



MY WEEK FIONA FRANK

23 March 2012



This week started with the satisfying task of sending off our mid-term report on “Being Jewish in Scotland” to the Scottish Government, which has funded the project. The aim is to learn more about the variety of experience of Jewish people throughout Scotland, and it feels as if I’ve been travelling constantly since January! I’ve talked to Jewish people of all affiliations and none, from the northern coast of Aberdeenshire to the Scottish borders, in the main communities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, in the small communities of Dundee and Aberdeen, and with people who live miles from their nearest synagogue.

Over the past week I’ve conducted a focus group over chicken soup and post-Purim hamantaschen with some people in Edinburgh who had never met one another before. I have also held a discussion at the Royal Glasgow Institute alongside an exhibition of the work of my late aunt, Glasgow artist Hannah Frank, and another over bagels with members of a university Jewish Society.

On Sunday I went with Glasgow’s newest Klezmer band, Kasha-Malasha, to a tiny village near Dumfries, where a small group of Jewish people and friends from a 40-mile radius listened, danced, and sang with gusto. We also had a talk by a local artist, which meant the discussion didn’t end till nine in the evening. It would have gone on longer if some of us hadn’t had a long drive home. I left them planning a joint seder and deciding where to meet next, and when I got home I discovered that the people I’d talked to earlier in the week in Edinburgh had been exchanging e-mails and planning to get together again.

The project has a dual purpose – not only to get to the nub of the issues, but also to create community as we go around the country. That certainly seems to be happening. But we’ve also heard details of worrying examples of antisemitism, and although there have been exemplary responses by some institutions, others have been inadequate and ineffective. While a university offered hotel accommodation for a student who had suffered an antisemitic attack at her hall of residence, we have also heard about a head teacher who took no action about antisemitic name-calling in the playground as she ‘didn’t want to make it any worse’.

After a quick trip south to Lancaster over Shabbat where I saw my daughter and attended a charming mock Seder hosted by the J-Soc, I was back in Aberdeen for a film evening and a chance to reflect on our findings with members of the local community. Soon enough it will be time to start writing the final project report.

Fiona Frank is the “Being Jewish in Scotland” project worker with the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities.