

# ***Spurensuche* in the Rural District of Celle**

**Searching for traces of the history of the countryside**

**Project of  
the Rural District Archives Celle  
and the Society of the Friends of the Bomann-Museum Celle**

## *The “SPURENSUCHE” Project*

As part of a project of the same name, i.e. “Spurensuche”, which is being conducted throughout the State of Lower Saxony, Florian Friedrich has been working for the Celle Rural District Archives since November 2000 on a documentation of recognisable traces of historical human activity in the Celle Rural District. These traces, it is hoped, can be integrated to provide a picture, however imperfect it may be, of the history of the countryside.

The Spurensuche project is concerned with all the features in the countryside that result from human activity; particularly interesting are traces left by rural trades, for example flax pits, an early stage in linen production, ridge-and-furrow fields, pollard willows which provided withies for basket-makers, pollard trees and woods that once provided pigs with fodder in the autumn, peat diggings and canals for peat-barges, sand and clay pits, beehive stands, animal enclosures, raft-building yards on rivers, fords, water-meadows, and many other features.

Some of the most interesting features are those that relate to the local duke, his hunting parties and his game, for example: bird traps, rabbit warrens, Jagdsterne (star-shaped forest clearings used in hunting), duck decoys, and boundary stones and/or boundary banks and ditches surrounding the land owned by the duke, ancient roadways and tracks, sandstone drinking troughs from the times of horse-drawn traffic, and even memorial stones commemorating an important person or event.

One must not forget that the two World Wars (WW) have also left their marks on our landscape in the Celle Rural District. The remains of numerous POW and forced-labour camps from WW I & II, munition depots (*Munas*), the German naval mine depot, bomb craters, underground bunkers and anti-aircraft sites.

The features mentioned above have one thing in common; their function or purpose has long been forgotten and there are few people who can tell you about them. Now, it is just the documentation of this information on the function and importance of these relics in the countryside, which is the chief purpose of the SPURENSUCHE Project.

All recognisable/identifiable relics or traces are photographed, marked on a map and all available information about them recorded and stored. The data collected in this way is kept in the Celle Rural District Archives and is made accessible to local researchers for their work. This data is also passed to the Lower Saxony Heritage Association (Niedersächsischer Heimatbund, NHB) in Hanover, where it is digitalised and stored in a databank.

In this way during the next few years we hope to be able to build up a comprehensive documentation of the relict features derived from human activity that still exist in the Lower Saxony countryside.

A project such as this is important for the local population - preservation of the history of the countryside is at the same time preservation of the history of the people who live in it. A further essential in such a project is to keep a lookout for possible features of tourist value, which may prove worthwhile to include as points of interest on walking or cycling tours.

We depend heavily in our search for the relict features mentioned above on help from the local population - we cannot rely solely on map interpretation to discover features that are frequently hidden by trees. Moreover, the actual search for historical features, and perhaps more important, research on the true origin of an old pit, an old bank and ditch or a crooked old tree, for example, is just what we want to encourage with this project - that people should come to grips with their own homeland, its uniqueness and its beauty.

### ***Come and help us!***

If you are keen on taking part in the Spurensuche Project, the Archives of the Celle Rural District will be happy to assist you. You can get a form from us on which you can tell us about a feature you know of, as well as any relevant details and anything you remember or have heard about the feature. In addition we can provide maps if necessary and give you useful hints on how to proceed with further researches.

Florian Friedrich would be happy to go into the field with you and inspect any relict feature you know, and perhaps work out an interpretation with you *in situ*. He will probably be available until April 2005.

If you wish to tell us about any relict historical feature, you will find our address and (for features outside the Celle Rural District) that of the Lower Saxony Heritage Association at the end of this booklet.

### ***Some examples***

On the following pages a few of the features that have been already documented are described as examples. It should be mentioned that the features described below constitute a very small proportion of all the relics that are relevant to the project. The only essential criteria that we insist on for a feature to be worthwhile recording in our documentation are that: (i) it is visible (photographable), (ii) it was produced directly by human activity, and (iii) it is a historical feature, i.e. pre-1950.





