
HOW IT ALL STARTED

In 1963 the “Pinner and District Liberal Congregation” was formed and within a few years had become Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue. In 1965 our founding Chairman, Alan Lewis, arranged for the fledgling congregation to borrow its first Scroll on long-term loan from Westminster Synagogue, and made a donation of £100. The Scroll was collected by President of the Synagogue, Bertram Jacobs. in January 1966. By 1970 the congregation badly needed a second Scroll and after an appeal the necessary sum, now £125, was raised. A successful application was once again made to Westminster Synagogue and the second Scroll was collected by Rabbi Andrew Goldstein in June 1971.

For some years we used the Scrolls with reverence but without any consideration as to their origins. We knew only that they came from a collection held by the Westminster Synagogue. According to the paperwork, the first Scroll had come from Třeboň and the second from Kolín in what was then Czechoslovakia.

On Yom Kippur 1978 Rabbi Goldstein gave a sermon, prompted by a Religion School project, based on what was known about the origin of the Scrolls. Concentrating on the one from Kolín, he outlined the history of the Jews of that town. In an unscripted remark at the end of the sermon he asked if anybody in the congregation happened to travel to Czechoslovakia, even though in Communist times not many people from the West travelled there. Our member, Michael Heppner, came forward and said he made regular business visits and would go to Kolín to see what was possible.

WHERE THE SCROLLS CAME FROM

The story of the Czech Memorial Scrolls is well documented, but less well known than it deserves. This is a brief summary.

Unlike in Germany and the other countries the Nazis conquered, most of the synagogues in the heart of Bohemia and Moravia were not destroyed, and their Torah Scrolls and Judaica were sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague. Everything was carefully labelled and recorded and for many years it was believed that the cataloguing was done under duress by Jews who were afterwards deported to their deaths in concentration camps, and that the Nazis intended to create an exhibition of artefacts of the extinct Jewish race once they had won the war.

Later research suggests a different story. It is now believed that leaders in the Jewish community in Prague somehow managed to persuade the Nazis to authorise them to bring all the Scrolls and other artefacts from these synagogues to Prague where a band of expert curators catalogued them. It was hoped that when the Nazi nightmare was over, the Scrolls could be returned to their congregations. Most of these brave curators perished, but the Scrolls and their records survived as their legacy.

The Scrolls were identified by the town from which they had been received and, in many cases, the date of writing, though the latter was often inaccurate. They were eventually stored in the synagogue in the Prague suburb of Michle, where they lay, to all intents and purposes forgotten, for many years. In 1963 the Scrolls which had become State property were offered by the Communist State authorities to Eric Estorick, an American art dealer living in London, who came to Prague on frequent buying trips. The offer was passed on to Rabbi Harold Reinhart of Westminster Synagogue and a congregant, the philanthropist Ralph Yablon, put up the money to make their purchase possible. After examination of the Scrolls, a deal was done and on 7th February 1964 two lorry loads carrying the first of the 1564 Scrolls arrived at Westminster Synagogue, where they were carefully stacked on specially built racks on an upper floor.

The Scrolls were sorted, examined and catalogued, and a Memorial Scrolls Committee began to distribute them on loan to congregations and academic institutions around the world. Some of the Scrolls were beyond repair and have become memorials to the victims of the Shoah; NPLS has an example from Kladno, mounted in a case on the Bimah.

Most of the Scrolls needed restoration work and this was a problem. There were *soferim* (scribes) prepared to do the work but the committee was not willing to let the Scrolls leave the premises. It so happened that while the committee was trying to find a solution to this problem a *sofer* was walking down Knightsbridge after visiting the Israeli embassy and noticed the sign outside Westminster Synagogue. He rang the bell and the door was opened by Mrs Ruth Shaffer, at that time the secretary of the committee. He asked Mrs Shaffer "Do you have any work for a *sofer*?" She was overwhelmed, and, unable to find a suitable answer, just beckoned him inside and took him to Rabbi Reinhart's office. There the *sofer* repeated his question, and Rabbi Reinhart, similarly affected, asked the *sofer* to follow him and threw open the doors of the store where the Scrolls were awaiting repair and renovation. The *sofer*, David Brand, worked on the Scrolls, for nearly thirty years.

