

London UK (# 268) At Finchley Reformed Synagogue  
Contact David Rose, david@rosefamily.org.uk



Shabbat Shuva, Saturday 18 September 1999. For the service included the Scroll from Uhříněves which is on permanent loan at Finchley. This occasion was my first involvement with the Scrolls project. George is in top row second from left. My cousin from my mother's side David Hofman is in front row second from left.



# TREE OF LIFE



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The Newsletter of Finchley Reform Synagogue

*A Constituent of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain*

Iyar-Sivan-Tammuz 5759

May-June 1999

עתון ק"ק עץ חיים

אייר-סיון-תמוז תשנ"ט

מאי-יוני 1999

## UHŘI'NĚVES & OUR CZECH SCROLL

Last September, our Chairman passed onto me an invitation to a one-day seminar at Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue. FRS were invited, because we have a scroll from Czechoslovakia. It is light, narrow but tall, with fairly plain wooden rollers. Due to the faintness of the Hebrew, the scroll has been declared *pasul* (not kosher). While we do not use it for services, we value it as a memorial to the Czech Jews who perished during the Holocaust.

Our Czech scroll is on permanent loan from the Czech Memorial Scroll Trust, which has a collection of 1564 Torah scrolls, sent to London from Prague in 1964. The scrolls were originally collected by the Nazis with the intention of putting them on display in a museum dedicated to an extinct people. It is thanks to their obsessive recording that we know the names of the communities from which each scroll came.

The scrolls were repaired by the Trust and have been despatched to communities all over the world on permanent loan. Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the White House and an American Naval College are among the diverse institutions that have acquired one from the collection; we got ours in the late 1960s.

At the seminar, we heard from representatives from a number of communities with a Czech scroll, who had researched its history. The account which really caught my imagination was given by Neil Pike of Nottingham Progressive Jewish Community, who got their first scroll from the Trust. It came from Austerlitz, a small town in

Czechoslovakia and a group of members had started to trace the history of the Austerlitz community. There followed a remarkable and inspiring account of how this small Nottingham community had made links with individuals in Austerlitz, had transformed the life of one woman survivor, and had made a difference in the lives of countless others. The project culminated in a

recently-published book documenting the history of the Austerlitz Jewish community.

### THE FRS SCROLL

I was inspired by what I had heard. I hoped that, from this seminar, I would be able to start a project that would uncover the past of our Czech scroll. My vision was to use the scroll to create a Holocaust memorial that would be both personal and meaningful to our community.

At the end of the seminar I realised I knew nothing of the origins of our scroll, and wasn't sure where to start. I was having a cup of tea when I was approached by a confident and cheerful individual, who introduced himself as

Michael Heppner. I only had to mention FRS and he got visibly excited. He said that he knew our Chairman, Brian Humphreys well, and immediately told me that our scroll was from Uhrineves, a town outside Prague that had more recently become one of its suburbs, and that the synagogue is now used as a laundry. He was surprised that I wasn't aware that an article about Uhrineves had been published in *Tree of Life* some time ago, couldn't understand why FRS hadn't showed more



Uhři'něves Synagogue



interest in researching its Czech scroll, but seemed very pleased that I appeared to be taking an active interest.

I was quite taken aback by Michael's apparent encyclopaedic knowledge of the scrolls and their communities, and I told him that I didn't know where to start. His advice was to start by getting the transport list giving the names of the members of the Uhrineves community that had perished, and to involve a group of people in our Synagogue so that the success of the project wouldn't hinge upon one person.

I left Northwood feeling quite overcome with the responsibility of the task facing me. However, thanks to Michael Heppner and David Vulkan - who have done a lot of scroll research - I had a list of web sites, museums and other genealogical sources to investigate.

I obtained from our TOL editor, David Sylvester, a copy of the 1982 article about Uhrineves, written by Larry Ross' son, Jake who had visited Uhrineves during a school trip to Prague with Friern Barnet County School. The article included (on the front cover) a photo of the shul building, and the following paragraph:

"It is somehow far fetched, hard to imagine seriously, that men called Rabbi Vilem Beykovsky and Rabbi Daniel Kohn pored over the same parchment and the same script in the land of the Czechs and Slovaks, in the vicinity of Prague, ancient city of a thousand spires...as Rabbi Jeffrey Newman in Fallow Court Avenue."

In November I wrote to a number of institutions including the Jewish Museum in Prague, but got very little response. In December a friend introduced me to Eva Emmerova, a Czech living in Prague. I asked Eva to help me with the research there, and she has been spending a lot of time researching the community, visiting the cemetery and talking to people in Uhrineves.

