

The Hausertor workshop Production facilities of the Leitz company

After the bankruptcy of the Mitteldeutschen Gerberei and Riemen factory, Ernst Leitz II overtook their facilities and in 1921 he manufactured parts for microscopes, projectors, and epidiascopes here. The buildings also accommodated the shipping department.

Since 1925 two floors were prepared for primary manufacturing as well as final assembly of the Leica. The objectives Elmax and Elmar came from the main factory. The assembly was performed under the strict personal supervision of Oskar Barnack. His favorite saying so it is said, was “Mr. Uhl here a half of a whiff is missing.” By the end of 1925 the Leitz Company had sold 1000 cameras of the model type A. Up to his death in 1936 he turned most of his ideas into functioning prototypes and realized his technical ideas based on experimental models. With his hand drawn drafts he employed a whole row of mechanics, until a construction department was built up.

The camera casing was drawn from aluminum pipe, pressed and wrapped with vulcanized cloth, which made it better to handle. The upper part and the covering flap were made out of brass and were highly polished, engraved and coated. The polishing had to be done by hand, each stroke in the same direction. A special device was necessary, so that while polishing only the part to be polished was free and the rest would not be scratched. The engraving was lined with bismuth. The part to be engraved still had to be warm, in order to get a raised letter engraving.



Final assembly of the 35 mm projektor in the topfloor of the Hausertor plant

The cameras were assembled in quantities of 10 per box. The simple assembly work was done by unskilled female workers, shutters, range finders, were mounted and respectively adjusted by skilled workers. The assembly sets were called 10-boxes and went from place to place. Between each new work process a quality control was performed. Approximately 85% of the costs for producing a camera had to be calculated for work time and the therefore necessary skilled workers were taken from the microscope production. Therefore a high level of quality was reached from the beginning. The price of the end product was correspondingly high.

Following the transfer of camera assembly to the high-rises in the Ernst-Leitz-Straße, the Hausertor workshop was used until 1982 as the company training center for precision engineering. (One floor for each apprenticeship year). The customer service department was also housed here.

Since the end of the 1990s the buildings have no longer been used by the Leitz Company. Now there are offices and Doctor Practices here.

1925 the sale of cameras was 5% of total sales, 1934 34%, and 1933 70%. (Ulf Richter S. 102)

The Leica camera was not only a success in Germany which is shown by the percentage of exports from total camera sales 1925 46,9%, 1927 53,2% and 1933 60%.



The Leica production facilities at the hHausertor plant at the end of the nineteen twenties

Text: Gerhild Seibert

Literature and pictures:

BECK, Rolf (1999): Die Leitz-Werke in Wetzlar. Erfurt

KELLER, Emil G. (1990): Leica im Spiegel der Erinnerungen. Stuttgart