The Scrolls have been distributed across the world in response to requests from new and developing congregations and other institutions. In this way they have been given new life. They have also had the effect of stimulating contact between recipient congregations across the globe, and, in many cases, have been the starting point for research into the vanished congregations from which they came. Michael Heppner has instigated much of this work and has lectured on the subject in this country and America. At Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue the Czech Connection has become the strongest continuing thread in our history.



The Czech scrolls, collected in Prague

The Michle Synagogue



KOLÍN

Six months after Rabbi Goldstein's sermon on Yom Kippur, 1978 Michael Heppner returned to Prague and sought information about Kolín from the chairman of the Jewish community and was told "there is nothing, there is no-one, there is just a memorial in a cemetery, it's not worth making the journey."

The tranquil
Old Cemetery,
Kolín



“THERE IS NOTHING, THERE IS NO-ONE,
THERE IS JUST A MEMORIAL IN THE
CEMETERY, IT'S NOT WORTH MAKING
THE JOURNEY”

Michael
Heppner with
Olga Kodíckova



Yet on 5th March 1979, Michael took the train to Kolín. It was a Sunday in darkest Communist times when town maps were not available, tourists not encouraged and few passers by who spoke English or German not anxious to talk to a stranger. Happening to walk down Ulice Na Hradbách (little did he know the synagogue was in that very street) a woman did tell him where to find the Jewish cemetery. Getting there he found it locked and looking over the wall saw it overgrown. He took photographs and returned to Prague.

Meanwhile Rabbi Goldstein, on Sabbatical in America, had discovered that there was an elderly Jew still living in the town. On his next visit, in May 1979, Michael found Olga Kodíckova, who was extremely deaf, and conversation took place by writing notes in German. She had survived Terezin from June 1942 until liberation in 1945 and was now the last Jew in town. She took him to see "her friends", whose names were amongst the 480 inscribed on the impressive memorial dedicated to the Jews of Kolín killed in the Holocaust. Olga obtained the key to



The memorial
in the Kolín
Cemetery

the cemetery prayer hall. Unused for over twenty years and filled with junk, it also contained the "Kolín Arch" that was to find its way to Northwood. Later she gave him a first impression of the pre-Holocaust town with its significant Jewish population. She took him to see the synagogue although he only saw the interior through a small broken window: it was being used to store large red Communist propaganda banners.

This visit led to many new contacts, and on his next visit Michael went with Rabbi Goldstein and they were able to enter the synagogue, dedicated in 1696 yet in remarkably good shape. They also visited the old Jewish Cemetery which dates back to early 15th Century. These experiences were made possible by the interest of Drs Antonin Rakusan and Zdenek Jelinek, two historians who had formerly worked at major museums in Prague, but following involvement in the Prague Spring of 1968 lost their jobs and eventually became assistants at the tiny Kolín Museum. Part of their rebellion against of the Communist system was to research the history of the

Jews of Kolín and mount a small exhibition dedicated to them in the museum, perhaps the only such exhibition at the time outside of the Jewish Museum in Prague.

In subsequent visits to Kolín, Dr's. Rakusan and Jelinek gave Michael Heppner and Rabbi Goldstein historical articles, ephemera, and copies of documents telling the story of the Jewish community of the town and its fate under the Nazis. In time a number of prayerbooks were taken from the synagogue and this collection was added to by donations from Olga Kodickova and her friend Olga Ledererova. Thus NPLS acquired a considerable archive of material in the history of the Jews of Kolín including copies of letters by its last rabbi Dr Richard Feder. Assistance also came from the leadership of the Czechoslovak Jewish community (a difficult position in Communist times), Dr Desider Galsky, Artur Radvansky and František Kraus. It was the latter who informed Michael Heppner in December 1981 that the Communist authorities planned to liquidate the New Jewish cemetery along with its memorial to the 480 Jews of Kolín murdered by the Nazis and erected by Rabbi Feder in April 1950. A concerted campaign by NPLS members as well as South London Liberal Synagogue who also have a Kolín Torah, led to the cemetery being saved, although the prayer house was demolished. Fortunately Michael was able to use his contacts to save the "Kolín Arch" before the demolition (see page 08).

