

KOSHER KOALA

Newsletter of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society
www.ajgs.org.au



December 2014

*The AJGS Committee wishes all our members
a very happy Chanukah!*



Detail from the new Jewish Refugees Memorial, Shanghai (see p.12)

Sculptor: He Ning, 2014

Photo courtesy of Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum

AJGS News

Ethel Davis' talk



At our workshop on 12 October, Ethel Davis, author of *Latvia's Haunting Secrets*, gave a wonderful talk about her research journey through Latvia. As an almost 80 year-old-solo traveller, she inspired us all with her determination to find out about her family's life in Libau, and the fate of those who disappeared in WW2.

We were joined by a number of Ethel's friends and acquaintances who did not previously know of the many relevant resources we hold at AJGS. We hope that they will come again and join us.

Ethel Davis, October 2014

NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies Conference

In September, our committee members, Kim Phillips and Kym Morris, spoke at the 2014 Annual Conference of the NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies. Kim spoke about her *Spirits-of-Gallipoli* project, and Kym spoke about resources for finding Jewish ancestors.

By all reports, these were the best sessions of the conference!

Treasurer-elect

After he generously offered to take on the role of Treasurer when Eva Browne stands down in 2015, we have co-opted Michael Taub to the AJGS Committee. Over the past few years, Eva has heroically wrestled with the changeover to direct-debit renewals, and with the vagaries of currency exchange for those organisations yet to recognise the Australian dollar. We are truly grateful for her time and valuable assistance.

Membership renewals

It is that time of year again! We hope that you will not only renew your membership, but also come along to our workshops and talks. It is amazing how often members sitting at the table in the Reverend Katz Library overhear a snippet of conversation which leads to new connections or new leads for breaking down their brick walls.

Even if you do not have a particular problem to solve, come along and browse our collections, see what has been added to databases since you last looked, or simply schmooze with like-minded family history enthusiasts.

Correction

In the last edition, an editing error meant that the Jewish population of Dover Heights was grossly understated.

The correct statement is:

- ❖ approximately 50% of Dover Heights residents were Jewish – this was the area with highest concentration in NSW, and represents 11% of all NSW Jews. In Caulfield North (Melbourne), the estimated Jewish population was 51.6% of the total population.

This has been amended in the issue uploaded to our website.

Apologies for this error to JCA and the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University.

A family brush with fame paints a complicated picture

By Dani Haski

It's always exciting to find a relative with links to celebrity. I have discovered a connection between my great-grandmother's first cousin, Myer Myers (born Myer Rothbaum on 21 July 1890, at Clifton Hill, VIC) and the Hilton sisters! No ... not Paris and Nicky! The original Hilton sisters, Daisy and Violet Hilton (born 5 February 1908, at Brighton, England)! Never heard of them? In the 1920s and 30s, Daisy & Violet were the world's most famous conjoined twins. And thanks to a recently released biography, *The Lives and Loves of Daisy & Violet Hilton* by Dean Jensen, I now know a lot more about them and the life of my Nan's cousin.

Violet and Daisy Hilton captured the hearts of millions of people across Europe, Australia and the USA, finding fame as Vaudeville and Broadway stars, before sinking into obscurity. They were born to an unwed waitress in the seaside town of Brighton in the UK. The midwife who helped them into the world, Mary Hilton, adopted them when their mother rejected them.



Daisy and Violet Hilton c.1927

Source: Creative Commons Licence 4.0
<http://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/image/V0029595.html>

Mrs Hilton immediately saw the girls' earning potential; they were joined at their lower back by bone and cartilage. She promptly put them on display in her pub, charging people to look at them. Before the girls were two, she took them on tour, exhibiting them before a curious public and, more interestingly, to packed halls of doctors – many of whom offered to try to separate the twins. Most of these quacks admitted that one would likely die during the operation. Mary knew that the girls were worth much more connected. She declined their offers.

During their first five years, the girls toured England and the continent – on display at country fairs and exhibitions. Thankfully, Mary saw value in educating them. Daisy and

Violet were taught to read and write and were subjected to an array of lessons including singing, dancing, saxophone, clarinet and piano. They developed into quite credible performers.

A famous impresario of the day, Ike Rose, took on management of the girls. They were invited to Australia to appear at the opening of Luna Park, on the beachfront in St Kilda, Melbourne. The promoters of this event assumed that the girls would be as popular here as they had been in the UK. Unfortunately, their appearance was not received with the expected rapturous applause. Ike Rose left Mary, her daughter Edith and the twins in the care of an aide and left Australia in search of a troupe of midgets.

Thankfully Mary was nothing if not resourceful; she soon secured a tour for the girls with a wagon circus. The rigours of the Australian outback almost undid her. The summer of 1913 was particularly harsh. Because drought had devastated communities in the far-flung townships the circus visited, few people could afford to see the show. The aide Ike Rose had assigned them soon quit and Mary quickly realised that the outback was no place for two single women and a pair of 'freak' five year olds.

