

# Sukkat Shalom

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community

Scottish Charity SC035678

[www.eljc.org](http://www.eljc.org)

July 2013

Tammuz–Av 5773

issue 55

## July

- 12** Service and Supper  
CC 7.00
- 13** Shabbat Morning Service  
**Dundee Synagogue**  
See p. 5 11.30
- 14** Choosing Judaism  
Usual location 10.30  
Tea and Talmud  
CC 4.00
- 27** Shabbat Morning Service  
CC 11.00

## August

- 2** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 9** Erev Shabbat Service  
CC 7.00
- 16** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 24** Shabbat Morning Service  
CC 11.00  
Tea and Talmud  
CC 3.00
- 25** Philosophy Group  
CC 4.00
- 30** Kabbalat Shabbat  
MSG 6.15
- 31** **First Cheder Session**  
MSG 3.30

## Venues

- CC** Columcille Centre  
2 Newbattle Terrace
- MSG** Marchmont St Giles  
1a Kilgraston Road

## Word from the Chair

News and previews from Norman Crane

2

## What hope?

An experience of fractured reality recounted by  
Sue Lieberman

3

## Also in this issue

Shabbat in Dundee

*Nick Silk*

5

A 'thank you' to Blanche Mundy, z"l

*Ruzena Wood*

5

Equal marriage is about love, not gender

*Jen Underwood and Rebekah Gronowski*

6

Admission free; gentiles half-price: Edinburgh this August

*Catherine Lyons*

7

Maintaining a (liberal) Jewish life in Poland

*Michael Hornsby*

8

Mazel Tov to Kate on the publication of her new book

Solidarity with Muslims: 'a moral obligation'

*Catherine Lyons*

10

Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam, Jewish Care, and

Sistema Scotland

11

Jewish Edinburgh in 2023

*Gillian Raab*

12

## Community Phone and Email

These go to several council members

Leave voicemail

**0131 777 8024**

Send email

**[contact@eljc.org](mailto:contact@eljc.org)**

## Urgent Support

For urgent use or in emergency

**0131 208 1447**

## Contacts

Chairman Norman Crane

[chair@eljc.org](mailto:chair@eljc.org)

Administrator Catherine Lyons

[admin@eljc.org](mailto:admin@eljc.org)

Treasurer Gillian Raab

[treasurer@eljc.org](mailto:treasurer@eljc.org)

Equalities Rebekah Gronowski

[lgbt@eljc.org](mailto:lgbt@eljc.org)

Membership Eva Wiseman

[membership@eljc.org](mailto:membership@eljc.org)

Newsletter

[newsletter@eljc.org](mailto:newsletter@eljc.org)

---

## Word from the Chair

First, an update on the situation with regard to the **Church of Scotland**. We, that is Catherine Lyons and I, introduced Rabbi Mark and Rev Sally Foster Fulton to each other. The meeting was friendly, open, and productive. When we meet in the autumn, at Rabbi Mark's suggestion we will plan a day of dialogue in which he will take part. We will also discuss developing a shared vocabulary that other groups could refer to.

It never ceases to amaze me just how talented members of our community are, even when they leave us for foreign parts. Mazel tov to **Kate Lebow** on the publication of her book (p.9), and good wishes to Kate, Andrew, Naomi and Jacob. When are you going to come and visit us ?

We have already heard some reactions from those who went on the Community's Human Rights trip to Israel and the occupied West Bank, and **Sue Lieberman's** article on p. 3 is reflective and thought-provoking. We are planning an opportunity for trip participants to present their experiences directly to members and be available to answer questions. This will take place on Erev Shabbat, 25th October, as part of a community supper.

I do hope that as many people as possible will be able to go to **Dundee**. Our last trip was very successful and much appreciated by the local community. It was the first time for a long while that a service led by a rabbi had been held there. It was also for us an opportunity to experience as a community a service held in a building designed and consecrated as a Synagogue.

In the hurly burly of events this Summer I have forgotten, I confess, to arrange a celebration of a significant occasion and I aim to put that right in a small way here. I am sure everyone will join with me in sending **Rabbi Mark** every best wish for his birthday. You are very special to us all.

Congratulations to Rebekah Gronowski, who sent in the first successful answer to our cheder quiz. The answer is that the play-dough letters spell '**Daliyah**,' a girl's name (meaning 'blossoming bough'). Thanks too to Nadine Cossette, the mother of the young lady whose name it is. When cheder starts again, Nancy Lynner will ask the children to make 'Rivkah' in play dough to congratulate Rebekah.