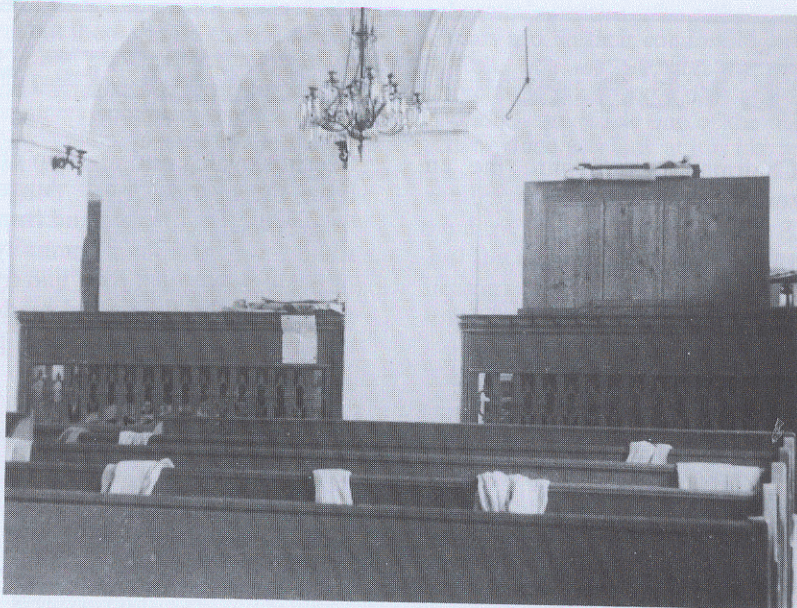
### AMAZING COINCIDENCES

Another recommended research route is a web site called [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org). This site holds a treasure trove for budding genealogists and has numerous databases of Jewish families and shtetls. Through the site I recently made contact with Peter Lowe from Hertford, who has been researching the Beykovsky family tree for some time, and is a distant relative of Vilem Beykovsky, the former Rabbi of Uhrineves. I contacted Peter by e-mail and he told me that, by coincidence, his mother lives in Etchingham Park Road, Finchley. Neither he nor his mother knew of the existence of the scroll. He asked me

the name of our Synagogue, and when I told him that it was FRS he replied that, by an even greater coincidence, his sister lives in Fallow Court Avenue opposite! The hairs on the back of my neck stood up! Peter has recently sent me a lot of information about the Uhrineves community, including a family tree of the Beykovski family. I am planning to meet him and his Finchley family in the near future.

### NEXT STEPS

I believe the next stage of the project is to try to find a survivor of the community who can tell us about life in Uhrineves before the Holocaust. I would love to know who the synagogue members were, their professions, roles in the community etc. Peter has given me a translation of an article about the community written in 1934, giving the names of the prominent members. I have posted some 25 surnames of the community leaders onto the Jewishgen web site in the hope of making contact with descendants.



The Uhrineves community consisted of about 300 people. Thanks to Peter Lowe, we now have the list of the 1,000 names that appeared on the "BG" transport list published in the Terezin Memorial Book. A large percentage of the Uhrineves community was deported on that transport, on 12 September 1942. I am hoping that the Shabbat service on 18th September can be used to commemorate the destruction of the Uhrineves community and its members, and I hope to involve some of the young people from the community especially, as many of those who perished were of the same age. I also hope distant relatives of the Beykovski family and other descendants of Uhrineves families will come to the service at our invitation. If all goes well we may want a memorial service to become an annual event, as happens at Nottingham Progressive.

If you would be interesting in helping me with this project please contact me on 0181 343 3677, fax 0181 343 3626, or e-mail [drose@cccl.co.uk](mailto:drose@cccl.co.uk).

David Rose

*[There have been some interesting developments since this article was written, following Neil Pike's presentation at the AGM, and an initial group has been formed to take the matter further. Ed.]*



## **A Short History of Our Czech Memorial Scroll- No 286 from Uhrineves**

### **The Memorial Scrolls Trust**

On 7<sup>th</sup> February 1964 two large Lorries arrived at Westminster Synagogue in Knightsbridge. From them were unloaded 1,564 Sifrei Torah, scrolls of the law, a consignment which must have been unprecedented in Jewish history.

The Czech Memorial Scrolls as they later became known originally formed part of a larger collection of synagogue possessions confiscated by the Nazi protectorate during WW II from Jewish communities in Bohemia Moravia and Slovakia.

When the scrolls arrived in Kent House, in Knightsbridge, the home of the Westminster Synagogue, they were housed in racks made especially for them and each was given a number from one to 1,564. Many of the labels at the time of confiscation had survived and provided valuable information and in some cases despairing messages were concealed in the scrolls. Almost all of them bore some evidence of the tragedy of the Holocaust. Many were blood stained, some charred by fire or damaged by water and in some instances wrapped in personal clothing or a tallit (prayer shawl) to protect them from harm.

