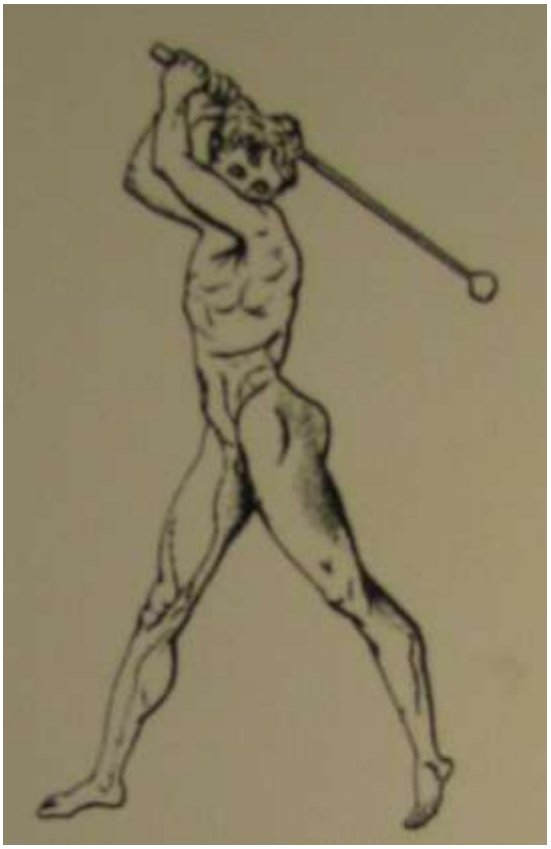
Maliën in the Netherlands

The game of ‘maliën’ is the Netherlandish version of the French ’jeu de mail’ (pall mall in English), which originated in Italy as ‘pall(i)o maglio’ or ‘pallamaglio’. Not much is known about where, since when, and by whom this game was played.

A sketch attributed to Raphael (1483-1520), found in a Venetian museum (Jacques Temmerman, ‘Golf & Kolf Seven centuries of history’, 1993), depicts a player swinging a stick with a spherical head, possibly a pallio maglio player, though this is uncertain.



The sketch of a stick and ball player by the famous Italian painter and architect Raphael (1483-1520) could be the oldest known pictorial reference to the game of ‘pallamaglio’ in Italy. – From ‘Golf & Kolf Seven centuries of history’, Jacques Temmerman

Most probably, the Italian princess, Catherina di Medici, who married the future king of France, Henry II, introduced the game into France (c.1550). It is known that both Queen Catherine and King Henry were avid mail players.
Mary Stuart, the future Queen of Scotland, who was educated in France, learnt the game here and probably played it with the queen and the king. When she returned to Scotland after the sudden death of her husband, it is suggested that she played pall mall at Seton Palace. It was her son, King James VI of Scotland, who became King of England as King James I. He moved to London with his court in 1603, where he had a mail alley constructed in St James's Park.
Most probably, the Italian princess, Catherina di Medici, who married the future king of France, Henry II, introduced the game into France (c.1550).
(Geert & Sara Nijs, 'Games for Kings & Commoners', 2011)

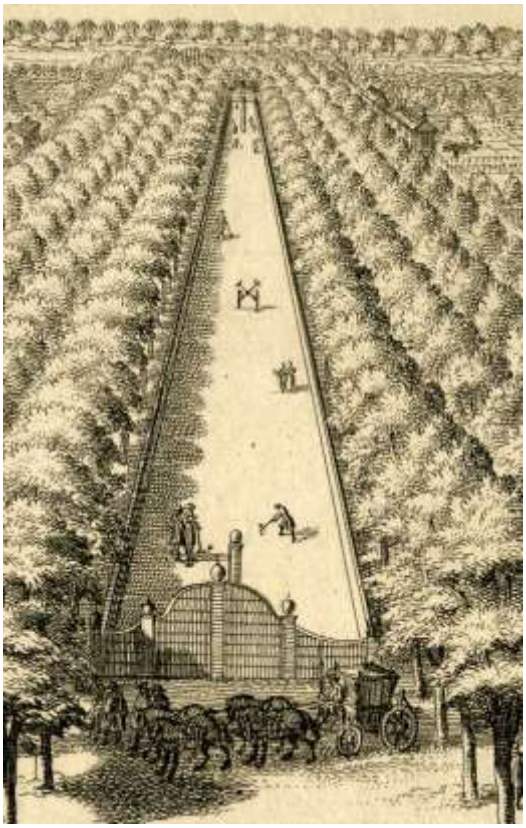
From that period onwards up to the first part of the 18th century, the game became very popular with royalty, nobility, and the bourgeoisie. All over France, both in towns and in private gardens of the gentry, long lanes were constructed for jeu de mail, mostly consisting of straight courts of battered earth with low boardings and lines of trees planted all along, providing welcome shade to the players.

Originally, the bourgeois playing fields were built in town or just outside the walls, becoming part of the centres in present-day times. When the game ceased to exist, the mail alleys became beautiful, shaded promenades or car parks, as here in Groenlo. In August 2007,43 monumental and healthy oaks and beeches from the period 1870/1880 fell victim in favour of a reconstruction of an ancient stronghold with a car park, to dismay of a major part of the citizens.– http://www.mooigroenlo.nl/maliebaan.html

The game was played in the streets and on the sandy paths in the countryside, too. This country game was mainly played by the common people, especially in the south-eastern part of France, in the Languedoc region; this variant was played until 1939, when the last player finally laid up his club and balls in the attic of his house.

It did not take long before the ‘aristocratic’ mail fashion crossed the French border into the neighbouring countries: Britain, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Malta, Denmark and last but not least the Netherlands. The first Netherlandish ‘maliebaan’ (mail course) was constructed in 1609 near the city of The Hague, the official seat of the Prince of Orange and an important diplomatic centre.
Soon, the cities of Leiden, Utrecht and Amsterdam followed, as did the aristocrats who constructed them on their own properties.

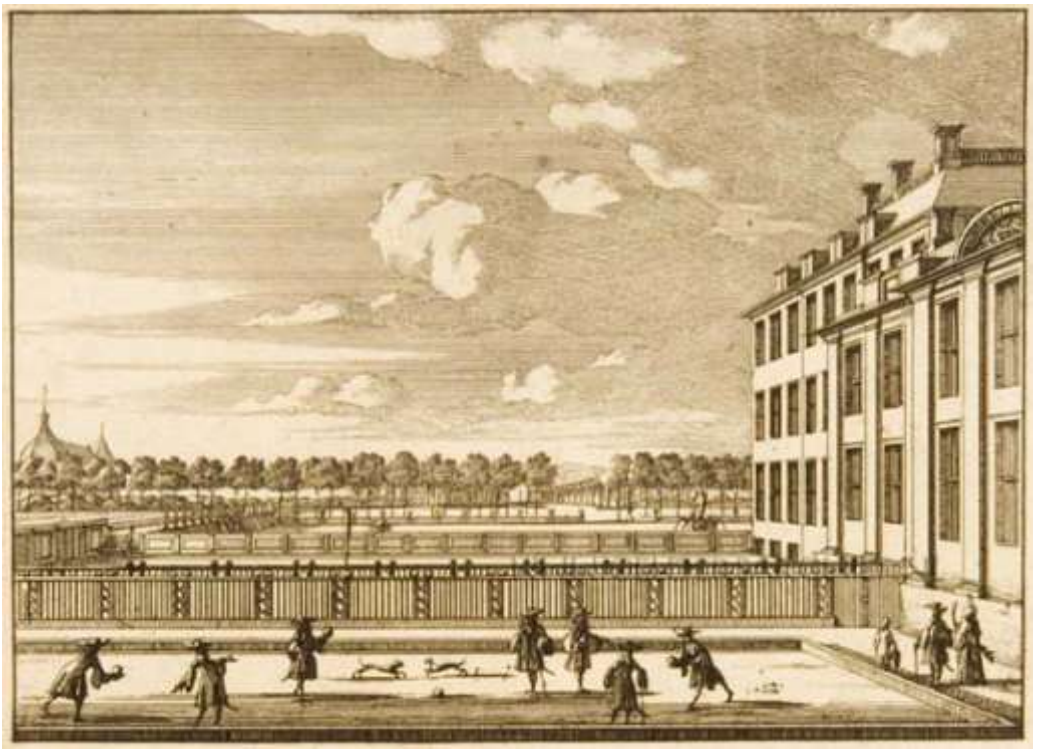
Initially, the game was called ‘paille-maille’, and when and why the name changed into ‘maliën’ is unclear. It is said that the word ’malie’ refers to the hoop used as an ‘in between’ target on the mail alley or that it refers to the hoop used as a target in the game of ‘klossen’ (short colf without clubs). The linguistic Netherlandish meaning of the word ‘malie’ is ring and not hammer.



