

*The third in a series of articles examining how and why courts preserve, destroy or edit their archives.*

**I**N 1795, Prince William V of Orange–Nassau (1748–1806) and his family left the Republic of the United Provinces, which his sixteenth-century ancestors Prince William I (William the Silent) and Prince Maurice had helped to found. The rapid advance of French revolutionary troops, supported by the Dutch democratic movement known as the Patriots, brought an end not only to the Prince of Orange's power in the Netherlands, but also to the complex polity of the once glorious Republic.

William V was received in England by King George III as an ally. After spending almost six years at Hampton Court Palace, William and his wife, Princess Wilhelmina of Prussia (1751–1820) left for mainland Europe. Aware that he could not realistically expect to be restored to his position in the Netherlands, William settled on the Nassau estates in Germany. After a brief stay in England, his ambitious elder son, William, the hereditary Prince of Orange (1772–1843), moved to Berlin, where he was supported by his mother's family. By the Treaty of Amiens (1801) the European powers had granted the House of Orange–Nassau compensation in the Holy Roman Empire, consisting of secularised properties. The hereditary Prince ruled over his new principality for over four years. In 1806, his allegiance to the King of Prussia in the war against Napoleon cost him not only these possessions but also the Nassau domains he had inherited from his father.

The Prince's star was to rise again, after Napoleon's unsuccessful Russian campaign. The Netherlands, which had been a puppet kingdom under King Louis-Napoleon from 1806 to 1810, and was annexed to France in 1810, sought release from the yoke of French oppression. The restoration of independence was accompanied by the return of the Prince of Orange in November 1813, a move supported by the Allied Powers. The modern unitary state introduced by the French was retained, and the monarchical principle was reflected in William's title of Sovereign Prince, which was replaced by that of King in March 1815. Napoleon's escape from Elba had hastened the establishment of a larger state on France's northern border, in accordance with the wishes of Great Britain and other countries. The Congress of Vienna gave King William I a state consisting of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands. He also became the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, as compensation for the loss of his territories in the Holy Roman Empire. William made the error of failing to recognise Luxembourg as a separate territory. However, this changed in 1830/31, when the Concert of Europe sanctioned Belgium's secession as an independent kingdom. With the signing of the Treaty of London in 1839, Luxembourg became a state in its own right, joined by a personal union to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

After his return to The Hague in 1813, William I amalgamated the papers his father had taken to England and the personal archives of the House of Nassau, which up to then had been stored at the family home in Dillenburg in Germany, and such records of the House of Orange, including those of the chancellery formerly administering their German lands, as had not been confiscated in the Netherlands. The National Archives, established in The Hague in 1802, was already the custodian of significant parts of the archives of the stadholders' secretariat. The first King of the Netherlands wanted to ensure that all the archives in his care were properly managed. Personal documents were to be kept in the family archives, while those relating to the stadholders' share in government were brought together in the National Archives. The project was largely completed between 1825 and 1832, the period which saw the creation of the Royal Archives. Moreover, the King made efforts to acquire additional documents to augment the collection (for example the Beninck papers), in order to assist scholars writing the history of his new realm.

In 1831, he appointed his former Secretary, G. Groen van Prinsterer (1801–76), then a young man, as the first director of the Royal Archives. Groen van Prinsterer officially held the post until 1871, although his most productive years were those until 1850 or thereabouts, before his political duties started to make demands on his time. After researching in the Royal Archives and consulting sources in Belgium, Germany and northern France, Groen van Prinsterer published an edition of the correspondence of members of the House of Orange from the time of Prince William I, under the title of *Archives ou Correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*. The first series he edited, consisting of eight volumes, covers the period 1552–84. A second series of five volumes deals with the years from 1585 to 1688. The quality of this edition was outstanding for the time and was invaluable to the historiography of the Dutch Revolt and the emergence and triumph of the Republic. The Royal Archives became famous, attracting the interest of other scholars, among them the German historian Leopold von Ranke. Groen van Prinsterer was, however, unable to find suitable accommodation for the collection. In the 1880s, when the archives of King William II (1792–1849) and that of the commission responsible for administering his estate had to be added, the premises which the Royal Archives shared with another office of the royal household proved inadequate.

