

the village of Ladorudz. Upon arrival, Jews got off at the station and walked to the church located approx. 500m away.

6. The Church in Chełmno

The Church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the most characteristic building in the village, located in its centre, on the bank of the Ner valley. It was founded in 1875 by Mikołaj Karol Bistram, owner of the Chełmno estate. It was designed by the district engineer Ignacy Miłobędzki.

The German authorities' repression against the Roman Catholic Church in the Wartheland also covered the parish in Chełmno. In the autumn of 1941, the parish priest Rev. Karol Morozewicz was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp, where he died on May 3, 1942. After the priest was arrested, the church was closed to the public.

On account of its size and location adjacent to the extermination camp grounds (approx. 50m), the church building was used by the camp staff as a garage and a storehouse for personal belongings of the victims. During the second period of the camp's operation, the church served as a temporary place of stay for the victims brought to Chełmno by narrow-gauge trains in June and July 1944 (a total of 7,196 people in ten transports). After a night spent in the church, where the conditions were very difficult (crush, stuffiness, lack of water and food), the victims were transported to the Rzuchów Forest, where they were exterminated. As Andrzej Miszczak, Chełmno inhabitant, recalled:

This time [in 1944] Jews were brought directly to Chełmno. They were locked in the church for the night, and then transported by lorries to the Chełmno Forest [this name is used by local inhabitants interchangeably with the Rzuchów Forest – K.J.'s note].

The church, in an unchanged form, still functions as a parish church.

Commemoration of the Road of Death

The last road of the victims was commemorated by stones with inscriptions in Polish, German, and Hebrew. They can be found in places of key significance to the operation of the extermination camp: at the Koło railway station, at the no longer existing narrow-gauge railway stop in Powiercie, at the parish church in Chełmno, in the grounds of the former manor complex in Chełmno (the seat of the Museum of the Former German Kulmhof Death Camp in Chełmno-on-Ner), and in the Rzuchów Forest. These commemorations were created in 1995 on the initiative of Holocaust survivor Wilhelm Mosel from Hamburg and through the efforts of the German-Jewish Association (Deutsch-Jüdische Gesellschaft) in Hamburg.

Kamil Janicki

Commemoration stones:



Koło



Powiercie



The church in Chełmno



The Museum in Chełmno



The Rzuchów Forest

MUSEUM OF THE FORMER GERMAN
KULMHOF DEATH CAMP
IN CHEŁMNO-ON-NER



BRANCH OF THE MARTYRS'
MUSEUM IN ŻABIKOWO



The Trail of Remembrance of Kulmhof Victims

The brochure presents places along the so-called trail of death that Jews followed to the extermination camp in Chełmno-on-Ner (called Kulmhof by Germans) during both periods of its operation (the first one: November 1941-April 1943; the second one: March 1944-January 1945). The Trail of Remembrance starts at the railway station in Koło, where transports of Jews from the Łódź ghetto (from the Radegast Station) arrived, and ends at the Place of Remembrance in Chełmno.

1. The Railway Station in Koło

Work on the construction of the railway line through Koło started in 1919. It was the shortest rail connection between Warsaw and Poznań and one of the main routes connecting the territories of Prussian and Russian Partitions. The station building designed by Engineer of Architecture Romuald Miller, Head of Construction of the State Railway Directorate in Warsaw, was built in 1925 on an elongated rectangular plan (about 55m in length), with two outermost projections, as a one-storey building with a loft. Its architecture refers to the so-called national style popular in Poland at the time.

On September 2, 1939, the station building was damaged when the German air force bombed an evacuation train from Krotoszyn. After the German army entered Koło, the station was handed over to the German Reich Railway in Poznań. It was an important point on the communication route from the West to the East.

