

HERITAGE AND MISSION - Page 17-18

Speech by Dr Sybille Krafft, president of the BADEHAUS association at the opening ceremony of the Remembrance Place BADEHAUS on the 21/10/18

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The building in which we gathered here today for the opening ceremony, is just as noteworthy as the Bathhouse. From the year 1940 onwards, it served as a meeting hall for the Nazis and was located at the Adolf-Hitler-Square.

After the war and during the time of the Jewish DP camp, the big synagogue was accommodated here. And the Square was renamed to Roosevelt Square.

In 1957 it was decided that this place would become the first Catholic Parish Church of Waldram. And since then this address is known as „Seminarplatz“. Later the so-called „Late Vocation Seminary“ used it as an assembly hall. Today it is the school assembly hall of the St. Matthias schools.

Adolf-Hitler-Platz / Roosevelt Square / Seminarplatz:

There is no shorter and more distinctive way to convey history.

Waldram, formerly Foehrenwald is, indeed, a very special place, a historical treasure. A place in which contemporary history strongly reflects itself.

I am aware of the fact that you are all familiar with the past of this place, but please do allow me to summarise the most important milestones briefly:

In the year 1940, the Nazis started the construction of a model settlement for arms workers here at the Wolfratshausen Forest. Thousands of German conscripts, as well as foreign civilian workers and foreign forced labourers lived here during the Nazi era and had to work in the nearby munition's factories – producing the lethal war machinery.

As the Second World War was nearing its end, the path of the death march of the Dachau concentration camp prisoners passed by here.

Survivors of the horrible Death March, spent their first hours and days of freedom here in Foehrenwald. The Americans took care of them and provided medical treatment, in the Bathhouse they were able to wash themselves once again after a long time - and after having been only a number, here is where they returned to being human. What a significant moment!

This alone would justify creating a memorial site here. In the first few months following the end of the war thousands of people from different countries and of different religions, who had been made homeless due to the chaos of the war, were then stranded in Foehrenwald. They were called „Displaced Persons“ (DPs). From October 1945 onwards, General Eisenhower declared Foehrenwald as a Jewish DP camp only.

„The surviving remnant“ came together here. These were people who had survived the horrors of the concentration camps, or who had been hidden in forests, in caves or with non-Jewish families.

These were people who had to overcome severe emotional and physical traumas and who had to create a new existence, which they obviously did not want to live in Germany, the „Land of the Perpetrators“, they dreamed instead of Israel, the US, or another country as far away as possible.

We can only try and guess how painful it must have been for these people to have “survived” – their existence eradicated, their life plans destroyed, their relatives murdered.

A few years ago, when Max Mannheimer visited us to give us his support for the preservation of the Bathhouse, his voice suddenly broke whilst remembering the so-called

„Hard-Core Cases“ which he looked after here in Foehrenwald under the authority of the Americans.

And Max Mannheimer was a witness of the past who really had experienced and suffered a lot...

Despair, grief and traumas on the one side – on the other joie de vivre (joy de vie), hope and optimism, because these are also part of Foehrenwald’s history: memories of a seemingly carefree and happy childhood here in the middle of Bavaria, in the last Jewish „Shtetl“ on European soil.

All those who witnessed those times and who have come here today from near and far, know how important Foehrenwald is. They know it is the sowing seed of their own life, one of the sowing seeds of the Jewish communities in Germany and one of the sowing seeds of the State of Israel.

Several families would have liked to stay here, when in 1956, the Catholic organisation “Siedlungswerk” bought the area in order to rehome mostly catholic families with a lot of children and who had been expelled from their home country.

Tensions arose between the last Jewish residents and the new Catholic residents, the so-called, „Settlers“. This should not be kept secret, just as it should not be kept secret that many struggled to understand why this place was given the new name “Waldram” – after a foundation abbot of the Benediktbeuren Abbey.

The expellees too brought their traumas caused by flight and displacement with them, when they started arriving here in the Wolfratshausen Forest from 1956 onwards, after various, often risky stops at different places on their journey.

They too had to leave behind their home, their culture, their properties, and they also lost their relatives in war, although to a very different extent and at very different war fronts. And they were also not welcomed with open arms by the local Bavarian population.

However, after a short time, a very significant development started to take place:

The similar origin, the same belief, the similar economic situation - namely that they all had nothing - and the special talents they brought with them from their former lives, such as making music, made it easier for all of them to settle in their new home.

Music, by the way, already played a crucial role back then in the DP camp. Former Foehrenwald residents told us - full of melancholy - about the secular and religious sounds in this last Jewish "Shtetl" on European soil.

Later on today, new versions of these will be performed by Heinrich Zapf. And the Bavarian songs of the Musicanti Bavaresi and the Singers of Waldram who are also here today, were already taught to these singers when they were only children by Senior Franz Mayerhofer, who co-founded the award-winning piece „Musical Miracles of Waldram“.

As you can see, my honoured guests, Waldram as well as Foehrenwald really do have a lot to offer:

- a unique, interlinked contemporary history,
- visible evidence in the architecture which can still be seen today
- prime examples of voluntary as well as forced migration and immigration
- typical destinies of that time... which combine both relieved smiling and bleak crying, hope and despair.

When we started this project more than 6 years ago in order to voluntarily build up this memorial site, we did not foresee that soon there would come a time in which remembrance work would be mocked without any shame. A time in which we would be told to finally draw a line and that all of this is just a flyspeck. A time in which active residents would be called "do-gooder" and "hysteric".

My distinguished guests, if someone of our generation still has not understood that history teaches us, he or she is surely a helpless case...

But if the murder of millions during the "Shoah" and the murder of millions on the European battlefields, is to have had any purpose at all, then it is our responsibility to remember and to deliver the story of the past to future generations.

It is such a shame that so many important companions are not able to experience this special day today: Such as Max Mannheimer, who is meanwhile our honorary member and who insisted on becoming our number 1 member back then.

Or the evangelical pastor, Kirsten Joergensen who supported us from the very first moment.

Or the Ukrainian forced labourer Anna Kubat who told us about her hard life in such an open and emotional way.

Or Martin Walter, the trace seeker from Geretsried, who generously shared all his research with us and has been a witness of Foehrenwald himself.

Their passing away has just demonstrated again how important it is to capture personal memories. We are very lucky to be able to obtain authentic and first-hand reports about Foehrenwald and former Waldram.

This is why the centrepieces of our exhibition are the interviews with the witnesses of the past in the media station. 2 of the total 21 films will be shown to you shortly.

In former Foehrenwald a „Forest of Remembrance“ will grow now. And this is not only meant metaphorical:

For each time period there is a „Tree of Remembrance“ on the top floor. Part of this are seat islands with media stations so you can find some quietness to process the individual life stories. Slowly we hope to get more biographies. This „Forest of Remembrance“ should grow bigger and bigger.

For the future, I hope that many more people will be fascinated by the Bathhouse! We would like to motivate school classes, church communities, associations and individual people to find out about the different fates of life here in Foehrenwald/Waldram – so that this historical treasure will never be forgotten.

The Bathhouse therefore is not supposed to be a silent museum, but a vivid place to meet, remember and for finding out about different people from different nations, different religions and different generations.

One dream has already come true: the preservation of our memorial site. Please help us to make another dream come true: to breath life into the bathhouse.