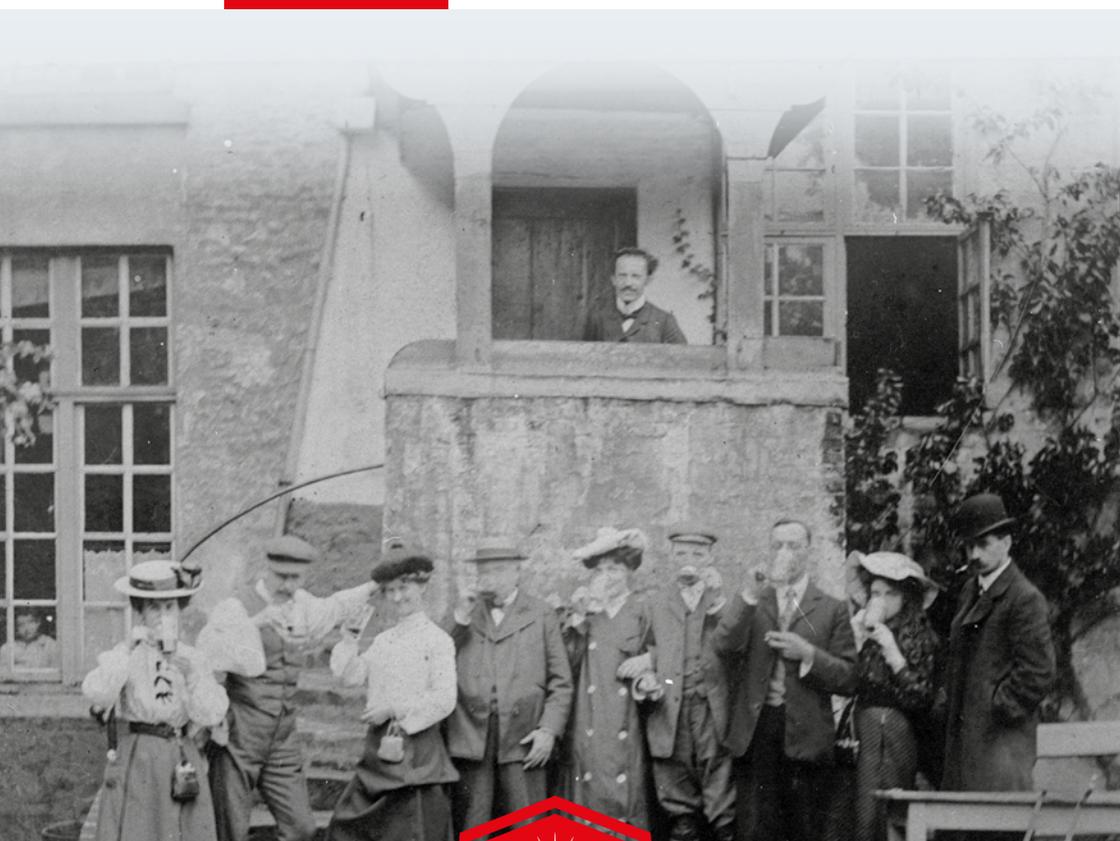


**B R U
G G E**

**MUSEA
BRUGGE**



Santé



Santoater

...t is beter bier dan woater

**EXPOSITION
25/04 - 13/12/2015
VOLKSKUNDEMUSEUM BRUGGE**



Poster of the cultural society the Black Cat, residing in the pub Au Lion Belge, 1894, Bruggemuseum

INTRODUCTION

With "Santé santoater...", the Volkskundemuseum explores the role of cafés in Bruges' past.

The trigger is the 500th anniversary of Café Vlissinghe, not far away from here in Blekersstraat.

Cafés or inns – as they used to be called – have played a major role in the community life of the town for quite a few centuries. Parishioners, neighbourhood residents, guild members and colleagues met in the inn. They gathered there to have meetings, to celebrate, to play and gamble, to exchange news and conclude contracts. Due to the public nature of the inn, social relationships received an almost official endorsement. And drinking together is an excellent start to this.



