

## The Levice Torah: Storyline

Jews had lived in Bohemia and Moravia for more than a thousand years, and over that time a rich Jewish culture had developed. It was centred on Prague and spread across a large number of communities in towns throughout the country.

In November 1938 50 Synagogues were attacked by mobs and their contents including their Torahs were destroyed. When the Nazis invaded in Bohemia and Moravia in 1939 the Jewish community knew worst was to come. According to the 1930 census, there were 117,551 Jews in Bohemia and Moravia. By 1943, some 26,000 had managed to emigrate. Approximately 81,000 Jews were deported to Terezin and other camps, of which about 10,500 survived.

In 1942, a group of members of Prague's Jewish Community came up with a way to bring the religious treasures from the deserted small villages to the comparative safety of Prague. The Nazis were persuaded to accept this plan and more than 100,000 items were sent to the Museum.

[www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/amuseum.htm](http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/amuseum.htm)

Among them were about 1,800 *Torah* Scrolls. Each was meticulously recorded on a card index by the Museum's staff with a description of the Scroll and the place from which it came.

At the end of the war, the fewer than 10,000 survivors returned from the camps, and some 50 congregations were re-established. They were provided with religious artifacts' not necessarily from their particular communities

One of these was the Jewish community in Levice.

But freedom was short-lived as the Communist coup in 1948 stifled the revival of Jewish life. Most of the revived congregations gradually closed and most of their artifacts' were returned to what by 1950 had become the State Jewish Museum in Prague.

In 1964 the 1,564 Czech Memorial Scrolls which were purchased from the Czechoslovak Communist state by the Westminster Synagogue in the UK and so were taken back into Jewish hands. The dedication, vision and courage of the initiators' plan and the teams of specialist curators who were recruited to implement it was finally rewarded.

By 2006 the Synagogue in Levice was abandoned. All its members had either emigrated or died. The Torah ended up at the Castle Museum but few visitors were interested, they came to see the castle and the museum's collection of Roman coins and the torah was left in storage. This was becoming expensive for this small museum and was eventually offered to any Jewish community that could take proper care of it.

NB highlight text I have made up the rest is factual.