

Case Name: Public Sculpture 1945-85: Prisoner of War memorial

Case Number: 1431261

Background

Memorial sculpture group 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945' by Fred Kormis is one of a number of pieces of sculpture identified for consideration for listing as part of Historic England's project on public sculpture erected between 1945 and 1985.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	HE Recommendation
1	1431369	Memorial sculpture group 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945'	Listing	Add to List

Visits

None: Data from other sources.

Context

The sculpture group is not situated in a conservation area, nor has it previously been assessed for listing.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The local authority (the owner), the Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER), and the War Memorials Trust were consulted on the details of the case. No responses were received.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (DCMS, March 2010) state that particularly careful selection is required when considering structures which post-date 1945 for listing. Specific considerations in the listing of C20 public sculpture is set out in the Historic England Listing Selection Guide to Commemorative Structures (April 2011) and include aesthetic quality; historic interest; and relationship to the object's environment. Unless compromised by alteration or of little design interest, there is a presumption in favour of listing all war memorials.

Recognition through listing of the finest works of public sculpture is well established on the basis of artistic interest and, in many cases, historic significance. The post-Second World War period marked a particularly important period for public sculpture, as its function shifted from being largely commemorative to making an active, but primarily aesthetic, contribution to the public building and rebuilding programmes of the time. The integration of art into public spaces continued into the later decades of the C20, becoming a well-established principle. This has left an important artistic legacy, but one in danger of being taken for granted; the threats of neglect, redevelopment and sale have left it vulnerable. For this reason the best and most significant examples of public sculpture should be recognised through listing for their important contribution to our built environment and artistic heritage. In identifying public sculpture for listing, aesthetic factors such as the

choice and use of materials, quality of workmanship, physical relationship between the work and its site, and the broader artistic context of its expression, will be of importance. Overlapping with this will be the factors which impact on a work's historic interest, such as the reputation and importance of its artist, its position within his/her oeuvre, the circumstances of its commission, and its function in communicating important social, historical or cultural ideas.

There are approximately one hundred public sculptural works (including memorials) dating from after 1945 currently listed for their artistic and historic significance. Others of comparable importance remain to be identified and added to the List and many, though not meriting statutory listing, should be recognised and valued for the contribution they make to their location.

Sculptural memorials to the non-military dead of the Second World War are relatively rare, and those commemorating prisoners of war and victims of the holocaust are rarer still in an English context. Some examples include the competition for a 'Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner' (1952), won by Reg Butler but never realised. More recently, the 'Holocaust Memorial' in Hyde Park, London was erected in 1983 to the designs of Mark Badger, Richard Seifert and Derek Lovejoy. Flor Kent's 'Für das Kind' outside Liverpool Street Station is based upon the related theme of the Kindertransport, the programme in which the UK accepted almost 10,000 Jewish children from the Third Reich in 1938-39.

In this work, the prisoner's changing inner state is rendered as a spatial sequence of figures. This compositional device, exploring the human condition and universal themes of freedom and captivity, is enhanced by the expressive renderings of the figures and a well-composed setting. The memorial is all the more poignant for drawing upon Kormis' own experiences in a First World War Siberian prisoner of war camp and later as a refugee from Nazi Germany. As a powerful and moving piece of artistic quality it should be added to the List.

In recommending the extent of designation we have considered whether powers of exclusion under s.1 (5A) of the 1990 Act are appropriate, and consider that they are not.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information, and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

Memorial sculpture group, 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945', of c1967-69 by Fred Kormis, sited at Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill is recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Artistic interest: a powerful and moving sculptural group, exploring changing inner states through a spatial sequence of figures, with a well-composed setting;
- * Historic interest: a rare example of a memorial to prisoners of war and concentration camp victims, deriving poignancy from Kormis' own experiences in a Siberian prisoner of war camp.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. An accomplished sculpture of both artistic and historic interest which should be listed at Grade II.
SG 27/11/15

Second Countersigning comments:

Agreed also. The subject matter for this sculpture is unusual in being a memorial to prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps. It is a powerful piece expressing, according to the artist, the different mental states of a prisoner. It fully merits its place on the List at Grade II.
V. Fiorato, 9th December 2015

Annex 1**List Entry****List Entry Summary**

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: Memorial sculpture group 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945'

List Entry Number: 1431369

Location

Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill, London, NW2,

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Brent	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed:

Date of most recent amendment:

Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy Number: Not applicable to this List entry.

Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description**Summary of Building**

Memorial sculpture group 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945', c1967-69 by Fred Kormis, sited at Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill.

Reasons for Designation

Memorial sculpture group, 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945', of c1967-69 by Fred Kormis, sited at Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

* Artistic interest: a powerful and moving sculptural group, exploring changing inner states through a spatial sequence of figures, with a well-composed setting;

* Historic interest: a rare example of a memorial to prisoners of war and concentration camp victims, deriving poignancy from Kormis' own experiences in a Siberian prisoner of war camp.

History

The period after 1945 saw a shift from commemorative sculpture and architectural enrichment to the idea of public sculpture as a primarily aesthetic contribution to the public realm. Sculpture was commissioned for new housing, schools, universities and civic set pieces, with the counties of Hertfordshire, London and Leicestershire and the new towns leading the way in public patronage. Thus public sculpture could be an emblem of civic renewal and social progress. By the late C20 however, patronage was more diverse and included corporate commissions and Arts Council-funded community art. The ideology of enhancing the public realm through art continued, but with divergent means and motivation.

Visual languages ranged from the abstraction of Victor Pasmore and Phillip King to the figurative approach of Elisabeth Frink and Peter Laszlo Peri, via those such as Lynn Chadwick and Barbara Hepworth who bridged the abstract/representational divide. The post-war decades are characterised by the exploitation of new – often industrial – materials and techniques including new welding and casting techniques, plastics and concrete, while kinetic sculpture and 'ready mades' (using found objects) demonstrate an interest in composite forms.

The sculptor and medallist Fred Kormis (1897–1986) was born Fritz Kormis in Frankfurt, Germany to Czech-Jewish parents. At the age of 14 he became an apprentice in a decorative sculpture workshop. A scholarship to the Frankfurt Art School was interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914, and Kormis was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army as his parents were deemed Austro-Hungarian subjects. Captured by the Russians the following year he was transferred to a Siberian prisoner of war camp. He escaped from the camp and returned to Frankfurt in 1920 and became a portrait sculptor. Kormis and his wife were Jewish and after Hitler came to power fled to Holland and then England in 1934.

In his lifetime Kormis was perhaps best known for a series of bronze portrait medallions, but ever since escaping from Siberia his major ambition was the realisation of a memorial to prisoners of war, later expanded to include the victims of concentration camps. In 1967 Kormis recalled his own experiences as a prisoner of war: 'First there is the numb shock of realizing you are a prisoner in the hands of the enemy. Then there is the dawning awareness of your predicament and the primitive conditions. The next phase is the thought of escape and freedom. After that many succumb to despair and a sense of hopelessness. Others overcome their dejection and manage to escape'.

Subsidised by a bequest from a relative in Germany, Kormis developed a series of figures, intending to install them on a bombsite, but no suitable site could be found. In 1967 Brent Council agreed to accept the memorial sculptures and identified Gladstone Park as an appropriate site, the exact location to be chosen by Kormis. The sculptural group was unveiled on 11 May 1969. Over time the condition of the sculpture deteriorated and in December 2003 they were seriously vandalised. They were repaired and conserved as part of a Heritage Lottery Funded restoration of Gladstone Park, and re-sited in their original position in September 2004.

Details

Memorial sculpture group 'to the memory of prisoners of war and victims of concentration camps 1914–1945', c.1967-69 by Fred Kormis, sited at Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill.

This group comprises five fibreglass resin sculptures with bronze powder. Four male seated figures occupy a series of stepped platforms, with a fifth standing at the margin of the group. The platforms are clad in dark brindled brick pavements and surrounded by a cobbled surface of pebbles set into cement with a pavement border. The group is set against a sloping wall of shuttered reinforced concrete, painted white. A plaque on the retaining wall behind reads 'TO THE MEMORY OF / PRISONERS OF WAR / AND VICTIMS OF / CONCENTRATION CAMPS / 1914–1945'.

