

DAVID COHEN & CO.: THE FAMILY AND THE FIRM, AN ANGLO-JEWISH STORY.

by
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Read to the Society (Sydney), 21 August, 1985.

(A shorter version of this paper is published in the *Journal of Hunter Valley History*, I, 1985).

In his entertaining book, *The Cousinhood*, Chaim Bermant describes a compact group of Anglo-Jewish families conspicuous for clannishness, wealth and public service. It is not surprising they should provide a role-model for the colonies — particularly the firm and extended-family associated with Michaelis-Hallenstein in Melbourne and David Cohen & Co., which began in Maitland in the Hunter Valley and spread to nearby Newcastle, Sydney and London. A family whose head was called “the doyen of Australian finance,” whose warehouse was gutted in Newcastle’s most spectacular fire and which built two of Maitland’s Victorian showplaces may well claim the attention of a Newcastle historian. I offer it to you also as an Anglo-Jewish story indicating the attitudes of their prominent merchants and how they were transmitted and shared in the colonies.¹

The firm was venerable, but how venerable? Their advertisements stated it was established in 1836, sometimes 1835, and they claimed a centenary in 1936. Advertisements in *The Australian* and family tradition help us to put the story together. Lewis, Samuel and David Cohen came from a well-established Anglo-Jewish family which had entered with the first wave permitted by Cromwell. Their parents lived at Lambeth. Lewis arrived in Sydney in 1831, Samuel in 1834 and David in 1840. In 1835 the brothers bought land in High Street, Maitland, later the site of their warehouse, and in the following year Samuel opened Lambeth House, a store selling a great variety of goods. In 1837 they announced a partnership, L. & S. Cohen, which was dissolved two years later, Samuel continuing to trade in Maitland and Lewis in Campbelltown and Sydney. In 1840 their first cousin, Lewis Wolfe Levy, left England and after a short time in Maitland opened a successful store in Tamworth, residing there between 1846-54. Late in 1841, evidently in difficulties, Samuel announced his debts should be paid to his brother, David, and he had retired to Sydney. Two years later he filed his Insolvency schedule. In 1845 he was residing, at least part-time, in Maitland and Levy had joined the firm. The three names were put into a hat and David, youngest of the brothers, last to arrive and later returning to England, gave his name to the celebrated firm.²

Technically, the firm had begun in 1836. An early date would check any inference the brothers had quarrelled and would imply they had the strength to outlast the general collapse of 1842-3. Levy, who lived in Maitland between 1854 and 1862 certainly led the vigorous expansion which made his partners rich and gave him the basis to become a merchant prince in Sydney. The resident partners in turn were George Judah Cohen, son of Samuel, to 1879, when he followed Lewis to Sydney, then Benn Levy, son of Lewis, who took charge of the London office in 1886, then George’s cousin and David’s son, Neville. Surviving documents indicate partners trading as David Cohen & Co. of West Maitland or, appearing to do so, were David, Samuel and Lewis Levy, in 1860; David and Lewis, in 1862; David, Lewis, George Judah Cohen and Maurice Cohen, in 1874; George and Lewis, in 1878; and Neville Cohen acted alone in 1887 and 1891. It is surprising that he could not give a receipt

in 1888 and a draft Release was drawn up adding David and George; perhaps this was the current practice with large sums.³

Advertising and the few surviving account books tell us something of the business conditions of the time. A century ago, "American Goods" — tools, clocks, sewing machines and electroplated ware for example — were emphasised and popular. The tell-tale phrases, "just landed" and "damaged by sea water", and the name of the ship indicate the uncertainty of carrying stock and the need for bold advertising to clear it. The firm had their own anchorage when the old course of the Hunter River, clearly visible in front of the Sports Ground, ran behind their warehouse. But this was ancillary to the services of a reliable carrier from the Morpeth steamers at the head of navigation. At the turn of the century they emphasised English branded grocery lines and teas as shown in their advertisement in that familiar source, the *Historical Records of Newcastle* by Windross and Ralston (1897). They employed in that year 40 in Maitland, 30 in Newcastle and 15 in London.⁴

For many of their clients, including some of the prominent graziers of northern New South Wales, the groceries etc. on one side of the ledger were paid in kind "by", as the accountants would say, sale proceeds of their skins and wool, with an occasional cheque to make up the difference. Here the "pure merino" or squatter had an advantage over the selector or small man with his limited assets and security. In 1874 the firm took a Bill of Sale, or chattel mortgage, over the livestock of a Singleton farmer and in 1878 a mortgage over land owned as heir by a Walcha innkeeper to cover their debts for goods supplied.⁵

As they prospered the firm built well and the partners became more prominent in the community. Before incorporation as a public company in 1912 they at times divided a six-figure income and George was to leave over £500,000. A warehouse was designed on their land in High Street, Maitland, in 1865, by Edmund Blackett, one of the most eminent architects ever to practise in Australia. Built of brick in three stories it was notable for an elaborate stone facade and internal iron columns and stairway. It was largely the work of John Horbury Hunt, an American newcomer in his office soon to reveal his own talent. Later, the Maitland architect, John W. Pender was to add several adjacent buildings. Opinions differ: "coarse, but it is nevertheless quite vigorous" writes Morton Herman, dean of our historians of architecture, while a contemporary claimed that the facade in style and finish had no equal outside Melbourne. No one could doubt the quality of the local Ravensfield stone which made the carving of the massive keystones and the vigorous design possible.⁶

