

AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF 'FRUM'¹ JEWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES 1788-1940

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INTRODUCTION

It should be no surprise to learn that, when the first Jews arrived in New South Wales, at the founding of the colony on 26 January 1788, none of them could be regarded as '*frum*' - that is, strictly Orthodox. One would hardly expect convicts, for that is what our first Jewish arrivals were, to be pious, punctilious upholders of every religious law and principle. On the other hand, strictly Orthodox Jews did not first arrive in the post-war period, or even just prior to World War II, which has been part of the popular mythology. I was aware of this fact from three sources. The first was the accounts of the piety and religious observance noted in relation to the Goulburn Jews in the 1840s (actually, from 1833) onwards. The second was an account told to me in 1965 by Fela Herszberg, a very *frum* Gerrer Chassidic lady who has now passed on. She was born in Poland and related to me how her Australian mother had returned to Poland to marry, with her father's guidance, a *shidduch* (match) he made in Poland. Fela's mother had perished in Auschwitz, along with all but one of Fela's siblings, Tzirel (or Cila) Unfanger, and, after the War, her mother's brother, Cyril Rosenbaum, searched for surviving relations in Poland and brought them out. The third source was an account mentioned years ago by my teacher, Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, of a religious, 'foreign Jews' synagogue' in the southern reaches of the city of Sydney, where Yiddish was spoken. These were my starting points.

In addition, I was privileged to stay regularly at Rabbi and Rebbitzin Osher Abramson's place, and later, live there, in the mid 1960s, so I learned from several sources (including directly) Rabbi Chaim Gutnick's story and of the situation that existed in Sydney from the 1940s onward. Rabbi Chaim Gutnick was the eldest son of Rebbitzin Abramson, by her first husband.

DEFINITIONS

What do I mean by 'frum', 'strictly Orthodox' or 'Haredi'? Basically, I mean people who live their lives according to Torah Law. When I was interviewing people, collecting information for this paper, some were happy to be called 'frum' but did not think they were worthy of being called 'haredi', yet others, on apparently the same level of observance, were quite happy to wear the label 'haredi'. All were happy with 'strictly Orthodox', although some correctly said, 'Orthodox is Orthodox'. However lax practice, decried by our religious leaders for over the past two hundred years in Australia, has debased the value of 'Orthodox' without any strengthening qualifier.

The subjects of this paper, come from a variety of different Orthodox backgrounds. Some are *Yekkes* - strictly Orthodox Jews of German origin or following the German traditions espoused by Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. Some are *Litvishe* - strictly Orthodox - basically of Eastern European origin, following the teachings of Rabbi Elijah, the Vilna Gaon, the historical opponent of the Lubavitch movement of Chassidim, referred to as *Mitnagdim*, a term which was disparaging. Some are Chassidim from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are non-chassidic Hungarians, very close to the teachings of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and also of the *Chofetz Chaim* and the *Chasam Sofer*. Some are from the great Anglo-Sephardi Orthodox families. Some are from North African Sephardim, and some are descendants of the Jews exiled to Iraq.

There is a caricature of a *frum* Jew as wearing a black hat or *streimel* (fur hat), with long *peyos* (side curls) and a long coat, tied with a *gartel*, and perhaps wearing white stockings and breeches; his wife in a *sheitel* (wig) with baggy, unattractive clothing covering her from the neck down, apart from her hands. This is only one image of *frum* Jews, and by no means typically all encompassing.

What is common to all, is that the Sabbath (*Shabbos* - *Shabbat*) is sanctified and kept as holy in every respect. Every effort is made to observe all the laws pertaining to the Sabbath - from lighting candles and wearing good clothes and making *kiddush* (sanctification of the Sabbath meal) before eating morning and evening, over wine or grape juice, with two *challahs* (plaited loaves) and eating three good meals; to not switching on or off lights, not cooking on the Sabbath, not cutting or tearing to size (hence 'Shabbos toilet paper' being pre-cut sheets), not writing, phoning, driving a car or using a motor, and not carrying, except within an *Eruv* (a specially checked "community of courts" with a rabbinically certified border.) Sydney has, I understand, the largest *Eruv* in the world. (This applies to recent times, and is not relevant to the time period of this

article.) The same standard applies for the observance of all festivals and fast days - strict observance (but one can cook, with certain restrictions, and carry for the needs of the festival on *Yomim Tovim* - holy festival days.)

Beyond this, there is strict observance of the laws of *kashruth* (keeping kosher), family purity, speech, interaction with others, business ethics and modesty in dress. Traditions do vary from community to community - for example, the Iraqi origin *frum* women generally do not wear a *sheitl* (wig), but wear a loose, long scarf in *schule* or in places where modesty is required. In German Orthodox tradition and Austria, part of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and even parts of Poland, men wore modern suits in modest styles, in the concept that such dress was more modest than the distinctive garb of Chassidim. Men of this tradition wear *peyot* (side curls) curled up tightly and pinned behind their ears or under *kippot* (skullcaps).

In short, the people of whom I am writing are living their lives in accordance with the 613 commandments of the Torah, generally with the aim in mind of improving their level of observance and meticulousness of observance. They are generally great supporters of charity, not only giving, but doing. They are, and have been, the movers and shakers in setting up congregations, communal institutions, educational and welfare organisations.

STRICTLY ORTHODOX SYDNEY CONGREGATIONS TODAY

Today, in Sydney, we have the following strictly Orthodox congregations:- Adath Israel with the Sydney Communal Kollel, Beth Yosef (downstairs from Adath Israel), Dover Heights Schule, Mizrachi, two *shtibelech* almost next to one another in Bellevue Road - one of Rabbi Gourarie and one of Rabbi Ritchie Moss, Ohr Chadash at Academy BJE, the Jewish Learning Centre of Rabbi Blackman at 'Beit Halevy' in Warners Avenue (he also was formerly in Bellevue Road), Tzemach Tzedek (the break away from the Yeshivah) at the back of Adath Israel, Machzike HaTorah (Roscoe Street) and Yeshiva (now called Chabad Lubavitch Yeshiva since the events of 2003-2004.) Some might argue about Mizrachi's inclusion, as it is at the more middle of the road end, but I take my criteria by those depicted in *Hamodia*, English Edition - the newspaper of *Haredi* Jewry, and they include Mizrachi religious Zionists in their scope. South Head *Schule*, which is about 50% primarily modern *frum* might also just squeeze in, or perhaps it belongs with the mainstream of Orthodox *schules*.

Some may query why I do not include the Chabad Houses. I see them as outreach organisations, much as the rest of the Orthodox

Synagogues essentially are - a core of *frum* members, but many who would not hesitate to drive on *Shabbos* or do some other act in breach of *Shabbos* that no member of the strictly Orthodox congregations would do.

HISTORY OF EXCLUSIVE ORTHODOX JEWISH CONGREGATIONS

The phenomenon of having an exclusively strictly Orthodox congregation is relatively new. Certainly, we know that, in nineteenth century England, its Sephardi non-compliant members were expelled from the congregation (as happened to the Disraeli family), but in Europe, especially Western Europe, the whole community belonged, no matter how observant or unobservant (except those banned by a *cherem* or excommunication order).

This was the situation until 1849, when in Frankfurt-am-Main, a group of strictly Orthodox German Jews petitioned the Senate (the City Council) of Frankfurt to permit them to secede from the community because it had allied itself with the Reform movement. The Senate responded that they could only do so by establishing an independent religious association, not a community. The *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* (Jewish Religion Society) thus began, swelling within a short time from 18 to 80, including Baron Amshel Rothschild. After unsuccessfully attempting to have Rabbi J.M. Sachs as their rabbi, they asked Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who was then Chief Rabbi of Moravia, to serve as their Rav (rabbinical leader). They only had 100 members at this time, but Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, who had framed the philosophy of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* (Torah combined with secular learning), and who was a strong opponent of Reform Judaism, which he saw as destructive to Torah True Judaism, readily took up the challenge. Initially, they met in rented rooms, in a city with no kosher meat, no functional *mikvah* (ritual bath) and no school.

This congregation became called 'Kehillath Adath Jeschurun'.² With Rabbi Hirsch's influence, as well as that of Rabbi Zalman Spitzer (1826-1893), a disciple of the Maharam Schick,³ and Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer⁴, similar breakaway congregations were established in Vienna and Berlin, named 'Kehillath Adath Israel'. The Hungarian strictly orthodox synagogues, which were strongly influenced by Rabbi Hirsch, also called themselves 'Adath Israel'. The split in Hungary between Orthodox and Reform (called "Neologues" in Hungary) occurred in 1869.⁵ These congregations maintained a strict separation from the anti-religious Jews.

These developments took place in the second half of the nine-

teenth century, so that at the time of the first Jewish settlement in Australia, it was unheard of for *frum* Jews to separate themselves from the rest of the community. Also, the Reform movement had not been born and was only in its early gestational stage, when our first Jewish settlers arrived.

