

Synagogue of the Outback Museum

By Margaret Lee Price

Events

In March 2018 the Synagogue of the Outback Museum had the pleasure of participating in and helping host a celebratory happening: a five-day visit of sixty members from the Orthodox Jewish Ark Centre in Hawthorn, Melbourne. It was the most significant event that happened for the Museum in 2018. It has led to a marked increase in interest and support for the work of the Museum as well as to all kinds of marvellous acquisitions through gifts and donations.

So, how *did* this event happen?

Late in 2017, members of the Ark Centre Congregation, Mr and Mrs Lawrence Paratz, on a flying visit to South Australia, detoured their flight through Broken Hill because they had heard, but couldn't believe, there was a Synagogue here! When they discovered there was, they returned to Melbourne and organised to fly to the Hill in November 2017 with Rabbi Shneur Reti-Waks, the Rabbi of the Ark Centre.

It was a foggy November Friday in Melbourne, and the plane was delayed. By the time the Rabbi and Lawrence Paratz had landed in Broken Hill there was almost no time to explore the whole of the Synagogue of the Outback Museum. However, there was time for some Broken Hill residents, including the Mayor, Darriea Turley, to meet with the Rabbi in the old Synagogue. Before he left the Rabbi sang a beautiful prayer. He also said, very firmly, 'I will be bringing people back.' And, indeed, he brought the promised people back from the 8th to the 12th of March, 2018.

Some members of the Ark Centre congregation drove and some flew to Broken Hill. The caterers for the group drove a large truck up from Melbourne laden with kosher food. During the five days of the visit, all food eaten by members of the Ark Centre was delivered from the truck to the kitchen in the Salvation Army Hall for preparation. It was then served in the Hall's dining room.

Doctor Howard Goldenberg, who participated in the 2010 Centenary of the Synagogue Foundation Stone, helped organise and lead the visit. Others joining with the Ark Centre were educator Robyn Dryen, descendant of the pioneering Krantz, Dryen and Lakovsky families of Broken Hill, and Paula Edelman, daughter of Alwyn Edelman, who helped secure the Synagogue building for posterity. Former Broken Hill resident and BHHSoc member Professor Leon Mann AO, social scientist and co-author of *Jews of the Outback: The Centenary of the Broken Hill Synagogue 1910-2010* (Hybrid, 2010), also joined the visit.

One of the planned events during the visit was a walking tour of former Jewish businesses and homes led by well-known Broken Hill personality, Margot White, a coordinator of the previous Town Tour Guides, and Professor Leon Mann.



Part of the tour group in Argent Street in front of the Astra Hotel. Professor Mann and Margot White are third and fourth from the left. Margaret Lee Price is third from the right

Leon Man also led the group to the corner of Blende and Bagot Streets, where his father had once had a shop.



Professor Mann in front of his father's shop

Another event was a Sunday afternoon guided tour of the Jewish section of the Broken Hill cemetery co-led by Robyn Dryen and Leon Mann.

Traditional Jewish Friday night and Saturday morning and afternoon religious services were held in the Synagogue.



Women from the Ark Centre Melbourne praying in the Synagogue

It was amazing to see and hear Rabbi Shneur Reti-Waks read from the Torah, the first time a Torah had been read in the Synagogue since 1962.

Other lovely moments during the Ark Centre visit came when the men, wearing traditional prayer shawls (tallit) and phylacteries (tefillin) gathered in the Synagogue for Monday morning prayers.



Rabbi Shneur Reti-Waks is on the right at the very back

Following the Ark Congregation visit Leon Mann spoke after the Broken Hill History Society (BHHSoc) Annual General Meeting on 'Writing about the Broken Hill Jewish community: Looking back and looking forward' (see BHHSoc *Journal and Proceedings* 2017, vol. 53, pp. 52–59). To celebrate his eightieth birthday Leon Mann made a generous donation to the Museum, some of which will be used to construct a bench in front of the Synagogue for rest and contemplation.

Acquisitions, by gift

In 2017 a Mr Ronald Zmood from Victoria visited the synagogue and asked if we had a Torah, to which our answer was 'no'. In February in 2018 he and his wife Devorah returned with a replica he had made of a portion of a Torah scroll.



Torah scroll replica

The glass case that holds the replica Torah scroll was constructed and donated by Benzion Erez and his wife Barbara.

Sam and Ada Moshinsky of Melbourne, who attended the 2010 Centenary of the Synagogue Foundation Stone Celebrations, donated a 'Gragger' or Noisemaker, used to drown out Evil Haman's name every time it is pronounced when 'Megillah Esther' is read during the Festival of Purim.



Photo: Gragger

Following the Ark Centre visit, members of the Ark Centre sent gifts to the Museum. One member sent us a new mezuzah cover for the small parchment scroll placed on the doorpost of the Synagogue and inscribed with specific Hebrew verses from the Torah.



Photo: The mezuzah

Another acquisition gifted is a Chanukah Menorah, the candelabra with eight branches, one for each night of the eight nights of the Jewish Festival of Chanukah. The Menorah now sits on top of the Ark in the Synagogue.



The Chanukah Menorah on the top of the Ark

The Ark Centre also gave to the Synagogue of the Outback a Kiddush Cup, so that we might remember their visit.



