

# **POELS**

and the

## **GREAT COMPANY**



*The emblem in the house of every member of the Great Sheep Company*



*sheep being driven past a pond or "Poel"*

# The Story of the Venray Sheep Companies

With an area of almost 150 square kilometres, Venray, a municipality in the northern part of Limburg, is one of the largest municipalities in The Netherlands. More than half of the land used to be part of the Peel, an area of vital importance for the local farmers. The presence of wide areas of moorland led to the development of sheep farming and related cottage industries, such as the production of yarn, cloth and hats. Sheep produced an average of 2,5 kilograms of wool each per annum, and were therefore a welcome source of secondary income, quite apart from the droppings that they left on the land. At that time sheep were not reared for their meat. However, the French soldiers who were stationed in Venray from 1794 to 1814 were enthusiastic mutton eaters, and this gave the farmers cause to take another look at the economic value of their animals.

## Foundation of the Venray sheep companies

Around 1809 some of them had the smart idea of driving their sheep to Paris, at that time the capital city of the empire to which they belonged, and offering them for sale in the market place. When it became known that this trade was profitable, others soon followed in the pioneers' footsteps. Five farmers pooled their interests and founded a partnership, "De Grote Compagnie" (The big company), which set up an organized trade route between Venray and Paris, with fixed staging posts along the way. The drive on foot to the markets of Paris took two weeks on average, and ran south of the Peel to Antwerp, and then through the lush pastures along the Schelde to northern France. The herds were collected together in the border village of Warcoing before undertaking the last stage of their journey to Paris.

## Expansion of the Venray sheep companies

Initially the partners' only drove their own sheep, but within a few years there was a network of buyers in The Netherlands, and Venray became the focus of a trade which saw tens of thousands of sheep being sent to France each year, not only by "De Grote Compagnie", but also by five smaller enterprises. Under the Raets, Poels, Camps, Trynes and Vorstermans families the business flourished to such a degree that in 1845 a second outlet market, London, was opened up, to which the sheep were transported from ports such as Harlingen, Medemblik, Rotterdam and Vlissingen. Dutch sheep farmers were meanwhile unable to cope with the demand, so that ever increasing numbers of German sheep were being bought, and when even this source proved inadequate, representatives of the company travelled to the Ukraine, Denmark and Iceland in 1875 or so, and in 1891 a trading office was opened in Buenos Aires, which arranged for the transport of not just live sheep, but also deep-frozen meat to Europe. Around the turn of the last century, the meat trade in the slaughterhouses of Paris, London and Antwerp was dominated by Venray businesses, and until the outbreak of World War II they were the most important producers of bacon and tinned ham in Poland, Hungary and Canada.

## The End of the Venray sheep companies

Although the smaller sheep companies folded one by one after 1900, "De Grote Compagnie" remained in existence until 1951, when representatives of the eleven participating families from a number of different countries held their final annual gathering in the high-class Swan Hotel in Venray, at the card table of which, 150 years earlier, their joint company had been founded. In the intervening time this initiative had given rise to a host of independent companies. At this gathering the final collective bank balance, a sum of 5,000 guilders, was presented to the parochial church of Venray to finance new choir stalls, which since then serve as a reminder of a unique example of Limburg enterprise.

References: Jan Derix, Limburg, Eisma Publishers, Leeuwarden/Mechelen. (Wikipedia)

(This is computer translated, so far from perfect.)

## THE SHEPHERD.

This picture is a tribute to the old shepherds from this part of the Netherlands, who developed into true entrepreneurs and traders, carrying out their work in the 18th and 19th century world with much risk and pioneer spirit.



Schieëper is the Venrays dialect word for shepherd. Hence the Venrays dialect words schieëpershoond and schieëpersschupke, which mean respectively sheep dog and herdersschopje.

Venray and a part of North Limburg lie to the edge of the former Peel, a vast, savage, and almost uninhabited area of almost 70,000 Ha. This unimproved area of heathland held grazing possibilities for sheep on the higher pastures. Dozens of shepherds, generally in the service of a sheep farmer, grazed their sheep on the Peel and on several spots stood z. g. folds. In Venray there were more than 60 sheepfolds between 1800 and 1910. The shepherd would spend the night in the folds with his sheep. In this way Venray was, at the beginning of the 18th century, a centre of sheep farming. The Venrayse heathland sheep were known at the time as wild, small and requiring little food other than young heathland plants, grass and kruid and houtachtige ate implantate, which grew along the country ways.

Shepherding was the lowest paid profession in agriculture. The shepherd watched over his flock day and night. Many shepherds started at 13, 14 or 15 years old. These young people came down from the Peel with their sheep between 19 March (St.Jozef) up to Aureole Sunday (1st Sunday in October), a grazing time which was only interrupted on or around Saint Jan (24 June) when the sheep were shorn. At the stocktaking of 1756 in Venray 3121 sheep were counted, by 1870 there were 7770.

As pay the shepherds got expenses and lodging and a miserable amount of pocket money. Sometimes he also got clothing off the farmer as an allowance in kind, from a package containing leather, a couple hemden and socks.

They killed time while with their flocks by cutting and collecting sufficient heathland fodder for the animals for the winter. Furthermore the knitting of wools socks, cutting shoes peggen (houten nails), and making brooms. These activities produced extra pocket money.

In Venray some large sheep farmers united themselves into a Company, which traded not only in the entire Netherlands, but in 1846 even got a foothold in the London market. Later in the 19th century they expanded their trade deep into Prussia, into the countries of the Donau monarchy, Ukraine, Denmark, Iceland, and the United States. Later several sheep families separated off to the vleeshandel from Argentina. A lot of the activities were a long time ago, but in Paris, London, Buenos Aires, and Antwerp one today still finds ventures whose origin lies in the Venrayse sheepdrovers, and the names of the families which were involved in it.

Excerpts from

## **Who Wants To Buy All That He Sees**

The history of the Venray's Sheepcompanies, by Jan Derix. (ISBN 90-70285 29 0).

### **Introduction**

Sometime during the French occupation (1794-1814) a few smart sheep farmers from Venray took their fat livestock to Paris to sell them there. From this venture in the last century a trading organisation arose which soon spanned a large part of Europe, penetrated into Russia and sent out purchasers into the Argentinean pampas. In Venray this remarkable company was known as "De Grote Kompenij", and they who were a part of it were known as "de schopsnikkers".

It is surprising that the history of the Venray sheep companies (other smaller companies also had a share in this trade) has so far not been given the degree of interest which such a striking and interesting phenomena should deserve. Publications about it so far have been occasional episodes handed down in the family. The complete, documented story has never been written. The result is that the present generation has no idea about the activities of the Venray's sheep companies, having never had the chance to take learn of it. This alone justifies the effort to write a history. It seemed even more urgent to us, because - with the death of the last eye-witnesses - this episode in the history of North-Limburg was threatened with oblivion.

We hope that this book will avoid this and that families, archaeological organisations and the government will find a reason from this to secure any documentation about the sheep companies for the future. Much is already lost, but because the Venray's sheep companies have made history all that is still there is valuable enough to keep for posterity.

