Women of Nimwegen – from Leaden Lady to Mariken

An historical walk through the lives of women of Nijmegen

As one of the oldest cities in the Netherlands Nijmegen has a rich history. The Institute for Gender Studies invites you to step into the shoes of the women of Nijmegen. This tour takes you around the center and downtown Nijmegen, where you will meet famous, infamous and everyday women from Nijmegen’s past.

The Institute for Gender Studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen is a lively interdisciplinary institute for teaching and research into women, sexuality and gender.

Info

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Check our website for an extended version of this tour including foot-notes.

We did our best to find all the rightful claiments with regard to all the photo’s and information in this app. Whomever believes that his or her material is used in this app without his or her permission can contact us.

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The starting point for the walk through the lives of ‘Women of Nimwegen’ is by the bronze statue of Mariken van Nieumeghen on the Grote Markt.

**Mariken of Nieumeghen**  
*Grote Markt*

The tale of Mariken of Nieumeghen is told in a miracle play written about 1500: the author is unknown. According to the story Mariken was seduced by the devil Moenen and together they travelled from Nijmegen to Antwerp and sowed death and destruction throughout that city. After seven years they returned to Nijmegen where Mariken realised her sins and repented. She was freed from Moenen and obtained forgiveness. Her true repentance is the main point of the story - ‘however great one’s sins, true repentance shall always save one from spiritual downfall.’

Continue in the direction of Sint Stevenskerk (St. Steven’s Church). Is the church open? It is certainly worth a visit! In the church there is a mural of St. Ontcommer and Catherine of Bourbon is buried there.

**Ontcommer**  
*Sint Stevenskerkhof*

Wilgefortis was a king’s daughter from Portugal and was intended to be the wife of the King of Sicily, but, devout as she was, she declared herself to be married to Christ and prayed to God for help. In answer to her prayers, in a single night, God gave her a beard, whereupon her father was so enraged that he had her crucified. As she died, God told her that in the future she would be known as Ontcommer because she would ‘ontcommer’ (free) others from their suffering. Her legend has its origin in the mistaken interpretation of Byzantine images of Christ that were seen as those of a woman. Excessive hairiness on women, or ‘hirsutism’, was much more common in the Middle-Ages than it is now, and was not viewed as a problem in family life. It was far from being considered pretty, though. The growth of the excessive hair could speed up when the woman suffered from stress. Perhaps the growth of Wilgefortis’ beard is more than just a story.

Please continue to pause in front of the Sint Stevenskerk a little longer to read the story of Catharina van Bourbon.

**Catharine of Bourbon**  
*Sint Stevenskerkhof*

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands it was permitted to be buried in a church. To be interred in a church was more prestigious than being buried in a church graveyard. Since her death in 1469 Catherine of Bourbon has lain entombed in this church. The daughter of the Duke of Bourbon, Charles of Valois, and the wife of Duke Adolf of Guelders, due to her family, marriage and position, in the second half of the fifteenth century she was one of the most influential women in Guelders.

Walk round the church towards the steps on your left. Here you can take a look at the statue of Moenen.
Moenen
*Sint Stevenskerkhof*

Moenen has also been given a place in the city, not far from Mariken. He has been placed half way down the steps between St. Steven’s and Stikke Hezelstraat. The statue was designed by Piet Killaars and was installed in 1968. Appropriately for a devil, Moenen sits with his back to the church.

**Walk around the church and take the North Church Steps (Noorderkerktrappen) you eventually see on your left. When you reach the bottom turn right. Walk down the Ganzenheuvel and you come out in the square, Kitty de Wijzeplaats.**

**Kitty de Wijze**
*Kitty de Wijzeplaats*

This bronze statue of Kitty de Wijze was made to commemorate the 400 Jewish Second World War victims from Nijmegen. From May 1940 the Netherlands was occupied by the Germans. On 17th November 1942 the four daughters of the De Wijze family, along with 192 other Nijmegen Jews, were seized in a raid. The sisters were then transported to Westerbork and from there to Auschwitz. There Kitty and Joke died on 15th December 1942; their other sisters and their parents died in 1943. Kitty was a cousin of Louis de Wijze (1922-2009), one of the few Jews from Nijmegen who survived.