EUROPEAN HISTORIC ROOTS OF AUSTRALIAN JEWISH SETTLERS

Thus, all Jews arriving here until the twentieth century were nominally Orthodox, and, though they may have strayed or been ignorant, Orthodoxy was the only form of Judaism they knew. During the nineteenth century, Jews living in the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia experienced ongoing antisemitic legislation. In 1827 Tsar Nicholas I introduced compulsory conscription of young Jewish boys with the aim of converting them to Christianity. In view of this, it is not surprising that from time to time during this period single, young, erstwhile yeshiva students, or even boys who fled from Russian Poland prior to their Barmitzvah made their way to Australia via England. With a disrupted education, it is not surprising that, although *frum*, there were few *Talmudei Chachamim* (Torah scholars) among these boys. Additionally, there were no materials available to support their Jewish learning in Australia.

The evidence I have gathered on a wide range of *frum* immigrants of European background shows that, in the nineteenth century, and into the early twentieth century, they all came via England, after living there for a period, so that they were already partly acculturated.⁶ They were part of the great tide of migration unleashed by the harsh rule of the Czars, together with Romanian antisemitism, the impact of the Napoleonic Wars and the general unrest in nineteenth century Europe, which left Europe for greener fields - firstly England, then mostly to the United States, but sometimes Australia, Canada, South Africa or South America.

Looking back, it is hard to actually judge how *frum* or not a person may or may not have been, but drawing analogies from the twentieth century, where it is known that persons who were definitely *frum* founded congregations wherever they went, it would appear reasonable to posit the proposition that those who formed the first *minyanim* (prayer services with a quorum of ten adult males) which became congregations were, to some degree at least, *frum*.

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY NEW SOUTH WALES

When the first convicts and even the first free settlers arrived, it would have been very hard for them to exert their religious faith,

other than to request in court an oath on the 'Old Testament' (which is actually in breach of Jewish Law, which forbids taking an oath). It was compulsory for all convicts to attend Church of England services, courts were held on Saturdays only⁷ and the only marriages officially recognised were those by the Church of England. Thus, the first marriage between two Jews in Australia was a Church of England ceremony.

Until the New South Wales Act (4 Geo IV, c.96) and the Third Charter of Justice in 1823, the colony (which then included all of eastern Australia, including Tasmania) was still very much a prison colony, with few of the rights one would expect today. Even though Governor Macquarie could have been more lenient,⁸ he continued to treat the colony as a giant prison. Not until the Australian Courts Act, 1828 (9 Geo IV c. 83) was passed and implemented were greater freedoms extended to the population at large.

Therefore, it is remarkable that, in 1817, a *Chevra Kadisha* was formed, with burial rites for a deceased convict being apparently performed by fellow convict and ex-Polish Yeshiva⁹ student, Joseph Marcus.¹⁰ Rabbi Porush points out that Marcus 'nonetheless married in the Church'¹¹, but, as this was the only legal form of marriage in the colony at that time, one cannot take this act alone as indicative of a departure from Judaism and Marcus was buried as an observant Jew.¹² This *Chevra Kadisha* appeared to have existed only on an ad hoc basis between 1817 and 1825, until the death of Joseph Marcus.

Other elements of Jewish religious practice were also in place by the 1820s. For example, *Matzot* were baked in the colony for many years, with rival bakeries even, prior to the first mention of *Matzot* in the general press. *Matzot* were also sent by the Sydney Synagogue in the 1830s to the Jews on Norfolk Island,¹³ as were prayer books and candles in the 1840s.

PHILLIP JOSEPH COHEN AND HIS TIMES

The first person to arrive in the colony of New South Wales who can definitely be described as 'frum' was Phillip Joseph Cohen (1802-1864). Rabbi Porush describes him as 'a religious, young merchant of twenty-five, educated in Jewish tradition and familiar with the Services of the Synagogue, able to address a congregation, and equipped with the Chief Rabbi's authority to perform marriages according to Jewish usage.'¹⁴ As he arrived, in 1828, with the authority of the Chief Rabbi to perform marriages, I wonder whether or not some convict, such as Joseph Marcus, had not complained to the Chief Rabbi on the situation whereby only marriages performed by the Church of England were held valid if performed

within the colony. Upon his arrival in the colony, Phillip J. Cohen began organising Jewish life for the several hundred strong Jewish community - which was scattered beyond Sydney as well. *Minyanim* began at his home (with, in true Jewish style, break-away *minyanim* as well), then at other private homes and business premises.¹⁵ He later went on to help found the Maitland Synagogue.

The first organised congregation, a direct forerunner of the Great Synagogue, was founded in 1831 by Joseph Barrow Montefiore (1803-1893) (President), A. Elias (Hon. Treasurer), George Moss (Hon. Secretary) and a committee consisting of Messrs M. Brown, P.J. Cohen, A. Lyons, S. Moses, M. Phillips, I. Simmons and W. Solomon. Although one would have expected Montefiore to follow the English Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese Jewish) tradition, obviously the majority prevailed, for the congregation was founded following 'the same as read by the "German Jews" in England, the Ashkenazi *Minhag*...'.¹⁶ It is a reasonable assumption that most, if not all, the founders listed above were, to some degree at least, *frum*. Some most definitely were, and some even today, have *frum* descendants, married into the *frum* families that arrived after World War II.

One can also presume that Michael Hyam, who had arrived as an immigrant to Sydney in 1828,¹⁷ and who performed the first *Brith Milah* (circumcision) was probably *frum*, as the performance of a circumcision, often done by a *shochet* or a doctor with the requisite religious knowledge, takes considerable skill. However, I do not know to what extent he was *frum*.

P.J. Cohen's authorisation from the Chief Rabbi to perform marriages was exercised in 1832 at the marriage of Moses Joseph and Rosetta Nathan. This was the first Jewish marriage ceremony in Australia between two people both Jewish from birth. The fact that this took place forty-four years after the colony began, shows clearly the difficult beginning. It occurred at a time of increasing free settlement, when a number of wealthy persons of standing were coming to the colony to take up land grants. Moses Joseph later became president of the York Street, Sydney Synagogue (forerunner of the Great), whilst Rosetta Nathan's family¹⁸ became prominent leaders in the New Zealand Jewish community.

ABRAHAM MOSES AND OTHERS IN THE EXTENDED GOULBURN DISTRICT

One such Jewish person was Abraham Moses described as 'pious' by Levi and Bergman.¹⁹ He arrived on the *Palamban* on 10 January, 1833, together with his family and his own *shochet* (ritual slaugh-

terer) and *melamed* (religious studies teacher) for his children. The *shochet* was Norman (Nahum) Simon, who Bergman and Levi allege must have neglected his duties very soon, as it was reported in the *Australian* on 17 July 1835 that he had acquired an auctioneer's licence and opened a store 'Berrima House' at Berrima. However, this interpretation may not be correct. The family had settled in the Goulburn District where auctions have always, to my knowledge, been held mid-week. Simon could well have had a manager in the store. One would have to look at all the evidence before coming to a definitive conclusion.

According to Bergman and Levi, in 1837 Abraham Moses was the first Jew to receive a licence to pasture stock beyond the established boundaries of settlement in the foothills of the Australian Alps.²⁰ The Goulburn District - encompassing then the Southern Highlands, the Southern Tablelands and slopes and the foothills of the Australian Alps - attracted many wealthy, aristocratic Jews and some not so wealthy, but all reputedly *frum*. It was a town where all Jewish businesses and shops were closed not only on the High Holy Days but every Sabbath. Goulburn Jews were renowned for their honesty and reliability.²¹

The Goulburn locals provided me with information, in 1988, to the effect that a number of the early settlers there were related to the Montefiores, the Sassoons or the Rothschilds (who were all related). This is borne out in Levi and Bergman²² who state that Nathan Mandelson's wife, Phoebe, was a cousin of both Lady Judith Montefiore and Baroness Rothschild. In 1837 Nathan Mandelson and Phoebe began at Bungonia, where they were granted a licence to run the Hit or Miss Inn and they moved to Goulburn in 1840 where Mandelson's Guest House (as it is called today) is still operating, in other hands. Mandelson also operated the coach service from Goulburn to the new goldfields at Braidwood. The Rothschilds and the Montefiores were known as *frum* leaders in their communities.

Nathan Mandelson's brother-in-law, Samuel Emanuel, arrived in Goulburn in 1845.²³ In 1868 he purchased, from Mr Bradley, the Lansdowne Estate, locally known as 'Emanuel's Farm', on which is situated a small building which local tradition holds was used for private religious services²⁴ by the Emanuel family and guests. Until the early 1960s I understand locals would come here for the High Holy Days, staying in the buildings on the property. By then, I understand, the *frum* Jews of Goulburn had long departed to Sydney. However, I lived in Goulburn for a while in 1988, with my sons coming home from Yeshiva for the school holidays. Rabbi Mandel also regularly stayed in Goulburn to visit the Jewish pris-

oners in Goulburn gaol. He was of great assistance to me as to the local facilities.

OTHER RURAL SETTLERS

As mentioned earlier, P.J. Cohen was a founder of the Maitland synagogue. From the early 1830s onwards, settlement across New South Wales expanded rapidly, as did Jewish settlement, and in many places small congregations sprang up. The pattern tended to be that a religious Jew would arrive in a place, and start looking around for other Jews to form a *minyan* for services. Sometimes that is all it took - one very persistent and very persuasive *frum* Jew to galvanise his (rarely her) less committed fellow religionists to form a formal congregation and hold regular services. Some of these *frum* Jews in isolated places were pedlars, travellers or merchants on business or setting up a business, hoping for opportunities. It was those that put down roots that made their mark, but, generally, when they left, everything fell apart.

