

THE EAST MELBOURNE MINISTRY

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In celebrating East Melbourne's 120th anniversary in 1977, a spokesman for the congregation expressed intense satisfaction that it had remained steadfast to its principles throughout its history and that, 'as a vibrant body', it had been consistently responsible for 'encouraging and assisting members of the Jewish community to maintain Jewish traditions and customs'.¹ Certainly, an examination of the congregation's progress confirms that East Melbourne has served continuously as a stronghold of religious traditionalism in Melbourne, and that it provided an Eastern European-oriented balance to the middle-of-the-road Anglo-Orthodoxy of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (and, later, the St Kilda Congregation) from its inception. At the same time, as a communal fixture dating back to the first generation of settlement in Port Phillip, the 'Mickva[h] Yisroel' Congregation has always been part of the Jewish religious establishment — albeit to the 'right' of it. Located on the periphery of the city centre throughout its history, East Melbourne was also at the edge of immigrant settlement for a century and served as a border — both geographical and philosophical — between the more up-market Anglo-Orthodox institutions and Melbourne's diverse Eastern European congregations.

Although chroniclers of Victorian Jewry have made frequent reference to East Melbourne *en passant*,² only two short studies (to date) have attempted to examine its evolution and progress in any detail. In the 1950s, Alfred Newton Super prepared a celebration of the congregation's first century. (A committee-room dispute apparently prevented Super's essay being published.) Twenty years on, Dr Morris C. Davis commemorated the construction of the Albert Street *shul* with a rather disjointed compilation of historical notes and extracts from congregational records.³ Neither Super nor Davis paid great attention to the succession of *chazanim*, ministers and rabbis who served East Melbourne; nor did they explore to any extent the congregation's key role as preserver of Eastern European traditionalism in Melbourne. In this paper, I highlight the persistent 'Foreigner versus Englishman' sentiment which underscored relations and stylistic differences between the three original metropolitan synagogues, and I focus specifically on East Melbourne's spiritual leaders as the visible agents of the institution's religious practice and policy. The pre-eminence of the office of *chazan* at Albert Street effectively demonstrates the *shul*'s fundamental divergence from the 'denominationalism' which characterised the Bourke Street/Toorak Road and Charnwood Grove synagogues well into the twentieth century.

In a letter to the *Australian Israelite* in October 1871, an English-bred member of East Melbourne complained bitterly at the treatment being meted out to him there by his 'foreign' co-religionists, and protested that he was regarded by them with 'the utmost contempt':

I know that they claim the exclusive possession of the knowledge of the correct working of the Judaic system, and that while they regard me as 'a good Jehudee', they yet shrug their shoulders at what they consider my ignorance, saying 'After all, what does he know? he's only an Englishman'.⁴

This letter underlined the cleavage between Englishman and 'Foreigner' which, according to the Reverend Moses Rintel, had been a decisive factor in East Melbourne's split from its parent congregation in Bourke Street some 14 years earlier.⁵ Ostensibly the impetus for founding East Melbourne was a dispute between Rintel and the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation's board of management, but there were undoubtedly other factors. Many of the secessionists had been Polish Jews who felt distinctly ill-at-ease within the determinedly Anglophile Bourke Street and, hence, they had readily followed the more hospitable minister when he defected. (According to a later report, Rintel, the son of a Polish rabbi, exhibited a 'peculiar sympathy' with 'foreign Jews'.)⁶

Another element was the desire to perpetuate a stricter level of ritual observance than seems to have been the norm at *laissez-faire* Bourke Street.⁷ In the view of the English critic cited above, East Melbourne's 'foreign' majority believed singlemindedly in 'the Din, the whole Din and nothing but the Din', whereas their anglicised peers conformed more to the *spirit* of the Law.⁸ Describing the state of local organised Judaism in the early 1870s, journalist Solomon Joseph conceded that Melbourne's Continental Jews were 'as a rule, more scrupulous in their regard to our ancient rites and ceremonies than their English co-religionists'. In his view, East Melbourne represented the 'zero of the religious thermometer' compared with Bourke Street or the new, Reform-prone St Kilda. The differences were apparent in the service. The Stephen Street synagogue was widely known as 'the Polish *shul*', its members adhering zealously to the 'old Polish *minhag*'; Rintel performed the ritual there 'with little or no variation from the good old orthodox routine of early days'. Bourke Street was reportedly more modern in its approach (as per the modifications sanctioned by the British Chief Rabbi).⁹

East Melbourne served as the community's chief traditionalist bastion — 'a solid Orthodox religious bloc' (according to Newton Super) — for several generations.¹⁰ Its style and its relationship with its sister synagogues were moulded and nurtured from the outset by Rintel, an indisputably major figure in the history of Melbourne Judaism. Born at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1823, the son of Polish-born Rabbi Myer Rintel, he was trained by his father in Hebrew and Talmud, studied in London under Dr Sulzberger, and was certified as a *shochet* by Chief Rabbi Hirschell. Following a short association with the Brighton Hebrew Congregation, Rintel emigrated to Australia in 1844; he served initially as *shochet* and *mohel* to the Sydney community and whilst there, founded and taught at the Sydney Hebrew Academy. From 1849 to 1857 he acted as senior minister and headmaster to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. He was instrumental in the creation of the United Jewish Friends Benefit Society in 1856 (serving as inaugural President), co-founded both the Benevolent Asylum and the Victorian chapter of the Order of Oddfellows, and was an active Freemason (attaining the rank of Grand Chaplain of the King Solomon Lodge).

Rintel's relations with Bourke Street's board of management was far from harmonious; a series of minor conflicts (over salary cuts and such issues as the admission of proselytes) climaxed in a major dispute in 1857 over his failure to attend weekday services. He resigned in March of that year, taking with him thirty supporters, including brother-in-law Henri J. Hart (Rintel married Elvira Hart in 1849), and together they founded the 'Mickva Yisroel' Congregation. (Solomon Solomon, Morris Nelson and Rintel were first President, treasurer and Honorary secretary respectively.)¹¹

Rintel built up the dissenting East Melbourne body from humble breakaway beginnings into a solid communal institution, and he fostered its progression from makeshift meetings in temporary Lonsdale and Spring Street premises through to construction of a modest building in Stephen (now Exhibition) Street in 1860. Ultimately, he saw the consecration of a permanent home in Albert Street in 1877.¹² Newton Super has written of the Albert Street building:

No magnificent contributions marked inauguration. It was built through the loving sacrifice of the devoted Jews, mainly from foreign lands, who contributed their most, which was but little, towards the erection of a House of God, in which should be incarnated the spirit of the Synagogues in their mother lands.¹³

Dedicated to his flock, Rintel initially enjoyed an intense popularity among them; an independent income allowed him to devote most of his energies to the institution's progress and, in fact, he served without remuneration for several years. The *Jewish Chronicle* observed at one point that East Melbourne belonged to its minister much more than he belonged to it.¹⁴ Like his contemporary at Bourke Street, the Reverend Abraham Ornstien, Rintel met Anglo-Jewish demands that he be a preacher (although he did not deliver sermons as regularly or — reportedly — as well as Ornstien who he disliked intensely). Yet, while also able to fill the multiple roles of *mohel*, *Ba'al Koreh* and *shochet*, he functioned primarily as a *chazan* 'of the old school' — the embodiment of local Eastern European traditionalism. (Reverend Elias Blaubaum of St Kilda subsequently dubbed Rintel 'a true champion of Orthodox Judaism').¹⁵ From 1864, he served under the Reverend Samuel Herman (of Ballarat and Geelong) on the Victorian *Beth Din*, the first authorised Jewish ecclesiastical court in the colonies, and he functioned briefly as chairman following Herman's death in 1879.

