

WMF

Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik

Geislingen Germany

An eBay brief description of WMF followed by rather more

WMF in Geislingen/Steige was founded in 1880 by a Merger of the two Companies Straub & Sohn and A. Ritter & Co. They soon became famous for extremely innovative and stylish JUGENDSTIL metal works made of brass, copper & silver plate.

Growing very fast WMF acquired quite a few further companies such as AK & CIE (Albert Köhler und Cie), Orivit AG from Cologne and the ORION Kunstgewerbliche Metallwarenfabrik. Many famous artists and designers worked for WMF: Hans Peter, Albert Meyer, Rudolf Meyer, Herman Obrist, Albin Müller and last but not least also Peter Behrens. WMF's company's trademark in the Jugendstil period was an ostrich.

WMF – Württembergische Metallwarenfabrik – known as Wurtemberg Electro Plate Company outside of Germany. At the turn of the 1900s this was perhaps the largest maker of domestic metalware in the world.

The German version of Art Nouveau known as “Jugendstil” was their speciality. They worked with influential and specialist designers. At their peak with 6000 workers in Germany Austria and Poland their elaborate catalogue showed some 3000 pieces.

The catalogue in English was available in 1906 from their British headquarters in Fore Street, London.

Founded in 1853 in Geislingen, Germany by 1914 they were able to say that they were able “to supply half the Globe with Electro-Plate and Art Metal-ware unaided”

The founder Daniel Straub born in 1815 was a miller's son. Marriage to another miller's daughter consolidated his prosperity. Investing in local railway works he established a repair workshop for railway equipment in 1847 and after to engineering works and a foundry. Then in the 1850s he formed a partnership with the Schweizer brothers to make metalware.

Geislingen although agricultural had a tradition of skilled craft workers and carvers, railway communications, a prospering economy, and prosperity in the rising middle classes throughout Germany. These were all factors that made a contribution to the firm's success.

In 1866 Straub took over the interest of the Schweizers and brought in his own son as his partner. In 1880 a move into electro-plating was life changing for the business changing production methods and leading to a huge increase in manufacturing capability. There was a huge demand for their products.

Quality, design, innovation, a willingness to invest in new metal foundry equipment, glassworks and to refine and develop new techniques enabled this business to satisfy the artist longings, prestige and position of the newly moneyed middle classes.

Daniel Straub retired and was succeeded by Carl Haegele who brought an understanding of chemistry and further business ability and development to WMF. Acquisition of competitors (Orion as an example) followed and outstanding skills in the production of one off, highly valued, pieces.

The war in 1914 caused the immediate loss of all export markets. The firm reinvented itself between 1927 and 1939 when managed by Hugo Debach.

SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTISTS

WORKING WITH WMF

Artists worked with WMF both as free lance artists and as paid employees

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Amongst many artists **Hans Peter** (1856-1945) was a fine artist who could transfer the sculptor's art to the work of remarkable one off pieces for demonstration and exhibition. He was associated with WMF during his working life, in 1907 in the metal ware business on his own account

(For examples of Hans Peter's work see the article Osiris....Orivit etc and look at Juventa)

- **Albert MAYER** , sculptor and designer : director of the WMF Art Studio from 1894 to 1914. *WMF, the company preferred to create its own designs and so the main proportion of the beautiful creations in Art Nouveau style are from their own Art studio which was directed from 1894 by sculptor and designer Albert Mayer. Mayer, specialized in designs which depicted beautiful maidens & nymphs with flowing hair and graceful postures.*

- **Rudolf MEYER** (1848-1916) a goldsmith & sculptor

- **Franz von STUCK** (1863-1928) sculpter a vase



(item 3 at page 370 of 1906 WMF catalogue)

- **Herman OBRIST** (1862-1927) sculptor - see below

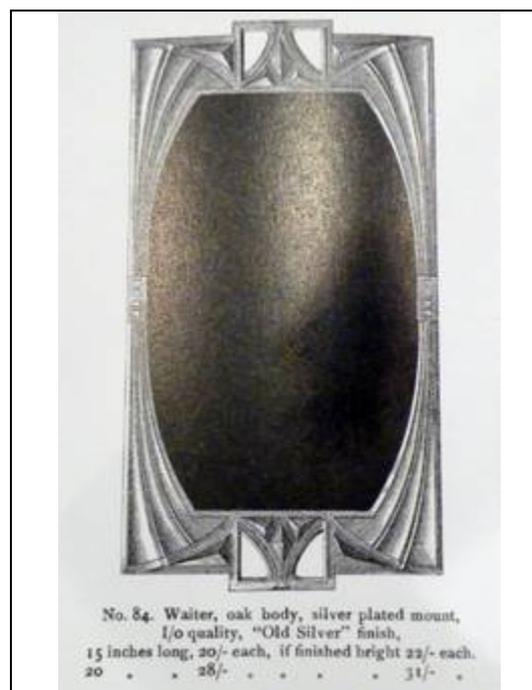
- Hermann DÜRRICH (1864- ?) sculptor

- Albin MÜLLER (1871-1941) - a bottle stand



(item 15 at page 153 of the 1906 WMF catalogue)

