

The children's drawings about the First World War in the Museum Elbinsel Wilhelmsburg

By Jürgen Drygas

At the beginning of the First World War, Wilhelmsburg schoolchildren drew their ideas about what was happening at the front in class. These drawings lay unnoticed in the attic of School 3 schoolhouse for decades until they were handed over to the Association for Local History in Wilhelmsburg e.V. (today Museum Elbinsel Wilhelmsburg e.V., MEW) after the great Hamburg storm surge in 1962.

There too, there was initially little attention and so it took almost a century until this collection was rediscovered in the depot by librarian Peter Beenk in 2013 and was now met with understanding and appreciation in the Museum Elbinsel Wilhelmsburg.

In a large folder there were 293 drawings on the subject of World War I, sorted into eight groups according to topic and grade level and grouped together with now rusty paper clips. This classification is maintained, although drawings can fall into several categories, just as war can take place anywhere: Class 2a land warfare, hospital, sea warfare and 2c air warfare as well Class 4a land warfare, hospital, sea warfare and 5a air warfare and a small group without a given assignment, which is still being processed.

At that time, the classes were numbered downwards, so in class 4 were the younger children aged 10 to 11 and in class 2 were the older children aged 12 to 13.

The drawings are not dated, but several points speak for the first years of the "Great War":

1. There are no tanks shown that were only used by the British from September 1916 onwards (MARK I)
2. There are no signs of poison gas attacks that were first carried out by the Germans in 1916 (GAS WAR)
3. From 1916 onwards, the "pickel hoods" drawn by schoolchildren on the German side were replaced by more protective steel helmets without "pickles". This also speaks for the early years of the "Great War".
4. The French were always depicted with red trousers, but in the first years of the war these were replaced by less conspicuous blue trousers.

These children, whose fathers and older brothers were actively involved as soldiers in the First World War, represented the commanding, executive generation in the Second World War 25 years later.