

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL



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# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

The Australian Jewish Historical Society was founded in Sydney in August 1938. The Victorian Branch of the Society was founded in October 1949, and incorporated in 1988 as AJHS-Vic. A Branch also exists in Canberra and Western Australia has its own Jewish Historical Society.

The Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal has been published since 1939. From 1988 the production of the Journal has been shared by New South Wales (June edition) and Victoria (November edition).

The Journal is edited and published by an Editorial Committee whose members are:

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A complete list of the Society's office-bearers is printed on both sides of back cover.

The Editors welcome suggestions for articles and manuscripts dealing with any aspect of the history of the Jewish people in Australia. The Journal is national in coverage and deals with the whole sweep of Australian Jewish history from 1788 to the contemporary period.

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Opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not reflect the  
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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Another year living with the pandemic has passed since the publication of the last Sydney-edited *AJHS Journal* and society is gradually accepting they need to live with vaccinations, antigen testing and isolations and is returning to normal, as I complete editing my thirty-second issue of the *Journal*. In the meantime, the regular production of the journal has continued without interruption. I feel very honoured that I was elected as Patron of the Society at the 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Society, recognising my many years of service to the Society, starting with my joining the Committee in November 1970 after the publication of my first book published by the Society and the *Australian Jewish Times*. It was entitled *Seventy-Five Years: The history of a Jewish newspaper* and marked the paper's seventy-fifth anniversary. In 1995, following the merger of the *Times* with the Melbourne-based *Australian Jewish News*, my first book was incorporated into a new publication marking the paper's hundredth anniversary, entitled *Pages of History: A century of the Australian Jewish Press*.

This year's June issue covers the full span of Australian Jewish history, from convict days until the contemporary era. The first article by Elizabeth Warren covers the life of the Jewish female convict, Sarah Lyons, who arrived on the *Lady Juliana* shortly after the arrival of the Second Fleet in June 1790, after an arduous journey lasting nearly ten months.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Warren can trace her ancestry back to Sarah Lyons, and after learning about her Jewish and convict roots over 20 years ago, she began to research her story. This article is the product of Warren's detailed research into the complex and challenging life of Lyons. It helps the reader to understand the hardships which women faced in the colonies, as well as the ongoing problem of antisemitism, and has parallels with the story of Esther Abrahams. This undercurrent of antisemitism is part of the story of the 'longest hatred', the term coined by the late Professor Robert Wistrich. Her article also illustrates the methodological difficulties in undertaking such research, with records often being difficult to locate or incomplete. The focus of her article is on Sarah Lyons, but there is significant debate as to whether

her husband, William Tunks, was Jewish. He does not have a separate listing in John Levi's *These Are the Names*, although Sarah Lyons has an entry.<sup>2</sup> If William Tunks was 'in fact a Hessen, then he would have been genetically, a European' but this does not mean he was Jewish, and there is no clear surviving evidence to prove that he was, indeed, Jewish, in contrast to his wife, Sarah.

Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple's article on the prayer for dew (*tal*) and rain (*geshem*) takes the trajectory of this issue to questions of theology and assimilation. This prayer, which forms part of the Sabbath and festival liturgy, is normally recited according to the northern hemisphere seasons, so that Jews living in the southern hemisphere celebrate the yearly cycle of the seasons out of sync with what they are seeing on the ground. It is this practice which demonstrates how deeply rooted Judaism is in *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel). However, with the assimilated nature of the Anglo-Jewish community, the Great Synagogue, under the leadership of Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen, changed the order of the recital to be based on the southern hemisphere seasons of summer and winter. Rabbi Apple's article examines this development and its implications in relation to Jewish connections to *Eretz Yisrael*. With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the prayer reverted to being recited according to the Israeli seasons. This issue clearly illustrates the theme of Professor Peter Medding's important study, *From Assimilation to Group Survival*.<sup>3</sup>

We move from this religious/theological theme to the bravery of the Jewish soldiers fighting in New Guinea during World War Two. Peter Allen is in the process of researching the stories of Jewish servicemen who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 1990, as outlined in the President's report. His detailed and interesting study of the eight Jewish volunteers who served in the Lark Force provides a snapshot into the enormous suffering of the soldiers fighting in New Guinea, as well as the complex socio-economic stratum of Australian Jews in the interwar period. The eight men varied in terms of age and background, and yet all were part of this battle of life and death. Some made the ultimate sacrifice; others survived, including David Selby who went on to make significant contributions to the legal profession. Indeed, Russell Stern, a member of our editorial team, remembers Selby giving a lecture during his law studies at the University of Sydney.

The next two articles focus on pre-war Jewish refugees and their contributions both during the war and in the post-war era. Dr Hans

Kimmel was a Viennese lawyer by training. He had a brilliant mind, but suffered from mental illness, which was greatly exacerbated by the *Anschluss*, the German takeover of Austria, in March 1938. The family managed to migrate to Sydney, where despite being in and out of mental institutions, he managed to impact significantly on Sydney Jewry, particularly in regard to the development of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. When our former president, the late Sophie Caplan, decided to donate a prize to Moriah College to stimulate interest in modern Jewish history through an essay writing competition, she named it the 'Hans Kimmel Prize'.

When I introduced the modern Jewish history program into Moriah in 1976, I made it a compulsory part of Year 10 assignment work. The competition is now going into the third generation of Moriah students and is still having a powerful impact on Year 10 students – so that 'Hans Kimmel' has become a household name in the Sydney Jewish community. When Deborah Green was looking for a topic relating to Jewish Holocaust survivors, she decided to focus on the impact of the Nazi era on mental health. I mentioned Dr Kimmel to her, although he arrived with his family as a pre-war Jewish refugee from Vienna, because he suffered from serious mental illness. Drawing on his memoirs now located in the Leo Baeck archive in New York, her article is based on one chapter of her thesis and is the first extended piece to be published on his life.

Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian also arrived as a refugee, in his case from Germany, before the war and made substantial contributions to Australian Jewish life through his ministries in three cities: Adelaide, Brisbane and finally the North Shore Synagogue in Sydney. His daughter, Dr Miriam Frommer, has drawn on his autobiographical writings and other sources, to discuss his many contributions to each of these three communities. His life story is another key example of how the pre-war Jewish refugees contributed so significantly to the development of Australian Jewry.

The last article is by Adele Rosalky, the president of the ACT branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society. She has written an overview history of the ACT Jewish community. This is based on the talk she gave marking the community's foundation seventy years ago. Her article significantly supplements the history of Canberra Jewry written by Rabbi Dr Israel Porush in the 1970s and is based on the history which she and Sylvia Deutsch wrote to mark this important anniversary.

We have a number of book reviews, ranging from Lian Knight's story of Issy Smith, who won the Victoria Cross, reviewed by Roger Selby; to Tony Bernard's revelations about his Holocaust survivor father, Otto Bernard, with both father and son working as doctors at the Northern Beaches; to the contributions of Leo and Mina Fink who played a key role in assisting survivors migrate to Australia after the war and the development of Melbourne Jewry; to Angelina Jacob's personal story of migration from Bombay (now Mumbai) whose Baghdadi Jewish family migrated to Australia after World War Two, reviewed by Elana Benjamin, whose Indian Baghdadi family also migrated to Australia. Elana has published that story in her book entitled *My Mother's Spice Cupboard*. All these books help to provide further insights into Australia's rich Jewish history and tapestry, including both Ashkenazi and Sephardi stories.

Finally, Peter Philippsohn's report from Sydney's Annual General Meeting is published as is customary. Under the innovative and visionary leadership of Peter Philippsohn, the Society has well and truly moved into the twenty-first century. This is seen in the significant project of digitalising all the Australian Jewish press, through a cooperative endeavour of the AJHS, the National Archive of Australian (NAA) and the National Library of Israel (NLI). The scanning of the newspapers is now completed, and the digital versions have now gone live on TROVE. The Society thanks David Lesnie, whose generosity has made this project possible. Thanks also to Peter Philippsohn and the NSW Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA) we also have a full-time archivist, Sabrina Elias, whose sterling efforts are ensuring that the communal records of our past history are being collected, catalogued and correctly stored. Due to this development, and changes at the University of Sydney Library, the resources of the Archive of Australian Judaica are being combined with the AJHS Sydney archive, and new storage facilities are being investigated. All these developments are very exciting for our Society and demonstrate how we are living up to our motto, the biblical commandment to 'remember the days of old'.

Once again, I would like to thank wholeheartedly my *Journal* sub-committee without whose assistance this issue could not have been produced. I would like to thank Helen Bersten for all her ongoing assistance both in the sub-editing and in supplying information and references. Russell Stern has also been very helpful in picking up errors, ensuring that a high standard of articles continue to be published and



Sue Davis has assisted with the proof reading. I would also like to thank my Melbourne colleague, Dr Hilary Rubinstein, editor of the Victorian issue, for her assistance and collegiality.

In last year's editorial I wrote 'as we see the gradual end of enforced confinement with COVID 19, I hope readers will continue to explore Australian Jewish history both through the pages of past journals now accessible on the web, and also through other elements of our website.' Subsequently, we have gone through the waves of Delta and Omicron, with further lockdowns. Things have now eased in 2022, but we keep being warned that the pandemic is not over. However, when one reads about the infant mortality and early deaths described in Elizabeth Warren's article on Sarah Lyons, we are reminded how much medical improvements have changed our lives. I wish you all happy reading and continued good health.

Since just before this issue of the Journal went to press, I have learnt the sad news of the passing of Dr Howard Freeman and, like so many in the Australian Jewish community, I am deeply saddened by this great loss. While the Society will pay full tribute to Howard in the November issue, produced in Melbourne, I felt strongly the need to write a few words. Apart from Dr Howard Freeman serving for 36 years as President of the Society in Melbourne, I worked closely with him for eighteen years as the Journal's Sydney editor. In November 2003, he took over the editing of the Journal from Dr Rodney Goutmann, with Dr Hilary Rubinstein as his associate editor. In his first editor's introduction he wrote about taking on this task with the production of that issue, Vol XVII, Part I. He was to dedicate himself for so many years to this task with all his passionate commitment and we are all the richer for his efforts. May his memory be for a blessing and may God comfort Lorraine and his family among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Suzanne D. Rutland

## Endnotes

- 1 Penny Edwell, 2016, *Lady Juliana*, The Dictionary of Sydney, [https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lady\\_juliana](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lady_juliana). Accessed 16 March 2022.
- 2 John S. Levi, *These are the Names: Jewish lives in Australia, 1788–1850* (Carlton, Vic., The Miegunyah Press, 2006), pp. 501–2.
- 3 Peter Medding, *From Assimilation to Group Survival: a political and sociological study of an Australian Jewish community*, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1968.

## THE SARAH LYONS STORY

*Elizabeth A Warren*

### ABSTRACT

My Jewish ancestors arrived in Australia on the First Fleet on 26 January 1788 and the ship *Lady Juliana* on 3 June 3, 1790. Some ancestors were convicts while others served in the military. Some of these were English with some originating in Ireland but I knew nothing of this until 1997. After learning of this history, I developed an interest in the historiography of Australia's European genesis and a search led to finding a woman convict, my first female ancestor here. She had at various times used a number of names and, in asking why, I soon realised she may have had good reasons. Sarah Lyons was a convict from the ill-noted *Lady Juliana*; she was Jewish, and I discovered that the stigma of Jewishness as well as the erroneous belief of whoredom that incorrectly plagued so many early women here, as well as her convict status, may have been the reasons why so many of her records were burnt during the 1950s, at a time when shame at coming from such people was at its zenith.

That Sarah Lyons was a survivor cannot be questioned. Her repeated floggings did not break her will to survive as it did so many. Her actions to take life where she felt it was necessary showed strength of character that few develop. In giving birth to six, possibly even more, children and losing all but one is, for most, an unbearable burden. Despite this, she forged a worthwhile life in this colony. She unwittingly helped to save thousands of lives through the improvement of conditions on the convict ships. Despite belief to the contrary, Sarah Lyons is a name worthy of remembrance. This article focuses on her story.

**KEYWORDS:** Australian History, Family History, Convicts and Early Settlers, Biography, Women, Sarah Lyons

Tracing Sarah's story has been challenging because at various times she used different surnames. As my research proceeded, I realised she may have done this for good reasons. Apart from Lyons (also spelt Lyon), there is another record giving Sarah's last name as Moses.<sup>1</sup> This may have been her mother's maiden surname. There is yet another name to be explored: that of Sarah Sabolah as mentioned in the journal of *Lady Juliana's* steward, John Nicol.<sup>2</sup> Despite extensive research over 25 years, there do not appear to be any other records reflecting this name. Then, there is the 'Mystery Letter Writer', identified only as a woman who sailed on the *Lady Juliana*, whose letter to a fellow prisoner, Lord George Gordon, ultimately changed the way convicts were transported, contributing to saving many lives. As discussed below, I have explored the probability that Sarah Lyons and Sarah Sabolah were the same person as, indeed, Sian Rees and Thomas Keneally indicate as well, and that she was the mystery letter writer.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever her real name, Sarah Lyons is the name that followed her to Australia. The name of Lyon or Lyons was almost certainly adopted by the family following the pogrom that resulted from the signing of the *Decreto de la Alhambra*, *Edicto de Granada*<sup>4</sup> by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand in Spain. It seems likely that Sarah's family had settled in Lyon, France, adopting this name.

Born in 1763, Sarah Lyon [sic] was convicted in 1786 in England for stealing nine yards of lace valued at 20 shillings from a haberdasher.<sup>5</sup> She was in the company of Ann Gibson and a child. Ann Gibson was in a relationship with a Jewish man. For some reason charges were not pressed against Gibson and she was released but Sarah Lyon was convicted, receiving a six-month gaol sentence that included hard labour with fifteen lashes.<sup>6</sup> She was held in a bridewell (women's prison) for this term. The hard labour involved the unravelling of old tarred ropes to make oakum for use as caulking, mainly in ships but often in houses. The unravelled ropes were used for stuffing into cavities/cracks to exclude water and cold. This was an unpleasant chore, as the ropes, stiff with detritus, were difficult and unpleasant to handle and hands suffered. At this time, it was a punishment particularly meted out to women, but it was later used more generally. It is mentioned in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*<sup>7</sup> and, while his book was set in the 1830s

describing work for children in the workhouse, it reflected punitive measures of the broader time.

The issue of her identity was further confused due to the erroneous belief that she was a black woman, but closer research disproved this. The belief stemmed from an omission in recording her words when she stated she had a black-haired sister. The court stenographer recorded her as saying she had a 'black sister'. The dark complexion of many Jews set them apart from most English citizens and contributed to antisemitic views.

Two years later Sarah Lyons [sic] was taken into custody for a similar crime and on 26 June 1788, convicted for the theft of seven yards of handkerchief silk, again valued at twenty shillings. She was tried as if this were her first offence so the slight difference in name may not have been noticed. The day before her crime, two women, one of whom was Ann Gibson, were caught shoplifting but the woman with Ann Gibson was released with the child.<sup>8</sup> This shop was near the shop where Sarah Lyons, acting alone, stole from, a day later. There was no legal representation for either woman, indicating they represented themselves, pointing to some paucity on their behalf. This is an anomaly, given events now known about Sarah Lyons.

Sarah Lyons was kept in a cell close to the two cells occupied by Lord George Gordon,<sup>9</sup> a well-known agitator and a man inclined to philanthropism, recorded as having given money to about ten women held in the better part of the gaol.<sup>10</sup> Gordon, held on spurious charges even though he was still a member of the House of Lords, had raised a petition addressed to himself that he intended giving to King George III,<sup>11</sup> decrying the 'ungodly' notion of transportation as expressed by the King himself. Giving lie to the fact that women were not capable of comprehending political matters, 84 women are reputed to have signed it. It is not known whether he did send this petition to King George III. It is mentioned in Robert Watson's book about Lord George Gordon, but the petition seems to have been burnt with his effects on his death from typhus in 1793.<sup>12</sup>

In their separate trials, Gibson and Lyons were sentenced to seven years' transportation each and held in Newgate Prison prior to boarding the *Lady Juliana*.<sup>13</sup> There are a number of indicators showing these women remained friends, particularly while in the colony of New South Wales and specifically when on Norfolk Island. Then they were

separated with Sarah returning to the mainland of Australia while Ann later went to Van Diemen's Land. Whether they remained friends after that is not known.

Sarah was housed in the 'wealthy' part of Newgate Prison.<sup>14</sup> The first question to be explored is what was the imperative for her committing this crime if she had sufficient funds to pay the cost of serving her sentence in the 'wealthy part' of the prison? Archival research indicates that it was probably her brother, Angel Lyons, otherwise known as Asher Bar Judah<sup>15</sup> who paid the weekly board of two shillings and sixpence for the nine and a half months she spent in prison. He also visited her regularly.<sup>16</sup> When Angel visited her, it is also noted that he visited Lord George Gordon, who had converted to Judaism and is recorded to have been a member of a Hassidic sect, which would have had a specific dress code. Gordon was reported to have been very strict about the religious laws as practised by his sect and he initially turned Angel away for not dressing as a 'proper' Jew.<sup>17</sup> Later, Angel returned with more appropriate attire (according to Lord George). It is not stated whether Angel attended the many *minyanim* (Jewish prayer services that require ten men) that Lord George held during his stay in Newgate Gaol, though it might be surmised that he attended some, in accordance with the records of Newgate's gaol keeper, Mr Kirby, who describes these services. Lord George also financially supported 'ten pensions' for the convict women he chose to support as they had no other means of support and without this, could not purchase food to survive. John Nicol reports collecting these funds on a weekly basis in his *Journal*.

An examination of the records of the women that boarded the *Lady Juliana* show Sarah Lyons and Sarah Sabolah share many similarities. It is unlikely that Sabolah was the exact spelling of this name though it was probably a variation of such in Spain where the family originated and as Sarah and John Nicol seem to have become friends, it is possible she confided her familial name to him. Given that his journal was written 22 years after the ship's arrival in the colony, he may have remembered her surname differently or he may have deliberately misspelt it. However, there is little doubt that Nicol had valid reasons to hide the identity of this particular convict for two good reasons: Sarah, as with many other women on the *Lady Juliana*, was given a good deal of freedom while aboard the ship and he describes her organising and leading groups

of women in at least three quasi-religious parades in order to extract money from the residents of the towns whose ports they stayed in for many weeks while on route to Sydney. This amount of freedom given to a prisoner could have seen her severely punished by the authorities if she was caught. This may also have related to the strong letter written by the 'mystery woman' describing the terrible conditions for the convicts on the Second Fleet, which arrived shortly after *Lady Juliana* docked in Sydney – a story which is discussed later.

### **Trip to Australia**

Sarah Lyons was one of the first convicts to be loaded onto the *Lady Juliana*, the second ship to Australia to carry women exclusively. She boarded from the Thames in the early morning of 8 March 1789, nine and a half months following her conviction. This ship was not loaded with prostitutes as has been erroneously alleged. In fact, none of the women on board *Lady Juliana* had been convicted of prostitution,<sup>18</sup> which was not classified as a crime at that time. So, it is strange to claim they were being transported for such a transgression. Deborah Oxley is one of several noted historians to state that it seems merely a story to titillate the senses, with a small percentage of women practising this as a profession and of those that did, most did so opportunistically to feed themselves or their family.<sup>19</sup> This is supported by Portia Robinson's findings.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, John Nicol himself in his journal claims that during conversations he had with the few prostitutes on board most said that once they had food, warmth and shelter they had no need to engage in this activity.<sup>21</sup>

After collecting women from other gaols while in the Thames, *Lady Juliana* sailed to Portsmouth, loading yet more women, then left Britain's shores on 4 June 1789. The ship arrived in Sydney on 3 June 1790, all but one day short of one year. Most ships took about four months to sail here. This lengthy sailing time has also been used as evidence, falsely, that widespread prostitution took place. Yet, Nicol's Journal of 1822 neither states nor implies this.<sup>22</sup> In his version of events there were only a small number of women who were prostitutes for a brief time with sailors from passing ships while they were anchored at two of the ports where the ship restocked.

While still in Portsmouth, extra supplies were loaded, adding to her already over-loaded state. At this time there were no limits on the amount that could be loaded. The Merchant Shipping Act proposed by

Samuel Plimsoll<sup>23</sup> to limit shipping loads was not enacted until 1876, almost 100 years after transportation of convicts to Australia began, so it was left to the discretion of the captain about how much could be safely loaded. The *Lady Juliana* was supposed to carry 180 women but loaded 236. (The number of women that actually boarded varies in the accounts of the steward, the agent, surgeon and government records. They range from 225 to 251. I have taken John Nicol's number as he had the most to do with these women.)

None of *Lady Juliana*'s mariners were allowed to take wives aboard, nor were any free passengers allowed to travel on this ship. In public records it is noted that following the striking of an iceberg by the HMS *Guardian*, the supply ship of the Second Fleet, survivors were taken aboard *Lady Juliana* when she arrived in Cape Town. The only female survivor noted is Philip Schaeffer's twelve-year old daughter. However, Cape Town was the last port of call by *Lady Juliana* before her arrival in New South Wales so that this episode had no bearing on the events described by John Nicol in relation to Sarah Sabolah/Lyons. In other words, she had conducted her daring exploits of 'penitent' parades in order to obtain money before *Guardian*'s remaining crew and passengers came aboard. John Nicol states that all nine women Sarah led on the parade were her 'Jewish friends', but, seemingly from the records of the women, not all were Jewish. Sarah led the parades along esplanades in three of the four ports before their arrival in Australia. According to the records, she did not lead any parades in the township of Cape Town and none of the convict women went ashore there.

If Sarah Sabolah and Sarah Lyons were the same person as is strongly suggested by evidence, it indicates she was Sephardic. Sarah Lyons' Spanish origins were confirmed by DNA, with her Jewishness confirmed by relatives now living in the Canary Islands. Judging by his writings, Nicol displays some admiration for Sarah. That she arranged for some groups to be given an extraordinary amount of leeway, remembering that this could only have been done with the captain's approval, as he gave them the material to drape over themselves during the parades, speaks volumes. The captain also allowed the ship's carpenters to make Christian crosses for these women to carry, a direction that, according to Nicol's journal, almost certainly seems to have come from Sarah. He records that the women were treated well by the locals as they paraded along wharves and esplanades of the various towns.

On the other hand, the colony of Cape Town, he warned, was entirely another matter because it had a reputation of cruelty, meting out appalling treatment to convicts on ships passing through. Nicol indicates they made significant money from the bystanders from their three previous displays of 'penitence', no doubt to help them for the future in an unknown gaol but he doubted they would receive well-wishes there. During her transportation to New South Wales, Sarah displayed *elan*, *éclat*, ingenuity, perspicuity and good business sense, that no doubt ensured her survival.

### **The 'mystery letter writer' and its ramifications**

A significant historical episode of this period is the fact that a female convict, who arrived on *Lady Juliana*, wrote an anonymous letter to Lord George describing the horrific conditions following the arrival of the four ships of the Second Fleet in New South Wales, two weeks after *Lady Juliana*'s arrival on 3 June 1790. This was before a number of women, including Sarah Lyons, were sent to Norfolk Island six weeks later. The letter was sent to London on the return journey of the *Lady Juliana* which departed Sydney Cove in August 1790, thereby evading the colony's mandatory censor, Judge Advocate David Collins, who was most unlikely to have passed it. In her letter, the woman described how the convicts on the Second Fleet had been transported in chains in the same manner that these same slave traders carried slaves to America and other countries. They were forced to sit in water up to their chests and their rations were often withheld during the four-and-a-half-month journey. This was especially problematic because transportation to other countries took much less time than the long journey to Australia; hence the worse state of health of the convicts sent to Australia. One quarter of the convicts on the Second Fleet died, and half of the remainder were disabled to varying degrees, some permanently.<sup>24</sup>

Most in the colony were appalled at the condition the Second Fleet convicts arrived in as a result of their inhumane treatment, but the women from *Lady Juliana* were even more conflicted. They had been treated remarkably well, arriving in good health, with little disease of either a sexually transmitted nature or illness resulting from malnourishment or mistreatment. The Second Fleet's terrible conditions, highlighted in the woman's letter, parts of which were published anonymously in three London newspapers,<sup>25</sup> were followed by an angry outburst by Governor Arthur Phillip who sent a strongly worded letter of



censure to the British parliament. Yet, his letter only managed to engage the attention of parliamentarians fleetingly. It was not published in the press, unlike the letter from the *Lady Juliana* woman, even though that was written anonymously. The letter's publication caused a furore in Britain and this outrage eventually resulted in the introduction of laws which mandated a more humane transport of convicts, particularly when it was found that some subsequent ships, owned and managed by these same slave traders, also mistreated the convicts in a similar fashion during the long trip to Australia. After many sessions of debate, parliament mandated that owners, captains and agents were to allow prisoners to exercise, have fresh air for a certain period each day and be given proper rations. This Act was finally passed in 1814.<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note that Captain William Hill from the New South Wales Corps also wrote letters complaining of the treatment of convicts, in which he describes the 'avarice and mismanagement'.<sup>27</sup> He sent one letter to Jonathan Wathen Esq of Bond Court, Walbrook, London and the second to the reformer, William Wilberforce.<sup>28</sup> In his letter to Wilberforce he states, 'The slave trade is merciful compared with what I have seen in this fleet... had I been empowered, it would have been the most grateful task of my life to have prevented so many of my fellow creatures so much misery and death'.<sup>29</sup>

Governor Phillip's letter denouncing the captains and agents of this fleet and the scandalous ways they had treated convicts did eventually result in charges being pressed against both the owners and captains of the Second Fleet ships *Surprise*, *Neptune* and *Scarborough* (but failed to attract any censure.) This occurred only after he sent several more letters demanding action be taken, but broader legislation was not introduced at this time.

There are a number of reasons to believe that the mystery woman was probably Sarah although no definitive proof, such as handwriting comparisons or Sarah Lyon's signature on the Mystery Letter, has been uncovered. However, over 25 years I have researched all the women from the *Lady Juliana*. First, I eliminated those who could not write or displayed limited literacy skills. I then eliminated those women that did not know Lord George, thus leaving the women from Newgate Prison, who were only a small number in comparison to those that were finally sent on this ship. I then examined those who, given Lord George Gordon's conversion to Judaism and his strict self-imposed guidelines,

were likely to be accepted by him. Sarah Lyons, Elizabeth Barnsley, Anne Wheeler, and Sarah's friend Ann Gibson were imprisoned in the 'wealthy' cells adjoining Lord George Gordon's two cells, so would have had a passing familiarity with him. (Gibson at that time was in a relationship with a Jewish man and was one of the ten women from *Lady Juliana* that Lord George supported there.<sup>30</sup>) However, Sarah's case was different.

The 'Mystery Letter Writer' clearly knew Lord George well. Sarah was imprisoned at Newgate for nine and a half months of Lord George Gordon's lengthy sentence and prisoners housed in the cells of the 'wealthy' were free to roam freely inside the prison. She was the only Jewish person amongst the women identified above and her family lived in the more exclusive part of London where Jews resided. She was also reasonably observant, thus meeting some of Lord George Gordon's criteria, so would in all probability have been the only woman acceptable to him. It is also probable that they knew each other personally before her term in prison, given his conversion to Judaism and the fact that her brother, Asher Angel, also visited Lord George when he was in prison. The content of the lengthy 'Mystery Letter' itself is an indication that these two knew each other because, at the end, not immediately finding what she hoped for in New South Wales, the writer asks him to use his influence to intercede on her behalf to allow her to return to Britain once her sentence was completed.<sup>31</sup>

As well, given the lengths mariner John Nicol went to in order to disguise Sarah's identity, and her own efforts to do likewise, due to the serious consequences if they were discovered, the law of probabilities seems to point to Sarah as the most likely author of this mysterious letter. In addition, as Rabbi Dr John Levi and Dr George Bergman state, Jews had '...deep respect for education so that it was common for the poorest Jews to be able to read and write...'.<sup>32</sup> With this in mind, it is almost certain that Sarah would have been considered literate, though, according to some historians,<sup>33</sup> many women could only read. Some could write their names, and a few could both read and write to some extent while almost all the women had numeracy skills.

Recidivism mostly attracted the death penalty for both sexes in Britain during the Australian convict era and almost certainly Sarah Lyons would have been aware of this. That again begs the question of, why, if she had monetary resources, did she risk such a punishment? It

was probably only the difference in the names, Lyon and Lyons, however, that saved her from being hung and burnt on her second conviction, a punishment reserved for women only. (Men were hung outright with no burning at the stake.) On the face of it, she may not have been recognised as the same person. It is possible that she arranged this slight variation herself in order to be transported. It is estimated, up to 25% of women used name changes to avoid such a fate<sup>34</sup> and this may have been the case with Sarah, particularly given the difficulties facing the Jews in Britain and the disproportionate number transported at the time. This indicates some determination on Sarah Lyons' part but still leaves the question of why she wished to be transported to Australia, the possible reason for which is analysed in the next section.

### **Sarah's life and times in the colony of New South Wales**

Following her arrival in New South Wales Sarah does not appear to have come to anyone's attention for any adverse behaviour and, as a woman with a good report from the captain of *Lady Juliana*, she was sent to Norfolk Island two months after arriving in the colony, to ease the burden of shortages since Governor Phillip had received reports that the soil was better there and so was more suitable for food production than the poor soil of Sydney Cove. However, it is here that things take a decided turn for the worse for Sarah. Lieutenant Ralph Clark took an immediate and intense dislike to her and ordered her to be flogged on three occasions.<sup>35</sup> He also records her as 'a d(amned) b(itch)'.<sup>36</sup> It was mutual dislike. Sarah is also recorded in Clark's journal as giving Surgeon D'arcy Wentworth a piece of her mind, for which she received one of the three floggings under Clark's orders, despite the fact that none of the officers gave Wentworth much credence.<sup>37</sup> One of her floggings was for refusing to divulge to Lieutenant Clark why she and the two women she was with refused to explain why they wished to see Lieutenant-Governor Robert Ross, a major who also served as head of the marines.<sup>38</sup> (It may have been to lodge a complaint about him because one of the three women had been raped and was now pregnant, giving birth to a child two months later. The child is recorded in a burial on Norfolk Island.)<sup>39</sup> All three of the women were flogged, despite one being seven months pregnant and despite Clark declaring earlier that he would not flog a pregnant woman. Sarah's third flogging was for fighting with another convict, Catherine White, who was a favourite of Clark's. It seems White may have stolen some of Sarah's belongings.

On 4 November 1791, a marine from the *Sirius*, William Tunks,<sup>40</sup> recorded variously as Tonks, Jacks, Tonge, Tinks, as well as several other names in a number of records, arrived on Norfolk Island after resigning from the marines. Following DNA conducted by significant numbers of descendants, William's name almost certainly does not seem to have been 'Tunks', and instead was anglicised by British recruiting officers for ease of pronunciation, as so many others were anglicised. According to a descendant of this family found in America through DNA testing, his name may have been either Tzunz or Tunz. (Many fighting on the British side of the American War of Independence settled in America. If William's name was this, he either had children there or a close relative settled there.) Following the destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust, the only relatives likely to be found now are those from other countries, such as America. There have been many descendants in Australia over the generations that claim he was German *and* Jewish, though the latter was whispered, but with his Northern European origins he may have been from one of the Russian or Baltic states.

There is much conjecture about William's origins. One established fact is his age at death in 1821: 67. This makes him 34 on his arrival here as a marine on *Sirius* in 1788. It has taken many years of research to recover some of William Tunks's details before his arrival in New South Wales. There are records indicating he fought in the American War of Independence as a Hessen<sup>41</sup> (often referred to as 'hessian'). DNA records him as Northern European,<sup>42</sup> and he was thought to be of Hessen origins given his history. Hessen troops were not volunteers but were mandatorily trained from an early age to be 'loaned' to friendly countries. Substantial payments were made to the lending country, and this seems to have been a welcome business. The commercial status of this later gave rise to the term 'mercenary' though the nuance of this word has now changed as the soldiers themselves then did not benefit in any pecuniary way. In the case of the American War of Independence, a member of the Prussian royalty lent his prepared military to his relative, King George III. William Tunks served in the navy rather than as a soldier. Since almost all Hessens served in the army, this also casts doubt on William being a Hessen. It seems he may have later been lumped into this group as he served in the American war and was from Europe.

The belief has been that he and Sarah began living together at this time, but there are a number of indicators leading to them having

known each other in Britain, and recommencing cohabitation after her arrival in the colony. They may have already married, but research at Bevis Marks Synagogue and the Great Synagogue did not reveal this. It is worth noting that there were a number of small synagogues at the time in London but records from them are no longer extant. Sarah and William did not take up Reverend Johnson's offer to marry them. Following William's arrival on Norfolk Island, Clark ignored Sarah. Nine months after William's arrival on the island their first daughter, Rebekkah Ann, was born on 5 August 1792.<sup>43</sup>

There are family rumours of a Hebrew Bible owned by William and another one owned by Sarah, both of which are reputed to have survived until the 1950s when many family records pertaining to Sarah were deliberately burnt. This was witnessed by a number of descendants and disclosed in a phone conversation in 2006, on condition of anonymity. Records pertaining to William were also destroyed at this time, probably because of his connection to Sarah, but there are no surviving indications to show what details were destroyed. The motives for this destruction are also unclear, but the relatives burning the papers apparently made derogatory comments about Sarah and probably wanted to destroy any evidence of this shameful past history. It is almost certain both Sarah and William's correct names would have been shown in the frontispieces of their Hebrew Bibles.

Extensive searches have found that William served for a number of years on a 74-gun warship, *Ganges*, under Captain Sir Roger Curtis, as well as serving on two ships prior to the American War of Independence, engaging in actions in several parts of the world. It had been thought he was from the British training ship *Ganges*, but this was another later ship also named *Ganges*, which was not in existence during William's lifespan. The *Ganges* William Tunks served on was the first ship of this name and it was never used as a training ship.

From the *Ganges*, he was discharged to Haslar Hospital near Portsmouth in 1785, with a further report saying he was later discharged back to headquarters.<sup>44</sup> This could mean he was assigned guard duties in Haslar Hospital but no records in support of this have been found. It seems more likely he was sent there following an illness or accident. Conditions in Haslar Hospital were primitive, with little nursing as we know it today, and assignment to this place for guard duty was sometimes used as punishment. Multiple reports indicate drunkenness was

rife amongst patients and staff alike. Patients often absconded and, as this was a military hospital admitting only military personnel, it was regarded as going absent without leave – a serious breach.

After three months in Haslar, William was discharged back to the navy but not to his originating ship. He was also not assigned another ship. He languished for a short period and, as personnel from the rank and file not on active duty did not receive pay when stood down, he was without means of support. There is a belief by one descendant that William worked as a merchant seaman for a short period, but I have found no indicators to support this.

In late 1786, while on unpaid leave following his discharge from Haslar Hospital, William heard of a fleet of ships being prepared to transport convicts to a land hitherto purported to be largely unknown. William applied to Nicholas Nepean and was accepted as a supernumerary marine on HMS *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet, under the captaincy of Arthur Phillip.<sup>45</sup> William's job was as one of six awl and gimlet makers,<sup>46</sup> though whether he had experience in this field prior to this time is not known. At this stage he had been with the military many years, probably since boyhood, which was not uncommon.

After his arrival in New South Wales, William was assigned to exploration parties, some of which were led by Governor Arthur Phillip. In the time not spent exploring he had picquet duties,<sup>47</sup> as well as the repair of awls and gimlets as no new supplies arrived from Britain until two and a half years following European settlement and, even then, supplies did not meet demands for some time, given the size of the emerging shipbuilding industry.

Conditions in the colony were far from ideal and the promised support from Britain for this emerging settlement was not immediately forthcoming. Rations were reduced, then reduced again, then again. While many, including convicts who had their own huts, grew some vegetables,<sup>48</sup> those living in barracks or under canvas could not. Physical work could not be sustained with such limited rations and workloads were reduced for military and convicts alike. Apparel, both uniforms and personal clothing, was rapidly wearing out and repairs to clothing and tools were difficult to undertake without primary resources. Life was increasingly difficult. William, unaware that Sarah was on her way here, applied to return to Britain on the next available ship but Major Ross appears to have rejected his application.<sup>49</sup>

When *Lady Juliana* arrived in the colony carrying not only women convicts but survivors from the wreck of the HMS *Guardian*, William and Sarah did not immediately reunite. William may have been involved in one of the exploratory duties and away from base at Sydney Cove at the time of *Lady Juliana's* arrival, only returning some weeks later.

There are a number of clues indicating that Sarah 'arranged' to come to New South Wales to be with William. In comparison to many other women, she had access to some monetary resources and, therefore, the need to steal seems, on the face of it, unnecessary. Her first conviction was committed at the time of preparation of the First Fleet, coinciding with William's enlistment and she probably knew that only a few wives were being allowed to accompany their husbands. Her second conviction was just as preparations of a ship to depart with only women on board became public. In taking these matters into consideration it seems she wished to be reunited with her partner, as many did.<sup>50</sup> Evidence points to Sarah being adventurous and not afraid of taking risks. It is not possible to know whether William applied for Sarah to come with him on *Sirius*, but it is noted that none of the supernumerary marines was granted this luxury. His desire to continue his marriage with Sarah seems an explanation for his application to return to Britain but then applying to stay in New South Wales on realising Sarah had arrived in the colony.

William did not apply to Major Ross for permission to remain as Ross had refused his original request to return to Britain and could now refuse this request. If this happened, he may never have seen Sarah again. He had completed his term of enlistment and was entitled to resign and apply for land as a free settler. Accordingly, he applied to Governor Phillip rather than Major Ross to go to Norfolk Island where Sarah had been sent.

Governor Phillip had previously granted William land on the mainland while he was still with the military. Seventeen months after Sarah was sent to Norfolk Island, they were finally able to reunite permanently when William arrived at Norfolk Island on 7 November 1791 on the *Atlantic*. Governor Phillip allowed him to exchange his land for a block on Norfolk Island. Each grant was sixty acres, the amount of land given to married childless free settlers (not convicts), but the choice of land was left to Major Ross, now Lieutenant Governor on Norfolk Island. Major Ross assigned William a steep block of land that was difficult



to manage.<sup>51</sup> Limited in what could be built and also what could be produced, William and Sarah experienced a number of difficulties. Major Ross returned to the mainland only three weeks after William's arrival. The reason for assigning such a difficult block is not known, but it is noted he gave other settlers, including convicts, more accessible and productive land. Perhaps the couple's Jewishness played a part. Or it could have been related to William's being thought of as a Hessen, as Philip Schaeffer, a Hessen, free settler and survivor from the *Guardian* and commissioned by no less than Arthur Phillip himself to manage the winery he wished to establish,<sup>52</sup> was also treated badly by many of the military in the colony though Schaeffer was not Jewish. Whatever the reason, it cannot be known whether Lieutenant Governor King (Ross' replacement) would have given William better land.

Despite the difficulties, William and Sarah raised sufficient grain for government use but without receiving the promised payment.<sup>53</sup> Governor Phillip had promised payment for the grain produced by the settlers, but Governor Grose refused to honour this pledge.<sup>54</sup> This act of non-payment was not directed specifically at William but at all the settlers, both on Norfolk Island and New South Wales. Grose claimed the food was government property and therefore not for sale to the government. Thus, denied an income, settlers became disillusioned and dissatisfied, causing many on Norfolk Island to wish to return to the mainland.

While Governor King was a more pleasant person than vituperative Major Ross, he was not a strong leader. For a short time things went reasonably well for Sarah and William despite the difficulty the steep land posed. Yet King made little attempt to control the demands of the increasing numbers of soldiers antipathetic to the marines, and the situation for marines, ex-marines and convicts on the island generally became untenable. Soldiers demanded the land of those already there, already productive and with housing, and in many cases, demanded their women.<sup>55</sup> King did little to temper their demands. In only a short time, half of William's land had to be surrendered and it was the arable half that included the house that William had built and the land growing the grain he hoped to sell.

To counter the increasingly strident complaints from settlers, King claimed the reason that land and housing were being taken from settlers was that there were mistakes in the initial surveying.<sup>56</sup> This was



not entirely true and resulted in much dissatisfaction and resentment. Meetings were held with many deciding to return to the mainland. Once the settlers told King of their plans, he sent word to the New South Wales government stating the reason they were returning was their inadequacy and dissatisfaction as farmers, again none of which was true. They *were* dissatisfied with the leadership. The farms of these people generally had proved productive, supplying both the small colony of Norfolk Island as well as the colony of New South Wales, thus preventing almost certain starvation of the fledgling colony in Sydney Cove. William, with Sarah and baby Rebekkah Ann, returned to Sydney on *Kitty* on 7 March 1793,<sup>57</sup> along with many others, to take up land back in New South Wales, where markets were developing. Rebekkah Ann was listed under Sarah's surname, 'Lyons', the first indication that William and Sarah did not marry in the Christian ceremony offered by Rev Richard Johnson on his visit to Norfolk Island.

Back on the mainland, William, needing money to support his growing family, rejoined the military, the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot, staying with it until its disbandment in 1810<sup>58</sup> when he was 56 years old. All in all, William had served in the military for about 45 years. Yet, he did not progress beyond the rank of private as a marine or soldier, though his service, if not illustrious, seems to have been solid, showing no adverse reports. The reason why he was overlooked for promotion is not known.

