

www.portofzeebrugge.be/en/port/history

1st - 11th century

The early history of the port began circa 10,000 years before our Christian calendar, when the North Sea came into being as a result of the warming of the poles and a rise of the water level. This resulted in the delta of the large rivers (Rhine, Scheldt and Meuse). Around 500 BC, the new coastal plain was washed over several times by the sea. This resulted in creeks and channels along which ships could reach the hinterland. A settlement where people occupied themselves with salt extraction arose on the edge of this creek area. An archaeological find from the late 19th century also proves the Roman presence. When digging the new sea canal, the remains were found of a Roman vessel that dates from around 200 AD.

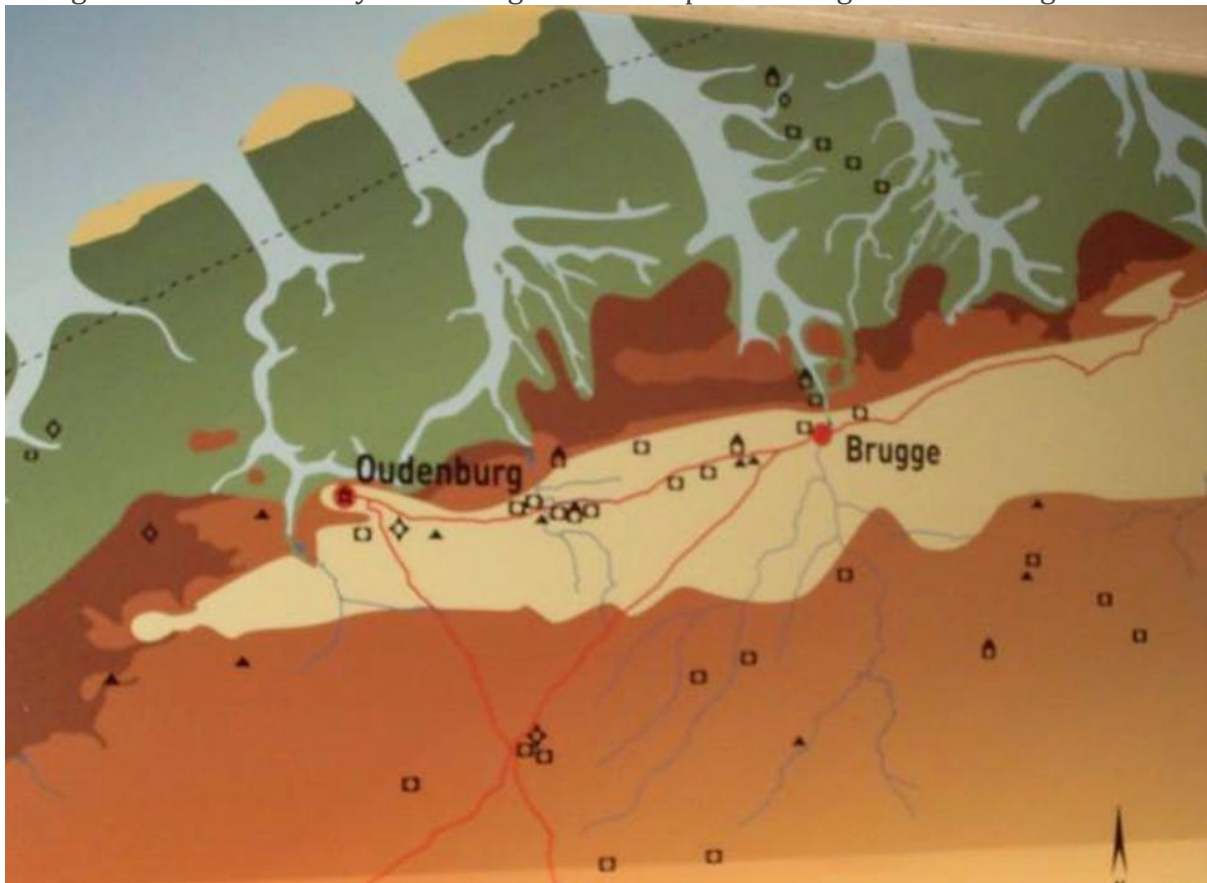


The name of this settlement also refers to the connection of its inhabitants with the water. Initially, it was called 'Rogia' (which is the original name of the navigation channel 'Reie'), but under the influence of Old Norse, the name was later changed to 'Bryggia', which means landing stage. In addition to the Reie, there was another creek in the vicinity, the 'Sincfal', but it is not clear whether it also connected Bruges to the sea.

It was not until the Vikings attacked and plundered the region in the 9th century that the count of Flanders decided to build a fortified castle at this site, around which a residential nucleus developed.

