

ANGLO-NETHERLANDS SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

c/o Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP

Tel: 07401 660 615 (Wednesdays 11 – 3 pm)

administrator@anglo-netherlands.org.uk Winter 2016-17

Vice-President: The Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

President: Sir Michael Perry GBE

Vice-President: the Hon. Sir Clive Bosson Bt

Hon. Newsletter Editor: Mr Hans Neher

Chairman: Mr Dick van den Broek

Administrator: Mrs Carine Williams



In connection with the Unilever Lecture by Prof. Lambert : Burning of the English Fleet at Chatham, 20 June 1667 (Raid on the Medway), Peter van de Velde, 1667 - 1700 from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Forthcoming Events

Linley Sambourne House

There are still a few places available.
Thursday 19 January at 11am

New "Europe 1600-1815" Galleries, V&A

Tuesday 14 February at 11am ; waiting list only

Unilever Lecture

'Learning a hard lesson : the Dutch in the Medway 1667'. Professor Andrew Lambert, Laughton Professor of Naval History, Department of War Studies at King's College.
Tuesday 21 March, drinks at 6pm for lecture at 6.30

Obsession, Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Barbican
Starring Jude Law and directed by Ivo van Hove, stage adaptation of *Ossessione*, a film which gave rise to a cinematic movement.
Sunday 30 April at 3pm, optional lunch at 12.30pm

Purcell Club : a Private Musical Tour of Westminster Abbey in the evening

We are fortunate to have been granted one of only ten Tours taking place in each year, and will visit parts of the Abbey where public access is usually restricted.
Saturday 20 May at 6.45pm

New Members

We welcome:

Mr T B and
Mrs J B
Mr R J B
Dr R C
Mr K-J K and
Mrs S K
Mr M R and
Mrs M R
Mrs B S and
Mr C E
Mr P v V V and
Mrs M v V V

Chairman's New Year Message 2017

Incorporating main points from the Annual report at our recent AGM

As your new Chairman for about a year I hope you enjoyed a relaxing end of year 2016 which brought us many surprises. Allow me also to express a few sentiments about our own great Society.

First of all I would like to thank all the volunteers, led by Connie Sangster, who made such tremendous contributions in organising events, writing up reports on them, and making suggestions in respect of new ones. These have been much appreciated by our members, according to the large number of members that have participated in these events. We have an increasingly diverse and dispersed membership which does not make it easy for our dedicated Events Committee to offer events which suit everybody. In that context any suggestions would be most welcome. I would also like to thank our Administrator, Mrs. Carine Williams, for all her work and enthusiasm which she has displayed during the year.

Referring to our quarterly newsletter, it is not surprising that we continue to receive such positive comments about our newsletters, both from members and from outside sources. It is produced with considerable skill and effort by our Hon. Editor, Hans Neher, who has on each occasion the challenging task of managing quite often different masters and meeting strict deadlines. I can only express the hope that he will continue in this masterful role for many years to come. Our website is not only for outsiders, but also for you, members, where you can find old newsletters, details of future activities, and various application forms. Just use the username/password you will find on this page (changes every quarter). It is also a convenient way to submit commentaries.

We organised some eleven events for our membership during 2016. Some of these attracted large numbers such as the Unilever Lecture with our guest speaker Prof. Barend ter Haar on the subject of "What is a Chinese Identity?" and our recent Annual dinner in the Reform Club with Sir Brian Unwin on the subject of "Does Brexit mean Brexit?" (report on page 4). A group visit was organised by Marianne Denney to Cornwall where a variety of interesting places and gardens were visited towards the middle of September. An extensive schedule of events is already planned for 2017, some of which you will find in this newsletter. I should also mention the successful continuation of our Awards to students of Dutch languages at Sheffield University and UCL. Much appreciated by the faculties and students; the winning essay at UCL in 2016 you will find on pages 5 through 8.

Although we had a fair number of our members attending the AGM on December 8, I would like to provide those members who

were not able to attend, with some major matters which were reported to members, so that all can be aware of the formal discussions.

Firstly, the financial health of the Society remains strong. There was again a surplus for the year, being added to reserves. Our cash resources continue to increase, partly explained by some investments maturing. It remains a challenging situation to obtain any decent return on these cash balances without exposing the Society to unwanted risks.

You will already have been informed that Council has decided to keep the level of subscription fees unchanged, for the tenth year running. It was explained that the subscription rates are for covering our basic costs, including those for the Administrator and the newsletters. Events are being charged separately and should cover our costs and make a small contribution to overheads.

Our individual membership numbers continued to show a healthy net increase during 2016. Quite a few of these are still active working people for whom perhaps a slightly different choice of events is required to get them actively involved in our activities. Heineken, who re-joined the Society as a Patron towards the end of 2015, kindly offered to host our AGM in 2016, followed by drinks. We continue to encourage employees of our substantial list of Patrons to participate in our events.

