

Rabbi Michael R. Mandel

Michael Mandel was born in Simleul, Transylvania, in 1929, the youngest son of Herman and Hermina Mandel. His father was an eminent Hebrew scholar and the author of a Hebrew commentary on the Pentateuch. The family could trace its origins back to the time in 1423 when it was forced to leave Spain.

At the age of 8, Michael was sent to Hungary to live and study with his uncle, the headmaster of the local Jewish day school, until he was ready to return home to study in the *yeshiva*. With the Nazi domination of Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Michael Mandel lost most of his family and found himself in various labour camps. In 1947, he came to Australia, aged 18, and acted as *chazan* at the Bankstown Synagogue on the High Holydays. In 1950, he left Australia and spent three years on a kibbutz in the Galilee. Because he spoke seven languages fluently, he was able to act as interpreter on behalf of the Jewish Agency aiding new immigrants arriving in Israel. Upon his return to Australia, he became a Hebrew teacher and officiated as *chazan* in various synagogues. He then spent five years as assistant minister at Temple Emanuel. During these years he studied elocution, voice production, liturgical music and singing. Eventually, he returned to the orthodox community and became minister of Strathfield Hebrew Congregation and then of the Coogee-Randwick-Clovelly Congregation. He came to the Great Synagogue in March, 1967, as the second minister.

His work was to be largely concerned with G.S.Y. and he assisted the G.S.Y. chairman, Theo Freilich, in planning and directing G.S.Y. activities. Hospital visiting was a regular weekly responsibility, and it was estimated that during the year 1967/1968, he visited over 1000 patients.

Because of his previous association with other congregations Rabbi Mandel often received requests to officiate at other Synagogues besides The Great. The board consented to these requests as it was their wish that "all sister congregations should be helped wherever possible". A Hebrew-speaking study group was formed by him, and with Rev. I. Gluck he trained young officiants for the two annual youth services in the Synagogue.

In February 1970, he resigned his position as minister, to take a rabbinical diploma prior to becoming the chief minister in Auckland, New Zealand. Later he served as director of the Melbourne Chevra Kadisha, and subsequently, for a number of years, as rabbi of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation.

Source: Archives of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, Darlinghurst, N.S.W.