



## 5780 / 2019-20 Programme

Unless stated otherwise, all meetings start at **8:00pm** with tea served at the end of the meeting. The venue is the **Marian Oppenheim Hall, Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, 4 Salisbury Road.**

**Opening of the season Monday 28 October 2019**

**Bart van Es (University of Oxford), 'A Hidden Life: A Talk from the Author of *The Cut Out Girl*'**

Bart van Es is a literary critic and writer. He is a Professor of English at the University of Oxford, where he is also a fellow of St Catherine's College. He was born in the Netherlands and lived in Norway, Dubai and Indonesia before his family settled in the United Kingdom in 1986 when he was 14 years old.

His 2018 book *The Cut Out Girl: A Story of War and Family, Lost and Found*, which won the overall Costa Book of the Year award for 2018, tells the true story of Lien de Jong, who as a young Jewish girl was fostered by Bart van Es's grandparents for her own safety when the Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1942. The judges described it as 'sensational and gripping ... shedding light on some of the most urgent issues of our time'.

2019

**10 November: Geoffrey Cantor, 'The Anglo-Jewish Press of the 1840s: The Voice of Jacob and two Jewish Chronicles'**

Much of our news about events in the Jewish world is gleaned from reading such publications as the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *Jewish Telegraph* (including their online versions). Yet the Anglo-Jewish periodical press was only established in the early 1840s with the founding of the *Voice of Jacob* (f. 1841) and two periodicals with the title *Jewish Chronicle* (f. 1841 & 1844). Why were these periodicals founded? Who produced them? Who read them? And why did two of these publications fail? In this talk Professor Geoffrey Cantor will set the early history of the Anglo-Jewish press in the context of the frenetic world of London publishing during the 1840s, which included such innovative titles as *Punch* and the *Economist*.

**Geoffrey Cantor** is Professor Emeritus of the History of Science at the University of Leeds and an Honorary Senior Research Associate in the Department of Science & Technology Studies at UCL. His research has focused on nineteenth century British science and especially on the inter-relations between science and religion. In retirement he works part-time as a mental health mentor to university students in London.

**1 December: Edna Fernandes, 'The Last Jews of Kerala: the incredible story of India's oldest Jewish Diaspora'**

Ten years after its publication, author Edna Fernandes discusses her book *The Last Jews of Kerala* and how this moving story has resonated with Jews and non-Jews alike from around the world. How does it feel to know you are the last of your community after two thousand years of history? To know there will be no more weddings, only funerals? In 70 CE, the Roman capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple scattered a wave of Jewish immigrants across the globe like the seeds of last hope. One group settled in Kerala, southern India. Feted as foreign kings by Kerala's rajas and lavished with land, privilege and autonomy, they lived in peace for many years until division set in. By the end of the twenty first century, despite finding acceptance in this Indian paradise, despite every advantage, they found themselves on the brink of demise. This is the story of the Black and White Jews of Kerala and their centuries-long feud – a community that chose to bury itself instead of burying their differences to survive. In the end it was not persecution, pestilence or war that destroyed them, but one another. Theirs is the story of a Jewish apartheid, a civil rights movement and finally a love story between a Black Jew and a White Jewess who smashed apart the old divide.

**Edna Fernandes** is a British Indian writer. Her first book *Holy Warriors* was a finalist for the UK's 2008 Index on Censorship TR Five prize and nominated for India's Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Best Book Award. Her second book, *The Last Jews of Kerala*, was a finalist for India's 2009 Vodafone Crossword Literary prize and named a UK Sunday Times Travel Book of the Year. In 2018, Edna released her third book, *The Hollow Kingdom: ISIS and the Cult of Jihad*. Aimed at the general reader wishing to understand the most dangerous terrorist group in modern history, the book deconstructs Islamic State's ideology, funding and recruitment structure. She is former Special Correspondent for Britain's *Mail on Sunday*, former foreign correspondent for *The Financial Times* and UK political correspondent for Reuters. She has appeared as a commentator on religious extremism and terrorism on BBC News, Channel 4 News and Sky as well as speaking at international literary festivals including the Delhi Literary Festival, Edinburgh Book Festival, Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression conference in Oslo, Jewish Book Week in London, Cumberland Lodge in Windsor and the Cheltenham Literary Festival.

