

Report of the Ostrava Meeting, 8th March 2009

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for
Leicester Liberal synagogue

Following the talk about Ostrava which David Lawson gave us on Jan 18th, Aldo and I went to the Ostrava Day in Kingston United Synagogue on Sunday (8th March). We had a lovely afternoon. We met many interesting people, heard about the latest findings from Ostrava (David is always SUCH a good and captivating speaker), and had a lovely snack. At the start of the meeting a very beautiful prayer was chanted for Ostrava and other holocaust victims. The power of the cantor's voice really struck a deep chord with me – I feel it was important and meaningful to do that (*David Prager sang **El moleh rachamim** and then Philip Heitlinger recited **Kaddish***)

People had come from far and wide; we met two ladies from Israel whose father was an Ostrava survivor, as well as people from Prague, Ostrava itself, and all around the UK. Jiri Rosenstajn (George Roden) and Heinz Vogel came – the two Ostrava survivors I had got to know in September. Both were looking fine and well; Jiri is always keen to speak Czech and share memories.

Felix and Anne Beck were there; Felix has joined our shul now, so I'm looking forward to seeing him more often. I feel it's amazing that we do now have a genuine Ostravak in our congregation i.e. a member of our original scroll community. So Felix has made the same journey as our Sefer Torah, from Ostrava to Leicester.

There was a poignant moment which I happened to witness: two survivors from Ostrava each recognised himself in a 1931 class photograph of the Jewish school there. They began to talk, gradually remembered each other, and remembered that they had played together as boys. They embraced – reunited after 70 years. Incredible!! I can't imagine how they must feel; it almost made me cry watching them.

Three things David mentioned:

1. This goes without saying really, but anyone with information about family or friends from Ostrava, Jewish-owned businesses, Jewish life there etc... please do share it.
2. The idea of a group trip to Ostrava was mooted. I'm definitely up for it. Anyone else like to go? Let me or David Lawson know.
3. There is now lots and lots of material accumulated about Ostrava Jewish history, and it needs collating and sorting out so it remains accessible for future generations. Ideally this would be done by someone based in Ostrava today. The Jewish Museum in Prague is supportive, and estimates that it would require a person to work part-time for about a year to organize and archive all the Ostrava materials. So they are looking to raise an estimated £10,000 to cover payment and expenses for this individual. Get in touch if you'd like to help.

Martie