A six-storey warehouse was built on the sandhills of Newcastle East in 1890 where a smaller building later erected on the foundations still stands. In 1897 there was much talk of a massive brick building complex in Scott Street designed for A.A. Dangar by the noted local architect, Frederick Menkens. The largest portion was to be leased by the firm for their "magnificent warehouse." To replace the Sandhills building they commissioned in 1901 a warehouse in Bolton Street which is undoubtedly one of Menken's finest. The arched wagon doors are functional while the eye is carried easily upwards through four stories of windows grouped within pillars and an arch to be capped by a pair of this architect's familiar turrets. But it was not readily functional for a declining firm or modern business conditions. Fortunately, it was saved from demolition by a Heritage Commission Order in 1976 and the facade, a living reminder of the architect and the art of the late 19th century bricklayer, has been preserved.⁷

Fires demolished the Sandhills warehouse on the 1st day of 1900 and Scott Street, now the Bebarfalds site in January, 1908. The Maitland building was eventually

reduced by the effects of fire from three stories to one. Scott Street, Newcastle's most spectacular fire, led to much criticism of the meagre fire equipment and slap-dash methods — "fire-fighting" would be a misnomer — that a professional service with modern motor vehicles and extension ladders was soon introduced. The damage was estimated at £150,000 but fortunately the contents were well insured. The warehouses, like the theatres of that time, carried large amounts of inflammable oils and paint without the brigades, pressure pumps and chemical extinguishers to deal with an outbreak.⁸

Their private homes included "Cintra" and "Engadine." The former may be known as a coastal resort and fishing town in Portugal near Lisbon and it has been suggested that Lewis Levy or his son Benn had spent a pleasing holiday there. It was designed for Benn by the Maitland architect, John W. Pender, about 1880 and still dominates Regent Street, now a fine display of Victorian and Federation buildings, with its tower, ornamental gates, landscaped gardens and stables. The cast-iron lace, in very good condition, was designed locally and cast in Sydney. The builder was Henry Noad. Two children were born there to Benn and his wife but in 1887 we find in the records of the Pender firm, now carried on by his grandson, Ian, that Neville Cohen commissioned a new wing to consist of a billiard room off the verandah with bedrooms over. As Benn was later described in the press as head of their London office we might presume that the transfer occurred with the new owner. They were respectively brother-in-law and first cousin of George Judah Cohen for whom "Engadine" was a fit setting.⁹

George was born in Sydney in 1842 and by the late 1850's his father was able to give him further education at the University of London and extensive travel. He returned in 1861 when his father died and after a period in Sydney took charge of the Maitland warehouse. Not only was he a successful manager but he supported the School of Arts and as Chairman of the Gas company was long remembered for reducing the charges. In 1868 he married Rebecca (known as Re) Levy, his partner's daughter.

Long before his obituaries appeared George was known as the "doyen" or "patriarch" of Australian finance and commerce. He had the personality to lead and attract awe. In Sydney he succeeded to his father-in-law's directorships including chairman of the CBC Bank between 1892-93 and 1901-33 and the United Insurance Co. between 1904-35. In 1926 the Bank commissioned a portrait by the noted George Lambert which is still hanging at the George Street head office. He built a palatial mansion, "Engadine," opposite the celebrated Elizabeth Bay House, which reached from Onslow Avenue to the water and lived well amid a large staff of servants, his antiques and Sydney's first domestic electric lift. At his club it was customary to mark his place with a jar of his favourite hot pickles; it was a customary joke to offer them to younger members and note their wince. Interviewed in his 90's he quoted the Bible and gave earnest advice to would-be tycoons to be busy and honest. He cherished the British Empire as an example of toleration. One of his chief complaints was that as a life-long patron of the turf he had difficulty climbing the stands at Randwick. In 1936 he helped to celebrate, aged 94, his firm's reputed centenary. It is rumoured that the venerable George was offered and refused a knighthood. But his son Samuel, who was a director of Sydney hospital and involved in innumerable community organisations, was offered and accepted in 1937, year of his father's death.¹⁰

George became Chairman when David Cohen & Co. Ltd. was incorporated in 1912. The capital was £500,000 of which three-fifths were preference shares. They also passed a Resolution prohibiting public subscription and restricting transfer so

it was kept firmly in the family hands. The eight subscribers to the Memorandum were Samuel S. Cohen; Solomon A.B. Marks, both of Newcastle; Alroy Maitland Cohen, barrister and in the 1960's, Q.C. and the oldest practising barrister; George J. Cohen, the Chairman; Neville Cohen, with a London address, by his attorney, George; Septimus R. Levy; Maitland Benn Levy, student; and David Lennard Cohen. Seven of the eight were descendants of Samuel Cohen the elder, David Cohen or Lewis Levy.¹¹

Lewis persisted in the family as a first name sometimes spelled Louis. There was also an extraordinary number of cousin and sibling marriages. Three of Lewis Levy's children married children of Samuel Cohen, including George, and another three married children of Samuel's brother, David. The mothers of Samuel/David were sisters and Samuel and David married sisters.