It is the history of people who, though perhaps unsophisticated, more than made up for it by their trading spirit, their enterprise and organisational talent, crossing the borders of their native land to find new markets.

This initiative existed in Venray because at the beginning of the last century the village was a sheep breeding centre. The meat of Venray's sheep, for which there was little demand in their own region, seemed to be to the taste of the French so the Venray's shepherds drove their flocks to the Paris slaughterhouses. They united into a company which was soon trading throughout Holland and which in 1846 got a foothold in London. When the railways in Europe were developed they looked for trading areas in Prussia and the fringe areas of the Donau monarchy. They explored the possibilities of trading in the Ukraine and Iceland, in Denmark and the United States, before getting into cattle and meat trading from Argentina and the export of bacon and ham from different countries in Eastern Europe, Canada and Australia.

Many of these activities are now in the past but in Paris, London, Buenos Aires and especially Antwerp one can still find enterprises which originated in the Venray's sheep trading and the families who were involved with it.

The history of the Venray's sheep companies lends itself to the writing of an adventure-novel. One could also without any difficulty make a "chronique scandaleuse" out of it. We have resisted this temptation as in our view it is the facts of the story that must take priority. Now the historic truth - as far as it was possible to reconstruct - can speak for itself, we leave its judgement to others.

**Jan Derix**

**Horst, 5 september 1982.**

## **chapter VI: The Poels family**

Around the year 1715 Johannes Poels, born in 1687 at den Hoebert, buys “De Liet”. “De Liet” is one of the oldest farms in the borough of Venray. The farm was demolished in 1971.

Johannes Poels was a sheep drover as well as a farmer. He has six children by two marriages of whom three are sons. The eldest son, Henricus (1723-1785), inherits his parent’s farm. We will follow his line. Like his father he married twice. First to Hendrina Janssen, then to Margaretha Reynkens. From his first marriage came Martin Poels, from his second marriage Henricus Poels jr .. The two sons of Henricus Poels can be seen as the “ancestors” of the “Grote Compagnie”. Their descendants have dominated the history of the “Grote Compagnie” from beginning to end.

I: Martin Poels (1759-1818)

In 1789 he marries Joanna Rutten from the old estate “De Vorsthof”, Bergen. They live there until around 1800 when he buys a farm between Oostrum and Venray. They have seven children. Two sons are of importance to us, namely Gerardus and Henricus.

I a: Gerardus Poels (1799-1857)

He is the one who in 1824 when applying for a foreign passport gives as occupation “sheep salesman”. In 1827 he marries Theodora Elberts (1800-1855). They have eight children, and three sons join the “Grote Compagnie”. These are Peter Hendrik, Martin and Jan Willem. Martin, also called “the Black Poels,” had an establishment in Warcoing, South Belgium. Jan Willem was the owner of the Inn, “De Zwaan” (The Swan), where from 1877 the “Grote Compagnie” held their yearly reckoning days. It is not known if Peter Hendrik Poels (1831-1900) played an important role in the company, but his son Gerard (nickname Hupse) was active in the company for a while.

I b: Henricus Poels (1806-1 877)

He is seen as the founder of the “Grote Compagnie”, although he never went abroad for sheep trading. In 1836 he marries Joanna Camps, they have nine children. All their four sons were members of the “Grote Compagnie”, namely Martin (the “White Poels”), Jan (Rotterdam), Peter Jan and Henricus.

II: Henricus Poels jr. (1772-1841)

He marries Hermina Evers, they have nine children. Their three oldest sons get into sheep trading.

II a: Henricus Poels (1805-1877)

He is a shepherd and in 1835 he marries Francisca Wismans. After her death in 1843 he marries Anna Mechtilda Voesten, they have eight children. Their son Frans (1848) was in the “Grote Compagnie”.

II b: Martinus Poels (1807-1889)

In 1838 he marries Gertruda Verdellen, they have ten children. None of the children were involved in the “Grote Compagnie”.

II c: Jan Poels (1815-1882)

He does not marry and is rarely mentioned in the “Grote Compagnie”.

Around 1830 the “Grote Compagnie” had only four members. They were the brothers Gerard and Henricus Poels (I a and I b) and their two cousins, also the brothers, Henricus and Martinus Poels (II a and II b). If we assume that these sources are correct, then in the first ten years the “Grote Compagnie” was about four young people trying their luck to find an alternative way of earning a living.

Around 1840 many young people had joined the “Grote Compagnie”.

## **ch XIII: The arrival of the second generation**

The five years 1865-1869 were in several aspects the turning-point in the history of the “Grote Compagnie”. New sources and markets were explored and exploited, new ports were used for exportation to England, the key position of Warcoing was strengthened and Antwerp became a new centre of commercial activities.

Overall they were also lucrative years. In that period in total between two and three hundred thousand sheep were traded and every share made a profit of almost ten thousand guilders. From the notes Cornelis Raedts made, it seems that in those days they did not only think of themselves, but also of the community. We can see this in the gifts they gave to the churches of Venray and Siebengewals.

An explanation for the new spirit was that the company had rejuvenated itself. In this period the second generation slowly took over the work from the older members, especially in the Poels family.

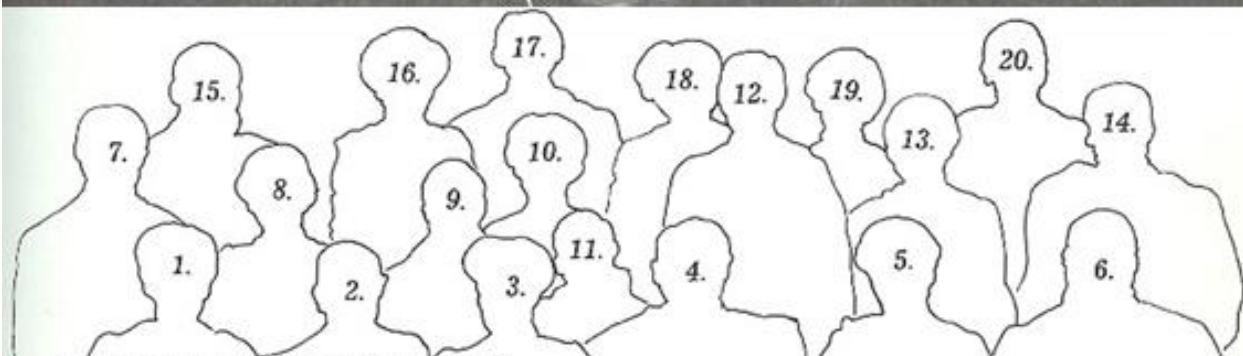
Around 1870 the “Grote Compagnie” was expanded into a multinational enterprise, with Venray at its centre. The rearing of sheep was mainly in North-Holland and Germany. The main consuming markets in this area were London, Paris and Lille. Rotterdam and Antwerp were the most used shipment ports for the

sheep sent to London, while those for Paris mainly went via Warcoing. In 1870 the functioning of the system was interfered with due to the outbreak of the Franco-German war, but the company was able to keep the damage limited to 12,000 francs by immediately raising sales in London.

