

Other prominent female members of the aristocracy who joined the BIWF during this period included the Marchioness Dowager of Headfort and Lady Folkestone, the Countess Dowager of Radnor. The latter was a founding patron of the BIWF.³⁷ Lady Folkestone had a period of convalescence in 1876 during which she was introduced to the literature of the British-Israel movement and was ultimately converted – along with her husband the Earl – to the cause. In 1924, the Marchioness inaugurated the ‘Order of the House of Israel’ (OHI) and established herself as leader of the Grand Chapter.³⁸ She explained the aims of the order in a volume of her memoirs, published in 1927:

The OHI was instituted with a view to enlarging the work of the existing British Israel World Federation by means of small meetings for the study of the subject . . . not only in the big towns, but also in villages and private houses.³⁹

The Earl of Radnor was not the only member of the aristocracy who lent his patronage to the movement. The Duke of Buccleugh, the Earl of Meath, and the Earl of Dysart all supported the BIWF at its inception.⁴⁰ The former, whose name was Walter Montagu Douglas Scott, was a member of the royal family, owing to the marriage of his sister to Prince Henry. He was also a Unionist MP during the inter-war period. The Earl of Meath, meanwhile, was a general in the First World War and was also the son-in-law of Viscount Adare (the founder of the Irish Reform Association). This association between the aristocracy and the BIWF lasted late into the twentieth century. In 1961 Lord Brabazon spoke of his adherence to British-Israelist doctrine during a debate in the House of Lords. Brabazon was a Conservative politician who had served in Churchill’s cabinet during the war. He had – in the years preceding 1939 – convened with the British Union of Fascists to organise opposition to Britain’s entering the war.⁴¹ Speaking in a debate on the issue of Christian unity, he confessed:

I belong to the Church of England, and I am a British Israelite. I was brought up with the sole idea relative to Roman Catholicism that their chief desire was to revive the Fires of Smithfield. I have got over that.⁴²

To this day, the ties that bind the BIWF with the British aristocracy remain unbroken. Up to the present day, Lady Sara Allenby, Viscountess of Meggido, serves as a trustee of the BIWF.⁴³

There have long been rumours that the crowned heads of Britain were secret supporters of the British-Israel cause. The royal tradition of circumcising newborn princes appears to have bolstered this claim.⁴⁴ At least one aspect of this theory was proven beyond doubt in 1996 when a series of letters, written in 1922 by the then Prince Albert (who would be King George VI),

were made public. In the letters, the future king openly expresses his commitment to the basic tenets of British-Israelist thought, writing:

I am sure that this British Israelite business is true. I have read a lot about it lately and everything no matter how large or small points to our being ‘the Chosen Race.’⁴⁵

The attachment of some elements of the aristocracy and the royal family to British-Israelism is mirrored in the affection felt by many British-Israelists for the British aristocracy and the royal family. This tendency is embodied in the figure of Lesley Pine. A prominent British-Israelist of the mid-twentieth century, Pine also served as a curator of the history of the British nobility in his long-standing role as the editor of Burke’s Peerage. British-Israelist royalism is grounded in part in an historical claim about the genealogical origins of the Royal Family. For most British-Israelists claim that the Royal Family are not descended from the tribe of Ephraim (like other British people) but are in fact of the line of David, the tribe of Judah. Furthermore, British-Israelists claim that the stone of Scone, used in the coronation of British monarchs, is the stone upon which Jacob rested his head, according to Genesis 28.⁴⁶

During the early twentieth century, several prominent politicians also lent their support to the British-Israel cause. Lord Gisborough was a veteran of the Boer War who served as a Member of Parliament for Liverpool Abercromby and later sat in the House of Lords as a Conservative from 1895 until his death in 1938.⁴⁷ He served as the second president of the North of England Anglo-Israel Council, until his death, and also served as president of the BIWF for a period in the 1920s. As recently as the 1970s, prominent Members of Parliament expressed public support for the British-Israel movement. In 1976, Teddy Taylor MP addressed the BIWF Autumn Conference at Glasgow Central Hall. Taylor was a prominent member of the right-wing Monday Club who, in 1980, called for Nelson Mandela to be shot.⁴⁸ He represented the Cathcart constituency for the Conservative Party from 1964 to 1979 and the Southend East constituency from 1980 to 2005. Taylor ‘warmed the hearts’ of his audience in Glasgow, updating them on the wellbeing of the ‘BI folk in the border country of Rhodesia.’⁴⁹ Taylor again addressed the Glasgow branch of the BIWF on 6 May 1978. On this occasion he spoke on the topic: ‘The Law: can Britain break it and survive.’⁵⁰

The influence of British-Israelism in the political sphere has always been most prevalent within the Unionist community in Ireland. In 1931 the British-Israelist preacher Maxwell Carnson was joined onstage at a rally in Wellington Hall, Belfast, by William Grant MP.⁵¹ Grant was a former shipwright and an Ulster Volunteer who would go on to be elected as a representative in North Belfast and to hold several cabinet positions in the Stormont government including as Minister of Security, Minister of Labour and Minister of