

Private Sekundarschule Hugo Stern

Address by Dr Hans-Günther Bracht
at the renaming ceremony on Nov 12, 2022



Dear descendants of Hugo Stern, ladies and gentlemen,
Today we honor Hugo Stern, who was born in Rütthen in 1889, died in Düsseldorf on January 24, 1958 and was finally laid to rest in Rütthen. Many of you will perhaps ask yourselves: who was Hugo Stern and why did this school choose his name, two questions with which we have been occupying ourselves for a long time now. I would like to outline our reflections on these two questions together with our Head Teacher, Ms. Tappe.

How did we find out about
Hugo Stern? -
The history



But first of all, let me say something personal that is part of the background to the development that led to us being assembled here today. In the book on the history of the town of Rütthen - published for the 800th anniversary of its foundation in 2000 -, it was my task to treat the time of the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist dictatorship - i.e. the time from 1918-1945. I was able to give an insight into life in Rütthen during the Nazi era and also to record the effects of state and local measures on the members of the Jewish community here.

I felt compelled to continue my research in order to find out more specifically how people at that time were personally affected, and in 2001 I completed a longer essay on the Pollack family in the "Lippstädter Heimatblätter" in our local newspaper in Rütthen. I called it "A Contribution to the memory of the expulsion and murder of the Jewish citizens of Rütthen". It was only after I retired as headmaster of the Friedrich-Spee-Gymnasium in 2013 that I found the time to continue to deal with this horrifying chapter of German history and, encouraged by our town archivist Mr. Sommer, came across Hugo Stern, among others.

My work received a further, strong incentive when I found an interview in the Old Synagogue in Essen that Hugo Stern's daughter Miriam (formerly Karin) had given. My further investigations led to a lecture in 2017, of which Alma Puts, who is with us today, had become aware. Subsequently, a first email contact was established. So much for the personal side of our being here together in the auditorium of the school today.

The members of the school board founded this school - in this building - in 2014, and by 2020 it had successfully expanded with years 5-10; since then, the approximately 300 students (per year?) have been cared for by almost 30 educators. However, the school bore no name with which it could be identified more personally in this day and age. The formal designation "private secondary school" (Private High School wäre besser) (oder Sekundarschule?) did not appear sufficient for us.

The criteria for choosing a future-oriented name for the expansion were immediately clear to us - it should be no name of a politician, no classical

name like Goethe, Schiller or Einstein, and if possible it should be a name with a direct connection to our town. The name should also concur with the tradition of our town, with the ethical culture of remembrance practised in R then, of which I would like to give you a few examples:

Firstly, there is a memorial plaque commemorating the destruction of the synagogue in the K nigstrasse, and also one commemorating the murder of the Jewish citizens of R then at the entrance to the Jewish cemetery.

Secondly, our grammar school was named after Friedrich Spee, an opponent of witch hunts and the use of torture during the 17th century, for which R then became infamous. The town council under Mayor Weiken decided to rehabilitate the victims of the witch hunt as a sign against any form of discrimination, and so-called "stumbling blocks" were placed in front of the houses of the former Jewish residents of R then.

If possible, the person after whom our school was named should also fit in with this tradition. Unfortunately, the name of a suitable female citizen of R then could not be found during the search, but the name Hugo Stern, a son of the town, was found. His curriculum vitae was only roughly known, there were gaps, there was still a lack of historical classification, there were no contemporary witnesses, but above all there was a lack of assessment as to whether Hugo Stern's person could meet our expectations. So the research continued - also to establish whether Hugo Stern's vita offers enough connecting points for today's youth and for today's societal conditions.

Who was Hugo Stern?



I will now introduce to you a few stations in his life - based on existing photographs and documents:

Hugo Stern grew up in this commercial building, on the left in the photo from 1925. The picture below shows the current buildings and shows that it is now used by the editorial staff of the local newspaper "Der Patriot".

Drawing by H. Stern



The picture you can see here was drawn by Hugo Stern from memory and shows the residential wing of the building. Hugo Stern, born in 1889, grew up as the eldest son in this house in the center of R then. It was the largest clothing store in R then and had been in the family for a long time. Hugo's father Heinrich was one of the most prominent and wealthy citizens of R then.

