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'The Most Saving Slum in Glasgow, and the Most Abandoned': Twentieth-Century Materiality and Twenty-First Century Virtuality in the Jewish Gorbals, Scotland

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Abstract
In 1905, Yiddish poet and Glasgow union activist Avrom Radutsky described the Jewish population of Scotland as 'a mere drop in the ocean'. Nevertheless, by 1920 this drop had swelled to 20,000 people, centred primarily (though by no means exclusively) around the Gorbals in Glasgow. The area was characterised by vibrant community life, but also cramped low-quality housing, poor sanitation and harsh economic inequality. Many of Glasgow's Jews began to climb a social ladder that would lead them out of the Gorbals and towards more spacious residences in the south-west of the city, but maintained regular contact with its streets, shops and places of worship. Large-scale demolition of the neighbourhood in the 1960s mean that the Gorbals looks very different today, and the Jews are gone. The Jewishness of this space, however, still remains: a remembered or imagined presence in the minds of second and third generations, celebrated through community outreach, or romantically evoked in popular narratives. Equally, an absence of Jewish life in today's Gorbals has been paralleled by the emergence of wide-ranging and socially minded virtual networks of shared memory. Through analysis of contemporary accounts and archival sources, oral histories, fieldwork interviews, and lively online discussion groups, this article examines how this former densely populated Jewish neighbourhood now functions as an important *lieu de memoire*, but in a significantly different way to Eastern Europe's pre-war Jewish spaces. At the geographical edges of more traumatic histories, the Gorbals instead provides an affective link for contemporary, assimilated Scottish Jews, while at the same time the area's Jewish history becomes part of a wider virtual online community – signifying an emotional connection to immigrant narratives and grounding personal and social histories.

Keywords Scotland · Glasgow · Gorbals · Virtual · Twentieth century

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> In the twenties the majority of the families in Apsley Place were Jewish and I hardly knew those who were not. How Jewish the street was may be assessed from the fact that in a summer of the late twenties by the time one walked the length of Apsley Place one could hear from the open windows, the whole of 'A Yiddishe Momma' sung by Sophie Tucker.
> Jack Joseph, *Edinburgh Star*, issue 14 (1993:20)[1]

Introduction

This article looks at Jewish space on the margins of Europe. We might even say that it is on the margins of the margins, in that Jews in Scotland (as distinct from England) have often negotiated a hyphenated sense of identity: Scottish–Jewish. Or as the Glasgwegian Jewish poet AC Jacobs eloquently wrote:

> Here in my native land
> I'm answering for someone else.
> Exile within exile.
> Who's a Jew? Who's a Scot?
> What happens after independence?
> How much history does anyone need?[2]

The independence and histories that Jacobs cites were – and remain – equally pertinent to both Scottish and Jewish identities, underpinning a complex dialogue that enables multiple and shifting subject positions. But this duality can also be illuminating, as Phil Alexander, Hannah Holtschneider and Mia Spiro (2019:1) note: 'Of course, what is marginal always depends on what is perceived to be central. The numerically strong, culturally productive, and religiously prolific Jewish communities in British centers, such as London or Manchester, often dominate what is considered to be Jewish life in the United Kingdom; still, the comparative marginality of Jewish lives, communities, and organizations in less populated locales in Britain does not automatically suggest their irrelevance'. In fact, the authors continue, 'issues of identity, belonging, Jewishness, and other national, cultural, and religious expressions are amplified in these so-called marginal contexts' (ibid.).[3]

For the focus of this article, we must add in a third layer: Glasgow's Gorbals district. This area was the heart of the city's Jewish immigrant life, and a space that

[1] Edinburgh Star is the magazine of the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation. This issue can be viewed at: https://www.edinburghstar.info/issue/no-14/. Accessed 23 March 2024.

[2] AC Jacobs (1937–1994), *State* (Jacobs 1996:188).

[3] This also, of course, depends on who is doing the defining, and from where. It is unlikely that the majority of Scotland's Jews see themselves as existing on any sort of margins, particularly with regard to their daily Jewish (or even 'Jew-ish') lives – a point well-made by historian and writer David Daiches, son of Edinburgh rabbi Salis Daiches: 'The two worlds [Scottish and Jewish], in my childhood, were not really separate…It never occurred to me as a child that this combination was odd or unsustainable' (Daiches 1987:5). My argument is more that the centre is often seen to speak for the periphery, whereas an attention to areas away from the noisy middle can often reveal important alternative perspectives.

was often viewed with a mixture of suspicion and fascination from those outside its bounds. In the 250-year history of Scotland's Jews, Glasgow's Gorbals has been central to these issues of identity, belonging and Jewishness – especially since the late nineteenth century, which is when the area began to receive relatively large numbers of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. However, the Gorbals functions somewhat differently from some other, more traumatic, spaces of former Jewish settlement in mainland Europe. While today's Jewish Gorbals is now a virtual, archival space and a site of memory, the wider city of Glasgow itself is still home to the majority of Scotland's Jews – they just don't live in the Gorbals anymore. And in contrast to other historical Jewish sites in the UK, or many in the USA, the Gorbals' spaces of settlement themselves (the houses, streets and community buildings) are no longer there in any recognisable form – they have almost all been completely destroyed in favour of a series of often ill-fated urban planning decisions. Nineteenth-century tenements and their accompanying busy thoroughfares were replaced in the 1960s and 1970s with low- and high-rise estates, most of which were in turn pulled down to leave a less clearly characterised district that is today a mixture of low-rise housing, large civic and office blocks and modern multi-use developments still under construction. Therefore, unlike New York's Lower East Side or London's Whitechapel, these physical sites of former Jewish life in the city of Glasgow have not just changed their meanings, but have in recent decades been transformed into a completely altered set of physical structures and forms. There is no tenement museum here, because there are no tenements left.

In fact, the Gorbals of the early to mid-twentieth century was already changing while Jews were still living there.[4] As the arrival point for new immigrants, it was also a space from which many sought to move on, frequently to the more spacious (and relatively wealthier) suburbs further south from the city centre – suburbs such as Giffnock and Newton Mearns, which have for many decades now formed the geographical centre of Jewish life in Glasgow. For immigrant Scottish Jews and their descendants, the Gorbals and its role in their lives was transforming not because of persecution or threat of eradication, but because of social mobility, and would later change again because of urban planning. Social geographer Fran Tonkiss summarises these processes nicely:

> City-making is about making spaces of collectivity and segregation, of inequality and illegality, of mobility and materiality. These designs are scored into the city in built and unbuilt patterns. Urban form is therefore not simply about buildings and the spaces between them, street layouts and open spaces, skylines and city boundaries – although it is about all of those things. Urban form is also about densities and distributions of people, spatial relations between social groups, the spatial markings of legal boundaries and entitlements, urban environments and the submerged or social infrastructures that shape and segment them. (Tonkiss 2013:25)

[4] For a fuller discussion of the changing attitudes, spaces, and social relations of Glasgow's Jews during the first half of the twentieth century see Braber (2007), Collins (1990) and Taylor (2013, 2019). For a specifically gendered analysis, see Fleming (2005).

Consequently, while the Gorbals indicates a geography, the *Jewish* Gorbals indicates a chronology – not just a place but also a time. And the distinct nature of this cultural where and when is amplified by the fact that the area's massive architectural and structural changes of the past five decades mean that, from a contemporary subject position, it is impossible to inhabit the same actual spaces (although we will encounter some creative responses). Though it is still a spot on the map of the city, 'the Gorbals' as a signifier equally often invokes a series of historical moments – in our case one intimately bound up with immigration, mobility, memory and changing Jewish identity. The different physical iterations of the Gorbals through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are themselves overlaid with multiple structures of feeling: a space of the imagination (both Jewish and non-Jewish) as well as a site of daily life, and also an archival and online context for reminiscence, discussion and critique. It is, thus, in many respects, a complex virtual Jewish space of the twenty-first century.

What follows brings together new interview material with historical biography and little-known reportage, alongside contemporary and recent dialogues around urban space and memory that engage directly and explicitly with archival and online representations. As the argument unfolds, it will become clear that the contemporary iteration of this particular Jewish space is both physical and virtual, and needs to be understood across multiple axes simultaneously. As this diverse range of sources will show, contemporary perspectives are very much informed by affective memory, both real and imagined, and to engage fully with the ambiguities of the Gorbals of the twenty-first century requires a willingness to probe the ways that its nineteenth and twentieth century Jewish history has been perceived and decoded – by Jews and non-Jews.

