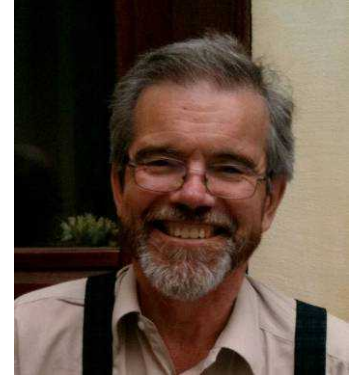


CCS visit to Gotha

John Henry

Gotha is one of numerous small towns in Germany of aristocratic origin and arranged decoratively at the foot of a schloss (a castle or palace) on a commanding height. Gotha is unique in being the home of Justus Perthes (JP), publishers of atlases, who celebrate their 225th anniversary this year, although rebranded as Klett Perthes. The first generation of the Bartholomew dynasty and of W and A K Johnston, both major Edinburgh cartographic firms, apprenticed at JP. A tradition of employee exchanges continued up to World War II between the



firms in Germany and Britain. We understand it continues today with a German research student currently studying the Bartholomew's archive at the National Library of Scotland. We also learned that August Petermann, an eminent cartographer in the JP organisation, was secretary to the Royal Geographical Society in London for a period in the 1850s, while freelancing in London before he joined JP. This was news to this reviewer but, once realised, the connection was obvious; maps in the RGS journals of the period are very similar to examples we saw of Petermann's work for JP.

But, I am getting ahead of myself. The CCS trip to Gotha took place from 14-18 June. It came about after Anne Stauche, a native of Gotha and currently running her own London-based map company¹ had mentioned her interest in the Perthes anniversary to Gerry Zierler. The trip was arranged around a day in the archive in Schloss Friedenstein, a vast pile set in an 'English' landscaped park on the hill above Gotha. The schloss accommodated the Herzog (duke) of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and his extended family, his militia, his mint, his treasury, his church, his administration, his stables, his theatre and his collections. Successive Herzogs were patrons of art and science; among many interests they supported Justus Perthes in cartography and several proto-geologists, also of interest to your reviewer.

The Thursday was the core map day in the archive. Dr Petra Weigel, head of the Perthes Collection, introduced historical map material from the JP publishing house. Most of the vast collection is currently held nearby at Erfurt University but will be moved to the archive of Schloss Friedenstein over the next few years. When the seventh generation Perthes sold the business to Klett, part of the deal was that the company archive of JP went to the state archive.²

There followed a talk, '225 Years of Cartography from Gotha', by Herr Volker Streibl, marketing director of Klett Perthes, direct successor to the JP cartographic dynasty. The business had been through the vicissitudes of two World Wars, Russian occupation and the Cold War and finally the re-unification of Germany,