Childhood and Education

WER WAR HUGO STERN?



- Elternhaus
- Kath. Umfeld
- Katholische Schulen
 - Volksschule Rüthen
 - Rektoratsschule Rüthen
 - Gymnasium Petrinum Brilon

Since Hugo was the only Jewish schoolchild in Rüthen, he attended Catholic schools. Since he was very willing to learn and talented, he quickly took up Catholic rituals and worked as an altar boy until his father had him released from religious instruction at the age of 10. Now he no longer regularly attended Catholic services, which of course had made their mark on him, but instead he occasionally attended the small local synagogue.

On account of his intellectual ability, after four years of elementary school he was sent to the Rüthen Rectorate School, which enabled him to attend the Petrinum High School in Brilon and even to skip a class there at the start. As a boarder in Brilon, he came home every two weeks and during the holidays. He successfully graduated in 1907.

Legal Studies - Employment

JURASTUDIUM - ANSTELLUNGEN

- Studium an mehreren deutschen Universitäten
- schon 1910 1. Juristische Prüfung (mit 21 Jahren)
- als Referendar an mehreren Gerichten tätig – auch am Amtsgericht Rüthen
- nebenbei Promotion
- nach dem 1. Weltkrieg Ernennung zum Assessor
- Festanstellung am Essener Landgericht

While most of the Petrinum graduates studied theology, Hugo Stern, who showed no interest in taking over the family business, chose law and political science as a major, like many other high school graduates from other schools. He studied in Münster, Munich and Berlin; he completed a semester abroad in Lausanne, Switzerland. He did not merely confine himself to lectures on the subject of law, he also attended courses in the fields of history, art, philosophy and literature. In 1910, after only 3 years, he passed his first law examination.

As a junior lawyer,, he worked at several courts in order to gain experience, including the Magistrates' Court in Rüthen. Obviously underutilized, but performance and goal-oriented, he completed his doctorate. (not bad, Google!) After World War I, Hugo Stern was appointed assessor and briefly worked again at the Rüthen district court. After passing the 2nd state examination, he obtained a permanent position as a district judge at the Essen Regional Court.

Military Service

MILITÄRDIENT



- freiwilliger Militärdienst
- Unfall
- Kriegsteilnahme

> „Verlorene Jahre“

Like most Jewish Germans, Hugo Stern naturally wanted to serve his fatherland and completed voluntary military service in 1911. He can be seen in the picture on the right. The consequences of a serious accident, during which he was run over by such a gun carriage, made things difficult for him for the rest of his life.

When the war began in 1914 and the Fatherland called, he wanted to participate as a volunteer; however, he was at first not accepted because of his injury. A little later he was, but only for deployment behind the front. To him, as he later wrote, those were “lost years”.

Marriage and Children

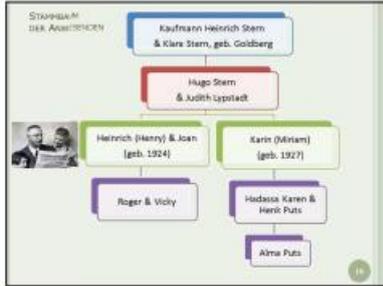
HEIRAT UND KINDER



- 1923 Heirat mit Judith Lypstadt
- 1924 Sohn Heinrich
1927 Tochter Karin

On the basis of the permanent position as a district judge, he had a secure economic future which enabled him to marry Judith Lypstadt, the daughter of a cigarette manufacturer from Wiesbaden.

Genealogy of those present



They had two children: Heinrich in 1924 and Karin in 1927.

We see part of the family genealogy next to the photo:

Heinrich, who later called himself Henry, who is Roger's father. Roger and his wife Vicky have come the longest way from California.

Hugo Stern's daughter Karin, later called Miriam, is Hadassa Keren's mother. Hadassa joined us today from Holland and her daughter Alma from London.

Welcome again.

Successful professional life



Hugo was a well-recognized jurist and judge, popular with his colleagues and the trainees he supervised. He is the third from the left in the picture. He received good reviews from his superiors. He turned down a position at the higher regional court in Hamm in order to be able to stay with his family in Essen.

