



# The Edinburgh Star

SYNAGOGUE CHAMBERS  
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## Cover Picture :

Photo: by Malcolm V. Merrick  
Detail of the gable-end fresco in  
Ferry Road, Leith, portraying  
many of the historic activities  
that immigrants would have  
seen when arriving from  
Lithuania.

The fresco was painted in 1986 by  
Tim Chalk and Paul Grime.

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# Contents

<b>Editorial</b> .....	1
Open Day .....	1
Letters to the Editor .....	2
<b>Community</b>	
Freda Riffkin reports .....	3
Carole and Mickey Cowen by Ian Shein.....	5
Lodge Solomon – 80 Not Out by Philip Mason.....	7
Cheder by Lesley Danzig.....	8
Lunch Club by Freda Riffkin.....	8
Congratulations, Births and Deaths.....	8
Edinburgh Reform Jewish Community .....	10
<b>Diary</b> .....	11
<b>Diaspora</b>	
'Bak-u beyond' by Ros Abramsky.....	11
<b>Family History</b>	
From Leith to Lithuania by Malcolm Rifkind .....	15
<b>Holocaust</b>	
Auschwitz Summer 2000 poem by Joyce Caplan photograph by Malcolm Merrick.....	20
<b>Short articles and reviews</b>	
Kosher Haggis by J.A. Aronson.....	21
Chicken soup by Julia and Malcolm V. Merrick.....	22
<i>Modern Jewish Cooking with Style</i> reviewed by Susie and Jonathan Adler.....	23
<i>Songs from Misty land</i> reviewed by Micheline Brannan.....	24
A Tradition of Wandering by Anthony Gilbert .....	25

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The Board would also like to thank

Mr & Mrs Harold Mendelssohn for kindly defraying the cost of sending *The Edinburgh Star* overseas.

## DIVERSITY IN COMMUNITY, AN ASSET FOR THE 21st CENTURY

The cover of this edition portrays Leith and it was into this alien hive of activity that the Jewish immigrants were disembarked at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Malcolm Rifkind takes the reverse journey back to Lithuania to explore his roots. There were already Jews in Edinburgh; some had come from England some from overseas. Now living in Edinburgh, the Jews took Scotland to their hearts, committed the poems of Robert Burns to memory and learned to put *kosher* haggis and Scotch whisky, which is very fortunately *kosher*, in their stomachs. It is, therefore, with the greatest pleasure that I accepted a digestive on the haggis from a clinical pharmacologist and great wordsmith Jeff Aronson. For Edinburgh Jews there was only one, unsurpassed haggis maker, Jos Lurie. His products were sent world-wide and the shop was the nerve centre for community news.

"Rich and strange" is this Jewish community of Edinburgh. For richness take the Lunch Club. I came to Edinburgh over 25 years ago now and it was fairly new then. It was supported by volunteers from the core of the Hebrew Congregation and also, and this is my point, by Jewish atheists and agnostics from the wider community. This breadth gave a liveliness to the conversation, and respect for the range of Jewish identity that has to be recognised. So I welcome the article introducing the Edinburgh Reform Jewish Community. If you read my piece about Hong Kong in the last issue, you would see that I was already banging a drum in support of pooling resources in support of a diverse community. We really should consider it seriously.

Now what is "strange"? There is a strangeness about the Masonic movement. There is also antipathy to others having secrets and giving preference to members of their own group, yet we all do just this. In some circumstances it is inappropriate. However, much good is done by the Masons and I have no doubt that the 80<sup>th</sup>. anniversary of Lodge Solomon deserves recognition in the *Star*. It is yet another example of the diversity of Jewish activity. Ros Abramsky has visited Azerbaijan and found a Jewish community there that, give or take an oriental carpet or two, is not so strange or different from our community in Edinburgh. In fact the oil flares and lunch club are quite familiar. Both our communities also support traditional Jewish learning.

I have concentrated on the Diaspora in this issue. National Holocaust Memorial Day is marked by a poem and a picture and there are events in Edinburgh that you may wish to attend. Events in the middle east are turbulent and tragic. I hope the smoke will clear in 2001. I wish the readers a good secular new year.

Finally I would like to thank the editorial board for giving me the opportunity to edit this edition of the *Star*, the contributors for making time to write and all those, including my husband, who helped with this issue.

Julia Merrick.

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## 'OPEN DAY' INVITATION

### EDINBURGH HEBREW CONGREGATION

We are a warm vibrant Jewish Community here in Edinburgh, who are always looking for more people to participate in our many activities including Jewish Sunday School for children.

We are delighted to invite you to an

**Information Afternoon on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2001.**

This open forum will be of interest to:-

- a) parents of children who wish to attend Jewish Sunday School.
- b) those who want to know more about the various activities taking place within the Jewish Community.

This will be an informal afternoon, and we should be delighted to see you anytime between 2.30 pm – 4.30 pm. Simply, contact Jackie Taylor, our Administrator, on 01324 612126, or RSVP to the Administration Offices, 4 Salisbury Road, Edinburgh, EH16 5AB.

We look forward to welcoming you there.

**Re: Edinburgh Star November 2000**

I would like to compliment you and the Editorial Board for your last publication of the *Star* which included a number of articles and photographs from the past. I can relate to a number of these items, as I was still a member of the community although it is now nearly forty years since my departure from Edinburgh to take up my residence in Manchester.

I had no trouble in recognising the photographs of the couples on their respective weddings, likewise the pictures of the Maccabi teams.

The feature on Professor David Daiches, by Ian Shein, was well represented. With regard to the paragraph about "Motty Rifkind who conducted the *Yom Kippur* services" this statement requires elucidation. May I explain that, prior to the building of the Salisbury Road *shul*, there was the *big schul* know as the *Englisha* sited in Graham Street and two *Chevras* who held services in *Shteibles* in Adam Street and Clerk Street, respectively. On completion of the Salisbury Road *shul*, all three congregations united and became one *kehillah* around 1932. I can clearly remember that we had a full complement of ministers who, always, conducted services. On *Yom Kippur* day the format of the entire day was as follows:

<i>Shacharit + Leyening</i>	Reader Chazan Sheni
<i>Musaf</i>	Recited by Chazan Rishon
<i>Mincha</i>	Reader Yecheskiel Rifkind (warden)
<i>N'Eilah</i>	Recited by Chazan Rishon

I would like to add that the late Yecheskiel Rifkind was the grandfather of Arnold and Malcolm. Both Mr Rifkind and my late father, Samuel Rubinstein, were recognised as *Talmidim Chachomim*, because of their knowledge and love of *Torah* and were held in high esteem by the entire congregation.

Nat Rubinstein  
Salford

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**Thanks**

Betty and Michael Gold would like to thank family and friends from the Friendship Club, who attended our *simcha* on the occasion of our Golden Wedding.

We also would like to thank everyone who sent us cards, flowers, fruit, gifts and cheques. The latter have been sent to the Alyn Children's Hospital in Israel.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the *Shul* committee for the beautiful basket of flowers. Also Katie and the wonderful ladies who worked and served a lovely meal.

We were quite overwhelmed.

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**The Wedding**

As the writer/producer of "The Wedding" (page 4) – contrary to public belief, it was scripted and produced! I would like to thank the cast Gersh Mendick, Joe Aronson, Myrna Kaplan, Jonny Sperber, Norman Berger, Rachel Razbeau, Tony Gilbert, Ron Lewis, Willie Caplan for being such great sports and helping raise over £1,000 for Communal Hall funds. The wedding photograph is by Judy Gilbert.

Ian Shein

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**THE EDITORS WISH TO APOLOGISE . . .**

We are grateful to Hana Hornung who pointed out errors in the article by Myrna Kaplan. Hana writes 'It [Terezin] is in the north of Prague, and was built as a fortress by the Austro-Hungarian Empress Maria Theresa in the 18th century. Later it became a garrison town. Further I would like to stress that Treblinka, which is not Terezin, or next to it, was a concentration camp north of Warsaw (Poland)'. Our sincere apologies.

*Terezin* was otherwise known as *Theresienstadt*. It became a transit camp for Czech Jews prior to their deportation to Austchwitz.

## FREDA RIFFKIN REPORTS....

WIZO held three extremely successful lunches

On September 20th at the home of Mrs. Sylvia Donne. Around 25 ladies attended this lunch and much enjoyed a beautifully arranged buffet and the pleasant ambience of Sylvia's lovely home.

A raffle was also held and

altogether the sum of over £100 was raised. I was not able to attend the next lunch but the following was received from our special correspondent Kate Goodwin.

On October 23rd a ladies' lunch was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Bennett. Our loyal supporters were there in force not only to meet and eat but also to see

Arthur Kleinberg demonstrating how to make *challah*, *strudel* and *bulkies*. He even let some of the ladies have a hand in the making. Irene Hyams then conducted an auction of the finished products. The bidding was brisk and the last *bulkie* fetched 75p. It was a most enjoyable event that raised £160. Our thanks to Shirley and Peter.

On 22nd November the next lunch was held at the home of Barbara Bennie. After negotiating the terrors of the Barnton roundabout (now happily *alov hasholem*) the intrepid band of travellers to the far west were rewarded by Barbara's warm hospitality and a most attractive meal. After lunch Kate Goodwin, who with Sylvia Donne had just returned from a trip to Israel gave us a talk on what they had visited, and how inspiring it was to see in action the projects, for which WIZO worked, and to see how much good they were doing for the women and children of Israel. The sum of £110 was raised. Many thanks to Barbara and Leslie for the use of their home.



Quizzed by WIZO ladies, Arthur Kleinberg replies as he shows them how to bake.

## CHIQUE

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### Some highlights of a visit to Israel made by Katie Goodwin and Sylvia Donne

With 12 other WIZO workers from the UK they visited The Elaine Blond Day Care Centre for 130 children; Rehovot School for 110 children from 14-18, with special educational needs; WIZO Centre, Ashkelon where battered wives receive counseling advice and support for themselves and their children; and the A. P. Gold de Leonescu Parents Home. A visit to Jerusalem was replaced by a visit to WIZO Hadassah Canada Youth Village. This proved to be a wonderful opportunity to see the total dedication of the WIZO women in Israel. (See p. 4)

## Exclusive to *The Edinburgh Star!* Society Wedding of the Year

We are proud to be able to tell our readers that we, and we alone, have been entrusted by the Sheemilt Family to report on the most talked about affair in Edinburgh this year. We refer to the Wedding of Miss Fay Sheemilt to Sir Crochen for which invitations were eagerly sought by the elite of the town.

