

## Essen Police Headquarters

### Difficult building conditions

In December 1914, excavation work for the new police headquarters began on Hufelandstraße.

Even before the new headquarters was built, there was an urgent need to build a police headquarters to house the majority of Essen's offices and officers. The renting of buildings in the city centre, for example in Kronenstraße, at Pferdemarkt or Viehofer Platz, had not been satisfactory. In particular, the establishment of the Royal Police Headquarters in Essen in 1909 had led to calls for a central building. After several years of planning and searching for a site - the idea of using the former district and county court in the old town for this purpose had been rejected - part of the site of the former Haumannshof in Rüttenscheid was finally chosen for the construction of the headquarters. The property was enclosed by Hufelandstraße, Virchowstraße and Weyerstraße (today Büscherstraße). Other parts of the Haumann property had already been acquired for the construction of the district court as well as the remand prison. More than 8,000 square metres of land for the planned police headquarters were finally purchased for 360,960 marks. The unfavourable soil conditions - the site with its layer of loamy sand lay in a strong stream of groundwater when it rained - the beginning of the First World War, a shortage of building materials in some phases and the frosty winter of 1916/17 were to lead to a delay in the construction project. In March 1918, however, the work had progressed so far that at least the offices could be occupied on a makeshift basis. 224 officers of the Royal Police Headquarters found their place of work in the building complex, the construction of which, including the land, had cost 1.7 million Reichsmark.

### Not only an authority, but also a residential building

The completed building complex is grouped around three inner courtyards. Apart from the basement, the main building has four full storeys. On the ground floor, to the left of the main entrance on the forecourt, the porter's office, which existed on the same site until the 1980s, was followed by the caretaker's office, the messenger's office and, opposite, the telephone exchange. To the right were the cashier's offices. The meeting room in the middle of the main building on the first floor was connected to the office and the flat of the police chief with its own lift. When it was built, the main building of the police headquarters was not only an office building but also a residential building. On the ground floor were the flats of the caretaker, a middle-ranking official, the stoker and the chauffeur. There was also an automobile room with a small workshop. The courtyard space behind the flat wing served partly as a service yard, partly as a passage for carriages and partly as a garden for the president.

The other wings of the building complex served as service rooms. Thus, in the middle longitudinal wing, 26 screening and detention cells were set up. Bathrooms were available for both the prisoners and the officials. In the same wing, the identification service and the photographic studio were housed in the roof. There were two passenger lifts here, one of them for the police prison, as well as a file lift.

The residents' registration office moved into the wing on Virchowstraße, which also had its own entrance there.

Contrary to the plans, the entire building was immediately equipped with electric lighting, although the original intention was to use the cheaper alternative of gas lighting, at least in part. While almost the entire presidium was fitted with linoleum flooring or even just cement flooring, the meeting room and the president's flat were fitted with high-quality parquet flooring. Contrary to the usual equipment of official buildings, the building was completely fitted with double windows and oak doors.

### **French occupy the Presidium**

In 1923, French troops marched into the Ruhr region after Germany failed to make sufficient war reparations from the French point of view. The police headquarters is occupied and all those inside are thrown out. When the French leave the headquarters again after a long period of occupation, it resembles a pigsty inside. The French had also been unable to cope with the use of the toilets, so that they were thoroughly dirty and clogged. In weeks of renovation work, the presidium had to be restored to its former condition.

### **In ruins**

During the Second World War, most of the Presidium was bombed out and only gradually rebuilt in the post-war years. Due to the shortage of space at the time, several offices of the city administration were also housed in the Presidium immediately after the war. A letter from the police committee to the state minister for reconstruction in the late 1940s revealed that the police stations were housed in the worst possible cramped conditions and sometimes had to do their work while rainwater poured into the rooms. Many of the windows of the service rooms were without glass. Of the original 244 rooms, only 26 had remained intact. The wing of the building on Virchowstraße, which had originally been the same height as the main building and had been reduced to rubble, was not completely rebuilt. It was only given a ground floor for the garages and a first floor with offices. Incidentally, the construction work on the headquarters was done in the post-war months by the police officers themselves, who came from far away in the morning on foot, by tram or on bicycles with garden hose tyres. They loaded transport trucks with shovels and by hand, for which a rail track had been specially laid on Hufelandstraße. In a photograph from 1946, the then police chief Emil Neitzel can still be seen working on the rubble with a pickaxe. Whether president, constable or commissioner, the war had made ranks and offices equal, at least in this respect.

### **Modernisation in the 80s**

After the war, there were several attempts to change the Presidium and to remedy the progressive lack of space. The technology in the building was also no longer up to date. In a letter to all employees, the police chief had to expressly admonish them not to overload the passenger lift, which could only carry six people at a time, because on several occasions up to eight employees or citizens got on at the same time and then got stuck between the floors, which resulted in considerable repair costs. In 1972, the plan matured to demolish everything except the front, the administration wing and the front of the building facing Hufelandstraße and to build a two-storey base with a high-rise building on the open space. The state had already made an initial payment of 100,000 marks to the Staatshochbauamt for this. The fact that nothing ever came of the high-rise building can still be seen on site today. In the 1980s, the idea developed of demolishing the Presidium and rebuilding it on the same site with additional building sections. The plan was finally abandoned. The 80 million marks that were to be budgeted for this were not available. In the mid-90s, however, the old garage wing on Virchowstraße was demolished and replaced by a new multi-storey office building. In 2006, a new, modern wing was added to the Presidium's inner courtyard. The main building is now a listed building.