

BOOK REVIEWS

THESE ARE THE NAMES: JEWISH LIVES IN AUSTRALIA, 1788-1850

By John S. Levi

(Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2006)

Half a century ago Australian Jewish history had barely begun. Not in the sense of there being nothing to report – Jewish life in Australia was a rich tapestry dating back to the first day of white settlement in 1788 – but the story had not begun to be told. Attempts had been made by A. Newton Super, Percy J. Marks, and especially by Rabbi L. M. Goldman and the early stalwarts of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, but not until John Levi and George Bergman published their *Australian Genesis* in the 1970s was there any solid work combining impeccable research and elegant writing to lay the foundations of Jewish historiography in this continent. Others have followed – notably Hilary and William Rubinstein and Suzanne Rutland – and the story is now a widely respected genre of Australian and Jewish literature.

John Levi has continued to be an active, productive and inspiring participant and leader in the field over all these years, earning a remarkable reputation as a researcher, recorder and writer, and every time I have the privilege of launching or reviewing one of his works I marvel at his capacity and skill.

These Are The Names covers the first 60-odd years of Australian Jewry, resurrecting the lives of more than 1500 of the earliest Jews in Australia: convicts, common and characters; dealers and drapers; the proud and the pedlars; the bankrupts and the bankers; the feckless and the fortunate.

Were the early Jews literate? Honest? Religious? How do their stories compare with those of their gentile counterparts? How did they fare at the hands of officialdom? Is Levi right that ‘Jews were often damned if they succeeded and damned when they failed’?

Where did Levi find his information? It took years of painstaking delving into often quite unsatisfactory documents but unlike the gold rush prospectors of the mid-nineteenth century Levi often came up with virtual gold. There will be critics who will pounce on errors of omission or commission in the book, but no one will fail to be enlightened. Once again John Levi has placed us firmly in his debt. Once again he has come up trumps.

Raymond Apple