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City history

Photo of the Month for September: New traffic arrangements at the market square

Historical photograph from 1934 from the Bocholt Municipal Archives // A glimpse into the town's history

As part of its 'Photo of the Month' series, the Bocholt City Archives is this time presenting a photograph of the first traffic lights on the market square.

"Anyone wanting to drive across the market square must look up. Then all dangers sort themselves out beautifully" - with these cheerful opening lines of the poem "Green and Red", the Bocholt-based local poet Alois Johannes Jacobs sought to rally the public to the new road traffic regulations in the summer of 1934. The background to this appeal was the installation and commissioning of two traffic lights in front of the newly redesigned market square on 14 September 1934.

The reason for installing these suspended traffic lights was the heavy volume of traffic at the junctions near the market, namely at the crossings of Osterstraße and Ravardistraße, Königstraße and Kirchstraße, and Nordstraße and Neustraße. They were also intended to replace the traffic police officers who were permanently stationed there. The photograph shows the two traffic light systems between the Gewerbebank and Kaiser's coffee shop (in the foreground) and on the street corner in front of Feldmann's chemist's (in the background). The viewer is standing in Nordstraße and looking south into Neustraße. On the left is the advertising column with a clock mounted on top, which stood in front of the Georgius Pharmacy until early 1936. The posts in front of it, which were red and white and connected by chains, were part of the structural improvements to the market square (then known as Horst-Wessel-Platz). The two electric traffic lights each weighed 80 kg and were suspended 4.80 m above the road, with the control panel located behind the Kaiser's coffee shop. For the local population, this innovation was a sensation, as the market square was teeming with people in the first few days after it came into operation, all wanting to familiarise themselves with the changes to the traffic system on the spot. Even the redevelopment work on the market square proved to be quite extensive and warranted detailed coverage in the press. This included explanations of how the new traffic lights worked and a description of the resulting traffic rules.

However, the public initially found these changes quite difficult to cope with. Humorous Low German rhymes and illustrative examples of the mistakes pedestrians, cyclists and motorists were still making were intended to help. Incidentally, the verses by the writer Jacobs mentioned at the start, which were published in the press, ended with the recommendation : *"O 'My friend, lift your gaze with confidence when traffic swirls wildly around you; remember, your path, your destiny, is now guided only from above."*

Photo: Bocholt City Archives, Demes Estate No. 4, Text: Wolfgang Tembrink



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Two traffic lights in front of the newly redesigned market square on 14 September 1934.