

WARTSKI, ISIDORE (1878 - 1965), businessman

Name: Isidore Wartski
Date of birth: 1878
Date of death: 1965
Spouse: Dorothy Wartski (née Harris)
Spouse: Winifred Marie Wartski
Child: Joseph Harris Wartski
Parent: Flora Wartski (née Callamon)
Parent: Moritz Wartski
Gender: Male
Occupation: businessman
Area of activity: Business and Industry
Author: Nathan Abrams

Isidore Wartski was born in Ostrowo, Prussia on 9 January 1878, the eldest child of **Morris Wartski** and his wife Flora Callamon. In 1882 he moved with his family to Bangor where his father peddled jewellery and watches before opening a shop at 21 High Street. In the 1891 census, he was listed as a 'scholar' living at 8 Eldon Place.

Isidore followed his father into business opening a fine drapery and clothing store 'Wartski & Co' in premises that were located at 204 High Street. In 1896, it was advertising for 'a first-class Traveller for an established drapery business to travel North Wales'. Because Morris's two other sons, Charles anf Harry, were managing the jewellery business they had opened in Llandudno some years earlier, in 1906 Isidore was tasked with running Wartski's 'By the Cathedral' Quality Drapery and Clothing Store.

In 1918, Wartski opened another store at 196-200 High Street - an upgrade from its smaller shop further down the street - selling evening wear, frocks, cloaks, furs, trimmings, laces, silk hose, fans, gloves, hair accessories and the like. The business already had 'a large clientele amongst the leading county families', according to the local newspaper, enabling it 'to keep constantly employed a staff of skilled workers, and to carry out work expeditiously and with taste and style, peculiar to their productions'. Isidore developed it into a large shop selling the latest London and Parisian fashions. It was known also for its pneumatic tubes for sending and receiving cash. It came to play a huge role in the daily lives of the residents of Bangor and beyond. Receipts from the firm in the personal collection of the Marchioness of Anglesey dated 1940-1941 include a fur cap, angora coats, and a crocodile handbag. This was high-end stuff indeed. Wartski's occupied the store until 1965 when it was taken over by Browns of Chester.

In January 1902, Isidore Wartski married Dorothy ('Dolly') Harris at the Hope Place Synagogue, Liverpool. That November, their son Joseph Harris (Billy) was born at their house Gwynfryn in Bangor. Dolly died in February 1923 and was buried at Green Lane Cemetery in Liverpool. In 1925 Wartski remarried, to Winifred Marie (1889-1982), and they had another son, John.

Business was good such that by 1925, Wartski's dream to build 'a modern castle by the sea' was achieved. Derwen Deg, overlooking the Menai Strait, is one of the finest houses in Bangor. A large house in early arts and crafts style, it was one of the earliest that characterised the move from the valley to Upper Bangor. In August 1926, he hosted a garden party for the University's Jewish students attended by former PM **David Lloyd George** whom Wartski knew personally. Wartski was also friendly with Lord Marks, Lord Woolton and Lord Samuel.

In 1928, he bought The Castle Hotel opposite his shop and the area came to be known locally as 'Wartski's Square'. He transformed it into one of the most sumptuous high-class establishments in the whole of north Wales, modernising the building by introducing Art Deco-influenced gabled dormers and a new ground floor façade replacing the former Georgian exterior. At the rear, there was a ballroom and garage space for 100 cars. It was well known for its plush interiors, oak-lined lounges and smoke rooms, restaurant, drawing rooms and especially its famous Empire Ballroom where 200 people gathered for dances on its sprung floor on Friday and Saturday nights. He ran the hotel until his retirement in 1950.

Civic as well as commercially minded, Wartski was active in promoting Bangor as a shopping centre and served on its Chamber of Commerce, as chairman, for many years, as well as the North Wales Holiday Resorts Association. A popular figure, he sponsored various local sports and charitable organisations. He was elected to the town council in 1924 and served on most of its committees. During his 25-year tenure, Wartski had a major impact on the city including rehousing residents from the disease-ridden slums of the former fishing village of Hirael to the newly built housing estates on the outskirts of Bangor, as well as dropping the tolls on the Menai Bridge.

Fifteen years later, in 1939, he was elected Mayor of Bangor, the first Jewish person to hold this office in Wales. At his installation luncheon, Wartski said that he felt that his election was a 'deliberate assertion of the principle of religious toleration, or rather religious equality, which was one of the noblest features not only of public life in this country, but also of municipal and political institutions through the Empire'. During his campaign for re-election as Bangor's Mayor in 1940, Alderman John Williams stated, that he 'had been a resident of the borough almost long enough to claim himself a native. He had breathed the healthy atmosphere of the town and surrounding Welsh hills from boyhood.' He served from 1939-1941.

When war broke out in 1939, Isidore and Winifred Wartski began taking in Jewish evacuees, and arranged kosher meals at a temporary canteen in St. James' Church Hall. Wartski was also commended for providing a haven for the contents of the Montefiore Jewish Museum of Ramsgate and the Jews' College library at his house for the duration of the war.

Wartski was active in the affairs of Bangor's Jewish community. He was elected chairman of its Jewish Friendly or Benefit Society in 1897 and the following year was appointed the secretary for marriages of the Bangor Hebrew Congregation. He was also chairman of the Bangor Hebrew Literary Society. He remained active in the dwindling congregation until his death on 6 January 1965, aged 87. He was buried at Broadgreen Cemetery in Liverpool.

In 1968, three years after his death, Winifred bought several fields on the shore of the Menai Strait at Nantporth Farm and donated the land to the people of Bangor in his memory. They are still known as Wartski Fields and a pair of tablets were erected by the City of Bangor to commemorate the donation.

Author

Nathan Abrams

Sources

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