

Würzburg's "Ancient Crane"

The crane at the former Oberzoll and Hallamt was erected between 1767 and 1773 under the then Prince-Bishop Adam Friedrich Graf von Seinsheim.

Von Seinsheim commissioned the 34-year-old Franz Ignaz Michael von Neumann, who had just been promoted to Major Engineer, with the planning and execution. Neumann was already well-known because he was introduced to architecture by his father Neumann from an early age. It was therefore natural that, after his father's death in 1753, Franz Ignaz completed many of the works Balthasar started, such the pilgrimage church of Maria Limbach. He also completed partial orders such as the creation of plans for the vault and roof for the Neresheim Monastery.

Before the crane construction could begin, there was work to be done to prepare the foundation. The substructure needed to be able to with stand recurring flooding. On top of the completed bastion, a round tower was built to house the technology It is cleverly located above the Mainuferstrasse and also has an access point to the Juliuspromenade.





The building, made of Randersackerer limestone, hides the interior swiveling drum wheel which is built of hard and soft wood. The wheel is attached to a spindle (central support) which is firmly connected to the crane arms above the small rotating roof, which is above the large roof. Ropes or chains run over the shaft to lift the cargo over the two arms, which could be operated alternately. Up to 1.2 tonnes of weight could be lifted. Both vertical and horizontal movements were carried out by workers inside the building using Neumann's ingenious technology. No convicts or animals were ever used.

After a construction period of six years, an unparalleled sight had been created which, in terms of beauty, solidity, grandeur and majesty, was unique on the banks of the Main or Rhine rivers.



Architects from the surrounding area came, not only to marvel at the crane, but also to copy the technology and erect similar buildings elsewhere. For just a short time, this hoist was used to unload the barges on the Mainriver, and to lift the logs brought by rafts.

It was already replaced in 1846 by a new crane that was built in the immediate vicinity. It was a so-called iron tripod, which can still be admired in Bamberg.

The technical masterpiece completed in Würzburg has a large coat of arms on the front - facing the Main river, which shows the insignia of Prince Bishop Adam Friedrich Graf von Seinsheim (1755-1779).

The coat of arms is flanked on the right and left by two figures. On the right, the river god Moenus who has a jug between his legs from which water bubbles.

On the left is the patron saint of Franconia, Frankonia who carries the raised sword of justice and the city flag.

The chronogram, which is attached as a band in the lower area, reads:

ACCIPIO TRADO QVOD LVBET EXPEDIO

(I carry everything you ask and want)

If you write the highlighted numerical letters in a column and add them up, you get 1773 - the inaugural year.

Barges arriving from upstream of the Main river were pulled by horses along the towpaths, on the right and the left bank of the river. During this time, the Main river had no locks, and was much wider and had no shallows. That's why many places which end with the suffix -furt were places to go from shore to shore.

The ships were loaded with, e.g. Cereals, food, wine, copper, iron and tin. Furniture came from Flanders - beautiful tables, chairs, clocks and chests. The goods brought ashore were sometimes sold at a local market. Others were stored and delivered by the 'Kärrnern', men with a horse-drawn cart, who worked as freight forwarders.

Logs tied as rafts came from the upper reaches of the Main river also came ashore and were transported on land to woodworking companies.

Today, this imposing hoist stands almost unaltered, just as beautiful as it was on the day it was completed. The crane, preserved in its original condition when the city was bombed on March 16 1945, delights visitors every day. The former road under the building has been preserved, but is no longer used since the road was re-routed. The creation of restaurants within the main building behind the crane has been popular.

One can be proud of the Ancient Crane, which was completely preserved when Würzburg was destroyed on March 16, 1945.

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