Walk back in the direction from which you came and immediately turn right into Lange Brouwerstraat. Take the first street left to the junction with Lompenkramersgas (Ragseller Street). Please pause here.

**Brothels and prostitutes**
*Kabelgas*

In nineteenth century Nijmegen the chief haunt of prostitutes was the lower town where there were various brothels and such public women as ‘De Duitse Kee’ (the German Kee) and ‘De Pruisische Laadstok’ (the Prussian Ramrod) plied their trade. Nijmegen also boasted the ‘longest street of the Netherlands’, Pepergas, which one ‘entered in the evening and only emerged in the morning’. A well-known female brothel-keeper, or madam, was Anna Acker. From 1867 to 1880 she headed various brothels in Nijmegen, and here, in the Kabelgas, she opened her own second establishment. She died in 1888 in Arnhem.

Turn into Lompenkramersgas. This street leads to Begijnenstraat (Beguine Street) and here turn left and stop in front of the Health Centre ’t Weeshuis (The Orphanage).

**Christina (Stijn) Buys**
*Begijnenstraat 29*

This was the site of the Protestant Orphanage (weeshuis) (1817-1989). This institution, previously the Citizens’ Children’s Orphanage (1560-1817) owed its existence to Christina (usually called Stijn) Buys. On her death in 1557 she let it be known that she wanted an orphanage to be founded from her estate. As well as
shelter, Stijn Buys wanted to offer the orphan children a good upbringing and religious education. The Citizens’ Children’s Orphanage was only for orphaned children whose parents had been Nijmegen citizens. Other orphans were taken into the Poor Children’s Orphanage (1638-1817), later the Roman Catholic Orphanage (1817-1953). The entrance gate on the car park next to the Protestant Orphanage is the last reminder of this Roman Catholic home for orphans.

Follow Begijnenstraat further until you emerge in Lange Hezelstraat. Turn right here heading in the direction of Joris Ivensplein.

Women’s Centre Gaotika

Joris Ivensplein

Until the nineteen-eighties the building Terminus stood on the present-day Joris Ivensplein. The Women’s Centre Gaotika was housed there from 1977 to 1984. Gaotika offered room to various women’s groups in the city that had no accommodation of their own, for example the Nijmegen women’s newspaper ‘Vrouwentongen’ (Female tongues). In addition the Centre organised various courses and lectures specifically for women, and until 1983 there was also a girls’ café. In 1984 Gaotika closed its doors. In the meantime it had been split into a Women’s House and the Women’s Educational Centre Vrouwenspoor (Women’s Line). Other (women’s) organisations had taken over Gaotika’s activities and so the Centre was closed.

Walk back in the direction of Lange Hezelstraat and turn left into Bottelstraat. Take the first turn right, Kloosterstraat (Convent Street), at the end turn left and continue until you reach the stairs. Take the stairs and have a view of the river Waal. Go down the steps on the other side, you are now at the Waalkade. Turn left and continue until you reach a bronze statue of a mermaid.

The Mermaid

Waalkade

This statue of a reclining naked woman is known as ‘The Mermaid’, but the real title is ‘De Wachteres’ (the Watcher/ Guardian). In 1983 the artist Paul de Swaaf was commissioned to make a statue to ornament the Waalkade. He designed a statue of a woman, her skirts blown high in the wind, standing and looking out over the high water of the river Waal – the watcher. Ultimately de Swaaf was not satisfied with his design and created a new image of a reclining woman. When the waters of the river are high this statue of a woman ‘floats’ in the water and she seems like a mermaid.

Walk further along the wall of the quay and then go immediately up again. On your right hand you will find the Sint Anthonispoort.

Sint Anthonispoort

Lage Markt

Sint Anthonispoort is an old city gate and until the seventeenth century it was the site of the execution of criminals. The condemned could escape their punishment if a woman exercised ‘women’s grace’- the right of unmarried women to save the life of a criminal by proposing marriage. In 1676 in Nijmegen ‘Peter van Wanckom, imprisoned because of a stolen horse (...) is freed on condition that he shall lead Beatrix to the church.’ A reason for the ‘grace’ was that ‘marriage is a worse punishment than hanging’ and that a wife could ‘torment’ a man ‘worse than an executioner’.
Go through the gate and immediately turn left and then take the first right. You are now in Nonnenplaats. Continue as far as the steps and climb these to the top. You are now in Nonnenstraat (Nuns’ Street)

Mary Magdalene Convent
Nonnenstraat

Nonnenstraat is the last reminder of the oldest women’s convent in Nijmegen. At one time the Mary Magdalene Convent stood here, probably founded in 1274. It housed about sixty sisters. The convent drew its income from, amongst other things, the rent from land and also the sale of the nuns’ handwork.

