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*Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect an official position of the Society.*

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This edition of the Journal is the first under my editorship, but it has been achieved only with the close collaboration and guidance of Dr Hilary Rubinstein as the Associate Editor. Hilary's professionalism and warm friendship is deeply appreciated, and her sure touch will be obvious to all readers of this Journal.

The wisdom and experience of our publisher, Louis de Vries of Hybrid Publishers, has served to continue the wonderful relationship that began with last year's Journal – Louis is so easy to work with, and his generosity and expertise has greatly lightened my load.

Our Journal contains some particularly enriching primary research material, beginning with the unique and fascinating cover article by Mr Justice Howard Nathan. Moreover, in the memoirs by Devorah Erskine and Rachel Mestel we hear the voices of two remarkable women, which from that period are not often heard as loudly or as clearly as history demands – these items go some way to redress that imbalance. No less remarkable is the brief contemporaneous essay by Phyllis Slutzkin (later Stanton) about her fourteenth year, starting in Alexandria at the outbreak of the First World War, following the family's evacuation from Rehovot when it fell to the Turks.

Remarkable for the original research and deep scholarship by its author is the essay on Jewish community involvement in the criminal life of Melbourne between 1835 and 1850. His Honour Paul Mullaly QC has uncovered new facts and insights about the early years from deep within the archives of the Victorian Supreme Court.

Professor Bill Rubinstein continues his authoritative demographic contributions with an article on Jews in the 2001 Australian census, with observations of profound contemporary significance in the light of current world and Australian events.

We continue to publish reviews of books of Jewish relevance that are both interesting and unlikely to be seen described elsewhere.

This year we have omitted our regular feature on 100 Years Ago – unfortunately the State Library of Victoria microfilm version of the *Jewish Herald* for 1903 could not be read with sufficient clarity to permit publication this year.

Finally, I wish to thank all those who have so willingly given in to my insistent requests for articles – we are always looking for new material, however. We wish to encourage a wide spectrum of contributions, not only the academic and learned, but the anecdotal and personal. I hope they will also cover that part of the genre known as 'popular history'.

Articles submitted for publication should be saved in Microsoft Word format, together with relevant illustrations, and sent as attachments by email to:

[howfree@epartments.com.au](mailto:howfree@epartments.com.au)

Please note that any books cited in footnotes should include the date and place of publication.

Dr Howard A. Freeman (Editor)

Dr Hilary L. Rubinstein (Associate Editor)

## **ROSETTA JOSEPH: THE BELL, HER HUSBAND AND HIS MONEY**

*Howard T. Nathan*

In my chambers of the Supreme Court of Victoria, the cedar desk glows with healthy old age and the warmth of 130 years. Handsome, light, but the timber is soft, requiring care. What has this got to do with the bell from an old sailing ship? Well, very little, except that on this desk my telephone rested when I answered a call from an unnamed person who offered to sell me a family artefact of unique quality. Further enquiry revealed the vendor had on offer the bell from the cedar-built, four-masted barque *Rosetta Joseph*. I told him I could not possibly buy the object as to do so would contravene the Shipwrecks (Preservation) Act. My caller said: 'Don't you worry about that Your Honour. I am the local sergeant of police.'

Asked how it was he had come to put the offer to me, the policeman (identity known) replied that he had 'found' the bell while scuba diving off Point Lonsdale, which is at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay. He 'salvaged' the bell and then saw cast into its bulb the inscription *Rosetta Joseph Sydney 1847*. He hired a genealogist who identified me as a direct descendant of Rosetta. Therefore, so he thought correctly, I would be an ideal prospective purchaser. I thought the transaction might be illegal but on the other hand I did not believe the story of 'finding' the bell. A relaxing drive to Port Lonsdale was arranged to inspect the bell. Even as displayed to me I did not accept the provenance so I offered the vendor one-tenth of that which he asked. He replied: 'I am leaving my wife today after thirty years of a disastrous marriage; I have just retired from the police force and want to escape the jurisdiction with as much money as I can.' Of course, I purchased the bell.

Laden with the bell, I crossed on the ferry to the other side of Port Phillip. This sea journey did not end in disaster so I then consulted the Maritime Archaeology section of Heritage Victoria, which confirmed that the bell was genuine. It was X-rayed, catalogued, photographed. I did not quite have to render a DNA sample, but I was then allowed to keep the bell. The archaeologist Ross Anderson informed me that it would have cost about five times as much to cast and mount as I had paid for it.<sup>1</sup>

Validated as a genuine Australian historical artefact, its missing provenance was then supplied by these notes. The bell is hung from a heart shaped brass swivel mounting. Overall it is 50 cm or 20 inches high, and 40 cm or 16 inches across. The brass is primitively cast, and the connection is asymmetrically cast to conform to the irregular shape of the cone on the bell. The bowl is cast iron

with a thickened rim; the clapper is missing. At first I did not believe an iron bell could have been from a ship. However, the archaeologist informed me that this was a classical mode of casting colonial ship bells. The Sydney foundries lacked the expertise of their British and Indian counterparts. But there were artisans who could make a reasonable fist of things. The thickened rim was customary; it is to prevent cracking when the clapper hits the bulb. In all, there is no doubt about the authenticity of the artefact.

Now to the construction of the barque. She was built on the Manning River at Pelican Point, Taree, in 1846 by Captains Alexander Newton and William Malcolm. She was of 265 gross tons and measured 88.9 x 32.2 x 15.0 feet, registered as 82/2847. Taree and other northern river towns were great shipbuilding centres of the 1830s and 1840s. More than 250 ships were constructed there in those decades.<sup>2</sup> The reasons for this energetic enterprise are as follows. First, the local New South Wales colonial ban on shipbuilding was lifted in the mid-1820s. The prohibition had been enforced because the authorities had not wanted to provide this means of escape for the largely convict colony. However, the surge in whaling and sealing, which were the major sources of international trade and commerce at the time, required more and better ships to be built. The colonial capitalists had not wanted to lose this trade to their American cousins who sailed all the way from New England to scour the southern seas for oil and skins. Their pressure was successful in having the ban on shipbuilding lifted.

The second reason was the abundant supply of cheap and suitable timber. The cedar forests of the northern river hinterlands were decimated in order to supply timber, including the wood for my desk. Cedar is light, easily worked and floats well. It was punted down the rivers to towns such as Taree and Port Macquarie. This wonderful resource was free to the cutters. No Aborigines claimed royalties, no government extracted an excise, convict labour was cheap, and so the costs of construction were minimal. A subsidiary factor in bolstering this industry was the wool trade, which boomed in the 1830s. Australian cedar ships, built to the designs of and with the knowledge of the English oaken ones, sailed faster than their originals. Cheapness and efficiency combined to make colonial cedar ships the mass vehicles of the time. This is not the place to go into the strictures of the Imperial Navigation Acts, which restricted colonial shipping and delivered profits to the English owners; suffice it to say there were ways around these impediments, and the colonial owners used them.

The *Rosetta Joseph* was built for Moses Joseph, a merchant and entrepreneur of astounding dash, but more of him later. The barque was named for his wife, her maiden name being Nathan. The barque was one of 14 ships owned by Moses. Other well-known ones were the *Exporter*, the *Louisa*, the *Louis and Miriam*, the *Australian* and the *James and Amelia* and the *Rebecca Nathan*. He was part-owner of the *Australian* and the *Eleanor*, wrecked in 1846 off Yule Island in the Gulf of Papua on her way to China; fortunately all aboard were saved.

The *Rosetta Joseph* was built to be the pride of his fleet. The Joseph clan had established merchant houses in each of the new settlements, dispatching one brother or another to each place as it was set up. By the late 1840s there were Josephs, Nathans, Moseses and Cohens in Sydney, Newcastle, Maitland, Port Macquarie, Melbourne, Launceston, Hobart, Adelaide, Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin, and all were closely related. This trans-Tasman trading network has not been replicated since. It was even more remarkable then, as it all grew out of the enterprise of a convicted felon, Moses Joseph. Again, more of him later.

Immediately after she was registered, the barque was loaded with general cargo and set sail for Auckland. Among the 30 passengers was Hyam Joseph, who ran the Auckland branch of the business. He advertised in the *New Zealander* of 14 December 1847 as follows:

For Sydney Direct

To sail positively on Friday next.

The fine new colonial clipper-built barque, ROSETTA JOSEPH 300 tons, coppered and copper-fastened. Capt Patrick. This vessel offers an excellent opportunity to parties proceeding to the above port, her cabins having been fitted with every requisite that can conduce to the comfort and accommodation of passengers.<sup>3</sup>

Early in 1850, news of the Californian gold discoveries hit Sydney like a tidal wave. Every Sydneysider who could dig wanted to get there immediately, including the ex-convicts who came to terrorise that territory and became known as the Sydney Ducks. Moses heard about the gold discoveries before most of his competitors. Appreciating that he could gazump the Yankee merchants, who were obliged to ship their goods around Cape Horn, and then north against the prevailing currents to San Francisco, he dispatched his fastest and most commodious ship, with her 15-man crew, to San Francisco on 29 May 1850. The *Rosetta Joseph* was loaded with household goods, wheelbarrows, picks and anything else that would find a ready market in a town Moses had never seen, but which he appreciated would be hungry for the provisions he could supply in quick time, or at least in advance of his New York and Bostonian competitors. After 80 days sailing she entered San Francisco Bay, after an uneventful but novel voyage.

On 15 October 1850 the *Rosetta Joseph* left San Francisco to return with 32 passengers to Sydney. On 1 December Captain Patrick retired to his cabin on a warm summer evening. The ship was running with a favourable wind behind her. Suddenly, she found herself surrounded by rocks and then perched up on a shelf of rock, as if she had been willingly beached. The barque had foundered on Elizabeth reef, then uncharted but later to become the graveyard of many other vessels. The reef is about 250 km north of Lord Howe Island, and 700 km east of Australia. Dawn on the next day revealed the ship to be hopelessly stranded. Captain Patrick

made the decision to abandon her. The wind strengthened, and in the attempt to launch the boats the jolly boat was swamped; it was bailed and saved. Later the weather abated a portion and all the passengers and crew got aboard the longboat, the pinnace and the jollyboat.

The wind turned into a gale, boats were swamped and refloated, the jolly boat was used as a sea anchor, bread and provisions were soaked, and everybody was bedraggled and exhausted from constant bailing. The newspaper reports from one of the survivors say that they had to throw overboard all their blankets and 'bags of gold dust'. Whether that happened remains moot: undoubtedly some of the passengers, one of whom was inaptly named Mr Rudder, must have been successful diggers. This was an expensive ship to travel upon and not for the indigent. After two days Captain Patrick was able to take an observation: he found they had been travelling backwards in a strong easterly current. He rejected Lord Howe Island as a destination and headed for the Australian coast. Six days later a ship was sighted about four to five miles off, but it did not see the shipwrecked wretches in the small boats. Nine nights and eight days later one of the passengers, George Francis, who was also an experienced seaman, recognised a headland as Camden Haven near Port Macquarie. Later that day all the passengers and crew were safely landed ashore, destitute and distressed but alive and unharmed. This is one of the unknown stories of heroism and seamanship which mark so much of Australian history.<sup>4</sup>

*Rosetta Joseph* remained perched on Elizabeth reef for a further eight years. On several occasions she sheltered crews from other ships wrecked on the same reef. In 1858 a salvage crew burnt her to the waterline in order to recover the metalwork. Then, just as now, copper was a valuable recyclable product, which justified the risk and cost of plundering the wreck. Moses himself would have had little interest in salvaging the barque: he had been paid out in full by the insurance company. Besides, there were many other less hazardous enterprises to pursue.

I consider, although I have no positive proof, that when the so-called salvagers stripped the *Rosetta* of her metal work, the bell was souvenired. It would have been an irresistible prize, and an easy task to unscrew and unbolt the bell and carry it back to Sydney. To have done so was not a crime, as the wreck no longer had an owner, and government regulations about wreck preservation would not be introduced for about another century.

To advance another 110 years: my vendor was certainly a keen scuba diver. His abilities as such and those of his mates were and remain common knowledge in Point Lonsdale. He told me that in 1968 he and they rediscovered the wreck of the sailing ship *Holyhead* after searching for it. The wreck did not seem to be of much value: most of its cargo not already salvaged appeared to be iron rails. There were, however, items of general metal cargo, which I am sure included the *Rosetta Joseph's* bell.

The *Holyhead* was a magnificent 2336 gross ton, iron, four-masted barque,

294 by 42 by 24.5 feet. She was ten times the size of the *Rosetta Joseph*. Captain Williams was, at the inevitable enquiry, reported as being an ‘extremely trustworthy and capable skipper’ on ‘his first visit to Melbourne’. The voyage from Liverpool had been uneventful. The ship’s listed cargo consisted of 1000 tons of iron rails, 1000 tons of slate, a large quantity of bottled beer and spirits, chemicals and other goods to the value of £60,000. As the ship approached the Heads she flew a signal flag requesting a pilot. But the officer in charge did not wait for one. She came to grief in broad daylight owing to the derring-do of her mate and not her captain. The mate, Roberts, approached the Heads ‘with a full spread of canvas’; he had never even visited Australia before. About half a mile from the Point, and not knowing the reef extended out from the shore to that point, the lookout shouted that breakers were ahead. She could not go about in time, and hit the reef, and within ten minutes seven feet of water was in the hold and waves were breaking over the deck. There was no hope of floating her off. The contemporary newspaper reports indicate that most of the cargo was salvaged.

The site has been examined by the Heritage authorities who report that the wreckage still in place is a mound with a winch at the bow and ‘the steering gear is still standing with the rudder standing nearby’. It also refers to the unsalvaged cargo.<sup>5</sup> This leaves open the likelihood that the personal possessions of the captain and crew were too small and inconsequential to warrant professional salvage, as did the large quantities of iron and slate. In the debris I believe my informant found the bell, which I in turn found for the family and national archives.

My major reason for suggesting the bell came out of the *Holyhead* wreckage, besides accepting the word of a policeman, is that the captain of that vessel was Thomas Williams, who had spent a number of years in New South Wales, New Zealand, and Tasmanian waters. Although the *Holyhead* went down 32 years after the *Rosetta Joseph* was stripped of her metal, a young salvager, say aged 20 in 1858, could easily have risen to become the captain of the largest ship to attempt to enter Port Phillip in 1890. Williams was reported as having 20 years’ experience, presumably as a skipper, in that latter year. What is unquestionable is that the bell comes from the original ship and that it was rediscovered in Port Phillip and now sits on my mantelshelf. It is likely to have been one of the personal artefacts of Captain Williams that went down with his ship.

I now return to the cedar ship. Rosetta Nathan became the wife of Moses Joseph; they were first cousins. Moses (1803-89) was the second son of Joseph and Amelia (Minkey) Joseph. Amelia was the daughter of Hyam Nathan and Fanny somebody. It is known that Hyam (1743–c. 1824) was a fancy tailor, later to become a costumier in London.<sup>6</sup> He may have also been known as Lewis. What is certain is that he opened premises in Tichborne Lane in 1790. His son later did business with Richard Brinsley Sheridan and with Charles Dickens. The theatrical supply firm of Nathan and Berman still operates in London; it was at one time part of the Robert Holmes à Court collection of companies.

Rosetta was the eldest child of Nathan Lion Nathan (1783-1850) and his first cousin Sarah, whose surname was also Nathan. Nathan Lion (1787-1837) was one of the sons of Judah Nathan, who probably originated in Antwerp. However, this is not a story of the 'begats' or of the surprising fact that the progeny can read and write despite several generations of inbreeding. Rather, this is the story of the recovery of the bell and its connection with Australian mercantile history.<sup>7</sup>

Moses lifted a watch and/or some jewellery from another pedlar, for that is what he was at the time, in 1826. Appearing before the Warwick Assizes, he was convicted of larceny and sentenced to transportation for life. Dispatch to New South Wales within six months of conviction saved him from the worst indignities suffered by those incarcerated on the hulks.

Moreover, the journey was uneventful, even enjoyable. Captain Ralph of the *Albion* was a humane man, and the ship's medical officer even more so. Nobody died on the way out. It seems fair to say that most convicts arrived healthier than when they left England. After the Second Fleet the worst excesses of the convict transports were overcome. The commercial carriers were only paid in full when all the convicts were delivered; this helped to ensure reasonably tolerable conditions on board. The Admiralty prescribed minimum rations. Although boring, these were more than enough to sustain life, as the number of on-board conceptions testifies! It is one of the myths of Australian folk history that all convict transport ships were like the trans-Atlantic slave ships. It is to be recognised that the four or five months of enforced idleness taken up by the transportation time was for many the longest period of rest they had or would ever encounter. For the first time many received medical care, and decent levels of nutrition. And so it must have been for Moses. He arrived in Sydney town on 20 May 1827, well rested, fit, literate and vigorous: just the assets needed to help him on his way to wealth and respectability. Moreover, he had left a girl behind, who was prepared to follow him to the ends of the earth.

Rosetta Nathan was the eldest of Nathan and Sarah's nine children. Ultimately all of her siblings were to follow her example and come to Australia. Some were married, and so they carried to these shores the surnames Moses, Moss, Solomon, and Benjamin. The vital factor was that Rosetta's aunt had married Henry Moses. He owned a wholesale clothing warehouse in Monkton and Cannon Streets, Aldgate, in London's East End. It was Uncle Henry Moses who really set the extended family on its path to prosperity. He appears to have trained each of his own sons, as well as his Joseph and Nathan nephews, in matters of trade and finance. When his sons, or daughters if they were to marry, set out for Australia and New Zealand, he staked them £100 worth of goods. This gift or loan, whatever it was, provided each one with the necessary capital to open and then manage a business of their own.

I shall divert from Moses Joseph's story for a moment to draw the migration chain of Rosetta Nathan's siblings. Louis Nathan (1811-86) with his wife and

first cousin Henrietta, a daughter of the fabled Uncle Henry, set out in 1834. They stayed very briefly with Moses and Rosetta in Sydney, and then travelled south to Hobart to set up shop with the £100 worth of goods. Just as Moses was the first president of the congregation in Sydney, Louis became so in Hobart. Very soon after their arrival they were joined by one of Uncle Henry's sons, Samuel Moses. Together they established the firm Nathan and Moses, moved into whaling, owned some light whalers and then moved into ships provedoring. Samuel too became the president of the Hobart congregation. Some of his brothers joined him and they later changed their names to Moss and Walford. Perhaps this was the start of the family's maritime enterprises, of which the bell is the only surviving remnant.

The next Nathan to reach Australia was Arthur Isaac. With his £100 he set up business in Launceston. He also became a founder of that town's congregation. Two girls, Rachel and Miriam, then arrived in Sydney to stay with Rosetta and Moses. They were married off in quick time – Rachel to Samuel Cohen of Sydney and Maitland, in 1837, and Miriam in 1841 aged 16, to Solomon Benjamin (1818-88) of Melbourne. The latter couple produced 17 children; Solomon became the second president of the Melbourne congregation. I have no doubt that Uncle Henry's stake helped to establish what was to become the Benjamin dynasty of Melbourne. Julia, the youngest of the girls, was dispatched into married life with David Cohen, the brother of Samuel. He had opened a business in Newcastle. Another of her sisters, Esther (1826-93), married Moses Moss of Launceston.

In 1839 David Nathan (1816-86) was 23. He had done his time with the affluent Uncle Henry, and was to be sent to the new colony of South Australia. However, on arrival and owing to the poor state of that colony's economy he was redirected to the even newer settlement in New Zealand. He started out in a tent in what is now Russell on the Bay of Islands. With his £100 worth of goods he was able, shortly thereafter, to build a kauri store in Shortland Street, Auckland, a site purchased for £360 for him and Israel Joseph by Moses Joseph. Israel resurfaces later. They also called their business Commercial House. The partnership did not last. In 1864, when I suspect Moses was liquidating some of his assets in order to return to England, he sold his Auckland properties back to the Nathans for £7000.

Hyam Edward Nathan (1828-85) settled in Sydney but later moved to Dunedin in New Zealand. He continued to spin the trans-Tasman mercantile network together with another of his brothers, Henry, who perhaps later changed his name to Chester and came to Melbourne. The Moses and Joseph business in New Zealand received some additions from the Davis clan when Edward Ezekiel Nathan married Rachel Davis, and subsequent generations of cousins married each other. Their businesses were to produce Glaxo and Woolworths (New Zealand).

The last of the Nathans to settle was Burnett or Baruch Nathan and his wife Maryanne Collins (originally Kalisch). They were sent off to Adelaide in 1842 when its economic condition had slightly improved. The meeting to establish the Adelaide congregation was held in their home and Burnett became president in

1849 and again in 1859. Several of Moses's siblings were dispatched to the new settlements as each was founded. Joseph Joseph married Amelia Nathan, one of Sarah's sisters; they sent their son Jacob to Wellington soon after David had set up in Auckland. He too initiated a congregation.<sup>8</sup>

To return to Rosetta. She must have acted as a magnet for her siblings, financed as they were by her uncle, and attracted by the prosperity of her husband. Her signatures on the petition to marry and on the marriage certificate are spidery. I suspect her literacy was marginal. However, she certainly was numerate. She must have been party to her husband's many commercial decisions, and she certainly worked hard at keeping the network in smooth order. There are many occasions when she travelled to the various outposts accompanied by *ketubot*, or bandages in the case of a *brit milah*. When sitting for her portrait by the fashionable portraitist Richard Read, which now hangs in the Great Synagogue in Sydney, she decked herself out in jewels and lace and shows the stern face of a demanding matriarch. This she was not when she and Moses petitioned the governor to marry. The petition reads in part:

The Petitioner [i.e. Moses] on his arrival in this Colony was assigned to Messrs Cooper and Levey in whose service he has ever since continued [it refers to a certificate from that firm which reads: he has at all times deported himself honestly, soberly and industriously and is well deserving of the most gracious consideration and mercy of His Excellency the Governor ... to approve his marriage]

That the Petitioner was for some time before he left England acquainted with and attached to your Excellency's other Petitioner Rosetta Nathan a reputable and virtuous young woman who lately arrived in this colony by the ship Margaret evincing thereby the continuance of her attachment and determination to share the fate and misfortunes of Petitioner Moses Joseph.

That your Petitioners are of the Jewish persuasion and with your Excellency's sanction are about to be married according to the rights and ceremonies of that religion.

Your Petitioners therefore most humbly pray your Excellency to be pleased to sanction ... and humbly implore that your Petitioner Moses Joseph may have extended to him the merciful indulgence of a Ticket of Leave or Exemption.<sup>9</sup>

This imprecation was successful, and the marriage was duly approved. The *chuppah* occurred on 1 February 1832 under the direction of J. P. Cohen. It was one of the first Orthodox Jewish marriage in Australasia. Ultimately eleven children were produced; two died in infancy. This was a survival rate they could not have expected had they been in England. I initially registered surprise at the readiness of Rosetta's parents to permit her to travel alone, half way around the earth, in order to marry a convict. Further research has revealed I should not have done so. Her

father, Nathan Lion Nathan, had been here before. He was convicted in 1799, at the Old Bailey, of larceny. At the age of 16, he had been sentenced to seven years transportation. He arrived on the *Royal Admiral* as part of the squadron making up the Third Fleet. In 1807 he applied to Governor Bligh for permission to return to England, which he did on the *Hart*.<sup>10</sup> Government sanction was required in order for a convict whose term had expired to return to England. Generally, the authorities did not want their criminals returning to the Motherland, and in any case most convicts did not have the funds or the family to return to. Nathan must have saved the necessary funds or *mishpochah* might have; however, return he did. He married Sarah in 1808, so I imagine that too was an arranged union. He died, described as a 'gentleman', in 1850.

Colonial mercantile development did not get under way in earnest until the 1830s. That is when the numbers of free and assisted migrants began to exceed the numbers of convicts transported. So it is that point to which I now return.

Shortly after disembarkation from the convict ship *Albion* in 1827, Moses, as noted, was assigned to the firm of Cooper and Levey. This would be the present day equivalent of a new settler obtaining a job with the board of BHP Billiton – namely with the leading mercantile and industrial company in the country, and the one with international connections. His literacy made Moses valuable both to the government and any assigned employer. He made the most of this experience, because he was issued with a certificate of exemption from government labour on 7 April 1832 – that is, just under five years after arrival, and two months after marriage. A certificate has to be distinguished from a ticket of leave. The latter permitted the ticket holder to work for any employer, as well as undertake government work. A certificate assigned the holder to a named employer, very often a spouse; they had to live together. However, the holder did not have to work for the government at all.<sup>11</sup> It is possible to see how this aspect of the convict system was designed to build a society committed to bourgeois values (although being sentenced to remain married is not now one of the most accepted).

Operating in the name of the wife seems to have been as common in the nineteenth century as it became in the greedy 1980s. In any event the Josephs began to prosper mightily. On 11 July 1839 Moses obtained a conditional pardon. This enabled him to become a landowner in his own right. Very shortly after that he purchased some old shops in George Street, Sydney, between King Street and the Police Office. This street is described by Joseph Fowles, who published *Sydney in 1848*, illustrated with copperplate engravings, as 'the main artery through which the vital stream of commerce flows to the remotest part of the Colony'. In 1840 or 1841 the weather-board cottages were demolished and Moses constructed a three-storey shop, which he named 'Commercial House'. From here he conducted a drug-dealing business, that is, as a tobacconist. A replica of this shop has been reconstructed in the Jewish Museum at Darlinghurst. The business must have prospered. Both he and his wife Rosetta set about recruiting all their siblings as

migrants to Australia.

At the same time, on 3 November 1841, the Jewish congregation purchased land for its synagogue in York Street. Fowles comments: 'the Hebrews became so numerous and respectable a portion of the community it was thought necessary to erect a new synagogue, subscription lists were opened, and to which many names belonging to various denominations of Christians were added, displaying a liberality rarely to be met with even in England, and in a short time upwards of two thousand were collected, and the present chaste and classic edifice, represented in the annexed plate, was erected.'<sup>12</sup>

It was built in the then fashionable Egyptian style, reflecting the imperial spirit of the British triumph over the French, in particular Napoleon's defeat at the naval battle of the Nile. Moses, with the status of an emancipist, became the first president of the congregation when it occupied its new synagogue in 1844. J. B. Montefiore had been the first president of the community, which formed itself into a society in 1832, but a burial society predating that had been formed in 1817. That was extraordinary activity considering that the census of 1846 revealed 603 Jews in Sydney and only 1086 in the whole colony, which at that time included Victoria and Queensland.

Within ten years Moses and Rosetta had become scions of colonial mercantile society; as an emancipist he and his wife were more or less accepted by the business community. However, I cannot find invitations to Government House or into the homes of the so-called 'Exclusives'. Then, just as today, one way towards both wealth and social acceptance was to become a landowner. Following the conditional pardon, which liberated him commercially, Moses was granted an absolute pardon in 1848. This enabled him, and subsequent generations, to pretend that he had never been convicted at all. Later he was able to return to England, as if he had been a mere sojourner in Australia. Land was of special significance to Jews. At the time Jews found it difficult to purchase land in England for it had been only a matter of months since they had been prohibited from owning it.

Abraham Moses, one of Uncle Henry's sons, had arrived free in Sydney in 1833. In 1837 he was the first Jew to receive a licence to pasture stock beyond the established boundaries of settlement in the colony. He had selected the Monaro high plains. So began the long and enduring association of Jews with the land along the Murrumbidgee to the south of Canberra to Mount Kosciuszko. Abraham was to become the owner of more land than most English dukes. He probably rivalled the Macarthurs, but this story is not about him.

Moses purchased Mahratta station, of 8000 hectares, near Bombala in 1861. Earlier in the 1840s he had acquired the leasehold of nearly 50,000 hectares, in the same area. Some of this was converted into freehold. The two holdings were amalgamated into one, until some of the leases reverted to the Crown in 1912 when the extension of the railway from Cooma made closer settlement a government priority. It was an extensive run and became the focal point for much of his interest.

I have letters addressed to his son Hyam Moses Joseph in 1877, wherein he inquires as to the state of health of his prized bulls and asks about the pasturage.<sup>13</sup> The amazing fact to note is that some of his descendants, Louis Joseph and his son Peter, and Bill 'spec' Joseph (deceased) and his sons Robert, Craig, and Graeme, are still on the land around Bombala, 160 years after their forebears.

By the late 1840s Moses and the extended family were very wealthy and esteemed in the community, but still brimming with entrepreneurial ardour. He had land, thousands of sheep, and was also a wool-buyer of significance. His advertisements as a purchaser of wool ran in both the settlements of Sydney and Port Phillip, as his advertisements in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 14-20 January 1847 and the *Age* during 1847 testify. But like all landowners and squatters he had been adversely and grossly affected by the wool glut of 1841-44. In the 1830s British capital had flowed into the colony, fuelling a boom, which financed wool runs into unproductive country, in fact beyond the nineteen counties. The wool shorn helped the industrial revolution then under way in the United Kingdom, in particular the Yorkshire mills. Overproduction in the 1840s led to declining prices. It was said that the price of sheep in New South Wales 'was sinking so rapidly that men hesitated to fix the possible minimum above zero'.

As with all booms, the consequent bust led the entrepreneurs to search for alternative products. At first sheep were boiled down for tallow. The meat was simply wasted. The export of tallow from Port Phillip grew from eight tons in 1839 to 35 tons in 1842. The price of one sheep had fallen from around 6-8 shillings a head to one shilling by 1844. It was more profitable to slaughter a sheep for its fat, than to shear it for its wool. The entrepreneurs looked for other uses.<sup>14</sup>

Although in 1846 Sizar Elliott exhibited tins of canned meat at the Spring Exhibition of the Australian Floral and Horticultural Society in Sydney, they were only three weeks old. They exploded and poor Sizar was lucky to escape injury. Sizar may have been the first to display canned meat, but he was not the first to think of the idea or put it into commercial practice. Moses would have known of canned meat processing, which emanated from his home suburb in London. He was the real founder of food processing in Australia. On 27 July 1847 the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried the first of a series of advertisements, which read:

M. Joseph.

Patent Preserved Meat Manufactory, Camperdown.

Begs to inform the Merchants, Shipowners, Captains of Vessels, Innkeepers and Settlers, that he has completed his Manufactory for Preserving Fresh Provisions, which he will guarantee to remain in a complete state of preservation in any climate for several years ...

The annexed list comprises the provisions manufactured.

There follows *turtle, beef, ducks, oysters and milk*. The list is startling for an observant Jew. The meatworks, constructed at Camperdown, had a capacity of one ton a day; they must have required much effort and time to commission

– more than the seven months’ lapse between the display of the exploding cans and Moses’s invitation to eat *treyfa*. If that were not reason enough to claim Moses as the founder of the Australian canning industry, the following report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 29 July 1847 proves it:

Mr Israel Joseph [one of Moses’s brothers] who has recently returned to this colony has commenced the manufacture of preserved provisions on a large scale. When he was in England he paid a large premium to be allowed to work in one of the patent houses, in order to learn the mode of performing the various operations. Having done this he purchased the requisite apparatus and materials and came to Sydney.

As a return trip to England took about nine months, to which must be added the time Israel spent learning the trade, it is obvious he must have set out sometime in 1845 or earlier. The Moses brothers must have been the first to appreciate the possibilities of the trade and the first to produce a marketable product. The Moses enterprise ultimately faced competition from the Dangar family business of Newcastle. Both went out of business shortly after the advent of the gold rushes. This event led to huge inflation in the price of sheep and then labour. Canned meat was simply no competition for gold. The canning process that Israel brought back to Australia, was the invention in 1840 of a Hungarian Jew, Stefan Goldnar of 137 Houndsditch. He devised a method of sealing the cans securely in a calcium chloride brine bath. The method was commercially successful, and canned meat is still produced today.<sup>15</sup>

Moses did not restrict himself to land or industry. When the gold rushes broke out, the precious metal itself became the subject of his activity. Like most of the other Jewish merchants he moved into gold buying. The colonial governments required such merchants to be registered. Benjamin and Moses, Phillip Hart, and Israel Montefiore all feature as prominent buyers. It was Moses who headed the list of buyers in 1852. After that year his Victorian cousins overtook him.

In one of many moves to climb the ladder of colonial society Moses donated a side window to the Great Hall of Sydney University in 1856. About 1870, Moses and Rosetta returned to England, following the reverse migration path of many of their successful relatives. Moses died in 1889, and Rosetta two years later, in 1891.

Property holdings recited in Moses’s will show inner Sydney houses and warehouses in William, York, Barrack, George, Bridge, Australia, and Clarence Streets, and at Camperdown. He had agricultural land at Armidale, Queanbeyan, Stockton, Mosquito Islands well as Mahratta. The list of his stocks and shares is mouth-watering and appalling: Indian, Egyptian, Quebecois, New Zealand, Newfoundland, West Australian, Honduran, railways of Buenos Aires, and New South Wales bonds in the hundreds of thousands. It was the hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of bonds in the Confederate States of the United States which

really diminished the value of the estate, which nevertheless exceeded £300,000.<sup>16</sup> This was small in comparison with the assets of Abraham Moses, who returned to England, and died worth more than £650,000 in 1873.

Forty years after he arrived in Australia, probably in manacles, Moses and Rosetta had returned to London stupendously rich and free, to live permanently in England. A grand house at 17 Bedford Square in the heart of the West End was purchased and became the centre from which their empire was organised. Many of their successful and wealthy relations had also returned to the United Kingdom, both to flaunt wealth and often change names, Lumley, Beddington, Moss, Walford and Marsden being the most common. The reasons for these observant Jewish families converting themselves into Anglo establishment figures are both obvious and obscure. First they had come out to the colonies to better themselves and make wealth; having done so, nothing seemed more appropriate than to go home in order to display it. The journey via the colonies, from the East to the West End of London, seems to have involved a lessening of their Jewish identities. The great treasure they took back to England helped to finance Britain's growth into becoming the most wealthy and powerful country on earth by the end of the nineteenth century. It is more productive to note that the sons and daughters these colonial Britons left behind in Australia helped to shape our nation's cultural and commercial life, and to participate in creating a more prosperous, tolerant and innovative society than that from which their ancestors had come.

The donation made to Sydney University raises a paradox. This gift was from a man who endowed the Jews' School in Stepney, as well as other Jewish primary schools in London. Here was a contrast between his own primary education, for that is all he could have had, and tertiary education in the country which provided him with such unimaginable wealth. It is a further paradox that his heart must have remained in Bombala, for that is the only place he wrote of, and to, with any affection.

