

Jewish Religion and Culture

Juliet Flesch on Jewish Study Resources in Melbourne

Much of the time of the Collection Development Division is taken up with discussing with academic and library staff what resources the University of

Melbourne Library has or can acquire to support the teaching and research programmes of the University. Of necessity, our view is, to a certain extent, inward-looking. Students and academics are principally concerned with what they can lay their hands on easily, and need in many cases to be coaxed into using resources outside their immediate vicinity. Such coaxing, however, is also part of our

job, since we cannot buy, process, or house everything our readers might want.

Although our principal expertise lies in working out what people need, where we can get it from and how we can pay for it, it is vital that we be aware of resources outside our own library so that we can best judge what we should be trying to acquire. This may on occasion involve considerable investigation. What follows is the result of my own attempt to locate the most important resources for the study of Jewish religion and culture in Melbourne.

It is notable that very few of the relevant repositories are listed in the publications in which one might expect to find them. The Guide to collections in Victorian special libraries, compiled by the LAA Special Libraries Section Victorian Group in 1987, contains no entries whatsoever under Jewish, Judaica or indeed Religion. The Directory of special libraries in Australia 8th edition, 1991, while listing several New South Wales

institutions, does not list any in Victoria. The world of learning is no help either, and at this point one might feel inclined to give up. One would be wrong, however, to deduce that the resources aren't there; they just need to be found.

There are other directories to Victorian libraries, both general and specialist. One of them, the Directory of collection strengths in Victorian libraries, published in 1986 by the LAA Acquisitions Section, Victorian Group, is disappointing, in that it lists very few of the resources even in academic libraries.

A useful and immediately relevant directory is Coralie Jenkin's recently published Collections of religion and theology in Australia and New Zealand. This was published in 1992 by Auslib and a quick look through reveals almost 20 Melbourne libraries which contain material relating specifically to Jewish studies or the study of comparative religions. Some caution is needed in using this directory and Gary Gorman's review in a recent issue of AARL draws attention to some shortcomings. Certainly the entry for The University of Melbourne Library contains some minor errors, probably the result either of misunderstandings or faulty proof-reading, but the information on specific subject strengths is valuable.

Also very useful is the information on who to ring to make an appointment to visit. Many theological and other special libraries are small, making visits from large groups inadvisable if not impossible. Many of these libraries are charged with providing a service to a specific category of user and while librarians will rarely refuse access to their collections to bona fide researchers

outside their constituency, they will, understandably, let outsiders in only when they will not inconvenience the regular clientele. In her introduction, Jenkin notes that many libraries refused to be listed in the directory precisely because they were unwilling to open their doors "to the public", so you will need to check before you visit.

This leads me to the vexed question of privately-owned libraries. There are two very large collections in Jewish studies known to me, which belong to individuals. One contains about 20,000 titles. I am not going to tell you who owns either. Both collections are well-known in the Jewish community and you may, if you pursue your enquiries in depth, find that someone suggests you get in touch with one of the owners; otherwise, we just have to accept that private property is exactly that, nobody's business except the owner's.

There are, however, many collections which are open to the public, either just by walking in off the street or by appointment, some of which are outlined in the following.

Melbourne possesses one of Australia's great libraries, the State Library of Victoria. We are perhaps over-used, especially in recent years, to tales of the dire straits in which the State Library finds itself. We should not allow this to blind us to the enormous riches it contains. Specifically, in this area, the State Library houses Victorian-published Jewish newspapers and those of local communities with substantial Jewish populations as well as newsletters and other serials. It is in community newspapers and periodicals that local news, advertisement and review of events and publications of local and community interest occur. The material in the State Library will, therefore, lead the enquirer to further resources as well as providing a picture of community life and concerns.

The La Trobe Library, within the State Library of Victoria, also holds the records of a number of community organisations and individuals, including the large number of Jews prominent in Victoria's cultural, commercial and political history, so a check there is an obvious starting point for anyone seeking community and historical information.



Illustrations from the *Mantua Haggaadah*, 1360

The University of Melbourne Library provides almost an embarrassment of riches as the many facets of Jewish studies have been a longstanding focus for academic enquiry. The Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies was the first such department set up in an Australian university. An interdepartmental major in Jewish studies is possible and the subjects taught include Syria and Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages, the New Testament and Judaism in Ancient Palestine, Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, Modern Jewish literature, Israel in Egypt, Jews in the English-speaking world, Christians and Jews in Medieval Europe, the Holocaust and Modern Jewish history from the mid-eighteenth century to the



present. The languages offered include Hebrew and Aramaic.