During the 1860s, Rintel was assisted in *shul* (and on the *Beth Din*) by second reader and *shochet* Isaac Pulver. Born in 1803, Pulver was reader to the Cheltenham Congregation in England in the 1840s, and minister to the Cape Town (South Africa) community, 1849-51. He arrived in Australia in 1852, and served as assistant minister to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation (1852-4), as *shochet* (1854-9), and as second reader and school secretary at Bourke Street (1859-60), before serving as general assistant and 'dogsbody' at East Melbourne. Forced to resign because of persistent ill-health, Pulver was *shochet* and minister to the Hobart community from 1871 until his death in 1873.¹⁶

Rintel's final years were plagued by ill-health and interpersonal tensions which led to a significant deterioration in his popularity. Many members of the community became (understandably) frustrated by his lengthy and outspoken feud with Reverend Ornstien which had its origins in Rintel's insistence that he be recognised officially by the community as its senior spiritual leader and spokesman.¹⁷ (Rintel persisted in appending the letters SJM [*Senior Jewish Minister*] to his name until he died; one bemused commentator laughingly suggested that his foible may have aroused 'in the minds of Protestant strangers a vague suspicion that a Jewish branch of the followers of *St Ignatius of Loyola* flourished in Melbourne'!)¹⁸ Likewise, his confrontationalist stance over proselytism and the day-to-day running of the *Beth Din* tended to alienate many 'moderates'. By 1875 his critics were insisting that he 'had done nothing in the last few years to advance the cause of Judaism', and one exasperated commentator went so far as to assert that 'Moses the Lawgiver himself would have been unable to work with him'.¹⁹ The 1870s saw the consolidation of powerful factions within East Melbourne, several serious challenges to the autocratic rule of the 'old guard' (which included Rintel and his family and Henri J. Hart), and an embarrassing airing of the whole situation in the press. In addition, financial problems, including a sizeable debt from the construction of the Albert Street building, necessitated salary cuts and led to Rintel's temporary resignation.²⁰ He was terminally ill by that time and, although reinstated, did not live to regain his former standing with his congregants. Rintel died of consumption in May 1880, survived by his wife and eight of their nine children.

Delivering the eulogy from the East Melbourne pulpit, his clerical colleague Elias Blaubaum assessed: 'He was the heart and soul of this congregation, aye this very house owes its existence to his unflinching zeal and energy'. Rintel's funeral was impressive: from Albert Street the cortege proceeded to the Bourke Street Synagogue (where the congregation recited *Yigdal*) and on to the Melbourne General Cemetery, where assistant minister Greenbaum read the services and Dr Dattner Jacobson pronounced the final oration. Reverend I.M. Goldreich of Ballarat subsequently intoned the afternoon prayers in the mortuary chapel.²¹

Rintel's death left East Melbourne in a quandary how best to replace him. The congregation's *shochet*, *mohel* and assistant minister, the Reverend Simon Greenbaum, stepped into the breach temporarily. Born in Russian Poland (c1827), Greenbaum emigrated to England as a young man, trained there, and served congregations in Merthyr Tydfil (Wales) and Bath. He came to Australia (via South Africa), with his wife and eight children, in the 1860s and spent nine months as religious 'functionary' to the Launceston community before succeeding the Reverend Pulver at East Melbourne in 1871. A capable and hard-working man, who led High Holyday services for the fledgling St Kilda congregation soon after his arrival in Victoria (and earned a stern rebuke from his employers for doing so), he was unfortunately also an extremely quarrelsome one. His rancorous association with the Reverend Louis Goldstein, the Bourke Street *shochet*, matched the Ornstien-Rintel feud in intensity, and

his relations with Rintel's successors were to be less than harmonious. Assisted by Moses Goldstein and Woolf Davis, Greenbaum led services at Albert Street until the committee recruited a visiting Eastern European *chazan* in August 1881.²²

Reverend Abraham David Wolinski (1847–1935), a native of Suwalki, Poland, came to Australia following service as *shochet* and *chazan* to the Altona community in Germany and (for six years) the Leeds Hebrew Congregation. Initially engaged, for three months, by the recently-established (and shortlived) Druitt Street Congregation in Sydney, Wolinski was lured to Melbourne by the prospect of the Albert Street post, auditioned at Sabbath services, and was promptly engaged. According to the *Jewish Herald*: 'Mr Wolinski has everything in his favour — his appearance, voice and style of reading ... His *chasoneth* is certainly in the orthodox style'.²³ A capable reader and teacher, possessed of an attractive baritone voice, and a qualified *mohel*, he proved popular with some members of the congregation although his lack of preaching ability displeased others (see below). He resigned after only two years due to a combination of salary constraints, claims that he met with disrespect in some quarters, and a debilitating personality clash with his off-sider Greenbaum. According to Goldman, discord between the two men erupted during New Year services when Greenbaum refused to help Wolinski rise 'after the prostration during the *Alenu* prayer ... a custom practised in many synagogues'. (Greenbaum claimed to be incapacitated 'by a bad hand' but 'the committee guessed that a deeper reason lay behind the refusal ...'). On another occasion, the cantankerous Greenbaum accused Wolinski of eating *trefah*; the *chazan* countered by refusing to eat from Greenbaum's *shechitah* ('claiming the sharpness of his knives did not comply with Jewish law'). Later still, Wolinski refused to attend the wedding of Greenbaum's daughter and was forced by East Melbourne's committee to apologise.²⁴ Wolinski subsequently served Sydney's Great Synagogue, as second reader and assistant minister for 43 years, and, in recognition of his years of service, was honoured with the title 'rabbi', by the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi A.I. Kook, while on a visit to Palestine in 1929.²⁵ (One of Reverend Wolinski's children, Joseph, earned fame as a singer and artist).

Once again East Melbourne was compelled to find a replacement. (Greenbaum again stepped in temporarily). Members were vocally divided over whether their new spiritual leader should be a modern 'preacher' (like his Bourke Street counterparts), a *chazan* first and foremost (like Rintel and Wolinski), or perhaps both. The discussion echoed contemporary debate in Britain.