Once the invasions and the destructions by the Vikings had stopped, the inhabitants of Bruges started trading with England and Scandinavia, thanks to the excellent connections with the sea.

The sea partially retreated, thus creating salt marshes that were used to breed sheep. Man gave nature a hand by reclaiming the coastal plain through dike building.



The sheep provided wool, which was the raw material for the textile industry. In the 9th and 10th centuries, the production of cloth also developed in Ypres and Ghent. It was not long before the domestic sheep breeding was no longer sufficient and the industry was compelled to import wool from England, while the finished product (the cloth) was exported. This made Bruges into a trade centre. However, the land to the north and the north-east of Bruges was once again washed over in 1134 AD, the positive result being that Bruges had an even better connection to the sea: the Sincfal was further eroded and given a new name: 'het Zwin'. As from that moment, it was possible to safely reach Damme with large ships via 'het Zwin'. From Damme, the outer port of Bruges, the city could easily be supplied via a natural connection. A network of canals, the "reien", made it possible to take the merchandise to the centre of the city.

12th - 14th century

Meanwhile, the population of Bruges keeps increasing, new parishes are created and large churches are built: the Saint Saviour's Cathedral, the Church of Our Lady and the Saint Donaas Church. In Bruges, the merchants, who are also called patricians, are the most important citizens. In the 12th century, these patricians assume the control and the organisation of the city, under the supervision of the count. Later, the craftsmen also start to unite in guilds. After the murder of count Charles the Good in 1127, the prosperous citizens fear disturbances and plundering. That is why the new count Diederik van den Elzas grants them privileges; they build a fortification around the city and – more importantly – the city is given the right of self-government. This government consists of a council of aldermen who are chosen by the count. The aldermen are all

merchants and have all administrative and judicial powers. The craftsmen are not in the least represented in this council, which logically results in friction, in particular since the citizens are laden with a heavy tax burden.





These tensions escalate and come to a head in 1280: the Belfry with the archives and the treasury of the city burn down. Count Gwijde van Dampierre intervenes and sides against the aldermen in order to confine their power. The king of France, on the other hand, wants to increase his power over the county and supports the aldermen. The city is occupied by the French. They give Bruges a new and bigger rampart with 8 city gates,

some of which have been preserved to this day. Bruges is thus divided into 2 camps: on the one hand the 'Lelieaards', followers of the king of France and on the other hand the 'Klauwaards', followers of the Count of Flanders.

The antagonism reaches its summit in 1302 with the Battle of the Spurs around the Groeninghe Field (near Kortrijk), where the French army is defeated by the Klauwaards, the result being that the craftsmen are now also allowed to appoint aldermen.

This leads to a restoration of peace and a flourishing trade.

In the 14th century, Bruges becomes the hub for trade in merchandise from the South (Italy, Spain, Portugal, France) and the countries bordering the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. In addition to the traditional cloth, the Flemings especially sell carpets, horses, cattle, dairy products and herring. Import mainly included wool, tin, lead, pit coal, beer and corn from England; hide and leather from Ireland; wine, oil and salt from France, spices from Genoa; hop, wax, pitch and wood from Germany; fish from Norway and hide from Russia.

More and more foreign merchants settle in the city and build their warehouses where their representatives are established. In order to defend their interests, the merchants unite in 'Hansen'. For the powerful "German Hanse", Bruges was a very important trade junction, where they established an influential head office, namely the "Oosterlingenhuis" – Eastermenhouse. The bloom of Bruges is also illustrated by the power of the "Flemish Hanse of London".

Bruges also becomes an important financial centre, mainly as a result of the arrival of the Italians. These Italians are merchants as well as bankers who change money, lend at interest and make payments. In Bruges, these financial activities mainly take place in the square in front of the inn of the Van der Beurse family. Hence the Dutch name 'beurs', which will later capture the world as the name for the place where money is traded. The Italian family De Medici also introduces the bill of exchange in Bruges.

15th - 19th century

The merchants in Bruges gradually withdraw from active trade and start acting as brokers or intermediaries, as a result of which they are more dependent on foreign merchants. The citizens of Bruges slowly lose hold of the trade as the main activity.

Other factors are responsible for the economic downturn of Bruges as well : 'het Zwin', the lifeline for the accessibility of the city by sea, starts silting up. Sluis becomes the new outer port of Bruges.

England starts its own textile industry, as a result of which the export of wool from Flanders experiences a decline. The ships that supply Bruges must often sail back empty. As a consequence, they prefer not to berth anymore. The protectionist ban on importing English cloth also compels merchants to look for other places.

Other ports, such as Antwerp, Hamburg and Bremen, develop and gradually take over the commercial position of Bruges.