2020

### **12 January: David Aaronovitch, 'Party animals: being raised in a communist family'**

David will base his talk on his most recent book, *Party Animals*, which is a highly critical, colourful, moving and amusing part-history, part-autobiography. He'll explore the way he was brought up in a rather myopic, claustrophobic household by a Jewish father from London's East End and non-Jewish, upper middle class mother from the shires, both of whom were steadfast, card-carrying communists and devout atheists. They lived rather furtively and parallel to the non-communist majority, carrying on their own ways and traditions. In fact, the Cause dominated most of their waking moments: attending meetings, writing articles and books, marching, watching Soviet films. David's upbringing also had an equally fascinating cosmopolitan side, however, meeting political activists and comrades from around the world. In this talk David will illustrate how dedication to the Party shaped his childhood.

**David Aaronovitch** is a writer, broadcaster, commentator on culture, international affairs, politics and the media. Having previously written for other papers, including *The Jewish Chronicle*, he is currently columnist for *The Times*. He has won numerous accolades, including Columnist of the Year and the Orwell Prize for Journalism. He studied Modern History at Balliol College, Oxford and Manchester Victoria University. He is the author of several books, including *Paddling to Jerusalem: An Aquatic Tour of Our Small Country* (2000), *Voodoo Histories: the role of Conspiracy Theory in Modern History* (2009) and, most recently, *Party Animals: My Family and Other Communists* (2016).

### **2 February: Judy Russell, 'Being Ernest's Daughter'**

Ernest Levy was possibly the most renowned Holocaust survivor in Scotland; not only dedicated to the development of Holocaust education but a fine cantor as well as rabbi at Giffnock Synagogue for most of his life in Scotland. In *Being Ernest's Daughter*, Ernest's stepdaughter Judy Russell will reflect personally on Ernest as a man and father, on his influence on her, and on her role now as the inheritor of his work on Holocaust memory. What was it like to grow up with someone who, despite his personal suffering in the camps, succeeded in living without bitterness? What was it like to be the daughter of someone so well-known in Scotland and so esteemed as a human being? How does Judy now see the future direction of his work?

**Judy Russell** was born in Budapest and came to the UK in 1957 with her parents and grandparents. Her father, who was seriously ill, passed away shortly after they settled in Scotland. Her mother, Kathy, also a Holocaust survivor, met Ernest in Glasgow and their friendship bond was strengthened by their similar experiences. 'Ernest was the only father I really knew.' Judy's and Ernest's father/daughter relationship grew stronger in later life. Involved in helping Ernest write his second book, the discussions of his experiences influenced Judy's own thinking. A teacher all her working career, she was keen to share his story, and now retells Ernest's story in schools whenever she gets the opportunity. After Ernest's death in 2009 Judy donated much of her father's writings, photographs and music to Edinburgh City Libraries. Judy is still actively involved in making sure that the archive is available to all who wish to use it.

### **8 March: Ian Black, 'The Worst-kept Secret in the Middle East'**

Binyamin Netanyahu likes to boast about things going on 'just below the surface' in the Middle East. What Bibi means is that common hostility to Iran and Islamist movements have forged increasingly close ties between Israel and the Gulf states. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar all accept that the Jewish state is a permanent feature of the regional landscape, boosting security, trade links and shared strategic agendas despite the lack of the formal peace treaties that exist with Egypt and Jordan. In recent times Netanyahu has appeared publicly in Muscat, capital of Oman, alongside the head of the Mossad intelligence service. Israeli ministers and officials routinely visit other Gulf capitals. And all this has been happening as the

prospects for resolving the ever-emotive Palestinian issue appear to be at an all-time low, constraining 'normalisation' with Israel.

**Ian Black** is a Visiting Senior Fellow at the Middle East Centre of the London School of Economics. He worked for *The Guardian* from 1980-2016 as Middle East editor, diplomatic editor, European editor and Jerusalem correspondent. He has also written for *The Economist*, *The Washington Post* and *The Observer*, and is a regular commentator on Middle Eastern and international affairs for the BBC and many other TV and radio channels. He won the 'Peace Through Media Award' in 2010. He wrote *Zionism and the Arabs, 1936-1939; Israel's Secret Wars* (with Benny Morris); the introduction to *The Arab Spring: Revolution, Rebellion and a New World*. His latest book, *Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917-2017*, was chosen as a book of the year for 2017 by *The Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*.