Free time and hobbies



We know little about Hugo Stern's hobby "chamber music", (he played the violin), and also not much about his hobby "photography", but pictures of leisure activities in the countryside have survived.

Hugo Stern often went hiking in the Sauerland on winter days with snowshoes, tried out bobsledding and went skiing with his wife and friends.



In summer, water sports dominated in the folding canoe club. He often went out with his children. The pictures show him as a popular person with many social contacts.

At the peak of his professional life

AUF DEM HÖHEPUNKT - HUGO STERN:



- o umfassend gebildeter, erfolgreicher Richter – gesellschaftlich integriert
- o Familienmensch
- o vielseitig interessierter und künstlerisch begabter Mensch mit vielen Hobbys
- o mit seiner Heimat Rütthen verbundener Deutscher, der zur gehobenen Mittelschicht gehörte

- an educated, successful judge - socially integrated

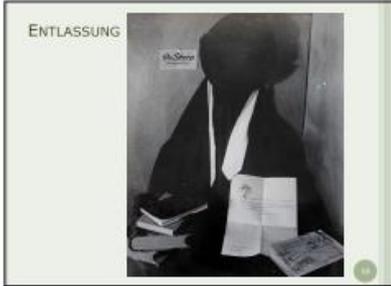
- a family man

- a versatile man, with wide interests and artistically talented with many hobbies

- a German associated with his home town of Rütthen, who belonged to the upper middle class

And then came the catastrophic break

Dismissal



The political unrest in the Weimar period had hardly affected the economically well-positioned family. But when the National Socialists came to power in the spring of 1933, everything was destroyed:

Hugo Stern was dismissed without notice. Even a petition to President von Hindenburg did not help.

In a photo collage, Hugo Stern put together what he had to give up in view of the letter of dismissal:

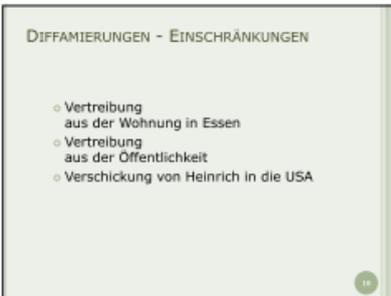
clothing: black robe and white tie, black hat;

Legal texts,

his name tag.

Everything which marked his professional life. Quite apart from the drastic reduction in income.

Defamation – Limitations of life



Defamation and limitations of life

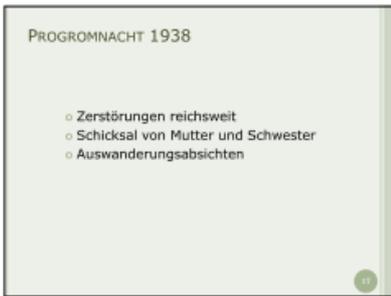
The family was driven out of the Essen apartment in which they had lived for many years - a so-called Aryan was supposed to move in. The family stayed with Stern's mother-in-law in Wiesbaden. The circumstances of the family became more modest, they suffered from the legal restrictions and prohibitions which were imposed on Jews. In the years that followed, not only were numerous professional activities for Jews continually restricted or banned, but leisure activities were also banned from taking place in public, which particularly affected children and young people: Visiting swimming pools, playgrounds, parks and sports facilities was gradually banned; Cinemas, theatres, zoos and museums increasingly refused entry; as early as 1935, numerous health resorts advertised that they were "free of Jews"; Finally, the use of public transport was forbidden for all Jews, except for Jewish children if they attended the Jewish schools that were planned from 1936 and which were often far away from where the children lived. At the beginning of 1938 all Jews had to give up their passports. Leaving the country was only possible with permission from the authorities.

Hugo Stern knew about the arrests of Jews in Rütten, about the increasingly successful economic boycotts against Jewish businesses, including that of his family, which was run by his brother Erich. The last Jewish shop in Rütten had to be closed in the summer of 1938. The family was still optimistic: governments could change. But the harassment and hatred of Jewish fellow citizens escalated. More and more Jewish Germans fled abroad, thus son Heinrich came into contact with an American organization that brought young people to the USA. The family took this opportunity in 1938 and sent their son to relatives in Cleveland. They themselves wanted to remain.