The Town of Forbes enjoyed a brief gold-rush in the early 1860s.²⁵ A congregation, the Lachlan Synagogue, was formally constituted in June 1862. Its weatherboard synagogue was consecrated on 24 September 1862. This followed services having been held at least from early 1861. The census of that year records 70 Jews in the area but gold ran out and by 1871 Porush states there were only ten Jews living in the area.²⁶ From this, however, we can surmise that religiously committed Jews also took part in the gold rush. Most probably, they sold supplies to diggers rather than to be actually digging, as was the case in other Australian goldfields.

I am aware that a *frum* Jewish family originating from Russian Poland settled in Boggabri around the 1880s.²⁷ Wolf Ruta Cohen, a foundation member of Central Synagogue in 1912, was a merchant in Wee Waa.²⁸

In Tamworth, although there were scatterings of Jews from early days a Jewish congregation was not established until 1934, when Sir Samuel Cohen (as he was later) presented a Sepher Torah because he hoped to attract the European refugees who were starting to arrive in Australia. There had been a Jewish wedding there in 1904. Rev William Katz, later of the North Shore Synagogue in Lindfield, a Sydney suburb, was sent there to build up the congregation. He reportedly found it difficult and used to like holidaying in the Blue Mountains at Katoomba in a German Jewish Guest House in preference to being in Tamworth.²⁹ Tamworth simply did not have the core of committed Jews necessary to enable a congregation to survive. The refugees departed or intermarried.

Grafton appears to have had a small group of religious Jews in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Rabbi Porush tells us that the father of Grafton-born A.M. Loewenthal was 'for a number of years a tutor for the religious education' of his grandchildren. As Loewenthal senior had thirteen children, it is not surprising that he could handle such a task, being Jewishly committed. Lewis Samuel Loewenthal was, together with Louis Jacobs and Samuel Cohen, a trustee of the one-acre site granted to the Grafton Jewish Community in the 1870s for a synagogue. Unfortunately no synagogue was ever built, rates were being claimed against it (wrongly, but possibly because it was unused), and in 1937 the government resumed the land. Reading between the lines, it would appear that the large Loewenthal family, who lived in Grafton in the 1870s, were the main force in the district. Once they relocated to Sydney the community collapsed.

The aforementioned Maitland community, where services were first held by reputably *frum* P.J. Cohen from 1830, finally consecrated its *schule* in September 1879. However, when the active members of the congregation moved away to Sydney within twenty years of that date, the *schule* died.³¹

Broken Hill was known to have an observant Jewish community, some with ties at some stage to Adass Yisroel Melbourne, which is very *frum*.³² At the first recorded service, for the High Holy Days in 1898, Rosanowe 'gave the sermon' and members of the congregation officiated, assisted by a four voice male choir.³³ From this one can surmise that the congregation consisted of a number of members capable of fully conducting services and Reading the Torah, including the very difficult and long High Holy Day Services, so there was a reasonable probability that those persons were at a minimum strongly observant and quite possibly *frum*. L. Gordon was the original president of the *Kehilla* (congregation) when the *schule* was founded in 1900, under the wing of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, due to Broken Hill's proximity to the South Australian capital.

Broken Hill's first minister definitely arrived with *frum* credentials, being a member of the renowned Mandelbaum family, Rev Bezalel Mandelbaum, who also served as a *shochet*. Rabbi Porush states that it was recorded that 'All Jewish shops...were closed on the Holy Days.'³⁴ I note that it does not say 'on the Sabbath and Holy Days' which was the Goulburn situation. Did the writer on the record (unquoted by Rabbi Porush) mean to include 'the Sabbath' by implication in the term 'Holy Days' or were some Jewish businesses open on the Sabbath?

Interestingly, Rev Mandelbaum, who left Broken Hill in 1914,

went to Ballarat, after a short period in Perth. Ballarat was one place where Rabbi Jacob Saphir, who is discussed later, found *frum* Jews around 1861, and still had apparently a handful of *frum* inhabitants in the first part of the twentieth century.

Rev Abram Berman, who I believe was *frum* and served as the Broken Hill minister for four years from 1940, was a refugee from Europe.³⁵ He initially ministered to fellow refugees in about as remote a part of Australia as his congregation could imagine. The link of this *schule* with *frumkeit*, I think, is underlined by the fact that, according to Rabbi Porush, its two *Sifrei Torah* (Torah Scrolls) were transferred to the Yeshiva Gedolah in Melbourne when the *schule* closed its doors in 1962.³⁶ When I was in Broken Hill around 1990, the synagogue building and its flat were still intact. Today they house the Broken Hill Historical Society, which is very mindful of the building's history. The Historical Society has retained the *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark) in the synagogue.

I will deal with both the Newcastle and Wollongong congregations and *frum* Jews in those areas later, as some of the strong influences there are post-war personalities and I wish now to return to Sydney in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

PERSONAGES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONGREGATIONS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SYDNEY

Back in Sydney, the first formal *schule* began in rented premises at 4 Bridge Street in 1837³⁷ and was called simply *Beth Tephillah*, namely 'House of Prayer'. When it was reconstructed as a House of Worship, it had seating for only hundred men and thirty ladies (for a total Jewish population of some 400 in Sydney). Clearly this was a demonstration that most of the population were not expected to attend *schule*.

In his history of the Great Synagogue, *The House of Israel*, (1977) Rabbi Porush mentions the many personalities over the history of white settlement in this country who contributed to the development of what is now the Great Synagogue. Many irregularities occurred in the early days of settlement, due to the lack of a competent rabbinical leader in Sydney, combined with several strong personalities of influence in the community, people who felt strongly Jewish, but were ignorant of Jewish law. Even though these early settlers may have had sentiments for Judaism, strictly Orthodox they were not. Reading accounts of these early days and the ructions involved, one gets a sense of a rather lost group muddling through.

Clearly, in 1830 - or probably 1829 would have been the date of

the original request - one couple's minds must have been focussed on proper religious procedure, as, in 1830, Rabbi Aaron Levy was sent by the London Beth Din to effect a *get* - a religious divorce (without which a wife may not remarry). 'Dayan [judge] Rabbi Levy arrived in Sydney on 12 December 1830, after a tiring journey of some eighteen weeks. Acting at the same time as Rabbi, scribe and messenger, he arranged the *get* in Sydney at the behest of the husband and delivered it in London to the wife in the presence of the London Beth Din.'³⁸

Dayan Levy was in Sydney for some five months and his presence as the learned, *frum* rabbi enabled him to put straight many errors that had crept into local practice through ignorance. He also brought with him a *Sepher Torah* (Scroll of the Law) and *Siddurim* - prayer books - which led directly to the founding of the above-mentioned congregations.

In addition to *shochet* Nachum Simon, employed by Abraham Moses in the Southern Tablelands, a number of other *shochtim* arrived in the colony. Rabbi Porush makes no mention of *Shochet* Simon (presumably because he was privately employed), and refers to Michael E. Rose, reader, *Shochet* and *Mohel* as 'the first Jewish Minister in Australia',³⁹ who also had the Chief Rabbi's permission to perform marriages. However, Rabbi Porush goes on to say 'he had no rabbinic or even proper ministerial qualifications'. Whether Rose, described as a 'dealer' in the shipping records, just happened to be an observant Jew with the bare minimum of knowledge to satisfy London, we may never know.

Shochet Jacob Isaacs,⁴⁰ who arrived in 1840, was a properly qualified *Mohel*, *Shochet* and *Baal Koreh* (Reader of the Torah Scrolls), who earned more in business than in ministry, like many suburban and small congregation ministers even today.

As I have mentioned previously, there were many lax practices in those early days, but there was a group who were passionate about, or devoted to, their religion. Whether any would qualify as *frum*, I am unsure, but other names that I believe should be mentioned include the teacher, Rev A. Rintel (also a *shochet*) - known by students as hard and cruel, but zealous - Rev A.A. Levi, Abraham Pollack, George Moss and Morris Joseph. The latter three gentlemen were behind the building and administrative running of the York Street Synagogue and Rev Levi apparently did everything to make the *schule* function. George Moss, the synagogue's secretary, also launched a Sydney edition of the London Jewish newspaper, *The Voice of Jacob*, which lasted only three issues.⁴¹ As well, he established the Jewish Library and Hebraic Institution and Jewish reading Society in 1846.

The York Street synagogue - *Beth Israel* (House of Israel) - (the name of the Great Synagogue), was consecrated on 2 April 1844 and S. Benjamin was keen enough to celebrate *Succot* properly by importing from London four *lulavim*.⁴² Presumably he imported the extra *lulavim* for three others - probably for sharing with other congregants. This report was in the *English Voice of Jacob* on 6 June 1845, so was, presumably, about the previous year's celebrations. (News travelled slowly in those days.) *Frum* Jews take a special joy in purchasing quality sets of *lulavim* and *etrogim*. Apparently the items for the balance of the sets were obtainable locally. Presumably Benjamin was *frum* - possibly a forbear of a family that is still *frum*.

