

The Second Great Pork Butcher Descendants' Reunion.

Hohenlohe Region, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, 3rd to 7th August 2016.

By Peter Towey, Vice President.

This trip was organised by Karl-Heinz Wüstner of Ilshofen who is well-known to many of our members as an expert on the German pork butchers who came to UK in the 19th century. He has spoken at several conferences in UK and was kind enough, after organising the first reunion in 2014, to organise this one!

About 40 people joined the Reunion, many of them Society members, and all (except Jenny & I) descendants of the pork butchers who emigrated from the Hohenlohe region of Württemberg to UK. Jenny and I went because we were interested and to show the Society's flag.

On Wednesday, 3rd August, we all made our own ways to the little town of Ilshofen where we were to be based. The Flair Park Hotel there was modern and comfortable having been built in 1990 by the international company based opposite. Karl-Heinz and his wife Hanne welcomed us and we settled in for the evening with an excellent meal and an address of welcome from the Mayor of Ilshofen. Then we each introduced ourselves. Those with pork butcher ancestors told us what they knew of their immigrant ancestors and in most cases it was Karl-Heinz who had discovered which village they had come from and which other local families they were related to. While we were out in the coach over the next few days he was able to point out the individual houses the emigrants had lived in.



A group photo at the old town hall of Künzelsau

The following morning we went first to the town of Künzelsau where so many of the pork butchers had originated. We were welcomed by the city archivist, Herr Stefan Kraut, who outlined the history of the town and then took us on a guided walk. Like much of the area the dominant religion was Lutheran and had been since the Reformation; the main ruler, the Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg being Lutheran. The town looked very prosperous but still had several old buildings. The main interest for many of us was to actually walk in the town where their ancestors had lived. There were also several houses in the English style that had been built by returning retired pork butchers who had made their fortune in UK.

We then left for an excellent, leisurely German lunch in the open-air biergarten at the ‘Zum Löwen’ Inn at Bitzfeld. In the afternoon we went for a tour around the vineyard at Schwabbach hosted by the Weihbrecht family who owned and ran it. The weather stayed warm and bright while we were there and tasted many of the wines overlooking the vineyard and the valley below. We then went down to the Weingut Weihbrecht and had dinner in the weinstube there – more German wine and food. While we were there the heavens opened but it had cleared up again when we returned to the hotel.



Wine tasting at Schwabbach

On Friday 5th August, we had an early start and drove to the BESH sausage factory in Schwäbisch Hall. This is a farmers’ co-operative. By the 1970s the local pig, the Schwäbisch Hällisches Landschwein was virtually extinct. The supermarkets and the authorities wanted produce that could be produced cheaply and in standard form everywhere. Local breeds were

frowned upon. Rudolf Bühler, a local farmer, campaigned to preserve the breed and managed to get about 2 dozen pigs together by about 1986. From these, with a certain amount of genetic material from similar breeds (the Schwäbisch Hällisches Landschwein is mainly based on the British Saddleback pig and had been introduced from England by King Wilhelm I of Württemberg, soon after this area had become a part of his kingdom in 1806) the breed has gone from strength to strength and is the source of all the local pig meat. The co-operative started out with 8 local farmers and now has 1,500! They are mainly small farmers with 30 hectares or less. Because they cut out the middlemen and do their own marketing, they are able to pay their members 40% more than other farmers get! They have set up co-operatives in Kerala in India, and in Serbia where they get the spices they need.



Feeding the pigs

Christian Bühler, Rudolf's son, gave us a guided tour of the impressively modern and clean sausage making factory and we were then able to buy tins of various types of sausage meat to take home. Very much the kind of sausage meat that the pork butchers might have made in their British shops. Rudolf Bühler also came and spoke to us about how he had preserved the breed and, after lunch in the co-op cafe, we were able to watch the pigs being fed acorns; this apparently gives the meat a unique flavour and the meat is marketed in different cans.



