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Memorial for Nazi victims unveiled in Gmunden

31 Mar 2023

A memorial to Gmunden's victims of the Nazi regime was unveiled today on the Esplanade in Gmunden on Lake Traunsee.



The commemoration ceremony was attended by Upper Austria's Governor Thomas Stelzer, the Mayor of Gmunden Stefan Krapf, the Cultural Officer of the City of Gmunden Andreas Hecht and the Secretary General of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism Hannah Lessing.

The guest of honour was Holocaust survivor Frederic (Fritz) Rujder, who is originally from Gmunden and travelled from France together with his daughter to take part in the ceremonial unveiling.

The event featured a reading by the writer René Freund and the passacaglia "Sine nomine", composed especially for the occasion by Michaela Schausberger and performed by Anja Sodnikar (SodL) on accordion, Johann Gstöttner (viola) and the theatre group of Gmunden High School under the direction of Peter Holzinger.

Secretary General Hannah Lessing: "This simple metal strip mounted above the waves connects the names of the murdered residents of Gmunden with their home community once more: they must have often stood here on the esplanade when they lived here, to look out over the lake. Today we look out over Lake Traunsee and see their names that have returned home. And so, for Gmunden, a circle comes to a close."

In his speech, Frederic Rujder thanked those who were involved in creating the memorial: "You all worked to make this memorial possible. This remembrance work is even more important in these so very dark times, when respect for people's right to live freely and equally, it seems, is not yet taken for granted by all."

Fritz (Frederic) Rujder's family history is closely connected with Gmunden. His parents lived there until the late 1930s. As Jews, they were subjected to persecution after the "Anschluss" of Austria, and his father was sent to Dachau and then Buchenwald concentration camp. After his release in 1939, the couple fled with Fritz, who was just a few months old, via Italy to France, where they survived the Holocaust in hiding. Frederic Rujder now lives with his family in France.

Origins of the Memorial

In 2020, the Gmunden municipal council decided to erect a memorial to the murdered Nazi victims from Gmunden. Within the framework of an invited competition, a five-member jury decided in favour of the project by Gmunden architect and technical college teacher Kurt Ellmauer. The memorial consists of a bronze strip bearing the names of 25 Jewish persecutees, 16 euthanasia victims and 19 political persecutees. A QR code provides access to more information about the fate of the victims and enables members of the public to call up the victims' biographies online.

The memorial was erected with the financial support of the National Fund. Its construction and assembly were carried out by master locksmith Manuel Kreuzer, *Edelstahl design und Metallbau*, Ohlsdorf.

On 31 March, Gmunden will also host the world premiere of the musical "Letters from Ruth", which recalls the fate of the artist Ruth Maier, who was born in Vienna in 1920 and murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. The exhibition conceived by the Documentation of Austrian Resistance and co-financed by the National Fund, "The Short Life of Ruth Maier. Vienna – Oslo – Auschwitz" will also be displayed in Gmunden at the end of March.

Links

- Project description with photos of the memorial (project-database)
- About the memorial and its creation (Municipality of Gmunden)
- Biographies of the Nazi victims from Gmunden (PDF, in German, Stadtgemeinde Gmunden/Holger Höllwerth)
- Video of the opening ceremony on 31 March 2023 (Salzi.TV)
- Video of the opening ceremony on 31 March 2023 (TV1.nachrichten.at)
- Project description of the exhibition "The Short Life of Ruth Maier" (project-database)