That Samuel Cohen could be declared insolvent in the early 1840's and later described as a "rich man" and worthy M.P. was not uncommon in those uncertain times for the colonies in general and the country traders in particular. *The Maitland Mercury* said approvingly, not only was he rich, but he had "thoroughly earned his wealth" and his firm was the "largest" in these districts. After years of agitation practising Jews were admitted to the House of Commons only in 1858. Benjamin Disraeli, was already a Member; he never denied his religion but had been baptised and was personally indifferent to formal religion. Only two years later, in the Australasian colonies, Cohen was elected to the seat of Morpeth and Nathaniel Levi to the seat of Maryborough in Victoria. Having defeated the flamboyant David Buchanan, self-styled friend of the workers, he lost to him at the general election in December. Edward Close Jnr., who had resigned and supported Cohen, was then persuaded to return in 1862. Given the recent agitation in Britain and Buchanan's notorious involvement in sectarian disputes, it was wise of Cohen to plunge in and acknowledge his religion and offer a ringing defence of the religious liberty which they enjoyed. This however could cause problems. He avoided parliamentary sittings on Friday evening, his Sabbath, and so failed to vote on one of the divisions on the Robertson Land Bill, one of the key issues in the country towns.¹²

Lewis Levy also became a M.P. for a country seat while living in Sydney which was common then as the non-resident Member is still common in Britain. Edward Close had resigned complaining of the interminable waste of time in the proceedings of Parliament which, he claimed, would eventually drive away all the Members resident in the country. Levy had represented Liverpool Plains in 1871-72 but disliked the sheer size of the district. He was reluctant to run against his friend, Benjamin Lee, in West Maitland where he had long associations, but on Lee's retirement in 1874 agreed to do so. In the tradition of the town he supported Henry Parkes and Free Trade but was not "thick and thin" while a government neglected levee banks for the river and the interests of the district. He preferred a place where he was well known over many years than Sydney where he lived. Like Cohen, he frankly tackled the issue of religion. Though he differed from the majority, he said, he contributed to all charities and had laid the foundation stones of churches from Maitland to Armidale. After the dissolution in November he did not contest the seat but was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1880.¹³ Henry E. Cohen, who represented West Maitland between 1874-80 and 1882-85 was no relation but had worked for the firm when younger and before qualifying for the legal profession. He, too, had a Maitland connection while resident in Sydney and frequently attended public functions during this period including laying the foundation stone of the Maitland Synagogue in February, 1879. He was more ambitious or more attuned to the political factions as he served in the Farnell and Stuart ministries.

The business disasters of the early 1840's were a shared experience for the older and established merchants. In Maitland folk-lore there has been one depression, not the 1930's, not 1893 which was overshadowed by the record flood, but the early 1840's when sheep were sold for sixpence each to be boiled down for tallow. How you then handed yourself might indicate whether you were worthy of Parliamentary honours or business leadership. Speakers reminded the election audience in 1860 that Cohen had genuinely coped with his debts and dealt fairly with his customers. John Wyndham wrote from Dalwood, which his father had bought in 1828 and abandoned for a few years in the depression to the family of the late Lewis Levy, that he had lost a dear friend who had given him kindly words and "still more substantial help in former days." It was to become one of the best-known vineyards in the Hunter Valley, if not in Australia, and the historic home is now being restored. Benn Levy, his son, chaired a gathering of "several leading residents of Maitland" in September, 1883 at Cohen's family hotel (no relation) to give a presentation to the now successful but once insolvent biscuit manufacturer, William Arnott, who had insisted on paying his creditors in full.¹⁴

Parliament was not the only aspect of their community service to attract attention. They served charities and hospitals during their lifetime and provided large bequests in their Wills. When the Maitland hospital committee was advised that Lewis Levy had left them £200 in his Will, Dr. R.J. Pierce, one of the best-known citizens, commented that few firms in the colony were as generous to charitable causes as David Cohen & Co. It was one of a long list of his charitable bequests.¹⁵ In 1888 his children as a memorial gave the people of Sydney the marble fountain topped by a bronze figure, modelled by C.B. Birch, which is near the Woolloomooloo gates of the Botanical Gardens. Neville Cohen was President of the Maitland hospital during the rebuilding of 1903 and 1905 and Samuel was President of Newcastle hospital during the rebuilding of 1913, both very large projects.