**This magnificent ceremony took**

**great friend as groomsmen, Raphael Razbeau.**

The family members were resplendent especially the two mothers of the pair. Mrs. Sheemilt had chosen a multi-coloured suit crowned by a hat in toning colours. Her hat was worthy of the famous Shilling milliners and could have

The guests were then sat down to a dinner which was beautifully catered. The only niggle arose when it was announced that wine was on sale. There were at this point some who felt that they had come to the wrong wedding and doubted the lineage of the participants. After Dinner and under the chairmanship of Mr. John Cosgrove sparkling speeches were made by the Bride's Father and most especially by the Groom. Telegram's were read by the Best Man including one from Al Gore regretting that he was unable to be present as at this point he was much involved with Mr. Bush.

The *Shul* Council represented by the Treasurer Dr. Mason made a presentation of a gorgeous egg cup to the couple and Mrs. Judy Gilbert presented them with a hot water bottle to keep their love warm.

Our best wishes to the Happy Couple who then left for a wonderful day trip to Portobello.

### WIZO Hadassah Canada Youth Village (Continued from page 3)

Family units of 10-12 children live with foster parents in long, bungalows. These children come from dysfunctional families but are encouraged to visit their parents at least every other week. They stay in groups of their own age until ready at 18 for National Service but then should they wish to return to the village, at any time, they are always made welcome and accommodation is found for them. We walked round the village and had lunch in the large hall with the children. They are noisy, happy, healthy individuals although some come from the most terrible backgrounds of abuse, drugs, cruelty and worse. Some have been rescued from countries at war and some have been abandoned and left homeless.



place in the luxury of the Edinburgh Communal Hall before a select array of friends and well-wishers. The Bride wore an exquisite, white brocade gown with a long sweeping train. Her veil was of the finest lace held in place by a headdress of white flowers. The dress was only enhanced by the fact that a little bump showed that she and Sir Crochen had a deep and close relationship. She was attended by two beautiful bridesmaids, Antonia Gilbert and Rhona Lewis. The bridegroom was attired in well tailored black suiting and was attended by his

been paraded at Ascot without a quail. Lady Crochen wore a black and green beaded top with matching plumes and was obviously a proud Jewish Mama.

The service was with difficulty conducted by almost a Rabbi J. Sperber who had been at the *kiddush* wine to give himself strength.

Although it was clear that the *machetonim* had not quite settled all the details of the marriage and prenuptial arrangements, eventually all were in agreement and the marriage took place.

## CAROLE AND MICKEY COWEN

In May 1980 the then 50-year-old Edinburgh Synagogue underwent a radical and innovative uplift, transforming the interior into a more practical centre for the local Jewish community. The Synagogue itself was literally raised to the ladies' section providing more than adequate seating for all members. Beneath, an excellent community centre materialised from what had been the men's section. Should any of the latter incautiously complain that they now had to climb stairs to pray, this was derisively dismissed by ladies who decisively declared that they had been doing this for years. The complete self-contained unit had facilities for *cheder* classes. Mickey Cowen always claimed that this wonderful asset was a team effort. There is no doubt however that he, as president at the time, deserved the credit and thanks for the vision, purposefulness and sheer enthusiasm which saw its completion in time for *Yomtov* 1980. He praised the support of the community and the encouragement of his wife Carole who shared with him the trauma and tribulations inherent with this most successful and rewarding undertaking.

Mickey was born in Edinburgh, the only child of Isaac and Rosa Cowen, *née* Oppenheim. He attended George Watsons' College leaving at the age of 16. He secured an apprenticeship in the retail trade with the long-established outfitters James How, attending evening classes in accountancy, salesmanship and window dressing, subjects in which he excelled. He then joined the family outfitters business in South Bridge, helping to expand this to five retail outlets. Mickey enjoyed the commercial trade, in particular fondly recalling the era of Carnaby Street and the advent of jeans and Levis, a far cry



from his father's excursion into sales promotion successfully using photographs and cameos of popular film stars to attract young shoppers.

His parents had always been involved in communal work. Isaac Cowen had for many years been a member of the Synagogue council climbing up the executive ladder to president and was only the second person to be honoured with the title of Hon. Life president. Rosa Cowen had similarly been heavily involved having been, amongst other activities, chairman of the Ladies Committee for many years. Consequently Mickey had unofficially acted as assistant, grooming him for early entry into communal service. He became the youngest member of council in 1960, being elected president in 1978. There are few organisations in which he has not been involved, ex-

chairman of Maccabi and community centre, ex-treasurer of *The 'Edinburgh Star* and currently treasurer of *Chevra Kadisha* and a Trustee of the Synagogue. Outwith, he is active in Citizens Advice Bureau. His sporting interests have included table tennis, cricket and golf.

In 1975 Mickey was appointed a JP and 13 years later became chairman of the Justices' committee for the city of Edinburgh holding this important post for ten years. In recognition of his services, he became the first JP to be honoured by a reception hosted by the City Fathers in the City Chambers where he was presented with a silver quach bearing the city coat of arms. Appointed as the capital's representative to the District Court Association of Scotland, he thereafter became National

### CAROLE AND MICKEY COWEN — *Continued*

chairman from 1996 to 1998. He currently is a member of the Central Advisory Committee for JPs in Scotland and also sits on the Lord Provost's Advisory Committee, duties relating to the appointment of JPs within Edinburgh.

When chairman of Maccabi, he met Carole, the second of three children of Barney and Sylvia Lewis, *née* Lindey. Carole was educated at St. Margaret's in Edinburgh and although attaining the necessary qualifications in the sciences, including maths and physics, elected not to go to university, unable to visualise herself as a teacher. She secured a position as a technician in the Blood Transfusion Unit at the Royal Infirmary thereafter working in medical research at the Western General Hospital in the then comparatively new field of genetics and chromosomes. She and Mickey married in 1963 and she devoted her time to her young family and home.

In 1976 she began employment

as a cytotechnologist in research projects relating to cervical smears. She is an executive member of the National Association of Cytologists and a member of the International Academy of Cytology. She is also a national examiner for N.H.S. cancer screening programme.

Carole's background is also bound up in communal work. Her grandmother was very active in Jewish social service and benevolence as was her mother who served on many committees for the benefit of the community. Carole herself has been chairman of the Ladies Committee, treasurer of the Community Centre and currently is member of the Synagogue Council. She is a popular cook at the Luncheon Club. For four years she has been involved with children's problems as a member of the Children's Panel. Her interests, with whatever time she has, centred on her family and travelling. She and Mickey have three children. Mark is an accountant who resides with his

wife and one child in Manchester. Gary, who is also married, and Sally, both barristers, reside in London.

Both Carole and Mickey have realistic views on matters relating to the community. Their beliefs are rational and forward-looking. They share a compassionate understanding of problems within society, aware of human aspirations and feelings. Mickey believes that there is optimism for Edinburgh Jewry, proving to be positive and thought-provoking in his assertions that there may have to be a different format for its future. Consideration could be given to the utilisation of both religious and secular expertise within the community to provide additional practical and financial advice for its long term future. Carole and Mickey deserve gratitude for their unstinting efforts on behalf of all members. Long may they continue to do so, sensibly and selflessly as they have done for many years.

IAN SHEIN.

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### Regular Community Events

Junior Maccabi meets on alternate Sundays from 1.00pm to 3.00pm. For further information, contact David Brannan, Samuel Danzig or Joel Raffel (229 5541).

Senior Maccabi meets on Sunday evenings in members' homes. For further information, contact Rowan Hendry (331 3795) or Benjy Bard.

The Jewish Philosophical Society meets every month on a Sunday in members' homes.

The Luncheon Club meets every Tuesday and Thursday at 12.30 p.m..

The Parent and Toddler Group meets on Sunday mornings at 10.00am.

Dates have not yet been finalised for the Friendship Club. Meetings on alternate Sunday afternoons at 3.00 pm. Contact Willie Caplan (667 7984) for details.

*All meetings are subject to alteration.*

*All the above events, unless otherwise stated, take place in the Community Centre, 4 Salisbury Road*

John Cosgrove is giving "Thought for the Day" on BBC Scotland at approx. 7.26 a.m. on the following dates:

Wednesdays 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> January and Tuesdays 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2001.

## LODGE SOLOMON — 80 NOT OUT by Philip Mason, Right Worshipful Master

In recent years, Freemasonry throughout the UK has attracted considerable negative publicity and attention. Yet Scottish Freemasonry stretches back over 400 years. In fact, under its umbrella over 1800 Lodges now exist not just in Scotland but in many other countries throughout the world. In Edinburgh, alone, there are 40 Lodges of which half were instituted prior to Lodge Solomon's consecration in 1920. Thus, Lodge Solomon's origins are much more recent than Edinburgh's oldest Lodge which dates back to 1598. Lodge Solomon arose in 1920 in order to cater for the special needs of the Jewish Brethren of the City of Edinburgh — although a person of any religion can become a member of any Lodge. At the time there were about 200 Jewish Freemasons in Edinburgh and a considerable number of these transferred their membership from other Lodges to Lodge Solomon.

Eighty years on, Lodge Solomon remains a strong, vibrant and active Lodge. This was never more evident than at the Divine Service, held in the Synagogue on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup>. February to commemorate its 80<sup>th</sup>. anniversary. How often do we see the Synagogue filled with over 250 people? Brethren together with their wives travelled from all over Scotland in order to be with and lend support to Lodge Solomon on this important occasion. They included representatives from Grand Lodge and the Provincial Grand Lodges of Edinburgh, East Lothian and Berwickshire, Midlothian, Lanarkshire, Fife and Kinross, and Roxburgh, Peebles and Selkirkshire all bearing their characteristic green sashes and aprons.

