



Recha Freier

In 1931, Recha Freier founded the Youth Aliyah in order to help children and youths immigrate to Palestine without their parents. She played a decisive role in saving thousands of Jewish children and youths from the Nazis.

Further information can be found in the booklet on Recha Freier, available on request from the Equal Opportunities Officer Elke Kirsten.



Three youths from Norden who succeeded in emigrating with the help of the Youth Aliyah: Zvi (Erich) Weinberg, Ruth Zadek, née Netheim, and Rudy Wolff in Haifa, Israel, 1985

Foto: Lina Gödeken, Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Synagogenweg Norden

A tour of Norden

1 Neuer Weg 110 | Oldest part of the Jewish community centre located in Synagogenweg. Purchased by the Jewish community in 1679, it was used as a synagogue (a room for prayer), a school and a residential building. In 1903, it was newly erected with a teacher's flat on the upper floor.



2 Synagogenweg (formerly known as Jews' Lane) | The Jewish community centre was situated between Neuer Weg, Norden's main shopping street, and Uffenstraße, which connected the market place with the old harbour. As an ensemble of buildings, it is unique in the region. **Memorial** | In 1804, a new synagogue was built. In November 1938, the synagogue was burnt down during Kristallnacht. In 1987, a memorial was erected on its site.

Synagogenweg 2 | The house where the beadle of the community lived. It was also used as an office, a conference room and a place to store timber for coffins and biers. The mikvah, the bath where the cleaning ritual was performed, was located here, too. The names of the committee members are engraved in bricks next to the entrance.

Synagogenweg 3 | The house, where Recha Freier was born, was built in 1891 as a teacher's house.



The names of the board and committee members as well as the year the building was erected are engraved in the stones next to the entrance. In addition, the inscription of Recha Freier's father "Kantor M. Schweitzer" is to be found here.



Synagogenweg 4 | Jewish school from 1871; extension of the building in Neuer Weg 110 with a little garden belonging to the school; the gym of a nearby sports club (Norder Turnverein) was used for physical education lessons.

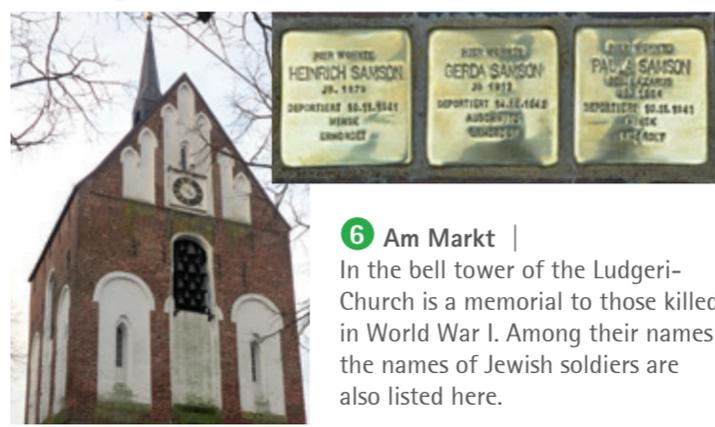
3 Recha-Freier-Platz | In the centre of Norden the Recha-Freier-Platz reminds the citizens of Recha Freier. In 2013, a Memorial Plaque was put up in commemoration of Recha Freier's lifework.



