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# THE GOLDEN AGE

## AMSTERDAM'S MAIN TOURIST THEME FOR 1993

**F**rom June 5th, 1993 to March 7th, 1994, Amsterdam's tourist activities will focus on the Golden Age – the 17th century in which the city reached the top of its power and wealth.

From that period of splendour, much has survived: Amsterdam is the only West European capital whose historic city centre plan has hardly changed since the 17th century. Despite the march of time, the circle of famous canals lined with beautiful houses is still largely intact. Public buildings, churches and museum collections containing the cultural heritage of the period are now the prime tourist attractions.

The "Golden Age of Amsterdam" activities cover a very wide range and some of the highlights are presented here. For further details you'd better pay a visit to the VVV Tourist Office (Station-splein), where you can also get a brochure for a self-guided tour called "Walk through the Golden Age".

### The Rijksmuseum

Rembrandt is the best-known painter of Amsterdam's Golden Age and several paintings (including the "Jewish Bride") will be on display for the first time after their recent restoration. The exhibition was originally planned for June 5 - August 1, but at the moment of writing an extension to November 1 seems likely. And of course these top-exhibits form part of the permanent collection, so that they will be on display after the special exhibition as well. A self-guided

tour through the Museum, called "Walk through the Golden Age", helps you to find your way in the collections. From December 11 to March 7, a special exhibition "The Dawn of the Golden Age" shows paintings, sculptures, silver, glass and other art objects from North Holland 1580-1620. This is the first such major exhibition of treasures from that period.

### Amsterdams Historisch Museum

This is housed in the former city orphanage (Kalverstraat 92) and from June 5 to March 7 it will feature an audiovisual covering Amsterdam's development in the 17th century. The collections also give a panorama of life in the city in that period.

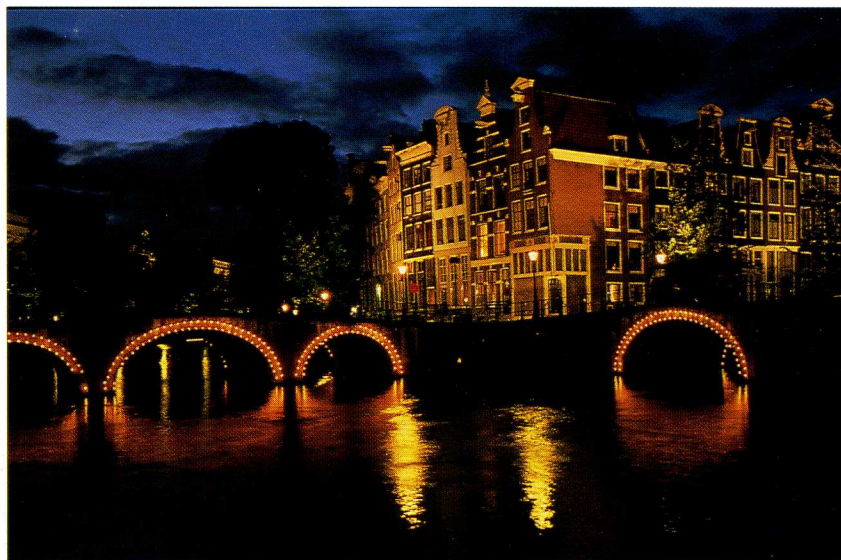
### Museum het Rembrandthuis

Of course Rembrandt's house (Jodenbreestraat) is a "must", because it not only shows many of

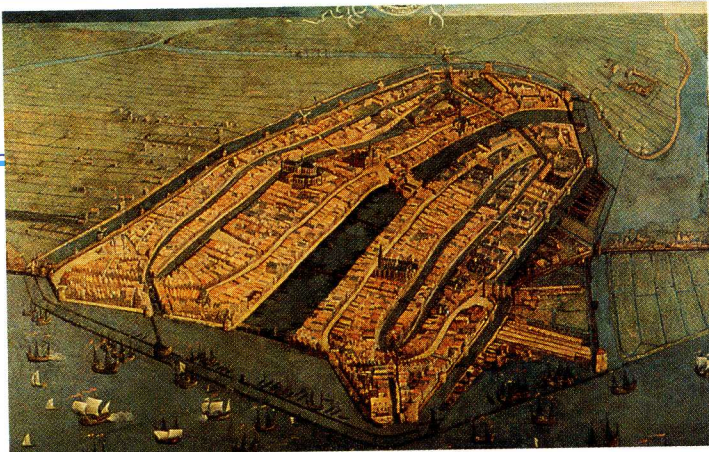
his works but also gives you an idea of how well-to-do people lived in the 17th century. Special exhibitions will show Rembrandt's etchings and Dutch landscape prints from the Golden Age.

### Museum Amstelkring ("Our Dear Lord in the Attic")

The house of the merchant Jan Hartman (Oude Zijds Voorburgwal 40) is now a museum and contains an authentic 17th-century living-room showing what domestic life in that period was like for the wealthier citizens. The attic of this house was a "secret" Roman-Catholic church, a so-called conventicle. It is the only surviving example of the many such conventicles that existed in the city – religious tolerance did not always prevail in The Netherlands! From July 10 to October 10 a special exhibition shows Dutch silverware from the Golden Age.







### Biblical Museum

From June 3 to March 7, this museum (Heerengracht 366) hosts a special exhibition of Dutch tiles decorated with scenes from the Bible. The Bible, published in Dutch (Statenvertaling) in 1635, had a strong impact on daily life of the Golden Age. Illustrated precious Bibles are also on display.

### Royal Palace (Dam)

Originally the Town Hall, this building became the Royal Palace when the country got its first King (Louis, brother of the French emperor Napoleon). Its interior is a magnificent example of Dutch Golden Age opulence. A number of rooms not normally open to the public can be visited during the Golden Age event.

