



From Destruction to Memorial: the Ruins
in the Community of the Cross of Nails

Among the most profound stories in the Community of the Cross of Nails are of those churches and buildings which have become memorials to their history, each a witness to some of the darkest moments in our past, and each uniquely different in character and story. The following slides feature nine of those partners.

Coventry Cathedral, 15th November 1940



Frauenkirche, Dresden

The Frauenkirche, constructed between 1726 and 1743, is regarded as one of the finest examples of Baroque architecture. Designed by architect George Bähr, its distinctive dome is an iconic feature of the Dresden skyline. Initially a central place of worship for the Protestant community, the church evolved into a symbol of faith and cultural identity for the city.

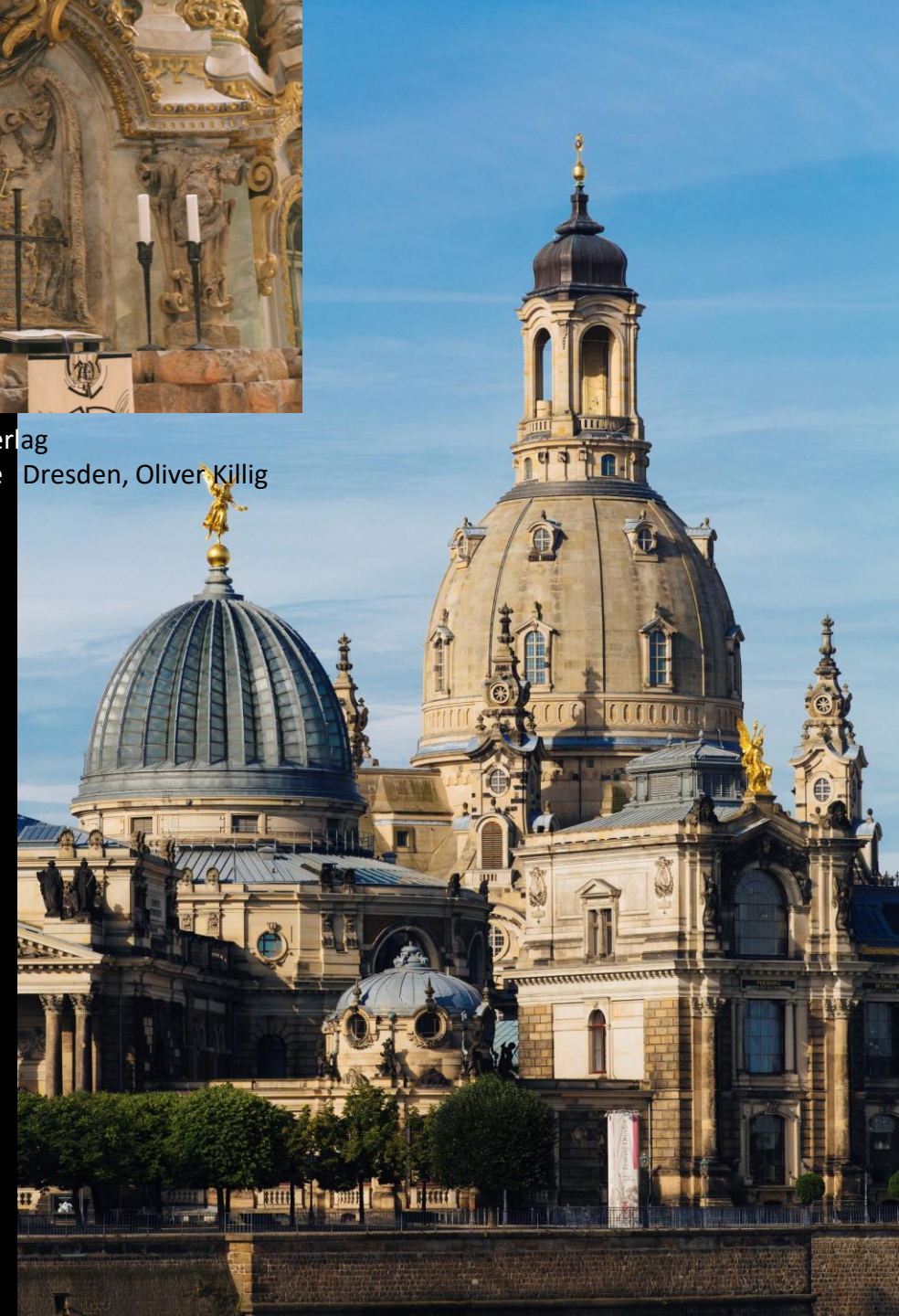
The Frauenkirche was almost completely destroyed during the bombing raids on Dresden in 1945, and remained a ruin for nearly fifty years until, following the reunification of Germany, there was renewed interest in restoring this historic building. Major reconstruction efforts began in 1994, fuelled by numerous donations and public support.

In 2005, the Frauenkirche was reopened it has since become a significant cultural venue and memorial, attracting countless visitors each year. It stands not only as a place of worship but also as a powerful symbol of reconciliation and the rebuilding of Dresden, playing an essential role in the city's history.



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DenkRaum Sophienkirche, Dresden

The Sophienkirche, one of Dresden's major churches, had its origins in a former Franciscan monastery, first mentioned back in 1272. The church was very badly damaged during World War II air raids in 1945, which claimed over 20,000 lives. Two weeks after the bombing, what remained of the church collapsed, and the remains were only eventually cleared between 1962 and 1963.

Since the 1990s, efforts have been made to create a memorial space, culminating in the completion of the Denkraum Sophienkirche in 2020. Beginning in 2010, a side part of the church, the Busmannkapelle, was reconstructed in concrete and enclosed in a glass structure. Today, the memorial hosts rotating exhibitions and services, such as the Coventry Cross of Nails prayers, and serves as a unique space for reflection and remembrance.