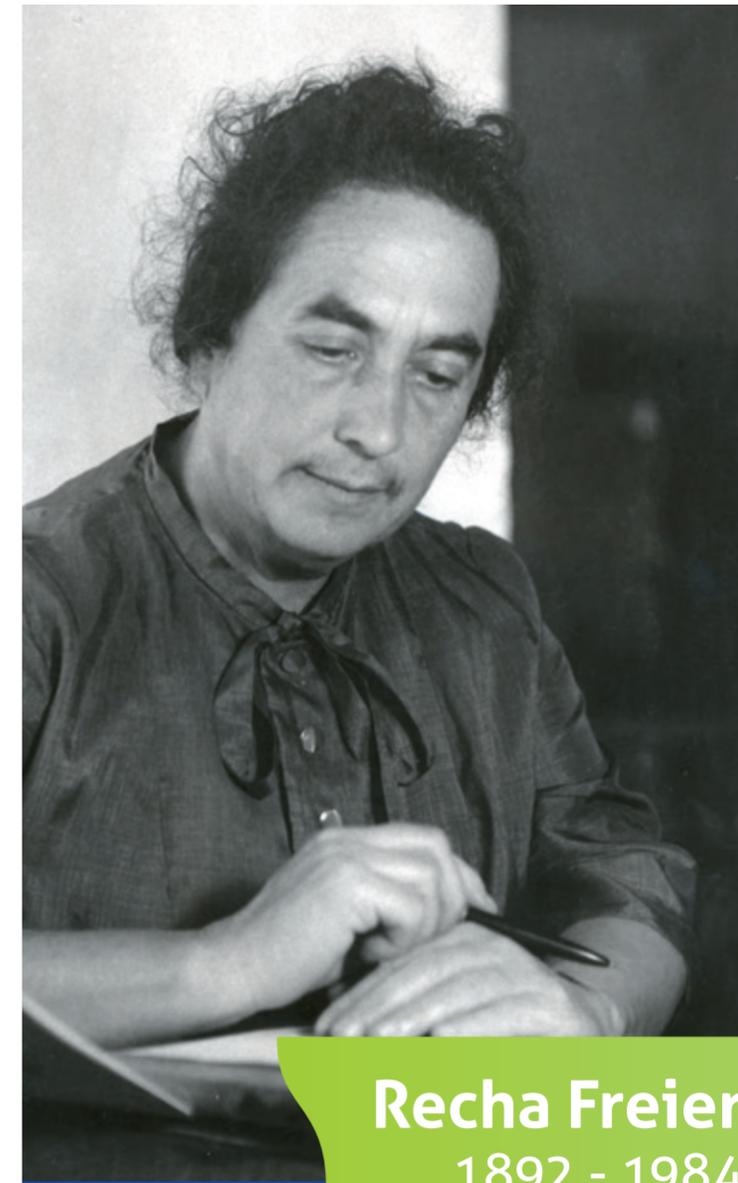
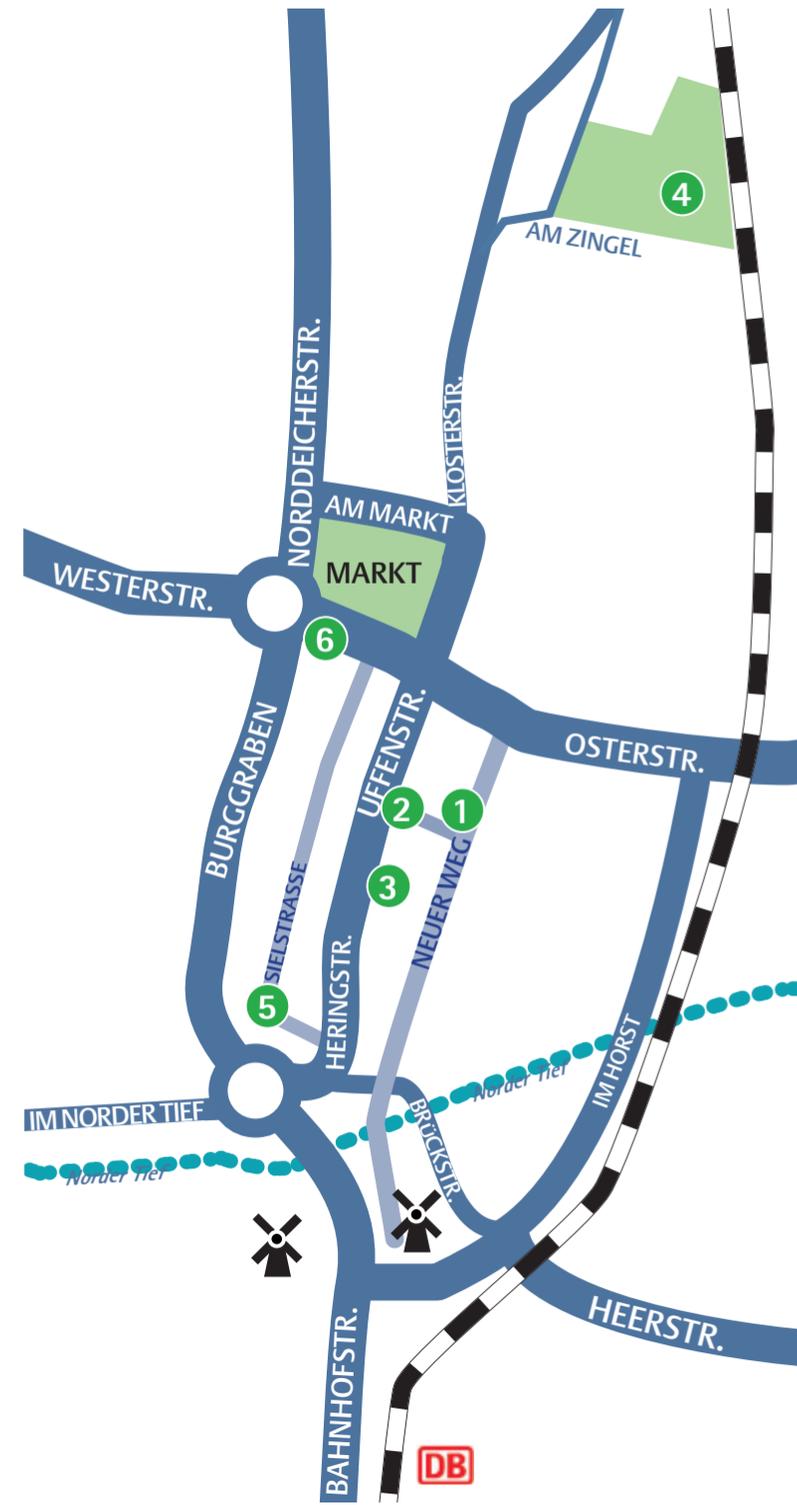
4 Am Zingel | This is the oldest Jewish cemetery in East Frisia, established in 1569. About 330 gravestones still exist, the oldest one dating back to 1659. The last burial was in 1940. In 2005, a Memorial was erected to commemorate all the Jews who were either born in Norden or who lived here and who were murdered during the Holocaust.



