

Two Hundred Years of Scottish Jewry: A Demographic and Genealogical Profile

by Neville Lamdan and Michael Tobias

In 2010, the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem (IJG) was challenged to “think outside the box” with regard to its future programs. The Institute had commissioned an independent cost-benefit analysis of its activities, and while it was given high grades for what had been accomplished in the first four years of its existence, it was urged to consider a number of probing questions. Included was: “Is there a mega-project that IJG could undertake, which would open up new horizons for Jewish genealogy and, at the same time, introduce wider audiences not acquainted with Jewish genealogy to the field?”

One suggested answer was that the Institute should venture into virgin territory and attempt a genealogical survey of a definable Jewry at the national level—and, in the process, seek to derive “outputs” that would capture the imagination of broad segments of the Jewry concerned (and beyond), as well as stimulate deeper interest in academic circles. This line of thinking gave birth to the Institute’s project on “200 Years of Scottish Jewry,” a ground-breaking enterprise, now under way.

For a number of reasons, the IJG elected to study Scottish Jewry:

- It is manageable in terms of age and size. It emerged as an organized entity barely 200 years ago, with the establishment of the first synagogue in Edinburgh in 1816. Since then until modern times, the total number of Scottish Jews (broadly, and loosely defined as “Jews with a meaningful Scottish connection”) probably amounts to not more than 50,000 to 60,000 individuals.

- The sources and resources needed for the study are readily available. Scottish national censuses from 1841 to 1911 are accessible online, as are the bulk of birth, marriage and death records until relatively recent dates.

- The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre in Glasgow has been systematically collecting documentation and other materials on Scottish Jewry for more than 25 years. It has, for example, computerized 99 percent of Jewish burials in Scotland and has compiled a name list of almost 38,000 Scottish Jews. It agreed to make its resources available to the project and actively assist in its implementation.

- The specialized human resources and scholarly expertise required to implement the project successfully are at hand in Scotland and Israel.

- Organized groups of genealogists outside Scotland are prepared to collaborate on the project, starting with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain which will conduct parts of the research in Jewish and British archives located in London.

- A number of renowned scholars in Scotland and abroad have stepped forward to monitor the project’s progress and



Glasgow Herald (March 1, 1822): *The first Jewish wedding in Edinburgh (and probably Scotland).*

its adherence to standards of academic excellence.

Thus, a serious study focused on Scottish Jewry as a whole is eminently feasible and full of potential. On the demographic level, the survey aims to produce wholly new knowledge about the geographic origins of Scottish Jewry and to map its dispersal and settlement patterns throughout Scotland. It then will analyze, from various sociological and historical perspectives, Scottish Jewry’s demographic growth and the changes in its composition over time. On the genealogical level, it will investigate the dynamics of the “kinship factor” in drawing Jews, mainly from Eastern Europe, to Scotland and then examine this critical variable as a force for the development of family networks and the evolution of dominant “clans” and communal elites, social, religious, economic, intellectual and other. That done, it will endeavor to construct a theoretical model for a “Family Tree” of Scottish Jewry and apply it to the fullest extent possible.

In addition, the project will study attempts by Scottish Jewry to preserve its identity and heritage. To that end, it will trace the development of the religious, social and educational institutions that the community established for its self-preservation. Within that, the study will seek to assess the degree to which family ties played into the maintenance of Scottish Jewry’s distinctive culture, heritage and traditions.

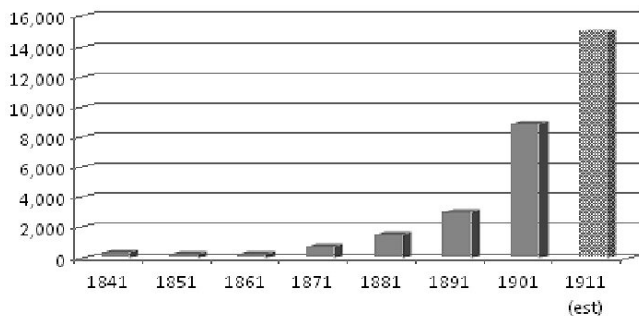
Work in Progress

At present, work on the project is in the first phase of its information gathering and data retrieval stage, with a focus on identifying every Scottish Jew. We have already made considerable progress in compiling data from online sources for the 19th century, up to and including the 1901 Scottish census. Some fascinating results are beginning to emerge, even though the picture necessarily remains fluid

and tentative, since the data retrieval and verification processes have still to be completed.

For the first time, authoritative figures for Scottish Jews are being established for the 19th and early 20th centuries. With nearly 9,000 Jews living in the country in 1901 and somewhat more than 15,000 in 1911, the numbers are proving larger than those previously assumed or reported. The Jewish population may have risen slightly in the three years between 1911 and 1914 but, at this early stage of the research, it seems to have stabilized at between 15,000 and 16,000 Jews in 1914, with growth from births and immigration being essentially counterbalanced by deaths and emigration to other parts of the British Isles and overseas. After World War I, the population seems to have maintained itself at the 15,000 to 16,000 level until the 1950s, when it went into slow but steady numerical decline (exact figure today yet to be determined).

Jews In Scotland



The population graph shows that after a slow start in the first half of the 19th century, the number of Scottish Jews almost tripled from 1861 to 1871. Over the next three decades, this high rate of growth in the Jewish population of Scotland was sustained; it more than doubled from 1871 to 1881; it almost doubled again from 1881 to 1891 and almost tripled from 1891 to 1901.

Thereafter, the relative rate of growth decreased significantly, registering only about a 60 percent increase in the next ten years until 1911. Interesting questions arise concerning this slowdown. A partial explanation may lie in a reduction in the number of ships from Hamburg and elsewhere docking at ports on the east coast of Scotland at the turn of the 20th century, paralleled by an increase in transatlantic passages from Baltic and other European ports direct to the United States.

Local births were a significant factor within the growing numbers of Jews in Scotland in the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, in each decade between 1851 and 1901, as many as one-third of the additional Scottish Jews were locally born (or, to put the same statistic another way, only two-thirds of the newcomers were immigrants). The rapid increase in local natural growth was particularly vivid in the decade between 1887 and 1896, as can be seen from the birth chart on page 23. In 1887, the number of Jewish births in Scotland was 100; six years later, in 1893, it doubled to 200; and three years later, in 1896, it reached 300. From

that point on, it continued to grow at a more moderate pace.

The phenomenon of high internal natural growth is supported by the relatively large number of recorded Jewish marriages—almost 1,000—that took place in Scotland from 1842 to 1901. Add to this the fact that many of the married immigrants settling in Scotland were young and contributed markedly to the population increase.

Marriage announcements are proving useful. Even more helpful are marriage certificates and eventually birth certificates. In Scotland these documents provide a wealth of information about the demographics and origins of Scottish Jews.

Glasgow, once known as the “Second City of the British Empire,” was a thriving place at the end of the 19th century, and by far the largest part of the Jewish newcomers chose to live there due to the economic possibilities the city offered. The project will carefully plot Jewish residency and occupational patterns from at least 1881 onwards in Glasgow and also Edinburgh (whose Jewish population was rapidly outstripped by Glasgow’s from mid-century on).

Strikingly, however, by 1881, meaningful numbers of Jews were moving around Scotland, sometimes travelling to its northernmost reaches in search of a livelihood. In fact, by that date, the nuclei of future Jewish communities already were present in Aberdeen, Dundee, Greenock and Inverness, while Jews also were scattered in smaller towns and even far-flung villages.

In the 19th century, Scotland was preeminently a country of transmigration for Jews (and non-Jews), moving from continental Europe to the New World (approximately 80 percent of them headed for the United States). In the decades before 1914, the number of Jews who passed through Scotland was at least five times as many as the number of Jews who settled there permanently. The project will not study these Jewish transmigrants in depth, since, generally speaking, they remained in the country for very brief periods of time and had little, if any, lasting impact on Scottish Jewry and its development.

