

BRABANT
THAT IS ANOTHER CUP OF COFFEE

Cor Swanenberg & André Rieth



Brabant is another cup of coffee

Cor Swanenberg

André Riether

Eburon Delft 1992

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Why and who for?

Defining the characteristics of the Dutch and the peculiarities of their behaviour is a favourite pastime of many a foreigner who - for one reason or another - is condemned to take residence in Holland for a more extended period.

Foreigners are capable of giving historical, cultural and social explanations which are proof of a fertile phantasy and a capacity for keen observation.

Some of these descriptions and explanations do not go beyond the level of gossip or insinuation. Some of them stem from scholars and are available in the form of a book like the recent publications by Simon Schama. Other ones reflect on the level of a longlasting personal confrontation like the extremely hilarious book by Rentes de Carvalho (*Waar die andere God woont; where that other God lives*) (probably not available in English). And many other examples of sharp observations can be found for which the Dutch have to be grateful.

But there are traces of reluctance as well, when the Dutch have to react to the foreign eagerness to state generalizations.

A very simple way of confusing a foreigner is stating that we are not from Holland. The confusion increases when we admit to be Dutch and from the Netherlands. In our particular case the solution is simple: we are from Brabant.

But in everyday language our country for reasons of convenience will be called 'Holland'

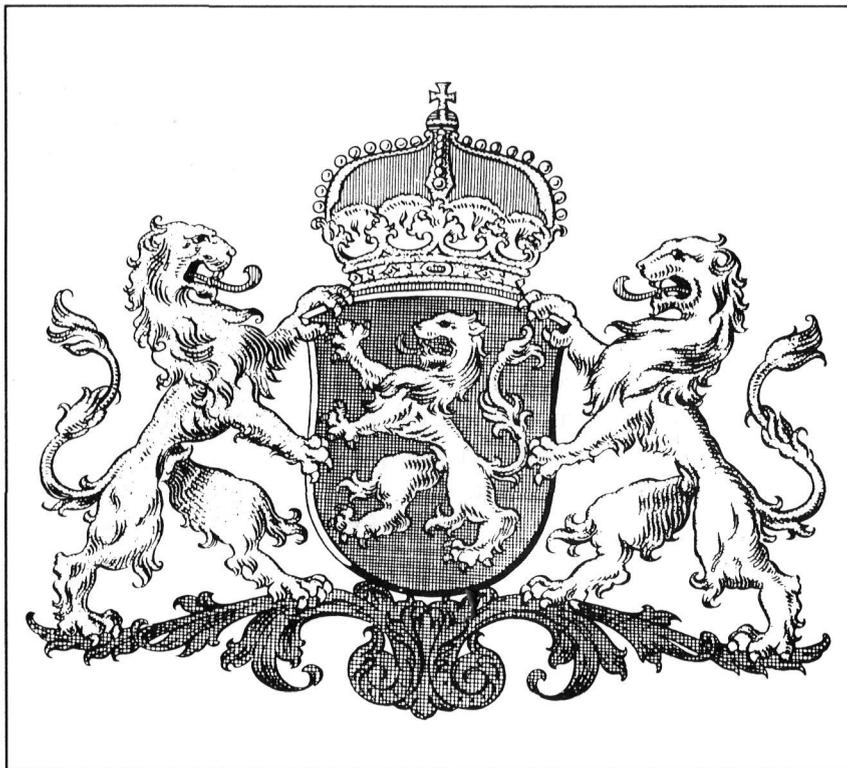
We wrote this book for the foreigners who want to find out more about a specific part of the Netherlands than can be found in the leaflets from the Tourist Bureau. Some of them may actually have historical roots in this part of the world without having access to the Dutch language.

Our intention is to complete the general picture of Holland. We want to show historical, political, religious and other reasons for the differences that to some extent may be minor, but still significant enough to take them into consideration when dealing with people from Brabant.

Finally, this book has the intention of being a revenge. A kind of revenge or compensation for all of the suffering which resulted from minor misunderstandings.

The relativity of being Dutch.

Cor Swanenberg
André Riether



Brabant Arms

Introduction

About the Netherlands and North Brabant

It is a bit risky to write about a people in general. As soon as you start thinking about certain characteristics of the Dutch people you cannot help focussing on the average that in reality does not exist. Especially in these turbulent times and this ever fluid society that hazard of generalizing will always be there.

In the overall taxonomy of the Dutch there are certain typologies that will rarely fit the Brabant people. In our province you'll meet narrow-minded people who object to being called 'Hollanders' although they consider themselves members of the Dutch society. The consensus of opinion is that Holland is the 'Randstad', the 'Super-conurbation', roughly comprising the provinces North and South Holland, a region which has a great impact in our relatively small country. (Actually the term 'Holland' is a poor choice; originally it was the name for the two western provinces and that Randstad-nucleus in particular, but since the Dutch themselves mostly use the denomination, there is no reason why we should not.)

Etymologically Holland seems to stem from Holtland, holt being the old word for wood. (Onions, the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology.) Some people opt for the derivation from hollow land.

What are the physical features of the Dutch? According to the Roman writer Tacitus (55-120 A.D.) the inhabitants of the Low Lands between the rivers Rhine and Maas were blue-eyed, red-haired Batavians...

However, a host of societal and sociological changes have taken place since then due to which the classification 'blue-eyed, red-haired' no longer stands. Watching major sports events one may get the impression that Holland is mainly inhabited by coloured people; our prizepunchers and judo-champs were of Surinam descent and so was the fastest female dash-ace.

The Dutch are often depicted as an industrious, economical and steady people having a deep sense of freedom. But roughly speaking from the sixties onwards the Dutch have also become notorious for their 'Hollanditis', i.e. their response to the universal problems such as nuclear armament, environmental pollution and human rights. An outsider, who need not necessarily be a detractor, might rightly assert that the Dutch are eager to present themselves as the conscience of the world.

But, strangely enough, the general conception of the Dutch is a most positive one: the almost limitless tolerance and candour are emblematic of the country's many-sidedness.

Foreigners often tend to visualise Holland as a very lowly country with a lot of water-mills, tulip-fields and dikes. They fancy a small country full of beer-drinking, cheese-churning and herring-eating folks, preferably dressed in old-fashioned wooden shoes, bell-bottom-trousers and the lot.

A traditional caricature of the Dutchman is that of a farmer eating his fish raw while standing. It stands to reason that only very few Dutch residents could be typecast that way.

In certain eulogies the Netherlands have been coined 'a hive of industry, a garden of flowers, a haven of tolerance, a happy home for cyclists'. The little country that occupies the northwestern edge of Europe is sometimes called 'the heart of the continent, the gateway and crossroads of Europe'. The latter jingoistic catch-phrase mainly derives from the fact the Netherlands are within three hours flying time from every other European country.

The Dutch people are reputed to have no less than a taste for order and punctuality, a love of the sea and wild enterprise, a deep devotion to home and family life, a sense of beauty in colour and form. (It is remarkable that this trading and fishing nation should have left an overriding imprint in the fields of pictorial art.) This cosmopolitan kaleidoscope of qualities does not show any modesty. Holland still has the image of a clean country even though that reputation was established a long time ago; in the last few decades the Dutch seem to have soiled that cleanliness-emblem.

Nowadays there are a lot of gables, walls and bridges that have been sprayed with the child-like 'art' of graffiti.

Flat Holland is famous for its wide landscape beneath an immense sky, paradise for painters but also mockingly called the bleak, wind-swept realm of the 'water-counts'. It is hard to decide which is which, for after all, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder...'

In the romantic view of the country the decorated barrel-organs in the streets and the floating barges on the canals with the arched drawbridges across them will always be part and parcel.

Dutch topography will show you that long distances in the Netherlands are of rare occurrence. Everything is more or less within ambling distance: from Amsterdam it is only 170 miles to the 'deep' south of the country and 150 miles to the 'far' north.

In consequence of this Holland is a very densely populated country with almost 800 people to the square mile. There is many a foreigner who will easily say that the Dutch have an extraordinary linguistic ability; that about 80 per cent of the people speak English and German and a few even French into the bargain. This is the blessing of a trading nation they say. But we should not lose our sense of proportions; on the whole the Dutchman's knowledge of foreign languages does not really reach beyond the so-called smattering, though he does possess quite a bit of 'flair'. As for his mother-tongue the average Dutchman can hardly be called word-perfect.

Holland has only got two land-frontiers: Germany to the east and Belgium to the south. All along the western and northern sides the North Sea hugs the coasts.

North Brabant is the nucleus of the southern provinces of the Netherlands and borders Belgium.

North Brabant does not suit the traditional pattern of Holland. It is not just one of the twelve provinces of the Netherlands. In Western Europe people say: 'going south the world gets warmer'. There are Brabantine and other poets who want to make us believe that the same holds good for the provinces of the Netherlands. Apart from a narrow region along the River Maas and some claylands in the West the province of North Brabant lies rather high for Dutch standards; there are hardly any watermills, only windmills, mostly non-operative; it is mainly sandy country with a thin layer of clay along the brooks and its big border-river Maas, called Meuse in French.

The people in the southern provinces are rumoured to be different from the Hollanders. Like the Limburgers they have their big festivals with carnival and the fairs, which are either absent or of minor importance in the other provinces.

Brabantine people are reputed to have this remarkable Burgundian aptitude for celebrating; to possess that more-the-merrier attitude; not so earnest and gloomy as the average Dutchman...

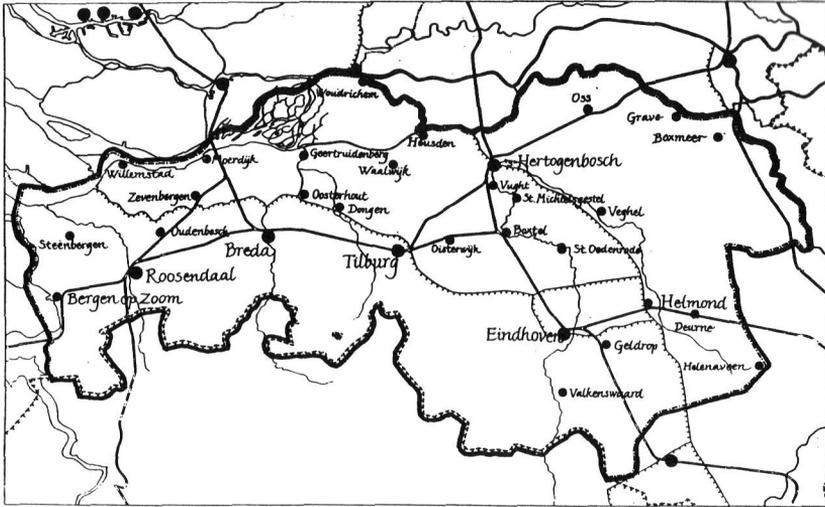
Brabant is mostly pictured as the cosy county; by and large its residents are cordial and kind, with a predilection for a cup of coffee any time of day. They have a great sense of humour and their light-hearted glee is proverbial.

There seems to be a hate-love-relation between Brabantine and Dutch people. The southerners are often looked upon as the good-willing, dumb country-folk and they seem to enjoy that image rather well. They are even fostering it. The northerners, especially the 'Hollanders', are mostly pictured as the would-be superiors who really know how to deal with everything and who are always willing to downplay the other party even if they have just settled in the south and are complete strangers there.

We tend to think that the following English joke on the Hollanders has its root in Brabant (anyway, that is where we picked it up for the first time): 'There are at least five types of Dutchmen: there is the Amsterdam Dutchman, the Rotterdam Dutchman, the old-fashioned fishy Volendam Dutchman, the 'cheesy' Edam Dutchman and... the other damn Dutchman!'

In the provinces of North Brabant and Limburg the landscape gradually assumes a hillier shape. The people here are predominantly Roman Catholics. Here we are well away from the sea, the dikes and the polders. The frontiers are solid and the people evidently have experienced an intriguing blend of Latin and Teutonic influence. Here they seem more relaxed, more talkative than their northern compatriots who will respond to conversation but will seldom initiate it.

Right from the start we have to state that this non-uniformity, if present at all, is disappearing rapidly because of the increasing assimilation of people in that hectic get-on-with-it-quickly society of ours.



Map of North Brabant by André Langerwerf

Of course the two southern provinces, once known as ‘the Generality’ (see page 18), were not integrated in the original ‘United Provinces’. For a long time the people from the south were indicated as ‘the folk from below the rivers’ and their country was cynically called ‘the dark south’. The inhabitants of these poor regions were looked upon as aliens by the superior north.

Nowadays this rather negative conception can be busted by the fact that these southern provinces boast certain attractions which the north virtually lacks. These forlorn parts of the Netherlands have become favourite holiday-resorts because of their scenery, notably Limburg of course, with the only ‘mountain range’ of the entire country.

Another root of this draw for tourists is to be found in the striking diversity of the resident people, which will give some Dutchmen the feeling of being a bit abroad without crossing any frontier.

We will try and find out more about these shades of difference and in that connection Brabant’s history is indispensable.

BRABANT'S HISTORY

In olden times

*Of the beautiful barrow of Oss
Nothing was left but the fosse
But for Dutch erudition
Its flattened condition
Is more of a gain than a loss.
(Ch. Hawkes, English archaeologist)*

We can't be too sure about the origin of North Brabant as for its landscape and initial population. Part of Brabant is relatively young in that it dates from the post glacial age. But most of the overall surface is pleistocene. The oldest parts come to surface in the west of the province. In the heart and the east the so-called 'middle-terrace', a kind of interface is predominant.

In the western part of the province the difference in height is easily discernible; it is the sudden change from holocene to pleistocene. Here, near Woensdrecht, there must have been a coastline in the shape of the Sea of Shallows. Sea-clay was deposited up to the line Ossendrecht - Bergen op Zoom - Steenberg - Roosendaal and Oudenbosch. (Zoom here means hilly ridge or bank of the river.) West of this line the landscape changed again and again until recently, which proves that this part of the Brabant soil is very young indeed.

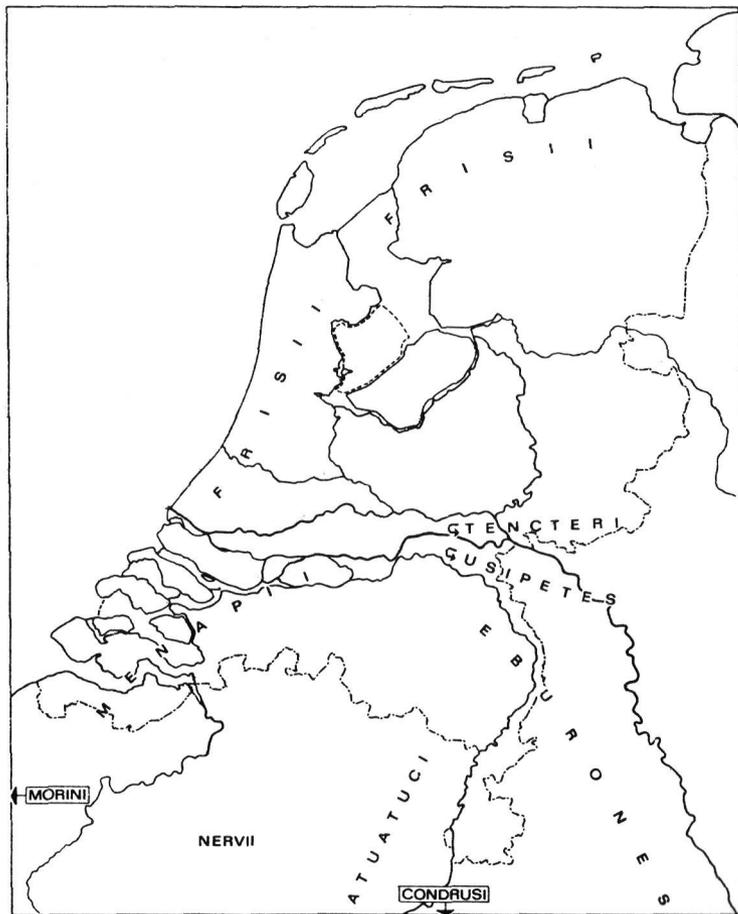
It's hard to tell exactly when people started settling down in these regions. Even nowadays excavations add to our knowledge in connection with Brabant's prehistory. It is likely that the southern part of the later Brabant was inhabited in the Stone Age about 1800 B.C. The discovery of the famous 'King's Grave' near Oss feeds the supposition that Celts must have lived there. From other sources, however, we know that Germanic tribes invaded the Brabant-country during the last few centuries before Christ.

Recorded history in the southern low lands can be traced back to the time when the powerful Roman warriors kept on moving north with historiographers and chroniclers in their wake.

In Roman times

'Rare jongens, die Romeinen!' (Odd chaps, these Romans!)
(*Ambiorix, quoted by Asterix*)

The last century before Christ was a turbulent period for our part of Europe. Northern tribes were fighting southerners after they themselves had been driven out of their residential quarters. Even in



Dutch tribes in the times of Julius Caesar

Rome, the mighty capital of the Roman Empire, something was rotten. The times were ripe for a fearless leader: Gaius Julius Caesar. He had fought his way up to the highest position in Rome. He intended to expand the Empire. This was one of the reasons for his armies to go north-east in about 60 B.C. His march on Gallia was successful till 57 B.C. Then the Romans encountered a sort of guerilla warfare they could not cope with. The enemies were most mobile nomad tribes.

The people between Maas and Rhine, the Eburones, concluded a treaty with the Romans. The tribe would not survive this alliance. In the winter of 54 B.C. there was a great lack of food. The Roman troops were dispersed over various army camps. Five cohorts were billeted on the inhabitants of Aduatuca (probably the later Tongres). The rebellious leaders Ambiorix and Catuvolcus managed to lure the Roman soldiers from the protection of their camps and killed them in substantial numbers. The revenge came from Caesar himself: the Eburones as a nation became extinct. Hardly more than a name - if remembered at all - remained from this nation.

In 49 B.C. Caesar proclaimed entire Gallia and Belgia, including Maas- and Rhine-estuaries, Roman areas. The great leader had to return to Rome where unrest of more importance to him was brewing.