**In 1872, a new member aged 19 joins the company. He is Peter Jan Poels [1853] .His father is Hendricus” kwaan” Poels of “ t Brukske”. He had often driven his father’s sheep to Warcoing and on one of those excursions he met Pauline Trynes. Love was mutual and they married on 2 February 1877, ten months after the death of his father Hendricus. After their marriage Peter Jan Poels and Pauline Trynes left for London, for the company. They bought a house in Hampstead, a prosperous suburb of London. After 10 years working for the company Peter Jan writes a letter to them. He thanks the company members for their help in bringing about his financial success. As a thank you he lets proceed be shares in the capital of the company. Peter Jan had done well during those years in England. He was the man who was responsible for the import and sale of tienduizenden sheep which were shipped annually by the company to England. He sent them to Smithfield, where he got the nickname Big John. Then in 1886, Big John left the company. The London trade continued to be run by him, but he established his own independent venture.**

**He travelled to North America, around 1885. He stayed some time in Chicago, visited the meadows of the Great Plains in spite of the danger of the Red Indians, returned vervolgens to the United Kingdom and reported to his partner [Brewster] that the population over there would be growing explosively so there would be no sense buying cattle in from those areas. They laughed at him, but he got it right. However he saw money in transporting cattle from the relatively less densely populated areas of South America. In 1893, he recommended that the company, which he continued to serve faithfully, send out Louise Raedts, Gerard van Meijel, and Martin Poels Jr. to Argentina. The sheep which were bought in Argentina were shipped to markets in Smithfield and Liverpool. Another route was through Dunkerk to the Warcoing trading post and on to French consumers.. In 1898 Big John sent his oldest son to Argentina .**





Warcoing, familiefoto plm. 1906.

1. Henriëtte Cuigniez-Trynes, Warcoing; 2. Brewster jr., Londen; 3. echtgenote van Brewster, Londen; 4. Peter John Poels, Londen; 5. Pauline Poels-Trynes (echtg. van P.J. Poels); 6. de chef v.d. Deptford-markt te Londen; 7. Peter Gerard van Meijel, Warcoing; 8. Victoria van Meijel-Poels (echtg. van P.G. v. Meijel); 9. Victorine Poels-Lecomte, Warcoing; 10. echtgenote van Albert Poels, Londen; 11. Victor van Meijel (zoon van P.G. v. Meijel); 12. Henri Poels (zoon van P.J. Poels) Londen; 13. echtgenote van Henri Poels; 14. Victor Cuigniez (echtgenoot van Henriëtte Trynes) Warcoing; 15. Labisse (schapenkoopman), Duinkerken; 16. Margret Cuigniez (dochter van V. Cuigniez), Warcoing; 20. George Cuigniez (zoon van V. Cuigniez),

warcoing.

## Chapter 25. Meat from Argentina, bacon and ham from the East

Until around 1920 Poels & Co. had continued at Antwerp, importing sheep from Argentina and Denmark, but after the First World War the trade in horned cattle (especially oxen) from these countries began to dominate. At the same time the trade in frozen meats from Argentina became interesting business, in connection with the international aid programs set up to help those countries worst hit by the war, namely France and Belgium.

During the war the company was forced to stop its activities in Antwerp as a result of military developments. Belgium immediately became involved in the war. This, in 1914, was enough incentive for Henri Poels to flee with his family to neutral Holland, where they were accommodated at the Vullinghs family home in Horst, which belonged to the parents of Henri's wife Josephine. Harrie, the eldest son, was sent to school in Horst.

In a sense, the Poels & Co. Company was continued in Horst and Venray during these years. The two owners, Henri and his nephew Jan Poels, considered possible ways of adjusting the trade to the prevailing wartime situation. Hence they tried to earn money by exporting dried fish to Belgium. To achieve this Henri Poels travelled to Antwerp several times. Because the public transport in Antwerp had come to a standstill, he often travelled to business associates by dog and cart, a form of transport usually used by bakers to deliver their bread.

Poels & Co. tried to profit from trade not only with civilians but also with the military. In the Netherlands 300,000 soldiers had been mobilised and this put special demands on their food supply. By the final stage of the war Jan Poels, who had in the mean time been elected a member of the Dutch House of Commons (1918 - 1922) and had a wide network of contacts, had been able to secure contracts with the Dutch ministry of War for the delivery of meat from Argentina. He made them a simple offer: "If you take care of the shipping, I'll take care of the meat."

It was likely this was limited to only a few deliveries, as was the case with other business ventures made by the twosome during these years. One such initiative was the foundation of a small factory on the Amerikaansegweg in Horst (it later became the Timmerman's cigar factory and has now been demolished), which started off as a shoe production line and ended up producing dried vegetables.

Henri Poels put his time in Horst to good use in many ways. When the Buyssen windmill obtained an electricity generator, he ensured there was enough cable available to connect up the residencies in the village centre. Every home was given one lamp or light source. When the family was returning to Antwerp in 1919 and the coach was about to set off towards the station, someone said:

"There goes Horst's guiding light"

In the course of the year 1919, Poels & Co. managed to get concessions from the Belgian government, allowing it to import cattle in conjunction with an extensive aid program designed to return food supplies and livestock numbers in Belgium to their pre war levels. The project was funded by the United States. The aid program was called "American Relief for Europe" and also extended to other countries that had suffered from the First World War.

Antwerp became the main dock for the import of cattle and meat financed by "American Relief for Europe."

Poels & Co. were doing well.

From 1919 onwards contracts were entered into, with the company Sidney & Poels in Buenos Aires, for the delivery of sheep and oxen. There was now a similar large scale import of oxen, as well as sheep, from Denmark. Poels & Co. acted not only as importer for Belgium, but also as commissioner for France (Dunkirk) and England (London). Freights destined for Belgium enter via number 28, the stables building in the port of Antwerp.

Normally Jan Poels would arrive in Antwerp on Friday evening to head the trade for Poels & Co. at the Saturday market the next morning. He would be back in Venray on Sunday. Monday to Friday he stayed in The Hague to fulfil his parliamentary duties, unless he had to travel for business or national politics. He was often able to combine the two, so that Poels & Co. did not have to bear the full brunt of travel costs. During these years he was often in London to do business with the Poels & Brewster company belonging to his uncle Peter Jan.

This **P.J. ("Big John") Poels** became chairman of the Agricultural Relief of Allies Fund, a charitable organisation of English farmers wanting to help their colleagues in the devastated region of Flanders to overcome the damage done by the war by donating breeding stock and farming equipment. In the summer of 1920 P.J. Poels was the guest of honour during the first post-war cattle show in Dixmuide, where he and a British delegation were welcomed by Baron Ruzette, the Belgian Minister of Agriculture. The show took



place amongst the ruins of the former town hall. On this occasion minister Ruzette honoured P.J. Poels with the Grootorde van de Kroon, a distinction which he was awarded by King Albert of Belgium.

As well as P.J. Poels, James Sidey, director of Sidey & Poels, was on the panel for approving the breeding stock. The trophy of honour, courtesy of the Earl of Portland, was presented by P.J. Poels. During the reception afterwards minister Ruzette and the governor of Flanders, Bisthoven, expressed gratitude to the Agricultural Relief of Allies Fund. P. J. Poels expressed his thanks in Flemish.