This was when Myer Myers came into their lives. Myer was barely 6 months old when his mother, Theresa (née Taube Cypres, born 1864 in Krakow), died in Melbourne, of "spinal disease, paraplegia and tuberculosis". Myer's father, Gershon, eventually took him and his two older siblings, Isaac Henry and Bluma, to Western Australia.

Myer's next appearance in the public records is an entry in the *West Australian* in August 1912. This reports his arrest, along with 10 other men. He was accused of being a 'person of evil fame'! Myer, a shopkeeper, and his co-accused were charged with, and eventually convicted of, collusion in an auction scam. He was fined £25 plus court costs.

We can only speculate that, after this incident, Myer hit the road (In his book, Dean Jensen claims that Myer had run away with the circus at the age of 12 or 13 ... it's a romantic thought, but I am yet to find evidence of this).

In 1913, as Mary, Edith, Violet and Daisy were braving the outback heat, Myer was following the circus, selling balloons and candy to whomever showed up. He was almost a decade younger than Edith, who, reportedly, was painfully shy. It took two and a half years for Myer to convince Edith (or perhaps more importantly her mother) to consent to marriage. They wed in December of 1915 in South Melbourne.

Like his mother-in-law, Myer seemed to be a natural-born salesman. Taking over the management of the girls, he soon secured an engagement for them at the opening of the White City Amusement Centre in Sydney. The family were then living with Myer's aunt and uncle (my great-great-grandparents), Meier and Leah Myers, at 42 George Street West.

Myer must have realised there were limited opportunities in Australia and that their fortune lay in the US. They left Australia aboard the *Sonoma* in June 1916. Unfortunately, their high hopes were almost dashed on the doorstep of America, when the twins were initially refused entry because of their 'disability'. Edith was left to care for the girls in an immigration detention centre, while Myer and Mary went ashore to try to secure their release. Their canny use of the media pressured the authorities to allow entry on the grounds that, contrary to the assessment of the immigration clerk that they would be a burden on the US health system, their very disability would ensure they could earn an excellent living and look after themselves and their family.

Myer proved to be a true impresario. He developed the brand of the *Hilton Sisters* beyond anyone's wildest dreams. At the height of their popularity, Daisy and Violet were the toast of Broadway. They were feted across the country and proved to be much more than 'just' conjoined twins. They were stars!

The girls grew into charming young women and many remarked on their uncommon beauty. It was also recognised that they had distinct personalities and much speculation was made of their romantic interests ... and of these they appeared to have had many.

Behind all the positive spin in the media, though, was a darker story that finally came to a head in 1931, when Daisy and Violet were 23 years old. Their adoptive mother, Mary, died in Alabama in 1919 and, as if they were chattel, effectively bequeathed the twins to Myer and Edith. Myer viewed the girls as his personal possessions and, like Mary before him, profited hugely from their efforts. The family lived in a palatial mansion built especially for them in San Antonio, Texas. Myer purchased numerous other properties, all in his own name, across the USA. The relationship, however, was strained, with Myer ruling by fear. When the girls learned that he had warned off a potential suitor, one whom Daisy was particularly keen on, they were furious. Sensing that they were finally in a position of strength they demanded more autonomy. Myer assigned a manager, William L. Oliver, for their next tour and sent them off on their own for the 1928-29 season.

In 1930, Daisy and Violet received a subpoena naming them as co-respondents in a divorce suit. The papers alleged that "by wiles and deceits they had conspired to alienate the affections of a married man", the aforementioned Mr Oliver – the tour manager Myer had hired to protect them. Myer was furious. He called the girls every name under the sun. The media lapped up every detail of the sordid affair ... and made up what they couldn't verify. It seemed that Oliver, twice the twins' age and married, might have been romantically involved with both girls ... at the same time!

In the course of preparing their defence against these charges, the girls' lawyer, Martin Arnold, asked them about their relationship with Myer and Edith. He was horrified when he realised that they were effectively indentured to their guardians and concocted a plan to 'free' the girls from their apparent servitude.

The subsequent lawsuit was reported from coast to coast. The twins sought an accounting of all their earnings, pocketed first by first Mary, and then by Myer and Edith. The newspapers described them as being sold into slavery by their destitute birth mother and being exploited throughout their lives by their guardians.



Myer and Edith Meyers with Daisy and Violet c.1927

Source: Creative Commons Licence 4.0
<http://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/image/V0029596.html>

The Myers vehemently denied all the charges, claiming the twins wanted for nothing and had never expressed a desire to leave their care. Their defence lawyer, T. J. Saunders, portrayed Myer Myers as ... *a martyr who had dedicated much of his life to Daisy and Violet Hilton only to be betrayed by them.*¹

In the end, Judge McCory awarded the twins \$80,000 in cash and all their personal effects, worth another \$20,000. The Myers managed to hold on to all the properties, including the San Antonio mansion, but that was the end of their association with the Hilton Sisters.

