City of Port Phillip Heritage Review

Address:	**99 Hotham Street, Balaclava**	**Heritage Precinct:**	**Not applicable**
Category:	**Community: Lodge Hall**	**Heritage Overlay:**	**HO337**
Style:	**Postwar: Modernist**	**Graded as:**	**Significant**
Constructed:	**1959**	**Victorian Heritage Register:**	**No**
Designer:	**Dr Ernest Fooks, Max Lyle**		
Amendment:	**C29, C161**		
Comment:	**Revised citation**		

Significance

What is significant?

The former B'nai B'rith House, designed by Dr Ernest Fooks and constructed in 1959, at 99 Hotham Street, Balaclava is significant.

A two-storey modernist community building consisting of two sections, both with a rectangular footprint, flat roof – the taller main and smaller northern unit. Initially the front of the main part had an open undercroft, which was then infilled soon after in 1961 by Fooks. The roof of the main section projects with a timber fascia and has a soffit with stained, slatted timber. This section is concrete framed, and its façade has a wide (segmental) curved cream brick wall in stretcher bond with a regular configuration of projecting bricks (alternate bricks in every second course) and recessed, narrow side windows. A large bronze sculpture of a menorah by Max Lyle is located to the southern end. The side elevations include panels with a pebble finish alternating with glazing to the front part of the upper level with limited areas of cream brick (some infill). The glazing is timber-framed with large, fixed panes either side of a narrow openable window. The smaller northern unit is set back in cream brick with similar window groups comprised of narrow openable and large fixed panes, with a timber panel above.

Alterations and additions associated with the conversion to residential use are not significant.

How is it significant?

The former B'nai B'rith House is of local historical and aesthetic significance to the City of Port Phillip.

Why is it significant?

B'nai B'rith House is of historical significance as a community lodge established in 1959 following a period of massive growth for Melbourne's Jewish community during and following World War II. It is specifically associated with B'nai B'rith, the oldest and largest international Jewish community service organisation in the world. Like many Post-war organisations, following their establishment in Melbourne in 1945 they initially met in pre-existing buildings for some years before building this dedicated lodge on Hotham Street. It served as an important community focus among the Jewish population in this area until 2010. (Criterion A)

B'nai B'rith House is of aesthetic significance as a largely intact and distinctive example of Post-war religious architecture in the Modernist idiom designed by preeminent Jewish émigré architect Dr Ernest Fooks who was a member of the Lodge. The bold and striking composition with an expressed concrete frame in conjunction with a finely detailed brickwork and timber-lined soffit is demonstrative of Fooks' position at the forefront of architectural design at the time. The building is complemented by a bronze sculpture mounted on the façade by Max Lyle. (Criterion E)

Thematic context

Victoria's framework of historical themes

2. Peopling Victoria's places and landscapes: 2.4 Arriving in a new land, 2.5 Migrating and making a home, 2.6 Maintaining distinctive cultures; 8. Building community life: 8.4 Forming community organisations

Port Phillip thematic environmental history

3. People: 3.5 Expressing identity and culture; 8. Community life: 8.4 Gathering places

History

Thematic history

The strong Jewish community in St Kilda and Elwood today is largely a result of post-World War II migration, however there had been a Jewish congregation in the area since the late 1800s. In 1921 the Jewish population of Melbourne was 7,600 people, and this grew to approximately 30,000 by 1961 (Lipmann, 1973, as cited in Townsend, 2018).

The St Kilda Hebrew Congregation was established in 1871 and built its first synagogue on part of the former Charnwood estate the following year. The congregation grew and by the early 1920s, it needed a bigger synagogue. The new St Kilda Hebrew Congregation Synagogue was built almost directly opposite the original building and was consecrated in 1927. Designed by Joseph Plottel, the synagogue is built in Byzantine Revival style.

