

## AJHS PRESIDENT’S REPORT – NOV. 2023

During Covid, I wrote that we all hoped next year’s report would not need to refer to the pandemic. Sadly, this year we communicate in the shadow of the Israel-Hamas War and hope that by next year this will be another painful but healing scar in our Jewish history.

### **Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (AJGS)**

During the year, we welcomed the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society as our partner. Two of the former AJGS committee joined the executive of Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) and their presence has been a boost to our energy. With the addition of a quarterly *Kosher Koala* to our publications, we now have an arm dedicated to the research of family history.

### **Premises**

Sydney Jewish Museum’s redesign of the Darlinghurst Jewish community complex including the AJHS offices have been further developed. Plans have been submitted to City of Sydney for Development Approval and it is hoped that works can commence mid-2025 and be completed mid-2027. These plans provide for a greater focus on Australia’s Jewish heritage. AJHS’s expertise and experience in genealogy and archives will be a major part of this initiative.

During the anticipated two years of works, AJHS will be seeking alternative housing for our offices and for those archives which are most accessed.

### **Digitisation**

We now have digitised 14,000 of the 40,000 photos from the pre-digital era held by the *Australian Jewish News* in Melbourne. By using facial recognition software to help identify people, 28,000 faces have been processed and tagged. To date, 10,300 individuals have been identified. We plan to make these photos from events between 1970 and 2000 available online during 2024.

We continue to digitise audio and video cassettes using software that automatically transcribes voice to text. Current work in progress

is 250 audio cassettes from lectures and guest speakers at the Sydney Jewish Museum between 1977 and 2004 as well as AUJS audio reels from the radio show 'You Don't Have to be Jewish.'

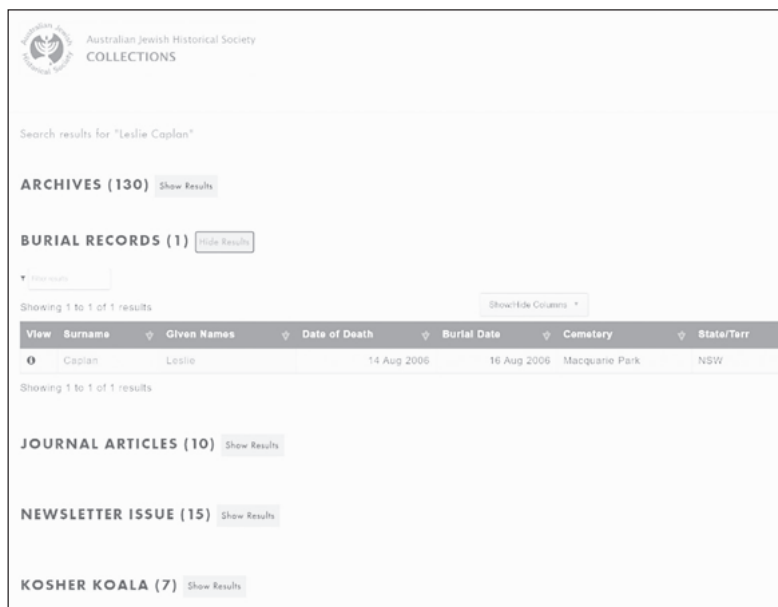
## Oral history

While the community has long focused on interviewing Holocaust survivors, AJHS is now gathering interviews from members of the community who were born and raised in Australia particularly those pre-World War Two.

## Website and databases

On 1 July 2023, we launched a completely redesigned website. A major feature is that researchers can interrogate our vast repository of communal archives online. As well as searching in Archives, Burials or other of our many databases, you can now search for anyone or anything across all archives, databases and publications.

There has been a significant increase in the number of people



The screenshot shows the AJHS website interface. At the top is the logo and 'Australian Jewish Historical Society COLLECTIONS'. Below is a search bar with the text 'Search results for "Leslie Caplan"'. The results are categorized into several sections: ARCHIVES (130), BURIAL RECORDS (1), JOURNAL ARTICLES (10), NEWSLETTER ISSUE (15), and KOSHER KOALA (7). Each section has a 'Show Results' button. The 'BURIAL RECORDS (1)' section is expanded, showing a table with one result for Leslie Caplan. The table has columns for View, Surname, Given Names, Date of Death, Burial Date, Cemetery, and State/Terr. The result shows Leslie Caplan, born 14 Aug 2006, buried 16 Aug 2006 at Macquarie Park, NSW.

