

## GEORGE STRAUSS: SENIOR MASTER AND FRENCH TEACHER, 1960-1962



George Hermann Strauss was born in December 1923 and was of Jewish background from Vienna, Austria; the population was mostly of Germanic origin and German was the main language though there were Slav, Polish, and Hungarian minorities, and Jewish people were about ten percent of the population in Vienna.

George's parents were Moses Samuel Strauss and Elsa Klapp. Moses's father Hermann Strauss was from Vienna and his mother Katherina Rurnauer from Korican, Czechoslovakia. Elsa's parents were Leopold Klapp and Karoline Fauvers from Czechoslovakia. Moses Strauss and Elsa Klapp married in 1907 and raised two children: Karoline (1908-1920) and George Hermann (1923-2014). The circumstances of Karoline's death as a teenager is not known.



George Strauss and his parents were caught up in the horrors of World War Two and it's likely that George was sent as a teenager to England to escape the increasing persecution of Jews. His mother Elsa nee Klapp was not so lucky, because she died in the Izbica concentration camp, Poland, about 1942, as did his grandmother Katherina Strauss.

According to *Wikipedia*, the Izbica ghetto was a Jewish ghetto created in 1941 by Nazi Germany serving as a transfer point for deportation of Jews from Poland, Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia to Belzec and Sobibór extermination camps.

His father, Moses Samuel Strauss, must have escaped by a different route to China because he died there in Shanghai about 1944.

In 1940 George, a leatherworker, was in London where he was classified as a Jewish Refugee and a German Internee. He was 'captured' in July 1940 for being an enemy alien. In September he was transferred with 2,541 other enemy aliens mostly Jewish, from England to Sydney on the S S Dunera.



In November 1940 he was marched into and was interred at No. 7 Camp at Hay, New South Wales. It must have been strange experience of confinement mixed with intellectual challenge:

*" . . . the school of the German camp no.7 has 101 courses, comprising 181 classes and is attended by 560 students. The studies pertain to languages, sciences, technology, agriculture, arts, and religion."*

Was it here that George extended his fluency in several languages?

In 1941 Strauss was transferred to Tatura and then released to Shepparton in 1943. Possibly this is where he was working in a factory.

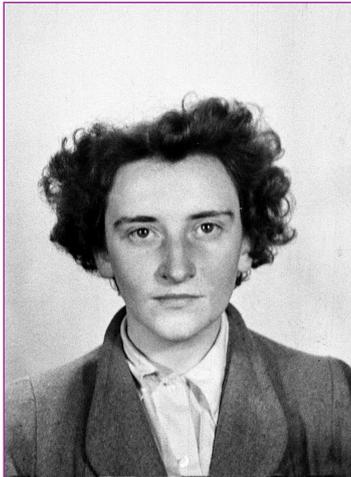
Strauss retained connection with his fellow Hay/Tatura internees and later joined a committee to maintain connection with the Dunera people. The group formed the Hay Tatura Association in the late 1980s and published the Dunera News. Over time, the management of the association shifted to Melbourne, and George Strauss was on that first Melbourne committee.

George's name is also included in the Tatura Irrigation & Wartime Camps Museum's book, "The Dunera Tapes" (1990) which was written for the 50th anniversary of their arrival in Australia.

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George's whereabouts between 1943 and 1946 have not been traced. After his stay in Shepparton, he must have moved to Melbourne because he was living in Surrey Hills when he applied for naturalisation in 1946. He probably enrolled in tertiary studies at this time, which would have taken several years - where this occurred is not known but was probably at Melbourne University. He ended up with qualifications as Master of Arts (French) and Diploma of Education.



