

Jewish Pioneers of Fremantle walking tour

An offer of a free guided tour around Fremantle to learn about some early Jewish pioneers led to a very successful collaboration between the Council and St John's Anglican Parish. The event was held on the afternoon of Sunday 16 May, in warm and sunny autumn weather, with the guided walk lasting approximately two hours. There were about 35 participants, approximately half being parishioners of St John's Church and the remainder CCJWA members and friends.

Tour guide Dr Ari Antonovsky, of Temple David, has given such heritage walks over many years, based on historical research conducted by his wife Wendy Antonovsky. Normally they take place on Sunday mornings, but Ari was happy to run an event for CCJWA in order that churchgoers might participate, and to provide an occasion for interfaith fellowship.

The tour commenced at St John's Church with introductory remarks about the approach to be taken — with stops at four historical sites, each associated with a Jewish pioneer who had made a significant contribution to Fremantle and the Swan River colony. The group then walked to the first stop.

Site 1: The offices of Elias Solomon, 52 Henry Street



Elias Solomon

Elias Solomon served for many years on the Fremantle Council, including as Mayor, and initiated many of the landmarks still existing today. He was elected as a Member of the WA Legislative Assembly, and subsequently, in the first federal election in 1901, successfully contested the seat of Fremantle. He was also very involved with Jewish community affairs, notably with the construction of the Fremantle Synagogue.

Site 2: Port Lodge, 28 Marine Terrace

A short walk around the corner took us to the second stop. Here we learned the intriguing story of Rosa Henriques Smith, who with the Women's Christian Temperance Union, started Sailor's Rest — the forerunner of the Flying Angel Club which still exists today in Queen Victoria Street. The story is long and complex, beginning with the Spanish Inquisition, and including Jewish pirates of the Caribbean, but suffice it to say that Rosa is renowned for having spent over three decades caring for seafarers who arrived at the port.



Rosa Henriques Smith

Site 3: 31 Cliff Street

The third stop was again a short walk away, to the offices of Lionel Samson & Son Pty Ltd, established in 1829. It has the distinction of being the oldest family-held business in WA, and second oldest in Australia.



Photo: Mary Marshall

Lionel Samson, a Londoner, was from an affluent Jewish family, and had been educated at Oxford University. He arrived in the colony with his brother William in the sailing ship *Calista* in 1829, bringing with him four servants, a prefabricated house, horses and sheep, plus wine and liquor which he intended to sell. As well as acquiring land granted to him in proportion to the value of goods he had brought, he purchased two lots in WA's first land sale. The location of his business was central in that goods off-loaded from ships at the south end of Cliff Street were transported to the north end to be loaded on to barges for transfer upriver to Perth.

In 1842, Samson returned to London with the intention of marrying Fanny Levy, the daughter of a former flame. He returned to Fremantle with his wife, and the couple raised six children, becoming the first Jewish family in the colony. As well as holding many honorary positions, Samson served in the Legislative Council under three different governors. Two of his sons, and one grandson, became Mayors of Fremantle. A remark in his obituary sums up his significance neatly: "To write a sketch of Mr. Samson's colonial career would be to write a history of the colony itself".

Site 4: The Round House

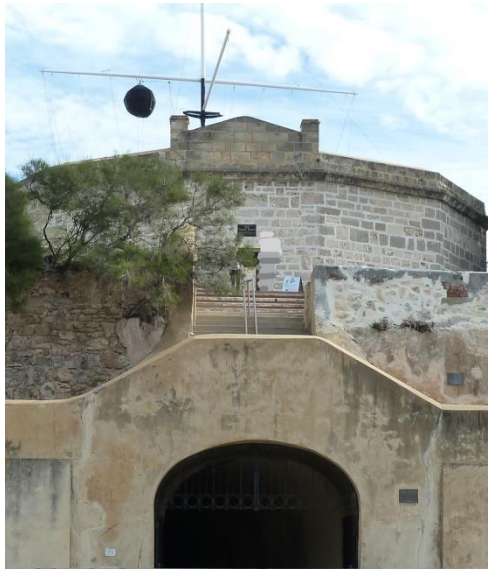


Photo: Mary Marshall

This site — the oldest extant building in WA — is associated with the Krakouer family, the name being derived from the Polish city of Krakow. Theodore Krakouer was one of many Jews who fled from Eastern Europe to London to escape persecution. In order to survive, he and his friend Elias Lapidus became involved in petty crime, and both were sentenced to 15 years gaol in WA, arriving in the colony in 1851. As a Ticket-of-Leave man, Theodore was able to go off to work elsewhere, but had to return each day when the Round House bell was rung. Like other T-o-L men, he probably lived in a cottage nearby.

Theodore married Brina Israel, who arrived in 1853 — one of many young women who immigrated voluntarily on supported passages. (Elias married her sister Esther.) Ari was eager to set the record straight with regard to two of the Krakouers' sons, Rudolph and David, who pioneered a direct route from Broomehill through to the Goldfields, clearing 500 km of unexplored country. Although the major credit for this feat should rightly have gone to the Krakouer brothers, sadly the route was named after another member of the party, John Holland. The Krakouers also went on to start a chain of hotels from Collie to Norseman, but the brothers are best known for having married local First Nations women, and thus starting a dynasty of brilliant footballers of Jewish-Aboriginal descent.

Site 5: The Old Synagogue



The group heads toward The Old Synagogue, visible in the background

Photo: Mary Marshall



Dr Antonovsky shares the history of The Old Synagogue

Photo: Mary Marshall

The Fremantle Synagogue was the first purpose-built one to be constructed in WA. By 1887, a Jewish congregation was established, and in 1891 services were held in the guard room of the Fremantle Barracks. Wishing to build their own premises, the community purchased Lot 1366 in Norfolk Street, but this site was required by the Fremantle Council and a land swap was arranged by the government in 1895. As a result, in April 1896, Elias Solomon and W.F. Samson, as Trustees for the Fremantle Congregation, acquired Lot 1375 South Terrace. The foundation stone was laid by Elias Solomon in January 1902, during his term as the Federal Member for Fremantle. There were about 60 in the congregation at that time.

Meanwhile, in 1892, a second congregation had been established in Perth, and by the time the synagogue was built, there was a movement of the Jewish population to the new centre, and the Fremantle community was beginning to decline. In 1908, the Perth congregation took control of the Fremantle site, and services continued there only until 1910. In 1916, the building was sold to the Department of Defence.

Since the 1920s, the building has had a variety of uses — auction mart, café, carpet shop, clothing outlet, and art gallery — and it then lay unused for two decades, but has now been redeveloped as a highly successful dining and bar precinct comprising four separate venues.

In 1976 the Perth Hebrew Congregation applied to the Fremantle Council to remove the Star of David from the building's front gable, with a view to incorporating it in their new synagogue in Menora. However, the Council declined, offering instead to supply a replica, and the prominent feature remains to this day, as the photograph shows.

Conclusion

The formal tour ended at The Old Synagogue, and participants expressed thanks to Ari for his most interesting commentary. Walkers then returned to St John's Church for refreshments provided by the parish, with Ari continuing to engage with participants. Marie Wilson warmly thanked Revd Patrick King for enabling the interfaith event to take place, and presented a donation for the parish as a token of the Council's appreciation. Many of the walkers stayed on to attend Evensong at 5:00pm.

Mary Marshall
Hon. Secretary, CCJWA Inc.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, images are from notes supplied by Dr Antonovsky.