

## *Extracts of Bengt Ferrner's diary of his journey through the Netherlands in 1759*



Gerhard Wilhelm Kernkamp (1864-1943), Professor of History at Utrecht University and editor-in-chief of 'De Groene Amsterdammer', translated the diary written in Swedish into Netherlandish. The diary is in the Royal Library in Stockholm. In doing so, he has tried to reproduce the original as faithfully as possible and has not sought to embellish Ferrner's simple narrative style. In 1910, he published his translation in the journal of The (Netherlandish) Historical Society.

Source: DBNL

(KB, National Library, Den Haag, The Netherlands)

*Gerhard Wilhelm Kernkamp – Photo Utrechtse studentenalmannak 1919*

From 1758 to 1763, Bengt Ferrner, Swedish professor, astronomer and mathematician, travelled in Germany, the Netherlands, England, France, Italy, Austria and Bohemia, during which he met several of the leading scientists of the time.

A wealthy Swedish industrialist and banker, Mr Lefebure, invited him to accompany his son Jean on a trip abroad. Ferrner accepted this invitation; he was not only interested in the study of his subject but also had a great interest in and knowledge of history and economics and spoke foreign languages easily; he must have been attracted by the prospect of getting to know the most important countries and peoples of Europe on a long journey abroad.

On his trip abroad, Ferrner kept an extensive diary: four volumes, the first two of which are in the Royal Library in Stockholm; the other two seem to have been lost.



*Bengt Ferrner (1724-1802), painting by painting by Jean Hugues Taraval – Nationalmuseum Stockholm*

## *Diary's extracts about kolf*

**15 April 1759** – In the afternoon, the whole party, which was numerous, amused themselves with the game of kolf, which I had never seen before I was here in Holland, where it is commonly played.

*Note: Kolf was still a popular pastime then. In 1792, 217 kolf courts were found in and around Amsterdam, apart from those on private estates: 'Amsterdamsche kolfbanen', Ernst Wilhelm Moes, Amsterdamsch Jaarboekje, 1889*

To give a brief idea of this: a parallelogram 50 to 60 cubits (1 cubit = 45-56 cm long, length of forearm) long and 12 to 15 cubits wide is surrounded by walls of boards, which are a cubit high on the long sides and 2, 2½ or 3 cubits high on the transverse sides. The length and width of the lane and the height of the walls vary according to the taste of the players, the size of the country estate and other circumstances. At both ends of the court, two poles with a diameter of 3, 4 or 5 inches diameter are set up; the height is about 5 to 6 quarters of a cubit. These posts are placed in the centre of the space between the longitudinal walls and almost equidistant from the transverse walls.

