

Jeu de mail in Germany

Many 'Maillebahnen' (mail courts) likely existed in private castle gardens and public parks, but have since disappeared or lost recognition, highlighting their historical importance. Limited literature exists on gardens with potential ancient mail courts.

My findings of jeu de mail alleys in Germany are listed alphabetically, with their locations marked on the accompanying map for clarity.

When written with capitals, I used the German spelling for the castle or mail alley.



Ansbach's Hofgarten (Bayern)

The Hofgarten's layout, established in 1727, reflects its historical origins, featuring a mail lane of 1550 paces lined with lime trees imported from the Netherlands in 1724, showcasing its classic design.

(‘Geschichte und ausführliche Beschreibung der Markgräfllich-Brandenburgischen Haupt- und Residenz-Stadt Ansbach, oder Onolzbach, und deren Merkwürdigkeiten’, Johann Bernhard Fischer, 1786)

The red pavilion, situated at the eastern end of the Maille-Allee in the Hofgarten, is positioned in the centre of a roundabout, initially designed for the game of Paille-Maille and now flanked by lime trees along the footpath.

On the plan, number 14 marks the Maille-Allee, while number 15 indicates the roundabout where the red pavilion is located, aiding in visualising the layout.

Plan from Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser – Gärten und Seen



Hofgarten, Altes Schloss (Castle), Bayreuth (Bayern)

In 1679, a mail alley was constructed and incorporated into a new palace garden.

Alongside the Mailbahn, rows of lime trees provided shade, later replaced with willows, in 1844 with ash trees and, eventually, when nobody played the game anymore, with oak trees.

(https://www.bayreuth-wilhelmine.de/deutsch/hofg_ns/gesch.htm)

As land to the north of this avenue has been cut off several times over the centuries, today, the Mailbahn is located at the northern edge of the park.

The black line on this map of the Hofgarten of the castle in Bayreuth represents a beautiful shady promenade, still bearing the name 'Mailbahnallee'. This long alley was once the Mailbahn from Marquis Christian Ernst von Brandenburg and his wife Sophie Luise von Württemberg, their children and their esteemed guests. – Hofgarten Bayreuth, Bayerischen Schlösserverwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen



Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin (Brandenburg)



Although Charlottenburg Palace was the pleasure palace of his wife Sophie Charlotte, with playrooms inside, Friedrich I von Brandenburg laid out outdoor playing fields in the palace garden. After the death of his wife (1705), he created in the extended garden, amongst others, a pheasant garden, two grass fields for lawn bowls and a Mailbahn.

(‘Schloss Charlottenburg’, Clemens Alexander Wimmer, Martin Schaefer, 1999)

When the west is west in this dessin, the red line represents the Mailbahn. The two lawn bowl fields could be right from the supposed alley near the top. The two pools are on the left and right sides of these fields.
– <https://space4.de/projekt/besucherzentrum-schloss-charlottenburg>

Brühl (Nordrhein-Westfalen)



The Falkenluster Allee near Schloss Falkenlust in Brühl – Wikimedia Commons, photo by Frank Vincentz,

Former mail courts are still recognisable in the landscape as avenues. The Falkenluster Allee in Brühl would be such an example. It connects the castles Augustusburg and Falkenlust and was accompanied by a mail alley from the 1750s.

(<https://ancientgolf.dse.nl/pdfs/eidloth%20renes.pdf>)

In 1749, Sieur Coste Père, Coste Senior, was invited by the elector and archbishop of Köln, Clément-Auguste, to design and build a jeu de mail at his court, probably at the summer palace Augustusburg; castle Falkenlust was a hunting lodge.

(‘Statistique du département de l’Hérault, Hippolyte Félix Baron Creuzé de Lesser – Montpellier’, Auguste Ricard, 1824)

Schlosspark Pillnitz, Dresden (Sachsen)

At the beginning of the 18th century, a chestnut tree alley led alongside the river Elbe towards the castle. The initial plan was that the alley would continue in the city of Dresden. From 1766, the king and his court used the already constructed 760 metres to play the mail game.