At the stroke of 3pm, virtually 80 years to the day after Lodge

Solomon had received its Charter (5<sup>th</sup>. February 1920), the Synagogue doors opened and two processions entered simultaneously down the two stairways into the synagogue. On one side were the High Constables of Edinburgh, with their Moderator, followed by the Sword Bearer and Mace Bearer, members of the City of Edinburgh Council, their wives and followed by representatives from the Provincial Grand Lodges. On the other, a procession of the office bearers and brethren of Lodge Solomon followed by a very large number of office bearers of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Edinburgh was led in by Rabbi David Sedley and Reverend Ernest Levy, Senior Chaplain of Lodge Montefiore of Glasgow. It really was a very colourful and highly charged moment, made all the more moving by the synagogue choir's opening renditions. I, as Right Worshipful Master, felt very honoured to be the one at the helm of Lodge Solomon's procession.

My thoughts strayed to those who had been Right Worshipful Master before me, some of whom had just followed me into the synagogue. Since its Consecration on the 15<sup>th</sup>. April 1920, 28 members of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation have become Masters of Lodge Solomon, including Alec Rubenstein, Norman Cram, Gerald Glass, Ian Shein, Ian Brodie, Morris Kaplan, Sid Caplan and Sam Skop. In fact, both Alec Rubenstein and Ian Brodie have been Master on no less than 3 occasions - but the story doesn't stop there as uniquely Ian's late father, Morris and his late-grandfather, Abe were also Master of Lodge Solomon in 1962 and 1943 respectively. What a hard act to follow, I pondered. However, I knew I had everyone's support. In addition, I knew the occasion had

been meticulously well organised by the Lodge's Secretary, Alec Rubenstein. By the time I reached my seat next to the Rabbi, in his box, my worries had dissipated. As expected, everything went smoothly. The ingredients for success had in any case all been put in place for some time by our efficient Lodge Secretary; a Divine Service beautifully led by Cantor Ernest Levy, an excellent and witty sermon delivered by Rabbi David Sedley and the choir, under the able direction of David Mendelssohn and supported by Stuart Caplan, Lodge Solomon's Organist, singing distinctly better without me.

At the end of the Service, both processions left the Synagogue to the resounding notes of the bagpipes delivered by the Grand Piper, John Simpson. Everyone proceeded to the Marian Oppenheim Hall where refreshments were served and speeches made. A presentation of a cheque of £50 was then made to Mr James Wilson with the request it be handed to the Lord Provost for use by a charity of his choice

Sincere thanks for helping to make the Divine Service such a memorable occasion were then conveyed by myself, on behalf of Lodge Solomon, to Reverend Ernest Levy and Rabbi David Sedley, to whom presentations of books were made, and David Mendelssohn and the Choir. Alec Rubenstein's planning, foresight, and immense effort had been central to the day's success.

As the afternoon drew, all too quickly, to a close and the visiting Brethren returned to their homes I felt sure that Lodge Solomon would easily go on to reach a century.

## CHEDER

### Bereavement Workshop

It is a popular fallacy in our current age that children should not be exposed to the subject of death and dying. Notwithstanding that, on Sunday 19th. November the children of Edinburgh's *Cheder* participated in a workshop on bereavement run by Tammy Fransman who, apart from being a member of the Edinburgh Jewish Community, is also a well-known professional psychotherapist.

The session was part of 'The Jewish Lifecycle' topic which the pupils have been studying this term. Groups were formed to discuss questions such as what the children thought death was, how they felt about someone dying and the funeral traditions of other cultures and religions. This provoked much discussion and each group brought back their ideas to the larger forum. This led smoothly to the introduction of Jewish customs surrounding funerals and mourning.

The richness and depth of the children's response to the issues raised was very rewarding and the *Cheder* would like to thank Tammy for her sensitive, yet direct, approach to this particular area of the Jewish lifecycle.

Lesley Danzig.

*With Compliments  
from  
Mark and  
Judith Sischy*

## THE EDINBURGH SYNAGOGUE LADIES GUILD

### LUNCH CLUB

The Lunch Club was begun as a follow up to the Friendship Club which has been running so successfully for many years. It was felt that this could be a useful addition to the services offered to our more senior members and this it has certainly turned out to be.

This was approximately 25 years ago and since that time a band of dedicated women have come twice a week to cook a lunch for all who wish to come and also to provide carry-outs for those who are housebound. We provide meat meals on a Tuesday and fish meals on a Thursday and between diners and carry outs provide over 30 meals a day.

We are recognised by Edinburgh Social Services from whom we receive a subsidy for each meal and also for heating and lighting. This particular subsidy of course goes to the Communal Hall to cover the costs incurred in the use of the kitchen and hall. We are also now able to provide transport for members of the club through the agency of the South Edinburgh Amenity Group and this is much appreciated.

We have had some highlights in the course of years and one has been our *Chanukah* dinner to which we have invited the Lord Provost of the time and we are happy to say that we have enjoyed a close friendship with them all. This was demonstrated last year when Lord Provost and Mrs. Milligan invited us to the City Chambers for tea. A report of this was published in the *Star* (No. 35). We have had many birthday celebrations and this year the *Chasen Torah* and the *Chasen*

*Braishes* very kindly included the Club in their celebrations by giving them lunch.

It would be invidious to mention names as everyone has worked so hard but the name of Stella Jacobs who for years peeled potatoes and vegetables and who made delicious soups and also that of Willie Caplan who is so helpful in many ways must be recorded. Also among those who cannot be forgotten are Betty Franklin, who fried fish for many years, and Leila Goldberg who almost single-handedly kept the club going for some time

We have had difficult times but now under convenor Joyce Cram we have a full contingent of cooks. More members are welcome, as are new volunteer cooks.

Freda Riffkin.

## CONGRATULATIONS

### **Barmitzvah boys**

Robbie Ansell Forsyth  
Martin J. P. Hendry

### **Batmitzvah girl**

Alice Kelpie

### **Examinations**

Benjamin Adler, younger son of Michael and the late Ruth Adler, on becoming a Member of the Royal College of Physicians.

**Chazan Torah:** Edward Green.

**Chazan Bereishit:** Ron Lewis.

## BIRTHS

Congratulations to Martin Simmen and Shari Cohn-Simmer, on the birth of a beautiful daughter Hannah Rebecca Cohn-Simmen.

## DEATHS

Condolences to family and friends of Norman Benjamin who died on 8th January.



Above: Willie Caplan and Norman Dorfman



Right: the Green family with Sammy Latter and Rose Orgel left

Below: Happy diners and (inset) Joyce Cram



SEAG van and driver, Harry

## EDINBURGH REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY

by Maurice Naftalin

On October 6th 1997, over 40 people crowded into a living room in the New Town in response to an invitation from the Glasgow New Synagogue (GNS) to join an *Erev Shabbat* service. The numbers and enthusiasm of the people attending were a welcome surprise to GNS members in Edinburgh. The Glasgow New Synagogue is the only Reform-affiliated synagogue in Scotland, and some of us Edinburgh members had long felt that Glasgow should not have all the glory! Since that first service we have been able to sustain regular activity in Edinburgh, and have recently constituted ourselves formally into the Edinburgh Reform Jewish Community. In this article we take up the kind invitation of the editor of the Star to introduce ourselves to its readers.

The main impetus to get together in Edinburgh came from the practical and social difficulties of belonging to a synagogue in a city 50 miles away. Having to travel to Glasgow for every service and synagogue activity may not present us with ethical problems, but the practical ones remain! Besides, we were aware that an important part of our tradition lies in local community consciousness, and we wanted to work within that. In this we have been successful - our events have a very local, informal and (we hope) welcoming feel to them.

Under our formal constitution, we are an affiliated group of the Glasgow New Synagogue, sharing its aim of giving Judaism renewed meaning for its present-day adherents by seeking to balance ancient faith and tradition with modern wisdom and understanding. Our membership rules are the same as for the GNS and the Reform Movement generally, although we have two

kinds of members - those who belong only to the Edinburgh Community, and those who are also full members of the GNS. Our membership numbers are still uncertain, because we only gave a formal basis to the group a little while ago, and we are still contacting the many people who have attended our events in the past. We expect though, to have over 50 members when the dust settles, drawn mainly from Edinburgh but including the Lothians, the Borders, Fife and even the Highlands! The community encompasses all age groups from the very young to the quite mature, with widely varied backgrounds, and we hope that this helps us to create an atmosphere welcoming to all. We value everyone, but we are especially pleased to have the sustained involvement of the children, many of whom also attend the weekly Religion School at the GNS.

Community activity centres around services, of which the most regular and important is an *Erev Shabbat* service, which we hold monthly. Often the Glasgow synagogue spares our Rabbi, Pete Tobias, to lead the service in his inimitable style. We hold it in very informal surroundings - for a while we used our members' living rooms until we outgrew them - and the atmosphere has very much of a home service about it. Usually 20 to 30 people attend. Recently we have started to imitate a long-standing tradition in Glasgow of having a communal meal on some Friday nights following the service. Our longest-standing festival tradition is that of a communal *Seder*, which we have now had on three occasions. We use a room at Inch House which can accommodate some 50 people, and we have never had spare seats.

A particular pleasure at the *Seders* is to be able to welcome the many Reform Jews who are visiting Edinburgh at any one time, many of them Americans working at the University.

During the course of the last year we have organised several events including an 'Open *Shabbat*' - a whole day of worship, study and food - and a Purim party, which we took rather too seriously in the fancy dress aspect - the chairman of the Community will not readily forget the unplanned experience of buying petrol from a garage forecourt while dressed as Snow White, complete in too many details. Other activities include a study group, which has met in preparation for important festivals and currently is studying the Book of Genesis. Most recently we celebrated the start of the High Holy Days with an *Erev Rosh Hashanah* service, which we conducted ourselves. For the main *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* services - as for most others - we still travel to Glasgow. We are optimistic about developing our own resources in Edinburgh, but we intend to walk before we run.

Why Reform? Because for the Reform movement, rooted in the religious concepts of Jewish tradition, the application of these concepts is an evolving task. We look for ways of making traditional values relevant in a very different world from the one in which they developed. In a world which regards men and women as equal, we offer families the opportunity to sit together and encourage the same participation in services for men and women alike. In a society where Jews no longer live in close proximity to places of worship, we believe that involvement in worship overrides biblical and *halachic* concerns about travel on holy days.