### The Synagogues

The Jewish community was already an important factor in Amsterdam during the Golden

Age. Two 17th-century Synagogues (the Great and the Portuguese, opposite each other on the J.D. Meyerplein) have survived even the Second World War. Both have been restored and are open to the public.

### The churches

The Nieuwe Kerk (Dam) contains several showpieces of the 17th century, such as a magnificent pulpit, organ and choir screen, and the tomb of the country's famous admiral, De Ruyter. (July-December).

The Westerkerk (Rozengracht) has been completely restored. Rembrandt was buried here and the magnificent tower can be climbed by the hardy. (April-October).

In the Zuiderkerk (Zandstraat near the Rembrandt House) an exhibition gives an insight into the restoration work carried out in The Netherlands. The belfry has a famous Hemony carillon. (June-October).

### Horticulture

The Botanical Garden (Plantage Middenweg) displays plants brought to the city from the Far East, including the world's oldest potted plant, a palm of 1680 vintage! (September).

And finally, the Aalsmeer flower parade (September 4) is also dedicated to the Golden Age. The parade is about 2 kms long, leaves Aalsmeer around 09.00, leaves the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam around 14.15 and arrives at the Dam around 16.00 hrs. The floats

will also be on static display in the Aalsmeer flower auction on September 3 and 5.

### Concerts

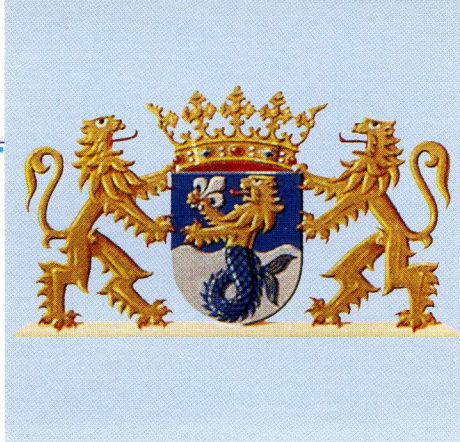
Apart from the regular concerts in Amsterdam's concert halls, there are several 17th-century music events in various churches. This is an excellent opportunity for you to listen to the beautiful music of the period. Especially the carillon and organ concerts will recreate the ancient Dutch atmosphere. Enquire at the VVV for further details.

### Madame Tussaud Scenerama

A whole floor of Madame Tussaud will be dedicated to "The Netherlands in the Golden Age" (June 5 - March 7). A panorama of the city, East India Company ships, Vermeer's studio and other special effects and exhibits bring the past back to life.







## PROFILE OF THE PROVINCES

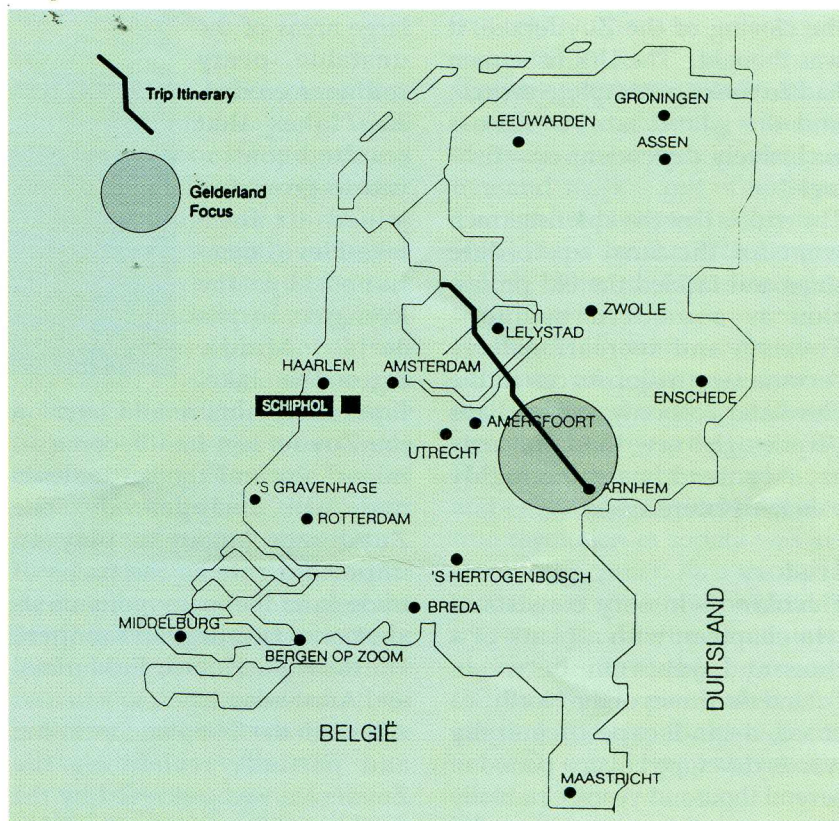
# FLEVOLAND:

## THE TWELFTH PROVINCE

**F**levoland is the newest province of The Netherlands, entirely man-made in modern times except for two small islands (Urk and Schokland) that now form part of it. Flevoland consists of the three largest reclaimed areas ("polders") in the country: the Noordoostpolder, Oostelijk and Zuidelijk Flevoland.

There are six municipalities covering an area of over 240,000 hectares. Almere is the largest (population 90,000), followed by Lelystad (60,000) and the total population amounts to about a quarter million at this moment. The story of this most recent portion of the country is best told by the following figures: on January 1, 1977 Almere consisted of 70 houses; the projected population for 1995 is 100,000 inhabitants, making Almere one of the 20 largest cities in the country.

