

HET KASTEEL VREDENBURG

AdIeU Spangiaerts feL, ghII hebt UtreCht te grof gepLaeCht,
DaerOM zIIdI sneL Van VredenburCh geJaeCht.

In this type of rhyme capital letters, sometimes in the middle of the word, as Roman numerals can be added to make a total corresponding to the date of the subject of the rhyme. In this case the date is 1577, and the subject, the departure of the Spanish garrison from Het Kasteel Vredenburg.

Thus we find in this rhyme:

$$\begin{array}{r} 7 \times I = 7 \\ 4 \times V = 20 \\ 3 \times L = 150 \\ 4 \times C = 400 \\ 1 \times M = \underline{1000} \\ 1577 \end{array}$$



Fig. 1

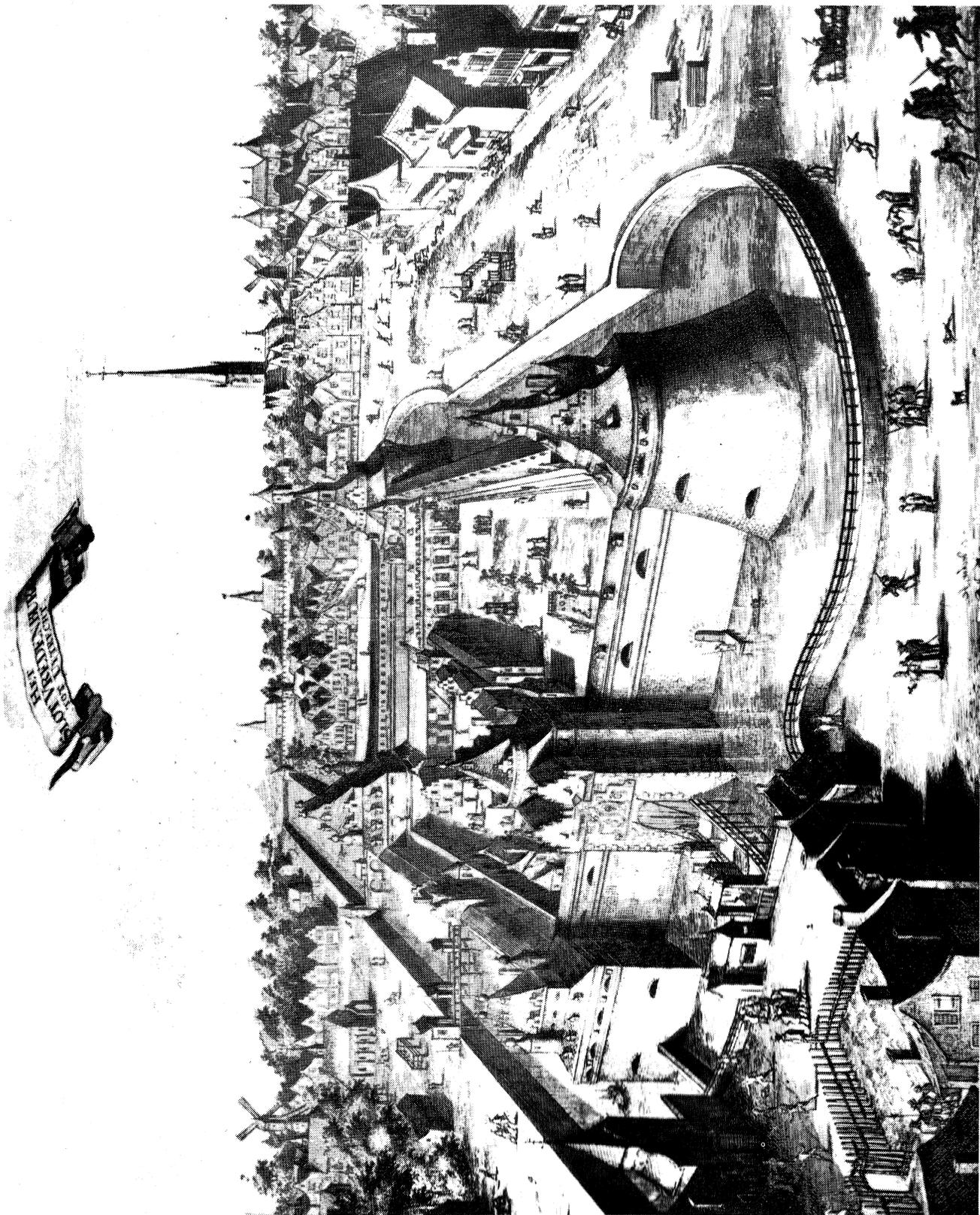


Fig. 2

HET KASTEEL VREDENBURG

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AdIeU Spangiaerts feL, ghII hebt UtreCht te grof gepLaeCht,
DaeroM zIIdI sneL Van VredenburCh geJaeCht.

This chronogram with the date 1577 hidden within it was written to celebrate the departure of the Spanish garrison from Het Kasteel Vredenburg in February of that year. It marked the end of fifty years of threat to the burghers of Utrecht from within the walls of their own city.

Charles the Fifth had built Het Kasteel Vredenburg early in his reign, in 1528 and 1529, immediately after gaining control of Het Sticht, or Utrecht, from its bishop, Hendrik van Beieren. During the medieval period Utrecht had been a temporality under the Bishop of Utrecht. However, though officially the Bishop might rule the city, in fact the Utrechters were independent and unruly, and had exercised a considerable degree of political power through the representation of their powerful guilds in the civic government. A weak bishop, Hendrik van Beieren despaired of keeping control of the rebellious burghers.

Charles the Fifth took immediate action to curb the freedom of the burghers, so that he would be assured that they would not later rise against him. He ordered that a castle be built in what was then known as Catharijneveld. At that time this was the site of Catharijneklooster, a monastery, church, and hospital of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria. The surrounding open meadowland was traditionally used for markets and fairs.

Early in 1528 Charles ordered that Catharijneklooster be vacated, as it was to be incorporated into the citadel to be built on the site. More than 2,000 workmen were set to the task of building what was then considered to be the largest