This article, then, offers three perspectives on the Jewish Gorbals: the early twentieth-century immigrant voice, the historical (and historical imaginary) narrative and the contemporary virtual. We begin with a range of first-hand accounts drawn from interviews and newspapers that not only give a sense of the material conditions of immigrant life in the area in the early twentieth century, but also show that the imagined, exoticised, memory-inflected Gorbals was very much under construction while the area was still home to a large Jewish community. The next section layers more recent reflections and perspectives of Scottish Jews whose parents or grandparents grew up and lived in the Gorbals. This brand new interview material is contextualised by some of the more romanticised iterations to be found in Scottish–Jewish memoirs. The final part of the article considers the Gorbals today as an archived, virtual space, exploring the ways in which memory and representation is curated and disseminated both online and physically.[5]

These perspectives are neither objective nor all-encompassing. My aim here is not to offer a quantifiable history, but rather to explore the ongoing interaction of these different temporal and geographical frames. The spaces and times discussed all inflect one another: the virtual and archival Gorbals of today is based both upon

[5] It is important to note, of course, that the area is very much still a living space of homes, workplaces and public services for many contemporary Glaswegians. However, my present-day focus here is on the way that the Gorbals functions as a site of memory, alongside its daily urban materiality.

historical materiality and a sense of the imaginary, and is simultaneously a response to the area's totally changed physical structures. What follows, therefore, often leans heavily upon partial and subjective viewpoints, and it is the individual, affective elements of these voices that I hope to represent, as noted by historian Linda Fleming:

> Certain dominant images, and sometimes frankly stereotypical imagery, become central to the way that the past is reconstructed. These intrude on subjective experience and create narratives that weave both elements into their fabric. (Fleming 2005:136-7)[6]

In search of these narratives, I have deliberately chosen novel and creative methodologies that bring archival materials into explicit confrontation with contemporary memory and the development of virtual Jewish space. This affective and evocative approach can, I believe, expand and deepen wider scholarly discourses, most notably at the intersection of urban studies, cultural studies and anglophone Jewish history. It is my aim to further an understanding of the creative and evocative ways in which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish histories, biographies and representations inform a contemporary space that, in the case of Glasgow's Gorbals, is constructed across the productive and emotionally resonant planes of memory, archival representation and virtuality. This article is therefore an important engagement with the wider volume's themes of virtual Jewish space, presenting an unusual case study where a rich seam of memory meets a contemporary physical limbo, simultaneously paralleled by a lively online discourse.

Di Gorbals, Glazgoy: Perspectives from Within and Without

> the Gorbals, somehow, was less intimidating than other parts of the town for it reminded me vaguely of Dvinsk. There were Yiddish posters on the hoardings, Hebrew lettering on the shops, Jewish names, Jewish faces, Jewish butchers, Jewish bakers with Jewish bread, and Jewish grocers with barrels of herring in the doorway. The herrings in particular brought a strong whiff of home. One heard Yiddish in the streets—more so, in fact, than English—and one encountered figures who would not have been out of place in Barovke.[7]

In 1891 the Rev. Isaac Levine of Glasgow's Garnethill synagogue, in the West End of the city centre, proudly declared 'All this alarm regarding the Jews is entirely groundless…We are in complete touch with every Jew in Glasgow at this moment, and we have not the slightest hesitation in saying that the immigration is absolutely

[6] Writing of cultural studies, Ben Highmore makes a similar point: 'The cliché is what we already have to grasp the world… Description, then, is often, and necessarily both a form of vigilance (avoiding the immediate cultural reflex, weighing possible adjectival directions) and a form of self-reflexivity' (Highmore 2018:250-1).

[7] From Chaim Bermant's autobiographical *Coming Home* (1976:52). Bermant was born in Poland in 1929 and came with his family to Glasgow when he was 8.

without effect here'.[8] As Levine's anxious reassurance made clear, it was not that there were no Jews at all – there had in fact been Jews in Scotland for several centuries by this point. These were, however, generally smaller communities or individuals, often reasonably wealthy and relatively quick to acculturate. The immigration that Levine – himself a Polish Jew – was speaking of was a specific one: the movement of (poorer) Eastern European Jews from Russia, Lithuania and the Austro-Hungarian empire, frequently into the less affluent enclaves of big cities in Western Europe and the Americas.

One such arrival was Avrom Radutsky. Born in Rzhyshchiv, Kyiv gubernia in 1873, Radutsky came to Glasgow aged 17. Living in Portugal Street in the Gorbals, he worked at Mitchell's Cigarette Factory – the lucrative Scottish cigarette industry was in fact largely built upon the labour of Eastern European Jewish immigrants.[9] In 1895, Radutsky was one of eight men who established the International Cigarettemakers' Union in Glasgow, fighting increasing automation and its inevitable redundancies. In an occasional *briv fun shotland* column for the St Petersburg Yiddish daily *der fraynd*, Radutsky documented the daily struggles of his fellow Jewish immigrants, usually with a strong focus on the inequality of working relations and social deprivation. Keen to emphasize Glasgow as a (non-Jewish) outpost in relation to central and eastern Europe, in April 1905 he described the Jewish population of Glasgow as '*a tropn vasser in yam*' ('a mere drop in the ocean'). Just a few months later, however, Radutsky noted an increase in numbers, including the growing movement of eastern Jews through this 'big *goyishe* city' and onwards. As a key point along transatlantic shipping lines, the city was a stop for large numbers of people on their way from the east to the *goldene medina* [golden land] of the USA:

> Over the past few weeks emigration through Scotland has increased noticeably; there are weeks that bring 500–600 emigrants. They are mostly from Lodz, Zhitomir or other cities. It's not just Jews traveling to 'Golden America', but also Russians, Poles and other nationalities. Amongst the emigrants you can find students, intellectuals, journalists and fellow-workers from Hebrew and *zhargonish* [Yiddish] newspapers…
>
> It breaks one's heart to see the picture that the emigrants present, as they go from the 'Green House' to the ship. Rustic farmers with big felted boots, with tall hats on their heads, carry sacks, with teapots, in their hands; Rus-

[8] *Glasgow Evening News*, 13 June 1891, page 2. Although this was ostensibly a chance for a member of Glasgow's (at that time small) Jewish community to be taken seriously, the article cannot resist a contrast with London Jewish stereotypes: 'the hook-nosed oleaginous party with old clothes…and round the corner Jewry's daughters—luscious in figure, dark of eye and skin, and nimble-fingered; or Jewry's mammas—very fat and very oily, with a tendency to bulge' before reassuring readers that 'there is no such Hebrew colony in Glasgow'.

[9] According to testimony given by Jacob Kramisch, manager of Mitchell's Cigarette Factory, to the 1903 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration: 'The Stephen Mitchell and Son branch of the Imperial Tobacco Company started the cigarette department with two or three foreign males, and so extensively has the trade grown, that this branch of the company now employs about 160 males and about 100 females. The former are all foreign Jews – of various nationalities – and the latter are about equally divided between foreigners and natives'. See https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012177868, page 793 (accessed 26 June 2023).

> sian and Polish women and girls with coloured scarves wrapped around their heads. Jews with shiny bootlegs, and long cloaks split up the back up to the belt, carry packs under their arms, with wanderer's sticks; wives, poor Jewish wives, troubled and preoccupied so they can scarcely walk, breastfeeding children wrapped up in a shawl.[10]

As Scottish–Jewish archivist Deborah Haase has noted: 'While a lot of people were flowing through, a lot of people were sticking',[11] and by 1920 there were between 15,000 and 20,000 Jews living in Scotland. The vast majority were in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city. At this point the so-called second city of the British Empire, Glasgow was a busy, diverse industrial hub, a centre of shipbuilding along the River Clyde and one of the UK's most important ports for those heading west across the Atlantic. Although Jews lived in a number of places in Glasgow, the largest area of settlement was the Gorbals, on the south side of the city.[12] Originally a genteel village, the Gorbals had grown with the rise of the city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, developing into a wealthy suburb. Large-scale tenement building in the nineteenth century, combined with the area's proximity to the river and slight distance from the wealthier West End and city centre, turned the area into the city's most diverse and multi-lingual neighbourhood. Here, in the early twentieth century, Jews negotiated often cramped community with other immigrant groups: Irish, Poles, Lithuanians, Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Italians among them.

In his 2006 study 'The Gorbals Jewish Community in 1901', historian and co-founder of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre Harvey Kaplan probes the 1901 census to provide some very helpful numbers. Kaplan estimates that at the turn of the twentieth century, there were 4642 Gorbals Jewish residents – out of a total Glasgow Jewish population of approximately 5700 and a total Scottish–Jewish population of approximately 7500 – spread across 791 households.[13] This number shows a 400% increase on 1891 (although still only 5% of the total Gorbals population), and numbers would continue to grow over the subsequent decades. Kaplan notes that in 1901, just under a quarter of all Gorbals streets (around 90 in total) contained no Jews at all, while 20 streets in particular were home to 75% of all Gorbals Jews. More than half of these were listed as immigrants from the Russian Empire, and at

[10] Radutsky's 'drop in the ocean' analogy comes from the front page of *der fraynd, di ershte teglikhe yudishe tsaytung in rusland*, 5 April 1905. The longer description comes from the same newspaper, 27 June 1905, page 1 (Yiddish original, my translation). Both newspapers were accessed through the National Library of Israel online collections: https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/newspapers/jpress (accessed 23 March 2024).

