

10. August 2022

Education and culture

## Many visitors at lecture about shirts murder case

### Almost 100 interested people attend event in Hemden hall

For the "Stadtgeschichte vor Ort" series, Bocholt historian Dr. Marius Lange had reconstructed a criminal case from 1919 on the basis of archive files and captivated those present with his presentation.

"After the end of World War 1, there was a time of uncertainty in Bocholt. Soldiers returned home from the World War, many families suffered hunger and hardship. Numerous 'hoarders' roamed the surrounding farming communities in search of something edible," explained historian Marius Lange at the beginning of his lecture. The result: countless nocturnal thefts and robberies. It was against this backdrop that a horror incident occurred in early 1919 in Shirts, which sent the population into an uproar, Lange said.

The visitors of all ages in the well-filled Hemden hall listened spellbound to the lecture. For on the night of February 27-28, 1919, two shots pierced the nightly silence in Hemden. The daughters of the Nienhaus gnt. Mispelkamp farm immediately rushed out of their beds to confront suspected burglars.

In one bedroom they found their parents apparently asleep. Only upon closer inspection did they realize that Anton and Maria Nienhaus had been shot in their bed. The son Heinrich immediately took a rifle and pursued the alleged perpetrators. Outside, there was an exchange of gunfire between them, but the perpetrators were able to escape unrecognized - this is how Lange presented the police's reconstruction of the crime the next morning. A drawing he had made also explained the spatial situation in the house.

### **Years of investigation**

The prosecuting authorities then questioned many witnesses: the family, neighbors, friends. But they did not find any clear leads to the perpetrators. DNA samples and other modern methods of investigation did not yet exist. Lange named many suspects: the son Heinrich Nienhaus, burglars and other criminals. However, it was never enough for a conviction.

After several years of intensive police work, the investigation almost came to a standstill, noted Lange, who had consulted the original investigation files.

Only "Commissioner Chance" succeeded in convicting the perpetrator four and a half years after the crime. Not the police, but an "external detective" had gathered so much circumstantial evidence that the son Heinrich was arrested again.

The accusation of the crime: the exchange of shots with the alleged perpetrators had been staged, Nienhaus had wanted to get possession of his parents' farm and had gotten his parents out of the way, who had not agreed to his marriage to his partner. Heinrich Nienhaus was ultimately found guilty on the basis of numerous incriminating pieces of evidence. The verdict was: death penalty for the so-called "parricide".

### **Deportation to Poland**

Nienhaus was not satisfied with this. In order to save his life, he submitted a petition for clemency. This was granted after a long debate. Nienhaus received a life sentence. He could have been released from prison after 15 years. But during World War II, the Nazis needed domestic tranquility, Lange said.

Further, they considered Nienhaus a so-called "professional criminal" who had forfeited his life in the Nazi "Volksgemeinschaft." Ultimately, both amounted to a death sentence: in

early 1944, Nienhaus died in the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland less than three weeks after his deportation.

After the lecture, Dr. Lange answered many more questions about the criminal case from Hemden and its clarification, and afterwards many visitors continued to discuss in smaller groups and let the lecture linger.



*Viele Zuhörerinnen und Zuhörer lauschen dem Vortrag von Historiker Dr. Marius Lange  
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