

THE PRE-WAR JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MELBOURNE

(Address given by His Honour JUDGE TREVOR RAPKE, to members of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society on 2nd October, 1972)

Is anecdotage not a second childhood? Benjamin Disraeli counselled that "when a man falls into his anecdotage, it is a sign for him to retire from the world." Or as Henry Vaughan more challengingly expressed the same thing—"They are all going into the world of light and I alone sit lingering here."

My mandate summons me back to a Melbourne Jewry served by East Melbourne, Bourke Street, and St. Kilda's old synagogue in Charnwood Grove. In the late twenties Bourke Street Synagogue was sold to the Equity Trustee Co. by a verdict of that congregation that may well be open to challenge for its wisdom. And in 1927 the foundation stone of St. Kilda's great Byzantine edifice was laid on Purim. Carlton was the centre of Jewish life. In addition to Stone's Minyan serving the ultra religious needs, the Kadimah fed the Yiddish culture in astounding strength, and the Victorian Zionist Organization Hatchiah, led by men of the calibre of the late Solomon Wertheim, nurtured the growing interest in the Yishuv of torn Palestine.

When the stalls at the Victoria Market produced the necessary deposit, the more affluent and assimilated members of the community joined the earlier indigenes or immigrants in the burgeoning suburb of St. Kilda. There Anglo-Jewry reigned supreme and undisputed. Toorak was not then the next social stepping stone. It was only in the latter part of the two decades I am scanning that chutzpah was defined as the attribute of a man who moved from Carlton to Toorak without first sojourning in St. Kilda.

Let us spare a glance to record a few contemporary events in the community at large. In February, 1929, two years after Carlton and St. Kilda shules had been built and while work was commencing on the new Melbourne Synagogue at Toorak Road, Lily Robenstone of Scotland was married to Matthew Harrison of Eildon Road, St. Kilda. The chief bridesmaid was Miss Cissie Bressler. Mrs. Zelman Komessaroff and family, of "Rozalia", Princess Street, Kew, returned home on Sunday, February 8th, 1929, after spending three very enjoyable weeks at the seaside, staying at the Back Beach Palace, Sorrento.

The previous August, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Abrahams succeeded the late Sir Benjamin Benjamin as Presiding Officer at the 24th Annual Meeting of the Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society at which Mrs. Edgar Solomon succeeded Mrs. Maurice Gross as President.

In Scotland, Oscar Slater, who 20 years earlier had been sentenced to death for the murder of a Glasgow woman, had, due to the interest of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, been found not guilty by the same court.

On 12th November, 1928, Rev. J. Danglow consecrated 74 new graves released by the St. Kilda Cemetary trustees for the Jewish community, to add to the 198 interments already in the Jewish portion of the cemetery. The foreseeable future seemed to be catered for, and the Malthus theory of population was then still discredited.

Musically, Cantor Wolf Rechter regaled functions with his folk songs, as well as worshippers at East Melbourne with his chazonot. Henri Penn was director of the St. Kilda Conservatorium of Music while David Susserman played the 'cello, Mina Heselev sang, and Philip Cohen played the violin. Linda Phillips composed.

A coming-of-age party on September 12th, 1933, was given to Sydney Benjamin at Leonards-on-sea, and 200 guests included the Mayor and Mayoress of St. Kilda, Cr. and Mrs. Burnett Gray. Norman's Corner Stores offered 10% discount to readers of the Jewish Herald.

The Victorian Jewish Graduates and Undergraduates' Association, affiliated with Inter University Jewish Federation in Great Britain and Ireland, held its 2nd annual meeting in September, 1933, and elected Dr. J. Leon Jona, President, and Hershell Rockman, Vice-President. The committee included A. Newton Super, L. Goldberg (afterwards Professor), Miss Myrtle Silverman (soon to be his wife), Dr. M. A. Schalit (soon to marry Miss Ruby Rich of Sydney), M. Morris (later Dr.), G. Gore, B. Boas, J. Feldman and S. Landau. (S. Landau is, of course, now one of the most senior and talented Public Servants of the Commonwealth, presently the head of the Department of the Navy.) In this scanning of the years it is of interest to see how much wasted talent our so-called leaders have allowed to flourish unharnessed outside the community, as if we Jews were so blessed with genius and talent that we could afford to be spendthrift with our outstanding brains.

At that same graduates' meeting, Newton Super traced Jewish origins in Victoria to the goldfields, to association

with Batman, and the Hon. H. I. Cohen, MLC, told of his own family history in the early colonial days.

The 18th Zionist Congress opened at Prague under the Presidency of Mr. Nahum Sokolow. No German delegates attended and the German language was avoided. The grave anti-Semitism in Germany in September, 1933, hung like a low cloud over the assembly. Professor Einstein, then in England, wrote his name in a Visitors' Book in London and in the address column he wrote "Without any".

Let us return to St. Kilda where A. D. Hart's mansion home, "Charnwood", stretched the entire length of the eastern side of Charnwood Grove, which was then a gracious backwater and peaceful tree-laden haven of rest, quiet and opulence. When he sold his acres by subdivision on a Shabbat, he set the St. Kilda Trustees a problem in how to purchase land for a new shule without causing a Chillel Hashem. It was achieved by means that analysis might make painful and the old synagogue was doomed to become an out-of-date dance hall.

The giants of St. Kilda Jewry lived nearby. In Robe Street, then a respectable street where the Mayor of St. Kilda, Cr. Alfred Levy, J.P., lived in No. 8, resided the F. D. Michaelis family in "Orwell". Fred Michaelis was a son of the founder of St. Kilda synagogue, Moritz Michaelis, the remarkable immigrant who founded a dynasty that is pre-eminent among St. Kilda's Jewry. Fred Michaelis was an old Wesley boy and no doubt this fact, combined with his continued association with Wesley, led Jewish parents seeking a Public School education for their children to opt in many cases for Wesley. There, for these generations, anti-Semitism was unknown. Indeed when St. Michael's School for girls in Marlton Crescent, off Wellington Street, and the Anglican nuns who ran the school, attacked Jews and told the Jewish girls they would no longer be welcome unless they participated in the Christian life of the School, the hear-hears which followed this startling announcement did not come also from Wesley.

Opposite Fred Michaelis lived the frequent traveller, Edward Michaelis. Near "Orwell" lived Edward's two sons, Roy (later a President of the Synagogue) and Orwell, a Cambridge graduate who became actively associated with me in running the Jewish Boy Scouts.

Around the corner in Acland Street was "Linden", the gracious home of Fred and Edward's brother, Ernest N. and of Mrs. Baruch, their sister. It was Mrs Baruch's daughter, May, who married Jacob Danglow, the second

Rabbi of St. Kilda Synagogue, whose record ministry spanned nearly sixty years. The Danglows lived, in their early married life, in a cul-de-sac off St. Leonard's Avenue until the old estate of Eildon, in Grey Street, was subdivided and they purchased a block of land in Inverleith Street. My father also bought in this sale and for a decade of my impressionable years we lived close to the Danglows in Eildon Road. I was attracted closer and closer to communal service. After I was deflected by Rabbi Danglow from pursuing my chief choice—that of becoming a Rabbi—I settled for the prospect of succeeding to the Secretaryship of St. Kilda Synagogue when the late Joel Fredman retired. Rabbi Danglow's method of deflection was a refinement on the joke that being a Rabbi is no job for a Jewish boy. He told my parents, with the force of that worldly wisdom of which he was master, that I would have to go overseas immediately—I had just become Barmitzvah—and that I could never expect to fall on my feet and get any post remotely resembling that of St. Kilda. If you ask why I didn't become Secretary, I assure you it was no fault of mine. I had the misfortune to win a free place at the Melbourne University. When I explained to the then President that I would need time off from my teaching and Assistant Secretaryship, he refused, saying, "We don't need an educated secretary." At this ultimatum I opted to become a lawyer instead of a Synagogue official.

It was Rabbi Danglow's fortune to be the exception to the history enshrined in Goldman's record of Victorian Jewry where Machloikas and Annual or Special Meetings were synonymous, and where Presidents and Rabbis went different ways. He had a truly remarkable relationship with his Board of Management. An example will suffice. When the late Dr. J. Leon Jona, one of Melbourne's leading gynaecologists, became a member of St. Kilda's Board of Management, he brought with him the enthusiasm of a man who had led the growing Zionist Organization of Australian in its early days. Dr. Jona refused all entreaties to take his turn as President of the Synagogue because he had had many differences of argument with Rabbi Danglow over the latter's then lukewarm interest in the Yishuv of Israel and its struggle for nationhood and the extinction of the Mandate of Great Britain. One such difference involved Dr. Jona interrupting the Rabbi's sermon from the Warden's seat.

I was tramping round the environs of Charnwood Grove. Near the St. Kilda Junction, off Barkly Street, lived one of the most gracious and gentle gentlemen that

I was ever privileged to know. Another lovely English-style home set in glorious gardens was "Woonsocket", the Hallenstein home. On most Saturdays and all Yomtovim the green Rolls Royce chauffeur-driven drove Lucy Hallenstein to service. Lucy Hallenstein was a Dame May Whitty prototype without her acidulous tongue. She ruled, unchallenged, the Hallenstein family. She and Mrs. Fred Michaelis were active in World War I. Each lost a son. Each was decorated for her war work. Each was looked up to and respected by every active worker in the congregation. One of the closest and most fruitful associations was that between Lucy Hallenstein and Frances Barkmann, a talented French teacher with the Education Department. The present Welfare Society work was foreshadowed in much that these two women achieved.

Over the Junction, in St. Kilda Road in "The Lees", lived Myer Zeltner, a childless early immigrant who was, with Fred Michaelis, chiefly responsible for engaging Jacob Danglow in London in 1906. Zeltner's English home was later the venue of the early Jewish caterers, Cohen and Davis.

Travel down St. Kilda Road towards the city on the west footpath and after a stroll of half a mile you come to the large villa home of Shalom Judah Slutzkin. I remember as a schoolboy being taken to school by a lovely young woman, Gladys Israel, whose father was the chief accountant at the Slutzkin Flinders Lane warehouse. Later, when attending the St. Kilda Hebrew School, held in the succah and schoolroom next to the old Synagogue, we were dismissed early by Headmaster Joel Fredman because he had to conduct the choir and his teacher sister, Louise Fredman, had to be organist at the 4.30 p.m. choral wedding of S. J. Slutzkin to Gladys Israel. He was then a man of 40 odd and the bride was 18. The bridegroom's many children by his first marriage attended the Service. So did the staff of L. P. Slutzkin Ltd. So did the schoolchildren. Gladys presided over the Slutzkin household with success, humour and warm hospitality. I remember many happy occasions, mostly identified with Succot and Seder, at the Slutzkin household. Leo, the eldest son, taught me a great deal and through him I became a regular attendant at the only Mincha and Maariv Service on Saturday afternoons at the Montefiore Home. It was there I began to study leining and I owe much to Leo's encouragement and teaching.

Before leaving St. Kilda Road let us walk to Toorak Road where, opposite the new Nahum Barnett Toorak

Road synagogue, was a block of flats called "Delmar". In a dingy flat in this complex lived Rabbi Israel Brodie. Both in this flat and in his room at the Synagogue Rabbi Brodie taught Higher Hebrew to Newton Super and me. Rabbi Brodie also attracted a number of lads to his Jewish Young Hebrew Association. One boy who attended these classes later became my brother-in-law and is now the Hon. Mr. Justice W. Kaye.

Back up Charnwood Road, near the corner of High Street, lived the venerable and learned Isaac Malin (or Malinsky). He, too, was one of the sources I turned to in order to get the crumbs of a Rabbinical education. Another mentor, the late Rabbi I. J. Super, had added great stature to the orthodox learning of the St. Kilda Congregation when he moved to Crimea Street from Carlton. His home became not only a centre of Jewish learning; it also nurtured his son, Arthur, into the Jewish ministry. Rabbi Super later established a shiur in the Board Room of St. Kilda Synagogue and here Sabbath afternoon services were conducted to supplant for me and support for many the Montefiore Homes contribution to this gap in religious Shabbat services.