(‘Schloss Pillnitz’, H.J. Neidhardt, 1988)



The ancient mail alley in the Schlosspark of Pillnitz is still recognisable. At the entrance of today’s Kastanienallee (chestnut alley), a large stone vase was placed in 1785. At that time, hardly anyone played the game anymore. – Photo by Bert Kaufmann, 2008 – Wikimedia Commons

Dürlach (Baden-Württemberg)

In Durlach near Karlsruhe, the memory of the former Mailbahn lives on in the name 'Palmaienstraße'. Until 1905, the name of the street was Allmendweg.



By courtesy of Volkmar Eidloth, 2016

Erlangen Schlossgarten (Bayern)

In 1743, at the castle in Erlangen, which served as a widow's residence, a mail alley was built and renewed in 1771. ('Das Erlanger Schloss als Witwensitz 1712–1817', Christine Hofmann-Randall, 2002)



The palace gardens in Erlangen are characterised by many beautifully laid out paths. – Foto: CC0 / Pixabay / scholty1970

Maille Park, Esslingen a/Neckar (Baden-Württemberg)

In the heart of the historic centre of Esslingen lies the park 'Die Maille'. The name, for the first time mentioned in 1752, refers to the game of mail once played here mainly by students. The target of the game was an elevated ring through which a wooden ball had to pass. The park was not part of a castle or manor.



The Esslingen Maillebahn owes its existence to the students in the centre of the town, like the mail courts in Utrecht and Leiden in the Netherlands, which were also initially built for the students. – Photo by Karlheinz Woschée, 2005 – Wikimedia Commons

Halle an der Saale (Sachsen-Anhalt)

A Mailbahn was also established in Halle an der Saale in the first quarter of the 18th century, for the amusement of the inhabitants of Halle, especially the students, according to a contemporary source. ('Pagus Neletizi et Nudzici', Johann Christoph von Dreyhaupt, 1755)



The pub along the mail alley, at the end of the 17th century, was well-known for its excellent coffee. – Anonymous

Altona in Hamburg (Stadtstaat Hamburg)

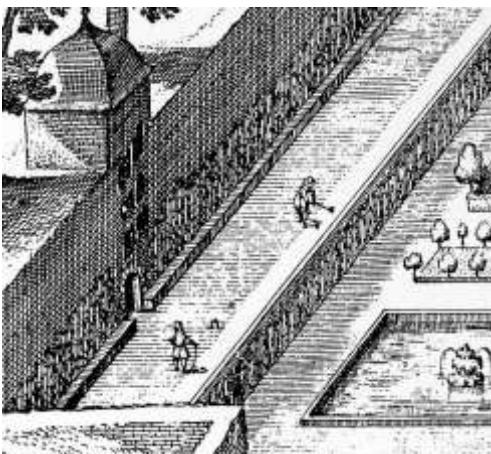
In 1638, Graf Otto V von Schauenburg constructed the 'Palemaille' (mail) alley and planted over 400 lime trees. A ring was the target at both ends of the alley. The alley was built near the village of Altona, now a part of Hamburg. The mail course was very short-lived because Graf Otto died in 1640. After his death, the interest in the game decreased. Like several disused mail alleys, the Altona Palemaille became an avenue with beautiful houses.



The Altona Palemaille in a bird's eye view; today, it is a prominent avenue comparable to the Maliebaan at Utrecht and the Pall Mall in London. –

Litho by Julius Gottheil, c.1860 – © Museumsverband Schleswig-Holstein und Hamburg e. V.

Hortus Palatinus, the Heidelberger Schlossgarten (Baden-Württemberg)



The Heidelberger Schlossgarten, built between 1610 and 1620, had such an exceptional garden that, at that time, people called it 'the 8th wonder of the world'. It may have had the most ancient mail alley built in Germany.