Fig. 1. Ford across the Quarmbach stream, Habighorst parish

In the past, horse-drawn carts and wagons caused certain stretches of roadways, normally an inclined stretch or the brow of a hill, to become eroded. The roadway thus became sunk in a hollow, particularly on the sandy soil of the heath. These so-called holloways are sometimes still visible. In Figure 1 we see where the highway “*Brandenburger Heerstrasse*” crossed the Quarmbach stream. The *Kurhannoversche Landesaufnahme* map of 1777 shows clearly that this was a bottleneck, where the highway and several tracks cross swampy ground.

A historical ford is quite rarely found as a relic, since normally a bridge has been built at such a popular crossing point and this often removes all traces of an earlier ford.

Further along the “*Brandenburger Heerstrasse*” highway towards Celle, we come across another interesting feature, the Galgenberg (gallows hill) of Burghorn, which is in a way connected with this highway. This gallows, which once belonged to the knight’s estate at Habighorst (“law court” is marked on the 1777 map at Habighorst ), was later also used by the court at Beedenbostel, a village almost 8 km from the gallows hill.



Fig. 2. Galgenberg Burghorn, Habighorst parish.

This particular spot was most certainly chosen for a gallows on account of its exposed position. The hill lay on the *Brandenburger Heerstrasse* highway, near where it crossed the Quarmbach stream and, more important, at the point where it crosses the N-S *Heuweg* (hay way). The *Heuweg* was regularly used by carters driving their vehicles northwards loaded with hay. The sight of a corpse on the gallows served to remind the travellers what punishment might await anyone who disobeyed the law.

Ancient roadways are often only recognisable with the help of air-photographs, or by obvious ground features such as a holloway or a strip of compacted soil. Frequently, these roadways were re-routed or fell into disuse owing to new measures introduced by the government. In particular the enclosure laws brought with them many changes in the countryside.

The following example shows how important interviews with local people can be, especially with a knowledgeable local resident who is interested in the past. It concerns the course of the former Kirchweg (church path) between the villages of Sandlingen and Wienhausen.





Fig. 3. The former Kirchweg from Sandlingen to Wienhausen; Sandlingen parish

In Wienhausen itself, a signpost provides evidence that part of the Sandlingen Kirchweg still exists. Near the village, it is marked on the official map as “*Rotkäppchenweg*”, a somewhat romantic name translated as “Red Riding-Hood way” probably coined by people who went that way through the woods.



Fig. 4. “*Rotkäppchenweg*” (Red Riding-Hood way) formerly Sandlingen Kirchweg; Wienhausen parish

Cobbled roads are not easily re-routed! On the Lüneburg Heath cobbled roads were rare due to the lack of suitable road-making material. However, some roads joining important places were cobbled. Most cobbled roads were made in the 19th or 20th century, for example that between the villages of Wieckenberg and Fuhrberg, which has been placed under a conservation order.



Fig. 5. The road between Wieckenberg and Fuhrberg

Since this road is already under a conservation order, it has not been entered as a historical feature in the Spurensuche Project records. We are aiming at recording those historical features or objects that have not already been incorporated in a protection program or been scheduled as ancient monuments or specially valuable or beautiful natural features. A good example of a building that would be protected as a historical monument is a water mill, meaning the actual building. However, the mill watercourses and sluices would not be considered for conservation although they are essential to the working of the mill - in fact these associated features are in many cases older than the mill building itself.



Isolated stones set in the ground are a completely different type of historical relic in the countryside, and much more easily moved or removed. A stone may be used as a memorial to a person or to commemorate an event. It is noticeable that at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century numerous stones of this type were erected. As an example, the stone commemorating the last wolf to be killed in the *Becklinger Holz* (Becklingen Wood) (1872), a large bear killed near Bargfeld (1837), and the last beaver to be shot in Osterbruch (1917).

Local inhabitants were especially moved when tragedy struck their village, for example the murders of Dora Klages (1890 near Eschede) and of two foresters between Wieckenberg and Fuhrberg (winter 1919).



Fig. 6. One of the two forester's stones, Wieckenberg parish.

