

1.08 Objavljeni znanstveni prispevek na konferenci
1.08 Published Scientific Conference Contribution

*Rik Opsommer**

THE TOWN ARCHIVES OF IEPER: "PAST AND PRESENT"

Abstract:

Since Ieper used to be a very important town in the Middle Ages, it had one of the most notable town-archives in Belgium. However its marvelous historical sources were almost completely destroyed during the Great War. Between 1919 and 1991 the historical and archival activity was organized inside the town's library. Only in 1991 the town archives were re-established. In less than two decades the (new) archives not only significantly enlarged its collection and manpower but could move to one of the best archives building in the country. The Ieper town archives work closely together with the state archives. However the typical Belgian situation of federal and regional governments leads to a surrealistic legal framework concerning archives. Our archives try to be the key-player in historical and genealogical research in the southern part of West-Flanders. Furthermore we try to have good contacts with local historical organizations and with local and regional archives in the whole of Europe.

Key words:

local archives, history of archives, archival legislation, archival service, archives and public relations

Izvleček:

Mestni arhiv Ieper: preteklost in sedanost

Ker je bil Ieper v srednjem veku pomembno mesto, je imel enega izmed najbolj znanih mestnih arhivov v Belgiji. Njegovi najznamenitejši zgodovinski viri pa so bili skoraj povsem uničeni med prvo svetovno vojno. Med letoma 1919 in 1991 je bila arhivska dejavnost organizirana znotraj knjižnice, mestni arhiv pa je bil ponovno ustanovljen šele leta 1991. V manj kot dveh desetletjih je arhiv močno povečal svoje zbirke in kadre ter se preselil v eno najboljših arhivskih stavb v državi. Ieperski mestni arhiv tesno sodeluje z državnim arhivom. Tipična belgijska situacija zveznih in regionalnih vlad pa vodi k nedorečenemu zakonskemu okviru delovanja arhivov. Arhiv v Iepru se trudi biti pomemben faktor pri zgodovinskih in rodoslovnih raziskavah v južnem delu province Zahodna Flamska. Prav tako skuša obdržati dobre odnose z lokalnimi zgodovinskimi organizacijami ter lokalnimi in regionalnimi arhivi v vsej Evropi.

Ključne besede:

lokalni arhivi, zgodovina arhivov, arhivska zakonodaja, arhivska služba, arhivi in odnosi z javnostjo

It is only possible to give a presentation of the Town Archives of Ieper¹ at a conference in another European region 1250 kilometers away, if one takes into account the long-term history of this nowadays rather small town as well as the difficult legal framework of the Belgian state and consequently of the Belgian archives. So this article will not exclusively focus on the archives but also on the historical context in which our archives function daily. Furthermore, the terminology

* Prof. dr. Rik Opsommer, Stadsarchief Ieper - Universiteit Gent, Stadsarchief Ieper, Weverijstraat 7, 8900 Ieper, Belgium.

¹ We would like to thank town librarian Eddy Barbry for his support.

which we have to use poses a lot of problems. Archival terminology in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium is still highly influenced by the French language and for the names of places and institutions we usually have Dutch, French, English and even German names. In this article we will use the Dutch names for places in nowadays Flanders and French names for places in France or nowadays Wallonia, mentioning the names in other languages between brackets only once. We will try to use adequate English administrative and archival words but in regard to specific Belgian institutions we will express ourselves in Dutch, trying to give an appropriate English description between brackets.

1 THE HISTORY OF IEPER

The town of Ieper (English and French: Ypres; German: Ypern) used to be one of the most important cities north of the Alps during the Middle Ages. It was first mentioned in 962 in a charter which clearly is a false one. Still Ieper celebrated its millennium in 1962. The first correct mentioning is in 1066.² Most of the 10 surrounding villages, which now are part of Ieper, also appear for the first time in the 11th or 12th century. By that time Ieper was already one of the most important cities in the county of Flanders. Together with Gent (English: Ghent) and Brugge (English: Bruges) it was one of the three members of the Provincial Estates, which had to approve the taxes claimed by the count. The historical county of Flanders, which existed until 1795, does not have much to do with present day Flanders, since the former county now is divided in three countries: Belgium (more or less the present provinces of West-Vlaanderen and Oost-Vlaanderen), France (la Flandre française) and the Netherlands (Zeeuws-Vlaanderen). Due to the production and trade of cloth, Ieper must have been enormously rich. The cloth-hall was the biggest civil gothic building north of the Alps. Its belfry (central tower) was the place where its extensive archives were kept until 1914. One can estimate that in the late Middle Ages Ieper had around 35.000 inhabitants. Its prosperity went down after 1383, the year in which the parishes outside the city walls were destroyed by the English and the inhabitants of Gent.³ These parishes were never rebuilt. Still, Ieper remained an important administrative centre up to the French Revolution and in 1559 it even became a bishop's see replacing the small French town of Thérouanne (Dutch: Terwaan), which had previously been destroyed by the emperor Charles V.⁴ In the 17th century, the town was heavily fortified by the then ruling Spaniards in their effort to resist the annexation plans by the French kings Louis XIII and Louis XIV.⁵ However, this failed and in 1678 Ieper was captured by Louis XIV and remained a part of France until the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). During this first French period, the fortifications were upgraded by the famous French architect Vauban and his staff members. The architectural realizations (cloth-hall, cathedral, town-walls) of the Ancien Régime still dominate the view and street-pattern of the present town. During the following Austrian (until 1795), French (until 1815) and Dutch (until 1830) periods, Ieper gradually lost its administrative and strategic importance and, in the

² Ieper, Elverdinge and Vlamertinge are all mentioned in LILLE, ARCHIVES DÉPARTEMENTALES DU NORD (Lille, State Archives), 16 G 1 (Chapitre Saint Pierre de Lille), 16 G 463; Stéphane LEBECQ, *La charte de Baudouin V pour Saint-Pierre de Lille (1066)*, une traduction commentée, in: *Revue du Nord*, 86 (2004), p. 567-583.

³ On these events one can consult Romain VINCKIER, *Ieper Tuindag. Zesde eeuwfeest, Ieper*, 1983.

⁴ On the diocese of Ieper one can consult Claude DUHAMEL, *Het bisdom Ieper 1607-1646*, Leuven, 1993, (unpublished master's thesis); Rosa HERPELYNCK, *Het bisdom Ieper 1762-1789*, Roeselare, 1991.

