

A VISIT TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN DUBLIN, IRELAND

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On a recent trip to Ireland, we decided to visit the Jewish Community in Ireland. First of all, the original Jews (five families) settled in Ireland about 1100 A.C.E. Unfortunately, all the writings are in Gaelic from the Annals of Innisfallen, and to my knowledge has never been translated into English. (Most of the Irish Jews are trilingual, and are fluent in English, Gaelic, and Hebrew.) While little is known about the middle Ages the Ballyborough Jewish Cemetery in downtown Dublin has gravestones dated in the early 1700's and are one of the two Jewish Cemeteries in Dublin. The cemeteries have caretakers (not Jewish) who live on the premises and are employees of the Irish Government.

The population of Dublin is approximately 1,000,000 people, and there are presently about 1800 Jews living in Dublin, of which 85% are orthodox. There is a kosher butcher shop and a kosher bakery! Many Jews came to Ireland in the early part of this century, when the ships that were traveling to the U.S. and Canada stopped in Dublin to take on provisions for the arduous sail across the Atlantic. Many passengers, probably seasick from the trip, disembarked in Dublin. In the early 40's, the Jewish population of Dublin was about 5,000. After Israel became a State, many of them moved to Israel.

While almost everyone knows that Bobby Briscoe was the Jewish mayor of Dublin, as was his son, in reality there were five Jewish mayors of Dublin, going back to the early 1700's. There is also, at present, three-elected Jewish councilman in Dublin. These, incidentally, are elected by popular vote! We also found out, to my surprise, that *Chaim Herzog* was born in Dublin, and his father, *Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog*, was not only born in Dublin, but was the chief Rabbi of Ireland!

A visit to the Irish-Jewish museum was the highlight of our trip. The museum, located in the downtown area of Dublin, is located on a quiet side street, and was formerly the synagogue in the center of Jewish life in Dublin. As with many countries, the Jews moved out of the city center into the suburbs, and the synagogue was boarded up for about 10 years. Since there is (according to the Irish Jews I met) NO antisemitism in Ireland, when they finally opened the museum, there was no vandalism!

The museum offers a multitude of archives, artifacts, and informative displays on this little known part of Irish history. The ground floor contains a plethora of information on Irish-Judaism, beginning with history, and branching out to include such topics as prominent people, stories of various communities, daily life, etc. adjacent to the exhibit hall is a well-stocked kitchen as it existed in a Jewish home many decades ago. In fact, this was once the actual kitchen of the museum's caretaker!

The actual synagogue is upstairs on the second floor. It has been preserved so well that I would imagine they could actually conduct services there if they wished to.

The overall atmosphere is quiet, warm, and relaxed, and very friendly. The curator I talked to (can you imagine a Jew speaking English with a pronounced brogue and Jewish intonations! After asking him a slew of questions, I asked him if there was anyone named "Lapides" (my grandmother's maiden name). To my surprise, he said that there was a "Harry Lapidus" that belonged to the shul! I asked him for the address,

and we found it in the telephone book. I wrote him a letter immediately, and I was surprised I received no answer-only to hear from a distant cousin in Zaire, Africa that Mr. Lapidus had forwarded my letter to her ,as his eyesight is failing, and had no access to a computer ! He was a second cousin to my grandmother , and my cousin had visited him in Ireland two years ago.

This certainly was a very interesting experience, and if any of you plan on going To Ireland, be sure to visit this fascinating place!

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