

RABBI DR. ISRAEL PORUSH, O.B.E.

The whole Jewish world is bereft with the passing of Rabbi Porush, He was a Rabbinic leader with such style and stature that he was known and respected everywhere. But it is Australian Jewry that feels the loss with especial sorrow. For he had been, for over 50 years, the most influential figure in the Australian Rabbinate, and much of the shape and structure of the postwar community in this country is due to this one man's extraordinary vision, dynamism, persistence and inner wisdom. When the time comes to write his biography it will thus inevitably be a history of our times.

Within the Australian Jewish Historical Society, Rabbi Porush played an unrivalled role. President for more than half of its history, author of papers of consistent historical and literary quality, guide and mentor to new generations of historians, and its great advocate in the wider counsels of the community, he gave the society status, stability and direction. And as an inspired interpreter of its motto, the biblical verse, "remember the days of old", he was untiring in urging a developing community to know and understand its past in order to build appropriately for the future.

In the words of the sages, "The memory of the righteous will be a blessing."

Rabbi Raymond Apple, A.M.
Immediate Past President.



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AN APPRECIATION

RABBI DR. ISRAEL PORUSH O.B.E. 1907 - 1991

History will assess the full measure of a leader's worth as "good" or as "great". Usually, too, it is the times which make the man, often extending his horizons far beyond anything he himself might have imagined. Someone once said, "No great man ever complains of want of opportunity".

Rabbi Porush came on to the Australian scene at a time when no one could possibly have foreseen the testing times - most of all for the Jewish community - which would call for all the potential greatness any leader could muster. His family background was undoubtedly an asset here, as were his educational opportunities.

He was born on 16 July 1907, in Jerusalem, a member of the sixth generation of one of the oldest Ashkenazi families in Palestine, established by his grandmother's grandfather in the 1830s. His ancestors belonged to the *Mitnagdic* group, most of whom were followers of the school of the Vilna Gaon, and were imbued with a fervent love of Eretz Israel. The first of the direct family to settle in Eretz was Menachem Mendel Kamenitz, the grandfather of his paternal grandmother, Pearl Porush (1851-1947). His surname was "Baum", but he was known as "Menachem Mendel from Kamenitz". Though born in Brisk, Lithuania, in 1800, his family had settled in Kamenitz, Lithuania. In Eretz Israel the name "Baum" was never used. Menachem Mendel's father was Rabbi Aharon ben Menachem, the author of the rabbinic book '*Seyag Latorah*', a reference commentary on Tosafot. This was published in Lvov in 1810. Rabbi Aharon's wife was Zippora, daughter of Uri Lippa of Kamenitz. It was immediately after their marriage in 1833, that they left Lithuania for Eretz Israel.

Rabbi Porush's father was the manager of the Shaare Zedek hospital in Jerusalem. Israel Porush went to Germany at the age of 15 to complete his high school studies in Berlin. He then studied mathematics, physics and philosophy at the University of Marburg where in 1931 he obtained the degree of Ph.D. with a thesis on mathematics. He obtained the Rabbinical Diploma at the Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin on 8th July 1932. The famous motto of that institution, incidentally, is from Proverbs 3, v.6: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths."

In 1928, he began to preach on the High Festivals for the Berlin Jewish community and became a teacher of religion in secondary schools and Hebrew classes. For two years, he was headmaster of a Talmud Torah. In 1933, Rabbi Porush moved to London, where he was married to Bertha Link, whom he had met in Berlin. The Chuppah was at Golders Green Synagogue in October 1934.

In June 1934, he had been inducted into office as minister of the Finchley and District Synagogue. His experiences at Finchley Congregation were comprehensive. He was headmaster of the religion classes, vice president of the Finchley Memorial Hospital, a member of the executive of the Jewish National Fund, vice-president of the Finchley Branch of the League of Nations Union, founder-chairman of the literary circle of the Finchley Scout Troop. He was also one of the contributors to the Soncino translation of the Talmud. He translated into English two of the tractates: *Kerithoth* and *Mailah*.

