

Personio  
Die HR-Software für alle Personalprozesse.

WEITERE INFOS

Rosie Whitehouse  
August 12, 2018

## German town where 'nothing happened' confronts Nazi past

- News Features
- Obituaries
- The Diary
- 



Rosie Whitehouse

August 12, 2018

# German town where 'nothing happened' confronts Nazi past

Landsberg am Lech appears set to examine its wartime story — but some locals are unimpressed by the plans



Landsberg prison, where Hitler wrote Mein Kampf (Photo: PA)

After 73 years of ignoring its Nazi history, the city of Landsberg am Lech in southern Germany has finally decided to address it.

The city's mayor, Mathias Neuner, revealed earlier this summer that work was underway for a permanent exhibition detailing the events that took place in the beautiful medieval city during and after the Nazi era.

In the town hall, in front of an audience of Holocaust survivors, their liberators and their families, he also said the council would set up information boards at significant places in Landsberg and open an information centre.

The reason? Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* while incarcerated in Landsberg's prison after the failed 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch, and after the war over 300 SS guards were tried and executed at the same site.

During the Third Reich, the town was an ideological hub for Hitler Youth and its baroque town square witnessed regular torch lit parades.

After war broke out, Landsberg was surrounded by a series of slave labour camps. After the liberation, thousands of survivors in its Displaced Persons (DP) camps took part in a remarkable Jewish revival that significantly contributed to the founding of the State of Israel.



The sign to the slave camp today

The bunker built by slave labourers is still used by the German air force and there is a small museum inside that opened four years ago, but access is limited.

One of those slave workers was Ivor Perl, then just a thirteen years old. He helped build the revolutionary Messerschmitt Me 262 aircraft, one of the world's first jet fighters, in the nearby DP camp at Feldafing. Mr Perl, who was born in Hungary, says he would like to see not just the horrors of the camps remembered but the period after the war.

“My strongest recollection is of being born again,” he says.

He was brought with his brother to the UK by the Central British Fund, the forerunner of World Jewish Relief, and would like to see the help given to survivors recorded for posterity because “without their help I don't know what would have become of me.”

Father Cyril of the nearby St Ottilien monastery, who accompanied the Holocaust survivors and their families to the town hall meeting, has worked hard to commemorate the help given to survivors at St Ottilien, where there was a Jewish hospital.

But he is far from impressed at the mayor's proposal.



Manfred Deiler in Kaufering 7

The information centre will be a dank, dark stairwell behind the town hall's lift shaft: "I think we can do better than that. We have to do better." Manfred Deiler, who has been campaigning for Landsberg's history to be remembered since the 1980s, is also sceptical and fears it will be too limited in its approach.

When Mr Deiler, who is now in his late sixties, asked his parents what had happened in Landsberg during the war they replied: "Nothing ever happened here." He waves his hand in the air, implying "nothing" means everything.

On a trip to Dachau in 1988 he spotted a picture of the Kaufering camp that surrounded the town.

"Imagine my astonishment when I discovered there were 23,000 Jewish slave workers here," he says.

That day trip to Dachau changed his life and set him on a quest to document the real history of his hometown. Mr Deiler has purchased the site of the camp at Kaufering 7, where the prisoners were housed.

It is the only privately owned concentration camp site in Germany.

He drives me in his small red car-cum-van out to the site, past the dense woods and flat wide-open fields, pointing out places where different camp buildings once stood.

To the untrained eye it is impossible to spot the way the trees in the forest have been cut back into rectangular clearings where there were once prison compounds but nothing now remains. "It's disappearing and soon there will be no evidence," he says.

Mr Deiler thinks that the Landsberg mayor's plans will have little impact.

“We need a documentation centre where people can come to discover what happened using original documents.

“We need a place where questions can be asked and discussions take place — not just notice boards.”

Landsberg is a small town, he explains, and slave labourers were working not just in the camps but all over town. They were even peeling potatoes in restaurants.



20th December 1924: Adolf Hitler (1889 - 1945) leaves the Landsberg Fortress after a nine month period of imprisonment. (Photo by Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

“The survivors did not tell their children what had happened to protect them from the horror, but our parents did not tell us to protect themselves,” he adds.

The plans for a permanent exhibition come at a politically sensitive time for Bavaria, where right-wing parties are in the ascendancy.

This autumn, the state goes to the polls and Mr Deiler fears his dreams of setting up a documentation centre will never be realised — and that even the limited plans outlined by the major will never actually be put into place.

“Politics in Bavaria,” he says, “is moving to the right as the conservative CSU try to guard against losing votes to the right wing AfD.

“The AfD have called the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a ‘memorial of shame’. That is why there is a reluctance to build German shame into a concrete building in Landsberg.

“The CSU, who control the city council, don’t want to lose votes to the right.”

“If you don’t know the truth about the past, you don’t know the dangers ahead!”

He taps the table defiantly and adds: “To remember the Jewish slave workers, we Germans have to remember that we murdered them.”