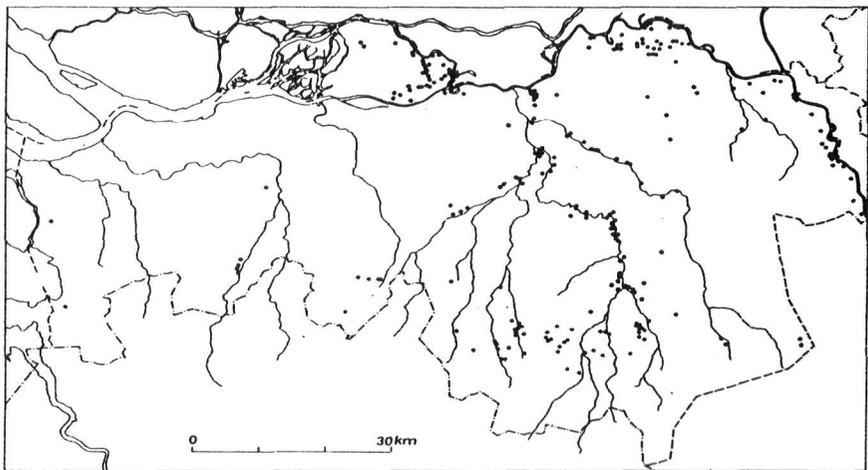
Meanwhile tribes were still on the move. Between 50 and 12 B.C. Batavians and Caninefates settled in the low lands between Maas and Rhine.

Under the rule of Augustus the 'barbarians' in the north met with Nero Claudius Drusus whose assignment was the elimination of the constant threat of the intruding tribes. He concluded alliances with several tribes, who in turn had to supply soldiers for his own legions.



*Ambiorix statue in Tongres
(photo Wim Boselie)*

Thus the Province of Gallia Belgica, stretching from the Channel to the Rhine, was founded. For the sake of proper rule the province was divided into districts called 'civitates'. In 'our' surroundings there were e.g. the civitas Menaporium with its Castellum Menaporium (Kassel), the civitas Morinorum with Tarvanna (Terwaan) and the civitas Tungrorum with Aduatuca Tungrorum (Tongres). As far as Roman rule was concerned Brabant was affiliated with Tongres. In the beginning of our era the Romans were beaten by the Cherusk leader Herman (lat. Arminius). The main cause of the revolt was the heavy tax the Romans imposed on their fellow-tribes. Many uprisings were to follow. In 68 A.D. Julius Civilis, a Batavian educated as a Roman commander, revolted against his superiors. He wanted more freedom for the Batavians. In the end he was beaten by Cerialis and his gigantic military forces. The Roman Empire would last for nearly two more centuries, thus causing an important cultural impregnation.



Population in the second century AD

Many vestiges of romanisation are found in North Brabant. In the hamlet of Halder, between Vught and St. Michielsgestel, a treasure of over 4.000 Roman coins was found in 1962. In Esch, 's-Hertogenbosch, Riel, Baarle-Nassau, Terheijden, 's-Gravenmoer and many other places significant archaeological discoveries were made, all of them going back to the times of the Roman occupation.

Altars were found in Rijsbergen and Ruimel (again near St. Michielsgestel), statues were discovered in Esch and Veldhoven and remainders of settlements were excavated in Cuyk and near Heusden.

As a reminiscence of the Roman warriors there was a spectacular discovery in the region of De Peel, the marshy expanse around Deurne: a skeleton in armour and remnants of a rider, with a helmet, a cloak-pin, a spur, a shoe and a dagger-sheath.

Most of the archaeological finds go back to our era, when Gallia was divided in Aquitania, Celtica and Belgica. Later on Belgica was split by Domitian (81-96) into another two provinces: Germania Superior and Germania Inferior. Cologne was to become the capital of the latter province.

Near important crossroads and fords in the rivers 'villae' would come into existence. The Roman roads were leading up to the northern low lands as far as the sea near Leyden. In order to defend these roads the Romans built a great many 'castra' and 'castella' as fortifications. One of these was Cuyk (castellum Ceuculum).

Remains of a Roman watch tower were excavated in Veldhoven and a 'villa' near Hoogeloon. Burial mounds (tumuli) were discovered in the eastern part of North Brabant near Esch. There have been places of cult in Oss (Ussen), Empel, Hoogeloon and Alphen-Riel.

The Roman culture in Brabant is thought to be essentially native. Evidence of Roman military presence is rare, probably there have been hardly any soldiers or Roman colonists. We would rather think in terms of romanisation: an integration of the native-tribal society into the Roman system.

'In Batavia', according to Roman records, 'Emperor Constantius Chlorus beat the rebels in 306'. This was about the last Roman victory gained here. Roman rule was broken in 361 when Franks, Saxons and Allemans invaded Gallia. The Rhine no longer was a natural boundary, the Roman roads were not safe any more. By the end of the 4th century AD Roman rule had virtually vanished from the low lands.

A Name of its Own

In the beginning of our era 'Taxandria', the name of the region north-east of the old Brussels Brabant-core, was older and therefore more appropriate as far as the present province of North Brabant is concerned.

The name of Brabant derives from an old region ('pagus' or county) whose origin is Merovingian. In 633 it was mentioned in a chronicle at St. Baaf's Abbey in Ghent. This so-called 'Pagus Brabantensis' (from *Brac* = *swampy* and *Bant* = *border*) was bounded by the river Scheldt in the west and north-west, by the river Dijle in the east, the district of Taxandria in the north-east and the region Hainault in the south.

In a geographical sense the term 'Brabant' gradually got a wider purport and it moved up into north-eastern direction.

In the ninth century the vague notion 'Brabant' was subdivided into four small counties: Lovon, Bruxella, Alost and Malines, in which we can easily distinguish the later names of Louvain, Brussels, Aalst and Mechlin. Their frontiers were not very distinct though. As early as that period Brabant must have been moving in eastward direction, for Mechlin and Louvain were added to the Brabant-region. This was a reflection of the political swing from west to east, from the old Neustria to Austrasia.

When you look up 'Brabant' in the Dictionary of People and Places (Collins, 1975) you will find: '*Brabant, historical region of Belgium, Netherlands. Duchy from 12th century. Prosperous medieval centre; Louvain, Brussels were capitals. In Spanish Netherlands from 1477; divided 1830; Brabant is Belgian province, North Brabant is Dutch province.*'

This very concise report requires some extension.

A Medieval Centre

The Duchy of Brabant dates from approximately 1000. The Duke of Brussels died childless and his brother-in-law, Lambert, Count of Louvain, inherited everything. Louvain and Brabant were united. Later Antwerp was added and then Brabant became the old region roughly consisting of the present-day Belgian provinces of Brabant and Antwerp including Dutch 'North Brabant'.

The Duke of Lorraine got the title of Duke of Brabant in 1106. In these times Brabant was enclosed by the rivers Maas, Scheldt and Sambre and the counties of Namur, Hainault, Flanders, Holland and the bishopric of Liège.

Henry I, Duke of Brabant, built a fortress in the north of his realm, the independent state of Brabant. Here was a village on the Duke's wooded estate alongside the river Maas, named 'des Hertogen Bosch' (Duke's Wood). This rather dignified name of 's-Hertogenbosch is quite a mouthful and therefore mostly shortened to 'Den Bosch'. In 1185 Den Bosch, nowadays the provincial capital, was granted its municipal charter. In the twelfth century this small town became the capital of the 'Meierij', roughly the north-eastern part of Brabant. 's-Hertogenbosch ranked number four among the major cities inside Brabant. In those days seignorial Breda and the Marquisate of Bergen op Zoom were under Antwerp rule.

During these feudal times the Duchy of Brabant was one of the leading districts in the low lands of north-western Europe from several perspectives. For commercial and cultural reasons the dukes realized that trade and cities were important. Duke Jan I who won the Battle of Woeringen (1288) gave Brabant its largest acreage. From that moment the Rhine-Scheldt-route was in Brabant hands. Especially in the 13th century new cities arose like Eindhoven, Breda and Bergen op Zoom. (It should be remembered that the 'Langstraat' and the north-west were to become parts of Brabant as late as the 19th century.)

The Duchy of Brabant was a powerful and rich region during those times. This affluence stemmed from the presence of some important trade routes and the significance of its many castles and fortifications.



*The Great Church of Breda
(photo Nelleke de Laat)*

In 1355 Johanna, daughter of Duke Jan III, succeeded her father. The cities demanded 'a gleeful entry' ('blyde incomste') in which she promised to maintain certain privileges. Then the cities gave their pledge of loyalty in return. This type of 'constitution' was going to last for the next three centuries.

Burgundy was a mighty governor of Brabant in the fifteenth century. This was the golden age for Brabant as reflected in magnificent churches, townhalls and cities. In the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and in less well-known literature these glorious times were also immortalised.

The year 1430 was of crucial importance for Brabant. The Duke of Brabant died childless. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, now also became Duke of Brabant. In retrospect this heralded the beginning of the disintegration of Brabant. The Dukes of Burgundy chose Brussels for their capital and made it the administrative centre of their realm.

During the Spanish-Habsburg reign of Charles V (1500-1558) Brabant got involved in several wars. The situation worsened rapidly. The first signs of dissatisfaction with the deterioration were couched in petitions to the sovereign, but soon they were followed by far more extreme manifestations of discontent. Brabant was going to be heavily taxed and war-ridden for a long time to come.

A War of Liberation for Eighty Years

The 'Eighty Years' War', the Tachtigjarige Oorlog, was going to last from 1568 till 1648. For Holland the final outcome was religious freedom, political independence and economic prosperity. The protestant Reformation also took the form of a political revolution, which led to antagonism between Holland and Brabant. Traces of this historical event are visible to the present day.

The translation of the Bible contributed to a swift distribution of the new religion of Calvin and Luther. But there was a lack of appreciation for this from the side of the Holy Roman Emperors and Kings of Spain, Charles V and later Philip II (1527-1598). They considered themselves sole representatives of God. Therefore they demanded unity of religion in their realm and prohibited protestantism. From the very beginning even the Roman Catholics in the southern Netherlands were not very much inclined to cooperate with Spain. It was evident that they did not feel at ease under the Spanish regime. They thought the Spanish far too strict and severe towards the new religion. But the lines of division between Catholics and Protestants were not always easy to draw. For example, at a certain stage of the war 's-Hertogenbosch turned protestant, whereas Amsterdam remained a bulwark of Catholicism.

Two years before the actual start of the war with Spain, in 1566, the 'Beeldenstorm' ('Iconoclasm') was sweeping the country. This revolt started from religious sentiments, but was going to be meaningful in many other respects. In times of poverty and hardship it was more than just a protest against the wealth of the church, in the course of which many magnificent church-interiors in North Brabant were destroyed.

In the year 1567 the Spanish Duke of Alva was commissioned to put into practice the 'Blood Council': during this major endeavour to suppress the revolt more than a thousand people were sentenced to death. But in the end these outrageous verdicts had an adverse effect: the people of the low lands found a common enemy and would stick together.

Local aristocrats turned against their emperor. William the Silent (of Orange) was the first to take charge. He was to be followed by other members of his family as 'stadhouders'.

Brabant, in particular, was afflicted as it was alternately looted by the Spanish soldiers and the Dutch revolutionaries. On top of all this misfortune came the devastating consequences of the Plague.

After Alva had left in 1573, the Duke of Parma was asked to restore the Spanish regime in the Netherlands. He was a better diplomat and gradually regained the people's confidence.

Many southerners migrated to the north. The 'Geuzen' (Protestant 'Sea Beggars') were going to challenge the Spaniards and their hegemony on the seas. Of vital importance for the Dutch revolution was of course the destruction of the Armada by the English in 1585. The naval supremacy of the Spanish was put an end to.

The establishment of Protestantism in the Netherlands was of enormous significance for Brabant. Because of political and military developments the people from 'Staats-Brabant', as the region was called from 1585 until 1795, went through a dark period.

All the major positions were destined for the Protestants, Roman Catholicism as a religion was forbidden. The numerous convents ceased to exist.

The 'Generality' became the name for the lands south of the Maas. They were governed from The Hague by the States-General.

The Netherlands were born as a state and the Dutch became an independent nation. Even today people and culture reflect many of the political, military and social changes which took place in this war of liberation. But the success of a first European Revolution against an absolutist monarch brought glory, fame and a lot of money to Holland, as can be seen in the simple phrase 'Golden Age'.

But Brabant has less glorious feats to remember. The Sieges of Breda and the conquest of 's-Hertogenbosch in 1629 by Frederick Hendrik are no more than minor incidents in a long chain of military events. Permanent warfare and occupation yielded Brabant not a farthing of the wealth and prosperity which is generally associated with the 'Golden Age' of Holland.

At long last peace was made at Munster in 1648. The eighty year war had come to an end. The Republic of the Seven United Provinces (Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelre, Oversticht, Groningen and Friesland) was the new name for the northern Netherlands. The frontier between north and south ran right through Flanders, Brabant and Limburg. Whereas the Dutch Golden Age proceeded in a period of peace poor Brabant was still in troubled waters. It was divided: the north belonged to the new republic, the south remained in Spanish hands.

The bigger part of Brabant with the cities of Antwerp, Brussels and Louvain remained under Spanish rule and was called 'Spanish Brabant'.



View on Breda, 1638

As mentioned before, from 1648 till 1795 Brabant belonged to the so-called 'Generaliteit'. The south was governed by the States-General; hence the name 'Staats-Brabant'. It was a country deprived of rights, but burdened with duties. Brabant south of the river Maas was looked upon and treated as war-loot ('wingewest'), conquered from the Spaniards. It was not considered to be part of the new country: the status of a colony was all there was in it.

Some Contributions from France

In Dutch history the year 1672 is called the 'year of disaster' (Rampjaar) because the French invaded the country and war was declared by England, France, Munster and Cologne. For the Roman Catholics in North Brabant, however, this cloud had its silver lining: there was a short period of freedom of religion. This minor privilege was dearly bought: in the end the price of the French occupation was probably too high.

From the end of the Eighty Years' War onwards, the French were a real threat: they conquered several parts in the south of the Netherlands. 'Staats-Brabant' was important for the Dutch Republic: it was a military line of defence against France because of its fortresses like Grave, 's-Hertogenbosch, Breda, Bergen op Zoom and Steenberg. Brabant used to be the north of the south, but from 1648 onwards this was reversed step by step. It gradually changed into the south of the north.

In 1713 the major powers (England, France and the Republic) decided that Spanish Brabant should be put under Habsburg Rule. There was hardly any prosperity in Austrian Brabant, but still its population was better off than in northern Staats-Brabant.

It is quite understandable that Brabant was crying for 'Liberté, Fraternité et Egalité', even though the French were not regarded as liberators. There was no reason to trust anyone any more.

In 1794 the French had conquered practically the whole of 'Staats-Brabant'. A year later 'Batavian Brabant' (Bataafsch Brabant) was officially granted the same rights as all the other provinces.

In 1796 the province of North Brabant was officially recognized. 'Hollands Brabant' (Dutch Brabant) was united in 1805; Zevenbergen, Hooge and Lage Zwaluwe, Geertruidenberg and Heusden as well as the old 'enclaves' Bokhoven, Boxmeer, Gemert, Megen and Ravenstein were added.

Once More Separation

When Napoleon exited from the European stage in 1815 after his defeat at Waterloo, the Vienna Congress stipulated the northern and southern lowlands be united and be given the name of 'Kingdom of the Netherlands', ruled once more by a representative from the House of Orange, King William I. This reunion called for a new constitution; the frontiers of the two provinces of Brabant had to be marked. This was the moment when the southern Dutch province got the name of North Brabant in order to avoid more confusion.

The overall situation was close to desperate. North Brabant was isolated and neglected. On the endless moorlands there were myriads of cart tracks. What little roads there were, were in a terrible shape. In the east the notorious swamps of De Peel extended, the north and west consisted of inaccessible marshlands along the big rivers, in the south there were wastelands and sand-drifts.

There is a report on the state of reclamation of lands in East Brabant dating back from 1810 which runs as follows: *'Il n'y a pas de pays ou règne tant de misère que parmi cette classe laborieuse de la plus grande parti de ce département...'* In short: nowhere the situation, especially for the working people, was worse than here.

So a high priority was given to providing an infrastructure for transport and communication. Once the overland connection with Antwerp had been paved the city of Breda developed rapidly into an important traffic-junction. The new roads contributed to the development of industry. Spectacular progress was made when the 'Zuid-Willemsvaart', a canal in the east of North Brabant, was dug (1822-1826).

After the occupation and subsequent annexation by France, Belgium was not going back to Habsburg Rule. At the same time the people living in the part of the world we now call Belgium were not very eager to join the north. They had very little confidence in William I and did not think of him as a genius. Moreover the union with the northern low lands meant automatically heavier taxes. William I clashed with the clergy of the south. The Roman Catholics did not want the king to interfere in religious matters. The introduction of Dutch as major language aroused anger and resistance as well.

In 1830 riots broke out in several Belgian provinces. Labourers demanded lower prices for bread and more employment. They saw the oppressor in the 'Dutchman'. Distrust was widespread and some people even refused to learn how to read and write in Dutch 'because this was only meant to make them Protestants'. In that period French was a common language in the south and it was going to retain that status for a long period. In fact the Belgians have been waging their 'linguistic conflict' ('taalstrijd') to the present day and they have not found their '*Waterl'eau*' yet. Also in Northern Brabant French was to remain popular as the language of the well-to-do classes for many more decades. A strong French influence in the Brabant dialects can still be traced as we will see later on.

But Belgium was not yet an independent state. A war of independence did not fit into the schemes of William and once more Northern Brabant was going to pay a substantial share of the price. During the mobilisation in 1831 many Dutch soldiers found their quarters in North Brabant. For the Brabant people the disadvantages outnumbered the advantages: the soldiers deemed the Brabant crofters traitors because they were Roman Catholics just like the enemy. Poverty and unemployment kept increasing because no goods could be delivered in Belgium any more. Agriculture and cattle-breeding were hit by inundations, because the dikes were pierced and sluices were opened for military reasons.

At last, in 1839, the Kingdom of Belgium was recognized. The soldiers left North Brabant where the gloomy forties started with a crop failure. This led to sheer famine. North Brabant once again relapsed into being a forgotten border-area.

A Roman Catholic Identity

After William II had been proclaimed king in 1840 the situation gradually improved. The convents discarded their illegal cloak and got some rights at long last. Joannes Zwijsen, a priest and a southern friend of the king, achieved some lasting contributions in this development. Later on Zwijsen became arch-bishop of Utrecht and bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch. In that way he symbolized the connection between north and south.



Praying Brabant woman in old-fashioned costume (photo Harry van Liempd)

In 1848 Europe went through a period of revolutions. In the Netherlands a new constitution was introduced by Thorbecke. Included in this constitution, which was widely supported by the Catholics, was the phrase 'freedom of union'. This meant that the Catholics were free to organize themselves on a religious basis again, for example by the foundation of new convents. Negotiations with the Pope were resumed. Their ultimate result was the foundation of four bishoprics, two of which were in North Brabant: 's-Hertogenbosch and Breda. Now the situation gradually improved for the Roman Catholics.

Between 1795 and 1913 more than a hundred churches were pulled down and more than 400 were built. When these churches passed into the hands of the Protestants after the Reformation they were neglected for a long time. Many a medieval church was demolished. But from now on they were to be replaced, mainly by the new neo-gothic or neo-romanic buildings which can be seen so frequently on a Brabant horizon.