The first Australian Temple Beth Israel was founded in Melbourne in 1930 by Ada Phillips. It promoted a progressive form of Judaism that was more relevant and appealing to younger Jews. Services were held at Wickliffe House on the St Kilda Esplanade, the St Kilda Town Hall and the Christ Church hall. A synagogue was purpose-built at 76-82 Alma Road, St Kilda in 1937. But by the end of World War II, with 1,600 people attending on High Holidays, some services had to be held at the St Kilda Town Hall. By the late 1950s, the congregation had grown to become the largest single Jewish congregation in Australia.

The Elwood Talmud Torah congregation was founded in the 1930s to serve the increasing number of Jewish migrants escaping growing anti-Semitism and persecution in Europe. The congregation, like so many others in the study area, began meeting in private homes before raising enough funds to purchase land and build a synagogue. Kurt Popper, a Viennese modernist architect, designed the Elwood Talmud Torah. It opened its doors in 1957. Part of the community broke away in 1939-1940 to form the Adass Israel

Congregation, which established a synagogue at 24 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea in 1950. In December 1950, the foundation stone for a mikvah – a ritual bathhouse – was laid behind the main building. The community continued to expand its synagogue to surrounding sites from the 1960s, to accommodate its growth.

The Sephardi Jewish community also arrived in the area during the huge wave of post-war migration in the 1950s. They worked hard to establish a place of worship of their own, and in 1994 former Australian Governor Sir Zelman Cohen opened the Sassoon Yehuda Sephardi Synagogue on Hotham Street, East St Kilda.

These synagogues are still in regular use. The range of congregations demonstrates the diversity and strength of the Jewish community in the City of Port Phillip (TEH).

B'nai B'rith House

Founded in the United States in 1843, B'nai B'rith is the oldest and largest international Jewish community service organisation in the world. B'nai B'rith supports human rights and anti-discrimination and promotes multi-culturalism and inter-religious understanding and social justice activities. The organisation has accredited NGO status at the United Nations in both New York and Geneva, and maintains representative offices in Jerusalem, and in Brussels to deal with issues relation to the European Union. At a grass roots level, B'nai B'rith delivers community welfare services such as youth and young adults' programs, senior citizens' housing, and financial support for educational services. Initially, B'nai B'rith was a fraternal Lodge, and membership was open to Jewish men 'of good repute, and at least 25 years old', while women could become members of Chapters associated with the Lodges. However, in 1990 B'nai B'rith International voted to admit women as full members (B'nai B'rith website; *The Australian Jewish News* 3 May 1957 p9).

In Australia the first Lodge was established in Sydney in 1944, followed soon after by the commencement of the Sydney Women's Chapter. Melbourne instituted its first Lodge, no.1547, in 1945, which was installed on 20 May at the Samuel Myers Hall (*The Australian Jewish Herald* 8 June 1945 p6). These were established by Austrian and German refugees and immigrants from Europe as well as leaders from the Australian Jewish community. In Melbourne, Frank B. Lippmann, a former past president of a European lodge played an important role in the establishment of Lodge no.1547. B'nai B'rith was eventually established in all Australian states, but only Sydney and Melbourne remain today (B'nai B'rith website).

An early initiative of the B'nai B'rith Lodge in Melbourne was the awarding in late 1946 of scholarships for students attending Hebrew schools in Victoria or at the University of Melbourne (*The Sydney Jewish News* 29 November 1946 p8). The Lodge also worked closely with the Australian Jewish Welfare Society provided help for needy members of the community. One example was the Mothers Help Scheme commenced in 1952 by the Women's Chapter, which arranged immediate help for families when a mother became ill or had to go to hospital. In 1955 the Lodge donated a hut to the A.H. Sicree Memorial Camp for Jewish Youth at Upper Beaconsfield (*The Australian Jewish News* 3 May 1957 p9).

