

Archaeological Monuments and Finds of the Second World War and the Cold War in Berlin

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Since the mid-1980s, Berlin's archaeological conservation department has been involved with the archaeological monuments and finds of the Second World War and the Cold War in Berlin that remained in the ground, a procedure that was controversial among experts at the time. The aim of the symbolic excavation begun in 1985 by the Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin and the Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt and continued by the Senator for Cultural Affairs on the grounds of the former Prinz-Albrecht-Palais (today's Topography of Terror) was to uncover the underground structural remains of the cells and cellars of the buildings of the Secret State Police and the High Command of the SS in order to make the public aware of them once again. In 1988, the cell floors were listed in a constitutive procedure.

After 1990, areas that had been inaccessible due to the Berlin Wall became part of the planning for the capital and were designated for the construction of parliament and government, such as the area of the former Ministergärten (today the Holocaust Memorial and the buildings of some of

the permanent representations of the German federal states in Berlin). After geophysical investigations, as a result of which archaeological building supervision was carried out, various bunkers (the bunkers of Hitler's motor pool and of Joseph Goebbels' official residence) and structural remains of various government buildings from the National Socialist era, including those of the Neue Reichskanzlei, came to light.

The best-known testimony is probably the bunker of Adolf Hitler's motor pool on the grounds of the Ministergärten, at the corner of Ebertstraße/Voßstraße, which was opened and documented in 1992, a bunker whose entrance had been buried by bombs or artillery fire (Fig. 1). Its discovery resembled a "frozen moment of the last days of war and of the downfall," as Alfred Kerndl put it. The remaining interior, cutlery, weapons and uniform parts, but also empty bottles of wine and schnapps, as well as murals give an idea of what the bunker inmates thought and of the apocalyptic demise of Berlin in the spring of 1945. After several unsuccessful efforts, this bunker and the bunker of the official villa



Fig. 1: Finds from the bunker of the motor pool shown in the exhibition "Archaeology of Horror", 2005 (© Claudia Klein)

of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels on Behrenstraße, which had been opened in 1998, were included in the Berlin monument list in 2006.

In the course of an archaeological rescue excavation of a Late Bronze Age settlement, which was carried out because of the federal housing programme, remains of barracks emerged in Lichterfelde-West in 1998 which on the basis of aerial photographs, maps and photographs as well as published eyewitness reports could be assigned to one of the 67 satellite camps of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The foundations of three barracks and splinter ditches of the camp built in 1942 came to light. The recovery of waste and ammunition remnants from several deeply filled pits was carried out by the bomb disposal team. The Lichterfelde Satellite Camp Initiative, formed as a result of the rediscovery of the camp, accompanied the subsequent construction work and collected finds from the camp, which were first brought to the Heimatmuseum Steglitz and then to the Museum of Prehistory and Early History of the Berlin State Museums, Berlin's deposit museum, as archaeological finds worth preserving. The restoration workshop of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin made a semi-burnt and weather-beaten file of the camp readable again (Fig. 2). It contained the accounts of material movements between 1942 and 1944 at the SS construction sites and evidence of a number of hitherto unknown construction sites and labour battalions of camp inmates.

The archaeological excavation carried out in the area of Berlin-Tempelhof Airport since 2012 has uncovered relics, fragments and traces remaining in the ground. Together with the analysis of aerial photographs, it provides valuable information in particular on forgotten and partially removed buildings and facilities.

After the law on the preservation of the Tempelhofer Feld in was adopted in 2014, the archaeological prospecting on the Tempelhofer Feld, which had already begun in 2012, were continued. Among other things, they served the purpose of discovering the forced labourer camps located thereon. Along the edges of the airfield several barracks camps were arranged, in which forced labourers were accommodated, who were used among other things in the armaments production (Fig. 3). The excavations on the Tempelhofer Feld led to a cooperation project with the Institute of Near Eastern Archaeology at Freie Universität Berlin, which is processing the excavations and finds from 2012–14.