⁵ On the fortifications one can consult Octaaf MUS, Hugo CONSTANT, a.o., *Omtrent de vestingstad Ieper, (Monumenten beleven)*, Brussels, 1992.

newly formed kingdom of Belgium, it became a small remote provincial town far away from the capital and close to the French border. By 1914 the number of its inhabitants had diminished to 17.500. Rather by accident German and British troops clashed around Ieper in October 1914. Although German cavalry drove through the city on October 7 and 8, it would remain a frontline city in British hands until the armistice in 1918. Already on November 22 the town archives perished, by May 1915 the population was completely evacuated to France and by 1918 the area of Ieper was destroyed for more than 95 %. Although the British wanted to keep the "holy soil" of Ieper in ruins as a memory for their enormous losses, in the end the town was rebuilt.⁶ The reconstruction was mainly done in (neo-) gothic style, with the main buildings being almost a copy of their pre-war predecessors. It was only by the 1930s that some industrial companies settled in Ieper (the most persistent one in 1936 being Picañol, a manufacturer of weaving machines) and that its economic power increased but the number of inhabitants remained low (around 19.000 just before 1970). That changed in 1970 and 1976 when an administrative reform forced ten surrounding villages to join the city. Nowadays together with Boezinge, Brielen, Dikkebus, Elverdinge, Hollebeke, Sint-Jan, Vlamertinge, Voormezel, Zillebeke and Zuidschote Ieper comprises 130 square kilometers and 35.000 inhabitants.



Picture 1: Ieper town seal (around 1400)

2 THE HISTORY OF THE TOWN ARCHIVES OF IEPER (DUTCH: STADSARCHIEF) UNTIL 1914

Since the Middle Ages the precious town's documents were kept in the belfry tower.

After the French annexation in 1795, the archives in the whole of Belgium underwent an enormous reorganization.⁷ In Ieper Jean-Jacques Lambin (+1841) in 1807 became responsible for the separate archives of the Civil Hospices (Dutch: Burgerlijke Godshuizen), which were set up in 1796 mainly with goods of the church, and were and still are an independent public organization.⁸ In 1819 he also became

⁶ On the reconstruction of Ieper one can consult Koen BAERT, Jean-Marie BAILLEUL, a.o., *Ieper de herrezen stad, Koksijde*, 1999.

⁷ Filip WYFFELS, *De archiefwetgeving van de Franse periode 1788-1814*, (Archief- en bibliotheekwezen in België. Extranummer, 33), Brussels, 1987.

⁸ Until the Belgian law on the Commissions of Public Assistance of March 10, 1925, some aspects of charity also were provided by the Charity Bureau (Dutch: Burelen van Weldadigheid).

the first town archivist. He was succeeded by Félix Missiaen (1842-1847), Isidore Diegerick (1847-1885), Jules Cordonnier (1888-1892), Arthur Merghelynck (1892-1896) and Emile De Sagher (1896-1917). Helped by his son Alphonse, Isidore Diegerick published the first inventories and also a lot of other scientific articles on medieval Ieper.⁹ The rather curious and rich Merghelynck was attracted to genealogy. He and some of his friends, which were paid by him, made a lot of genealogical notices on local households.¹⁰ De Sagher continued inventorying the archives but also made the archives known to some famous Belgian and French historians of that time, like Georges Espinas, Henri Pirenne, Prosper De Pelsmaeker, Lodewijk Gilliodts-Van Severen and Guillaume Des Marez.¹¹ This resulted in a lot of text-editions in the years just before the Great War.¹² Especially the medieval charters must have been of enormous value. Approximately 7.000 letters of commitment between cloth-traders were considered unique in its kind.¹³ Unfortunately, the town itself did not have much interest in these "old papers" and some archivists clashed with their hierarchical superiors. In August 1914, for example, De Sagher was suspended for two months (September and October). Because of the outbreak of war, he had left the town for Calais without the proper authorization. Whether he ever returned to Ieper is unknown.

All these archival treasures eventually vanished in 1914. Archivist De Sagher seemingly did not show any initiative in rescuing the archives when the belfry tower was hit by German artillery fire on November 22, 1914.¹⁴ Since the tower was being renovated at that time, the surrounding wooden construction added to the catastrophe. Within one or two days, the whole historical archives and the records which were in the equally destroyed cloth-hall, vanished. Rumors that British troops later took archives from the rubble must be considered a fairytale since until today only five pieces of the old archives - recognizable from the 19th century stamp which was put on it: "Archives de la ville d'Ypres" - were recovered. These pieces probably had already been illegally taken by someone before the Great War.¹⁵

The aftermath of this catastrophe is a story of its own. During the war the town administration settled in Le Touquet Paris-Plage (departement Pas-de-Calais) and De Sagher lived 25 km away in Cayeux-sur-Mer (departement Somme). In April 1916, De Sagher made a report on behalf of the town concerning the value of the perished archives, which he estimated at 478.291 francs. The aim was clear: the town had good hopes to obtain huge damage compensation after the war. However, the

⁹ Isidore DIEGERICK, *Inventaire analytique et chronologique des chartes et documents appartenant aux archives de la ville d'Ypres*, 7 volumes, Ypres, 1853-1868.

¹⁰ Arthur MERGHELYNCK, *Vade-mecum pratique et utile de connaissances historiques et indicateur nobiliaire et patricien de ces contrées*, Tournai 1897; Kristof PAPIN, *Zoekgids voor het fonds Merghelynck. Vijf genealogische vormingsavonden*, Ieper, 1997.

¹¹ Emile DE SAGHER, *Notice sur les archives communales d'Ypres et documents pour servir à l'histoire de Flandre du XIII^e au XV^e siècle*, Ypres, 1898.

¹² Perhaps the most important one was the edition of the oldest town accounts. Guillaume DES MAREZ, Emile DE SAGHER, *Comptes de la ville d'Ypres 1267 à 1329*, (Commission royale d'histoire), 2 volumes, Bruxelles, 1909-1913.

¹³ Guillaume DES MAREZ, Carlos WYFFELS, *Analyses de reconnaissances de dettes passées devant les échevins d'Ypres 1249-1291*, (Commission royale d'histoire), Brussels, 1991. This edition is based on a manuscript written by Des Marez in 1898-1899.

¹⁴ IEPER, STADSARCHIEF (= Ieper, Town Archives) (Further as SAI), Stadsarchief, *Rapport des séances du Comité d'administration de la ville d'Ypres pendant les jours de terreur et de ruine de novembre 1914*, p.23: "Le beffroy et les halles ont pris feu, nous n'avons aucun espoir de sauver ces bâtiments, par suite du manque d'eau et manque de bras".

