

MARBACH AM NECKAR – SCHILLER'S TOWN

People generally refer to Marbach am Neckar as Schiller's town, and rightly so. Wherever you go in the town, you are reminded that this great writer was born here on 10 November 1759. On closer inspection, however, this honorary title is not quite sufficient, for there was a Marbach before Schiller, too, and Marbach's illustrious son cannot be made answerable for everything.

Present-day Marbach is a bustling little town on the edge of the Stuttgart conurbation. Although it is only half an hour from the centre of Stuttgart by commuter train, the town has guarded its independence and has by no means the appearance of some characterless suburb. Its population has grown steadily in recent years and today, together with Rielingshausen and Siegelhausen, totals 13,500. Of its working population, some 2,160 work in Marbach, and these are joined by roughly 1,830 people who commute to Marbach. By contrast, just over 3,700 of Marbach's inhabitants commute from Marbach to work in other towns. The agricultural sector has declined markedly, with the exception of the hamlet of Siegelhausen (incorporated into Marbach in 1828 at the request of its inhabitants), which is still exclusively agricultural in character. The fields around Marbach are being tilled by fewer and fewer farmers, most of whom have moved to re-sited farms outside town.

For the towns and villages in the vicinity, Marbach, which has been part of the Ludwigsburg administrative district since 1938, is above all important for its schools. With the exception of its primary school, the majority of pupils attending the various Marbach schools – the Uhlandschule (special school), the Tobias-Mayer-Hauptschule (secondary school), the Anne-Frank-Realschule (secondary modern school) and the Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium (grammar school) – come from outside Marbach. Nearly all these schools are located in a school centre on the south-eastern edge of town. Here you will also find the municipal sports facilities, including the Leiselstein Stadium, the Karl Nusser Gymnasium and the sports hall. Other facilities whose importance reaches beyond Marbach's boundaries include the district court, the county hospital and the Lutheran dean's office.

Even the earliest municipal seal of 1301, from pre-Württemberg times, includes a vine-garlanded tower. This motive, which the Württemberg authorities kept, alludes to Marbach's viticulture. A lot of wine is still grown in Marbach over an area of slightly more than 18 hectares, and many of the town's typical wine cellars have been preserved. The old winepress in the town centre was demolished in 1971, but the vintner's cooperative had already erected a new building on the southern edge of town in 1970, where the grapes are delivered every autumn, where wine is sold and where popular wine-tasting evenings are organized.

Of course, Marbach completely owes its wider importance to Friedrich Schiller. Schiller's birthplace in Niklastorstrasse was identified in 1812, and since that time has attracted admirers of the writer from all over the world. In 1859, it came into the possession of the Marbach Schiller Association, and since then has been completely converted several times, most recently in 1994/95. As scarcely anything has been preserved from the original household of the Schiller family, the showcases in Schiller's birthplace contain mementoes from every phase of the writer's life, while his literary legacy is the responsibility of the National Schiller Museum on Schillerhöhe. In 1876, this small park saw the unveiling of the Schiller memorial, designed by Ernst Rau. Marbach's citizens had waited forty years for this memorial, which could only be erected after Emperor Wilhelm I had ordered that 32 hundredweight of bronze from French cannon be delivered so that it could be cast. The museum, which was opened in 1903, was deliberately given an exterior reminiscent of the palaces built by Schiller's Duke Karl Eugen. It has to be said, however, that its palatial character corresponds more with the ideas of the writer-prince Schiller, and less with the educational motives of today's museum directors. However, interesting exhibitions and intensive public relations work on Schillerhöhe counteract this anomaly. Next to the museum stands the Deutsches Literaturarchiv (German Literary Archive), founded in 1955 as a central archive for the manuscripts, drafts, letters, dairies, etc. of German authors since 1700; a task which has been assumed by national libraries in other countries. This research institute is highly regarded throughout the world, and researchers come here from many countries in order to exploit the treasures Marbach has collected. Both the Museum and the Archive are run by the German Schiller Society, which grew out of the Swabian Schiller Association in 1946. Its buildings on Schillerhöhe are complemented by the new Collegienhaus, a hall of residence built between 1991 and 1993 for researchers using Marbach's archive. Above all, the aim was to provide students and postgraduates with affordable accommodation. Even the civic hall, which is also on Schillerhöhe, has something to do with Schiller. It was built by the town in the 1950s in order to provide a suitable venue for Schiller's 200th anniversary celebrations in 1959.