The relative merits of the old-fashioned *chazan* over the modern Anglo-Jewish preacher preoccupied British Jewry at intervals throughout the late nineteenth century. In 1871 Sydney's Reverend Alexander B. Davis (himself a pioneering antipodean example of the latter) had contributed a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle* in which he dubbed the former 'almost obsolete':

The time has now come — we might say a new order of things has arisen — under which it is not deemed sufficient that a minister shall be only a *chazan* ... even the minor synagogues

now look about for a minister who shall be able to spread before his congregation an intellectual feast ...²⁶

Actually, Davis was overstating the situation; the *Chronicle* predicted that it would be some time before all English congregations rose above the temptation of preferring a singer to a scholar. Adamant that the preacher should enjoy primacy, the paper insisted: 'No other sect but ours would form so strange a standard of ministerial duty as that which has made it possible for them [*chazanim*] to be ministers'; nonetheless it was forced to acknowledge that *chazanuth* remained as much in demand as ever.²⁷ Undoubtedly, this reflected the preference of British Jewry's growing immigrant sector.

In seeking a replacement for Wolinski, East Melbourne's vocal 'foreign' contingent strongly favoured a combination *chazan*, *shochet* and *mohel* (like Rintel). Therefore, they were keen to engage an applicant from Edinburgh, the Reverend Furst, described as a 'pleasing *chazan*' but not a fluent preacher. By contrast, those members who wanted a 'lecturer' veered more towards applications from the Reverend Dr Berlin (then Principal of Aria College in Britain) and local boy, the Reverend Isidore Myers. Both had reputations as skilled preachers; Joseph E. Stone noted that Myers was definitely not a *chazan*.²⁸

The selection process proved to be lengthy and acrimonious. A late application from the colourful if controversial Dr Dattner Jacobson (former minister to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation) aggravated the situation and resulted in the resignation of President Woolf Davis (he violently opposed employing Jacobson).²⁹ In the long run, the congregation elected to engage Myers — largely because he was a known quantity who did not need to be imported from abroad. However, Albert Street's traditionalist lobby had sufficient influence to ensure that the committee subsequently also advertised for a *chazan*. (Several members reportedly resigned because of the lack of such an officer).³⁰ As a result, East Melbourne was able to boast the presence of both *chazan* and preacher for a short time in the late 1880s.

Isidore Myers' background was a blend of old and new.³¹ Born at Suwalki, Poland on 15 February 1856, he came to Melbourne at age 13 and benefited from a solid, traditional religious training at the hands of his father Morris Myers (teacher and sometime headmaster of the Melbourne Hebrew School). At the same time, he received enviable secular schooling at Scotch College and graduated BA from the University of Melbourne. In the 1870s he taught at East Melbourne's Hebrew School, formed a choir there, and spent a year as congregational secretary. He was a skilled lecturer in English (as per the Anglo-Orthodox model), but sufficiently 'old world' to preach a traditional Yiddish *drosha* on Festival afternoons.³² He gained experience as spiritual leader to the Sandhurst (Bendigo) Congregation (1880–85), preached at Albert Street on special occasions during that period, and took over the East Melbourne pulpit *pro tem* (and, according to him, very reluctantly) in 1886.

In later years, an enthusiastic supporter of Myers would claim that he had been 'an extraordinary man', who had teamed the selflessness of St Francis Xavier with the gentleness of St Francis of Assisi and the enthusiasm of a

Savonarola! The writer (who effusively dubbed Myers 'the most lovable man' he had ever met) maintained that the young cleric's only colonial peer in scholarship and eloquence had been Rabbi Dr Joseph Abrahams.³³ Certainly he appears to have been an exceptionally capable clergyman, even if somewhat impulsive and outspoken on occasion. Goldman notes that 'the most Orthodox of the Eastern Europeans could not complain about Myers' piety and energy as a minister'. Yet the fact that he was unmarried, something of a modernist (by virtue of his secular education) and did not sport a beard, aggravated some members — most notably the arch-traditionalist Woolf Davis who set up his own *minyán* as a result. Myers' salary was barely adequate, and although he enjoyed considerable popularity in some quarters, he found himself constantly at loggerheads with the congregation's lay leadership. In 1889 he declined re-election following a confrontation with the executive over alleged inattendance to duties, and he left East Melbourne (and Australia) in the following year. Before departing, he took the opportunity to castigate the congregation for its perpetuation 'of the ignoble and un-Jewish practice' of treating spiritual heads as mere paid officials.³⁴

Myers' resignation was a loss to the community, but the *Australasian Hebrew* later suggested that it had been inevitable, that the minister had been 'cramped' in the colonies ('He was as little to be fettered as a panther'), and so needed the stimulation of a wider sphere overseas.³⁵ He found it in a succession of posts which included work as a touring lecturer for the Chovevei Zion movement in Britain, a year (1896-7) as minister to Congregation Haar Hashomayim in Montreal, a six year period with the Ohabei Shalom Synagogue in San Francisco, and the pulpits of Temple Beth Israel and Temple Sinai in Los Angeles. In 1897 he married the daughter of Dr Dattner Jacobson in New York; they had two children, one of whom, Carmel, became a silent screen star. Myers himself won a minor claim to fame late in life, as the rabbi who advised D.W. Griffith on the historical veracity of the Judean scenes in the 1916 film epic *Intolerance*. He died after being knocked down by an automobile in Los Angeles on 25 April 1922.³⁶

East Melbourne was without a preacher following Myers' departure, but the will of the congregation's Yiddish-speakers had prevailed two years earlier in the engagement of a *chazan*, and he gradually took over many of Myers' duties.³⁷ Reverend Jacob Lenzer (1858-1921) came to Melbourne from Russia with little or no English and uncertain prospects, and ultimately led his flock for more than 30 years. Once he had acquired a sufficient command of the language he began to deliver sermons but, like Rintel, he was first and foremost a *chazan* (undoubtedly a world-class one; the press dubbed him 'perhaps the best who ever officiated in Australia'), and he strongly reinforced the congregation's traditionalist style with his full-bodied practice of the cantorial art.³⁸

Born at Kritchev and raised in Roumania, Lenzer commenced Yeshivah studies when only 11 years of age, and first officiated in a synagogue at the young age of 14. He was taught by the Reverend Nisan Belzer (a man who enjoyed a reputation as one of the greatest *chazanim* of his day), and he

eventually filled several positions in Russia, the last of them with the Polyakov Synagogue in Moscow for nine years.³⁹ (He was married at Berditchev in 1878 and ultimately raised nine children).⁴⁰ East Melbourne recruited him on the strength of testimonials to his vocal powers, and notwithstanding some reservations about his lack of English, he more than met expectations. For instance, a visitor to the synagogue for *Pesach* 1893 lauded Lenzer's musical prowess, and wrote that finding so much beauty, meaning and impressiveness in the services there had been 'a revelation'. When the Reverend Adolphus T. Chodowski visited Albert Street some years later, he also came away deeply stirred by the *chazan's* distinguished appearance and personality; in Chodowski's view, Lenzer's bearing and singing evoked the prophet Jeremiah: 'the masterly manner in which he intoned the *Echos*, to the ancient tunes and some of his own composition ... revealed the great master of *chazanuth*'. With his 'rich and resonant' baritone voice (which spanned some 18 notes from Lower 'D' to High 'F'), and 'his deliberately cultivated lion's mane of red hair', Lenzer was a striking figure.