5 Stolpersteine | Thus far, 98 remembrance stones, also known as "Stolpersteine", or stumbling stones, like those that have been laid across Europe, have been embedded in the pavement throughout the city centre to commemorate the former Jewish inhabitants. The remembrance stones are, above all, to be found in Neuer Weg and in Sielstraße.



6 Am Markt | In the bell tower of the Ludgeri-Church is a memorial to those killed in World War I. Among their names the names of Jewish soldiers are also listed here.



Recha Freier
1892 - 1984

Stadt Norden

Landesfrauenrat Niedersachsen e.V.
frauenORTE
Niedersachsen
Recha Freier · NORDEN

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Recha Freier

(née Schweitzer)

Recha Freier was born on October 29, 1892, in Norden (East Frisia) into an Orthodox Jewish family. Her brothers, Willi and Arthur, were also born in Norden, while her sister, Eddie, was born in Glogau (Glogow, Poland). Recha's mother, Bertha Schweitzer (née Levy), had taught English and French privately and her father, Menasse Schweitzer (born in 1855), taught at a Jewish primary school and was the cantor of the local congregation. Menasse died in Munich in 1929, 16 years before his wife Bertha, born in 1862, died of typhoid fever in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (now Terezin, Czech Republic) in June 1945. It was as a very young child in Norden that Recha first encountered antisemitism. This painful event was to profoundly affect her for the rest of her life. In fact, many years later she wrote a poem about that incident.



Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah

In 1932, realizing that Jews had no future in Germany because of the Nazis rising to power, Recha Freier organized the first emigration of a group of Jewish youths to Palestine, thereby essentially founding the Youth Aliyah movement (Aliyah, the Hebrew word for "going up" is used to refer to immigration to Israel). In January 1933, she officially founded the Jüdische Jugendhilfe e.V. (Committee for the Assistance of Jewish Youth, later renamed Youth Aliyah). Its aim was to encourage and facilitate the emigration of Jewish children and youths to Palestine. Then, in September 1933, the Youth Aliyah was incorporated into a new organization called Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden (Representation of the German Jews in the German Reich). Recha Freier became the director of the board of the Jüdische Jugendhilfe (Jewish Youth Welfare) department, which was responsible for choosing applicants to be trained in agricultural centres and Youth Aliyah schools and to be prepared for life in Palestine. She also organized the necessary immigration certificates and travel expenses.

