

NEW EVIDENCE ON STOBS INTERNMENT CAMP 1914 - 1919

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Two previous articles in this journal have given valuable insight into the workings of Stobs internment camp during the First World War. Julie M. Horne uses the German-language camp newspaper *Stobsiade* as her main source; Judith E. Murray mainly draws on information from local newspapers.¹ The following article aims to widen the scope of evidence by bringing together sources from various German and British archives. Thereby, some new light can be shed on the structure and development of the camp. I will concentrate on those aspects that have not been described in the previous two articles, rather than covering all aspects of camp life.

Three categories of prisoners were held in Stobs during the course of the war: civilian "enemy aliens" who had settled in Britain before 1914 and were now perceived as potential spies; civilian passengers and seamen taken from merchant vessels and passenger liners; and military prisoners of war caught on the battlefield or at sea. The three groups constituted the composition of the internees in three different phases: a purely civilian camp from November 1914 to spring 1915; a "mixed" one until July 1916; and a purely military camp until the release of the prisoners in early 1919. If initial plans by the war ministry had been realised, Stobs would have developed into one of the biggest camps in Britain with a capacity of 12 000.² In actual fact, the peak number does not seem to have exceeded 6000,³ which still made Stobs the biggest camp north of the border, with administrative functions for various other camps in Scotland.

The following table is mainly based on reports by camp inspectors from the American embassy in London who made their rounds through British camps throughout the war. Numbers for the latter period of the war could not be traced.

Number and composition of internees, February 1915 to April 1916

	February 1915	April 1915	15 June 1915	13 April 1916
CIVILIANS	300	?	1098	2269 (incl. 178 Austrians and 2 Turks)
P.O.W.s	none	?	1278 (783 soldiers; 495 sailors)	2323 (1821 soldiers; 502 sailors)
TOTAL	300	800	2376	4592

Sources: Federal Archives/Military Archives Freiburg, RM 3/5402, Report John B. Jackson, 27. 2. 1915, p. 50; RM 3/5579/73f., Report American Embassy/German Division, 26. 10. 1915; Parliamentary Papers, misc. 30 (1916), Report American Embassy/German Division, p. 15; Tower Hamlets Local Library and Archives (London) TH 8662/52, letter Pastor Planer to Pastor Abraham, 24. 4. 1915.

"Enemy aliens" in Scotland were first detained by the police and then brought to Redford Barracks in Edinburgh which functioned as the central collection camp for Scotland. In Glasgow, "some well known businessmen [...] were amongst those arrested and pathetic scenes were witnessed in the Central station as the prisoners were taking their leave of their

relatives.”⁴ From Edinburgh, the prisoners were dispatched to camps all over Britain. The first batch of prisoners arrived in Stobs on a special train from Edinburgh in early November 1914.

Civilian internees were accommodated in compounds A and B, P.O.W.s in compounds B and C. Each compound consisted of twenty huts measuring 120 feet in length and 20 feet in width and sleeping thirty-three persons on average.⁵ The camp was surrounded by barbed wire.

As can be seen from the table, the number of internees tripled in May 1915 from 800 to 2376. Both the civilian and the military compound expanded considerably due to two war related, but isolated occurrences. Firstly, on 7 May 1915 the British passenger liner “Lusitania” was sunk by German torpedoes off the Irish coast. This caused a wave of anti-German feeling, and Germans living in Britain were an ideal target against which public feeling could be directed. In Dumfries and Annan, for example, serious rioting against premises owned by Germans occurred.⁶ In Glasgow, Liberal ex-Provost Sir Samuel Chisholm maintained in front of a crowd of 4500 in St. Andrew’s Hall:

“Every man and woman of them belong to a nation which is our sworn, subtle, savage, implacable and perfidious foe. (Loud Cheers). [...] The fabric of our industrial, commercial and social life has been honeycombed by the influence of Germans who contribute nothing to our national prosperity, nothing to the promulgation of those ideals of honour and truth on which our glorious Empire rests; Germans, whose secret and often, indeed, very unconscious influence is only to lower, coarsen and degrade (Cheers).”