Peter Jan Poels, born in Venray in 1853 and founder of the partnership Poels & Brewster from which a large number of companies for cattle and meat trade came forth, died in 1927.

“Big John” was an authority not only in the Smithfield trade centre in London, but also as a businessman of international stature. He and his wife Pauline Trynes had moved into a residence in Hampstead in 1877. They later moved to the St. Rita’s estate in Eastbourne on the south coast of Britain.

After his death the company A.J. Poels & Co. came into being under the direction of his son Albert John. The company acted as meat importer for the Smithfield Argentine Meat Company in Zarate, and also exported cattle and meat to mainland Europe. Partners in this business were “Big John’s” two sons-in-law, namely John Jenkins and Louis Edward Gryspeerdt. The former was married to Big John’s daughter Alice and the latter to Marie Poels. John Jenkins involved himself in numerous commercial activities outside the meat trade and it is rumoured he became a millionaire as a result. He was, amongst other things, the owner of the British company Radio Rentals. Around 1958 A.J. Poels Co. owned the company Britain’s Meat Ltd., a meat wholesale business with headquarters in Smithfield and depots in, amongst others, Birmingham, Liverpool and Wales. In its prime this organisation employed around 250 people.

After Albert John Poels’ death in 1968 his family withdrew from the British cattle and meat trade.

The cooling compartments belonging to the Smithfield & Argentine Meat Company in Zarate had already been sold in 1948 to the Co-operation of Argentine Producers (CAP), for the sum of one million pound Sterling. Packing House Products Ltd., which at around 1955 had an average annual turnover of 12 million pounds Sterling, was converted into a public company.

The Poels’ family name was commonplace in the London’s business community for nearly a century.

In the issue of the 12th March 1927 Peel and Mass wrote:

One of the English newspapers, dated the 3rd of March, reported the following about Mr. P.J. Poels, who died in London where he had lived for 53 years, though he was still a real Venrayer at heart:

“It is with great sadness that we inform you of the death of Mr. Peter Johannes Poels. He was healthy and in good spirits before going to bed on Saturday evening, but during the night he became unwell, and after having been administered the extreme unction, he passed away twenty minutes later. Our good friend was a prominent personality in the meat trade, and although over the past few years he did not actively take part in the trade, he still followed it with great interest. Sir Poels was the most senior partner in the company Poels & Brewster and he was the founder of the Smithfield and Argentine Meat Co. Ltd., where he was chairman for many years. He put much energy into the Smithfield Club and played a big role in the board of directors. He had also been director of the Meat Trade’s Journal from when it was first established, and his clever and sensible advice was very much appreciated. During the war he aided Belgium refugees and contributed much livestock to bring that brave country back up to standard. For this he was honoured by King Albert of Belgium. He was a great man in all respects and was liked by everyone he met. When it came to charity he was always first in line and offered help in a friendly and generous manner, not only when it came to our trade but also in other fields. He was a thoroughly high-principled man and will be sorely missed. Mr and Mrs Poels would have celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary this May. On behalf of the whole trade we offer our sincerest sympathies to his devoted wife and family”.

After 1918, Poels & Co., Poels & Brewster and Sidey & Poels, three of the corporations that had come forth from the Venray sheep corporation (Grote Compagnie), played a dominating role in the restoration of Belgian livestock levels. The Poels & Co. business in Antwerp extended its meat-importing activities to other west European countries as becomes clear in this issue of the daily paper De Maasbode, dated 18th August 1923:

**"CATTLE FROM ARGENTINA** - On Tuesday a cattle cargo from Argentina arrived by Seapool in the IJssel harbour in Rotterdam for the company Poels & Co., which is based in Antwerp and Buenos Aires. The cargo is destined for Switzerland and Austria. Our country has already become fully acquainted with this Argentinean cattle in the form of frozen meat. It is however, fairly unusual for a live batch to be brought here. This is the second time the Poels & Co. company has had a live cargo of Argentinean cattle delivered to our harbour. They could just as well have chosen the ports of Hamburg, Antwerp or even Genoa. However, with the intention of contributing to the revival of our harbour, they have selected Rotterdam, even though the resulting transport costs are certainly no more favourable. The well known Shorthorn breed of cattle, which is both fatter and heavier than the Dutch variety, is destined for the slaughter-house. The company Lion, in Boxmeer, has taken responsibility for the consequent transport through Germany. The cattle may not be slaughtered in our country and hence will be transported, in sealed vehicles, to its destination via Bentheim. The cattle are healthy but, as is commonly known, there have in the past been protests to prevent slaughter in our country. In Montevideo 260 oxen were put on board but they had scarcely reached the sea before they suffered a huge hurricane, in which no fewer than 80 animals were lost. Those that survived also suffered from the storm and the adverse weather conditions, which caused two ships on the same line of latitude as the Seapool to sink, but they managed to recover completely during the course of the journey. They are all ready for slaughter and weigh an average of 700 kilograms. As the cargo was insured the importing company did not suffer any damages."

The import of sheep and "beasts" (oxen), mainly via the port of Antwerp, remained the main source of business for Poels & Co. during the period that Belgium and other western European countries were recovering from the impact of the First World War. On average a ship arrived from Esbjerg once a week and a densely packed steamliner arrived from Argentina every two months. Ships from South-America usually carried 500 oxen and 800 to 1000 sheep. Because they had not been custom build for transporting cattle, wooden pens of up to two stories high had to be specially build on the decks. The risk of loss was particularly high for the sheep because as soon as one jumped overboard the rest tended to follow. However, this had occasionally proved advantageous when all the cargo had to be thrown overboard to prevent the whole ship going down hook, line and sinker.

