

# The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue – Holland Park.

## The roots of the founding community

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue, Holland Park was founded by Jews who came to England from Salonika and Istanbul in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The origins of the Salonika and Istanbul community is quite diverse: -

- Jews lived in Turkey from early days – there was a community at the time of Alexander the great and there are ruins of synagogues in Turkey from Roman times.
- Substantial numbers of Jews settled in Turkey from the 13<sup>th</sup> century
- The greatest influx came during the reign of Beyazit the Second (1481-1512) as a direct result of the expulsion of Jews from Europe, not just Spain and Portugal but also Sicily, France and Hungary.
- On hearing the orders of the expulsion from Spain, Beyazit II is recorded as saying “not to refuse entry or cause the Jews difficulties, but to receive them cordially.” Thus, Turkey became a haven for Jews fleeing the expulsions.
- The Spanish Jews chiefly settled in Istanbul, Salonika, Safed, Jerusalem, Damascus, Alexandria, Cairo and Bursa.
- Jewish culture flourished in the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish Jews introduced their traditions into the Turkish liturgy and their Hebraic, Spanish Language Ladino.

Many of our Congregants names reflect their origins:

- Saragoussi form Zaragoza, Spain
- Carmona from Carmona, Spain
- Toledano from Toledo, Spain
- Behar from Bejar, Spain
- Molina – A miller – in Spanish
- Da Costa (Portuguese)
- Mendoza (Spanish)
- Molho (Portuguese)
- Periera (Portuguese for Pear Tree)
- Coenca from Coenca, Spain
- Medina, Spain

To name just a few.

## The foundation of the synagogue

Jewish immigrants arrived in Britain from Ottoman Balkans from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

They had a different liturgy and customs from the established communities in Britain – including the use of Ladino (Judeo Espanol) still spoken over 400 years after the expulsion from Spain.

In 1908, there was a large influx of families from Salonika and Constantinople (now Istanbul) who came to the Franco British Exhibition held at White City which attracted 8 million visitors.

They came to market their wares – fine carpets and tobacco.

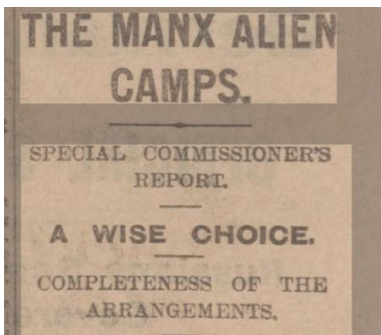
Many never returned but settled close to White City in the Shepherds Bush area. These were gradually joined by earlier immigrants who had first gone to live in Shoreditch, London.



By the time of the First World War, regular services were being held and a part time minister appointed.

Many more young men arrived here at the onset of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War as they did not wish to be conscripted into the Turkish army

Unfortunately, because Turkey was allied with Germany and despite the fact that Salonika was part of Greece from 1912, many male members of the communities were interned until 1917.



*In September 1914 the camp was requisitioned for use as an internment camp for enemy aliens, housing a privilege camp for those better off, a Jewish camp and a general camp. The privilege camp men had better quality food and shared a tent with fewer other internees.*

They were released upon the personal guarantee of the Haham (Chief Rabbi) Dr Moses Gaster, of the Spanish & Portuguese Jews Congregation.

One of our founders, namely Mr Vitali Elnicave was appointed the representative of the self-titled Sephardi Congregation of Levantine Jews to help release the internees.

Some founders originally settled in Shoreditch near the Bevis Marks Synagogue as it had a liturgy (minhag) most close to their own. They joined the management and eventually persuaded them to assist with the building of the Holland Park Synagogue.

The community decided after the First World War to build its own Synagogue in West London. But the community was very poor. Donations were collected at the rate of 6d per week (2.5p today). Mr Jack Cohen and others would go out on bicycles in all weathers to collect the money.

A fund-raising committee was set up in 120 and in 1924 a plot was purchased in St James's Gardens for £1,500, £750 in cash and a £750 mortgage from Lloyds Bank.

In 1926 a deal was struck with the existing Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation at Bevis Marks who purchased the land for £1,500 and granted the synagogue a lease for 999 years at £50 per annum.

The building costs were estimated at around £8,000. The Sir Sasson David Trust donated £5,000 towards the building costs and the Synagogue is named Sha'ar Hashamayim Knesseth Sasson David in his honour (Sha'ar Hashamayim being the Spanish & Portuguese Jew's Congregation).

In June 1928 an additional piece of land was purchased for the Semoff Hall.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1928, the foundation stone was laid.

In October the adjoining house was purchased for £1,775 to accommodate the Synagogue Minister.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1928, the synagogue was consecrated. There were no pews and no communal hall.

The Sassoon David Trust donated a further £5,000 in 1929 which enabled all works to be completed.

The Communal Hall was constructed in 1930 and over 80 children attended the Chanukah party in the hall that year. A photograph of the party hangs in the Hall.

More recently a second floor was built over the hall and more recently still the Hall was extended to create a permanent Succah.

### Salonika reflection

On a sad note, the Jewish community which remained in Salonika suffered two terrible tragedies.

The Great Thessaloniki Fire of 1917 was a disaster for the community. The Jewish community was concentrated in the lower part of town and was badly affected, the fire destroyed 16 of 33 synagogues and left 52,000 Jews homeless.

During the Holocaust, Salonika's 54,000 Jews were shipped to the Nazi extermination camps. More than 90% never returned. Only the Polish Jews experienced a greater level of destruction.

### The Synagogue today

We are an orthodox community and the services are recited in Hebrew with additional prayers in Ladino, men and women sit separately

Over the past 90 years the synagogue has evolved, founding families have a strong presence on our membership although many no longer live in the immediate vicinity of the Synagogue. The Synagogue has been a welcoming place for Jews to come – and we have had several influxes of

**new members – for example post war migrations, the Jews of Iraq in 1950, from Egypt in 1956 and more recently Jews from France.**

**We are a small Community with some 240 families as members. Friendly and welcoming with its unique liturgy and service.**

**VISITORS ARE MOST WELCOME TO OUR SERVICES.**

**Points of interest**

**The building is modelled on the elegant Turkish Synagogues and the designs of Bevis Marks and Lauderdale Road Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues.**