As he stood on the *Almemar*, like a true High Priest of God, robed in white, with his eyes closed, oblivious to all around him, and with his arms outstretched in earnest worship, no man has ever looked more inspired.⁴¹

Under his ægis, East Melbourne's ritual drew praise as 'an excellent example of the genuine Orthodox *Ashkenazi* service at its best.'⁴²

His 'internship' came at a critical juncture in East Melbourne's affairs. Myers' resignation took effect 18 months after his arrival, and Greenbaum's long illness and death (in July 1892) left the congregation without its second reader.⁴³ The inroads of the economic Depression of the 1890s and an outstanding debt of £6000 (mainly owed on the construction of the Albert Street building) forestalled any possibility of replacing the former. With the congregation 'on the brink of ruin', Lenzer proved his worth by inaugurating a bazaar and Art Union, and canvassing for goods door-to-door (both locally and in the country); his efforts helped reduce the mortgage by £1000 and the overdraft by £1500. He took on Myers' duties *pro tem*, and ultimately remained the institution's minister until his death. Samuel Michelson, who had been appointed *shammas* and collector during Wolinski's tenure and had occasionally assisted with services ever since, succeeded Greenbaum as honorary second reader in 1893, and would continue to function in those multiple capacities for another thirty years.⁴⁴

Widely respected within the community, and highly esteemed by his flock, Lenzer was also active in local Jewish education (a founder of the Melbourne United Jewish Education Board), in philanthropic circles, and as a full member of the *Beth Din* from 1905 (following the deaths of Reverends Blaubaum and Goldreich).⁴⁵ His career at Albert Street was not all 'smooth sailing' of course. Report after report of congregational meetings and factional disputes are evidence of the volatility that characterised East Melbourne's internal politics throughout the nineteenth century, Lenzer's tenure, and beyond. No sooner had the *chazan* arrived in Melbourne than he came into conflict with the committee over the question of his duties. Maintaining that he had

been led to believe that Albert Street already had an established choir, he declared he had been duped on discovering that the congregation expected him to form and train one. ('Had I known', he wrote, '... I should not have come for any money in the world as it is an utter impossibility for me to show my capabilities without').⁴⁶ The situation was resolved only when Lenzer relented and undertook to form and groom a choir. (It later lapsed, no doubt due to the pressure of his other responsibilities.)⁴⁷

A more ugly dispute erupted over the issue of *shechitah*. When Lenzer endorsed his brother Benzion's application for the vacant post of *shochet* to the congregation in 1894, he was accused of nepotism by supporters of a second candidate. The question became so heated that, on one occasion, several members walked out of *shul* just as the minister/*chazan* was about to deliver a sermon. Rabbi Abrahams was forced to arbitrate, and the more popular applicant, Louis Goldsmith, won.⁴⁸

Newton Super has noted that, throughout its history, East Melbourne was a 'poor' congregation, a reality reflected in ongoing friction over the salaries paid its officers.⁴⁹ We have seen that finances proved problematic for Rintel, Wolinski and Myers; they appear to have remained so for Lenzer (and would continue to pose difficulties for his successors). Only a few months before his death, Lenzer was forced to threaten resignation, claiming he was unable to support his family or the dignity of the position on his current remuneration. 'I have been your spiritual head for a period over 30 years', he lamented, 'and I think you will allow that I have given the very best of my life for the interest of the Congregation'.⁵⁰ Lenzer left solution of the matter in the hands of the committee; presumably the difficulty was resolved as he stayed on.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, Lenzer was viewed with ever-deepening affection and respect the longer he led the congregation, and his sudden death in April 1921 came as a major blow. Obituaries paid tribute to him as 'a fearless torch-bearer of Judaism', one 'among the greatest *chazans* in the world', and 'one of the strongest pillars of Australian Jewry'.⁵¹ His years of service saw East Melbourne at its strongest, most uncompromising and most influential. (In 1913, for instance, the new Central Synagogue in Sydney applied to use Albert Street's charter, constitution and by-laws as prototypes in setting up an *Orthodox* synagogue.)⁵² However, Lenzer's passing made it clear that, by the 1920s, the congregation was facing serious problems. As Newton Super has observed, 'his years of devoted service, the magnificence of his *chazanos*, had overshadowed the changes that had taken place'.⁵³

Without its pilot, warned the *Australian Jewish Herald*, East Melbourne was in an unenviable position: 'The ship is very near the rocks and only very able hands will save her before she founders'.⁵⁴ By 1922 Shabbat attendances had dropped dramatically; many members who had retained their connection with Albert Street out of loyalty to Lenzer, promptly departed for the more up-market synagogues (particularly after St Kilda opened its new *shul*).⁵⁵ Some favoured amalgamation with the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation — but this solution did not get past the planning stages, and was vetoed by Bourke Street.⁵⁶ According to the press, East Melbourne 'without Lenzer' was characterised

by apathy and a *laissez-faire* attitude to its own economic well-being: 'Nobody seems to care the proverbial "rap", provided the usual routine is followed, provided the *Torah* is taken from the Ark and put back again — all as it should be. Nothing else matters'.⁵⁷ The thankless task of leading worship while the committee ruminated over Lenzer's replacement fell to a succession of casual recruits, among them Mark Rosenthal and Manuel Bernstein, both associated with the Ballarat community. (Following the retirement of the long-serving Samuel Michelson, Bernstein was employed as East Melbourne's second reader, *Ba'al Koreh* and collector from January 1923 until his premature death, aged 32, in a car accident at Ballarat, while on a visit to conduct services there in 1928.)⁵⁸

Lengthy debate on how best to replace Lenzer reactivated the *Chazan* vs Preacher debate of the 1880s. Modernists insisted East Melbourne must move with the times; they saw the employment of a secularly well-educated and English-bred lecturer as vital ('We don't want to be classed with a *Chevra*'). Others cited the congregation's financial plight, and argued that engaging another *chazan* was preferable. (With luck, they suggested, such a man might develop into a minister like Lenzer). A third sector unequivocally favoured the perpetuation of tradition in the appointment of another European *chazan*.⁵⁹ The *Jewish Herald* stressed that, unless a decision were reached quickly, the growing apathy of the members would ensure that neither a 'minister' nor a *chazan* would be needed.⁶⁰ In the long run — and in the interests of the 'younger generation' — the congregation resolved to take a risk and employ a modern, trained clergyman. A graduate of Jews' College (and protege of Chief Rabbi Hertz) was selected, and members pledged themselves to a 15% seat rental increase to cover his salary.⁶¹