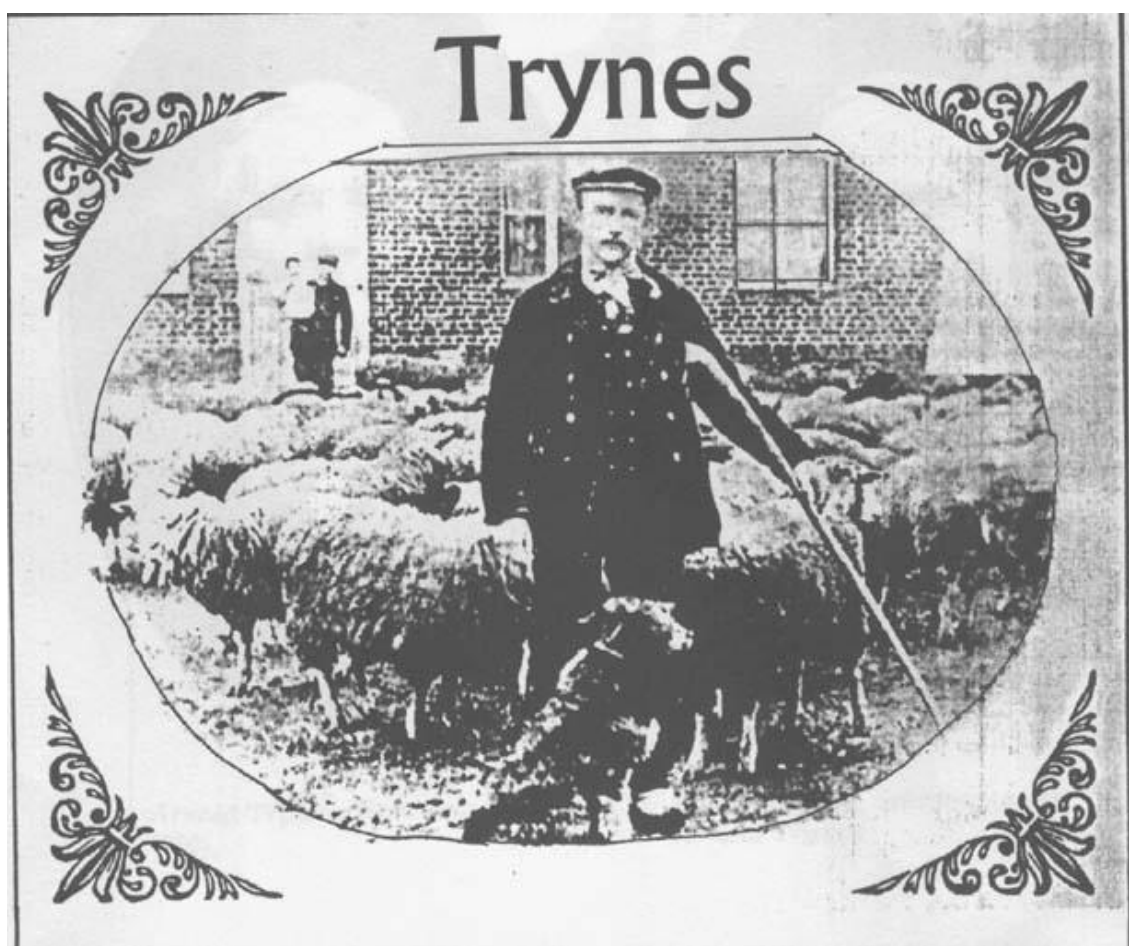
One of the ships which regularly sailed the Buenos Aires - Antwerp stretch was the S.S. Belgier. This ship sank on the 15th of April 1922 during heavy storm in the Bay of Biscay. There had been 1200 sheep and 150 oxen for Poels & Co. on board. The storm left no survivors.

The loading of ships in Buenos Aires was usually done by Sidey & Poels. This was the case until 1930 when Henri Jozef Poels died and the company in Burzaco was closed down. During the crossing, which takes an average of three to four weeks, the animals were looked after by peones (ship's hand) who were often Italians trying to earn free passage to Antwerp. They were under the orders of Argentinean capotas (bosses) who were responsible for the delivery of the cattle in Antwerp. On a few occasions the peones, who were paid one pound for working both the outward and return journeys refused to continue with their work in protest of their bad treatment on board. In such cases the mutineers were chained up to break up the strike.

The docking in Antwerp was always a spectacular occasion which attracted a large crowd. On such a day Antwerp experienced a veritable rodeo. Before the oxen of the Argentinean pampas could be brought to the stables, the streets had to be cleared of traffic. Thereafter the hundreds of animals were driven off the ship and were skilfully herded to quay 28 by capotas and guachos who had brought their horses. This happened alongside much cheering, cracking of whips and rearing of horses. When, sometime in the 1920's, a diamond company was celebrating its anniversary and a procession of jewels toured the city, one of these guachos was chartered to take part in the parade on horseback.

**TRYNES**  
*and The*  
**Great Company**

*De Venraysche Grote Schaapscompanieën.*



Hendrik Trynes, with 47 sheep. Leunen, Venray 1 Feb 1844

The farmers, especially around the vast Peel moorland, all kept sheep. In Venray there lived some clear headed buyers who led the way selling to selected foreign countries and the young people followed their example. They already understood co-operation and had chosen "Schopskompagnie" for their name. A company. The word must be understood, in the sense of a community or association of family members, friends, and acquaintances, not a plc or Ltd. A good company meant in the Limburgs dialect, a good gezelschap. The Great Company was never formally instituted. Income reached several millions guilders....which then was a lot of money yet they did not make use of the banks. I believe in the previous century The Great Sheep Company had also never had central accounting. They acted and co-operated purely on the basis of trust, whereby at a set date every year the reckoning was made of the expenses and incomes of the members.

The Rams Head was the symbol of membership of the Great Company, these hung in the house of every member and also in the The Swan Inn where every year in December the reckonings were made.

Sheep rearing in the surroundings of Venray had been based at this time on meat quality. Wool was an unimportant by- product. The farmers engaged young sheep drovers as the first railway connection only reached Venray after 1850. The sheep company had operated from 1845 in the markets of Leiden, Druten, Koblenz, Bunnigen, Neuss and Purmerend, in the ports of Vlissingen and Dordrecht. They founded bases in Antwerp, London and Paris and trade went on in the neighbourhood of Neuwied, Kassel and Neurode.

Jacob Trynes was one of the officers of the sheep company. His sister Hendrina married into the Wismans and had a daughter called Anna Geertrui Wismans.

The officers of the Company were:

- **Gerard Poels [1799-1857]** had three sons who joined the company: Martin "Black" Poels , who later settled in Warcoing South Belgium, Peter Hendrik, and Jan Willem Poels.

- **Hendricus "de Rojje" or "Kwojje" Poels [1806-1877].** These nicknames describe their appearance and character. For many years an alderman of Venray, in 1836 he married Joanna Camps.Samen and they have 9 children: all their children become members of the sheep company. O.a. Martin"white" Poels and Hendricus "Soekerei" Poels

- **Gerard, Jacob, and Arnold Trynes.** Their parental home was in Leunen [small village at Venray] no. 332 near the church. Their parents were Hendrik Trynes [1768] and Hendrika van Aarsen [1777] of Bergen and of their six sons who are in the Venrayse census three are registered as landowners and three as merchants.

- These last three, Gerard [1809], Arnold [1814], Jacob [1818] are connected with the Great Sheep Company. Hendrik Trynes, an unmarried brother, is working as a shepherd for the company in 15-04-1848 when he applies for a foreign passport for London and Paris. In 1867 Hij 84,019 kilos sheep meat were shipped to London and in 1875 even 574,602 kilos, by way of Harlingen with the Steamboat Maatschappij under the shipowner A.G.Robinson..

In around 1840, the company consisted of approximately 12 members of whom four were from the Poels and three from the Trynes.

Live cattle after 1846 generally went by means of Rotterdam. Vanuit the area of the Betuwe, where as from 1845 the company bought sheep on a large scale, could use rivers such as the Waal and the Lek for transport to Rotterdam, whereas Harlingen could use the IJssel and Kampen and on from there by way of the Zuiderzee. The trade going to the wool port of Antwerp ran by means of Deurne, Asten, Leende, Valkenswaard, and Bladel to the border post at Reuzel and thence from Turnhout to the Schelde at Antwerp. The sheep flocks were very welcome in Belgium as they fertilized the land. From there the sheep were also driven south to Metz, Valenciennes or by means of Warcoign, to Lille, and onto Paris. Major staging posts were: Warcoign, Lille, Valenciennes and Paris [pan tin].