It is certain that George Judah Cohen, who was born in Sydney in 1842, was *frum*. He married the daughter of the Hon L.W. Levy, MLC and was himself 'the undisputed lay leader of the Community'.⁴³ Rabbi Porush⁴⁴ refers to him as an observant Jew and notes that 'he would not ride on *Shabbat*'. He was a member of the Board of the Great Synagogue for over fifty-five years, president for fifteen years and vice-president for six years. Members of his family, who were presumably also *frum*, were involved in the foundation of the Maitland, Newcastle and Macquarie Street synagogues. He passed away in January 1937.

In Britain, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr Nathan Marcus Adler (1803-90) (an erstwhile colleague and rival of the aforementioned Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch), proclaimed his realm to extend to Australia, in his role as 'spiritual guide and director of all Jews in the Empire'⁴⁵ and this was recognised in Sydney. Nevertheless, distance and the lack of an actual qualified rabbi on the spot led to irregularities and to splits within the community. There was a big problem with no qualified *Beth Din* to undertake conversions and men vastly outnumbering women, which led to men marrying out or just not marrying.

Definitely 'Rev' (probably, correctly 'Rabbi') Herman Hoelzel who was appointed as 'spiritual head of the York Street Synagogue'⁴⁶ would appear to have been *frum*. This Hungarian-born son of a *Dayan* (Judge in a Rabbinic court) was a student of the prestigious Pressburg Yeshiva. He was bestowed with the title '*Morenu*' (Our Teacher) by Rabbi Moshe Sofer (the *Chasam Sofer*) who was strictly Orthodox. It is the type of background one finds today, or half a century ago, at Adath Israel - either Sydney or Melbourne, but particularly Melbourne Adass. Rev Hoelzel was capable of delivering sermons, speaking and teaching in good English on a wide range of subjects. He was educated in rabbinics, but was merely described as '*Mohel* and Reader' - probably because he was qualified in Pressburg and not Jews' College. This is despite the fact that Pressburg

Yeshiva is and was far more prestigious in the Jewish world and delivers a much greater depth of Jewish religious learning.

There was a mutual distrust situation between Western European Jews, and Central and Eastern European Jews which lasted up until at least the 1960s, whereby *rabbonim* (rabbis) with *s'machot* (rabbinical ordination) from the most prestigious Central or Eastern European Yeshivot were ignored or given the title of 'Rev' by the London establishment, which, for the most part, only allowed Jews' College graduates to be called 'Rabbi'. Those disparaged held the Jews' College graduates in equal contempt. Unfortunately Rabbi or Rev Hoelzel, who went first to minister in Hobart, due to delays on the part of the Sydney community, only stayed in Sydney less than two years.⁴⁷ Given that the Great Synagogue tradition is Anglo-German Orthodox, perhaps Rabbi Hoelzel was too Central European for the congregation.

Following Rabbi Hoelzel's departure, the Sydney congregation split in 1859 into separate congregations in York Street and Macquarie Street, owing to weak religious leadership and strong personalities. Serious errors of practice arose at this time.

THE VISIT OF RABBI JACOB SAPHIR

When Rabbi Jacob Saphir, a very *frum* rabbinical traveller, who visited Australia and New Zealand for 16 months between September 1861 and January 1863,⁴⁸ arrived, he had the opportunity to right a number of situations.

Rabbi Saphir,⁴⁹ though born near Vilna in 1822, arrived in the then Turkish province of Palestine as a child with his family in 1832. He first lived in Safed, where he lost both parents (1833, 1834). Then he had to leave the city due to anti-Jewish Arab riots in 1835. After hiding in neighbouring villages, young Saphir arrived in Jerusalem in 1836. He obtained his *smicha* at the age of 16 and became a *sofer* (scribe) for the *perushim* of Jerusalem (the non-chassidic Ashkenazim - followers of the Vilna Gaon - Rabbi Elijah of Vilna). He married a rabbi's daughter at the age of only 14. He arrived in Australia with recommendations from all the rabbinical authorities of all the Jewish communities in Jerusalem. (At that time Jews were a greater percentage of the total population of Jerusalem than even now, and they were all *frum*.) His prime aim was to raise funds for the rebuilding of the Hurva synagogue, but also he wished to raise funds for all the Jews of Jerusalem. In that, he was singularly unsuccessful, as the Jews of Melbourne had to end up putting together to pay his fare home. (Possibly talk of the gold rush lured him to Australia.) However, he, unlike most other

visitors, left a detailed record of his visit in his book, *Even Saphir*, written in beautiful Hebrew, translated and reported on by Rabbi L.A. Falk in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* Volume VI, Part 4. His comments, especially coming from a *frum* traveller, on the Australian Jewish society of the time, and also even on Aborigines and Maoris, are most useful. No contemporary visitor had written at length on the emerging communities.

Rabbi Saphir's abilities as a *sofer* were remarkable. Having arrived in Dunedin on the Wednesday before Purim, and discovered they had no *Megillah* (parchment of the Book of Esther) for Purim on *Motzei Shabbat* (Saturday evening after the Sabbath), he had written one for them, ready for Purim. However, the Sydney and Melbourne communities were not so enamoured of him, as there were reportedly heated arguments with the synagogue Boards of Management in both cities. Possibly this was over some of the above-mentioned irregularities.

Saphir notes that the majority of Jews in Australia came from England, though some had originated in Poland and had lived in England for some time.⁵⁰ Speaking on the vast immigration of Jews of European origin to Australia, he said, 'They continue to come month by month and all who come, settle down because it is better here for them than there. Among these Jews are rich and honest merchants. Some of them are pedlars who go out with their packs on their shoulders or in carts, going round towns and villages to sell their merchandise, in the same way as the settlers who come to England and America, but here they amass greater wealth, because, instead of silver, they get gold. Some of them have become wealthy and rich.'⁵¹ He also noted that the Jews lived in conditions of equality with their neighbours: 'The Jews live in safety and have a share in all the benefits of the land and in government posts and political administration.'⁵²

Unfortunately, he also saw the effect on assimilation and inter-marriage. He tried to alleviate the situations he found, where possible. In Bendigo he was able to find two other Jews *frum* enough and learned enough to join with him in forming an ad hoc *Beth Din* to assist the family of a poor pedlar, too poor to go to Melbourne, so that his wife and children could be officially admitted into Judaism. This *Beth Din* consisted of Saphir, Gedaliah Isaac Friedman (who had studied in Hungarian *Yeshivot*) and 'another learned and pious Jew from Liadi in Poland'.⁵³ No fee was taken. Those with any knowledge of Lubavitch, would immediately recognise Liadi as the home of one of their Rebbes - Rabbi Shneuer Zalman of Liadi, a renowned *frum* community. This action by Rabbi Saphir was condemned by Rabbi Adler in London after Rabbi Saphir had written to

both Rabbi Adler and Rev Rintel in Melbourne (where he had gone after Sydney). Rabbi Saphir responded with a very learned response justifying his actions.⁵⁴

Saphir was highly critical of the lack of observance throughout Australia. Clearly he found a handful of *frum* Jews in Bendigo, but he was appalled at the widespread failure to keep *kashrut*, even where facilities were available, and also at the general lack of knowledge. For this, justifiably in my opinion, he blamed the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, for neglecting the colonies and not sending out suitable *rabbonim* who could offer spiritual guidance and leadership.

Indeed, I would assert that a paternalistic, arrogant attitude from Britain existed until probably the 1970s in respect of the rabbinical leadership sent to Australia, which was seen in Britain as 'the convict colony' to which 'the dregs of society' were sent, and so they saw more than their fair share of problem 'ministers' and teachers. Proper leadership would have realised that Australian Jewry needed very effective rabbinical leadership to counter the ignorance and high level of assimilation into the general Australian society. Saphir, at least, saw this, and was not afraid to not only say it, but to publish it.

BREAKAWAY EASTERN EUROPEAN CONGREGATIONS IN THE LATTER PART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The growing numbers of Jewish immigrants originating from Eastern Europe via England, mentioned by Saphir, meant that there was a sense of dissatisfaction with the York Street Synagogue and its successor, The Great Synagogue (completed March 1878), as the Great followed the Anglo-German Ashkenazi *nusach* (form of prayer) and *minhagim* (religious customs), and the new immigrants wanted a more Eastern European style of prayer. This led to the founding of several, initially small, congregations in the southern, less fashionable part of the city.

These congregations, which eventually transformed into sizeable *schules*, have tended to be confused with one another, not the least because of personalities going between one and the other and combined services of the main two - *Mikve Israel* (which began as the Druitt Street synagogue) and *Nidchay Israel* (also known as the Baron de Hirsch minyan).

The idea that the somewhat notoriously anti-Orthodox Baron de Hirsch⁵⁵ could have anything to do with an Orthodox *minyan* was a bit of a surprise. A closer look showed that, in actuality, the Baron de Hirsch Memorial Aid Society (he died in 1896)⁵⁶ had, surprisingly, spread its wings to religious activities in 1898. That *minyan* was

called "*Nidchay Israel*".⁵⁷

However, almost 20 years earlier, in 1882, at premises at 60 Druitt Street, Sydney,⁵⁸ began a definitely *frum* synagogue, listed in Sands Directory at that address for the years 1882-4.⁵⁹ The trustees were Jacob Selig, Harris Hymie Solomon⁶⁰ and H. Zion (or Zions). The members of this *minyan*, all Yiddish speaking, though some were born in Australia and others in England, had their roots in Poland around Lodz, Maripol and Kalisch. They all had family connections and were passionate about their religion. They were always on very civil terms with The Great Synagogue. In the early 1880s, Rev Wolinski was employed as the minister of Druitt Street, but he moved to the Great Synagogue shortly afterwards.

