

Gingerbread Baker's House

History...

For 350 years, this stately craftsman's house, of which only the original façade remains, was the workplace and residence of Dachau's gingerbread baker, chandler, and mead brewer. He was the only representative of that craft in all of Dachau county. The trade died out in Dachau in 1947 on the death of Johann Altherr.

Gingerbread bakers were among the most distinguished craftsmen. They came into some wealth, reflected in the location, size, and architecture of their house.

Honey and wax, his most important raw materials, were provided by the beekeeper. Both honey, for centuries the most important sweetener, and wax were only available in limited quantities, and were costly and cumbersome to process – and therefore expensive. Thus, sweets made from spiced honey dough, such as decorated *Lebzelten* (gingerbread), were luxury foods. Beeswax, much used for candles in churches and monasteries and noble and bourgeois households, was just as costly. A beautifully decorated wax taper was therefore always regarded as a special gift. Mead (made from fermented honey) was used as a tonic in the Middle Ages and was also much prized as a stimulant.

With industrialisation, imported cane sugar from overseas and, later, locally produced beet sugar becoming available in large quantities, the craft began to decline. The production of sweets passed to confectioners. Candlelight was displaced by paraffin and the electric light bulb.

... and a story

All manner of superstitions abounded in past centuries: the red wax string from a consecrated wax taper was wrapped around the wrist of an expectant mother to protect her from harm during childbirth.



The Gingerbread Baker's House (right) around 1960: only the façade remains of the former craftsman's house. It forms part of the town hall.



Heart-shaped wax taper depicting St. Veronica behind glass, painted, Dachau District Museum, early 20th century

The picturesque old town of Dachau with its 1200-year history features many sites of historical interest. Special buildings of prominence in the townscape are marked by these historical plaques.

Dachau historical plaques are a joint project by the town of Dachau and the Dachau District Museum.