

Who left these footprints here?

Footprints in Kalamehe quarter

Start – wherever

Hello. I am so happy that you are here with me today. This means you're in the mood for a walk, doesn't it? Well, sometimes you just feel like wandering around the town and thinking about what has been and what is yet to come. Especially around your home where you walk every day – in the evenings carrying your shopping and in the morning, still tasting the fresh coffee. You know... There is no need to explain why you have decided to go at this precise moment or what bought you here. All I want to do is to ask if I may accompany you on this walk?

1. Suur-Jõe Street 10/12 – Pärnu brewery

So, we have reached our first stop. At the moment you can only see walls and gates and barred windows, but in fact you are standing next to one of the most remarkable reminders of the industrial history of Pärnu. It is situated on the border of Riga suburbs (today's Kalamehe quarter) and town centre. I will give you a hint – it's a news headline that stated more than 30 years ago: „Pärnu beer is no longer salty. The reason is simple: sea water no longer floods the driven well of the brewery.“ Well, this hint was pretty straightforward and you probably already guessed that you are standing in front of Pärnu brewery. This is exactly the place where Eduard Blibernicht, son of a local smith bought an old iron casting shed for 5500 silver rubles and built his brewery in 1879.



All photos are from the internet

The brewery was run as a family business until the war and its brew was well-known. By the way, Eduard was the establisher and director of the first museum in Pärnu and it was rumoured that he bought the artefacts found in the river banks for beer which he as the brewery owner could get for free. A more intriguing story is, however, that at the beginning of WWI the brewery was forced to stop, but since fermenting beer was not good for the machinery the

brewery workers had no other option than to release the beer into the river. For years one could hear local fishermen tell stories about how the fish caught on that fateful day got several men drunk.

Look over there – can you see the pinkish-grayish factory buildings? This is the former Cibus bread factory established in 1914, being special for the showers built for its workers – no other factory had them at that time. However, the showers weren't able to save the factory's mill burning down in 1935 due to a draught.

Generally speaking, this region was the heart of Pärnu as an industrial town, because those very streets carried the feet of the thousands of workers earning their daily bread in the various factories, getting married and having children in their dwellings, salting fish for the winter and finally at the end of their life being buried in the nearby Alevi cemetery. However, in order to keep warm and keep up the pace, let's walk straight on along these streets.

2. Suur-Jõe Street 13 – the railway

Do you feel somewhat special? Does this street bear more energy compared to those you just walked along to get here? Perhaps so, because at the moment you are standing on the former main street of Pärnu along which ran the most important way to the town centre – the railway coming



from Riga and ending near the today's bus station. It can be said that you are standing on the railway at the moment.

Õie, today in her 80s, remembers: „I had relatives living near Uulu and every autumn we went there to harvest potatoes. We often took the horse and carriage, but we'd come back by train. When we reached Rat's Village (Raeküla part of town), I already knew the train would slow down and it'd be wise to jump off on the corner of Liiva Street instead of walking back from the town centre. So, one autumn I had the very same plan, however, I failed to notice that the bag of potatoes sent by my aunt was not fixed properly on one side. As soon as we reached Liiva Street and I jumped off the train, the potatoes fell all around me, because the bag had been torn open during the jump.“

By the way, the railway received only as much land from the town government as much of the abandoned former moat the railway workers were able to fill. Today's Vallikäär was left open to be used as a winter port, but rest of the moat was filled. This very same filled land was the spot for the first railway station in the town center, next to today's bus station. The last train from the town centre left as late as 1971. Have you sometimes thought about how much has changed in the town during your life? Which buildings have been demolished and which have been built?

3. Kalamehe Street 2 – military living quarters



I don't know what the weather is like today, but if the wind is blowing from the right angle and you breathe in the air the very right way you can still smell the shoe polish and gunpowder of the soldiers. The house which has served as the military quarters for most of its existence has now found a much more peaceful use as

an apartment building. By the way, the cobblestone road on which you are standing originates from the time when soldiers used to march up and down the street. This place was known as the Kalamehe military township rather recently and there were several other buildings belonging to the military near the living quarters. There has also been a war prisoner's camp and the building has hosted several dozens of patients when the first hospital of Pärnu burnt down. Many locals claim the former township is gravely haunted, but the most well-known of Pärnu's psychics refuted this argument in the 1980's. Still, Kalamehe Street remains as one of the oldest streets of this area and serves as the main street of today's Kalamehe quarter.

