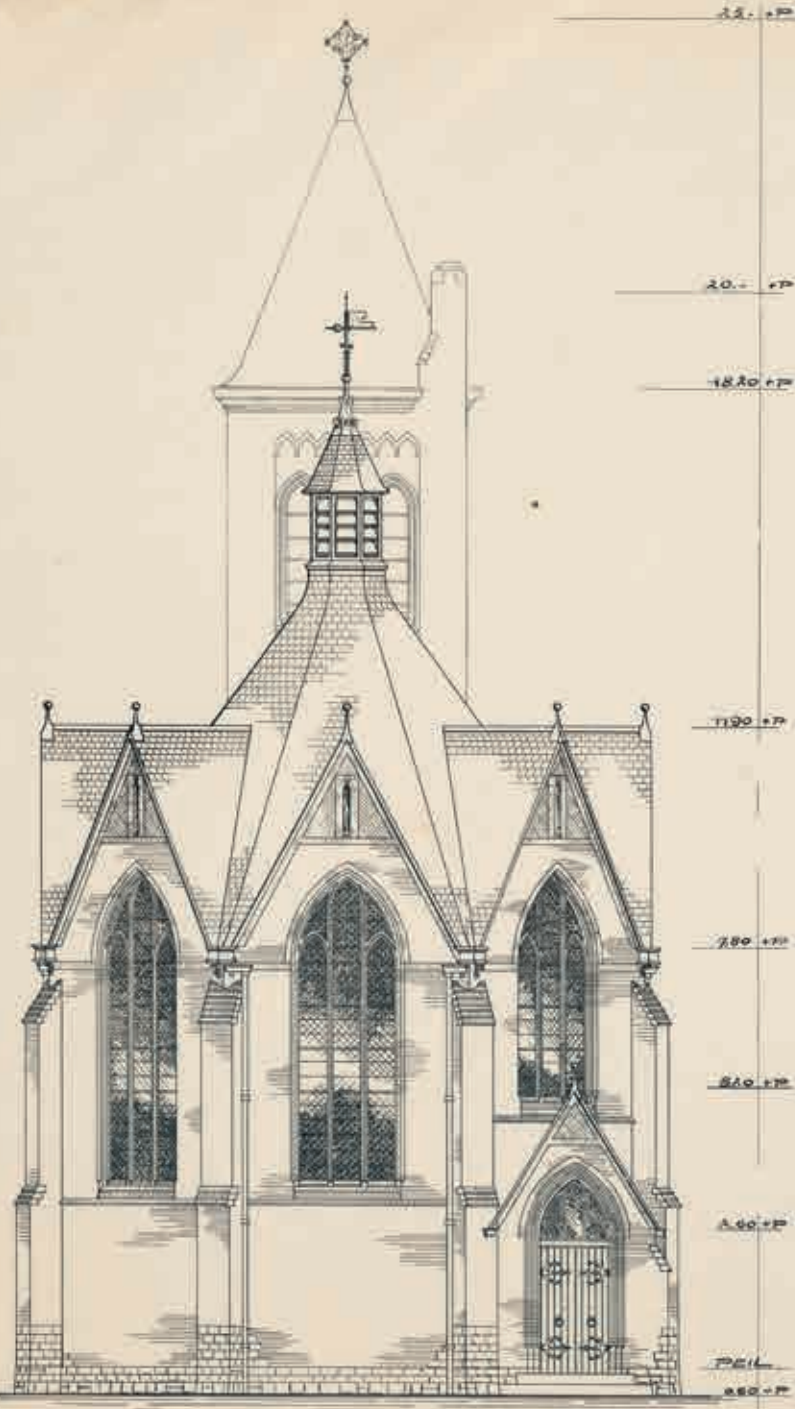


ENGELSCH KERK  
VLISSINGEN

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AANZICHT PAUL KRUBERSTRAAT

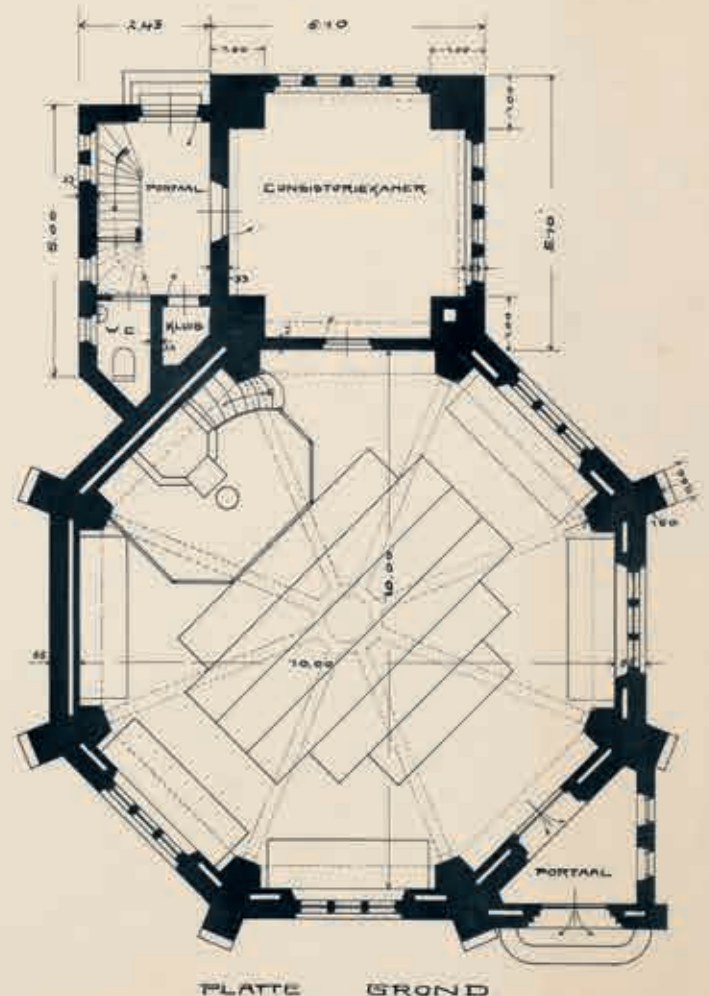


PLATE GROND

VLISSINGEN OCTOBER 1912  
DE ARCHITECT

*P.S. Dijkstra*

# MISSIONARY ARCHITECT PIETER SIMON DIJKSTRA AND HIS DUTCH WORKS

MARIEKE KUIPERS AND  
NICHOLAS CLARKE

1. P.S. Dijkstra, design drawing for the English Church on the Nieuwe Markt in Vlissingen, facade and floor plan, with tower, October 1912; not built (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)

In South Africa, the Dutch architect P.S. Dijkstra/Dykstra (1884-1968) is considered an important innovator in Protestant church design. Yet his work gets barely a mention in Dutch historiography. His early twentieth-century oeuvre is especially interesting from a cultural-historical point of view, because it is closely linked to the Reformed *zuil* (pillar: one of the diverse socio-culturally cohesive groups based on a specific worldview that founded their own institutions, varying from newspapers to housing corporations and suchlike).

Born into a right-wing reverend's family, Dijkstra was raised in the midst of the turbulence of church schisms and controversies over schools in which the anti-revolutionary clergyman-politician Abraham Kuiper played a prominent role. The building of new Reformed churches and schools was directly aligned with a strong missionary zeal to spread the 'true faith'. Dijkstra delivered several designs in this context. Although he was raised and educated in the northern Netherlands, he worked mainly in Zeeland before emigrating to South Africa in 1927, where he was to develop mainly as a missionary architect.

This article focuses on the Dutch part of Dijkstra's oeuvre, primarily on those structures with a Reformed connection and to the extent that this could be deduced from the scarce sources. His body of work is surprisingly versatile in both typological and stylistic terms. His church buildings were predominantly designed in the 'transitional' style between historicist and rationalist; for example, some of his housing projects can be compared with the rationalist work of Jan Ernst van der Pek. Sometimes Dijkstra also worked for non-Reformed clients. Most notable is his involvement in the rebuilding of the English Church after the destruction by fire of the St Jacob's Church in Vlissingen (Flushing), for which Pierre Cuypers had made a preliminary design in late neo-Gothic style (fig. 1).

#### BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

Pieter Simon Dijkstra was born on 8 March 1884 in the parsonage of the Christelijk Afgescheiden Gemeente (Christian Segregated Congregation) in Oldekerk in the Westerkwartier of the province of Groningen.<sup>1</sup> He was the fifth child and the second son. His father Harmen Dijkstra, educated at the Theological School in Kampen, was an ardent advocate of pure doctrine and was particularly active on behalf of the Reformed mission overseas.<sup>2</sup> His mother Johanna Geertruida Dijksterhuis, a minister's daughter from the same social and religious circle, was prepared to move with the family each time to a new place of employment: from Oldekerk via Jutrijp-Hommerts to Smilde.<sup>3</sup> In nearby Assen, Pieter Dijkstra followed a course in construction with artist-engineer Jean Krans and worked in a carpentry shop during holidays.<sup>4</sup>



2. Y. van der Veen, possibly with the collaboration of P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church at Spijk, interior with view of the podium pulpit, 1905 (photo: H. Elsinga, 2008, Reliwiki)

In 1903, he joined his cousin Johannes Hermanus Koekkoek jr. in Baarn as an apprentice draughtsman, carpenter-bricklayer and occasional estate agent.<sup>5</sup> Like Dijkstra, Koekkoek belonged to the Christian Reformed Church congregation, which from 1881 had its own church building on Oude Utrechtseweg, designed in the neo-Dutch Renaissance style by Sytze Wopkes Wierda.<sup>6</sup> This was a building with allure, as requested by Prince Hendrik when he donated part of his land for this purpose.<sup>7</sup> The church community flourished, and when expansion became necessary in 1904, Koekkoek made an unsolicited proposal. However, this was rejected in favour of a fancier but more expensive variant by Tjeerd Kuipers (1857-1942), a well-known Reformed church designer.<sup>8</sup> It was presumably through him that Dijkstra came into contact with his then partner Ytzen van der Veen (1861-1931), who worked mainly in Groningen and the Ommelanden (surrounding areas).<sup>9</sup>

There, Dijkstra became draughtsman-supervisor in the employ of Van Veen in 1905 and was most probably involved in the construction of the new Reformed Church (A) in Spijk. Van der Veen had designed this freestanding church building with a high corner tower as an independent architect, but it was clearly influenced stylistically and in terms of the centrally placed podium pulpit by the churches he had built with Kuipers, such as the Zuiderkerk in Groningen. Both buildings show a mixture of historicizing and innovative stylistic elements (fig. 2).<sup>10</sup>

A year later, Dijkstra was working in Essen (Germany) with the architects Otto Wassermann and Emil Haakshorst, and after that with the Westdeutsche Marmor- und Granitwerke in Dortmund.<sup>11</sup> In May 1908, he settled as an independent architect at Badhuisstraat 74 in Vlissingen.<sup>12</sup> He may have been encouraged to make this radical move by his sister Maaike Johanna and his



brother-in-law Dirk Pol, who had just been appointed Christian Reformed pastor of the Church A there.<sup>13</sup> With no other acquaintances, Dijkstra had to build up his architectural practice in Vlissingen from scratch.

Initially, he advertised weekly in regional and Reformed newspapers, offering free sketch designs. In the Christian-historical newspaper *De Zeeuw*, he presented himself emphatically as an impartial expert for 'anyone wanting to build (church, school, mansion, shophouse, dwelling house, etc.)' or to remodel, and clearly stating a modest, fixed percentage fee.<sup>14</sup> He also offered private lessons in architectural drawing.<sup>15</sup>

Dijkstra was still a bachelor when he arrived in Vlissingen, but two years later, in early 1910, he moved into an upstairs flat at Badhuisstraat 49 – together with his German wife Johanna Elisabeth Kilian from Dort-

mund.<sup>16</sup> That she had not been born into the Reformed church indicates that Dijkstra was also open to contacts outside his own circle of male Reformed brethren. For a one-man architectural firm, a network more extensive than one's own 'pillar' was indispensable.

#### VLISSINGEN AS A PLACE OF WORK

Shortly before Dijkstra settled in Vlissingen, the old maritime city on the River Scheldt had been badly hit by the Storm Surge of 12 March 1906. Repairing the damage was accompanied by large-scale plans for single- and multi-family housing, spearheaded by the energetic alderman for Public Works J.G. van Niftrik jr. (1889-1924).<sup>17</sup> This liberal democrat was a son of the Amsterdam city engineer and had been the director of the local gasworks since 1884. His first proposal was the development of a 'villapark' (an upmarket area of detached, single-family homes) behind Evertsen Boulevard, possibly on the advice of his younger brother Piet Hein van Niftrik, who was an architect in Amsterdam.<sup>18</sup> In 1909, three old harbours were filled in: the Koopmanshaven was turned into Bellamy Park and the former Achterhaven and Nieuwe Haven provided space for new construction. The Dokhaven on the east side, formerly an Admiralty naval base, remained in the hands of the De Schelde shipyard, which was the main driver of employment and industrial activity for the next one hundred years and also had a great influence on further urban development and public housing (fig. 3).

In great contrast, the area of Vlissingen to the west of the former fortress developed into a seaside resort à la Scheveningen, with a seaside hotel and a series of boulevards. The two centres had been connected by Badhuisstraat since around 1880. Thanks to rail and tram lines and boat connections with Flanders, Rotterdam and England, the seaside resort was easily accessible to a national and international public. Because of these international connections, Vlissingen at the time was home to 12 consulates as well as freight agents, foreign exchange offices, a postal and telegraph office and ten hotels.<sup>19</sup> Tourism was promoted early on, bringing a new dynamism and population growth. In 1910, alderman Van Niftrik proudly noted that Vlissingen had 21,590 inhabitants and had thus become the largest city in Zeeland, with various modern urban facilities such as the Municipal Grammar School, the Trade School and an Electric Power Station, in addition to a beautiful seafront boulevard to its south: 'All over the city wide pavements have been laid, wide connecting roads opened, beautiful shops and large hotels have been built, and electric trams installed. The seaside resort is increasing in prosperity. A traders' register has been established, the likes of which one will find in only a few cities.



3. Part of the map of the municipality of Vlissingen, c. 1925. The yellow dots mark the locations of the works by P.S. Dijkstra discussed in this article (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg; adapted by authors)

Vlissingen is indeed a city full of spirit and vitality.<sup>20</sup>

The population was quite diverse, in terms of both nationality and world view, even though Protestants were in the majority. Among the latter, Abraham Kuyper jr. was briefly the direct 'rival-colleague' of Dijkstra's brother-in-law Pol in the dissenting Reformed Church B.<sup>21</sup> Apart from these two Reformed churches, there were places of worship for the Dutch Reformed, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Mennonites, as well as a synagogue.<sup>22</sup>

For a beginning architect like Dijkstra, urban expansion seemed to offer good opportunities for a varied portfolio of commissions. Judging from Vlissingen's address books, he was the first in this city to register explicitly as an architect and remained the only one until his departure; even so, he did not have it easy as a 'newcomer-architect'.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, he faced competition from more renowned architects from outside, who designed for the leading citizens and established institutions.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, there was – especially among Reformed people – a long tradition of thrift and 'self-build' with commissions being given to local (carpenter-)contractors and builders. Some architects from Middelburg and surrounding areas were also active on Walcheren.

At the time, a diploma was not required for someone to set themselves up as an architect; the title of architect was not legally protected in the Netherlands until October 1998. Dijkstra had already acquired sufficient knowledge and experience to practise as architect. Soon after setting up, he was engaged to teach professional drawing at the Avondschoon voor Handwerklieven (evening school for craftsmen) and the Burgeravondschoon (civic evening school), which provided him with a modest but permanent secondary income, albeit on a temporary basis.<sup>25</sup> His first design commissions came, not surprisingly, from within Reformed circles, especially for churches and schools, and later also from the middle class and the cooperative movement.