The confrontation of religions continued. A result of the political liberalisation was the possibility of education in schools with a Roman Catholic identity.

Before 1863 secondary education, the stepping-stone between primary school and university, was taught in the old Latin schools (Gemert, Boxmeer) and in the rare grammar-schools (Den Bosch, Bergen op Zoom). In 1863 secondary education was officially introduced. There was a constant lack of classical tuition in Roman Catholic schools. Therefore many students had no other choice but to end up in the seminaries of North Brabant either belonging to the bishopric or the congregations. Names like Oudenbosch, Heeswijk, Beekvliet and Ypelaar were to become legendary.

Not until the episcopal charge of 1868 did some Catholic 'normal schools' arise. The foundation of the episcopal training college for teachers in Den Bosch in 1895 was quite a remarkable feat in that respect. Teachers for all branches of education came from the Roman Catholic Courses (de Katholieke Leergangen), the predecessor of the present Brabant University of Tilburg.

The labourers in the factories were badly off in those days. The wages they earned were so low they would have filled even Dickens with disbelief. A direct consequence was that women and children had to work along with the men in order to make a living. Few protests were heard among the meek Brabant people. From the villages they moved to the cities where the factories were, even if the expected improvement turned out to be an illusion. They worked from five o'clock in the morning for 15 hours, Sunday being the only day off.

Many factories arose in North Brabant: textile factories in Helmond and the 'cottonopolis' Tilburg, light-bulb factories of Philips in Eindhoven and cigar-factories in 's-Hertogenbosch were of major importance. In West-Brabant in 1894 there were so many sugar-beets that people spoke of Brabant's 'sugar-corner'; there were more than twenty sugar-factories.

But the 'silent resignation and calm contentment', stable qualities in the Brabant-man would be substituted by a gradual self-assurance: the labourers started to get organized and the trade unions were to bring about many changes. Also the farmers started to have themselves organized, be it mainly in the similar way as the labourers under the guidance of the Catholic Church.

At the turn of the century North Brabant was the most industrious province of the Netherlands. The extensive moorlands were reclaim-

ed with the help of a new invention: artificial manure. Cattle breeding was soaring and farmers started to cooperate. Cooperative dairy-factories and cooperative trading-companies were the result.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Roman Catholic farmers had a prominent leader in the unifying sense: Father Gerlachus van den Elsen, therefore nicknamed 'the Farmers' Apostle'. Both the disinterest and fright of the farmers and the resistance of tradesmen had to be overcome. Van den Elsen committed himself energetically and entered several Boards of Cooperative Companies, thus providing the church with some power and influence.

The bond between church and crofter was strengthened. 'Credit and cooperation' became the keywords for agricultural Brabant. Van den Elsen provided a basis for the Cooperative Rural Bank (Boerenleenbank). Also the cooperative purchase- and sales-companies like CHV (Coöperatieve Handels Vereniging) and CAV (Coöperatieve Aan- en Verkoopvereniging) were of tremendous importance for agricultural developments.

Turning Brabant from brown to green

In 1888 De Nederlandsche Heidemaatschappij (the Dutch Company for Moorland Reclamation) was founded and it started work vigorously in Limburg and Brabant. The old 'brown' Brabant, a term that originates from Dr. Verberne, developed into 'green' Brabant. Sixty years before, only fifty percent of the Brabant-lands were cultivated. On two and a half thousand square kilometres a hundred thousand men, women and children tried to make both ends meet. In 1890 only a quarter of Brabant's soil was still waste land and large reclamations were once more on their way.

The Brabant world was already changing intensely when in 1914 the First World War broke out and hundreds of thousands of Belgian refugees with their scarce possessions crossed the border, chiefly at Roosendaal, destination unknown. Holland managed to maintain its neutrality and to avoid military participation in this war only with great difficulty.

The overall situation seemed rather static, even though some towns were growing spectacularly and roads were improved in order to give more scope to the 'new' means of conveyance, i.e. the bike and the car. Overcrowded trains and buses travelled from one region to the other and inland barges navigated to and fro.

At first sight the villages and towns, the farms surrounded by their cornfields, the woods and heaths did not seem different from a century ago. But that stability in landscape and popular mentality was deceptive. Presently the major clash with other cultural designs and ideas was to start. North Brabant opened up.

In the south of 'De Peel' the Wessem-Nederweert Canal was dug that later linked up with the Wilhelmina Canal, opened in 1923. Important traffic-bridges were built such as the one across the Bergse Maas near Geertruidenberg.

North Brabant was the first province that took the production and distribution of electricity in its own hands: in 1914 the Provincial North Brabant Electricity Company or PNEM (=Provinciale Noordbrabantse Electriciteits-Maatschappij) was founded.

Labour-intensive activity could thrive among the poor and numerous population. Between the years 1920 and 1940 the number of inhabitants increased with no less than fifty percent and gradually a change in mentality manifested itself.

The clergy were dominant in ruling the material lives and the Roman Catholic unions had supreme power. With their support the employers were able to maintain their low wages and long working-hours much longer than in the north. In Brabant there was much strife for improvement, it is true, but there were no serious efforts to overthrow the existing order, like the socialist movements that manifested themselves in the north.

Many workmen were still scantily paid so that they were forced to do all kinds of extra chores such as broombinding, basket-weaving, clog-making and chair-mending. About the year 1930 more than 33.000 farmers had some subsistence; the cultivated area had grown with 25.000 hectares. The marshy lands of De Peel were used for the cultivation of buckwheat and peat-making. Although this definitely attributed to more economic activity in this thinly populated area, the peat-diggers still eked out a scanty livelihood. After 1920 small villages arose here like Ysselstein, De Rips and Terraveen (later on called Odiliapeel).

The Brabant farmer, though better organized than ever before, was still very vulnerable to the caprices of the economy, as he soon was going to find out. After the Crash of 1929 banks got into trouble when clients had to take out huge sums in order to comply with their financial duties, companies were hollowed out and the economic machinery got stuck. The Brabant sharecroppers soon fell victim to the deadlock in commerce. On the sandy soils the farmers were utterly dependent on the supply of fertilizer. Many small farmers were compelled to go and look for a job elsewhere, either with major fellow-farmers or in the industrial enterprises. Unemployment skyrocketed so that the government devised special programs to provide jobs. But income had sunk to an unbearable minimum. The industry had to curtail its expenses drastically. In 1931 the major market for the woollen materials, England, was lost.

The year 1932 turned into a disaster year for the industry. Holland overflowed with cheap products from abroad and was ousted from many important markets.

Nonetheless, the density in the Brabant towns kept growing and the acreage of deserted and unused ground was diminishing. The annoyances of 'environmental pollution' were not yet evident. The textile factories and the tanneries were the worst polluters as we were to find out later.

Famous examples of industrial expanse survive to this present day. Philips in Eindhoven had already developed into a concern of renown. In 1892 the annual production and sale amounted to 11000 bulbs, in 1930 this had grown to as many as 70 million. In 1918 Philips had started with the manufacture of radio-bulbs, ten years later radio-sets were added. The year 1990 has shown that Philips will have 'to dim its lights' a little. In the shade of this giant concern the Van Doorne Brothers set up a small workshop with 28 labourers in order to produce trailers and semi-trailers. Despite the on-coming misery of crisis the company kept growing. In 1934 already 300 men were employed with DAF and many more were to follow.

Between 1913 and 1933 Holland spent two milliard guilders on public works. Huge projects were the Zuyder Zee-works, the improvement of the national road-system and the construction of bridges. For Brabant it was utterly important that a start be made with the canalisation of the Maas River. From time immemorial this river had twisted like a capricious, unpredictable stream through the Brabant land and there were many bends, especially near Grave and in de Maaskant. Whenever there was heavy rainfall the river would swell to a tremendous mass of water. The whirling water would force its way beyond the river-bed, clashing and foaming onto the dikes and the overfalls.

In 1917 a big part of the Brabant Maasland was flooded and nine years later another flood took its toll from the farming land around the river. In 1929 Ir. Lely whose name is a synonym for the 'Zuyderzee-works' was commissioned to canalise the river. Bends were cut away, dikes were strengthened, river-beds were shifted and overfalls were closed down.

In order to provide people with employment this project was started off by de Nederlandsche Heide Maatschappij (the Dutch Moorland Reclamation Society). It is hard to imagine that on places where the water now flows many a farm could be seen in former times. For shipping purposes dams and locks were built at Sambeek, Grave, Heerwaarden and Lith. At last the north-eastern part of Brabant had been delivered from freshets and floods. In memory of this victory a monument was erected near Beers. It has an inscription of a small poem by Dr. L.C. Michels that reads in Dutch:

*'Geen beter bate dan de kost
die ons van overlast verlost
En van de Beerse Overlaat
niets dan 't gedenken overlaat'*

*No better benefit than the 'salt'
that delivers us from annoyance
and leaves of the Beers Overfall
mere remembrance*

Meanwhile the pinch of poverty and unemployment was still felt in these days of recession. Now that the episode of relative prosperity after the First World War had been followed by economic stagnation, the tensions gradually increased. Initially the employers looked for a solution by means of prolongation of the working-week. According to many people there was economic and religious bondage in Brabant at the time.

The latter adjective was indeed aimed at the clergy, the church, that still held on to conservative ideas which were imposed on the catholic labourers. Small wonder that there was a strong desire among the workmen to get organised. 'Not religion and socialism, but religion and capitalism were at daggers drawn', leading catholics proclaimed in the labour-circles.

The controversy between employers and employees was intensified. The fraternal concord between capital and labour, the togetherness and catholic solidarity was not the idyllic affair which is so often depicted by some clergymen. In 1925 the Roman Catholic Labourers Movement (KAB = Katholieke Arbeiders Beweging) was founded, which implied that from then on there would be an all-embracing organisation for the five separate diocesan labour unions.

Rapid mechanisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, reclamations, crises and rebellions are characteristic for Brabant in the Thirties. The Moerdijk Bridge, built in 1936, contributed to the growing flow of traffic between Holland and Brabant. Moerdijk comprises the separation between north and south. In the phrase 'below Moerdijk' or 'below the rivers', a kind of 'mini down under', the inhabitants of Brabant and Limburg are incorporated.

The War with Germany

At the end of the Thirties Monsignor De Brouwer, the mentor of the new periodical 'Brabantia Nostra', issued the statement that Brabant was the land of the Brabant people and that Brabantine stood for catholic: 'We consider you, non-Brabant people, ali good folks, but then aren't we also? ... We are Brabanters and we intend to stay that way'.

The magazine 'Brabantia Nostra' quickly acquired a broad support and this not merely because poets glorified the province where faith was still alive and kicking.

The stirring times also account for the fact that some people expected more salvation from a new fascist order. The success of Mussolini in Italy and the brown hordes in Hitler-Germany could not but appeal to the imagination of romantic young people who hung on to high ideals. Thus the catholic fascism made its entry.

Almost simultaneously, namely in 1931, the National Socialist Union (Nationaal Socialistische Beweging: N.S.B.) was founded. Their leader Mussert got little or no support in North Brabant: the Dutch bishops had already banned both fascism and national-socialism. But after the German invasion in 1940 the N.S.B. would seize the opportunity; they became the worst collaborators.

On November 4th 1939 warnings were given that a German invasion was imminent. In the next six months this alert was to be repeated for no less than eighteen times. From May 10th 1940 onwards the poor defence of Holland soon became evident. As for North Brabant, the General Staff had high hopes that the Peel-Raam position on the border with Limburg would be able to supply a major share in the defence-projects.

Beyond this the Third Army Corps, assisted by a Peel-division and a Light Infantry Division, was stationed here after the mobilisation. However, the major drawback of this positioning was the fact that it did not reach as far as the Belgian defence-line along the Albert Canal.



De Peel (photo Jan Verhoeff)

The initial German aggressive activities focussed on the railway-bridge across the Maas near Gennip and the railway Boxel-Goch. This bridge was necessary to force a quick breach in the Peel-Raam position. An armoured train and a goods-train with an army-battalion were prepared to attack. In order to secure a straight march from North Brabant on to Holland the Germans intended to have the Moerdijk-bridges conquered by parachutists. Thus the defence of the Maas-lines and the Peel-Raam position had to face strong German forces. The bridges between Roermond and Grave all went sky-high, but the railway-bridge near Gennip fell into the enemy's hands undamaged, which was of pivotal importance. The Dutch defence, in bunkerettes with outdated rolling stock, soon had to withdraw from North Brabant. After the successful airborne landings near the Moerdijk-bridges Brabant now provided the Germans with an ideal transit for the attack on Belgium.

Consequently North Brabant already was occupied territory when the unequal battle over Holland at the Grebbeberg was still to come.

After the Rotterdam bombardment on May 14th 1940 the Dutch army capitulated. Four tough years were dawning for all of Holland. Some key words from those dark days were: curfew, black-out (in order to eliminate landmarks for allied aircraft), labour commitment (compulsory labour in German factories), shelterers, deportation,

concentration-camps, resistance, pilots-relief, illegal pamphlets, English (secret) transmitters, hostages, strikes, collaborators, food-rationing, strong arm boys, razzias.

During the German occupation groups of prominent Dutchmen were frequently put in internment-camps as hostages.

By capturing the social and intellectual elite the Germans hoped to curb the Dutch resistance movement. Their lives served as a collateral security. If after major resistance campaigns the perpetrators did not report, hostages would be shot. This threat was carried out two times. Although this can hardly have been the intention of the Germans the 'imprisonment' of a national elite in Sint Michielsgestel also created the conditions for a unity between them, which had never existed in Holland before. In the camps they experienced a common fate as hostages. As representatives of extremely different political and religious convictions they were able to sink their differences. To the present day traces can be found of the lasting cultural and political effects of this social network which was created by the Germans. This feeling of togetherness broke through the denominational segregation of the Dutch polity.

In 1942 the Germans decided to replace the Amersfoort 'KZ-Lager' by a new camp near Vught. Contrary to Westerbork the Vught concentration camp ('Konzentrationslager Herzogenbusch') was run in the 'genuine' German fashion: pitilessly. The camp had two objectives: a concentration (and labour) camp for non-Jews and a transit camp ('Durchgangslager') for Jews. Until its evacuation in September 1944 almost eleven thousand people were held captive there.

An exploitation of North Brabant was vital for the German war industry. Its economic and military importance was sufficient ground for the Allies to bomb out the Eindhoven Philips Plant.

Particularly the Eindhoven companies DAF and Philips were of crucial importance. They 'received' a large number of military orders. It is not only the historians who still have a problem in giving an interpretation of the borderline between collaboration, cooperation and passive resistance as could be found in Brabant during these days.

Initially an effective or even organized resistance did not exist. In general there was an attitude of reserve. In Holland the hard core of

resistance was formed by people with a strong political conviction like the communists, but also by people from a traditional protestant background.

Due to their location the southern provinces were an important operational sphere for illegal borderline activities such as the 'pilots relief'. This implied more than only support for allied airplane crews who had been shot down during the air-raids on Germany. Also French prisoners of war after their escape from German captivity were helped on their way back. The legendary 'Bob' Bouwman set up a complete network of people in Limburg and Eastern Brabant who were willing to give shelter to runaway soldiers.

But also Jews and people from other parts of Holland had reasons to hide in Brabant. In the spring of 1943 there were successive strikes because all former Dutch soldiers had to report as Prisoners of War (POWs) and thus lay their fate in the hands of the enemy. Many sabotage and resistance moves followed; now the underground work really got going. Alas, in the last few weeks prior to the liberation scores of resistance people had to pay with their lives.

The liberation of Brabant from the German yoke started in September 1944 and brought American, British, Canadian and Polish soldiers, some of whom can still be found in a next generation rooted in Brabant. The first major military event is remembered as operation 'Market Garden'. Initiated by General Montgomery, its aim was creating a traffic route ('Corridor') through Brabant. In the north Holland had to be liberated and at the same time Hitler-Germany was meant to be harassed.

In Brabant the American 101st Division was to land near Son and Veghel on September 17th 1944 with the objective to conquer the bridges across the Wilhelmina-Canal and the Zuid-Willemsvaart. The American 82nd Division, scheduled to land south of Nijmegen, would have to tackle the Maas-bridge near Grave. The bridge near Son exploded, but the one near Veghel and the Maas-bridge near Grave were quickly captured by the Americans. In great haste a Bailey-bridge could be built near Son and now the Allies possessed the ever so elementary corridor, but the route proved to be most vulnerable. Hence the nickname of 'Hell's Highway'.

After three days the Allies conquered the bridge across the river Waal near Nijmegen. The main Rhine-bridge near Arnhem could not be seized, however, and consequently Market Garden had failed. Twenty years later this heroic tragedy was filmed in 'A Bridge too Far'.

After this setback the Allies started the liberation of the areas nearest to the Corridor. On September 25th General Hodges, commander of the American First Army, was commissioned to purge the occupied territory as far as the Maas. The American 7th Armour-division, however, was stopped by the German Fallschirmarmee near Overloon.

As late as October 12th the attack on Overloon was resumed with British support and five days later Venray was within reach. The fierce battle of Overloon is remembered to the present day in a National War Museum at Overloon. To commemorate the battle for the Corridor there is an Airborne Museum at Veghel, called Bevrijdende Vleugels (Liberating Wings) and another in Best.

On October 16th the Canadians blocked the vital Kreekrak-dam. The operation between the Corridor and the Maas ended in a narrow victory, and considerable damage across the entire area.

The liberation of Den Bosch also entailed a lot of heavy combat. On October 27th 1944 its liberation had become a fact, but for this the city had had to pay dearly. Many buildings, like the Central Station had been annihilated, houses destroyed and hundreds of lives taken.

Also on the 27th the Canadian liberators were welcomed in Roosendaal. Two days later the Polish Armoured Division belonging to the British Second Army took Breda. On the last day of October Geertruidenberg came into allied hands.

On the ninth of November North Brabant south of the Maas was liberated. Despite the evacuations there were many deaths among the population. More than a hundred churches and monasteries were destroyed, as well as thousands of houses. Bridges had disappeared, factories had stopped altogether for lack of fuel and raw materials. And even then the Brabanters could not but count themselves lucky. They had not fallen prey to the total looting as it was undertaken by the Germans at the end of the war.

With the liberation of the south the work of the illegality came to an end in Brabant. But many former resistance-men now started to participate in line-crossing, the maintenance of connections (particularly via the impenetrable swampy area of the Biesbosch) between occupied and liberated Holland. From the still occupied Land of Altena (in Brabant) radio-contacts were maintained.

The episode of reconstruction

Heavily damaged Brabant slowly emerged from the war. Sooner than Holland, which had to wait almost another year for its liberation and which had to survive the final stage of a tragic 'Hunger Winter', Brabant had the opportunity of a fresh start.