Solomon Zvi Mestel was born in Galicia on 24 December 1886, and emigrated to England as a child. He matriculated from Jews' College in 1911, and subsequently gained an Honours degree in Semitics and an MA from the University of London. He spent several years teaching Hebrew classes and at *Talmudei Torah* in the London area, was among the founders of the North London Mizrahi Zionist Society, and served congregations at Richmond, Bristol and Nottingham from 1918-23. Married to Rachel Brodestsky in 1919 (the couple produced four children), Mestel came to Melbourne in 1923, with a reputation as a talented Talmudist, a 'good lecturer' and 'a pious Jew'.⁶²

The decision to recruit Mestel — a 'new-age', trained minister — highlighted East Melbourne's links with the Anglo-Jewish establishment, and suggests a mild concern on its part to compete with its more up-market sister institutions. Newton Super records that modernists at Albert Street were keen to obtain 'the spiritual leadership combined with modern scholarship possessed by the spiritual leaders of the Melbourne and St Kilda Hebrew Congregations'.⁶³ With that in mind, the committee allowed its minister six months leave in 1925 to return to London and complete requirements for his rabbinical degree at Jews' College. (The press observed that now Mestel could join the select band of Jews' College graduates bearing *s'micha*. Israel Brodie, at Bourke Street, was another.)⁶⁴ East Melbourne further emulated the Melbourne and St

Kilda Congregations by finally yielding to fashion and introducing a mixed choir in 1927. (The action roused the ire of die-hard traditionalists in the ranks, and prompted an outraged Joseph E. Stone to resign in protest).⁶⁵ At the same time, East Melbourne retained its strong Eastern European orientation; Yankel Rosenbaum has underlined the strong nexus between the congregation and successive generations of Carlton Jewry.⁶⁶ Regular sermons and mixed choir aside, Albert Street's ongoing Orthodox determination was demonstrated in its' intransigence over proselytism and Mestel's stands over *shechitah*, education and Sabbath sport.

Back in the 1870s the congregation had banned any involvement by its minister (then Rintel) or other officers in effecting conversions to Judaism, and this unblinking opposition to *guerim* persisted well into the twentieth century. In 1913 members legislated against admitting proselytes *under any circumstances*, maintaining that the precarious nature of the community rendered such action necessary;⁶⁷ Albert Street led the community's anti-conversionist forces when debate on the matter came to a head in the 1920s. Furious when the Beth Din made five converts in 1924, a number of East Melbourne members convened protest meetings and organised themselves into a 'Society for the Abolition of Proselytism'. Mestel was publicly barred by his employers from having any future involvement in the Beth Din's conversion procedures.⁶⁸

The community found East Melbourne just as uncompromising over *Kashrut*. In 1928 the committee came into conflict with the Beth Din and the Melbourne United Shechitah Board over the latter's contract with non-Jewish meat suppliers, F. Watkins & Co. Mestel objected that Watkins' shops opened on Shabbat and Holy days (when *shomrim* could not be in attendance); he demanded that the shops close on Saturdays and that keys be lodged with the *shochet* and Shechitah Board. When the Beth Din declined to intervene, East Melbourne transferred its custom to the newcomer Smorgon brothers, cancelled its annual subsidy to the Shechitah Board, formed one of its own, and threatened to create an alternative ecclesiastical court.⁶⁹ The same year saw Mestel in dispute with another communal institution, the Melbourne United Jewish Education Board. Arguing that the MUJEB was not providing advanced instruction in Hebrew, he undertook to teach several senior pupils himself or to send them to non-Board classes. As a result, he was suspended from the Board and East Melbourne withdrew its educational subsidy in protest.⁷⁰

On the question of Sabbath sport, Mestel found himself at odds with his old friend Rabbi Brodie. The issue grew out of a request by Maurice Ashkanasy, President of the Judean League, that the Beth Din give a ruling on the acceptability of the Hakoah Soccer Club playing non-Jewish groups on Shabbat. Initially, Mestel was opposed to the practice and Brodie favoured it; however, on reflection, both men reversed their stances. Brodie now cited the Chief Rabbi's disapproval, while Mestel was also challenged by Rabbi Isaac J. Super, the community's chief *shochet*. Regardless, he stuck to the view that sport was permissible on the day 'of rest, joy and recreation', and he quoted Maimonides and the *Shulchan Aruch* in support of his claim.⁷¹

Rabbi Mestel's individualist positions on Sabbath recreation, *shechitah* and Jewish education, and his threat to mount an alternative *Beth Din*, were indicative of his considered commitment to Orthodoxy — and the communal good: 'His standard demanded careful attention to ritual, and perhaps this was not always acceptable', writes Davis, who yet credits the minister with 'a fine aesthetic sense of spiritual values', and an 'unblemished' tenure at Albert Street.⁷² Unfortunately he fell victim to the congregation's ongoing economic problems. The increased attendances which followed his appointment dwindled again while he was studying overseas (to such an extent that President Louis Morris advised him not to return). Week-day services had relied on paid minyanmen for some years, and they ceased by 1927.⁷³ The board's decisions to reduce and then discontinue subsidies to the Shechitah and Education Boards were partly motivated by financial shortages.⁷⁴ The impact of the Depression subsequently left the congregation with little choice but to ask its paid officers to take salary cuts. David Krass, recruited as assistant minister and *chazan* in 1929, took up a better-paid post with the Carlton *shul* after only a few months.⁷⁵ Mestel refused to countenance any reduction in his conditions and resigned in November 1930. The committee regretfully voted him £1100 in appreciation of his services, and he returned to England. He served as minister to the West Ham District Synagogue until 1934, as welfare officer for the United Synagogue, and as Chief minister of the Ilford District Synagogue in Essex, until his retirement in 1957. Mestel died of cancer on 21 September 1966.⁷⁶

Reverend Ephraim Isaiah Kowadlo, a Polish-born *shochet-mohel-chazan* who had served the Perth community briefly following his arrival in Australia in 1927, was appointed assistant minister in 1930 and took over some of Mestel's duties. He stayed only two years before accepting a better-paid post at St Kilda.⁷⁷ Chaim Yoffe, who officiated as second reader while Kowadlo was on leave, stayed on as general assistant following the latter's departure (ultimately until 1951). Meanwhile, East Melbourne necessarily took stock of its fortunes. With no permanent spiritual leader, no representative on the *Beth Din*, and inconveniently situated, it considered proposals either to combine with the Carlton Congregation or to re-establish itself south of the Yarra (in Elwood). Sentimentalists balked at selling the Albert Street building.⁷⁸ Recognising that its long-held status as the leading institution of northern metropolitan Jewry was now very much open to question, the congregation acted on the *Jewish Herald's* advice that it 'profit by past experience' and advertise for another Lenzer-like *chazan*. (The newspaper asserted that such an officer could hopefully appeal to the large body of Carlton Jews who yearned for traditional liturgical music and melody.)⁷⁹ The committee, acting on the advice of Carlton businessman David Tugend, was fortunate enough to procure such a man in the Reverend Woolf Rechter.