At this AGM we said farewell to a long-



standing member of Council, Rineke Weatherill. For more than thirty years she has contributed tremendously, in various ways and roles, to the health and activities of the Society and thereby the furtherance of Anglo-Dutch relations. In recognition thereof it was considered only appropriate that she should be offered an Honorary membership of the Society which was presented to her at the AGM, under great applause. Fortunately, Rineke has agreed to join the Advisory Committee of the Society, a Committee which meets twice a year and represents various

"streams" within the Society, both Patrons and individual members. The input and advice given by these Advisory Committee members is much appreciated by Council.

In my message last year I mentioned a few challenges:

Firstly, we had been informed by our Patron ING that they would be moving offices during the first half of 2016 and unfortunately there would be no space for us to have an office in their new environment. Council had been looking for alternatives; not easy with companies reducing their offices. However, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands came to our rescue and offered us a room in their lovely building at 38 Hyde Park Gate. We moved across in June 2016, after having gone through many boxes containing old files, and were warmly welcomed by the people at the embassy. We may well not be there for too long, but for the time being we are well-established there with a new postal address and (mobile) telephone number (see front page newsletter).

Secondly, with the departure of my predecessor Robert Brooke at the end of 2015 and the indicated resignation of Rineke Weatherill at the end of 2016 as Council members, we looked around and identified some outstanding members who were willing to join Council. You have already been informed of the new Council members, Jacqueline Tammenoms Bakker and David Glassman. David has now taken over my role as Hon. Treasurer, a very safe pair of hands. Many thanks to all Council members for their contributions in many different ways, in high spirits.

Thirdly, and more of an on-going challenge, is the need to attract new members as there is always a natural falling off in membership for various reasons. I am aware that there are still many potential members around, including close family members, so do not hesitate to entice them when meeting one. We shall be happy to send them a sample newsletter.

On behalf of the Society, I wish all members the best possible year ahead in health, safety, and fulfilment.

Dick van den Broek, Chairman

Members' Page

www.anglo-netherlands.org.uk

username: removed
password: removed

Members can download duplicate application forms and various other papers via links on the Members' Page. Alternatively, please request a paper copy from the Administrator.

“Learning a hard lesson: the Dutch in the Medway 1667”

Unilever Lecture by Professor Andrew Lambert, Tuesday 21 March, drinks at 6pm for lecture at 6.30

The Anglo-Dutch relationship has deep roots in shared aversion to the hegemonic ambitions of Continental superpowers and Habsburg Spain, but they remained rivals at sea. Their contest for command of the sea dominated the seventeenth century maritime world, in the greatest purely naval wars in history. The conflict was ended by the graver threat of Louis XIV's pan-European ambitions, but not before the Dutch Republic had demonstrated the power of ideas and experience.

The 1667 attack on the Medway pitted a republican system against Royalty, and ended in humiliation for the King. His flagship, the mighty Royal Charles, was towed away, to become a fairground attraction in Amsterdam. England, divided

and short of money, had no answer to the sound finances of the Republic. Twenty years later the English imported sound financial methods, and a Dutch ruler, to bolster the coalition that stopped Louis XIV's plans. Ultimately, post-1707, the British state became the dominant partner in the maritime coalition that sustained the European balance of power, the Republic and Britain. If 1667 was a profound shock, it forced the English to reform their state and follow a better model.

Professor Andrew Lambert is a Laughton Professor of Naval History in the Department of War Studies at King's College. After completing his research in the Department he taught at Bristol

Polytechnic, (now the University of the West of England), the Royal Naval Staff College, Greenwich, and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and also Director of the Laughton Naval History Unit housed in the Department

His books include 'Nelson: Britannia's God of War', 'Admirals: The Naval Commanders Who Made Britain Great' and 'Franklin: Tragic Hero of Polar Exploration'. His highly successful history of the British Navy, 'War at Sea', was broadcast on BBC Two.



‘Obsession’ at the Barbican Theatre

Sunday 30 April at 3 pm, preceded by optional lunch at 12.30 pm

We have secured a limited number of tickets for the play Obsession, directed by Ivo van Hove and starring Jude Law, together with members of Toneelgroep Amsterdam. The play, which will have its world premiere in the Barbican Theatre, is based on the 1943 film ‘Ossessione’ by Luchino Visconti.

Jude Law plays the magnetically handsome, down-at-heel Gino in this new stage adaptation of Visconti's penetrating social drama.

Drifter Gino, powerful and graceful as a puma, encounters Giuseppe and his much younger, trapped wife Giovanna at their roadside restaurant and petrol station. He and Giovanna are so irresistibly attracted to one another they begin an affair while plotting to murder her husband. But the crime does not unite them in this chilling story where passion can lead only to destruction.

Ivo van Hove said:

“It's very exciting to bring British actors and specifically Jude Law together with actors from our Toneelgroep Amsterdam ensemble for the first time. Obsession is a raw and timeless tale about idealised love and its fleeting nature. Major themes that resonate for all time which I am looking forward to staging at the Barbican, a venue I consider to be our London home.”

