



MUSEUM
PRINSENHOF
DELFT

VERMEER'S
DELFT

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Press release

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New biographical facts on Johannes Vermeer

During preparations for the exhibition *Vermeer's Delft*, two new biographical facts about Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) came to light. Former archivist Bas van der Wulp, of Erfgoed Delft (Delft Heritage), discovered a previously unknown entry on Vermeer in the burial register of the Oude Kerk which indicates the artist was buried with honours. In an archival document with damage reports, Babs van Eijk, of the Museum Prinsenhof Delft, found that Vermeer's mother, Digna Baltens, received financial compensation for damage to Herberg Mechelen after the devastating gunpowder explosion of 1654. With these discoveries, new information has been added to our knowledge of Vermeer's life. Both archival documents will be on display at the exhibition.

<p>Burial entry with details on Vermeer's funeral (16/12/1675), City Archive Delft</p> <p>16-x Johan Vermeer artist painter behind the N[ieuwe] kerck [church] and O[ude] Lang[en]dijck Own Grave 14 bear[ers] 1 toll 8 m[inor] ch[ildren] 3 adult ch[ildren]</p>	<p>Compensation to Vermeer's mother for damage to Herberg Mechelen (09/07/1655) City Archive Delft</p> <p>Diginium Baltens widw[ow] of Reijnier Jansen de Vos f 150 the 9 Juillij [July] paid f 60</p>

Burial entry

The previously unknown entry on Vermeer in the burial register of the Oude Kerk, where the artist was laid to rest, states that at Vermeer's funeral, on 16 December 1675, the coffin was carried by no fewer than fourteen pall-bearers and the church bell was rung one 'time'. The exact burial entry reads as follows: '16 December [1675]: Johan Vermeer artist painter behind the N[ieuwe] kerck [church] and O[ude] Lang[en]dijck Own Grave 14 bear[ers] 1 toll 8 m[inor] ch[ildren] 3 adult ch[ildren]'

Burial with honours

The initial presumption that the guild probably paid his funeral expenses seems unlikely. Former archivist Van der Wulp looked into the funerals of other painters, but none of them were given such a costly funeral. Vermeer's brother-in-law, Willem Bolnes, who died in 1676, was, however, given precisely such a funeral as Vermeer and Vermeer's mother-in-law, Maria Thins, who died a few years later, was given a comparable funeral, too, with the difference that the bell tolled two 'times' for her, not just once. The assumption is therefore that Vermeer's funeral was paid by his mother-in-law. Van der Wulp: *'The mother-in-law probably only wanted to advance Vermeer's funeral expenses to her daughter and there was at that time no idea of the financial misery Vermeer had left behind: three years after the Disaster Year, 1672, Vermeer was penniless.'*

Remarkable discovery

Considering how much research has been carried out on Vermeer – by dozens of people in the past 100 years – the discovery about the funeral is remarkable. Van der Wulp, who worked for the archive for 45 years, never made a discovery like this before. He talks about 'a cap (not a flare) and a wonderful moment, soon after my retirement.' Janelle Moerman, director of the Museum Prinsenhof Delft, says: *'There has been so much investigation into Vermeer that everything one discovers about the artist is in fact news. With every discovery, we add, as it were, a piece to the life-puzzle of the most famous Delft master.'*

Compensation Herberg Mechelen

During the devastating *Delft Thunderclap* on 12 October 1654, Herberg Mechelen also suffered damage. A year later, the States of Holland paid compensation to Vermeer's mother, Digna. She ran the inn after her husband died and at the moment of the devastating gunpowder disaster, she was still living there. The archival document reporting the damage was already known; the information that Vermeer's mother had received compensation had not been noticed before, however.

About Vermeer's Delft

The exhibition *Vermeer's Delft* focuses on the life of Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), his network and his relationship with the city of Delft. On the basis of more than 100 objects from the Netherlands and abroad, including masterpieces by Delft painters, objects of applied art, maps, prints, drawings, books, biographical documents and other archival matter, an impression is given of the bustling atmosphere of the 17th-century city. Never before has this been the focus of an exhibition on the world-famous Delft master. The exhibition will run concurrently with the major Vermeer exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

The exhibition Vermeer's Delft is made possible in part by the city of Delft, the province of South Holland, De Laatste Eer, the Turing Foundation, the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Stichting Zabawas, the J.E. Jurriaanse Stichting, Stichting voor Hulp aan Delftse Jongeren, the Kerkelijke Stichting Stalpaert van der Wiele and the Van der Mandele Stichting.

Note to the editor (not for publication)

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