During his ministry, the Finchley congregation increased from 80 to 600 members, and the number of children on the roll of the Hebrew Classes rose from 30 to

155. This is remarkable by any criterion, but particularly so, as he admitted later in life that he had always had difficulty in communicating with children, but he had learned that he could possibly get his thoughts across to their parents, and he hoped and believed that through them he could reach the next generation.

So this was the young man, with his wife and two small daughters who came to Australia in the early months of 1940, to become the fourth fully-qualified minister to have charge of the "Mother Congregation of Australia".

The Synagogue had been without a first minister in its 112 year history for almost two years, following the departure in 1938 of Rabbi E.M. Levy, although Rabbi L.A. Falk, as second minister, had kept the congregation well served during that time.

The Board of Management of the Synagogue had a fine representative in London in the person of Norman Mandelson, who had placed an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* seeking applications for the position of chief minister. There had been quite a good response but Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush's application came with strong recommendations from Rabbi Israel Brodie, former minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, and from Chief Rabbi Hertz, although both expressed some reservation because of the fact that, in 1937, Rabbi Porush had declined a "call" to Melbourne.

An interview with Norman Mandelson, after the latter had attended a service at Finchley, resulted in the following report: "Rabbi Porush has a nice manner, his learning is profound and he is well thought of here. I certainly do not think you could find anyone who would suit you so well. Moreover, he has a charming wife who would be a great asset, and both have done and are accustomed to do, a great deal for communal visiting work. He has a pleasant and melodious voice and no accent; and is a gentleman in every sense of the word. He is much liked and very popular with his congregation, having done excellent work during his office at Finchley."

In a letter dated 28th August, 1939, to John Goulston, President of the Board of Management of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Porush accepted the position, though there were several questions, such as the mixed choir, the omission of the silent Musaph prayer, and the reading in English of certain prayers, which were still to be discussed. (During his ministry in Sydney, Rabbi Porush gradually introduced more traditional patterns to the services.)

John Goulston went to London and together with Norman Mandelson, met and discussed with Rabbi Porush further details of the appointment and on 6 January 1940, Goulston cabled to Sydney that Rabbi Porush "agrees to all conditions."

The initial period was for the engagement to be of a three year duration. It was to last though, for more than 32 years. So he might gain more experience with Beth Din procedures before leaving England, it was arranged with the Chief Rabbi - who proved very helpful in the whole matter - that Rabbi Porush would, until his departure for Australia, attend meetings of the London Beth Din.

Chief Rabbi Dr Hertz, sent a special letter dated 19th January, 1940, to the executive of the Great Synagogue saying, "I wish formally to testify that Rabbi Porush has both the moral and intellectual qualifications for the post. His rabbinical degree is of a high order and he now has had intensive practical training in connection with my Beth Din. I would ask you to look upon Dr. Porush as my deputy in all ecclesiastical

problems that may arise in your Community. I pray that God may bless his activity in this new and larger sphere of labour which he is now entering." At a special meeting of 19 February 1940 the congregation unanimously accepted the recommendation of its Board that Rabbi Porush be appointed Chief Minister of the Synagogue.

The Australian Department of the Interior was very helpful to the Congregation in its efforts to bring not only Rabbi and Mrs Porush and their two small daughters, but also Mrs Porush's mother, Mrs Link, as quickly as possible to Australia.. Rabbi Porush and his wife had Palestinian passports, the children were English born and Mrs Link had a Czechoslovakian passport. So the family was able to set sail for Australia, a country they were to adopt for their permanent home. En route to Australia, they visited Rabbi Porush's parents in Jerusalem, as it had been many years since they had seen each other.

On their arrival in Melbourne, early one June morning, they were met by Rabbi Jacob Danglow and members of the boards of the Melbourne and St. Kilda synagogues, who had arranged a joint reception of welcome.

From Melbourne they travelled by rail to Sydney, arriving on 6 June, and were welcomed at an official luncheon by the members of the Board of the Synagogue and their wives. In the evening, the new Rabbi was inducted into office by Rabbi L.A. Falk, at a well-attended choral service. The following Sunday, a reception was held in the Maccabean Hall, where Rabbi and Mrs Porush were welcomed by over 300 members of the congregation. Rabbi Porush officially assumed office on 16 June 1940.