#### CHURCH BUILDING

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following on from the Napoleonic state and church reforms, various reformational groups split off from the Dutch Reformed Church, and sometimes yet again from one other. The first group of secessionists, the Afscheidenen (separatists) was formed in 1834 out of dissatisfaction with what they saw as the Reformed Church's overly liberal religious views and too tightly nationally orchestrated administrative structure. In 1886, a new, much more radical schism occurred. Led by Abraham Kuyper, it was called the Doleantie (the Dutch word is derived from the Latin to lament). It led to the establishment of the Nederduits Gereformeerde

churches, which referred back to the doctrinal rules laid down by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618 and 1619. However, that same Abraham Kuyper managed to unite the two orthodox movements in 1892 in a new church confederation known as De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. But even after that, some Reformed church congregations continued to function separately side by side as an A or a B church.<sup>26</sup>

The union of the Afscheidenen and the Dolerenden in De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in 1892 also led to a spate of new church buildings in Zeeland to bring the faith communities that had emerged as a result of the amalgamation together under one roof. These were conceived entirely as 'Houses for the Gospel', mainly for preaching, prayer and communal singing. That these churches were often very austere in appearance was due not only to time or financial constraints but also to the Reformed aversion to ostentation and excess. Issues of style were of secondary importance for the design of Reformed church buildings. What counted was the availability of a large, undivided church space.

As a Reformed pastor's son, Dijkstra was familiar with the simple hall churches of the northern Netherlands from a young age. He was undoubtedly also familiar with the ideas of Abraham Kuyper, who since 1897 had regularly published articles on church building in the Reformed weekly *De Heraut* (The Herald) and in 1911 compiled them into the influential book *Onze Eeredienst* (Our Worship).<sup>27</sup> Kuyper took the view that the church space served the 'assembly of believers' and should be structured in such a way that all could [clearly] see and hear one other and the preacher.<sup>28</sup> He preferred a pulpit on a podium to a high pulpit to emphasize that the minister of the word, surrounded by the church council, was part of the Reformed congregation. As a result of his apprenticeship, Dijkstra was already familiar with the application of this idea in the cross-plan churches of Tjeerd Kuipers and Van der Veen.

However, Dijkstra's first commission in 1909 focused only on increasing capacity within an existing, traditionally furnished hall church in Souburg. He added a gallery with over 70 seats for the growing Reformed church congregation.<sup>29</sup> Shortly afterwards, Dijkstra received his first design commission as independent architect for an entirely new Reformed church. This was in Geersdijk, the smallest village of the former island of Noord-Beveland. This hall church, consecrated in September 1910 and built in the transitional style, stood as a landmark on Oostkruisstraat near the top of Schoolstraat.<sup>30</sup> The brick facade with central entrance was marked [out] by a gable-wide segmental arch and five vertical windows and was crowned by an open belfry with cast-iron ornamental crown on the





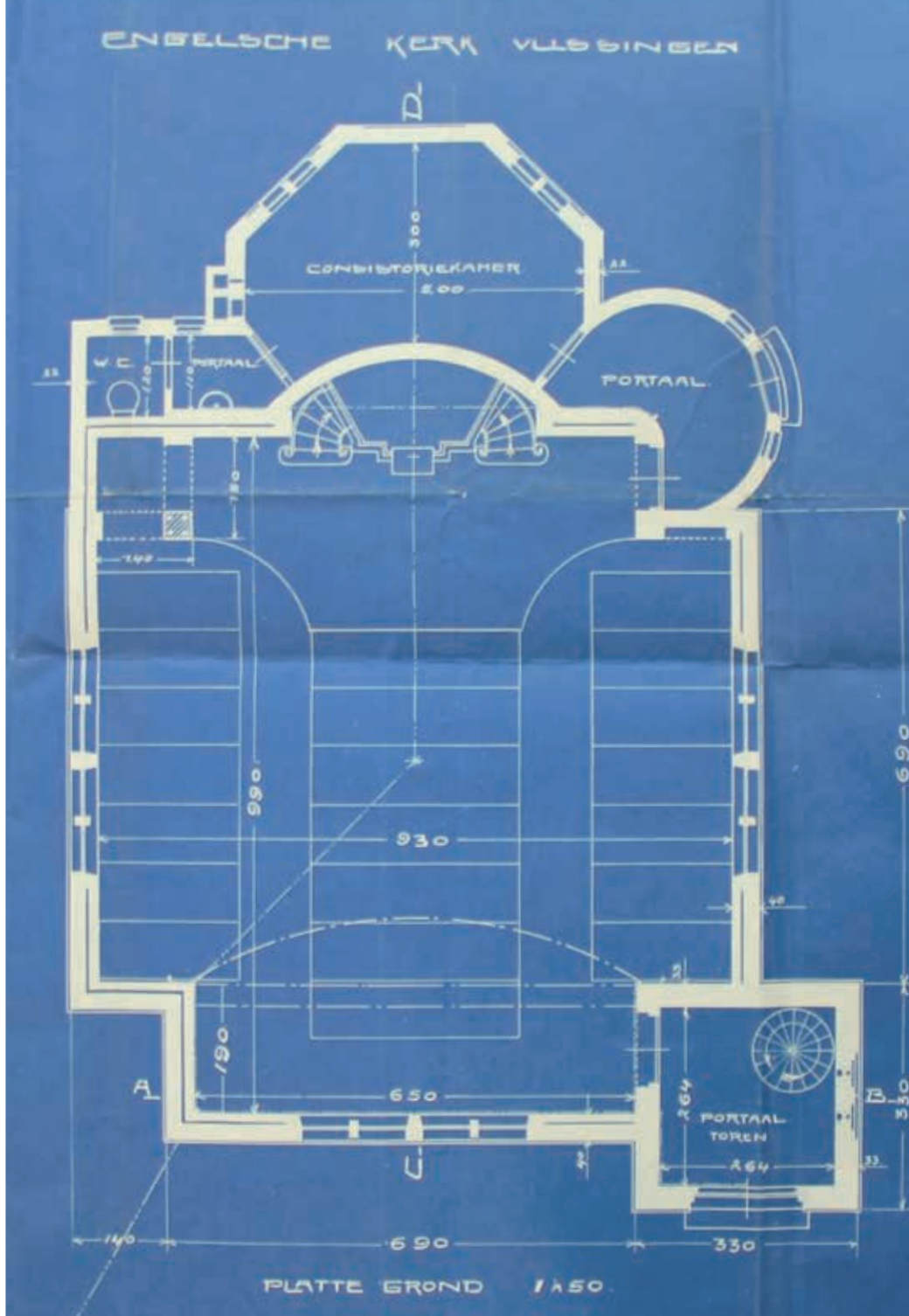
4. P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church in Geersdijk with the later School met den Bijbel on the right, c. 1930 (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)

tent roof (fig. 4). The segmental arch most likely mirrored a flattened barrel vault spanning the interior. The two-hundred-seat capacity of the church hall was clearly aimed at growth, but in reality that proved overly ambitions.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime Dijkstra was working on a similar church commission in Vlissingen, which he had received through his brother-in-law Pastor Pol. The latter had unintentionally triggered another church split when, in January 1910, he announced an ‘ineensmelt- ing’ (amalgamation), and 150 congregants switched from the Reformed Church to the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>32</sup> Since this group wanted its own church building, a corner plot on Kasteelstraat was bought from the shipyard company Koninklijke Maatschappij de Schelde (KMS). A condition of the purchase was that the church building had to be completed within one year or the property would revert to the KMS without compensation. So speed was of the essence: the conveyance was completed in July 1910, the foundation stone was laid on 9 August and the new church was inaugurated as early as 15 December.<sup>33</sup> This brick-built hall church is covered by a tiled saddle roof with a

5. P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church Eben Haëzer on the corner of Kasteel - and Lammenstraat in Vlissingen. Left in the background, renovated houses of the ‘Rode Buurt’ neighbourhood (photo Marieke Kuipers, 2021)





6. P.S. Dijkstra, undated design for the new English Church to be built in Vlissingen, floor plan for a hall church; not built (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)

