

Essay on
Emil and Bertha Dietz and
their eldest Daughter Johanna Axe

A Survey on chosen biographical and historical Issues

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A long Introduction to a short Text

The present text is intended to give an overview on my familyresearch on my great-grandparents Emil and Bertha Dietz and their eldest daughter Johanna. Since the latter died in England and that only little biographical information was known about her, I got curious: Got she any children? Are there any relatives resident in England yet?

It was said that she had married in England before the Great War broke out in 1914, that her husband's name was Joe, that Joe was occupied as a butcher. A difficult task, reminding on the German language proverb "Die Suche nach der Stecknadel im Heuhaufen" (metaphorical: The search for a needle in a heap of hay). I even did not know the christian name of my great-grandfather, nor I was aware of Johanna's married name or even the plac(es) of residence Johanna or my family.

Furthermore, there was a picture taken from the family reported to be taken just before the family had to leave England due to the War.

To commence research seemed to be a enormous undertaking but it came by chance when I made a marvellous discovery in Coburg. In the course of my research on the Viennese composer Johann Dubez (1828-1891) I came across a autograph from Dubez' hand: a Concerto for Violin and Orchestra from about 1860, hold by the Statelibrary of Coburg, dedicated to Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. At closer look on the political and historical background I came across a certain Hofrat Carl Dietz. At once, my first idea was that this person maybe an ancestor of mine, due to to fact that my grandfather, Ernst Dietz, was born in Coburg in 1899.

It did not take a long time to find out that this person is not relative to the mentioned Carl Dietz, but on the other hand, the little amount of research made me more curious that I have been ever before. I was completely fascinated by the biography of my ancestors with name Dietz (only on this part of the family, there is no curiosity on other ancestors at all).

The Purpose of the present Essay

My aim is to supply the name Dietz, Emil Dietz, Bertha Dietz born Göpfert resp. Dietz as keywords for searchengines and of course I hope that eventually there are persons dealing with some of the matters relevant to my family so that I get in contact with them. Of course I will deliver any information I will get.

Maybe there are persons researching on the Axe family or that there are persons who were acquainted with Johanna Axe.

Acknowledgements

Furthermore I was surprised that there are some of my more distant relatives who started research long before I did, so we had a lot of exchange and I had an encounter with members of the family I did not meet since about 40 years. I am grateful for the exchange and the large amount of information I share with my with my cousins of second degree Jutta Mohrmann, Birgit Retzer und Carsten Goerke.

A valuable support was given by Mrs Janet Penny (Doncaster), Amanda Penny (Frankfurt a. M.) und Mrs June M. Symons, maiden name Penny (London und Eastbourne) and her

brothers John and Peter. The latter are likely to consider as grandaunt and -uncles by law of second degree (I think this is my own construction but I am nor sure about the suitable nomenclature in English).

Additional Remark

If you have any information, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone, e-mail, post, or by any means you may prefer. I am looking forward.

All the best,

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(Please note that the 0 in brackets is usually be omitted when calling from abroad)

1 In Advance

The photo below shows the Dietz-family It was given to me by my aunt Katharina Dietz, Baesweiler, Rhineland. Her first thesis was that the picture is taken in their flat/house in England, but obviously glancing at the background we find that it has been taken by a professional photographer.

Since my great-grandfather has been interned in England in 1915 and my great-grandmother left England to stay in the Netherlands it is evident that this thesis is not supported by reliable facts.



Hans	Ernst	Johanna	Georg	Gretel	Fritz
Emil	Erich	Ethel	Joseph Machin	Bertha	

Obviously the boy standing close to my great-grandfather is the youngest son Erich. He was born in the second at the end of 1910 in Doncaster. At a first glance we can trace that he will be aged about seven or eight years. That means – of course, the age is estimated – that the photo is taken later.

After my great-grandfather has been released, he moved back to Germany where he was employed at Nordhausen/Saxony-Anhalt.