In 1809, while still with the military, William was attacked by First Nations guerrilla warriors: Tedbury, Bun-del and another unnamed man. Tedbury was either the son or grandson of the guerrilla warrior Pemulwuy, while Bun-del's mother was attacked by a shark with his father killed in battle. (This may be a euphemism for 'killed by European settlers in a land or resource dispute'.) Bun-del had been adopted and raised by Captain William Hill of the NSW Corps (previously mentioned as the man who wrote letters complaining of the convicts' terrible treatment<sup>59</sup>) but as a teenager Bun-del rejoined his own people. Whether this attack on Tunks was personal or occurred as a result of being a 'red shirt' (part of the military that was obliged to take part in the hunting down of First Nations people), is not known. William's life was saved by the appearance of other settlers on the path behind him.<sup>60</sup> At the time of this attack, he had been taking gimlets and awls to one of the now many shipbuilders along the river. He reported the attack, but

the magistrate exhorted him and his family to take no reprisals.

Over time, William was granted and bought various blocks of land, the largest of his government grants comprising 140 acres on the banks of the Nepean River. This was productive land, and, giving lie to the claim that he was one of the 'indifferent' farmers, he is reported as growing crops well. He was diversifying his income with his business of his awl-and-gimlet making, with another source from cattle. Many floods on this river beset the colony, with William surviving most of them until the flood of 1806, in which he and Sarah lost everything – livestock, crops, sheds, and housing. Following this disastrous flood their last child was born but the only record that exists comes from Rev Samuel Marsden's report that William's 'concubine' Sarah Lyons (meaning they had not married in a *Christian* ceremony) had two children (only two were visible to the recorders as Sarah had three still alive) and was near her time when he and Surgeon Thomas Arndell were assessing the needs of the farmers that had been so badly affected. It is noted by Peter Christian that Rev Marsden disliked Sarah, and he indicates that Marsden stated '...that concubine (Sarah Lyons) with two illegitimate children and near her time and friendly with that other concubine Amelia Levy...' <sup>61</sup> Sarah had appeared as a witness for Amelia in a court case in 1795 in the colony <sup>62</sup> and they seem to have had a long-standing friendship until Amelia's death.

### **A growing family**

Sarah and William had six known children, possibly seven, but only three were known to have survived to adulthood, a story that was common in that period. There is an indication of a young man with the name of Joseph Tunks in Australia purchasing land near William and Sarah in Minto in 1810 but, apart from one Colonial Secretary's document, there are no other records of this person. If this man was their son, he would have been born in England prior to William and Sarah arriving in the colony. Research has not indicated a birth or record of arrival as a free settler or convict and in searching *Brit Milah* records of Bevis Marks, I did not find one for a Joseph Tunks. (At that stage I did not know that this was not William's surname, and I did not search for records in the Great Synagogue of London.)

Their known second son, Abraham, <sup>63</sup> was born in Sydney at the end of 1793 but died in 1798 and their next child, John, was born in 1795. Their next child was a daughter born in 1800 named Esther <sup>64</sup> but

she died in 1801. Their next child Charles was born in 1802. The next child was born in March 1806 during the terrible floods of that year and appears to have been stillborn or died shortly after birth.<sup>65</sup> I could find no burial records for this child.

William and Sarah's son Charles was lost at sea at the age of nineteen in 1821. A newspaper report<sup>66</sup> of the third ship carrying the name *Campbell Macquarie* stated it returned from Hobart to Sydney then immediately put to sea again for reasons unknown and no records exists of its fate. Charles had not married nor had children. His father William died around the same time, also in 1821, at the age of 67. Despite Charles' youth he was a property owner at this stage, with land adjoining his sister and brother-in-law in Bargo. As his sister, Rebekkah Ann, with her husband John Andrews, was running an inn in Sydney belonging to John Tunks, the eldest surviving brother, there may have been an arrangement between Charles and his sister and her husband for him to run the farms after he had made enough money at sea. In his mandatory will, required of all sea-going sailors, Charles left his effects to his mother, Sarah Tunks, with brother John as executor. However, Sarah did not benefit from the realisation of Charles' estate or from William's estate.

Sarah's only surviving daughter, Rebekkah Ann, died at the age of 42 in 1834, three years prior to Sarah. She had given birth to nine children, with one dying in childhood. Charlotte, born in 1813 was lost in the bush in 1815. The remains of her body, along with identifying clothing and trinkets, were found two weeks later, partly devoured by 'native dogs' (dingoes).<sup>67</sup> Searches were mounted within minutes of her being missed after wandering into the bush while playing with her two older sisters, but she could not be found at that time. She was not quite two years old. Her brother William was born within weeks following her death. Her mother was 21 years old, and they were living on the properties owned by John Andrews, Rebekkah Ann's husband, and her brother, Charles Tunks at this time.

In time, it was evident that farming was not the forte of American convict John Andrews, Rebekkah Ann's husband. John, born in 1776 in Massachusetts, America,<sup>68</sup> was a member of a well-to-do shipping family. He had somehow become involved in a scam, stealing eight bushels of wheat, alongside his cousin and best friend, William Richards, while visiting England in one of the family ships. Following the theft, John and

his cousin William were prosecuted by the magistrate from whom the wheat was stolen. John was transported here with a sentence of seven years, on *Glatton*. At the age of 27 he met and married Rebekkah Ann, only 15 at the time. He turned his hand to farming but John Tunks, his brother-in-law, thinking that business might suit him better, offered the couple the management of his inn, The Rose, Shamrock and Thistle. In 1832, for unknown reasons, John Andrews committed suicide by hanging, leaving Rebekkah Ann with eight children and an inn to manage. It is not known whether she left the inn or stayed to manage it further, but she married John Perry two years later. The marriage was short-lived with Rebekkah Ann dying within three months. John Andrews, John Perry, and Rebekkah Ann were all buried together, with John Tunks paying for their funerals and burial accoutrements.<sup>69</sup>

Following Rebekkah Ann's death, the older children initially cared for the younger ones, but within a short time the children commenced living with John Tunks and his second wife Phoebe. John had six children with his first wife, Esther Arndell, daughter of John Arndell and granddaughter of Surgeon Thomas Arndell. Esther died in 1828. Upon her death John married widow Phoebe Mobbs (nee Tomlinson, aka MacRoberts). Phoebe had two children from her first marriage to John Mobbs. Following her marriage to John Tunks, Phoebe immediately became pregnant with son James. She was pregnant at the time of Rebekkah Ann's death. She had worked in the house of the Reverend Samuel Marsden<sup>70</sup> and had adopted his antipathy to members of the Jewish faith.

After his marriage to Phoebe Tomlinson (Mobbs), John Tunks built a large house, naming it Norfolk House, still in use today<sup>71</sup> but now known as Stonehaven. After the children of his dead sister came to live with them, he built another large house on one of his farms, subsequently named Tunks Farmhouse, also still extant.<sup>72</sup> John at this stage was reasonably well-off so there was convict help for the workload, as his and Phoebe's family expanded until there were 27 children in all, 16 of whom were John Tunks children by his two wives.

Following William Tunks' death in August 1821, Sarah (Lyons) now alone and without any support, returned to Sydney Town from the farm she and William leased following the floods of 1806. She lived in the section of town where many Jewish people lived, called then Back Row East, later renamed Phillip Street, for Arthur Phillip (whose

father is thought to have been Jewish).<sup>73</sup> In the small Jewish community that had strong family ties, Sarah, in her fifties and in straitened circumstances, through her strong links with the Jewish community was offered employment with Jacob and Esther Isaacs at their managed property in Liverpool Road, known as the Half-Way Inn.<sup>74</sup> Jacob Isaacs was assigned three convicts to run the small dairy and beef herd and attend to the vegetable garden. Sarah's duties as the only employee, her sentence being completed in 1795, were confined to the inn – bed making, washing, cooking, sweeping and serving, along with minor chores. It is possible she had occasional help from convict women, but I found no records to support this. While the male convicts were housed in huts outside, Sarah had her own small room inside the inn.

This was the only inn on the Liverpool Road, so it did a thriving business. The property was the estate of William Roberts. He left it to his 14-year-old son with his executors being Solomon Levey, and John Grono. Solomon Levey was William Roberts' son-in-law. The property was 500 acres, but eight acres of land were sectioned off for use by the Half-Way Inn, with half an acre developed as a vegetable garden. It catered to the many daily travellers as well as the coach service three times a week but also had a regular clientele from the government's Forest Reserve directly across the road.<sup>75</sup>

Jacob had secured the position of the Half-Way Inn as victualler to travellers on the way to Liverpool and the districts of Appin and Airds. While the property was only eight acres, cattle were run on the rest of the 500-acre property, and these supplied meat to the inn. The dairy cows were contained on the eight acres, supplying milk to the inn. Roberts had also run the King's Arms Inn at the corner of Hunter and Castlereagh Streets before his death and the livestock provided the meat used in this inn as well.<sup>76</sup> Roberts had known Sarah Tunks (Lyons) from her associations with Solomon Levey and John Grono. John Grono had a shipbuilding enterprise, building some of the biggest ships with his business on the Hawkesbury River near William Tunks and Sarah, with William supplying many of the awls and gimlets. Solomon was an active member of the nascent Jewish community, to which Sarah, and possibly William, belonged.

Sarah worked for three years in Jacob and Esther Isaac's Half-Way Inn. The inn was not a public house as many inns were,<sup>77</sup> but was meant to emulate an establishment offering private home facilities, sustenance

and well-being to weary coach travellers in search mainly of a meal and bed. Alcohol was a minor part of the service to these travellers. It did offer bread baked daily, which must have been a huge improvement on bread baked once a week. It also boasted clean accommodation. After Roberts died in 1819, I found no record of who ran the inn between his death and Jacob and Esther taking it over, so whether they started from scratch or merely took over cannot be ascertained. Jacob took out the lease in 1822, the same time Sarah began work for the couple.

In 1825 another opportunity beckoned for Jacob and Esther: Bagnigge Wells Tea Gardens, so named for the famous Tea Gardens in London, required new management.<sup>78</sup> This place was located nearer to Sydney's facilities at almost three miles from the burgeoning town on the Parramatta to Sydney Road. Sarah again worked for Jacob and Esther. The Bagnigge Wells Tea Gardens occupied ten acres of a 240-acre block of land and was administered by the Jewish surgeon John Harris following the death of its original owner, but again, part of the estate of almost 160 acres was administered by Solomon Levey. This inn too offered rest as well as refreshments and was more comfortably set out and furnished than The Half-Way House. It was across the road from the property of George Johnston and Esther Abrahams,<sup>79</sup> and next door to former Governor William Bligh's Racecourse, known as Camperdown, owned by his son-in-law Maurice O'Connell after Bligh left the colony. Accordingly, the number and type of clientele expanded.

It was from here that Esther Isaacs, an industrious lady with a full complement of staff at Bagnigge Tea Gardens, was able to begin a business of 'feather maker', that is the adornment of hats, a part of millinery that Sarah seems to have had some experience in from earlier London days. This may have been Esther's business in London before coming to Australia to join her husband, Jacob, a convict.

Both businesses prospered for a time and Sarah Lyons stayed with the Isaacs a number of years. When more severe liquor restrictions were introduced, Jacob became resentful of the government's increasing control and imposition. In order to circumnavigate these, he became involved in activities that brought him into conflict with the authorities but there is little doubt they were keeping an eye on him particularly. He almost lost his liquor licence but had enough support from the community to convince the magistrate to return it, thus allowing him to continue his business. The property continued to support the couple

and their adopted daughter Rachel though their income was curtailed to some extent, making life more difficult. Sarah Lyons stayed on during this time with them, but problems arose and finally the property was put up for auction. It did not sell and they, along with Sarah, stayed there until 1832.

Jacob and Esther's marriage did not survive the many difficulties it faced. Esther struck out on her own, and she left Jacob to concentrate on her millinery business in Sydney, where Sarah may have continued to work for her. Then Jacob died in 1836. The business success of the inn had been curtailed by Jacob's disputes with the law and his later mismanagement. Following Jacob's death, the business collapsed and, in 1837, Esther married Samuel Levy.

Sarah Lyons had a long working life with the Isaacs, from 1822 until 1835 or 1836. By then, age was catching up with her and she retired, living quietly in her small house in Phillip Street. Up until then she had received a small wage and free board and lodgings with Esther Isaacs in return for light work. Following Esther's remarriage, she was left bereft of support and too old to earn an income. Her only option was to appeal to her only surviving child, son John Tunks, living at Parramatta. John was a successful businessman, running several businesses but he and Phoebe were what is today called 'upwardly mobile' and were trying to cast off the shackles of their conviction and transportation that both Phoebe's parents and John's mother, Sarah, were transported under. It seems also that Sarah's Jewishness presented a problem, and both of them wanted as little to do with Sarah as possible.

At the age of 74, Sarah's body was found floating early in the morning of 28 July 1837<sup>80</sup> near the wharf where she had alighted from a boat the day before. According to records from the inquest she had returned by steamer from Parramatta in the late afternoon after visiting her son John, presumably to ask for money. Her body was found floating face down near the wharf the next morning, but no personal effects were reported being found on or near her. The inquest showed her being formally identified by another publican rather than any member of her family. Sarah had herself worked in two such establishments, and her son John owned the Shamrock, Rose and Thistle Inn which Sarah's daughter, Rebekkah Ann, and husband John Andrews managed for a number of years, so she was well known in the trade.

That there was a rift between John Tunks and his mother is clear,



but there is little doubt that the rift could have been exacerbated by John and Phoebe's rising wealth and elevation within the general community and that they were trying to distance themselves from John's mother, a Jewish ex-convict labouring under the common misconception that she was one of the 'whores' of *Lady Juliana*. John did not attend his mother's inquest and does not appear to have taken care of Sarah's burial or paid for her burial accoutrements. Sarah was not buried with any other member of her family and her gravesite has never been discovered despite being buried in July 1837 in St John's Church cemetery where there is a vault for Tunks's descendants. Unusually, no paperwork seems to exist to show where she was buried. She may have been buried as a pauper or a suicide though the inquest findings were that her death was accidental.

### **Antisemitism and concluding thoughts**

There is ample evidence of the derision that the Jews experienced during the early days of Australia's colonisation but whatever it was, there is little doubt that it was less structured in the colony so that Jews were marginally better off than their co-religionists in Britain. Both in Britain and New South Wales, many drawings of Jews were caricatures, and Jacob Isaacs came in for more than a fair share of this. At the time that Esther Abrahams was in a dispute with her son Robert, as she tried to wrest management of her own affairs from her son following her husband Captain George Johnston's death, records of the court case that resulted depict Jacob Isaacs, Esther Abraham's witness, as a snivelling, comical Jew with a large nose that had the courtroom in fits of laughter at his precise speech.<sup>81</sup> Almost everything about Isaacs was openly mocked, and he was not the first – nor the last – to be so misrepresented. Despite all that together with the fact that he had arrived as a convict, Isaacs created for himself a productive and successful life in the colony, the story of many of the Jewish convicts.

Even Esther Abrahams, for a short time Australia's 'First Lady', came in for her share of ridicule. Her manner of speech was negatively noted, and her drinking was highlighted when drinking in the colony was common, indeed promoted by some officers during what has become known as the 'rum economy'. Conditions in a country trying to rise above the sad times of enforced convict genesis could not, at any stage, have been pleasant. This created the atmosphere for some form of trying to bury the past in what was most available – drink.



Amelia Levy, another long-time friend of Sarah's, is another Jewish person unfairly characterised when she retaliated and tried in court to give vent to her anger when groups of convict men made continual reference to her Jewishness, using what she said was improper language. She was charged, but the men were not castigated for their provocation. Amelia indicated this was a common practice that, so far, she had tolerated to some extent, until anger got the better of her.<sup>82</sup>

It would be a fitting tribute to Sarah Lyons if the records pertaining to her burial could be found and noted, as she contributed to saving the lives of many convicts, even though inadvertently, by publishing a letter that garnered public support which eventually resulted in the British government passing an act of parliament that forced sea captains into taking reasonable care of their 'cargo'. In recent years a plaque has been placed by Sarah's descendants on the Tunks Family Vault in St John's Cemetery in her memory, even though it has now been badly damaged and is in danger of being permanently lost. It is the only reminder of Sarah Lyons' life.

John Tunks' first wife, Esther Arndell, was the daughter of John Arndell, son of Thomas Arndell. John Arndell followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a surgeon and sailing to Australia. He had a number of 'romantic' liaisons on his way to the colony, as well as while there. Like his father he too needed to escape his many entanglements, some of which resulted in the birth of children. Convict Elizabeth Jackson gave her daughter, Esther, the father's name of Arndell rather than her own but he denied all responsibility and refused to pay any maintenance for the child, or indeed, any of the other children he is known to have fathered during his short time in the colony. DNA testing has confirmed this familial link, taking it from rumour to fact.

Sarah and William have thousands of descendants, many of whom have risen to prominence and can list many achievements. The family threads are woven deep into this community of Australia and owe much to its Jewish genesis. Despite this, their Jewish origins became an issue of shame and were suppressed in family history, even though general convict origins have become a matter of pride. This article seeks to rectify this gap in our knowledge.

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## TAL AND GESHEM – CLIMATE CHANGE IN AUSTRALIAN JUDAISM

*Raymond Apple*

### ABSTRACT

Jewish liturgical usage includes seasonal prayers for rain (*Geshem*) and dew (*Tal*) which are traditionally linked with the advent in Israel of winter (when the *Geshem* prayer is said) and summer (*Tal*). Each of these prayers has a poetic, ceremonial text. In Australia, Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, moved the two prayers to acknowledge the antipodean seasons, so that *Geshem* was said on Passover at the beginning of winter and *Tal* on *Sh'mini Atzeret* when summer commenced. This change reflected the weather in Australia but diminished the traditional link with Israel. After Rabbi Cohen's time the original arrangement was restored. This article tells the story.

**KEYWORDS:** Religious Issues, Festivals, Francis Lyon Cohen, Liturgy, *Geshem*, *Tal*

Writing on *Minhag Australia* ('The Australian Usage') in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* in 2013,<sup>1</sup> I touched upon the status in Australia of climate-based prayers, especially *Tal* and *Geshem*, the prayers for dew and rain. The present article seeks to explore this issue in greater depth in relation to whether these prayers should be said according to the climatic conditions in Israel and the northern hemisphere, which is the *halakhic* approach, or according to the seasons in the southern hemisphere. It will illustrate the different approaches to this issue in Australian synagogues – especially the Great Synagogue, Sydney – and compare these with other parts of the southern hemisphere. With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, this debate basically came to an end and the *halakhic* tradition is now followed.

There are three instances of *Tal* and *Geshem* where these prayers are recited, two being *halakhic* (legal) and one ceremonial.

### **The Halakhic versions**

The *halakhic* versions are insertions in the blessings of the weekday *Amidah*, the *Prayer Said Standing*, which is known as the *Shemoneh Esreh*, *Eighteen Blessings* (though the number of blessings has expanded to Nineteen).<sup>2</sup> The *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (*Shorter Code of Jewish Law*) edited by Solomon Ganzfried, states (Chapter 19):

In the winter we say (at the beginning of the *Amidah*), ‘*Mashiv haru’ah umorid hageshem* – Thou causest the wind to blow and the rain to fall’; there are places where it is customary to say (in the summer), ‘*Mashiv haru’ah umorid hatal* – Thou causest the wind to blow and the dew to fall’.

In some places *Mashiv haru’ah* is omitted from this latter phrase, which now reads ‘*Morid hatal* – Thou causest the dew to fall’. These phrases are inserted in the second blessing of the *Amidah*, known as *Gevurot* (Mighty Deeds), where they testify to God’s power. Ganzfried continues: ‘We begin saying *tal umatar* – *Grant dew and rain* – in the (ninth blessing of the *Amidah* in the) evening prayer of the 60th day of the autumn equinox.’ This ninth blessing asks God to bless the cycle of the year, which includes the weather.

### **The ceremonial version**

There is a Passover *piyyut* (religious poem) in honour of *Tal*, with an equivalent *Geshem* (‘Rain’) poem on *Shemini Atzeret*. Both celebrate the Divine gifts. Rain makes nature revive; the *Shema* calls it a reward for obedience to God’s laws (Deut. 11:11–17); Elijah warns Ahab that the punishment for disobedience is drought (I Kings 17:1). *Mishnah Rosh HaShanah* 1:2 states that on *Sukkot* the world is judged in respect of water (rain). The dew is a blessing bestowed upon Nature for man’s benefit. Dew is a symbol of freshness: ‘the dew of youth’ (Psalm 110:3) is a metaphor for revival and resurrection. The *Tal* and *Geshem piyyutim* are probably by Elazar Kallir, a medieval poet. They aver that all Creation needs God’s continuing blessing; prosperity needs the right weather at the right time. The rabbis debate the geographical provenance of these texts. Is the question the climate of the land of Israel or of other northern hemisphere lands where Jews lived?



It was taken for granted that ‘summer’ meant the northern hemisphere summer and ‘winter’ the northern hemisphere winter. In Britain, Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler refused to allow any of the ‘climate’ liturgy to be omitted, though he did allow modifications to other parts of the liturgy. The standard ‘climate’ prayers found their way into the standard Anglo-Jewish prayer books,<sup>3</sup> the Singer *Siddur* and the Routledge *Mahzor*. A new problem arose with the rise of communities in the southern hemisphere, and a chapter of the story was played out in Australia, both in regard to saying *Tal* and *Matar* in daily worship and the *minhag* (usage) of saying the festival *piyyutim* about dew and rain.

### The daily prayers

In Australia those of the early Jewish settlers who wished to say their prayers were exercised by these insertions. (No-one suggested a link with Aboriginal rain-making rituals.) For Jews the question was whether they should mentally attach the mentions of *Tal* and *Matar* to the holy Land of Israel or associate them with the quite different patterns of the southern hemisphere climate. An enquiry was sent to Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler by Asher Hymen Hart of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation on 27 June 1848, asking about saying ‘*Taloo mottor*’ (that is, *tal u-matar*) in Australia. His question was, ‘At the appropriate seasons, should we or not read the prayers appointed for rain and dew, the seasons in this hemisphere, as you are aware, being opposite to those of our native country?’ Adler apparently replied (the text of his response is not available) that the climate-based liturgical interpolations could be dropped in the southern hemisphere. If a prayer for (local) rain were needed in winter, it could be inserted before the *Shema Kolenu* (‘Hear our voice’) blessing of the *Amidah*.<sup>4</sup> The response might be in the Chief Rabbi’s letter books, held at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. I do not recall seeing it there when I worked on the Adler archive at the JTS library in 1970, but it can be reconstructed from a letter from Adler to the Hobart Hebrew Congregation two years earlier.<sup>5</sup> Adler had told Hobart that the *Tal* and *Geshem* prayers could be dispensed with altogether, and this permission became regular practice in Australia. Australian synagogues were not such sticklers for strict orthodoxy that they objected to a *hetter*, a dispensation. Most were happy to have grounds for apparent leniency. In any case few synagogues had daily services and those which did, presumably left the

decision to the minister. When an individual prayed on his own, he was likely to follow the rite he was used to, but few others were likely to know or to care.

Rabbi Abraham Eber Hirschowitz,<sup>6</sup> a Russian rabbi who spent several years in Melbourne in the 1890s, records in his *Bet Avraham* (1907) a query he sent in 1892 to Rabbis Yitzhak Elhanan Spektor (Kovno), Shmu'el Salant (Jerusalem), Jacob Reinowitz and Hermann Adler (London) and Aryeh Leib Rashkes (Schnipischock/Vilna)<sup>7</sup> urging that Australian Jews be told to say the same prayers as Jews everywhere. He adds that even in the Australian summer, rain is a blessing. He says that the omission was ascribed to Nathan Marcus Adler, though the latter's son and successor Hermann says that the omission was authorised by an earlier chief rabbi, Solomon Hirschell. Hermann Adler also says that the antipodean omission of the prayers was by now an entrenched custom. The early *halakhic* authorities were not agreed on the subject; they ranged from Rashi who supported the original Talmudic custom, to Maimonides who (at least in his early period) believed that congregations should recognise local climatic factors (*Mishnah Commentary*, T'ānit 1:3). The compromise supported by many authorities was to highlight the Land of Israel in public worship whilst acknowledging local needs in one's private prayers. This, as we have seen, was basically what Nathan Marcus Adler advised in his letter to Melbourne and Hobart.

In Australia, the statelier the synagogue, the more they were likely to ignore the daily prayers, and the more interest was attached to the more musical and dramatic performance of the festival *piyyutim*. In Victoria, the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation omitted both versions of *Tal* and *Geshem* for about a century. Ministers – including Rabbis Joseph Abrahams and Israel Brodie – were loyal to the chief rabbi and gave his *hetter* the status of a ruling. *The Enduring Remnant* – the history of the congregation – records that it was not until the time of Rabbi Hugo Stransky in the late 1940s that the festival *piyyutim* of *Tal* and *Geshem* were re-introduced.<sup>8</sup> By that stage the congregation very rarely had weekday services other than for a *Yahrzeit* (death anniversary). The same was true of the St. Kilda Hebrew Congregation, where Rev. Elias Blaubaum upheld orthodoxy but turned a blind eye to infractions. His successor Rabbi Jacob Danglow was rather elastic in his orthodoxy. East Melbourne – the 'foreign' synagogue – long continued

with (and quarrelled over) the weekday services, and probably made no concessions to the Australian seasons. In New South Wales, the Great Synagogue was in a slightly better position in that – at least in some periods – it held services on weekday afternoons and on Monday and Thursday mornings and other days when there was a Torah reading. The Great currently has daily morning services. In other parts of Australia, the establishment synagogues rarely had weekday worship.

The more anglicised ‘cathedral’ synagogues usually followed the London dispensation, but ‘foreign’ congregations such as East Melbourne did not. At first sight the situation seems to be a matter of religious politics and to depend on where the British chief rabbi’s writ ran. In fact, the difference of usage was based on real *halakhic* differences. The first Jewish congregation in South America was Brazil, which in 1637 sent a query about prayers for rain to Rabbi Hayyim Shabbatai of Salonika,<sup>9</sup> who told them to follow northern hemisphere practice regardless of local climatic conditions. In the twentieth century, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, chief rabbi of the Holy Land, endorsed this in a *responsum* dated Sivan, 1929, concerning ‘Argentina and similar countries.’ Rabbi Shlomo Brody noted that ‘My students in Yeshivat HaKotel from Australia, South Africa, and Uruguay’ confirm that Jews in the southern hemisphere adhered to Rabbi Shabbatai’s rule.<sup>10</sup> In Australia at the end of the nineteenth century Rabbi Abraham Eber Hirschowitz found that few congregations said the dew and rain prayers in any form.

### The festival poems

Though many poets produced texts for the *Tal* and *Geshem piyyutim*, the conventional Ashkenazi versions are attributed to Elazar Kallir, the leading religious poet of the early Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> Kallir’s *piyyutim* – utilised for many sections of the High Holyday services – have an intricate style with constant resort to acrostics. He brings in Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic allusions which generally only a scholar can appreciate, though his *Tal* and *Geshem* are not as complicated as his High Holyday *piyyutim*. Kallir’s texts have a range of musical settings; *Tal* has become especially popular in recent times by reason of Hazzan Joseph (Yossele) Rosenblatt’s lively version<sup>12</sup> which many synagogues utilise. Both poems are lent especial awe and solemnity by the white High Holyday robes worn by the cantor. Indeed, it must be said that without *Geshem* and *Yizkor* (memorial prayers), *Shemini Atzeret* in particular would seem empty. In Israel the day is combined with *Simḥat Torah*, creating

a strange mixture of emotions, moving from joy to sorrow and back to joy.

In Australia, where the seasons are the opposite of the northern hemisphere, Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen (chief minister of the Great Synagogue 1905–34) took a somewhat unorthodox initiative. Cohen was not only a critic of Zionism but often *halakhically* unconventional. His board of management, not known for its *frumkeit* (strict observance), sometimes declined to support him and even asked Chief Rabbi Hertz to rein him in. When Cohen made radical proposals to amend the wording of the *Kol Nidrei* declaration on *Yom Kippur*,<sup>13</sup> to allow organ music on Shabbat and festivals,<sup>14</sup> and to institute a three-yearly cycle of Torah readings instead of a one-year cycle, Hertz rejected them.<sup>15</sup>

Cohen reversed the occasions for the two *piyyutim*, moving *Tal* to *Shemini Atzeret* and *Geshem* to *Pessah* in order to fit in with the Australian seasons (and probably to dislodge the Eretz-Israel associations of the prayers). We are not certain of the exact date of the change, though there is anecdotal evidence that it did happen. The most we can find in the Great Synagogue minute books is that a letter was tabled from Rabbi Cohen at a board meeting on 4 October 1918, suggesting ‘an improved form of prayer for *Tal* or *Geshem* (to) be used on Pesach and Shemaneh Ahsarets (sic).’ The matter was to be considered at the next meeting, but no such discussion is recorded in the minutes of that ‘next’ meeting. This suggests that Cohen went ahead on his own initiative, which he believed he had the right to do regardless of the chief rabbi. Perhaps he got the congregational president to support him and there was never a full discussion at the board table. The synagogue issued a small leaflet detailing the changes. Copies of the leaflet are extant, but their dating is uncertain.<sup>16</sup> Congregants were asked to affix the leaflet to their *Mahzorim*. At some stage the two *piyyutim* might have been declaimed in English, which exemplifies one of Cohen’s habits. Before Cohen’s time the custom seems to have been for *Tal* and *Geshem* to be completely omitted from the festival services.

It is hard to believe that Hertz was unaware of Cohen’s views. Cohen represented a dilemma – an ordained rabbi, head of an accredited Beth Din, but a critic of the *halakhic status quo*. Cohen himself told his board that the chief rabbi was only an adviser and a ‘venue of appeal when necessary’.<sup>17</sup>

This contrasts with East Melbourne (the ‘Polish Shule’), where the

two *piyyutim* were omitted in the time of Rev. Moses Rintel, as they had been at Melbourne's original synagogue in Bourke Street. They were probably restored by Rev. Jacob Lenzer, an eastern European cantor who was adamant about tradition. East Melbourne prided itself on its orthodoxy, and liturgical issues always raised ructions.<sup>18</sup>

Most Australian Jews practised a rather lax form of orthodoxy, though a few individuals and groups trenchantly opposed *halakhic* concessions. The issue in relation to *Tal* and *Geshem* was not so much the Eretz Israel associations of the prayers but the hold of orthodox practice. In Sydney, refugees from the Eastern European pogroms bolstered the traditionalist elements in the community and led to several (short-lived) *minyanim* (prayer groups) which upheld tradition despite the 'establishment'. The 'foreign' congregation headed by Rabbi Isidore Bramson<sup>19</sup> objected to the 'Englishness' of the Great Synagogue. Bramson attacked Rev. A.B. Davis' lack of formal rabbinic qualifications, but when Bramson left Australia, his congregation disbanded. His supporters who returned to the Great Synagogue had no choice but to accept the ways of the Great.

When Rabbi Cohen came to Sydney in 1905, he was disappointed as a musicologist that the grand performances of *Tal* and *Geshem* did not figure in the festival services. He began thinking of a solution, presumably assuring the board that the *piyyutim* were dramatic and musical as befitted a 'cathedral' synagogue. The board, constantly interested in enhancing the services, may have been unaware of the *halakhic* considerations, though some board members like Aaron Blashki<sup>20</sup> were traditionalists. Cohen's innovation did not last; it came to an end either in the time of the Zionist-minded Rabbi Ephraim Moses Levy (chief minister 1935–38)<sup>21</sup> or early in the incumbency of Rabbi Dr Israel Porush (1940–72)<sup>22</sup> who might have quietly brought the synagogue back into accord with other leading congregations in other countries.

I made an (admittedly cursory) investigation of practices in other parts of the Anglo-Jewish southern Diaspora. In other Australian State capitals, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, and Hobart, there was little strong feeling either way. In New Zealand, the Auckland and Wellington congregations – both led by very long-serving ministers – generally asked the British chief rabbi what to do but then made up their own minds in favour of leniency. In South Africa, the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation generally followed the lead of the London Great Synagogue. However,

in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it possibly omitted *Tal* and *Geshem*, re-introducing them under Lithuanian influences at the end of the twentieth century. In Johannesburg, the first Jews and their rabbis were at odds over many issues including 'anglicised' customs. South Africans I consulted recall *Tal* being a choral highlight on *Pessah* and *Geshem* on *Shemini Atzeret*, but there was no folk memory of the two *piyyutim* ever being omitted or their timing being reversed.

Rabbi Cohen's maverick attitude to orthodox practice was already suspect in the eyes of the London chief rabbinate.<sup>23</sup> His theology, as evident from his sermons, which were generally printed verbatim each week in the *Hebrew Standard*, was conventional. He seems to have had no theological objection to orthodox liturgy including prayers for a good climate, though his reference point was not the climate of the Holy Land but Australia. He was a Diaspora Jew with a negative (or at least an ambivalent) attitude to political Zionism, though he did not go as far as American Reform, which said in its Pittsburgh Platform that wherever Jews lived was their Promised Land and wherever they worshipped was their Temple.<sup>24</sup> Insofar as he was a nationalist it was in the shape of British patriotism. In a biographical study I called him 'the passionate patriot'.<sup>25</sup> His criticisms of Zionism were based on the fear that the movement would compromise British loyalties.<sup>26</sup> Yet, he was inconsistent and donated to Holy Land appeals.

From a theological point of view Cohen does not seem to have given sufficient weight to the notion that *Tal* refers to resurrection (Micah 5:6), not only of Zion but of the Jewish people (Hosea 14:6), which makes it more relevant to *Pessah* than to *Shemini Atzeret*. However, Cohen feared that the prayer was too Zionist for Australian (and British) tastes and thought that it would arouse antisemitism.

Though the Balfour Declaration issued in 1917 emanated from the British government (for Cohen the British Empire and the Mother Country held supreme significance), he did not mention the declaration from his pulpit for three years. Yes, he must have said *Uva l'Tziyyon go'el* (A redeemer will come to Zion) and other prayers for a return to Zion and the restoration of God's presence to Jerusalem, but in his mind, these were futuristic, theoretical notions, and he was suspicious of the political Zionist movement and critical of the Australian Zionist leadership.<sup>27</sup> From the practical point of view his priority was not the Holy Land but Australia and what the gentiles would say. Today, in contrast, no rabbi would question the supremacy of Israel in Jewish life. Cohen

died in 1934 and we cannot predict what his attitude would have been to the Holocaust or to the State established in 1948. His younger contemporary Rabbi Jacob Danglow became quite well-disposed towards the State of Israel after its creation despite his earlier stance.<sup>28</sup>

Did the British chief rabbi not contemplate exercising control over Cohen? After all, Chief Rabbis Hermann Adler and J.H. Hertz had imposed sanctions on several ministers who held unacceptable opinions, for example, on Rev. Morris Joseph because he opposed the restoration of sacrifices, and on Rev. Dr Joseph Hochman for challenging orthodoxy.<sup>29</sup> At a later period, Chief Rabbi Brodie faced the modernist views of Rabbi Louis Jacobs. Why was Rabbi Cohen not censured for his compromises? Three reasons:

1. Cohen and his Australian colleagues often claimed that were the Chief in their shoes he would act as they did.
2. They believed that compromises would keep their communities within orthodoxy.
3. Their compromises were generally limited to liturgy and matters of practice on which there was a range of opinions, some strict, some lenient.

In these circumstances sanctions on Cohen were unlikely, especially since Australia was geographically so far away. In addition, Cohen's negative attitude to Zionism was shared by Hermann Adler and a number of British and Australian rabbis. Whilst Hertz must have disapproved of Cohen's anti- or non-Zionism, the 'offence' was not intended to defy or denigrate the chief rabbinate. Cohen was provocative but safe. Fears of gentiles suspecting Jews of dual loyalties were real at the time but are rare now, though (especially in the USA) there are antisemites who deliberately misconstrue Jewish love for Israel.

These days, those who represent the twin extremes in Israeli politics – secularism and ultra-orthodoxy – and who decline to describe Israel messianically as *'reshit tzemihat ge'ulatenu – the first flowering of our redemption'* – take it for granted that the Holy Land has a special place in God's eyes and Jewish affections, which give *Tal* and *Geshem* a distinctive symbolism.

It is not only antipodean communities where the *Tal* and *Geshem* poems gained extra status from about the middle of the twentieth century. Even in the northern hemisphere where *Tal* and *Geshem* occasioned no geographical problems, the prayers assumed additional



significance all over the Jewish world. Their newly enhanced status appears to be a concomitant of the re-birth of Israel in 1948. The rather limited question, 'Is Israel blessed with good weather?' is part of the broader question, 'What is the *matzav*, the situation, in Israel?'

In the final analysis, the traditional timings for *Tal* and *Geshem* are more logical than Cohen's calendrical tinkering. Regardless of local conditions, *Pessah* indicates the Jewish people's national springtime, the appropriate time to pray for dew. *Shemini Atzeret* at the end of *Sukkot* emphasises the concern that the *sukkah* will not be marred by rain – nor will the upbuilding of the Land be compromised by internal dissension or external threat – and hence a rain prayer is appropriate at the end of the festival.

A concluding question: if the establishment congregations in Australia were satisfied to omit *Tal* and *Geshem*, why were they so apparently inconsistent as to generally retain (without argument) the liturgical interpolations in the *Amidah* blessings referring to wind, dew and rain? The answer may be quite pragmatic. It may be that the *Tal* and *Geshem* poems were highly public choral features, 'large print prayers', as it were, whilst the *Amidah* interpolations were 'small print', relatively unnoticed or unremarked by the average worshipper. Whether the 'large print' poems were sung by cantor and choir or even declaimed in English, synagogue theatrics seem to have mattered more than spiritual piety and devotion.

### Acknowledgements

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### Endnotes

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## THE EIGHT JEWS OF LARK FORCE: TRAGEDY AND SALVATION

### THE JAPANESE INVASION OF RABAU, 1942

*Peter M. Allen*

#### ABSTRACT

This article tells the epic and powerful stories of the eight Jewish soldiers of Lark Force: David Bloomfield, Keith Levy, David Selby and Issy Weingott who escaped New Britain after the Japanese invasion of Rabaul in January 1942, while Harry Bernstein, Albert Fernandez, Leslie Pearlman and Herbert Silverman MID did not escape. It seeks to bring to light this forgotten saga, illustrating the terrible suffering and demise, as well as fortitude, of the Australian soldiers who confronted the brutal Japanese forces during World War Two. As exemplified by the experience of these eight men on New Britain, their adversaries included not only the Japanese and their cruelty, but also hunger, exhaustion, disease, volcanoes, tropical jungles, crocodiles, head-hunters and dangerous seas. Of the 1,485 Australians in Lark Force defending Rabaul, tragically 1,093 men did not return. By July 1942, most were victims of either shocking murders or ultimately, the catastrophic sinking of the *Montevideo Maru*.

**KEYWORDS:** Military History, Second World War, New Britain, Lark Force, Tol massacre, *Montevideo Maru*

There have been several articles and some books written by or about Jewish Australian servicemen who returned to Australia, such as the personal accounts by David Bloomfield<sup>1</sup> and David Selby<sup>2</sup> or the anthologies by Gerald Pynt<sup>3</sup> and Mark Dapin.<sup>4</sup> However, the detailed exploits of our more than 340 men who died on service have rarely been documented.<sup>5</sup> The writer is researching their stories and aims for

this paper to be the first in a series that focuses on the extraordinary events involving particular groups of Jewish Australian servicemen who have made the supreme sacrifice.

For example, in World War One (1914–18) there were some 39 Jewish diggers who died over the eight months of the Dardanelles Campaign in 1915, then ten killed in action in just 24 hours of the battle of Fromelles in July 1916.<sup>6</sup> However, in World War Two (1939–45) there were fewer situations in which multiple deaths of Jewish servicemen occurred, reflecting the very different nature of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> Approximately half of all Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircrew flew with Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons in Europe – most in Bomber Command – as shown by 27 of their names inscribed on the new Australian Jewish War Memorial in Canberra.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, at the very start of the war in the Pacific the situation arose when the lives of eight Jewish men in the Australian Army fatefully crossed: Harry Bernstein, David Bloomfield, Albert Fernandez, Keith Levy, Leslie Pearlman, David Selby, Herbert Silverman and Issy Weingott. During 1941, less than one year after leaving their relatively quiet civilian lives, they landed with Lark Force at Rabaul, New Britain. Few people appreciate that it was the first Australian territory to be attacked by the Japanese – in January 1942 – more than a month before their attack on Darwin, and most Australians do not know Lark Force's horrific story. Equally, the ages of those eight men – a cross-section of the Army at the time – challenge the myth of the fresh, 'young Aussie digger': six of them were between 30 and 43, one was 20 and the youngest was only 18 years old. Indeed, only three attested their true age at enlistment, but most had family with military experience.

After Lark Force's fraught retreat from Rabaul in January 1942, four of them continued their audacious journeys to miraculously escape New Britain by the following April. However by July, the other four Jewish soldiers had died in terrible circumstances, including Private Leslie Pearlman. In the previous *AJHS Journal*, Erica Cervini graphically describes Pearlman's murder by the Japanese and his mother's anguish.<sup>9</sup> This paper sets out to complete the intersecting, remarkable and confronting stories of the eight Jews of Lark Force and their families.