Jude Law said:

“I'd heard great things about Ivo van Hove and when I saw 'A View from the Bridge' at the Young Vic and then 'Antigone at the Barbican' I knew he was someone I really wanted to have the opportunity to work with. And now I can't wait to return to the Barbican, where I performed 22 years ago with the RSC, to take on the role of Gino, immortalised in the 1943 classic, Ossessione by Luchino Visconti, whose films I adore.”



Obsession is van Hove's fourth Visconti production. It is performed in English and brings together for the first time members of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam ensemble and British actors, led by Jude Law. His charismatic stage and screen performances have established him as one of the foremost actors of his generation.

Purcell Club : a Private Musical Tour of Westminster Abbey

Saturday 20 May, 6.45-9.15pm

A private tour of Westminster Abbey with musical interludes by the Purcell Club was a great success for our members in 1996 and in 2003. Notwithstanding their popularity, tours take place only ten times per year, by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. This year the ANS are privileged to have been granted a tour.

The Purcell club, founded in 1927, is named after Henry Purcell, the famous composer, who was organist of Westminster Abbey from 1679 to 1695. It is a male voice choir formed by members of the Westminster Abbey Old Choristers' Association. The singers give their services in order to put on these tours and all profits from ticket sales go to support the Abbey and a range of small charities.



We will assemble in the Cloisters for a welcome, then enter into the Abbey where we will take seats in the Nave for the commencement of the tour.

The speaker describes the history and architecture of the Abbey in some detail, moving from one location of interest to the

next, including the Quire, Sacrarium, High Altar, the Cosmati Pavement (unique in this country), St. Edward the Confessor's Shrine, Henry VII Chapel and Poets' Corner. At various points there is a pause for the Purcell Club to sing suitable musical items ranging from the 16th to 21st centuries. On returning to the Nave for the final part of the tour, a short piece is played by one of the Abbey organists to demonstrate the Abbey's magnificent organ. The tour ends with the choir singing a piece of suitable solemnity around the Unknown Warrior's Grave as the lights dim.



Adriaen van de Velde : Dutch Master of Landscape

Report, by John Hurst, on our visit on Saturday 15 October

The appropriateness of choosing Cafe Rouge for the social lunch before our visit to the Dulwich Picture Gallery became clear when our party of twenty started looking at the red chalk sketches that 17th Century Dutch Master of Landscape Adriaen van de Velde created to define the elements of his works, prior to producing the paintings themselves.

The Gallery had cooperated with the Rijksmuseum to collect those sketches from



far and wide, and displayed them intriguingly around the finished paintings. The most striking set was "The Hut" (soon to be back in the Rijksmuseum) and its four pre-sketches of the woodland hovel, the animals and the people, gathered from Boston, the Amsterdam Museum and a private collection.

But that was after the first room, where several views on Scheveningen caught the eye with their subtle use of light, and their finely-drawn figures - a marked contrast with the Mesdags more commonly associated with that coast. Centrepiece was 1658's "The Beach at Scheveningen", painted by van de Velde at only 22 years of age, and acknowledged to be his masterpiece. Parallels with Mozart entered our thoughts when we learnt that van de Velde had only 13 more years of career (albeit less prolific than Mozart) left before his death.

Outside the van de Velde exhibition, a new generation was composing "the longest landscape ever", and had reached 42m - the same length as the Statue of Liberty is high - pictured on the right.

The exhibition can still be seen up to 15th January, and the £25 book (see picture on



the left) makes a very attractive present.

Thanks to Chantal Tjon for organising the event, and to Evelien Hurst-Buist for hosting on the day.

Members' Dinner

Report, by Denis Doble, on the Annual Dinner at the Reform Club

The Society's annual dinner was held on 18 November in the august surroundings of the Library of the Reform Club, Pall Mall, founded in 1836. Our Chairman, Dick van den Broek, welcomed the seventy or so members and guests, especially those who had recently joined the Society, also the Dutch Counsellor for Political Affairs, Arjan Uilenreef.

After an enjoyable reception, which included "bitterballen" perfectly cooked by the Club, we had an excellent dinner of salmon and dill fishcake and breast of guinea fowl. Coffee having been served, our Chairman introduced our guest of honour and speaker, Sir Brian Unwin, a distinguished former British diplomat, senior civil servant (Deputy Secretary at the Cabinet Office and Chairman of the Board of HM Customs and Excise) and for seven years President of the European Investment Bank. The Society was also pleased to welcome Lady Unwin. Sir Brian's subject was 'Does Brexit mean Brexit?' and in a most lively and stimulating address he discussed the Referendum campaign, the task now facing civil servants of implementing the departure of the UK from the EU, the likely economic consequences, the Bank of England predictions, likely future inflation and borrowing, the effect on tax revenue and on inward investment. Sir Brian was concerned that the UK would cease to be a preferential borrower from the European Investment Bank, which had committed loans of eight billion euros to the UK in 2015, representing investment of more than twice that amount! He concluded that the UK would survive, but in a troublesome world, with the Middle East turmoil, the refugee crisis,



and the behaviour of Russia. He believed it should remain, facing these problems with its partners within the EU rather than from outside. Following the election of President-elect Trump, we could also see some changes in the political balance in Europe, not excluding the Netherlands. A scenario of Scotland wishing to become independent and serious consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland were possible. When the negotiations had been completed, Sir Brian favoured a second Referendum on what was on offer.