- Peter BEHRENS (1868-1940) of the Darmstad Artist Colony,



for a geometric jugenstil Waiter (item 84 at page 181 of the 1906 catalogue)

The Munich Sculptor and Painter Franz Von Stuck (1863-1928) was an artist of consequence associated with WMF.

His work shows the essential swirls and movement with the female body which inspired some Art Nouveau. (perhaps his clear interest in female breasts was something which the pewter ware makers did not seek to follow)

His artwork “Dancers” follows and this says a great deal about the Art Nouveau style and inspiration-



The Sculptor and Embroiderer Herman Obrist (1862-1927).

A Swiss–German designer, he developed Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) in Munich from 1894. Travelling in Britain in 1887, he trained as a ceramicist. He came to notice in 1896 with an exhibition of thirty five embroideries that displayed his abstract approach to nature in art. He was a prolific writer and teacher.

The design below displays his important contribution to the Art Nouveau movement of the ‘Whiplash’ design’. (like Icing in movement.....)



Herman Obrist was born in Kilchberg near Zurich in 1862. In 1892 he and a fellow Swiss opened an embroidery and tapestry workshop in Florence moving to Munich in 1894 where he remained for the rest of his career as one of the best known Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) artists. His most celebrated work created in 1895 was “Der Peitschenhieb” (Whiplash), a large tapestry with large vegetal motifs, plant to root, with life movement implied.

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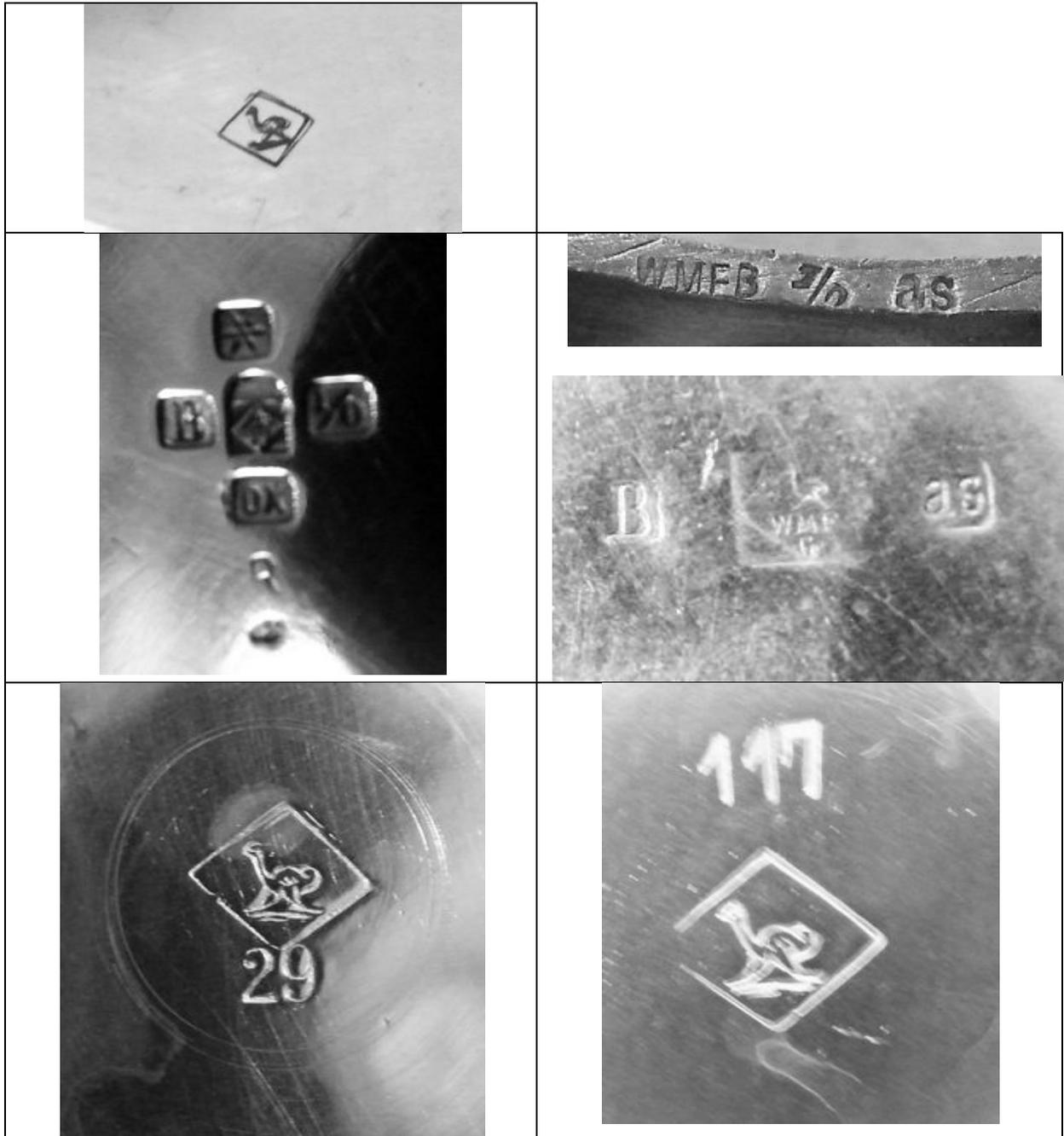
By association with recognised and admired designers so did WMF become recognised for the quality of design and by innovation experimentation and investment for producing the best products.

