

## JEWISH SCHOLARSHIP IN SYDNEY BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS: PART II

*Raymond Apple*

**I**n Part I of this article, published in this Journal last year, the role of two important Jewish scholars of the interwar period in Australia was discussed. Jack M. Myers' three-volume *History of the Jewish People* and the *Blashki Humash* (known also as the Silberman Rashi) were important contributions to Jewish scholarship on an international level. The present article discusses the Chevra Midrash, an institution dedicated to Jewish learning, and the substantial contribution which Abraham Rothfield made to Jewish education over a long period. If Sydney was largely a spiritual desert in terms of Jewish learning, these contributions constituted an oasis that existed despite the broader Jewish community's virtual indifference to Jewish culture.

### 3. THE CHEVRA MIDRASH<sup>1</sup>

The only Sydney institution dedicated to Jewish learning in the interwar period was the *Chevra Midrash* (Study Society), which met weekly at the Maccabean Hall on Sabbath afternoons. It was the nearest thing Sydney had to the traditional *Bet Midrash* (House of Study), which was an established feature of traditionally-minded Jewish communities all over the world. An offshoot of the Great Synagogue, whose chief minister was the official or unofficial director of studies, it attracted mostly Great Synagogue members, though a few members of the Central and other congregations also attended.

Before the Great Synagogue was consecrated in 1878, there were two city congregations, York Street and its breakaway in Macquarie Street. Each synagogue presumably had a *Shabbat* afternoon service with the ministers, *shammass* and a few religiously observant congregants in attendance. The members of both synagogues mostly

lived in the city, though some had their homes in Ultimo, Newtown, Moore Park and Paddington. After the reunification of the community in the 1870s the Great Synagogue must have attempted to hold similar services, but there was probably very little support. As time went on the community dispersed towards the suburbs and very few people were willing to come back into the city on a Saturday afternoon. A further consideration may have been the sheer size of the 'cathedral' synagogue and the lack of a minor synagogue or *Bet Midrash* which would have provided a more intimate setting for a small number of worshippers.

After the Sir Moses Montefiore Jewish Home opened in South Dowling Street, Moore Park, in 1889, the Synagogue had its *Shabbat* afternoon service there. The location was more convenient for congregants, and the Home had enough male inmates to augment the nucleus of the *minyan*. Rev Alexander Barnard Davis, chief minister of the Great Synagogue, had raised considerable sums to create the Home and was pleased to see it providing religious facilities, which also included the Synagogue *sukkah* and communal *Seder*. However, the Sabbath afternoon service did not emphasise Jewish learning as such. Raymond Joseph (I think) Rosenberg, who later became president of the Home, said that 'the building acted as a communal centre, and as a boy I myself attended for *Havdalah* (at the end of *Shabbat*) and at the *sukkah*'.<sup>2</sup>

It is not certain when the name *Chevra Midrash* was first used. Writing about the Sydney visit of Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz in 1921, the *Great Synagogue Journal* said in January 1952, that he had given 'addresses to learned Jewish bodies such as the *Chevra Midrash*'.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the writer meant to say that the chief rabbi spoke to the group that was later called *Chevra Midrash*. The name seems to have come with the group's move to the Maccabean Hall, opened on the corner of Darlinghurst Road and Burton Street in 1923. The 'Macc' offered Sydney Jewry a venue for many community events and had a library to which the Sabbath afternoon services were transferred in about 1925.

As *Chevra* director, Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen gave well-attended lectures, which, like his sermons, were often published in the *Hebrew Standard*. The handwritten notes of some of his sermons and discourses are in the Synagogue files. Though his preaching followed the style and pattern that was by now characteristic of the Anglo-Jewish ministry, he was also capable on occasion of giving an address which 'took the form of a *droshe* (exposition) by an old-fashioned *maggid* (expositor), and the novel interpretation of the text and frequent Tamudical references were much appreciated'.<sup>4</sup>

Presumably the other Great Synagogue ministers also supported

the *Chevra*, since all lived within easy walking distance. The congregation had several Judaic scholars amongst its membership, and the *Chevra* became the Sydney version of what the rabbinic sages called *bet va'ad lahakhamim*, 'a gathering place for the wise'.<sup>5</sup>