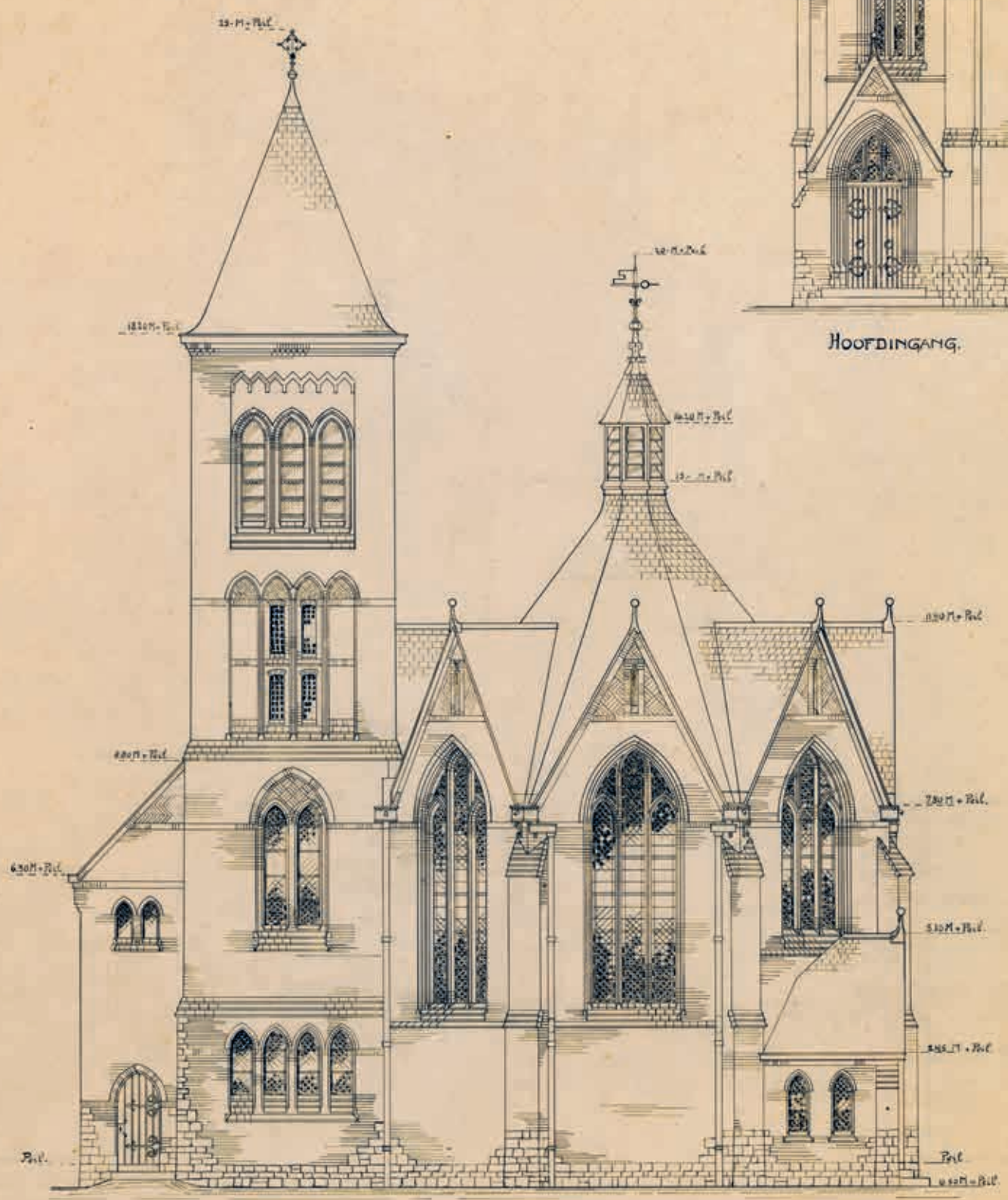
small ventilation tower located in the middle of the ridge. The design combines historical and contemporary stylistic elements. The front facade has a large semi-circular arch over an arched central entrance doorway, with above it the name Eben Haëzer, and a blind rose window flanked by two brick pointed arch windows all crowned with a fanciful finial (fig. 5). Both side elevations also have brick gothic windows and there is a rose window with coloured glazing in the top of the rear elevation. The entire interior is spanned by a segmental arched vault and originally had a podium pulpit, in accordance with Kuyper's prescription.<sup>34</sup>

Not all of Dijkstra's church clients were of the Re-

formed persuasion. He was unexpectedly called upon by the church council of the English Church, more specifically the English Presbyterian Church, after their church hall, part of the historic St Jacobskerk in Vlissingen, was razed by a fire that started while repair work was being carried out in September 1911. Although it was immediately decided to restore St Jacobskerk, long discussions about the rebuilding of the tower (owned by the city) and possible 'dismantling' of later additions ensued.<sup>35</sup> The English church council ultimately wanted its own place of worship and, to this end, in February 1912 acquired a small plot on the corner of Nieuwe Markt and Paul Krugerstraat.<sup>36</sup>



ENG. KERK TE VLISSINGEN.

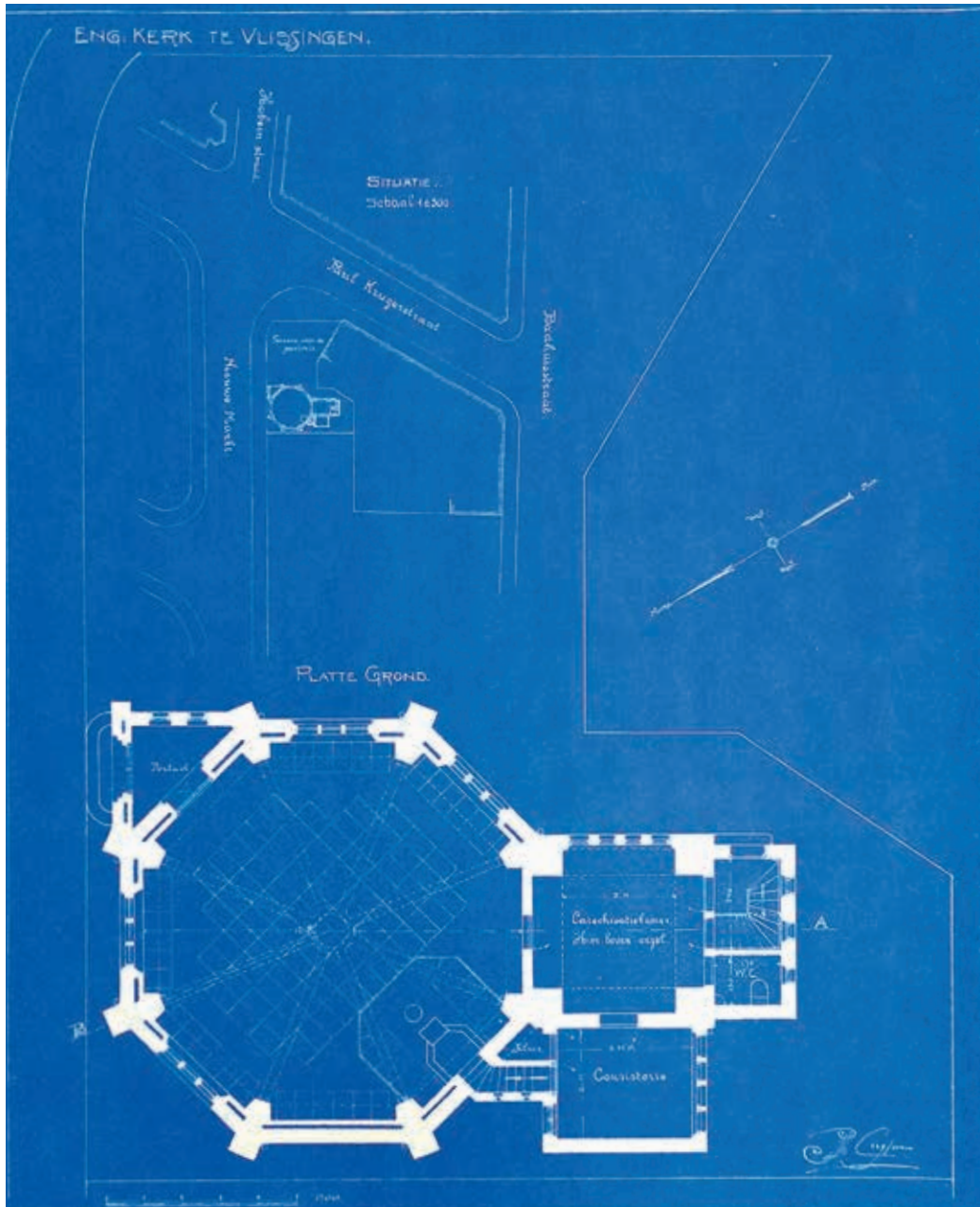


HOOFDINGANG.

