



Opus 29

Alsfeld

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In 1975, the European Year of Protection of Ancient Monuments, Alsfeld in Upper Hesse acquired model-town status, along with Berlin, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Xanten and Trier in Germany. In this way the Council of Europe was acknowledging the long tradition of monument protection in a place where an astonishingly large number of historic buildings have survived. There are numerous tightly-packed timber-frame buildings in the medieval ground plan of the town, some built as long ago as the 14th century. The market place, forming the centre of the town with town hall, Weinhaus (wine house) and Hochzeitshaus (wedding house), is one of the most important complexes of its kind in Germany. The town hall, built in a way that inspired many of its German successors, was to have been pulled down in 1878 by order of the town council. It was not until residents protested that preservation and restoration of what is now the symbol of the town were assured, providing the first example of Alsfeld's tradition in this field. Even today ensembles of unique unity are to be found in its main streets. There is almost nowhere else where one can form such a good impression of a small German medieval town than here.

Hesse's Department for the Protection of Monuments was quick to recognize the town's value in terms of architectural history. Art historian Werner Meyer-Barkhausen recorded the historic building stock in the *Alte Städte in Hessen* series as early as 1927.

The present volume does not intend to show Alsfeld just as a »timber-frame museum«; an attempt was also been made to show how a town of this kind has changed in the upheavals of the past 100 years by juxtaposing Uwe Rüdénburg's photographs with pictures produced in about 1880 by Ludwig Bickell, Hesse's first Provincial Conservator.

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