There is a lovely story told by Ruth Shaffer, a trustee since 1964 who has recently retired. The trustees realised that a large proportion of the scrolls needed repairing or restoring and their greatest need was a resident scribe who could work systematically on the repairs. One day in 1965 there was a ring on the door of Westminster Synagogue and an orthodox man sporting a long black coat and a long white beard asked if the synagogue had any scrolls for repair. Mrs Shaffer took him up to the rooms where the scrolls were kept. When she ushered the scribe into the room that had 1,564 scrolls stacked from floor to ceiling his jaw dropped. His name was David Brand and he became the resident scribe and devoted the next twenty four years to repairing and restoring the scrolls.

The scrolls have been given on permanent loan to Jewish communities and institutions all over the world who requested one, including Yad Vashem, Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle, The White House. Priority was given to new communities.

### **Our Scroll No 286 from Uhrineves**

In the late 1960's when Finchley Reform was a relatively new congregation Rabbi Henry Goldstein requested a Czech scroll and we were sent scroll No. 286 from Uhrineves. The scroll served us well but when the community grew, newer scrolls were acquired and the scroll was retired to the Geniza (archive) below the ark. There it remained for the next 30 years, emerging occasionally for High Holyday use.

The scroll is approximately 200 years old and was probably written in Germany. It is distinguished in having unusually wide columns.

In 1998 the synagogue was invited to attend a seminar at Northwood and Pinner Synagogue called "Sharing the Czech Experience". David Rose, a warden was despatched as a representative. He can remember being inspired by a presentation made by Neil Pike from Nottingham Progressive community. The Nottingham Progressive community had forged links with Austerlitz, the town where their Czech scroll originated and through their efforts the derelict synagogue building was rebuilt and restored to its former splendour. David met Michael Heppner, an ebullient man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Czech scrolls. He encouraged David to start researching the Finchley Reform scroll.

### **Uhrineves**

Uhrineves is a small town approximately 15 miles south east of Prague. Jews have lived in the area of the town since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest stone in the cemetery is dated 1719. The synagogue building is from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Uhrineves community originally owned 7 scrolls\*. The community had a full time Rabbi and a small school operated for a short period. The Jewish Community ceased to exist on 12th September 1942 (Cruelly, the 1st Day of Rosh Hashanah) when the majority of the 392 Jews were deported to Terezin. There were only a handful of survivors.

Today there are just 2 or 3 Jews living in Uhrineves. The synagogue building belongs to the Prague Jewish Community but it is let to a commercial firm as a showroom.

### **Our Special Relationship With The Town of Uhrineves**

Mrs Libuse Votavova, a retired school teacher and David Rose, have built bridges between the town of Uhrineves and the Finchley Reform Synagogue community. Over the past 13 years a rich relationship has developed with the townspeople of Uhrineves and there have been many successful cultural exchanges.

In October 2000 a memorial was erected on the outside of the former synagogue building. In November 2001 the Uhrineves children's choir, Jiskricka Choir came to Finchley for a series of performances of Brundibar "Bumble Bee", the children's operetta by Frans Krasa.

In 2002 the town put on a concert and prepared a display about the Jewish community to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the deportation of the Jewish community to Terezin in September 1942. More recently, In September 2012 a group of FRS member travelled to Uhrineves to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation.

### **Scroll Group Achievements to Date**

Over the last 13 years the FRS Czech Scroll Group has been very active in researching the origins of the scroll. The scroll is used at least once a year during the Czech scroll memorial service and it has been taken to the synagogue's religion school on many occasions as a teaching aid when educating children about the holocaust.

Our first memorial service took place in September 1999. It was a most powerful and moving occasion and made all the more so by the inclusion of 12 other Czech Holocaust Scrolls brought by other London area congregations. This took place in the presence of a number of VIPs including the Czech Ambassador,

Members of the group wrote and presented an educational module to 9-11 year olds about the origins of the Czech Torah scroll and about the impact of the Holocaust on the Jews of Uhrineves and the Czech Republic in general. The programme has been repeated three times.

Over the past 13 years the group have put on a number of successful fund raising functions.

In October 2004 Idit Gold, our choir leader, organised, with the support of the Czech Scroll group, a choir tour of the Czech Republic. The 19 member choir flew to Vienna and travelled by coach to Brno, the capital town of Moravia. The choir gave concerts in Brno synagogue, Olomouc University and the Spanish synagogue in Prague. The trip was a great success and the group were warmly welcomed everywhere they went. The warmest welcome was in Uhrineves where we were treated as guests of honour of the deputy mayor, Karolina Pirklova and Libuse Votavova. They also met Rabbi Abrahams, a young orthodox Rabbi who grew up in Uhrineves and whose grandparents were married in the synagogue in Uhrineves.

In November 2006 the scroll was moved to its own display case in the synagogue. The occasion was marked with a fund raising concert.

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\*All were saved and sent by the Memorial Scroll trust to synagogues and other Jewish institutions in the U.S. and the UK.