AUSTRALIAN JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY (VIC) INC ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 2026

Committee of Management

President	Rodney Eisfelder
Vice President	Bernie Kuran
Secretary	Terry Ashton
Treasurer	Mark Ellison
Committee	Viv Bayer
	Aaron Blicblau
	Rene Eisner
	Helen Gardner
	Liz James OAM
	Yolande McNicoll
	Max Wald OAM

Honoured Life Members

Rodney Eisfelder
Liz James OAM
Allan Jankie

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Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (Vic) Inc.

ABN 17 078 119 093

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Report edited by Rene Eisner

2026 PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Rodney Eisfelder

At the time of writing, the committee consists of:

Rodney Eisfelder - President	Bernie Kuran - Vice-President
Terry Ashton - Secretary	Mark Ellison – Treasurer
Liz James - Committee & Librarian	Rene Eisner - Committee
Max Wald - Committee	Aaron Blicblau - Committee & Webmaster
Yolande McNicoll - Committee	Helen Gardner - Committee
Viv Bayer - Committee	

This last year has seen a mix of talks, both zoom and in person, presented by international speakers – from USA, Israel, New Zealand and England, local speakers and members of the committee. We had two talks on AI and its application to Genealogy, an introduction to Genealogical research, a talk on tomb stones and the stories they tell, a talk on Galician research, another on the motivations for recording one's history, and a talk on the Wiener Library and its resources for Holocaust research and more.
We assisted numerous school children with their Roots projects for five Jewish Schools, and assisted both members and the general public to research their Jewish roots.

At last year's AGM we farewelled our Past President Allan Jankie after many years of service, while Rene Eisner stepped down after many years as treasurer to become a general committee member and Mark Ellison stepped up to become treasurer.

Rodney Eisfelder,
President.



Rodney Eisfelder



Bernie Kuran



Terry Ashton



Mark Ellison



Max Wald



Liz James



Rene Eisner



Aaron Blicblau



Viv Bayer



Yolande McNicoll



Helen Gardner

SECRETARY'S REPORT AND PRESENTATIONS 2025-2026

By Terry Ashton

Committee meetings for 2025-2026 were largely face-to-face, with meetings held via Zoom during the colder winter months.
During the past year our committee has provided members with a variety of talks, some presented as Zoom presentations when the speaker was from interstate or overseas.
The committee has decided that after this year's AGM and in line with many other organisations, there will be a fee for attending Zoom meetings. The cost will be $5 for members and $10 for non-members.

The following is a summary of AJGS' 2025-2026 presentations.

July 20th 2025: Translating, Transcribing and Summarizing Documents using AI



Thomas MacEntee spoke via zoom on "Translating, Transcribing and Summarizing Documents Using AI." A genealogical 'Rock Star,' Thomas MacEntee used his IT knowledge to improve the genealogical research experience for our members.

August 17th 2025: Tombstones-The Stories They Tell



With more than thirty years as a high-tech professional—including over two decades at a global Israeli hi-tech company—Zvika Oren delivered a zoom presentation for members on "Tombstones-The Stories They Tell," discussing what can be learned from tombstones and cemeteries and how to search the Internet for tombstones and information about the deceased.

September 7th 2025: 35 years of researching a family history



Claire Bruell from New Zealand spoke to members on the 35 years of researching her family history. She documented a four-generation family history of the Briess and Bruell families, tracing their origins in Czechoslovakia, their escape from Nazi-occupied Europe in 1939, and their relocation to New Zealand. This comprehensive narrative is compiled in her four-book series titled *Searching for Identity*. Her broader efforts also led to the founding of the Holocaust Oral History Project in New Zealand to preserve survivor testimonies in major national archives.

October 12th 2025: How to use records to find families in Galicia



AJGS committee member, Viv Bayer presented a highly detailed and informative talk on how to use records to find families in Galicia. To see a PDF copy of Viv's notes, log onto https://ajgs-vic.org.au/ and go to 'Events'>'Past Presentations.'

November 9th 2025: AJGS (VIC'S) AGM & ANNUAL LIONEL SHARPE MEMORIAL PRESENTATION



The annual AGM was held at the Glen Eira Town Hall, where elections were held for the 2025-2026 committee, after which Sidra Kranz Moshinsky (Director and CEO at the Jewish Museum of Australia), delivered the annual Lionel Sharpe memorial presentation, providing a detailed discussion on the origins of the Roots Project for schools and its progress over time.

Sidra Kranz Moshinsky discussing the origins of the Roots Project and its development over time.

November 30th 2025: New AI Tools for Jewish Genealogy



Dr. Jan Gronski discussed how the L'Dor V'Dor Foundation is building first-of-kind AI models that read historic Yiddish handwriting and other languages common in Jewish records. He explained how demystifying training Handwritten Text Recognition in Transkribus with Mame-Loshen and its two related Yiddish AI models, which showed real accuracy gains enabling full text search and translation capability on 19th–20th-century sources. He discussed how PastPort, an interactive map, built on the largest online database of Jewish surnames and Jewish towns, places ancestors with their town neighbours.

