The Malvern Victory Supermarket: Jewish enterprise, modernist rhetoric and cultural change

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Abstract

In August 1956 Melbourne’s newspapers were abuzz with the controversial advent of a new concept in shopping: the ‘super market’. One early example took the form of the Victory Supermarket in Wattletree Road, Malvern. Housed in the repurposed Victory Cinema, the supermarket brought together a variety of stallholders. It was the brainchild of Melbourne lawyers Joseph and Stella Shatin, and was showcased in the Argus’ food hygiene campaign as a best-practice outlet. Many designs for its façade, and many of the associated features considered during its conception, were the product of research on this new retail form undertaken by architect-planner Ernest Fooks, formerly of Vienna. The Victory Supermarket comes into being at a particularly important moment in Melbourne history, not least for being the year that the eyes of the world are on the city hosting the second Olympic games since the Second World War. Melbourne was modernising, and the way that Melbournians shopped and consumed was changing, with ramifications for not only urban life but also employment and retail networks. Suburban and city local food markets were in some measure archaic and certainly often seen as unhygienic. But what, if anything, was to replace them in the second half of the twentieth century?

Using newspapers, council archives, field work, the Fooks archive held at RMIT University and other diverse sources, this paper investigates the Victory Supermarket as a case study of changing suburban society in the postwar era; a problematic cultural and built environment heritage story; a scenario (and built legacy) that arguably signifies the valuable and proactive ministrations of Melbourne’s Jewish community in progressive change within an otherwise often staid city.

Introduction

A modern new supermarket at Malvern with 23 shops built inside the former Victory Theatre in Wattle Tree Road will open for business within the next six weeks.

The proprietor (Mr. J. Shatin) announced this last night.

The supermarket would feature:

A car park for 50 to 60 vehicles adjacent to the market.

A crèche in charge of a trained nurse situated near the rear entrance in a garden setting.

Nine large stalls and 23 modern lock-up shops. (‘Supermarket for Malvern to Open Soon’, Melbourne Age, 29 February 1956 p. 5)

This paper relates the story of the remaking of one particular building: the 1920 Victory Theatre at 127-133 Wattle Tree Road, Malvern and its variety of uses following the discontinuation of
operations as a cinema in 1955. In this regard it is a story of built heritage—at time of writing, the cinema building still stands, its upper floors apparently still intact—but also of a broader cultural heritage including, but not limited to, the history of Jewish enterprise and engagement with postwar Melbourne; the history of consumption in Melbourne; and the heritage of place, placemaking, food and pleasure.

Melbournians in 1956 might have been forgiven for feeling a slight sense that the frustrations of postwar austerity were finally—a decade since war’s end—beginning to lift. Television, scheduled to begin late in the year, would bring Australia into line with global media consumption patterns. This novelty would coincide with the Summer Olympics, taking an obscure southern hemisphere city to the attention of the wider world for two and a half weeks. There had been concerns that Melbourne’s Olympic facilities and accommodation might not be ready in time; these were assuaged, and the city was presentable. The first visit by a reigning royal had already taken place in 1954 but now Prince Philip, the popular Queen’s consort, was returning to open the Games. The experience undoubtedly caused citizens to reflect on their own city, and questions remained as to whether Melbourne measured up to the rest of the developed world in efficiency, convenience, and modernity.

Shopping was a part of this, and retail in Australia underwent significant change in the 1950s. This initially took place with a shift to the modern experience of self-service in grocery chains and proto supermarkets. The following decade would see the opening of corporate one-stop shop supermarkets such as Woolworths and Coles (Bailey 2014; Humphery 1998). In this article, we make a distinction between these later formations and the Australian supermarket in its nascent, and therefore ill-defined, form such as the subject of this paper, the small, multi-stallholder Victory supermarket; the emerging conventional supermarket; and the soon to arrive drive-in shopping centre, as a larger collection of shops generally containing one, if not more than one, supermarket. Further still, this retail model is distinguished from public transport-based main road suburban shopping strips, the dominant form of urban commercial enterprise since the city’s settlement. We assume there can be no drive-in shopping centre—as discussed for instance by Peter Spearritt (1995) and Matthew Bailey (2014) as central elements of postwar urban society in Australia—without supermarkets. Spearritt writes of Chermside, Australia’s first such shopping centre opened in 1957 in Brisbane, and Chadstone, its second opened in 1960 in Melbourne; each contained one supermarket and one department store amongst smaller ‘specialty’ shops (25 and 90 respectively). Yet, it would appear that the supermarket as a retail concept warranted consolidation to be better understood by Australians prior to the advent of standalone drive-in shopping centres.