## DIARY 2001

## JANUARY

21 <sup>st</sup> Sunday	Literary Society; Rev. Ernest Levy <i>Reflections on the first national Holocaust Memorial Day</i>	
22 <sup>nd</sup> Monday	<i>And let's not talk about that . . . The Holocaust in Contemporary Society</i> A talk by Dr Stephen D. Smith at The Hub, Castlehill	6.00 pm

## FEBRUARY

4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Tree planting by children of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation in Princes St Gardens	10.30 am
Until 6 <sup>th</sup> .	<i>Anne Frank; a history for today</i> An exhibition at the City Art Centre from the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam	
8 <sup>th</sup> Thursday	<b>New Year for Trees</b>	
11 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 pm
18 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Literary Society; Professor Larry Hurtado, Edinburgh University; <i>Monotheism at the time of the Second Temple</i>	8.00 pm
19 <sup>th</sup> Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 pm
22 <sup>nd</sup> Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews; Rev Malcolm Weisman; <i>Interfaith Dialogue.</i>	7.30 pm

## MARCH

4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Friendship Club Edinburgh Jewish Community <i>Open Day</i>	3.00 pm 2.30–4.30 pm
8 <sup>th</sup> Thursday	<b>Fast of Esther (Purim 9<sup>th</sup>)</b>	
11 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Literary Society; <i>Is Just one Nobel Prize too much to ask for?</i> A Purim entertainment by members of the 'Lit'.	8.00 pm
8 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Friendship Club	3.00 pm
19 <sup>th</sup> Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 pm
22 <sup>nd</sup> Thursday	Council of Christians and Jews; The Rt. Rev. Andrew McLellan, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; <i>subject to be advised.</i>	7.30 pm
25 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Literary Society; Professor Bernard Wasserstein, Glasgow University; <i>Jerusalem; Symbol and Reality</i>	8.00 pm

## APRIL

8 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	<b>First Day Passover</b>	
9 <sup>th</sup> Monday	<b>Second Day Passover</b>	
16 <sup>th</sup> Monday	Lodge Solomon	7.00 pm
29 <sup>th</sup> Sunday	Literary Society; <i>Performance of Shostakovich's Opus 79; From Jewish Folk Poetry;</i> introduced by Dr. Esti Sheinberg	8.00 pm

## EDINBURGH REFORM JEWISH COMMUNITY — Continued

In a community where Hebrew is in no way the dominant language, we give congregants the opportunity to use English in prayer to enrich their understanding and appreciation of our worship and our traditional teachings. Reform Judaism continues to develop and grow as human knowledge and understanding continue to grow; the two complement rather than oppose one another.

One welcome feature of our

situation in Edinburgh is the good relations that exist on a communal level between the Reform and Orthodox communities. Part of the reason for this must be the Literary Society, which benefits from the enthusiasm of many people from both communities. But the real responsibility lies with the many people who have chosen to build on our areas of common understanding. In this spirit we want to thank the *Star* for this opportunity to introduce the

Community, and to welcome interest in us and our interpretation of Jewish tradition.

We welcome everyone who would like to know more about our community or about Reform Judaism in general. Our next service will take place on February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

For details of any of our activities please write to

Hillend Cottage, 1, Duncanlaw Cottages, Gifford, East Lothian, EH41 4PQ or email us at [erjc@morninglight.co.uk](mailto:erjc@morninglight.co.uk).

## 'Baku Beyond' A Story of the Diaspora in Azerbaijan

by Ros Abramsky



Though fated to bear a Mosaic heritage, I never expected to find myself confronted with a burning bush. Yet that's exactly what happened to me in Azerbaijan. The capital, Baku, from where I am taking a short sightseeing drive along appallingly bumpy roads, is in a desert region, just about as far east as you can go in Azerbaijan without falling into the Caspian Sea. Out in the middle of nowhere round a sharp corner I am suddenly confronted by what looks like a bonfire that has run into the trail of a leaking petrol tank. But there are no campers or cars close by - just a hillside suffused with natural gas that self-ignites as it passes through the twists and turns of the layers of rock and earth.

### Jews among Zoroastrians

Did the thought that light might stand a chance against darkness emerge from a prophet's musings on these weird flames? Some say that it was here that the ideas that reshaped the middle east, the world of Darius and Cyrus, took shape in the mind of Zoroaster about 1000

BCE. Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, replaced the pantheon of gods worshipped by the ancients. The Zoroastrians attributed the troubles of the world to the squabbles of Ahura Mazda's twin children, the spirit of light and the spirit of darkness. The Jews, brought by force to Babylon in 586 BCE already had their own one god and would not have any truck with separate good and evil gods for whom humans were pawns, lacking free will. Many, however, remained in the Persian Empire even after Cyrus allowed a return to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple. They lived at peace with their Zoroastrian neighbours and were allowed to supervise their own affairs.

Until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, that is, when Zoroastrian fundamentalism set in and life got tough. Then, many moved northwest from the busy Persian cities to the remote desert regions of Azerbaijan and Daghestan. Disputes within the Jewish community could also have led to such relocations. Living up in the highlands of the Caucasus,

keeping well away from trouble, they became known as Mountain Jews. Some say Jews were here even earlier, even that remnants of the ten lost tribes found their way here. Others suggest that some members of Khazar tribe, said to have been converted to Judaism in the fourth century CE, also swelled their ranks.

Later an era of trading began, with the Silk Route not far away. Over the centuries since, many others have come to this out-of-the-way region, on the cusp between Europe and Asia. They have developed their own culture and speak a version of a local language called Tat, which has its own culture and literature, to which the Jews have contributed.

### Muslim patronage

As Europe enjoyed the era of enlightenment, the Jews of this region took a step forward too. Jews displaced by the brutal forays of the emperor of Iran, Nadir, sought shelter with those living nearby in the town of Quba. The local ruler, Fatali Khan, encouraged such settlement so he could draw on the Jews' skills in craftwork, manufacture and trade. After Nadir Shah was assassinated, Fatali Khan extended his empire towards Persia, taking in Baku and other towns. Mountain Jews from all over his empire migrated towards his capital at Quba to join their prospering co-religionists. Fatali Khan agreed to give them their own enclave, on the other side of the river from the Muslim town. The Khanate did not last long, however, falling prey to the imperial ambitions of Russia.

### The red village of Quba

To this day, only Mountain Jews inhabit Kracnaya Sloboda, the red village. Nowadays it forms a vibrant quarter of Quba, reached by a bridge over the river Kudial. Quba is a thriving agricultural centre, but nowhere near as modern as Baku.

Isolation did not altogether protect the Mountain Jews from Stalin's anti-Semitism, and many left before the war to go to Israel. Though the synagogues were closed and Jewish observance punished and frustrated, Kracnaya Sloboda continued to house only Jews, who claim to encounter no prejudice at all from the locals. Indeed, today, such tolerance is a stated policy of Heydar Aliyev, the man who has been president since 1993 after rising through the ranks of the KGB and a period as a member of the Soviet Politburo. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, did not, it seems, bring about a change in power here.

By local standards, the housing in the enclave is in good condition, with many houses being renovated. Jews who have roots here, now living and working in Israel, the US and Russia like to come and enjoy the new-found freedoms of the 'heim', setting up second homes here for the holidays. The President of the Synagogue expected a congregation of 200 in the (not so bad) 'old' synagogue, three-quarters of whom would be temporary residents. In keeping with the local view that women belong at home, women don't go to *shul* here. So there is no need for a women's section and certainly no arguments about *mechitzas*. This certainly makes life simpler for the people refurbishing the 'new' *shul*, which is about 10 minutes' walk away. Built 100 years ago, this fell into disuse in Soviet times.

Males seem to be privileged too in some new efforts being given to bring Jewish knowledge to the youth of Kracnaya Sloboda. Orthodox communities in America fund a youth club where boys whose parents abandoned religious ways of life, for whatever reason, can learn what it's all about. Under the guidance of their two rabbis, they learn Torah and Talmud, *daven* and lay *tefillin*. Some have been to yeshiva in America and Israel,



Above: Entrance porch of the 'New' Synagogue being refurbished  
Below: Interior of the 'Old' Synagogue, both at Kracnaya Sloboda



where one is training to be a *shochet*. They learn English, maths and computing too, spending the afternoon there after a full morning at state school. In the absence of any real future here, albeit for economic rather than religious reasons, they seem grateful to be given new horizons.

### Baku

Back in Baku, things seem a lot tougher. The world's first oil exports came from here. But only a tiny minority of local inhabitants have benefited. Rather than helping the proud, handsome, and dark Azeris, the profits have been grabbed by greedy and powerful imperialists, first the Turks, and more recently the Czars and the Soviet Union. Today, Azerbaijan's resources are dwarfed by richer fields elsewhere. Oil companies still harvest and prospect here, although few benefits reach the natives.

Most people blame corruption. While there seems to be little censorship or repression these days, now the country has been liberated from the yoke of the Soviet Union, people are resigned to the situation, even though there is little hope that the economy will improve until there are big changes. Though poor, people in Baku don't seem to be starving. Food is plentiful and cheap. Begging on the street is no more widespread than in Britain's towns and cities. The major problem is that there are no jobs. Young men and women with university degrees drive taxis and run shops. Some have studied, at state expense, in Moscow and St Petersburg, but now the infrastructure that planned to employ them as teachers and researchers is only a distant memory. Even doctors, ostensibly working for the state-funded health service, have to make their patients pay to eke out laughable salaries.

Indigenous peoples have survived for generations as farmers and herders, craftspeople and traders, in sparse, isolated, almost

nomadic communities battling to eke out a livelihood from the deserts and mountains. Now their self-sufficiency has all but vanished. Amid a population rich in engineers and technicians, there is simply no will and no money to develop and maintain basic lifelines such as housing, banking, and social welfare. What should be a sparkling, vibrant city looks more like a benighted bazaar, arranged, it must be said, around many impressive if down-at-heel buildings. Men hang out in the squares and parks all day long, clean and orderly in spotless shirts and pressed suits. Most women stay at home. The country has also had to deal with a million or so refugees from the beautiful, fertile region of Nagorno Karabakh. The neighbouring ex-Soviet state, Armenia, unceremoniously booted them out in the early 1990s, depriving them of their land, homes and livelihoods. Many international agencies are here, working to help them rebuild their lives. Aid workers here aim to improve matters not only by supplying the basic needs of the refugees, but also by encouraging them to assert themselves and show enterprise in bettering themselves.