One extraordinary benefaction was a joint bequest of £200,000 in 1887 to George and his brother-in-law, Benn on the death of their uncle, David Lewis (Levy) of Liverpool and Manchester with instructions to apply it for the benefit of the industrious classes of those cities. The amount was handed over to trustees in 1893 and subsequently used to build a hospital, workingmens' hotel and club, nurses home and recreation grounds.¹⁶

Lewis Levy's brother, who had converted a first to a surname, was one of the pioneers of modern, large-scale retailing. His first shop established in Liverpool in 1856 grew to become a celebrated department store with five branches and its own manufacturing source. Being childless but very conscious of family, both a Jewish and a middle-class Victorian trait, he turned to several Australian nephews. In Australia, David Cohen & Co. used family connections to strengthen the importing side of their business. David Lewis had registered the brand name, "Rocklight" which is listed on David Cohen's Newcastle advertisement in the Windross and Ralston book. Louis Cohen, one of Samuel's sons, lived with David while apprenticed in Liverpool. Subsequently he joined the firm, married Martha Levy, Lewis Levy's daughter and David's niece, became a partner and succeeded him as chief executive between 1886-1922. It also remained a family operation and became a public company only in 1924. They also had a spectacular fire in 1886 reproduced in Asa Briggs' *History of Lewis'* from a charming old lithograph. Undeterred, they held a salvage sale and rebuilt inside twelve months. Louis emulated the family's public service becoming Lord Mayor of Liverpool in 1899.¹⁷

Singer's Daily Prayer Book has long been a standard item among English-speaking Jews. It first appeared in 1890 to be followed by 26 printings and sales of

half-a-million. The new and current edition of 1962 states that for many years its sale at a moderate price had been assured by a large benefaction in memory of Mrs. Louis Cohen of Liverpool. Samuel Cohen's son and Lewis Levy's daughter in this way continued to assist their Australian co-religionists.

That department stores are created by concentrated urban markets and in turn express the vitality of urban life is emphasised by Briggs in his *History*. One of Louis' first and most spectacular projects was the chartering of "The Great Eastern," the world's largest liner, to provide floating attractions and advertising during the Liverpool exhibition of 1886. "Lewis' are friends of the people" was painted on the sides in letters thirty feet high. Some have described this vessel as a magnificent failure but, like Lewis', it is an important part of modern British history. During the year Louis Cohen's eighth child was born and named, after the designer, Brunel, (Sir) Jack Brunel Cohen.

In the mid-nineteenth century the tax on glass was abolished and it was now possible due to new manufacturing processes to buy large, plate sheets at one-tenth the cost a century earlier. The Crystal Palace housing the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a landmark for the new age. The effects on city streets in the form of ornamental shop fronts and pedestrian arcades were soon noticeable. The department store is usually traced to Bon Marche in Paris in the 1840's and they grew apace when merchants realised the benefits of display and perambulation. In the 1860's Macys in New York and Lewis' in Liverpool were adding the adjacent shops to form one large operation. It was marked by variety of goods, fixed prices, bold advertising and an inviting interior, an extension of the lively city streets. The presence of the founder and his descendants, and a comforting slogan such as Lewis', "Friend of the People", concealed their vast size. The century closed with a famous and exuberant example. Harrods began as a small grocery in Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, expanded to four-and-a-half acres and built the present edifice sheathed in bright Doulton tiles between 1897-1905. The massive dome and great bulk reveals the aspiration of the department store to join other monumental and public buildings. The warehouses of David Cohen & Co. were no less eye-catching parts of the cityscape of Maitland and Newcastle.

The development of Lewis' and their Australian connections takes us to the heart of a well-known debate in economic history. Was there, as contemporaries alleged, a Great Depression dominating the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Victorian Britain? Sometimes it is given the explicit boundary years of 1873-96. In 1934, H.L. Beales denied it, soon to be joined by W.W. Rostow and in 1965 by Charles Wilson who is visiting Australia this year and is Emeritus Professor of Modern History at Cambridge.

They argue that industrialisation changed its direction following the railway boom and technological innovation and entrepreneurs and capital were now moving to satisfy the demands of city folk for distribution of groceries, bicycles, factory-made clothing and footwear all advertised in the new, popular newspapers. David Lewis joins Lever, Boots, Liptons, W.H. Smith and Harrods in a significant historical development. Real wages were rising due to the falling prices of imported grain and raw materials; a growing population had more to spend on consumer goods. As Wilson points out, "at every point the retailing changes were closely connected with new or reorganized systems of mass manufacture; each indeed was a function of the other." Lyons' bakeries and Boots' medicines sought a multiple retail outlet; and David Lewis made clothing for his stores.¹⁸

In the Anglo-Jewish tradition which the partners and their families freely acknowledged they combined religious orthodoxy and active participation in the

larger community. George served fifteen terms between 1882-1920 as President of the Great Synagogue in Sydney and his funeral service in 1937 was held in the Synagogue, a rare honour. His son, Samuel, was President for seven terms between 1921-39 and Neville held office for three terms between 1902-08. George's father as indicated, would not attend Parliament on the Sabbath and he did not open the Maitland warehouse on Saturday. Yet their lifestyle would involve some compromises. George and the younger Samuel became enthusiastic racegoers and they attended meetings, presumably on the occasional Saturday, and Samuel raced under his own colours.