As we would expect, Aaron Blashki found the *Chevra* a congenial meeting place. As discussed in Part I of this article, he was a well-read orthodox Jew whose father, Phillip Blashki, had brought him up on the weekly Torah portion with the commentary of Rashi. As previously noted, Blashki prepared an English translation of Rashi with another *Chevra* Midrash figure, Louis Joseph, whose real name was Joseph Abovy Louwisch, and about whom more is said later in this paper. The Blashki/Joseph manuscript was eventually merged with a translation made in London by Dr A. M. Silbermann and Rev Morris Rosenbaum and the published work was dedicated to Blashki's parents. The story is told in the first article in the present series.<sup>6</sup> Blashki's learned relatives included his brothers-in-law Lazar Slutzkin, who lived in Australia before settling in Israel, and Shaul Chune Kook. In old age Blashki went to London, where he died in 1938.

Elias Green was another regular attendee at the *Chevra* Midrash. Patriarch of a religiously-minded family, he was a pioneer of the Central Synagogue, which began in 1912 in Dowling Street, close to Oxford Street and convenient for Jewish families who were part of the migration to the eastern suburbs. The 'Macc', opened in 1923, was very close to the original Paddington location of the Central Synagogue, which moved to Bondi Junction in the 1920s. Hyman Lenzer, a Great Synagogue *shohet*, was another enthusiastic member, as was one of his successors, Morris Snyder, who often led the study sessions of the *Chevra*.

The *Chevra* was faithfully supported by Hyam Sholom Himmelferb, a scholarly Jew from Eastern Europe, and his son Morris Zion (later Forbes), who acquired a wide knowledge of rabbinic texts and even in old age criticised his fellow congregants for their lack of interest in Jewish study. Himmelferb senior frequently conducted the *Chevra*'s study sessions. In the late 1950s Morris Forbes, a lawyer who eventually became Deputy Crown Solicitor of NSW, was the *Chevra*'s chairman. Forbes was also a mainstay of the Australian Jewish Historical Society from its inception, already contributing articles from the 1950s and later serving as president and editor of this *Journal*.

The discussions at the *Chevra* were generally on the Torah portion of the week and were accompanied by the afternoon and evening services. Between Pesach and Rosh HaShanah the *Chevra* frequently focussed on the reading of *Pir'kei Avot*, the six chapters

of the Mishnaic tractate known as *Ethics of the Fathers*. The discourses were sometimes given by the ministers but frequently by scholarly laymen whose learning would surprise today's orthodox community. Not all were strictly observant in their private lives and a number were not too particular about not travelling on the Sabbath. Many came by tram from the eastern suburbs; some salved their consciences by arriving in a car driven by a non-Jew.

Most members of the Great Synagogue were quite indifferent towards the *Chevra*, but the synagogue was generally represented by at least one of its board members apart from the ministers; the board defrayed the expenses of the meetings, and a Torah scroll owned by the Great Synagogue was used each week. The Ark was donated by Morris Symonds, a former president of the Synagogue. The *havdalah* set was given by Aaron Blashki.

In 1939 Edmund Van Cleef, from a German orthodox family, arrived in Sydney and joined the *Chevra Midrash* as well as the *Chevra Kadisha*. Van Cleef, who became chairman of the *Chevra Midrash*, was sometimes accompanied on *Shabbat* afternoon by his grandson Clive Kessler, later a professor at the University of New South Wales. Other regulars included the Synagogue *shammash*, George Heyman, as well as Arthur D. Robb, Solomon Berglas, Jacob Diamond, Henry Golomb, Lewis Shaw, Abraham Isaac Ellitt and David Levitus. Much assistance was given at a difficult time by Sydney B. Glass, a solicitor who was a founder of the Australian Jewish Historical Society and its first honorary secretary. In the 1950s, Elias Green's son Israel, congregational president for many terms, took a keen interest in the *Chevra*.



*Edmund Van Cleef, a German Jew in fortunate exile: with his grandchildren.*

*Clive and Naomi Kessler [later Kronenberg], Darling Point, Sydney NSW, c. 1945<sup>7</sup>*

Expositions were often given by Louis Joseph (his real name, as was mentioned above, was Joseph Abovy Louwisch), a teacher and linguist who gave spell-binding addresses, though some called him 'Meshuggener Joseph'. A versatile but sometimes volatile figure, his tombstone at Rookwood Cemetery (he died 12 February 1962, aged 71) calls him 'an outstanding Talmudic scholar and linguist, a great personality and character'. As Captain J. A. Louwisch, he was on Defence Force headquarters staff as an interpreter and in this capacity was posted to Japan after the war. He reported on Jewish services in Japan in the *Great Synagogue Journal* in June 1946. Another Louis Joseph, grandfather of Rabbi Aryeh Leib Solomon, school rabbi of Moriah College, also attended the *Chevra*; he was not related to Louwisch.

Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, chief minister of the Great Synagogue from 1940 to 1972, often came and gave addresses, though to relatively small numbers. The rabbi frequently criticised the community's apathy towards Jewish learning,<sup>8</sup> but he apparently never complained when his discourses failed to attract the crowds. During his incumbency other regulars at the *Chevra Midrash* included Martin Lapin, who had lived in Bathurst for many years but retained his enthusiasm for Jewish learning, Mordechai Eisen, a teacher and bookseller who had previously been the minister in Broken Hill, and Selig Horwitz, manager of the *Chevra Kadisha*, who was also the Synagogue's *ba'al teki'ah* (*shofar* blower). Some regulars attended for many years whilst others tended to come and go. Attendances ranged between 20 and 24 people. One of the attractions of the *Chevra* was the opportunity for mourners to say *Kaddish* with a *minyan*.

The only extensive article that the *Great Synagogue Journal* published about the *Chevra Midrash* was in the September 1954, issue, with a heading, 'The Synagogue and the Beth Hamidrash'. The author is not identified, but it may have been David J. Benjamin, one of the community's few Jewish intellectuals, who was a major figure in Australian Jewish leadership and for a period was secretary of the Great Synagogue. Calling the *Chevra Midrash* a 'less-known Synagogue subsidiary', the article says:

At one time or another the *Chevra Midrash* included in its circle almost every outstanding orthodox Jew in Sydney. Today there are barely any survivors in our community of this type of 'old school' Jew.<sup>9</sup>

Nearly five decades later, however, things have changed, and the community can boast many study circles and *shi'urim* (rabbinic lessons) and a good sprinkling of orthodox families.



By 1957 the *Chevra Midrash* was finding it difficult to assemble a *minyan* and a short piece in the *Great Synagogue Journal* in July that year (presumably also by David Benjamin) appealed for support. There was very little response, even when Benjamin undertook arrangements for lecturers and tried to involve significant personalities such as Mordekhai Nurock, Minister of Israel to Australia. Around the same time a group of young adults, mostly recent arrivals, began to come to Rabbi Porush's home at Potts Point on *Shabbat* afternoons to study Mishnah or Maimonides and to *daven Minchah*, but this was independent of the *Chevra*.

Though the *Chevra* faded away it left an offshoot in the *She'arith Yisra'el* congregation that met on *Shabbat* morning at the Maccabean Hall with the involvement of Rev Aaron Kezelman after his retirement from the Great Synagogue. *She'arith Yisra'el* had occasional discourses, but the group seemed more interested in a short, relatively informal service than in becoming a centre of learning. In the 1970s one of its members told others that they could attend the *Shabbat* afternoon *shi'urim* of the then rabbi of the Great, but he himself would not because the *shi'urim* were not in Yiddish.

*She'arith Yisra'el* attracted some of the postwar Jewish migrants who lived around Kings Cross and found the Great too English, pompous and unfriendly, though some of the group's members also belonged to the Great and attended there on Friday nights and weekdays. Most of *She'arith Yisra'el*'s religious appurtenances were on loan from the Great Synagogue, though some were 'inherited' from the *Chevra Midrash*.

The Great had no regular *Shabbat* afternoon services from the late 1950s until early 1973, when Rabbi and Mrs Apple and Rev and Mrs Isidor Gluck opened their homes for *Minchah* services with songs and refreshments. Up to 60 people came, children as well as adults. Some youngsters walked long distances in order to be present. Morris Forbes generally conducted the *Minchah* service and sometimes gave expositions in the rabbi's absence.

Distinguished visitors to Sydney attended these services from time to time including Chief Rabbis Immanuel Jakobovits and Jonathan Sacks as well as Rabbi Porush, who after his retirement had moved to Melbourne. One of the regulars named the services 'the armchair congregation'. The ministers themselves tended to call the gathering 'the *Oneg*', a reference to *Isaiah* 58:13, 'you shall call the Sabbath a delight (*oneg*)' as developed by the Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik who inaugurated a weekly cultural event in Tel Aviv on Sabbath afternoons close to the end of the day.

