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Number of pages, including this sheet: 3

Memo: Report follows. I will await your instructions.

Ben Braber

Report on Glasgow Jewry in 1866.

This is a report to answer your questions (1-4) of 3rd November 1992. In each answer I will give a summary of our findings, to be followed by some remarks on the material which we have located. After answering all four questions I will suggest further steps.

1. There is a Jewish community in Glasgow. The history of this community goes back to the early 19th century. Relevant aspects of this history until 1866 are:

- the development of the Glasgow Hebrew Congregation, its synagogues and other Jewish organisations, still very inward looking;
- the social position of the Jews in Glasgow, a tolerated but not yet integrated part of the city's life;
- personalities, like known leaders of the congregation; and
- Jewish business activity (see also 3).

This history is not very well documented. There are a couple of historical studies, of which at present only one is still in print which touches upon the year 1866. The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC) has copies of these studies and other records which can be consulted for further research. The records, however, have to be consulted on the premises of the SJAC.

2. The first Jew to settle in Glasgow was Isaac Cohen, a hatter who came from London via Manchester. He became a Freeman of the city in 1812. His children and grandchildren still lived in Glasgow in 1866. Other Jews from England and the European Continent (Holland, the German states and Russian Poland) followed, but initially only in small numbers. As a result of the influx of Eastern European Jews, Glasgow Jewry, from being one of the smaller Jewish settlements before the 1870s, grew in size to become the third provincial Jewish centre in Great Britain during the 1930s. In 1866 Eastern European Jewish immigrants had started to arrive in the city. At that time the Glasgow Hebrew Congregation consisted of some 40 or 60 families, in total probably about two hundred persons. In addition there was an unknown number of Jews from Eastern Europe in the city who had not joined the congregation. At that time Jews constantly moved to and from Glasgow.

The settlement of the Jews in Glasgow before 1866 is not very well documented, but there is some material which gives an impression of how many Jews lived in Glasgow at the time and where they had come from.

3. Before 1866 Jews settled in the old city centre of Glasgow, in neighbourhoods near the High Street, Saltmarket and Bridgegate near the river Clyde. Shortly before 1866 the more affluent Jews started to move towards what is presently known as the West End, following the non-Jewish middle class of the city. The early settlers were mostly shopkeepers and small manufacturers, like Isaac Cohen. They catered for a middle-class clientele. Before them Jewish doctors, dentists and quacks had visited Glasgow. During the 1860s some of the small businessmen were moving into larger retail and wholesale enterprise.

As in 2. there is some material to show where the Jews settled and what their occupations were. Detailed business records are not available, although there are some sequestration records in cases of bankruptcy. Some of the material comes from local newspapers. It would be possible to consult sources like the Post Office Glasgow Directories, but this is a very time-consuming work.

4. The old city centre or the West End are not particularly associated with the Jews. The neighbourhood in Glasgow associated with the Jews is the Gorbals, on the South Side. Immigrants from Eastern Europe started to settle there in the early 1870s (they were not yet there in 1866). The Gorbals was almost completely demolished during the 1960s and 1970s. Slums in the old city centre have been cleared and many other old buildings have disappeared. The synagogue of 1866 no longer exists (the oldest surviving synagogue dates from 1879). The burial place in use in 1866 is completely neglected but can be visited, its records have been kept.

Through the means of photographs, the displays in the SJAC and a guided tour we could try to recreate the atmosphere of 1866, but expectations should not be great.

Suggestions

I suggest one or more of the following steps:

- a visit to Glasgow;
- the commission of detailed research on specific questions;
- the commission of reports on questions 1-3 (written or verbal); and
- the request for reproduction of suitable material which is free of copyright.

It should be noted that for the purpose of producing reports, it would be useful to have more specific questions.

Glasgow, 10th November 1992