

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

### **Reports to the AGM**

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### **CHAIRMAN**

The last two reports to the AGM that I have done have been fairly similar, and, truth be told, I should probably be writing a similar ‘formal’ report this year too. Indeed my ‘Word from the Chair’ article that I wrote for the latest (January / February 2020) edition of Etrog could easily have been the report I submitted to this year’s AGM. It is fairly formal and looks back on my three years as Chair, and so I think it’s appropriate that I put in a link to the article:

[Link to Jan/Feb 2020 Etrog](#)

Having used my Word from the Chair article as the formal part of my report, what I want to mention are some of the positive things that took place last year, albeit it's not as if they just apply to last year. In no particular, some of these really good things include:

- Our tu b'shvat seder where we once again invited members of other faith communities for what was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion led by Rabbi Mark
- Our High Holyday services, where we have the really nice contrast in services led by Rabbi Mark and Rabbi Andrew Goldstein
- Our cheder, which continues to thrive. During the year we said goodbye to Dan Hershon as Head of Cheder and we now have Adam Budd fulfilling this role. Dan did a great job and Adam is now doing so
- We have good relationships with Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation. This is maybe something that we forget to acknowledge because we do have a good relationship, but it is worth remembering that not all communities are as fortunate as we are to have such a relationship
- We continue to receive a steady number of people who are interested in converting and who do so thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Mark with assistance from Norman Crane
- The number of people in our community who help out in one way or another, and which is quite high – be that standing on Council, leading services, booking rooms, teaching at cheder or all the other things that people do to help. Similarly if you think of the number of people who attend services, while we sometimes might think “wouldn't it be great if we had more?” – and for sure it would – as a percentage of the members of our community, I think quite a few other congregations would like to have a similar percentage attending their services.

It's often very easy to focus on things we think we could do better, or that we don't do at all. But I think it's really important that we

remember all the good things we do – and there are a lot more of them than I've mentioned above. It's all these things, some big ones but mostly all the small things, that define who we are. So, in my concluding remark as Chair, and as I said in my Word from the Chair article, I've been proud to represent our community and I did and still do get a great buzz when I hear people say what a nice community we are. I'm sure I will continue to get this buzz once I've stood down as Chair, and I hope that in the near future we will have an individual as Chair who can and does get that same buzz too. In the meantime, I'm sure that the sharing of the Chair's duties will be well done by Council, and I would like to thank everyone who has helped me during my time as Chair over the last three years.

## **RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

Our services in 2019 followed the pattern set in the year before, following the move to St. Marks. We had a full schedule of services, and a fortunate conjunction of calendars allowed Rabbi Mark to be present with us for Tu B'Shvat, Purim, Sukkot and Simchat Torah as well as the major festivals – except for Rosh Hashanah, led this year by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein. We celebrated the joyful events of Raffi Cooper's baby naming and the wedding of Becky Gilhooley and Fraser Halliday. Our pilgrimages to Newstead and Glasgow during the summer were both very successful, and repeats are already planned for 2020.

Once again, it's taken the efforts of many people to make our services happen. Charlie Raab renders sterling work as warden, assisted by Des Shanko. Liaison with our venues is handled with exemplary efficiency by Stew Green. Service support is co-ordinated by Gillian Raab and Sue Bard (Gillian reports on this below). Helen Ford continues to organise and lead the Kabbalat Shabbat services, and our lay leaders for various services last year also included Gillian Raab, Norman Crane, Wendy Crane, Ricky Hogg, Nick Silk, and me.

As always, we need more service leaders, and more singers! Please don't think that you would have to begin my leading an entire Shabbat service – we have ideas for how you could work up from a very small portion at our most informal and low-key services. It's very encouraging that we're once again sending a community member to the Ba'al Tefillah course: the more lay leaders we have, the more that services become genuinely communal events.

Something else that we need is feedback on how our services are conducted, and how they could be improved to speak more directly to our members. Don't assume, because we've always done things in some particular way, that we'd never consider changes. If you can think of a way in which services could be changed to make them more meaningful to you, tell us. To quote LJ's home page, "Liberal Judaism affirms the dynamic, developing character of our Jewish religious tradition": so, let's make Sukkat Shalom's tradition dynamic and developing!

## **Maurice Naftalin**

### **CHEDER**

The cheder continues to run smoothly this year, with the regular involvement of 16 families with bright kids aged 4 to 14. Adam, Rebecca, Gila, and Mor comprise a dedicated team of teachers, with the help of two Jewish Society students: Ella and Darcy.

We attribute the smooth working of the cheder this year to two new developments: remuneration of all staff, nominal funding for meetings and supplies, and an ongoing positive relationship with Marchmont St Giles.

Adam wishes to express his warm thanks to all parents, and particularly to the teachers. Our final session of the 2019/20 session will take place in mid-June. Please send any questions, comments, suggestions to [adam.budd@ed.ac.uk](mailto:adam.budd@ed.ac.uk)

## **Adam Budd**

## **BURIALS**

I am pleased to announce that there have been no deaths within our community over 2019 and early 2020. We did however help to organise and officiate at the burial of Joseph Hellszajn at the request of his family.