At the other end of the town, the late Gothic St. Alexander's Church also has its connection with Schiller. In its tower there hangs the bell financed by money collected by the German colony in Moscow in 1858, which they wanted hung in the Marbach belfry as their contribution to Schiller's 100th anniversary celebrations. Even today, it is still rung at 7 and 11 a.m. on Schiller's birthday (and, of course, whenever there are services). Apart from that, St. Alexander's is

the town's only public building to have survived the great fire of 1693 without any appreciable damage, because it was situated outside the town walls. Both this location and a number of other clues would suggest that the settlement of Marbach was originally sited around St. Alexander's, and re-sited at its subsequent location in the Middle Ages. The visitor can only comprehend the beauty of this church once he has stepped inside. A high, light choir rises up to the east, its ribbed vaults joined together by keystones, some of which bear the coat of arms of the counts of Wurttemberg, of their master builder Abalone Org and of Marbach. From this, it would appear that it was Abalone Org who supervised the start of work on the choir in 1450. The nave is constructed with a high central nave with aisles on either side, has a far more elaborate, but lower net vault than the choir, and is always bathed in a certain dim light. After the Reformation of 1534, only the pulpit remained of the church's once rich trappings. This pulpit, completed shortly before 1500, is in every respect a sermon made stone.

There is evidence of two predecessor churches on the same site, the first of which reaches back to 972, the year in which Marbach was first mentioned in any document. Of course, the settlement is older. Even the Romans settled here, leaving so many monuments behind them that Simon Studion, the schoolmaster at the local Lateinshule (grammar school) who excavated them in around 1580, was able to go down in history as the father or archaeology in Wurttemberg. Ever since Count Eberhard the Illustrious purchased Marbach from the impecunious Dukes of Teck in 1302, the town has shared the fate of the Wurttemberg domain. In particular, the Reformation was introduced in 1534 and, in 1693, in the Palatinate War of Succession, the town was put to the torch by French troops and almost razed to the ground.

Marbach's castle also fell victim to the flames. Three pictures of the castle exist, and show a simple rectangular building, with a roof ridge running parallel to the town wall. Reconstruction was originally planned but then abandoned when, only eleven years later, Duke Eberhard Ludwig began building a new residence only eight kilometres away in Ludwigsburg. This was a blow for Marbach, and had far-reaching negative repercussions for the town. The castle site was never redeveloped, and when development was finally planned in the 1970's, preservationists first wanted to check whether there were not some remains of the castle left after all. For Marbach, their findings were sensational, for they discovered the foundations of a late Mediaeval castle whose existence had hitherto been a secret. The archaeologists were particularly impressed by the foundations of a mighty keep. It is meanwhile assumed that its location in the south-east corner of the walled town – precisely where the town was most vulnerable to attack – has to be seen in immediate relation to the re-siting of the town at its present location. As the town council wished to do the everything possible to fill the old town centre with life, the remains of the walls were carefully restored and the whole ensemble given a new lease of life as a town-centre festival venue. On the one hand, its historical significance is still apparent, but on the other, it can be used for events of all kinds during the warm months of the year.

In other areas, too much has been done in recent years to give the old town centre new splendour. St. Wendelin's Chapel, used for profane purposes since the Reformation, was renovated and is now open to the public as a book shop and art gallery. The town hall, built seventy years after the fire of 1693, was also renovated, and the work allowed remains of the former market hall to be restored to form a foyer. The town council's assembly room was moved into the newly created citizens' hall in the attic storey, and councillors now make their decisions under the exposed, mighty beams.

The birthplace of Tobias Mayer, the astronomer and cartographer, is also one of the buildings in the old town centre that has been thoroughly restored. Although the family left Marbach two years after he was born (1725), he always stressed that he had been born in Marbach. After finishing his training as a cartographer he acquired such a wide knowledge of surveying that, even without a university education, he was appointed profession in Gottingen in 1751. The first reliable moon charts can be traced back to him, and after his premature death in 1762, his widow received part of the money set aside by the British Admiralty as a prize for an improved method of reading longitude on the high seas. Since 1995, the house has been in the possession of the enterprising Tobias Mayer Society, which has set up a small museum on the ground floor.

Elsewhere in the old town centre in recent years, many house owners have played their part in making the sight of the houses and alleyways a delight for Marbach's inhabitants and visitors alike.

This being the case, it does not seem such a great loss that industrialization has largely passed Marbach by. There are three power stations down by the Neckar, one of which is itself now a historic monument, but apart from them there are not many modern factories to be seen. Nor did the canalization of the Neckar, fifty years ago, provide the town with the hoped-for benefits. The rowing club benefits most from it, as it provides ideal rowing conditions. And visitors can now come to Marbach by boat, an opportunity that is made good use of in the summer months. By contrast, the narrow gauge railway through the Bottwar Valley to Heilbronn was closed in 1966, and replaced by a bus service. In the opposite direction, the rail connection with Stuttgart has been considerably improved since 1980,

when the commuter railway went into operation. This train service has made the words of a charming old lady come true, who said: "The best thing about Stuttgart is Marbach". Translation: Philip Mann