

magnificent steel truss viaduct, built by Bouch, designer of the ill-fated Tay Bridge; remembered for the latter, his pioneering work developing railways during the mid-Victorian years is largely forgotten. Leaving the railway, we dropped steeply through woods to Bilston Burn, then up equally steeply on the other side to emerge onto a narrow ridge revealing a fine view over an oxbow of the North Esk. Another steep drop to the river, then along the undulating wooded river path southward back towards the Chapel, passing Horthenden Castle and Wallace's Cave, where once a whole army was concealed, emerging finally right underneath Roslin Castle, which brooded dramatically, silhouetted against the bright afternoon sky.

Thus was our foray into local history completed and £120 raised for the Community Centre.

## Cheder Report

### Out of School for Cheder

This year Cheder ended most satisfactorily for 21 'students' and staff. Susan Hyams handed out the beautiful books with great dignity, and graciously received a bouquet of flowers from Sonya Rosen in response. Rabbi Rose delivered the end of term report, which was followed by an unprecedented and most generous gesture made by Morris Caplan who presented children and parents, who had attended the family service regularly, each with a lovely kiddish cup.

In view of the hitherto wet weather, picnic fare was consumed in the Shul garden in order to forestall possible disaster by definite access to shelter if necessary. Following lunch, the company repaired to the Royal Park armed with football, play parachute, blankets and raincoats. Shortly after

the Rabbi demonstrated his goalie skills, Jackie arrived with the ubiquitous orange segments. The sun peeped coyly out of the rain clouds and finally shone down with great deliberation, on a very satisfactory end to the year.



# Being Jewish in Ekaterinberg

Irina Fridman

I came to Edinburgh to study at the SUISS International Summer School. I was lucky enough to receive a Sloan Street Trust scholarship, which supports Jewish students from Russia. As I have the opportunity I would like to thank all involved people for giving me a chance to get acquainted with Scottish literature, and the highly-skilled professor staff of the SUISS and it goes without saying to experience the kindness and the hospitality of the Edinburgh Jewish community.

I live in Yekaterinburg, which is situated close to the Ural Mountains, right in the middle of Russia – on the border between Europe and Asia. The city is famous for various historical reasons: it is the place where the last royal family was killed and Boris Yeltsin, the first Russian president, was born. There are about 1.3m people, and it's often called the third capital of Russia. There are about seven thousands Jews who live here.

The Jewish community was organised in our city in 1842 just after the first Jews settled here. But it received official status only in 1920. At that period it owned several synagogues but by 1937 all of them had been destroyed and the community stopped its activity.

Only in the beginning of the 90's some innovative Jews began to get together to study national culture, traditions and customs. Then the first Jewish charity organisation appeared.

In 1993 a group of Jewish women arranged *Menorah Community Centre* to help elderly Jews in different aspects, to celebrate Jewish holidays and to involve youth in Jewish life.

The Hillel Youth Club receives many requests for projects which would cover a variety of interests and age groups:

Literary and Music Hall introduces Jewish music in connection with literature about

Jews; *New Names* programme sponsored by American Distributed Community JOINT supports young talented musicians and singers;

Intellect club invites guest writers to read and discuss new books and movies;

Family club arranges activities for Jewish families: concerts, parties, lectures, intellectual games on Jewish history and traditions;

Old People Club organises Kabbalat Shabbat services and discussions on various topics;

Jewish kindergarten provides primary kids education with elements of Jewish traditions; culture and Hebrew learning;

At Sunday Art School kids from 8 to 16 learn Jewish songs, dances, poems, prepare concerts for Jewish Holidays celebrated by the Community, take part in festivals and competitions all over Russia;

Jewish Exhibition Centre arranges photo and art exhibitions of Jewish

interior, accessories and other things;

Both my parents are Jews and most of their friends are Jews as well, so I always knew that I am Jewish by birth. When I was a child I was perfectly sure that being a Jew means to be a good person. I was a rather active and communicative child and I used to convince my Russian kindergarten mates that they were Jews as well. Now I can imagine what a shock it should have been for their parents to hear one day, that their absolutely Russian child considered him or herself to be a Jew. When I studied at school I found out that the teacher wrote in the journal the nationality of each pupil and to avoid troubles she wrote everyone Russian. I was very much displeased with that and tried to make her change my nationality into the "right" one, she asked my parents to come to school immediately after that.