After a number of questions deftly handled by our Speaker, the Society's President Sir Michael Perry expressed our warm thanks to Sir Brian, observing that we are where we are and had to face reality. Much legal and determined debate would doubtless continue. Winding up, the Chairman suggested that the Dutch might be able to help, as they had once in 1688. Meanwhile, Society Members could look forward to a number of good events to come, thanks to the Events Committee. This evening was a great success all round.

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report, by Petronella and Anthony Keeling, on our visit on 8 December

We were welcomed by our guide, Anthony Palmer, who gave us a brief overview of the origins of the building, particularly the architects' competition (276 competitor designs!) leading to the appointment of George Grey Wornum and to the building's completion in 1934. We were then taken outside to admire the main facade facing Portland Place with the BBC building, completed two years earlier, a short distance to the South. It was pointed out that the ground floor 'rustication' (simulated huge stones or blocks) was a requirement of the freeholders, the De Walden Estate, but was adopted as a theme in several parts of the interior. The 1.5 tonne main doors - of now dark-green bronze - were most impressive with bas-reliefs of London buildings. Either side of the entrance are pillars capped by symbolic sculptures of a man and a woman who look up (in awe?) at the architect depicted at the top of the building itself.



Back inside, we were taken into the splendid colonnaded central atrium and its staircase. At the lower level, the staircase incorporated distinctive brass lions from the RIBA crest into the bannisters (see photo); at the first floor it took us to the magnificent main reception room. All this was in a beautiful Art Deco, 'Swedish Modernist' style, with angularity softened by fine bas-relief sculpting. The reception room had some fascinating bas-relief work including discreet portraits of the architect, artisans and other experts involved with the building's construction. The focal point of

the room is a huge carved panel with a matrix of columns (major regions of the empire) and rows (aspects of life in each). We, with our guide, were photographed in front of this as you will see. The British



Empire and RIBA members' roles in designing important buildings for it are a consistent theme of the building.

On the next floor, the principal room is a meeting room facing onto Portland Place. It was lined with white kid leather which, with generations of members who smoked during meetings, has become a light kipper colour! The top floor, as it originally was built, has the institute's Council Chamber with an eclectic mix of styles: rusticated fronts to seat rows, fabulous wood veneers on the walls, a modernist door, a huge Edwardian-style chairman's chair and a Festival-of-Britain clock.

The two set-back administrative floors which, since 1958, have topped this building, were 'cut' from the original design as, in the hardship of the 1930's, the RIBA cut the building's budget - from £120,000 to £100,000! It was still a huge building yet it was completed in only sixteen months.

We were all intrigued and impressed by this building and much enjoyed our visit. We thanked our guide and made our way to the AGM in the Heineken offices, a short walk away.

ANS Award 2016 at UCL: the winning Essay, by Robin Jacobs

"What does late 16th and early 17th Century Dutch literature concerning beached whales reveal about the early-modern Netherlandish mindset?"

In January this year, five sperm whales became beached on the island of Texel. Initially the Dutch authorities were hopeful of saving them but when treacherous weather caused rescue efforts to be abandoned, the creatures' fate was sealed and by the following afternoon marine biologists were already performing the grisly task of dissecting the carcasses in order to ascribe the episode a cause. Environmentalists were quick to blame the animals' demise on the activities of 21st Century man, perhaps correctly so, but if they assumed whale strandings to be an exclusively modern phenomenon, they were wrong.

As one might expect, the focus of Emmanuel van Meteren's *Historie van de Oorlogen en Geschiedenissen der Nederlanden*, en der Zelfer Naburen (History of the Wars and Events of the Netherlands and its Neighbours) is the tremendous political and religious upheaval that engulfed the Netherlands in the latter part of the 16th Century. The entry for 2nd February 1598 therefore comes as something of a surprise. The Antwerp chronicler, who lived from 1535 to 1612, recounts how, in Holland, on the beach between Katwijk and Scheveningen near a hamlet called Berckhey, a whale appeared. He says as follows:

'In Holland is in dit jaar den 2den van Sprockelmaand, op 't strand tuschen Katwyk en Scheveningen omtrend een gehught, Bergey geheeten, een Walvisch aangekomen,'

He goes on to explain that the whale had become stranded as a result of the tide having receded and that it had been brought gradually closer to land by fishermen, howling and growling, with cables around it. It died there a few days later, having "burst internally" because of its heavy weight on the hard sand, as the blood and fat ran from its mouth. He tells us that, because of its nature, the creature was called a sperm whale.