The year rolls on; here is the first advance notice of the High Holidays, which fall very early this year. Our **Erev Rosh Hashanah** service will take place on Wednesday evening, **4 September**, at St Mark's Unitarian Church. Members will of course be duly informed of arrangements in the usual way.

Lastly I would like to issue a **newsletter** health warning. Next month's edition will be left to my paltry efforts and will not have the benefit of Catherine Lyons' skilful editing, as I am allowing her to go to Spain on holiday. Thank you Catherine for what you do in producing the Newsletter.

*Norman Crane*

## What Hope ?

### Personal reflections on the ELJC Israel-Palestine human rights tour

*Sue Lieberman*

*It is two weeks since we returned from our tour to Israel and the West Bank: a trip which was unquestionably one of the most impactful of my life. It was something I had long wanted to do, and the importance of making such a journey in a Jewish group, amongst people I knew, cannot be over-emphasised. I needed those emotionally safer conditions: they meant I could be open to feel what came at me without having to defend or pretend.*

**an emotional assault course** Yet going on this journey was a severe shock: one much bigger than I had anticipated, as I think things often are when you find yourself facing realities which turn your safe suppositions upside-down. Our visit went well beyond fact-finding, though facts there certainly were, and in abundance. More fundamentally it was an emotional assault course: disturbing, dismaying, distressing, disbelieving. Every question about being Jewish, Jewishness, Judaism, what you make of Jewish history, what it means to have a Jewish state, is thrown into messy turbulence. There are no neat conclusions here.

Coming home was neither easy nor comforting. My mind seemed to be elsewhere. I tried to write about our experiences and failed. Five days later, in the routine act of stopping my bike at a kerb, I missed my footing, keeled over, and fractured my wrist. My distracted mind came suddenly and painfully into bodily reality as I sat on the pavement clutching a wrist in agony. And now, as I face the prospect of several weeks one-handed, I am forced to reflect on how this accident brings into my personal reality the acute pain of a fracturedness not of body but of soul. How to manage for a few weeks with a fractured wrist is a mute reflection of a far profounder question of how we Jews relate to, manage, live with the terrible state of fracturedness that we have learnt to ignore or avoid in this other State that most of us care about somehow. All being well my arm will heal in a normal time-frame; I wish I had similar confidence about Israel.

**constant shock and dismay** The trip was intensely packed with visits and meetings. We met Physicians for Human Rights, Rabbis for Human Rights, the Israel Committee Against House

Demolitions (ICAHN), Breaking the Silence, Combatants for Peace, Windows for Peace, Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam ... We toured East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, the Negev, the South Hebron Hills; visited villages on the West Bank, Hebron itself, Bethlehem, Ramallah, two refugee camps, saw the remains of a house knocked down that morning; we met villagers and Bedouin struggling to cope with Israel's increasing encroachments on their land and freedom to move around for their most basic needs ...

It wasn't just the volume of meetings that was intense, but the constant shock and dismay at meeting face-to-face what is going on in and around the West Bank as Israel asserts increasing levels of control over Palestinian lives. None of what we met induced much hope in the prospects of a just settlement. None, that is, except for our hosts and guides: the extraordinary, passionate, dignified, committed people we met on both sides; Israelis and Palestinians who hold to a vision of a just society and who give their time, commitment and sometimes their freedom to the hope of one day achieving it.

William Sutcliffe wrote recently in *The Guardian* that nothing — no photographs, no descriptions of the Separation Wall — prepares you for the physical shock of seeing it. He is right about the wall itself. It is a grotesque intrusion on a beautiful landscape, a physical expression of the

**mental walls** mental walls and barriers increasingly blocking Israelis' view of the alarming consequences of their government's expansionist policies. Israelis have been persuaded to think of it as a 'security' wall, but that seems a poor shadow of the truth. Thousands of Palestinians cross into Israel every day to work, and we learnt that it is remarkably easy, with a bit of organising and ingenuity, to climb over it, so the opportunities for a dedicated suicide bomber are plentiful. The real purpose of the wall is to make life as difficult as possible for Palestinians: to stop them crossing a road running between their houses and their fields; to cut them off from fresh water springs; to force them into long detours to take their children to school or visit family in neighbouring villages.

