



In Search of Scotland in a Zeelandic Town: *sources for Scottish history in the records of Veere*¹

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At the end of the seventeenth century, a remarkable legal battle took place. It all started because of a woman and almost escalated into the annulment of a trade contract the Scots and the community of Veere had signed one hundred and fifty years before. The protagonists were Isaac den Heldt, the mayor of Veere, and John Gordon, a merchant from Aberdeen. All manner of accusations were made in writing, and a lively correspondence ensued between the relevant parties in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Veere, and The Hague. As the following letter shows, documents could sometimes take a long time to reach their destination. On February 6th, the mayor of Veere wrote a letter to his attorney:

*Dear sir, please find enclosed a report from Scotland, and from Edinburgh and Aberdeen, as well as the Dutch translation thereof. The reason it has taken so long, is that ships carrying the letters were struck by storms and head-on winds which drove them to the north of Scotland where they were taken ashore; our documents of proof were 40 days old before they were delivered (...)*³

This document can be found in a letter book dating from 1695 until 1701 which is housed in the archives of the 'Orphan Chamber' in the town of Veere. It is labelled 'estate documents belonging to Isaac den Heldt', which does not immediately tell you that this is where you should look if you are trying to gather information on postal traffic between the Netherlands and Scotland in the seventeenth century.

This source is one of the many documents on Scottish history which are found in the archives of Veere. This town in the Dutch province of Zeeland was for centuries a place with strong ties with Scotland. Municipal and private institutions had to deal with these foreigners. This can be shown in the records of the town, courtyard ('vierschaar'), notaries, orphan chamber, and private institutions as churches and guilds.

Scottish presence in the records of the town.

The archives that were set up by the town clerk during the period before 1800, extend over a length of about 300 metres. Although the oldest document dates back to 1348, the series started in 1470. It was in this year that the town hall in Veere was built, and it provided a place of safe storage as well as enough room to house the steadily growing number of records. Over the centuries however, they became rather jumbled and archivists tried to bring some sort of order to them. Nevertheless, an inventory of the records has never been made.

A few years ago this work has started and will be complete it in the year 2008. The present stage is the making of general descriptions. The ordering system is based on the tasks and duties of the Veere municipal council. The written reports pertaining to these tasks have been classified into 25 chapters.

¹ This article is a revision of the paper that was given at the workshop 'Scottish Sources In The Netherlands, Dutch Sources in Scotland', organised by the Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies of the University of Aberdeen on May 8th 2004.

² Peter Blom was between 1989 and 2000 municipal archivist of Veere. Since the reorganisation of 2000 he is working in the Zeeuws Archief in Middelburg where the records of Veere are kept.

³ ZA, archief weeskamer stad Veere, inv.nr. 152b (Letter from Den Heldt to his attorney Schrick, February 6th 1699) The original text in Dutch is: *Hier nevens bekomt Uedele relaas in forma uijt Schotland soo van Edinburgh als Aberdeen neffens het Duitsche translaat. De reden waar om 't selve soo lang heeft geardeert, is dat de scheepen waarmede de weebrieven waren weggesonden door contrarie wind en storm tot int noorden van Schotland waren gedreven en aldaar aangeland sulx onse citatien 40 dagen oud waren eer die wierden besteld (...).*

The documents in these archives concerning the relations Veere entered into and maintained with Scotland, have been classified under 'Relations with Scotland and her Royal Burroughs'. The sub-headings are: documents concerning the establishment and observance of rights and rules, the judiciary and ecclesiastical matters and business affairs.

The contracts entered into by Veere and Scotland are found under this section. Unfortunately the original of the first contract dating from 1541 has not survived, but there is a copy in the so-called *Rood Costuumboek*⁴, which is the town's cartulary. The original contracts signed between 1578 and 1780 by the representatives of the Royal Burroughs and the town of Veere have survived however⁵.

Following on from this, there are also documents dealing with negotiations between them. These could be notations used in the negotiations on the articles or accounts from administrators in Veere as to why the staple should remain there.

Separate articles sometimes resulted in more written reports. Documents that were received by the town of Veere as a result of the contract and explicitly dealing with Scottish legislation, the Scottish Church, or Scottish commerce are described separately..

Articles taken from these contracts could explain precisely why there are no documents about certain cases survived. For instance, according to the contract, those who lived under the protection of privileges did not have to pay any taxes on wine and beer. The consequence of this must have been that Scots were constantly found roaming the streets of Veere in an inebriated state. However in the assessment registers and invoices of the beer and wine tax we find no taxes which are paid by Scottish inn-keepers.

