

Ivo Hammer

Some further impression Brnec "Schindlers Ark" (visit in September 20, 2021)

(with additions to my report of June 23, 2021)



Brnec, looking north (from left): former plumbing workshop (ca. 1895?), SS-building (mid 19th c.), Schindler's Ark. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brnec, looking west (from left): heating plant, plumbing workshop, administration building, south wall of SS-building. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brnec, looking south-west: plumbing workshop. Foto: Ivo Hammer 9.6.2021



Brnec, looking south-west: plumbing workshop and heating plant. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brněnec, looking north-west: heating plant/boiler room building, social facility and plumbing workshop. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brněnec, looking north-west (from left): extension of big spinning and carding hall, heating plant, social facility (covered by truck), plumbing workshop and SS-buildng. Foto: Ivo Hammer 9.6.2021



Heating plant/boiler room building. Foto: Helena Zemanková, Conversion of the Factory in Brnenec to Polyfunctional Area, Brno 2020



Brnenec, plumbing workshop, west façade, entrance, looking south.



Brnenec, plumbing workshop, interior, looking west. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brnenec, plumbing workshop, interior, looking east. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brnec, plumbing workshop, interior, couloir, looking west. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021



Brnec, plumbing workshop, west façade, entrance, looking south. Foto: Ivo Hammer 20.09.2021

The building of the former **plumber's workshop (PW)**, which in my report dating from June 23, 2021 I wrongly called carding building after the somewhat confusing description on the plan from 1982. The building should date from around 1895, so it was in any case the fourth side of the courtyard in which Schindler's Jews stood in front of the SS guards. It is based on stone and concrete foundation strips. Floor plan dimensions of the building 19.20 x 10.0 m. A two-storey building, the subterranean basement with windows, the roof covered with a saddle truss made of wood. Bituminous roofing, brick masonry, reinforced concrete ceiling. There is a space of a former workshop, with three divided wiring. In the basement there used to be a heating distribution. All the furnishings in the building have been demolished, but the fabric of the building is largely intact. The façade is covered with a smoothed plaster and painted with a pale yellowish color, the brick decorations in dark red. A very opaque paint, perhaps a resin-paint, not very pleasant. The pilaster strips of the interior walls are connected with flat arcades. The ceilings consist of reinforced concrete cast on site between steel bars. The interior walls are apparently painted with lime.

The second building is the former **heating plant/boiler room building (HP)**. This building probably dates from 1961. The boiler room building has floor plan dimensions of 15 x 14.6 m. It is based on concrete footings. It is a three-storey building, with a partial basement. The building is reinforced concrete with brick filling. It is covered by a saddle roof, which is formed by steel trusses, the roofing is sheet metal - profiled sheet metal. Reinforced concrete ceilings, steel windows with glass filling, construction without the former technology - steel boilers and heating distribution, electrical distribution and BTI. Everything has been dismantled in 2012. The façade is plastered with scratched greyish plaster (perhaps *Břizolit*). A thin lime wash could give to the building a more friendly appearance. The pillars consisting of reinforced steel could be painted in a color different to the plastered surface of the façade.

There is also a connecting wing between the two buildings: The former **social facility**. It is based on stone and concrete foundation strips. Floor plan dimensions of the building 5.30 x 16.60 m. It is a single-storey building, located and integrated between PW and BRB as a background for the workshop and boiler room. There is a dressing room, shower and toilet, hallway and storage. Brick masonry, roof made of wooden saddle trusses with one skylight, bituminous roofing, concrete floors. Wooden windows, wooden doors. Partly in a destroyed state, without any equipment, without electricity and BTI.

The **HP (Heating Plant)** and the **PW (Plumbers Workshop)** are, I repeat, both in good condition in terms of the building fabric.

When it comes to the PW, I don't understand why it wasn't listed by the Heritage Authority as part of Schindler's concentration camp.

Of course, there is some damage caused by moisture infiltration.

But this building could easily be converted and furnished as a restaurant, or as an exhibition room or lecture room, with a view of the courtyard of the concentration camp and the three other buildings.

