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Thirty years of restoration of synagogue buildings in Southern Germany

During the November 1938 pogrom in Germany, almost all of the synagogues were demolished or even destroyed. But quite a few synagogues were not destroyed for the simple reason that they had already been sold before to new owners. Some of the synagogues which survived the Second World War were demolished after 1945 due to the fact that most of the former Jewish communities didn't exist anymore and even potential buyers then were rare. Only during the 1970s the attitude towards a sensitive management of the still existing synagogue buildings had changed. Since then a greater amount of former synagogue buildings were restored and designed for appropriate activities with different conceptions. Since the 1970s Joachim Hahn has accompanied the restoration of various former synagogues intensively. He can tell about multiple difficulties but also about successful results of these restoration activities.

Joachim Hahn will present several restorations of former synagogues during the last 30 years as in the following towns:



Kippenheim



Offenburg



Schmieheim

Kippenheim: Built in 1850-51 the Kippenheim Synagogue served the local congregation until its desecration in November 1938. Thereafter the building was principally used for storage. From 1986 to 1989 its exterior was faithfully restored to its original condition; what remains if its former interior is being preserved.

Offenburg: The building of Lange Strasse 52 ("Salmen") included a synagogue which had been installed in the banquet room of a former inn in 1875. In 1938 the synagogue was demolished. In 1997 the community of Offenburg bought the former synagogue. Within the next five years the building was completely restored and now serves as a meeting place, offering concerts, conferences and meetings of all kind. Two exhibitions remind of the historic past; one deals with democratic traditions, another deals with history and fate of Jews in Offenburg.

Schmieheim: A synagogue was built in 1812. After the demolition of 1938 it stood empty for a while, and in 1950 a local industrial company moved in. Some years ago the building was transferred some years into a dwelling house, the shape of the building still reminding of the former synagogue.



Sulzburg: The synagogue building today

Sulzburg: The Synagogue of 1823 was built in a mixed baroque and classicistic style. The building was demolished in 1938 and restored between 1977 and 1984. It is now a meeting place for the town and neighboring communities.



Freudental: the synagogue building before 1938, in the 1960s and today

Freudental was a center of Jewish life for a large region in the 18th-19th century. The beautiful synagogue, built in 1770-71, demolished in 1938, was restored in 1983-85. Together with the adjacent structures, some newly constructed, the building serves as a pedagogical-cultural center which sponsors appearances and shows by lecturers and artists of all faiths. The government of the Ludwigsburg supports the cultural centre which in 2010 celebrated its 25 years anniversary.



Hechingen: interior before 1938 and after demolition in November 1938 - synagogue today

Hechingen. Hechingen was a village with a very special Jewish history. For some time the Jewish Community was one of the largest in Hohenzollern (today part of Baden-Wuerttemberg). The former main synagogue – erected in the 18th century – was demolished in 1938 and restored in 1983-86. During the following years the members of the synagogue association cared for special events as meetings, lectures, exhibitions, and concerts. The former synagogue became a regular cultural institution.



Haigerloch: the synagogue before 1938 and today



Baisingen

Haigerloch: A synagogue was built in the center of the Jewish district of the town in 1783. It was demolished in 1938. In 1951 the synagogue came into private ownership. The shape of the roof was changed, Roman arch windows were closed by brickwork. For some years the former synagogue became a movie theatre. From 1968 until 1981 a food market was installed, from 1981 until 1999 it was used as a storehouse for a textile company. Restoration of the former synagogue took place between 2001 and 2003, resulting in a memorial site together with a museum displaying the history of the Jews in the Hohenzollern region.

Baisingen: A synagogue was built in the 18th century in the so-called "Judengaessle" (small Jewish alley). The building was wrecked in 1938 and used for storage after 1940. The new owner broke a door into the wall next to the former Tora Shrine. In 1990 the Baisingen Synagogue was designated as cultural monument. The building was restored between 1994 and 1998. In November 1998 it started as a memorial site and a museum with a couple of events. The restoration was on purpose incomplete. Showing not only the original building but also the wounds of the tragic past during NS times was the intention.



Former Synagogues in Michelbach an der Luecke and Affaltrach

Michelbach an der Luecke: The synagogue was built in 1756-57 with a characteristic barrel-vault, Roman arch windows. It was demolished in 1938 and was nearly ruined by 1980. In 1983/84 it was renovated as a "Center of Documentation of Jews in Franconia" with exhibitions and other events. Because of water damage a renovation was again necessary in 2012/13, since May 2013 it is re-opened.

Affaltrach. There was a Center for the Jewish community since 1851 with synagogue, school, teacher's home and mikwe. The building was demolished in 1938. Thereafter the building was used for makeshift lodging and for storage purposes. 1985 an association to preserve the building was founded. 1987/88 it was restored. Since then it is used as a "Center for Documentation of Jewish history in the Heilbronn region".