Committee member, Helen Gardner, introducing Jan Gronski

February 10th 2026: RESOURCES, SHORTCUTS AND EASY STEPS FOR FINDING YOUR JEWISH ANCESTORS

Before an audience of approximately 70 attendees & held in conjunction with the Lamm Jewish Library of Australia, AJGS-VIC librarian and archivist, Liz James OAM, discussed 'Resources, Shortcuts & Easy Steps for Finding your Jewish Ancestry,' covering such areas as immigration, naturalisation records, newspapers, census and shipping records, holocaust records, wills and probate records & war and military records. Liz's presentation was followed by a Q/A session.



Liz James OAM

MARCH 22ND 2026: "The importance of recording one's personal history"

In late March, Rachelle Unreich, a journalist for over 37 years, spoke on the importance of recording one's personal history, touching on the story of her mother, a Holocaust survivor. Her talk was highly informative and created much interest.

Rachelle Unreich



MAY 31ST 2026: RECOVERING THE WORLDS OF MY JEWISH FAMILY: THE JOURNEY TO OPPORTUNITY

AJGS-VIC committee member, Yolande McNicoll, PhD, drew on stories shared to her by her grandmother, which allowed her to build a richly documented family history. In this talk, she traced her Fink ancestors' 40 year journey from Poland to Melbourne via Geelong, London, Guernsey and Berlin, using genealogical research and expertise in history and language and palaeography.



Yolande McNicoll

JUNE 21ST 2026: USING THE INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE

Elise Bath of the Weiner Library, London manages the international tracing service archive and holds a Masters in museum studies, plus a Master of Letters. Elise discussed how to use the International Tracing Service Archives as a resource, explaining how the Wiener Library began pre 1939 and what its role is today. Today, the ITS contains more than 30 million documents.



Elise Bath

Terry Ashton,
Honorary Secretary, AJGS-VIC

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STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

FOR YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE, 2026

	2026 $	2025 $
Income		
Membership fees	4,360	4,205
Donations	5,452	6,038
Meeting income	510	180
Total income	**10,322**	**10,423**
Expenses		
Rent Beth Weizman	2,771	2,670
Meeting expenses	1,430	963
Advertising	488	200
Equipment Hire - In One Voice	327	349
Lamm Library catalogue maintenance	924	924
Printing and purchase resource books	1,114	424
Subscriptions	404	244
Zoom , video and SMS for meetings	357	339
Insurance	1,160	980
Website	1,350	817
Donations, affiliations	162	441
Square fees	61	51
Other	49	49
Total expenses	**10,597**	**8,451**
Net surplus / (deficit)	**-275**	**1,972**
Bank balance 1 July	16,680	14,708
Bank balance 30 June	**16,405**	**16,680**

TREASURER'S REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE, 2026

by Mark Ellison

I was appointed Honorary Treasurer at the last AGM, and I would like to thank my predecessor, Rene Eisner, for the wonderful job she has done over many years, and in particular for her time in helping me transition to this new role.

Membership fees received for the financial year 2026 were $4,360 with 123 financial members, a slight increase from the previous year.

We were delighted to welcome 16 new members during the year.

We received a total of $5,452 in donations, and we thank you all for your generous support.

For the financial year we saw a small deficit of $275, compared to the previous year's surplus of $1,972, principally due to higher expenditure on meeting, IT and printing expenses. However, our bank balance remains very healthy, showing $16,405 at 30th June 2026, which will allow us to pursue new opportunities as they arise.

Mark Ellison
Honorary Treasurer

RESOURCE ROOM REPORT

By Liz James OAM

We extend our sincere thanks to Steve and Louise Einfeld for their generous donation to the Society in recognition of the research and preparation of their extensive ancestry and descendant lineages. We also thank Garry Ciddor for his generous contribution to our library collection.

We continue to receive enquiries from people seeking assistance with family trees, compiling family history books, navigating genealogical websites, and searching through the many archival resources to uncover elusive ancestors.

Books recently added to the AJGS-VIC / AJHS collection:

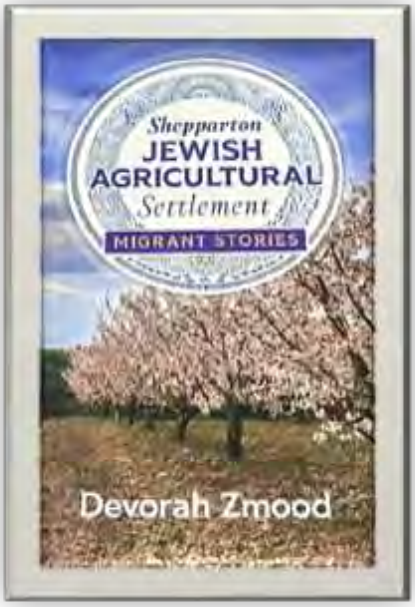
*** ECAJ 2024 Report on Antisemitism in Australia**
1 Oct 2023 - 30 Sep 2024
(This report is produced to assist understanding of anti-Jewish violence, vandalism, harassment, and prejudice in contemporary Australia).
Researched, written and compiled by Julie Nathan.