A key component of the ‘supermarket’ was the new concept of self-service however, in 1950s grocery chains such as ‘Dickins, Franklins, Crofts and Moran & Cato [which] were concertedly converting to self service’ complicating the criteria for the emerging concept of the supermarket (Bailey 2014 p. 62). Many of these small now self-service grocery stores labeled themselves supermarkets. As of 1959, there were 3000 small, self-styled supermarkets, although the exact form or mode of operation of these is unknown. (Hutchings 1996). The notion of the supermarket, so ubiquitous for most of the second half of the twentieth century as to be mundane, was an exotic rarity for Australians until the mid-1950s, as the Age’s 1956 announcement demonstrates. The key elements of the Victory Supermarket as announced by ‘proprietor’ Joseph Shatin held promises of both liberation and personal expression: the dedicated, broadacre car park, still a novelty in mid twentieth century Melbourne when cars were so few that streetside parking was commonly more than adequate; a crèche, which suggested that housewife shoppers would be enabled to spend time away from their offspring as well as luxuriate in the goods for purchase; and the promise of choice and value. A fortnight after Shatin’s ‘announcement’ he went one step further, promising that his Victory Supermarket would not only be ‘the most modern supermarket in the Southern Hemisphere’ but also that it would be ‘10% cheaper than in any other market’. As well as these important and attractive elements, the supermarket would ensure its component leaseholders signed ‘an undertaking to qualify for The Argus Food Cleanliness Certificate’ (‘10% cut at new supermarket’ Melbourne Argus 13 March 1956 p. 8).
As it transpired, Joseph and Stella Shatin’s Victory Supermarket was a failure. The couple was not, from all evidence (and despite some prior experience) equipped to operate such an enterprise that in any case seemed to have been ill-fated from the start; it almost certainly never operated at the advertised full capacity of over 30 stalls and/or shops.

Yet, the Victory provides us with a useful and engaging example of an early foray into the world of the supermarket in Australia. Through examining its genesis and context, a blend of networks and emergent new consumer tastes, we better understand the era in which the business rose and fell, and the ways in which this phenomenon burgeoned in the post-austerity era. It also tells us about the recycling of buildings at this time and the conceptualization of what constituted an appropriate supermarket space in postwar Melbourne before the supermarket became a standalone, purpose-built structure.

The Victory Theatre was opened on 20 October 1920 by Malvern’s Mayor, Frederick Henry Francis; it accommodated 1800, a credit, Francis said, to ‘the designer and owner, Mr. M. Lucas, who had erected it at a cost of £20,000’ (New Picture Theatre for Malvern’ Melbourne Age 21 October 1920 p. 9). There is no indication that it was down on its luck when it was unceremoniously closed in late 1955, but an Age report on the new supermarket venture remarks in passing that it was ‘ordered closed by the Health Department’ (‘Pram Park at Supermarket’ Melbourne Age 7 December 1955 p. 9). Newspaper advertising suggests the last film screened there was the 1953 comedy Trouble in Store, starring Norman Wisdom as a department store clerk with a hankering to be a window dresser (Melbourne Age 13 September 1955 p. 20). The choice of film was accidentally portentous: after thirty-five years as a cinema, the building would spend almost twice as long ‘in retail’.