The Old Tempelhof Airport was one of the first civil airports. It started in 1923 and remained in operation until 1945, while between 1939 and 1945 the entrance building for the new airport by Ernst Sagebiel was used for armaments production. This work had to be carried out mainly by forced labourers recruited from Eastern Europe, who were housed in the barracks camps adjacent to the entrance building.

The former Columbiahaus military prison was used as a concentration camp in 1933–36 and demolished during the construction of the Sagebiel building. During the excavation, the pit of the house was found, which had been filled again after its demolition so that only a trace of one of the most feared prisons of its time has survived. In these fillings there was the fragment of a cellar wall that could have be-



Fig. 2: Camp file in the exhibition "Archaeology of Horror", 2005 (© Claudia Klein)

longed to the house and therefore probably represents the last fragment of the Columbiahaus. Whether it is a relic of the cellars where tortures were demonstrably carried out cannot be said for sure.

The forced labour camp in the Columbiadamm area is characterised by well-preserved floors of the camp barracks, a fire extinguishing pond filled with a vast number of finds, and splinter protection ditches only at the entrances (Fig. 4). One of the camp barracks which according to the sources was inhabited by Russians showed remains of various technical installations, indicating water, heating and sewage in the barracks. It was also surrounded by a barbed wire embedded in the ground, which is interpreted as an obstacle to prevent inmates from approaching. In the area of the camps, a small collection of personal items was found, such as a prayer chain, a harmonica, plaques, jewellery (brooches, a ring), toys (marbles, a domino), a black plastic hair comb with an engraved date, and clothing (buttons, textiles, and shoe remains). For the former owners, they are memorabilia believed lost of their years of forced labour in Germany under inhumane conditions. For society they are also memorabilia of the dark sides of Tempelhof Airport and of German history. Some of them, such as the plaques and marbles, were probably even made in the camp. The simplicity and the self-production of the objects under the given circumstances give them a special meaning, as they were certainly an enrichment for the owners in the dreary everyday life of the camp.

The BERLIN lettering on the tarmac, 100 m long and 15 m high, is still preserved at the old airport. Its white colour was intended to provide orientation for arriving aircraft. With the beginning of the air war over Berlin, the lettering was darkened and its white paint was removed. Of the letter R, the concrete edging in the floor has been preserved, as in isolated cases the paving stones laid in rows with remnants of paint.



Fig. 3: Archaeological excavation in a barrack at Columbiadamm, 2012 (© Jan Trenner)



Fig. 4: Splinter protection trench of the camp in the area of Tempelhofer Damm, 2013 (© Jan Trenner)

During the construction of the Berlin Wall Memorial in Bernauer Strasse, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out in 2007 and 2010 in order to document the remains of the Berlin Wall and the previous buildings in the ground affected by the construction measures. A selection of the remains in the ground was included in the Berlin Monument List in 2010. Several archaeological windows make visible and accessible the authentic remains of the Wall and the buildings located in this area before the Wall, such as the foundations of the Church of Reconciliation situated in the border installations of the GDR and blown up four years before the fall of the Wall.

Several excavations have been carried out to document the individual construction phases of the inner-city border installations in Bernauer Strasse. In Bernauer Strasse, the GDR's differentiated border security system could be documented in the ground. It could also be shown that on the northern side of Bergstrasse the former cemetery wall of the Sophiengemeinde was demolished in the course of the straightening of

the border system and that graves were given up. The discovery of modern small finds, such as grave marks, used tracer ammunition (Fig. 5), barbed wire fragments, porcelain spools belonging to signal fences, and cartridge cases of the AK-47 assault rifle used by the border troops of the GDR underline the poignancy and frightening precision with which the border system was secured and expanded.

Further archaeological results were the localisation and documentation of the foundation walls of the former Church of Reconciliation. On 21 and 25 January 1985, it also fell victim to border security when two blastings were carried out and the remains were removed.