Subsequent generations, including my own, have not possessed the bounty of Moses, but we have done even better. We live here.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Letter to the author from Ross Anderson, marine archaeologist. Heritage Victoria, 7 January 1999; letter to Jewish Museum of Australia from Sharon Towns, director of the Victorian Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Material, 28 September 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> J. A. Bach, *A Maritime History of Australia*, 1976
- <sup>3</sup> *New Zealander*, 14 December 1847, quoted in Charles Bateson, *Gold Fleet to California*, 1963; R. F. Rhodes, *Pageant of the Pacific*, p.369
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in the *Port Macquarie News*, 31 January 1977. I also thank the Mid North Coast Maritime Museum and its voluntary staff; 'The diary of Enoch William Rudder' is in the possession of the museum; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16, 17 December 1850.
- <sup>5</sup> For material on the *Holyhead* see *Wrecks on the Reef: A guide to the historic shipwrecks at Port Phillip Heads* (brochure from Heritage Victoria), p.35

- <sup>6</sup> For this and subsequent paragraphs many sources have been combined. In some order of significance they are: computer records and facsimiles belonging to John Nathan of Ramat Gan, Israel, formerly of Auckland; Dudley Davis, formerly of Melbourne and Auckland; Monographs with photocopies of relevant records, 'The other side of the record', lodged with the AJHS library; J. S. Levi and G. F. J. Bergman, *Australian Genesis* (first edition), and particularly his notes on Nathan Nathan, OBSP 1799-80. Case 46; *Sydney Gazette* 13 March 1807; records held by A. M. Rosenbaum Museum, Great Synagogue, Sydney; Wilfred S. Jessop (formerly Joseph) of Sarasota, United States, papers lodged in the State Library of Victoria
- <sup>7</sup> Lawrence D. Nathan, *As old as Auckland*, 1984.
- <sup>8</sup> Lawrence D. Nathan, '38 Presidents', comprising 100 family trees, computerised, alphabetical index, containing 3000 names and lodged with the AJHS archives.
- <sup>9</sup> Lawrence D. Nathan, *As Old as Auckland*, 1984.
- <sup>10</sup> Lawrence D. Nathan, '38 Presidents' comprising 100 family trees, computerised, alphabetical index, containing 3000 names and lodged with the AJHS archives.
- <sup>11</sup> Australian Genealogical Society website, [www.sag.org.au/ozsources/pardon](http://www.sag.org.au/ozsources/pardon); also National Library website, [www.nla.gov.au/collect/genealogy/mfopen/generalnsw](http://www.nla.gov.au/collect/genealogy/mfopen/generalnsw).
- <sup>12</sup> Joseph Fowles, *An illustrated portrait of Sydney*, Sydney, 1848.
- <sup>13</sup> NSW Land Records Stockowners; MF Cabinet Drawer No. 7; Certificates of Depasturing Licences; MF Cabinet Drawer No. 9; mfn N 985. Index to Land Grants 1788-1865. MF Cabinet Drawer. No. 7. mfn n229; letters in the private collection of Mr. Max Joseph of Forster, NSW, photocopies of which are in 'The other side of the Record', *op. cit.*
- <sup>14</sup> K. T. A. Farrer, *A settlement amply supplied*, Melbourne, 1980
- <sup>15</sup> 'People in Bright Sparcs', published by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, online edition; 'Technology in Australia, First 100 years': see website [www.austec.unimelb.esu/tia/078](http://www.austec.unimelb.esu/tia/078)
- <sup>16</sup> Will of Moses Joseph, copy lodged with AJHS archives.

# HOW I SPENT MY FOURTEENTH YEAR

*Phyllis Slutzkin*

## Introduction

*Phyllis Slutzkin (later Stanton) was just about to turn 15 when she wrote this account of the first year of World War One, which she spent, together with her family, as an evacuee in Alexandria.*

*Phyllis was born in Melbourne in 1901, the daughter of Lazar and Rose Slutzkin. Rose was the daughter of Philip Blashki, and Lazar had emigrated to Australia from Russia in 1895. Lazar Slutzkin established a successful textile firm in Melbourne, and by the early 1900s was travelling extensively on business to England and Europe. He took his growing family with him on these trips, and in 1907 he built a house in Rehovot, Palestine, where his parents and other family members came to live, from Russia. In 1908 he established an office in Manchester.*

*By this time his business had expanded, specialising in embroidered muslin, organdie and lace, which suited the Australian climate and which were very popular for ladies' and children's afternoon dresses and also for domestic servants' formal wear. The cloth came mostly from England (which was the reason for establishing the firm in Manchester) but the printing was chiefly done in St Gallen, Switzerland, where they specialise in this type of cloth, or in Mulhouse, north-eastern France. The embroidery was mostly done in Vorarlberg, Austria which is also near the Swiss border and for some weeks in 1911 they stayed in a hotel (the Valhallah) in St Gallen so that Lazar could set up and organise the chain of supplies. He also visited Paris frequently to buy designs for the print side of the business: in this he was a near genius, being able to pick those with sales appeal.*

*However, it was only a short-term solution to stay in St Gallen. They all moved over to England, where Lazar's office was already established in Manchester, but they still had close contacts in St Gallen and Lazar visited there often.*

*Rose and Lazar decided to send their eldest son, Nahum, to the Hirsch Realschule in Frankfurt in 1912, probably because of its central position in Europe, close to Lazar's sphere of operations.*

*After a year they were pleased with Nahum's progress and decided to move the family to Frankfurt, where they took a flat in the Palmengarten. The other children were also sent to the school there. In August 1914 they were in St Moritz (at Burman's Hotel, which still exists) on holiday when war broke out. Since they were British citizens they could not return to Frankfurt as Lazar would have been interned, so they all travelled to Palestine, at which point Phyllis starts her account.*

## How I Spent My Fourteenth Year (22 August 1914–22 August 1915)

(This was written by Phyllis Slutzkin, age 13 years, 11 months, 3 weeks, on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1915 entirely from memory. Every word is perfectly true.)

My thirteenth birthday fell on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1914. At the time we were on the boat from Italy to Palestine, the Great War having started some three weeks previously. On my birthday we were stopping at Port Said, and being Saturday we could not go ashore,<sup>1</sup> so we spent a very unpleasant day on board ship. We were about the only Europeans on board and so had nobody's company but our own. I cried most of the day and grumbled the rest.

We had a very rough night and in the morning at about 9 o'clock came in sight of Jaffa.<sup>2</sup> Went straight on shore and surprised Auntie and Uncle very much by turning up so unexpectedly. Fraulein Ullmann (our nurse) was in a bad temper the whole day. After having a bonza dinner for the first time for three weeks we went by carriage to Rechovoth.<sup>3</sup> It was the first time we ever went by carriage and I hope also the last.

We left Jaffa at 4 o'clock and got home at about eight. Everything was dark at home. Mrs. Dorfmann, the housekeeper, was not expecting us and everything was in a dreadful muddle. We settled down somehow or other.

For the next few weeks we got on alright. Father was able to draw money from the Bank and all would have been well if something dreadful had not have happened. The *Goeben* and *Breslau*,<sup>4</sup> two German raiders, were bottled up in the Straits of Messina, when by some fluke they escaped into Turkish waters. A week after Turkey declared war on England. We, being English,<sup>5</sup> were now in a nice muddle. The Banks all closed and we were left with nothing but English Bank drafts and a few pounds in gold. Father being well known in Jaffa and in all the Colonies, we were allowed credit for nearly everything. The children all had diphtheria during Succoth.<sup>6</sup> Paper money was then issued by the Colonies, and so we managed to get along without luxuries until the beginning of December.

One day Mother went with my eldest brother Nahum<sup>7</sup> to Jaffa to see about some new clothes. We were all reading in the afternoon, when a carriage rolls up the drive. As we were not expecting Mother that day we got a bit of a fright, and were still more frightened to see her with a big Turkish soldier. It appears that on that day an English warship had been cruising around Jaffa to reconnoitre, and also a seaplane had been seen. The commandant of Jaffa thought that the town was going to be bombarded, so he got very excited and went rushing through the streets like a madman threatening to imprison every British, French and Russian subject in the town. Mother got very frightened and went straight to the American Consul who sent his Cavasse (bodyguard) with her in a private carriage to our home. She took our two little cousins with her as they were afraid to be in Jaffa.

After that day life was unbearable. The United States *Tennessee* often brought money from American relief funds to relieve the poor Jews, but we, of course, got none. One day we got a telegram from Australia via the American Ambassador asking us what we needed and we wired back gold as paper money was useless.

After the first visit of the English warship the port of Jaffa, which had previously been closed, was opened to neutral shipping. One day orders were issued that all Russian subjects were to leave the country. The whole of Jaffa went literally mad. The military authorities took any Jew they saw in the streets and took them down to the wharf without asking any questions and put them as they were on board the Italian boat, after first robbing them of any valuables or money they had on them. They were not allowed even to go home for luggage or to say goodbye. One gentleman, a personal friend of ours, came away without a hat! He was standing in front of his house when two soldiers came along and dragged him to the boat. We were in Rechovoth all the time so missed most of the excitement, Thank Goodness.

After that day the Commandant was sent away and another man took his place. The people were then allowed to leave the country and nothing dreadful was done, but threats were plenty. It was threatened to take all Englishmen to Damascus, and several other things, and at last the American Consul, in whose hands we were, advised us to quit the country by the American cruiser which was now, by kind permission of the United States Ambassador, being turned into a transport for refugees. One can hardly imagine how glad all we children were to hear that we were going to leave Palestine. We first went to Jaffa and stayed in Tel Aviv in the Hotel Salant. We waited eagerly for the arrival of the *Tennessee* and packed up everything each morning for two weeks. One Thursday we went as usual to the beach and saw a ship in the distance. We soon saw that it was a warship and so we went straight home to tell Mother. We found out then that Daddy was trying to back out of going away. But the American Consul told us that we had better leave the country.

After having dinner at Auntie's we walked to the Custom House and found the doors locked so we had to walk over people and luggage and force our way to the main entrance. If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget that push and scramble. The whole family except Mother and Daddy were in hysterics. Everybody was trying to push towards the gate at once. At last we got through the gates and then began the usual examinings etc. only it was ten times worse than usual. At last we got into a little boat and after a terribly rough trip reached the ship. The sailors were awfully pleased to be understood and we made many friends straight away. We were shown into some officers' cabins and we hardly got on deck when the ship started. The other people all slept on deck but we, being the only English people, were given cabins. Everybody on board was very nice. The ship rocked dreadfully and after talking with some of the sailors we went downstairs. The Captain sent us some very nice pancakes, but as they were made with lard<sup>8</sup> we

did not eat any, but asked for bread, which they gave us plus butter and jam. I went with one of the sailors to the cook shop and a fat negro cook made some very nice cocoa for us.

In the morning the sea was still dreadfully rough. I was not sea-sick at first so I went on deck with David, spoke to a sailor, then had to go downstairs because David felt sick. As soon as I got below I felt sick so finished the journey downstairs.

At about three o'clock on Friday we arrived at Alexandria. After the refugees went ashore on barges we got into the Captain's motor-launch with another gentleman and went ashore at the quarantine station. To our great dismay it was found impossible for anyone to go into town that night. At first we were put in a shed with the other people but Mother kicked up a fuss. Major Blattner (of the police) who was in charge there said he would see what he could do and after some time the Doctor of the station gave us his room. We were given mattresses, linen, towels, etc. and food was brought from town. The next day being Shobbos<sup>9</sup> we could not go into town and as it was raining we stayed most of the time in the courtyard. In the evening we took two carriages into town. On the way we were very excited as we saw some Australian soldiers. We went to about 10 hotels trying to find rooms. At last a gentleman told us to go to his hotel. We went there and found that there were sufficient rooms so we stayed there for the night.

During the next week we made the acquaintance of some Australian soldiers from the 15<sup>th</sup> ASC who were stationed at Alexandria at that time. Went to visit the camp one day. It was very pleasant to be in a civilised (or half civilised) country once again and to walk about the streets in safety.

We wrote to our cousin Br. General Monash (then Colonel) to come up for Pesach [Passover, the eight-day festival which in 1915 began on 29 March] which was then drawing near, but he answered that he had no time. Nahum met an old school friend of his in school one day and he used to come and see us pretty often. On Seder night, Mr. and Miss Berlin came to see us, but we did not enjoy ourselves very much. The next night two Jewish American sailors came for Seder. On the last day of Pesach two Australians came for lunch and told us that they were leaving that night for some place unknown to them. They told us also that the provisions on board the troopship were for three days only.<sup>10</sup>

After Pesach we got a letter from Australia saying that our cousin, Fabian Pincus, had left Australia for Egypt. We made enquiries at once and after much bother found that he was sick in the hospital at Heliopolis (Cairo). Mother went with Nahum the next day to Cairo and returned the day after. She saw Fabian and told us he was very bad with double pneumonia. She wrote to General Maxwell who kindly had him transferred to the hospital here in Alexandria. We went to see him on the day after his arrival and found him in a bad temper. It turned out to be that he was told that he was going back to Australia and was fearfully disappointed when Mother's letter changed the doctor's plans. We were awfully surprised to see such a kid. He did not look a bit like a soldier.

Meanwhile the wonderful landing at the Dardenelles [*sic*] had been effected by our dear Australian boys, and the result was, of course, wounded men. They kept on arriving. We began to get telegrams enquiring about some soldier sons reported wounded. The first telegram referred to Lieutenants Goldring and Brodziak.<sup>11</sup> We found out the whereabouts of Lt. Brodziak but could not find Lt. Goldring. Mr. B. was at Victoria College Hospital and we went to visit him every day. The hospitals were all in frightful disorder as the large amount of wounded were unprepared for. We took all possible comforts to Mr. Brodziak and made friends with several other officers and men in the hospital. We found out after some time that Eric Goldring was in Cairo and Mother wrote. One Sunday we went to Victoria to see Mr. B. and found that he had left and was on a hospital ship. Colonel Hearly gave us information as to the name of the ship and number of quay and we went home after first visiting Fabian at San Stefano. Nahum went the next morning to the ship and said goodbye for us. Mother then thought that she would go to Cairo to see Mr. Goldring as we kept on getting telegrams enquiring after his health. Just as she was going someone told her that his brother Harold was here in the German hospital so she went to see him instead.

Some time previously we had entered a French school here, the Lycée Française. It was very dull at first as we had no friends at all. Afterwards we made friends with an English girl, Dilys Bryan, who introduced us to some others. One Friday when we came home from school the man in the hotel told us that an Australian officer had been to see us and was coming again that evening. When we were having supper, who should walk in but Lt. Arnold Isaacson. There was a great excitement as he had just returned from Gallipoli.

After we all settled down a bit he told us that he had joined in Australia as a private (although he holds a commission in the regular forces) and was promoted here in Egypt to the rank of Lt. He was attached to the staff of General Birdwood.

The next Sunday was when we went to see Mr. Goldring and on Wednesday was Shevuoth [Shavuot, which began in 1915 on 19 May]. We took Mr. Goldring some flowers etc. for Shevuoth. On Wednesday evening we went to Shule and there met Corporal Wootsan whom we took home with us. Found Mr. Isaacson waiting for us and had supper together. The next Friday Isaacson came again for supper and again on Sunday morning he came to tell us that he was going that afternoon back to Gallipoli. He invited us to go down to his ship for tea. Mother did not want to go so Nahum, Olga and I went down to the wharf. We found Mr. Isaacson very busy sorting out drunken soldiers left behind by another ship. He told us to go on board which we did and we waited and waited till the Captain told us that we had better go ashore and the ship was leaving. Mr. I. was very sorry that he did not have time as he did not expect the drunken soldiers. He walked to town with us and said goodbye.

We had made many friends at school by now amongst whom were the three Chevaliers and the two Aghions. As summer was drawing nearer, the hotel was too hot so Mother began house hunting. We used to visit the hospitals every afternoon nearly. One day Olga felt sick and was put to bed. It was the day of Italy's mobilisation and we saw all the demonstrations as the first reservists left. The next day I felt sick too and the doctor said we had diphtheria. While we were in bed everything seemed to happen. Mr. Goldring came to see us. It was the first time he was out of the hospital. Then some friends of ours came from Cairo and then Miss Landau came from Jerusalem. She stayed at our hotel. After we were better we went to school as usual. Mr. Goldring was billeted with a lady called Mrs. Jessop, who was the Aunt of the Chevaliers.

The next Sunday night we gave an evening and Mr. Goldring came, also Mrs. Abonside [?] and Miss Landau. It went off very well and we discovered that Mr. Goldring was going to the same dentist as we were at the same time in the following day. We met him at the station the next day and went together.

The next Saturday night we took a box at Cinema Moderne and took Mr. Goldring with us. The next day Mr. Isaacson returned from the Dardenelles [*sic*] and came to see us. The Thursday after June 26<sup>th</sup> we moved into our new house. It was at Ihrakinuch<sup>12</sup> (a suburb of Alexandria). It was not very big but furnished. The same day we broke up at school. We spent the days all very much the same way spending most of our time at the beach and in the hospitals, visiting our dear boys. We had soldiers up to our place nearly every day and Lt. Isaacson came every Friday night<sup>13</sup> when possible. One night we went with Mr. Isaacson to a show which was not bad. Olga's birthday was on the 10<sup>th</sup> August and we went to tea with a lady where we met some nice officers.

Now I am within a week of my fourteenth birthday at the time of writing this and I sincerely hope that my fifteenth year will be a happier one for everyone than my fourteenth one was. I hope also that my next birthday will see the end of this terrible war and that we may be home in dear old Australia by then.

Phyllis Slutzkin

August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

### Postscript

*The family remained in Alexandria until the end of the war, keeping open house and entertaining many Australian and British servicemen. Phyllis attended a French school, from which she received the equivalent of matriculation. They returned to Palestine at the end of hostilities. Then some of the family, including Phyllis, went back to Melbourne, sailing on the Dunbar Castle late in 1919.*

*In 1920 Phyllis became a student of singing and piano at the Conservatorium of Music, Melbourne, but did not finish her studies, instead travelling to London, where she went to a cooking school. Returning again to Palestine, she taught*

*cooking at the Annie Landau Girls' school in Jerusalem, before finally returning to Melbourne in October 1925. She met Leonard Stanton in 1927, and they were married in 1928.*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> During the Sabbath (sundown Friday to about an hour after sundown on Saturday) observant Jewish travellers will not leave a ship on which they are travelling so as to not break the Sabbath.
- <sup>2</sup> Jaffa, near the then-new city of Tel Aviv, in Palestine.
- <sup>3</sup> Usually spelled Rehovot, south of Tel Aviv and on the way to Jerusalem. The Slutzkin family lived in Rehovot.
- <sup>4</sup> 'The Indomitable and Indefatigable sighted the German battlecruiser Goeben and the light cruiser Breslau at 9:32 a.m. on August 4, 1914. The British cruiser Dublin soon joined the battlecruisers. The Goeben was pulling away noticeably, and the battlecruisers lost sight of her about 3:35 p.m. The Dublin became their eyes, reporting the German's adjustments of course so that the battlecruisers could change theirs. The Dublin lost sight about two hours later in a light fog. The British ultimatum to Germany expired at midnight, August 4, 1914.' – Dan Van Der Vat, *The Ship that Changed the World*, pp. 71-6; from <http://www.kutz.com/list/combat/2001-06/00004327.htm>  
So, the 'fluke' referred to was a fog patch which enabled the German ships to evade the British ships following them.
- <sup>5</sup> Until 1949, Australians overseas carried British passports, and although not English, often considered themselves as such or European.
- <sup>6</sup> Sometimes spelled Sukkot, this Jewish holiday is celebrated around September or October. In 1914 Sukkot started on October 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Pronounced 'Nay-ym'.
- <sup>8</sup> Lard, being animal-based fat, would not have been kosher. The Slutzkin family were observant Jews and as such would only have eaten kosher food.
- <sup>9</sup> Often appears spelled 'Shabbos' or 'Shabbat' this is the Hebrew word for the Sabbath.
- <sup>10</sup> In view of the dates of Pesach, it is possible that these Australian soldiers were about to leave for the landing at Gallipoli (which occurred on 25 April 1915).
- <sup>11</sup> 'Wounded on MacLaurin's Hill, 26th April : "The Turkish fire was most deadly in this part of the line. One after another, officers who had done great work through the first day and night were lost, either then or shortly afterwards ; ... Cadell, Brodziak, Carter, Butler, Goldring, Macfarlane, McDonald, Beeken of the 3rd, Macdonald of the 11th, were wounded and put out of action." (Bean V1 pp. 433-6, 483 quoted).' And: 'Lieut. Goldring was shot in the throat, but fortunately survived it.' (Moore, Lt. Col. D. T, 'Heavy Losses: 3rd Battalion's Baptism.' *Reveille* Vol. 4 No. 7; 31 Mar 1931 p. 48)."(from <http://www.anzacs.org/pages/AOCadell.html>)
- <sup>12</sup> This may actually be 'Ibrahimia' which is a suburb of Alexandria.
- <sup>13</sup> For the Sabbath evening meal.

# RECOLLECTIONS OF ERETZ ISRAEL

*Devorah Erskine (née Schneerson)*

*For a kid growing up in an outback town in Australia, and then to suddenly find you have an Orthodox Jewish background, set me on a voyage of discovery into a very different world from that I had grown up in, culminating in me giving a tape recorder to my mother and asking that she string together some stories of her early life that rightly or wrongly she had kept hidden from us children. I have been to Israel some ten times now and met secular and Orthodox members of my family. The contrast and the journey continue to amaze me.*

*—Brian Erskine*

## **Editor's note**

*Devorah Erskine, a member of the celebrated Schneerson family, was a sabra who settled in Mildura with her husband Alan, following a period in Britain after 1948. The following is an edited excerpt from her personal memoir.*

I was born in Israel in 1916, in a little place called Hebron. It's not very far from Jerusalem, the Holy City. If my memory is correct, it's not even half an hour's drive from Jerusalem to Hebron. It's a little city where Arabs and Jews have lived together for many, many years. Hebron, of course, if you look at the Bible, is where our forefathers, Abraham and Sarah, lived

My childhood was a rough one. My parents were very very strict. My father was a very very sadistic man, a very cruel man. But when I went to visit Israel in 1970, and I hadn't been home for 26 years, I couldn't believe it was the same man; it was just as if they took him and turned him inside out. He was the most loving of fathers. I couldn't believe it because he was cruel, he was sadistic and he screamed, he didn't just shout, he screamed. The whole neighbourhood used to listen to him screaming, and my mother, even though she was a strong woman, she cowered from him. He loved her, there's no doubt about that, in my mind, he loved her, I saw that in later years, I saw how much he loved her. She would sit there a lot at the sewing machine; I always remember my mother sewing, she was always repairing or sewing something at the machine.

I can't forget the beatings I used to get from my father, for different reasons, but this particular one was for bringing bad reports from school, and I used to get beaten with a rope doubled up with his hand across my face. What could I say, how could I get good reports? In the morning I had to take milk, this little girl of eight, that's when I started with the milk, walking up the street, with an urn in

one hand and a ladle in the other, going to these few customers that we had, to give them milk; that was before school. Then I would come home just to go to school; then in the evening, the same thing, before the goats came down from the mountains, I would have to go with the milk to these customers, and then when I came back the goats were coming in, and I would have to see to the kids. I never had time to study, and I was practically at the bottom of the class. There were only very very few subjects that I was really good at; and for some reason or other, one was the Bible; I loved the Bible. And the other one was music. I wish someone had given me the opportunity to play some kind of instrument. I was also good with languages; apart from learning in our own language, we learned three others – English, French and Arabic.

I remember once my Uncle Isaac did start to teach me the banjo. I was getting quite good at it. But he left when he got sick and I used to visit him in the hospital, and then the next thing I remember is that he'd gone to Tel Aviv, and he was married, and he shot himself. Why, I don't know, but I think there were money problems. He left his beautiful wife, and two children, a boy and a girl. I couldn't believe it.

But I loved him. I loved all my uncles. There were three uncles, four men; my father was the eldest, then there was Sholem and then Isaac and then there was Mordecai, then in between there were three aunties, Sarah and Rachel and there was the eldest girl, I don't know her name. And I didn't know her story until much later in life. I was in Egypt, in Cairo with Alan when the news came to me that Uncle Isaac had shot himself. I was very cut up about that because I really loved him. His wife is also named Sarah. Funnily enough she had married again later



*Devorah (second from left) with her mother and sisters*

on in life, but she always remained Schneerson, she always came to the family, and all the holidays and all the birthdays, she always came home to the family. She was a lovely lovely lady, Auntie Sarah.

And so my childhood had its downs, I was going to say ‘ups and downs’, I’m trying to think there must have been some good moments, and if I remember I will really tell you about it. But I seem to remember all the bad ones. When I brought a bad report home, I could see the rope coming, I could see it coming, it was a terrible thing.

I wasn’t allowed to go to the daily excursions. The teacher used to say, ‘Tomorrow we are going up to the mountains, and we are going to look for caves, don’t forget to bring your back-packs, bring water, bring food, and wear your very heavy walking shoes.’ I knew that no way would my father let me go. He would say: ‘And who is going to look after the goats, and who’s going to look after the milk?’ I couldn’t even ask him because I would get this awful hand come right across my face. I did go once, I can’t remember when it was, and how it was he allowed me to go; all I can remember is that I did crawl into the caves, and you crawl in and you come into these big, big rooms. We saw some beautiful, beautiful sights. But that’s a faint memory. I loved the mountains around Hebron. I loved Hebron: it was beautiful.

My memories are bad ones there, absolutely bad. We used to go to the synagogue with my father; girls meant nothing, girls meant absolutely nothing. Boys would sit on their father’s shoulder, of course, and they would surround the Torah, the beautiful holy scroll that they used to get out from the holy cupboard as we called the Ark. It was covered with this beautiful curtain which was very very holy too. A certain man would come around and they would push the curtain aside very gently, open the doors very gently, and here were these beautiful scrolls, covered in these beautiful cloths, all silk, all embroidered; and the man would take one out, and another man would take another one out, hold it against their shoulder, and they would come down the few steps and dance around the floor in the synagogue, and we would be sitting upstairs, because the ladies were never allowed to sit with the men together.

And the ladies would sit: it was a sort of a balcony inside the room and the balcony even had a curtain around it so that the women could peek around and see the men, but the men were not allowed to see the women.

I was born into a very religious family, extra religious, belonging to the Habad movement. My great-great-grandfather was a very very big rabbi in Russia, and he sent his children to Israel, which was then Palestine of course, to teach the Habad movement. I was born into that. The synagogue was part and parcel of our lives, and as I said, the boys would sit on the men’s shoulders and we would be peeping through holes and things to see it all. It was such a happy thing: they were singing and going around with these scrolls, these beautiful scrolls, and the men would reach out and put their hands on it and put it to their mouth and kiss it, it was so

holy, absolutely holy. This was our Bible, this was our Torah, this was our religion, this was the word of God, and God to us was just absolutely *it*!

I was the first born. I was a disappointment. My sister Esther was born three years later. Three years after that, my sister Judith was born, and five years later, when I was ten, my sister Ruth was born.

There was no love in my family whatsoever till Ruth was born. Somehow or other, I don't know why, the maternal instincts only then came out in my mother, and that child got all the love, all the deepest deepest mother-love. And I'll never forget my father. He put his arm out one day to strike Ruth, who was in my mother's arms, and my mother turned around and said: 'You hit this child and I'll walk out on you. You'll never see me again, this is one child you are not going to hit.' And he never did lay a hand on that child.

I'll never forget when on holidays we used to love going to my grandparents at the hotel they owned. We used to get some nuts, and on this particular day, I knew my girlfriends were coming to collect me, to go and play 'Nuts'. We used to have this funny game, you played for nuts. Nuts were the price, and we used to have nuts in a big handkerchief and go and play. Well, I went down to my grandparents hoping to get my allocation of nuts, and it wasn't coming, and I waited and waited. I daren't ask. So I helped myself. They were in the corner of the cupboard where my grandmother kept them. All of a sudden I was picked up by the scruff of my neck and taken to the bathroom.

Just outside the bathroom was this trough, and my grandmother used to do her washing there. Well, my father turned my back to the trough, tied my hands behind my back, tied them to the trough water tap, took a broom that was hanging there, turned it upside down, and stuck it right in between my back and the trough so I was standing there like a ramrod, straight as a die. I couldn't move, I couldn't bend, and that's how my friends found me, standing tied up at the back of the trough, and of course I was part of all the jokes in the days to come, they just couldn't stop laughing at the sight of me standing there.

Actually, most of my girlfriends that used visit sometimes had lovely lives. I couldn't understand why mine had to be so rotten, but it was, and I don't remember how long I stood there; my girlfriends left and I stood there for a long long time, and eventually my mother must have taken pity on me. She must have spoken to my father – I don't know – but she came to me and untied me, and she said, 'Now you go and kneel down in front of your father and kiss his hand and say that you're sorry, you'll never do it again.' He was sitting there in an armchair in the lounge, and I knelt down on my knees, kissed his hand and said I was sorry, and that was the end of that. So, you see, not much fun in that kind of life.

My grandparents were lovely gentle, gentle people, and they were very busy, because they owned this hotel named 'E Shel Abraham', translated into Abraham's tent, Abraham's abode. My grandfather was a very gentle person, very religious. I remember him with this beautiful long white beard. My grandmother, Zippora, was

always cooking, always busy, and they had the British officers staying there.

I'm jumping the gun because when I was born in 1916 I was born into the Ottoman Mandate, it was Turkish and we were under Turkish rule. But a year later, in 1917, Lord Allenby marched in with his troops and took over the country, and we then came under British rule, under the British Mandate, until 1948. The soldiers used to stay in the barracks of course, but a lot of the officers used to stay at my grandparents' hotel, which was like a second home to us. I was always there; it was a loving place. When I wasn't working, I used to run and play there. When the soldiers came, they would come home from work or whatever they were doing, and they would have their evening meal, and they loved sitting in this special room which I remember very well. They used to sit round the table and play cards and this one particular officer used to always sit me on his knee, always bring me something, whether it was an ice cream or a piece of chocolate or whatever, and he would always try to teach me words in English. At school of course, we were taught in Hebrew, but we had three compulsory languages – English, Arabic and French – and I was good at them all.

Now, I'll tell you about the Hebron massacre. It was 1929, I was twelve years old. The Arabs decided on an uprising. They used to do that periodically: every few years there would be an uprising and they would kill a few Jews. I remember that I went up in the afternoon on the Friday to serve the milk; I used to go on the road to Jerusalem on the main highway; nothing happened when I was walking up, but when I was walking back I saw these little groups, just little groups of about ten Arabs here and there, talking. And as I was nearing home, one of them threw a stone at me and hit me in the cheek, and of course I started screaming and ran to the house, and as I ran up the stairs my father opened the door, dragged me in and shut the door again quickly. 'We are leaving, we are going to our grandparents,' he said, which was only down the road actually. I don't think it was 100 yards down the road from where we lived, from where we had our dairy. The school was opposite; we were on the left of it and my grandparents' hotel as on the right of it.

So we ran from the back way. We took few belongings; we didn't have time. I didn't understand it at the time, but my father said we were going to the hotel, and sure enough we went through the back way and ran down through the different yards, and got to the hotel and there were already different people there. There was an elderly couple that came on holidays and they were staying there, and the doctor was upstairs, he was staying there; and a few of our friends came and then later I found out there were 33 souls staying there, my aunties and Uncle Sholem and his wife, and so on, and some friends. I'll never forget, we locked all the doors, and they said we would be safer upstairs, so we all walked upstairs and, of course, we weren't safe.

There we were, Esther and I, standing at this big window, upstairs in the hotel, and when we were looking out we were looking out to another house not very far at all, and it was called the Yeshiva School; the Yeshiva School was where

Orthodox young men were learning the Torah, but that's the house where they stayed, where they lived.

And, sure enough, we could see the Arabs – they had hardly any guns but there were these long swords – screaming 'Kill the Jews, kill the Jews' in Arabic.

And first they opened the doors, and a few minutes later they came out and my sister couldn't believe it, we could see the blood, we could see the blood on those swords; and of course, we couldn't understand what was happening. Anyway, the next thing, all of a sudden, the Arab who was the owner of the hotel – my grandparents were just running it, of course – and this wonderful man, this Arab, who was in his vineyard with his two wives (it was picking time I think) heard apparently of the massacre that was going on, and came running with his wives and he ran up to us and said: 'Come on you are not safe here. Come down quickly.' He took us down the back steps to his home. It was one big room and off it were the bedrooms (and whatever other rooms), but we, all 33 of us, went into this room and sat down; and he locked the doors and put his two wives on guard outside the door and that was it.

We stayed there a day and a night, and then at one time the Arabs kept knocking and the women would say: 'There are no Jewish people here, there are no, no, no Jewish people here, just our friends who are so afraid of you, you mustn't do it.' They went away, lucky us! I couldn't believe it, because what we heard afterwards what they did was just absolutely shocking.

Then all of a sudden we were sitting there quietly. As a matter of fact, my auntie had a baby, and she had her hand over the baby's mouth because the baby was just starting to cry and there were these Arabs standing outside. She put her hand over the baby's mouth, almost choking it. We were so still, you could hear a fly going around the room. And the fear! You could smell the fear! The shocking fear! Then all of a sudden, this voice from outside near the school shouted 'Help! Help!' It was our cousin; Slonim was his name. My father jumped up and he was running towards the door, and the uncles got up and said to father: 'Where do you think you're going?' He said: 'I'm going to help, he's calling for help, they're killing him.' They said: 'You can't do anything.' It was a really shocking moment.

What actually happened was that Slonim was the bank manager, and he had all these people working for him, and amongst them was a friend of his, an Arab, a great friend of his, working there with him. And these Arabs were running up the steps to his home and he came up and saw his friend and he said: 'Thank God it's you. Now I feel safe.' And the fellow took a gun and shot him.

Then the others ran in and they stuck a sword down his wife's throat. The couple had two boys, so they killed one of them, but the other one miraculously survived. They had a neighbour, a very big fat woman, wearing these big, big clothes that were hanging down, and she lay down on top of the other child. His name was Binyamin Slonim, and he is still alive today, somewhere in Israel. He's the only one that was saved out of the family.

These Arabs went around and they killed and killed and massacred. Our baker, poor darling baker; they lit the primus stove, and they put his head on it, and another was found upside down in the toilet. The toilet was just a hole in the ground; and they just did atrocious things. And the British didn't do a thing to stop it, and eventually there was a hue and cry and they started coming around; they stopped all the massacre and they came around and collected all the ones who were alive. When they knocked on our door they said: 'British police here.' And of course we opened the door, and they gathered us and put us in this truck, one of the old, old trucks with benches on either side, and took us to the police station.

On the road we saw bodies lying in different parts of the road. We saw bodies lying on the ground and being picked up, and when we came to the big square in front of the police station, there were so many dead lying around and so many people sitting next to them howling, crying, moaning, holding their heads. It was a terrible picture: there were bodies and blood everywhere, and one poor woman, whose husband was on a stretcher, was on her knees and she was bent right over him and her dress was all red with blood and she was crying for her husband and the scene was just absolutely shocking

They took us in and they put us in this big lounge and we were there two days, and slept there. Our shepherd used to milk the cows and the goats and he brought us the big urns of milk and I would stand there with the ladle and the people would come with a cup or whatever, and I would give them milk. They must have fed us. I really don't remember what we ate, but I remember giving the people milk to drink, and one mother would go walking on the roof of the police station for a bit of quiet, and this poor mother was mourning her son; she only had the one son and she was Spanish [Sephardi is probably meant here – Ed.] I think, and she was crying in Spanish [probably Ladino] and talking in Spanish and crying for her son, the only son she had. Anyway two days later they came and got us (all the survivors) in trucks, and took us to Jerusalem.

To go back: my father was crying at the funeral – he was wonderful to bury the dead – and it must have been a terrible, terrible thing. They were all buried in one grave, at night, all people we knew.

In Jerusalem they took us to this big, big building, called Strauss's house. There were all these rooms on the second floor. I think it was some medical place on the bottom floor where they used to have clinics. They gave each family a room, and just gradually and slowly family and friends would come up and take us out, and that was to try and establish ourselves somewhere.

So gradually we all got settled in, and I went to school of course. The school was called Lemel; it was on Strauss Road, funnily enough.

When I finished Lemel school, I went to High School. It was a commercial school. We learned business and that. I was there about two years, but I was lazy, I just wasn't interested and with all the learning that I did in Hebron, I just wasn't good anymore, so my teacher came to my father and said: 'Look, you are just

wasting your time. This girl just hasn't got any learning in her at all, so take her out and put her into a job.' And so my father did and I started going to evening classes.

My mother would walk me up there, and then she would come and collect me there, or I would have to say it was from seven to eight, so they would take me there, and then I would have to be home at five past eight, so they would know where I was.

My father got me a job packing biscuits. It was a contract job: you didn't get weekly pay, you would be paid by the work you did. There were 30 of us altogether, sitting around benches. The benches were separated, and the men would come and pour a bucket of biscuits onto the bench, and we would take four biscuits on the left and four biscuits on the right, and put them together on this piece of paper, wrap them all up and put them away in a cardboard box and close the box and put them aside until we stacked up so many dozen; and then we would take this beautiful printed paper and then wrap around it, and with a bit of gum, close it all up, and that was it. We got paid for every dozen. I used to make seven dozen a day. That was a lot, because it was a lot of work, and I would sit at this bench, and I was good at that. There were two of us who were the best, very quick, and I remember we used to get £1 a week, but every now and again there would be this little extra accumulated and when it accumulated to 10 shillings the man would give it to us, which means that I earned one pound 10 shillings. This was on rare occasions, but it did happen, and I'll never forget one day when I got it and I put it in my father's hand. He was always waiting for it; he wasn't working, he couldn't get a job. He used to borrow money and go and get some food, and borrow money and go and get some more food, because when we left Hebron we had absolutely nothing. We lost everything, absolutely everything.