### **Jews from diverse backgrounds answer the calls to arms**

As each of their following pen sketches demonstrate, these Jewish soldiers came from a variety of upbringings and social strata. The oldest of

the eight men was Albert Fernandez, born in Sydney on 4 August 1898 to Matilda (*née* Isaacs) and Ralph Fernandez, a 'dealer' and some-time burglar. After their elder son, Nathan was born in 1896, Ralph continued to have a few brushes with the law, and the family often moved between Manly, Surry Hills and Seven Hills.<sup>10</sup> In 1915 Nathan enlisted in the 1st Australian Imperial Force (1st AIF),<sup>11</sup> by which time Ralph had gone to South Africa and divorced Matilda.<sup>12</sup> After enduring a fire at her Manly residence, 1917 brought more distress when Matilda was fined for assaulting another woman and Nathan was killed in action at Passchendaele, Belgium.<sup>13</sup> Albert unsuccessfully tried to enlist in the AIF and then he and Matilda dealt in second-hand clothing.<sup>14</sup> In 1928 Albert was involved in a fight while defending an accusation that Matilda had mobilised local housewives to protest against the noise emanating from George Colvin's neighbouring factory at night.<sup>15</sup> The *Sydney Truth's* report, headlined: 'BANG! Scene of Stoush in "The Village" MANLY MEN', was quite amusing in its characteristic scurrilous style:

'There were only two blows, and each was a knock-down,' Colvin told the magistrate, Mr. McMahon. 'That ought to appeal to the audience at the [Sydney] Stadium,' remarked Mr. McMahon, and Colvin agreed that 'it was good punching.' Fernandez declared: 'It was Colvin who swung the first blow. I wasn't expecting it just at the moment, so stopped it with my right eye.' Mr. McMahon gave a decision worthy of Solomon: 'The merits of the affair are suggested by the result. I think it was about even as far as punishment went, although Fernandez might have got a little the worse of it. But I think justice will be best served by dismissing both cases?'<sup>16</sup>

Matilda died in November 1939, two months after war against Germany was again declared, and in April 1940 Albert enlisted in the Australian Military Forces (AMF), aged 41. He claimed that he was a full ten years younger – lying like many men who wanted to meet the 18 to 40 year-old criteria.<sup>17</sup> NX19620 Private Albert Fernandez commenced training as a medical orderly at the Sydney Showgrounds and was transferred to 2/10th Field Ambulance at Liverpool in September.



*Private Albert Fernandez of 2/10th Field Ambulance, enlisted April 1940, aged 41.  
(Manly Local Studies Image Library)*

Harry Bernstein was born in London, England, on 20 August 1899 to Sarah (*née* Michaelson) and Abraham Bernstein of Whitechapel. Harry worked as a clerk and served briefly in a British pioneer battalion then sailed to Western Australia in 1921.<sup>18</sup> He later moved to Victoria and lived in St Kilda, Melbourne, working as a tailor's machinist. Like Fernandez, he was still single in June 1940 when he also enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) claiming to be 40, one year younger than his actual age, as VX28109 Private Harry Bernstein.<sup>19</sup>

David Mayer Selby came from a very different social strata. Born on 13 March 1906 in Melbourne, he was the eldest of Aimee (*née* de Beer) and Herbert Selby's four sons and daughter.<sup>20</sup> The family moved to Sydney, where David was educated at Sydney Church of England Grammar School and – rather than entering his father's scientific instruments business – chose to study Arts and Law at the University of Sydney. There, he joined its part-time militia unit and transferred to the 1st Artillery Brigade. He was admitted to the New South Wales Bar in 1931, and married Barbara Phillips in March 1939. Their first daughter

was born in 1940, but David, now aged 34, still volunteered for active service and enlisted as NX142851 Lieutenant David Mayer Selby.<sup>21</sup>

Leslie Pearlman was born in Ballarat, Victoria, on 10 September 1908, the fourth of nine children to Rose (*née* Jacobs) and Baron Pearlman, a peddler and some-time goldminer. They were members of the Ballarat Synagogue, where Baron's father was *shammas*, Rose's sister Celia married Samuel Phillips in 1909 and Leslie was bar mitzvah in 1921. Samuel was one of some twenty Jewish men born in Ballarat who served in the 1st AIF.<sup>22</sup> Sadly he died in Egypt of nephritis in 1916 aged 27, without firing a shot in anger. Leslie won two scholarships to the Ballarat School of Mines and his youngest brother, Lloyd, recalled: 'He really was a wonderful cricketer [and] sportsman. He always had a job ... even in the Depression. He opened up a printing shop for the Kleinsteins in Ararat ... and was the first in the family to buy a car.'<sup>23</sup> Leslie remained there after Baron died in 1930, working as a draper, while Rose moved to St Kilda. In March 1939 Leslie joined the local militia, but with the outbreak of war he also moved to Melbourne, then enlisted in the 2nd AIF in June 1940 aged 31, as VX30758 Private Leslie Pearlman.<sup>24</sup>

Issachar Weingott was born on 23 April 1910 to Harris Weingott and his second wife, Leah (*née* Caroline Welch) in Annandale, Sydney, not far from the family's waterproof-clothing factory.<sup>25</sup> Three sons of Harris and his first wife, Sarah (*née* Knopp – divorced 1903), enlisted in the 1st AIF. Tragically, both Alexander and Samuel died of wounds received at Gallipoli within five weeks in May-June of 1915.<sup>26</sup> *The Hebrew Standard* noted beneath the headline, 'The Toll of War' that: 'The one consolation Mr Weingott will find in his double bereavement is the knowledge that his sons played the part of men in the struggle for righteousness over tyranny ...'<sup>27</sup> After their deaths, in August 1915 *The Sydney Mail* included a disquieting picture of five-year-old Issachar dressed as a miniature digger, with an inaccurate caption.<sup>28</sup> Despite the *Hebrew Standard's* 'consolation', in 1921 Harris Weingott 'accidentally ... drowned' in Sydney Harbour.<sup>29</sup> During his abbreviated service, Samuel Weingott wrote a diary of his army exploits, something that his young half-brother would emulate decades later. By 1940 Issachar had married and moved to Victoria, then in June enlisted at Caulfield as VX19707 Signaller Issy Weingott, understating his age by one year and naming his wife, Anne (*née* Keady), as next of kin.<sup>30</sup>



*Five-year old Issachar Weingott. The photo in The Sydney Mail, Wednesday 25 August 1915, was captioned: 'Issacher Weingott, the six-year-old son of Mr. Weingott, Annandale, Sydney, who recently collected £33 for the Australian Wounded Fund. Two of his brothers have fallen at the Dardanelles' (NLA Trove)*

Herbert Nathan Silverman was born on 4 December 1910 in Fitzroy, Melbourne, to Janet (*née* Lucks) and Harold Silverman, who worked in his wife's family's drapery business. Harold was on the board of management of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha and his father was Reverend S. Silverman, who was living in Palestine. Herbert was a very bright student and capable speaker.<sup>31</sup> He was awarded First Class Honours in Hebrew at the 1928 Leaving Certificate and completed medical studies at the University of Melbourne in 1936.<sup>32</sup> The following year, Herbert served as a Resident Medical Officer (MO) at Brisbane General Hospital and then became the MO at Julia Creek's new hospital in outback Queensland.<sup>33</sup> By November 1940, Herbert had returned to Melbourne, living in St Kilda with his sister, Myrtle. The following January, whilst a locum at Colac District Hospital, he and three nurses were on their way to an urgent case at Apollo Bay, when their car lost control and overturned near Forrest. One of the nurses died and Herbert escaped with lacerations and concussion.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps that was the catalyst for him to join the AAMC a few weeks later in February 1941. Aged 30, V11358 Lieutenant Herbert Nathan Silverman was posted to 5 Casualty Clearing Station at Balcombe Camp on the Mornington Peninsula.<sup>35</sup>

Lark Force's youngest two Jewish soldiers were born almost 25 years after the eldest two. Keith Joseph Levy was born on 28 September 1921 to Esther (*née* Harris) and Reuben Levy of St Kilda, Melbourne. In August 1914, Reuben was one of the first men to enlist in the AIF,



as No. 121 of the 7th Battalion.<sup>36</sup> He was wounded during the landing at Gallipoli, then served in Britain and France as a Staff Sergeant, using his civilian training as a dental mechanic. In World War Two, Reuben understated his age by two years to enlist for home service.<sup>37</sup> His son, Keith won a scholarship to Brunswick Technical School in 1940 and served part-time in the Port Phillip Fortress Signals while working as a 'motor salesman'.<sup>38</sup> He overstated his age by one year when he enlisted for full-time duty with the unit in January 1941 at Queenscliff, Victoria, and despite actually being only 19 years old, VX125137 Keith Joseph Levy was immediately appointed Acting Sergeant.<sup>39</sup>

David Morris Bloomfield was born on 28 June 1923 to Lily (*née* Abrahams) and Alfred Bloomfield of Glebe, Sydney. The family lived in Point Piper when David was bar mitzvah at The Great Synagogue in 1936, and he became an active member of the Maccabean Tennis Club.<sup>40</sup> He overstated his age by a year, claiming to be already 18, when he enlisted in the artillery and commenced training in April 1941 as N109549 Gunner David Maurice Bloomfield.<sup>41</sup> Training at Georges Heights, overlooking the serene Sydney Harbour, the adolescent soldier could not have imagined what hardships he would experience nor the horrors he would witness just nine months later. By then, this disparate assortment of eight Jewish soldiers, ranging in age from 18 to 43 with all but one being single, and in occupations from lawyer and doctor to the rougher edges of society, would find themselves together with new mates in a harrowing struggle against an even newer enemy.

Privates Leslie Pearlman and Harry Bernstein undertook recruit training at Balcombe Camp, then in July 1940 both went to Puckapunyal, central Victoria, joining the 2/22nd Battalion, raised that month. While Pearlman trained as an infantryman, the much older Bernstein was attached as a stretcher-bearer, and they were joined by Signaller Issy Weingott. As part of the 23rd Brigade of the 8th Division, they were soon training with another Victorian-based battalion, the 2/21st. In September 1940, Japan signed a Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, including a 'New Order in Greater East Asia.' That same month, in a portent of events to come, the two battalions marched the 240 kilometres from Trawool to Bonegilla, near Albury-Wodonga, over ten days. They sang:

It's a long way to Bonegilla, it's a long way to go.  
It's a long way to Bonegilla, to see the Murray flow.  
Goodbye Young and Jackson's, farewell Chloe too ....<sup>42</sup>

Historian Hank Nelson noted: 'So confident were the troops that they were on their way to North Africa that they imposed the language of the AIF in the Middle East on the upper Murray: even the creeks cutting through the white grass became "wadies".'<sup>43</sup> The three sister battalions of the 23rd 'Bird' Brigade soon separated: the 2/21st went to Ambon with Gull Force and the 2/40th joined Sparrow Force on Timor. Lark Force was established to serve in New Britain and New Ireland, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John Scanlan, a distinguished veteran of the 1st AIF.

On 11 March 1941, Harry Bernstein, Leslie Pearlman, Issy Weingott and the men of the 2/22nd rode a troop train to Sydney, to embark the next day on HMT *Katoomba* for Rabaul, as part of Lark Force. Joining them aboard was a fourth Jewish soldier, Private Albert Fernandez with a detachment of the 2/10th Field Ambulance. By then, Rose Pearlman's anxiety was palpable: of the four of her eight surviving children who had enlisted, three were now on active service.<sup>44</sup> As the men on *Katoomba* sailed north via Port Moresby, they had mixed emotions, as observed by Nelson:

None of the troops who went to Rabaul expected to go there, none were prepared for service in the wet tropics, and nearly all were from southern Australia. The 2/22nd had trained for longer than most battalions before it sailed for overseas, but the training had been for mobile warfare in open country where it would have been just one unit in an Australian division, and a British army. The men had been frustrated by rumours of shifts, and by units more recently formed taking pre-embarkation leave and photographs of crowded wharves and troop ships. When they learnt where they were going, they were uncertain in their reaction. They were glad to be on the move, glad to be going somewhere new, but, they asked, 'were they on their way to war and were they on their way overseas?' – in the way that Libya and Palestine were overseas, and Tasmania was not. Many, AIF and militia, thought Rabaul might be an interlude leading to something better. They knew little about the town, the country around it, or the people who lived there.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, it seems that the task of withstanding a Japanese attack on that remote tropical island was also beyond the capacity of the Australian authorities.



*The Fortress Signals Troop, Australia, prior to departure for Rabaul, c. 1941. Lance-Sergeant Keith Levy (rear, second from left) and Captain Keith Denny (foreground) were among 24 of the 39 men to return.*

### **Lark Force prepares to defend New Britain**

On 28 March 1941, the 2/22nd Battalion, the 1st Independent Company, six Army nurses, smaller anti-aircraft and ambulance units disembarked from the *Katoomba* at Simpson Harbour, Rabaul. Located at the northern tip of the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, at that time the isolated town was capital of the Australian-administered Territory of New Guinea, having been captured from the Germans in 1914. Rabaul also happens to be in the caldera of one of the Territory's most active and dangerous volcanoes. The troops soon settled in with the relaxed lives of the expatriate and native populations. Leslie wrote home fortnightly: 'We play a lot of cricket here! I am just the same as ever, get a wicket now and again. There are also boxing matches, but I am a better looker than a boxer.' He also sent photos, several of which include Tavurvur: 'The volcano is still very loud at present, it makes Rabaul just about

unbearable to go into on leave. The dirt and pumice is terrible.' In May, Leslie and his fellow soldiers climbed to the rim of the volcano's crater, and he wrote how: 'You can see the steam coming out. The only trouble will be when the steam stops.'<sup>46</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 6 June 1941, they watched Tavurvur erupt; but it was not an extraordinary event.

Meanwhile, having transferred to the artillery, and now Captain Herbert Silverman, the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) of 'L' Heavy Battery embarked from Sydney on HMTS *Zealandia* in early April. Also on board was Lance-Sergeant Keith Joseph 'Bluey' Levy, with the Rabaul Fortress Signals. The day after Anzac Day 1941, 26 April, the *Zealandia* sailed into Simpson Harbour with Rabaul's new battery: it boasted just two six-inch coastal guns. They had been taken from Fort Wallace at Stockton, NSW, and were set up at Praed Point, on the southern slopes of South Daughter, overlooking the harbour's entrance and behind Tavurvur. Rabaul and the Lakunai airfield lay on a flat stretch of ground on the northern shores of Simpson Harbour, between the slopes of North Daughter and The Mother. Overlooking the town and south of Simpson Harbour was another volcano, Matupi, barren and weathered, from whose crater a mighty column of black volcanic ash poured during the middle months of 1941. South of the town another active volcano, Vulcan, lay on the western shore of Blanche Bay.

For the Japanese, Rabaul was important because of its proximity to the Caroline Islands, mandated to them by the League of Nations after the First World War and the site of a major Imperial Japanese Navy base on Truk. The capture of New Britain would offer them one of the best natural deep-water harbours in the South Pacific and airfields to provide protection to Truk, and also to attack Allied lines of communication between the United States and Australia.

In August 1941 'L' Anti-Aircraft Battery, consisting of 54 militiamen, arrived in Rabaul where they were to complete their training. It included another two Jews: the Commanding Officer (CO) Lieutenant David Selby and Gunner David Bloomfield. Like 'L' Heavy Battery, as an AMF unit they were also looked down on by some of the 2/22nd Battalion's AIF men as 'Chockos' ('Chocolate Soldiers').<sup>47</sup> Yet, these details would have mattered little as anxiety continued to rise while they learned the Japanese army had invaded Indo-China and was heading south.

In early December 1941, Lark Force was supported by the arrival of 24 Squadron RAAF. Its role was to protect the seaplane base and

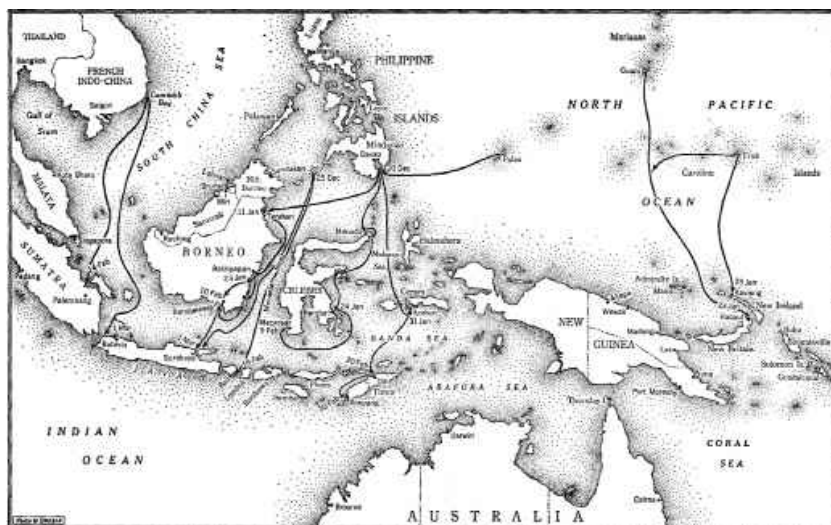


*2/10th Field Ambulance detachment at Rabaul, July 1941. Of the 24 men pictured, Private Albert Fernandez (second row, second from left) was one of 17 who did not return. Privates Wilkie Collins and 'Billie' Cook (back row, second and third from left) both miraculously survived the horrific Tol massacre by the Japanese.*

airfields at Rabaul, as well as provide early warning of Japanese movements through the islands to Australia's north. However, the squadron only had four *Hudson* bombers and ten *Wirraway* fighters, because resources were limited by the demands in Europe, Malaya and elsewhere. By then a total of 1,485 Australian troops made up Lark Force – plus some local New Guinea Volunteer Rifles – to defend that eastern part of the Territory against the Japanese threat of invasion, with more than 1600km of coastline. The reality was that Lark Force was ill-equipped to repel an invasion. It had no sea support, poor air cover and little artillery. The infantry units were lightly armed and possessed few mortars or machine guns. The view of the Australian Chiefs of Staff was that, at best, this force could no more than briefly delay a Japanese advance.

The United States and Australia declared war against Japan after its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on 7–8 December 1941. Guam was captured two days later by the Japanese South Seas Detachment, under Major General Tomitaro Horii, who was then directed to capture Kavieng, New Ireland, and Rabaul, New Britain, as part of 'Operation R.' For a few weeks that December, Harry Bernstein was admitted with

malaria to the 2/10th Army General Hospital on Namanula Ridge. He might have met Albert Fernandez, an orderly, among its staff that included the six Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) Sisters, who were mostly treating soldiers suffering from tropical diseases. Meanwhile, the merchant vessels *Neptuna* and *Macdhui* – with Jewish seamen and brothers, John and Henry Rosen respectively – evacuated most of the expatriate women and children from New Ireland and New Britain. They included German and Japanese sympathisers, some of whom had been supplying information to the Japanese for several years. *Map of the Japanese advance south from December 1941 to January 1942 (not to scale). It also shows the relative position of Rabaul to Port Moresby, where*



*escapees reached, and to Luzon, Philippines, where 1,052 POWs were killed in the sinking of the Montevideo Maru.<sup>48</sup>*

### **The Japanese attack Rabaul**

Tavurvur continued rumbling through the new year, while the Japanese Mobile Carrier Fleet steamed south. From 4 January 1942, it commenced air raids on Rabaul and consequently Lieutenant Selby's 'L' Anti-Aircraft Battery fired the first shots from Australian territory at an attacking enemy – albeit without the range to reach the bombers' altitude. Selby watched as they flew overhead in arrowhead formation: 'flashing silver in the bright sunlight' and then the earth 'leapt and danced in a huge swirling column' as Lakunai airfield was bombed.<sup>49</sup>



A week later the volcano erupted even more spectacularly, spewing lava into the air accompanied by lightning. Nonetheless, it was still not as furious as in 1937, when Tavurvur and its twin, Vulcan, erupted simultaneously, killing 507 people around Rabaul. This time, although 800, mostly European, women and children had been evacuated from Rabaul since December, they had not left because of the volcanoes: it was the fear of an imminent Japanese invasion.

Aware of their perilous situation after the first Japanese air raids, Selby later wrote:

Again about the middle of January, I went down to headquarters and asked what the plans were should a withdrawal become necessary. Despite my lowly rank, I had been present as a unit commander at various conferences, but this particular matter had never been raised. The reply I received to my question was disconcerting: 'That is a defeatist attitude, Selby!' I was referred to an order of the day which had been promulgated on the first of January. This order which I learned later had come from Australia, exhorted every man to fight to the last, and ended with the words underlined and in capitals: 'THERE SHALL BE NO WITHDRAWAL'.<sup>50</sup>

Selby later reflected, '... isolated and vulnerable as we were, we were later to regret bitterly the absence of a comprehensive plan for a fighting retirement.'<sup>51</sup>

The Japanese bombing of New Britain increased in intensity over the ensuing weeks. Of the eight *Wirraways* sent aloft to challenge the Japanese raiders on 20 January, five were shot down or crashed. Watching from Frisbee Ridge, 'L' Anti-Aircraft Battery's David Bloomfield wrote: 'It was like hawks attacking sparrows. We had never seen aircraft with such speed.'<sup>52</sup> Also helping to keep the enemy aircraft at a high level was 'L' Heavy Battery, although unsuited to the task. During that time its RMO, Captain Silverman, was himself a patient in the Rabaul Hospital, where perhaps he too met Albert Fernandez. Then on 21 January, frustrated at the lack of planning to evacuate casualties, Silverman apparently discharged himself from the hospital in his pyjamas, determined to return to his unit.<sup>53</sup>

Just before 8:00am the next day, a further attack was launched by

45 Japanese fighters and dive bombers on 'C' Company of the 2/22nd at Vunakanau. The dive bombers then turned to Praed Point, silencing 'L' Heavy Battery's guns, so they never were able to engage enemy shipping, as was their original purpose. Under a heavy pall of smoke and dust, dazed survivors said that the upper gun had been blasted out of the ground, crashing onto the lower gun, killing eleven men and injuring many including the CO, so Silverman would have dealt with numerous casualties at his Regimental Aid Post (RAP).<sup>54</sup> The 24 Squadron was virtually destroyed, and its three remaining aircraft were withdrawn. With no use for the airstrips, both were demolished; but only the RAAF had an evacuation plan. With the loss of the coastal battery, the departure of the air force and the cratering of the airfields, Scanlan decided that the justification for the prime role of Lark Force no longer existed. He ordered demolitions be carried out and the township evacuated. At 3:30pm he received news from Selby's position that an enemy convoy was approaching. At 4:00pm preparations were further disrupted by the 'rather botched demolition' of the airfield bomb depot. It levelled everything within a quarter mile, killed several civilians and shattered the valves of wireless sets in Rabaul, putting the headquarters radio transmitter out of action. The only remaining means of passing messages was by a tele-radio at Toma, 30km south. Thus, as Rabaul received confirmation of the arrival of the enemy convoy, its main link with the outside world snapped and it would be days before the high command in Australia had any clear idea what happened there.

Scanlan then made the controversial decision to inform his men they were going on a field exercise for the next two days. Perhaps he thought this would put the men on alert without destroying their morale, but it also meant that the men took only a light load of rations and other supplies with them. This would prove disastrous during the subsequent retreat into the interior. Selby was ordered to destroy his anti-aircraft guns, but prevaricated, relocating them as Lark Force withdrew from Rabaul to wait on the western shores of Blanche Bay for the inevitable enemy assault. The men who had been attached from 'L' Heavy Battery were relocated nearby, so Silverman established an RAP in the area of Vulcan. By 5:00pm all were settled in their new positions and watching civilians making their way south in trucks, cars and on foot along the road to Kokopo, beneath a cloud of black smoke from the burning wharves and the demolitions in Rabaul township.



Private Albert Fernandez was one of several orderlies involved in the hasty relocation of the hospital patients and supplies later that night, which Sister Lorna Johnston, one of the Army nurses, described:

We'd been on duty about 28 hours by the time John May our padre came up to see us. There were a lot of casualties and we were very busy. John told us that somebody had sent a signal to the military in Australia that said: 'We who are about to die, salute you.' Apparently, this huge Japanese convoy had been sighted just off the coast of New Britain. We evacuated about 9 o'clock that night out to the Mission Station at Kokopo ... We had 80 patients and took them in two or three ambulances and some private cars. We were the last to actually leave Rabaul and the troops had already blown up quite a few roads, so we had to go around the back way. We finally arrived at Kokopo about 2 o'clock in the morning. And straight away we set to work digging slit trenches.<sup>55</sup>

At midnight on 22 January, the Japanese South Seas Force approached Rabaul: a massive fleet including twelve destroyers, eight cruisers, nine submarines, two aircraft carriers with 171 fighter and bomber aircraft and nine troop transports – totalling more than 50 ships. The transports launched landing barges, each holding between 50 and 100 men, at six points around Simpson Harbour, some 5,000 enemy troops.

It was daylight on 23 January before the trenches at Kokopo were completed, and the nurses looked down at the harbour. 'We couldn't believe our eyes,' remarked Sister Johnston at the size of the Japanese force: 'Our troops had no chance, there was nothing they could do. There were only 1400 of them.'<sup>56</sup> By 8:00am the main body of the invasion force was mopping-up and Rabaul township was occupied. An hour later Lark Force headquarters received reports that the Japanese were coming 'in their thousands' and could not be held. At about 11:00am, the flustered CO Scanlan gave the panicked order: 'Every man for himself.' No further defence was feasible, and the Australian forces withdrew and broke into small parties. At the same time, a Japanese float plane dropped leaflets, with General Horii's proclamation:

To the Officers and Soldiers of this Island!

SURRENDER AT ONCE!

And we will guarantee your life, treating you as war prisoners. Those who RESIST US WILL BE KILLED ONE AND ALL. Consider seriously, you can find neither food nor way of escape in this island and you will only die of hunger unless you surrender.

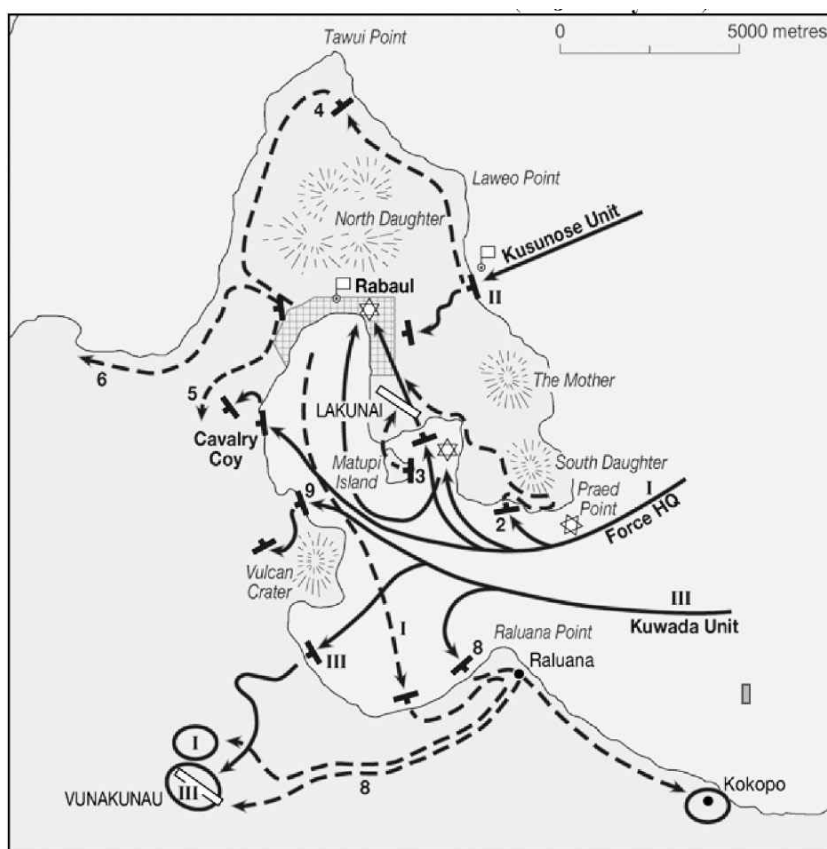
January 23rd, 1942.

Japanese Commander-in-Chief.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile at Kokopo, the nurses found that their two Medical Officers and most of the orderlies had gone: 'They just left us, all excepting two orderlies who volunteered to stay behind and help.' Fernandez must have been one of them because, as Sister Johnson explained: 'All of the orderlies [who left] were [later] massacred at Tol Plantation. The men were wearing Red Cross armbands, but their captors ignored these.'<sup>58</sup> The hospital staff met the Japanese on the beach to surrender, and so Private Albert Fernandez was one of the first Lark Force soldiers to be captured.

From Three Ways, Selby watched the Japanese approach 'like a swarm of black ants' and his men fought hard until the threat from the right flank forced them back.<sup>59</sup> At midday, the Japanese fleet moved up the harbour in line and an hour later the invasion of Rabaul was complete: the enemy forces had grown to some 17,000 men. Under fire from the ships, the Australians began to pull back through the bush. Unprepared for retreat, chaos ensued, and Lark Force disintegrated, splitting into small parties that withdrew in two main lines across the Gazelle Peninsula: west to the north coast, and south-east toward the south coast. During that day's fighting, two officers and 26 men were killed, while the Japanese lost 16 killed.

The next day the Japanese, thinking they had silenced all of the Australian batteries, performed a victory fly-past. Lieutenant Selby's anti-aircraft gunners opened fire, shooting down a Japanese bomber, but having given away their position, they destroyed their guns and headed for the jungle too. At the same time, Signaller Issy Weingott set off with a group of mates in the same direction: 'As we were walking down the road the Jap planes machine-gunned and bombed the road,' he wrote in his diary, 'so we thought it time to take to the jungle. We cut our way through jungle and finished up in a deep gully.'<sup>60</sup> Each group sought its own way to escape, but only some would achieve salvation.



*Diagram of the Japanese South Seas Force invasion of Rabaul, New Britain, on 23 January 1942, involving more than 50 ships and 20,000 personnel. (The six-pointed stars represent the advancing, Japanese Force HQ).<sup>61</sup>*

### **Escape from Rabaul – but not all escape from the Japanese**

Two days prior to the invasion, on the afternoon of 21 January, L/Sgt Keith Levy's Fortress Signals section had evacuated the wireless station at Malaguna on the instruction of his CO Captain Denny, and the next day made their way south past Toma. About midnight they abandoned their vehicles at the Warangoi River, and then used a native outrigger for three hours to relay across it. The party arrived at Putput Plantation for a rest when dawn was breaking on 23 January, but – when a Japanese seaplane dived to investigate – as Levy later explained:

Capt. Denny ordered us to get away from the plantation as quickly as possible. We crossed the neck of Putput

Bay in a canoe and a ketch. Capt. Denny's instructions were that we were to keep going along the track by the coast in a southerly direction. No particular destination was mentioned to me. When we were about three miles from the plantation, we heard explosions and I was subsequently informed that the plantation had been bombed.<sup>62</sup>

After another 25 kilometre hike, Levy's party arrived at Sum Sum around 6:00pm and met a lot of RAAF officers, who were waiting to be evacuated by seaplanes. One officer advised Levy that his party could not get away on them until all the air force personnel had been removed. Less than an hour later he was aboard one of two Short Sunderland seaplanes with the injured and weakest soldiers, taking only the clothes they wore. Overloaded by some 900kg each, the Sunderlands failed to get airborne on their first attempts and had to dump fuel before they could stagger aloft and fly the four-and-half hours to Samarai, an island off the south-eastern tip of New Guinea. A second group took a schooner south to Tol Plantation and were rescued from Wide Bay by another RAAF Sunderland on 24 January. It was the last flight out of New Britain, totalling some 150 evacuees – but that was not the last time Tol would be heard of.

On landing at midnight, the overloaded seaplane punctured one of its floats, necessitating four of the personnel to sit on the opposite wing to keep the damaged float clear of the water for three hours, until they managed to get ashore. The CO of 11 Squadron that arranged the rescues from its base at Samarai was Squadron-Leader Julius Allan 'Dick' Cohen – later renamed Sir Richard Kingsland – one of the most famous Jewish aviators of World War Two. Following repairs, the same Sunderland took Levy and his men to Townsville on 26 January. A few weeks later, L/Sgt Keith Levy provided a comprehensive witness statement to an army court of enquiry.<sup>63</sup> While it was focused on determining details of the Japanese invasion of Rabaul, the enquiry also established that the soldiers had not been guilty of desertion.<sup>64</sup>

Returning to the rapidly deteriorating situation on the Gazelle Peninsula, where the other six Jewish soldiers were among over a thousand Lark Force men still eluding the Japanese in assorted groups with hundreds of civilians: Captain Silverman and Major Akeroyd, the 2/22nd MO, were in a party heading westward. As the Japanese occupied

Four Ways, cutting off the road to Tobera, the party skirted it and moved on through the dense jungle, avoiding the roads and eventually reaching the Keravat River, near the north coast. However, following a skirmish there on 26 January, infantry Lieutenant Lennox Henry and Captain Silverman were delayed while treating some wounded troops, and were captured by the Japanese. The officers refused to identify another Australian soldier involved in the skirmish. The Japanese then beheaded Henry on the spot and took Silverman to Rabaul because he said he was a doctor. Back at Rabaul, on 30 January Silverman had unfortunately not been wearing his Red Cross brassard (armband) and the Japanese would not recognise his status as a doctor. They therefore considered him an escaping soldier and summarily executed him.<sup>65</sup> Captain Herbert Silverman, aged 31 and one of at least five Lark Force officers murdered by General Horii's troops, was posthumously Mentioned in Despatches.<sup>66</sup>

In the meantime, the other five Jews – Selby, Bloomfield, Weingott, Bernstein and Pearlman (now a Lance-Corporal) – were among the majority of Lark Force fleeing to the south coast. When Selby's party arrived at the Warangoi River, they were able to stock up on ammunition and food from the trucks abandoned there.<sup>67</sup> Then further south, at his temporary headquarters in Toma, Scanlan refused to meet Selby, who was told by the CO's Signaller 'Bill' Harry: 'When the beach defence broke down it was one glorious *shemozzle*.'<sup>68</sup> The men then had to climb the rugged Baining mountains and traverse mosquito-riddled rain-forest, enduring heat, unrelenting tropical rain and electrical storms. 'Distances were measured on a time basis, as the nature of its terrain is such that linear distances have little meaning: to go forward one mile requires travelling four or five miles nearly vertically up and down.'<sup>69</sup> Also, the men were untrained in navigating the jungle, where even in the daytime visibility could end at arm's length, and they were starving: some subsisted on a biscuit a day each, while some did not have any food for four or five days, being unfamiliar with the native plants. All the while, Japanese seaplanes and naval vessels patrolled the coastline and hinterland, looking for people fleeing Rabaul and seeking to cut off their escape routes. Many were also driven by rumours that the RAAF would return to Wide Bay and rescue them too.

Captain Richard Travers voluntarily surrendered near Toma on 27 January with approximately 100 men of his 'D' Company and was





joined by 'Y' Company, and so Weingott's party overtook them. On 1 February, Weingott's party reached the coast, then shot a pig and dynamited a river for fish.<sup>71</sup> They were just a day or two behind Pearlman's group, which was approaching Tol further south, while all were trying to avoid not only the Japanese enemy, but also – even more frightening – the *Mok Kol Kols*, a nomadic tribe of murderous natives, who were rumoured to be head-hunters. On 3 February, Bloomfield saw five Japanese landing craft moving south along the coast from Rabaul and recalled: 'The only thing that was intact was my underpants. My shorts were torn, my shirt collar had come off, rotted. My boots were soft from being wet all the time. My socks were sodden.'<sup>72</sup> David Selby's granddaughter described their wretched situation in a recent article:

The men became increasingly ill – Selby, like many of the others, caught malaria but, fortunately, at a stage when there were still some quinine tablets left. They were injured and debilitated, their boots cut to shreds and their hope fading. One of Selby's lowest moments was when he sought comfort in the photograph of his wife and baby and discovered that the jungle rivers had washed away the image.<sup>73</sup>

Having trekked some 300km in ten days – scarcely echoing the 2/22nd recruits' benign, country stroll from Trawool to Bonegilla 16 months earlier – Leslie Pearlman's group eventually arrived at Tol Plantation on 2 February. The following morning, soon after Leslie spoke to some fellow soldiers at the plantation – possibly Privates Brannelly and Waugh – five Japanese craft landed troops of the 144th Infantry Regiment there, trapping those Australians who needed canoes or boats to cross two rivers to escape. A party of 22 Australians congregated around a white flag on the beach. They all belonged to the Army Medical Corps and were wearing Red Cross brassards, which the Japanese soldiers immediately removed; but these prisoners were spared and taken back to Kokopo. Over the rest of the day, the Japanese rounded up more than 180 soldiers and civilians who were hiding out in the surrounding jungle, including Leslie – many too weak or sick to care, let alone run. Meanwhile, Brannelly and Waugh escaped with some other Australians and disappeared in a different direction. The Japanese forced their captives to surrender their remaining belongings such as identity tags, letters and paybooks. They then fed them a hot,

'good meal of rice and Australian bully beef.'<sup>74</sup> This reinforced some prisoners' idea that perhaps they would be better off in Japanese hands – but actually the Japanese were preparing them to die anonymously.

The Japanese soldiers took groups of up to twelve men, tied together, into the plantation and asked them to choose whether they wished to be shot or bayoneted. Erica Cervini's paper includes details of their subsequent murders and the gruesome description provided by Private 'Billie' Cook of 2/10th Field Ambulance.<sup>75</sup> The Japanese brutally executed 115 Australian soldiers and 43 civilians in four separate massacres at Tol and Waitavalo Plantations on that horrible day, 4 February 1942. After being left for dead where they fell, Cook, miraculously still alive despite a bayonet through his throat, managed to untie his hands and make his way to the beach. At dusk he saw the smoke from a camp-fire and staggered towards it. The next morning, he found a small party under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Scanlan. Although he lost his voice as a result, Cook survived the Tol massacre, along with five other men – but Private Leslie Pearlman, aged 33, did not.

The next day, Selby's party cautiously approached Tol. Bloomfield was walking on a track close to the plantation and, despite accidentally brushing the shoulder of a Japanese officer, luckily managed to escape his trailing patrol by detouring further up the Bulus River.<sup>76</sup> Two days later on 6 February, Bloomfield came across one of the massacre locations in a coconut plantation and found another survivor amongst the executed soldiers, Private Maxwell 'Smacker' Hazelgrove. Selby asked Bloomfield to get Smacker to Kaline Mission for medical treatment to prevent his wounds becoming septic. When they finally arrived at the mission, its Father Meyhoeffer said: 'No. Keep going ...' but Selby appealed: 'Look, we've got two wounded men here from a Jap massacre.' Meyhoeffer pleaded: 'The Japs have been here and have threatened to kill me if I help the Australian soldiers,' to which Selby replied: 'If you don't help us, I'll kill you.' Smacker received treatment and the party continued southwards.<sup>77</sup>

Along the way, they learnt that two wounded men, found by the Japanese in the homestead of nearby Waitavalo Plantation, had been smeared in pig grease and burned alive. Meanwhile, Issy Weingott's party rescued another survivor of the Tol massacre, whose hands were tied behind his back for two days before he found someone to undo them, and so his wrists were all festered. One of the six survivors of



the horrific massacres died of his wounds within a month, but four subsequently were able to testify against their slaughterers, which also helped to stoke the resolve of the Australian forces in New Guinea.

Over the following days, Selby's party met more groups of Australians heading south, including Scanlan's party. On learning of the Tol massacres and reading a note from the Japanese stating that he was responsible for what happened, Scanlan said he was going to give himself up, hoping that would placate them. 'His speech,' wrote Selby later, 'through its sheer hard logic, depressed me more than anything which had happened on the track.'<sup>78</sup> Scanlan began the long walk back to Rabaul on 10 February and with his party of four handed themselves in at a *Kempeitai* (Japanese Military Police) outpost near the Warangoi River on 21 February, joining the growing number of Lark Force POWs. During those eleven days, the so-called unassailable 'fortress,' Singapore, also fell to the Japanese. Over 130,000 allied servicemen passed into captivity, including more than 15,000 Australians of the 8th Division, many of whom died as a result. So, even if Lark Force's 2/22nd and the other 'Bird' battalions of 23rd Brigade had not been split from the division, they would still have succumbed to the Japanese onslaught.