The downturn has affected Jews as well, in particular those whose life and work are based in Baku itself. The Ashkenazi community here developed when Jews from Western parts of Russia came during the nineteenth century to help

develop the oil industry. The Rothschilds played a major part in this enterprise, as did Alfred Nobel. The bulk of the Ashkenazi community has now left for Israel or America. But for some, such a move, while now not forbidden, would be too disruptive, not to mention expensive. Paediatrician Dr Larissa Reikhdudel invited me to join a birthday party for one of the elderly ladies she helps to keep going. Most of the guests were solid but vivacious ladies who had taken care to put on their lipsticks and party frocks. Equally welcome was one slight, stooped Mountain Jew in more traditional garb and with a brightly coloured scarf.

The partygoers have aged well in this dry air. In spite of lives shaken by Stalin, they have studied and worked hard to help develop the state. Now, in their old age, it has abandoned them. Pensions, like salaries, yield tiny amounts. For many of life's necessities they rely on Larissa. She would like to help them more, for example by giving them a regular meeting place, which would also provide meals. She is also collecting for the orphans in the city, who live as paupers in their state institutions, and have no shoes or notebooks to go to school with.

The burning hillside may be inspirational, but without more public-spirited and skilful leadership it cannot succour all those whose forebears have been brought here by its potential.



Birthday party for Jewish ladies in Baku, Dr Reikhdudel, fourth from right.

## The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind K.C.M.G., Q.C. takes a journey from Leith to Lithuania

*What I have been wanting to do is to share with you, not just my own family, but to do so in a way that will be of interest and possibly of use to those with a similar interest in searching out their roots.*

When, as a child, whenever Arnold or I were looking miserable my father used to say 'You have a face as long as Leith Walk'. Well Leith Walk is pretty long but not as long as the route from Lithuania to Leith. The starting point is one many of you will agree with, is how little we knew of where our families came from. Certainly my grandparents, indeed my parents' generation actually had very little interest in discussing these matters even among themselves and relatively little information to pass on to their children. Perhaps it is only this generation that has begun to take a real interest in these matters and that itself raises some interesting questions.

The Jewish presence in Lithuania was not a recent one. It went back to the fourteenth century, when very large numbers of Jews moved from Germany and from central Europe to Lithuania and they moved because the ruling classes of Lithuania desired to attract Jews with the talents they had and the skills they could provide. Since 1581, within Lithuania there was a very high level of Jewish autonomy. Jews collected their own taxes; they ran their own communities.

Of course, there were periods when it was a less attractive place to be but overall Lithuania was, right up until the nineteenth century, one of the better places to be and that is why Vilnius, in particular, became one of the great centres of Jewish learning and was known as the Jerusalem of Europe at that time.

It is worth remembering also, that we think of ourselves, those of us who came from Lithuania, as coming from part of the Russian

empire, and, yes, my grandparents were technically Russian citizens, but for most of the history of Jews in Lithuania they weren't Russian. Lithuania was Polish, right up to the third and final partition of Poland in 1795, when Poland was divided between Prussia, Austria and Russia. Then what is now known as Lithuania became part of the Russian empire until 1918.

The other interesting point, if you can envisage that Baltic coast line, is that their nearest neighbour was, up to 1918, East Prussia, which was part of the German empire under the Kaiser, and stretched right up to the city of Memel, Lithuania's main port now called Klaipeda, and therefore the Jews of Lithuania, who lived in Russia were just a few short miles from the German empire. The take over of Poland by the Russians was very important and in *The Jews of Lithuania* by Misha Greenbaum, she says:

*There was a fundamental difference between the Czars' attitude towards their Jewish subjects and that of the Polish Lithuanian Kings. The Polish and Lithuanian Kings, by and large, maintained a sympathetic, tolerant and benevolent posture towards the Jews. Fully aware of the needs that the Jews might be able to meet, they did their best to shield and protect them from their Christian neighbours' hostility and violence. The Czars, by contrast, were absolute monarchs, despotic, reactionary, intolerant and autocratic. The imperial policy of the Romanoffs was one of discrimination, not only against the Jews but also, in somewhat milder form, against Muslims and, in fact, against anyone not affiliated to the Russian Orthodox Church, including Catholics and Protestants.*

So there was a very crucial difference once the Czars took over. I don't know for certain why my grandparents left. We do know that they lived in an environment where there had been violence in many parts of the Russian empire and the

likely explanation is that it was a combination both of the pogrom background but also, to some extent, economic migration, looking for a better life in the west, Britain, the United States or South Africa, which was the main destination of most Lithuanian emigrants.

It is worth remembering, though, that many stayed behind. Right until the second world war the Jewish population of Lithuania remained about a quarter of a million and sadly about 95% of them perished in the Holocaust.

Now that is the background against which I and my cousins started thinking whether we should try to find a little bit more about our family and where it had come from. Let me share with you what we actually knew when we began this exercise two or three years ago. All that we knew, and it does not take long to tell, was:

- My grandfather had come from a place, how big or small it was we did not know, a place called Meshad. We knew Meshad was in Lithuania and we knew it was in somewhere that was described to us as Kovno-Governor. What that precisely meant nobody had bothered to find out.
- My grandfather had come round about 1899 and that his brother had come three or four years earlier.
- My grandmother came from another place called Zosliai.
- We had a sort of rudimentary family tree that my cousin Philip Goldberg had obtained from my father's eldest brother, Hyman who was born in Lithuania, in 1899. It was able to tell us that my grandfather's father had been called Joseph. Well we had known that because of his Hebrew name, but also his father was described to us as someone who was called Ber of Salant, not Ber Rifkind but of

Salant, that was how it had been passed down and that of course raised that whole question of when Jews acquired surnames and the circumstances in which surnames had been provided.

- There was also a family story that had been passed down to us as to what might have been the origin of the name Rifkind, that it came from Rifka's *Kind* and had been acquired in the following circumstances: the Czar's army conscripted, against their wishes, young Jewish boys but they would sometimes leave one son. If there was a widow who only had one son to look after her, they wouldn't take her only source of livelihood away. And so the story that was passed down was that one of our ancestors, some time in the nineteenth century, might have been one of several brothers and that in order to pretend to the visiting Russian army that he was the only son of a widow, they found someone called Rivka and he was Rivka's *Kind* and therefore was exempted from conscription.

So that was the starting point. A big change that has happened since the break up of the Soviet Union has been that the archives have not only been made available, but the Lithuanian authorities are hugely helpful in assisting inquiries by people of Lithuanian origin into their family background and you can do it by email.

Of course the other change that is relevant is a sense of Lithuanian guilt at their complicity in the Holocaust. Most young Lithuanians are totally unaware of this because throughout the whole Soviet period it was never mentioned by the Soviet authorities. For example, the memorial to commemorate the 150 Jews of my Grandfather's town, Meshad, who were slaughtered during the war, simply says it is a memorial to two members of the communist party and others who died during the Nazi occupation. To

be fair to the new Lithuanian government of the last ten years, that situation, although it has not gone as far as we might like, in terms of curriculum in the schools and matters of that kind, has improved. We saw in various places memorials put up in the last few years to the Jews of Lithuania who had died. There is a real debate in Lithuania about not only a need for Lithuania to commemorate its Jewish community but the extent to which some Lithuanians assisted the Nazis in what they did. That has led to quite considerable co-operation with Jews from other parts of the world who are inquiring about these matters.

This enabled myself, David Kaplan (Maurice and Myrna's son), and also Marion and Gabrielle Rifkind, (the daughters of my father's youngest brother Jo Rifkind) to do quite a lot of research before we left for Lithuania. Marion was of particular value to us because she speaks Russian.

Now, what were we able to discover? Before we even got to Lithuania we had to find out where Meshad was. We discovered that many of the places where Jews came from had several names. Yiddish, Russian and, sometimes a Lithuanian name. So Meshad turned out to be, now, a small town called Mosedis. We had been told that Meshad was in Kovno-Governia, Governia means the province 'governorship' of Kovno or Kaunes. This is in the centre of Lithuania, and so in our blissful ignorance we assumed that Meshad must be in the centre of Lithuania. We found it on the map and it turned out to be right at the very west near the coast, near the Latvian border and 20 miles from the sea. So, how could it be in Kovno province when it was right to the west of the country? A bit more research gave us the information. When the Russians took over those territories, they did not want to encourage Lithuanian nationalism. As far as they were concerned there

was no Lithuania, there were various provinces and they called the provinces after the main towns in the area. So Kovno province in fact means most of modern Lithuania, probably about three quarters of it, which explains why Meshad was there. Vilnius, the capital, because it was in the far east was in a separate province at that time.

We also discovered that Zosliai where my grandmother had come from was much further east and was in fact between Kovno and Vilnius, the capital. We discovered that my grandfather had almost certainly gone to Zosliai to go to *yeshiva* and near there had met my grandmother and they got married.

I said earlier that we were not even quite certain when my grandfather arrived, and so David Kaplan thought, well, the best way, and I helped him in this, was to go through the Home Office to find the naturalisation papers. At first, we could not get the information because there is a hundred year rule about releasing them. And actually there is a certain logic behind it because when you apply for citizenship you have to provide references and because sometimes these references are very, very candid and may not be as complimentary as you expected, there is a guarantee that they are kept confidential. So we wrote saying, okay, we don't want to see all the references but is there anything in the papers that can tell us when our grandfather actually arrived and confirm where he came from? And we came up trumps! We got a letter from the Home Office which said 'from the naturalisation documents your grandfather was born in Meshad in the Governia of Kovno on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1877, his parents were Joseph and Sarah Rifkind, who were of course Russian citizens. The specific date of entry into the United Kingdom is not shown but on his application for naturalisation, dated 17<sup>th</sup> September 1923, he states that he had been a

resident for 23 years. A minute on the file confirms 1899.' So there we are! We had gone another step forward.

There was also fascinating information that helped to confirm the accuracy of the story we had been told about the origin of our name being linked to the problem of conscription. Because in looking at some of the history books we found that indeed what we had been told by word of mouth had some historical justification. And I quote again from Misha Greenbaum's book :

Action taken in 1827 was a Ukasi, that is a Russian government edict, prescribing the conscription of all Jewish boys at the age of twelve for a period of 25 years. And this was in order to win new souls for the Russian Orthodox Church. Each Jewish community was given a quota of so called Nicolas soldiers, under Czar Nicolas, that it was to provide. Boys of 8 or 9 were sometimes kidnapped by professional snatchers who were employed for the purpose of filling the quota. In all more than 50,000 boys were torn from their families in this fashion. For decades Russian Jews retained the memory of that terrible era by recounting the abuse and suffering visited on these children as well as the many tales of courage and heroism in resisting conversion.