[11] BBC Interview *Being Jewish in Scotland*. Broadcast 13 October 2022. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001d2w0/being-jewish-in-scotland (accessed 26 June 2023).

[12] Log books from Gorbals primary school, for example, reveal that in the early 1920s two-thirds of pupils were Jewish, and in winter the school would close early on Fridays in time for Shabbat.

[13] See Kaplan (2006:8). As 'religion' was not a census question, Kaplan arrived at his conclusions on the basis of a sophisticated synthesis of multiple factors, including surname, profession and country of origin (noting also an understandable mistrust of censuses on the part of some Russian Jewish immigrants). He also consulted other sources such as Jewish Year Books and Post Office Directories.

the beginning of the new century less than 10% of all the Jews in the Gorbals were aged over 45.[14]

Unsurprisingly, the Gorbals Jewish community was not a wealthy one, although perceptions of universal and unrelieved poverty have arguably been overly inflected by the memoirs of writers such as Ralph Glasser and Evelyn Cowan – paralleled in Edinburgh by Howard Denton's *The Happy Land* (Denton 1991) – discussed later in this article. As Kaplan illustrates, Gorbals Jewish life was in fact characterised by a fairly heterogeneous set of living conditions and socio-economic status, with working lives that took in – among other trades – shopkeepers, tailors, tobacconists and cigarette cutters, cabinet-makers, pedlars and hawkers.[15] There were no Jewish day schools, but by the eve of World War I Gorbals School was two-thirds Jewish. A multitude of kosher butchers and bakers operated in the area, alongside Benevolent Societies, a Free Reading Room and various incarnations of the Jewish Institute, which from 1935 functioned as a large multi-use social, theatrical, sporting and leisure space next door to the South Portland Street synagogue.

It is, of course, important to note that despite these strong community networks, Jews were just one immigrant group within a larger urban patchwork: throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Gorbals was a fluid and changing space of migration across multiple cultures and ethnicities. In 1944, Scotland's first permanent mosque was opened in a top floor tenement room at 27 Oxford Street, just a few doors away from the Chevra Kadisha synagogue, which had been consecrated in 1897 and would continue to operate until the 1950s. In 1954, the first Sikh Gurdwara was created at 79 South Portland St, twenty doors away from the grand synagogue where Meyer Fomin (who we will meet shortly) worked. And although the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a significant ongoing decline in the district's social and economic conditions, popular perceptions of the area as almost universally violent and slum-like are inevitably a very partial representation:

> For those who are unfamiliar with the city, [the Gorbals] is a name that is linked with violence, poverty, and teeming slums. But for Glasgwegians, quite why the Gorbals should have achieved such an infamous reputation is something of a mystery (Eunson 1996:3).

The Eastern European immigrants described by Radustky and Levine above were only the most recent Jewish arrivals, and their difference was visible (and audible) not only to non-Jews, but also to older co-religionist communities. North from the Gorbals, across the river Clyde, the Glasgow Hebrew Congregation had been established in 1823, followed by the construction and consecration, in 1879, of an impressive synagogue in the fashionable Moorish style. Garnethill synagogue,

[14] For more detail on the Glasgow Jewish population and demographics in the early twentieth century, see Braber (2007:3–5). For a far fuller history of Glasgow Jews than I could hope to provide here, see the excellent work of Collins (1990) and Braber (2007).

[15] Known as *trebblers*, these travelling salespeople (selling fabrics, pictures or jewellery often on a fairly unstable sale-or-return basis) feature prominently in real and imagined histories such as those of David Daiches (1987) and David Simons (2008).

unlike its Gorbals counterparts, still stands today – even as its congregant numbers are vastly reduced. The majority of these Garnethill Jews were middle-class, cosmopolitan and anglicized. By contrast, the post-1880s Gorbals immigrants were mostly poor, Yiddish-speaking Jews. They included those who were more orthodox in their observance, and also those more radical in their politics – though rarely in the same individual. And while the older, longer-established Jewish community boasted a wealthier and far more influential demographic, from the early twentieth century onwards the Gorbals increasingly asserted its presence as the religious and community hub of Glasgow Jewish life. The perceived differences between the two communities were humorously captured by Rev. Isaac Hirshow (1883–1956), a Russian-born synagogue cantor who emigrated from Łomża to Glasgow in the early 1920s. Hirshow worked first at Chevra Kadisha synagogue in the Gorbals, but a few years later was offered the more prestigious position of cantor at Garnethill. Speaking in 1950 of his move from the Gorbals to Garnethill, Hirshow gently poked fun at the conflicting expectations on both sides of the river:

> One of my advisers tried to persuade me against taking this most risky step. 'Think twice, Mr Hirshow. What sort of Yidden are there in Garnethill anyway? They cannot even speak Yiddish!' A second said, 'You had better pack up your Chazanut. Garnethill doesn't need a Chazan.' A third said, 'You will have to shave off your beard.'[16]

Although its infamy may sometimes have been exaggerated or sensationalised, throughout the first half of the twentieth century the Gorbals did often hold the dubious distinction of Europe's worst slum. Here again is Avrom Radutsky, writing in 1905 – with characteristic lyricism – of the poverty and hardship that he and others faced:

> Not long ago, we had a Jewish troupe, 'The United Oriental Operatic and Dramatic Players Society'. The pieces they presented were: 'The Seder Night' and 'The Wandering Soul'. Now, there was little trace of art and talent on the stage. It would have been unfair to expect this, for people knew that the actors were simple workers, who went hungry nine months of the year. They wanted to eat, and so they shaved off their moustaches, wiped their faces, hung coloured curtains around the boards that they called a 'stage', and made a theatre. And although we Jews are lovers of songs and jokes, the actors didn't bring us a great deal of joy – because we don't need theatre to show us that times are hard. Many serious dramas play themselves out almost daily in every household – dramas that truly tug at the heart and bring forth real tears… (*der fraynd*, 12 August 1905, p. 1)

Viewed from the outside, however, where the poverty and deprivation was at something of a remove, the Gorbals was not simply the city's worst slum, but also its most

[16] Hirshow's words come from a speech he made in December 1950 at Glasgow's Grand Hotel to celebrate 25 years as Reader/Chazan of Garnethill synagogue (text courtesy of Hirshow's granddaughter Adèle Stephens).

evocative, its most romantic. With a touch of poetic licence, harsh social reality was adaptable – for those not directly confronted by it – into a space of the imagination. Even while the area was still very much a living immigrant community, it also became a romantic othered enclave within the noisy materiality and industry of the Empire's second city, and this exoticised romance was represented most frequently by the area's Jewishness. Jews here were not only a working immigrant population, but also emblematic of a fully different society and set of social values. For example, in the early 1930s the great Scottish writer Lewis Grassic Gibbon (1967:90), in a series of vignettes about the city, derived a rich, though questionable, sensuality from this Jewish space:

> [the Gorbals] is lovably and abominably and delightfully and hideously un-Scottish. It is not even a Scottish slum. Stout men in beards and ringlets and unseemly attire lounge and strut with pointed shoes: Ruth and Naomi go by with downcast Eastern faces, the Lascar rubs shoulder with the Syrian. In the air the stench is of a different quality – a better quality. It is not filth and futility and boredom unrelieved. It is haunted by an ancient ghost of goodness and grossness, sun-warmed and ripened under alien suns. It is the most saving slum in Glasgow, and the most abandoned.

Gibbon was no stranger to national constructions. His most famous novel, *Sunset Song*, is a powerful tale of the clash of traditional rural Scottish life with the ravages of World War I, in which the central character must choose between her two selves: (English) education and cosmopolitanism, and (Scottish) love of the land. Notable in the description above, however, is the explicit *un*-Scottishness – to use Gibbon's own term – of the Gorbals Jewish inhabitants: biblical (but not Scottish) first names; dress that seems curiously out-of-place anywhere; physical ways of being (lounging and strutting) that signify both geographical and ideological distance from a hard-working Scottish protestant ethic; and an atavistic, semi-mythical embrace of the contradictory impulses of goodness and grossness, within a complexity and richness that stands in strong contrast to the more straightforward, one assumes, deprivation of native Scottish slum-life.

