

September 2008

Request to AJR for a Grant to Organise and make Available our Ostrava Archive

1. Background

Kingston Synagogue has a *sefer torah* (Scroll of the Law) on permanent loan from the Czech Memorial scrolls Trust. The scroll came from Moravská Ostrava in Czechoslovakia. For the past 3 years, a small group of us have been researching the history of the Jewish Community of Ostrava.

The initial objectives we set for our work were:

1. To revive and keep alive the memory of the Jewish community of Ostrava, who they were, how they lived, what they did, and what happened to them.
2. To establish and maintain contact with the current Jewish community of Ostrava and Jews who were, or whose families were, originally from Ostrava
3. To create and maintain an educational resource relating to the Ostrava Jewish community. This includes establishing exhibition materials for local or travelling display.

The initial work was funded by donations from members of the synagogue and subsequently by a grant from the National lottery *Awards for All* and a small grant from the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

2. Results so Far

2.1 Archive Material

Printed Material

We have collected a significant archive of printed material. Some of this is fairly standard, readily available books but there is quite a lot of material which is less accessible to the general reader either because it was published in specialised niche journals or was privately published (e.g. autobiographies) for a small select group of readers. Some has never been published at all and has been made available to us by the author or their family.

Some of it is in English but some is less readily accessible, being in German and some is in Czech and even less generally accessible. We have translated or summarised some of the material into English and hope to do more.

Electronic Material

This is generally primary source material, being audio or video recordings of interviews with Ostravaks, about their family and their own experiences. We have interviewed about 30 Ostravaks so far and have plans to interview more

Photographs and scanned documents

We have a large number of scanned family photographs and documents from the Ostravaks that we have interviewed. Included here is an archive of letters throughout the war to Eric Auerbach who had managed to reach England in 1939.

There are also many family trees relating to the people we have interviewed. Through our contacts in Ostrava, we have been able to produce much information for our network of Ostravaks, relating to family members who had died or were killed by the Nazis during the war.

2.2 Ostravak List

We now have over 100 Ostravaks on our contact list. They are all either refugees or the family of refugees and the majority of those in the UK are members of AJR. In fact, two of our more recent contacts were actually introduced to us by Hazel Beiny of AJR. Through our contacts we have been able to put family members who had totally lost touch with each other since the war back in contact and reunited friends who had not seen or heard of each other since primary school, 60 years ago.

We have been able to provide information on missing family members and photographs or other documents relating to the family during their time in Ostrava (school photographs, family trees, photographs of shops and houses, business advertisements etc).

2.3 Presentations and Publications

We have made a number of presentations on our work to The British Czech and Slovak Association; Kingston College (to Holocaust A-level students); Bnei Brith; local synagogue groups; etc and have had an exhibition in Kingston Museum. Reports of our work have appeared on Czech television and on Radio Prague. Our material has been shown and acknowledged in exhibitions in the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Memorial Scrolls Trust in Westminster. In the coming months we will present some of our findings at Limmud in Brighton.

2.4 Newsletter

We publish an occasional Newsletter which is circulated to our network of over 100 Ostravaks and many other interested organisations and people, throughout the world. In our latest Newsletter (#6) we included a summary of an interview with Anna Grant, which had been arranged by Hazel Beiny of AJR and an article explaining what AJR is and inviting our network to make contact with AJR if they had not already done so.

2.5 Ostravak Meeting

We have organised two general meetings of our Ostravak network, in the synagogue. The first of these was a Service of Rededication of the Scroll and the second, in March this year, was a social meeting to update people on our results. We had visitors from the Czech Republic, Austria, America as well as most parts of the UK. HE The Czech Ambassador was our Guest of Honour on each occasion.

The next meeting is already planned for March 8th 2009.

2.6 Website

Some of the results of our researches and texts of our presentations are given on the website: <http://www.kingston-synagogue.org.uk/group.php?c=50>.

3 Plans for the Future

It is our plan ultimately to publish a book on the history of the Ostrava Jewish community but before we do that we wish to ensure the long-term security and accessibility of our archive. The first actions that we intend to carry out are:

1. Organise all our material and put it into a form that can be readily accessed and used by other researchers in the future
2. Fill in as many of the gaps in the material as we can
3. Arrange that the archive is stored and hosted in a place that will ensure that it continues to be accessible to any scholars who want it.

We estimate that this will take about 6 months of an archivist's time (1 year of elapsed time), supported by ongoing efforts of our Ostrava Group. We will, of course, continue to extend the Archive. Thereafter, we intend writing *The Ostrava Story* for publication.

