



# **THE HISTORY OF THE HUISZ – FREYTAG – LOHMAN ORGAN OF ST. SEBASTIANUS-KERK IN NOORDWOLDE**

**(PROVINCE OF GRONINGEN)**

**By Dr. Adrian de Groot**

## CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

The construction of a brick St. Sebastian Church in Noordwolde started around 1225. It was a simple hall church in the so-called Romano-Gothic style. The tower was separate from the church. There were originally masonry attic vaults. Before ca. 1350, the church was enlarged to the east with a fourth bay: the choir.

Since the Reformation, the church has been extensively modified many times: large pointed arch windows were added to allow more light, the vaults were replaced by a wooden ceiling, the leaning southern side wall was supported by a heavy buttress. In connection with the installation of a new large organ, a wooden barrel vault was installed and the church roof was also raised.

The lower part of the tower was built at the same time as the church. In 1639 the tower was raised and the new upper part decorated with natural stone tracery in the upper reverberation holes. An onion-shaped crown, which is rare in the province, crowns the tower. In that onion ('siepel' in Groningen dialect) there is room for fifteen people that can look out in all directions from the four windows.

The large bell in the tower dates from 1597 and the smaller dated from 1888. They were stolen in 1943 by the Germans. The large one was saved and made a triumphant return to the village in 1945.

All the old church furniture is from the 17<sup>th</sup> C. :



## ROLE OF NOBILITY

It was not uncommon for the noble families of the province of Groningen to have considerable influence over village and church matters; they would typically appoint the minister, the schoolmaster and the organist (the latter two functions were often occupied by the same person). That they were “the boss” and considered themselves more important, in this church there is an elevated seat (*left, above photo*) that looks down upon the pulpit on the opposite side. What is also unique here is that the two east windows have stained glass windows with 16 quarters of heraldry of Johan Sickingha and Elisabeth van Berum. Also, at the top of the west wall a unique black and white art work was painted, which is now hidden behind the organ:



image pulled from video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=ynhnyVr0fCo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=ynhnyVr0fCo&feature=emb_logo)

## FIRST ORGAN

The first organ dated from the sixteenth century. Nothing is known about its layout as, unfortunately, a large part of the church archive was lost in a farm fire in 1934. The patron behind the organ was most likely Bernhard van Berum.

## 1621 Rebuilding of church

In 1621, an extensive restoration of the church took place, including of the organ.



**1639**

In 1639 the tower was raised with its rare the onion-shaped spire and was connected to the church.



**1640**

Around 1640 the church roof was raised and the current wooden barrel vault was made. The 16th-century organ, restored in 1621, was relocated to an enlarged organ balcony. Perhaps the old swallow's nest was likely made straight at this time. The old balcony layout lines can still be seen on the floor. The bellows might have already been installed in the new intermediate area between church and tower. The organ has had shutters at this time, the old pins are still on the organ case.

**1658 NEW ORGAN BY HENDRIK AND JOHAN HUISZ (THEY BUILT THE ORGAN IN KANTENS, HOLWIERDE AND 'T ZAND AS WELL)**

The organ in Noordwolde was built by Hendrik Huisz (they were most likely the brothers of the better known Berend Huisz, who was supposedly an uncle of his successor Arp Schnitger; this is not certain) in 1658. The instrument was the largest village organ in the province of Groningen at 27 stops over three manuals and pedal. The builders used parts from the previous organ, including pipework from around 1570 and from 1621 likely by Anthoni Verbeek or Anthoni Waelckens. Alternative spellings of Huisz are: Husz, Huisz., Huss and Huß.

**The 16' Bazuin, from around 1621, is believed to be the oldest surviving 16' pedal reed in the world.**

In the disposition collection of Joachim Hess (1774) we find the following specification:

**Manuaal**

Praest 8v  
Rhoerfl 8v  
Octaav 4v  
Sup.Oct 2v  
Siflet 1v  
Quint 3v  
Mixtuur  
Cimbel  
Tromp 8v

**Borstwerk**

Holpyp 8v  
Octaav 2v  
Quint 1 1/3v  
Tertiaan  
Cimbel

**Pedaal**

Bourd 16v  
Praest 8v  
Octaav 4v  
Bazuyn 16v  
Cornet 4v

**Rugwerk**

Quintad 8v  
Praestant 4v  
Baarpyp 2v  
Octaav 2v  
Quint 1 1/2v  
Mixtuur  
Cimbel  
Kromhoorn 8v

**1695**

In 1695 maintenance was performed by Arp Schnitger. In the time from 1731 to 1802, maintenance was probably carried out by the organ maker Albertus Anthoni Hinsz and his successors Frans Casper Schnitger Jr. and Heinrich Hermann Freytag.

