



GRAFENECK MEMORIAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

GRAFENECK – PAST AND PRESENT FROM THE 13TH CENTURY TILL TODAY



1560



1765



1904



1930



1940



2005

Castle Grafeneck has a history stretching back almost a thousand years. Over the centuries, it has undergone remarkable changes. The original medieval fortress was replaced around 1560 by a Renaissance-style hunting lodge for the Dukes of Württemberg. In the mid-Eighteenth Century, Duke Carl Eugen expanded the castle into a luxurious Baroque summer residence.

In the Nineteenth Century, the castle went into decline, and individual buildings were torn down and sold for scrap. The castle itself served as a forestry office until the beginning of the Twentieth Century, when it came into private hands. In 1928 it was acquired by

the Lutheran Samaritan Foundation in Stuttgart, which converted it into a home for invalids and ‘cripples’. In 1939, shortly after the beginning of the Second World War, Grafeneck was expropriated for the ‘purposes of the Reich’. Between January and December 1940, more than 10,600 people were murdered there. The victims came from institutions and homes in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia.



1990



2005

In 1941, once the killings had come to an end, Grafeneck was used for the ‘Kinderlandverschickung’, the evacuation of children from cities targeted by the Allied bombing campaign. After the end of the war it was taken over by the French occupation authority. In 1946/47 it was returned to the Samaritan Foundation.

The pre-war residents of Grafeneck who survived the war were able to move back into the castle. Since then, Grafeneck has been used by the Foundation as a home and workplace for people with physical disabilities and mental illnesses. The first signs of commemoration of the ‘euthanasia’ murders begin to appear in

the 1950s and 60s: urns containing the ashes of victims found at the site were placed in two large graves in the cemetery, and marked with a memorial cross. The first plaque acknowledging the crimes of 1940 was placed on the cemetery in 1982. In 1990, under the motto, ‘Memory needs a place’, a chapel was built as a dedicated site of memory. The essential complement, a ‘site of information’, was added in October 2005, in the form of the Grafeneck Memorial Documentation Centre.

GRAFENECK MEMORIAL

Today, Grafeneck is home to a memorial that commemorates the 10,654 victims of Nazi ‘euthanasia’ in south-west Germany. For thousands of people, Grafeneck thus represents a place of individual mourning and collective remembrance.

The memorial is also a site for research and documentation. Historical materials relating to the site and the crimes committed here are stored in an archive on-site, and made accessible to the public by means of publications, lectures, readings and workshops, as well as a travelling exhibition and, above all, the Documentation Centre, which opened in 2005. The memorial is run by the Grafeneck Memorial Society (founded in 1994) in close co-operation with the Nürtingen and Grafeneck chapters of the Samaritan Foundation.

Grafeneck has a third function as a centre for learning and civic education, focusing specifically on history and politics. Here, visitors learn about the historical background of the ideas and mechanisms that ultimately led to the crimes of 1940. Every year, Grafeneck receives a large number of visitors of all ages, from Germany and abroad.

The memorial at Grafeneck has a public and humanitarian mission to provide information and support to cities and municipalities as well as to courts in matters relating to compensation and inheritance. As public awareness of the Nazis’ crimes against people with cognitive disabilities and mental illnesses continues to grow, so does the number of visitors who come to Grafeneck for information and advice, including the relatives and descendants of the victims of 1940.

For decades after the war, the memory of Nazi ‘euthanasia’ was marked by silence, repression, and denial. This is only now beginning to change. Hence, in years to come, the memorial will continue its task of collecting, preserving, documenting and providing access to the events of 1940, as well as working with the relatives of the victims and communicating their memory to visitors. This goes beyond merely providing information about the historical facts of these events: it means facilitating a critical engagement with them.

Current debates about bioethics, assisted suicide, political extremism, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia reveal the urgent need for such a critical engagement with the ideas and practices that led to the murder of 10,654 people at Grafeneck. Despite, or perhaps rather because of its focus on the historical context of Nazi ‘euthanasia’, the work of the memorial is directed toward the future: it emphasizes

the importance of democracy and of the democratic principles of human dignity and human rights, and seeks to promote democratic consciousness. In this way, the memorial and the documentation centre stand at the intersection of commemoration, civic education, research and interpersonal relations.

Grafeneck is not only the principal memorial for the victims of Nazi ‘euthanasia’ in Baden-Württemberg, but also a modern care facility, run by the Samaritan Foundation, for people with cognitive disabilities and mental illnesses. The co-existence of these two functions makes Grafeneck a truly unique place.

GRAFENECK, 1940

A male nurse describes the murders from his perspective:

‘As they walked or were carried into the gas chamber, the patients were counted again, whereupon the door and the ventilation window were closed. Then the doctor would turn on the gas from an adjacent room. The nursing staff’s role consisted exclusively in getting the patients into the gas chamber. The only person who turned the gas on was the doctor. [...]