#### 4. ABRAHAM ROTHFIELD<sup>10</sup>

Another key personality in the world of Jewish learning in the interwar period was Abraham Rothfield, whose educational career influenced generations of Sydney Jewish children. The *Reader's Digest* used to run a series entitled 'My Most Unforgettable Teacher'. The popularity of the series proved that regardless of what one learns from books and formal study, more of a person's principles and attitudes derive from the personality of a memorable teacher. In Judaism this is second nature, beginning with Moses, whom tradition wisely dubbed 'Moshe *Rabbenu* – Moses our Teacher', proceeding through the many influential teachers in the Talmud, and continuing up to our own day.



*Abraham Rothfield*

Australian Jewry is part of the story, with its long record of effective and sometimes individualistic teachers, amongst whom Abraham Rothfield ('Roth' or 'Rothy'), headmaster of the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education from 1924-64, holds a special place of honour. Like his predecessors Louis Pulver and M. A. Cohen, Rothy was a beloved institution in the community.

The Board of Education probably produced very few really literate Jews. The times were not ripe for a learned community. Rothy's lessons, however, trained countless youngsters to be fluent in the prayers and in many cases to conduct all or part of a synagogue service. He gave a firm grounding in Hebrew reading to many who would have otherwise struggled with the language. He made Jewish history live for a large number who might have thought

of it as an ancient irrelevancy. He made the festivals an exciting experience for many whose home life was far from being governed by the Jewish calendar. He probably saved generations of young people from brushing their Jewishness aside and abandoning it. They all remember his foibles even if the details of his lessons have become vague and uncertain in their minds.

Born in 1890 to a pious family in Gateshead in the north of England, he moved to Sunderland as a small child. He gained a Bachelor of Arts degree at Durham University and began teaching. His life – and much of his subsequent teaching – was changed forever by his gallant military service as an officer in the 14th Durham Light Infantry in France in World War I. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) and then a Bar to it, the equivalent of a second MC. Some even say that he was worthy of a Victoria Cross. He was not only brave but thoughtful. If he found a soldier asleep whilst on guard duty, Rothy would let the man sleep and take over his duty.

According to the *British Jewry Book of Honour*, the citation for his MC reads:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. Although exhausted by illness he successfully led a daylight raid into the enemy trenches, inspiring everyone by his unexpected presence, and taking all his objectives with the greatest skill and gallantry. He has previously done very fine work of the same description.<sup>11</sup>

The citation for the Bar to his MC reads:

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when in command of a company which was heavily attacked three times. During the bombardment he walked along the top of the trench to reorganise the men. He was badly wounded, but continued to direct operations until unable to do so through loss of blood.<sup>12</sup>

When exchanging reminiscences with one of his Sydney friends who fought (aged 18) in the Boer War, he used to say: 'You won the Boer War and I won World War I!' It was of course a joke; he was not one to brag.

His decorations were given to NAJEX (the NSW Association of Jewish Ex-Service Men and Women) by his second wife, Olive, but somehow ended up in a shop in the United Kingdom that specialised in military memorabilia, and NAJEX did not succeed in re-acquiring them for the ex-service display at the Sydney Jewish Museum.

As a teacher in the Jewish educational system in Sydney his



pupils loved trying to distract him by asking him for army stories and he often complied. The evidence of his patriotism and exploits fitted well into the climate of thought in Australia of those interwar years and later.

Rothy's stories were not limited to wartime subjects. He embellished all his teaching with reminiscences of the way *Shabbat* and the festivals were observed in his childhood. Even youngsters in other parts of Australia such as my childhood self in Melbourne read and enjoyed his stories in *Ittoni* (My Newspaper), produced by the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education and supplied to children in other states. One of the disappointments of my early days in Sydney was that Rothy was no longer alive. Meeting the great man in the flesh would have been an experience, though I did hear stories of 'The Guv'nor' from Olive, who became a dear friend.

After his war service Rothy taught for the London County Council in its secular schools. In 1924, after the death of the previous incumbent, M. A. Cohen, (who held office from 1897-1923), he came to Australia to be headmaster of the NSW Board of Jewish Education. He officially retired in 1957 but after an overseas trip returned to the Education Board teaching staff until his second retirement in 1964, when the Board named him Headmaster Emeritus in recognition of forty years of loyal service.