All this we saw and heard about, repeatedly. It is the persistent accumulation of shocks like these that stops you in your tracks; forces you to look, and look again, in disbelief, dismay, horror. Can this really be going on? Is this what a Jewish state looks like?

*disbelief, dismay, horror*

It is not just the wall. That is simply the outer expression of complex and interlocking policies that together have a general thrust in one direction: to move Palestinians off the land and into urbanised — easily controlled — areas. The so-called Palestinian State which Israel seems to envisage will, if things continue to move in this direction, be little more than a series of discontinuous municipalities without the land integrity needed to form a meaningful State. In this setup Israel will continue to control the two principal sources of water, all the main roads and lines of communication, access to Jerusalem and its key religious sites, even electricity supplies. I came away queasily recalling how the Nazis emptied the countryside of Jews, moving them into urban ghettos where they could be more effectively controlled. Israel is not a Nazi state; to make such assertions is facile and degrading. Nevertheless, we may have unwittingly learnt more than is good for us about methods which enable you to stay ruthlessly on top.

It is impossible not to be angry at finding all this out, just as it was impossible not to be in floods of tears at times during the week. No Jew wants to have their hoped-for image of Israel shattered like this. I've spent many years feeling uneasily protective of Israel; as though Israel (militarily one of the most powerful countries in the world) needed me to protect it. I do not like what I saw; it brings shame on some of what I hold most dear about Judaism and being Jewish.

*clash between self-ideal and reality*

Most Israelis live with this outright clash between self-ideal and reality by not-seeing, by opting not

to look. There is a mental wall that invisibly runs somewhere down the faultline between the old Biblical territories — backward-looking and exclusionist — and the Mediterranean strip that used to be what, post-'48, we thought of as Israel: outward-facing, modern, open, absorbing of diversity. Faced with red notices plastered all over the West Bank advising Israeli citizens that it is illegal, not allowed, and VERY DANGEROUS for them to go to certain places, it's easy to understand that many Israelis will retreat in fear. Yet we found nothing but welcome from Palestinians. I say this despite one day getting angry with a young Palestinian involved in a protest, who likened Israeli oppression of the Palestinians to the Holocaust. That is pure ignorance. But perhaps Palestinians might be readier to sympathise with this appalling Jewish history if they experienced Israelis as readier to understand how the Palestinian experience of dispossession feels.

It was very strange to return to the bubble that is Tel Aviv at the end of our trip. You could easily forget that only fifty miles away is a physically evident world of separation, exclusion, control, destruction. At the offices of Windows for Peace we met young Palestinians and Jews. Among them were two feisty young Palestinian women, dressed as any modern western youngster is, still wrestling with the complex question of Israeli and Palestinian statehood. Ruti (WfP) told us that these young women were amongst the leaders of tomorrow: they would make any parent proud.

*a profound anomaly*

I found myself wondering what kind of state it is that can hate the claim of such fine youngsters to be fully equal in the society they have grown up in. Can there be such a thing as a Jewish state that is secular and diverse in the way we expect a modern state to be? There is a profound anomaly at the very heart of Israel's existence, and this trip served to highlight it.

©Sue Lieberman, June 2013

Sue Lieberman is a psychotherapist and writer. She is a founder member of Sukkat Shalom.

*Readers of Sue's essay may be interested to know that a presentation by trip participants to our own community is planned for 25 October, as part of a 'supper and songs' Erev Shabbat.*

*A number of authors will appear at the Book Festival this year whose work will be of interest. Some are previewed on p. 7.*

## Shabbat in Dundee

Last year we had a very successful day out to the Dundee Hebrew Congregation — now called the Tayside and Fife Jewish Community — and once again this year we are visiting them. We are invited to their synagogue at **9 St Mary's Place, Dundee, DD1 5RB**, on **13 July**. Rabbi Mark will lead a the service, starting at **11.30 a.m.**

After the service will be lunch, then a study session on the theme of Tisha B'Av (16 July). Our hosts will provide lunch and have asked us to bring fruit. (They have a kosher kitchen).

Last year a group of us went by train. Norman and Wendy Crane will be going to Dundee on the **9.29** train, arriving at **10.32**. Meet them at 9.15

at the gate to the platform.

- *Contact Norman* if you plan to meet at the station.
- *Contact me* to offer or ask for a lift.

