

# **A Jewish-Australian Family: an ancestral story of Beatrice Janet Bowie née Kirsner**

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# A Jewish-Australian Family: an ancestral story of Beatrice Janet Bowie née Kirsner

(Ian Bowie)

Beatrice Janet Bowie née Kirsner (Beetle) is a fourth/fifth generation Australian whose migrant ancestors came from 'the Continent' via England. In her lineage she is Ashkenazi Jewish, a semitic people historically bonded by their religion. As such, she has inherited a documented though contested history going back thousands of years. However, because of the Diaspora and the problems of language and extant records she has not been able to trace her lineage back many generations until recently.

Beetle's more immediate ancestry (on the chart below) is from two distinct lines, Anglo-Jews on her mother's side and Eastern European Jews on her father's. Until recently we knew something of the Anglo-Jews from family and published records (including information passed on to Beetle from her mother about the forebears of Beetle's English-born grandfather and Australian-born grandmother). Research, particularly by Rodney Benjamin, Rhonda Maher (the Harts) and John Nathan, and by more distant cousins has amplified that knowledge.

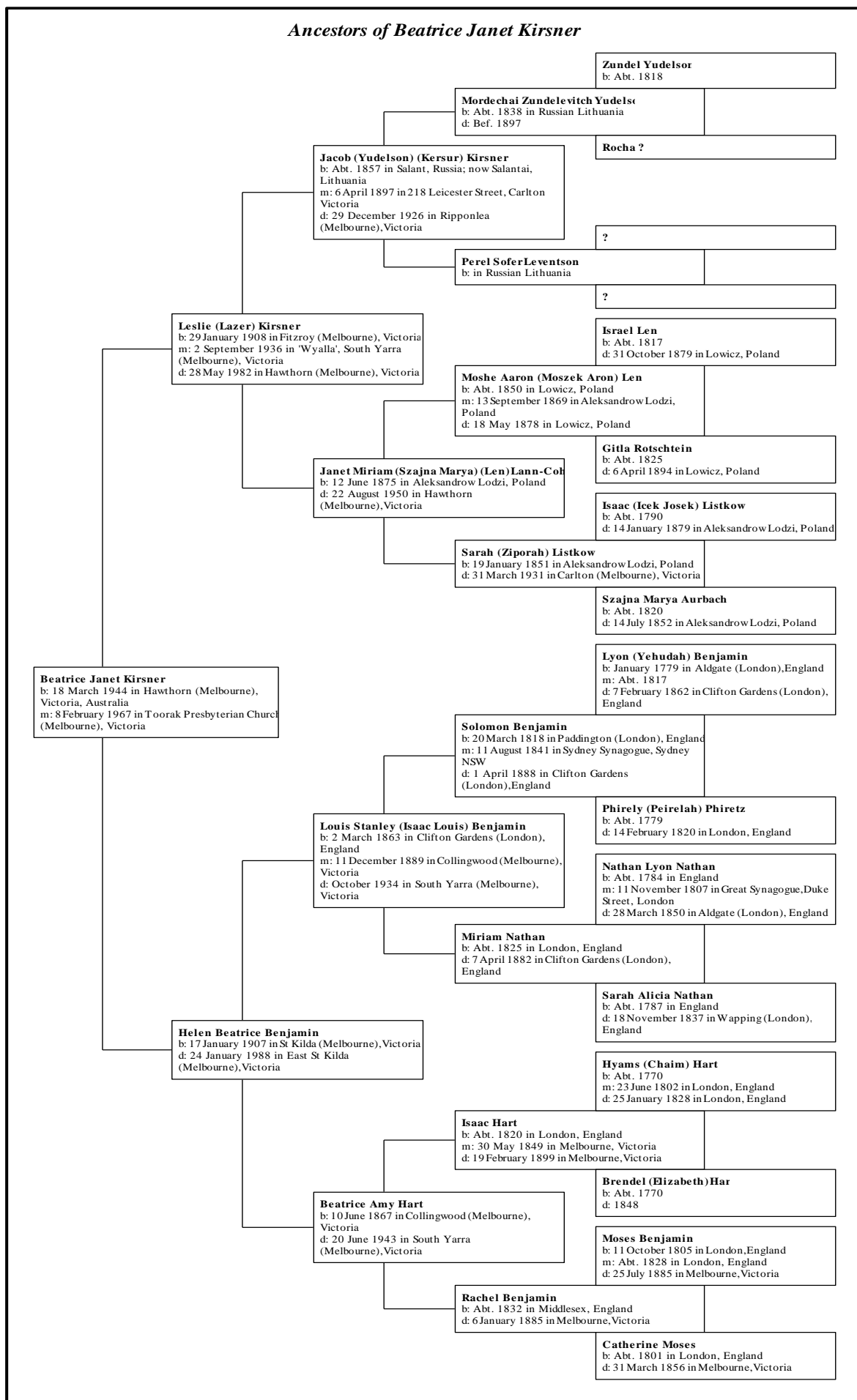
We didn't give much thought to what Beetle's mother had passed on until Beetle started to look seriously at her family history in 2008. Since then, we have corroborated much of Helen's information against information from other family members and in both official records and newspaper reports and as we checked information on births, marriages, and deaths, and digitised images and all our supporting documents, these have been saved into a substantial 'collection' of digital files.

The checking of information was a learning process, so it was only in 2011 that we realised that Beetle held a genealogical gold mine in four 'registers' that had been compiled for Benjamin and Hart ancestors of information on names, births, marriages, and deaths and which had passed previously to Helen. With few records before official registrations these registers are of historical importance for Beetles' extended family. Because we cannot store them properly, Beetle has donated the hard copies to the Jewish Museum of Australia in Melbourne.

Comparable information on Beetle's Eastern European forebears is not available, but Maureen Goldberg introduced us to genealogical information about them in official Australian migration, naturalisation, marriage, death, and other records which have Beetle's paternal grandparents born respectively in Russian Lithuania (her grandfather) and the then Russian Duchy of Poland (her grandmother).

Armed with information from a memoir by her Kirsner father shared by Ruth Cameron we contacted distant cousins in Australia and Britain and after visiting Lithuania and Poland in 2011 we became brave enough to overcome language and other barriers to obtain official information about Beetle's nineteenth century Polish ancestors. European records now amplify information in Australian records which is not always consistent and which sometimes list names that differed from the Jewish, or Russian-ised or Germanic, ones used in Europe.

## Ancestors of Beatrice Janet Kirsner



More recently, DNA matching has linked Beetle to names in perhaps thirteen earlier generations of maternal ancestors of Ashkenazi Jews who arrived in England through the Netherlands from adjacent parts of western Europe ('Ashkenaz' is the Hebrew word for Germany). So far, DNA matching has not extended to what has been learned about perhaps six earlier generations who lived in the Russian Pale in Poland and Lithuania, but her DNA suggests that these ancestors also had moved through what is now Germany.

It is somewhat to our surprise now, that Beetle has information on many of the important events in the lives of most in her last four preceding generations, has corroborated much of this information, discovered and met relatives she'd not known about at the start of this adventure, and obtained much new information, notably from on-line sources (such as [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org) and Jim Falk's [www.meta-studies.net](http://www.meta-studies.net) as well as publications by (distant relatives) Rodney Benjamin and John Levi.

In the process of establishing Beetles' lineage we have acquired many images and documentary records. Perhaps more Eastern European civil records, and British and Western European family records, will become accessible in time. Perhaps also, discrepancies among the names matched to Beetle by Ancestry DNA ThruLines that have arisen because of step marriages, marriages between close cousins, and simply name changes will be clarified.

But, with the help of a great deal of information from online and family sources, we now can tell a fuller story than was known even a few decades ago and we have posted this online in 2023 to share it with others. The story here includes no images or references but for anyone wanting them, we have deposited a digital copy of the images and documents we hold with the Australian and New Zealand Societies of Genealogists.

## The Anglo-Jews

### The Benjamins (and Moses)

The Jewish family names Benjamin, Hart, Nathan, and Moses in the ancestries of Beetle's maternal grandparents are of ancestors who appear to have moved through what are now Alsace, Lower Saxony, Poland, Sweden, and then England. Benjamin ancestors are reported to have been born in Amsterdam and Nathan ancestors in Amersfoort in the middle of the eighteenth century, but the Moses and Harts appear to have been in England earlier, possibly in the sixteenth century in the case of the Moses. These families lived in various English port cities but especially in the east end of London by the late eighteenth century.

From these cities, small cohorts of often-closely intermarried families which had accumulated modest prosperity as traders and dealers made their way to Australia and New Zealand in the early decades of the nineteenth century. So, it is in England that Beetle's known ancestral story started, from two children of Nathan Lyon Nathan and Sarah Nathan, Miriam (shown in the chart above) and her brother David, and from children of two of of Lyon (Yehuda) Benjamin's wives (Miriam Moses and Phireley (Pierelah) Phiretz), although Beetles' first Australian-born ancestor was Beatrice Amy Hart (born in Victoria in 1867).

Lyon (Yehuda) Benjamin might be regarded as the patriarch of the Anglo-Jewish side of Beetle's extended family. His Hebrew name, sounding like 'Yehuda bar Binyamin Bunem', suggests that his father's given name was Benjamin, and that his father may have been known as 'Bunem' before or

after his possible arrival in England from Holland at a time before family names became settled in western Europe. This Benjamin has been plausibly linked by DNA to a family that appears to have been known in Amsterdam as 'Shochet' or 'Soughet').

We do not know how, when, or why the Soughet line in the Netherlands became Beetle's Benjamins in England. Apart from what is in Solomon Benjamin's 'register' of births, deaths and marriages no record of his own birth or of vital details pertaining to any of his siblings or their parents has been found in, for instance, English or Dutch synagogue records. So, Lyon's name and origins are clouded in mystery, though matching of DNA and family trees by Ancestry indicates with some certainty the names of his wives and of his mother.