His work entailed not only teaching but also organising and supervising education throughout the community, applying to education the skills of strategy and tactics he had learned during the war. Finding teachers was a constant problem and Rothy constantly encouraged his best pupils to accept teaching responsibilities, which entailed providing training courses and teaching aids (often created from scratch by Rothy himself, generally in consultation with the incumbent chief minister of the Great Synagogue – first Rabbi Cohen, then Rabbi Levy, and then Rabbi Porush).

Those who attended his children's service at the Great Synagogue were fascinated by the imaginative teaching aids he developed in regard to the *Shabbat* Scriptural readings. He trained his Barmitzvah boys in the cantillation notes from yet further teaching aids, which enabled them to handle any given Torah portion and *haftarah* (the reading from the Prophets), not just the passages they needed for their own Barmitzvah. Some veteran congregants of the Great Synagogue can still chant a *haftarah* on sight because of the effectiveness of Rothy's teaching.

In theory Rothy's supervisory responsibilities as headmaster remained the same over the years, but the task became more and more onerous and complex with the changes in the community. His first decade in office coincided with a period of accelerated

geographical dispersal from the inner city, requiring new centres to be opened and staffed, right-of-entry classes to be established at new schools, and some of the older venues to be reduced or closed down altogether. Then came the Depression, when Jewish education was unable to hold its own financially against the stringencies affecting many families. Enrolments rose with the arrival of the refugees, but there was no increase in funding as communal facilities (notably the Australian Jewish Welfare Society) needed to be created to assist integration of the newcomers. It was a constant battle to maintain educational standards, and Rothy and the Education Board needed unceasing flexibility...and faith.

During the war the absence of men on active service affected their children's schooling, religious as well as secular. The arrival of postwar immigrants meant that still further centres needed to be opened up, in many cases providing the basis for the establishment of a suburban congregation.

Throughout these years much of Rothy's time was devoted to the Great Synagogue, which was still the largest congregation, the centre of the community. In the 1940s the Education Board appointed an additional headmaster in Rev Caesar Steinhof (Stanton), a German refugee, who concentrated on the management of synagogue Hebrew classes and brought new ideas to curriculum development, while Rothy devoted most of his energies to the Board's other major area of activity, the right-of-entry classes at state primary and high schools. Stanton was particularly associated with the Central Synagogue whilst Rothy focussed on the Great.

Both were enterprising educators who tried to make up for the lack of textbooks and teaching aids by producing their own, though it was a time when the Education Board was financially strapped. Rothfield presented Jewish beliefs and practices in a 45-page booklet entitled *An Outline of Jewish Religious Knowledge*, produced for children in senior primary classes. The material, generally in note form, is an extension of duplicated notes, which the author had long been producing for teachers and pupils.

Stanton spearheaded a local version of a Hebrew textbook, *Dan and Gad*, by Ze'ev Neier, published before the war for use on the Continent. It follows a year's experiences of Dan and Gad as they learn Hebrew phrases. Stanton did not alter the text but added a vocabulary and preface, indicating how skilfully the author had integrated the Land of Israel as well as Jewish religious life into the two boys' daily lives. This book, aimed at pupils aged 8 to 10, was also used in other States. My own first acquaintance with spoken Hebrew was sentences from *Dan and Gad* such as '*Dan, red min ha-gader* - Dan, get down from the fence'. Presumably some of the

children who used *Dan and Gad* eventually made Aliyah and found that their Hebrew textbook in Sydney laid some basic foundations for life in modern Israel.

Though both textbooks were introduced after the period to which this paper is dedicated, they reflect needs, which had already become evident before the war. The postwar spirit of reconstruction inspired these books as well as the innovative *Ittoni*, to which reference has already been made. The first *Ittoni* was published in 1949 and the magazine continued until financial considerations forced its closure in 1953. Edited by M. H. Cohen, son of Rothy's immediate predecessor, it relied greatly on Rothy's skill as a writer and his ability to seize and hold his pupils' interest.

Despite the fact that he generally taught primary-aged classes, he had the expertise in Biblical Hebrew and its grammar to teach up to matriculation level, which was beyond most other teachers at the time with the exception of Rabbi Porush and some of the other ministers.