It is a well-established fact that Bruges lost a lot of its economic power after 1450. In the 15th century, under the Burgundian Dukes, Philip and Charles the Bold and Mary of Burgundy, the city reaches a new height, yet primarily as a cultural city. Obviously we think especially of the Flemish Primitives Hans Memling and Jan Van Eyck.

Under the Habsburgs and the Spaniards (Charles the Fifth) and during the religious wars, Bruges gradually became a dormant city. Maximilian of Austria wanted to curtail the power of Bruges and introduced high taxes. The subsequent political riots resulted in his imprisonment in Bruges in 1488. Out of revenge, he deprived the merchants of Bruges of more privileges after his release. During the Eighty Years' War, Bruges became a front-line city and in 1604, Sluis was captured by the North Netherlands (by the troops of Maurice of Nassau): Bruges lost its outer port and its connection to the sea at one stroke.

In addition, this was again confirmed by the Westfalen Peace Treaty (1648), which involved the end of the religious wars and the definition of the borders between the North and South Netherlands. Antwerp also lost its outlet to the sea. For Holland, on the contrary, it was a 'Golden Age'.





In the 17th century, the Flemings attempted to revive trade by digging the Canal Ostend-Bruges-Ghent with the dock ('Handelskom') in Bruges, but by then Bruges had not been an international port for a long time and only played a minor role as a small regional port.

Under Napoleon, the digging of a canal between Bruges and Breskens (currently known as the 'Damse Vaart') was started, but this project was never finished due to the Belgian revolution. All in all, the period between the 16th and the 20th century was a period of poverty for Bruges. There simply was no money to replace old buildings with new ones, as a result of which the historic setting of the Middle Ages has been largely preserved. But this has only been beneficial to the tourist sector from the second half of the 20th century onwards.

19th century

In the second half of the 19th century, Georges Rodenbach described Bruges as a poor city bled to death ('Bruges la morte'). The publication "D'une communication directe de Bruges à la mer", which was written in 1877 by hydraulic engineer Auguste de Maere, was the turning-point. De Maere, who was alderman of Public Works of the city of Ghent, published his brochure in particular with the purpose of reconnecting his own city to the sea, but his project could count on little support in Ghent.

In Bruges however, everyone readily accepted the idea. King Leopold II was also greatly in favour of a new seaport on the coast. Belgium had to react to the first maritime revolution, when sailing vessels were gradually replaced with much larger steel steamers. In 1891, the Belgian government appointed the "Commission Mixte de Bruges

Port de Mer" (Mixed Commission of Seaport Bruges), which organised a contest for the construction of a seaport in Bruges with an outlet to the sea via Heist.