Various members of the family contributed to the treasures of the Great Synagogue. George Judah Cohen donated a silver breastplate to celebrate his seventieth birthday. In memory of her husband Mrs. L.W. Levy gave a complete set of ornaments for a Sefer Torah. The mantle epitomises the Anglo-Jewish spirit. Made of red velvet and silver thread it features an embroidered wreath of roses, shamrocks and thistles and a coat of arms including a wolf (his second name), or it is possibly a heraldic lion, a Latin motto, "labore et honore," and a pitcher and plate which is a reminder of the traditional duties of the Levites in Tent of Meeting. My wife, who was born at Swansea, Wales, and whose relatives are buried in the Jewish cemetery at Bryn Mawr, immediately noticed the absence of a leek. The Cohen and Levy families established their own congregation by leading a secession from York Street in 1859 and creating a new Synagogue in leased premises in Macquarie Street, Sydney. The initial meeting was held in the firm's offices; Samuel became President and, following his death in November, 1861 Lewis Levy became President, until he resigned in 1874. To ease the financial burden the firm bought the building and leased it back and at times remitted the rent. The cause was a bitter quarrel concerning the status of a would-be proselyte. Personally, I think the Cohens were right to ease the requirements for a genuine convert in a remote and struggling community and to insist that a Board may direct their minister to perform the usual ceremonies. Time, diminishing support, and the possibility of sharing the splendid new building rising in Elizabeth Street healed old wounds and encouraged its dissolution and amalgamation with the Great Synagogue. The establishment and conduct of the St. Kilda Synagogue by the Michaelis-Hallenstein families from 1871 provides the Melbourne analogy."

They exercised patriarchal leadership and strong influence over the small Jewish communities of Maitland and Newcastle even while casting their net in Sydney. The first Jewish services were held at the older Samuel's house in Maitland for the High Holydays of 1844. In February, 1879 the foundation stone was laid in that town of the first provincial Synagogue outside Sydney and it was dedicated with the traditional ceremonies in September. It was designed by John Pender next to his own house in Church Street at a cost of £1200-1400. That a community of about 70 people could afford a Synagogue and its fittings and a minister suggests the substantial aid given by the prominent firm and family in their midst. Levy received an inscribed ivory and silver trowel and laid a substantial donation on the foundation stone with the request for more in the traditional manner. Accompanying him from Sydney was Henry Cohen, the local Member. Levy reminded the audience of his long association of "nearly forty years" with the town and his wish to promote goodwill between the religions. At the dedication, Rev. A.B. Davis of the Great Synagogue noted that Levy had presented the congregation with the scrolls of the Law, yet another example of the generosity of the families. The Synagogue was described as Romanesque in style with an elaborate, rendered facade; it still survives after long neglect and rough use and is now awaiting the

disposition of a Conservation Order. The Maitland community virtually collapsed after the departure of their second minister in 1898⁸ and after the sale of the building in 1926 the furnishings were given to the Newcastle Hebrew Congregation and the Anglican Theological College at Morpeth.²⁰ As Cohen and the Maitland merchants drew benefit from its shipping it is appropriate they should even indirectly contribute to the historic charm of Morpeth today.

Collectors of Australiana are now familiar with an inscribed presentation piece of an emu egg set in local silver. One, now among the Treasures of the Great Synagogue, was presented to G.J. Cohen in 1879 by the Hebrew community of Maitland to mark his valued services to the congregation and in the erection of their Synagogue.

Late in 1905 George sent for Isack Morris, the young Reader at the Newtown Synagogue, and asked him to inaugurate and lead a Jewish congregation in Newcastle. Morris, who had not long been in Australia and not long married,

David Cohen & Co.,
BRITISH & FOREIGN
MERCHANTS & IMPORTERS,
London, Sydney, Maitland & Newcastle.
 ESTABLISHED 1835.

Departments :

GROCERY,
 DRAPERY,
 IRONMONGERY,
 CROCKERY,
 GLASSWARE,
 FANCY GOODS,
 PATENT MEDICINES,
 WINES & SPIRITS.