## **22 March: Gillian Raab, 'Jews Marrying in Edinburgh: 1855 to 1911'**

The start of civil registration of births, marriages and deaths in Scotland in 1855 provides rich sources to study Jews living in Scotland during this period. The marriage records are especially interesting because they give details of the couple and their parents with their occupations, as well as the officiants at religious marriages. For this talk I have analysed the records of 352 marriages of Jews in Edinburgh between 1855 and 1911 which were assembled as part of a demographic study of 200 years of Scottish Jewry. The records give interesting insights into the lives of Jews in Edinburgh at that period, as well as their relationships to the various synagogues.

**Gillian Raab** is an applied statistician, mainly working in the medical and social fields. She is professor emerita of Applied Statistics from Edinburgh Napier University. In her retirement she continues to work on various research projects using administrative data. She is a founder member of Sukkat Shalom, the Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community.

## **26 April: Lord Dyson, 'A Life in the Law'**

Lord Dyson will talk about his European/Jewish roots, his childhood in the Jewish community of Leeds in the 1950s and his career at the Bar and on the Bench culminating in his being appointed a Justice of the UK Supreme Court and Master of the Rolls. He will give some insights into the art of judging at both trial and appellate level and will describe some of the challenges faced by judges. He will also discuss the important question of whether the power of judges is now too great and has expanded to the detriment of Parliament.

**John Dyson** was born in 1943. He was educated at Leeds Grammar School and Wadham College, Oxford (where he read Classics). He was called to the Bar in 1968, became QC in 1982, appointed to the High Court of England and Wales in 1993, the Court of Appeal in 2001, Supreme Court 2010 and Master of the Rolls and Head of Civil Justice 2012. He retired in 2016. He has returned to his Chambers where he practises as an arbitrator. He was Treasurer of Middle Temple in 2017. He has published *Justice: Continuity and Change* (2018) and his memoir *A Judge's Journey* (2019).

## **10 May: Melissa Raphael, 'What's Jewish About Jewish Art'**

By the closing decades of the twentieth century, Jewish cultural historians had shown that the Second Commandment is not a blanket ban on visual art but rather proscribes the making and worshipping of images of the divine. The Bible forbids idolatry, but concedes that not all images are idolatrous. Although religious Jews have often been visually reluctant, the notion of Judaism as an aniconic tradition is, it seems, a modern one that owes more to Emmanuel Kant than the rabbis. Given that Jews have, in fact, been making, selling and buying art since the nineteenth century, Jewish commentators have instead turned their attention to what might be Jewish about Jewish art. These days, most deny that it has any definitive, 'national' characteristics. This talk,

illustrated by slides, will invite debate by suggesting that, on the contrary, a Jewish image is one that exists because of the Second Commandment, not in spite of it. A Jewish image is an idoloclastic one that stabilizes power by both revealing and concealing, restoring and cancelling, the glory of its object.

**Melissa Raphael** is Professor of Jewish Theology at the University of Gloucestershire, UK and teaches modern Jewish thought at Leo Baeck College, London. Her books include *Rudolf Otto and the Idea of the Holy* (1997), *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* (2003), *Judaism and the Visual Image* (2009) and *Religion, Feminism and Idoloclasm: Being and Becoming in the Women's Liberation Movement* (2019).

## **24 May: Jonathan Silvertown, 'Comedy of Errors: Why Evolution Made Us Laugh'**

We all laugh, but it's an odd behaviour if you stop to think about it. Laughter is involuntary and infectious. It starts in the cradle, well before the development of speech, but this innate behaviour blossoms into something that can bring a whole room into uproar. It is found in all cultures and when heard it is recognisable across boundaries of language. All these characteristics strongly suggests that laughter is hard-wired into the human psyche, which immediately conjures the favourite question of every evolutionary biologist: what good is it? Answering that question throws new light on the subject of humour generally and Jewish humour in particular.

**Jonathan Silvertown** is Professor of Evolutionary Ecology in the Institute of Evolutionary Biology at the University of Edinburgh. In addition to numerous research publications, Jonathan has published 4 popular science books on evolutionary topics. The most recent is *Dinner with Darwin: Food, drink and evolution* published by Chicago University Press in 2017. It has been translated into 8 languages. *Comedy of Errors* is forthcoming. [www.jonathansilvertown.com](http://www.jonathansilvertown.com); Twitter: @JWSilvertown.