Visit to Werben Spreewald 2013

by Janet & Andrew Kollosché

The start of our Heritage Tour: We met our guide, Uwe Porten in Berlin to begin the three day Spreewald personal family history tour.

Fritz Kollosche: That morning Uwe took us to the Charlottenburg memorial where the names for those who were shot or imprisoned and beaten, protesting against Nazis Facisism in the early 1930's. On the plaque is the name of Fritz Kollosche a pre World War II casualty. Fritz was arrested, brutally beaten and died as a result. It took some searching to find the memorial which is attached to the front of a building now used as a local youth club.

In the afternoon we met 86 year old Mrs Eva Gumpel and her husband Gunter. Eva's mother was Luci Margare Auguste Kollosche, sister of Fritz and a very distant relative. I gave Mrs Gumpel the latest copy of the family tree chart and a toy Kangaroo as a token of our friendship. The Gumpels have been married for 65 years and have lived in East Berlin in the same unit for 49 years, they have many great grand children. Mrs Gumpel gave me a very good copy of a photo of Fritz with the other members of the Red Support group.

Village of Burg: Leaving Eva and Gunter we travelled to the quaint township of Burg, making it our base to travel around the Spreewald area. Burg is only 2km from Werben and 20 from Cottsbus the regional center, and 160km to Bauzten, capital city of upper and lower Lusatia. The Hotel we stayed in displayed many museum quality artefacts from the Sorb culture and was immaculately maintained. We enjoyed the local food and wines each evening, let's not forget the beer.

Ancestral home of the Kollosche family: On the following day Uwe took us to Werben, my great-great grandfathers home town, and to the townships of Cottsbus, Zahsow, Dahalitz, Kunersdorf, Papitz, Muschen, Brahmow all local villages where Kollosche's once lived. The last Kollosche died in Werben back in 1933, he and his wife only had surviving daughters, no surname has been passed on.

There may be relatives still living in Werben, descendants of Christian's daughters, but German privacy laws for obtaining birth, records are not available before 100 years of the current date, makes it very hard to trace female family members.

We visited Werben cemetery and noticed that all the headstones were very modern. As the grave sites are leased for a 20 year period, there was no sign of any old headstones dating back to the 1800's. Except for the von Schondfeldt family plot.

The home of George Kollosche: Uwe had previously attempted to locate property records for George's cottage, unfortunately these records do not exist. Many new houses have been built in the township over the last 40 years, most now incorporate the older red brick buildings as part of their homes, as garages or sheds and depicts a rich blend of styles. The township is a charming village very well maintained.

Even the home of the von Schonfeldt family, the German landlords of Werben, was demolished, all property and lands seized by the Communist East German government in 1945. It would appear they were not able to show what land and buildings they owned after reunification of East and West Germany and have lost much of their property. They had very strong feelings about this matter, while visiting the Werben cemetery we came across a recent (2001) von Schonfeld headstone stating "1945 Werben enteignet", meaning expropriated (striped).

Werben Lutheran Church : While waiting for the church warden to arrive so we could view the inside of the Werben Lutheran Church, I wandered around a few blocks of the village taking photos. The church construction started in 1346, and is

quite large, with a two tiered balcony on each side and pipe organ opposite the alter. On the right side of the alter is a special room with a glass windows for the von Shonfeldt family to sit for the service. Hanging from the decorated ceiling to one side of the alter was a brightly painted wooden baptismal angel in which a bowel with the baptismal water is placed in its hand. I was surprise to see the church bells are now controlled by electronic timer to chime on the hour, between 6am and 10pm. The church also services the villages of Muschen, Ruben and Brahmow.

Sorbish Life: The next day we drove to Batuzen and visited the Sorbish Museum. We spent three hours there, perhaps more than we should have and missed out on visiting the Sorb open-air museum in Lehde. There were many examples of early Sorbish life, farm implements, displays of period costume and decoration, living areas and construction techniques. Sadly, the Museum has not produced a book about its history or contents.

The Burg hotel had many photos along their corridor walls of the Spreewald area dating back 100 years or more, which were of great interest. Just before leaving I purchased a book about Spreewald, of course it is written in German, but the photos are very good and a memento of our visit.