Innkeepers of "'t Oudhandbogenhof", 1934, City Archive Bruges

COLOPHON

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CAFÉ LIFE IN BRUGES

During the heyday of Bruges as an international trade city, foreign merchants not only found accommodation and storage space in the inns, but also relaxation and entertainment, and a place where they could exchange information and negotiate their business affairs. The innkeepers thereby acted as brokers.

The local inn is the perfect place to strengthen local bonds of solidarity. Everyone met everyone there, regardless of wealth or social status. 'Everyone' is not quite correct: inns were real male bastions. Boys and girls

only met in the tavern to dance, drink and find a suitable marriage partner on holidays such as Shrove Tuesday.

From the 18th century, there was a growing distinction between the poor and the rich. The upper classes visited the elegant coffee shops, or cafés, on the Market Square and in the better commercial streets. They had fine-sounding names, such as "Grand Café", "Au Panier d'Or" or "Café Royal".



*Detail from Abraham Van der Hecken, Tavern scene, 17th century, Groeningemuseum Bruges
- © Lukas vzw, photo Hugo Maertens*



Taverns on the main Market, 1898, City Archive of Bruges, coll. J. A. Rau



Bar In 't Onze Vrouwtje, 1898, City Archive of Bruges

The poorer classes met in one of the numerous 'estaminets' (pubs) or gin bars. During the second half of the 19th century, the number of these pubs rapidly increased. More and more people from the poorer class districts turned their front rooms into a café in order to earn some money on the side. There was often a woman behind the counter, trying to supplement the income of her husband, who was often enough unemployed. Bruges has 283 liquor houses in 1807. A century later, this number had risen to 1,296. One in eight houses was a café!

Concentrations could be found along market squares and access roads, or, in other words, the streets near the city gates. In the vicinity of the barracks and in the popular Saint Anne district, cafés also rose up like mushrooms. Around 1900, Langestraat had no less than 54 cafés, Vuldersstraat 32, and Carmersstraat 30.

The number of cafés dropped again following the Vandervelde Law of 1919, which prohibited the sale of strong liquor in cafés, and due to the stricter regulations with respect to running a café. Cafés also faced competition from other forms of entertainment, such as the cinema, radio and television. Increasing prosperity and individualisation led to the demise of community life, in which cafés played such a crucial role.

DRINKING

The 'Bouc der Ambachten' (*Book of Crafts*), a French-Flemish conversation booklet from 1370 that belonged to a schoolmaster from Bruges, tells us what drinks could be obtained in a 14th-century tavern in Bruges: Rhenish, French and Greek wines, locally brewed beer, German beer, English ale, mead (honey wine) and apple cider. Water was not on the list of drinks. The risk of infection was too high. Beer had a much better reputation, and was also said to be very nutritious. Everyone drank it: men, women and children. Ordinary beer – the so-called cleyn (small) beer – had a much lower alcohol content than modern day lager: about 3°. Due to the high costs of transportation, wine was only reserved for the more affluent citizens.



Tankards of the society "Kunstgenegen" with meeting room in Café Vlissinghe, around 1894

Most innkeepers produced their own beer in the Middle Ages. This was mainly due to its limited shelf life. Real breweries – independent of the taverns – arose in the course of the 15th – 16th centuries. Up to the 18th century, Bruges mainly imported beer from Brabant. Local beers were on the rise again later, however, and in 1913, Bruges listed 31 active breweries.