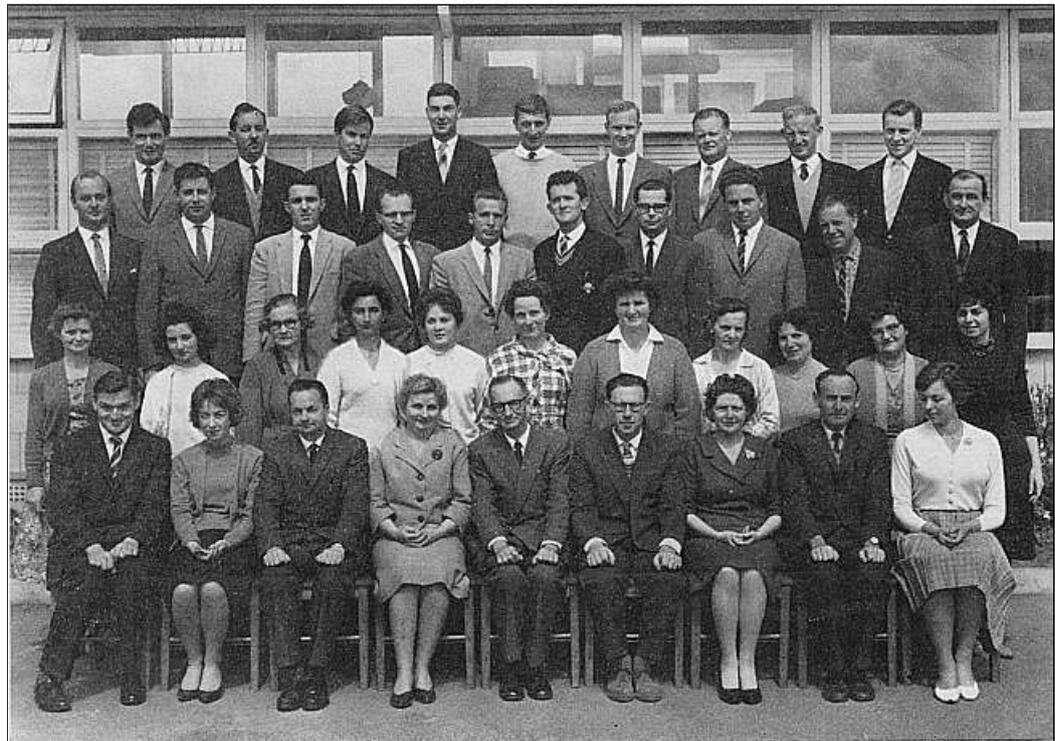
In 1946 George Hermann Strauss married Valda Carmel Mooney and they raised four children: Elsa, Philip, Margaret, and Peter.

Valda's family was of Irish background from Roscommon and came to Australia in the 1860s; they were in Colac in 1866. Valda was born in 1925 to John Francis Mooney and Anni Millicent Halkyard, who were living in Brunswick North at the time. Valda had enlisted at age 18 years for service in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force in 1943, working as a Clerk Stores Assistant with rank of Aircraftwoman. She was discharged in 1946 on demobilisation.

In 1949 George and Valda were living in Bairnsdale, where George was working as a teacher and Valda as a clerk.

In 1954 they were at Box Hill South, where George was again working as a teacher. In the late 1950s he was teaching at Burwood High School.

George Strauss started at St Albans High School in 1960 in the position of Senior Master - the Headmaster was Mr Barker and the Senior Mistress was Miss Taylor. Strauss was aged 37 and fluent in English, French, and German, which were three of the languages being taught at the school. He would have been able to converse with many of the students' parents as many of the refugees and displaced persons in St Albans spoke German. It's often been said that German was the local *lingua franca* of St Albans in the 1950s.



Front: Mr. G. Reid, Miss V. Fenelon, Mr. J. Everson, Miss E. S. Taylor (Senior Mistress), Mr. M. H. Wilkinson (Head Master), Mr. G. H. Strauss (Senior Master), Miss G. M. Bowles, Mr. L. E. Burchell, Miss R. Meyer (Physec.).  
 Second row: Mrs. J. Cox (Sec.), Miss H. Eadie, Mrs. E. Sturesteps, Mrs. L. Pavlova, Miss G. E. Coutts, Mrs. J. Fielder, Mrs. L. Cameron, Mrs. Kriksclunas, Mrs. M. Burden, Mrs. S. Hudson (Sec.), Miss R. Bechler (Psych.).  
 Third row: Mr. E. Youd, Mr. J. Morieson, Mr. D. Hill, Mr. F. Schiller, Mr. P. Pavlov, Mr. L. King, Mr. G. Sacharonok, Mr. I. M. Smith, Mr. T. Walsh, Mr. G. G. Gibson.  
 Back: Mr. J. D. Conroy, Mr. N. Bolvari, Mr. J. Mott, Mr. J. Hunt, Mr. T. G. Scarff, Mr. R. Robertson, Mr. K. Chilton, Mr. K. Robertson, Mr. E. Ford. Absent: Miss M. T. O'Connor.

1960 staff, George Strauss is in front, fourth from right.

Strauss did not stay long at St Albans, leaving at the end of 1962. In 1963 George and Valda were living in Pascoe Vale and both were working as teachers.

In 1970 George Hermann Strauss was conferred as Doctor of Philosophy by Melbourne University. George and Valda then moved to New South Wales and were living in Bathurst. George was working as a lecturer, most probably at Mitchell College, as in 1971 he was appointed to the board of the Mitchell College of Advance Education. He was also on the board of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) during the 1970s.