- **ECAJ - Anti-Jewish Incidents Report 2024**

Researched, written and compiled by Julie Nathan.

- **ECAJ - Anti-Jewish Incidents Report 2025**

Researched, written and compiled by Julie Nathan.



- **Shepparton Jewish Agricultural Settlement**
  by Devorah Zmood
- **Fulfilment of my great Australian Dream**
  Memoirs of John R. Aarons
- **A photograph, a memoir**
  by Ruja Varon
- **Megillah of Esther'**

Diary written by Esther Jacobs/ Cook/ Lipman. 149 pages (Digitised)



Please email secretary@ajgs-vic.org.au for an appointment to use the resource room if you wish to do research or simply to browse.

Hope to see you shortly.

Liz James OAM 2026

ROOTS PROJECTS 2026

By Liz James OAM

Schools Participating -

- Mount Scopus – Year 8 – (5 sessions) – presenter Bernie Kuran
- Yavneh – Year 9 - presenter Bernie Kuran
- Sholom Aleichem – Grade 6 - presenter Liz James
- Bialik – Year 7 - presenter Liz James
- King David – Year 8 – presenter Bernie Kuran

Locations -

- The Jewish Museum - Yavneh, Mt Scopus and Sholem Aleichem
- Bialik College Campus
- King David Campus
- Evening presentations at the Jewish Museum for Mount Scopus and Yavneh parents by Bernie Kuran

Presentation included –

- Assortment of documents available for Roots Projects / History of surnames– presented by Bernie Kuran (10 sessions)
- Researching your Jewish Ancestry – Liz James – (1 session)
- Assortment of documents available for Roots Projects at Bialik – presented on campus - Liz James

Pre-Preparation - January -

- Rene Eisner prepared email handouts and business cards.
- Liz James updated PowerPoint presentation on finding documents, maps, photos, and the use of websites to support the data found on each family tree.

February -

- Participating School staff emailed with instructions, and then students completed their four-six generation trees to send back to the Society two weeks before our visit.
- Documents from National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, Yad Vashem, USHMM, Bad Arolsen, Australian Jewish Historical Society, Miriam Weiner- 'Routes to Roots', JewishGen – (various sites), Gesher Galicia and JRI Poland etc. were consulted for proof of – Birth, Death, Burial, Marriage, Census records, Holocaust testimonies, Military, Immigration, Newspaper publications, Residences and other relevant information.



Where available, these documents were attached to their six-generation trees and returned to the students on the day of their session.

- Family Trees assisted by Liz James for Sholem Aleichem;
- Family Trees assisted by Rene Eisner and Terry Ashton for King David
- Family Trees assisted by Rodney Eisfelder, Yolande McNicoll, Viv Bayer and Max Wald for Mount Scopus
- Family Trees assisted by Helen Gardner, and Liz James for Yavneh

Activity at Bialik-

*Students used their family tree results to trace the journeys their ancestors took to arrive in Australia

- Assisted on the day by Terry Ashton, Bernie Kuran, Viv Bayer, Rodney Eisfelder, Rene Eisner, Mark Ellison, Yolande McNicoll and Liz James.



Evaluation -

- Sessions went smoothly, staff extremely supportive and interested. Students were very engaged.
- Preparing the trees before the sessions meant that students already had ownership of up to four generations and the rest could be discovered over time.
- As mentioned previously, many of the grandparents of these students were born between 1950-1960 in Australia, South Africa, Israel, Morocco, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, Rio de Janeiro, USSR, Yemen and Ukraine. There are currently very few records available for many of the above countries. However, JewishGen is steadily expanding its collections, and now includes additional research resources for many Middle Eastern countries.

*The Society should begin preparing for increased interest from people whose families originated in these regions. This will involve expanding our knowledge, acquiring relevant resources, and developing the capability to assist with locating, translating, and interpreting historical documents so that more people can begin the rewarding journey of discovering their unique family history.

* Artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT can be valuable in translating historical documents and providing research assistance. However, they still have limitations, and important translations should be verified where accuracy is critical.

'One of the benefits of doing a Family Tree, is seeing history through the eyes of your ancestors'.