And then it says later on that most of these youngsters who had been forcibly conscripted served the prescribed 25 year term, if they lived so long, and others who had been snatched away at an even younger age sometimes served 35 years in the army. No parents were secure with their son, but there is a description of what was sometimes done to avoid the problem.

Little wonder that all sorts of subterfuges were used in attempts to avoid military service. One could even understand the willingness of the wealthy or the communal



Reaching his grandmother's home village, Malcolm Rifkind with David Kaplan at Zasliai

officials whom they supported to shield their own children from service by substituting others, as allowed by law. The hapless substitutes were nearly always the children of the poor and socially marginal.

*So clearly strenuous efforts were made, sometimes fair, sometimes unfair. But here was some fascinating endorsement that this policy of conscription might indeed have had relevance to my own family's background.*

There are various ways in which information from these times has been recorded. There were many great kinds of taxes which the Jews of Lithuania, as well as others, might have been expected to pay. Box tax is where a lot of the information comes from. This was a tax on kosher meat, also called the *pushka* or *kupa* tax. It was collected throughout the Jewish community and used to pay for its various social needs. Lists of people who paid this tax always give the family, first in fathers' names. Then the candle tax of which a list was also kept in the archives was a tax on Sabbath candles and was used for the needs of Jewish education. And these lists exist for almost all the Jewish communities in Kovno province and there are lists for 1846, 1877, 1892, 1904 and some other years.

It has also been said in some other documents that we obtained, that the Czarist government issued a requirement in 1826, that Rabbis, generally who were elected by Jewish communities registered births, marriages, divorces and deaths. And each year the government authorities went to the synagogues to copy these registers, probably in Yiddish, and simply copied them out in Russian, and so the archives that we have seen are



Mosedis, Jewish graveyard on an island

all in Cyrillic. And for example they found the example of a man called Rifkind Gersh bin Yankel, who was 30 years old in 1816. This was the furthest back we have been able to go, so that if he was a relation of ours it takes us back into the eighteenth century.

Now, what have we discovered as a result of these archives? We have perhaps a couple of dozen references to people called Rifkind who lived in Meshad or Mosedis or in the other communities nearby, and in many of the cases the first names coincide with people we know to have been members of our family.

I mentioned that when we started this exercise the furthest back we had been able to go was this chap Ber of Salant, who was my grandfather's grandfather. Well, we discovered him. He existed. He wasn't just a myth. We saw when we were in the archive in Kaunes a Russian document which actually mentions him by name; Ber Joselovitch Rifkind, son of Joseph Rifkind. We knew him as Ber ben Joseph, actually. So he was for real. What was particularly fascinating was, not only that his father was called Joseph, but his mother was called Riva, and so who knows. Maybe he was Riva's *Kind*. Maybe we have discovered the origin of the name that he had adopted. We don't know that but we are entitled to think that may be the case.

Now let me describe the visit. When we arrived in Vilnius, by chance we found that the only surviving synagogue was literally only 200 yards from our hotel and it has a Rabbi, originally from America, and there is a Jewish community in Vilnius of about 250, mostly Jews from parts of the old Soviet Union, who have settled in Vilnius since 1945. The synagogue is the synagogue that would have been there in the last century.

The first village we went to was Zosliai, where my grandmother's family came from. It was more what we expected: virtually a single street, wooden houses on either side. As well as modern transport, there were still horses and carts being used. We found a 75-year old man called Ivan, and he showed us the Jewish graveyard in an old wood outside the village. It was

rather unkempt. There was no vandalism but it was overgrown with weeds and grasses. We found a number of Jewish tombstones. We discovered that many of these (all from before the second world war) dated back to the nineteenth century and we discovered one with the name Rohm on it. My grandmother's family included people called Rohm, so that might have been a relation. That is something we haven't yet been able to establish. It was curious to think that Ivan must have been born in 1925 and that his mother and father would have almost certainly known my grandparents.

We then went on and the most interesting thing was when we came to Mosedis, Meshad. It turned out to be a village in a National Park. It has a church which was built in 1789 and people can point to where the synagogue was, where the Jewish streets were but there is nothing that indicated that they are Jewish. Now we know there was a fire in about 1909 and so most of these buildings would not be the same buildings but in the same style. Even discovering that fire was fascinating because my father had been told by his parents that my great grandfather had died in a fire in round about 1907, 1908 and when we were in Meshad they told us quite independently, 'Yes, there was a big fire here in 1909'. That clearly was the same occasion that my father had been told about.

We met in Meshad a 95-year old who was the oldest person still alive in the village but sadly he was somewhat confused because when he heard who we were he persuaded himself that we had come back to claim our property and he spent the whole time trying to assure us that he had acquired the property entirely legally and therefore we should not be too concerned.

There was also interesting confirmation that we had not anticipated, regarding Ber of Salant. The particular reference was

instructions he had been given, along with other Jews in Meshad in 1846 to leave and to go and live somewhere else. He was being given some compensation but there was no explanation why they were being asked to leave. The archives people said there was another reference in the document saying they never in fact left but nobody knows quite why. That seemed a bit of a mystery and then in the book *The Jews of Lithuania* I discovered a paragraph which says as follows:

*As early as 1839, when visiting London, the Czar had been presented with a petition by prominent British political leaders urging him to annul an edict ordering the expulsion of Jews from towns and villages within 35 miles of the German and Austrian borders. The decree was in fact allowed to lapse but only because it proved harmful to state interests.*

Now that part of Lithuania was very close to what then would have been German territory. So this is confirmation of the information we were given in Kaunes as to why my great, great grandfather had been ordered to leave and in fact had not done so.

I now come to the most exciting part of our whole visit. In Meshad there is no visible evidence of its Jewish past. But we were told by some people we met that there had been an old Jewish graveyard on an island in a lake, very close to the village. So we said 'Well, can we go to the island?'. One person said 'Well, there really is no way you can go there, there are no boats there, and we can't find anyone who would be able to take you'. Another chap said, 'Well there is no point in your going anyway as there is nothing on the island now. It's completely deserted'. And then we were just about to abandon that idea when a third person said 'Well actually there is a memorial on the shore, not on the island itself but on the shore, that has been put up by the Lithuanian authorities a couple of years ago to commemorate the

Jewish graveyard across the water on the island". And we found this monument and were photographed and were able to see the island. And we got in the car and had actually turned the engine on to leave, when suddenly we saw a chap rowing a boat. Some things are ordained! I swear it is absolutely true. We had turned the engine on and were about to leave, when suddenly on the water was this guy who had been fishing in a very small wooden boat and he was going to pass us. And Marion shouted out to him and said would he be willing to consider taking us across to the island. And we got on to the boat, a rickety little boat, and we were rowed across to the island and far from being deserted when we got there, there were twenty or thirty Jewish tombstones. And the island was most attractive (one has to be buried somewhere) and I can't think of a nicer place. I think it was used occasionally by people fishing to have a picnic or something. There was no vandalism and there were about 20 or 30 Jewish headstones. We thought our great grandfather was almost certainly buried there. We have no evidence of that as we did not find his tombstone, but we know that he died in Meshad in 1909. That was the Jewish cemetery right up to 1940.

We left Meshad and our final place to go was Klaipeda which used to be Memel. We hadn't intended to spend very long there but my great grandmother had retired there after my grandfather had died in the fire. So we wanted to see it and according to our map there had been an old Jewish quarter and we found that where the old Jewish graveyards had been there was a courtyard and they had built into the wall of the courtyard some of the old tombstones, as a very attractive visual structure, and then there was a building nearby with a *magen David* and there was a *menorah* nearby. And when we went into the building there were three or four people there and they turned out to be a small Jewish community.

When you go to Lithuania, and if you go as we did to see the roots of ones family, in fact we found not just one Jewish Lithuania but there are three. There is the one we had come to find, which was the Lithuania of the past, the nineteenth century. But you are constantly reminded of the Holocaust of the 250,000 who lived there and who perished in 1940 and that is something which is very much part of current Lithuanian preoccupation. And then the third is that small but vibrant Jewish community that still exists, in Vilnius, in Kaunes, in Klaipeda and which continues the tradition of one of the most remarkable Jewish communities of the Diaspora. So I simply say that we had no regrets about this particular odyssey. We didn't discover anything remarkable; there was no great dramatic revelations but we did manage to extend our knowledge of our own family which had only gone back to about 1860, 1870 to the latter part of the eighteenth century. We discovered that all these names that had only been names, they are now real people. We now know something about who they were, who they were married to, when they were born, where they lived, at least in general terms. And when you see a name on a document that was part of their lives that is much more interesting than just a name you have heard vaguely and have no other associations. So I share these thoughts with you and I simply say that if anyone has similar interests, our conclusion was that the whole exercise was much less complicated, much easier, and much more satisfying than we had dared imagine.

#### References

The all Lithuania data base [www.jewishgen.org/litvak](http://www.jewishgen.org/litvak). this major data base contains full or partial revision lists, family lists, census lists and town residence lists for 1816, 1834, 1851, 1858 and 1874 for most of the districts in Vilna and Kovno-Governia and for many other towns. A large collection of Jewish candle and box

*taxes, business taxes, savings book information as well as property and real estate taxes can be found combined in this data base.*

#### Check list for a visit to Lithuania

1. Hire a car, because if you want to go to any of the *shtetls* or small towns then you need your own transport.
2. Arrange some access to someone who speaks Russian or Lithuanian, although English is fine in Vilnius or Kaunes. Five years from now you will all be able to find a youngster who speaks English and can translate for his parents or grandparents. But that is not yet true and if you are speaking Russian or find someone who is speaking Russian, get them to start by making it clear to the Lithuanians that they are not themselves Russians then they will happily speak Russian.

This article is taken from a talk given to the Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society in October, 2000.