In *Jewish Anzacs*, Mark Dapin provides vivid accounts by Selby and Weingott of their daring struggles through the New Britain jungle, as the remnants of Lark Force continued their fraught retreat. Weingott's party made a raft to cross a river, but 'All the time we were crossing it we were thinking of crocodiles as the river was supposed to be alive with them.'<sup>79</sup> In the following extract, Selby elaborated how – of necessity – their trekking was mostly done in darkness:

At night time the brightest stars and even a full moon were completely blotted out, and no matter how near one walked to the man ahead, it was impossible to see even the dim outline of his figure. ... That night, as the leaders stumbled over obstructions in the path, the word would be passed down the column in a tired, dead voice, 'Roots,' 'Vine,' 'Log,' 'Slippery patch.' Our bones and muscles ached till we felt that we could scarcely stand; when we stopped for a rest, we grew so stiff, we felt that we could never move on, our bodies, clammy with sweat, growing cold in the night air. Our boots felt

like masses of lead and our packs seemed to weigh tons.  
 My steel helmet bowed my head down. Still we kept on,  
 stumbling, slipping and falling.<sup>80</sup>

Some of their other accounts illustrate the range of attitudes that the Australian soldiers faced. After the native villagers of Drina had murdered the plantation manager, raped his wife and were apparently planning to ambush the Australians, Selby executed the ringleader of the revolt. Later, at Palmalmal Plantation, his party was given food and refuge by Father Ted Harris, a Sacred Heart missionary.<sup>81</sup> Weingott described how their feet were cut by coral and he was saved from drowning by a native. Over the next two months, dozens of men began congregating at camps around Jacquinot Bay, located twice the distance south of Rabaul as Tol was, on the north shore of Wide Bay. They had trekked a total of 500 to 600km from Rabaul. Many of the fugitives were delirious, most were suffering, and some died from malaria, dysentery, tropical ulcers, starvation and exposure. With crucial assistance from men of the Coastwatchers group, the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit organised rescue missions, and the first escapees reached Port Moresby on 27 February after getting away in a small craft. Following another five weeks of subsistence and elusion, on 9 April Selby, Bloomfield and Weingott were among 156 desperate Australian soldiers and civilians that crammed into the administrator of Papua's diesel yacht, now HMAS *Laurabada*. Under cover of a storm early the next morning, it sailed for Port Moresby, 700 nautical miles south and west across the open seas and arrived there three days later. Most of the men were immediately transhipped to Australia on the MV *Macdhui*, whose new Chief Saloon Waiter was Henry Rosen. He was still grieving for his elder brother, Chief Steward Jack Rosen, who had been killed just seven weeks earlier when the MV *Neptuna* was sunk in the Japanese bombing of Darwin.<sup>82</sup> Alas, when the *Macdhui* returned to Port Moresby two months later it was also attacked and sunk by the Japanese, killing ten crewmembers, including Henry Rosen, who was manning one of its guns.<sup>83</sup> Jack and Henry Rosen are one of five pairs of Jewish Australian brothers that died on service in World War Two.<sup>84</sup>

Eventually, by July 1942, more than 300 members of Lark Force had managed to return to Australia in various vessels. Meanwhile, those soldiers who disregarded General Horii's decree and were captured after fighting rather than immediately surrendering, were simply



*The diminutive HMAS Laurabada arriving at Port Moresby, New Guinea, on 12 April 1942, after three days navigating the 700 nautical miles from Jacquinot Bay, New Britain. David Selby, David Bloomfield and Issy Weingott were among the 156 Australians that it evacuated from the pre-arranged rendezvous at Palmalmal.*

murdered in the same fashion as Captain Herbert Silverman, one of 43 men who died or were killed attempting to escape from New Britain. Nonetheless, most members of Lark Force were taken into captivity over this period, joining the likes of Privates Fernandez and Bernstein. During an air raid on Port Moresby the Japanese had dropped a bundle of hand-written messages from some of Rabaul's prisoners of war. They were allowed only a few words, so most letters were pitifully short: 'Dearest this is just a line to let you know that I am a prisoner of war in the Japanese [censored] at Rabaul. I am well and uninjured and am very well treated. Love to my little one.'<sup>85</sup> It was enough to give families, friends and comrades hope that the 1,200 Australian men and women still on New Britain were safe. Ominously, nothing more would be heard of their fate until after the war.

## The POWs sail from Rabaul

The military POWs and civilian internees alike endured five months of imprisonment under primitive conditions, labouring for food to stay alive and being subjected to brutalities and indignities. They also came under regular bombardment by the RAAF while at forced labour in the Blanche Bay area. By the end of May the Japanese army had handed the POW camp over to its navy, in preparation for their invasion of mainland New Guinea and the transfer of the prisoners to Asia.

At about 4:30am on 22 June 1942, Japanese marines and guards roused the main group of male soldiers and civilians and organised them into parties of 50. This first transfer was planned to the Japanese-occupied island of Hainan, off the coast of China. Some 60 Australian officers and a dozen or so civilian women were retained in the camp. Half-starved and ill, Albert Fernandez, Harry Bernstein and hundreds of other men marched from the compound at 9:00am, 'with a smile and a cheery farewell for those remaining; the stronger supporting the weaker, arm in arm as they boarded the ship.'<sup>86</sup> Historians estimate that 853 POWs and 200 civilian internees left that day on the *Montevideo Maru*. After operating as a troopship in the Japanese islands, it had returned to Java before sailing for New Britain. However, when it departed Rabaul, *Montevideo Maru* was not marked as a POW transport and sailed north-west for Hainan unescorted, keeping to the east of the Philippines in an effort to avoid Allied submarines.

After completing three patrols in early 1942, the submarine *USS Sturgeon* was refitted at Fremantle, Western Australia, and returned on 5 June to patrol the South China Sea north of the Philippines. The *Sturgeon* sighted *Montevideo Maru* off the island of Luzon on 30 June. Believing it to be an enemy troopship, Lieutenant Commander Wright pursued it, but was unable to fire as the target was travelling too fast. However, *Montevideo Maru* slowed towards midnight and for approximately four hours the submarine manoeuvred into a position to fire its four stern torpedoes. The *Sturgeon's* log of 1 July 1942 records an impact at 2:29am, approximately 100 feet (30 metres) aft of the funnel. Minutes later, Jack Atkinson was one of several submariners invited to inspect the damage through its periscope:

'Captain let us come up and see this one that we hit. I had a look ... and we thought it was a troop ship ... We saw people jumping over the sides,' he recalled around

70 years later at age 93, fighting back tears. 'I'm so sorry that it happened. But we didn't know about it. So I can't say anything else. It was just a terrible thing.'<sup>87</sup>

Survivors from the *Montevideo Maru's* Japanese crew reported two torpedoes striking the vessel followed by an explosion in the oil tank in the aft hold and that she sank by the stern in as little as eleven minutes. Although ordered to abandon ship, it seems the crew made no attempt to assist their captives, resulting in the deaths of all prisoners and internees on board. The ship's lifeboats were launched but all capsized or were too damaged. It is believed that 1,140 (including 88 Japanese crew) were killed. While 18 crew survived, including the captain, and made it to the Philippines, most of them were killed by local guerrillas. Private Albert Fernandez, aged 43, and Private Harry Bernstein, 42, died in this catastrophic mistake: the worst maritime disaster in Australian history and also the greatest single loss of Australian lives in peace or war.

Yosiaki Yamaji was the sole remaining survivor from the *Montevideo Maru's* crew when he gave the only eyewitness account, in 2003. Even after 61 years, he recalled hearing the death cries of trapped Australians going down with the ship and graphically described the dreadful spectacle:

We went back to the place where the ship sank to pick up Japanese crew members. There were more POWs in the water than crew members. The POWs were holding pieces of wood and using bigger pieces as rafts. They were in groups of 20 to 30 people, probably 100 people in all. Some were singing, and some had their heads down, silent. I was particularly impressed when they began singing 'Auld Lang Syne' as a tribute to their dead colleagues. Watching that, I learnt that Australians have big hearts.<sup>88</sup>

In July 1942, the second group of Australians, including Scanlan and about 60 officers plus 18 women, were shipped to Japan. The Japanese launched the Kokoda, Buna, and other key campaigns from Rabaul, including the massive naval air battles of Midway and the Coral Sea. Up to 300,000 Japanese were garrisoned there between 1942 and 1945, while up to 300 bombers and fighters operated from its five airfields.

From August 1942, General Horii led his troops over Papua's Owen

Stanley range to within sight of Port Moresby. In October the 2/1st Battalion, led by outstanding Jewish soldier Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Cullen, was one of the Australian Army units that faced remnants of the infamous 144th Regiment at Eora Creek, from where they fought the Japanese back along the Kokoda Trail towards Buna. In an ironic reflection of Lark Force's escape from Rabaul, in early November Horii and two other Japanese soldiers desperately set out along the coast for Giruwa paddling a canoe, but it capsized. 'I have no strength to swim any further,' the commander told his surviving companion, 'Tell the troops that Horii died here.'<sup>89</sup>

### **From hope to anxiety – then to closure and eventually, to recognition**

As 1942 unfolded – amid Australia's worst year of the war – Rose Pearlman kept anxious watch over her letterbox at 121 Argyle Street, St Kilda. She corresponded with two sons: Lloyd, who was still in Australia with the army, and Cyril, who had been awarded a Military Medal serving with 2/16th Battalion in the battle of Bardia, Libya, in January 1941. Her daughter, Celia's letters arrived regularly from Palestine, where she was a nursing Sister serving in the AANS. Still there was nothing from Leslie. The Tol massacre was mentioned in the newspapers in April, but from then on, government censorship all but eliminated news of atrocities, and he was now listed along with hundreds of other soldiers as 'Missing Abroad.' In September 1942 the army reported to Rose that at a plantation on 3 February, witnesses had spoken to Leslie, who was 'quite well' and so could be a surviving POW.<sup>90</sup> Thus encouraged, Rose continued writing to him and asking after him from anyone in uniform, not unlike the anxious families of the other thousand missing Lark Force men.<sup>91</sup>

After twelve months of unbearable waiting since Captain Silverman was officially posted missing, Myrtle Goldberg learned in April 1943 that her brother Herbert was: 'Now reported believed deceased (date unknown).' Eventually, in March 1944, Sir William Webb completed his first report on 'Atrocities or breaches of the rules of warfare by the Japanese armed forces in the Pacific';<sup>92</sup> but no information regarding the lost men of Lark Force was released. The families of the three Jewish soldiers who were still missing continued to hope and pray for their safe return.

It took a year after the Guadalcanal campaign on the Solomon Islands, further south, before the American forces eventually landed on

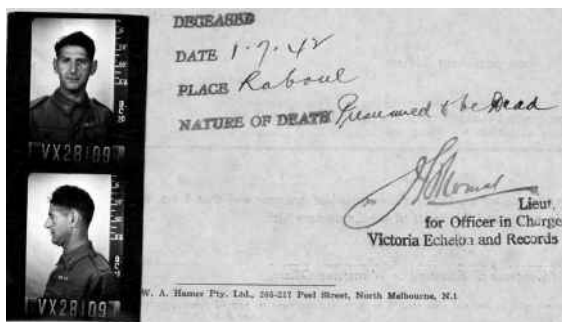
New Britain in December 1943. Australians returned to relieve them another year later and had effectively confined the Japanese around Rabaul by the beginning of 1945. The following April, Lloyd Pearlman served with the RAAF for a couple of weeks at Jacquinot Bay. That was the same location from which the *Laurabada* had picked up Lark Force escapees some three years prior, and not far from where his brother, Leslie's bleached remains still lay with other victims of the Tol massacre, unbeknown beneath the rapid jungle regrowth until discovered later that same month. At their surrender in August 1945, some 69,000 Japanese troops were still in Rabaul, and it took another two years to repatriate them all. Coincidentally, the writer's father, Sergeant Philip Allen, served there for the first nine months of that process.<sup>93</sup>

When General MacArthur's troops were on their victory march into Tokyo, the six Army nurses were found by accident. They returned to Australia with most of the second group of Lark Force POWs transported to Japan, having survived more than three years of deprivations, heat, cold and cruelty. Shortly afterwards, the death of the men on the *Montevideo Maru* was revealed to the public, and a controlled release of fragments from the Webb report included reference to the Tol massacre and 'Billie' Cook's evidence – but not all of the names of the victims. So, if Leslie had survived the Japanese invasion of Rabaul and the massacres, then been taken a POW – as the Pearlmans believed – he may have ultimately perished on the voyage to Asia.

Two months after war's end and after three and a half years of hearing nothing regarding the missing POWs of Lark Force, most of their next of kin, including Private Albert Fernandez's uncle Albert Isaacs in Brisbane and Private Harry Bernstein's mother Sarah in London, were finally advised of their fate, while their service records were stamped: 'For official purposes presumed dead on 1 July 1942 (on *Montevideo Maru*)'. The following December 1945, Captain Herbert Silverman's sister was finally advised, and his service recorded that: 'For official purposes presumed dead. Location and date not stated.'

After one to six months convalescence, all four Jewish soldiers who had escaped New Britain re-joined the fight on mainland Papua New Guinea. Interestingly, while later serving in the Jacquinot Bay area of New Britain for the five months to mid-April 1945, Keith Levy attended a Passover seder there, commemorating another, much earlier exodus to salvation.<sup>94</sup> They survived to be among the hundreds of thousands of servicemen and women who flooded home to Australia as 1945 rolled





*Extract of the service record of Private Harry Bernstein, stretcher-bearer with 2/22nd Battalion. Captured on 27 January 1942 at Toma, New Britain, he spent the next five months as a POW in Rabaul, before embarking on the ill-fated MV Montevideo*

into 1946, that also included David Selby's four siblings and Rose Pearlman's other three children – but the fate of Lark Force's eighth Jewish soldier still remained unconfirmed. It was not until May 1946 that Rose finally received the telegram that she had dreaded for over four years:

'Leslie became missing and for official purposes presumed dead on 4 February 1942', but there were no other details.<sup>95</sup> Mercifully, when Rose died in 1956, she was still unaware that Leslie had been brutally murdered at the Tol Plantation.

The Japanese unit responsible for the Tol massacres was the 3rd Battalion of the 144th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Masao Kusunose. After the war, he was tracked through Japan to the foot of Mount Fujiyama, where he was found in December 1946, having starved himself to death from a peculiar sense of honour, rather than face a War Crimes Trial. Kusunose had written in his diary: 'Heaven will preserve Japan and the Emperor.'<sup>96</sup>

In 1947, five years after his death, Captain Herbert Silverman was posthumously Mentioned in Dispatches for: 'Services rendered whilst POW in Japanese hands.'<sup>97</sup> However, the specific details of his actions were not publicly known until 18 years later, when the *Australian Jewish News* published a letter on 29 January 1960:

#### TRIBUTE TO JEW

As a member of the 2/22 Battalion AIF I attended a service at the Shrine [of Remembrance, Melbourne] last Sunday.

Dr John Akeroyd, who was the Battalion Medical Officer, gave the address and eulogized the bravery of Dr Silverman, a Medical Officer stationed at Rabaul



with the Australian Forces. Dr Silverman was himself a patient at the Rabaul Hospital at the time of the Japanese attack.

Leaving his sick bed, said Dr Akeroyd, this brave Jewish Medical Officer undertook duties far beyond what could be expected from any Officer under the circumstances, and showed devotion and heroism in the care of our sick and wounded until he was captured by the Japanese.

Refusing to identify another Australian Soldier involved in a skirmish with the Japanese, which would have meant the death of that soldier, Dr Silverman maintained that attitude although under pressure and knowing full well he himself was facing the death penalty. Dr Silverman was executed.

Giving this as one example of Jewry's contribution to Australia, Dr Akeroyd stated that he was proud to have been associated with Dr Silverman and bluntly deplored recent attacks of anti-Semitism.

It is right and proper that we should give equal prominence to the actions of our non-Jewish friends as well as reporting the vile attacks made on us.

Yours faithfully,

Charles Lewis<sup>98</sup>

The names of Captain Herbert Nathan Silverman MID (1910–42), Lance-Corporal Leslie Pearlman (1908–42), Private Harry Bernstein (1899–1942) and Private Albert Fernandez (1898–1942) are engraved on the Rabaul Memorial in Bita Paka War Cemetery, Rabaul, New Britain, that commemorates more than 1,230 members of the Australian Army and RAAF who lost their lives in the area or the sinking of the *Montevideo Maru* and have no known grave. Bernstein's and Fernandez's names are also on the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial at Ballarat, Victoria, dedicated in 2004. It had taken some 60 years for researchers to confirm that 1,093 of Lark Force's 1,485 men did not return to Australia. Regrettably, it has taken 80 years to confirm that neither did four of its eight Jewish soldiers return alive: their names also inscribed on the Australian Jewish War Memorial, Canberra, dedicated in 2018.<sup>99</sup>

## Postscript

It is apt to note that, with Jews comprising approximately 0.5 percent of the Australian population, their actual number in Lark Force corresponded with the statistical likelihood of between seven and eight Jewish men. Conversely, given his detailed record of interrogation by the Army, it is odd that Keith Levy (1921–83) was the only one of the four Jewish survivors of Lark Force who did not provide a personal account after the war. Issy Weingott (1910–1971) wrote an unpublished diary of his experience. David Selby (1906–2002) rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Citizen Military Forces<sup>100</sup> and in 1956, wrote a book, *Hell and High Fever*. He reflected on the experience of evading the Japanese:

One thing which we never treated flippantly was a conviction among everyone that we had been preserved by Divine Guidance. There was scarcely a man in the party who had not been saved several times from death by what seemed nothing short of a miracle. Often, when I found myself sinking into the depths of depression, I would remind myself of the remarkable escapes I had had ... A cynical voice would whisper that those who had already died or were now dying had probably thought the same at some time, but it was a voice to which I refused to listen.<sup>101</sup>

It seems that Rose Pearlman also displayed a similar sense of hope, but just as Divine Providence did not favour her son Leslie, 47 of the 53 men of David Selby's Rabaul 'L' Anti-Aircraft Battery did not see their homeland again.<sup>102</sup> In 2001, another one of its six men who did return, David Bloomfield (1923–2008) published *Rabaul Diary: escaping captivity in 1942* and was interviewed in 2004 by the Australians at War Film Archive.<sup>103</sup>

The Japanese attack on Rabaul of 23 January 1942 is regarded as their only entirely successful operation in the South Pacific and was arguably the beginning of our country's bleakest year of the war. 'The battle for Australia has commenced,' the Acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde, broadcast to the nation the day after the invasion. So horrific was the Tol massacre that the Australian government suppressed details for 46 years, until 1988. Perhaps that is because the fall of Rabaul is generally considered Australia's worst defeat of World War Two, arguably due

to the ineptitude of the authorities and Lieutenant-Colonel Scanlan. Hank Nelson also points out that:

On Gallipoli, in Singapore or on Ambon, the Australians fought on foreign lands and as junior partners: the major decisions about the civil population and military planning and tactics were often controlled by others. On the Gazelle the Australians were the only troops, they controlled the civil administration, and they fought on land they had administered since 1914. But they had no home ground advantage.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, Margaret Reeson quotes ‘an Australian officer who escaped from Rabaul as saying “the abandonment of the European males and the Chinese population was scandalous”,’ and she argues that ‘The little Dunkirk of the islands was the triumph of independent initiative’ rather than due to action by authorities in Australia.<sup>105</sup>

There have been national commemorations for the fall of Singapore and the bombing of Darwin. Yet the fall of Rabaul – which occurred one month earlier and resulted in more than four times the number of victims as Darwin – has been marked only by a few quiet ceremonies, noted Nelson. He argues that part of the reason seems to be that there were relatively few survivors, and many of them remained so traumatised by what happened that they could hardly talk about it. Also, only four of the hundreds of European civilians who remained in Rabaul were alive at the end of the war. Consequently, most Australians know nothing about the first Japanese attack on Australian territory, the terrible murders, the tragedy of the *Montevideo Maru* or this critical time in our history.<sup>106</sup>

After decades of lobbying by relatives and others of the Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Society, in 2009 a plaque was unveiled at Subic Bay, Philippines, to honour the men lost in the sinking; in 2010 the Australian Government officially recognised the history and sacrifice resulting from the fall of Rabaul; and in 2012, Governor-General The Hon. Dame Quentin Bryce unveiled the Rabaul and *Montevideo Maru* Memorial in the grounds of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

No less incredible and shocking than, if not echoing, many awful stories of the *Shoah*, after 80 years’ silence this dreadful saga of eight Australian Jews on the opposite side of the world must also be heard. It exemplifies the courage and suffering of all of Lark Force’s soldiers and

families, who were caught in the extreme brutality and inhumanity of the paradoxically named ‘Pacific War.’<sup>107</sup>

### Acknowledgements

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- 90 It is likely that those witnesses were Leslie's mates, Thomas Brannelly and William Waugh, who eventually escaped New Britain and are in the photo on p. 486 of Erica Cervini's AJHS paper.
- 91 Cervini, 'Yizkor for Rose', Section Two, p. 32, PhD 2019.
- 92 Fact Sheet 61, *World War II War Crimes*, National Archives of Australia, accessed 2 February 2022, from [http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact\\_sheets/fs61.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/publications/fact_sheets/fs61.html)
- 93 Following nine months' active service with 47 Bn on Bougainville, N456894 Sergeant Philip Allen (1925–99, <https://www.ajhs.com.au/military-members/134/>) served with 31/51 Bn in Rabaul from September 1945 to June 1946 as part of the Australian garrison overseeing Japanese troops, prior to their repatriation. As well as images of war debris, natives and volcanoes, Philip's photo album includes pictures of Japanese prisoners queueing for trial by a military court. Hauntingly, I recall that he would not detail their war crimes to me.
- 94 All but three of the 26 attendees were Australian servicemen. 'Passover in New Britain', *HSA*, 12 April 1945.
- 95 Cervini, 'Yizkor for Rose', Section Two, p. 55.
- 96 Australian War Crimes Trials, see: <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au>  
137 Japanese war criminals were executed by military firing squads or by hanging. Australia maintained a prison for Japanese prisoners



- on Manus Island, New Guinea, pending returning them to Japan to complete their sentences in the early 1950s.
- 97 Honours and Awards, accessed 2 February 2022, from <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1574785?image=1>
  - 98 Letters To the Editor, 'Tribute To Jew', *The Australian Jewish News*, 29 January 1960.
  - 99 Of the sixteen pairs of brothers named on that Roll of Honour, Nathan and Albert Fernandez are one of three pairs that had one brother die in the First World War and the other die in the Second World War. See <sup>84</sup> re the Rosen brothers.
  - 100 'The Honourable David Mayer Selby, AM ED QC BA LLB HonD', *NSW Association of Jewish Service & Ex-Service Men & Women (NAJEX)*, accessed July 2, 2021, from <https://najex.org.au/hero/honourable-david-mayer-selby-ed-qc-ba-llb-hond-1906-2002/>.
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  - 102 Soldiers of Lark Force by John Winterbotham, Rabaul and Montevideo Maru Memorial, accessed 31 January 2022, from <https://memorial.org.au/Electronic/NominalRoll/index.html>
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  - 104 Nelson, 'The Troops, the Town and the Battle', p. 216.
  - 105 Margaret Reeson, 'A Very Long War: The Experiences Of The Families Of The Missing Men Of The New Guinea Islands, 1941–1995', p. 98 and p. 103, Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Australian National University, March 1996, from [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/144141/2/b19533111\\_Reeson\\_M.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/144141/2/b19533111_Reeson_M.pdf).
  - 106 Hank Nelson, 'The Tragedy of the Montevideo Maru. Time for Recognition.' Submission to the Commonwealth Government, November 2009.
  - 107 While the allies refer to the 'War in the Pacific', the Japanese use the term 'Pacific War'. Bullard, p. 9.

## DR HANS KIMMEL: ‘TWICE A NEW CITIZEN’

*Deborah Green*

### **ABSTRACT**

Dr Hans Kimmel was a Viennese Jewish lawyer born in Galicia who fled from Europe to Australia after the Anschluss, the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, arriving in Australia in 1939 with his family. His memoir titled ‘Twice a New Citizen’, located in the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, provides the basis for this article. The 180-page document details his life as a child and teenager in Galicia and Vienna, highlights antisemitism, the rise of Nazism and his early bouts of depression, a condition which severely affected the trajectory of his life over the subsequent sixty years. His years in Australia are well documented by Professor Suzanne Rutland, but through his own words, we can gain a better knowledge of his early years and a better understanding of his severe mental illness, enabling a fuller exploration of his life’s story and contributions to Sydney Jewry.

**KEYWORDS:** Antisemitism, Nazism, Dr Hans Kimmel, biography, mental illness, Australian Jewish refugees.

The name, ‘Hans Kimmel’ is well known in the Sydney Jewish community because the late Sophie Caplan chose to honour him with a Jewish history competition for Year 10 students at Moriah College, which has been running since she introduced the competition in 1975. Yet, his tragic story is not known and has not been published. This article seeks to fill this gap of the history of the man known as Sydney’s ‘stormy petrel.’<sup>1</sup> It is also important because of Kimmel’s contributions to the development of Sydney Jewry, despite his mental illness.

The story of Dr Hans Kimmel is a graphic illustration of a survivor

who suffered from mental illness, either caused or exacerbated by antisemitism, Nazism, displacement and emigration.<sup>2</sup> The issue of the impact of trauma and mental illness has been explored in detail in recent scholarship. In general, it is not possible to write openly about most of the cases of mental illness because of privacy issues, but the situation with Kimmel is different because his memoir, 'Twice a New Citizen: Reminiscences, 1895–1948', is publicly available and other archival sources are accessible. His story shines a light on antisemitism in Europe at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, the rise of Nazism, forced emigration, in his case to Australia, and the challenges faced by those with mental illness and their families.

The contextual setting for his early life in Galicia and Vienna helped shape the narrative of his life. Some of his quotes are used to share an appreciation of those times and to showcase his astute observations. His memoir was probably written when he moved to live in London later in life, but it was not discovered until well into the twenty-first century in archives in New York and Berlin. The memoir contributes much to the story of the *Anschluss* of Austria, desperate migration, his life in Sydney, and eventual departure to join his daughter and her family in London.

Multiple sources of information provide the background from which this article has been written and have enabled this specific case study of mental illness, an aspect which is normally difficult to explore because of privacy issues. His memoir showcases the issues experienced by many Jewish refugees from Nazism, such as exposure to hatred and antisemitism, poor health outcomes, separation, forced migration and exploration of survival for an educated Jewish refugee in a new homeland. In his memoir he created a much more complete picture of his life, especially in Galicia and Vienna, and subsequently in Sydney. Contemporaneous newspaper articles and notices, as well as the relevant file on him in the National Archives of Australia, add to our understanding of the shape and dimension of the achievements and tragedies of the Kimmel family, as does the archival documentation.

This was a man whose involvement in Jewish community life in Sydney has been documented by Suzanne Rutland in the history of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies and remembered through the Hans Kimmel essay competition, but whose background and trauma need to be better understood.

### Monasterzyska: The early years

Kimmel was born in Monasterzyska, Galicia around 1890. The town was under Austrian rule from 1772 until 1918 and was known to have had a Jewish population since 1625.<sup>3</sup> The main employment in town was with a tobacco factory and a toy factory.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the Holocaust, some 1,306 Jews lived there. Kimmel writes that in 1890 the Jewish community constituted some 2,450 members, or 56 per cent of the town's population.<sup>5</sup> There were four synagogues and a primary school funded by the Baron de Hirsch Fund. Moritz von Hirsch or Maurice de Hirsch was a German Jewish financier and philanthropist who set up charitable foundations to promote Jewish education and he donated £500,000 for the establishment of primary and technical schools in Galicia and Bukovina.<sup>6</sup> Kimmel's parents were Hermann and Sarah née Gruberg.<sup>7</sup> He was one of seven children and attended the *cheder*<sup>8</sup> and primary schools of the Baron Hirsch Foundation.

The historian, Omer Bartov, notes that by 1914, some 2,000 or 50 per cent of Monasterzyska was Jewish. The town was invaded twice by the Russians during World War One and the Jewish population was attacked, raped and murdered by Ukrainian nationalists. By the 1920s, the population of the town had halved. The Germans occupied Monasterzyska in July 1941, murdering Jews or transporting them to locations such as a mass killing site in Buchach or the Belzec camp.<sup>9</sup> The town was declared *Judenrein* by November 1942 and only 20 Jewish residents survived mostly by escaping to the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> Little is available on record about the struggles of families like the Kimmels and a monument in Hebrew is all that remains of the Jewish presence in Monasterzyska. Bartov observes that in the Ukraine 'this was no distant, neatly organised, bloodless bureaucratic undertaking, but a vast wave of brutal, intimate and endlessly bloody massacres.' Further, he observes that the history of Jewish residents and these events are not remembered or commemorated. His research indicates that, in the Ukraine, history has been discarded and reshaped to support the Ukrainian national identity and those who stole the land of Jewish citizens.<sup>11</sup>

In 1899 when free meals ceased at the Monasterzyska *cheder* school, Kimmel's parents, both aged 43, decided to move to Vienna with their three adult daughters and three children under eleven in search of a better life for the family. The cost of the third-class rail journey was

funded by their eldest son, Benjamin, then aged 21, who was working at an egg import firm in Dortmund, Westphalia.<sup>12</sup> The impending emigration to Vienna assumed high expectations.<sup>13</sup>

### **Life in Vienna**

A large-scale immigration of Jewish families into Vienna occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Most of those arriving from Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia took advantage of becoming part of a large city. However, Galicians like the Kimmels, as well as Russian and Polish Jews, were fleeing persecution and deprivation.<sup>14</sup>

The family settled in the second district called Leopoldstadt, a centre of Jewish activity, socialisation and business.<sup>15</sup> Kimmel was enrolled at the Jewish Talmud Torah<sup>16</sup> day school. The Kimmels struggled to make a living in Vienna by running a business selling butter, cheese and live fowls, but the business was uncompetitive because of their lack of experience. However, the two older sisters were able to obtain jobs which at least paid the rent on the Kimmel's house at 2 Kleine Pfarrgasse. Kimmel found it difficult to make friends and enjoy time with classmates due, in his opinion, to the fact that he could not speak the Viennese-German dialect. He noted that his sisters felt uncomfortable in the company of their co-workers who were mostly non-Jews.<sup>17</sup>

Summer in Vienna proved to be a positive period for Kimmel who was receiving good marks and proving to be a good student. He did envy the other students who had better clothes and food, were taken out by their parents and he also enjoyed no real contact with non-Jewish students. For the first time in his life he became aware of the different social classes in a city such as Vienna.<sup>18</sup> In July 1899, his father took him to undertake an examination for admission to the Sophien Gymnasium, the oldest secondary school in Vienna, founded in 1553. He was accepted to this highly regarded secondary grammar school despite his limited German.<sup>19</sup> Kimmel noted that this success should have lifted his spirits, but summer brought even more sadness for the family.

The second district where the Kimmels lived was overcrowded and the risk of transmission of infection was high. His youngest 'nice and clever one-year old sister developed whooping cough' which was raging in the community. The health inspector ordered an admission to the Children's Hospital where she died a few days later. Kimmel was always pleased he had the chance to kiss his much-loved sister at home in her

cot before her death in hospital. Then, his beautiful third oldest sister, aged 20, developed tuberculosis and died in hospital. Yet another sister, who was four years old, developed diphtheria but was treated in time and survived. He always recalled how deeply stricken his mother was after the double tragedy of losing two of her children.<sup>20</sup>

Much discussion ensued in the Kimmel household about whether they should return to Galicia. His sisters wished to stay in Vienna, but his mother wanted to go home. Given the two deaths and an inability to make a living, the family decided to return to Galicia. However, Kimmel's father recognised that his son was talented and wanted him to continue his studies in Vienna, so he was placed into the care of the academic painter, David Kohn. Kohn had been appointed as the *Kaiserlich und Königlich Hofmaler*, Imperial and Royal Artist to the Hapsburg Court. Like other successful Jewish Viennese residents, he was a generous benefactor, founding a home for children orphaned by pogroms in Eastern Europe and financially supporting the city's Talmud Torah School. He organised for Kimmel to continue attending this school and to board with an elderly widow in the Taborstrasse.<sup>21</sup>

At the age of 11, living without his family and after the loss of two much loved sisters, Kimmel described himself as 'beginning a very sad period where I took refuge in my studies.' He focussed his energy on learning German and pursuing his studies at the Talmud Torah. Kimmel achieved such good marks that he earned a scholarship to attend the Sophien Gymnasium, and though he tried to make friends among his Jewish colleagues, he was unsuccessful. Hence, Kimmel was not only isolated from his family but also isolated among his peer group in Vienna. As an excellent student, he was able to earn money by tutoring other students. In the evenings he enrolled in the Talmud school conducted by Lector M. Friedman.<sup>22</sup>

Kimmel wrote that if he had been asked what his guiding star during the years at the Viennese Gymnasium was, he would have said assimilation into the world of educated and enlightened Germans while remaining committed to be an Eastern-Jew with a special interest in all Yiddish public affairs.<sup>23</sup> This included following the sensational Dreyfus trial and its aftermath. Such events generated greater Jewish solidarity and introduced Kimmel to the concepts of Zionism and the pursuit of truth by the writer Emile Zola who challenged the enemies of Dreyfus.<sup>24</sup> Kimmel described the spread of Zionism into Jewish households and

schools and the creation of a group of well-educated young Jewish men who participated in serious discussion. Ideals of Zionism were reinforced by the painter Kohn, who ensured young Kimmel did not become estranged from his Jewish heritage and religion.<sup>25</sup> This was important as the early twentieth century was marked by the antipathy of the Catholic population towards the Jewish residents of Vienna.<sup>26</sup>

At this time a Lueger brand of violent antisemitism emerged in public places, highlighting the antipathy of the Christians towards the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Karl Lueger, the mayor, was a moderate Christian Socialist, but there existed an explicitly racial antisemitic wing of his Christian Socialist Party founded on the German Nationalist movement. The party's antisemitic platform was regarded as a key element of its electoral success. Lueger was an opportunistic, sophisticated Viennese politician who dealt effectively with the Jewish elite and businessmen of the city but also condoned antisemitic slander. He was an expert at manipulating professional envy and fear of Jewish competition.<sup>28</sup> His promotion of antisemitic and anti-intellectual rhetoric against poorer Jewish citizens of Vienna was reflected in the violent demonstrations in the streets.<sup>29</sup> The school Kimmel attended was in Taborstrasse, often the centre of antisemitic demonstrations. The Viennese Jews could not understand this hostility as they were often worse off than most other residents in the city of Vienna.<sup>30</sup>

Kimmel's description of the scenes he witnessed on the Taborstrasse raised fundamental questions about being a Jewish citizen in Vienna. Probably in response to the anti-Jewish rhetoric and demonstrations erupting in Vienna and across Europe, and the reactions of other Viennese Jews, Kimmel developed an interest in politics and the ideals of social democracy. He joined the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria founded by Dr Victor Adler, for whom he developed a great admiration. Adler had studied medicine at the University of Vienna, becoming a *moderate* charismatic social democrat, who successfully united the Austrian labour movement and contributed to Viennese cultural life. Kimmel attended meetings at which Adler spoke in a 'quiet dignified academic manner, presenting himself to the audience as a scholar and a sage.'<sup>31</sup> As a member of the Imperial Council parliament from 1905, his policies were founded on the values of reason, justice and nonviolent opposition to capitalism. Adler dedicated himself to humanistic goals, while Lueger utilised demagoguery and opportunism.

This stark contrast was visible to all on the streets and in the cafes of Vienna.<sup>32</sup>

At this stage in his life Kimmel became committed to the principles of social democracy, inclusion and justice. At school he benefited greatly from a number of outstanding teachers, gaining an appreciation for German literature and a growing interest in classical humanism. He completed exams for the leaving certificate and performed very well, matriculating to the University of Vienna. Although he could have selected any course of study including medicine, religion or philosophy, he chose the faculty of law. He rejected the possibility of studying medicine due to what he described as having 'an allergy to the pains of other people.'<sup>33</sup>

This was understandable given that the experience of separation from family and tragic losses experienced as a child created or contributed to long-term issues for Kimmel. Little research has been undertaken on this subject, but one study shows that social support is a key link between attachment and well-being. The findings show that the experience of separation from family can be associated with long-term psychological vulnerability due to insecure attachment.<sup>34</sup> Whilst direct conclusions cannot be drawn from such limited study, it is reasonable to suggest that being isolated from his family at a young age made Kimmel vulnerable to damage appearing as depression in adolescence.

### **The Kimmel family returns to Galicia**

Life in Galicia continued to be very difficult for many Jewish residents including the Kimmels. Kimmel himself noted that during 1904, a major fire destroyed almost half of the town of Monasterzyska, including most of the Jewish quarters, leaving families without homes. He sent to his family a few spare 'guilders' [coins] he had earned from tutoring in Vienna to help alleviate their terrible circumstances. At the same time, the marriage of his eldest sister was dissolved, and a condition was the return of her dowry of several hundred guilders, enabling the family to purchase a home.<sup>35</sup>

Kimmel visited his hometown and family during his mid-teens but described himself as suffering from depression throughout this period. This was the first occasion in which he recorded evidence of suffering from a mental illness. During the visit he noticed that many of the people he knew had emigrated out of Galicia. Every family had at least one member who had emigrated and every bit of spare money was saved



to fund the journeys due to the desolate situation in Galicia. Chosen destinations were Vienna, Germany and the United States.<sup>36</sup> In time, it became known that letters arriving on Saturdays often contained dollar notes from America. The postman, a Mr Strzelbicki became aware of this, opened letters and stole the dollars belonging to addressees. This was discovered, the thief was charged, imprisoned and lost his job as town postman.<sup>37</sup>

On this visit Kimmel estimated that more than half the population of the town was Jewish, and the remaining inhabitants were Poles and Ruthenians.<sup>38</sup> He noted relationships between the groups were very poor, a situation which had worsened in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when a monetary economy replaced the long-standing feudal system. Jews had developed roles as moneylenders, tavern keepers and estate owners in the Ruthenian villages. Ruthenian-Ukrainian newspapers began portraying the Jews as exploiters of the peasantry, trying to undermine Ruthenian culture and tricking them into tobacco and alcohol addiction. The starkest symbol of these allegations from both Polish and Ukrainian nationalists, was apparent in the role of Jews as tavern keepers.<sup>39</sup> However, the facts did not support these allegations in the Ruthenian media as it is estimated in 1902, only 15,000 out of close to a million Jews owned property in Galicia.<sup>40</sup> Kimmel saw Poles engaged in actions designed to exclude Jewish merchants from economic life, effectively creating poverty, suffering and compulsory migration for the Jewish community.<sup>41</sup> In writing about his hometown, Kimmel cites two texts which are Rabbi J. S. Bloch's memoir, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben* published by R. Loewit in 1922 and Professor Ismar Elbogen's *Die Neueste Construction der Jüdischen Geschichte*, published in Breslau, 1902

### **The University of Vienna**

The next phase of Kimmel's life was studying at the University of Vienna, where many of his professors were Jewish and his days were occupied with lectures on the history of German law and the Austrian empire. In the evenings he met with fellow Jewish students from Vienna, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia in cafés like Café Börse in Börsegasse, described as a meeting place for the 'Jewish-nations Association.' Cafes and salons had become the venues for the liberal cultural life of Vienna and the customers were often Jewish. Cafe Griensteidl was the popular choice for young literary Viennese. Based on descriptions by contemporaries,

the most significant contributors to Viennese cultural life in the early twentieth century were Jewish, and Kimmel was attracted to the cultural social life of the cafe.<sup>42</sup> He tried to connect with students from Galicia including newspaper editors and journalists and the *Association Bar Kochba*.<sup>43</sup> Here his interest in journalism began through his reading the two Jewish weeklies, the *Jewish Journal* and Dr Bloch's *Austrian Weekly*. He also attended performances at the Hofburgtheater where he heard stars such as Enrico Caruso.<sup>44</sup> This was an enjoyable time in his life as he studied criminal law and court processes, engaged in politics and experienced cultural activities.

However, during 1909, when he was in his late teens, he returned to Monasterzyska, describing himself as being in a bad psychological state. His doctor advised him to take a break from his studies for a four-week period, spending those weeks with his mother supporting him at Dorna Watra Bukowina spa in Romania.<sup>45</sup> He was given a cold-water treatment under medical care for an acute depressive illness. He duly returned to Vienna, finished his degree, graduated and completed the requirements towards a degree as a court practitioner and court recorder in the Civil and High Courts of Vienna. At this time, he lived in Josefstadt, the eighth district of Vienna. The name Josefstadt inspired his use of the pen name "Dr Joseph Staedter" as a columnist of the *Sydney Jewish News* after World War Two.<sup>46</sup> His first job was a concipient<sup>47</sup> in commerce in Westbahnin, Mariahilferstrasse and then he assumed a position in criminal law for several months.