Another speaker demanded:

“I would sweep these alien enemies out of our country root and branch. As a British ratepayer, who has paid taxes for 40 years, I maintain that we have fed the lazy Germans long enough (Cheers).”⁷

Government actions reacted to public feeling and internment was intensified. During the month of May 1915, internment numbers for the whole of Britain rose from 19,000 to 32,440. Stobs received a considerable portion. The internees came from very specific cities and were accommodated accordingly. Huts 1 to 20 in compound A were occupied by “enemy aliens” from London, Middlesbrough, Glasgow, Edinburgh, as well as civilians taken from enemy ships. One of the inmates was August Blume, whose boarding house in Edinburgh went bankrupt in his absence and was finally sequestered.⁸ Huts 21 to 40 were occupied by aliens from Manchester and Liverpool. For Manchester, the Glasgow Herald reported:

“On May 13 and 15 [1915], police in Manchester arrested a large number of aliens, and these were conveyed under escort from Manchester to Stobs internment camp [...] arriving there on the 15th. There were 152 prisoners altogether, and their property - money, watches, and such like - was rolled up into packages for transit. The property was handed over to the custody of the military authorities at the railway siding at Stobs.”⁹

The second war-related development influencing the composition of the camp was the course of warfare on the European front. In March 1915, British forces had attacked in Neuve Chapelle, and in May 1915 the allied Artois Offensive was launched. In the course of this offensive, the British First Army under General Haig launched an attack near Festubert on the night of 15 May. It was from these two battlefields - Neuve Chapelle and Festubert - that German prisoners of war were transported to Stobs. Thus huts 41 to 60 in the military

compounds C and D were occupied by infantrymen captured at the battle of Festubert, as well as the crew of the battleship "Blücher". Huts 61 to 80 were occupied by infantrymen from the battle of Neuve Chapelle, as well as the crews from the battleships "Gneisenau", "Leipzig", "Torpedo", and "Blücher".¹⁰ Prisoners thus came to Stobs as members of pre-existing military or civilian social entities, not as isolated individuals.

The camp authority under Commandant Major A. J. Bowman and three civil captains set up strict standing orders for the camp.¹¹ Examples of these regulations are:

"All Prisoners of War are subject to Military Law."

"Any Prisoner of War guilty of disobedience to orders or of any act prejudicial to the safety, good order or discipline of the Camp will be liable to punishment."

"It is to be distinctly understood that any Prisoner of War attempting to pass the boundary fence, or to go out through any gate without a permit signed by the Commandant, after being once duly warned and disregarding that warning, will be fired upon."

"In case of an escape, or attempted escape, by individuals, the whole body of the Prisoners will become liable to loss or curtailment of privileges and to the enforcement of more stringent discipline."

As regards the daily routine:

"Prisoners will be mustered twice daily for roll-call - at 9.30 a.m. and 2.30 p.m."

"Roll-call will be carried out in the following manner: The Companies will form up in quarter column. Rolls will be called by a member of the Staff, each Prisoner to answer his name. Captains of Companies will cause their men to stand at attention during roll-call, and strict order and silence will be maintained. After the roll is called Captains will march their Companies off in an orderly manner."

"The huts will be cleaned out twice a week, viz., on Mondays and Thursdays." "The Camp will be inspected daily at 10 a.m."

"All lights will be put out at 10 p.m."

"All Prisoners must remain in their huts from lights out to reveille, except as follows: Not more than two men at a time may visit the latrine."

"Intoxicating Liquors: Prisoners of War are not allowed to consume liquor or to have it in their possession, without special permission. Any Prisoner of War found drunk will be punished."

The interpreters' office was responsible for censoring any external contacts. Interviews with relatives or friends were restricted to Saturdays, "owing to the inconvenient train service". All interviews were arranged by the interpreter and took place in his presence and in his office. For letters, regulation notepaper and envelopes had to be used and both outgoing and incoming letters had to bear the censor's mark. This ensured that only trivial information - and certainly no critique - could reach the outside world. A letter from E. Willinger who had been living in Middlesbrough before the war shows this. The letter is addressed to the pastor of the German evangelical congregation in Middlesbrough and is quoted sic:

"Dear Mr. Abraham,

this to let you know that we are here in Stops Camp A now. That is to say not all of us from the Ship. there are only about 10 from M'borough and Southbank here. there is quit a young Pastor coming here from Edinbrough (I forgotten his name) but he says he may see you some day, I hope so. It is quit all right here. The Air is splendit. I understand you are

going to Lancaster and Lofthouse Park [two other internment camps, S. M.] as well. Please remember me to Paul Schulz, Franz v. Rohn and some of the old M'brough boys. I hope Your Wife and Child are quit well same yourself. My Adress is E. W. Concentration Camp A. Hut q.a [?, S. M.], Stops, Hawick, Scotland.

