

THE HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE SIMON ISAACS Q.C. (9.4.05 to 16.6.87)

and his wife

MARIA ISAACS nee ISRAEL (28.1.07 to 29.3.94)

SIMON ISAACS, son of penniless immigrants, rose after a brilliant professional career to become a Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales

Simon, or Sam as he was always known to his family and friends, was born in London, on the 9th of April 1905, second child and first son to Herman and Elizabeth Isaacs. Both were born in Holland to impoverished families, Herman on 31st of July 1878 in Amsterdam, and Elizabeth in 1875. They had both come to London just before the turn of the century and were employed respectively, until their marriage, as domestic servants.

The family lived in Edmonton in Middlesex when Sam was born, and later in Hackney in London's East End. Young Sam commenced his schooling at a local school near the Roman Road. With increasing signs of anti-Semitism in England at that time, Herman Isaacs left for Australia around 1910. His wife and five children remained behind in London's East End. Sam was a good pupil and won the King's Medal for good conduct, presented by the London County Council for the year 1912-13.

Elizabeth Isaacs and the children rejoined her husband in Sydney just before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

After arriving in Sydney, Sam was first a pupil at Bourke Street Public School until December 1914, and when his family left the district, he became a pupil at Hurstville Public School, where he completed his primary education. He already showed signs of the scholastic brilliance which became evident throughout his academic life.

At the end of his primary schooling in 1917, aged 12, he won a bursary to attend Sydney Boys' High School, first located at Mary Anne Street Ultimo, and later at Moore Park. At the age of 17, in December 1922, he passed the Leaving Certificate with second class honours in chemistry and history.

Throughout his life, Sam Isaacs was an observant Jew following the orthodox tradition. He was a member of the Great Synagogue for many years and a frequent attender on Shabbat and always on the holydays. He was often given the honour of an Aliyah and over the years made offerings for the various members of his and his wife's family. His seat in row G.12 was alongside those of his friends, the Einfelds.

The Strathfield Congregation

In 1942 Sam and Ria and their three children moved to Strathfield which at that time had only a handful of Jewish families. There both became involved with the Jewish education of the young children of the area, joining Henry and Naomi Koltz and other families who had already begun Hebrew classes for the children. By the time the Isaacs family arrived at Strathfield, classes were being held in the home of Dave and Vera Pearlman at the rear of their fruit shop adjoining Strathfield station. The N.S.W. Board of Jewish Education provided a Sunday school teacher, Miss Laura Boas.

Sam and Ria became very active, together with Vera and Dave Pearlman, Fanny Robinson and others on the committee of the Strathfield community. In 1947 they formed a parents and citizens association and began searching for a more suitable site for the growing community of children and their parents.

Sam was instrumental in approaching the government to contribute funds for the purchase of vacant land to be used for a Jewish Sunday school and other communal Jewish events. As the land proved to be too small, subsequently in 1949 he was responsible with others for acquiring the property in Florence Street Strathfield, which still today is the address of the Strathfield Synagogue. It was necessary for the committee to raise funds to acquire this property and Sam, Ria and others worked tirelessly to this end.

Throughout his life Sam was continuously involved in on-going work for the Jewish community. While his family were young teenagers, he and Ria were among the parents who with Issie and Bella Green founded the Great Synagogue Youth in the mid-40's.