Figure Two | Jan Saenredam | Beached Whale near Beverwijk witnessed by Graaf Ernst Casimir van Nassau-Dietz | Engraving, with text by Theodoor Schrevelius | Museum Boijmans van Beuningen

'die zig an grond vindende, het water afgeloopen zynde groot getier en misbaar maakte, daar hy van de visschers, met Kabels omslagen, allengjes nader by het Land gebragt werd daar hy naar eenige dagen gestorven is, inwendig geborsten zynde door zyn groot gewigt op het hard zand, want het bloed en smout hem pislings asliep uit het Bakhuys: hy werd naar zynen aard van de Visschers genoemd een Potwalvisch'

Van Meteren proceeds to describe the whale in detail, telling us that it was fifty-two feet long, that its eyes were fifteen feet from its mouth, that four feet behind its eyes it had a fin, that its mouth

had a lower jaw of seven feet, but very narrow, in which there were forty-two teeth, as white as ivory, each sticking up like a large hen's egg, and that its long mouth closed at the top of the palate, in many "putter" which were hard. From the creature's six foot protruding member van Meteren was able to deduce that it was male! The creature's 'staerd' was thirteen feet high or wide. The creature's thickness could not be measured as it was lying in the sand but it was to be sure, a large beast, "as we have seen for ourselves".

'Hy was lang tweenvyftig roeivoeten, zyne oogen stonden vystien voeten van zynen muil, vier voeten agter der oogen had hy eene vlim, de muil had onder eenen bek, uitstekende lang zeven voeten, maar geheel smal, en hier in stonden tweenvertig tanden wit als yvoor elk uitstekende gelyk een groot Hoender Ei, en die lange bek sloot in 't gehemelte boven, in zo veele putter, die hard waren: deeze Visch was manlyk, want hy had zyn manlyk lid uitsteekende, en dood zynde zes voeten lanf: zyn staerd was hoog of breed dertien voeten, zyne dikte, vermits hy in't zand lag, kon men niet meten, maar was, voorwaar! Een groot Beest, gelyk wy zelfs gezien hebben.'

Van Meteren concludes with what became of the whale's carcass, noting that it was sold to the State of Holland for one hundred and twenty-six guilders – a bargain given that oil could be made from it - and that the mouth was given to Count Jan van Nassau and duly transported to Dillenburg, the ancestral seat of the House of Nassau.

'Hy werd, wegens de Graaflykheid van Holland verkogt voor honderd zesentwintig Guldens, dat goed koop werd gerekend voor de geenen, die Traan Olie daar van maken: de bek werd geschonken aan Graaf Jan van Nassau, en naar Dillenburg gevoerd.'

In his account, Van Meteren refers to "groot getier en misbaar" which roughly translates as "howling and growling" or "great uproar and clamor." He appears to attribute this to the whale. However, using the same words, other chroniclers such as Petrus Christiaanszoon Bor, (referred in Simon Schama's *The Embarrassment of Riches*) suggest that the disquiet may have emanated not from the whale itself but from troubled onlookers. Based on other accounts, this is entirely plausible. Writing in Latin alongside a print of the whale, the Haarlem born writer, poet and classicist, Theodore Schrevelius (1572-1649), commented:

'A large whale, thrown up out of the blue sea (gods, let it not be a bad omen!), washed up on the beach near Katwijk. What a terror of the deep Ocean is a whale, when it is driven by the wind and its own power on to the shore of the land and lies captive on the dry sand.'

In a further text produced some years later for a widely-circulated pamphlet about another stranding, the same Schrevelius, today best known for his *Harlemias* (a history of Haarlem) returns to the notion of the whale as omen. Referring to it as "mortalibus omen" and "monstro portenditur" he talks of the "many calamities and bloodbaths" that have occurred subsequently, specifically the siege of Ostend, reports of a Spanish armada headed for the Netherlands; an earthquake, and a severe outbreak of the plague. An accompanying illustration by the celebrated artist Jan Saenradam (1565 -1607) shows Death, in the form of a skeleton, executing the helpless Maid of Amsterdam with a crossbow.

In yet a further pamphlet, an image of the Berckhey stranding was printed alongside a map of the Principality of Cleves, which in August 1598 was occupied by Spanish soldiers and subjected to atrocities. The whale is accredited with having heralded this.

It almost goes without saying that the respective analyses of van Meteren and Schrevelius could not be more different. Van Meteren's matter-of-fact, unsensational account of the stranding appears as 'rational' or 'modern' in outlook. Everything that is said about the whale, from the physical control exerted over it by the fishermen, to its reduction into everyday vocabulary and units of measurement and its ultimate appropriation by the political establishment, emphasises humankind's control over nature: the extraordinary – in so far as it even exists – is comprehensively absorbed by the everyday. Moreover, the attempt to analyse and document the creature can be seen as proto-scientific in outlook and characteristic of an increasing drive to understand the natural world.

By contrast, for Schrevelius the natural world is wild, savage and mysterious, a force that not only illustrates the subjection of human

beings to a higher power, but which plays a key role in maintaining it. This viewpoint – here manifested in the notion that a beached whale could in some sense serve as omen or portent - merits further consideration and, to that end, I wish to devote the remainder of this essay to exploring two particular issues, firstly the origin and character of such a mentality, and secondly, how widespread it was.