I don't know what happened to the goods. I haven't got a clue what happened to our furniture, what happened to our clothes: we lost the lot. When we were sitting in the truck ready to leave Hebron, and we were standing there almost ready, my mother gave this Arab boy ten shillings, and said to him: 'Please go and get me a pair of slippers.' And after a little while he came back and said: 'The shop's shut.' So he gave her back the money. There were good Arabs, there's no doubt about it; I mean, there were Arabs, who got certificates of merit for helping Jewish people, who were absolutely recognised for the good they'd done.

## MEMORIES OF MELBOURNE: EXTRACTS FROM AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Rachel Mestel*

*Ukrainian-born Rachel Brodetsky migrated to Britain with her parents and siblings in 1893. One of her brothers was the eminent Cambridge-educated mathematician Professor Selig Brodetsky of Leeds University, a Zionist activist who in 1939 became the first foreign-born Jew to head the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Rachel married the Reverend Solomon Zvi Mestel in January 1919. He had migrated to London in 1908 from his home near Brody in Austrian Galicia. He toiled in a sweatshop, studying during the evenings at the Whitechapel Public Library. By 1914 he had gained his BA in Hebrew and Aramaic as an external student of London University. He worked as a Hebrew teacher and was awarded an MA before being called to a ministerial position at the Richmond Hebrew Congregation in Surrey. He held similar posts in Bristol and in Nottingham before going to the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and eventually obtaining his rabbinical diploma. The following is an edited extract from Rachel Mestel's autobiography, entitled This Is My Life.*

In 1923 after a stay of nearly three years in Nottingham my husband, the Reverend Solomon Mestel, received a call to Australia at a salary of £850 a year, plus insurance, first class passage and accommodation. So with high hopes we left Nottingham with good wishes and some gifts from our friends, to stay with my family before leaving on 22 June. I confided in my sisters that I was anxious to be on board so that all farewells would be over.

We were fortunate in having a send-off by the Chief Rabbi, Dr J. H. Hertz, and one by the Students' Union of Jews' College, London. The invitation said 'At Home given by the Chief Rabbi to meet Rev. Brodie and Rev. Mestel prior to their departure for Australia'. (Reverend Israel Brodie was going to take up the position of minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, whose synagogue was situated in Bourke Street.) Among the guests were some members of my family and two important members of our new congregation. Another souvenir in my possession is the menu of the luncheon given by the students. In it it says 'Toast to the New Melbourne Ministers' by the chairman – the Chief Rabbi – and 'Toast to the New Rabbis' by Dr Buechler. Judging by the autographs some very well-known personalities of Jews' College and in the Jewish community participated. My late father figures on it too.

But there was one more farewell, arranged and given to us at home by one of my sisters. If my memory does not play tricks with me here, I believe we had the honour of having the future Mrs Israel Brodie, who was a school friend and colleague of ours. I still have in my possession the beautiful handmade linen tray cloth which she kindly gave me.

The journey was a new and exciting experience, for it was my first of foreign travel. The ship *Themistocles* was the very same on which the Chief Rabbi had made his tour to the Empire on behalf of the Memorial Council, so the chef and purser were acquainted with all necessary food arrangements – chickens, meat, etc. being supplied by Barnett's. It was like being on a floating luxurious hotel: evening dress for dinner, food and service perfect. There was the usual display of dress and jewels but it did not give me the impression of being overdone or as ostentatious as we find today.

The Australian passengers returning home were inclined to be more friendly and told us that it took the English, who were more class-conscious, all the journey to thaw. They initiated us into the Australian language – 'dinkum Aussie', 'bonza clobber', etc., etc. Children usually help to break the ice. But what was pleasing was that people seemed to accept a clergyman and his family more readily, although one man did not approve of hearing a baby crying at night – he evidently forgot that he was one once.

The first three weeks of our journey were pleasant after we found our sea-legs; the Bay of Biscay, usually dreaded by most people, behaved itself. There were the dances, fancy dress parties, concerts by crew and passengers, deck games and all the usual fun of a sea cruise, including boat-drill. One must not omit the ceremony of crossing the Equator. First class passengers were taken round the ship and into the engine room.

The children's fancy dress party stands out for the reason that our daughter Jessica was presented with the prize for being the most popular child on board. With the help of some passengers I concocted a costume and dressed her up as a Japanese girl or 'Geisha'. With my dressing gown, flowers in her hair, boot polish on her eyes to render them Japanese-looking, fan and sunshade, she tripped in and immediately won all hearts. She was voted as the best.

When ships come into port, there is always great excitement and the usual break from sea-life, especially if the vessel stays long enough for people to disembark. But the *Themistocles* stayed only a few hours at Tenerife, which to me was a revelation. Natives began to come on board with all the noise imaginable, trying to sell us souvenirs at fancy prices; but the seasoned travellers gave us the benefit of their experience. Always offer a fraction of the price and wait, they advised. Well, when the time arrived to leave, two hand-embroidered bedspreads of Madeira work were pushed on us for 30 shillings instead of £5! How pleased I was. They were to adorn our beds in our home and still do.

When the ship docked at Cape Town we were met by my husband's uncle and

cousin who took us to their home where we were warmly welcomed for a few days. And a good thing too, for the noise of the coal being loaded would have disturbed my children's sleep. The sight of Table Mountain with its 'table cloth' impressed us very much, but except for the abundance of good help obtained in the house – two or three servants which left so much leisure for the housewife – I don't think I would have cared to make my home there.

Equipped with real ostrich feathers, which were still in fashion though gradually dying out and of which I sent one to my mother, we returned to the ship to continue our journey for about another three weeks.

Little did we all dream what was in store for us; for in the words of the captain in the Australian press, 'Heavy gales and mountainous seas, considered to have been the worst experienced in the Indian Ocean for many years, drove the Aberdeen Line "Themistocles" many miles out of her course from Cape Town to Albany. Anxious for the safety of the ship and passengers the Captain had a sleepless time and remained continuously on deck for almost six days.'

My little daughter was thrown against iron machinery on deck, which necessitated a stitch on the eyebrow. The 'roaring forties', with waves 60 feet high reaching the bridge, were terrifying, but a joke with us now in retrospect.

Decks were forbidden to us for fear of our being thrown down as some had been, sustaining bruises. Everyone felt so sick and prostrate that all one could see were passengers lying stretched out on the side decks covered with blankets and taking sips from the sauce bottle, for it was whispered among the crew that the contents were a good antidote. (Some of our neighbours included the actress Irene Vanbrugh and her company who were now prevented from rehearsals). We dreaded going into meals in the dining room for things had sometimes been flung about, and also sickness would come on. Going to sleep in the cabin was the worst ordeal of all, especially with portholes closed. Looking after oneself was difficult enough under these circumstances but having two young children to bath and feed, do their washing and ironing, clothe them in winter-wear to be got out of the hold, made it worse. Curiously enough, children are not seasick as a rule.

So a comprehensive sports program for the passengers could not be carried out and there was not much fun. Conditions improved when crossing the Great Australian Bight, but Jessica became ill and was visited by the ship's doctor, who told us that she might have to be left in port if she did not improve. Great was our relief when she recovered and was able to go out on deck, receiving a beautiful doll from an English passenger. Before this mishap, it had heartened us when we received a radio message – 'Welcome to Australia' – from Rabbi D. I. Freedman of Perth. This was the beginning of the Australian brand of hospitality; those who have experienced it know what it means.

My husband got busy composing his sermon on the 'Corona' typewriter which he had purchased. Somebody once asked him who his secretary was, to which he replied that she was his wife. When he had an inspiration, he would ask me

to sit down and write to his dictation, which I didn't mind except that I preferred evenings, not mornings, especially Fridays. Very often I was his congregation or audience too, for he would ask me to listen to his sermon, speech or address. Even before I was engaged I was asked to read and offer my opinion on his sermons for the coming New Year and Day of Atonement.

However, we must return to the main topic. As we neared Melbourne we put on formal clothes, my husband in his long clerical coat and top hat, wearing a longer beard now (my joke to my children later on was that his beard grew longer every time he received a call), and my children and I in our best, for we were coming to a new land and people unknown to us. One incident made me furious. An Australian passenger, who had worn a different evening dress each night, approached me and asked whether I would do her a favour. 'Well,' I answered, 'If I can, I shall be only too pleased.' She had apparently bought many clothes and furs in Paris and wanted me to wear these costly furs while going through the Customs. 'Oh', I said, 'I will do anything for anybody if I can, but not this.' I dislike dishonesty and I told her my face would give me away. Oh why, oh why, couldn't she pay the duty if she could afford to buy these costly articles.

## Arrival

On 1 August having docked in Port Phillip Bay, we disembarked at Melbourne, on a sunny day in winter. The air was crisp and the sky high, blue and clear. We were given an overwhelming welcome, being met on board by a large representative body of men and women, including the clergy, presented with a bouquet and interviewed and photographed by the Jewish and non-Jewish press, which referred to my husband as another 'pillar of the Jewish Church', 'a noted Hebrew scholar'. Afterwards we were whisked by car to a furnished flat rented at five guineas per week – which struck me as rather a lot – where the kitchen was complete with kosher pots and pans, cutlery, etc., and food and drinks of all sorts, not forgetting a large turkey (I had never tasted turkey before), all prepared by the ladies. There was enough food to last for some time, until I felt at home, so I was informed. I was even provided with a girl from downstairs, to come and dust for one hour each day at a wage of one shilling.

Mention must be made of the unique iced cake in the shape of a large Bible given by a sweet old soul, Mr Yoffe. There was enough with which to welcome all callers from any congregation who came to welcome us. And so it was for weeks that interviewers would visit us and make their contribution to the Jewish press in the large cities. One article amused me by even describing the colour of my eyes, etc., which was a little embarrassing. I wish I had not destroyed some of these items, for how interesting they would be now.

There were warm letters of welcome from every organisation in Melbourne and elsewhere, to which I replied. The highlight of it all was the induction a week later. Never shall I forget how I was escorted into the ladies' gallery by the wives

of the clergy and saw the synagogue filled to capacity. I felt, with all due respect to Her Majesty the Queen, like she must have felt on her Coronation. There was a combined mixed choir from the Melbourne and St Kilda Hebrew congregations, with three soloists and an organist. I was so moved by everything that I vowed there and then to dedicate myself to my husband's community. And my husband, I am pleased to say, rose to the occasion. The words of the text he chose, 'Not to forget the rock from whence you were hewn nor the whole of the pit whence you were dug', and which were often quoted afterwards, left such an indelible impression on me that I even quoted them to my grandson on his Barmitzvah celebration.

Reports of my husband's installation and his reception at the vast St Kilda Town Hall appeared in all the press. There had been one, I recall, at the Hotel Windsor nearer to our synagogue too; my husband was referred to as a man of 'high character' and 'gifted to train their children in the spirit of Judaism'. The retiring rabbi of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, Dr Joseph Abrahams, brother of the distinguished scholar Israel Abrahams of Cambridge when my brother [Selig Brodetsky] was in residence there, said that Rabbi Mestel already stood high in the estimation of his congregation. My husband in his reply said amongst other things 'that he had been welcomed in Australia like a prince', and concluded with 'Be true to the past, work in the present and realise the responsibilities of the future'. I was taken aback when I was asked to respond on my own behalf. However, when all the welcomes, public and private, were over, our president said to my husband: *Veni, vidi, vici* ('I came, I saw, I conquered'), which I have always quoted.

Things were a little strange at first – as might be expected. But the people were warm and friendly; in fact, they would have organised my life and run my home if needs be. It required infinite tact to keep up the dignity of the position which was required. The standard of living was higher than in England, so there was no poverty and a little more refinement in the lower classes (if I can use that term), for I was informed by one tradesman that 'Jack was as good as his master'. I sometimes thought he seemed better than his master.

In England today people do not care how a minister and his family live or dress so long as he carries out his duties, for he is essentially a 'paid official'. I soon discovered that in this part of the world it was not so. Everything had to be perfection – my husband was equipped with a handsome robe and a satin one for the High Holydays which were approaching. No price was too high; and in subsequent years when he wore them for services in England, they looked so flashy side by side with those cotton ones worn by others.

Religion, as in America today – and it is fast becoming so in England too – was more social than anything else. Congregations expected more sex-appeal, charm, oratory and command of the social graces than learning. And what made it more difficult was that the clergy and their congregations came into closer contact than in England. Each minister has his own sphere of activity.

I was advised by a warden to keep away from the butcher and the grocery

store in what seemed effectively a small ghetto and order everything by phone. So during our eight years' stay I never once went inside these shops. Sometimes it wasn't very satisfactory, as when I once ordered three chops. I was sent such that each one was large enough to feed a whole family. But I took all this in my stride, even when I had to pay twice for the same chicken for the fellow who denied that I had paid him to hand over to the woman who supplied them. It would only cause tittle-tattle I thought. I learnt that there are more important things in life than this.

The choosing of fish at first proved puzzling, for they were so entirely different from those I had been used to; and I hope I do not offend any Australian reader – for I know how they feel about such things – when I say that they did not strike me as good. I hadn't the slightest idea of the names, so I asked for those with fins and scales.

Everything appeared so much dearer to me and I wondered how we would manage, especially as the other clergy were much more prosperous. I was taken aback when I came across a dress exactly like the one I had bought in London's Oxford Street for £5 marked at £25 sale price!

My husband came to the decision that nothing but the best was required, so he took extra trouble with the preparation of his sermons, speeches, lectures, etc., for as the Sabbath ended, he would choose a text for the following Sabbath, and away would his typewriter click. When I consider how at 22 years of age he did not know one word of English, and come across while dusting all the classics in his library, which he studied for style, and how he delivered his sermons without reading them, I think it was truly marvellous.

With hearts brimming over with enthusiasm for our work and the future, we attended the first function of our congregation. It was a Barmitzvah and the celebrations took place at a first-class hotel. Can anybody imagine our shock when 'oyster soup' was served to the minister of the most Orthodox congregation of the three in Melbourne and his wife? What were we to do? Of course we partook of nothing except bread, almonds and a soft drink. But the most embarrassing part was to address the Barmitzvah boy – I cannot for the life of me recall what my husband said – and *bench* [recite the blessing].

A new experience for us, coming from England, was the number of intermarriages. A proselyte was something I had never met before and I couldn't understand how it was possible to be made a Jew. One had to be born one. I believe the position in England today has become what it was then in Australia.

Two important problems had to be solved at this stage. The first was buying a house, which we did [at Simpson Street, East Melbourne], the cost being £5,000, which seemed such a vast sum then. But it was one which I liked immensely – a ten-roomed villa standing at the corner of two wide roads with a garden in the centre. When I visit one of my daughters there stands a bungalow at the corner of a similar road which carries my mind back to those days. There were two bathrooms

and toilets and I appreciated having no stairs to run up and down, especially when anybody was sick. The peach and nectarine trees thrilled me too, and there were wire windows and doors to keep out the flies. Even in those comfortable parts of the globe there were no refrigerators or washing machines yet, but troughs with taps for washing. Food was kept in ice chests (cost eight guineas) for which ice was delivered everyday for one shilling. But I had to be patient and wait a few months to take possession of the house as the owners were engaged in building a new house for themselves.

The other job was to become naturalised. Ever since we were married we were eager to do this, for in line with English law at that time I as a woman lost my British nationality upon marriage with a foreigner to become a Pole, my husband being registered as such in July 1919. Until then he had been an enemy alien on account of his birth in Galicia, Austria, and had for a short time been interned. It was strange to me to have to report any change of address or obtain permission for both of us to spend a weekend at Bristol or sleep at my parents' home in Stamford Hill, and so forth. The last entry I see in the Identity Book – which I have preserved as a piece of curiosity for my children – is 11 Belgrave Square, Nottingham.

My husband had paid many a visit to his solicitor about the matter, when one day he came across a notice in the *London Jewish Chronicle* saying that the issue of a naturalisation certificate could be expedited. So he handed over his £8 but never heard any more from the rogue.

But in Melbourne we obtained this naturalised status without much difficulty. It gave me much satisfaction to be once again a British subject with all its advantages; and incidentally I must add that I was able to record my vote, the suffrage having been granted to women after the war.

Before long the High Holy Days were upon us with all the work which falls upon the clergy. But in addition to this my husband's stomach trouble flared up again. It was most worrying and distressing for me to be informed by the women worshippers that he had gone out. I learnt from him that he had vomited. However, we had to wait till all was over so that we could seek the advice of a specialist, accompanied by his friend and colleague Rabbi Brodie. My heart sank when after the usual X-rays and tests the physician diagnosed a gastric ulcer and strongly urged an operation before it might become perforated and necessitate an emergency one to save his life.

With the help of some of our honorary officers, the best surgeon, Mr Devine, was engaged – his usual fee being £300 or so, if I remember correctly. But there was a nice custom of charging clergy lower medical (and also school) fees, so he in fact charged a fraction. So my husband entered Mount St Euins Hospital – a private nursing home run by nuns, where he remained for almost ten weeks. It cost about £100, which I had no hesitation in paying so long as he received the best medical attention.

Need I say what an ordeal I went through. For five hours he was in the operating

theatre while I was comforted and consoled by various members and friends. In all fairness I must say everybody was kindness itself. And when at last the surgeon emerged from the scene of operation, he informed me (supported by friends) that everything was as well as could be expected; and in addition he said that the ulcer would never grow again for with the aid of a diagram, which I still cling to, he showed that he had cut away part of the stomach and made a new opening. He assured me too that it was not malignant.

Gradually my husband got over the awful after-effects of the operation with internal and external stitches, and was making a good recovery with the aid of my chicken soup which I brought daily from the new flat that we had moved into. Mr Yoffe accompanied me in my search for a little flat near the sea where he could convalesce after his discharge.

But a terrible thing happened. While my husband was paying a visit to the bathroom unaccompanied, he caught a very bad chill (it can blow in Melbourne although the sun shines so much) and became dangerously ill with pneumonia and pleurisy, running a temperature of 105° F. The news was supplied to me by a very dear friend and *landsleit* of my parents, Ashkanasy by name, who had befriended us on our arrival. The sister (or Mother Superior rather) had evidently got in touch with this good lady and asked her to use her tact to keep me away and say that he was not ready to leave. Never shall I forget how she behaved to me and came to my flat to persuade me to come away with my two young children and maid and stay with her. What friendship!

Of course, I immediately guessed that something was wrong and thought it was the end. I was too terrified to pay a visit to my husband and lay prostrate on the couch until, after administering a stimulant, she and Rabbi Brodie pushed me into a taxi which was to take me to the nursing home where my husband had been asking for me. I looked so pallid that my friend told me to rub my cheeks to put some colour into them.

Although the crisis was passing, the fluid produced by the pleurisy would not dry up, so it was necessary to remove a rib or two to drain the pus which was poisoning the system. This was agreed to, but without an anaesthetic, for my husband said he was too weak to stand one. So a second operation was performed and a tube inserted in the lump to keep the wound open. The reader can well imagine what a state of panic I was in, fearing that anything could happen, for before I rang up each morning to enquire about the night he had had, I had to take a drink of brandy to strengthen my beating heart.

My husband told me some time afterwards how he prayed to pull through for the sake of his children and that his will to live helped him. Gradually he improved but would have remained more than ten weeks there if he had not implored the doctor to allow him to go home since his children would be near him and his library would help him to recover more quickly.

## Settling in

So with the help of our committee an effort was made to move into our own house and set up the furniture which we had brought with us. They even paid for additional furniture and fittings, consisting of a beautiful carpet for the study, carpets in the halls, a hide leather suite and a few other items which came to £90. They also wanted to pay all the doctor's bills but I insisted on paying one. The local press was impressed with the fact that the pantechnicon came all the way from Nottingham. Great then was my relief when I saw my husband back once again amongst us, for pity I had in abundance. Everybody was sorry for me: 'A stranger in a strange land', some said. But it was not yet the end, for a nurse had to come daily to sterilise the tube and insert it again which took 35 shillings of our salary besides £100 for nursing and alcohol to keep his heart going. But nothing like this worried me so long as my husband was 'out of the wood'.

Something must now be said about the maid problem. They were fewer, more highly paid and, with one or two exceptions, more troublesome than in England. They sometimes dressed better than the mistress, so it was difficult to distinguish who was who. I remember one I had who told me she paid 10s 6d for a pair of pure silk stockings which were in vogue then, and which I couldn't afford.

But what worried me most was that they wanted every night off, which was not possible in my case for many of my duties lay outside. I learned to my cost that there were 'worse troubles in life' – as I had been told in Nottingham and disregarded at the time.

Some of the advertisements in the newspapers used to amuse me. 'Wanted, a maid, no cooking or washing, daily help kept, small family, good wages, liberal outings.' I wondered what was left for the maid to do.

Sometimes they would ask to see your house and tell you that either it, or your family, was too large. One of my congregants once told me that she said to one maid: 'Would you like me to drown some?' As a rule they did not stay long, which caused me much irritation, for by the time I had given them a lesson on our religion and training in the *kashrus* of a Jewish home and felt I could then give my mind to other things, off they would go, sometimes while you were entertaining a visitor.

As for uniform, one dared not expect that for fear they would leave. One was thankful to have someone responsible to leave your children with. I overlooked it if the work was not satisfactory: I simply helped with it.

But there was one maid named Lily who stands out always as one of the best. She was the sort one liked to have around, quiet, refined and efficient, who stayed with us for many months and knew much about a Jewish home, for she would answer questions about *minyan*, etc. to telephone enquirers and would ask 'what time Shabbos was' in order to lay the table. I was amused, on meeting her mother, to hear that when she visited her own home she would wash up meat and

milk dishes separately. When she left, for a change of scene, my friends advised me to employ a nurse/housemaid to attend to the children and to do light duties, and a charwoman to do the rough work. The latter were easy to get although they were dear at ten shillings a day as against sixpence an hour in England. In this arrangement with two on my 'staff', I worked hard myself, for when Passover was approaching I found myself doing the spring-cleaning.

But what made me furious one day was when I served them with lunch. It was fried whiting, I remember, which was a better and a dearer fish than its counterpart in England – 1s 6d each – with chips, peas and rice pudding. And when I went into the kitchen, the talking ceasing (for I was told that no matter how good you are to them, the conversation always centres round 'she') I observed that the fish was not eaten, so on asking why, the charwoman answered that she was taking it home for her dog. Well, I soon discovered that one 'necessary evil' was better than two.

I noticed that one maid simply dumped her chicken portion for dinner into the dustbin if it was giblets. Another I employed was treated with the greatest care and consideration, even being given a birthday present during the first fortnight of her stay, and immediately afterwards my heart fell when she came and informed us that she would have to leave us as her grandmother was ill. I soon came to the conclusion that this sort of thing was a good excuse for leaving. Perhaps they missed bacon, my husband thought. Several of my committee, when on a visit to my husband, said that I was better to my maid than to myself which I know was true, for I always rose earlier, made tea and knocked at her door saying 'your tea is ready' – this even when I was expecting a baby!

After my husband's convalescence he was able to resume his manifold duties to a certain extent, until I caught sight of him taking his temperature and then I knew all was not well, for often he would go to the doctor to have his wound probed as it was evident that pus was forming again. Blowing exercises were prescribed to inflate the lung. This would happen several times in the course of the year and I knew that my husband was still not out of the wood.

One night I sat down and wrote to my family a letter of 16 pages about everything, for I had often heard my father say that there was no hurry to tell people bad news. After finishing it I remembered nothing till I was picked up in the bathroom where I had fallen into a faint. Some time later, when my husband had cause to visit a sick member in the hospital where he had been a patient, the mother superior jokingly remarked: 'There was no place for you at the throne of Abraham'.

Soon an endless round of duties and functions began again for us: card parties in which I was not very interested and declined to be taught; charity balls, 'at homes', and my own receptions every first Saturday in the month, not counting the 26 weddings a year; barmitzvahs, *shivas* (which sometimes turned into social functions), youth work, meetings, etc.

What made things a little easier was to be driven to such venues by friends and members in their car. Of course, a car and chauffeur was always sent to convey us to a wedding at which my husband officiated. I remember that on one occasion when I was just getting over a confinement, the wedding breakfast was held up while I was driven home to feed my new-born baby.

Funerals and *shivahs* were most painful for me to attend. I was almost scared and found it an ordeal to face the bereaved, especially when children were involved – death being so final. If you omitted to say: ‘I wish you long life’ or expressions like ‘Well over the Fast’, which I dislike, then you made an enemy for life, and your children’s bread and butter was in danger.

We knew many people’s sorrows and troubles about with which they trusted us, just as we seek our family doctor for our physical ailments. Before the advent of marriage guidance councils, we were even called upon to settle love affairs, and confronted with intimate sexual questions which were sometimes most embarrassing for a young minister’s wife. I can recall now one such novel experience which brought a blush to my cheeks.

My husband was most happy to help to bring two people together and prevent a broken marriage for the sake of the children. How he ran backwards and forwards one *Erev Yom Kippur*, when a man refused to forgive his wife who had confessed about a lapse on board a ship. My husband was never too busy even in the middle of preparing sermons or speeches. Sometimes people would say something which hurt. What I did not like was when I was told that I was paid to be *frum*!

The women did valuable work and raised large sums of money for charity at the Annual Ball at St Kilda Town Hall. What always amazed me was how women who did little work at home would come and work like Trojans, some of course to be in the limelight. I would go along and give my help by donating some cake or biscuits and help to cut up the many loaves of bread and make sandwiches. Perhaps that is why I now prefer to do others’ jobs, even harder than this one, when I think of all the sandwiches I have prepared for parties, receptions, lunches, etc., during my life, not forgetting my school lunches.

A very nice gesture which I recall was that the minister’s wife was included with the special ladies to receive a posy. But here is another thing I disliked – the detailed description in the press of what the women wore. I am afraid I could not afford to wear a new dress for each function. Besides, my early upbringing in economy would prevail. I was sensitive and self-conscious and not fond of being noticed. So here was I always in the public eye! But I fought this complex. When I listened to some women airing their opinions confidently in ordinary and sometimes broken English, I would say to myself: ‘If I am not better than somebody else, I am as good.’ This helped me to gain more confidence and assurance over the years.

We often had visitors, especially on Friday nights, *seder* nights and festivals. I once put up an Orthodox rabbi while on his way to take up a position in Sydney, but confess I was startled when he asked me whether his collar was clean enough!

Another guest was a school friend and her husband and two children on their way to Sydney too; the man was headmaster of a Hebrew school. One man rang me up one day and was surprised that I was the rabbi's wife for he said I spoke such good English. Did he expect me to wear a *sheitel* [wig] and have a *shlumper* [perhaps limp]? So, for that reason alone, my home was always ready to welcome anybody. A member of another congregation visited us one *Yom Tov* because, he explained, he wanted to recapture the festival spirit.

I had several girls from the Central Foundation School whom I was thrilled to have, for I can understand now how and why *landsleit* cling together in a strange land. One was in love with my pancakes and gefilte fish on Passover and adorned my table and piano with embroidered cloths; and the other was a very frequent visitor until she left to take up a reporter's job in Sydney.

I am one of those who believe that visiting one's flock can do an enormous amount of good, for it brings a minister into the homes of people and in closer contact with the individual, thereby gaining people's full confidence. Infinite tact is essential always. But where could one find the time to visit all? Some demanded many more visits than others. And should you fail to visit an important member then he becomes your enemy for life. We visited poor and rich. Somebody was once overheard to say in synagogue that a minister only works one day in the year! There was always something going on and we were expected to be there.

And what about our own family life with its worries and sicknesses and a household to be looked after? Our home, as I said, had to be always ready and the children properly brought up. No one would be more severe in their criticism than the public if the minister's wife failed in any of these her duties. I have never forgotten how we rushed home by bus and on foot from one visit to a member when our maid informed us, by phone, that our baby was crying so much and she was unable to do anything about it. It was fortunate that we were both too young to suffer a heart attack.

'At homes' were held once a month. The difficult part was that not a bit of kosher cake or biscuits could be bought anywhere in Melbourne. So this entailed much baking at home, usually a whole week beforehand. I would study every recipe book and newspapers (Jewish recipes were unpublished as yet) for new ideas, and peep into non-Jewish pastry shops to give my own a professional look with the help of icing, paper cases and all sorts of gadgets. But my chocolate éclairs and cream buns took pride of place, so much so that several women were not content to have my recipe but wanted me to give them a practical demonstration in my kitchen, which I did one day.

My maid and I worked hard to produce a good show of fancy cakes and biscuits of every description, sandwiches garnished in the Australian way, ice-cold soft drinks, chocolates and so on. Everybody voted them a great success socially, of course, too – for my visitors were not limited to our members but friends from the other leading congregations were welcomed. But what put a cold douche over me

was that my maid overheard somebody say when leaving: 'She didn't make them, she bought them'! Such are the little pricks one has to endure and the minister's wife comes in for a fair share of them.

Because of the large number of intermarriages then taking place in this continent, one of the cleverest and kindest women, Mrs Ashkanasy, set her heart on combatting this scourge by building a communal hall where young Jewish boys and girls could meet in a Jewish atmosphere. The Judaeen League of Victoria aimed to uphold traditional Judaism, advance the Zionist movement, and to strive for the unity, vigour, goodwill and prosperity of the Jewish people of Victoria – very noble I am sure. Its affiliates were the Judaeen Club, the Society of Judaeans, the Associated Judaeen Athletic Club, the Young Judaeen Zionist Society, the Jewish Literary and Social Club, and the Victorian Zionist Society.

At the head of all this was a brilliant young man named Maurice Ashkanasy, later a QC and one of the leading personalities in Australia. I was asked to become honorary treasurer of the fundraising bazaar and soon almost everybody was getting enthusiastic about it. Every Sunday my husband and I would make our way to the clubs in the 'ghetto' of Carlton, for I was happy in the company of youth with its absence of intrigue. There were some people, I am sorry to say, who were not keen on the idea of a bazaar just because it did not emanate from another quarter. Sometimes I was pressed to go on the platform and ask the youngsters to put forth every effort to make this function a huge success.

When I finished my duties in the morning and left my two children safely with the maid, a young girl named Heather (the wife of Maurice Ashkanasy) called for me in her car and took me to various leading stores to collect gifts and money: and very generous they were. Sometimes the president, Mrs Ashkanasy, would ask me to accompany her. When at last the time arrived, great enthusiasm prevailed during the two days. The opening ceremony was performed by Dr Abrahams and supported by the Reverend Danglow of St Kilda and my husband, who said that 'a communal hall was next in importance to a synagogue'.

In addition to the sale of goods, money was raised by a Palais de Dance, refreshment stall and side shows. Each evening a concert was held and exhibitions of dancing were given. Photographs and names of the organisers with a description of the bazaar and carnival appeared in several of the Melbourne papers: 'The success of the Bazaar was due to the energetic work of the President, Mrs M. Ashkanasy, with whom were associated Mrs S. Mestel, Hon. Treasurer, and Mr & Mrs I. Simmons, Joint Hon. Secretaries'. I have a photograph of St Kilda Town Hall as it looked then, the organisers holding bouquets and wearing badges of office and all the women workers wearing dainty white aprons. How it brings back happy memories.

Needless to say, it was a huge success, and a large sum was raised of which it was agreed that a certain amount be subscribed to the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society of which I was a member, besides several other charitable societies to

which my husband and I belonged. At this stage I was made a life member of the Benevolent Society and am proud to have the certificate in my possession.

### **Reverend Mestel's duties**

Let us now return to some of my husband's duties. As co-director of Hebrew education in the Jewish community he took a very active part in trying to raise the standard, and spent a good deal of time at the classes under the Melbourne United Jewish Education Board; he was always fully aware that, the 'child being father to the man', the pupils were the future Jews, and that very often too, parents were brought back to Judaism through their children. He had a love and a flair for teaching, as borne out by testimonials, and he always endeavoured to arouse in his older pupils through history and other means, a Jewish consciousness which would accompany them through life, and often, I may say, there was evidence of his success. He was honorary vice-president of the Australian Zionist Federation, he being of course a keen Zionist.

My husband's greatest love was teaching. And every teacher knows the difficulty of imparting Hebrew to tired children at the end of a school day. Discipline is more difficult partly due to the parent-teacher relationship, and the teaching of religion, especially, brings bewilderment to children.

Now, it occurred to my husband that if he could gain permission from the headmasters of the public schools in Melbourne to come along and teach the Jewish boys whilst the rest were receiving instruction in New Testament as is done today (my grandson told me that is being done in the City of London School) it would improve matters. So with the approval of his congregation's honorary officers he found no difficulty in convincing the headmaster of the Melbourne Grammar School where work soon started; he also laid his plan before the Church of England School and also the Presbyterian Ladies' College (which two of my little daughters attended) who readily agreed, when one day one of his colleagues went in and announced that he did not agree, nor approve! This did great harm to the whole project, yet on 20 July 1925, my husband had received the following letter from Casper J. Perlstein, secretary of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation: Reverend and Dear Sir, I am directed by the President, Mr. L. Morris, to inform you that, at a meeting of the Board of Management, held on 1st instant, a resolution of congratulation was accorded to you for your success in maturing your scheme, for the teaching of Hebrew & Religion in the Secular School.'

My husband was a member of the Beth Din. He supervised baking of *matzas*. As far as I can remember there were matters on the Beth Din which caused some disagreement; for instance my husband did not think it was right for the butcher shop to be open on Sabbath for people to purchase meat. The hot weather was but a poor excuse, for did not most people possess ice chests? Being one who had the courage of his convictions he never failed to raise his voice in the cause of truth and justice when necessary. Here there was no room for politics or diplomacy or

popularity. Another difficult position arose when the question of making proselytes came up, for according to the rules of his own congregation, he was not allowed to do so. What was he to do?

Like teaching generally, a minister's work can be a great strain on the nervous system, although people may not be aware of it; for during 52 weeks of the year, except for a fortnight's holiday, he belongs to his congregation. Very little time is left for recreation, hobbies, study or working for higher degrees (that of D.Litt. was once his aim). His only relaxation was a game of chess, although sometimes I failed to see what rest one got out of it.

My husband looked forward to his visits to the Freemasons – the Duke of Sussex Lodge at first and then the King David Lodge which was formed later and of which he was a chaplain. Wild horses couldn't get any information out of him as to what was done there. I knew this and only probed for fun. Even Delilah wouldn't be able to extract this secret from a Mason. What I gathered, though, was that Freemasonry was a great institution if its members lived up to its principles and ideals. When I look at a photograph of my husband dressed in his Masonic regalia, apron, gloves, etc. I am reminded too how my husband's beard grew longer with each call to a new congregation.

### **Tragedy and joy**

On 1 August 1924, exactly one year to the day after our arrival in Melbourne, our beloved little son, aged two and a half years, passed away. True, he had been liable to colds and wheeziness in the changeable climate, where the sunshine was inclined to be deceptive, but little did I dream that death could grasp so quickly. He received all the attention needed even though I was busy with bazaars, etc., but I believe the fatal cold took hold of him when he came running to the door at the ring of a visitor's bell, my maid having left me. He was put to bed and received the treatment then prevalent: a cotton wool jacket sandwiched with a little dry mustard worn round the chest and gradually removed piece by piece when the cold had disappeared. But in the light of modern experience he might have been saved had we acted more quickly. At midnight on that fateful day, whilst my husband and little daughter were asleep, he suddenly took a bad turn and became delirious singing out the *Hatikvah* and *Adon Olam* (the previous Sabbath he had made his first visit to the synagogue). I shall not attempt to describe the shock I received. I had not witnessed anything like this before. But this was the moment to act, and at once. Not wishing to alarm my husband I roused him gently and immediately phoned a doctor whose number I remembered because I had had occasion that very day to make enquiries about his wife. He came immediately, prepared me for the worst and administered hot mustard poultices and sent my husband out to get a medicine, saying that our son might rally. But by five o'clock the end came because of congestion of the lungs. That experience will remain with me until I leave this earth.