Initially, the gas chamber could accommodate 30 to 40 persons at a time. Later it was expanded, meaning that the wall was moved to incorporate part of the so-called cloakroom. The new gas chamber could accommodate an entire transport, in other words about 75 persons. I don’t know how long the doctor kept the gas running or how long he left it to take effect. [...]

Opening the door and turning on the ventilation was done by one of the nurses who were in charge of locking the inner door. The doctor would give the order to open the door and turn on the ventilation after half an hour, or perhaps an hour—I can’t remember exactly. Just like the other nurses, I had been assigned to this task. At first, the doctor would open the door himself, wearing a gas mask. Later, we would just hold our breath when we opened the door and then move quickly away.

At the same time, the ventilation would be turned on remotely. Quite often the crematorium staff would be the ones who opened the door. The gas chamber door would be left open for a period of time until it was aired out. I’m not sure if it was an hour or two hours.’



Deportation: The red postbuses were painted grey and repurposed to transport patients to Grafeneck

Patients were taken to this building upon arrival and gassed with carbon monoxide

The gas chamber was officially referred to as the ‘shower room’

THE GRAFENECK MEMORIAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Room I-Grafeneck, 1940: History

The Documentation Centre houses a permanent exhibition, the memorial office, as well as an archive and library. The first room of the exhibition documents the events of 1940. Grafeneck was one of the first sites of systematic and industrialised murder of human beings in Nazi Germany and thus stands at the beginning of a monstrous programme of crimes against humanity.

The murders at Grafeneck began on 18 January, 1940, and continued until December of that year, by which time over 10,600 people had been killed. The killers employed a stationary gas chamber, which was installed in a pre-existing building on the castle grounds. Despite the euphemistic terminology—‘euthanasia’ and ‘mercy killing’—used by the Nazis, this process can only be described as ‘industrialised’ mass murder. The victims belonged to a group which, since at least the end of the nineteenth century, had been considered ‘doubly inferior’. They were seen as a threat and a burden to the healthy ‘body politic’ (Volkskörper). The State argued on eugenic and economic grounds that the lives of people with cognitive disabilities and mental illnesses were not ‘worth living’, which in turn meant that their very right to live was also called into question. Only those

patients who were able to work were allowed to remain at the clinics and psychiatric institutions; the rest were deported and killed. The killings at Grafeneck came to an end in December 1940, and this is also where the first room of the exhibition ends.

The killings were stopped once it became impossible to keep them a secret, and in the face of growing protests from the church, the victims’ relatives, institutions, and from within the National Socialist party itself. At the same time, the fact that the staff at Grafeneck were transferred to another killing centre, Hadamar in Hessen, also indicates that the T4-administration had achieved their goals in south-west Germany. Once the centralised phase of the ‘euthanasia’ programme was over, the perpetrators from Grafeneck were reassigned to extermination camps in the east such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and Belzec. Grafeneck thus marks the first step along the path that led to the Holocaust.



THE GRAFENECK MEMORIAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

Room II-Grafeneck, 1940: Memory

In addition to the historical perspective on the victims and perpetrators, the ideas and mechanisms that made these crimes possible, the exhibition also looks at the period after 1945. How did society respond to these crimes? What was the role of the press and the legal system in coming to terms with these events? And how does the memory of this terrible time in German history find a place in the broader commemorative discourse in Baden-Württemberg? The exhibition also considers the parameters and preconditions for such commemorative work.

A decisive point in this process was the restitution of Grafeneck to the Samaritan Foundation in 1947. Since then, Grafeneck has once again been a home for the disabled and mentally ill. In 1946, the Foundation published its first annual report after the war, which frankly refers to Grafeneck as an 'extermination camp'. Shortly thereafter, the legal proceedings against those responsible began, though in fact only a fraction of the perpetrators were prosecuted and sentenced at the 1949 trials in Tübingen and Freiburg. With the founding of the new German Federal Republic, interest in pursuing the crimes of Nazi 'euthanasia' declined sharply. There are only a few reports from this period that deal explicitly with the 'euthanasia' programme, mostly in

the form of apologies or justifications. In 1965, the structure containing the gas chamber was torn down. At the same time, a small memorial was added to the on-site cemetery. The 1970s witnessed the first attempts to break the decades-long silence surrounding the memory of Nazi 'euthanasia', and finally in 1990 the Grafeneck memorial was built. A commemorative book at the memorial lists the names of over 9,600 victims. More are still being added. The exhibition also points to other sites and memorials that work closely with Grafeneck, and which play an important role in preserving and promoting the collective memory of Nazi 'euthanasia'. These are to be found in the towns, clinics, and institutions that were home to the victims before they were deported to Grafeneck. The final section of the exhibition describes the memorial's present-day work.