What happened thereafter to Myer, Edith and their daughter, Theresa, is largely unknown. They appear to have remained in their Vance Jackson Road mansion in San Antonio, where Myer passed away on October 11, 1943. His wife, Edith, died on August 2nd 1966. I have not been able to find any records about their daughter, Theresa Mary Myers.

Daisy and Violet went on to have turbulent lives. They were always curious about their birth parents and at times invented fanciful stories about their identity. In 1932, after obtaining American Citizenship, they travelled back to the UK. Their one hope was to meet their mother, Kate Skinner. Sadly, this dream was never realised as Ms Skinner had died two decades earlier, on August 1st 1912, after complications during the birth of her fourth child. Violet and Daisy's sister, Ethel Kate Skinner, and their brother Albert (born 1910),

were thought to have been fathered by Frederick Andress, a local hairdresser. He is also thought most likely to have been the twins' father.

None of their birth family was interested in meeting them. Jensen quotes a relative of the girls – their aunt's son, Joseph Haestier – as saying they ... *must have been heartbroken upon realising that, after all these years, they were still regarded as untouchables by their blood relatives ... I suspect my family felt embarrassment at being related to girls whom others regarded as freaks.*²

The girls' romantic lives were always of great interest to the press. They had several very public affairs and while in England, Violet became engaged to prominent British boxer Harry Mason. Daisy, in the meantime, had been receiving daily letters from band leader Jack Lewis. Unfortunately, like so many of their relationships, these men failed to honour their declared intentions.

Both girls did experience short-lived marriages. In 1936, Violet married James Moore, a close friend, in a highly publicised event on the 50-yard-line of the Cotton Bowl during the Texas Centennial Exposition. Unfortunately, James had failed to reveal that he was actually homosexual. While he adored Violet, the marriage was annulled a few months later.

Daisy was visibly pregnant at Violet's wedding. She gave birth to a son in Minnesota in December 1936. He was immediately given up for adoption. She never revealed the identity of the father but he is believed to have been, a married man, a member of their touring band. In 1941, Daisy married the considerably younger Harold Estep in New York. This marriage too lasted only a couple of weeks before Harold realised he was 'unsuited' to marriage to a celebrity conjoint twin.

¹ Jensen, Dean, *The Lives and Loves of Daisy and Violet Hilton*, Ten Speed Press, Berkeley CA, 2006, p.185

² *Ibid.*, p.228

Daisy and Violet never stopped looking for love, but as their stars faded and their fortune trickled away, fewer suitors came calling. Work also became harder and harder to find and they were forced to take on almost anything to make ends meet, including a stint in the burlesque scene (they were once billed as the world's first Siamese twin strippers), cruise ships (the closest they came to their old life) and even, briefly, setting up a fast food concession (they ran the *Hilton Sisters Snack Bar*, a hot dog stand, in Miami in 1956).

The girls also made a couple of unsuccessful attempts to break into the movie business. Not long after their release from the Myers' guardianship, they were cast in the now classic 1932 horror film *Freaks*, directed by Todd Browning. In the early 1950s, they were talked into staking their life savings on the film *Chained for Life*, a courtroom drama in which one twin is accused of the murder of her lover. The jury must decide whether to free the guilty twin or send the innocent twin to jail. The film failed to recoup its budget – leaving the girls, once again, on the edge of destitution.

Daisy and Violet lived the last decade of their life in North Carolina where, after having their earnings stolen by yet another unscrupulous tour manager, they found themselves destitute, friendless and alone. Thankfully, a few kind souls took pity on them. They were given a job at a local grocery store in Charlotte. The owner of the store also arranged housing for them. They lived out their last few years quietly and finally passed away in 1969, during an epidemic of the Hong Kong 'flu. According to the medical reports, it's thought that Daisy might have died a day or so before Violet. How must she have felt, not being able to feel her sister breathing beside her? We'll never know.

The story of the Hilton Sisters has been immortalised in the Broadway musical *Side Show* (1997) and in a newly released, award-winning documentary *Bound By Flesh* (2013), directed by Leslie Zemeckis.

And somewhere out there is the son Daisy gave up for adoption. With luck, he or his children will one day discover his birth mother and her sister, and proudly associate themselves with these remarkable women.

Report from the 2014 IAJGS Conference, Salt Lake City³

By John Stanhope

The venue for the 34th Annual IAJGS Conference was the convenient Hilton Hotel in downtown Salt Lake City, just a medium walk from the Family History library, where I spent a day before and three days after the conference, doing research.

Here are some of the highlights of my conference. I write from a non-Jewish perspective, as the Jewish ancestry is my wife's.

❖ Bennett Greenspan & Family Tree DNA

Family Tree DNA had a stall offering three DNA tests

- Y chromosome – analysis of the paternal line of male subjects;
- Mitochondrial DNA – analysis of the maternal line of males and females; and
- Autosomal DNA – analysis of the 22 other chromosomes of male and female subjects, establishing links with relatives connected in recent generations.

