

THE LIVES OF THE JEWS OF PŘEŠTICE



IN MEMORIAM

יִזְכּוֹר



WESTMINSTER SYNAGOGUE

“THE SPIRIT OF JUDAISM CANNOT EVER BE BROKEN”

Dear members, friends and students of *Or Shabbat*,

Our late Rabbi, Albert Friedlander, once told me that being remembered is our immortality. By holding our annual service to commemorate the memory of the Jews of Horažďovice and Přeštice, the Westminster Synagogue ensures they will never be forgotten. At the same time we honour all the Jews murdered in the Holocaust. May their memory never be forgotten

We are fortunate to house the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust with its important museum, in our building. Although most of the 1564 scrolls that were brought to the synagogue in 1964 have now been distributed around the world, the museum has a number on display together with other Judaica of the destroyed communities. The work of the MST and their museum helps to keep the memories of so many alive. Thank you for joining us today. We grieve for the loss of so many innocent people, however, at the same time we celebrate the survival of the Sifrei Torah and the fact that they can be seen, touched, read and passed on to the next generation, including those in our own *Or Shabbat*.

**Jeffrey Ohrenstein, Chairman, Westminster Synagogue
Czech Scrolls Committee**



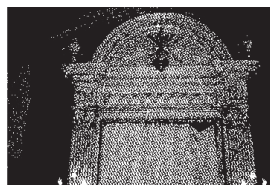
At the time when we are just about to celebrate 50 years since our Westminster Czech scrolls and 1,562 scrolls arrived at our Synagogue, it is important for us and our young people not only to honour the memory of the Jews who read and studied from them, but also to remember that the spirit of Judaism cannot be ever broken. *Or Shabbat* has a scroll from the small community of Přeštice and at our service today we will remember many of those who perished, amongst them six young people whose memory gives us both inner and outer strength in ensuring that what Judaism is teaching, and what is represented by the scrolls, are kept alive. The spirit of the *Torah* is to celebrate humanity and honour the Crown of Creation-humanity. It is also a timely reminder of what human beings can do to one another unless they are prepared to study and accept the teachings contained in the Five Books of Moses.

By reading from our scroll on both the High Holy Days and other significant occasions such as today, we maintain our connection to the Přeštice Jewish community and the children of *Or Shabbat* are ensuring the Jewish legacy of Přeštice for generations to come.

We hope and pray that there will never again be such a destructive spirit in the world but if it comes to pass then we, as a people, will ensure that Přeštice. We hope and pray that there will never again be such a destructive spirit in the world but if it comes to pass then we, as a people, will ensure that goodness and hope will prevail.



PŘEŠTICE SYNAGOGUE CIRCA 1942



PŘEŠTICE ARK PHOTOGRAPHED
IN PLZEN SYNAGOGUE IN 1982



REAR VIEW OF THE
PŘEŠTICE SYNAGOGUE

PHOTOS COURTESY MEMORIAL SCROLLS TRUST ARCHIVE

FROM PŘEŠTICE TO WESTMINSTER

On 28 May 1942, a letter was sent from Dr. August Stein of the *Jüdische Kultusgemeinde* (Jewish Community) agency of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, directing all local Jewish authorities to send their cultural materials to the Central Jewish Museum in Prague.

A detailed list of artefacts covered by the directive accompanied Dr. Stein's letter. So began the journey of the Czech Torah scrolls, binders, breastplates and other Jewish cultural items.

The plan to save the religious objects was developed by Jewish leaders in Prague, as the deportation of Jews from these regions meant that synagogues and their contents were subject to looting and wilful damage.



The synagogue in Přeštice (a town approximately 60 miles west-southwest of Prague) served as a collection point. Items from the synagogue and the surrounding smaller communities were then forwarded on to the Central Jewish Museum, where they were stored for the remainder of the war.

Some of the Scrolls were wrapped in *Tallitot* for the journey to Prague, and many bore signs of severe damage.

After the war, Jewish communal life did not return to most of these communities. In all, nearly 80,000 Czech Jews perished.

PHOTO: WORKERS RECEIVING THE CULTURAL OBJECTS AT THE CENTRAL JEWISH MUSEUM
(COURTESY JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE)

THE JOURNEY OF THE CZECH SCROLLS

In the early 1960s, representatives of the Czech state approached a leading dealer in fine art, Eric Estorick, regarding the Scrolls collection, which by then was being stored in the synagogue building in Michle, a suburb of Prague.

