



Nautical Archaeology Part One

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examine the links between Nautical Archaeology and Early Golf.

DURING the last half a century, especially since metal detectors have become popular, hobbyists are combing the fields in the Netherlands to find all kind of metal artefacts. Regularly pieces of metal are found which turned out to be club heads of the ancient game of colf, the so-called 'slofs'. Also in the centre of ancient towns such slofs are found during excavations.

To the amazement of the colf connoisseurs and the naval archaeologists such slofs are not only found on land but at sea as well. In the 1970s and 1980s, several wreckages of Netherlandish merchant vessels from the 16th and 17th centuries were discovered on the bottom of the sea, in which slofs and even complete colf clubs were excavated. These finds throw interesting new light on the history of colf and the equipment used in this game.

In this first part of 'Nautical Archaeology' we would like to discuss the excavation of the so-called 'Biddinghuizer colf ship' which sank in the Zuiderzee, present-day's IJsselmeer, in 1540. (See Figs 1 and 2)

In part two we would like to discuss the excavations of two merchant ships that were wrecked in respectively 1653 and 1662 near the Shetland Isles.



Fig 1 Reconstruction of the OM 11 or 'Biddinghuizer colf ship' which sank around 1540 in a heavy storm in the Zuiderzee. The length of the original cargo ship was approximately 20 metres the width was about 5 metres. Such ships were used for transport of goods between the two economic centres on the west- and east-side of the sea. – www.gelderlander.nl



Fig 2 The Zuiderzee was a bay of the North Sea entering deep into the heart of the North Netherlands. Contacts between the economic centres on both sides of the bay were done mainly by boat. – Map of the Netherlands by Janssonius, 1658 – <http://www.let.rug.nl>

The OM 11 or 'Biddinghuizer colf ship'

Until the 20th century the Zuiderzee, a relatively large bay, part of the North Sea, separated the western part of the North Netherlands from the eastern part. In the west one found the important towns, such as Delft, Leiden, Haarlem and Amsterdam, while on the eastside there were several Hanseatic towns, for instance, Deventer, Kampen and Zwolle. Transport of goods between these two economic centres took place by small cargo ships. During stormy weather, it was not unusual for ships to go down with all hands and sink deep into the muddy bottom of the bay.

At the beginning of the 20th century there was a growing need for more agricultural land to feed the ever-growing population on both sides of the bay. After several land reclamations in the past, work started in 1950 to reclaim new parts of the Zuiderzee for that purpose.

One part of the reclaimed land was called East Flevoland. In 1957, the sea was 'driven' back and farmers could start to farm five metres under sea level. Since the reclamation and cultivation of Flevoland at least 422 shipwrecks have been found, and

it is therefore the largest ship graveyard in the world.

On the 27th of August 1984 during agricultural work on a piece of land numbered OM 11, and west of the village of Biddinghuizen, the remains of a ship were unearthed by chance. Although this find was considered as very exceptional, it was not until 1992 that the wreck of the ship was excavated. (See Fig 3) The OM 11, the professional, archaeological name of the ship, turned out to be a coaster, 20 metres long and 5 metres wide. The cargo ship was on its way from Amsterdam, at the west side of the bay, towards the town of Kampen, the main Hanseatic harbour on the east side of the bay.

The coins found in the shipwreck were of help to determine that the ship sank around 1540. Several parts of the ship remained in surprisingly good order such as the rudder, the anchor, two hooks and some pulleys. The contents of the coaster could be divided roughly into cargo and other finds: tools, cutlery, personal belongings, etc.



Fig 3 In the picture is the wreck of the Biddinghuizer colf ship. After the reclamation of this part of the Zuiderzee the ship was discovered and excavated. Between the debris of the cargo, after four hundred fifty years, six slofs and ten complete colf club were found. This was the most remarkable find in the history of the related games colf, crosse, mail and golf. The wreck is reburied in the ship archaeological graveyard near the town of Nijkerk. – <http://www.groedersvanlimburg.nl>



Fig 4 One of the ten complete colf clubs recovered after almost five hundred years from the wreck of the Biddinghuizer colf ship. All clubs were in a remarkably good shape and are now stored in the maritime collection of the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed, Lelystad, The Netherlands – From 'Oud Hout' by Lies Resink, 2007

Not much was left of the original cargo. It could well be that part of the cargo was lifted from the sunken ship, shortly after it was wrecked. The remaining cargo consisted of, among other things, seventeen wooden barrels with what was left of herring, and to the surprise of the archaeologists several slofs and no less than ten complete practically undamaged colf clubs. (See Figs 4, 5 and 6) Because of this find the coaster is now known as the Biddinghuizer colf ship. These clubs were probably ordered by players from the club makers in Leiden or Middelburg, early centres of colf club manufacture.