and one of the most modern in concept of the castle fortresses of Europe. Italian construction experts were brought in to supervise the building, while the plans for the castle were the work of a leading Flemish architect of the day, Rombout Keldermans. Two bishops' castles were pulled down to supply stones. To these were added stones from a ruined castle, and more from the Windesheimer convent. With extraordinary speed the castle was hurried to completion, and was virtually finished within the short period of one year, having been built between Easter of 1528 and Whitsuntide of 1529. Such details as remained unfinished were completed within the confines of the stronghold.

The Spanish castle, the first purely military stronghold in the Netherlands, consisted of a great walled area in the form of a trapezium. At each of the corners were heavy two-storied towers. Later, between 1541 and 1547, these towers were remodelled in the revolutionary new military building style known as "trace italienne." This meant the conversion of the capped towers into flat-topped bastions which could be mounted with heavy cannons.

Ostensibly, the castle was built to defend the city from attack from outside by its enemies. To this end, one side of the castle was incorporated into the powerful renovated city wall with which Charles surrounded Utrecht.

A broad moat, made even broader during the 1540's, surrounded the castle. The main entrance was a large rounded tower with a drawbridge. Later a small watergate and bridge were built on the west side of the castle. Through this doorway troops could be brought via the castle from outside the walls directly into the city, a fact which always threatened danger to the burghers.

A second use of the castle was even more apparent to the burghers of Utrecht, who feared its use as a means of control over the citizenry. To most Utrechters there was a sinister quality to the words carved in golden letters above the entrance to Vredenburg:

Arx dicor Pacis, a quinto condita Carlo,
Grata bonis statio, sed ferrea virga malignis

or

I am called the citadel of peace, founded by Charles
the Fifth,
A pleasing installation for the good, but to the
wicked, a rod of iron.

Soon after the castle was completed, a gallows was set up before the entrance. Rebellious burghers were hanged there or, if not, they disappeared within the confines of the castle, which was well furnished with torture chambers and prisons. As heretics, too, were disposed of in this way, the growing Protestant faction in Utrecht looked on Vredenburg with utter hatred.

