow in 1823 . During the 19th Century, more Jews arrived, many fleeing from persecution in the Russian Empire.

The Jews (and the recently arrived Irish) found themselves at the very bottom of the social scale. Many Jews settled in the Gorbals, a district of high population density on the banks of the Clyde, where tenements were packed with families living in slum conditions. However no one persecuted the new arrivals and, while there was some prejudice, blood-thirsty mobs were not about to attack and burn the Gorbals to the ground.

In a pleasing irony, the only political institution committed to a policy of anti-Semitism, the British Union of Fascists, were not welcomed in Scotland – but for all the wrong reasons. When the BUF leader, Oswald

Moseley, swaggered into Edinburgh in 1934, he and his followers were attacked on Princes Street by the Protestant Action Group. John Cormack, their leader, believed that the fascists were Italians and therefore dangerous Roman Catholics.

When a Jewish community becomes established in an area, one of the first things they do is acquire land for burial.

In 1793 Herman Lyon bought a plot of land on Calton Hill for burial.

1820 saw the first Jewish cemetery in Scotland. In 1820 a small Jewish cemetery was opened in Braid Place (now Sciennes House Place), which was used until 1867. The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC) has a list of approximately 30 burials which took place there. In fact, some Jewish people came from Glasgow to inter relatives here.

Around 130 Jews were buried in Newington (Echobank) Cemetery, from about 1869 to the early 1960s.

The first Jewish burial in Piershill was that of Paulina Camberg in 1890 and there have been around 1600 burials since then.

Historical Background in England

The Jewish population of England grew extensively under William the Conqueror from 1066. Henry 1 was the last King of the Norman line and his nephew Stephen of Blois invaded England to claim the throne. The anarchy lasted for twenty years with parties supporting Stephen and Matilda, Henry's daughter, fighting each other.

Under the Plantagenet's Henry the Third and Edward the First the Jews became increasingly ostracised by church and state. In January 1251 the church became increasingly repressive against the Jews, ordering that Jewish worship in synagogues should be inaudible to Christians. Jews were also forbidden from employing Christian nurses or domestic

help, Jews could not eat or buy meat during Lent, and no Jew could stop another Jew from becoming a Christian.

In 1280 Jews were ordered to listen to the conversion sermons of the Dominicans and to stop building new synagogues. They were to wear an oblong white badge and pay tithes to the church. Christians were not permitted to eat at Jewish tables or to be attended by Jewish doctors.

On 18th July 1290, the Jews were ordered to leave England by All Saints Day. They were permitted to take with them only what they could carry and all other possessions went to the King, Edward 1. Sixteen thousand Jews left England at this time. Their exclusion from England was not ended until 1655 when Oliver Cromwell permitted their return.

Synagogues in Edinburgh

As I mentioned above, the first Jewish congregation gathered for worship in Edinburgh in 1816 and a second synagogue was founded in Glasgow in 1823. During the 19th Century more Jews arrived , many fleeing from Russian persecution.

The first synagogue in Edinburgh was established in Richmond Court in 1816 or 1817 and held sixty seven people. Michael Tobias has made a study of this period and is convinced that there is an existing photograph of 5-6 Richmond Court (the location of the synagogue at this time).

From around 1818, Meir Rintel was the first minister (rabbi) of the congregation. The map of the early 1800s shows six synagogue sites, with the earliest one being at 22 North Richmond Street (which became the Greener Schul) which was predominantly Yiddish speakers. The people were tradesmen and traders.

1868 Park Place Synagogue

The Edinburgh community remained at around 150 people throughout the 1840s and 1850s, but by 1871 had risen to around 250 and moved to a new premises at Park Place in 1868.

In 1868 a new synagogue was consecrated in an 18th century mansion, Ross House in Park Place, "owing to the total unsuitability and unfitness of the locale of the old synagogue." It accommodated over 100 worshippers (95 men and 50 women) and was in use for 30 years. It was demolished when the site was required for building the University Union.