Wooden beer barrel from the brewer August Van Neste, around 1900

Beer porters or beer carriers transported the oak **beer barrels or kegs** to the taverns using special **carts**. There, they were often stacked in a cellar. The innkeeper first poured the beer in a **beer jug**, with which he then filled the **glasses or tankards** in the drinking room. The **sizes** of the barrels, the jugs and the kegs were strictly laid down, and were regularly checked by inspectors. The first beer pump on the counter was introduced to Bruges in 1818. Mr Godell from London demonstrated its operation in the English coffeehouse in Kuipersstraat. Towards the end of the 19th century, many breweries started filling beer into **bottles**, which were then transported in wooden crates. Inventors searched for the best way to seal the bottles: the re-sealable swing-top bottle with metal clamp and



Porcelain beer tap from
Café Vlissinghe

a porcelain cap with a rubber seal (Charles de Quillfeldt, 1875), the screw-on cork (Henry Barrett, 1879), the crown cork (William Painter, 1889), and the round stopper bottle with a glass marble (Hiram Codd, 1892).

From the end of the 17th century, **gin and brandy** gained popularity as the people's drink. The rise of these drinks, especially among the poorer classes of the population, which combined a lower price with a higher alcohol content, was described as a true plague by contemporaries. Moreover, increasing grain prices also made beer more expensive. The typical packaging for gin from the second half of the 19th century was a stoneware jar or **jug**. Gin from the jug was poured into a **shot glass**. The "**oorlam ('dram')**" is a cup-shaped glass with a short stem, fitted with a heavy, flat foot that could be slammed onto the table with a bang to reinforce the toast that was made with it.

The high alcohol consumption of the working class alarmed the upper classes. As early as 1860, the Bruges City Council issued a Regulation regarding the **control of public intoxication**. Any innkeeper who got a customer drunk was also punishable. The national legislation was established in 1887. The measures had little effect, however. In the period around 1880-1890, **abstinence associations** and **anti-alcohol groups** arose all over Belgium. As everywhere else, the 'Brugsche Onthoudersbond' (Bruges Abstinence Association), founded in 1891, recruited its members from the better bourgeois circles. They blamed the poverty and misery of the workers to their alcoholism, but ignored the structural causes of these social problems. The highlight of this anti-alcohol offensive was the Vandervelde Law of 1919. This law prohibited the sale of strong liquor in cafés, and remained in force until 1983.



Beer porter with special cart in the inner-courtyard of brewery "De Halve Maan", 1923, City Archive of Bruges, coll. J. A. Rau

GAMES

Cards, backgammon, dominoes, chess and checkers, darts, skittles, dice... to name but a few. Most cafés had one or more of these games available for their customers. You can try out some of the old café games here as well, at the inn and in the garden of the Folklore Museum.



The bowlers of "De Wilde Baan" pub, 1937, City Archive of Bruges



krulbollen

The most popular pub games by far in the 19th century were **bowls games**. There were several regional variations, each with its own way of being played and its own type of balls. Bruges locals mainly played 'wildebaan bowling', 'pasbaan bowling' and 'gaaibollen' (a type of bowling with skittles). In 'wildebaan bowling' and 'pasbaan bowling', the players rolled **flat balls** on a hardened surface of about 20 metres length as close as possible to the 'stake' or 'plume'. In case of doubt, the **compass** was used to measure the distance between the ball and the 'stake' down to the last millimetre. The 'gaaibol' players used smaller bowls, which were rolled over a level strip of 10 to 20 metres length towards a set of skittles, or 'gaaien'. Those 'gaaien' were fitted to the end of a sloping surface.



Steel bow archers on the shooting range of the Inn "Het Peerd", 1932, Bruggemuseum

A typical phenomenon during the second half of the 19th century was that associations or companies started organising games in inns. In 1860, Bruges had 41 **bowling associations**, of which 24 were 'pasbaan bowling', 12 'gaai bowling' and 5 'wildebaan bowling' associations. Each of these associations was linked to a café, had its own name, its own rules, and sometimes even a **banner** or crest. Members who broke the rules paid a small fine. With the money from the **fine box** and the membership fees, the associations organised banquets for their members.



The Bruges smokers' club in front of the tavern Craenenburg (main Market), around 1900, Bruggemuseum

Finchers, pigeon fanciers, canary bird lovers, domino players, billiard players and cyclists also formed associations, and met in cafés to discuss or celebrate. **Smokers' clubs** were all the rage at the end of the 19th century. They organised competitions in which the participants tried to smoke as long as possible with a specific amount of tobacco without the fire going out. One room in this museum is completely dedicated to tobacco and pipe smoking.