To some extent, the portentous significance of the beached whale at Berckhey can be attributed to Christianity. Both the Old Testament and the New are littered with examples of God expressing his will through natural phenomena. The Book of Jonah recounts how, having been told by God to travel to and confront the sinful city of Nineveh, Jonah instead sought to flee from "the presence of the Lord" by boarding a ship travelling in the opposite direction. A tempest arose and after admitting to his fellow sailors that he was the cause, Jonah was ultimately thrown overboard in an attempt to calm the sea, the dumping of cargo having failed to alleviate the ship's invidious predicament. Jonah's life was miraculously saved when he was swallowed by a large whale in whose belly he spent three days and three nights. While in the whale, Jonah prayed to God who subsequently commanded the fish to spew him out. Jonah then did as requested and visited Nineveh.

As Schama notes, the Book of Jonah - and by extension whales - seem to have held a special place in the Netherlandish consciousness. An unusually large number of prints and drawings were produced of the subject, including one now in the British Museum bearing the inscription, "Jonas vliet Godt doch even wel hem vint Door tempeest naer een visch he slint" or "Jonas fled from God, who found him anyway a tempest led him to a fish." (Fig.3). At the same time, "to cast barrels before a whale" was a popular Flemish proverb warning against greed." For Schama, whales were the writing on the wall: a reminder of the consequences of disobeying God and the "bearers of bad tidings to the sinful."

Support for the above notion can be found in a Dutch poem accompanying a version of a print by Jacob Matham (1571-1631) of the Berckhey whale. After describing the whale's dimensions, the poet considers what it all means, asking whether it is perhaps "a threat or warning about vain people's clothes" or an attempt to "frighten", something which should not be necessary as "God already warns us enough in his holy word which each person has to obey well-intentioned while bowing, spreading the praise of his high name on and on whose miracles are great and confirm his highness." The poem reads:

*'wat brought u burgher ons aenboort
Ist dreyghingh of waerschouw of ydel volx costuymen
Hem hier verschricken in, welck niet gheschieden hoort
Godt waerschouwt al ghenook ons in syn heghligh woor
Daer elck goetwillich most ghehoorsaem onder buyghen
Den lof syns hooghenaems verbreydt sy voort en voort
Wies wonder wercken groot syn heerlyckheytt betuyghen.'*

With respect to the above, it seems important to note that the use of the English words "miracle" and "wonder" and the Dutch ones "mirakel" and "wonder" appears to have evolved somewhat. Whilst today they may refer to a welcome and unexpected event, in previous centuries they more probably connoted an omen or message, having been translated from the Greek 'semeion' the literal meaning of which is 'sign.'

Whales were by no means the only way in which the almighty communicated his displeasure. The whale formed part of a wider visual vocabulary. An example can be found in an extract from an almanac-song-and-verse-book published by the town of Maassluis, a herring and fishing port near Rotterdam, where, in 1661, the appearance of a shooting star was interpreted with considerable foreboding. After asking whether the Netherlands will not turn from sin and righteousness and walk once more in the ways of God, the poem observes that a star has been seen in the southeast with rays both great and small. "What is this,"



Figure Three | After Paul Brill | *The Story of Jonah* | Engraving, with text by unknown author | British Museum, London

asks the writer, “if not a sign that God will punish all our sins?”

*‘Heeft men hier onlans niet vernomen.
Een Sterre Aan des Hemels-pleyn,
Die men in ’T Zuyd-Oost Op zag komen,
Met Veele Stralen Groot en kleyn,
Wat is het anders als een teeken?
Dat Godt wil onze Zonden wreeken.’*

However, for all the importance of religion it seems that to fully appreciate the response to the beached whale at Berckhey we also need to be conscious of a deeper folklore that had existed since pagan times and which tended to see any departure from the natural order as ominous. Willem Frijhoff has noted that “Protestant Reform did not all of a sudden succeed in eradicating the practices, rituals, symbolisms, images and gestures embodied for generations, if not centuries, in the minds of men and women, and even in their social organization. In it some see the persistence of a pagan world that Christianity only very gradually succeeded in converting to a more internalised and intensely felt Christian faith” and this proclivity to “wallow in an ancient visual world” seems to have manifested itself whenever there was an unfamiliar event for which there was no obvious explanation. Whilst the sighting of comets and shooting stars are perhaps the most obvious examples, it seems that the appearances of whales on beaches also fall into the same category.

Given that whale strandings were few and far between – only fifteen are recorded in the North Sea between 1560 and 1609 – and that, in spite of Holland’s maritime traditions, relatively few of its citizens would have sailed on the open ocean, to most, whales would have been as rare and unusual a sight as a comet or shooting star. The lack of familiarity with whales would explain why various artists were so keen to sketch the whale. It would also explain why Jacob Matham made errors in doing so, supposing the creatures’ fins to be ears and representing them as such.

