

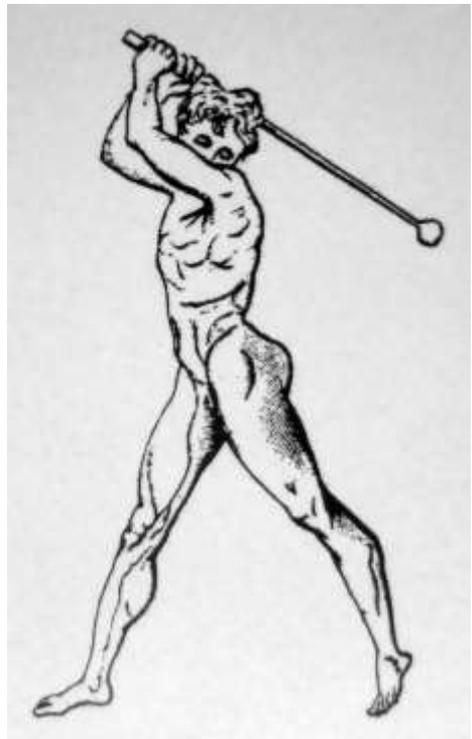
# Maliën in the Netherlands

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The game of 'maliën' is the Netherlandish version of the French 'jeu de mail' (pall mall in English).

This French game found its origin in Italy where it was called 'pall(i)o maglio' or 'pallamaglio'. Not much is known about where, since when, and by whom this game was played, nor has information been found up to now about why the game ceased to exist.

In a Venetian museum, an interesting sketch from the famous painter and architect Raphael (1483-1520) was found (Jacques Temmerman, 'Golf & Kolf Seven centuries of history', 1993). The sketch shows a single player making a full backswing with a stick with a spherical head. It could be that Raphael depicted a pallio maglio player; however this is not certain.



*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 on Seton Palace. It was her son, King James VI of Scotland, who becoming King of England as King James I moved to London with his court in 1603 where he had a mail alley constructed in St James's Park.

(Geert & Sara Nijs, 'Games for Kings & Commoners', 2011)

From that period onwards up to the first part of the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 more often than not car parks.  
– Parking in Rue du Mail, Voiron, France*



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.

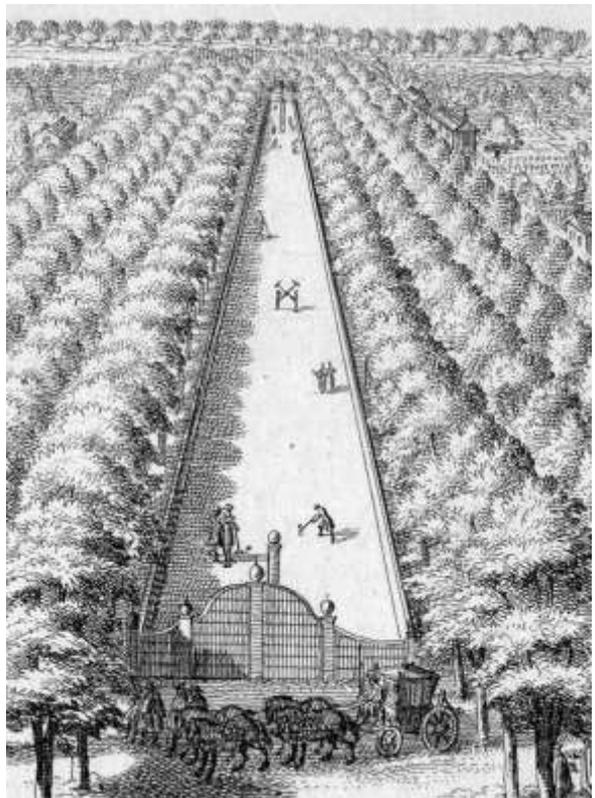
The first Netherlandish ‘maliebaan’ (mail course) was constructed in 1609 near the city of The Hague, the official seat of the Prince of Orange and an important diplomatic centre.

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 of ‘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 used also, both on the surface and elevated. In Utrecht, half-way 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'*

“In particular, authors of traditional games are of the opinion that not only the French jeu de mail game but also the ancient game of klossen influenced the Netherlandish version of mail.

In this medieval game, players threw or rolled a heavy ball called a ‘klos’ (or ‘kloot’) through a ring or hoop on a narrow track with sideboards. When players missed the ring they did not receive any points. Touching the ring brought the player one point, passing the ball through the ring earned the player two points. The player who was first in collecting 12 points was the winner of the game.

The game was played by nobility as well as by the commoners. The Countess of Holland played the game in her garden in The Hague. Count Karel van Gelre had even two klos courts in his gardens in Arnhem, a big one and a small one (ladies size?).”

(‘Het dagelijks leven in de 17de eeuw’ [Daily life in the 17<sup>th</sup> century], Haye Thomas, 1981)



At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when ‘jeu de mail’ was introduced in the Netherlands, the game was already known by the young noble 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 considered this game to be much more fashionable than the games of caetsen (hand-tennis), colf, ‘beugelen’ (court bowls) or klossen.
- ◆ The refined French fashion with silk stockings, pointed shoes and embroidered sleeves was inconvenient when playing colf on muddy fields in rain and wind and cold. A mail alley was far more agreeable.
- ◆ It could be played all year round.
- ◆ Klos players did not want to get calloused hands and sore muscles by throwing heavy balls on long lanes and the new game seemed to be a good alternative.
- ◆ Colvers saw their game constantly banned while jeu de mail was officially encouraged by the authorities.