AANZICHT WESTZYDE.

*P.J.H. Cuypers*

7. P.J.H. Cuypers, undated design for the English Church in Vlissingen, view of west side and detail of the main entrance through a three-sided portal (Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam)



8. P.J.H. Cuypers, undated design for the English Church in Vlissingen, floor plan with pew plan and site plan (Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam)

For this site Dijkstra initially designed a simple hall, like the one on Kasteelstraat but in this instance with a corner tower, but apparently his (undated and unsigned) sketch plan did not satisfy his client (fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> The authoritative Pierre Cuypers, who had come to Vlissingen in May 1912 to advise on the reconstruction of the St Jacob's Tower, was subsequently asked to propose an alternative design. It is possible that Alderman Van Niftrik, who was acquainted with Cuypers, played a role in this, as he wanted a landmark building on the Nieuwe Markt square to serve as an overture to the 'centre of new-Vlissingen'. The pastor of the church Heiko Tiberius Oberman, who was well-travelled and interested in history, may also have had some influence on the design.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, it has proved impossible to discover precisely how the unprece-

dent collaboration between the Catholic Cuypers, the Reformed Dijkstra and the Protestant minister of the English Presbyterian Church came about. Nor can it be determined why an octagonal model with corner tower was chosen, although it is probable that the ambitions of the various parties involved and the limitations of the building site contributed to this compact design.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, the surviving material in various archives does allow for a general reconstruction of the collaboration.

What has survived is a series of signed but undated sketches by Cuypers for an octagonal, neo-Gothic church with high tower on the Badhuisstraat side: an unusual, asymmetrical central-plan building with 120 seats (fig. 7).

Space was reserved on the west side for a future

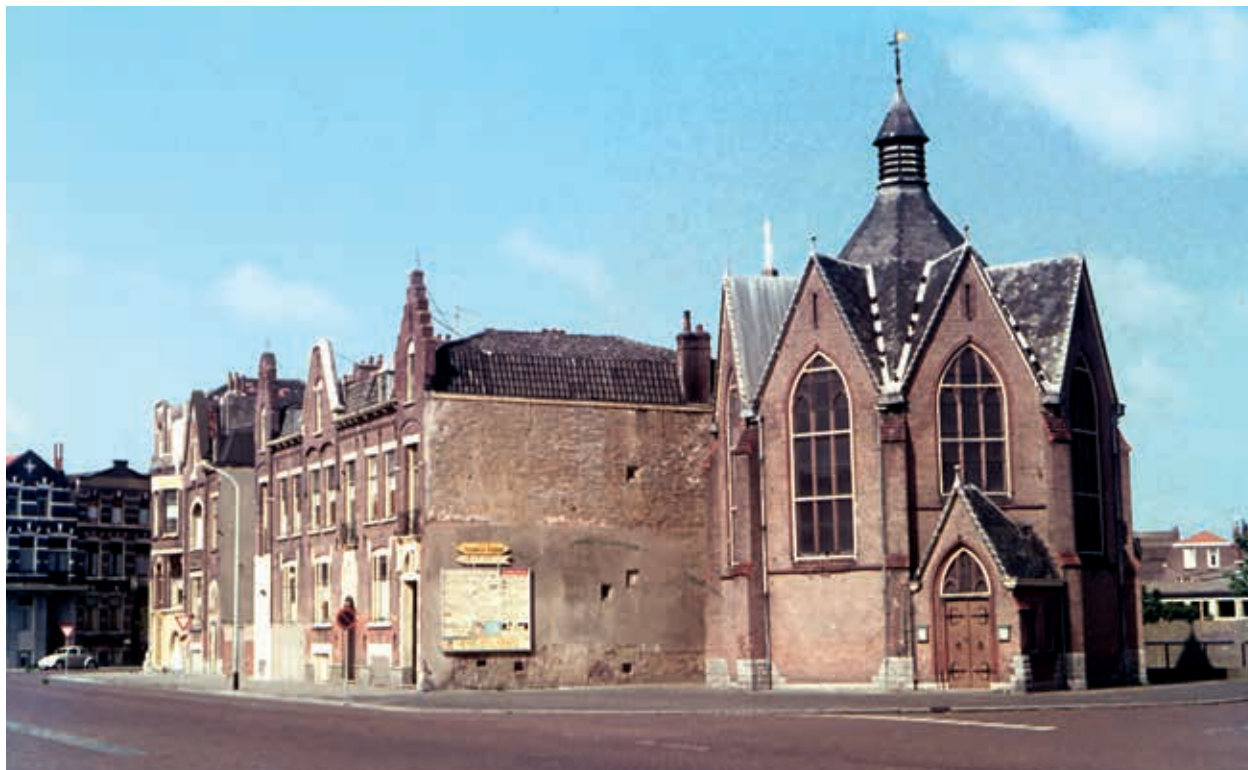


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9. P.S. Dijkstra, final design for the English Church in Vlissingen, longitudinal section with (unbuilt) tower, October 1912 (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)



10. P.S. Dijkstra, English Church on Paul Kruger Street in Vlissingen, c. 1958; photo W. Sprong (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)

presbytery, but this was never constructed (fig. 8). It was up to the local architect, Dijkstra, to elaborate the final church design, draw up the specifications, call for tenders and supervise the construction.<sup>40</sup> Dijkstra moved the location of the church slightly westwards on the small plot, necessitating a partial modification of the floor plan (fig 1). The contract drawings and reinforced concrete foundation drawings were ready by October 1912, and were approved by the municipal building inspector during the month of November. Three offers to build a church with tower were submitted on 5 November of that year, but the tall tower structure was soon omitted, presumably as a cost-cutting measure. According to an undated note, Dijkstra had travelled to Cuypers' home town of Roermond, possibly to discuss this omission and other details. Other archival documents also reveal that Cuypers had provided only the preliminary sketch design and that Dijkstra was the project architect (fig. 9). Construction began in 1913 and on 4 January 1914 the 'octagonal miniature church building, culminating in a spire and providing space for over 100 people' could be inaugurated.<sup>41</sup> The English Church which, despite having been renovated five years earlier, would be demolished in 1963 without much opposition, was and remained an exceptional project in Dijkstra's (and Cuypers') oeuvre (fig. 10).<sup>42</sup>

Dijkstra's next church commission came from the province of Drenthe, by way of his father Harmen. It was for a new church building for the breakaway



11. P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church De Vlaswiek on Rijksweg in Hoogersmilde, built in 1916 (photo Hans1967, Reliwiki)





12. P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church on Veerweg in Kamperland, now De Ark (photo Marieke Kuipers, 2022)

Christian Reformed Congregation in the linear village of Hoogersmilde near the ‘mother congregation’ of Smilde. Faced with a limited budget, Dijkstra designed a detached hall church of elegant simplicity under a saddle roof and with colourfully contrasting brickwork (fig. 11). By setting the church back from the Rijksweg, he created a forecourt next to the presbytery, with the brick church facade with its round-arched windows and small bell tower as backdrop. As with the Eben Haëzerkerk, Dijkstra opted for a wooden segmental vault that spanned the entire interior. In the Hoogersmilde church he however placed the podium pulpit in a shallow niche with the organ prominently above it. This church, named ‘De Vlaswiek’ (flax wick), was consecrated in 1915 and remained in use until 2009.<sup>43</sup>

After his Drenthe outing, Dijkstra built a large Reformed church on the Veerweg in the linear village of Kamperland on the former island of Noord-Beverland, now known as ‘De Ark’ (fig. 12). He himself laid the foundation stone in 1923. This robust church, with corner tower, has a centrally planned layout based on the Greek cross, with balconies in three of the four

arms and a podium pulpit in a niche (fig. 13). This, in combination with an amphitheatre arrangement on a sloping floor, provided for the closest possible contact between preacher and congregation – a model recommended by Kuyper. The church design also met Kuyper’s requirements in other respects, such as ample entrances and exits, adequate ventilation and modern uniform heating.<sup>44</sup> A ventilation tower stands centrally on the roof crossing, and the originally fixed pews incorporated electric heating. While the English Church had to make do without a tower, a striking tower was erected at De Ark, mindful of Kuyper’s assertion that ‘every church, by its very nature, calls for a tower. The finger pointing upwards’.<sup>45</sup> The Kamperland church, built in the transitional style, would serve as an important reference point for Dijkstra’s later career.