I had both my YDNA and mtDNA samples taken, and took home an mtDNA kit, which my wife used and posted to the laboratory. My results showed expected Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Viking elements. My

³ For another take on the conference see: David Laskin's *A Report From the Jewish Genealogists' Summer Camp*, at <http://forward.com/articles/204417/a-report-from-the-jewish-genealogists-summer-ca/?p=1>

wife's results showed links with Sephardi, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi populations, confirming the expected Sephardi connexion with North Africa.

❖ **Art Benveniste, Genie Milgrom and Schelly Talalay Dardashti: *Crypto-Judaic Studies***

Some Sephardi communities were, because of persecution, characterised by secrecy and denial. Examples included Mashad in Northeast Iran, where Jewish merchants carried out important trade with Russia and central Asia. Joseph Wolff and Jacob Samuel, both converts, made efforts to convert Jews to Christianity. On 27 March 1839, there was a severe outbreak of violence against the Mashad Jews by Muslims, followed by intermittent persecution. Some ostensibly converted to Islam, but maintained secret observance of Jewish rituals.



John Stanhope and Peter Nash in Salt Lake City, July 2014

Milgrom traced her Iberian Sephardi female ancestry back through 20 generations in Catholic and Inquisition records. There was frequent cousin marriage. Records were faked to avoid the attention of the authorities. Portuguese Inquisition records are on the Internet. Useful websites are <http://www.sephardim.org> and <http://www.sephardicgen.org>.

In another address, *A Search for Jewish Roots*, Milgrom stated that the Council of Trent standardised reporting of events across all Catholic jurisdictions. On 'coming back' (attempts to reassert Jewish identity and find acceptance in synagogues), she said that there were few Sephardi rabbis to process applications, and that many Ashkenazi rabbis, who do not understand the difficulties in providing documents, are not welcoming. Greenspan contrasted this attitude with the openness of Jews for Jesus and other Messianic (Christian) organisations.

Beneviste said that some Jews moved from Spain and Portugal in 1492 to Morocco and other Mediterranean countries. He provided a time-line of events in the Iberian Peninsula.

❖ **Schelly Talalay Dardashti: *Sephardic Genealogy: Many Resources***

Sephardi includes Mizrahim (Middle East), Romaniote (Greek) and Italki (Roman); a more restrictive definition refers to those with roots in the Iberian Peninsula.

Resources for researching Sephardic heritage include (1) MyHeritage.com (2) Geni.com (3) Ancestry.com (4) Sephardicgen.com (5) Sephardim.com (6) JewishGen.org (7) TracingTheTribe.com (8) eSeferard.com (9) SephardicStudies.org (10) AmericanSephardiFederation.org (11) Saudades Sefarad.org (Portuguese) [Editor's note: the website <http://www.saudades.org> appears to be inaccessible, access via Yahoo groups: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/saudades-sefarad/info>]

Notre Dame University has on-line documents of the Inquisition, and a Ketubot collection.

❖ **Gary Gans: *Guess who's buried in a Jewish cemetery?***

Criminality is no barrier to Jewish burial – Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel's grave has a memorial and a *yahrzeit* tablet. Meyer Lansky, the gangster chief who ordered Siegel's killing, and Jack Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, are also buried in Jewish cemeteries.

Jewish pirates' gravestones were complete with a skull and cross bones sign! Judicial execution is also no barrier to a Jewish burial, e.g. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Occasionally, people not known to be Jewish might also be found, e.g. Wyatt Earp, whose wife, Josie Marcus, was Jewish.

Inscriptions are determined by the family of the deceased, not by the community, and a Hebrew text is not necessary. An abbreviated form of the Hebrew translated as *May his/her soul be bound up in life eternal* is usual.

A *geniza* (burial plot for outworn ritual objects) might have a stone listing the original donors.

Gans warned of the risk of computer translation – Google translate renders ‘preserved to eternity’ as ‘pickled to perfection’!

❖ **Avraham Groll: *How did Jews get to Europe?***

After the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations, Jewish identity was not fixed in a geographic place. A Jewish community had three requirements (1) prayer – a synagogue (2) study – a school (3) *kashrut* – access to kosher food. There is a contested tradition that the king Cyrus, who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, was Queen Esther’s son.

In the 9th century CE, Babylonian Jewry declined due to a failing economy, Muslim taxes and destruction of Jewish-Christian trading relations. With the establishment of the Islamic caliphate based in Baghdad, Jewish leadership moved to Baghdad. Muslim rulers in Spain encouraged the movement of Jews to Spain, though some had been there since Roman times.

In Spain, the Arian Visigoths favoured Jews because they were an ally against the Catholics, but this ended when a Visigothic king converted to Catholicism. In 589, the Third Council of Toledo imposed penalties on Jews. The Fifth Council (636) decreed that any Christian who helped Jews was to be excommunicated. Jews then supported the Muslim conquests in the Iberian Peninsula. More Jews migrated to the peninsula from the Middle East. Eventually the Catholic re-conquest led to anti-Jewish policies.

Jews were present in Germany from Roman times, especially in Cologne, but Constantine I issued decrees against the Jews and in 429, Theodosius II prohibited them from holding public office, and from building synagogues.

