

Cornelius van Dun(ne) (1483-1577)

A Dutch native of Breda became a bodyguard and master of ceremonies for the Tudors and a benefactor in London.

By Fanny van Dun and drs. Lucas van der Hoeven

St. Margaret's Church, London, stands next to Westminster Abbey and opposite the parliament building. Within that church one can find a funerary monument in honour of Cornelius van Dun(ne), alias Cornelys van Don (Vandun). The sculpture is the oldest tomb in St Margaret's to be seen. It is also the oldest image of an English palace guard with the royal initials: E * R = Elisabeth Regina. The rose between the two letters is the typical "Tudor Rose". The text around the bust reads: "Cornelius van Dun liesth here, born at Breda in Brabant, soldier with K(ing) Hendrik at Turney (the siege and capture of Tournai), yeaman of the guard and usher (master of ceremonies) to K(ing) Henry, K(ing) Edward, Q(ueen) Mary and Q(ueen) Elisabeth, of (who lived an) honest and vertuous life, a caful man for pore folk, dyd build for pore widows 20 howses of his owne coste".

This photo shows the current grave monument. It was heavily damaged as a result of WWII bombing. (photo Lucas van der Hoeven)



The same funerary monument of Cornelius van Dun in St. Margaret's Church in 1794. (photo National Portrait Gallery, d25451; www.npg.org.uk)

Although this Breda native's name is written in most English texts as Cornelius van Don (or Vandun), his original family name is van Dun(ne). Unfortunately, during a great fire at St. James Palace in 1809, much information from the records of the Yeomen of the Guard, including Cornelius, was lost. The reconstruction below is therefore based on other sparse archival documents.

Cornelius van Dun was born in Breda (the Netherlands) in 1483.

Nothing is known about the birth, upbringing and functions of Cornelius. That only changed with his enlistment as a British mercenary. In the year 1512, the English King Henry VIII (1491 – 1547) sent his ambassador Sir Edward Poyning to the Netherlands in order recruit warriors for his planned invasion of France. The invasion would take place in the summer of

1513. In addition to his army, France was also attacked by that of Emperor Maximilian I of Austria. King Ferdinand II of Aragon, then father-in-law of the English king, also took part in this invasion. Henry VIII's army consisted of some 40,000 warriors, who besieged Tournai, among other places. The city was in French hands at the time and was successfully occupied after a siege of one week. Cornelius's epitaph clearly refers to his involvement in this siege ("souldiour with King Henry at Turney"). It was likely due to his merits during this siege that Cornelius was appointed afterwards as a member of the king's bodyguard. After all, King Henry's bodyguard of 800 men fought during the siege of Tournai, which at that moment was a city located in Belgian territory.



Remaining "Tour Henri VIII" with walls eight meters thick. (own picture)

Henry VIII started the return journey on October 13, 1513. He left some 5,000 English soldiers behind in Tournai, including 400 men of his own bodyguard. With the final withdrawal of the English troops from Tournai on February 9, 1519, most of the soldiers were sent home. Most of the 330 bodyguards who still lived joined Henry's court in London. Of the 330 remaining bodyguards, most of them joined Henry's court in London. In 1526, the English king reorganised his entourage due to budget cuts. Only twelve personal bodyguards remained, undoubtedly including Cornelius van Dun. He may have been promoted to one of his four masters of ceremonies.



Above part of a large painting in which Henry VIII is depicted three times on horseback in the Royal procession at the "Camp of Gold" near Calais on June 24, 1520. The painting is not an exact representation of events, yet we can still imagine how Cornelius van Dun must have found himself among his colleagues from The Yeomen of the Guard

Bodyguard and master of ceremonies under successive monarchs.

Cornelius also held the positions of bodyguard and master of ceremonies under Henry VIII's successors, such as Edward VI (1537 – 1553), Mary Tudor (1516 – 1558) and Elisabeth I (1533 – 1603) until he died at an extreme age of 94 years old. He must have been a person of great merit to have held that position of trust for so long under successive Catholic and Protestant monarchs. This may indicate that such confidential positions actually had a kind of official status, including an appointment for life. It seems that position was not subject to political and religious vicissitudes.