It has been suggested that 'Bunem' (which has been used elsewhere as a given name and as a family name) might have been a nickname, and online that 'Bunem' or 'Bunheim' might have derived from the French 'bon homme' or 'good man'. It has also been suggested that it might have been a corruption of the name that sounded like 'Benjamin', which would be consistent with Lyon adopting 'Benjamin' as his family name. Beetle's mother recorded Lyon's father as 'Benjamin Benjamin', so it now seems certain that he was not named Abraham.

Lyon was reported in the 1841 census to have been a slops-(clothing) seller and claimed in 1851 to have been born in Aldgate (in the east end of London). He has been confused with other Lyon Benjamins who included a sealing wax maker in The Strand who was a signatory to the 1797 lease of the Western (Denmark Court – in Westminster) independent synagogue – but 'our' Lyon would have been too young and too far from The Strand. However, 'our' Lyon did make sufficient to have retired by 1851. He was buried as a member of the New synagogue (Ashkenazi Orthodox), in the East End.

Our Lyon's patriarchy rests on six children by three wives (the first two of whom, Miriam and Peirelah (Phirley), may have died in childbirth; Beetle traces her descent from both, through Lyon's sons Moses and Solomon respectively). It was only in his last years that he could have enjoyed his patriarchy however because all six of his children to reach adulthood migrated to Australia and only Solomon (with whom Lyon was living at his death) and David returned with their children to live in England, in 1853 and 1854 respectively.

Samuel, one of Solomon's half-brothers, arrived in Sydney on the *Ann* in 1833 where he quickly established Benjamin & Moses as a general warehouse variously in Castlereagh Street and in George Street (opposite the present town hall) in partnership with Elias Moses, a cousin and shipmate who became his brother-in-law in 1835. The firm prospered, with branch stores in Windsor and Goulburn between 1837 and 1855 as well as manufacturing enterprises. Samuel became a leading member of Sydney's Jewish community and he purchased land also on Collins Street in Melbourne.

Solomon, one of Beetle's great grandfathers, seems to have followed or accompanied his older half-brother David to Launceston where David had arrived on the *Henry* in 1838 with goods to establish a clothing and general store at *Tamar House*. After visits to Port Phillip in November by one of the brothers, a second general store was set up in Melbourne as *Cheapside House* (on the corner of Collins and Queen Street, 'the oldest establishment in Melbourne') in February 1839 (when a Mr Benjamin, thought to have been Solomon, arrived in Port Phillip on the *Wallaby*). In April 1840 the brothers began trading as D & S Benjamin, with Solomon based in Melbourne and David in Launceston.

David (in 1840 in Van Diemen's Land) and Solomon (in 1841 in Sydney) married Esther Solomon (who'd arrived in 1829) and Miriam Nathan (who arrived with siblings David and Esther),

respectively. Moses (another half-brother) with wife Catherine (née Moses) and their six living children followed the brothers from England to Victoria on the *London* in 1843, apparently expecting to join the 'family firm'. Moses set up the rival firm of M Benjamin & Sons in Collins Street but joined his brothers in D S & M Benjamin between 1846 and 1854. Their sisters, Sarah (Myers) and Harriet (Hart) went to Adelaide.

Catherine (Benjamin née Moses) was from yet another Jewish family which migrated to Australian colonies from the East End of London, in this case six siblings (four with their spouses) who arrived separately between 1831 and 1843, apparently at the urging of two of them, Samuel Moses (in 1831; he later returned to live in England) and Elias Moses (1833, mentioned above), during separate visits to England. Nothing much is known about their parents, but their father (Moses Moses) may well have been a clothing dealer of that name known to have traded in Whitechapel.

In late 1846 (via the *Shamrock*) David, who had led the building of a synagogue in Launceston in 1844, moved his family to Melbourne where Solomon had helped to establish the Jewish Congregational Society which held its first *minyan* (services) in the Benjamin's *Cheapside House* from 1841. Solomon (then the president of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation) laid the foundation stone for Melbourne's first synagogue in Bourke Street in 1847; David (as president in 1853) laid the foundation stone for the building that replaced it.

Solomon, David, and Moses Benjamin became substantial landowners in Williamstown, Melbourne and elsewhere (and David a Melbourne director of the Bank of NSW in 1853). After gold was found in Victoria, they branched out into gold trading and became very wealthy, sufficient that Solomon and David were able to take their families back to England (Solomon in 1853 on the *Waratab* to Sydney, thence the *RMS Melbourne* to London and David 1854 on the *Prince Alfred*), to live with their large families (apparently in retirement) at fashionable addresses in Maida Hill, London.

After the partnership of the three brothers was wound up at the start of 1853, David and Moses Benjamin continued in a partnership until 1854 when it was dissolved leaving Moses who subsequently owned a wholesale firm in Melbourne. One of Moses' sons, Benjamin, was to become the first Jewish Mayor of Melbourne and first Jew to be knighted in Victoria; one of his daughters, Rachel, was to be Beetle's maternal great grandmother.

Solomon returned to England with Miriam and their six living (of seven) children. They proceeded to add a further ten children to their family in Harley and then Brunswick Houses in Clifton Gardens. Subsequently, six of their sons and a daughter (Miriam Sanders) lived in Australia, although Leo and Arthur returned to England in 1892 (and Frederick around then). Solomon lived the rest of his life in England but made a brief return visit to Melbourne in either 1877 or 1878 (perhaps for the reopening of the Melbourne synagogue in 1877 and returning on the *RMS Tanjore* in 1878) when he was not accompanied by Miriam, who was to die in 1882.

In England, Solomon and his family were well-to-do and generous to many charities including the Jewish Board of Guardians of the Poor and ones concerned with the plight of Jews overseas. He was actively involved in the Great Synagogue and then from 1863 (when David was its first president) as a founding seat-holder in the Bayswater synagogue (both were Ashkenazi Orthodox associated with the New Synagogue). A Solomon Benjamin, but probably another, was involved also with the Western (Marble Arch) synagogue.

The fifteenth (and ninth male) of seventeen named children, Beetle's maternal grandfather Louis Stanley Benjamin was born in England in 1863 as Isaac Louis Benjamin, although he was reported

in the 1881 census and was married as Louis Isaac and was generally known in Australia (including to his father) as Louis Solomon Benjamin until after he had lived in New Zealand (1902).

Louis attended University College School in London and was said by his daughter Helen to have wanted to become a solicitor. However, according to her Solomon decreed that 'I am a commercial man, and all my sons shall be commercial men after me', so Louis after a year in Germany was sent to gain 'colonial experience' in Australia (where he arrived between 1885 and the middle of 1887).

In this, Louis followed his brothers, Alfred (Leo) who had arrived in 1875, Morris (Arthur), Nathan (Lionel), Benjamin (Albert) and David (Fred) who had joined M D Benjamin & Co which had been established in Brisbane about 1875 by Morris (David) Benjamin, a cousin [the names of Solomon's sons are confusing because the brothers were generally but not always known by their middle names and 'Solomon' was often adopted instead of their Hebrew names as a new middle name; hence, there were several named 'L S Benjamin'].

In 1887, by mortgaging their inheritances, the brothers bought out and put a further £90,000 (over \$500,000 in 2023 money) into M D Benjamin & Co to trade in tobacco and other goods as 'Benjamin Brothers'. Shipping records suggest that Leo, Lionel, and Louis (who was described as 'accountant') then travelled extensively for the company up and down Australia's east coast.

However, Benjamin Brothers became over-extended as the Long Depression deepened. After a succession of floods, a break-in, and a suspicious fire in their new Spencer's Building the firm became insolvent in 1891. The six brothers became insolvent, Louis with debts including his share of Benjamin Brothers to the tune of £60,000 (nearly \$300,000), but with the winding up of their father's estate delayed, to help the beneficiaries seek more favourable prices for sales of property in Victoria amounting to some £185,000 (nearly \$1,000,000), they were not declared to be bankrupt.

It is not known how much the siblings netted out their father's estate in England and Australia but, although Leo and Arthur returned to join their sisters in England, Lionel went to Melbourne (then New Zealand) and Albert to Sydney, it appears that none of them were reduced to poverty. For his part Louis, who had married Beatrice Amy Hart (whom he had met at Leo's wedding), headed south in 1892 to a job with L P Jacobs and A D Hart who had formed the tobacco trading company Jacobs Hart & Co to take over the business of Feldheim Jacobs & Co in 1883.

Between 1897 and 1902 Louis and his young family (Helen had yet to be born) lived in Wellington (New Zealand) where he represented Kronheimer and Co, another Melbourne tobacco trading company established in 1854). He travelled widely in New Zealand and returned there often after he became Melbourne Manager of Kronheimer's in 1902.

Under Louis, Kronheimer's merged its interests with those of the Sydney firm W D & H O Wills in 1903 to become W D & H O Wills (Australia) Ltd, which was then taken over by British-Australian Tobacco to become the virtual monopoly importer, manufacturer, and distributor of British and American tobacco products in Australasia with Louis as managing director.

These companies were subsequently merged into the largely American-owned British-American Tobacco Company in various corporate reinventions, with Louis remaining as Australasian General Manager until 1934 shortly before his death. Louis travelled extensively on behalf of BATS, including at least five trips to Britain, on which he was accompanied by his wife and youngest daughter (Nell) in 1909/10, 1926/7 and 1933. He also was probably the author of a little pamphlet, *The Place of Tobacco in the March of Civilisation* (Lothian, Melbourne, 1926).