As I write after many years have elapsed, the tears still fill my eyes for I can still see his staring eyes. Never shall I forget the grief and pain his father and I both experienced. I felt as if a part of me, a limb, had been wrenched, literally, from my body. My world went to pieces. And this was my sacrifice I made to stem intermarriage. Rabbi Brodie officiated at the funeral, and gave an address, I believe.

Of course, the news of my child's death spread all over Melbourne and it goes without saying that telegrams, letters and visitors arrived during the week of mourning, which to be candid now, made me personally feel worse. I prefer to grieve in solitude. One has to come to terms with life through one's own efforts. When one is suffering from such a blow, it often appears that the whole world is happy and gay and one feels that the sun ought not to shine. I did not wear any special outward mourning as was the custom then. Today one hardly sees any deep mourning worn for long; like everything else it has changed. People were more formal and conventional. Deep mourning was worn for six months and then half mourning. Widows wore weeds or veils. Crêpe bands are not seen any more. But I heard my mother say that wearing black was not particularly Jewish; besides, I believe it is not customary to wear anything new during the first 30 days following a death.

I did not need any outward reminder of my mourning. It followed me about everywhere – this cruel stroke of fate. People were extremely kind to me. Almost every Sunday someone or other would ring us up and take us for a day's motoring to Frankston, I remember, which was a favourite haunt of most people. I can also recall being driven to the Dandenong Ranges – Sassafras comes to mind – along a road looking down into a deep creek. But all this was of not much avail for I grieved everywhere. Only time, I was told, would soften it. I took to knitting. My husband tried to console me by saying that our son would come back in another form. Neighbours from afar offered their sympathy and told me how they used to admire our two children out with the maid – one with dark curls and the other auburn. Our previous maids came to register their sympathy too but all this did not help much. I had to change my pattern of living and look forward to replacing the lost one. Functions, weddings, parties and so on held no attraction for me now. In fact I did not care to meet people, and I believe that after three months there were heard some murmurings and grumblings: 'It is time Mrs Mestel stopped mourning.' I lost all interest in things which once thrilled me. I did not have the heart to have a *succah* constructed. But in Australia it is a 'must' to go round visiting on Succoth, the weather being so favourable. So I had one erected, canvas walls and a sliding roof, but imagine our dismay when we received a notice from the local council, who had probably been informed by someone nearby, that we were to remove the structure because of the risk of fire. However, after a special plea, we were allowed to keep it up for the duration of the festival.

I did begin to attend a meeting or so to which I took my daughter, for she too

missed her brother; and what explanation could we offer her? We decided therefore to send her to school – the Presbyterian Ladies' College, a fine school. The fees were reduced for children of clergy. It was not the thing to send them to the State School. We arranged, too, for her to start music lessons and encouraged her to have a little girl home to play with her.

I cannot explain the following so it will always remain a mystery to me and I must leave the explanation to experts. But the incident is worth mentioning. Before we left Nottingham for Australia, being in a happy mood, I paid a visit to a woman who professed to read your hand. She told me that I was to go on a long journey and that there would be a death in the family! Becoming more curious, I pressed my husband to pay a visit to her too for she was not aware of our relationship; and imagine my surprise when she foretold the same thing to him! It thus makes you wonder whether there is anything in the art of foretelling the future.

When I discovered that I was to have another baby in due course life became a little more bearable. I see from my records that I accompanied my husband to the 'Unveiling and Consecration of the Memorial to the Victorian Jewish Soldiers who paid the supreme sacrifice in the Great War'. This took place on 14 December 1924 and Melbourne's four ministers officiated. My husband's name figures in the service: 'Psalm 16, Mincha service, Rev. S. Mestel M.A.' The Memorial was unveiled by Sir John Monash.

Preparations for the coming event in the family had to be made, which once again gave my life a sense of purpose. What was rather flattering was that one of my maids, Lily, asked if she could come back and work for me again as she had come to the conclusion that I had treated her as a companion in the home and not merely a servant. I felt it a compliment in Australia and useful too as she did not need any schooling except that I gave her some instruction in kosher cookery so that, with the supervision of my husband, she would be able to look after my family.

I was to go into a nursing home in St Kilda for three weeks (it was expected in our position) and the doctor I was sent to was a specialist for the whole of Australasia, I was informed by everybody. He gave his patients medical attention before and after the event for about a year in all and his fee was 75 guineas. He sent in a bill of 12 guineas for us! But I must say here and now that we didn't get hormones, milk, vitamins, etc., and all the prenatal care given now in clinics and hospitals. Naturally I longed for another son and this sometimes brought forth doubts. Right up to the birth, I studied all signs and symptoms.

During the short but treacherous winter, my daughter caught a cold which developed into whooping cough just before the birth of my baby was due. It was most distressing to see and worrying, too, for fear that the newborn might become infected. I had never witnessed the illness before, and although my friends assured me that it wasn't dangerous, every time Jessica had a spasm I was terrified for fear she would choke. All sorts of queer remedies were offered, such as a garlic

concoction, a visit to the gas works, injections, etc., and to give my husband all the sleep which he needed so much I removed her to another room where I sat up with my feet resting on the cot to watch her and help her right through the night.

When my doctor heard of this he suggested that my husband and I should take it in turns to sit up, for he said I needed my strength too. How fortunate mothers are today, for doctors have discovered that prevention is better than cure. And so the young baby receives injections against diphtheria, which once carried off many, and against whooping cough and polio.

At last the time arrived for me to leave by taxi for the nursing home. And no sooner was the house left unoccupied (the maid had gone home) than one of my previous maids, who had only been with me a short time, broke in and helped herself to a meal of bananas, and took money out of the Jewish National Fund box which she opened with a tin opener. She was caught by the initials on my pair of gloves which she had taken and was convicted, Lily my maid having to go to court and to give evidence.

This amusing incident took place while I gave birth to a baby girl which I confess brought me slight disappointment but soon turned into joy when I beheld what a sweet little thing she was. The name we chose for her was Nechama (meaning consolation in Hebrew), Norma in English, and what a change she brought me! It is astonishing what a baby can do. It reminds me of a little story my mother once told me when I was a young girl. A childless but very rich couple once passing by caught sight of another couple through a window, laughing and playing with their baby and evidently deriving immense pleasure. So they decided to return home and do the same with their money. But, alas, they failed.

Australians always did things on a large scale. The telegrams, letters, visits, and presents were numerous. But one secret I must let my reader into is that my husband one morning visited me and presented me with a book he bought, called *Sex at Choice*, which I studied. One day I taxed my doctor about whether it [gender selection] was possible, to which he replied that if it were so, how many rich people would give everything to have a desired heir. Perhaps the disadvantage would be that there would be too many of one sex.

Looking back now, Australia must have been a welfare state many years before England became one. There were clinics in existence where I believe you could get expert advice and help about babies; but I never visited one, again on account of my husband's position. But I did apply for £5 maternity bonus on the strong advice of my fellow patients, for they said it was due to rich and poor alike. I must confess, however, that I had a sneaking dislike for it.

It must be recorded here that it was interesting for me to go and register my vote, for I had witnessed the struggle for female suffrage. It was strange that some did not make use of this hard-won privilege, and those who failed to do so were fined. Dental fees were high for I remember paying £25 for a few fillings, an X-ray and an extraction. The rest of the work was interrupted on the sudden death

of my little son – I was too prostrated with grief to bother about this.

To return to the nursing home: my doctor kept his patients in bed for three weeks for he held the theory that because of this rest women enjoyed better health in middle age. It seems he was right in my case. I was discharged after a month and after the elapse of another two weeks, I was well and strong enough to work hard, for life was worth living again. Even with a maid in the house one had to wash the baby's napkins oneself. But I learnt my lesson that there can be worse troubles than any sort of work.

Unlike now, the baby was either vaccinated before one left the nursing home or it was done at six weeks, so that it was all over. My monthly receptions were resumed as soon as possible and music was heard in the home for we had decided to purchase an American pianola costing £250 on hire purchase (the only occasion we took that opportunity). Before the advent of the radio, this sort of instrument was in fashion, for by means of rolls one could enjoy such wonderful music as 'Samson and Delilah', 'O Sole Mio', 'The Mikado', etc., which I chose gratis. Besides, I felt it would take some time before the children could play the piano well.

It soon became apparent to my husband that it would be an asset if he obtained a rabbinical diploma (*semicha*) owing to the difficulties in the community to which I have previously referred. Most people were aware that his scholarship was equal to rabbinical attainments; in the words of the late Chief Rabbi, Dr Hertz, on the eve of our departure: 'Everybody knows you can learn.'

So at a special general meeting the resolution was adopted 'That the Reverend S. Mestel MA be granted leave of absence for six months to enable him to sit for the examination, Rabbinical Diploma, in London.' It was indeed very exciting for me, especially as my husband did not subscribe to the view of my brother Selig that I, together with my children, should remain in Melbourne. My *joie de vivre* rose; not that I was glad to leave Australia – how could I when I thought they were so wonderful to allow us this leave with full pay – but that I would see the old world again and especially my family and friends.

Preparations were begun. Our home was let furnished at four guineas a week and the farewells started wishing us *bon voyage* and a safe return to carry on the 'good work with renewed vigour'. Letters from our congregation, the United Jewish Education Board and the Chevra Kadisha arrived too, as well as gifts, amongst which were bottled and tinned foods of every description from a member of ours who was a pickle manufacturer, which overwhelmed me.

My Shabbos school class was left in the hands of a young fellow who was to become a future minister, if my memory does not play tricks with me here. We had decided to travel on a single-class vessel via the Suez Canal to avoid the severe weather and to see another part of the world, taking with us kosher tinned meat, for the catering would obviously not be equal to the first class cuisine on the *Themistocles*, but nor would there be any necessity for dressing up for dinner.

## Visit to Britain

When the day of departure arrived at last on 1 February 1926 we were seen off to the *Hobson's Bay* by many people, including representative ones, with all the apparent goodwill in the world as some of the flowers, bottles of cherry brandy, etc. in our bunk testified. Australians have a happy way of throwing streamers about as soon as the liner leaves.

This journey was slightly shorter, taking about five weeks. But seasickness can be most distressing, although not serious, particularly when there are others to look after; for the next morning in the Bight, answering the appeals of my husband, I rose with the help of cherry brandy (no pills were in fashion yet) to attend to my young baby – baths, feeding, washing, ironing, mending had still to be done. Even washing had to be watched, for it was known that little things could disappear from your cabin or your line on deck. But as soon as I found my sea legs, shipboard life became very pleasant with its amusements, fancy dress dances especially for children, sports, tournaments (deck tennis in which we both took part). At Perth we were welcomed by members of the local community who took my husband off for a little while and generously presented him with lots of Jewish fare from a wedding, and which I devoured with gusto.

The most trying part of the journey was from Colombo to Port Said – a run of ten days – because of the extreme heat and humidity. Bathing Norma in the cabin was an ordeal, with perspiration pouring down you, likewise ironing. Each night in the tropics passengers could be seen bringing down their mattresses to decks, upper and lower, allotted to men and women respectively. People wore few clothes, perhaps a frock and slippers. It was not this era yet of bathing costumes or bikinis, nor of exposing much of the human body.

There was so little air at one period that we were obliged to push our baby in a pram right near the railings to catch a breath of air. I remember it was passed round that one woman had become delirious with the extreme heat.

As I look back and call to mind these details of our sea journey, I cannot omit to say how very much amused and puzzled one of the stewards seemed when on asking me to dance at one of the balls, he received the reply: 'I am a rabbi's wife.' 'What of it?' he replied. I fear I was not prepared then to go into all the implications.

Perhaps the most exciting time on board a liner is when coming into port. How everybody looks forward eagerly to getting off on dry land to go sight-seeing. This we did at Colombo and Port Said. Taking a taxi, we were shipped off to a Buddhist Temple of which I can always conjure up a mental picture; also sitting outside a café at Candy with the scent of cinnamon trees in our nostrils, and a ride on a tram during a thunderstorm, intrigued by the Singhalese attire, which appeared like a towel wrapped round the man's body (lower part) and a comb protruding from the male head! What worried me most was when the children

came too close to my children. What they thought was probably that they were looking pale. But the most distressing sight was seeing the women working on the roads and breaking stones for 9d a day, which was offset by the chant of a man reading the Koran.

Our souvenirs were made of ebony – an inkstand, an ornamental sugar basin fashioned out of a coconut on a stand, and a cigar box made with quills, not omitting the large and small elephants.

The stop at Port Said brought new interests. We should have liked to visit Egypt and gaze at the Pyramids but this was not possible with young children, so we were content with being led by a guide in search of a kosher meal which, after some time had elapsed, consisted only of an omelette.

In their eagerness to sell their wares to tourists, people in the East often irritate you. They persist to such a degree, even though you show them that you have already purchased that article, that I was forced to call out: '*Allez-vous en*' – no other language seemed to do the trick. One only requires one pair of sunglasses, one fountain pen marked down from 10s to 9d. (The kind of tactics here reminded me of those in Petticoat Lane during my youth.) Many people purchased beads. I only indulged in two rows but reserved my shopping to a brass table with smoking articles, a brass coffee set bought in a shop where my husband was greeted in Hebrew, and lastly a fez for my special moments on our last journey home.

We resumed our journey. Sailing through the Suez Canal was most interesting with its dredgers as seen through the portholes early next morning and the sight of a man falling prostrate in prayer.

Although we still had ten days to go to Southampton, I remarked to my husband that we were home. But this last lap of our trip was a cold and rougher one. One day the steward called me from the deck to inform me that our cabin was full of water with the tinned and bottled foods sliding to and fro owing to the tossing of the ship.

It goes without saying that I was more than happy to be in England once again. I was glad to see my family in London, particularly my mother, and introduce my new baby Norma, who was truly pretty. Meeting my parents [Akiva and Adel Brodetsky] helped me more than ever to accept the loss of my son although the scar can never be removed.

It soon became evident to me that my mother's health had deteriorated and that it would not be right for us to impose a heavy strain by staying with my parents. We had in the meantime met my father's sister from Russia, who had made her home in one of the rooms at 68 Cazenove Road, Stoke Newington, and she corroborated this impression. She was regarded as a first class dressmaker. She remained there till she joined her married sister in Chicago. She passed away only recently. We left to stay in a boarding house in Highbury where I came across several old friends in the neighbourhood.

My sister Freda had since married and given birth to a son, so while my

husband was busy seeing people in connection with his forthcoming exam, we met almost daily and together had tea at Monnickedam's where it was nice to partake of kosher cakes and pastries. I found things very cheap as compared with Australia and felt like buying up half of London to take back. I became aware before long that I was being stared at when out with my pram and children, so I became somewhat curious and asked a girl in a shop the reason for this, to which she assured me it was only the uncommon-looking pram, which was an object of admiration and not otherwise. I was greatly relieved, for my make-up being what it was, I was never keen to be the object of curiosity.

In due course (March 1926) my husband took his exam, including an oral one and came out with flying colours, at which people who knew the extent of his knowledge were not at all surprised. But we shall return to this later.

We were very flattered to receive an invitation to stay with Mrs J. Weinberg JP of Nottingham after Passover, when we had entertained my sister and husband at *Seder* as our guests at the boarding house, where we found the food and people quite congenial. Mrs Weinberg's home and environment was one which awed me, for when she was out with us, did I not behold the policemen on horseback saluting this respected citizen? She had informed us that, when we were in Australia, she kept our memory evergreen, and for my part I had never forgotten the costly antique *megillah* printed bold on leather and rolled up on ivory handles which she had given my husband and which he uses on every occasion and treasures; nor the silver cup and £100 left to us by her brother-in-law. Unfortunately a clause in the will stipulated that we were to receive the money if in the service of the Nottingham community, but we were en route in the ship to Australia. However, we did not mind for it was the thought that pleased us.

So at a reception given in our honour by Mrs Weinberg we were afforded the opportunity of meeting all the members and old friends. We stayed with friends of ours, the Ryness family, well known for its Orthodoxy and related to a Zionist family in Manchester. I can say indeed that I felt on top of the world. Another visit was made to my brother Selig in Leeds where we made the acquaintance of his little son Paul, aged two. So typical of my husband, who crept out one day unnoticed and returned with a tricycle on his shoulder for his nephew! There was also an invitation by the wardens to preach at Poet's Road Synagogue, lunch with our family at the home of the late Dr and Mrs Hertz when we met their six children, a visit to Mr and Mrs Shoot, *landsleit* of my parents, when we heard radio on ear-phones for the first time – very much in its infancy.

Speech Day took place in May. In the chair was Sir Robert Waley Cohen with the Chief Rabbi distributing the awards. Being always mindful of how hard it must have been bringing up a large family I always took care not to take advantage of my mother by leaving my own children in her care, so we decided to take our children with us to Jews' College leaving Norma in the charge of the caretaker. Of course I visited my mother very often.

I have no hesitation in declaring that this was my husband's 'finest hour.' As reported in the *Jewish Graphic* (14 June 1926), the Chief Rabbi said:

The conferment of a Rabbinical Diploma is not an everyday occurrence. Since the association of Jews' College with the Chief Rabbinate in the conferment of such Rabbinical Diploma a generation ago, only seven Jews' College men have taken that degree. The attitude of the East Melbourne Congregation signifies that Australian Jews desire scholarship and authority in religion – authoritatively interpreted for them by a Talmud Chocham and a man of deep piety whose Torah-ideal is that of Rabbi Meir. (Turning to the Rev. Mestel) 'It now gives me great pleasure to announce that the Board of Examiners for the Rabbinical Diploma have recorded their high opinion of your rabbinic knowledge and speak in glowing terms of the brilliant manner in which you have acquitted yourself at the examination. I therefore hand you your Rabbinical Diploma in Hebrew and English, and herewith endow you with all the rights, privileges, prerogatives, and status thereunto belonging. I am happy to greet you as Rabbi Shelomo Tzevi Mestel. May God bless you and your labours.

I was deeply moved and am sure my husband was too when he stood up to deliver his speech:

It is needless to tell you that this day is one of the greatest in my life. It is the day that has brought with it the realisation of the silent prayers of my mother and the fulfilment of the ardent wish of my father. Ladies and gentlemen, you are aware that I came 12,000 miles in order to obtain this Diploma. My friends in Melbourne deemed it to be a very courageous undertaking on my part. And had they known the difficulties and trials under which I had to pursue my studies at Jews' College; or had they known me on the 8th September 1908, the day I entered the Preparatory class of this institution with the object of becoming qualified for the calling of a Jewish Minister, lacking the elementary secular knowledge and material means and without any definite prospect of material support, they would have thought me even more courageous.

Something that added to my feeling of well-being was that in 1924 my father had taken over the work of looking after emigrants to the United States who had been stopped at Eastleigh, near Southampton. He was one of the founders of the Federation of Ukrainian Jews which at the time of writing still exists after 40 years and under a different name. It helps victims of persecution. I believe he acted as a kind of minister and was once again earning a living. But I do not believe it was for very long. Before this he had collected Zionist funds in Leeds.

One morning when out with my sister near Clissold Park, both of us pushing a pram, with my little daughter at my side and I feeling once again on top of

the world, my husband approached us and handed me a letter which he had just received from the editor of a Jewish newspaper. If the earth had opened and swallowed me up like Korah, I should have been more than relieved. This was a patent example of being stabbed in the back; and by people who prided themselves on being British and playing the game. Speaking for myself and saying the least, my world crashed down in ruins about me together with every vestige of faith in human beings. [The circumstances here are obscure – Ed.]

My husband immediately paid a visit to the Chief Rabbi, whose words I shall refrain from repeating, and he advised us to return home. So after taking farewell of my family including my grandmother – my grandfather having passed away during our ministrations in Nottingham – we set sail on a one-class Commonwealth ship. Once again on leaving England my father put some money in my hand to hand over to charity on arrival in Melbourne to ensure, so to speak, a safe return. This voyage, of course, lost some of its thrill for us. It was the usual journey for which we had provided ourselves with sufficient kosher *worsht* [sausage and rice] in the cold storage to which the steward accompanied me each day, advising me, in the tropics, to put on a winter coat, for fear of contracting pneumonia!

### **Return to Melbourne**

The things that stir the memories are the terrific heat in the Red Sea, my husband's return to the ship at Colombo with a huge crate of bananas bought for 6d, and being welcomed and entertained by the late Reverend Hirsh and his wife and the drive through the town. After our arrival in Melbourne and welcome as the much travelled and toasted rabbi, with many congratulations on the manner in which my husband acquitted himself at his exam, we soon learnt about the politics that had been going on. 'While the cat is away the mice are at play.'

Two large synagogues were being built to attract the young members moving to the other side of Melbourne; for who has not met the social climbers who will do anything to hobnob and rub shoulders with the elite and powerful ones in the community, who sometimes use the minister's and his wife's friendship for this purpose. It was still the era when the distinction between a foreign-born rabbi and an Anglo-Jewish minister was sharply drawn. That, fortunately, has disappeared due perhaps to the lack of recruits for the ministry. For why should an accident of birth, for which one is not responsible, make such a difference? Probably jealousy comes in.

A new regime started in our congregation. The president resigned and Mr Yoffe, that dear old man whom I referred to before, was elected instead to the new board of management. He had cabled to the Chief Rabbi that Rabbi Mestel was essential for the welfare of the Jewish community here. I gave a sit-down supper consisting of 30 people all told. This and the monthly receptions became a regular feature each year.

Our own Hebrew School was started with my husband as head assisted by

the second reader, the Reverend Bernstein. I too was asked to give my services and experience which we all did gratis. But it fell more heavily on my husband for he taught every day.

We believed in the doctrine of learning by doing, for the children were taught to make *kiddush* after Sabbath service for which Mr Yoffe provided lemonade and kosher cakes. When Passover came the parents were delighted with our demonstration *Seder* which I believe had never been done before and is now becoming more common. Once again Mr Yoffe came on the scene with his usual generosity by presenting us all with a framed photo which is still proudly displayed in my husband's study and one photo even appeared in the non-Jewish press. When the first prize day arrived, my husband issued a report of the work done, and everybody regretted the untimely death of the Reverend Bernstein; he met his death so tragically while driving over a level crossing, which we were asked by the police to make known to the family.

When Chanukah came round the Ladies' Auxiliary, whose work is always so important for looking after the congregation's needs, supplied the refreshments and prepared the function, for which we received a letter of thanks from the Board.

My husband's goal was always before him – to raise a generation of Australian Jews who love their Judaism and everything Jewish, and are proud of their history and of their race.

One of the greatest events in the history of Melbourne, I should perhaps say in the Jewish community of Victoria, was the official opening on 17 October 1926 of the Jewish Communal Hall in Carlton by the great Jewish soldier, Sir John Monash, after whom the hall was named as Monash House. It was, I remember, a sparkling event graced by several leaders in the Commonwealth Parliament. As I peruse the program, the menu of the lavish Banquet and the toast list, I see my husband's name figures several times. He and the Reverend Danglow welcomed the guest of honour in the porch outside the entrance to the hall. After the ceremony of the formal unlocking of the door with the golden key, a prayer composed and recited in Hebrew and English by him followed in the upper hall. Grace too was said at the end of the meal after which several important toasts were submitted to the representative company, my husband's being 'Our Guests'. What a memorable occasion it was. And when I read in a report on the Jews of Australia recently that intermarriage had been reduced to less than 7 per cent, whereas it had at times reached to such alarming proportions as 15 per cent, I think I may say that the communal hall has justified its existence

I now have to record the death of my mother, which took place on 25 December 1926 at the age of 62, by a sad coincidence on the anniversary of her wedding day, she having married in her teens. This came as a blow to me and it took me some time to resign myself. It was not altogether unexpected for when taking leave of her on our return in June to Melbourne, she was very apprehensive of ever seeing me again. I always remember the 10 shillings out of her *knippel*

[coin-collecting tin for charity] which she sent us to buy a little gift for Jessica, her eldest grandchild. And that gift, which was a music case to hold her music books, is now being used by her great-grandchildren! The prospect of another child in the course of the year and the hope of replacing our lost son helped me to bear the loss of my mother, although now and then I would look anxiously for some sign that that would be so.

I attended functions as much as I could and continued teaching at Sabbath school and on Sundays. We always entertained visitors, especially on Friday nights and festivals, and such names as the Zionist emissaries Dr S. Jacobi, and Mrs Henrietta Irwell come to mind; we welcomed too Rabbi Brodie's sister who married the son of one of our members, also a guest on the Sabbath. Thanks to the invitation of a member, we were able to see at close quarters the Duke and Duchess of York (the future sovereigns) during their tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1927.

On the advice of another member and personal friend we purchased a crystal [radio] set for six guineas! And how wonderful we thought it was to listen in to a band playing, or a sermon from nowhere – it seemed. When I was alone at night sometimes, it would be very helpful to retire into bed with these earphones on.

On 5 August 1927 I gave birth to my son Leon, whose name perpetuates my mother's memory. What joy! It knew no bounds, for the sun shone brightly for me once again. The birth took place at the Bethesda Salvation Army Hospital, a splendid and efficient institution nearer our home and at a smaller cost. Also, my husband was able to bring me some kosher food. Lily, our devoted maid, came once more to take charge of the home and family.

But life is never completely happy. It is always diluted by some sorrow or tragedy; for a few days before this happy event I sensed that there was something being hidden from me when a school fellow of mine came to visit us. So I locked my husband in our study and taxed him with it so much that he was forced to let me know that my brother, a brilliant Fellow at Cambridge, had been killed in a motor accident.

I wondered afterwards whether it was not a good thing that my mother was spared this. It was sufficient that my poor father had to identify the body and afterwards receive the news of my brother having passed his *Tripas* and been appointed to his first position.

The *bris* of our son took place at home with the Reverend Danglow as his godfather. A woman baked special kosher cakes and biscuits, some of which were brought for the nurses, the wine being unacceptable because of their temperance principles. The silver cup, suitably inscribed, was handed over to our son on his marriage. Other gifts came pouring in, in true Australian style.

One man named Brand, a regular worshipper in the morning at *minyan*, gave us the following articles from his antique store: a chess table, an inlaid occasional table, two pairs of silver candlesticks and a pair of bronze ones, a French clock,

a Chinese teapot and a bowl. Most generous indeed!

Great care was taken that our baby son should not repeat Norma's feat of hanging right over the pram attached to one side only; and another time of falling completely out of her cot receiving slight concussion and necessitating my running outside to request a man on a bicycle to hasten and inform my husband who was engaged in teaching at the Synagogue. It was whispered that the congregation was planning to present its minister with a car to ease his duties but my brother's tragedy unnerved me so much that I did not desire my husband to drive one. However, with 24 hours of quiet rest ordered by our doctor, she recovered. But life is full of hazards however careful one is. For one night while feeding my son, I dropped off to sleep from fatigue and awoke with a start to find him white as wax. A cold sweat settled on me till I saw his colour return, after I had rubbed him and exposed him to air.

By now our elder daughter Jessica began to show promise at school. She participated in a play as a dwarf for which I made a costume, and was classified dux of her class. At a Hebrew School display, we were approached by the head of a drama school, asking us to enrol her as a pupil, for he wished to put her in a play. But the following incident interested us. During a school inspection an examiner one day asked her class if someone would come out and point to a town on the map of England. When she accordingly came forward and pointed to Leeds, the examiner was surprised and asked her what she knew about it. 'Oh', she answered, 'I have an uncle at the University'. 'Is it Dr Brodetsky?' he replied. 'I know him very well, I was there too.' He asked whether he could borrow his book on Sir Isaac Newton which had just been published and a copy of which my brother had sent us – something to boost a schoolgirl's morale.

A very happy thought came to mind of Charles Sheezel, our next president. He said that some recognition should be shown me for the effort I was putting forth to teach at the classes in face of the difficulty with maids and a young family. One day I received a letter from the board of management that they had granted me an honorarium – not a very large sum but very much appreciated. So I suggested to my husband that it might be worthwhile to have a fur coat made, not, as the reader will have gathered, that I like being over-dressed or conspicuous. But our position here demanded it because the minister and his wife were forced to vie with his colleagues in order to keep up the reputation of his congregation.

Let us for a moment now return to the question of 'keeping the home fires burning' on the Sabbath during periods when our household was maidless. Fortunately, although the winter was somewhat treacherous, it was not severe nor of long duration, roughly about three months I should say (June, July and August). Firewood (tree logs) not coal was burnt in the kitchen stove. But the snag was the extinguishing of the lights on Friday nights. I had a horror of sitting by candlelight, especially when there were visitors present partaking of a meal. One night after such a meal and my husband had retired to bed, I went to the front door to search

for a *Shabbos goy*. Being a nice residential district, there were few passers-by to be seen until suddenly I caught sight of a girl of about ten or so. After instructing her in why she was to switch off the light in the dining room or breakfast room rather, to be more correct, and to help herself to a silver coin which I had been in the habit of placing on the mantelpiece before Sabbath began for such a contingency, I too retired to bed relieved. Very soon there was a ringing of the front door bell. I hastened to go and see who the visitor was at such a late hour, when I beheld an irate parent reprimanding me. Although I did my utmost to explain that because of our Jewish religion we did not kindle or extinguish lights on the Sabbath, she still could not understand why we didn't put out the electric light ourselves. She was under the impression that there was something more to it.

I can well appreciate her fears with regard to a young girl, although I assured her of our uprightness and innocent motives. However, that experience put a damper on my spirits and robbed me of that night's sleep. In the next few days it set me thinking how to solve this problem. If only I could get some mechanical means of extinguishing the lights and so avoid all explanations. Well, at the suggestion of one of our members, a friend, I consulted the electricity company, who after hearing my problem suggested installing an alarm clock attached to the meter switch. I did not mind if it had cost me a small fortune, for how grand it was to set the alarm before Sabbath and go to bed, even read, with the lights on and have them go out without depending on human aid.

Let us now consider holidays in Australia. I am aware that the people do not welcome criticism but I must however be frank and say that that was what I found most difficult during our sojourn there. There were no Jewish hotels, restaurants nor any kosher meals to be got anywhere. Throughout the year we could not find much time to take our children to the sea front at St Kilda, Elwood or Brighton which was only a tram ride away. But we did take them for their yearly visit to the Zoo. This was a 'must' with us. But wives and mothers do sometimes need a complete change from home cares. How was this possible when it meant transferring pots and pans, etc., even the minimum, to a strange house and there run my family in the same way under more inconvenient conditions? Our first holiday in 1924 was at a small place called Mentone where Mr Yoffe and I had hired a wooden shack for a fortnight for my husband to convalesce in after his illness. It was so primitive that we were glad to return to our own home. In 1928, feeling the need badly for a change and rest, I reluctantly arranged another holiday at Mordialloc. This resort, like the previous one, was a very small village on the long sea front with hot sands blowing about and raised by the passing cars as we sat under the bathing tents to shelter from the sun's rays, and to keep the numerous flies away we had to wear nets round our faces and necks. We lived on meatless meals, of course, but strangely enough fish was hard to come by although we were near the sea.

Though some memories are apt to grow hazier and hazier with the passing of

time, yet I have a clear picture of this one, how after walking five miles to procure a fish (snapper) at no cheap price for our dinner my husband presented me with something which was so unfit for consumption that even the cat turned up her nose at it. Well, to cut a long story short, I packed up and returned home after ten days. It was not my cup of tea. And to crown it all, my husband was called away to Melbourne to carry out a duty even though we had arranged with the *shochet* that he would deputise and for which I had given him a tea service.

### **On the domestic front**

On 28 September of the following year [1929] Ruth was born, on Rosh Hashanah. What a date to choose! My husband came along to blow the *shofar* for me in hospital, for is it not the duty of every Jew to hear its tones on this day? But many troubles came our way before this happy event took place as so many times before my confinement.

One day my husband came home with a rise in temperature and was determined to go out again in a treacherous wind to read the *Kinoth* [lamentations] on the eve of Tisha b'Ab as the *chazan* was unable to do it. He had always shown such a sense of duty and punctuality that he was prepared to risk his life. Never has he been late for any duty right through all the years until his retirement at the age of 66, but was always at his post at least one quarter of an hour before.

Well, recalling that he had had pneumonia the previous winter, I reminded him that one owes a duty to oneself and that he was taking a terrible risk. This was much more dangerous then; use of antibiotics has done much in the treatment today. He tried to assure me that he would go to bed with a hot water bottle when he returned.

Not satisfied, I rang up our doctor who agreed with him. But fortunately I told the doctor that I was taking the law into my own hands. I put him to bed and engaged a trained nurse to come at once, and after assuring me that she would call me if anything happened, she persuaded me to lie down and get some sleep as I needed all the rest I could get in my condition.

Early the next morning she informed me that his temperature had risen to 105 and she had been forced to act on her own initiative and administered strychnine for his heart. The doctor was accordingly informed and, wanting in courage to face me, sent his brother, the president of the Judaeen League, to persuade me to have my husband removed by ambulance to the hospital to give him a chance, for he had developed a 'patch' on the lung. And later on I was let into a secret: that I had saved my husband's life by refusing to let him go out that night with a temperature of 100. However, I was in a pretty poor condition, for troubles never come singly. All the children had fallen ill with winter complaints and there I was maidless too. But can I ever forget our friends who always brought us comfort and encouragement in our trials both ministerial and domestic? Some were more than goodness itself. Nothing seemed too difficult for them to do. Great was my

joy when my husband was discharged from hospital, out of danger, but it was essential for him to go away and convalesce. So taking Jessica with him, for she needed a change too, he went off to Warburton on the advice of our friends – a vegetarian hotel in the heart of the country run by the Seventh Day Adventists where everything was absolutely kosher, even beds were not made on the Sabbath, cold food was served and no chess even was allowed to be played.

At about this period it became necessary for my children to have their adenoids removed. Jessica had already been done. The operation was performed at home, my husband being the anaesthetist. My children always remembered this because of the ice-cream they were given to suck after the operation – ice cream was still a luxury.

Because of all we had been through, our joy was complete when all ended happily with the birth of Ruth, our youngest. I did have a lurking hope for another son for reasons of symmetry, and so forth, but one accepts with love whatever comes.

During my stay in hospital I announced to my husband that I had fully made up my mind to dispense with a maid, as soon as I was strong enough, and make do with a charwoman, not only for reasons of economy but because maids were becoming a constant worry. Very soon too Norma would be joining the Presbyterian Ladies' College, making two at school. We had had one or two maids, desirable ones, who had entered fully into our family life – one Catholic girl being so much so, she was a comedienne in her mimicry. She was more fond of the children than the housework and having been at a convent was an expert at smocking, which she used in making Norma a frock. She said she wouldn't care to be Jewish – it entailed so much work especially before the Passover, but she liked our food all right and in between meals would ask my husband to appeal to me to make some more *latkes*. She was the maid who only whispered on Good Friday, which intrigued me very much. But my mind goes back to one young girl of 16 or 17 who gave us all that disgusting skin rash known as scabies, which almost drove me frantic.

One night while we were out at a function, this girl, with all good intentions, took Jessica into her bed to comfort her when a car knocked into our fence. When I one day had asked her why her arms were full of scratches, she blamed the cat. But after seeking the advice of our doctor about the rash on Jessica, he advised us to send her home because of this highly infectious skin rash. I believe there is a new treatment for it now for children at school which I learnt while teaching later in the 1930s, but then the affected person would have to have constant baths followed by the application of sulphur ointment. And every item of clothing which came into contact with the body had to be boiled for three hours, otherwise the patient became reinfected. All other clothing including furs had to be aired in the sun.

Very soon the whole family became infected as my husband helped me with the baths and applications, so that for weeks and weeks we all suffered. I was ashamed to appear anywhere, for the skin irritated so much that all I could do was scratch. I

almost broke down under the strain and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving when we saw the last of it. I remember wondering and being amused when all we had to do in order to pass the ship's doctor before disembarking for Australia was to show the backs of our hands. I understand fully now.