Gruß

E. Willinger"¹²

The camp newspaper *Stobsiade* remarks on the censorship issue (translation by the author):

"Sometimes a letter comes flying over the barbed wire. From Germany or from the English home. It does not say what we actually want to know. Of course not. Parcels arrive as well. If something very desirable [i.e. alcohol, S. M.] can be heard splashing inside, the censor keeps it. Of course."¹³

Another article addresses the mental problems caused by the long period of internment and isolation:

"By now, our minds have become a bit simple, or even get crackers, and get into a state of sentimental delirium. Our brains are contracting. Life before internment appears very distant. When was it again, that we gave our darling the farewell-kiss? Does this darling exist at all, or is she also part of our fantasies? God alone knows."¹⁴

Symptoms like boredom or depression were summed up by contemporaries under the term "barbed wire-disease". Serious cases of mental illness had to be treated in the camp hospital. As one of the American inspectors in April 1916 reported:

"Unfortunately there had been three deaths during the last few days before my visit, which had told very much upon the nerves of the interned soldiers and civilians, as they have so little to think about. [...] Most of the prisoners in the hospital were suffering from nerves, colds, wounds, or tuberculosis."

During the eighteen months up to April 1916, twelve prisoners died. Four doctors were in charge of the infirmary, assisted by twenty-eight German attendants. In cases needing operations, a surgeon came from Edinburgh. On the day of the inspector's visit, there were sixty-five patients in the hospital. The hospital kitchen was staffed by four German cooks.

The healthy prisoners, too, were catered for by their compatriots. Each of the four compounds had a kitchen with between ten and twenty German cooks. One of them was a chef and the others his assistants. In camp C there was also a bakehouse which baked for the whole camp and employed fourteen bakers, all soldiers and sailors. The flour issued was made by the prisoners "into the sort of rolls and cakes they like."¹⁵ There was also a Board of Justice,

"which assists in regulating small matters between the prisoners themselves, so that, if there should be any disagreements of slight nature, these may be brought before this Board of Justice, which frequently is enabled to arrange a settlement by apology or otherwise. These committees are all chosen and run by the interned prisoners themselves."¹⁶

The chief captains elected for the civilian camp were Herr Winter from hut 7 for compound A, and Dr. chem. Marle from hut 40 for compound B.¹⁷

Work, recreation and education were the only ways to escape boredom. Over 500 of the prisoners were engaged in roadmaking. Others set up workshops where they pursued their professions such as shoemaking, tailoring, or hairdressing. The camp school taught a multitude of subjects, for example shorthand, languages or history. An orchestra and various other instrumental groups existed, two military singing societies, one civilian singing society, a library with English and German books, and a theatre society. Gardening, i.e. laying out flower beds was very popular. By April 1916, there were skittle alleys and equipment for gymnastics. Two tennis courts and a recreation ground were in the making.

On Sunday, 8 August 1915, a "Sport-Fest" was organised by the sports committee of the military compound. This is the cover sheet of the programme.¹⁸

*2000 wies
Stuhl mit
1915*

FRISCH
FROMM

Kriegsgefangenen-Lager

STOBS, Schottland.

3.

SPORT-FEST

Sonntag, den 8 Aug. 1915.

Anfang Nachmittags 1½ Uhr.

Veranstaltet

vom Sport-Ausschuss des Militaer-Gefangenen-Lagers
mit.guetiger Erlaubniss des Kommandanten
Major Bowman

I. Vorsitzender	Ob. Masch. Mt. STALLMANN.
II.	Feldwebel HESSE.
I. Turnwart	Unteroffizier DICKENSCHIED.
III.	Masch. Mt. HAMANN.
I. Sportwart	Masch. Mt. STANETZEY.
II.	Vz. Feldwebel BROCKHAUS.
I. Zeugwart	Ob. Matr. SALAWSKI.
III.	Inf. JAEGER.
Schriftfuehrer	Inf. MOHNKE.

Musik ausgefuehrt von der Camp-Kapelle.

