

Slide 2:

Why? NWR theme country(ies)

Some know more than I do: will ask for your input along the way (within time limits)

Slide 3:

What are your clichés? (Art to follow)

Slide 4: Art

Rembrandt, Van Eyck, Vermeer, Rubens, Mondrian, Magritte, Bosch, Brueghel, Jan Steen, tapestry, Tin Tin (other cartoons?), still life, Delft tiles, Van Gogh

Any other artists...? (Judith Leyster, for instance)

BUT this is not an Art History talk...

Slide 5: History, etc lesson

Low Countries = **Benelux countries** - from the initial letters of their names: [Belgium](#), [the Netherlands](#), and [Luxembourg](#).

“Low Countries: a quarter of the total land area of the Netherlands is below sea level

- **natural sand dunes** and **man-made sea walls** and [dikes](#) protect the [polders](#) from flooding.
- **polders** = **artificially reclaimed fertile farmland** from the deltas of the rivers Schelde, Meuse (Maas), and Rhine and the [Zuiderzee](#), which was formerly a shallow arm of the North Sea; plus **network of shipping canals and waterways** links the major rivers.
- **Among highest population density in Europe and in the world.** All three countries are **highly urbanized**: some **nine-tenths in cities or urbanized** [communities](#).

Ethnically, **transitional zone between the ancient Germanic and Latin heritages of western Europe.**

- [Dutch](#) (a Germanic language) is spoken in the **Netherlands and in northern Belgium** (where it is known as **Flemish**), while [French](#) (a Romance language) and its Walloon [dialects](#) are spoken in **southern Belgium**. In Luxembourg, **Letzenburgish**, a German [dialect](#), is the [spoken language](#) of the majority.

Conquered by the Romans in the 1st C BCE and remained under Roman occupation **until the early 5th C.** Then controlled by the [Franks](#).

After the **collapse** of the Frankish [Carolingian](#) empire in the **mid-9th C**, a number of **political units emerged** in the area of the Low Countries, including the county of [Flanders](#), the [duchy of Brabant](#), the county of [Holland](#), and the bishopric of [Liège](#).

The rule of the **Dukes of Burgundy** and then of the [House of Habsburg](#) during the **15th and early 16th centuries brought** a degree of [unity](#) and stability to the area.

A **revolt** began against the rule of **Spanish Habsburgs in 1568 (Phillip II of Spain)**, and the predominantly Protestant northern provinces formed a Dutch republic, the [United Provinces](#), 12 years later. Spain **formally recognized Dutch independence in 1648.**

Throughout the 17th century the **United Provinces** was one of the great commercial powers of Europe.

Slide 6: More history

Dutch East India Company: a rival to the English version. Wildly successful (but at a cost? – more later)

- Then in 1795 came under the rule of [revolutionary France](#), and in 1814 they were reunited as the independent Kingdom of the Netherlands. But the mostly Catholic southern provinces, which had remained under Habsburg rule during the 17th and 18th centuries (up to 1795), revolted against the north and formed the independent kingdom of Belgium in 1831.
- Luxembourg, for much of its history a principality of the [Holy Roman Empire](#), was set up as a grand duchy in 1815 to be ruled as a separate state by the kings of the Netherlands. That union ended in 1890.
- During [World War I](#) the Netherlands remained neutral, while Belgium and Luxembourg were occupied by German forces; all 3 countries were overrun by the Germans in World War II.
- The Low Countries are one of the world's more highly industrialized regions and have market economies that are heavily dependent upon external trade. In order to help secure and protect their trade, they were early pioneers in [economic integration](#), forming the [Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union](#) (BLEU) in 1921.
- After the WWII, all three countries abandoned [neutrality](#) and became founding members of [NATO](#).
- Then in 1947 the three nations also formed the [Benelux Customs Union](#), which broadened over the years into what a 1960 treaty confirmed as the [Benelux Economic Union](#). That union allows for the:
 - free movement of people, goods, capital, and services between the three countries;
 - coordinates their policy in economic, financial, and social fields;
 - and pursues a common foreign-trade policy.
- In 1958 the three nations were among the six founding members of the [European Economic Community](#) (EEC; now in the [European Union](#)).
- The Low Countries are [constitutional](#) and [hereditary monarchies](#) with parliamentary forms of government; and whilst most of the population of Belgium and Luxembourg is Roman Catholic, religious adherence in the Netherlands is equally divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Slide 7: Tolerant and egalitarian