Targets on the course differed. Stakes at both ends of the playground were very common, but hoops or rings were also used, both on the surface and elevated. In Utrecht, halfway along the alley, a hoop was placed through which the ball (or ‘kloot’ or ‘klos’) had to pass on its way to the final target. – Detail of an engraving by Jan van Vianen, 1697 –
© Trustees of the British Museum

From 'het dagelijks leven in de 17de eeuw'

Authors of traditional games believe both the French jeu de mail and the ancient game of klossen influenced the Netherlandish version of mail. In klossen, players threw or rolled a heavy ball called a 'klos' (or 'kloot') through a ring or hoop. The game took place on a narrow track with sideboards. Players received no points if they missed the ring. Touching the ring earned one point, while passing the ball through it counted for two points. The first player to collect 12 points won.
Both nobility and commoners played the game. The Countess of Holland played in her garden in The Hague. Count Karel van Gelre had two klos courts in his Arnhem gardens: a large one and a smaller one, possibly for ladies.
('Het dagelijks leven in de 17de eeuw' [Daily life in the 17th century], Haye Thomas, 1981)



The game of klossen 'short colf without clubs) could be seen as a kind of maliën without a club. The ball was thrown towards a hoop and depending on the achievements, points were given. – Klos court at one side of Het Loo Palace in Apeldoorn, J. (van) Call Senior, 1688-1700 – www.geldersarchief.nl

At the beginning of the 17th century, when 'jeu de mail' was introduced in the Netherlands, the game was already known by the young nobles and bourgeois adults who made educational trips to the important cultural centres of Europe. At that time, anything French became fashionable, and several important towns started to construct mail courses mainly for the noblesse, the bourgeoisie and the students of the universities.

There seemed to be an interesting market for this new game:

- The aristocracy loved such a sophisticated French game.
- The bourgeoisie preferred this game over caetsen, colf, beugelen, or klossen, seeing it as more fashionable.
- French silk stockings, pointed shoes, and embroidered sleeves made playing colf on muddy, rainy, or windy fields difficult. A mail alley was much better.
- The game offered the advantage of being playable throughout the year.
- Klos players wanted to avoid calloused hands and sore muscles from throwing heavy balls on long lanes, so they chose the new game as a better option.
- Authorities encouraged jeu de mail while banning colf, which frustrated colf players.

From 'De groote tour'

"The young Netherlander Cornelis van Aerssen got involved on the mail course in a dispute about replacing a ball. Only a high-level intervention could prevent a duel. In the presence of Marshal d'Estrée, the son of the Duke of Bouillon, Count of La Marck, and Cornelis van Aerssen, Lord of Spijk, settled the dispute."

('De groote tour. Tekening van de educatiereis der Nederlanders in de zeventiende eeuw' [The grand tour. Sketch of the educational travel of Netherlanders in the 17th century], Anna Frank-van Westrienen, 1983)

At the beginning of the 17th century, the arrival of the ‘paille maille’ (mail) game in the Netherlands created new competition for ‘het colven’, which had been the most popular game. Colven's popularity thrived during cold winters, as ice provided both an open playing field and a temporary escape from the restrictive laws of council and church authorities.
In summer, people played colf in the streets, churchyards, and open spaces in and outside town walls. Local authorities imposed fines on street colvers because of the dangerous aspects of the game. People could get hurt, and windows could get broken by the flying balls, and services in churches and monasteries could be disturbed.
For years, many ordinances were issued to ban the game from town. The authorities could not stop people playing the game, and often their game was only allowed on special playing areas; for example, in 1571, the students of the Amersfoort Latin school were only allowed to play on a ‘colffelt’ (colf field) outside the city walls.
(www.archiefeemland.nl)

The comedy ‘Moortje’, written in 1615 by the playwright Bredero, shows clearly that regular colvers were banned from the in-town streets because they were a nuisance and a danger to passers-by. Mail courts were enclosed to diminish the chance that other people would get hurt. – Portrait of Bredero, c.1619, etching by Hessel Gerritsz – www.kb.nl

The Netherlandish poet and play-wright Bredero wrote in his comedy ‘Moortje' (1615):

“In anmen rechterhangt daer kreegh een goet-mans Vrouw
Een kolf-bal voor huer hooft, van een deel groote scholvers;
Tis een vreemt dingh, dat van duese weytsche kolvers
Die dus int wilt toeslaan, geen ong'lucken geschien;
Hadt ick maar iens de macht ick souwt'er wel verbien.”

(And at my right, a decent woman got
A colf ball at her head by a bunch of louts;
It is strange that these careless colvers
Those wo hit wildly at the ball do not provoke accidents;
If I had the power I would ban this game)

For these commoners, the game of mail was fairly expensive, for one had to pay a sort of ‘green fee’ for every ‘round’. One was not allowed to use one’s own clubs and balls and had to hire them from the warden, and the drinks in the ‘maliehuis’ (mail house or wine house) were probably far more expensive than in the local tavern.

Colvers had their own clubs and balls and they played for free, extra- and intra-mural (not counting the risk of being fined by the constable), and on the frozen waters.

Not many people could play on the mail alley at the same time. One had to wait till the players ahead were out of reach. Adding to the above, the restricted number of playgrounds constructed, it is clear that the majority of the commoners continued the ancient game of colf.
Meanwhile, some of the rich and wealthy in fashionable attire found an interesting alternative in the French game of mail. Here they could play, drink and talk in pleasant surroundings with their own kind.

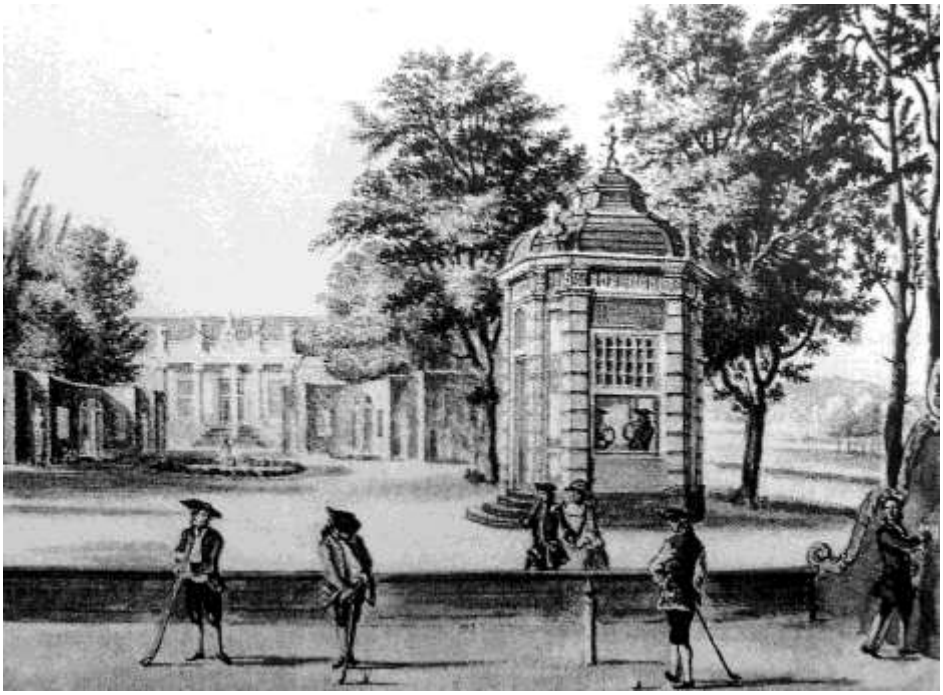
Aristocrats often preferred other amusements than mail, such as hunting, horse riding and playing caetsen. –
Adriaen van de Venne, ’The King and Queen of Bohemia seen riding near The Hague with their hounds, followed by Frederik Hendrik and Amalia van Solms’, 1620s, from an album of 102 drawings –
© Trustees of the British Museum

The excitement surrounding the game quickly faded. For some towns, creating a mail alley was a display of prestige rather than genuine enjoyment. Others aimed to draw "distinguished" outsiders or students to local universities and institutions. Municipal leaders may have anticipated that the mail game, confined to designated playgrounds, would supplant the unruly colf game.

Similarly, the rich and wealthy occasionally played on the mail course to amuse guests. Some also maintained compact courses on their private grounds, playing with friends or guests to stimulate appetites before large meals. However, they generally preferred horseback riding and hunting to long, tedious games such as mail.

In contrast, students favored fencing, dancing, and indoor caetsen. As already noted, the colvers were not interested in the more expensive mail game, which had limited playing options and required paying 'green fees' as well as hiring clubs and balls.

A sort of alternative, short ice colf game was played now on a fenced, flat, and dry court where the players could use their own colf clubs and balls and where the refreshments were at hand. – Kolfbaan de Olifant, Jan Hendrik Verheijen, c.1820 – Webmuseum Colf & Kolf & Malie



For the aristocrats and rich bourgeoisie, playing kolf in their private gardens became an attractive alternative to the long mail game; it was less tiresome, less time-consuming and had the same standing as the previous long game. – Drawing by J.H. Muntz, c.1770 – Stichting NGA Early Golf

The mail masters or wardens (and the authorities) faced low occupancy rates. As a result, exploitation costs were far too high. In response, they allowed more and more colvers to play on the course with their own colf equipment.
However, the colvers had become used to playing the short colf game on ice in winter and did not want to return to the long winter game. As a result, they welcomed the small courts built next to the inn, which gave them a simple, year-round place to play on flat, dry, fenced ground.
This change made the gardens and forecourts of inns and taverns, inside and outside city walls, suitable for smaller playing areas. Innkeepers responded by building more of these small mail, or 'colf courts,' so players could use the same clubs and balls they had used in fields and on ice.

