

Official presentation of memorial metal bands on Platform 2 of the train station in Treysa

A special commemoration ceremony took place on Wednesday, 9 November 2022, at the train station in Treysa: the official presentation of metal bands mounted above the handrails of the stairs leading to Platforms 2 and 3 featuring the names of all 53 Jews from the Schwalm region who had been deported from Platform 2. Further information about the deportation of Jews in 1942 and biographies of the 53 people concerned here are available on the homepage of the town of Schwalmstadt and via QR code. The event was organized and carried out by the Commemoration Committee (“Arbeitskreis Gedenken“) in cooperation with the town of Schwalmstadt, mayor Stefan Pinhard, and students of the high school in Treysa (“Schwalmgymnasium Treysa“). Introductory speeches were given by representatives of local and regional politics, among them members of the Hessian state parliament Wiebke Knell (FDP, Free Democratic Party) and Heidemarie Scheuch-Paschkewitz (Die Linke, The Left) as well as the leading representative of the Schwalm-Eder County Parliament, Jürgen Kaufmann (SPD, Social Democratic Party). Jürgen Junker spoke in representation of the Commemoration Committee and gave insights into the historical background and presented the biographies of some of the Jewish citizens who had been deported. Special guests had arrived from England: three daughters of Hans-Joachim Spier, a citizen of Treysa whose life was saved by taking part in a Kindertransport (enabling children to leave Germany) to England, made possible by an orphanage in Frankfurt in 1939, when Spier was 11 years old. Sally Cunningham and her sisters Margaret Brewer and Paula Bradbury contributed to the event by giving a speech about their own history. This was a matter of the heart for them, as was the discussion session with youngsters from the local high school following the ceremony.

At the stairs leading to Platform 2 students from the local high school in Treysa read out the names of the 53 Jewish men, women and children who had been deported from here, followed by a musical performance. Reverend Dieter Schindelman shared a moving devotion in commemoration, after which the ceremony ended with the Jewish lament of the dead, *Al male rachamim* (G'd full of mercy), sung by Cantor Jakow Axenrod from Kassel.

On the development of the commemoration project

The Arbeitskreis Gedenken (Commemoration Committee) consists of a group of citizens of the town of Schwalmstadt. Members are Reverend Dieter Schindelman (Franz von Roques Protestant parish), Dr. Hans-Joachim Zeiss (Committee on the History of the Town of Schwalmstadt), Bernd Lindenthal (retired teacher at the local high school), Hans Gerstmann (retired teacher at Carl Bantzer School in Ziegenhain), Jürgen Junker (retired teacher, curator of the exhibition *Lifelines – Rescued Children from the Schwalm Region*), and Karin Brandes (Memorial and Museum Trutzhain), all of whom had accepted the invitation of Karin Brandes to meet and develop a concept for a memorial ceremony at the train station in Treysa in commemoration of the Jewish population and the deportation of the last Jews from the

Schwalm region in 1942, to be presented to the German Railway (Deutsche Bahn) and the magistrate and mayor of the town of Schwalmstadt, Stefan Pinhard.

The deportation measures took place on 31 May and 6 September 1942, both days Sundays, from Platform 2 of the train station in Treysa and led via Kassel to Nazi concentration and extermination camps. The deportation of Jews meant the end of more than 400 eventful years in the history of Jewish life in the region of the Schwalm. So far there had been no public commemoration of the deportation and the fates of those involved.

The wish for an appropriate means of commemorating the deportation of Jews from the station in Treysa in 1942 had been expressed long before the Commemoration Committee was founded. Among others, Hans Joachim Spier, born in Treysa, contacted former mayor Gerd-Friedrich Huck on 18 September 1989 from England. “Jack“ Spier had survived the holocaust in England. His parents, Willi and Rosel Spier, and his grandmother, Jeanette Spier, had been deported on 6 September 1942 from the station in Treysa and murdered in concentration camps. Now, 80 years later, Jack Spier’s three daughters from England were able to take part in the commemoration ceremony.

The Commemoration Committee quickly reached an agreement on the conception of the ceremony. They planned “memorial bands“, strips of metal mounted along the stairs leading to Platform 2, featuring the names, ages, and places of residence of the Jewish men, women, and children deported from there. The idea of these metal memorial bands was inspired by similar memorial bands at the main station in Marburg, where it was agreed that Schwalmstadt could plan accordingly.

Requests for support placed to the German Railway and the magistrate and mayor of Schwalmstadt, Stefan Pinhard, were readily granted, for example by a unanimous vote of the magistrate in February 2020. Donations also made the financial realization of the project possible.

Structural modifications to the station in Treysa between 2019 and 2022 made the final realization of the project possible, and on 9 November 2021 the presentation of the memorial bands to the public finally took place with the participation of students from the local high school (Schwalmgymnasium) with their teachers, Astrid Meschede and Dr. Stefanie Sievers.

Jürgen Junker for the “Remembrance Working Group”