- A haven for those seeking refuge and looking for a safe place to escape conflicts; migrants looking for job opportunities and better lives.
- Free thinkers – creative minds who fled persecution in search of freedom to be themselves. Religious freedom to those challenging the “status quo” by legalizing the use of soft drugs, prostitution, gay marriage and even euthanasia.

Hanseatic league: anyone who resided in the cities (**burghers**) were free, not vassals of some lordship. Once you were a burgher, you were all the same. With so many wealthy cities in fairly close proximity, the **power of the nobility was limited**.

Religious freedom: Tolerance (perhaps) dates back to the **end of the Eighty Years' War (1648)**. **William of Orange** enshrined in law that the Catholic minority had the freedom to practice their faith as they saw fit. It was all in the spirit of "live and let live." [Overall support against the Spanish, when people were excessively taxed and Philip II pursued an active policy of counter-reformation.]

Many different **religious subgroups** were also welcomed and allowed to practice peacefully next to each other: appealing to for the religious refugees like the **Portuguese Jews, Puritans and French Huguenots**.

Another religious-inspired element: Dutch Protestant factions followed at least some of the lessons of **John Calvin**, who preached about a **sober lifestyle**. This was reinforced by the struggle against the Spanish, who were thought of as rather foppish. It is a culture where even now **ostentatious wealth is not done**. If you want to **flaunt your wealth** in the Netherlands you do that **through quality, not garishness**. This means that's it's much **harder to differentiate between the rich, and those less well off**; and thus a **society that's less divided**, and as a result, is more egalitarian.

Dikes: In the past it was well understood that **everyone needed to play their part to make sure everything stayed safe**. Often dike maintenance was done by the local farmers, all of which kept an eye on their little section of dike, and who would call for people to come and help fix it if it didn't look good. In oversimplified terms, this also meant that you had to take care of your neighbours in a wide sense. **You can't afford to ignore that someone is not doing too well, if that means that that someone won't be able to maintain their stretch** of dike. This has also led to the Dutch political system of **consensus building**. The Dutch political system called **the "Polder Model"** is jokingly named for locking up politicians in a car and driving them around the polder until they agree. In practice, it's that recognition that **you need to find a solution that works for everyone, or in the end, everyone will suffer**.

WWII: the **bombing of Rotterdam**, the deportation and then **murder of 100,000 Dutch Jews** in concentration camps (**75% of Dutch-Jewish population killed**, an unusually high percentage compared to other occupied countries in western Europe), and the **hunger-winter** were shared experiences. It was abundantly clear that **someone could suddenly, without fault of their own, become homeless, poor, and in dire need of medical help**. This resulted in social programs to provide housing, income, and healthcare.

Slide 8: The dark side...

Atrocities in Indonesia (enslavement, torture, rape and executions; the torturers lionised in the Netherlands) **and the Belgian Congo** (again, enslavement, torture, genocide, famine and disease) **all wreaked havoc**. Congo was a Belgian colony from 1908 to 1960. **The Belgians**

still have a hard time admitting the horrors of King Leopold II's rule (almost his personal fiefdom, > 10 million deaths in just first 23 years (from 1885)); the Dutch have formally apologised.

Apartheid ('apartness' in Afrikaans) - entrenched racial segregation, which was the law of the land in South Africa from 1948 to 1994.

- The roots of apartheid can be found in Dutch and British colonialism. The **Dutch East India Company established the first European settlement in southern Africa in 1652**. Dutch farmers **seized land from indigenous Africans and established a system of slavery so they could grow crops and raise livestock on a bigger scale**. These early settlers developed a distinct language known as Afrikaans and were often referred to as **Afrikaners or Boers (farmers)**.
- Britain first took control of the region in 1795, and when they imposed British rule and laws, around 13,000 Afrikaners left their settlement in the 1830s – embarking on what would become known as 'The Great Trek'. Established independent Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State in the interior of South Africa, far away from the Cape Colony. Though colonial rivals, the laws and customs they enacted were all based around the exploitation of the indigenous African population. This effectively laid the groundwork for apartheid.

