

A historical artefact in routine use at SPS Our small Czech Memorial Torah Scroll #365



- *ITS PAST, GENUINE PROVENANCE, AND PREVIOUS MISCONCEPTION*

About Karlovy Vary

Karlsbad is a town in in western Bohemia, Czech Republic, about 80 miles west of Prague. Karlsbad is its German name while the locals know it as Karlovy Vary.

This town had previously been ruled by Charles IV, the King of Bohemia, who founded the city in the 14th Century. The town is famous for its hot springs and many visitors.

Not much is known about an original Jewish settlement in the town in medieval times. Jews started arriving there in the 16th Century as visitors of the spas, and by the 19th Century the Jewish community was well established. There was a Kosher restaurant in town and a Jewish spa-hospital was opened with an adjacent prayer hall. In 1870 the community employed their own Rabbi. A Jewish school opened a couple of years later, and the town had a burial society and a women's society. By 1925 the community was almost 3,000 strong.

The town hosted two Zionist congresses. The 12th Congress took place in 1921 and the 13th in 1923. It was in Karlovy Vary that the first post-World War I Zionist Congress took place and where delegates discussed and endorsed the famous Balfour Declaration that laid out the foundations for the State of Israel.

As stated above, in 1938, the 'Sudetenland' was annexed to Nazi Germany. The local synagogue, built in 1877, was torched in 1938 and torn down in 1939. Nearly all the town's Jewish residents fled the region, and the remaining Jews were interned. Over 90 percent of the Jewish residents of the town were murdered in Nazi death camps.

Jews gradually returned to Karlovy Vary after World War II. In 1947 the town hosted a European-wide Zionist conference.

The association of Karlovy Vary to our small Czech scroll at Southgate Progressive Synagogue?

Our Czech Memorial Scroll had been thought to be one of those 'orphan' scrolls that could not be traced back to its original community.

It so happened that **Stuart Willner**, a then member of our SPS congregation, was born in Karlovy Vary and survived the Holocaust to eventually settle in Southgate. Hence in November 2009 the community decided to dedicate the scroll to the memory of members of the Jewish community of that town who perished in the Holocaust.

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