

WILLIAM II OF WÜRTTEMBERG

Background to his Jubilee year, 1916

William II (* Stuttgart 25 February 1848 – † Bebenhausen 2 October 1921) was the last king of Württemberg. He ruled from 6 October 1891 until the abolition of the kingdom on 30 November 1918.

William's years of maturation coincided with a progressive diminution of Württemberg's sovereignty and acknowledged presence on the European stage, concomitant with the process of German unification. Württemberg took the side of Hohenzollern Prussia in the Franco-German war (1870 – 1871) and became a state of the German Reich (1871 – 1918), further diminishing its influence and sovereignty.

In 1916, at the height of WWI, the then Generalfeldmarschall King William completed 25 years on the throne. At that time, it was written of him "In Württemberg the relationship between king and people is unclouded. The king has never made an offensive utterance against any party. His public comportment is characterised by the kind of reserve which everyone would wish to see in a non-partisan servant of the state". Despite this, as was the case for all German royalty, the monarchy was abolished, he was deposed by populist politics and he abdicated on 30 November 1918. This ended 800 years of Württemberg rule.

Early in the 19th century the monastery of Bebenhausen became a hunting palace for the kings of Württemberg. With the abolition of the kingdom, King William II was banished from Karlsruhe Schloss, to live in Bebenhausen Schloss. There he stayed until his death in 1921, and his second wife, Princess Charlotte of Schaumburg-Lippe, lived there until her death in 1946.

In 1991, sculptor Hermann-Christian Zimmerle unveiled a monarchical statue of King William II of Württemberg with his Spitz dogs, "a late triumph for a king whose removal in 1918 still gave Stuttgart's pangs of guilt seventy years later".

Postcard Photograph: William II, the last King of Württemberg c. 1914. Printed: E.A.Schwerdtleger & Co. A-G Berlin N 65. Source: Svenska Dagbladets Bild-arkiv. Svenska Dagbladet is a Swedish newspaper established on 18 December 1884 and based in Stockholm. The archive houses over 10 million images (10 004 321, January 2020) images and currently is owned by Joakim Berglund through the company Bilder i Syd (Pictures in the South).

Photographs of Neues Schloss and Schlossplatz, Stuttgart; Bebenhausen village (monastery and palace).

Philatelic items: two issues of Municipal Service stamps released on 6 October 1916 to mark the Jubilee of William II of Württemberg. SG M202/208 and Q209/218

Ref: Swabian Loyalty and the Uses of Gefühlspolitik. Frank Lorenz Müller. 2019 Heirs to the Throne Project. University of St. Andrews