

## NEWSLETTER 2000/3

### New exhibition in the winter prayer hall of the Spanish synagogue

The beginning of September saw the opening in the Winter Prayer Hall of the Spanish Synagogue of the exhibition *"Bejt Levitus - Memories of a Family House"* which features the work of Czech-born Israeli artist Chava Pressburger. Originally from Prague, she studied graphic art and paper-making in Israel, where she emigrated and now creates art works from paper she produces herself.

The paper works by Chava Pressburger have an extraordinary ability to give expression to hidden feelings and to revive forgotten memories. They take form from various materials, mostly from plants which grow in the parched desert.

In her latest exhibition Chava Pressburger returns to her most hidden memories of childhood. Née Eva Ginzová, she was born into a Prague Jewish family originally from East Bohemia. Her grandfather, Josef Ginz, was a school teacher in the village of Ždánice near Kouřim who later opened a second hand book and antique shop in Prague. He passed on his literary and artistic interests to the next generation. His grandson Petr was a multi-talented child, loved by his parents and admired by his younger sister Eva. The Ginzes maintained close links with the

family of Eva's aunt Herma and uncle Karel Levitus, who built a family house in the late 1920s in Podolí, a suburb in South Prague. It was here that both children grew up and spent their happiest childhood moments. There were often family picnics and parties in the garden, which was where the extended family would come together.

All this was suddenly changed after the occupation, when the childhood world disappeared for ever and plans for the future overnight became part of the past. Despite the increasing number of prohibitions and orders, the family gatherings continued for a few more years in the Levitus' house, which became their last safe refuge.



Her grandmother Berta, aunt Herma and uncle Karel Levitus were deported in the summer of 1942, followed by her fourteen-year-old brother Peter in the autumn, and then the other Jewish members of the Ginz family, and finally Eva herself and her father. In Theresienstadt Petr was a respected figure among his peers and became editor-in-chief of the well-known magazine "Vedem" (We are Leading). The entry of 28 September 1944 in Eva's diary marked her last farewell to Peter before he was deported to Auschwitz.

Only a few years had passed, but the images of a happy childhood and a loving family were gone for ever, and the future had become meaningless. It seemed impossible to live in an



environment that had been afflicted by so many losses. Eva and her parents did survive the Holocaust, but they had lost what was most valuable, what had kept them together. Memories had to be erased and obliterated, although they remained hidden somewhere in the darkest corners of the soul.

In this exhibition Chava Pressburger seeks to uncover her forgotten memories of childhood, which are dominated by memories of the House of Levitus.

In her own words, "this exhibition is of great personal significance to me, a sacred duty I am fulfilling towards my family, which, on my father's side, almost entirely perished in the Holocaust. The greatest loss for me was my sixteen-year-old brother Peter.

Even though I was only a young girl at the end of World War Two, the Holocaust marked a decisive turn in my life. I saw and experienced things that are important not only for myself, things that demand to be told.

Translating this message into a visual experience was a real challenge. Being unable to understand the reason, the purpose, the monstrosity of the disaster of the Holocaust, I have always turned to Nature, in which I feel the eternal continuity that stands against the unexplainable."

The curator is Dr. Arno Pařík from the Jewish Museum. The exhibition runs until the end of November.

### **New programmes of the Museum's Educational and Cultural Centre**

Several new educational programmes have been prepared by the Educational and Cultural Centre in co-operation with a number of primary and secondary schools, universities and regional educational and cultural centres. So far this year over 4,000 people have taken part in these programmes. Apart from a series of three-day seminars on ***How to teach on the topic of the Holocaust*** (to which over 500 teachers have applied this year), there are two further interesting projects concerning Jewish culture.

The **Lost Neighbours** project, which is held under the auspices of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic, aims to make today's young generation (especially 14 to 18-year-old students) aware of the fate of those who lived through or perished in the Second World War in their own neighbourhood. New approaches to education in this area are encouraged by the recent opening of archives and a general change of atmosphere in the Czech Republic. It is expected that students will collate the information gained from school and local archives, narratives and documents (photographs and letters etc.) and, in particular, from personal encounters with those who witnessed and survived the Holocaust. This will produce a literary and documentary testimony to a time when people disappeared from schools and public life simply because of their origins.

The results achieved by the project to date have exceeded all expectations. Some of the work goes to show that after the fall of Communism people in the Czech Republic both in large and small communities can realize their allegiance to the Jewish faith without any fear. The project outlines the overall situation and, at the same time, should have a positive impact on changes taking place in Czech society.

One of the results of the project will be a volume compiled from student work which will later enable online contact between the students. The initiation and

implementation of the project received financial support from Prague City Hall and the Czech Ministry of Education.

