



The Hague

The Hague City Archives

The briefest history of The Hague

City of Peace and Justice



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We are very pleased to present you the history of The Hague in a nutshell. This booklet offers a glimpse of its past, allowing you to look at the city through different eyes and perhaps arouse your curiosity in more tales of bygone times. The Hague City Archives offers assistance in your search and investigations. Our collections are at your disposal and can be consulted in our reading room. Much can also be found on haagsgemeentearchief.nl. Highlights from our collections are exhibited in the Atrium of the City Hall, Spui 70. You are very welcome!

The staff of The Hague City Archives



Map of The Hague in 1580

Early settlements, court and village (1230-1568)

The first traces of The Hague originated in an almost deserted piece of land on the border of a reclaimed peat bog and - at the time still quite desolate - woodland and dune lands along the coast. It is likely that around 1230 Floris IV, Count of Holland, established a court in an area known as Die Haghe. In 1242 his son William II issued a charter containing the oldest reference to The Hague. William's son Floris V further expanded the court, including a large hall, a precursor of the present-day Hall of Knights or 'Ridderzaal', at what we now know as 'het Binnenhof'.

The Counts of Holland spent increasingly more time in The Hague and their gradually expanding administrative machinery was also set up here. People responsible for looking after the count and his entourage took up residence around the court. Before long a small village appeared.

Around 1280 the village became a parish headed by a Burgomaster and Aldermen. In the 14th century trade and the textile industries started to flourish. However, the customary privileges and defensive walls of a city failed to materialize. In 1433 the county of Holland fell into the hands of the Burgundians. From that moment onwards The Hague was no longer a count's residence, but the abode of stadholders, representatives of the Burgundian sovereign.

In the 16th century the village fell into disrepair due to fires and epidemics. In 1528 it was pillaged by robber baron Maarten van Rossum. However, The Hague remained the regional centre of government in Holland, which had meanwhile become part of the large Habsburg Empire. In their efforts to centralize the empire and in their rigid attitude towards the Protestants, Charles V and his son Philip II gave cause to increasing resistance. 1568 marked the start of the Dutch Revolt: the Eighty Years' War.



The Republic's governmental centre (1568-1795)

In 1574 the Spaniards used The Hague as a base of operations in their attempts to reconquer rebellious Holland. A year later it was suggested to raze the run-down village of The Hague, but this was prevented through the intervention of Prince William of Orange. This represented a turning point in favour of the Revolt and of The Hague. In 1577 The Hague once again became the place where the States of Holland assembled; from 1588 this also applied to the States General.

The Hague witnessed a new period of growth. The number of inhabitants rapidly rose to 16,000 in 1622 and the town required enlargement which necessitated a systematic plan. New inland ports were dug in the Spui district. The Hague was governed by both provincial institutions and the town government. These parties were often at odds with one another, and as a result the city never fortified with a town wall. However, over the course of time a certain level of cooperation was ultimately achieved.

There were also conflicts in the areas of religion and politics. It was not long before Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was no longer able to participate in these conflicts; in 1619 the statesman was beheaded at the Binnenhof after a conflict with Prince Maurits. Economic prosperity continued, however. Holland found itself on the threshold of the Golden Age. Stadholder Frederik Hendrik's court bestowed The Hague with style and grandeur. The paintings in the domed central room at Huis ten Bosch depicting his heroic deeds and apotheosis, constitute an artistic highlight of this period.

Many citizens of The Hague made a living from manufacturing luxury and everyday products for the many diplomats and high-ranking civil servants. Others found employment in the arms industry, book trade and the art of printing, the brewing industry and the rapidly expanding retail trade sector. The number of inhabitants continued to grow to 24,000 in 1670 and to 30,000 in 1700. The Prinsesegracht and surrounding area was constructed, and along the Voorhout splendid palaces were built.





