

## **Building Bridges**

### *Thought for the Day*

*Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)*

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It might not have been the most important news story of the week, but the report that painting the Forth Bridge will soon no longer live up to its metaphorical endlessness did attract a lot of attention. The BBC briefly invited suggestions for a replacement metaphor, which yielded the inevitable “building the Edinburgh tram-line”.

But I was thinking about it for a different reason. I was invited this week to speak in a small Jewish community in England about the challenges facing their survival. My journey across the border and past a number of iconic bridges reminded me that, while their primary purpose is to connect, at the same time there would be no need for connection if the two sides were not separate.

So does the bridge separate or connect us? Is England, to misquote Shaw, another country, separated by a common language?

Yesterday’s announcement of the Scottish Government’s legislative programme suggests we are moving apart: Scotland is to have a single police force. There is to be minimum pricing for alcohol. And, of course, there is the flagship legislation to tackle football-related offensive behaviour and threatening communications.

I declare an interest in that one. It’s not that Jewish people in Scotland are in any immediate danger – far from it – but too many people report a sense of insecurity for us or the authorities to ignore it. Ask yourself: why would, or should, a young mother in a Highland village not want her neighbours to know she’s Jewish? Or for that matter, why would, or should, the 9/11 anniversary make a Muslim woman feel nervous about wearing her head-scarf? Why should a Christian woman lose her job for wearing a cross? Could it be that we have more in common than separates us?

So I welcome the moves to strengthen and clarify the law. It’s not the whole story, but the law has a role to play in changing attitudes – look at the Race Relations Act and the smoking ban. If Scotland can do to hate-speak what it did to smoking, we really will live in a better, more connected place.

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