Although the seated figures are arranged in contrasting postures they depict male figures of similar appearance, with swaddling-like wound strips of clothing, as if the same individual is shown at different states

or conditions. Kormis described the sequence of figures as 'a five-chapter novel, each chapter describing a successive state of mind of internment: stupor after going into captivity; longing for freedom; fighting against gloom; hope lost; and hope again.' This suggests the sequence is meant to be read from left to right; the final standing figure, with arms gazed aloft and an upwards gazed, representing hope.

Selected Sources

Websites

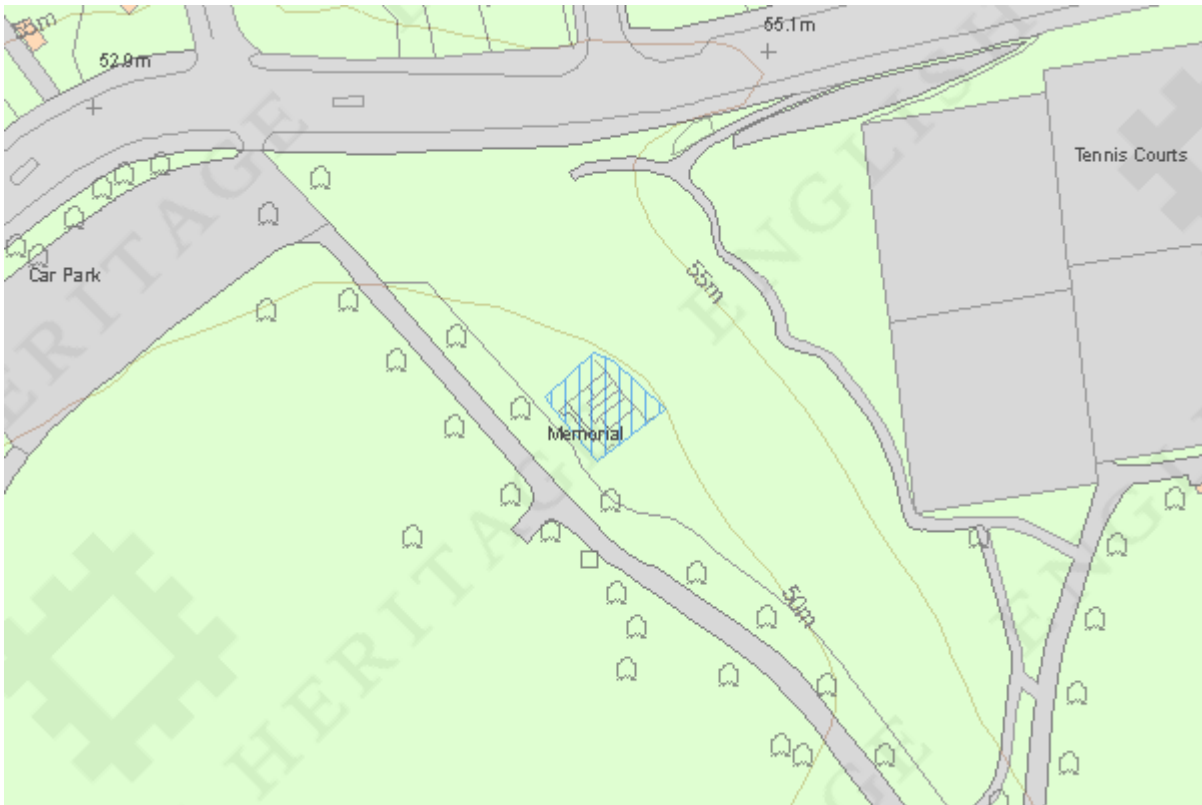
Colloms, M. and Weindling, D 2013 'The sculptor Fred Kormis', West Hampstead Life, accessed 28 October 2015 from <http://westhampsteadlife.com/2013/08/07/the-sculptor-fred-kormis/5075>

'Fred Kormis', Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951, University of Glasgow History of Art and HATII, online database 2011, accessed 28 October 2015 from http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=msib4_1274354708

IWM War Memorials Register: Prisoners Of War And Concentration Camp Internees, accessed 5 November 2015 from <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/123>

Map

National Grid Reference: TQ2204185978



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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF - 1431369_1.pdf