

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc

Newsletter September 2017



Ten year Anniversary plans of HHRSA: 3 January 2018

Celebrations will take place at the wonderful Hub 62 in Chiltern on the afternoon of January 3 before the annual picnic tea at Lake View. Food, drink and merriment. Keep the date free! Details available in the next newsletter at the end of October.

HHR trip to Germany: Munich and Marquartstein

In this issue we continue the account of the HHR Society's trip to Germany, focussing particularly on **Munich**, where HHR lived for parts of 1895 and 1896, and **Marquartstein** where she spent summer holidays.

Dr Irmgard Heidler was our gracious, well-informed and indefatigable guide for these places.



Dr Irmgard Heidler

Arriving in Munich

Our journey began on a cold wet evening in May. We'd each arrived in Munich that day from different places—Japan (Graeme and Dot Charles), Australia (Carolyn Mooney, Graeme and Gloria Banks), and Italy (Helen Macrae and Janey Runci). Although Munich was actually the second city where HHR lived in Germany (after Leipzig), it was our first port of call.

Our destination that night was Max Joseph Platz in the old part of the lovely city of Munich, and the Spatenhaus Café where we were to have a happy reunion with Dr Irmgard Heidler who had delivered the HHR annual Oration in Maldon just two months before. In the oration Dr Heidler had spoken of HHR's Munich and now we were to see the real thing.

Dr Heidler takes up the story here.



At the Spatenhaus Cafe

Dr Heidler's summary of our time in Munich

All the visiting members of the HHR Society were already there, when I arrived at the Munich Spatenhaus on Monday evening. The restaurant is situated opposite the National Theatre, the Bavarian State Opera, and well-known for its Bavarian food. It was pouring, so there was no walk afterwards beyond the underground station.



Graeme, Helen, Dot and Irmgard

Next day the weather was quite adequate for walking through Munich—which we did extensively. Good on

you, Carolyn, Dot, Gloria, Helen, Janey and Graeme I and II! We traced the Munich of Mary, Lillian Richardson, and HHR (and J. G. Robertson and Otto Neustätter) and the houses they lived in, starting with Akademiestraße and finishing with Thorwaldsenstraße.

We looked at the music places, and also the Bohemian Schwabing and Maxvorstadt including restaurants (arriving at the Alter Simpl just in time, being very hungry) and cafés. We then went to Lillian Neustätter's places, to Prinzregentenplatz and Liebigstraße; and we visited the idyllic cemetery where Mary was buried.

Our first impressions

(Janey Runci continues the story on behalf of the group)

We had a small taste of what the next day would offer us when we stepped out from the café. Irmgard pointed to the building ahead of us over the expanse of the dark and wet Max Joseph Platz—the Bavarian State Opera House, a place attended many times by HHR and Lil.



Bavarian State Opera House

To the left Irmgard indicated a building that had once been a café where the playwright Ibsen, whose work HHR greatly admired, is reputed to have sat and written his plays while admirers looked on, only a few years before the Richardson family lived there.

We walked the short distance up to Odeonplatz then for Irmgard to explain where we would meet in the morning. We stood on the steps of the Feldherrnhalle, the monumental loggia that forms one end of Ludwigstrasse and Irmgard pointed down to the triumphal arch at the other end of the wide boulevard and said, 'That's where we'll go tomorrow. That's HHR territory.'

After all the thought and planning for this trip we had finally arrived.



Feldherrnhalle on a sunny day



View down Ludwigstrasse

Walking the streets of HHR's Munich

We met at the same spot the next morning and this time Irmgard read to us a passage from *The Young Cosima*, HHR's last novel.

In this passage Richard Wagner has recently and unhappily settled in Munich. His friend, the composer, Peter Cornelius eggs him on in his dissatisfaction:

'No, my own town it's not, this cold, unfriendly place, perched up for all the winds that blow to whistle through its streets. And oh, these streets, these endless, shabby, monotonous streets – Amalien, Turken, Theresien, Gabelsberger or whatever else their names may be—one so like another that you never know which you're in... and what's more don't care. Merely to have to walk through them, between their rows of scabby houses, sends your heart into your boots. Yet, tell me, can one good word be said for Ludwigstrasse—this pompous, pretentious Ludwigstrasse!—which the people here think so much of? I doubt it.'



