

ARMS ENGRAVED IN THE FLOOR OF AMSTERDAM'S OUDE KERK

By Paul Campbell

A recent business trip brought me to The Netherlands, where I planned some free time in the schedule to explore Rotterdam and Amsterdam in hopes of finding some interesting heraldry. Rotterdam had unfortunately little to offer as the Germans destroyed most of the city during World War II with only a few buildings surviving. There was some nice heraldry on the City Hall which survived the war, but the shields are small and very high up, a difficult challenge from my trusty but admittedly basic Nikon.

Having survived the ravages of the war a bit better, Amsterdam had more to offer. And it was there in the city's famous Red Light district where I made a great discovery. There stands the city's *Oude Kerk*, "Old Church," which was consecrated in 1306 by the Bishop of Utrecht. Within the confines of the church, I found some very interesting heraldry literally underfoot. The church was built on a cemetery. Interestingly, people continued to be buried under the stone even after the church was built, and this practice continued until 1865.

The church's floor today consists of 2,500 graves where about 10,000 people lay in eternal rest. As the number of deceased exceeded the number of available spaces, the newly deceased were buried in columns under the floor with the previously deceased. Many of the deceased bore arms and, undoubtedly for a suitable contribution, many of their arms were carved into the floor. While many were very worn from the years, quite a few were in excellent shape.

Included here are a handful of the better-surviving arms which caught my interest. My knowledge of Dutch heraldry is very limited, so I can't offer much in the way of commentary. Time did not allow me to do the research I would like to have done, but I did take many photographs, some of the better of which are shown here.

Those interested in learning more about the church can visit its English page on the Internet at www.oudekerk.nl/infoeng.htm. Information on the graves, including many pictures, can be gathered here, www.gravenopinternet.nl, with information in Dutch, English, French, German, and Spanish. This site has an interactive map; just click on the grave to learn about who is buried there.



