

B U L L E T I N

GENOOTSCHAP NEDERLAND-ENGELAND

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UTRECHT BRANCH VOL. 18 NO.4 APRIL/MAY 2009

Venue: Noorderlicht Church, 92B Bergweg, Zeist

Dear members of the Utrecht Branch of GNE,

This bulletin, in fact the last one of the 2008-2009 season, brings you a review of the last two lectures and a preview of the two next ones.

A number of members of the Utrecht Branch participated in three National Events: the Waterhouse exhibition in Groningen, BBC Awards (14 volunteers), and the Tiffany exhibition in Laren.

A flavour of the next season's programme is given. The committee is busy organizing the Christmas Party, preparing the AGM and contracting a local speaker. Six speakers were selected from the National Programme list. The next season will start October 16th. We decided to skip September as many members will then still be on holiday. We will discuss this decision at the AGM which is also held in October.

The committee wishes you, a bit early perhaps, pleasant holidays and we hope to see you in good health at our first -new season- event.

Herman Steeneken

Friday 16th Oct. 2009	Hero or Villain: in Search of Rob Roy McGregor / John Sutton Followed by the AGM 2009
Friday 20th Nov. 2009	Nelson: the Myths and the Truth / Heather Woodward
Friday 18 Dec. 2009	Christmas Party
Friday 22 Jan. 2010	Planthunting in China / Carla Teune
Friday 12th Febr. 2010	The English Language: Emphasising its Debt to Dutch / Roy Skan
Friday 12th March 2010	Living with Jane Austen's Legacy at Chawton / Louise West
Friday 16th April 2010	Curiosities of the Counties / Jill Collinge
Wednesday 19th May 2010	Holkham Hall / Michael Daley

COMING EVENTS:

April, Friday 24th in the Conference Room of the Noorderlicht Church at 8.00 p.m.
A GLIMPSE OF CHATSWORTH –a slide-illustrated talk by Christine Robinson

Chatsworth is one of the finest stately homes in England, with a rich history dating back to the Elizabethan period, and a particular link, we think, with Holland, since it was the 4th Earl of Devonshire who brought William and Mary across from Holland to take the English throne in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. William and Mary thanked the fourth Earl with the Dukedom of Devonshire, and ever hopeful of a visit from the Monarchs, he rebuilt Chatsworth on the strength of it, and gave us the magnificent House we have today - a House which is also still very much a family home.



This illustrated talk covers all aspects of the House and how we care for it; winter and summer, behind the scenes and "public", and some of the special events and parties hosted at Chatsworth over the last few years.

About the lecturer.

With a degree in History, Christina Robinson took on the role of Housekeeper for the visitor route at Chatsworth in 1981, and has seen many changes over the years, as Chatsworth has grown to become one of the most popular tourist attractions in the country.

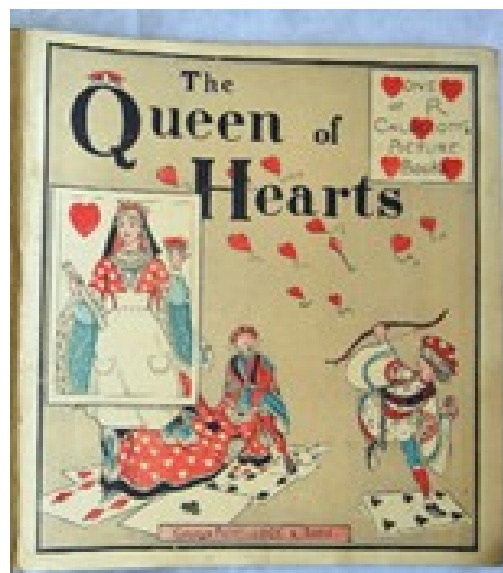
Her role within the enterprise has developed to that of Head Housekeeper and Head of Visitor Welcome, so that she now has the pleasure of ensuring a warm welcome for all our many visitors, and making sure that the House is fit for them to see.

She is also leader of the team preparing special Christmas displays for our visitors in the months of November and December.

May, Tuesday 12th in the Conference Room of the Noorderlicht Church at 8.00 p.m.

Unfortunately Peter Goddard cannot come in May to present his talk on the **Jurassic coast – a world heritage coast** -. This information reached us just before the publication of this bulletin so we had to take immediate action. We succeeded in inviting Mrs. Christine Sinninghe Damsté, she will talk about “**A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH CHILDREN'S BOOKS**”.

The history of toys, games and picture books is Christine's passion and she said she could talk about them for hours on end! She warned us, however, that with just one and a half hour to cover a period of 500 years of children's books, she could only give us selected highlights. Nevertheless, she will convey a great deal of information show wide range of illustrations as well.



