

Places of Remembrance

Shoah Memorial

In memory of the victims of the Shoah in Herne
and Wanne-Eickel



Abbreviated version

The text by Ralf Pior has been taken from the brochure "Places of remembrance – Shoah memorial", published by the town of Herne, January 2010.

The complete brochure in German is available from the Herne Press Office, presse@herne.de.

„Nothing is safe, particularly not in history“

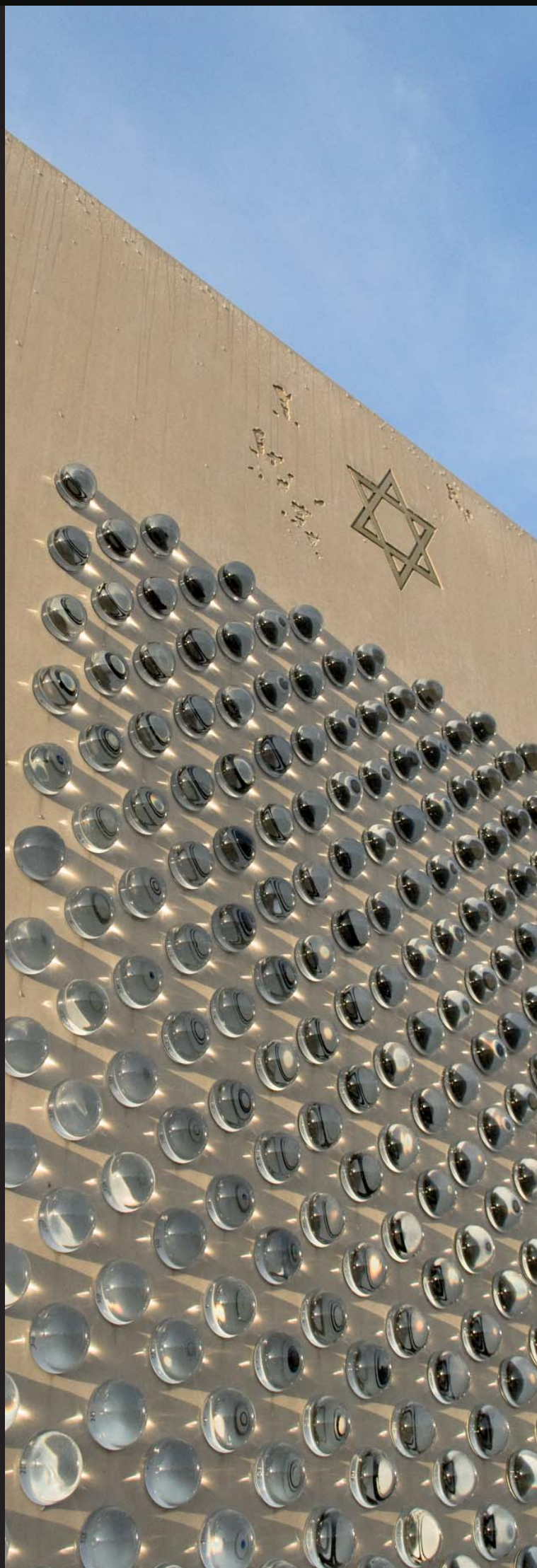
Reflections on the Herne Shoah Memorial

By Ralf Piorr

The bulky concrete slab stands in the way. A huge, upright protest in the view corridor between houses and people. The pale concrete is not completely flat; it displays irregular scars and pits. Nothing is safe, particularly not in history. At the top of the slab there is a Gold Star of David.

“Daddy, I can’t see the Gold Star of David any more”, Esther Hochermann called one morning more than 70 years ago. It was 10 November 1938. At that time she was still the little German girl Edith Jankielewitz with a white ribbon in her hair and a starched dress. She was not allowed to play with the children in the street that she could see from the window. She was Jewish. From her parents’ flat little Edith had always been able to see the Gold Star of David on the dome of the synagogue on Schäfer Strasse. She had a wash and cleaned her teeth but when she looked out of the window that morning, the Star of David was no longer there.