**1802**

In 1802, Heinrich Hermann Freytag rebuilt the organ, removing the Borstwerk, resulting in 2 manuals and pedal at 20 stops. The organ got new windchests (with a compass of C-c3). He reused the old organ case, balcony, and 2/3 of the pipes. It may also have been at this time that the organ balcony was made straight. The tuning was changed to one "in good harmony".



**1833**

Nicolaas Anthoni Lohman (successor of the Freytag workshop) further renovated the organ in 1833, replacing three stops and providing many new carvings by Anthoni Walles. The instrument was revoiced to a degree and the tuning changed once again to near equal. He replaced the Quint 3' with a Viola di Gamba 8' and the Sesquialter II-III with a Flageolet 1'. The Quintadeen 8' of the Rugwerk was moved to become a Holpijp 8'. He also changed the pedal Cornet and renewed the manual coupler. The facade pipes were provided with (new?) tin foil. The new stops were 2/3 lead, 1/3 tin. The total costs were 780 guilders, which was the price of a house in that village in those days.



**Pre-restoration; date unknown. pd**

### **AFTER 1833 TILL CA. 1900**

The Lohman family maintained the organ from 1834 till ca. 1870. Roelf Meijer probably maintained it from 1870 till ca. 1900.



### **1903**

Marten Eertman, inn-keeper, organist and organ maker in the village of Noordwolde, worked on the organ in 1903 and replaced the Flute 2' (Freytag, most likely) of the Hoofdwerk with a Bourdon 16' in 1907.

In the period ca. 1925 to 1946 the organ was severely neglected.

### **1944 AND AFTER**

Between 1946 and 2006 no further changes were made to the organ, in large part due to the influence of Paul Moerman, organist of the church from 1944 until his death in 2004. Moerman was a fierce defender of the organ, and forbade any restoration work on it (a wise decision, as many restoration techniques from the 1950-1970's are now known to have been way too invasive). A large repair was carried out in 1950 by the Mense Ruiter firm. Today, it is one of the most original organs in Groningen province and unites the vocal late Renaissance style of Huisz with the Classical style of Freytag and Lohman. The only change was the addition of a blower to the organ by the Mense Ruiter firm in 1946, who has been maintaining the organ ever since. Some repairs took place in 1984, including the removal of the woodworm infested Bourdon 16' of the Hoofdwerk. In 1990, the organ was tuned to a Neidhardt temperament.



## 2004-2006 RESTORATION

The very needed restoration was carried out by the Mense Ruiter firm from 2004-2006. A 'conservation restoration' approach was chosen: integral preservation and restoration of the situation of 1833. Hence, one register was reconstructed, the Flute 2' of the Hoofdwerk.

The consultant was Stef Tuinstra, and the government advisors were Rudi van Straten and Wim Diepenhorst.

Its unique character is formed by the typical principal chorus, variety of flutes, the Vox Humana enclosed in a wooden box, the 19th century Viola da Gamba, and a wooden Hammer "Schel" gives the signal to the calcant.

## THE ORGAN'S SIGNIFICANCE:

The instrument is considered a "Historic Organ of European Significance" and enjoys worldwide reputation.

Much of the sometimes very old pipework has been preserved and all registers sound again in full glory. The organ has a very specific, direct sound, clear and sometimes fierce in tone and colour. The principal choir has many enthusiasts, as does the Vox Humana, which is covered with a wooden resonance box. It is of course special that, in the midst of many 'Baroque registers', there is also a Viola da Gamba 8'; a remnant of nineteenth-century interventions.

Amateur and professional organists can play the organ. Please contact Mr. Kruize, 050-3013634. It costs €15,- per day portion.





