

Chapter 12

A Tale of Two Towns: Heritage and Memory of Civilian Internment in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 1942–2012

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Abstract Biberach and Bad Wurzach are two communities linked by the tragedy of war to the two largest British Channel Islands, Guernsey and Jersey. Although the background story of the two internment camps in the two small towns which are only 30 km apart is almost identical, there are some major differences in the situation of the camps and the postwar developments that led to the present differences in the atmosphere of the relationship between former internees and the places of their internment. The relationships between past physical and social conditions and present-day perceptions of an interlocked heritage reveal the complex ways in which individual and social memories are created, lost, and recreated, as understood by avocational researchers linked to some of the communities involved.

Introduction

In September 1942, some 2,200 British citizens were deported from the Channel Islands to Germany as a reprisal for the internment of German citizens in Persia. Originally, Hitler's order had been to deport ten British citizens for every German interned, but the order was lost in the jungle of German government bureaucracy. When the matter was brought up again nearly a year later, the Führer's order had to be immediately implemented. The only large numbers of British citizens within German reach were British residents in the occupied Channel Islands. But the

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number deported was in the end considerably smaller than the number originally aimed at, partly due to remonstrations of the German Foreign Office and the Wehrmacht, who were not all enthusiastic about the deportation of families with small children for which they would be responsible.

The deportees were transported to various camps in southern Germany in what is now Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria; three of them had been used as PoW camps before. Two of the camps—Laufen in Bavaria and Liebenau near Tettngang—were mixed nationality internment camps for male and female prisoners respectively. Biberach and Wurzach were family camps with the Channel Islanders as the predominant group, and can thus be compared. These two camps were situated close to each other in a very rural region with small agricultural towns and villages. Biberach internment camp was situated about 2 miles from a town of approximately 11,000 inhabitants. The camp of Wurzach was located in a baroque schloss or castle right in the center of a small town of about 2,000 inhabitants.

Upper Swabia—Oberschwaben as this area is called—was and still is predominantly Catholic, which in political terms meant a certain distance from Nazism. The political leaning before the Third Reich had been very conservative, the dominant party being the Center party which politically represented the Catholic population. This does not mean that most people were opposed to the Nazis; many of the local unemployed had voted for Hitler in 1933, as had some former supporters of conservative parties, though disillusionment grew as the war continued. This was an attitude that the more observant internees noticed in Wurzach and was probably a basis for mutual understanding which helped to overcome any hostility they may have felt towards the townspeople.

The political structure of Biberach was different, with more votes for the Nazi party and the Social Democrats, so that only a small majority of Roman Catholics politically favored the Center party. Yet for the internees in the camp these differences were not easily observed or understood; they sometimes mistook some of the stubborn conservative Upper Swabian people with very conservative leanings for Nazis, whereas they did not always recognize a number of committed Nazi party members. These appear to be minor divergences in regard to the general political and war situation, but they contributed to significant differences in how the local population related to and treated the internees. This was one reason why it was easier for the townspeople of Bad Wurzach to break the collective silence concerning the Nazi past in the postwar period.

During the first few months of internment of the Channel Islanders, the Wehrmacht was still responsible for the camps, but in December 1942 the Württemberg Home Office took over the administration of the camps and the military guards of around 200 armed men were replaced by a small number of elderly policemen, mainly from the Stuttgart area. All the camps were under direct control of the SS *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA—Reich Security Head Office) in Berlin, a department of the SS responsible for all the police forces in Germany. The responsible civil servant in Stuttgart had to report to an *Obersturmbannführer* in the RSHA. But the internees and local people did not see much of this SS influence—in stark contrast to what some internees later recounted who claimed to have been guarded by SS men. The local authorities of Wurzach and Biberach had nothing to say in

these matters. The ignorance of this structure was revealed as late as spring 2010 in an online discussion in Jersey, following a report about the liberation ceremony in Bad Wurzach, about the question of whether the people in Bad Wurzach should be forgiven or not (Jersey Evening Post, April 29, 2010). This discussion would have been incomprehensible for people in Bad Wurzach—had they known about it.