Various publications show that Cornelius was issued a passport in 1546 (at the age of 63) for a trip to Germany: "Cornelys Vanden, the Queen's servant, had passport towards Almain (Germany). Eight months before Henry VIII died; Cornelius was apparently not in the service of the king himself. But he turned out to be the personal servant of Queen Catherine Parr (1512 – 1548), who was Henry VIII's sixth and last wife. However, the nature of his assignment remains unclear. The assignment may have been of a diplomatic nature and only entrusted to a confidant of the court. There could be three reasons for this. In 1546 there was a great famine in Great Britain due to failed harvests. The British government was eager to buy grain in Denmark and "Bremmerland"; the region around Bremen in Germany. Another motive could have been that despite mediation by Charles V, the peace talks with France had failed. As a result, Henry VIII was forced to recruit mercenaries such as Spaniards, Italians, Albanians, Swiss and Germans. The final potential reason for Cornelius' journey could have been that in 1546 the value of English coins had fallen sharply. This is due to the proceeds from the sale of all kinds of ecclesiastical estates, monasteries, dissolution of foundations and hospitals. A lot of money came into circulation, partly increased by the many foreign loans. This eroded the currency value, resulting in a serious devaluation. Cornelius' journey may have been intended to persuade the then European lenders, the Fugger's based in Germany, to ask for additional loans. However, these bankers refused to lend any amount to the British monarch.

Anglican Church founded in 1534.

King Henry VIII urged the Vatican to nullify his marriage to the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon. Unfortunately, of their six children, their three sons died almost after birth. Only Mary Tudor remained alone in life, so there was no male heir to the throne available. However, Pope Clement VII was a prisoner of Emperor Charles V, who in turn was Catherine's cousin. Henry's possible divorce would mean for Charles V that his aunt Catherine became an adulterer and his niece Mary Tudor a bastard child. For this reason, Charles V opposed the annulment of Henry's marriage. Clement VII, as a prisoner of Charles V, therefore had little choice, and so refused to agree to the dissolution of Henry's marriage. Rome did not agree to his divorce and so Henry VIII dismissed Cardinal Wolsey from his ecclesiastical office. He also crowned himself head of the new Anglican Church of the United Kingdom in 1534. He subsequently annulled his own marriage and Catherine was removed from the court. With this rigorous intervention in religious life, Henry VIII also confiscated all Roman church goods and funds. Partly because of this, the *caritas*, the aid to the poor by the Roman Catholic Church, came to an end. It therefore became necessary for the government itself and private individuals to provide for this from now on.

Cornelius van Dun and Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540)

Cornelius also felt called upon to do so at the end of his life. In his living will he left a large sum of money for the construction of alms-houses for widows and old men. Probably Cornelius was inspired by the ideas of Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540).

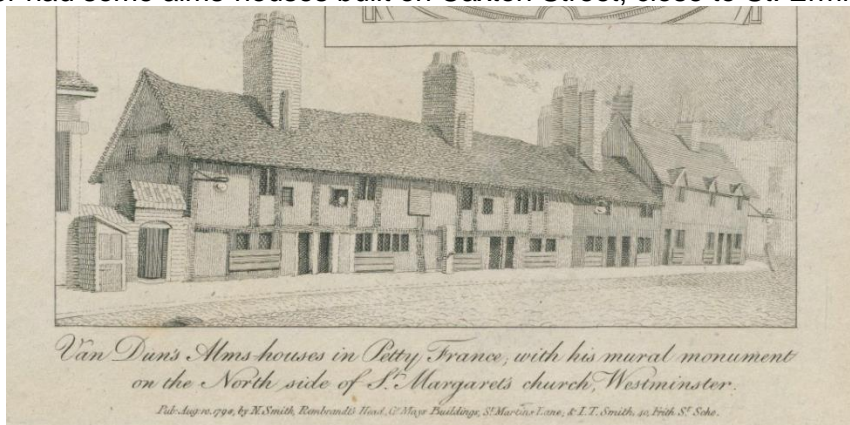


Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540). (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Luis_Vives#/media/Datei:LuisVives.jpg)

This Belgian professor in Oxford was also appointed as teacher of Princess Mary Tudor (1516 – 1558) at the British royal court. Vives' ideas about poor relief actually represent a transition from medieval ecclesiastical caritas to assistance by citizens. However, as the cities increased in size, so did the number of poor. In 1525, the city of Bruges asked Vives for his vision on how the city of Bruges could improve the plight of the poor. Vives set out his views in: "The Subventionem Pauperum Sive de Humanis Necessitatibus"; "On the necessity of intervention for the benefit of poor humanity." Vives asserted that the state had a responsibility to provide financial relief to the poor, as well as craft training for the unskilled poor. His proposals regarding social relief were legislated in 1530 in England and the German Empire. In 1528 he fell out of favour with Henry VIII by standing up for his wife Catherine of Aragon because of their imminent divorce.

