

HARBURG PROJECT 1986 - 2008

JEWISH FAMILY HISTORY IN NÖRDLINGER RIES

RESEARCH PROJECTS BY ROLF HOFMANN

ACQUISITION OF THE HARBURGER SYNAGOGUE

Between 1986 and 1989 Rolf Hofmann was involved in the acquisition and refurbishment of the former synagogue in Harburg (near Nördlingen in Bavarian Swabia), dating from 1754, and its transformation into a local cultural centre. Since the mid-1960s, this structure had been used as an office building and its original internal historical features had been obliterated. However, the facade had been left essentially unchanged and the building therefore represented one of the most prominent surviving synagogues in southern Germany. Its architectural forms, for example its pointed-arch windows, are typical of many medieval synagogues. Last but not least, the location of this synagogue in the region of the centuries-old Oettingen Castle, whose Counts and Princes were dominant in the Harburg region, makes it a historical site of considerable significance.



The former Harburg Synagogue ((Photo: www.jhva.wordpress.com)

HARBURG SYNAGOGUE CULTURAL CENTRE

The former synagogue was successfully transformed into cultural centre between 1989 and 1992. More than 120 stimulating events were presented: exhibitions, lectures, theatrical performances, historical events and classical and jazz concerts. One highlight was a program of piano concertos, played on a restored Blüthner grand piano. In 1992 the Association of the Volksbanken and Raiffeissenbanken honored the Donau-Ries administration and presented a certificate of commendation that recognised the district's concern for conservation and its support for the revived use of the former Harburg synagogue.



Former Harburg Synagogue. (The Harburg Castle can be seen on the hill in the background)

(Photo: www.alemannia-judaica)

JEWISH FAMILY HISTORY RESEARCH

In 1992, Rolf Hofmann began the Harburg Project, which engaged him in several years of extensive study of the history of the twelve Jewish communities in the area of the former County Oettingen (focusing on the Nördlinger Ries as the core area). Data were derived from documents held in the Royal Archives of Harburg Castle. This research collection was supplemented by archival material held in various State and local archives. The research focused on studies of family trees of Jews who once lived in the region. Over 1,000 family sheets relating to more than 200 surnames were produced over the years. Various historical events led to extensive migration of these families, and this necessitated research on a global scale to find descendants of families once living in the Nördlinger Ries region. With the close cooperation of Dr Joachim Hahn, the family trees and records of relevant family stories were published at www.alemannia-judaica.de/harburgproject.htm Over the years, the Harburg Project developed into a global operation. In 2006 it was recognised through the conferral of the internationally renowned Obermayer Award.

AN INVENTORY OF GRAVES IN JEWISH CEMETERIES

A second area of research, which also began in 1992, involved the compilation of burial lists for six Jewish cemeteries in the Nördlinger Ries region. Many years later, in 2008, similar work was carried out in the Jewish cemetery in Schopfloch in Middle Franconia, which belonged to the Oettingen administration in former times. The inventory work was carried out in close cooperation with fellow researchers. In addition to a list of names, essential family history details were recorded, together with a schematic plan of each cemetery. The lists of these graves have also been published on the internet on the alemannia-judaica website.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS OF JEWISH CEMETERIES

In cooperation with Mario Jacoby, the tombstones of the Harburg Jewish cemetery were cleaned during 1992, along with the noting and translation of the Hebrew inscriptions, assisted by Mario Jacoby's wife Ruth Litai-Jacoby. A printed publication (in limited edition) was produced with pictures of 50 gravestones (out of 150) which had legible inscriptions. This publication was unique for Bavarian Swabia. Similar cleaning, recording and photographing of Jewish gravestones was subsequently organized in 1995 in Mönchsdeggingen and Wallerstein. Rolf Hofmann then followed