By 1982 George had transferred back to Victoria to the Prahran College of Advanced Education. He was one of the founders and principal lecturer in Interpreting and Translating at Prahran CAE and it's said that he was one of the pioneers in the field of interpreting for diverse immigrants and indigenous groups. He also held interpreting classes at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in the 1980s.



George Strauss with senior staff and prefects 1961.

## Publications

George Straus has written a number of publications in French and English, including:

- The Role of the Devil in the Works of Andre Gide, University of Melbourne, 1970.
- Contes amusants easy stories for young students, 1965.
- Voyage aventureaux, 1966.
- Margaret Holmes A Life of Ecumenical Service (1886-1981).
- Notre siècle: lectures françaises modernes, 1968.

At some stage Valda and George Strauss moved to Sassafress, Kalista. Then in the late 2000s they moved to a retirement home in Viewbank, Victoria.

Dr George George Herman Strauss died in August 2014 at age 90 years and was buried at Eltham:

*"Loved husband of Val. Father of Elsa, Philip, Margaret and Peter. Grandfather of Freyja, Konrad, Mitzi, Tekla, Cathy, Steven, Peter, Shelley, Michaela and Lara. Father-in-law to Loy (dec) and Aea. Grandfather-in-law to Miles, Lindsay, David, Marcel and Hannah. Great-grandfather to Harriet, Luca and Lachlan. A fine man."*

Valda had been a teacher, editor and writer, and two of her publications were *Quellers*, *Undertakers and Wild Irish Stew* and *Irish Famine Orphans in Australia* about young girls sent to Australia between 1848 and 1850.

Valda Carmel Strauss nee Mooney passed away in July 2015 at age 89 years and was buried at Eltham with her late husband:

*"Loved wife of George (dec). Mother of Elsa, Philip, Margaret and Peter. Grandmother of Freyja, Konrad, Mitzi, Tekla, Cathy, Steven, Peter, Shelley, Michaela and Lara. Mother-in-law to Loy (dec) and Aea. Grandmother-in-law to Miles, Lindsay, David, Marcel, Hannah and Buddha. Great grandmother to Harriet, Luca, Lachlan and Mitchell. Always with humour. "*



## Remembering George Strauss

**Rosemary Keegan:** In the four years at the high school I was taught by wonderful teachers. The most influential teacher in all of my education was Mr. George Strauss - later Dr. Strauss after he completed a Ph. D. at Melbourne University in French literature - on the role of the devil in the works of Andre Gide. Mr. Strauss had been a young Jewish boy sent to England to escape the barbarity that was occurring in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. He gave us a love of learning and a belief in personal integrity. He was particularly drawn to a group of students among us who, he said admiringly, not only read European works of literature but read them in their original languages. These were the children of European parents who had been displaced by the war and who, more often than not, were professional people: chemists, engineers, educators, in their own pre-war countries. I was not one of those multilingual Europeans - but I was part of the group who wanted the sort of education which was being offered to us. In the end, even though I was not gifted in languages as my European friends were, Mr. Strauss had me reading the works of Andre Gide in French.

**Daryl Keeble:** George Strauss came as the senior master in 1960 and I remember him as the French teacher who was also very strict. He was a very intelligent Jewish guy who had a tough life but fortunately left Europe at the right time to escape the pogroms and genocide. He had a Master of Arts degree but in Australia I think he started off working in a can factory before coming to teach at St Albans. He was probably a good teacher but he was very strict.

**Bernie Kokot:** French classes were rarely looked forward to with George Strauss. He too was very strict and rather impatient when we could not immediately repeat the French phrases he conveyed. It was easy for George to speak French in the correct tone because he had a huge nose designed for the job, and we pupils were at the young age where our voices were still soprano. I persisted however and found that in future years that developing some comprehension in French, combined then with my ability to fluently speak Polish and rudimentary German, I impressed my later girlfriends and their Aussie parents.

**Jeff Barlow:** Strauss was an impressive man. Like some of his former students at St Albans I found him to be a firm disciplinarian, not surprising given his background. Seems he came to St Albans when I was in 5th form in 1960. I studied French in 5th form and I think I had a different French teacher - can't recall now. The Dunera story itself is quite significant and I understand the crew were very callous and even cruel to the people they were transporting. George's PH D thesis on the works of Andre Gide is in the Melbourne University library both in French and in English editions. From a small bit of reading I have done it looks like Andre Gide had quite an influence on modern Existentialism and drew some of his ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche. He appears to have lauded an appreciation of the senses of the body and liberating the body in contrast to the theme of the sinful body that was promulgated by religion at the time.

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Article written by Joseph Ribarow

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