In 1591 the convent was disbanded, the building handed over to the city and in 1599 was replaced by houses. Now nothing can be seen of the former convent, only the name of the street reminds one of the nuns and of the Mary Magdalene Convent.

Walk left and take the stairs behind the parking places. You are now going along Keumegas. Continue until you reach number 3 Franseplaats, next to the Commanderie Sint Jan (Residence of the Commander of the Knights of St. John) and the brewery De Hemel (The Heaven).

Nijmegen women of the Resistance: Anna Snoeck-Pijnacker Hordijk
Franseplaats 3

During the Second World War many women were active in the Resistance, members of the National-Socialist Movement (NSB), part of the labour force working in the war industry or as nurses at the front. Anna Snoeck-Pijnacker Hordijk lived at 3, Franseplaats: she was active in the Resistance and gave aid to British pilots who had been shot down. There were extremely heavy penalties for lending such aid to enemy pilots. She is probably one of the first Nijmegen women in the Resistance to be arrested by the Germans. She was taken on 10th April 1942 and died on 25th January 1944 in Ravensbrük, the German concentration camp for women.

Turn back in to Keumegas and take the first turn right in to Pepergas, called ‘the longest little street in Nijmegen’! At the end turn left in to Grotestraat. Take the first turn right in to Muchterstraat. Continue along here until Muchterstraat becomes Ridderstraat. At a particular point you will see on your left a grey building called ‘Roze Huis’ (Pink House). Here turn into the side street, Sint Anthoniusplaats. Pause before the Roze Huis.

The Pink House
Sint Anthoniusplaats 1

This building houses the Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum (COC) Nijmegen (Culture and Leisure Centre). COC is a national association founded in 1946. The name Culture and Leisure Centre was chosen when it was inaugurated because in the society of that time it was impossible to have an association with ‘homosexuality’ in its name. The Nijmegen branch is one of the most active COC associations in the country. By means of campaigns and activities the association sets out to improve
the emancipation, acceptance and integration of lesbian women, homosexual men, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT).

Before COC, the Women’s Documentation Centre De Feeks was settled in The Pink House. This centre opened in 1978 with the aim of improving the general women’s culture in Nijmegen. The women’s movement in Nijmegen organised numerous activities such as witches’ nights. At night many women were accosted in isolated places in the town. Starting on 19th May 1978 the women’s movement organised annual witches’ nights during which a procession of women walked through these lonely places where women were attacked. The group of ‘witches’ often drew many spectators, but they were also spat upon and heckled by those watching. Originally the witches’ night was aimed at the incidence of rape and assault, but later was a protest against all forms of sexual violence against women. In 2011 the Women’s Documentation Centre De Feeks was closed.

Go back to Ridderstraat. Please pause opposite to The Pink House, at number 8.

Agneta Verspijck
Ridderstraat 8

On the facade of number 8 you can see the coat of arms of the Roukens family. In the eighteenth century Johan Roukens, councillor of the city of Nijmegen lived here with his wife Agneta Verspijck. In December 1747 the house of the Roukens family was attacked by a group of townspeople while Agneta was in childbed. At a certain moment a storm broke and the rain gushed from the heavens. The rebels fled and Agneta and her child were unharmed. It was this incident that led to the placing of the plaque on the house.

Continue and immediately turn right into Stockumstraat, go left and walk to the end through the narrow alley. You then come out on Burchtstraat where you go to the left and stop by the big grey plaque that lies in the middle of the street.