In France, Pepin III gave trading privileges to Jews. The Carolingians tolerated Jews because they could be trade intermediaries between Christians and Arabs.

❖ **Daniel Horowitz: *The Jews who left Spain and their genealogy***

Conditions in the Iberian Peninsula before 1478 were such that Jews had patronymic surnames with endings *-ez* in Spanish and *-es* in Portuguese, and the prefix *ben-* elsewhere. In Spain, the patronymics were fixed around 1000-1100 CE. Religious officials had titles which became surnames after Jews migrated to Germany.

The Spanish Inquisition started in 1478. In early 1492, the Alhambra Announcement ordered that Jews had to leave Spain by 31 March; extensions were then granted. On 3 August 1492, Columbus announced his impending departure on 10 August, but left on 11 August. Jewish names and occupations were common among his three crews; his fleet had no priest.

Because of the dynastic link between Spain and the Habsburg Emperors, many Jews went to Austria. Jews were later forced to take on surnames from an approved list, paying a fee in proportion to the ‘niceness’ of the name. Poor people could get a free surname, but it was usually a derogatory one.

On 18 August 1811, three centuries later, Napoleon I ordered that all citizens, throughout his empire, must register their names, and civil registration officials were appointed.

❖ **Michael Tobias: *How to Document a National Jewry: The Jews of Scotland***

This lecture was of interest to us, because my wife and I have Scottish ancestry. There is no historical evidence that Jews were persecuted in, or expelled from, Scotland in the Middle Ages. In 1180 Christian clergy in Scotland were prohibited from borrowing money from Jews, but the Jews in question were probably residing in England. The expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 had no effect in Scotland, probably because there were no known Jews there. Individual Jews came from England in the 16th and 17th centuries for study; the Scottish universities did not discriminate, whereas the English universities were open only to members of the Church of England.

Francis Berlin, a teacher of drawing arrived in Edinburgh in the late 1770s, and considered himself the leader of the Edinburgh Jewish community, even though he was married to a non-Jewish wife by whom he had several children. In 1790, Henry Daniel and his wife sued Berlin who had alleged that she had a lover. Also in 1790 a Jewish man went from Edinburgh to Sunderland in North England, to be married by a rabbi, suggesting that there was no rabbi nearer.

Following the influx of French people fleeing the revolution, the British parliament passed the *Alien Registration Act* in 1793. The Act required aliens to self-report and lodging house proprietors to report their alien lodgers. Herman Lyons, a German dentist, on 10 March 1794 reported that he had been 6 years in Edinburgh. Moss Daniels, spectacle maker, reported on 11 March 1794 that he been 6-7 years in Edinburgh (he was the alleged lover of Rose Daniel).

The first official congregation of Jews was established in Edinburgh in 1816-7. The first Jewish marriage in this congregation was held in 1822. A synagogue building was purchased in Richmond Court in 1825 and was used as such for 40 years.

Glasgow displaced Edinburgh as the main concentration of Scottish Jews during the 19th century, as a consequence of Ashkenazi immigration from Europe. Blytheswood was initially a popular district, but Gorbals later became a haven for poor Poles and Lithuanians. Shipping was easy from Hamburg to Scottish ports. This migration fell off due to a cholera outbreak in Glasgow in 1892 and easier travel to the USA.

There was another influx of continental Jews to Glasgow 1908-14. Bremen and Rotterdam were popular ports of departure.

I have shared this information with fellow volunteers at Scottish House cultural centre. At a recent Scottish genealogy day, a lady came who was descended from a Glasgow rabbi.

Jewish Revival in Poland?

By Robyn Dryen



The Bimah, Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw 2014 Photo: Robyn Dryen

The official opening of the core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews on 28 October 2014 was a long awaited event. From the many press reports, it far exceeded expectations. In an indication of its importance to Poland, the President of the Republic of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, was joined by the Prime Minister of Poland, Ewa Kopacz, the Marshalls of the Sejm (lower house of parliament) and the Senate, the Mayor of Warsaw and 1500 guests including the President of the State of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, and the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich.

I was not surprised by this public affirmation of the place of Jewish heritage and culture in today's Poland.

Let me declare my bias right at the beginning – I love Poland. I didn't – on my first visit in 1965. Then, it seemed bleak and grey. I was too young, at fourteen, to understand the impact of Soviet annexation immediately following on from the German occupation. Since then, I have had several visits, each more wonderful and enriching than the previous.

My most recent visit, in September 2014, was a study tour as a guest of the *Forum for Dialogue Among Nations*, sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. The Forum's mission is ... *to foster Polish-Jewish dialogue, eradicate anti-Semitism and teach tolerance through education*. This not-for-profit organisation is largely funded through grants from the Polish government and the EU.⁴

This trip introduced me to a Poland I could never have discovered as an independent traveller. It provided opportunities to meet with some of the leading commentators on Polish-Jewish dialogue, to meet some of the key players in the process of restoring Jewish culture and history to its rightful place, and most exciting of all – to meet some of the inspirational young people (mostly not Jewish), who are the educators and participants in the Forum's programs.