Sectarianism: Belgian still struggles with this (more later) but interestingly, by late 18th C /early 19th C the Netherlands began a process of "**pillarization**". Catholics, conservative Calvinists and socialists **fought for their religious and civil rights**, demanding the formation of their own parties and institutions. Lay and religious authorities allowed just that, seeing as the **growing secularization of society might have easily pushed public sentiment towards hostility**. This had to be avoided, and thus the four pillars were created: Catholic, liberal, Protestant and social-democratic.

- Every pillar had its **own schools, hospitals, shops, and later – radio stations, newspapers and television channels**. Thus, a Catholic would only buy groceries in a Catholic shop or read Catholic papers. In towns and cities, entire districts emerged populated by mostly single-pillar citizens: predominantly Catholic or Protestant areas. In order **to solve problems at the national level, the pillars would delegate their political and religious elites to make terms** among themselves. The art of compromise and the art of negotiation that had grown out of mercantile and nautical traditions became ingrained in the national character.
- All of these factors seemed to feed into a rather coherent worldview: **people differ from one another and there's nothing one can do about it; one should, therefore, tolerate others and make the most of the situation**.

Geert Wilders has no love for Islam, Muslims and Moroccans; he blames the latter for high crime rates. He's called for the **Qur'an to be banned and has proposed a tax on wearing headscarves**. And he is also the **first politician ever to stand trial on charges of 'incitement to hatred'**:

Marc Dutroux, Belgian serial killer whose case [provoked](#) outrage so intense was the public's reaction that more than **one-third of Belgians with the surname Dutroux changed their names**.

In 1989 Dutroux was convicted of **five sexual assaults and sentenced to 13 years in [prison](#)**, though he was **released after only three years**. During the **next four years he abducted and sexually assaulted an unidentified number of girls, some of whom he allegedly murdered**. Along with several [accomplices](#), Dutroux also purportedly **sold children into slavery** in other countries and **claimed that he hosted a party that was [attended](#) by government officials and police officers**

The Dutroux case aroused popular suspicions about the **inefficiency and corruption of [Belgium's](#) law enforcement and political establishments**. The police were denounced for **not pursuing leads** in the investigation and for **ignoring information provided by various individuals—including Dutroux's mother**, and there were **allegations of a cover-up and suggestions that Dutroux may have been providing girls to government officials**.

All this caused outrage throughout Belgium and led to a **demonstration in Brussels of some 250,000 people—one of the largest demonstrations in Europe since [World War II](#)**.

In 1998 Dutroux **escaped for three hours after being allowed to leave prison to examine files for his impending trial**. In 2004 he was convicted on charges of [murder](#), [kidnapping](#), and [rape](#) and sentenced to life in prison.

Luxembourg is the richest country in Europe (banking, steel and industry) **and the 2nd richest in the world**. The country has the highest minimum wage in the EU, but also the highest cost of living. **It is a well-know tax haven. The EU Commission refers Luxembourg to the Court of Justice** for not completely implementing EU anti-money laundering rules (Nov 2018). The Commission proposed that the Court charges a lump sum and daily penalties until Luxembourg takes the necessary action.

Slide 9: East Anglia

Migration

Frisian mercenaries were hired to **assist the [Roman invasion of Britain](#)**. Part of the wave of **ethnic groups**: the Angles, Saxons and [Jutes](#), starting from around the fifth century when Frisians arrived along the coastline of Kent and settled in East Anglia and elsewhere.

Similarities in dialect between [Great Yarmouth](#) and Friesland; Frisians are also known to have founded the Freston area of [Ipswich](#).

In the 11th C Flemish migrants left for England to escape **large-scale flooding in Flanders**.

In medieval England **one person in every hundred was an immigrant**. About 65,000 people came to the country between 1330 and 1550. The influx was largely a result of the **Black Death creating a labour shortage: conditions and the wages were relatively good in comparison with other north-western European areas**.

