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Nine towers along a lengthy wall

Everyone knows the landmarks of the city of Lucerne – the Water Tower, the Chapel Bridge, and the Culture and Convention Centre on Europaplatz. Before the Second World War, the first name that visitors from all over the world would have mentioned is the Musegg Wall with its nine towers. The lustre of the jewel in Lucerne's crown has since faded. By Ueli Habegger

Walls and towers were the pride of many European cities in the High Middle Ages. They marked out the boundary between city and countryside. When the city guards closed the tower doors in the evening, those who were not wanted in the city at night – vagrants, highwaymen and sick armesmen – were left outside the Musegg Wall. This is according to a romantic view of history from the 19th century. And generations of schoolchildren, for example, learnt that the Musegg Wall and its towers must have been built in 1386 around the time of the Battle of Sempach. Construction did in fact begin in the 14th century but long before the Battle of Sempach, which ended in defeat for the Habsburgs, and it took until the end of the 15th century. The people of Lucerne built the towers first and only then constructed a wall to fill the gaps between them. And by the time the wall and towers were completed, they would have been of little use against the artillery of the day, the culverins. These findings about the historical structure are new. When the Association and Foundation for the Conservation of the Musegg Wall took on the task of restoring the towers and wall

in 2003, they had to research the history of the structure first. In a nutshell, it can now be stated that the Musegg Wall and towers were built by the city and republic of Lucerne at the end of the Middle Ages as a symbol of power. They were the jewel in the crown of a self-assured Lucerne.

Saved by private initiative

In 1578, Lucerne's archers welcomed envoys from Valais with a salute from the battlements of the Männliturm tower. The envoys had come to Lucerne for the oath of alliance. All this faded into obscurity. In 1864, the City Council considered demolishing the Musegg Wall and its towers as part of the opening-up of the city. Prominent visitors changed the minds of the Lucerne authorities. Only the Äusseres Weggistor tower (near to modern-day Löwenplatz) had to make way for traffic. The Musegg Wall – 870 metres in length and with nine towers – is today one of the longest remaining fortifications from the Middle Ages in Switzerland. The city undertook major restoration work shortly before and after 1900. In 1978, access was created to a section of just over 200 me-

tres – from the Schirmerturm tower to the Wachtturm tower – as part of the celebrations for the 800-year anniversary of the city of Lucerne. Civic commitment subsequently waned, and the condition of the proud monument visibly deteriorated as efforts to maintain it were abandoned.

Determined Lucerne residents united in 2000 to save the monument. In 2002, they founded the Association and in 2003 the Foundation for the Conservation of the Musegg Wall. The Association has since set itself the objective of securing funding for the project. Under the leadership of retired Lieutenant General Beat Fischer, the Foundation is managing to achieve what the public authorities failed to do for years, even decades, namely to ensure the professional, cost-effective and efficient restoration of the wall and towers. The cost will run to 12 million Swiss francs. The city's parliament has approved a contribution to the project of four million Swiss francs. Contributions to the conservation of the monument have also been made by federal government and the cantonal authorities. The Association and Foundation need to raise around 4.2 million Swiss francs themselves to enable the work to succeed.

The Association and Foundation want to preserve the historical structure for future generations of Swiss and visitors alike. Last year, more than 157,000 visitors climbed the Musegg Wall between March and October to enjoy the view. Many of them came from India, China, the USA and Latin America. Visitors have the opportunity here to experience Switzerland in the Middle Ages. Since 2008, an information project tailored for school classes has been trying to establish understanding of and support for the restoration work among young people.

www.museggmauer.ch

DONATIONS

Anyone who would like to make a contribution to the restoration of the Musegg Wall can make a transfer to the post office account: PC 60-205447-7 or the bank account: Stiftung / Erhaltung Museggmauer, Luzerner Kantonalbank, IBAN CH50 077 8010 0601 1030 5, account number 01-00-601 103-05. Contact address: Verein und Stiftung zur Erhaltung der Museggmauer, Ernst Widmer, Geschäftsführer, c/o Welcome Immobilien AG, Hübelistrasse 18, CH-6020 Emmenbrücke