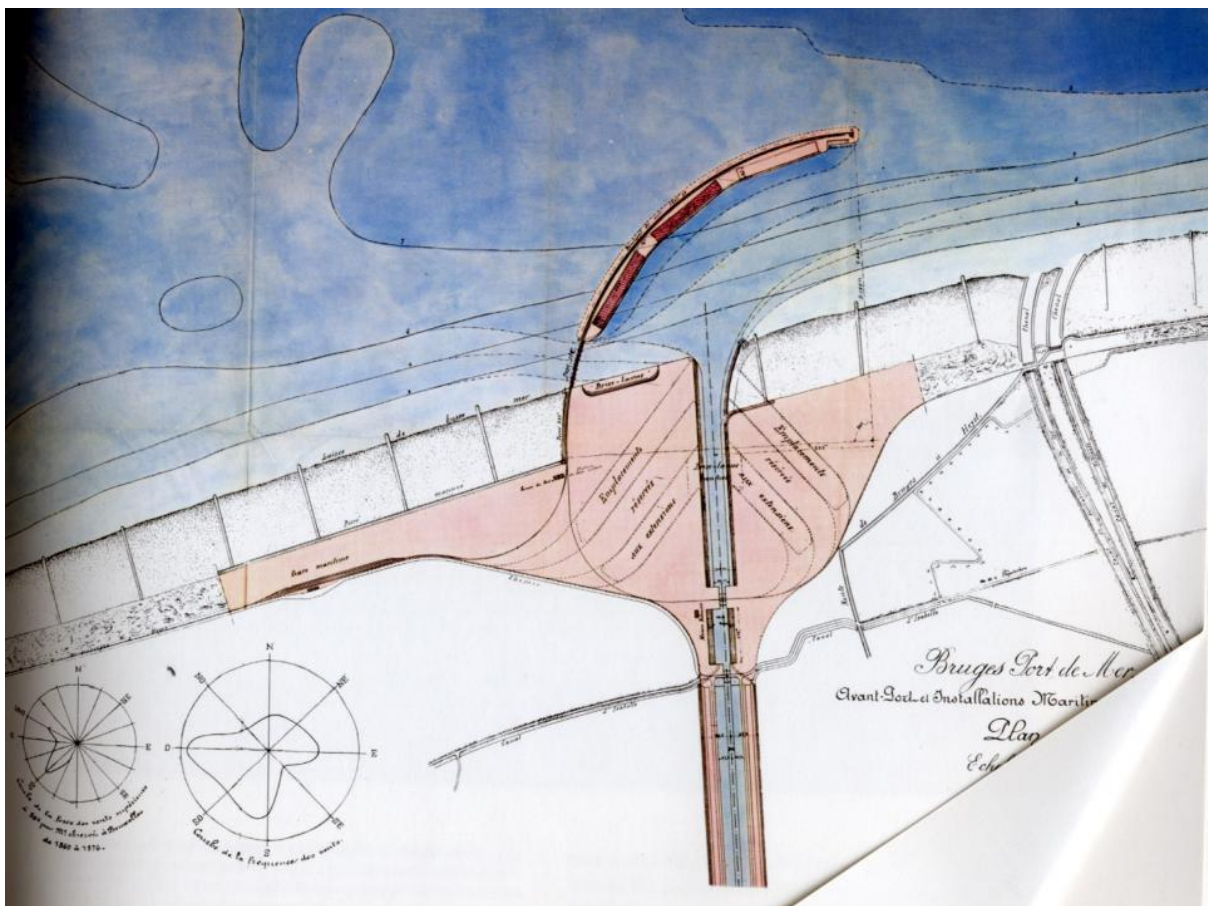
1895-1907

At the end of the 19th century the Belgian government decided to construct a new port at the coast of the North Sea.

On 1 June 1894 the Belgian government, the city of Bruges and Messrs. L. Coiseau and J. Cousin concluded an agreement in which the conditions regarding the construction and management of the new port were stipulated.

This new port would consist of 3 different parts :

- an outer port on the Belgian coast; this place was called "Zeebrugge", i.e. "Bruges-by-the-sea";
- a sea canal from the outer port to Bruges;
- an inner port in Bruges itself, situated north of town.





This agreement was approved and ratified by Parliament on 11 September 1895; the Royal Decree was published in The Belgian Law Gazette of 13 September 1895.

The works for the construction of the port were executed by a company which, within 3 months after the conclusion of the agreement by Parliament, was founded by Messrs. Coiseau and Cousin.

This company was founded on 25 November 1895 under the name of "Compagnie des Installations maritimes de Bruges", today "Maatschappij van de Brugse Zeevaartinrichtingen" or M.B.Z

The capital of this company was subscribed for 50 % by the city of Bruges; the rest by Messrs. L. Coiseau, J. Cousin and other private persons.

The construction of the port was carried out by M.B.Z., which was also granted the concession for the management and exploitation of the new port complex.

The works started in 1896 and were completed in 1905.

The port was officially inaugurated by his majesty king Leopold II on 7 July 1907. The birth of the new seaport of Bruges was attended by large festivities in Bruges.

1907-1951

A difficult start

During the first few years, maritime traffic remained disappointingly low: every year, some 200 to 250 ships called at Zeebrugge. This was mainly due to the lack of return freight for the ships, the absence of proper road and railway connections and the limited hinterland industry. The transatlantic passenger services did not have the hoped-for big success, either. A few regular services were introduced, though : the passenger service that made the crossing from Zeebrugge to Hull twice a week and a regular connection with Rotterdam. The most important industrial establishment in that period was the Cokes factory.



4m. Valentine met nitraat.





The World Wars

The MBZ built the imposing “Palace Hotel” on the sea dyke of Zeebrugge for the wealthy (primarily German) cruise passengers of the Hamburg-America line. Minister Van de Vijvere, who inaugurated the building in 1914, concluded his address with the words: “...and let us hope that the Germans will soon come over!” In fact, they did come 11 days later, unfortunately in uniform.

During the first World War, the Germans demonstrated the importance of the strategic position of Zeebrugge. They turned Zeebrugge and Bruges into the base of operation for part of their fleet of submarines. In the port of Bruges, they built pens to protect their submarines and defended the pier with heavy artillery. Furthermore, the entrance to the port was partially obstructed by means of four barges, which were linked together with nets and chains. The total German military force in Zeebrugge was 1,000 strong. Because of the large risks of a possible attack on Zeebrugge, the British army hesitated until 1918 before taking action. In fact, they were forced to take action : in 1917, the German submarines had succeeded in sinking 6 million tons of allied ships.



