

DE WESTBRABANTSE MOLENS

*Vereniging tot behoud
van molens
in West-Brabant*



On Saturday September 1st, the seminar “Tide Mills” took place in the old town house of the city of Bergen op Zoom in The Netherlands. De Westbrabantse Mill society welcomed about 40 participants from all over The Netherlands and Flanders. A mixed party of millers, mill building companies, molinology experts, representatives of governmental heritage agencies, historians and other interested in tide mills attended the program.

De President of the Westbrabantse Mill society Ton Meesters opened the seminar at 10.00.

The first presenter was Robbert Verkerk who took us on a journey addressing all tide mills in Western Europe. He drew a clear picture of all activities that took place during the centuries along the costs of Western Europe. Unfortunately many Tide Mills have turned into ruins but there are still a few remaining. The tide mill of Rupelmonde in Flanders is the only still working mill in our region.

After this European journey, the next presenter Jacques Brinkhof was taking us back in time to Breda around 1500. Jacques revealed a lot of information about the lost and forgotten tide mill of Breda. In his recent study he found out that the oldest water mill in Breda was built near the castle of Breda in 1509. This castle mill was a river water mill. In 1560 the “Gampelse” water mill was built. In 1563 another water mill was built, this mill called “Grote Watermolen” was used for milling corn. It disappeared in 1817. In 1612 the “Gampelse” mill was torn down, its material was used to built a new water mill, from 1718 onward this mill was named “Het Fortuin”. Also this mill did not survive, it burnt down in 1785. The castle mill survived until 1828. Today nothing reminds us about any of the mills.

Long time the tide mill in Bergen op Zoom was in a dilapidated state. Architect Jan Weijts, the next presenter, played an important role in restoring this mill. Already in 1493 it was discussed where and if a new tide mills was to be built in Bergen op Zoom. The harbor in those days was picked as a spot for this new tide mill. The mill consisted of a main milling building with two stepped gables. The private house was built crosswise onto this main building. At the waterfront there were two gates with two vertical water wheels, a sluice gate house and a building to control the water in the mill pond. The water wheels were of different size and two set of mill stones were present.

After these interesting presentations a nice lunch was served and the participants enjoyed discussing the new gained information over a glass of wine.

At 13.30 the program continued with Marco Vermunt, an archeologist of the city of Bergen op Zoom. He presented this very extensive research done on the mill in Bergen op Zoom. In 1889 the tide mill was bought by the council of Bergen op Zoom, and the mill stones, the water wheels and steam engine were taken out at that time. The council only used the mill as general storage and the mill deteriorated rapidly. Thanks to extensive archeological research the mill is restore in its old glory although many old items such as the mill machinery and water wheels have not been placed back.

The last presenter is Hans Smeenk. He owns the tide mill and did all the restoration work. In 2002 the tide mill was bought by Hans and he started restoring the house and mill. He worked closely together with architect Jan Weijts and Archeologist Marco Vermunt to restore the mill in its old glory. Hans still has plans to restore the mill machinery and reinstall the water wheels but with the changed environment it has become a real challenge.

After the presentations the group leaves the town hall and after a short walking tour the tide mill is reached. Here the exhibition Tides + Mill = Unique can be viewed (until September 9th).

With snacks and drinks we concluded the day and around 17.00 we all went home with a lot of new tide mill information to think about!

If you would like more information about this seminar, you can contact the Westbrabantse Mill society, Peet Quintus at peet@peetspalette.nl