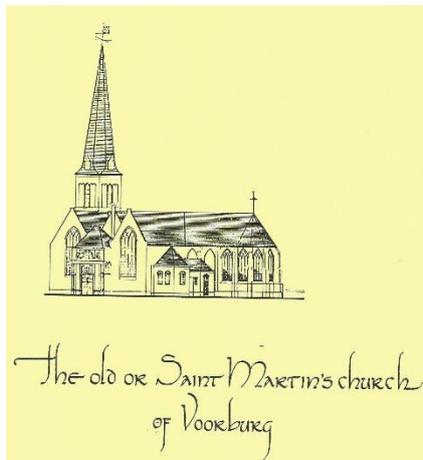


# The Old or Martini Church in Voorburg



## If stones could speak.....

If stones could speak, they would speak about generations of people: farmers, artisans, soldiers, nobles and even a real princess, men and women and children, many young-died, innocent children. Human beings were married here and buried inside or around the church. People confessed their religion, restored and enlarged their church. Not only would they speak about the hard times of war, of pestilence's and of famine, but also about times of prosperity, the special way of live in Voorburg and of the country life, which was mostly not as pastoral and poetic as the pictures would want you to believe. In a nutshell: an

old church like this, aged about seven centuries, is the product of many generations of human beings living in the low lands.

## The first parish of Saint Martin in Voorburg

Anno Domini 1275 there was already a parish of Saint Martin and there still is Anno Domini 2006. The first statement about Forenburg is made in a charter of the archdiocese of Utrecht. That was about the year 900. The exact date of the founding of the church is unknown. It is said that the Irish monks, who christianised our Low Countries during the 8th and 9th century founded a little wooden church.

## Saint Martin of Tours

Saint Martin of Tours was a patron-saint of the church. You may have seen the picture of a Roman soldier, sitting on his horse, who divided his cloak with his sword into two parts and gave one half to a beggar. In Martin's dream the beggar appeared to him. When Martin realised that the beggar was Jesus Christ, he reformed and repented. He became the bishop of the French city of Tours and founded a monastery in Marmoutier. At the time of his death, the 8th of November 397, he was so popular, that the local population canonised him and raised him as a National Saint.



## Orientation of the church

The former priest choir of the church is directed to the East, as in almost every Romanesque or Gothic church. The parish priest, standing at the high altar directed his face to the East and stood with his back to the believers in the ship of the church. The people of the Middle Ages had many more symbols than we have nowadays and they compared Christ as the 'Oriëns', the Rising Sun. For that reason the main axis of the church is not parallel to the centre line of the Herenstraat and the Parkweg, the two main roads on both sides of the church.

## A mini-iconoclasm

The year 1566 was the year of the iconoclasm according to our history books. It was the year of struggle between the Catholics and the Protestants. In many churches all the statues

of the saints, all the altars and all the leaded stained glass windows were destroyed. Fortunately we only had a little iconoclasm in our little village. Once, in the same year of 1566, the pastor was dining with three noble men. The wine was good, perhaps too good! After the dinner one of the nobles demanded the keys of the church. The pastor had to give them. The drunken noble entered the sacred space with his companions and completely destroyed the statues. This incident wasn't without consequences. The so-called Blood Council in Brussels, the council of the notorious duke of Alva, condemned the nobles to banishment and confiscation of all their goods.

### **After the iconoclasm**

Many important features of the church were restored after the iconoclasm. The present oak pulpit was made in 1625 and the copper lectern decorated with the coat of arms incorporating three lions of the donor was added in 1641. On the lectern is a 'Statenbijbel', printed in 1851. The church has again several leaded stained glass windows and two organs. The main organ is called the 'Marianneorgel' and was donated by Princess Marianne in 1879.

In the chapel at the South side of the church remained a family vault, built in 1705 by the families Timmerman and Coymans, with some mummified bodies. This mummification is probably due to the very dry climate in the burial chamber below street level. The coats of arms of several grave stones in the church have been removed during the French occupation early 1800. The "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality" attitude did no longer allow coats of arms. Two heavy grave stones of the family Van Halewijn, however, were hidden under the floor and covered with a layer of cement. These grave stones with all its coats of arms have been restored and form part of the floor of the choir.

### **A royal princess was living in Voorburg**



During the previous century a royal princess was living in one of the famous manors in Voorburg. This Princess Marianne, daughter of King William I, came to Voorburg on the 8th of May 1848. She was a recalcitrant person, especially after her unsuccessful marriage and divorce with the debaucher Prince Albert of Prussia. However, the inhabitants of Voorburg were delighted with 'their' princess. She was a very social minded person. Every Sunday she visited the church. She felt that the organ wasn't well tuned and she ordered a new organ. One day the new organ was delivered to the church. The church government knew nothing about the gift of the princess, but had to accept it with pleasure. The royal princess died in 1883 in her castle in Germany and you can see her statue in the church yard.

*Source: Bernard Dijkman*

*Co-operator of the Office of Historical Records  
Municipality of Voorburg, The Netherlands*