

‘New’ Jewish Cemetery in Barsinghausen

My maternal grandparents Leo Goldschmidt and Dina Levy lived in Hohenbostel, a small village about 3.5 km northwest of the town of Barsinghausen. Barsinghausen was approx. 25 km west of the city of Hannover. My grandmother Dina died in 1919 and my grandfather Leo died in 1936, and they were both buried in the “new” Jewish cemetery in Barsinghausen, located on Kirchdorfer Strasse. The cemetery was in use during the years 1912 to 1944, and it contains 28 graves.

Barsinghausen had an older Jewish cemetery located at Deister Strasse, that was in use from the 18th century up to 1912. It was closed after that time because it was full. Dina Levy’s parents and grandparents and other relatives would have been among the graves in this old cemetery. This cemetery was severely damaged during the November Pogrom, also known as “Kristallnacht”, on the night of 9-10 November, 1938. But it was not completely destroyed until after the war ended in 1945, when work commenced to clear the land for new construction. The construction work was stopped, but not before all traces of the former cemetery had been removed. In the 1980s, a very small number of monuments, which had been found in various places around the town, were re-erected. And in 2015 a memorial wall was unveiled containing fragments of gravestones that had been found.

Today, Barsinghausen and Hohenbostel are suburbs of the city of Hannover. The property my grandparents owned in Hohenbostel has long since been replaced by a mini-mall, and the small synagogue that once served the Barsinghausen Jewish community is long gone. However, the “new” Jewish cemetery in Barsinghausen has remained more or less intact, and I and other members of my family have visited it over the years. One can find reference to it on the web – for example, at the following URL:

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuer_juedischer_Friedhof_\(Barsinghausen\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neuer_juedischer_Friedhof_(Barsinghausen))

The following photo was taken from this website. I don’t know when this picture was taken, but it is probably fairly recent:



My first visit to the Barsinghausen cemetery was in 1967, and I was there with my parents. I took the following photos at that time:



The photo at the right shows my mother looking at the gravestone of her mother. Note that the plaque contains a spelling error. The surname has been spelled "Goldschmidt". It was clear that the stone had been broken in half at some point before 1967, and it had been repaired. One can see evidence of the break behind the plaque. At that time the original plaque from 1919 must have been replaced with this one – with the spelling error.

I returned to Barsinghausen in 1996 and at that time I was only carrying a video camera. The photos I have are all taken from the video, and they are not of high quality. However, here is what the plaques on the gravestones looked like in 1996:



Although it isn't obvious from the photos, you will have to take my word that both gravestones are the same as 29 years earlier. But the plaques are clearly different. In the case of Leo's gravestone there is evidence that this one has been broken too, and the damage must have occurred sometime between 1967 and 1996. The stone has been repaired, and a new plaque has been installed. The lettering on the plaque is less ornate than previously. The final line "Ruhe sanft" (rest gently) has been omitted.

Dina's plaque is also different. In this case it does not appear that there was further damage to the stone than had occurred before 1967, so I have concluded that the plaque was replaced in order to correct the spelling error.

Was the damage to these stones caused by vandalism? It is hard to say for certain, although it is clear that both stones were, at one point, broken in half. Old gravestones are fragile and they can break quite easily. What is noteworthy is that someone has gone to the trouble and expense of repairing these stones, and to the best of my knowledge it was not someone from our family. If this had been done by someone in our family I am fairly sure I would have heard about it.

I therefore presume that the repair was done by someone from the town of Barsinghausen. Today, there is no longer a Jewish community in Barsinghausen, although there is a thriving Jewish community in Hannover. I think we should be grateful to whoever it is that looks after this and other Jewish cemeteries in this region.

A visitor to the Barsinghausen cemetery in 2017 subsequently contacted me to say that he was not able to find Leo Goldschmidt's grave. In response I offer the following:

Below on the left is an enlarged view from the photograph shown earlier in this document. Leo Goldschmidt's grave is the tall white gravestone with a circular rose emblem near the top:



The photo on the right is one I took of Leo Goldschmidt's grave with my video camera in 1996. Note that the plaque with Leo's dates of birth and death is not visible because it is mounted on the back of the stone, not on the front. The front, seen in these two photographs, is inscribed in Hebrew, and it has become heavily weathered, so it is likely very difficult to read.