

**Dedication of the newly designed Synagogue Memorial**  
9 November 2018,

Dear **Rabbi Simon**,

Dear **Pastor Haase**,

Honoured Members of the **Association for Christian-Jewish Cooperation**,

Dear **Landrat Nahrstedt**,

Dear **Superintendent Schmid**,

Dear **Carl-Peter von Mansberg**,

Dear **Guests of Honour**,

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

A cordial welcome to you all to the reopening of the extended Synagogue Memorial. It gives me great joy to see so many gathered here for this ceremony. I would like to extend a particular welcome to those descending from members of this erstwhile Jewish congregation. We feel much honoured by your presence. A very warm welcome to you!

Ladies and gentlemen,

we are gathered here at a special memorial site in Lüneburg. From 1894 to 1938, this has been home to the Jewish congregation of our town. A magnificent red-brick building formed the centre of their congregational life and their faith. However, as everywhere else in German under National Socialism, - and even before the Pogrom Night of 1938, 80 years ago today - Jews were ostracised, humiliated, pressured and finally their lives threatened and exterminated. Lüneburg townspeople participated in this. In their majority, they lacked the faith and moral courage to take a stand against this. Even more so, as harassment and later murder formed part of the system and thus were legitimised by the powers that be.

The pogrom night of 1938 marks a turning point in the inconceivable horror that unfolded.

In Lüneburg, the authorities of the day, i.e. the chambers of commerce, the municipal administration, the regional government and the party leadership, forced the Jewish congregation to demolish their synagogue and to sell it far below value.

The Jewish congregation of around 180 members at the turn of the century had dwindled to only 38 in 1937. Only two Lüneburg Jews managed to survive persecution and war in their home town.

Since 1950, a memorial stone commemorates the former synagogue. It was erected by Jews, then known as Displaced Persons, researching the history of the Jewish congregation in this town. It was carved by stone mason Dörries.

The stone itself: unobtrusive and quite hidden.

Much too hidden, as felt particularly by those attending the annual memorial ceremonies. Much too hidden and not visible enough for an appropriate and worthy memorial, to encourage people to stop and reflect. This realisation gained in strength. In 2012, the town council passed a motion to redesign the site.

But: What is appropriate today? What do we want to commemorate, how should we do it? How can we get through to people, especially the younger? These questions have no easy answers.

We have had many a deeply committed discussion, and by we I mean the Association for Christian-Jewish Cooperation whose long-standing chair Ela Griepenkerl had taken the initiative for a redesign, for which we are most grateful. By we I also mean the churches, the History Workshop, the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists [VVN-BdA], the architect Carl-Peter von Mansberg, the Museum Lüneburg, the council's culture and twinning committees, in short: everyone in our community who played an active part in this. On behalf our municipality, I would like to express my thanks to all of them.

It has been a long and intensive process.

Which undoubtedly has been beneficial.

Because together we have sought to understand and include the various perspectives and interpretations. Together we have striven for the right way, the right goal.

We have left nobody behind, but have together realised this memorial: a place that makes history visible and that names the expelled and murdered Lüneburg Jews. A place that invites to analysis and debate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced that this is the only way. That this process constitutes a value in itself. That we have to work towards reacquisition of our memorials, and that we have to repeat this process again and again.

An event in Hanover last week called upon people to respell the process of commemoration, *Gedenken* in German as “*Geh denken*” – with an additional ‘h’ in the sense of “go and think”, i.e. an active process.

Active commemoration. That is what this newly designed site in Lüneburg should invite and encourage us to do. I myself would be delighted if this memorial site also and particularly found acceptance with the younger generation. – For this reason: if involvement and commemoration grows old and dies out with the affected generation and their descendants, even the most successful edifice will no longer touch hearts and souls.

And the latter is so important, particularly today. In view of the anti-Semitism flaring up again in Germany, in view of the rise in radical and extremist views, expressed ever more brazenly in words and sadly often also in acts of violence against minorities, it is so important to embark on this active commemoration – and hopefully let it lead to valour, moral backbone and moral courage. And thus represent a Germany different from that of the 1930s.

That period occupies our minds today more than ever. With great concern we observe recent developments and hope that doubts in democracy may never again rise to the levels of those times and that groups critical of our system may never again rise to the power they wielded then. But that humanity and moral courage may prevail.

This memorial site, same as the Tiergarten cemetery and the Lindenstrasse memorial, is dedicated to the victims.

My wish for this memorial site is that it may thus touch and encourage many of Lüneburg's inhabitants today as well as visitors to our town.

Thank you for your attention.