Soon they found that the three mile walk from Sydney's inner western suburbs to Druitt Street was really too far for most of them and so, in 1883, a second *minyan*, from the same group, began services at the home of Abram and Naomi Solomon (brother and sister-in-law of Harris Hymie Solomon, who founded the *matzah* factory)⁶¹ at 6 Georgina Street, Newtown only a few doors from the present Newtown Synagogue. Newtown was then a fashionable suburb and Georgina Street was one of the most fashionable and 'nice' streets in Newtown.⁶² The Solomons had married in Ballarat, the previous year.⁶³ Abram's father, Simon, was born in Maripol in Russian Poland and brought his family to Australia, via England. They were very *frum*, but enterprising business people, getting into timber mills in Queensland and shipping goods to Norfolk Island.⁶⁴ Soon Abram and Naomi Solomon moved to a larger house at 15 Brown Street, Newtown and the *minyan* moved with them.

Other founders at this time included William Berkman, Lewis Symonds, Harris Hymie Solomon, Harris Wolfson, Jacob Selig and his wife and H. Zions.⁶⁵ As can be seen, the three trustees of the Druitt Street Synagogue - *Mikve Israel* - were founders of this private *minyan* in Newtown. Before long services ceased at Druitt Street and continued instead at Newtown, which continued with the name of *Mikve Israel*.

SHAYA WEINGOTT AND FAMILY AND NEWTOWN/WESTERN SUBURBS SYNAGOGUE

Also quite early on, we come across Shaya Weingott, noted in the *AJHS Journal* Special Issue (P. Barg et al) Western Suburbs Synagogue (1974) Vol VII Part 6, as an honorary minister (one of nine mentioned) between 1883 and 1903.⁶⁶ Shaya (Yoshuah or Isaiah) Weingott was the ancestor of Fela Herszberg, whom I mentioned, at the beginning of this paper, and her Australian mother

who was murdered in Auschwitz.⁶⁷ From the Newtown *schule* documents, it appears everyone called him by the Yiddish diminutive Shaya'. He was born in Lodz in Russian Poland in 1835, the son of Zvi Weingott and Celia Pinchevsky.⁶⁸ In 1854 he married Faigela Nelkin, who was born in 1833 in Kalish, in Russian Poland. The first six of their children - Gusta (short for Augusta), Harris, Abraham, Samuel, Hinda and Rebecca, were all apparently born in Lodz. Their youngest son, Lazar, was born in London, England on 3 April 1878, so they had clearly left Poland prior to that date. According to his descendant, Louise Rosenberg⁶⁹ the family had come to live in Manchester because of the difficulties in Poland, and through their friendship with the Glass family of Manchester, ended up emigrating to Australia.

The first Weingott to arrive in Australia was Harris (following his friend Harris Glass and their great business idea in waterproofing) in the late 1870s. Harris was soon joined by his brother, Sam. They had first gone to Melbourne, but soon had a factory opened in Sydney. Harris married Sarah Knopp in Melbourne (Sandhurst) on 4 April 1886. Sam married her sister, Annie, at The Great Synagogue in Sydney on 16 March 1890. These family celebration dates and locations give some idea of the movement of the family. The Knopp sisters were born in Victoria. I have not yet ascertained the exact date Shaya arrived in Australia, but his sons, Harris and Sam, were supposed to have brought him and their mother out to Australia around the early 1880s. Interestingly, Shaya was also supposed to have been a qualified rabbi. Although eventually all Shaya and Feigela's children arrived in Australia, there were hiccoughs.

Gusta apparently went back to Poland to marry a suitably *frum* man, Rabbi Yechiel Rosenbaum from Lodz, who died there on 24 February 1916. Gusta was then left a widow. She lived the rest of her life in Sydney, passing away there in 1936.

I am still trying to establish more facts on the tales of journeys back and forth between Poland and a Sydney base. The story was that Yechiel was trying to make a suitable *shidduch* for Fela Herszberg's mother, Channa Rachel Rosenbaum (née Hammer), and died. From all the dates and places of marriage it would appear that Gusta and Yechiel probably did live in Australia, as Fela Herszberg said, though their children appear to have been born in Poland. Descendant Yankel Unfanger⁷⁰ believes his great-grandfather came here and turned around, going straight back to Poland. The eldest two children married in Poland, the next two in Sydney (1898 - Esther to Sam Golomb, and Sam to Millie Solomon of the Solomon's

Matzah family - no date given). Then Yechiel, being unhappy with the lack of suitably *frum shidduchim* available in Sydney apparently took Channa Rachel and Bessie, the next two daughters, back to Poland to make suitable *shidduchim* for them and passed away in 1916. Therefore, the younger children, Cyril and Celia, married in Sydney.

Shaya Weingott's third child, Abraham, ended up in the United States. He had married in London, England on 12 May 1887 and had one child born in Sydney in 1901, who also died that year. Abraham then appears to have gone to the United States. Harris Weingott lived at 380 Annandale Road, Annandale and Shaya Weingott went to live with his son, Harris, at this address until his death.⁷¹ Harris owned eight houses at Forest Lodge, known as Avoca Terrace, in Junction Street, Forest Lodge. Various members of the extended Weingott family lived in these terraces.

This is a family that basically left Poland around 1878, was part of the backbone of Newtown *schule*, and extremely *frum* back then, which today has family members who are still leaders in the *frum* community of Australia - Herszbergs and Unfangers (of whom more below). Laibel Herszberg was amongst the founders of the Sydney Talmudical College, popularly called the Yeshiva. His son Meyer is behind Hatzalah in Melbourne and also on the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha. Yankel Unfanger, born in Sydney, runs the Melbourne Kosher Butchery under the supervision of Rabbi Beck of Adass Israel Melbourne.

Now, back to Newtown. The Solomon's house was getting too cramped, so services moved to the home of Jacob Selig at Alice Street, Newtown, where they met for many years.⁷² Eventually, even that venue proved too small, so funds were raised to enable a public venue to be obtained. As the building of a synagogue took longer than hoped, the community was forced to rent premises in the Oddfellows Hall in Wilson Street, Newtown.⁷³

This proved unsatisfactory, as demonstrated on *Shabbos Shuva*, (the first Sabbath after the Fast of the Ninth of Av) when Shaya Weingott, Wolfson, Jacob Selig, Jacob Sugerman, Henry Cohen, Harris Cohen, and Leon and Joel Goldberg arrived at the building to *davven* (pray) they found all the chairs stacked up, the *Sifrei Torah* (holy Torah scrolls) rudely removed from the cupboard used as an *Aron Kodesh*, (Holy Ark), the Reading Desk removed to another room and the floor strewn with sawdust - for, they were informed - a DOG SHOW! Jacob Selig angrily declared the time had come to have their own *schule* and 'to stop being dependent upon premises which were never intended for a synagogue anyway.'⁷⁴ That was in 1903.

It took time. The foundation stone of the 'Mickva Yisroile' *schule* (in Georgina Street, Newtown) was laid on 30 June 1918. The *schule* was consecrated on Sunday 7 September 1919. Although World War I had intervened, that, alone, does not fully account for the lapse in time. Reading between the lines, one might postulate that the necessary funds were slow to be raised and, more importantly, the dispute with Central Synagogue over which organisation should receive the funds from the defunct Druitt Street Congregation⁷⁵ (decided by the Court in Newtown's favour after the dedication of the Newtown Synagogue) would have been a major drain on efforts, energy and funding.

From 1883 to 1903 services were led by individuals, including M. Levy, Shaya Weingott, Jacob Sugerman, Jacob Selig, Abraham Solomon, Harry Cohen, William Berkman, Lewis Symonds, Harris Solomon (brother of Abraham, founder of Solomon's Matzahs) and the presidents of the committees from time to time. From 1903 the positions of Honorary Reader and Honorary Minister were held by Levy and Shaya Weingott respectively.⁷⁶ They also received assistance from Rev P. Phillipstein of The Great Synagogue. An attempt was made to engage Isaac Morris, recently arrived from Cardiff, as reader and *shochet*. Within the short period he was there membership more than doubled, but he soon moved on to the Newcastle Synagogue. In 1913 we see a Mr Levy paid as Reader for the High Holy Days, assisted by J Rosen, Shaya Weingott and Joseph Goldberg.

The appointment of Rev A.D. Chodowski apparently led eventually to a decline in the *schule*. There were still good *frum* people there, but he had an inexcusably lax attitude on some things, including the sale of kosher meat, which he assigned to a non-Jewish butcher, who also ran his own *trefe* (the opposite of kosher) butchery in the same shop and was observed by kosher consumers to use the same knife for *trefe* as the so called 'kosher' meat (thereby rendering it *trefe*).⁷⁷

Rev Chodowski differed with the Chief Rabbi, Dr J.H. Hertz, on matters concerning proselytising, the calling up of more than the allotted number on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, *shochtim* and the local Beth Din. 'In every instance the Chief Rabbi upheld the legal, traditional views held by Rabbi Cohen and those who supported him in the Newtown Synagogue.'⁷⁸ Newtown had its own independent *Kashruth* (supervision of food in accordance with Jewish Law) and its minister was its *shochet* in those days, so to have a lax minister was painful, indeed, for those members - the majority, I gather, who were meticulous about such things. The dissatisfaction with Rev Chodowski led to his dismissal in August

1921 and the appointment of Rev B. Lenzer as the new minister in January 1922.

