STATIONS OF REMEMBRANCE

In the footsteps of Gangelt's former Jewish citizens

By Ingrid Heim

Jewish life in Gangelt can be traced back to 1654.

At the beginning of 1933, there were 12 Jewish households here with a total of 45 Jewish people, including two Jewish women who had married non-Jewish men.

The roots of all families can be traced back – based on documents - to the beginning of the 19th century – and in some cases even earlier. (The heads of households were men, but women also worked in businesses.)

Five of them were merchants with their own shops: Falkenstein (tobacco and leather goods), Hertz-Memler (furs), Hartog (housewares), Josephs (textiles) and Morgenstern (tobacco goods). Six others were in lifestock trade: Lichtenstein (small lifestock trader), Hertz (two lifestock/horse traders), Rosendahl (two horse traders) and Leopold (cattle dealer with his own slaughterhouse and butcher shop). Their income must have made a considerable contribution to the prosperity of the community.

Stumbling stones (Stolpersteine) have been laid at 10 stations. An asterisk (*) indicates this. Historical street names and house numbers have been replaced with current ones.

STATIONS OF REMEMBRANCE

STATION 1

TOWN HALL,
BURGSTRASSE 10

The memorial plaque above the outer staircase of the town hall was unveiled on November 9, 1991, in the presence of two Holocaust survivors: Helmut Rosendahl and Ernest Hartog. It commemorates the victims of Nazi terror in Gangelt including Jewish fellow citizens who first lost their civil rights, then livelihoods, and finally their homeland. Many of them were murdered. It also remembers the female patients of Maria Hilf Hospital who, because of intellectual or physical disabilities. were taken from here to killing institutions as part of the Nazi "euthanasia" murders.

STATION 2

CEMETERY
BEHIND THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS

The memorial tablets set up in 2014 commemorate the fallen of both world wars. Among the names are four Jews from Gangelt who died in 1916/17: Ludwig Hertz, Max Hertz, Karl Josephs, and Jakob Lichtenstein. They disprove the Nazi claim that Jews evaded military service.

In 1932, there had been heated debate about whether the names of Jewish war dead should appear on the plaques.

The original plaques from 1932 are embedded in the walls of the mortuary.

STATION 3

TOBACCO MANUFACTORY & RESIDENCE OF THE
*FALKENSTEIN FAMILY,
BRUCHSTRASSE 26

In 1933, Emil Falkenstein lived and worked here with his wife Jeanette, son Hermann, and daughter Meta. The Falkenstein family was well integrated: Emil was a founding member of the volunteer fire brigade, and his son played in the local soccer club. Except for Meta (married Marx), all were murdered.

Left:
Circa 1922,
Falkenstein shop.

Right:
Eddy Falkenstein

By a miracle, Hermann's baby son Emil-Hans (Eddy Falkenstein), born in 1941 in the Netherlands, survived. His descendants live in the Netherlands. Since 2025, a street in Gangelt has been named after the Falkenstein family.

Emil's sisters, Mina and Julie, had already lived in the Netherlands for a long time and had started their own families there.

STATION 4

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL,
KATHARINA-KASPER-STRASSE

During the Nazi era, the hospital in Gangelt was complicit in crimes against people with intellectual and physical disabilities. Forced sterilization and murder were the state-ordered methods to rid the "healthy national body" of "life unworthy of life." Doctors and staff not only carried out forced sterilizations but later were also involved in the "euthanasia" program. Between 1937 and 1944, nearly 260 patients were transported from here to killing institutions.

Harry Seipolt researched this topic and discovered some disturbing truths. (See his article on the Gangelt municipality website.)

STATION 5

HORSE TRADING BUSINESS & RESIDENCE OF THE *ROSENDAHL FAMILY,
SITTARDER STRASSE 11

In 1933, Max Rosendahl lived here with his wife Julie, their sons Helmut and Erich, and their daughters Hilde and Meta.

His widowed sister Jeanette Wolff also likely lived with them until her death in October 1936 - her burial was the last in the Jewish cemetery.

Max came from the large Rosendahl family, documented in Gangelt since the late 18th century.

(His brother Emil, also a horse dealer, lived in his parents' house at Heinsberger Strasse 28 until 1935.)

Max and his son Helmut were the only ones in their family and of all the Jewish residents of Gangelt to survive the unspeakable horrors of the concentration camps. Thus, they became important witnesses to the events of the time. Helmut was liberated by Soviet soldiers in a subcamp of Auschwitz at the last minute. He later built a new life in the USA, where his descendants live today.

His testimony, recorded on tape during a 1984 visit to Gangelt, remains available in written form on the municipal website.

STATION 6

FUR SHOP & RESIDENCE OF THE *HERTZ-MEMLER FAMILY, SITTARDER STRASSE 12

The name „Hertz" also appears in Gangelt documents dating back to Napoleon's time. The house was already owned by the family in the 19th century. Many children were born here.

In 1933, only three people lived here: the childless couple Therese Memler, née Hertz, her non-Jewish husband, master furrier Carl Memler – with whom she continued her parents' fur business – and Therese's sister Elise. Elise disappeared in a French concentration camp. (Her uncle Carl Hertz had been living in Aachen for a long time.) Therese Memler remained unmolested until September 1944, presumably because she lived in a "mixed marriage." As Allied troops approached Gangelt, she and her husband were to be arrested. With the help of the local policeman, they were initially able to escape, but were then betrayed and deported. Therese's trail ends in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her husband is also missing.

STATION 7

RESIDENCE & BUSINESS OF THE *HARTOG FAMILY, SITTARDER STRASSE 16

The house came into Jewish ownership as early as the mid-19th century. The cattle dealer and butcher Max Josephs (1855–1932) lived here with his wife and four children.

During World War I, Max Josephs, a kosher butcher by trade, was the only butcher to secure the city's meat supply in the summer of 1917 thanks to his large slaughterhouse. He even slaughtered pigs (non-kosher animals) for this purpose.

Since July 2024, a street in Gangelt bears their name.

The eldest son was killed in July 1917. The other two sons completed apprenticeships as textile merchants and founded their first business in their parents' home. In 1925, they bought the house on Heinsberger Straße, which still stands today, and founded the „Gebrüder Josephs" textile department store (see Station 14).

Their sister Paula married Emil Hartog in 1927 and, together with him, ran a well-known household goods store in their parents' home.

In 1933, Emil and Paula Hartog, née Josephs, lived here with their son Ernst, born in 1928. They were popular and well-integrated citizens.

In the November pogrom („Kristallnacht"), the Nazis destroyed their business. Emil was taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp for four weeks. Afterward, he was forced to sell the house far below value. Paula and ten-year-old Ernst escaped the Nazi mob in Gangelt thanks to the intervention of the local police officer.

The family fled in 1939 to Belgium. Emil was later arrested and murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. Paula and Ernst managed to go into hiding and survive. In 1947 they emigrated to the USA, where Ernest and his descendants still live. Since July 2024, a street in Gangelt bears their name.

Lion Leopold during the First World War, sons Erich and Hugo

STATION 8

RESIDENCE & BUSINESS OF THE *LEOPOLD FAMILY, SITTARDER STRASSE 22

At the beginning of 1933, Lion and Ida Leopold lived here with their four adult children: Hugo, Else, Frieda, and Erich. (The daughters married in 1934 and 1937, respectively, and moved away. They spent the war years in England.)

Lion was a fourth-generation cattle dealer and butcher. He traded with local farmers, slaughtered the cattle in his own slaughterhouse, and sold the meat in his butcher shop. He had an excellent reputation in the town and beyond: To-

gether with Emil Falkenstein and other residents, he had founded the volunteer fire brigade. He had served in World War I and received a medal for his service. Last but not least, Lion and his son Hugo were valued as fairly trading partners. Lion was also a highly respected leader of the Jewish community and prayer leader in the synagogue. Once a week, the rabbi responsible for Gangelt came from Geilenkirchen to teach the sons Hebrew and the Torah. Due to anti-Jewish laws, the family was forced to close their business and sell their house. Fortunately, the buyer was a neighbor and good friend. The Leopold sons fled to the Netherlands a few weeks before Kristallnacht, and their parents were able to join them legally in 1939. Hidden during the occupation under extremely difficult circumstances and in constant fear of discovery, all survived in hiding and later emigrated to the USA. Their descendants still live there.

The Nazis boasted of having killed Heinrich Morgenstern at the Kahnweiher (boat pond).

STATION 9

RESIDENCE & BUSINESS OF THE *MORGENSTERN FAMILY, WALLSTRASSE 10

In 1933, widow Berta Morgenstern (née Leopold) lived here with her children Irma, Heinrich, and Fritz.

The parents of Berta's husband Siegmund (1875-1916) had already run a cattle business in this house from the mid-19th century. Irma was 9, Heinrich 7, and Fritz 5 when their father died. His widow gave up the cattle business and ran a tobacco shop.

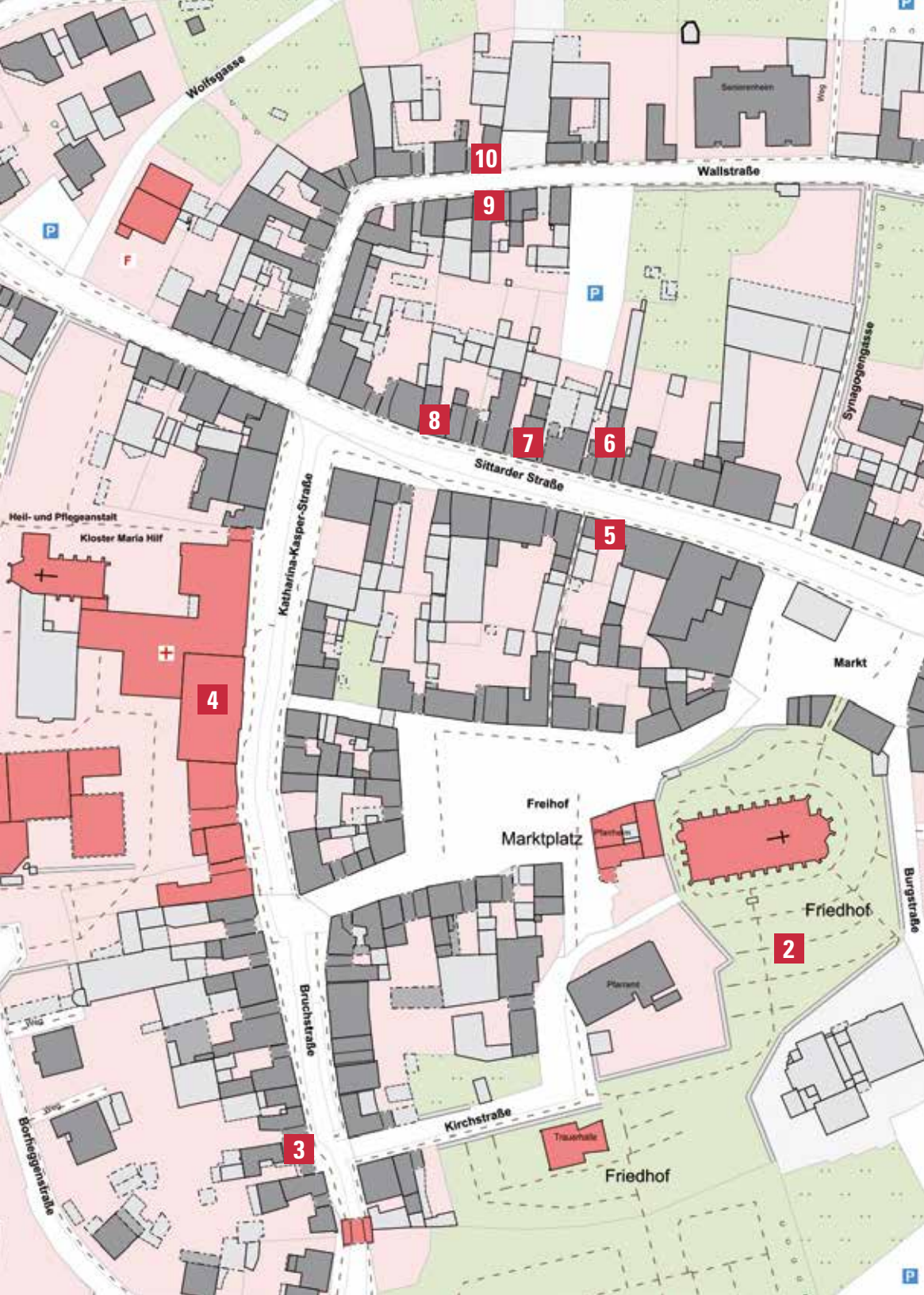
With the Nazis' seizure of power, everything changed for them, too. The boycott measures led to a drastic decline in sales. When Berta Morgenstern died in June 1936, her three adult children continued the business until the situation became increasingly threatening.

Before Kristallnacht, Irma and Fritz left Gangelt.

For unknown reasons, 29-year-old Heinrich Morgenstern was alone in his parents' house on the night of November 9, 1938. A gang of Nazi thugs broke into his home, attacked him, and dragged him down to the Kahnweiher lake. He managed to flee to Amsterdam but was arrested weeks later.

He was deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz in 1942 and murdered shortly afterward.

His sister and brother survived and emigrated to the USA. Irma remained childless, Fritz/Fred became the father of a daughter, Carol Berta, in 1943. She married and is now (as of 2024) the mother of two sons and a grandmother.


Wolfsgasse
Seniorenheim
Weg
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Wallstraße
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Synagogengasse
8
7
6
Sittarder Straße
Heil- und Pflegeanstalt
Kloster Maria Hilf
Katharina-Kasper-Straße
5
Markt
4
Freihof
Marktplatz
Pfarrhaus
Friedhof
Burgstraße
2
Pfarramt
Bruchstraße
Weg
Kirchstraße
Trauerhalle
3
Friedhof
Borfheggenstraße
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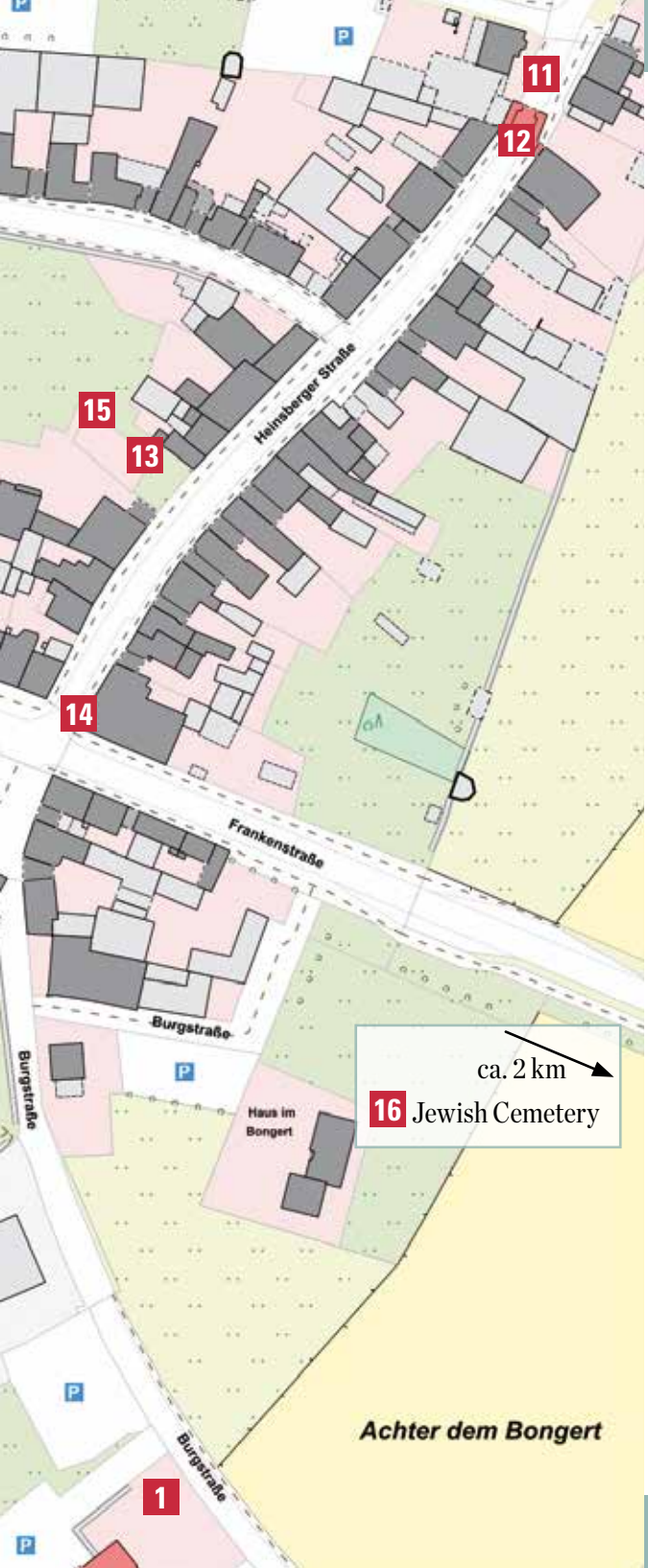


STATIONS OF REMEMBRANCE:

1. Memorial plaque at the townhall, Burgstraße 10
2. Memorial plaques at the cemetery
3. Falkenstein family, Bruchstraße 26
4. Hospital, Katharina-Kasper-Straße
5. Rosendahl family, Sittarder Straße 11
6. Hertz-Memler family, Sittarder Straße 12
7. Hartog family, Sittarder Straße 16
8. Leopold family, Sittarder Straße 22
9. Morgenstern family, Wallstraße 10
10. Sara Hertz, Wallstraße 15
11. Hertz family, Hanxlerstraße 4
12. Heinsberger Tor
13. Lichtenstein family, Heinsberger Straße 11
14. Family Joseph, Heinsberger Straße 2
15. Old Synagogue
16. Jewish Cemetery

STATION 10

*SARA HERTZ,
WALLSTRASSE 15

In 1933, 74-year-old Sara Hertz lived here. She came from a large family that had lived in Gangelt for several generations. For example, she was a paternal cousin of Moritz Hertz, the father of Therese Memler (see Station 6).

Sara Hertz grew up in this house with six siblings. (Her parents are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Gangelt, as are three of her siblings, including her sister Lisette.) After her husband's death, Lisette moved back to her parents' house with Sara. She died here in March 1936, and Sara, who remained unmarried, moved to the Kalverbenden Jewish retirement home in Aachen.

At that time, it was actually a home for elderly, sick, and infirm Jewish men and women. In 1941, the Nazis occupied the house and used it for their criminal purposes. In July 1942, Sara Hertz, now almost 83 years old, was deported from there to Theresienstadt. She died in the ghetto in December 1942.

Deported to Theresienstadt and murdered at the age of almost 83.

STATION 11

*HERTZ FAMILY
HANXLERSTRASSE 4

The seven brass stones, which have been commemorating the Hertz family since 2018, are not located exactly where the house and stables once stood. They were blown up by the Allied occupation. The stones now lie in front of a neighboring house, near the Heinsberger Gate.

In 1933, the cattle and horse dealer Hermann Hertz lived here with his wife Pauline, his daughter Hedwig and his son Leo. With Leo's marriage, the family expanded to include Bernie from Lower Saxony, who gave birth to Dieter in 1934 and Margot in 1936.

Old views still give an impression of the imposing size of the two-story house, built in 1914, and the separate stable building, built in 1921. The owner was Hermann Hertz. He and his son were evidently very successful, achieving considerable wealth. They traded with farmers from the surrounding area and further afield. Antisemitism from 1933 onwards and envy of the wealthy made their lives increasingly difficult. As a result, Hermann Hertz sold the property to a local building contractor in 1937 and subsequently emigrated to the nearby Netherlands with his wife, daughter, and son. His daughter-in-law did not come with them. She went into hiding with her young children and emigrated to Uruguay in early 1938,

Berni Hertz with Dieter and Margot, 1938

where relatives were already living. Her husband was supposed to join them, but this plan fell through.

After the Nazis invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, Hermann Hertz, his daughter, and his son were no longer safe in Puth, east of Geleen, Netherlands. (Pauline Hertz had since died.) All three were arrested, deported, and murdered.

Dieter Hertz and his sister grew up in Uruguay but later moved to Israel. Margot remained childless, Dieter became the father of Dalia Hertz, who came to visit Gangelt in the summer of 2023 and brought with her valuable information about the family history.

STATION 12

HEINSBERGER GATE

HEINSBERGER STRASSE

Two rooms above the medieval city gate served as a prison in earlier centuries. Access was via a narrow spiral staircase. In 1937, an incredible story unfolded here. Leo Hertz and Hugo Leopold, the eldest son of Lion Leopold (see Station 7), were the last two Gangelt cattle dealers still active in 1937. Both were arrested and imprisoned in the Heinsberger Gate for allegedly inadequate business records.

Hugo was strong and managed to break down the door to his cell. Fortunately, it wasn't sufficiently secured. He then opened the door to Leo's cell as well. Now the two had the opportunity to escape. But Leo refused: He considered it incompatible with the law and stayed. After his release, he fled to the Netherlands (see Station 11).

During the night of November 9-10, 1938, other Jewish men were also imprisoned here: Isidor Lichtenstein, Albert Josephs, and Emil Hartog.

Apart from them, only Max Rosendahl, Lion Leopold, and Emil Falkenstein and their wives were living in Gangelt at that time. It is unknown whether these three men were also imprisoned.

STATION 13

*LICHTENSTEIN FAMILY,
HEINSBERGER STRASSE 11

Isidor Lichtenstein (born 1867) and his wife Regina, née Falkenstein (born 1868), were dealers of small lifestock. Isidor was also the „shammes“ of the Jewish community, meaning he maintained the synagogue behind his house and prepared the services. (His role was similar to that of a sexton.) During Kristallnacht, Nazis broke into his apartment, then entered the synagogue and vandalized its interior.

He was jailed overnight in the Heinsberger Gate (see Station 12).

In 1941, the couple was deported from Gangelt, imprisoned in transit camps, and deported to Theresienstadt in 1942. There, their trail is lost. Their daughter Emilie, born in 1900, converted and married a non-Jew in 1922, with whom she had three children. Miraculously, the family survived the Nazi era in Gangelt unscathed. Descendants still live in Germany until today.

His daughter Emilie and her family survived the Nazi era in Gangelt unscathed.

STATION 14

REDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL BUILDING, OF THE *JOSEPHS FAMILY,
HEINSBERGER STRASSE 2

In 1925, the three-story building (which still appears unchanged today) was purchased by the brothers Albert and Hugo Josephs (see also Station 6). They converted the ground floor into a large store.

It became a success and the first address for textiles and shoes far beyond Gangelt. The brothers provided generous loans and established a transport

Karl Josephs

service for customers living further afield. They were considered very socially responsible. From 1931, Albert Josephs was the sole owner. (His brother Hugo had moved out with his wife and started a new business in the Ruhr region.) In 1938, the Josephs department store was destroyed by the Nazis. Albert was imprisoned for four weeks in a labor camp (just like his brother-in-law Emil Hartog), forced to sell his property for far less than its value. He was 52, his wife Frieda 40, and his son Karl 15 when they were deported and murdered by the Nazis in 1942.

The former synagogue has been a listed monument since 1993.

STATION 15

FORMER SYNAGOGUE

VIEW FROM SYNAGOGEN-GASSE

The former synagogue can be seen through an opening in the wall. From the outside, the small brick building still looks largely as it did when it was built around 1817/18. At that time, the Jewish community probably consisted of at least ten adult men or boys. (This number was required for proper worship.)

In 1823, the synagogue was desecrated for the first time and re-consecrated in 1824 – despite protests from the Christian majority. During Kristallnacht, the synagogue was not set on fire due to its proximity to neighboring houses, but its interior was destroyed. After decades of misuse – including as a pigsty – the synagogue was acquired by a private individual in 1985 in a dilapidated state. It has been a listed building since 1993 and was renovated in 1998. It is used exclusively for private purposes and is therefore not open to the public.

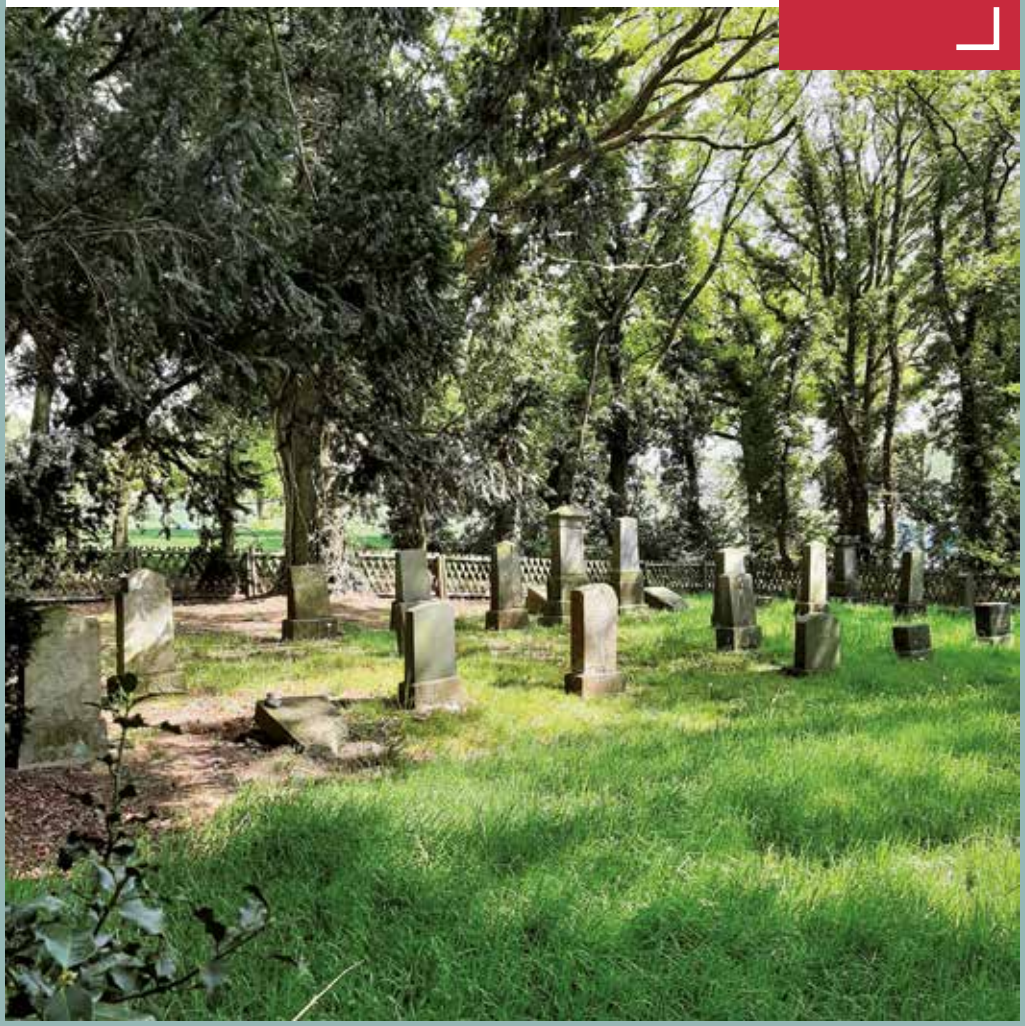
STATION 16

JEWISH CEMETERY,
FEDERAL HIGHWAY L47

After the war, the cemetery was inherited by the State Association of Jewish Communities in North Rhine-Westphalia. It has been a listed building since 1986. The approximately 480 m² fenced-in site is located about 2 km outside the town center in a small wood on the L47 toward Geilenkirchen.

When the Gangelt community urged the Jewish community to purchase the property in the fall of 1877, the offer was met with resistance. After all, the community had been

Épidat – Epigraphic Database on Jewish gravestones.



burying its dead in the Jewish cemetery in Heinsberg since the mid-17th century and wanted to continue doing so. Pressure from the authorities finally led to the conclusion of the contract at the end of December 1877. The first burial took place in January 1879, the last in October 1936. According to documents, a total of around 50 burials must have taken place here. (No gravestones were erected for small children.)

Many gravestones have disappeared; of the 31 that have survived at least partially, only 22 are legible. Since the deceased were supposed to be buried side by side in order of death, their likely location can be reconstructed based on the death certificates. Repeated desecrations, beginning during the Nazi era and continuing today, have disrupted the original order. Gravestones have been toppled and incorrectly replaced, gravestones damaged, and names defaced. Nevertheless, it is known who found their final resting place here. No one can destroy this knowledge! There is now even a digital database („epidat“).

Sources:

Documents and files from the archives of the municipality of Gangelt, the city of Geilenkirchen, the city of Neuss, and the Heinsberg district

Chronicle by Heinrich Joseph Otten

Articles by Dr. Horst Seferens and Harry Seipolt

Gangelt municipality website

Newspaper articles and letters from private archives

Reports from contemporary witnesses, and many more.

All photos are from private archives.

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westzipfelregion.de

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