One of the main original reasons for the IJsselmeer reclamation project was to obtain more land for agriculture. But nobody could foresee the changes in farming that would take place in a short time. This becomes clear from the data for the oldest area, the

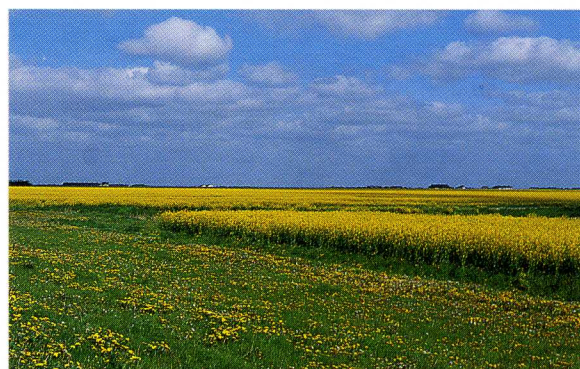


Noordoostpolder. Although agriculture is still important there, it now accounts for only about a quarter of the employment figure (originally the figure was 60%). Services and industry are now the main factors in the economy of that area, and for the two

(younger) Flevoland polders that is even more true. The most surprising example of changes in the economy is the former island of Urk. Up to 60 years ago, the island was totally dependent on small-scale fishing. That source of income would surely dry up with

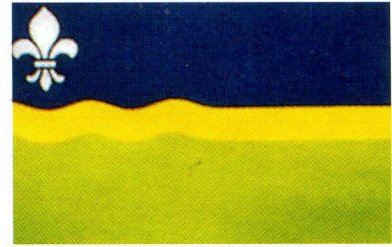
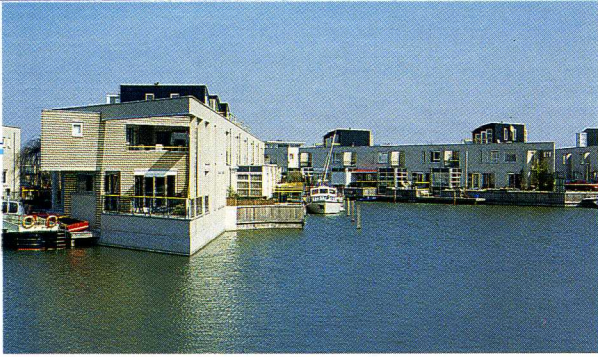


Before



After





the closing of the Zuyderzee, it was thought. The Urk fishermen had to make a complete switch, and the island is now almost exclusively dependent on...fishing!

The crux is that the Urk fishermen went for the most up-to-date ships and tackled the old profession as a modern business. Tourism and recreation have become two major forces in the Flevoland economy and perhaps surprisingly: new though it may be, Flevoland has some highly valuable Nature areas.

### History

Flevoland's history consists of two chapters, with a blank of a thousand years in between. Behind the dunes of the North Sea coast, a landscape of marshy woods developed over a period of several thousand years. Gradually the peaty soil became more solid and was covered by river sediments. People began to live there and many traces of their activity and settlements of up to 8000 years ago have been found in the reclaimed areas. Some 4000 years ago the dunes were breached (near Petten, for instance) and

large areas of the unstable peaty soil were eroded. The lakes that resulted continued to grow and joined to form lake Flevo, mentioned by the Romans. In the early Middle Ages the lake, first called Almere and later on the Zuyderzee, had become an inland sea and the settlements had all disappeared. The Zuyderzee began to play an important role as the focus of trade from the many ports on its shores (Elburg, Kampen, Harderwijk, Hoorn, Enkhuizen and Amsterdam).

Although the first plan for closing and partially reclaiming the Zuyderzee was conceived by the mathematician Simon Stevin in the 17th century, such a project had to wait for the invention of the steam engine. Near the end of the 19th century, the engineer Cornelis Lely had worked out a plan consisting of closure of the Zuyderzee inlet and reclamation of some 225,000 hectares of land.

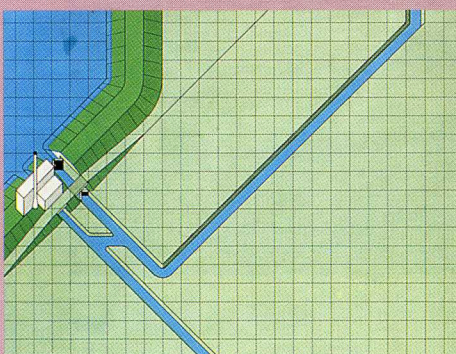


Lely was the driving force behind the project and is now commemorated by a statue on his "enclosing dyke" (Afsluitdijk) and by having the city of Lelystad named after him. The plan was accepted by Parliament in 1918. In 1932 the Zuyderzee was closed off and became a lake instead of an inland sea. The Noordoostpolder fell dry in 1942, Oostelijk Flevoland in 1957 and Zuidelijk Flevoland in 1968.

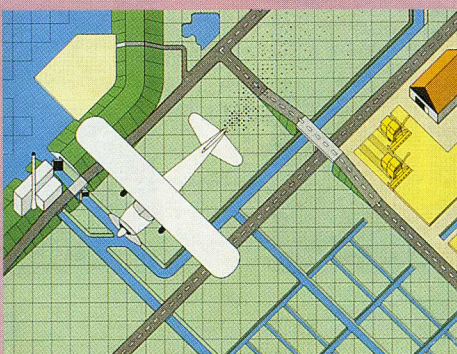
Both the coat of arms of Flevoland and the flag - blue for water, yellow for the golden harvest and green for the pastures- symbolize the tremendous man-made change that has taken place in only half a century right in the heart of The Netherlands.