The Camps

Lindele camp in Biberach, situated about 2 miles from the town, was founded as a garrison in February 1939 and consisted of standard-sized barracks. In August 1940, it was turned into a PoW camp, Oflag VB. The neighboring camp in Wurzach became Oflag VC. Oflag VB was used first as a PoW camp for about 900 British officers, 26 of whom escaped through a tunnel, and later used for Serbian and French officers. The first civilian internees arrived from Jersey on September 20, 1942. On November 11, 1942, Guernsey civilian internees were transferred from Dorsten camp in Westphalia to Biberach after many of the Jersey people had been moved to Wurzach.

When the Wehrmacht handed over the camp to the Württemberg Home Office on December 1, 1942, Lindele camp was converted into an exchange camp for British and American nationals. This was the reason why Jewish prisoners from the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen came to the camp towards the latter stages of the war and were “kept in stock” for a German-American exchange via Switzerland and Marseille, which was never implemented.

After the Channel Islanders were repatriated to the UK in June 1945, Lindele camp became a camp for German refugees. Since 1951 the compound has been used as a training center by the Württemberg Police (Adler 2002; Binder 2007). The old huts were removed in the early 1970s and new buildings were erected, so the only building that still reminds former internees of Lindele camp is the main building (known to the internees as “the White House”), with its easily recognizable clock tower (Binder 2007:94).

The Schloss, as the former internees still call the place of their internment, is a baroque castle at the center of the small town of Wurzach, which the internees used to call a village. Before the war the castle had been used as a Catholic boarding school which was closed down by the Nazis. The castle owners, the Catholic order of Salvatorian Fathers, were forced to rent it out to the German Wehrmacht. The prisoners were housed in the castle itself whereas the guards were accommodated in barracks which were erected in the grounds. The first men to be detained in the castle were French officers, most of whom were of Corsican origin. These French prisoners hardly came into contact with the local population as under the Geneva Conventions the officers could not be forced to work. In general, only those who stayed in the town, working on the farms or for the local craftsmen, were remembered by the civilian population, because their presence was unusual in this rural part of Germany. This PoW camp for French prisoners was dissolved in the autumn of 1942 after it had been downgraded as a branch camp of Oflag VD then stationed in Biberach.

At the end of October 1942, the castle was turned into an internment camp for some 600 men, women, and children, who were moved to Wurzach because Biberach camp was overcrowded and a delegation of the Swiss Legation had reported unfavorably about the conditions and various quarrels between Jersey and Guernsey internees there. Apart from one Guernsey family, all of those who were moved to Wurzach had been deported from Jersey. Although the PoW camp had been dissolved, its registration cards were used for the internees. This is why the file cards which some internees took home as a souvenir after their liberation were the pre-printed forms of *Oflag 55* or *Oflag VD*, long after these units were deployed elsewhere, and these can be correlated with the surviving camp register.

The policemen who guarded the internees in Biberach and Wurzach received very strict instructions resembling those of military PoW camp guards, but discipline soon relaxed as it became obvious that there was no real danger of escape attempts. The situation of the internment camp became more complicated in spring 1943 when a Hitler Youth military training camp (*Wehrtüchtigungslager*) was set up in empty barracks in the grounds of the castle. The two camps on both sides of the wire constituted a strange and not always friendly neighborhood. Groups of Hitler Youth boys arrived every 3 weeks to be not only trained in military skills but also subjected to ideological schooling. One internee, Michael Ginns, remembered that “Villagers were never hostile and the only sign anyone saw of Nazism was the Hitler Youth barracks” (Jersey Evening Post, August 6, 1993). The internees were seen as the enemy by many of these boys, whereas the internees themselves commented rather pitifully that the boys were being trained as cannon fodder. It is notable that the existence of the Hitler Youth camp was totally erased from social memory in Bad Wurzach, and only through research about the internment camp were people reminded of this part of the Nazi past.

After the internees were repatriated in June 1945, the castle was temporarily used as a UNRRA camp for displaced persons. By November 1945, the Salvatorian priests were able to reopen their boarding school in one part of the Schloss, thus taking the first steps back to a “normal” life which also meant erasing the unpleasant memories of the “Thousand-year Reich” as discussed below.