¹⁵ SAI, Ieperse Aanwinsten, 206-207, 270-272.

enormous task of rebuilding the devastated regions after the First World War meant that the topic of the archives only came back on the agenda in 1929. The Belgian state set up a peculiar legal framework for compensation of war damages. In the end, special tribunals and courts for war damages had to decide how much each individual, company or institution would benefit. Logically the most important tribunal had its see at Ieper.¹⁶ The town finally claimed 445.372 francs but the Belgian state presented a report by a Brussels librarian indicating that the actual value was only 129.812 francs. Ieper countered with a new report, written by the famous historians Henri De Sagher, (son of the late Emile De Sagher) and Henri Pirenne and the Brussels town archivist Guillaume Des Marez. In November 1930 the town was awarded 448.356 francs.¹⁷ Still, the Belgian state appealed at the court in Gent, but in vain. On May 13, 1931, Ieper was awarded the mentioned huge compensation, which it had to use to reconstruct the lost historical information.¹⁸ However, that part of the sentence never would be executed in the following half century.

3 EVERYTHING LOST?

Those who think that nowadays it is impossible to study the history of Ieper before 1914 are wrong. First of all, some important documents, like town accounts or the 19th century registers of births, marriages and deaths were made in double and kept at other places (inside or outside of town), so the information is still available. The first ones are at the Brussels State Archives (microfilms are at the town archives), the latter ones used to be at the local court house (nowadays at the State Archives in Beveren but either on microfilm, in photocopy or digitally available at the town archives). Since the late Middle Ages, two copies of the town accounts were made. One was kept at the belfry, the other was sent to the county audit court in Lille (French: Chambre des Comptes; Dutch: Rekenkamer). When Lille was annexed by the French, the archives concerning the Habsburg Netherlands finally ended up in Brussels.¹⁹ Due to its enormous administrative value, handmade copies (with the same legal value) were made of all the registers of births, marriages and deaths between 1921 and 1923 (not only for Ieper but for Boezinge, Brielen, Hollebeke, Sint-Jan, Voormezele, Zillebeke and Zuidschote as well). Unfortunately, the registers of Ieper for the period before the French Revolution, for which only one copy existed, vanished, which is of course an enormous loss for genealogical researches. The situation is different for some of the villages which now are part of the city. Some of these registers are still conserved (nowadays either in the Beveren State Archives or in our town archives) for parts of the 17th and 18th century.

The most important "genealogical" rescue however, originated out of a remarkable situation. As already mentioned, archivist Merghelynck collected an enormous amount of genealogical notes, mainly based on information out of the pre-war town-archives. Since he quarreled a lot with the local politicians, he made a will in which he excluded the town of Ieper ever inheriting anything. His notes were

¹⁶ Karel VELLE, Joëlle DHONDT, *Inventarissen van de archieven van de Hoven en Rechtbanken voor Oorlogsschade in Vlaanderen en rechtsopvolgers 1919-1936*, (Rijksarchief te Beveren. Inventarissen, 59), Brussel, 2001.

¹⁷ BRUSSEL, ALGEMEEN RIJKSARCHIEF (= Brussels, State Archives), *Dienst der Verwoeste Gewesten*, 2497.

¹⁸ BEVEREN, RIJKSARCHIEF (= Beveren, State Archives), *Rechtbank Oorlogsschade Ieper*, 120, nr. 49146, Hof Oorlogsschade Gent, 34, nr. 15549.

¹⁹ Erik AERTS, *Geschiedenis en archief van de Rekenkamers*, (Algemeen Rijksarchief en Rijksarchief in de Provinciën. Gidsen, 27), Brussels, 1996.

donated to the Brussels Royal Library, where they still are (for a major part also on microfilm at our town archives). At present they are the most important source for genealogical studies concerning the town of Ieper. Furthermore, Merghelynck kept some limited personal archives in his superb mansion. Together with the furniture and other treasures, these archives were brought to safety to France, and returned to Ieper after the Great War. Now, these rather small archives are in the town archives whereas his mansion has become a museum, operated (but not owned) by the town.

Still, the most valuable archives which were partly saved were those of the Civil Hospices. In May 1915 the archives left Ieper for the small village of Loker for the duration of the war, something which happened again during World War II. It is estimated that due to both evacuations, probably almost half of these archives are lost. Nevertheless, our oldest piece still comes out of these archives.²⁰ This is a charter from 1208 which describes the donation of a house in the present Rijselstraat to the Hospice of the Holy Spirit.

Like the town archives, the archives of most of the surrounding villages also perished during the Great War. Only those of the villages to the west and south of Ieper (Dikkebus, Elverdinge, Vlamertinge), more or less survived the catastrophe. Unfortunately, after the war destiny struck again when in Vlamertinge on January 1, 1922, the temporary wooden church caught fire and the local archives, which were in a wooden shed next to it, also suffered great losses.

Since the state archives in Brugge were never destroyed, a lot of archives concerning the surroundings of Ieper survived the First World War. The archives of the "Kasselrij Ieper" (French: châtelainie) are certainly the most important of them.²¹ Since 1992 these "Kasselrij" archives are stored in the town archives.

On the contrary, early in 1915 the town librarian Julien Antony was able to organize the evacuation of the Public Library. The library not only housed popular books but also a lot of older books going back to the 16th century. The inventory from 1867 mentions in all 4.326 books for example.²² Furthermore, a former local librarian, town mayor and minister of the interior, Alphonse Vandeneereboom, bequeathed a lot of books to his native town in 1884. On September 19, 1919, most of this collection came back from Le Touquet Paris-Plage packed inside 382 wooden boxes. Unfortunately, they never were inventoried again. Recently, the books printed before 1800 were handed over from the library to the town archives and a new inventory was started.

Furthermore, the 19th century newspaper collection (illustrating the typical Belgian catholic-liberal political struggle) was also rescued due to the efforts of the before mentioned librarian and now has finally found refuge at the town archives.²³ Recently, almost the entire collection (until 1940) has been put on-line and can be consulted everywhere in the world.²⁴

²⁰ SAI, OCMW-Archief, *Oorkonden Heilige Geest*, 105.

²¹ Until the French Revolution the county of Flanders was divided in a number of "kasselrijen". Parts of present day Ieper, however were situated in the "kasselrij" of Veurne.

²² Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque publique de la ville d'Ypres, Ypres, 1867.

²³ The oldest newspaper present is the number 40 edition of "Le Propagateur" from January 13, 1819.

²⁴ www.historischekranten.be (consulted on January 6^t 2012).

4 THE TOWN ARCHIVES AS PART OF THE TOWN LIBRARY (1919-1991)

For almost three quarters of a century, Ieper did not have any proper town archives. What was left was kept in the library, which was housed in a typical reconstruction-style building in the Sint-Janstraat from 1933. The librarian acted as an archivist at the same time. Both librarian-archivists, Julien Antony (1914-1946) and Octaaf Mus (1946-1990) tried to collect as much historical documents as possible, but an independent archival service did not exist. Still, Mus became also the archivist of the Commission of Public Assistance (Dutch: Commissie voor Openbare Onderstand), which changed in 1976 into the Public Centre for Social Welfare (Dutch: Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn). Between 1949 and 1972 Mus made some good inventories of the old archives (before 1795) of the different hospices. The 19th century archives, however, remained untouched.