In the case of stones being erected in memory of murder victims, this has no connection with the popularity of memorial stones during the 19th and 20th centuries. This particular tradition probably goes back further, to the time when a convicted murderer had to erect a so-called “Sühnstein” (atonement stone) at the site of the murder, in order to partly atone for his sins, by reminding the local people of the murder as well as setting up a memorial for his victim. Stone crosses should be mentioned in this connection, as these were erected particularly in the 13th to 16th centuries for similar reasons.



Many motorists may see a stone that stands at the side of the main road (B 191) between the villages of Altenhagen and Garssen as an excellent example of a memorial. It was erected in memory of the first person to be killed in a motor-traffic accident in Lower Saxony at the spot where the accident took place in 1908.



Fig. 7. Stone in memory of the first victim of a fatal traffic accident in Lower Saxony; Altenhagen parish

Whether this was truly the first fatal traffic accident in the whole of Lower Saxony can no longer be proved. However, it is certain that it was the first “prominent” victim of a traffic accident in Lower Saxony. For the victim was the “*hochverdienten Landeshauptmann der Provinz Hannover, Georg Lichtenberg, Dr. Theol.*” (the honoured President of the Province of Hanover, Georg Lichtenberg, Dr. of theology), who was killed as a result of an error made by his driver when he overtook a hay cart and hit a tree.

There are other stones of considerable significance in the countryside apart from memorials. Of course we must mention megalithic tombs here, although these have all been fully described and recorded, and are protected. Their importance for our cultural history is reflected by the fact that they appear, sometimes as symbols, in shields and other emblems. They are of course

recognised as irreplaceable and are maintained as a vital part of our cultural heritage.

Small and relatively unobtrusive stones, such as boundary markers or surveyors' stones belong to a completely different category of historical relic. In this context we must mention old milestones, which in this region show that two independent systems of linear measurement were in use during the same period: the Westphalian and the Hanoverian mile. Stones were set up during construction of the railways at the centres of curvature of the track. They provided reference points from which the relevant radii could be measured, thus ensuring the correct track curvature.

A boundary stone is usually an unobtrusive object but nevertheless was very important in the past; however, the use of stones was by no means the only method of marking a boundary.



Fig. 8. Old boundary stone in the “Sprache”; Lachtehausen parish

The boundary stone shown in Figure 8 is one of over 300 that marked the boundary between the “Sprache” wood, formerly a royal/ducal forest, and the surrounding commoners' land. All these particular stones are numbered consecutively and are also marked with the “*Wolfsangel*” (wolf-trap), which designated land that was under the responsibility of the royal/ducal forester. Most of these stones still exist; however, some of them have almost completely sunk into the ground, and some have fallen to pieces and have been replaced by



new ones. On the whole this series of stones is an impressive relic of a once most important boundary.

In those areas where stones were not available or where stones were considered unsuitable as boundary markers, a boundary would be fixed by other means. Thus, for example, we find an old boundary described as follows: “as far as the crooked tree” or “up to the Wolde wood”. In some instances the hearths of farm houses were used in fixing a boundary and normally, in these cases, the *Kesselhaken* (pot-hook) over the fire served as the fixed point. And this was done even with the boundaries of bishoprics. We find recorded that the boundaries between three major bishoprics met at a triple point - at a *Kesselhaken* in the village of Rebberlah.

Where there were no clear landmarks available, as was commonly the case in heathland, one was forced to construct a mound of sand (*Schnedehügel*). Sometimes there were disputes in court over the exact course of a boundary; sometimes sand mounds or boundary stones were unlawfully moved (a serious offence deserving a very severe punishment). As a result it was usual to construct an earth bank, normally with a ditch on the outside, to mark the boundary. This would make the boundary clearly visible along its whole length and guarantee that nobody “moved” it, particularly if it were regularly inspected (a tradition called “beating the bounds” in Britain).



Fig. 9. Boundary bank between the Celle and Winsen bailiwicks; Stedden parish

Descriptions of boundaries sometimes mentioned beehive stands, which were frequently surrounded by a bank and ditch, as mentioned above. The

oldest documentary record of a beehive stand, in 1445 near Celle, is mentioned in connection with a boundary. At that time Duke Frederick gave to his servant Hans Kaldenbaghe and his wife Ilseke a meadow in Wietzenbruch for their lifetime. The relevant document contained a description of the boundary in which a beehive stand is mentioned.

