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Leiden Exchange

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Abstract

After last year's extremely successful visit by the lovely Dutch Medical students, we were keen to make the exchange a regular reciprocal visit. Our erstwhile President Paul Mills had been in touch with Monique, his Dutch counter-part for some time and eventually a date was agreed on.

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LEIDEN EXCHANGE

After last year's extremely successful visit by the lovely Dutch Medical students, we were keen to make the exchange a regular reciprocal visit. Our erstwhile President Paul Mills had been in touch with Monique, his Dutch counter-part for sometime and eventually a date was agreed on. Despite the logistical nightmare involved in :

(1) persuading people they want a cheap holiday???

(2) getting 18 medical students on a plane to Holland???

(both surely very trying tasks Ed.)

we seemed to succeed without many hitches. The fact that I had paid for the whole trip before we had received any money from Trust was of no concern to me or my Bank manager. Though unaware that such a time existed we left according to plan at 5 in the morning, leaving Paul behind to argue our cause.

We were a little worried that Paul might not be able to cope flying out on his own, so we arranged an escort for him in the form of our favourite faculty member Fanny K. Which proved to be one of our greatest decisions.

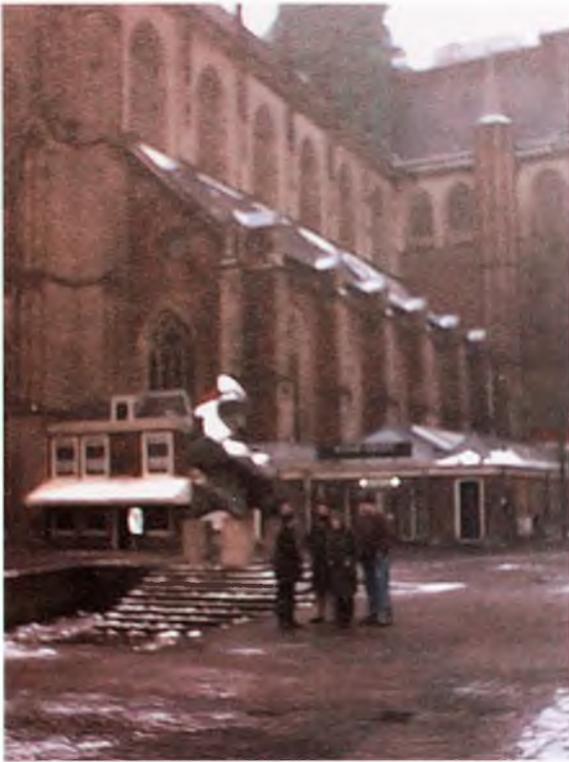
The Leiden group were a motley band of ruffians and pirates which we had scraped together by searching through dodgy bars, bear pits and bare knuckle fighting dens. They seemed perfect to represent the society abroad. They included four first years who must be very brave (though one must never be mentioned in polite company), we also had some of the finest examples of British men and woman in existence to show these Dutch what we were made of... unfortunately we took an arts student but we kept him well hidden!

After a slight delay in Edinburgh, we arrived in Schipol airport late afternoon. We were met by the famous Monique and her lovely companion Charlotte. As a suitable introduction to Dutch Culture, they whisked us straight to the Heineken brewery where we were informed, not for the last time, about how good the Dutch are at everything. I don't know much about the technical aspects of brewing the end result certainly tasted lovely and the fact that it was all free and served by a man with a fantastic moustache just made it seem all the better.

We headed back to Lieden to discover what our accommodation was like. The students in Lieden