A number of **weavers and goldsmiths from Flanders**, now part of Belgium, are listed as well **as servants brought back by aristocrats from English-occupied France at the end of the Hundred Years War (1453)**. When they arrived many people were given a surname relating to their origin or trade, so lots and lots of people who today have names like Baker, Brewer, Smith or Cooper could actually be descended from immigrants in the Middle Ages.

In the late Middle Ages, many of the **'wool churches' in the East of England**, so called because they were financed by profits from the wool trade, were **constructed with the help of skilled artisans from the Low Countries**.

Norwich had suffered much **economic hardship in the years after Kett's Rebellion** against land enclosures in 1549. A **harsh winter in 1564-5** added to the city's distressed state. Local leaders, notably the Duke of Norfolk and the Mayor, Thomas Sotherton, realized that the economy of the city could be improved by inviting **skilled textile workers** from the Spanish Netherlands. In response, **Queen Elizabeth authorized '30 Dutch masters' to settle in the city along with their households** not exceeding ten members. However, events quickly overtook them as many Calvinists were in a life-and-death situation in the wake of the *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury) of 1566.

Large numbers left Flanders, often taking a boat from Nieuwpoort to Great Yarmouth and then onto Norwich. **By 1568 there were well over a thousand Flemish and Dutch in Norwich, known locally as Strangers, many of them from leper in West Flanders.**

Fabric and weaving

A good number of the incomers were **skilled weavers**. They introduced new types of fabric, which helped Norwich to recover its prosperity. They **taught their skills to local people** and employed some as apprentices, again contributing to the local economy. Possibly the most majestic mark of the weavers' skills still hangs in the church of **St Peter Mancroft; a beautiful tapestry, into which the date 1573 is woven.**

During the *The Norwich Shawl* exhibition at the Castle Museum in 1995, an elderly man wrote in the comments book that his mother used to tell them **"the river ran red"** referring to the madder dye being rinsed in the river Wensum.

The city of Norwich was built on the prosperity of the weaving trade, which was well established as early as the 14th century. The tidal river connects the city to the port of Great Yarmouth through the Broads, and allowed the direct trade of goods with Europe and the world.

Dutch and Walloon refugees known as 'The Strangers', were invited to Norwich in 1565 to boost a flagging local weaving industry and introduced light-weight figured cloth, woven on the drawloom. They made hybrid fabrics from worsted warps and woolen wefts which became known as 'new draperies'. Ups and downs in trade

caused by plague, wars, fires, or changes in fashion had a devastating effect on trade. The weavers responded with new innovations and distinctive luxury fabrics known as 'Norwich Stuffs'. These reached their height with the fashion for a mix of silk and worsted shawls from 1780 – 1860. The story of Norwich Stuffs is one of a pre-industrial economy and of interdependent highly skilled craftsmen and entrepreneurs.

In 1565 decline in the Norwich worsted trade led to the City Elders inviting 30 households of religious refugees from the Netherlands to come to Norwich. They comprised of 6 French-speaking Walloons and 24 Dutch or Flemish, who specialised in lighter weight cloth and brought the drawloom with them. They also brought canaries which were kept in cages in the

workroom. By 1579 there were 6,000 'Strangers' in the city making them a third of the population. The Dutch wove short staple cloth which was dyed later (in the grey), the Walloons wove patterned long staple cloth with pre-dyed warp and weft. Laws and rules were imposed to separate the established local cloth from the New Draperies. The local cloth was known as Figured Russells, and statutes (1578) were made to distinguish one from the other by the cloth width. The combination of English wool and Flemish technique was thought to be ideal for making luxury cloth.

Traces of the weaving industry can still be found in Norwich, like the Maddermarket theatre. The horizontal weaver's windows in the third storey of houses in the Colegate area are reminders of looms being worked in maximum light next to merchant's houses built of flint in 1530 and elegant Georgian buildings. Even restored

Engineering/Print

Cornelius Vermuyden, Dutch-born engineer who introduced Dutch land-reclamation methods in [England](#) and drained the [Fens](#), the low marshy lands in the east of England.

CV was employed in 1626 by King [Charles I of England](#) to drain Hatfield Chase on the [Isle of Axholme](#), Yorkshire. Jointly financed by Dutch and English capitalists, this project was a controversial [undertaking](#), not only for the [engineering](#) techniques used but also because it employed Dutch instead of English workmen. The fenmen, local inhabitants who hunted and fished in the fens, attacked the Dutch workers; to complete the project, the engineer had to employ English workers and compensate the fenmen for their loss of hunting and fishing rights.

In 1630-37 Vermuyden drained the Great Fens, or Bedford Level, Cambridgeshire. During the [English Civil Wars](#), Parliament ordered the [dikes](#) broken and the land flooded (1642) to stop a Royalist army advance. In 1649 Vermuyden was [commissioned](#) to reclaim the Bedford Level; 40,000 acres were drained by 1652.

In 1653 Vermuyden, who had been knighted in the 1620s and had become a British subject (1633), headed an unsuccessful English mission to the [United Provinces of the Netherlands](#) to arrange a political union between the two nations.

Despite the initial success of his land-reclamation efforts, Vermuyden's techniques were undermined by the unique peatland ecology of the Fens. Draining the marshes caused the [peat](#) to shrink dramatically, lowering the land surface by as much as 3.7 metres (12 feet) below the height of the drainage canals and making the area extremely susceptible to flooding. Indeed, much of the reclaimed land was regularly flooded by the end of the 17th century, and the issue remained largely unsolved until steam-powered pumps were employed in the early 19th century.

Brabanders (in Belgium today), too, arrived in Norwich. **Anthonie de Solempne** worked in Antwerp as a merchant, but after arriving in Norwich, he operated a printing press in the town 1568-70, probably helped by a typesetter from Holland, Albert Christiaenszoon. Solempne printed books for use by the Dutch Calvinist church in Norwich, including a Dutch psalter and a confession of faith. Ironically, one of Solempne's English publications was a poem by Thomas Brooke. He had tried to stage an uprising to drive the Dutch and Flemish migrants out of Norwich, but had been foiled and was awaiting execution when he wrote the poem.

War

Anglo-Dutch Wars, four 17th- and 18th-century naval conflicts between [England](#) and the [Dutch Republic](#). The first three wars, stemming from commercial rivalry, established England's naval might, and the last, arising from Dutch interference in the [American Revolution](#), spelled the end of the Dutch republic's position as a world power.

Locally (and specifically), England declared war in **March 1665** and won a [decisive](#) victory over the Dutch off [Lowestoft](#) in June. After the destruction of the Dutch flagship, only hasty action by Vice Adm. [Cornelis Tromp](#), prevented the defeat at Lowestoft from descending into a total rout. The English failed to capitalize on their initial success, however, and most subsequent battles (which occurred in the following year) were won by the Dutch.

The **Battle of Solebay (Southwold)** took place in May/June **1672** and was the first [naval battle](#) of the [Third Anglo-Dutch War](#). The battle began as an attempted raid on Solebay port where an English fleet was anchored and largely unprepared for battle, and ended at a hard-fought draw. The battle however prevented a planned allied naval invasion of the [Dutch Republic](#) and boosted the morale of the Dutch population. Both sides claimed victory.

In a strategic sense, it can be seen as a Dutch victory as it deterred Anglo-French plans to blockade Dutch ports and land troops on the Dutch coast. But, tactically, both sides sustained heavy damages.

Porcelain

Replicate Chinese porcelain was first made in Lowestoft during the early part of the 18th century. There were **thriving trade routes in to The Hague, Rotterdam, Haarlem and Antwerp** along with a significant amount of **human traffic**. The first **accomplished potters in East Anglia were of Dutch origin**, producing a **crude form of Delft-ware**. These somewhat rustic craftsmen would, for the most part, work with **raw materials sourced from home rather than relying on English china clay**.

