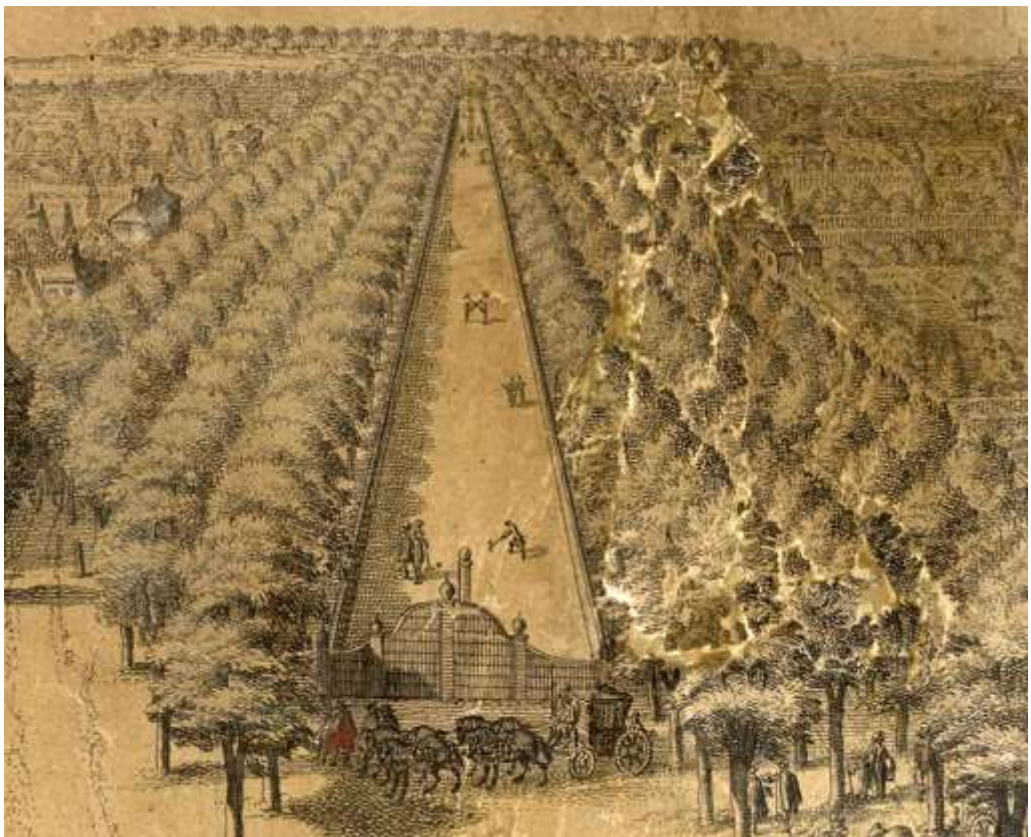


The first trees along the 'Maliebaan' in Utrecht

In 1637, the Utrecht town council decided to construct the 'Maliebaan' (mail course). This decision was related to the fact that the 'Illustre School' of Utrecht was promoted to university, for which they wanted to attract students. At that time, the game of mail was trendy.

*On this detail of an engraving by Jan van Vianen (1697), one can see how the trees on both sides of the 'Maliebaan' have grown over sixty years.—
© Trustees of the British Museum*



During the 17th and 18th centuries, Netherlandish arboriculturists were well-reputed in Europe, especially the Van der Stoop family at Utrecht. When the Utrecht town council decided to construct the 'Maliebaan' (mail course), Van der Stoop certainly gave a quote.

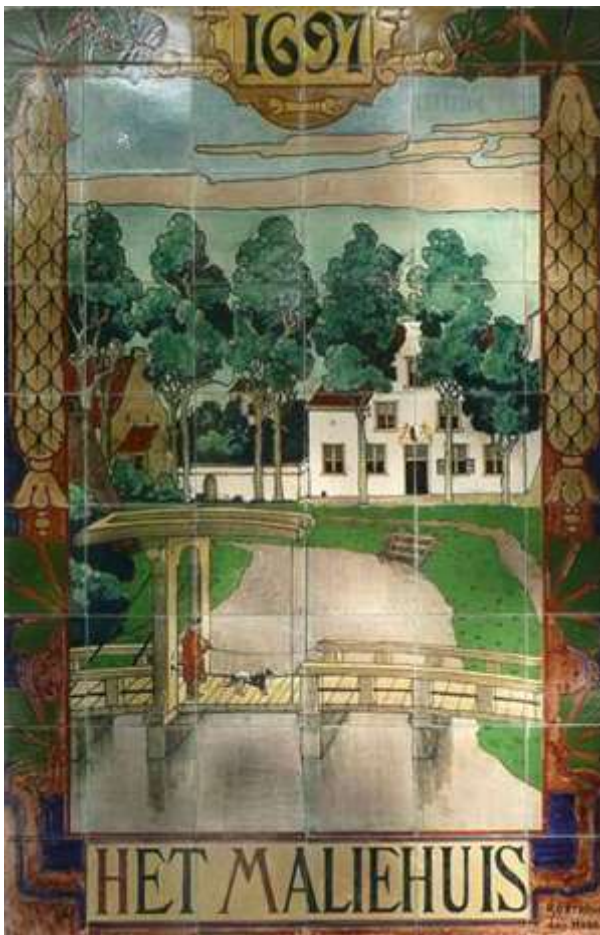
The Utrecht course had a length of 200 rods (some 750 meters) and was closed by a low wooden board. To offer shadow to strollers and spectators, four rows of trees bordered the course on both sides: 1,200 lime trees and 600 elm trees. Those 1,800 trees cost 1.300 guilders, an amount that would mean today some € 20.000 (source: <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/calculate2-nl.php>).

The archives don't mention who supplied and planted the trees, but it is plausible that it was Van der Stoop, living in Utrecht and capable of providing large quantities. Besides, the plantation of lines of trees as straight as an arrow was one of his specialities.

*The town council bought the tavern 'Het Gulden Vlies' near the mail course, which became the 'clubhouse' for the players. –
Watercolour drawing by M.J. Goetsee (c.1850) after J. le Veau (1772) –
Het Utrechts Archief, Utrecht, The Netherlands*



Responsible for the maintenance of the trees was the 'maliemeester'. He lived in the nearby inn, 'Het Gulden Vlies' (The Golden Fleece), bought by the council to function as maliehuis and leased out to the 'maliemeester', just like the course. He was responsible for maintaining the course and the garden; he looked after the newly planted trees, cut the grass between the trees with a scythe, kept the weeds out and collected litter on and around the alley. His income came from the green fees, renting out the clubs and balls, storing and repairing the equipment and collecting the fines. 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.



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

Sources:

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