On the memorial there are 410 oculars. They were handmade at glassworks in Bohemia. At 1,400 degrees centigrade the glass liquefied and flowed into its final form. If observers change their position in front of the monument, the glass elements on the slab create movement of light and shadow. Our memory is not static; it is a dialogue that constantly moves between past and present. In the oculars there are roundels with names, dates and places. From a distance it is just lost rows of letters that shine through the glass. To see what they say, you have to come closer and have a close look at



the individual inscriptions. They are names of real people. Oskar Adlerstein, Manfred Brader, Sally Fischel, Leo Gangbar, Simon Hecht, Lotte Lauber, Emil Lewy, Helmut Marx, Siegfried Oppenheim, Betty Reicher, Gita Rothenstreich, Erich Schwarz, Kurt Wolf and many, many more. People of all ages, women, men, children. Missing, deported, declared dead, murdered. Riga, Bergen-Belsen, Chelmno, Auschwitz. A register of lives that were destroyed and brutally broken.

The names of Esther's parents, Hermann and Regina Jankielewitz, are also here. Murdered in 1944 at Stutthof concentration camp, victims of the Shoah – a Hebrew word that refers to the devastation and catastrophe suffered by the children of Israel in war and persecution. In Israel the word is used solely for the Nazi genocide of European Jews.

The names of 401 victims of the Shoah from Herne and Wanne-Eickel are known. Up to today we have been unable to find any trace of some of these people. In 1971 Julius Leiser, the former head of the Jewish community, wrote in a letter, "There was a family by the name of Frenkel who had a shoe shop in Wanne-Eickel." 30 years later registers were searched, address books were ploughed through, letters were written to international organisations, lists and memorial books studied but all traces of the family had vanished, lost forever. Thus the list of the victims is always a desideratum. Who were Mrs Tanne, the Samaskewitz family or the Rülff family? People whose first names we do not even know. Julius Leiser remembered them; for him they were people with faces, a house or a flat, a profession. He met them in the street in Wanne-Eickel or at the synagogue on Sabbath. He handed them down to us. But we just know something and this "something" makes what we do not know all the clearer: "Fate unknown", "missing", "deported". Words that conceal more than they reveal. In 1942 the bureaucratic entry in the files of the Herne municipal authorities was just: "Deported to the East". The truth was that the Jewish women, men and children were deported to the concentration camps in the East where they were murdered.

The light in the oculars moves. We read the names. In the Jewish religion the names of the dead are read out as a sign of remembrance of those who are no longer with us. "I

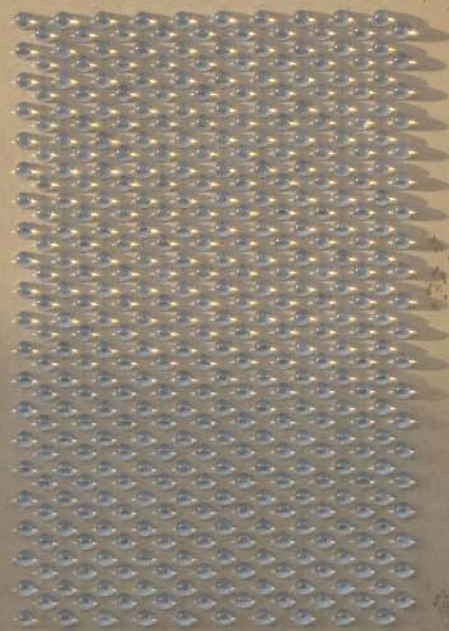
would like someone to remember that there was once a person by the name of David Berger", David Berger wrote in his last letter in 1941 before he was murdered in Vilna by the Nazis. In some oculars there is just the word "unknown" representing all those whose names could not be found. At the foot of the slab are the five Hebrew letters denoting the words "May his soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life." This is the inscription on many graves at the Jewish cemetery in Herne.

The five-meter long ramp is made of black concrete and is slightly sloped. It leads to the memorial. To see the oculars this path must be taken. It is the arduous path of history. When you start looking at the Shoah there is often a feeling of complete shock. This moment of distress must be preserved, not smoothed over or canalised in rituals of remembrance. I remember the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the striking iconography of the camp. The big Gate House, also the SS's main guard tower, which the prisoners called the "Gate of Death". It is a late summer day in 2008. The rails go straight through the middle of the gate into the camp. Parallel to this there is a tarred path for tourists. The railway lines run to the left and right of the one-time ramp. It was here that the trains with the deported people stopped. It is not far to where the gas chambers and crematoria used to be. Now grass overgrows the rails and ruins. It was at the ramp that the first selection process took place. Channa Birnfeld talked to me about it.