By the 18th Century, nearly 14,000 Dutchmen would be involved in the whaling industry and a whole quarter of Amsterdam would be occupied by the rendering works and warehouses of the trade, the area being affectionately known as “de stinkerijen.” It is thus no coincidence that by this time, whales had long ceased to hold the same mysterious visual-resonance and that a dead whale was removed from a painting by the landscape painter Hendrik van Anthonissen (1605-1656), turning it into an innocuous and more saleable beach scene. However, in 1598 the appropriation of the whale into everyday life was far off and the only people possessing any familiarity would have been mariners. Indeed, it is telling that in van Meteren’s account it is fishermen who approach the beast and are able to name it. A similar instance is recorded in a poem about a stranding at Zandvoort – once again printed alongside an image thus stressing the significance of visual culture in this context (Fig.5) - where sailors are able to inform bystanders that the dead fish in question is not in fact a whale but rather a tuna:

*‘Als men duyfent, vijf hondert, heeft gheschreven
Ende vier en tneghentich, in de maent
November, eenentWintich, aenghedreven
Quam t’Sandtvoort, in Hollandt, dus van ghedaent,
Eenen dooden Visch, die men eenen Walvisch waent:
Maer Tanijn ghenaeamt Wordt van den Zee luyden’*

Thus, it seems that, independently of religion, the unusual was conflated with the ominous.

As for the extent of this mind-set, writing in Latin, the celebrated jurist and scholar, Huigh de Groot (1583-1645) (also known as Hugo Grotius) divided the onlookers at Berckhey into two groups. He recounted how the more learned had been concerned with the natural processes that had

driven the whale onto the shore, speculating on the role of storms, while others, “among the common people,” debated its ominous significance, some taking it as a sign that “the Hollanders would triumph over their enemies, others that it was a portent of disaster.” Whilst the above distinction may, to some extent, be representative of how different sections of society viewed the world, it nevertheless seems overly simplistic to say that the educated leaned towards an enlightened interpretation while the lower echelons remained routed in superstition.

Instead, it appears that society was characterised by a dualism, a curious mixture of the rational and the superstitious, and that omens were very much embedded in the collective consciousness. Schama notes that the habit of regarding apparently extraterrestrial phenomena as the mark of God’s wrath was so deeply ingrained that when it was attacked by the writer of a treatise on comets, the Rotterdam magistrates withheld his stipend as a penalty. Similarly, van Deursen notes how, in its resolutions, the State of Holland recorded the way in which omens had spurred them to fear the wrath of God.

Nor was belief in omens confined to a particular religious confession. In Plain Lives, van Deursen comments that churches were unanimous in their belief that God spoke to man through signs while Frijhoff argues that until far into the early modern era Catholics and Protestants still largely shared a similar physical and symbolic mental universe including perceptions of natural phenomena and stories about the causalities of the earthly and heavenly world. There are documented instances of people of all major confessions – Lutheran, Mennonite and Catholic – purporting to witness signs in 17th Century Holland.

It seems that this common language of perception, understood by everyone and based on collective observation, was so ubiquitous that even those who did not necessarily subscribe to it ended up engaging with it. For example, Florike Egmond notes how, in a pamphlet commissioned by Stadhouder Maurits to commemorate his ride along the coast in a wind powered car (illustration at Fig.6) Grotius alludes to the whale and its supposed meaning, ‘*De gravure is omlijst door 24 gedichtes van de jeugdige Hugo de Groot. In een daarvan komen niet alleen de zeilwagen maar ook de aardbeving en de walvisstranding ter sprake.*’ Grotius’s poem, by no means a neutral report, sings the praises of the countryside and its liberator, seemingly rejoicing in the way his patron has defied the omen and prospered:

*‘Doen hier de walvisch lagh so groot schier als het strandt
Daer catwijck houdt den naem van’t oude Vaderlandt’*

To quote the old Flemish proverb, Maurits has ‘shat on the gallows’ (*de galg beschijten*)!

The contrasting responses that one sees to the stranded whale at Berckhey typify the mind-set of the time. On the one hand, this was a period of scientific advancement and a growing recognition that the world was governed by discernible, rational laws. However, at the same time it seems that the new learning had a limited impact on the collective consciousness, which remained characterised by what was essentially a medieval outlook.

The particular tendency to see beached whales as portents of doom appears to reflect the general mood of anxiety arising out of decades of war and the possibility of decades more, with a favourable outcome by no means a forgone conclusion. It is no coincidence that at the end of the 17th Century, in a time of greater prosperity, people came to see the natural world as a sign of the benevolence of God rather than his wrath, the worried forebodings of Schrevelius giving way to the placid reflections of the entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647 – 1717), to whom the metamorphosis of the butterfly, which emerges from a lifeless hull and joyfully flies heavenward, was a hope-giving symbol for the resurrection of the soul from the dead physical shell of the Christian’s body. The final stanza of a song at the end of the book – set to the tune of Jesus, You, Who my soul - reads as follows:

*'Dearest God / thus you will deal
With us, too / in due course;
As the caterpillars change themselves /
And / by dying /
Come again to life /
Like the dead / in the ground:
Let me, poor worm,
Be thus commanded unto you.'*

Editor's Note : please refer to the Autumn 2016 Newsletter regarding the aims of the Award. Two illustrations of beached whales were omitted from the Newsletter, as were the footnotes and bibliography. The complete Essay can be downloaded from the Awards section at www.anglo-netherlands.org.uk

Figure Six | De zeilwagen van Simon Stevin, 1602, Willem Isaacsz. van Swanenburg, naar Jacob de Gheyn (II), 1603 | Engraving, with text by Hugo Grotius | Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Original print 1.5m wide.