*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 17<sup>th</sup> century], Anna Frank-van Westrienen, 1983)

*Page 92: 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.geldersarchieff.nl](http://www.geldersarchieff.nl)*

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the ‘paille maille’ (mail) game entered the scene of physical entertainment in The Netherlands, ‘het colven’, the most popular game in the country until that moment, was played in winter in the fields and on the frozen canals, rivers, ponds and lakes. During the cold winters in the Little Ice Age people could feel free on the ice playing their adapted game of colf, because they considered the ice as a safe haven for the laws of the council and church authorities.

In summer people played colf in the streets, churchyards and open spaces in and outside the 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 regularly 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 got hurt. – Portrait of Bredero, c.1619, etching by Hessel Gerritsz – www.kb.nl*

The Netherlandish poet and playwright Bredero wrote in his comedy ‘Moortje’ (1615):

*“In anmen rechterhangt daer kreegh  
een goet-mans Vrouw  
Een kolf-bal voor huer hoof, 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  
Who 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 numbers of playgrounds constructed, it is clear that the majority of the commoners continued the ancient game of colf.

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 amusement 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*



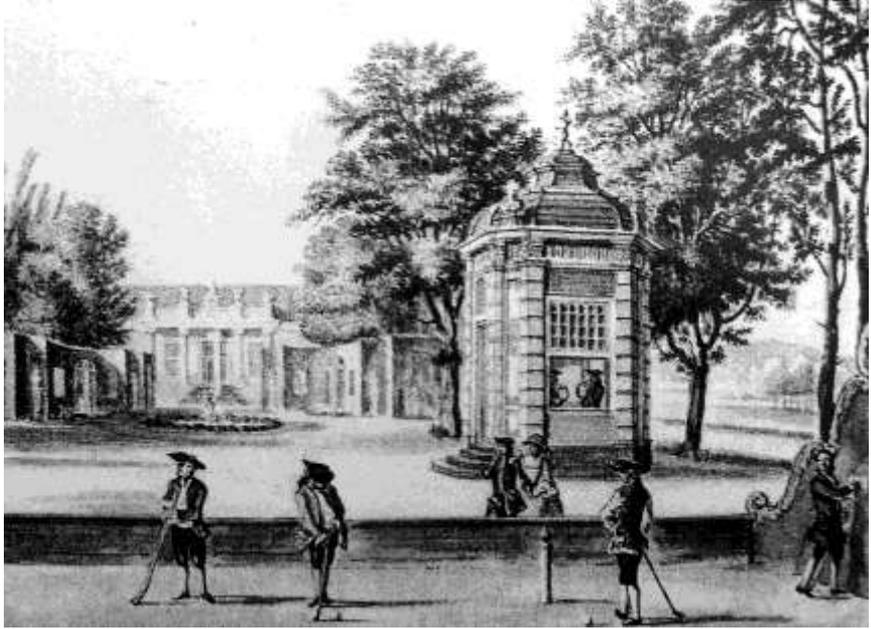
The enthusiasm for the game was relatively short-lived. For some towns having a mail alley was much more a status symbol than actually providing first class entertainment while other ones wanted to attract ‘quality’ people from outside or students to the local universities and other institutions. The local authorities may have hoped that the mail game, restricted to special constructed playgrounds, would replace the somewhat undisciplined colf game.

The rich and wealthy occasionally played on the mail course to entertain guests, while some of them had a relative small one on their private grounds, which they used to play with friends or guests to whet the appetite for copious meals. In general, they preferred horse riding and hunting above long and ‘tiresome’ games such as mail.

Students preferred fencing, dancing and the sophisticated indoor caetsen. As explained above, the colvers were not very much interested in the more expensive mail game with restricted playing possibilities, paying ‘green fees’ and 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 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 J.H. Muntz, c.1770 – Stichting NGA Early Golf*

The mail masters or wardens (and the authorities), confronted with the low rate of occupancy and therefore far too high exploitation costs, allowed more and more colvers to play on the course with their own kolf equipment.

Alas, the colvers who had become used to the ‘short kolf game’ on the ice in winter did not want to go back to the ‘long winter game’ and reacted favourably to the small courts constructed next to the inn by the landlords where they could play all year round a type of kolf on a flat, dry and fenced terrain.

The gardens and forecourts of inns and taverns both intra- and extra-mural could easily accommodate such smaller playing grounds. So the innkeepers started to build more and more of these miniature mail or rather ‘kolf courts’ where the players could use the old well-known kolf clubs and balls, formerly used in the fields and on the ice.

The mail masters tried to turn the tide by building kolf courts adjacent to the mail alleys. Regrettably for them it was too late, for both bourgeois and commoners had found new playing grounds.

The aristocrats did the same in their own gardens to play a less time-consuming and a less tiresome (but having the same status) miniature mail or kolf.

The Netherlandish mail courts were all constructed in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a hundred and fifty years later most of them were seldom used anymore. Authorities started to allow horse racing on the attractive lanes and opened them for the other popular leisure time activities, strolling for the common people and riding in horse drawn carriages for the ‘better off’.

Alongside these beautiful promenades stately homes were built. These well-shaded lanes, aligned with hundreds of trees, are sometimes attractive avenues while 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*