After the death of King William III (1817–90), his widow Queen Emma, formerly a princess of Waldeck-Pyrmont (1858–1934), acted as regent for his daughter and successor Queen Wilhelmina (1880–1962). Queen Emma helped to strengthen the bonds between the royal family and the Dutch people, and enhance the monarchy's prestige, by touring the country with Wilhelmina in the years leading up to her daughter's investiture. Another of Queen Emma's accomplishments was the construction of a building in the gardens of Noordeinde Palace, designed especially to house the archives and historical collections. She modernised the institution by combining the existing offices of director of the archives and royal librarian, and entrusted the incumbent with the administration of collections of art and historical memorabilia which had been bequeathed

to Queen Wilhelmina. The new premises were inaugurated shortly before 1900. The spacious central section contained offices for the staff, a reading-room for researchers and an exhibition hall for the Queen's collection of art and artefacts. The left wing was designed to house the records, the right wing to function as a library. The library also provided a home for drawings, etchings and engravings. Finally, once the building had been fitted out, it was decided to keep the collection of portrait miniatures in the salon furnished for the Queen's use.

The head of the new institution was Baron A. C. Snouckaert van Schaumburg (1841–1902), who had founded a private museum of arms and armour in The Hague and subsequently transferred his collection to the new Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Snouckaert was mainly concerned with the construction and furnishing of the Royal Archives, designed by the architect Hoefft van Velzen (1842–1910), who was also Intendant of the Royal Palaces. In addition, Snouckaert introduced the custom, whereby the records of the various departments of the royal household, such as those of the master of ceremonies, the crown equerry and the treasurer, were regularly transferred to the Royal Archives. Two historians subsequently took the helm from Snouckaert. The first was Professor F. J. L. Krämer, Queen Wilhelmina's former history tutor, and the second Dr N. Japikse, director of the Office of Government Historical Publications. Both continued the tradition of publishing documents from the Royal Archives.

Most of the individuals associated with the royal household were retained under the German occupation, albeit under the supervision of a powerful German official. The latter allowed the art treasures belonging to the House of Orange in the palaces and the Royal Archives to be preserved as part of the nation's heritage, and as many as possible of these valuable objects were removed to safety. The bulk of the records and library remained in the Royal Archives, where they were examined for sources which the occupying authorities felt were relevant to German history. Because of the thoroughness of this research and the grudging assistance given by the Dutch, the chests containing the documents were not removed from the Royal Archives until 1943 or perhaps even 1944. Immediately after the war, the Allies recovered them at Ehrenbreitstein Castle, near Koblenz, and restored them to their rightful owner.

After 1945, the pressure of assisting researchers, answering letters and organising exhibitions increased. This was accompanied by an influx of contemporary material in the form of books, photographs, films and gifts presented to the royal family. Scholarly work almost ground to a halt. Two circumstances intervened to change this: Queen Juliana (b. 1909), who acceded to the throne in 1948, was the sole heir of her mother Queen Wilhelmina, who for her part had been the sole beneficiary of her father King William III. Queen Juliana appreciated that steps had to be taken to safeguard the continuity of royal status on the one hand and the historical heritage of the House of Orange on the other. In the interests of the latter Queen Juliana established two foundations: the House of Orange-Nassau Archives Trust (1968) and the House of Orange-Nassau Historic Collections Trust (1972). The first was responsible for the archives, the library, the engravings, photographs and other documentary collections, and the latter for the museum collection, the portraits and historical paintings, the portrait miniatures and gifts from the former

Dutch territories overseas. The House of Orange–Nassau Archives Trust is headed by the reigning monarch, while the Historic Collections Trust is managed by a board of three: a member of the royal family, a representative appointed by the minister of culture, and a third board member appointed by the other two. The director of the Royal Archives is the administrator and secretary of both Trusts.