However, recent research in connection with an exhibition of the work of a Utrecht master painter of the day, Jan van Scorel, shows that there were burghers in Utrecht who admired the castle, and took its message at face value. They were the higher nobility and church leaders of the city, men such as the members of the Jerusalem Brotherhood pictured by Jan van Scorel. They looked to the castle for the protection of Catholicism, and the keeping of the peace as it had not been kept for 400 years of unruly independence. A lively correspondence of the church leaders, artists and nobility of Utrecht with their counterparts in other countries of Europe, shows their mutual appreciation of Het Kasteel Vredenburg as the largest castle of its day, generally admired for its then ultra-modern design. The speed with which it had been built was also praised.

Then in 1555 Philip the II succeeded his father as ruler of the Netherlands, and Utrecht changed masters. Conditions in the Netherlands worsened, and rebellion against Spanish rule increased. In 1566 and 1567 opposition to Philip's reign led to open conflict in Utrecht, as elsewhere in the Netherlands. In the years of open rebellion which followed, Utrecht as a border region, primarily pro-Spanish, had much to endure. At times the often unpaid Spanish soldiers would mutiny, and cities

would be plundered. A particularly bad incidence of this occurred at the end of 1574 when mutineers attacked Utrecht, entering by ladder at the Catharijnepoort. The commander of Vredenburg, D'Avila, forced his men to come to the assistance of the burghers by firing on the mutineers. In the ensuing action Utrechters were shot as well. Even without mutineers, Utrecht was plagued with Spanish soldiers, for at times Alva quartered large numbers of troops both at Vredenburg and in town. At one point there was an entire tercio in Utrecht, the tercio of Lombardy, numbering 1,588 men. These soldiers were unruly, and under poor control, yet the city government had no means to protect the burghers from their ravages.

When the governor, Requesens, died suddenly in 1576, there was no replacement for the time-being, and the situation became particularly dangerous. The unpaid Spanish troops mutinied once again, and were joined by increasing numbers of Spanish soldiers. In Utrecht, tension grew. An attack on the city from Vredenburg appeared imminent. At the time, the fortress was manned by a garrison of some 150 Spanish soldiers. The attack came on December 21, 1576, when, as the clock struck mid-day, Spanish soldiers ran out of the castle. They drove back the watch kept by the burghers, and set fires in the surroundings. Attracted by the noise, more burghers arrived, with German mercenaries to help them. They succeeded in driving the Spanish back inside Vredenburg, and quenching the fires. The fighting continued in skirmishes, with the Spanish making forays from Vredenburg to set more fires. Help for the burghers came from William of Orange, but it was with relief that the majority of burghers, chary of too close a connection with William, saw Bossu take over the leadership of their battle against the Spaniards. After seven and one half weeks of fighting, on February 7 the exhausted Spanish troops capitulated. It was agreed that D'Avila, the commander of the Spanish garrison, would evacuate Vredenburg "met hare wapenen,

gevouwen vaendel en sonder tromslag," leaving weapons and ammunition behind. On February 11, the garrison departed with wives and children for the journey southwards. Vredenburg was then occupied by two companies of burghers.

Many Utrechters still looked anxiously at the castle, for if the Spaniards once returned, they could again threaten the city from the walls of Vredenburg. For three months the governors of Utrecht hesitated to give the command to destroy the hated castle. Such an order obviously would be in direct conflict with the wishes of the King, and most citizens, in spite of all, still wanted to remain loyal subjects of Philip II. Some wanted to keep the castle intact so that it could be used against possible opposition within the city, or in case of attack from Holland.

At this point, impatient at the delay, the burghers took matters in their own hands. On the evening of the second of May, Catharijne van Leemput, wife of the captain of the burghers, the hopman van Leemput, led a group of angry women in an attack on the castle. Armed with picks and spades they set to work to demolish it, to obliterate the hated symbol of Spanish oppression. Their flamboyant action roused the burghers to join in a general effort to demolish the castle. The city governors tried to halt them, but the destruction continued until irreparable damage had been done. Then the city government wrote to the States General for permission to demolish the castle. Eventually this was given, and over the next five years Vredenburg was gradually levelled to the ground. Only those towers which were part of the city wall, the two western bastions, were allowed to remain. Where the castle had stood was a large open space, afterward to be known as Vredenburg.