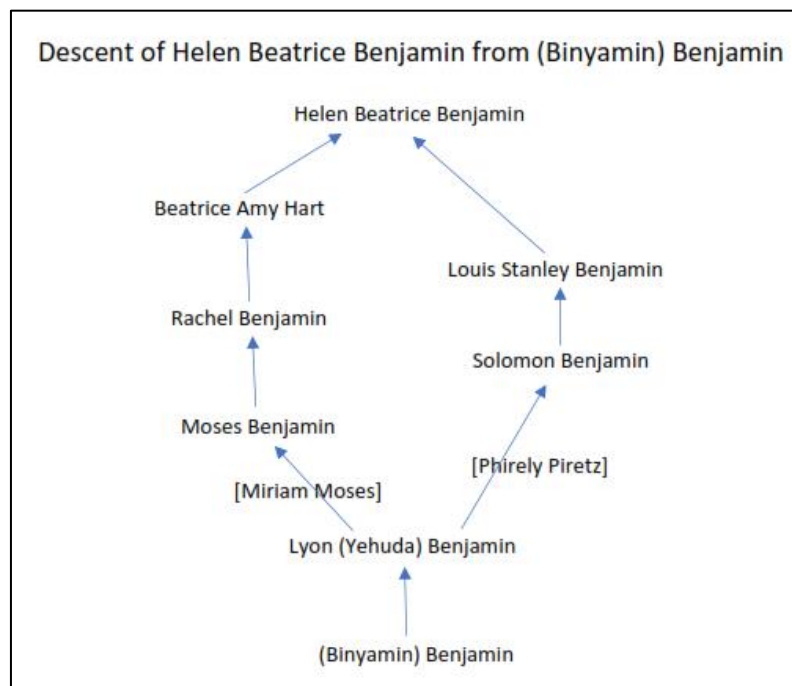
As a private citizen, Louis (who had adopted the middle name of Stanley by the election of 1909) was active in the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation's St Kilda Road synagogue (serving four terms in the 1920s as president), near to *Wyalla* (at 71 Queens Road until 1926 and later 3 Marne Street in South Yarra which they built in 1929). He was a trustee of the Kronheimer charitable trust for many years from 1914 and served on the Victorian State War Council from 1914, the 1928 Royal Commission into the Victorian Railways and charities including the Boy Scouts. He also was also honorary consul for Uruguay in the 1920s.

All of these suggest a conservative man – which is in line with his being one who was stopped in Paris for driving too slowly and one who didn't allow his younger daughter to complete her Leaving Certificate examinations in order that she could be bridesmaid at her sister's wedding in Sydney in 1923 (which meant also that Helen could not matriculate). With Rotary, golfing and other social memberships (a walking club) shared with people such as his close contemporary and co-religionist, John Monash, he would have been a member of his class and proudly Australian.

### The Harts

Beatrice Amy Hart was the youngest of eight girls and second last of 14 children to Isaac Hart and Rachel Benjamin. Beatrice was not the first Hart to have married a Benjamin during the nineteenth century. Indeed, Louis and Beatrice met at the Melbourne wedding of Leo Benjamin to Beatrice's sister Alice Hart in 1887, and a third brother Lionel Benjamin moved to New Zealand and married a Hart cousin (Ada) in Dunedin also in 1889. In a previous generation Beatrice's mother, Rachel, was a daughter of Moses Benjamin (half-brother of Solomon).

As Louis, Leo and Lionel were all sons of Solomon Benjamin, while Beatrice and her siblings as children of Rachel Benjamin were grandchildren of Moses Benjamin (Solomon's half-brother), their children (including Helen, Beetle's mother) inherited a vast network of Benjamin and Hart cousins (including more than eighty first cousins at my last count, born over more than forty years, and countless second cousins), who included Beatrice Hart, whose diminutive ('Beetles') was adopted for my 'Beetle'. Beetle's mother thus was both a great granddaughter and a great-great granddaughter of Lyon (Yehuda) Benjamin!





Isaac Hart was the youngest child of Elizabeth (Brendel) Hart and her cousin Hyam (Hebrew name Chaim). Their Hart name probably derives from the occupation of Isaac's grandfather, a hatter, though 'hart' is Yiddish for 'hard'. Elizabeth's parents appear to have been known as 'Birmingham' and seem also to have been involved in the rag trade. Other than a sister who may have remained to care for their mother, all of Isaac's siblings (including a sister who had married in the United States before coming to Australia) had reached Melbourne by the early 1840s.

Little is known about Louis and Henry who traded together as clothiers in Melbourne until Lewis' death in 1843 (Louis/Lewis was the first Jew to be buried with a tombstone in Melbourne; he is said to have been in the colony for only a few months). Theirs appear to have been two of the names (with Hyam, their father) on an 1826 insurance policy on various Rosemary Lane properties in Whitechapel which appear to have been clothing stores and their homes.

Asher Hymen Hart (not to be confused with his uncle Asher Hart) appears from newspapers to have been in Windsor (NSW) from 1837 and trading there as an auctioneer in 1840-41. He opened a drapery at *Commercial House* in Melbourne in 1842 but soon returned to being an auctioneer who made enough from dealing with gold bullion, also to retire to England in 1854 (*Calcutta*) after the banks took over gold-buying. Asher was the second and (between Solomon and David Benjamin) fourth president of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation of which he too was a founder.

Edward arrived in Sydney via Calcutta and Hobart on the *Pero* in 1838. He was followed to Sydney by Isaac on the *Augustus Caesar* in 1839. Together, the brothers moved on to Melbourne in 1840 to set up a drapery in *Waterloo House*, Collins Street. They dabbled in gold buying and bullion export and prospered considerably. Isaac continued with the drapery after 1853, when Edward died, but he appears to have been insolvent in 1859. Notwithstanding, he subsequently became an investor and a leader of Melbourne's business community.

From 1858 Isaac was a life-long trustee of the Melbourne General Cemetery, and from 1859 (he had been a founding shareholder in 1851), was a life-long director of the Melbourne Gas and Coke Company (later, the Metropolitan Gas Company). He had involvements in both the Jewish congregation and the wider community (the Victorian Education Board). About 1865 he built a large house, *Walmer*, in Collingwood to live there in considerable comfort until his death in 1899.

We know little about Isaac or Rachel as people (except that they had a large family, many of whom prospered in business) but perhaps there might be an indication in Isaac's apparent pride late in his life evidenced in newspapers in his grandchildren's musical accomplishments.

### **The Nathans and others**

The Nathans are from another family which has intermarried with Benjamins in several generations. Early records of this family are sparse and confusing not least because of changing family names in the generations that had preceded their being in Amersfoort and perhaps elsewhere in the Netherlands before being in Hull (where one Nathan was a toll-collector) and later in the clothing trade in Whitechapel (London) during the eighteenth century.

'Our' Nathans are descended from Nathan Lyon Nathan who was the father of of Miriam who was the first of Beetle's extended family to live in Australia. It is thought (by Howard Nathan and John Levi in Australia but disputed by Lawrence and John Nathan in New Zealand and Israel) that Nathan Lyon Nathan was the Nathaniel Newton who in 1800 aged 16 had been transported to Sydney by the *Royal Admiral* after snatching a purse and returned to England after serving his seven years.

Regardless of whether he had previously been in Sydney, 'our' Nathan married his cousin Sarah Nathan in England in 1807 and all ten of their children migrated to colonies in Australia or New Zealand (and seven of whom died back in England). Amongst these as well as Miriam (who became the wife of Solomon Benjamin), were Esther and David who also arrived in Sydney on the *Orient* in 1839, and Rosetta who on the *Margaret* in 1831 had followed her convicted cousin Moses Joseph (transported on the *Albion* in 1826) to Sydney where they married.

These Nathans were members of an intricately intertwined extended family some of whose members are said to have been helped to migrate by the commercially successful Henry Moses, a tradition which was to be continued by David Nathan (one of the beneficiaries) who had been given £100 (perhaps \$250,000) for tradable goods and which may have been echoed in the manner in which the sons of Lyon (Yehuda) Benjamin funded their commercial activities in Australia and in the funding by his sons David and Solomon of their sons' travels to Australian colonies.

In 1840 David Nathan sailed on the *Achilles* to Kororareka (Russell) in New Zealand, where with further help from Moses Joseph (who had prospered in New South Wales), he and Israel Joseph (brother of Moses) set up a store in Kororareka and then bought land in Auckland which became the site of a second store until the Russell store was closed. In 1844 David bought Israel out of their partnership; Israel went on to California leaving David to found a dynasty of retailers in Auckland.

In successive generations David fathered Laurence David, who established L D Nathan & Co and fathered David Laurence, who fathered Lawrence David Jose Nathan. Under the last, who was Executive Chairman 1944-75 and a Director until 1979, L D Nathan & Co became New Zealand's largest retailer (with interests in wholesale and manufacturing as well). After 1988 when it merged with Lion Breweries (New Zealand Breweries), Lion Nathan moved to focus on alcoholic and soft drinks and divested itself of most of the L D Nathan & Co businesses.

Other names such as Cohen, Joseph, and Sanders recur in Beetle's extended family as results of intermarriages, but Cohens and Nathans have been especially important for Beetle because of marriages with cousins of Beetle. Both children of her Uncle Eric (who had changed his name from Benjamin to Brendon) married Nathans, Jill to Frank (in 1946) and Anne to Lawrence (L D J Nathan in 1947). The children of her aunt (Edith – 'Bibs' – who had married a Cohen) were Brian Cohen and his sister Bettine (Silver, now deceased).

## The Eastern European Jews

### Jacob Kirsner's origins

The Pale of Settlement, which comprised those parts of Imperial Russia in what are now the Baltic States, Poland, Byelorussia, and Ukraine and in which Jews were allowed to reside following the eighteenth-century partitions of Poland, was the locus of significant Jewish populations as Ashkenazi Jews moved essentially from Central Europe where Jewish people had settled as they migrated up the Danube and down the Rhine during the Middle Ages.

Jacob Kirsner's background is not clear. According to his various Australian records, he was born about 1857, to Markus Kirsner and Perel Sofer, in Russia. He is reported by Ruth Cameron (a grandniece of Jacob through his brother Samuel) from her father's memoirs to have been the

eldest of six siblings born as Yudelsohn in Salant, Russia (now Salantai in Lithuania), of whom Sarah (and possibly after time in South Africa, Benjamin) ended up in the United States, Yetta and Solomon in South Africa, and Samuel along with Jacob in Victoria.

