



**GMINA WYZNANIOWA
STAROZAKONNYCH w RP**
קהילת בני ברית ברפובליקה הפלנית
JEWISH OLD TESTAMENT COMMUNITY

For correspondence : P.O.Box 15 , 00-950 Warsaw, Poland
Tel / Fax: +48 22 636 36 89; mob.: 0 602 243 150;
e-mail: starozakonni@interia.pl , www.jewishcem.waw.pl
Board Office : Gibalskiego Str. 21 , 01-190 Warszawa , Poland

Warsaw, September 2004

POZNAŃ SYNAGOGUE PROJECT
MR. ANDREW HINGSTON

Dear Friends,

I am a founder of two Jewish organizations in Poland, the Jewish Cemetery "Gęsia" Foundation [Fundacja Cmentarza Żydowskiego „Gęsia”] and the Jewish Old Testament Community of Poland [Gmina Wyznaniowa Starozakonnych w RP], both of which you can learn about on the web at <http://www.jewishcem.waw.pl>. I am well known for my concern for the preservation of Jewish patrimony in Poland.

The organization that, in 1997, was assigned the responsibility for caring for the Jewish patrimony of Poland is not caring for it. It has chosen on numerous occasions to sell for profit precious and irreplaceable traces of the Jewish memory of Poland – traces that are precious not only to Polish Jews but also, increasingly, to Poles themselves, and to open-minded and caring people of all faiths all over the world.

Indeed, many of those who are now showing the most concern for Jewish cultural patrimony in Poland are not themselves Jewish. Perhaps given the numbers of Jews and the numbers of non-Jews in Poland today this is inevitable. I am certainly grateful for all those who are helping, for without their help too much of the memory of the Jews of Poland might well be lost.

Among the most promising and imaginative new initiatives is that of a small group of distinguished architects and art historians centered in the western Polish city of Poznań – **Komitet Ochrony Dziedzictwa Architektonicznego w Wielkopolsce** [Committee to Preserve the Architectural Heritage of Wielkopolska]. KODA is concerned for the future of Jewish, Christian, and secular patrimony. They see things from an historical and aesthetic perspective, not a religious perspective. As the pressures of modernization and the temptations of rapid commercial development increase, vigilant, independent organizations like KODA will become increasingly important. They understand, as do I, that by working together, we will save more of these fragile properties than we could ever do by working alone.

As you will see when you read the enclosed letter, KODA has proposed a promising experiment: the establishment of an oversight committee of world-class experts to watch over and protect major examples of patrimony. Because KODA is based in Poznań, it has chosen to begin with the

once magnificent synagogue of that city – the largest synagogue built between Berlin and Warsaw.

The synagogue's owners, based in Warsaw, have allowed it to slide into terrible disrepair, but at the same time they have refused important offers of financial and professional assistance. When asked why, their answers are evasive and opaque. While they equivocate, the building decays. What is clear is that essential maintenance has been deferred for years. The roof leaks badly. Windows are broken and never fixed. Paint peels and plaster crumbles. The electrical and plumbing systems are dangerously obsolete, inviting irreparable disaster. The owners periodically talk about turning it into a Jewish Community Center, but they have been talking about it for years and have done nothing at all to bring it about. Their inactions speak more clearly than their words. They even turned down the offer of a sizable donation (\$40,000+ / 147,000+ PLN) from the American-based foundation, Poznań Synagogue Project, and forced the cancellation of a conference on Jewish patrimony because they refused to allow others to express opinions on these matters. [<http://www.poznansynagogueproject.org>]

An effective defense of the Poznań synagogue in the ways suggested by KODA could become a model for saving similarly placed properties throughout Poland. Fortunately, organizations like KODA are keeping the pressure up. But they need our help.

You can help by sending a letter to the Voivod of Wielkopolska with a photocopy of that same letter to the Conservator of Poznań, asking them to protect the synagogue as an official landmark, and to appoint an oversight committee to protect its future. Enclosed with this letter you will find two suggested letters to the Voivod, one long and detailed, the other short and succinct. Please choose the one that best reflects your views – change the wording as you feel proper. Put your name and other information in the appropriate places. Then mail it to the persons to whom it is addressed. **Please do this as soon as possible.** And feel free to share this message with others who might wish to help.

Finally, please send an email to KodaPoznan@02.pl as soon as you have sent in your letter, giving KODA your name and email address, indicating which letter (long or short) you sent, and the date you sent it. KODA will keep you apprised of the progress they are able to make.

If you help, this will work – and when it does it will very likely become a model across Poland.

Your sincerely,



Bolesław Szenicer

GMINA WYZNANIOWA STAROZAKONNYCH W RP