Communication Across the Wire as a Basis for Future Remembrance

In the autumn of 1942, Biberach and Wurzach townspeople were bewildered to see civilians, including women and children, in “their” camps. Information was scarce, but as the reasons for their deportation were not known even to the internees themselves, it was much more difficult for the townspeople to understand why they were there. English was not yet a very common foreign language, which enhanced the difficulties of communication. Usually, the internees were referred to as “the English people.” Nobody knew anything about the Channel Islands from where they had been deported.

The internees from Jersey stayed in Wurzach camp much longer than the French prisoners, so some were able to develop close ties which were later to form the basis for a town twinning process. As they were only guarded by a few elderly policemen, opportunities for contacts increased. People became used to the sight of families behind the barbed wire and of children playing in the courtyard of the castle. Moreover, the internees were able to watch everyday life in the town from their windows; after all they were at the very center of the settlement, just opposite the town hall! This picture of everyday life behind the barbed wire is one of the main reasons why many Wurzach people still have vivid memories of the camp, even if they were only children at that time.

The situation was different in Biberach, where the camp was outside the town so the local people did not have many opportunities to encounter internees. Only members of the German camp administration and the guards had a chance of making close contacts with them. People generally tended to be anti-British because of World War I, particularly in a town with a small National Conservative, Protestant majority in 1942. However, some of the elderly guards had experienced several years of imprisonment as PoWs in England and could talk to the internees and understand their problems, despite the fact that direct contacts between German personnel and the internees were strictly prohibited by their superiors and could only be executed secretly (Thomas Schilling, interview June 2011).

In Wurzach the internees and some of the guards built up a relationship which was considered far too friendly by their superiors in Stuttgart. One guard was transferred for disciplinary reasons because he had been reported by a Hitler Youth boy who had seen him give an apple to an internee child. The German commandant, *Leutnant* Martin Riedesser, was generally characterized as very strict, but the internees soon came to appreciate him as someone who did his best to run the camp effectively, dealing fairly with them. Even 65 years after their liberation, former internees remember incidents which proved him to be a decent man. For example during the visit in April 2010 Paul Atyeo, whose father had died in the camp in 1945, recounted how Lieutenant Riedesser had addressed him with the German *Sie* which is used as a polite form when talking to grown-up people instead of the *du* for children which he had used before his father died, thus showing his respect for him after his father's death. However, in the long run he was not rewarded for his conduct because he had been a member of the Nazi party although nobody in the camp considered him one, and therefore he lost his position during the denazification process after the war and was never able to take up his career as a police officer again. A testimonial about his proper treatment of the internees by the former deputy camp leader, Frank Ray, was of no avail.

In Biberach, as well as in Bad Wurzach, there are still many people who remember getting chocolate and biscuits from the internees and, being children at the time, believed that they were very rich as they were in possession of fancy things. The internees used the contents of their Red Cross parcels to barter with the townspeople in order to receive milk, fresh fruit, and vegetables. In Wurzach, there were far more opportunities than in Biberach, where bartering directly through the barbed wire was impossible. In Wurzach, 200 internees sometimes paraded through the town on

their regular walks, only guarded by one or two policemen. Sometimes they were even allowed to stop for a drink in one of the small village pubs and the guards had made sure a few days in advance that village people would know where to find the internees. In 2005, Mary Cornish, one of the former internees, described these walks, saying, “the villagers used to sit in their windows, and some of them wanted to talk to us. We felt that they did not want to be at war” (Jersey Evening Post, April 25, 2005). There are accounts of internee children who received toys from local people or were able to go ice-skating in the canal in the grounds of the castle because the Salvatorian priests opened up the boarding school stocks of ice skates for them, and the guarding policemen allowed them to leave the camp.

In Wurzach camp the barbed wire itself gradually became more and more permeable as part of the original fence was removed in order to build another fence in the grounds where additional recreation space had been granted to the internees. It was common knowledge, even for the German guards who pretended not to see or know it, that some internees left the camp on bartering business.

In Biberach the relationship between internees and local people or guards were not as close as in Wurzach. Internees were allowed to go on guarded walks outside the camp but they hardly ever visited the town. A lot of Biberachers, however, remember having secretly swapped apples, eggs, and fresh vegetables for chocolate bars, real tea, or coffee. Genuine friendship grew mainly between those female internees and local women who shared a room when giving birth to their babies in Biberach hospital.