In response to these changes, the mail masters tried to turn the tide by building kolf courts next to the mail alleys. Nevertheless, these efforts came too late, as both the bourgeoisie and the commoners had already found new places to play.
Noble families did the same in their gardens, playing a quicker, simpler, but still respected small mail or kolf game.

The Netherlandish mail courts were built in the first half of the 17th century. A hundred and fifty years later, most were rarely used. Authorities then allowed horse racing on the lanes and opened the courts for other popular activities: strolling for ordinary people and carriage rides for the wealthy.

Stately homes were built alongside these beautiful promenades. Well-shaded lanes, aligned with hundreds of trees, are sometimes attractive avenues; in other places, no traces of this game can be found anymore.

"Wij zijn gegaan, al naar de maliebaan,
Al naar de maliebaan, dat is geen zonde,
En we zijn gegaan al naar de maliebaan,
Omdat we 't daar zoo frisch en luchtig vonden!"

(We have gone to the maliebaan,
To the maliebaan, that is no sin,
And we have gone to the maliebaan,
Because it is fresh and airy there!)

('Broadside ballads' of the Meertens Instituut, Koninklijke Bibliotheek)

When the mail trend was over, in many cities in Europe, the lanes became attractive promenades or avenues where stately homes were built. –
Maliebaan in Utrecht today –
By courtesy of Do Smit

The maliebanen

The public courses built in the Netherlands in the first part of the 17th century were not different from the mail courts in France. In general, they were straight alleys varying in length between 600 and 1,000 metres, depending on the space (or perhaps the money) available and a width of approximately 5 metres. The terrain had a surface of battered earth, covered with a layer of pounded shells or fine sand, and was bordered with a low fence that had a few openings to get in or out of the court. On the fence, lines were drawn, and figures and numbers were written to give the players an indication of how far they had hit the ball.

Several rows of elm and lime trees were planted alongside the lane.

Paths ran between rows of trees, letting people stroll in the shade, meet others, and watch those playing the mail game.

Adjacent to the public field, there was always a mail- or wine-house. It was the house of the mail master, who was often appointed by the authorities or the leaseholder. The game was considered a tiresome one that made one thirsty. In the house itself or in the gardens, the players could recover, relax, and have a good glass of wine. As the years went by, the interest in the game continued to dwindle, and the mail house developed into an independent home for exclusive societies.

In addition to the public ones, private courts were laid out in mansion and castle gardens, either as decoration or for use by the owner and guests. Remains show these playgrounds could be even shorter than 300 metres.

How to play

Each mail alley was equipped with a starting point that was also the finish of a ‘round’ of mail and at the other side there was the turning point, a stake or a ring from where the match continued towards the finish. The targets were different: in Utrecht there were two stakes while the one in The Hague seemed to have elevated targets. It is unclear what types of targets were used on the other Netherlandish playing fields.

The targets were placed at both ends of the track at some distance from the ‘rabats’ (high-end boards). The basis of the game was very simple. He or she who could ‘round’ the course in the fewest number of strokes was the winner of the match. It is said that sometimes players bet on the number of strokes they would need to reach the final target.

The players made their first stroke from near the starting/end point in the direction of the opposite turning target. To avoid sending the ball over the boards and ending up ‘out of bounds’, players kept the ball low and rolling. It is said that average players could hit the ball 100 metres, roll included, while the most experienced players could hit the ball up to 200 metres, roll included, depending on the surface and the condition of the terrain. Once they reached the turning target, players continued the way back, towards the end target.

In Utrecht, an additional hoop—an upright ring through which the ball had to pass—had been placed in the middle of the lane before play continued towards the turning target; it is unknown if such halfway obstacles were used elsewhere.

Mastery of the game was no easy feat. Strength alone would not win a round; only those who learned to ‘hit far and sure’—to ‘swing’ with cleverness and finesse—earned success. The names of the teachers (professionals) are often lost to history.

From ’ Het maatschappelijk leven onzer Vaderen in de XVIIe eeuw’

“De malie en de klos, de kloot die sij hantieren,
De bal, die sy de baen met kracht doen overswieren,
Sy maecken ‘t broose lijf tot eenen vasten klomp,
Een Davids in ’t gevecht.”

(The club and the ball, the ball they handle,
The ball that they sweep with force across the alley,
They make the fragile body into a strong torso,
A David in the fight.)

(Johan van Someren in ‘Het Maatschappelijk Leven onzer Vaderen in de XVIIe eeuw’ [Social life of our ancestors in the 17th century], Dr. Gilles Denijs Jacob Schotel, 1869)

The books ‘Les Maisons Académiques’ (descriptions of all kinds of games, also containing the rules of ‘paillemail’), first appeared in 1659. ‘Nouvelles règles pour le jeu de mail’ by Joseph Lauthier was published in 1717. Neither existed when the game came into vogue. Only a French pamphlet from around 1630, ‘Les Loix dv Paillemail’, circulated at the time (see chapter ‘The rules of the game’).

Near the starting or final target stood the mail house. Here, players could recover after a demanding game, enjoy refreshments, and relax with fellow players. The public courses, built and owned by local authorities, were rented out, often for three years, to a keeper of the court and wine house. This keeper maintained the playground and house, repaired what was needed, and kept order on and around the course. He collected green fees and fines, handled clubs and balls, looked after clubhouse guests, and sometimes served as a professional and referee. His income depended on how actively players and passers-by used the mail course and house.

Maliecolven and cloten (clubs and balls)

The book ‘Les Maisons Académiques’ (descriptions of all kinds of games, also containing the rules of ‘paillemail’) first appeared in 1659. ‘Nouvelles règles pour le jeu de mail’ by Joseph Lauthier was published later, in 1717. Neither existed when the game came into vogue. Only a French pamphlet from around 1630, ‘Les Loix du Paillemail’, circulated at the time.

The equipment of the players, rented most of the time from the mail master, consisted of a wooden ball, the ‘malie-cloot’ or ‘ball’, and was hit with a ‘mallet’ or a ‘maliecolf’, having a long, flexible wooden shaft with a velvet grip. On the lower end of the shaft, a cylindrical head was attached, with a metal band at both ends of the cylinder, to protect the wood against damage by the impact of the hard wooden ball and to increase the weight of the head.

Because the ball had to roll, it is not sure if there was a difference in the inclination of the strike faces, as was the case with the mail clubs in London and in Paris.
There were no standard dimensions neither for the 'kloot' nor for the 'maliecolf'.

Public mail courts

Four public courts were constructed in the first half of the 17th century:
− 1609 The Hague (diplomatic centre)
− 1637 Utrecht (university centre)
− 1637 Leiden (university centre)
− 1651 Amsterdam (commercial centre)

How many private courses were built is unknown.

The maliebaan of The Hague

The first mail court in the Netherlands was constructed in 1609 in The Hague, the residence of the Stadtholder and an international diplomatic centre; it was laid out in the Haagse Bos (The Hague Forest).
In The Hague, the playground was leased for periods of three years to tenants, mainly the keepers of the Haagse Bos.

In the heart of the governmental centre of The Hague one can find the Maliebaan and the Malieveld (field), protected by an act of Redemption from 1576. Today the area is used for large events such as fairs, festivals, demonstrations and national celebrations. – http://icmonline.ning.com

The alley was 1,074 metres long. As such, it was probably the longest one in Europe. Several rows of trees were planted alongside. Next to it was a big area named the Malieveld (field). At both ends of this field, there was a big tree. The area was probably used for several games, such as caetsen (a game involving hitting a ball with the hand), beugelen (where a heavy metal ball is rolled through a narrow hoop), archery, klootschieten (a form of a long-distance ball-throwing game without clubs), and colven (playing with clubs, possibly using trees as targets). In these games, the trees could have been used as targets.
The open space in the Haagse Bos was protected by an 'Act of Redemption' signed by Prince Willem of Orange, the stadtholder, in 1576. This act stated that no tree in the area should be cut down and that the land should not be sold, which is why the Maliebaan and the adjacent Malieveld still exist today, now surrounded by the high-rise buildings of the governmental ministries.

The castle of the Prince of Orange and the houses of several embassies were in The Hague. It is said that mostly nobles, embassy representatives, and important guests played on the course. Still, very little is known about how it and the mail field were used, except for one case. In 1626, Adriaen van de Venne made a drawing showing the King of Bohemia, also called the Winter King, and Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange playing jeu de mail at the court in The Hague.

One of the very few pictures ever made of the aristocracy playing the game of mail. The King of Bohemia and his host, Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange, playing together on the course in The Hague. – 'A game of pell-mell' by Adriaen van de Venne (1620s), from an album of 102 drawings – © Trustees of the British Museum

Announcement on the conditions to which everybody has to adhere (code of order)

All persons who want to play on this maliebaan have to pay, before they start, three ‘schellingen’ (± sixpences) to the leaseholder or his superintendent.

When they have stopped playing the game or have left the court and want to play again, they have to pay again as described above.

If someone does not follow the rules, they must pay a penalty of three ‘ponden’ (pounds) to the leaseholder.