In a short time Brabant got almost 1600 temporary-farms. The overall recovery, the restoration and the new construction made gradual progress, though it would take more than two decades before the housing-shortage had been relieved to a reasonable extent. From London the Dutch government repeated frequently via Radio Orange, that enough food would be available after the liberation, but this promise was not to be carried out. Additionally a lack of transport-capacity increased the pinch of starvation.

In the liberated south relief-campaigns like 'South supports North' were coordinated by the National Relief Action Red Cross. Thousands of people volunteered to help the north. Yet there were also people whose response was less enthusiastic: Had not the north discriminated the south for ages? 'Brabant is dissatisfied', the Maasbode (Maas-Herald) wrote on February 21, 1946. The root of that discontent lay deep. Once more an antagonism that had lasted for centuries came to the surface.

A basic characteristic of this development contains more than a gradual emancipation by the southerner. Whether the elimination of his inferiority complex justifies every manifestation of chauvinism is another issue, but from a historical perspective we should turn to another context. Deeply-rooted as many of these sentiments may be, it takes another approach to gain some understanding of an aspect the Brabanders themselves do not easily talk about. They are 'introverts', which refers to a strong inclination of shutting up in themselves.

'In the field of appreciation Brabant has never held a front position but after the war things have not improved at all. The memory of the liberation-epoch is not exactly a pleasant one. The feeling is that Brabant is ignored. The constitution of boards and corporations does not please the south at all; sometimes there is the impression of being put under guardianship. It is allowed to partake in everything,

but to have as little a say in the matters as possible' (Maasbode, 21 February 1946).

Here a lance was broken for a continuation of the emancipation that had been ignited a century before. This was an expression of self-confidence with a proper sense of self-esteem. The North Brabant population amounted to more than a million, among them quite a few of upper-Moerdijk descent. From an economic viewpoint the province served as a draught-horse and the Brabant man had stopped being the backward farmer from the pre-war depictions.

Whereas the atmosphere in Holland was incidentally defined by a narrow-minded national unity-thought, prominent Brabant men cast glimpses across the border at that part of the old duchy that was situated in Belgium. This was not a mere theory as became evident during the 'Groot-Kempische Cultuur Dagen' (the Cultural Days of the Greater Kempen) in Hilvarenbeek, a manifestation of the Brabant 'writing-fraternity' in particular. The initiative was taken at the Postel Abbey in 1947; 'the pious wish was expressed to establish a regular cordial contact between all those residents at both border-lines who take a genuine interest in the unification of the so closely related parts of the nation both north and south'.

Mayor Meuwese of Hilvarenbeek, curate Van der Heijden and the author Jan Naaijckens were the initiators. Professor Asselbergs, better known by the pen-name of Anton van Duinkerken, was a great stimulator together with Emiel van Hemeldonck. Monsignor Dr. P.C. de Brouwer and Monsignor Dr. K. Cruysberghs from Louvain became patrons.

Almost a quarter of a century Hilvarenbeek was to be the rendez-vous of North and South Brabant, which was of prime importance because of the concrete unity experience between the Low Countries.

'With regard to the socialist trade unions and the socialist press and radio our greatest fear is increasing secularity, irreligiousness and subsequent deterioration and decline of moral standards' said the 1954 Episcopal Charge, which further stipulated that Catholics be inhibited the membership of socialist unions such as the N.V.V., Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (the Dutch League of Trade-Unions). The tide of increasing interference and secularisation was unstoppable. Though in 1948 no less than 90% of the provincial

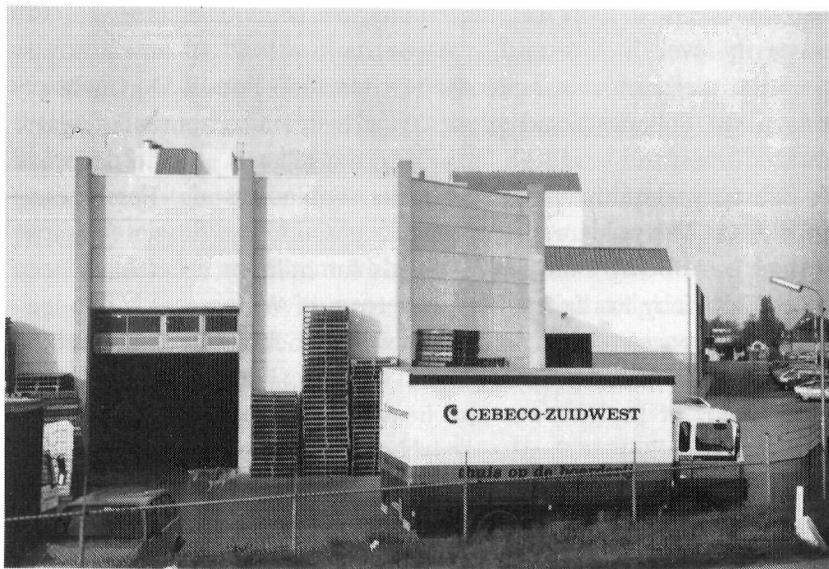
population was Roman Catholic, it was evident in 1980 that Catholicism had lost its grip on a major part of the Brabant society. Within the church rising contradictions between progressive and conservative groups became manifest. After the Vatican Council the former received major support from Monsignor W.M. Bekkers of the bishopric Den Bosch who sincerely pursued oecumenical cooperation. In the Sixties and Seventies the church changed rapidly by discarding a number of ancient institutions and ceremonies. Latin was replaced by the mother-tongue. However, in the Eighties the clock was put back drastically after Rome had intensified its grip on the Dutch ecclesiastical province with the nomination of conservative bishops. Still the atmosphere had already been changed definitely. Radio and television impressed an ever-growing stamp on expressions of culture. It is significant that already in 1965 the bishops should release a statement which said inter alia that 'in the present-day N.V.V. the views with regard to church and religion had become much milder and that an evident pursuit of a better understanding was demonstrable'. The 'at that time enforced prohibition-orders and sanctions' were abolished.

This growing openness towards dissenters could not save the Catholic Church from further crumbling. In 1953 there were some forty orders of priest- and friarhood with an ample 150 monasteries and homes and 370 nunneries. Many religious houses were abandoned and apparently church-buildings could not be maintained either. Social-economic problems rather than ideological ones determined the political relations after the war. Already in 1966 the opposition Protestant-Catholic proved to be outdated for the majority of confessional parties. K.V.P. (Katholieke Volkspartij), A.R.P. (Anti-Revolutionaire Partij) and C.H.U. (Christelijk Historische Unie) assimilated into Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) in 1970.

The Sixties and all that . . .

Particularly in the Sixties there were sweeping changes in agriculture, the means of subsistence that has traditionally largely determined the rustic character in the cultivated part of the province. Due to re-allotments, road-building and city-expansions this changed completely. Mechanisation and agriculture on a large scale were stimulated by the heavy rise of cost of wages and the general increase of the prosperity-level. In the northwest re-structure had got under way in an earlier stage, also owing to the terrible 1953 floods. During heavy gales dikes collapsed and presently a tremendous mass of water pounced upon the land, the farms and the villages. At the daybreak of February 1st the ANP (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau) reported: '...The polders of Ruygenhil and Oude Heijningen (Fijnaart borough) are being swamped. Appeals for military relief have been made. Electricity has failed. The little town of Willemstad is flooded.' The consequences of the catastrophe were shocking. Zeeland and the South Holland Isles were hit most severely, but the entire north-western part of Brabant was also heavily damaged. Hooge and Lage Zwaluwe together with the neighbouring boroughs were waterlogged. Somehow the disaster provided the impetus to the execution of the so-called Delta-project that aimed at the construction of a dam in the Volkerak between North Brabant and Overflakkee. The enclosure of the Haringvliet about 1970 made it possible to create a large drinking-water-reservoir but its shady side was that the former character of a free nature-territory was partially lost. The Land of Altena was also altered by the construction of the highway Utrecht-Hank-Breda and the bridge to Gorcum and the one near Keizersveer. Thus the former isolation was put an end to. Meanwhile the land-exploitations, re-allotments and a change in water-economy exerted a strong impact on agriculture: after 1962 the number of farms was halved within two decades (from 5000 to 2500). As fewer inhabitants could earn a living in agriculture many emigrants decided to cross the Atlantic in the Fifties and Sixties, but they were outnumbered by the migrants who moved from the country to the city and if necessary even from the south to the north. In order to bust the pressure of the high cost of wages it was imperative in the

Sixties to find ways to improve the efficiency and thus fortify the marketing-position. This modern approach was applied e.g. in the South Netherland Dairy Union where the production was streamlined by means of a gigantic cooperation, called DMV Campina. Something similar occurred in the United Cooperative Sugar-factories in West-Brabant.



Agricultural industries in West Brabant, near Dinteloord

In the meantime the Central Rural Bank (Centrale Boerenleenbank) had managed to consolidate its position tremendously. After a turbulent post-war episode of monetary reform and 'handing-in' the pre-war expansion could gradually be continued. In 1972 the Central Rural Bank merged with the Raiffeisenbank under the new heading Rabo-bank. Both in the textile and footgear industries many small outdated firms got into trouble in the Fifties. They could not cope with the growing competition of modernised 'brothers' from low-wage countries such as the then Italy. Particularly the wool-industry in Tilburg was hit hard. The increasing mechanisation took its toll again. The downfall proceeded so vigorously that in the Eighties hardly ten percent were employed in the textile-industry and oddly

enough, almost thirty percent of the national textile-factories can be found in North Brabant.

About 1930 Waalwijk, then the leather and boot-centre of Holland, processed still 2500 hides a day. But this branch of industry suffered a heavy loss of employment so that ultimately it represented only 6% of the provincial industry. The metallurgic industries became the all-category-victors. These days their share amounts to almost 45%, among them are i.a. DAF and the Dutch Railways Workshop in Tilburg. Supported by a rapidly modernising agricultural sector a versatile and expansive foods and allied products industry began to prosper. This implied canned products, beer, cakes, candy, chocolate, cigars and cigarettes, etc. Besides Brabant was the cradle of the margarine-industry whose original foundation in Oss had thrived since 1871 to such an extent that it served as the stepping-stone for the later Unilever-concern in Rotterdam. The major Dutch canning industries are located below the Moerdijk e.g. Hero, Jonker Fris and Hak.

Very big establishments of the dainties and delicacies sector are General Biscuits and Red Band in Roosendaal, Faam in Breda, Mars in Veghel, Van Melle in Breda and Peyenburg in Etten-Leur. Prior to these developments Brabant had already acquired a reputation with the chocolate-bars of Kwatta and the Baronie-chocolate. Together with the national increase of prosperity the consuming market for dainties and tasty titbits grew enormously.

In the Sixties the big concerns gradually took more advantage of the free market as a result of the European Cooperation in the European Economic Community (since 1957). Small wonder that Brabant was nicknamed 'the sweetest province of Holland'. Next to the domestic developments the foreign consumers' market became more and more important and in a kind of interplay the economic boom of Brabant cities lured increasing international activity towards our regions.

More than 265 enterprises from the U.S., Great-Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Kuwait settled over here. North Brabant, situated in the triangle of the Antwerp-Rotterdam and Ruhr-area, with its youngest professional populace, possessing both national and international

industries in sectors with great potentials, may more than proportionally profit from an economic rally in the future.

In a geographic sense North Brabant covers one seventh of Holland. Its major feature is an extremely varied environment with an attractive living and working climate. On an average, its population is younger than the Dutch, which imparts a great flexibility to the labour-market. As for the industrial employment Brabant has even assumed a prominent position: one fifth of the overall number of industrial workshops is located in North Brabant.

Certain branches of industry such as the electro-technical, the rubber and the synthetic material ones have made quite a stir in the business-world and so has the transportation-sector. Only an ample five percent of the occupational population finds employment in the agrarian sector and approximately six percent in related enterprises. With 14 percent of the national acreage of cultivated land, almost 20 percent of the productive value and a large share in the export of agrarian products North Brabant assumes a prominent position in the agrarian industry of Holland. The building-industry is traditionally over-represented (8%) and the work-spheres are largely to be found outside our province. The transportation-sector comprises 1150 enterprises. About one fifth of the domestic flow of goods moves through North Brabant, whereas the international percentage amounts to some 70%. Fifty-five percent of the vocational population is employed in the service-sector; the national percentage is 65. Tourist attractions, such as the Efteling (Kaatsheuvel), the Beekse Bergen (Tilburg), the Euro-beach (Valkenswaard), The Land of Ever (Drunen), the Autotron (Rosmalen), natural territories such as the Strabrechtse Heide, the Kampina, the Biesbosch, the Groote Peel, the Drunense Duinen (Dunes), the Oisterwijkse Vennen (Fens) and the marinas of Made and Drimmelen have made the province of North Brabant a prime touristic draw. (The region around Den Bosch nowadays calls itself Brabant Parkland!)

The numerous military encampments (i.a. Oirschot, Grave, Vught, Den Bosch, Breda, Ossendrecht) and airbases (such as Volkel, Gilze-Rijen and Woensdrecht) serve as major work-suppliers. Civil aviation focusses on Eindhoven Airport whose objectives are the regions within flying distance and the supply of goods to Schiphol



Biesbosch (photo Jan Verhoeff)

(Amsterdam Airport). There are regular flights to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Groningen, Maastricht, Hamburg, London and Paris and the emphasis is on business (passenger) traffic. Its slogan is 'Eindhoven Airport, runway to Europe!' It may safely be concluded that in these roaring times North Brabant is by no means a backward province. Another conclusion might even be that Brabant has moved from a conurbational position towards the centre of Dutch society. Due to the international European and Atlantic cooperation, with Brussels as the major centre for both, the area with the name of Brabant, north and south of the Belgian-Dutch border, forms a regional nucleus not only of the Benelux but even of all Western Europe. According to the booklet *Turbo-taal* (Turbo-lingo, from socio-chatter to yuppie-speak) a person from Brabant should be called Brabo. The term probably is very Dutch and un-Brabantine, but it does suggest a certain vigour, doesn't it...?

Recent developments in Brabant

As the province opened up the interplay with national and international cultural developments increased. In a cultural sense mention should be made of the numerous open-air plays that were to be performed from the initial fifties and next the theatres where both the home-made and the universal cultural representations were granted a stage. Due to integral regional efforts the Brabant Orchestra could be founded. The board was composed of representatives of the 'Friends of the Brabant Orchestra', of the province and the four big sponsoring cities, namely Breda, Eindhoven, Den Bosch and Tilburg. In 1989, incidentally, the Brabant Orchestra raised a good deal of dust. The provincial capital reputedly bore the image of the major governmental and cultural centre. In 1949 'she' had obtained the seat of the Brabant Orchestra. However, in view of recent cultural resolutions it cannot but be concluded that Den Bosch (= 's-Hertogenbosch) is, unwillingly though, heading for the title 'capital, void of culture', because the Brabant Orchestra was meanwhile transferred to Eindhoven as was the Provincial Board of Land Registry whereas de Genootschapsbibliotheek, the Society Library, now resides in Tilburg. This is not right, however, as there will be few cities that stage such a host of cultural events through the year as Den Bosch does.

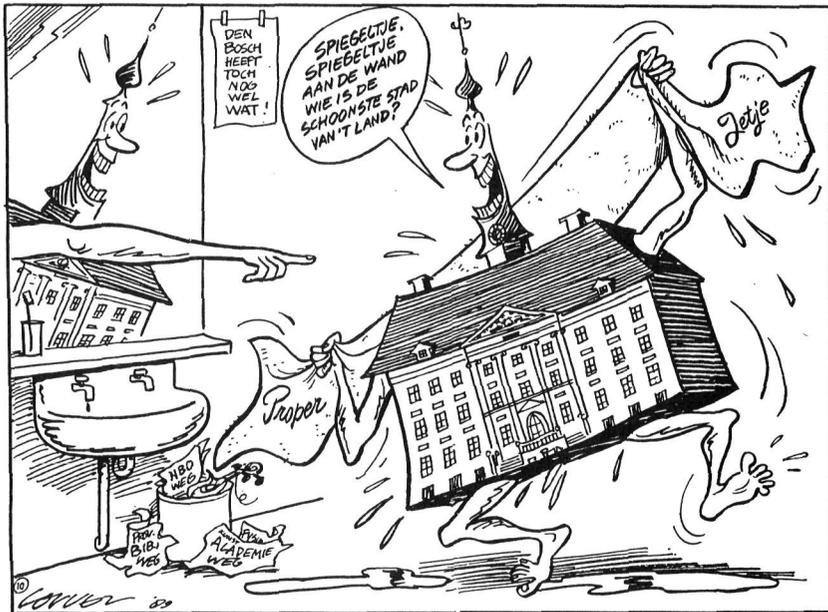
With reference to the distribution of art teaching in North Brabant the authoritative Volkskrant wrote: ART TEACHING ISSUE BRABANT TRIBAL WARFARE! In a sensational article Ben Rogmans wrote i.a.: 'there's no love lost between Tilburg and Breda when the issue is the designation 'urban junction' (...) Den Bosch considers itself in a slightly stately manner 'governing city' with an art- and culture-loving audience. Den Bosch and Eindhoven are now competing for the new domiciliation of the Brabant Orchestra. Naturally Eindhoven is the technopolis with big money, Tilburg bestowed itself the title of 'the Dutch education-city' and a prolonged peer at the world-map proves to the surprise of a great many people Breda to have been labelled the 'Intersection point of the Benelux' and 'the top transport-city'. (...) No sooner is there something to be distributed in North Brabant than the cities will tumble over each other. This time art teaching is the point at issue. Here mergers have become the order of the day; consequently North Brabant has been hit as well and meanwhile there have been bursts of indignation. Breda is the seat of the still independent St. Joost Academy for Arts and Design. In Tilburg we find the Catholic Instruction-courses for i.a. architecture, dance, music and design. Den Bosch still is the proud proprietor of the

Royal Academy for Art and Composition. In Eindhoven there are a school for drama and the Philips-focussed, hence almost untouchable, Academy for Industrial Design...'

The museum in the Bethanicstraat in Den Bosch was officially proclaimed North Brabant Museum in 1983. It was allocated another building for accommodation, namely the Governmental Palace in the capital's Verwerstraat.

At the moment there are plans for gigantic mergers in higher education in Brabant. Breda Hogeschool 'West-Brabant' will merge with Tilburg Hogeschool 'Midden-Brabant'. They will have some 10.000 students. A real mammoth-institution is going to emerge from the amalgamation of Eindhoven University and the Pedagogic Technical Academy of the Netherlands (Pedagogische Technische Hogeschool Nederland, PTHN-Eindhoven) and the Roman Catholic Courses (de Hogeschool van de Katholieke Leergangen) in Tilburg. This 'big-is-beautiful' conception will result in a conglomeration that can accommodate 30.000 students, bigger than any university or academy in Holland.