When I left the hospital after the birth of Ruth, I had a maid for a short time who was more of a worry even than that, for she stayed out all night once and I discovered that she must be attending a clinic from some of the suspicious things in her room. Fearing that she might give my children something even worse than scabies when handling them, I at once consulted our lawyer friend who told us that legally we were entitled to put her luggage outside and send her away. Of course, it was not easy to run a home and a family of six besides carrying out ministerial duties. But the biggest headache of all was leaving the children with someone while going out to functions. While pregnant, I did not attend many except if specially requested. One member, I remember, asked me to come to an engagement party so I had to say to my maid: 'Can I have an evening off?' – for she had been out every evening for ten weeks! Hard work I did not mind, but my heart was in my mouth when I was forced to leave a girl of ten to look after a baby in the cot while I attended school and classes. People took their cue from the minister's wife. Many people could not follow the service very well and would watch her to see when to stand up or sit down. Sometimes I could hardly stand up and would have to sit. This caused a strange situation.

I believe I am not wrong in saying that I was one of the first people to employ a baby-sitter. This practice hailed from America and became a common thing in England with the shortage of maids. It was the best I could do, and it was not very easy for me to bathe and feed the children, put them to bed and then prepare myself to appear in public, punctually of course. I was sometimes on tenterhooks wondering if the charwoman would let me down.

When I took my family out daily with two in the pram, one on either side and another couple of their friends, people would ask me if they were all mine.

Before dealing with a matter which almost shook the whole of Melbourne, so to speak, I must mention several things though of minor importance. One day while out, my husband was suddenly approached by somebody who asked him to take the part of Christ in a film because of a close resemblance. Needless to say, when my husband related this incident to me, a smile crept over my face and that was that.

Our president kindly treated the whole of the East Melbourne Hebrew School to a performance of 'No, No, Nanette', a light-hearted musical comedy which made a break from everyday life and all its seriousness.

One day an agent called in his car to convey us all to view a plot of land at Ferntree Gully which he was trying with all his salesmanship to sell to us. What we remembered particularly were the huge blackberries which we picked. It appears now that he knew what he was saying when he predicted that one day it would

become an important district, for when we were holidaying in Yugoslavia a few years ago a young lady, a broadcaster on the radio in Melbourne who was staying in our hotel in Dubrovnik, volunteered the information that the plot for which we paid £60 was now worth a considerable sum. But alas, on our leaving Melbourne we left it in the hands of a friend to manage. And all I remember in the midst of our trials and tribulations are bills coming in periodically for removing the weeds on the plot. At the time it intrigued me that I should be in possession of land.

Television was not yet in existence, but radio had come a long way by now and the 'talkies' had just begun to take the place of the silent film. Everywhere we went people were talking about it and 'The Jazz Singer' with Al Jolson which had arrived in Melbourne from America. We were pressed to come and see the first talkie, which was most certainly a new and exciting experience.

One day we decided that I should take our children, except the baby, plus a few of their friends whose parents had been extremely kind to us, to a talkie in the city. Although my little son was rather young and restless to sit for so long through it, nevertheless it made a deep impression on them. But something stands out clear as crystal in my mind and that was the nostalgic pang that I was seized with when I saw people on the Thames Embankment. Although midsummer outside with brilliant sunshine contrasted very much with the drab scene on the screen in comparison, people drably dressed and carrying umbrellas, yet I could not help thinking of Scott's words: 'Breathes there the man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, "This is my own, my native land."' Since then I have met many people living away from their birthplace, and they get nostalgic too, periodically.

During our stay in Australia, I had often nursed a desire to see a kosher kitchen installed in the Monash House where it could be proved that food cooked according to the dietary laws can be attractive in spite of the fact that certain things like milk, butter, cream, cannot be used after a meat meal. There were among certain sections the idea prevailing that what is clean is kosher, and one person is even reported to have placed her finger on her nostrils when 'kosher' was mentioned. Some of us have heard of the woman who brought *treyfa* meat and koshered it but this beats it: one unmarried old woman told me that she placed the meat in water and put the salt in. It was quicker! Monash House had been filled with chairs donated by us all with the name of the donor inscribed, and functions including weddings, barmitzvahs, etc., were held but there was no kosher kitchen. However, life has taught me since that one must persevere if one is convinced that an idea is right.

The wife of the president of the Judaeo League had grasped the idea too, equipping herself with the necessary training. Very shortly it was announced that demonstrations by her would be given. And how wonderful they were. The decorated cakes, gateaux, puddings, etc., among all the other dishes shown were worthy of the *ordon bleu* cuisine in the demonstrations I have seen under the gas and electric companies. And very shortly we received an invitation to a

function where the 'kosher kitchen recently installed would be officially opened'. Presentations to the president, treasurer and secretaries of the bazaar were to be made too. So taking our young baby of three months with us, it was indeed among the happy moments of my life. I remember saying in my response of thanks that I would treasure the illuminated framed address and hoped to display it to my grandchildren in the years ahead.

I remember reading in a book on Australian Jewry reviewed by my husband a few years ago [probably Peter Medding's *From Assimilation to Group Survival*, published in 1968 – Ed.] how, with the influx of newcomers, there had been the establishment of Jewish day schools in a country where in the 1920s the attempt to obtain admission to the secondary schools to give Hebrew and religious instruction to the Jewish boys was opposed – the promoters of the idea were shouted down and called 'evangelists' who should go back to the country they came from. I had the supreme satisfaction of knowing that a kosher kitchen had been installed.

We also read of the existence of kosher kitchens, of a Jewish hospital and the establishment of representative bodies: a Jewish Board of Deputies in each state. I am happy in the thought that, as the Chief Rabbi put it, I, together with my husband and other ministers did the pioneering work.

Life became rather a strain on me in spite of constant help, so we decided to take our annual holiday, which falls after Christmas in the Antipodes. But I did not care to do what we did in previous years, which as the reader will remember, was no holiday at all for me. All I desired was a complete rest from the cares at home. This I found at Warburton. All I had to do was to look after the children with one baby on my knees. There I found the company of other holiday-makers with whom I would sit and chat. As I was not familiar with vegetarian dishes I was advised to say 'right through' when asked what I would like to have on the menu. I found the food quite satisfying although sometimes a little heavy for my husband's stomach, especially the nut meals. But I confess that we ate our grilled chop with extra relish on our return home, where we found a whole fortnight's newspapers wet and scattered all over the front veranda, the result of a storm, and indeed worthy of Tony Hancock on television.

It is amazing how one incident usually stands out above all others. One of our members and friends staying there thought of giving us a little change from supervising our young family and urged us to take a walk on our own in the bush while she took charge. It was certainly nice to be in the company of the kookaburra, the kangaroo, the chirping cicada and other inhabitants of the Bush but the snakes worried me a little and we continually kept looking around us in case we should step on one, which was one of the hazards. Of course nobody would dream of going without a stick and first-aid kit.

On 14 April 1929 my husband read Psalm 122 at the laying of the foundation stone of the new Melbourne synagogue on the corner of Toorak and Domain roads. I was extremely interested in seeing the records and documents deposited

beneath the foundation stone after they were read, and in seeing corn, wine and oil poured onto the stone. On 14 May of that year occurred the consecration of King David Lodge of which Bro. Rabbi S. Mestel was a foundation member. On 27 July 1930 my husband gave a lecture on Don Isaac Abarbanel in Monash House to the Zionist group called the Hatchiah Society.

### **The Sabbath sport controversy**

1930 goes down as the year of the Sabbath sport controversy raging over the Australian Jewish communities, for it was in the early part of that year that my husband was approached by the president and other officers of the Judaeen League of Victoria to give a ruling in accordance with Jewish law on whether games were permitted on the Sabbath. In reply he sent a letter to them together with a detailed exposition of the situation as derived from the various Jewish rabbinic authorities. The statement in full was published in the *Jewish Herald* and certainly hit the headlines. 'It constitutes the most definite statement of the purely religious side of this question which has ever been made in this country and is rendered additionally striking by reason of its being made by a Rabbi of an orthodox Victorian Synagogue. The true Jewish conception of the day – one, not only of rest but of joy and recreation, and amateur sport on the Sabbath is not only not prohibited but is expressly permitted by Jewish Law.'

As my husband was aware that the League had as their object the upholding of traditional Judaism, he felt it his duty to uphold its request.

In 1936, five years after we left Australia, we received a copy of the *Jewish Herald* from which I quote: 'From the honorary secretary of the Judaeen League I have received the following regulations passed by the executive governing Sabbath sport.' These details I shall not quote for reason of space but the passage continues: 'Any member of the League engaging in Saturday sport failing to comply with the foregoing stipulations, shall be suspended for a certain period.' This was all in accordance with my husband's statement of 1930.

'The A.J.A.X. shall appoint a Sabbath sport steward for each club or team competing on the Sabbath, whose duty it shall be to report to the Sabbath Sport Board any breach of this statute,' the paper continued. 'The council shall appoint a Sabbath sport board of three who shall enforce compliance with this statute and report on the same to the council at least once a year.'

Well, in between these periods tension mounted. It is not necessary to point out where the greatest opposition came from. The reader will probably guess. People who should have known how to 'play the game' wrote to the non-Jewish press, washing their domestic linen in public not for reasons of Orthodoxy, but because of 'politics' which ought not to exist in the ministry. If an idea or movement is right in principle, it should not matter from whom it originates. Had it been the other way round, my husband initiating objection to Sabbath sport, the cry would have gone round: 'This is Australia, it is different here.' In the Reverend Chodowski's

*Australian Jewish Chronicle* published in Sydney, appeared the following:

Hard times, however, still seem to leave ample leisure for public and private discussion on the topic which is now vexing the community – ‘Sabbath sport’. It will not be long, I am sure, before finality is reached upon this matter in one way or the other by the Council of the Judaeon League, and I wonder what the Jewish people of this city will have left to them as a subject of conversation. It forms the subject of heated talk in numerous committees and at numerous private gatherings. The subject crops up at social evenings, bridge parties and functions, at which matters of the like nature have hitherto never intruded. I was at dinner recently, and discussion on the subject lasted from lokshen soup to Russian tea. It even formed, most inappropriately, the subject of discussion at the cemetery at a recent funeral, and otherwise respectable citizens have seized me by the buttons of my coat in the streets of Melbourne, and taking me on one side, have poured their views on the matter into my reluctant ear.

Here is another quotation:

Those who support the proposal of the Judaeon League do so relying upon the Victorian Beth-Din and their enthusiasm in the matter betokens well for the future organisation of Jewry in Melbourne. The opponents are showing almost equal vigour. But whilst full and vigorous discussions are undoubtedly indicative of a healthy state of affairs, it is unfortunate that some of the opponents of the measure referred to, should have introduced the element of personality into the matter. Were it not for those, the quiet and sincere discussion that is taking place would give me unqualified pleasure.

And another quotation:

And so we must not be astounded when we find the opinions of qualified and scholarly Rabbonim attacked by the conceited and the ignorant. Not only by the entirely ignorant. That would not be so bad, for the mouthings of many who can hardly pronounce the Shema might be noisy, but are also merely laughable. But the old adage that ‘a little knowledge is a dangerous thing’ still has its force. There are some who, equipped with some modicum of learning with distorted quotation and misconceived authority, still dare to call into question the considered and detailed exposition of Jewish law by a most scholarly Rabbi.

My remarks in this regard may be a little vigorous for my gentle pen. But the campaign of misrepresentation and vilification which has gone on has aroused my ire. I do not deny the right of every Jew, indeed of every man, to think and decide for himself. Judaism is free in the broadest sense, and every Jew should and does decide for himself what he will

accept and what he cannot accept. But there is a great difference between the acceptance or refusal to accept a particular law and the disputing what the law is ... 'I must confess to a feeling of annoyance when I hear or read opinions on these matters ventured by ignoramuses or semi-ignoramuses. Take the opinion on Sabbath Sport by Rabbi Mestel. There you have a Rabbi who, upon his appointment, had praises showered upon him by his Board of Examiners for his scholarship and ability. To the high degree of Rabbi he adds the University degree of a Master of Arts. His statement was a brilliant piece of scholarly and logical reasoning, revealing remarkable knowledge and research into Jewish law. Its effect was to bear out and endorse the opinion given by the Melbourne Beth Din ... Yet Tom, Dick and Harry are prepared to contend that it is unsound. This may perhaps be the case, but certainly they are no more qualified to say so than they are to criticise a judgement of the High Court.

Other comments appeared elsewhere, including the Yiddish press. Many years afterwards in 1954, this same question cropped up in South Africa and the London *Jewish Chronicle* kindly published the full statement made by my husband in 1930 and an editorial comment under the caption 'Rabbinic Pronouncements' as follows:

Judaism has nothing to fear from the sincere questioner, no matter how persistent he is. It has much to fear from the support of the ignorant.

In other words sincere inquirers are entitled to receive reasoned answers from our religious authorities. *Ex cathedra* utterances of a merely arbitrary character will not suffice. Logical reasons and arguments, based on the appropriate sources and precedents, must be adduced. Jews do not subscribe to the doctrines of authoritarian infallibility and unquestioning faith demanded by certain other creeds. Rabbinical pronouncements which are made for their guidance need to take this important factor into consideration. Recently, for example, Dr. Louis J. Rabinowitz, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg, issued a statement that the playing of games, including football, on the Sabbath does not necessarily constitute a violation of the Jewish day of rest. This view appears to receive support from a statement on Jewish Law and Sabbath sport made by Rabbi Solomon Mestel (now of London) in Australia some years ago, to which reference is made on another page. It is precisely because the decisions of Rabbi Rabinowitz and Rabbi Mestel quoted chapter and verse in Jewish law that they are likely to influence and carry weight with Jewish public opinion. Several recent rabbinical pronouncements on other problems, however, appear to be more in the nature of an *ipse dixit* than of a reasoned statement.

The uproar during 1930 in Melbourne left, I regret to say, a bad taste in

my mouth which has taken years to fade and still lingers. One member of ours presented us with a bronze model of a man throwing a ball to remind us of the vexed question of Sabbath sport, as if I needed a reminder. I have unfortunately long and bitter memories of wrongs done, especially of bad ones which leave deep scars on the mind and soul.

### **Return to Britain**

While people were occupied with the burning question of Sabbath sport, hard times were being experienced everywhere. Who does not remember the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the Depression it brought generally, more severely in America and Australia?

Congregations were experiencing it too, for people were unable to pay their contributions, especially in ours, where many who belonged for sentimental reasons found that they had to discontinue membership. Ministers were asked to accept reductions in salaries: £100 per annum for us. Now, while the other ministers, for reasons I shall not enter into here, would not feel the pinch so much, I thought it would press more heavily on us, for we were the least paid and had heavier responsibilities and commitments. In addition to the heavy duties, worries and intrigues of public life, we would have even greater financial ones. This, I felt, would weigh so heavily on my husband that the risk to his health and life would be too great. And so, taking it on my own responsibility, I phoned the president, Mr Sheezel, and in these very words said: 'You brought us out, please send us back'. I assured my husband that with his qualifications, energy and enthusiasm he would always get another position in England, although I confess that things were totally different then from what they are now. The truth was there were more ministers than communities. I said that I feared for his life. It was a bold step to take but I have never regretted it. I sometimes wonder, even now, where I got the courage. I told my husband that I was prepared to go back to schoolteaching till he was placed.

Accordingly my husband wrote to the congregation explaining in detail the sums we would have to lay out during the year and how impossible it would be to reduce in any way our living expenditure so as to enable to offer any salary reduction, much as he was anxious to meet the Synagogue's necessities.

And so in November 1930 my husband tendered his resignation as chief minister of the East Melbourne Congregation, a post he held for almost eight years. At a Special General Meeting of members the sum of £1100 pounds was granted in appreciation of his services to the congregation. Needless to say, by his resignation a bombshell was thrown into the Jewish community. People loved to have the clergy as a topic of conversation. (I do not insinuate of course that they did not regard them with more awe and respect than in the old country.) Some people immediately got busy getting signatures to bring pressure on us and urge us to reconsider our decision. But we were convinced that it was best. And as

I look back now over the years, it was so indeed, for only recently when two Australians visited my son at Cambridge in order to learn about its synagogue he was informed that East Melbourne congregation was no more. What we would have done there, God only knows!

In my view once a decision is made there should be no looking back, for to be undecided is the worse state to be in. So we went straight ahead with all the necessary arrangements such as the booking of a passage and date of leaving first.

We had decided that as things were cheaper in the old country we would sell most of our home by auction. Our house, with its luscious yellow cling peaches and nectarine trees, I was sorry to leave behind. This beautiful villa which cost £5,000 – a vast sum in those days – only brought £1700 by auction so it returned to the bank. Such was the state of affairs. For almost eight years we had paid over £5 a week. Our silver, cutlery which was stainless now (the old cleaning machine was superfluous), library which contained valuable and a few rare books, best linen, small occasional tables, best china, a set of tall glasses given to us by a special friend and our pianola which had to be encased in a box for £20 – all these were to accompany us home.

The day before the auction sale people came to view the numbered articles of furniture, etc. For a moment it made me realise that in the words I used when I met my father: ‘I threw away bread and came to look for crumbs’. Our good friends advised us not to be present at the sale but to stay at a boarding house run by the *shochet*, for it required all my faith and courage to witness our home dismantled and things sold for next to nothing, although we did get £18 for a Georgian table bought for £10 in Bristol.

My temperament is such that the sooner we were on our way the better I would feel. I should have liked to return via the New World but I was afraid that travelling with children for five days in a train would present difficulties. It perhaps goes without saying that many of our friends and well-wishers gave us a good send-off to speed us on our way, as Australians can. I quote from the local press:

Not the least regretful of the many people and associations in Melbourne over the departure of Rabbi Mestel will be the Council and general members of the Judaeon League. Throughout his stay in Victoria Rabbi Mestel has at all times shown his appreciation of the work the League has been doing among the younger Jewish people in particular. His appreciation has been of a practical nature throughout, and both he and his wife have very actively supported the League – Mrs. Mestel especially showing her interest by representing an important section of the League, the Women’s Auxiliary – on the League Council.

We offer the Rabbi and his family the best of good wishes for their prosperity in the future and trust that their enthusiasm and sincerity will be availed of in whatever sphere they will resume their labours.

And again: 'Rabbi Mestel of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, who will leave for London with his wife and family in the *Esperance Bay* tomorrow, met a large circle of friends in the reception rooms of Mr. & Mrs. H. Davis of 'Georgian Court', East Melbourne, on Sunday afternoon to bid them farewell. Afternoon tea was served and four scholars of the East Melbourne Hebrew school presented the Rabbi with a chess set in mahogany and ebony (inscribed).'

Here is another one:

The departure of Rabbi S. Mestel, Mrs. Mestel and four children, gathered together a goodly number of friends to bid farewell. Sincere regret was expressed by those present at the decision of Rabbi and Mrs Mestel to return to the Homeland, and earnest hopes were generally entertained that the great ability possessed by the Rabbi would be availed of very soon after his arrival in England and that he would be serving in the sacred calling he so much loves. Mrs. Mestel will have the near companionship of her accomplished relatives and old friends at home to compensate her in a small way for the break with Melbourne.

With a young family, her devotion to the affairs of the congregation and the school children was nothing short of wonderful, and too much praise cannot be given her on that score. Friends noticed on the wharf were Rabbi Dr. Joseph Abrahams, other clergy, Executive and Presidents of East Melbourne and Carlton Synagogues etc. etc.

The *Sun-News Pictorial* carried a large photograph of the family: 'Sailed for England in the *Esperance Bay* – Rabbi S. Mestel, Chief Minister of the East Melbourne Synagogue, photographed with his wife and family before the vessel left Port Melbourne on Christmas Day.'

Among the many gifts we received were a travelling sports suit for my husband from Mr and Mrs Davis, many hats for me from Mr and Mrs Cohen, two travelling rugs, flowers, chocolates, liqueurs, etc. It goes without saying that many of our friends and well-wishers gave us a good send-off (the usual carnival of streamers) as Australians can by showering on us many presents, an example of which is shown above. Having travelled on a Commonwealth single-class ship twice before, nothing was novel to us. The children enjoyed it, especially as it started off with a party the very next day, being Christmas, except that it was marred by seasickness in the Great Australian Bight. Sports proved exciting but it took us all our wits to keep an eye on the family, some of whom would be wandering all over the vessel – we even searched in the 'crow's nest' on one occasion. They were friendly with the crew, who seemed most fond of children and kept them supplied with luscious fruit. Otherwise things would have been uneventful if it hadn't been for the rough passage near Sicily and more so in the renowned Bay of Biscay (it called to mind a song I once learned at school) which was the worst we had experienced. The captain confided in my husband that he had actually stopped

the engines, having been up all night, although I did know from an officer once before that fog was the worst hazard. As for me, I doubt whether I had any more sleep for I kept one eye on the life belts ready to put them on the family whom I had put to bed in their clothes. I was really glad, I said, that we would not have to return to Australia, for it was frightening to see the crockery etc. crashing with the rocking of the ship.

We arrived at Southampton on Saturday, 1 February 1931 but remained there until the termination of the Sabbath. We were met by my sister and husband and had dinner with a Jewish family. I remember it was one of those real wet days yet I could not suppress my secret feeling of inward joy at seeing the old familiar English scenes – at the joy of seeing a young boy in uniform selling Peters' chocolate on the station!



*Rabbi and Mrs Mestel at the barmitzvah of their grandson.  
(London, 1966)*

# JEWS IN THE 2001 AUSTRALIAN CENSUS

*W. D. Rubinstein*

Every five years the Australian government holds a national Census, which includes an optional religious question. The religious data provided by the Census has long served as the basis of much of our knowledge of the Australian Jewish community, and has been analysed by me and other researchers for the information it contains.<sup>1</sup> It is well-known that the Census figures for Jewish religious identity understate the actual number of Jews in Australia by a considerable extent, but these are the best and most up-to-date national figures which exist. The Australian figures must also be set in the context of a world Jewry keenly worried about intermarriage and assimilation, trends which, in the past, have fallen more lightly on Australia than elsewhere in the Diaspora, although this fortunate situation may now be coming to an end.<sup>2</sup>

## **National and local trends**

Between 1996 and 2001 the number of persons declaring themselves to be Jewish by religion in Australia grew from 79,805 to 83,993, an increase of 5.2 per cent. Although obviously satisfactory, this rate of increase was somewhat lower than for the 1991-96 period, when the number of declared Jews in Australia increased by 7.6 per cent. In the ten years from 1991-2001, the number of Jews reported in the Census grew from 74,186 to 83,993, an increase of 11.3 per cent. By international comparison with any Diaspora Jewish community, this rate of increase was very good indeed, and may well not have been matched in any significant Diaspora community. Reasons for the apparent slowdown in the increase in the five years prior to 2001 probably focus on a diminution in the rate of Jewish immigration to Australia, as migration from the ex-USSR dries up and as the Australian government has cut the number of immigrants allowed to migrate there. It is also possible that the comparatively satisfactory fertility and birth-rate statistics of the larger Jewish communities is worsening, a product of higher school fees and living costs encountered by many Jewish families, although against this must be set the increasing numbers of Strictly Orthodox Jews for whom this is arguably less of a factor in their familial decisions. Although reports of higher rates of intermarriage have been made in the Jewish press, these were apparently the result of a computer error; the actual figures do not support the view that intermarriage has drastically increased.

The actual number of Jews in Australia, above and beyond the Census figure, is the subject of widespread speculation in the Australian Jewish community.

Normally, this revised figure is calculated by assuming that the number of Jews reported in the Census is identical to the percentage among the whole Australian population who report a religious affiliation, and that the actual number of Jews may be ascertained by adding in a figure to the general population who report 'no religion', 'religion not stated', or are reported as 'inadequately described' as their religious affiliation. In 2001, 72.08 per cent of the whole Australian population reported that they belonged to a religion, with 27.92 per cent in the non-religious categories. Assuming the same degree of undercounting applies to Australian Jews, then the actual number of Jews in Australia in 2001 was 116,527, or 32,534 more than the Census figure. Most observers would probably believe that this figure of 116,527 was somewhat too high, and that 110,000 was a more likely figure, bearing in mind that the question of 'who is a Jew?' has no clear answer. It seems reasonable (see below in the section on birthplace and languages) to believe that the number of ex-Soviet Jews may be 20,000 (or even more) higher than the actual figure identified by the Census, while many Holocaust survivors and non-religious Jews almost certainly do not identify themselves as Jewish in the Census. An overall figure of 110-115,000 Jews in Australia in 2001 thus seems to be the most reasonable estimate one can give of Australian Jewish numbers.

### **Jewish population by state, 1996-2001**

	<b>2001</b>	<b>1996</b>		<b>% Increase/ Decrease</b>
ACT	529	505	+24	+4
Western Australia	5072	4702	+ 370	+7.9
New South Wales	34,345	32,652	+1693	+5.2
NT	149	146	+3	+2.1
Queensland	4271	4506	-235	-5.2
South Australia	1072	1164	-92	-8.6
Tasmania	180	167	+13	+7.8
Victoria	38,374	35,963	+2411	+6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>83,993</b>	<b>79,805</b>	<b>+4188</b>	<b>+5.2</b>

The five-year interval between the 1996 and 2001 Censuses showed solid growth in Jewish numbers throughout most of Australia. As noted, the total number of declared Australian Jews increased from 79,805 to 83,993 in 2001, a gain of 5.2 per cent in only five years. There was overall growth in the Jewish population in most of the states and territories, although (surprisingly) Queensland and South Australia

showed declines. Victoria continues to contain the largest Jewish community, numbering 38,374 in 2001, an increase of 6.7 per cent, with the Jewish population of New South Wales up by 5.2 per cent, from 32,652 to 34,345. Growth was particularly marked in Western Australia, which increased from 4702 to 5072. On the other hand, the Jewish population of Queensland declined by 235 (5.2 per cent) from 4506 to 4271. One can only speculate as to why this was so: a decline in the local economy, or of the Gold Coast as a residential magnet, are possible answers; perhaps, too, Census day in 2001 saw fewer Jews in temporary residence from other states compared with 1996 (Census respondents are included where they actually were on Census day, not where they are normally resident). More predictably, South Australian Jewry continued to decline, from 1164 in 1996 to 1072 in 2001, a drop of 8.6 per cent. Alarming, this came on top of a significant decline between 1991 and 1996, when South Australian Jewry's numbers were reduced from 1304 to 1164. South Australian Jewry has declined in numbers by 17.8 per cent in only ten years, and some considerable alarm must be shown at this negative trend. Victoria still contains the largest Jewish community and, indeed, its rate of increase between 1996 and 2001 was greater than that of its New South Wales rival.

### **Jews in capital cities, 2001**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	<b>Capital</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>in Capitals</b>
Adelaide	979	1072	91.3
Brisbane	1667	4271	39.0
Canberra	528	529	99.8
Darwin	91	149	61.1
Hobart	109	180	60.6
Melbourne	37,779	38,374	98.4
Perth	4871	5072	96.0
Sydney	32,941	34,345	95.9
	<b>78,965</b>	<b>83,993</b>	<b>94.0</b>

Nor surprisingly, most Australian Jews live in the capital cities – 78,965 out of 83,993 in 2001, or 94.0 per cent. Only in Queensland do a majority of Jews live outside the capital city, in this case presumably on the Gold Coast. Over 95 per cent of Jews in Victoria, New South Wales, Western Australia and the ACT lived in their respective capital cities, although it should be noted that over 1400 Jews in New South Wales lived outside Sydney. These patterns were very similar, of course, to those found in the 1996 Census.<sup>3</sup>

It is an ironical fact that when Jews are condemned to live in ghettos by medieval or totalitarian governments they regard it as a crime against humanity, but, left on their own, most Jews voluntarily live in heavily Jewish areas which resemble ghettos. A more detailed picture of the main Jewish areas can be gained by looking at the number of Jews by postal code areas in 2001, to identify the most heavily Jewish zones of residency. In 2001, 36.4 per cent of all Australian Jews lived in just ten postcode areas, with 47.5 per cent resident in just seventeen such postcode areas. These seventeen – nine in Victorian, seven in New South Wales, one in Western Australia – were the only postcode districts in which 1000 or more Jews were resident in 2001:

Postcode	Area	Number of Jews
3161	North Caulfield	5707
3162	South Caulfield	5203
2026	Bondi	4353
2030	Vaughan	3751
3183	St Kilda East	3600
2029	Rose Bay	2178
2075	St Ives	2064
3163	Glenhuntly/ Murrumbeena	2063
2023	Bellevue Hill	2030
3185	Elsternwick	1643
3142	Toorak	1611
6059	Dianella	1475
3165	East Bentleigh	1338
3204	Bentleigh	1329
2031	Randwick	1273
2022	Bondi Junction	1182
3187	East Brighton	1136

This list is little different from that in 1996, and reflects few surprises – the ‘Golden Mile’ in Caulfield and its adjacent areas, as well as the Eastern and Northern suburbs in Sydney, are home to the most Jews – and reflects considerable neighbourhood stability. Unlike the situation in American Jewish communities, these patterns are probably fairly similar to what they would have been forty years ago, with growth occurring in areas adjacent to existing areas of Jewish settlement rather than reflecting sudden mass movement.

### Birthplace trends

Australia is a nation of immigrants, and of few communities is thus more true than the Jewish community. Nevertheless, the patterns of immigration by Jews to Australia have altered considerably over time, with a community predominantly (but not wholly) of British background giving way to a community disproportionately drawn from Holocaust refugees and survivors, to a much more mixed picture.

### Birthplaces – top 10, 1996 and 2001

		2001	%		1996	%
1.	Australia	38,940	46.4	Australia	37,245	46.7
2.	South Africa	10,473	12.5	'Elsewhere' (chiefly Israel & USSR)	11,653	14.6
3.	Eastern Europe – Other (USSR etc.)	6751	8.0	South Africa	7535	9.4
4.	United Kingdom	4329	5.2	Poland	4801	6.0
5.	Israel	3886	4.6	United Kingdom	4504	5.6
6.	Poland	3838	4.6	Hungary	1997	2.5
7.	Hungary	1738	2.1	Germany	1794	2.2
8.	USA	1592	1.9	USA	1517	1.9
9.	Germany	1571	1.9	Other Asia	1170	1.5
10.	North and Western Europe – Other	1393	1.7	Austria	890	1.1

Trends in Australian Jewish birthplaces were broadly stable in the five years between 1996 and 2001. In 2001, a narrow majority of Australian Jews were born overseas, as was the case in 1996. Indeed, the number of overseas-born Australian Jews actually increased from 37,245 to 38,940, although the percentage of overseas-born Jews declined slightly. Owing to the unfortunate labelling of birthplaces in the 1996 Census, especially a large category of births 'elsewhere' which apparently includes Israel and Russia, country-by-country comparisons are somewhat difficult. Some conclusions are, however, possible. The number of South African-born Jews increased sharply, from 7535 to 10,473 in only five years. South Africa now probably represents the second-largest place of birth among Australian Jewry. Inevitably, as time passes the number of Holocaust refugees and survivors continues to decline, with significant falls in the number of Polish- and

Hungarian-born Jews, and a somewhat smaller decline in German-born numbers (many German-born Jews in Australia were actually born after World War II in DP camps – they were not refugees from the 1930s). According to the Census figures, too, only (at most) 6751 Australian Jews were born in the former Soviet Union. This figure is almost certainly a considerable understatement, since perhaps 25,000 ex-Soviet Jews settled in Australia between the early 1970s and the present. It seems very likely that the undercounting here was due to many ex-Soviet Jews not declaring themselves to be Jewish by religion in recent Censuses. This category alone could well be responsible for an underreporting of 20,000 (or even more) Australian Jews in the Census figures. Another interesting feature of this table is that about two-thirds of Australian Jews were born in countries where most if not all Jews speak English as their vernacular language, adding together the numbers born in Australia, South Africa, Britain, America, and countries such as New Zealand and Canada not among the top ten in birthplace numbers. Even if the ex-Soviet figures are underestimates, it seems clear that Australian Jewry comes predominantly from English-speaking countries.

### **Jewish languages**

English is, of course, the predominant language spoken by Australian Jews, with nearly three-quarters of all Australian Jews normally speaking English in the home in 2001. The top ten languages spoken by Jews in 2001 were as follows:

	<b>Language</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1.	English	61,148	72.8
2.	Russian	7854	9.3
3.	Hebrew	5086	6.1
4.	Yiddish	2440	2.9
5.	Hungarian	1447	1.7
6.	Polish	1038	1.2
7.	German	918	1.1
8.	French	665	0.8
9.	Other Eastern European	450	0.5
10.	Spanish	354	0.4

Apart from the strength of Russian (whose figures are almost certainly an understatement), probably the most striking feature of this table is the inevitable but sad decline of Yiddish, now spoken by only 2440 people, with German, the predominant language of refugees from the 1933-40 period, now spoken by only 918 persons. The number of Hebrew speakers (5086) may well come as a surprise to many.

### Age structure

Only limited statistics on the age distribution of Australian Jewry in 2001 were available to me; in particular, no detailed breakdown for Jews aged under 15 was available. However, for age-cohorts aged 15 or over, the following picture emerges, comparing Jews to the general population:

#### Percentage of Jews and of the total Australian population by age, 2001

	Jews	All Australians
15–19	7.79	8.92
20–29	14.05	17.23
30–39	14.00	19.09
40–49	18.13	18.55
50–59	17.60	13.93
60–69	9.46	9.76
70–79	11.06	7.57
80+	7.91	3.94

The Australian Jewish population's age distribution thus approximates the age distribution of the general population, with the exception that there were nearly 40 per cent more elderly Jews (aged 70+) than among the general population. This probably reflects both greater longevity among Jews and the fact that relatively large numbers of now-elderly Holocaust survivors came to Australia.

Australian Jewry contains a somewhat smaller percentage of children and minors aged 0–14 than the general population. In 2001, 17.22 per cent of Jews were aged 0–14, compared with 21.70 per cent for the general population. This shortfall is probably not as great as in many other Diaspora communities. Indeed the percentage of Jewish children aged 0–14 compared to the number of Jews aged 15–69 is actually higher (25.6 per cent) than the percentage of all Australian children aged 0–14 compared with all Australians aged 15–69 (21.70 per cent). The age structure among Australian Jews thus appears relatively satisfactory, especially when compared with other Diaspora communities.

### Intermarriage in 2001

Probably the most controversial subject of demographic concern to the Australian Jewish community is that of intermarriage, where there are fears that the relatively favourable and low intermarriage statistics which the Jewish community has enjoyed through the post-war era has changed for the worse. Fuel was apparently added to these fears by evidence originally released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that intermarriages increased by 20 per cent between 1996 and

2001. Reports to this effect were given wide publicity in the Australian Jewish press in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, these reports were highly inaccurate, the result of an egregious computer error which the ABS has never officially acknowledged, despite the fact that I pointed it out to them shortly afterwards. In fact, the actual situation is that the percentage of intermarried Jews was virtually identical to that found five years earlier. The majority of married Jews whose spouses list a religion are married to Jews. In 2001, 88.8 per cent of married Jewish women (15,853 in all) whose husbands listed a religion were married to Jews, while 84.4 per cent of married Jewish men (15,853) were married to Jewish women. A total of 1999 Jewish women were married to non-Jewish men (11.2 per cent) while 2941 Jewish men (15.6 per cent) were married to non-Jewish women, making a total of 17,852 Jewish women and 18,794 Jewish men who were, in 2001, married to a spouse who listed a specific religion. In addition, 1934 Jewish women and 1477 Jewish men were married to a spouse who did not give a specific religious affiliation in the Census, listing 'no religion', 'religion not stated', etc. instead. (Many of these are believed to be ethnically Jewish.) These percentages were virtually identical to those found in 1996 by Gariano and Rutland, who concluded that 15.6 per cent of Jewish men and 12.3 of Jewish women were married to spouses giving a religion other than Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the intermarried percentage appears to have actually declined slightly between 1996 and 2001, although definitional and other questions probably do not permit us to say more than that the percentages were almost identical. There are certainly no statistical bases, in recent federal censuses, for pessimistic conclusions about Australian intermarriage rates.