On 22 April 1918, the British Vice-Admiral Keyes was in command of 168 ships and small vessels and a military force of 1,800. The attack on Zeebrugge began with a diversion: 3 cruisers, including the "Vindictive", assailed the pier in order to eliminate the German heavy artillery. Meanwhile, 3 other cruisers filled with cement made an attempt to reach the harbour entrance before the sea lock in order to be sunk there, so that the German submarines would no longer be able to put out to sea. The attack was a success, as the English succeeded in sinking 2 of the 3 cruisers just in front of the lock gate. Each year, the battle for Zeebrugge is commemorated in the port on Saint George's day.

After the first World War, the port was a heap of rubble. The salvage and repair work was carried out by the company Decloedt. In 1920, the port was open to ships again; the Zeebrugge-Hull line was resumed and a new important line was added: the train-ferry service to Harwich. The glassworks of Glaverbel, situated along the sea canal, became operational in 1925.

On several occasions, Zeebrugge also served as the port of departure for the fleet of Congo ships of the 'Compagnie Maritime Belge'. This proved that Zeebrugge could receive the largest ships in spite of the silting problems with which the port was confronted. In 1929 however, the Belgian government decided to bear the expenses of the dredging operations in all Belgian ports, which resulted in more financial breathing space for the Port authority. In the same year, more than 1,000 ships called at Zeebrugge and more than 1 million tons of goods were handled.

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 From **ZEEBRUGGE** every **MONDAY** and **WEDNESDAY** at **7-0 p.m.**

At HULL the Boat Trains run to and from the New Riverside Quay, and at ZEEBRUGGE Quay Express Boat Trains to and from BRUGES, GHENT (St. Pierre), and BRUSSELS (Nord) connect with the Steamer.

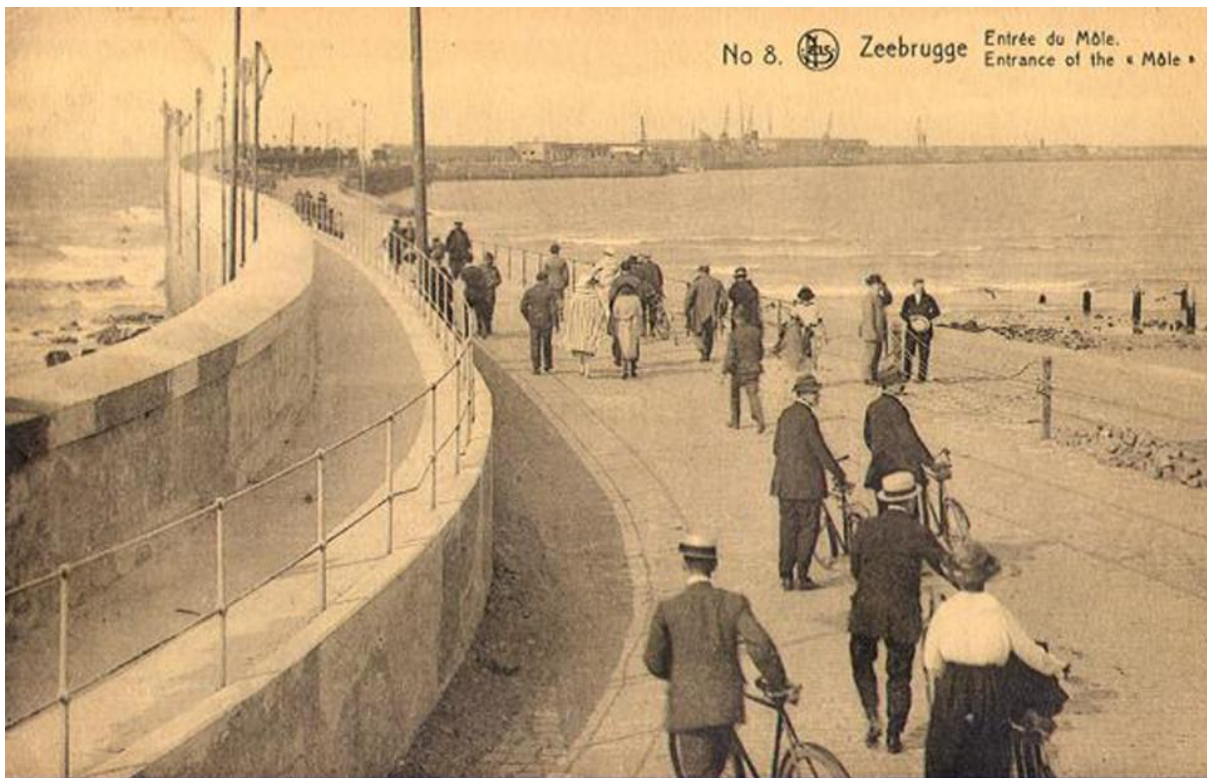
JOHN A. F. ASPINALL, GENERAL MANAGER, L. & Y. RAILWAY. **A. KAYE BUTTERWORTH, GENERAL MANAGER, N. E. RAILWAY.**

The 1930s brought a downward trend : the economic crisis spread all over the world and the tension between the Port Authority and the City of Bruges flamed up. Two great personalities in the history of the port managed to iron out the differences: Pierre

Vandamme, the future mayor of Bruges and chairman of MBZ, and Achille Van Acker, socialist politician and future Prime Minister of Belgium.