Almost everyone we met told us that the turning point in Poland's post WW2 psyche was the release, in 2001, of the book *Neighbours*, by Jan Gross, and the subsequent debate and investigation of what occurred during the Jedwabne massacre. The slow realisation that Poles themselves bore responsibility for some of the appalling atrocities perpetrated against Jews, permitted the beginning of a broader examination of Polish-Jewish relationships.

Among the amazing thinkers and doers we met on our travels was the pocket dynamo, Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Director of the core exhibition at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Her passion and vision were so evident in the sneak preview we had prior to the museum's opening. She is someone who has steered and cajoled, who has bridged the divide between competing narratives, to bring us all the richness of 1000 years of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. In an article for *Tablet*, Allison Hoffman so aptly described Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as the 'Curator of Joy and Ashes'⁵



At the Forum offices, Warsaw

L-R: Konstanty Gebert, Amanda Mendes Da Costa, Michael Danby MP

Photo: Olga Kaczmarek, Forum Dialogue

Konstanty Gebert, was another who gave time to meet with our group. A Jewish activist and journalist, he founded *Midrasz*, a Polish language, monthly journal, devoted to Polish, Jewish and Polish-Jewish culture, art, literature, history and religion, and contemporary matters. He also regularly contributes opinion pieces to the progressive newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Gebert is one of the growing number of Poles who have always known they were Jewish, but who, under Communism felt it irrelevant, and now understands his Jewishness to be an integral part of his Polishness.

We took guided walks through old-town Krakow and Warsaw, led by architects who had a deep understanding of the historical importance of place in pre-WW2 Jewish life. Our guide in Krakow was Piotr Lewicki, a partner in the architectural firm *Biuro Projektów Lewicki Łatak*. Piotr and partner, Kazimierz Łatak, designed the remodelling of *Bohaterów Getta* (Heroes of the Ghetto) Square with its hauntingly beautiful memorial to the Jews of the ghetto.

We met with politicians, academics, and businessman Adam Ringer. Ringer's parents managed to secure passage to Sweden for him and his brother at the outbreak of war. A work opportunity saw him return to Poland in the 1990s and he has remained, establishing a number of prospering businesses including the chain of *Green Caffè Nero* coffee shops. Each person we met, shared with us the event which sparked their interest in exploring their own Jewish history, or more generally, Poland's Jewish history.

⁴ For more information about the Forum see: <http://www.dialog.org.pl/en/>

⁵ <http://tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/128885/poland-new-jewish-museum>

Each now contributes in some significant way to rebuilding knowledge of Poland's Jewish history and culture, and importantly, they contribute to an emergent Jewish life in Poland.

After a Shabbat service on the Friday evening we walked across the road from the shul to join members of the Krakow Jewish community for their regular Friday-night communal dinner. This was a real treat. Every Friday, around 80 people gather in the JCC complex to enjoy a traditional Shabbat dinner. There was a handful of Holocaust survivors and another handful of visitors like us. The remainder were young people, a mix of those who have reclaimed their Jewish identity, and those who have newly discovered Jewish connections and are making their first tentative steps to see if this is where they belong. It was lively and much fun. We were served by an army of volunteers. On this occasion the prayers were led by one of the young staffers as the JCC cannot afford the services of a full-time rabbi.

Over dinner we spoke with several of the JCC staff. None of them were Jewish; all had undertaken Jewish studies of one form or another. They read Hebrew, speak Ivrit and are extremely passionate about the importance of reviving Jewish life in Krakow. It was a memorable evening.

If I had experienced no more, then I would have returned home many times enriched and intellectually stimulated by this trip. However, the highlight was a visit to the Marie Curie Vocational Secondary School in Wiskitki, Masovia. Here we met with a group of students who had participated in one of the Forum's Schools for Dialogue programs in 2013. These 16-18 year olds were either in the hospitality or the IT vocational streams at the school. Realising that it was the week before Rosh Hashanah, Oskar – one of the students – had prepared honey cake to welcome us.



With the students and teachers in Wiskitki

Photo: Olga Kaczmarek, Forum Dialogu, 2014

The students introduced themselves and talked about what they had learnt of Jewish custom, and the daily life of the Jews who had once lived in Wiskitki. They then took us on a walking tour of the town to point out locations that would have been important to my grandfather and his family. All this conducted in their second (or third) language – English.

This meant even more to me than the warm embrace of the Jewish community in Krakow, for these young people are the custodians of my heritage in Poland. If they don't know about the Jews who lived in Wiskitki, the knowledge will be lost. Furthermore, their participation in the Forum's program helps to ensure there will be no more Jedwabnes.

Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, was unable to tell us how many Jews are currently living in Poland, but he was able to say with certainty "tomorrow there will be more than today".