Salantai was a small, isolated town where Haredi (or Litvak) Jews then made up about a quarter of the population, in the rather remote north-western corner of Russian Lithuania. It was relatively near in walking terms to the Courland in Latvia, also 'owned' by Russia, and to Memel (now Klaipėda, the main port of Lithuania) and Lithuania Minor in what was the north-eastern extremity of the Prussian and later German Empire until 1919. Although 'our' Yudelsohns appear to have been settled there this may not have happened much before the middle of the nineteenth century.

Jacob's youngest brother Samuel understood that their parents were Mordechai (anglicised as Markus) Yudelsohn and Pearl Sofer and these parents were shown on Samuel's birth certificate (translated from the original Russian) as Markus and Pere. That certificate confirms that Samuel was born in Salantai and his Jewish name was given in the certificate as Zundel Yudelsohn. Litvak taxpayer lists which are online at JewishGen.org appear to link Zundel (ie Samuel) (and Jacob if he was Yankel) to three earlier generations of Yudelsohns (and some related Urdangs) who lived in Salant.

We have been unable to contact descendants of other than Samuel and Jacob so know nothing about Markus and Perl. A photo from the 1880s suggests that they might have been in Latvia when it was taken. A later photo has Markus in clothes that suggest an association with the schul. Perhaps they moved away from Salant for a while because of the pogroms of 1881-4 (and success of the Jews of Salantai in their court action against Russian efforts to evict them in 1885), because their daughter Yetta (as Etta Mere Urdang had a savings account there in 1912).

Litvak tax records show a Markus Yudelsohn living in Salantai prior to 1883, but not later, while Jacob's marriage certificate indicates that his father had died by 1897, which helps us to date a group photo that included him, but we cannot know where it was taken. The mid-1880s photograph of Perel with her two daughters was taken by a Latvian commercial photographer which lends some support to the idea that Jacob's parents were in Latvia then, though it is possible that this photographer worked away from Goldingen (Kuldīga).

The question of whether the Yudelsohns moved to Memel or Latvia is complicated by the fact that while the borders, between Lithuania and Latvia and between Salantai in the Russian empire and Memel in the German empires, were closely policed they were porous, and people did cross them from time to time for reasons as simple as going to a doctor in Memel or visiting relatives or going to a market in Latvia.

'Yudelsohn' or something sounding similarly may have been a family name, as required by the Russia authorities, and its spelling in Western documents simply a transliteration of Russian to Latin script. The maiden-name of a sister Sarah was recorded in her son's marriage registration as 'Adelsohn'. South African records list two men who may have been Jacob's brothers (Benjamin and Solomon) as 'Idelsohn'.

It appears that Jacob and Samuel changed their name to something approximating Kirsner (perhaps the Lithuanian Kirzneris, which might have been spelt with a 'G') before they arrived in Victoria, which was then written down in their passenger arrival records respectively as 'Kersur' (Jacob) and 'Kirschner' (Samuel) (The name has also been spelt 'Kersner' in some Australian newspaper entries). An American immigration record may have been for a brother Benjamin who had done similarly in the United States.

It is not known why Jacob took the Kirsner name. The name appears to reflect an occupation ('furrier' or 'fur dresser' is *kürchner* in German, *kirzhner* in Lithuanian). JewishGen.org records, as well as listing many Yudelsons and Kirsners (in spellings that include 'Yudelson' and 'Kusner'). It is possible that (following a practice said to have been common in East Prussia and the Baltic States) Kirsner (or something similar) was Jacob's first wife's family name (though this would not explain why Jacob's younger brothers Samuel and perhaps Benjamin also took the name Kirsner).

Nothing is 'known' about Jacob's first wife. In the 1908 registration of Leslie's birth Jacob stated that he and his first wife married in Bavaria ('Bayeron', or Bayern which is the German name) before 1881. In the registration of Jacob's second marriage to Janet, Jacob is stated to have been a widower since 1884. Australian birth registrations, and Jacob's death registration, both suggest that there were two living children from that marriage, Malca or Matha given as born about 1882 (which is consistent with an ancestry.com 'record') or earlier and Elias given as born about 1884.

If the Yankel Yudelson in Lithuanian tax records was Jacob, then he was 'absent' in 1877 and 'runaway' in 1881, suggesting he might have been travelling and establishing his first family before the pogrom. Although we have not been able to trace Malca, Beetle has traced Elias and contacted his descendants in the hope of learning more from them. Her search, along with information from Ruth Cameron (Samuel's granddaughter) which includes another group photo, mid-1890s, gives some basis for guessing as to Jacob's life before 1887.

### **Jacob's first family**

From the certificate of his 1900 marriage in Sunderland (England) to Rose Schachner, Elias was born about 1879, with Jacob noted as a 'merchant'. This Elias is given in the English 1901 census (as 'Elijah') as born in 'Germany' about 1879, and with the same age as his new wife – though it is possible that both over-stated their ages to enable them to be married. Sunderland was a place where Lithuanian Jews settled, being near both Grimsby and Hull which were on migration routes across the north of England *en route* to North America.

In fact, Elias and Rosa, probably on foot (Elias was recorded as a 'pedlar' in the 1911 Irish census), got as far only as Cork (where stories abound as to how migrating Jews confused Cork – 'ork' – with New York). Irish census records for 1911 have Rosa and Elias living there with their children born, other than Rebecca, in Ireland (though there appear to be two records for Elias which confuses this). A 1913 passenger record has Elias (again born about 1879 in Memel, then in East Prussia), arriving in New York from Ireland to visit his aunt Sarah Hurwitz. He is listed in a 1921 Cork street directory but was living with a son in Lancashire at his death in 1938.

In due course Elias and Rose and all their children moved at various times for better lives in England, mostly marrying there (although Harry married in Dublin and lived later in Cork), settling in Lancashire and Essex where we were to meet descendants in 2011 (some descendants are now further afield, in Scotland and in Australia).

Although a private tree on ancestry.com has Elias as born in Latvia, rather than either eastern Germany (east Prussia) or Russian Lithuania, Memel makes more sense as it is near Salantai and was then in the 'Germany' where Jacob is reported to have married his first wife. However, there is a similar uncertainty about whether Rosa Schachner (who had Latvian as well as Lithuanian antecedents) was born in East Prussia or Russian Lithuania.

Memel at the time was an interface between Germanic and Lithuanian, especially Jewish, cultures and was both a major port for Jewish emigration when it was legal and a point of entry into an

‘underground’ route by which Jewish refugees moved also (often without legal passports) westward from Lithuania (also from Latvia and Poland) during the pogroms that followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, and after Memel expelled Jewish non-citizens in 1885.

Cork had a small Lithuanian Jewish community into which Elias and Rosa may have settled still hoping to move on to America. The 1913 shipping record is interesting in this regard because it has Elias’ passage paid by his aunt Sarah Hurwitz (née Adelson in her son’s marriage certificate) in Ohio and yet he returned to Ireland. We do not know why Elias left his family behind when he went to the United States, but it may well have been in search of an opportunity which he didn’t find.

It is possible that Elias had earlier gone to South Africa as an ‘E Kirschner’ sailed from Southampton to Capetown in 1906 and returned to England as ‘Mr E Kirsner’ in the same year. At that time Elias had two uncles (Benjamin, who later went to the United States, and Solomon) and an uncle by marriage (Samuel Urdang, husband of Yetta/Etta) working in the mines in South Africa from the 1890s. Aunt Sarah’s husband (Bier/Barnett Hurwitz) had also been in South Africa as a miner between 1896 and 1899.

We cannot be sure when Sarah arrived in New York, but it seems likely that she followed Bier/Barnett there with their son about 1900 although another record which notes their marriage in Salantai suggests that she could have arrived about 1890 (possibly an earlier arrival). There is a similar uncertainty about the movements of Yetta. A Yetta Yudelson was in England, on her own, in 1891 and no other records such as of marriage or shipping have been found for her, suggesting that she was the Yetta Yudelson who later married Samuel Urdang in Lithuania., the two becoming known in South Africa as Hillel and Ethel Marie Urdang

When Samuel Urdang went to South Africa about 1904 (he may have gone there a first time from 1896) he left his wife behind and it appears (from her having a post office savings account in Salantai in 1912) that Yetta and her children had remained in Salantai, perhaps with her mother, until they went to join Jacob (as Ethel Marie) in South Africa in 1913, supposedly on the urging of Yetta’s youngest brother Samuel who visited his brother-in-law from Australia in 1911.

These movements hint at the apparent role of family ties and networks of co-religionists in getting Jews around the world, and the apparent ease with which family members travelled. Further, more tantalising hints of this might be seen in other records such the note in Bier/Barnett Hurwitz’s 1899 entry into the United States to the effect that he was going to a related ‘Jankel Kurshner’ with an address in Buffalo, NY.

All of this is consistent with what Samuel Kirschner is reported to have said (in the 1982 memoir by his son, Marcus) about Jacob’s first family going to Ireland and writing ‘begging letters’ from there. In fact, Elias may have been in difficulties before going to Ireland; he and Rose may have lost babies and, certainly, he had a succession of jobs in Ireland, including ‘general dealer’ in 1900, ‘tallyman’ on one son’s birth certificate in 1910, ‘pedlar’ in 1911, ‘salesman’ in 1906 and 1913, ‘upholsterer’ in 1938 and ‘commercial traveller’ on Rose’s death certificate.

The evidence, sparse as it is, suggests that Jacob may have gone from Russian Lithuania to Germany before the time of his marriage (Allie retails a story about him on a horse, crying ‘stop thief’ so as illicitly to get across an unknown border). He may have travelled in Germany with his first family and then headed west without his first family, perhaps after the death of his first wife, or after the 1880s expulsions of non-citizen Jews from German Memel), but we know nothing certain about his time in Germany, even about the marriage in ‘Bayeron’ and the births of his children.

