



Stumbling Stones: Remembrance and Admonition



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Stadt Düren

Imprint

Publisher:

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Photos: Otto Böhr (Fotografische Gesellschaft Düren 1925 e. V.)

Layout and production:

Studiopro GmbH,

Design & Advertising Düren

www.studiopro.de

12/2013

Just think about it



Düren is the site of an outstanding piece of work of the internationally renowned artist Ulrich Rückriem whose biography is closely connected with our town and region. Rückriem's material is the stone. Commissioned by Düren's town council in 1988, the artist created a decentralised memorial: Ten steles refer to places in our town where people were exposed to unspeakable suffering during the period of the national socialist

reign of violence. This injustice – committed amidst our town and our town's present-day boroughs – must not be forgotten!

Thus, while on our daily routine ways in Düren, we come across stone blocks that want to remind and admonish us. They are stumbling blocks, stones of remembrance. We find them where destroyed synagogues were located and also where people were kept prisoners and tortured. The steles keep alive the memory of the deportation of the Jewish fellow citizens to the extermination camps in the East, the persecution of people who had different political convictions, the killing of people with mental illness and of handicapped people, the inhumane treatment of prisoners of war and forced labourers.

Such remembrance gives fresh impetus to reflection and motivation for responsible political acting today.

Eight decades after these terrible events, the present brochure is designed to make the stone blocks speak along these lines. But in addition the word of Sculptor Ulrich Rückriem holds true: "Each stone, however, whose meaning is not understood by the people is a 'Just think about it', anyway."

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Paul Larue". The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial "P" and "L".

Paul Larue
Mayor

1 Schützenstraße

» After this November 10, Düren had become a different town.«

Clinking glass, crackling flames, collapsing walls: A part of Düren's culture is being destroyed. On the early morning of November 10 1938, the brutal persecution of the German Jews reaches a preliminary climax that is witnessed by the whole world. As everywhere in the Reich, SA and SS – the agents of the government-ordered “popular wrath“ – destroy everything that they know to be Jewish.



“After this November 10, Düren had become a different town“, a contemporary witness will later remember.

For many citizens of Düren, Christian and Jewish alike, it was indeed difficult to understand what was happening. For more than 700 years, Jews had lived in this town, had played an important part in the economic, social and cultural life and, just as their fellow citizens, had identified themselves with their home town.

Even if we do not have accurate knowledge of the financial situation of Düren's Jewish community, it is fairly safe to assume that it counted among the well-to-do ones. In the city of Düren, there were many Jewish shops, above all from the textiles and clothing trade, as well as a number of Jewish doctors' surgeries. Further Jewish business activity focussed on butchers' shops as well as the cattle and horse trade.

Düren Jews are committed to the cultural and social life of their town. They are active in clubs, such as Joseph Gordon, in the 1920s the chairman of the West German Football Association and the general manager of “Verein für Jugend- und Volksspiele 1896 e.V.“, today “Spielvereinigung Schwarz-Weiß Düren 1896 e. V.“.

In view of such “normality” it appears to be incomprehensible that a minority could experience such isolation in only a few years’ time. Numerous are the triumphant reports of the “Westdeutscher Beobachter”, the local NS newspaper, covering the exclusion of the Jews from attending the public swimming baths, the parish fair and the theatre, also their removal from whole professional sectors and trades as well as “revelations“ about the alleged racial and personal inferiority of the Jewish fellow citizens.

With the Pogrom Night still three weeks ahead, the Nazis, despite their undisputable “successes”, believe “that the elimination of the Jews still required quite some effort“, so the “Westdeutscher Beobachter“.

And lest anything go wrong, even the NSDAP’s deputy district leader, Georg Logauer, personally contributes to the arson in Düren on the early morning of November 10 1938. After a first attempt had failed, a rag soaked with petrol is now used to go the whole hog, so that the flames soon set the entire synagogue on fire. The family of the synagogue servant Holländer can save themselves from the upper storey only seconds before the staircase collapses.

The firefighters have their share in the success of the venture by aiming their hoses not at the burning synagogue but at the neighbouring garden.

A few weeks later, Düren goes back to normal. According to a resolution of Mayor Peter Josef Schmitz, the synagogue plot is acquired by the town at a price of RM30,000, “less RM3,000 for the demolition and removal of the remaining parts of the building“. The site becomes a parking lot.

*»You needn't stand guard here,
he'll peg out anyway!«*

The Friedrich Ebert Youth Centre of the Workers' Welfare Association in Wernerstraße, inaugurated in 1927, was a lively centre of the Düren workers' movement. Thus it was natural that, on March 14 1933, the celebration commemorating the 50th anniversary of Karl Marx's death was to take place here. But this was not to happen.



In mid-March 1933, the centre was violently occupied by SA and SS and renamed "Schlageter Centre". Albert Leo Schlageter was one of those figures around whom the Nazis, at great expense (and unfortunately also with considerable success), wove ever more insane legends that built him up into a martyr of the "movement" and made him a role model for large numbers of its supporters.

In the months thereafter, this Schlageter Centre turned into a downright centre of terror. Numerous social democrats, trade unionists and above all also communists were hauled off to this place, interrogated, beaten up, tortured and interrogated again. It must have given the Nazis sadistic pleasure to hold sway over the representatives of the workers' movement in the latter's own premises.

This, at least, is suggested by the statements made by witnesses on the occasion of several trials during the post-war era. Accused were a handful of known SA members, of whom ultimately the highest-ranking, SA Obersturmführer Mundt, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. One defendant was sentenced to two months in gaol, the others were acquitted.

These judgments appear to be all the more beyond understanding if the detailed accounts of the brutalities given by the witnesses are taken into consideration. The following abstracts are representative of a large number of similar cases.

Witness Joachim Sch.: “In July 1933, about ten SA men came for me at my home, beat and maltreated me and eventually took me to the Schlageter Centre. Hardly had we arrived there when I was received with more punches to my head. Mundt ordered this beating and witnessed the entire scene and asked me amongst other things: ‘From whom else do you dog collect dues?’ I replied: ‘I have nothing to collect.’ Having repeated the same question several times, Mundt said: ‘Give the red bastard the first thrashing.’ Then I was grabbed and beaten up with a steel rod and snap hooks. After this torture I was given another four thrashings until I was finally unconscious. Besides, I was spat at and dealt one blow to my chin after the other.

In this unconscious condition, I was thrown onto a sandheap close to the barrack. There, after quite some time, I regained consciousness. I opened my eyes and saw that an SA man was guarding me. After a short while another SA man appeared - I do not know whether it was Mundt - and said: ‘You needn’t stand guard here, he’ll peg out anyway!’ The sentry then went back to the barrack and I crawled behind the barrack on all fours and fled to Arnoldsweller Straße into a coal storage place. There, I stayed until nightfall, tucked away under coalsacks. Under the screen of night, I walked to Lendersdorf, cooled my distorted face with acetate of alumina and travelled to Aachen on the following day. After 16 weeks, evidence of the beating was still visible.“



»On April 30 1941, Düren is free of Jews!«

On January 29 1936, Dürener Zeitung published an article titled: "Farewell to a picturesque corner. The biggest part of Düren's old barley mill will be demolished". The reason given for the demolition of the mill that was situated on the footpath between Stürtzstraße and the sports ground at Ober-tor was decrepitude. Only a small part was to be preserved for residential purposes.

A large number of Düren Jews came to know the barley mill not as a "picturesque corner" but as a collection camp on the way to deportation, initially after the November pogrom in 1938 to the concentration camps in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Dachau, later then to the so-called "work assignments" and to the extermination camps in Poland as well as to Theresienstadt. Contemporary witnesses are unanimous in stating that the barley mill served as a transit camp already during the wave of arrests beginning immediately after the November pogrom.

According to the official NS report in Dürener Zeitung of November 11 1938 "about 40 Jews were taken in protective custody" in the course of the day. Later accounts covering the history of Düren state the number of 102 members of the Jewish community who were "spontaneously" arrested and taken to the barley mill.

The barley mill is used as a collection camp and euphemistically called a "shelter". What happened to the "shelterless" Jews is shown by the resolution of the council session of December 1940 submitted by Mayor Peter Josef Schmitz: "The budget estimate covering food for, and deportation of, police prisoners and homeless people is raised

from originally RM800 to RM1,800.“ Already in its statement of accounts for the year 1939, the real property administration had complained about the “fairly difficult management“ of the 112 police-arranged shelters and pointed to the rising costs for the accommodation of homeless people.

When the actions became ever more brutal, the farce of homelessness was dropped also in the council protocols. In a further resolution of the mayor of July 1941 it says: “Under 62/621/1036 an unbudgeted amount of RM4,000 was provided and referred to as ‘Expenditure covering the resettlement of Jews’.”

Like the other camps in today’s town area, the barley mill is likely to have been packed in May 1941 when the Jews living in the district and the town were expelled from their homes and concentrated in camps. As everywhere in the Reich, this was a Gestapo-ordered “concentration of the Jews“ which had to be completed by July 1 1941.

The Nazis were so certain of the effectiveness of their measures that NSDAP District Leader Peter Binz could announce already in early April 1941 “that Düren would be free of Jews after April 30.“

4 *Amtsgericht*



If it is useful to the German people, it is right, if it is harmful, it is wrong. The sources from which this right is derived are the principles and objectives of the national socialist state and the movement supporting the interests of the state. Therefore the NSDAP programme is the governing law.

The stele in front of the Local Court of Düren reminds us of a particularly sad chapter of German history, which, however, was far from over after the fall of the Third Reich. It stands symbolically for that part of the terrorist repressive apparatus that functioned almost immaculately and that shook our belief in the validity of human and constitutional rights to its very foundations. Not least because of the fact that, after the demise of their brown masters, these dispensers of injustice merely had to pull over a different-coloured gown in order to be able to whole-heartedly serve also their new masters.

Here, it simplifies finding the facts that in particular the national socialist propaganda never tried to hide their idea of how they intended to change the law for the benefit of their purposes. In its “Düren History Chronicles“ column, the “Westdeutscher Beobachter” reported several times a week with undisguised satisfaction about the sentencing of Jewish “race defilers“, “Marxist elements“ and other “public vermin“. And often enough not even the brutal laws and decrees were adhered to; individual justice was created as the case required.

An example of this is documented by the “Westdeutscher Beobachter” in its edition of December 10 1935. The Local Court had forbidden a legal representative having custody over his two minor children to sell to a Jewish woman a piece of land owned by the children.

The competent Regional Court rejected the appeal stating that "while it was correct that there was as yet no law banning Jews from being or becoming owners of German landed property, it was nevertheless the governing law that a Jew could no longer acquire German landed property. If it was useful to the German people, it was right, if it was harmful, it was wrong. The sources from which this right was derived were the principles and objectives of the national socialist state and of the movement supporting the interests of the state. Therefore the NSDAP programme was the governing law. Accordingly, only a German belonging to the people by blood could be the owner of German landed property as had already been defined by the land heritage law ... In his speech in Saarbrücken some weeks ago, Minister of the Reich Dr. Frick had announced a law on the economic activities of Jews. Therefore, it had to be assumed that the issue of land acquisition by Jews would be provided for by law in the near future."

Without the slightest qualm, lawlessness was turned into governing law, and that at a time when at least vis-à-vis foreign countries the appearance of constitutionality was to be maintained. After all, the Olympic Games were imminent.

How cynical are then the words written in the foundation stone deed of May 9 1938 for the current Local Court: "May the building rise and become a place of unerringly just administration of the law and a seat of judicature that is truly dedicated to the people. May in it only German men discharge their duties who are profoundly committed to the exacting duties of their profession."

»The mass killings of psychically ill and mentally handicapped people during the rule of the national socialists did not have anything to do with euthanasia in its true sense. They were deliberate, intentional and well considered killings that went along with a malicious deceit of the patients and their relatives.«



In October 1939, Hitler signed a decree backdated to September 1 that instructed “Reichsleiter (national leader) Bouhler and Dr. med. Brandt to increase „the authority of certain physicians to be designated by name in such manner that persons who, according to human judgment, are incurable can, upon a most careful diagnosis of their condition of sickness, be accorded a merciful death.“

This euthanasia decree sealed the fate of one hundred thousand psychically ill and mentally handicapped citizens. They were gassed, killed by lethal injection or they starved to death.

Under the date of October 9 1939, the directors of hospitals and mental institutions received identical letters asking them “with regard to the necessity of the planning of a record of hospitals and mental institutions” ... to complete and return the enclosed questionnaires at their earliest convenience.

In the hospitals and mental institutions it was not known what purpose the questionnaires were to serve. It was widely assumed that the patients who were fit for work or particularly useful were to be withdrawn from the hospitals and mental institutions in order to be used in the armament industry. The realisation of this aspect would have rendered the work of the institutions considerably more difficult as the institutions depended on the cooperation of the patients who were fit for work.

These considerations led to the fact that many questionnaires were completed to the disadvantage of the patients in such a manner that they were said to be unable to work. It could not be recognised that it was the intention of the planners of the euthanasia campaign to get rid of “useless eaters”.

Against the background of this order of the Führer, 376 men and 222 women were picked up from the Rheinische Provinzial-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Düren and, “for important war-related reasons“, transferred via the stopover institutions in Galkhausen and Andernach to the killing institution in Hadamar near Limburg.

During the second half of August 1941, this first phase of the murder of psychically ill and mentally handicapped persons was stopped by another order of the Führer. In the years thereafter, until the end of the second world war, another 1,300 men and women were transferred from the Rheinische Provinzial-Heil- und Pflegeanstalt – upon the directive of the Civil Defence Commissioner of the Reich (Reichsverteidigungskommissar).

With few exceptions, these patients also died a cruel death. The now free beds were used to establish a military hospital in the institution. Besides, free beds were offered to other institutions, e.g., to Riehler Heimstätten in Cologne.

After the massive attack on Düren on November 16 1944, the last patients were transferred. The Düren institution had ceased to exist. Thus it occurred what had been intended by the national socialists in the first place: to close the Düren institution, because “there was no more demand”.

6 Birkesdorf



»The discharge of the prisoners cannot be advocated ...«

Birkesdorf is an old industrial location that had a strong workers' organisation already at a very early date. Small wonder then that there was an active local group of the "Combat League against Fascism", which had been established in 1931. In the first few months after the transfer of power to the national socialists, the old town hall became the home base for the relentless persecution of the opponents of the Nazi régime. But the workers' movement did not want to quit the field without a fight. Thus there was an SPD meeting in the Kratzborn hall on March 4, one day before the general and provincial elections, that was attended by 400 persons during which the speaker of the evening, the Birkesdorf elementary school teacher and SPD functionary Dr. Hermann Pesch, was so outspoken that a police commissioner, who was present at the meeting, ordered him to stop speaking.

Soon after the general elections, which had been so disappointing for the Nazis, public political activities became impossible for socialists and communists. They were forced to meet secretly, in disguise, in order to look for possible forms of resistance. A trial report reveals that, for example, rambling clubs were founded whose main activity during "wanderings" was the distribution of flyers.

Although the Nazis announced already after a few months that the organisations of their political opponents had been crushed, that nobody was opposing the "national revolution" any longer, the workers of Birkesdorf appear to have been fairly inventive when it came to expressing their political views, i.e., their resistance to the brown system. How else can we understand a report in the "Westdeutscher Beobachter" of March 2 1935, in which a "ban on masking" was decreed

for this year's carnival "as a consequence of the events on Women's Carnival Day"?

While the "simple" members remained unmolested for the time being, the leaders of the political left had been arrested at the very beginning. A pretence was offered by the Reichstag fire during the night from February 27 to 28 1933. Upon the directive of the "Senior Police Leader in the West" the Birkesdorf communist Hubert Rankers, an upholsterer by trade, was taken "in protective custody" on the same day. More than a year later, in March 1934, the special SA commissioner in the district of Düren, Standartenführer Lentzen, was asked to comment on whether Rankers was to be discharged.

Lentzen's answer to the District Administrator: "I cannot advocate the discharge of the prisoners ... and Hubert Rankers of Birkesdorf. These two are, so to speak, the head of the communist movement and the pronounced type of a rabble-rouser. ... Discharging the two persons mentioned would disproportionately increase the risk of provocations and special clashes."

That these "fears" were not unjustified, because not all persons discharged from protective custody complied with the ban on political activities, is shown by a report in the "Westdeutscher Beobachter" of August 9 1935:

"Former KPD functionary arrested. On Thursday afternoon, a former KPD functionary of Birkesdorf was arrested by the criminal investigation department of Aachen on account of seditious activities. Upon the request his wife had made to the NSDAP, he had been discharged from the concentration camp some time ago."

At times, up to 50 inhabitants of Birkesdorf were detained in the protective custody and concentration camps of the Nazis. In addition to the communists, social democrats and other members of the opposition were equally affected.



»Here to Arnoldsweiler the prisoners came to die!«

A major complex of barracks surrounded by watch towers and situated in the north-west of Arnoldsweiler: That was the POW camp, an outpost of Stalag VI in Bonn. Thousands of French and later Russian prisoners of war and forced labourers were interned here and many hundred of them died here under cruel circumstances.

It is not until the summer of 1960 when the dead on the cemetery in Merzenicher Heide are exhumed in order to find their final resting place in the park of honour in Rurberg that a wider public gains knowledge of the full extent of the mass dying: Instead of the originally estimated 500 more than 1,500 dead are ultimately re-buried. And it is a fact that these were not all victims because many of them, so contemporary witnesses, were not buried in the Merzenicher Heide but loaded onto lorries in order to be hastily buried elsewhere.

Conditions in the camp were disastrous, above all because many diseased people from the surrounding industrial and coal-mining areas were hospitalised here. “Here to Arnoldsweiler the prisoners came to die!“, a German paramedic on duty there at the time remembers. Life was somewhat more bearable for the forced labourers accommodated outside the camps. Most of them were used as farmhands.

However, as the war kept dragging on, employment in the armament industry gained ever growing strategic importance. Thus, the District Administrator of Düren ordered on September 6 1944 “the transfer of 700 workers, Poles and Russians, from agriculture to industry”.

The forced labourers constituted a special problem for the security organs. In a circular issued in September 1944, the “director of the security police and of the SD“, Berlin, reports with remarkable frankness: “In this connection it must not be ignored that, through their generosity and misunderstood pity, many fellow Germans foster the intentions of the foreigners. Quite often begging foreigners are given money, food ration stamps or food by German citizens who, though unwittingly, thus give their support to fleeing foreigners or agents.“

The same circular orders a rising number of raids against the foreigners, the objective of which it is to crush the existing resistance organisations of the forced labourers.

As stated in the strictly confidential “report on important state-police events“, the state police branch of Cologne had “penetrated as early as in May 1944 a Soviet resistance movement formed by eastern European workers under the name of ”Committee Battle against Fascism“. The movement, which had connections to Euskirchen, Jülich and Düren, was centrally controlled from Düsseldorf.“ “So far“, the report adds, “it has been possible to arrest 39 persons, among them the leaders of the districts of Düren, Jülich and Euskirchen. The investigations will be continued.“

Today we do not (yet) know whether it was the result of this investigation that there were such connections also to the Stalag in Arnoldsweiler. But this is absolutely negligible, for the stele in Arnoldsweiler stands as a symbol for many other camp sites in Düren. Most certainly it also stands for the place in Echtz where, in 1942, two Polish forced labourers were hanged because they had had sexual intercourse with German women.



»It is a miracle that I have not given up all my hopes, for they appear to be absurd and unfulfillable. But in spite of everything I cling to them because I still believe in the good in man.«

Her name is known to many; some know from films shown on TV that she was a Jew and was killed by the Nazis. But why should a school be named after her, why should an Ulrich Rückriem stele stand in the schoolyard of this school of all places?

“It is a miracle that I have not given up all my hopes, for they appear to be absurd and unfulfillable. But in spite of everything I cling to them because I still believe in the good in man“, Anne Frank wrote in her diary on July 15 1944 after she and her parents had suffered under the Nazis for years. From them and their racial laws, the Frank family fled from Frankfurt on Main to Amsterdam in 1933, only to be caught up with again by the terror in the form of the German occupation as early as in 1940.

In June 1942, Anne is given a diary for her 13th birthday and she begins to commit to paper her story, which is similar to that of many millions of Jews. With extraordinary accuracy and sensitivity she documents a time and the attitude of the people of that time, which is characterised by the national socialism that so many people have let themselves in for.

Fear, lack of interest, self-righteousness, exaggerated nationalism and egoism, unquestioning obedience towards questionable authorities allowed the Nazis to spread their terror over half of Europe.

In July 1942, the Frank family tries to escape from this terror by hiding away. With the help of friends, they make themselves at home in a rear house that is shut off from the outside world by a turnable shelf. For more than two years, the Franks and their Jewish friends, the van Daan family and Mr Dussel – altogether eight persons – live in an extremely narrow space permanently fearing discovery. In August 1944, the police storm the rear house; only Otto Frank, the father, survives the deportation and the concentration camp.

What made Anne Frank's name famous throughout the world is the fact that, still today, her diary is understood as a symbol of optimism, tolerance and human dignity. Through her written accounts, Anne Frank has appealed to posterity to nip in the bud any racial hatred, discrimination and intolerance. The second Düren comprehensive school, which became independent in 1988, tries to honour this appeal. In its first annual account it said at the time: "Learning by reflection, becoming aware of the past in order to have a future, acquiring independent judgment, developing independent socially responsible commitment – this can be the educational mandate of Anne Frank Comprehensive School."



»When Jewish blood splashes from the knife, things are twice as good, hang the Jews, put the fat cats up to the wall.«

In many respects, the synagogue community of Gürzenich is typical of the synagogue communities in the District of Düren. Like everywhere, their members were respected fellow citizens, integrated in the social life of the village and interested in its development as much as the other inhabitants.

For 200 years Jews had lived in Gürzenich, had worked there, traded, married, got children and eventually been buried on the Jewish cemetery, and often enough these funerals were attended by the Catholic population. They had gone to war for their German fatherland, been wounded and awarded orders as naturally as their non-Jewish age-mates. And they had died for Germany as, for example, 20-year-old Josef Heumann from Gürzenich, who is recorded in the “Memorial Book for the Fallen Jewish Soldiers of the German Army, the German Navy and the German Protection Forces 1914 - 1918“, published by the Reichsbund of Jewish Frontline Soldiers.

Unlike in a big town, the social ties in a small community like Gürzenich were much stronger between Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants. The Jewish community was much too small in number in order to shut itself off in a way as may have been the case in a number of big towns.

On the contrary, both sides did everything to avoid separation on account of the different religious affiliations. The most striking example of these efforts was the contribution of the Christian population to the construction costs of the new Gürzenich synagogue, which was solemnly inaugurated on September 7 1906. Funerals were mutually attended and Father Hecker is known to have paid a visit of condolence to the widow of Jonas Jacobs, who had been killed in an accident.

The reports of surviving Gürzenich Jews show how close their friendships with neighbours, fellow pupils and colleagues were. At the same time, there is still the palpable amazement about the fact that such friendships could break so quickly under the merciless pressure of only a few, that the overwhelming majority of the population so unresistingly bowed to the bloodthirsty Nazi slogans.

And they certainly cannot forget the song which, preferably on Sundays, the SA and SS men bawled on their march through the village: "When Jewish blood splashes from the knife, things are twice as good, hang the Jews, put the fat cats up to the wall."

It is a sign of the love of their native Gürzenich that, despite the many harassments and humiliations they had to tolerate, the Gürzenich Jews did not leave their village. Even after the ominous signal of the Pogrom Night, when also the Gürzenich synagogue fell victim to the brown mob and the male Jews were arrested and interrogated in the community hall, they did not find an answer to the question: "What have we done to you?"

At least for some of them this was the final reason to escape from the country that could no longer be their home. Under the most difficult circumstances, in some cases with the help of the few remaining friends, they successfully and often illegally crossed the border into the neighbouring countries.

But also here there was no safety. A number of Gürzenich Jews were deported from Holland to the extermination camps.

10 *Lendersdorf*



»On the day my parents were transported to the concentration camp, I was allowed to visit them with the approval of the Cologne Gestapo. My parents, my sister and the Lichtenstein family were first transported by tramway from Lendersdorf to the Düren railway station. From the station in Düren to Izbica/Wierpz, District of Krasnystaw, Community of Lublin, from where I received letters until August 1942.«

The Thuir's Mill in the southernmost tip of the borough of Lendersdorf is a former corn mill of whose complex only the residential house is left today. It ceased to operate in about 1939/40 because it was no longer profitable.

In the mill, above all Jews from the southern district areas were concentrated. A former Jewish fellow citizen from Gey recalls: "In 1941 the Jewish inhabitants of Gey, Maubach and Drove were accommodated in the Thuir's Mill camp. My parents lived there in one room together with Carl Lichtenstein, his wife and his little son Rudolph.

Another room housed Isaak Meyer, his sick wife Lina and his daughter Elly. On the day my parents were transported to the concentration camp, I was allowed to visit them with the approval of the Cologne Gestapo.

My parents, my sister and the Lichtenstein family were first transported by tramway from Lendersdorf to the Düren railway station. From the station in Düren to Izbica/Wierpz, District of Krasnystaw, Community of Lublin, from where I received letters until August 1942."

The Jewish prisoners were guarded by local SA members who patrolled the yard with their rifle shouldered and, like so many of their like-minded comrades, could for once bask in the glow of their power.

On the other hand, also those are borne in remembrance who tried to help the Jews. There are, for example, accounts about a family in Lendersdorf who ran a bakery and provided the Jews with bread and other foodstuffs. Also the residents of “Eulengasse“ – that was the name of the small path down to the mill – every now and then slipped something to eat to those whom the Star of David marked as outcasts. For the sustenance of the prisoners was inadequate; often they did not even get “a sip of water”, a local resident recalls. Despite the poor diet, the able-bodied Jews must do forced labour under supervision, amongst others in the Lendersdorf smelting mill where they are used for paving work along the railway track on the premises of the mill and return to their prison in the evening.

The Jews suspect that they are doomed. Nevertheless they try to arrange their lives in and around the mill in as “normal” a manner as possible. They use what little freedom of movement they are allowed in the beginning in order to store furniture and other valuable things with friends for the time “thereafter“. Even a wedding takes place: The daughter of the Lendersdorf Jew Isaak Roer, Sara, marries a young fellow believer from the region of Vettweiß. But then comes the order: Get ready for transport. “To the labour camp“, so the official version. Guarded by a policeman, the approximately 50 Jewish fellow citizens present a sad procession. Some whisper a last farewell to a friend on the roadside, then their route leads them via the Mühlenteichbrücke to the stop of the electric tramway where a tram and a trailer stand by. Nobody tries to escape. And without a stopover they travel to the railway station in Düren where a goods wagon is waiting for them.

Afterword

In their entirety, the ten steles certainly form an impressive chain of “stumbling blocks“ and therefore they serve their purpose. Here it may well be neglected that some of the sites are not in exact compliance with the historical locations (e.g. Schützenstraße, Wernersstraße). Of greater importance appears to be the fact that some embarrassing questions (inevitably?) remained unasked, e.g., concerning the early commitment that some renowned Düren industrialists extended to national socialism. Thus, one stele should certainly have been placed at the gates of a well known Düren company which, as early as in 1932, made available a meeting room to the SA on its premises and also in other ways offered ample assistance.

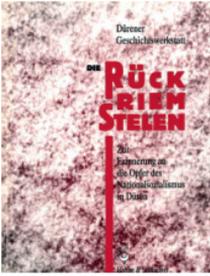
Another stele could have been dedicated to the chapter “Düren schools“. In the early days of the Third Reich, many a press release proudly announced that this or that school was firmly in the hands of the Hitler Youth, the “reward” for which was the raising of the Hitler Youth banner on the school premises.

There would surely be no lack of historical occasions for a number of further steles.

For all the shortcomings in points of detail, it may however be said that the Rückriem steles offer Düren a great opportunity to find a productive approach to debating the long neglected brown past. The objective of such a debate can, however, only be to do justice to the victims of national socialism by doing as complete research into the historical facts as possible on the one hand and by bracing ourselves against possible new perpetrators on the other. And nobody will seriously dispute that this is necessary.

Meanwhile, the commemoration of the victims of national socialism at the Rückriem steles has become a tradition regularly attended by numerous citizens.

Literature



The historical background of the ten stele sites is dealt with in more detail by the Dürener Geschichtswerkstatt: Die Rückriem-Stelen. Zur Erinnerung an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Düren.