The oldest traces of border fortifications were documented in archaeological prospections of the former houses at Bernauer Strasse 9, 10, 10a and 18–20. Most of these houses were destroyed during the Second World War. The houses on Bernauer Strasse 9–10a became famous, because their inhabitants attempted to flee to the West in August 1961 by abseiling and jumping out the windows. Initially, the GDR had the windows and doorways of the buildings bricked up, and later the buildings were demolished. At the beginning of the construction of the Wall, parts of the façade walls bordering Bernauer Strasse were incorporated into the border system as temporary walls. As a visible sign of the ruthless demarcation of the border, the cellar niches with their hollow blocks of concrete were found during the archaeological prospections of the former houses 9–10a. Visitors to the memorial can experience the foundation walls of the border houses 9–10a as a walk-in archaeological window and view the walled-in cellar niches (Fig. 6).

On one of the few still undeveloped plots of land on the southern edge of the open-air site of the Berlin Wall Memorial, the unusual course of the border installations, which were elevated here, was documented in 2017 in the area of Nordbahnhof. They crossed the track of the Stettiner Bahnhof, which had been moved higher from 1892–97. The station bridged streets that crossed in the terrain (Figs. 7, 8).



Fig. 5: Tracer ammunition, 2018 (© Torsten Dressler)

With the help of additional slabs and backfills, the border wall, which also included other elements such as control strips, vehicle barriers, guard paths, light lines, signal fences, signalling networks and hinterland walls, was brought up to the rail track and even crossed it. At a height of approx. 3 m above the top edge of the terrain, the border installations bent northwards. In the area of this bend a round watchtower BT 6 was in operation from 1969–83 and a square watchtower BT 9 from 1983–89/90, which gave this area the appearance of a bastion.

During the time of the GDR border installations, the underground S-Bahn station in the Nordbahnhof was closed. The station's buildings above ground were located in the restricted area and were closed from 1961–89, bricked up and secured against possible escape attempts. The workshop building located in the restricted area was first used by the transport police and the GDR border troops as a guard house and base and demolished in 1969.

The Berlin Wall Foundation secured a number of building and equipment parts of the border installations in the ground recovered in the area of the Nordbahnhof in order to be able to show them as original and archaeologically dated evidence of the installations in the open-air area. These include the concrete slabs that enabled the border wall to be brought up to the rail track, barbed wire remains from the early days of the border installations, concrete poles of the signal fence with remains of the barbed wire, and a cable duct of the light line laid in a casing pipe and covered with clay blocks.

The foundation of the square watchtower was recovered with the aim of extending the open-air site to its original location, of setting it back close to its original location and making it visible. Together with the tower, the installations that maintained its function were salvaged: parts of the glazed clay sewage pipe leading out of the tower foundation, the drinking water pipe next to it, a yellow painted steel

girder with rail profile and concrete poles of the signal fence south of the foundation.

By chance, in 2017/18 a vehicle barrier and the accesses to escape tunnels at the edge of the Wall Park came to light. Due to an exchange of areas, the remaining evidence of the early border installations of 1961–63 in this area was not replaced by the more recent barriers, which led to the re-discovery of the vehicle barriers and escape tunnels that no longer existed in other areas.

A concrete bed weighing 28 t and measuring about 6 m length x 4 m width x 0.60 m height with five separate dragon's teeth embedded in it formed the in-situ foundation of the vehicle barrier, which lay in front of the border wall and thus represented the first obstacle of the border installations (Figs. 9, 10). In the middle of the bed, two separate iron girders of a barbed wire fence were embedded as additional barriers. The iron girders were 2.20 m apart, formed a row and were arranged parallel to the border wall. Several layers of barbed wire rows were stretched between the girders. Vehicle barriers served to prevent a border breakthrough with heavy vehicles, as was feared in this area bordered by several roads.

After the completion of the construction work, the vehicle barrier, like the watchtower, is to be placed close to its original position and made visible. This area will then also be one of the extensions to the open-air site.

A shed located behind the border wall and on the West Berlin side offered favourable conditions for the construction of an escape tunnel. Its entrance was visible by a rectangular, dark discolouration of 3.70 m length x 1.40 m width in the southeast corner of the shed. On the basis of sources, it could be the entrance to the Weinstein escape tunnel, which had been constructed in 1963. The access and the tunnel were not further excavated as they are not endangered.