The search for old beehive stands (in fact it is normally the enclosure, the surrounding bank and ditch, that is still recognisable) in the vicinity of the village of Hohne revealed how many of these historical relics have survived the changes undergone by our agricultural countryside.

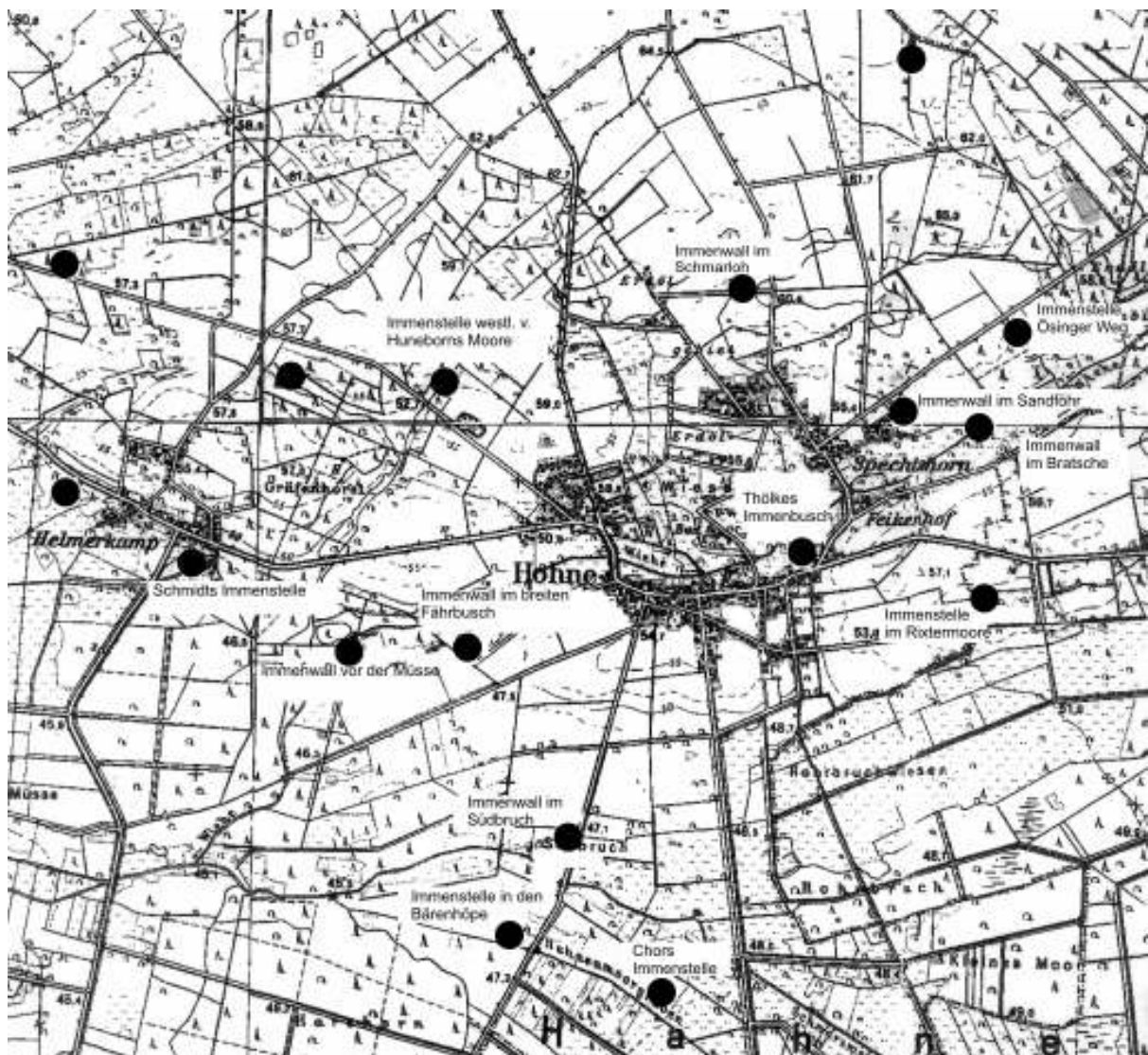


Fig. 10. Existing remains of beehive enclosures around Hohne in 2002

It must be mentioned here that according to the animal register of 1589 and compared with other villages, Hohne was not a major beekeeping centre. With respect to the number of beekeepers registered for each village at that time, Hohne lay about half way down the “top ten” list of villages.