In the winter of 1942, the first transports of victims from the Łódź ghetto started to arrive in Koło and were sent to the Kulmhof extermination camp. These events were recalled by Kazimierz Paterkowski, assistant freight dispatcher at the station in Koło:

In the winter of 1942, transports of Jews started to arrive in Koło. In 1942, a regular set of carriages ran there – there were about 20 carriages [...] the crew was German. Initially, the Jews were marched to the Shul, but later they were loaded on a transfer track onto a narrow-gauge train which went towards Chełmno. When such a transport came, you had to stop work, and all Poles had to leave the platform. They were afraid that Poles would warn them. The train arrived at about 1 p.m.

The railway station in Koło still operates today. A few years ago the station building was renovated. One of its parts houses the Municipal and District Public Library in Koło.

2. The Synagogue in Koło

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, there were two synagogues in Koło, the so-called great one and the small one. Built in the middle of the nineteenth century, they were located in the New Market (also called the Jewish Market), in the Old Town. Next to them there was a mikveh and a Jewish school "Jabne".

On September 20, 1939, Germans set fire to the great synagogue, and then they accused Jews of destroying it and imposed a heavy tribute on them.

In the years 1940-1941, the small synagogue was used as a place of temporary detention for the Polish and Jewish displaced persons

and forced labourers. From December 1941 to March 1942, the house of prayer along with the adjacent seat of the Jewish Committee were used by the staff of the extermination camp in Chełmno. As the buildings could accommodate a large group of people, Jews deported to the Kulmhof camp were temporarily kept there. Jews brought to Koło marched from the railway station to the synagogue. They were treated in an extremely brutal way. These events were recalled by Jerzy Kruszyński, inhabitant of Koło:

After getting off the train, they still had strength for some of the way, but having covered one and a half or two kilometres down Toruńska Street, towards the end of which they slipped on the mud and stones, as there were cobblestones there [...], some of them collapsed, hurt themselves, got bruised, but there were also cases – and I saw them myself – when the weaker ones were just finished off.

Having reached the synagogue, the victims were locked to spend the night. Inscriptions preserved on the synagogue walls, found after the war, proved their anxiety and a premonition of death. On the following day, Jews were taken by lorries to the extermination camp in Chełmno. This lasted until March 1942, when they stopped marching Jews to the synagogue due to complaints from Germans living in Koło.

The building of the smaller synagogue was still used by Germans as a storehouse for personal belongings of the victims, mostly clothing and shoes. In 1945, during the visit of Judge Władysław Bednarz from the District Court in Łódź to the site, approx. 6,000 pairs of shoes were found there.

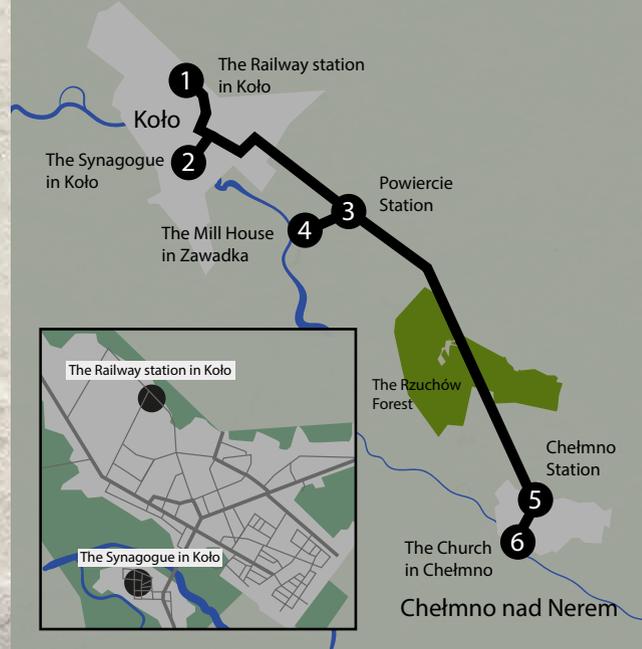
The small synagogue was demolished in 1945, even before the end of the investigation into the extermination camp conducted by Judge Władysław Bednarz. Today, a reminder of the existence of both Jewish houses of prayer is the monument erected in 1989 near their location on the initiative of Holocaust survivors and descendants of the victims.