Over the following years a number of group visits were made to Kolín, the largest being in 1992 and 1996. The former commemorated the 50th anniversary of the deportation of the Jews in June 1942 to Terezin and Auschwitz. We cooperated with Hana Greenfield, a Kolín survivor who has done much to keep alive the memory of its former Jewish community. Ulice Na Hradbách was packed with civic and religious dignitaries, the Israeli ambassador as well as hundreds



Entrance to
the well-
concealed
Kolín
Synagogue

of townspeople who witnessed the unveiling of a memorial on the former Jewish school that stands in front of the synagogue.

An even larger party went in 1996 to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the dedication of the Kolín Synagogue. Northwood's "Kolín Torah" was taken back and read in the synagogue by Hana Greenfield's granddaughter. The NPLS choir sang during a moving service. The Oaklands Drama Group performed in the town theatre "Stones of Kolín", Judy Herman's musical history of the Jews of Kolín.

Over the years research has continued into the life and history of the Jewish community of Kolín. An English translation was commissioned of Rabbi Feder's account of the fate of his community in the Holocaust "Židovská Tragedie". Rabbi Goldstein is researching a biography of Rabbi Feder. For some years the NLPS Kabbalat Torah class have held a Shabbat service in the Kolín Synagogue. Every year a "Czech Memorial Weekend" is held in June when memorial prayers

and a selection of names of the 480 Jews who perished in the Holocaust are read out and memorial prayers recited. Michael Heppner has told the story many times at Northwood and around Britain and the world inspiring other synagogues to research the history and keep alive the memory of the communities whence came their Czech Memorial Torah Scroll.

The Torah was again returned to Kolín in 2009 when NPLS members and Kabbalat Torah students came to celebrate Simchat Torah. Dr Ladislav Jouza of the Kolín museum brought to the service a Sefer Torah donated to the museum in 1939 by the Jewish community. It was probably the first time that this Torah had been inside the Kolín ark since before the War. As well as the services, two seminars were held to inspire local High School students to keep alive the memory of the former Jewish community of Kolín. In 2010 the Kolín Museum plans to open an exhibition in the synagogue telling the history of the Jews of Kolín.



A Scroll returns to the Kolín ark

THE STORY OF THE KOLÍN ARCH

The wooden Arch, whose parts surround the Ark of the Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue, was brought from Kolín to England in 1981. Michael Heppner first saw the Arch in 1979 standing forgotten in the deserted prayer hall of the New Cemetery.

The Kolín Arch surrounds the Ark at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue



The Arch originated in Malín, a village on the outskirts of Kutná Hora, 12 miles from Kolín. Kutná Hora was a Royal town and Jews were not allowed to reside there until 1848. They lived in Malín and Kolín and commuted to Kutná Hora to do business.

A prayer room was established in Malín in 1800 in the loft of a distillery. In 1856, a fire destroyed the distillery and the prayer room along with it. Due to various financial

and technical difficulties the new synagogue was not completed until 1863. However, by then Jews were living in Kutná Hora itself and built their own synagogue in 1871. The Malín Synagogue continued until after World War I, but its congregation had dwindled.

In 1922 the building was sold to SOKOL Gymnastic Association and converted into a gymnasium. The wooden Ark and presumably the Torah Scrolls and other religious

The Trebon Synagogue, now a private house



artefacts were moved to Kolín. The Ark cupboard was installed in the winter synagogue at the side of the sanctuary, and the Arch – the decorative Ark surround - was erected in the prayer hall of the New Cemetery as a feature surrounding the rabbi’s pulpit. There it survived until it was rescued in 1981. It was a complicated mission to save the Arch, but Michael Heppner managed to persuade the Prague Jewish community, the Communist state authorities, and the British Customs to allow the Arch to be brought to Northwood. Soon after it arrived the prayer hall was demolished and had Michael not saved the Arch it would almost certainly have been destroyed.

