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Objects hidden by prisoners found at Auschwitz

15 May 2020

On 21 April 2020, numerous objects dating back to the time of the camp were found in Block 17 of the former Main Camp at Auschwitz, where the new Austrian exhibition will be displayed. During the course of the renovation and restoration work commissioned by the National Fund in preparation for the new Austrian exhibition, a chimney flue was uncovered on the ground floor while measures were being undertaken to preserve original masonry. Hidden objects came to light beneath it, including knives, forks, hooks, scissors, pieces of leather, cobbler's tools and parts of shoes.

The objects were carefully recovered, documented and handed over to the museum's conservation department. Thus another piece has been found in the puzzle of the building's history.



The National Fund's structural consultant, master builder Ing. Johannes Hofmeister, believes that it is no coincidence that a chimney was used as a hiding place in the very building where chimney sweeps were accommodated. It is likely that people with special manual skills were housed in the building. Survivor testimonies indicate that there were a number of workshops in the cellar where, for example, baskets were woven.

In the absence of an in-depth analysis by historians and conservators, it is still too early to discuss how they were used and the possible intentions of the prisoners – conceivable examples include making and repairing clothes, locksmithing or to prepare for an escape. It is also possible that the scissors and cutlery were used to barter with other prisoners.

Renovation and restoration continue to progress despite difficult circumstances

Since the renovation of the listed building Block 17 commenced in September 2019, elements that were added after the war have been demolished under the supervision of conservators and the structural reinforcement of the entire building has begun. During the demolition of the architecture that was incorporated into the building in 1978, original elements that had not been taken into account in the original planning came

to light, which made it necessary to adapt the implementation planning. In this particular case, solutions were reached in consensus with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the Malopolska Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments.

Due to the official measures in force in Poland to prevent the spread of Covid 19, the construction site personnel had to be massively reduced in March. Only certain work involving building safety was allowed to be carried out; measures solely involving restoration were not. The work on the structural reinforcement of the building could be continued with adequate precautions and is now almost complete. The safety measures put in place so far have enabled the continuation of all conservation and construction work within this project.