**Food retail in 1950s Melbourne: dreams and realities**

Even in the austerity of the 1940s and 50s, consumers were typically encouraged to imagine what they could and perhaps one day would have. Aspiration towards a life of ease and efficiency was an uneasy bedfellow to the ‘precise and yet uneven reception of the phenomena of modernity’ discussed by Lloyd and Johnston (2004, p. 270). An article in the Melbourne Age from 28 November 1945 made much of ‘American Efficiency’ in a study of the way in which American household shopping had ‘simplified and speeded up’ in comparison to Australians’ experience of a ‘monotonous and tedious task’ (ibid p. 5). Supermarkets in North America, readers of the Age were told, presented goods on a self-serve basis, allowing consumers to browse aisles, locate goods, examine, and then choose the things they wanted to buy, so as to obviate being lumbered with items of lower quality. The article continues:

> So quick and efficient is the system, that an average morning’s shopping takes only seven minutes, and saves going from one shop to another. Even business men have no objection to slipping into a food mart on their way home and getting the household requirements. Imagine trying to get your husband to shop for you in Melbourne! (‘A Modern Way to Market’ Melbourne Age 28 November 1945 p. 5)

Sydney provided precedents closer to home. Buckingham’s supermarket in Oxford Street, Darlinghurst allowed one to ‘buy all your foodstuffs under the one roof’ in the late 1940s (‘Buckingham’s’ (advertisement) Sydney Morning Herald 21 July 1948 p. 7). In 1951, a supermarket reputedly modelled to an American template opened in Hurstville, in Sydney’s southern suburbs; it was, as stated to readers of the Sydney Morning Herald, the ‘only supermarket in Australia which will cater, under one roof, for all the food needs for a family’; in size, it was ‘equal to anything in Los Angeles’. And ‘[p]lanned on the most modern American lines’ including ‘5,000 different items of merchandise’ (‘Hurstville Supermarket Will Be Housewives’ Boon’ Sydney Sun Herald 2 December 1951 p. 5).

Stolid Melbourne was not Sydney, of course. The agendas of the Labor and Liberal parties within State government at the time expose a trepidation with regards to the ‘modern’ and the way new enterprises and systems would change the culture and face of Australia, as the Federal limitation on cultural diversity equally expressed. Under John Cain Sr.’s government of 1952-55, it was firmly declared that ‘American interests would not be permitted to establish
supermarkets in Victoria if’, as it was clearly believed they would, ‘they proposed to deprive small shopkeepers of a living or to break down working conditions’ (‘Supermarkets Must Not Take Small Shops’ Living, Says Minister’ Melbourne Age 12 August 1954 p. 4). A host of warring business organisations, such as the Shopkeepers’ Political Action Committee, the Victorian Grocers’ Association and the Legal Trading Hours’ Association, battled in public over the future of wage rights, international (particularly, American) investment and related issues (‘No Reply to Shops Queries’ Melbourne Age 14 August 1954 p. 5).

Cain’s government appeared to stem the tide of enthusiasm not only for consumer choice per se, but also for the lifestyle options promised by supermarkets, drive-in shopping centres, and similar convenience-oriented commercial fixtures of the modern world. Even so, had the Labor party not split in 1955, it is surely the case that significant changes to the retailing realm would have taken place as Melburnians agitated for the greater opportunity to spend and acquire their greater prosperity in the postwar era. At the same time food industries were consolidating. Peter Spearritt has detailed a mid twentieth century Australia in which services were local and face-to-face; one early plank in this social arrangement to fall was, for Spearritt, the demise of local bakeries in the face of corporatised breadmaking firms such as Tip Top (1994, p. 131). Soon other elements of local food production and distribution would follow suit.

The newspapers of mid-1950s Melbourne were frequently an arena for the announcement, and considerable discussion, of new supermarket and shopping centre projects, few of which appear to have eventuated in any meaningful, or tangible, way. As was perhaps to be expected, those launching projects were often liberal with their promises; then, as now, the first step in initiating a project was frequently to promise much more than might ever feasibly be delivered: the announcement quoted at the beginning of this paper is one example. Others include the ambit claims of developers putting forward new proposals for retail amenity in emerging suburbs.

