

Kiedrich in the Rheingau



Kiedrich is a community of 3800 inhabitants. From the Middle Ages until 1803, it was part of the archdiocese and the electorate of Mainz on the Rhine. During the reign of the Archbishop Frederic of Mainz, more than 1000 years ago, Kiedrich was mentioned in writing and documented for the first time. In the 13. century it became autonomous both as a community and as a parish. The economic and religious prosperity of the 14th. and 15th. centuries, are manifested in Gothic buildings and works of art. Hence Kiedrich is known as the **Gothic Village of Wine**.

Three components led to this development:

the **economic power of winegrowers** made it possible for them to employ renowned artists often from as far away as Bavaria or Cologne. The vineyards of Gräfenberg, Wasserros, Sandgrub and Klosterberg are counted among the best of the Rheingau. 80 % of their grapes are the famous Riesling.

2. the castle of **Scharfenstein** north-east of Kiedrich was built about 1215 and served as temporary residence for the archbishops of Mainz over a period of 150 years. This attracted numerous noble families to settle there as well.
3. the **pilgrimage** to the patron of the church St. Valentine. Highly esteemed as patron saint against epilepsy, St. Valentine was a martyr and bishop from Terni, Italy, in the

3rd. Century. The relic of his cranium, now on the right-hand altar, was brought to Kiedrich from the monastery of Eberbach in the 14th. century and set off a pilgrimage which exists to this day. In 1417, a male pilgrims' hospital was erected, and about 100 years ago, a second one with 300 beds for female epileptics.

The **ecclesiastical** center of the community was based these three components. It is complete with parish church, St. Michael's Chapel, parsonage, sexton's residence, and choir school building. All buildings are surrounded by a high wall. This creates a unique architectural and historical unit.

The **church** was erected on the foundations of a Romanesque building in the 14th. century, of which the side aisles have been preserved. The center nave was then vaulted to the height of the side aisles on exposed consoles still visible. The large chancel was started after 1460 and finished by 1481 (see date in the vault). Following this, the center nave was erected (see date above the organ), and the galleries were vaulted by 1493. The magnificent star-shaped vaults, together with the glass Windows, give the church a grand and festive character. The rood-screen, closing off the wide choir, dates from the late Gothic period and is of great importance for the accoustics of the choral singing.

Three altars are Gothic winged altar-pieces. The altar of St. John, in the left aisle, dating around 1500, is especially valuable with St. John the Baptist; St. John the Evangelist, St. Anne, St. Mary and the Infant Jesus.

The high altar (1619) and St. Catherine's altar (to the right, 1620) are counted among the precious

works of the Renaissance. The chancel of 1493 is formed like a wine goblet from which flows the pure wine of the word of God. Numerous pictures and statues of Christ and the saints speak to the faithful: the immense crucifix with angels, St. Mary and St. John (1490) in the triumphal arch; lovely and gracious the Madonna of Kiedrich (of 1330) on a pedestal in the choir and many more. The rich inventory is complemented by the large number of implements and vestments from the Gothic period which are still in use today. In the three naves, the pews of 1510 count among the greatest and rarest precious objects of late-Gothic church furniture. Maxims, admonitions, prayers and the lovely presentation of a grape vine (on the right front pew) have been carved into the pews with great imagination.

In addition to this wealth of works of Gothic visual art, Kiedrich possesses a unique feature of Gothic music: heavy old bells, dating 1389 and 1513. They weigh from one and a half to almost 4 tons and are still rung every day. The organ is considered one of the oldest in Germany and was built around 1500 and added on to in (?) 1650. It is still played daily and has a peculiar, somewhat stiff Gothic sound to it. On every Sunday since 1333, the Kiedrich Choir Boys have been singing a Latin high mass in the Gregorian chorale which deviates considerably from the chants usually sung in the Catholic church. This "**gothic-germanic chorale dialect**" is written down in gothic horseshoe-nail notes. Clad in vestments, boys and men sing from the old pews in the choir; the congregation sings the invariable parts of the mass (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei). Thus in Kiedrich you don't merely see the accomplishments of the Gothic period, you can also **hear** them.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHAPEL, built from 1434 – 1444, is an architectural jewel. In the Middle Ages, its ground floor (Karner) was used to receive



skeletons. On the outside, the pierced stone spire and the small choir, built on a console and ornamented with fantastical animals and foliage, are most remarkable, as is the pulpit. The priests preach from this pulpit during the main services during the pilgrimages.

Inside the chapel, the ribbed vault leads to the small choir with the altar. A festive ornament is the Madonna, which makes up part of a lustre, made in 1520 as a double-sided statue.

Between 1857 and 1873, the conservation of both these mute and audible works of Gothic art is due to the Baronet John Sutton, an Englishman who considered Kiedrich his second home. In addition to restoring the buildings, he also had a very strong social commitment. He had a hospital built for children and the sick, houses built for the poor, and created jobs and scholarships for gifted students. The community has erected a memorial to the baronet in the left church window in the choir. His mortal remains were transported 1974 from Brugge, Belgium, - where the baronet had died in 1873 - home to Kiedrich.

A well-preserved village centre rewards the visitor who strolls through Kiedrich. There are beautiful old half-timbered houses, aristocratic residences and the market place with the city hall, built in 1585. The new fountain on the market place shows the choir boys, emissaries with a bunch of grapes and the wine queen, all under the watchful eyes of patron saint Valentine. It is a well executed modern contribution to the appeal of the 1000 year old Gothic wine village of Kiedrich in the Rheingau.