View	Surname	Given Names	Date of Death	Burial Date	Cemetery	State/Terr
0	Caplan	Leslie	14 Aug 2006	16 Aug 2006	Macquarie Park	NSW

accessing ajhs.com.au. In the four months from 1 July to 31 October there have already been 4,300 visits compared to 8,500 for the previous full year. On average, visitors are spending much longer at 9:00 minutes compared with 6:40 minutes in the previous year. Searches of the Archive are at 2,002 – slightly ahead of Burials at 1,750.

With our associates at AJGS Vic, we now hold digital copies of marriage registry entries for over 68,000 people from 70 different congregations around Australia. The marriages span from 1832 up to early 2023. Details of 'Marriages pre-1942' are available online. For privacy reasons, more recent marriages are only available on request by interested parties. We have expanded the 'Jewish Members of Parliament' database by adding bios for many of the MPs. Back issues of *Kosher Koala* since 1993 have joined the Journal which dates back to 1939. All are full-text searchable.

In a joint initiative with JewishGen, AJHS will now provide burial data to the JewishGen Online World Burial Registry (JOWBR). JOWBR data for Australia and New Zealand will replicate AJHS Burials currently held.

### **Marketing & Events**

*From Australia's Jewish Past* prepared by Ruth Lillian continues to appear on J-Wire every Tuesday. These interesting histories drawn from AJHS publications and archives as well as other authoritative sources have become a popular Tuesday feature on J-Wire.

Since joining with AJGS, we have returned to regular monthly events, many on Zoom with participants from across the country. Most of these are recorded and available online. We also hold workshops to help those searching their family tree.

A rare event was the gathering in September at the former synagogue in Broken Hill. 60 people from all parts of Australia gathered to unveil two benches in honour of those who worked tirelessly to convert the closed synagogue into a museum and the home of the Broken Hill Historical Society.

### **Cemeteries**

Following extensive research into old trust deeds and other documents, we can confirm the appointment of three new trustees for the Goulburn Jewish cemetery. This now secures the management of this historic site in Jewish communal hands. We have also received a significant grant from Heritage NSW to conduct a Conservation Management Plan which will document the rehabilitation works required for the site and set a plan for the next decades, as discussed in the article in this issue of the Journal by Chris Betteridge and Gary Luke.

Journal and newsletter

65% of our members have chosen to receive the *Journal* electronically, saving AJHS printing and delivery costs. *Kosher Koala*, which is distributed electronically, has a strong following both locally and internationally. 60% of recipients of *Kosher Koala* open and read it online every quarter.

Archives

Our core purpose and justification for our communal funding is the archiving of communal records. Our archives team have increased our holding from last year’s 10,000 files to over 12,000.

Collections	Subcollection		Boxes/Containers		Files/Items	
			completed		completed	
	2	2	2	2	20	2
	023	022	023	022	23	022
Audio (mixed digitised and physical)	3		10	4	650	4
Australian Jewish Historical Society			350	3	4,246	4,246
Communal Organisations	6	59	500	459	12,511	1
Communal Organisations (AAJ Static)	4		681			0,654
Personal Papers	30					To be completed 2024
Photographs dispersed within personal papers and Communal Organisations	71	66	438	10	2,000	1,133
Photographs electronic – digitised AJN	3	1	N/A	6	846	8
Small Individual Donations (mixed electronic and physical records)	1		N/A		14,000	46
	10	5	30	3	100	3
						5

Sixty-four communal institutions now have their archives held by AJHS including The Great and Sephardi synagogues, ECAJ, JCA, NAJEX, NCJWA and more. We also have ingested various contributions of value and relevance to our holdings relating to organisations as diverse as Habonim and the Maccabean Literary & Dramatic Society.

AJHS holds 71 sets of personal papers of communal leaders. Newly added are collections from Marcelle Marks, Earle Hoffman and Isador Magid among others. All of which add to the rich fabric of our community.

In conjunction with The Great Synagogue and subject to funding, we have begun an exercise to digitise key documents from the Synagogue held in the State Library of New South Wales. Our intent

is to make available online almost 10,000 pages from 1832 to 1976 including minutes of meetings from the earliest years.

While we are predominantly focussed on New South Wales, we cannot allow Australian history to disappear. AJHS has been approached for assistance with archives held in Victoria for B'nai B'rith and Maccabi as there is no local communal home. In some cases, such as Bet Olam burial records, we have transported Melbourne archives to Sydney for documentation and long-term storage.

