

Brielle's militia and militia group portraits

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Garrison town

Brielle was a garrison town until 1882. A garrison town is a town of military importance where one or more army units are based. Reminders of this in Brielle include the Provoost (military prison) and the Arsenaal (Arsenal), as well as De Hoofdwacht (main guardhouse) on the other side of Markt. The Hoofdwacht or Grande Garde is the name for a central base or a building from which army units or militias carry out their patrols. Brielle's Hoofdwacht was built in 1789 by Johannes Van Westenhout. He also replaced the original stepped gable on Brielle's town hall with a neo-classical facade.

When a garrison departed, the town council asked the States of Holland for a replacement garrison. In the meantime the garrison's tasks were largely covered by the militia, such as the guardposts and maintaining public order.

The militia

The militia or the guild of militiamen was a military unit made up of volunteer citizens, established in the Middle Ages in order to protect the town or the village against attack and to maintain order in the event of civil commotion, fire or distinguished visitors. Militias were initially grouped according to the weapon that they used - the longbow, the crossbow or the musket - and later according to the district in which they operated. The members of the militia practised firing on a training ground. Such a training ground or shooting range was called 'de doelen' (the butts). They were almost always located close to the town walls, so that any damage was limited.

De Doelen

There were separate butts for the longbow militia (who used a bow and arrow), the crossbow militia and the culveriners ('kloveniers'), who used a type of musket known as a culverin (from the French word 'couleuvrine').

The word 'doelen' (butts) was later also used for the militia's clubhouse where they also practised.

The militia in Brielle

Brielle had a militia that was divided into three 'banners': orange, white and blue. Each banner was responsible for protecting a separate part of town. The Brielle militia had no special 'doelen' building built for them, but gathered in the Sint Jorisdoelen based in the former Poor Clares convent (Clarissenklooster). The meeting hall for the Sint Jorisdoelen was located in the chapel of the former Paul Clares convent. This also housed the militia group paintings that were painted by Maarten van der Fuijck in 1660. It is believed that he has included himself in the group portrait of the orange banner (the seated man dressed in white). Research is currently being carried out in order to identify the portrait's subjects.

- Maarten van der Fuijck
Militia group portrait of the officers of the Orange Banner
Oil on canvas, 1660
Origin St. Jorisdoelen Brielle 1806; Brielle town council chamber 1916
Inv: HMDB 0031
Bibliography: Groeneveld 2009

- Maarten van der Fuijck
Militia group portrait of the officers of the Blue Banner
 Oil on canvas, 1660
 Origin: St Jorisdoelen 1806; Brielle town council chamber 1921
 Inv: HMDB 0033
 Bibliography: Groeneveld 2009
- Maarten van der Fuijck
Militia group portrait of the officers of the White Banner
 Oil on canvas, 1660
 Origin: St Jorisdoelen Brielle 1806; Brielle town council chamber 1923
 Inv: HMDB 0032
 Bibliography: Groeneveld 2009

When the 'doelen' building was turned into a hospital in 1806, the militia portraits were rolled up, brought to the town hall and stored there. And then forgotten. Until the Brielle archivist and first curator of the museum, Johan Been, found the canvases in the attic of the town hall. An art dealer in The Hague wanted to buy them, but Brielle town council did not take up the offer. On the advice of Jonkheer B. van Riemsdijk (1850-1942), director of the Rijksmuseum at the time, the paintings were restored by the firm of J.A. Hesterman en Zonen in Amsterdam. The Orange Banner was returned in 1916, the Blue Banner in 1921 and the White Banner in 1923. They were hung in the council chamber in the town hall. Subsequently they underwent another major restoration in the 1950s. Because they are so large they were moved outside through the windows. Obviously the windows and frames had to be removed temporarily for this.

Militia cup

To go back to the militia. It existed in Brielle until 1795, when the French took control of the Netherlands. On the orders of the French occupiers led by Napoleon the militias in the Netherlands were required to disband. On the one hand this was in order to restrict the risk of armed civil resistance to the French, and on the other hand because militias fell under the prohibition on guilds. All the (display) silverware owned by the militias had to be handed in and was sold or melted down. The militia in Brielle was also disbanded by the French occupiers in 1795, and all possessions were declared forfeit.

Brielle's militia cup

A militia cup which had belonged to the Brielle militia turned up at Christie's auction house 1987. Brielle town council decided to buy the silver cup. The significance of the cup for the town of Brielle was that this goblet had been made in 1793 by the Rotterdam silversmith Bartholomeus van der Tooren for three officers of the Brielle militia. One of them was Jan Kluit. Jan Kluit, who was captain of the Blue Banner of the Brielle militia in the 18th century, managed to save the militia cup from being melted down. The cup remained in private hands until 1987, when it ended up at Christie's auction house. Following the purchase by Brielle town council this display piece could be reunited with the three militia group portraits in Brielle Museum. The militia cup (inv. no. 0014) can be seen in the display case in the hall of the museum. The museum collection also contains three cupboard doors (inv. nos. 3357.01-03) from Brielle's 'doelen' building (the militia's clubhouse) and a portrait of Jan Kluit (inv. no. 0192). They are displayed in the Brielle Treasury under the topic of *French Rule*.

Sources: Don 2002; Groeneveld 2009; Holtrop 2012; SAVPR website.

A booklet about the Brielle militia written by Jenneke Groeneveld is on sale in the museum shop.

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