## Making Polders

### HYDRAULIC WORKS



### RECLAMATION AND CULTIVATION



### LAND DEVELOPMENT







# TOURING THE SEA-BOTTOM

## DISCOVERING FLEVOLAND

**S**ome people may think that "there's nothing much to see yet" in Flevoland, but they could not be more wrong! And of course, when you do not live in the country, nothing could better illustrate the "classic Dutch tale" of land reclamation than these recently reclaimed stretches of the sea-bottom. Touring through the area, you can literally see how the twelfth province was planned and created, the result of four centuries of know-how. Flevoland has become a major tourist attraction and has its own VVV Tourist Centre (office: Agorahof 4, 8224BZ Lelystad, phone 03200-43444), which has a wealth of information available covering accommodation, bike-tours, nautical sports and sights. First of all, here are some of the principal attractions. For times of admission etc.: enquire at the VVV!

**New population centres:**

Lelystad and Almere are the main new population centres. The concept of Lelystad - some two decades "older" - was advanced for its time, because slow and fast traffic were kept separate. Almere, the bigger of the two, at present consists of three quarters: Haven, Stad and Buiten, with two others projected. The city offers some interesting examples of modern architecture and city-planning. People we spoke to said they loved living in the "new land" but the towns of the "old land" were preferred for shopping.

**Old population centres:**

The two former islands of Urk

and Schokland are remnants of the Ice-Age landscape. Urk has been continuously populated since the Middle Ages; the entire population of Schokland was evacuated as recently as in the 19th century when the island was in danger of disappearing altogether. Urk has a pleasant old village centre, a fishing museum and a large fish auction. Picturesque tiny Schokland has a very nice museum telling the tragic story of the community and the former island has a haunting atmosphere. Ancient ships:

At Ketelhaven near Dronten the Museum for Ships' Archeology has a superb collection of the remains of ships wrecked at sea centuries ago and excavated after the land fell dry. A "must"!

On the other hand, near Lelystad, a 17th-century sailing ship is being reconstructed. The "Batavia" project is doubtlessly one of the most interesting sights in the "Golden Age of Holland" vein and in this issue you can read more about it. Another "must"!

**Reclamation:**

The reclamation story never fails to fascinate people. The "Nieuw Land" exhibition centre near Lelystad (next to the "Batavia" building-site) presents a survey of the land reclamation projects in The Netherlands. Models, pictures, audiovisual presentations and displays of finds in the former Zuiderzee area tell a highly informative story. In the autumn of 1993, a new "space-age" building will be opened.

### Creating a new province.

It must be a challenging task: how to create a new area in which to live and work ...out of nothing. The first experience in this field was gained by the 17th-century Dutch, when in a few decades' time the large lakes in North Holland (Purmer, Schermer, Wormer and Beemster) were reclaimed and a complete infrastructure had to be designed. The Flevoland project was planned and executed in a period when a true revolution in society was just around the corner. As a result, the plans were either soon overtaken by events or fundamentally changed in the process. Originally, the plan called for a single large city (Lelystad) and some 50 smaller population centres!







In the Noordoostpolder you can see how apparently sound plans went awry. A central town (Emmeloord) is surrounded by 10 villages and the idea was that the farmers' hands would live near the land, but still within "biking-distance" of the town. Each village had no less than 3 schools: two of Christian denomination and one "neutral". And then everything changed: farmers' hands disappeared within a

decade, car ownership made "biking-distance" irrelevant and people started to move to the towns. In the Noordoostpolder, it has become difficult to maintain sufficient community services in the villages and of course, having 3 small schools in a single village is now nonsensical.

Chronologically, the three areas (Noordoostpolder, Oostelijk and Zuidelijk Flevoland) also tell the decreasing impact of agriculture

and the increasing importance of recreation. Areas dedicated to recreation were not incorporated in the Noordoostpolder at all, in Zuidelijk Flevoland they formed a substantial portion of the total area from the very beginning. Another major difference between the Noordoostpolder and the other two is that the former is joined to the "old land"; the latter are separated from it by broad stretches of water, the "rand







meren" (peripheral lakes). These prevent excessive drainage and consequent drying-out of the land adjacent to the polder, which has indeed occurred in the case of the Noordoostpolder.

When the land falls dry, it actually is far from that, but a sticky mess you cannot even walk on. It takes quite some time and effort before it can be used. The first plant to grow on this goo is called marsh-endive and its appearance is like an explosion. At the end of the Fifties, Amsterdam was inundated by fluffy stuff floating in the air: the tufts of cottony hairs of marsh-endive seeds from Flevoland! Reeds sown by aircraft form the next stage in the vegetation process. The reeds dry out the soil and the roots form a firm mat. The first true crop is rapeseed, which can tolerate some salt and yields valuable vegetable oil. These first stages in preparation of the land are carried out by the



State and take about 5 years. Then the land is taken over by private enterprise.

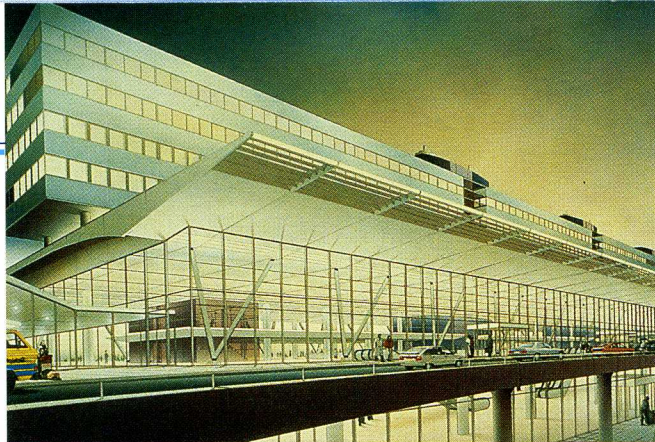
The most interesting process of development that has taken place in the twelfth province - especially in Zuidelijk Flevoland - was not the occupation of the new land by man, but by Nature! To some extent, this was the original intention: the last two areas to be reclaimed (Oostelijk and Zuidelijk Flevoland) have the highest percentage (per total area) of deciduous woods in the entire country! These are being managed according to modern scientific principles of forestry and though they may be young, the woods already show an impressive diversity of plants and animals. For instance, some 1300 different species of mushrooms have been identified in Flevoland, many of them not found anywhere else in the country. But one nature reserve, the Oostvaardersplassen, developed