Exoticised, orientalised perspectives such as these also inevitably carried economic social overtones, often perpetuated from within Jewish communities themselves. We can see a similar, although more class-driven, discourse surrounding Edinburgh's Jewish southside of the early twentieth century, this time from one of the most established organs of British Jewry, the avowedly Anglo-centric, London-based and right-leaning *Jewish Chronicle*, which in 1911 described the Jewish quarter of Edinburgh in strikingly similar terms to Lewis Grassic Gibbon:

> It effervesces with the same bustling hand-to-mouth life, and is populated by the same Rembrandtesque types, so heterogenous and yet so similar. One meets the same bent and hoary Jew hobbling along with his basket and the same 'young bloods', covered with smiles and cheap jewellery. There are the same old women who babble in Yiddish and, on the other hand, the younger women with their dark complexions, nature-tinted cheeks, and jet-black hair.

> Many a Scottish artist has been fascinated and inspired by the haunting sadness of the Hebrew face (Jewish Chronicle, 14 July 1911, p. 28).

The virtual, romanticised, memory-inflected Gorbals discussed later in this article thus predates its archival presence by many decades. And interestingly, these types of cultural constructions were also available to the sizeable minority of Glasgow Jews who lived somewhere other than the Gorbals. In these cases, the area represented a link to Jewishness and Jewish life that was elsewhere perceived to have been severed through assimilation and changing social structures: a sort of tradition-heavy, out-of-time (often frankly weird) Judaism evoked through the immediacy of language and the senses, but also a real and working channel of communication between eastern family roots and newer immigrant identity. In her unpublished memoirs, the Scottish Communist Party founder member Sadie Span recalled her trips to the Gorbals as a young child in the very first years of the twentieth century:

> The excursion to the Gorbals, as well as the food we bought there, was a highlight in our lives. It was news from another world – my Mother's one chance to speak Yiddish, which at home she never used – she was anxious to learn English. What stories she brought home. Some funny and some tragic. First of all she had a favourite shop. It was small and dark, with a strong smell of herrings and gherkins. This shop was called the 'Rebitzens'. It was run by a woman who wore the traditional wig. Both mother and son had a squint eye (we called it 'skelly eyes'), and we found it amusing. Every week we had the latest news on what marriages were arranged and the size of the dowry…Once mother was terribly shocked when she heard that a young man, whose mental state was in question, could really get a dowry. Fancy paying a meshuganer [Yiddish: crazy person] to marry your daughter – what was the world coming to? It wasn't always gossip. As my mother could not read English, we never had a newspaper, and one day she came back in great distress – there was a trial going on in Czarist Russia which in essence was anti-Semitic and she feared there would be pogroms. When my father died, her parents came to Glasgow to beg her to go back to Shavil with them. My mother said she would rather face the poverty of Glasgow than go back to pogroms. More exciting was the story she came back with about the Jewish missionary. Apparently a Jewish preacher turned up in the Gorbals exhorting the Jews to become Christians. He was well versed in the Bible and Hebrew; this was a revelation 'A Jew become a Christian' – it just wasn't right. A Jew could become an Anarchist but not a Christian![17]

Aside from its humorous value, this last episode also points to a significant feature of Gorbals life: a notable – if at times fruitless – intercultural dialogue. Whilst there were of course certain streets that contained large numbers of Jews, the area in general was not large or ordered enough to be divided along ethnic or racial lines, meaning that although the Gorbals as a whole was somewhat ghettoised, there were fewer

[17] These memoirs are held at the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre in Glasgow (www.sjac.org.uk).

individual ethnic ghettoes within it. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Yiddish did not really survive in Scotland much beyond the first immigrant generation.[18] And while we cannot by any means claim a complete absence of antisemitism in Scotland, it is also safe to say that the vast majority of antagonism, social panic and direct confrontation happened in the much larger areas of Jewish settlement, most notably London's East End. For Scotland's relatively small Jewish presence, we can sometimes also spot iterations of Jewish space as a humorous rather than threatening exchange, one that builds on occasional commonality amidst the difference. In this 1908 sketch from the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, Jewish weirdness is set against Scottish intransigence, and yet both seem to find common ground, in this case through music:

> The Difficulties of Yiddish –
> A bill, printed in Yiddish, was last week exhibited in many Glasgow shop windows advertising a Jewish dramatic sketch. A correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald* writes that the other afternoon he overheard a conversation between two old Scotch worthies, who had been studying the announcement. 'Weel, John,' said one, 'can ye mak onything oot o' it at a'?' 'Naw, Wull,' was the reply, 'it fair bates me the noo; but—man,' he continued, 'if A' had ma fiddle wi' me A' believe A' could play it' (*Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 October 1908, p. 6).

This dialogue went in both directions, such as the unique and short-lived linguistic moment of Scots-Yiddish (colloquially known as Skiddish) – snippets of which can be seen in Scotland's only surviving Yiddish newspaper, the 1903 *idishe tsaytung*, which sees the city of Glasgow universally Yiddishised as *glasgoy*, along with call-outs to *trebblers* (travelling salesmen) and *shopkippers* looking to stock up on *suten* and *leydies fashn*, and the appealing expression *keyn trobel* (no trouble).[19] This linguistic duality is also beautifully captured in a 1924 Hanukkah service invitation at the South Portland St synagogue, the largest in the Gorbals – and indeed the city – and home to the Russian-born cantor Meyer Fomin (1888–1960). For this service, however, Fomin is handing over the reins to *kvayer boy* N Jackson:

> Mir hoffen dos oykh dizen yohr vet ihr alle kumen un **inkaredgen** dem boy, un dos vet oykh zayn eyn **ekzampel** far andere kinder. Alle zenen vilkomen. [We

[18] There are, of course, other important contributing factors to the language's swift decline in Scotland. These include the absence of Jewish day schools in the early 1900s, and the lack of a strong Hasidic presence in Glasgow. The pressures on Yiddish also came from within the Jewish community: an 1892 report in the *Jewish Chronicle* on the reopened Gorbals Main Street synagogue contains the following injunction from Rabbi Simeon Singer, who had been invited to consecrate the newly refurbished building: 'I can conceive no good whatever in keeping up in Scotland or England or Ireland for an hour longer than you can help the use of Jüdisch-deutsch [Yiddish]. For a few weeks or months it may be of service; after that it is no longer necessary…since there is no chance of your inducing your neighbours to give up their language for yours, the wisest thing to do is to exchange yours for theirs' (*Jewish Chronicle*, 16/9/1892 p. 8).

[19] This sole surviving newspaper copy is also held at the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre.

> hope that this year too you will all come and encourage the boy, and that this will also be an example to other children. All are welcome.][20]

And many Gorbals Jews also clearly positioned themselves as Scots, albeit Yiddish-inflected ones.[21] At the busy Jewish Institute, also in South Portland Street and next door to the synagogue, could be found Avrom Greenbaum and the Jewish Institute Players – an amateur theatre group that turned out plays of consistently high quality, garnering a reputation for new and challenging work by playwrights such as Sylvia Regan. Founder and director Greenbaum (1903–1963) was born in Isbitzer, Poland, and came to Glasgow as a small child.[22] A tailor by trade, he wrote plays that directly addressed European antisemitism, and also produced his own Jewish versions of Scottish culture. Here, for example is an extract from his 'Address to the Fress' – a Scots-Yiddish lament for the disappearance of Jewish cuisine amongst the children of immigrants, based on Robert Burns' Address to the Haggis that begins every annual Burns supper.

> The thocht fair maks me rave and rant
> Or aiblins schlog sich kop in vant
> That the communal leaders o'tomorrow
> Should hae sic stomachs, kein eine horra.
> Wi appetites sae weak and idle,
> They canna face a matza kneidle.
> Or syne dae nocht but grin and grimace
> At sicht o' an honest saucy tzimmes.
> And ne'er the name o' cholent heard
> They micht as well be gut in d'rerd.[23]

Beyond their undoubted entertainment value, these diverse sources offer a number of important findings. They point to a significant heterogeneity and fluidity in the construction of early twentieth-century Gorbals Jewish identities, enfolding ideas of Scottishness and Jewishness in ways that are variously pragmatic, playful and often highly sophisticated. The following sections offer some more recent perceptions of Gorbals Jewish identity, including material drawn from a number of interviews, conducted especially for this article, with contemporary Scottish Jews, each of whom positions themselves in different degrees of connection to the Gorbals. As we move into these more recent recollections – both first- and second-generation – we will see this pragmatism and fluidity shift gradually into nostalgia and a sense of loss, paralleled by the area's irreversible physical transformations.

[20] Hanukkah flyer provided by Meyer Fomin's granddaughter Marilyn Freedland. I have transliterated the text exactly, rather than according to standard Yiddish orthography.

[21] Scottish–Jewish historian Harvey Kaplan makes a similar point about Jewish names: 'If you look at the census, you see the kids who in 1901 were called Chaim, and maybe in 1911 they're called Hyman, and then by 1921 they're Harry'. Personal interview, Glasgow, 2 March 2023.

[22] For a full discussion of Greenbaum and the Players, see Maloney and Scullion (2019).

[23] Courtesy of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. Note Greenbaum's decidedly non-YIVO orthography. *Fress* is a Yiddish term for eating enthusiastically, or even messily.