In 1955 the Lodge celebrated its tenth anniversary and in April 1957 the second B'nai B'rith Lodge (Harmony Lodge No. 2099) was instituted in Melbourne. Three other new lodges were instituted in Sydney, Perth, and Brisbane at around the same time. By this time membership exceeded 500 and was steadily growing (*The Australian Jewish News* 3 May 1957 p9).

With the growth in Lodge members a permanent meeting place was required. The Lodge trustees acquired the present site in Hotham Street in 1957 and Dr Ernest Fooks was engaged to design alterations and additions to the nineteenth century house on the property. The first stage, completed c.1958, comprised internal alterations to the house to create meeting rooms and office spaces. The second stage, completed in 1959, was a two storey addition built in front of the house (see Figure 1), which contained a main Assembly Hall on the first floor that could seat 350 people accessed by a stairwell on the north side (with a cloakroom below) (BP). The building was named 'B'nai B'rith House'. A feature of the façade was a copper sculpture in the form of an abstracted menorah, which was created by sculptor, Max Lyle (*Interview with Max Lyle*).

Figure 1: B'nai B'rith House (Hotham Street Reception Rooms), East St. Kilda 1960 (Source: State Library of Victoria, H2003.100/283)

Beneath the assembly hall was an open undercroft. In 1961 this was infilled to create an additional committee room. At the same time additions were made to the rear of the original house to create a caretaker's dwelling. Fooks was the architect for these alterations and additions (BP).

In 1966 a building permit was granted for a further committee room. Kurt Popper was the architect for this addition, but it is unclear whether it proceeded. In 1983 Fooks and Popper collaborated on the design of a two-storey addition at the rear of the original house for a new caretaker's dwelling (BP).

In 2010 the Lodge decided to offer the building for sale, as it was no longer considered suitable for the organisation. The funds from the sale were used to relocate the Lodge to Beth Weizmann, and to promote and expand the organisation (*The Australian Jewish News*, 25 October 2010). In 2017 a permit was approved for a residential development that retained the 1959/61 building and replaced the nineteenth century house with townhouses (BP). This was completed in 2022.

Dr Ernest Fooks - architect

Born during 1906 in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, Ernest Fuchs was educated in Vienna, where he completed a degree in architecture in 1929 and subsequently a doctorate in town planning in 1932. He started his own practice at that time but in 1939 fled the rising anti-Semitism in Europe, marrying Latvian-born Noemi Matusevic in Canada en route to Australia (HE).

In Melbourne, he became assistant town planner for the Housing Commission of Victoria for nearly a decade (until 1948) working on projects across the State. During this time, he wrote extensively, and lectured, on town planning issues leading to his appointment in 1944 as the first lecturer of town planning at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT). In 1946, he outlined his ideas and solutions to planning in Melbourne in *X-Ray the City!: the Density Diagram, Basis for Urban Planning*.

On becoming an Australian citizen in 1945, he changed his surname to Fooks. From 1948, he established a successful architectural practice, drawing much of his clientele from Melbourne's thriving post-WW2 European émigré community.

Fooks' practice specialised in 'own your own' flats for developers completing over forty blocks of flats in St Kilda, Caulfield, Toorak, South Yarra and Hawthorn. In 1955, he self-developed an office with four bachelor flats attached at 1 Woonsocket Court, St Kilda (extant but much altered). Fooks also designed numerous single-family residences, beginning with modest-scale examples in the austerity driven period of the late 1940s and early 1950s but evolving as prosperity increased to more ambitiously scaled and detailed

examples subsequently. In this sphere, he was influenced by courtyard focused precedents and the use of Japanese-inspired screens, culminating in his own-famed house in Caulfield (1966). Other projects included some commercial (such as shops) and educational buildings (for example, Mt Scopus Memorial College, Burwood), as well as three notable community facilities – the B'nai B'rith in Hotham Street, Balaclava in 1959, Adass Israel Synagogue in Glen Eira Avenue, Ripponlea, completed in 1965, and the National Jewish Memorial Centre and Community Facility in Canberra, completed in 1971 (Edquist).