The Board had rented a nicely furnished flat for the family at Birtley Place, Elizabeth Bay. And, so Rabbi Porush and his family settled down in Sydney. He soon realised he would be bearing most of the rabbinic responsibility for the whole Jewish community. As rabbi of the Great Synagogue, he was the religious representative of the community and he was invited to all State and civic functions with other senior clerics.

In 1943, after he had completed three years in office, the Board of Management held a reception at which tribute was paid to Rabbi Porush's work, and he was congratulated on the warm place both he and Mrs Porush had won for themselves in the affections of the congregation and the esteem in which they were both held. The Board was gratified, too, that Rabbi Porush had accepted a re-appointment for a further five years.

The *Hebrew Standard* wrote on 8 July 1943, that Rabbi Porush had at once become a leader of New South Wales Jewry and had associated himself with every Jewish activity. Recalling the controversies which had abounded during the ministry of Rabbi E.M. Levy, the *Judea* wrote "Rabbi Porush has sought none of the artificial popularity that is based on cheap publicity or undignified propaganda. His recognition has been won as much by his modesty and unspectacular methods as by the soundness and constructiveness of his Ministry."

Although he made it clear in his initial correspondence with the Board that he was a Zionist, already involved in J.N.F. activities in London, he was careful not to go to extremes in preaching to his congregation on Zionism and was thus able to avoid some of the problems which had led to Rabbi Levy's departure from the Australian scene.

Rabbi Porush broke new ground by the formation of intermediate and junior membership groups of the Great Synagogue. In the field of education he played a leading part. He was prominent in the negotiations for the recognition of Hebrew as a subject for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. He was largely responsible for the re-organisation of the community's scheme of religious education, and held office for many years as Honorary Director of Education. He also took senior Sabbath Class at the Great Synagogue. He was Chairman of the Sydney Beth Din from the time of his arrival and, after Dr Hertz's death, Chief Rabbi Brodie especially endorsed Rabbi Porush's position as *Av Beth Din* 1947, 1953 and 1962.

Rabbi Porush devoted himself to the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry, and one newspaper said of him, "To the large number of newcomers, he has been a warm and sympathetic friend. His home has been the centre of cordial and generous hospitality."

As the representative of New South Wales Jewry, he was active in public relations work and spoke with dignity and conviction on many important platforms. He frequently lectured to a variety of Christian audiences.

One of Rabbi Porush's main activities in his work for the general community was in the field of public relations. And Rabbi Porush's work for the community in general and for education in particular was recognised by the award of the O.B.E. in the 25th year of his ministry at the Great Synagogue.

Already by 1941, he had begun publishing with a pamphlet, *The Revolt Against Religion*, which spelt out the evils of racism and the Nazi ideologies. On 15 May 1941, he delivered a lecture to the Sydney Legacy Club on this subject.

In 1942 the NSW Jewish Advisory Board (the predecessor of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies) formed a special Public Relations Committee and Rabbi Porush became a member and one of its panel of speakers. He later became a member of the Constitutional Committee of the Board. One of his major, and lasting achievements was the inauguration of the *Great Synagogue Congregational Journal*. Soon after his arrival, he expressed the view that a direct avenue of communication between the Synagogue and its members would greatly enhance the congregational activities as well as help to spread more generally the message of the Synagogue. In September 1944, the first issue of the *Journal* made its appearance, and for over 40 years, he was a regular contributor. The *Journal* has maintained unbroken publication for almost 50 years.

As early as 1951, Rabbi Porush had been using radio for the propagation of Jewish knowledge among the Jewish community. He had been presenting regular festival broadcasts over the ABC. At his suggestion, formal application was made for a licence for a Jewish station, an affiliation with one of the commercial stations or at least for one Jewish programme, once a week. Nothing came of this revolutionary idea at the time.