Unless cross-Channel shipping records become available we may not know how Elias or Jacob got to Britain or whether Jacob stayed any length of time in Britain, but his brother Samuel is said to have learned the drapery trade in London before he came to Melbourne on the *Barmen* (sailing from Antwerp) in 1893. Jacob may have done similarly in the years before he sailed for Victoria.

### **Jacob Kirsner in Australia**

Jacob arrived in Australia in Victoria from England on the *Port Denison* in 1887 as a 'bootmaker'. He naturalised in 1891 as a 'drapery traveller', briefly advertised (from Melbourne) his pawnbroker's shop in Ballarat in 1896 but married in 1897 as a 'traveller' in Melbourne and was working in 1898 as a pedlar – a hawker on foot – mainly in Victoria's western districts (his brother Samuel also was a 'traveller' and licenced as a hawker by 1897 in Beechworth), and at the time of the birth of his eldest son in 1898) as a 'commercial traveller'.

However, on his younger sons' birth registrations (in both the original and the partly corrected 1922 versions of Leslie's) and in his death registration he was described as a 'draper', so he advanced fairly quickly from travelling perhaps between Jewish connections in rural Victoria to having a shop in Melbourne (at 140 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, where according to electoral rolls he lived with his family between about 1904 and about 1923 and where his shop was listed in directories as 'importer, draper and clothier').

Jacob was reported by his nephew to have remitted money from Victoria to his first family, early on, and this may have ceased after his second marriage. When he married Janet, Jacob was living at 10 Bell Street Fitzroy but after the marriage Jacob became a householder at 218 Leicester Street Carlton where Janet had been living with her family and where they had married until their move to Brunswick Street which suggests a degree of prosperity, though it isn't known whether the Fitzroy premises were owned or rented.

Jacob was reported also to have been 'not a good provider' and to have been more interested in attending minyan at Stone's schul in Carlton than in earning an income. This may not have been entirely the case. Jacob's early addresses suggest that he might have been involved in the Jewish community of Carlton and, certainly, Jacob was involved with the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha (a burial society, literally 'holy brotherhood', based in Carlton) between 1910 and 1917.

As to his involvement in Stone's ultra-orthodox schul, his marriage was celebrated by Jacob Lenzer, rabbi of the still very orthodox but Polish-preferred East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. Lenzer celebrated the marriages of Janet's sister and brother, and Jewish newspapers report Jacob as an active member of his congregation (along with at least one of Beetles' Benjamins) as early as 1902.

Also, wedding presents given by 'our' Kirsners in both 1903 and 1914 suggest a degree of prosperity (his brother Samuel prospered more and had a drapery and then furniture store at 422 Chapel Street in Prahran, reportedly for some 30 years until after 1922, though he had first advertised as a time-payment salesman in 1902 (before which he had been a hawker and possibly a tobacconist) and continued to be a money-lender between 1928 and 1930 when he sold that business; he died as an 'investor').

However, Melbourne Court of Petty Sessions' records do indicate that Jacob had difficulties in getting paid for goods supplied. He took fifteen customers to court successfully between 1903 and 1905 alone but appears to have been fined in 1902 for using insulting language against one

recalcitrant debtor, suggesting that he might have been under stress – perhaps a reason for his confusion about own marriage year and the birthdate, name and sex of his son when he registered Leslie's birth in 1908!

(The 1908 birth registration was partly corrected in 1922, the year that Leslie (as 'Leyser') started at Scotch College. Curiously a 1922 certificate of the registration has the spelling 'Lazer' and Leslie subsequently changed his name by deed poll from 'Lazer').

Ernest Kirsner was born Moses Aaron ben Yakov) in Carlton in 1898 but was known as Ernest. He was followed in Fitzroy, in 1906 by Marcus (known as Marcus David, or Mark, to distinguish him from a cousin also Marcus Kirsner born 1908) and in 1908 by Lazer (whose name was changed to Leslie by deed poll in 1936, prior to his marriage). The boys appear to have been named for their maternal grandfather (Moses Aron Len), paternal grandfather (Markus Yudelsohn) and a maternal great uncle (Lajzer Len).

World War I and the costs to Janet and Jacob of educating their sons, albeit that they went on scholarships (to Scotch College, and to Melbourne High School in the case of Mark, then to Melbourne University) may have made life difficult. By 1918, Ernest was tutoring (at 218 Leicester Street where he may have been living again). Soon after, Jacob and Janet with Mark and Leslie moved to St Kilda living initially in rooms at *Ravelston* (Tennyson Street) where Leslie remembered the boys sleeping in tents and doing homework in the kitchen.

St Kilda was perhaps more upmarket than Carlton and its synagogue was more German-Jewish than Polish-Jewish which may have been along a path towards assimilation although it was still orthodox, rather conservative, and not Anglo-Jewish. By 1924 Janet and Jacob at least had moved to an address in Erindale Avenue, Ripponlea (Caulfield). However, Jacob reportedly was hospitalised for more than a year after a stroke (and with diabetes) and died of a heart attack in 1926.

### **Janet Kirsner's origins**

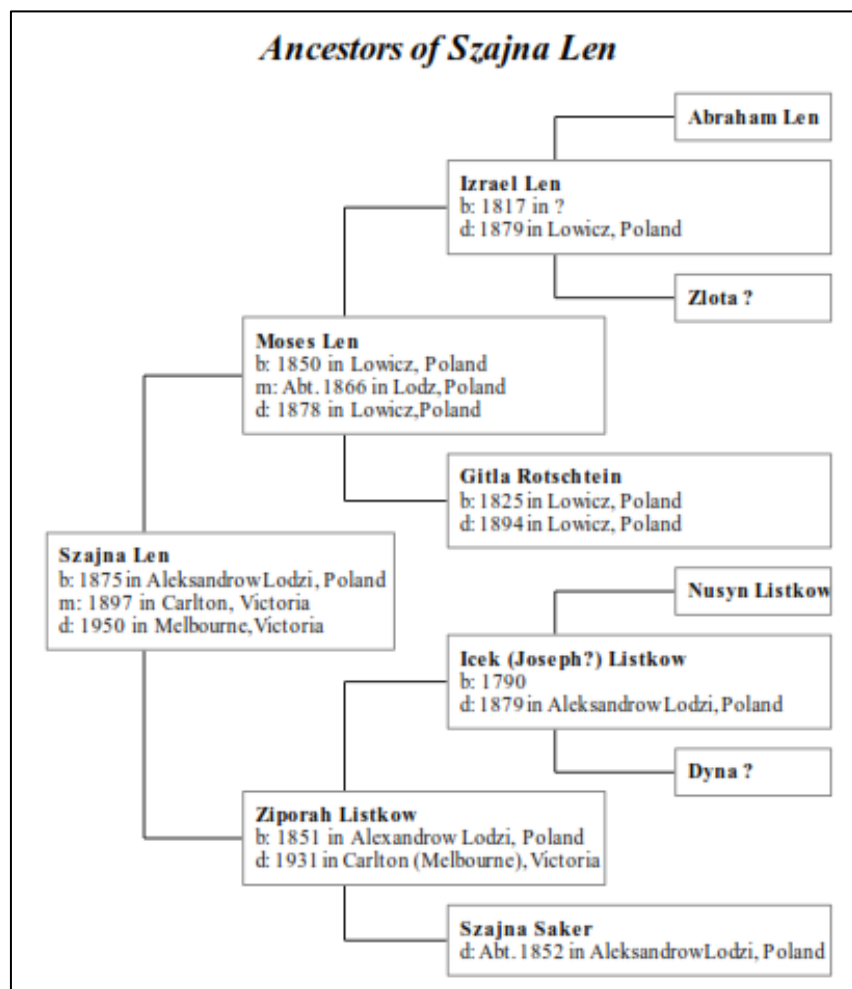
Janet Marie Kirsner, as she was known at her death (though she was buried as 'Jennie Marie Kirsner'), was born into a Jewish community in what was then Russian Poland. Little was known with certainty about her origins until 2012 when we became able to obtain and have translated information in Polish official records. It might be possible to explore their lives more fully through 'town books' but the birth, death and marriage records now qualify somewhat the information given in their Australian death records of Janet, her siblings, and their mother.

Janet was born as Szajna Marya Len in 1875, in Aleksandrów Łódzki (Alexander near Lodz) in Poland and named for a grandmother. She had a younger sister Jessie (Dwojra Judesa) born in 1878 also in Aleksandrów and registered as 'Listkow' because her father had died. They had older brothers, Mendel Enoch and Lajzer who died, born in 1870 and 1873 respectively in Aleksandrów as 'Len'. The three surviving siblings all migrated to Victoria. We have traced and been in contact with descendants of all three.

Their mother, Sarah, was said in her children's marriage registrations to have been born as Ziporah Aurbach and in her 1916 naturalisation papers to have been born in Łódź in 1850, but the new evidence indicates that it was Sarah's mother who had been born as Aurbach, known later as Michłowicz and Saker, and that Sarah was born Ziporah (Cypru) Listkow in 1851 at Aleksandrów Łódzki (which is a short bus ride to the northwest of Łódź proper).

Listkow (the name appears to refer to 'leaves', possibly leaves in books, in Polish) seems to have been a name localised in Aleksandrów and the family may have taken it after coming to Aleksandrów after it was established in 1818 (to become notable as a hosiery knitting and, later, as a Hasidic Jewish centre). This localisation of the 'Listkow' name, and Sarah's 'Aurbach' associations (Auerbach is a place name), suggest that the family may have come to Aleksandrów from what had been in the early nineteenth century the nearby south Prussian part of East Prussia.

Sarah married Moses (Moszek Aron) Len, said in her death registration to have been a 'writer of the law' (ie a scribe who inscribed the rolls used in the synagogue), in 1869 at the age of 19 in Aleksandrów Łódzki. In 1878, just two months before Jessie was born, Moses died in Łowicz (Lowitz), a town then becoming an important railway junction. It is not known why Moses was in Łowicz but his second son (Lajzer) had died there, his parents were to die there subsequently, and people named Len remained in Łowicz until the Holocaust.