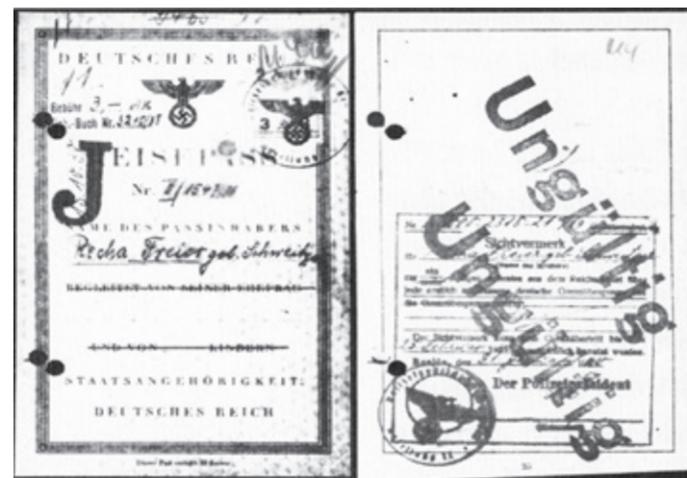


Youths saying good bye to their families at a Berlin station, 1936, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Photo: Herbert Sonnenfeld

Between 1937 and 1939, Recha Freier's three sons and her husband Moritz emigrated to Britain. Recha, however, refused to emigrate as long as she was able to help Jews flee from the Nazis. So she stayed in Germany, together with her ten-year-old daughter. Without any official approval, she provided exit papers for Polish prisoners in 1939, which freed them from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Because of this unauthorized behaviour, she came into conflict with the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (Organization of the Jews in the German Reich, the new name for the above mentioned Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden) and was removed from all her official positions.

Escape from Germany

In 1940, Recha Freier's passport was confiscated. Lacking any travel documents, she and her daughter Mayaan fled to Zagreb, Croatia, via Vienna. From there, she, once again, succeeded in saving Jewish children from Nazi Germany. Her escape ended with her arrival in Jerusalem. There she, however, was not able to continue her work for the Youth Aliyah due to personal differences with Henrietta Szold, the director of the Jerusalem Office of the organization.



Recha's passport stamped with a the letter J for Jew (Jude), declared "ungültig" or invalid.

Recha Freier in Israel

In 1943, Recha Freier founded the Agricultural Training Centre where children and youths from socially disadvantaged families could be cared for and educated. She also became involved with modern music, played the piano and wrote poems in German and in Hebrew. In 1958, she established a fund to support Israeli composers. She organized the "Testimonium" – a festival for setting central historical events in the lives of Jewish people to music. Six major concerts took place between 1968 and 1983. Two books of poetry were published in Germany: *Auf der Treppe* (On the stairs), 1976, and *Fensterläden* (Shutters), 1979. On April 2, 1984, Recha Freier died in Jerusalem – at the age of 92.



Jewish Life in Norden

The first Jews settled in Norden around 1550, the earliest gravestones on the Jewish cemetery of Norden date back to 1569. By the end of the 19th century about 300 members belonged to the Jewish community of Norden. Norden, at that time, was a seaport characterized by trade, shipping and agriculture. Many Jews worked as livestock dealers, butchers, grain merchants or traders.

In the 1933 election the National Socialists gained the majority of votes in Norden. Soon after that Jewish shops were closed and the Jewish population was banned from their jobs, from schools and from clubs. Many Jews had already emigrated before 1938 – they had to sell their houses and their properties for less than their true value. During Kristallnacht in November 1938 the Synagogue was set on fire by members of the SA and the SS from Norden, all Jewish families were driven to the slaughterhouse and maltreated there.

With the deportation of the last Jews in 1940, the nearly 400-year-old history of the Jewish community in Norden had come to an end.



Synagogenweg 3, Norden – the house where Recha Freier was born

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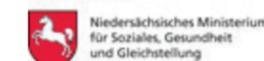
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