Real estate sales business Willmore and Randell’s proposed Jordanville shopping centre in Melbourne’s east—a residential locality adjacent to the suburb of Chadstone—predating the announcement of Chadstone shopping centre by five years, is a case in point. Two supermarkets were proposed for this venture, a theatre and 60 shops, alongside spaces for 2000 cars. The company also proposed a ‘similar project’ with twice as much parking in Albion, on the other side of Melbourne. In both cases the figure for parking allotment reflected a different way of seeing such accommodation from the present day; ‘spaces for’ 2000, or 4000, cars does not equate to as many physical spaces, but a calculation of the amount of cars that would maximally used the facility in a given day. The details of the actual rubric are lost to history (£1 million drive-in shopping area for Jordanville’ Melbourne Argus 21 October 1955 p. 5).

Far from these high-concept proposals, older groceries began to update and remake themselves. While the ideas of larger modern developments wouldn’t emerge for a decade, similar language in certain grocers’ advertising suggests the modern was already being sought, by provider and consumer, on a smaller scale. The Sands and McDougall directories show that 204 High St Kew had been the premises of W. H. Bradshaw, licenced grocer, since 1941. Bradshaw had operated his business very close by, in Cotham Road, for decades prior, and had

![Figure 2: “Mrs America is going shopping”, Melbourne Age 9 Feb 1955, p. 11.](image-url)
also been president of the Kew Traders’ Association during the First World War (‘Kew Traders’ Association’ Camberwell and Hawthorn Advertiser 17 July 1915 p. 6). It is unclear what Bradshaw actually sold aside from alcoholic beverages; the peculiarity of this arrangement, in ‘gracious…and peaceful’ Kew no less, made it the chief concern of both his advertising and editorial regarding his business (Vaughan 1960 p. 201). In 1955, Sands and McDougall listed 204 High St as ‘Rishon Supermarket’, yet still a licensed grocer. ‘Rishon’ is the Hebrew word for ‘first’ and, coincidentally or otherwise, there was also a ‘Rishon Motors’ operating in central Melbourne. It is unclear who operated the Rishon Supermarket, whether they were connected to the dealership, and whether the business’ name was intended to appeal to a sector, for instance, the small but influential Jewish sector of the population. Rishon Supermarket was promoted as a new self-service enterprise that followed the American trend, where all shopping could be completed in a one-stop shopping centre, providing lower prices and pre-wrapped, pre-packaged, and snap-frozen goods. Businesses such as Rishon may have been the template used by the Shatins to embark on their own ‘supermarket’ venture. In order to more fully explore the development of the Shatin supermarket enterprise, it is necessary to first discuss the lives of Joseph and Stella Shatin, and what led them to invest in the emerging retail model of the supermarket.

The Shatins and their world

Both Stella, née Rothschild, and Joseph Shatin had migrated to Australia in their youth with their respective families: Joseph, from Poland to Melbourne in his teenage years; and Stella, as a small child, from Russia to Sydney. Rising anti-Semitism in Russia and Poland led to an influx of Jewish immigrants from these countries to Australia from the 1890s up until the Second World War. Many of this group sought to unite with the established Jewish community of Australia who were of either British or German backgrounds and embodied a publicly Anglo-image in line with Australia’s British identity (Lippmann, 1973, 14). Consequent to the realities of cultural difference within the Jewish community, the Shatins were not deeply-involved participants in the European-dominated post-war Jewish community of Melbourne. Living in Glen Iris, Camberwell and then Balwyn, rather than Caulfield and St. Kilda where the majority of the post-war Jewish community had settled, the Shatins raised their children outside the borders of Melbourne’s post-war Jewish life. However, the Shatins were not entirely disconnected from the Jewish community and its cultural practices. They attended St. Kilda Synagogue on religious holidays, and Stella Rothschild Shatin was employed as the publicity officer for the newly-established Jewish Day School, Mount Scopus, in the mid-1950s. Furthermore, the Shatins were both solicitors, a line of work popular with the Jewish community in postwar Australia (Lippmann, 20-21).

