



About rich and poor at the same time

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Armen care

Poor were a normal part of society. They could not do anything about it. And by giving to the poor, the rich could come to heaven.

Danger

From the 12th century came gradually change. More and more rural residents moved to the city, and that was threatening to the richer urbanites. In order to prevent social unrest and epidemics, wealthy citizens set up shelters in which the needy found temporary accommodation.

The 14th century was a period of catastofale famines, and to make matters worse, the plague broke out. Especially poor people were victims of this, due to malnutrition and poor (or no) housing.

Woman's house

In those turbulent times, around 1350, Hendrik Suderman, wealthy German merchant, set up a home for poor girls and women on the site of the Sint-Elisabeth hospital, the Vrouwkenshuis. The current Lange Gasthuisstraat was then still rural area outside the city walls. He ensured that the Vrouwkenshuis could continue to exist after his death. Only there were only 7 beds, and the women could go there with their children ' **one night** ', and there were ' **elcx a scotel potagien** '. A drop on a hot plate.

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cities did not like that. Halfway through the 15th century begging was prohibited by law and equated with crime. Work was required. But the supply of labor was much greater than the demand. As a result, wages plummeted, and even workers could barely keep their heads above water.

Whoever begged, went to the pillory or got lashes and was sent out of town, or even worse. That did not make matters any better, because that is how entire troops of poverty-stricken men came from one city to another, looking for some food or work. Poor parents often even sent their children away because they could not feed them.

Maegdeckens house

Jan Van der Meeren, a '**cruydenier**' who had made a fortune, saw how especially poor (orphan) girls were exposed to all sorts of dangers. When his third wife died and left him with 11 young children, he came up with the idea to set up an orphanage for poor orphan girls, a '**maegdckenshuys**'. With his money, a new building was erected in 1552 next to the Vrouwkenhuis.

Thanks to an annual interest, the chaplains, the administrators, were able to pay for the work, but on condition that they did so: with good care and education. Or with his words: '**to the glory of meyskens cleene**'. And that was the beginning of the Maagdenhuis.

Expansion

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During this major renovation, the Maagdenhuis got its current view with the façade in white natural stone.

Maagdenhuis

A hundred children could go there. They were given shelter, nutrition and education. They learned to read, write - even French! - and count. They also learned sewing, lace making and spinning, washing and cooking. And they had to go to church every Sunday. If they had learned enough, they could work as a maid in a good civilian family.

For boys there was a similar orphanage, the Knechtjeshuis on the Paardenmarkt. They learned all sorts of crafts there. At the time of Napoleon, the French army even recruited boys for the French military academy in Versailles.

Unhealthy

The Maagdenhuis also had difficult times. In some periods the girls were mainly used as a workforce. Their sewing and lace work served to pay the costs. Especially in the 18th century, everything was focused on production, so there is no time left to learn something else. Relaxation or pleasure was not at all. All that sewing and lace work was also highly unhealthy. From early in the morning until late at night the girls were trapped inside, bent over in the workhouse.

Get out

In 1882 the Maagdenhuis finally closed the doors as a girl's orphanage. The building was vacant. The orphans were given a new home in 2 large, more modern institutions to replace the old Maagdenhuis and the Knechtjeshuis.

During the 20^e century, these two traditional orphanages gradually replaced by new institutions - smaller, cozier, with more focus on the individual child. The number of orphans has also fallen sharply, they are more often included in foster families. But that is an other story.

Art

Over the centuries, the charities have collected many artifacts through inheritances and gifts. Rich citizens even had whole churches and chapels set up. Halfway through the 19th century was an independent commission - where Hendrik Conscience was a member - identify all structures of the province. The rich collection of paintings from the Antwerp Maagdenhuis and Knechtjeshuis soon became apparent. The management of the two orphanages, the so-called Board of Civil Aldermen, housed 84 paintings in the former chapel of the Maagdenhuis and opened in 1884 as a museum.

But

Meanwhile

In the second th half of the 19 th century - along with the accelerated industrialization - the poverty reached a sad climax. The city is flooded with people looking for work and food. For example, the Office of Charity - already created under Napoleon to control the unemployed poor, helped to get back to work - in 1849 support for no less than 39% of the Antwerp population.

COO

1925. The Committee of Public Prosecution (COO) is created by the merger of the Board of Civilian Houses (which manages, among other things, the orphanages) and the Office of Benevolence. With this, the COO comes into possession of a large art collection, and decides to reorganize the chapel as a museum.

Maidens museum

In 1930 the time has come. On the occasion of the World Exhibition in Antwerp and an international congress on charity, the COO opens the doors of the new Maagdenhuis Museum. The public can admire works by, among others, Jacob Jordaens and Antoon Van Dyck, but also receive important historical documents about public poor care.

Since then, the museum has expanded. Some unique pieces also find their way back from the KMSKA to the Maagdenhuis Museum.

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The COOs will be converted into Public Social Welfare Centers (OCMWs) by the law of 8 July 1976. The fact that the Maagdenhuis Museum strangely enough falls under the umbrella of OCMW Antwerp at first glance, has just grown historically.

Poor and rich

The history of OCMW Antwerp goes back to the different charities of the early Middle Ages. The rich art patrimony of the Maagdenhuis Museum is the reflection of this.

All artworks are linked to a piece of Antwerp social history. And the many utensils are directly related to the history of the Maagdenhuis and the poor care throughout the centuries.

The Maagdenhuis Museum, which is a moving heritage about rich and poor at the same time.

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Opening hours

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from 10 am to 5 pm

Weekend:
from 1 to 5 pm

Closed on Tuesday and on following public holidays:

1 January, 1 May, 25 May, 1 November
and 25 December

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Did you enjoy the museum?
Did you come for the temporary exhibition?
Did you participate in one of our activities?
How did you like it?

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