by chance. This was a "difficult" area to reclaim, because it stayed very wet. Therefore its reclamation was postponed for some years, and then it was discovered that by "running wild" the rather worthless area had become a unique habitat. In a short time, it has begun to closely resemble the primeval Dutch landscape of thousands of years ago! Now it is one of the most highly prized bird sanctuaries of Europe, where even eagles can be seen. The Oostvaardersplassen are not open to the public, of course, but huts for bird watchers have been provided at the edge of this newest piece of Nature in The Netherlands.

So for your next trip, put Flevoland on top of your list, because there is no other area where you can hop from a city under construction to a ghost village and a "prehistoric" landscape 25 years in the making...







# SCHIPHOL:

If you have recently passed through Schiphol Airport, you'll have noticed that it's buzzing with activity. And if you have not been there recently, you may hardly recognize the airport when you next see it. For some years, Schiphol has been undergoing a transformation with a dual purpose: raising its capacity for passengers and cargo, and anticipating developments in Europe.

## Mainport position

The changes now occurring in Europe are fundamental. On the one hand, the West European countries are making serious efforts to harmonize their laws and economies. Despite squabbles, the European Community is making considerable progress in several fields. One is the disappearance of its internal frontiers for EC citizens. For airports like Schiphol, which principally handle international and interconti-

ental flights, this means that the entire traffic flow must be split into two streams. For EC citizens and cargo no customs inspection or passports are required, for non-EC citizens and goods the situation remains as before. Secondly, some former East Bloc satellites that have regained their independence appear to have sufficient governmental stability and potential for economic recovery. These countries like Hungary and Czechia - may be able to join the EC at some future moment. The EC may therefore include more countries than originally foreseen. Forecasts have it that in the near future, air traffic will concentrate on about five large intercontinental European airports, or mainports. Schiphol ranks among the European top five and to keep this position, it aims at a capacity of some 30 million passengers and 2 million tons of cargo by the year 2003 (about double the figures of

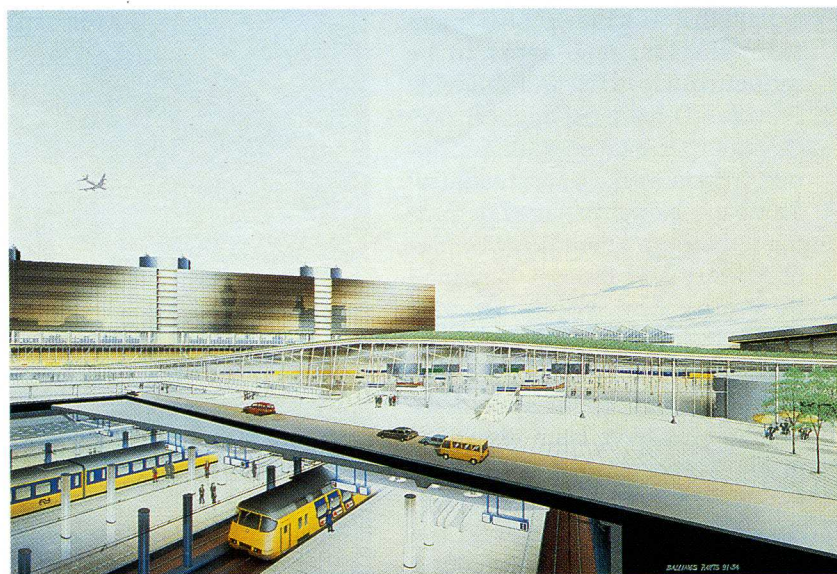
1989, when the expansion project began). Most importantly: the expansion of the airport should cause the minimum impact on the environment.

## A panorama

We'll survey some of the changes by referring to the illustration of the mock-up, where the buildings not yet completed in the beginning of this year are shown in red. First to be completed was the new Air Traffic Control tower (1), covered in a previous issue of this journal.

