

- 1213 Geertruidenberg is granted the status of town, making it the oldest in Holland.
- 1296 Murder of Count Floris near the town of Naarden.
- 1349 'Hoekse en Kabeljouwse' (Hooks and Cod Dispute) breaks out, ending 1433.
- 1493 Philip de Schone (Philip the Handsome) takes control of the provinces of the Netherlands.
- 1555 Charles V renounces the throne; Philip II takes control of the Netherlands.
- 1559 William of Orange gains governorship of the provinces Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht.
- 1566 Iconoclastic Outbreak – church interiors destroyed, the beginning of the Dutch Revolt.
- 1567 A furious Philip II sends the Duke of Alva (the 'Iron Duke') to punish the Dutch.
- 1568 Start of the Eighty Years War.
- 1572 The Waterguezen ('Sea Beggars') seize Den Briel "in the name of Orange".
- 1584 William of Orange murdered by Balthazar Gerards.
- 1585 William of Orange's son Maurice becomes stadholder (governor).
- 1600 Maurice wins the Battle of Nieuwpoort (Belgium).
- 1625 Maurice dies and is succeeded as stadholder by his brother Frederik Hendrik.
- 1647 William II succeeds Frederik Hendrik as stadholder
- 1648 Treaty of Munster signed ending the Eighty Years' War.
- 1672 Year of disaster for the Netherlands; at war with France, England, Munster and Cologne.
- 1672 William III is appointed stadholder.
- 1747 William IV becomes stadholder.
- 1766 William V comes to power.
- 1789 The French Revolution; end of the 'ancien régime'.
- 1795 The Netherlands occupied by the French who rename it the Batavian Republic.
- 1804 Napoleon Bonaparte asserts claim to be Emperor of France.
- 1806 Napoleon Bonaparte's brother, Louis, appointed King of the Netherlands.
- 1813 Napoleon loses control of the Netherlands; William VI becomes King William I.
- 1814 The northern and southern Netherlands become one state with William I as king.
- 1830 The National Congress of Brussels declares independence for Belgium.
- 1874 The Vestingwet (Fortification Act) states that vesting (fortified) towns should be dismantled.



Nederlandse Vestingsteden



BERGEN OP ZOOM
 BRIELLE
 GEERTRUIDENBERG
 GORINCHEM
 GRAVE
 HELLEVOETSLUIS
 HULST
 RAVENSTEIN
 MEGEN
 WEESP
 WILLEMSTAD
 WOUDRICHEM

WALLED TOWNS

What is a fortress?

You have probably heard the word fortress before, but what is a fortress actually? The term "fortress" is a collective name for castles, fortresses and entrenchments. Walled towns are fortified towns whose population is primarily civilian. The necessity to protect home and property led to towns and strongholds being fortified in the Middle Ages. That is how towns became surrounded by walls, towers, ramparts and city gates. New developments in the field of warfare made it necessary later to modify the defence strategy. Stone walls were dismantled and earthen walls were built according to a carefully calculated plan.

Construction of walled towns

Walled towns can be recognized by their special shape. They are built so they cannot be conquered easily and can also defend themselves extremely well.

Middle Ages

The basis for most walled towns was laid in the Middle Ages, as it was for all towns. Initially they were settlements next to waterways. Under the influence of population growth and commercial prosperity they grew into residential areas, which later received town privileges. Each town had to defend itself against "uninvited guests". These visitors attacked with bow and arrow and gigantic catapults for shooting burning straw bales and rotting dog cadavers. The towns defended themselves by digging moats and high walls with towers inside the moats so they could see the enemy coming.

Compact and full of life

In times of war, all civilians lived inside the walls and the walled town was self-sufficient because of the farms within the walls. The entire city life took place within the walls, which is why every square centimetre of space was utilized. This made a walled town not only very compact, but also very well-organised. The notion of being well-protected against enemies produced a lively and creative public character. That spirit is still present. The places where once the smiths worked and the garrisons were stationed, now experience a thriving trade in art and antiques in most walled towns.

Flooding (inundations)

Throughout the centuries, water has played an important role in defending towns and areas in the Republic and later the Netherlands. These regions are traditionally mostly made up of polders with dikes around it. A little digging with a spade is all it takes to open these dikes and allow the water to flow into the polder. If a town in Holland was threatened in the Eighty Years War, then that is what happened. Water would flow into the polders up to 1 m deep, so the enemy could not advance. The sheets of water that were created were too deep to wade through and too shallow for sailing. The relief of Leiden in 1574 was due to the flooding of a large part of South Holland. Such actions are called deliberate inundations. Of course they were greatly to the advantage of the town defending itself. They greatly disadvantaged the farmers living in the inundated polders, as their crop failed and they were unable to sow their land.

Remaining walled towns recede in importance

The walled towns that had to remain for military reasons and that were not allowed to dismantle their fortifications remained small. Building outside the walls was not allowed, as it would obstruct the shooting range of the artillery. Such walled towns therefore had to remain small, despite the fact that from a military point of view they were becoming less important.



A BIT OF HISTORY

The remaining walled towns were increasingly becoming a kind of help station for the defence lines, especially the New Dutch Waterline. This was a shift of the Dutch Waterline past Utrecht. Their military importance decreased because the inundation plan was extended, new locks were built further away and new fortresses were constructed at other locations in the country. This was because the range of enemy artillery was gradually increasing.

Only two walled towns in operation

After the First World War only Muiden and Weesp remained as walled towns, because they were located in the Defence Line of Amsterdam. Military strategists then decided to use that line as the last line of defence, which would be defended under all circumstances. With the arrival of airplanes the waterlines lost their military significance and walled towns were no longer needed. Since the 1960s many walled towns have been partly or sometimes entirely restored. The New Dutch Waterline has also come into the picture again.

Still tangible evidence

The walled towns are tangible evidence of the genesis of the Netherlands. Nowadays what goes on in a walled town is no longer a secret for outsiders. The era of hermetically closed city gates and guards armed to the teeth has long gone. Where the gunpowder smoke has long since lifted and the turmoil of battle has silenced, there is now the charm of a historic inner city. An inner city that is enjoyable to visit for both city and country people.

A perfect day or weekend out for both young and old

Enjoy the fresh air and take in a panoramic view while strolling over the walls. Then sit back and relax on a terrace in the inner city, enjoying fine food and drink while you admire impressive monumental buildings and centuries-old façades. Stroll through narrow streets filled with antique shops and intimate galleries. Breathe the air of the gun smoke as it were, at one of the many historic cannons that can be found in every walled town. You can do all of this in the walled towns. For a complete list of all tourism opportunities, visit www.vestingsteden.nl.

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