The supply of china clay in potentially commercial quantities resolved in the mid 1750's by Hewlin Luson, son of a merchant who resided in Gunton Hall. Luson took in a Dutchman, Van der Huvel, the sole survivor of a shipwreck on the shore of his estate and while walking with him during his rehabilitation the Dutchman remarked that the clay which was sticking to their boots would be ideally suited for making pots. On confirmation of this Luson immediately set up a somewhat crude furnace and kiln at Gunton.

Great quantities of Lowestoft porcelain were exported to Holland for years, and warehoused in Rotterdam before being sold on across the near continent. However, this was the time that **Napoleon Bonaparte was flexing his muscles** in pursuit of empire. A hard winter left the rivers and canals of the Low Countries frozen, and the French were able to march across usually impassable waterways and sack Rotterdam, making a point of seeking out British interests for special treatment. The Lowestoft stores were duly razed to the ground, and tens of thousands of pounds worth of porcelain pieces were smashed and, obviously, rendered unsellable. The company was unable to bear this combination of grave losses, and closed shortly afterwards, in 1803.

Canaries

And we should not forget the local football club, Norwich City. Their nickname is the Canaries. This derives, it is thought, from the habit of local people of keeping canaries, which they adopted from the Dutch Strangers.

Slide 11: Celebrities

Mata Hari

The Dutch exotic dancer Margaretha "Gretha" MacLeod – universally known as Mata Hari – has been synonymous with female sexual betrayal. Convicted by the French of passing secrets to the enemy during WWI, MacLeod's prosecutors damned her as the "greatest woman spy of the century", responsible for sending 50,000 Allied soldiers to their deaths (though "no one ever identified any specific defeat or leak of information that could be blamed on her"). MacLeod's status as a foreigner, a divorcee, someone who could be not only charming but spoke several languages, and was unrepentant about sleeping with officers of different nationalities, made her a perfect scapegoat in 1917. In fact she was an abused woman who was forcibly separated from her daughter and later executed, having refused a blindfold, in the outskirts of Paris on 15 October 1917, aged 41.

Eduard Steichen

Born in Luxembourg, his parents emigrated to Hancock, Michigan (UP) where his father worked as a miner. [His sister later married the noted poet Carl Sandburg.] Eduard (later he changed his name to Edward) was recognised as being a talented artist while still a boy and later moved to Milwaukee to study art. He quit school to do a 4-year lithography apprenticeship and taught himself painting and later photography. He is credited with

transforming photography into an art form, and pioneered fashion photography. Alfred Stieglitz hailed him as the “greatest photographer that ever lived”. A photographer, painter and curator (1947-1961, Director of the Dept of Photography at NY’s Museum of Modern Art, and curated the famous “Family of Man” exhibition, which was seen by more than 9 million people and was added to UNESCO’s “Memory of the World Register”).

Django Reinhardt

Born in Belgium as Jean, but adopting his Romani nickname “Django”, with Stephane Grappelli he formed the Paris-based Quintette du Hot Club de France in 1934. They were among the first to play jazz that featured the guitar as a lead instrument. Known for his gypsy jazz swing, it’s immediately recognisable. Following an accident in 1928 which left his left hand severely burned, he could only use his first two fingers on that hand. Subsequently he developed a completely new left hand technique. And he played completely by ear: he couldn’t read or write music.

[Sample music]

[Moustache]

The Quiz

- 1. Many think that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels drafted *The Communist Manifesto* in London. But where was it actually written? Extra points for which year it was published.**
Written in the backroom of La Maison du Cygne (the swan) bar/restaurant, on the Grand Place in Brussels. Marx lived in Belgium 1845-47, and the manuscript was published in London in 1848.
- 2. Which Benelux city was the first in the world to introduce free public transport? Extra points for the year**
Luxembourg City, in 2020. Free travel on trains, trams and buses.
- 3. Where will you find the tallest men in the world?**
The Netherlands: average height is 183cm (6ft) and for women it’s 171cm (5ft-7in). According to military records average male height has risen 20cm in the last 200 years. Perhaps attributed to: genetics, universal healthcare, low social inequality and a diet rich in cheese and dairy products. [Interestingly, a Guardian piece last week reported that children aged 5, and raised under UK austerity measures, were shorter than their European peers, concluding that this was due to poor diet and NHS cuts.]
- 4. In the 10th C carrots were originally white, purple or pale yellow. So why did they evolve their iconic orange colour that we know today?**
William of Orange (King William III) helped the Dutch to win independence from Spain in the 17th C. Arguably, to honour him, Dutch farmers bred their carrots to turn orange. BUT orange carrots have been around for much longer than the 17th C. Researchers mapping the

genome of the carrot found that mutations caused orange carrots to first appear in the days of the Roman Empire. In any case, orange carrots became hugely popular and orange is still the Netherlands' official colour, and the colour of the Dutch Royal family: and the Dutch wear orange to celebrate King's Day.