Besides there will be an exchange between higher education and trade and industry in the field of advanced technology in a University Enterprise Training Partnership if the EC-capital Brussels is willing to cooperate in subsidizing and all plans can be materialized. Global awareness is making progress in Brabant's educational circles.



Den Bosch 'cleaned out', as seen by cartoonist Corver: 'Mirror, mirror on the wall...'

BRABANT'S CULTURE

Fancied and factual differences

Those who want to know the reasons why Brabant is different from Holland should acquaint themselves with its history. As we have seen it was a region that has been exploited for ages and that has not been recognized on an equal basis until some 150 years ago.

The people are different they say... Some people tell (and write) that 'the' Brabant-man is more kindly and more easy-going than 'the' average Dutchman. They say that the southerners know how to see things in their real perspectives and some even say that this is on account of the innate patience and the melancholy aspect of the Brabant land! But we think that the ancient omni-present Roman Catholic religion and its traditions explain a lot more in this respect. Here the 'eternal' rule of clerical paternism has held good for ages. However, it should be remembered that the priests mostly were farmers' sons and there was hardly any ill feeling towards the clergy. The province is different, they say... Brabant's population is growing not only by births but also because of the influx of new settlers from the north and besides there used to be no place in the Netherlands where the death-rate is so low. It's a pity that Brabant should head both the urbanisation and the Dutch traffic-density process. It ranks first for industry as well. As for the wooded area only Gelderland takes precedence over North Brabant. Brabant is the first 'butter-province' and there are more arboricultures than anywhere else in the Netherlands.

Here more pigs and chickens are bred than in any other province and the 'bio-industry' is worse than in any other part of the country. We have also seen that there's little affinity with Holland and how close Brabant and Belgium were in the past. Within Brabant itself the west and east are often distinct from each other. Brabant is easily identified with East-Brabant where people reputedly have maintained their unique Brabant character (whatever that may be) better than anywhere else and that's why the west of the province sometimes exhibits a kind of inferiority-complex. They are sometimes labelled Dutch rather than Brabantine. Let's first focus on West Brabant, i.e.



Markiezenhof, Bergen op Zoom (photo Jan Verhoeff)

the part of the province that lies west of the line Waalwijk-Alphen, to which the marquisate of Bergen op Zoom and the barony of Breda belong.

The Lords of Bergen op Zoom (especially the famous Van Glymes family) had their residence in the Markiezenhof, built by the Keldermanses from Mechlin. To this very day it has been a glorious monument of the city together with the Town Hall and the Great Church.

The church of the nearby village of Wouw is worth mentioning because it is a splendid specimen of Brabant Gothic. The west, south of Bergen op Zoom looks very Belgian. Seignorial Breda was bought from the Duke of Brabant by the nobleman Jan van Polanen. His grand-daughter Johanna married Engelbrecht van Nassau in 1403 and shortly afterwards the town became the residence of the Nassaus. Under their regime the Renaissance-palace was built which (in a mutilated form) is the home of the Royal Military Academy. The Great Church was a Roman Catholic cathedral built in the 15th century. It became a reformed church in 1648.

'Dutch' Brabant or 'Hollands' Brabant are the incidental ticket-names for big parts of the Langstraat, the Land of Altena and the north-west of the province of North Brabant consisting of flat polders. Some writers say that this region is Dutch both because of its landscape and its people.

We have seen that Brabant has been the continuous theatre of the battle for freedom (especially in the 16th and 17th centuries). The province was proclaimed war-loot afterwards, but in those times Breda and Bergen op Zoom were better off than the east of the province; they also belonged to the 'Generality', but there were so many manors belonging to the Princes of Orange that this western part was treated relatively well. The economic situation in the west was not so bad as in the east that held the record for poverty until the latter part of the 18th century.

In the eastern part of North Brabant the situation improved when William II showed real concern for Tilburg and surroundings, although Brabant was William III's pet aversion. The landscape of the east seems to possess a certain attraction; Vincent van Gogh, born in Zundert and later on living in Nuenen, wrote: 'there will always be something of the Brabant fields and moorlands in us...'

In certain respects North Brabant remained a backward province that was neglected by the Dutch. In 1974 there were six universities in the Netherlands but in the south (beneath the rivers) with three million people, there was none though the twentieth century saw tremendous economic progress. The Brabant people still are inferiority-

stricken. Brabantia Nostra, a movement for self-confidence, tries to find a remedy for this. The slogan is 'Edele Brabant, Were Di!' ('Noble Brabant, strain thee!') Brabantia Nostra was a foundation whose aim was to congregate all the Brabant intellect and power in order to make the Brabant people achieve the selfsupporting existence. It was based on the Roman Catholic religion.

The last few decades the overall tendency has been to see all events through the eyes of the Randstad. Thus gradually an identification is achieved between the Netherlands and the Randstad and in this way the old relationship with its differences between the north (with its superior position) and the south (with its inferiority-complex) is sustained. The writer-philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven calls this 'het randstedelijk provincialisme' (the provincialism of the Randstad). He implies that people in and around Amsterdam think that they have the only true conception of aestheticism and all other visions are inferior. Some Brabant authors are in the habit of jumping to generalizing conclusions: 'Brabant people are definitely different from Frisians, Zeelanders and Limburgers; everyone who crosses the big rivers can experience this. The people are no worse, no better, they are just different because of their language, their mentality, their characteristics, their attitude towards life, their past, their daily existence and their rare remnants of folklore'. Anton van Oirschot is quoted.

Sometimes they recognize that even in Brabant there is a process of levelling at work, but still, according to those writers, there are those typical Brabant people. They typecast the Brabant man as a being full of pent-up emotions, although he never minds a good laugh and some celebration. Brabant people think it difficult to express their self-assertion. They tend to hide things under the guise of modesty and timidity. The Brabant man is supposedly gifted with both humour and a fair amount of mild irony. He is fond of traditions and faithful to church and nation. He hates melancholy and fanaticism. He is quiet, even-tempered, loyal and contented.

If there has ever been any truth at all in these statements we'd like to coin them outdated now.

Famous feasts

Ons hërremeniejke

. . . . èn ze speule nog 'n mùpke èn ze drinke nog 'n drùpke
diej minse van de hërremeniej
èn ze speule nog 'n mùpke èn ze drinke nog 'n drùpke
ze heure d'r èige hërriëj niej.

And they play another stopper and they have another whopper,
the village brassband on a gentle spree
and they play another stopper and they have another whopper
they never hear their own din, no sirree.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the lyrics: "èn ze speule nog 'n mùpke èn ze drinke nog 'n drùpke diej minse van de hër- re-me- niej". The second staff contains the lyrics: "èn ze speule nog 'n mùpke èn ze drinke nog 'n drùpke, ze heure d'r èige hërriëj niej." There are some accents and a tilde over the 'r' in 'hërriëj' in the second staff.

(En ze speule nog 'n mùpke, en ze drinke nog 'n drùpke, die minse van de hërremeniej..., a Brabant song by Linnegoewd)

Carnival

Nowadays carnival is probably seen as the greatest fete in the south, especially in Limburg and Brabant. This colourful happening originated as a feast of lent. We do not know for sure how the name arose. Some people maintain that 'Carrus Navalis' is the root; the cart-ship that, loaded with jesters and fools, would run through Germany, Limburg and Belgium. Others would rather think that the word derives from 'carnelevare', do away with the meat and then there are those who say that it simply comes from 'carne vale', i.e. farewell meat. Well, who shall decide when experts disagree..., but it is a fact that the word carnival is rather young in Brabant. People

used to speak of '*vastelaovend*' which means the eve of Lent. It might be compared to English Shrove Tuesday and to German Fastnacht. (Shrove Tuesday precedes Ash Wednesday and is also called Mardi Gras (French: Fat Tuesday) and Carnival. It has been noted for the elaborate mumming parades and boisterous parties. The name comes from the custom of 'shriving' or purification through confessing one's sins prior to Lent. Traditional food for this holiday includes thick soup of pig's feet, beans, peas and pancakes. 'Pancake Day' is another name for Shrove Tuesday.)

The festivities in the Brabant country were restricted to this one day. Then people would have good meals with ham- or bacon-pancakes and they would have a proper drink and all this was launched with a view to the scanty forty days that were to come before Easter. There are some Brabant cities that have known carnival from times immemorial; especially Den Bosch, Bergen op Zoom and Breda. Here it was looked upon as a great fraternity-party lasting three days. Bergen op Zoom has the oldest written proof of this so-called Burgundian carnival: in 1413 already the town-council paid some musicians for their services during carnival. In the fifteenth century there were some jousts in Den Bosch on Shrove Tuesday and in 1530 it was enacted that the inhabitants of the Brabant capital should not wear masks on 'vastenavond'. Den Bosch, in carnival-times called 'Oeteldonk', has long been considered the centre of those 'papal vices' as the Protestants called this turbulent public entertainment, which mainly took place in the streets.

In the country 'vastenavond' was more a feast for children; they would go along the houses singing the old song: 'Jan 't is vastenaovend, komme nie thuis vur t'aovend...' The end of the song gave the message: 'koekebakkerij, koekebakkerij, gif me 'ne cent, dan go'k verbij...' i.e. 'confectioner, confectioner, give me a cent and I will pass.' The children's singing was accompanied by the rumbling-pot. It simply consisted of a jar with a pig's bladder membrane on top to make it into a small drum; a reed in the middle gave the special humming sound. They were allowed to go around, dressed up like adults with painted faces, singing and begging for three days. This phenomenon shows some resemblance with the Halloween 'trick or treat'.

In the villages there were no carnival-processions, no carnival-princes and no misses carnival or no 'elevenses' like in the German Rhineland.

All these items have been imitated during the last few decades. With the disappearance of the strong catholic conscience which had been part of 'the right attitude in the fast' (according to the church) the feast of carnival gradually lost some of its authentic charm as well. Then there were those Northerners who uninhibited by any knowledge of the right spirit started 'composing' carnival-songs. Soon business prevailed and with that the entertaining level sank. Of course these are no complimentary words for the Southerners who virtually embraced the northern 'well-plugged' rubbish and said goodbye to their own original songs. Cornelis Verhoeven therefore is quite near the truth when he calls carnival a 'compulsory town-feast' that is fake-imitation imposed by Hilversum-radio.

Anton van Duinkerken was rather fond of this folklore, he wrote: 'We also get our Sunday's sermon, for us heaven is above all but we make love in the week of the fair and dance at carnival.' A quotation from Jan Naaijens: 'Carnival, when pleasure rages through the cities as a foaming piebald stream; Bergen op Zoom, Breda and Den Bosch have known this from of old'. Carnival also has a positive ring but Naaijens realistically notices the odious danger-signs. A lot of people from the north and the south come to the carnival-feast because they have some voluptuous orgy in mind. Well this never belonged to the real carnival. Neither did the septic pubs where you can hardly get a drink because of the drunks in front of you.

Small wonder that every year more southern people get away from carnival and go skiing in Germany, Switzerland or Austria, leaving the carousing to the allochtons.

Kermis

Another impressive annual ceremony is the fair or kermis, though these days its aura is fading as well. Formerly the Sunday of the village-fair was one big family be-in. The family-member living in the village of the fair would invite all his next of kin from here and there to come and have 'a cuppa ... soup'. Actually the latter was a complete meal that was digested with lots of beer and brandy. Next it was customary for the entire 'clan' to go and admire the (kitchen)-garden and the crops on the fields while chatting casually on casual matters on the way and then several hours later they'd walk to the fair in the village-centre where they were bound to meet all and sundry. And then after exchanging the latest bits of news they'd stroll back and have a 'farewell-sandwich' with coffee. Formerly every

village had its summer-fair and people looked forward to the festivities. The greatest attractions in those days were the dance-palaces. But the old romance has gone. Apparently disco and dance-palaces don't go together. In the old days the fair was a feast for everybody, nowadays it only seems to attract youngsters. Until the Fifties the fair was for Tom, Dick and Harry who had eagerly been longing for their yearly 'kermis'

For the tiny totters there were the merry-go-rounds, the giant's stride and the candy-stalls. For the school-children who might think themselves too old for this merriment, there were the shooting-galleries, the cake-walks, the dodge'm-cars and the doughnut-booth. For the grown-ups there were, apart from the dance-palaces, the try-your-strength machines (Kop van Jut), the one-armed thieves, the fish-mongers and the music-filled pubs. In bigger villages and towns there might even be a wheel of fortune and a fortune-teller.

The guild

Then there was the inevitable guild that in many places would open the fair with drums beating and colours flying. All dressed up in their medieval uniforms, of course. Most guilds in Brabant originated as citizen soldieries. Once they were formed to protect their own residence against invaders and looters. But many years ago they doffed their protective cloaks and nowadays they are just a show-group in search of new topical objectives. On the Sunday of the fair the guild held its annual marksmen-contest at the popinjay (de vogel or de papegaaï). The proclamation of the new champion-shot called for a celebration at the Guild's home. They'd dance and have their beers together with their wives or girl-friends. Monday was another day of rejoicing for the guild-members. The whole group of the village soldiery went to their shooting-range again for the shooting of the 'bird' on a voluntary basis. In the twentieth century the clergy often opposed the Guild-festivities because they sometimes degenerated into bacchanalia.

Admittedly most guilds nowadays are just a folkloristic ornament with medieval uniforms and banners and drums. But it should be



*Guildsmen of the past
and the future*

remembered that most of these brotherhoods date from the period between 1200 and 1600.

According to Dr. Reintges, Brabant and Flanders were the cradle for these citizen-soldieries, called 'guld' or 'schut' in Brabant.

At first these guilds consisted of archers, later on 'kolveniers' (gunmen) were also added.

Saint George, Saint Anthony, Saint Catherine, Saint Sebastian and Saint Barbara are the common patron saints in Brabant.

In former days the guild maintained order, arranged processions, feasts and shooting-competitions.

Nowadays there are some 7.000 guild-members in North Brabant and

we can't but confess that the flying colours and beating drums lend a special enchantment to the overall view at a village-fête.

Processions

Processions are Brabantine to the core, which not surprisingly is related to the Roman Catholic faith.

In the days of old there were the Holy Sacrament processions leading through the fields for the crops, the entry to the church of the children for their first Communion or the solemn entry of freshmen and novices. There were the candles-processions through the church at Candlemas and the Way of the Cross as well as the palm-procession.

During the latter half of the twentieth century the greater number of these gradually disappeared.

Some spectacular annual processions survived though, in Brabant: There is the Maria-procession in Bergen op Zoom, the Silent

Procession in Den Bosch and the Bloodprocessions in Boxtel and Boxmeer. The latter take place on Trinity Sunday. For Boxtel the legend is based on the Blood Miracle: In 1380 when the priest Eligius van den Aker accidentally spilled some wine on the altar-cloth. The wine, which was white, turned red on the spot and the stain could not be removed. A similar incident occurred in Boxmeer about 1400. Every year the stained cloth is exposed and a mumming parade with all kinds of biblical characters slow-marches through these towns.

Some facts about North Brabant

Brabant has a surface of more than 5000 km², that's about 15% of the total surface of the Netherlands. More than 80% of its soil is sand, 7% is clay (sea-clay in 'Hollands' Brabant and river-clay along the Maas). The west-east division is also applicable in this realm. West Brabant often relates to the rich clay-country of de Westhoek whereas the 'greater' Meierij is the poor sandy land of the east. The region around Tilburg is called Middle-Brabant or Brabant-Centre. The east is traditionally called de Meierij, although nowadays it is confined to the area around the capital Den Bosch. Formerly de Meierij included Maasland (Oss), de Peel (Deurne) and Kempenland (Eindhoven). (Kempen originally means waste-land, like Kampina for that matter.) As for Brabant's natural areas only one fifth has been preserved. The old 'ordinary' landscape is still neglected in several municipalities and the environment has to cope with the 'acid rain' as well. The old landscape consists of little meadows and fields surrounded by hedges or walls to give shelter to cattle and crops. The little fields look like tiny squares between hawthorn- and oak-hedges.

Those who want to see this should go for a walk in the natural parks. (They can write to Stichting Het Noordbrabants Landschap, Postbus 80, 5076 ZH Haaren, or they can phone 04117-2775. There they can get a detailed description of all these few areas.)

Since 1962 no reclamations have been carried out, but from then on canalisation and open-field system took their toll on the landscape. Barbed wire substituted the old hedges and in agriculture the main aim was bigness and extent. Brabant had known crofters with little farms and through the ages many a farm had become smaller because the parental estate had to be split up among several offspring. But in the Sixties small was not yet beautiful in the farmers' eyes. Nowadays the justified question is often raised: 'should the few farmers who are left be allowed to destroy Brabant's landscape which in its turn is a living space for 2 million people?' In the last few decades many a farmer has proved not to be the landscape-protector of bygone days. The small-holders have completely exited the Brabant scene, the 'bio-industries' have ruined the skyline and environment not only by their towering silos and grain elevators but even more so by their gigantic

surplus of manure which turns several farms into enormous stinking toadstools.

The old 'brown' Brabant with a lot of wastelands developed into a 'green' country, but nowadays in early spring it sometimes assumes a different 'brown' again. The authorities should tackle this manure-problem on the spot and maybe there would not be much harm in reducing the number of farms.

Until the beginning of this century rye had been the mainstay, but gradually dairy-products gained ground. Cattle-breeding became so important that the Brabant live stock even outgrew that of Friesland.

Although our province has also fallen victim to irresponsible real estate developers and renovators, it is still rich in little villages oozing beauty and atmosphere.



*Cycling under the poplars near Veghel (photo Harry van Liempd)
'Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.'
(Joyce Kilmer)*

Brabant specialities and the like

'The poor man in his castle
Sells tickets at the gate
While all the rich plebeians
Have fun on his estate.'

(Leonard Cooper)

In Roman Catholic Brabant there are still a lot of pilgrimages; most famous is probably the Mary-adoration in Den Bosch during the month of May, but places such as Boxtel, Boxmeer, Handel, Bokhoven, Esbeek, Dorst and the village of Zeeland also boast their annual pilgrimages.



Den Bosch Cathedral (St. John's)

North Brabant is famous for its churches. There is the Great Church of Breda and Saint Gertrudis in Bergen op Zoom, but most famous is the Gothic cathedral in Den Bosch with its funny medieval sculptures

on the flying buttresses attached to the nave as ecclesiastical decorations. They are unique and they are genuine Brabantine art. It is a great pity that some of the old interior decoration was sold in the 19th century; one can see the rood-loft of Saint John's Cathedral in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London!