**Ricky Hogg.**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Following 2019's AGM, Sukkat Shalom introduced associate membership, which offers every non-Jewish person a more inclusive opportunity to participate in the life of our community. Nobody is required to become associate member apart from those who join the Exploring Judaism classes for the purpose of conversion. At the end of 2019, Sukkat Shalom had 14 associate members, all of them belonging to the study group. Although associate membership provides an option to non-Jewish individuals who want to formalise their link to the community, it hasn't brought any significant economic benefit for our finances, either because the members of Exploring Judaism are exempt from fees for the first 24 months, or because due membership fees have not been paid.

As membership secretary, in 2019 I reviewed the membership list to make sure that we had the consent of every member to keep their personal data. I also reached out those whose membership status had been unclear for a while and had not paid the membership fees. The count of people who were members at the end of 2019 is 99, a decrease from 109 of 2018. The reason of the decrease is linked with the review mentioned above, and with those members who moved from Edinburgh to other cities, such as students who finished their studies and went back home.

One of the plans for 2020 is to create an online membership directory. Members have already expressed their consent on whether they want to be included in the directory and, if so, which pieces of information they want to make available online. However, we will contact everyone again before publishing the directory, which

will be in compliance with data protection regulations and will be accessible only to members.

## **Stefano Giossi**

### **INTERFAITH**

The restructuring of the Edinburgh Interfaith Group (EIFA) means that there are now no longer formal religious representatives for each of the various faith groups, rather the Council is made up of those who have volunteered to stand. At the moment, I don't think that there is anyone from either Jewish community on the EIFA Council. Having said that, we have still continued to play our part in EIFA – I gave a reading at the annual peace service, a good number of our members took part in the peace walk and we once again invited EIFA members to our tu b'shvat seder which was a great success. I have also been involved in the West Lothian Faith Group, including giving a reading at their peace service and attending an interfaith supper.

While we do continue to play our part in Interfaith matters, it would be great if one of our community would like to volunteer to take the lead on Interfaith matters. I'm sure that there is much more that we could be doing. I hope that we have someone stepping forward at the AGM, and I would be more than happy to work with someone on interfaith matters.

## **Nick Silk**

### **NEWSLETTER Etrog: January – December 2019**

This year, we have produced six bi-monthly newsletters. Mostly online, we are happy to provide print copies for people who want them. They are an important part of the way in which we communicate both within our community and with the many non-members, along with our fortnightly reminders, our website and our facebook page.

Etrog gives us the chance both to anticipate and reflect on the many festivals and events, religious and cultural, that fill our year; to celebrate our members' life events and achievements; to introduce our new members and to get regular reports from our thriving cheder. While the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish community is small, it is outward-facing, with many individual and community external connections. This is reflected in Etrog, which this year described our visits to other Jewish communities in Scotland, included accounts of Jewish life, past and present in other parts of the world, and reported on interfaith activity.

We welcome contributions to Etrog, so if there's something you think you'd like to write about, please just let us know. Etrog is produced by the newsletter group, consisting of Sue Bard, Maurice Naftalin, Charlie Raab and Gillian Raab

## **Sue Bard**

### **ADULT EDUCATION**

The general pattern of adult education has remained the same as in previous years. On his monthly visits Rabbi Mark Solomon, usually on a Shabbat afternoon, leads study sessions called Tea and Talmud. The texts we have looked at have included Bible and other types of Jewish literature. No prior knowledge of Hebrew language is needed. We are often joined by non-members and regulars include members of other faith groups or none. This helps to make the topics under discussion lively and thought provoking. The day after on the Sunday afternoon the Rabbi leads a discussion group. We have looked at the construction and content of the new draft Siddur. We have spent some time looking at extracts from Maimonides Guide For The Perplexed. With Rabbi Mark's expert leadership we are perhaps a little less bewildered.

Rabbi Mark sets out a curriculum for the year for the exploring Judaism group. He takes the group on Sunday mornings and I cover

the rest of the curriculum once a month after the Kabbalat Shabbat service.

**Norman Crane**

## **SERVICE LOGISTICS/ SECURITY**

Our move to use only two main venues for our services has simplified our procedures for the logistics of organising services and ensuring the safety of those attending.

We use St Marks Unitarian church for two services per month and for our High Holyday services. For our regular services we use procedures initiated by Yonathan Eisenberg that ensure we have three people assigned to each service to greet people and to set up for the venue, including moving the ark into position for Shabbat morning services. Procedures for admitting latecomers are either via the doorbell (back room) or by a mobile phone that is set to silent and advertised on the door. Members and associate members who have signed up to be helpers make up the rota of people for each service. We would welcome more people to join the helpers group.

For High Holyday services, especially Yom Kippur, we have separate rotas organised at St Marks. People are only admitted to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with a ticket that has been sent to members and associate members or requested in advance of the service. We inform Police Scotland of the times of our High Holyday services and they usually come to monitor things.

Marchmont St Giles Church Centre is used for our cheder and for early-evening kabbalat shabbat services. At the cheder one parent, who also supplies the snack, stays during the cheder to monitor people coming in to the building.

Thanks to everyone who contributes to this part of our organisation.

**Gillian Raab, Sue Bard**