Detail of the mail alley in Heidelberg with two people playing the game. – Detail of a copper engraving by M. Merian, 'Palamaill-spieler Obere Terrasse des Hortus Palatinus', 1620 - Wikimedia Commons, Immanuel Giel

Baille-Maille-Allee in Himmelkron (Bayern)

In 1662, Markgraf (Marquis) Christian Ernst constructed a 'Baille-Maille Linden-allee' (pall mall lime tree alley) with 800 lime trees in four lines. The length of the course was a thousand strong man's strides. The alley was considered the most beautiful mail alley in Germany. Noble ladies and gentlemen from all over the country used the alley. In 1792, a Bayreuth fusilier battalion cut down the lime trees. It took 200 years before new trees were planted. ('Die Baille-Maille-Allee zu Himmelkron', Hans-Martin Jungmeier, 1992)



In 1662, the Baille-Maille Bahn of Himmelkron should have been the longest and most beautiful mail alley in Germany. In 1792, soldiers cut down all 800 trees against the people's will. In 1992, new lime trees were planted again. – <https://www.die-lindenallee.de>

Schlosspark Nymphenburg, München (Bayern)

Kurfürst (Elector) Max Emanuel built a pagoda castle between 1716 and 1719, and north of the palace, an alley for the mail game. A contemporary wrote that 'the noble players used this Indian-like building to relax after they played jeu de mail'.

The Maillebahn in the Nymphenburg Palace Park was constructed in a U-shape to prevent the problem of oncoming players. Players started near the palace on one leg of the court and returned to the palace on the other leg of the U-shape. In 1780, a canal filled up the open space between the two mail legs. –

Photo by Rufus46, 2008 – Wikimedia Commons



Schlossanlage Schleißheim in Oberschleißheim (Bayern)

The 'Lustgarten' (pleasure garden), designed in 1684, and the Mailbahn, established in 1722, exemplify key features of aristocratic leisure spaces, highlighting their historical significance. Not much is known yet about the mail course and its users. There are two paintings in Schloss Nymphenburg in München by an unknown painter that show the pleasure garden of Schleißheim. In both paintings, the mail alley is visible, and on the bottom part of the painting, two groups of 'noble' people are playing the game of mail.



A detail of a painting from the 18th century shows players on the mail alley in the Scheißheim Schlossgarten. Their clothing shows that the players belong to the aristocracy. – Detail of a painting in Schlossanlage Schleißheim, Oberschleißheim – By courtesy of Michael C. Lang, alias Carl Ludwig, Freiherr von Poellnitz

Lustgarten in Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg)

The first mention of the Stuttgart Pallemalle dates from 1609. In 1627, a stately zoological garden was constructed, including a 'Pale Male Bahn', which was 1126 steps (800 metres) long and 8 steps (6 metres) wide and planted with two rows of lime trees and bordered by wooden beams and boards. In 1806, the landscaping of the palace gardens according to the plans of Nikolaus von Thouret, deleted the Mailbahn.

Detail of the design of the zoological garden with at the bottom, the mail alley. – Heinrich Schickhardt, 1627 – Stuttgart, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg



Schlosspark Thurnau (Bayern)

Between 1698 and 1703, Carl Gottfried von Giech laid out the Mailbahn. The Lindenallee was laid out in 1706 with 107 lime trees as a lateral boundary for the mail game and had a length of 240 steps and a width of 7 steps. The lime trees were not planted at regular intervals but along the course of the water veins that existed at the time.

Entrance to the palace garden through the lime tree avenue, planted in 170. – Carl August Lebschée, 1851



So far, the mail courts in Germany I could trace back.

If you are fluent in German and want to have more background information, I can recommend the study of Volkmar Eidloth and Hans Renes, 'Mailbahnen als städtebauliche und landschaftsplanerische Innovation im 17. Jahrhundert', 2018. You can find it on this website under the 'Mail' button.