Bokhoven-church has some beautiful Baroque sculpture by Artus Quellinus and Wouw-church is famous for its Baroque wood-carvings. It is regrettable that so many churches and old characteristic buildings were demolished during the last world war.

North Brabant had many castles as well. Some still exist and are gentle reminders of serfdom. We mention Croy (Stiphout-Helmond), Nemelaer (Haaren), Maurik (Vught), Heeswijk, Dussen, Henkenshage (St. Oedenrode), Stapelen (Boxtel), Heeze, Bouvigne (Ginneken) and Bergen op Zoom.

As for local architecture in Brabant, especially in the east, the cross-farm is the most typical. It is a narrow longish building in which the dwelling, stables and barn are next to another in a row. If it is true that a province can be recognized by its farms, North Brabant's identification would be the long-gable type. In West Brabant the dwelling is often not attached to the stables and barns.



Beautiful long-gable farm at Dorshout

Some beautiful characteristic Brabant village-centres are the old hearts of Oirschot, Uden and Hilvarenbeek.

There used to be some special Brabant women's wear; the so-called 'poffer'-outfit. The women dressed up in black but the dress was topped by an impressive white show-piece, called 'poffer' probably because of its bulk. The white lace was adorned with greenish and pinkish floral fringes. This garment was especially worn by country-women. Simple gold jewelry was part of the attire as well; ear-drops, necklace with cross, brooch and ring. It was a gorgeous total, but this 'dress of state' was out-dated and when the bike was introduced this national dress was discarded. It turned out to be too impractical in wind and rain and cycling was hardly possible in this elegant attire. The accompanying men dressed up much simpler; all in black. In former times connoisseurs could tell the native towns of the farmers' ladies by their lace-hats. There were remarkable differences between Baronie (Breda) hats and Meierij (Den Bosch) 'poffers'. Most places had their own typical hats. In West-Brabant they were smaller and sometimes called 'kroesel'.

In the field of food there is the Brabant coffee-table, probably arisen from the funeral-festivities. In former days practicality and ethics were interwoven. After the long funeral service the next of kin and the close neighbours were invited for a meal. It should be remembered that formerly the Catholics were not allowed to breakfast when they were to receive Holy Communion. Therefore a simple meal of bread and cheese and coffee was waiting for the church-goers after the ceremony. In poverty-stricken Brabant such a trifle was easily called a feast. In the course of time this plain 'coffee-table' added a certain lustre to diverse celebrations.

It gradually grew into a kind of banquet with lots of meat, all kinds of rolls and buns, gingerbread and currant bread, not to mention all the accompanying other frills of which the good old vanilla-brandy seems to have become an obligatory appetiser. But whether the Brabantine-label can still be stuck on this meal has become most doubtful, because similar coffee-tables are served in several provinces of the Netherlands.

Two more items from the provincial cookery book are brawn ('zult') and pork-porridge ('balkenbrij') whose roots are obviously agricultural.

Here follow the recipes for these Brabant culinary specialities:

Brabant brawn:

You need half a pig's head, 1500 grams of flat ribs, mandible-ham and a couple of pig's ears. The latter is a must. They produce the natural jelly-effect. Mind you; the ears should not be minced with the rest. You need a big pan with a solid bottom.

Take so much water that everything is immersed. Add one spoonful of salt per liter of water. Now let things boil for two and a half hours. Then take the meat off the bones and remove the ears. They are of no further use. Let everything cool down and put it through the mincing-machine. Strain the boiling-fluid and add the minced meat. Add half a teaspoon of pepper, a few cloves and half a decilitre of vinegar. Let it all boil for five minutes and next let it cool down.

Pour it into a cold dish and stir it a little so that it will settle nicely. Let it cool down and put the cover on.

Pork porridge:

You need 500 grams of liver, kidneys and/or heart, one litre of boiling-fluid from sausages, 250 grams of fresh bacon, one spoonful of ground cloves, 250 grams of buckwheat-flour, some wheat-flower and butter.

Boil the meat (not the bacon) in the sausage-fluid for some thirty minutes. Cut the bacon into cubes and fry half of them in a frying-pan. Take these out of the pan and mince them. Add water until the boiling fluid will amount to one and a quarter litres. Stir the meat, the fried and raw cubes of bacon and the cloves. (In Brabant a special herb-mixture called 'rommelkruid' is often added.) Boil the substance and while stirring add the buckwheat-flour. After ten minutes' boiling this should become a solid porridge. Put the mass in a flour-dusted dish and let it cool down and get hard. Cut slices from the pork-porridge and fry them quickly in hot brown butter.

(These recipes were taken from the book *De Brabantse Koffietafel*, by Nelleke de Laai and Cor Swanenberg.)

Typically Brabant-like

In the world of tourism the southern province of North Brabant is regularly stereotyped as being generous, good-natured, convivial and sociable.

We would like to stick the twaddle label on this kind of generalisation. In this context it could be both helpful and interesting to quote philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven: 'In the eyes of many people the Brabant man evidently does exist after all and he is definitely classified as a cordial and yet unreliable, hospitable coffee-drinker and yet suspicious, fond of merry-making and yet heavy-handed etc. In the changing interpretations of the uniform, but ambiguous picture some scope has been given for another emphasis on what seems most 'real'. That margin is so wide that on second thoughts it might embrace approximately the entire population...' (From: *Of de Brabander bestaat in 'Boven de boomgrens'; Whether the Brabant man exists in 'Above the tree-line', 1977)*

Another man of great genius, Anton van Duinkerken, diagnosed similar discrepancies in the Brabant man; reputedly he is boisterous on a substratum of melancholy. 'They conceal themselves in liberal talk on all kinds of everything'. But that same author also stated: 'In most cases the 'genial character' will be chary of words, but what he does say will hit home'.

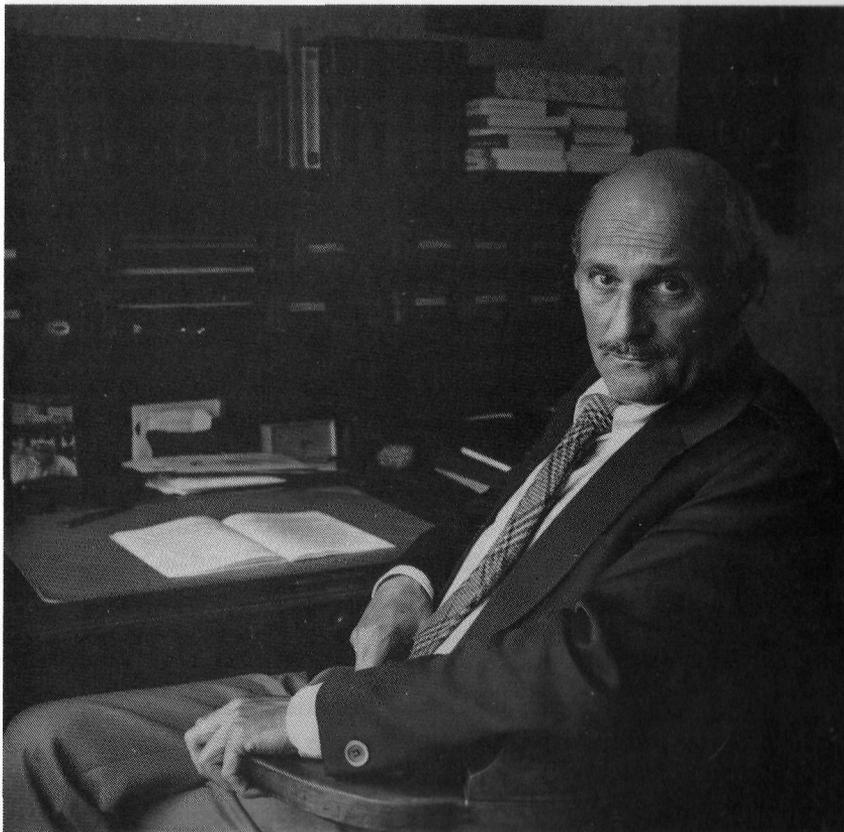
It seems that Brabant people are as hard to scan as people elsewhere. Still numerous other views have been registered...:

'When Brabant-bound the world is getting warmer.

A more intimate way of life is coming my way...' (The poet Harriet Laurey, returning from Harlem.);

'The proverbial cheerfulness of the Brabant man, his sense of humour and irony, his carefree lightheartedness...' (Jan Naaijkens in 'You're telling me...about Brabant people', 1978); 'The result of the psychological test that Naaijkens set the Brabant man of yore is such a close hit, that nobody will be able to improve it: 'The average Brabant man is an eminent beer-drinker, who enjoys the colourful flourish of pageants, guild-festivals, fun-fairs, weddings, and who once a year will plunge into the resounding carnival din. Many of his outward characteristics can be traced back to the fact that he belongs to the plain, hardly complicated, intuitive kind of people...' (Anton van Oirschot in 'The Land of the Brabant people', 1975).

Of course it is rather tempting to ascribe such positive qualities to a community you yourself belong to, but it remains most doubtful whether such findings are in accordance with reality. In this respect Cornelis Verhoeven is resolute: 'To my mind authors like L. van Egeraat, Jan Naaijken and Anton van Oirschot in their books on Brabant too easily give way to the charms of the traditional image'.



Philosopher Cornelis Verhoeven (photo Frans de la Cousine)

Occasionally Brabant people will pride themselves on a 'Burgundian tendency' whatever that may be. This was meant to contribute to and account for their generosity and eagerness for feasting. We find that we should not allow such vaguenesses to be promoted as characteristics of life. In this connection, too, it is illustrative to quote Verhoeven: 'In its restoration Brabant folklore meets the image that exists on Brabant and its average resident. I know of Brabant mopes who in the face of outsiders will fall

into the role of jester or liberal laughter; gloomy worriers, who with wide gestures will sweep every problem from the table, and misanthropic misers who spasmodically play the hospitable Burgundian because they are persuaded into that role with gentle tourist force'...

...'When we talk about identity and the like, we usually refer to such things that will meet with the expectations of others.'

What Verhoeven experiences in man as most characteristic of Brabant -and he states it with diffidence- is a profound scepticism with regard to power and policy, work and planning. We can fairly well agree with that view; as typically Brabantine we ourselves noticed the so-called 'Brabant quarter': the unpunctuality with regard to appointments, a kind of derision towards any scheduling we might say. Brabant people tend to come late and often it exceeds a quarter of an hour.

We are convinced that another feature is: the inability to say no to any request. Thus Brabant people are saying yes where no is intended and they possibly answer in the affirmative and yet fail to show up for the execution or confirmation of the promise that was reluctantly made. There is quite a bit of beating about the bush when a direct answer is required. The people in our southern environment will often talk nineteen to the dozen. When afterwards one considers what has been said the conclusion is very often that one has found out very little or nothing at all about the Brabant partner in speech. However, on the other hand there are events in the course of which one learns to know a slightly embarrassing amount at the very first encounter.

Characteristic of the direct vicinity was to our mind the established custom of entering by means of the backdoor. If you would unexpectedly knock at the front-door the incidental reaction would be: 'There's a fair in the backyard'. There were certain reasons for this custom; in former days it was customary for the caller to just 'walk in' which meant that the front-door gave direct access to the living-apartment. It very often occurred that due to tremendous loss of heat the front-door had to be boarded up. Particularly at farmhouses visitors would enter via the backstable and the slop-kitchen. But then the caller was expected to announce himself in terms of: 'Anyone there?' In the usage of the Brabant language we will come across some remarkable linguistic phenomena.

Practically each Brabant dialect possesses hybridised verbal forms such as *hedde gij* (have you), *zedde gij* (are you) and *gaode gij* (do you go). Like in English there is only one word in the Brabant dialects for the second person singular; so you is *gij*. In Brabant they say *gij* to God and everyman. In the Dutch language there are three pronouns for the second person singular: the common form *jij*, the polite and formal *U* and the archaic form *gij*.

Brabantine uses *gij* for all occasions.

Among the loose words that are most frequently heard we might rank '*hoi*'(hello) and '*houdoe*' (see you). The first one is often followed by '*hoe gaget?*'(howdy, how are you?). '*Houdoe*' (in West-Brabant they say 'oudoe') is an elegant valedictory salute that is evidently gaining ground. But when we hear 'conurbationites' (from the Randstad) use this word on entering we cannot help feeling both embarrassed and indignant. It may well be that these pseudo-Brabant people mix this up with the English equivalent 'how do you do'. However, '*houdoe*' should merely be seen as a parting word whose meaning amounts to 'take care' and it is blameworthy if the phrase is used without any respect for the real meaning.

An ancient custom in our southern province is the celebration of a person's fiftieth birthday. The hero of the hour is represented either as Abraham or Sarah in the shape of a life-size doll featuring all his or her typical qualities. Mostly next to the puppet there's a big board with a funny text. We do not know if this custom also occurs beyond the Brabant borders, but we are certain that in the Eifel-area (Germany) the hero of the party is presented with an enormous 'candy'-doll whereas in certain Belgian districts the celebration is accompanied with the donation of big jars of mustard. For after all at that age one is supposed to know what o'clock it is. There is some resemblance with the American 'Over the hill'-celebrations.

It may, by the way, safely be assumed that the present Brabant residents will have friends and relations in other countries i.a. due to widescale emigration to Australia and America shortly after the 1945 liberation. It was then that many offspring from very poor Brabant families decided to seek their fortune elsewhere. But in the course of the last few decades the face of our global community also as a result of the ricochet effect of rapid technological progress has changed entirely. These days ours is a fluid society that has taken in all sorts and conditions of foreigners; viewed in this light Brabant already has an international character and its capital Den Bosch seems to have been 'americanised' with no less than 17 American companies and approximately 1700 employees.

That aforesaid international trait has always been there even though the rest of our country may not have perceived that. Not so very long ago in the Brabant Press a complaint was made on the fact that the Fourth Memorial on Town and Country Planning paid little or no attention to the Brabant-Flanders borderland. Especially West-Brabant manifests itself together with Antwerp as one borderless region. There is a Belgian-Dutch Border Deliberation (Benego, since 1967) which aims at cooperation within the Benelux-treaty. The main point of the Belgisch Nederlands Grensoverleg is to be found in West-Brabant and Antwerp. No less than 34 municipalities in the Belgian province of Antwerp and the Dutch province of North Brabant participate. The Queen's Commissioner for North Brabant, Mr. F. Houben, voiced the opinion that the provinces of Brabant and Antwerp should manifest themselves more emphatically as one economic area. Words to that effect can be heard at almost any meeting. This leads on to a striking feature of our Brabant people: traditionally they have fancied going to Belgium. Thus we might state that the residents of the largest southern province feel a certain attraction towards their Belgian neighbours.

We return to the issue of the slightly anarchic leaning that Cornelis Verhoeven diagnosed before in his essay: people from a province in which farming has been a major means of existence are fully aware that certain matters cannot be dictated. The harvest depends on numerous factors. Besides a nation that has been trampled upon for ages may rightly be sceptical of power. In this Cornelis Verhoeven finds the explanation for the 'alienocracy'; indeed it is conspicuous how many non-autochthonous persons wield the sceptre in town-councils.

In 'Farewell to Brabant' Verhoeven says: 'In the Brabant philosophy of labour the saying goes 'we just jumble along' (we klotten maar aan), thus depicting labour as the filling up of a void, an escape from melancholy and the mind-racing that may drive a man round the bend. The indication shows that we beforehand resign ourselves to the failure'.

We do not think that anybody has perceived and worded these matters more keenly than the frequently quoted philosopher, who is evidently a Brabant man among Brabant people, but who nevertheless would rather not be 'awarded' the detestable, generally accepted clichés: 'I feel rather embarrassed when outsiders burden me with characteristics that are inherent in the genuine Brabant man according to them... I do not recognize myself in that curtailed and folkloristic image of man...'



Tilburg

Tilburg Railway Station (drawing by Nelleke de Laat)

In 1947 the priest P.C. de Brouwer dedicated an entire book to the Brabant soul. Undauntedly he arrived at the conclusion that a catholic disposition must be the basis of the deepest inner self of the Brabant man and that that should be connected with a devotion to Holy Mary. If this view was based on reality at all, it must have become moribund in the meantime. Let us have one more close look at the changing face of North Brabant:

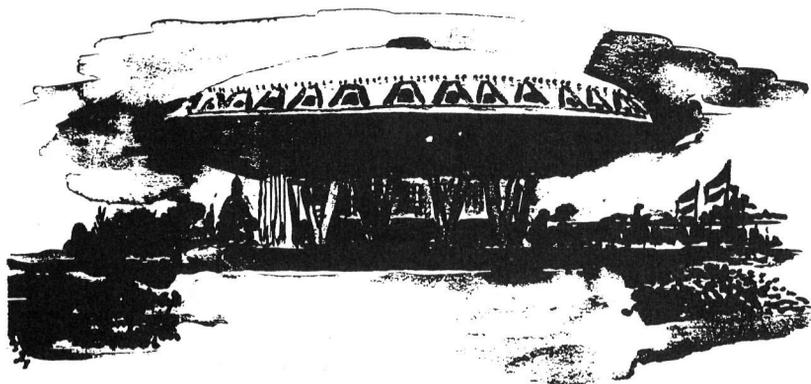
In former times happiness seemed to take precedence over prosperity. The old people looked contented despite their scanty living. They wanted to break the laborious routine and sought fun and joy every now and then and that's why the fairs and family-festivities on the occasions of e.g. births, christenings, first Holy Communions, weddings, removals and funerals were so important. Creativity both in song and in play were highly appreciated.

These days the Brabant people don't seem so keen on feasting. In the twentieth century the province has changed from a poor crofters' to an agricultural one.

At present Brabant is trying to gain an important role as a touristic region and so far it has already built up some reputation: there is the Efteling: the enchanted forest at Kaatsheuvel, the 'Land of Ever' in Drunen (het Land van Ooit), Eindhoven, the 'Electronics City', had its Evluon, an architectural wonder, Tilburg has its 'Beekse Bergen', a safari-park, in Den Bosch we find the North Brabant Museum and the St. John's Cathedral, Rosmalen has its Autotron and Breda boasts an old castle where the Royal Military Academy resides.

And there is more to come: recreation along the Maas for example. In 1990 a plan was made for a great 'Maas-spectacle' from Mook to Woudrichem: an old fleet of 'brown' sailing-vessels is scheduled to enhance the naval days in Nijmegen and 'Den Bosch-Maritime'.

Some people stepped down to earth and instead of adding a Cosmo-Science Center the Efteling started to think of some streamlining and backtracking to its old wonderland-theme. Evidently the future scope had been over-estimated. The discarded bombastic visions turned out to be a fairy-tale in themselves.