### **Research**

Our doors are always open to researchers, be they academics or those looking for some obscure aspect of their family's Jewish history. Researchers have asked for access to a cross-section of archives: whether for information on Isaac Steinberg who tried to create an autonomous Jewish region in the Kimberley of Western Australia, on the legacies of European-trained lawyers who migrated to Australia between 1930-1960, for an upcoming documentary, *Revenge: Our Dad the Nazi Killer* or on Chelsea Farm, which was a training farm for Jewish refugees.

### **Staffing**

As with all cultural institutions, staffing is our largest expense being almost 60%. Head archivist Sabrina Elias is expanding our sources of interns beyond Sydney, Charles Sturt and Australian Catholic universities. Harnessing the skills and energy of interns, including three based in Melbourne, who currently are describing eight sub-collections, continues to be invaluable to AJHS.

### **Financials**

While we charge for archival services, we are a communal resource and endeavour to ensure that fees are never a barrier to an organisation's records being captured for posterity. We continue to apply for grants for specific projects and have been successful twice in the last year.

AJHS continues to operate at a significant deficit and relies on generous donors and JCA for funding. We would encourage all members to donate to the JCA's annual campaign as without our annual allocation and additional support, AJHS and the community will disappear.

AJHS policy is to grant free and unlimited access to all our records other than those with restrictions placed by the depositor. Consequently, we are phasing out the \$30 annual subscriber option.

The benefits of paid membership are the right to vote at meetings,

serve on AJHS committees and opt to receive a print copy of the biannual *AJHS Journal*. The above policy has lowered the attraction of financial membership. However, since AJGS has joined AJHS, we have seen an increase in membership numbers, many from former AJGS members who were not already AJHS members.

We have also introduced a \$30 concessional membership for students and holders of a Commonwealth government benefit card. Our new online membership system allows members to join, renew and update their personal details at their convenience.

### **Membership (as at 6-Nov-2023)**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Benefactor Members	3	3	3	0
Members	154	152	140	170
Life Members			4	9
Subscribers / Concession	24	57	17	5
Local Institutions	2	2	4	3
Overseas Institutions	4	6	5	3

### **People and thanks**

Every year, the number of staff, interns, committee and volunteers grows, and I would like to recognise all for their continued support. Two people merit special mention. Head Archivist Sabrina Elias who is our ringmaster and retiring treasurer Ralph Hirst who for over ten years has kept AJHS on a steady financial footing. We thank them and everybody else who keeps AJHS functioning so well.

### **Closing remarks**

My closing comment in my 2021 report was '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."' For 2022, I wrote 'we look forward to being able to deliver more of the Australian Jewish story not just to Jews but to the whole Australian community.' In the light of the increase in antisemitism sparked by the Israel-Hamas war, it is more important than ever to chronicle the presence and contribution of Jews to Australia since 1788.

Peter Philippsohn OAM  
President

## ERRATUM

Deborah Green, 'Survivors, Trauma and Mental Illness: A Challenge for Australian Jewish Welfare,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, Deborah Green, 'Survivors, Trauma and Mental Illness: A Challenge for Australian Jewish Welfare':

The final reference, 64, p. 229, is missing from the endnotes. It should be:

R.H. Fishman, 'Compensation for Mental Illness Resulting from Holocaust Trauma,' *Lancet*, vol. 352, issue 9129 (29 August 1998), p. 718. Doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(05)60844-6.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Marilyn Aminuddin**, BA, MA, Dip. Industrial Admin., was born in Melbourne, Australia, raised in New Zealand, and has lived in Malaysia for 50 years. For 35 of those years, she taught in a local university which led to publishing more than ten books in her field of industrial relations and human resource management – all under the professional name of Maimunah Aminuddin. After retirement, she started researching her family, about which initially she knew almost nothing. As a result of this research, in the third quarter of 2023 she wrote a book about her ancestors entitled *Fears, Tears, Secrets & Successes* published by i2i Publishing, UK.

**Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple**, z'l, AO, RFD, BA LLB (Melbourne), MLitt (UNE), Hon. LLD (UNSW), DUniv (ACU), was 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 had been living in Israel, largely devoting his time to research and writing. Sadly, he died in January 2024.

