

'Servitengasse 1938'

Remembering the Holocaust in a Vienna street

In 2003 the residents of an apartment house in Vienna's 9th district asked themselves who had lived in their house in 1938. Research revealed that half the flats had been inhabited by Jewish families and in 2005 a commemorative plaque was unveiled to the 27 victims of Nazi persecution from this one house. But what about the street – the Servitengasse – as a whole? Who had lived there in 1938 and what had happened to them under National Socialism?

The citizens' initiative grew and a two-year research project revealed that 462 people – residents, business and property owners – had been persecuted as Jews. In 2008 a memorial to them was unveiled in the street. The project has also produced a book on its findings, put on an exhibition, and been the subject of a documentary film. This April six members of 'Servitengasse 1938' spoke about their work at the Austrian Cultural Forum in

London. They were joined by George Vulkan, a London resident and AJR member who lived near the street until 1938, when his family were forced to flee.

The event began by tracing the memorial landscape in Austria since 1945. Joanna White, a doctoral student at the University of Vienna, explained that the Servitengasse project was one of a number of grass-roots initiatives which had emerged since 2000 that are dedicated to researching and remembering the lives of ordinary citizens across Vienna. Peter Koppe, a founding member of the group, then spoke about how the project began and developed over time – who became involved, how it was funded, and their experiences of working with local politicians. Next, Birgit Jöhler, who headed the research project, gave an overview of the findings of archival research and spoke about the importance to the group of meeting former residents. Barbara Sauer, a historian who also lives

in the street, talked about the process of choosing a design for the memorial and how it is used today as a site for commemoration. Katharina Kober, another of the project's historians, outlined the project's current research into synagogues and other Jewish religious sites in the 9th district. Finally, George Vulkan's memories of the area helped bring it to life and he shared his feelings about the work being done by this kind of project.

The evening ended with a lively discussion on topics such as the street's non-Jewish residents, 'aryanisation' and restitution, and similar European memorial projects. The members of 'Servitengasse 1938' are very grateful to the Austrian Cultural Forum for the chance to present their work and hope it will encourage other forms of remembrance of the victims of National Socialist persecution.

Joanna White

www.servitengasse1938.at