

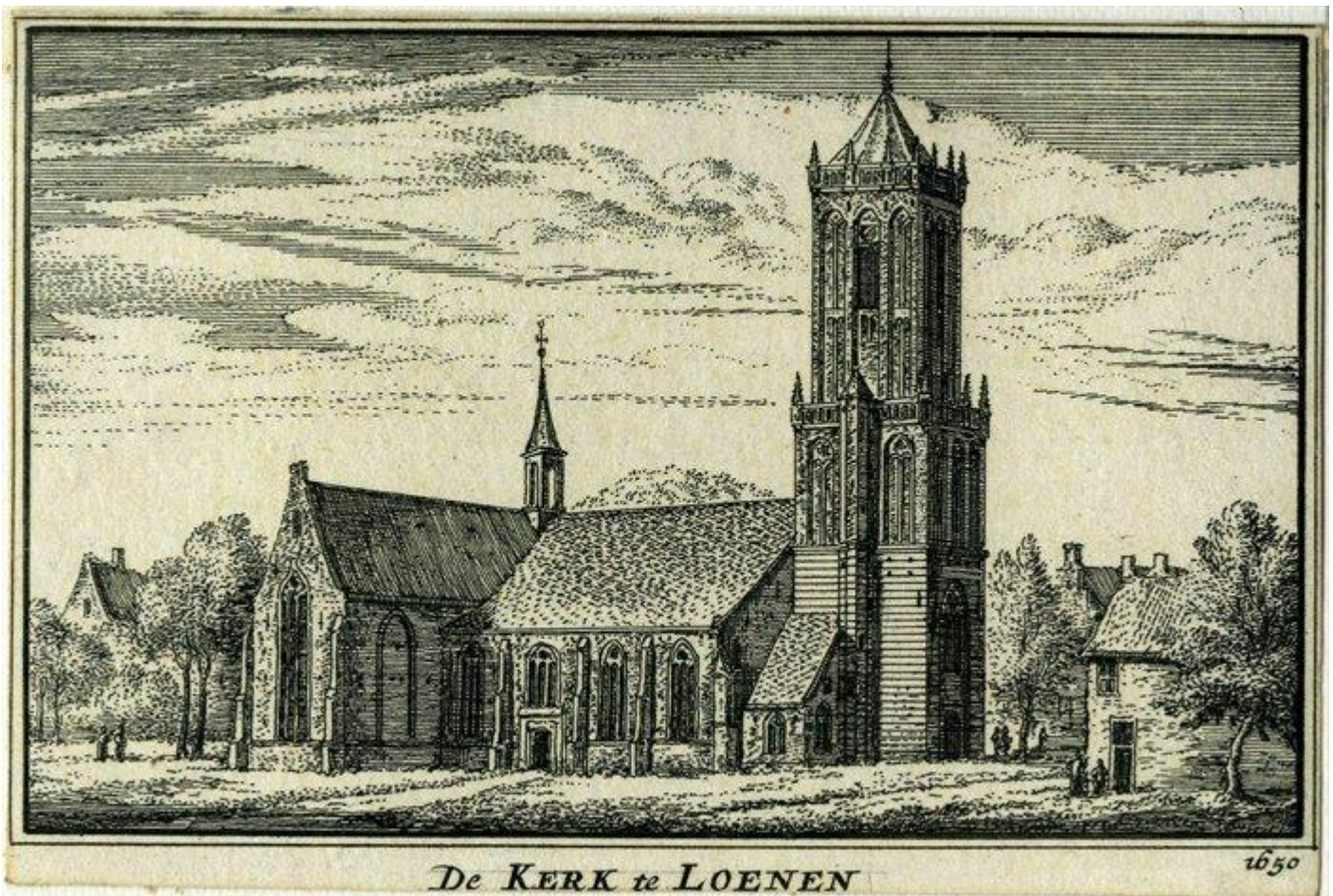
The Reformed Church in Loenen.