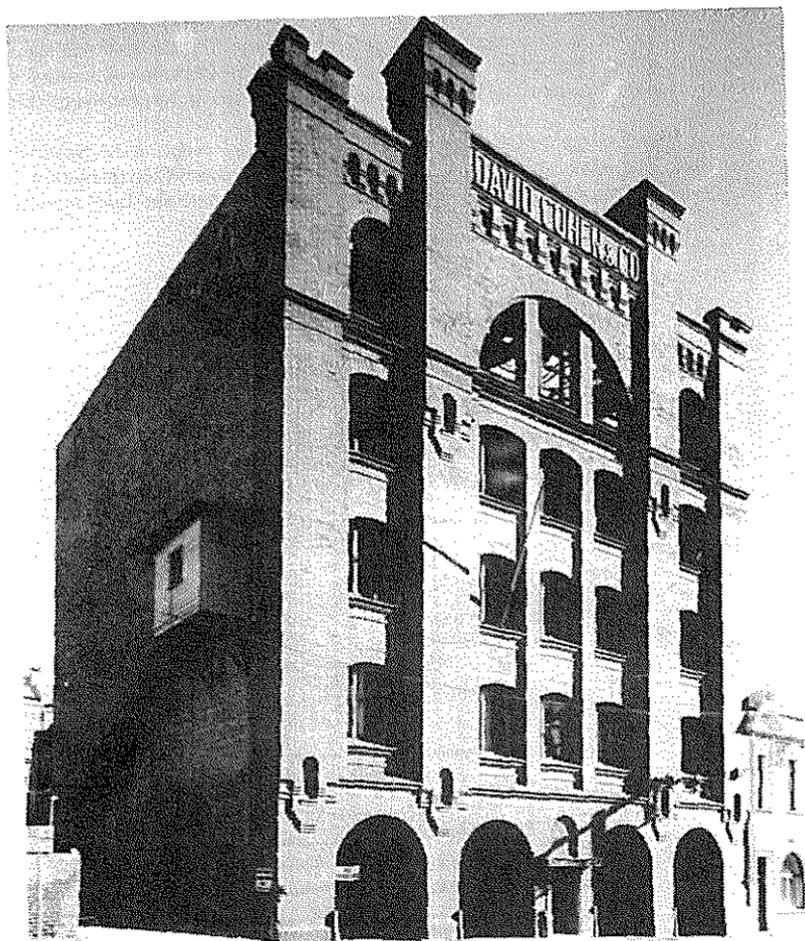
Sole Agents for

Gillard's Celebrated Pickles, John Bull Teas,
 Bird's Baking and Custard Powders, Monserrat Sauce,
 and Elephant Brand Moleskins.

Proprietors of the

VARIOUS ROCKLIGHT MANUFACTURES.

*(From John Windross & J.P. Ralston, Historical
 Records of Newcastle, 1797-1897.
 Newcastle, 1897; fac. rep. 1978)*



This photograph by courtesy of Brian Suters, Newcastle

naturally asked about a steady salary upon which he was promptly offered the firm's guarantee. George, acknowledged by a brass plate in the Synagogue, is officially its "founder." In the eyes of his less affluent and prominent co-religionists his son Samuel was literally their squire on the hill. Manager of the Newcastle branch between 1890 and 1915 he was in 1906 the first President of the Newcastle Hebrew Congregation and also President of the Newcastle Club. He lived in a mansion adjacent to the town's elite on The Hill, now the offices of a firm of local solicitors, and opposite the present site of this prestigious and very English club.²¹

In 1921 the Congregation paid the first instalment on land for a Synagogue to the Australian Agricultural Company which nearly a century earlier had received 2,000 acres and a monopoly of the coal workings, owning a great deal of land in the centre of Newcastle. Material in the Synagogue records suggests that David Cohen & Co. was not only generous but linked the two Congregations as trustees. In 1925 the Committee noted possible sale of the "Congregation's Maitland property." In October, 1926 the Building Fund Committee reported that having raised £500 the firm would match it and they could expect £1,000 from the sale of the Maitland Synagogue. They thereupon called for tenders and in 1927 the foundation stones were laid in May and the Synagogue was dedicated in September. The first stone was laid by Samuel as their first President. In September, 1933 the last of the building debt was paid and he had contributed £100 of that final balance of approximately £400. The Equity Court agreed to transfer a bequest granted to the Maitland Congregation many years before from the estate of David Cohen, the individual, who had died in England. In the early and mid-1930's the firm and estate were paying at least £150, sometimes more to the Synagogue or nearly one-third of its receipts. Without it they could not possibly have afforded a minister who was still the able and dedicated Reverend Morris.²²

In the 1930's Samuel became increasingly conscious of the Nazi persecution of his co-religionists. In 1936 he called a meeting which established a German Jewish Relief Fund which soon became known as the Australian Jewish Welfare Society. He served as President until 1946 and his son Paul, a young practising accountant born in Newcastle in 1909, was the first secretary. The Society raised funds and in 1938 were empowered by the Commonwealth government to select a quota of 15,000 deserving migrants as long as they were not a charge on the community. The placement and training of farmers became the secretary's special project. The Committee was incorporated in that year as the AJWS, now a stable, professional, communal organisation which named him patron in 1981 after 45 year's service.

An officer in the army reserve, Paul Cullen quickly joined the AIF and was one of the first to leave for overseas service early in 1940, serving in the Middle East and North Africa. He was responsible for the evacuation of the Australian force from Greece and one of the last to leave. Because of the risk to himself and his men if the Germans captured a soldier named Cohen he changed his name at this time to Cullen. He was decorated with the DSO and Bar in New Guinea. After the War he resumed practice and became managing director of the family company and so continued to visit Newcastle. For his work in developing the peace-time CMF he was promoted to Major-General and awarded the CBE. He has also been active in the National Council for the Blind, Austcare and the United Nations Association and after 1972 was awarded the new decoration of the AO. Belonging to the third generation of the merchant princes of Sydney, it is appropriate he should live without show at Darling Point. At an age when most men have retired and many are decrepit he still actively pursues the family tradition of public service.

