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City history

City history: A memorial for victims of war and violence

Bocholt city archive presents the historical "photo of the month"

In its monthly themed series, the Bocholt City Archive is this time remembering an artistic memorial to victims of war and violence. It was presented to the city of Bocholt 54 years ago.

Since 1960, the main committee of the city council has repeatedly discussed the erection of a memorial to commemorate the destruction and reconstruction of the city of Bocholt. After the monument to heroes erected in front of the district court during the Nazi era was removed in autumn 1967, this issue was once again the focus of discussions.

In spring 1968, an agreement was reached on the creation of a memorial to commemorate the fallen soldiers and civilian dead of both world wars as well as those who had gone missing and those who had perished in concentration camps. However, it was also to be a monument that not only referred to the past, but also included a forward-looking aspect, namely respect for the victims of war and violence.

Ellen Bernkopf (1904-1992), an artist who was born in Hanover and lived in Jerusalem, was commissioned to create the monument. The decision to choose a Jewish artist was seen as a gesture of reconciliation. Her design envisaged a seated person with their arms folded in their lap and their head bowed. In the opinion of Lord Mayor Günther Hochgartz, the model conveyed both grief and remorse, but not despondency and hopelessness.

During a visit to Bocholt on 28 August 1968, Bernkopf recommended the site between the Aabrücke bridge on Neustraße and the Südhaus, where the bronze sculpture should be placed facing south under the chestnut tree there. She also suggested adding the simple but unifying words "To the Victims" to the plinth in keeping with the significance of the memorial.

The memorial was finally handed over in a ceremony on 21 March 1970, the day before the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the city of Bocholt. Mayor Günther Hochgartz laid a wreath in memory of the war victims on the southern bridges and commented on the artistic design: "No soldier, no man, no woman - a human being is depicted. That impressed us, because everyone - men, women and children - all had to endure suffering and death through war and violence."

The photo shows the municipal wreath and the wreath of the Association of Returnees, with the Lichtburg theatre, the tower of St Joseph's Church and the chimney of the former Drießen factory in the background. Incidentally, the memorial found a new location on 17 March 1999 in the course of construction work, a few metres to the west in the green area of the Aurillac Promenade.





*"To the victims": The sculpture of a seated person with arms folded and head bowed by the Jewish artist Ellen Bernkopf was ceremonially handed over in March 1970.
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