Sam Lipski has recalled that 'the great Chazan Rechter', a cantor 'of international repute', made East Melbourne's services 'special' in the 1930s and 1940s. Eastern European Jews flocked from all over Melbourne to hear him on the High Holydays:

In the tradition of the great cantors of Eastern Europe he had a powerful tenor voice and the manner to go with it. On the eve of the Day of Atonement, when the synagogue would be crowded for the Kol Nidre service, he would wait until the aisles were so blocked that he could barely pass. Then he would enter dramatically from the rear of the synagogue, pushing his way through, his voice ringing out with the first prayers before he had even reached the altar ... Rechter was a living reminder of what they could only hear on scratchy recordings: Kussevitsky, Yossele Rosenblatt, Sarota and the other great names of the cantorial pantheon.⁸⁰

Born in Bessarabia in July 1900, the son of Israel and Hannah Richter, and educated at the Czernowitz Yeshivah, Rechter had held posts at Lemberg (Lvov) and with the Sinai Synagogue in Warsaw, acquiring in the process a substantial reputation within cantorial circles. (The Tomacki Synagogue, the largest *shul* in Warsaw, boasted the talents of Rechter's famed contemporary Kussevitsky.) His decision to 'start over' in remote Australia was probably prompted by political concerns. (According to his son, Rechter had witnessed the killing of a Jew outside his family home at Otwosk in 1930, and he was alarmed at the rise of Hitler in Germany). Like Lenzer, he had no English when he arrived in Australia in 1933, but (similarly) he rapidly made good this deficiency. By the time his wife Bertha and three children joined him in Melbourne in 1934, he was preaching in English. (Bernard Rechter believes that he was tutored in English by Lenzer's daughter Lisa, and that Miss Lenzer actively assisted in the composition of his sermons.) More importantly, throughout his tenure Rechter attracted waves of Yiddish-speaking newcomers who found his singing style an emotive link with the 'old world'; indeed, the committee credited his performances with producing such an improvement in attendances and finances that East Melbourne could be dubbed 'one of the securest institutions in Australia' by the time he left.⁸¹ On one memorable occasion, more than 1000 people turned out to hear him lead the *Selichot* service.

Although East Melbourne's committee took justifiable pride in its recruit, relations between Rechter and the Board were often (and predictably) less than harmonious. A dedicated, gifted and intuitive musician, he could muster little enthusiasm for the clerical side of his duties (such as preaching, conducting weddings and funerals) and, in view of his poor remuneration, he strongly resented restrictions placed by his employer on such outside activities as appearing on ABC Radio. Exception was taken in some quarters to his use of pitch-whistles or tuning forks, and in others, to the fact that he was on friendly terms with Cantor Krutsch of the Liberal Temple Beth Israel. (His dealings with the formidable Maurice Ashkanasy appear to have been particularly strained.) Even so, his departure was greeted with general regret. When a lottery win of £10,000 enabled Rechter to pay off his mortgage and resign his position in 1949, the committee voted him £750 as testimonial and indicated its willingness to re-engage him at a future date.⁸² Rechter subsequently spent several years as Chief Cantor of the Carmel Synagogue in Haifa before settling in America where he performed regularly on radio and led services at the Roumanian Synagogue in New York. He died in New York on 28 May 1964.⁸³

One member lamented Rechter's loss as a prelude to the congregation's disintegration. (In his view, many attendees had only come to listen to the

chazan).⁸⁴ Ensuing decades ultimately proved such pessimists wrong even though the synagogue did come perilously near closing down in 1958 and again 10 years later. On both occasions the determination of a dedicated core membership, and a communal acknowledgement of the congregation's historical importance, combined to keep the venture afloat. East Melbourne has maintained regular services into the 1990s, its members mostly travelling to worship from the southern suburbs. Today it has the questionable distinction of being the one Melbourne synagogue which has empty seats on the High Holydays.

Following Rechter's departure, the *chazanuth* tradition continued with Reverend Moses Sher from 1949–58 and Reverend Abraham Sternfein from 1959–66. Sher, who subsequently served as Reader and secretary to the Carlton Hebrew Congregation from 1961–7, died in 1981. Born and (Yeshivah) educated at Lublin, where he trained and served under the great *chazan* Rabbi Shlomo Luria in the 1930s, Abraham Sternfein had spent the war years as an itinerant worker in Greater Russia, including stints with the Russian army, at a tank factory in Stalingrad, and with a baking collective in Samarkand! The recipient (with his wife) of the first legal permits to enter the Holy Land after the creation of the State of Israel, he served with the seventh brigade during the War of Independence and subsequently found employment with the Religious Affairs Department in Tel Aviv, and as *chazan* to a Viennese congregation in that city. Recruited by East Melbourne on the strength of a recorded audition, he subsequently occupied positions with the Strathfield and Perth Hebrew Congregations, and spent some years as Chief Rabbi to the Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation. Following his retirement, he led services for the Wellington Hebrew Congregation for a year (1996–97), and (currently) continues to provide occasional assistance to East Melbourne for the Festivals.

Reverend Sandor Gescheit succeeded Sternfein at Albert Street from 1966–69. Also associated with the Northcote Congregation in the early 1960s, and a sometime assistant minister with the Kew Congregation, Gescheit died in 1995.⁸⁵ During the same time-frame, Assistant minister Chaim Yoffe was succeeded by Reverends Andre Winkler-Lis (1951–57)⁸⁶, Ezra Teitelblatt (1957–72) and Maurice [Moshe] Hazan (1972–77). For two years the congregation also enlisted the services of Canberra academic Dr George Schlesinger. Reader in Philosophy and Science at the Australian National University, Schlesinger had trained as a rabbi, and was active — in an honorary capacity — within the Canberra Jewish community. From 1959–61 he commuted to Melbourne for the Festivals and other special occasions. (He subsequently continued to serve Canberra Jewry voluntarily until 1967 when he took up a professorship in the United States).⁸⁷

Rabbi Mattus Honig took on overall responsibility as East Melbourne's spiritual leader in 1969. Morris Davis has assessed that Honig, a sincere worker 'and above all, a strict traditionalist', was eminently suited to the post.⁸⁸ Born in Carlton in 1922 (and thus one of the first Australian-born rabbis to officiate locally), the son of Moshe and Ricki Honig, he trained for the rabbinate at Jews' College and gained a Master of Philosophy degree from the University

of London. He brought with him to East Melbourne a solid background in Jewish education (he and wife Dora co-ordinated a Sunday school for Jewish students unable to attend day schools in the 1950s), and, apart from four years with the Auckland Synagogue in the early 1980s, he stayed with the congregation until Chanukah 1996. Sadly, he died only days after retiring, on 4 January 1997, and was buried in Jerusalem. At a special memorial service, congregational trustee George Revelman noted that Honig had taken over the reins at a time when East Melbourne was in 'rough waters' and had steered it back towards viability.⁸⁹