#### SCHOOLS

In 1901 the introduction of compulsory education triggered a new wave of school construction. Virtually all boys and girls aged six to twelve were thenceforth required to attend in-class education.<sup>46</sup> However, the



13. P.S. Dijkstra, Reformed Church on Veerweg in Kamperland, the later partially altered interior (photo Nicholas Clarke, 2022)

political battles over school funding and curriculum content raged on until 1917 when an amendment to the Constitution granted special and public education equal access to financial support from the government. Before that accord, Reformed families who wanted to have their children educated in conformity with their world view had to raise the money for the buildings and staffing themselves. They could, however, receive some subsidies and municipalities paid for the construction of the teacher's house. The accessibility and quality of school buildings were increasingly subject to legal requirements, especially with regard to daylight, ventilation, hygiene and fire safety. As a result, trained architects were increasingly engaged, even in rural villages. On Walcheren, the construction of new Gereformeerde schools was also in competition with new Hervormde schools, rather than public schools.

It was against this backdrop that Dijkstra built a new 'primary school on a Reformed basis' in the centre of the neighbouring village of Koudekerke, which was opened with psalm singing in January 1910.<sup>47</sup> In the symmetrically designed school building, the four

classrooms (each for 48 pupils) were grouped back-to-back and fitted with subdivided windows with inward-opening hopper windows at the top for ventilation. The chimney was placed diagonally in the middle of the mansard roof.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, Dijkstra designed an extension and teacher's house for the School met den Bijbel (School with the Bible) on Schoolstraat in the fishing village of Arnemuiden.<sup>49</sup> Although both school buildings survived the war and the 1953 North Sea Flood, they were demolished in 1961 to make way for new Christian schools.

#### HOUSING

The effects of pillarization were also manifested in public housing. In Vlissingen, the growth of the ship-building company Koninklijke Maatschappij de Schelde (KMS) and related businesses, led to an increase in the working-class population and with it the need for suitable rental housing. In 1909, KMS and five other local employers founded the Vereniging tot Verbetering der Volkshuisvesting Vlissingen (vzv) (Housing Improvement Association) in response to the possibilities for pre-financing opened up by the 1901





14. P.S. Dijkstra, housing design for 'Gemeenschappelijk Belang' on Verkuyl Quakkelaarstraat in Vlissingen, built 1919-1920, c. 1935 (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)

15. P.S. Dijkstra, housing for 'Gemeenschappelijk Belang' on Geraniumlaan in Vlissingen Garden City, 1917 (Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg)



Housing Act.<sup>50</sup> The Protestant-Christian housing association *Gemeenschappelijk Belang* (GB, Common Interest) followed two years later. For the latter Dijkstra built two series of houses on *Verkuijl Quakkelaarstraat* in 1917 and 1919-1920, the only two-storey houses on this street (fig. 14).<sup>51</sup> They stood immediately adjacent to the *v.v.v.'s Rode Buurt* north of *Kasteel Street*. Both building plans for the GB included 'two-family blocks in garden-city layout', which were built in the *Bloemenbuurt* located further north (fig. 15).<sup>52</sup> A GB complex of 113 single-family houses and three shops along the *Hyacintenlaan* and its surrounding streets were added in 1920 based on plans by Dijkstra and Amsterdam architect P.J. Hamers (1882-1966).<sup>53</sup> According to historical photos, the houses were grouped alternately in twos, fours or eights under transverse gable roofs or high mansard roofs.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, Dijkstra independently designed a small-scale garden village for the local housing association in the *Molen Polder* in *Arnhemuiden*. The single-family dwellings 'under friendly red roofs, each pleasingly homely and cosy with nice square windows in simple yet elegant facades, some just breaking through the roofline' were situated in a quasi-landscape setting.<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately none of Dijkstra's built housing complexes survived, due to war damage, the 1953 flood and rigorous town and village renewal projects in conjunction with drastic changes in the housing corporation system. The strong attachment of builders and residents to the Socialist, Reformed or Catholic 'pillar' waned over time.

## SHOPS

While new housing estates arose to the north [of the city] on land once occupied by fortresses, in *Vlissingen's* old town centre a gradual process of retail conversion took place, with historical houses being wholly or partly replaced by shops. Such commissions mostly came from private shopkeepers who lived above their own businesses. Remarkably, Dijkstra's career as a shop architect began thanks to two consumer cooperatives with many socialist-minded members. In 1910 he converted a house into retail premises for *De Broederband*, with the name of the cooperative in *Art Nouveau* style on the large shop window.<sup>56</sup> In the adjacent *Schelde* neighbourhood, he built a branch of the *Eigen Hulp* cooperative in the transitional style. Opened in February 1912, this multifunctional corner building contained a grocery store, bakery, shoe repairer and upstairs flats, all under one roof.<sup>57</sup> Other shop conversions followed, including in 1925 the delicatessen of *Joos Goetheer* (Reformed) and the clothing warehouse of *A. Kreymborg & Co* (Catholic), both located on *Walstraat* and known at the time for their modern interiors.<sup>58</sup>

Particularly noteworthy is the expressionist retail premises with workshop and separate office that Dijkstra designed on *Nieuwstraat* for radio dealer *H.J. van der Meer & Zonen* (fig. 16). The striking triangular shop window originally had stained glass at the top and may have been inspired by the design of the radio sets the client himself made or sold.<sup>59</sup> This was also where the many radio amateurs in the maritime city went in search of spare parts. While their focus was on the technical aspects of transmitting, for the architect it was the expressive design that counted as a reflection of the radio business. This richly decorated masonry ensemble was one of the last works Dijkstra completed in *Vlissingen*.



16. P.S. Dijkstra, shop and office of radio dealer *H.J. van der Meer and Sons* on *Nieuwstraat* in *Vlissingen*, built in 1923 and 1926 (photo *J.L. van Leeuwen*, 1978, *Zeeuws Archief*, *Middelburg*)

17. P.S. Dykstra, *Second Reformed Church* in *Melville*, *Johannesburg*, *South Africa*, built in 1935 (photo *Morné van Rooyen*, *Wikimedia Commons*)





## TO SOUTH AFRICA

In April 1927 Dijkstra rather surprisingly transferred his office to the – Catholic – architect H.H.M. Preller and left Rotterdam with his family on a freighter bound for South Africa.<sup>60</sup> What exactly motivated him to make this major U-turn is unknown. However, his emigration was in keeping with his father's missionary zeal, although that was more focused on Christianization in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, there were traditionally strong ties with the brethren in South Africa, and he may also have been inspired by the evocative travel impressions published some years earlier by Herman Kuyper, Abraham's eldest son and also a Reformed pastor and editor-in-chief of *De Heraut*.<sup>61</sup>

Dijkstra carried with him an attestation that would enable him to register with the South African Reformed

Church, a sister church of that in the Netherlands.<sup>62</sup> He must have had prior contact with the Reformed church council in Klerksdorp, in the present-day North-West Province, as he completed a church there shortly after his arrival.<sup>63</sup> Once registered as an architect in South Africa, Dykstra, as he spelt his name in his new country, designed the Second Reformed Church Johannesburg North in 1935 which contains echoes of his Kamperland church building (fig. 17). As in Zeeland, he also undertook a variety of commissions in his new homeland – for housing, healthcare, commerce and schools – in addition to churches. But with more than twenty new church buildings, all for Reformed church congregations, he performed his role as missionary architect in South Africa with verve.<sup>64</sup>