Moses appears to have been born about 1850 but we cannot be certain that it was in Łowicz as claimed in Sarah's death certificate because the register for that year is missing. It is possible that Moses was born elsewhere because the Len name (it refers to flax or linen) was more common further east in Poland, and in what is now the Ukraine, though it is the case that Jews had been permitted to settle in Łowicz since 1796.

Soon after Jessie's birth in 1878 both Sarah's father (in Aleksandrów) and father-in-law (in Łowicz) died. Jessie's birth was registered to a younger Isaac Listkow (who may have been a cousin



widowed in 1839). It is not known whether this Isaac had married Sarah (and he too may have died) but it appears that Sarah and her living children soon joined the westward exodus of more than a million Jews (and many others) from Lithuania and Poland before World War I, begun even before the pogroms that followed the assassination of the Russian Czar Alexander II (1881).

We do not know when or how Sarah and her children arrived in London, separately or together; they may simply have been in search of a better life than a poverty that might have been the cause of and exacerbated by her recent family deaths. Nor do we know how Sarah was supported when she arrived in London, but she (as Listkow) and Leib Hachohen (Lewis Cohen) took the unusual step of getting authorisation for their 1882 marriage from Britain's Chief Rabbi, so she seems to have been involved with the English Jewish community.

What we do know is that by early 1882 she and her new husband-to-be, were living at 9 St Anne's Court Soho. We know little about Lewis other than that he was a widower and another Jew from Poland. The fact that he was at the same address then suggests that he could have travelled with Sarah from Aleksandrów. The address is interesting in that the Court contained Jewish tailoring shops and the neighbourhood had a history as a haven for political refugees from Europe, including Eastern Europe though this may or may not be relevant.

Cohen appears to have died in 1886 and their child together about the same time (there were many Lewis Cohen deaths in London in the mid-1880s). While in England, Janet and Jessie now known as 'Lann' attended the Jews Free School and briefly the Westminster Jews' School until they were 'required at home' in 1888/9. In school records Sarah is recorded as 'Lann' living at various addresses in what appear (from Charles Booth's map of social condition) to have been 'better' parts of Tower Hamlets (but still in London's East End).

In the 1891 census, Sarah is referred to as 'Goldberg' (head of household and mother of two 'Lann' daughters including Janet as a tailoress). Her 1891 Victorian arrival record from Southampton on the *Kaiser Wilhelm II* lists Sarah again as Goldberg and as 'wife' immediately above the Lann girls, but it is not known why she used the Goldberg name. Later after their arrival in Victoria, Sarah used the style 'Cohen' in her naturalisation and other papers but Janet and Jessie both used the style 'Lann Cohen' and Mendel became 'Lenn'.

The Bells Lane Jews' Free School admission and discharge records show that Janet had around three years of primary schooling there (1884-8) and Jessie two (1886-9), attaining Standard 3 in the case of Janet, followed by a brief attendance at the Westminster Jews' School also in London. As children in England were required then to have four years of infants' and primary schooling between ages five and 12, the girls may have attended the Jews Infants' School or a Tower Hamlets Board school before 1884. Later, they may have been taken out of school to work.

We do not know how Mendel was styled in England or about his movements as we have found no comparable school or other English records for him. Mendel would have been 11 or 12 in 1882 and, if he had arrived in England then, he may have been too old for primary school (children could leave school at 10 if they had a job and were certified to have attained an acceptable educational standard; Mendel is reported later to have been 'educated' so he might have attended another Jewish or even a Council school in London.).

We do not know why Sarah used the Goldberg name because she was recorded as 'Lann' in her daughters' school records. It might be that she could not read English (she signed with marks both her 1882 marriage registration and (as Sarah Cohen) her 1916 naturalisation papers. Although names in her earlier records are probably reliable (for instance the Chief Rabbi's authorisation of

the 1882 marriage would have been supported by proper documentation) names in later records may well reflect what officials thought they heard or what Sarah wanted them to hear.

### **Janet in Australia**

We do not know how Sarah and her children came to migrate to Victoria, but it may have been with assistance from the Anglo-Jewish community (which wasn't altogether comfortable with the post 1881 influx of Eastern European Jews and which supported their further migration to North America, South Africa, and Australia). Although Mendel went ahead (he is recorded as arriving in Melbourne from Antwerp on the *Chemnitz* in 1890 as Emanuel Lann – transcribed in shipping records as 'Saunn') we have no sure knowledge of how he got established.

After her 1891 arrival in Victoria, Sarah became involved with the Jewish community in what has been described as the 'shtetl' of Carlton and was a householder at 218 Leicester Street, Carlton, in 1897 when Janet (described in her shipping record as 'dressmaker') married Jacob Kirsner. From the marriage records of her other children Sarah appears to have still been at that address with her children in 1900 but she was at 304 Drummond Street when she naturalised, and at 557 Drummond Street when she died.

From Melbourne City rate records, it appears that Sarah was neither owner nor occupier of the Leicester Street terrace (later the location of Kidd's Warehouse, owned by Richard Kirsner's father-in-law next to Graduate House where I lived for a year), so it seems that her abodes here and at her other Carlton addresses were in rooming houses, the first owned by an Allan Joseph and the second an address of Freemans stables and (from a newspaper advertisement in 1920) possibly associated with the Carlton United Hebrew Congregation. It is possible that she was the Sarah Cohen living in Trades Hall about 1919.

Janet married as Jane Miriam Lann Cohen. Mendel married (as Henry Lenn) in 1900 (then moved to Sydney, where he was a tailor when he naturalised in 1914 and later became a retailer and where Sarah visited including for her eldest grand-daughter's wedding in 1922.) Jessie married also in 1900 as 'Lann Cohen' (then moving to Auckland as Mrs Spitz; she died in 1925).

After Janet's marriage to Jacob, it is presumed that she worked in Jacob's drapery business but there are hints that she may have aspired to more.

It has been said that Janet started a course in medicine, and it is known that she was interested in astronomy. In fact, she was the 'Mrs J Kirsner' who briefly advertised professional services as an optician during a visit to Mount Gambier in 1915 and later that year (but only till the end of the year) in the *Jewish Herald*, having gained a diploma from the Victorian College of Pharmacy in 1914 (it then offered a variety of 'medical' courses including optometry training until 1917). A 1921 street directory has a J Kirsner at 100 Collins Street, which may be relevant.

Later, pursuing a memory of Allie, Beetle's sister, that their grandmother had taught at Kingsville Primary School we have found a 'Mrs Jeanette M Kirsner' (recorded as being born in 1881!) registered as a temporary assistant teacher between 1924 and 1927 and teaching at Kingsville and other Victorian primary, and at Camberwell central, schools. According to her inspectors this woman whom we take to be Janet was 'comparatively untrained' and not successful as a teacher.

Her final inspection described her as 'earnest and painstaking but...teaching methods.....not sound and....class control.... weak', awarding her a 'D plus' for secondary teaching. At Camberwell Central

school she had ‘a knowledge of the science but [was] not forceful enough, nor sufficiently stimulating’.

Janet appears to have abandoned career aspirations however and by 1928 was keeping house (as ‘Janet Marie Kirsner’ in 1931) for her eldest son Ernest in Benalla until after he married (1931). Until 1932 she was active in various organisations in Benalla. She then returned to Melbourne to keep house for Beetles’ father in Hawthorn until after Beetle’s parents had married while she continued with some of her community involvements, and then (according to electoral rolls) for her second son Mark in Armadale (Melbourne).

Janet died after a stroke in 1950 but Richard recalls her as having dementia (before which she had taught him some science and had been ‘demon knitter’ and an excellent cook). She died as ‘Janet’ but was buried as ‘Jennie’ Kirsner!

### **Jacob and Janet as people**

Neither Beetle nor her Lann/Lenn and Kirsner cousins know a great deal about their ancestors as people. Jacob seems to have led a somewhat peripatetic life while Janet (who died in 1950) is remembered as a more focussed and disciplined, but hard, person. In their own ways these characteristics might have been responses to lifetimes of penury in their journeys from Poland and Lithuania, through the East End of London at least in the case of Janet, to the Jewish enclaves of Carlton and St Kilda.

Further on, there are family stories about Sarah in relation to her (self-adopted) role in Melbourne as the matchmaker for her grandchildren. It seems that some of her grandchildren did not share her commitment to her religion or her matchmaking: while visiting Melbourne from New Zealand, Minnie Spitz took a shine to the Goldberg brother not favoured by Sarah – and was thrown out of the house, to have to live with her parents-in-law to be; later, Colman Spitz took one look at Sarah’s choice for him and went straight back to New Zealand; David and possibly Simon married out.

Both Janet and Jacob stayed close to Jewish communities in Australia. They are believed to have spoken Yiddish at home, and their boys learned sufficient Hebrew for Ernest to witness a wedding (Ernest also wrote in support of Zionism while a student). Yet, although Ernest and Mark maintained their religious ties and grandson Richard learned Hebrew before he Bar Mitzvah-ed, Jacob and Janet made decisions that led to their grandchildren marrying out.

Both Jacob (in 1891) and Samuel (1896) naturalised early, though the Lanns naturalised later (Mendel in 1914, and Sarah in 1916). More significantly, their boys were educated at that most anglo-celtic of Melbourne schools, Scotch College (then in Eastern Hill), and the ‘establishment’ Melbourne High School, as well as in the medical school of Melbourne University..

It may well have been the schooling that Janet had received in Jewish schools in London that promoted Anglicisation that produced these outcomes, among other things enabling her to tutor her sons to scholarships and perhaps encouraging her in her own aspirations to become an oculist and, later, a schoolteacher.