**Helen Bersten**, OAM, BA, Dip. Lib., gained her Graduate Diploma in Librarianship at the University of New South Wales in 1964. She was a research librarian in Fisher Library at Sydney University from then until 1970. During that time she spent two years in the University's Rare Book Library. She worked very briefly in the Zionist Federation Library in 1972 and from 1979 was Honorary Archivist of the Australian Jewish Historical Society for thirty-two years, retiring at the end of May 2011. During that period, she spent six weeks cataloguing books in the Falk Library in the 1980s. She received her OAM in 2005 for volunteer services as Archivist. Helen is a member of the AJHS Inc. editorial committee and reviews books for the *Journal*. Pre-digitisation, she compiled indexes for the *Journal* and *Newsletter*.

**Christopher Betteridge**, BSc, MSc, AMA (Lond), M.ICOMO, was born in 1947 and grew up in Parramatta. Qualified in Botany and Museum Studies, Chris was the original landscape and environmental specialist in the Heritage and Conservation Branch of the NSW Department of



Planning from 1978. For over 30 years, Chris worked as a consultant on cultural landscape and heritage investigation, assessment and management. A founding member of the Australian Garden History Society, he served in specialist heritage roles on several committees, including some years as the Cemeteries Adviser to the NSW National Trust. Chris died in May 2023, survived by his wife Margaret and children Simon and Lucy. In May 2024, he was honoured posthumously with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the NSW National Trust Heritage Awards.

**Rodney Gouttman**, BA, MEd, PhD, Teach Cert, is a former senior academic of the University of South Australia who has written many articles on Australian Jewish history and the Australia-Israel relationship. He is a former editor of the *AJHSJ* (Melbourne Edition) and the *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*. His most recent book was *In Their Merit: Australian Jewry in WW1* (1915). He now resides in Jerusalem.

**Kip Green**, BA/LLB, Dip Ed, MHist, PhD, is a historian and educator working at the Sydney Jewish Museum. They began their educational career as a teacher in secondary and tertiary institutions, before moving into the field of Holocaust studies. Their role involves working closely with Holocaust survivors, as well as delivering student seminars on topics relating to the history of the Holocaust. Dr Green's current research focuses on theatre productions in DP camps, and the people who created them.

**Ruth Lilian**, OAM, has a professional background in the management of meetings and events specifically in the medical, education, and scientific sectors over a period of fifty years as at August 2024. She pioneered the world of meetings and events for Australia and has been recognised with an Order of Australia for this. Her other love is researching history and the biographies of people who have left their mark through their specific workforce and life areas. This includes her having prepared podcasts during 2020 for the AJHS in the first year of COVID and she has continued writing for J-Wire since 2021 on behalf of AJHS with biographies each week on Jewish members of the community who have contributed to Australia through business, medicine, art and culture, building, architecture and more.

**Gary Luke**, DipFHS, was a trustee of the Jewish cemetery sections of Rookwood Necropolis in its final years ending in 2012, overseeing data management and conservation, and is a member of the cemeteries

advisory committee of the National Trust of NSW. He instigated the establishment of the Friends of Maitland Historical Jewish Cemetery and is the primary trustee of the historical Jewish cemetery at Goulburn, both now acknowledged as significant sites on the State Heritage Inventory. He oversees the AJHS burials database, and was nominated in 2022 by AJHS for a RAHS Certificate of Achievement.

**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.

**Jana Vytrhlik**, MPHA, MA (Hons), PhD (Palacky University, 1976), PhD (University of Sydney, 2020), is an independent Jewish art and architecture historian and curator of Judaica. She started her museum career in the world renowned Jewish Museum in Prague and later joined the Sydney Jewish Museum. In 1997, while working at the Powerhouse Museum, Jana curated the *Precious Legacy* exhibition, the first international Judaica presentation touring Australia from Prague. She is presently leading the curatorial review of the A.M. Rosenblum Jewish Museum collection at The Great Synagogue in Sydney. Jana's monograph *Treasures of Old Jewish Sydney* is based on her recent PhD research and was published in May 2024. She regularly publishes research articles and presents conference papers in the broad areas of Jewish visual culture.

**Peter Winterton**, AM, BA, MBBS, FRACGP, DRACOG, Grad Dip Forensic Med(Monash), FFCFM(RACP), Clinical A/Professor, lives in Perth. His heritage and roots lie in central and eastern Europe, with his parents fleeing Nazi Austria in 1938. He is a family physician, child protection physician, and medical historian, remaining in active

clinical practice. He has been involved in medical history all his professional life and is a foundation life member of the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine. He has published historical articles relating to Australian, Austrian, and Nazi medicine. Outside of medicine he is the president of the Friends of Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Western Australia and is both a keen bibliophile and numismatist.