### **The impact of World War One and the interwar period**

The outbreak of World War One meant his family had to leave their home in Galician Monasterzyska. They escaped the Russian invasion, which severely damaged the town and returned to Vienna. Little is known about their lives after arriving in Vienna. Kimmel reported that one sister did relocate to Berlin. No record of the Kimmels can be found in the Yizkor Memorial Book.<sup>48</sup>

Over 300,000 Jewish soldiers served in the Austro-Hungarian army and of those, 25,000 were reserve officers. It has been noted that they were less exposed to antisemitism when compared with other armies. Nonetheless they were not permitted to rise to the highest ranks of the army, although they served in the officer corps and the reserve.<sup>49</sup> Kimmel was required to present for military duties in 1915 and 1916 but was declared unfit for active duty. He did not explain in his memoirs

the health reason for this assessment. In 1917 his examination was postponed indefinitely. He became ill during May of that year, suffering from 'a state of exhaustion' with symptoms which made him 'incapacitated for professional duty with debility in body and mind.' His older brother provided funding for him to be taken initially to the nerve clinic or asylum of the *Allgemeine Krankenhaus* in Vienna. He then spent several months at the Sanatorium of Dr Weiss in Frohnleiten, Germany, but no improvement was noted. After a second admission to this clinic, he was judged sufficiently improved to resume his duties in the legal profession.<sup>50</sup>

However, instead of returning to the law he started publishing a weekly Jewish newspaper, mostly written by him but only published on six occasions. He did improve to the extent that he decided to return to the law by completing the solicitors' examination in July 1919. He began assisting some Jewish refugees as a part of his legal practice by advocating for their petitions to remain in Vienna. Life in Austria was very difficult for many, but especially for the refugees. Kimmel noted that initially there were attempts to move them on but with the onset of winter some pity for refugees did emerge from the police and officials.<sup>51</sup> During that winter of 1919, Kimmel renewed his acquaintance with Emmy Berger, a middle-class girl he had met at a solicitors' ball years earlier. The couple became engaged and were married in 1921 by the Rabbi of Währing, Dr David Feuchtwang, in the presence of 50 family members and friends. After a honeymoon in Germany, the couple moved into a new home furnished by the father of the bride.<sup>52</sup>

Kimmel's memoirs are divided into three parts, and it is at this point after marriage, that the first section concludes. His last chapter heading in this first section is *Marriage and Move to a New Home*, where he concludes on a positive note in celebration of his new life. This first section narrates the events up until 1921. The seminal events are emigration from Galicia with his family, separation from family at a young age, social isolation as a child and teenager, witnessing hatred and antisemitism and discovering the intellectual ideas and values that would inform his life. He documented his episodes of depression quite specifically and he must have felt great social isolation in Vienna, choosing to return to his family in Galicia for support. Interestingly, the only member of his family he ever mentions again is his older brother Benjamin.

### **The *Anschluss***

While the discussion of the early part of his life has been drawn from his memoirs, the story of the impact of Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938 and his decision to emigrate can be charted from a wider primary source base. In particular, the National Archives of Australia provides information about the family desire to emigrate to Australia and documents relating to his mental illness.

By 1938 the Jewish population of Vienna had decreased to about 175,000. However, there were a significant and growing number of Jewish organisations in the city. In total there were about 450, of which 90 were synagogues and temples and the Zionists had about 30 organisations.<sup>53</sup> The Jews of Vienna experienced a roller coaster of emotions as Hitler made various promises about the ongoing autonomy of Austria, but the Austrian government was progressively aligning with Nazi policies. Ultimately, the fate of Austria was irreversible and described by Kimmel as 'the rape of Austria by mighty Germany'. On Tuesday 14 February 1938, Hitler postulated that Austria should hand over the Departments of Foreign Affairs and the Police to the Nazis. On the 16 February the leaders of the trade unions, communists, fascists and socialists declared in a resolution to fight for Austria's independence with the calling of partial strikes,<sup>54</sup> but this declared resistance was to prove to be of no avail – less than a month later the *Anschluss* occurred.

On 12 March the fate of Austria and its Jews was sealed. After years of economic stagnation and Nazi propaganda, German troops entered Austria which was incorporated into Germany the next day. The Nazis occupied the Chancellery and shortly after began marching through Leopoldstadt shouting 'destruction to the Jews.'<sup>55</sup> The persecution of Jews commenced immediately with the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany with that date being known as the 'Anschluss'.<sup>56</sup> Jewish citizens of Vienna were in despair because following the Anschluss they lost their citizenship and became stateless refugees overnight. They began searching for countries that might offer refuge, but information about landing permits was difficult to obtain. Palestine was a possibility if family was already living there. Most South American countries proved difficult. England was a possible destination for women seeking domestic roles, but male refugees could not enter a trade or a profession.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, Jews were being eliminated from economic life and evicted from their businesses. Progressively and inexorably, life was

made more difficult and many were sent to the Dachau concentration camp.<sup>58</sup> Kimmel observed that 'every Nazi vested himself with the authority of a privileged executive organ over the rhythm of life of a Jewish inhabitant. Many sensitive individuals became melancholic and suicided.' Emigration became urgent and preferred countries were Palestine, the United States and in South America.<sup>59</sup> Kimmel was severely depressed again, so the plan to migrate was postponed until July 1939. Hans and Emmy had hoped to emigrate to the USA but did not have sufficient funds to gain a visa. However, they had enough money for an exit visa to Amsterdam and boat fares to Australia. While Australia was not their first choice, it seemed as though it may have been the Kimmel family's last chance to escape from Austria.

In August 1938, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) forwarded to the Commonwealth a Form 47 for the admission of the Kimmel family on economic grounds. Hans Kimmel was described as a Doctor of Laws and advised that the family intended to establish a factory of machine knitted dresses. The AJWS furnished their guarantee that Kimmel would be found employment in Adelaide without any disadvantage to local workers.<sup>60</sup> Approval was subject to furnishing £200 landing money and the Landing Permit 26975 was issued. Kimmel initially thought that he was too unwell to travel, having experienced 'a nervous breakdown', so Emmy sought to travel on her own with their two children and as a result the Passport Control Officer twice counselled against bringing the Kimmels to Australia because Kimmel was an invalid. In order to assist the immigration process, the AJWS advised that Emmy was the business head of the family.<sup>61</sup> In desperation Emmy sent a telegram to Australia saying 'husband recovered STOP May we use permit all together. Let us not starve here with children.'<sup>62</sup> Kimmel had been able to obtain a medical certificate from Dr Albert Schwarz, medical adviser to the British Consulate. It stated he did not suffer from a physical disease, was not mentally defective and had never been in a mental hospital.<sup>63</sup> As a result, the family's emigration to Australia was approved.

### **Emigration**

The family travelled to Amsterdam, where they had a break before boarding SS *Strathallan*, the last boat to arrive in Sydney before the outbreak of war. The boat was loaded with those fortunate enough to leave Europe, but it was a pleasant journey free of worries. They arrived in

Sydney on 19 July 1939 when Kimmel was 51, his wife was 43, Elisabeth Charlotte, 5 and brother, Friedrich Georg, 13. Kimmel recorded on his landing permit form that both his parents were deceased. An unnamed family arranged for their permit and greeted them on arrival with other members of the Jewish community.

As they had not been sponsored by the AJWS, they had to find work and a home immediately. This was, in fact, a very common occurrence in 1939. In the first six months of that year, of the 2,500 refugees who arrived in New South Wales, only 135 were sponsored by the AJWS. Sponsorship by the AJWS involved an undertaking that those refugees who were sponsored would not become a financial burden on the government for five years. However, the AJWS was directly responsible for obtaining 1,000 permits for up to 3,000 individuals and the Kimmels were amongst these numbers.<sup>64</sup> The Kimmels did not settle in Adelaide, and they did not open a factory to make knitted dresses. They remained in Sydney and began their new lives in the winter of 1939.

### **Life in Sydney**

Not surprisingly, the Kimmels experienced some difficulties settling into life in Sydney. Friends assisted in finding them a home in the southern beach suburb of Maroubra and they then relocated to 343 Pennant Hills Road, Pennant Hills where they lived for many years. Kimmel felt that he was too unwell to work but was anxious for his wife to find an occupation. She was a graduate of the Wiener Conservatorium of Music and sought to establish herself as a singing teacher. To supplement the family income, Friedrich had to leave the Technical College in which he had enrolled to gain an apprenticeship as a toolmaker. Kimmel was hoping to seek employment as an office clerk or a secretarial role in a Jewish organisation. However, the level of his English knowledge, as he described it, was equivalent to that of a primary school student and for this same reason he could not even consider seeking to prequalify for the profession of law.<sup>65</sup> This would have required a further three years of study, as European law degrees were not recognised in New South Wales. The legal profession, like the medical profession, worked to prevent any potential competition. There were a large number of lawyer refugees from Germany and Austria who found it difficult to gain employment in their profession.<sup>66</sup>

To add to their difficult situation, within three months of arrival in Sydney, Kimmel was admitted to Broughton Hall mental hospital

in Rozelle with acute melancholia. It was noted in his records that the patient had a history of the disease prior to arriving in Australia although he had provided the authorities a medical certificate of fitness prior to departure. As an ineligible patient and given that he did not have Australian citizenship, he was required to pay fees, though correspondence shows that neither the family nor the AJWS contributed to the costs. Although deportation was contemplated at this time and subsequently, it was not considered practicable.<sup>67</sup> In its letter, the hospital noted that, while the AJWS did not furnish a guarantee for the Kimmels to emigrate to Australia, the Society might help fund treatment,<sup>68</sup> but it appears that no reply was received.

After his discharge Kimmel took on a part time role working for Dr Itzhak (Isaac) Nachman Steinberg on the monthly paper *The Australian Jewish Forum*.<sup>69</sup> Steinberg had been a leading Russian social revolutionary before the 1917 Revolution and served as Justice Minister in Lenin's first cabinet. When Steinberg arrived in Sydney in 1939, he noted the lack of Yiddish social and cultural activity and so, with other like-minded refugees, he established the Jewish Folk Centre in 1941. Steinberg and others then became important voices of the Centre in seeking to reform the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies to create a more representative democratically elected organisation.<sup>70</sup> *The Forum* was established in 1941, under the editorship of Steinberg and continued to be published until 1949.<sup>71</sup>

During this period Kimmel also worked for the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund (UJORF), which sent care parcels of food and clothing to alleviate suffering in Europe. By 1941 his English had improved, and he began writing for the *Sydney Jewish News*, initially earning £1.1.0 per week. The paper discussed issues of interest including debates about Zionism.<sup>72</sup> Whilst this was a time for Kimmel to use his journalistic skills and earn a salary, these were times of sadness as they discovered many of Emmy's family had died in Theresienstadt, the concentration camp outside Prague.<sup>73</sup>

In August 1941, Kimmel had another episode of severe depression, and he was admitted to Gladesville mental hospital, remaining there until May 1942. He was eventually granted a leave of absence and discharged six months later. His treating doctor diagnosed manic depressive psychosis from which he was likely to recover but was also likely to suffer a relapse.<sup>74</sup> No financial contribution was made again for



this protracted admission and, under Section 8 of the Immigration Act, he was liable to deportation though this again was not enforced.<sup>75</sup> With the situation during the war, it was deemed impractical to deport him despite the fact that this was a potential course of action because he was an ineligible patient. During these years the Deputy Master in Lunacy made representations to the Collector of Customs concerning the collection of funds but to no avail. As such, these costs had to be absorbed by the hospital.<sup>76</sup> As the available public records do not include any correspondence about Kimmel's mental health between 1942 and 1945, it is not possible to ascertain what occurred during those intervening years. However, given the frequency of his episodes in adolescence and after emigration, it seems likely he required admission to a mental hospital every second year.

Somehow the family managed to survive economically, with Emmy making string shopping bags as well as teaching singing, while Fredrich enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). The end of the war should have brought some relief to the family, but in September 1945, tragedy hit again. Whilst on leave from the RAAF Fredrich was killed while riding a bicycle on Pennant Hills Road on 29 September 1945.<sup>77</sup> Kimmel placed an advertisement in newspapers seeking witnesses to the accident.<sup>78</sup> His obituary noted that he had studied at the Cleveland St. Technical School in Redfern and that he demonstrated great ability in electrical and optical science and musical studies. It went on to state that on completion of his high school studies, he chose to serve his adopted country and joined the Royal Australian Airforce (RAAF). In a short time, he was promoted to the rank of corporal, while at the same time continuing his musical studies, having been awarded a scholarship in pianoforte at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Further tragedy followed in 1947 when the family became aware that Emmy's mother had died in 1942. They posted a notice in the newspaper remembering Emmy's tender and devoted mother, Jeannette, who died in a concentration camp on 13 October 1942.<sup>79</sup> 1947 was a significant year because the Kimmels received their Australian certificates of naturalisation after seven years in the country trying to rebuild their lives.<sup>80</sup>

During the year of 1953 both Emmy and Hans Kimmel had books published. Firstly, Emmy Kimmel wrote *The Art of Perfect Voice Production*, a book which was to be published in Vienna. She travelled by herself on the *Port Napier* in August of that year to Vienna, where

she was planning to supervise the publication of her book. The article published about her departure noted that she thanked patrons and friends for their confidence and kindness, who took great interest in her plans.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile Hans Kimmel released his first volume of *Sydney's Jewish Community* under his name and his pen name Dr Joseph Staedter.<sup>82</sup> The book is a record of the activities in Jewish life between 1948 and 1952 and consists of his various articles published during those years in the local Jewish press, as well as other material he considered of interest.<sup>83</sup>

Kimmel enjoyed describing the cultural life of the emigres in Australia, such as *Das Kleiner Wiener Theater* or Viennese theatre and Yiddish theatre groups. He also wrote about the various Jewish philanthropic organisations, cultural institutions and religious life in Sydney. However, involvement in the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies was a major feature of his life and a passionate commitment which manifested itself during the early 1950s.<sup>84</sup>

### **The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies**

The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies was established in 1945 as the peak group representing Jewish interests for the community and as an avenue to speak out against racism and discrimination.<sup>85</sup> As originally constituted, it did not achieve the aspirations for democratic representation, whereby most of the deputies would be selected by a general franchise vote. For its first seven years, 75 per cent of deputies were selected by member groups or indirect appointment and 25 per cent of deputies were elected by general franchise.<sup>86</sup> Kimmel began making representations and consistently expressed his opposition to the original 1945 constitution, describing the campaign for democratisation as 'considerable and formidable' and that 'no chance was lost to remind the Board of its illegal composition'.<sup>87</sup>

At the January 1953 meeting, he moved a motion to set up a standard for candidates, a motion that apparently caused heated debate.<sup>88</sup> He noted that of 6,000 potential voters, only 500 participated, and argued the lack of financial support forthcoming from the Jewish community for the activities of the Board was a reflection of the lack of democratic participation.<sup>89</sup> The Board President Horace Newman was critical of Kimmel at this time, declaring 'Dr Kimmel has appointed himself communal witch doctor, a sort of Jewish Senator McCarthy. I have given a fair ruling and Dr Kimmel is splitting hairs'.<sup>90</sup>

A second area of the constitution which concerned Kimmel was the process by which a Deputy could be suspended or terminated. A constitutional amendment for the removal from office of a deputy was agreed at a special meeting in November 1954. However, Newman also used this meeting as an opportunity to speak out about the conduct of Kimmel. He claimed that 'Kimmel deliberately defies the Chair's rulings and creates disorder and confusion whenever he is not pleased.' He went on to note that the debates of the Board had descended into 'contempt and disrepute' due to Kimmel. Referring to the October meeting, he said the 'Board witnessed scenes unparalleled in history'<sup>91</sup> whenever Kimmel disagreed with the rulings. Patience ran out for this conduct and at the January meeting in 1955, Sydney Einfeld, member of the Executive, moved a motion that Kimmel be suspended, and this motion was carried unanimously. It was concluded this action proved effective as, when Kimmel returned, he was no longer disruptive.<sup>92</sup>

As described by Rutland and Caplan in their history of the Board, *With One Voice*, Kimmel disrupted many Board meetings, but it also seems that he was able to accelerate the process of democratic reform. It took some time for the Board to introduce reforms to create a more democratic election process. Finally, a proposal was adopted to allow for 50 per cent of the 120 deputies to be selected by general franchise every two years. Kimmel sought to amend these reforms by arguing for 80 Deputies with only 35 per cent representing member organisations and for the adoption of a three-year term. In fact, the three-year term was approved in 1955. A further reform was also adopted to endorse the use of suspension rather than expulsion of a deputy. The new Board, which was elected in 1955, chose Kimmel as chairman of the Constitutional Committee, a decision that surprised many. He served in that capacity until he suffered another episode of depression in 1956 when he sought a leave of absence and ultimately submitted his resignation in June 1956.

Rutland described Kimmel as 'stormy petrel' who demanded direct and universal franchise.<sup>93</sup> He was a strong advocate for democratic reform and a key figure during the debates around the constitution of the board. This is not surprising given his legal background and his adoption of social democratic principles as a teenager in Vienna. In his own discussion of those years, Kimmel judged this an important battle fought over several years, despite his health problems. This fight

for constitutional reform was his legacy to the development of Sydney Jewry. Whether his behaviour at meetings was in part due to his mental health problems is perhaps difficult to judge but his commitment to effecting change was a hallmark of his participation in Sydney's Jewish communal life. This period in Kimmel's life was a unique opportunity to utilise his legal qualifications as a means to critically review the constitution of the Board and to use his reporting skills as a journalist to publicly express his views in the *Sydney Jewish News*.

### **The later years**

In 1956, Kimmel was assessed as too old and too unwell at the age of 67 to be employed and was therefore recommended for an invalid pension which was approved.<sup>94</sup> During that year his daughter, Elisabeth, married Dr Jeffrey J. Segall. She moved to London, and they resided at 308 Cricklewood Lane.<sup>95</sup>

In 1957, Kimmel had several admissions to various private hospitals and was provided with a total of over £250 for medical assistance, hospital care and relief by the AJWS.<sup>96</sup> This was a challenging period for the Kimmels who decided to join their married daughter Elisabeth in London in 1958. His poor mental health continued in London but little more is recorded about his life after leaving Australia. It is known he began writing more articles, this time about the British Board of Deputies, arguing for more democracy in representative organisations of British Jews. He published an article titled 'The Board of Deputies of British Jews; 1945–1968'.<sup>97</sup> He also wrote his memoirs in London. The first section focussed on his family in Europe, and the last two sections dealt with general observations about Jewish community life in Australia. These latter chapters commented on Yiddish culture at the Jewish Folk Centre, various Jewish educational organisations, the National Council of Jewish Women and prominent members of the community. Hans Kimmel died in October 1970 aged 81. This was four years before compensation for a diagnosis of mental illness was awarded to eligible survivors.

### **Conclusion**

The Kimmels left Galicia to seek a better life free of antisemitism. In Vienna they lived in an overcrowded district where contagious disease flourished and as a result two of their children died and a third also almost lost her life. Kimmel's father's decision to leave his eleven-year-old

son in Vienna when they moved back to their hometown, may have advanced his educational opportunities, but coping with the grief of losing siblings and leaving him alone without his family support, must have been deeply distressing for him. He proved to be a dutiful child who successfully completed secondary and tertiary studies alone without the support of his family. However, by the age of eighteen he began to experience bouts of depression. His story illustrates the struggle with the burden of chronic mental illness, although he still married, had a family and with them, escaped Nazism. Australia was the country that showed the Kimmel family compassion, despite wanting to deport him, and he created a life as a writer and advocate for democratic representation in Jewish Sydney.

Kimmel became acquainted with Vienna's educated and sophisticated Jewish citizens and enjoyed the support of renowned painter David Kohn. He witnessed growing antisemitism and hostility especially of Catholics towards Eastern Jews and developed an early commitment to Zionism. Ultimately, he experienced Nazism, forced emigration and expulsion from his European life. This was the beginning of an exploration of the meaning of survival for one of the many educated Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis, with those who arrived on Australian shores enriching the general Australian cultural, intellectual and economic life, as well as establishing the basis for the transformation of the Jewish community, including the formation of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. Hans Kimmel made significant contributions to these developments within the community. His main legacy is contributing to the functioning of the Jewish Board of Deputies as the representative body of the community in New South Wales. Indeed, in recent years all the Jewish Board presidents have come from the general franchise, rather than from representatives of member organisations, enabling a young, dedicated leadership to emerge.

Kimmel concluded in his memoirs that, while initially the refugees were viewed as very foreign by Sydney Jews, in time they became accepted in accordance with the principles of equality and camaraderie. Kimmel's reflections on his adopted country are summarised by his words, 'refugees adjusted themselves to the Australian way of life dominated by principles of equality, freedom and humanitarianism.'<sup>98</sup> These are the same principles which were embraced by Kimmel during his early life in Vienna.

Despite the difficulties Kimmel faced due to his mental illness, his newspaper columns and two published books in the 1950s provide an important source for historians of the Sydney Jewish community. The late historian, Sophie Caplan, decided to name the family history essay she sponsored at the largest Jewish school in Sydney, Moriah College, in his honour. As a result, his name is well known in the Sydney Jewish community to this day. This article provides insight into his background and struggles with mental illness and adds to our knowledge of mid-twentieth century Jewish Sydney and the ways in which one survivor, despite multiple periods of incarceration in mental hospitals, contributed to the transformation of the community from an isolated, assimilated Anglo-Celtic enclave to the vibrant Jewish centre that it is today.

## Endnotes

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He clearly intended to publish more volumes, since he called the publications 'Australian Jewish Community Series,' but only the two volumes appeared.

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## A TALE OF THREE CITIES: 1940–89: RABBI DR ALFRED FABIAN'S AUSTRALIAN MINISTRY

*Miriam I. Frommer*

### ABSTRACT

This year it will be 33 years since Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian's passing. The title 'A Tale of Three Cities' was chosen for this historical overview of his ministry in three Australian Orthodox congregations in recognition of the invaluable resource of his 1979 private autobiography of the same name. This provided both detailed factual material on the major external events of this part of his life, as well as reflective insights into their significance for him. To complement this Australian story, the foundational experiences of his life growing up in Europe between the wars are described in his 'Personal Story' on the 'Stories' section of the AJHS website, titled 'From Breslau to Down Under', based on an oral history recorded in 1981. These sources have been drawn on in the compilation of a private memoir 'A Drama in 5 Acts: The Life and Times of Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian ED OBE' into which original documentation has been integrated, some of which has been used to illustrate this article, with the last Act covering the period until his death in 1989.

**KEYWORDS:** Biography, Congregations, Alfred Fabian, Adelaide SA, Brisbane Qld, North Shore Sydney NSW

### Introduction

*A time of war, and a time of peace  
(Koheleth/Ecclesiastes 3.8)*

The great upheaval of the past two years with the COVID-19 pandemic has produced heightened awareness of what is most valuable in people's

lives – their family, friends and community. These were the drivers of Rabbi Fabian's life; they underpinned his professional roles and provided him with the support and inspiration to fulfil his chosen mission as a rabbi in three Australian communities – Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney. Having been a scholar of ancient languages, he viewed Jewish history against the background of great powers like Greece and Rome, while his own life history, like that of so many Jews of his generation, was divided between a 'before' and an 'after' chapter, with World War Two intervening.

The first chapter of his life, growing up in Germany, is described in detail in his 'Personal Story' on the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) website.<sup>1</sup> When the Nazis came to power and he realised he would be unable to practise the profession of jurist in which he had qualified in 1933, Rabbi Fabian undertook studies at the Breslau Theological Seminary, where he obtained his *semicha* as a rabbi on almost the last day of 1938. With the financial help of an American relative whom he had never met, he succeeded in embarking for Shanghai in May 1939, only to receive a telegram when about to board the ship in Surabaya, that his fiancée, Ilse Sternberg, had succeeded in obtaining a permit for him to come to Australia as well. He finally arrived in Sydney shortly before the outbreak of war in Europe, on 11 July 1939, little realising then that he would 'arrive' there again 25 years later as a rabbi at Sydney's North Shore Synagogue.

### **Sydney, 1939–40**

For his first 18 months in Australia, Rabbi Fabian worked in various positions in Sydney, including as a de facto Assistant Minister at the Temple Emanuel, where he conducted some services and taught in the Sunday school as well as for the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education. He gave a good number of private lessons, solemnised his first marriage, and delivered his first sermon in English at the first anniversary service for *Kristallnacht*. It was made clear that he had been engaged partly with a view to increasing the size of the congregation by gaining new members from amongst refugees like himself. During this time, he was hoping to earn enough to soon proceed with his marriage. As detailed in his 'Personal Story', after applying for the position of 'Officiating Minister' in the Adelaide Jewish Congregation, supported by several references from Germany, he was engaged to assist in their High Holyday services in 1940, ultimately securing this position in

November. Of interest is a confidential letter from the president, Mark Hains, raising the issue of rabbinical degrees which were not recognised in the British Empire, and asking Rabbi Fabian to explain his position to Rabbis Freedman and Danglow. It is interesting to note that, in this regard, there was also a query with respect to the status of Rabbi Dr Israel Porush and his rabbinical and doctorate degrees. Rabbi Fabian was asked to consult all the rabbis necessary 'to ascertain the procedure to be adopted to bring about recognition if possible'.<sup>2</sup>

### **Adelaide, 1940–47**

*Seek peace and pursue it*  
(Psalm 34)

The war years spent in Adelaide in Rabbi Fabian's first Australian ministry were a time of establishing roots in his newly adopted country in both the Jewish and outside worlds. There were many differences between the local expectations of a rabbi and those with which he had been familiar in Europe, where Jews were automatically registered in their communities; the parochial attitude to 'newcomers' and those who had 'married out' were recurring themes that he faced, and with which he had to deal. He was puzzled by the fact that only paid-up members were entitled to any rabbinic ministrations, even though among the non-members were newcomers who could not afford synagogue membership and non-Jews married to Jewish partners. He observed the great bitterness and emotional reactions over these issues that was far beyond any rational approach, but he tried to institute positive remedies in such cases and adopt a humane attitude, rather than expose potential members to 'the dead hand of rejection'. His comment that only one man actually walked to *shule* on Shabbat, and he 'was regarded as an exceptionally *froom* man' reveals just one aspect of the huge culture shock which he faced.

### **The war comes to South Australia**

With the onset of World War Two, Rabbi Fabian's work covered army chaplaincy in addition to the major areas of Jewish and wider communal activities and Palestine/Israel. With the arrival of American troops after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, this included liaison with his American counterparts, and broadened his exposure to the particular geographical challenges of this large continent. By dint of his keen desire to assist fellow Jews, he became a de facto Jewish chaplain

(despite opposition from Rabbi Jacob Danglow, the Senior Jewish Chaplain), conducting religious and counselling services for American servicemen, delivering public lectures, and welcoming them into his home. This very fruitful liaison with his American colleagues was exemplified when he accepted an offer of transport in their staff car despite not having a permit to visit the Jewish servicemen. He observed that he felt this ‘should have been the official attitude of Jewish leadership in this country’. Religious services would have benefited from his Prayer Book for Jewish Members of HM Forces 5701–1941, which states in a Preparatory Note that ‘This Prayer Book is substantially the same as that issued in the latter part of the Great War. English Translation is taken from the Authorised Prayer Book of the Chief Rabbi’.

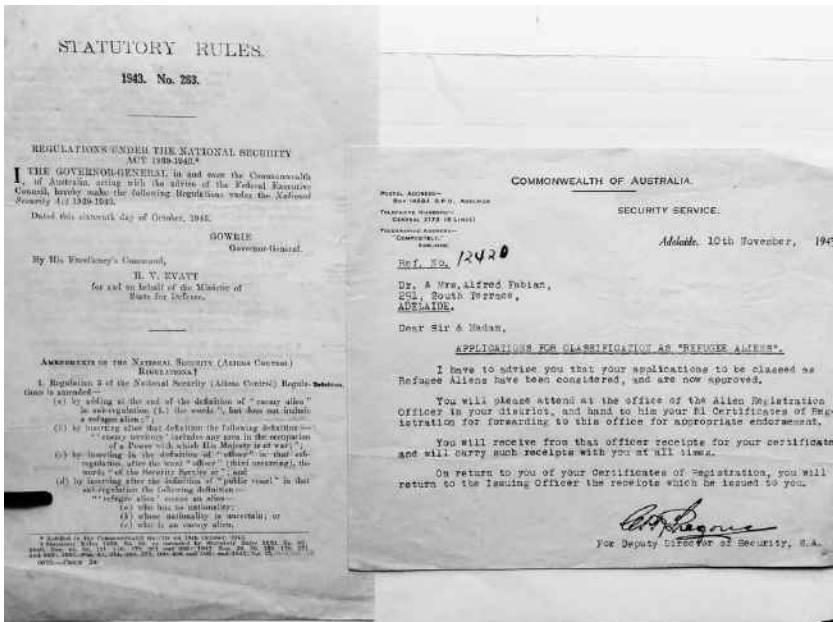
### **Enemy or refugee?**

Like refugee Jews in other parts of Australia, as well as in other countries, Rabbi Fabian came up against the official labelling of ‘enemy alien’. He endeavoured to rectify this by writing to various government officials, so that people like him would not be lumped into the same category, and sometimes forced to live in the same locations, as Nazi sympathisers. The very first entry in his book *An Australian Ministry*,<sup>3</sup> a selection of his sermons, addresses and articles from the years 1940 to 1979, is his letter to the main local newspaper, *The Advertiser*, entitled ‘The Martyred Race’, in which he expresses appreciation for an editorial which stated that ‘every Jew who has been hounded out of Germany by the Nazis is necessarily an implacable enemy of that country’.

Aspects of this controversial topic are covered in two articles in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* [AJHSJ]<sup>4</sup> and a 2017 book on Jews in the Australian Military,<sup>5</sup> while Rabbi Fabian opines that the negative public sentiment towards refugees was ‘symptomatic of the whole climate of “refugee treatment” in those years where the strongest opposition always came from our own ranks’. Incredibly, he was also among those under surveillance by the Department of Internal Security for Communist or Revisionist Zionist tendencies, as occurred with many key Jewish leaders and communal organisations at this time because the Australian security officers equated Zionism with Communism.<sup>2</sup> He describes the necessity to exercise care when quoted in the local press about ‘developments in Palestine and the issues of Jewish Terrorism directed against the British’, although his easy access to the *Advertiser* staff resulted in many items being published verbatim.



Rabbi Fabian also visited Loveday internment camp to deliver the German and Italian Jewish internees a *Torah* and other religious items, and later to conduct a *Chanukah* service. He wrote letters on behalf of the relatives of particular Jewish internees, including the musician, Werner Baer. He expressed his delight when these endeavours bore fruit and the previous 'enemy aliens' classification was changed to 'refugee' aliens in his correspondence of July and August 1942 with South Australian Premier Thomas Playford and Federal Minister for the Army, Frank M. Forde. At that time, he was also officially registered to celebrate marriages. The final stamp of approval came in a letter of 10 November 1943 from the Deputy Director of Security in South Australia, when the erstwhile 'enemy' aliens became 'friendly' ones instead!



*Statutory Regulation gazetting the exemption of refugees from the designation 'enemy' and notification of Rabbi Fabian's changed status at the end of 1943*

One interesting aspect of his special treatment by the authorities is revealed in his correspondence requesting exemptions from wartime restrictions, such as using a broadcast receiver at home in January 1943 and travelling within the metropolitan area except between midnight and 5 am, at a time when there was an earlier night curfew in Adelaide.

Another endeavour to change his status, which gave him tremendous satisfaction on its successful completion, was that of his naturalisation as an Australian citizen, initiated in July 1944 and finally achieved in October 1945, at which time he was told to surrender his Aliens Registration Certificate as he was no longer subject to National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations.

Towards the end of the war, he participated in a Commemoration for President Franklin Roosevelt, after which the American Consul expressed his thanks for the very moving synagogue service. During that year and the following, he also received numerous invitations to official functions under the auspices of the then Governor-General of Australia, the Duke of Gloucester, as well as the Mayor of Adelaide. Both in Adelaide and later in Brisbane, he had the opportunity to meet VIPs from all walks of life, being the one and only rabbi in each of the cities to represent the Jewish community, with these experiences contributing to a very rich and varied life.

### **Jewish communal affairs**

Within the Jewish community, as well as the traditional activities associated with synagogue services and pastoral care, Rabbi Fabian was particularly focused on education, with a soft spot for sport among the youth. He travelled extensively on public transport, both inside and outside the city boundaries, stating that:

Every time I trotted from one tram to another, in temperatures perhaps over the century, to try and teach one child in a far-away School for half an hour, I felt immensely elated that my personal exertion may have meant the difference between disappearance and continued identity, even if only for a single Jewish child.

Children's participation in synagogue services was encouraged by arranging special High Holyday services conducted by older children, with his part confined to a brief talk. He also introduced a Dedication or Presentation ceremony for girls on *Shavuot*, where he emphasised that 'the value of such a service was not in the glamour of the occasion, but its preparatory course of special instruction.' The girls recited passages like the Ten Commandments in Hebrew and English, as well as a special Prayer, and paragraphs they had written themselves on subjects they had studied, a formula which he later continued very successfully in Brisbane.

## Personal

The Fabians lived a one-mile flat walk to the synagogue in a rented property at 291 South Terrace, which they were later able to purchase. It became the venue for a style of home entertaining which continued in their homes in other cities. This was an 'At Home' on Sunday afternoons, when congregants were welcome to drop in for tea and homemade cake, and where the refugee 'newcomers' could meet the established residents. One important acquisition which further contributed to their enjoyment was a piano on which Rabbi Fabian played as both accompanist and soloist at fund-raising concerts in their home. He and Ilse prided themselves on treating everyone alike and not favouring any particular group, with Rabbi Fabian reflecting that 'I still feel that some of our success in the Ministry stems from this essentially Jewish and truly democratic approach'. It was a philosophy which continued to underpin their interpersonal relations for the rest of their lives, resulting in an affection on the part of many ex-congregants which persisted throughout the decades. After their first two daughters were born, the strand of family life was added to their activities, already then being given central place as a source of great joy and satisfaction.

## Interstate visits

Rabbi Fabian was 'rather overawed' when he was required to deliver his first public address at the Centenary of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation Toorak Road in July 1941. He describes one of the very rare coincidences of his life, when he happened to pick up a Torah from among the 20 laid out for the procession, only to be confronted by a man who asked him tearfully whether he remembered him. It transpired that this man had been on the same Dutch liner en route from Europe, and that Rabbi Fabian had read from this very Torah during a *Shavuot* service he had organised for the Jewish passengers. The man had disembarked in Colombo, but later made his way to Australia, where he had donated his Torah to this Melbourne congregation. Rabbi Fabian also made the acquaintance of Abe Newhouse at a Federal Zionist Conference in 1944, which helped pave the way to his next rabbinic appointment.

## Working for Palestine

One special wartime responsibility which Rabbi Fabian faced was the ongoing need to support the *Yishuv*, the Jewish community in

Palestine, during the period when the British opposed migration, and he began reaching out to other religious denominations. This ecumenical aspect of his ministries was one which set him apart from most Orthodox rabbis of the time, and yet was integral to his philosophy as a cosmopolitan person who sought to build bridges of peace between people of differing backgrounds. He became particularly interested in the Christadelphians and their strong commitment to the return of the Jews to their homeland in Palestine, as he began his advocacy for the cause of the Jewish state, which was to become a core part of his life's work.

However, within the Jewish community there was quite pronounced opposition to giving for Palestine, with the main counterarguments being its limited absorptive capacity and possible conflict of interest from 'double loyalties'. He records that 'at a time of extreme distress and urgent need for the Jewish people' there was only a very small financial response compared to 'American Jewry's rather unlimited generosity'. The South Australian Branch of the Australia-Palestine Committee eventually became functional in June 1944, with the intention of appealing to the British government to abrogate its 1939 White Paper on Palestine, which limited the total number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine to 75,000 over five years, after which Jewish migration was to cease. There were regrettable excuses from prominent Australian Jews, including Sir Isaac Isaacs, who was a leading opponent of political Zionism and the struggle to create a Jewish state during and after the war.

### **Fighting for Jewish survival**

Rabbi Fabian believed he had a special duty to awaken the conscience of the world to the plight of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, having so nearly been one himself, and having been an eyewitness to the pre-war conditions in Nazi Germany. He reflected that 'My only handicap at the beginning was the lack of fluency in English, but it did not take me very long to overcome this difficulty which decreased to the same degree as occasions for public speaking increased.' One of his earliest addresses (1940) was 'Challenge to Religion', where he described his personal experience of utter horror when he saw the Breslau Great Synagogue going up in flames on *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi pogrom of November 1938, and recalled the words inscribed on the dome, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. He outlined the attitude of the Nazi regime

to different Christian denominations, praising Pastor Niemöller for his principled resistance. After the Fall of France in 1941, he spoke on 'Idols and Ideals' to the Adelaide Rotary Club. Having suggested the formation of 'a united front of all denominations, groups and individuals who proclaimed the ideals of humanity', he found himself in demand as a speaker at a range of communal organisations and delivered an address on 'Humanity at the Crossroads' in the same year.

### **Using the media**

Rabbi Fabian ensured that he conveyed the tragedy of the Holocaust and other key messages through both the press and radio. His speeches to Jewish audiences during special wartime Services of Intercession were frequently quoted in the mainstream media, and he had the great good fortune to be able to act as a public relations spokesman by giving regular talks on Station 5KA. There were thus many different types of occasions where he was able to communicate his ideas to a wider audience, speaking on such topics as 'Our Spiritual Freedom' at a local church, and 'Israel's Extremity' in a March 1944 broadcast. In a deeply passionate and stirring call to arms, he stated that three of the six to eight million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe had reportedly already been murdered, and that, despite a strong denunciation of the Nazis in the British House of Commons in December 1942, and 'a wave of sympathy with suffering Jewry sweeping the globe', what was needed was not pity but constructive action, which had been thus far sadly lacking. He concluded by demanding that 'all decent and fair-minded citizens within the United Nations [then League of Nations]' immediately offer a helping hand, as 'the present struggle... must not have room any more for racial or religious discrimination'.

### **First Conference of Australian Jewish Ministers, Sydney, March 1946**

In 1946 Rabbi Porush of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, called the first Australia-wide conference of Jewish ministers. Rabbi Fabian delivered a paper at this new forum, on 'Eretz Israel as a Religious Factor', illustrating the depth of his commitment to religious Zionism already at this early stage of his Australian ministry. He stated that the fundamental basis of his reflections was 'the evidence from ancient testimony and from Jewish history that Palestine, or rather, Eretz Israel, has occupied a central place in Jewish religious life and thought from the beginning of our existence until this very day'. He emphasised the organic,

uninterrupted continuity of Jewish life in that land, stating that ‘If Jews could not live there – in the instability of the medieval world – they at least wanted to die there’. After pointing out that ‘a full observance of Jewish law and custom is impossible outside of Palestine’, he proceeded to describe ‘the part that Eretz Israel can play in the modern regeneration of Judaism’. In conclusion, he challenged the Australian rabbis to be no less courageous than the London Beth Din, which had produced a statement condemning the closing of Palestine to Jewish refugees from the Nazi regime.

### **Brisbane, 1946–62**

*Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are  
peace  
(Hillel, Ethics of the Fathers)<sup>6</sup>*

In his Brisbane section of his autobiography, Rabbi Fabian wrote:

To sum up our Brisbane relationship with the Community: – Somehow, from the very outset, the two sides – Rabbi and Congregation – clicked beautifully and perfectly. It was a mutual feeling of equal and harmonious partnership out of which, we all felt, something worthwhile would emerge and, in fact, did emerge over the long and happy period of our Brisbane ministry.

This quote illustrates the flavour of this phase of Rabbi Fabian’s Australian ministry seen in the many different phases of his work in Brisbane.

### **Jewish communal affairs**

A significant factor in the very positive relationship Rabbi Fabian had with the community was the broad sweep of backgrounds among his congregants, where European refugees who arrived just before and after World War Two joined a community with a core of Australian Jews going back several generations, and a Yiddish-speaking group originating largely from Russia at the turn of the century. By the end of his tenure there were three synagogues in the Orthodox tradition – the original Margaret Street in the CBD, Deshon Street in South Brisbane, and the Gold Coast located at Surfers’ Paradise. They were characterised by a cohesiveness and commitment which produced a vibrancy out of proportion to their relatively small numbers.



*Margaret Street Synagogue  
Brisbane, now (2019) hemmed in  
by skyscrapers.*



*Foyer with central tablet listing  
Queensland Jewish men who 'voluntarily  
joined the forces of H.M. King George  
V to defend the Empire and uphold the  
cause of righteousness in the Great War  
1914–1919. 5674–5679'. Surrounding  
stained glass memorials honour lives lost  
in both world wars and in the Nazi ghettos  
and concentration camps, and a plaque  
commemorates the Anzac Centenary in  
2015.*

Once again Rabbi Fabian had the marvellous experience of discovering a Torah in a very unlikely place, Tugun near the Gold Coast. It had been kept under a house, wrapped in canvas, after coming into possession of the niece of early immigrants from Eastern Europe who had settled in Kangaroo Valley in New South Wales. The family generously donated it to the Gold Coast Congregation in 1961. Rabbi Fabian was later very supportive of the Canberra Jewish War Memorial Centre, whose foundation stone was laid in 1962 by Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie (later Sir).

During this period, Rabbi Fabian's work was centred on Jewish education. He was very fortunate to have a sympathetic environment in which to test out his many ideas, with both the Queensland Department of Education and the communal parent body being very supportive. What were then called religious right-of-entry classes (known colloquially as 'scripture classes' and now called 'Religious Instruction' in Queensland) were established in the two primary schools which had the largest Jewish enrolments, and later in two secondary schools as well, where Rabbi Fabian taught all the classes. He also was given permission to use the primary school premises for after-school *cheder* classes lasting three hours, and in later years this also occurred at the



*Earlier photo, probably taken in 1952. From l. to r: Rev. L. Levine, unidentified couple, Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, his wife, Fanny Brodie, Ilse Fabian and Rabbi Fabian.*



Deshon Street Hall. Margaret Street Hall was used for the Sunday School, and attendance increased from 30 at the beginning to 120 by the end of his tenure, with most children also attending a mid-week class. He was fortunate to be assisted by other professional teachers over the years, some simply drawing on their own extensive Jewish education, others being Israelis partially supported by Jewish Agency funds. There were also batmitzvah and barmitzvah preparation classes, as well as post-barmitzvah classes for both junior and senior students, and a weekly class for children living in the Southport/Surfers Paradise area.