In 1942, with the frightful news of the fate of European Jewry becoming fully understood, he tried to establish a Council of Christians and Jews but was only successful in this venture in 1943, after a similar organisation had been formed in Great Britain. With the consent of the Advisory Board, he called on the heads of the main Christian denominations and formulated, as the main aims of the Council, the promotion of understanding and goodwill among Christians and Jews, a fellowship between the different youth organisations in educational and cultural activities, and

the fostering of co-operation towards post-war reconstruction. It was only after protracted negotiations that the Council was formally constructed on 24 March 1943. He was later to write a paper on this subject for publication in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*. On 19 October 1942, he was elected on to the Committee of the Society, and was subsequently to become its longest serving president - his term of office was from 1946, on the death of E.S. Marks, until he left Sydney to live in Melbourne in 1973. In April 1973, Rabbi Porush celebrated his 27th anniversary as president of the Australian Jewish Historical Society. He had always been interested in Jewish history, and had been one of the contributors to Vallentine's Jewish Encyclopaedia published in 1938. He joined the A.J.H.S. soon after his arrival, and on 18 April 1942, delivered his first address to the community on Australian Jewish history, on the occasion of the centenary of the laying of the foundation stone of the York Street Synagogue on 19 April 1942. This address was published in the Historical Society's *Journal*, in which in due course, most of his other historical studies appeared. One important paper of his was "The Story of State Aid to Jewish Establishments in New South Wales", read before the Society on 8 July 1943. After he left Sydney, Rabbi Porush became the Society's Patron. His 27 years' presidency resulted in a great development in research of Australian Jewish history, as he was always greatly encouraging to budding historians and his efforts and continuous collaboration with the Society will not be forgotten.

In 1946 the Rabbi attended an international conference of Christians and Jews at Oxford, after having been selected by the Australian branch of the Council of Christians and Jews as one of its two representatives. During his stay in England, Rabbi Porush preached at his old Finchley Synagogue, and a reception was arranged for him at Jews' College. He then visited European centres. He took the opportunity on his way home to visit his family in Jerusalem.

The Council did valuable work in the public relations field, organised brotherhood rallies and distributed pamphlets exposing anti-Semitism where it was known to exist. But by 1948, the Council had become inactive, and it died without formal dissolution. The Rabbi later termed the work of the Council "unspectacular but meaningful."

War-time conditions also necessitated other activities, and with the help of Rabbi Max Schenk of the Temple Emanuel, who was an American, Saul Symonds, president of the Great Synagogue, and others, Rabbi Porush formed a special committee to care for the thousands of American soldiers in Australia.

During 1944, he helped to unite the three youth groups of the Synagogue, Junior, Intermediate and Senior, into G.S.Y. (Great Synagogue Youth). Pastoral visits by Sydney ministers to the scattered Jewish families in country districts took place regularly from the 1940s. In 1944, Rabbi Porush visited the Jewish residents of Wollongong and district on behalf of the Jewish Overseas Relief Fund. This was his first contact with the Jews in country areas. Many of the pastoral tours, which led him as far as Lismore and Tamworth, were to follow.

It is not generally realised that in the early 1960s, when Australia was contributing to the calculations towards putting a man on the moon, Rabbi Porush's skills as a mathematician were called upon to work out astronomical calculations. A creative mathematical mind was needed to formulate solutions.

The office of Director of Education, which was envisaged by his terms of

engagement, naturally commenced soon after his arrival. As he himself wrote, strong efforts were necessary to raise educational standards and achieve appreciable objectives. During 1942 and 1943, together with M.H. Kellerman, this course was pursued. In 1943, when the Central Synagogue joined the Board of Education, Rabbi Porush helped establish the present New South Wales Board of Jewish Education, which became a more comprehensive communal body. He worked unceasingly to improve Jewish education, and to make the work of the Board more effective. During the whole of his Sydney ministry, Rabbi Porush was an executive member of the Education Board, serving continuously, as chairman of the Education committee, for 23 years as Honorary Director, and for 14 years as deputy president, and later president. He assisted in Bible quizzes, in Demonstration Seders, called on possible sponsors, supervised teachers and taught various special classes. At all times, he actively participated in every phase of the work of the Education Board. Rabbi Porush also became Chairman of the International Bible Contest.

When the controversial proposals to make religion a part of the social studies course in state schools made headlines in 1953-1961, and again in 1966-67, Rabbi Porush represented the Education Board and the Jewish community generally in putting forward a Jewish viewpoint strongly opposing the proposals.