In the late 1980s a curious evolution inside the library would lead to the creation of a new town archives. In 1989, two local politicians, a town's elderman and the president of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, decided to establish a subdivision for "genealogical and social archives" inside the library. Originally, its main aim was to promote genealogical researches and to obtain as much local historical documents as possible. It now seems quite odd that an institution, which mainly collected funeral announcements and mourning cards, would be the nucleus for our present day archives. However, the dynamics this subdivision created led to the official foundation of the (new) town archives within two years. By 1991 the town archives were again an independent organization within the town administration with one archivist, a part-time scientific employee and since 1992 its proper location in the Lange Meersstraat in an inadequate former building of the employment office. At that time, nobody expected that less than two decades later the archives and the library - both housed on two unadapted different locations - would join forces again in an impressive new high-standard building.

5 THE TOWN ARCHIVES OF IEPER BEFORE MOVING TO THE NEERSTAD (1991-2009)

This period should be considered as the start of the expansion of our archives. First of all, in 1992 the State Archives were prepared to give the archives of the "kasselrij" in loan for 30 years if the necessary staff would be available.²⁵

After a hesitating start with three archivists within five years, the number of professional staff gradually increased from one and a half to five full-time equivalents since 2005. Also the financial means for acquiring archives and books increased.

This positive change was also due to the new policy followed by our archives.

Since 1996 the town archives sought close contacts with other archives inside and outside Belgium, which increased the pressure on the town to improve the material and financial situation of its archives. Visits (with members of the town administration and local politicians) to new archives buildings in Aalst, Lier and Middelburg would be very convincing to obtain the necessary new location. We organized the annual international "Zeeuws-Vlaams archivarissenoverleg" (a yearly

²⁵ Officially: "Overeenkomst voor in bewaring geven van archief en teruggeven van gemeentearchief aan de stad Ieper" from August 18, 1992. Some archives of the villages now being part of Ieper were given back to the town at the same moment.

colloquium open to all archivists in the provinces of West-Vlaanderen, Oost-Vlaanderen and Zeeland) in 1997 and 2008 and played a keyrole in establishing the "West-Vlaams Archievenplatform, a rather informal yearly meeting of all archivists in the province of West-Vlaanderen.

Even more important were the contacts with local historians and genealogists, who also supported the expansions of our archives. Since 1991 an archives commission, set up with politicians, local historians and genealogists, a representative of the State Archives and our own staff tends to gather yearly in order to discuss and improve the working of our archives.²⁶ Since the town archivist is the archivist of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, an unofficial cooperation between both institutions was set up concerning the old archives. This would lead to the official contract of March 2, 2006, in which the Public Centre for Social Welfare promised to consign all its archives prior to 1925 to the town archives.²⁷

Three other events would determine the history of our archives in the new millennium. In October 2004 we finally got a second staff archivist who became responsible for records management and the 20th century archives, at that moment still in the cellar of the rebuilt cloth hall. Furthermore, the Flemish government set up heritage cells (in Ieper in 2004), aiming at bringing cultural heritage closer to ordinary citizens. In 2009 the municipal heritage cell was expanded to the surrounding region and renamed CO7 or Cultuuroverleg 7 (Cultural Consultation Seven), since it concerns seven towns and villages. Finally, at the end of 2003, the town bought some of the old buildings of the already mentioned Picañol factory and decided this would be the new location for the library, the archives and the two town academies (institutions for music, drama and plastic arts). However, it would take another three years before the first brick was laid and another two years to complete this marvelous project. In May and June 2009 the library and the archives moved to the new Neerstad building. The name (French: Basse Ville) was chosen after the mid-17th century place name, given by the Spanish when they incorporated this lower area into the town's fortifications.

6 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As most Belgian town archives, our archives work within a very complicated legal framework. The State Archives are still a Federal institution, culture is in the hands of the Flemish Community and the supervision on local government is done by the Flemish Region. The Belgian Archives Law of June 24, 1955, as adapted by a Federal Law of May 6, 2009, and its executive decrees are still valid.²⁸ For towns they mainly focus on the inspection and possibility to stock local archives in State Archives. Article 132 of the 2005 Flemish Municipal Decree makes the College of Mayor and Aldermen responsible for the town archives. This article is the direct successor of the similar former article 100 in the Belgian Municipal Law of 1836. On July 9, 2010, the Flemish government made a new, own Archival Decree.²⁹ But quarrels concerning authority between the Federal and Flemish level led to the fact

²⁶ At present this commission has 14 members: 2 archives staff, a representative from the Town Library, a representative from the Town Museum, a representative from the State Archives, 4 local historians and genealogists and 5 politicians.

²⁷ The contract remarkably also stipulated that in the reading room of the new archives building, the coat of arms of the Public Centre for Social Welfare had to be clearly visible.

²⁸ Belgisch Staatsblad, 12/081955, 19/052009.

²⁹ Belgisch Staatsblad, 5/08/2010.

that both the State Archives and the Flemish Government are suing each other in court. Furthermore, there are no executive decrees for the Flemish Archives Decree. And finally, there are almost no jurists employed either in the State Archives or in the regional or local archives. This "de iure" confusion leads in concreto to a "de facto" slight anarchy. One could conclude that on the legal level, the Belgian archival world is as surreal as the Belgian state. The State Archives appear to have the best long term archival knowledge, but the Flemish government (supported by most provincial archives and big town archives and by the Flemish Union of Librarians, Archivists and Documentalists³⁰) has most of the money. The final outcome of this quarrel is at present unknown. For local archives this leads to a lot of opportunities and autonomy. In a way a town like Ieper can decide rather autonomously how to organize its archives as long as everything is more or less in order. Of course, since the town has a contract with the State Archives concerning the "Kasselrij"-archives, it has to meet some extra standards (mainly concerning staff). That contract also stipulates that the town archivist, when authorized by the State Archives, can fulfill some inspections on behalf of the State Archives. In practice the town archives are still under the supervision of the General State Archivist, his Responsible for Flanders or the State Archivist in Brugge.

Our archives follow Federal and Flemish legislation concerning privacy, public access to documents and intellectual property. Local legislation stipulates the access to documents kept at the town archives and fixes the prices for copies and other services delivered by our archives. A contract from July 5, 2011, with the neighboring small village of Heuvelland means that our archives offer the possibility to Heuvelland to use our infrastructure for the storage of their older archives.

