

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 25th May 2003 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating The Jewish Cemetery at East Perth

Citation by Mr David Mossenson

The first Jew to be buried in the old East Perth cemetery was the convict David Joseph, a thirty-eight year old Londoner who had been transported to Western Australia after being convicted on a charge of breaking and entering. Following his death in May 1867, not many months after his arrival in the colony, he was buried in the Church of England portion of the East Perth cemetery. Three of his fellow Jewish ticket-of-leave men — Abraham Rosenberg, Isaac Harris, and Henry Seeligson — had earlier appealed to the authorities seeking a separate burial ground for Jews. Governor Hampden acceded to their petition. Through the Executive Council he designated Perth Town Lot E72 containing one rood and thirty-two perches bounded on the north by Stokes Street, on the south by Wickham Street, on the east by North Plain Street, and on the west by Town Lot E73 to be "a cemetery for members of the Jewish persuasion".

Having fenced a section of the land assigned to them, and being permitted to exhume Joseph's body, Rosenberg and his associates re-interred it in their new graveyard in accordance with Jewish custom. Rosenberg and Harris then addressed the following letter of appreciation to the governor and his officials through the medium of the *Inquirer and Commercial News*:

Would you be kind enough to insert in your valuable paper one of the many kindnesses of His Excellency the Governor, namely — In August last year we petitioned to His Excellency to grant us a portion of land for a Jewish Cemetery which he freely granted; and we have completed our duty on Friday 6th instant, of fencing in a portion of the grant, and have had removed from the Church of England Cemetery to our new Cemetery the body of David Joseph, a Jew who died on the 1st May last and we have consecrated the new burial ground according to our law and custom. Now, on the part of ourselves and those of our persuasion in the colony, we feel ourselves bound to return to His Excellency our humble sincere thanks for his kindness and likewise to those gentlemen whom we gave so much trouble on this occasion, namely the Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. W.H. Knight, Mr. G. Phillips and Messrs. Charles and Bernard Evans. It is our earnest wish that Western Australia may become a large and prosperous colony, and that those Jews who may make the colony their home in after time will ever remember the great kindness of His Excellency the Governor and his officials of Western Australia.

We remain Sir

Your humble and obedient servants

Abraham Rosenberg

I. Harris

Perth, Dec 9th, 1867

Apart from the events surrounding its formation not much is known about the old Jewish cemetery at East Perth, and of the individuals who were interred there during the thirty-odd years that it operated as a burial ground. Throughout the 1870s and eighties Perth's Jewish population was quite tiny, numbering forty-three in the census of 1891. That year was nevertheless a notable one for the colony's Jews as it marked the first visit to Western Australia by an ordained minister of the Jewish religion. Reverend Abraham Tobias Boas of Adelaide spent several weeks in the colony at the behest of the Fremantle Jewish community which in those days was larger than that in Perth, and already possessed an organised though rudimentary congregation. One of the tasks Boas

performed during his stay was to consecrate the Jewish cemetery at East Perth.

Soon after its establishment in November 1892 the Perth Hebrew Congregation assumed control of the Jewish cemetery. No doubt this action was facilitated by Henry Seeligson, the surviving member of the three original trustees, who actively associated himself with the formation of the congregation.¹ For some years Solomon Levi Horowitz, one of the congregation's founders, served as honorary director of funerals. After Reverend Freedman's arrival in 1897 he took charge of all aspects of the congregation's religious activities, and within a few years he constituted an elective Chevra Kedisha to supervise burial arrangements.

When the Karrakatta Cemetery was brought into use after 1899 the East Perth cemetery was closed. Unfortunately the number of Jews who had been buried in the Jewish section on the western side of Plain Street must remain a mystery. Apparently no register of these burials or list of names was maintained by any official or private sources; certainly no such record is extant. With the passage of the years the headstones fell into disrepair and disintegrated.