Fig 5 A beautiful picture of a four hundred and fifty year old colf club. The club is practically undamaged after remaining for centuries in a sunken ship below sea level. Hundreds of thousands of people in the early Renaissance period had used such clubs in the towns, on the fields and on the frozen canals, lakes, ponds and probably on the frozen Zuiderzee. – NGA Early Golf Webmuseum



Fig 6 Picture of an undamaged colf club showing a 1 metre long ash wood shaft with a leaden club head.

During the excavations three lead objects with a piece of wood at one end were discovered, and immediately recognised by the archaeologists as slofs (colf club heads). It was an interesting find though not exceptional. That the slofs were made of lead was not unusual. By 1429, the magistrates of the city of Zierikzee, in the southwest of the North Netherlands, had already issued an ordinance enacting 'that nobody strikes the ball on the streets with clubs with lead or iron heads'. Somewhat later there was an air of great excitement, when together with three more slofs, ten complete colf clubs were found.

Never before in the history of colf nor in the history of the related stick and ball games have complete clubs from the 16th century been found. From the total of sixteen slofs twelve were made for adults and four were clearly meant for children. Nine adult slofs were made for right-handers and three for lefties. Two children's slofs were for right-handers, the other two could be used by both left- and right-handers. The complete clubs consisted of leaden slofs, wooden shafts and grips made of cord or leather.

The club heads were made of a lead alloy. The adult club heads were all smaller than ten centimetres and weighted approximately 125 grams. The children's club heads were much smaller, between six and seven centimetres, and approximately 75 grams. Some of the slofs show decorative lines and some have cleek marks. We do not know whether these marks refer to the club maker, the guild to which the club maker belonged or to the town in which the club maker lived and worked.

The shafts, made of ash wood, are on average 1 metre long. The diameter of the oval to round shaft reduces from 3 centimetres at the top end to 2 centimetres in the middle. Near the place where the shaft is inserted in the club head the shaft is again somewhat thicker. Four of the shafts still have their original grips made of cord and leather wound as a spiral around the shaft and secured with small nails. The grips have a length of 30 centimetres. Some shafts have no special grip but small dimples to improve the grip of the hands on the shaft.

Part of the above information is derived from:

- 'Biddinghuizer Colfschip' by Dr. J-M A W Morel, article in 'Drooggelegd land blootgelegd verleden. Cultuur Historisch Jaarboek voor Flevoland', (Impoldered land- the past laid bare.) J P A Gruijters, L. Noordeggraaf, H R Reinders & G H L Tiesinga (Red.), 1993
- Summary of the bachelor paper 'Het Biddinghuizer Colfschip' by Koen Blok, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Art History and Archaeology, 2010
- 'Knooppunt Zuiderzee. Een ruimtelijke analyse van

scheepsvindplaatsen in Flevoland (Junction Southern Sea. An analysis of sites of ship wrecks in Flevoland)' by Yftinus van Popta in 'Paleo-aktueel 23', yearly publication of the University of Groningen, Institute of Archaeology, 2012.

- 'Oud Hout. Een bundeling van columns over 'Scheepshistorie in de Flevopolders (Old wood. A compilation of columns about the ship history in the Flevo polders)', Lies Resink, 2007.

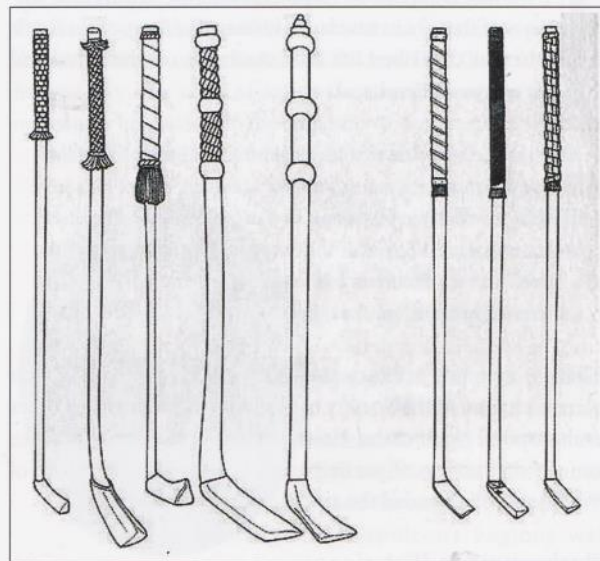


Fig 7 A drawing of various colf clubs from the 16th and 17th centuries. The five clubs on the left in the drawing show that colf clubs in the 17th century looked very much alike. They were copied from the many colf paintings of that period. The three clubs on the right are drawings from clubs found in the wrecked Biddinghuizer colf ship. – Drawing by Dr. J-M A W Morel – Article 'Biddinghuizer Colfschip' in 'Cultureel Historisch Jaarboek voor Flevoland' 1992

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