A Grand Vision: Henry Philip Harris and the History of Burlington Terrace

by Giselle Roberts

Part 1, which we published in the previous Newsletter, concerned Henry Phillip Harris and his family's building and occupation of Burlington Terrace on the corner of Albert and Lansdowne Streets. The following paper talks about the social and religious life of that part of Eastern hill.

PART 2

[As we saw in Part 1 of this paper] the location of Burlington Terrace rendered it an attractive residence for Jewish businessmen and leaders of the Melbourne and Albert Street synagogues. One of the Harris' first tenants was Reverend A.F. Ornstien, who had arrived in Australia in June 1866 to become 'the head of the Jewish denomination in Victoria.'(6) In 1868, he settled into life at Burlington Terrace and 'entered upon his duties [at the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation], which included preaching regularly on Sabbaths and Festivals and the reading of the Law.'(7)

Reverend Ornstien was just one of many prominent Jews who lived at Burlington Terrace. Rabbi Dr. Joseph Abrahams was probably the most well known and influential occupant of the Terrace.(8) Born in London in 1855, Abrahams was the 'first minister of the Congregation to be educated in Europe.' After completing his BA, MA, and PhD, Abrahams received his Rabbinical Diploma at the Hildescheimer seminary in Germany.(9) He arrived in Melbourne in 1883 as the appointed minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and took up residence at Burlington Terrace in 1886.

As a representative of Victoria's Jewish community, Abrahams was invited to the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, Federation celebrations, and the opening of Parliament.(10) Throughout his years of service to the Melbourne community, Rabbi Dr. Abrahams lived at Burlington Terrace.

In the late 1890s, journalist Maurice Brodzky lived next door to Rabbi Dr. Abrahams at number 388 Burlington Terrace. After migrating to Australia in 1872, Brodzky was employed as a teacher at the Melbourne Hebrew School and the Fitzroy Secular Academy.(11) He later became a journalist with the *Herald* and the Australian correspondent to the *London Daily Telegraph*. In 1877, Maurice Brodzky produced a comprehensive history of the Melbourne and East Melbourne Hebrew congregations. (12) He founded *Table Talk*, a newspaper he owned and edited between 1885 and 1903.(13) Described as one of the 'raciest' Australian publications, *Table Talk* enjoyed immense commercial success.(14) During the depression of the 1890s, Brodzky utilized his paper to investigate 'the land banks [and] the financial manipulations of the leading

men of the day.(15) He conducted and published the results of these investigations while he was a resident of Burlington Terrace.

Also a Polish born Jew, Philip Blashki's life at Burlington Terrace was less turbulent than Brodzky's. A prominent member of the Jewish community and the Freemasons, Blashki had pulled himself out of bankruptcy in the 1850s to become one of Melbourne's leading jewellers. (16) He designed the Sheffield Shield, held a 'monopoly on the manufacture of Masonic regalia in Australia,' and served on the committee of the Chamber of Manufactures. (17) Philip Blashki also worked 'tirelessly' for the Jewish community. He became president of the United Jewish Education Board in 1896, and assisted the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum

Politicians, professors, solicitors, consuls, and superintendents of police also lived at Burlington Terrace. Robert Walsh, MLA, occupied apartment number 4 in 1873. In the same year, Thomas Lyttleton, superintendent of police, lived at number 13 Burlington Terrace. Two years later, the new superintendent of police, Frederick Winch, took up residence at the Terrace. Other important dignitaries also chose to live at Burlington Terrace. Italian consul, C.L. Marinucci lived at apartment number 8 in 1875, and between 1884-1888, this terrace was also home to G.N. Copper, consul to Portugal. Other tenants include F.B. Clapp, founder of Melbourne's tramways, and Government analyst C.R. Blackett.(18)

Henry P. Harris cultivated a small community at Burlington Terrace. This ' community' was so well known that a Jewish football club made up of former students of the Hebrew School even named itself the 'Burlington Football Club!' Many of these ties were broken on 18 July 1892, when Henry Philip Harris, the owner and occupant of Burlington Terrace for over twenty years, died at the age of sixty-one.(19) His funeral procession to Melbourne General Cemetery began at the place he had built 26 years earlier. Described as a 'wealthy East Melbourne property owner,' Brodzky's *Table Talk* speculated that Harris 'had left a fortune not far short of eighty thousand pounds.'(20) By early September, details of his ' fortune' were published in *Table Talk*. The newspaper reported: 'his will is sworn at £27,000 real and £11,000 personal: total, £38,000.'(21)

Perhaps due to the economic conditions or her close ties to Burlington Terrace, Elizabeth Ackman Harris did not sell the property after her husband's death. Instead, she endured eight long and difficult years struggling to operate the Terrace in times of economic depression. While the Harris family had profited from Melbourne's boom in the 1870s-1880s, Elizabeth Harris confronted the harsh reality of 'bust' in the early 1890s. By 1894, tenants who had occupied Burlington Terrace for years

continued

were unable to remain due to the hard economic times. Seven houses were left vacant that year. Rabbi Dr. Abrahams, Edward Marks, Robert Morrison and Morris Cohen were the only tenants able to remain with Elizabeth throughout this bleak period.