7 THE NEERSTAD-BUILDING

The new library and archives were built in a public-private sharing agreement. There is an underground parking lot. The ground floor comprises around 3.000 square meters and is completely shared by the library and the archives. The library has around another 1.000 square meters on top of their wing. Private luxurious flats were built above a part of the archives. The fact that all the archives are on the ground level is an enormous advantage. We do not need to use elevators and the archives are less threatened by possible flooding. The front office of the archives consists of a spacious reading room and three offices. In all, 24 people can sit in the reading room. The back part has a long corridor with in all nine rooms to the left and right. Seven of them are storerooms, an eighth one has been transformed into a scanning room, but can, if necessary, be used as a quarantine room; the ninth one is a room where we can easily receive huge archives and deliveries. One storage room has been conceived as an archives room, but is now in use as the library depot. It could however, easily be transformed into an archives room. At present we use six storerooms of which one contains our maps, plans and posters. The five other ones all are equipped with compact mobile shelving. The total back office storage capacity is around 5,9 running kilometers. Another 0,4 kilometers open storage is available in the reading room. The storerooms are equipped with the necessary fire-detection, a constant temperature and humidity air-conditioning and anti-burglary

³⁰ The VVBAD or "Vlaamse Vereniging voor Bibliotheek, Archief en Documentatiewezen" was founded to promote libraries in Flanders in 1921. Since 1984 it has a section for archivists. On its history: Frans HEYMANS, Nu van hooger hand... Vijfenzeventig jaar Vlaamse Vereniging voor Bibliotheek-, Archief- en Documentatiewezen, Antwerpen, 1996.

systems. Four of them have a direct emergency exit. The reading room and each storage room are provided with internet connecting points. Furthermore we share a multi-purpose auditorium for 100 persons inside the library wing. This room can be used for lectures but also for small exhibitions. The auditorium "Alpha & Omega" is named after the late 15th local chamber of rhetoric (in Dutch: rederijkerskamer).³¹ The archives' reading room, decorated with the coats of arms of Ieper and those of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, is named after the archivist Jean-Jacques Lambin.



Picture 2: Entrance to the library and the archives in Ieper



Picture 3: Archives' reading room

³¹ First mentioned in 1483. SAI, Ieperse Aanwinsten, 93.

8 OUR COLLECTIONS

Our main old archives consist of the "Kasselrij"-archives (approximately 300 running meters) and the archives of the Civil Hospices before 1795 (approximately 30 meters). The former concern mainly the records (either in registers or individual pieces) of criminal and civil trials, which were held at the different "kasselrij" courts in the 16th, 17th and 18th century. Perhaps the most remarkable objects are two 15th century registers in which you can find some of the oldest feudal law judgments in the county of Flanders.³² The old archives of the Civil Hospices consist of the charters, registers and other papers from different medieval hospitals, nursery and pensioners homes. The oldest piece nowadays at our archives is a charter concerning the Hospice of the Holy Spirit going back to the year 1208. Small but very interesting are parts of the old archives of the former abbey of Mesen, which are kept at our archives.³³ These archives were at the small town of Mesen until 1914, but got dispersed due to the First World War. German soldiers took a lot of the undestroyed pieces as war trophies. After the war most of the archives ended up at the Brugge state archives, but in the last decade we also obtained some important pieces from German citizens.³⁴ The second oldest document at our archives is a charter from 1219 in which the archbishop of Reims confirms some donations of land in Oostvleteren, Nieuwkerke and Bailleul to the abbey of Mesen.³⁵ In addition, on January 18, 2009, the Mesen Museum Committee also put down its documents from the former abbey at our archives. Then there are also the general acquisitions (Dutch: leperse Aanwinsten) in which all kind of separate old documents, mostly bought since the 1950s, have been put together. One of its crown pieces is a description of the fortifications of Ieper around 1700 made by Hue de Caligny a principal staff member of the well known Vauban.³⁶ The still not inventoried archives of the 18th and 19th century noble families de Buus and de Navigheer more or less complete our older archives. The de Buus archives are very important for the village of Hollebeke since that family owned the local "seigneurie," whereas the de Navigheer family had a lot of possessions in the village of Kemmel, nowadays a part of Heuvelland. So it is not a surprise that the de Navigheer pieces were jointly acquired by Ieper and Heuvelland in 2011.

For the 19th century we again have to point to the archives of the Civil Hospices (25 meters). For the 20th century the town archives and those of the surrounding villages are quite complete (770 running meters). The archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare are still at their own locations but will probably be transferred to our archives in the next decade. Two remarkable private archives of architects who took part in the reconstruction after the Great War are now at our town archives. The archives of Raphaël Speybrouck (approximately 25 running meters) were acquired in 1997; those of Jules Coomans (approximately 30 running meters), who was also the official town's architect, were bought in 2010. These archives can be completed with information out of the archives of Julien Antony as a State Commissioner for the Reconstruction in the 1920s. On the political level we recently obtained the personal archives of Jerome Stubbe, a long time Member of Parliament;

³² SAI, Kasselrij Ieper, 1^{ste} reeks, 237-238.

³³ Nicolas HUYGHEBAERT, Abbaye de Notre-Dame à Messines, in: *Monasticon belge*, 3: Province de Flandre occidentale, Liège, 1960, p. 211-238, with references to older inventories.

³⁴ Acquired from the families Hellwig (2000), Haaga (2000) and Broesamle (2010).

³⁵ SAI, Abdij Mesen, 18/11/1219.

³⁶ SAI, Ieperse Aanwinsten, 63.

those of Jan Durnez, a long time Provincial Deputy; those of Yves Leterme, a former Prime Minister and those of Paul Breyne, a former Provincial Governor. All four of them were also very active in local politics as members of the Town Council, Elderman or Mayor. Out of the numerous other personal archives, those of Freddy Laplace (local Chamber of Commerce, obtained in 2007) and Rolande Petit (local Red Cross branch, obtained in 2009) are certainly worth mentioning. A lot of local social and sport organizations also placed their archives at our archives. The largest and most important one is certainly that of the local Scout Association (Sint-Martinus-Scouts Ieper), which was founded in 1935.³⁷

Since the author of this article is not directly responsible for the modern archives, we will not elaborate on this item any further. For the moment around 780 running meters of modern archives (mostly beginning in 1919) concerning Ieper and its incorporated villages are at the town archives.

The most important part of our collection consists of old maps and views of Ieper and the surrounding region. Until 1795 some of the villages, which are at present a part of Ieper were situated in the "kasselrij" of Veurne (English: Furnes).³⁸ Further, the "kasselrijen" of Cassel, Bailleul and Warneton almost bordered the present day Ieper, so we have maps of these regions as well. Due to the enormous historical importance of our fortifications, we collect plans of fortifications in the neighboring Belgian and Northern French towns as well. However, the most important views of the town ended up in the Town Museum, since their collection was taken out of the library in the early 1980s before the town archives were re-established.