The congregation showed its capacity by being able to manage High Holy Day services conducted by M. Schwipp, J. Abeshouse and M. Levy. (The Abeshouse families can still be counted among the *frum* community in Sydney.) H. Himmelfarb conducted the normal services.⁷⁹

Russian born B. Lenzer (who was entitled to the title 'Rabbi') was the brother of Rev Jacob Lenzer, minister of the strictly Orthodox East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. He had arrived in Australia, aged 22, some 27 years earlier. He had credentials from the late Chief Rabbi, Dr Adler, from Rabbi Yitzchak Elchornon, Spector of Kovno and from other highly respected Russian rabbis.⁸⁰ He was also a qualified *mohel* (performer of circumcisions).

NEWTOWN AFTER SHAYA WEINGOTT'S DEATH

Shaya Weingott passed away on 9 June 1922 at Arthur Street, Forest Lodge, the year of Rev Lenzer's appointment. (Faigela had passed away on 4 July 1917).⁸¹ Had he lived to attend that year's Annual General Meeting, he would have been pleased to learn that Rev Lenzer had the Hebrew School running well, assisted by Miss Emanuel and Hyam Lenzer. Over 80 children were enrolled.⁸²

It was noted at that meeting that Rev Lenzer 'visits the Kosher butcher daily'⁸³ in addition to sick visits. Obviously Rev Lenzer's attention to the standards of *kashruth* and education, in addition to running the services properly and making the congregation the strictly orthodox congregation that its founders envisaged, led to a recovery in the *schule's* finances and membership. Meyer Levy and M. Wittenberg assisted Rev Lenzer on the High Holy Days, in addition to which *chazan* (cantor) Rev M. Einfeld officiated on the second day, by invitation.

On 22 December 1922 Rev Leon (Arieh Lieb) Goran (father of Mrs Trudi Collins)⁸⁴ was appointed as second reader, assistant teacher and collector. He was born in Lithuania where he learnt in a Lithuanian Yeshiva (*ketana*) from the age of four. He left his parents' home at the age of nine to avoid being conscripted by the Russian army, moving to stay with a Polish uncle on the German/Polish border. At the age of 16 he arrived in London where he married very young. When he was 27 he travelled to Hobart with a wife and three little children. Newtown was his second appointment in Australia. Under Rabbi Lenzer's instruction young Arieh Leib learnt *shechitah* (the profession of *shochet* - laws and practice) and more Talmudic and other religious knowledge required for a

minister of a congregation. According to his daughter, he was 'ordained by Rabbi Lenzer' after he passed these exams and then gained the title 'Rev'.⁸⁵

According to the special issue of the *AJHS Journal*, 'The Western Suburbs Synagogue',⁸⁶ Rabbi Lenzer 'was invested as a Rabbi by the Chief Rabbi' of Shanghai in 1934, whilst he was visiting that city on leave from Newtown. After serving the congregation for 14 years, he resigned in 1936. During his period as rabbi and chief minister of Newtown Synagogue, the congregation had flourished. There were many *simchas* (family celebrations). The Hebrew School was well attended and there was a boys' choir. Unfortunately, also during that period, many of the founders passed away. Nevertheless, the membership increased, income was good and attendances at services "satisfactory".

Rabbi Lenzer's successor, Rev I. Rabinovitch, a former 'Oberkantor' from Vienna, appointed in 1939, was not a success. Population shifts appeared to have occurred as *shule* membership declined to an all time low of 78 in 1941.⁸⁷ Possibly wartime mobilisation contributed to this decrease in membership.

NIDCHAY ISRAEL AND RABBI BRAMSON

Now it is time to return to Nidchay Israel, the other 'foreign Jews' *minyan* mentioned above. This appears to be identical with the Baron de Hirsch *minyan*, so called because it began in those premises. It is often confused with *Mikveh Israel* - indeed, the *AJHS* archives have one file for both - 'Foreign Jews synagogue'. It existed for about 20 years from around 1898 at various locations. From a careful examination of the persons found to be involved in this *minyan*, it would appear that, for the most part, they would fall short of being defined as 'frum'. Nevertheless, they had a great affinity with Newtown's *Mikve Israel* congregation and the two held joint *Simchat Torah* services at the Oddfellows Hall in Newtown in 1898 to which Rabbi Bramson was invited. It appears that shortly after that Rabbi Bramson was asked to lead the fledgling congregation.⁸⁸

Rabbi Isador Bramson had arrived in Sydney in April 1897. He had a *S'micha* from Volozhin Yeshiva, one the three most prestigious Yeshivot in Europe at that time. He frequently wrote learned articles in good English on Jewish issues in the general press. His writing, both English and Hebrew, was written with an outstandingly beautiful hand. In all probability he was also a *sofer* (scribe). Rabbi Moshe Gutnick commented to this writer that his late father, Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, had the greatest respect for Rabbi Bramson.

His attraction for the Baron de Hirsch *minyán* was that he spoke excellent Yiddish and could conduct services in the *Litvishe* or Polish tradition. He also did not charge for his services, apparently. There are accounts of many indigent couples coming to him to perform weddings, because he performed this service without charging a fee. There were allegations that he was not licensed to perform weddings, but this is not borne out. The question to me, on the evidence, is, at what date did the state of New South Wales grant him that licence? It is clear that he had such a licence on and after 3 October 1901 (documents from the Registrar General's office bear this date),⁸⁹ but prior to that date he may or may not have had such a state licence.

Clearly Rabbi Bramson regarded his authority as superior to that of Rev Alexander Bernard Davis of the Great Synagogue (and in rabbinical qualifications, that was so) and allegedly performed *gets* (divorces) and admitted proselytes, as well as performing marriages. Although he had, from the beginning, been willing to assist the Great Synagogue,⁹⁰ he was treated with contempt, despite the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem confirming Rabbi Bramson's authority to Rev Davis. From a frosty beginning for relations with the Great Synagogue, the situation deteriorated, until apparently Rev Davis effectively forced him out. He was succeeded by Rabbi Hartman.

From various contemporary correspondence, it would appear that members of this congregation were more in touch with authentic Judaism than the Great Synagogue at that time. One member acidly commented about the Great Synagogue's 'confirmation service' for girls, likening it to Catholic practice and remarking that 'the girls wore veils and such adornment that had been last used by "The Children of Mary" in a recent Catholic occasion.'⁹¹

Compared to what was then happening at the Great, they were *frum* at *Nidchay Israel*, but maybe not compared to Eastern European standards or today. Joseph Esserman kept the books and ledger. Ginger Eisenberg was the reader. When the *minyán* folded, its three *Sifrei Torah* went to Central Synagogue on permanent loan.⁹² However, in May 1908, Sol Levy, chaired a meeting of the congregation, raising objections about the lax standard of *kashrut*, in that the Great Synagogue did not provide a butchery with wholly kosher meat. Rabbi Hartman of Jerusalem was at this meeting and announced that he was a qualified *shochet*, but the Great Synagogue's Rabbi Cohen refused to even examine his qualification.⁹³ Sol Levy, a tobacconist, was active in a number of community institutions and was committed and communally concerned. He may well have been *frum*. (His descendants are still strongly committed.)

CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE

The Central Synagogue grew out of these two *minyanim* - especially the Baron de Hirsch *minyan*. It officially began on 28 September 1912 at a meeting held at the office of Elias Green, 176 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.⁹⁴ Present were Solomon Pechter (a bootmaker who was also part of the Baron de Hirsch *minyan*), Elias Green (a financier), Jacob Morris, Joshua Brukarz (a businessman), Michel B. Michelson (a jeweller), Jacob Esserman (who apparently was the honorary treasurer or secretary of the Baron de Hirsch *minyan*, a shopkeeper) and Julius Opit (clothier). Apologies were received from Wolf Ruta Cohen of Wee Waa, who, remarkably, was present at following meetings. The object of the meeting was 'going into the ways and means of creating a fund for the building of a synagogue'⁹⁵ and they formed a Founders Committee, chaired by Solomon Pechter, with Elias Green as honorary treasurer. However, the press reaction was condescending when the plans were announced. The concept was compared unfavourably with the Newtown congregation and held to be unmeritorious. The leaders were ridiculed for wanting 'in all faithfulness...worship endeared by youthful memories to brethren in North Eastern Europe'.⁹⁶ Their actual aim was:

to do something towards arousing the community from its spiritual sloth and religious stagnation; to expand the narrow ambit of Jewish influence; to effect Jewish solidarity; to afford facilities for the practice of the traditional customs of Judaism - and above all, to arrest the spread of the canker of Intermarriage which has attained here proportions abnormal and alarming...⁹⁷

The abovementioned aims demonstrate that, if anything, the outlook was almost Lubavitch - that is, very much into outreach and definitely not the exclusive *frum* approach. Note, also, the use of the word 'traditional and not 'Orthodox'. Thus, the Central *schule* tends to sit at the 'Traditional' end of the Orthodox scale. However, it rates a mention here because, in the second decade of the twentieth century, if Newtown was too far away and one found the Great to be objectionably running away from true Orthodoxy (which many at that time did feel), Central was the *schule* of choice.