Together with a client of his, he arranged for a prominent scholar of Hebrew Studies, Professor Chimen Abramsky, to visit and assess the collection.



PHOTO: MICHLE SYNAGOGUE NEAR PRAGUE, WHERE SCROLLS WERE STORED FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS FOLLOWING THE WAR (COURTESY JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE)

The client was Ralph Yablon, a founding member of Westminster Synagogue. Mr. Yablon then arranged for the transfer of the collection to what was to become the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust. In 1964, 1,564 scrolls arrived via lorry at Kent House, and the work of restoring as many of them as possible to a usable state began.

Today, restored scrolls are loaned to Jewish communities throughout the world, whilst those damaged beyond repair are stored in the Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum on the third floor of Kent House.



PHOTO: RESCUED SCROLLS AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL AT KENT HOUSE
(COURTESY CZECH MEMORIAL SCROLLS TRUST)

ABOUT THE MEMORIAL SCROLLS TRUST

1,564 Torah Scrolls came to Westminster Synagogue in 1964 thanks to its founding rabbi, Harold Reinhart and through the generosity of Ralph Yablon. The Memorial Scrolls Trust was soon set up to care for the Scrolls, to assess their condition and to repair them as necessary.

Requests to house a Scroll came from all over the world and the Trust distributed them on long-term loan to congregations and Museums across the globe.

The Trust continues to monitor them but now that most of the Scrolls have found homes, it can turn its attention to other matters, with education uppermost on its agenda. The Czech Memorial Scrolls Museum welcomes synagogue and school groups and it has a well-stocked library of books about the Czech lands as well as relevant photographs and archives. It also possesses and displays a superb collection of about 400 *Torah* binders, probably the largest such collection in the country.



PHOTO: SCRIBE WORKING ON SCROLL AFTER ITS ARRIVAL AT KENT HOUSE



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This Service honours the Memorial Scroll which originated in the small Czech town of Přeštice. It is also the scroll used and treasured by Or Shabbat and its symbolism today is unmistakable. This scroll lived through the Holocaust and bears witness to the terrible events of those years. Yet here it is, surrounded by young Jewish people, used and loved as it proudly proclaims the future and the survival of our faith.

The worst fate that can befall a victim is to be forgotten and often, the Torah Scroll is the only survivor of what had once been a vibrant community. We remember the past with sorrow as we say Kaddish and recite the names of those who perished. But as we look around us, we can be happy amidst our tears.

This is also an opportunity to become involved in gaining more understanding of the special significance of the Czech Memorial Torah Scroll and for the children of Or Shabbat to bond with it as they reach across the years to remember the children of Přeštice to whom this Scroll once belonged.

Evelyn Friedlander

Evelyn Friedlander, Chair, Memorial Scrolls Trust

SCROLLS FROM PŘEŠTICE



The records of the Memorial Scrolls Trust show that 14 Memorial Scrolls were received from Přeštice. As Přeštice had become the centre of the region's Jewish community at the turn of the 20th century, many of these scrolls originated from much older and smaller surrounding synagogues as they were closed down.

According to Jiri Fidler, a historian in Prague, the Přeštice scrolls came from the villages of Dolní Lukavice (3km from Přeštice) after 1903; Dnesice (6 km from Přeštice) in about 1900; Lužany (3 km from Přeštice about 1912; Malinec (10 km from Přeštice) after 1906 and Merklín (10 km from Přeštice) in 1913.

Scroll 178 (Czech No. 32348) was issued on loan to Westminster Synagogue on the 6th October 1964. In early 2010, the scroll underwent substantial repairs. It now lives in the *Or Shabbat* Ark and is used in all their services.

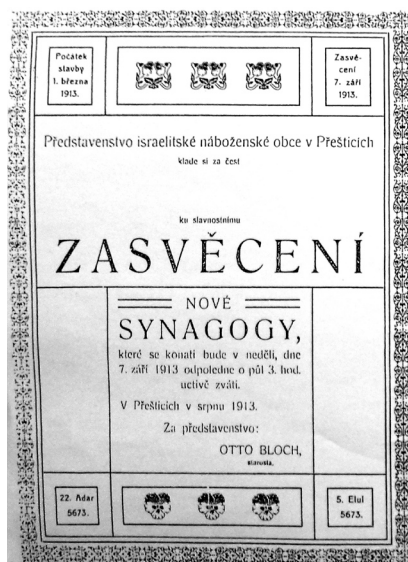
The 13 other Přeštice scrolls on loan from the Memorial Scrolls Trust can be found in the following communities – a number of which will be holding a Memorial Service on this *Shabbat*:

