

BREMKE RE-VISITED — OR : 51 YEARS ON

It took a few minutes after our bus entered the yard of Gasthaus Jütte before I realised what it was which had been missing at Friedland and which I had been looking forward to. It was Bremke that was the significant milestone in the experience of IVSP Relief Unit 4. The part the team and the workcamp played at Friedland was apparently irrelevant in the modern Friedland story. I spoke to the guide at the ramp at the start. The origins at the farm over the railway were known but of no interest. For the rest, a wheelchair was no place to catch up on his tour - but the Nissen hut said it all: workcampers would see no resemblance to our work in the sanitised Museum that is Friedland now.

Several friends at the Conference commented on the seeming contradiction that this group of anti-war volunteers were there because the British Army fed, clothed, housed and provided transport - everything but pocketmoney! They also commandeered Gasthaus Jütte for our base, ideal for its proximity to the Zone frontier crossing points at Vogelsang and Besenhausen, the station at Friedland and Göttingen. (One reason for this last was that Col. Perkins, the British Military Government Officer in charge of Kreis Göttingen was bi-lingual in English and German and had known Mutter Jütte well in pre-war years). For us it couldn't have been better for our introduction to working with Germans.

A village inn that had been in the family for generations, it had an atmosphere we felt immediately, summed up in the phrase 'Mutter Jütte's'. It was possibly reassuring that in the group of twelve, three were female (one of whom had her husband in the team with her). Daughter of Mutter Jütte Margaret with her command of English, aided by brother Gustav (Fritz, who took part in several workcamps returned while we were there from POW camp and acting as interpreter for the British) helped organise a routine where the family undertook all domestic duties and the Team were able to devote themselves to their new tasks.

It was very welcome to come back to what was nearly a home from home after days dealing with the problems arising from the influx of thousands of German refugees from Poland, mainly female and children, carrying all their worldly goods in every kind of bundle and handcart. The deteriorating weather of autumn and winter 1945 added to what was a depressing, often harrowing, scene.

We relished the opportunity of making contacts with Bremke villagers, notably the Holtermann family. Anneliese gradually identified herself with the team, and served in many capacities, including Friedland workcamp, where brothers Horst and Dieter took part. She was also very much involved with the development of the German Branch of SCI.

Team activities included entertaining the village children to a Christmas party (one local ex-member of Hitler Youth could not see the point of having a committee to organise the party, when people could just have been told what they were to do!), and a football game when the local policeman's boot unintentionally put me out of action for a month.

We were already aware of the long association the Inn had with the University, and Göttingen was the venue for the contacts with the students, already involved with helping the refugees, and for negotiations with the authorities. But the decision to embark on an IVSP workcamp was taken at a team meeting in the dining room where we had our meal on 18/10/96.

During the intervening years members of the team, with their families, enjoyed the continuing friendship and hospitality of the Jütte family, and the invitation to David and me to spend a few days (recuperating?) after the Hannover weekend was no surprise. Our only regret was that Margaret, whom we had hoped to greet again, died a month before.

Fred Pitkeathly, Nov. '96