In 1845 London had around 2 million inhabitants. The official figure for 1841 was 1,940,000 compared with 880,000 in 1801. With exception of Peking London was the largest city in the world. In 1841 London had 260,000 houses, which meant that on average each house had 7.5 inhabitants. In Paris the situation was still worse, there 1,053,879 people made do with only 20,500 houses; that is 34 people per house. Why these figures....well these people must also eat. And so the trade flourished. Smithfield market, near New Gate, in the centre of the city was the largest cattle market in London, where practically all London butchers bought their meat. This market was a large open area, bordered by houses. In 1849 236,975 head of cattle and

1,417,010 sheep went through Smithfield Market. The market days were Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The Great Company used the port of Deptford certainly from 1847. As well as exports to London rams also went from London to Warcoign.

As a result of the intensive trade to Paris and London a number of members decided to move to places on the route which the sheep took for their sale and purchase. The registers of 1860-1880 mentioned among other things about Venray that 47 persons had left town as sheep merchants.

In state papers:

October 1849; Arnold Trynes [1814], member of the sheep company, from Belgium.

April 1855: Gerard Trynes [1809] member of the sheep company, from Belgium - Warcoign.

29 May 1867: Franciscus Poels [1845], from Belgium Warcoign.

Departure: 14-02-1864: Martinus Poels [1836] to Warcoign

28-01-1867: Johannes Jacobs Steeghs, to Paris

8-9-1869: Peter Camps, to Belgium

3-5-1870: Peter Johannes Poels to Warcoign

29-01-1873: Johannes will tending sparrow Poels to Antwerp

12-04-1868: Hermanus Poels [1842] to Warcoign

1-3-1877: Peter Camps [1846] to Belgium.

Arnold Trynes "Trieneze – Nöl" [1814] was frequently with his brother Gerard, because they were often together at a duty post in Warcoign - south Belgium. Arnold Trynes had definitely left Venray by September 1853. He married 31 year old Silvie Lecomte, the daughter Henri Ange Lecomte deceased 1838, a merchant, who was also a burgomaster in Warcoign. The mother of Silvie was Sophie Catelle. Arnold was 38 years old when the marriage took place in 25-04-1852 in the Town House of Warcoign.

Martin Poels [1836] the second son of Gerard Poels black Poels' marries on 5-2-1864 the sister of Silvie, Victoria Joseph Lecomte aged 22. The mother of these two girls is overleden in 1845. She has four children, 2 boys and 2 girls. Of them Victoria [1871] will later marry Gerard van Meijel from Venray.

Together Martin and Arnold reinforce the interests of the company in the entire region of Belgium and Noord-Frankrijk. The two big players Poels - Trynes looked for a vital foothold for the trade of the great sheep company.

Warcoign was a village in the Belgian province of Henegouwen in the Tournay district. In 1856, the village had 11,000 inhabitants. It nests in a turning in the Schelde. Warcoign is exactly halfway between Venray and Paris. In former days it was usual for the purchaser and salesman to meet each other halfway, for their handelswaar or cattle. For this reason hamlets and cafés arose with the name Half-way. Store sheep were bought up and on their journey to their destination they grew fat on the rich meadows. In the drovers staging posts they could get fitter for the markets to come. Frequently in this way the smaller herds were joined together to form larger ones to go on to the markets. Much later the Warcoign trading post was also used for the import of sheep and cattle meat from Argentina.

Arnold was one of the major pioneers of the great sheep company, which in 1864 consisted of the following 13 members:

Hendrik Poels, Brukske, Venray

Martinus PoelsHزون, Brukske, Venray

Pieter Vorstermans, Sevenum

Arnold Trynes, Warcoign Belgium

Jacob Trynes, Venray

Gerard Trynes, Venray

Cornelis Raedt, Venray, born Sevenum

Hendrik Poels, Venray village

Jan Poels, Venray heathland

Hendrik Poels Gزون, Venray Weverslo

Martinus Poels Gزون, Warcoign

Will Helmet Poels Gزون, Venray Weverslo

Jan Wilms, Venray, Overbroek

The company became divided into shares. Not everyone had the same and Trynes and Poels had the biggest shares. In the period 1865-1869 in total between two and three hundred thousand sheep were traded and

every share showed a ten thousand guilder profit, as a result of which capital of up to 6000 guilders could be raised by members. These calculations come from the detailed notebooks of Cornelis Raedts.

In 1863, the unmarried brothers Gerards, Andries and Bernhard Trynes were living in Leunen on the parental farm. Their brother Arnold had already left for Warcoing and was there in 1852. After 1862 Gerard was living with his brother Jacob at Grotestraat 64, Venray. Jacob was a merchant in grain and also a member of the sheep company. Jacob married [second marriage] Hendrina Camps . Of the three children from the first marriage, the son Hendrik [Henri], born in 1853, took over the sheep company after the death of his father in 1874.

In august 1878 the widow Hendrina Trynes - Camps goes to Venray. She is paying for a Russian passport which is sent by express to Henri Trynes., nevertheless without a visa he travelled to Oswiecim [Auschwitz] - Galicië. These young 20 year old Trynes still had no advancement in the company. He used it as a trader for the German market. Several members operated on the German market. For instance there are transit documents in Venlo that show Martinus Poels [600 sheep], Hendrik Poels [1000 sheep] to Martinus, Cornelis Raedts [2000 sheep]. In 1878, Henri and Gottschalk buy over 12,000 Russian sheep. Henri and Gottschalk travel to Odessa from Oswiecim. They buy no sheep there because of the lack of truck capacity on the railways. This is due to the movements of the military. Henri and Gottschalk sailed further by steam ship to Nicolaieff and further on by train to Nowa Poltafka. They probably travelled to the hinterland of Odessa to get an idea of the sheep of these regions. They both returned to Venray to submit a report to the company.

In July 1879 two other members left separately for Odessa [passport was applied for on 5 July 1879 for Hendrikus Franciscus Wismans, merchant in sheep, and a passport was given 8 or 9 august to Peter Camps]. From that can be inferred that the impressions of the first expedition were positive. Henri Trynes had written down much in a small notebook. Wismans route was the same as Gottschalk and Trynes took the previous year???

Odessa is a port on the black sea. The city grew considerably because this was a major transit port for Russian goods, particularly agricultural products. By far the most important export product was grain from the Ukraine brought in by oxcarts. In the summer months hundreds of such transports drew into the city daily. Other exports were skins, flax, wood, sheep manure and wool. The Ukraine has for centuries been the breadbasket of Russia and the most fertile area of Eastern Europe. After Gotschalk-Trynes-Wismans-Camps, nobody else in the great company travelled to Russia. The high costs and the long supply distances had not made it attractive to buy Ukraine sheep for the London market.