#### *The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain*

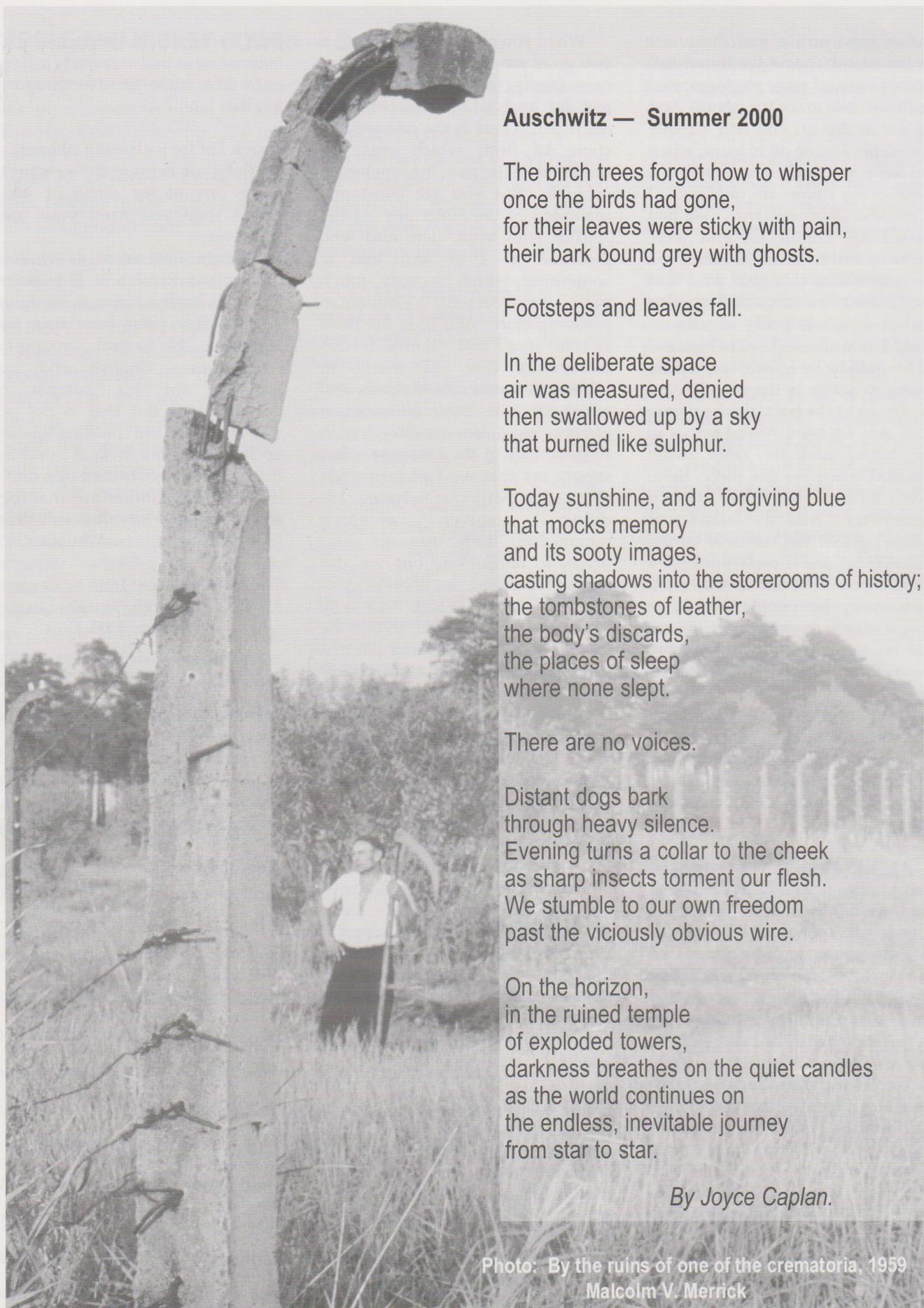
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**Auschwitz — Summer 2000**

The birch trees forgot how to whisper  
once the birds had gone,  
for their leaves were sticky with pain,  
their bark bound grey with ghosts.

Footsteps and leaves fall.

In the deliberate space  
air was measured, denied  
then swallowed up by a sky  
that burned like sulphur.

Today sunshine, and a forgiving blue  
that mocks memory  
and its sooty images,  
casting shadows into the storerooms of history;  
the tombstones of leather,  
the body's discards,  
the places of sleep  
where none slept.

There are no voices.

Distant dogs bark  
through heavy silence.  
Evening turns a collar to the cheek  
as sharp insects torment our flesh.  
We stumble to our own freedom  
past the viciously obvious wire.

On the horizon,  
in the ruined temple  
of exploded towers,  
darkness breathes on the quiet candles  
as the world continues on  
the endless, inevitable journey  
from star to star.

*By Joyce Caplan.*

Photo: By the ruins of one of the crematoria, 1959  
Malcolm V. Merrick

## KOSHER HAGGIS

by Dr J. A. Aronson

Everyone knows what a haggis is, and some may even have gone so far as to have eaten one (kosher varieties are available). The Oxford English Dictionary gives this definition:

*A dish consisting of the heart, lungs and liver of a sheep, calf, etc. (or sometimes of the tripe and chitterlings), minced with suet and oatmeal, seasoned with salt, pepper, onions, etc., and boiled like a large sausage in the maw of the animal.*

But the origin of the word is not known. It is widely believed that the dish had its origins in Scotland, but that is probably not so. Since the fifteenth century at least, haggis has been very popular in many parts of England, and one popular explanation of the origin of the word is that it is from Middle English. This is what Ivor Brown wrote about it in *Words in Our Time*, one of the several excellent books he published during the 1950s on the origins and meanings of words:

*Something new about haggis—the fact that it derives from Middle English. This will hardly worry the Scots, who may well be weary of the English notion that they go (or would gladly go) through life consuming nothing but the native broth, haggis, and whisky. No depreciation of the article is intended. But all nations are entitled to resent labels unnecessarily applied. Haggis has become, in English fancy, the Scots' gimmick, if that word must be used; consequently it will only make Scots smile when they are informed by their own Scottish National Dictionary that haggis comes from a Middle English verb meaning to cut or chop, and that the Northern English, and possibly the Southern*

*too, were "hagging" their meat at table (and possibly each other too in their incessant baronial wars) some eighty years before the Scots "hagged" up most of a sheep (except the mutton) and sewed it with spice and oatmeal in its paunchy container.*

There is certainly in Northern dialects a word *hag* meaning to cut, hew, or chop, and its origin is given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as from Old Teutonic (*hauwan*) via Old Norse (*haggw-*), equivalent to the Old English *heawan*. A *hag* was a cutting or felling of trees, and the *hagworm*, i.e. the cutting or biting snake, was the adder. In his etymological dictionary *Origins*, Eric Partridge supports this, saying that the Old Norse word *höggva*, to hack, gave the Scandinavian word *hag*, and that haggis is a *minced-meat dish* [his italics]. There was also a supposed connection with the French words *hache* (an axe or hatchet) and *hachis* (minced meat or hash).

But the frequentative form of *hag* is *haggle*, to hack away at something and therefore to argue, so perhaps there's something to argue with. And indeed James Murray, the first editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was sceptical:

*The analogy of most items of cookery suggests a French source; but no corresponding French word or form has been found. The conjecture that it represents French hachis "hash", with assimilation to haq, hack, to chop, has apparently no basis of fact; French hachis is not known so early, and the early forms of the English word are more remote from it. Whether the word is connected with the verb haq, evidence does not show.*

Now there speaks a proper lexicographer, who knew his stuff.

So if it isn't from Middle English or French, where is it from? Well, all the best culinary delights were invented by the Jews, and the termination of the word haggis is reminiscent of the names of some other familiar types of food—*blintzis*, *tsimmiss*, and *gribbinis*.

Indeed, following this line of etymological inquiry has led me to believe that the haggis has a much longer tradition than has previously been suspected. Imagine, if you will, the Children of Israel packing their bags ready to leave Egypt. They had been told to bake *matzot* for dinner on the night the slaying of the first-born was due (*Exodus xii:8*), and then took with them when they left in a rush the next day. Now how could you pack those cakes of matzo in your luggage without getting crumbs everywhere? Much more sensible to crumble them first and pack them into some sort of bag; and with characteristic parsimony, what better bag to use than the intestines of the sacrificial lamb? Of course, this would have involved at least two acts of disobedience. First, they had been told (*Exodus xii: 10*) to *let nothing [of the lamb] remain until the morning*; if anything did remain it was to be burned. Secondly, there was no way they could have avoided staining the *matzot* with the blood of the lamb, and there was a long-standing prohibition on eating blood (see for example, *Genesis ix: 4*). Perhaps they just pretended it was *chrayn*. Anyway they called what they made from it haggis, a pudding.

Now how do we know that they called it haggis, or that haggis meant pudding? The first clue comes from a later period. You've all read those adverts that appear in the newspapers on 14 February every year, in which lovers call each other by their pet names—"piggly-

wiggly", "snookums", "ugly-mug", and other like endearments. It is not widely known that this habit started with one of the greatest of biblical lovers, King David. The names that have come down to us as being those of his wives and lovers were not in fact their real names, but the pet names he gave them. Ahinoam, his first wife, who must have been something special, he called "Hot stuff" (*akhi* = my fireplace + *noam* = delight); Avigail was "Lusty" (and no doubt busty too) from *aviyona*, libido + *ga'al* free; Maacah was "Tasty" (*ma'akhal* a meal); Avital was "Luscious" (*aviyona* + *tal* = dew); and Eglah was "Milkmaid", referring to her bounteous gifts (from *eglah* a heifer).

And Haggis? Haggis was the name of David's fourth wife. Note that her name begins with a khet, commonly transliterated as an aitch. She is mentioned five times in the Old Testament, each time in the

context of being Adonijah's mother (see for example 2 Samuel iii: 4). Of all David's wives she was the plumpest, so well rounded in fact that she needed an extra large girdle (*khaggorah*) and resembled that plump bird the partridge (*khaglah*). And so David's pet name for her was Khaggis or "Pudding".