The name, the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue, was chosen already in 1912. Central *schule* was founded with the intention that 'services shall be conducted according to the usages, customs, practices, rites, ceremonies and traditions of Judaism, in conformity

with the Polish *Minhag* (*Minhag Polin*).⁹⁸ This clearly differentiated it from the Great Synagogue, which followed the Anglo-German Ashkenazi tradition.

Of the founders, Elias Green, who 'was noted for his orthodoxy and adherence to ritualistic practices' and was 'a generous philanthropist',⁹⁹ could probably be described as *frum*. He was clearly a man of principles, born in Eastern Europe, a member of the Sydney *Chevre Kadisha* - the burial society - (which relied, and still relies, upon the *frum* community in order to function) and the Sydney Jewish Aid Society. He and two of his sons, Israel and Simon had been prominent members of the Great Synagogue¹⁰⁰ and would return there later. Apparently Sol Levy, who was concerned about the kashruth of the meat supply, was also an early member.

What is apparent is that Central Synagogue was (and is) a strongly Zionist synagogue. All the founders were Zionists. If anything, the Great Synagogue at that time was anti-Zionist. However, the synagogue did have a small core of *frummer* members.

The origins of this congregation led to litigation between Central Synagogue and Newtown Synagogue concerning the assets of the Druitt Street *Mikveh Israel* congregation. The court found in favour of Newtown Synagogue in 1921, but, unfortunately, many items belonging to the Druitt Street Congregation simply disappeared.¹⁰¹

The next significant event in the history of Central Synagogue was the appointment of Rabbi Gedaliah Kirsner in 1926, after the synagogue building in Grosvenor Street, Bondi Junction had been consecrated on 25 March 1923. (In the interim the congregation had worshipped at what is now Taylor's Square, Darlinghurst - then called Paddington, and had thereafter amalgamated with the Bondi-Waverley congregation).

Cantor Rakman,¹⁰² then the *chazan* of Central, formed a break-away congregation, *Machzikei Hadas*, which prayed at the Astra Hotel at Bondi Beach and lasted until the 1930s. It was allegedly a *frum* group. There were arguments about 'unauthorised' kashruth activities arising from Rakman's activities. The first purpose built *mikvah* in Sydney was built at the Astra Hotel around this time, but according to Rabbi Porush it was never satisfactory.

Whilst Rakman's activities caused some controversy and led to the creation of the New South Wales Jewish Advisory Board, representing all the Sydney synagogues, the split over the dismissed Rabbi Kirsner in 1933 was a major drama. That split led to the first basically *frum* congregation being founded in the eastern suburbs of Sydney - namely *Mizrachi*. The story goes that a Board Member

of the Central Synagogue, who had an unmarried daughter tried to make a *shidduch* between his daughter and the unmarried Rabbi Kirsner, which was unsuccessful. As a consequence of his disinterest in this lady, malicious rumours, which the rabbi found very hurtful, began to circulate. This adversely affected the rabbi's health, which, in turn, affected his ability to perform his duties.¹⁰³

At the time there were also ructions within the *schule* concerning its Orthodoxy or lack thereof, one of which sent Elias Green back to the Great Synagogue in anger at what he claimed was 'Reform practice'. Sam Ochert was vocal against any English in the Service and other matters.¹⁰⁴

At the 1932 Annual General Meeting it was announced that the rabbi's contract would not be renewed, but early in 1933, as the contract was about to expire, those unhappy with this decision called an Extraordinary General Meeting in an attempt to have this decision rescinded. As a two-thirds majority was required on this at a secret ballot, it is not surprising that the rescission motion was not successful.

RABBI KIRSNER'S REMOVAL AND THE BIRTH OF MIZRACHI

On the Sabbath after the 1933 Extraordinary General Meeting, Rabbi Kirsner went up to the *bimah* (from where he tried to conduct the service). He was then physically removed by the synagogue executive to prevent him from attempting to conduct the service. A physical brawl then ensued between the parties for and against the rabbi, at which time the rabbi was alleged to have said: 'There will never be peace in this congregation until I receive justice.'¹⁰⁵ This became known as 'Kirsner's curse' and has been blamed for all the trouble in the synagogue since. It is interesting to note that Abraham Rabinovitch, known to be *frum*, and who was honorary treasurer at the time, did not split from Central then, nor did the Simons family, which is counted within the *frum* community today.

Rabbi Kirsner and his followers then formed a new congregation called *Mizrachi*, affiliated to the religious Zionist movement of that name. *Mizrachi* is affiliated with the *B'nai Akiva* religious Zionist youth movement and strongly emphasises *aliyah*. On the *frum* scale, I would rank it at the traditional, or at the less *frum* end of the spectrum. Nevertheless, the *Mizrachi* movement is included in the target readership of *Hamodia*, the proclaimed newspaper of *Haredi* (*frum*) Jewry.

According to Rabbi Porush¹⁰⁶ the new congregation met in the premises of the Women's Zionist Organisation, *Ivriah*, headed by Rieke Cohen, who was a strong supporter of Rabbi Kirsner, and who

appears, from all accounts, to have been within the *frum* spectrum. Rabbi Kirsner, also with the consent of British Empire Chief Rabbi Brodie, formed part of the Sydney *Beth Din*, (founded in July 1905),¹⁰⁷ together with Rev Einfeld and Rev Falk with regard to proselytism.¹⁰⁸

Eventually *Mizrachi* acquired a building (now, in mid 2006, the site of the Monash Flats) in Old South Head Road, Bondi, opposite Francis Street. The *schule* was upstairs and *B'nei Akiva* youth group met downstairs. The congregation was very supportive of Rabbi Kirsner for the rest of his life, caring for him later in life during his illness.¹⁰⁹

1930s AND 1940s ARRIVALS FROM EUROPE

During the 1930s there was an influx of Jewish migrants from persecution in Europe. Increasing antisemitism in Poland brought a few strictly Orthodox Jews to Sydney, to *Mizrachi*, some via England and they were reinforced by Jewish refugees from Nazism. Most of the German Jewish refugees who found sanctuary on the Australian shores were of the Reform persuasion, and tended to undermine the Orthodoxy of the whole community. In those days it was extremely hard to keep *Shabbos* as the normal working week included Saturday morning and shopkeepers would lose their tenancy if they closed on *Shabbos*. If someone was truly *Shomer Shabbat* (fully observant of the Sabbath) then you knew they were truly *frum*.¹¹⁰ According to Rabbi Mordecai Gutnick, families at *Mizrachi* who were truly *frum* included the Wise family (who had lived in England) and the Chester family (previously called Socharczeski). His late father, Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, z"l, found few others who were truly *frum* when he arrived at the end of 1940.

Reb Noson Socharczeski was a *shochet* and had been employed by the Sydney *Beth Din* to *shecht* (ritually slaughter) meat for the community. He arrived from Poland around the early 1930s. According to Rabbi Mottel Gutnick, he was instructed to go on the second day of *Yom Tov* (a Holy Day) to *shecht*. Rabbi Gutnick described the incident:

Reb Noson Socharczeski objected. He was told it was for the benefit of the community, as they needed meat. (It is permitted to *shecht* on the second day of *Yom Tov* for the sake of *Yom Tov*.)

He was told: 'Because of the fact that the *kehillah* (the community) needs meat, therefore, it's just the same as if it is

needed for *Yom Tov* itself. It's extenuating circumstances'.

He said: 'If the *Beth Din* tells me, I'll go, but how am I going to get there?'

He was told: 'Well, in the circumstances, you're allowed to take a train'.

He said: 'This is going too far! To *shecht* is one thing, but to take the train! The *Beth Din* says to take a train!' So he hung up his *shechting* knife.¹¹¹

It was practices like that that drove highly qualified people away from Sydney's 'mainstream' which had, frankly lost the plot of Yiddishkeit.¹¹²

The balance of this paper (Part Two) will be published in the next Sydney issue of the *Journal*. It deals with events from the arrival of Rabbi Porush at the Great Synagogue on 6 June 1940, until the Sydney Community *Kollel* was established in 2006.