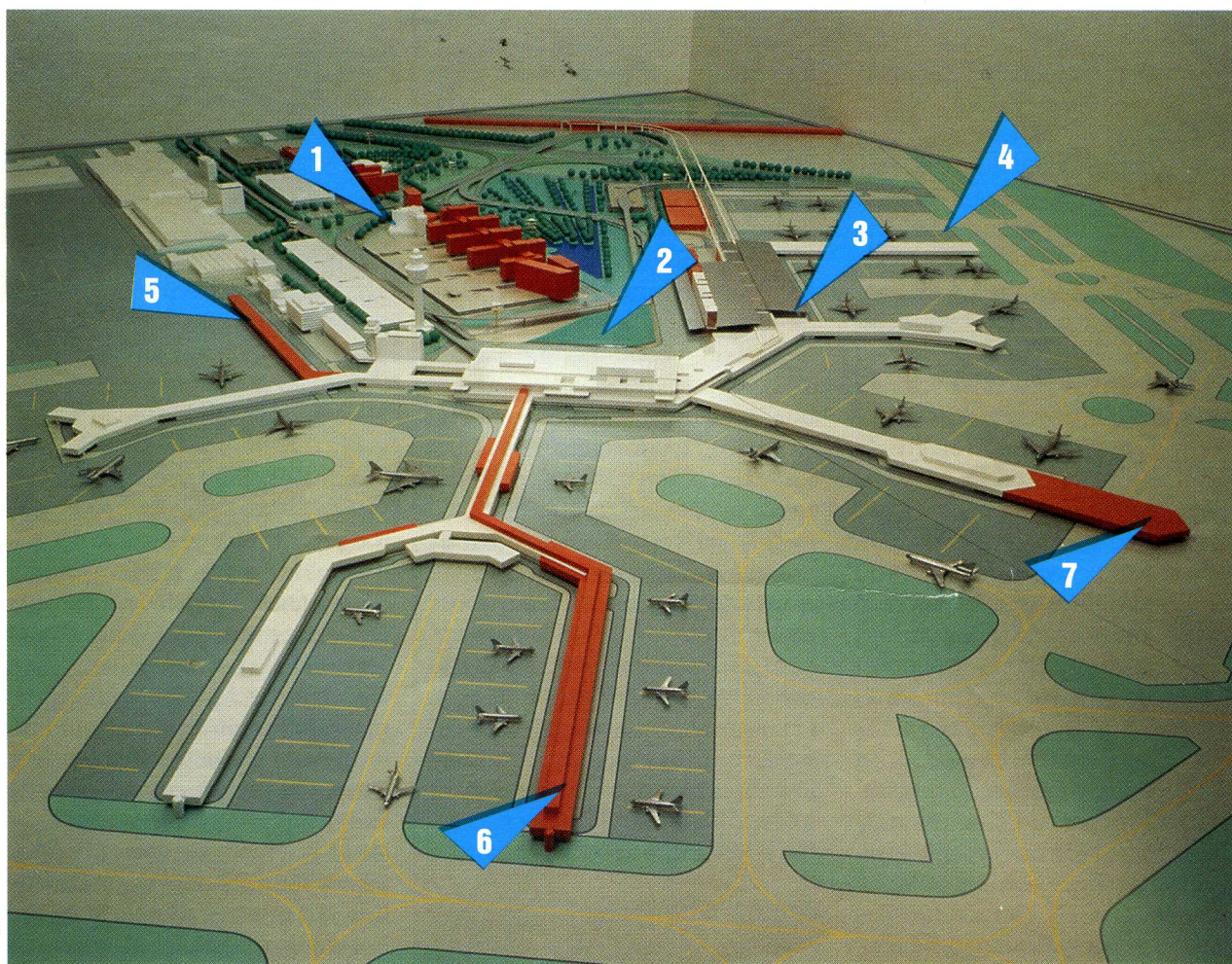
Schiphol has always actively promoted the railways as a means of transport to the airport. The railway station will be enlarged, also to cope with the high-speed trains expected to become an alternative to some of the European air traffic. Except for 6000 of the total of 28,000 square metres, the triangular "square" now facing the terminal will be roofed over and the resulting central hall will become the focus of the passenger streams. The hall - with a roof covered by succulent plants! - will contain the new railway station and facilities such as shops (2).

The capacity of the terminal has been raised to 27 million passengers by the west extension. This was opened in the spring and because it is an extension instead of a new terminal, Schiphol's unique principle of "everything under one roof" has been maintained. The West terminal will handle nearly all non-EC flights, it is topped by office buildings and of course there is a wide range of facilities like a new luggage-han-





# From Airport to Mainport



ding system, lounges, shops, business centre etc. The two terminal buildings connect through an 80-metre wide lounge and further extension has been taken into account (3).

Large expansion of pier capacity is another highlight in the activities at Schiphol (4, 5, 6). In 1990, an extension for 13 gates serving medium-sized aircraft was inaugurated and in 1992 the fifth pier (330 metres long, 8 gates) was completed. As the mock-up shows, further additions are planned (7). The new piers have

their own facilities for security, check-in, transfer and luggage-handling. As the airport grows and distances to the gates increase, fast "people movers" will ensure that transfer is still possible within 50 minutes for intercontinental flights. To reduce ground traffic on the aprons and restrict environmental impact, the technical facilities for the aircraft now include fuelling-points and a special (400 cps) electric power supply.

Around the airport buildings, a complete new infrastructure is

being built. Dual-level roads (passengers on top, services underneath), parking garages, offices, hotel facilities, doubling of the railway tunnel and of the taxiways, updating of the runways, ultramodern waste disposal and water purification facilities, extensive landscaping...it's all geared to the standards of the 21st century. And the beauty of the project is that it still fits within the available Schiphol Airport land-area, with a large "overflow capacity" for the next century just across the highway!





# ZUIVELTOERISME IN LELYSTAD

**"Z**uiveltoerisme" is misschien een nieuw woord voor veel lezers, maar de betekenis zal wel duidelijk zijn: "kom kijken hoe de (zuivel)boer zijn beroep uitoefent". Vooral voor de stedeling is "boeren" een onbekend bedrijf, en zeker voor veel mensen van Nederlandse afkomst is dit een goede gelegenheid om te zien wat er van de vaderlandse boer geworden is. Voor wie geen insider in de Europese zuivelwereld is: sinds enige jaren wordt binnen de Europese gemeenschap een beperking van de produktie nagestreefd door middel van een complex van maatregelen. In een "Flevoland Special" mag het boerenbedrijf zeker niet ontbreken - daar was het de oude Cornelis Lely immers allemaal om begonnen, ook al is het anders uitgepakt! En vlak bij Lelystad, in de Gelderse Hout, duidelijk aangegeven door borden, staat de zuivelboerderij van de familie Van den Burgwal, die alle dagen behalve zondag van 09.00 tot 18.00 uur te bezichtigen is.