On the banks of the Vecht, a number of settlements arose in the early Middle Ages. The settlement of Loenen appears to have existed as early as the tenth century. The oldest known mention of the village appears in a charter of the year 953. Emperor Otto I (936-973) donated the goods of Count Hatto (died before 953) in Lona (= Loenen) to Bishop Balderic in Utrecht. Loenen must therefore have originated earlier. The church in Loenen was founded in the tenth century as a daughter church of the church in Nederhorst den Berg and dedicated to Saint Liudger. At that time, a wooden chapel was also built. The original chapel stood on the site of the current choir. As a reminder of the history, a keystone with an image of Liudger has been built into the vault of the choir. The large Church of Loenen is also called Ludgeruskerk.



Keystone with an image of St. Liudger.

It is difficult to determine when the current church building was erected. The choir is the oldest part of the church. It is also known that the church was extended several times between 1320 and 1464, including a five-sided choir and a sacristy, built of brick with a tuff cladding. The commission for these extensions came from the Van Amstel van Mijnden family, who had a family grave installed in the choir. Originally members of the family inhabited Mijnden Castle, in 1446 Kronenburg Castle became their headquarters. Mijnden and the two Loosdrecht belonged to the parish Loenen at that time, because the three separate lordships had too few inhabitants to found their own church. Possibly there was a baptistery in present-day Nieuw-Loosdrecht (at that time called Ter Sype), a so-called baptistery, where the pastor of Loenen could baptize the children. This saved the inhabitants of Loosdrecht a long journey to Loenen. The Van Amstel van Mijnden family influenced the regular enlargement of the church building. A transept was erected around 1518. Shortly afterwards, the single-aisled nave was widened to a size of three naves, giving the church its current form of a cross church. Some time later the tower was also built, inspired by that of the Dom in Utrecht.



A drawing of the church in Loenen from 1650. In this image, the tower has a much blunter spire than the current one.

Transition to the Reformation

In 1578, Amsterdam opted for the Prince of Orange and thus also for Protestantism. In that year the classis Amsterdam of the then Low German Reformed Church (formerly: Dutch Reformed Church, now Protestant Church in the Netherlands) was established. From the classis, pressure was exerted on surrounding churches, especially in Holland, but also in the border region between Utrecht and Holland, to also join the Reformed Church. The church in Loenen followed Amsterdam in the same year. She was assigned to the classis Amsterdam for reasons related to the patronage rights. The transition was accompanied by a purification of the interior of the church building. The Roman statues and altars were removed from the church. The stained glass windows, depicting saints, were also destroyed. A rich history can be extracted from the objects still present in the church. In the church there are a dozen mourning signs of the noble families who lived in and around Loenen, especially the Van Lynden and Moens families. There are also tombstones in the church that can tell of a rich history.

The Roman Catholics of Loenen and the surrounding area had to look for another place of meeting. They met in the period 1578-1652 in a remote place, namely in the Huis Het Honderd (current address: Honderdsche Laantje 4 in Nieuwe ter Aa).

The lords of Kronenburg remained faithful to the Roman Catholic religion after the church reform in 1578. At the beginning of the 17th century, Anthony van Lynden († 1626) was Lord of Kronenburg. His wife Alexandrina van Stepraedt, who survived him for a long time, continued to support the Roman Catholic population in Loenen and Loenersloot. In 1652 she had a small (hidden church) built on the Slootdijk. In the French Period (1795-1813) there was a debate about whether the Grote Kerk in Loenen should be returned to the Roman Catholic population. The outcome is known: after much back and forth, the church building remained in the hands of the Reformed Church.