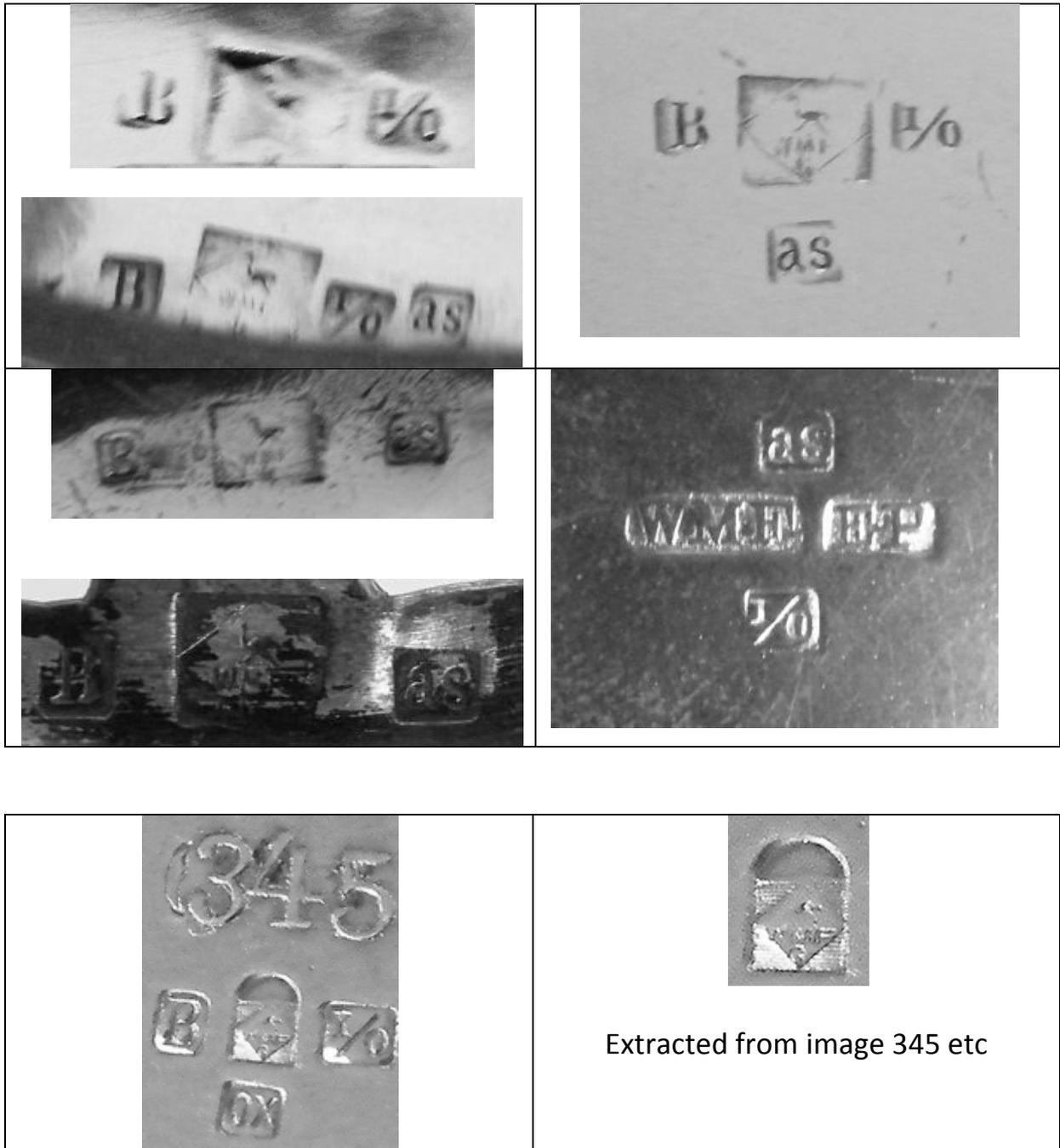
For far more detail and illustrations of much of the 1906 catalogue interested readers should consider acquiring – Art Nouveau Domestic Metalwork published by the Antique Collectors’ Club with an Introduction by Graham Day ISBN 1 85149 510 X

