

= Hotel Polen fire =

The Hotel Polen fire occurred on 9 May 1977 in Amsterdam , the Netherlands . The conflagration destroyed the Hotel Polen ( Hotel Poland ) , a five story hotel in the centre of the city which had been built in 1891 , as well as the furniture store on the ground level and a nearby bookstore . Many of the tourists who stayed at the hotel ( of whom the majority were Swedes ) jumped to their deaths trying to escape the flames . Upon their arrival , the fire department used a life net to help people escape , but not everyone could be saved . The incident resulted in 33 deaths and 21 severe injuries . The cause of the fire is unknown .

The hotel was located between the Kalverstraat ( no . 15 @-@ 17 ) and the Rokin ( no . 14 ) , near the present day Madame Tussauds . Its place is now occupied by the Rokin Plaza , which was originally an office building , today it houses several fashion shops . The Polish @-@ born artist Ania Bien created a photographic installation based on the fire in 1986 , which compared it to the Holocaust .

= = Background = =

In the beginning of the 16th century , there was an inn on the site where the Hotel Polen was later located . At the end of the 18th century , the " Poolsche Koffiehuis " ( Polish Coffee House ) was established , which began offering guest accommodation in 1857 . In 1891 , the Hotel Polen was established by the " Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van het Poolsche Koffiehuis " ( Polish Coffee House Society ) , after the adjacent space on the Rokin was bought , and a building was constructed there which was possibly designed by the architect Pierre Cuypers , who also designed the Amsterdam Central Station and the Rijksmuseum . Another source lists Eduard Cuypers as the architect . The hotel was five stories high and on the ground level of the building a café @-@ restaurant was opened .

The Hotel Polen was once known as a fashionable place to stay . The café @-@ restaurant was closed at the end of 1974 and its location was subsequently rented to the furniture store Inden . The hotel remained open as a part of the Krasnapolsky Concern .

The building , including the load @-@ bearing elements , was constructed of wood . There were 10 fire extinguishers and 11 fire hoses in the hotel . Only a few escape routes had proper emergency lighting and directions to the emergency exits , and the hotel was also not on a hotline with the emergency centre of the fire department . The building had been inspected by the fire department , first in February 1976 , and later in the beginning of 1977 , after which the hotel 's management was notified in writing that there were severe fire safety defects . They issued a list of proposed improvements to be implemented by the hotel , such as complying with the building regulations and the regulations for residence facilities .

= = The fire = =

On the night of Sunday 8 May to Monday 9 May 1977 , about 100 people were staying in the Hotel Polen , including a large group of Swedish tourists . About 6 : 20 am , the hotel staff were preparing for breakfast service , when one of them noticed smoke that seemed to be coming from the freight elevator ( which had not been used since the café @-@ restaurant on the ground floor had closed the previous evening ) . The night porter was alerted . Contrary to instructions , he did not call the fire department immediately ; instead , he poured some buckets of water into the shaft , in an attempt to subdue the fire . By the time he decided to call the fire department , the hotel was filling with smoke . The night porter was unable to reach the phone at the front desk because the fire had already reached it . The porter then ran outside , where he stopped the driver of a laundry truck serving the hotel , and instructed him to drive to the Hotel Krasnapolsky to warn them and to call the fire department .

By 6 : 30 am the fire was spreading very quickly through the building , although from the outside nothing was visible . Because of the wooden construction , the building was soon engulfed in flames

. The guests on the top level could not escape and stood panicked in the windows . When the fire reached the rooms of some guests , they leaped out of the windows to escape . At 6 : 42 the first large fire engine arrived . On the street there lay several dead and injured people , who had jumped from their hotel room windows . On the lower floor , the furniture store Inden was also on fire . The fire fighters tried to fold out a life net in the Papenbroekssteeg ( which runs between the Rokin and the Kalverstraat ) but the alley was too narrow for it .

On the front side , on the Rokin , the rescue operations of the fire department were also hampered . There were so many people standing on the window ledges screaming that the fire fighters did not know who to save first . Time was also lost because some people threw their luggage in the life net and then jumped into it themselves , causing injuries . Some people fell to the side of the net and were severely injured . Just before 7 : 00 am the part of the hotel which faced the Kalverstraat collapsed . The burning debris landed on the fire engine in the Kalverstraat , and the fire fighters barely escaped to safety . The nearby book store was also burned out and fires broke out in several buildings on the other side of the Kalverstraat , which were quickly brought under control .

At about 8 : 30 am the wooden construction of the main part of the building also burned through and collapsed . Despite the fact that there were still people in the building and more people were lying around the building severely injured , the fire fighters decided to withdraw . The fire department proceeded to extinguish the smoking debris , and at 9 : 30 am the fire was declared under control . The building 's collapse left a gaping hole ; of the hotel , the furniture store and the book store , almost nothing remained .

The disaster caused the deaths of 33 people : 32 tourists ( 17 of them were Swedes ) and the occupant of the apartment above the book store . Eighteen charred bodies were recovered from the debris . Thirteen people , who had jumped from windows , either died or were severely injured . Among the dead was the celebrated German concert musician and composer Walter Kraft , longtime organist of St. Mary 's Church , Lübeck . Of the 57 people who were injured , 21 had severe injuries . Two guests from the United States escaped without injury .

= = Possible cause = =

The cause of the fire could not be determined with certainty . One possibility is that a fire smouldered in the furniture store Inden under the hotel , and the opening of the elevator shaft in the morning provided an inflow of oxygen , causing the fire to spread . There is also a theory that the fire was set by burglars who tried to cover their tracks ; however , there was no evidence of a burglary .

The high number of casualties was a consequence of the wooden construction of the building , the poorly marked escape routes and the shortage of safety equipment .

= = Cultural impact = =

Polish @-@ born artist Ania Bien produced a photographic art installation in 1986 called " Hotel Polen " . She fabricated 18 replicas of the hotel 's menu stands , and used them to display photographs alluding to the Holocaust . David Levi @-@ Strauss wrote that Bien 's art piece is a " polysemous work of absence , in which what happens between images is the most important . " The work was displayed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1987 and at the Amsterdams Historisch Museum in 1988 .