

## NEWSLETTER 1998/2

### **Visit by Sir Nicolas G. Winton**

In March the Educational and Cultural Centre welcomed a prominent guest – Sir Nicolas Winton from London. In 1938-39 this former London stockbroker played a key role in the rescue of a group of 664 Czechoslovakian children, most of whom were Jewish. He organised several transports from Prague to England, thanks to which these children avoided the fate that befell their families, the overwhelming majority of whom were killed in the war. Before he could bring the children to England he was involved in difficult negotiations with the English Home Office and later with the Nazi authorities. Preparing the actual list of children was difficult enough, as it was naturally hard for parents to be separated from them. Once in England the children were accommodated in families which looked after them until the end of the war. After the war most of "Winton's Children" did not return to Czechoslovakia and Nicolas Winton continued in his job as a stockbroker, without anybody being aware of his tremendous activities. It was not until 50 years after the war that Nicolas Winton was discovered by his "children", who were then able to thank him for rescuing their lives.

Sir Winton came to Prague in 1991, when he was welcomed by President Václav Havel, and again in March 1998 to take part in a documentary on his war-time activities with the Slovakian director Matej Mináč and the writer Jiří Hubač. The latter visit was organised by the Educational and Cultural Centre, which also arranged for Sir Winton to give a special talk. He spoke to a full audience at the Centre about all that had taken place and answered many questions. Also present at his talk were many of those whom he had rescued 60 years ago.

### **Spanish Synagogue**

Building and restoration work in the Spanish Synagogue has now entered the final phase. At present, work is being completed on the restoration of protected murals and on the painting of the whole area of the synagogue. Window-panes have been restored and refitted, and work is continuing on the restoration of the Torah Ark. New wooden panels are being installed in the main nave and restorers are now applying paintwork on the basis of the original.

In 1935 the south section of the synagogue was enlarged with a modern extension (the area behind the front entrance to the synagogue), which until the Second World War was used as a winter synagogue. Repair work is also taking place in this part of the interior – i.e., heating installation, paintwork, the laying of a new floor and repairs to the Torah Ark. After the reopening, the hall and the small gallery of the winter synagogue will be used to house temporary exhibitions.

As part of the overall refurbishment of the Spanish Synagogue, the rare organ dating from 1880 is also being restored and repaired. After it has been installed it will once again be used at planned concerts.

Preparations are already well under way for an historic exhibition that is to open in the Spanish Synagogue at the end of the year. This will cover the history of the Czech Jews from the late 18th century up to the present. The Jewish Museum would like to express its thanks to Prague City Hall which provided funds for the realisation of this project.

As we have mentioned in earlier issues, building and restoration costs for the

Spanish Synagogue are considerable, which is why the Jewish Museum would welcome any kind of financial assistance. Donations may be sent to the following address: The Jewish Museum in Prague, bank account no. 195420830257/0100, Ko-merční banka a.s., Spálená 51, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic.

### **Jewish Museum visitor services**

The Jewish Museum in Prague is responsible for looking after the following architecturally and historically valuable sights – the Pinkas, Maisel, Klaus and Spanish Synagogues, the Old Jewish Cemetery and the Ceremonial Hall. These are all situated in what was the former Jewish Town of Prague. Since 1971 the whole area has formed part of a specially protected zone (Prague Monument Reservation) and is now listed as a world heritage sight (UNESCO). Alongside the Prague Castle, the Jewish Museum is one of the most visited historical sights in Prague. Each year it receives about 600,000 visitors from all across the world. It is encouraging that many of them are young people – about a half of all foreign visitors and two-thirds of Czech visitors. The relatively high number of visitors from Czech secondary schools and universities can be largely put down to the activities of the Educational and Cultural Centre of the museum, which prepares attractive educational and cultural programmes. One of the basic goals of the Jewish Museum is thereby being accomplished: to systematically fill the more than forty-year vacuum in the area of information on Judaism and Jewish history.

In 1995 the Museum introduced an automatic ticket booking system through the Reservation Centre, which caters both for individuals and groups. The computerised system of ticket allocation means that the movement of visitors can be regulated throughout the whole area of the Museum, which considerably limits crowding at individual sights. Previous overcrowding was frustrating for visitors and detrimental to the actual sights and exhibits. Tickets can be booked through the Reservation Centre for entrance to all the historic sights of the Museum – the Maisel, Pinkas and Klaus Synagogues, the Old New Cemetery and the Ceremonial Hall, in addition to the Old New Synagogue which is managed by the Prague Jewish Community. Advance booking is not, however, obligatory. Tickets can be bought immediately prior to visiting the Museum at the Reservation Centre, in the Maisel or Pinkas Synagogues or at the Matana tourist agency in Maiselova Street.

The Reservation Centre also provides Museum guides who are able to offer their services in English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Russian and Spanish. In order to increase the knowledge of guides and thereby improve the services available to visitors, the Jewish Museum has a programme of special lectures and tests. On successfully completing this programme, guides are awarded a licence for showing visitors around Museum sights. Around 1300 licences have been issued since the introduction of this system in 1995. In view of the gradual expansion of Jewish Museum exhibitions, the Educational and Cultural Centre has now prepared a programme of new courses and tests which guides will have to complete in order to receive the new licence which will be required as of July 1999. In this way, the knowledge of the guides is developed and further checked.

The Jewish Museum seeks to make all sights accessible to people with disabilities. However, as the historical monuments are protected under the planning process, it is difficult and sometimes even impossible to carry out

additional structural changes. This is why the museum can not always guarantee disabled access to its sights. Nevertheless, the museum tries to do all it can through its Reservation Centre to meet the needs of disabled visitors and to ensure they have access to practically all the major exhibitions. Disabled access will be provided to the Spanish Synagogue which is expected to be open in late 1998.