In 1981 Paul Cullen wrote a memoir of the Welfare Society in which he declared:

"It could be truly stated that the initiative of our Society established a precedent for Australia to admit refugees, and ever since then Australia has been in the forefront of the nations of the world in this regard." That is a big statement; but I would refer you to Barbara Stewart's, *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism*, a dissertation of 1969, published in 1982. She shows that the U.S. government did not change the existing law or enlarge the existing ethnic origins quotas, and she concludes, "It is hard to explain why Roosevelt should have received so much credit for so little courageous action." Britain took few and reduced the entry into Palestine. But she does commend Australia for the relatively large number admitted, or who would have been admitted but for the outbreak of War. It is a historian's tribute to a tolerant country and a Jewish community which, led by the founders of David Cohen & Co. and their descendants, had won the respect of their fellows.²³

In the 1920's and 1930's the firm owned a magazine called *Voice of the North*, "an advocate of the interests of the northern and north-western districts of New South Wales." Established in 1909, it was another casualty of the Depression in 1933. It provided an outlet for historical articles by W.J. Gould before he established his own journal conducted by the Newcastle Historical Society. An editorial in May, 1922 advocated a Greater Newcastle Council sixteen years before it eventually occurred. The firm frankly gained from the development of the district. They advertised furniture in the Cohen warehouse made in Newcastle. They naturally drew attention to George's 80th birthday and claimed that sixty years service with one family company was a record in the commercial history of Australia.²⁴

The firm began and acquired its reputation when massive, horsedrawn wagons trundled bales of wool and skins from the outback and returned with tools, flour and station stores. Their warehouse at Maitland was a vast clearing house or market or mirror of the outside world. They continued the familiar business of wholesale grocery even though an established Newcastle firm, Earp Bros., had closed down this department in 1922. In their judgment, the golden age of the importer-merchant who showed the retail shopkeeper his branded English pickles and his sacks of spices had passed and the local manufacturer and the regular delivery van was taking over. The firm never recovered from accumulated blows of changing business conditions, the Depression and the demands of a large family network here and in England.²⁵

Not only business and benefactions but names were shared with the extended family network in England. By the 1930's the theatre world was familiar with their cousin, Benn Wolfe Levy (1900-73), the dramatist, and movie-goers in the Hunter were familiar with his wife, the actress, Constance Cummings.

They left permanent reminders of their firm and its traditions in Maitland, Newcastle and Sydney. Their name is preserved on the facade of the Bolton Street warehouse along with the familiar signs of its architect. The guardians of Sydney's heritage may rediscover the Levy fountain as it softly splashes amid the city lawns almost opposite the entrance to the Mitchell library of Australiana whereby the Hunter furnished another fortune, that of David Scott Mitchell, to enrich the metropolis.

Addendum:

Since giving this paper Paul Cullen has drawn my attention to the frequent references to Levy and David Cohen in *The Wallabadah Manuscript* ed. Roger Millis (Sydney 1980) who in the same year published a history of Tamworth. Wallabadah is a town on the New England highway about 50kms south of

Tamworth and the MS is attributed to a Willaim Telfer Jnr (1841-1925?) who wrote it ca. 1900 when working at Wallabadah station. The editor enlarges these references from his own researches. Levy went to Tamworth in 1846 because a store was assigned to the firm in lieu of the owner's debt, leaving in 1854 to take charge in Maitland. Another brother, Abraham Cohen, replaced him. That it was acquired in "dubious circumstances" is not justified in my opinion by the flimsy material given. The firm, through Levy, introduced a coaching service from Morpeth to Tamworth in 1847 and later engaged in store-keeping and gold-buying on the Peel River diggings (pp. 168, 207, 220).

NOTES

1. Chaim Bermant, *The Cousinhood* (New York, 1971); Charles Price, "Jewish Settlers in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society V* (May 1964), 371-72; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 January, 1937 (Rabbi Falk's remarks at G.J. Cohen's funeral). In the 1960's M-H became Michaelis Bayley Ltd and David Cohen was absorbed by Petersville Ltd for a time retaining the goodwill use of the familiar name.
2. George Bergman, "Samuel Cohen, *AJHS*, VI (September 1969), 334-43 (I have checked cited advertisements from *The Australian*); His Children, "Lewis Wolfe Levy," *Ibid.*, VI (July 1970), 474-87; Alroy M. Cohen, "The Jews of Tamworth," *Ibid.*, III (August 1952), 350-60. Samuel said in 1860 he had been in business "27 years"; Levy said, also to the electors of Maitland, all he had done "since 1840" was before them, and opening the Synagogue in 1879, he had "lived here nearly forty years, off and on" (*Maitland Mercury*, 31 July, 1860, 6 August, 1874, 25 February, 1879). Lewis Cohen conducted a store in Murrurundi and died in Sydney (Police Inspector Ted Cohen, Petersham, a descendant). The *AJHS* has a family tree in Sydney with all collaterals and two letters, 17 June, 1840 and 25 July, 1849 from the parents to Lewis Cohen and his wife respectively. The brothers had quarrelled.
3. David Cohen & Co. Papers, Mitchell Library, are meagre including several bound ledgers of 1850's and 1860's. Mullen Papers (WHM, solicitor, was first Mayor of West Maitland), Newcastle Regional Library, have several documents drawn for the firm including contract of carriage between the partners and Henry Ingall, June 1862, Morpeth to Maitland, for £8 a week. D.B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper: a History of the Darling Downs* (Sydney, 1968), 164-71, discusses store credit, a substantial gap in Australian economic history. John Windross & J.P. Ralston, *Historical Records of Newcastle, 1797-1897* (Newcastle, 1897; fac. rep., 1978). For advertisement, see *Maitland Mercury*, 11 May, 1878.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Morton Herman, *The Blackets: an Era of Australian Architecture* (Sydney, 1963), 110; "Town & Country Journal," 23 December, 1871, cit. J.M. Freeland, *Architect Extraordinary: the Life & Work of John Horbury Hunt, 1838-1904* (Melbourne 1970), 28-29. Mr. Appleby, Broadmeadow, has a ledger from the Bolton Street warehouse showing net profit for 1898-99 at £10,218 or 4% turnover, more than doubling in 1901-02. This could pertain to only one warehouse in a larger operation; the "six figures" is an estimate of Paul Cullen, Sydney, 1983.

