

## **MS 2520 Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society, 03** **February 1924 - 10 January 1960**

### **Administrative History**

The Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society grew from a number of Jewish arts societies set up in Birmingham in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The first Jewish Dramatic Society in Birmingham was started around 1870 by Edward Lawrence Levy and it is from this group that in 1879 the Birmingham Jewish Young Men's Association appears to have sprung. It was a debating society, including debates between Conservatives and Radicals and on contemporary Jewish issues such as the problems of the Jews in Russia and the admission to this country of pauper aliens. The group became so proficient that they were able to take on other debating societies, travelling to Manchester, Hull and London. The Association enjoyed much social prestige. It held an Annual Ball in the Edgbaston Assembly Rooms, musical evenings, smoking concerts, athletics, swimming, and cycling. Women were admitted only to the less serious activities at first, but by the 1920s, they were participating in two meetings per session.

I.A. Shapiro considered the Society to be 'the most important and formative influence on the 'tone' of Birmingham Jewry until the expansion of the Community in the 1930s.'

In 1925, the Young Men's Association admitted women and changed its name to the Birmingham Jewish Literary Association.

By the early 1920s, a new organization was felt to be needed for Birmingham's Jewish youth. On 22 January 1923, Isidore Ackerman and a group of friends decided to form The Jewish Arts Society, limiting the membership to members 'whose interests were in some degree intellectual'. The founder members included Isidore and Rebecca Ackerman, Bertie Davis and his sisters Elsie, Vera, and Juliet, Alfred Cannon, Louie Green, Sidney Marks, B.Z.Cohen, and Dick Moss. The first meeting was held on 25 February 1923 in the ballroom of Chad Hill, a large house at the corner of Chad Road and Harborne Road. Alfred Cannon spoke on "Progress, Is it an Illusion?" and in April Dr A Cohen also lectured. Despite being dubbed 'the Snob Society', there was a rush to join, and the Committee was forced to raise the membership limit, first to 40, then to 70. However, they maintained a firm refusal to admit married people.

A tennis section was formed, which used the court in Quinton, the Music Group had its own orchestra and frequently gave concerts, and there was a Dramatic Section, which was thought to be the Society's outstanding achievement. Plays were performed using scenery borrowed from Leon Salberg at the Alexandra Theatre. In 1923, the officers of the Jewish Arts Society's Dramatic Section were Edward Lawrence Levy (President), Victor Goldman (Director), Harold S Cave (Business Manager), Carol Levitas (Honorary Secretary), and Rosalie Cave, Alfred Cannon, and Cyril S Joseph (Committee). The Society met fortnightly.

In 1935, the Arts Society amalgamated with the Literary Society to form the 'Lit Arts', resulting in a very strong society which lasted until 1960.

Information from Zoe Josephs, 'Birmingham Jewry' volume 2, pp. 125-127.

The collection has been arranged in chronological order.

## Description

Minutes of meetings of the the Birmingham Jewish Arts Society and its successor, the Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society, including a scrapbook of programmes, reviews, and other material relating to plays performed by the Jewish Arts Society's Dramatic Section and minutes of meetings of the whole membership of the Society and of the General Committee that managed the Society.

## Related Material

This is one of several collections deposited by the Birmingham Hebrew Congregation. Most of the material deposited relates to Singers Hill Synagogue (JA), but there is also a small collection of records from the New Synagogue, Park Road (JB), which merged with Singers Hill in 1997. The archive also contains records of the Birmingham Jewish Arts Society (MS 2520), Birmingham Youth Council (MS 2522), Young Israel Council (MS 2523), Birmingham Shechita Board (MS 2529), Birmingham Hebrew Educational Aid Society (MS 2539), and the personal papers of the historian Zoe Josephs (MS 2524). The personal papers of Dorothy Gillman (MS 2525) and Constance Davis (MS 2526) were also deposited by the Congregation.