1896 Graham Street Synagogue



By the 1890s there were around 1000 Jews in Edinburgh. In 1896 the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation moved to a converted chapel in Graham Street. The Scotsman newspaper of 14th February 1898 reported on the consecration of the new synagogue by Chief Rabbi Adler – an occasion of "great rejoicing yesterday among the Jewish community in Edinburgh" Dr Adler passed under the arched arms of the young stewards " ... who wore evening dress with rosettes, and carried wands of office decorated with blue and white ribbons..."

Graham Street Synagogue was enlarged in 1913, and in use until the present synagogue in Salisbury Road was opened in 1932.

There was a cheder (elementary school teaching basics of Judaism) in its basement. Rev. Jacob Mendel Teitleman was Chazan or Reader for more than a quarter of a century at Graham Street Synagogue. There were other small congregations in the city, other than Graham Street and Dalry.

A group of Jewish workers had come from Leeds to work in the slipper factory in Guthrie Street, where one of the rooms was fitted out as a synagogue.

Another small synagogue in Lothian Street (later South Clerk Street) was known as the "Bolshie Shul".

In Richmond Street (later Roxburgh Street), there was a Yiddish-speaking congregation – the "Greener Shul" – founded in 1895 and in use until 1921. This was led by the Rabbi Jacob Rabinowitz initially. This took over from the earlier synagogue established in North Richmond Street.

1880 Dalry Hebrew Congregation

The Dalry Hebrew Congregation was established by a group of waterproofers, who had moved to Edinburgh from Manchester and worked for the Caledonian Rubber Company. They established a synagogue in Caledonian Crescent in 1880. In 1890 the congregation moved to a larger building, known as the "blecheneh shul" because of its tin roof (probably one of the "iron churches" showcased in the September 2018 Currie Chronicle. This building was in use until the

First World War. The Jewish Year Book estimated that the congregation still consisted of around 35 families in 1901.

Jewish involvement in Edinburgh Life

- Changes in economic status and profession were major drivers.
- Early Jewish folks settled around the Canongate, followed by Leith, Dalry and the area around Edinburgh University.
- After World War 1 there was a population shift to Edinburgh's southern suburbs which is highlighted by the construction of the current synagogue in Salisbury Road.

1932 Salisbury Road Synagogue

In 1932, when the community was 1600 strong, a new synagogue was consecrated by Chief Rabbi Dr J H Hertz in Salisbury Road – "a house of worship worthy of the mother community of Scotland" - , in the presence of the Lord Provost and other civic worthies. 1,400 guests were entertained at a reception in the Palais de Danse.

Over 230 years of Jewish life in Edinburgh is revealed through the topographical recording of the city. Homes and businesses are mapped, revealing changes both in economic status and in profession. Beginning with the earliest documented Jewish settlers living around Canongate, three distinct areas of activity then become apparent: Leith, Dalry and the streets around the University of Edinburgh – the synagogue being the axis for each community. After World War 1, there was a population shift to Edinburgh's southern suburbs, highlighted by the construction of the new synagogue in Salisbury Road in 1932.

Now the Jewish community is much reduced. Glasgow was its main centre for many years, but according to the 2001 Census only about 5000 live in and around the city. Most of the remainder of a tiny

remnant of 6400 live in Edinburgh (Liberton and Morningside) and Dundee (Arbroath Road 1889) and Aberdeen (Mugiemoos Road 1911). The reasons for decline are straightforward. When individuals marry outside their faith (and Jewish custom is clear about this) they usually cease to be formally Jewish. After integration and assimilation, emigration has also caused the Scottish community to shrink. Many have gone south to Manchester or London, some to settle in Israel. Gateshead and Leeds still have Jewish communities and there are smaller groups in other cities such as Lincoln.

Population Changes

The above example shows step-migration in action, with those who arrive first in a new place bringing others in their wake. As the cancer of anti-Semitism grew in the first half of the twentieth century many more Jews came from Eastern Europe. By 1950, the Jewish community in Scotland had grown to 80,000. The writer and academic David Daiches believed Scotland to be a haven when he noted that, of all of the countries of Western Europe it had no history of institutional anti-Semitism.

Text of Mediaeval Song

Give us back our Jews

For the Jews were debonair

Greatly more , in this affair

Than now the Christians are.

Eddie Shaw CDLHS