A bunker station, a molasses terminal, a fuel terminal and a steel plant were constructed in Zeebrugge in the second half of the thirties. The hub of the port activity shifted from the inland port in Bruges to the outer port on the coast.

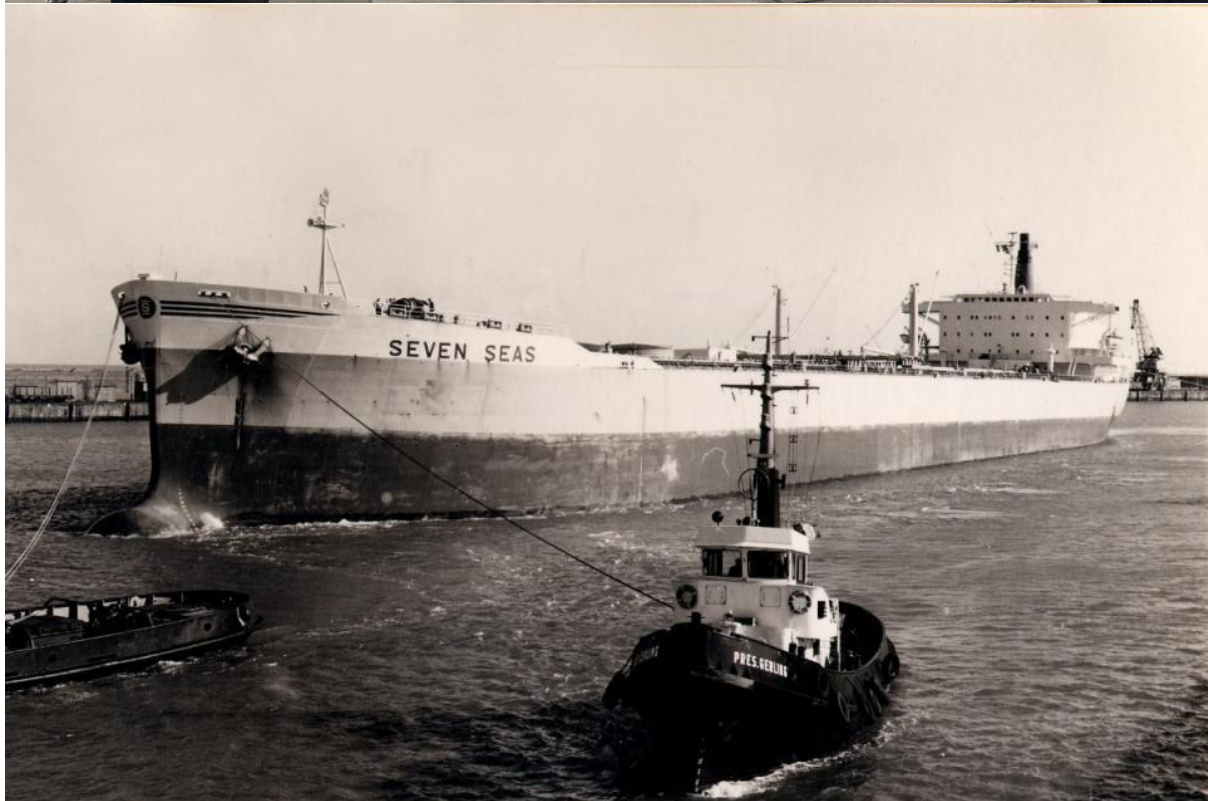
During the second World War, Zeebrugge played a rather discreet role. Just before the arrival of the German troops, some ships were sunk on strategic points and the lock gates were blown up. The Germans repaired the damage and turned Zeebrugge into a fortified castle, which they included in their 'Atlantikwal'. When liberation was near, they began to systematically destroy the port installations, except in Bruges where they met with opposition of the resistance. However, the port was largely destroyed and Zeebrugge had to be reconstructed for the second time.



After the war, the shipping industry only made slow progress, as the repair works were not finished until 1951. From the fifties, we remember the industrial establishments in the inland port of Bruges, with e.g. the flourishing of the shipbuilding yards ('Rederij Hermans', 'Scheepswerven van Vlaanderen'), the interest of the Greek shipowner Onassis and the Suez crisis of 1956. Owing to this, Zeebrugge carried out adjustments in order to be able to receive the new larger oil tankers. The Sinclair Petroleum Terminal became operational in 1961 and the Prince Philip dock was put into use in 1962.