Johan van Oldenbarnevelt kneels blindfolded before he is to be beheaded on the scaffold at the Binnenhof on May 13, 1619, print by R. Vinkeles, 1777

The Hague had become a town, but its legal status remained that of a village. 'A village of towns, where each street is a town', wrote the famous town administrator, composer, scholar and poet Constantijn Huygens in 1625. Already in the second half of the 17th century the typically Hague social divide between sand and peat was visible. The higher grounds were often inhabited by the richer residents, whereas the poorer groups lived on peaty soil in the area of the Spui. In 1672 the latter group no longer went unheard. In this 'year of disaster' a mob of furious House of Orange supporters lynched the prominent regents, the brothers Johan and Cornelis de Witt, in front of the Prisoner's Gate or 'Gevangenpoort'. But also many shopkeepers and established citizens were involved in the political assassination.

The 18th century saw a period of stagnation for the Republic, yet The Hague performed reasonably well compared to towns such as Delft and Leiden. Expenditures by government officials, diplomats and high-ranking civil servants continued in less prosperous times as well. The population continued to grow gradually to over 38,000 in 1795, but enjoyed less prosperity. An increasing number of citizens of The Hague made their living by operating very small businesses or became dependent on charity.



Public celebration in The Hague on May 19, 1798. The occasion is the acceptance of the constitution for the Batavian People. This polity is considered the first Dutch constitution, engraving by R. Vinkeles, 1798

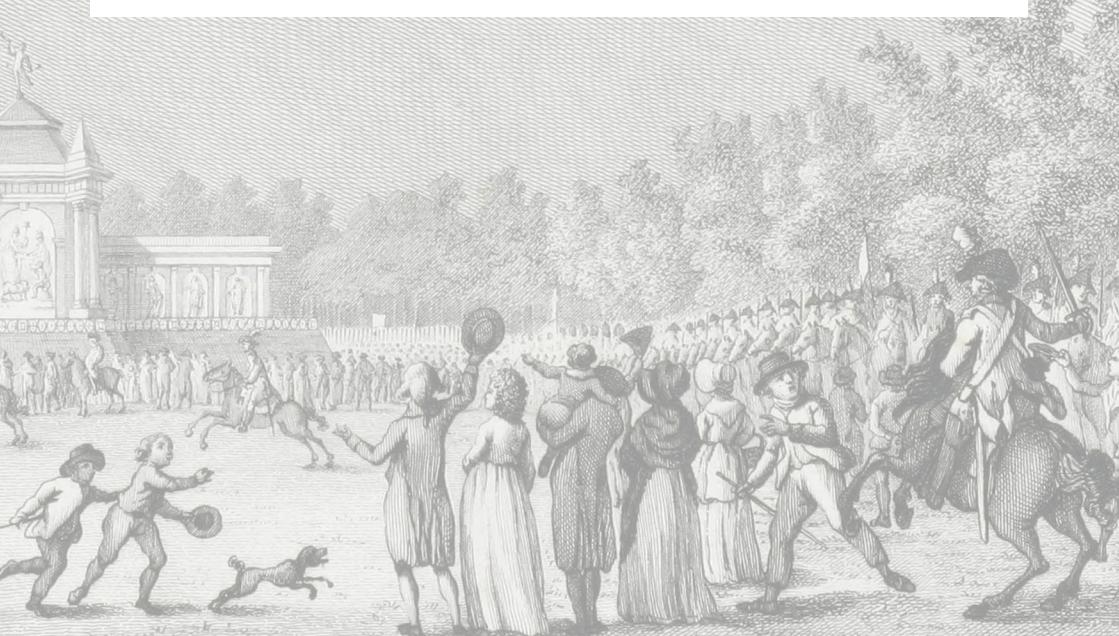
At last a city, thanks to the French (1795-1815)

In the winter of 1794-95 the revolutionary French armies entered the Republic to spread the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. In January 1795 Stadholder William V and his entourage fled via Scheveningen to England. A revolutionary 'Batavian' city government was installed in The Hague during what was called the Batavian Republic.