*Nick Silk*



## A 'thank you' to Blanche Mundy z"l

The day of Blanche Mundy's funeral was sunny and gentle. Afternoon sunshine was a relief from the biting cold of a Winter reluctant to take its leave.

Blanche Mundy died on 13th May 2013. She was mourned by her children, grandchildren, friends and neighbours. Among the funeral congregation were people who had known Blanche for years. When Blanche moved into Home Royal House in Marchmont, she launched into new challenges.

I first met Blanche when she joined a group of students who wanted to brush up their Hebrew. A rabbi from New Zealand, David Sedley, had just been appointed to the Orthodox synagogue in Salisbury Road. David's wife encouraged the students and she did not hesitate to exclaim, "That's wonderful!" as we struggled to the end of a sentence. Standing beside her, Blanche looked dignified — greeting young and old, whether she had met them before or not. (There is nothing like a genuine welcome to help anyone feeling shy!) Blanche also enjoyed bridge games shared with friends.

Blanche's determination also led to her making an arrangement with Home Royal House for our fledgling community to meet once a month on a Friday evening. I looked forward to this (I am sure everyone else did too!). Candles, prayers,

folk-songs — and Challah!! Blanche was in her element as a hostess.

On one occasion I asked Blanche about the origin of her surname. She told me that "Mundy" was derived from the Latin word for "World". Was this meant to be a permanent reminder of the Diaspora, a subtle echo of everything to do with dispersion a long way from home?

It's a mysterious word, 'Diaspora', like the word "heaven". We don't know much about "Heaven" either. It's not surprising that lots of people find heaven difficult to imagine. May I suggest that there are times when we actually need Heaven. We learn about the Eternal One and human dependence upon hope. We know about the people who really mattered to us throughout our lives, the people we hope to be reunited with.

Traditional Negro Spirituals link the existence of heaven to a hope for survival. May Blanche discover a refreshing new world in heaven, free from pain. May those who were dear to her and her friends who are already in heaven share her joy. May they offer her a new life and show her the flowers, the trees, the hills and the lakes ... and the everlasting Light of the Eternal One. May we remember our friend Blanche and her acts of kindness. © Ruzena Wood

*Ruzena Wood*

## Equal marriage is about love, not gender

*Jen Underwood and Rebekah Gronowski*

*Jen writes* The Scottish equal marriage bill was published on 27 June. Despite arriving later than hoped, it proposes a more flexible and liberal regime than that seen in the new equal marriage laws in England and Wales.

For instance, the Westminster legislation bans the Anglican Church from performing same sex marriages. There is no similar ban in Scotland. Religious bodies are asked to opt in to performing the ceremonies so it is not automatically assumed that they have accepted this.

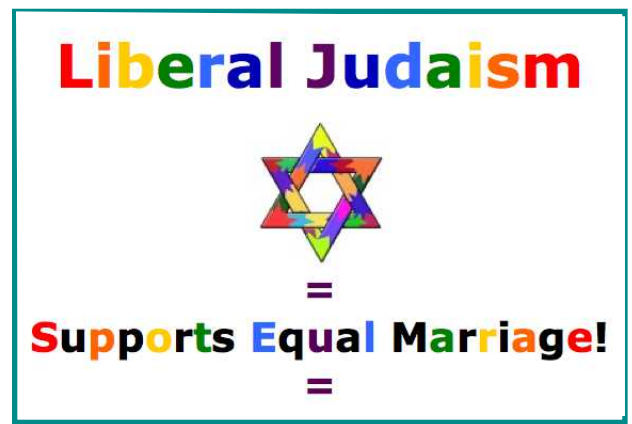
Alex Neil, the Scottish health secretary, said:

A marriage is about love, not gender. And that is the guiding principle at the heart of this bill. At the same time, we also want to protect freedom of speech and religion, and that's what the bill sets out to do.

This is truly wonderful news for us at Sukkat Shalom. For those who don't know, Liberal Judaism and Sukkat Shalom have been actively campaigning for equal marriage. My own belief is that marriage is about love between two people, any two people. I'm sure in a few years, we will look back with horror that gay and lesbian couples weren't allowed to marry. However, for now, we can celebrate the news that at long last they are allowed!

*Rebekah writes:* Several of our members have been active supporters of the equality campaign, even from before our community was born. For the last five years some of us have been involved in the Campaign for Equal Marriage in Scotland in one way or another.