So when the Children of Israel crumbled *matzot* and packed them tightly into the intestines of the lamb, they called the resulting blood-stained product "red pudding", or in Hebrew *khaggis adamah*. Later, because of a scribal error, this became *haggadah*. The connection with the haggis is also explained in Exodus xii:14, in which the Children of Israel are told that they should "keep [this day] a feast to the Lord", *khaggosem oto khag l'Adonai*. And a later alternative name for *Pesach* was *khag gez*, or "festival of sheep-shearing". But, in case you were wondering, there's

no connection with the word *hagzamah*, an exaggeration or spoof, which begins with a hay not a khet.

Haggis is therefore a Jewish pudding, and the lost tribes are alive and well and eating it in the Highlands and Islands.

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## Chicken Soup

by Julia and Malcolm V. Merrick.

The air in Old Reeky is not nearly as polluted as it was, but chest problems still oppress us, so it is interesting to read that the medical journals have again reported curative properties of chicken soup for respiratory viral infections. In an editorial, Professor Bradley S. Bender advises that you should sit down and, in his mother's words, *Don't eat so fast! You'll ruin your digestion*, then in his opinion, inhaling the steam from chicken soup would undoubtedly raise the temperature of the airways and help loosen secretions. The soup would further help the patient by providing proper hydration. Actual experiments are reported in a paper by Renard *et al*.

The authors, who have made quite a meal of the subject, showed that

extracts of chicken soup, with and without *matzoh* balls and vegetables, 'significantly inhibited neutrophil chemotaxis'. In plain English this means that in the test tube, chicken soup toned down the exaggerated response of white blood cells to virus. (It is this exaggerated response, rather than the virus, which causes the symptoms.) It is to be regretted that their experiments took place on the laboratory bench and have yet to be confirmed with *in vivo* tests. The recipe for the home-made soup tested was given to the author by C. Fleischer and is known as Grandma's soup.

For the full account read **Chest** 118/4/October, 2000, editorial p887 and *Ckicken Soup Inhibits Neutrophil Chemotaxis In Vitro* . pp1150-1157.

### Grandma's soup

- 1 5-6lb boiling fowl or roasting chicken
- 1 package of chicken wings
- 3 large onions
- 1 large sweet potato
- 3 parsnips
- 2 turnips (the author does not state whether orange or white)
- 11 or 12 large carrots
- 5 or 6 celery stems
- 1 bunch of parsley
- salt and pepper to taste.

Take a large pot and cover the clean chicken with cold water. Bring to the boil. Add the root vegetables and boil for 1½ h. skimming off the fat as it accumulates. Add the parsley and celery and cook for ½ h. Remove the chicken and wings. Liquidise the vegetables and add to the soup. (The author explains that Grandma did this during the Great Depression in the USA, so that the family would eat their vegetables.) Season to taste.

## Modern Jewish Cooking with Style

The title of this recipe book by Denise Phillips is slightly misleading; while it certainly contains modern and stylish recipes, almost none of them could be described as typically Jewish. Its style and content seem very similar to many other modern cookery books that are available. The book is subtitled *Innovative and Contemporary Kosher Recipes for all Occasions* and although the recipes are, of course, free from any forbidden foods, many of them in fact being completely vegetarian, the emphasis is much more on modern dishes that happen to be kosher as opposed to new interpretations of traditionally kosher dishes.

On a more positive note, it does contain an enormous variety of recipes ranging from Thai Fish Cakes and Oriental Chicken Filo Tarts to Spatchcock of Poussin with Caramelised Apples in Cider and Sesame and Orange Lamb Chops. As the names suggest the recipes aim to cater for both 'mid-week

suppers' as well as 'entertaining to impress'. The recipes are very clearly laid out, easy to follow and the book contains some excellent photographs.

We tried out Mint and Chive Sweet Potato Vichyssoise and Basque-style Tuna Stew with Aubergine Tabbouleh. The dishes were easy to make and quite tasty although the quoted preparation times were a little optimistic.

As well as recipes the book also contains some general cooking tips on the planning and presentation of meals and has some suggested menus for special occasions such as *Rosh Hashanah* and *Seder*. It also has a section on wine which, rather surprisingly, fails to mention the religious significance of wine in Judaism, and in particular the specific rules on wine *kashrut*.

All in all this is not a bad cookery book, providing interesting recipes for a wide range of less common

dishes from around the world but if you are looking for a real 'Jewish' cookbook then you should stick to the likes of Evelyn Rose and Claudia Roden.

**Susie and Jonathan Adler**

*Modern Jewish Cooking with Style*  
by Denise Phillips, Robson Books, 2000.

### To My Friends

Each of us carries the imprint  
Of the friend met along the way;  
In each the trace of each.

Primo Levi

From *The Mirror Maker*

Translation by Raymond  
Rosenthal, Published by Mierva  
in 1991.

**Quotation selected by the  
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## Songs from Mistyland by Eva Neuberg-Erdelyi

Eva Neuberg-Erdelyi has had a remarkable life. Her journey through life mirrors that of European Jewry in the Twentieth Century, taking her from Bohemia to Vienna, to the UK, America, back to the UK and finally to Israel where she has made her home since 1987. I have been privileged to know her for the last 24 years of that journey. Her collection, "Songs from Mistyland", published earlier this year by Minerva Press, bears witness to the huge cultural and artistic resources that she has acquired through a life of scholarship and literary endeavour.

The book is divided into three parts. The introductory poems are mystical in tone. They look ahead to the great mystery of the end of life; *to the land of far-seeing to the place /Where I may rest awhile*. This is Mistyland, the term itself a wordplay for that mysterious place. It is one of the poem's great strengths that they contain no self-pity. There are several poems of gentle nostalgia and regret. But irony and humour are also present even in this dark theme. In Mistyland *there might be refreshments*

*of every kind /But you could only buy what is healthy*. My favourite lines in this part are from *Sweet Thames, Flow Softly*:

*On a bridge of gold  
Trembles now my boat;  
Hear the song unfold  
To the final note.*

*Seagulls show the way,  
Each will find her nest;  
At the end of day  
Time will come to rest.*

Part 2 contains sonnets mainly on biblical and classical themes. With King Priam, we visit Achilles in his tent to reclaim the body of Patroclus. We join Ruth in following Naomi to *The House of Bread*. But there are also sonnets on personal themes where Eva looks back on those she has loved and lost. These elegies are given a wider significance. In mourning her mother, she seems to lament the lost Jews of Europe and to find some comfort in the *fruit which is ripening in the orange grove*. In her *Elpenor - A Vision* she describes a perfect child who has *run ahead of us and strayed beyond the marble doors*. *Elpenor* means Man's

Hope, and it is the name of Odysseus's lost companion whose shade he meets on his visit to the Underworld. Eva's vision is inspired by the Odyssey, but her Greek hero becomes something much more personal: "My boy, with shadowed eyes and golden skin"; who is raised to transcendent glory in the last two lines:

*I see his face, transfigured by the light,  
His wounded brow ennobled by a crown.*

This poem is one of multi-layered beauty to be read and reread.

Part 3 contains 62 limericks which Eva has included to fulfil her promise in the preface of "relaxation and entertainment". I would encourage readers of the Star to buy the book and see for themselves the wonderful richness and breadth of Eva's inventiveness.

Micheline Brannen

*Songs from Mistyland*

Minerva Press, London 2000.

ISBN: 075411 2101

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## A Tradition of Wandering by Anthony Gilbert

The Jews are a nation of wanderers. From the travels of Abraham in today's Middle East, the years of Moses' meandering in the desert, the scattering of Jews throughout the world by the exigencies of history to the return to modern Israel, the Jews have always wandered. And tradition being so much part of the Jewish way of life, it should come as no surprise to report that a number of us have been careful to maintain the 'spirit of wander' latent in all of us.

We have the good fortune to live in a city surrounded by glorious countryside. Within easy reach of Edinburgh are the hills of the Pentlands and the Borders, and the gently rolling terrain of East Lothian; even inside the city boundaries, there are numerous attractive parks and routes well worthy of exploration.

Recognition of this has led to an assortment of members of the community gathering together on perhaps half a dozen or more Sundays of the year in order to go for a ramble. This has been quietly taking place now for a number of years, the initial impetus for this coming, I am fairly certain, from Hilary and Arnold Rifkind. With the passage of time, the number involved in this activity has increased markedly, peaking last *Pesach*, when 25 of us assembled for the annual *matzoh*-ramble. This was a splendid event, encompassing a very broad age spectrum of Community members, from the youngest Winetrobe to those with bus passes, but not yet wheel chairs, and including a substantial proportion of the *Cheder*. On more modest occasions, we still customarily muster ten or more souls for an enjoyable meander.

The walks are not especially arduous. We have no aim to break any records; we just hope to enjoy the company, the conversation and the surroundings. In the most ambitious, we have done something on the lines of a few of the tops of the Pentland Ridge, and even this has generally been after the group has done a voluntary split into a more adventurous 'flying column' and the remainder taking it all a bit more leisurely. The reward of the hilltops is of course the view. More down to earth in all ways, we have had walks along the canal, beside the Forth by Dalmeny, after an exciting voyage on the trans-Almond ferry, and along the disused railway up to Balerno. The activity tends to quieten somewhat in the winter months, but I can recall a lovely snowy walk starting at Peebles and returning beside the Tweed by Castle Neidpath.

There are still masses of good, new walks that await our investigation. Among those that I would like to explore some time are the Esk inland from Musselburgh, former railway tracks east and south of Edinburgh that have become walkways, the hills above Gladhouse Reservoir and more of the Tweed Valley and the hills overlooking it.

With the longer walks, we have customarily made a morning start, put a light sack on our backs and taken sustenance with us; the *Matzoh* walk has not been so called for nothing; I just hope the stuff is biodegradable. For the shorter walks, the reward is the tea at the end of road; our greatest coup in this department was to go to the pub just up from Colinton Dell and to collectively demolish twelve cream teas. On such trips an

essential companion is John Danzig; his skill in sniffing out the dainty tea room is quite unsurpassed.

If you are tired of the obligations of grinding through the remaining 85 pages of Sunday's *Observer*, if your heart yearns for something just a bit different from pulling up last winter's dahlias, why not give the Ramblers a turn? If there is a favourite bit of the locality you want to go back to, share it with us. Let me know of your interest at any time, and I will keep you posted about any forthcoming walks. I maintain email lists, which are a handy means of proposing and advertising forthcoming walks, but it is not necessary to be connected up in this way; please just let me know of your interest, and I am very hopeful I will find something to enjoy.

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