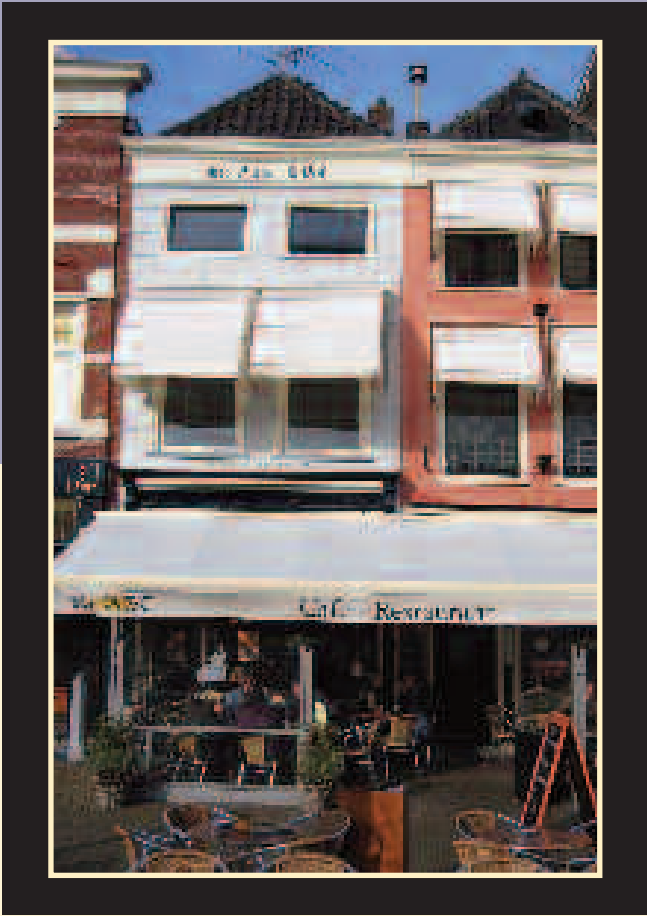


Tafelmusik Salutes: Het Gulden ABC



Het Gulden ABC Today

Het Gulden ABC is a restaurant on the historical main square of the Dutch city of Delft. It occupies the former residence and bookshop of Jacob Dissius, a late 17th-century artisan registered in the records of the Guild of St. Luke as a bookbinder.

At the end of the 17th century Jacob Dissius had 21 paintings by the Delft painter Jan Vermeer hanging in the little house.



The inside of the restaurant has kept the intimate atmosphere of the old shop. The walls have reproductions of some of the Vermeer paintings which were hanging in the house in the time of Dissius. The café serves Dutch specialties such as *pannenkoeken*, large thin pancakes from a recipe which dates from Vermeer's time.

The centre of Delft has changed little since the 17th century. The outdoor tables of the restaurant have magnificent views of the buildings that Vermeer and Dissius would have seen every day.



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Photos of Golden ABC by Dennis Verbeegen