The Library, to support all this, has assembled an impressive collection of material in many languages including German, Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish as well as English. In 1988, through the generosity of a Jewish community group, it became the first (indeed the only) library in Australia to acquire a Comprehensive collection from the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. The Center is dedicated to salvaging Yiddish culture from extinction by seeking out Yiddish books which have survived the Holocaust and placing them in research libraries. This collection includes over 1,000 titles in Yiddish, many of them quite rare and has formed a fine basis for an area of increasing academic interest.

We have built on this collection by the steady acquisition of Memorial Books, the volumes published after the Second World War to commemorate communities destroyed in the Holocaust. We have also acquired significant microform resources such as the Jewish displaced persons periodicals from the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, a project which, in 33 reels of microfilm, reproduces some 150 dailies, weeklies, monthlies and broadsides published from the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s in the Displaced Persons camps of Western Europe.

An Infoguide produced in the Library in 1984 lists 26 pages of German Judaica in the collection, ranging from reference works to community histories, biographical works, material on Zionism and anti-Semitism in Germany, etc., etc. and the collection has been steadily expanded since then. As another example of the richness of our holdings, you may be interested to know that a few years ago, we were able to mount, from our own resources, an exhibition on German synagogue architecture.

As well as enormous resources on German Jewry generally and on the Holocaust, in print and in microform, the University of Melbourne Library has an impressive collection of Judaic manuscript treasures in facsimile, including the Kennicott Bible, the Rothschild Miscellany, the Barcelona Haggadah and the Pessach Haggadah. These facsimiles are themselves rare books produced in strictly limited editions. They may be inspected in our Special Collections Reading Room.

In studies of Australian Jewry, without impinging on the areas of special responsibility of the State Library of Victoria, the University of Melbourne Library has a far from negligible resource. The University Archives, for example, contains material relating to the Myer Emporium, John Monash's Reinforced Concrete and Monier Pipe Construction Company Limited, the City Property Company Limited, floated by Benjamin Fink, and a small collection relating to the life and work of the late Mina and Leon Fink. The Archives also contains papers of many prominent Jewish members and former members of the academic staff, including, for instance, the notable lawyer Julian Philips, whose name will be familiar to you from various civil rights cases.

The Meanjin Archive also contains manuscripts of a wide variety of Jewish Australian writers and the Library, as part of its general collecting of Australiana, has acquired books by many Australian Jews in all fields of scholarship and creative writing. The Library's Music Branch also contains examples, in print and in recorded form, of the work of Jewish musicians.

Turning from the University of Melbourne Library to other libraries and resource centres in Melbourne, I found

the Jenkin directory very helpful. I would, however, urge you to inventiveness when you strike a problem like this. I myself located a dozen or so likely repositories before I looked at Jenkin, by looking up the Melbourne phone book and talking to one or two useful academic contacts.

In the phone book, I started under "Jewish" and for the academic input, I started with someone whose research interest is German Jewish history and who teaches in this area and in our Holocaust course, as well as supervising students writing theses across the field of Jewish history.

The Australian Catholic University, Mercy Campus, with a collection of over 30,000 books claims subject strength in religions other than Christianity.

The Australian Institute of Archaeology, with a collection of 7,000 monographs, is strongest in the field of near eastern archaeology and scholarship relating to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The City of Caulfield Library Service with libraries at Caulfield and Elsternwick catering for a large Jewish community, has special strengths in Judaica noted in Jenkin and has in addition some 1,000 adult works of literature, history, general Jewish culture, etc. The Library also holds between 200 and 300 children's books in Hebrew. (This last may well be the strongest collection in the state.)

St Kilda Public Library houses an extensive collection of novels in Hebrew and Yiddish, complemented by good collections of material in English relating to Jewish life and culture, including a strong reference collection.

Deakin University, Toorak Campus, formerly the Victoria College, Toorak Campus holds material in English, Hebrew, Yiddish and French.

The Joint Theological Library at Ormond College, University of Melbourne has a collection of some 112,000 monographs and 360 serials. Its collections are owned by the institutions which support it, not by a single institution.

The Jewish Cultural Centre and National Library "Kadimah" offers con-



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and moderns.

Whilst *Stream* ceased publication in 1931, the Leonardo "thrived within stagnant Melbourne culture"⁷. Artists like Arnold Shore and Adrian Lawlor, interested in modern art in the late twenties, acknowledged the influence of the Leonardo. It is not surprising then that in 1937, when the modernist camp joined forces to oppose the formation of the Australian Academy of Art by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, the discussions took place in the Leonardo. In response to the conservative proposal for an Academy George Bell and other Melbourne moderns issued a pamphlet "To art lovers". It invited anyone interested in joining the Contemporary Art Society to contact Nibbi or Adrian Lawlor at the Leonardo. Bell and his group acted quickly and on 13th July 1938 the Contemporary Art Society was formed with Bell as President. Modern art had officially arrived in Melbourne and the Leonardo had been its physical and ideological host.