For a short-lived period more citizens than in previous times had a say in politics, but after several years the old regents were once again pulling the strings. In 1806 the Batavian Republic was succeeded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Louis Napoleon, brother of the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, became king. That same year The Hague finally obtained the status of true city, but at that time this status was no longer accompanied by many privileges. The high costs of the Napoleonic wars, stagnating trade and the departure of King Louis Napoleon's court in 1808 were all significant blows to the economy. The population stagnated at around 42,000 and about twenty percent of the population was forced to live on charity. Entire districts fell into neglect. After the annexation of the Netherlands to the French Empire in 1810, the resistance against the French became stronger.

In November 1813 the French left the city. Immediately thereafter the Prince of Orange - son of the last Stadholder and later King William I - landed in Scheveningen.



Seat of government for the Kingdom (1815-1880)

Within this second Kingdom of the Netherlands, now with a king from the house of Orange, The Hague regained the status of seat of government. The population increased again to 70,000 inhabitants in 1850. Burgomaster Copes van Cattenburch was responsible for the establishment of a municipal bathhouse and presented the first plans for a harbour in the seaside resort and fishing village of Scheveningen. In 1843 The Hague was connected with Amsterdam by railway and in 1847 also with Rotterdam.

The second half of the 1840s was a turbulent period due to hunger riots and revolutions throughout Europe. In March 1848 the king asked the liberal statesman Thorbecke to draw up a new constitution in which the citizens were given a greater say. The new Municipalities Act of 1851 and the introduction of direct suffrage paved the way for lively political debates and a large degree of public involvement in the administration of the city and the country.



View of the municipal bathhouse (built in 1828), coloured pen lithography by E. Huijgens, 1830



Titlepage of the Tram-way March Gallop, a composition made in honour of the first horse drawn tram (in 1864), anonymous, 1865

In the second half of the 19th century the population growth accelerated. The expanding government and in particular the rapidly growing metal and furniture industry needed more workers. The Willemspark, Schilderswijk, Zeeheldenkwartier and Archipel quarters were built. Urban life was modernised at a rapid pace: in 1864 the first horse-drawn tram to Scheveningen was introduced, one year later the first HBS (former Dutch high school) opened its doors and in 1870 the first railway connection with Utrecht was completed. After some shilly-shallying the municipality became involved in the construction of a sewer system, waterworks and natural gas mains. Prosperity increased rapidly, but this was of only little benefit to the poor. Following the example of the Catholics and conservative Protestants, the working class started to organize itself.

Unprecedented flourishing (1880-1940)

Industry and trade expanded enormously. In addition to large metal works, The Hague had important furniture manufacturers and printing presses. The growing prosperity resulted in more shops and from 1885 the ladies of The Hague were seen doing their shopping in the Passage, a luxury nineteenth century shopping mall. The construction of the Kurhaus and various large hotels in Scheveningen added to The Hague's grandeur. Mesdag, Israëls, Weissenbruch, Mauve and other members of the so-called 'Hague School' enjoyed great fame with their innovative impressionistic style of painting. In 1881 Mesdag together with his wife painted a panorama of the Scheveningen fishing village that still bears his name and can be visited today. Also on the literary scene The Hague enjoyed a reputation, with authors such as Ermants, Kloos and Couperus. In fact, Louis Couperus honoured the city with the words 'If I am anything at all, it is a citizen of The Hague'. He was one of the many people who permanently resided in the city of the royal residence during this period.

During the last decades of the 19th century the municipality attempted to regulate housing and after 1901 – thanks to the Housing Act – it assumed a leading role in eliminating the slums and building new, better housing for workers. During this period the administrative system expanded very rapidly, in particular due to the continuous rise in population up to 200,000 inhabitants in 1899, and the expansion of the number of municipal responsibilities. In 1894 a storm disaster destroyed most of the fishing fleet of Scheveningen. It took until 1904 before Scheveningen finally had a safe home harbour. In 1899 the first peace conference took place in Huis ten Bosch, followed by a second one in 1907. The American millionaire Andrew Carnegie provided funds for the building of the Peace Palace, which was completed in 1913. This made The Hague the international capital of peace and justice.