Some customs which he introduced very successfully were a model seder conducted entirely by children, High Holyday services for teenagers which were run entirely independently of adults, and the *Chag HaBikurim*/First Fruits tradition on the Sunday nearest to *Shavuot*. Children dressed as farmers paraded round the synagogue grounds carrying their colourfully decorated baskets of fruit, then formed a tableau on the stage. The baskets were then auctioned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), with the whole happy enterprise exemplifying in Rabbi Fabian's view 'the real purpose of Jewish Education... achieved by combining ancient historical customs with the spirit of modern Israel and the great Mitzvah of *G'ulat Ha-aret* (Redemption of the Land) through the medium of the JNF'.

Rabbi Fabian also adapted ideas from Education Week aimed at bringing children's parents and friends closer to their school, mounting an exhibition of their projects together with historical Jewish and Israeli objects and his own special Holocaust collection. These were able to be viewed on Open Day, when there was also a programme of Hebrew and English performances by the children, and an innovative symposium titled 'Jewish Education and You' in which a parent, a senior student, a congregant, a Board member, a teacher and the headmaster briefly

stated their own view on Jewish Education. This highlighted Rabbi Fabian's innate egalitarian belief in the value of enabling all stakeholders to have their views heard in a bottom-up process, rather than the dogmatic top-down fashion in which traditional teaching often occurs.

Another of his many successful initiatives was the introduction of classes for engaged couples, held in his home, where they discussed topics such as the meaning of marriage in a Jewish context, the Jewish family, birth control, and the Jewish home. These were extremely well received, and often resulted in a heightened interest in the synagogue, partly due to his very personal approach, where his wife, Ilse, would join the group at supper time and get to know the young people. He also re-introduced the *Bedecken* ceremony of veiling a bride before she joined her husband-to-be under the *chuppah*, and as with so many of the rituals which he performed, tried to imbue it with meaning and significance for the person involved.

### **Working for Israel**

Rabbi Fabian continued his involvement with the Zionist movement. He took an active interest in the Jewish Boy Scout and Girl Guide Troops and supported the fledgling State of Israel via Zionist organisations such as Jewish Child's Day, Youth Aliyah, *Keren Hayesod*, and *Betar*, as well as entertaining many Israeli emissaries in his home. These included the second Israeli Minister, Mordechai (Max) Nurock, who requested a copy of his sermon on the origins and purposes of the Yad Vashem project. He also suggested that he use his High Holyday sermons to advocate 'pilgrimage to Israel during the year of its 10th Anniversary' foreshadowing the inauguration of Heichal Shlomo, which served as the headquarters of the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem, in May 1958 when the main topic of a World Conference of Rabbis and Religious Leaders in Jerusalem would be 'Religious Problems in Israel and the Diaspora'.

Other key overseas visitors to Brisbane in this period included Josef Sapir, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Moshe Sharett. One of the most impressive visitors was the non-Jewish diplomat James McDonald, who had served as High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany 1933–35, chaired the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees 1938–45, been US Special Representative to Israel 1948–49, and finally US Ambassador till 1951. Among James McDonald's creative public suggestions was that congregations should send their rabbis to Jerusalem every sabbatical year. As a mark of the community's appreciation of the

commitment of the Fabians to Israel, a *Nachlat*<sup>7</sup> was established in their honour by the JNF in 1962, which they were later able to visit.



*Brochure for Nachlat Fabian fund-raising activities*

### **Work in the wider community**

Rabbi Fabian developed connections with many general welfare organisations such as the Red Cross, Flying Doctor Service and Queensland Marriage Guidance Council. He became vice-President of the United Nations Association of Australia, where he delivered a lecture 'The State of Israel – After 12 Years', when he stated that the 'recent deplorable outburst of Antisemitism focused world attention on the Jewish Nation'. He received a letter of thanks for his magnificent address, with '... [a] clear recital of the facts (with no resort to emotionalism) ... and your frankness and evident sincerity in speaking of the Arab refugee problem... [which] won the respect of all'.<sup>8</sup> Another very significant milestone occurred in 1953, when he was appointed Jewish Chaplain Northern Command in the Australian Armed Forces, with the rank of Captain.

Being a big fish in a small pond, Rabbi Fabian represented the Jewish community in a wide range of areas, often commenting that his responsibilities covered an area six times the size of Britain. He was very proud of his 1952 Anzac Day sermon drawing praise from Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and that his 1962 sermon was commended by Premier Nicklin. Rabbi Fabian was asked to read verses from 'Job' at the Citizens' Memorial Service for King George VI in 1952, having been allocated a seat on the official dais at the Exhibition Grounds. Of particular pride was the occasion of his meeting the Queen and



*Rabbi Fabian (back row second right) in group photo of chaplains from different Australian religious denominations*

Duke of Edinburgh on their first visit to Australia in 1954. Realising Rabbi Fabian was not Australian-born, Prince Phillip engaged him in conversation about his origins, afterwards commenting to the Queen that he was 'one of the persecuted Jews of Germany'. Ilse, apart from looking regal herself in a beautiful lemon satin gown, later made her mark at their farewell luncheon at Government House, when Governor Sir Henry Abel Smith remarked to Rabbi Fabian that she was the most intelligent woman he had ever met! Among other visiting VIP receptions that he attended were those for various Governors-General, the King and Queen of Thailand, Field Marshal Montgomery, Harold Macmillan and The Archbishop of Canterbury. He was also very happy to be invited to a special preview of Cecil B de Mille's film of 'The Ten Commandments' in 1958 and was asked to '[to] express your personal opinion regarding the merit of the production'.<sup>9</sup>

### **The musical rabbi**

One of Rabbi Fabian's greatest joys was classical music and he regularly attended concerts of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra in the City Hall, as well as being a member of its Subscribers' Committee. This

resulted in his meeting visiting artists, many of whom were Jewish, among them Isaac Stern and Walter Susskind, as well as Victoria de los Angeles. When Anna Russell, Daniel Barenboim and Jan Peerce visited, they were invited for Shabbat dinner, with Barenboim dazzling Rabbi Fabian's daughter of similar age with his cosmopolitan manner as a 15-year-old. Rabbi Fabian brought a degree of cosmopolitanism to his own family by virtue of his deep roots in classical music, one manifestation of which was his singing of the *Rosh Chodesh* prayer on the Shabbat before New Moon to the melody of the beautiful slow movement of Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*.<sup>9</sup> He was the de facto cantor of the synagogue, leading all services except *Shacharit* (where Reverend Levine was the leader) with his melodious baritone voice, singing traditional melodies by composers such as Lewandowski, more in major keys than in the minor keys of the Eastern European and Sephardic/Mizrachi traditions.

### **The sporting rabbi**

In addition to his love of music, Rabbi Fabian was also interested in sport. One of Rabbi Fabian's particular enjoyments was to encourage young people in sports competitions, as his scrapbook of newspaper articles reveals. After his debut as Patron when the Brisbane Judean Sports Club hosted the interstate Carnival in 1950, there were references to his being 'one of the boys', which he was said to have earned 'by his understanding of the youthful mind'. Another article reported that he had helped to make it 'on a par, or even superior, to any previous carnivals', and in characteristic fashion he used his closing address to appeal for more unity between Jewry in Australia. The following year, when he and Ilse acted as chaperones for the Brisbane team at the Sydney Carnival, a journalist expressed disappointment at the striking absence of members of the local Sydney Jewish community but noted that Rabbi and Ilse Fabian had 'attended all events with religious regularity'.

Special Sports Carnival Shabbats were held at Margaret Street Synagogue in 1950, 1954 and 1958, and Rabbi Fabian's popularity with the sports community was such that he was invited to be patron yet again at the 1962 Carnival. He delivered the sermon at the Carnival Shabbat in Adelaide in 1978,<sup>10</sup> having done so at North Shore Synagogue in 1973, and also farewelled the Maccabi Team at the Great Synagogue in 1980. A newspaper cutting from a London *Jewish Chronicle* of 1957, entitled 'Anglo-Jewry and Sport' in his collection, alludes to the moulding of the

British character on the famous playing fields of Eton, and expresses regret that the Jewish community eschews the opportunity for young people to develop more broadly, in contrast to the Orthodox in Israel who are sports fans like the English. This clearly reflects his attitudes to the importance of sport.

### Personal

By the early 1950s, Rabbi Fabian and Ilse Fabian had three daughters and a very fulfilling family life. At the beginning of 1954 they moved to a larger home in New Farm which was able to accommodate their annual 'At Home in the Succah', attended by hundreds of congregants every year. As the rabbi's study had a small built-in Ark, Rabbi Fabian was able to introduce Sabbath afternoon services, followed by *S'udat Shlishit* and *Maariv*, at his home with good attendance mainly from the large number of congregants living in New Farm.

In 1960, Rabbi Fabian and Ilse embarked on a half-sabbatical world trip, their first to Europe and America since the war. In St Louis, they met Nathan Burgheim who had been instrumental in securing Rabbi Fabian's escape from Germany, and many relatives on both continents, including Rabbi Fabian's brother Walter, whom he had not seen since they had parted ways in 1939, in Brazil. This was to be the last time they were to meet, as Walter tragically passed away shortly after Rabbi Fabian's return to Brisbane, his health having been compromised by his earlier sojourn in Bolivia, living in the highest capital city in the world, La Paz. His second wife Marianne and their son Roberto emigrated to Australia shortly after.

This was also the time of the very early exodus of Jews from South Africa, in protest at the apartheid regime. They were very knowledgeable traditional Jews, and Rabbi Fabian became great friends with Dr Toby Arnold and his family. He also was friendly with a group of families from Russia, via Harbin, who he noted were staunch and devoted Jews 'of a type that hardly exists today... almost patriarchal figures who dominated not only their families but left their mark in the Community'. There were also Anglo-Australian families to whom he became very close, while among his greatest personal friends were many who had escaped Europe like himself and with whom he could converse in his mother tongue of German. However, both he and Ilse were fortunate in having learnt English at school, so they adjusted to their new country relatively easily, and could support others who had

to struggle more, including concentration camp survivors.

### **Three fundamental issues**

In a reflective section towards the end of the Brisbane part of his autobiography, Rabbi Fabian wrote about three fundamental issues which arose during his Australian Ministries. While they provide an insight into some of the challenges in the Orthodox community in those years, they may also shed light on issues which are still current. His views are summarised in the following three paragraphs:

**Sydney Beth Din:** As this did not have local knowledge, it had quite unrealistic expectations, and did not acknowledge the expertise of the rabbi with his assistant minister and learned laymen in undertaking instruction of proselytes. Its stance helped to fortify Rabbi Fabian's 'entirely negative attitude towards the Beth Din' when he came to Sydney.

**Ministry:** There existed variable employment conditions between different Orthodox congregations, with no guaranteed retirement deal. International applicants had greater bargaining power and there was no career path for locals. The relative status and pay of lay directors of education was also problematic, needing constructive discussion.

**Smaller communities of Australia:** The overpowering influence of the Sydney and Melbourne communities over Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, was compounded by there being even smaller communities in Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra, Ballarat, Geelong, Hobart and Launceston, plus small numbers of families in Toowoomba, Kalgoorlie, Grafton, Broken Hill etc. No state-wide roof bodies existed to look after them, and there was a widespread attitude of snobbery and misguided assumptions about the threat of intermarriage, an absence of Jewish facilities and a lack of proper Jewish education. Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart celebrated centenaries and their communities were more close-knit, yet the ECAJ continued to focus on Sydney and Melbourne, even advising refugees not to go to 'smaller States'.

Rabbi Fabian campaigned against this at interstate conferences, as well as in sermons, newspaper articles and letters to the editor, querying if 'after we had lost so many Jewish Communities in the Holocaust, was it right that here, in prosperous Australia, we should allow Synagogues to close and Communities to decay without lifting a finger to help them



[referring particularly to Hobart and Ballarat]?’ Among his contributions were ‘The Problem of our Smaller Communities in 1949’<sup>11</sup> and ‘Queensland – Our Fourth Jewish Centre’ in 1954.

Yet a basic parochialism persisted despite a survey showing 400 Jews living in country NSW. He suggested a statistical survey of the 15% not living in Melbourne or Sydney, devising a scheme for visits by Roving or District Ministers to cover some basic needs, correspondence classes for Jewish Education, boarding facilities at Day Schools such as Mt Scopus, and a whole-of-Australia Teachers’ Seminary. He believed that medium-sized communities could benefit from pulpit exchange, teaching material unification, new settlers’ assistance and conference rotations, and bemoaned the fact there were only three truly Federal Jewish bodies: Maccabi, FAJEX and B’nai B’rith, with others being sorely lacking.

### **Sydney North Shore, 1963–78**

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem | Let my right hand forget her  
cunning (Psalm 137)*

Rabbi Fabian began his Sydney ministry with two important achievements: his recent appointment to the position of Senior Hebrew Chaplain in August 1962 and the publication of *The Babylonian Talmud*, a monograph of his address accompanying the presentation of its first unabridged English translation to the University of Queensland, in 1963.<sup>12</sup> Both these events should be seen against the background of his deep connections with institutions outside the normal purview of Jewish communal life. He felt deeply honoured by the interest in, and understanding of, his particular Jewish experience which his fellow Senior Chaplains exhibited and was very appreciative of the equality they afforded him at their monthly Canberra meetings, when he represented such a tiny percentage of Australian servicemen.

### **Jewish communal affairs, including working for Israel**

Rabbi Fabian was inducted at the North Shore Synagogue by Rabbi Dr I Porush on 17 February 1963. Although several Orthodox rabbis boycotted his induction – expressing a mixture of regret and ‘profound disappointment that your Synagogue has made it impossible at present for me to attend your induction’ because of women being seated downstairs, rather than separately in a women’s gallery – he nonetheless laid out in his inaugural sermon an optimistic set of goals which he hoped

to achieve. One of his greatest supporters, Professor Julius Stone, wrote that he ‘admired your dignity and wisdom’ in meeting the strain of induction, but also ‘the delicacies of relations which we all know were involved’, appreciating that his message of the tasks ahead was ‘bold and clear’. Another prominent congregant, Asher Joel, declared it to be a ‘splendid sermon... rank it as one of the finest speeches I have ever heard’.

With his move to the much bigger Orthodox Jewish community of Sydney, Rabbi Fabian now represented the interests of the one-fifth who were members of the North Shore Synagogue congregation. He felt very strongly the need for them to participate in all aspects of communal life, but he had to contend with the perception that the distance from the North Shore to the Eastern Suburbs was somehow much smaller than in the opposite direction! To quote from a later address referred to in the Sydney part of his autobiography:

In spite of an increasing degree of self-sufficiency, North Shore Jewry is fully aware of its responsibilities toward the Sydney *Kehilla* as a whole. Its spirit of co-operation is as strong as ever, and it has not the slightest desire to isolate itself from the main centres across the Harbour. All it expects, in return, however, is an increasing awareness of its true needs and a spirit of reciprocity and co-operation, leading to a strengthening of the total Community, and to more evenly balanced planning for the future.

As well as expressing this in such diplomatic terms, he was very active in such organisations as the NSW Board of Jewish Education – even though his own classes were no longer under their auspices – and volunteered for right-of-entry classes. He became Patron of the roof body of Jewish Sport in New South Wales and continued his active involvement in the Australian Jewish Historical Society. He was co-opted onto the Public Relations Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, being very aware of the need for anti-defamation work and was on their speaker panel to address outside organisations such as Rotary and Apex. He devoted significant amounts of time to various kinds of writing, seizing the opportunity to present his ideas on both Jewish and general societal issues to a wide range of audiences, and was heartened by the reception, which was often very enthusiastic.

The monthly synagogue bulletins, to which he contributed 'From the Rabbi's Study', together with the Annual Reports of the North Shore Synagogue, provide detailed information about the life of the community. When he started his ministry with the congregation, Louis Klein was president and Russell Whitmont the youth counsellor, while a Youth and Education Centre had recently been opened. In 1964 Victor Smith had become president and an Adult Study Circle was initiated on 'Let's Look at the Bible', followed by 'The Spanish Story'. The Silver Jubilee Brochure produced in 1965 contained an historical survey with numerous photos, including one of the 217 children enrolled in the Sunday School, making it the largest in Sydney. In his congratulatory letter, Rabbi Dr Alexander Grozinger from the Kingsford-Maroubra Hebrew Congregation wrote that he thought 'you are the rabbi who has made the most friends serving in three states'. Similar sentiments were



*Rabbi Fabian in his traditional synagogue garb*

conveyed by Rabbi Dr Benjamin Gottshall, who had succeeded him in Brisbane, writing that he had been 'loved and appreciated by all those who recognised in you the Rabbi who is foremost a Mensch!' In 1965 Rabbi Fabian was awarded an Efficiency Decoration (ED), for which he received congratulations from NAJEX, and the Golden Jubilee Brochure published in 1990 set his achievements against the background of significant communal progress.

Rabbi Fabian conducted lunchtime discussion groups at different Sydney universities in his capacity as Honorary Hillel Counsellor, spoke to AZA and BBYA youth groups on topics including the contraceptive pill, wrote articles for student magazines on evolution, the ethics of the Vietnam War and conscription, and gave talks on famous Jews such as Moses Mendelsohn. He participated in a student inter-faith forum on Judaism's relationship to Christianity, addressed many different Christian groups and schools on this topic, and spoke at Moore Theological Collage on 'The Jewish Attitude to Jesus' and 'The Credibility of Jesus as the Son of God'. This outreach gave him 'some degree of personal satisfaction' as many of his listeners had never before

met a Jewish lecturer, and they ‘appreciated the opportunity of getting authentic information on Judaism, Israel and the Jewish position in the world’.

Many international Jewish leaders visited Sydney during those years for Independence Day celebrations, including Yigal Allon, Mordechai Gur, and Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who flew ‘back to Jerusalem just in time to reach the Western Wall with the first Jewish troops and to sound the Shofar on this miraculous occasion’; he subsequently sent a copy of the Israeli Parachutists’ Prayer. Just after the Six-Day War came Ariel Sharon, whose personality made a deep impression on the Army Staff Officers he addressed on the successful military campaign. Other famous Jewish visitors included Menachem Begin, Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Rabbi Dr Norman Lamm of Yeshiva University, New York (who delivered some magnificent addresses), Rabbi Moses Rosen, chief rabbi of Rumania (who in 1974 ‘presented an almost incredible picture of Rumanian Jewry under Communist rule’), Viscount Samuel, Allan Bronfman, Sir Barnett Janner and Nahum Goldmann (who impressed as a profound original thinker with a tremendously wide sweep of ideas).

Rabbi Fabian continued his commitment to the *Keren Hayesod* yearly campaigns, including hosting drawing room meetings in his home; VIP emissaries included Gideon Hausner, Pinchas Sapir, Chaim Herzog and Israel Goldstein. The theme of his yearly *Shabbat Shekalim* sermon was the JNF, and he advocated for donations to Israel at every *simchah*, with the North Shore Synagogue being the only one to contribute to the Six-Day-War Emergency Appeal. He was also a great supporter of the JCA, belonged to Friends of the Hebrew University, participated in a fund-raiser for the first visit of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1966/7, and entertained Moshe Atzmon when he was the permanent conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Rabbi Fabian continued to maintain his strong links with B’nai B’rith, and in 1964 began delivering the annual opening address at Albert Einstein Lodge, speaking on ‘Jewish Ethics and Modern Man’. Over the years his topics were focused on many areas of Jewish interest, including contemporary history, trends in Jewish thought and current problems. He also delivered sermons on many key occasions; these included ‘Vatican II and After’ (1966), ‘Day of Prayer 4 June, Great Synagogue’ (1967), ‘Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration’ (1971), ‘Retirement of Rabbi Israel

Porush, Great Synagogue' (1973), 'Massacre at Ma-a lot' (1974), and 'Louis Klein – In Memoriam' (1975); many of these were published in two of his books.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting that in one of his sermons, delivered at the North Shore Synagogue Masonic Service in 1974, he cites the beautiful aria of Sarastro in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, as an inspiration 'in this age of unrest and violence... to advance towards the blessings of the Kingdom of God... the light of faith.' This text resonated with his fervent and oft-repeated belief in the brotherhood of man, under the fatherhood of God.

We know no thought of vengeance  
Within these temple walls  
Where love leads back to duty

By friendship's kindly hand held fast,  
Whoever from duty fails;  
He finds the land of light at last.

Here each to every other  
Where every wrong finds pardon,  
Those whom this bond cannot unite

By mutual love is bound;  
No traitor e'er is found  
Are all unworthy of the light

### **Work in the wider community**

Rabbi Fabian continued his commitment to many local council and charity organisations, including Freedom from Hunger, Austcare, National Heart Foundation and the Red Cross, helping to organise doorknock appeals. He was on the Hospital Chaplains' Committee of the North Shore Hospital and took full part in the campaign to establish a Hospital Chapel, even though it would not be used by Jews. He was the only Jewish minister at Mental Health Association meetings, and participated in functions and seminars on migrants, prisoners, alcohol and drug addicts, as well as being on the Prisoners' Aid Society's committee. He was a regular attendee at a Jewish-Christian Study Circle, where he contributed a talk on 'Salvation' from the Jewish point of view.

The amazing variety and scope of these years on the North Shore

is well illustrated by a comparison of the Special Events and Highlights he recorded for two years a decade apart – 1963 and 1973 – when he was involved in functions in many places outside Sydney, as well as in Sydney congregations other than his own.

### Personal

During the early 1970s Rabbi Fabian had the joy of officiating at the marriages of all three of his daughters, announcing the engagement of the middle one at his retirement dinner. Alex Gottshall interviewed him in his home office, observing that it was ‘crowded with files and papers... tremendous accumulation of memorabilia’ which he intended to use in the ‘tale of three cities’ which he would be writing.<sup>14</sup> He revealed that over the course of his three ministries he had ‘officiated at 400 weddings, 500 barmitzvahs, conducted 25 batmitzvah ceremonies and visited literally thousands of sick people.’ He pledged to offer his services to smaller communities with no permanent minister, as his own experiences had given him ‘an understanding and appreciation of Jewish tenacity and endurance.’ He signalled his intention to continue his work as Senior Jewish Chaplain and revealed his pride in how Masada College and the



*Association of Jewish Ministers' Conference May 1975. Rabbi Porush, who organised the first conference in 1946, is fourth left front row, Rabbi Apple is second right, and Rabbi Fabian is behind him. Reverend Andre Winkler, chazan at North Shore Synagogue, is far left back row.*

Hebrew School had grown. His parting wish was for the local rabbinate to consider the model of the Chief Rabbi's cabinet, in which different members had areas of specific responsibility assigned to them, such as hospital visiting, marriage guidance and charitable activities.

### **Ilse Fabian**

No tale of Rabbi Fabian's life would be complete without reflecting on the significance of his wife Ilse's contribution. As many of those who knew them will have observed, theirs was a marriage 'made in heaven', while their children were constantly reminded of how much they meant to, and supported, each other.

In her oral history recording made in 1996, Ilse covers much of the same ground as Rabbi Fabian in his oral and written records, commenting on many key events in their lives from a somewhat different perspective.<sup>15</sup> Of great interest is her account of her own Jewish background, which was so very different to Rabbi Fabian's. Her family were typical non-observant German Jews, but she started to develop an interest in Jewish organisations in her teens, after Hitler came to power, as well as introducing Jewish holyday customs into her home and attending Friday night synagogue services. She emphasises how differently Liberal Judaism was practised in Germany, with separate seating but a mixed choir and an organ in the synagogue.

She began medical studies in Prague, only stopping after *Kristallnacht*. This was one of the two occasions when she took action which was crucial for Rabbi Fabian, as she had by chance remained in Breslau after semester resumed in October 1938 to help her mother. She was thus able to alert him by phone after her own father had been arrested on the night of *Kristallnacht*. Years later, in 1976, Rabbi Fabian wrote a vivid reflection on that experience, concluding 'That phone call may well have saved my life'. The second occasion was when Ilse courageously visited Canberra to seek a permit for Rabbi Fabian from the relevant minister, succeeding just in time to prevent his boarding for Shanghai.<sup>16</sup>

The role of Orthodox rabbi's wife was one which she embraced with total commitment, being taught the ins and outs of *kashrut* and learning about the full gamut of Jewish observance. She became a 'model' rabbi's wife, which in the 1950s and 1960s entailed vast amounts of home entertaining, with everything being homemade. She threw herself into Jewish women's organisations such as Women's Guilds, National



Council and WIZO, as well as attending hundreds of barmitzvah parties and wedding receptions.

Ilse shared Rabbi Fabian's intense musical education, and they made a beeline for the opera house in all the cities they visited on their first trip back to Europe at the beginning of the 1960s. When asked in later years about her experiences as a refugee from Nazi Germany, she often emphasised her family's incredibly good fortune in being able to bring even their grand piano to Australia.

## Retirement

*Be strong and of good courage*  
(*Tanakh, Joshua 1:9*)

## Challenges

Rabbi Fabian experienced very mixed feelings as his retirement approached, which he committed to writing in 1977 in a 30-page confidential document. This covered contentious issues which he had already faced during his North Shore ministry, and others which occurred both before and after the handover to his successor. One source of pressure was the board of Masada College, which had been strengthened by the arrival of large numbers of South Africans, some of whom were not backward in demanding that the community accommodate their needs, with little empathy for those already here and the large number who continued to send their children to the synagogue classes. Later there were some dark moments for him as he grappled with the consequences of having left his ministry and of no longer being valued as he once was. Particularly painful was that, despite his regular attendance at services, sitting close to the front of the synagogue, he was rarely given the honour of an *Aliyah*, while people with almost zero connection to the congregation were.

Another particularly unpleasant event during this time was the demand for a *mechitza* to separate women from men downstairs, just when the push for more equality for women was gathering momentum in society. Yet another was the insensitivity displayed by various people in interviews in the Jewish press, which denigrated Rabbi Fabian's level of Orthodox practice in most disrespectful ways. When he settled into life in Sydney, he had realised that the ethos of this congregation was more akin to the American Conservative strand of Judaism and was very proud of the tremendous decorum and dignified services with

cantor and choir over which he had presided. However, the time was not yet ripe for a fully-fledged Conservative congregation to be established in Sydney, which had to wait until the arrival of Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins at the beginning of the 1990s.

### *Continuing interests*

With the responsibilities of being a congregational rabbi no longer on his shoulders, Rabbi Fabian was able to pursue his many interests in a more leisurely manner. He continued to deliver lectures to the Albert Einstein Lodge in their annual series, the last being when he ended his presidential term in 1987. They covered a wide range of topics including proselytising, Maimonides' legacy and Franz Rosenzweig. He gave a number of addresses from a historical perspective on Jewish life in different Australian communities, especially on significant anniversaries, participating in the centenary of the Margaret Street Synagogue in Brisbane in 1986, as well as the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Gold Coast Synagogue. Returning to these places gave him tremendous satisfaction as he renewed old acquaintances. They would, in turn, visit him whenever they were passing through Sydney.

Rabbi Fabian accepted many invitations to officiate in other congregations and he published two books of sermons covering the years 1940–79.<sup>17</sup> He also reviewed autobiographies of other ministers, spoke at the Jewish-Christian Study Circle, and continued his involvement in army and ex-service affairs, including regular Chaplains-General conferences in Canberra. Just as he had in the early years of his ministry, he continued to preach at special services for FAJEX and Sports Carnival Conference Shabbats, as well as those for Remembrance Day and Yom Hashoah. After welcoming the arrival of a grandson after four granddaughters, he was delighted when all his grandchildren eventually became students at Masada.

### *Issues with the Diaspora relationship to Israel*

Although Rabbi Fabian had continued his deep commitment to Israel, his faith in their government was sorely tested in 1982 when Ariel Sharon took his IDF troops far beyond the southern part of Lebanon for which he had authority, all the way to Beirut, being there during the massacre of Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila camps. Rabbi Fabian's confidential correspondence with a close friend over the relevant religious and ethical issues reveals their wrestling with the Jewish position. Essentially, they debated whether the end can

ever justify the means, with Rabbi Fabian categorically stating that it cannot, but being realistic enough to appreciate that ‘might is right’ is more often than not preached from the pulpit. He bemoaned the fact that anybody who tries to apply Jewish moral and ethical principles is called a traitor, finding especially frustrating the self-imposed restraint of Diaspora communities when they do not allow people to express their opposition to shameful policies, but insist they keep silent for fear of breaking the bond of solidarity with Israel. His position on this, as on so many Jewish ethical issues, was very principled, but because of local politics it could not be openly expressed. This was due to the fact that Australian Jewish community leadership, with its strong Holocaust roots, was staunchly defensive of Israel and believed that they should not criticise Israeli government decisions because they were not living there and did not face the same security threats. This position caused tensions with those who were critical of Sharon’s actions in the Lebanon 1982 war.



*Rabbi and Mrs Fabian in the grounds of Government House Sydney  
on the occasion of the award of his OBE*

### ***Family and friends***

During this time, his daughters came to rely on their parents for grandparenting duties while they pursued their careers; nevertheless, Rabbi Fabian and Ilse were able to make several trips to visit friends

and family overseas, twice returning to Germany as guests of the government. They also visited Israel, which continued to hold a special place in Rabbi Fabian's heart despite his critical attitude toward aspects of its government's policies.

There were many family celebrations of important milestones, especially his seventieth birthday in 1980, the year he received an OBE.

### ***Reflections and final years***

His reflections at the end of the Sydney part of his autobiography, headed 'Striking the Balance', reveal how Rabbi Fabian attempted to balance the positive and negatives of his rabbinical experiences in Australia, seeing both advantages and disadvantages in moving from one ministry to the next. However, consistent with his generally optimistic nature, he states that one of the most positive results was the establishment of great personal friendships in a number of cities, which were maintained long after his retirement with regular interstate visits and visitors.

Unfortunately, Rabbi Fabian suffered a stroke after his health had begun to deteriorate in early 1988 and he was admitted to North Shore Hospital in a coma. Apart from the great concern shown by many friends, his wife and eldest daughter had the most heart-warming experience when two Christian Senior Chaplains came to express their sympathy in the most genuinely warm and caring terms, testament to the deep and abiding sincerity of their friendship. Their response was particularly noteworthy because it was in marked contrast to the inexplicable absence of some of his fellow rabbis, providing a shining example of the brotherhood of all people, with their actions speaking so much louder than pious words.

Rabbi Fabian eventually became a resident at the Hunter's Hill Montefiore Nursing Home in the final year of his life. Yet even though his speech had been affected by his stroke, he continued to enjoy classical music, conducting with his hand in time to the rhythms of Beethoven. During this period Ilse visited him almost every day as he experienced several ups and downs, before finally passing away between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, on 4 October 1989. Regrettably the religious restrictions of the time did not allow any of his immediate family to play a role in either the funeral service or the *shloshim* service, and this continued when a Torah was consecrated in his honour a year later, with one son-in-law and his small grandson standing on the bimah next to the scribe as the final letters were written.

This exclusion of female family was so ironic because Rabbi Fabian was a feminist to his core who championed girls in the most effective way he knew how, including preparing a whole generation of them for a meaningful batmitzvah. He encouraged his daughters in all their studies, taught them to recite Grace After Meals from a very young age, enabled them to proceed to university if they wished, and by stepping willingly into the role of grandparent, freed them to pursue their careers knowing their young children were in good hands. His devotion was returned with interest, as evidenced by the deep bond between his five grandchildren and Rabbi Fabian, and after his death, with their still very youthful grandmother Ilse.

While Ilse was still alive, the family were asked to contribute to a book on Australian rabbis. Some of her thoughts as recorded at that time follow, reflecting her perspective on her husband's life and character.

- He never allowed the memory of what had been done to the Jews of Europe by the Nazis to fade from the communal consciousness.
- He was a passionate Zionist and a strong supporter of all the communal organisations working for Israel.
- Although he was a member of the Association of Jewish Ministers, he did not have any personal desire to sit on the Beth Din.
- Despite the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in his social relationships, he made friends with people in all walks of life, social classes and religions.

## Conclusion

*Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?*  
(Malakhi, 2:10)

Apart from the prophetic quote above, another one of Rabbi Fabian's favourites was the famous one by Emanuel Kant:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe  
– the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

These two quotations sum up his central beliefs. He considered it an honour to serve his fellow humans and his sermons were focused

on social justice and only rarely *halachic* injunctions. He wore his scholarship lightly because he was at heart a modest and humble man. It was the spirit and not the letter of the law which motivated him, the universalistic rather than the particularistic aspects of Judaism. He combined deep knowledge of Torah and Talmud with a modern approach, incorporating all the best of secular culture without in any way tarnishing his 'brand' as an observant Jew. He sincerely believed that Judaism provides a way of life which is uplifting and meaningful, while also adhering to the 'golden mean' of the Ancient Greeks. In relying on the power of reason to deal with life's challenges, he maintained his dignity while 'seeking peace' with quiet diplomacy.

## Endnotes

- 1 Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian's private memoir is based on primary sources from the large collection of his private and public correspondence, sermons, talks, broadcasts, reports and other writings. It is organised chronologically from the Sunrise Years in Europe, through Winter (Adelaide), Summer (Brisbane), Autumn and Sunset Years (Sydney), under the themes of Jewish Community, Wider Community, Palestine (later Israel), Family and Friends, Correspondence and Army, many similar to those in his autobiography. All quotations, apart from those acknowledged, are taken from his autobiographical writings. For more information on the memoir, contact Miriam Frommer by email: [miriamfrommer@icloud.com](mailto:miriamfrommer@icloud.com). See also: Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian, Archive of Australian Judaica, <https://judaica.library.sydney.edu.au/histories/Fabian.html>

For more information on his chaplaincy, see NAJEX. Details of all three of his publications are provided as endnotes in this article, and details of resource articles from past editions of the *AJHS Journal* plus books are given as endnotes where cited. To access official publications of the different congregations in which Rabbi Fabian's involvement is mentioned, please contact their office directly or search online. All unreferenced quotations in this article come from his autobiographical writings.

- 2 When outlining how Rabbi Fabian replaced Rabbi Louis Rubin-Sacks who had accepted a position with the Perth Hebrew Congregation, Dr Rodney Gouttman notes: '...his commitment to Orthodox Judaism was questioned because of his previous association with the Liberal Synagogue in Sydney. This does not seem to have concerned the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation...' Rodney Gouttman, 'The Adelaide

- Hebrew Congregation and its Community', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal [AJHSJ]* vol. 22, pt. 4 (2016), p. 633.
- 3 Alfred Fabian, *An Australian Ministry: Selection of Sermons, Addresses and Articles from the years 1940–1979*, Ch 1, 'World Events and Struggle for Israel', Pymble, NSW, Playbill Pty Ltd, 1980, p. 9.
- 4 Gouttman, 'The Adelaide Hebrew Congregation' *AJHSJ*, vol. 22, pt. 4 (2016), pp. 621–41 and W.D. Rubinstein, 'Australia and the Refugee Jews of Europe 1933–1954: A Dissenting View', *AJHSJ*, vol. 10, part 6 (1989), pp. 500–523. See also Suzanne D. Rutland, 'Jewish Immigration to New South Wales, 1919–39', *AJHSJ*, vol. VII, part 5 (November 1973), pp. 337–47.
- 5 Mark Dapin, *Jewish Anzacs: Jews in the Australian Military*, NewSouth Publishing, 2017, pp. 219–21.
- 6 This quote is originally from *Eshet Hayil* (A woman of valour), *Proverbs*, 3:17, and is 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace'.
- 7 Literally a region, but referring here to an area, normally a forest, established and maintained by the JNF.
- 8 Lecture to the United Nations Association of Australia, 'The State of Israel – After 12 Years, 5 April 1960, letter, 7 April 1960.
- 9 Wintergarden Theatre Pty Ltd, inviting him to 'The Ten Commandments' screening, 27 March 1958.
- 10 Fabian. *An Australian Ministry*: Ch. 5: 'Education and Youth', p. 95.
- 11 Ibid, Ch 1: 'World Events and Struggle for Israel', pp. 39 and 46.
- 12 Alfred Fabian, *The Babylonian Talmud*, University of Queensland Press, 1963.
- 13 Alfred Fabian, *A Time to Speak: Selected Sermons and Addresses Sydney 1962–1976*, Pymble, NSW, Playbill (Australia) Pty Ltd, 1976; Fabian. *An Australian Ministry*: Ch 1, 'World Events and Struggle for Israel', Ch 7: 'B'nai B'rith'.
- 14 This is mentioned in an interview with Alex Gottshall 'Rabbi's Roving Role', *Australian Jewish News*, 25 July 1975.
- 15 Recording made in 1996 by Ilse Fabian's grandson, Michael Frommer.
- 16 'Personal Story' online details these events.
- 17 Alfred Fabian, *A Time to Speak* and Fabian, *An Australian Ministry*.



## THREE SCORE YEARS & TEN: REFLECTIONS ON 70 YEARS IN THE ACT JEWISH COMMUNITY

*Adele Rosalky*

### ABSTRACT

This article was originally delivered as an Australian Jewish Historical Society ACT presentation on 12 December 2021 to mark the 70th anniversary of the ACT Jewish Community and the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Mona and Louis Klein Wing of the National Jewish Memorial Centre in Canberra. It gives a personal reflection on 70 years in the community by Adele Rosalky, President of Australian Jewish Historical Society ACT. The focus of the narrative is Earle Hoffman's work in the community. Earle Hoffman OAM, the author's father, was instrumental in the founding and development of the Community. The talk was followed by the launch of a commemorative booklet, *ACT Jewish Community: 70 Years, Highlights & History* by Adele Rosalky and Sylvia Deutsch OAM, Canberra, ACT Jewish Community Inc., 2021, which presents a much-expanded version of this article.

**KEYWORDS:** Communities, ACT Jewish Community, National Jewish Memorial Centre, Earle Hoffman OAM, congregations, social history.

### Introduction

On 12 December 2021, the ACT (Australian Capital Territory) Jewish Community celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the community and the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Mona and Louis Klein Wing of the National Jewish Memorial Centre. This was combined with the official opening earlier in the day of the new Millie Phillips Wing by His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley

AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, an event that had been postponed twice by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

These anniversaries represent something special to me personally, as my life has coincided almost exactly with the beginnings of the ACT Jewish Community. I was born in Canberra at the end of 1949, when the first informal meeting for the formation of the community was held. This then led to the foundation meeting in July 1951 at the home of Dr Ronald and Ruth Mendelsohn to form the ACT Jewish Community.<sup>1</sup> My narrative focusses on Hoffman's work in the community because he was instrumental in the founding and development of the community.

I'll include here a little story that I told at the consecration of my father's grave in 2014. As I trawled through his papers after his death, I found an account he had written of his first visit to Canberra in 1928 when he was seven years old. It is a delightful description of a road trip in the Nash Tourer with his parents and younger brother, opening and shutting gates on nothing more than a dirt track through private property, and camping each evening near running water. Once they arrived in the national capital they pitched a tent at Acton near Lennox Crossing, which is now under Lake Burley Griffin. After having the car serviced in Mort St, they viewed the brand-new Parliament House and looked across the lucerne flats on the flood plain of the Molonglo River to Blundell's Cottage in the distance. Next morning as they left Canberra, my grandfather asked him: 'Well son, what do you think of the place?'. His reply was 'Wouldn't want to live there.' Twenty years later, in 1948, with wife Anne and son David, he returned as a young bureaucrat in the fledgling Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and by his own admission, he enjoyed the next 65 years, working and building a community in Canberra.

There had been Jews in the region surrounding what became the nation's capital of Canberra since the nineteenth century — Queanbeyan, Yass, Cooma, the South Coast and Goulburn and surrounding areas all had Jewish residents. The 1861 census showed 72 Jews in Goulburn, making it the third largest Jewish community in Australia at that time after Sydney and Melbourne. These Jews were mainly store-keepers and hoteliers who had followed the discovery of gold on the Southern Tablelands.<sup>2</sup>

With federation, there was a dispute between Melbourne and Sydney about the location of Australia's capital, with the Yass-Canberra

site being approved by an Act of the federal parliament and Canberra being named on 12 March 1913. The following year war broke out in Europe and the Middle East, so work on the new city came to a virtual stop. All that Walter Burley Griffin, the winner of the design competition for the new capital, could do before his services were terminated was to establish some infrastructure — water, sewerage and some roads, including parts of National Circuit, where the National Jewish Memorial Centre now stands.<sup>3</sup>

After the war, in the early twenties, the building of Canberra resumed, employing a work force of over 1000 men, mostly of Scottish and Irish origins. This brought Moisey, known as Mischa, a tailor by trade, and Adele Berstein, with two young sons to Canberra. They later changed their name to Bersten. They went on to have two more children while living in Canberra. They took up residence in Elder St, Braddon, next to the bowling green, opposite where Ainslie School now stands. Adele Bersten recorded (orally on tape) their feeling of complete isolation with no other Jewish families during the years c. 1928–32 while they lived in Canberra. With the onset of the Great Depression, unemployment rose steeply in Canberra, so the Bersten family returned to Sydney.