Since 1980, when homosexuality was decriminalised, many factors have motivated campaigns for equalities legislation. I think this was the starting point for LGBT recognition. It has been a long, tortuous, journey. The year 2000 was a milestone. The infamous Section 28 was repealed, and several laws came into effect from then until 2008: lowering the age of consent;



Rebekah Gronowski's campaign banner would have been last seen down at the Scottish Parliament had Rebekah not been denied accessible parking at the launch of the equal marriage bill. [Grrr! Ed.]

gender recognition and civil partnerships enabled; equal access to public services; adoption equality, equality in fertility law, employment equality, and hate crime laws introduced. In 2010 the new Equality Act came into force which altered perceptions; it was a decisive moment in the history of equality. This gave protection in law to nine specific groups with particular characteristics.

All this gave it impetus to our Equal Marriage Campaign in 2008. Over five years we have engaged with public bodies, religious organisations, and politicians to plan an Equal Marriage Bill in the Scottish Parliament. We have met in small groups, in large groups, and one-on-one huddles over cups of tea. We have held interviews, distributed surveys, evaluated findings, held video conferences and TV interviews: all to establish people's views from all angles on all sides.

The last eighteen months, while we scrutinised the Draft Consultation (Equal Marriage) Bill, have been the busiest, while we examined the implications for different communities and for individuals, to arrive at a fair evaluation for all sides in the Equal Marriage debate. The Draft Consultation was submitted in December and finally the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament on Thursday 27th June 2013! It was a truly historic day!

*Readers may also like to read 'The Chuppah awaits', by Rabbi Danny Rich, in HaAretz, 2 July*

## Admission free; gentiles half-price: Edinburgh this August

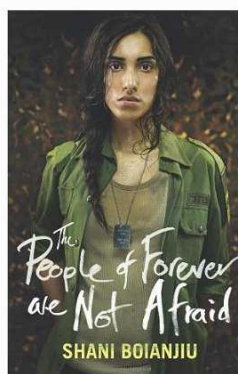
*Catherine Lyons*

Fans of Ivor Demina will know that I stole that line from his show. Ivor will be telling his Old Jewish Jokes again this year, at the Laughing Horse @ Bar 50, at 6pm every day throughout the Festival except Tuesdays (suitable for 14+).

I asked Ivor if there was anything he'd recommend of Jewish interest in the festivals this year, and he suggested I Google. The only Jewish Edinburgh festival performer Google knows about is .... Ivor Dembina (nice one, Ivor!).

But Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation will again be holding a festival open day. This year it will be held on Sunday 18 August. The line-up is yet to be revealed.

In the absence of lighter material, some thought-provoking events are coming up in the Book Festival and the newly named Just Festival (formerly the spirituality and peace festival; monosyllabic festivals only, please). Middle-eastern political writers are common at the Book Festival, but this year promises some unusual perspectives.



In her début novel, *The People of Forever Are Not Afraid*, Shani Boianjiu uses her experiences as a soldier in the Israel Defence Force to powerful effect. The book explores the impact of the occupation on those brought up to maintain it. I am reliably informed that this book provoked more

discussion at the Jewish Book Club than any other. Even those who didn't like it were drawn into engaging with it.

This year the Book Festival includes a comics theme, of which one of the high-profile guests is Joe Sacco. A political journalist, Sacco may seem incongruous as a comics author, but his investigative work in *Palestine* and in *Footnotes in Gaza* is finely documented in his graphic accounts. In his drawings we see Sacco himself interviewing his subjects, and we see their own history in narrative image.

A very different account of the occupation comes from Israeli architect, Eyal Weizman, author of *Hollow Land*. Most academic analysis of Israel and Palestine focuses on history. Weizman's dispassionate examination of the physical and human geography perhaps explicates some of the

shock expressed in Sue Lieberman's essay (p. 3). Weizman perceives a paradox in the 'optical urbanism' of the settlements.

'Like a theatrical set, the panorama is seen as an edited landscape put together by invisible stagehands who must step off the set as the lights come on. On different occasions, Palestinians could exist between the visual registers of danger, biblical authenticity [in cultivating the land in our image of Biblical pastoral], native pastorality and political invisibility. This lacuna of the latter register has been best demonstrated by Sa'adia Mandel, the head of the architecture department in Ariel College in the West Bank, who claimed that his architecture students watching out of the the classroom windows "see the Arab villages but don't notice them. They look and they don't see And I say this positively." '

Another comics author is the Israeli graphic novelist Rutu Modan. *Exit Wounds*, set in Tel Aviv, was described by the Times as ' a moving and utterly convincing portrayal of what it must be to live in modern Israel. At the book festival this year, Modan will be discussing her most recent book, *The Property*, a tale of family secrets, lost property, and the bond of family love.