Grafeneck continues to be a site of commemoration and mourning, but also of documentation, research and education. The site has also become an important point of contact for associations, societies and municipalities, for lawyers and researchers, and of course for relatives and descendants of the victims.



THE GRAFENECK MEMORIAL

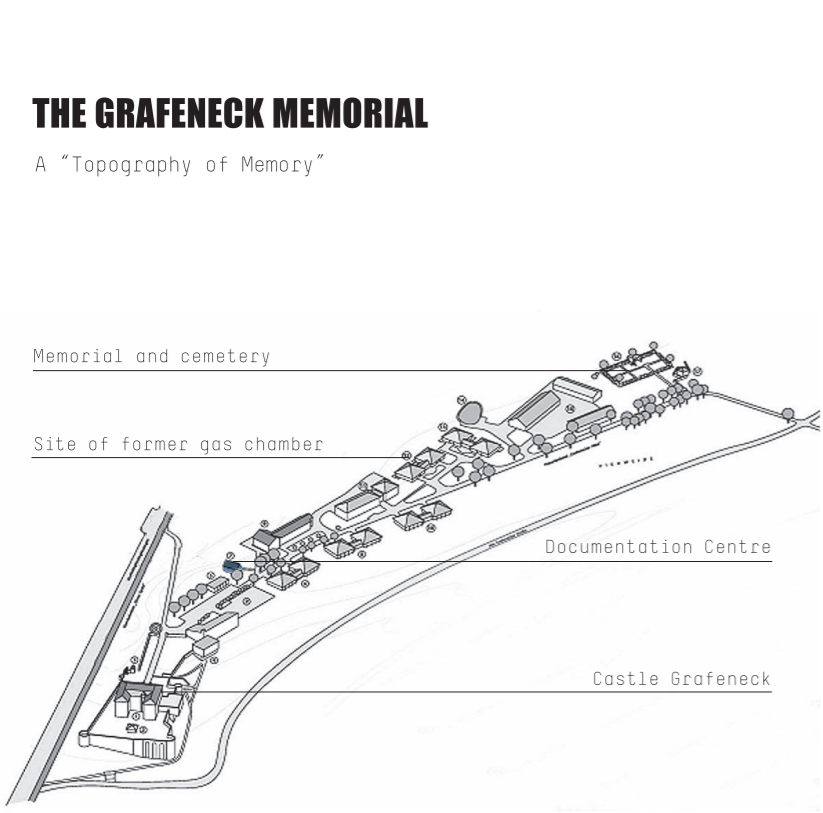
A “Topography of Memory”

Memorial and cemetery

Site of former gas chamber

Documentation Centre

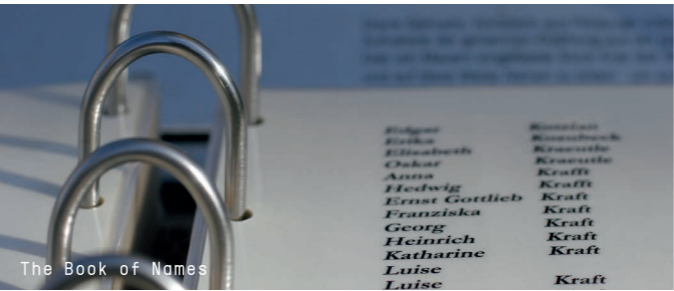
Castle Grafeneck



Memorial chapel (1990) and book of names (1998)



Alphabet Garden near the memorial



The Book of Names



The cemetery with the first memorial (1962)



Stone slab marking the memorial entrance

FURTHER READING

In German:

Grafeneck 1940 „Wohin bringt Ihr uns?“ NS-„Euthanasie“ im deutschen Südwesten. **Geschichte - Quellen - Arbeitsblätter. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart 2012.**

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Rößner, Franka. ‘Im Dienste der Schwachen’: Die Samariterstiftung zwischen Zustimmung, Kompromiss und Protest 1930-1950. **Nürtingen: Senner- Druck, 2011.**

Stöckle, Thomas. Grafeneck 1940. Die Euthanasie-Verbrechen in Südwestdeutschland. 2002. 3rd ed. **Tübingen: Silberburg, 2012.**

In English:

Burleigh, Michael. Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany, 1900-1945. **Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.**

Foth, Thomas. Caring and Killing: Nursing and Psychiatric Practice in Germany, 1931-1943. **Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Osnabrück, 2013.**

Friedlander, Henry. The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution. **Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.**

Knittel, Susanne C. The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory. **New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.**

VISITOR SERVICES

- The Memorial and Documentation Centre are open daily, all year round
- Guided tours and seminars (registration required)
- Travelling exhibition and lectures (on request)

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CREDITS

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GRAFENECK IST SEIT 1929 EIN
BEHINDERTENHAIM DER SAMARITERST
DIESER FRIEDHOF WURDE 1930 FÜR DAS HEIM AN
1939 BESCHLAGNAHMEN DIE NATIONALSOZI