SIGNPOSTS

Nederlandse City Lunch

"Prominent speakers from the Netherlands": Piet-Hein Donner, vice-president, Raad van State 19 januari, 12 uur voor 12.30, Dutch Church.

Janine Jansen, violin

with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev. 5 February: Bernstein, 12 March: Brahms and Strauss, and 6 April: Berg, in each instance commencing at 7.30pm, Barbican Hall.

Lunch and Talk on Migration

with Professor Paul Collier, on his book "Exodus: How Migration is changing the world" 22 February, 12 for 12.30pm, Dutch Centre.

Dutch National Student Orchestra

23 February, 6 for 6.30pm, Dutch Centre.

Europe and the rise of populism

debate, with Nick Clegg and Thierry Baudet 28 February, 7 for 7.30pm, Dutch Centre.

Nederlands Kamerkoor

directed by Peter Dijkstra: "Sacred and Profane", part of 'Choral at Cadogan' 8 March, 7.30pm, Cadogan Hall.

Verkiezingen 2017

Please register to vote, in good time.

Elections for the Tweede Kamer will be held on 15 March 2017. To vote from abroad please register by 31 January, via a webform at www.denhaag.nl/kiezersbuitenland, or one might contact one's local Consulate.

Simone Lamsma, violinist

Schubert, Arvo Pärt and Strauss, 12 March, 11.30am, Wigmore Hall,

Toneelgroep Amsterdam : Ivo van Hove

Epic 'Roman Tragedies', based on works by William Shakespeare. 17 - 19 March, 4pm, Barbican Hall.

Caro Emerald

'New year, new songs, new show, new tour.' 12 April, 7.30pm, Royal Albert Hall.

Subscriptions 2017

Our subscription year is based on a calendar year and we would be most grateful for early payments by members not yet paying by standing order. The latter is our preferred form of payment and can easily be set up through your bank account. The account number of the Anglo-Netherlands Society is 05 40 98 45, our sort code 50-41-02.

A reminder of our great value rates, which have now been kept unchanged for ten years:

Joint Members pay £30 in Greater London, reduced to a mere £25 when the Country Rate applies. **Single Members** pay £23 in Greater London, reduced to just £20 when the Country Rate is applied.

* The Country rate is available to members whose address is outside a radius of 50 miles from Hyde Park Corner. ;** Joint Members are any two members who receive one copy of each mailing at one single address.

Anglo-Netherlands Society

Established 1920, incorporated 2002

Company limited by guarantee, number 4322131

Registered Office:

100 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0DY
c/o Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,
38 Hyde Park Gate, London SW7 5DP

Mobile phone (and SMS): 07401 660 615

Website: www.anglo-netherlands.org.uk

e-mail: administrator@anglo-netherlands.org.uk

AIMS and OBJECTS

The Anglo-Netherlands Society exists to promote the social, artistic, literary, educational, scientific, and other non party-political interests in common to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Apart from publishing this Newsletter, the Society reaches its members by organising social functions (including dinners, lectures and recitals) and by arranging visits to exhibitions, concerts, and places of interest. The Society relies on voluntary workers.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Any person or organisation desirous of promoting the objects of the Society is eligible to apply for membership, subject to acceptance by the Society's Council. More information is available from the Administrator.

PRESIDENT

Sir Michael Perry, GBE

VICE-PRESIDENTS

H.E. the Netherlands Ambassador
The Hon. Sir Clive Bossom Bt

COUNCIL

Dick van den Broek (Chairman)
Paul Dimond (Hon. Secretary)
David Glassman (Hon. Treasurer)
Sylvia Knight

Jacqueline Tammenoms Bakker

EVENTS COMMITTEE

Connie Sangster (Chairman)
Marianne Denney Marietta Freeman
Evelien Hurst Ann McMellan Chantal Tjon

CORPORATE PATRONS

The Society has for years been fortunate in having the help of several organisations. To recognise this support, which has often been sustained for decades, the following organisations are termed Corporate Patrons:

Royal Netherlands Embassy

ABN AMRO Bank

Heineken

ING Bank

PricewaterhouseCoopers

Royal Dutch Shell

Unilever

CORPORATE MEMBERS

Carpenters' Company

This form of membership can be tailored to your requirements.

(c) 2017 by the individual named with the contribution, otherwise Anglo-Netherlands Society. Published in London. All rights reserved. Any facts and opinions expressed in this Newsletter or in the advertisements solely reflect the current opinion, judgement or knowledge of the author(s) and do not imply a collective view on the part of the Anglo-Netherlands Society. Advertisements and contributions are accepted on the understanding that the contents are factually correct and do not contravene relevant Acts and Codes. The Editor reserves the right to refuse or withdraw advertisements and other contributions at his discretion, and does not accept liability for errors or omissions, although reasonable care is taken to avoid mistakes.