## Maintaining a (liberal) Jewish life in Poland

*Michael Hornsby*

*At a first glance, being a liberal Jew in Poland appears to be relatively easy. There are a number of organisations which state that they follow progressive Judaism, based in a variety of towns throughout Poland, notably Warsaw and Kraków. One Jewish organisation is 'progressive' but — and — under the auspices of the Orthodox community in Warsaw (I am still trying to work that one out).*

The problem, however, coming from Britain and finding yourself in a Progressive Jewish congregation in Poland, is that 'progressive' means different things to different people. That is true of anywhere and of any movement styled progressive, whether Jewish or not, whether religious or not. What strikes me (and note that these are personal reflections, not a definitive statement on the affairs of Polish Jewry) is that progressive Judaism in Poland is still finding its way, still discovering its voice.

One major strand that seems to emerge is that progressive is defined, albeit subconsciously, as non-Orthodox, in the sense of being not-quite-Orthodox. Many Poles of Jewish descent identify with Orthodox Judaism in Poland and, in my view, that is a brave and not always obvious choice to make in a country where the residue of pre-war anti-semitism regularly rears its ugly head, but thankfully rarely flares up. Following an Orthodox path within Judaism is as good a choice as any,



*A re-enactment of a Jewish wedding in the Old Town in Lublin, May 2012. Such events are not only for tourists, but serve to reinforce inherited notions of what it means to be 'authentically' Jewish to both non-Jews and Jews in Poland in the twenty-first century.*

at times if Polish Jews are (subconsciously) looking for the equivalent of the Roman Catholic Church in a Jewish setting, looking for the one, true way to express their Jewishness. I



I have met a number of young, very committed Polish Jews within the progressive movement here in Poland, whose self-declared sympathies and interests lie within Orthodoxy. I am not sure what is preventing them from an out-and-out identification with the Orthodox community here, but I pick up a sense of conflict within such individuals. When I lived in Dorset and attended events at an Orthodox shul, I recall a rabbi saying that 'certain converts' were going to the local Reform shul 'because nobody else would have them.' The point is, in Poland, because of an open-door policy, it is relatively easy to identify with the Orthodox community here; the Orthodox would indeed 'have them'.

Another strand appears to be those Jews, or those Jewishly identified Poles, whose yardstick is Christianity. Given the total suppression of Jewish life in Poland in the decades after the war, this is not at all surprising. It can take the form of attending shul on Shabbat and then, if the following day happens to be the Catholic festival of All Souls', travelling halfway across the country to visit the graves of departed loved ones in order to light devotional candles. I personally find such hybrid practices quite touching and sincere. More confusingly for me, the tendency for others to identify as Messianic Jews suggests a reluctance on their part to totally leave Christianity behind in their quest for a religiously meaningful life.

*continues overleaf*



Coming from the West, such ‘muddy waters’ can be difficult to navigate. I attend Jewish events here — not as often as I would like, to be honest — but I have to admit to a sigh of relief when entering a liberal shul back in London or in Edinburgh. Heaven forbid that there should be a consensus of practice or of opinion in such congregations, but the framework is identifiably and reassuringly liberal Jewish. To me, this means that I can bring all of myself for collective worship with other liberal Jews, and, even if not all of the people I encounter there may agree with my choice of life partner (to take one facet of palpable difference), the ethos still remains that of Liberal Judaism, and I can take certain tenets as understood and broadly shared. I cannot make such assumptions when entering a progressive congregation in Poland, however, and cultural differences make it difficult for me to be myself on

occasion. (I recently cancelled my partner’s and my attendance at an event organised by a progressive Jewish organisation because it was increasingly being advertised as a ‘family occasion’. I became more and more unsure that the event organisers and my partner and I would find common ground over what constitutes a ‘family’). My hope is that progressive Judaism in Poland is still in the process of finding a voice and that it will one day find and nurture a voice that is genuinely liberal. It is furthermore to be hoped that the currently more conservative stance of many progressive Jews here in Poland is more of a phase rather than a fixed characteristic.