The second factor underlying the improvement was a new financial arrangement between the royal house and the government in the 1970s. One of its results was that the staff of the Royal Archives was almost doubled to its present size of 13 posts, some part-time, under the director. Although the demand on their services continues to grow, the staff has nevertheless been able to publish on a modest scale. After the 1980s, the threat of disruption appeared in a different guise, this time because of insufficient storage space. Nor did the storage areas meet the climatological and other standards applicable to establishments where similar collections are preserved. Temporary solutions were sought at first. For instance, much of the historical costume collection was transferred to the new museum of the history of the royal house in the former Royal Palace of Het Loo in Apeldoorn. For the same reason, more recent archive material was moved to an attic in Noordeinde Palace after its restoration around 1980.

The transfer of the Royal Archives' building to the Historic Collections Trust offered the prospect of a more permanent solution. The trustees drew up plans for new underground repositories in the palace gardens, linked to the present building. The project, which was funded with support from the royal family, was completed in the autumn of 1998. At the same time, parts of the old building were restored and altered. A celebration was held to mark the inauguration and reopening of the premises in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and her husband His Royal Highness Prince Claus of the Netherlands, who is also chairman of the board of the Historic Collections Trust.

## 1. The archives and collections

### 1.1. *The archives*

At present, the archives occupy a shelf space of more than 2,500 metres. They are divided into five groups. The first (group A) consists of documents left by members of the House of Nassau from the thirteenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century and the archives of members of the House of Orange–Nassau from the sixteenth century to the present. It includes the letter-books kept by the private secretaries to the kings and queens and other members of the royal family. The papers of the seventeenth-century stadholders Maurice, Frederick Henry, William II and William III are by no means complete. Material relating to Frederick Henry and William II passed by inheritance to Dessau (Sachsen-Anhalt), and many records of the stadholder-king William III are held in Britain. The comprehensive archives of the last two stadholders, William IV and William V, contain not only personal letters but also administrative and military correspondence, documents concerning their interests abroad, and financial papers referring both to their personal affairs and those of the court. The archives of the first two kings in the

nineteenth century are also largely intact. There are gaps, however, in those of King William III and his first wife Queen Sophie. Queen Wilhelmina herself chose to keep only a small selection of her personal correspondence. Moreover, part of her archive was destroyed in 1940 following the German invasion.

The second group (group B) consists of documents concerning the House of Nassau, or Orange–Nassau, in general. Among them are certificates pertaining to the family's titles in the Holy Roman Empire and the *Erbverleihen* regulating the succession between the various branches of the House of Nassau. In addition they include files on the dispute over the will of the stadholder-king William III between his sole heir, the stadholder of Friesland, of the Nassau–Dietz branch, and his cousin the King of Prussia. The matter was only settled, in 1732, by a pact dividing the estate.

The third and fourth groups (C and D) concern lands inside and outside the Netherlands. These are the principality of Orange in the south of France (up to 1702), the county of Vianden in Luxembourg, counties and other estates in Germany and present-day Poland (group C), and possessions in the Netherlands (group D). Group D is relatively small. When William V left the country in 1795, the Nassau domains were nationalised, as was the archive of the Nassau domain council, which is in the National Archives in The Hague. When the country regained independence in 1813, the palaces and estates at Soestdijk and Het Loo were the only Nassau domains to be restored as the private property of the House of Orange, and only the Soestdijk archive up to 1813 has remained in the Royal Archives.

The last group (group E) contains the records of the various departments of the royal household, which were established by the new monarch around 1 January 1814. These holdings, which are substantial, are also growing faster than any other. The concentration of the royal household's offices at Noordeinde Palace in The Hague since 1980 has led to a more centralised record creation system.