The address of the Reservation Centre:  
U Starého hřbitova 3a,  
110 00 Praha 1,  
tel: 00420 2 / 231 7191, fax: / 231 7181,  
e-mail: marek .selnekovic@ort.ecn.cz.

Museum Opening Hours:  
every day except Saturdays and [Jewish holidays](#).  
January – March: 9 AM – 4.30 PM;  
April – October: 9 AM – 6 PM;  
November – December: 9 AM – 4.30 PM.

### **Activities of the Educational and Cultural Centre**

Since the beginning of 1998, the Centre has been holding an interesting lecture series, to which contribute leading Czech and foreign experts from the field of Hebrew and Jewish studies and literary history as well as representatives of the Jewish Community in Prague. Those interested in Jewish issues can select a number of absorbing lectures from the following series: The Jewish Year – on Jewish festivals and related customs, Jewish Thinking – on questions of Jewish ethics, philosophy, the Bible, Talmud and Cabbala, Jewish Authors in European Literature, and the extremely topical film cycle The 50th Anniversary of Israel. The Centre is also the venue for film screenings organised by the Bejt Praha community. In addition, there are regular concerts performed by the local music groups Mishpacha, Ester, Klezmerim and Sharbilach.

In April and May of this year several external cultural events were organised by the Centre, to which contributed various other institutions. All these events met with great audience response. In collaboration with the Archa Theatre the Centre prepared for friends and associates of the Jewish Museum a special theatre performance entitled Sladký Theresienstadt (Sweet Theresienstadt) – a play by the Czech writer and theatre director Arnošt Goldflam (directed by Damien Gray). This was attended by a number of prominent figures from the world of culture and politics, such as the President of the Czech Senate, Dr. Petr Pithart; the Czech Minister of the Interior, Dr. Cyril Svoboda; Member of the Czech Parliament, Dr. Jiří Payne; and representatives of the diplomatic corps in the Czech Republic.

The second cultural event, to which the Jewish Museum contributed via the Educational Centre, was the 4th International Book Fair Book World. This took place in Prague on 21–24 May 1998 under the auspices of the Czech Minister of the Culture and Prague City Hall. The main guest country of the book fair was Israel. The Centre held an official function to mark the occasion with the Israeli writer Ruth Elias, whose book Hope Helped Me Survive has just been published in the Czech language for the second time. The Centre also organised a one-day conference on Czech Jewish Literature, Jewish Themes and Translation,

which involved the participation of leading Czech critics, writers and translators. The morning seminar, which was chaired by the director of the Educational and Cultural Centre, Dr. Pojar, involved contributions from, amongst others, Dr. Jiřina Šedinová; the writer, Ivan Klíma; Professor Eduard Goldstücker; Dr. Bedřich Nosek ; the translator, J. Vacek ; the Chief Rabbi, Karol Sidon; and the writer and director of Sefer Publishers, Jiří Daníček . The conference was also attended by a number of prominent guests from Israel, notably the writers and translators, Victor Fischl and Ruth Bondy, and the director of the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, Nilli Cohen. In collaboration with the publishing house of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, Sefer, and with the Terežín Initiative Foundation, the Jewish Museum in Prague then displayed its recent publications to visitors of the Fair.

### Visits to the Museum

**In April** the Jewish Museum was visited by a number of prominent political representatives from abroad. These included, amongst others, the General Secretary of the West European Union, José Cutileira; the French Minister for European Affairs, Pierre Moscovici; the Latvian Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Aija Odina; and the Council of the Indian Embassy.

**In May** the Jewish Museum was visited by ambassadors of ten South American States; the Vice Mayor of Jerusalem, Jehudit Huebner; and the Israeli writer, Efraim Kishon.

### Czech towns in Israel

March 1998 saw the opening of the travelling exhibition Roots of the Jewish Nation in Bohemia and Moravia in the Tel Aviv Town Hall. This highlighted a number of Bohemian and Moravian towns and included two panels of photographs depicting the interiors and exteriors of historical buildings of the Jewish Museum in Prague. After Tel Aviv, the exhibition appeared in Haifa and Jerusalem.

### Museum publications and posters

The Jewish Museum has published a new issue of the journal *Judaica Bohemiae*, which includes the following contributions:

*a) essays and articles:*

**Alexandr Putík** : Fight for a conversion in Kolín, Bohemia in the year 5426/1666. A contribution on the subject of reverberations in Bohemia of Shabbatai Zevi's messianic appearance.

**Lenka Matušíková**: The duties of Prague Jews in the late 17th century.

**Abraham David**: The Prague MAHARAL and his participation in Jewish-Christian polemics.

**Michal Frankl**: Can we, the Czech Catholics, be anti-Semites? Anti-Semitism at the dawn of the Czech Christian-Social Movement.

**Václav Štěpán**: Anti-Semitism in the nationalist movement in Těšínsko.

**David Chaloupka**: Hugo Steiner-Prag and the sets for the opera Golem by Eugen d'Albert.

**Anna Hyndráková – Anna Lorencová:** A systematic collection of memories compiled by the Jewish Museum in Prague – Part V.

**Andrea Braunová – Daniel Polakovič:** Additions to the catalogue of Prague Hebrew prints from the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague.

*b) reports:*

**Leo Pavlát:** Activities of the Jewish Museum in 1997.

**Jiří Fiedler:** Catalogue of Jewish Communities.

If you would like to purchase Judaica Bohemiae issues, you can write to:

The Jewish Museum in Prague,

Jáchymova 3,

110 00 Prague 1,

Czech Republic,

fax: 00420-2-2310681