A similar problem exists with the photographic collection, which was also at the library until the 1980s. Originally an odd division led to the fact that the photos of buildings ended up at the museum and those depicting people stayed at the "genealogical and social archives". The digital revolution however nowadays makes it possible to put both the museum and archives collections on-line, so this division will be solved in the near future. One of the most remarkable photo collections (photos and photonegatives), which ended up at our archives is that of a local press photographer, Gilbert Bossaert, which enables us to show Ieper between the early 1950s and the mid 1990s. Including our other 20th century images our collection at present amounts to approximately 90.000 inventoried images. To this we can add the already mentioned nucleus of our archives: around 60.000 funeral announcements and 20.000 mourning cards, the oldest of them going back to the first half of the 19th century. For the inventorying of the photographic collection and the funeral collection, we rely on two senior citizens who know the history of Ieper after the Second World War quite well. Our important 19th and 20th century newspaper collection already can be consulted online (up to 1940 at home, and up to 1972 at our archives). The old prints (books printed before 1800), rescued in 1915, pose another problem. We estimate having around 3.500 of them but at present only 1.400 have been inventoried. We have to add that imprints of Ieper are systematically bought at old books shops and at auctions. For this we can rely on an excellent inventory of local printers made between 1873 and 1881 by the former assistant-archivist Alphonse Diegerick.³⁹ The two oldest imprints of Ieper nowadays available at

³⁷ Norbert LAMERANT, Luc PYNCKET, *Inventaris van het Scoutsarchief Master de Cock, Ieper*, 2011.

³⁸ One of our most important items is a map of the "kasselrij" Veurne from 1648, of which only three copies are known to exist. SAI, *Kaarten en Plannen*, 165.

³⁹ Alphonse DIEGERICK, *Essai de bibliographie yproise. Étude sur les imprimeurs yprois 1547-1834*, Ypres, 1881.

our archives are a religious book by Thomas Vlas, which was printed at Paris in 1531 but distributed by Gaspar van den Steene at Ieper and an imprint of the costumary laws of the Kasselrij printed at Ieper by Antoon van Volden in 1571.⁴⁰ The town archives possess also a large collection of posters of all kinds of manifestations, which took place in Ieper since the 1920s. Some of them have been put in frames so it is easier to use them for all kind of exhibitions. For the interbellum this collection mainly focuses on the typical Flemish "kermissen" (English: fairs) with typical Flemish music, cycling, archery and even finch contest. Noteworthy are posters of the Cats Festival, which in its present form takes place since 1955. Even some of the original drawings of the masks and wagons used at the cat parade and designed by the well known Frans Van Immerseel are preserved at our archives. The same goes for the original sketches of the stained window in the town hall, depicting the town's history and made by Arno Brys in 1970.⁴¹ Since the Cats Festival was of enormous importance in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, all kinds of other cat objects arrived at the archives as well. Even the official jewelry of the cat's queen (a well known beauty contest in the 1960s) is nowadays in a special cupboard inside the archivist's office. The archives also try to collect all kind of printed and written objects, which deal with local organizations or with the political events (federal, regional and local elections). We have, for example a lot of party political leaflets and posters since the 1960s. We try to do the same for all kind of sporting events. The best known sporting events being the Rally (since 1965) and the Gent-Ieper cycling event (since 1934).⁴² These collections are in a way an ersatz since we do not have the archives of the organizing committees in question.

Although the In Flanders Fields Museum collects all objects, which have something to do with the Great War, some less important items continue to turn up at the archives. Since the town gets a lot of important and less important official foreign visitors, the number of relation gifts is huge. Monthly we receive remembrance shields given by British military or other institutions. However, delegations from all over the world visit the city. For example one of our most recent gifts was a shield by the "Policia e Kosovës/Policija Kosova". Perhaps the most important pieces in which the 20th century history is reflected are the three official visitors' books (Dutch: gulden boek). The first one (for the interbellum period) is on display at the museum. The second one, for the years 1944-1967, is at the archives.⁴³ Curiously, the first one to sign was the well-known Polish general Stanislaw Maczek, since Ieper in 1944 was liberated by Polish troops.⁴⁴ The most recent one (with the signatures of pope John-Paul II, Mother Teresa and Bob Geldof) is still at the mayor's office. Of course you can find signatures of Belgian and British monarchs in all three of them.

Last but not least, due to the efforts of the librarian Octaaf Mus, the town has an enormous scientific historical library. This library, which at present has 19.000 digitally retrievable volumes - around 3.000 still have to be inventoried - focuses on typical local subjects: the medieval cloth industry, the religious difficulties around 1570, Jansenism (a 17th century heretical theory developed by Jansenius, bishop of

⁴⁰ SAI, *Oude Drukken*, 873/LINE/1531, 34/(09)/1571.

⁴¹ Jan BREYNE, *Arno Brys luister van Ieper*, Ieper, 1976.

⁴² Pol MORISSE, Marcel TRYBOU, *Gent-Ieper 50 jaar Kattekoers*, Ieper, 1990

⁴³ SAI, *Gulden boek 1944-1967*.

⁴⁴ Roger VERBEKE, G. MANDELINCK, a.o., *De eerste Poolse pantserdivisie en de bevrijding van Vlaanderen in 1944*, Poperinge, 1984.

Ieper), fortifications, the consequences of the First World War. Furthermore, all books concerning the history of the southern part of West-Vlaanderen and the formerly Dutch speaking part of Northern France are acquired. For genealogists, we buy all possible books and magazines on families who once lived in the area of Ieper. Finally, we try to gather all literature on archival theory and archival practice.

9 HOW TO DISCOVER OUR COLLECTIONS, THE NUMBER OF VISITORS AND HOW WE REACH THE PUBLIC

To get access to our archives a small fee (2,50 or 5,00 € for one year) is due. During the years the number of registered visitors slightly increased (for example: 1996: 250; 2001: 284; 2006: 258; 2011: 329). Most of them (around 65 %) come for genealogical purposes. However, recently we see an increase in the number of persons looking for the original plans of houses. In 2011 115 persons were local citizens, 102 came from other places in West-Vlaanderen, 43 out of the rest of Belgium and 69 were foreigners. Of these 66 were French. Add to this some visitors from Wallonia and you can understand why the personnel responsible for the reading room certainly has to know French as well. This "French connection" increases when you take into account that yearly at least 100 written genealogical demands are handled as well. This time-consuming service comes at a minimum fee of 9,00 €. French genealogists from nearby Nord-Pas-de-Calais are always invited to come and perform their research themselves. It is very difficult to estimate how many times a visitor comes in each year. Some local ones we see almost daily but others only come in only once or twice. In all we yearly register around 2.000 visits. The fact that the public is allowed to take digital pictures means that people who come from further away nowadays take a lot of pictures. So they tend to visit our archives only once or twice, whereas they came for example six or seven times some years ago.