How long did we travel from Klausenburg to Auschwitz? It may have been four days and nights. We were transported in cattle cars with a small opening at the top. We arrived somewhere in the late afternoon and the train just stood there until it got dark. Then the doors were torn open: "Los, los, raus (go, go, get out)!" Leave all your things here, you'll get them back tomorrow!! We jumped out and they immediately shouted: "Men to the left, women to the right! Los! Los!" That was the first time that I heard this "Los! Los!" which I was then to hear again and again for a whole year. We women were not able to say goodbye to our fathers; it all happened so quickly. We were all standing together and such strange figures appeared in strange, striped pyjamas and they said something in Yiddish. I did not understand but other

„What I think is much more significant is the fact that the idea of investigating and coming to terms with the past has become an important subject for so many of you and that you have the same feeling, namely that this sad period of history cannot be pushed into the background without thinking, without remembering, without warning. And this must be acknowledged by all the survivors of the Shoah, even those with the most painful memories“

Kenneth Ellington, survivor of the Shoah who was born in Wanne-Eickel and now lives in England, April 2008.



ת'נ'צ'כ'יה'

1933-1945 GEDENKTE

P Tiefgarage Einfahrt Kulturzentrum Sparla

Wollner Platz Rolf Tolag



people did. "Take off your headscarves and pinch your cheeks. Make yourselves look bigger and stronger!" Later I heard that they said to the young women with children: "Give your child to your mother! Give your child to your mother-in-law." We were in a state of shock and unable to think. After a short time they told us to form rows of five.. Strangely rows did form. I was on the left, then came my mother and my sister, who was really beautiful and had blond hair, and then two women we did not know. We moved forward and stopped. There was a light; someone in uniform was standing there; he took my arm and pushed me to the left and the other four to the other side. It was a dark night and I was crying because I was so frightened. Suddenly I heard my name being called. I turned round and saw my sister. "Where did you come from?" She told me that she had had the feeling that I was frightened. She turned round to me behind my mother's back.

She moved forward further to the right and the light fell on her face and the SS officer saw her face. As she was young, beautiful and blond, he even followed her a few steps, took hold of her arm and pulled her to the left. Later my sister told me that Mother had asked: "Where should I go? They are my daughters!" The SS man said: "You'll see them again tomorrow." And that was the last we heard of our mother. We did not hug her; we let her go that last way all alone.

To the right and left in the black concrete of the ramp are the names of the extermination and concentration camps, ghettos, satellite camps and forced labour camps, internment camps and labour education camps in which Jews from Herne and Wanne-Eickel were murdered: Riga, Kiel-Hassee, Stutthof, Belzec. *Black milk of morning we drink it at dusk. Minsk, Łódz, Majdanek, Buchenwald. We drink it at midday and morning.*



Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Warsaw. *We drink it at night.* Treblinka, Sobibór, Zamosc. *We drink and drink.* Theresienstadt, Tarnow, Lemberg, Dachau. *We scoop out a grave in the sky.* Gurs, Bergen-Belsen, Chelмно, Auschwitz. *Where it's roomy to lie.*

In June 1939 Berthold and Franziska Wollstein and their three grown-up children Erich, Herbert and Ursula-Edith fled to France. They lived there illegally for several years. In early 1943 someone offered to take the children overseas for a large sum of money. They were living under terrible pressure and Mr Wollstein accepted the offer. The children were not taken anywhere safe but handed over to the German authorities, deported to Auschwitz where they were gassed. Mr and Mrs Wollstein survived. In 1949 they returned to Herne, a broken man, a broken woman. They were laid to rest at the cemetery on Wiescher Strasse. The names

of their children can be found among the oculars.

At the start of the ramp it says in Hebrew and German letters: "Lest we forget 1933-1945." It is here that we start to explore the memorial. It is up to us to make the monument become an embodiment of what should remain firmly anchored in our minds: the memory of all the victims of the Shoah and the commitment that we have.

The Shoah memorial was designed by Gabriele Graffunder and Winfried Venne of Wuppertal and was inaugurated on 29 January 2010.

Translated by Pat van den Brink.