FROENLICH
FREI

At 1 p.m., all the contestants lined up behind the canteen and marched to the "fairground". From 1.30 p.m. onwards, the following disciplines were performed: parallel bars; pentathlon (stone-putting; long/high jump; triple jump; hurdle race; keep-fit exercise); wrestling and boxing; flag waving; 100 meters sprint; squad gymnastics; 400 meters and 1000 meters relay race. At 6 p.m. the football competition for the camp championship began, followed by the awards ceremony and a procession through the camp.

The spiritual needs of both Lutherans and Catholics were catered for in the camp. Dr C. van Biesen, a Dutch catholic priest residing in Hawick during the war, held regular services. The situation for protestants turned out to be more complicated. Until June 1915, regular services were held by C. Planer, who had been the pastor of the German Evangelical Congregation in Edinburgh and was interned in Stobs after the outbreak of war. When he was released in April 1915, he could not return to Edinburgh as this was a "prohibited area" cleared from "enemy aliens". His congregation had been dispersed. He decided to return to Germany and asked Gerhard Abraham, the German pastor in Middlesbrough, to continue his work at Stobs. Abraham agreed and came to Stobs probably every two or three weeks. Services were held in the canteen. The organ belonged to the German congregation in Edinburgh and was played by machinist R. Adomat from hut 63.

More support from outside the camp came from various relief committees: the Y.M.C.A., the "Society of Friends Emergency Committee for the Assistance of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians in Distress", and the "Prisoners of War Relief Agency" which was organised by a German chemist living in London, Dr. K. E. Markel. These committees supported internees throughout Britain. The internees in Stobs also received some assistance from those members of the German communities in Edinburgh and Glasgow who were not interned because they were female, too old, or naturalised. The German Club in Glasgow provided books from its library for the camp library. Herr Schultzen and Frau Peacock stood in regular contact with the internees and sold some of their handicraft products such as frames or boxes. These items were often purchased by Germans living in Glasgow and Edinburgh who displayed them in their households as memorabilia until long after the war.¹⁹

In the British context, Stobs seems to have been one of the best organised and well attended camps. This becomes clear when compared to other camps such as Stratford near London, which was described by one inmate as a "veritable hell"²⁰, or Leeman Road Camp in York, which was closed in 1915 due to unsanitary conditions.²¹ The comments about Stobs are of a more favourable nature. Albert E. Rosenkranz, who had been the pastor of the German congregation in Liverpool before the war, wrote in 1921 without any censorship that those of his flock who came to Stobs had no reason to complain about their treatment.²² Corporal Emil Bahrs, reporting to the German authorities after his release, described his food rations as sufficient.²³ Commandant Major Bowman supported the activities of the German pastors as much as he could within the framework set by the war office.²⁴ During inspection visits, the internees had the chance to talk to the inspectors individually and bring forward any complaints, but

"none of the complaints [by civilian internees, S. M.] were related to the conditions in the camp or their treatment or food situation. Grievances were rather related to the fact that they had been interned, and that it had been impossible for them to organise their private affairs due to being interned at such short notice. The soldiers and sailors had no complaints." [translation by the author].²⁵

"The situation of the camp is high, and, though cool and breezy, seems very healthy."²⁶

Despite these favourable commentaries, however, and despite the range of occupational and recreational facilities, it would be misleading to imagine camp life as being happy. The activities were nothing more than attempts at coming to terms with a difficult situation and trying to avoid insanity in an extremely confined situation. When the war ended, most of the civilian internees were not allowed to return to their homes in Britain but were deported to Germany alongside the military prisoners of war.

¹Julie M. Horne, 'The German Connection. The Stobs Camp Newspaper 1916-1919', in *Hawick Archeological Society Transactions* 1988, pp. 26-32; Judith E. Murray, Stobs Camp 1903-1959, in *ibid.*, pp. 12-25.

²Federal Archives/Military Archives Freiburg RM 3/5579, Report American Embassy/German Division, 26. 10. 1915, pp. 73f.

³This number is mentioned as the maximum capacity by Murray, Stobs Camp, p. 15.

⁴Frances O' Neill, *Foreign Immigration to Glasgow 1870 - 1914*, M. A. University of Glasgow 1984, p. 67.

⁵As footnote 2.

⁶West Register House (Edinburgh), HH 31/10/25478/3781, Chief Constable Dumfries to Scottish Office; *Glasgow Herald*, 17. 5. 1915.