*Michael Hornsby is a former member who moved to Poland in 2009. He’ll be breathing a sigh of relief to be pitching up in Edinburgh in September for the High Holidays.*

## Mazel Tov to Kate on the publication of her new book

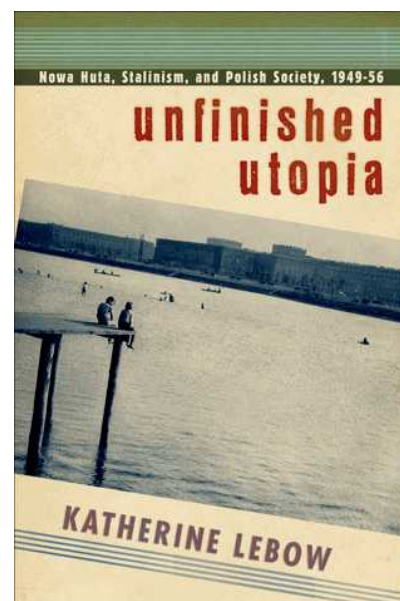
Kate Lebow, a former member who has moved with her family to Vienna, is very pleased that the book she was working on in Edinburgh is now published.

*Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56*

Cornell University Press, Katherine Lebow

*Unfinished Utopia* is a social and cultural history of Nowa Huta, dubbed Poland’s ‘first socialist city’ by Communist propaganda of the 1950s. Work began on the new town, located on the banks of the Vistula River just a few miles from Kraków, in 1949. Nowa Huta was intended to model a new kind of socialist modernity and to be peopled with “new men,” themselves the builders and the beneficiaries of this project of socialist construction. Nowa Huta was the largest and politically most significant of the socialist cities built in East Central Europe after World War II; home to the massive Lenin Steelworks, it epitomized the Stalinist program of forced industrialization that opened the cities to rural migrants and sought fundamentally to transform Polish society.

Focusing on Nowa Huta’s construction and steel workers, youth brigade volunteers, housewives, activists, and architects, Katherine Lebow explores their encounters with the ideology and practice of Stalinist mobilization by seeking out their voices in memoirs, oral history interviews, and archival records, juxtaposing these against the official and unofficial transcripts of Stalinism. Far from the gray and regimented landscape we imagine Stalinism to have been, the fledgling city was a colourful and anarchic place where the formerly disenfranchised (peasants, youth, women) hastened to assert their leading role in “building socialism”—but rarely in ways that authorities had anticipated.



## Solidarity with Muslims: 'a moral obligation'

*Catherine Lyons*

As the newsletter goes to press, I am including this report from a meeting on 2 July at the Central Mosque organised by United Against Fascism and attended by some of our members.

As I cycled through George Square on my way to the Mosque, I was puzzled to see police getting out of a hired minibus onto the cobbles. I crossed the top of the square and saw a crowd of police in fluorescent jackets. I could hear ahead of me the brute hatred of the Scottish Defence League. Their curses upon the Mosque were loud but there were only 15 of them. Opposite them, outside the Mosque, with more police, were more than 100 people holding United Against Fascism posters in support of the Mosque.

I sought to address the hate-mongers. Leaders of the hate group Stop the Islamization of America, invited to address an English Defence League rally, have been refused entry to the UK. Given that their group places ads on buses posing 'Israel and civilisation' against 'jihad and savagery', I wanted to address the SDL and let them know that did not have the support of Jews in Edinburgh. However, the police inspector wouldn't give me permission to address them for fear of how they would react. So I continued into the Mosque, past the Muslim equivalent of the CST. Inside the building were more police standing guard.

Inside the hall more and more chairs were brought out; it was a packed meeting. Speakers on the panel and from the floor spoke movingly of their personal experiences. There were people from the Mosque, clergy, teachers, trades unionists and others. The meeting covered both the sweep of history and our personal lives here in Edinburgh today. The EDL and the BNP may seem like insignificant minorities, but, we were reminded, the Nazis entered the Reichstag with 2.6% of the vote in 1928. We heard about the



*A packed meeting unites against hate speech*

subtle bias and the insidious provocation of the local journalist who covered the Newtongrange incident. We heard that more than half of Britain's mosques have now been attacked following the murder of Lee Rigby. We heard from a Muslim taxi driver who endures degrading filth from drunken customers, and his five-year-old son who comes home from school asking what a Paki is, his playground epithet. One young woman spoke positively about the diversity training at the investment bank she works for. But another speaker told of a bank clerk who was reprimanded for 'not being a team player' when she declined to decorate her desk for Christmas. We heard about a fascist demonstrating at a mosque in Dumfries who was found with an axe and a hammer. We heard about a Muslim woman who fears for her children's safety.