Reference has already been made to the acquisition by King William I of the Bentinck papers in 1828. A few years earlier, the King had purchased papers from the estate of Constantijn Huygens (1608–87), the erudite and able secretary to the seventeenth-century stadholders. Huygens's accomplishments were not confined to the realm of politics. He ranks as one of the leading Dutch poets of his day. Understandably, therefore, his papers are divided among Leiden University Library, the National Archives, the Royal Archives and other repositories. The Royal Archives acquired his papers relating to the House of Orange–Nassau, with the addition of a letter that Rembrandt wrote to Huygens, which formed part of the manuscript collection. There were no major acquisitions of private archives after the time of King William I. Nevertheless, an increasing number of personal papers of non-members of the House of Orange–Nassau were donated by their owners, so that this group continued to grow steadily (cf. S. de Bellaigue, 'The Royal Archives, Windsor Castle? *The Court Historian*, 3, 2 (July 1998), 10–22). Suffice it to mention in this connection the papers of Professor H. Tollius (1742–1822), tutor and advisor to the hereditary Prince of Orange; R. van Olden (1752–1828), treasurer and financial adviser to the House of Orange–Nassau; H. G. J. Grégoire (1794–1854), advocate of Liège

and from 1830, after the secession of Belgium, representative of the Orangist Belgians in The Hague; and L. H. Ebersson (1822–89), private architect to King William III. These private collections of documents are classified as group G.

### 1.2. *The manuscript collections*

The manuscript collections were started in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these collections were transferred from the archives, others purchased or donated by third parties. They contain genealogical, heraldic and other information about the House of Orange–Nassau, and shed light on Dutch history in general. The manuscripts purchased by Queen Sophie (1818–77) and her youngest son Prince Alexander (1851–84) are of an entirely different nature. Among the more noteworthy are the many letters written by Enlightenment philosophers, and the Weigel Collection, named after its owner, a collector from Leipzig, who acquired over 4,000 letters relating to the Thirty Years War. The Weigel Collection is administered separately, although part of it was exchanged in 1988 for personal correspondence between Queen Anna Paulovna (1795–1865) and her son Prince Henry (1820–79), which had passed to Weimar through inheritance.

One of the more interesting of the few medieval manuscripts in the Royal Archives is a fifteenth-century Gospel book, which was presented to King William II on the occasion of his visit to St Agatha's Convent in Cuyk in 1841. A manuscript by G. du Busc, entitled *Devises sur le soleil* (1694), dates from the time of William and Mary, and extols the feats of William III in eighteen allegories. The manuscript collections can be accessed through card index systems and written catalogues.

### 1.3. *The library*

The library houses a collection of some 75,000 books, atlases and pamphlets. It contains only part of the stadholders' library from before 1795, the rest being in the Royal Library in The Hague. The library at the Royal Archives, which has been assembled over the past two centuries, includes a substantial collection of material from earlier periods, but the majority dates from around 1800 up to the present.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, numerous small libraries belonging to deceased members of the royal family were brought together at the Royal Archives with the director's reference library and the library of King William III, which had hitherto been at Noordeinde Palace.

Since then, three factors have been responsible for the growth of the library. Many volumes presented to the Queen or other members of the royal family are immediately transferred to the library. Authors of publications who have consulted the archives or any of the collections undertake to present the library with an author's copy. Finally, the library itself purchases material on the history of the Houses of Nassau and Orange–Nassau and their estates, and the general history and art history of the Netherlands. These are the three main subjects covered by the collection. In addition, the library subscribes to journals and annuals relevant to its own collection.