⁷Strathclyde Regional Archives (Glasgow), PA 11/II/4, Enemy Alien Danger, Safety of the Realm. For a general picture see Panikos Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst. Germans in Britain during the First World War*, Providence - Oxford 1991; for Scotland see Stefan Manz, *Migranten und Internierte. Deutsche in Glasgow, 1864-1918*, Ph.D. University of Durham 2002.

⁸*Glasgow Herald*, 2. 12. 1914.

⁹*Glasgow Herald*, 18. 3. 1916.

¹⁰Tower Hamlets Local Library and Archives (London), TH 8662/80, letter Pastor Planer to Pastor Abraham, 18. 6. 1915.

¹¹Imperial War Museum (London), IWM II (14) - (K) 141, Stobs Prisoners of War Camp, Standing Orders.

¹²Tower Hamlet Local Library and Archives, TH 8662/68, 11. 5. 1915.

¹³Stobsiade 1, 5. 9. 1915.

¹⁴Stobsiade 1, 5. 9. 1915.

¹⁵Parliamentary Papers, misc. 30 (1916), Report American Embassy/German Division, p. 16.

¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁷Tower Hamlets Local Library and Archives (London), TH 8662/80, letter Pastor Planer to Pastor Abraham, 18. 6. 1915.

¹⁸Hawick Borders Regional Library, RH 828 R/S.

¹⁹*Glasgow Herald*, 19. 2. 1915; letters from pastor Planer to pastor Abraham between 24. 4. 1915 and 18. 6. 1915, Tower Hamlets Local Library and Archive, TH 8662/52, 59, 60, 64, 77, 80; German Club Glasgow, Minute Book, Glasgow University Archives, DC 402/1/2, pp. 133-136.

²⁰Imperial War Museum, 'The First World War Diaries of Richard Noschke', p. 13.

²¹Federal Archives/Military Archives Freiburg, PH 2/588, report by Arno Singewald.

²²Albert E. Rosenkranz, *Geschichte der Deutschen Evangelischen Gemeinde zu Liverpool*, Stuttgart 1921, p. 211.

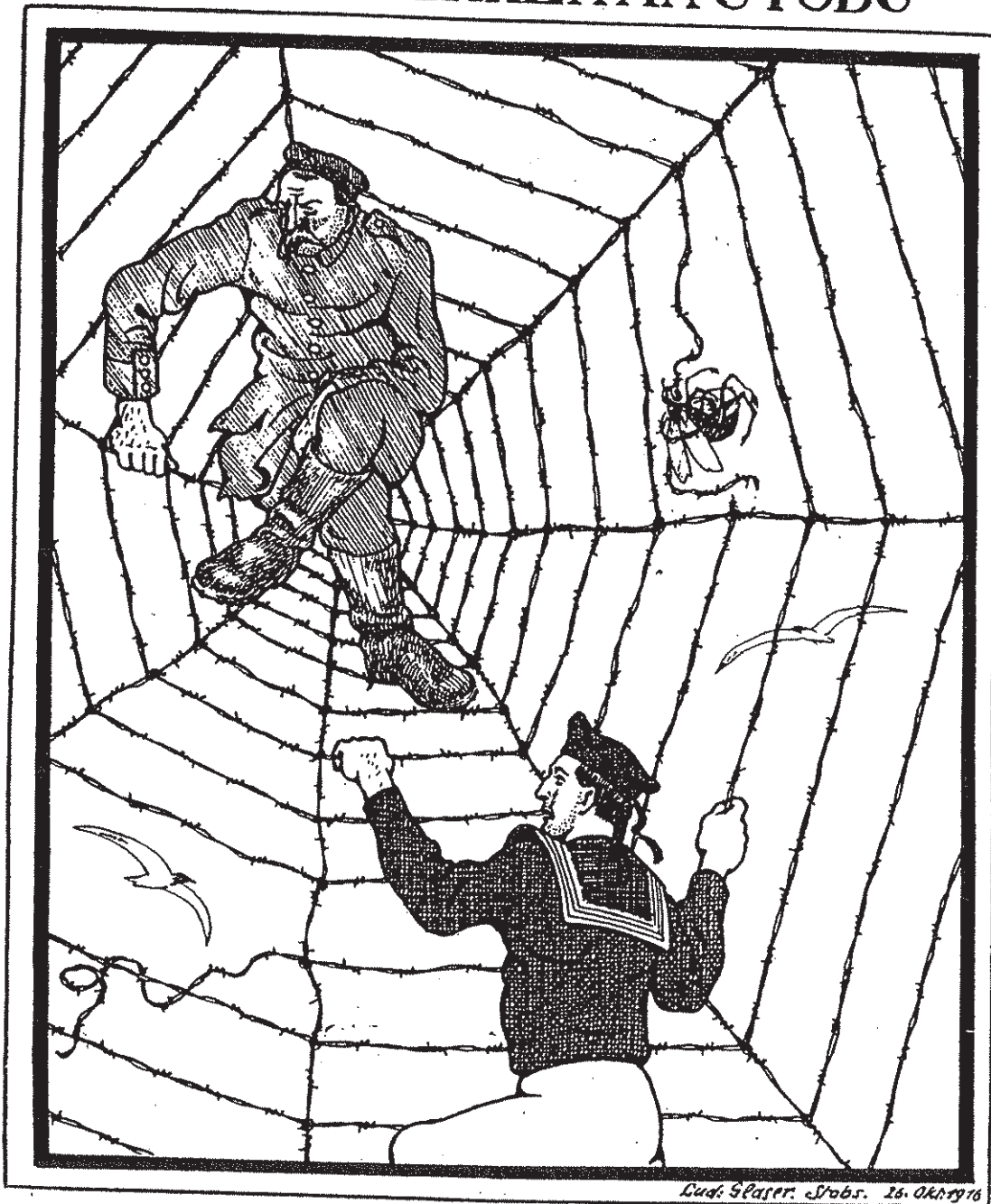
²³Federal Archives/Military Archives Freiburg, PH 2/588, report by Unteroffizier Emil Bahrs.