Leaden Lady
Burchtstraat

It was here that during excavations in 2001 a lead sarcophagus containing a female skeleton dating from the fourth century was found. Research has shown that the woman in this grave was between 35 and 50 years old. Her coffin was made of lead, then an expensive material. In addition, gold and various precious objects were found in her grave so that we can conclude she was a wealthy woman. A replica of her skeleton has been made, and this along with the original lead coffin and the accompanying grave gifts can be seen in the Museum Het Valkhof.
Continue along Burchtstraat, at the end turn left and continue in this direction towards De Lindenberg: Huis voor de Kunsten (The Linden Hill: House for the Arts) and stop there for a moment.

Policewomen in Nijmegen

Ridderstraat 23

In 1927 the first female officers in Nijmegen joined the police force - Jeannette Geldens and Annie van Velzen. They went to work with the Child Police. Where the Lindenberg now stands was in those days the police headquarters. The first woman police officer in the Netherlands was Dina Sanson. In 1911 she joined the Rotterdam police force. The idea of appointing policewomen in the Netherlands first arose as an effect of more strict local moral regulations, which was mainly concerned with women and children. Therefore, all policewomen, in the first instance, served in the child and vice divisions. At the beginning of the twentieth century women were recruited into the police of various major European cities.

Turn to your right and walk in the direction of the statue of an angel in front of the Valkhof Park.

Statue The Angel

Valkhof Park

This statue was installed to commemorate the first railway line from Nijmegen to the German town of Cleves. It was designed by Jan Jacob Weve of Nijmegen (1852-1942) and executed with a cast made by A. Cassner of a statue in Regensburg by the German sculptor Christian Daniel Rauch (1777-1857). In 1874 Nijmegen was no longer a garrison town and such a railway could be built and causing trade in Nijmegen to flourish. The statue in the form of Victoria, the Roman goddess of victory, symbolises the triumph over the long isolation of Nijmegen as a garrison town. It was an important beginning of new connections.

Go round behind the statue and into the park and walk round to the left. You are now passing the de Sint-Nicolaaskapel (St. Nicholas Chapel). Pause here for a moment.

Theophano

Valkhof Park

Theophano, born in 960, married Emperor Otto II in 972 in Rome, making her Empress of the German lands. From her husband’s death in 983 until her own death in 991Theophano ruled the Empire as regent for her son, three years old at the time his father died. It was long thought that the St. Nicholas chapel was built on the orders of Theophano, but research has shown that it was built in the reign of Emperor Otto III, her son, who lived from 980 to 1002. Otto caused the chapel to be built in honour of his mother.

Take the Valkhof Steps opposite the St. Nicholas chapel. Go a few steps up, turn right and walk straight ahead along Groene Balkon (Green Balcony) to the end; from here you have a wonderful view over de Waal. At the end of Groene Balkon you reach the Onze Lieve Vrouwentrappen (Our Blessed Lady Steps). Go down these and then turn left and stop to look at the mosaic on the wall.
Onze Lieve Vrouwentrappen (Our Blessed Lady Steps)

Onze Lieve Vrouwentrappen

The name Onze Lieve Vrouwentrappen has no clear origin and was formerly called Onze Lieve Vrouwendas (Our Blessed Lady Street) and led to Onze Lieve Vrouwenpoortje. Onze Lieve Vrouwendas owed its name to statue of the Virgin that was installed against a neighbouring house. Together with St. Olaf, the Virgin was the patron saint of the mariners’ guild. Onze Lieve Vrouwenpoortje is a dilapidated connection between the Waalkade and Steenstraat, opposite Onze Lieve Vrouwendas. Prostitutes used to stand here waiting for clients to lure into the brothels.

You are now in Vleeshouwerstraat. Walk on in the direction of Grotestraat and once there turn left and walk upwards until you come to number 33.

Henriette Presburg

Grotestraat 33

You are now standing in front of the house in which Henriette Presburg, mother of Karl Marx, used to live. At the end of the nineteen-eighties a plaque was placed here, an initiative taken in connection with the international commemoration of the centenary of the death of Karl Marx in 1983. Henriette Presburg was born in Nijmegen and in 1814 married Heinrich Marx. After their wedding they moved to the German city of Trier where Karl was born in 1818. Karl Marx’s best-known work, *Das Kapital*, written in 1867 provided the basis for communism in the former Soviet Union and China.

Continue along Grotestraat where the nineteenth century poetess Anna Ampt lived.