For another report on Jewish revival in Poland, see Sue Fishkoff: <http://tinyurl.com/fishkoff>

News

IAJGS conference, Jerusalem 2015 – Registration now open

<http://www.iajgs2015.org/>



Registration is now open for the 35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy to be held in Jerusalem from 6-10 July 2015. The Conference is being held in cooperation with MyHeritage and with the support of individual and corporate sponsors.

A Shabbaton (Friday-Saturday) weekend will precede the Conference, followed by an Exploration Sunday of tours and programs (including a Yad Vashem option) prior to the official Conference opening on Monday.

Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum

<http://www.shanghaijews.org.cn/english/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/ShanghaiJews>

In September, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum unveiled a copper wall inscribed with the names of 13,732 Jewish refugees who took safe haven in China during World War II. At 34m x 2.5m, the wall is composed of 26 copper plates and features a sculpture depicting Jewish refugees at one end. The relief sculpture is by He Ning, a Chinese-born American sculptor.

ChinaDaily.com reported that the artist said the six figures, at the forefront of the relief, represent faith, suffering and love, determination for the future, and brightness and hope.

The museum, on the site of the former Ohel Moshe Synagogue, has a website with a searchable database.

They would welcome any additional names or additional details for those already on the database. For additions: <http://www.shanghaijews.org.cn/english/article/?sid=43>



Wall of Names
Jewish Refugees Memorial, Shanghai

Photo: Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum

US visa investigation files – Shanghai 1946-51

<http://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/shanghai-visas/>

The US government has opened access to the visa investigation files from US consulate in Shanghai 1946-51. 113 of the estimated 1300 case files have been digitised and can be viewed online. All case files have been indexed, but the names list does not indicate which files have been digitised. If you find a name of interest, you will need to then put the name in the site search engine to see if a digital file exists.

While this is a clumsy process, the files are well worth investigating as they contain family information, names of associates and biographical information about the subject.

New synagogue in Cottbus, Germany

In a remarkable twist of news reports of former Jewish property disappearing in Europe, *Haaretz* <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/1.624589> reported that a decommissioned church in the German city of Cottbus (125 km southeast of Berlin) is to become Germany's newest synagogue.

The Evangelical parish in Cottbus has handed the key for the church to the Jewish Association of the State of Brandenburg. The synagogue will be dedicated on Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2015.

According to JewishGen's Communities Database, Cottbus had a Jewish population of around 350 in 1900. Today's Jewish community in Cottbus is once again about the same size, all of them Jews from the former Soviet Union.

Australian Jewish cemeteries added to Billion Graves

<http://billiongraves.com/>

David Milston reports that all the Jewish graves at Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park (formerly Botany Cemetery, Sydney) have now been added to Billiongraves.com.

Judith Wimbourne reports that the Jewish section at Woden Cemetery, ACT has also been added to this database where you can search by name, and view results for free.

UK changes information access rules for adoptees' relatives

The UK government announced new access rules for adoptees and their relatives. The right to information now extends to children, grandchildren and other relatives of adopted adults.

Previously, only the person adopted and their birth relatives were able to use specialised adoption agencies to obtain information and make contact with their biological family members.

See the press release at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/relatives-of-adopted-adults-now-able-to-trace-family-tree>

Wills and probate records for England and Wales

<https://www.gov.uk/search-will-probate>

You can now search for English and Welsh wills and probate records from 1858 to the present day. For a fee of £10 you can order a copy of the grant which will be provided within 10 days. When you place an order you will receive notification by e-mail that the order has been received, and when the document is available for download you will receive a further e-mail. Payments can be made by debit or credit card.

New book on Jewish Glasgow

The Scottish Jewish Archives Centre has published *Jewish Glasgow, An Illustrated History*, by Kenneth Collins, Harvey Caplan and Stephen Kliner.

It provides details of Glasgow Jewry's activities and achievements over the years, accompanied by many fascinating photos from the late 19th century through to modern times.

Price £25 (+ £13 postage to Australia). To order, email info@sjac.org.uk

Highlights from JewishGen

<http://www.jewishgen.org/>

To herald the New Year, JewishGen reminded us of the wealth of information now held in its databases. Of note:

- ❖ **Yizkor Book Project** – 782 books translated (23 new in 2013-14)
- ❖ **Memorial Plaques Project** – 56,000 records from 90 synagogues
- ❖ **KehilaLinks** – 783 Town websites

- ❖ **ViewMate** – 5,358 Submissions and 28,978 images in the ViewMate Image Gallery
- ❖ **JewishGen Family Finder** – 100,000 Researchers, 530,000 Town/Surname Entries, 130,000 Unique Surnames and 18,000 Unique Towns

If you haven't visited the website recently, you may find that there is new information just waiting for you!

Global Family Reunion

New Yorker, A.J. Jacobs, is attempting to create a family tree of the entire Human Race. As part of this dream he is organising a global family reunion. To be held in New York on 6 June 2015, the event will also raise funds for various Alzheimer's charities.

To learn more about the event, to connect your family to the tree, or to see if you link to some hot-shot celebrity, go to: <http://globalfamilyreunion.com/> Thanks to Dani Haski for this item.

