

The brotherhood of St. Christopher



The old Arlberg hospice on a photograph taken in around 1910 with Oswald Trojer, the landlord.

The ascent and descent were arduous and often terrifying, travellers not infrequently encountering great danger. The hazards of the rough road were sharpened by storms, snow and ice. **Heinrich Findelkind**, a shepherd in the service of the lords of Überrahein of **Arlen Castle**, was familiar with the – sometimes deadly – perils involved in crossing the Arlberg. He thus resolved to build a lodging at the top of the pass to provide shelter and refreshment for travellers. He won the support of **Duke Leopold III**, the Tyrolean ruler, who accorded him safe conduct. In **1386** Heinrich Findelkind started work on his charitable project, **Ulrich Nosseck**, his faithful companion from St. Gallen, assisting him in the construction of the hospice. According to Heinrich's autobiographical notes, seven lives were saved in the very first winter and some fifty in the course of the first seven years! Such a success could not but inspire the goodwill and support of prominent and influential personages, the most significant example of this being the **papal warrant** issued to Heinrich Findelkind in 1397. On 1st February of the following year **Pope Boniface IX** retrospectively sanctioned the building of the hospice, chapel and outbuildings, although these had in fact been fulfilling their function for more than a decade. Today this valuable document is kept in the deanery archives at Zams. The reasons listed for the building of the hospice are most interesting: the Arlberg was known for its frequent heavy snowstorms and rainfall. Being some three German miles from human habitation, travellers could frequently not reach these houses or find refuge elsewhere on the mountain. Thus they were compelled to die without the comforts of the Church. For the refreshment of wayfarers, Heinrich Findelkind and Ulrich Nosseck had now erected in honour of the Blessed Virgin, all the Saints, the Holy Cross, St. Catherine and St. Christopher a chapel, living quarters and farm buildings for the use of the chapel steward. The pope permitted the founders of the chapel to have this consecrated by a bishop of their choice. The head of the Roman Catholic Church also granted indulgences to those who might with pious intent visit the consecrated chapel on the feast days named.

The **Brotherhood of St. Christoph** was inaugurated to safeguard to existence of the hospice. Volumes were opened to record the names of the members, founders and benefactors with their titles, status and coats of arms and the sum pledged annually. Armed with these books, Heinrich Findelkind and his assistants traversed the land in order to call upon all patrons regularly. The latter were not only to be found in the Tyrol or the Habsburg domains, but much further afield, too, e.g. in Görz, Graz, Vienna, Prague, Magdeburg, Cologne, Nimwegen, Trier, Strasbourg and Basle, to name the most far-flung places. The donors came from all classes of society, ranging from the archdukes of Austria, the dukes of Bavaria and the bishops of Mainz, Trier and Chiemsee to ordinary people of whom no more is known than their name.

The Reformation caused a decline in the St. Christopher Brotherhood and many a complaint was heard regarding the dilapidated state of the building and the landlord's neglect of his duties. **Jakob Feuerstein**, parish priest in Zams and master of the brotherhood from 1621 to 1650, was responsible for a temporary revival. The brotherhood was finally disbanded in the reign of Emperor Josef II, although the hospice continued to provide accommodation. In January 1957 the hospice was destroyed by a fire, but it was subsequently rebuilt and must be the most renowned hotel in the Arlberg region today. Restoration work on the chapel was completed in the autumn of 1961 and the chapel was reconsecrated on 7th January of the following year. Meanwhile the ecclesiastical authorities had approved the re-establishment of the St. Christopher Brotherhood. Today, as in Heinrich Findelkind's day, it serves its purpose with charitable works.