The upper classes also didn't feel too fine for café games, although they preferred other games, such as billiards, chess and dominoes. In 1886, more than 50 **billiards associations** were active in Bruges.

A great deal of **gambling** also took place in cafés, even though it was officially banned. **Playing cards** and **dice** ("tuysschen") for money were particularly popular. Another popular gambling game was the **anchor and sun game**. The game consisted of a board and three dice, with the same symbols on them. Players put money on one of the symbols and threw the dice. For each dice that fell with that symbol up, they won the same amount as the stake. And if the local constable happened to pass by, the board could quickly be folded and stowed away. The only permitted form of gambling was a **lottery**. For many innkeepers, organising a lottery was a profitable business.

FESTIVITIES, MUSIC AND DANCE



Dancing in the tavern, coll. Alex Calmeyn

During the local fair, neighbourhood parties, weddings and other festivities, a lot of dancing took place in the cafés. The Procession of the Holy Blood was also an ideal opportunity to organise dance parties. The dancing could start as soon as the Procession had passed by.

The mixed dance parties for young people were a thorn in the flesh for the parish priests. The Church even made up its own word for this: 'labism'. After the Council of Trent, parish priests carried out a real crusade against this sin. The attitude of the Church became milder in the course of the eighteenth century, but the suspicions remained. In 1912, the city council of Bruges officially approved no less than 703 dance parties, most of which took place in a café or adjacent hall.

But in order to be able to dance, there had to be music, of course. Before 1850, the violin was the café instrument par excellence. Thereafter, the variety of instruments increased: piano, hurdy-gurdy, orchestrion (a mechanical organ), harmonium, accordion... In 1913, seven cafés in Bruges had a **pianola** as a permanent instrument. The museum inn features a rare preserved specimen dating from 1910. The music was recorded on paper rolls with perforations, similar to the books of a barrel organ. The piano played by itself, by means of a pneumatic system. The **gramophone** developed simultaneously with the pianola. In 1913, 18 cafés in Bruges were the proud owners of a phonograph – the forerunner of the gramophone. From 1950 onwards, the first jukeboxes made their appearance in the nightlife of Bruges.



Pianola in the inn "In de Zwarte Kat" in the Volkskundemuseum of Bruges, 1910



The musicians Eddy Burssens and Gaston Verhaeghe are fooling around in the pub "Het Brugsche Vrije", coll. Alex Calmeyn

A new form of popular entertainment was introduced to the cafés in Bruges in the 1850s: the **café chantant**. The phenomenon originated from Paris. At a **café chantant**, a singer started a song, and the customers that were present joined in. They were usually farcical songs with a well-known melody, and everyone joined in the chorus. The bourgeoisie often complained about the often scurrilous and vulgar content of the **café chantant** songs. Some folk singers also dressed up, and turned their performance into a full comic sketch. Various cafés in Bruges obtained a piano, in order to make the event even more attractive. Other folk singers used an accordion to support their songs. The '**Lichterveldse trekzak**' (**Lichtervelde squeezebox**), or the so-called "Callewaert", named after its inventor Eugène Callewaert, was very popular.



Three musicians in an inn in Oostkamp, 1920, City Archive of Bruges, coll. J. A. Rau

CULTURE AND SPECTACLE

In the 19th century, some cafés had their own drama club, which rehearsed there, and, from time to time, gave a performance in the back room or in the garden. The first 'cinematographic spectacle' in Bruges also took place in a café: on Saturday, 5 September 1896 in the 'De Keizerlijken Arend' café (The Imperial Eagle) on Schouwburgplaats (Theatre Square). Another way of attracting customers was the performance of strange spectacles and the display of natural curiosities or freak shows, featuring giants, Siamese twins or misshapen people.