Evluon, Eindhoven (water colours by Nelleke de Laat)

When you want to see Brabant you should know that Eindhoven and Tilburg, industrial agglomerations of rural villages, are the biggest cities of the province and that Den Bosch, Bergen op Zoom and Breda

are cities with history and character. Beautiful little towns are Heusden, Ravenstein, Megen and Willemstad. Little is left of the typical long-gable farms in Brabant; many were destroyed in the Second World War and many were pulled down later for modernity's sake.

The Brabant economic life has a lot of perspective in the sector of professional services such as lawyers-, accountants- and engineers-help and in the field of computers, advertising, public relations and temping bureaus. In 1988 employment had almost doubled since 1973 and there still is a lot of potential. Innovation centres should bear this in mind. For foreign investments in the Netherlands North Brabant is the most attractive province. The 1987 survey showed that our province represented one third of the total of foreign companies settling in the Dutch country. The investment amounted to 464 million guilders with an extra of 650 new jobs. The dynamic power is the province's trademark.



'Bulb-dwellings' in Vlijmen; more of these 'grow' in Den Bosch (photo Jan Verhoeff)



Remarkable architecture in Helmond. (photo Jan Verhoeff)

In traffic-affairs Brabant rarely gets first right; the Dutch government spends too little fund on the road-system in this important province is an often heard complaint and yet 100 kilometres of traffic-roads have an international function. On the other hand a lot of people rightly object to road-building, because of the modern environmental problems.

In that context slogans such as 'Living is good and easy in Brabant land' (sung in Dixieland style) are a bit deceptive. Those reminiscences of the past are more than once ridiculed nowadays. But despite its pollution-problems North Brabant seems to enrich itself in its integration just as it once impoverished in its isolation.

The Brabant dialects

In his Handbook of the Dutch Language (*Handboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, 1937) Dr. Jac van Ginneken s.j. says: 'In the east of North Brabant we find a transition-character between West Brabant and Limburg. Some time ago I typecasted the East Brabant-man by referring to the scent of their old buckwheat-fields. And I believe that this comparison still stands; flourishing under oppression and a somewhat tarnished perfume of the soul. With the intellect of their eastern compatriots they are even more genial because of their unlimited kindness. (...) Nearly all of them are Roman Catholics though not as religious as their western North Brabant counterparts. (...) In the Cuyk region and North Limburg the character of people resembles that of the bordering districts of North Brabant. It is remarkable that a similar equal people should develop a totally different dialect because of different borders. Historically speaking, the Land of Cuyk belonged to Guelderland and Cleves for ages. Well, the Cuyk dialect (including Grave and surroundings) is not related to the East Brabant dialects, but to the Guelders and Limburg. East Brabant owes its close connection to Tongres to the fact that it already belonged to the Tongres-bishopric in Roman times. Both in Germany and in our country the early-medieval borders of bishoprics have been reflected in the separation-lines of our dialects. It may well be that these old borders are based on older tribal frontiers, but this is hard to prove by sources. De Kempen people manifest other differences from the Limburgers. Dreaming virgins and pining youngsters are scarcely found in de Kempen, according to (the author) August Snieders. People here are not over-sensitive. They are strong, willing to work, educated in the notion that it will be hard to earn the daily bread and so they are materialized rather than refined. (...) The image of the east (and Limburg, too) is even more splintered than the west of North Brabant. The textile-labourers of Tilburg, Helmond, etc. form an important group, but also the cigar-makers, beerbrewers, leather-tanners, brick-makers and finally the peat-diggers. (...) For the dialects of East Brabant we only have very few reliable texts, which is the more unfortunate, because the differences in dialect between the villages are so conspicuous.'

One should remember that this was written more than 50 years ago. Nowadays things are very different: there has been a kind of Brabant-craze in the sixties and seventies resulting in a lot of very reliable texts.

We think of the singers and performers: Thieu Sijbers (Nijnsel), Nol van Roessel (Schijndel), Drik de Bruijn (Rijsbergen), Gerard van Maasackers (Nuenen), Ad de Laat (Nistelrode), Arie van Roozendaal (Schijndel), Huub van Eijnhoven (Best), Willem Iven (Bakel), Peter Aarts (Deurne), Peter Haans (Geldrop), Gerard Ulijn (Oss), Jan Strick (Maarheeze), Ger Coppens (Boerdonk), Wout van Venrooij (Loosbroek), Jan Steenbergen (Berlicum) and Nillus & Nelleke (Rosmalen, Berlicum), who all released one or more LPs or CDs in their dialect. The Brabant folk-groups Dommelvok (Boxtel), Moek (Deurne), De Ploegadoers (Liempde), Fluitekruid (Tilburg), Doedelier (Schijndel), Pro & Contra (Asten) Smidje Verholen (Roosendaal), De Sjawî's (Valkenswaard), Boekels Ketierke (Boekel) and Linnegoewd (Berlicum), who have all performed in dialect for years and made records, might also be included. In the long line of poets and prose-writers we'd mention Lodewijk van Woensel (Eindhoven), Willem van 't Hof (Eersel), Jean Filiassi (Hilvarenbeek), Luran Toorians (Tilburg), Frans Hoppenbrouwers (Valkenswaard), Johan Biemans (Bergeijk), Has van Rukven (Heeswijk) and Ivo van Dinther (Geffen).

Most important of all was, however, the fact that some authors wrote significant studies on one or more Brabant dialects. Mention must be made of the splendid work of Jan Elemans: *Woord en wereld van de boer*, *Word and World of the Farmer* (a monography on the Huisseling dialect, 1958); *Herinneringen aan mijn moedertaal*, (*Memories of my Mother tongue*) by Cornelis Verhoeven (on the Udenhout dialect, 1978); the voluminous work of A.P. de Bont: *Dialekt van Kempenland*, *Dialect of Kempenland* (in particular the language of Oerle) in three volumes, 1958, and then to top it all *Het Woordenboek van de Brabantse Dialecten* (the Dictionary of Brabant Dialects) was started at Nijmegen University under the supervision of Prof. A. Weijnen and later continued under the direction of Prof. A. Hagen. So far some ten volumes have been published. This comprehensive study is based on all the Brabant dialects, i.e. the dialects of North Brabant, of Belgian Brabant and Antwerp.

Evidently there was no such dialect-boom in West Brabant, but nevertheless Dr. Jan Stroop (*Sprekend een Westbrabander; Speaking a West Brabant man*, 1979) and Dr. Hans Heestermans (*Witte nog;*

Do you recall?), 1988) did a lot of good in this field.

'The standard Dutch language originated in Limburg and subsequently met with the predominant influence of Flanders, Brabant and Holland', says Dr. Jos Schrijnen in *Nederlandsche Volkskunde*, ('Dutch Folk-lore').

Prof. A. Weijnen (in his book *The Dialects of North Brabant*) gives the principal division into East-, West- and Middle-Brabantine transitional dialects. This division is mainly based on the occurrence of Umlaut (vowel-mutation) and shortening of vowels. (The more eastwards you go the more of these you will hear.)

In a speech on the occasion of 'The Day of the Brabantine' in Goirle Professor Weijnen once said that he thought there were only a few general characteristics in the Brabant dialects; in his opinion the verb-form with you (= *gij*) was the most striking. In Brabant they say *hedde gij, zedde gij, gade gij*; a form which could be compared to hast thou, art thou and goest thou. Weijnen excludes Cuyks (like Van Ginneken), Budels and Westhoeks; they are not Brabantine, but a mixture of Rhineland-elements (Cuyk), Limburg (Budel) and Holland (Westhoek = Willemstad, Klundert, Fijnaart and Dinteloord)).

In our Brabantine languages there are a few expressions which reflect history: *'t kan me niej skille wiej Holland wint* (I don't care who wins Holland); and *al sterve alle koei in Holland, dan erve wij nog ginne start* (when all cows die in Holland we won't inherit a single tail). We must add that these sayings have become obsolete.

Brabant regional novelists like Antoon Coolen were ridiculed by Marsman (a Dutch poet and critic) because their Brabant books were not readable above the big rivers, yet Coolen's found their way in translations all over Europe, even in countries where they never got acquainted with Marsman's Dutch poems. Coolen's subject-matter was Brabant country (especially de Peel and surroundings) and its poor people living in the simple provincial communities of pre-war Brabant. There is an occasional dialectical dialogue in his regional novels, but it is never beyond the reader's grasp.

Then we have to say something on the singularity of 'ons' (our). A striking aspect in the Brabant dialects is the double bottom in the possessive pronoun 'ons' (E. our): very often 'ons' will assume the meaning of 'mijn' (E. my). So it is 'our father' and 'our mother' even if it is the one and only child speaking. When phoning a member of the family it is quite common for the caller to say: 'hier met onze Piet' (E. this is our Pete

speaking). In the event of the mother making the phone-call she'd say: 'hier ons mam' (E. this is our Mum). Someone who does not have the intention nor the feeling of sharing his wife with anyone else, will nevertheless refer to her as 'our wife'. How come? Well, that's hard to tell, but part of the explanation could be found in the fact that Brabant people - often stemming from large families - have grown accustomed to sharing things in general.

And what about the impact of the French language? Well, at second sight the Brabant dialects prove to contain many words that have a French root, even though that's not always recognizable on the spot.

We have gleaned some for you.

There is the word *strant* or *straant* (E. cheeky) derived from French *assurant*: *akkerdere* and *avvesere* are related to French *accorder* (E. agree) and *avancer* (E. ± hurry); *kaskenade* (E. boasting) probably came from *gasconade* and *ammezuur* (E. the right feeling for playing or doing something) from French *embouchure*.

It is common knowledge that sayings and expressions hardly ever run parallel, but it may safely be assumed that *een tut mèm* (meaning all the same) and *toepertoe* (E. all at once) are derived from respectively French *tout de même* (chose) and *toepertoe* from *tout par tout*.

Walking through some regional garden we might stop and admire the *snuffel* or *snoffel* (E. gillyvors), a corruption of French *girofle* and the *kroesel* or *knoezel* (from French *groseillier*) for the gooseberry.

Another feature which is typical for North Brabant dialect is the valedictory message *houdoe*, an old corruption of hold thee. It is a pleasant word and says far more than Dutch *daag*, because it expresses care and sympathy. Therefore it is agreeable that even newcomers adopt this word (as long as they use it in its proper sense).

For the rest, it was Goethe who wrote: 'Jede Provinz liebt ihren Dialekt, denn er ist doch eigentlich das Element, in welchem die Seele ihren Athem schöpft...'

(Any province loves its dialect, for properly speaking it is the element in which the soul finds its breath...)

Made in Brabant

An effort to language-comparison

‘Once upon a time there was a thing called Dutch that only rarely sounded double-dutch to the ears of the man in the street but with the emergence of the chip and all that the members of the Dutch establishment suddenly came down with the so-called Mid-Atlantic disease. They felt an irresistible urge to interlard their speechway with an increasing number of extra-ordinary words.

Our Dutch manager thinks he badly needs an international image; he uses a multi-stranded lingo because of efficiency. He is a self-made man equipped with the know-how related to his occupation and its subsequent inevitable follow-up.

Our man of the world is always on the move and he is with it. At cock crow he either mounts his home-trainer or he goes jogging, because he is fully aware that fitness is a must and that his weight is being watched.

He puts the slogan: ‘make your arm-pit your charm-pit’ into practice and is willing to spend quite a bit of money on deodorants, body-lotions, etc. ‘He gets a kick out of it!’ Grapefruit, cornflakes, honey-smacks are regular items on the shopping-list which he settles with his credit-cards. It stands to reason that his sartorial outfit is bought at Men’s Fashion; for casual wear he chooses jeans, T-shirt and pullover. He thinks himself a real socialite; he visits cocktail-parties of course where he drinks gin-and-tonic or martini-on-the-rocks. He will drive to the tennis-court or the golf-course in his air-conditioned Jaguar; during the tea- and tie-breaks he will talk shop and then he means business. Occasionally you may hear words like, issue, appeal, steady, shit, fuck, dumbo, sorry and okay.

We think that his mental make-up is out of focus at times, but if he thinks that this is the way to mind his business, we don’t mind...’ This story could easily be made double its size and the amount of English words then would be doubled as well. But we think this is enough to serve as an example.

These are rather new words. Let’s see if there any older similarities between English and Dutch. As for idioms there seem to be more

American English words that resemble Dutch words than British English terms. This could be explained by the many emigrants that left the Netherlands to find a living in the U.S.A and Canada. In the American-British dictionary *What's the difference?* (by Norman Moss) we found several words that could be associated with Dutch. There is *cookie* (sweet biscuit) and Dutch *koekie*, *crib* (cot) and Dutch *krib*(*be*), *druggist* (chemist) and *drogist*, *klutz* (clumsy person) and *kluns*, *pinkie* (little finger) and *pink*, *parakeet* (budgerigar) and *parkiet*, *spool* (cotton reel) and *spoel*, *street lamp* (lamp post) and *straatlamp*, *vest* (waistcoat) and *vest*, *water tower* (water reservoir) and *watertoren*.

On the American words *boodle* and *stoop* (as a noun) Moss says: 'boodle is bribe money. From Dutch *boedel*; stoop is a noun meaning a porch separated from the street by several steps, seen on terraced houses in many American cities. The word comes from the Dutch *stoep*, and originated in New York when it was the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam.' A *makefast* (any structure to which a ship or boat is tied up) is more or less the reverse of the Dutch verb *vastmaken*. In America and in the Netherlands they have *bock beer*, a dark German-style beer.

During the nineteenth century a lot of English words were adopted in the Dutch language. In connection with shipping we think of words like *boot en schoener*, *railing* and *trawler* (sometimes called *treiler*), *bunkeren*, *alle hens* (all hands), *full speed*, *steward* and *kapseizen*. 'There are *boycot* and *interview*, *gasfitter*, *fitting*, *cokes*, *rails*, *wagon*, *buffer*, *bumper*, *tank*, *frame*, *step*, *freewheel*, *film*, *type(n)*, *run*, *clearing*, *claim*, *total loss*, *safe*, *manchester*, *molton*, *jumper*, *overall*, *bacon*, *pudding*, *sandwich*, *jam*, *kerrie*, *rum*, *grog*, *bowl*, *lunch*, *after-dinner*, *after-eight* and *the-morning-after-pill*. We won't talk about the numerous English terms from sports used in the Dutch language. In the field of sports English terms have been used universally and for that reason we don't think it sensible to look for specific Dutch roots, if there are any. In the world of fiction the Dutch took over *humo(u)r*, *detective*, *short story*, *paperback* and *column*. It is common knowledge that the English are always reluctant in admitting that they borrowed from other languages, but there can be no doubt whatsoever that the following words are Dutch to all intents and purposes: *yacht* (*jacht*), *dock* (*dok*) and *landscape* (*landschap*).

Gleaning through South-African stories by Alan Paton the reader is bound to come across a number of typically Dutch words such as *trek*, *veldt*, *kraal*, *steenbok*, *wildebeest* and *shame on us*, the ominous word *apartheid*.

Daalder went to America and returned as *dollar* and *baas* did the same to end up as *boss*.

Are there any connections between Brabantine dialect and English? In the field of idioms there are American *icebox* (refrigerator) and *ijkskaast*; there is a clear similarity discernible in smoking and *smeuke* (=to smoke and to smoulder); the stovepipe hat (tophat) is sometimes called *kachelpijp*, too.

We tend to think that there is a clear relation between Brabant *kniejp* (= pen knife) and English knife.

Brabant *skit* and English *shit* not only have the same smell but also a similar root. *Korre* (meaning grain) is the English corn.

Zoft is soft of course, *spietse* is English to spit, *scheper* is English shepherd.

There is even some semantic similarity in Sweet William and Brabant *lievermènneke* for the flower *duizendschoon* (*dianthus barbatus*), the same holds good for *blaow zeug* and *sow-bug*. English Shrove Tuesday is Brabant's *Vastenaovend*; *strùivendzeg*, (*Pancake-Tuesday*). There is a begging rhyme in England that could be compared with Brabant *Vastenavond*-singing: 'Knick a knock upon the block; flour and lard is very dear, please we come a-shroving here. Your pan's hot and my pan's cold, hunger makes us shrovers bold: Please to give poor shrovers something here.'

The old Brabant *taafte* is the English afternoon. (*Atemiddeg*, originating from *aaftermiddeg* also exists.)

There are striking similarities in the following words: English *mouse* and East-Brabant *maus*, *house* and *haus*, *hen* and *hen*, *sock* and *sok*, *wife* and *wijf*, *blind* and *blijnd*, *mast* and *maast*, *stook* (Scottish and Northern English for a group of twelve corn-sheaves stood up close together in a field) and *stuik*.

Grammatically speaking, there are a few conspicuous phenomena: in Brabant dialect the semi-propwords *inne* (masculine) and *een* (feminine) are used: *Dè is 'ne skonnen inne* (=that is a beautiful one) This does not occur in Dutch. The manifold use of *doen* (to do) as an auxiliary is also typically Brabantine: *We doen kaarte* (we play cards);

we doen 't veul gebrùike (we do use it a lot); *worum doede nouw zoiets make?* (why do you make such a thing?) And then there is the double negation as in American English: *hij kùmt noit neres* (he never comes nowhere); *ge ziet noit niemes niej* (you never see nobody); *d'r gebeurt ok noit niks niej* (Never nothing happens); *ge he't nog niks niej gezeijn* (you ain't seen nothin' yet!).

There is a disappearing use of a remarkable infinitive-version in Brabant dialect, e.g.: *'ik zo' gèk zen èn doen 't gelijk alleen.'* Such a sentence could be compared to English 'I would be mad to just do it all by myself. (Of course in Brabant dialect it is not exactly a split infinitive.)

We already hinted at the mutual influence of languages in connection with emigrants. Of course it often was not the best of English these people used and after some decades their original mother-tongue had lost some punctuality as well. We'll never forget our late uncle who had emigrated in the early Fifties. He said (on our visit to his estate in Appleton (Wis): *'Tenaacht gon we drijve met de kaar'* (Brabant *kaar* = cart). He thought this proper Brabant dialect. In fact he translated the sentence 'Tonight we're going to drive in the car'. He should have said: *'Vanaovend gon we autorije'*. He said so unawares and for us his former mother-tongue was good enough but to the foreign ear this kind of hybridized lingo may sound somewhat confusing.

Sometimes similarities play tricks on emigrants, as the following incident may show. A colleague of ours taught some young farmers some English before they emigrated to Canada. After a few years they came 'over' and visited their former teacher of English. Things went well in Ontario and they had managed all right with the foreign language, though in the first flush of enthusiasm they had made a slightly painful slip of the tongue. When asked about their occupation in Holland one of them had quite spontaneously responded: 'we fucked pigs!' (Dutch *fokken* = to breed).