In past times, beehives were highly important for many reasons, all of them economic. Beekeeping, particularly in heathland, offered a useful additional source of income from selling honey and beeswax. Honey was the chief sweetener in those days before sugar beet was introduced. In addition, bees were essential for crops as pollinators; this was one of the valuable “services” provided by bees to agriculture.

In many cases it is not possible to say indubitably, without a reliable documentary source, whether a bank and ditch surrounding a roundish, oblong or square area (now usually in a wood) was truly once a beehive enclosure. Perhaps it was a tree nursery or plantation for young trees or another kind of enclosure. The size of the enclosure sometimes provides a clue, for beehive enclosures were commonly 30-40 m in diameter; sometimes a local person interested in local history can be a great help - as in many other instances - when searching for and/or identifying historical relics in the countryside.



Fig. 11. Beehive enclosure; Winsen parish

Further recognisable traces have been left by exploitation of gravel, sand and clay. The cover picture on this booklet shows, for example, what now remains of *Rathberg* hill near Winsen, where sand was obtained for the calc-silica brick plant there. The so-called *Kaliberg* near Wathlingen (tip heap from the local potash mine) and the *Ölberg* (tip heap from the local oil-sand mines)

are impressive witnesses to the industrial history of the region. One should not forget, however, that mineral deposits were also exploited on a much more modest scale than this; clay or loam pits were often dug by one man for his own requirements.

In a region in which extensive mires give their character to the landscape, peat digging was of considerable importance. Peat was necessary for hearth fires, since, for several reasons, wood was in short supply. Salt production at Sulze also required fuel peat in enormous quantities - to evaporate brine and obtain salt. In many places the remains of peat diggings are still recognisable and document this old-fashioned method of winning fuel. Other features that are directly connected with peat are canals used for transporting peat by barge to a nearby town or distribution centre. In spite of their having been abandoned more than a century ago, these peat canals can still be seen relict in the countryside. Only rarely have they been reliably dated. As a fortunate example, construction of the peat canal at the ducal peat barn at Grossmoor has been definitely dated. It was built in the 1680s, as is evidenced by records that were kept of the work done. The northern continuation of this canal is suspected to be considerably older, but no files or documents have yet been found to prove this.



Fig. 12. Peat canal in the Weisses Moor; Westercelle parish

The man-made countryside is subject to continual change. A fine example of this is the heath itself - a truly man-made landscape. Before and after the Ice Age, when Northern Germany was covered by a very thick ice sheet, the most



extensive kind of landscape was forest. The people who settled here made use of the forest in many different ways and, over the many centuries that went by, what we now call a man-made landscape developed.

As the population increased, forest exploitation was more or less equivalent to forest destruction. Clearing the forest to obtain agricultural land by “slash-and-burn” and by felling trees, as well as felling trees for selling the timber, all contributed towards considerable loss of forest, which reached its most serious extent during the 17th and 18th centuries. The *Kurhannoverische Landesaufnahme*, maps produced towards the end of the 18th century of the entire Province of Hanover, provides an impressive record of the result of this destruction, i.e. the vast areas of barren heathland.

Salt production (at Lüneburg, Sulze and other places) was by no means the only cause of forest decimation; there were many malefactors. Timber was felled for building, “slash-and-burn” was a common method of turning forest into agricultural land, and quantities of wood were consumed in charcoal production; all this accounted for a considerable proportion of forest loss. And in addition, the felling, sale and shipping of timber to Bremen and from there to many parts of Europe also contributed to forest loss, which was so serious that the Lüneburg heath became almost a desert as a result.