RECENT EVENTS:

February, Tuesday 17th in the Noorderlicht Church, Zeist

Drawing the Baroque Landscape: Kip, Knyff and English Gentlemen - Ray Biggs

In February we welcomed back Ray Biggs. Having enjoyed his previous talk on the “Hidden Houses of Middle England”, we were intrigued as to the content of his new talk. It was as equally fascinating as his first, illustrating his talk with beautiful prints from engravings made of the plans

for various gardens and estates.

A survey made by Vita Sackville West of English Country Houses explained how the Grand Houses were the central point and were meant to dominate the scene, the lands around were shown to reflect the riches and enhance the grandeur, power and position of the family who owned the property. Ray followed the development of the gardens, from the “roomed” gardens or formal gardens of the Tudor period, which were often best viewed from the first floor, to the grand extravagant designs of the 17-century sometimes including the Dutch influence of canals and water features. Hidden vistas and grand avenues, clever use of optical illusions and perspectives, underpinned the power and wealth of their owners and showing off on the ‘grandest of scales’. One of the most famous gardens built on this grand scale was at Versailles in France designed by Claude Molet and Hilaire Masson. Built on a swampy area with its enormous display of fountains, the pleasure gardens took 30.000 workers ten years to complete.

Designers had many varying ideas, Sir John Vanbrugh drew on military designs for his inspiration whereas Capability Brown used a naturalistic approach. All in all making a wonderful diversity in garden design and a joy to us today.

Ray also told us about the prints he had used to illustrate his talk. Art works in their own rights. Leonard Knyff, an architect and naturalized Englishman, born in Haarlem, made his living by making detailed standard and aerial views of gardens and in collaboration with his colleague Johannes Kip, who came originally from Amsterdam and who was an engraver and expert in etchings, produced a series of 77 views of 'English country home and estates'. Published as “Britannia Illustrata” in 1797 it was republished the following year as “Nouveau theatre de la Grande Bretagne”. Were these prints accurate, especially the aerial views? Ray thinks they were as descriptions of gardens in journals have proved to be accurate even in the fine details. In any event their entrepreneurial venture has left us with prints that not only provided us with details of 17th century gardens but also they formed a superb historical record of England at that time, of the fashions worn and details of the life lived on a large estate. Ray gave us a very interesting, informative and fascinating talk....I wonder if we can persuade him to come back in the future!

CB

March, Friday 6th in the Noorderlicht Church, Zeist

Heart of the Sahara - A Journey by Camel to the Ancient Salt Mines of Taoudenni – John Pilkington

The return of 'our' intrepid traveller, John Pilkington, to talk to us always raises our sense of the unexpected and to hear from someone who'd actually been to the somewhat mystical Timbuktu was magnet enough.

John's journey started at Bamako, the capital of Mali. His aim was to travel along the Niger River (the world's 11th longest river) to Timbuktu then head north by camel across the 700-odd km of Sahara desert. This journey started by bus because the rapids at Mopti made the river impassable.

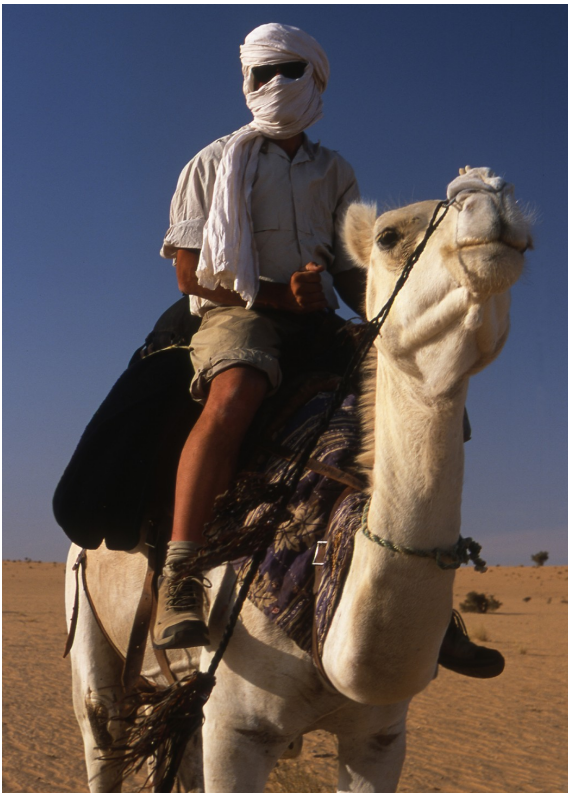
From Mopti he travelled in a local vessel called a pinasse, a French word - English pinnace.