The archives are a bit hidden on the town's Website.⁴⁵ You have to look under "Arts and Culture" to find us. The latter has to do with the fact that the archives have been classified under that topic in the town's organigram. On that Webpage you find the basic information, including an overview of all our archives. For individual inventories you have to come in the reading room. At present some are still in a printed form, others are digitally available. They have been made in Microsoft-Word or in Access. One of the main challenges is to make all these inventories accessible with one Aquabrowser. For the moment, together with the In Flanders Field Museum and the Town Museum, we are in the process of putting as much information as possible in an Adlib system.⁴⁶ However, the typical Belgian administrative autonomy will not make it possible to put all our information into that system. For financial reasons our scientific library will stay inside the provincial Winob-system for libraries.⁴⁷ Finally, two projects which are organized and funded by the CO7 heritage circle run under other software. These are the already mentioned newspaper-project and the Westhoek Image Bank. In Dutch this project runs under the name "Westhoek verbeeldt" and the local subproject under the name "Ieper verbeeldt". It is aimed at putting images, which are in private hands, online. It is funny to establish that the

⁴⁵ www.ipeper.be/default.aspx?SGREF=2517 (consulted on January the 6th, 2012).

⁴⁶ Adlib is a Dutch firm which, since 1986, develops software for libraries, museums and archives. www.adlibsoft.com (consulted on January 6, 2012).

⁴⁷ Winob or "West-Vlaams Informatienetwerk van Openbare Bibliotheeken" takes almost all the costs at their expenses. www.winob.be (consulted on January 6, 2012).

images in private hands finally will be on another image bank then the one which is owned by our archives.

Next to the classical written invitations, press releases and our good contacts with the regional television station, we have two other new media to contact the archives minded public. Since 2009 each trimester we publish a digital newsletter to which anyone can subscribe.⁴⁸ Furthermore, since 2011 we are on Facebook with all kinds of information and images on our archives and its activities.⁴⁹ For the moment 258 persons subscribed to this site. It was actually this social media tool that originated the connection between our archives and the organizers of this colloquium.

10 PUBLICATIONS, EXHIBITIONS, LECTURES, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

First in cooperation with the State Archives, the town archives started to publish books in a series called "Ieperse Historische Studies". In all 11 volumes were published between 1996 and 2004. Most of these books were actually reprints of older studies concerning the region of Ieper. However, four were completely new studies. Unfortunately, since there is no agreement with the local historical societies and since there is a lack of good articles, the publication policy will have to be reviewed. Ieper has, remarkably enough, three historical societies and then there are even smaller organizations in three of the villages which now are part of Ieper. All these six societies have their own periodicals.⁵⁰

Almost on a yearly basis our archives organize an exhibition. The first exhibitions on poverty in the Netherlands and on prostitution (1998) were in cooperation with the State Archives. Later our archives started to make exhibitions on its own. These exhibitions either take place in our own building (when it is a little exhibition) or in the town's Cultural Centre. The best received ones were on the Cats Festival (2000), the Ministers of Ieper (2006), local sports (2007), Vauban and the local fortifications (2007), the printers of Ieper (2009) and local public transport (2011). Three times we were able to edit an interesting catalogue as well.⁵¹ In 2002 we set up an exhibition on the history of Ieper at the castle in our German twin-town of Siegen.

Furthermore, we organize historical lectures on a regular basis. For 2011 we staged one on the repression after the First World War and one on the history of the FC Brugge soccer club, the best known team in this region.

⁴⁸ More information can be obtained by sending an e-mail to modern.archief@ieper.be.

⁴⁹ www.facebook.com/stadsarchief.ieper (consulted on January the 6th, 2012).

⁵⁰ Westhoek, tijdschrift voor genealogie en familiekunde in de Vlaamse en Franse Westhoek (since 1985); Iepers Kwartier, tijdschrift voor heemkunde (since 1965); De Omwalling, mededelingenblad van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis en Vestingbouwkunde Ieper (since 1992); De Boezingenaar (since 1974); Flambertus (since 2001); Selebeke (since 2007).

⁵¹ Jan BREYNE, Sabine DEJONCKHEERE, a.o., *Kattenhistories. Van Kattenfeest tot Kattenstoet*, Ieper, 2000; Jules ALLEMONT, Rik OPSOMMER, a.o., *Vauban en de Ieperse vestingen*, Ieper, 2007 (a separate catalogue exists in French); Rik OPSOMMER, Katrien GOUDSEUNE, a.o., *Op 't perron. Trein en tram in Ieper*, Ieper, 2011.

11 COOPERATION WITH OTHER SCIENTIFIC, HERITAGE AND LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

Our archives work together with other local key players in the historical sector. For exhibitions, we lend and borrow pieces with the In Flanders Fields Museum and the Town Museum. The same goes with other archives, mainly in the province of West-Vlaanderen. For 2013 we are planning a joint cross-border exhibition and perhaps an international colloquium with the colleagues of Dunkerque and Diksmuide on the Treaty of Utrecht and the further evolution of the Franco-Belgian border. As for the Vauban exhibition, we hope to get some European Interreg subventions for this 1713-2013 project.

The already mentioned on-line newspaper project and the "Westhoek verbeeldt" project are elaborated in joint-venture with the CO7 heritage cell, which provides the necessary funding. The local part of the latter project is mainly worked out by two volunteers, who on Friday mornings receive local people who bring in photos to be digitalized and to be put on the internet. Each six weeks all volunteers and contributors of this project are invited for a drink. With the Scout Association there exists an even more intense cooperation. Each Wednesday morning two elderly volunteers come to inventory their archives. But we can call upon this organization as well for preparation purposes and technical support during exhibitions and lectures. Since these Scouts have a good network with other local associations and private persons, they are very important for us to detect archives in the region which are still in private hands. The main archivist and the archivist responsible for the digital archives are also board members of numerous historical and archival societies. There are informal contacts with a lot of archives in Belgium and neighboring countries. Especially we mention the "Zeeuws Archief" at Middelburg, the "Noord-Hollands Archief" at Haarlem and the town archives of Dunkerque, Ratingen and Siegen. Both archivists give lectures at various colloquia. This increases the general awareness of the town archives as well. In all we can conclude that a century after the 1914 catastrophe, the town archives of Ieper is again a key player among the small town Flemish archives.