Honig's successor at Albert Street, Rabbi Levy Tenenbaum was born and raised in New York, and is a graduate of the Lubavitcher Yeshivat Tomchei Tmimim; his wife, Beruria (née Greenbaum) is the daughter of a Melbourne psychiatrist. Tenenbaum was inducted in August 1997 and, at the time of writing, has begun providing a weekly lunch-time *shiur*, and is canvassing the possibility of opening a kosher delicatessen two or three days a week, as an outreach to Jews working in the Central Business District. In addition, he convenes a *Gemarah shiur* at the *shul* each Tuesday evening.⁹⁰

The style of worship which Albert Street members perpetuated under Honig (and continue to perpetuate under Tenenbaum) is a direct descendant of that fostered by Moses Rintel a century earlier. Under a succession of *chazanim* and ministers, over 140 years, the congregation has remained essentially true to its founding principles. From the outset, it promoted itself as a stronghold of Orthodoxy, and its relatively 'foreign' ambience appealed to several generations of Yiddish-speaking immigrants who found the anglicised moderation of the Melbourne and St Kilda Synagogues alien to their experience; at the same time, as one of the community's oldest institutions (dating back to the first generation of settlement in Port Phillip), East Melbourne represented for many years a bridge between 'newcomer' Carlton Jewry and the Jewish establishment south of the Yarra. Although its role as 'guardian of traditionalism' lessened as newer, more conveniently located competitors and counterparts propagated, the congregation's history of tradition-oriented spiritual leadership and ongoing emphasis on ritual observance, ensured that it remained (and still remains) an important reference point for Melbourne Jewry.

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NOTES

- 1 George Revelman, quoted in Morris C. Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation 'Mickva Yisroel', 1857-1977*, Melbourne 1977, p.9.
- 2 Notably: L.M. Goldman, *Jews in Victoria in the 19th Century*, Melbourne 1954, *passim*; L.M. Goldman, 'The Early Jewish Settlers in Victoria', Part 2, *AJHS. Journal [AJHSJ]*

- 4(8), 1958, p.445-7, 450-7 *passim*, 470-2; Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Victoria 1835-1985*, Sydney 1986, p.31, 107-8, 159; Hilary L. & W.D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: a Thematic History from 1788 to the Present* (2 Vols), Melbourne 1991, Vol 1, p.258-60; Vol 2, p.167.
- 3 A. Newton Super, 'A Century of Jewish Loyalty', unpublished typescript [1957], AJHS Archives (Sydney); Davis, *History of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation 'Mickva Yisroel', 1857-1977*.
- 4 *Australian Israelite*, 13 October 1871.
- 5 *ibid.*, 20 October 1871.
- 6 *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895. A small but vocal Eastern European presence in Melbourne can be dated to the community's infancy. G.F.J. Bergman cites the enthusiastic support rendered Polish revolutionaries in 1863 as evidence of a strong local Polish-Jewish element. G.F.J. Bergman, 'Australian Jewry in 1878', unpublished typescript [1978], p.5. AJHS archives (Sydney).
- 7 *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1874.
- 8 *Australian Israelite*, 12 December 1873.
- 9 *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1874; *Australian Israelite*, 31 October 1873, 12 December 1873, 30 April 1875.
- 10 A. Newton Super, 'The History of the Jews in Australia', unpublished Honours thesis, Dept of History, University of Melbourne, 1933, p.177.
- 11 Joseph Aron & Judy Arndt, *The Enduring Remnant: the First 150 Years of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, 1841-1991*, Melbourne: 1992, p.29-33; Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, Vol 1, p.258.
- 12 *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895.
- 13 Super, 'The History of the Jews in Australia', *op.cit.*, p.179.
- 14 *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 February 1874.
- 15 *Jewish Herald*, 21 May 1880.
- 16 His son Louis (1855—1897) was headmaster of the East Melbourne Hebrew School (1878-84), choirmaster at the Great Synagogue in Sydney (1880s) and headmaster of the NSW Board of Jewish Education's Hebrew Schools (1885-97). Isidor Solomon, 'The Pulvers'. *AJHSJ* 3(1), 1949, p.28-36; *Australian Israelite*, 16 May 1873.
- 17 For details of the Rintel-Ornstien feud, see my article 'Reverend Abraham Frederick Ornstien', *AJHSJ* 12(3), 1994, p.451-4, 464.
- 18 *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895.
- 19 *Dialectic*, 5, August-September 1875.
- 20 *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 December 1879. The debt was still a concern to the congregation two decades later. See *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895.
- 21 *Jewish Herald*, 21 May 1880; Goldman 1954, p.267-8.
- 22 *Jewish Herald*, 10 September 1880 & 15 July 1892; *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895; Goldman 1954, p.196-7, 300-6, 354, 379.
- 23 *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November 1895; Goldman 1954, p.305-6; *Jewish Herald*, 26 August 1881.
- 24 Goldman 1954, p.305-6.
- 25 Israel Porush, *The House of Israel*, Melbourne: 1978, p.318.
- 26 *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 July 1871.
- 27 *ibid.*, 18 Feb 1881, 15 December 1882, 11 May 1883.
- 28 *Jewish Herald*, 13 June 1884.
- 29 Goldman 1954, p.330.
- 30 *Jewish Herald*, 16 March 1888.
- 31 For full biographical detail on Myers, an unjustly neglected figure (in my view), see my paper, 'Reverend Isidore Myers (1856—1922)', *AJHSJ* 14(3), 1998.
- 32 Myers later formed a *Beth Hamedrash* for the benefit of his congregation, and convened English classes for recent immigrants.
- 33 *Australasian Hebrew*, 22 November & 29 November 1895. The anonymous enthusiast was probably journalist, and former East Melbourne secretary, Jacob Goldstein.

