

Chairman's Report 2010-2011 Season

The Lit had an interesting 123rd year, which saw some changes from the past. For the first time in anyone's memory, a talk was postponed due to snow following the unprecedented snowstorms of late Autumn and early Winter that swept the UK, shutting it down for several days. Fortunately the talk was rescheduled for the start of Spring after the thaw. Membership was good, at least not dwindling from last year and somewhat up, partly likely from advanced mailing for memberships but also from sharing an event with the Edinburgh International Festival of Middle Eastern Spirituality and Peace (MESP). In all there were 8 events, including one film.

Alex Goldberg, a broadcaster on interfaith issues, spoke about varied aspects of interfaith issues, discussing both successful and unsuccessful attempts to bridge the gulf between different religious cultures within the UK.

The second event carried us back to much poorer interfaith relations, in 16th century Italy. A near-local, **Dr Emily Michelson**, a specialist in Renaissance history at the University of St Andrews, gave us a glimpse of her ongoing research on preaching in the history of Christianity. She focussed on conversionary preaching to Jews in the Roman ghetto, asking the timeless question of what it was the Jews meant to Christians.

The event for November was postponed to March by the weather, when the noted Chemist from the University of Liverpool (and father of one of the Shul's members), **Prof. Alan Shenkin**, gave us his views on some of the hidden meanings behind Primo Levi's stories of the elements in the *Periodic Table*.

The first half was concluded in the Chanukah season with a showing of the award-winning Israeli film *Bikur Ha-Tizmoret (The Band's Visit)*, a delightfully understated comedy about the adventures of an Egyptian police band lost in Israel in search of the Arab cultural centre that invited them to perform.

The second half was opened by **Prof. Donald Bloxham**, an expert on the history of genocide, and the Holocaust in particular, to coincide with the week of Holocaust Memorial Day. In a very frank discussion, he spoke about motivations of the great number of people implicated in the Holocaust as well as the motivations, including his own, for continuing to study the Holocaust and what its occurrence may tell us about the human condition.

The following event featured **Dr Nathan Abrams**, known to many when he lectured at the University of Aberdeen, and currently an historian at Bangor University. Having completed his survey of small Jewish communities during his stay in Scotland, he presented his findings, involving some curious communities and stories, including a small Iraqi-style synagogue in Dundee.

The best attended event, also scheduled as a pre-event to the MESP, was a musical delight in which **Rabbi Mark Solomon**, the rabbi for Edinburgh's liberal Jewish community, gave a very engaging talk on the Jewish liturgy, illustrated with, among other pieces of the liturgy, fourteen renditions of the kaddish, all sung in his exquisite cantorial voice.

For the final event (or what would have been final without the postponed talk), we were pleased to have the Glaswegian author **J. David Simons** return and speak to us on his most recently completed novel, *The Liberation of Celia Kahn*, in which he breathed life into an incidental character from his earlier novel, *The Credit Draper*. His character, living in the early 20th century, showed that feminism was alive and well well before the 60's. He also let us in on a few tricks of the trade for writing historical novels. He concluded with a peek of his ongoing project, currently entitled *An Exquisite Sense of What is Beautiful*, in which he deals with the relationship between the United States and Japan, in part as a vehicle for discussing his own confused feelings towards Israel.

Finally, the Chairman would like to express his gratitude to Julia Merrick, who provided the posters advertising the events, and to our Secretary Tony Gilbert and Treasurer Micheline Brannan for their essential and substantial efforts in keeping the Lit running. Sadly, the Lit bid farewell to Christine Burns for her many years of assistance to the Lit, as she enters into a much deserved retirement.

Avery Meiksin, Chairman
Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society, 1 May 2011