From time to time in the new century suggestions were made to utilise the East Perth cemetery land located on the western side of Plain Street. This land had been allocated to various denominations and included the Jewish portion between Wickham Street and Wittenoom Street (formerly Stokes Street). Unlike the other allotments, the Jewish area had been partly fenced and was known to contain approximately twenty headstones.² In 1916 the Perth City Council sought to acquire the Jewish cemetery site and convert it into a public park. No reason is advanced?? to explain the council's failure to gain the necessary approval, but it can be inferred that the congregation refused to relinquish its holding.³ In 1932 following the continued deterioration of the old Jewish cemetery and the non-usage of other sections located west of Plain Street, the government of the day enacted legislation which vested these grants in the crown and placed their management in the hands of the State Gardens Board.⁴

No action followed the passage of this legislation for almost two decades. In the meantime the East Perth cemetery as a whole continued to deteriorate sadly. Also the Education Department sought access to nearby land to serve as playing

Memorial of the Real Estate Vested in the Trustees of the Perth Hebrew Congregation required to be registered under the provisions of the Associations Incorporation Act 1895

<u>Name of Trustees</u>	<u>Name of Incorporated Association</u>	<u>Description of property & Nature of Tenaancy</u>
<u>Abraham Rosenberg</u> <u>Isaac Harris</u> <u>Henry Seeligson</u>	<u>The Perth Hebrew Congregation Incorporated</u>	Parish Town Lot E72 Enrolled N. 2640 Bounded on the North by one and a half chains of Stokes Street. On the South by one and a half chains of Wickham Street. On the East by three chains of North Plain Street and on the West by Perth Town Lot E73 measuring three chains

I, Ernest Emanuel Erug of St Georges Terrace Perth Financier being one of the Executors of the late Henry Seeligson who was the last surviving Trustee hereinbefore referred to in this memorial DO HEREBY DECLARE that in the best of my knowledge and belief the above Memorial contains a true statement of the names of the Trustees in whom the Real Estate of the said Congregation was vested AND ALSO a true description of all such Real Estate.

Declared at Perth aforesaid
 This 28th day of August One thousand nine hundred and six

E E Erug

Before me ???

This Memorial is requested to be registered by William Percy Smail of St Georges Terrace Perth Public Accountant
 Signed by the said William Percy Smail
 In the presence of Alfred ???

fields for the East Perth Girls' School (now Police Traffic Branch). This action induced the government to act. Between 1950 and 1952 the East Perth cemetery was restored. Headstones were repaired where possible, rubble was removed and the area was generally cleaned and tidied. Part of this process entailed the closure of Wickham Street east of Plain Street with the resultant land being incorporated in the cemetery. In addition the northern boundary of the cemetery site was extended to Wittenoom Street.

In restoring the East Perth cemetery, now frequently referred to as Pioneers' Cemetery, the original Jewish portion of 1867 ceased to exist. The eight recognisable headstones it then contained were transferred to a new Jewish portion constituted for this purpose from part of the reclaimed former Wickham Street. The rubble from the collapsed and broken headstones was removed and buried in Karrakatta. The original Jewish cemetery remains today an unused block on the corner of Wickham, Wittenoom and Plain streets.

The eight headstones now preserved in the relocated site within the main cemetery area relate to burials undertaken by the Perth Hebrew Congregation between 1892 and 1899. The essential details contained in these memorials are as follows:

Abraham Kott, Aged 29 years, buried 1896;
Louis Hyam Seeligson, Aged 5 months, buried 1896;
Lipman Kaufman, Aged 39 years, buried 1898;
Philip Bernard Kensler, baby, buried 1897;
Charles Gustus Israel Cohen, Aged 3 years, buried 1896;
Eric Abraham Joseph, baby, buried 1898;
Barnett Fein, Aged 34 years, buried 1898.

The eighth stone bears no inscription and may be part of the headstone of Herman Salomons, aged fifty-nine years, buried 1896.

With the exception of David Joseph's name, and the names listed above, nothing is known of other Jews who had been buried in the old East Perth cemetery between the granting of the Jewish portion in 1867 and its use by the Perth Hebrew Congregation after 1892.

Today the Perth Hebrew Congregation possesses a substantial collection of documents covering its own activities and much of the history of Western Australian Jewry from the 1890s to the present day. In view of the completeness of these archives it is somewhat surprising, and also disappointing, that over the generations which encompassed the period 1892 to 1950 no congregational official recorded the data depicted on the other, then recognisable headstones at East Perth. As a consequence valuable information relating to Perth Jewry and its history, especially in the pre-gold rush days, has been irretrievably lost.

NOTES

1. Perth Hebrew Congregation Memorial dated 28 August 1906 following death of the remaining trustee.
2. Lands and Surveys File 2996/88.
3. Ibid. 1608/16.
4. East Perth Cemeteries Act 23 George V No. IX.