²⁴Tower Hamlet Local Library and Archives, TH 8662/64, Pastor Planer to Pastor Abraham, 7. 5. 1915.

²⁵Federal Archives/Military Archives Freiburg RM 3/5579, Report American Embassy/German Division, 26. 10. 1915, p. 75.

²⁶Parliamentary Papers, misc.30 (1916), Report American Embassy/German Division, p. 17.

ZUM ANDENKEN AN STOBS



„Mensch spinne keinen Stacheldraht.“

In Memory of Stobs

“Don’t spin any barbed wire, mate.”
 (“spinnen” in German also means “to go crazy”)



Christmas card from private Ohms to family or friends in Germany

From Captivity in England

You know where my heart is at Christmas time;
 but I do not despair!
 I send you my best wishes for Christmas & New Year.
 (censored)
 We are united through loyalty & courage and hold out. – Just like you!

Kriegsgefangenen - Lager,
STOBS, Schottland.

❁ *Weihnacht, 1915.* ❁

“Hallo Stobs!!”
Grosse Weihnachtsrevue.

mit Musik (Chor u. Orchester), Gesang und Tanz,
CORPS DE BALLET Unter Mitwirkung hervorragender
Kuenstler.

Regie: F. Hoffmeyer.

Musik komponiert und arrangiert von E. Beu.

Dramatische Szenen und Text verfasst von H. Beckmann,
E. Behrens, A. Hotes, B. Katz und O. Kriesche.

Kostueme aus dem Atelier W. Fr. Schulz.

VERANSTALTET
vom Komitee der Civil-Lager mit guetiger Erlaubnis
des Kommandanten Lieut.-Colonel Bowman.

Praesident—RUDOLF RADBRUCH.
Geschaeftsfuehrung—FR. JAEHKKEL und E. ROMMEL.
Regisseur—F. HOFFMEYER.
Musikalische Leitung—E. BEU.

Scott & Paterson, Printers, Hawick.

Programme for Christmas revue 1915,
with music (choir and orchestra), singing and dancing



Theaterfreunde.

—*—

Stobs, Weihnachten 1916.

—*—

Der Verschwender.

ORIGINAL-ZAUBERMAERCHEN IN 3 AUFZUEGEN

von

FERD. RAIMUND.

—

MUSIK

von

KONRADIN KREUTZER.

—

Spielleitung :

W. BACHENHEIMER.

—

Musikalische Leitung :

K. SPINDLER.

Programme for Christmas theatre play 1916

The Spendthrift

Fairy Tale in 3 Acts

(Illustrations courtesy of John L. Coltman)