Anna Ampt

Grotestraat

Anna Adriana Everdina Henrietta Ampt was a Nijmegen poetess, born, brought up and died in the city. In 1854 she married the brick manufacturer Jan Willem Steens Zijnen and they had twelve children. For a long time she lived in Nijmegen in Molenstraat, Grotestraat and Scheidemakershof. Anna Ampt was involved in two major social questions during her life – women’s emancipation and the emancipation of slaves. Ampt did not speak out against slavery as such, but advocated the good treatment of slaves. She died on 5th March 1885 in Nijmegen.

Having come to the top of Burchtstraat turn left and then keep right until you reach the Stadhuis (Town Hall).
Ien Dales
*Burchtstraat*

The first female mayor of Nijmegen was Ien Dales. She was installed as the first socialist and female mayor of Nijmegen in May 1987. She was given the nickname ‘Ma Flodder’ by the inhabitants of Nijmegen due to her simple appearance and her humour. She met the people on their own ground by going into the various neighbourhoods and learning what were the city’s problems, but she also met a lot of resistance and criticism because she often paid no attention to the arguments of opponents. After less than 1,000 days as mayor, in 1989 she returned to national politics as a minister.

Walk further along Burchtstraat and take the first turning right. You are now in Marikenstraat; walk up the right side until half way along the street you see a swing on your right.

**Monument The Swing**
*Marikenstraat*

On 22nd February 1944 Nijmegen was shocked to the heart by a bombing raid by the Americans. It later became apparent that almost 800 people died in this ‘mistake’ by ‘friendly fire’. This monument of a swing was placed to commemorate the victims of the bombing raid, in particular those who died in the nursery school of the Society Jesus Mary Joseph that then stood on this spot. The school was destroyed, 24 children and 8 nuns were killed.

Continue along Marikenstraat and cross a little bridge to reach the left side. Go on in the direction of Mariënburg. Please pause near the chapel.

**The Mariënburg chapel**
*Mariënburg 26*

The Mariënburg chapel is the remnant of the former convent Mariënburg. The precise date that the convent was founded is unknown, but it was probably in the fifteenth century. In 1592 the convent was closed and handed over to the city of Nijmegen. Since then the building had a number of functions, such as a barracks, military hospital and artist’s studio. The chapel was restored and then served as the municipal museum. During the war when many buildings and churches in Nijmegen were bombed the chapel was used as a temporary emergency church. At the moment the Mariënburgkapel houses the Huis van de Nijmeegse Geschiedenis (House of the History of Nijmegen) and the VVV-tourist information point.
Take the steps down and then turn right. Stay on the left and cross Koningsplein in the direction of Ziekerstraat. Keep right here and immediately turn left into Molenstraat. Immediately on your left is the Petrus Canisiuskerk (Peter Canisius Church).

The Black Madonna

*Molenstraat 37*

In this church you can find the little figure of Our Blessed Lady, known as the ‘Black Madonna’. This image was the central point of the annual Virgin Mary procession in Nijmegen in which all the nuns in every convent in Nijmegen took part. This progress through the city was held from 1273 until 1994, except between 1591 and 1926. The statue was saved from burning in 1592 during the Iconoclasm. In 1836 it was displayed for people’s reverence in the church and in 1931 it was crowned during the National Virgin Mary Conference in Nijmegen. Since then the Black Madonna has remained in the Lady Chapel of the church. You can find her in the small chapel on the left side of the church.

Walk a little way back and go on into Broerstraat. Walk to the end of the street and finally you at the Blauw Steen (Blue Stone) that lies at the junction of Broerstraat, Grotestraat and Burchtstraat.

The Blue Stone

*Grote Markt*

In the early Middle Ages justice was often administered at the large stones in a city. An example of this in Nijmegen is the Blue Stone (Blauwe Steen). In the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries on the Grote Markt there was a ‘Draaikooi’ (hanging cage or whirligig) in which female criminals must suffer their punishment. Once in the cage, this was revolved at high speed after which the women were banished from the city. Another punishment for women, for instance for adultery or failing to pay a fine, was wearing a stone of shame: wearing a stone pillory they were led through the town by the executioner.

Your walk through ends where it started, at the Grote Markt.