The Remembered – and Imagined – Gorbals

> I think it's probably the same as with the Jewish community generally. With a small amount of people they can have such a large impact on an area…I mean, they might have had a Jewish person in their close, but there was eight other flats there (laughs). And the way that they looked, even for people wanting to blend in, people knew that they were Jewish if they were going to *shul*. I don't know if I'm being contrary there. (Howard Brodie)[24]

Hyphenated, contingent, multiple and adaptable, Jewish diasporic cultures are always cultures in transition, always, as RB Kitaj suggested, living in two societies at the same time and looking two ways at once (Kitaj 1989:19). In addition, the Gorbals itself was changing while Jews were living there, not least because Jews themselves were moving out, initially to more spacious areas just a little further south, and subsequently to suburban Giffnock, which is where the majority of the city's Jews still live. A significant number also headed further afield – to England, or overseas to the USA and Israel:

> The interesting thing I think is that there were still Jews arriving from Eastern Europe into the Gorbals at the same time that other Jews who'd lived there for 5 years, 10 years, are moving to Govanhill, Pollockshields, Queens Park and starting congregations there, so there's this revolving door thing. It's an indication of the community becoming better off. But to move from Abbotsford Place to Allison St in 1902, it didn't mean you were rich! It took maybe another generation to reach Giffnock.[25]

By the 1960s, there were few Jews left in the Gorbals. The majority of the area's tenement housing had been long condemned for its lack of sanitation, overcrowding, dark and cramped conditions, social deprivation and associated problems – recalling Lewis Grassic Gibbon, it was by now very much a 'Scottish slum'. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, in a spate of urban planning intended to regenerate the city of Glasgow that included the destruction of parts of the city centre to allow for the construction of a major motorway, almost all Gorbals tenements were pulled down to make way for a number of tower blocks and lower rise estates, and while the aspirations of these developments in many ways led to an improvement in living conditions, the effects on the ground – or up in the skies – were less positive. Social isolation, crime, exclusion and an ever-widening class divide were often the result, along with poor health due to poor construction of the tower blocks themselves. Since the late 1980s onwards the Gorbals tower blocks have mostly been razed to the ground,

[24] Howard Brodie was born and raised in Glasgow. His grandmother Hilda, coincidentally, was Sadie Span's sister. All his comments come from a personal Zoom interview, 22 June 2023.

[25] Harvey Kaplan, Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. Personal interview, Glasgow, 2 March 2023.

with a number of more empathetic and socially conscious series of housing and regeneration projects now underway.[26]

Many contemporary Scottish-born Jews trace either their parents or grandparents back to the Gorbals, and most also point to the area as a vital and formative phase of immigrant UK Jewish life. Set against the older, strongly anglicising tendencies of historical British–Jewish culture, the larger eastern European immigrant waves of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often signify a sort of rooted difference, creating for several of my interviewees a sense of belonging that is both of and not of Glasgow:

> It seemed that the only thing that was still standing in Gorbals St was the Citizens Theatre! It was changing out of all recognition, and I always used to think, you know, the Jewish Gorbals is disappearing…In 1980, I wrote a play about a *shul* auditioning for a new rabbi, and one of the things in the play – if you look at it now it would maybe feel sentimental – was the fact that things were changing. It was hard to get a *minyan*, there was a very old rabbi there who was loved and respected, he died, and now they were getting a new rabbi…so I was aware of Glasgow life changing (David Neville).[27]

Of the Jewish presence in the Gorbals, no indications remain today, either as physical sites or as memorials, plaques and the like.[28] This latter absence is not wholly surprising. There are few seminal or formative events to commemorate, but also – fortunately – no tragedies to honour: no pogroms, notable persecutions or burnings inside the tower, and as a result of continued but irregular regeneration, the Gorbals has remained something of an open canvas, carrying its own sort of marginality:

> My mother's side of the family, they were not Gorbals people. They were reasonably well off. My grandmother's uncle was Sir Morris Bloch, you know, one of the biggest philanthropists, etcetera, and they lived in Victoria Road, they lived in Pollokshields. My mother was brought up in the West End, so you know it's a different story. So my attachment to my grandfather on the other side, I only just discovered it. So I had no real connection, I was, 'Oh, no, we're not from the Gorbals, my family', when other people would say 'My family comes from the Gorbals', we'd have nothing to do with that. And then I was amazed to discover this. And, you know, quite pleased if you know what I mean (laughs). You know, I *am* from the Gorbals! Not just this wealthy – (laughs) it appeals to my left wing views, you know (Howard Brodie).

The historical Jewishness of the Gorbals persists, however, within Glaswegian popular memory. Memoirs such as Ralph Glasser's Gorbals trilogy and Evelyn

[26] For more details about the changing faces of the Gorbals, see, for example, 2015's Royal Town Planning Institute working paper (Pendelbury 2015).

[27] Playwright and broadcaster David Neville's grandparents were Russian and Lithuanian immigrants to the Gorbals, and his parents both grew up there. All his comments come from a personal Zoom interview, 27 June 2023.

[28] *Almost* no indication: the ever-resourceful staff and volunteers of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre provide occasional Gorbals walking tours that reflect upon the area's Jewish history.

Cowan's *Spring Remembered*, or the fictional narratives of David Simons' Credit Draper series, depict a familiar mixture of material poverty and spiritual nourishment – a messy, noisy, close-up life characterised by family, friendship and a necessary degree of streetwise self-preservation. Narratives such as these effect both a simultaneous connection and distancing: a vital link to a version of Jewish community that is felt to have largely disappeared within non-orthodox UK Jewish life, and at the same time an index of social mobility and integration. Indeed, of his much-lauded autobiographical trilogy, *Growing up in the Gorbals*, Scottish psychologist and economist Ralph Glasser said: 'I was driven to write these books because the spirit of the Gorbals would not leave me and insisted that I give expression to its continuing power and its lessons for our society', thus articulating clearly both his own post-Gorbals position, and yet a fundamental and necessary historical link that we sever at our peril.[29]

For writers especially, the nostalgia of a disappearing world has often proved a lyrical touchstone of a hard-won communality, frequently perceived – through the haze of subsequent decades – to represent a simpler and more honest world view, often connected to childhood and its loss. Here is writer Evelyn Cowan (1974:155) recalling her family quitting the area for greener suburban pastures.

> One of the mover's men gently lifted me into the van. 'Come on, lass. Back you go. You'll fall off that edge. What are ye starin at, anyway?'
> Leaning out, I still looked backwards, and I always will, as they fastened the drop half-door. Goodbye to my best friend Rosie Schulberg! Goodbye snottie Natie Hornstein! Goodbye to our big kitchen table from which so many eager young faces had already departed! Goodbye for ever to the make-shift Passover grocery store, and the fading ghetto life of Glasgow Jewry. And so I waved a last goodbye to the vanishing streets of the old Gorbals.

And while his memoir is less overtly nostalgic, and certainly grittier, in a similarly self-conscious way Ralph Glasser was also moved to look 'back' at the end of his Gorbals trilogy:

> There was no 'back' left. When I took her to see the Gorbals, by that time little more than a collection of dark grey ruins awaiting the bulldozers, it looked as foreign and horrifying as a deserted battlefield…Yet the ineluctable pursuit remains in command, intransigent as always, and of course no settlement, no halting place will ever be found. And Gorbals works upon the spirit implacably—how could it be otherwise?—still kneading the original clay, continuing its questioning, the Sphinx constantly changing the terms of the riddle, never to be solved. (Glasser 1998:209)

[29] Reflections upon the Gorbals, especially of growing up in the area, are of course by no means the sole province of Jews. In 2020, for example, Scottish historian Danny Gill published *The Streets of Gorbals Past*, a series of vignettes, poems, oral histories and 'a walk down the streets of the Gorbals of the old tenements, when we still had open coal fires, over 130 pubs and over a thousand shops and we shopped daily as we had no fridges in our tenement houses back then' (Gill 2020:8).

If the Gorbals has often functioned as an imaginative space upon which external visions have been projected, this process did not change as the area began to empty of Jews; rather, it was replaced by the development of an occasionally grotesque fascination with razor gangs and tough streets that the Gorbals – and by extension Glasgow itself – served to epitomise in popular culture,[30] and individual perceptions:

> I grew up in Edinburgh. So anything I know about the Gorbals has been within the last 20 or so years, really, apart from my perceptions, growing up in Edinburgh of the terrible Gorbals that we never—I never visited Glasgow in all my 20 or 22 years living in Edinburgh, not once growing up. Yeah. It was a big, bad, dirty place, with knives, and slums! (Fiona Brodie).[31]

For those Jews that did actually go to the Gorbals regularly to visit family, this sense of difference was also noted, but manifested itself in a slightly less menacing, although still keenly-felt way:

> Going into the Gorbals, it felt very smoky. It felt quite a dark place, in a sense "(David Neville).

> To me, my grandmother's house was a strange place…it was all quite dark, you know? Next to the bathroom was my uncles' room, which I think I probably peeked in once, and there were all these iron bedsteads (laughs), so that was quite creepy (Lesley Danzig)".[32]

The lingering nostalgia that appears to greater or lesser degrees within autobiographies and fiction is also often seen through a more pragmatic lens by contemporary Scottish Jews. Much like London's Whitechapel or Liverpool's Brownlow Hill, the Gorbals is a space that remains within origin stories but also signifies a necessary move onwards and (implicitly) forwards:

> The generation ahead of mine, maybe my generation a wee bit, are very attached to the memory of the Gorbals, or a nostalgic thing to some of the older people. But the generation after mine, no – I think it's gone. I mean, some people are generally interested in their ancestry or whatever. But I think with my generation, it's definitely gone. People have moved on, and so many of the Jewish community have moved away, of course. So any attachment, or what have you? If there is any attachment it's just in their minds rather than anything else (Howard Brodie).

[30] The most notorious depiction of Gorbals gang life is to be found in H Kingsley Long and Alexander McArthur's *No Mean City*, first published in 1935.

[31] Fiona Brodie is a key member of the Scottish Jewish Archives team. Unlike the other interviewees, she was not brought up in a practising Jewish family and does not trace her ancestry to the Gorbals, both of which make her thoughts an important counterweight. All her comments come from a personal Zoom interview, 7 March 2023.

[32] Lesley Danzig's grandmother lived in Abbotsford Place in the Gorbals and her father and his siblings all grew up there. All her comments come from a personal Zoom interview, 26 June 2023.

> I think there's two sides to it. Mostly my father and my mother would tell me about growing up in the Gorbals, and while there was a very close-knit Jewish community, it was a hard life. People were poor. My grandparents worked very very hard – they were cobblers. My grandmother at one point she sold fruit, and then she learned how to be a dressmaker, and up until a very old age she used to make dresses and kilts, and she had a stall at the Barras. So I think the nostalgia for my parents was about people and community. I think it's that closeness of community that's important…I think there probably was a nostalgia for the closeness of the community geographically in the Gorbals, but not necessarily for the living conditions (David Neville).

And sometimes sentiment is rejected altogether:

> I personally, I think, might feel a little smothered by it. You know, living cheek by jowl with people and everyone knowing your business, and what have you. And the living conditions in most of the Gorbals were mostly terrible. I'd rather have better living conditions and less sense of community. So to me it's not a time that I look back on and think 'Ooh, I wish I had been alive then'. No, it's interesting to find out about, to note the changes over the years. Perhaps to bemoan the fact that we're such a small community now. But no, I don't think I would swap. I wouldn't feel nostalgic about it in that way (Fiona Brodie).

Particularly striking in these responses is an articulation of the physical space of the Gorbals through consciously affective emotional and experiential terms: *dark*, *smoky*, *smothered*, *closeness*. While the historical Gorbals may be, as Howard Brodie suggests, 'just in their minds', this does not diminish its evocative power, nor its ability to elicit notably different reactions. This resonantly productive intersection of memory, nostalgia, comparative historical and contemporary perspective is equally important to our third area of study: a busy and fluid set of spaces that brings together archival activism, virtual dialogues and a keen sense of historical context.

The Archived and Virtual Gorbals

> They just left the place a wasteland. The gorgeous buildings that were there, like the great synagogue and the Jewish Institute, just flattened and destroyed. So I feel a sense of regret from that point of view, that the heritage was just wiped away. However, there's also the thought in my mind that it was actually, you know, the closing of the great synagogue that inspired the beginnings of the Archives. Because it began to occur to people like Kenneth and Harvey that, wait a minute, that was effectively the end of the Jewish community in the Gorbals. They've all gone, but what's happened to the history? You know, the documents, the records of this vibrant life that went on there. Where's it all gone? (Fiona Brodie).

The radical and permanent changes that the Gorbals district underwent in the second half of the twentieth century mean that to wander its contemporary streets brings little or no felt connection with the area's immigrant history. Once crowded and noisy tenements are now well-ordered open-plan housing developments, many still under construction. One single tenement block on Gorbals Street remains: built in 1900, it was once home to the British Linen Bank but lay derelict in recent decades. The building has undergone extensive restoration and is currently used as a combination of property developer showroom and community gallery space.[33] It is not hard to spot the few other structures that escaped the wrecking ball. The Gorbals Library building – the first public lending library in the city – still stands on the corner of South Portland St and Norfolk St, one block away from the great synagogue (which is now a newly built mixed-use training centre), although it is no longer a public space. Further up South Portland St, next to the river, is a warehouse built in 1908 that was originally the home of Finnie & Co. ironmongers. These two grand edifices stand on either side of a mixture of open community space and more recent office blocks. Once entirely characteristic of the area, they are now markedly different in style, stature and colour from their surroundings: a small sense of the urban palimpsest; sullenly persistent bookmarks that nod backwards a century or so.

> It's always in my mind that there are such ghosts there. I'm just very aware that there was this really vibrant Jewish life going on. And generally speaking it was a vibrant area, it was a very packed area. Lots of activity in the streets (Lesley Danzig).

In contrast to many former sites of Jewish life in Europe, Glasgow's Gorbals has been neither gentrified nor museum-ed. The complete transformation of its physical make-up means that heritage tours are possible but awkward,[34] and a combination of socio-economic, geographical and commercial reasons (perhaps also the absence of busy high streets) mean that the area remains untroubled by hipsters, tourists or inflated house prices. Partly as a result of this, the historical Gorbals has developed a lively, often community-based, virtual and archival presence. Internet groups and photo-sharing sites open up discussion spaces that are a mixture of personal memories, social history and political/civic comment. Glasgow is a city that remains proud and conscious of its past, and while these fora often refer to the 1950s and 1960s, by which time many Jews had left, the Jewishness of the Gorbals is rarely far away.

A physical Jewish absence in the Gorbals is thus now paralleled by (and replaced with) a virtual space, curated and represented digitally. The Jewish Gorbals is now, at least in part, constructed through black and white photographs, historical maps and memories shared online. Archival collections such as Glasgow's Mitchell Library virtualmitchell[35] offer online repositories (frequently provided by the Scottish Jewish

[33] See https://urbanunionltd.co.uk/urban-union-to-breathe-new-life-into-historic-gorbals-building/. Accessed 20 June 2023.

[34] There have been one or two attempts at creating neighbourhood walking apps, such as APKPure's Gorbals Community App. These have, however, met with limited success (and functionality).

[35] See http://www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell/index.php. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Archives Centre, discussed below) that document the area's immigrant history, frozen in snapshot moments. One such is the Jewish cap-making factory owned by Solomon Collins, who was born Shama Kagarlitzky 60 miles outside of Kyiv. A photograph – part of the virtualmitchell collection – of the Oxford Street factory from *c*.1910 shows 14 workers seated at a long table, its surface fully covered with sewing machines and piles of fabric (Fig. 1). To the right of the photograph stands a man in a dark suit and a bow tie, possibly Solomon himself, the camera shake at this edge of the picture giving him something of a ghostly appearance. The workers, both men and women, are young but not children, their eyes turned towards the camera catching a moment of rest and quiet in the daily working rhythms.

Online archives such as these often solicit comments and reminiscences that in turn promote engaged discussions. Another photograph, from the Glasgow City Archives Facebook page, taken in 1917, shows the ovens and workers of Malow and Lien bakers at 53 Gorbals Main Street.[36] One baker looks into a large stone oven, while the other takes a break from the pile of coal that fuels the bakery. To the left of the photograph stands a smaller man in suit and flat cap, and next to him, mostly out of the frame, is what looks like the frock-coat, beard and black hat of a more orthodox Gorbals resident. While this photograph is viewable as part of the online Mitchell Library collection, it is the Facebook site that opens up discussion and shared experiences, including comments that manage to skilfully weave contemporary critique in among the memories:

> My gran used to take me into the Jewish bakery on Ballater St facing Florence St, it was an amazing place as a kid, the men making the bread in front of you, you went down a couple of steps from road level into it, nowadays they would call it artisan and you would pay through the nose for what was once the place the working class and poorer people went for bread and rolls.[37]

Shared memories of, for example, going to – or being taken to – a Gorbals Jewish bakery are not uncommon amongst contributors, often implicitly linking a richness and quality of experience directly to everyday life, but an everyday life that is felt to be no more:

> As a wee girl I remember going to the bakery and also the barrels of herring outside the shop. At home we ate all kinds of continental bread that was baked here....a plain loaf was a treat![38]

[36] See https://www.facebook.com/GlasgowCityArchives/photos/a.1856945884570408/2869835973281389/?type=3 (accessed 26 June 2023). The photograph is also part of the virtualmitchell collection.