It may seem far-fetched, but still there might be some sense in comparing Wellerisms and Brabant apologetic proverbs. Let's start with some Wellerisms we took from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*: 'Heads,' as the *pieman* says; 'There's nothing so refreshin' as sleep, sir, as the servant-girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful o' laudanum; 'Werry glad to see you, indeed, and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'l'm'n said to the fi'pun'note; 'There, now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off, to cure him o' squintin'; 'Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar Bear said to himself, ven he was practising his skating.

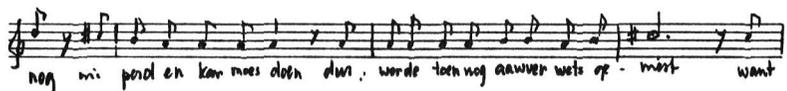
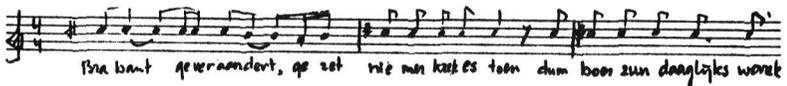
In Brabant we registered some hundred apologetic proverbs in which mostly farmers or wives are the ones who speak: *'Brannittel is zùiver goewd, zin d'n boer, daor veegt gin man z'n gat me' af* (Stinging nettles are clean, said the farmer; no one will wipe his bottom with them); *Denken is vur de pèird, zin d'n boer, diej he'n grotterder hères* (Thinking is for horses, said the farmer; they have bigger brains); *Ik wil 's wete of de f'miliej al slupt, zin d'n boer en iej kiejk in de vèrkeskoi* (I want to know if my family slept, said the farmer and he looked in the pigsty); *Wiej wè bewaort diej he' wè, zin 't wefke, en ze waar al tachtentig jaor maagd* (Saving is keeping, said the woman and she had been a virgin for eighty years); *Alle bietjes hèlpe, zin de mug en ze pieste in de zee* (Every little helps, said the gnat and peed into the sea); *ik skèij 'r af, zin Bèrt d'n Boer, ik go' werke* (I call it a day, said farmer Bert, I'm on for the night-shift).

Incidentally, we, who have been and still are passionately in love with our own patois, cannot close our eyes and mouths on the ever so sad observation that the Brabant dialects are fading away.

Brabant a-changing.

(Brabant ge veraandert, a song by Ad de Laet)

Brabant you are different
 from what you were at the start
 The crofter's daily chores
 were carried out by hoss and cart
 The dung he spread in the ol'-fashioned way
 and just supposed the Lord would bless his day
 Things of the past,
 things that we lost



The Quipmasters

It is a well-known fact that in the face of dire poverty and outrageous oppression man has always managed to find some sort of safety-valve. In the midst of misery some people somehow aroused laughter by means of a crushing retort or an astounding sense of understatement.

The Jews, the Poles, the Irish, they all have suffered beyond proportion and despite all that they sometimes lived it down by unforgettable 'gems'.

Through the centuries the Brabant folk have refused to bend a knee to the inevitable tragedy of their lives. They turned it into a song, a poem or a joke.

'His great grandparents were so poor that they and their nine children all lived together in a three-room cottage'. 'Cor, how did they ever manage?' 'Oh, they got along.., they took in roomers!'

Unconscious humour can be funnier than conscious wit:

There was this rich farmer who collected his spoiled daughter from the boarding school. On the way home she confessed: 'Dad, I'm afraid I'm not a virgin no more...' 'Damn you, brat, I've sent you to this expensive school and you still speak dialect!'

There was this poor farmer on his death-bed. All his family were gathered around him and his eldest son said: 'Father, now the time has come that you should confess that you did not obtain all your land in an honest way. Every year, when ploughing you stealthily extended your land. . . ' The old dying man nodded, sighed and thinking of hell said: 'You keep what you have, I'll do the suffering as much as I can!'

Another poor crofter was coming from Sunday's Mass and on his way home his eldest daughter came running towards him. (It was in those days that several small farms were set fire to in order to get the

insurance-money and build a better housing.) The girl told him that their farm was on fire. 'Jesus,' said the man, 'I knew that this was due to happen and still you scared me.'

There was a burial in the village and an old man stopped to let the procession pass. When the last person came along he asked: 'Who is dead?' The answer came straight away: 'The first one, I think.'



Old-fashioned farmers amidst their rye-crops (photo Ad de Laat)

'When I started I had nothing but my head and my hands', said the newly rich manager. 'Then you do have every reason to say: 'I started with very little!', said a colleague.

There was this complaining carpenter who went to his boss and said: 'you don't pay me what I deserve'. 'I know' said the boss, 'but if I would pay you what you deserve, what would you live on?'

A man who had a car-accident is in hospital. His wife visits him. He complains that she so seldom comes to visit him. 'Oh', she says, 'I would come more often if you hadn't ruined our car...'

Old Sina is doting. Her brother Jan has died and when the burial is taking place, she asks: 'where for God's sake is our Jan?' 'Quiet Sina', says the neighbour, 'Jan is leading the procession!'

Only recently the study of anecdotes has been embarked upon. The urge to relate, to entertain some company in a pleasant way, to be witty and sociable nowadays emerges in the narratives of incidents. Formerly there were sagas, legends and fairy-tales sprouting from the people. Story-telling by the fire-side is a thing of the past, but the desire to tell stories, whether they are short and concise or just funny, will never disappear.

At the beginning of the war people were hardly aware of the imminent dangers. So when Sijntje was tending her cow in the pasture, she was not really struck by the ear-splitting noise of a shell that had hit a very tall Canadian poplar. But she did look at its fallen crest and casually remarked: 'Gosh, them things could cause big accidents...'

The overall domestic scene in the southern provinces was characterized by big families, lots of care and little fare.

Therefore many people tried to earn an extra by smuggling things like coffee, butter, linen and elastics across the Belgian border. Then there was this Brabant petty dealer who was stopped by the customs and asked: 'What's that in your wheelbarrow?' Answer: 'chicken-fodder'. The border-guard wasn't quite convinced and said: 'Alright then, show me!' When the gunny-sacks were removed, quite a load of coffee-beans were exposed. 'And you call that chicken-fodder!' the guard snapped.

With a look of dismay our smuggling smallholder stammered: 'Well, if they don't like them, they're gonna get nothin' at all!'

We would like to wind up in a lighthearted vein by stating some specimens from the bottomless farmer-lingo's well.

Dinah says that she's going to be married between the wheat and the beans. She will marry fifty acres and two hundred head of cattle. And her husband-to-be whose name hasn't been made public so far has given her a wedding-present in the shape of a beautiful watch with the kind exhortation: 'you'd better be careful with it for after all you're wearing two cows on your left wrist!'

Conclusions

To quote Jilly Cooper:

'I am very aware of the inadequacies of this book. The subject is so vast and so complex that I have only touched on a few aspects which seemed important to me. I have made many sweeping generalisations, which I hope people won't take too seriously, because other classes are not better or worse than one's own, they are merely different.' (Class, 1979)

Now that we have looked at the stereotyped images of Brabant it is high time to question their accuracy. At first sight the contrast between pre-war Brabant and Benelux Brabant is great. Though the notion Brabant's own is rather hazy there's no denying that the famous indication has been used very frequently during the last sixty years. Its literal meaning must be Brabantine as opposed to non-Brabantine.

Brabant's own refers to regional culture. It is a tricky and delicate issue. Not only the folklore and dialects between Zeeland and Limburg are implied but also the old patriarchal customs and class-distinctions inherent to Brabant's social life. We see the social structure of the old Generality in which everyone knew his place and was rather contented with it. There was a climate of familiarity in which many conflicts were covered up. A seemingly harmonious community which made little appeal to individual responsibility; that's why the smuggler and the poacher could prosper so much.

Brabant's own refers to national character, to regional qualities.

Dr. Gerard Knuvelde once said mockingly: 'beer-porridge, brawn, pork porridge and nettle-cheese belong to Brabant's own'.

Add the guild and you have come near the end of the tether. Caution is required when dealing with terms that easily pass into prejudices. Every bias also contains some truth and Brabant's own refers to something that was regarded a concrete reality. Modesty, homeliness, lack of achievement, timidity, moral carelessness, loyalty, Burgundian joy of living and Roman devotion were the key-words in the descriptions of the old-fashioned rural character. Business-like, modern-liberal features were still lacking.

Brabant's own was a historic phenomenon dating from the times of the First World War. Defining one's own heritage was used as a weapon in the struggle against modernity. Progress brings forth changes and in this irrevocable process the old village-communities with their family-life and religious traditions are drowned. Life dons a commercial cloak and 'die Entzauberung der Welt', the disenchantment of the world, sets in.

In the Twenties Brabant gradually said farewell to the times of pinching poverty, infant mortality, typhoid fever and illiteracy. North Brabant started its way up by becoming an industrial province. Of course this caused great unrest. Bishop Diepen would rather have kept his diocese unimpaired; he tried to put a glass dome over the old situation.

But there were also shrewd pioneers like Dr. P.C. de Brouwer who saw the dangers and tried to find proper solutions. He was the mastermind behind the foundation of a Brabant Students' Guild in 1926. A Brabant movement arose in which the Catholic Youngsters participated: Anton van Duinkerken, Gerard Knувelder and Antoon Coolen. Professor J. van Ginneken, prophesied in 1923: 'The Brabant spirit awakes and grows after the example of Limburg. And indeed: The Netherlands will be very pleased with its Generality some time'.

Brabantism emerged. Grandeloquent cries replaced inferiority-complexes. The slogan was: Brabant Were Di! (i.e. Brabant, take your stand!) The glorious Brabant of the late Middle Ages, unblurred by Reformation, Enlightenment, materialism and political disestablishment served as a model. (Genuine catholicism was at the back of all this.) Disbelief and secularization were the prying dangers. Economic developments severed traditional ties, modern paganism infiltrated from the cities into the immaculate country. Materialism versus idealism, individualism versus collectivism, dechristianisation versus religious faith. Brabant became a moral concept: the world should be 'brabantized'. Young rebellious students decried the hypocrisy of the catholic factory-owners, the superior power of the clergy, the mock-unity of the Catholic States-party and the deterioration of the south. Fascist catholics emerged who radically criticized the catholic culture of the Thirties. They denounced docility and religion without contents.

They reverted to original Christianity and Brabantine religious folklore. From 1935 onward the periodical *Brabantia Nostra* informed the public about Brabant's own. The motto was: 'National unity in regional diversity'.

In the first few years of the war the *Nederlandse Unie* (Dutch Union) in which the Brabant movement was well-represented, sustained this spirit. Some people in North Brabant hoped that under German leadership Brabant could be re-united and that one Greater-Holland and even a new European unity with regional characteristics and a catholic society-order could be realized. At the end of the year 1944 Brabantism revived in the liberated south. Reconstruction, war-nihilism and the Americanized Brabant youth necessitated these efforts to restore old Brabant values. Times had changed, however. The Brabant people did not want to be mobilized again.

Conservation of the old Brabant gave way to the creation of a New Brabant. When the Fifties started the authorities in Brabant began to embrace modern times.

Many Brabant intellectuals under the leadership of the Prime Minister-to-be, De Quay himself created a new infra-structure which would boost Brabant rapidly.

Not so long ago industry and its pernicious influence had been abused; now industry and modernisation were the promise of the future. This change was caused by the material distress and the lack of agricultural means for the fast growing population. The authorities were greatly concerned; what would become of the 'good people' in the factories, what would remain of Brabant's own and religion?

Romantic idealism had cleared the track for the acceptance of modern times. Belief in progress was the order of the day. The dangers of modernity could be overcome. As a matter of fact Brabant wanted both, modernisation and prosperity and conservation of its old Roman Catholic peculiarities. Of course that was out of the question. Brabant's own was preserved in dire times but prosperity removed it rapidly. Modernisation of the province was a great success but it meant bad luck to religion.

Brabant's own as a leading idea exited from cultural life. For younger people it had lost its meaning and contents. *Brabantia Nostra* died a silent death in the Sixties. Ideological conceptions are tough stuff.

SEEING
BRABANT
IS KNOWING
HOLLAND



Heusden Bridge. (photo Regional Tourist Office, 's-Hertogenbosch)

Brabant's own has come up at intervals since then. Sometimes it is used as mainstay against anti-papism or Randstad-arrogance, sometimes it is used as a justification for the provincial cultural policy. Nowadays it sounds like a hollow cliché, however. It is often looked upon as mere nostalgia. Former regionalism still resounds in present-day visions of a future role of North Brabant as an economic centre in the Europe of 1992, as an intermediary for north and south in a Europe where state will be replaced by region. Some people have even started thinking of a Greater Holland again and state that it is high time for Belgium and the Netherlands to act as one nation again. 'That would save the national culture', they claim.

'Seeing Brabant is knowing Holland' is a new slogan coined by the Province of North Brabant itself. It is just as unreal as the assertion that Brabant is the major difference between the Netherlands and Holland.

The Brabant identity has not been fed by the grandiose Burgundian-Brabant past for a long time; it can no longer live on a number of dear memories of the 'real' Brabant from the Fifties.

That Brabant is dead and gone.

Brabant was related to Tongres in Roman times, in the early Middle Ages it was influenced by city-centres in northern France, then it was connected with Louvain, Mechlin and Brussels and at last it came under the domineering influence of the conurbation in western Holland that calls itself Randstad. Brabant as a peripheral region has experienced influences again and again.

On Brabant's background

There are some important publications for the study of North Brabant.

As far as we know there is only one book in English on Brabant: it is the publication 'North Brabant, Jewel of the South', by Anton van Duinkerken (text) and Martien Coppens (photography), translation by James Brockway.

Under the editorship of Prof. van den Eerenbeemt an important initiative was effected in 1964 when the first 'contribution to the history of the south of the Netherlands' in book-form was published and many were to follow. (In 1989 there were already 78 books, all issued by the Foundation Brabant Historic Contact.)

Then there is the Encyclopedia of North Brabant (in 4 volumes), edited by Anton van Oirschot, 1986, an important vademecum for anyone interested in Brabant affairs. Dr. L. van Egeraat published in Dutch 'Among the Brabant people', 'Say bye to Brabant' and 'Brabant, the other Holland'. Next there are the Brabant Memories (Brabantse Herinneringen) by Anton van Duinkerken, the books on the Brabant people by Jan Naaykens, the essays on Brabant and its people by Cornelis Verhoeven especially Above the tree-line (Boven de boomgrens), the Reminders of Fatherhood (De Resten van het vaderschap) and Memories of my mother tongue, Herinneringen aan mijn moedertaal) and The New Brabant (in three volumes), composed under the tutelage of Prof. Dr. J.E de Quay, Aug. C.J. Commissaris, Antoon Coolen, Ds. B. ter Haar Romeny and Prof. Dr. F.J.H.M. van der Ven.

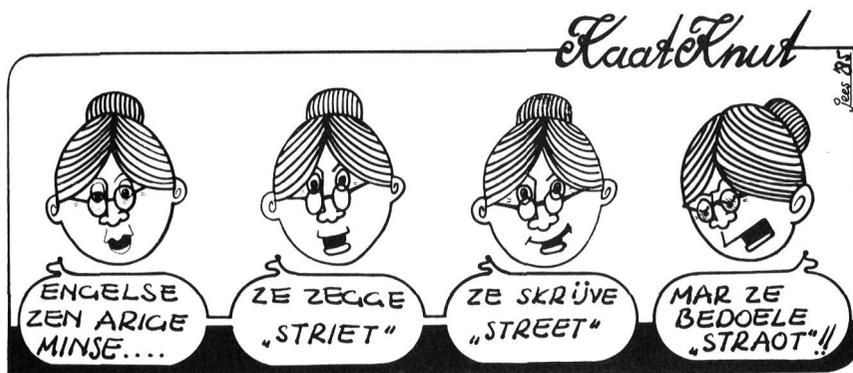
There is the recommendable 'Tweeduizend jaar geschiedenis van Noord-Brabant', (A two thousand-year-history of North Brabant) by Klaas Jansma and Meindert Schroor, Leeuwarden, 1987.

A book on processions in Brabant is Optocht in Brabant by Anton van Oirschot and Dr. Pieter Anton van Gennip, Maasbree, 1982.

For Brabant dialects there are of course the editions of the Dictionary of Brabant Dialects (Prof. A. Weijnen i.a.), The Dialects of North Brabant by A.A. Weijnen, The Dialect of Kempenland by A.P. de Bont, Word and World of the Farmer (Woord en Wereld van de

Boer) by J.H.A. Elemans, Speaking a West-Brabant man (Sprekend een Westbrabander) by Jan Stroop and Do you recall? (Witte nog?) by Dr. Hans Heestermans.

Harrie Franken made a contribution to dialect and folklore with his publication 'Songs and Dances from de Kempen' (Liederen en Dansen uit de Kempen). In 1988 an elaborate collection of Brabant proverbs and expressions by H. Mandos and M. Mandos-Van de Pol was published. Of course there are the books by Antoon Coolen, P.A. van Gennip, Jan Cartens, Toon Kortooms, Nol van Roessel, Thieu Sijbers, Johan Biemans, Willem Iven, A.M. de Jong, Cor Swanenberg, Carel Swinkels, and the first books of A.F.Th. v. d. Heijden which have a Brabant background. For dialect-fans there is the anthology 'Hedde gij, zedde gij, edde gij, zijde gij', published by the Noordbrabants Genootschap. Harry Verwiël wrote a Museumbook for North Brabant. For the study of the Brabant province there are i.a. the periodicals Brabantia, Brabants Heem, Brabants Landschap and Brabant Business.



The English are odd people . . . they say striet, they write street, but they mean straot! (Cartoon by Jan Steenbergen)

Those who feel like shading their window of the world for a while in order to keep pace with the daily regional developments and topicalities can always tune in on FM 95.8 which stands for radio-station Brabant (Omroep Brabant).

The 'Brabant Press' which is an umbrella-name for the 'Eindhovens Dagblad', 'Helmonds Dagblad', 'Nieuwsblad' and the 'Brabants Dagblad' (dagblad = daily), provides the reader not only with the latest news on universal and continental events, but 'enhances' his breakfast also with national and regional news-items and brief snippets from the local scene into the bargain.

The same holds good for the West-Brabant newspapers 'De Stem' and the 'Brabants Nieuwsblad'.

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For ages Brabant people have been in love with that aromatic brown fluid, coffee. It makes them chatty and linger a longer while. And for many other reasons it makes sense to distinguish Brabant and Holland. Maybe you will come to the conclusion that Brabant people are different, just like other people. But that's another cup of tea.

So far Cor Swanenberg, the main author, published more than 20 books, all dealing with aspects of North Brabant. As a specialist on the Brabant dialects he wrote some very successful vocabularies.

André Riether wrote articles for several Brabant and Limburg newspapers. He published some books, i.a. on the Venlo-dialect and on sports-journalism.



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