There were opportunities to work outside the camps, but only a very small percentage of the internees availed themselves of this. Many believed that taking up work meant collaboration with the enemy and fiercely objected to any demands. Usually those internees who were willing to work were met at the main entrance gate of the camp by one of their employer’s children. The friendships which were forged in these cases became the nucleus of the future twinning efforts, both in Bad Wurzach and Biberach. Obviously, the internees came to see a different sort of German than their fellow Channel Islanders were exposed to during the Occupation period. In Biberach, many German members of the guard and camp administration, as well as an unknown number of citizens, maintained close contacts with the internees after liberation, links which in some cases continued for years.

Inevitably there was ample opportunity for frictions and misunderstanding both in Biberach and Wurzach. Some people believed that the internees were better fed than the Germans and envied their apparently peaceful and lazy life. They did not know that the internees were treated according to the Geneva Conventions and that the main basis for decisions concerning the internees was the principle of reciprocity, with the preliminary concern being how one’s own people in enemy hands were treated. It is true that even nowadays some local German townspeople find it hard to consider the internees as real victims of the Third Reich; they prefer to see them as “privileged prisoners.”

When in 1944–1945 some Jewish prisoners from the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen were transferred to the camps, local people could not fail to see their miserable state. One of the internees describes in his diary how the behavior of the

German guards and townspeople changed after this. They became more distant and obviously were afraid of what was to happen after the war.

The coming of the Jews was a dreadful shock to all of us, inside and outside the wire, but to the German staff and townspeople it also brought much more, principally shame and embarrassment, but also fear ... The town changed after the Jews came. Now, whenever I went outside the camp, I began to notice that people I passed ... were suddenly not so friendly. Our old friends, for that is what they had really become, would turn aside or look away if they could, or hardly return a greeting (Graham n.d., 28ff).

This period of the internment camps proved to be the most difficult aspect to be digested by local people as it had suddenly become part of the terrors of the Holocaust which “had not taken place” in the small town because there had been no Jewish inhabitants. The majority of townspeople preferred to “forget” this and it was erased from collective memory for the next 50 years, whereas it was much easier to talk about the “English” internees.

The final days of the war provided ample material for stories and local legends that were remembered, half-remembered, and created. One incident from Wurzach can illustrate how the treatment of the camp and its inmates could be instrumentalized for other purposes. There have been persistent rumors, for which proof has never been found, of an attempt by the SS to blow up the castle in Wurzach with all of its inmates, but which was allegedly stopped by courageous local people. Several denazification files of local Nazi party members show that this rumor was exploited to whitewash them by claiming that they had defended British citizens at the risk of their own lives.

In Wurzach, the end of war was seen differently by internees and local people, but they stood side by side watching French tanks and army trucks moving into town, the internees cheering, the local people dejected but glad nonetheless that the war had finally ended. One positive shared memory from these first weeks under French occupation is firmly anchored in the memory of elderly people, especially women. The commander of the French combat unit that pressed on towards the Alps made the deputy camp captain, Frank Ray, provisional mayor of the town. Many old Wurzach people still hold him in high esteem as they firmly believe it was due to him that no serious incidents took place and, particularly, that no rapes were reported.

Postwar Contacts

The internees left Wurzach in June 1945, most of them determined never to return. Yet already a few years later the first ex-internees came back to visit people with whom they had made friends during their internment. With its return to an “everyday” use as a boarding school, they did not come back to a prison camp. The rightful owners of the castle, the Catholic priests who had not been involved with the Nazi regime, welcomed these visitors warmly and showed them the rooms they had occupied. Thus the Schloss has always served as a bridge between past and present, as a nucleus of



Fig. 12.1 Visitors in front of the schloss at Wurzach, April 2010 (Courtesy Tony Pike)

remembrance. Even today, the tour of the castle is one of the indispensable elements of the annual visit of the former internees in Bad Wurzach (Fig. 12.1). Some stories are told over and over again on this occasion, but every year new memories resurface.