## NOTEN

- 1 Rev Harmen Dijkstra (1851-1922) served in the Christelijk Afscheiden Gemeente Oldekerk from 1879 to 1889; <https://gereformeerdekerken.info/2016/10/20/uit-de-pers-5-1956-over-de-vroege-geschiedenis-van-de-gereformeerde-kerk-te-oldekerk-gr/> (accessed 22 November 2022).
- 2 H. Dijkstra wrote numerous publications related to the mission and was, among other things, founder of *De Macedoniër. Algemeen Zendingstijdschrift* (1883-1939), editor of *Het Zendingblad* and chair of the Deputaten der Zending. After his retirement in 1917, he moved to Rotterdam, where he died in 1922; 'Kerknieuws enz. Begrafenis ds H. Dijkstra', *De Standaard*, 19 January 1922, Second edition, 6.
- 3 H. Dijkstra was the first pastor of the Christelijk Gereformeerde Gemeente in Jutrijp-Hommerts and was called to Smilde in 1892, following the church Unification; [www.gereformeerdekerken.info/Smilde](http://www.gereformeerdekerken.info/Smilde) (accessed 22 November 2022) and H. Dijkstra, *Na zestig jaren, een gedachteniswoord voor de Gereformeerde Kerk te Smilde*, Breukelen 1895 (volume 1).
- 4 <https://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=443> (accessed 22 November 2022).
- 5 See, for example, *De Gooi en Eemlander*, 19 May 1906; Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Bevolkingsregister, volume 92, sheet 116, Koekkoek later went bankrupt and emigrated to America; *De Courant*, 3 January 1908, 3.
- 6 Among other things, Wierda built the Christian boarding school De Eikenhorst in Baarn before emigrating to the South African Republic in 1887 to become Director of Public Works at the request of Paul Kruger; K.A. Bakker, N.J. Clarke and R.C. Fisher (eds.), *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens. A Shared Dutch Built Heritage in South Africa*, Pretoria 2014.
- 7 E. van der Ent, 'Fan Frieslân fia Baarn nei Súd-Afrika (diel twa). Geboue in Baarn ontwerp deur argitek Wierda', *Geheugen van Baarn*, 3 May 2021.
- 8 <https://gereformeerdekerken.info/2022/02/01/de-gereformeerde-kerk-te-baarn-1/> (accessed 22 November 2022).
- 9 J.H. van der Veen, 'Collega Tjeerd Kuipers te Bussum 80 jaar', *Bouwkundig Weekblad Architectura* 58 (1937), 477-478.
- 10 G. de Jong and K. van der Ploeg, 'Gereformeerde kerken in de provincie Groningen', *Groninger kerken* 10 (1993), 50-69; Drents Archief Assen, 2001.2, Bevolkingsregister Smilde part 2, 1900-1921, no. 27, leaf 362.
- 11 <https://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=443> (accessed 22 November 2022); what work Dijkstra did in Germany is not known.
- 12 *Middelburgse Courant*, 21 May 1908, 4.
- 13 Rev D. Pol's ordination service was introduced by his father-in-law, Rev Harmen Dijkstra, *De Nederlander*, 18 June 1907, 2.
- 14 For example: *De Zeeuw*, 16 January 1909, 4.
- 15 Advertisements in the *Vlissingse Courant*, 14, 23 and 30 October 1909, 4.
- 16 Relocation notice in the *Vlissingse Courant*, 9 May 1910, 3. Pieter Dijkstra had three children with Johanna Kilian; Zeeuws Archief Middelburg, 7434, Burgerlijke Stand en Bevolking Gemeente Vlissingen 1810-1994, inv. no. 610, sheets 354 and 238.
- 17 Van Niftrik was alderman for Public Works in 1905-1913 and 1919-1924 and for Finance in 1917-1919; B., 'J.G. van Niftrik 1889-1924', *Het Gas* 44 (1924) no. 11, 302-305.
- 18 B.I. Sens, *Gemeentebescrijving Vlissingen*, Middelburg 1994, 15 (unpublished MIP report); the plan of the villa park is included in: *Vlissingen*, Amsterdam 1925, unnumbered at the back.
- 19 *Vlissingen*, Amsterdam 1925.
- 20 J.G. van Niftrik jr., 'De Toren in de ville morte', *De Opmerker* 46 (1911), 401-402. Written in response to a suggestion that Vlissingen, like Bruges, was a dead city.
- 21 Dr Abraham Kuyper jr. (1872-1941) served the Reformed Church B (Middelkerk) from June 1906 to September 1910, *De Zeeuw* 2 August 1906, 2 and 13 September 1910, 2. On 2 January 1910, both he and Pol announced the 'amalgamation' of churches A (Noorderkerk) and B; Zeeuwsche Kerkbode, 7 January 1910, 3.
- 22 P.K. Dommissie, *Plattegrond en Register van merkwaardige panden binnen Vlissingen*, Vlissingen [1909].
- 23 Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 7415, Adresboek Vlissingen, inv. nos. 2189-1912, 2189-1918, 2189-1922, 2189-1926.
- 24 For example, the Amsterdam architects Schill & Haverkamp (Havenstation, 1894) or the Rotterdam-based J.P. Stok (office buildings for Wibaut & Co, 1909, and Koninklijke Maatschappij De Schelde, 1913).
- 25 Dijkstra's appointment was not made permanent until 1921; *Vlissingse Courant*, 2 September 1908, 2 and 22 April 1927, 5.
- 26 J. van Gelderen, 'De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland', in: R. Steensma and C.A. van Swigchem, *Honderdvijftig jaar gereformeerde kerkbouw*, Kampen 1986, 8-15.
- 27 A. Kuyper, *Onze Eeredienst*, Kampen 1911; J. Vreeze, 'Abraham Kuyper en het gereformeerde kerkgebouw', in: R. Steensma and C.A. van Swigchem,