Fooks passed in 1985. Despite the coverage in magazines such as *Australian House and Garden* and extensive output of both built work and in publishing, his work has only recently become more widely acknowledged in general architectural circles (Peterson).

The B'nai B'rith commission is said to stem from Noemi's encouragement to be involved with local community affairs (Edquist). Fooks was a member of B'nai B'rith and his wife, Noemi, was part of the Women's Chapter. In 1974 Fooks became the second president of the Unity Lodge, a position he held until 1978. The Unity Lodge was a unique group within B'nai B'rith both in Australia and internationally at the time, as it was comprised of men and women. He also served as consultant to the Jewish Museum and had close links with Toorak Synagogue and community charities (*The Australian Jewish News* 6 May 1983 p12). Following his death in 1985 one of the main halls at B'nai B'rith House was dedicated to his memory. Speakers at the dedication ceremony included his widow, Noemi, Royal Australian Institute of Architects past president, Keith Mackay and colleagues, relatives, and friends (*The Australian Jewish Times* 15 Jan 1987 p4).

Max Lyle - sculptor

Max Lyle (1935-) studied art at RMIT, Melbourne 1951-53 and 1955, Caulfield Technical College 1957-1959; Gordon Institute of Technology 1960-62. In 1963 he was appointed to the University of South Australia: South Australian School of Art 1963-1996 retired as Head of School in 1996. He held his first solo exhibitions in the early 1950s at the Victorian Sculptors society. Other early exhibitions included 1958 Tasmanian Tourist Bureau Melbourne, 1959 Victorian Artists' Society Melbourne and 1962 Museum of Modern Art of Australia Melbourne and he was continuously represented in shows over five decades until the early 2000s.

His commissioned architectural sculptures include 1999 "Bamboo installation" Building Bamboo Art Institute of Indonesia Yogayakarta; 1995 Development Bank of Singapore; 1988 Mount Gambier Civic Centre two wind impelled metal sculptures entitled "Performance"; 1982 Littlehampton School wall sculpture; 1979 Broken Hill Civic Centre "Jamieson Shaft sculpture"; 1973 Adelaide Festival Centre foyer "Environmental sculpture"; 1967 Deakin University Toorak campus Melbourne fountain; 1964 Arndale shopping centre Adelaide pendant sculpture; 1960 Bendigo State College Victoria "Phoenix" wall sculpture; 1959 B'nai B'nith Lodge Melbourne "Menorah" wall sculpture.

Lyle has been the recipient of several awards and grants including 2000 Consultancy for Arts SA, 1991 Study grant from University of South Australia for 6 month tour of Europe, 1984 British Council UK study grant, 1981 Artist in residence Victoria College of the Arts, 1974 Australia Council grant for Adelaide Festival of Arts; 1954 Aubrey Gibson Sculpture prize Victorian Sculptors' Society.

Lyle is represented in the collections of the Australian National Gallery Canberra, University of Sydney, Art Gallery of South Australia, University of Adelaide, RMIT Melbourne; Mildura Arts Centre, Victorian College of the Arts, Geelong Art Gallery; Lord Perth Scotland; and private collections.

(Source: *Interview with Max Lyle*)

References

B'nai B'rith Australia New Zealand website, https://www.bnaibrith.org.au/our-history.html (viewed 23 November 2021

Certificate of title, Vol. 2637 Fol. 399

Council Building Files held by Port Phillip City Council (BP)

Edquist, Harriet (2012), 'Fooks, Ernest', P Goad & J Willis, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Melbourne, pp. 258-259

Lyle, Max & Linn, Rob & National Library of Australia. Oral History Program (2004). *Interview with Max Lyle*. Viewed online at https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/36507294 24 November 2021.

Peterson, Richard (2009, 2nd ed. [2005]), 'Edgewater Towers' (chpt. 43) in *A Place of Sensuous Resort: Buildings of St Kilda and their people*.