- 34 *ibid.*: *Jewish Herald*, 25 October 1889; Goldman 1954, p.329.
- 35 *Australasian Hebrew*, 29 November 1895.
- 36 Goldman 1954, p.356; Turnbull, 'Reverend Isidore Myers', *passim*.
- 37 *Jewish Herald*, 14 September 1888, 15 August 1913.
- 38 *ibid.*, 25 September 1891, 17 September 1909, 15 August 1913; *Australasian Hebrew*, 29 November 1895.
- 39 *Jewish Herald*, 3 August 1888, 29 April 1921.
- 40 *ibid.*, 15 Aug 1913, 29 April 1921.
- 41 *ibid.*, 21 April 1893, 17 September 1909, 15 August 1921; Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: a Thematic History*, Vol 1, p.259.
- 42 *Jewish Herald*, 27 September 1901.
- 43 See Greenbaum's obituary, *Jewish Herald*, 15 July 1892.
- 44 Goldman 1954, p.306, 379, 387; *Australian Jewish Herald*, 29 September 1892.
- 45 *Jewish Herald*, 25 September 1891, 16 September 1898, 22 September 1905, 15 August 1913.
- For some two decades after the death of Moses Rintel, East Melbourne was without full representation on the *Beth Din*. (The congregation wanted Myers to participate in the 1880s but no vacancy existed at that stage). The Chief Rabbi allowed Lenzer to attend *Beth Din* meetings and so familiarise himself with its procedure from 1898, but permanent membership was not conferred on him for another seven years. *ibid.*, 16 September 1898; see also Letter from Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler to the East Melbourne committee, 31 January 1898. (East Melbourne correspondence, held by AJHS Victoria archives.)
- 46 Letter from Jacob Lenzer to President and Committee, 15 November 1888. East Melbourne Congregation correspondence.
- 47 *Jewish Herald*, 15 August 1913.
- 48 *ibid.*, 15 June, 13 July & 27 July 1894; see also Goldman 1954, p.378.
- 49 Super, 'The History of the Jews in Australia', p.179.
- 50 Letter from Lenzer to the President of the Congregation, 25 October 1920. East Melbourne correspondence.
- 51 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 29 April 1921.
- 52 Letter from Hon Secretary, Central Synagogue, to East Melbourne Committee, 14 January 1913. East Melbourne correspondence, AJHS Victoria archives.
- 53 Super, 'A Century of Jewish Loyalty', p.20.
- 54 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 12 May 1922.
- 55 *ibid.*, 9 September 1926; Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, Vol 1, p.263.
- 56 The possibility of amalgamation was mooted several times as a would-be solution to the financial woes afflicting one or other congregation. As early as 1869, an attempt had been made to reunify Melbourne and East Melbourne, and again in 1873-4, 1878, 1893, 1904, 1922 and 1932. Invariably, dissent over the relative 'Orthodoxy' of the two synagogues, inability to reach agreement on the status of respective officers, and the reluctance of either congregation to lose its individual identity, ensured that all such bids failed.
- 57 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 12 May 1922.
- 58 East Melbourne correspondence, 14 August, 22 August & 25 August 1921; 20 December 1922; 8 December 1924. Rosenthal served as voluntary assistant reader or acting minister of the Ballarat *shul* for a number of periods from 1898 until his death in 1934. Newman Rosenthal, *Formula for Survival: the Saga of the Ballarat Hebrew Congregation*, Melbourne 1979, pp. 59, 98.
- 59 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 12 April 1922, 16 March 1923.
- 60 *ibid.*, 8 December 1922.
- 61 *ibid.*, 16 March 1923.
- 62 *ibid.*; *Who's Who in World Jewry 1955*.
- 63 Super, 'A Century of Jewish Loyalty', p.20.
- 64 *Australian Jewish Gazette*, 29 July & 26 August 1926.
- 65 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 11 Aug 1927.

- 66 Yankel Rosenbaum, 'Religiously Carlton: Jewish Religious Life in Carlton 1919—1939', *AJHSJ* 12(3), 1994, p.523.
- 67 *Jewish Herald*, 2 January 1914; see also *Laws and Regulations of the Mickva Yisroel East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, Albert Street*, Rule 15A: 'This congregation shall not entertain any applications from anyone applying to become "proselytes" to the Jewish faith: neither shall any of their officers be permitted to assist in their private or other capacity in making "Geurim".'
- 68 For a detailed examination of the furore, see my article 'The Proselyte Debate in Melbourne during the 1920s', *AJHSJ* 10(7), 1989, p.590-7.
- 69 Davis, *op.cit.*, pp.49-50; Aron & Arndt, *op.cit.*, pp.317-9.
- 70 *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, 11 October & 29 December 1928.
- 71 *ibid.*, 1 May, 3 July & 17 July 1930; *Australian Jewish Herald*, 15 May 1930.
- 72 Davis, *op.cit.*, p.83. Mestel, like Brodie, was also highly visible in the Zionist movement while in Melbourne. He was first vice-president of the Zionist Federation of Australia in 1928.
- 73 Rosenbaum, *op.cit.*, p.523; *Australian Jewish Herald*, 29 September 1922. See also unsigned, undated letter to Mestel suggesting he attempt to find another post in Britain. East Melbourne correspondence, AJHS Victoria archives, Box 9 [1926].
- 74 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 16 June 1927. As part of its austerity drive, East Melbourne regretfully reduced the annuity paid to Lenzer's widow, Bertha. East Melbourne correspondence, 2 January 1931.
- 75 Correspondence between EMHC committee and Reverend David Krass, 8 March, 6 June & 16 September 1929. Born in the Ukraine, and boasting experience with several congregations in Palestine, Krass (1898—1980) spent two years with Carlton before moving to Sydney where he served as chazan to the Central Synagogue for 34 years. *Central Synagogue Journal*, September 1990.
- 76 East Melbourne Correspondence, 27 November 1930; *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 September 1966; *Jewish Yearbook* 1965; Details from Mestel's death certificate.
- 77 Kowadlo, who served as general religious assistant and choirmaster at St Kilda until 1969, died in 1978. East Melbourne correspondence, AJHS Victoria archives, 2 January 1931, 18 June 1931, 1 August & 15 August 1932; *Great Synagogue Journal*, April 1979; *St Kilda Congregation 'Chronicle'*, December 1967 & September 1978.
- 78 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 18 August & 15 September 1932; Super, 'A Century of Jewish Loyalty', *op.cit.*, p.21.
- 79 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 29 September 1932.
- 80 Sam Lipski, 'Memories of a Jewish Boyhood: Yiddish Sounds, Carlton Sights', *Bulletin*, 8 January 1966, p.25.
- 81 *Australian Jewish Herald*, 31 August 1933; East Melbourne Congregation, minutes of Annual General Meeting, 18 September 1949 (A.J.H.S. Archives, Vic); Interview with Bernard Rechter, 13 July 1998.
- 82 East Melbourne Congregation Minutes, *ibid.*; Interview with Bernard Rechter.
- 83 Interview with Bernard Rechter.
- 84 East Melbourne Congregation minutes.
- 85 W.D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: a Thematic History*, Vol 2, p.195; East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, Annual Report 1981; Stephen Levine, 'A Lifetime of Shule Service', *Australian Jewish News*, 27 November 1998.
- 86 Hungarian-born Winkler-Lis, son of a chazan, trained at a number of yeshivot (including Pressburg), and came to Australia in 1950. Following his time with East Melbourne, he took on a long-term appointment as chazan at the North Shore Synagogue in Sydney. *North Shore Synagogue Silver Jubilee Booklet*.
- 87 East Melbourne Correspondence 1950-77 *passim*; Israel Porush, 'The Canberra Jewish Community (1951—1981)', *AJHSJ* 9(3), 1982, p.195-6. A number of other *chazanim* and clergymen provided intermittent or occasional assistance to East Melbourne at various times after Reverend Rechter's departure. These included Chazan L. Isenstadt (1949—50), Mordche Parasol (1949—50), Joseph Adler, Rabbi L.M. Goldman and Rabbi Shlomo Rudzki (early 1950s), Reverend Boris Belfer (1966) and Reverend J.E. Gelbar (1967). *ibid.*

- 88 Davis, op.cit., p.85.
89 *Australian Jewish News*, 10 January 1997.
90 *Australian Jewish News*, 13 June 1997.



*Watercolour from an illuminated address presented in 1889 by
the Victorian Jewish community to Sir Benjamin Benjamin, Mayor of Melbourne
in honour of his knighthood*