

RECOLLECTIONS OF POLAND

By Bessie Deitsch (Bashia Kutnowski)
(1989 during visit to Poland)

Additional memories by Bernice Cohen on the same visit



ul. KUTNOWSKA

The Kutnowski's lived in Gostynin. Those who died in Poland are buried in the Jewish cemetery outside the town. The road that takes you to the Jewish cemetery is called Ulla Kutnowska. It is possible that the family lived in one of the minute houses along that road. No one had proper surnames in Poland, because serfdom had only been abolished during the 1850's. Therefore, everyone took the name of the nearest town, like de for the French or von for the Germans. The nearest town on that road called Ulla (road) Kutnowska was Kutno, about 15 to 20 miles away. Gostynin was a very small village.

When we visited it in 1989, there were many clap-board wooden bungalows, still from the 19th century. The village had not been badly damaged by the Germans; it seemed to have an almost medieval look, and very poor. Outside one little row of houses was a water pump. As we drove through a woman came out of a house and filled a bucket with water. Wooden carts pulled by donkeys were the main means of transport to be seen. Cars were very few. The houses in Ulla Kutnowska were tiny two roomed bungalows made mainly in wood, with a central front door and a tiny front yard leading to the road, rather like Victorian cottages in England.



All the head boards in the Jewish cemetery had been removed when we visited it in 1989. No one knew where they had been taken. As far as we know, all the Kutnowski family who lived in Gostynin were buried in that cemetery. The cemetery lies in a wide, open field, covered in

grass, and sloping gently away from the town. It is right on the outskirts of Gostynin.

Symcha Kutnowski, Bessie's grandma, was born around 1845, she died aged about 63-64, in 1909, when Bessie was very young. Chaim, her husband, was very upright and very religious. He stuck to his principles. After his wife died he lived alone with his young family. He was still alone and alive when Bessie came to England in 1922. He was born around 1840. His first daughter Bashia, died very young. All his children named one of their daughters Bashia, to remember her by. That is why the name appears so often. He had a second daughter later, whom he renamed Bashia (maybe it was his mother's name?). Auntie Bashia had a flat in Gostynin and she used to sublet rooms to make a living. I do not think she ever married. She was born around 1876, and was about 46 when she died. According to Bessie she was killed by the Germans after the Warsaw uprising - perhaps in 1922 (but since the Uprising in Warsaw took place during the Second World War there is something wrong here. Maybe it was an earlier pogrom).

Chaim's younger brother, Charles, came to England, where he died, I think around 1953-5. But I'm not sure. Most of his children went to America. Perhaps Andrew can try to make contact again. Daughter Rosie, came to England in the early 1950's to see her father. I remember meeting her then.

Chaim had an older brother Leibish, who had a son called Jacob, who married Freydamalka, a daughter of Gronim by his first wife. There were five intermarriages between the Deitsches and Kutnowskis in three generations. Sarah Fanny, Gronim's second wife, only had 3 children; Lewis, Phillip and Sulka.

All the Kutnowskis lived in Gostynin. Bessie's oldest brother, Abram, born around 1901-2, went to live in Lodz in 1914, with Dora's brother Bernard (after whom Bernard Ellis and I are named). Uncle Bernard had no children. Abram went to stay to avoid going to the war and to find a good job. He married and stayed in Lodz, but he came to visit the family in England in 1937, without his wife or children. All the Polish family died during the 1939-45 war. Pray for their souls.

Lewis and Gronim came from Plozk, a small town up the river from Wastwavek (this is my pronunciation (*actually Wloclawek*)). Lewis and Rachel (Kutnowski) plus their two sons, Sid and Abraham (six months old) plus Gronim and Sarah Fanny (his second wife) went to England in 1906, soon after Abraham was born. They travelled in carts as the trains were very scarce and expensive. Carts with drivers were the main way of getting around.



Dora (Bessie's mother) came from a large family. Her mother died around 1913 to 1914, but before the war (which began in August). She was the oldest daughter with 2 brothers and several sisters. Bessie remembers one young sister, called Topsha, who sang like a bird and was so pretty, people stopped to admire her in the street. Dora's father died in Berlin - he went to have a stomach operation and he died there, around 1910.

Jacob and Dora went to live in Wloclawek. It was a large town. They lived at 33 Kaliska, a wide main road that led from the town square at one end to the station and the railway line at the other end. There was a shule in Kaliska, facing the square. Alongside the railway was a beautiful boulevard with tall trees, where the family would often walk after visits to shule.

33 Kaliska was a small house with 2 rooms and a central doorway, like those we saw in Gostynin. When we visited in



January 1989, the house had crumbled into dereliction. Only a gap remained where it had stood, but the neighbouring houses were still standing. Behind the house was a large cobbled courtyard. That was still there in 1989, and at the back was a little house with a very old lady living in it. Jacob bought fodder and kept it in the yard to sell to farmers, who also brought produce to him, so he could sell it on. It was a hand-to-mouth existence. They were incredibly poor. Bessie remembers how she used to sit, as a young child of about 7, reading books in the courtyard until it got dark and her mother called her in. When we went to Kaliska in 1989, we found that the name had been changed after the war, to commemorate the

date of liberation of the town from the Nazis. It is now called 26 January. We were there on 18 January 1989.

The family stayed at Kaliska until 1915. The house was sold and they moved to the outskirts of the town, but at the same end as Kaliska. The second house was bigger; it was 4, Zdunsk, a corner house. Uncle Benny only remembers this house. He went to visit it in the 1950's. It was still standing and we now have the cine film he took of it while he

was there. Bessie had only bad memories of that house. She would never talk about it. There was terrible anti-Semitism and they were scared to leave the house. The 1914-18 war made conditions very bad.

In 1920, Jacob and his son Simon came to England to decide whether to follow his sister Rachel's example and emigrate to England from Poland. In 1921 Lewis took his young daughter Kitty, then aged 13, on a return visit to Poland, to see the family remaining in the "home country". In 1922 Jacob brought his whole family over to England to settle, except for Abram, then aged about 20. He was settled well in Lodz by then, and didn't want to emigrate.

Dora died in 1928 when Abraham and Bessie were on their honeymoon. Like her father, she also had to have a stomach operation, and died before she recovered from it.

Gronim was the true founder figure for our family. He had ten children, many of whom survived and had large families. When the family tree is complete, we should count up his living descendants. He came to England when he was 85. Papi Deitsch remembers him as an upright elderly pious man, with a very long white beard. He always wore a top hat. I remember being told this when I was a child, but I never actually saw a photograph of Gronim until 1988, when I found a photo on Auntie Kitty's mantelpiece and recognised Gronim from Papi's description. Papi told me that he and his brother Sid used to protect their grandfather from the Mosley anti-Semite mobs in the East End, when he came home from shule. The story has it that he gassed himself by catching his tullas in the gas tap, while he was dovening. He was 107 years old. He and Sarah Fanny are buried in the Edmonton cemetery, as are most of the Kutnowski older generation. Gerald Deitsch and Gregory Abrahams are named after Gronim.



Posted with the author's permission.

From the [Wloclawek Shtetlinks page](http://www.shtetlinks.org/Wloclawek/wloclawek_shtetl_links.html)

http://www.shtetlinks.org/Wloclawek/wloclawek_shtetl_links.html

Copyright ©2010 Martin Kaminer