[37] Ibid.

[38] From https://www.facebook.com/251032471675283/posts/from-italian-cafes-to-a-jewish-bakery-every-group-of-new-glaswegians-brings-with/1386179748160544/. Bakeries in particular seem to elicit poetic memories. Writing of the last Jewish bakery in Edinburgh, Kleinbergs, the journalist Albert Morris described a space that was 'once filled, in its delicious smelling heyday, with polyglot customers, Scots, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, and people from other nations and races drawn to the place because of the excellence of its wares…To taste its ginger or sponge cakes, its apple strudel, often of a lightness and texture that was the gastronomic equivalent of an Impressionist painting, was to have the taste of childhood back again' Edinburgh Star no. 72 (2014:45), see https://www.edinburghstar.info/issue/no-72/. Accessed 26 June 2023.

This ongoing virtual exchange of archival materials, lived affective memory and social conviction is in direct dialogue with the changing spaces themselves (Jewish and non-Jewish), as vital parts in the development of an *imagined community* – though on a smaller scale than the nationalism famously theorised by Benedict Anderson. An urban space that a century ago was home to the processes of immigrant community life now enables, through online images and text, a sense of collectivity, accessible anywhere, available to anyone, yet still geographically specific, that fits Anderson's (2006:7) criteria well: 'imagined' because not all members will ever meet; 'limited' by boundaries, however elastic; and constituting a community of 'horizontal comradeship'.

In a more formalised way, the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre (SJAC), based not in the Gorbals but at Glasgow's prestigious Garnethill synagogue in the West End of the city, has done much to revitalise a sense of Scottish–Jewish history. Actively soliciting family archives, organising community talks and presentations, and supporting a lively publication arm, the SJAC has helped to make Jews one of the most well-researched immigrant groups in Scotland. In many ways, also, the work of this archive has served to create a more historically contextualised (and therefore less romanticised) understanding of Gorbals Jewish life. And as founder Harvey Kaplan explains, the Jewish history of the Gorbals was central to the creation of the archive itself:

> One of the central themes of our work at the Archives Centre has been the Gorbals, because so many of the Jewish community lived in the Gorbals at one time. In 1984, before there was the Archives Centre, there was a cultural group the Gorbals Fair Society, a non-Jewish group. They put a letter in the Jewish Echo saying they were interested in the history of the Gorbals and they had discovered that there had been a large Jewish community in the Gorbals and they were planning an exhibition and would anybody in the Jewish community want to get involved. I got involved and we put a little booklet together, 'A Scottish Shtetl', and an exhibition, and people in the Jewish community and the City Archives contributed. And after it was all dismantled and I wrote a letter to the Jewish Echo saying it was a very nice exhibition and it's a shame the Jewish community wasn't in this in any way, and Kenneth Collins,[39] who was the secretary of the [Glasgow Jewish] Representative Council, got in touch, and the two of us spearheaded the founding of the SJAC. And so in this sense it arose from what we could preserve of the Jewish community of the Gorbals.[40]

Although the archive initially developed outside of Scotland's Jewish community, subsequent outreach has led to a sustained and deeply engaged dialogue, as well as a space for personal and generational memory:

[39] Kenneth Collins is in fact the grandson of Solomon Collins, the cap factory owner mentioned above.

[40] Harvey's parents grew up in the Gorbals and his bar mitzvah took place in the South Portland St synagogue. All his comments come from a personal interview, Glasgow, 2 March 2023.

Fig. 1 Solomon Collins cap-making factory, Oxford Street, *c*. 1910. Courtesy of Glasgow City Archives

> Over the years I've given presentations about the Jewish Gorbals at various places, most of them to the Jewish community, and people loved wallowing in the nostalgia of it. What I get a sense of nowadays is that there's less people around who remember the Gorbals. People are getting older, and what I think nowadays is that Govanhill, Queens Park are the new Gorbals in the sense of people's nostalgia. I once interviewed, maybe about ten years ago, a lady in her nineties, who had grown up and lived for many years in the Gorbals. She said an amazing thing, she said 'Right, I'm walking up Gorbals St, and on my left is this shop, and that shop'. She named all the shops, synagogues, and she would say 'I'm turning into Norfolk St, and so-and-so lived up that close, and chazan so-and-so lived there, and there was such-and-such the butchers. We never went there, because it was better to go to so-and-so.' And in her mind she walked through the Gorbals. Incredible. But I know that not everybody can do that now.

As already noted, the city of Glasgow in the twenty-first century includes an active, if diminishing, Jewish community: an entwined set of day-to-day networks of observance, education, social relations, celebration, and other forms of collectivity. This is a contemporary, lived Jewish space, one that is populated by Jews, and in that sense quite distinct from some of the Jewish spaces of central Europe famously discussed by Diana Pinto (1996) and Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002). It is a space that is formalised through physical structures of synagogues, a school, a daycare centre, a delicatessen and so on, but also linked to Scottish–Jewish diasporic networks, in Israel and the USA particularly. It is also a space that is distanced – not just geographically – from immigrant history. Contemporary Jewish life in Glasgow is largely centred some four and a half miles to the south-west of the Gorbals, and despite the prominence of remembrance and continuity within Jewish culture, there is little or no interaction between today's Jewish life and the processes and networks

of Jewish memory effected through representations of the Gorbals: Glasgow's Jews have moved on.[41] We can therefore discern two parallel, and mostly separate, Jewish spaces: the lived processes of contemporary Jewish life in the city, and the shared – virtual and archival – space of Jewish memory.[42] An absence of commemoration in the contemporary Gorbals (reinforced by the area's physical transformation), and the extreme unlikelihood that the Gorbals of the future might ever produce a Jewish cultural centre or similar physical hub – as in, for example, Krakow's Kazimierz district – or attract a younger Jewish demographic interested in revitalising the area's Jewish cultural identity (in the way that Yiddish language, music and culture are increasingly to be found reappearing on New York's Lower East Side or in London's Whitechapel) also serve to maintain this separation, despite the misgivings of some:

> They are feverishly rebuilding the Gorbals…But there's nothing to tell you there was a Jewish community there. People talk about having a sculpture in Central Station for the Kindertransport, and that's important, but there's more that defines the history of the Jewish community than refugees. I think it's worthy of remembering that one time there was a big Jewish community in this area (Harvey Kaplan).

The virtual, shared space of memory also offers the opportunity for some very directed criticism of latter twentieth-century planning decisions. Such criticism is hardly new, nor is it surprising to find it online; what is noteworthy, however, is how these critiques frequently refer back to the area's immigrant history. For example, where Chevra Kadisha synagogue once stood is now the huge grey concrete Sheriff Court of Glasgow and Strathkelvin, prompting the following post on hiddenglasgow.com:

> I was at Gorbals Primary School in Buchan St, they knocked down an architecturally beautiful functional school and replaced it with the modern Glasgow Sheriff Court – this was vandalism!

On the same site, however, this development is placed within a more nuanced context:

> It's scary how run down that area has become in 30 years. Drugs and being near the court an issue?
> [in response] Glasgow Sheriff court is the busiest court in Europe, for that reason there may be some people with drugs history in the area. Oxford Street

[41] The notable exception is the outreach work of the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, which presents on the Jewish history of the Gorbals to audiences both within and without the Jewish community. Arguably, though, this important work also serves to reinforce the Gorbals as a historical space of Jewish memory, rather than of contemporary Jewish life.

[42] Returning to bakeries…the one remaining Jewish delicatessen in Scotland, Mark's Deli in Giffnock, is run by Mark Cohen, a descendent of two famous Gorbals businesswomen: Sophie Geneen, who ran the famous Geneen's Hotel, and kosher caterer Annie Cooper, known universally as Auntie Annie. However, although Mark's is a busy and welcoming kosher caterer, it is also a more separated space. Despite linking clearly to its heritage (including a display of photos of long-gone Gorbals Jewish bakeries), it is nevertheless unlikely to be frequented by non-Jews in the way that Gorbals bakeries were.

> area reflects what the Gorbals area has done for years, provide homes and work for emigrants for Glasgow.
> The Jewish, the Irish, Highlanders, Indopaks, more recently Polish and North Africans.[43]

Radical visual and structural disjunctures between the Gorbals of 100 years ago and its present-day appearance throw up imaginative and affective ways of reconnecting to this disappeared landscape. Photographer Duncan McCallum (also known as streapadair), in partnership with writer Peter Mortimer, produced the 2013 book *The Gorbals in the 1970s*, a stunning collection of more than 140 black and white images from the 1970s with accompanying historical descriptions, capturing the area just before its demolition (already begun in several of the pictures).[44] A particular atmosphere pervades these photographs. The light is strong and the resulting contrasts lend a geometric feeling to each composition – the inanimate subjects are both a part of the urban landscape and simultaneously each a study in their own right. Despite a number of boarded-up or smashed windows, the solidity of the structures – their weight and texture, the materiality of their bricks and mortar – is palpable, aided by the looming sensation created through diagonal camera angles all shot from ground level. These are not architectural schemata; if anything, they feel more like ageing urban combatants whose fate remains uncertain – in solidarity, perhaps, with their former inhabitants:

> In 2008, I had a play on called *Dough*. And that was set in a Jewish bakery shop. It was about this shop that had been somewhere like Govanhill or even the Gorbals, and the community had moved away, and Isa the wife of the baker wanted him to retire and get out, basically. And he wasn't gonna shut down for nobody, there were still customers coming. And that was very much inspired by these places that I would be taken to (David Neville).

