

VEERE ON THE ZEELAND ISLAND OF WALCHEREN

By Jan Scheffer

On the island of Walcheren in Zeeland, Veere was a mere harbour hamlet in the 13th century with direct access to the North Sea. It was founded by nobleman Wolfert I van Borselen in 1281 when he built a modest ferry house complete with a ferry, hence the name Veere (Eng.: ferry). After he built an enormous castle nearby called Zandenburg, he needed a ferry to get off the island for business and groceries. Because of his father's aristocratic connections, Wolfert was able to marry Scottish princess Maria Stuart in 1444, daughter of the Scottish king James I. Trade ensued, and Veere became a flourishing trading hub. In 1355 the town received city rights. Foreign trade became significant enough for Italian bankers and loan sharks, called Lombards, to open a pawn shop.



The Industry that built Veere

The primary reason the Scots contributed greatly to Veere's growth is that in the 12th century there was a surplus of wool in Scotland and England. The production of wool exceeded the needs of the people. They needed baling out. Founded and subsidized by the King David of Scotland, the Catholic Cisterian monks of Melrose Abbey started exporting Scottish wool, duty-free, into Flanders. This right was formalized in 1407 by a decree of the Duke of Burgundy, a Catholic who ruled the Netherlands at that time. He created the office of Conservator of Scottish Privileges with its headquarters in Bruges. More and more wool was exported to towns along the North Sea, the Low Countries, France, and Germany, and the Baltics.

When the River Zwin silted, access to Bruges' harbour became impossible. Despite efforts by its citizens to retain the Scottish Wool Staple, the Conservator of Scottish Privileges left Bruges and set up shop in Middelburg in 1518, 18 miles from Veere. Another reason why they left was the growing pressure from Spain to force Roman Catholicism on Flanders. When this same religious pressure was felt in Middelburg, the headquarters were moved to Veere, where the local Catholics sympathized with the Calvinist views of the Scottish trading community and of the Dutch Republic. Faith in money was more important than faith in Rome.

Veere flourished most significantly in the 16th century when it became the primary port for Scottish wool. The Staple Contract granted Veere a monopoly on importing, storing and trading Scottish goods in the Netherlands. Other major imports were coal, hides, whiskey, flax, grain, and fish. Exported to Scotland were cloth, tiles, leather, brassware, weapons, wines and Dutch gin. During the sixteenth century, 50 to 60 ships a day sailed in and out of town. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Veere had about 750 houses inside its city walls. Of the 3000 residents, 300 were Scots. It is highly likely the Scottish seamen also mustered aboard ships that were employed by Admiral Boisot for the raids by the Watergeuzen, with letters of Marque by William of Orange departing from Flushing. One of these ships, with Lambrecht Lambillon as captain, captured the ship that carried Oxford from Calais to Dover on April 10th/11th 1576 – where his life was saved by a Scottish seaman who recognized him as a nobleman. Richard Malim thoughtfully dedicated his book *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare* (2010) to this unknown Scotsman.

Obviously, Oxford would have been intrigued and amused by the similarity between the name Veere and the family name Vere and he would also have been aware of the multiple meanings of veer in Dutch: ferry, feather (beautified with our feathers?), spring. Sir Edward Veer, the bastard son of de 17th Earl and Anne Vavasour was spelled like this on his full portrait with his arm in a sling, He died, like many other Oxfords in the Netherlands, where from a gunshot in the back of his head in a siege before Hertogenbosch in the company of Stadhouder Frederic Henry of Orange – who was the target of the marksman? – because of his being part of the English expeditionary force. Veere derives its name from from

CampVere (or Campfer), earliest mention 1290, the place of the ferry to Campen – or Campan, (earliest mention 976) on the island North Beveland. Letters from William of Orange in the 1570s are located ‘from Campfer’. It is, given the centuries difference unlikely that the name Vere derives from the town of Veere, whereas the name Ver in Cogentin, Normandy dates back to the 9th ct.

End Notes.

Richard Malim, *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of “Shakespeare” The Literary Life of Edward de Vere in Context*. 2010, Mc Farland & Company, Inc., Publishers. Jefferson, North Carolina and London

Jan Scheffer, ‘Oxford Captured by Pirates’. *De Vere Society Newsletter*, Vol. 22, No. 4, October 2015, pp 4-14.

The Province of Zeeland, 1580, images of the islands of Walcheren and North Beveland opposite each other.