In 1982 the Arch was re-erected in Northwood in three pieces and then in 2001, with the refurbishment of the synagogue, the Arch was reassembled as it had stood in Malín and then Kolín.

In 2002 Rabbi Goldstein went in search of the Malín “synagogue”. It had been demolished in the 1950s, but in a local pub he found a photograph of the building when used as a gym. The place in which the Arch once stood was clearly marked in the brickwork of the Eastern wall. The photograph is now believed to be in the Kutná Hora Museum]

TŘEBOŇ

Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue received its second Westminster Torah scroll in 1971; it was from Třeboň, a small picturesque town in southern Bohemia.

We know little about the Jews of Třeboň. They arrived sometime after 1848, before which only two Jewish families were allowed to live there. They were a small group consisting mainly of shopkeepers in Třeboň itself and scattered across the surrounding villages. Their numbers peaked around 1900 but by 1930 there were only 43 Jews left living in the town itself. The Synagogue and adjoining Jewish school were small and undistinguished and by 1930 the congregation could no longer afford a rabbi. The building has now been converted into a private house, its origins recognisable only by the place where the two tablets of the Commandments once stood on the facade. In the attic, remnants of the original blue painted ceiling with gold stars can be seen. Michael Heppner tracked down Dr Karel Velemínský, the last Jew in town, who, in 1980, handed over to the Prague Jewish community the Transport List with the names of the 87 Jews of Třeboň and the surrounding villages who were deported on 18 April 1942. He also gave details about the Jewish families from the area. At the time Rabbi Goldstein and Michael Heppner were present and made handwritten copies, now in the NPLS archives. There is a small cemetery on the outskirts of the town, where the burial chapel has been converted into a private cottage. NPLS groups have made various visits to Třeboň and are seeking to erect a memorial plaque on the former Synagogue.

KLADNO

In a glass case on the wall of the Bimah is the torn remnant of a Scroll. It is one of many of the Memorial Scrolls that were beyond repair, and it has been placed here as our Holocaust memorial.

Above Members of the Jewish community of Kladno before their transport to Terezin.

Below The Kladno Synagogue, since 1939 a Hussite Church



According to the number on its brass plaque the fragment of Scroll was from the Kladno, 25 km west of Prague. The fragment on one roller only, contains only part of the book of Numbers and the book of Deuteronomy.

The Jewish congregation of Kladno offered to share its building with a Hussite congregation in 1939 when the Christian's premises became a shelter for the influx of Sudetenland refugees that resulted from the Munich agreement of September 1938. By 1940, the Hussites had effectively taken over the building but continued to share it with the Jewish

congregation until the Nazis banned Jewish services. Even then, the Jews continued to have use of the basement as an office. The building remained nominally Jewish property until it was officially transferred into the ownership of the Hussites in 1956.

The building has been converted into a church, with a large crucifix where the ark used to be.

In 1981, Michael Heppner went to Kladno and met Rudolf Salus, a survivor from the Kladno Jewish Community. Salus explained that when instruction came in 1942 to send the Jewish treasures to Prague for safekeeping, he and his companions feared for the safety of the Scrolls and hid them in a cavity in the wall of the synagogue basement. However, nine scrolls from the Kladno district were sent to Prague in 1948 and our Scroll fragment is probably one of these.

Rudolf was not on the main Kladno transport in February 1942 and was only deported in January 1945. After he returned to Kladno he found the hidden Scrolls and they were sent to the Jewish community in Prague and joined other Scrolls that were accumulated in the former Michle Synagogue.

In 2007 Congregation Beth El in Fairfield, CT, USA, which has another of the Kladno Scrolls, made contact with the Hussite congregation in Kladno and held a joint event in the former synagogue in 2007. This inspired NPLS to revitalise its own Kladno project and in October 2009 a group from Northwood joined the Hussite community for a Sunday morning service. Rabbi Andrew Goldstein preached and read from a Torah Scroll; an event that had not happened for nearly 70 years in that building.