**Workshop 2000** is the most recent project prepared by the Educational and Cultural Centre of the Jewish Museum in Prague. It is intended for secondary pedagogical schools, primary and secondary pedagogical faculties, teachers and, above all, primary school children.

The main aim of the project is to contribute to alternative educational approaches aimed at promoting tolerance. Workshop 2000 offers an encounter with another culture through art, drama, dance and music. This gives children an opportunity to find out about Jewish cultural and religious traditions which relate to general human qualities, notably the ancient principles of love, humility and fidelity.

In connection with this project, the Jewish Museum's Educational and Cultural Centre has provided newly refurbished ground-floor space at 15 Maiselova Street for primary schools (in the future for kindergartens as well).

Since opening in April the workshop has been visited by over 500 primary school children. On 13 June the Jewish Wedding project was attended by the wife of the Czech President, Dagmar Havlová.

Implementation of the project is supported by Prague City Hall and the Prague 1 local authority.



### Internet sale of Jewish Museum publications

As of July you can send email orders for material published by the Jewish Museum in Prague at. On offer, for example, is a complete list of back numbers of the *Judaica Bohemiae* journal (published since 1965). These volumes include specialist articles on the history of the Jewish community in Bohemia and Moravia and are in English and German (early issues are also in French). You

can also order Czech/English guides to the permanent exhibitions in the Klausen and Spanish synagogues and a selection of drawings and poems



**Photographic testament**

Frank Bright (formerly František Brichta) from England sent us a photograph of his class in the Jewish school in Jáchymova Street, Prague. This dates from the last year he studied here, probably June or July 1942. The Jewish school was later closed down, the school building being allocated to the war-time Jewish museum.

F. Brichta, who was 13 at the time, is standing in the middle of the last row (as indicated by the arrow); the class teacher Dr. Jiří Glanzberg is on the far left. F. Brichta never saw any of his fellow pupils after the war and seems to be the only one from the whole class to have survived. On the occasion of a new exhibition in the Imperial War Museum in London he is once again trying to find out if any of his fellow pupils are still alive. Should you have any information on any of the children in this photograph, please inform the Imperial War Museum in London or the Jewish Museum in Prague.



### **Regional Jewish Museum in Polná**

After three years of reconstruction the synagogue in Polná opened on 5 September. The reconstruction was carried out by the Jewish Religious Federation of the Czech Republic and the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Sites with financial support from the town of Polná, the district of Jihlava and the Czech Ministry of Culture.

An exhibition dedicated to the history of the Jewish Museum in Polná and to other Jewish sites of the region is housed in the synagogue. This took form in co-operation between the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Regional Museum of Vysočina in Jihlava and Polná.

The exhibition also contains a short-term display in the refurbished women's gallery which covers the story of Leopold Hilsner (also held in co-operation with the Jewish Museum in Prague). The exhibition will be open throughout September and October and may be seen between November and February upon prior agreement with the regional museum or the Polná local authority offices.

## "The Jewish Phenomenon - A Journey across Europe"

This is the title of a series of literary and music programmes launched by the AGADA Agency in the Spanish Synagogue. Intended for people both from Prague and abroad (English translation provided), these programmes include recitations and music. There will be ten performances featuring extracts from European literature and music which are thematically linked to the Jewish faith. High quality is guaranteed by the participation of such distinguished performers as actors Ondřej Vetchý, Jiří Ornest and Pavel Rímský, violinists Pavel Šporcl and Petr Maceček, violoncellist Jiří Bárta and the Jupiter Quartet.

### Prominent visits

On 18 July the Jewish Museum in Prague was visited by a delegation from the People's Republic of China:

**Li Yuanchao**, Vice-Minister of Culture.

In early July the film director **Vojtěch Jasný** made a documentary film about the Holocaust for the SHOAH FOUNDATION in the Jewish Museum in Prague.

Based primarily on the testimonies of those who survived the Holocaust, the film made use of documents and photographs from the Museum's Holocaust archive and of the Museum's collection of Terezín children drawings.

The unique interior of the Spanish Synagogue in Prague was selected by the US Picture Start Films, inc. (under director **Elliot Caplan**) for the filming of the musical section of the film "Hidden Things" (a portrait of holocaust children and the objects they carried). And so in the twilight hours of late June the synagogue resounded to the velvet tones of mezzo-soprano *Edita Adlerová*, accompanied by the *Czech Clarinet Quartet* performing works by Erwin Schulhoff and George Gershwin and original improvisations on Hebrew texts.

At the beginning of July an Israeli TV crew were filming in the Museum's exhibition rooms and depositories. The director, **A. Kushnier**, focused on the Museum while preparing a film on Jewish Prague. The film met with great success when broadcast in Israel on 10 August.