This dearth of intense davening or involvement in the busy lives of Jews in other parts of the metropolis was a feature of St. Kilda's Anglo-Jewish conservatism. Isaac H. Boas, a son of Rabbi Boas of Adelaide, came to Melbourne, became a Board member when he was Chief Chemist at the Footscray factory of Michaelis Hallenstein, later became President of the Synagogue, and also head of the Forests Division of the CSIRO. He and I became closely associated when Rabbi Danglow entrusted Boas, Leo Slutzkin and me with the 1924 task of originating Children's Services on the High Holydays. That long tradition involved many who later became well known as adults. I recollect names such as David Sonenberg, Zelman Cowen, George Casper, Maurice Saunders (now President of St. Kilda Congregation), Sam Cohen (later a Senator of the Commonwealth Parliament), Baron Snider, Colin and Raema Levi, and Athol Harlem and Athol Orbuch (who lost their lives in World War II) and many, many others of both sexes. We introduced innovations which, had they been copied in the Synagogue, would have rendered the work of Ada Phillips, founder of Liberal Judaism, superfluous. Boas told me that he regarded himself as a Jew from 10 to 12 on a Saturday morning. The rest of the week he was an Australian, and a man's religion in his daily life was irrelevant. He deplored any form of

public attention being attracted to the Jewish community. His chief interest in the burgeoning Victorian Jewish Advisory Board, of which he was President and I was Secretary, was in attempting with little success to prevent the noisy north-of-the-Yarra Jews from making statements about Jews or carrying on with protest meetings or writing letters to Government bodies unless the Advisory Board so decreed. The early role of the Board was to appoint Rabbi Danglow and Rabbi Brodie, in successive years, as the Victorian Jewish representative for Government purposes, and thereby ensure that a man who knew how to behave at Vice-Regal and civic and governmental functions would be the Jew there. But noisy and dissident rumblings came as the Judean League and the East Melbourne synagogue flexed their growing muscles and clamour for change became more noticeable. One of the chief progenitors of this dissidence was a young barrister named Maurice Ashkanasy. I had also become attracted to the North Fitzroy tennis courts of the Judean League and the social, athletic and literary clubs of Carlton and became Chief Secretary of the League. I also identified myself with the Hatchiah and worked with Solomon Wertheim. We fought the secularism of Sammy Wynn and his Kadimah boys with an enthusiasm that only youth can explain.

Soon the Advisory Board decided that the Catholic Church tactics were best. Just as the church places its umbrella over all schisms and breakaway movements, and consolidates by diversification, so the Advisory Board conservatives thought it best to accede to Ashkanasy's repeated demands to admit the League to the Advisory Board in addition to the three foundation member Synagogues. But they knew not of Ogden Nash's instruction:

How courteous is the Japanese;
He always says—"Excuse it, please."
He climbs into his neighbour's garden
And smiles and says "I beg your pardon"
He bows and grins a friendly grin,
And calls his hungry family in.
He grins and bows a friendly bow;
"So sorry, this my garden now."

This sort of Ashkanasy doggedness must be read in the context of many contemporary battles originating with East Melbourne Congregation and spreading its tentacles of dissent into the knitted world of St. Kilda and Toorak Road. The Judean League, citing Chief Rabbi Kook of Israel and Rabbi Mestel of East Melbourne, declared that

no Jewish law forbade sport on Shabbat. The Beth Din consisting of Rabbis Brodie, Danglow and Super condemned this. Then Ashkanasy was defending himself at the Frankston Court in one of his interminable squabbles with the Melbourne traffic police. He entered the witness box to give evidence in his own behalf when Stipendiary Magistrate Jackson inquired whether the oath Ashkanasy took was binding on his conscience as he, the Magistrate, observed that Ashkanasy, unlike other Jews, had been sworn bare headed. Maurice Ashkanasy gave a long dissertation on this custom which led the magistrate to accept his declaration of Jewish law that Jews need not cover their heads when taking an oath if they preferred to remain uncovered. This widely reported case was answered in the press by a letter under the joint signatures of the Rabbis of the Beth Din condemning Ashkanasy's exegesis as spurious and stating that no Jew should swear an oath with an uncovered head. Add to this pot-pourri all kinds of squabbles and even scandals in which may be heard and seen the infighting of Aaron Cohen, J.P., the late Mr. Revelman, Senior, the victimisation of the ubiquitous Secretary of many Jewish philanthropic organisations, the late Casper J. Perlstein, some of the clergy including the one who disappeared after winning a Tattersall's consultation, the Will case in which a Rabbi beneficiary was threatened with dismissal if he did not pay his legacy to his Synagogue and the threat carried out, and it will be understood that the taking over of the Advisory Board by the laity of the community, and turning it into the Board of Deputies where congregations were relegated to a minor role, was a natural corollary.

Let us turn from Crimea Street and by so doing overlook the Goodmans and the Sniders and the Yoffas and the Frybergs, and even the remarkable Feuerman family of Odessa Street, to pause at the Redan Street home and tennis court of Gad Louis Blashki. The Blashki family—a large one—had its roots deep in the early days of St. Kilda. Phillip and Henry Blashki were men of renown both within and outside the community. Two women had married Slutzkins, Goodmans and Frybergs. The Blashki tennis courts and hospitable home were focal points for Jewish social recreation. The late Sir James Ross Macfarlan, a Supreme Court Judge, lived in his 93 Alma Road home, unaware that that home would soon be bought by Ashkanasy and Rapke for the Judean League's south-of-the-Yarra home to replace the dying Monash Hall in Canning Street, Carlton.

A distant source of strength for the growing Melbourne community was the Jewish settlement of Agriculturalists at Shepparton and Berwick. The devout Feiglin family had not then moved to the metropolis. Berwick trained early pioneers of Aliyah for their ultimate journey to settle in Palestine.

Socially, the southern Jews found expression, entertainment and matrimony in the Danglow-founded JYPA. To this club came the late Sir Phillip Phillips whose father, Montague Montefiore Phillips, was Master-in-Equity and Lunacy for the Supreme Court. He was a member of St. Kilda until his death. His son's intrusion into the JYPA was meteoric and ephemeral. Another supporter of Melbourne Jewry whom I first introduced through the JYPA was Professor Alan Rowland Chisholm who still writes in retirement for the "Age" newspaper.

Shechita was another thorny question in which East Melbourne was in conflict with the other two congregations. The large butcher firm of F. W. Watkins had a contract to supply both the north and south communities with kosher meat. Much later Messrs. Smorgon & Batagol intruded, as did another in Lygon Street, Carlton, Mr. S. Parish. Many years later the ranks were closed when all the metropolitan Rabbis turned to me to help fight the Government decision to ban Kosher killing within 9 months on the ground of its cruelty. I formed the Kashrut Commission and, with the splendid help of Rabbi Dr. Herman Sanger, we saved Kashrut and Shechita. The late Rabbi Gurewicz condemned much in Liberal Judaism because of his extreme orthodoxy but he never wavered in his personal admiration for Herman Sanger whose many compromises at Gurewicz's request taught orthodoxy a lesson in tolerance and the meaning of Klall Yisrael.

Another premier family was the Isaacson clan. They came from Stawell. Michel, the inveterate carnation wearer and sartorial perfectionist, was President of St. Kilda in the early twenties. Abel married Rabbi Danglow's sister. Arnold (whose widow, Linka, and son, Peter, are remembered in their own respective rights) was a military man—the copybook Colonel. Alec was the bachelor man-of-the-world with close associations with the stage as represented by Harry Musgrove. One of the sights of St. Kilda and St. Kilda Road was the florid, white handlebar-moustached Alec perched high up on the seat of the ancient Renault sports car presented to him by Harry Musgrove, complete with goggles, gauntlets and check cap, hanging on grimly to the wheel of his juggernaut.