One might also look at the religious denomination of non-Jewish spouses married to Jews. The results here are also interesting, and are summarised in the table on page 82.

The largest increase among Jewish men was among those married to Orthodox Christian wives. Most if not all of these are recent Russian immigrants, who were almost certainly married before migrating to Australia. The largest single category, rather surprisingly, consisted of Catholic spouses married to Jews, closely followed by Anglicans. Little or nothing is known of who these might be or where they might live. Most Catholics in Australia are either of Irish descent or of post-1945 immigrant (Italian, Polish, German, etc.) stock. Neither group is known for its closeness to the Jewish community, and it is simply difficult to see who these intermarried spouses might be. Quite possibly, many are the second husbands/wives of divorced or widowed Jews. More research on this topic is definitely necessary.

**Religions of intermarried Jewish spouses, 1996 and 2001**

<b>Jewish Men: Non-Jewish Women</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	
Orthodox Christian	118	444	+326
Roman Catholic	918	1118	+200
Anglican	783	898	+115
Lutheran	60	71	+11
Presbyterian	162	157	+5
Uniting Church	200	218	+18
<b>Jewish Women: Non-Jewish Men</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2001</b>	
Orthodox Christian	66	117	+51
Roman Catholic	586	724	+138
Anglican	577	641	+64
Lutheran	34	28	-6
Presbyterian	109	123	+14
Uniting Church	126	150	+24

**Socio-economic and education statistics**

There are few surprises in what the 2001 Census shows about the educational and socio-economic status of Australian Jewry in 2001. Jews are better educated than the general population, with 52.2 per cent of adult Jews having some kind of post-tertiary qualification, compared with 34.7 per cent of the adult population. No less than 34.3 per cent of adult Jews held a BA or post-BA degree, compared with 12.9 per cent of the general population. 51.2 per cent of Jews in employment were in the managerial/administrative or professional occupational categories, compared with 27.4 per cent of the general population, although the percentage of Jews in the 'Clerical, Sales, and Service' occupations (20.5 per cent) was nearly as great as the general population (20.6 per cent). In 2001, 24.2 per cent of adult Jews had a weekly income of \$1000 or more (\$52,000 per year), compared with 10.7 per cent of the general population. At the very top, 13.8 per cent of Jews had a weekly income of \$1500 or more (\$78,999 per year), compared with 3.8 per cent of the general population. It must be carefully noted, however, that 22.9 per cent of Jews reported an income of \$200 per week (\$10,400 per year) or less, not much below the figure of 27.1 per cent for the population as a whole. Plainly, however, Australian Jewry was largely upper middle class, with a socio-economic profile more fortunate than that of the population as a whole.

### Conclusion : Optimism or pessimism?

The 2001 Census results should, rationally, be seen as the basis for a considerable degree of self-congratulation, showing a Jewish community which is growing, hallmarked by comparatively low levels of intermarriage and general prosperity. As everyone knows, however, there is no such optimistic mood among many Australian Jews but rather the reverse, a sense of malaise and even foreboding. The Jewish day school system is now so expensive that increasing numbers of Jewish parents are voting with their feet to leave it, at least at the primary level. Although Jewish secondary school enrolments in Victoria increased by 15 per cent between 1997 and 2002, they declined by 5 per cent at the primary level.<sup>6</sup> School fees of up to \$20,000 per year per child can simply no longer be afforded by many parents. More disturbingly, perhaps, are the dangers presented by the recent upsurge of international terrorism and of hostility to Jews and Israel, especially from the anti-American, anti-Western ideological left, but also from the rise in Muslim numbers and visibility in Australia. From 1996 to 2001 alone, the number of Muslims in Australia grew from about 201,000 to 281,520; in other words, in only five years the number of Muslims in Australia increased by almost the total size of the entire declared Jewish population of the country. It seems inevitable that there will be at least 500,000 Muslims in Australia in fifteen years and one million or more in a generation. Apart from being a source of hostility to Jews and Israel, and a potential seed-bed for terrorists, the influence of such a large community on policy-making in Canberra is virtually certain to work against Australia's traditionally warm relations with Israel and even with America. These are very real clouds on the horizon of an otherwise fairly optimistic picture.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The previous Census was analysed by me in 'Jews in the 1996 Australian Census', of the *AJHSJ*, Vol. XIV, Part 3, 1998, pp. 495-507. As with the previous analysis, I am most grateful to Rev. Philip Hughes of the Christian Research Association (CRA), of East Ringwood, Victoria, for providing me with a good deal of unpublished data. I have also used this data for my Religious Community Profile pamphlet and CD-ROM on 'Judaism in Australia' which the CRA produces. Some of the material in this paper was presented by me at a talk to the Australian Jewish Historical Society (Victoria) Inc. on 13 February 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> For the first time in history, the 2001 British Census included an optional religious question similar to that in the Australian Census. This found that 266,740 persons reported themselves as Jewish in Britain, compared with a UK Jewish Board of Deputies estimate of 283,000. However, demographers estimate that because of the optional nature of this question, Jewish numbers in Britain in 2001 were actually between 296,000 and 438,000, with about 350,000 a likely figure, indicating a shortfall of about 30 per cent from the Census number. (David Graham, 'So How Many Jews Are There in the UK?', *JHR News* (Spring 2003).)
- <sup>3</sup> W. D. Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 498.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Kohn, 'Mixed Marriages Up 20 per cent Since 1996', *Australian Jewish News*, November 15, 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> Cited in Rubinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 505.
- <sup>6</sup> Address by Ian Rockman, Jewish Community Council of Victoria, 7 April 2003, 'Jewish Edu-

## JEWISH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF MELBOURNE: 1835-50

*Paul R. Mullaly*

The Jewish connection with Melbourne has its origins in the plans of some residents in Van Diemen's Land to expand their commercial and pastoral interests by acquiring land across the Bass Strait. In 1827 Joseph Gellibrand and John Batman sought permission from Governor Arthur to occupy land at Port Phillip. Permission was refused. Over the following years strategies were devised whereby the land would be acquired by entering into a treaty with the Aborigines who occupied that land. To this end a Port Phillip Association was formed. John Batman was the public face of this Association and the other nominated members were reasonably well known to the government in Van Diemen's Land. For present purposes, it is necessary only to mention Anthony Cotterell as one such member. Cotterell was the husband of Frances, whose father, Joseph Solomon, was then still technically a prisoner of the Crown. As soon as Joseph Solomon became free by pardon, it was acknowledged that he was a member of the Port Phillip Association and that a portion of the Association's land, on the Saltwater River (now the Maribyrnong), acquired by the treaty had been allotted to him. As has been pointed out elsewhere, Solomon was the only member of the Association with commercial interests and that fact was significant for the development of the Jewish community in Melbourne. Joseph's brother, Judah, was also interested in the new settlement and sent stock from Van Diemen's Land. John Pascoe Fawcner recorded in his journal on Saturday, 19 December 1835 that 'Young Solomon had landed from the *Adelaide*'.<sup>1</sup>

The Port Phillip Association's activities were not well received by government, and Governor Bourke's Proclamation of the illegality of unauthorised settlement or of treaties was published on 26 August 1835. In April 1836, the secretary of state, Lord Glenelg, instructed Bourke that settlement was to be allowed under the guidance and direction of the government. About this time the population in Melbourne consisted of some 177 persons – 142 males, 35 females – and in June 1836 a public meeting was held to work out some temporary mode of self-government whilst requesting the real authorities to appoint a resident magistrate at Port Phillip. A 'J. Solomon p.p. E.F.' is listed in the records as a signatory to the minutes of this meeting; the 'E.F.' is presumably Edmund Fergusson whose signature immediately precedes that of Solomon. Eventually, in September 1836, Captain William Lonsdale was named as police magistrate for the district of Port

Phillip in the Colony of New South Wales and he arrived with two constables on 1 October 1836.<sup>2</sup>

By 1840 the population was about 10,000; in 1850 it was about 76,000. It is not possible, given the focus of this article, to go into much detail of the growth of the Jewish community in Melbourne. Some concentrated on their pastoral interests, others developed their commercial interests. Whilst some had come from Van Diemen's Land and others from Sydney after being transported, immigration in 1840-42 bought many more directly from Great Britain, either privately financed or under the bounty system. These migrants were particularly attracted by the commercial opportunities alleged to exist in this new settlement. Solomon Benjamin came in 1839 and was later joined by his brother David. The Benjamins purchased land in Thompson Street off Nelson Place in Williamstown in September 1840. Michael Cashmore arrived in 1840. Asher Hymen Hart was briefly in Sydney before coming to Melbourne. All were affected by the economic depression, which overtook the district in the early 1840s. That depression may well provide a context for some of the criminal activity on which I will soon concentrate.

Comment has been made of the extent to which the Jewish community in Melbourne was involved in the retail clothing trade in the period prior to the gold rush and, indeed, afterwards. In February 1841, those in the retail clothing trade announced that they would close their shops each night, except Saturday, at 8 o'clock. Of the clothing shops in Melbourne in 1845, 25 shops were owned by Jews and 22 by non-Jews. Their retail premises were mainly in the centre of the town. At this time, there was no street numbering system and retailers tended to provide a ready reference point by naming their buildings. The Benjamin brothers had Cheapside House, Moses Lazarus owned Portland House, Edward and Isaac Hart managed Waterloo House, Michael Cashmore's shop was called Victoria House, the partners Harris and Marks owned the London Mart and the Liverpool, and Moses Benjamin's store and shop was called Albert House.<sup>3</sup>

My research indicates that criminal activity tended to be concentrated in an area bounded by Flinders, Queen, Little Bourke and Swanston streets. In the main, the drapery shops were in that area. Where possible I will identify the location of the business premises to which I refer. Police evidence in committal proceedings during the 1840s would lead to a conclusion that the criminals, the prostitutes, the idle and the disorderly tended to live in or resort to Little Bourke Street and lanes off it in the area between Swanston and Elizabeth streets.

I will deal, first, with those persons, identifiable as Jews, who were charged, convicted or acquitted and, secondly, with those involved as victims, witnesses or bystanders in indictable criminal cases between 1835 and 1850. My research, so far, has been mainly concerned with the Crown solicitor files, many of which still exist from that period although there are some gaps. As was usual in British

colonies, the criminal law applicable in the colony of New South Wales was the English criminal law. In effect, we adopted and adapted the English legal system and, by the time the district of Port Phillip was established, there was some local legislation in New South Wales. A well-established part of that legal system was that magistrates and justices of the peace were able to investigate felonies and misdemeanours and take depositions from witnesses, usually in the presence of the accused, who could make a statement in his or her defence and call witnesses. It was known as a committal proceeding and, at its conclusion, the bench decided whether the prisoner should be committed for trial and, if so, whether bail should be granted. The prisoner could be legally represented but this was not a frequent occurrence. Until 1839, all trials for indictable offences were held in Sydney. In May 1839 sittings of the Court of General Quarter Sessions commenced in Melbourne for all except capital cases and in 1841 a resident judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales commenced sitting in Melbourne. These judges successively were John Willis, William Jeffcott, Roger Therry and William a'Beckett. The latter became the first chief justice of the colony of Victoria.

**Emanuel Ackman** arrived free in 1847. He was then aged about 56 years and set up business as a draper in Geelong. Early in 1849 there was a burglary in the house of a Captain Larcomb in Melbourne, and among the property stolen were two valuable mourning rings – rings with the name of the deceased engraved on the inner aspect. Not long afterwards, a man who appeared to be a 'bushman' tried unsuccessfully to sell those rings to William Patterson, a jeweller in Geelong. He then tried to sell a ring engraved 'Henrietta Larcomb' to David Cashmore, who must have been a cautious man, because he immediately sought and accepted Patterson's advice, which was not to buy it. Much later, on 9 July 1849, Chief Constable Carman of Geelong happened to be in the company of Emanuel Ackman in the parlour of the Thistle Inn in Geelong and saw some mourning rings on Ackman's fingers. Carman asked to look at them and Ackman offered to sell one of the rings to him. On its inside it was engraved 'Henrietta Ann Larcomb ob 24<sup>th</sup> January 1816'. Ackman then claimed to Carman that his name was Larcomb and that he had a brother, Jacob, in England. Carman wrote to Captain Larcomb in Melbourne and the effect of the reply was that the ring shown to Carman was one of those stolen. Carman then went and got both rings from Ackman, who had no receipt for their purchase and could not say from whom he obtained them. At his committal Ackman was bailed in sum of £50 with two sureties of £30. He was tried on 16 August 1849 before William a'Beckett for receiving stolen property knowing the same to be stolen by a person name unknown. He was acquitted.<sup>4</sup>

**Elijah Levy:** On 25 June 1850 some clothing – 'trowsers' and a waistcoat – was stolen from the bedroom of George Edward Bennett a 'laborer' in the employ of Harris and Co whose premises were in Elizabeth Street. On the following day Bennett saw Levy wearing that clothing and gave him in charge to a constable.

Levy was tried for larceny before a'Beckett at Melbourne on 17 July 1850 and was acquitted. Rabbi John Levi identifies this Elijah Levy, and also Elijah Levey, as Elias Levy who was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1833.<sup>5</sup>

Elijah Levey was later convicted and sentenced for the indecent assault of an eight-year-old girl named Maria Ann Perkins, who swore that on Thursday, 21 November 1850 about half past 3 o'clock 'she was returning home through a lane off Bourke Street and met the prisoner who asked me to mind his tray of cakes while he went in search of some bottles. He put the tray on the ground and then he put his hand under my clothes and I felt his hand touch my person and with the other hand he pushed me down. He kept his hand on my person; his trousers were unbuttoned but I did not see his person. I screamed and he put his hand on my mouth. I have seen the prisoner before but he never did anything before – he goes around with a tray selling cakes.' Catherine McCarthy, who resided in Little Collins Street, saw the man put his hand under the girl's clothing and ran to Mary Acorn's house. Apparently, Mary Acorn was in a shed when she heard the child scream and saw her trying to get away from the prisoner who was holding her down; the flap of his 'trowsers' was down and he was in the act of buttoning it up. She gave evidence that the lane was not a thoroughfare. The Perkins family kept a fish shop in Bourke Street. Catherine Perkins, the mother, asked Maria what the 'Jew' had done to her – she said he had pushed her down and put his hand up her clothes.

Levey was committed for trial on a charge of attempted rape, but James Croke, the crown prosecutor, charged him at his trial with indecent assault and, alternatively, common assault. I can understand why he did this and agree with him. The activity was not sufficiently proximate to the penetration, essential in rape, to constitute an attempt to rape as a matter of law. Levey was tried before a'Beckett at Melbourne on 18 December 1850; he was found guilty of indecent assault and sentenced to work on the public roads for three years. His status is recorded as 'Free by Servitude', which meant he had been transported to Australia and had completed his sentence or had a conditional pardon.<sup>6</sup>

**John Levi or Levy** was charged in January 1842 with the larceny of a watch belonging to one John Pagan, a recent immigrant. It had been stolen from a lodging house conducted by Levi under the name of 'William Smith'. The only evidence against Levi was that he probably had possession of the watch some three weeks later when a brothel in Little Bourke Street, behind the Post Office, was raided by police. Levi was said to have handed the watch to a woman when police arrived. He was acquitted at his trial in February 1842. What is interesting is some evidence given in collateral proceedings relating to that brothel, which was conducted by a man named Hammond.

On 18 January 1842 constable John Waller gave evidence of going to Hammond's house about 2 a.m. on a Sunday with Constable Nolan. They went

to a skillion at the rear and Nolan pushed the door and it fell in onto the floor. On the table there were two packs of cards and bottles and glasses – one of which contained gin. He handcuffed the men and saw Levy try to pass a watch to a female who came in. Hammond also tried to give her one. Waller found stakes on the table and betting money. ‘The house is one, which is frequented by women of bad fame and men of bad character. I swear that Hammond has kept a brothel and now does.’

On 19 January 1842 a constable George Nuye (or Nuge), gave evidence that he knew Levi, Hammond and Sells ‘to be connected with all the cattle stealers and housebreakers in town’.

And on that same day John Waller again gave evidence:

Hammond kept a board and lodging house. I have known bad women at different times going into Hammond’s house with men – it is a common resort for such men. I know also that several men who have been taken up for felonies and suspicion of felony are in the habit of living in and resorting to Hammond’s house. I have this morning been to the house with a search warrant and found the house gutted with the exception of an old bed and “the piece” [i.e. a firearm] produced. Mrs. Hammond said all had been sold off to employ counsel.<sup>7</sup>

**Isaac Mendoza (Mondoza)** was convicted in April 1849 of stealing mutton valued at sixpence from a butcher’s shop in Little Bourke Street on a Friday night in March. He was imprisoned for two months. In June 1850 he stole a waistcoat from a fellow lodger and pawned it for three shillings. The pawnbroker, Jabez Plevins of Little Bourke Street, gave evidence that the accused used the name ‘William Jones’. On this occasion he was imprisoned for four months with hard labour. On each conviction his status was given as ‘Free by Servitude’.<sup>8</sup>

**James Simeon** came to Melbourne from Van Diemen’s Land – he was a nephew of the well-respected David Moses. He set up a clothing business in Collins Street and seems to have been the victim of some larcenies. In one such case Mary James, alias Mary Vallance, was tried on 4 December 1841 for stealing a handkerchief from Simeon’s shop; she pleaded guilty. Her status was that of ‘Free by Servitude’. She was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment and enquired as to what would happen to her three and a half year old child. Judge John Willis said it would be sent back to her father in England.

Simeon was in financial trouble by 1842. Apparently, he was then not held in high esteem by his fellow Jews. I quote from Rabbi Levi’s *Australian Genesis*:

Asher Hymen Hart’s name was put forward in July 1842 as a candidate for the Melbourne Municipal Council. To his chagrin his name was seconded by James Simeon, an early Jewish settler at Port Phillip whom Hart knew to be a liar and a cheat. Hart protested to the Port Phillip *Herald* on 12 July 1842 for publishing a report of the meeting in which his name was

coupled twice with that of ‘a person, who however respectable he may be in your estimation, I assure you I have not the slightest ambition to become familiarised with’.

It would seem that in October 1842 Simeon received a letter from David Moses, who resided in Van Diemen’s Land, informing him of a power of attorney sent to Solomon Benjamin for Simeon to pay to Benjamin the balance of Moses’ account of £74 4 s and 41s 2 d. Solomon Benjamin later swore, in some insolvency examination, that, when he showed Simeon the power of attorney, the latter abused him but did not pay. In the same insolvency examination, Asher Hymen Hart swore that Simeon asked him the best way of getting his (Simeon’s) uncle, David Moses, to make a claim for £300 when he only owed £74.

The examination also revealed that Simeon’s name was over his shop in Collins Street but was erased one night and the shop later reopened. Simeon swore ‘he did not request it but knows the man who did it but not his name’. In evidence, a John Levy swore that one morning, after the new shop was opened, Simeon said to him ‘what do you think of my pocal?’ – which means ‘hump’. The hump was high up on his back. Levy took him to mean that he (Simeon) was concealing something and removing stock that way.

There is an entry in the Criminal Record Book for 15 May 1843 which indicates Simeon was before Judge Willis for fraudulent insolvency and that the jury returned a verdict of guilty. However, there is a further entry saying ‘New trial ordered’ but there is no indication that any further trial was held.

Eventually, Simeon resumed business and was still trading in 1850. In April of that year, John Douglas, an overseer at a station in the Wimmera District, had his pocket book stolen from him in a hotel outside Geelong. The pocket book contained two orders – one for £15 drawn by Andrew Love on Dunford & Co. of Geelong. On Monday 8 April, two men came into Simeon’s shop and selected clothes and paid by the stolen order for £15. Thomas Griffiths, a shopman in the employ of Simeon, did not want to take the order, so went in search of his employer and showed it to him. Simeon accompanied Griffiths back to the shop, where he said he would send to Geelong about the order. The goods were not given to the men, who were told to ‘come back tomorrow’. Simeon asked the man where he got the order and was told he got it from one Douglas in payment for a horse. Simeon forwarded the order through his agent to Geelong and was told it was stolen. William Halton – the man who actually tendered the order – was tried before Judge a’Beckett on 16 May 1850 and convicted of larceny. He was an exile from Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Wight and was ordered to work on the public roads as a prisoner for three years.

The practice by shopmen of referring suspect cheques and orders to the employer became common as did the practice of telling the person to return later. The suggested return on the next day in this case indicates how quickly mail could be transported to Geelong and an answer returned.<sup>9</sup>

**Joseph Solomon:** The person of this name who actually came to the Port Phillip District in the early days was the son of the person involved in the Port Phillip Association and was known as ‘Johnny’. Johnny was married and he settled on the Saltwater River where a crossing place – Solomon’s Ford – was named after him and Michael Solomon, son of Judah.

On Thursday, 9 November 1838 one of his employees, Samuel Tucker, was branding and dressing sheep. He saw a plate lying between him and the kitchen door ‘which he feared would be broken by the fowls’. He told the servant woman. She asked him what business it was of his. He said none and returned to his work. Between two and three hours afterwards Johnny Solomon came to where Tucker was working and without saying anything to him struck him on the head with a walking stick which broke with the blow, which was very violent. Tucker’s head was cut and bled very much. He claimed in his evidence that he had given Solomon no provocation and had asked him after he was struck why he had done so. Solomon then told him the woman had informed him that ‘I [Tucker] was watching them to find them both together’. Solomon called Edward Newton as a defence witness. This was a mistake as Newton confirmed that Solomon went up to Tucker and said ‘Sam what have you been saying respecting me’ and then hit him with the stick. Solomon was fined £2 10s by William Lonsdale JP for the offence. Although this assault was dealt with summarily, I thought it worthy of mention as a good example of the level of personal violence in early Melbourne. Because sticks and whips were frequently carried to assist in working or controlling stock, they were used indiscriminately if an occasion for assault arose.

Samuel Tucker must have had some inherent ability to attract violence. A month after this incident with Johnny Solomon he was again a complainant, describing himself as a servant in the employ of Edmund Fergusson carting wool. In his evidence he described how Fergusson had threatened him when he found him in a hotel and again when he got back to the farm. Johnny Solomon happened to be there when Fergusson came up to Tucker with a large stick he had been riding with and struck him. Solomon was not called as a witness. Fergusson was convicted and fined. He was related to Solomon.

The references to the servant woman in the case of Solomon’s assault on Tucker are made even more intriguing by the brief note in the Melbourne Court Register for 28 November 1838 in proceedings under the Master and Servant Act – it was then a criminal offence to breach a contract of service. The note is:

Appeared before William Lonsdale Esquire one of Her Majesty’s Justices of the Peace, Catherine Hollins having been apprehended yesterday the 27th inst. by warrant issued on the same day upon the complaint of Mr Joseph Solomon for that the said Catherine Hollins did yesterday leave her hired service without permission; and the said Catherine Hollins having heard the charge laid against her declared she was guilty of the said offence.

Fourteen days imprisonment.<sup>10</sup>

In Van Diemen's Land during the 1830s, Ikey Solomon had some degree of domestic trouble in the course of which his daughter Ann's paramour – a Mr J. G. W. Wilson – wrote to Governor Arthur. In the Port Phillip District a George William Wilson was a partner of either David or Solomon Benjamin in a pastoral lease in the Westernport District. The Wilsons and the Benjamins were financially secure but it would seem that in or about April 1842 Joseph (Johnny) Solomon was in some financial trouble – probably with a Supreme Court judgment against him. I say this because of evidence that the sheriff seems to have been in possession of some of Solomon's sheep. Wilson and Benjamin paid an execution to the sheriff and as a result got some of the sheep and were driving them to Joseph Solomon's property when a confrontation took place with a man named David Fitzgerald, who claimed to be a sheriff's bailiff, and who was accompanied by a man named Henry Miller. Both Wilson and Solomon were armed and presented their firearms at the Fitzgerald party. This did not deter Miller, who directed Fitzgerald to arrest Wilson who was then handcuffed. Wilson charged Miller and Fitzgerald with aggravated assault and they were committed for trial. It would seem that the Crown authorities did not persist with this private prosecution; nor did Wilson. This Henry Miller was probably the well-known money-lender, banker and insurer in Melbourne and it may well be that Joseph Solomon also owed him money at that time of financial depression in the District<sup>11</sup>

Farmers tended to fence their land with post and rail type fences but wandering and trespassing stock were a constant problem. The remedy adopted was that long-established in England – to set up pounds to which trespassing stock could be taken. The owner of the stock could reclaim them from the pound by paying set fees. Those fees were often used by government for the relief of the sick. In the same way as the authorities adopted the English pound system, the locals adopted the English practice of attempting to rescue stock from the pound – which was an offence – or on the way to the pound, which the Port Phillip Crown prosecutor, James Croke, did not consider constituted the offence. It was in one such attempted rescue case that I discovered that there was also a local practice of giving the local pound keeper a written general authority to take to the pound straying stock found on the signatory's land. A signed authority from Joseph Solomon has survived from an 1850 case of attempted rescue. He gave the authority to the pound keeper at Braybrooke – which was then sometimes written as two words. The handwriting and signature indicate he was accustomed to writing.<sup>12</sup>

**Samuel Wulff** was probably born in Copenhagen. He must have gone to England and been convicted there as he arrived in Sydney aboard the ship *Portsea* on 18 December 1838 as a transported convict with a sentence of 10 years. He eventually found his way on assigned service to the Geelong area and at Geelong on 10 March 1845 a ticket of leave was issued to Samuel Wulff by Foster Fyans, a magistrate, for the purpose of 'arranging private business'.

The detail on that ticket of leave gave his trade or calling as watchmaker, his age as 33 years and his height as 5 ft 1 in, 'with hazle eyes and a dark slightly pockpitted complexion with one tooth lost in front and on his arms marks of having been bled'.

The nature of the 'private business' never emerged, but on 25 April 1845 John Hunter Patterson at McIvor Creek, near Pyalong, engaged Wulff as a shepherd and later – about 6 May 1845 – sent him to Melbourne with a pony to deliver to someone named Townsend – probably Henry Townsend, a commission agent in Collins Street. The route from Pyalong took Wulff to the Golden Fleece Hotel, Pentridge, and he arrived there with the pony on 10 May 1845. Thomas Robinson was the landlord of that hotel and agreed to keep the pony as security until 1 June 1845 after advancing to Wulff a total of £4 and getting an IOU from him. Patterson eventually got a warrant for Wulff's arrest on a charge of horse stealing. That warrant was executed in the Mount Martha area by mid-June and Wulff was brought to Melbourne. The police constable in this Wulff case was named Samuel Tucker – the same name as the victim of the Solomon and Fergusson assaults in 1838.

Wulff was tried before Judge Therry on 15 July 1845 on a charge of obtaining money under false pretences – that he owned the pony. He pleaded guilty and on 19 July was sentenced to six months imprisonment with hard labour, and his ticket of leave was cancelled. I can understand the charge being obtaining by false pretence rather than horse stealing. The Crown prosecutor, James Croke, may well have thought it arguable that, when the horse was left as security, Wulff possibly then intended to redeem the IOU and, accordingly, there would be difficulty in proving an element of larceny – the intent permanently to deprive the owner of his property. On the other hand, it was easy to prove the falsity of the pretence made, in the IOU, as to the ownership of the horse when obtaining the £4 and the victim's reliance upon the pretence. Wulff was fortunate that Croke did so – the usual sentence for horse stealing was much heavier than six months imprisonment.

Rabbi Levi is of the view that this Samuel Wulff is identical with the Samuel Wolfe who appears in the records of the Jewish community.<sup>13</sup>

I turn now to the cases in which Jews were victims or witnesses.

**Joseph Abraham:** I have only come across one brief reference to him as a witness in a larceny case in 1846. There was a hotel known as the Clarence Hotel on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth streets – it was on the south side of Collins Street and was of good repute. In September 1846, an opossum rug valued at some 14 shillings went missing from one of the parlours. It was sold for 5 shillings to a man named Thomas Richmond who repaired it and left it at Healey's shop for public sale. Joseph Abraham was the employee of Healey who was involved in the transaction and gave evidence. A man named James Hardman was identified by Richmond as the person who sold him the rug – he was charged and acquitted.<sup>14</sup>

**David and Solomon Benjamin:** These brothers had been in the clothing business in Launceston and in or about 1840 established a branch in Melbourne

– it was a draper and clothier’s shop in Collins Street called, as noted, Cheapside House. It is clear from my research that payment for purchases in shops was sometimes by cheque or some other form of money order; it is also clear that forged cheques and orders were quite common. A case with the Benjamins as victims is quite typical. On Monday, 8 December 1845 a man named William Williams went to the Benjamins’ shop and represented to the clerk there, Frederick Perkins Stevens, that he was an overseer for Donald Campbell Simson. Stevens would have known that Simson was a pastoralist with very extensive holdings in the District. Williams wanted some ‘slop clothing’ sent to Simson’s and wanted some for himself. He made his selections to the amount of £14 and paid by a cheque for £22 and received £8 change. This was a standard *modus operandi* to ensure that some cash was immediately obtained. The cheque was in printed form drawn on the Bank of Australasia – it was for £22 payable to William King and signed D. C. Simson – the signature was quite unlike the signature on Simson’s deposition at the committal. It was dishonoured on presentation at the bank as Simson had no account with that bank. Williams had been a cook at Simson’s and had been discharged on 20 October 1845. He was tried before Judge Therry on 19 January 1846 for forgery and found guilty of uttering. On 31 January he was sentenced to be imprisoned in Melbourne for two years’ hard labour – every fourth month in solitary confinement.<sup>15</sup>

**David Cashmore** apparently spent some time in Portland but he was in Geelong by 1849 where he had a drapery shop and must have lived on the premises. Early in 1849 he was a prosecution witness in the Ackman case (above).

On Sunday, 30 December 1849 Cashmore’s shop was closed and he was away from the premises from three to seven in the evening. When he returned Chief Constable Carman was waiting for him and asked him if he had been robbed. Cashmore said he did not know but found it difficult to open the front door. He went inside and found handkerchiefs and ribbon missing, valued at £15. That property had been in drawers behind the counter; the till had been broken open but had had no money in it. A miniature of his grandfather had been taken from a box. The explanation for Carman waiting outside the shop was that the thief had already been captured. On this day at about six o’clock, a Constable Kirby was standing at the back of the police office when he saw Edward Rogers going past with a bundle. He ran after him and, knowing him to be a reputed thief, took him into custody. He asked him where he got the bundle and the prisoner said a man had asked him to carry it and had then run away. At the watch house, it was found that the bundle contained 22 pieces of silk handkerchiefs and 17 rolls of ribbons and he also found the miniature and a ‘chissell’. Carman discovered that the property belonged to Cashmore and that entry to the premises had been obtained by a key. Skeleton keys were not unusual in the Port Phillip district at this time.

Edward Rogers was tried before Judge a’Beckett at Geelong on 20 February 1850; he was convicted of larceny – he was an exile from Millbank prison, London,

and was sentenced to work on the public roads for three years. This was the first criminal case heard in the Supreme Court on circuit at Geelong.<sup>16</sup>

**Michael Cashmore** (1815-86) had come to Melbourne in early 1840 and set up business in Elizabeth Street in premises he called the London and Manchester Warehouse. *Kerr's Port Phillip Directory* for 1841 gives only the Elizabeth Street address. With his newly married wife, he set out, in January 1841, from Sydney to Melbourne on the steamer *Clonmel*. Among her cargo was some stock, which Cashmore was going to use in his business in Melbourne. Unfortunately, the steamer ran aground near Port Albert and, whereas the Cashmores were safe, the stock was lost. Cashmore was not deterred and he continued to Melbourne where he soon opened a shop on the north-eastern corner of the intersection of Collins and Elizabeth Streets – he called it Victoria House. I do not think he could have had any idea that the Port Phillip District would become the colony of Victoria – I think the name indicates his belief that demonstrable patriotism was good for business. He was probably correct in this belief. By the mid-1840s, this shop was a substantial two-storey building with a dormer window in the roof facing Collins Street. On occasion, when giving evidence, Cashmore said he resided there. From evidence given in cases, it would appear that Cashmore also had what was described as a ‘branch establishment opposite Victoria House’, probably the London and Manchester Warehouse in Elizabeth Street. Cashmore usually described himself as a ‘draper’ although his staff tended to use the more generic expression ‘clothes shop’. He also regarded himself as a competent actor and took part in theatrical performances in Melbourne in 1842.<sup>17</sup>

On Thursday morning, 14 April 1842 about ten o'clock a man named James Mecklin came to the shop and showed Michael Cashmore an order addressed to Donaldson and Munro (who were drapers in Collins Street, and asked him to supply the clothing goods listed. Cashmore later swore of Mecklin: ‘He was very tipsy at the time but not so drunk as not to know what he was about.’ Cashmore sent him away but he later returned and got an employee to give him clothes to try on, and the employee sent him into a back room to do so. The clothes included a waistcoat but when he came out wearing the new clothes he denied that the selected waistcoat had been supplied; he got another one and put it in the bundle with his old clothes. Later, the first waistcoat was found under the shirt Mecklin put on in the back room. This was a common trick. The depositions about this case seem to relate more to forged orders than to the larceny of the waistcoat: when police later searched Mecklin they found a number of pieces of paper which remain on this file. To me, they look like trial runs at forgery. It is not clear that Mecklin was ever prosecuted.

About 12 months later, a man named Robert Apsey came to Cashmore's shop when Michael Davis was in charge of it about seven o'clock on a Wednesday evening and purchased goods to the amount of £6 10s. He gave Davis a cheque for £8 10s and ‘told me distinctly he was servant of Mr. Henty and had the cheque

as payment for wages and had just arrived from Portland Bay.’ He endorsed the cheque ‘John Anderson’ in the shop – that being the name of the payee. Davis gave him £2 in cash. When he presented the cheque at the bank he was told it was a forgery. He went looking for the prisoner and found him in the watch house. He still had part of property purchased with him. He was in the watch house for uttering other forged cheques. Apsey was tried before Judge Willis on 15 May 1843 for uttering forged cheques. He was convicted and sentenced to be transported for life. A sentence of transportation imposed in the Port Phillip District meant transportation to Van Diemen’s Land, Port Macquarie, Norfolk Island or Moreton Bay. As I have said, Cashmore had two establishments and in April 1844 a burglary was committed at the Elizabeth Street shop. Ralph Raphael had charge of ‘the branch establishment opposite Victoria House’. He left the shop about nine o’clock on a Monday evening and locked the door. When he heard of a man being in the shop he examined the lock but could detect no force being used. ‘The entry must have been effected by skeleton key. The shutters were secure and remained as I had left them.’

William McLelland, a shopman to Cashmore in the Collins Street shop, was informed about 11 o’clock that night that some suspicious characters were loitering about the premises of his master’s shop in Elizabeth Street. The shop was closed for the night and the shutters were up. On going to the shop door the prisoner was in the act of coming out of the shop. McLelland seized hold of him and he escaped; he pursued him and took him in charge and then searched the shop but could not say if anything was missing. At the committal hearing the following day, Michael Cashmore swore: ‘I arrested the prisoner in my shop last night from information I received from my shopman that the prisoner broke into my shop.’ My research indicates that shopkeepers in Melbourne, at this time, were well aware of the citizen’s powers of arrest. William Jarvis was tried before Judge Jeffcott on 23 April 1844 on a charge of entering a dwelling house with intent to commit a felony and breaking out in the night time. He was free by servitude; he was convicted and sentenced to be imprisoned for two years with hard labour every alternative month of that term. Imprisonment might be either in the Melbourne Gaol or at Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour.

In late April 1844, William McLelland again saw a man in the Collins Street shop after hours and told John Turpin, another shopman in Cashmore’s service; Turpin then saw a man passing Dr Wilmott’s door (close by in Collins Street) with his arms full of clothing. He ran after him and brought him back to the shop and told Cashmore, who took the prisoner into custody. Turpin heard the prisoner say to Cashmore that he was at his mercy and not to do anything to him. For this larceny Francis Reilly, who was free by servitude, was tried and convicted before Judge Jeffcott on 15 May 1844 and on 18 May was sentenced to be transported for five years.