Fig. 13. Raft-making site, Baven parish

It is well known that huge quantities of timber were rafted down streams draining the heathland to the River Aller, then to the River Weser, and thence to Bremen. This is also evident from relict features in the countryside. Numerous sites exist on river banks where timber rafts were put together; these and the relict saw-pits give evidence of the volume of timber transported by river.

The remaining areas of forest were to suffer still further - from pure necessity of the rural population - right into the 19th century. Since meadows for grazing were in short supply, animals were driven into the so-called “wood pastures” and there they devoured everything that could have contributed towards natural rejuvenation of the forest. We are fortunate in the Celle Rural District to possess a unique example of such a “wood pasture”, which for this reason has been under conservation since the 1920s.



Fig. 14. “Wood pasture”; note that the trees have been pollarded to provide additional fodder for the animals; Hornbostel wood pasture

Before the introduction of mineral fertiliser, the shortage of suitable meadowland, which was necessary to provide winter fodder for the animals, could only be alleviated in this region of poor soil by irrigating the fields with river water - making them into water-meadows. The fact that river water not only watered fields but supplied them with nutrients had been known for a long time. The channels, weirs and sluices associated with this type of irrigation are said to have been constructed and used by the Romans already. However, in



Germany the method was not optimised or extensively used until the School of Meadow Farming was founded at Suderburg in 1853. During the following decades this school encouraged local farmers to introduce the system on their land and also exported the system to other regions. The ridge-and-furrow (*Suderburger Rücken*) appearance of the meadows has frequently disappeared as a result of modern methods of agriculture, but the associated channels, weirs and sluices can still be recognised. In some places they have been used for other purposes and in other places they have just been forgotten. Today the weirs across streams or rivers are disapproved of by some nature conservationists since they tend to act as a barrier, discouraging biodiversity among micro-organisms, particularly when part of the stream bottom consists of concrete rather than permeable bottom sediments. For this reason, some of these old weirs have been removed and replaced by *Sohlgleiten* (gravel ramps).



Fig.15. relicts of a water meadow at Meißer river

The aim of the Spurensuche project in such cases must be to document all existing remnants of these features and, if the feature is environmentally compatible, it should be protected and as far as possible preserved. It seems to me to be vital to conserve some relics of this formerly highly important agricultural system for the coming generations as far as we are able.

The darkest periods in German history have also left their mark on our countryside. In the Celle Rural District we can still find remnants of former munition depots (*Munas*) and munition research establishments. Unfortunately, many of these sites are still contaminated by munitions, for example the former Hambühren “*Muna*”.



Fig. 16. The remains of a bunker after being blown up; former naval-mine depot at Starkshorn

Figure 16 shows one of the 110 bunkers in which naval mines were assembled during WW II. The whole depot was constructed in woods and thus was well camouflaged. It was connected with the *Reichsbahn* (main railway) by a narrow-gauge track. At the end of WW II much of the depot was blown up using explosives found abandoned in the surrounding *Munas*. All that can be seen in the field now are numerous craters and masses of rubble.



This small booklet on the results of Spurensuche in the Celle Rural District does not claim any degree of completeness. This type of publication aims merely to demonstrate by means of a few examples what we mean by “historical relics in the countryside”. We must point out that many types of relict feature have been omitted from this short account.

When the project work in the Celle Rural District has been completed, we plan, with the help of suitable promoters, to produce a book in which the tangible results are described for the benefit of a broadly based readership. In this way we trust that the history of our countryside, and thus of the people who once lived and worked in it, can be preserved for future generations. May I therefore invite you to take part in the Spurensuche project and to share your knowledge with us.