The Rabbi Porush Kindergarten on Old South Head Road, Bondi Junction is a tribute to his inspiration and zeal in introducing Jewish kindergartens to Sydney.

No account of Rabbi Porush's educational work would be complete without reference to the help and active participation of Mrs Porush, especially as life president of the Education Women's Auxiliary.

When in April 1944 the 100th anniversary of the opening of the York Street Synagogue was celebrated there was a commemorative service at the Synagogue and a reception at the Paddington Town Hall. Rabbi Porush gave an address which was a comprehensive survey of the early history of New South Wales Jewry, later to be printed in instalments in the *Hebrew Standard*. His commemorative address on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Great Synagogue in 1948, showed how deeply he had delved into early Australian Jewish history. After this, he continued to do serious research into the early Jewish history of Australia and in February 1952, suggested - alas, unsuccessfully - to the Board of the Great Synagogue, the publication of a booklet relating to the history of that Synagogue or at least of Sydney Jewry, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary celebration of the Synagogue planned the following year.

Rabbi Porush never failed to be ready, as president of the Historical Society, to call a committee meeting when asked for it. He concerned himself with many of the important tasks undertaken by the Society, such as the preservation of the historical tombstones at Lidcombe and Botany Cemeteries. He was instrumental in the collection of funds for their re-erection at Rookwood, and in the Pioneers' Memorial Garden at Botany in 1974.

When the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* was planned in the 'sixties, he was commissioned to write over twenty articles and particularly those concerned with Australian Jewry. In 1972, he published his book, *Today's Challenges to Judaism*, in which he discussed the present day problems of Australian Jewry. Then, in 1977, he published *The House of Israel* (which, incidentally, is the actual name of the Great Synagogue).

Rabbi Porush's Jewish scholarship was recognised in 1951 by his appointment as honorary lecturer in Semitic Studies at the University of Sydney. For 24 years he was to lecture on Post Biblical Hebrew at the University.

In 1955, he delivered a series of lectures in the United States under the auspices of American B'nai B'rith. Rabbi Porush had joined the B'nai B'rith Order as a foundation member of the Sydney Lodge in 1944. He addressed the first of the meetings of the Lodge after each summer recess.

During the same trip in 1955, Rabbi Porush went to Israel with Mrs Porush, and when there planted trees in the Queen Elizabeth Coronation Forest on behalf of Australian Jewry.

The war and post-war years had seen the conflict between the British Government and Jewish interests. Some prominent Australians like Sir Isaac Isaacs and - to a lesser extent, perhaps - Sir Samuel Cohen, felt duty bound to support British policies, although, as Rabbi Porush has pointed out, "they, as Jews ought to have felt that a great injustice was being committed."

It was not an encouraging augury for him on the occasion of the first anniversary of the foundation of the state of Israel, in May 1949, when delivering a powerful sermon, he found the Synagogue half empty and the gallery almost empty. When a year later, he delivered a sermon on Independence Day, and the same thing happened, Dr. Hans Kimmel wrote in the *Sydney Jewish News* that, "every good Zionist should consider it a matter of regret if he missed the high-spirited sermon which Rabbi Porush gave on this occasion." The same poor attendance was observed when in October 1953, Rabbi Porush paid homage in the Synagogue to the Memorial for the late Chaim Welzman, first President of the State of Israel. It was at this Service that, probably for the first time, an oration was also given in modern Hebrew in the Synagogue, by Mordecai Nurock, Ambassador for Israel, and it was also the first time that the Rabbi allowed a lay-man to speak from the pulpit of the Synagogue.

Rabbi Porush kept wisely out of the political controversy concerning the reason for poor attendances on occasions relating to the State of Israel. He devoted his time instead to helping the refugees who had arrived recently before and after the war. A membership committee was formed in the Synagogue which made it their business to approach and welcome the newcomers as members of the Great Synagogue. Rabbi Porush speaking some of the languages of the newcomers, was very helpful in their integration and, in two years, the Committee was able to attract 300 immigrants as members of the Congregation.

