

Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society

Minutes of the 120th AGM held on Sunday 1st June 2008 at the EHC Community Centre

Present: Micheline Brannan, David Ellison, Judy Gilbert, Tony Gilbert, Avery Meiksin, Julia Merrick, Rabbi David Rose, Elaine Samuel, David Neville, Maurice Naftalin

Apologies: Catherine Lyons, Heather Valencia, Mike Valencia

1. Minutes of the AGM of 16th March 2007

The minutes of the AGM of the year 2006-07 were read out by the President, Avery Meiksin. They were accepted without change following proposal by Judy Gilbert and seconding by Julia Merrick.

2. President's report

Avery Meiksin read out his Presidential Report giving a brief summary of the events of the previous year. He noted with regret the sad loss of our Secretary, Steve Engleman, whose efforts had contributed so much to the year's successful programme; Steve will be sorely missed.

3. Treasurer's Report

David Ellison (Honorary Treasurer) tabled his Treasurer's Report.

He noted that membership had dropped from roughly 90 in 2005-06 to about 60 in 2006-07 to about 45 in 2007-2008, with a consequential drop in members' fees; this had been compensated to some extent by an increase in people attending single meetings; nevertheless the reduction in membership was viewed with some concern and there was discussion (below) as to means to reverse the decline.

Expenses rose compared with last year, with a consequent deficit of £139.88, compared with last year, which itself was down on the previous year (2005-2006).

The Society's assets at 31st March 2008 stood at £2731.34.

Elaine Samuel proposed and Micheline Brannan seconded adoption of the Report, which was agreed. David Ellison was thanked for his work on this and at the desk throughout the year, as well as Gershon Mendick for his support in the accounting.

4. Financial Matters/New fees

It was agreed to alter membership fees according to £12 per individual, except students, for whom the fee would be £10; the charge for a single event would be £3. Neither concessions would be offered, nor couple discounts. No discount for advanced payment before the first night would be offered.

A request from the Salisbury community hall was made to increase the fee for use of the hall to £175 from the current £125. It was suggested to offer an increase of £135 in view of the loss incurred this year, which may be justified by reducing the number of events from 8 to 6.

It was agreed the Lit would donate £50 to the Marie Curie Society in memory of Steve Engleman. A donation to the Lit was also received from friends of Steve's.

5. The Future of the Lit

The rapidly diminishing membership and poorer turnout at events has caused considerable concern, including questioning the relevance of the Lit to today's community. It was agreed the Lit still had a function, but it was suggested that perhaps fewer events should be held each season. It was emphasised that advertising is crucial.

At the 2007 AGM, the following suggestions had been made as methods to counter the diminishing membership:

- show non-members who come to single meetings the remainder of the year's programme and ask if they would like to join
- advertise talks more widely; we may be able to put up posters in Falco's, the Causewayside Deli
- repeat emails publicising meetings

Additional new measures suggested were

- advertise at the Eric Liddell Centre; the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy; the Traverse; Unitarian Church
- prepare a Lit leaflet advertising the Lit for the Festival Open Day at the Edinburgh Hebrew Community, possibly including upcoming speakers, or highlights from previous sessions
- provide notices to libraries and cafes, like the Metropole
- broaden the nature of the talks for a wider audience (some talks too academic)

- keep a note of numbers attending
- provide a sign-up list at events
- move the starting times to 7.00pm to allow more time in the evenings for members who may prefer returning home at an earlier time and to ease the travelling for more distant members; entertainment for the speaker would then be provided after the event

6. New Officers

David Ellison stepped down as Treasurer. Micheline Brannan agreed to act as the new Treasurer.

Tony Gilbert agreed to act as the Co-ordinating Secretary. Julia Merrick kindly agreed to continue providing posters, for which she was thanked.

7. Suggestions for speakers in 2008-09

(People who made the suggestions in brackets, where known)

Specific speaker suggestions:

1. Left over from previous years

Fiona Frank on her aunt, the Glasgow Jewish artist (Julia; Laurence Bowman 2008)

Reva Klein on the refugee experience, London based (Maurice)

Charlotte Mendelson: Award winning novelist recently published "When We Were Bad" (Elaine, Gillian)

Geraldine D'Amico: Director of Jewish Book Week (Sue Lieberman)

George Wilkes: Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge-Lectures on various Jewish subjects. (Nicholas de Lange)

Adam Sutcliffe: King's College, London, specialises in the intellectual history of Western Europe, c.1650-1800, and in particular Jewish History, and is the author of "Judaism and Enlightenment" (Julia)

Miri Freud-Kangel: Faculty of Theology, Oxford, Specialist in Orthodox Jewry in the 20th century (Nicholas de Lange)

Rodge Glass: Debut novel, "No Fireworks," about a dysfunctional Jewish family was short-listed for a number of awards including the Saltire first novel award.. Reviewed by Lit member Michael Lister in the Edinburgh review. (Michael Lister). Missed engagement last year, but has agreed to speak in 2008-2009.

Bob Kutner: based in Glasgow; autobiography: left Nazi Germany in '33, then in France, followed by wartime experiences (Contacted Maurice: he lectures on this in schools; not clear how good a speaker he is)

Jeffrey Alderman: writer of 'A new history of British Jewry' (Rabbi Rose)

Margaret Brierley: has spoken to CCJ; good speaker; Archbishop of Canterbury's (?) advisor on the Holocaust

Maria Benjamin: freelance journalist; book: 'Jews of Iraq'; London based (Rabbi Rose)

2. New suggestions

Donald Bloxham: Armenian vs Jewish genocide, possibly a panel discussion (University of Edinburgh) (Elaine Samuel)

Ben Braber: Jews in Glasgow (University of Glasgow) (Elaine Samuel)

Berndt Rieger: "The Creator of Nazi Death Camps" (Elaine Samuel)

Linda Grant: for work related to Rachmann affair (Elaine Samuel)

Susanna Heshel: visiting Edinburgh (Elaine Samuel and Rabbi Rose)

Jonathan Mills: New Edinburgh Festival organiser (David Neville)

Michael Friedland: (Jonathan Friedland's father), biography of Al Jolson (David Neville)

J. David Simons: new writer in Glasgow, "The Credit Draper" (Avery Meiksin)

Joachim Hemmerle: journalist from Mannheim visiting England, writing on Haki-Baki, a Yiddish puppet theatre (Heather Valencia)

Anthony Lehrman: (Maurice Naftalin)

Alan Johnston is suggested as Opening Speaker

3. Other ideas

It was suggested to broaden the variety of meetings, possibly including a literary brunch, a debate and a concert:

A talk on anti-Semitism on campuses (to try to interest students)

Debate with Josh Brickman and Catholic representative on stem-cell research

Sharon Jacobsen musical group

Other music Group, eg St Mary's school, University Ensemble, Hector Scott's music group

Judy Sischy on bringing children over

Rabbi Rubin

8. Next Committee Meeting

(There is a rule that this ought to be before June 1st in order to give secretaries adequate time to contact speakers)

The best we could do this year (agreed after the meeting) was to hold it on:

Wednesday 2nd July at 8pm at Rabbi Rose's: 8 East Parkside

9. AOCB

None.