END NOTES

1. Meaning strictly Orthodox or *Haredi*.
2. For a full treatment of this topic, see Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman, *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: Architect of Torah Judaism for the Modern World*, Brooklyn N.Y.: Artscroll History Series. Mesorah Publications Ltd., Second Edition. February 1996, particularly chapters nine to sixteen.
3. Ibid., pp.164 f. Maharam Schick was the ancestor of Rabbi Schick who was rabbi both at Coogee Synagogue and at Montefiore Home in Sydney.
4. Ibid., p.171. See also Jacob H. Sinason, *The Rebbe: The Story of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1996, Chapter 3 'The Conscience of Berlin Jewry', pp.57ff-78 presents a slightly different slant. Page 69, however, gives 28 July 1876 as the date when the *Austrittsrecht*, the right to secede, became law and the date that Hildesheimer's *Adass Jisroel* and Hirsch's *Religionsgesellschaft* became independent communities.
5. Klugman, op.cit. p.140f. Also see Sinason op.cit. p.52ff. The *Chasam Sofer* held strong sway in Hungary so a greater portion of Hungarian Jewry was true to Orthodoxy.
6. Charles Price, 'Jewish Settlers in Australia', *AJHS Journal*, 1964.
7. Judge Advocate Ellis Bent in 1810 commenting on the work of Sydney magistrates, J.M. Bennett and Alex Castles, *A Source Book on Australian Legal History*, Sydney, Law Book Co. Ltd, 1979, p.25.
8. Opinion of C.J.Forbes on the 'Condition in N.S.W. after the 1823 Act' in a letter to J.R. Wilmot Horton, M.P. 6 March 1827. in Ibid., p.70.
9. A yeshiva is a rabbinical college where, in particular, the Talmud is studied in depth. Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, Sydney,

- Collins Australia. 1988. 1st edn. p.23.
10. Israel Porush. *The House of Israel*. Melbourne: The Hawthorn Press, 1977, p.2.
11. Ibid. p.2.
12. Rutland. op. cit. p.24.
13. Porush, op. cit., p.4.
14. Ibid., p.3.
15. Ibid., p.3.
16. Ibid., p.5.
17. Ibid., p.6.
18. Ibid., p.6.
19. J.S. Levi & G.F.J. Bergman, *Australian Genesis. Jewish Convicts & Settlers 1788-1850*. Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth: Rigby Ltd. 1974, p. 247.
20. Ibid., p.247.
21. There are numerous references to this. These matters are still talked of in the city of Goulburn, where I lived and worked as a solicitor for a short while. Many Goulburn people are proud of their city's honourable Jewish heritage, some acknowledge Jewish ancestry and they feel protective towards the Jewish cemetery which was restored with the help of the local Catholic school children around 1986. Many Goulburn Jewish descendants came to Sydney. Some are in Canberra.
22. Levi & Bergman op. cit., p. 249.
23. Ibid.
24. Timoshenko Aslanides and Jenny Stewart. *Green Goulburn and Environs. A Comprehensive Guide*. Canberra: Olive Press, 1983, p.66, plus local Goulburn tradition relayed to me when I lived in Goulburn and information from a family whose relatives used to attend such services.
25. Information from Porush, op. cit. p. 327.
26. Ibid.
27. Ancestors of my neighbour, Narelle Lederman née Adams. Information from Mrs Lederman.
28. Melinda Jones and Ilana Lutman, *Orach Chaim: A way of Life — The Central Synagogue*. Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 2000, p.4.
29. As reported to, and remembered by myself and Ruth MacDonald née Weisman, daughter of the owners of that guest house.
30. Porush, op.cit., pp 328f.
31. Ibid., pp.326f.
32. Heard from sources within Adass Melbourne and also from my late husband who had been told this by someone in these circles.
33. Porush, op.cit., p.329
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p.330.
36. Ibid. In 2007 Yeshiva Gedolah was not aware of this transfer.

37. Ibid., p.8.
38. Ibid., p.4.
39. Ibid., p.6.
40. Ibid., p.7.
41. Ibid., pp. 9-11. See also AJHS Archive file 374.
42. Ibid. p.10. A *Lulav* is the unopened young shaft of a date palm. Bound to it are three three-leaved myrtle branchlets and two willow branchlets. Collectively they are also called a *lulav*. Together with an *etrog* (citron) they are held and shaken, after a blessing is made, on the festival of *Succot*. They are also shaken during the saying of *Hallel* (Psalms of praise) during *Succot* and are carried around the synagogue in a procession during the saying of the *Hoshanot* prayers on *Succot*. Observant Jews go to considerable efforts to obtain quality *lulavim* and *etrogim*.
43. Porush op. cit., pp 129-130.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p.12.
46. Ibid., p.18ff.
47. See also article on Hoelzel by Rabbi Porush *AJHS Journal*, Vol II, pp.172f and AJHS Archive file 355.
48. Raymond Apple, 'Rabbi Jacob Levi Saphir and His Voyage to Australia' *AJHS Journal*, Vol VI, Pt 4, pp. 201 ff.
49. Ibid. p.196 ff.
50. *Even Saphir*, Pt II, p.132, 135 quoted by Apple ,op. cit. p. 207.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p.208
54. Ibid.
55. Aharon Perlow, 'Harav Shlomo of Bobov, zy" a On his 100th yahrzeit' *Hamodia Magazine*, Vol VII, No. 365, Parshat Chukkat, 29 Sivan 5765, 6 July 2005. p.6 column 4.
56. Sachar. op.cit. p.511.
57. AJHS Archive, file 243.
58. Ibid.
59. P. Barg, et al, 'History of the Western Suburbs Synagogue', *AJHS Journal*, Vol VII, Part 6, p.461, n.2.
60. Information from his descendant, Ms Ann Tooler (formerly Rebbitzen Blaivas) who, with her father, ran the family business at Solomons Matzah factory until it was sold. Harris Hymie Solomon was the founder of Solomons Matzos. Interview, 17 July 2005.
61. Ibid.
62. Information from my first cousin once removed, Una Smith, c. 1980. Her grandfather or great-grandfather reputedly owned most of Newtown.
63. Barg ,op.cit., p.391
64. Interview with Ann Tooler, supra.
65. Barg. op.cit., p.429.

66. Ibid.
67. Interview with Louise Rosenberg, Sydney, 30 June 2005
68. Louise Rosenberg, *Of Folktales and Jewish Folk in Australian History*, Melbourne: Printworks. 2004. All geneological facts on the Weingott family derive from *The Weingott Family Tree (8 Generations)* as at 9 June 2005, supplied to me and compiled by John Knopman, 9 Ritchie Avenue, Coogee (following my being supplied an earlier version (3 March 2005) of the same by a Weingott descendant, Tzila Holtzman (née Unfanger). Additionally, many members of this extended family have contributed to this paper by interviews and in depth discussion and analysis,.
69. Information given to me by Louise Rosenberg on 30 June 2005.
70. Interview with Yankel Unfanger, 2 May 2005, Melbourne.
71. Information given to me by Louise Rosenberg in an interview on 30 June 2005 in Sydney.
72. Barg et al, *AJHS Journal*, Vol VII, *op.cit.*, p.392.
73. Barg, *op.cit.*, p.393.
74. Ibid., p.392, p. 462, Note 4.
75. Ibid.. pp. 396-400.
76. Ibid., p. 429 ff. plus information from Ann Tooler *supra*
77. Story related by a descendant of a customer.
78. Barg, *op.cit.*, p. 435.
79. Ibid., p.438.
80. Ibid., p.438ff.
81. Dates from Knopman, *The Weingott Family Tree (8 generations)*., *op.cit.*
82. Barg, *op.cit.*, p. 440.
83. Ibid., p.440.
84. Interview with Mrs Trudi Collins (née Goran) 6 July 2005 in Sydney.
85. Trudi Collins interview *supra*. Rev Goran later went on to Ballarat where he served for two years. This congregation had some families who were "quite *frum*". Then he founded the Carlton Talmud Torah in Melbourne, where he remained for eleven years, before returning to Sydney to take up the post of the first minister at Strathfield Synagogue.
86. Barg ,*op. cit.*, p.444.
87. Ibid., p. 445.
88. 'Proposed New Congregation', *The Hebrew Standard*, 2 December 1898. p.7.
89. AJHS archive file 243.
90. Porush, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-6.
91. Letter from Norman Esserman re Rabbi Hartman, AJHS archive file 243.
92. Ibid.
93. Porush, *op.cit.*, p.81.
94. Jones and Lutman, *op.cit.*, p.4.
95. Ibid p.5. quoting *The Hebrew Standard*, 29 November 1912.

96. Ibid.
97. 'The Central Synagogue Annual Report, 1914', quoted in Jones and Lutman, op. cit., p.6.
98. 'Central Synagogue Minute Book', 21 June 1913. Photo Jones and Lutman op.cit., p.11.
99. Ibid., p.7.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., pp.13ff.; Barg ,op. cit., p.394 ff. and note 2, p.461.
102. Jones and Lutman, op. cit., pp.80-81.
103. Interview with Rabbi Mordecai (Mottel) Gutnick, 29 April 05.
104. Jones and Lutman, op. cit., p. 82 f. and passim.
105. Ibid., p.86.
106. Porush, op.cit., p.124.
107. Rabbi Moshe Gutnick phone conversation. 2005 was the 100th Anniversary.
108. Porush. op. cit.,p.124.
109. Interview with Rabbi Mottel Gutnick (supra).
110. Ibid.
111. Interview with Rabbi Mottel Gutnick (supra). One is not permitted to ride in transport (except to save a life) on the Sabbath and on Holy Days. Although a rabbi in India (where trains are packed, frequent, make regular stops and are clearly run for the benefit of the enormous non-Jewish population) ruled that it is permissible to ride in a train - I believe he would only have said on Yomim Tovim - provided the ticket had been purchased before the holy day, that is an exceptional ruling. Certainly, for a strictly observant Jew from Poland or elsewhere in Eastern Europe, such a suggestion would have been totally outrageous.
112. Knowledge of Judaism and its practice, Jewishness.