



A short English Guide to FRAUENCHIEMSEE in Upper Bavaria

In the midst of a landscape so beautiful it almost defies description lies the Fraueninsel (Dame's Isle) in Chiemsee. The tiny fish-shaped island takes its name from the abbey of Benedictine nuns there, whose history reaches back more than a thousand years to the times of Charlemagne.



Historians take it that the last of the Agilolfingers, Duke Tassilo III, founded the abbey on Frauenchiemsee in about the year 770. Irish monks probably had mission stations on the islands in Chiemsee one hundred years earlier. In 817, Louis the German, King of the Franks and grandson of Charlemagne, who called himself King of Bavaria, inherited the abbey. His daughter Irmengard was given the task of renovating and extending the house in about 850 and she is considered to be co-foundress. She died on July 16th 866, just 33 years old. According to tradition there were no poor people in the vicinity of Chiemsee while she lived because of her



charity: that is great testimony for the open-minded, prudent and generous woman. She was buried in a marble coffin let into the foundations of the Minister near the South-West pillar. At that time this was tantamount to canonization. The idea was to show that holy people were the supports of the Church. Even today Irmengard is the support of her abbey.



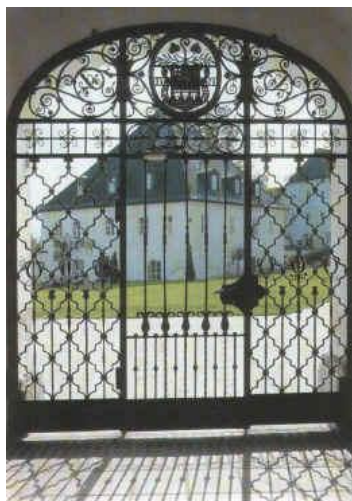


About 50 years after Irmengards's death, the abbey was destroyed by the Hungarians. The only remains from that period are the imposing gatehouse opposite the entrance to the cemetery and the foundations of the Minster.

Towards the end of the first millennium, convent life according to the Rule of St. Benedict seems to have been firmly established. In the High Middle Ages Frauenwörth was a rich and important abbey with

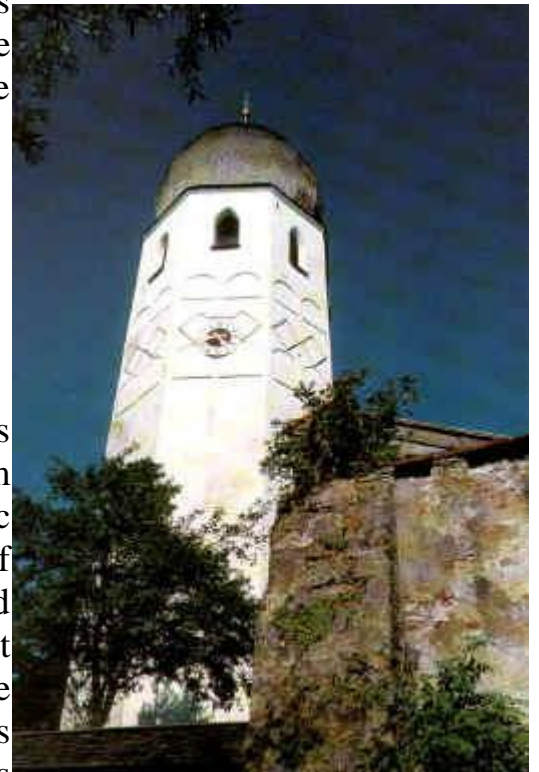
possessions extending into the Inn and Ötz Valleys and into Southern Tyrol. During the ravages of the 30-Years War, the abbey, under the guidance of the famous abbess Maria Magdalena Haidenpucher, was a sanctuary for many nuns from other houses.

The foundations of the church are very old, probably from the 11th century. Within the church, Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque styles harmonize with one another. The Baroque altars date from 1686-1702.



The entrance porch has a fascinating tympanum and doorframe, and a Carolingian door-knocker in the form of a stylized lion's head graces the iron-clad door. The face is said to be taken from the death mask of Charlemagne.

The octagonal bell-tower at the side of the church is a rarity this side of the Alps. It probably dates from the 9th century. In the 16th century, the characteristic onion-dome was added. The Campanile of Frauenwörth is the landmark not only of the island but of the whole of the Chiemgau area. The present abbey building was completed in 1730. During the Secularization, the abbey, together with its possessions, archives and art-treasures was confiscated by the State, though the nuns were allowed to continue to live





in the buildings.

In 1937, King Louis I of Bavaria generously re-established the house on condition that the nuns take on the task of educating young people.

This was a major apostolate of the abbey for over 150 years. Since the closing of the



schools in 1995, the abbey has become a place of hospitality for seminars with participants coming from all parts of the globe. The abbey shop sells marzipan and gingerbread made by the nuns, and the famous herb liqueur whose mixture is a well-kept abbey secret, together with a good selection of books, cards and trinkets.

In 1828 artists from Munich and the surrounding area "discovered"



Frauenchiemsee, some painters took up residence here, others were frequent visitors.



A boat service to the island began in 1845 and since 1860 there has been a railway service to Prien on the Munich-Salzburg line. Car drivers can reach the island from the tiny port of Gstadt.



The charming island houses and the potter's workshop are added attractions, but amid all the natural beauty, Frauenchiemsee remains essentially what it was: a place of prayer.

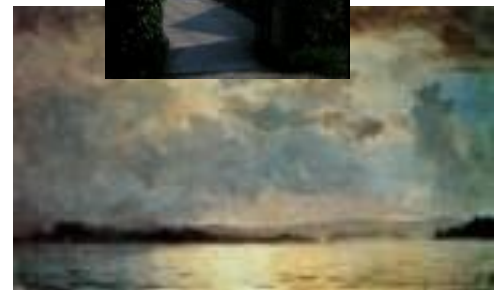


The abbey guesthouse, built in 1611, offers those seeking silence and refreshment from the myriad activities of the world the opportunity to take part in the life of prayer of the nuns who sing the Divine Office and live according to the Rule of St. Benedict: ora et labora.



The nuns pray the Divine Office of the church, meeting five times each day to sing Psalms and celebrate the Eucharist. Their areas of work include kitchen, garden, library, office, liqueur-cellar, bakery, shop, verger, and hospitality.

The gatehouse is a reminder of the great age of the foundation; the excavations of 1961-64 indicate that this building was probably erected by King Louis the German, grandson of Charlemagne, as an imposing entrance to the abbey. In the upper storey of the gatehouse there is a chapel dedicated to St. Michael containing splendid Carolingian frescoes. The gatehouse has served many purposes since the Middle Ages.



After the Secularization in 1803, St. Michael's Chapel was a school-room, then an atelier and gallery for the "Chiemsee painters". Every Summer there are exhibitions of art, archaeological finds and goldsmithing there.

On December 19th, 1928, Irmengard of Chiemsee was beatified by the Pope. She intercedes at the throne of God for the nuns, the inhabitants of the island and the Chiemgau, as well as for the many pilgrims who come from near and far to pray at her grave.