## The next generations

The Kirsner boys were driven to get good educations. Ernest and Leslie won scholarships to attend the prestigious private Scotch College after finishing primary schooling (it was said that Janet would have had Leslie repeat his last year at secondary school if it had been necessary to win a scholarship for university); Mark attended the public but also prestigious Melbourne High School with a year at Scotch before high school. All three completed their secondary schooling by matriculating to Melbourne University

Ernest read for a science degree at Melbourne University between 1915 and 1919 and won a non-residential scholarship to Ormond College for 1917. He began Medicine in mid-1919 and graduated MBChB in mid-1922. He was registered as a general practitioner in 1923 when he went to practise in rural South Australia (and later Broken Hill). After the death of Jacob, Ernest returned to Victoria, as a general practitioner and Shire Health Officer in Benalla in 1927. In 1934 he bought into a medical partnership (later a sole practice) in East Malvern (Melbourne).

Mark may have followed Ernest into Melbourne University, but we know that he studied Pharmacy part-time while working and did not complete his intermediate and final examinations until 1928 and 1929 (in the same years as his cousin Marcus). In the 1930s Mark bought into the Victoria Pharmacy, then across the road from the hotel of that name in Little Collins Street (between 1944 and 1954 he was sole owner and in the hotel building), before selling up to buy a pharmacy in Surfer's Paradise (Cousin Marcus meanwhile had a pharmacy in Caulfield).

Leslie won a minor residential scholarship from Ormond College in his Leaving year at Scotch (1924) and after being a Dux in Science at Scotch in 1925 he entered Medicine in 1926 as a resident at Ormond College. He finished in 1931 with a first-class pass in Clinical Medicine, a second in Surgery and a third in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, after which he did his residency at the Alfred Hospital. In 1935 he bought into a medical practice which had surgeries at what was then known as *Therapia* at 2 Hepburn Street (now No 6) and in Tooronga Road.

Before Ernest (1932) and Leslie (1936) married (Mark did not marry), the brothers seem to have been close, with newspapers reporting for instance Leslie spending his university holidays in Benalla after their mother had moved there and where he worked as a fruit picker, and Mark living at Hepburn Street in 1936 when Janet was keeping house there (she later kept house for Mark when he bought a house in Armadale). Ernest and Leslie and shared a second surgery in Collins Street for a time in the late 1940s.

Both Ernest and Leslie married 'well', at least if newspaper reports of their marriages are an indication. In the case of Leslie and Helen, Beetle's parents became engaged late in 1935 but (though Leslie attended the Orthodox St Kilda synagogue while Helen went to the more liberal Toorak synagogue, descended from the Bourke Street one) they had attended the same social activities as early as 1925. So perhaps Frances Barkman (Jewish Welfare Society) who is said to have brought them together saw the potential for matching medical ambitions and social graces.

Helen Benjamin (then known as Nell) was the youngest among her siblings and was raised in circumstances of some privilege. She travelled widely and well, among other places to Britain in 1909/10 (*Bremen II* and *Seydlitz*), Europe and North America with her parents in 1927, Perth with her Harper cousins in 1932, and Europe again with her parents for eight months in 1933. She also interacted socially with many of her cousins in New Zealand and Australia, not to mention others in the Jewish community who were more distantly connected.

Helen was tutored by a governess until she was 12 after scarlet fever and then attended St Catherine's School 1920-24 but she did not sit her Intermediate Certificate (so that she could attend Bibs', her sister Edith's, wedding in 1923, it is said). She seems (from poetry written as editor of the school magazine in her last year) to have enjoyed school. Her name then appears often in the social pages of newspapers and she is said to audited courses at the University of Melbourne.

Although Beetle never knew her Benjamin grandparents, her Mother (Helen) talked affectionately of them. Their grand houses named *Wyalla* in both St Kilda (until 1926) and in South Yarra (from 1929) were venues for many charitable, social, and family gatherings and in convenient locations for attending Vice-Regal garden parties and for Helen to get to know the Botanical Gardens. Louis took her on three of his business visits to England, including one in 1933 when Helen and her parents attended a garden party at Buckingham Palace.

Around that time she met Leslie Kirsner as a medical student, whom she was to marry in 1936. For a time after Beetle's parents were introduced, Leslie couldn't cope with Helen's social life, and it was said that he broke off the relationship on at least one occasion for this reason. But their marriage won them both Jewish partners, something which for Helen at least might not have happened otherwise.

Interestingly, the wedding was a private (family) one and, because a more public reception was held afterwards, I wonder whether this was because so many of the Kirsners' friends were not Jewish or perhaps a way of side-stepping differences in outlook between the synagogues that Leslie and Helen had separately attended.

Regardless, the match worked well and we have no sense that Helen regretted missing some of the things she had experienced when she had been overseas before her marriage, though she and Leslie still attended theatre and parties into the 1950s and she continued to be active in the hospital auxiliaries of both the Royal Women's and Children's Hospitals and in the St Catherine's Old Girls Association. As the youngest daughter she was probably also closely involved with care of her mother until the latter's death in 1943.

After their marriage Helen supported Leslie by manning the phone at what soon became a solo practice at 6 Hepburn Street (and subsequently at 517 Glenferrie Road). The practice prospered though Leslie was unable to pass the exams to join the Royal Australian College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (Ernest had become a MD in 1938 to become a Member (later Fellow) of the Royal Australian College of Physicians).

Richard, the first child of Leslie and Helen, was born in 1937 and was followed (after a gap) by Beetle (1944) and Alison (1945). In due course, while still in their faith (Richard was Bar Mitzvah-ed but Beetle didn't Bat Mitzvah), the siblings as day-pupils followed their parents to Scotch College and St Catherine's School respectively (conveniently located in Hawthorn, the suburb of Hepburn Street). (Meanwhile, Ernest and Bertha's children – John and Marian – were born in 1934 and 1937, went to Melbourne Grammar and MCEGGS respectively).

During the Second World War, Leslie was not allowed to join the services and, instead, helped to carry the workloads of brother doctors who had gone overseas, which probably helped him to develop the wide circle of medical friends which he cultivated later. He was one of the very early members of the Royal Australian College of General Practice which was formed in 1958. However, he also had a bout in hospital early in the war and another shortly after the war when he had surgery on both kidneys. Later he became afflicted with chronic back pain.

Beyond Medicine, Leslie's interests were limited by his difficulty in getting locums or colleague to cover the practice when he had time away. He had been in the University Rifles with Mark, was active in the Scouting movement for a time and enjoyed an annual family holiday at Point Lonsdale or driving further afield for instance to the Central Coast. He maintained his professional reading and his newspapers but in a society where other sources of information were limited his remained an essentially conservative view of the world.

With their own children at University, Leslie and Helen moved their home and the practice in 1963, from the grand Hepburn Street house where Beetle had grown up to Glenferrie Road also in Hawthorn. By this time, Leslie's workload was easing, which allowed him and Helen to get away more and after we returned to Australia to visit us each year in Bathurst as part of driving trips to Mollymook (visits that were reciprocated particularly by our girls during many school and college holidays until Helen's death).

Leslie was still working when he died in a road accident in 1982. Helen subsequently moved to a flat in Mercer Road, where after heart problems she had a massive stroke which put her into a private hospital for six months before her death in 1988. For their parts, Mark sold his Surfers Paradise pharmacy about 1973 (having become the most travelled among his siblings when he visited us in Britain in 1970) and died in a Montefiore Home in Melbourne, and Ernest retired in 1975 and died ten years later.

## My observations

For me as a gentile, Beetle's research on top of the fragments left by her mother and the ongoing research of a wider network of 'cousins' we have met across the world has enabled a glimpse of not only the history of her own family and its connections with Australian Jewry but also the culturally rich story of Jewish people who came out of poverty in Britain and Europe to achieve prosperity in Australia, largely by dint of their innate intelligence plus their own hard work and a fair bit of luck.

Beetle's quite recent family history includes popular stereotypes such as money lenders, street hawkers and sellers of tobacco and cheap clothing, as well as evidence of the deep love of and respect for learning and religion for which Jews are renowned. However, it shows also how family members rose to the challenges of migration and took advantage of opportunities presented to them while both maintaining their Jewish traditions and contributing to the cultural development of their adopted homelands and becoming seriously moneyed in some cases.

More recently, the continuing success of the last generations seems in part to have been due to a readiness in Beetle's parents and (to some extent) grandparents to look out beyond, rather than gaze inwards into, their Jewish heritages, in short to become Jewish Australians rather than Australian Jews. True, this has involved a turning away from the cultural heritage to which earlier generations contributed significantly, and to Beetle and her siblings becoming separated from their Jewish cultural roots, but it has also led to these siblings finding their own personal places in the world.

Although we know nothing of the lives of Beetle's ancestors on the European continent, we can surmise that they lived pretty much 'hand-to-mouth'. The arrival of ancestors in England during the early stages of its Industrial Revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century would have provided unprecedented opportunities for them to achieve more settled lives as dealers in the

produce of the new economy. Then, their migrations to England's new colonies offered new opportunities of which they had the wit and acumen to take advantage.

Particularly in the colonies to which they had migrated, Beetle's ancestors and their collateral lines were able to prosper from unexpected circumstances such as Gold Rushes as well as being caught up with general rises in material standards of living. In this they benefitted from support from their own families, and from their Jewish communities, but they also well repaid that support through their involvements in these Jewish and the wider communities of their adopted homelands.

One constant has been the involvement of recent generations in public life beyond the contributions of Benjamins, Harts and Nathans to their synagogues. Solomon Benjamin was involved in secular organisations as was Isaac Hart. Some of Louis Benjamin's involvements have been mentioned above but Beatrice his wife was also involved (an anecdote in a history of the St Kilda and Balaclava kindergarten talks of 'the minor interruptions to the committee's continuity due to [her] regular trips home', including one in 1918-9!).

Helen continued this tradition of involvement and in due course was elected a Life Governor of both the Royal Children's Hospital of Melbourne (1954) and the Royal Women's Hospital of Melbourne (1977) (the names on these certificates suggest that she moved in fairly elite circles but Helen was modest about her social and family connections, so much so that when once she asked me whether she was a 'snob' I could honestly say 'no' because she had never talked, let alone boasted, of her connections). For his part Leslie was actively involved in the Australian College of General Practice as well as the Scouting Movement.

