



## World

## Suicide of Mad Ludwig was murder, says film-maker

Germany

David Crossland Berlin

"Mad" King Ludwig II, the eccentric monarch famed for building Bavaria's fairytale palaces, did not commit suicide but was murdered, according to a Munich film director.

Klaus Bichlmeier, 70, has presented what he says is irrefutable evidence that the king was shot in the back in 1886. His documentary film, to be shown in Bavaria this summer, contains testimony from a 97-year-old man who says that his father was ordered in 1961 to burn the coat Ludwig was found in. When he did, he made a chilling discovery. "This is the big bang

moment of research into Ludwig," Bichlmeier told *The Times*. "I want to rehabilitate our beloved king. He was murdered."

If true, Bavaria will have to rewrite the story of one of its greatest heroes, a restless, reclusive dreamer who built Neuschwanstein palace, slept by day and paced its battlements by night, held conversations with imaginary dinner guests and saw himself as a reincarnation of legendary knights.

The official version of events is that Ludwig, distraught after being declared unfit for office and dethroned, killed his psychiatrist and then committed suicide by drowning himself in Lake Starnberg,



King Ludwig II was the force behind Bavaria's many fairytale palaces

near Munich. Bichlmeier wants Ludwig's body to be taken out of the mausoleum of St Michael's church in Munich and re-examined, because he is certain it will reveal bullet wounds in the king's back.

He said his witness, Willy Beyhl, had lived on the estate of Nymphenburg palace, one of the Wittelsbach dynasty residences. Mr Beyhl's father worked as a handyman, and the cellar of the building he lived in had a stove with an open flame.

"Mr Beyhl told me that the palace chauffeur came to see them one day with some remaining belongings of the king, the coat and a wad of documents, and strict orders that his father burn it all in the stove. His father had been a medic in the First World War and immediately noticed that the coat had two bullet holes."

Bichlmeier said that he had also unearthed a 19th-century document granting lifelong free accommodation at Nymphenburg to Leonhard Huber, the palace employee who found Ludwig's body in the lake. "He was a key witness," he said. "They bought his silence and he carried his secret with him to his grave."

His research has added to a growing body of circumstantial evidence that there was foul play. The conspiracy theory is regularly espoused by a secret society of "Guglhänner"; Ludwig followers who wear black robes and hoods and mark

anniversaries of his death with torchlit processions.

Peter Glowasz, a historian in Berlin who has been researching Ludwig's death for 40 years, said the government of the day wanted to rid itself of the king because of the public debts he had accrued with outlandish projects that included an artificial grotto inspired by Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. It had a lake, a wave machine, a waterfall and a shell-shaped boat in which he let himself be rowed around.

Modern-day psychiatrists who have studied reports on Ludwig's behaviour have concluded he was probably suffering from agoraphobia, but that he was not insane, even by 19th-century definitions. "Ludwig was illegally and brutally forced to leave Neuschwanstein," Mr Glowasz said. "The government wanted to topple him because they knew he was about to sack them."

He alleged that the king, who had been locked in the lakeside palace of Berg, was shot while trying to escape across Lake Starnberg in a rowing boat, and that his psychiatrist committed suicide or was killed as part of a cover-up.

Bichlmeier said that Ludwig was owed justice by Bavaria. "His incredible palaces are visited by millions of people from all over the world every year. He has made Bavaria world famous."



Ludwig-2

"Unerhörtes ist geschehen!"

Der Film von Klaus Bichlmeier

