

“KREIS-IRRENANSTALT ERLANGEN” GERMANY’S UNIQUE PANOPTICAL ASYLUM - AN APPRECIATION OF THE FIRST BAVARIAN MENTAL HOME

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Introduction: There are two edifices left to represent one of the most impressive cultural monuments of mental homes in Middle-Europe. The destruction of these historical buildings is intended to establish a modern “Translational Research Centre”.

Objectives: To outline the significance of the asylum in the history of psychiatric architecture.

Aims: To appreciate the first Bavarian mental home.

Methods: Study of literature.

Results: The British philosopher Jeremy Bentham is considered to be the founder of the panoptical (“invisible from all around”) concept in architecture. Several panoptical asylums have been built in Great Britain. In France, Italy and Germany a unique exemplar was realized. As the entire ward could be checked from a central room, the possibility of optimal surveillance of the patients was given and the minimisation of staff was enabled. In contrast to the emergent industrial cities (e.g. Nürnberg, Fürth, Schwabach) Erlangen disposed of enough building ground. There, J.M. Leupold (1794-1874) gave a lecture on the new establishing medical department of psychiatry. Thanks to his advice the project of the first Bavarian mental home could be completed within 12 years. The cruciform floor plan was supplemented by cross buildings, which constituted a relevant modification of the panoptical system. Concerning the extension of buildings (1874-1879) the internationally appreciated “system of pavillons” was realized and could be used by university since 1903.

Conclusions: As the TRC-project may serve as a document for future medical progress, it is important to remember the “Kreis-Irrenanstalt Erlangen” as a milestone in the evolution of psychiatric architecture.