Leiden on a winter's day



Harlem, a district in Amsterdam

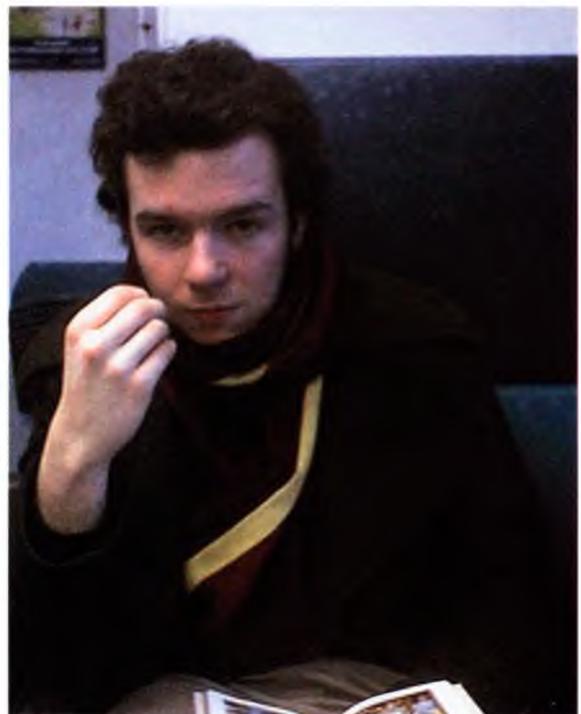
live in fraternity houses, which are bizarre to say the least. Our house was furnished with a huge TV, a fridge devoted to beer and an official ban on women in the common room. Other people's contained randy dogs, holes in the floor and random men coming and going day and night.

That evening we were given a tour of the largest fraternity house, called Minerva, possibly comparable to our Students' Union. This included a fantastic wine cellar and the infamous naked room (Twister, football and chess; apparently, we were the first group of foreign students to stop and chat to the naked men). They then kindly provided us with free food and drink, and when the bar got too busy they just gave us a keg and trays of Jenever, a lovely drink we got to know far too well.

The next morning they had arranged an early morning talk on the history of Leiden Medical School. This was very interesting and we learned much about the historical links between the faculties of Edinburgh and Leiden. Next we were treated to a tour of the massive Leiden University Medical Centre, a huge hospital with the medical school

integrated into it. It also includes an extensive art collection and an entire shopping arcade. During the tour our entire party unfortunately became trapped in a lift for fifteen minutes, which was fun in so many ways. Our tour guide, who had waxed lyrical about the technological marvels of the new hospital, became strangely quiet at this point. We also became trapped in a very hot neonatology room by a very bizarre doctor. After dinner, we were given a talk by the famous Dr Helmerhorst on Factor V Leiden, surprisingly enough.

On the Friday we visited the Den Haag, the political centre of the Netherlands. We were given a tour of the First chamber of the Dutch parliament by one of the Senators, who looked on bemusedly as we called for a speech from the Honourable member for Iceland East. Outside, we experienced the environmentally friendly side of Dutch politics, as Paul was nearly run over by a politician on a bike (who, despite his insulting demeanour and language, possessed yet another splendid moustache). The party then split, some to shop in Den Haag and some to boldly sally forth to Gouda (for the cheese). We reconvened in Leiden that evening for a jolly meal (with raw steak) and much social fraternising with our Dutch counterparts.



Our intrepid reporter

On Saturday was the fabled visit to Amsterdam. The city was covered in snow and was also extremely cold (this was becoming a recurring feature of our journeys). Despite the weather, we had a very cultural experience, travelling the city's extensive tram system, visiting the Van Gogh museum and attempting to visit Anne Frank's house (unfortunately, everyone else in the city had the same idea). We also have unconfirmed rumours that Mr Mills was able to find one or two shops he quite liked. Afterwards, Dr Helmerhorst (or at least his faculty) treated all of us and some of the Dutch students to dinner in a great restaurant converted from an old warehouse. The cultural exchange was completed by a display of traditional Scottish singing from some of the male members of our party, with improvised lyrics which left certain people bemused (and not just the Dutch).

On Sunday we were left to our own devices. Many people revisited Amsterdam, and some took in various other towns, including Amhem, where British troops bravely held a bridge against the German forces in World War II. The evening passed quietly and we all retired early before flying home the next day. Some of us went straight to the wards, while the less dedicated amongst us slept for the next three days.

On our trip we learned many things. The students of Leiden have many strange and curious traditions (although some would say the same of the RMS), pride comes before a fall (our poor tour guide), Dutch neonatologists are a strange bunch, and there are many things which Edinburgh and Leiden share in their past. A good time was had by all and we await with anticipation the next visit of the Dutch students.



Gouda