Jews began to settle in Canberra in the late 1930s. On arrival these pioneers found themselves among a disparate and disconnected collection of Jews without any of the traditional trappings that they and their fellow Jews had known in the places they had come from. Canberra was literally and spiritually a wilderness. They were too few and too isolated to generate organised Jewish life in the city. According to the 1933 census there were only four Jews in the ACT, but in 1947 the number had grown to 26, and in 1954 there were 54. These figures are of those who declared their religion as 'Jewish' or 'Hebrew' in the census papers. However, not all citizens answered the question on 'Religion'. Many Jews have refused to declare their religion either for fear that this information might one day be used against them (such as refugees from Nazi oppression), or because they are non-observant Jews, though ethnically they are still regarded as Jews.

In 1936 Nat Lipman, with his wife Sadie and children Beverley (Bev) and Graeme settled in Canberra and stayed. They lived in Kingston where Nat was a compositor at the Government Printing Office. Among Hoffman's papers I found the *hesped* that he delivered at the consecration service for Nat on 16 May 1965. He wrote: 'Throughout

the twenty and more years before a Jewish community was organised in Canberra, they kept alive those ideals we value so highly, and lived by them and brought up their family by those same ideals. Nat Lipman was an upright and honest man, and we respect and honour his memory.’

### **Developing a Jewish communal structure**

After the end of World War Two, the survivors of the Holocaust were divided into two categories. There were those who concluded that Jews had had enough of persecution as a minority and had lost faith in God and in themselves as Jews, gave up on their distinctive identity and merged into the majority. Yet others, especially those who stemmed from the great centres of Jewish life in Eastern and Central Europe, were determined to live as Jews and salvage the values, traditions and ideals that had been destroyed in their native lands. It was the spirit of this latter group that brought about the remarkable revival of Jewish life – religious, cultural and social – in post-war Australia. It is reflected in the increase in the number of congregations, the creation of a chain of Jewish day schools, the establishment of Talmudic Colleges in Melbourne and Sydney, an upsurge in Jewish youth movements and the strengthening of Jewish institutional life in every direction.

Post-war survivor immigration concentrated on Sydney and Melbourne, but by the late 1940s a small collection of Jews, brought up in the large cities of Australia, had come to work in Canberra. The time had come for the Jews of Canberra to organise themselves, and this occurred with the encouragement of Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, who was also the President of the Association of Jewish Ministers in Australia and New Zealand and was in touch with the small but growing band of Jews in the capital. He travelled to Canberra to assist in the formation of the Jewish congregation. At the end of 1949 an informal meeting was held at the home of Dr Oscar Beran, a migrant from Czechoslovakia working at the Patents Office, where Rabbi Porush conducted the evening service (*Maariv*), probably the first of its kind held in Canberra. It seems he received an enthusiastic response by all present, and it planted the seed of the idea of creating a Jewish congregation in the capital.

As mentioned above, the foundation meeting of the community was held in July 1951 in the home of Dr Ronald and Ruth Mendelsohn in Yarralumla. Dr Mendelsohn was then Assistant Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Department. The motion to form a congregation was

unanimously adopted, and Dr Mendelsohn was elected as the first president. Present at that meeting were Earle and Anne Hoffman (Earle Hoffman became first honorary secretary); Kurt Gottlieb, an engineer at Mt Stromlo Observatory;<sup>4</sup> Ernie and Nina Horton, who owned successful businesses in Canberra; Nat Lipman who became the first Treasurer; and Irma Starke.<sup>5</sup> They possessed the spirit of pioneers, and the immediate task was to identify other Jews living in the ACT.

Dr Mendelsohn went out of his way as president of the community and as a public servant to find positions for newcomers. He is quoted as saying that as first president, his principal job was as an employment agent.<sup>6</sup> The Jewish Welfare Society in Sydney would often contact him, and since employment conditions in Canberra were favourable in those days of growth, and the young men (they were all men) were very well qualified, he was able to place quite a few newcomers in jobs. He would collect them from the trains and place them in migrant hostels. However, some failed to identify with the nascent community and hid their Jewishness in their new homeland, but this did not apply to all.

The first Friday evening service was held on 10 August 1951 after an advertisement had been placed in *The Canberra Times*. Then on 10 October 1951 the first *Yom Kippur* service with a *minyan* was held in the ante room of the original timber Masonic Centre located in Acton. There was no one in Canberra competent to conduct the demanding service on this, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. A *chazan*, S. Waldberg, came from Sydney, and a *sefer torah* was obtained from the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation in Toorak. Apparently, an excellent spirit pervaded the community at that historic *Yom Kippur* service, when all were delighted at being together, and all were eager to go forward.

For some years, the services were confined to the major festivals, yet when a *minyan* was required for a *yahrzeit* to say *kaddish*, it could always be mustered. The perennial problem was the *minyan* for regular services, highlighted by the adjournment of one particular service when Maurice Kuner, the tailor, gave the Indian High Commissioner a fitting. He was gone so long that two others had to be dispatched to bring him back so that the service could continue. This story highlights ongoing problems for small Jewish communities, such as in Canberra.

Services and festivals were held in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the Good Neighbour Council Huts on the slopes above Eastlake where apartments exist today. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, services were held

in various locations including the curved Industry House in Barton (a portent of our new curved wing), and the Priory of St John in Forrest, both now demolished.

The first recorded barmitzvah was that of Graeme Lipman in 1956.<sup>7</sup> The first communal *Seder* for Passover was held in 1954 in the Congregational Church Hall in Northbourne Avenue. People came from as far as Cooma, Goulburn, and the Snowy Mountains area for the *Seder*, and by 1956 no fewer than 120 people attended, all looking for Jewish company and the traditions that lingered in their memories. Over the next years communal *seders* were held in the Country Women's Association rooms in the city, Turner Infants School, and as Hoffman later served as president of the Telopea Park School Parents and Citizens' Association, where my brother and I attended high school, we had the use of the tuck-shop hall for a couple of years.

From the start, the utmost attention was paid to the Jewish education of the children. The initial *cheder* (Jewish religious school), held in private homes, started with six children and there were always young men and women in the community who gave up their Sunday morning to take a class or to demonstrate a festival. The first teacher was Dr Harry Rosenberg, the father of three young boys, and a scientist at the John Curtin School of Medical Research. His son Michael made and donated the stained-glass memorial to his father, now hanging in the Orthodox synagogue, accompanied by the plaque.

As in most other parts of Australia, the priority before the building of a synagogue was to establish a Jewish burial ground. The community was allocated a section at Woden Cemetery, and this was consecrated by Rabbi Porush in 1958, with the first burial taking place in 1963. An earlier burial took place on 8 September 1942. It was conducted by Kurt Gottlieb for George Hans Frohlich, aged 23 years, a co-worker of Kurt's at Mount Stromlo Observatory. He is buried in the general section. Then, and to this day, volunteer members of the community have performed *tahara*, an act of respect for the dead, preparing, spiritually purifying, and dressing the body in a shroud for burial. Eventually the burial ground was extended, to be divided only by two rows that had been allocated to the Seventh Day Adventists. On 10 October 1979 a second burial site was consecrated at Gungahlin by Rabbi Simon Silas of the Sephardi Synagogue in Sydney, then president of the NSW Association of Jewish Ministers.

The 1950s were important formative years and, in his monograph entitled *The Canberra Jewish Community*, Rabbi Porush described Ron Mendelsohn and Earle Hoffman as ‘the foremost leaders of Canberra Jewry of their generation.’<sup>8</sup> Dr Mendelsohn served once as president from 1951 to 1955, to be followed by Earle Hoffman from 1955 to 1956, when Hoffman left Canberra to undertake post-graduate study in Iowa, but returned to serve another term from 1959 to 1962, and a third time as president from 1964 to 1967. Their wives, Ruth and Anne, were also both dedicated community workers in the National Council of Jewish Women and in the Ladies Guild. Dr Mendelsohn and Earle Hoffman were recognised in later years for their work professionally and within the Jewish community with an OBE for Dr Mendelsohn and an OAM for Hoffman. Rabbi Porush also refers to other stalwart couples who were prominent in the development of the community: Nina and Ernie Horton, Elizabeth and Norman Stanton, and Kurt and Isley Gottlieb.

From its very conception, the ACT Jewish Community was, and still is, an unusual model. Even though Jews represent less than half of one percent of the Australian population, we have two major streams of identification — Orthodox and Liberal, which today has changed its name to Progressive. Right from the foundation meeting of the Canberra Community, individuals came from both streams. In large cities, congregations are either one or the other, but in Canberra, for the most pragmatic of reasons, that is, critical mass, we have always been two congregations, but one community. For the most part, we reside in harmony. Today we are just starting to see similar models in other small communities, but during the 1950s and 1960s, this ‘religious division’ polarised Australian Jewish congregations, especially in Melbourne. This has relevance to the formative years leading to the building of the National Jewish Memorial Centre, as discussed below, but for the most part these issues were not germane from a Canberra point of view.

From 1958 to 1967 the community had the good fortune to have as its member an ordained rabbi, Dr George Schlesinger, who was a Reader in the Australian National University’s Department of Philosophy. Dr Schlesinger generously volunteered his services whenever needed as a leader, lecturer, and officiant on the Sabbath and festivals, attracting some 30 people to attend Orthodox services and a study circle. His Israeli wife, Shulamit, also volunteered as a Hebrew and *cheder* teacher. Before his departure in 1967 to take up a professorship in North



Carolina, Dr Schlesinger was honoured as ‘the first rabbi of Canberra’, and as a tribute, a *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll) was presented to the congregation, known as the Schlesinger scroll. The *Torah* belonged to a large consignment of scrolls that had been salvaged from the Nazis in Czechoslovakia, his country of birth (Scroll no. 84).

In 1978, Rabbi Uri Themal, formerly rabbi of the Liberal Temple David in Perth, arrived in Canberra to work at the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. His arrival provided the fledgling Liberal congregation with a volunteer leader and teacher, enabling those community members to hold regular Sabbath services and receive a range of educational programs for adults. Rabbi Themal also volunteered as the community’s Hebrew teacher and headmaster of the *cheder*.

Other than these two serendipitous arrivals, services were lay led for 63 years by well-educated volunteer members of the community until 2014, when the first full-time rabbi was appointed. These included Bill Rieder, Ephraim Frid, Dr Claude Billigheimer and his father, Dr Michael Hasofer, Reverend Eddie Belfer, and in more recent years by Dr Mervyn Doobov, Dr Alan Shroot, Dr David Rosalky, with members of the Lehrer, Solomon and other families leading services for the Liberal/Progressive congregation.

### **Building a National Jewish Memorial Centre**

The first move towards the building of the National Jewish Memorial Centre, the home of the ACT Jewish Community, began in 1925, when the Great Synagogue in Sydney was informed by the federal government that land could be made available for Jewish worship in Canberra under the Church Lands Lease Ordinance (1924–32). As there was less than a handful of Jews in Canberra at that time the Great Synagogue wrote back that they did not feel that they could take on the holding of a block with the obligation to build on that block but expressed the hope that they would be able to take advantage of the favourable conditions, free of rents and taxes, under the ordinance at some future time. Thirty-five years later, a renewed offer came from the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) to the ACT Jewish Community, without specifying a site. By this time, the community numbered about 160 men, women, and children.

The Committee of Management was faced with a yes-no choice and had to decide whether just to think locally or Australian-wide.



Accordingly, it explored both options. Dr Mendelsohn found an existing building on New South Wales Crescent in Barton that was available at quite a reasonable price. It was a large block, but it had other buildings already around it so there would be no scope for expansion as the local community grew, and there would be costs in modifying the building for Jewish purposes. Those in favour of a national viewpoint, led by Earle Hoffman, agreed it would have to be a multipurpose centre rather than a synagogue on its own, and that it would have to be for all Australian Jewry.

The decisive incident occurred when the committee of management met in June 1960 at the home of Norman and Elizabeth Stanton, the owners of Georges Fabrics. In attendance was Rabbi Lazarus Morris Goldman, cantor at Toorak synagogue, and one of the chaplains to the defence forces, who was in Canberra overnight and had been invited to meet the committee of management. The one item that created debate was the response to the NCDC. Rabbi Goldman sat quietly in the background, listening to the different opinions being bandied across the table, and finally he asked whether he could intervene. He pulled a pound note from his pocket saying, 'I would like to buy the first brick in the National Centre.' That evening, the committee of management resolved that they should put to the forthcoming annual general meeting that the community would respond to the NCDC offer and acquire a block of ground. A month later the AGM approved the resolution, which was followed by endorsement from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the roof body of Australian Jewry, which offered its blessing, but no financial assistance.

Regarding the selection of a site Earle Hoffman recalled:

The first site that was suggested to us by the Administration was a large sized urban block behind the USSR Embassy in Kingston, on Light Street. This, mind you, at a time when Khrushchev was in power, when religion in the USSR was being stifled, and in particular the Jewish religion. Obviously, somebody in the administration had the impression that we were asking for a site solely for the local community, or alternatively, he had a peculiar sense of humour and no political sense whatsoever.<sup>9</sup>

The committee of management wrote back politely saying that the site was not suitable, and that the community was thinking of a site for a national centre. The response was immediate and cooperative, resulting in a good site being offered, where the Malaysian and Austrian embassies now stand in Talbot St, Forrest, but it was still of limited size. Hoffman said: 'When we indicated that there were difficulties with that one, the Administration then said, 'Well what site would you like?' and Hoffman indicated the site bounded by Canberra Avenue, National Circuit and Franklin Street.<sup>10</sup> At that time he lived in Deakin and worked in Barton, passing the site every day on his way to work. Instead of the authorities rejecting this request out of hand, the opposite happened; they were delighted to grant the block to the community. It had a watercourse running across it and fill had been added to it over the years, so that it appeared as though it was only suitable for parkland. The bonus was that the community gained the already sealed continuation of Franklin St, which today is still the Centre's driveway.



*Signing of Lease for site, January 1962. l. to r.: Norman Stanton (ACTJC Treasurer), Earle Hoffman (ACTJC President), Gordon Freeth (Minister for the Interior), David Smith (Private Secretary to the minister and ACTJC Vice-President). Photographer unknown.*

In January 1962 the lease was signed by Earle Hoffman (President) and Norman Stanton (Treasurer). For the Department of the Interior, it was Minister Gordon Freeth, and the witness was his private secretary, David Smith, who was vice-president of the community and who later went on to be official secretary to five governors-general.



*Laying of Foundation Stone, 26 February 1962. L. to r. Adele Hoffman, Rabbi Dr George Schlesinger, Anne Hoffman, Earle Hoffman, Rabbi Israel Brodie, Prime Minister Robert Menzies, Bertha Porush, Tamar Yuval (slightly obscured), Ambassador of Israel H.E. Moshe Yuval, Arthur Robb, and Rabbi Dr Israel Porush. Photographer L.J. Dwyer.*

The laying of the foundation stone took place on 26 February 1962 on a very, very hot day. Rabbi Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, who was making a pastoral visit to Australia, performed the honour, in the presence of the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and the Israeli Ambassador H.E. Moshe Yuval. The marble stone is today set into the entrance gate of the National Jewish Memorial Centre and the trowel used is on display in the ACT Jewish Community's museum. Both Menzies and the Chief Rabbi praised the vision of the Canberra leaders and their faith in the future of the community. It is interesting to note that in November 1965, Prime Minister Menzies made a personal donation to the Building Fund through Dr Mendelsohn, a cheque that

was never cashed and is also on display in the community's museum.

Several Jewish architects volunteered their services and sent sketches and were willing to work for expenses only, but the committee of management located émigré architect Dr Ernst Fooks, European trained, pre-war Viennese Jewish refugee, born in Czechoslovakia, who had designed a synagogue in Melbourne and won an architectural prize for his own home at 32 Howitt Road, Caulfield. According to Hoffman's account, Dr Fooks' outstanding characteristic was his compliance with the clients' requirements. In 2017, my husband David and I were invited to the opening of an exhibition by the Melbourne School of Design, curated by the Director, Professor Alan Pert, who worked with 26 Melbourne School of Design Masters students to revive knowledge and understanding of Fooks' large body of work. I had supplied a database of drawings and documents of the National Jewish Memorial Centre that were included in the exhibition. Dr Fooks was far more than an architect. He was a prolific traveller, artist, town planner, lecturer, interior designer, furniture designer, writer, and theorist.<sup>11</sup>

A workable set of plans was produced by Dr Fooks in Melbourne, in close collaboration with the committee of management. It was submitted to the Building Section of the Department of the Interior and the NCDC. The NCDC came back with the suggestion that glazed white or off-white bricks should be used, but this was a difficult request to meet. It was not just that white brick would be an irresistible inducement to graffiti, it was the fact that it would add \$10,000 to the cost of the building. So, Hoffman and Horton and Dr Mendelsohn went to see NCDC Director, Sir John Overall, at his home one weekend and explained the difficulty to him. The NCDC request for white brick was removed and was not raised again.<sup>12</sup> This would not happen today, but in the 1960s Canberra was a small and parochial place.

The religious divide between Orthodox and Liberal impacted on the development of the Centre but not from within Canberra itself. The outcome of these external pressures was that services and practices would be conducted on traditional lines, that is, Orthodox, which was in accordance with the ACT Jewish Community's constitution.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, there would be a consecrated Orthodox synagogue as part of the Centre and Liberal services would be held in another part of the building. The first offers of financial support for the project came from the Orthodox in Melbourne and Sydney, but they both wanted to

build a *mikvah*. Dr Mendelsohn recalled: 'It was said at the time that the only building we would be able to construct would be a National Jewish Memorial Mikvah!'.<sup>14</sup> Material support came from the much larger Orthodox membership of the community, and this has continued to be the case. Yet, the leaders of the Canberra community adopted the position that the National Jewish Memorial Centre had to be one where all Jews could meet, and every president of the ACT Jewish Community has held to that stance.

According to Hoffman, fund-raising was the major issue for building the centre. The National Council of Jewish Women agreed that the National Centre would be its fundraising project for the 1961–64 triennium, but on its own the community could not raise the funds for what was planned to be a national centre. Efforts were made to obtain funds from congregations and individuals in the different state capitals, and much of this canvassing was carried out by Hoffman, in conjunction with official work for the Australian government as he travelled to inter-state meetings. I personally remember as a teenager visiting with my father some people whose names have appeared in *Financial Review's* Top 100 – perhaps my father wanted me to meet the sons of these wealthy possible benefactors – and I also remember at least one rather swanky fund-raising dinner held at the home of a prominent Sydney family. My father was unabashed about approaching people for donations. Dr Mendelsohn recorded in his oral history interview that 'Earle worked valiantly and successfully — nobody else wanted to tackle it'.<sup>15</sup> By 1970 funds had grown to \$71,500, but the estimate for the building was over \$200,000. Plans had been approved, quotes had been obtained, but the gap was more than could possibly be closed.

In the face of this conundrum, Sydney Jewish leader, Louis Klein entered the picture. Together with his cousin Sidney Sinclair, he was joint managing director of the men's clothing manufacturing firm, Anthony Squires Pty Ltd, and one of the most distinguished leaders of Australian Jewry. He served as president of the North Shore Synagogue, a leader in the New South Wales Board of Deputies, and a president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (1972–74). He also acquired *The Australian Jewish Times* in 1968 and contributed generously to Jewish institutions here and in Israel.<sup>16</sup> His interest in and contribution to the NJMC facilitated its establishment, and the naming of the Centre after him and his wife Mona was a well-deserved tribute. He was

honoured by the Queen with the OBE in 1973. The community widely mourned his untimely death in July 1975.

In his recollections Hoffman described the negotiations in more detail. He and Dr Mendelsohn had met with Klein in November 1970 but came away without a financial commitment. Klein was about to leave overseas on a business trip but promised to talk again on his return. No sooner had he left Australia than the committee of management received an ultimatum from the builder saying that because of inflation and the rise in the cost of steel, he would not be able to hold to the figure quoted for longer than a month. Hoffman rang Klein who was in Jerusalem. He said he would consider the matter further and asked Hoffman to ring him in Rome. At 2am Canberra time, Hoffman spoke to Klein in Rome, and he generously committed himself to guarantee the project. From observing the recent experience financing the community's new wing, you can be sure fund raising and negotiations are done in a very different way today.

A special general meeting was immediately called, and a budget was chalked onto a piece of chipboard with yellow chalk. Hoffman noted that the figures, in retrospect, were laughable, but were the best estimate that could be made at the time. Building started in January 1971 and immediately the builder said the one large tree on the block would have to go. The building committee ended up moving the building rather than the tree, but sadly the tree went eventually. As the building progressed and the costs blew out, other donors were found, including Henry Krongold and Frank Theeman. Izzy Kingsberg, the owner of the Vogue Giftshop in Garema Place in Canberra created and donated the Burning Bush sculpture on the front of the building, and Melbourne artist Trudy Fry created the ceramic water wall in the original foyer, which is now without water. Many other important items were donated at the time.<sup>17</sup>

The synagogue was consecrated on 5 September 1971 in readiness for the New Year festival of *Rosh Hashanah*, followed eight days later by *Yom Kippur*, but at that point the community did not yet have a certificate of occupancy. Someone talked fast to convince the authorities to give this permission. The official opening ceremony followed on Sunday 12 December 1971 with Prime Minister William McMahon unveiling the plaque of the Mona and Louis Klein Building, and his wife, Sonia McMahon, unveiling a plaque in the auditorium on the first





*Prime Minister, William McMahon, opening the National Jewish Memorial Centre, 12 December 1971. Photographer Kurt Gottlieb.*

floor named after Dr Fanny Reading in honour of the National Council of Jewish Women.

For the next 43 years the building served the community well and became a home, a synagogue, a school and a playground as the community undertook the weekly, monthly, and annual religious cycles of the Jewish faith under lay leadership. Some major milestones occurred, including:

- The unbroken publication of the Community's magazine *Hamerkaz* since 1965.
- The election of women presidents: Ruth Holzman (later Goren), Susan Doobov, Dr Anita Shroot, Professor Kim Rubenstein, Yael Cass, Veronica Leydman and now Karen Tatz.
- In 1986 the ceremonial opening of the Ben Gurion Garden by Israeli President Chaim Herzog in the presence of Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke.
- Community events such as food fairs, celebrations, lectures, symposia, and social gatherings.
- Renovations to the original Orthodox synagogue in 2008.

- Many exhibitions, such as ‘The Holocaust Exhibition’ in 1984 and the ‘Anne Frank Exhibition’ in 2015.
- Creation of affiliate organisations and other activities including the formation of the ACT branch of Australian Jewish Historical Society, JewishCare, ACT Zionist Council and outreach including interfaith.

### **Recent developments, 2014–22**

The community functioned as a centre for local Jews, but progress was, in retrospect, underwhelming. Real change started in 2014 when, after 63 years, the need for a full-time rabbi became essential. To finance the initiative, donations were received from generous individual members, and subsequently New South Wales Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA) support was secured. In July 2014, Rabbi Alon Meltzer was appointed as rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community and rabbi to the Orthodox congregation, with additional duties as program coordinator, educator, and pastoral carer. An inauguration ceremony was held on 25 November 2014 for Rabbi Meltzer in the presence of visiting Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogues of the Commonwealth. At that ceremony Rabbi Mirvis turned the first sod in anticipation of the next stage in the development of the National Jewish Memorial Centre. In the three and a half years when Rabbi Meltzer was with the community, through his creative ideas and strategic planning, he brought tangible change and improvements. He also looked outwards and established strong partnerships with Jewish leaders and organisations across Australia.

After Rabbi Meltzer and his family left Canberra in December 2017, Rabbi Shimon Eddi was employed in February 2018 as community rabbi. Rabbi Gary Robuck, formerly senior Rabbi of North Shore Temple Emanuel, was engaged on a visiting basis to provide services for, and to develop, the Progressive congregation. In 2019, the Progressive congregation achieved full affiliation with the Union of Progressive Judaism, the roof body that resources Progressive activities. After Rabbi Eddi’s employment concluded, he continued to offer adult education to members.

In February 2020, amidst bushfires, hail, floods and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rabbi Elhanan Miller, arrived from Israel as interim rabbi of the Orthodox congregation. Rabbi Miller, a journalist,



researcher and Middle East specialist, was faced with unique challenges imposed by the pandemic to maintain the community's social cohesion during the full lockdown. With the closure of the Centre, Zoom created the opportunity to connect, and many members, young and old, embraced the technology, attending *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Havdalah* online. Rabbi Eddi continued to deliver adult education classes on Zoom also. In late August 2021, during the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rabbi David and Rabbanit Mili Leitner Cohen arrived from Israel and took on the continuing role of community rabbis.

One of the finest achievements of the past 70 years has been the establishment and dedication of the Australian Jewish War Memorial in the grounds of the Centre.<sup>18</sup> Since the opening of the building in 1971 it was the vision of the founders and members of the Community to honour the memory of fallen Australian Jewish service personnel with a national war memorial worthy of their sacrifice, as referenced in the name: National Jewish Memorial Centre. A lack of finances and a suitable commemorative occasion meant that any plans were stalled, despite the enthusiasm and dedication of both Earle Hoffman and Margaret Beadman OAM over many years. The plinth in the original foyer served as the interim memorial.

A year after Hoffman's death, the Centenary of Anzac Jewish Program was formed in June 2014, coordinated by Peter Allen of the NSW Association of Jewish Service and ex-Service Men and Women. It was a national collaboration, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Federation of Australian Jewish Ex-Service Associations, and the Australian Jewish Historical Society. The Australian Jewish War Memorial at the Centre was one of its projects. Commonwealth grant money was obtained from the 'Saluting Their Service Commemorative Grants Program'. The centenary of General Sir John Monash's knighthood on 12 August 2018 provided the appropriate occasion to dedicate the newly designed national memorial.

Over the next four years the project was given impetus and direction by Dr Merrilyn Sernack, with assistance from Peter Allen and the Australian Jewish Historical Society and came to fruition. At a solemn ceremony on Sunday 12 August 2018, the new memorial, embossed with the names of 341 Jewish military personnel who laid down their lives in wars serving in Australian or Empire Forces, was unveiled

and dedicated by the Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC and Lady Cosgrove, in the presence of the Chief of the Defence Force General Angus Campbell AO DSC. In his capacity as Patron-in-Chief of the General Sir John Monash Foundation the Governor-General and Lady Cosgrove also unveiled a commissioned portrait of Sir John Monash.



*Dedication of the Australian Jewish War Memorial, 12 August 2018.  
Photographer Merrilyn Sernack*

The Australian Jewish War Memorial is being supplemented by a touch screen that displays narratives and images of the men listed on the memorial. The ACT Jewish community is now the proud custodian of a perpetual national war memorial that symbolises the commitment and contribution of the Australian Jewish community to our nation's security and ensures that the sacrifice of our servicemen will never be forgotten.

The community's latest milestone is the building and dedication of the new Millie Phillips extension to the building by the Governor-General the Honourable David Hurley and H.E. Mrs Linda Hurley. During the past few years, the community has expanded, taken on professional management, dedicated a national war memorial and developed a cultural facility to display to the broader community consisting

of a library, museum and art gallery. The community increasingly assumed roles to serve the religious, educational, cultural and social needs of its members and friends, but also external roles with interfaith, political or national organisations and other outreach channels. This expansion placed huge pressure on the original building, which was not designed to cover such diverse activities.

The need to expand the building was recognised early, indeed, by the founders and subsequent presidents. Hoffman, a man of vision, argued long and hard for an expansion project and conjured many a design, but these did not come to fruition initially. Although informal community consultation had taken place earlier, serious organised planning only began in 2010 during the presidency of Professor Kim Rubenstein and her Board member husband Dr Garry Sturgess. It was continued in 2012 with a new Board under President Robert Cussel. The community treasurer, Dr David Rosalky, took on the responsibility of pursuing the building project, which gathered momentum during 2013. Philip Leeson Architects were engaged to develop initial plans, and by November 2013 a revised design emerged.

The challenge the community faced in proceeding with these plans was how to finance and to advance the project. In response, the community sought and received access to the JCA capital appeal for 2016. The community catered for the Jews of the national capital with a wide range of services, thereby ensuring Jewish continuity, but was also well situated physically and professionally to engage with political and diplomatic leadership to offer gateways for leaders of national Jewish organisations to protect Jewish interests. This paradigm was presented to potential donors and the strengths and value of the project were apparent. The Australian Jewish community has many generous philanthropists, and through the tireless efforts of then community president, Yael Cass, as well as Rabbi Alon Meltzer, the community was successful in securing most of the funding required. The first stage, comprising the security perimeter fence, the underground services, and the refurbishment of the existing Orthodox sanctuary, was completed in May 2018. The more challenging new wing with a state-of-the-art security system was completed in May 2020.

In October 2021 this extension was announced the winner of the Master Builders Association ACT competition for a commercial construction for less than \$5 million. The citation read: 'The internal finishes impress, with native hardwood and contrasting grey concrete



*The National Jewish Memorial Centre, 22 May 2020. Photographer Adele Rosalky.*

blocks used extensively throughout the project. The acoustic panelling added warm colours to the mix to give a calming ambience.’ The National Jewish Memorial Centre has now been transformed from a facility designed in the 1960s and serving the ACT Jewish Community for 50 years, into a national facility of high quality and modern design for the next 50 years and beyond.

Over the years Canberra, as the national capital, has attracted a distinctive population. Its Jewish population reflects that character, which has changed little in 70 years with the same mixture of public servants and academics, now augmented with specialists in the medical and legal professions, the IT industry, technocrats and diplomats. It is not a wealthy community; it is small and somewhat transient. Although a core population has settled there, it still faces critical mass issues. These have an impact on the supply of kosher food, the lack of the availability of a Jewish school, and mikveh facilities. This has resulted in some observant young professionals leaving Canberra.

Young people, my children’s age and younger, are the first generations that did not know their relatives who were the immigrants who came from Eastern Europe or the East. My grandparents who travelled from Mariupol, Ukraine via Harbin, China, came to Australia with a strong religious and work ethic. It is not unique to Jewish communities that it can be hard to motivate young people to support community and to volunteer or contribute like their parents. This seems to be true especially for a perception of history. I have witnessed over these past

five years that I have been president of the ACT branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society that it takes an effort to encourage a younger generation to actively engage with the recounting of their Jewish past.

So, I have followed the creation and developments of my community, both tangible and intangible, for over 70 years, and given you a personal account. I never thought I would have to live through the building process twice, once with my father Earle Hoffman as the main fund-raiser, and 50 years later with my husband, Dr David Rosalky, as the go-to man, but the results have been significant and very satisfying indeed. I am sorry that the early founders, Earle Hoffman, Dr Ron Mendelsohn, Ernie Horton, Kurt Gottlieb and others are not here today to see how far we have come.

Over the years heroic efforts were made by the few to carry the many in the preservation of Judaism, and despite some shortcomings, the ACT Jewish Community is well equipped to cater for the coming generation of young families to foster Jewish continuity in the nation's capital for the foreseeable future. To borrow from our JCA pitch, it has been and continues to be a community that 'educates, celebrates, advocates, and proudly represents Australian Jewry under one roof'.

### Postscript

Since this talk was presented, the ACT Jewish Community has received government and private funding to develop the Canberra Holocaust Museum and Education Centre which is now in the planning stage.

### Endnotes

- 1 Rabbi Israel Porush, 'The Canberra Jewish Community (1951–1981)', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal of Proceedings*, vol. IX, Part 3 (1982), p. 189. The author has drawn on various material in this work, which was the original ground-breaking historical publication documenting the history of the first thirty years of the ACT Jewish Community.
- 2 Stephen J. Tazewell OAM, *Grand Goulburn*, Goulburn, NSW, The Council of the City of Goulburn, 1991, p. 31.
- 3 Earle Hoffman presented many accounts of the establishment of the ACT Jewish Community for AJHS presentations, articles in *Hamerkaz* (the magazine of the ACT Jewish Community), the *Oral History* (see below), and for commemorative occasions. Papers in Earle Hoffman's archive have been cited throughout this talk.

- 4 R. Bhathal, 'Gottlieb, Kurt (1910–1995)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gottlieb-kurt-18054/text29631>, published online 2019, accessed online 10 March 2022.
- 5 Rabbi Israel Porush, 'The Canberra Jewish Community (1951–1981)', p. 189.
- 6 Adele Rosalky (ed.), *The Jewish Community of Canberra: Recollections in Oral History*, ACT Jewish Community Inc., 2008, p. 15.
- 7 Personal communication to the author by Bev Chalker, sister of Graeme Lipman.
- 8 Porush, 'The Canberra Jewish Community', p. 192.
- 9 Rosalky, *The Jewish Community of Canberra: Oral History*, p. 59.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Exhibition notice for Dr Ernest Fooks retrospective *The House Talks Back*, University of Melbourne, 2017.
- 12 Rosalky, *The Jewish Community of Canberra: Oral History*, p. 78.
- 13 The first ACT Jewish Community Inc. Constitution dated November 1958 stated that 'The powers and functions for which the Association is established to make provision for the conduct of divine service or devotion, public or private, and of ceremonies, rites and religious practices according to the customs of the Jewish faith'. At that time the 'customs' would have been interpreted as Orthodox.
- 14 Rosalky, *The Jewish Community of Canberra*, p. 92.
- 15 Ibid., p. 44.
- 16 Suzanne D. Rutland, 'Klein, Louis (1917–1975)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/klein-louis-10758/text19073>, published first in hardcopy 2000, accessed online 10 March 2022.
- 17 Communal newsletter, *Hamerkaz*, Issue 543, p. 10, December 2018.
- 18 For a full record of this event refer to the publication: *Australian Jewish War Memorial, a record of history in the making*, Canberra, The ACT Jewish Community Inc., 2018.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### RATBAG, SOLDIER, SAINT: THE REAL STORY OF SERGEANT ISSY SMITH VC

*by Lian Knight*

*Melbourne, Hybrid Publishers, 2022, pp. xii + 336, plates, addenda*

*ISBN: 9781925736830 (p,) 9781925736847 (e)*

Bearing glowing accolades from General the Hon Sir Peter Cosgrove AK AC CVO MC (Ret'd) and Major General (Ret'd) Emeritus Professor Jeffrey Rosenfeld AC OBE, Lian Knight's biography of her grandfather holds great promise for the reader who takes up this book. In my view that promise is fulfilled to the letter and much more.

Sergeant Issy Smith VC was both the first Jew to be awarded the Victoria Cross while alive and the first Jewish non-commissioned soldier to receive this fabled award for military valour. That meant that, despite his place as an outsider and despite his spotty record in the military discipline department, he was then able to walk with kings and princes. Yet, the personal price he and his small family paid for the physical and mental war injuries he suffered were immense, occasionally bringing him to destitution and even attempted suicide. Notwithstanding this, his life as eloquently depicted by the author, was infused with an extraordinary dignified kindness and generosity of spirit. He was devoted to assisting returned soldiers and their families, whether financially or in other ways or other forms of community service, such as being a voluntary justice of the peace and even standing for federal parliament. After thirteen years residence in Melbourne, he died just short of 50 years of age and was accorded a state funeral.

Writing Issy Smith's biography was a challenge for at least two reasons. First, much of the source material consisted of newspaper reports, many of which were inaccurate, inconsistent and in some cases tendentious. Second, because of the nature of his early years, official documents were often inherently inaccurate. For example, youths wishing to enlist



frequently increased their age and, in some cases, recruiting officers, desperate to fill a quota for much-needed manpower, were not too particular about such details. By the author's reckoning, Issy was just thirteen and half when he enlisted in the British Army. It is not even clear where Issy was born, but the author concludes Constantinople.

Knight's first book was a novel but she has used the novelist's skill of starting on a journey down the highway of Issy's life and frequently diverging to take the reader off the main road along numerous side roads and lanes, providing fascinating background historical information and context, before going back to the main road of Issy's extraordinary life.

Examples of these byways are:

- the history of 'Russification' (which we now witness nightly on television screens) and the brutal Tzarist policy of destroying the cohesion and unity of the Jews in his empire by conscripting Jewish males, sometimes as young as eight or nine, into the army for 25 years from their eighteenth birthday;
- how sport and in particular boxing came to play such an important role in the Armies of Commonwealth countries;
- how boxing became much more dangerous when padded gloves were introduced (read the book to find out why);
- the terrible privations of trench warfare, with so many different ways of dying quite apart from enemy action;
- the terrible era of the Spanish Influenza;
- the disastrous World War One campaign of the British Army in Mesopotamia, in which it suffered its worst defeat and most abject surrender up to that time;
- the growth of the film and entertainment industry, both in England and Australia, in which Issy had conspicuously participated, both as an actor and a film salesman; and
- the shameful treatment that disabled returned soldiers received and how, at times of unemployment, that led to mutinies and strikes. Indeed, Knight's family still possesses the truncheon with which Issy was issued, when in the mid-1920s at a time of civil disorder in Great Britain, even the

police went on strike and ex-servicemen were recalled to keep order. (Such was the memory of the national neglect of these soldiers who had suffered so much mentally and physically, that World War Two servicemen sent Winston Churchill's government packing even before that war had ended, ushering in a socialist government that embarked on a massive program of nationalisation and of course the introduction of the British National Health Scheme. Who could blame them?)

Reverting to the author's main road, in the 1860s Issy's parents (surname Shmeilowitz) and their children moved from Berdichev (then part of Russia and now in Ukraine) to Odessa, then Rostov-on-Don, and then to Constantinople. These regular displacements occurred in order to escape the misery of Russification and vicious government sponsored antisemitism, including murderous pogroms. It was in Constantinople in 1890 that eleventh child, Issy, was born to a father then aged 68 and who had lost one leg and so was ill-equipped to bring up an energetic and wilful young boy. Because of the instability prevailing in Turkey, many members of the family moved to Egypt. However, an older brother decided to go to London, and sometime later eleven-year-old Issy, after expressing his dissatisfaction with his violin teacher by smashing his violin over the poor man's head, fled to England (as a stow-away on a ship) determined to find his older brother. Without a word of English, he managed to do this, and, after a couple of years of desperate poverty, enlisted in the British Army in 1904.

Issy (by then a reservist) moved to Australia in 1914 at the suggestion of his fiancée, Elsie, in order to escape the poverty of the East End of London. This was after he had already completed over eight years' service in the British Army, including a stint in India. He was only in Melbourne for a few months when World War One broke out and on that very day Issy presented himself to army authorities. As things turned out, he never became a member of the AIF, but served as an Imperial Reservist in the British Army. When he finally settled in Melbourne after the war, this was to have unfortunate and complicated results for his disability pension entitlements.

In 1915, at the Battle of Ypres, after enduring the horror of a German gas attack, he rescued his wounded platoon commander and others in no-man's land, whilst under fierce gunfire and for this he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Victoria Cross transformed Issy's life. Instantly he became a celebrity and over his life met kings and princes and numerous other notables. Issy was in a hospital in Ireland convalescing from the results of the gas attack, the crippling effects of which were to stay with him for the rest of his short life. Knight recounts how 'the following day (after the gazettal of his decoration) the hospital was besieged by Jews from all over Ireland who came to offer their congratulations. They took him from the hospital on their shoulders and carried him through streets lined with cheering crowds.' Following his decoration, communities everywhere 'laid claim' to Issy, not the least in Australia.

Although Issy was desperately shy, entranced audiences loved his laconic, modest accounts of what battle was like and what had impelled his heroism. So, he immediately put his fame to good use by campaigning at a gruelling pace for recruits for the army at a time when Britain had no system of military conscription. It was a hard and often thankless task. As the author explains, when there was bad news from the front, no one wanted to be part of the carnage and when there was good news, the feeling was 'well, they don't really need me'. Finally, Britain introduced universal conscription in early 1916 to meet the enormous demands for 'cannon fodder' (the expression introduced at that time).

Although experiencing enormous fame in Britain and his ultimate home, Australia, Issy's life was an unrelenting struggle. There were times when he had good jobs: indeed, he acted in a number of films about the war. However, there were also periods when he was ill, depressed, incapacitated, unemployed and destitute, having to rely on charity. This reached a point where at one stage he pawned his prized medals. It was only due to the efforts of the wife of Chief Rabbi Dr J. Hertz (president of the Jewish Historical Society of England) that funds were raised for Issy's sustenance and to enable him to redeem the decorations. Despite all this, Issy was an abundantly compassionate and generous man, whose war experiences had imbued him with an unquenchable desire to help his fellow man. His extraordinary community service, while struggling financially and with debilitating physical and mental problems from his war service, are described extensively by the author, leaving a profound feeling of admiration on the part of the reader and a humbling realisation of just how tough and full of adversity were the times during which Issy had lived.

Throughout the book, the issue of antisemitism appears and Issy was all too familiar with it, particularly the time-honoured perception

that Jews were shirkers, weak and cowardly. Among several others, the author recounts one episode at one of Melbourne's most celebrated restaurants (still in existence), at which a particularly raucous antisemite, having recognised Issy with his family, began loudly holding forth on the subject of Jews. Finally, when Issy's large plate of spaghetti arrived, he solemnly emptied it over the head of this man to the cheers of other diners, whereupon, wearing a wig of pasta, he and his party got up and departed and the restaurant quickly produced another meal for Issy.

When Issy died at the age of 49, he received a state funeral with full military honours and many readers would consider that the lifetime of Issy's community service, as described by the author, would have justified this even without his VC.

I would encourage any reader of this book not to overlook its endnotes. Many of them are intriguing elaborations or explanations of matter in the main text and would actually have been better situated as footnotes on the relevant pages, leaving the source material to be included as endnotes.