Formal education outside Jewish establishments and beyond secondary schools has been important only for recent generations in Australia. The formal education of earlier generations seems to have been limited to what was learned in the schuls, though both the literacy of the Anglo-Jews and their apparent interest in music suggest that the educations of the Benjamins and Harts in the synagogues of England may have been more liberal than those of their brethren in the schuls in the shtetls of eastern Europe.

From what we now know, Sarah Listkow's father was (contrary to what was stated in her death registration) a 'szkolnik' which suggests close association with a 'schul' or synagogue in a town later an important centre of Hasidic Ashkenazi orthodoxy. Sarah's first husband was a 'writer of the law' or scribe, a clerk to a rabbi. Her second husband (from his name Hachohen) might also have been associated with religious education. Jacob Kirsner also was interested in Judaic teachings, but in the intellectual and rather unworldly tradition of eastern European Jewry.

It is unclear whether Sarah Listkow was literate as she did not sign her naturalisation papers (it may be that she was literate in her birth languages and unable to read or write in Latin script) but in Britain she made sure that her daughters received an English education sufficient for Janet to become an oculist (optician) and later to teach in a brief and unsuccessful school career. In doing so, she put her descendants onto pathways toward more liberal formal educations and in due course all of Janet's sons were to obtain formal university qualifications.

Beetle and both her siblings also gained university qualifications after attending attending schools with protestant Christian leanings. Richard indeed achieved an international reputation as an academic and researcher in medical physics in Melbourne, while Beetle worked widely (in Melbourne, then Edinburgh and later in NSW) as a radiographer and medical photographer, and Alison worked as a public-sector and private psychologist in Melbourne. All three also have been actively involved as volunteers in community organisations.

(For the record, their Kirsner cousins became a judge's associate, then a bookseller, in Melbourne in John's case, while Marian graduated as a master printer from London's Central School of Arts and Crafts. Their Cohen cousins became a Justice of the NSW Supreme Court in Brian's case, while Bettine graduated in science and married Donald Silver who was a managing director of Cominco Gardner Ltd. Their Brendon cousins, Jill and Anne, married New Zealand brothers Frank and Laurence Nathan who also were descended from Nathan Lyon Nathan mentioned above).

Almost certainly the more liberal educations of recent generations encouraged assimilation in England and Australia. Over the generations there has been a shift in occupation from manual trades and 'dealing' (Jacob was a bootmaker when he arrived in Australia, Janet a dressmaker, Solomon Benjamin and Isaac Hart were drapers but soon became dealers) towards professions requiring higher levels of formal education. The Anglo-Jews were also conspicuous after they arrived in their loyalties to their adopted England and Australia.

Liberal educations may also have led to many in the later generations 'marrying out' despite the strong disfavour toward this among Jewish religious leaders. Beetle and her siblings all married out, completing a process of assimilation into an essentially 'anglo-celtic' Australian society that was begun by their parents as they stopped attending first the St Kilda synagogue and then the Toorak one in the 1950s (in part because of the – understandable – obsessions of many Jews with Holocaust and Zionism and their related tendency to stand apart from mainstream society). They both were given funerals in Uniting churches.

Beyond all of this have been the responses of Beetle's ancestors to migration experiences out of the shtetls of Eastern Europe where the Jews of the Pale of Russia accounted for large and important but inward-looking urban minorities, and the ghettos of Western Europe where Jews were more integrated into their wider communities. None were particularly settled in their countries but migrations to and through England brought Beetle's ancestors to places that were more tolerant (to the point indeed where some clearly came to regard England as Home).

In all of this, Beetles' immediate family has largely been spared the worst of the twentieth century. Beetle's Brendon uncle did serve in the First World War and her father's cousin Ernie Lenn during the Second but, otherwise, the closest impact of these wars was the belated naturalisations of Mendel Lenn and his mother (and broken shop windows for Samuel Kirsner). As for economic adversities, while her grandparents had their shares of misfortune, mostly Beetles' ancestors were able to grow as Australia emerged from the great depressions of the 1890s and 1930s.

In Australia the members of Beetle's extended family have assimilated in various degrees. Here, Jews form a tiny and seldom conspicuous minority but one which has made enormous contributions to Australia. In accepting the challenges of adapting into a dominantly anglo-celtic society Beetle's ancestors became Australians with a specific cultural heritage, who have made significant contributions to their new country and built good lives for their own descendants.

However, Beetle remains a Jew in her bloodline. That suggests that she may share some medical predispositions. Whether diabetes is one of those predispositions is contested but it was fascinating for me to hear her share her family history of diabetes (and peripheral shakes and missing lateral incisors) with her English second Cousin Marion Cowland in 2011 and to see some shared Kirsner traits in evidence then.

However, while we might debate such things as whether Beetle got her eye colour from her Len grandmother (and longevity from that branch of her family?) rather than from her Kirsner or other



ancestors, it seems that Beetle and her siblings have acquired physical characteristics such as body shape and maybe mannerisms from their Benjamin ancestors.

It means little that her lineage is confirmed by DNA, but it does make her Jewish cultural heritage more interesting than the mixed and European ancestral and ethnic inheritances of most Australians including me.

## Beatrice Janet Bowie née Kirsner

To round out this short family history I add an outline of Beetle's own story.

She was born in the Hepburn Street house in which her father had his medical practice, and she has fond memories of growing up in a grand house where she probably saw more than most children of her father because he worked there, and of a somewhat undemanding schooling at the Anglican-associated St Catherine's School that had been attended by her mother.

On leaving school she started a course in industrial chemistry at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in 1962, but transferred to a course in diagnostic radiography, studying while working as a trainee radiographer with the Melbourne Diagnostic Group. She graduated with a certificate of competency in 1964 and continued working at Epworth Hospital as a diagnostic radiographer.

So far, predictable! Then she met me, just after she had just re-joined the Melbourne University Choral Society (MUCS) which I had joined after arriving in Melbourne, and towards the end of 1965 we were attending Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Youth Concerts together, which led to romance, marriage in 1967 in The Toorak Presbyterian church, and Beetle abandoning ideas about travelling overseas with friends.

Within six months of our marriage we left Melbourne for Edinburgh anyway, and a bonding experience there that we might not have had otherwise. Our four and a half years in Scotland where Beetle worked as a cardiac technician and medical photographer were not easy but when we returned to Australia in 1972 it was as a family, with eighteen-month-old Fiona, Susan *in utero*, and some life-long friends.

For the next twenty-four years, longer than Beetle had lived in Melbourne, we were settled in Bathurst where Beetle flourished as wife and mother, but grew also as friend, musician, community activist and radiographer.

Even before Susan was born and although she hadn't worked as a radiographer for five years Beetle was asked to help with on-call work and as a casual in the X-ray departments of both local hospitals. In time she became permanent part-time, upgraded her qualification to an associate diploma in diagnostic radiography 1975, acted as Chief Radiographer in Bathurst Base Hospital in 1984 and completed a TAFE course in radiography department management. She worked also in Lithgow, Mudgee, and Oberon.

After playing pianos for pre-school and Anglican All Saints' cathedral youth groups, Beetle upgraded her music qualifications also, from grade 5 AMEB to an associate diploma in creative arts at Mitchell College in 1982, with particularly good results in musicianship which left us with memories of her practising on a clarinet (and bursting an ear drum while playing it with a cold). She was baptised also in All Saints' cathedral in 1979 and confirmed there in 1989.

Beetle became active in the regional branches of the National Trust and Australian Institute of Radiographers (secretary of its 1996 national conference) and locally in Riding for the Disabled and (as chair) the Bathurst Information and Neighbourhood Centre. She helped to host musicians visiting Bathurst for Musica Viva and Sydney Symphony Orchestra concerts, and academics visiting for Geography meetings. She played tennis regularly.

And then there was music. In addition to the concerts we attended in Bathurst, almost inevitably she was enrolled into community choirs which sang in churches and eisteddfods, in Bathurst and as far away as Penrith, Dubbo, Cowra, and Goulburn. She also sang ten times in the chorus lines of musicals and Gilbert and Sullivan productions in Bathurst.

Because I was often away for work, she took on much of our domestic management, and she supported me in an increasingly toxic work environment at Mitchell CAE. She travelled too, with our girls and with me, often to visit our families in New Zealand and Melbourne but also to return four times to Edinburgh during two further trips around the world (1977 and 1991) and two to Europe (2000 and 2011), with trips to North America (1992 and 2008), a fortnight in China (1987) and visits to various Pacific islands and every State and mainland territory of Australia.

After our girls completed their schooling in Bathurst and had left home, my job at what had become Charles Sturt University evaporated and I took early retirement which led to our moving to the Central Coast in 1996 for five years during which Beetle worked part-time for Breast Screen NSW where she became the radiographer of choice – because she had warm hands – and maintained her community involvements while also helping to break in yet another new garden and to renovate yet another house in need of our love.

However, Green Point turned out not to be a place for our retirement and in 2002 we moved to Bowral where Beetle continued working part-time until 2008. Here, we found a community which offered the friendships, just about every retirement activity we could have wished for and a place (both Bowral, and in a retirement village which had never been on our radars) half-way between Canberra and Sydney where our girls have settled, and on a train line to the airport and concerts in Sydney.

And, so, Beetle became immersed in yet another community – in St Jude's, U3A, Volwing, tennis, yoga, On Trac, community choirs and other music-making, cinema, concert-going, climate action, family history, and (as a way of giving back to our communities and their environments) The Greens. She has been able from afar to watch our grandchildren growing up, and to continue travelling further afield, more recently for family and friends, in a comfort that wasn't always the case earlier.

Beetle's path through life has been neither predictable nor conventional. Her lineage is Jewish-Australian, but she is assimilated fully into Australia's diverse community. Without great expectations, she has received from and given to this community and her family. I can only hope that we have not taken each other too much for granted in all of this.