

Kutno, Poland - Cemetery Description

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<http://jewish.kutno.free.fr>

The first documentation of Jews in Kutno (named Moshe, Salomon and Lewek) was 1513, but certainly the Jews lived here before that date. In 1753, a fire destroyed the town and the local Jewish community documents. Jews developed commerce reaching even Germany and the Netherlands. The Jews of traded livestock to make leather goods, shoes, and felt items. Skins of wild animals like hares, foxes also were used. Crafts such as tailoring were common. An additional source of income was breeding horses and cattle so 29% of animals belonged to Jews. In 1765, 928 Jews lived there. The 19th century was busy with construction of a railway line to transport goods from the factories of Lodz and construction of the brick synagogue and many Jewish communal organizations. The Jewish population multiplied: 1800-1,376 (70.2%) to 1908-8,978. Kutno's rabbi, Israel (Eliyahu) Yehoshua TRUNK, for thirty years was a Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, advocate.

Kutno is also known as the hometown of Shalom Asz, Yiddish playwright, prose writer, and essayist. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Jewish population began to decrease due to WWI, movement to Lodz, and immigration to America so in 1921, 6,784 Jews lived there. The Germans occupied Kutno on September 15, 1939. The synagogue was destroyed in the first months with many Jews taken for forced labor. A Judenrat was appointed as early as November 1939, with increasing numbers of refugees from nearby, but the ghetto was officially established in June 1940 on the grounds of the "Konstancja" sugar factory for more than 7,000 Jews. Franz Hansen, a Wehrmacht soldier posted there, photographed the Jews moving to the ghetto surrounded with barbed wires and watchtowers. Since the factory buildings had been bombed, many Jews lived outdoors. Black markets and smuggling kept ghetto prisoners able to preserve some semblance of normality, but disease was rampant and food scarce. Liquidated at the end of March/early April 1942, most of the ghetto prisoners was sent to Chelmno. The rest was executed in the cemetery in a mass grave

The Kutno Jewish cemetery is located on a hill between Sobieskiego, Tarnowskiego and Zdrojowa streets. It was established most probably in the early 1500s. The cemetery burials are difficult to calculate. The oldest Kutno inhabitants remember a "forest of matzevot", thousands of graves, before WWII. The ohel of Rabbi Israel (Eliyahu) Yehoshua TRUNK was destroyed. The

Old Cemetery is located on a hill with some trees overlooking the gravestones. Some names are etched in stones in the town's streets and backyards: Reb Johanan in an alley, Reb Moszego in a garden. Archival photos of the cemetery before WWII. Approximately 6,700 Jews (25%+) lived in Kutno (Lodz district) prior to WWII. The Nazis destroyed the cemetery using stolen gravestones for pavements, squares and residential yards occupied by the Germans. At the cemetery, they planned to build a Victory Monument to the Third Reich, but never did. In the Jewish cemetery were buried 1060 people who died or were murdered in the ghetto. Some were also executed directly in the cemetery after digging their own graves, not included in the 1060 who have a death certificate. At liquidation time, the remaining Jews in the ghetto were either sent to Chelmno (about 4000) or stayed in the ghetto before being executed in a mass grave (about 1600), inside the Kutno cemetery. After the war, few Kutno Jews brought ashes from Chelmno nad Nerem to the cemetery for a symbolic burial. They unveiled a monument to the victims of the Holocaust, a stylized matzeva with Magen David and the words in Yiddish and Polish: "Eternal memory. Jews murdered by the Nazi assassins are buried here in a mass grave. Respect their memory." Unknown perpetrators however, very soon destroyed the matzeva. The last burial at the cemetery took place in 1948. Later, the cemetery gradually slipped into oblivion. Gravel gathering and rubbish dump became its fate. Residents graze livestock, which at least keeps down the vegetation. A few times graves have been opened and searched for valuables. A few surviving gravestones were stolen. Gravestones or fragments for many years can be found in the city including in Kutno Old Market Square's cobbles (today Plac Wolności) and ulica Sobieskiego, along the eastern side of the cemetery. In the 1980s, thanks to the involvement of Andrej Urbaniak, a former director of the museum in Kutno, the members of the Society of Friends of the Kutno Region (TPZK) began to recover and protect the Jewish gravestones. Gravestones from surrounding yards, streets, and gardens were gathered for several years, until several hundred matzevot were found. The book "Broken Memories" virtually reconstructed some 150 matzevot, some 90 with complete information. Matzevot were planned to be transferred to the cemetery and create a lapidarium from the damaged tombstones. These plans were not finalized so the gravestones remain stored in a warehouse of the Regional Museum in Kutno (Saxon Palace). In 1993, a monument was erected in the cemetery, dedicated to the memory of the Jews of Kutno in Polish and Hebrew. It is the one that still exists. Today, the cemetery has no gravestones. "Newspapers of the Mazowia Region," describes it thus: "In winter, the cemetery turns into a toboggan run and is a summer playground for sports, organized by the residents' children in the vicinity. In addition, regularly, drinkers use it. The aggressive hooligans knock over plaques dedicated to the Jews and paint offensive graffiti."

In 2008, an international active group of descendants was founded ("Jewish Kutno Group") who created a website, published the "Broken Memories" book, translated the 1968 Yizkor Book in Yiddish and Hebrew to English, French and Spanish.

In 2025, a Foundation ("Friends and families of Jewish Kutno"), dedicated to the restoration of the cemetery and other Jewish Kutno related projects, was created, and the property of the cemetery grounds was transferred to the Lodz Jewish Community.

Video. Photos. Photos. Yad Vashem photos of the Holocaust. Map [May 2009]

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Kutno is located in Lodz province at 52°13' 19°23', 41 km from Plock and 50 km from Lodz.
Cemetery address: ulica Tarnowskiego. Present town population is 25,000-100,000 with no Jews.

Town: Urząd Miasta, Plac 19 Stycznia 18, tel. 42785.

Regional: Wojewódzki Konserwator Zabytków, 09-400 Plock, ulica Kolegiarna 15.