The heating plant (from 1961?) Is a clearly structured industrial building with the sobriety inherent in an industrial building, but at the same time also clear in proportions, with two upper floors flooded with light.

As indicated in one of the student works, this building could also be used as a building for facilities and exhibitions and workshops, lecture rooms.

The current damage caused by moisture in the foundation area, which probably happened when the heating was stopped, can be repaired with not too big effort.

I can accept that the former social facilities, situated between PW and HP building is being demolished and modern facilities are being built at this point.

But it is difficult to understand why the other buildings are **planned to be demolished**.

The money that is required for the proper demolition of the other two buildings (PW and HP) could be used for an intelligent adaptation of these buildings.

I wonder if an additional building is even necessary for exhibitions and recreation. These purposes could be achieved with a **careful adaptation of the existing buildings**.

Especially with the former plumber's building, I don't understand the planned demolition at all. The very welcome intention to create a place of remembrance is impaired by the demolition of a building that is spatially and optically an essential part of the complex to be remembered.

If this new building is absolutely to be built, I would do it in a location that does not require demolition. Or at least "only" the demolition of the heating plant, but not the former plumber's workshop.

When I think about it, I also don't understand why a **new building** in the style of the Barcelona Pavilion by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe has to be built. The Tugendhat House has no direct connection with the builders and owners of the factory in Brněnec. One could understand a modernist new building in place of the old factory building as a built break with history, as a foreign body that distracts from the mediation of history and constructs a present that is not (directly) connected with history.

However, the adaptation of buildings that are part of the historical stock but have lost their original function contributes to an authentic memory and is moreover an ecologically responsible action.

The **large chimney** in the north of the area is an important eye-catcher, also from a tourist point of view. What will happen to him? In general, I think that the history of this factory also includes the history from 1945-1989 and also from 1989-2012. Significant parts should - if possible - be preserved. It is completely incomprehensible to me that the Czech preservation authorities, which in any case only acted after our joint visit in May 2016, only placed three buildings under protection in September 2016, i.e. Schindler's Ark, the SS (German building) and the administration building.

I was shocked by the **reaction of the Heritage authorities** to the method of preservation.

Regarding the emergency security, they only stated that this obligation was the owner's. They could not provide any concrete suggestions. The architect, too, only shrugged his shoulders when asked how he would proceed with the emergency security of the SS building.

I am not an architect. But I could imagine that you could put a tear-resistant tarpaulin on the roof with a steel cable that is stretched from gable ridge to gable ridge. This tarpaulin could be stretched onto the roof with additional ropes. But these are of course costs for which there is apparently no cover and which - in contrast to the new building - have not been applied for.



Brněnec, SS-Building. Photo: Ivo Hammer 9.6.2021



Brněnec, SS-Building. Photo: Ivo H20.9.2021. Dramatic acceleration of the damage of the roof.

In the meantime, in December 2021, Daniel Low-Beer took the initiative at his own expense. He commissioned the professional provisional covering of the destroyed roof of the SS building.



Brněnec, SS building, provisional covering of the destroyed roof; photo Daniel Low-Beer, December 2021



Brněnec, SS building, provisional covering of the destroyed roof; photo Daniel Low-Beer, December 2021

Concerning the method of preservation of the listed historical buildings was the monument preservationist (Mag. Švec) of the Heritage authority of the opinion that these are not aesthetically valuable buildings, but only historically significant buildings, and therefore no conservation-science study is necessary. When I asked who should then examine the building, he replied that a *historical building study* was necessary. When asked why the former plumber's workshop was not listed as a historical monument, the preservationists did not answer.

When asked where the building files are, from which one can read the history and formal changes of the historical buildings, we were informed that the building files had been stolen.

So far, I have not become aware of any documents from which subsidy applications for emergency security and for the restoration of the historic buildings can be seen. Without a prior examination by conservators-restorers or at least cooperation with conservator-restorers, it should also be technically difficult to submit serious subsidy applications.

If subsidies are approved by public bodies, an invitation to tender for architects and construction companies should actually be issued.

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