The first postwar contacts were purely personal, between friends. It was not until 1966 that a visitor from Jersey and an inhabitant of the town, who had met by chance, visited the cemetery together to look for the graves of those internees who had died in Wurzach. Shocked by the derelict state of the graves, he made it his personal task to see these graves restored and received support from the local authorities. These efforts stimulated a series of new contacts. When the open air chapel of the local cemetery was rebuilt, the names of all those who had died in the camp were added to the names of the German soldiers who had lost their lives in the two wars of the twentieth century, thus making them part of the town's war memorial. Since then, the graves have been maintained by the town authorities, always decorated with flowers as required by local tradition (Fig. 12.2). In 2007, however, the graves were nearly flattened in the process of restructuring and extending the cemetery, as the town administration planned to remove the graves and simply put up a new memorial for all the victims of war and terror. This may have been due to thoughtlessness rather than the wish to forget this embarrassing part of the local history. One of the authors (GR) and a member of the town council, Egon Rothenhäusler, started a campaign to emphasize the importance of these graves as memorial, a landmark of the reconciliation process, and convinced the town council and the planning office to abandon this plan.



Fig. 12.2 Grandchildren of a former internee lay flowers on the graves of those who died in Wurzach camp, April 28, 2010 (Courtesy Tony Pike)

In 1973, a large party of former internees came for the first official visit to Bad Wurzach, one of the results of which was an exchange between Bad Wurzach students with children of former internees, which helped both sides to learn more about their common past. These student exchanges were organized annually over a period of more than 10 years, but were not continued when the internees' own children left school, although attempts at revival have periodically been made by those in Bad Wurzach.

In spite of these recurrent contacts, the camp disappeared (or was buried) in the memories of most people in Bad Wurzach, who were reluctant to recall it. The discussion of Nazi crimes made it very difficult for the local people, who were unsure of the difference between a concentration camp and an internment camp, so they preferred not to talk about it at all. Memories were pushed aside and hardly touched. One former internee, Mr. Chinn, noticed this attitude during a visit in 1993, remarking, "Younger people in the town have a guilt feeling which came across very strongly. They want to bring it out and discuss it. But the older generation want to forget, they want to black it out" (Jersey Evening Post, August 6, 1993). There is no municipal museum in Bad Wurzach and so the few remaining artifacts have never been systematically collected and displayed. It was not until the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the camp that a plaque was attached to the wall of the Schloss to commemorate the darker aspects of its history (Fig. 12.3).

In Biberach, contacts between internees and local people had been made by Guernsey women during their stay in local hospitals while giving birth. There have been at least three families who have kept in close contact for three generations. Most of the other contacts broke down due to language or financial problems, or when people passed away (Frau Anne Figel, interviews January 28 and 30, 1999; Haug 2009). Denazification measures by the French Occupying Forces caused



Fig. 12.3 Mayor Roland Buerkle and former internee, Michael Ginns, unveiling the plaque on the Schloss at Wurzach, April 28, 2005 (Courtesy Tony Pike)

suspicion about the former guards and the town's administration, although the latter had never been involved in camp affairs in Biberach (Biberach Town Archive 1953). People preferred not to discuss their camp publicly and, over the years, social memory of Lindele camp faded away.

For visitors to Biberach, the situation was different from Wurzach as the camp was on the outskirts of town, less convenient to reach, and therefore easier for the local people to forget. People from Guernsey who returned after the war found that Biberach people were not able even to locate the former internment camp. Only a few inhabitants admitted knowing that the town's present police training college used to be an internment camp during the war. Former internees who wanted to visit the site of their captivity were often upset, returning home with the impression that local people closed their eyes to the past and their fate. It was only when the police administration became aware of the history of the camp that they started to welcome former internees (Fig. 12.4), which changed the situation for the better.