Two artistic societies saw the light of day in 1894: 'Kunstgenegen' (inclined towards the arts) and 'De Zwarte Kat' (The Black Cat). Both had their meeting place in a café: Kunstgenegen in an annexe of Café Vlissinghe, and De Zwarte Kat in a back room of café 'Au lion belge' in Langestraat. De Zwarte Kat was named after the first real cabaret in Paris, Le Chat Noir, founded by Rodolphe Salis in 1881. Like its Parisian example, it brought together a culturally interested audience for literary readings, concerts and exhibitions. The activities suddenly reduced after 1900, and the group fell apart.

Kunstgenegen was a society for teachers and (former) students of the Academy of Fine Arts, with the aim of encouraging each other at an artistic level. They furnished a meeting room to their own taste in the side building of Café Vlissinghe. This room was known locally as "t museetje (the little museum)".



The interior of the meeting room of "Kunstgenegen" in Café Vlissinghe, City Archive of Bruges



The museum inn features relics preserved from both De Zwarte Kat and Kunstgenegen. The **sprekerston** (speaker's platform, 1898) and a **large poster designed by Théophile Steinlen** (1896) originate from the meeting room of the Black Cats. There is a roll painting (from 1896) behind the speaker's platform by Victor De Loose, a member of Kunstgenegen. The roll painting displays scenes from "De vogel en de vis (The bird and the fish)", the anthem of the regular customers of Vlissinghe.



The meeting room of the Black Cat in the pub Au Lion Belge, 1899, City Archive of Bruges, coll. J. A. Rau

SAVING

Another café tradition made its appearance in the late 19th century: café saving clubs. Many cafés had their own savings company. The **wooden savings boxes**, which can still be found in some old cafés, are a reminder of this. Each saver was given a compartment in this wooden box, with a number and a slot. Banknotes were crammed as deep as possible into the compartments with a small shoehorn. The treasurer collected the money from all the members and took it to a bank (A.S.L.K.) or post office, where the money yielded some interest. At the end of the working year, often at carnival, the saved money was used for the so-called 'teerfeest' (*feeding feast*). Food and drink: a way in which the innkeeper could bind his customers. el. Manger et boire : c'était une façon pour le tenancier de café de fidéliser les clients.



Wooden savings box in Café Vlissinghe

FURNISHED POPULAR CAFÉ



Counter of Café Arthur, around 1950, Bruggemuseum

The museum inn 'In de Zwarte Kat' is designed like a popular café from the late 19th century. This was indeed previously the site of one of the many cafés that flourished in the Saint Anna district.

It was typical for a popular café that it often consisted of one open space. Through the open space, you could see everyone, and also talk to everyone without having to get up from your chair. It goes without saying that a private conversation was not really possible.

Some other interior elements are also characteristic of a popular café: the savings box and the card rack on the wall, the pianola, the skittles, the spittoons on the floor and the white-stone drainer on the bar or counter. The front of the counter features a relief with pigeons. It is possible that the origins of this counter could be found in a meeting room for pigeon fanciers.

Popular cafés often exude the feeling that time has stood still. The interiors rarely change, and this type of café could still be found quite regularly until the 70s. They have largely disappeared from the scene today, however.



Aan de toog van Dries Weyts

Café Vlissinghe, which is located in Blekersstraat, is one of the oldest inns in Bruges. There has been a drinking establishment here, without interruption, since 1515. With its unique atmosphere and ambiance, Vlissinghe has attracted both tourists and the people of Bruges alike.

2015 is a celebratory year for this café, with a full programme of festivities commemorating its 500th anniversary. Close cooperation with Erfgoedcel Brugge (Heritage Bruges) has put the focus on Vlissinghe's own heritage. Mini exhibitions alternate with video montages in the café itself, whilst various lectures, guided walks, workshops and other activities look in more detail at Vlissinghe's 500 year history.



Counter of Café Vlissinghe, 1928, City Archives Brugge

For further information on this varied programme of festivities, visit
www.cafevlissinghe.be/500

Or check the Facebook page for the latest news, information and photographs
www.facebook.com/cafe.vlissinghe