

OBITUARIES

RABBI ALFRED FABIAN

On 4 October 1989 Rabbi Dr. Alfred Fabian O.B.E., E.D., died after a long illness. He was best known, perhaps, for his connections with the North Shore Synagogue, where he was Chief Minister for 13 years from 1962 and headmaster of its religion school from 1964. He had been the Rabbi of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation from 1940 till 1947, and in Brisbane from 1947 till 1962. In Brisbane, he encouraged the foundation of the Gold Coast Congregation. His article in the *Journal* of the AJHS Vol IX Part 2, 1981, "From School to Shul", The Early History of the Gold Coast (Queensland) Congregation (1954-1962), gives a detailed account of its development. Besides this, he was senior Jewish Chaplain to the Australian Forces from 1962, succeeding Rabbi Jacob Danglow. He served as a member of the Chaplains-General Conference, and later of the Religious Advisory Committee to the Services, and he was national chaplain to the Federation of Australian Ex-Service Associations (FAJEX). In all, he served as Senior Jewish Chaplain for 26 years, only retiring with the onset of his final illness.

Rabbi Fabian was born in Breslau in 1910, the son of a rabbi, Leo Fabian, minister of the Breslau Synagogue. His mother, Ella (nee Barn), was a school teacher. Both parents died when Alfred was still a child -first his father, in the 'flu' epidemic of 1917; his mother died the following year. He and his brother were then brought up by their maternal grandparents, Baron. Alfred Fabian attended Freiburg and Breslau Universities, graduating as Doctor of Laws in 1933. He spent five years at the Breslau Jewish Theological Seminary, where he gained his rabbinical diploma in 1939. In 1940, he married Ilse Sternberg, and they had three daughters, Miriam, Diana, and Carmel.

During his ministry in Sydney, Rabbi Fabian made time for writing. He wrote three books, *A time To Speak, An Australian Ministry*, and an unpublished work, *A Tale of Three Cities*. This latter book dealt with his ministries in the three capital cities. He wrote articles for the *AJHS Journal*. He was a Vice-President of the Society for over 10 years. His association with the Society began whilst he was still in Adelaide. He was one of the first to point out, publicly, that the Jews of Australia had shown how, in a multi-cultural society, a minority group might retain its identity as a unified entity, resisting assimilation, and participating in the life of the society around them, whilst exercising an influence for good out of all proportion to their numbers.

His involvement in the community was manifold; besides his ministerial responsibilities and his work with the Jewish Forces, he was a leading member of the Association of Rabbis and Ministers and was its treasurer for eight years. He was a strong supporter of Maccabi and patron of many of the interstate Carnivals. He was with B'nai B'rith, which he saw as symbolising his beliefs in a more united and harmonious Jewish community. The proceeds from sales of his book *An Australian Ministry* he donated to the Albert Einstein Unit of B'nai B'rith Lodge.

Gorr handled probably 20 or 30 enquiries every year from Australia, invariably with successful outcomes. Quoting from his last letters to this Society, written in June, 1988 "Much is happening with me. I am involved in so many research projects that it is quite staggering ... I am receiving more and more commissions from Australian Jews to research their genealogy and to draw up their Family Trees. It is very gratifying. This is not the time nor the place, but I can definitely identify more of the First Fleet convicts who were Jewish. One of those names is Burdo. I am currently researching a family Burdo of Lithuanian Jewish background and whose London born descendant is my client."

He was always on the lookout for connections between Australia and the Holy Land; particularly the genealogical pathos of 19th century rabbis who went from Jerusalem to Australia on fund-raising missions. In fact much of his writings concerned the derivation of Jewish family names. He addressed a wide range of groups including Yeshiva students, women's organisations and, participated in several international conferences on Jewish genealogy as well as a number of overseas lecture tours. Another subject was the Jewish settlement in the Holy Land in the nineteenth century; its research bound him intimately with Jerusalem. He laboured tirelessly to locate ancient tombstones on the Mount of Olives and braved the elements with a personally developed kit of restoration materials preparing stones to be photographed for his clients. He was a familiar figure in the libraries, archives, and Chevra Kadisha in Jerusalem, often discovering precious documents, letters, diaries, minute books of societies and manuscript family trees. He had a phenomenal memory for sources and his colleagues could always be confident of receiving sound advice on how to further their researches. His collection of portraits of rabbis was upwards of 2,000.

Above all, Rabbi Gorr was a staunch adherent of Chabad, revering its leader, the Lubovitcher Rebbe. He published a learned treatise drawn from Biblical and Talmudic sources concluding that just as we performed certain rituals and observed festivals 'Zeher lemaase bereshit' (in remembrance of the act of Creation), so the discovery of the links in the long chain of Jewish existence was "yet another affirmation of faith in the act of creation of the world by Hashem". The issue of *The Jerusalem Post* 6 October 1981, carried a full page article on Rabbi Gorr by Greer Fay Cashman (formerly of Sydney). It was entitled *Trees of Knowledge*. Shmuel did make provision in his Will for his unique archive to be housed in an institution in Jerusalem where it would be accessible to all scholars and genealogists. His untimely passing is a tragic blow to his life's work in genealogy and is a deep sense of loss to his friends. Many are the anecdotes told and fond memories held by his friends. He is survived in Jerusalem by his mother and sister, and by a son in Sydney.

The above compiled by Louise Rosenberg and contains extracts from the correspondence of Chaim (Keith) Freedman, Petah Tikvah, Israel.