The tunnel was constructed from March to July 1963. The underground jacking from west to east over a length of 65



Fig. 6: Archaeological window in the open-air exhibition of the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Strasse, 2016 (© Wolfgang Bittner)



Fig. 7: Nordbahnhof excavation site, border installations west of Postenweg, 2017 (© Torsten Dressler)



Fig. 8: Nordbahnhof excavation site, border installations east of Postenweg, 2017 (© Torsten Dressler)



Fig. 9: Vehicle lock as found on site, 2017 (© Torsten Dressler)



Fig. 10: Lifting of the vehicle lock, 2017 (© Torsten Dressler)

m, a width of 0.80–1.00 m and a height of 1.00–1.20 m was difficult and time-consuming due to the clay soil. Within the narrow tunnel tube, the hard clay was removed centimetre by centimetre, pulled through the tube in buckets, transported upwards and stored in the shed. The clay naturally ensured the stability of the tube. The tunnel was neither completed nor used as it was discovered and destroyed. People associated with the construction and use of the tunnel were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

For a long time, there had been a request to excavate an escape tunnel and make it accessible to the public. For structural and above all ethical reasons as well as reasons of monument conservation, there was scepticism about this wish.

In 2017/18 the Berliner Unterwelten e.V. built the 26.5 m long, 1.95 m high and 1.0 m wide visitor tunnel between

Brunnenstraße 141 and 143 in order to make the Herschel escape tunnel visible. Starting from the corner building at Brunnenstr. 137/ Bernauer Strasse on the West Berlin side, the Herschel escape tunnel running along the Bernauer Strasse area was constructed as the last escape tunnel in the winter months of 1970/71. Behind the entrance, the tunnel led down an inclined ramp about 6–7 metres below the building’s basement floor, before crossing below the border for a length of 120 metres. This tunnel, too, was neither completed nor used, it became known and was destroyed. The people associated with the construction and use were also sentenced to imprisonment.

For the non-destructive exploration of the tunnel, geophysical measurements were carried out in 2014, which detected anomalies at a depth of 5–7 m below ground level. In



Fig. 11: Herschel escape tunnel, cross section, 2018 (© Torsten Dressler)

2017, pile-driving core soundings at a depth of 5.5 to 8 m below ground level revealed concrete remains without cavities, which suggested that the tunnel had been backfilled with lean concrete. Further sounding at a depth of 3.3 to 5.8 m below the top edge of the terrain located a cavity without concrete remains.

For the first time, the archaeological documentation required for the construction of the visitors' tunnel provided information on the state of conservation, the course and the composition of a longer section of an escape tunnel in Berlin.

During the excavation of the visitor tunnel, a cavity measured at a depth of approximately 3 to 4 m below ground level was first encountered, which proved to be a fault situated above the tunnel ceiling. After removing the earth from the cavity, the actual tunnel tube with a cross-section of about 1 m in height and 0.65 m in width was encountered (Fig. 11). The depth of the bed was measured at 5.10 m to 6.10 m below ground level.

Evidence was found of the Herschel escape tunnel at a length of about 28 m in a slightly curved course. The tunnel tube was laid in solid marl and thus naturally secured. The groundwater horizon was below the bottom of the tunnel tube. No penetration of stratum water and of water from cut-off pipes, which hindered the completion and use of escape tunnels elsewhere on Bernauer Strasse, was detected in the

exposed area. Nails to fix the light cables and small boards were recovered from the tunnel.

The tour of the escape tunnel will be made possible by the Berliner Unterwelten e.V. as part of guided tours through the visitor tunnel.

The archaeological monuments and finds of the Second World War and the Cold War in Berlin have not only multiplied considerably, from the initial bunkers and forced labour camps to the testimonies of the Berlin Wall. They are gaining interest in a city that is changing as a result of growth. They move into the present and thus closer to the people living in the city, lending their history a face.

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