There was an emotional ending of the service when the Pastor presented Rabbi Goldstein with an illuminated address, in Czech, English and Hebrew, expressing hope for friendship between our two congregations and sorrow that they had not done more to protect Jews in the Shoah. The manuscript hangs proudly on the walls of NPLS. And so the story continues...



Above
The Old
Synagogue,
Plzen

PLZEŇ

In 1992 Rabbi Andrew Goldstein together with his son, Aaron (who has now succeeded his father as Senior Rabbi at NPLS) led a group of young adults to Plzeň to help renovate two local cemeteries.

Rabbi Andrew Goldstein had close contact with the Plzeň community in Communist times and, after the Velvet Revolution, began frequent visits and arranged for NPLS members to conduct services and Passover Seders. As a token of thanks in 1992 the Plzeň leadership agreed to Northwood having a Torah Scroll on permanent loan and the young adults brought it to England – all the way by train. The Scroll was written in 1934, and had been hidden throughout the war under the floor of the synagogue. This synagogue was completed in 1893 and is the second largest in Europe. It stands proudly on the main street right in the middle of the town. It was one of the last buildings to be occupied by the Nazis and until its restoration as a concert hall and civic centre in the late 1990s, carried the scars of battle. Today the community use a small “winter synagogue” at the rear of the building.

The
Synagogue,
Plazen



A large party from NPLS visited Plzeň in October 1996 to hold a Shabbat morning service. The “Big” Synagogue was under reconstruction but another synagogue building survived the Holocaust. It is the building used by the community until they transferred to the “big” synagogue in 1893 and situated behind the community offices in Smetanovy Sady. In 1996 it was semi-derelict. However the NPLS congregation managed, despite the cold weather, to hold a Shabbat service there, the first one for many decades.

SPIŠSKÁ NOVÁ VES

In 1998 the fourth Torah Scroll from the former Czechoslovakia was presented to NPLS by Mr Otto Kohn of Willesden, London.

Otto Kohn had been born in Plzeň. In 1936 his sister, Sylvia, became the second wife of the widower, Arpad Rauchwerger who lived in Spišská Nová Ves, a town in Eastern Slovakia.

Jews were permitted to settle in Spišská Nová Ves in the second part of the 19th century, and a fine synagogue was built in 1899 in a street off the main square. It is recorded as being "Neolog" rather than Orthodox. Sadly this building was burnt down by visiting Hitler Youth in 1941.

Arpad Rauchwerger was a wealthy industrialist who owned a gypsum mine. As such he was valuable to the Nazis so he and Sylvia were not deported with most of the other Jews of the Spis Region in May 1942. By the time the next wave of deportations took place, in 1944, Arpad and Sylvia were hiding in the mountains where they managed to survive until liberated by the Soviet forces in January 1945. Arpad was penalised again after the Communist take over in 1948, as a "capitalist", and briefly imprisoned. He and Sylvia moved to Bratislava where Arpad died in 1960 and is buried in the city's Neolog cemetery. It is not known how Arpad came to be in possession of a Torah scroll or when it was rescued from the synagogue and where it survived the Holocaust.

In 1968, Sylvia went to visit her sister in Vienna during the "Prague Spring". From there she travelled to London and settled near to her brother Otto and his wife Anna. She married again, to a widower, and acquired a daughter

and granddaughter. Somehow she managed to send for and receive all her belongings from her home in Bratislava.

After her death in 1998 Otto decided to sell a wardrobe Sylvia had brought over. Just as it was about to be taken away to the sale room he discovered a secret compartment in which he found the Torah Scroll. We shall never know the full story, but in all probability Arpad had hidden the Scroll there when he removed it from the synagogue. Hearing of Northwood & Pinner's interest in Torah Scrolls Otto contacted Rabbi Goldstein and donated it to the synagogue.