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Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedaechtniskirche, Berlin

The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, constructed between 1891 and 1895, is an iconic example of Romanesque Revival architecture. Designed by architect Franz Schwechten, the church was originally intended to serve as a monument to Kaiser Wilhelm I and quickly became a central place of worship for the Protestant community.

During World War II, the church sustained significant damage during air raids in 1943, leaving only the tower and the ruins of the nave standing. In the years following the war, the decision was made not to fully restore the church but to preserve its remains as a memorial to the horrors of war. The surviving structure has since become a powerful symbol of peace and reconciliation in Berlin.

In 1961, a new church building was completed adjacent to the ruins, designed by architect Egon Eiermann, featuring a modern aesthetic that contrasts with the historic remains. Today, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church serves as both a place of worship and a memorial site, drawing visitors from around the world who come to reflect on its history and the lessons of the past.



© Katharina Dorn



© Kaiser-Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin

Mahnmal St. Nikolai, Hamburg

The St. Nikolai Church, originally built in 1195, has evolved into one of the city's most iconic landmarks. In the 19th century, the church underwent a neo-Gothic transformation designed by architect George Gilbert Scott, resulting in an impressive tower that reached 147 meters, making it the tallest building in the world until 1876.

During World War II, St. Nikolai was severely damaged in the 1943 air raids; while the tower remained largely intact, the main structure was left in ruins. After the war, it was decided to preserve the remains as a memorial to the victims of war and violence.

Today, the St. Nikolai Memorial serves as a place of remembrance and reflection on the horrors of war. The preserved tower functions as an observation point, offering visitors a view of the city and original church outline. The memorial also features a crypt dedicated to exhibitions and historical documentation, highlighting the devastation of Hamburg and honouring its war victims.

As a significant symbol of peace and reconciliation, St. Nikolai plays a central role in Hamburg's culture of remembrance, attracting numerous visitors who admire its architecture and reflect on its historical importance.



© Mahnmal St. Nikolai



Jakobikirche, Rostock

The Jakobikirche, part of the Innenstadtgemeinde Rostock, constructed from brick in the 13th century Gothic style, is one of the city's oldest churches. Originally serving as a parish church for fishermen and sailors, it is situated in the northwestern part of the Old Town. During World War II, the church suffered severe damage in the 1942 air raids, resulting in the destruction of much of its structure, including the tower. The building remained a ruin for many years and was ultimately demolished in 1960, with only the chancel preserved.

Today, much of the Jakobikirche ruins has been removed, and the site transformed into a park. The chancel, which does remain, serves as a memorial, commemorating the destruction of the city and the fate of its community. The park and remnants of the church symbolize the transformation of Rostock over the centuries, offering a place for reflection on the past, and its impact on the city's heritage.



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© Garrisonkirche Potsdam



Garrisonkirche, Potsdam

The Garrison Church was built between 1730 and 1735 under the commission of King Frederick William I of Prussia to serve as a place of worship for the Prussian army. This Baroque church, with its distinctive tower and ornate interiors, became a significant site for both military and social events throughout its history.

Severely damaged during World War II, the church's ruins were partially demolished in the post-war years, remaining a silent witness to Potsdam's turbulent history. In the 1990s, restoration efforts began, with the goal of reviving the Garrison Church as a cultural and memorial site. Today, it hosts events, concerts, and commemorations, reflecting both Potsdam's military heritage and religious tradition. The full restoration of the church is still an ongoing project.



©Stadt Hanau

Wallonisch-Niederlaendische Kirche, Hanau

The Walloon-Dutch Church was established after the first Walloon refugees arrived in Hanau in 1593. The local Count saw economic benefits in welcoming these refugees, who were French- and Dutch-speaking, which led to the construction of a unique "double church" — a single structure, divided by a wall, to accommodate both congregations. Exterior construction was completed in 1608, though the interior work took several more years.

During World War II, the church was largely destroyed, with only the outer walls remaining. The smaller Dutch half of the church was rebuilt, while the larger Walloon section was preserved as a memorial. The ruin received the Hessian Monument Protection Award in 1988 and is now used for various events, serving both as a historical site and a space for cultural activities.

St. Luke in the City, Liverpool

St. Luke in the City, located in central Liverpool just minutes' walk from Lime Street station, was constructed between 1811 and 1832, and originally intended as a parish church. During the Liverpool Blitz of World War II, the church was severely damaged by a fire that destroyed its roof. Instead of rebuilding, the decision was made to preserve the ruins as a memorial to honour those who lost their lives during the war. Today, St. Luke's, often referred to as "the bombed-out church," with its grassy floor, functions as a symbol of resilience and is used for exhibitions and cultural events, and outdoor worship.





© Menschenrechtszentrum Cottbus e.V.



Menschenrechtszentrum Cottbus, Cottbus

The Cottbus Memorial was originally established in 1850 as a Prussian penitentiary, and served as a prison for political prisoners until German reunification in 1990. Originally designed as a typical prison of its era, the facility adapted to various political regimes over time. During the East German period, it became notorious for housing political dissidents, those who attempted to flee the country, and individuals labelled as state enemies. The harsh conditions led to inhumane treatment and psychological torture for many inmates.

Following reunification, interest grew in the historical evaluation of the site. In 2007, the Cottbus Memorial was opened, commemorating the suffering of political prisoners and addressing the crimes committed by the East German regime. Today, it serves not only as a site of remembrance but also as an educational centre where visitors can learn about the dark history of political repression and the importance of freedom. The memorial stands as a significant symbol of the reckoning with the past of East Germany and the process of reconciliation.