

# ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

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## *July 2018 – St. John’s and St. Roch’s*

2018 marks the 500th anniversary of the two Nuremberg cemeteries known in German as St. Johannes and St. Rochus. If you have been living in this area for a while, you will most certainly have visited them and admired the bronze epitaphs, the gravestones beset with flowers, the sense of history that they convey. Of course, if you have never visited them, then it’s high time you went. A visit in October is a good idea when the summer geraniums have given way to an abundance of heather.

It was the Emperor Maximilian I who decreed in 1518 that burials could henceforth only take place outside the Nuremberg city walls, a blow to Christians who wished to be laid to rest as close as possible to their churches. The decree was motivated, however, by a concern for public health and safety.

One of the results of the crusades of the early middle Ages was that the number of people suffering from leprosy had risen steeply around 1200. These poor souls were looked after in so-called “Siechenhäuser” (siechen = sick), in other words in hospitals outside the city walls for the terminally ill. Nuremberg had several such hospices located on the main roads leading out of the city. St. John’s was set up in 1234 and was extended in the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the addition of a burial area for those who had died of the plague. The Black Death is estimated to have killed somewhere between one third and two thirds of Europe’s population and towns everywhere struggled to bury the dead in an adequate way.

And so it came about that the cemeteries of St. John’s, serving the parish of St. Sebald, and St. Roch, burying the deceased from the parish of St. Lawrence, became the resting places of many of the citizens of Nuremberg. Famous figures from the city’s illustrious past can be found in St. John’s. Albrecht Dürer and the humanist Willibald Pirckheimer serve as examples, though I could also mention the Englishman William Wilson, the Northumberland engineer who came to Franconia to drive Germany’s first locomotive, the Adler. He died in 1862 and was buried with a large section of the city’s population in attendance.

St. Roch, a saint one turned to during “visitations of the plague”, is the name of the other cemetery. Here the bronze caster Peter Vischer, the Elder, is buried and the composer Johann Pachelbel.

Both cemeteries are renowned for the bronze and brass epitaphs found on the sand-stone tombs and visitors can spend hours enjoying the craftsmanship as well as deciphering names and symbols. Here is an example. Which profession, do you think, is being alluded to?

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