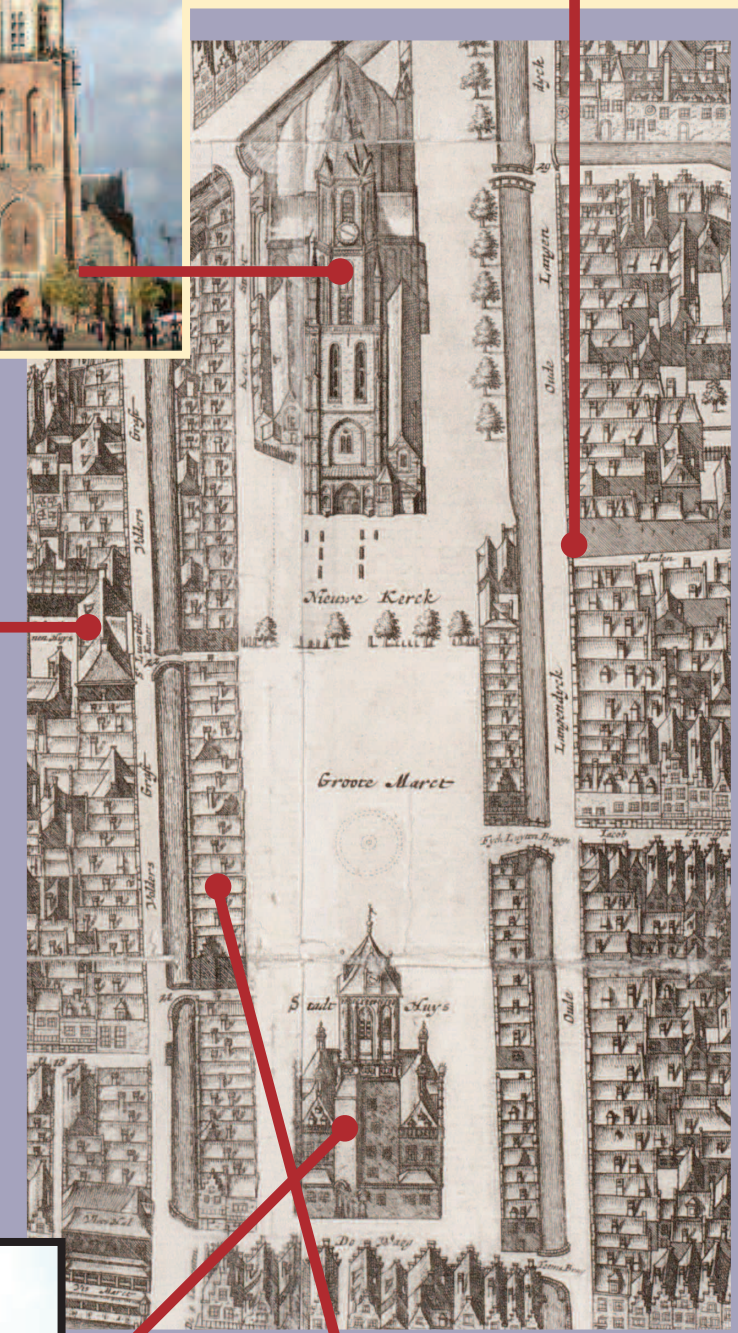
Delft in the time of Jan Vermeer and Jacob Dissius

The Nieuwe Kerk or New Church was built in the 15th century and is the burial place of the Dutch royal family. The famous carillon bells in the tower date from 1660. The young women painted by Vermeer standing at open windows must have heard these bells many times!



Vermeer's House

The Guild of St. Luke was the name for Dutch unions of professional artists and artisans such as glassblowers, weavers, potters and booksellers. The guild imposed limits on the sale of artworks from outside the city and regulated a rigorous system of apprenticeship, which lasted for four to six years. The great Delft painter Jan Vermeer joined the Guild as a professional artist in 1653, the year Jacob Dissius was born. Today the restored building houses a Vermeer interpretive centre.



Delft Regional Heritage, Archives Delft collection, Aerialviewal section.



The Stadhuis or City Hall is at the opposite end of the market square from the New Church, with the Golden ABC halfway between. It housed the council chambers, the civic guardroom and the town treasury. The entrance hall was sometimes used by merchants for trade in books, paintings, maps and paper.



Het Golden ABC

Just outside the Golden ABC was an annual textile market where the townspeople bought their precious linens.

A house full of paper, books, and 21 Vermeers was full of the products of flax farming:

- linen for artist's canvas
- linseed oil for paints
- paper made from linen rags

Flax farming and linen weaving had been part of northern European culture for millennia. The Romans who conquered the Low Countries were astounded at the high quality of linen clothing worn by the local population. Linen was the product of many laborious procedures.

Flax seeds were sown at the crack of dawn when the top layer of the soil was still moist. After a hundred days the woody stalks were pulled out by the roots. This was backbreaking work done in a stooped position. Then the flax was "retted" – left in the field to rot to ease the release of long fibres.

Beating or "scutching" the flax separated the fibre bundles from a woody core. The unbleached and bleached linen fibres on display have been scutched and combed. They display a luster that comes from the high wax content of the plant. Spinning and weaving produced strong durable fabric that lasted for generations.

