

## „Injustice remains injustice“

### Stumbling stones for Adolf Goldwein and 17 other Meimbress Jews

By Dorina Binienda-Beer



An office chair with a sad history: Friedhelm Dilcher still cherishes the gift from Jewish merchant and neighbour Adolf Goldwein to his grandfather Karl Dilcher 85 years ago. Photo: Dorina Binienda-Beer

**Meimbressen.** The 1930s: for 70 Jewish people, Meimbressen meant home first and foremost. They live in 17 families scattered across the village of 600 souls, side by side with their Christian neighbours. Meimbressen was called „Little Jerusalem“ at the time. But the Nazi seizure of power changed everything. A few emigrate early, most still hope that things will not be so bad. But things turned out worse than they could have imagined. The majority of the Meimbressen Jews die a horrific death under the Nazi regime. Those who managed to avoid deportation left their belongings behind

and fled to a distant country with an uncertain future. None of the survivors returned to Meimbressen for good. The young association „Judaica in Meimbressen e.V.“ wants to remember their names and fates - with 18 more stumbling blocks. The first two were laid in 2019 on the initiative of the history association.

Several of the small brass plaques, which are currently being set into the pavement in front of the former homes of Meimbressen Jews, were financed thanks to donors.

Adolf Goldwein (born in 1891) is one of those commemorated in this way. This name has been familiar to Friedhelm Dilcher, 71, a master carpenter from Meimbressen, since childhood. „Der Schlaumes“, as Adolf Goldwein was called by his fellow citizens at the time for reasons unknown today, not only lived just around the corner. He and Dilcher's grandfather Karl kept in close contact, both in business and in private. Little Friedhelm pricked up his ears at an early age when, after the war, he and the other local Jews were often talked about at the carpenter family's kitchen table. There were many anecdotes about life together in the village.

Decades later, donating a stumbling block for the „Schlaumes“ immediately came to Dilcher's mind when the Judaica Association announced its planned memorial campaign. Anyone who asks him what is on his mind so many decades after the dramatic events of that time will get the following answer from Dilcher: *„Injustice remains injustice.“* The Jews were an integral part of the village community until the horror also befell Meimbressen. *„And I am a part of Meimbressen.“* The head of the village, who is also generally interested in history, feels touched by the suffering of the victims of the Nazis and feels a responsibility to keep the memory of them and what happened alive in his home village. Not everyone likes that. Dilcher counters reproachful statements such as *„It's not my fault“* with: *„Be glad that you don't have to bear this guilt.“*

Even his own family could not avoid the question of guilt. As an 18-year-old man, Dilcher's father Erich was forced to obey the SA's destructive orders to the HJ (d.i. Hitler Youth) during the pogrom against his fellow Jews. He hit the wooden shutters of the Jewish neighbour's house with a truncheon. He later confessed to the offence and testified as a witness in a court case after the war. The fact that his father 'didn't hurt anyone and didn't break any windows' is at least reassuring for Dilcher. His conclusion about the atrocities in Meimbressen: You can only learn lessons if you face up to your own history, however painful that may be.

Adolf Goldwein, a close acquaintance of his grandfather, was one of the Jews from Meimbressen who survived the Holocaust. Together with his wife Bertha and their two children, he managed to flee to the USA in 1939. Before his forced departure from Meimbressen, the Jewish neighbour gave wood turner Karl Dilcher a gift: his desk chair. The family cherishes it to this day. The Dilchers never heard from Adolf Goldwein and his wife again.

DATE: Stumbling stone laying event in Meimbressen, Tuesday, 17 September, 10 a.m. in the village community centre, followed by a solemn commemoration at the places where the stones were laid.

## BACKGROUND

### **Survived, but in economic hardship**

The cattle dealer Adolf Goldwein and his wife Bertha also ran a grocery shop in Meimbressen. The family lived and worked below the Kirchberg. After the November pogrom of 1938, Adolf Goldwein was among the group of Jewish men who were arrested. He was imprisoned in Buchenwald concentration camp until 10 December 1938, but was released after showing his front-line combatant's licence. The couple managed to flee to the USA with their two children in 1939. There, the former cattle dealer was unable to find work for years and therefore had no income. He later took on the physically demanding work of a leather sorter, but the family's economic situation remained precarious. Adolf Goldwein died in New York in 1954 at the age of 63; his wife Bertha survived him by 13 years. (pbb)