Scroll 185	Congregation Beth Or	Maple Glen, PA	USA
Scroll 222	Shalom Day School	Sacramento, CA	USA
Scroll 655	Temple Sinai of Sharon	Sharon, MA	USA
Scroll 993	Wilshire Boulevard Temple	Los Angeles, CA	USA
Scroll 1020	Temple Beth El Co-op City	Bronx, NY	USA
Scroll 1029	Temple Israel	Sharon, MA	USA
Scroll 1030	North Country Reform Temple	Glen Cove, NY	USA
Scroll 1254	Temple Beit Hayam	Stuart, FL	USA
Scroll 1263	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Jerusalem	Israel
Scroll 1265	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Jerusalem	Israel
Scroll 1433	Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation	Evanston, IL	USA
Scroll 1463	Jewish Federation of Hawaii	Honolulu, HI	USA
Scroll 1532	Congregation Beth El	Yardley, PA	USA

INVITATION OF THE OPENING OF THE PŘEŠTICE SYNAGOGUE, 1913

*“The Council of the Jewish Community of Přeštice
is honoured to invite you to the Dedication of the new Synagogue
which shall take place on Sunday afternoon,
7th September 1913 (5 Elul 5673)
at 2.30pm.”*

Otto Bloch, Chairman, Přeštice Jewish community



The opening day dedication service began with a recitation of *Má Tovu* followed by the ceremonial entrance and placement of the scrolls.

Speeches were given by Leopold Singer, who was to serve as Přeštice's rabbi for 41 years until his death in 1934, Otto Bloch, the chairman of the Přeštice Jewish community and the distinguished Rabbi Zibrid Bret from Klatovy.

PŘEŠTICE SYNAGOGUE



PHOTOS: JUDAICA FROM PŘEŠTICE SYNAGOGUE. THE TZEDAKAH BOX IS INSCRIBED
"GIVING IN SECRET SUBDUES ANGER" (COURTESY JEWISH MUSEUM IN PRAGUE)

The last Přeštice Synagogue was built in 1910 on Husova Street, near the town square. An earlier synagogue had been located nearby on Komensky Street.

The synagogue served Jews in Přeštice as well as Jews in the surrounding villages of Dolní Lukavice, Dnesice, Lužany, Malinec and Merklín.

The Plzeň Jewish community sold the synagogue building in 1948 to the Czech Brethren, and it was used as a church after the war.

It was demolished by order of the communist state of Czechoslovakia in 1974.



PHOTO: RAZING OF THE SYNAGOGUE IN 1974

JEWISH LIFE IN PŘEŠTICE

Přeštice is a town of 6000 inhabitants, on the River Úhlava in the historic region of Bohemia. A Jewish presence is believed to have existed from ancient times and Dolní Lukavice, a village close to Přeštice, has a Jewish cemetery dating from the 15th century.

Early Jews of the Přeštice region lived mostly in the surrounding villages of Dolní Lukavice, Dnesice, Lužany, Malinec and Merklín and were subject to decrees and orders that made life extraordinarily difficult throughout much of their entire history. Officially banned from the guilds, these early Jewish residents were farmers and traders. Jewish traders passing through the towns were a constant focus of the non-Jewish residents because of perceived competition. In 1950, the official Přeštice Town Chronicle recorded the origins of the town's Jewish community:

“After the dispersion of the Jews, they spread throughout Europe in the distant Middle Ages but they preferred to settle in towns where they were engaged as business people in which they were real experts and always to the detriment of other citizens. They avoided trades and agriculture and so, in our Přeštice town, they appeared in significant numbers.”

The most far-reaching restrictions on Jews were a series of measures known as the “**Family Laws**”, introduced by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Charles VI in 1726 and designed to limit Jewish population numbers. All marriages between Jews required the State's permission. No Jew under the age of 30 could marry and only the eldest male in each family was permitted to do so.

Before 1848, Jews in Bohemia were only granted “privilege” to own real estate by special permission of the state, which was rarely granted, and the number of residents permitted in each town was strictly limited. This likely accounted for the low immigration into the Přeštice district where Jews consistently averaged roughly 1% of the total population.

The Jews of Přeštice claimed German nationality, causing friction with the local Czech population. In the 1880's, the Jews of Přeštice had a special religious school conducted in the German language. In the 1890's, an attempt to change the school into a public German-Jewish school was rejected. The religious school was dissolved and beginning in 1894, Jewish religious teaching was conducted under state supervision in the public school building.