Emil and Bertha Dietz got eight children. The photo shown above is presumed to be taken in 1918 or 1919. The precise dating and locating is a matter of guesswork, but taking into account that the Great War ended in 1918 and that Joseph obviously would not have

got any chance to visit Germany before, it is evident that the mentioned years are most conceivable. The location seems to be Nordhausen.

2 Emil Dietz

Childhood to the early years of Adolescence

Emil was born illegitimately in Hof/Bavaria on 4th January 1872 and grew up in Forchheim/Bavaria. His full name according to the birth document is Johann Emil Nicolaus. Nothing is known about his childhood, except of the fact that his father got an employment in a textile factory. Though descending from the lower social classes Emil's father obtained social ascendancy as a weaver and foreman in textile industry.

The childhood was a period of economical crisis. In May 1873 the so called Gründerkrach caused a longlasting period of recession.

Besides in particular in Germany the period was coined by many ambitious projects in terms of industrial production, educational and research policy, and also in military development.

The Foundation of the Family

There is no evidence about the circumstances Emil met his wife Bertha. Of course they met and what is evident are the consequences: In 1893 Johanna, the first daughter, was born illegitimately in Siebleben near Gotha, of course Emil married Bertha in 1896. For a short while the couple settled in Brand near the border to Bohemia, where Hans was born in 1897. Emil may have had a relation to that region of Germany, he himself was born there and some of his ancestors hailed from this area.

Emil may have had a relation to that region of Germany, he himself was born there and some of his ancestors hailed from this area. We do not know what happened in that period, but as being responsible for the livelihood of a family it is assumed that the crisis of the textile industry affected the vital interests.

A Change in Respect to make a Living

In about 1897 Emil commenced a professional training to become a civil engineer in Hildburghausen and Coburg. These places are not verified to be the ones where Emil actually received professional education, I got evidence that he is not mentioned in the references of students in Hildburghausen and I am still waiting on more information from the authorities in Coburg.

That is why all matters of his training still remain speculation in spite of the fact that there is no other explanation for the residence in Hildburghausen as well as in Coburg. But there is evidence in a newspaper from July of 1899 announcing that my grandfather Ernst was born as son to the "Techniker" Emil Dietz, and we can also supply the date of settlement from Hildburghausen to Coburg on 25th March 1899 and from there to Nordhausen 14th April 1900.

His education led him to the Shaft sinking Company Gebhardt and König, Nordhausen as a mechanical engineer beginning in April 1900, the beginning of a remarkable career.

First commissions led him to the coal region of Aix la Chapelle (Aachen), Rhineland. It seems that he was in charge of sinking a shaft in Duffesheide, Alsdorf. But obviously he lived in Herzogenrath where his son Georg was born in 1901.

England 1902-1917

From about 1902 they moved to England, at first to Dawdon near Seaham, Co. Durham. Presumably the Washington Glebe shafts (only a few miles from Seaham) and also the shafts of Dawdon were sunk under his direction: a venturesome undertaking due to the fact that the sinking had to be proceeded in watered ground below sea-ground-level. These were the first attempts reported to employ the so-called freezing method in English collieries. Three children were born in County Durham: Fritz in 1903, Margarethe in 1904, and Ethel in 1906.

In about 1909 the projects in County Durham got finished. New ones got acquired, thus the Dietz-family moved to the coal region of Doncaster. It is proved that Emil was in charge of sinking the shafts for the colliery of Bullcroft



On the first photo we see the second person on the left with the bright coat. This man is supposed to be Emil.

Most probably also the new shafts in Thorne, situated in the North of Doncaster, were sunk by him, a contract with the firm mentioned above is proved.



Doncaster is a place in England situated in the South Yorkshire County, a little closer to the big cities especially to London than County Durham. In 1910 Erich was born in Doncaster or Thorne, where the family was resident.

The Great War – a Caesura

Certainly life was coined by success and wealth. The family went through a time of economical prosperity and it may be assumed that the period of residence in England were the best years in their lives. My aunt Katharina Dietz told me that Bertha annually used to attend the spa of Bad Nauheim for the purpose of cure. The degree of prosperity of this period derived also by the reports of shopping tours of the couple in London.

But times changed radically. The rhetorical, economical and military combativeness of Emperor Wilhelm II was followed by the First World War. When Germany occupied Belgium England declared to enter the war on 4th August 1914.

One of the consequences of the War were that the contracts with Gebhardt and König were cancelled and the sinking process was continued by the Shaft-Freezing Ltd. London. As mentioned in the first section, Emil was happen to be charged and interned as a Prisoner of War. He was housed at Knockaloe on the Isle of Man in September 1915 and released in January 1917. For a few days he stayed in Stradford near London, then he was sent to Germany.

2.1 Back in Germany – A Life in a destroyed Economy

Back in Germany Emil settled in Nordhausen. Dokuments from authorities prove that the entire family lived there. Political situation in Germany was not stable at all, remember the

coup d'état, so called Hitler-putsch and the inflation, both in 1923 as well as the global crisis following the Great Crash of the Stock Market from 1929.

Besides, also the sons, Hans, Ernst, Georg and Fritz were employed at Gebhardt and König. For a couple of years there was a lot of work to do and there were a lot of acquisitions of shaft sinking tasks in Germany.

Thus Emil and also at least his sons Ernst, Georg and Hans moved to North-Rhine Westphalia where plenty of work had to be done. One of the most profitable collieries was Carl-Alexander in Baesweiler. Here his son Ernst, my grandfather, made the acquaintance of his wife Margarethe, born Dautzenberg.

An accident happened in December of 1926. Fritz drowned in Stolberg/Harz. This story was often repeated in Baesweiler. What happened to the family? Besides: In 1926/27 only Emil is mentioned in the address-book of Nordhausen.

But since there were no contracts to sink shafts abroad. Germany was the enemy and in consequence the lack of work caused the dismissal of Emil in 1927. As the expert he was, redundancy was a short term state. He found employment soon. As many of German miners he went to Russia.

Russian Intermezzo

The Treaty of Rappallo from 1922 was a basis for an advanced collaboration in terms of economical activities and trade between Germany and Russia. Stalin started a rapid industrialization in particular in the Ukraine. There he was responsible for the so called Holodomor connected with the Great Purge. Millions of people starved or got deported.

We do not know details about Emil's stay in the Ukraine. Obviously he moved to Charkov, at this time the capital of the Ukraine, at least in 1930 since for that year only Bertha is registered in the address-book of Nordhausen.

Furthermore he seemed to have got into a closer relation to an Ukrainian ballerina from the State Opera. Remarkably Bertha seemed to have got a very tolerant attitude towards this matter.

It is reported that he could not attend the marriage of his daughter Ethel in 1931, but there is a photo from that year taken in Forchheim and Witten/North Rhine Westphalia.

We don't have more information, my grandfather stated that Emil once met Stalin.



This picture is taken in 1931 in Forchheim. Here we see Emil and Bertha together with Emil's sisters, married Lobinger and Rachinger. Emil is standing in the background, on the hand we see Erich, Emil's son, and Dr Hertha Rachinger, student of medicine.

There is no information whether Emil's stay there lasted for a long period.

Some years later he returned to Nordhausen. He died in the Municipal Infirmary of Stolberg/Harz on 23th November 1938. He also was buried there on the cementary.



This is supposed to be the last photo of Emil.



Emil and his son Georg in Witten near Dortmund

My mother recalls that Emil twice visited Ernst in Baesweiler when she was a little child. She describes her grandfather Emil as an impressive appearance, elegant and well educated, I think, the picture shows these features very well.

3 Bertha Dietz

Little is known about Bertha. She was born on 21th November 1972 in Eisenach/Thuringa very close to the place Johann Sebastian Bach was born.

Her entire name according to the birth certificate is Marie Elisabeth Franziska Bertha, her maiden name is Göpfert.

As mentioned there is no information when and where Emil and Bertha met first. Notable is the fact that her father Johann August Karl moved from Eisenach to Siebleben near Gotha. He was employed there as a chief guard His first occupation was that of a fitter, a kind of mechanical locksmith

The role of a woman in these days was that of a mother and exactly that was what she did. These photos show her with her children. On the reverse side we find entries showing that the picture were taken in Doncaster.