The Tower

Until the 18th century, the tower was owned by the church. When, by the State Regulation of 1798, the towers *"attached to the church buildings of formerly predominant Churches, together with the bells of these houses, were declared to be and remain the property of the Civil Congregations, standing at all times under the management and maintenance of the Church,"* our church tower also passed. During the restoration, as a result of the fire in 1714, the spire, which until then had been quite blunt, was replaced by an even more pointed model. In this way, the tower was broadly given the silhouette as it rises above Loenen to this day. The tower has been out of whack for years. Crack measurements at various places in the church show that the cracks are getting wider and wider. This means that the tower is still in motion. In the past, attempts have been made to straighten the tower. For example, it is known that in 1747 the tower, when it was very crooked, was straightened by a local contractor, after several specialists (distinguished tower builders) had indicated that they did not want to burn their fingers on this. However, the local contractor liked it. To do this, he dug a trench on the side to which the tower was to be lowered. He rang the bell and lo and behold, the tower sank to the right side again. This earned the local contractor a poem in addition to an expense allowance, which was of course many thousands of guilders lower than that of the distinguished tower builders.

Restorations

Over the years, it is known from documents that major maintenance and / or renovations have been carried out on the church several times. In 1714, lightning struck the tower of the church. People were very concerned and thought that the tower would burn out completely and fall over. In the process, the church and possibly surrounding houses would be destroyed. In a hurry, a renbode was sent to Loosdrecht, where Loenen's preacher, Anthonius Konijnenberg, preached. The renbode had to warn the preacher that he had to rescue his goods from the presbytery that stood next to the tower. The renbode arrived in Loosdrecht panting and disrupted the church service there, saying that the church in Loenen was on fire and that there were great dangers for the rectory and the entire village. The preacher, however, responded calmly and said to the messenger, *"Turn back, there is no one who lives, who can avoid the Almighty and beating hand of God. Leave my goods in her place. The Lord may have mercy on us.* Whether the preacher's faith reversed the mischief or whether it was because the combustible wood was burned throughout the tower will always remain unclear. However, the fact is that the fire in the tower went out on its own and the tower, like a smoking chimney, remained standing. The concern of the inhabitants of Loenen is understandable. From a charter of 1708, in which the number of haystacks had to be limited to 1 per house, it can be deduced that houses in the village had several haystacks. We also know that the extinguishers were very limited at that time. In such a village, a falling burning tower would have caused great damage, although the village did not have the size of today. If the tower had fallen, there was a good chance that the village would have suffered great damage.

In 1945, just after the war, there was a lot of damage due to fire caused by work on the roof of the church. For example, the Bätz organ was destroyed. This Bätz organ was donated by the lady Nicola Geertruijd Smissaert of Kronenburg. Commissioned by her, the construction of this organ was started in 1786. Construction was completed in 1787. The restoration of the church after the Second World War took many years. On March 29, 1950, the church was reopened.

Organ

On the basis of existing images of this Bätz organ, a new organ was built by the Fa. Flentrop. Recently (2005) this organ, which is included in the so-called triumphal arch, received a major overhaul. In order to preserve the original character of the organ, the organists' wishes to expand and adapt the organ were not granted. Only changes that do not affect the character of the organ have been implemented in consultation with the relevant authorities. The organ is a candidate to be included on the list of young monuments.



The Flentrop organ, in the triumphal arch, after the major overhaul in 2005.

Interior Restoration

In the past four years, a project called Work on the Church has been carried out within the Reformed Church. The project aimed to restore the church, make it more sustainable and multifunctional. And that with respect for Then and Later. Initially mainly preparation and planning, later applying for permits, involving the Cultural Heritage Agency and Mooi Sticht, fundraising and the last year mainly carrying out the work in collaboration with hired companies and many volunteer activities of various kinds. The old benches have been replaced by chairs that are set up on a floor of the old tombstones and equipped with underfloor heating. By applying stained glass in the former choir (now: Resurrection Chapel) it has undergone a transformation. A short description has been placed in the chapel (bulletin board). Here you can read what is depicted. The opening of the "renewed" building took place in September last year. In addition, it can be reported that images of the entire route can be found at:

Image bank <https://my.hidrive.com/share/19118pbvky#>

Video RTV Stichtse Vecht <https://rtvstichtsevecht.nl/nieuws/artikel/laatste-loodjes-voor-restauratie-grote-kerk-loenen>

Loenen aan de Vecht, 24 February 2007 and revised on 26 July 2023.