Arriving in Timbuktu, he set about organizing his journey north. John soon noticed a strange custom. Women carried loads on their heads in baskets, men carried theirs in wheelbarrows. There is a huge trade and local industry in baskets but where did the wheelbarrows come from?

Timbuktu is an old centre of Arabic learning, in the 1500's it boasted a 'university' with some 20 thousand students studying Islam, as well as medicine and astronomy. Nowadays, the sole remaining part is the centre for studying Islam and the Koran. Similarly, it's population has been decimated but international tourism is fast taking hold.

His local 'Mr Fixit' was Hemade Diekité, an irrepressible, smiling, young man of 26 who spoke several languages (French being the lingua franca) and seemed to be Timbuktu's sole Rastafarian. Mr Fixit was responsible for arranging food and other supplies. John was then introduced to Adei, a Moor and owner of 50 camels, proud of his wealth and not backward in showing it. Adei's brother,

U Batma, was to be the guide for the journey north and, despite the fact that neither spoke a common language, successful communication was established via John's English and with sign language. The journey there and back was to take five weeks and John relied entirely, both for his life (this was bandit country) and for his success, on his guide, his guide's brother and Mr Fixit. John adopted a modification of the local "haute couture" both for comfort and for personal safety. The headdress, the houli, came in different shapes and sizes and consisted of a piece of cloth, about a kilometer long, wound round the head in a sort of turban leaving the eyes and mouth clear, designed to combat driving sand. The idea of his wearing the Arab robe was abandoned in favour of shirt and shorts.



He and his companions were assigned three camels, two white middle-aged female ones (about 17 years old) which John named Buttercup and Daisy and one very headstrong young male camel who's main delight was chasing female camels. John named this - his - camel, The Runt. Despite animal-lovers protests the only way to control a camel overnight or during rest periods is, it seems, to hobble it. Camels' feet are cloven and with soft 'rubbery' soles (not so that they can wear flip-flops) so that they can spread the surface of their foot soles by up to 150 percent to distribute their weight over a greater area especially on soft sand. The normal saddle is wood but out of sympathy for the narrow-butted Englishman a leather one was provided. In fact, whenever the going was suitable, he walked. The staple drink was tea, except at overnight or lunch stops, taken 'on the hoof', with the brew being made in a kettle on a swinging brazier fueled by camel dung. John found the sweetness of it very refreshing.

The trek into the desert meant a daily three o'clock start to cover ground before the sun was too hot. On

the first morning they left without the traditional western goodbyes, they just got up and left. In Arab custom, that idea is too much like saying farewell for ever and is considered bad luck. They travelled from well to well, placed at intervals along the route. Wells, up to between 30 and 100 metres deep had been dug by the wealthier men as their contribution to the general society - something which present day bank officials might take note of. Adei himself proudly said that he had built one. Overnight and nomad camps are placed well away from the wells for the safety of the children.

The camel trains going north carry bundles of tussock grass, staple diet for camels. About three quarters of the way to the salt mines the grass that is growing runs out. John did not really expect to see any wildlife on his journey, so the occasional desert fox and dung beetle (which never drinks water but throughout its life recycles what it has in its body) reminded him that there is life in the harshest of environments. Once he was overtaken on the journey by a trotting train of some 80 camels all loaded with tussock grass; trotting to prevent them feeding on each others loads!

The first sign of the Taoudenni salt pans is a depression formed by an ancient dried-up lake. Some three metres of surface sand now covers the original salt layers and consequently no life of any sort exists there. It is, in John's words, a non-place. The only alteration in the vast expanse of sand is the occasional open-cast pits. In these pits the miners live, sleep and work for up to three months at a time, chiseling out slabs of salt from the tunnels that run horizontally in the seams which glisten like rows of diamonds. Each miner can bring out up to half a dozen slabs a day, each about the size

and weight of a pavement slab. No money is exchanged for these slabs which are taken back to Timbuktu by the camels that bring the tussock grass. Individual miners mark their slabs with a 'signature' and the returning camel train boss delivers one in four slabs to the miner's family where it is ground down and sold for income. The return journey was not entirely by camel. Trains only stayed at the mines for a couple of hours, just long enough to load up before making the return journey. However, John wanted to photograph the camels being loaded with salt and he had arranged with Adei for his jeep to pick him up after photographing the load then join up with a train already heading south. Adei arrived perfectly as arranged, but with 18 tourists and Mr Fixit! With unerring accuracy, the jeep met up with the camel train and John travelled the last five days to Timbuktu by camel. The return journey to Mopti was made by pinasse - this time not a passenger one but one loaded with 120 tons of salt slabs, which caused John to reflect nervously on just how low the freeboard was! Then it was bus again to Bamako and so on home.