He who wants to hire a ‘malie’ (club) will have to pay, in addition to the above fees, three schellingen.

Anyone unwilling to pay will have their coat taken until they pay what they owe.

No one may rent out their own malies or balls unless the malie master gives permission.

These are the rules set by ‘s-Gravenhage.

The accompanying text at the 1990 Treasures Exhibition in the British Museum explains that the depicted game is a political allegory. The Winter King, living in exile in The Hague, is about to strike the ball in a game in which he shares his goal with the Netherlandish Prince and Stadtholder Frederik Hendrik of Orange, who is seen on the right.

Charles II (1630-1685), son of King Charles I, moved to The Hague in 1648. As king, he later visited The Hague several times and had incidentally a mistress there. He was an avid mail and tennis player, and likely played on this course, though no documents confirm this.

It is not clear if Stadtholder William III, Prince of Orange, ever played jeu de mail at home. He preferred (hand) tennis and kept playing after moving to London to become King William III (England and Ireland) and II (Scotland). There is no evidence that he played golf or mail in Britain.

The game in The Hague did not last long. Around 1700, people lost interest as the wealthy 'Golden Age' faded and the economy shrank because of costly wars with England, France, and some German states. The Hague lost its title of 'Capital of Europe'.
Many nobles left the city, and in the first decades of the 18th century, the game ceased to exist, and today, practically nobody knows the meaning of the still existing Maliebaan and Malieveld.

After the nobles left and the original game ceased to exist, it is said that a new mail alley was laid out on what is now the Lange Voorhout. The name of 'Parking onder (under) de Maliebaan' seems to refer to that ancient playground, though no further details could be found on this possible move.
(Tuinhistorisch Genootschap [Historical society] Cascade, Weblog 2006)

From 'Het Nederlandsche Rijks-archief: verzameling van onuitgegeven oorkonden en bescheiden voor de geschiedenis des vaderlands.'

In 1663, an interesting incident took place. The 'kastelenij', the prison of The Hague, was specially built for 'well-to-do' prisoners who were treated much more graciously than the common criminals who were stowed by the dozens in small cells. The design of the gentlemen's prison was more like a decent guesthouse, be it that the front door was locked. The 'private' rooms were well-furnished and the gentlemen received their visitors and organised parties where wine richly flowed. The warden or rather landlord did what was possible to make the stay of the gentlemen as pleasant as possible.
On a summer day in 1663, when his 'lodgers' were somewhat bored, he arranged a carriage with horses and went out with some of them to go into the open to enjoy a round of mail. It all went well until they met some of their creditors and other gentlemen who complained about the unexpected guests. They refused to let them play and that resulted in a fierce fight between the two groups. Immediately after the fight, the warden left with his boarders leaving the gentlemen to continue their game.
It goes without saying that the warden was reprimanded severely.

('Het Nederlandsche Rijks-archief: verzameling van onuitgegeven oorkonden en bescheiden voor de geschiedenis des vaderlands.', Deel I [Netherlandish national archives: collection of unedited records for the national history], Bakhuizen van den Brink, Van den Bergh en De

The Malieveld became a military exercise area, a promenade for people to stroll and for horse drawn carriages. From the late 19th century dates a marching song 'Naar de Parade in de Maliebaan' of which we quote the following detail:

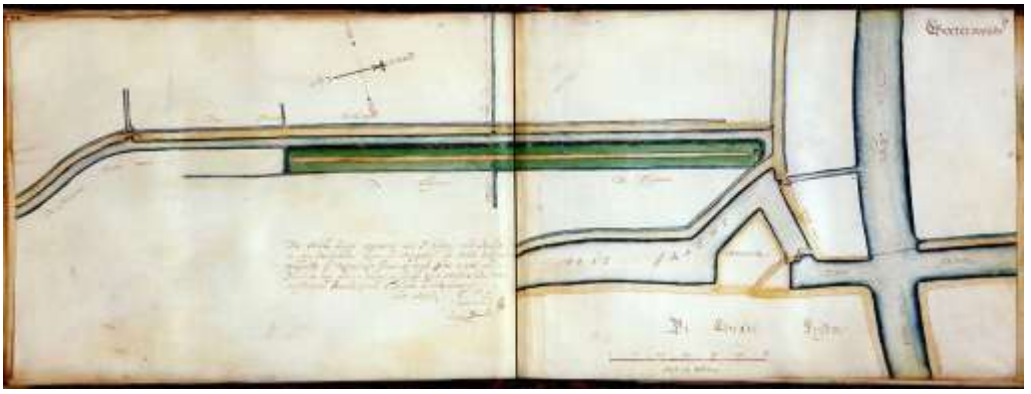
Wij zijn gegaan	We went
Heel netjes aangedaan	Very well-dressed
Al naar de maliebaan	To the mail alley
Van alle standen	For all kinds of people)

Today the Maliebaan is used by the people of The Hague for strolling and other leisure activities, while the Malieveld is used for big appearances, manifestations, fun fairs, demonstrations, festivals, etc.

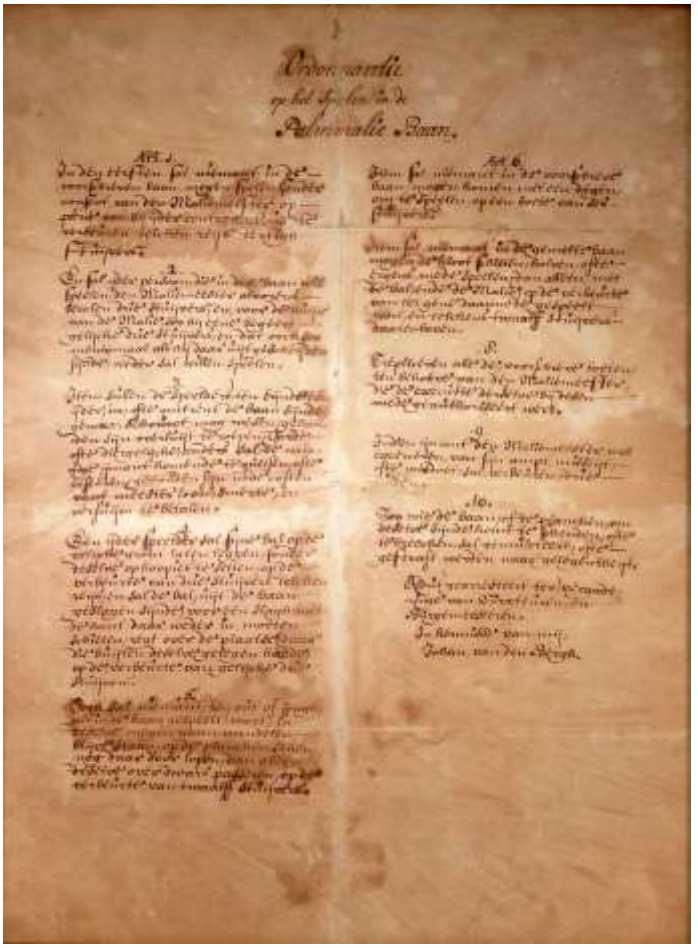
The field next to the mail lane was meant for all sorts of recreation, including games such as colf and the long caets (hand-tennis) game. The army used it for exercise purposes. –
Iven Besoet, 'Inspection of the citizen's militia', c.1760 – Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

The maliebaan of Leiden

In Leyden, or rather Leiden as it is spelt today, the oldest university in the Netherlands was founded in 1575. Neither the council nor the university governors provided many sports or recreation facilities for the students.
On 26 April 1581, for the first time, the curators of the university instructed the bailiff of the university to prepare a terrain near the city walls as a 'ballon plaetse' (area for ball games) for physical exercise and recreation for the students, such as colf, caetsen and probably bowls, klossen and klootschieten. It was not a success as often the caets balls fell into the water, and the colvers with their long and dangerous game interfered with the less space-consuming and quieter games.
Most students came from noble families. They did not wish to play these games amidst the common people, who were likely ousted from the town and the churchyard. These people found refuge among the students. There is no mention of the size of this playing ground. However, there is a reference to ‘a long and dangerous game’, which suggests it must have been of considerable length.
In 1599, a group of twenty-five students complained to the curators of the university about the absence of facilities for the students. After long deliberations, the governors assigned the layout of a new playground for ball games, of which the size is unknown, outside the Rijnsburger Gate (extramural) and only for the students. Once more, common players continued to use the students’ playing area, so in 1608, an ordinance from the bailiff of the university was issued that, except for students, nobody was allowed to play colf on the students' playing ground, but again the colvers did not take the slightest notice of the university rules.
In 1630, the students requested again a new terrain to be used by students only. It took three years before discussions started to build a ‘paille-maille bane’ (mail court), and finally, on 9 February 1636, the construction was started outside the ‘Witte Poort’ in the shade of trees, flanked on one side by the water of the ‘Trekvaart’ (canal) and on the other side by several attractive gardens. It had a length of 187 ‘roeden’ (700 metres).
After consultation in August 1636 with the mail master from The Hague, Mr Claude La Math was appointed in Leiden, but it is unknown who he was, where he came from (his name is rather French) and what his actual duties were. The master had a contract for three years for which he paid three hundred guilders per year, and the earnings from exploiting the course were his livelihood.
(Willem Otterspeer, ‘Groepsportret met Dame I - Het bolwerk van de vrijheid. De Leidse universiteit, 1575-1672’ [Group portrait with lady I – Bulwark of liberty. Leiden University], 2000)