The real breakthrough for Zeebrugge came about in the second half of the sixties, together with the second maritime revolution: the construction of increasingly larger ships and the advent of new techniques to handle unit loads: roll-on/roll-off traffic and containerisation. As from 1964, the British shipping company Townsend-Thoresen

organised ferry services for passengers and freight from Zeebrugge to Dover and Felixstowe. In 1972, North Sea Ferries set up a regular ferry connection to Hull.



Since Antwerp was inaccessible for the new supertankers, the American company TEXACO opted for Zeebrugge as its port of call, and a pipeline was installed between Zeebrugge and its refinery in Ghent. In 1968, the first tanker called at the port. In the same year, FerryBoats organised the first container transport to Harwich at the Short Sea Container terminal. In 1971, intercontinental container ships were handled for the

first time at the Ocean Container terminal Zeebrugge, on the newly constructed Western Peninsula.





The progress made by Zeebrugge compelled the authorities to examine the further expansion of the port. Various plans were drawn up, the most important of which are : the study group RA, the Harris plan, the Mortelmans project, the Gys-Cuypers proposal and the Zeestad project. In 1968, the Minister of Public Works decided to set up the Verschaeve Commission in order to examine the further expansion of Zeebrugge. This examination was faced with opposition from Antwerp as well as from the Walloon provinces, which claimed economic compensations. This tug of war was ended once and for all in 1970, when the framework agreement for the overall expansion of Zeebrugge was approved.



The works for the overall expansion were carried out between 1972 and 1985 and included the construction

- the outer port: built in the sea and protected by means of two longitudinal embankments with a length of 4 km, accessible without locks for large sea-going vessels. Because of the direct entrance from the sea and the large water depth in the navigation channel and along the quay walls (up to Z - 16 m), the outer port is very suitable for fast container traffic and ro-ro traffic.
- the Pierre Vandamme lock (500 m long, 57 m wide and with a useful water depth up to 18.50 m), which provides entrance to the inner port of Zeebrugge, that is equipped with two large docks:
 - the Northern Inlet dock (with a water depth up to 14 m)
 - the Northern Inlet dock (with a water depth up to 14 m)

The quay grounds around these docks are equipped with various terminals for the handling, storage and distribution of new cars, conventional general cargo, 'high & heavy' cargoes and containers.

The new port of Brugge-Zeebrugge was inaugurated by H.M. King Baudouin I on 20 July 1985.

At its inauguration the port is welcoming the “Cutty Sark Tall Ships Race”. Thousands of people are visiting the sailing ships in the port.





Increase of cargo traffic

As a result of the new port infrastructure, several large-scale transshipment companies opened new terminals in Zeebrugge, where several types and tonnages of ships can be served. Moreover, nearly all types of goods can be handled there. For this reason, many shipping companies and consortia have also included Zeebrugge as a fixed port of call in the scheme of their European and intercontinental lines.

As a consequence, the number of ships as well as traffic in Zeebrugge have increased spectacularly during this period; each year, more than 10,000 ships moored at the port and cargo traffic increased from 14 million tons in 1985 to 35.5 million tons in 2000.

A brief account of the most important events in this period:

The opening of various terminals in the inner port:

- Combined Terminal Operators (CTO) for the handling of conventional general cargo and new cars
- Belgian New Fruit Wharf for the supply of fruit (bananas, kiwis and apples)
- the Zeebrugse Behandelingsmaatschappij (ZBM) for the import of coal and iron ore
- the Cast container terminal, later transformed into the Canada terminal of SeaRo for the shipping of new cars
- Andrew's Fruit Terminal
- the Zeebrugse Visveiling
- the gas terminal of Statoil
- World Port Services (distribution of new cars)
- Flanders Cold Center (deep-freeze warehouse)
- Bridgestone-Firestone (distribution of tyres)
- the car terminals of Wallenius-Wilhelmsen Lines





The opening of various terminals in the outer port:

- the LNG terminal of Distrigas
- the Britannia ro-ro terminal of SeaRo
- P&O North Sea Ferries (passenger and freight terminal)
- Flanders Container Terminals
- the Dart Line ro-ro terminal of Hessenatie

The introduction of the Transport zone Zeebrugge.