The alms-houses of Cornelius

On December 18, 1569, Cornelius acquired land from the Dean of the Chapter of Westminster so that he could have alms-houses built there. This site was on the edge of what was then London, namely between the current St. James Park - where Henry VIII held his hunting parties at the time - and the current Buckingham Palace. On June 30, 1572, Cornelius received permission to build two units of alms-houses there. These were built on the southwest end of Petty France and hence called "The Petty France Alms-houses". These homes were also known as "The Red Lion Alms-houses" (the alms-houses of the Red Lion), after the coat of arms with the red lion of Cornelius. These houses were occupied by a few poor widows. In each of these houses lived a few poor widows, who had been chosen for this purpose on the recommendation of the Dean of Westminster, the chaplain of their parish and two church wardens. These first houses were located where Vandon Street is today. In nearby St. Ermin's Hill, Cornelius later had some alms-houses built on Caxton Street. Cornelius later had some alms-houses built on Caxton Street, close to St. Ermin's Hill.



*Excerpt from a pen drawing published as John Thomas Smith's Antiquities of London (7)
(Artist: James Findlay)*



Image from 1852 of the alms-houses. A few years later, in 1859, the buildings were demolished because of their desolate state. (Artist: James Findlay)

The gardens near these houses served to meet the food needs of its inhabitants. A 99-year support fund was also created. This made it possible to provide for the livelihood of the residents and any necessary repairs. The residents were also appointed as caretakers. The deans and chapter of Westminster Abbey each time extended the term of the fund until March 28, 1805. Extended the term of the fund at every opportunity until March 28, 1805. After the death of the last residents in 1805, the fund was subsequently abolished. As a result, the houses fell into disrepair, so that on April 11, 1859; the remaining alms-houses on St. Ermin's Hill were demolished. Today, a luxury hotel is located on that spot in Caxton Street.



Map of London's street plan showing Vandon and Caxton street, leading to Buckingham Gate. The map on the left is a cut-out from a map from about 1790 (www.romanticlondon.org)

In short, Cornelius van Dun was one of the first patrons of structured charity. By making use of a support fund to build alms-houses he became one of the first non-royal persons to take such a decision. Only King Henry VII, his mother Margaret and Henry VIII had established such alms-houses before him.

Posthumous period

The street where his alms-houses stood was later named Vandon Street. The adjacent passage was named Vandon Passage. Within this passage lies Vandon Court., whose main entrance is located in Petty France. It is located opposite the back entrance of Wellington Barracks, the headquarters of the five present Guards regiments. Vandon House itself is at the beginning of Vandon Street. It is not only these references to Cornelius in the street

names of London which serve as proof of his impressive career, but also his bust in St. Margaret's Church.

The merit and status of Cornelius is also evident from the fact that he was buried at his request in the same St. Margaret's Church in London. It is remarkable that this sculpture survived the iconoclasm of 1643-1644. After all, under the revolutionary reign of Cromwell (1485-1540) an order was issued to destroy all monuments in the churches. Neither the glass windows nor the statues in St. Margaret's church were spared. More recently, World War II bombing also caused significant damage to the church.

Elizabethan re-enactment

Today, the character of Cornelius van Dun is staged annually by two theatre groups in California during the annual "Renaissance Fairs". The Guild of St. George grew gradually into the only Elizabethan re-enactment organisation. The guild specialises in depicting people and events from the time of Elisabeth I (1533 to 1603) who reigned from 1558 until her death. As of 2006, Cornelius has been typecast as the leading personality over seven bodyguards.



Extra during the annual renaissance fairs (source: pinterest)

Literature

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For a more extensive version with acknowledgment of the source and the text of the will of Cornelius van Dun: see web pages of the relevant authors Fanny van Dun and drs. Lucas van der Hoeven: see www.vandun.org and

www.cbsm.nl/upload/articles/1483_1577_cornelius_van_dun_ne_1483_1577_breda_londen.pdf

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