The Narrow-Gauge Railway

The narrow-gauge rail line between Koło and Dąbie-on-Ner was built towards the end of 1914 as the final fragment of the Kujawy railroad via Sompolno to Piotrków Kujawski. To the north of the station, a break-of-gauge station was created for standard-gauge and narrow-gauge railways.

The line ran from the railway station in Koło via Powiercie to Rzuchów, parallel to the western edge of the road connecting Dąbie with Koło. In Rzuchów, it crossed the road and then went towards Chełmno. The narrow-gauge railway from Koło to Dąbie was used to transport Jews to the extermination centre during both periods of its operation, which means it transported most of the victims.

After the war, the line was in a good technical condition and it was used until 1963, when the rail traffic was suspended. Eventually, the tracks and stops were dismantled in 1968.



The railway station in Koło during the occupation, Museum of Ceramic Techniques in Koło.

The railway station in Koło, 2021



The small synagogue, 1945, Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.

The monument commemorating the synagogues in the New Market in Koło.



Victims transferring into the cars of a narrow-gauge train at the station in Koło, 1942, Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.

Victims getting off the train at the narrow-gauge railway stop in Powiercie, 1942, Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.



The Mill House in Zawadka, 1945, Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.

The location of the former narrow-gauge railway station in Chełmno.



The church in Chełmno, 1945, Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.

The church in Chełmno, 2021.



3. Powiercie Station

The narrow-gauge railway station in the village of Powiercie (approx. 4km away from Koło) was used to transport victims from March 1942, after it had been decided Jews would be no longer kept in the synagogue. This function was taken over by a mill house in the village of Zawadka. After transferring from a standard-gauge train to the cars of a narrow-gauge train, the victims were transported to Powiercie. Then Jews walked approx. 1.5km to the mill house in Zawadka. The reason why trains stopped in Powiercie was the damaged bridge on the Rgilewka River, which crossed the railway line further on. An account of transports during the first period of the camp's operation was provided by Henryk Kruszczyński, who worked at the Powiercie estate during the occupation:

After some time – I can't tell when exactly – they started bringing Jews by narrow-gauge trains from Koło. Transports came every day at about 3 p.m. The Jews were unloaded in front of the Powiercie estate, about 150 metres away from the crossing of the Dąbie-Koło and Stelituszki [in fact, Stelutyszki, K.J.'s note]-Zawadka roads. After their bundles were taken away (their luggage wasn't big anyway), they were marched to the mill house in Zawadki [in fact, in Zawadka, K.J.'s note].

4. The Mill House in Zawadka

The mill house located in the village of Zawadka was built in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was an unplastered masonry two-storey building measuring about 44x10m, located on the Warta River. Along with its yard, it was surrounded by a wooden fence.

The building was used by the camp staff from the middle of March 1942. The victims were brought to the mill house and spent the night there, and on the following morning they were transported to Kulmhof by lorries. This is how these events were recalled by Stanisław Zawadzki, worker of the Powiercie estate:

Already in the winter of 1942 Jews were brought by train to Powiercie and then marched to Zawadki, where they would spend the night in the mill house [...] The Jews were brutally treated, I often saw them being beaten with clubs. [...] Sick people were kept the whole night in the snow in the yard of the Zawadka mill house. The next day, when the Jews were loaded onto lorries, if any of the sick was still alive but couldn't get on the lorry, they would bludgeon them to death. The bodies of the dead Jews were thrown into the lorry.

The mill house building has not been preserved, one can only see fragments of its foundations. Today, it is private property, and so it has not been commemorated.

5. Chełmno Station

During the second period of the operation of the extermination centre, i.e. in June and July 1944, after the damaged bridge on the Rgilewka River had been repaired, transports of victims went by train to the village of Chełmno. The narrow-gauge railway station was located to the north of the village centre, near the road from Chełmno to