On each of the flat surfaces of the remaining bastions a windmill was placed. By early in the 19th century these had fallen into decay. What remained of the castle had become a picturesque ruin known as the Spaniaardsgat, which was a



Fig. 3

Katrijn van den Leemput
(litho by C. Craeyvanger, ca. 1830)

favourite subject for artists of the day. It was adopted as a coffee house by students of the University, who also used it as the traditional place for their initiation ceremonies. In the late 19th century it fell into complete disrepair, and gradually disappeared in the period between 1868 and 1931. In 1896 the greater part of it was demolished. Further demolition took place in 1919, when parts were dynamited by the troops to make way for the first Jaarbeurs building. Some remnants were removed in 1931, when buildings of the third Jaarbeurs were constructed.

In 1959, further excavations in connection with building the Jaarbeurs brought some of the foundations to light. Temminck Groll, the architect and historian, made a close comparison of these 1959 finds with the foundations of the castle as drawn by Rombout Keldermans in 1528. An important result of these excavations in 1959 was that a more exact location of the castle within the large open area was ascertained. This would prove most useful in later archeological investigations. A brief opportunity for excavation in 1962 revealed more walls. Then, in 1971, with the construction of an underground parking garage, the southeast tower of Vredenburg was briefly revealed, then demolished.

So it was with a degree of confidence that in May, 1976, the city archeologist, Dr. Tarquinius Hoekstra, approached the task of examining the last underground remains of Het Kasteel Vredenburg. He fully expected to find the foundations of the north-east tower and portions of the adjoining wall. Dr. Hoekstra was given the unusual opportunity of coordinating his work with that of the builders of a new Music Centre planned for the site. He could carry on his investigations unhindered for three months. However, all work was to be completed by Monday, August 9, the date when construction work would begin.

Shortly after Dr. Hoekstra's team set to work in mid-May, it became apparent that the finds would be much richer and

more varied than expected. Within a few days the excavators had revealed part of the foundations of Vredenburg, and quite unexpectedly, also part of the foundations of the 13th century Catharijneklooster. Soon a complex system of cellars, stairways and drains was brought to light. One of the earliest and most exciting discoveries was the fine paved road forming the entranceway to the northeast corner tower, the so-called Flemish Tower, as it had been called in the 16th century. Among the various staircases uncovered was one particularly interesting for its finely modelled central pivot. This staircase had belonged to the original 13th century monastery and had been incorporated into the castle.

Among the many bricks and tiles found were some very small paving stones, 5 centimetres by 5 centimetres. Some bricks were still in their original locations in the monastery foundations, while others had been removed and used elsewhere in the castle. A thick layer of late 16th century rubbish covered a brick floor.

Many drains were found, forming a complex pattern in the monastery foundations. Normally these drains served for disposal purposes, carrying away waste. One drain had a hardwood flooring, while others had various sorts of roofing.

The outer walls of the castle were at least four metres in thickness, and were supplied with cross walls and closing walls. The bays between the outer walls and the inner closing walls were filled with clay which had been moved there when the castle moats were dug.

When a piece of wall was discovered in front of such mud fill, it was allowed to stand. This policy led to the discovery of a fragment of the south wall of a tuff church in Romanesque style, possibly dating from the 11th century.

One of the most important and completely unexpected finds was a six-sided ammunition cellar. A cannon had originally been set up in the giant loophole which commanded



Fig. 4

the north wall of the castle, facing the city.

On June 12 the Central Museum of Utrecht opened an exhibit of finds from the excavations. As they were located, some of the most interesting finds were placed on display along with archival material on Vredenburg.

In July two most interesting finds were made. One was a small pottery figurine, the head of a Spanish soldier, molded with fine detail. The use of this object was only to be speculated upon. The second discovery was a graveyard located near the church wall. About thirty bodies were discovered, many of them in fine, large hardwood coffins. The bodies were surprisingly large, being between 1.80 and 1.90 metres in length. From the state of the burials the architects could ascertain that some of these graves had been moved hurriedly in the 16th century. It is speculated that the fact that a wall of Vredenburg was built directly through the middle of the monastery church, caused the monks to hurriedly move part of their graveyard to a new location.