During the Reformation, the University of Leiden came into possession of farm lands which had belonged to several Catholic institutions. In the years 1643-1645, land surveyor Johannes Dou made an atlas of these lands and named one of the parcels 'palmailgebaen' with a length of 187 'roeden' (700 metres). – Snapshot 6 – Leiden University Library, The Netherlands



For the players (and the onlookers), a code of order was drawn up. In this code, it was made clear how to behave and what the (financial) consequences were when playing on the court. – Ordinance 'palmmalie baan', 1690 -1748 – Collection Stichting NGA Early Golf

Code of order for playing on the 'palmmalie baan'

The town authorities had drawn up a code of order, an ordinance on how to play on the 'palmmalie baan', in which it was made clear that:

- Nobody is allowed to play on the course without permission of the 'Maliemeester' at a fine of thirty 'stuyvers' (five-cent pieces).
- Each person who wants to play should pay three stuyvers at the Maliemeester for every round of play and another three stuyvers if he wants to hire a club.
- A player who hits the ball should warn other players and passers-by shouting loudly 'Garde!!!'. When being negligent in doing so and hurting someone, the player is responsible for the consequent medical costs and loss of income.
- Every player who does not place the ball on a 'hoopken' (a little heap or tee) and hits the ball from the ground will be fined three stuyvers, and when he plays a ball outside the borders, he has to bring the ball back into the game by hand; otherwise, the player will be fined three stuyvers.
- When the game is in play, spectators and passers-by, old and young, are not allowed to sit on the bordering fence, standing still or walk on the lane other than crosswise; every offence will be fined twelve stuyvers.
- The fine for playing with a sword on the mail court is six stuyvers.
- Any other equipment than the 'bol' (ball) and the mail club will be confiscated, and a fine of twelve stuyvers will be imposed as well.
- The Maliemeester is authorised to collect the fines for his own benefit.
- Anyone who obstructs the Maliemeester in his work or maltreats him will be fined three guilders.
- When someone damages the playing ground, or damages or breaks down the fence, he will be fined or punished according to the damage done.

(Collection Stichting NGA Early Golf)

The ordinance of Leiden was signed by Johan van den Bergh during a meeting of the governing body of the university and the mayors; the code of order cannot be dated more precisely than between 1690 and 1748, in which period Van den Bergh was curator of the university (1690-1711) and/or burgomaster in 1748 for the twentieth and latest time.

The alley was reserved for the development of 'male exercises' of the students of the university. There are no records that imply that this decision was inspired by the plans of neighbouring Utrecht to build such a court for their citizens and students.
Up to now, we have been unable to find any information about the existence of a 'wine house' and the popularity of the game.

After a while, the students' enthusiasm for the game diminished. They often preferred to go to the many beer and wine gardens to have drinks with the professors. Behind these gardens, students often played kolf, kegelen (skittles), beugelen and caetsen.
After less than a hundred years, hardly anybody still played the game, and the course lay bare for many years just as pasture until it was converted into a 'hortus oeconomiocus' (botanic garden) in 1815 and finally into a vegetable garden. An inglorious end.
(Dr. Gilles Denijs Jacob Schotel, 'De Academie te Leiden in de 16e, 17e en 18e eeuw [centuries]', 1875)

Relations between the students were not always too friendly. Internal conflicts, often arising from the different nationalities of the students, could sometimes even lead to duels.

Duel on the Palmmaliebaan in Leiden

In August 1640, a duel was fought on the mail course. A certain Johann Christoph von Schönborn killed his opponent Dionisius Christianus, a Dane from Copenhagen. This severe incident caused the rector of the university to call in the council of Holland. The offender was banned for life from the university. The death penalty was imposed should he ever return to Leiden, while his second was banned for a period of five years.
The dead victim was punished by burying the body without any escort during the night; followers of the bier would be fined with a hundred guilders.
The blazons or the family arms were explicitly forbidden. This shows that at least a significant percentage of the students, and as such, of the mail players were from noble families.
If the challenge to a duel was the result of a dispute concerning playing the mail game, it is not documented.
(P. C. Molhuysen, 'Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche Universiteit. 1574- [1811]'{Sources of the history of Leiden University}, Vol. 2, 1916; Willem Otterspeer, 'Groepsportret met Dame I - Het bolwerk van de vrijheid. De Leidse universiteit, 1575-1672', 2000)

From 'Jaarboekje'

In the yearbook, Mr Knappert published the tragic story of a student with the name Cornelis Caesar who studied at the University of Leiden (c.1680).
The story contains a survey of the 'pocket money' of Cornelis and his expenditure, for instance, on the mail court and for buying mail equipment. In the references, the playground is named 'maliebaan', 'maaljebaan' and 'paille-maillebaan'.
In 1678, the student wanted to play, he needed and acquired a 'maalje' (club) and a kloot in an 'ordinaris sack' (a carrying bag). He paid 1.0 guilder.
In 1680, he paid the mail master 5.2 guilders for the right to play for one year.
A year later, he paid to Jan van Ingenegen, probably the mail master, 7.1 guilders for the right to play for one year and an advance for using clubs and balls for that period.
('Jaarboekje voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde van Leiden en Rijnland.' [Yearbook of the historical and archaeological society of Leiden and Rijnland.], 1916, L. Knappert)

Drawing of the mail court in Leiden alongside the 'Trekvliet' (barge-canal). The trees are still there, but the players have gone forever, and nothing reminds one of the history other than the name of the street. – View on the Trekvliet in Leiden, Jacob Timmermans, 1788 – Regionaal Archief Leiden, The Netherlands

In literature, the course was mentioned only twice:
Jacob Campo Weyerman wrote in his novel 'Den Ontleeder der Gebreeken' (The Dissector of Deficiencies), 1724): "Een Franschman, […], diverteer ik op een aangenaame wyze. Ik engageer hem om een Wandeling met my te doen na de Maliebaan […]" (I asked him, [a Frenchman] to join me for a walk on the Maliebaan.)

Jacob van Lennep, a romantic novelist, wrote in his historical novel 'De Pleegzoon' (Foster son [1833]):
"Komt meine Hern!" riep Graaf Ernst hun toe: "wollen sie nicht met kaan nach die maliebaan om onze etlust anzuwacheren?" ("Gentlemen", Count Ernst called out, "let's go to the mail course, to whet our appetite?")

There is still a long-stretched road in the centre of Leiden with the name Maliebaan. No sign or plaque refers to the origin of this road or to its name.

The maliebaan of Utrecht

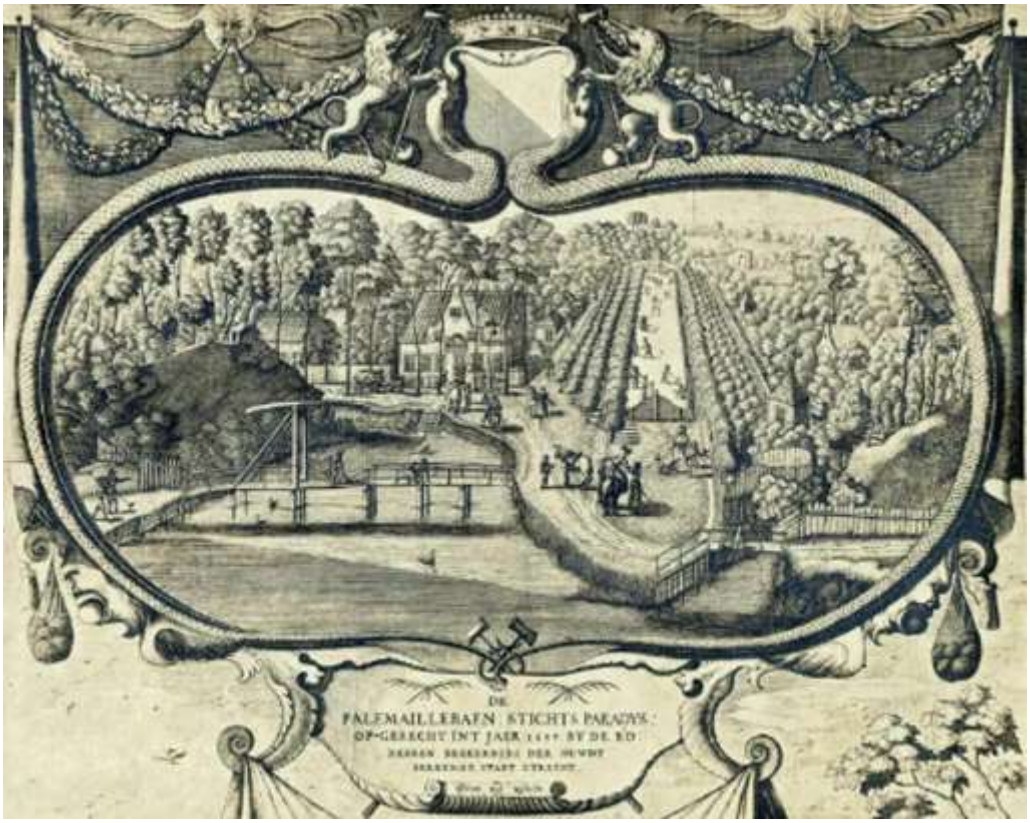
One of the most beautiful mail alleys in Europe was situated just outside the walls of Utrecht.
The decision for its construction was made by the council on the 9th February 1637. The intention of the authorities was to offer the citizens the possibility of physical exercise and recreation, and was related to the fact that the 'Illustre School' of Utrecht was promoted to a university, for which they wanted to attract students. It contributed to the standing of the city to have a 'jeu de mail' and to have students, and the first would make the stay of the second during their period of study more pleasant. The authorities wanted to be a worthy host, and therefore they also laid out a botanic garden and a riding, fencing and dance school. In addition, beer and wine were exempted from excise duties in the taverns.