During the summer of 2000 research began into the former Jewish community of Spišská Nová Ves. Thanks to the internet it was possible to make contact quite quickly with survivors or descendants in the USA, Israel and Australia, plus some still in Kosice, Bratislava and Prague. Arpad and Sylvia Rauchwerger's niece and nephew are both living in Melbourne. Another survivor is Walter Morgenbesser, now living near Tel Aviv. He is the youngest of seven sons of the Spišská Nová Ves tailor who made vestments for the Catholic priests. Another, Dr Valter Bauer, now retired and living in Kosica, became chief regional medical officer for a region in Slovakia. His father was a holder of the Iron Cross in World War 1.

At the same time that Cynthia Drapkin and the late Frances Sacker from NPLS were beginning to make enquiries about the Jews of Spisska Nova Ves a team of young American Peace Corps volunteers arrived in the region. Eli Fenichel was given the task of cataloguing and clearing the derelict Jewish cemetery on the edge of the town. He was put in touch with the two women from England and the three of them met in April 2002. They also met the Mayor who gave them information about the Jews of Spišská Nová Ves that his mother remembered (she had a Jewish doctor and always used the Jewish pharmacist).



In October 2001, a Jewess, Margita Teitelbaum who had survived Auschwitz and returned to live in her home town celebrated her 90th Birthday. She had become a national celebrity was seen on TV, had articles written about her and was well-known in her local community. She was introduced by email to the two women from NPLS, but unfortunately she died one month before their arrival in Spišská Nová Ves in 2002.

When Eli Fenichel left the area he put the women in touch with Professor Kormosova, the history teacher at the Gymnasium in Spišská Nová Ves. The teacher also knew Margita Teitelbaum and had begun a programme of research with her senior students. This project is on-going and the students have accomplished amazing work. They have exhibited at "Visigrad 4 – Our Lost Neighbours" with young people from all over Central and Eastern Europe. They have spoken to the members of the Slovak Parliament and appeared on national and local TV. With the backing of their teachers, the students clear and maintain the Jewish cemetery twice a year. This inspirational history teacher has also pursued her own line of research and achieved her PhD on the subject.

Two further visits by Cynthia Drapkin has kept up the contact with the Town Hall in Spišská Nová Ves and managed to get authority for the

Jewish cemetery to be refurbished – much of the physical work was carried out by the students and teachers from the Gymnasium under the direction of the Jewish community in Bratislava. The school launched an appeal to raise the necessary funding.

In October 2007, Rabbi Dr Andrew Goldstein led a small group from NPLS to Slovakia. They had a wonderful morning at the Gymnasium, with many specially invited VIPs, when the students made presentations, in perfect English, about their project. They had traced the former Jewish students at the school and what had happened to them. There was a poignant moment when a plaque was unveiled, near the school entrance, to those Jewish students who had perished in the Holocaust. The morning was followed by a Civic Reception and lunch at the Town Hall Then everyone went to the Town cemetery which contains memorials to Jews who fell in World War I as well as those who perished in the Holocaust. At the Jewish cemetery prayers of rededication were said, and all the hard work inspected – there are strong new gates and a notice in Slovak, German and English informing that this is a Jewish cemetery.

Top Mr Otto Kohn presents the Spisska Scroll

Bottom Professor Kormosova and her students in the Jewish cemetery they maintain



THE TEREZIN TREE

Terezin concentration camp, Czechoslovakia; in German, Theresienstadt. Morning, January 21st 1943, cold and bleak. A group of children is secretly gathered in a courtyard near their barracks. They are there because it is Tu B'shevat, the festival of the New Year for Trees.



Service under
the Terezin
Memorial tree,
1996

The Nazis had forbidden schools in the camp, but teachers managed to run clandestine classes in an effort to give the children some feeling of normality. One of the teachers, Irma Lauscher, planned a tree-planting ceremony to celebrate Tu B'shevat. She persuaded one of the men who worked in the fields to smuggle a seedling into the camp. He brought it hidden in his boot. This was the tree the children had come to plant.