By the late 1890s, Elizabeth had weathered the depression and let the Harris family apartments to predominantly female tenants.(22) In the early 1900s she moved from Burlington Terrace to Brighton. From her new home Elizabeth and her sons, Philip and Frederick Harris, managed the financial affairs of the Terrace. Philip lived at number 400 Burlington Terrace while Frederick continued to operate a store in Sale, Victoria.

Elizabeth Harris outlived both her sons: Frederick died in 1916, Philip in 1918. After her sons' death, Elizabeth's daughter, Ida Catherine Harris, became a part owner of the Terrace until 1920, when the women sold the property to Nancy Lawrence of Victoria Parade, East Melbourne. Elizabeth Ackman Harris died five years later, at the age of 86 .

And so ended a distinct chapter in the history of Burlington Terrace. After purchasing the property from Elizabeth and Ida Catherine Harris, Nancy Lawrence owned Burlington Terrace until 1928, when she died at the age of 54 years. At this time, Robert Leslie Walker of Hobart, Tasmania, inherited the building. During the 1930s, the property was owned by a plastering contractor named Charles Kitchener. In 1942, it was bought by Vadlure Investments, who leased the buildings as office space. The terraces continue to be used for commercial purposes.

In November 1974, the National Trust classified 'an important segment of East Melbourne... bounded by Morrison Place, Victoria Parade, Lansdowne Street and Albert Street.'(23) Burlington Terrace was regarded as the showpiece of the block, due to its architectural design and its ironwork balconies. Today, it is also included as a feature of Melbourne's Heritage Walks, which introduce lovers of nineteenth century architecture to the historic landmarks of Eastern Hill. These walks emphasise the iron fencing as an important component of the terrace, as well as the outside toilet, located off Lansdowne Street. Together with its architectural significance, Burlington Terrace stands as testimony to Henry Philip Harris' grand vision: a vision of home, family, business and community.

6. Aron and Arndt, *The Enduring Remnant*, p. 39. For a biographical sketch of Ornstien see pp. 38-44.
7. Ibid.
8. For a detailed biographical account of Rabbi Dr. Joseph Abrahams see Aron and Arndt, pp. 58-73.
9. H. Freedman and A.N. Super, *One Hundred Years: The Story of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, 1841-1941*, Melbourne, Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, 1941, p. 23.
10. Freedman and Super, P. 29; Aron and Arndt, P. 65
11. Hilary L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History: Volume One, 1788-1945*, Port Melbourne,

William Heinemann Australia, 1991, pp. 442-3.

12. Ibid., p. 443; Rubinstein, *The Jews in Victoria*, p. 45; Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney, Collins Australia, 1988, p. 128; Michael Cannon, *The Land Boomers*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1976, pp. 130-6; Maurice Brodzky, *Historical Sketch of the Two Melbourne Synagogues*.
13. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, p. 443; Rutland, Edge of the Diaspora, pp. 128-9; Hilary Rubinstein, *Chosen: The Jews in Australia*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987, p. 59.
14. Comments made by M. Oscar Commettant, French Representative at the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition, 1888, in Rutland, p. 129; Cannon, p. 132.
15. Cannon, p. 130.
16. On Blashki's bankruptcy see Rubinstein, *Chosen*, p. 13; Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, pp. 106-7
17. Rutland, p. 124; Rubinstein, *Chosen*, p. 54; Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*, p. 19; Goldman, p. 276.
18. National Trust of Victoria, 'Burlington Terrace'. See also Sands and McDougall directory, 1868-1900, State Library of Victoria.
19. See Melbourne *Age*, 18 July 1892.
20. *Table Talk*, State Library, Victoria, 22 July 1892, p. 3.
21. Ibid., 2 September 1892, p. 11.
22. See Sands and McDougall directories, 1896, 1897,1898, 1899, 1900.
23. 'East Melbourne Area Classification,' *Trust Newsletter*, Volume 3, Number 6, February 1975, p. 5.

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