Henri Trynes had withdrawn as an active travelling trader for the company, although he continues to have capital in it for some time. He does business in Turfstrooisel and opens a trading agency company in Deurne. He also founded a brick factory in Overloon. As a member of the provincial states of Limburg he gets two psychiatric institutions built in Venray, Saint Servatius in 1907, and Saint Anna in 1908. One of the sons of Wismans, Thielen married Hendrina, a sister of Arnold, Jacob, and Gerard Trynes of the Sheep Company. They have 6 children. Two sons of theirs, Martin Jr. and Hendrik, join the company. Hendrik first in 1868. Hendrik married Petronella Poels [1842-1907], the daughter of Hendricus Poels of the "kwaaië" Poels. Martin Jr. married Gertrudis of Meijel. Because of bad health Martin cannot perform much work for the company. The families became interwoven by marriage. This reinforced still more the links with each other.

Jacob Trynes died 9 July 1874.

The company is in its heyday day, but around 1888 the first dark clouds appear on the economic horizon. The European agricultural crisis has arrived, in fact the predicting voorspel on the 1st World War. Cattle from South America start to flood the European market and to upset the continental trade. The great company reacts. In 1889 they send two members [Henri Trynes and Martin Wismans], on exploration to Denmark. In 1894 Martin and Jean [Jan] Poels, the 24 year old son of Martin "white" Poels, buy the first Danish sheep. Esbjerg becomes an important port for the company; beside Rotterdam, Geestemünde and Antwerp. In Antwerp dead as well as live sheep are now transported. The beginning of meat exports to the UK. In the last quarter of the 19th century in Warcoing the great company and another one were the major traders. Around 1877 Arnold Trynes and Martin Poels were strengthened by the person of Gerard van Meijel of Venray, born 1861. In 1877, he leaves Venray for Warcoing. There he worked at first as a shepherd boy before becoming a member of the great company, after the sudden death of Martin Poels in 1880. [Peter] Gerard van Meijel descended??? from farm family to heathland this line Van Meijel, end up initially Sevenum???. Several distant family members of Gerard van Meijel established themselves between

1865 and 1890 as sheep traders in North-Frankrijk. Gerard had left Venray to build himself a life in Warcoing shortly after the death of his mother. After Arnold died in 1900, he represented the interests of the company in the area between Paris, Dunker and Lille, with Martin Poels Jr. [1868], the son of the late "zwarte" Poels. Gerard van Meijel married 22 year old Victoria Theodora Marie, the daughter of Martin Poels Sr., on 6 May 1899.

In 1882, and 1893, the company made an important decision. They took the plunge into ocean transport. Steamships had been invented and in Jan. 1877 the first ship leaves from Rouen for Buenos Aires. A hundred days later the ship returns to France with ingevroren??? meat.

European cattle breeding hit problems. During the first world war the Argentinean meat exports flourished. In Nov. 1891 the company sends Gerard van Meijel,30, from Warcoing and Jan Poels,21, from Venray to Buenos Aires with the task of buying up sheep, as many and as cheaply as possible. Sales in these areas work well for the company.

In 1908, Gerard buys the The Swan Inn in the Great Market in Venray. In 1916, he sells to Martin Poels and his daughters Maria Bernardina and Maria Petronelle. Up to 1954 the hotel remains the property of the two families.

In 1926, the Company in Venray gets together again to celebrate their one hundred year old existence.



Antwerp Docks

## The Shepherd at the end of the 19th century

(From the new Hazegraspolder, Lucien Dendooven, p144-162)



..... A shepherd usually learned his skill from another shepherd. shepherding was in fact more than one skill, it was a life habit. At the end of the 19th century shepherding deserved its rewards more than an ordinary boerenknecht. In 1871 a young sheep shepherd was paid 20 F per month. We know also the demands that a sheep shepherd at Knokke in 1884 put to a farmer: 25 F per month., the right to the sheep manure, and during some days per year a horse to work for its lapje ground. While the shepherd watched over his sheep, he usually did handicrafts that earlier would have been a woman's work: breien, and sew. He could mend also the clothing of the women that did not know how to. Such small handwerkjes provided him with a supplement to the family income that amounted to as much as his pay itself; Kooplieden, who bred the herds, did not like to change shepherds often. Around 1880 Shepherd Maertens was in the service of farmer Jacob, in the region of the Hazegras. He guarded the sheep there for 74 F per year, for **the Poels Company and farmer Jacob. Sir Poels** foresaw difficulties for the shepherd, and let him know that when he nevertheless remained in service he would get so many more drinkgeld such as he lost by the reduction of wedde. The shepherd has thus remained in service.

Among the people the shepherds had to be very enterprising. In some places their educational level was above that of their employer. Around 1870, a time when illiteracy in the population was commonplace there were shepherds who could read and write.

He slept in his cabin. It was often a box that was usually on a slide transported to the sheep meadow. In the winter the cabin was brought into the courtyard..... the cur barked at the slightest disturbance, on the lookout for sheep rustlers. The flock consisted of a considerable number of sheep, so the shepherd had two and even more dogs. It was normal for a shepherd to live in his cabin, and they slept there from young.

From memories we know how lonely the young shepherd felt. Not that it was cold! He ensured that there were no slits in, and that around and over him was more than one schapenvel. Also in the cabin he kept a good supply of clothes, and even his money belt, because the door could be locked. Shepherd Jacobus Maertens always had a splendid shotgun hanging in his cabin. ....

But the shepherd cared for his sheep more than for his personal possessions. None of the hundreds of animals could be lost. For this reason the sheep had to be counted every day. When the shepherd counted one or more animals too a little, he floated the sheep within the meadow, and herbegon with tellen. At the same negative result he warned the farmer, so that they would come themselves or send someone else. ....

The herd slept from May to diep in the autumn. During the winter months the sheep had been enclosed in a large stable on the hoeve. If it was a gentle winter, as in 1871 and 1872, could the shepherd almost daily withdraw with his herd to the meadows. Sometimes a storm arose when the sheep were deep in the schorren. The shepherds always have been great experts at foretelling weather. They knew from numerous signs when a storm was on the way. .... Often so fierce that that the shepherd could not even reach his cabin. Protection had he however in his large schapersmantel and protected himself against rain squalls with his large shepherds umbrella



## Impact of the mining industry

In three quarters of a century the mining industry had drastically altered the eastern corner of South Limburg in every aspect. When the first pitheads were built, this was an agricultural region of small villages with a population of scarcely 22,000. By the time the mines were closed down, more than ten times as many people lived there, and it was one of the most densely populated parts of The Netherlands. There was a massive influx of workers to take up jobs in the mines. In [1939](#) almost 700 foreigners of 9 different nationalities lived in [Kerkrade](#), which had been the first mining town in Europe. Mine management began to build houses for their workforce at an early stage, so that mineworker 'colonies' arose, such as that at [Lutterade](#) near [Geleen](#). Because there were numerous social problems in the mining area, and most of the miners were [Roman Catholic](#), the [bishop](#) of [Roermond](#) took an interest in them. In [1910](#) the priest-exegist dr. [Henri Poels](#) (1868-1948) was posted as a working [chaplain](#) to the mine area, where he introduced the concept of social action. Dr. Poels, who was a member of one of the leading families of the 'Grote Compagnie' in [Venray](#), thereby laid the foundations for a social structure in which all the various population groups were integrated, and it was he who stood up for the material rights of the miners. He stimulated the formation of interest groups based on the 'harmony' model, and although this cooperative union between capital and labour found little or no resonance elsewhere in The Netherlands, it was to some degree responsible for the fact that the government-initiated mine closures in and after 1965 did not result in any significant social or political conflict.