- Honderdvijftig jaar gereformeerde kerkbouw*, Kampen 1986, 60-66.
- 28 Kuyper 1911 (note 27), 10 and 114.
- 29 'Verbouwing', *Zeeuwsche Kerkbode*, 7 May 1909, p. 3. However, this church building was replaced by an even larger building in 1933; Huson (comp.), *Souburg in oude ansichten*, part 2, Zaltbommel 1982, 8 and 9.
- 30 *De Zeeuw. Christelijk-historisch nieuwsblad voor Zeeland*, 13 January 1910, 3.
- 31 The church remained in use until 1953, after which only the ground floor remained; today, with a modified gable under a flat roof, it serves as business and storage space.
- 32 J. Braat, 'Eben Haëzer', *De Wete* 24 (1995) no. 2, 17-20; see also note 21.
- 33 'Kerk- en schoolnieuws', *Vlissingsche Courant*, 17 December 1910, 2.
- 34 After the church closure in 2015, the pulpit was removed, as were most of the pews. Whether the organ placed on the balcony opposite in 1920 will be retained in the current conversion to a community centre is not known.
- 35 Report of Vlissingen Municipal Council for the year 1912, Vlissingen 1912, 68-76.
- 36 Documentation in Zeeuws Archief, 738, Middelburg, inv. no. 807.
- 37 Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 7358, Middelburg, inv. no. 818, undated blueprint of a plan for a hall church with segmental arched vaulting.
- 38 Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, CUBAg420, letter from Van Niftrik to Cuypers dated 21 September 1912. Cuypers and Oberman were both members of the Zeeland Society; Zeeuwsch Genootschap. *Archief. Vroegere en latere mededeelingen voornamelijk in betrekking tot Zeeland. Archief 1910*, Middelburg 1910, XVIII and XXV; see also note 33.
- 39 Wies van Leeuwen, in his biography of Cuypers, states that for his design of the neo-Gothic English Church, he took the eight-sided church of Willemsstad, the oldest Dutch Reformed church building in the Netherlands, as his model. W. van Leeuwen, *Pierre Cuypers*, architect (1827-1921), Zwolle 2007, 127. However, we found no concrete evidence of a direct connection with the eight-sided church at Willemstad in either the relevant Cuypers archive at the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam or in the archives on the English Church that we consulted in the Zeeuws Archief in Middelburg.
- 40 Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 7360, Middelburg, inv. no. 4542, Ledger of the English Church in Vlissingen; see also note 36.
- 41 'Kerknieuws', *De Standaard*, 20 September 1913, 2 and 'De nieuwe Engelsche Kerk te Vlissingen', *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 5 January 1914, 2.
- 42 Because of declining membership, and partly as a result of the nationwide compulsory closure of bookmakers' offices following the introduction of the Morality Act of 1911, the English Church congregation was disbanded in 1922 and the little church passed to the Vrijzinnig Hervormde [liberal reformed] community. It survived war and floods, but in 1963 it was purchased by the municipality to make way for Vlissingen's new town hall; L. van Wallenburg, 'Engels kerkje in Vlissingen zonder enige historische waarde', *Zeeuwsch Dagblad*, 7; Municipality of Vlissingen, *Notulen Gemeenteraad 1963*, Vlissingen, 1963, 223-224.
- 43 J. Proper's first organ was later replaced by the 1913 Vermeulen organ from the Reformed Church of Marum; in 2009, after merging with the local Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of Hoogersmilde was put up for sale and today the building is home to the Ramakrishna Vedanta Association Netherlands; www.orgel-sindrenthe.nl/hoogersmilde and www.vedanta-nl.org (accessed 30 December 2022).
- 44 Kuyper 1911 (note 27), 113-14.
- 45 Kuyper 1911 (note 27), 145.
- 46 T. Boersma and T. Verstegen (eds.), *Nederland naar school. Twee eeuwen bouwen voor een veranderend onderwijs*, Rotterdam 1996.
- 47 *Vlissingsche Courant* 4 January 1910, 2; the school was on 'Sietersillepadje' (now Cithershillsingel); www.koudekerke.info (accessed 8 December 2022).
- 48 Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 2475, Primas-Scholengroep, 1897-1997, inv. no. K9, blueprints May 1909. The accompanying teacher's house on Tramstraat followed two years later; 'Aanbesteding', *De Zeeuw*, 10 August 1912, 2.
- 49 Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 1201, Archief Gemeente Arnemuiden 1857-1951, 1857-1951, inv. no. 1207.
- 50 A. van Hoof, *Vlissingen Bijzonder wonen, 90 jaar volkshuisvesting*, Vlissingen 1999.
- 51 *Vlissingsche Courant* 1 February 1917, 2 and *Handelingen van den gemeenteraad Vlissingen 1918*, Vlissingen 1918, 508-509; Van Hoof 1999 (note 50), 175.
- 52 *Vlissingsche Courant*, 31 May 1919, 3; see also Van Hoof 1999 (note 50).
- 53 Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, HAME.110459194, blueprints.
- 54 See, for example, photographs 7413-160, 7413-161, 7413-227, 7413-588, 7413-2126 and 7413-5129 in Beeldbank Vlissingen, www.zeeuwsarchief.nl (accessed 12 December 2022).
- 55 'Nieuw-Arnemuiden', *Middelburgsche Courant*, 25 September 1920, 1; Zeeuws Archief, Middelburg, 1201, Archief Gemeente Arnemuiden 1857-1951, 1857-1951, inv. no. 737, blueprints and specifications.
- 56 Nieuwendijk 51; 'Aanbesteding', *Vlissingsche Courant*, 31 August 1910, 3; historical photo 16277 in Beeldbank Vlissingen, www.zeeuwsarchief.nl (accessed 12 December 2022); the upper dwellings were destroyed by fire at the end of 1932; *Verslag van den toestand der gemeente Vlissingen over het jaar 1932*, Vlissingen 1933, 153.
- 57 Dijkstra himself had purchased the land for this from the municipality in 1911; *Vlissingsche Courant*, 6 April 1911, 2, and 3 February 1912, 2. Field visits on 2 March 2021 and October 2022 confirmed that the building still exists, including the facade inscription referring to its original function, but the ground and first floors have been extensively remodelled.
- 58 Walstraat 21 and 84 respectively; *Vlissingsche Courant* 20 February 1925, 3 and idem, 3 April 1925, 1; historical photos 47065 and 47088 in Beeldbank Vlissingen, www.zeeuwsarchief.nl (accessed 12 December 2022). Only the exterior of Goetheers' shop is now partially recognizable, nothing of the clothing shop.
- 59 The client was Andries van Westen, who was already active in that field; the building was built in two phases (1923 and 1926) and the house numbers were later changed to 214-216. T. Rentmeester, 'Eerste fabriek van radotoestellen "H.J. van der Meer & Zonen te Vlissingen"', *Radio-Historisch Tijdschrift* 35 (2012) 140, 6-14 (part 1), 141, 58-68 (part 2), 142, 106-120 (part 3), 143, 162-183 (part 4). The building, now residential, is a national monument.
- 60 *Vlissingsche Courant*, 1 April 1927, 4 and idem, 14 April 1927, 3. Preller however had already left for Rotterdam at the end of 1929; *Vlissingsche Courant*, 18 December 1929, 3.
- 61 Prof Herman Kuyper made a three-month tour on behalf of the (Dutch) Synod of Reformed Churches and was invited to participate in the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa in Rustenburg; H.H. Kuyper, *Zuid-Afrika - reisindrukken*, Amsterdam 1925; most of the travel letters had already appeared in *De Heraut* in 1924.
- 62 *Zeeuwsche Kerkbode*, 29 April 1927, 3.
- 63 This church was replaced in 1951 by a larger church building, also designed by P.S. Dykstra, but that too has since been demolished for a newer building; <https://artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldgframes.php?bldgid=3809> (accessed 10 January 2023).
- 64 N.J. Clarke, R.C. Fisher and M.C. Kuipers (eds.), *Common Ground. Dutch-South African Architectural Exchanges 1961-62*, Edam 2021.



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## P.S. DIJKSTRA – A DUTCH REFORMED MISSIONARY ARCHITECT AND HIS WORKS IN THE NETHERLANDS

MARIEKE KUIPERS AND NICHOLAS CLARKE

Pieter Simon Dijkstra (1884-1968) is regarded as a noted Protestant church designer in South Africa, but his contribution to the built environment in the Netherlands is much less well known. His life and career in the country of his birth are of interest because they are closely aligned with the religious turbulence of the period, in which the anti-revolutionary clergyman-politician Abraham Kuyper played a prominent role. The building of new Reformed churches and schools was a direct expression of the zealous determination to spread the 'true faith'. The architecture of the new Reformed churches was often modest and restrained, influenced by Kuyper's view that the church space should serve the 'gathering of the faithful' and be arranged in such a way that congregants could see and hear one other and the minister. Dijkstra, born to a clergyman father with a missionary zeal, delivered various designs in this Reformed context.

Although Dijkstra grew up and trained in the northern Netherlands, Zeeland became his main area of operation. In 1908, after time spent working in Groningen (Spijk) and Germany, Dijkstra settled in Vlissingen (Flushing) where he set up his own architectural practice. At the time Vlissingen was an internationally oriented city undergoing a radical transformation under the direction of the liberal alderman of public works, J.G. van Niftrik jr. (1889-1924). Dijkstra designed two new hall-type Reformed churches: one in Geersdijk (1910) and the *Eben Haëzer* Church in Vlissingen (1910).

There followed a remarkable inter-denominational collaboration after the English Presbyterian community's place of worship in the St Jacob's Church was de-

stroyed by fire in 1911. After Dijkstra's initial design for a simple hall church was rejected, the authoritative Catholic architect Pierre Cuypers (1827-1921) was commissioned to provide a sketch design for a small yet monumental building. Cuypers' design for a neogothic church based on an octagonal plan was further elaborated by Dijkstra. The church was inaugurated in 1914.

This unique project was followed by the *Vlaswiek* Reformed Church in Bovensmilde (Drenthe, 1915) and the Reformed Church in Kamperland (Noord-Beveland, 1923). The design for this robust church with corner tower and amphitheatre arrangement is in line with Kuyper's views and foreshadows Dijkstra's later church designs in South Africa.

Dijkstra designed school buildings for the various Reformed communities in and around Vlissingen (in Koudekerke and Arnemuiden) and social housing estates, including three for the Protestant-Christian housing association *Gemeenschappelijk Belang* (Common Interest), partly in collaboration with P.J. Hamers (1882-1966). Among his commissions for retail spaces is the striking expressionist radio shop he designed for H.J. van der Meer en Zonen (1923 and 1926), still extant. In 1927, all out of the blue, Dijkstra decided to emigrate with his family to South Africa, where he continued to develop as a Reformed church architect. This article not only provides an assessment of his Dutch oeuvre as a prefiguration of his South African work, but it also positions him as an interesting architect within the Dutch context of his day, characterized as it was by *verzuiling* (lit. 'pillarization', a form of compartmentalization along socio-political or religious lines).