The Long Road to Town Twinning and Present Relationships

The first attempts at twinning Bad Wurzach with Jersey were made in 1973 by a former internee and the *Procureur du Bien Public* of St. Helier, but met with a lot of resistance—not in Bad Wurzach, which was very keen on forging such a friendship, but in Jersey, where the memory of the Occupation was still very vivid. The idea was dropped, despite repeated attempts by Bad Wurzach for a formal twinning which was more or less ignored by the official representatives in Jersey. In 1988, the Bad Wurzach mayor, Helmuth Morczinietz, and the Vice Dean of Jersey, Michael



Fig. 12.4 Former internees and members of the Biberach Friends of Guernsey standing outside the site of the camp, now a police training college, 2006 (Courtesy Werner Drews)

Halliwell, made another attempt but again to no avail. The mayor tried, again unsuccessfully, to establish closer ties, supported by the Jersey Ex-Internees Association which in 1979 developed from the Channel Islands Ex-Internees Association (founded in 1971). In 2002, the Bailiff of Jersey, Sir Philip Bailhache, took the decisive step to invite Mr Morcinietz and his wife to attend Liberation Day commemorations. In his speech, the Bailiff called for reconciliation and welcomed the guests in German, a language a lot of Jersey people did not want to hear—and especially on that occasion. But the time was right and, by the end of the year, the twinning of St. Helier and Bad Wurzach was made official, 57 years after the end of the war. When the twinning was officially performed, the mayor of Bad Wurzach, Roland Bürkle, made a public apology on behalf of the town.

In 2005, a large party of former internees returned to Bad Wurzach for the 60th anniversary of their liberation. The town made it clear that it acknowledged its past with a program of commemoration and acts of remembrances, and the commemorative plaque was unveiled on the wall of the schloss. As a special gesture, the ex-internees from Jersey were invited for an official dinner in one of the rooms of Schloss, which had been used as a dormitory during their internment.

There was still a lot of uneasiness in Wurzach concerning the Jewish inmates of the Schloss during the last months of the war, but one member of this group, a Dutch Jew, had agreed to return to Bad Wurzach on this occasion. He stretched out his hand for reconciliation saying, “For me Wurzach was heaven after Bergen-Belsen. I was reborn in Wurzach.”

It has become a tradition for the former Jersey internees to return to the small town for the anniversary of their liberation, with the group becoming bigger every year with people coming back for the first time after more than 60 years. Their visit to the Schloss is often a very emotional experience; they often start to cry when the

place brings back very vivid memories. But these memories are usually personal memories of family members rather than bitter recollections of bad treatment and injustice. The visit always conjures up long-forgotten stories and some former internees start talking about things they have not spoken about for decades. They gain a better understanding of their parents' experience, as most visiting ex-internees were children when they were in the camp. In general, they return home with very different feelings towards the local people. When the question of compensation is touched upon, it becomes clear that the former internees are aware that it has never been the town's responsibility.

In 2005 and 2006, those on both sides who had worked hard for the twinning were awarded decorations, thus showing the importance which is attached to the reconciliation process. Since then it has become increasingly commonplace for people from Jersey and Wurzach to visit each other. Former internees still visit the town, speaking to local school children about their experiences and people from Wurzach visit Jersey to the Liberation Day celebrations, observing that there still remains some resistance to the twinning and reconciliation process.

If the path to twinning was difficult in Bad Wurzach, it was even more so in Biberach. While the Jersey Ex-Internees Association was formed in the 1970s and favored twinning long before it became official policy, the Guernsey Deportees Association was not founded until the first contacts to Biberach had been successfully established in the late 1990s, even though the local townspeople had been tending the graves of former internees since the 1950s.

Local memories were first reawakened in Biberach in 1983, when local students won an award from the Koerber Foundation for their research on National Socialism in Biberach (Blanck et al. 1982). Research had not been easy as the town's archive service kept few files about this subject (E509, 549, 551, 555; Az. 730-61/4), and was worried about local sensitivities. Local people were interviewed, although some conflated details about the Channel Island internees and British officers interned earlier in the war. Others did not want to speak to the students as they were afraid of being accused of having been Nazis. The subject of internment was still a taboo in the town. In the end, most information came from an English publication on the story of the Islanders (Harris 1980). The students' work was eventually published.

It was easier to conduct research on the Nazi period in nearby Bad Wurzach. The work conducted in Biberach was already complete, more time had elapsed since the end of the war, and more files were open for consultation. Help from Jersey was easily available, but research on the Jews of Bergen-Belsen, who arrived in the camp and were cared for by Islanders, was much more difficult. Local people were afraid that the names of Nazi party members would be exposed.

