For Richer For Poorer: Weddings Unveiled

Tuesday 17 February, 2015

In February 2015, the Jewish Museum London will tell the story of Jewish weddings in Britain in For Richer For Poorer: Jewish Weddings Unveiled.

This major new exhibition showcases a rich and evocative collection of dresses, photographs, invitations and objects to tell the story of Britain's Jewish community from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.

Between the 1880's and 1914, around 150,000 Jewish immigrants arrived in Britain from Eastern Europe, with the majority settling in the East End of London. Part of a larger migration of Jewish people across the world, many were motivated to leave due to persecution suffered in their homeland.

Marriage is a central institution within Judaism and weddings were a hugely important social occasion for this growing community. Despite the poverty that many families experienced, some celebrated weddings with huge receptions, with families often saving for years to pay for them.

Highlights of *For Richer, For Poorer: Weddings Unveiled* include:

- A collection of wedding dresses dating from 1905, the 1920's, 1930's and from World War II.
- The 1905 dress belonged to Sarah Levy who married an immigrant bootmaker from Poland at New Road synagogue. The 1925 dress is a fashionable flapper dress with beaded tassels worn by the daughter of immigrants who was a shorthand typist. The dress on display from the 1930s was made by the bride, reflecting the financial hardship of the time.
- Stories of how Jewish couples met, including the role of the 'shadchan', or matchmaker, who arranged wedding matches within more orthodox communities. For the first time ever, visitors will be able to view a shadchan's ledger from the 1940s and letters between the shadchan and his clients.
- Photographs taken by Boris Bennett, together with his camera. The most sought-after wedding photographer of his day, Boris's East End studio captured the Hollywood glamour that 1930s Jewish couples wanted their wedding photos to reflect. Crowds would gather outside his studio every Sunday (the traditional Jewish wedding day) and Boris would photograph average of thirty couples in a single day.
- Artefacts used in the Jewish wedding ceremony, including a display of 'ketubots'– Jewish wedding contracts. The earliest English ketubah in our collection from 1729 will be displayed.
- A journey through the music, food and dancing that was at the heart of every celebration. There's a table plan for a wedding reception in Picadilly, a catering agreement by Sterns Caterers for huge amounts of food that continued all day long and printed table cards with lists of music that was played.

Abigail Morris, CEO of the Jewish Museum London, said, "Uncovering the stories behind this wonderful collection of objects has been a fascinating process because each and every item gives us an insight into the traditions, cultural 'norms' and social aspirations of this fledgling Jewish community at a critical time in its history. What comes across is that despite the challenges of the time – including poverty, in many cases – putting on a good party for the neighbours was vital, irrespective of the cost involved!

"We are delighted to unveil this inspirational, romantic exhibition and we are excited to use so much from our collection that has remained hidden until now."

Throughout the exhibition, the Jewish Museum London will host a series of events on the theme of love and marriage. Events include a 'Secrets of a successful marriage' workshop with the Jewish Marriage Council, a Jewish dance session for weddings and other celebrations, a tour of historically important wedding locations in London's East End with Rachel Kolsky and a talk by Maureen Kendler about weddings and relationships in the Torah. The full programme of events can be found at www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/whats-on

- ENDS -

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The Jewish Museum London is for people of all backgrounds and faiths to explore Jewish heritage and identity as part of the wider story of Britain. Displayed across four permanent galleries, the huge variety of objects, photography, hands-on exhibits and personal stories paint a rich and nuanced picture of British Jewish life and history.

The only museum in London dedicated to a minority community, the Museum's expansion and redevelopment in 2010 was supported by a £5m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The museum also houses a café, shop, 100-seat auditorium, and education space.

Website: jewishmuseum.org.uk

Twitter: @jewishmuseumLDN

Facebook: facebook.com/jewishmuseumLDN

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Opening Times: Sunday – Thursday: 10am – 5pm, Friday: 10am – 2pm

Exhibition Dates: 13 February to 31 May 2015.

Tickets are available to book at www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/weddings

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