Within a single decade of his arrival, the Australian Jewish community had more than doubled (from 22,000 in the 1920's and early 1930's to over 50,000). And, with this explosion of population from many disparate sections of European Jewry came problems of integration which might have stunned into immobility a lesser man. Rabbi Porush was able to meet every challenge with a sense of urgency, and with dignity, turning them into positive victory after positive victory, and usually with a supreme confidence. Welfare organisations, Jewish day schools, new synagogues ... The great weight of these responsibilities never seemed to daunt him.

One of the newcomers, John Lewinnek, Rabbi Porush perceived to be "good leadership material" and he recommended to the Board of Management that, in view of the newly arrived immigrants a non-Anglo Jewish presence on the Board

might be valuable. The suggestion was adopted, and for the first time in almost 80 years, the Great Synagogue made a radical change to its policy.

After he had been here for five years, Rabbi Porush felt strongly the need for a regular exchange of ideas and experiences among the ministers of this far-flung and isolated Jewish community. In August 1945, he invited together all rabbis to a first Conference of Australian Ministers. The response was most gratifying, and on 3 & 4 March 1945 the first "Australian Conference of Jewish Ministers" at which no fewer than 15 rabbis and ministers participated, took place in Sydney, proclaiming the adherence to historic Judaism.

One of the tangible benefits of the Conference was the publication of three pamphlets and their extensive dissemination throughout the community: *The Sabbath* and *Kashrut* by Rabbi Porush, and *Intermarriage* by Rabbi Jacob Danglow of Melbourne. At the second Conference, which did not take place until March 17 & 18 1952, this time in the presence of Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, the Orthodox Ministers founded the Association of Jewish Ministers, and elected Rabbi Porush as president, a position which he held until his retirement. Further conferences took place in November 1956, February 1962, April 1972 and May 1975. This latter conference was also attended by two rabbis from New Zealand - as New Zealand was included in the Association from the beginning. Rabbi Porush was to retire from the presidency after 29 years. After the Conference of 1975, he was honoured with the status of Honorary Life Presidency of the Association.

During the long period of his presidency, the Sydney Jewish community had found the need for a great many more synagogues. It fell to Rabbi Porush to consecrate or dedicate most, if not all, of them: Bankstown, North Shore, Maroubra, Wollongong and the Gold Coast. As most of these synagogues started as Education Centres, Rabbi Porush was closely associated with the creation and stabilising of the new suburban and country congregations. He did not see that they proved to be any competition to the Great Synagogue, but, to the contrary, he helped with their planning, with solutions to their problems, finding ministers for them, and establishing them as viable congregations.

Three times during Rabbi Porush's Ministry, Chief Rabbis from London visited Australia. In 1952 and 1962, Rabbi Israel Brodie came, and in 1970, Rabbi Jakobovitz came. When Rabbi Brodie retired from the Chief Rabbinate post, Rabbi Porush was one of eleven rabbis nominated for the office.

According to an interview given at the time of his retirement, and published in the *Great Synagogue Journal* in January 1973, Rabbi Porush expressed the opinion that "the impact of those visits on the internal development of Australian Jewry was not very exciting. I do not think that it is necessary for us (in Australia) to rely upon the Chief Rabbinate to the same extent as in earlier periods, as the community of 75,000 has now 45 rabbis and ministers. We need some independence. It will not come easily, because the orthodox community is not sufficiently united. The first step towards the establishment of a local Rabbinate should have been a head who would be regarded as the Chief Rabbi."

In the same issue of the *Journal*, Rabbi Dr. A. Fabian wrote that, "While the Australian Chief Rabbinate does not seem a practical proposition at this juncture, Rabbi Porush would have been the one Rabbi to have been assured of widespread support for such an office by reason of his distinguished spiritual leadership and his

Rabbinical personality."

It was not to be. Although, the ministers were still united in their Association, they were not united in this matter, and opposition, especially from Melbourne, but also from elsewhere, was strong. At no time was a serious attempt made to create a Chief Rabbinate in Australia.