Since Scottish residents formed part of Veere society from the 15th century to the beginning of the 19th century, traces of their existence are found in a large part of the remaining 25 sections of the town's archives.

When we are dealing with the activities of the governing bodies as laid down in statutes and ordinances, the minutes or the general categories of correspondence and petitions, we could come across special documents. A fine example here is a petition to the town's council by an old inhabitant of Veere who lived next door to the House of the Scottish Nation in 1764 and who wanted to take action against the loud singing and noise made by his Scottish neighbours⁶.

Under the population section we find the burgher books. People who originally came from Scottish towns are registered here from 1470 onwards. The register dating from 1470-1666⁷ lists 2700 people who took the oath of citizenship and mentions their place of origin: 7 % were of Scottish origin. In some cases the name of their birthplace was corrupted in the Zeelandic dialect, or it was written down phonetically. In these registers we find the names and places of origin of several people from *Abberdaan* or *Abberdoneran* like one David de Scot on 10th July 1527. Another, Andries Renny, came in 1651 from *Couris in Schotlant*. *Hindernis* was the town Charles Macqleijn came from in 1659. Aberdeen can be recognised in *Abberdoneran*. With a stretch of imagination 'Hindernis' may be read as Inverness. *Couris* or *Koeris* is the pronunciation of Fife locals for Culross, from 1981 Veeres twin town.

⁴ ZA, archief van de stad Veere (ASV) (records of the town of Veere) voorl. inv.nr. 311 (Rood Costuumboek, circa 1480-1572), folio 92.

⁵ ZA, ASV voorl. inv.nrs. 2089.14 (1578), 2089.13 (1612), 2098.06 (1675), 2089.01 (1697/1698), 2119.13 (1718), 2089.08 (1748), 2089.10 (1780).

⁶ ZA, ASV, voorl.inv.nr. 35 (notulen van Wet en Raad, 7-12-1765)

⁷ ZA, ASV, voorl.inv.nr. 920 (poortersboek/burgherboek 1470-1666).

Additional personal information can be found in divers sources. The death of Scottish residents before the 18th century is recorded in assessment registers of collateral succession, which is a tax on inheritance.⁸ For the last half of the 18th century their professions are registered in lists made by the chairmen of the district⁹.

Conservators of he Scottish Privileges

One can easily come under the impression that Veere was heaven on earth for the Scots: no taxes and cheap liquor. The fact that this did not always apply is proven in a letter written by the representative of the Scottish Nation. On 17 September 1756 Charles Stuart wrote to the Veere Town Council how the Scots in Veere, even though they were required to pay fewer taxes, always found their shopping worked out more expensive than the local Veere people. The Dutch were happy to eat bacon, grits, gruel and greens but for a Scot, to have a good piece of meat on the table was a daily requirement¹⁰. Stuart was between 1726 and 1760 deputy conservator of the Scots Privileges in the Netherlands, in 1760 he was appointed conservator. He died in 1761.

From 1541 onwards the position of conservator was linked to the staple in Veere and it continued to exist nominally until 1847. He resided in the Scots House. The conservator was subject to the Convention of the Royal Burroughs and his tasks involved administration, legislation, and the administration of justice. His jurisdiction and that of the magistrate of Veere were clearly defined. He had jurisdiction over people and goods belonging to the staple. He judged civil and criminal cases between Scottish nationals according to Scottish law. The magistrate's assistance was requested whenever there proved to be any difficulties regarding the execution of sentences.¹¹ The conservator's archives have not been preserved in Veere. The only register that has survived is the 'Conservator's Courtbook' dating from 1719 until 1740¹² and is kept in the NAS. In July 1691 a catalogue of the books belonging to the conservatorie office was presented by the conservator Andrew Kennedy to the Convention of Royal Burroughs¹³. From this document we know that the court administration dating from 1570 until 1688 was in his custody. There is no evidence that these court books survived in Britain or the Netherlands¹⁴.

Living under Scottish law

The involvement of the Veere courts in matters involving the Scots are to be found in the tribunal archives of the town of Veere which were formed by the clerk of the court. Once again the records were only preserved after 1470. Up to 1811, the file comprises about 300 sections.

The first sentences in civil disputes were transcribed in the aldermen and sheriff's deed books¹⁵ or daybooks dating from 1474. The Scots are regularly mentioned in these oldest preserved documents. They are mentioned by name and as individual persons, such as '*Pieter Haghen, schipper van Lieth (Pieter Haghen,*

⁸ ZA, records of the orphan chamber inv.nr 125 (lists of the death 1705-1811). See also ZA, Rekenkamer D (collaterale succesie Veere en ressort, e.g. D 63921 (1724).