The First World War led to major food shortages. Food distribution and rationing could not prevent hunger riots, and even led to fatalities. In 1917 universal suffrage for men was introduced and two socialists were appointed deputy mayor. Pieter Jelles Troelstra's call to revolution, however, was barely answered and was nipped in the bud, partly thanks to a mass demonstration of House of Orange supporters at Malieveld.



The steel rolling mill Enthoven at the Pletterijkade, photo anonymous, 1900

The Hague was the favourite city for soldiers and civil servants on furlough from the Dutch East Indies. The first restaurants specializing in food from the Dutch East Indies sprang up around this time. In the period between the two World Wars The Hague further expanded into a major administrative centre. Many institutions established their offices here, as did large oil companies and other businesses. In 1923 the city acquired more space through the annexation of Loosduinen. 1935 marked the opening of the Gemeentemuseum (Artmuseum), which was designed by architect H.P. Berlage. Due to the economic crisis in the 1930s many citizens of The Hague lost their jobs. In this period Football Club ADO surpassed more elitist clubs such as HVV and HSB. During the Second World War ADO even won the national championship twice. Another source of entertainment was the Kurhaus cabaret under the direction of Louis Davids.

A city in distress (1940-1945)

The city of The Hague paid a heavy price during the Second World War. Mayor, S.J.R. de Monchy, distinguished himself by taking a principle stand against the German occupier and for this reason was replaced by a member of the NSB (Dutch national socialist movement). 1942 marked the beginning of the deportation and destruction of the large and affluent Jewish community of The Hague, at that time the second largest Jewish community in the Netherlands. The majority of the Jews from The Hague did not survive the war. In that same year, entire sections of the city were demolished in order for the Germans to build the Atlantikwall in and around Scheveningen.

In 1943 an increasing number of young men from The Hague were rounded up to work in Germany. As a result, resistance clearly mounted. In the autumn of 1944 the first V-2's were launched from The Hague area. In an attempt to destroy these weapons, the English made a capital blunder on March 3, 1945: they accidentally bombarded the Bezuidenhout district. An estimated 550 inhabitants of The Hague perished. In the last winter of the war severe food shortages led to the deaths of another 2100 inhabitants. Finally, on May 8 of 1945, liberation came at last.



Marching German soldiers on the Plein, photo anonymous, ca. 1940



Liberation party on the Hoefkade (detail), photo by J. M. G. Schrama, 5 mei 1945

Reconstruction, prosperity and immigration (1945-present)

The Second World War left deep scars in Europe. For this reason in 1948 the governments of various European countries gathered together in The Hague's Ridderzaal to discuss closer cooperation. Following this 'Congress of Europe', there was a gradual increasing tendency towards greater unity in Europe which first surfaced in the foundation of the European Community for Coal and Steel in 1951, eventually evolving into the present European Union.

Both the municipal administration and the inhabitants of The Hague did everything they could to rebuild the city in as short a timeframe as possible, based on the plans of city architect W.M. Dudok. An urban district for more than 150,000 inhabitants arose in The Hague Zuidwest - one of the largest building projects of Europe at the time. Building such a large number of houses was needed in part to receive repatriates from the former Dutch East Indies, more than 30,000 of whom



In the Beverweerdstraat (Moerwijk) the 1000st apartment is delivered by housing developing company 's-Gravenhage', photo by Stokvis, 1952



Barry Hay and George Kooymans, singer and guitar player of the rockband Golden Earring, at the terrace of the Posthoorn cafe on Lange Voorhout, photo by Stokvis, ca. 1985

successfully blended into the community of The Hague, after undergoing some assimilation problems. Indo rock flourished in the 1950s, with the Tielman Brothers as its leading representative. In that same period The Hague was nicknamed 'Widow of the Dutch East Indies', following the decolonisation in December 1949. Wieteke van Dort, a popular singer, was later to sing 'Poor The Hague, it's so sad really that you are unable to forget. The sounds of krонтjong and of 'gamelan'.