Irmgard reading from 'The Young Cosima'

We were certainly cold that day as we walked each of these streets so disparagingly mentioned in the novel, but we were entranced by what we saw, and Irmgard, our untiring guide, was eager for us to see as much as possible. She took us to the places where the Richardsons and the Neustatters lived and worked and relaxed. We were immersed in the bohemian world of the Schwabing district, including the haunts of musicians, writers and artists during HHR's time there, such as the Alter Simpl café and Café Luitpold.



Living it up at Café Luitpold

We went into the inner courtyard of a building in Turkenstrasse that had been the site of the Eleven Executioners Cabaret, the first one in Munich, one that Lil and Ettie would have frequented.

A feature that emerged on the extensive walking tour that day was what a different place Munich was for each member of the Richardson family.

Lil came to Munich to study violin, immersed herself in the musical world and eventually married Otto Neustatter in 1900. She spent the first years of her married life there in relative prosperity with her husband and later their son, Walter (father of Angela and Patrick).



Lil and Otto's home in Possarstrasse, with a view to Prinzregentzplatz

HHR, on the other hand, lived in Munich for only a short time, first with Mary and Lil, rather unhappily it seems, from May to December 1895 in the months before her marriage. It is not known exactly which building the family occupied in Akademistrasse, but our main impression was of how much they were at the centre of things, just one block from the university, in the midst of the Bohemian Schwabing district and with the extensive English Gardens just a few minutes away.



From January to September 1986 HHR lived very happily with her new husband in a three roomed flat at

Thorwaldsenstrasse, until JGR received a position at the University of Strasbourg and they moved there.



Thorwaldenstrasse

Although buildings in this area were constructed as workers' quarters, they were also popular with artists. Interestingly the Robertsons' neighbour in the adjoining flat was a composer named Edward Schilsky, a surname familiar to readers of *Maurice Guest*. As we admired what we saw as an old building Irmgard drew our attention to the fact that the Richardsons generally preferred newly built accommodation. In *Myself When Young* HHR made it very clear that she did not appreciate what she saw as the unsanitary conditions of the various pensions where they lived in Leipzig:

Sanitary conditions were primitive, in some ways in the older houses indescribably so; bathrooms such rarities that in three years I came across but one – and it was used to store lumber in.

Mary Richardson's time in Munich was also brief. She spent the last 18 months of her life there, supporting her daughters as always until she died and was buried in this city so far from her birthplace in Leicester, England, and her home in Australia.



Mary Richardson née Bailey

We visited Mary's burial place (see Graeme Charles' account below), unmarked because of bombing in WW2. It was a relief to learn that at least she spent her

last months in better accommodation than in Akademistrasse. This time she and Lil lived in Galeriestrasse, a privileged area with ready access to the Hofgarten.



Hofgarten

A reflection on the burial place of Mary Richardson in Munich – by Graeme Charles

For me, one of the most moving places we visited in Germany, has to be the burial place in Munich of HHR's mother, Mary Richardson. Mary died in November 1896; according to Olga Roncoroni, 'from peritonitis following on the appendicitis for which at that time no operation was considered feasible'. She was buried in the Alter Nordfriedhof (Old North Cemetery) in Maxvorstadt, Munich, which is no longer a functioning cemetery, but is retained as a walled park. Many of the graves have no monument or other means of identifying exactly whose remains lie where.



Alter Nordfriedhof in Maxvorstadt, Munich

However, Irmgard Heidler, our wonderful guide in Munich had been able to establish where Mary's unmarked grave was, at least approximately, and so it was that our group were able to visit the site and spend a little time pondering the significance of the occasion. We wondered how many people had visited her grave

between the time of her burial and May 2017 and were pleased that we had been able to do so, albeit 120 years on.