References Jan Derix, *Limburg*, Eisma Publishers, Leeuwarden/Mechelen.



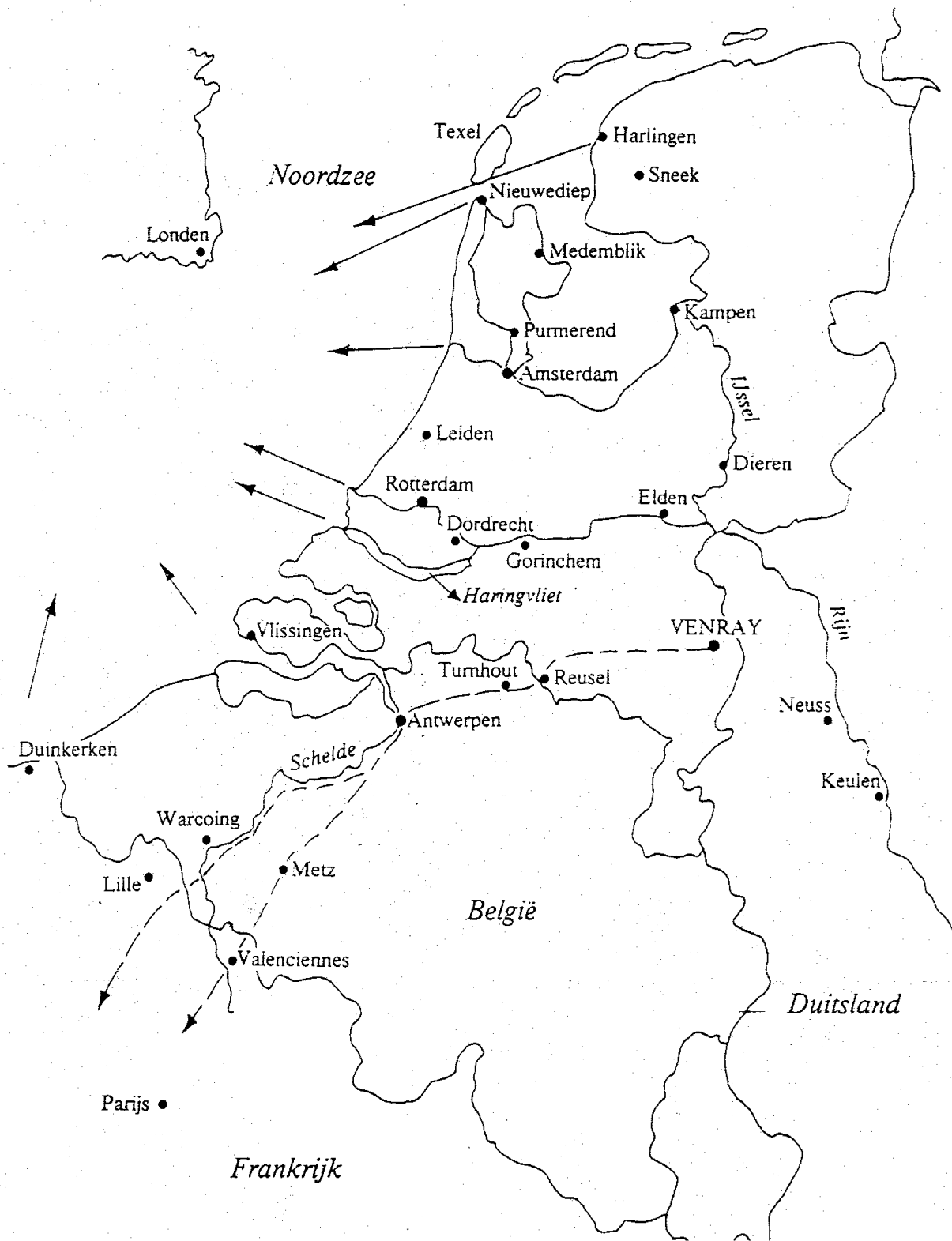
## Limburgse sheep companies

In 1982, Jan Derix and Sjef Verlinden in association with the daily for Noord- published, *What He Sees...* the history of the Venraysche sheep companies (ISBN 90-70285 29 0). This clear overview work of a turbulent period, during which the solitary existence of the sheep shepherd was coupled with commercial success of sheep traders. The conclusion of the book: Limburgse schaapscompagnie was no longer and would not return. In itself was it already a small wonder that a small group of at the most twenty leden-schapenfokkers in a little fertile region of Limburg, the Peel, could reach such a vast international schapenhandel. Shepherding was everywhere the lowest paid profession in agriculture, in fact child's work. Most shepherds were single and under 20 years, a shepherd of 11 years earned annual 4 guilders. Around 1809 for the first time a couple from a simple Venray farm drove their sheep from the Peel to Paris to sell them there. This generally took a month; returning with a pocket full of money the trip was a success. From this adventure a trade organization arose which covered shortly a large piece of Europe penetrated to Russia (Odessa) and even to the pampas of Argentina. From the ports of Rotterdam, Harlingen, Nieuwediep, Medemblik, Vlissingen, Oostende, Duinkerken, Calais and Boulogne the sheep were shipped. In Warcoing at Doornik a sort of doorvoerplaats arose. This remarkable gezelschap was the Great Company. At its height this organization had a million guilder turnover. Beside this Great Company, set up around 1826, there were also smaller companies. Per week there were brought at least 400 to 500 from Venray to Paris, where they were further marketed as meat; wool was a by-product. A shepherd at the most took 40 sheep, so that there were ten shepherds taken along each time. On the way the herd was enlarged with sheep from Germany and Belgium. From Eastern Europe sheep were sent by train. In 1915, during the first world war, the company underwent bad times, due to the complete lack of trade relations, let alone cross-border sheep herds.

### Peelschaap

We read on page 46: In these regions one bred the heathland sheep, wild small and hardy. As food they had the soft young heathland, hard grass and the houtachtige plant which grew along the vele country ways. One spoke here also of the peel or house sheep. Clearly from this description they were not the Mergellander, but rather the Veluws heathland sheep, or a German heathland sheep from the border region. Or possibly for the Burens sheep; the Great Company bought out large number of sheep from the Betuwe from 1845. In the company it is spoken of Tesselaars, North Dutchmen, Maaslanders (from along the Meuse, round Dordrecht), Leidensche, Zeelanders and Gelderlanders or Geldersche sheep, beside their own Peels heathland sheep. In 1868 it is reported: 97 Kempse sheep made over 500 francs in January. It is striking however that the Great Company had chosen a four horn sheep as its symbol.

# The Great Companies' trade routes



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