Dr Leo Pavlat, the Director of the Jewish Museum in Prague (JMP) has agreed that the JMP will accept and host our archive (see Appendix 2 for a copy of his reply to our request)

If we can get funding we hope to employ Mag. Hana Šustková to help us with the first two of these, on a part-time basis for 1 year. She has a Masters degree in History and used to work for the City Archive in Ostrava. She has researched and published material on the Jewish Community of Ostrava, speaks and reads and speaks Czech, German and English and was very helpful to us during her period in the City Archive.

The Local History Department in Kingston University is interested in the material and in its possible use, but there are yet no clear plans or ideas as to how their interest would be put into practice.

4 Budget

We have prepared a budget for organising all our material, filling in some of the gaps, and transferring it to JMP.

We have not included any equipment costs at this stage, as we assume that it is available.

5. Request for a Grant

The funds from the two original grants and the subsidy from synagogue members has now been more or less totally spent. We, therefore, ask AJR for a grant to enable our archive to be put into a proper format; some of the obvious gaps in the information to be completed; and the archive to be made available and accessible to researchers and for educational purposes.

Dr D N Lawson

APPENDIX 1

Members of the Ostrava Scroll Group:

The members of the group are:

- Peter H
- Dr David L
- Ian M
- Monica P
- David P
- Dr Helen S
- Heinz VI
- Helen W

Assisted by Dr Jan Bettelheim and Mrs Libuše Salomonovicová

Helen S is a lecturer at Birkbeck College, London, and also presents WEA courses. Heinz was a visiting Professor at Kingston University. Helen W taught IT and Ian is a practicing solicitor and an advisor to the Jewish Museum in Krakow. David P is the Managing Director of a chemical company and has close family connections with Czechoslovakia. His father and several members of his family were refugees from Brno.

Responses from Ostravaks

Some recent emails from members of the Ostrava network are attached:

1. From Alice Anson

HELLO thanks for the newsletter and all that info about my family it is amazing that we did not know when and where my cousins dissappeared.. will send my family tree but have not your adress it is rather a long one so not good to send by email.best wishes Alice

----- Original Message -----

From: [David L](#)

To: [david l](#)

Sent: Friday, August 08, 2008 9:44 AM

Subject: Newsletter #6

Our latest Newsletter is attached. I hope you enjoy it. Please let us know what you think of it.

With best wishes

David L

2. From Zuzana Crouch

Dear David,

thank you for the fascinating newsletter and for forwarding Bertie's letter.

I shall write to him very briefly as the fact that somebody is still alive

who remembers my grandfather's shop (and possibly my grandfather?) is very moving.

Regards
Zuzana

3. From Lilly Reiser, via Kara Buzga

Dear David,

This is Kara writing again. I read Lilly the newsletter and sent it to her in Honolulu. She was also happy to read / see the Cipora emailed her after you sent out the email asking Lilly's friends to contact her.

Lilly told me the following story about Cipora and her sister Annie. Annie and Cipora's father taught religion at the school Lilly and the girls attended. Lilly was closer in age to Annie but considers both Annie and Cipora friends. There were three children in this family, Cipora, Annie and a brother named Paul. Paul survived the war but committed suicide after the war. Lilly still finds this distressing all these years later.

Annie and Cipora's father was sent to Terezin. Lilly's father and brother were also sent to Terezin but she does not believe that either witnessed the event that Lilly relayed to me. Lilly's father, however, is the one who told Lilly this story. Cipora and Annie's Dad was singled out by an SS Guard and brought out to the courtyard of Terezin.

The Guard kept screaming "Run Jew, Run" while he was on a motorcycle revving his engine. Annie and Cipora's father started to run and the SS Guard started chasing him on the motorcycle. He ran and ran and ran until he couldn't run anymore. The SS Guard rammed his motorcycle into heir father and pinned him against the wall with such force that the SS Guard killed their father with the motorcycle.

Yet another story from Lilly centers around Herr Salter whom she remembered when I read the name from the newsletter. According to Lilly Herr Salter was their math teacher. He was very stern, strict and hard and Lilly does not have fond memories of him. However, Lilly remembers that despite his sternness she once won a test and he gave her a tiny chocolate basket filled with three tiny strawberries. Lilly was very proud about winning this chocolate basket and wanted to save it so she asked her mom if she could save it in the linen closet next to hankies. Lilly was very proud of winning the tiny chocolate basket was afraid that the chocolates would melt. Even though Lilly LOVES chocolate she never ate this chocolate basket.

Hope this finds you well. I will pass along stories as I get them.