When, in January 1974, as president of the Association, Rabbi Porush called a meeting of the New South Wales Division of the Association, to discuss proposals submitted by the United Orthodox Synagogue (U.O.S.) among which was the establishment of a "Communal Rabbi to assist communities without a permanent Rabbi", the Conference was called off because of lack of support by some of the rabbis.

Rabbi Porush's duties extended to many fields and there was hardly a communal event at which he did not participate. A recent look back over the years, 1948 to 1965 reveal that in December 1948, he opened the short lived Y.M.H.A. (Young Men's Hebrew Association) Centre at "Dunara", Point Piper. In 1950, he addressed members of the North Shore Synagogue on the history of the Sydney Community. In February 1951, he became a member of the Citizens' Protest Committee on German Immigration. In May 1951, he spoke at a rally organised by the Zionist Organisation to establish closer contact between the small but growing Sephardi community, and other members of the Sydney community. In January 1951, he delivered a lecture on "The Fundamentals of Judaism - Its Philosophical Aspects", at the Sydney University Jewish Student Union's Conference at Castlereagh, and in January 1953, he organised a lecture evening at the Great Synagogue, at which he spoke together with M.D. Friedman and David Benjamin. And, when he spoke in July 1953, at the "Tarbut" first "Oneg Shabbath", in commemoration of the deaths of Herzl and Bialik, the chairman, the late H.B. Newman, who was to become one of the most prominent leaders, not only of the Zionist Movement, but of Australian Jewry, praised Rabbi Porush's address as "one of the most fascinating of all lectures which in recent years has been heard in Sydney on such an occasion." And this continued unabated during his whole Ministry. Apart from the many obligations he found himself involved in with Jewish organisations, he, as the representative of the oldest and largest Jewish congregation, assumed also an important position in public life generally which he filled with dignity and devotion.

For decades, he worthily represented Jewry at regal, Commonwealth and State Government, municipal and diplomatic ceremonial occasions. He had thus become known to and developed cordial friendships with many high ranking and leading citizens throughout the Commonwealth. It will be recalled that at the celebrations of the 90th Anniversary of the Great Synagogue - in preparation for its centenary - the then prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, stated that he regarded Rabbi Porush as his personal friend. Thirty-two years is a long time for a Minister to serve a congregation, and one must say that Rabbi Porush did not only serve his congregation, but the whole Jewish community of New South Wales and in a larger sense, even Australia, during this period. He pointed this out, himself, when he wrote that it was gratifying that it was his privilege "to minister at a time when a mighty spiritual and cultural renaissance took place in the community". He added that it is not given to many rabbis to be in the heart of the great upsurge of construction in every field and to be able to participate in it helpfully; new synagogues and day schools, lodges and clubs, youth groups and camps, a solid Beth Din and kashrut facilities,

all largely brought about by the enrichment of a community through the arrival of migrants from the great centres of Jewish life in Europe.

In his work, Rabbi Porush was most ably assisted by his wife, Bertha Porush. Used to welfare work from her early youth, she had during Rabbi Porush's Ministry in London actively assisted the Hospitality Centre at Woburn House, where thousands of refugees were cared for in the 'thirties. She organised a scheme to rescue young girls from Europe and endeavoured to have them adopted. In Australia, Mrs Porush continued to rescue Jewish children from Europe and, was one of those responsible for persuading the Government to grant 150 special permits for Jewish children to come to this country immediately after the War.

Writing of his retirement from the Great Synagogue, the *Sydney Morning Herald* in a December issue said, "The farewell celebrations have been almost non-stop. A Kiddush at the Great Synagogue, lunch parties, cocktail parties, a dinner for 200 at the Maccabean Hall, with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice among the guests ..."

Rabbi Dr I Rapaport, Minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, and Chairman of the Melbourne Beth Din, at the communal dinner, spoke in the name of the Jewish Clergy in Australia and New Zealand: "Rabbi Porush is our supreme spiritual leader in this part of the world and were we not a community that holds upon the apron-strings of Great Britain, we would have no better person to occupy the office of Chief Rabbi of this country than him. He had upheld, with the utmost rigour and devotion, the teachings of Orthodox Judaism ..." He presented Rabbi Porush with an Illuminated Address as a token of the high esteem of his colleagues.