The establishment of Israel brought a number of new emphases to the Board's work, and Israelis who sought teaching appointments in Sydney had to be judiciously integrated into the system, though it was not possible to employ everyone who announced: 'I am Israelian – I will teach Hebrew!'

The *Great Synagogue Journal* paid tribute to Rothy in an article in July-August 1964 – probably written by David J Benjamin – which said:

As a teacher, besides wide learning and a deep love of Judaism, he has a number of rare gifts – enthusiasm, sincerity, humanity, humour and the ability to gain the confidence of the young. He never talks down to his pupils, and his approach is that of a friend rather than a superior. Countless pupils owe their religious knowledge and interest to his inspiration. By all these he is regarded with the warmest affection.<sup>13</sup>

His Barmitzvah boys had especial admiration for him, but if it was a Great Synagogue Barmitzvah he did not stand on the *bimah* with the boy nor even sit in the Synagogue beside him. Because of disappointed hopes described in the next paragraph the most he would do – at least from the late 1930s to the early 1960s – would be to stand just inside the Synagogue door and then return to his children's service elsewhere in the building. What he told some of the boys was that they should have learned their portion well enough to manage on their own.

He did come into the Synagogue and officiate from time to time

- when the *chazzan* was away. He was a capable officiant, though he was not a trained professional musician. He trained cantors for several synagogues and endeavoured to spread a love for sacred music throughout the community. He expected that after the death in 1937 of Rev Marcus Einfeld, *chazzan* at the Great since 1909, he would be given the position, but the board thought otherwise and appointed Rev Aaron Kezelman, who held office until his retirement shortly before the 1964 arrival of Rev Isidor Gluck, with whom Rothy had a close and friendly relationship. Any annoyance which Rothy felt was with the Synagogue board, not with Kezelman personally.

Rothy was proud to claim that he had officiated and/or read the Torah in every synagogue in New South Wales. At the Great Synagogue he acted as *chazzanic* locum, conducted overflow services at the Maccabean Hall, and trained boys to conduct parts of the Sabbath and holyday services. He was not a great cantor with the sensational, dramatic passionate quality of the world-renowned *chazzanim*, but a representative of the Anglo-Jewish tradition as enshrined in *The Voice of Prayer and Praise* (the 'Blue Book') edited by Rabbi Cohen together with a London choirmaster, David M. Davis.

He was a fine exponent of Torah cantillation. *Ba'alei K'ri'ah* (Torah readers) need more than the ability to memorise the notes and understand the text. They need to be Hebrew scholars with an insight into the patterns of Hebrew grammar and linguistics, and this was second nature to Rothy.

As we have seen, he had his own methods of training Barmitzvah boys in chanting their Torah portions and *haftarot* (prophetic readings). He had no time for mere rote learning, and other Barmitzvah teachers were judged against his standard.

With the support of the Education Board, Rothy emphasised the social side of the school community. As Maurice H. (Harry) Kellerman writes in his history of the Board, Rothy 'encouraged activities that gave pupils opportunities to work and play together as Jewish children, hence choirs and singing, dramatisation and plays, children's Synagogue Services, camping, scouting, were fostered, and in all of these he was very successful'.<sup>14</sup>

Sport was not neglected. As a youth, Rothy was a good soccer player and 'not too bad at cricket', though he claimed no special sporting expertise and felt he had more enthusiasm than skill. In Britain he was sports master at the Norwood Orphanage and at Bermondsey Central School, and in his early days in Sydney he would take Great Synagogue boys to play football or cricket at Moore Park on a Sunday afternoon. He was highly supportive of GSY - Great Synagogue Youth - from its formation in the 1940s and trained officiants for its youth services. A further adjunct to formal

education came with the arrival of Jewish scouting. Rothy was founding scoutmaster of the First Sydney Judean Troop in 1926. A second troop began in 1927, followed by a Wolf Cub pack and a Rover Scout troop. Scout camps were run on Jewish lines with Sabbath observance and kosher food. A Girl Guide company was inaugurated by Rothy's first wife Anne, who, like her husband, was also a teacher.

From about 1930 onwards celebrations such as the demonstration Seder, Purim picnic and Sukkot party became exciting events for children and their families, and the regular children's services introduced pupils to Sabbath and festival worship on a child-friendly level. Rothy was in his element and utilised the many educational possibilities of these occasions.