From 1985 there were repeated attempts by a resident of Biberach (Marianne Sikora-Schoeck), whose family had employed an internee during the war, to foster links with Guernsey. It was not until 1997, however, that a group of former deportees and a party from the Guernsey Council of Churches accepted an invitation from the Mayor of Biberach to join a "Reconciliation Week." That led to much publicity in the media both in Germany and the Channel Islands, as have many of the subsequent reconciliation events (Table 12.1). A year later, members of the Guernsey Council of

Table 12.1 Media attention for reconciliation events

Biberach “Reconciliation Week”

Robilliard, N., Biberach: From Oflag VD 55 to internment camp, *Weekender*, July 12, 1997; Guernsey Evening Press, July 17, 1997; Schwäbische Zeitung, July 14, July 16, July 17, July 19, 1997; Schwäbische Zeitung, July 21, 1998

Biberach Friends of Jersey

Schwäbische Zeitung, January 17, 2004

War memorial, Biberach

Kopien des Kulturamts der Stadt Biberach: Ansprachen anlässlich der Erinnerung an die Verstorbenen des Lagers Lindele in der Aussegnungshalle des Biberacher Stadtfriedhofs am Sonntag, September 8, 2002; Schwäbische Zeitung, 9.9.2002; Guernsey Evening Press, September 9, 2002; Medienwerkstatt Biberach e.V.: Guernsey & Biberach, Remembrance and Reconciliation 08.09.2002 (Video Tape)

Guernsey plaque

Schwäbische Zeitung, May 10, May 12, May 14, 2005; INFO, May 11, 2005; Wochenblatt, May 19, 2005; Guernsey Press, May 10, 2005

Linden tree planting, Biberach

Schwäbische Zeitung, May 10, 2005

National Socialism in Biberach exhibition

Schwäbische Zeitung, December 12, December 20, 2006, January 9, 2007; Brunecker, F., 2006, Nationalsozialismus in Biberach; Stuttgarter Zeitung, January 3, 2007

Churches and a group of former deportees revisited the town, leading to the foundation of “Biberach Friends of Guernsey.” They also initiated a war memorial similar to the one at Wurzach Cemetery with all the names of the British PoWs and internees that had not survived imprisonment at Biberach camp; it was erected in Biberach Town Cemetery in 2000 and officially dedicated by a group of former deportees and the Bailiff of Guernsey in 2002. On this occasion, the Town of Biberach and the local Historical Society published a book commemorating the history of Lindele Camp (Adler 2002), and Biberach Museum included some photos and exhibits concerning Lindele Camp as part of the permanent exhibition about Biberach history.

Exchanges between Guernsey and dignitaries and citizens of Biberach continued from this date, even though there has still not yet been any official twinning. On Liberation Day in 2005 in Guernsey, the Mayor of Biberach, Thomas Fettback, gave to the Island a plaque commemorating the people who had been interned in the camp. In the same year, the Biberach Friends of Guernsey, local citizens, and the police training college planted a linden tree in front of the former camp compound in memory of all the deportees and internees that had been liberated from the camp 60 years previously.

Local knowledge of the wartime events in Biberach was enhanced in 2006 by an exhibition on “National Socialism in Biberach” and a bilingual book was published in 2009 on the subject of memories of local Biberach people of the camp, and of former internees about local townsfolk (Maerker 2009). The clock tower of the administration building of the internment camp was taken down for safety reasons in 2010 (Fig. 12.5). This was viewed with sadness by former internees, as the building



Fig. 12.5 Picture of Biberach camp's clock tower, taken down in 2010 (Courtesy Gilly Carr)

was the only remaining feature of the camp that had survived to the present day, and the clock tower, whose timepiece governed their lives, was a key physical feature in their memories. Many former internees and townspeople hope that the tower will be converted into a memorial in the grounds of the former camp, but no decision has been taken at the time of writing.

The history of the camps in both Biberach and Bad Wurzach has now been published (Adler & Guderlei 1984; Adler 2002; Rothenhäusler 2008), with the authors awarded the *Landespreis für Heimatforschung*, the Baden-Württemberg award for research into local history. Research into local Nazi history is still a difficult venture in small towns, and very often is carried out by “outsiders” not born in the town, as they are less likely to be encumbered by personal relationships.