Program night 1938

November 1938 Pogrom Night

However the nationwide terror of the pogrom night from November 9th to 10th, 1938, showed that flight had become a necessity: many synagogues burned down, Jewish shops were destroyed, numerous Jews were kidnapped, attacked and died, the headmaster of Heinrich's former school



committed suicide. The pressure on Jewish families to sell their property increased daily.

Hugo Stern knew of the terrible things that had happened that night in Wiesbaden and in Rütten, his hometown. And although I've been researching for years, I've only known for two weeks what Hugo Stern naturally learned then: what happened to his sister Erna and his mother. Erna Traugott was married in Niedermarsberg, about 45 km from Rütten. It was a wealthy family that ran a larger sawmill. Klara Stern, Hugo's mother, did not live in Rütten at the time, but with her daughter Erna. On the night of the pogrom SA men rampaged and plundered free from restraint in Niedermarsberg: the front door of the Traugott family's house was smashed in with a tree trunk, furniture was destroyed, porcelain was smashed, pictures and grand piano were badly damaged, silverware and jewellery were stolen. Local Nazi figures and the mayor spent the night in the wine cellar and only left the house drunk in the morning. Erna's husband was deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Mother and daughter fled the house and wandered through Niedermarsberg. After a long search, they found refuge with a family for one night. After that, they were able to sleep at a neighbour's house for a week before their house was restored and locked up. Although Klara Stern had severe heart problems, "the nuns in the Catholic hospital won't take me," she later reported. Faced with this terror, Hugo Stern now realized that it was necessary to flee with his family.

Farewell – April 1939

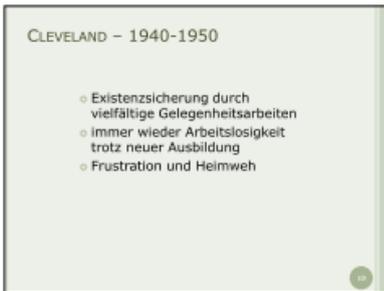


In his memoirs he wrote: "I never thought that saying goodbye to this country would be so difficult for me. You cannot change your fatherland as you would a shirt, or a suit, or a house, because invisible threads connect you to the old country..." The photo shows that he was hoping to see his country again.

How was one to survive in a foreign country without sufficient knowledge of a foreign language, without specific professional training? Let us not forget that Hugo Stern was already 50 years old, his adaptability was decreasing, as he himself wrote. The laws passed by the Nazis forced the sale of property, but prevented the taking of assets (money, jewelry, etc.). Hugo Stern had to waive any claims on the state such as pensions etc.

In April 1939, Hugo Stern emigrated with his wife, daughter and mother-in-law, each with only two small suitcases. First they flew to London, then continued by ship from Liverpool to Cuba, where they had to wait for the promised entry into the USA. In December 1939 Hugo and daughter Karin were allowed to leave Cuba and a few months later his wife and her mother were able to follow them to Cleveland. The delay was caused by the fact that immigration was dependent on a person's so-called 'quota number', and Stern's mother-in-law had a higher number than the rest of the family.

Cleveland 1940 - 1950



Cleveland was a large industrial city where Hugo only found employment as a casual worker. Among other things, he worked in an iron foundry, in a clothing factory, as a parking lot attendant and on a racetrack; and at night he trained at the university to become an accountant and chartered accountant. He passed several professional exams. His wife helped in restaurants in the kitchen. They were supported by the Jewish community.

When he was granted American citizenship in 1945, he found employment as an auditor in the military administration – but only for a short time, as the war machine was dismantled. Worn down by homesickness, disappointed by recurring unemployment and social misery, he thought of returning to Germany. He made contact with former colleagues.

Return to Germany



In 1950 the time had come: 61-year-old Hugo Stern was able to return to Germany and was employed at the Düsseldorf District Court. His wife and children, however, stayed in the USA: Heinrich, a former American soldier, was already studying in Chicago and Karin completed an internship in an agricultural camp to prepare her for immigration to Israel. In 1950, Karin briefly visited her father in Germany on her way to Israel. Hugo Stern's wife Judith regarded herself as a Zionist and did not want to go back to the "land of the murderers": in total 6 million Jews had fallen victim to the Holocaust, including a son of her sister in Auschwitz. Judith Stern would later follow her daughter to Israel. Many Jewish organizations had also refused to return to Germany, but Hugo Stern was driven by homesickness - and hoped that his wife would follow him.