Books once owned by royal personages, some of them beautifully bound, form

an interesting part of the collection. Among them is a small library that belonged to Louis Napoleon (King of Holland from 1806–10) which was transferred to the Royal Archives from the Royal Palace in Amsterdam around 1900. Two highlights deserve special mention. One is a prayer book of 1500, from the De Coligny family, which Queen Wilhelmina bought in 1910. It contains contemporary marginal notes on genealogical matters referring, for instance, to the birth of Louise de Coligny, the last wife of Prince William I, and the violent death of her father Admiral Gaspard de Coligny in the massacre of St Bartholomew in Paris in 1572. Another outstanding volume, illustrated with superbly crafted engravings, is *Dafbeeldinge van alle de gouverneurs der Nederlanden* (c. 1603), which includes portraits of Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester.

The librarian is also custodian of the music library, a collection comprising over 5,000 items, the oldest being the music used by Prince William V's court orchestra. It also includes manuscript and printed music composed for special occasions relating to the royal family from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and other music, acquired either as purchases or gifts. King William III, who was especially fond of music, organised contests for young artists whose education he had helped to finance. Both the library and the music library contain publications that were specially bound for presentation to the monarch, some of them bearing an autograph dedication as well.

### 1.4. *The photographic collection*

From the very earliest days of photography, pictures have been taken of members of the royal family, the palaces they lived in and, later, events and ceremonies they attended. This new, rapidly developing art form superseded the portrait miniatures exchanged by royal persons before 1850. Cabinet photographs became extremely popular and were exchanged on many occasions. The first member of the House of Orange to stand behind the camera was Queen Wilhelmina. As a young woman, in particular, she was an enthusiastic photographer, and used the medium as an aid for landscape painting. A large number of the negative plates she produced have survived. This genre, photographs of and by members of the royal house, is one of the two categories comprising the Royal Archives' collection. The other consists of albums and individual photographs presented to the royal family. In the second half of the nineteenth century it became customary to present photographs of cities, buildings or major public works either before or after a royal visit. Tributes from home and abroad were also showered on the monarch on the occasion of a royal anniversary, often consisting of or accompanied by photographic material. Two examples may be singled out by way of illustration, both concerning Dutch associations abroad. In 1874, Aurora, a Dutch literary society in Cape Town, presented King William III with an album of photographs of Cape Town and its environs to mark his silver jubilee. A few years later, the King visited England with his wife Queen Emma—whose sister was married to the Duke of Albany—and received a beautiful album from the Dutch community in London, which contained not only a drawing by the Dutch painter Laurens Alma Tadema, but also photographs of the Dutch church at Austin Friars in the City of London.

Bearing in mind that a photo reportage is made of every state visit, every official visit and very many working visits, it stands to reason that the curator of the photographs manages a rapidly growing collection. At present, it consists of more than 2,000 albums and some 100,000 single photographs.

The curator is also the custodian of the photographic record, now being produced more systematically, of the historical and art-historical collections administered by the Historic Collections Trust. This is useful for the Royal Archives' own purposes, but it is also a source authors and publishers may draw on when seeking illustrations for publications.

### 1.5. *The museum collection and important gifts*

In this context we can take no more than a fleeting glance at the collection of art and artefacts housed in the Royal Archives, some of which are on display. The objects vary widely, and range in date from the late sixteenth century to the present. Perhaps a good way to describe the collection would be by trying to convey the impression it might make on visitors entering the large exhibition hall. Their eyes would probably first be caught by the showcases of porcelain and engraved glass opposite the entrance. On the way they would pass the Art Nouveau cradle presented by the women and girls of Amsterdam in 1909 to mark the birth of Her Royal Highness Princess Juliana. Their attention would then be drawn by the large wall cabinets with garments ranging from the time of Prince William V (the Prince's Windsor Coat) to the gown Queen Juliana wore for her investiture in 1948. The monarchs' military uniforms are displayed with their ceremonial swords, and the Dutch and British field marshal's staffs belonging to King William II. The display cabinets in the centre of the hall contain silverware, jewellery and documents. A wrought-iron, spiral staircase leads up to a gallery with smaller wall cabinets displaying Dutch and foreign insignia and decorations, gifts from the former Dutch East Indies, and smaller tributes from the Netherlands. It should be mentioned here that a large collection of Indonesian objects and craftwork is kept in the Indonesian-style room which was created at Noordeinde Palace shortly after 1900.