Contrary to the 'jeu de mails' in Paris, London and The Hague, the one in Utrecht was less 'noble' or 'royal' but rather a course for the bourgeois and the students.

With a length of 200 'roeden' (740 metres), it was laid out on the 'Oudwijkerveld', a piece of land just outside the city walls.

It is interesting to note that in 1401, the game of colf was banned from the same piece of land:
"Furthermore, the Council forbid… neither to play with the club (colf) nor to play tennis (probably caetsen) on Oudwijk field."
(Steven van Hengel; Buurt-spraakboek 1401, fol. 307; Inv. Nr. I-16)

More than two hundred years later, the council itself ordered a mail course to be built on that same piece of land.
The location where the course would be constructed had horticultural soil, so barge loads of sand had to be shipped to the terrain to make a suitable base, which was then compacted and afterwards covered with pounded shells. On both ends, a wooden stake was placed, on which the town's arms were cut out and in the middle, a metal hoop was placed.
The court was enclosed with a low wooden board with some openings to get in and out, and to keep the ball in when it was driven off line. On the board, lines were drawn with numbers so that players could read the distance their ball had covered. Alongside four rows of trees were planted 1,200 lime trees and 900 elm trees. In between the rows of trees, promenades were laid out for strollers and spectators. An opening in the rampart of the town gave direct access to the mail alley.



The oldest picture of the alley in Utrecht, from 1645 named the 'palemaille-baen'. On the right of the engraving, the mail court is visible, and on the left, one can see the Maliehuis and the Maliebrug (bridge). –
Copper engraving by Hendrik Winter – Het Utrechts Archief, The Netherlands

No less than 2,100 trees were planted along the mail alley, with promenades in between the rows. The mail master had to look after the trees and cut the grass with a scythe regularly. – Detail of map by Caspar Specht, 1695 – www.hollandmaps.nl

Near the planned playground, the tavern 'Het Gulden Vlies' (The Golden Fleece) was bought by the council to be used as the 'clubhouse' for the mail players. – Water -colour drawing by M.J. Goetzee (c.1850) after J. le Veau (1772) – Het Utrechts Archief, Utrecht, The Netherlands

The nearby inn, 'Het Gulden Vlies' (The Golden Fleece), was bought by the council to function as a maliehuis, which was leased out to a 'maliemeester', just like the course. He was responsible for the maintenance of the course and the garden (looking after the newly planted trees, cutting the grass between the trees with a scythe, keeping the weeds out, collecting litter on and around the alley), collecting the green fees and the money for renting out the clubs and balls, storing and repairing the equipment and collecting the fines. It was also his duty to look after the coats of the gentlemen while they were playing. And last but not least, he was the innkeeper of the wine house where the players, after finishing a round, relaxed and had a few glasses of wine.

In the winter of 1637/1638, the paillemaillebaen was officially opened. The course was closed when it was raining or when it was wet, and on Sundays and religious feast days.

In 1645, the council leased the grass between the trees to a farmer, who, contrary to the prior mail master, was not allowed anymore to let his cattle graze under the trees but only his sheep, which caused less inconvenience with the many strollers and spectators.
In 1686, the whole court had to be repaired, and a supervisor was appointed to keep an eye on players, passers-by and the residents along the mail area who threw garden rubbish, garbage, brash, etc. on and around it and sometimes even stole the pounded shells for use in their gardens.

All these rules and regulations had barely any effect. In 1750, it was necessary to issue a decree in which it was forbidden for anybody to drive with waggons, carts or horses on the sandy paths alongside the alley or to drive horses, oxen, cows, pigs, sheep and other animals along the sand paths or to hunt and to graze cattle. It is interesting to note that an exception was made for gentlemen riding horses for their recreation.
Additionally, there are some ordinances to protect the income of the mail master, such as a ban on selling mail balls within a distance of 370 metres from the official course and, more importantly, on running a second café or selling tobacco in its vicinity.

There is no information available about the popularity of the game of mail in Utrecht in the 17th century. The game was played out, and back on a narrow lane, so not many mailers could play at the same time.

The mail court became known internationally when, during a short occupation of Utrecht by French troops in 1672, King Louis XIV of France was very impressed by its beauty. He stated that he felt sorry that he could not take the alley with him to Versailles. He threatened his soldiers with the death penalty if they cut down trees alongside the alley.

Ordinance on playing on the Maliebaan at Utrecht

I Nobody is allowed to play on the court without permission and knowledge of the malie master. Violation will be punished with a penalty of 30 stuyvers for each offender.

II Everybody who wants to play on this court must pay the malie master three stuyvers in advance. The costs of hiring a malie (club) amount also to three stuyvers, the same as for hiring a ball. These amounts have to be paid each time one wants to play.

III The players have to call out loudly ‘Garde’ or something similar to warn everybody on or near the court. When, because of negligence, somebody is hit, the player must compensate for the lost income and other costs of the victim. This penalty will be increased by an amount settled by the judge.

IIII Every player must play the ball from the ground without placing the ball on a tee. Violation will be punished with a penalty of three stuyvers for each stroke. When the ball is hit outside the court, the ball must be thrown onto the court by hand again, where the ball had stopped previously, with a penalty of one stroke. Violation will also be punished with a penalty of three stuyvers.

V When players are on the court, nobody, old or young, is allowed to walk, stay or sit on the court. Only straight crossing is allowed. Violation will be punished with a penalty of twelve stuyvers.

VI It is forbidden on the court to play the games of ‘klootschieten' (a kind of long bowls or colf without a club), of colf or any other game but playing with the malie and the ball. Violation will be punished with confiscation of the equipment used and, in addition, a fine of twelve stuyvers.

VII The above fines are for the benefit of the malie master. He himself is authorised to collect the fines.

VIII He who insults the malie master in the exercise of his function, or misbehaves towards him, will be punished with a fine of three guilders; half of the amount is for the benefit of the sheriff, the other half for the benefit of the malie master. This penalty will be increased by an amount settled by the judge.

IX Damaging the court and its fittings will be punished with a fine of twelve stuyvers.

X Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children will observe this ordinance.

Provisional agreed and laid down by the burgomasters and governors of the city of Utrecht, on the 16th October 1637

Signed by J. van Nijpoort,
Secretary of the city of Utrecht

It is not clear whether citizens, students or perhaps members of the French force played the game, but certainly a glass and a chat afterwards were not possible because the mail house was used during the occupation as a military bakery.

The damage caused by horse-drawn carriages was such that in 1693, they were banned from the court to be allowed on the adjacent footpath.

In 1713, delegates of Spain and Portugal actually signed a peace treaty on the course, ending the War of the Spanish Succession.

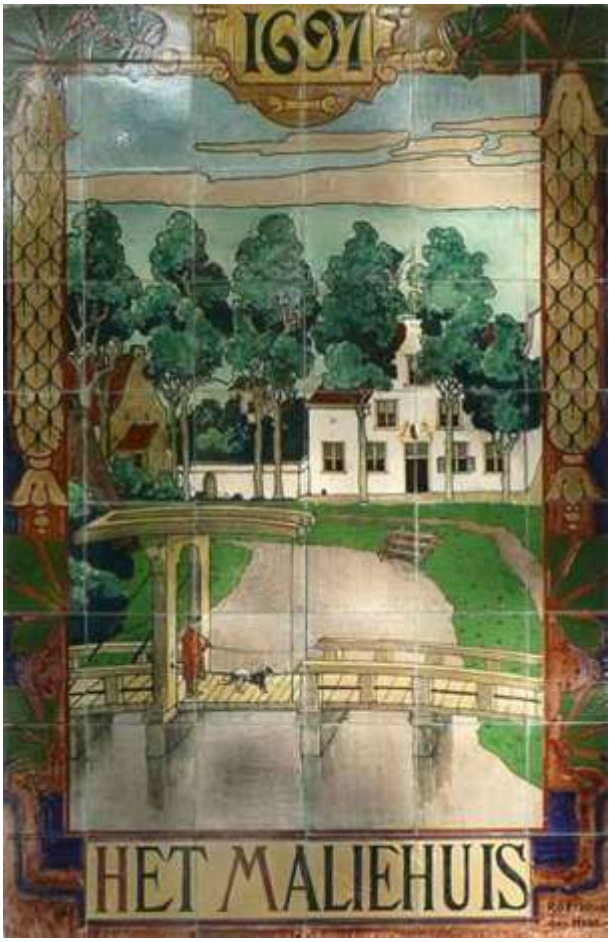
One of the oldest drawings of the mail court from c.1660. –
Drawing by Herman Saftleven, c.1660 – Webmuseum Colf & Kolf & Malie

It is fairly difficult, living in the 21st century and playing on well-groomed golf courses in attractive surroundings, to imagine how and in what environment sports were practised in the long-gone past. Bylaws sometimes help us to get a better idea about sports in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period.