Dot Charles lays a posy on Mary Richardson's grave; Graeme Charles in blue jacket

The visit to Mary's grave got me thinking about the far-flung nature of the resting places of HHR, her parents and her only sibling Lil. Could there be another family of four people whose burial places are located so far apart? I guess there is, but for the record, HHR, as we know, had her ashes scattered at sea off Hastings, England. Her sister was buried in Rhandir Head Cemetery, Llanfairfechan, which is near Bangor, North Wales. Lil prior to her death had been a patient in Bryn Y Neuadd hospital, Llanfairfechan. What was she doing in northern Wales? During World War II, Summerhill, the school that Lil and her second husband, A. S. Neill, had started, was relocated from Leiston, Suffolk on the east coast of England to Blaenau Ffestiniog in north west Wales, because of the threat posed by German bombing raids.

Much earlier of course, their father Walter Lindsay Richardson had died whilst the family were living in Koroit, in Victoria's western district, and was buried in Tower Hill Cemetery. Last year some members of the Society visited his grave, which is marked. The cemetery overlooks farmland with Bass Strait in the background, and as far as cemetery locations are concerned is quite picturesque.



Walter Richardson's grave in Koroit with Graeme Charles and Helen Macrae

Australia, Germany, England, Wales. Four different burial places for this small family, none of them even buried in the same country, let alone the same grave.

Our visit to Mary's lonely burial site in far away Munich aroused a feeling in me that I didn't quite understand then, and still don't now. However, I did find myself recalling what must surely be some of the greatest closing lines to any novel ever written, those of George Eliot as she concluded her masterpiece, 'Middlemarch'. How appropriate they are when we think about Mary's seldom visited burial place.

For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half-owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

A Day in the Country at Marquartstein: Dr Heidler's Summary

On Wednesday the weather was even better, and we left by train for our recreative day in Marquartstein, returning only at night. HHR and Lillian with families stayed there for many summers in the first decade of the last century, and Lillian quite often went there just for a weekend. We passed the villa of Richard Strauss - and his wedding chapel and went up the Hochplatte by chair lift for a view of the Bavarian mountains. Our mood was relaxed and happy.

(Janey Runci continues for the group)

Our day in Marquartstein was indeed a 'recreative day' as Irmgard mentioned in her report. We took the train from Munich to Ubersee and then a local bus that wound its way through fields to the small, quiet village surrounded by mountains, some of them capped with snow.



We walked over the bridge to the older part of the town where HHR and Lil stayed. Irmgard showed us a café that Ettie and Lil had frequented.



Unfortunately that café was closed, but we were more than happy with the sunny garden balcony of the café where we ate, with the river down below and the mountains around, the blossoms out, blackbirds singing and small deer in the adjoining field.

After lunch we walked up the steep streets, pausing at the home of Richard Strauss while Irmgard gave us more information, both about Strauss and HHR and LIL. Strauss lived in Marquartstein in the time when HHR and Lil came to this idyllic mountain village for holidays, both while HHR lived in Germany and after she'd moved to England.



Richard Strauss house

It was here that Strauss wrote his one act opera, *Feuersnot* (Need for fire)—a bawdy and erotic satire on Munich. It came out in November 1901 at the Dresden Court Opera and just one year later HHR and Lil were playing it, reminding some of us of the way the Richardson sisters as young girls in Maldon procured copies of the latest Gilbert and Sullivan operas to perform with the Calder sisters. This small town would clearly provide a haven for artists and writers.

We walked then up to a castle and a chapel on a hill, accompanied by the sound of goats' bells, taking one of the many walking tracks that HHR walked.



Irmgard had arranged for a local historian to meet us. Not only did he give us information about the chapel where Strauss was married but he drove us to the place where we took the the chairlift, conscious as we swayed up through the trees, only the sound of the stream below us, that HHR would have walked this steep climb.



On the chairlift

A network of trails branched out on the Hochplatte. It was not hard to imagine HHR setting out on these trails.



Thank you to Irmgard

Only two days in Munich and Marquartstein, but what a treasure trove Irmgard gave us! She could not have chosen a better way to show us these different aspects of the lives of HHR and Lil. We will be forever grateful.

Our next issue will focus on **Dresden** and **Strasbourg**.

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