



Beautiful Scenery, Open Air Theatre and Town Hall

About 800 years ago Neersen Castle originated from a so-called motte, a little wooden tower placed on an artificial platform. Located in a village of the same name, the smallest district of the city of Willich, it is surrounded by a scenic park featuring trees which are several centuries old. Today the castle not only accommodates the administrative headquarter of the city of Willich, but also serves as cultural hub: its open air theatre attracts around 20000 visitors every summer.

When there was a fire...

Neersen Castle underwent many phases of restructuring and renovation. During the period ranging from the 13th to the 15th century the former Romanic fortress was transformed according to Gothic tradition. From 1661 to 1669 it was then rebuilt by Adrian of Virmond who arranged for Donjon, gate-tower, battlements and outer wall to be removed. Adding the new West wing gave the initially rectangular estate its horseshoe shaped, symmetrical lay-out which is still its

main characteristic today. On top of that the old East wing was extended and four corner towers were built in the transformation process.

Visible contrasts

After the Virmond family had become extinct in 1744 when the last Earl of Virmond died, the Castle served as headquarter of the administration of Cologne. As soon as the so-called ancien regime had come to an end, a manufacturer from Mönchengladbach, a neighbouring city, bought the estate in order to open up a cotton mill. Later the Castle was also used as cotton wool factory. A fire caused by the explo-



sion of a steam engine in 1859 destroyed the entire castle and left nothing but the foundation falls.

Around 1900 manufacturer Gustav Klemme decided to reconstruct only the former Middle and Eastern sections while the West wing remained a ruin. After the end of the Second World War the Castle was used as recreation centre for children and training school of the German Red Cross.

Council meetings

Early 1971 the city of Willich, founded only a year before, obtained ownership of the castle. 1973 the City Council decided to reconstruct the West wing and to use the Castle as administrative headquarter. The architectural concept tried to emphasize the contrast of old and new by maintaining original building fabrics on the one hand and highlighting the modern characteristics of necessary amendments and extensions on the other hand. This effort is clearly visible in the cellar of the town hall as well as in the beautiful Great Hall on the first floor where council meetings and receptions are held.

It features a gallery of ancestral portraits of the Virmonds and windows in late-Gothic style, which perfectly contrast with the modern concrete ceiling. In the course of the reconstruction the former storage spaces in the East and Middle section became offices. Today the castle is workplace of 40 employees of the administration of Willich. On the second floor of the West Wing one can find a room called "Motte" in remembrance of the origin of Neersen Castle. It is used for concerts and exhibitions. Since 2006 the East wing also accommodates an elegant wedding chamber for all those who appreciate the romantic atmosphere of Neersen Castle.

Overview:

- Around 1200 the Castle came into being, first as so-called "Motte".
- Between 1200 and 1400 the former Romanic Fortress was transformed into a Gothic one.
- Between 1661 and 1696 Adrian of Virmond reconstructed the Castle and gave it today's shape.
- After the last Earl of Virmond had died in 1744, the Castle changed owners quite a few times. It accommodated the administration of Cologne as well as a cotton mill and a cotton wool factory.
- 1859 the Castle burned down. After it had been partially rebuilt, it served as recreation centre and training school of the German Red Cross.
- 1970 the city of Willich became owner of the Castle. 1973 the City Council decided to rebuild the Castle and use it as administrative headquarter.
- Today it is also venue of weddings and the famous Neersen open air theatre.



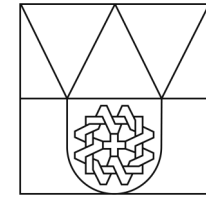
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NEERSEN CASTLE