Other collections held by Birmingham City Archives which may be of interest include Birmingham and District War Refugees Fund (MS 652), which includes minute books, registration forms, and correspondence, and may include information about Jewish refugees; records of Henry Yeoville Thomason (MS 1460), which include architectural drawings of Singers Hill Synagogue; personal papers of CB Lander (1904-1989), including family papers about naturalization, Jewish friends, and Jewish affairs and history (MS 1515); microfilms of minutes of the Birmingham Hebrew Philanthropic Society, the Birmingham Hebrew Educational Aid and Clothing Society, the Ladies Benevolent Board, and the Board of Guardians (MS 1678); and papers of Dr Carl Chinn (MS 1902), which contain some material about the Jewish community in Birmingham, including several autobiographies. Birmingham Central Library Local Studies and History holds material about the Jewish community including a set of Birmingham Hebrew Congregation Yearbooks, 1913-1971; an Order of Service held to celebrate the opening of the Birmingham Hebrew School at St Luke's Rd, Edgbaston, May 1, 1932.

Access: Open

Copyright: With depositor unless otherwise stated.

Condition: All records are in good condition.

MS 2520/1	<u>Scrapbook produced by the Dramatic Section of Birmingham Jewish Arts Society</u> The Dramatic Section of the Birmingham Jewish Arts Society was formed in 1923. Its officers are listed as follows: President: Edward Lawrence Levy Director: Victor Goldman Business Manager: Harold S Cave Honorary Secretary: Carol Levitas Committee: Rosalie Cave, Alfred Cannon, Cyril S. Joseph	03 February 1924-12 December 1931
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Scrapbook, labelled 'Record of Performances', kept by the Dramatic Section of the Birmingham Jewish Arts Society. It includes cast photographs; programmes, which include advertisements for Jewish businesses; notes by the Director reflecting on the success of the plays and recording comments made by the audience; and press cuttings of reviews. Plays performed by the society include: 'The Man in the Stalls', 'The Editor', 1924; 'The Way Things Happen', 1925; 'The Return' and 'Discord', 1925; 'The Lady of Belmont', 1926; 'Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire', 1927; 'You Never Can Tell', 1928; 'The Cassilis Engagement', 1928; 'Ariadne, or Business First', 1929.

Extent: 1 Volume

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| MS 2520/2 | <p><u>Minutes of meetings of the Birmingham Jewish Arts Society</u><br/>Minutes of the Birmingham Jewish Arts society, describing their meetings. The meetings are varied, including dancing (to music played by the Society's orchestra), performances of plays, lectures, and debates. The minutes cover the 11th and part of the 12th sessions of the society, ending with the 4th meeting of the 12th session. The Society's officers are listed before the minutes for each session.</p> <p>Extent: 1 Volume</p> | 01 October<br>1933-02<br>December<br>1934 |
| MS 2520/3 | <p><u>Minutes of the General Committee of the Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society</u></p> <p>Extent: 1 Volume</p>   | 11 May 1936-03<br>March 1952              |
| MS 2520/4 | <p><u>Minutes of Ordinary Meetings of the Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society</u></p> <p>Extent: 1 Volume</p>   | 11 October<br>1936-06 April<br>1952       |
| MS 2520/5 | <p><u>Minutes of Ordinary Meetings and General Committee Meetings of the Birmingham Jewish Literary and Arts Society</u><br/>Minutes of meetings of the General Committee, 9 June 1952 - 22 December 1959. Minutes of Ordinary meetings of the Society, 3 February 1952 - 10 January 1960.</p> <p>Extent: 1 Volume</p>  | 03 February<br>1952-10<br>January 1960    |
| MS 2520/6 | <p><u>Photocopy of the Birmingham Jewish Young Men's Association's programme for 1902-1903</u><br/>The programme was photocopied from "The Jewish</p>   | 1902                                      |

Literary Annual 1903", published by the Union of Jewish Literary Societies, London. It lists the officers of the Society and events taking place in Oct 1902-March 1903. These include social evenings, debates, lectures, and discussions. The copy was made in 1984.

Copyright: Unknown.

Extent: 1 Document