In 1729, a 'Groot Placaat Boek' (big poster book) of the city of Utrecht was published, containing ordinances of the council of Utrecht about the behaviour of people up and sometimes around the playing field:

1638 People living nearby sometimes stole earth and shell sand from the playground and the paths and ditches alongside. The council forbade stealing earth and sand under a penalty of twenty-five guilders.

1639 Farmers had cattle grazing under the trees alongside the court, while this area was reserved for the citizens of Utrecht for strolling and for looking at the players. The 'city fathers' forbade this misuse of the area under a penalty of three guilders.



Since 1897, this tile picture decorates the present Maliehuis at one end of the Maliebaan to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the change of name from tavern 'Het Gulden Vlies' (The Golden Fleece) into 'Het Maliehuis'. – By courtesy of Do Smit


GROOT
PLACAATBOEK
vervattende alle de
PLACATEN, ORDON-
NANTIEN en EDICTEN,
der
EDELE MOGENDE HEEREN
STATEN 'S LANDS VAN UTRECHT;
Mitsgaders van de
ED. GROOT ACHTB. HEEREN BORGEMEE-
STEREN EN VROEDSCHAP DER
STAD UTRECHT;
tot het jaar 1728 ingesloten.
Vervykt met allerhande Edicten van Keyzer Karel en Philips
den tweeden, Handvesten, Privilegien, Octroyen,
Instructien, Reglementen, Resolutien, en
andere aantekenlyke stukken.
JOHAN VANDE WATER, Rechtsgeleerde.
EERSTE DEEL.
TE UTRECHT,
By JACOB VAN POOLSUM.
MDCCXXIX.

Concerning the behaviour of the people on and around the mail alley, the council had to issue regularly ordinances, which were fixed on boards and placed near the court so that everybody could know them. – Groot Placaatboek, Johan van de Water, 1729

1662 Sometimes vandals wilfully destroyed parts of the borders with axes and other tools; the hooligans were warned that they would be fined one hundred and fifty guilders if caught.

1713 Secretly, horse racing was organised on the alley itself, seriously destroying the playing surface, and farmers were using it as a confined space for their cattle. The authorities made it clear that such behaviour would be fined one hundred guilders.

To leave no doubt, the decrees were printed on ‘placaten’ (posters) and affixed near the course.

It is documented that the well-known Scottish lawyer and writer James Boswell (Edinburgh 1740 - London 1795), who studied at Utrecht University in 1763 and 1764, made his daily walk on the course. It is unknown if he ever held a mail club in his hands.

In 1768, the use of the ancient facilities was as limited as was the income for the mail master when the authorities agreed to organise horse racing on the ancient lane, and so definitely destroyed the playing ground.
In the same year, the alley was enlarged to approximately 1,000 metres, not for the few remaining mail players but more for the Sunday strolls, a popular pastime for commoners, and for horse riders and open carriages, which were very popular with the bourgeoisie.

From 'Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap'

Johann Beckman (1739-1811) was a well-known scientific author. After his studies at the Göttingen University (Lower Saxony, Germany), he made a study tour through the Netherlands in 1762. During this trip, he visited Utrecht, where he saw the maliebaan. In his diary, he wrote:

"Vor der Stadt ist die schöne und angenehme Maillebahn, die aus 7 geraden und über 2000 Schritte langen Alleën besteht, davon die mittelste eigentlich dem Maliespiel gewidmet ist. Dieses besteht darinn dasz man versuchet, in wie viel Schlägen man eine hölzerne Kugel mit einem groszen hölzernen Hammer die Allee hinnunter treiben kan.
An diesen Alleën steht ein schönes Wirthshaus, in welchem die Hämmer und Kugeln verwahret werden. Man bezahlt in selbigem einen Ducaten, dafür kan jeder das ganze Jahr nach Gefallen maillen."
(Near the city is a beautiful and pleasant mail course consisting of 7 straight alleys, each 2,000 steps long, of which only the middle one is dedicated to the mail game. In this game, one tries to hit a wooden ball with a big wooden hammer to the end of the alley in the fewest possible strokes. Near these alleys is a beautiful tavern where hammer and balls are kept. One pays a ducat in the tavern for which one can play mail the whole year round.)

('Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap' gevestigd te Utrecht, 33e jaargang, 1912 [Contributions and announcements of the Utrecht Historical Society])

At the end of the 18th century, the popularity of the game in Utrecht reduced considerably. A new game became the fad, the game of 'kolf', a kind of miniature mail or miniature colf, played on a small-boarded terrain with the well-known old 'colf' clubs. Not only in town many new kolf courts adjacent to the taverns were laid out, but also in the gardens of the wine houses, taking away even more mail players.

In 1780, the mail master asked the council to cover the court in his garden, seeing more benefit in exploiting the game of kolf than the mail game. The wine house had developed in the meantime into a sort of society that was prepared to pay a considerable part of the roof construction on the condition that only members of the society could use the hall. The council rejected the proposal mainly because of financial problems.

In 1792, Utrecht counted twenty-one kolf courts, of which ten were indoors. Napoleon Bonaparte was clearly not fond of playing mail nor impressed by the beauty of the playfield, as was King Louis XIV; in 1811, and after cutting down a great many trees, he took the salute there of 25,000 of his troops.
After this gigantic parade and no interest left in the game, the stakes were removed and the fences broken down. In 1812, the course was finally closed for the game, and the playing surface was paved for the carriages. An inglorious end to the game of mail.
What remains is the most beautiful avenue in Utrecht, with big trees and beautiful houses, and only the name Maliebaan reminds one of the very special history.
Replicas of the ancient target posts are erected at the starting point of the Maliebaan with a sign explaining the history of the road and the game that was played long ago.

(Most information about the history of the Utrecht paillemaillebaen has been derived from Louis Beumer's 'Geschiedenis van de Utrechtse Maliebaan en het Maliehuis', adaptation of a manuscript by W.A.G. Perks, 1970.)

When, in the second half of the 18th century, interest in the game dwindled, and the income for the mail master was insufficient to maintain the course, the council allowed organising trotting races, destroying the surface of the playground forever.– Willem de Famars Testas, 1883 – From 'The Dutch Art Diary 2003', N. de Zwaan

Utrecht is one of the few 'jeu de mail' towns in Europe that refers to the rich history of its course with replicas of the stakes at both ends of today's Maliebaan and an information plaque explaining the origin of this beautiful cycle path, promenade and avenue. – By courtesy of Do Smit

The maliebaan of Amsterdam

The Amsterdam mail was laid out in 1651, fairly late for a rich city, in the Diemermeer. The court was 175 'roeden' (650 metres) long and had on both sides a row of trees that were trimmed on the inside. Although not as beautiful as the ones in Utrecht and The Hague, it was still good-looking.
The mail house was situated at the far end of the lane and was surrounded by a large garden. The wine house and its garden were called the 'paradise of Amsterdam'. In a small stream adjacent to the garden, young ladies and young gentlemen enjoyed themselves with rowing and fishing. Little information was found about the playing of the game itself, other than that it was not 'just around the corner' but at an hour's walk from town. Reading the following lines of poetry, one can conclude that the people of Amsterdam did not seem to like this recreation possibility particularly:

"Wat dunkt u van de Maliebaan?	What do you think of the mail course?
Die staat my maar zo pas'lijk aan.	I do not like it very much.
Want ze is te naauw van wandelwegen,	There are too few footpaths,
En al te ver van Stad gelegen."	And situated too far from town.

(From 'Fielebout, of de dokter tegens dank, kluchtig blyspel.' [Fielebout or the unwilling doctor, farcical comedy], Nil Volentibus Arduum, 1680)

In the middle of the 18th century the interest in the game reduced so much that the court was mainly used for trotting races and 'blindlopen' (trying to reach the far end of the alley blindfolded), a type of entertainment that needed no maintenance.

In 1651, the alley of Amsterdam, 650 metres long, was laid fairly far away from town. The Amsterdam people were not very eager to play this game. In the middle of the 18th century, the interest of the players diminished so much that the course was mainly in use for Sunday afternoon strolls. –
Anonymous engraving, 1725 - 1768 – Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

This drawing from the 'Herberg (inn) aan de Maliebaen' shows that the public house was still popular with the Amsterdam people. The number of active players diminished at that time. – Daniël Stopendaal, 1725 – Stadsarchief Amsterdam

One of the reasons for the decrease in popularity in Amsterdam was the end of the rich Golden Age, the decline of the economy and the explosive growth of the game of kolf. This game could be played outdoors and indoors, both extramural and intramural. In a few years' time, Amsterdam counted more than two hundred kolf courts.