Viewing McCallum's images, the sense of desolation and sadness comes partly from a knowledge that the buildings are caught in a moment shortly before their destruction, and also from the relative absence of human subjects in what was still a densely populated district. At the same time, as the photographer himself observes in the following example, there is also a feeling of once-greatness and lost opportunity amidst the evidence of defeat:

> Abbotsford Place, more than anywhere else in the Gorbals, anywhere else in the city, had an air of faded grandeur. It was a ruined, down-and-out aristocrat of a street…For 30 or 40 years it was a 'good' address, but the coming of the railway gave the middle classes the freedom to move further afield, to leafy suburbs far from the city slums, and the decline of Abbotsford Place (and Cumberland St and Nicholson St and others) was rapid. The size of the flats meant they were highly suitable for multiple occupancy, and successive

[43] These quotes all come from www.hiddenglasgow.com. Accessed 26 June 2023.

[44] McCallum's photographs are viewable online at https://www.streapadair.com/History/Glasgow-Gorbals-1973-77/, accessed 26 June 2023.

> waves of immigrants, Irish, eastern European Jews, Italians, and more recently Asians found in them a foothold on the property ladder. These tenements were soundly built, and could have been refurbished. The lack of imagination which led to their removal was shameful.[45]

Building upon photographic archives and resources, urban designer Peter Kelly is currently working on a 3D digital model of the area as it would have looked in the early 1900s.[46] Not yet complete but already striking, Kelly's model uses photographs and maps to create a colour-coded interactive virtual representation that he hopes will one day be useable by both public and professionals. Kelly's work is simultaneously a piece of social history, a study in urban planning and an ongoing labour of love. It is also, as he explains, a product of the collision of material histories with virtual space:

> I'm relatively new to Glasgow but for some reason the Gorbals has been in my head as long as I can remember possibly via TV and news reports, but later through my education in town planning and urban design where I learned more about the losses, the reasons behind them – the 60s visions, and the creation and defining of areas as slums, the class and social power play involved and the power of architects, planners and politicians... As well as trauma of war and post war economic collapse. Then, about the most recent rebuild, where historic streets were redefined with contemporary interpretations of Glasgow building types. The Gorbals was an exceptional 19th century piece of city, home to thousands of people, countless stories and incredible buildings.
> With each photo I rebuilt the building digitally by eye based on measurements in old plans where possible. Gradually my mental map of the Gorbals became more accurate as I realised how photos were related to each other. It was so exciting to discover mention of a Synagogue on the map and then find a photo which I could then build and realising it might have been behind the photographer of another photo. It felt like I was repairing the destroyed area and appreciating its beauty and intricacy in a way very few people would be able to.

Although the model is architectural and contains no people, for Kelly this journey of rediscovery has nevertheless elicited a curious sense of connection and intimacy, despite the fact that he himself has no historical or family ties to the area:

> After completing a street in the model, with perhaps a church or synagogue, working men's club, pub, shops and homes, I could 'stand on the ground' and look around. This felt like time travel. I felt as if I was standing alone on the street after everyone else had gone, seeing it all for the first time since it was demolished. The feeling was of being privileged to see that place designed by countless people laid out before me alone.

[45] Ibid.

[46] See https://urbanglasgow.co.uk/viewtopic.php?p=138954#p138954. Accessed 26 June 2023. Kelly has also spearheaded a plan to replace the M8 motorway, the development of which in the late 1960s involved the demolition of parts of the city centre.

> Visiting the Gorbals now is very different to how it was before. Standing on street corners I know what was there before, in a way that only people who used to live there really can. My heart breaks as I see a vacant site which was once occupied by a soaring spire or dome. I hope too that it will influence future planning decisions because there are areas which could be redeveloped in time, closer to what was once there and because of how well the place was organised, it would improve how people get around and experience the Gorbals today.[47]

The temporal fluidity ('time travel', 'after everyone else had gone') that peppers Kelly's responses to his creation, along with the openly emotional descriptions of his feelings ('privileged', 'my heart breaks') are striking, and link directly to some of the processes at work through my whole discussion here. Jay Winter writes that 'memory is history seen through affect' – memory 'seen through and criticized with the aid of documents of many kinds – written, aural, visual' (Winter 2012:12). The ways of seeing discussed throughout this article take multiple histories and pass them through distinctive affective filters. This produces contemporary spatial, textual and virtual representations that engage directly and inescapably with memory, articulating a felt and explicitly emotional connection to the past while also acknowledging the creative effects of imagination (or re-imagination). The cyclical nature of this process is significant, pushing against ideas of modernity that see these social and physical transformations as indicative of progress. Instead, the voices represented here are equally concerned with a dynamic and affective engagement that reaches back through different slices of time, questioning a sense of linear development. It is an understanding of virtuality that, while linked to absence, in fact suggests new ways of engaging with contemporary physical space.

Conclusions

This article has sought to understand Glasgow's Jewish Gorbals through a combination of three chronologies and three geographies: the immigrant enclave, the remembered and imagined/imaginative space and the virtual archive. All three speak to and inflect each other: the district's immigrant Jewish history makes possible connections of memory and imagination, just as the massive physical transformation of the area has in many ways enabled the virtual and archival community that exists today. Methodologically, I have sought to place lesser-known stories and biographies in direct dialogue with more recent recollections and perceptions, and also twenty-first-century virtual representations – in an approach that I believe enables a deeper understanding of the iterative relationships at play.

This innovative and creative combination of documented reportage, memoirs and contemporary ethnography allows us to see the space of the Gorbals as

[47] These generous explanations come from a personal email communication with Peter Kelly, 20 June 2023.

multiply constructed across several different planes. It is an analysis that recognises the real/imagined territory as an intersecting network of history, geography, memory and representation; I would argue that taking account of these overlapping and mutually influential dimensions can expand an understanding of the spatial and temporal ambiguities that frequently characterise the diasporic imagination. The material discussed here therefore offers an important contribution to new ways of thinking about the processes and functions of twenty-first century virtual and archival space in relation to increasingly distant historical narratives that nevertheless retain their affective and emotional power – and not just for those who claim a direct lineage.

The absence of persecution or terror for Jews in Scotland meant that, as in other UK cities, the Jewish move out of the Gorbals was a result of social mobility rather than external forces. Jews are just one of the remembered communities, and today's Jewish Glaswegians now centre around the suburbs of Giffnock and Newton Mearns, some few miles to the south-west of the Gorbals where many of their parents and grandparents arrived or were raised. For the majority of this group, the Gorbals figures in their daily lives hardly at all, while for a smaller number – perhaps those more closely involved with Jewish history in the city – collective and individual recollection creates an important link with this former Jewish space. We can thus see the development of two parallel Jewish spaces in the city: contemporary 'real-life' and an evocative virtuality.

A lack of Jewish presence in today's Gorbals, combined with no commemoration of – or building upon – its Jewish history, has led in parallel to the creation of a strong archival presence, largely through the work of Harvey Kaplan and the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. These archival resources in turn feed into the wider virtual space of Gorbals memory (including Jewish memory) that operates through lively online networks, and frequently reflects back – sometimes critically – upon the physical Gorbals, both of history and of now.

Jewish diasporic culture has often, perhaps inevitably, been skilful at operating across multiple histories and geographies simultaneously. As Jonathan Boyarin (1996:163) nicely puts it: 'the answer to the question "Where?" can also be a "time"…whenever we name a century we are identifying a location of culture'. The historical and cultural trajectory of the Gorbals offers a particular and unusual articulation of these operations, at the fringes of European Jewish life and with its own local tone of transnational voice. Nevertheless, the different and various expressions of geographical specificity discussed here highlight broader and deeper ways of understanding the duality, multiplicity, and back-and-forth of Jewish space more generally. And so to connect back a little, let us finish as we started, with the economic lyricism and sophisticated multiplicity of Glasgow Jewish poet AC Jacobs.

'Where do you come from?'
'Glasgow'
'What part?'
'Vilna.'
'Where the heck's that?'

'A bit east of the Gorbals,
In around the heart.'
AC Jacobs, *Place* (Jacobs 1996:35).

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