

HISTORY — AND YOUTH

Climbing a narrow wooden staircase, which creaks under the weight it has carried over the years, one enters the small ladies gallery overlooking the bimah and men's pews.

Carefully locked away in a cabinet on the landing are the remaining memorabilia of the community . . . the original birth register of 1844, the foundation membership list at the time of the synagogue's consecration, and the minutes of the early meetings dating back to 1842.

An adjacent room is used by the handful of children who attend Hebrew classes on Sunday mornings. Their teacher is a non-Jewish lady who studied Hebrew in Melbourne, and because there seems to be no alternative, the parents are happy that their children are being taught something about religion.



● President of the Hobart Hebrew Congregation, Mr. Clyde Epstein, examining the community's first birth register, surrounded by photographs from the past.



● **The Hobart Synagogue—the oldest in the southern hemisphere—situated in Argyle Street.**

The Hobart congregation has been without a full-time minister for more than two decades since **Rabbi George Ruben** (now of the North Shore Temple Emanuel in Sydney) was spiritual leader, yet services are held every Shabbat in the synagogue.

There is rarely a minyan, apart from occasional visits by Jewish tourists. During the High Holydays, the community 'imports' an officiant from Melbourne and last year there were 14 men and a dozen women in the synagogue.

For Clyde Epstein, a retired bookmaker, the synagogue holds special meaning and has devoted much of his time to its welfare.

He uses quaint Yiddish expressions to reinforce what he is saying and is naturally concerned for the future. This view is shared by the other office bearers of the synagogue, **Victor Coronal** (vice president) whose wife Mille is president of the local WIZO group, **Ayanoth**, **Ferry Fixel** (treasurer) and **Tom Schlesinger** (secretary).

"I'm 73-years-old, 95 per cent of our members are pensioners and I'm not sure how much longer we can keep it on," Mr Epstein said.

"We don't need any financial help but we would

"We don't need any financial help but we would like to see some assistance from the mainland communities," Mr. Epstein stressed.

Born and bred in Hobart, he is the son of **Moses Epstein**, a leading draper at the turn of the century, who acted as the congregation's honorary reader while there was no minister.

"My father always closed his shop on Friday nights and Saturday mornings when the main business took place, and I used to walk with him to shule," he recalled.