Where the Shatins did relate to Melbourne’s post-war Jewish life was in their work establishing the Victory Supermarket. This point of connection is significant in that it highlights an identifiable trend within Jewish post-war culture, which saw both established and newly-arrived Jewish migrants and refugees participating in Melbourne’s building boom. Jewish immigrants, in conjunction with the influx of other post-war migrants from Europe, were involved in a heightened period of development that changed both the social and physical landscape for Melbourne. This included the renovating of houses to satisfy migrants’ cultural needs, the repurposing of existing local infrastructure for migrants’ cultural practices, and the modernisation of Melbourne’s central business district and suburbs through the construction of buildings in the Modernist architectural style and implementation of modern design principles (O’Hanlon 2014; Hawcroft 2017; Wheeler 2017; Lozanovska et al 2013; Townsend 2018). Through this process, new ideas and values were imbued in Melbourne’s post-war urban landscape, hinting at a new dimension of the city: one outgrowing its monocultural past, embracing novel aesthetic elements, and most relevant to the city’s retail aspect, new patterns of growth and consumption.

Harriet Edquist’s work explores the Jewish architects of post-war Melbourne who reshaped streets, communities, and even occupation patterns in their design of houses, flats and apartment buildings (Edquist 1993). Seamus O’Hanlon (2014) sees the significant degree of Jewish participation in apartment flat development in particular as reflecting the Jewish community’s
desire to rebuild their European home and the urban life they lived previously, as well as instigate a new more public way of life and form of social living. This work in flat development also represented economic success for the community, as well as simultaneously driving it. In the years immediately following the war, Jewish refugees and immigrants worked in the *schnatte* (clothing) business, retail and other professions, with many finding financial stability by the 1950s (Lippmann 1973; O’Hanlon 2014). Jewish families turned to property investment and particularly the development of flats as a secondary source of income (O’Hanlon 2014). These developments often drew on family networks and community connections established in the *shtetl* (villages) of Poland and Russia, before Jews were forced to flee (ibid.). Frank Jones, Arnold Bloch Liebler and Slomin, Velik and Emmanuel, and other Jewish law firms, as well as Jewish real estate agents like Nathan Beller, brought together groups of investors, often extended families or community-based acquaintances (ibid.). Not only were the connections behind such developments a way in which the post-war Jewish population re-established a sense of community but, by developing part of the urban landscape, these families were able to carve out not just an economic foundation, but also a social and physical place in the wider community. Furthermore, in undertaking such projects, developers simultaneously created assets for their descendants, or for their Holocaust survivor parents to find sanctuary (ibid.).

This is pertinent as the Shatins’ utilisation of Jewish connections to establish the Victory Supermarket reflected this trend. Joseph worked as a solicitor for a Jewish draper, Mr Abraham Nagel, who, with the florist Mr A. E. K. Ireland, was partner in the Camberwell Fresh Food Market. Although Shatin had no market experience, he became a partner in the market, and the success of this venture no doubt inspired plans for another. Through further Jewish community connections again, the Shatins employed Ernest Fooks (1906-1985), a Viennese Jewish architect and one of the most popular amongst the community, to design their Supermarket (Townsend, 2018, 268). Fooks, in partnership with Anatol Kagan, had designed the new campus for the Jewish Day School Mount Scopus Memorial College, where Stella Rothschild Shatin was working as the publicity manager. While this may have been where the Shatins came into contact with Fooks, his work designing houses, apartments, and Jewish community buildings was prolific; it was only one avenue through which they might have become acquainted.

The Shatins’ production of the Victory Supermarket also reflected another trend found within the work of Jews who participated in the development of the urban landscape of 1950s Melbourne; that of the connection with modernism and its array of forms. While ultimately the built form of the Victory had little connection with supermarkets and modernity, the Shatins’ original idea to establish a modern ‘supermarket’ and their rhetoric promoted an idea of the ‘modern’ experience of shopping that would satisfy emergent contemporary needs. The Jewish connection with modernism was founded in the nineteenth century in Europe out of a need for Jews to escape the exclusionary and alienated socio-cultural conditions they faced. Modernism, in design, architecture, art, and as a way of life, portrayed a future liberated from historical, religious, and imperial hierarchies, and instead promoted functionalism and aesthetic forms which promised a future of equality and inclusion (Maderthaner & Silverman 2009). Jews in the nineteenth century around Europe had worked as patrons and practitioners of modernism with the hope that it would lead to social inclusion and acceptance for the Jewish community (Maderthaner & Silverman 2009). Although the Holocaust represented the ultimate rejection, and arguably the failure of this path of acceptance, many Jews who survived continued to work with modernist ideals in their new homes in Australia, America, Israel and London (Albrecht 2014). The Jewish community of Melbourne, comprising many Holocaust survivors, had a particular cause for concern in regards to both finding acceptance for the community in wider Melbourne society, and in establishing themselves as a modern community that would continue to live on in their new Melbourne home (Rubinstein 1986). Modernism, in style and ideas, was fundamentally utilised by Jewish developers, architects, clients, and consumers of modern products (Hawcroft 2017) who consciously looked toward a future of acceptance.