7. *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 9 September, 1897, 1 January, 1901, 21 January, 1908; Brian Suters, *Menkens Centenary Exhibition* (Newcastle, 1978, pam.) who kindly provided many photos of Bolton Street. The splendid National Australia Bank (formerly CBC, 1887) in High Street, Maitland was built when G.J. Cohen was on their Board who possibly wished to reward the town for his firm's durability and prosperity.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Information from Mr. Cullen. Mr. Pender holds the 1887 plans. Concerning the persistent story that Bann Levy was linked with *Benholme* next door, the stone was laid as the Maitland Benevolent Asylum by H.E. Cohen M.L.A. on 17 December, 1884 (*Maitland Mercury*, 18 December) and it has always been a charitable foundation taking the present name in the 1970's.
10. Information from Mr. Cullen. Inspector Cohen also commented on a family tradition of rectitude and service. *Cyclopaedia of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1907), 643; *The Telegraph*, 23 October, 1934; *Maitland Mercury*, 25 January, 1937; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23, 25 January, 1937; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 23 January, 1937.
11. Memorandum and Articles of Association, Sydney, 1912 are in the Mitchell Library.
12. *Maitland Mercury*, 31 July, 2 August, 1860. In 1847 Samuel had contributed to the Reverend McIntyre's Free Presbyterian Church and School whose most brilliant pupil, late 1850's, was Samuel W. Griffith, later first Chief Justice of Australia (Information from Mrs. Catherine Boer, Terrigal).
13. *Ibid.*, 13 July, 1860, 1, 6 August, 1874.
14. "Levy," VI, *AJHS*, 487; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 7 September, 1883.
15. *Maitland Mercury*, 21 January, 1886.
16. *Cyclopaedia*, see n. 10; Asa Briggs, *Friends of the People: the Centenary History of Lewis* (London, 1956; A.L.M. Cook, *The David Lewis Story* (1960?, pam.), copy provided by the Liverpool Public Libraries.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Charles Wilson, *Economic History and the Historian* (London, 1969), 189.
19. David Benjamin, "The Macquarie Street Synagogue, 1859-77," *AJHS*, III (December 1953), 379-429; *Ibid.*, (July 1949), 8-11.
20. L.E. Fredman, *Newcastle Synagogue Jubilee* (Newcastle, 1977, pam.); *Maitland Mercury*, 25 February, 9 September, 1879. In the *Federal Directory* (Newcastle 1901), Samuel is listed in the year of his marriage as resident at 1 Watt Street, address of the Great Northern hotel, no doubt using the Club regularly.
21. Minutes, June 1925; Building Fund Committee Minutes, 25 October, 1926; various Annual Reports, Newcastle Synagogue Archives. The David Cohen bequest was converted to cash and re-invested in 1981-2. An illuminated address given to Morris by the Newtown congregation on his departure in 1905 was presented by his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Wilma Morris, Newcastle, and is hanging in the Synagogue hall with a portrait of Samuel Cohen.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Paul Cullen, "Australian Jewish Welfare Society: a Short History," (1981), 5, typescript provided by the author. Barbara Stewart, *United States Government Policy on Refugees from Nazism, 1933-40* (New York & London, 1982), 342, 562-67.
24. Scattered issues are available in the Mitchell Library, 1918-33.
25. R.W. Earp, *History of Earp Bros. and Co. Pty. Ltd.* (Newcastle 1983, pam.),

25, issued for this firm's centenary and written by the founder's son. A loosely-drawn agreement which converted the partnership into a public company permitted regular calls for dividend and repayment of loans regardless of business conditions and devaluation against sterling (private information).

Ed. — "A Short History of the Jews of Maitland" by M.Z. Forbes may usefully be consulted, *AJHS* Vol. VIII, pp. 413-436.