4. Sillutise 1 – Pärnu prison

The prison was closed not too long ago – in 2007. It may be a surprise to you that the house built in 1861 was originally designed as an insane asylum and later developed into a prison. Of course not all of the prison buildings are not as old as its oldest cells. For example the family rooms for the couples and newlyweds were completed just a couple of years before closing. During the last decades of the prison around five couple were wed

per year and after the wedding the newlyweds could enjoy their honeymoon in the family rooms for three days.

Very many different people have served their time in Pärnu prison as well as in its separate part in Vana-Sauga street – murderers, criminals, but also political prisoners such as jews during the holocaust. There have been men



and women, elderly people as well as youngsters. Perhaps one of the most famous prisoners from the last period were a lifelong bushwhacker Ülo Voitka and Avo Viiol who used government money for gambling. One of the last prison breaks took place in 1999 when psychopats Jaanus Kibuvits and Aleksei Lesnikov ran away. The first was serving 20 years for murder and the second had been in and out of prisons since childhood. The guards noticed the break when the men were climbing over the prison wall and they were shot at, however they managed to escape to a nearby house. Half an hour later they were caught and had no choice to accept extra prison time added to what they were already serving.

Since 2007 there have been no guards roaming the prison walls nor has any prisoner played football in the uniforms still hanging in the prison warehouse. However, you can still see photos of nude ladies on the cell walls and playing cards on the tables.

5. Sillutise Street 4 – Pärnu hospital



It doesn't take more than to turn your back on the prison and you're already facing the hospital. By the way, in the 19th century this street was called Plaastri (in English: band-aid) street, named after the so-called Swedish band-aid aka plaster cast. Plaastri Street was later renamed Sillutise in order to avoid any

confusion.

Pärnu hospital has not always looked like that. The building towering in front of you was finished in 1910, before that there was a remarkably

smaller wooden building that burnt down the same year. Remember I mentioned the fire next to the Kalamehe military quarters? So, after the fire it was decided that a new 50-bed hospital with central heating and smaller fire hazard needs to be built. There were two separate rooms in the hospital to cure the prisoners. The hospital is still surrounded by the forgotten park – apples ripening every autumn, gooseberry and currant bushes fighting off bindweed. There is no one here to eat the fruit.

Next to the hospital you can see the chapel and morgue built in 1912 with an added disinfection chamber. Next to that is the infection hospital, next to which the building used for curing STD-s. By the way, former patients claim that it was not until the 1970s when the personnel of the hospital realized it is not advised to do the laundry of the maternity ward together with the laundry of the infection hospital, because not even boiling hot soap water can always kill all of the bacteria, thus infecting several babies. Despite temporary setbacks it is known that during the last 35 years of being open there were almost 24,000 people born in this hospital.

6. Liiva Street 8d – Liiva dormitory

The house in front of you is one of the only buildings in Kalamehe quarter with an infamous past and present. This is Liiva dormitory that shelters those who have had a rocky past in life. It was originally built as the dormitory of Pärnu fish-processing plant where its workers lived. The building also served as the centre of Liiva Street, because it had a phone in it (however, it enabled calls only within the town limits, for other calls one needed to walk to the post office in the town center). The dormitory's kitchens were like a marketplace – the locals claimed there was always someone in the kitchen who wished to buy fresh strawberries in the summer or a bag of potatoes for the winter.

Later, around the re-independence of Estonia (1991) the downfall of the dormitory began, because it was turned into a social home (shelter). Chairs and tables started to fly out the window and the hallway was guarded at night in attempt to keep any order, however, full order has still not been restored. The house was caught up in the „wood spirit“ tragedy, Liiva 8d is also a well-known address for policemen who are especially frequent guests here around the welfare payout



days. Of course not all of the habitants of the dormitory are outlaws and some of the children who grew up here have for example gone to learn medicine and have come back to start a job in the new hospital of Pärnu.

7. Liiva Street 1 - old boat harbour / under Conze

We have reached the last stop of our walk. We have heard several stories about Kalamehe quarter and we have grasped the people who lived here before our visit. Now we have wound up at the end of Liiva Street which was still known as „under Conze“ during the 20th century. The reason for the name „under Conze“ lays in the fact that the factories and other facilities near the river belonged to a German Conrad Conze who moved to Pärnu in around 1813. Exactly at the spot where your feet touch the ground have stood a wool factory, brewery, also the ceramics factory that produced most of the hot pots used at Pärnu's homes, some of which still exist. It is important that the end of the Liiva Street was used as a harbour, docking bigger boats as well as employing entrepreneur Ollino who took people across the river when they wished to visit the popular social gathering place – Niidu forest. Later, in 1926 a pontoon bridge was built here, so people could easily walk across the river, thus finishing the boatman's business.

Most of the buildings that stood here for decades have been demolished by now.





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