On 7 September 1913, a new synagogue was opened on Husova Street to service the entire district, replacing an older *shul* on Komensky Street. The service concluded with a prayer for Emperor Franz Josef I and singing of the Austrian national anthem.

Censuses indicate a steady decline in the Jewish population of the Přeštice district with 751 Jews recorded in 1862, 431 recorded in 1900 declining to only 300 Jews in 1930 of which only 80 were adults. Nevertheless, Jews were an important part of the region's commerce particularly in the textile industry with Markus Braun and his son Kubicek being the best known on the town square. Other textile shops were owned by the Kuranda, Hartmann, Eisenshiml, Glaser, Traub and Yohanger families. A leather shop on the square was owned by Singer.

The family of Philip and Karel Hanák, one of the oldest in the district and noted as being the only *Czech* Jewish family, owned a paint factory underneath the railway station which was still operating in 1950. The Freud family operated a large malt house with an annual production of 10,000 kg of malt in 1934 while Otto Bloch owned a small plant producing liqueurs and soda water. The Lewith family owned a spirit distillery. Jews were also active in the feather business, including the Roederer and Adler families, and the cattle business with the Hasa and Klein families. The Traub and Tanger families were engaged in the wheat business. The Roubiček family included a doctor and a veterinarian. Samuel Waldstein operated a general store on the main street.

On 15 March 1939, the German army declared Bohemia and Moravia to be a Protectorate of the Third Reich. Over the next three years, the Jews of Přeštice were dismissed from their jobs and their businesses and property were confiscated. They were increasingly isolated with curfews, restrictions on travel and a ban on radio ownership. From 15 September 1941, they were forced to wear yellow stars.

On 26 November 1942, 41 Jews from Přeštice were assembled and transported via railway from nearby Klatovy to Terezin on transport Cd with subsequent transport to Auschwitz for extermination. 38 perished and only three survived. In 1950, the official Přeštice Town Chronicle contains this final entry on the lost Jewish community:

"In 1950, there are no Jews in Přeštice which is not to the detriment of the town.

*In Dobřany, they are not tolerated.
In Plzeň, they have quite a beautiful
church – synagogue. How long will
Přeštice be without Jews?*

Only the future will tell...."



WESTMINSTER SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS
VISIT TO PŘEŠTICE, MAY 2011,
TOGETHER WITH LOCAL PŘEŠTICE
CHURCH OFFICIALS

PŘEŠTICE MEMORIES

Interview with Holocaust survivor, Pavel Fried

Pavel Fried, the grandson of Samuel Waldstein and currently head of the Brno Jewish community in the Czech Republic, provides a window into Přeštice Jewish life in excerpts from an interview in 2004:

“My grandfather on my mother’s side, Samuel Waldstein, was born in 1878 in Přeštice near Plzeň and his wife Matilda Waldstein, née Vogel, in Dolní Kralovice...I can only with great difficulty estimate how many Jews lived in Přeštice. But the village had a synagogue, and so I think that their number may have been around a hundred.

There was a rabbi there [Editor’s Note: Rabbi Leopold Singer]. Mother used to always reminisce about him. He taught her German. The rabbi required perfect command of grammar of his students. When she was 93 my mother still wrote in flawless German and Czech. She always said that it was thanks to that rabbi.

My mother’s father was a merchant. He had a grocery store in which he sold everything that people in the village needed, for example flour, eggs, spices, coffee, peanuts, petroleum, whips etc.. My grandmother used to help out. The store consisted of one large room, with an entrance from the street. The entrance door had a small bell. Behind the store was a kitchen with a fireplace where my grandparents usually spent their time. No-one was in the store all day, only when the little bell rang, one of my grandparents would come into the store and serve the customer.”



WALDSTEIN GENERAL STORE, 1931

TOP ROW: SAMUEL & MATILDA WALDSTEIN
MIDDLE ROW: DAUGHTERS HEDVIGA
GLÜCKAUF, MARIE PICKOVÁ, VALERIE ROTH
& MARTA FRIEDOVÁ (ALL NÉE WALDSTEIN)
& GRANDSON PAVEL FRIED
PHOTO: (COURTESY: PAVEL FRIED, BRNO)

“My grandparents’ house was more or less in the middle of the main street, which ran up a steep hill. Přeštice was built around only one long street. As I already said, the store was in the first room; behind it were the kitchen and a room they slept in. Upstairs was a living room for special occasions and two small rooms where we, the children, used to sleep when we were visiting our grandparents...In the driveway there were bags of flour that were sold in the store...In the courtyard were outbuildings for storage of grain and coal.