And we heard one man talk about how, as a child, he was often late home from school because he would be attacked on the way. There was no one there to stand in solidarity with him. That was Norman Crane. And Norman said that, as a Jew, it was a moral obligation for him to stand now in solidarity with Muslims who are being attacked.

United Against Fascism seeks to demonstrate that nowhere in our society is there a home for fascism. In all quarters, people stand up and refuse to be associated with it. UAF is gathering formal public support for their position from organisations representing all people who accept this moral obligation. I propose that our community be one of the signatories.

## Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam, Jewish Care, and Sistema Scotland

If you are wondering what all of these can possibly have in common, cast your mind back to our Kol Nidrei appeal. We have received thank you notes from all of these organisations.

### Jewish Care wrote:

We really appreciate your members thinking of us. And, with the economic climate continuing to worsen, more people in need are approaching us for help. It is always encouraging to receive such wonderful support.

**Sistema Scotland** organises the Big Noise orchestra for children in areas at risk of social exclusion. Their development officer wrote:

The Big Noise Concert in June 2012 saw the children of the Big Noise Raploch Orchestra performing alongside the internationally renowned Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Resulting from this extraordinary partnership, we have been invited to take the children on a once-in-a-lifetime cultural exchange to Caracas, Venezuela, and we are currently working hard to make that project a reality.

We are fortunate in having firsthand experience of the third recipient of our tzedakah, **Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam**. This intentional community was a highlight of the human rights trip. The village was jointly established by Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel and is located midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.



The Big Noise Concert 2012, Raploch, Stirling: 7000 in the audience and a third of a million people watching on TV.  
Source: [makeabignoise.org.uk](http://makeabignoise.org.uk)

The Silent Dome: a space of contemplation in the village.

Photo: Sharon Miller (Sue Lieberman's sister and a participant in the trip)



A cabin from the early days of the village has now been brightly refurbished.

Photo: Gillian Raab



## Jewish Edinburgh in 2023

*Gillian Raab*

Janet Mundy and Jane Ansell of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation have launched their project to facilitate communication between Jews of every sort in Edinburgh, people who are members of Sukkat Shalom, the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, and those with any other Jewish affiliation or with none.

The first meeting kicked off over a shared lunch on Sunday 30th June at Inch Park Sports Centre. Around 50 people took part. The meeting was structured around sharing our visions of the Jewish Community in Edinburgh ten years hence. Jane set the tone of the meeting by making it clear that we were to concentrate on the positive aspects and not the barriers.

We started by identifying initial themes: Community, Worship/Jewish practice, Education, Culture, Welfare and a catchall, "Other". We were then divided into groups to discuss these themes. The themes I took from the afternoon were education and co-operation. In her introduction, Jane quoted from Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can



Janet Mundy (l) and Jane Ansell (r), who initiated and facilitated the kick-off meeting at the Inch Park Sports Centre



Jane illustrated her introduction with this image in order to propose Ubuntu, the much admired African ethic, as a model for our dialogue. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes Ubuntu in the following.

"A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, based from a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed." (1999, *No Future Without Forgiveness*).

Image source: [www.allforonewonforall.com](http://www.allforonewonforall.com)

use to change the world." Aspects of education formed a large part of the feedback from the groups. The possibility of a joint cheder, or perhaps initially joint cheder activities, was raised by several groups, some seeing this as a way to lay foundations for the future. Joint activities, educational or social, were seen as a starting point for future collaboration. This already happens through organisations like the Jewish Literary Society, the Book Group and others, but more would be better. To quote one participant, 'We can play together even if we don't pray together'. Some groups brought up examples of other Jewish Communities, the Oxford and Stockholm Communities being possible models.

The very fact that so many people from different backgrounds were here together was evidence of existing cohesion. We have to thank Jane and Janet for their skill in setting things up in a way that differing views could be aired without conflict. A further dialogue meeting is planned for the Autumn, during the University term, to allow students to participate. A full report will be available. If you would like a copy and are not already on their list you can contact either Janet or Jane through our community email.