## Van het Nieuwe Land

Henk van den Burgwal blijkt als gesprekspartner een gelukkige keus te zijn, want hij is afkomstig van het "Nieuwe Land". "Ik ben geboren in de Noordoostpolder, waar mijn vader als pionier een boerderij had. Zelf ben ik toen teruggegaan naar de provincie Utrecht, waar mijn vader vandaan kwam, en daar heb ik ruim tien jaar geboerd." Wat hij daar begon, heeft hij in het nieuwe land (waarheen hij ruim drie jaar gele-

den terugkeerde) voortgezet: het direct leveren aan de consument in plaats van aan de fabriek.

"Bij mij staat het boeren voorop, toeristische attractie of niet, het is gewoon een commercieel bedrijf. We hebben een flinke klantenkring opgebouwd en bijna de hele produktie wordt verkocht in de winkel. De mensen komen gewoon met flessen of emmertjes hun spullen halen." Dat is aan de ene kant "ouderwets": het is al heel lang geleden dat de melkboer melk met een litermaatje in de melkkoker verkocht. Maar aan de andere kant is het modern: de consument probeert steeds meer afstand te nemen van wegwerpverpakkingen, met hun onvermijdelijke belasting van het milieu. In ieder geval is "kopen bij de boer" ook in Lelystad - met 60.000 inwoners toch geen boerendorp te noemen - duidelijk aangeslagen. "We kregen vaste voet aan de

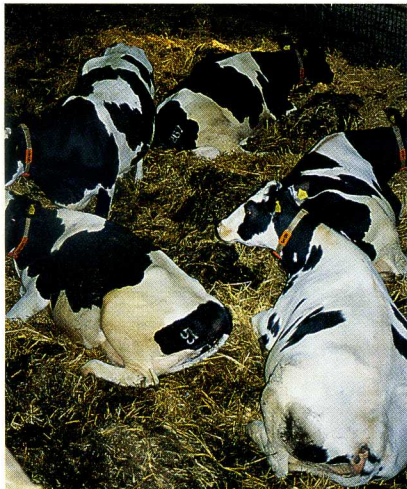
grond ondanks de supermarkten. De mensen moeten het gezellig vinden om even bij de boer boodschappen te gaan doen, vandaar dat we ook een speeltuintje voor de kindertjes hebben."

## De toeristische kant

Bezoekers krijgen een uitstekend overzicht van het zuivelboeren vanaf een platform boven de stal. "Dit bedrijf bezat geen kelders voor de mest en toen we hier begonnen, hebben we het klassieke principe van de 'potstal' toegepast. Het vee staat op een dik pakket stro, dat telkens wordt opgehoogd. Het eindresultaat is een droge mest die veel minder agressief is voor het milieu." Zo'n klassieke techniek wordt overigens gecombineerd met modern boeren: de koeien hebben een zendertje om de nek en via een code ontvangen ze automatisch de juiste hoeveelheid voer, afhankelijk van hun conditie en produktie. Een diapresentatie - ook in het Engels - geeft een goed overzicht van het zuivelbedrijf en heel aantrekkelijk is vanzelfsprekend het inkopen doen. "Wij zijn gespecialiseerd in de produktie van zure melkprodukten zoals yoghurt en kwark. Voor zelf kaas maken hebben we niet genoeg melk, de kaas kopen we in - allerlei soorten boerenkaas, Purmer, Leidse, Friese nagelkaas, geitenkaas, kruidenkaas en ga maar door. Verder hebben we eieren en sinds kort verkopen we ook aardappelen, verse groenten en fruit."







### Een vergelijking

Uit eigen ervaring kan Van den Burgwal een vergelijking maken tussen het "oude" en het "nieuwe land". Is er veel verschil? "Op het oude land zeggen ze wel dat de polders het beloofde land zijn. Dat is aan de ene kant wel waar: we hebben hier een hogere productie dan het landelijk gemiddelde. Voor tarwe is de opbrengst hier bijvoorbeeld 9-10 ton per hectare, tegen 7-8 ton op het oude land. Op dit moment lopen bij ons 80 koeien op 30 hectare en elke koe is goed voor ruim 7000 liter melk per jaar.

Aan de andere kant drukken de lasten hier veel zwaarder dan op het oude land. Grond is duur, de kosten zijn hoog en vooral in de akkerbouw zijn er jaren geweest dat de prijzen slecht lagen. Maar uiteindelijk luidt het gezegde dat de koeien nooit beter worden dan de boer is – en een reden voor de hoge opbrengst zou ook best kunnen zijn dat je hier in de polder een selectie hebt van de meer efficiënte boeren!"



# LETTERBOX

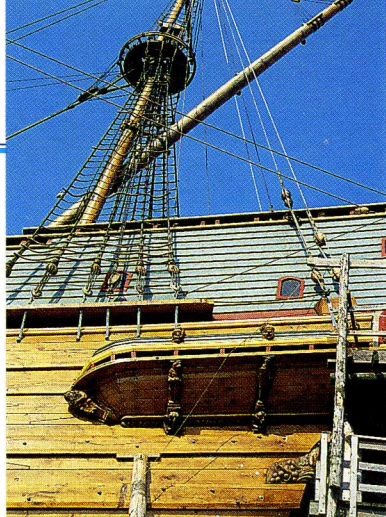
## A visit to Delfshaven.