He and the Board wanted to provide advanced classes for high school students, and though worthwhile attempts were made in this direction by the rabbis together with the more scholarly teachers such as Rothy himself and Louis Joseph, who had collaborated with Aaron Blashki in producing a *Humash* with Rashi's commentary translated into English (see the first part of this series: *AJHS Journal*, vol 19 part 4, 2010), it was always a struggle to attract and keep the senior students. Mid-week classes for the primary school age were never particularly successful, though the few children who did attend attained much higher levels than the Sunday-only pupils. At this stage the Board was still the major dispenser of Jewish education; the day school movement in its modern form only began in Sydney during World War II, and did not develop substantially until the 1970s.

In 1951 Rothy, by now a widower with two adult sons, married Olive Jacobs, a widow with a son and daughter. Olive had worked sporadically for the Education Board in the 1930s when her children were growing up. When they went overseas after Rothy's first retirement in 1957, they met his former pupils all over the world. He died on 18 August 1968, aged 78, and Harry Kellerman paid tribute to him in an obituary in the September-October *Great Synagogue Journal*, praising his 'fund of knowledge and...real love for his religion and its practices' as well as 'his human qualities as a man'.

In a series on Jewish scholarship there may be room to question whether Rothy could be considered a scholar. That he was well-read and had considerable Jewish and general knowledge was obvious, and he certainly had the ability to find an apt text or explanation, but did it raise him to the level of a scholar?

The answer is suggested by a comment attributed to the poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik at a time in his life when he put creative writing aside and turned anthologist. Bialik is said to have declared, borrowing the language of *Kohelet* chapter 3, that there was a time



to create and a time to conserve. In that sense Rothy was less of a creator than a conserver. By means of his teaching he ensured that Jewish commitment and experience, and to some extent Jewish knowledge also, would be preserved in a community that was then very largely apathetic towards its treasures and heritage. If one can posit a distinction between pure and applied scholarship, Rothy was a master of the second category.

## CONCLUSION

Great achievements often emanate from unexpected sources. Hardly anyone would have thought in the period before 1939 when Australian Jewry was an almost insignificant corner of the Jewish world, that high-quality books, institutions and personalities would emerge from the Antipodes. The material in this series of articles is evidence of the belief, *lo alman yisra'el* - 'Israel is never entirely bereft'<sup>15</sup> - from far-off Australia. It must be remembered, too, that though these articles deal with the interwar era, there was Jewish scholarship here in an earlier period - and recent decades have seen solid development in the field.

## ENDNOTES

1. I appreciate the assistance I have received from Helen Bersten, Joe Kensell, Clive Kessler, Gary Luke, Daniel Rossing and Andrew Samuel.
2. 'Guest of Honour: R.J. Rosenberg', *Great Synagogue Journal*, May 1955.
3. 'Dr Hertz in Sydney - Memories of 1921' (author not named), *Great Synagogue Journal*, January 1952.
4. *Hebrew Standard*, 28 September 1906.
5. *Avot* 1:4.
6. Raymond Apple, 'Jewish Scholarship, Part I', *AJHS Journal*, vol. 19 part 4, 2010.
7. Naomi Kronenberg, 'Clive Kessler: Some Biographical Reflections', in Virginia Hooker & Norani Othman (Eds.), *Malaysia: Islam, Society and Politics, Essays presented to Clive S. Kessler*, (ISEAS: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003), pp.1-15, esp. pp.2-4.
8. See, for example, *Great Synagogue Journal*, January/February, 1947.
9. 'The Synagogue and the Beth Hamidrash', *Great Synagogue Journal*, September 1954.
10. I appreciate the assistance of some of Rothy's former pupils, especially Wesley Browne, Joan and Sam Fisher, Joe Kensell, Rodney I. Rosenblum and Antony D. Robb.
11. 'Abraham Rothfield', Michael Adler (ed), *British Jewry Book of Honour, 1914-1918*, (London: Caxton Publishing Ltd, 1922), p.144.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Tribute to Abraham Rothfield, *Great Synagogue Journal*, 1964.
14. M.H. Kellerman, *New South Wales Board of Jewish Education: History 1909-1979 with Background Summary 1863-1909*, Sydney: NSW Board



of Jewish Education, 1979, pp. 22-23.

15. Jeremiah, Ch 51, V 5. The literal translation is 'Israel is not widowed', reflecting a common Biblical metaphor of God as Israel's 'husband'.