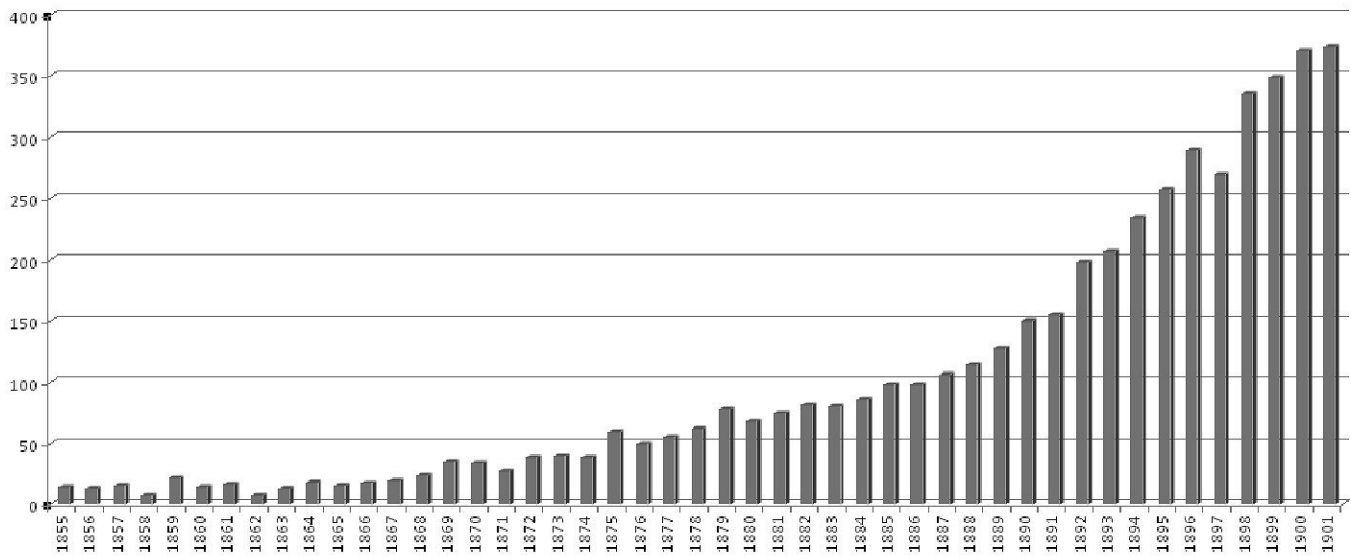
Prime Beneficiaries and Wider Audiences

The prime beneficiaries of the project will, of course, be Jewish genealogists and family historians, especially those with some form of attachment to, or roots in, Scotland. They will find particular value in the extensive databases that will be produced by the project, copies of which will be housed in the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre in Glasgow and at the IIJG in Jerusalem. These will provide, among other things, searchable master lists of all known Scottish Jews; Jewish migrants settling in Scotland; Scottish-born Jews; and Scottish Jews who emigrated from the country after a significant period of residence; as well as a list of all known surnames of Scottish Jews.

As mentioned above, however, the various “outputs” or end-products of the project are also aimed at audiences not necessarily interested in, or exposed to, Jewish genealogy. They will include:

- A scholarly monograph with a full description and

Births Registered to Jewish Families in Scotland 1855-1901



analysis of the results of the survey in the form of an integrated narrative supplemented by detailed tables, graphs and appendixes. This will be primarily for historians and social scientists researching the Jewish community (of whom there are several) as well as for others investigating ethnic and religious minorities in Scotland (a significantly larger group of scholars).

- A companion volume to the monograph of a much more popular nature—for Jews in Scotland and interested Jews generally. This publication should provide Scottish Jews with a deeper understanding of their origins at a very personal level and may have some impact on their identification and affiliation with the community into which they were born.

- A mobile exhibition, profiling Scottish Jewry, demographically and genealogically—for the general public throughout Scotland (and beyond), who often are unacquainted with the Jewish community that has lived among them for almost two hundred years.

- Teaching aids—for the younger generation, both Jewish and non-Jewish, designed to help them discover and take pride in their heritage while, at the same time, kindle an interest in genealogy.

The last two “outputs,” the exhibition and the teaching aids, may be important in a different area as well for they contribute to the strategic aims of the Scottish government regarding the integration of ethnic and religious minorities in an increasingly pluralistic society. Conceivably, they might interest the ethnic and religious minorities themselves, who may see in the Jewish community an example of a group that has successfully integrated into wider Scottish society and contributed disproportionately to it, without relinquishing its own identity, legacy and culture over an extended period of time.

Finally, the project will have another far-reaching dimension, as it could well become a model for further stud-

ies among other free-standing national Jewries of similar size and age (for instance, Ireland, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries). If this happens, the Institute’s initiative will truly have extended the boundaries of Jewish genealogy and opened up a new and challenging field for it, with benefits for wide-ranging target groups within and beyond the Jewish genealogical community.

Schedule, Sponsorship and Support

The whole project is scheduled to be completed in three to four years from January 2012, its official commencement date. In Scotland, its sponsors are the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities and the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council. Great faith in it was recently expressed by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe which, after a rigorous evaluation process, awarded the project a substantial “Heritage” research grant that will go a long way towards assuring its successful implementation.

Since 2006, Neville Lamdan has been the Director of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy at the National Library of Israel, which he helped to found. A former Israeli ambassador, he has published regularly in AVOTAYNU, written scholarly articles on Jewish genealogy in learned journals, and presented papers on the subject at major Jewish Studies and genealogical conferences.

Michael Tobias is Vice-President of Programming of JewishGen, Inc. and a co-founder of Jewish Records Indexing- Poland. He was database matching consultant for ICHEIC (the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims). A qualified actuary by profession, he is one of the principal researchers on the project described in this article, while concurrently working toward a Masters Degree in Genealogical, Palaeographic and Heraldic Studies at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.