My only other comment about this book is the use of the word 'Ratbag' in the title, which presumably derives from the occasionally delinquent conduct in which Issy engaged as a boy. Maybe it is meant endearingly, but the word is generally insulting and pejorative. To the contrary, Knight's book amply demonstrates that Sergeant Issy Smith VC was a *mensch* in the fullest sense of the word and a very courageous one, both physically and morally.

Roger Selby

## THE GHOST TATTOO: DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN TRUTH OF MY FATHER'S HOLOCAUST

*By Tony Bernard*

*Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2022, xxvi, 1–320 pp., plates, RRP \$32.95.*

ISBN: 978 1 76106 541 5

In her recent and important book, *The Nine*, Gwen Strauss reflects on the issue of Holocaust survivors not speaking about their traumatic experiences after the war and acting as if nothing terrible had happened.<sup>1</sup> She quotes from Howard Stein: 'What has consciously been banned from existence returns as a ghost, usually in the form of an enactment.'<sup>2</sup> Tony Bernard's valuable exploration of his father Henry's

Holocaust story illustrates this comment, and helps to explain the title of the book. Henry had his Auschwitz number tattooed onto his arm, but he did not talk about all of his traumatic experiences with his family after the war, and it was only much later in life that the 'torrent' finally came out. Yet, from the age of 24 his son, Tony, became interested in investigating his story. This book chronicles this journey – from 'The Silence' to the eventual sharing of the full story at the turn of the twenty-first century, over 50 years after the end of the war.

Tony Bernard's compelling narration of his father's story is not a traditional biography providing a chronological account of his father's life. It is divided into three parts: Part I: 'Living in a mental ghetto', Tony's gradual unravelling the story from 1970 onwards; Part II: 'Living in the Tomaszow ghetto', covering the war years from 1940–43, with the developments in his hometown of Tomaszow, Poland; and, finally, Part III: 'Afterwards', with the developments which led to the writing of this book. This approach of the gradual revealing of the facts surrounding each key event in Henry's Holocaust creates a sense of suspense and adds to emotional power and interest of the story.

The first Part of the book begins in 1970 when Henry was flown from his Northern Suburbs home in Sydney to Germany to bear witness at a war crimes trial in Darmstadt, Germany, against three Nazis who until then had managed to escape any scrutiny of their war crimes. At this stage, the only thing that Henry's three children knew about their father's war years was that that he had been in Auschwitz because of the tattoo on his arm, and they were aware of a few key objects, including a cutlery set he had received in the DP camp after the war. Apart from that, his father did not talk about the war. Yet, Tony comments, 'behind his Auschwitz tattoo he had another invisible mark in his conscience, a ghost tattoo that only Henry could see and feel' (p. 9). Each chapter in this part illustrates the key turning points when Tony learnt more about his father's story. Each of these key turning points are associated with his trips to Poland with his father in 1979, and its focus on Auschwitz; in 1985, with its focus moving also to the forced labour camp of Blizyn where his father was incarcerated; and, finally, 1997, with the door slowly opening on Henry's hometown, Tomaszow. In the chapter dealing with his first visit to Poland with his father in 1979, when he begins his voyage of discovery, Tony felt this was a doorway into his father's past. Yet, it was shut before the full story was revealed. Tony commented: 'during my childhood, it seemed like there were

many such doorways, but each one opened briefly and only led into one chamber of his previous life without connecting to others. As close as we were, he was a vast mystery to me. Going to Poland opened some of those chambers, but left others even more firmly shut.' He also stressed that only by being in Poland did he begin to understand what it meant to have 'the visceral sense of belonging to this vast and complicated family history' (p. 39).

The second Part then zooms in on the developments in Tomaszow, revealing the ghost behind the tattoo, as well as dealing in detail with the three Nazis who had been stationed in Tomaszow and their criminal violence and orgy of shootings. This included the violent murders carried out by Georg Boettig, a *Volksdeutscher* (ethnic German) who had attended the same school as Henry. This part shines a light into the actions of the Nazis as they systematically carried out the destruction of European Jewry, highlighting the successful manner in which the Nazis used the Jewish leadership, the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police, to implement their plan to destroy the Jewish people. At one level the story is very emotional, including describing how Henry's beloved mother, Theodora, is caught up in the final selection in the ghetto and sent to her death at Treblinka – to which the reader had already been introduced in the 1979 chapter entitled 'A doorway into the past' when Tony visited Treblinka with his father. On another level, the story has a more objective, dispassionate feeling to it. Perhaps, this is because, as Tony explains, his father had recounted the story so many times 'that he was able to do so without apparent emotion' (p. 268). Yet, this terrifying and tragic period in his life left its invisible mark on him. His inability to save his mother led to a lifelong feeling of guilt, which contributed to his obsessive behaviour and his flareups in anger.

The third Part, then brings the story to a close, dealing with the developments which led to the book being written. After his retirement, Henry felt the need to record his story, and he asked Tony, his eldest son, who had become deeply engaged in researching the Holocaust following their first visit to Poland in 1979, to assist him. The manuscript was finalised in 2016, a few months before Henry died, so that he had a chance to read it. In his determination to ensure the accuracy of his father's story, Tony met with Emeritus Professor Dr Konrad Kwiet, the resident historian of the Sydney Jewish Museum. Professor Kwiet stressed how important accuracy was in such a book and read

the manuscript carefully. They then agreed to meet in Darmstadt so that historian Kwiet could assist him with the archives of the 1970 war crimes trial, in which his father had participated, and which Tony had written about in the first chapter of his book. An intriguing aspect of this visit was his listening to the recording of his father's statement in court which had a huge impact on Tony. Not many descendants have heard the voice of their survivor parent in a court statement. Fifty years after that trial took place, Tony Bernard finally had uncovered his father's full story, together with discovering the ghost that existed behind his Auschwitz tattoo.

*The Ghost Tattoo* deals with many themes associated with the Holocaust. These include antisemitism, starting with Tony's experience of antisemitic bullying at school which made him want to dissociate from Judaism and the Jewish people; Jewish life in Poland before the war; the phases of the implementation of what the Nazis called 'The Final Solution', the murder of Europe's Jews, as they were carried out in an intermediate-sized town; the role of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish Ghetto Police and the moral dilemma they were faced with; and immigration and starting a new life in Australia, including the struggle with issues of Jewish identity. As well, Tony analyses the silence of survivors with the reluctance of most to speak to their children about their experiences due to a sense of guilt, shame and not wishing to distress their children. Yet, the trauma that they experienced manifested itself in other ways. Thus, *Ghost Tattoo* sheds new light on the Holocaust trajectory, particularly regarding the police from the Jewish ghettos, an aspect of the Holocaust which, as Professor Kwiet has commented, has been under-researched (p. 295).

The recent Gandel survey noted that Australians know little about Australia and the Holocaust, including being unaware of the significant number of Holocaust survivors in Australia.<sup>3</sup> This important new book would help them to understand the contributions which survivors made to the development of Australia. After his immigration to Australia, Henry studied medicine and then worked as a general practitioner on the Northern Beaches of Sydney, with his three children also taking up the medical profession.

*The Ghost Tattoo* is highly recommended for Australian teachers of the Holocaust as a valuable resource, as well as for students, especially in upper high school. Teaching difficult knowledge is challenging and



this book provides a very effective tool for understanding the processes of the Holocaust and its impact within an Australian setting. It is well produced by Allen & Unwin and has a good index. My only criticism is of the quality of the paper, which kept curling up as I was reading and taking notes, but this is a minor problem. I hope that this book will achieve the attention it deserves since it adds to our understanding of the Holocaust, the paradigm of genocides.

Suzanne D. Rutland

## LEO AND MINA FINK: FOR THE GREATER GOOD

by Margaret Taft

Clayton, Vic, Monash University Publishing, 2022, xiv +239 pp., photo inset 12 pages, bibliog, RRP \$34.95 (paperback)

ISBN: 9781922464866 (paperback), 9781922464873 (pdf),  
9781922464880 (epub)

Margaret Taft's biography of Leo and Mina Fink is an important addition to the scholarship of Australian Jewish history which is long overdue and fills an important gap. Leo and Mina Fink were the architects of the post-war transformation of Melbourne Jewry from a highly assimilated community into 'a powerful, proactive, outwardly focused network of democratically run organisations committed to the Jewish world and Jewish survival' (p. xiii). Peter Medding expressed this succinctly in the title of his book, *From Assimilation to Group Survival*.<sup>4</sup> It was the Finks' vision of rescuing and rehabilitating Jewish survivors of the Holocaust that has helped to shape contemporary Melbourne Jewry. As Margaret Taft expresses it, they were 'game changers' (p. xiv) who loom large on the post-war Australian Jewish scene. Taft explains that the central question in the book is to explore their motivation for why 'they relentlessly pursued a life of communal service' (p. xiii), and she returns to this question throughout the book.

The book begins with a description of the arrival in Sydney in March 1947 of the *Johan de Witt*, the only ship to arrive from Europe where the official Jewish quota of 25% was not enforced. Leo Fink had travelled to Canberra to meet with Arthur Calwell and persuade him to waive the quota because of the urgency of the situation with the survivors in France facing the possibility of losing their temporary right

to remain there. Calwell was appointed as Australia's first Minister of Immigration in August 1945 – until then all immigration issues were dealt with by the Department of the Interior, because before World War Two the Australian government policy was immigration should be 98% Anglo-Celtic. Until 1945, European Jews, with other Europeans, were classified as 'aliens'. Arthur Calwell was to change this policy radically, but xenophobia combined with antisemitism meant that the government did not want shiploads of Jewish survivors arriving on Australian shores. Hence, the 25% quota was introduced before the federal election of 1946 and retained afterwards, despite the re-election of the Labor Party government.

Reading the first chapter, entitled 'Against the Odds', with the story of the *Johan de Witt*, was very emotional for me. When I wrote about the history of this ship and its arrival in Sydney in *Edge of the Diaspora*, I had researched the history and interviewed both Mina Fink and Sydney D. Einfeld but I did not know that five members of my father's family were on the ship.<sup>5</sup> Taft describes how 'a small team of women' had 'cut sandwiches, ice cream and lemonade ready for the children'. When I visited Toronto in 1992, my cousin Jeanette Goldman (nee Perlman) informed me that she and her younger brother, Morris, were featured in the *Sydney Morning Herald* eating their ice creams.<sup>6</sup> This opening chapter of the biography sets the scene for the book. It highlights the key contribution that Leo and Mina Fink made to the migration of Jewish survivors who doubled Australia's Jewish population within a decade, with a high proportion settling in Melbourne. This was largely due to their efforts.

The book then returns to a chronological approach, beginning with Leo Fink's early years and providing background to the Jewish community in Bialystok, where, at the turn of the twentieth century, 75% of its population was Jewish. The new movements of Zionism and Bundism flourished there, and the concept of Esperanto as an international language emerged there. Both Leo and Mina were the products of this environment, and both were strong Zionists, even though Mina's uncle, Jacob Waks, was a Bundist, who was also to play a role in Melbourne's Bundist movement. Leo's Zionism was such that he made *Aliyah* to Palestine as a pioneer (a *halutz*) and, while his father encouraged him to leave the pioneering life to study in Berlin, he remained a staunch Zionist all his life.

After his studies in Germany, Leo joined his family who had relocated to Rumania to establish a new business that was not successful. When his parents decided to return to Bialystok with their sister, the three Fink brothers, Leo, Sam and Wolf decided to migrate to Melbourne. They were later joined by their youngest brother, Jack (Jacob). Taft describes their early struggles, their nine months of the Berwick Land Settlement, working in agriculture and their decision to return to Melbourne and establish a woollen factory. This enterprise quickly succeeded, despite the impact of the depression. When Leo returned to Bialystok to visit his family at the age of 31 in 1932 his mother arranged for him to meet Mina (nee Waks), who had been orphaned at the age of eight and was then only 19, having just completed her high school studies. Taft describes this as 'a marriage made in heaven' (p. 50). Indeed, both Leo and Mina played such key roles in building Melbourne Jewry that they could be described as 'a power couple'.

There is no doubt that it was in the area of relief, rescue and rehabilitation that the Finks made their most significant contributions. Leo's first communal involvement was with the Yiddish centre, Kadimah, initially located in Carlton, North Melbourne. By 1938 he was serving as its honorary treasurer. However, by far his and Mina's most important contribution was the formation of what became the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund (UJORF) in 1942. This became a mass organisation with over 2000 members with Leo as its president and Mina serving as president of its Ladies' Auxiliary. They worked tirelessly with a large team of volunteers and shipped an enormous amount of relief packages to Europe, as described in the book.

Taft demonstrates how, in the immediate post-war period, Leo moved from being concerned with sending relief packages to assist European Jewry to focussing on immigration. By July 1947, UJORF had amalgamated with the Australian Jewish Welfare Society to form the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society (AJWRS), with Leo serving as its president until 1960. That 'R' in the acronym, relating to UJORF, represented a takeover by the East European Jews of the leadership. They changed the nature of Melbourne Jewry, with the impact of the *landsmannschaften* (immigrant organisations formed to assist townsfolk in their migration). For example, the Bialystoker Centre played a key role in the sponsorship and absorption of the survivors. In

total, Melbourne Jewry established eleven hostels, with Mina Fink playing a key role in assisting the children in general, and the Buchenwald Boys housed in Camberwell House in particular.

After this discussion of the key formative years of post-war Melbourne Jewry, Taft deals with the later developments, including Mina and Leo's contribution to Israel's economic development with the establishment of the first fully Australian owned factory – the Australian Wool Industries – in Ashdod in 1963. Leo's passing in 1972 was not the end of the story, with Taft then focussing on Mina's key contributions to the National Council of Jewish Women during her term as National President from 1967 to 1972. She had previously served as Victorian President from 1959 to 1962. Mina also played a central role in terms of fostering Holocaust memory and memorialisation. After her efforts to support the publication of the English edition of Sheva Glas-Wiener's *Children of the Ghetto*,<sup>7</sup> she contributed to the establishment of the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne, both in terms of providing leadership and her own financial support.

In her preface, Taft describes her research methodology. She explains that the family gave her personal ephemera and agreed to be interviewed, but these colourful anecdotes were reinforced with archival and newspaper research, so central for historical validity. To do that, Taft has sought to understand the historical context which shaped the Finks and inspired them to act (xi-xiii). Throughout the book, the Finks' story and contributions are interspersed with pen sketches creating the historical context, so that the book is more than the biography of the two central characters. It is also a book which sheds light on twentieth century Jewish history, not only for Australia but also on the broader canvas of Jewish life at the time.

While the book provides valuable insights into this period of Australian Jewish history and the key role that the Finks played as architects of Australian Jewry, there are some gaps and inaccuracies. Taft refers briefly to Sydney Einfeld, who headed both Jewish Welfare in Sydney and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, but she does not discuss Einfeld's relationship with Leo Fink, which was so important. After the clashes with previous Sydney president, Saul Symonds, briefly referred to in relation to the story of the *Johan de Witt*, it was the cordial relationship between Einfeld and Fink, both of East European background, which was very important in the building of post-war Australian Jewry.

Again, there is a brief mention of Fink's role with the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, including his serving as acting president for a brief period. Yet, Maurice Ashkanasy, the third giant in this story, is not even mentioned. I would have liked to learn more about Leo Fink's relationship with Ashkanasy, given that the two men worked so closely together over such a long period of time. She also writes that Leo Fink 'seized control of Jewish welfare operations in Melbourne' during 'the darkest days of the Second World War' (p. 4) but while Leo did form UJORF in this period, he only 'seized control' of Jewish welfare from the Anglo-Jewish establishment after the war. Taft refers to Isaac Boas as 'a respected leader of the Anglo-Jewish establishment' (p. 97) but does not discuss the high level of dissatisfaction with his conservative approach to Jewish survivor immigration before and after the war. She also does not refer to the Association of Jewish Refugees, led by Rabbi Dr Herman Sanger, who worked closely with the Finks and strongly supported Leo Fink's taking over the helm of Jewish welfare in 1947.

Despite these omissions, Taft has produced a highly readable account of the history of Leo and Mina Fink, placing their story firmly within its historical context. Her account is recommended for both scholars of Australian Jewry and the general readership. There is no doubt that the Finks' contributions were 'for the greater good' and deserve to be told, so that Taft has filled an important gap in the history of Australian Jewry.

Suzanne D. Rutland

## FINDING HOME: MEMOIR OF A JEWISH GIRL: BOMBAY TO SYDNEY

*By Angelica Jacob*

USA, Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing Ltd, 2019, 162 pp., foreword,  
RRP \$10.72 (paperback)

ISBN 13: 9798571299350

India was home to three Jewish communities: the Baghdadis, the Bene Israel and the Cochin Jews. Although the Bene Israel were by far the largest of the three, most diaspora Jews know little about them. Angelica Jacob's warm, well-written memoir – *Finding Home: Memoir of a Jewish Girl Bombay to Sydney* – helps to fill this void, and beautifully illustrates the diversity of Jewish experience.

Angelica's story begins in 1970s Bombay (now Mumbai). In vivid detail, she describes her self-proclaimed idyllic childhood as the youngest of three sisters in a Bene Israel family, 'living a Jewish life as a minority in an inclusive, pluralistic culture.' Indeed, Angelica's ten closest school friends are a mix of Jews, Anglo-Indians, Catholics and Muslims.

Angelica's early life is uniquely Indian. Her parents for example, stand at opposite ends of their bedroom to fold her mother's six-yard saris 'with exact precision' (p. 36), and privately share jokes in Marathi, the traditional language of the Bene Israel. Her family celebrates the Muslim festival of Eid and the Hindu festival of Diwali, and she and her friends drink Badshah's famous *falooda* – a rose milk with basil seeds, vermicelli and vanilla ice-cream – at Crawford Market. Yet, Angelica's upbringing is also quintessentially Jewish.

On Fridays, Angelica's mother 'retrieves the ornate brass candelabra from the glass-door cupboard and places it on the white tablecloth for *Shabbat* prayers that evening.' And on *Yom Kippur*, the congregation spills out from under the four pillars of the sanctuary of Bombay's Magen David Synagogue, while children laugh and play under the watchful eye of their mothers.

This mix of Indian and Jewish culture, together with the remnants of the British Raj, permeate Angelica's youth. She says the *Shema* prayer every morning. Her breakfast consists of an omelet wrapped in two *rotis*, washed down with milk flavoured with Cadbury's Drinking Chocolate. She treks with her father to Bombay's grand cinema house, the Regal, to watch Cecil B. De Mille's *Ten Commandments*. Preferring Hindi films, Angelica's mother 'drags' her daughters to the Palace cinema, where 'it is not unusual' (p. 40) to see Baghdadi Jewish women on the big screen.

Woven into Angelica's story is a treasure-trove of religious customs and food unique to the Bene Israel. These include the *Malida* ceremony to receive God's blessing – conducted for birth, circumcision, blessings, fertility, health and peace; and dishes such as *sandaans*, sweet semolina rounds, and *karanjias*, a flaky fried pastry stuffed with desiccated coconut and dried fruit.

The memoir also traces the history of the Bene Israel: belonging to one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, according to legend they reached India when they were shipwrecked off Navagon, a coastal town about twenty miles south of Bombay Island. The local Hindu community welcomed the few survivors and gave them refuge. Remarkably, the

Bene Israel lived in India for 1800 years without being persecuted or experiencing antisemitism.

After Israel was established in 1948, the Bene Israel community slowly began to dwindle as its members – including some of Angelica's relatives – made *aliyah*. Yet, it was not easy. For those left behind, 'each separation represents a death in the family'. However, for those who leave, their Jewish identity is questioned by Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi, and the 'gentle Jews of Bombay [are] unprepared for life in the kibbutzim, the transit camps, and in the new homes allotted to them' (p. 48).

Angelica's parents – her 'fastidious' father and 'long-suffering' mother – are key players in her story. Dolls are banned from Angelica's home, and both parents 'deviate from the stereotype that women's destinies are defined by marriage and children.' (p. 63) Her mother, forbidden from going to university, is a strong advocate for her daughters' education. Angelica's father is even more vocal: 'Don't teach the girls to cook!' he says. 'They have to study well and get good grades!' (p. 19) He gifts Angelica with a love of words and the English language, together with an insistence that women must be economically independent.

Despite their liberal mindedness when it related to her education, Angelica's parents try to arrange for her to be married to a Jewish man (the Bene Israel adopted the tradition of arranged marriages from Hindu culture). To her parents' great disappointment, Angelica – only just out of college, not ready to be a wife and mother, and keen for the economic freedom she's been working towards – declines. Later, and with her parents' blessing, she marries Dilip, a Hindu. In 1984, Angelica and Dilip move to Australia, where Angelica builds a career as a journalist and the couple start a family.

*Finding Home* moves back and forward in time, from India in the 1970s to Australia in the 1980s. The memoir's poignant final chapter describes Angelica's return visit to Bombay in 2017. Now much older than the 26-year-old she was when she left her hometown, the gates to Angelica's beloved Magen David Synagogue seem smaller than she remembers them, but 'even in all its dilapidated glory' (p. 153), the house of worship still takes her breath away.

I would have loved *Finding Home* to have included some photos of Angelica and her family; to know more about how Judaism influenced her after she left India, and whether she has passed down any of her Bene Israel traditions to her children. However, the latter part of



Angelica's memoir focuses on her adjustment to Australian life and her career, and she does not discuss any religious or cultural affiliation she may have had to the Sydney Jewish community. Regardless, Angelica has overwhelmingly succeeded in the goal she outlines in her prologue: 'to create awareness, recognition, and a deeper understanding among a wider audience of the Jews of Bombay' (p. 6).

*Finding Home* is a captivating, highly readable memoir, in which Angelica Jacob expands our knowledge of what it means to be Jewish. In doing so, she affirms the importance of documenting and sharing Sephardi and Mizrahi stories in Australia's predominantly Ashkenazi community, which has historically overlooked the experiences of Jews from Islamic and non-Christian lands.

Elana Benjamin

### End notes

- 1 Gwen Strauss, *The Nine: How a Band of Daring Resistance Women Escaped from Nazi Germany*, London, Manilla Press, 2021.
- 2 Howard F. Stein, 'A Mosaic of Transmissions After Trauma', in *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations*, ed. M. Gerard Fromm, London, Karnac, 2012, p. 175, as quoted in Gwen Strauss, p. 254.
- 3 Steven Cooke, Donna-Lee Frieze, Andrew Singleton, and Matteo Vergani, 'Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey 2021', Melbourne, Gandel Foundation and Deakin University 2022, pp. 19–21.
- 4 Peter Medding, *From Assimilation to Group Survival: A Political and Sociological Study of an Australian Jewish Community*, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1968.
- 5 Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney, Brandl & Schlesinger, 1997, pp. 223–5. Mina Fink was extremely helpful in assisting me to access the Minutes of the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society, with her interview and providing photos for the book, including those on p. 234 of the *Johan de Witt*.
- 6 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March 1947, p. 3.
- 7 Sheva Glas-Wiener, *Children of the Ghetto*, was originally published by Isaac Rubinstein in Yiddish in 1974 as a supplement to the *Yiddische Naves*. It was translated by the author and Shirley Young into English in 1983 and published by Globe Press in Melbourne.

## **ERRATUM: *AJHS JOURNAL* VOL 25, PART 2 (JUNE 2021)**

There is an error in the first sentence of Martin Munz's abstract for his article 'The Secret Service of Prejudice'. It should read as two sentences as follows:

### **ABSTRACT**

This article critiques a recently-published book on Australian intelligence history, particularly allegations against the late Hirsch Munz. Noted is the treatment of Australian Yiddish and English literary and social activism in the mid-twentieth century associated with the Melbourne Kadimah and the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, amongst other Australian literary and Jewish communal organisations.

## AJHS PRESIDENT’S REPORT – NOV. 2021

At the end of 2020, one would have thought COVID was a word consigned to the dictionary of archaic terms. That has not been the case; nevertheless, we have managed to still be productive within the constraints of COVID regulations. Further, we are now becoming a victim of our own success. This has led to new challenges, especially in balancing our charter to be the archive of the community with the cost of safe climate-controlled storage and the upfront cost of digitisation.

### **Digitisation of publications and records**

In May 2021, we joined with our partners at the National Library of Australia in launching the collection of digitised Australian Jewish newspapers on Trove, the premier online research portal in Australia. We are now expanding that collection with the addition of some lesser-known publications. The only significant gap is the *West Australian Maccabean*. We also have some constraints due to copyright, but these are being worked on.

From the first day back issues of newspapers were available, we found people tracing their roots. One person excitedly reported that for years he had been searching for his great grand-mother’s history which he now has unearthed from the publication of the eulogy at her funeral. Others have uncovered genealogical gems in the announcement of births, deaths and marriages. Photos from social events decades back have excited researchers as they saw long-forgotten family and friends smiling at the camera. The Society has now invested in technology so that we can make more of our archives available on Trove which will significantly facilitate such searches. A search on Trove will now take you directly to any article from the Society’s 80 plus years of Journals. And there is more to come.

An extensive collection of audio cassettes from the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society and the Great Synagogue, including a series of lectures recorded by Suzanne Rutland and Helen Bersten at the Great Synagogue, have been digitised. More cassettes from the Archive of Australian Judaica have been brought back to life including

an interview with Werner Baer on his experiences in Singapore and at the Tatura Internment Camp. We even tracked down an old reel-to-reel tape recorder so that we could digitise 222 reels from AUJS of the radio program "You Don't have to be Jewish".

### **Website & databases**

Our most visited database is our collection of records of 82,000 Jewish burials and cremations from around Australia. This is estimated to be almost 90% of all Jewish deaths. Gary Luke has taken on the onerous task of gathering even more data on burials. As this data comes from various sources which often are in conflict over some aspect of the departed's history, Gary has been working to increase the accuracy of our records and to incorporate more photos of headstones.

Marriage records are still being gathered by a team in Melbourne headed up by Ian Samuel, Max Wald and Rodney Eisfelder. Recently we tracked down a missing marriage register among the 1950s papers of Rabbi Lazarus Morris Goldman of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation which found their way to the Central Archive of the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem.

We have continued to expand our online databases with website usage increasing by almost 70% over the last twelve months and over 100,000 page views annually and 9,000+ users. The average viewing session duration has increased by 23% to 5 minutes 25 seconds.

Databases and stories are regularly expanded and updated as additional information comes to hand. Many pages of handwritten notes about Jewish soldiers were found among the Society's archives which were the product of the labours of an unknown researcher. These have now been incorporated into the Military database. Following discussions with the Ukrainian Consul General, we exchanged information on Jewish former Ukrainians and Russians who served in the Australian armed services. Peter Allen continues his major project to research and write biographies for all the 341 Australian Jews who died on active service. At present 111 biographies have been completed and 69 have been uploaded to our website.

### **Marketing**

Following on from the success of the podcast series, Ruth Lilian has developed a series 'From Australia's Jewish Past' which features on

*J-Wire* most Tuesdays. These interesting histories are drawn from articles featured in the Society's Journals, newsletters or archives. This series gives the Society even greater visibility.

In August we collaborated with JCA on 'An Ordinary Day in Extraordinary Times'. This archive of 200 photos, now displayed on our website, were all taken on Friday 27 August 2021 by members of the community and will show future generations how people responded to the pandemic which swept the world.

### **Walk of Jewish Sydney gets a partner**

The 'Walk of Jewish Sydney' has been joined by 'A Jewish Walk through Marvellous Melbourne'.

Peter Keeda collaborated with the Victorian Society to produce another mobile phone app to guide walkers around Melbourne focusing on the many buildings from the late 1800s which have a Jewish connection and were an integral part of Melbourne's amazing growth where the population doubled in one decade.

Work has now commenced on a 'Driving Jewish NSW' app highlighting the many country towns which have a Jewish history.

### **Blue Plaques**

The NSW State Government announced the 'Blue Plaques' program to mark sites which capture public interest in key personalities, events and places. We are grateful to Walt Secord MLC who notified us of the project and nominated our four suggested sites. These were Bridge Street Synagogue; Maitland Synagogue; Barnett Levey's Theatre Royal; and the site where Isaac Nathan, the first Australian composer, was also the first person killed by a horse-drawn tram.

### **Goulburn Cemetery**

One of the objects of the Society is to 'to use its influence to secure the preservation of places of Jewish communal interest, such as old synagogue buildings, cemeteries, etc.' The Society is actively supporting the refurbishment of Goulburn Cemetery. This is one of only two Jewish-owned cemeteries in New South Wales. Through the efforts of Gary Luke and others, the cemetery has been listed on the State Heritage Register thus qualifying it for a complete heritage restoration. This will entail significant maintenance work and the Society will be assisting in the provision of funding.

## Journal & Newsletter

The Society's *Journal* is the cornerstone of our offering to members and the community. Many members and subscribers are now reading the *Journal* online and have chosen to no longer receive print copies. While the attraction of a tangible collection is attractive to many, a complete set of journals takes up valuable shelf space. Having all *Journals* online makes searching for articles on a person or topic very simple as well as reducing the Society's printing and mailing costs. For 50 years, Suzanne Rutland has been a member of the Society and without her editorship of the NSW edition of the *Journal*, since 1991, we could not maintain the high standards reached by the Society's flagship.

The Society's quarterly newsletter has now been electronic for three years and has steadily grown as more short form submissions are received for publication. This keeps our long-standing and totally committed secretary, Philip Moses, very busy.

## Hirsch Munz

During the last year, the Society took a stand on the publication of John Fahey's book *Traitors and Spies*. One of the founders of the Society, Hirsch Munz, was inaccurately depicted as being a leading spy for the Russians in the 1940s. The Society stood with the Executive Council of Australian Jewry in calling for Allen & Unwin to publish a retraction. An article by Martin Munz, the son of Hirsch, repudiating Fahey's allegations was published in the July 2021 edition of the *Journal*.

## Archives

As much as *Journals* and databases are the most visible manifestations of the Society, our core purpose is the archiving of communal records. For this we are funded by the community. Our Senior Archivist Sabrina Elias has put a lot of effort into transferring details of all our old archives and entering the many new collections into ArchivEra, our new database management system. We are now planning the next step which is making these available in real-time on the AJHS website. This has been a slower and more involved process than anticipated but there is light at the end of the tunnel. There are over 7255 items registered in ArchivEra representing twelve large collections and many smaller offerings.

This year, we have taken in institutional archives from organisations across the community such as the Sydney Jewish Museum, North Shore Temple Emanuel, Association of Holocaust Survivors and

Descendants, Inter School Committee, Australian Union of Jewish Students, Southern Sydney Synagogue, Australian Jewish Genealogical Society and Brisbane Hebrew Congregation. There are further pending acquisitions from Chavurah Inner West, North Shore Synagogue and Mount Sinai College. In addition, we have added personal records from Peter Wise past president of JCA and the late Aaron Aarons, a leader of the NSW Sephardi community.

We now receive a steady flow of enquiries researching a diverse range of topics from Jewish Australian Musicians to The Claims Conference. The latter is addressed in the papers of Max Joseph and will be used in an upcoming documentary. Besides academia, we also had Moriah Year 10 Students introduced to the Archives as part of their project on the compilation of a history of a Jewish community organisation. The Society anticipates that this will become an annual collaboration.

In October, our Senior Archivist met via zoom with Ira Bing representing the Auckland Jewish Archives Group who are part of the Jewish Lives media initiative in New Zealand. They recognised that there were no professionally administered Jewish archives in NZ and reached out to the Society for advice on policies, standards and practices.

Raffaele Capasso undertakes the Society's conservation work on papers and photographs, enclosing them in acid free folders or photographic sleeves in preparation for the archives description. During the year we farewelled Chaya Kasif who left us to study in Cambridge and welcomed intern Millie Mairead who is studying to become an Archivist.

### **Premises**

With the latest refurbishment of the Sydney Jewish Museum, the Society has moved its offices to Level 1 of the Museum. We have exchanged 70sqm of disjointed nooks and crannies on the Lower Ground Floor to 50 sqm in one coherent space. We now have a brightly lit accessible area to house our vertical files alongside workspace for our staff and volunteers. This space will be named in honour of the Lesnie family who have become strong supporters of the Society. We now have dedicated areas for the digitisation of documents and images and the digitisation and transcription of video and audio recordings.

The Louise Rosenberg Community Archive (LRCA) on Level 4 is almost full and we are storing archives in a commercial suite nearby in Crown Street which has been generously made available to the Society



at no charge on a short-term basis by Centennial Property Group. Paul Bondin is assessing the viability of extending the LRCA into the old lift motor room on Level 5 which will almost double the storage capacity of the LRCA. We are also assessing additional off-site storage options.

We acknowledge the support of Charles Aronson and the NSW Jewish War Memorial who continue to make the LRCA space available at nominal rent.

### **Archive of Australian Judaica (AAJ)**

The Archive of Australian Judaica at University of Sydney has been closed for much of the year. Some of AAJ's uncatalogued but more frequently accessed collections such as the papers of Sam Karpin, Sophie & Leslie Caplan, Hirsch Munz and Dr Max Joseph have been transferred from AAJ to AJHS and have now been incorporated into the Society's archive. We farewell Laura Carmichael who is leaving after six very productive years.

### **Financials**

The committee has followed a practice of investing in capital works for the long-term benefit of the Society. In today's minimal interest environment, it makes little sense to defer necessary expenditures which can immediately reap benefits. We have again been successful in winning some grants, but the competition keeps getting harder. Treasurer Ralph Hirst ensures that we meet our financials commitments in a timely manner and that we stay close to budget. While we do charge for archival services, we are a communal resource and try to ensure that fees are never a barrier to an organisation's records being captured for posterity.

The Society relies on generous donors and JCA for funding. The Lesnie family again have been significant supporters of the Society plus others via JCA. We would encourage all members to donate to the JCA's annual campaign as without our annual allocation and additional support, the Society and the community will disappear.

**Membership (as at 26 Oct. 2021)**

	2020	2021
Benefactor Members	3	3
Members	154	152
Subscribers	24	57
Local Institutions	2	2
Overseas Institutions	4	6
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>220</b>

**People & thanks**

In addition to the aforementioned, we are blessed with a dedicated team of committee members and volunteers. Sabrina's assistants: omnipresent volunteers Joe Kensell, Jeannette Tsoulos, Susan Moses, Julius Hoffman, Peter Perl, Peter Gorfinkel and Alex Salomon; invaluable committee members Anna Marks, Denise Lvoff, Gary Eckstein, Robert Gescheit and finally our honorary solicitor Phil Stern.

Our volunteers have been available wherever and whenever possible during the lockdown. It is the efforts of all of these unpaid and unsung people who make the Society what it is, and I am personally indebted to them for their involvement and dedication. For their efforts, just saying 'thanks' isn't enough but they ask for no more.

We look forward to 2022 and personally, I hope that I don't need to refer to COVID other than saying 'the story of COVID has been consigned to the archives.'

Peter Philippssohn

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Peter M. Allen**, BE (Hons), MEngSc, FIEAust, is a semi-retired structural engineer, living on Sydney's north shore. In 2012 he established and was the National Coordinator of the *Centenary of Anzac Jewish Program* (2012–18), whose major projects included the publication of Mark Dapin's *Jewish Anzacs* and the Australian Jewish War Memorial in the ACT Jewish Community Centre, dedicated on the centenary of the knighting of General Sir John Monash, 12 August 2018. Since then, Peter has been writing narratives of the 341 men named thereon for an associated touchscreen and the AJHS website's Military Database. He is currently the Coordinator of *Operation Jacob*, which inter-alia is seeking to have the flawed headstones of Jewish Australian servicemen corrected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

**Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple**, AO RFD; BA LLB (Melbourne), MLitt (UNE), Hon. LLD (UNSW), DUniv (ACU), is emeritus rabbi of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, and patron and past president of the Australian Jewish Historical Society Inc. He was formerly senior rabbi to the Australian Defence Force and *dayan*/registrar of the Sydney Beth Din. Since his retirement he has been living in Israel, largely devoting his time to research and writing.

**Elana Benjamin**, BA (History), LLB (UNSW), is an Australian-Jewish writer of Iraqi-Indian heritage. Her work has been published in *Good Weekend*, *Sunday Life*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *SBS Voices*, *Essential Kids* and the Jewish Book Council blog. Elana is also the author of *My Mother's Spice Cupboard: A Journey from Baghdad to Bombay to Bondi* (Hybrid Publishers, 2012), a memoir/history which traces her family's migration from Iraq to India to Australia. She lives in Sydney with her husband and two children.

**Miriam Frommer**, BSc (Hons), PhD (London), was a Lecturer in the Department of Physiology, Faculty of Medicine, at Sydney University from 1973 until her retirement in 2013, after which she continued in

an honorary capacity. She published research papers on the visual and endocrine systems, as well as collaborating in numerous educational publications for medical science undergraduates and postgraduate medical students. She grew up in Brisbane, where her father, Alfred Fabian, was the rabbi, and attended university in Sydney when he took up a position at the North Shore Synagogue. She has long been a committed feminist, advocating for structural changes in society to ease the burden on working mothers, and greater equality for women in Judaism.

**Deborah Green**, BSc, MA (History), M.Phil, graduated from the University of Sydney in 1976 and worked in psychiatric hospitals for ten years as a social worker. Subsequently she spent several years in senior roles in The Department of Health and became the CEO of South- Eastern Sydney Health Service, a role she held from 1997–2004. Subsequently she took on the position of National CEO of St Vincents Health, a role spanning four states. She retired from full time work in 2010 and undertook two master's degrees at the University of Sydney. She is a Board member of Macquarie University Hospital and a member of Macquarie University Council.

**Adele Rosalky**, BAppSc (Cultural Heritage Management), is the current President of the ACT branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society and has served in that role since 2017, after 15 years as a committee member. She is also the volunteer curator of the ACT Jewish Community's museum and art gallery. She was awarded the National Trust prize for her studies in Cultural Heritage Management. Adele edited *The Jewish Community of Canberra, Recollections in Oral History* (2008), compiled a self-guide booklet for the Community's museum (2017) and contributed to a booklet for the opening of the new National Jewish War Memorial in Canberra, *Australian Jewish War Memorial: A Record of History in the Making* (2018). She regularly writes for the Community magazine *Hamerkaz*, and has collated and maintains ongoing records for the AJHS ACT and the ACTJC.

**Suzanne D. Rutland**, OAM, MA (Hons), PhD, DipEd, Professor Emerita, the Department of Hebrew, Biblical & Jewish Studies, University of Sydney, is past president of the Australian Association

for Jewish Studies and the Australian Jewish Historical Society and has been editing the *AJHS Journal* since 1991. *Let My People Go: The Untold Story of Australia and Soviet Jews, 1959–1989*, co-authored with Sam Lipski, was the joint recipient of the 2016 Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award (Australian History). Her latest books are *Lone Voice: The Wars of Isi Leibler* (Hybrid 2021) and *Special Religious Education and its Value in Australia to Contemporary Society* (Springer 2021), co-authored with Professor Zehavit Gross. A member of the Australian Delegation to IHRA she serves on the Education Working Group and the Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial. In 2008, she received the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to Higher Jewish Education and interfaith dialogue.

**Roger Selby**, BA LLB, is the President of the NSW Association of Jewish Service & Ex-Service Men & Women, having served for ten years in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, including as Executive Officer and Navigating Officer on Attack Class Patrol Boats. He was a partner in a large Sydney law firm and also occupied senior corporate compliance positions in large corporations. For ten years he was the Honorary Secretary of the Zionist Federation of Australia and also the Honorary Secretary of the Zionist Council of NSW and Cremorne Synagogue. Many of his family served in the AIF, including his father, his father's sister and three brothers (World War Two) and his mother's father and her uncle, Maurice Kozminsky, who was killed at the Battle of Pozieres in 1916.

**Elizabeth A. Warren**, BA, MA, Dip. Ed., is a journalist and researcher who began her career with three years of nursing, teaching after gaining a Diploma of Education and working in a wildlife sanctuary as a dietician before working as a journalist in a number of publications after gaining a Bachelor Arts in Journalism. Following this she completed a Master's Degree in Literature before commencing a doctorate.

# **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY — VICTORIA INC**

**Founded 17 October 1949 (Incorporated 1989)**

Patron Lady Cowen, AM

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Beverley Davis, OAM, JP, ARMA DipArchives & Records

Lorraine Freeman, BA, Dip.Crim, GradDipApplSocPsych;

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**Founded 1988**

**President, Treasurer and Webmaster:** John Urban

**Vice President & Co-ordinator:** Michelle Urban, OAM

**Secretary:** Dr Michael Anderson, MA, MEd, P-G DipSocWork, P-G Cert Soc Admin, PhD

**Committee:** Warren Austin, Helen Hill, Sue Levy (Librarian), Jonathon Steinberg, MBBS(UWA) and FFARCSI, Jonathan Wolf, MA, BA, BTP, Dip Social Admin, Dip Social Work, CQSW

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## **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC**

Founded 21 August 1938 (Incorporated 1988)

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### **President**

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Philip Moses, BEc

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Anna Marks, OAM

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Sabrina Elias, BA, PGDip IM-Archives Admin

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Terry A.S. Newman, BED

Suzanne D. Rutland, OAM, MA (Hons), PhD, DipEd

Russell Stern, BA, LLM

Current categories and fees can be found on the Society web site.

## **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACT**

Founded 9 April 1984

**President:** Adele Rosalky, BAppSc (Cultural Heritage Management)

**Vice-President:** vacant

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