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Following are some marks recently seen on WMF pieces found elsewhere on this website-

WMF





What do these marks appearing above tell us?

1/0 - One gram of silver over one square decimetre – thickness of gold or silver plate.

as - Antique finish – flat areas polished, decorative oxidised

B - Britannia Metal (see other website articles)

EP - electro plated

OX - Oxidised – decoration blackened with potash of sulphur in solution, flat areas polished with pumice -

Asterisk large - * - Export or Special

WMFB – WMF Britannia Metal (early)

(Ostrich in simple diamond or square stood on a corner) – earliest mark perhaps before 1880 (?) – heraldic animal for Straub family

(Ostrich as above) over WMF over G - 1880-1925 for silverplated holloware

There are a lot of other marks which cannot be copied herein because of copyright difficulties – so as a distant second best, they are described below as well as this writer can –

Shaded square with extended top side curved upwards – with Ostrich over WMF over G – known as the beehive mark – introduced 1909 for French exports.

As above with empty (unshaded top area leaving square as above – introduced 1910 for clarity in small marks.



Antler Mark in cut corner long rectangle – cutlery and hollowware – with a DRP mark and number for patented nickel silver process. The antler refers to the state - Wurtemberg (wherein is found Geislingen)

Different forms of W over MF in striking Germanic lettering within various shapes - earliest being simple squares from 1907 – 1948.

In 1907 **W over MF in a square outline over Edalzinn** (meaning superior pewter) used on ORIVIT pieces (as had been made by Orivit A.G.)

The Warsaw Polish mark from 1886-1914 was a (road type) triangle with the word **WARSZAWA across the interior base. (WMF facing out up the left arm and CALW facing out on the right arm and an asterisk at the top peak corner.**

K & Co (over) AK & CIE 1900 Albert Kohler of Vienna acquired by WMF – used without the WMF mark for the Austro Hungarian trade until 1914. (No production simply repairs after 1918)

WURTT. METALLWFABRIK over GEISLINGEN/STEIGE – Around 1900 for hotel trade silver.

WEPCO (in long triangle with pointed arrow like sides over TRADEMARK – for the export trade to English speaking areas.

