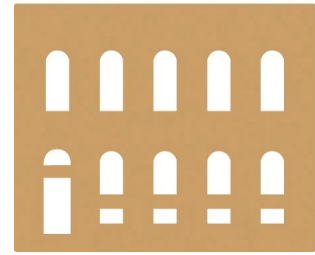


The history of the Billrothhaus

In the first half of the 19th century, an increasing number of medical discoveries was being made. This, combined with the need of top medical professionals to have somewhere they could meet, continue to educate themselves and maintain a library, led to the idea of establishing an association for doctors.

BILLROTHHAUS



In 1837, around 30 years before an Austrian law on associations came into being, the College of Physicians in Vienna was founded. A grand opening ceremony was held in the council chambers of the Old University on 24 March 1838. The College of Physicians is therefore one of the oldest associations in Austria and one that is steeped in tradition. Until 1841, meetings were held at the Old University. Lack of space – not least owing to the growing size of the library – led to the College renting a number of additional spaces before the Billrothhaus was eventually opened in 1893:

- Late 1841: The College rents a six-room apartment on the fourth floor of the cathedral chapter building in Stephansplatz.
- November 1844: The College occupies a two-room apartment on the first floor of 15 Petersplatz, in a building known as 'Zum Eisgrübel' (demolished in 1896).
- 1851: apartment on the second floor of a building at 21 Wollzeile
- 1855: apartment provided free of charge in the building of the military bishops [Feldbischofsgebäude] at 10 Teinfaltstraße (from 1857 designated for the use of the Austrian Treasury)
- 1857 to 1893: premises on the ground floor of the 'New Hall' at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Old University)

Disgraceful lack of space and threat to the unity of the College

In November 1890, Theodor Billroth himself lamented the terrible lack of space at scientific meetings of the College of Physicians in Vienna. When meetings were held in the New Hall of the Old University – used as College headquarters from 1857 – the

doors had to be left open, and members crowded into the corridors. Billroth felt that this was not only disgraceful but even considered it a threat to the unity of the College.

A building committee for the College to construct its own premises

In 1890, a building committee was therefore formed, tasked with constructing the College its own premises. The committee members were Leopold Dittel, Anton Loew, Leopold Schrötter and Thedor Billroth. A collection among the members raised more than 44,000 Austrian guilders in donations in just two months. Billroth himself donated 5,000 guilders from his private funds and, in September 1890, building work began on a plot of approximately 660 m² at 8 Frankgasse.

Five designs from five architects

Between late 1890 and early 1891, proposals and designs for the new home of the College of Physicians were submitted by five different architects. These were Ludwig Richter, Franz Neumann the Younger, Friedrich Schachner, Josef Scholz and Wilhelm Stiassny. On 6 March 1891, the Committee and the administrative body of the College of Physicians voted unanimously in favour of Richter's design.

The College gets its own premises

The Billrothhaus was therefore constructed between 1891 and 1893 according to the plans of the architect Ludwig Richter. Built in the neo-Renaissance style, it has five axes. Richter estimated that the building costs would amount to 115,000 guilders – 88,000 for construction and 22,000 to furnish the rooms. He also allowed for a contingency fund of 5,000 guilders.

„Now we're finally in a home of our own“

At the building's inauguration on 27 October 1893, Billroth opened his speech with the famous words, 'Now we're finally in a home of our own!' Since the opening of the Billrothhaus, it has been a place where the latest medical and scientific findings have

been presented and discussed by experts. The name 'Billrothhaus' wasn't chosen until 26 years later, in 1919, when Anton von Eiselsberg was President of the College.

Structural changes

- 1904: Construction of a new brick staircase from the vestibule to the basement.
- 1906: The courtyards were lowered by 1.7 metres to drain the basement and open up the rear of the building to store books.
- 1907: Installation of a spiral staircase in the reading room of the Grand Library.
- 1909: August: construction of the largest extension to the building. A single-storey extension is built in the right-hand courtyard, next to the wings of the building adjacent to the street and courtyard, housing rooms for the archive and wardrobe. The side staircase from the 1st to the 2nd floor, on the left-hand side of the stairwell, is staved off towards the courtyard like a bay.
- 1930: Construction of a roof over the remaining courtyard to expand the cellar.
- 1956: Installation of an oil-fired heating system with a 10,000-litre oil tank during the presidency of Wolfgang Denk. Expansion of the rear of the building to create an apartment.
- 1977: Renovation of the wooden gallery structure of the Food Handling Room on the ground floor.
- 2004: Under President Sepp Leodolter, the archive room is emptied and renovated and has been used as a seminar room ever since.
- 2007: Renovation of the façade.
- 2008: Historical monument: The Austrian Federal Monuments Office [Bundesdenkmalamt] recognises that 'it is in the public interest to preserve the Billrothhaus'.
- 2016: Installation of a lift and renovation of toilet facilities for improved disabled access under President Walter Hruby.

2017: Introduction of natural gas and modernisation of the heating system under President Walter Hruby.

From 2020: Renovation of the basement rooms during construction of the U5 Frankhplatz metro station.