During an extended trip to The Netherlands, J.W. Ras (Southport, Qld, Australia) paid a visit to Delfshaven – small picturesque oasis right in the middle of bustling Rotterdam. "Every true blue Dutchman knows that Delfshaven is the birthplace of Admiral Piet Heyn, who conquered the Spanish Silver Fleet, but not so many know that the Pilgrim Fathers left for America from the Delfshaven Church in 1620. Now a group of business people has started a foundation to encourage the restoration and upkeep of the interesting build-

ings in this beautiful historical part of Rotterdam. A Delfshaven jeweller saw a 17th-century Spanish coin called "Mat" (part of Piet Hein's loot) at an exhibition in 1991 and thought that this would be a good way to promote Delfshaven. A design was made and the "Matje" (see illustration) was approved by the Dutch mint as legal tender in Delfshaven. Its trading value is 5 guilders, it costs 7.50 and the balance of 2.50 goes to the foundation. Many traders in Delfshaven have signs stating that they accept the Matje. I think many Australian Dutch might be interested to get some!" Thanks for the tip, keen reader!







# BATAVIA: RECONSTRUCTING A 17TH CENTURY SHIP

**F**or an issue emphasizing "the Golden Age" and Flevoland, there could be no better feature than the 17th-century sailing-ship Batavia being reconstructed near Lelystad. And especially if you're from "down under", a visit to this major tourist attraction is a must. For the original Batavia, built in 1628 in Amsterdam, foundered on Australia's West Coast on her maiden trip. Batavia's unhappy voyage is a tale of hardship, mutiny and murder that was the subject of a bestselling book in the 17th century. The story also became widely known in Australia because the wreck has been salvaged and put on display in the West Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle.

## The project

In the Seventies, Willem Vos, a Dutch shipwright specializing in wooden ships, toyed with the idea

of building an authentic reconstruction of a 17th-century ship. The Batavia -then being salvaged in Australia- was ideal for this project because the ship represents the most characteristic type of Dutch large merchant vessel built in the beginning of the 17th century.

Construction was begun in 1985, sponsored by a large number of industries, and from the start an important aim of the project has been the professional training of young people in the crafts of traditional shipbuilding. Guided by comprehensive specialist research and working in teams under supervision of master-craftsmen, apprentices have been gaining firsthand knowledge while working on this impressive vessel. Measuring over 45 metres in length, with three masts carrying nearly 1200 square metres of sail, heavily armed and manned by a crew of 200 to 300, Batavia was one of the biggest ships of its time. Built specifically for the Far East trade routes, it had to be self-supporting for a journey that could take more than a year. Batavia is now nearing completion and last year the number of visitors passed the 300,000 mark.

## Decoration with a purpose

The basic structure of Batavia itself is beautiful: richly glowing oak, elegant sweeping lines and the complex patterns of the rigging - they "just look right". But in the final phase of building, the ship is also acquiring colour and a wealth of decorative detail: beautiful woodcarvings of various

types and sizes. Formal statues, grotesque masks, ornaments - Batavia is beginning to resemble a floating art gallery.

Cees van Soestbergen is Batavia's master woodcarver and has been involved in the project since 1987. "We have trained about 15 woodcarvers so far, and at present there is a team of seven. As an estimate, the ship will eventually be adorned by some 250 to 300 pieces of woodcarving. Batavia is a unique teaching-project: no formal training in woodcarving -for instance, for restoration work- is available in The Netherlands." What were the reasons for the Dutch merchants, budget-conscious as they were, to indulge in such opulence? "In that period, craftsmen thought their products simply were not finished if they were not decorated" Van Soestbergen explains, "especially if the product was in Batavia's size- and price-class! But the deco-







rations had a function too. In the first place, they have a story to tell. 'Batavia' was the contemporary name of the city now called Djakarta, the main destination of such a trading-ship. But the word also refers to the Batavians, an ancient tribe then thought to represent the ancestral Dutch. And just as the Batavians revolted against the Roman army of occupation in the first century A.D., the 17th-century Dutch had revolted against the Spanish. The parallel was obvious to anybody of that time and thus the four large statues decorating the stern, two of Batavian heroes called Claudius Civilis and Brinio, and two of Prince William of Orange and his son Maurice, told a story of continuing national identity." Besides, status was involved: such a beautiful ship could surely only belong to wealthy owners, and showbusiness was quite impor-

tant in dealing with foreign Sultans, Susuhunans or Mandarins....

### Style and form

I asked Van Soestbergen whether he would call this sort of woodcarving "difficult". As a master-carver, he did not think so and surprisingly, the apprentices I interviewed agreed with him. Using tools not really different from those of 300 years ago, the technical problems of woodcarving are not too difficult to master, it seems. But the master and his apprentices also agreed that a feeling for form, and three-dimensional insight, are the tricky things. There is hardly a straight line aboard Batavia and all decorations have to match the smoothly curving shape of the ship's hull. Another difficult question: what should the carvings look like? No detailed drawings of Batavia's decorations or remnants of the carvings have been found. On the basis of comprehensive historical research including examination of hundreds of drawings and etchings of ships from the period, the team has made an historically sound reconstruction. The figure-head, a fierce lion, was featured on all Dutch merchant ships of the period and the symbolic statues were carried to extremes in men-of-war, so there were enough "hard data" to work with. Craftsmen of centuries gone by often added their personal touches in a lighter vein to the serious projects they were working on. Some highly surprising representations have been found in odd

nooks and corners of medieval cathedrals, for instance. Batavia is known to contain two such "personal comments" of the builders. The first is called the Watchful Eye: a mocking Jolly Joker peeps through a porthole at the helmsman, telling him to "better look out, mate, or you'll run aground Down Under as well." The Joker's staff is the other prank: it is decorated with a bust showing a striking resemblance to the Master Woodcarver himself, a bit of quick thinking and acting by the apprentices while Van Soestbergen was on holiday...

If you approach Lelystad via the dyke from Enkhuizen, you cannot possibly miss Batavia. The ship can be visited daily between 10.00 and 17.00 hrs.





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