The tree became a symbol of hope, and successive groups of children nurtured it. When they were transported to the extermination camps in Poland they passed on the care of the trees to other children. By the end of the war 15,000 children had passed through Terezin, of whom few survived. The tree survived, though, and after the war Irma Lauscher transplanted it in the Terezin Cemetery where it flourished until it was a great tree over 60 ft tall, a memorial to the murdered children and a symbol of defiance.

For some years after the war Irma Lauscher and her husband Jiri took many groups, especially from Soviet countries, to visit the tree. In those days they found it necessary to explain what had happened to the Jews in Terezin, as the regular guides spoke only about the political prisoners incarcerated in the nearby Fortress.

The Lauscher's daughter, Michaela who also survived Terezin, eventually took over the duty of taking groups to visit the tree and in time her own grand-daughter accompanied her and was preparing to take over the care of the tree.



Children from Bialystok: Transport from Terezin to Auschwitz, October 5th, 1943

In 1996, a party from Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue went to the Czech Republic, and visited Terezin. Rabbi Goldstein, conducted a service of remembrance under the tree. One of the party picked up some of its seeds, brought them back to England and planted them in his greenhouse. Four of them germinated and were handed on to others to nurture. Cyril and Penny Sherwood looked after one of them, and Walter and Sylvia Weg another. On Holocaust Memorial Day 2001 the Sherwood's sapling was taken to Beth Shalom, the Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire, where it was planted in the garden of remembrance overlooking the children's memorial. On January 27th. 2002, National Holocaust Day, the eve of Tu B'shevat, the Mayor of Hillingdon planted the Wegs' tree on the verge by Green Lane car park in Northwood where it stands as a memorial to all who have died through tyranny and especially the children of Terezin. There are other trees in Washington DC and at Yad Vashem in Israel.

Sadly the original tree died as a result of the devastating floods of 2004 in the Czech Republic, but both the Beth Shalom and Northwood trees are now bearing seeds and from these new trees can be grown to perpetuate the memory. On September 6th 2008 the Terezin Museum planted a sapling they had grown to replace the original tree.

So it is that from one seed planted during the Holocaust, several trees are now growing around the world as a memorial to the children of Terezin who perished in the Holocaust.

DEDICATIONS

Many people helped us during the years into the research of the history of our "Torah Towns". Some are mentioned in this booklet, but we think also of those who helped with translation of articles and letters from Czech to English: Hanus Suchy and Ladya Hornan, Alfred Geiringer, Gerard Feder, Erna Meissner and Peter Fuchs.



Rita Lowy

This book is dedicated to Rita Lowy, a member of Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue who became increasingly involved in our Czech projects. She translated articles, kept us up to date with events in Prague, and most importantly was our guide and companion on several of our tours. She shared her experiences with us and was especially courageous on visits to Terezin, where she was able to take us to the places where she had lived and worked relating the various sites to her own real experiences.

Rita Lowy was born in Klatovy in Western Bohemia in April 1927. Her sister Anna, was 5 years older. Her father Ludwig was a textile engineer and mother Klara ran a small grocery store in town. As the threat of German invasion increased, Rita moved with her mother and sister to family in Moravia, but after the Sudetenland was given to the Germans they moved back to Klatovy. From there, after months of increasing privations, the family were transported in November 1942 to Terezin.

In a booklet (available from NPLS) Rita describes the terrible conditions she endured in Terezin, the work she was forced to do in the gardens and then in the factory stripping mica from the raw rock for use in aeroplane windows. She survived many diseases and the transport to Auschwitz of Anna in May and her parents in October 1944. After the liberation of Terezin in May 1945, Rita discovered that all her close family had been murdered. She briefly went back to Klatovy but discovered non-Jewish neighbours living in her home. A second cousin took her into his home in Prague and then Rita decided to train to be a nurse, which had the bonus of student accommodation. She escaped to London in 1952 where she lived with a cousin and his family and in 1956 married Franta Lowy, born in Kladno, Czechoslovakia. Two daughters and three grandchildren survive Rita.