The advertisement in the 'Amsterdamse Saterdaegse Courant' (Saturday paper), no 3 of 7 January 1741 marked the end point of the course when it was put up for sale together with the clubs and balls, and its 'herberg by de maliebaen' (mail house) with bowers, arbours, tables, benches and a kolf court, including stables and gardens.
Information after 1741 shows that the inn and the course itself were not sold and remained in the hands of the council, while the kolf court probably could have been sold easily. There is no information about the buyers.

The course itself was dilapidated, being used now and then for strolling and for horse racing with a silver whip, sometimes the winner's prize.
The new local by-laws written in 1759 were no longer applicable.
The total incline is clearly visible in the 'Vaderlandsch Woorden-boek' (National Dictionary) by Jacobus Kok, 1788; under the word 'maliebaan', it explained that the mail house was not maintained as well as in the time that people came to play their game.

The dwindling popularity in Amsterdam and in the other major cities was due to the explosive growth of the new game of kolf.
Another important reason was the ban on playing mail and other games on Sundays. These bans were imposed by the council under pressure from the Protestant clergy.

Above: Not only strollers and spectators made use of the paths alongside the mail court but also the farmers were allowed by the council to let their cattle graze on the fields between the paths. – Anonymous, c.1775, Stadsarchief Amsterdam

Bottom:When the game of mail was not played anymore the lane was an excellent place for riding in a carriage. The sports-loving people already played the short kolf game on courts all around and in Amsterdam. – 'Lustplaats Buytenlust', Daniël Stopendaal, 1725 – Stadsarchief Amsterdam

Nevertheless, people who played in the open (colf) or on private grounds in or near the taverns (kolf) did not take much notice of them.
On playing grounds owned by the town, it was easier to impose the bans on the players, and because the mail course was such a town-owned field, it could easily be closed on Sundays and on other religious feast days. It is understandable that mailers took a fancy to kolf.
(J.W. van Hoboken, 'Zondagsheiliging en –ontheiliging in vroeger eeuwen' [Sunday observance and desecration in former centuries], 1953)

In 1795, the alley disappeared due to lack of maintenance, while the tavern, the garden and the lane remained, as did the names Maliehuis and Maliebaan for a while until, at the beginning of the 19th century, the first was demolished, followed in 1842 by the remains of the second.
Today, nothing reminds us of this short-lived existence of the mail game in Amsterdam.
('De Volksvermaken' [Public entertainment], Jan ter Gouw, 1871)

Mixing up things

Sometimes (or should we say often) journalists, when writing about ancient games, have no clue where they are writing about. A funny example we found in the Netherlandish daily newspaper 'Algemeen Handelsblad' dated February 15, 1929. On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the reclamation of the Watergraafsmeer, an article was written about the history of the reclaimed lake. In the article, a reference was made to the mail court, constructed in 1651. The author had 'heard ring the bell, but he surely did not know from which parish':
"[…] Nobler was the amusement on the playground where a cheerful game of mail was played, a ball game imitated by the English, and today in the Netherlands it is called 'golf', just as the old game of beugelen that was also played on the same track and is today called 'croquet'. […]"

Private mail courses

As in France and in other countries, there must have been several alleys on the private estates of the aristocracy. Until now, we have been able to find descriptions of just a few of them.
Regularly, we came across the name Maliebaan in and around other towns, but no information is available about the origin of the name.

Breda: the princely 'palmagebaan' Speelhuis

Just a few years ago, a mail court was discovered near the city of Breda, once the residence of the Counts of Nassau. The archaeological society of Breda excavated the foundations of the Speelhuis (playhouse) and a 'palmagebaan' (mail alley), being today's Speelhuislaan and leading to the playhouse.
The Nassau family was a very progressive noble family and extremely ambitious. Count Hendrik III (1483-1538), one of the major nobles in Europe, was such a modernist that he imported the 'Renaissance' from Italy to north-western Europe to modernise with taste and style his Breda residence.

The Speelhuis (playhouse) was built in c.1620. It was meant, among others, for the 'gentlemen' to rest for a while after a 'round' of mail. – Copper engraving by Hendrik Spilman, 1750 –
Leiden University Library, The Netherlands

From the octagonal Speelhuis, several lanes spread into the garden. The one on which 'palmage' (jeu de mail) was played ran from the Speelhuis to the castle and back, covering a distance of two times 750 metres. – Detail of map by D. Portius 1620-1624 – www.cascade1987.nl

The ambitious family, real social climbers, decided (c.1620) in conformity with the newest ideas of the French and English nobility to create an imposing park with a small zoo, a garden of delight with in it a game park with animals such as peacocks, deer and rabbits, and a star-shaped forest in the form of an eight-spoke curb with pleasant promenades. On the axle, the Speelhuis was built, an octagonal building three floors high. Here, the gentlemen of Breda and the guests of the count could relax after a stroll, a hunt and most likely a round of mail, meanwhile maintaining their relations.

On an old map from 1625, a 'palmage' (mail alley) with a length of exactly 750 metres was indicated in the same position as the present Speelhuislaan. With this course, the counts of Nassau would probably have been taken seriously by international guests.
The woods around the Speelhuis were cut down in 1624, the building itself was demolished in 1824, and how long the palmage existed is unknown.
(Frans Gooskens, lecture for European Heritage Days 2008 in Breda)

An interesting comparison could be made with St James's Park in London. When James VI and I settled in London with his court, he ordered the draining of a swampy area adjacent to St James's Palace and the conversion of a part of the park into a kind of zoo. Around the same time, he had a pall mall constructed at the other side of the palace with a length of 750 meters.
In 1620, the Prince of Nassau had a garden constructed with a small zoo and a 750 metres long mail alley. Coincidence or copying what was made in London?

The maliebaan at the Witte Kasteel (White Castle) in Loon op Zand

Not that far away from the city of Breda, one can find in the small town of Loon op Zand the Witte Kasteel, a moat castle built in 1777 on the remains of a 14th-century castle amidst a large park. The construction of the new castle was initiated by a new owner, Lodewijk Karel Otto van Salm-Salm, a leading European politician, living in Senones in France, who used the castle in Loon op Zand as his holiday home. Before Van Salm-Salm became the owner of the castle, it is said that one of the lanes in the surrounding park was used for the game of mail.

Many castles had large gardens, mainly in a French style, in which a long straight alley could fit very well, as for example, in the garden of the Witte Kasteel in the town of Loon op Zand. – Schoemaker Atlas, 1710-1735 – Brabant-Collectie, Universiteit van Tilburg, The Netherlands

A sales act from December 1719 shows that the mail court or properties alongside were sold by the bailiff of the Lord of Loon op Zand. No further details about this sale are known.

In February 1723, the same bailiff sold lambs, pigs, bees and wood from the calf pasture near the playing ground. No further details of these transactions are known.
(Archief Schepenbank, Loon op Zand, Inventory Nr. 163)

Some of these ancient lanes still exist in the manor garden, and one of them could have been used for playing the mail game. There are no documents to confirm that Lodewijk Karel Otto van Salm-Salm played himself or entertained his international guests with the game.
(Heemkundekring [local history club] Loon op 't Sandt, Loon op Zand)

In the 17th and 18th centuries, there certainly must have been more mail courts in the gardens of the big manor houses which have disappeared during the following centuries. In the 18th century, many French-style gardens were remodelled into English-style ones, in which very long straight lanes did not fit very well. In other gardens, they still exist and even carry the name Maliebaan. Most historical garden societies are not aware of the existence and the origin of such courses.
We have only been able to localise just a few of them.

Maliebanen without further historical information

In alphabetical order, the other maliebanen, which exist partly still under the original name. Pictorial or written evidence from the past is so far untraceable.

Ameide

The name of the present Paramasiebaan was in 1822, according to the land register, Palmaribaan.

Arcen

Near the gardens of the Arcen Castle, there is still an avenue named Maliebaan with a length of approximately 500 meters. The original castle was destroyed in 1646. The president of the 'Stichting Heemkunde Arcen' (local history foundation) could not give any information about when it was built, who played the game and when the game died (contacted in 2012).

Groenlo

In the caption of the photo on page 2, you can read the sad end of the beautiful trees, making place for two fake cannons on stern-designed platforms.

Honselaarsdijk

The palace, Huis Honselaarsdijk, was spacious and had big gardens with statues and fountains. It also had a maliebaan, which was constructed around 1635.

Jorwert

Today, the village still has a street named Maliebaan, which suggests that in the past, there was a maliebaan.

Today

Around 1800, it was over and out with the mail game. As far as stick and balls are concerned, the Netherlanders turned to the kolf game both indoors and outdoors, always near a tavern, until in the 1890s the real game of golf entered the scene. Slowly at first, but since the 1960s, with unprecedented speed, making the game today one of the most played games in the country

The 'Koninklijke Haagsche Golf & Country Club' was the first golf club founded in the Netherlands in 1893, being a real continental golf links. Today, there are a few hundred golf courses to accommodate over 425,000 players. Golf has become one of the most popular games as colf was in the 15th up to the end of the 18th centuries, and as kolf was in the 18th and 19th centuries.– www.khgcc.nl