The following within a simple small square

MB – brass and Britannia metal

O – silver plating 50% thicker than OX

zg – fancy gilt

go – parcel gilt

ig – gilt interior

gg – all gilt

bg – base gilt

N or NS – nickel silver

the following with lines above and below the letters

A – reject item

AA – worse than A

brass (or) copper – export marks

23 – silver plate thickness in grams per square decimetre

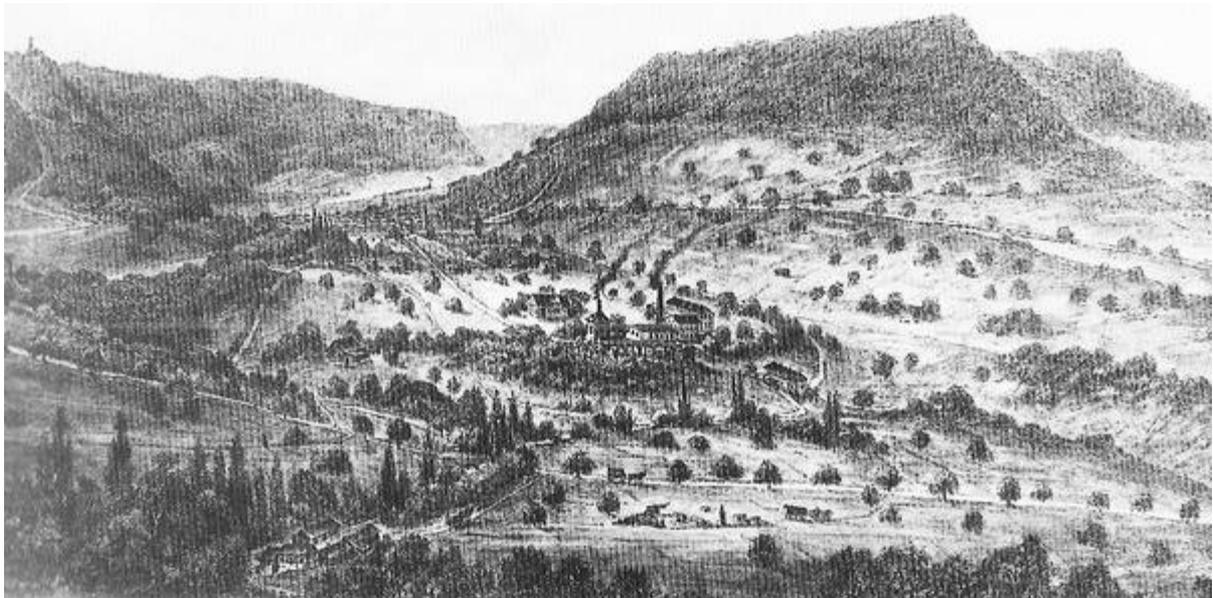
123 – indicating last three numbers from job number of a repair

ep – electro plated

D.R.P – Imperial German Patent

This article is intended as only an introduction, many more artists, and many other leading individuals were involved in the success of this outstanding German business.

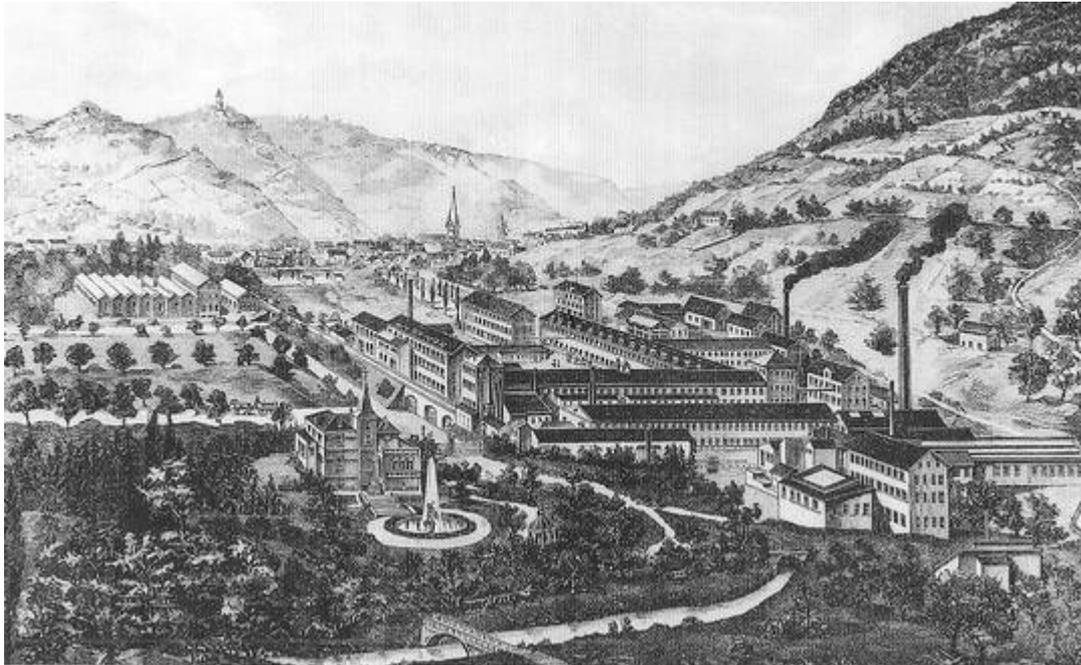
View of Geislingen in 1853



View of the interior of the WMF factory c1900



View of the Wurtemberg Electro Plate Company Factory at Geislingen in 1905.



REPEATED - For far more detail and illustrations of much of the 1906 catalogue interested readers should consider acquiring –

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Graham Dry.....ISBN 1 85149 510 X

There are many illustrations of stunning Pewter ware produced by WMF in other articles on this website – so much that it was decided against showing more examples here.