Peter and Jenny at the BESH sausage factory

As several of our members are researching Bühlers, I asked Christian if any of his relatives had emigrated to UK. He did not know but said that his father had had their family tree traced. The Bühlers probably took their name from the local river of the same name and came to Wolpertshausen, where they still farm, in about 1374.

In the afternoon we went to the Wackershofen open air museum where traditional Hohenlohe farm houses and other buildings are laid out on a 100 acre site. This gave us a real idea of how our ancestors lived.

After that we went on to a privately-owned brewery in Schwäbisch Hall – the Löwenbrauerei (the Lion Brewery) – and had a guided tour. That was followed by beer and a buffet (with a variety of sausages like our ancestors made) accompanied by a German band. It all went down well and soon everyone was joining in the singing. The singing continued on the coach journey back to the hotel.

On Saturday, we went first to Langenburg Schloss, the home of the Princes of Hohenlohe-Langenburg at Langenburg. They are close relatives of Prince Philip and there were a number of photos of our Royal family there. Though the castle had had a bad fire in the 1960s it is largely restored now and we saw the medieval parts that remained. On the top of the hill, overlooking the town and the valley below, it was very picturesque. For lunch we went to the princes' former summer palace which is now owned by another family who have restored it. We had an excellent lunch there, with a tour of their herb garden, followed by a tasting of sparkling wines made from elderflower, meadowsweet and roses.

We then made our way to the village of Buchenbach. The area had been flooded at the end of June and, though most of the effects had already been repaired, there were still some roads that were closed. Unfortunately this meant that we had to make several detours before we got there.

Fortunately the archivist and staff and the local reporter who were to meet us there, were still waiting when we got there!

The free-lance archivist Andreas Volk outlined the archives the community had and then showed us, using one of our colleagues whose ancestor came from there as an example, what information they could produce on people from the area. It was a real eye-opener: in this one little room were the Family Register (from 1834), details of wills and inheritance, tax and property. It would be possible to identify the house an ancestor lived in without leaving the room. We were told that most communities in the Hohenlohe region had similar archives. Herr Volk will do research for a fee.

After returning to the hotel, we then had a choice of three options: to see Jesus Christ Superstar on the steps of the cathedral in Schwäbisch Hall; to listen to Karl-Heinz's talk on pork butchers in UK from Hohenlohe, or to sit in the biergarten. Many took the opportunity to listen to the talk followed by a relaxing drink in the biergarten. Several locals turned up to hear the talk because they were aware of relatives who had moved to UK; giving rise to some interesting discussions. Those who went to the musical pronounced it excellent – even though it was in German.

The following day, Sunday, 7th was our last in Hohenlohe. We did not let up however. We spent the morning looking around the beautiful, largely medieval local city Schwäbisch Hall. The weather was perfect and there was so much to see. The free art museums included a major Picasso exhibition and a large collection of medieval paintings. Jenny & I had lunch in an open air café in the main square while the cast were rehearsing the next evening's performance of Jesus Christ Superstar on the cathedral steps.

After thanking Karl-Heinz & Hanne for all their hard work in organising the reunion, we then caught the train to Stuttgart from near Schwäbisch Hall preparatory to flying home on Monday morning.

Everyone agreed that we had got our money's worth – many had also been on the first Reunion 2 years earlier. We all hope that Karl-Heinz will see his way to organising another one in the next year or two. If you have pork butcher ancestors in UK you cannot go wrong as they virtually all came from this tiny part of Baden-Württemberg – Hohenlohe. In the meantime, if you have pork butchers in your ancestry, get in touch with Karl-Heinz Wüstner at [khwuestner\(at\)googlemail.com](mailto:khwuestner(at)googlemail.com). He will be able to help and advise.



2nd Pork Butchers' Reunion at hotel in Ilshofen, Hohenlohe, Baden-Württemberg, August 2016.
Recognise Peter Towey's trousers on the top right!