Port Phillip Thematic Environmental History (TEH), February 2021

Townsend, Catherine, 'Making Modern Jewish Melbourne: Schools, Synagogues, Aged Care Facilities and Community Buildings 1938-1979' (paper), 2018

Description

A modernist community building currently being converted to residential use. It consists of two sections, both with a rectangular footprint, flat roof, and two storey – the taller main and smaller northern unit. Initially the front of the main part had an open undercroft (SLV, H2003.100/283), which has been infilled.

The roof of the main section projects with a timber fascia and has a soffit with stained, slatted timber. This section is concrete framed, and its façade has a wide (segmental) curved cream brick wall in stretcher bond with a regular configuration of projecting bricks (alternate bricks in every second course) and recessed, narrow side windows. A large bronze sculpture of a menorah (ancient Hebrew lampstand) by Max Lyle is located to the southern end.

The side elevations include panels with a pebble finish alternating with glazing to the front part of the upper level with limited areas of cream brick (some infill). The glazing was timber-framed with large, fixed panes either side of a narrow openable window.

The smaller northern unit is set back in cream brick with similar window groups comprised of narrow openable and large fixed panes, with a timber panel above.

Comparative analysis

The former B'nai B'rith House is one of many institutional buildings (schools, community centres, memorials, aged care facilities etc.) constructed in in Melbourne during the 1950s, 60s and 70s in response to the massive population growth within the Jewish community following World War II. The architects commissioned were often Jewish émigrés themselves who brought with them detailed knowledge and experience of European Modernism. While their formative training always remained dominant, their work inevitably absorbed some influence from their new home. Dr Ernest Fooks, who was educated in Vienna before immigrating in 1939, emerged as one of the preeminent Jewish émigré architects practicing in Melbourne during the Post-war period.

The B'nai B'rith House is in the Modernist idiom. There is no ready comparison within the municipality in terms of contemporary public or community projects. B'nai B'rith House compares well with others completed in Melbourne at the end of the 1950s, such as St Faiths' Anglican Church at 8 Charles Street, Burwood by Mockridge, Stahle & Mitchell (1957-58) and St James Anglican Church at 1461 High Street, Glen Iris by Bogle, Banfield & Associates (1959). Both noted buildings employed striking massing/forms not necessarily associated with traditional religious architecture and were similarly boldly articulated with pronounced use of blank walls to the street.

Dr Ernest Fooks designed other buildings in the municipality for the Jewish community:

- Adass Israel Synagogue, 12-24 Glen Eira Avenue, Ripponlea (Citation 2434). Built in 1965, although the design had been largely settled four years earlier in 1961. It is in the Modernist idiom with fine façade articulation and a broad gable roof with wide eaves.

- Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, a Jewish mortuary and funeral home, 115-119 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, built in 1979 (not included in the Heritage Overlay). It is another distinctive building but reflecting the Brutalist style with its bold massing, extensive areas of blank wall and brown brick exterior. It similarly includes a projecting curved wall section to the centre of the façade as the B'nai B'rith House.

Assessment

This place has been assessed in accordance with the processes and guidelines outlined in the Australia ICOMOS *Charter for Places of Cultural Heritage Significance* (The Burra Charter) 2013, using the Hercon criteria.

Recommendations

Retain in the Heritage Overlay as an individual place. Reduce the Heritage Overlay extent to include only the 1959/61 building.

Primary source

RBA Architects & Conservation Consultants, *HO7 Elwood St Kilda Balaclava Ripponlea Precinct heritage review Stage 2*, 2021

Other studies

Andrew Ward & Associates, *Port Phillip Heritage Review*, 1998

Robert Peck von Hartel Trethowan, *St Kilda 20th century architectural study*, Volume 3, 1992

Other images

Front elevation in 2017

Side elevation in 2017 – note visible chimney of original house at rear

Stairwell of 1959 building in 2017 showing original window details