When I was twelve my mother sent me to the Jewish Sunday Art School where I was taught to dance and to sing in Hebrew and Yiddish. It's funny to say that neither we nor our teachers (young girls, boys and women) could speak either of these languages but we learnt the songs by heart and tried to remember some words. It was very interesting and exciting to be close to your native culture.

Then the Jewish Agency *Sochnut* began to arrange entertaining Jewish camps. We studied Hebrew, learnt Israel history and geography and got acquainted with Jewish philosophy, traditions and holidays. In the evenings we had great self-prepared shows full of irrepressible humour. Once we were taken on an excursion by train. We were waiting for the train at the platform all in white caps with the sign in Russian "Jewish Agency". A middle-aged Russian woman was passing by, looked at our caps and asked in disgust: "And are all of you Jews?" There were about hundred young Jews there who just burst out laughing. She blushed and ran away. It was probably the first time when I realised that I'm really proud of being a Jew.

I'm involved in Jewish life for already more than 12 years. There were some sad moments but mostly it has been an exciting and interesting experience. I especially like last two years when I was a director of Hillel-Yekaterinburg. Hillel started in the USA and now it is the largest Jewish campus

organisation in the world. Hillel is The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which provides opportunities for Jewish students to explore and celebrate their Jewish identity through its global network of over 500 regional centres, campus foundations and Hillel student organisations. Hillel is working to provoke a renaissance of Jewish life.

Hillel's mission is to maximise the number of Jews doing Jewish things with other Jews. Hillel actively seeks to engage uninvolved Jewish students on their own terms: to provide them with opportunities to do Jewish things that are meaningful and appealing to them. Students are empowered to take responsibility for their Jewish identity, whether they wish to participate in a community service project, express themselves artistically, participate in a social event, engage in informal Jewish learning or attend religious services. Any student may participate in Hillel - no membership is required. Hillel is committed to a pluralistic vision of Judaism that embraces all movements.

Our parents, and sometimes even grandparents, know nothing about Jewish culture and traditions, let alone Hebrew. Some knew at least a little about Jewish history and holidays, but not many. The students, who decided to organise Hillel in our city wanted Jews to get acquainted with their own culture. Because so many people were unable to understand such concepts re-acquaintance had to be interesting, easy-to-remember and entertaining:

You don't read Hebrew? It's not a problem! Just few of us do. Hillel students made Siddurs writing Hebrew words with Russian letters. It was not innovative but still it was very comfortable. While conducting Shabbat service every prayer was explained by midrash (a story) or from traditional point of view. I should say that we have almost no religious people with the full sense of this word. But to light candles for Shabbat, read Shma Israel and dance Hava Nagila - that is something that unites Jews all over the world. The same day, for the same reason we unite in the same action.

We deal a lot with different age groups: children, teenagers, students, our parents, old people... And that is one of the most interesting things about Hillel - when a student tells his parent or even grandparent about

Shabbat or Rosh-ha-Shana. JCC Menora used to organise Jewish family camps. And it is always so exciting and touching when little children explain to their parents why we should cover our eyes with a hand for reading Shma or how to say correctly Lekha Dodi, Yeddid Nefesh or other words.

Hillel staff educate students at special seminars showing how to organise and to lead the ceremony of any holiday. The students then return to their home cities to teach other students, arrange several services for different age groups and then they go to smaller communities all over the region to help them organise the holiday.

One of the major Hillel projects is devoted to Pesach. In order to reinforce every-holiday activity, students visit Jews who can't leave their homes but want to conduct a Pesach Seder. Once two girls went to a very old lady. They brought her food and all necessary Seder equipment. They cooked Charoset (apple, nut, spice and wine mixture) together, read Hagada, sang songs and suddenly she burst into tears and she cried so much that she could hardly explain what had happened. When she finally calmed down she told the girls that she hadn't sung *Ma ni shtana* (the Pesach question-song of the youngest child) for 75 years! When she was a child they used to have Seder at home and she was the youngest in the family but then her father was sent to prison by communists and World War II began. She never recollected those celebrations and especially songs in Hebrew. But when she heard the girls singing she herself suddenly began to sing as she remembered a particular song. These things I found most amazing.

I am sure that our Jewish Community Centre Menora will be glad to keep in touch with the Edinburgh Jewish Community. And I'm really glad to feel myself at home here. I know that there's a house where I can go on a certain day, at a certain time, light candles and sing a song in the same language. Hava Nagila!

Irina Fridman whilst studying literature at the University of Yekaterinburg works as the Rector's Assistant for Foreign Affairs at the Liberal Arts University in Russia.