

### *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 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, demonstrations and national celebrations. In the background high-rise governmental buildings. – <http://icmonline.ning.com>*

The alley was 1,074 metres long and as such probably the longest one in Europe. Several rows of trees were planted alongside and next to it was a big area, named the Malieveld (field), with a big tree at both ends, probably used for several games, such as caetsen, beugelen, archery, klootschieten (long colf without clubs) and playing with ‘colven’ (clubs), in which 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. Thanks to this act, stating that in this area no tree should be cut down and that the area should not be sold, the Maliebaan and the adjacent Malieveld still exist, today 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 nobility, representatives of the embassies and important guests played on the course, yet hardly any facts are known about its use and that of the mail field, but for one exception. In 1626, Adriaen van de Venne made a drawing, depicting the King of Bohemia, named the Winter King, together with Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange playing jeu de mail on the court in The Hague.

*One of the very few paintings ever made of the aristocracy playing the game of mail. The King of Bohemia and his host, Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange, are 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 superintendant.

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.

When not complying with the conditions, a penalty of three ‘pounds’ has to be paid to the leaseholder.

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

Somebody who is unwilling to pay the indebted amount will be forced to fulfil the payment by impoundment of his coat unless he finally pays.

Nobody may rent out, directly or indirectly, his own equipment, be it malies or balls, on any account, unless by permission of the malie master

This is the ordinance of ‘s-Gravenhage.

(Regionaal Archief Leiden, The Netherlands)

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, seen on the right.

It was Charles II (1630-1685), son of King Charles I, Duke of York and later King of Britain, who moved to The Hague in 1648 and later, as king, visited The Hague several times, where incidentally, he had a mistress. The king was an avid mail and tennis player, so it is more than probable that he played regularly on this course, although until now there are no documents found to prove his entertainment.

It is not known if Stadtholder William III, Prince of Orange, ever played jeu de mail in his 'home' residence. He was much more a (hand-) tennis player and continued to do so when he moved to London to become King William III (England and Ireland) and II (Scotland). There is no proof that he ever played golf or mail in Britain.

The game in The Hague did not last long; around 1700 interest in the game started to diminish, the reason being that the extremely rich 'Golden Age' period started to decline and the economy decreased because of (expensive) wars against England, France and some German nations. The Hague had lost its name of 'Capital of Europe'.

*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 Jonge, 1857)

Many nobles left the city and in the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the game ceased to exist and today practically nobody knows the meaning of the still existing Maliebaan and Malieveld.

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. No further details could be found on this possible move.

(Tuinhistorisch Genootschap [Historical society] Cascade, Weblog 2006)

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

<i>Wij zijn gegaan</i>	We went
<i>Heel netjes aangedaan</i>	Very well-dressed
<i>Al naar de maliebaan</i>	To the mail alley
<i>Van alle standen</i>	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 – [www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)*