Between twelve and one o’clock on a Saturday in mid-October 1846 Michael

Cashmore was standing in Collins Street outside his shop and saw John Flinn walk up to the shop door and take some trousers – value 6 shillings – from the place where they were hanging. He followed him and gave him over to the charge of a constable. Flinn was never tried; there is an intriguing note – ‘prisoner dead’ – on this file

On Tuesday, 31 July 1849 about six o’clock, Alfred Harris, a shopman to Cashmore, was in the Collins Street shop and saw someone in the street throw away a large ticket similar to those they kept marked with the price of goods. He thought someone had taken a ticket off some goods and when he looked around he missed a pair of blankets from the doorway of the shop where they were hung for sale. He went out and saw Richard Lovell going along Little Collins Street with the blankets under his arm. Harris had seen the blankets hanging up about a quarter hour before they were missed. At the committal hearing, Michael Cashmore swore the blankets produced in court were his property; he added that they had his mark on them and were valued at 13 shillings. This evidence of a private mark, as distinct from a ticket, on goods displayed for sale was not uncommon but, as usual, no evidence was ever given of the nature of those marks. We can only wonder. Richard Lovell, who was free by servitude, was tried and convicted before Judge a’Beckett on 15 August 1849 and was sentenced to be kept to hard labour on the public roads of the colony for three years.<sup>18</sup>

**John Davies** was the son of Michael; both were transported at different times. John was transported to Van Diemen’s Land and when released went to New South Wales and became a chief constable in Penrith, briefly, and then came to Melbourne where he was a reporter mainly with the *Port Phillip Gazette* and the *Port Phillip Patriot*. He was also an actor, taking part in theatre productions in Melbourne.

One of the early magistrates in Melbourne was Major George F. B. St John, a retired army officer. He did not get on well with the newspaper reporters who frequented his court. Garryowen recounts one incident:

Mr John Davies, one of the best known of the early reporters, and for years employed on the *Patriot* and the *Gazette*, was on the 2nd February, 1842, sitting in the reporters’ box and talking to some bystander, when the Major ordered a Sergeant of Police to turn him out amongst the crowd. This was done, and the next morning the Magistrate got hotly peppered by a newspaper paragraph; and on Davies making his appearance in Court, the Major ordered him to be *instantly* locked up in the watch-house. Here he was kept sweating for an hour, when, by St. John’s direction, he was brought back to Court, and there informed that he was discharged, and the reason he was not sent to gaol until next day was the fact that the prison was overcrowded with inmates! Davies commenced an action for false imprisonment, which was privately arranged by the intercession of mutual friends.

In December 1844 John Davies went bail surety for £10 for a person charged with a minor assault.

In early 1846 the *Port Phillip Gazette* reported that John Davies was convicted of the criminal libel of Mrs Kerr, wife of William Kerr, publisher of the *Patriot*, and fined after making an apology. However, there is no record of any such conviction in the Criminal Record Book nor have I yet found any Crown solicitor file for any such case. It may be that the *Port Phillip Gazette* report was an inaccurate report of civil proceedings in which damages were awarded.

Davies continued as a reporter and during the Orange riots in July 1846 he seems to have assisted the authorities. John O'Shanassy, who became premier of Victoria in 1857, was a witness at the later committal hearing relating to those riots. He swore:

... I was in Queen Street yesterday evening, about half-past 3 o'clock, when passing by Messrs. Annand and Smith's corner [Collins and Queen Streets] I met Mr. John Davies, who told me he believed there would be a riot, as he saw several persons armed round the *Pastoral Hotel*. He requested me to accompany him to the Mayor. I did so, and we met His Worship. We then proceeded with the Mayor to the *Pastoral Hotel*.

The Pastoral Hotel was on the northeast corner of Queen and Little Bourke streets. Subsequently shots were fired at O'Shanassy during this disturbance.

A short time later Davies went to Hobart where he founded the *Mercury* newspaper and where he died in 1872.<sup>19</sup>

**Michael Davis** was in charge of one of Michael Cashmore's shops in 1843 but by 1849 he had a clothing shop of his own in Elizabeth Street. On 13 August 1849, John Benson purchased clothing and wanted to pay by cheque. Davis would not cash it unless Benson could satisfy him it was good one – Benson gave William J. Sugden, then chief constable of police, as a reference and Davis directed his servant Daniel Pierce to go to Sugden. But on the way Benson went into the Britannia Hotel and later did not have the cheque. The next day James Kerr picked up the cheque from the floor of the bar of the Britannia and took it to the bank where it was pronounced to be a forgery, and then Kerr gave it to police. Benson was charged with uttering a forged cheque but the Crown prosecutor decided the case was too weak and it did not proceed.

In November Michael Davis was involved in what might be described as a somewhat cheeky attempt to utter a forged cheque. On Wednesday, 28 November 1849, a cheque was presented by Job Wigmore to Mrs Coulsen of the Queen's Head hotel in Queen Street. She had it taken to the Bank of Australasia and was told the drawer had no account. Somewhat surprisingly, Mrs Coulsen gave the cheque back to Wigmore and between six and seven o'clock that same night he was in Davis' shop purchasing two shirts from Daniel Pierce, the shopman. Wigmore tendered the same cheque in payment. Pierce kept the shirts and the cheque and

sent for Davis. Coincidentally, Constable John Johnstone was passing the shop and Pierce called him into the premises. Johnstone was a member of the new police detective force and asked Wigmore where he got the cheque – the first story was for wages from a station in the Wimmera; when asked for how long he had worked there the second story was that he received it in part payment for a horse. Wigmore was free by servitude and was tried and convicted before Judge a'Beckett on 17 December 1849 for uttering a forged order and was imprisoned for two years. On reading this case, I was not surprised that the Bank gave the cheque back but was surprised that the Bank did not put the notation 'forgery' very clearly on it as that crime was becoming common practice by the late 1840s.

As just mentioned, there was a police detective force operational in Melbourne in the late 1840s. Under a Sergeant Ashley, the detectives were developing investigative techniques suited to the commercial environment. In one such investigation into the larceny of money from The Freemasons' Tavern in December 1849 the suspect was found to have new clothing – mainly shirts. The police discovered he had purchased them from two shops – one was that of Michael Davis, who was able to give details of the time of day the suspect had been in his shop, what he had purchased and what denomination of bank note had been tendered. The suspect, John Amey, was free by servitude and was tried and convicted of larceny before Judge a'Beckett on 7 February 1850 and sentenced to work on the public roads for three years.<sup>20</sup>

**Samuel Henry Harris** was transported to Sydney in 1833 and obtained his certificate of freedom in 1840, came to Melbourne and was active in the Jewish community. By 1841, with Jacob Marks, he established a drapery business known as the London Mart in Queen Street and they later moved to Elizabeth Street where they had two premises – that on the north-western corner of Collins and Elizabeth streets was known as the Liverpool Mart and was single storey and adjoining it to the north was the triple-storied London Mart.

**Jacob Marks** had earlier had a store in country New South Wales and was shot and wounded in an armed hold-up; he then came to Melbourne and went into partnership with Harris.<sup>21</sup>

Alexander Verner went into the Harris and Marks shop on Friday afternoon, 10 June 1842, about 5 o'clock and wanted to look at a jacket. He tried on a jacket and said it was too large. Marks then got others and eventually missed one but found it and a handkerchief, which had been displayed on the counter, in the prisoner's bundle. There were also trousers in the bundle. Marks called a constable. Verner, who was free by servitude, was convicted of larceny before Judge Willis and sentenced to imprisonment for six months with hard labour.

On Saturday, 30 November 1844, a group of women went into the Harris and Marks shop where a shopman, Caleb Emmerson, was in charge; they wished to see various articles. Mary Wainwright wanted to be shown some printed gown

pieces; he put five pieces on the counter for her to look at but she left before the other women and he noticed she went to the nearby Melbourne Tavern in Elizabeth Street. He then noticed one piece missing; he knew it had private marks on it; it was valued at 15 shillings. He told Jacob Marks and gave him a description of the woman. Marks went to the hotel and asked the woman about the piece; she denied having it but he found it in a parcel behind the bar; the publican, John Hassett, gave evidence that Wainwright had brought the parcel into the hotel. Wainwright was 'free' but was convicted before Judge Jeffcott on 16 December 1844; the jury strongly recommended mercy and she was sentenced to be imprisoned for one month.

About six o'clock on Friday, 18 April 1845, Henry Williams went to the Harris and Marks shop and bought two shirts (one had a private mark on it), one silk handkerchief and two pair of stockings for a total of 16 shillings. Williams proffered a cheque for £3, payable to Henry Watson, so the shopman, James Doyle, gave him £2 4s change after Williams had endorsed the back of the cheque as Henry Watson. The cheque was dishonoured as a forgery and Jacob Marks found Williams and took charge of him. When searched he still had the marked shirt, the £2 4s, and he attempted to get rid of two more forged cheques. On 28 April 1845 Williams, a 'free' person, was found guilty of uttering and on 30 April was sentenced to be transported for seven years. There is some suggestion he was later pardoned.<sup>22</sup>

In October 1848 Harris's wife, Elizabeth, gave one of their employees, William Lloyd, money to pay what seem to have been household accounts. Lloyd returned Kirk the butcher's account apparently receipted by him and told Harris he had paid Kirk. In fact, Kirk had not been paid and eventually Lloyd, who was free by servitude, was convicted on 15 November 1848 of uttering a forged receipt and imprisoned for two years' hard labour.<sup>23</sup>

**Asher Hymen Hart** was a draper in Collins Street West and later became an auctioneer. In late 1842 a series of fires occurred in the inner city. One fire was on Sunday, 16 October 1842 in Collins Street and commenced in Hart's drapery store about 11 o'clock in the night; he lived on the premises. Other premises were also involved and, after the fire, all were plundered by looters. On Saturday, 5 November 1842, Hart went with Constable Waller, who had a search warrant, to Mrs Kelly's house, and there identified property – knives, forks, spoons, and a parasol basket – as his. There was evidence that William Wilson, known as 'Bill the Cook', had brought those articles to Kelly's house on the night of the fire claiming his boss did not want them. Wilson was tried and convicted on 26 November 1842; he was free by servitude and was sentenced to transportation for seven years. Hart was insured against fire and was compensated for his entire stock loss but not the loss of his library.

When Hart was an auctioneer in 1846 he kept the details of sales in two books

of foolscap size. The books were kept in a particular cupboard. At this time Hart employed Charles Banbury as a clerk but when Banbury did not turn up for work one day Hart noticed the books were missing – they contained details of sales of furniture to Banbury. Hart then discovered that Banbury was setting up his own business and had been seen to leave the premises with a shawl box about 18 inches square by 6 inches – big enough to hold the missing account books. Hart informed police of the suspected theft. There was a body of evidence that the box contained a shawl and a music book but Banbury was committed for trial in April 1846 and released on bail. There is a note on the fold of the Crown solicitor's file indicating that Banbury was discharged from his bail recognizance in the August session 1846. I interpret that to mean that for some or no reason the prosecution could not proceed with the case and some provisions of the Habeas Corpus Act were invoked to bring proceedings to an end.<sup>24</sup>

**Edward Hart** and **Isaac Hart** were in partnership as drapers in Collins Street. About eight o'clock on Friday, 20 April 1849 Benjamin Cully, assistant shopman in the employ of E. and I. Hart drapers of Collins Street, was in the shop. There were 'trowsers' on a stand near the entrance door. Cully heard a noise and saw a man running at full speed; he followed and called out 'Stop thief!' but lost sight of the man. However, he later saw a man held by someone named Spencer. The 'trowsers' were then in the channel of the street. Richard Spencer, corn factor in Swanston Street, gave evidence that he saw a man run past his shop and drop something and heard someone calling 'Stop thief!' He went after him and held him. At his trial, George Barton, the man caught by Spencer, made no admissions, and was acquitted of this larceny. Identification cases were as difficult of proof then as they are now.

On Tuesday evening 28 May 1850, a man named Thomas Fowler – claiming to be Robert Stevens – purchased some clothing from Edward Hart and paid by an order payable to Robert Stevens. Hart told him to come back the next day to get the change £1 6s 5d. He did come back and Hart told him to go with Hyman Hart, an apprentice, to James Dobson, the drawer of the order, to collect the money. They started out towards the wharves at the northern bank of the Yarra River but Fowler ran off. Hyman Hart went in pursuit and was joined by a constable who saw what was happening. They caught Fowler and took him to Dobson, who said he had stopped payment as the order had been stolen from Robert Stevens in the Edinburgh Castle Hotel on the Tuesday evening. Fowler was tried and convicted before Judge a'Beckett on 16 July 1850 for larceny. He was an exile from Millbank Prison, London, and was sentenced to work on the public roads for three years.<sup>25</sup>

**Moss Jacobs** worked as a cook in the Angel Inn in Lonsdale Street. It was common practice for smokers in hotels to go into the kitchen to light their pipes. On 15 March 1843, Patrick Brennan did that in the Angel Inn but would not comply

when Jacobs told him to leave. According to Jacobs, Brennan was ‘much in liquor at that time’. Indeed, he immediately fought with Jacobs and kicked him in the leg. Jacobs later swore it was broken but there was no medical evidence. Brennan also fought all others who attempted to subdue him as well as the constable who arrested him. Brennan’s trial on 21 June 1843 for this activity was the last criminal trial before Judge Willis was removed from the Bench during civil proceedings in July 1843. Brennan’s status was ‘bond’ and he was imprisoned for one week with hard labour. He would continue to serve his earlier sentence.<sup>26</sup>

**Moses Lazarus** was a clothier in Elizabeth Street and on Sunday, 30 July 1848 John Bishop and ‘another young man’ called at the shop and told Caroline, wife of Moses, that they were sailors on the ship *Sultana*, which was then in Hobsons Bay, and they wanted clothing. They selected some to the value of £12 odd and the unnamed young man gave her a cheque for £16, which was drawn by Asher Hart. She took the cheque and gave the change equally between them. The cheque was quite valid and had been given by Asher Hart to Richard Langford, the commander of the *Sultana*, in the course of business. Langford put the cheque in his pocket book, which he kept in his cabin. Bishop was employed as a labourer on the ship and had access to that cabin. Bishop’s companion was never discovered but Bishop was tried and convicted of larceny before Judge a’Beckett on 15 August 1848. He was an exile from Parkhurst Prison (Isle of Wight) and was sentenced to be imprisoned for 18 months with hard labour.<sup>27</sup>

**Thomas Lazarus:** On 10 January 1848 Thomas Lazarus, who was a shopkeeper and dealer residing in Collins Street, was present in the crowd of some 800 men at the three prize fights which occurred in the very early morning on the banks of the Saltwater River, about a mile and a half from Henry Kellet’s public-house, the Bush Inn. The police turned up and attempted to stop this illegal activity but met resistance. Lazarus was one of those who resisted and with fourteen others was charged with Riot and Assault. They were tried before a’Beckett on 16 March 1848. All pleaded guilty and were each fined one shilling and imprisoned until the fine was paid.

On Monday, 18 December 1848 a man named William Kidson, who resided in Little Collins Street, and who owed Lazarus money, came to the shop and gave Lazarus a cheque for £20 purporting to be drawn by Heape and Grice, well known merchants in Melbourne. According to Lazarus’s later evidence, Kidson desired him to get the cheque cashed, take what he was owed, and forward the balance to Kidson’s wife. Lazarus took the cheque and gave it to one George Clarke to take to the bank. Lazarus later swore he could not read or write. At the committal, Kidson was charged with uttering a forged cheque on Lazarus. The Crown prosecutor, Croke, did not proceed with this case. This decision does not surprise me: on reading this file I suspected that Kidson, Lazarus and Clarke were all involved in some cunning ploy.<sup>28</sup>

**Abraham Levey** was a shopkeeper in Corio Street, North Geelong. On 15 December 1841 Mary Saunders came into his shop and purchased some food and paid by a cheque for £10 10s 10d and got her change in cash. The cheque was drawn by George Buckley and Co. on the Union Bank. Saunders said Buckley was a settler at Portland Bay. The cheque was dishonoured as 'no account'. She was charged with uttering a forged cheque and acquitted. In those days, when the same cheque often passed through many hands, it was difficult to prove a particular utterer had guilty knowledge that the cheque was forged.

On Friday, 18 November 1842, Levey missed a child's lace cap worth 13 shillings and some cotton worth two shillings and sixpence from his shop. The property was traced to Julia O'Connor, who stated that her husband had deserted her four months previously and having taken a little spirits at Mr Unkle's she did not know what she was about when she was in Mr Levey's shop. She pleaded guilty on 15 December 1842 before Judge Willis. Her status was 'free' and she was sentenced to imprisonment for twelve hours. She had been in custody since the day of her arrest.<sup>29</sup>

**John Levey** had a clothing shop in Melbourne and on Wednesday, 23 March 1842, Patrick Barry paid for some clothes by an order on Campbell and Woolley drawn by Robert Hamilton. Levey sent the order to Campbell and Woolley – merchants in Elizabeth Street – who refused it as not being Hamilton's signature. Barry stated that he had been a hutkeeper to Messrs McKinnon (who were in the Portland Bay area) and in consequence of a dispute had left without being paid. He had walked 170 miles into town and drew the order with the overseer's name for the amount of the wages being the only way he knew of getting his wages. He was tried and convicted of forgery before Judge Willis on 7 April 1842; his status was 'free' and he was transported for life.<sup>30</sup>

**Isaac Lazarus Lincoln** was a tailor and draper in Collins Street and in January 1843 employed John Cohen as a shopman. On Monday 16 January 1843, John O'Donnell asked Cohen to advance him £1 on an order for 10 guineas. He said his name was John O'Donnell and he endorsed the order in the name of Thomas Wilson – this being the name on the order, which purported to be drawn by Thomas Dobson on G. W. Cole in favour of Wilson. Cohen brought the prisoner and the order to Nancy Lincoln, wife of Isaac Lincoln, and she saw him endorse it. Isaac Lincoln then told Henry Raphael, another shopman, to take the order to Captain George Cole – a merchant in Collins Street – who said he did not know the drawer and did not cash it. About the same time, and using other names, O'Donnell cashed other orders including one with the forged name of Henry Moor, then a Melbourne solicitor. O'Donnell was tried and convicted of forgery before Judge Willis on 15 February 1843; his status was 'free by servitude' and he was transported for life.

In early April 1843 Lincoln cashed two orders for John Lloyd Smith for a total of some £30 – both were forgeries. At his committal he admitted the offence

and pleaded guilty before Judge Willis on 7 April 1843; his status was 'free by servitude' and he was transported for life.<sup>31</sup>

Nathaniel Nathan was transported to New South Wales, arriving in 1831. He obtained a ticket-of-leave but lost it for offences in Sydney. He was sent to Melbourne and was a messenger at the Melbourne Goal. Again, he got a ticket-of-leave and, by 1844, he was a retail clothier in Elizabeth Street. He obtained his certificate of freedom in February 1845. In and about May 1844 there were a series of related thefts in Melbourne and the surrounding settlements, and various attempts were made to dispose of the stolen property. John Corcoran tried unsuccessfully to sell Nathan some boys' suits which were proved to be stolen. Corcoran, who was 'free by servitude' was tried and convicted of receiving before Judge Jeffcott on 16 July 1844 and sentenced to be transported for seven years.

On Saturday, 2 September 1848, a man named John Holmes came to Nathan's shop and purchased clothing to the value of £4 10s 0d and gave Nathan a cheque for £8 10s 0d signed by T. H. Pyke – a well known squatter – and got £4 change. Nathan knew Holmes and there was no conversation as to where Holmes got the cheque. Nathan believed it was correct but when he presented the cheque at the bank he found it was a forgery. Holmes told police he bought the cheque for £7. Holmes was charged with some offence related to the cheque but was acquitted before Judge a'Beckett on 14 September 1848. In this file the Crown Prosecutor expressed concern about the difficulties of proving guilty knowledge.

Again, in March 1849, Nathan took a forged cheque from Edward Jones in payment for clothing. Jones told Nathan he could not read or write but had seen the drawer, John Cato, write and sign it. Jones who was 'free by servitude' pleaded guilty before Judge a'Beckett on 19 April 1849 to uttering a forged order and was sentenced to work on the public roads for three years.

On Friday night 11 October 1850 about half past seven, Joseph Stammers, a miller of King Street, was passing Nathan's shop in Elizabeth Street and saw Dennis Buckley standing on the footpath and take something down from a shelf in the shop and offer it to another man who refused to take it. Buckley then dropped it on the footpath. Stammers called Nathan, who arrested the man. What Buckley had taken was a pair of 'moleskin trowsers'. Buckley, who was 'free by servitude', was tried and convicted before Judge a'Beckett on 16 November 1850 and was sentenced to be imprisoned for one month with hard labour.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Crimes committed by Jews were typical of the time and reflected the same degree of association with people of bad character as existed in the whole community. The offences described above are typical of the period.

Jews do not appear to have been singled out as targets for crime. Their conduct of retail shops made it more likely that attempts would be made to utter forged cheques to them. Jews seemed to have received the same degree of 'neighbourhood

watch' type assistance as others. Jews seemed to know and exercise their rights to the same degree as others.

About two-thirds of those tried in the Supreme Court either pleaded guilty (not very common) or were convicted by a jury. Aliases were quite commonly used in this period – presumably by people who did not want their previous history to be checked. Readers may be surprised at the number of previously convicted offenders. Even 'free' did not mean 'no previous convictions': it related to alleged status on arrival. In fact, many of those recorded as of 'free' status during the 1840s were really 'free by servitude': this was ascertained in the early 1850s during a parliamentary inquiry when the community was greatly concerned with the influx of convicts from Van Diemen's Land. The revised statistics seem to indicate that some two-thirds of those convicted were already convicts.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Historical Records of Victoria* (hereafter *HRV*) vol. 1, Chapter 1; A. G. L. Shaw; *History of the Port Phillip District*, Miegunyah Press, 1996, Chap. 4; John S. Levi & G. F. J. Bergman; *Australian Genesis*, MUP 2002, Chap. 21 (hereafter Levi); Billott: *Melbourne's Missing Chronicles*, Quartet Books, 1982, p. 22.
- <sup>2</sup> Bourke's Proclamation, *HRV* vol. 1, p. 12; Minutes of the residents' meeting, 1 June 1836, *HRV*, vol. 1, pp. 36-7; Lonsdale's appointment *HRV* vol. 1, p. 49.
- <sup>3</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette*, 20 Feb. 1841; Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.* p. 283.
- <sup>4</sup> *Victorian Public Records* (hereafter *VPR*) Series 30P Box 192 – NCR 397.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, Box 194 – NCR 476; conversation with Rabbi Levi, March 2003.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, Box 10 – 1-95-12.
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, – Box 185 – NCR 19; *VPR* Series 30P Box 185 – NCR 18.
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, Box 7 – 1-62-2; *VPR* Series 30P Box 9 – 1-90-19.
- <sup>9</sup> Michael Cannon; *Old Melbourne Town*, Loch Haven Books, 1991, p. 18; Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, p. 290; Simeon committal: *VPRS* Series 30P Box 2 – 1-21-5; Cannon, *op.cit.*, p. 66; Halton: *VPR* Series 30P Box 9 – 1-87-4.
- <sup>10</sup> Solomon assault: 1 *HRV* p. 324; Fergusson assault: 1 *HRV* p. 326; Catherine Hollins – 1 *HRV* p. 401; Assaults generally: 1 *HRV* Ch. 22.
- <sup>11</sup> Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, p. 238; *VPR* Series 30P Box 185 NCR 36 – (NB there are two files marked "NCR 36" – the other relates to James Smith & Stephen Egan – cattle stealing).
- <sup>12</sup> Charles Doherty – rescuing cattle: *VPR* Series 30P Box 194 – NCR 487.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Wulff' is the spelling in the criminal records about this incident – *VPR* Series 30P Box 4 – 1-13A-4; conversation with Rabbi Levi March 2003.
- <sup>14</sup> *VPR* Series, 30P Box 190 – NCR 249.
- <sup>15</sup> Cannon, *op.cit.*, p. 66; *VPR* Series 30P Box 5 – 1-20A-2.
- <sup>16</sup> Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, p. 300; *VPR* Series 30P Box 9 – 1-84-1.
- <sup>17</sup> *Port Phillip Gazette* 6, 9, 30 January 1841; Trevor S. Cohen: *AJHSJff*; D. Cohen: 15 *AJHSJ* p. 430 ff.; a lithograph done in 1847 by J. S. Prout, shows the view looking north in Elizabeth Street and includes both Cashmore's building and that of Harris and Marks, see Cannon, *op.cit.*, p. 126-7; Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, p. 130.
- <sup>18</sup> Mecklin: *VPR* Series 30P Box 185-NCR 30; Aspey; *VPR* Series 30P Box 2 1-21-4; Jarvis; *VPR* Series 30P Box 187 NCR 117, CRB p3A; Reilly: *VPR* Series 30P Box 3 – 1-4(a)-3; Flinn: *VPR* Series 30P Box 190 – NCR 253; Lovell; *VPR* Series 30P Box 8 – 1-71-9.

- 19 Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, passim; Garryowen; *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne* (Melbourne, vol. 1, 1888) pp. 100, 683.
- 20 Benson: VPR Series 30P, Box 192 – NCR 399; Wigmore: VPR Series 30P, Box 8 – 1-79-4; Amey: VPR Series 30P Box 9 –, 1-82-8.
- 21 Levi and Bergman, *op.cit.*, passim.
- 22 Verner: VPR Series, 30P Box 1 – 1-12-2; Wainwright: VPR, Series 30P Box 3 – 1-8(a)-4; Williams: VPR Series, 30P Box 4 – 1-10A-3.
- 23 Lloyd: VPR Series, 30P Box 6 – 1-55-2.
- 24 Wilson: VPR Series, 30P Box 1 – 1-16-5; Garryowen *op.cit.*, vol 1 pp. 205-07; Cannon: *op.cit.*, p. 234; Banbury: VPR Series 30P Box 190 NCR 240.
- 25 Barton: VPR Series, 30P Box 192 – NCR 360; Fowler: VPR Series, 30P Box 9 – 1-90-15.
- 26 *ibid.*, 30P – Box 2 – 1-21-3.
- 27 *ibid.*, 30P – Box 6 – 1-52-2.
- 28 Prize fight: *Garryowen, op.cit.*, Vol. 1, pp.749-50; VPR, Criminal Record Book, p. 44 No 5; Kidson: VPR Series, 30P Box 191 – NCR 323.
- 29 Saunders: VPR Series, 30P Box 186 – NCR 63; O'Connor: VPR Series 30P Box 1 – 1-16-1.
- 30 Barry: VPR Series, 30P Box 1 – 1-10(a)-5.
- 31 O'Donnell: VPR Series 30P Box 2 – 1-18-2; Smith: VPR Series 30P Box 2 1-20-2
- 32 Corcoran: VPR Series 30P Box 3 – 1-5(a)-9; Holmes: VPR Series 30P Box 191 – NCR 288; Jones: VPR Series 30P Box 7 – 1-64-26; Buckley: VPR Series 30P Box 10 – 1-94-8.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Yossi Aron, Adass Israel 50th Anniversary Dinner,  
Wednesday, 20 February 2002: History of Melbourne  
Adass Israel*

Adass Israel is probably the most rigorous of Melbourne's Strictly Orthodox synagogues and communities. Entirely self-contained, and seldom participating in wider Jewish community affairs, its adherents remain absolutely loyal to what they regard as Torah Judaism. As a result, surprisingly little is known of their origins and history in Melbourne. What little existed on the history of Adass Israel found its way into my *Jews in Australia: A Thematic History* (1991) volume on the 1945-90 era, and a number of newspaper articles have appeared on them since, but Adass has remained without an adequate history until recently. As part of their fiftieth anniversary celebration, the community commissioned Yossi Aron to write its history. Aron is extremely well-qualified to do this, having written several previous well-received works on Melbourne Orthodox synagogues and groups. His long (pp. 40-133) history of Adass appears in a commemorative volume produced for a dinner to mark their half-century. It is a very good piece of work, and it ought to become known to a much wider audience among historians of Australian Jewry. Aron is apparently writing a longer history of Adass, to which one looks forward. His history rightly focuses on the internal development of Adass in Melbourne and its key personalities, but more might have been said of a comparative and sociological nature. What, for instance, sets them apart from other Strictly Orthodox groups in Melbourne such as the Lubavitchers? Why would someone join Adass rather than another Strictly Orthodox group?

Many of the adherents of Adass were survivors from Hungary and other parts of central Europe, and the community is (p. 53) 'well known around the Jewish world as a kehilla that followed the traditions of Hungarian orthodoxy'. This itself is an important insight, for historians of Adass have had some difficulty in precisely accounting for the origins and social bases of this community, and many have assumed that they are a kind of catchall synagogue for all non-Lubavitcher Strictly Orthodox, without understanding their specific origins. Their origin, in other words, was not in Poland or the *shtetls* of the former Tsarist Pale. In Melbourne, they quickly established a remarkable range of institutions centred in East St Kilda, and are particularly visible and well-known for being the only Jewish grouping to dress in the traditional garb of old Europe on the Sabbath and other holidays. With zero rates of intermarriage and assimilation, youthful marriages and large families, they are among the fastest-growing section of Australian Jewry, but one

which is linked to the worldwide Adass community which exists in Israel, Britain, South America, Williamsburg, and elsewhere, rather than to any other section of Australian Jewry. That they can exist and flourish in today's Australia is a tribute to the success of multiculturalism.

Because so little is known about them, there is a tendency to dismiss them as a marginal relic. In fact, however, their high rates of population increase will make them increasingly central to Jewish identity in Australia. This work, and future works on Adass, should be welcomed for this reason.

William D. Rubinstein

### LINA BRYANS: RARE MODERN 1909-2000

by Gillian Forwood

(Miegunyah Press, Melbourne 2003)

Gillian Forwood is correct; most people who admire mid-twentieth century Australian art could not recognise Lina Bryans' name or identify her work in galleries. Why did Bryans not gain a place in Australia's main art histories? Art historian Bernard Smith completely omitted her from his authoritative work, *Australian Painting*. Robert Hughes referred to her only in passing in *The Art of Australia*. Thankfully she was included in *Modern Australian Women 1925-1945* and McCulloch's *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*.

To understand her real contribution to Australian cultural life, Forwood recommended a focus on her seventy-plus portraits, painted between 1937-74. These portraits of her friends formed an imposing pictorial record of Melbourne's art and academic glitterati. At the same time, Forwood discovered in the portraits Bryans' rare gift for friendship, her dynamic, generous temperament and her internationalism.

Lina Hallenstein was born in Hamburg in 1909. From the beginning, we see some of the conflicting and complementary parts of her life that made her special: part of an old, established Australian Jewish family, yet exposed to Europe's non-Jewish treasures; raised in a privileged, upper middle class family yet friends with impoverished immigrants; growing up in an era of stable Edwardian values, but belonging to the post-World War One era of experimentation.

I'd love to have known more about her relationships with her both sides of her family, the Hallensteins and the Benjamins. Forwood gives many details about them, and their connections in Australia and New Zealand, but we have no sense of their influence. Cousin Charles Brasch seemed to be the only relative with something to say about Lina's career.

There was even less information about husband Baynham Bryans, father of her only child. The two families must have known each other for many years, but there was no analysis of the decision to marry out. Nor was there comment on the raising of Edward, who boarded at Geelong Grammar.

Bryans' art career didn't involve enrolment in art school. She was probably influenced in the early years by Iain MacKinnon, the Scottish watercolour artist. He opened up the world of modern French art to her, and took her to galleries and exhibitions.

Then she met William Jock Frater, the man who had the greatest influence on her career. Frater had studied art in Glasgow, London and Paris, then came to Australia to assist at the modern art school. He was the father of Post-Impressionist, Cezannesque art in Australia. Frater's modernism liberated his own work from convention and in turn influenced younger artists, above all Bryans. She worked for some time in his Little Collins Street studio, and finally decided to become an artist herself. One of his most famous and beautiful NGV works was the *Red Hat*, a study of Bryans!

Artists Adrian Lawlor and his wife Eva Nodrum had lived in Warrandyte, and during the late 1930s were hosts to Bryans, Frater and Alan Summer. Together the artists went into the bush, painting. Many of Bryans' Warrandyte landscapes show she was excited by the water, light, flowers and the rich, modernist colours.

Of course, all modernists took risks; after all, they may not have found patrons among conservative art buyers. But women artists took even greater risks: travelling overseas, using modernist styles disliked by critics; pursuing career at the expense of family.

Bryans developed an unconventional life. She lived in the city, spent much time with a man not her husband (Frater), socialised with newly arrived immigrants, shocked her parents, and wrote/ painted/partied whenever she chose. This may have been a problem for an artist whose sole income came from selling art, but Bryans was financially independent. As Forwood noted, the question of patronage for Bryans was edgy: related both to her status as an untrained woman artist and to her modernist style.

Nonetheless, patrons she had. Her canvases were either sold to keen buyers, donated to public collections, or given to friends. I'm unsure if her membership of the Melbourne Contemporary Art Group helped or hindered her appeal to potential buyers.

Lina's first public success was at the Heidelberg Town Hall in 1937, then Warrandyte and the *Herald* Exhibition of Outstanding Pictures. And in 1940 she joined the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors, exhibiting with them for decades. Women artists worked together, dealing with workplace and family commitments, economic survival and sexism. Here Bryans met the finest women artists: Clara Southern, Ethel Carrick Fox, Dora Serle, Janet Cumbrae-Stewart, Isabel Hunter Tweddle, Ada May Plante.

Forwood published some of Bryans' earlier cityscapes. They were colourful and well composed, but were small and unambitious. Then the influential artist Norman Macgeorge and his circle of friends started inviting younger artists out to the Heidelberg area to paint. Bryans and her colleague Ian Fairweather

delightedly accepted.

Soon Bryans bought an old hotel, Darebin Bridge House, which became a cultural hub for artists and intellectuals. Like the Reeds at Heide, she played a central role in the Melbourne art world, nurturing young artists and supporting their exhibitions. Fairweather and Plante used the place as a studio.

Later Bryans toured coastal Australia and fell in love with Mallacoota, a small township known for natural wilderness. Some fine Bryans landscapes survive from Mallacoota. Her colours were becoming stronger, her beaches more sweeping, her seas wilder.

The 1960s saw portraits of important Australians. She did a wonderful portrait of philosopher Bruce Benjamin. There is a stunning portrait of writer Nettie Palmer in the National Library. Queensland Gallery Director Robert Haines was another significant sitter. And Bryans often painted Lawlor's portrait.

Bryans received many awards in older age and died in 2000.

Bryans may have been neglected by the historians, but Forwood did an excellent job reacquainting us with an important artist. As she wrote, Bryans' personal life was marked by upheavals: relationships were hot then cold; she moved around the state; her family was shocked. In the idiom of her day she was a New Woman, a free spirit. That she was a Jewish woman should make us eager for more.

Helen Webberley

## EARTH TO SKY: THE ART OF VICTOR MAJZNER

*by Leigh Astbury*

*(Macmillan, Melbourne, 2002)*

For a young Russian-born, Polish-raised adolescent who arrived in Australia in 1959, Melbourne must have been a complete shock. Clearly it was his family that made the decision to migrate, leaving Victor to tag along and make the best of a bad lot. He didn't like what he saw in Melbourne, and didn't want to discover the rest of the country either.

Within a short number of years Victor was working to earn an income, as well as studying art at the old Caulfield Technical School. Even Australian art history, which could have been so supportive and comforting for the young artist, failed to inspire. I cannot find anyone whose work he liked, not even the glorious Heidelberg artists who put Australia on the map.

If anyone was providing inspiration to him, it was more likely to be the American modernists. The Two Decades of American Art Exhibition was a liberating experience for Majzner, both personally and culturally, as Astbury noted.