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE HISTORY OF IEPER AND ITS ARCHIVES⁵²

- Jules Emiel CORMILLIE, *Ieper door de eeuwen heen*, Ieper (1950).
- Octaaf MUS. *Inventaris van het archief van de Commissie van Openbare Onderstand Ieper. Oud regime zonder de oorkonden, (Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de liefdadigheidsinstellingen te Ieper, 11)*, Ieper (1972).
- Octaaf MUS, Paul TRIO, *De geschiedenis van de middeleeuwse grootstad Ieper. Van Karolingische villa tot de destructie in 1914*, Gent (2010).
- Rik OPSOMMER, De opbouw van het Stadsarchief Ieper waar in 1914 de archieven verloren zijn gegaan, in: *Bibliotheek- en Archiefgids*, 74 (1998), p.2-5.
- Rik OPSOMMER, Het Iepers stadsarchief en de eerste wereldoorlog, in: *Archief- en Bibliotheekwezen in België*, 73 (2002), p.13-26.

⁵² This bibliography contains the basic literature on which our article bases. More detailed archival, book and article references can be found in the footnotes. Elderly literature has not been listed.

POVZETEK

MESTNI ARHIV IEPER: PRETEKLOST IN SEDANJOST

Korenine mesta leper segajo v 11. stoletje. Zaradi tekstilne proizvodnje in trgovine s tekstilom je kraj postal eno bogatejših in pomembnejših mest v nekdanjem okrožju Flanders. Ob koncu srednjega veka se je njegova ekonomska moč zmanjšala, leper pa je vseeno ostal pomemben upravni, cerkveni in vojaški center vse do francoske revolucije, kar dokazujejo mestna katedrala in utrdbe. V 19. stoletju je mesto postalo nekakšna pozabljena točka v novonastalem belgijskem kraljestvu. To je spremenila prva svetovna vojna. Med boji je bil leper popolnoma uničen, njegov dragoceni mestni arhiv pa uničen že 22. novembra 1914. Čeprav je bil v lepru že od leta 1819 prisoten arhivar, reševalna akcija ni stekla. Mesto je bilo ponovno zgrajeno v dvajsetih letih, vendar je potrebovalo veliko časa za izboljšanje svoje ekonomske in kulturne pozicije. Prejelo je sicer tudi vojno odškodnino za uničen arhiv, vendar denar kasneje ni bil porabljen v arhivske namene. Na srečo vse le ni bilo izgubljeno. Velik del samostojnega arhiva bolnišnic, ki sega v 13. stoletje, je bil evakuiran v Francijo. Veliko podatkov o "starem" lepru je mogoče najti tudi v virih, ki se nahajajo v arhivih izven mesta. Glede na to, da je bila knjižnica rešena, je še vedno ohranjenih nekaj pomembnih starih tiskov. Med letoma 1919 in 1991 je javna knjižnica zbirala dokumente o regionalni zgodovini in tako prevzemala vedno več arhivskih nalog, kar je vodilo do ustanovitve mestnega arhiva leta 1991, ki se predvsem osredotoča na zgodovino in rodoslovje. V zadnjih 20 letih se je arhiv zelo razširil in trenutno zaposluje 5 ljudi. S skupnimi močmi pa sta arhiv in knjižnica v letu 2009 pridobila tudi nove prostore v novi stavbi. Trenutna kapaciteta skladišč tehnološko ene modernejših arhivskih stavb v manjših mestih tega dela države je okoli 5,9 tekočih km, 0,4 km pa je na voljo še v prostorni čitalnici. Na žalost zakonski okvir, v katerem delujejo belgijski arhivi, ni sodoben. Zaradi kompleksnosti države je zelo težko ugotoviti, kateri arhivi so pod nadzorom federalne države ali pod nadzorom flamske regionalne vlade. Lokalnim arhivom ta situacija dej je veliko možnosti in avtonomije. Tako lahko mesta, kot je leper, sama odločajo o tem, kako organizirati svoj arhiv. Glavni stari arhiv mesta leper predstavlja arhiv Kasselrij ter arhivi bolnišnic pred letom 1795. Slednji so v lepru izposojeni od državnega arhiva. Stari arhiv vsebuje predvsem dokumente o kriminalnih in civilnih sodnih postopkih, ki so jih vodili na različnih "kasselrijskih" sodiščih v 16., 17. in 18. stoletju. Stari arhiv bolnišnic vsebuje listine, registre in starejše dokumente iz različnih srednjeveških bolnišnic, otroških domov in domov za ostarele. Najstarejši dokument v arhivu je listina Bolnišnice Svetega duha iz leta 1208. Dokumentacija mesta in okoljskih vasi iz 20. stoletja je precej popolna (770 tm). Arhiv hrani tudi gradivo dveh pomembnih arhitektov, ki sta sodelovala pri rekonstrukciji mesta, ter gradivo nekaterih lokalnih politikov, vključno z nekdanjim belgijskim premierjem. Pohvalijo se lahko tudi z zbirkami starih načrtov, fotografij in plakatov. Znanstvena knjižnica vsebuje preko 20.000 knjig, starih tiskov (iz časa pred letom 1800) je okoli 3.500, oboji pa niso v celoti popisani. Arhiv se osredotoča predvsem na zgodovinske dogodke, povezane z leprom in njegovo okolico: janzenizem, utrdbe in mačjo parado. Za ogled arhivskih dragocenosti je potrebno plačati manjšo letno pristojbino. Število obiskovalcev se je v letih od 1996 do 2011 povečalo z 250 na 329, od teh je skoraj 20 % Francozov. Število obiskov pa se giblje okoli 2.000. Vse več pozornosti je namenjene postopni objavi informacij na spletu. Razstave, ki jih prirejajo, so večinoma postavljene v arhivski stavbi ali - kadar gre za večjo razstavo - v mestnem kulturnem centru. Do

sedaj so bile najbolje sprejete razstave o Mačjem festivalu, o ministrih iz lepra, lokalnih športih, utrdbah, tiskarjih in lokalnem javnem prevozu. Leta 2002 so razstavo o zgodovini lepra pripravili na gradu nemškega mesta Siegen. Prav tako organizirajo zelo uspešna redna zgodovinska predavanja, ki se jih udeležuje okoli 100 ljudi. Arhiv sodeluje tudi z lokalnimi zgodovinarji. Za razstave posojajo in si izposojajo eksponate od muzeja ter drugih arhivov v Belgiji in izven nje. Dvakrat so organizirali tudi belgijsko-nizozemsko mednarodno posvetovanje Zeeuws-Vlaams archivarissenoverleg in imeli pomembno vlogo pri ustanavljanju "West-Vlaams Archievenplatform", nekakšnega neuradnega letnega srečanja vseh arhivistov province Zahodna Flamska.



Načrt mesta Ieper, konec 18. stoletja