However, after 17 years away from Germany, many social contacts were lost. Hugo Stern had to work with colleagues, of whom some had carved out careers for themselves during the Nazi era. Since there were still anti-Semitic reservations among the population, he was employed to process petitions for clemency, in which he proved himself, as his superior wrote. Hugo Stern had to fight for his promotion to the director of the district court, as had happened with equally well-qualified colleagues. In 1954 the Minister of Justice of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia awarded him the nomination.

Free time



Hugo Stern was unable to resume his varied leisure activities, as he only had time for excursions and short hikes in the area, but also in Switzerland. Frau Fromme, a housekeeper from Rüthen, supported him in coping with everyday life. Occasionally Hugo Stern came to Rüthen and always visited Mrs. Fromme's family then.

Family contacts



In 1954 his son Henry visited him with his newly wed wife. They drove to Italy together in Hugo's car.

Early Death



The early injury in his military service continued to plague him and the occasional physically strenuous work in the USA had weakened his body. The long-lasting struggle for reparations, for compensation, was exhausting and put an additional psychological strain on him. His heart was giving him trouble and he was too strong. This resulted in numerous visits to the doctor and sick leave. At the end of July 1957, Hugo Stern retired at the age of 68. His intention to visit his elderly mother in the USA could no longer be realized, he died on January 24, 1958. The funeral service took place in Düsseldorf.

Ich verstehe nicht den Satz: His heart was giving him trouble and he was too strong. Die deutsche Version verstehe ich auch nicht. Sollte es vielleicht so heißen: In spite of his physical strength, his heart was giving him trouble. ??

Burial in Rüthen



At his request, his body was cremated and his urn buried in his father's grave in Rüthen. His two children came to his burial from the USA and Israel

Hugo Stern saved his family's life by fleeing Germany, but their happy family life was over: After that, "everyone went their own way," his daughter Miriam said later.

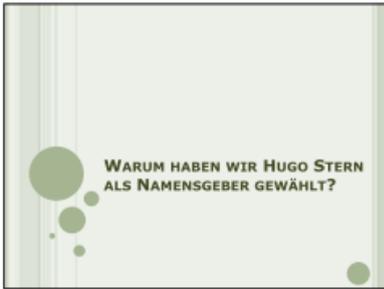


What the German-Swiss writer Carl Zuckmayer, who himself fled to Switzerland in 1938 and a year later to the United States, described, is also true for Hugo Stern:

Zuckmayer :

"The journey into exile is 'the journey of no return'. Anyone who enters it and dreams of returning home is lost. He may return - but the place he finds is no longer the same as that which he left, and he himself is no longer the same person as the one who left. He may return to people he had to do without, to places he loved and never forgot, to the realm of language that is his own. But he never comes home."

Why did we choose Hugo Stern as namesake?



Hugo Stern fits into Rùthen's culture of remembrance.

The findings of the research have met our expectations. They have shown that Hugo Stern, whose name the school has adopted, can - from the point of view of his biography - be seen as a further building block in Rùthen's culture of remembrance. The members of the school board have therefore unanimously decided to include his name as a worthy extension of the existing school name. The Arnsberg district government confirmed this decision with effect from August 1st, 2022. By naming the school after Hugo Stern, we not only wish to recall the suffering of the Stern family, but we also seek to remember the fate of all the Jewish citizens of Rùthen who were expelled or murdered.

For those who are interested: On the school's website, under the heading "Trägerverein", you will find a comprehensive essay on the life of Hugo Stern containing many historical classifications, with essays by Hugo Stern himself and further pictures.

Dear descendants of Hugo Stern,

as chairman of the school board, I would like to thank you for your enthusiastic reaction to the news that Hugo Stern's name was to be included in the name of our school. It is a sign of special appreciation for our project that you have undertaken the long journey in order to take part in today's celebration.

After a further song, Ms. Tappe will show us how the fate of Hugo Stern and his family can be addressed in the classroom.

Thank you very much.