The big breakthrough

The most recent period in history is characterized by, among other things, **the globalization of the world economy**. This translates into a far-reaching business integration, which has created **world players**, also in the logistics sector: both with the stevedores and with the shipping companies we see constant increases in scale and changes in the shareholders structure. In Zeebrugge this is mainly noticeable in the clear increase in the dimensions of the ships and in the rise of container volumes as from 2010. With a cargo flow of 49.6 million tons, 2010 is Zeebrugge's temporary record year. The economic consequences of the global financial crisis of 2008 nevertheless temper the growth. New container alliances are hard to attract but roro traffic (freight and new cars) and handling of breakbulk keep up traffic figures.



Most important events:

- Start of paper and pulp traffic of StoraEnso with a daily roro-connection between Zeebrugge and Göteborg.
- New weekly roro-services to Finland (Finnlines) and Denmark (Cobelfret).
- Start of the passenger and cargo connection between Zeebrugge and Rosyth in Schotland.
- Suspension of the daily services to Dover by P&O North Sea Ferries which will later be renamed P&O Ferries.
- Opening of the Toyota Vehicle Logistics Centre in the southern inner port.
- Construction of the Tern Island.



- The foundation of PortConnect, the fluvio-maritime chartering division of the port authority.

- Start of the C2C Lines container service to Ireland with CdmC as stevedore. This is an initiative of the Cobelfret-group in cooperation with ECS. Cobelfret also takes over the car terminal of World Port Services and renames the terminal as CdmZ. Furthermore Cobelfret obtains a shareholding of 50% Sea-Ro terminal, next to PSA HNN (Port of Singapore Authority – HesseNoord Natie).
- Opening of the bottling plant of juice producer Tropicana in the northern inner port.
- Demolition of the cokesfactory of Carcoke.
- Modernization of the container terminal on the Western Peninsula, which will from now on be operated by PSA HNN in cooperation with the French shipping company CMA CGM.
- The Distrigas terminal in the outer port is renamed: Fluxys LNG Terminal and will be extended with a fourth big storage tank. This is followed by a second LNG jetty in 2015 and a 5th storage tank in 2016.
- Opening of a new car terminal on the former terrains of bulk handling company ZBM at the Bastogne terminal. Initially the installation is operated by PSA HNN which will later sell his shares to International Car Operators (ICO), a part of the NYK-group.
- Opening of the container terminal APM Terminals Zeebrugge on the former terrains of Flanders Container Terminal at the Albert II-dock and the arrival of the first intercontinental container traffic of Maersk Line. Later on, Shanghai International Ports Group and China Shipping participate in APM Terminals.





- New distribution initiatives: the building of a packing station for Zespri and the building of a distribution warehouse by container and trailer operator 2XL.
- Deepening of the access channel to 17 m and introduction of + 9.000 TEU container vessels of CMA CGM, China Shipping Container Lines and Maersk Line. In 2016, Zeebrugge welcomes several 20,000 TEU container vessels.
- Start of the works to eliminate the many crossroads on the N31 expressway between the E40 and Zeebrugge in phases. Commencing of the works for the A11, which links up with the N31 and the N49.
- Development of the Maritime Logistic Zone (MLZ) with the establishment of coffee distribution centre Seabridge.
- The building of a bridge and a jetty at the Connection dock and the extension of the quay walls in the Southern Canal Dock.
- The building of centres for vehicle modification by Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics and ICO.
- Division of Sea-Ro terminal by which Cobelfret acquires concessions of the Britannia dock, the Swedish quay and the Canada terminal en by which the Wielingen Dock terminal passes into the hands of PSA. In 2014, Sea-Ro changed into C.RO-Ports.
- The building and start-up of Zeebrugge Food Logistics (storage of deepfrozen products).
- The building of the border inspection post for the inspection of perishables.
- Partial completion and start-up of the Zeebrugge International Container Port (ZIP) container terminal by PSA in the Albert II dock.
- In 2016, PSA returned the container concession to MBZ and closed the CHZ container terminal.
- Expansion of the Britannia terminal by partial filling of the Britannia dock and construction of a ro-ro jetty.

- Beginning of the rail investment programme of Infrabel, which will double the rail capacity of the port.
 - Remarkable growth of traffic to and from Scandinavia through regular services of Cobelfret-CLdN, Swedish Orient Lines, Finnlines, UECC, EML en Containerships.
 - Opening of the breakbulk terminal (paper and steel products) of Verbrugge Terminals in the Albert II dock.
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- Capacity extensions at 2XL, ECS and Middlegate Europe.
 - Opening of the terminal of Baggerwerken Decloedt (dredging works) in the inner port.
 - Remarkable increase in cruise traffic up to 160 vessels in 2017 and building of a cruise terminal.
 - Extension of the Bastogne terminal and putting into operation of the Hanze terminal for the purpose of the growing car traffic of ICO.
 - Handling of breakbulk and assembling of manufactured parts for the Yamal LNG project.
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