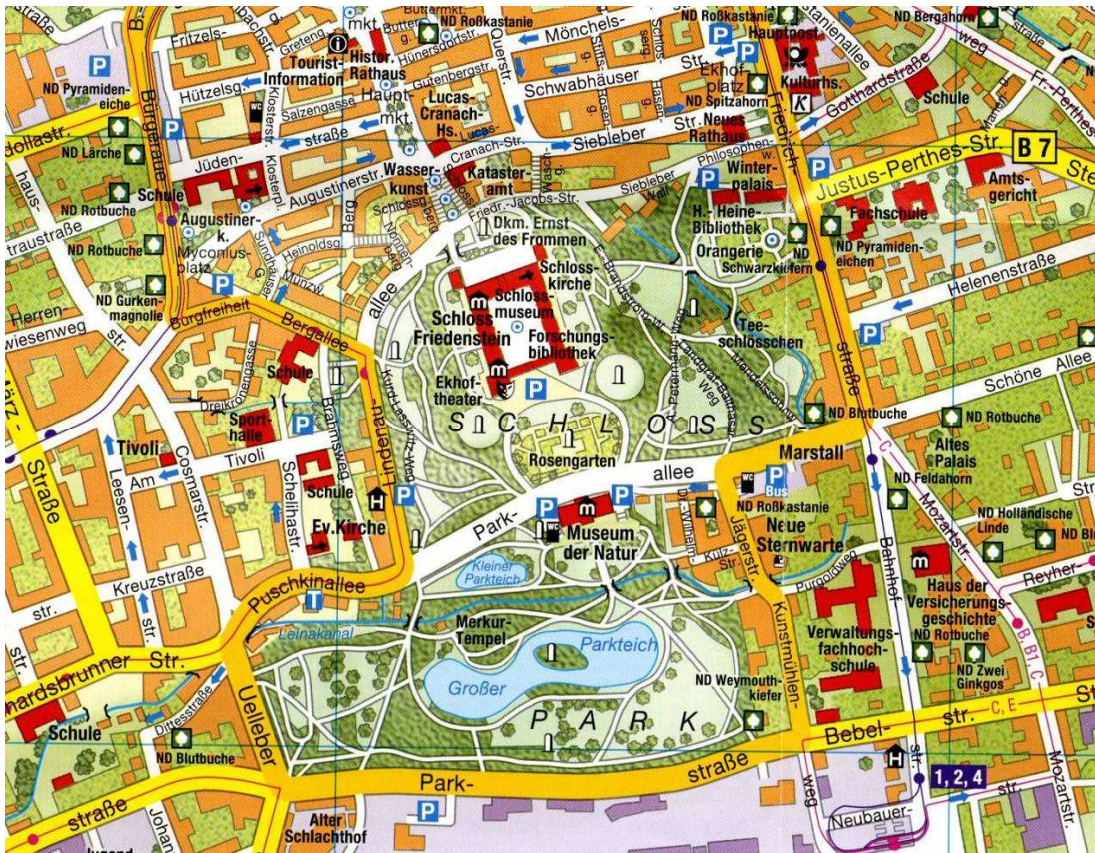
¹ www.thezoomablemap.com

² For more information see

www.uni-erfurt.de/fileadmin/public-ocs/Sammlung_Perthes/Startseite/Flyer_english.pdf

surviving through the post-WW2 phase as Haack and since 2003 as Klett Perthes. In both talks we learned of the great cartographers, Stieler, Petermann, and Haack *et al* and the great geographers von Humboldt and Berghaus. Scarcely known outside Germany, they had a profound influence on the design of atlases and the development of thematic mapping familiar to us through the various editions of Bartholomew and Times atlases.

After a tour of the Ducal collections and apartments, including a room of portraits reminding us of the Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Queen Victoria connection, we returned to the archive to look at the Perthes cartographic exhibition 'Botanical world images' showing plant-geographical maps of the Perthes collection.



Extract from mr-kartographie 1:10,000 Gotha. Note Justus-Perthes Str (top right)

There followed a visit to mr-kartographie, a remarkable cartographic design firm started by Herrs Muller and Richert in 1991. Following the collapse of the Iron Curtain and, soon after, their careers in Haack (the East German heirs of JP), Muller and Richert started with nothing but ideas. They now design a range of attractive map products for regional and local government, and private firms. Their cartographic heritage from JP via Haack is evident but modified and improved with the advantages of the digital revolution.

For the preceding day Anne had organised a tour on a vintage tram beginning with a fascinating visit to the depot and thence into the Thuringian mountains to a gypsum crystal mine. From there we took a minibus to Schloss Wartburg, a medieval castle occupying a pinnacle reached by a switchback track.

Beautiful in itself, Wartburg's main claim to fame is that Martin Luther sheltered here *in cognito* when he was outlawed. While here he translated the New Testament from Greek into German. In its impact on the richness of the German language, Luther's translation is equivalent to the King James Bible's contribution to English. We ended the day in the town of Eisenach, birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Following archive day, we travelled east by train to the small city of Erfurt, capital of the federal state of Thuringia. Erfurt is a beautiful and lively city. Instead of a herzog and a schloss, it had an archbishop and a cathedral or dom. On its high outcrop, the dom dominates the large market square and the medieval core which is spread on an alluvial plain traversed by several river channels with numerous bridges. The most enchanting bridge had shops built on both sides. The town centre is accessed by tramlines but is otherwise a pedestrian zone. After a guided tour on foot in the morning and lunch, we dispersed to explore. Your reviewer found a couple of antiquarian bookshops which were well patronised by several CCS collectors. Erfurt was organising for a major annual festival on the weekend and preparations for it were well advanced with market stalls and music stages being set up. We concluded the day and the trip with a wonderful meal in a lovely courtyard that we would never have found without Anne's local knowledge.

We thank Anne Stauche for her organisation of the itinerary and her flexibility and attention to detail during the trip. Her native knowledge of Gotha was so very helpful in locating interesting and good places to eat. And, she was in the midst of moving from London, after ten years, to Berlin. Thanks, too, to CCS member Peter Lush, resident of Berlin, who was extremely helpful as a translator and observer of life in Germany. He hosted an additional mini-tour to Berlin. Finally, many thanks to Gerry Zierler, *bon viveur* and *raconteur*, who organised the visit at the British end, was purser during the visit and recognised abundantly that a CCS tour marches on its stomach.

Gotha will be worth a CCS re-visit in a few years time. The Schloss Friedenstein archive and museum are undergoing great changes and our visit caught them in mid-stride. Eventually all will be displayed, but currently most of the JP collection was inaccessible, as were the historic geological collections and maps of the adjacent *Museum der Natur*, also being moved to the schloss.

Gotha, Eisenach and Erfurt all possessed great character. Sensitive, high quality renovations and new buildings were evident in all three as part of the investment and reinvigoration following reunification. Each town is attractive and has an individual character. In retrospect, the neglect of the Communist era protected towns in former East Germany from the uniformity brought by national chain stores, insensitive central planning and overdevelopment. Each centre had retained and expanded its tram system and none were given over to the automobile or high rises. In addition to the beauty of the townscapes and landscapes, one of the delights of travel in former East Germany is that most tourism is internal. Few foreigners travel there outside of the major cities. English is not widely spoken and foreign visitors have to make a greater effort; but this is met with goodwill which enriched our travel there.