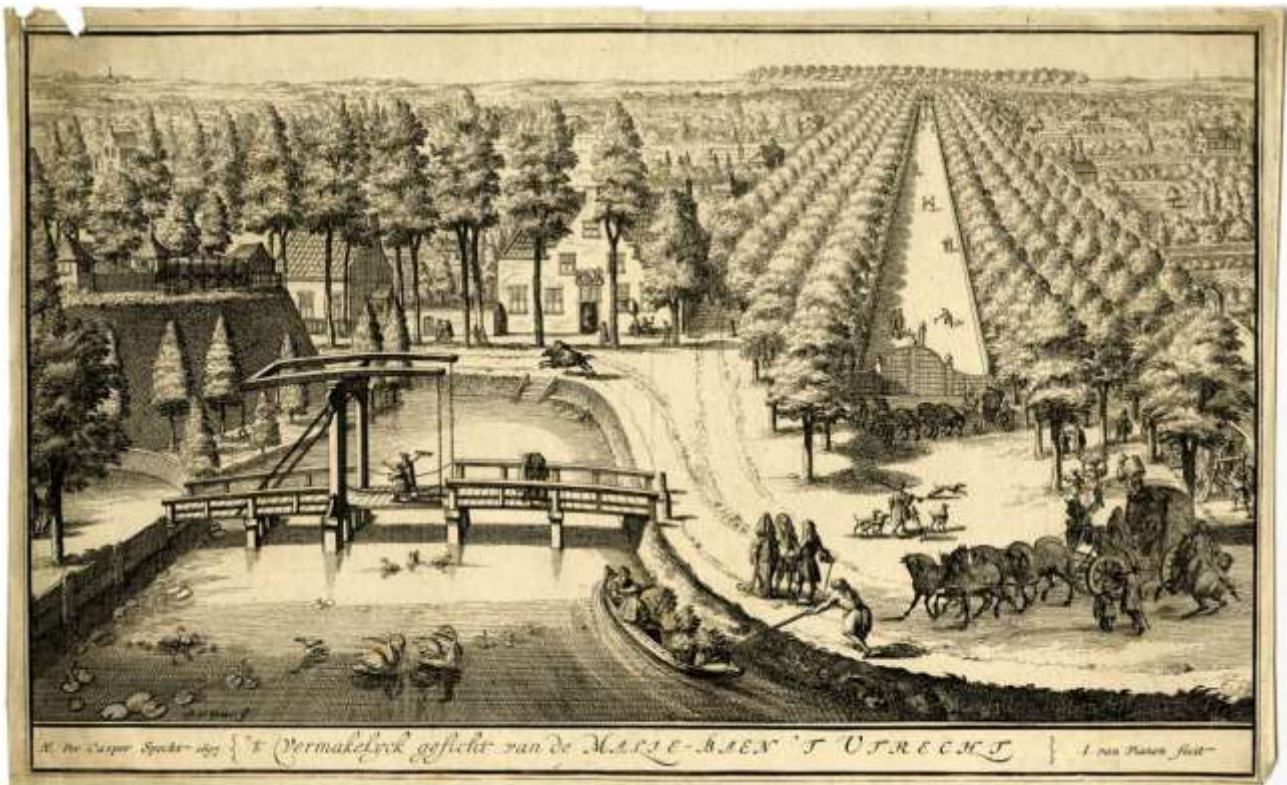


*For the aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois, playing kolf in their private gardens became an attractive alternative for the long mail game; it was less tiresome, less time-consuming and had the same standing as the previous long game. – Drawing by Aert Schouman, 1749 – Private collection*

The floor of the court should be made of clay, with fine sand on top, and should be as smooth and solid as possible because the excellence of the court depends on it. When the court is thus ready, each player should have a small hard ball about two inches in diameter and also a so-to-speak 'kolf' (club), similar to the stick of the whip of our rich peasants, with a handle of leather, and a brass fitting at the lower end, which is flat at the front. When everything is ready, the trick is to place the ball at one post and guide it with the club to hit the other post. How often the poles are hit and where the balls are placed depends on what the players agree on.

**3 May 1759** – At half past six, we arrived in Utrecht, a reasonably large city, but it looked ancient on first approaching its ramparts. As in all Dutch cities, the ramparts were brickwork made of clinkers, but they were so decayed that they could be mistaken for nothing but earthen walls in several places.

We took up residence in 'The Castle of Antwerp', at du Bois, who spoke fluent Dutch, German, French, Italian and English. Mr Grill immediately gave us the conduct of the mintmaster's son Novisadi, 29 years old, who assisted his father in the administration [of the mint]. The father was born in Stettin but had lived in Utrecht for 22 years. The young Novisadi accompanied us on a walk around the city, particularly to the largest mail course in Holland or to use the Amsterdam language in all Seven Provinces.



*One of Europe's most beautiful mail alleys was situated just outside the walls of Utrecht. The council decided on its construction in 1637. The authorities intended to offer the citizens the possibility of physical exercise and recreation, and this was related to the fact that the 'Illustre School' of Utrecht was promoted to university, which they wanted to attract students. It contributed to the city's standing to have a 'jeu de mail' and students. –*

*Colour etching by Jan van Vianen after Caspar Specht, 1697 – © Trustees of the British Museum*

It was 200 rods long; a rod is 12 Rhineland feet (31,4 cm), about 2 Swedish fathoms. A mail court differs from a kolf court in no other respect than length and also in that the balls there are hit with long sticks, not to hit a pole, but only to drive the ball from one end to the other with the smallest number of strokes. Only one could cover the course of 200 rods with 2½ strokes. On both sides of the court were the most beautiful walks one could wish for. Fine summer evenings are full of people of both sexes who walk or let themselves be driven in a carriage.

**24 May 1759** – With König I was invited to the country house of Mr de Smeth, where we played kolf.