As the number of interesting finds increased, there was a public outcry against the August deadline which would halt the work before completion. On July 28 the Jonckheer Jakob van Eyck Society called a public meeting in the Geertekerk to discuss the subject. About 160 people attended this meeting and lent their support. That evening an action committee called "Vredenburg - nooit weg!" was formed. In the following three days this Action Committee drew the attention of not only the media and the city to the problem, but sent telegrams to provincial and national ministries and obtained support at all levels. The Action Committee published a white paper on their stance, they sold tee-shirts, gave interviews to the media, and met with officials. They sold small photographs of Vredenburg to evening shoppers and set up a gigantic picture of the castle on a billboard near the excavations. On Saturday they ended their campaign by presenting to the



Fig. 5

mayor a petition carrying some 1,500 signatures. In this they asked that the deadline be postponed, and that the remains of Vredenburg be preserved in some appropriate manner. The final outcome was a compromise: the deadline was extended for one month, giving the archeologist's team the opportunity to work until Monday, September 9. However, there would be no question of building the Music Centre elsewhere, as had been suggested, nor of incorporating in the Centre the entire foundations of Vredenburg. However, several parts of the foundations would be preserved and used in the new Music Centre. These were later announced to include a large piece of wall from the Catharijneklooster, a section of the monastery foundations, and a piece of the church wall, 30 tons in weight. Other than these, the remains of Vredenburg were demolished in September.

Dr. Hoekstra has stated that while he is naturally disappointed in the outcome of the campaign for "Vredenburg - nooit weg," he is, nevertheless, pleased that more was saved than he thought possible. Knowledge has been shed on the nature of the castle and its foundations, and on the troubled times in which it flourished. He says the real blame for the destruction of Vredenburg, if there is any blame to be placed, should be on the burghers of 1577, and, perhaps, particularly on Trijn van Leemput, who started it all.

Yet, ironically, she has been, and remains, a folk heroine of the city, with even a statue in her honour, set up on the Bakkersbrug in 1960 by the students of the University of Utrecht. There passersby may read:



Fig. 6

Dit is't beeld
 Van Leemput's vrouw
 Die moedig heeft gedaan
 Dat burger noch soldaat
 In Utrecht dorst bestaan.

The memory of Trijn van Leemput is particularly vivid this year, the year of the celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the foundation of the Dutch state with the Union of Utrecht, signed by eight provinces and eight cities in the year 1579.

An artist's sketch of Trijn van Leemput waving the Union flag was placed in the corner of a Utrecht announcement of the Twaalf Provincieën Spel, one of the most spectacular of the popular events of the Union of Utrecht commemoration. Geared to a national television audience, it took place in May, 1979, and was a contest involving teams representing all 11 provinces plus one team from the IJselmeerpolders.

An unofficial event also featured Trijn van Leemput. This was the Street Theatre Day, May 12, 1979, announced only by a leaflet and an announcement in Het Stadsblad. There it was described as a protest demonstration of twenty-five local groups against the Stichting Herdenking Unie van Utrecht, using puppets as spokesmen. Among the events was a play by the Utrecht street theatre group Pantolini, who performed "Catherijne Hogerop, of hoe de burcht geen vrede bracht." This play involved "Kasteel Vredenburg, a Spanish spy, a rotund burgomaster, an ambitious civil servant and his lusty wife Katrijn."

And so, today, 400 years after the first destruction of Kasteel Vredenburg and the signing of the Union of Utrecht, the spirit of Katrijn van Leemput lives on. And two parts of the walls of Kasteel Vredenburg remain in existence, as part of the fabric of the new shopping centre, Hoog Catherijne.



Fig. 7

Large piece of wall removed for preservation



Fig. 8

The New music centre at Hoog Catherijne, on the site
of Kasteel Vredenburg

SELECTED MATERIALS ON HET KASTEEL VREDENBURG

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