National Archives (US) – Genealogy Fair

At the end of October, the US National Archives held a Genealogy Fair which included a series of lectures on files that might be of interest to genealogists. The full program can be seen here: <http://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2014/schedule-handouts.html>. The web-page contains links to most of the presenters' slides and handouts.

Of particular interest is the talk by Zack Wilske, *Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Exclusion and Deportation files at the National Archives*. His slides are comprehensive, but the live stream of his talk is even more useful and is available on youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hluirre9BN8>.

This single video is of the whole day's proceedings, so if you don't want to watch all 7 hours, move your counter along to the 5.08.00 mark where Zack's presentation (Session 10) begins.

Interesting websites and updates

Discovering Anzacs

<http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/>

The National Archives of Australia in partnership with Archives New Zealand has developed a website for you to explore WW1 and Boer War government records. Subjects include soldiers, munitions workers, nurses, conscription, internment, copyright and patents, defence correspondence and more.

In addition to these official records, there are photographs from the National Archives and Archives New Zealand. They include images of battle sites, maps and strategic plans, personal photographic collections of significant people, as well as official photographs of some soldiers and most internees.

Of equal importance are the user-contributed photographs and stories. Anyone can browse, but to contribute, you must register and login. When logged in on a profile page you are presented with additional options to upload, complete, link and add your contributions.

To register: <http://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/account/register>

NSW births, deaths and marriages

John Norris alerted me to the fact that with patience, the new search engine at NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages (http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au/bdm_fh.html) can be used to find the exact date of the event rather than just the year. Narrow search results first by month, then by week, then by day and you will have the actual date.

If this new search facility is not to your liking, there is now an alternative. Australian Cemeteries Index has developed a simple search engine to these records see: <http://austcemindex.com/bdmsch.php>

NSW Probate notices

<https://onlineregistry.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/content/search-probate-notice>

The NSW Supreme Court now requires all probate notices to be listed online. You can search for notices that were listed from 21 January 2013 until today. If you are unsure of the exact spelling, you can enter the first part of the surname and any surname starting with those letters will be listed. You can also search for a particular date of death, or a suburb, but you cannot search on first name alone.

There is a limit of 500 results per query, so if your search terms are too broad you will be prompted to narrow the search criteria.

Global newspaper search

<https://www.elephind.com/>

This is a search engine which enables a simultaneous search, for free, across many newspaper sites, rather than having to visit each site separately. Search results take you directly to the newspaper site which hosts that story.

Elephind includes *Trove*, and *NZ Papers Past*, as well as many US newspapers.

European Newspapers

<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/newspapers/gallery>

This website is another newspaper search engine. From the European Library, it has 5270 titles from 19 European countries, in 34 languages including Yiddish. Some titles were very short print-run, for others the digital process is incomplete and there will be more added to this collection.

Thanks to John Norris for this information.

Jewish Gilroes (Leicester, England)

<http://jewish-gilroes.org.uk/>

This site documents Gilroes, the only Orthodox Jewish cemetery serving Leicester and the surrounding areas. There is a searchable database of burials. Individual entries have headstone photos and additional family information.

Thanks to the JGSGB-DISCUSS list for this information.

GenTeam additions

www.GenTeam.eu

GenTeam now has over 11 million records indexed. The latest additions of most interest to Jewish researchers have been indexed by Georg Gaugush, and are

- ❖ *Familiants* in Prague up to 1848; and
- ❖ Jewish marriages in Prague 1784-1804

The Jews of Gibraltar

<http://gibraltar-social-history.blogspot.com.au/>

This wonderful website contains many illustrated chapters on the history of Gibraltar. Several of the chapters are about the comings and goings (i.e. the expulsions) of the Jews of Gibraltar.

Thanks to Alan Cohen and the JGSGB-DISCUSS list for this information.

Dates for your diary

Workshop Dates for 2015

The Society will hold workshops on the following dates at:

Rev Katz Library, North Shore Synagogue, Treatts Road, Lindfield

Sunday workshops 9.30am to 12.30pm	Monday workshops 10.00am to 1.00pm
11 January	19 January
1 February	16 February
8 March – AGM + Seminar*	16 March
12 April	20 April
3 May	18 May
14 June	22 June
5 July	20 July
2 August	17 August
30 August	21 September
11 October	19 October
1 November	16 November
6 December	21 December

*To be held in the Gevurat Israel Hall, North Shore Synagogue

The Last Word

Thank you to all of you who have contributed articles and news items, or have notified me of new websites. Without content, there is no *Kosher Koala*.

We have provided the National Library of Israel with copies of all previous issues of *Kosher Koala* and the *e-Report*, for their digital collection of newspapers and journals. At some future time you will be able to use their website to search all issues by keyword!

My wish list for 2015:

- ❖ More of your stories – whether they be about successes or failures, about your research processes, the family you found, the family lore you proved or disproved
- ❖ Your photographs – particularly images that might make the front page an eye-catching invitation to read on ...

Hag Sameach Chanukah to all!

Robyn Dryen
Editor

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