Melbourne’s Jews commissioned architects, often Jewish, to design their modern homes, purchased modern furniture, and often purchased new modern appliances such as refrigerators.
and electric stoves (O’Hanlon 2014). Here the Shatins’ work in founding the Victory Supermarket is visibly part of this trend of establishing or providing paths for modern living. The Supermarket itself was a key development in post-war modern life and was influenced by modern ideas for future living established in America, and which equally had a distinctly Jewish influence and a direct correlation with Jewish history (Shandler 2014; Wheeler).

Jeffrey Shandler’s (2014) exploration of Jews as consumers in post-war America depicts Jews as wishing to purchase their identity as Americans in order to assimilate. Andrew Heinze (1990) similarly argues that Jews relied on the symbolic potential of modern products in their search for an acceptable identity. The work of Fooks, as employed by the Shatins for the Victory Supermarket design, often reflected these ideas. His architecture encompassed inclusive modernist designs for social housing in Vienna, the Housing Commission of Victoria, and a neighbourhood-driven approach for the new Swan Hill township (Edquist 2001). This desire for inclusivity, and focus on the modern, is what arguably may have inspired the Shatins to work with Fooks on their Victory Supermarket design. Their own value of modern living was able to be reconciled through his ideas, as was likely their underlying Jewish disposition as outsiders to the mainly Anglo-Australian population.

Having established the site of the supermarket, and its instigators, we now turn to the third major element in the creation of the Victory: Ernest Fooks.

**Dr. Ernest Fooks**

Fooks was a Viennese Jewish architect, town planner, artist, lecturer, and author. He completed an architectural and civil engineering degree in Vienna, and a Doctor of Technical Sciences in town planning from its Technische Hochshule. He participated in the Viennese housing experiments of the 1920s and 1930s and was also active in avant-garde artistic and theatrical circles (Townsend 2016). Facing a dire situation in Vienna after the Anschluss, Fooks migrated to Australia in 1939. In Melbourne, Fooks was employed by Frank Heath, the head of the Victorian Housing Commission (VHC) from 1939 to 1948. At the VHC, Fooks worked planning new estates such as Fishermans Bend and Newlands in Coburg and, as mentioned, schemes for rural towns such as Swan Hill (Townsend 1998). These designs often involved the use of civic and neighbourhood centres as a way to improve urban community life in post-war Victoria, making reference to the notion of inclusivity through urban form (Edquist 1993). In the 1940s Fooks established himself as an author, an active participant in the local town planning and artistic communities, and gained registration as an architect. He published numerous articles on architecture, town planning, interior design and European initiatives, and in 1946 *X-Ray the City! The Density Diagram: Basis for Urban Planning* in which he proposed a new method for assessing urban population densities. He also was a pragmatic architect undertaking many utilitarian projects such as the Victory Supermarket.

