

A brief history of Christoph Briese: *Ackerwirt von Potrzymowo*

by David Briese

Christoph Briese was born in 1795. The place of his birth is unknown, but may have been Potrzymowo, a small village east of the town of Czarniejewo, south of the city of Gnesen in the Prussian province of Posen¹, where he spent all the known part of his life. This region was inhabited by Germans, such as Christoph, who were descended from the wave of emigrants that moved east several centuries earlier in search of land, and the local Polish people. The Germans lived in apparent harmony with their Polish neighbours, although they maintained their separate cultural and religious identity, being Lutheran or Evangelical Protestant while most Polish were Catholic.

The only details of his life are those obtained from records of the Czarniejewo Evangelical Parish Book². He was the only son of Michael Briese (according to the marriage records of the Czarniejewo Evangelical Parish Book). These records indicate that he had at least one older sister, Anna Johanne, who married Michael Noehrenberg and lived at the nearby village of Gembarczewo, though no other siblings are mentioned. Christoph was confirmed at Czarniejewo in 1812. Following his father's death in 1819, he probably inherited the family landholding at Potrzymowo, for he is subsequently referred to as *Eigenthümer* (property owner) and *Wirt* (landlord) or *Ackerwirt* (landholder) in church records.

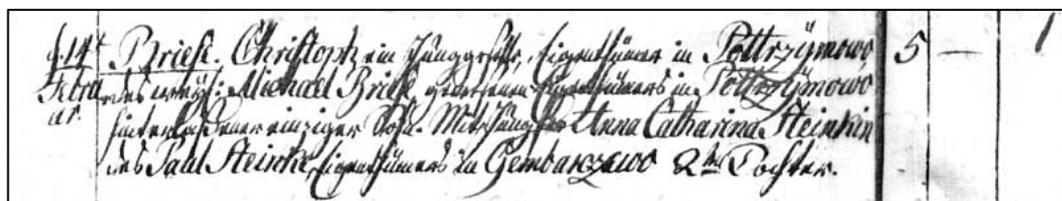
On 14 February 1820, he married Anna Catharina Steinke, the daughter of Paul and Anna Rosina Steinke (nee Huff), farmers of Gembarczewo. Both these villages formed part of the parish of Czarniejewo, and they may have met through Christoph's older sister, Johanne



The village of Potrzymowo in 1990

Noehrenberg, who lived there, or through Catharina's³ uncle, Gottlieb Steinke, who lived in Potrzymowo. The Steinke family were one of the largest families in the Czarniejewo parish.

Between 1821 and 1836, they had seven children; Johann Gottlieb, Johann Ludwig, Christian Benjamin, Anna Caroline Wilhelmine, Friedrich Wilhelm, Anna Juliana Amalie and August Ferdinand. The mid 1830s were a period of sorrow for Christoph and his family for Wilhelmine died at the age of 5 in 1834 and Ferdinand died in 1836, aged 9 months. Six months after the death of their baby son, Christoph's wife Catharina also died in May 1837, aged only 38 years. Christoph was left with a young family ranging from 3 to 15 years old and, like many people of his day, remarried fairly quickly to provide them with a mother. On 18 November 1837, he married Anna Rosina Krause, a young woman of 22 from the neighbouring village of Drachowo. However, tragedy also dogged Christoph's second marriage, for after two still births, Ludwig Adolph was born in 1844. Sadly he did not live to see his third birthday⁴.



Parish record of the marriage of Christoph Briese and Anna Catharina Steinke on 14 February 1820

J a h r 1 8 3 7						
No.	Jahr und Tag der Trauung.	Name des Gebl.lichen, welcher die Trauung verrichtet.	Vor-, Zu- und Geschlechtsname der Brauten, Aufnahmest., Stand u. Gewerbe, auch ob die Trauung in der Kirche oder zu Hause vollzogen worden.	Ob sie schon verheiratet gewesen, ingleichen ob sie unter Eltern und Vermählern.	A l t e r	
					der Brautgäme.	der Braut.
	Jahr. Monat.	Jahr. Monat.				
	18. November	Gillmann	Christoph Brieser, Sohn des Herrn Brieser, aus dem Ort Potrzymowo, mit Anna Rosina Krause, die hier in der Kirche verheiratet worden.	Widweib und Jungfer	37	29

Parish record of second marriage of Christoph Brieser to Anna Rosina Krause on 18 November 1837

J a h r 1 8 5 7									
Num. mer.	Jahr und Monat.	Todes- Tag.	An welchem Orte.	Vor-, Zu- und Geschlechtsname des Verstorbenen.	A l t e r:			Stand desselben.	Stand und Gewerbe des Vaters.
					Jahr.	Monat.	Tag.		
	1857								
	30 September	1857	Potrzymowo	Brieser, Christoph	62				

Parish record of the death of Christoph Brieser

The 1850s were quite eventful years for the Brieser family. In 1854, the eldest son Gottlieb married Wilhelmine Koerth from Wiecanowo, near Mogilno over 100 km to the north, and left the region to live there. In 1855, the second son, Ludwig, who had been working as a blacksmith in the nearby village Barczyzna, decided to seek better opportunities and emigrated to Australia. Only a month after Ludwig had set sail, his stepmother Rosina died, in September 1855. Sometime during 1857, the youngest surviving son, Friedrich Wilhelm, married Anna Pauline Traske. He apparently stayed on the family property. The only surviving daughter, Amalie, married Johann Koerth (the brother of Wilhelmine) in 1858 and also moved to Wiecanowo. Descendants of both Gottlieb and Amalie would later cross paths with those of their brother Ludwig later on in Australia.

Finally, on 9 September 1857 at the age of 62, Christoph Brieser died at his home in Potrzymowo.



This wooden cross and a few broken headstones are the only reminders that for several centuries German-speaking people lived in Potrzymowo

Notes

¹ The area where Christoph Briese lived is now part of modern Poland. The province of Posen is now Poznan, while Gnesen has reverted to its Polish name of Gniezno. Village names remain the same. The coexistence of Polish and German names for localities shows the mixed heritage of the region at that time. Posen reverted from Prussia to Poland after the defeat of Germany in the First World War.

² Czerniejewo (also known as Schwarzenau at the time) was the major centre for a number of small farming villages around it, and the Evangelical Parish included people from the town and surrounding villages, such as Potrymowo and Gembarzewo. Parish records were obtained on microfilm from LDS, Salt Lake City.

³ It was common practice at the time for people with multiple names to be referred to by the last of the names. The first name was often the same for several siblings in a family (e.g. Johann and Anna in the family of Christoph Briese). Note also that on the marriage record Catharina Steinke is referred to as Steinkin. This is the genitive (possessive) ending of the name and often appears after

the names of female family members. Equality of the sexes was far away in the mid 19th century.

⁴ The fact that only 5 of the 8 Briese children survived childhood was the norm for that time. Parish records showed that infant mortality rates of 18-30% during the year following birth. Many more children died at a young age, so that in any one calendar year, children under the age of 10 made up 40-65% of all deaths recorded. Death register entries often outnumbered birth entries for these years. It is difficult for us, with modern medicines and vaccinations at our doorsteps, to appreciate the hardship involved in raising a family in 19th century Europe.



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genealogy@gang-gang.net