⁹ ZA, records of the 'wijkmeesters' (masters of the district), several inventory numbers.

¹⁰ ZA, ASV, voorl. inv.nr. 2115 (letter of Charles Stuart, 1756)

¹¹ Foskea A.J. van der Ven, 'Kamp Zeist en Veere: Schotse rechtspraak op Nederlandse bodem' *Zeeland, Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen*, 2001, 2, pp 47-56.

¹² NAS, RA 11/2/1 (local and other court records)

¹³ A transcription, made in 2003 by Innes Duffes, Honorary Archivist to the Nine Incorporated Trades of Dundee can be found on the website of the Friends of Dundee City Archives.

¹⁴ *Memorandum on whether any records of the proceedings of the Court of the Conservator of Scottish Privileges in the Netherlands are in archives of the Netherlands (including Flanders), being not found in any Scottish, English or United Kingdom repositories.* (Faculty of Law, University of Glasgow, 18th May 1982)

http://sites.ecosse.net/robsuth/2_History_ScotsStaple

¹⁵ In Dutch they are called 'schepenaktenboeken'

skipper of Lieth)¹⁶ or ‘*Tomas Ackerston, coopman van Edinburgh en getrouwd met de weduwe van Wout Helliborton*’ (*Tomas Ackerston, merchant from Edinburgh and married to Wout Helliborton’s widow*)¹⁷. As a group, they are referred to as ‘*coopluijden uut Scotland*’ (‘merchants from Scotland’)¹⁸ or as ‘*coopluijden van de Natie van Scotland*’ (‘merchants from the Nation of Scotland’)¹⁹.

After the contract had been drawn up in 1541, in which the founding of their own court was mentioned, the staple contract indicates documents in which Scots are hidden away. And indeed, from this time onwards sources also refer to them as ‘members of the Scottish Court’.

Apart from the Scottish Court, there was also a council of justices of the peace from 1702 onwards. A Dutchman invariably presided and it would convene in the town hall. Court documents and verdicts had to be written in the Dutch language²⁰, and then translated into Scottish and registered in a book deposited with the Veere registry. The register dating from 1757 to 1791 has been preserved²¹. Examples of cases that were heard between Dutchmen and Scots are: a problem concerning a rental contract (4th November 1785), a case about an invoice that was overpaid (9th June 1769) and a matter concerning a Scottish merchant’s insolvent estate (April/May 1787).

The judicial body, which formed part of the Veere tribunal and was concerned with disputes concerning loading and damage, and disputes between merchants, captains and crewmembers, was known as ‘the college of maritime law’. Documents have been preserved from the period of 1677 to 1807. In a number of cases Scots are involved here.²²

Notarial deeds

The conservator acted also as notary. Scottish merchants could go to him and have an official will and testament drawn up. Neither magistrates nor orphan masters had any say here.²³ At the end of the seventeenth century however, we do come across a number of notaries in Veere who were associated with the Scottish Court.

Protocols of notaries in Veere from between 1589 to 1870, when the last notary left Veere, have survived. In 1700, there were seven notarial offices, 250 files have survived from the period up to 1811 and each comprises about 300 deeds.

It is not clear what status was enjoyed by the notaries associated with the Court. A list dating back to 1698 of families who were members of the Scottish Nation mentions an officially qualified notary practising in Veere. It also states very explicitly that this fact does not exclude his civil rights in any way.²⁴ A study of his protocols reveals that anyone who needed an official document could call on him at anytime.

¹⁶ ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 356, folio 88 (may/june 1474)

¹⁷ ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 356, folio 83v (28 march 1474)

¹⁸ ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 356, folio 97 (29 october 1474)

¹⁹ ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 356, folio 99 (5 march 1474)

²⁰ In the original says that it has to be written in ‘het Duits’. This means ‘Dutch’, the language that was spoken in the Netherlands. Nowadays ‘Duits’ means in Dutch ‘the German language’.

²¹ Van der Ven, 2001, p.50; The original can be found in ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 296a.

²² ZA, RAZE, records of the court of Veere, inv.nr. 329^E (damage to the ship of Robert Hogg in 1755)

²³ Van der Ven 2001, p. 50. It concerns the contracts of 1676 and 1697, 16th article.

²⁴ ZA, ASV, voorl. inv. nr. 2115.109 (‘lijst van de Familien aan de Scottish Nation hoorende woonende binnen de Stadt Vere’) (list of families belonging to the Scottish Nation living in the town of Veere).