Fooks left the VHC in 1948 and established his own self-named architectural practice, and was soon joined by his long-term associate architect Les Wedlock. The practice’s commissions were at first almost exclusively residential but broadened by 1955 to include retail fit-outs, warehouses, office buildings, and Mount Scopus College (Cohen et al 2016). The Victory Supermarket was an early and sizeable venture into retail design, an area in which Fooks took a keen interest; clippings in the RMIT Design Archives show that Fooks had been keeping cuttings on shopping designs since the early 1950s. Later the practice would produce shopping centre designs for property developer George Herscu including work at Forest Hill Shopping Centre, Gladstone Park, Waverley Gardens, and Mildura Plaza Shopping Centres. Patronage from the local Jewish community was vital to Fooks’s practice and for the entirety of his career the majority of his work was for Jewish clientele such as the Shatins and Herscu. Fooks’s architectural practice was consistent with the gentle modernism of 1920s and 1930s Vienna, and when he assimilated new influences they were often other Jewish Viennese émigrés such as Richard Neutra and former colleague Bernard Rudofsky. His buildings also show the influence of other North American Jewish architects such as Louis Kahan and Percival Goodman.
While entirely speculative, it is intriguing to consider to what extent Fooks’s interest in shopping centres originates from following fellow Jewish Viennese émigré Victor Gruen’s career in the United States of America. Just as Fooks collected many of Rudofsky’s books for his professional library, his collection of architectural journal articles on shopping centres frequently reference Gruen, one of the originators of the type. Fooks’ interest in shopping centres is also in line with other modern developments in Melbourne by Jewish entrepreneurs which included high-rise apartment blocks, office towers, hotels and motels (Wheeler 2017).

Architecturally the Victory Supermarket represented the juncture that shopping in Melbourne had reached by 1956. There was an awareness of the modern supermarket type, yet few Australians had directly experienced a supermarket. It was not known how Melbourne supermarkets could contend with their principal design elements of self-service, separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, climate control, car parking, modern aesthetics, advertising and signage. The modernising rhetoric of the name belied that typologically the Victory Supermarket was not free-standing or part of a regional shopping centre but rudimentarily located in the demolished interior of a high street theatre. The layout of individual shops and stalls along exterior walls, with a further central row, was similar to the small suburban markets of Melbourne such as Camberwell Market in which the Shatins were already involved. The stalls were arranged such that a delivery truck could drive through the asphalt-floored market facilitating direct delivery to stalls. This is in stark contrast to North American supermarkets where congestion, noise, car and delivery traffic were entirely eliminated by strictly separating pedestrian and vehicular traffic thus creating a modern, clean, and controlled environment.

The design of the typical stall at the Victory Supermarket also precluded the modern trend of self-service shopping: the counter prevented customers from entering the stall. Furthermore, there was no attempt at climate control in the Victory Supermarket; in fact it appears that the heating for the theatre was removed as part of the interior demolition.

Initial visions for the Victory project were far more grand than the outcome achieved, and showed clearer links to the modern supermarket type. Fooks had been collecting articles on shopping centres, shops, and supermarket storage and display since the early 1950s including seminal articles such as ‘Shopping Centers’, *Architectural Record*, October 1953 and ‘The Store that Cars built’ *Architectural Forum* May 1952. Fooks’s first exterior scheme for the Victory reworked the entire theatre façade with hard plaster and ground level windows somewhat emulating the blank modern designs typical of North American shopping centres of the time, yet the structure incorporated a street front awning typical of Melbourne high streets of the time.

This scheme also includes new shops to be constructed alongside the theatre at the front of the proposed adjoining car park. Fooks’s second façade proposal was solely for the ground level of the theatre, presumably for reasons of economy. It replicated the ground floor of the previous scheme but with one of the few hints of advertising associated with the project: the addition of large, almost Googie style, signage spelling out ‘Malvern Victory Supermarket’. The final working drawings, however, show that the only facade construction undertaken was a new glass window, a roller door, and the removal of some brickwork. New windows were installed in the side-walls and the drawings of the individual stalls indicated that a stripped economic functionalism dominated the aesthetic of the Victory Supermarket.

Two modern concerns that were associated with the project from inception to completion were car parking and child minding. The initial plan was to demolish property adjoining the Victory Theatre for car parking and additional shops. The shops were quickly abandoned, but the car parking appears to have eventuated as it is mentioned in the *Age* article ‘Supermarket for Malvern to open soon’ (29 February 1956 p. 5). Fooks’s first plan for the Victory Supermarket shows a crèche located in the former theatre’s balcony. Where the crèche was finally located is unclear, although press references mention it as near the ‘rear entrance in a garden setting (ibid).

