

# Charting the history of the Jews in the 20th century

Founded in 1906, the Jewish Museum in Prague is the largest museum of its kind in Europe. It has one of the most extensive collections of Judaica in the world, with as many as 40,000 items and 100,000 books from Bohemia and Moravia. It is consistently the most visited museum in the Czech Republic. Touring its four historic synagogues, the Ceremonial Hall and the world-famous Old Jewish Cemetery in the preserved area of the former Jewish Town offers a unique cultural experience – one of the greatest on offer in the Czech capital.

In addition to its permanent and temporary exhibitions, the museum focuses on the past and present, culture and education of the Jewish culture in the Czech Republic in many other ways. It devotes special attention to the organizing of cultural and educational programmes both for schools and the general public. Research work also forms a key part of the museum's activities.

Another important focus of the museum is on the period of modern Jewish history, in particular the history and fate of Jews in the 20th century. This area of interest is mainly dealt with by the museum's Shoah History Department, Archives, Photo Archive and Department for Education and Culture.



## Exploring the history of the Shoah

The museum's **Shoah History Department** focuses on the study of written and photographic documents relating to the Second World War period and the Holocaust. The core of the Archives are the **Terezín Collection** and the **Persecution Documents**, which contain a large amount of various materials (official documents, the estates of Terezín prisoners, literary works, music scores, diaries, albums, magazines, etc.). We also manage the personal papers of the prominent Jewish composer **Gideon Klein** and the violin virtuoso **Egon Ledeċ**, among others.



All of our collections are being continually expanded and we still welcome gifts and loans from individuals and institutions. We are focusing intensively on the **digitization and editing** of archive materials. In 2013 we made the Terezín Collection available **online**, providing access to one of the main sources for the study of the history of the Terezín ghetto. In the future we would like to continue providing documents and collections on the internet. (<http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz>)

The Shoah History Department provides research **information and services** to the general public and specialists alike from throughout the world. Each year we complete hundreds of research tasks, provide consultations (in person and in writing) and supply information about Shoah victims and survivors. We have an alphabetical digital database and a family card index of Jews deported from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Our staff also oversee the systematic care of the **Pinkas Synagogue Memorial to the victims of the Shoah from Bohemia and Moravia**. We make ongoing amendments and additions to the information about victims and provide photographs of victim's names when requested.

1/ The names of Shoah victims in Pinkas Synagogue.

2/ Hugo and Elsa Brauner in May 1936. The Brauner family papers were donated to the museum by Shosh Dub from Israel.

3/ Elsa Brauner with her daughter Shosh in 1937.

## Looking after archive materials

The museum's **Archives** mainly comprises material relating to the individual Jewish religious communities of Bohemia and Moravia. Also kept here are the holdings of certain Jewish associations and organizations, as well as a collection of personal papers. The core of the Archives comprises material dating from before 1945. The extant records of Jewish communities that were re-established after the Second World War are also being collected. We are also seeking to obtain personal papers and family archives that contain documents, photographs and testimonies of survivors from after 1945.



4



6

4/ Ivana Beranová at the Prague Jewish Community Hanukkah celebration in 1957.

5/ Photograph from Terezín, 1958 (seated from left: rabbis Emil Davidovič, Richard Feder, Gustav Sicher and Bernhard Farkaš.

6/ Shoah History Department staff member Pavla Neuner with Tom Kolisch, looking through archive documents and family photographs that he has donated to the museum.



5

## Listening to survivors and witnesses

The history of the Jews in the 20th century is also helping to chart the museum's oral history project, as part of which we have been recording **interviews with survivors and witnesses** since 1990. Our aim is to preserve Jewish memory and to establish the Jewish experience as part of Czech collective memory.

We take sound or picture recordings of the interviews at places chosen by the interviewees who are later given transcripts for authorization. The interviews cover not only the Shoah period but also the post-war experiences of the first and second generations. Our collection of interviews also include photographs and other material from family archives that document the recalled memories.

At present, the Oral History Collection has more than **1,300 testimonies** and is the largest of its kind in the Czech Republic. This material is of use to the research community and the general public, for publication or exhibition purposes, and for putting together educational materials.

## Documenting the past in photographs

The Jewish Museum in Prague has several tens of thousands of **photographs**, many of which document the life and work of the Prague Jewish Religious Community under the administration of the Nazi authorities. We also have photographs from the Terezín ghetto and other concentration camps, as well as post-war photographs provided by survivors and witnesses. There are also interesting collections of photographs of Jewish localities in Bohemia and of the museum's holdings. We will be continually adding these photographs to our online catalogue.