Bertha, Erich, and Ethel



Bertha, Margarethe, and Ethel

When Emil was imprisoned in England, she was responsible for seven of her children. Margaretha was sent to Germany where Bertha's sister Meta lived in Prien/Chiemsee.

Hans was also imprisoned in Knockaloe, so Bertha and six children were interned in the Netherlands perhaps in Bergen near Alkmaar.

There is a lack of evidence what Bertha did for a living after Emil died. According to the reports of my mother, Bertha was a very resolute and rigorous person. My mother recalls that she met her in Zschornowitz/Saxonia during the evacuation. Bertha lived there in about 1942 in the neighbourhood of Hans. Afterwards she moved to Dessau. There she spent her last years close to Georg and Margarethe and died caused by arteriosclerosis.



The elderly Bertha with bouquet of fresh flowers

3.1 Johanna Axe, born Göpfert, Maiden Name Dietz



Johanna Axe, autumn 1918

Johanna was the first born child of Emil and Bertha. She was born with as Johanna Adelheid Meta Christiane Göpfert. The name Göpfert was given due to the fact that she was born illegitimate

These happened more frequently in these days than we may assume. Emil himself was born illegitimate and Bertha was born only three months after the wedding of her parents.¹

When the family moved to England, Johanna aged nine years had to learn English as her second language. She seems to be adapted well since she is the only person from the family who remained in England later than 1918.

In 1914 she married Joseph Machin Axe from Doncaster. Josef had a butcher's in 224 Thorne Road, Doncaster. In 1915 the first child was born but died a few days later. Only one year later the second child was born and also died a few days later. The third child was born in 1922 and also died aged seven months. The couple remained childless.

We have little information about the butcher's and Josef. In the course of my research I had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of his niece June and his nephew John. There is also a more distant relative, Mrs Janet Penny from Doncaster.



One of my best hits by researching. I received these photos from Heinz and Helga Goerke, Cologne. Heinz is Ethel's son.

From June I learned that Josef did not participate in World War I. That is surprising, especially due to his age, he was born in 1891.

Presumably Johanna stayed in contact with her parents. Her portrait shown above dates from 18th August 1918 and is taken in Doncaster.

¹A remarkably short pregnancy.

Later,during World War II, Josef was conscripted for military service. After the war the couple moved to Halifax, also in Yorkshire. Nothing is known, what they did there for a living. Josef died in 1953 in Halifax and Johanna was employed in the household of Sir Enoch Hill at least until 1951 when Lady Hill died.

Sir Enoch Hill was a remarkable bank-manager. He was responsible for the world's largest building society, today part of the Lloyd Group and well known for his social attitudes. Mr and Mrs Hill lived in Upper Willow Hall, Halifax. An employment in this house was a very interesting opportunity to meet many influential persons.



This is a bird's eye view from Upper Willow Hall, Halifax. The villa is a kind of manor house, build in 1610 it house reputed family such as the family of the well known politician Jeremiah Dyson.

Johanna residence was 80, Crow Wood Park until 1960, then she lived in a Victorian villa, called The Grove, 335 Savile Park Road where she died on the 14th of March



The “Halifax Evening Courier and Guardian”, on Monday, 17th March 1969 says: “Axe – on March 14th 1969 at the Royal Halifax Infirmary, Johanna Christiana Adelheid Meta, aged 75 years, the dearly loved wife of the late Henry Axe, formerly of 80, Crow Wood Park, Rochdale Road, Halifax. Service at Holy Trinity Church on Thursday March 20th at 1pm prior to cremation at Park Wood, Elland at 1.40pm. Will friends please meet at the church and kindly accept this as the only intimation.”²

The Probate Office in London does not record any will, so it is to be assumed that she did not leave any considerable property in particular there were no heirs and no descendants.

Of course I hope to find more information. Any clues are welcome.

²Of course the husband’s name is mistaken for the name of her father in law.