The highest population figure of The Hague ever - 606,825 - was reached in 1958, followed by a downward trend. Many inhabitants moved to the nearby town of Zoetermeer and started to make greater use of the car to commute between home and work. Industrial activity strongly declined to make way for the service sector. 1968 was a year of celebration for the football fans of The Hague. Led by trainer Ernst Happel, the ADO Football Club of The Hague won its first Royal National Football Association cup by beating Ajax 2-1 in Zuiderpark.

In the meantime, the execution of the largescale plans for the city centre came to a standstill, although the Central Station and the Prins Bernhardviaduct were completed, but scheduled improvements for motor traffic met with broad social resistance. Pressurized by action groups and residents, the municipality made a start with urban renewal in the Schilderswijk and Transvaal districts, working-class areas with poor housing, high unemployment and large groups of underprivileged immigrants from Surinam, Turkey, Morocco and the Netherlands Antilles. The economic crisis of the 1970s put a halt to the prosperity and the financial position of the municipality deteriorated, in particular because of the decline in population. From the 1970s Kees van Kooten and Wim die Bie provided comic relief. Their satirical television programmes contained many characters typical of The Hague, such as the wheeler-dealers Jacobse and Van Es.



Kees van Kooten and Wim de Bie as wheeler-dealers Jacobse and Van Es present the book 'The Hole in the Hand of The Netherlands' by Flip de Kam and Frans Nypels, photo by Stokvis, 1980





Skyline of The Hague, seen from the Plein, photo by Gemeente Den Haag, 2015

Moreover The Hague managed to maintain its position as a prominent musical centre thanks to for example, the rock group Golden Earring, the North Sea Jazz Festival, Parkpop, Koninginnenach and pop club Paard van Troje. In 1981 Harrie Jekkers together with the Klein Orkest sang the chauvinistic song 'O o Den Haag'. To his surprise the song rapidly became the unofficial city anthem. Comicbook cartoonfigure and hero Haagse Harry even succeeded in making the dialect of The Hague popular far beyond the city limits.

Local politics increasingly exposed opposing views. From 1986 to 1990 the city had a progressive council with majority support, which eventually had a falling out over the construction of the new city hall at Spui. However, the opening of the new city hall, quickly nicknamed the Ice Palace, heralded a period of urban renewal in the city centre.

The Spui Theatre, the Resident, the new buildings for the Ministries of Housing & Spatial Planning, for the Ministries of Environment, as well as for Education, Culture & Science and the Ministry of Justice make up the city skyline, a striking marriage of historic and modern architecture.

The Hague continued to grow and new neighbourhoods were created. Wateringse Veld, Ypenburg, Leidschenveen and Vroondaal were built on the edge of town. Binckhorst and Laakhaven, which used to be industrialised areas, were transformed and became trendy neighbourhoods where people could live and work.



The Peace Palace in Madurodam, photo by Jospé, ca. 1952

In recent years, new international institutions such as the International Criminal Court and Europol have set up office in the city. The 2013 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), also calls The Hague its home.

Growing tensions between different ethnicities, cultures and religions became apparent in The Netherlands around the year 2000. This was also noticeable in The Hague. In late 2004, Laak district was the stage for a serious scare with the arrest of two suspects, members of the so-called Hofstadgroep, linked to Muslim fundamentalism.

However, The Hague was able to withstand polarisation and controversy and managed to keep the peace. It built bridges between different ethnicities and strengthened vulnerable neighbourhoods. Thankfully, uniformity is not an issue for The Hague. The city is much too diverse. It houses a wide variety of people, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, people that have lived here for generations as well as people who were born elsewhere in The Netherlands or the world.

The Hague is a city of government, but also an international city with an active community of expats. It is a city with wonderful museums where visitors can enjoy art and culture, and also a city with ancient traditions, cafes and local industry and trade. The Hague is in a league of its own: autonomous, authentic and unique. The presence of the Royal Family and the national government, the close proximity of the sea, the continuous influx of new residents and the eight city districts with each a unique atmosphere. It is all part of The Hague, **city of Peace and Justice**.





Photograph on the front and detail on the back: The Peace Palace, photo by Claudia van Noord, 2009

This booklet is based on texts
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Colophon

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