



new london
synagogue



I had the privilege of representing New London at the 60th Anniversary of 1,574 Czech Torah scrolls coming to Westminster Synagogue for, as Rabbi Benji Stanley put it, “commemoration, restoration and joyful use in communities around the world.” It was an exceptional and deeply moving event. The story was told of how the scrolls, gathered during the Holocaust and left festering in a warehouse in communist-era Prague, were offered for sale and thanks to the support of Ralph Yablon, arrived on two flat-bed trucks at Westminster. A little later a Chassidic scribe knocked on the door asking if the Synagogue had any scrolls that needed attention – he never left.

Today, the Czech scrolls are in use in Synagogues across the world. Two are on long-term loan at New London. In my mind, Rabbi Jacobs visited the Trust in its earliest days, also the earliest days of New London, to get scrolls from we could read at New London. I’m proud Ralph Yablon’s great-grandchildren, proud New London members, read from one of the Czech scrolls at their respective Bat and Bar Mitzvah.

Many of the scrolls returned to Westminster for the event. I was sat next to a colleague who had flown in from California for the occasion, we jostled, warm-heartedly, next to one another with scrolls over our shoulders. The New York Times reported the event, mentioning the scroll held at Central Synagogue in Manhattan – a scroll that came from Lipnik, the tiny village from which one of our scrolls also comes. Thank you Julian Futter for sharing that information and for all your work on Lipnik. Rabbi Kamila Kopřivová, one of the rabbinic team at Westminster and the first ever female Czech Rabbi, spoke of the meaning of home. It was all very poignant.

The scrolls carry a thread of connection to a past; before the Holocaust, beyond the Holocaust, defiled by the Holocaust but undestroyed and renewed and alive. As a thread connecting our todays to our yesterdays the scrolls connect back further still, before even the creation of these specific scrolls, to a narrative of a people – our people – who have carried Torah scrolls on wanderings through millennia, stopping to read and celebrate and re-read again and again and again.

The scrolls carry a thread of connection even beyond that, back to some mythic impossible-to-imagine moment we read about in the scroll last Shabbat; when the mountains leapt and the heavens crouched and there was a point of meeting between all that is Divine and all that is human.

Judaism claims two physical objects contain an imprint of divinity; our Torah scrolls and, of course, all humanity. Both are well, well worth treasuring.

We’ll be reading from one of our Czech scrolls this Shabbat – Rosh Chodesh. More information can be found on our own website <https://www.newlondon.org.uk/czech-scrolls/>.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy