

Stones of remembrance: Further information

My request for further information in last month's issue of the Journal has resulted in a number of replies from Vienna-based Dr Elisabeth Ben David-Hindler (Liesl), given below in italics. The task Liesl set herself has grown from very small personal beginnings into an enormous project. Information is available in English on her website (see below), but no details can be reproduced in the space available. Names and former addresses and a great deal of information are available in German.

1 How many stones are in existence?

There are now various associations in Vienna. We are working in the following districts: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20. In the 6th district, there is a different project: 'Erinnern für die Zukunft'. In the 3rd and 8th districts, we are responsible only for the technical part of the work.

Path of Remembrance

In the 2nd and 20th districts, we have constructed a Path of Remembrance, i.e. we seek to remember Jewish life and culture. We place stones to remind us of synagogues, schools, theatres, coffee houses and various Jewish institutions.

Stones for murdered inhabitants set on the Path

We usually place them in front of their former houses. If it was a house with 'assembly flats', we place a stone with the number of people deported from it (up to 170 people from one house).

Thus, to tell the number of existing stones, one must divide them into those which give information (20cm x 20cm) and those for the murdered inhabitants (10cm x 10cm). We always put four together and also place stones for people in whose family nobody survived.

I presume that the information readers would like refers to stones for Jewish women, men and children who lived there. Therefore the statistics include only them.

2 How many stones have been ordered?

3 In which districts are they placed and how many present and future orders are there?

4 What are approximately the shortest and longest times from request to placing?

If you send the request in the first half of the year, we can usually set the stone

in the following year. For children of victims, we try to make the stones as soon as possible.

5 What is the price per stone?

For each 10cm x 10cm stone we ask €120. If there are many victims in the family and the cost is too high, we seek to reduce it. We have never failed to set a stone because relatives were unable to afford it. As the cost is much higher than the €120 we now ask relatives if they can afford to pay more.

6 What is the final cost per stone?

The cost to us is €650 for a 20cm x 20cm stone with four names on it. The City of Vienna determines that we work with a street-construction firm to place the stones in the ground. This is about €270 per place.

7 How is the difference made up?

Our finances are based on private sponsorship and donations plus subventions from the National Fund and Future Fund, the districts, and the City of Vienna.

One difficulty is that we don't know how high the subventions from the various organisations will be for the next year. If they are reduced, we cannot realise our plans and must tell relatives that they have to wait. We had this problem last year but then obtained a special subvention from the City of Vienna and the Dr Renner Prize, so for this year we have no problems.

8 How many contacts resulted from Fred Stern's original article (January 2011) and what comments would you make relating to them?

I haven't counted the number of people with whom I have been in contact, but every contact is personal and we try to find an individual solution. I have received numerous letters and emails showing how precious our work is for the relatives.

9 How can help be given from this country?

I am delighted these articles are being published in the AJR Journal and am now sure that victims' relatives will know of our project. People should also know that we have published a booklet about the 2nd district in English. With the help of Frank Beck, who translated our booklet for the 9th district into English, we will also publish 'Stations of Remembrance in Alsergrund'. It would be helpful if the AJR orders more booklets together and sells, or gives, them to their Viennese members. We

are, of course, happy if AJR members wish to donate to our project.

Considering Liesl's huge task, she has to decide the relative order in time in which the stones are to be placed. This takes into account the age of the person requesting the commemoration of their loved ones. As each case varies, the time Liesl devotes to it must be tailored to the total project. In addition to all the paperwork, phone calls and interviews, each stone placing requires considerable preparation. Liesl must obtain the permission of the householders and of the district authorities concerned, and there is also the interaction with the manufactures of the plaques and the organisation which places them in their locations. The final cost of individual stones greatly exceeds the charge levied. The €15,000 awarded at the prize-giving (see January issue) was shared with her helpers, leaving little to Liesl herself, all of which she assigned to the cause.

The year after the first stone placing on the Volkertsplatz, I commemorated my family with five stones: four on the Karmeliter Markt, the centre of Jews in the Leopoldstadt and close to my Realgymnasium, and one on the gate of my burned-down Barmitzvah synagogue in the Tempelgasse, close to my home. There are in this district 136 'stations' to date.

On the day of a ceremony, attended by relatives and friends of the bearers at the 'station', the unveiling of the stones is accompanied by prayers, appropriate music, and an unscripted speech by Liesl. A very emotional ceremony, it replaces both burial and stone-setting.

Information on Liesl's website indicates that at the end of last year over 40 'stations' were planned for Vienna this year, that there are some 500 financial contributors from many countries, and that about 100 individuals as well as numerous organisations, associations and groups maintain the stones regularly. There are also numerous letters, speeches, meetings and much more. Of special interest is a letter from Austrian President Heinz Fischer to 'General Secretary Dr Elisabeth Ben David-Hindler' expressing gratitude for her project in remembrance of the Holocaust.

Further information may be found at www.steinedererinnerung.net and info@steinedererinnerung.net.

Fred Stern