Kiddush Cup

The LawrenceParatz family donated, in 2017, a book titled *Pentateuch and Haftorahs (The Five Books of the Bible)* on behalf of the Ark Centre and in appreciation of the work of the BHHSoc in preserving the Synagogue. It is placed in the Ark when no Torah scroll is available.

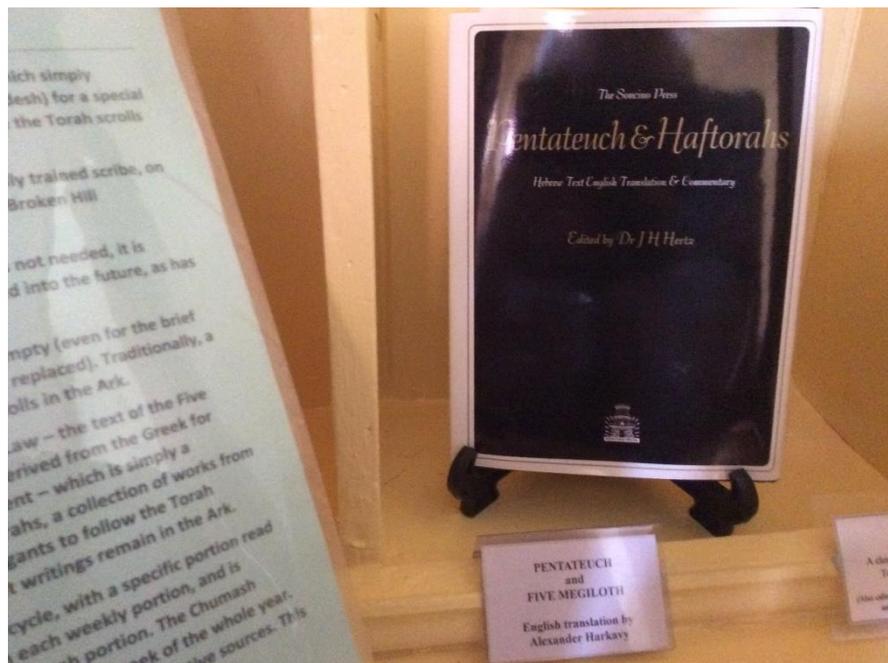


Photo: Pentateuch and Haftorahs

An amazing aspect of our acquisitions is that none of the gift donors from the Ark Centre had ever before had a connection with the Synagogue of the Outback Museum. It is incredibly moving that the Ark Centre's members have taken our Synagogue Museum to their hearts during 2018.

Preservation

This year has also seen much needed work completed around the Synagogue and Ralph Wallace Research Centre buildings.

The first project was the construction of a large covered area at the rear of the Research Centre.

Then, Sureway secured funding to cover a work-for-the-dole project. This focused on laying pavement from the front of the Synagogue yard to the rear of the Research Centre building and was supervised by Dale Pascoe.

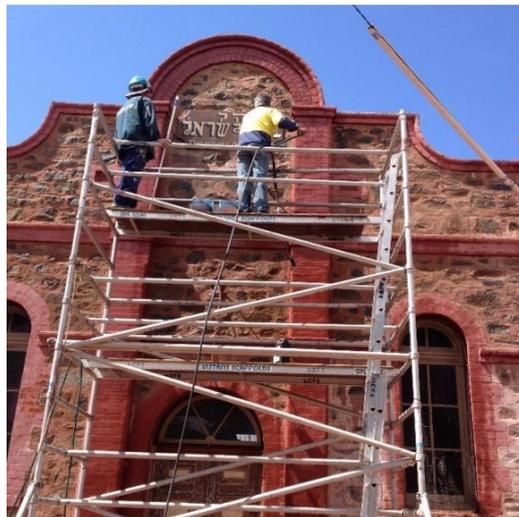


Building the covered area



New pavement

Additional funding was provided through an emergency grant from New South Wales' Department of Environment and Heritage. It was used to cover items for repair that were not covered by insurance, following the 2016 hail storm. The front and sides of the Synagogue were re-pointed, gutters replaced, window shades repaired, roof repaired and painting undertaken to restore the building back to its original state.



Re-pointing the front of the Synagogue

Internally, the building needed sealing since, after the roof repairs, dirt leaked over the walls.

Thanks to Chris DeFranceschi and his co-worker, all work on the Synagogue building was carried out under the guidelines of the Burra Charter, which are a set of principles adopted to create a nationally accepted standard for heritage conservation, and heritage listed buildings, in Australia.

Acknowledgements in memoriam

The Synagogue Coordinator wishes to acknowledge, in memoriam, the volunteer help and assistance given over recent years to the Synagogue of the Outback Museum by the these late BHHSoc members:

- Vivian (Peggy) Bowden, who painted a picture of the Synagogue, which hangs in the Synagogue building dining room;
- Val Anderson, a person of many talents who gave me help in so many ways, and always with words of encouragement; and
- Joy Fenton, who did the compilation of the contents of the Church Room in the Synagogue, and so much more.

About the author: Margaret Lee Price is a lifetime member of the BHHSoc and has been the Coordinator of the Synagogue of the Outback Museum for some 10 years. Margaret gratefully acknowledges advice on this report, and additional contributions to it, from Professor Leon Mann.