The protocols of notary Rijcx dating from 1674 to 1700, contain a wide range of Scottish documents. They include loading contracts²⁵ and damage reports, and now and again there is a report of the Scottish tribunal.²⁶ In a statement from 1695 (4th April) concerning damage to a Bo'nes ship, it is explicitly stated that it may be used as valid proof for the benefit of Court and Conservator.²⁷ The declaration of a Zeelandic skipper dating from 1674 concerns the problems he encountered when he delivered 25 pounds of gold from Guinea for the Scottish Parliament²⁸ and is a remarkable document.

It is thanks to the inventories that have been preserved in notarial archives that we have information on the material wealth of Scots living in Veere round about 1700. Like the warden of the Scottish Nation House in 1728 were the curators needed six days to make a list of his personal property²⁹ or the barber of the Scottish Staple court who fled for his creditors leaving behind his wigs and 48 paintings³⁰.

But more interesting for our subject: where is the 'cabinet full of papers' that is described in the '*Inventar of the goods and effects left by the deceased mr. Henry Wilky, sometime Lord Conservator att this stapleport of Campveere who departed this life the 8th of April 1684*'.³¹ The titles of some of the 62 volumes in 'A trunk of books' like 'The mistery of husbandry', 'The art of pleasing', 'Stuarts unhappy reign (in Dutch)' and 'A character of ye Low Countries' shows the broad interest of this Scottish conservator.

What we are dealing with here is simply a random summary. A more structured index based on personal-, topographical- or ships names has never been made. From 1990 to 1996, however, a group of volunteers has taken on the task of making cartularies on notarial archives from 1750 onwards³².

As an example a section dating from the period March 1771 to April 1775 of a notary from Veere is given here. Of the 300 sections, Scots are mentioned in 54. The documents concern payments of debts, different types of declarations such a trip that was too long or about the quality of the cargo, wills and so-called 'complaints about the sea and wind.'

Seventeen acts involve members of the Scottish merchant family Gregorie. Indeed, many of the volunteers who came to do indexing every Monday gradually developed a certain affection and affinity for these Scots. Unforgettable was the moment when the quiet atmosphere of the reading room was disturbed by a sigh and the words: 'Oh no, look, it says here that the old Gregorie has died'!

Orphans and unclaimed estates

The orphan chamber was a board whose task involved administrative work regarding orphans and half-orphans as well as managing estates that were bankrupt or left. The contract was a way of preventing any Scottish estates from falling into the hands of this official body in Veere. Nevertheless, one regularly comes across documents dealing with Scottish families. The Dundee-born merchant's daughter, who was orphaned in 1546, can be traced until 1553 due to the fact that her uncle neatly submitted all the bills for her education. We also know that she went to school in Bruges and ran away to escape the English husband-to-be her guardian had chosen for her when she was fourteen³³.

²⁵ ZA, records of notary Rijcx, inv.nr. 600 (12-6-1684: Contract of John Sands, 'master of the Good ship called the Janet of Culross')

²⁶ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Rijcx, inv.nr. 603 (2 march 1694).

²⁷ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Rijcx, inv.nr. 603 (4 january 1695).

²⁸ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Rijcx, inv.nr. 603 (29 december 1674).

²⁹ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Hekelbeke, inv.nr. 662 (3 october 1728).

³⁰ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Hekelbeke, inv.nr. 662 (22 october 1732).

³¹ ZA, RAZE, records of notary Rijcx, inv.nr. 600 (1684).

³² These indices can be found in the readingroom of the Zeeuws Archief in Middelburg.

³³ ZA, archief van de weeskamer van de stad Veere (records of the orphan chamber of the town of Veere), inv.nr. 130.

The orphan book listed the names of the fathers, mothers, children, and their guardians. As all the records of births, deaths, and marriages of the churches in Veere, including the Scottish church, were destroyed in a fire during the German invasion of 1940, these orphan registers can often help one to trace and reconstruct family ties.

In case of bankruptcy however, the magistrate did have some say. If a member of the Staple owed a debt to a citizen of Veere and bankruptcy was declared, the Conservator had to appoint a curator in consultation with the magistrate.³⁴ We have documents of people who belonged to the Scottish staple and died without heirs.

An example is the unclaimed estate of Adriaan Antony Brown, who was born in Veere in 1732 and a member of the Scottish Court and the Scottish Church. After a career in Zeeland and the West Indies, he died in 1784. His widow died without family or friends in 1790. When her body was found, the town council asked the Scottish parish to take care of her burial. The records of Brown also contain information on plantation life in the West Indies and his contacts with Scottish merchants in Zeeland.

Private records

In addition to the archives of the local government in Veere the Zeeuws Archief also houses private collections such as those belonging to churches, families, and societies that play an important role in Scottish-Veere history.