High tribute was also paid by the premier, Sir Robert Askin, who proposed the toast to Rabbi Porush and praised his work for the general community. "He worked to increase understanding, and represented Australian Jewry well at all forums. Thanks to the work of Rabbi Porush and leaders of other faiths with similar outlook, Australia is more ecumenical than ever."

In his reply, Rabbi Porush reiterated his wish to continue his work as Head of the Beth Din and as a lecturer at Sydney University.

After his retirement, Rabbi Porush liked to point out that his 32 years as Minister of the Great Synagogue had some special significance: Thirty-two has the Hebrew name "Lev" – the heart – so, he said, we may begin to take heart from what had come out of that particular generation. And, in answer to the question whether the result of his ministry had been commensurate with expectation, he replied, thoughtfully, "probably not. With hindsight and greater wisdom I could say, if I had my life again I would have done many things differently. But then, who has not learnt from time? This much I can say with confidence: taking the ministry as a whole, I have no regrets in having chosen this vocation. If I have not achieved much, I have helped to keep the flag flying through most difficult and challenging times. If I have not created much, I have helped to prevent decay at a time when all religions and moral values are questioned if not denied, and when our people are exposed to corrosion from outside and to apathy from within to an extent that the very survival of Judaism is threatened."

In April 1975, Rabbi and Mrs Porush moved to Melbourne to be near their daughter and her family.

In 1987, Rabbi Porush celebrated his 80th birthday, and in 1988, the Australian

Jewish Historical Society marked its 50th Anniversary. These two important milestones were celebrated jointly with a festive dinner held at the Great Synagogue on 1 November 1987. Also marking the occasion, the Australian Jewish Historical Society published a collection of historical essays to honour Rabbi Porush. This special publication contained 14 essays by friends and colleagues, plus a bibliography of Rabbi Porush's own writings.

In 1962, the artist, Walter E. Pidgeon, won the Archibald Prize with a portrait of Rabbi Porush. It was later donated to the Great Synagogue by Miss Janey Davis, and hangs today in the auditorium of the Synagogue. But his congregants probably do not need this to remind them of his unprecedented achievements on their behalf. At his death on 22 May 1991 Rabbi Porush's passing was mourned by many outside the Jewish community as well.

Rabbi Porush's 32 years' ministry at the Great Synagogue will always be regarded as a milestone in Australian Jewish history which left the Australian Jewish community with an elevated status. His memory will indeed be a blessing. The Sydney Jewish Community is alive with memorials to his sojourn in Australia. These, if nothing else, will serve to remind us of the scale and influence of his ministry here. However history sees Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush, he will stand proud as a notable figure among rabbis.

Louise Rosenberg

SAMUEL SHANNON: COOMA BUSINESSMAN (1802-1868)

by John Stanhope

INTRODUCTION

My wife Loreen Stanhope is the granddaughter of Rebecca Maude Boon, the granddaughter of Samuel Shannon. In the course of family research, I found the name Shannon and expected him to be Irish. The discovery that his marriage was Jewish was a surprise. Perhaps intervening generations had suppressed either their Jewish or convict background, or both. This discovery led us to an appreciation of the contribution of early Jewish Australians to our heritage.

SAMUEL SHANNON

Samuel Shannon was born in Bishopgate Street in London in 1802.¹ His death certificate² states that he was the son of a Jacob Shannon, who was a confectioner at Cannal Place, Kent Road.³

Samuel Shannon was arrested in 1821. On 13 August 1821 at Kent Assizes in Maidstone he was convicted of 'having and forging bank notes' and was sentenced to transportation to the colonies for fourteen years.⁴ He was imprisoned on the hulk *Retribution* in the Thames estuary at Sheerness for three months. When transferred to the *Richmond* his character was described as 'good'.⁵ He travelled on the *Richmond* which left Sheerness on 27 November 1821 with 160 male convicts, one of whom died on the voyage. They reached Hobart on 30 April 1822.⁶

On arrival at the Derwent, Hobart, Shannon was described as a merchant's clerk by vocation, aged 21, 5 feet 3 1/2 inches in height, with fair complexion, dark