In question time afterwards we also sorted out the age-old question, when is a camel not a camel? Having now researched the matter thoroughly there is not in fact a simple answer. However, basically a camel is the generic term for all types. A camel with two humps is a Bactrian camel and is native to central Asia. A camel with one hump is (officially) a domesticated Arabian camel but is sometimes referred to as a Dromedary.

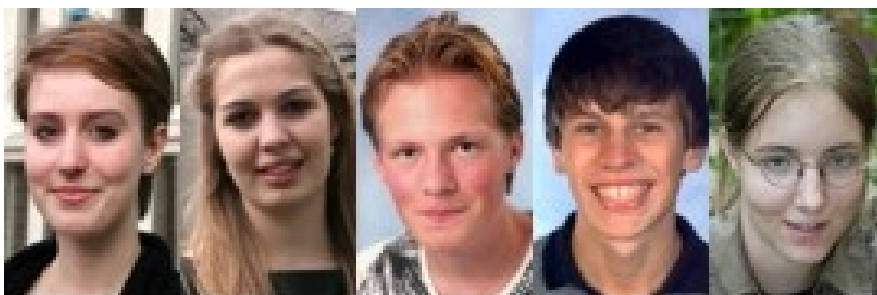
John's talk was illustrated by some wonderful videos of Mali music played by a celebrated local artist Salif Keita and, of course, many photographs. To illustrate this article I asked John's Saharan agent N. el-Ly to let me have a picture of him on a camel. When I saw it I asked, "But how can I tell it's John?". "By the knees", she said, "just look at the knees". I didn't have the heart to tell her we don't do knees at the GNE, well, not in Utrecht anyway. Thank you John for, yet again, an outstanding talk. Come again soon.

NLM

MISCELLANEOUS

BBC AWARDS 2009 WINNERS

After gaining top places in the exciting preliminary rounds and semi-finals of the Public Speaking Awards on 28 March our eight finalists competed for the first and second prize in the National Final. This was held in the Auditorium of the University of Amsterdam. **Roos van Ees** of the Montessori Lyceum, the Hague was the winner and **Hannah Louise van Otterloo** of the Rijnlands Lyceum, Wassenaar was runner-up. The Audience Award was also awarded to **Roos van Ees**. Both winners will take part in the International Public Speaking competition of the English-Speaking Union in London from 18-22 May.



Roos
van Ees

Hannah
Louise
van Otterloo

Victor van
Werkhoven

David
Vredevoogd

Maaïke
van der Plas

For the Young Writers Awards, eight essays were shortlisted. From these the jury selected **Victor van Werkhoven**, a student at the Christelijk Gymnasium Utrecht as winner and **David Vredevoogd** of the Cals College, Nieuwegein as runner-up. Both will follow a residential summer course at

one of the Arvon (the Foundation for Creative Writing) centres in Great Britain. The Audience Award in this category went to **Maaïke van der Plas** of the Rijnlands Lyceum, Oegstgeest.

ENGLISH THEATRE

The **Shakespeare Theater** at **Diever** has been producing one Shakespeare play a year since 1946. This year it's *Much Ado about Nothing*. The Dutch title – the play is staged in the Dutch language – is: *Hoop Gedoe om Niks*. The try-out is in July and August; the premiere on August 14th and there are performances (20.30 p.m. and matinees) through September 12th. More information about this open-air theatre at: <http://www.shakespearetheaterdiever.nl/index.php?pagina=Home> or secretariat: 0521-551430. Tickets and info-line: 0521-594999.

In **the Hague** there is the possibility to attend a performance of the play *Sight Unseen* by David Margulis, a production by the **AATG** – English Language Theatre in the Hague . Place: Warenaar Theater, Kerkstraat 75, 2242 HE Wassenaar. Date: June 4th, 5th and 6th.

AATG is an amateur group who enjoy, perform and support English-language theatre. Every year there are three major productions in theatres in and around the Hague, mainly in the “Theater aan het Spui”: www.AATG.nl or email aatg@aa-service.nl.

Amsterdam has the **In-Players** founded in 1950. They will be reprising three one-act comedies by Bernard Shaw on four consecutive nights, May 31 through June 3. Reservations through the CREA Theater, Turfdraagsterpad 17, tel.020-5251400. The In-Players stage an average of three plays a year: www.ostadetheater.nl or www.inplayers.org or 06-42722010.

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GNE Utrecht Branch Bulletin

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