Two account ledgers belonging to the Scottish community in Veere are all we have left of the church archives. In 1909 Davidson and Gray wrote the following in their account entitled *The Scottish Staple at Veere*:

‘The Records of the Scottish church, which are now preserved in the Stadhuis at Veere, begin with the appointment of Spang, and from this date the history of the church can be followed in considerable detail, and it throws much light on the life of the Scottish colony at the Staple port’³⁵. They based their study on ‘Miscellaneous Papers at Veere, including the Records of the Kirk Session 1630-1799’.

These church archives were retro-acta for the Registration Service and became state property and were taken to the State archives. Here these records were destroyed in the “bliz” of Middelburg in 1940. The current remaining two volumes were probably taken by Thomas Hogg, who was a minister for the Scottish congregation from 1694 to 1698, when he moved to a new post in Rotterdam. Both registers remained here until 1839, where they were kept in the archives of the Scottish community who lived here. In the same year, the minister at that time, William Steven, returned to his home country and took the church records with him. After his death in 1857, his widow gave them to the Scottish Record Office. In 1967, the records were added to the archives of the Scottish Church of Rotterdam. The records of Veere were donated to the municipal archives of Veere³⁶ in 1971.

Since they were not moved around so much and the town hall in Veere never burnt down, we still have records dating from the period 1380-1555 of the noble family who called itself the lords of Veere. In 1444, the lord of Veere married Mary Stewart, daughter of King James I. It was thanks to this marriage that Scotland’s interest in Veere grew. The records comprise documents relating to their possessions which were primarily situated in Zeeland, Holland, and Flanders. Although they once had rights in the counties of Buchan and Lauderdale, and used the titles associated with them, there is nothing to find about these Scottish

³⁴ Van der Ven, 2001, p. 50, note 56 (article 15 of the contracts of 1676 and 1697).

³⁵ J. Davidson and A. Gray, *The Scottish Staple at Veere, A study in the economic history of Scotland* (London, 1909) p. 278.

³⁶ ZA, Documentatiecollectie Veere inv.nr. 48 and Correspondance GA Veere 1971.

possessions in Veere. The importance of these records lies in the correspondence that took place between the lords of Veere. Letters from the Scottish King, the Bishops of Saint Andrews and Glasgow are proof of this³⁷. In a letter dating from about 1450, Richard Count of Salisbury asks for assistance regarding the crossing of the Scots who were on their way to fight the 'Great Turk'.³⁸ Besides these 'great men', we can learn a great deal about the lesser gods. In the archives of the hospice, the establishment where the sick, the orphans and the elderly were housed, we are told that in 1666 Cathelijnke Glispe was not considered eligible to look after a Scottish orphan³⁹, and from the records of the Guild of 'de Edele Busse' (the Noble Rifle) we learn that in 1739 a number of Scots including Smart Tennant and George Mac Aulij joined this Shooting club in Veere.⁴⁰

Pieces of a puzzle

Traces the Scots have left on paper in Veere are numerous. However, the lack of indexes is quite a handicap when one needs to find the names of people, places or ships in a short space of time. However a source guide is essential if one is to initially see what is available and where. A Flemish-Zeelandic source-guide, funded with EU-money, was in 1999 the initiative of the organisation of Flemish and Zeelandic archivists. A guide on Scottish-Zeelandic archive sources would greatly be appreciated.

The archives of the town of Veere show the involvement of the local authorities with the Scottish citizens who had settled there. This involvement can range from registering as a citizen to letters complaining about their loud music. In the archives of the tribunal, the registers of the council members dating from 1470 to 1541 can be used to find the names of Scots who had to appear in court. After that date, they might be found in documents dealing with matters in which Scots and the citizens of Veere crossed legal swords. Notary archives are where we find the documents Scottish residents needed and which they used at a later date as proof of their dealings. The 'Orphan Chamber' archives help researchers to unravel relationships between Scottish and Dutch families living in Veere. Estates that were bankrupt or left can prove to be a source of some interesting business. These files and private archives contain a wealth of information. They are small documents, pieces of a puzzle, which can provide us with more insight into how the Scots and their descendants lived and worked in the Zeelandic town of Veere for more than three centuries.

³⁷ Records of the Lords of Veere (archieff van de Heren van Veere), inv.nr. 408 en 410.

³⁸ Records of the Lords of Veere (archieff van de Heren van Veere), inv.nr. 427.

³⁹ Records of the hospital of Veere (archieff van het godshuis van Veere), inv.nr. 2 (2 juli 1666).

⁴⁰ Records of the guild of 'De Edele Busse' in Veere, inv.nr. 1895 (book of deeds 1714-1825) list of the guild brethren, 16 april 1750.