Discussion

Commemorative days related to the World War II have become part of a public ritual in Germany; rituals which are performed by politicians in order to be considered politically correct. The commemoration of internment camps presents just such an opportunity to talk about the difficult years of the Third Reich without touching upon more “delicate” matters, as no one in Biberach or Bad Wurzach can be personally blamed for the deportation of the Channel Islanders. Clearly, memory work in these two towns is easier than in places such as Dachau. Yet the internment of Channel Islanders was part of the two towns’ history, and although it is not a glorious or easy history for local people to celebrate, it is now acknowledged (Jersey Evening Post, April 25, 2005).

Clearly the type and the composition of the prisoners have played a major role in the commemoration process. Unlike many other German PoW camps, those in Biberach and Bad Wurzach were almost entirely filled with people of one nationality who mainly stayed in one camp throughout their internment, enabling them to develop close ties with the town. This can be contrasted to the women’s camp in Liebenau, the third camp in Baden-Württemberg that held Channel Island internees. The Jersey and Guernsey women were only one group among many of the inmates of this camp. In Liebenau, no such distinct memory of the internment developed or was cultivated; here the commemoration relates to the euthanasia of the mentally disabled people who inhabited the schloss before and during the war.

The old ties between individual people in the Channel Islands and in the two German towns were the decisive factors in creating new relationships between the Islands and Germany. The twinning process in Bad Wurzach has also been pivotal in keeping relationships alive, with the schloss at the center of this process. As Sir Philip Bailhache noted on the occasion of the opening of the Blampied exhibition in Bad Wurzach, the former internees have often been at the forefront of those in Jersey who have been most strongly in favor of reconciliation with their former enemy. They have been a powerful force in the twinning process, despite the constant reminder of an unhappy past that it provides. Unlike in Wurzach where it was the other way around, in Biberach research and memorialization came before contacts were renewed with the Channel Islands. Here, the path to reconciliation has taken longer as it lacked the presence or support of the former internees for many years.

These two small towns have taken a long time coming to terms with their past, and in much the same way as the nation as a whole. This period manifested itself locally through several stages, the first of which was characterized by the ambivalent nature of memory in the first decades after the end of the war. In private, friendships between internees and some local people existed, but in public a collective amnesia prevailed. In the 1950s, this attitude made it difficult for the local population to understand the difference between concentration camps and internment camps. The fact that some internees mistakenly remembered SS guards exacerbated the problem. It was easier to simply ignore the subject.

The long period of suppression of memory was followed by indifference, but the next generation had questions about guilt and responsibility. The first attempts to face the past were characterized by public apologies on the German side, with many official gestures and pleas for forgiveness. The frequent visits to Wurzach by former internees made it possible to commemorate events on a personal level and not just with “abstract” victims. This in turn spread awareness to a wider audience and enabled a “normalization” of relationships between local townspeople and those in Jersey in a way that has yet to be fully realized with Biberach and Guernsey.

Efforts are made to continue the commemoration and reconciliation process in both towns today. In Bad Wurzach former internees go to schools to talk to the students about their memories, which is at least as important as the wreath-laying ceremonies and the official speeches. It helps young people to become aware of the human stories that lie behind their history textbooks. Nowadays in both Wurzach and Biberach the memory of the camps is part of the greater commemoration of the atrocities of the Third Reich and the World War II, but it is not seen as a matter of personal responsibility. This contrasts with perceptions which still exist in the Channel Islands, where some still prefer to see it in these terms. Although both towns have now arrived at the same place in the perception of their history, differences can still be discerned among the former internees from Jersey and Guernsey. While local people in Wurzach no longer feel the compulsion to eternally apologize for events of 70 years ago, some former internees from Guernsey still need to hear the words, but this is perhaps understandable, as they have not been making the return journey to Germany for as long as their Jersey cousins. There is an awareness on both sides, in both towns and in both islands, that reconciliation cannot be taken for granted, but that the efforts for memorialization and reconciliation must be continued and that it is human relationships which, in the end, have made the difference.

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