The house was furnished with simple furniture, because my grandparents weren't rich. Besides, they had four daughters and had to save for their weddings and trousseaus. I don't remember them having a library. My grandparents dressed according to the times. They didn't wear the very latest fashions, but dressed solidly, like other townspeople. Grandpa didn't wear typical Jewish clothing; he didn't even wear a black cloak like some Jews did. He only covered his head in the synagogue and at the cemetery; otherwise he went without a hat.

There were no Jews in my grandparents' immediate neighbourhood. Grandpa spent his free time in the town pub, where there weren't only Jews. He was friends with Jews and non-Jews alike. He went to the pub every Saturday night. He went there to play cards with his friends. During the week he didn't go to the pub, because he took care of the store, and on Friday he didn't go either because he observed the Sabbath.

I can only with difficulty say to what extent my maternal grandparents kept Jewish traditions and how religious they were. Friday and Saturday services in the synagogue were however a matter of course with them...I would say that I come from a typical Czech Jewish family, which means something between conservative and liberal Judaism. In practice it meant that we never ate kosher and never missed Sabbath services. I think that these two extremes characterize Czech Jews of the 20th century. I studied Judaism in school, and never with my father. Only at Passover I would say the Mah Nishtanah and I have it memorized to this day.

My mother had three sisters, Hedviga, Marie and Valerie. Hedviga married a man named Glückauf. They had a son named Karel who was an excellent swimmer. He swam for Maccabi... They called the second sister Marenka. She married Fredy Pick, who worked as a dental technician. They had one daughter, Veruska. My mother's youngest sister, Valerie, was married in Prague to Mr Roth, who was a travelling salesman. My mother's sisters observed Judaism only in the sense that they had Jewish husbands. They went to the synagogue only on the major religious holidays, which I don't consider to be religiousness. It's really every Jew's obligation. All of mother's sisters died in concentration camps together with their children and husbands. Only Marenka's husband Fredy Pick survived."

LEFT TO RIGHT: MARIE PICKOVÁ NÉE WALDSTEIN,
PETR PICK, HEDVIGA GLÜCKAUF, NÉE WALDSTEIN,
KAREL GLÜCKAUF, 1935 ALL PERISHED
PHOTO: (COURTESY: PAVEL FRIED, BRNO)



Among those few lucky ones that survived was also my mother's father [Editor's Note: Samuel Waldstein]. Each year after the war he spent the winter with us in Trebic, and when it warmed up he returned to Přeštice, where he had a house. There he would spend summer in the company of his friends..."

IN MEMORIAM

יִזְכּוֹר

41 Jews were transferred from Přeštice via railway on transport Cd to Terezin on the 26th November 1942. One was deported by other means. Only three survived. Today, not one Jew lives in Přeštice.

The names and ages of the Jews from Přeštice who perished during the Shoah:

Jindřich Adler (56)	Josef Hartmann (56)	Marie Picková (34)
Helena Adlerová (25)	Pavel Hartmann (16)	Emil Roubiček (71)
Růžena Adlerová (60)	Bedřiška Hartmannová (46)	Kamil Roubiček (45)
Otto Bloch	Kamila Hartmannová (55)	Arnoštka Roubičková (66)
Bedřich Gross (65)	Valerie Hartmannová (19)	Zdeňka Strickerová (28)
Karel Hanák (58)	Ota Klein (45)	Ota Šancer (59)
Heřman Hanák (75)	Arnoštka Kleinová (72)	Hanuš Šancer (20)
Jiří Hanák (21)	Olga Kleinová (52)	Hedvika Šancerová (51)
Ela Hanáková (45)	Arnošt Kuranda (57)	Hana Šancerová (21)
Hermína Hanáková (47)	Emilie Kurandová (57)	Matylda Waldsteinová (66)
Růžena Hanáková (49)	Adolf Ornstein (64)	Edvard Weigl (29)
Alfred Hartmann (50)	Karla Ornsteinová (60)	Anna Weiglová (55)
Josef Hartmann (90)	Věra Picková (5)	Samuel Weigl (56)



PHOTO: PŘEŠTICE TOWN MONUMENT TO VICTIMS OF NAZISM

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WESTMINSTER SYNAGOGUE

Westminster Synagogue, founded in 1957 is an independent community, offering a combination of traditional and progressive approaches to Judaism. We are happy to welcome visitors and new members, and take pride in our commitment to a warm and welcoming community and an educational programme of excellence.

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