## CURRENT DISPOSITION:

**Note:** "old" can mean even older than Huisz.

### Hoofdwerk C-c3

Praestant 8' (old)  
Roerfluit 8' (old)  
Viola di Gamba 8' (1833)  
Octaaf 4' (old)  
Fluit 4' (old)  
Fluit 2' (2006)  
Mixtuur III-VI (old)  
Trompet 8' (old)  
Ventiel

### Rugwerk C-c3

Holpijp 8' (old/1833)  
Praestant 4' (old)  
Roerfluit 4' (old)  
Octaaf 2' (old)  
Speelfluit 2' (1802)

Flageolet 1' (1833)  
Vox Humana 8' (1802)  
Ventiel

### Pedaal C-d1

Bourdon 16' (1802)  
Praestant 8' (old)  
Octaaf 4' (old/Freytag)  
Bazuin 16' (old)  
Cornet 4' (old/1802/1833)  
Ventiel

Koppelingen:  
RW-HW (divided)  
HW-Ped

### Temperament:

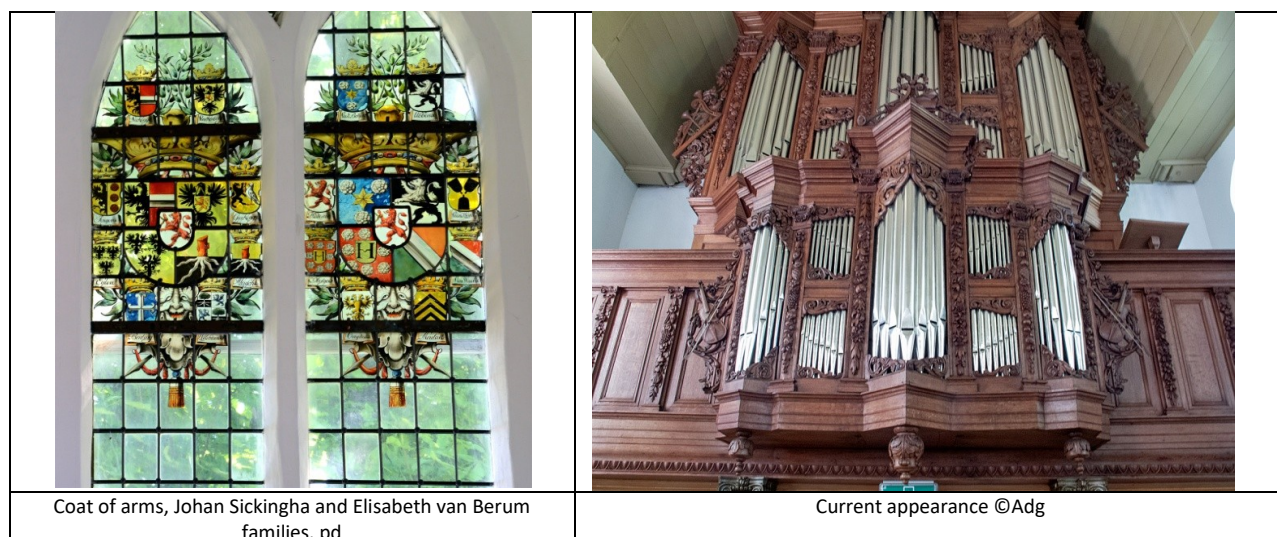
"Lohman" temperament  
(after old recordings of  
Farmsum) since 2006  
At a= ~465 Hz  
"Schel" (to alert the bellows  
operator)

### Mixtuur III-VI sterk (Hoofdwerk)

C: 1 1/3' – 1' – 2/3'.  
cis°: 1 1/3' – 1' – 2/3' – 1/2'.  
c': 2 2/3' – 2' – 1 1/3' – 1' – 1'.  
c'': 2 2/3' – 2 2/3' – 2' – 2' – 1  
1/3' – 1 1/3'.

## A NOTE ON THE TUNING:

During the restoration in 2006, the starting point was that the organ should be brought back to the situation as Lohman left it in 1833. It now has a temperament reconstructed by Stef Tuinstra from recordings by Klaas Bolt on the Lohman Organ of Farmsum of 1829. In this, six fifths are slightly tempered (with 1/8 comma) and another four minor (1/16 comma). As a result, keys with few accidentals sound cleaner, but not so that keys with many accidentals sound pronounced out of tune.





Compiled from diverse sources by Dr. Adri(an) de Groot, who lived in Noordwolde for about 11 years and must have heard this organ at least 550 times, but played it fewer times.

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Recommended website (in Dutch only) of the “Paul en An Moerman Foundation”:

<http://orgelnoordwoldegroningen.nl/>

Video (in Dutch) about church and organ:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=yhnhyVr0fCo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=yhnhyVr0fCo&feature=emb_logo)

Furthermore, many more videos on YouTube, featuring the organ.