We also have a unique collection of several hundred portrait photographs of war-time staff at the Prague Jewish Community and of their relatives. As there was a lack of accurate information about the people depicted in these photographs, we launched **The unKnown** project a few years ago in order to determine their identities (<http://collections.jewishmuseum.cz>).



7/ Photo of Zuzana Gutmann, a Prague Jewish Community employee during the war who was identified in The unKnown project.



8/ Prague Jewish Community employees sorting confiscated books, 1942-1944.

9/ Disinfecting confiscated apartments owned by Jews, 1942-1944



## Preparing exhibitions

We have been contributing to a number of **travelling and permanent exhibitions** on the history of the Jews in the 20th century. The 2003 exhibition *Silenced Tones* featured newly acquired material from the estates of the distinguished composers **Gideon Klein** and **Egon Ledeċ**.

The 2004 exhibition *Long-lost Faces* marked the culmination of the successful project *Help Search for Neighbours who Disappeared*. As part of this project, we contacted the public through a series of media appeals for assistance in the search for documents relating to the lives of Bohemian and Moravian Jews before and during the Second World War. The response from the public was extraordinary. A number of people donated or lent a wide selection of rare material to the museum.



10/ From the exhibition *Truth and Lies: Filming in the Ghetto Terezín, 1942-1945*.



11/ From the exhibition *Since then I believe in fate / Transports of Protectorate Jews to the East, 1941-1942*.

In 2005, 2007 and 2010 the exhibition series *Since then I believe in fate / Transports of Protectorate Jews to the East, 1941-1942* focused on the ghettos, concentration camps and death camps in the Nazi-occupied countries of Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Poland. In 2013 we collaborated with the National Film Archive in Prague on the exhibition *Truth and Lies: Filming in the Ghetto Terezín, 1942-1945*, which explores the history behind the making of Nazi propaganda films.

For a detailed list of our exhibitions, see <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/aarchive.htm>.

## Contributing to the education of pupils and students

As well as being of use to the research community and the general public, our archive documents also serve as educational material for Czech teachers and students dealing with the topics of the Shoah and Jewish life in Czechoslovakia before and after the Second World War. The Department for Education and Culture organizes various programmes for Czech schools and regular Q&A sessions with Shoah survivors.

In 2011-2013 the Department for Education and Culture, in co-operation with the Terezín Initiative Institute, carried out the educational project **Ours or Foreign? Jews in the Czech Twentieth Century**. More than **500 teachers and 26,000 pupils/students** of elementary and secondary schools have taken part in this project. In addition, we have published a large book of interviews that have been edited for educational purposes, as well as an extensive text on important yet neglected topics in 20th-century Czech Jewish history.



12/ An interactive seminar for teachers that was held in Pilsen in March 2013 as part of the educational project Ours or Foreign? Jews in the Czech Twentieth Century.

Project CZ.1.07/1.1.00/14.0089

The preparation of educational materials and the introduction of educational programmes relating to 20th-century Jewish history are co-financed by the European Social Fund and the State Budget of the Czech Republic.





## Opening up to the world

The Jewish Museum in Prague is involved in many international projects. Since the end of 2010, the Shoah History Department has been taking part in the **European Holocaust Research Infrastructure** (EHRI), a unique project that seeks to improve the accessibility of archive sources relating to the Shoah. This four-year project is funded by the European Union as part of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration. It is co-ordinated by the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) and involves the contribution of 20 archives and research institutes from 13 countries in Europe and Israel, including Yad Vashem.

As part of the EHRI, the Shoah History Department is co-ordinating the sub-project **Trans-institutional Research Guides** which aims to bring together archive documents that are currently scattered across several archives in various countries. One of the guides is focused on the Terezín ghetto while the other deals with the topic of Jewish communities in the Czech lands, Austria and Hungary during the Second World War.



13/ Ruth Brössler in 1938. Material on loan from the daughter's family.

14/ A page from the diary of Ruth Brössler. Thirteen-year-old Ruth Brössler came to the ghetto with her parents and younger brother on 28 January 1942, arriving on Transport 'U' from Brno. In her diary she not only provides careful and remarkably observant chronological accounts of events associated with the life of the girls in the L410 barrack but also reflects on the reality of the surrounding adult world and ghetto life, and contemplates the future. Both of her diaries contain a number of drawings and documents that have been pasted in (e.g. her family's transport numbers, tuition confirmation), as well as notes by other people.



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## Supporting us

The Czech-German Future Fund  
The Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund  
The European Union and the European Commission  
The Jewish Museum in Prague Foundation  
The Jewish Community in Prague Foundation  
The Foundation for Holocaust Victims  
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany  
The Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe  
The Embassy of the State of Israel  
The Embassy of the United States