ISBN 3-927312-05-3



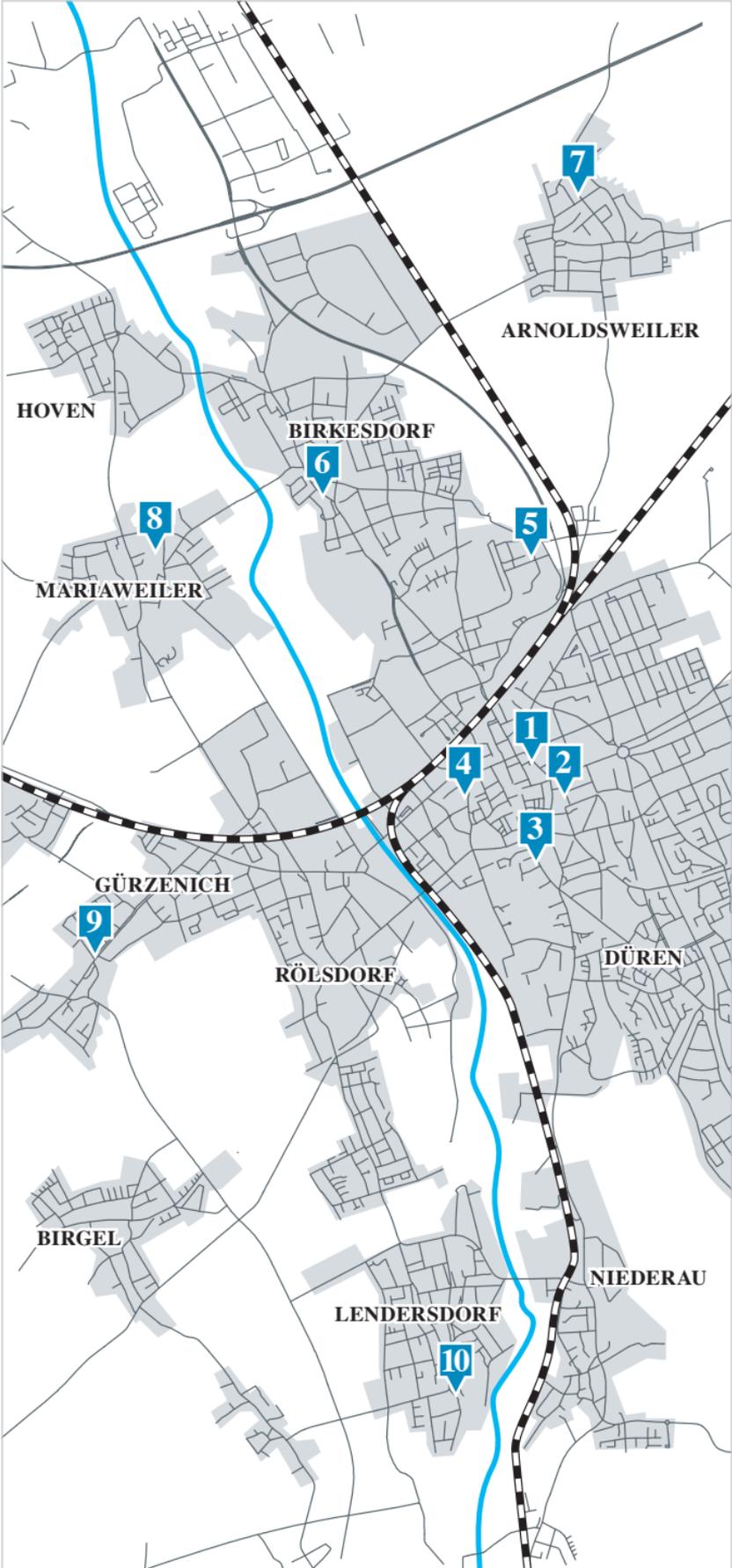
Research into the artistic dimension of this and other works of Rückriem in the region of Düren has been done by Art Historian Katrin Kaptain, who grew up in Düren: Ulrich Rückriem. Frühe Werke und das dezentrale Mahnmal in Düren.

ISBN 3-927312-49-5.

List of the stele sites within the city boundaries of Düren

Here you find a map of the city in which the different sites of the steles are located. The serial numbers refer to the specific places:

- 1** Schützenstraße
- 2** Wernersstraße, Martin-Luther-Platz
- 3** Gerstenmühle, Oberstraße
- 4** Amtsgericht, August-Klotz-Straße
- 5** LVR-Klinik Düren, Meckerstraße
- 6** Birkesdorf, Zollhausstraße
- 7** Arnoldsweiler, Ecke Neußer/Cormeillesstr.
- 8** Mariaweiler, Kupfermühle
- 9** Gürzenich, Schillingsstraße/Möschengasse
- 10** Lendersdorf, Schneidhausener Weg



Mit freundlicher Unterstützung der



Sparkasse
Düren