



Background

The Wartski family were well-known entrepreneurial retailers selling jewellery, antiques, art and fashion in Bangor, North Wales. The family had settled there and established the jewellery business in the later part of the nineteenth century.

Morris Wartski and his family were Polish Jews who had fled to Britain to escape anti-Semitic persecution by the Russians. After modest beginnings of peddling, Morris Wartski opened his first shop at 21 High Street Bangor.

The shop sold jewellery and clothing, and was so successful that the business grew until it became necessary to move premises to 196, 198, and 200 High Street Bangor.

By 1907, two additional shops had been established in Mostyn Street in the seaside town of Llandudno. The Wartski business benefitted greatly from custom from wealthy individuals such as King Edward VII and the 5th Marquess of Anglesey. He was known as the 'Dancing Marquess,' who was famed for his expensive taste. History tells of the Marquess having offered Morris Wartski a lift in his carriage, and suggesting to him that if he set up shop in North Wales, then he would buy from him. The Marquess died bankrupt at the age of just 29 in 1905. His debts almost dragged the Wartski firm into financial disaster.

Wartski's London

In 1911, a third branch of Wartski was opened in London by Emanuel Snowman, Morris Wartski's son in law, and the firm began a long association with the works of Carl Fabergé. Snowman had the foresight to purchase valuable antiquities from the Soviet Government department, known as the Antiquariat, between 1927 and 1933. Valuable items had been seized under the Communist regime to be sold off in order to raise money for tools and machinery. Snowman's purchases included many masterpieces by Carl Fabergé, and a dozen of the now famous Imperial Easter Eggs.

At the time he bought the eggs for around £400 to £600. Now each egg is worth about £30m. Queen Mary and George V subsequently became loyal customers of Wartski in London, and purchased the now famous Colonnade Egg.

Faberge was commissioned by Emperors Alexander III and Nicholas II from 1885 to 1916. Each egg was highly crafted and took over a year to produce. In total, 50 eggs were made. After the Russian revolution, 42 of the imperial eggs made their way into private collections and museums. Eight, including the Third Imperial Egg, were thought to have been lost. The Third Imperial Easter Egg was recently rediscovered when a scrap metal merchant who had the egg in his possession realised that it may be valuable after reading a newspaper article. This Egg was later exhibited at Wartski's of London in April 2014, over 112 years after it had last been seen by the public. Two others are thought to have survived, though their locations remain a mystery.

One egg, known as the Nesessaire egg was exhibited at the first ever Western exhibition devoted to Fabergé's work at Wartski's Regent Street premises in November 1949. Three years later on the 19th June 1952, it was sold to a buyer identified in their ledgers only as 'A Stranger' for £1250. That egg's last known location was Wartski.

Throughout the years, Wartski's customers have included the most rich and famous of the times. American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Yul Brynner, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra were all Wartski customers.

In 2011, Wartski of Llandudno made the ring for the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, and they also made the ring for Prince Charles' second wedding. Nicholas Snowman OBE, great-grandson of Morris Wartski and chairman of Wartski's received an Honorary Fellowship from Bangor University in 2015.



The Wartski family

Isidore Wartski

Morris's son Isidore (third from the right) was also a successful businessman like his father, and was responsible for expanding his clothes business, as well as working on developing the Castle Hotel in Bangor.

Isidore was a popular figure in Bangor and sponsored a number of local sports and charitable organisations.

WARTSKI'S OF BANGOR

After 15 years serving on the the Town Council, Isidore was appointed Mayor of Bangor in 1939 and became the first Jewish Mayor in Wales. As the town's Mayor during the war, Isidore Wartski was responsible for assisting with arrangements for evacuees to be rehomed in Bangor. He later received the tankard pictured below as a gift to thank him for all his efforts during this period.



References:

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