Florian Friedrich, 24.08.2004

## **Selected sources and references**

- Alpers, Paul und Barenscheer, Friedrich:** Die Flurnamen des Kreises Celle. Oldenburg 1941.
- Brosius, Dieter:** Urkundenbuch der Stadt Celle. Hannover 1996.
- Delfs, Jürgen:** Die Flößerei auf Ise, Aller und Örtze. Gifhorn 1995.
- Friedrich, Florian:** Der Immenwall – fast vergessenes Zeugnis der Kulturlandschaft Heide. In: Nachrichten aus Niedersachsens Urgeschichte (NNU) Nr. 73/2004.
- Geffcken, Hermann:** Imkerei in der Heide. In: Ja grün ist die Heide...Aspekte einer besonderen Landschaft. Schriften des Freilichtmuseums Kiekeberg. Ehestorf 1998. S.99-132.
- Gries, Joachim und Hoppe, Joachim:** Was wir tun, ist nicht gerade zum Guten - Marinesperrzeugamt Starkshorn 1937-1945. Celle [1991].
- Helmke und Hohls (Hrsg.):** Der Speicher – Heimatbuch für den Landkreis Celle. Celle 1930.
- Küster, Hansjörg:** Geschichte der Landschaft in Mitteleuropa. München 1996.
- Völksen, G.:** Die Lüneburger Heide – Entstehung und Wandel einer Kulturlandschaft. Veröffentlichung des Niedersächsischen Institutes für Landeskunde und Landesentwicklung an der Universität Göttingen, Nr.3. Göttingen/Hannover 1984.
- Wiegand, Christian:** Spurensuche in Niedersachsen – Historische Kulturlandschaften entdecken. Hannover 2002.

## Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the following people, many of whom have helped voluntarily in finding and documenting relics of historical features in the countryside. Should I have omitted any of the numerous local history researchers and those who reported features of interest to me, then I am sorry - I am no less indebted to them too.

Wilhelm Thies, Habighorst; Hans Georg Berger, Celle; Gerhard Friedrich, Hohne; Helmut Meine, Garßen; Gudrun Freitag, Stadt Celle; Wilhelm Riggers, Baven; Gerhard Röhrs, Baven; Heinrich Lange, Hermannsburg; Eckhard Grimm, Hohne; Elgar Drewsen, Lachendorf; Hans-Hermann Harms, Unterlüß; Hermann von der Kammer, Wardböhmen; Otto Petersen, Scharnhorst; Edgar Vester, Hambühren; Friedrich-Wilhelm Hanne, Sarstedt; Dr. Joachim Lueder, Celle; Dirk Kraemer, Meißendorf; Gisela Bechlarz, Scharnebecks-Mühle/Hermannsburg; Mathias Blazek, Adelsheidsdorf; Hinnerk Kruse, Thören; Lothar H. Bluhm, Bannetze; Otto Meier, Bannetze; Hanna Hasselmann, Oldau; Dr. Helmut Halberstadt, Südwinsen; Timo Wolf, Stedden; Hermann Kielhorn, Luttern; Walfried Köneke, Wienhausen; Joachim Gries, Eschede; Karl Pahl, Sandlingen; Werner Schrader, Wolthausen; Hilma Klaue, Celle; Helmut Schmidt-Harries, Offensen; Rudolf Uhrner, Jägerei; Wilhelm Helms, Sülze; Henry Toms, Celle; Die Winser Heimatpfleger; Thomas Neumann, Fassberg; Ute Rosin, Hermannsburg

Moreover I want to thank the Society of the Friends of the Bomann-Museum Celle, the Lüneburgische Landschaft, the Bundesagentur für Arbeit and the Rural District Council of Celle, namely District Archivist Rainer Voss for financing and making the project possible. In addition I want to thank Henry Toms for the translation into English.

### Contact:

Spurensuche in Niedersachsen:  
Niedersächsischer Heimatbund e.V.  
Landschaftstr. 6A, D-30159 Hannover  
Tel. +49 (0)511 3069087 oder 3681251  
Nhb.kulturlandschaft@t-online.de  
[www.niedersaechsischer-heimatbund.de](http://www.niedersaechsischer-heimatbund.de)

Spurensuche im Landkreis Celle:  
Kreisarchiv Celle  
Trift 24, D-29221 Celle  
Tel. +49 (0)5141 916 353 oder 916 113  
[Florian.Friedrich@lkcelle.de](mailto:Florian.Friedrich@lkcelle.de)  
[www.landkreis-celle.de](http://www.landkreis-celle.de)