**The Victory’s fate**

The Shatins’ venture into the world of the supermarket was arguably ill-advised; they seemed unable to prosper in this retail sector. Advertising in the Melbourne *Age* from the months leading
up to the supermarket’s opening does not fail to mention that stallholders were still required for the venture. One, from 10 August 1956 (p. 17), notes that the Victory still has ‘Vacancies for a Good FLORIST, FRUITERER, GROCER, HARDWARE.’ Other advertisements, from the same page in the Age (17 August 1956, p. 15) giving Joseph Shatin’s after hours phone number, refer to a ‘paints and brushes’ business and a ‘Ladies’ Hand Bag and Travel Goods Shop’ but these advertisements are poorly worded: it is unclear whether the Shatins required someone to establish such a business at the Victory, or were brokering a resale. Another advertisement from the period for a ‘girl’ to work in the cake and confectionary stall, is a scant example of employment offered by the Victory. It also reflects one curious aspect of the business: Sands and McDougall’s directories show that, perhaps by dint of the cinema’s established popularity, the shops either side of the Victory had long been confectioners’, three in one block.

Jewish networks came into play once again when the Shatins recognised that the Victory would not succeed. Max Rozental and Bernard Shemberg purchased the Victory building from the Shatins in 1956. Rozental had already bought the Rishon Supermarket using Slonim and Velik, as well the Jewish Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court, Graeme Emanuel. These networks enabled Rozental to continue developing this modern avenue for the Melbourne consumer, but the Victory Supermarket does not appear to have lasted long after its sale. In 1959, the site was owned by Jacob Kohn, a paper merchant who had relocated from smaller premises in Burwood Road, Hawthorn. In 1968, its use was more closely aligned to the Shatins’ vision: it had become a branch of Tom the Cheap, the briefly highly successful West Australian discount supermarket chain. Subsequent years saw the site used as a Rite Way, then a Superrite supermarket, and most recently as craft and haberdashery outlets Lincraft. At time of writing, there are plans to demolish the building just shy of its centenary year.
The *Age* announced in July 1958 that a G. J. Coles executive, Bevan Bradbury, would be travelling to the USA to study ‘supermarkets and chain stores and co-ordination problems’ (1 July 1958, p. 7). Very soon, with the creation of far more streamlined and single-merchant supermarkets (such as Coles Dickins, a key feature of Chadstone in 1960, Spearitt 1995) Australians fell into line with other western, chiefly American, patterns. It was at this point, it would seem, that consumer expectations recalibrated for the modern shopping experience.

**Conclusion**

Many of 127-133 Wattletree Road’s proprietors following the Shatins have been of Jewish descent. While this may no longer be due to Jewish networks and connections, as in the Shatins’ case, this indeed highlights the relationship between Jews and their work in the field of enterprise development in Melbourne. Developments such as Forest Hill, Gladstone Park, Waverley Gardens, Highpoint, Chadstone and Westfield Doncaster shopping centres, as well as many other new developments in the style of modern American retail outlets, were established throughout Melbourne in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, by a range of Jewish migrants.

The Victory Supermarket’s heritage value is found in its embodiment of the slow advent of modern Melbourne. It was in this moment that local consumers began to receive snippets of the ‘modern’ life they had been promised by the government since the end of the war. It was now finally arriving, driven in part by preparations for the Olympics; concurrently, post-war migrant communities were in the midst of establishing a modern Melbourne to satisfy their own needs. This cross-junction, between desire for and fear of the modern and the contrast between consumer needs and government imprecation is exemplified in the Victory Supermarket where the proprietors indeed sought to develop a new enterprise catering to everyday modern life as the term ‘supermarket’ suggests. However, in the Shatins’ failure to deliver an experience taking the consumer far beyond the nineteenth-century market, the Victory simultaneously failed to supply the customers with the lifestyle eponymously promised and therefore failed to fulfill the customers’ ‘modern’ needs as evident in the Supermarket’s short life. While not a success story as a business venture, the Victory Supermarket is an aspect of the relatively unexplored story of Australia’s Jewish migrants which can be captured in tracing the Shatins’ venture into the new field of supermarkets, and particularly their place in the trepidatious path to developing modern Melbourne.

**References**


Victory Supermarket Typical Stall Axonometric December 1955 Les Wedlock, Ernest Fooks Collection, RMIT Design Archives.