Kara

From Lilly #2

Dear David,

This is Lilly writing. So sorry about the delay in answering you and your questions posed in your wonderful newsletter - newsletter #6. You have no idea how exciting it actually was, for me, to see these pictures of faintly familiar childhood faces, of kids I knew. The most poignant was the photo of the third class of 1931. I know a few of the faces by name.

Kurt Immgrluck and Lissi Schornstein are sitting on the right hand side, in the third row behind the two children holding the class sign, on the right hand side of the photo. Kurt is wearing a white collared shirt and Lissi is wearing braids. Kurt was a friend of mine and my brother, Leo. Kurt died in concentration camp and his brother Otto (I think) died in Israel. Otto's wife, Vera, is still alive in Israel. I recall that Kurt and Otto's family used to live in an apartment behind the church by the bakery.

Lissi died relatively recently in Prague. She never emigrated, after the war, from Czechoslovakia. Lissi and her sister Franzi remained in Prague their entire life and are buried at the Jewish Cemetery there, Olsany.

In the middle row of the photograph, starting with the little girl in white, in the front, the fourth girl back, on the right aisle was a Kahn. I think her name may have been Susie Kahn but I do not recall. Susie is sitting in a row with three girls, one girl has her head turned away from the photograph. I think Susie may have fled with her parents to Israel. I think her father was a lawyer.

Only the best children who could sit with their hands folded behind their backs were allowed to sit in the front of the classroom. I was never able to sit this way. We also got hit with a bamboo switch if we did not sit properly. The classroom was always very quiet, you could hear a pin drop.

The teacher Herr Salter (Mr.. Salter) was also my teacher. He was a hard task master and I will never forget him. In one of his classes -- a math class -- he posed a problem and said that whoever has the right answer will get a gift from him. I was the one who had the right answer and his gift was a tiny, little gift basket of chocolate, about as big as my thumb. On top of it was tiny little strawberries. When I brought it home and showed it to my parents and brother they were very, very proud of me. I never thought of eating it because I was so proud of this trophy. my mother allowed me to put this tiny little basket of chocolates next to her handkerchiefs in a closet where it was cool and dark. I kept this tiny little basket until we were force to go to Terezin. I was forced to discard it but I never wanted to eat it.

Cipora's father also taught Religion at this school.

As I said, this was a wonderful picture recapturing my childhood and I want you to know how much I appreciate your effort to bring together people from Ostrava, even though there is just a handful of us left.

I am slowly getting myself ready to leave here on Sept. 7th and visit an old doctor friend of mine, in Portland Oregon, for a week. We will visit a national park and admire wonderful America. Please keep in touch with me, through Kara. We are always in touch. I will remain in New York until the end of October and then I leave for one month visiting Vietnam and Cambodia. Please keep me up to date with all of your activities regarding Ostrava. I am keenly interested to hear any news from there or about people from there.

Keep well and thank you again for doing such a wonderful job for all of us. Wishing you and your family a happy and sweet New Year with good health and happiness.

Yours, Lilly

4. From Bertie Goldberg

'phoned her to day and after many tries got through .

Yes my brother in law was her uncle.

We had a little chat and she told me that she is going to be in Ostrava later this month.

She has my Email address and will write to me on her return.

Thank you for enabling me to contact her.

Bertie

Appendix 2

Email, dated 5 September 2008, from Dr Leo Pavlat.

Dr. D

Dear Mr. L,
thank you for your letter dated 28th August 2008. The Jewish Museum in Prague is very pleased by the offer to take care, in the future, of the archival collection relating to the Ostrava Jewish community. One of the primary tasks the Museum is to safeguard the remnants of the cultural and historical heritage of Bohemian and Moravian Jewish communities. Our archives will therefore be prepared to house your collection, take care of all the materials in a professional manner and provide access for researchers and public.

Depending on the proportion of the materials related to the pre-WWII history of Ostrava Jewish community, the collection could either be filed into the general Archive of the Jewish Museum or into our Archive of the Holocaust History – both branches would be able to provide similar care and access to your materials. As you probably know, the Jewish Museum has created an extensive collection of interviews with Holocaust survivors, and we would be very happy to complement it with your interviews with the „Ostravaks“.

Please contact Vlastimila Hamáková, the head of the Archives (vlastimila.hamackova@jewishmuseum.cz <<mailto:vlastimila.hamackova@jewishmuseum.cz>>), and Michal Frankl, the head of the Holocaust Archives (michal.frankl@jewishmuseum.cz <<mailto:michal.frankl@jewishmuseum.cz>>) regarding the details.

I'm looking forward the cooperation.

Best wishes,

Leo Pavlát