Moneylenders were refused membership of St. Kilda throughout its history in the old shule. Lou Ellinson was elected to the Board and, after many years servilely attending as usher for members and visitors to find seats, he was rewarded by being elected Treasurer. But President—No! For the first time in its long history, St. Kilda had an election for President. The opponent was none other than Sir Archie Michaelis, a trustee and former President. When Ellinson won the day, it was generally thought that St. Kilda's days as the Rolls Royce congregation were numbered.

Another move which shook St. Kilda was the effort of my mother to obtain the franchise for women in the Synagogue, with its attendant corollaries of Board and officer eligibility. This was beaten by one vote. At first Lucy Hallenstein and Rabbi Danglow supported my mother. At the meeting Frances Barkman and Lucy Hallenstein voted against the proposal with the explanation that they were perfectly satisfied with the stewardship of their husbands and male representatives.

Dress was a feature of early St. Kilda life. All Barmitzvah boys had to wear straw boaters with a long black cord attaching the hat to the coat lapel. The entry of the Blashki and Slutzkin family to the old synagogue was a period cavalcade of impeccable salon manners. The wives entered alongside their spat-clad husbands, left their sides to enter their front pew seats. Then the male children followed in strict order of primogeniture. A selected son got a siddur or machzor with the place found and returned to his mother, raised his hat, and handed her the book. Her response was to smile at the family and the son who did this ministration. Colonel Harold Cohen, M.L.A. for Caulfield, and his sons, Geoffrey and Edward (now Sir Edward), and Elcon Baevski Myer and his sons, Leslie and Roy, performed similar entries.

Time and your patience have prevented my telling much more that teems through my brain. I can only limit my recollections of John Monash as a synagogue-goer and a Board member for several years, as well as a friend and counsellor in my university days.

I omit the history of Zionism in Victoria when the annual Pesach Blue Box collection in April 1930 netted £76.15.7 (\$153.56). At that time also the new Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, Sir Isaac Isaacs, was tipped as the next Governor-General, and St. Kilda made plans to undo the damage done when Isaac Isaacs was frightened out of active communal work by the in-

felicitous tongue of a leading Melbourne synagogue clergyman. I omit also recollections of the work of S. Y. Jacobi, a friend of Jabotinsky, who was preaching a new form of Zionism. I would have liked to trace the involvement of Monash in work for Palestine, a chapter that has still to be written.

I recall, with nostalgia, my attendance at the Wickliffe Cafe when Ada Phillips founded, with energy the Liberal Congregation, and my later tussles with the first Rabbinical incumbent, Jerome Mark.

I recall the mighty Haftorahs of Newman Rosenthal, Alee Masel, Issy Green (later President of the Great Synagogue, Sydney) and that doyen of lay Jewry in St. Kilda, the late David Benjamin.

Perhaps some day someone with time and pen will add to Goldman's story of Victorian Jewry the story of the twentieth century. To commission this may well be a task for this Association, perhaps in conjunction with the Commonwealth Literary Fund.

GEORGE BARON GOODMAN FIRST PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER IN AUSTRALIA

By Dr. GEORGE F. J. BERGMAN

In 1838 the French physicist, Louis Jacques Daguerre, invented the Daguerrotype photography. It was an English Jew, George Baron Goodman, who only three years later introduced professional photography to Australia.

Goodman was definitely the first professional photographer in Australia, although, according to *The AUSTRALIAN* of 15th May, 1841, an unknown amateur photographer, on 13th May, 1841, had made some experiments in Sydney resulting in a "beautiful sketch of Bridge Street and part of George Street."

Mr. Jack Cato, in his leading book on photography in Australia¹, wrote:

"It is reason to believe that a Frenchman, one of the early experimenters and amateurs, took the first photograph to be made in Australia. There is no further mention of the anonymous gentleman who conducted the experiment. He probably came out in one of the French ships and returned, when the ship went home again.