5. Where will you find the world's record for the longest period without an elected government?

It happened twice in Belgium: first in 2010-11 (589 days) and then this was topped in 2019-20 (652 days). This is because the opposing Flemish and Walloon regions couldn't agree on policy issues and thus could not form a coalition government.

6. Which Benelux city was named European Capital of Culture twice?

Luxembourg City: in 1995 and 2007. It also holds numerous UNESCO titles, not least for the 23km of underground tunnels, first excavated as early as 1644. During WWII they were used as air-raid shelters and accommodate > 30,000 people; and because of its defences it's sometimes referred to as the Gibraltar of the North.

7. Which quintessential "English" sport was thought to have been invented in which Benelux country?

Cricket, in Belgium. Immigrants from Belgium imported it to Britain, based on a 1533 poem that calls Flemish weavers "kings of cekettes" and mentions "wickettes". This pre-dates English references from the 1600s.

8. When was the term "Dutch courage" first used, and which drink does it refer to?

It originates from when the Brits and the Dutch drank gin during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). The Dutch invented gin (jenever) in the 16th C and introduced it to the British. It became popular in GB after William of Orange (him again: King William III) held the English, Irish and Scottish thrones.

9. In 1981, in London, the Motown singer Marvin Gaye was down on his luck and vowed to never record for Motown again. Where did he go to recover his mojo?

Ostend! In February! On the advice of a music promoter there, Freddy Cousaert, he moved into Cousaert's apartment, got himself off hard drugs, eschewed sex and began running on the beach/exercising and regularly visited a local church. This helped him to get his life together and to record again. He wrote and recorded "Sexual Healing" in Freddy's apartment, which went on to become his biggest career success, selling over two million copies in the U.S. alone and his most successful single to date. The video for the song was shot at Ostend's Casino-Kursaal.

10. Where will you hear the oldest national anthem in the world?

The Netherlands. The Wilhelmus, dates back to between 1569 and 1572, making it the oldest melody used in a country's national anthem. However it didn't become the official

Dutch anthem until 1932. The lyrics were also written at least 400 years ago, and refer to “Dietse Bloed”, an old word/phrase for Nederlands.

11. Where will you find Europe’s largest entertainment network?

Luxembourg. RTL (Radio Television Luxembourg) Group owns and runs 68 television channels and 31 radio stations in Germany, France and other European nations.

12. And speaking of national symbols... what is the national symbol of Belgium?

The Menneken Pis (peeing boy)! The statue in Brussels dates from 17th C but a similar fountain was recorded there in the 14th C. Legend has it that a boy stopped a fire from spreading in Brussels by peeing on it – city saved! Usually he’s naked, but he has 100s of costumes for all kinds of occasions, and someone takes the trouble of changing them every 2-3 weeks. And you can see many of them in the GardeRobe Menneken Pis museum in Brussels.

Some other Belgium museums include the lamp (Lumina Domestica), chocolate (Choco Story) and frites (Friet) museums in Bruges; and the sewer and Banksy (the World of Banksy) museums in Brussels; and the Tin Tin (Herge) museum near Brussels. Also worth it are the Begijnhof (Beguinage) in Bruges: founded in 1245, the home of beguines, emancipated lay-women who nevertheless led a pious and celibate life. Today the beguinage is inhabited by nuns of the Order of St Benedict and several Bruges women who have decided to remain unmarried. Peaceful and a wonderful antidote to fast city life! And of course, there are many, MANY splendid art and cultural museums all around the Benelux countries!

Thanks (in several languages!)