From the book we get a clear picture of the art that he was creating from 1966 on. Astbury tracked down the semi-abstract images that best represented Majzner's work in that hectic era. The Vietnam War was raging and Australia's involvement

in it was becoming deeper. The titles of a number of the paintings reflected his hostility to conscription and invasion. And the anti-war movement, taking the energy of so many young literary, arty and politically minded Australians, focused Majzner's mind as well.

I would love to have seen more of these earlier images reproduced in the book in colour, rather than black and white. This was particularly important since colour was clearly so central to Majzner.

By the 1970s, the supposed Australian cultural cringe was disappearing fast and Majzner seemed to be acclimatising to the nation that provided him with a permanent home. Questions of national and personal identity were becoming more urgent for artists in general, and for Majzner in particular.

But abstract images could not take him as far as he wanted; nor could they take his viewing public along with him. He pursued his notion of painting being a compounded, additive procedure which equated with human experience, but eventually more representational art emerged. And this art challenged the 'cultural icons and stereotypes of identity that relied on a chauvinistic, idealised view of Australia'. The Australian outback that Majzner had ignored for so long came to dominate his images.

It seemed bizarre. Majzner had arrived at landscape painting via abstraction and conceptual art! His landscapes were bustling with action and chock-full with symbolism. But was it possible for a Jewish Russian Polish migrant legitimately to tackle questions of Australian cultural identity, nationalism, aboriginal connections to the land, European landscape imperialism? Of course. Who better than the outsider, the Jew pressed with his nose to the window of mainstream art and comment?

Almost inevitably the outsider or latecomer will remain marginally out of the mainstream of Australian society. But in Majzner's case, this gave his analysis a sharper perspective. He was reporting on Australian society, as filtered via his own life experience. I particularly enjoyed the images of migrant history: boat loads of new arrivals, cakes from Acland Street, markets, neighbours.

Increasingly food, luxury and greed popped up as constant refrains. I had imagined that these images referred to newly arrived communities: first they would be struggling to meet their basic needs; later they would be trying to rise above the daily grind towards comfort. But Astbury suggested that Majzner's food symbols related more to the fear of turning art into just another consumer commodity in the market place.

The biggest change in his work came in 1982 when Majzner and others were invited to tour and paint in outback northwestern New South Wales. It was the eye-opener that changed the artist's priorities. And it challenged his own, long-held feelings. On one hand the Outback was harsh, dour, frightening and physically unknowable. On the other hand, he felt that the fierceness of the Outback had been romanticised and captured by white Australians who knew nothing of the black

experience of landscape.

Majzner's main question became: 'Are there dreams for and of Australia, other than the Anglo-Saxon dream?' The artist was forced, probably for the first time, to become involved with Aboriginal art and culture. He had to overcome the imposition of his own personality on the landscape and that of all the white artists who had gone before him.

Quite different were the images from his private, suburban paradise, Majzner's normal family home. And occasionally he examined the dichotomy between suburbia and the outback. Astbury's own concluding sentences summarised the work nicely: 'Majzner is not in any traditional sense a landscape painter. Rather landscape has become the site for the exploration of his personal identity and culture. He is constantly remaking and redefining his identity through the landscape, whilst providing a penetrating critique of the landscape tradition in Australian art.'

It is a shame that the religious content of Majzner's work was relegated to a postscript in the book. For someone with such a strongly secular history, it may well have surprised even the artist himself to see powerful Jewish symbolism emerging in his art (and its titles). Rabbi Cowen explained the awakening interest in Judaism on Majzner's trip to New York in 1977 where he was exposed to the Jewish Museum and other contemporary Jewish artists. This experience asked the artist, and the viewer, if 'in a contemporary world, one can use Jewish, as opposed to Christian or universal, humanist ideas'.

Clearly Majzner could. His most powerful Jewish themes were in *The Australian Haggadah* in 1993, a book described as the artist's personal vision of the Exodus. The landscape and the wildflowers were not part of the Egyptian desert; rather they were from the Australian Bush. Later he prepared a major exhibition, the result of his travels through the Negev in 1997.

For me, this Russian Polish French Australian has become a much more interesting artist over the last 15 years.

Helen Webberley

## LIVES AND EMBERS

by Jacob G. Rosenberg  
(Brandl & Schlesinger)

I can just imagine Jacob Rosenberg wandering in the desert with Moses, arguing over a glass of red with history's famous intellectuals and particularly enjoying discussions with the world's greatest poets. Rosenberg would hold his own, indeed, even give a lead, provocative thoughts, straight from Rosenberg's life lived to the fullest. It stems from his deep reading of Shakespeare (about whom he recently had a play tried out in Melbourne), the world's classics, Kafka, and Australian writers such as David Malouf, and, above all, Jewish folk stories and the Bible,

which he delves into daily – it's a ritual.

Over the last few years, Jacob Rosenberg has had published a diverse range of works, in Yiddish and English. These include essays, 'Elegy on Ghetto' (an arresting multi-media production, shown on SBS and used for Holocaust studies by schools), numerous books of poetry and his latest work, *Lives and Embers*, a remarkable collection of stories that cover the gamut of emotions. Rosenberg's imagination soars to great heights, scales memorable peaks and looks at every day life. His very moving 'Elegy In Ghetto' is read widely by schools and by Rosenberg in readings he gives. It is from his book of poems *Twilight Whisper* (Focus Words, Melbourne).

*Lives and Embers* is divided into two parts – Lives and Embers, just what it says – lives of men and women. The shorter stories, the Embers, come from the Midrashic tradition of biblical interpretation. The human comedy and tragedy covered through many facets of Jewish life, including folklore, scripture and history – the very roots of Judaism. The life and death questions, especially what it really means to be a Jew. Who really are these people with such an enduring history, traditions, beliefs and ideas?

I am reminded of works by leading Jewish writers, the sages and more recent authors such as Bashevis Singer, and not just because of some sexuality in the book. I would delight in meeting Rosenberg's memorable characters, but then, in some ways, I have, through talks with him. Ideas, people, plots, situations, 'what ifs' and, 'think about' and so on pour from his fertile mind ... words conjuring up a world of their own, as in this volume.

There are almost 50 diverse stories. Even a story about a calendar makes a rewarding read. Just one page can leave us pondering for a long time. Vignettes are gems.

There are endless questions posed and many answers we may argue with, disagree with strongly and yet feel all the better for having read and thought about them.

In one story a young disciple questions his teacher. 'What should one do, rabbi, to become a righteous man?'

'You might as well ask me what one should do to become king of England,' replies the rabbi.

The perplexed young man asks, 'Do you mean there is no answer to that question?'

Rosenberg's book implies that Jews have a role to play in maintaining 'the eternal flame of human decency'.

There is an arresting comment about a group of Jews that could sum up aspects of Jewish life from Abraham's days. 'They kept dreaming, and kept creating – books, art, philosophy. And they kept caring, so very much for a world, and a God, that had shamelessly forgotten them.'

There is a fascinating two-page story about Ptolemy, ruler of Egypt, military successor of Alexander of Macedon, who was a powerful and intelligent monarch. However, he found the Jewish notion of one God quite bizarre.

‘Look,’ he argued, ‘if I myself, with the assistance of all my gods, are hard-pressed to rule Egypt, how can a single god rule over the whole wide world?’ It was impossible, he concluded, the Jews must be lying – they must have more than one god. And he, Ptolemy, would unmask their trickery. And so he sets out to do this ...

It’s a fascinating read, ending with Ptolemy left speechless.

Jacob Rosenberg came to Australia after years in horrendous concentration camps.

‘I love the English language,’ Jacob Rosenberg told me. ‘It’s so rich, like a living organ constantly renewing itself. When you think of all the words in English, it’s wonderful. I can’t read enough of English; we should all cherish it.’

He sometimes rewrites a poem 14 times to ensure he has used just the right word or phrase. He has not trouble in thinking about what he wants to write anywhere and at any time ( even 3 a.m. ) – if you want to write, you will find a way,

When I read Jacob Rosenberg’s poetry and narrative, especially his latest work, I cannot help but think of a Man from La Mancha, ready to get on his faithful steed and battle the injustice, hatred, intolerance and evils that plague our world. His facile pen (or now a computer) is his sturdy lance.

A man for all seasons and stories. I look forward to his future writings, including a memoir he is working on. Jacob Rosenberg’s latest work, and, indeed, his earlier works, are well worth a read. You will be thinking about the stories, the men, women and children in them and about yourself and your place in the world in general and Jewry in particular, for a long time afterwards.

Stan Marks

## A FEW FROM AFAR: JEWISH LIVES IN TASMANIA FROM 1804

*Edited by Peter and Ann Elias*

*(Hobart Hebrew Congregation, GPO Box 128, Hobart  
Tasmania 7001, 2003)*

It is not often that the launch of a book about history in itself creates history. This indeed happened on the afternoon of Sunday, 25 May 2003 when this book was launched in the historic Hobart Synagogue by His Excellency Sir Guy Green, Administrator of Australia. The Governor-General, Dr Peter Hollingworth, had stood aside, and announced his resignation later that same afternoon.

This is indeed a comprehensive work. It starts with a list of contributors, then a forward by Caroline Heard, President of the Hobart Hebrew Congregation, then a useful glossary, a list of illustrations, a preface by Peter Elias, and an introduction by his wife Ann, who are the co-editors.

The anthology material constitutes the main body of the book, and is divided in chronological order into four parts:

Part 1 deals with Van Diemen's Land and the transportation period 1803–55.

Part 2 deals with Tasmania as a self governing colony – 1856–1900.

Part 3 is Federation to the Second World War – 1901–38

Part 4 is the Second World War and the post-war period – 1939–2003.

The book concludes with a bibliographical essay by Dr Malcolm Turnbull, a list of the office bearers of the Hobart Hebrew Congregation 1842–2003, the records of Jewish deaths in Tasmania, 1804–1954, information sources, end notes to each article, index to personal names in the text, and finally maps.

In his preface Peter Elias, a retired dentist born in Vienna but educated in England, explains how he was presented with the historical collection of his family friend Hedi Fixel shortly before her death in October 2001. She had been the secretary of the Hobart Hebrew Congregation for almost 30 years, and an active member for 55 years.

In accepting the collection, he felt an obligation to do his best with it, and from this germinated the idea of a book which would record the contributions made to Tasmanian life by Jews who had brought their talent and skills from all parts of the world, and added to the fabric of Tasmanian society.

Peter Elias describes how the book has grown into a comprehensive collection of both previously published and new material. Much of the already published material he found had not been easily accessible. In contrast famous (or infamous) Jews such as Ikey Solomon and John Davies (founder of *The Mercury* newspaper) are well recorded in *Australian Genesis* (Levi & Bergman) and elsewhere and so are only partly detailed here.

He concludes by regretting that the story is incomplete and invites readers to contribute further material.

In her introduction Ann Elias, a trained librarian, gives a broad description of Tasmanian life and culture, including a reference to the two distinctive features – the 'convict stain', and the island or isolation factor. From the earliest settlements onwards there has been a chronic brain and brawn drain. Those who stay behind, whether an occupational, religious, or social group, have found their numbers so small that a particular form of social cohesion results. Ann Elias then quotes a prominent Australian writer who remarked in 2002 having moved from Sydney to Hobart: 'You have to make things happen here. In Sydney you only have to sit and watch the pageant of life go by'. This volume records the lives of a number of people whose initiatives made things happen to the benefit of their fellow Tasmanians.

Ann Elias comments how in the nineteenth century Tasmanians referred to their Jewish population as Hebrews or members of the Jewish persuasion. It is as

recently as 1989 that I was asked by the elderly father of an establishment Anglican friend of mine in Hobart if I was of the Hebrew persuasion!

In the transportation period, Jewish convicts were as equally disadvantaged as other convicts but not more so. Jews who arrived free or gained their freedom here found that their religious practice was tolerated equally with that of non-Anglican Christians. This theme is expanded in more detail.

She links the lack of whole communities migrating, the matrilineal descent of Jews and the lack of women in convict and colonial times as factors restricting the formation of Jewish families. Jewish men had many decisions to make. The Tasmanian Jewish community have few relatives in the mainland communities and have had to be self-reliant over the years. The current Hobart Hebrew Congregation membership has less than 50 adults.

In the main part of the book are papers or extracts from 30 contributors past and present, local and mainlanders, beginning with a paper by Rabbi Dr John S. Levi on the convict arrivals at Sullivans Cove (later Hobart Town) in February 1804, through to a paper by Tom Schlesinger and Peter Spratt on the recent restoration of the Hobart Synagogue building from 1984 up to 1999.

The history of the Launceston Hebrew Congregation is covered in each time segment – in the first three by Rabbi L. M. Goldman, and in the post-war era by Beth Sandor (née Crawcour).

There is a four-page chapter devoted to the Holocaust Memorial Scroll from Czechoslovakia. This Sefer Torah was received by the Hobart Hebrew Congregation in 1993 and is one of 1564 Czech scrolls that first arrived in London from Prague in 1964. The epic story of its salvage is told in the book. It now proudly occupies a glass cabinet in the synagogue (being damaged, it is not kept in the Ark and cannot be used) and is rightly treasured as a memorial to all the victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

The modern era segment concludes with nine biographies of prominent Tasmanian Jewish citizens from all walks of life.

The extracts from previously published works are reproduced here complete with all their endnotes.

Dr Malcolm J. Turnbull, well known author and former editor of this Journal, provides a bibliographic essay where readers will find an accessible summary and listing of milestones in Tasmanian Jewish historiography. From this comprehensive coverage we learn, for example, that the Reverend Herman Hoelzel installed at the Hobart Hebrew Congregation in 1853, was styled 'the presiding Rabbi of the Jews of the Australian Colonies'. And the first edition of the *Australian Encyclopaedia* (1925) noted that the Hobart Congregation had been second only to Sydney in its heyday.

Dr Turnbull offers valuable commentary on the accuracy of the sources he has quoted, and considers Levi & Bergman's *Australian Genesis* is still the definitive

study of the community's convict origins.

The book itself is entirely a local production – editing, design, typesetting, maps and printing have all been done in Tasmania, and the Hobart Hebrew Congregation has published it as its contribution to the Bicentenary of European settlement in Tasmania. It is a very handsome volume with a strong soft cover, good quality paper and very clear printing. It will reward any reader interested in this colourful history, especially if they have Tasmanian ancestry, as well as being a valuable permanent reference work.

Dr R. Malcolm Fredman

### MEMORY LANE IN OLD HOBART TOWN

Hobart Town hosted 50 Victorian members and friends of the Australian Jewish Historical Society for four days at the end of May, to remember 200 years of Jewish settlement in Van Diemen's Land.

Sir Guy Green, Governor of Tasmania and Administrator of the Commonwealth, flew from Canberra to launch 'A Few From Afar – Jewish Lives in Tasmania from 1804' in the historic Hobart synagogue, the oldest in Australia. This was part of the celebration of the Bicentenary of European settlement in the state.

A packed congregation participated in synagogue services on Friday night and Shabbat morning, when Rabbi John Levi invoked the memory of the earliest Jewish convicts and free settlers. A guided walking tour of old Hobart Town on Saturday afternoon had special reference to places of Jewish interest and elicited many wonderful stories of the bad old days. The tour began in Temple House, the home of Judah Solomon, a founder of the congregation and donor of the land on which the 1845 synagogue still stands.

A Sunday bus trip to the Jewish cemetery at beautiful Cornelian Bay saw the rededication of the earliest graves at their new resting place. The graves had been rediscovered with the help of Rabbi Levi at the original cemetery in Harrington Street, long since abandoned and used as a housing estate. The moving and evocative service was followed by a trip to historic Richmond, and then back to the synagogue for the Administrator's launch of the book, beautifully edited by Hobart identities Dr Peter Elias and his wife, Ann.

On Monday another coach trip took Victorian visitors to Port Arthur, where Rabbi Levi and a local guide described the appalling conditions in which the prisoners, some Jewish, existed and died.

Howard Freeman  
President, AJHS Vic Inc.



*Book launch in Hobart Synagogue, 25 May 2003.  
[Photo courtesy of Lionel Sharpe.]*

## **THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORY ESSAY COMPETITION, 2003**

*Malcolm J. Turnbull*

In September this year I had the pleasure and privilege of joining Itiel Bereson in examining entries in the second Australian Jewish History essay competition. We found the task a most rewarding and enjoyable one, and we would like to commend the quality and calibre of all the entries. Topics tackled encompassed a diversity of family chronicles, biography, communal studies and short institutional histories.

Striking overall features of the winning entries are the enthusiasm, resourcefulness and imaginativeness with which the young writers have explored aspects of what we often refer to as the Australian Jewish experience. As space will not permit publication here of all winning essays, two papers have been selected (at random) by way of example. The first is a delightfully romantic speculation on the relationship between Esther Abrahams and George Johnston, presented in the form of a short play/video script, and distinguished by the author's empathy with her characters as living, breathing human beings. The second is an appreciation of the contributions of the Feiglin family to Jewish communal life and education in Shepparton and Melbourne, based in part (we are pleased to note) on interview.

## 1. ESTHER AND GEORGE

*Jackie Lange (Year 7, Mount Scopus College)*

*Scene 1. Esther is doing her Roots project, 2002.*

Esther: I can't believe it, sent to Australia for stealing two lengths of black lace worth 25 shillings. That is absolutely unbelievable. If someone stole lace today, though it sounds unlikely, they would end up with a fine, if even that. But sent to Australia! I wonder ....

*Scene 2. Esther stealing the lace, 1787.*

Esther: This lace looks perfect for my new dress. Could you take it out for me to look at?

Hannah Crockett (owner of the store): Oh yes. It is lovely lace and well-priced too. Would you like to buy it?

Esther: Well, could you also bring down that pink lace at the top.

(Hannah turns around and brings down the lace.)

Hannah: Here you go dearie. Yes, it is lovely ... wait a minute! Where has my lace gone? That lady, that awful lady, that wench has stolen my lace! Well, she ain't getting away that easily, not from Hannah Crockett.

(Hannah turns and runs out of the store)

Hannah (while running): I can see you and you ain't going to get far. Not with me lace you ain't. I caught you. (Hannah has caught Esther two blocks away from the material store.)

Hannah: I demand to have her searched!

Esther: I promise, I didn't steal anything. I may be pregnant but I didn't steal it. I don't do that.

(Suddenly two black balls fall from Esther's dress.)

Hannah: You lying wench. That's the lace you've taken and I don't expect you to get away easily. Officer! Officer!

(The officer who was patrolling the area comes along.)

Officer: Yes miss? And what would you be wanting at a time like this?

Hannah: That, that, that lady has stolen my lace.

Officer: Well then, she must be tried at court.

*Scene 3. Back at Esther's house, 2002.*

Esther: Mum, did you know that my great-great-great-grandmother was sent to Australia for stealing two lengths of lace?

Amanda (mother): Of course, dear. How do you think you got your name?

Esther: Um ... a famous movie star or ... a singer maybe?

(Amanda laughs.)

Amanda: No, and she was the first lady.

Esther: What's that?

Amanda: She was the first female Jewish convict to arrive in Australia.

Esther: Cool. And I haven't even started researching.

Amanda: Well you better start. Remember, it's due in soon.

*Scene 4. Esther is researching on the computer.*

Esther: Wow. I had no idea that Esther had had her baby in gaol. That must have been dirty ... Oh my gosh. She took her daughter with her on the boat and formed a 'friendship' with Lieutenant George Johnston. She was his mistress. I can't imagine what that must have been like or maybe I can. I wonder ...

*Scene 5. Esther on the ship, 1787.*

Esther: I feel downcast. I'm gettin' really seasick.

George: Don't worry dear. It's nearly over.

Esther: Sure it is. That's what you said last time, and the time before that, and the time before that.

George: Stop. You're making me seasick.

Esther: Well, it's not my fault that you live up in the barracks while I'm below deck starving. Every night I wonder whether you're just beating me around the bush, or whether you really do love me.

George: Well, when we get to Botany Bay I'll marry you and we'll live in a big house with lots of servants. And you'll never have to work again.

Esther: All these empty promises. You'll probably leave me when we get there. If we get there ...

George: You won't die on the ship, because you can't. However, if you do I would have to kill myself over a broken heart.

Esther: Oh no you wouldn't! You'll just find another temptress and marry her instead.

George: Never. You are my one true love.

*Scene 6. Back at Esther's house, 2002.*

Esther: How positively romantic. Boy, would I love to be Esther.

(Amanda walks in.)

Amanda: Oh no you wouldn't. I don't think you could wait 25 years.

Esther: What?

Amanda: Just keep researching and you'll see.

Esther: Mum!

(Amanda walks out of the room.)

Amanda (to herself): This should keep her busy for a while.

*Scene 7. Esther is researching on the computer, 2002.*

Esther: 25 years! She had to wait 25 years to get married. Mum was right. I can't even wait two minutes to get my hot chocolate. How was anyone supposed to wait 25 years to get married? I wonder ...

*Scene 8. Esther in Australia, 1810.*

Esther: Now. I want to get married now!

George: Not yet ...

Esther: Its been 23 years. You have already led the suppression of the revolt at Castle Hill.

George: Well maybe I'm just not ready yet.

Esther: I'm not finished. And you led the rebellion against Governor Bligh and became a Lieutenant governor and ... and I just want to get married.

George: Soon, my sweet, very soon. Just not yet.

Esther: If I'm not married to you by the time I'm 40 ... I'm casting you out.

George: No, please no. It will be soon. Just don't leave me.

Esther: I don't think I can accept that.

George: Well, please try.

*Scene 9. Esther back at home, 2002.*

Esther: I get it now. She waited but not happily. I wonder what did happen when he proposed, coz she got married when she was 40. So he must have done it just in time. I wonder ...

*Scene 10. When George proposed, 1812.*

Esther: You know George, in three months I'm going to be 40, and if I'm not married I am going to have to say goodbye.

George: Sorry, Esther. It will be soon, I promise.

Esther: With the way you're acting, it's almost as if you have been double-crossing me all these years.

George: Esther, please, please don't leave me. If you do I would have to become a hermit and never see people again.

Esther: I don't know ...

George: Esther Abrahams. I love you more than time could tell. You are life itself to me. You are the essential flame. Esther Abrahams, will you marry me?

Esther: George, Oh George, I have been waiting 25 years. This day has been delayed but finally I am with you and that day is here. Yes George, of course it would be my honour. (Esther and George kiss.)

*Scene 11. Back at Esther's house, 2002.*

Esther: How romantic. Mmm. I wonder whether my life could ever be as adventurous as my namesake Esther Abrahams.

## JEWS IN SHEPPARTON

*Shimi Fixler (Year 9, Leibler Yavneh College)*

One of the first Jewish families to settle in Shepparton (an agricultural Victorian town) was the Feiglin family, headed by Reb Moshe Feiglin. The original exodus of the Feiglins from Russia started in 1889.<sup>1</sup> The problem of antisemitism in Czarist Russia made conditions too difficult for Mr Feiglin senior (Reb Ya'akov Zvi), so the family migrated. First they went to Palestine. After facing some significant hardships in Palestine, the Feiglins decided to move to Australia.

The entire Feiglin family was involved in the establishment of the Jewish community in Shepparton. This beginning was strongly influenced by their orthodox connection to Judaism and the heritage of the Feiglin forebears who were mainly Lubavitch Chassidim. A story is told that when Ya'akov Zvi went for an audience with the previous Rabbi of Lubavitch, he was granted immediate access because he was a family member.<sup>2</sup>

When Moshe Feiglin arrived in Melbourne in 1912, he began working.<sup>3</sup> He had to take a pay cut for not working on Saturdays and Friday nights. After three weeks of this he left in search of other work. He was approached by the German philanthropist Marcus Kronheimer with an offer to move to Shepparton with a project of irrigation and farming there. Moshe Feiglin took up this offer almost immediately. The Feiglins then began to grow fruit and were a major supplier to SPC (Shepparton Preserving Company). From that day onwards the Feiglin family resided in Shepparton.

The house of the Feiglin family was built around 1916 and was later rebuilt in 1941. The house was built on a large block of land in a nice area. By today's standards the place was quite large. Then, however, the house was a standard size for a farming property, about 20 acres.

Aaron Feiglin, son of Moshe, tells of how life on the farm was mainly routine. 'We helped as soon as we came home from school and finished Hebrew class. It was fun, but as I was one of the younger members of the family, I had little involvement in the vital area of running the farm.'<sup>4</sup>

The main supporter of the Feiglin family and the other new Jewish settlers in Shepparton was firstly the German philanthropist Joseph Kronheimer. Kronheimer headed a project to help Jewish settlers. It was his firm belief that there should be an influx of Jews into regional Victoria and if they needed help he would provide for them 2000 pounds to be divided up between the new settling families at approximately 200 pounds each. The Australian Government also offered substantial grants and financial help.

Like most Orthodox Jews, the Feiglins were brought up with a strong Jewish identity, moral values and a joy for the religion. Fairness and trust were part of their values. They were a hardworking family; these were just a few of the virtues that the Feiglins pride themselves on. The Feiglins came from a strong

Lubavitch background that promotes outreach and a strong sense of friendship. These Chassidim believed in the personal bond between the soul of the individual and the Almighty, rather than a robotic service of G-d.

One of the goals that were achieved by the Feiglin family was the spread of Lubavitch in Australia. The import of immigrant teachers from all over Europe and the beginnings of Yeshiva College were clear indications of how much devotion and effort was given by the Feiglins to *yiddishkeit*. Strong determination, money and good organisation were required in the beginnings of first a yeshiva in Shepparton, then later on Yeshiva College in Melbourne.

The greatest achievement of the Feiglin family was firstly their work in helping to start a Jewish community in Shepparton. A particularly great achievement of the Feiglins was the spread of Lubavitch. They also made a significant contribution to Jewish schools (including Yeshiva College and Mount Scopus College), and thus the Feiglins were responsible for the education of thousands of Jewish children. Wherever there was a job to be done to help the community there was always a Feiglin there to help with unconditional support and devotion. It is widely known throughout the community that the Feiglin family was one of the most generous pioneering families in Melbourne.

In Shepparton it was surprisingly easy to keep kosher but the religious aspect of life was left to the home totally. As Aaron Feiglin recalls: ‘well ... there wasn’t much for us kids, but we had a very good home teacher. We would come home from school (riding our bikes) and would have to do some Hebrew study before we were allowed to do what we wanted’.<sup>5</sup> From this we can see that the Feiglin parents took it upon themselves to see that their children had a good quality Jewish education. Aaron Feiglin recollects that he had an exceptional *Cheder* teacher ‘whose name escapes me’.<sup>6</sup>

The Feiglins have left us with so many institutions and made our Jewish community a flourishing place. They have built institutions such as Yeshivah College, Beth Rivkah Ladies College and the Yeshivah Gedolah Centre for Rabbinic Ordinance, and many more. But most of all they have left us with values and a Jewish community to be proud of. Their legacy lives on in the institutions that they have created and in the continuation of the Feiglin family. There is so much to thank them for. Their tireless efforts and complete devotion to *Yiddishkeit* are remarkable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Uri Kaploun, Avraham Avinu of Australia, AAA Publications, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Taped interview by Shimi Fixler with Aaron Feiglin.

<sup>3</sup> Kaploun, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Aaron Feiglin.

<sup>5</sup> Kaploun, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Aaron Feiglin.

## REPORT TO MEMBERS

Our year commenced with the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on 13 February 2003, at the Jewish Museum of Australia. Elections resulted as follows: President – Dr Howard Freeman; Honorary Secretary – Mr Ronald Aarons; Honorary Treasurer – Mr Phillip Stanton; Honorary Archivist – Mrs Beverley Davis, OAM; Committee in alphabetical order: Dr David Cohen, Mr Trevor Cohen, Mr Clive Fredman, Rabbi Dr John Levi, AM, Mr Lionel Sharpe and Mr Isidor Solomon.

In his report to the members, the President was pleased to advise that our membership is in excess of 500, and growing. He also discussed progress with the State Library of Victoria regarding our archives. It is hoped that arrangements to transfer our collection from JMA to SLV will come to fruition later this year when the major rebuilding works at SLV have been completed.

As a result of two successful boat trips last year along the Maribyrnong River exploring the history of the river from Levien's Punt to Solomon's Ford, two further trips were arranged in February and March. More such trips will be arranged as a permanent activity in which the wider community will be invited to participate.

Following the formalities, guest speaker Professor Bill Rubinstein discussed 'Recent Demographic Trends in the Australian Jewish and Moslem Communities – Some Interesting Observations', which was both thought-provoking and timely. Well-known historian and long-standing member of AJHS Vic Inc., as well as editor of this Journal from 1988 to 1995, Bill was recently appointed to his second term as President of the Jewish Historical Society of England. He is currently Professor of Modern History at the University of Wales-Aberystwyth, UK.

On 10 April, the guest speaker, His Honour Paul R. Mullaly, QC, retired Judge of the County Court of Victoria, spoke to us on 'Jewish Community Involvement in the Criminal Life of Melbourne: 1835 – 1850'. His Honour discussed the involvement of Jews as criminals, victims and witnesses in what was a most lively and interesting presentation.

On the weekend of 23-26 May, some 50 members from Melbourne enjoyed an historic trip to Hobart, to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jewish habitation in Van Diemen's Land and the establishment of Hobart Town. A book on early Jewish settlers in Tasmania by Peter and Ann Elias was launched in the Synagogue by the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Guy Green. Rabbi John Levi conducted the Friday night service and Rabbi Fred Morgan led the Saturday morning service in the Hobart Shule. Rabbi Levi took the group on a walking tour of Old Hobart Town. During the weekend, members attended Cornelian Bay Cemetery for a Memorial Dedication of remains of early Jewish settlers by Rabbi Levi. Members went by

bus to other historic places of interest including both historic Richmond and Port Arthur.

On 17 July, journalist and historian Yossi Aron spoke to us on the origins and history of Melbourne Adass Israel. Yossi has been writing the history of the first 50 years of this remarkable and distinctive congregation, which is one of the fastest-growing sections of Australian Jewry.

On 2 September our members joined the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society for a combined meeting, when Dr Peter Elias (co-editor of the book *A Few From Afar: Jewish Lives in Tasmania from 1804*) spoke about the work involved in gathering material from some 30 contributors, including formerly published works. Simone Beyfus also spoke at the meeting about her own research, *Skeletons in the Family Tree*, and described how she used a wide range of genealogical tools to uncover her Jewish ancestors.

This year has seen the beginnings of a much closer relationship with the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (Vic) Inc. This culminated in the transfer of the large genealogical holdings of our Society to the care of AJGS, following the retirement of Beverley Davis OAM as our Honorary Archivist. Beverley devoted three decades of professional care and expertise to our historical records and our library – all of our books will now be held as a collection within the Jewish Museum of Australia. The committee wishes to put on record the gratitude of all members to Beverley for her many years of dedication to the cause of Australian Jewish history.

### **Donations**

It is with sincere gratitude that we acknowledge a number of generous donations this year from:

The late Ms Jenny Goldberg, Mr Gordon Rich, Mr David Sonenberg, Ms Dorothy Graff, Mr & Mrs Peter Lawrence, Mr John Cohen, Mr Tony Donovan, Mrs Deborah Fischl, Dr & Mrs Howard Freeman, Mr and Mrs Trevor Cohen, Ms Katherine Ingram, Mrs Ursula Rembach and Mr Travis Sellers.

Ronald B. Aarons  
Honorary Secretary AJHS (Vic) Inc.

**MEMBERS JOINED AJHS VICTORIA INC**

*since November 2002*

ASHTON, Terry

BLOCH, Michael and Toby

KALMAN, Arie and Floris

LANG, Allen and Barbara

LASICA, William

NAHUM, Alan and Tania

ROTMAN, Louis and Kate

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ron Aarons** has been the Honorary Secretary of the AJHS – Victoria Inc. for the last six years, and a tireless worker for the Society and its members.

**Devorah (Schneerson) Erskine** was the daughter of a highly observant Lubavitch family from Hebron, where she grew up. She was a young witness to the Hebron massacres of 1929, when Arab rioters killed many Jews. She was subsequently alienated by, and distanced from her father, who, as a member of the Irgun, had vigorously rejected the British Mandate. Before the Second World War, Devorah met (and after the War married) her non-Jewish British Mandate policeman husband, Tom Erskine. Eventually, after many adventures, they made a life together in Mildura. Her fascinating memoir was provided to us by her son Brian, and has been abridged for publication here.

**Dr R. Malcolm Fredman**, MB BS, D(Obst)RCOG, FRACGP, is a retired GP and medical teacher. He has been a member of the AJHS for about 40 years, and presented a paper on his grandfather Joel Fredman to the Society in 1975 (AJHSJ, Vol VIII, Part 6, March 1979). Both Malcolm and his wife Barbara come from pioneer families and are keen genealogists.

**Dr Howard Freeman**, BDSc, LDS, long-time President of AJHS – Victoria Inc, and more recently Editor of the Victorian Journal.

**Stan Marks** is a well-known Melbourne humorist, writer, journalist and cartoonist, and edits 'Centre News', the magazine of the Melbourne Holocaust Centre. Stan says he dropped into Melbourne University, but dropped out after first year to work in a newspaper.

**Rachel Mestel** was the wife of Rabbi Solomon Mestel, the spiritual leader of East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation between 1923 and 1930, and was the sister of Selig Brodetsky, British mathematician and Zionist leader. Her memories of Melbourne were abridged from an autobiography that was kindly presented to AJHS by her son, Prof. Leon Mestel, the Cambridge astrophysicist, and his sisters.

**The Honourable Justice Howard Nathan** is a proud descendant of two distinct generations of convicts, from which arises his fascination with history. Howard was educated at Elwood Primary School and Wesley College, and then both Melbourne and London Universities. Admitted to the Victorian Bar in 1964, he was appointed Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1983, and is now on the Reserve List, which leaves more time for an enormous range of other interests.

**His Honour Paul R. Mullaly**, QC, BA, LL.B, Dip Theol, was educated at De La Salle College and then at Melbourne and Deakin Universities. Paul was admitted to the Victorian Bar in 1952, was Prosecutor for the Queen 1961 to 1979,

Crown Counsel Victoria 1977 to 1979, and then Judge, County Court of Victoria from 1979 to 2001. He is the author of numerous legal manuals, and a student of history and theology when not involved with his thirteen grandchildren.

**Dr Hilary L. Rubinstein**, BA (Hons) MS, PhD, FRHistS, is the Associate Editor of Journal of AJHS Victoria-Inc, and is a much-published editor and author of the whole Australian Jewish experience. Hilary currently resides in Wales UK, with her husband Bill, and the distance has done nothing to abate her interest and involvement in Australian historiography.

**Professor William D. Rubinstein**, BA, MA, PhD, FAHA, FRHistS, is professor of Modern History at the University of Wales-Aberystwyth. Until 1995 he was Professor of Social and Economic History at Deakin University, and was editor of the Melbourne issues of this Journal from its inception in 1988 until 1995. Bill has published widely on Australian Jewish history. His next book, *Genocide: A History* will be published by Longman in February 2004.

**Phyllis Slutzkin** was one of an Australian family of nine living in Palestine in 1914, and when the Turks invaded Jerusalem the family fled to Alexandria on an American warship. Her father Lazar came to Melbourne from Russia at the close of the nineteenth century, and built a large business with his Australian-born wife Rose. He retired from active business in 1911 and made a home for his family at Rehovot in Palestine. Phyllis married Len Stanton in Melbourne in 1928.

**Dr Malcolm J. Turnbull** is a teacher and historian and a former editor of the AJHSJ. His publications include *Victims or Villains: Jewish Images in Classic English Detective Fiction* and *Safe Haven: a Guide to Jewish Records in the National Archives of Australia*.

**Helen Webberley**, BA (Melb), M Ed (Monash) was a tutor in art history at Melbourne University then lectured in art history at CAE and Melton. Her favourite period is the seventeenth century, with an emphasis on European and Israeli art. Helen attends Cambridge Summer School as often as possible and gives papers at the AAANZ and at Limmud Oz.