On either side of the main exhibition hall is a smaller room. One houses the collection of portrait miniatures. Some of them — there are more than 700 in all — can still be seen in the wall cases in which Queen Sophie (d. 1877) and her son Prince Alexander (d. 1884) collected them, mostly arranged by royal house or country. A highlight for the art historian is a showcase of English portrait miniatures from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The furniture in this room, including the cabinets where the miniatures not on display are kept, also originally belonged to Queen Sophie.

The other, smaller room contains two of the large gifts presented to Queen Wilhelmina in, or shortly after, 1901 on the occasion of her marriage to Prince Henry of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. They consist of collections of watercolours and drawings presented by the artists' associations of Amsterdam and The Hague, albums illustrating industry in the Netherlands and presented by the business community, and a collection of bibles in all the language versions published by the

Dutch Bible Society. These two very different collections are stored in fine Art Nouveau cabinets manufactured especially for them. One of the highlights in this section of the building is the encyclopedic *Atlas Munnicks van Cleeff*, a series of Dutch topographical drawings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, purchased by Prince Henry (d. 1879). Other collections of drawings, watercolours, etchings and engravings are stored in areas not open to visitors.

## 2. Access to the archives and collections

Access to the archives is strictly controlled. Members of the public who wish to consult archival material must apply to the director of the Royal Archives, specifying the subject and the purpose of their study. The archives may be used only for research purposes. Requests to this effect can only be granted with the consent of Her Majesty the Queen. Applicants are notified accordingly. Access is not granted to documents dating from after Queen Wilhelmina's accession to the throne (September 1898) for biographical research on Queen Beatrix's parents or grandparents. An exception was recently made for a biography of Queen Wilhelmina by the Leiden historian Professor C. Fasseur, the first volume of which was published last year. Exceptions may also be made if warranted by the nature of the research. In this event, the time-limit is moved forward to the end of the Second World War. The 1898 threshold will be changed in due course. Anyone granted access to the archives is required to sign a declaration undertaking to submit a proof of their text to the director before publication. They are also required to present a copy of their book or article to the Royal Archives library. Scholars may order photocopies or microfilms of material that can be reproduced. In addition, they may use the library and consult the documentary collections. The library catalogue is incorporated in that of the Royal Library in The Hague, which is open to the public. Books which are not available from other libraries may be borrowed through the inter-library loan service, providing they are in a satisfactory condition.

The archives of individual members of the royal family or of royal household departments can be accessed through typed or manuscript catalogues. Researchers consider this system unwieldy. Moreover, it is difficult for the staff to check whether documents are available on any particular subject. Catalogues of the archives are now being prepared for publication, and the first four volumes of the series have already appeared. This project follows the publication of a survey of all the archives held by the Royal Archives in a guide to private archives in the Netherlands issued by the Royal Association of Dutch Archivists.

Items from the museum, historical portraits and special documents from the archives may be loaned for temporary exhibitions in the Netherlands or elsewhere, providing the museums in which they are to be displayed meet the requirements laid down to ensure that such objects are kept in secure and suitable conditions. Requests to borrow items should be addressed to the director of the Royal Archives to be put before Her Majesty the Queen or the board of the Historic Collections Trust. Such items may be reproduced in the accompanying

exhibition catalogue against payment of a fee. The figures for the past few years show that 50 or more applicants receive permission every year to consult the Royal Archives, and that items are loaned for some 25 exhibitions a year. In both cases, requests from abroad, notably Germany and Belgium, make up about one third of the total.

In this way, the Royal Archives, while respecting the privacy of the royal family, can contribute to research in the fields of history and art history and to the publications and exhibitions thus produced.

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