Liz James OAM - 2026

Committee Member Report 2026

By Max Wald OAM

BURIAL DATABASE:

Throughout the past year, I have continued to collect burial data from the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha and the Adass Israel Chevra Kadisha. This information is forwarded to the Australian Jewish Historical Society's burial database in Sydney and is then incorporated into the Jewish Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR), maintained by JewishGen and available through its website. https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/

I have also continued my efforts to obtain burial data from Bet Olam. While we currently hold records up to 2020, obtaining more recent data has proven to be challenging, and I continue to pursue this matter.

MEETING ORGANISATION:

My responsibilities within the Society include organising our Zoom presentations and liaising with overseas presenters. During the winter months, I also organise and manage Committee meetings conducted via Zoom.

Following each online presentation, I download the recording and create a YouTube link for publication on the Society's website, enabling members who were unable to attend to view the presentation at their convenience.

I am also responsible for booking our presentations held at the City of Glen Eira Town Hall and ensuring that the technical connection between our computer equipment and the Council's audiovisual system is correctly set up and functioning.

In addition, I occasionally assist with the annual *Roots* projects conducted with various Jewish schools.

I appreciate the opportunity to continue contributing to the Society's activities and supporting its members through these various roles.

Max Wald OAM

Website Report 2026

by Aaron Blicblau

The AJGS-VIC website has been improved and redesigned to reflect the upcoming events on the front page. With “Posters” on the front page. All other aspects are functioning well. Future needs are for a ‘Member only’ section are in the process of being designed.

Digital Freaks continue to host the AJGS-Vic Website. The website maintenance report for the 2026 year highlighted that it was running smoothly in the backend. The website was updated constantly which is key to security and performance with the newest features, bug fixes, and security patches.

New email addresses have been created:

For general enquiries please email our Secretary secretary@ajgs-vic.org.au , for membership and accounts please email our Treasurer treasurer@ajgs-vic.org.au

https://ajgs-vic.org.au/



Committee Member Report 2026

By Rene Eisner

I look back on my 14 years as a committee member and most of that time as Honorary Treasurer. The camaraderie has been great, the joy of meeting so many wonderful and enthusiastic genealogists, the stimulating times when we help our members, the pleasure in helping the students prepare their trees for their Roots projects. I will be retiring soon, and I am glad that I leave the Society in good hands with the current committee.

I am sure that those continuing and the new committee members will be able to follow with the duties that I have completed in the past: as well as the accounts and membership register, I helped with creating newsletters, Society Brochures, overseeing the establishment of the new website, and editing this Annual Report each year.

Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (Vic) Inc

AJGS (Vic)

The place to discover your Roots

www.ajgs-vic.org.au secretary@ajgs-vic.org.au

Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) Annual Report 2026

By Helen Gardner

1. **Preamble**.

The Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) is dedicated to preserving Jewish memory through research which will locate and document every Jewish record across the globe. The data will be stored in a freely available online catalogue called JCat.

Most organisations which have been in existence prior to the almost universal use of computers have boxes of uncatalogued archive material stowed in boxes and stored wherever they can find room for them. The local arm of the project aims to create a master list of all archival records of Melbourne's Jewish communal organisations. This initiative will catalogue these records, preserve them and thereby help create a comprehensive history of the Melbourne Jewish community.

2. Report

Cataloguing of the archives of the Yehudi Sassoon Sephardi Shule and the JCCV has been completed and the data sent to each organisation. The data has also been sent to the US for inclusion in JCat.

Archives of Kew Shule have been significantly compiled; however, we have been asked to do further cataloguing of material not originally specified. This is expected to continue soon.

The “Essentials Guide to Australian Jewish Genealogy” has been checked and amended collaboratively by both AJGS Victoria and the AJGS Sydney (as part of the AJHS there). The final version was sent to the US for inclusion on the DoJR website along with other community guides. Marlis Humphrey (CEO of DoJR) is working on a standard format.

Jan Gronsky, responsible for the DoJR transcription models using Transkribus visited Melbourne and presented a talk to AJGS in November 2025. Transcription using Transcribus is a quite different process to using ChatGPT, as the AI models have been trained and tested for accuracy with a minimum of 300 documents of different kinds. Russian and Polish models are already available. The Yiddish model was launched at the IAJGS conference in August. They are working on Hebrew, Aramaic and Ladino.

Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) continued

Jan also gave a demonstration of his newest project, PastPort, which has collated Alexander Beider's list of Polish Jewish surnames with a detailed town list for all towns and shtetls in Poland. This allows queries on names to show all the towns that surname can be traced to, and for towns, a list of all the Jewish surnames recorded in that town. Historic and cultural details of towns are also displayed. Beider has allowed access to all of his books of Jewish names, and the project is being expanded to cover other areas.
Following a preliminary visit to Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, cataloguing their archival data is expected to start soon.

Helen Gardner
Team Leader, Victorian branch, DoJR
July 2026



DOJR
B'nai B'rith Community History Project.