In 1947 Nibbi closed his shop and returned to Rome. After its association with *Stream* and the Contemporary Arts Society, in the forties it continued as it had done initially, to supply readers and particularly art lovers with the latest from Europe. Throughout its nineteen year existence in Melbourne, it had been a progenitor and nurturer of the avant garde.

So the Book Lover and the Leonardo were involved in promoting and pioneering literature and ideas, and the enduring Melbourne tradition of book shops which are by no means just about the selling of books.

¹ Sendy, J. *Melbourne's Radical Bookshops*, Melbourne, 1983, p. 23.

² Henderson, L. M. *The Goldstein Story*, 1973, p. 169.

³ Ibid.

⁴ O'Grady, D. "Sincerely Gino Nibbi", *Overland*, No. 111, June 1988.

⁵ Tregenza, J. *Australia's Little Magazines*, Adelaide, 1964, p. 39.

⁶ *Stream*, Vol 1, No. 1, July 1931.

⁷ O'Grady, op. cit.

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siderable resources in Yiddish material. About 50,000 volumes in Yiddish and 1,000 in English are held in addition to serials from all over the world. The whole range of Jewish culture is covered, with some emphasis on Eastern European Jewry both before and after the Second World War, but this is not a religious library, and little specifically religious Judaica is held. The library is open for very restricted hours, confined in fact to Sunday mornings, but the librarian is willing to show small groups over the library at other times by prior arrangement. You will need to telephone her at the Braille and Talking Book Library on 867 6022 to arrange a time.

The Makor Library and Resource Centre holds some 6,000 monographs, covering Jewish history and culture, the Holocaust and the Australian Jewish community. As well as its monograph collection and almost 100 serial titles, it holds a considerable video collection and an important clippings file. The Librarian has asked me specifically to tell you that although there is a charge of \$4.00 to borrow from the Library, she will be happy to show you around free of charge. I have been asked, however, to point out that an appointment will be necessary. The Library is in cramped quarters and simply cannot accept large groups. It is, however, a major resource in the field and should be seen.

The Jewish Holocaust Centre and the Jewish Museum of Australia both hold important collections. The Holocaust Centre took over the Holocaust material from Kadimah some years ago. Its collection is available for consultation but not for loan. The Centre is open during the mornings from Monday to Thursday. It is very small, and you should ring to make an appointment before appearing at the door.

The Library of the Leo Baeck Centre in East Kew holds some 1,400 monographs while the Kew Hebrew Congregation also has resources in the Library attached to the synagogue.

Monash University is expanding its Jewish studies courses, and while its collections are far from the strength of Melbourne University's the two institutions are endeavouring to work in cooperation rather than competition, so one may

expect in the future to find specific titles at Monash which are not held at Melbourne.

The Northeastern Jewish War Memorial Centre is staffed by volunteers and open only on Sundays. Its collection of some 1,500 books covers all aspects of Judaica.

So far, I have concentrated on describing some collections. If you really want to know what's in them, however, you need to get to see them. I have also concentrated on institutions with collections specifically of Judaica or material produced for or by Jews. Of course, if your interests extend to modern Israeli politics, for example, you will find a different battery of libraries offering collections in Arabic, the history of other Middle Eastern countries, etc.

I am sure there are libraries and collections I have missed and one way of identifying these would be to consult some of the many books written on the history of Jews in this country. A look at the acknowledgments pages of these works will give clues about collections of relevant material. The recent 2 volume history by Hilary and W.D. Rubinstein on the Jews in Australia, and Serge Liberman's Bibliography of Australian Judaica, as well as Marianne Dacy's union list of Periodical publications from the Australian Jewish community are a few cases in point.

As well as these information sources, one finds, as one visits the various libraries, that the librarians themselves provide additional information and contacts. This kind of networking is invaluable to anyone embarking on a quest for library resources in any field. It is, however, most likely to be successful if you can refine your search and do the basic spadework yourself.

The moral of all this, I suppose, is that no matter how badly the mainstream reference works seem to let one down, there are always other avenues one can pursue. In this case, while offering special thanks to Dr John Foster of the Melbourne University History Department, I should also pay tribute to the Melbourne telephone directory, which provided my starting point and enabled me to obtain a great deal of cooperation and assistance from others.

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