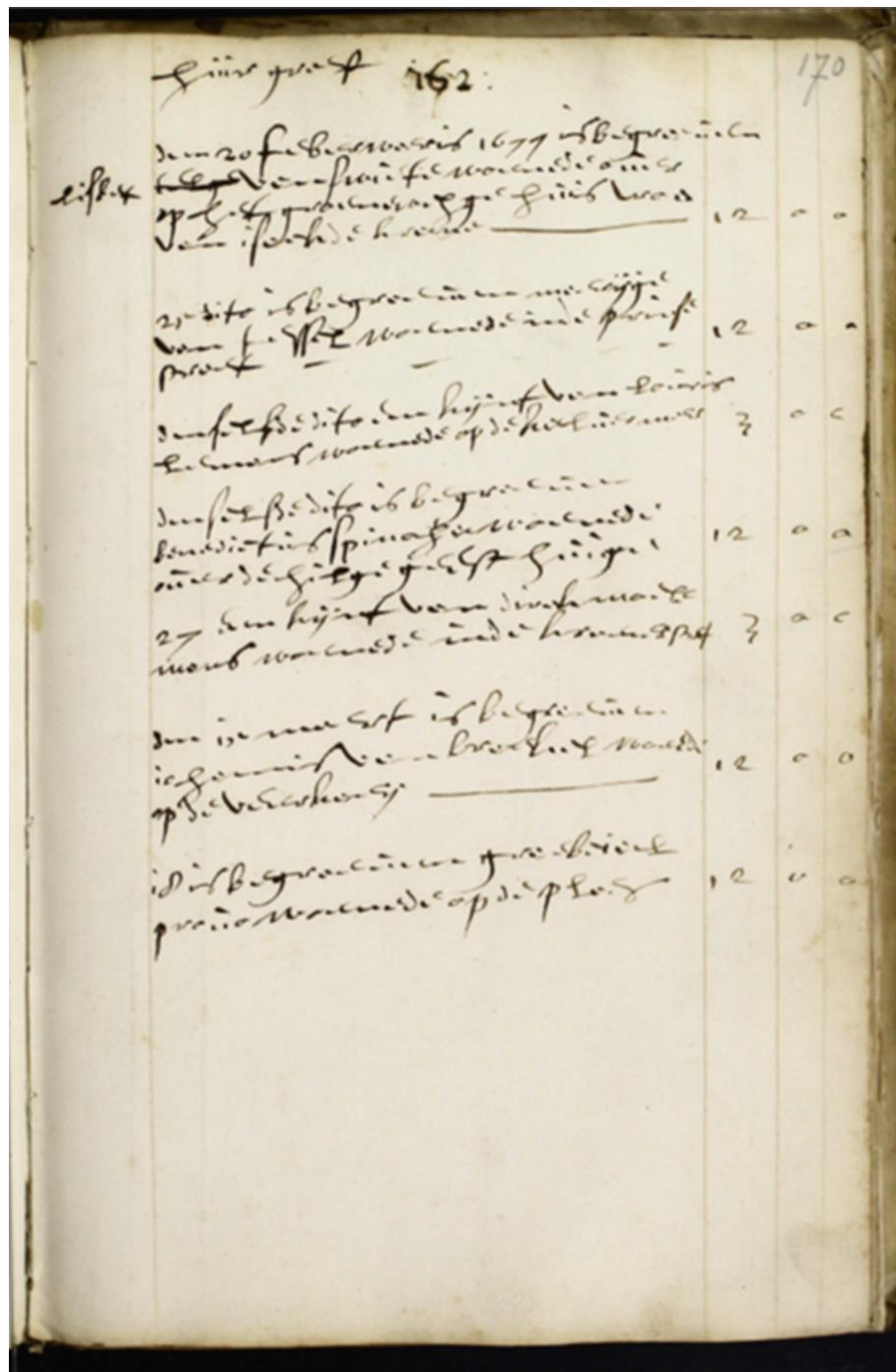


# The grave of Benedictus de Spinoza, Nieuwe Kerk, 's-Gravenhage



**Rental grave 162, Grave Book of the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church), Den Haag. <sup>1</sup>**  
**Seven people were buried in this grave between 20<sup>th</sup> February and 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1677.**  
**Benedictus de Spinoza is number four, he was buried on 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1677.**

<sup>1</sup> Haags Gemeentearchief BNR 0377-01 Inventaris bnr. 0373.01 Doop-, trouw- en begraafboeken 's-Gravenhage / Nederlands Hervormde gemeente / 1.1.1.1.3 Nieuwe Kerk / 279 Grafboek, 1656-1720 Deel 2 Graf 162, folio 170, scan p. 53/77. In the past, the entire *Grafboek* has been recorded in the DTB Register Begraven and referenced to the 'klapper op de DTB' (individual cards in alphabetical order). The 'klapper' was ultimately put on microfilm where it can be perused in the *Haags Gemeentearchief* to this day. In the *Register Begraven* 388 Spinoza is spelt 'Spinoha, Benedictus', in accordance with the original handwriting, and referenced to inventory no. 279, p. 170. The microfilmed photo on the fiche shows a (difficult to read) huur graf 162.

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Spinoza was buried in the *Nieuwe Kerk* in *huur graf* (rental grave) 162, a new grave which contained seven bodies when it was closed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1677. Grave 162 was connected with six other graves, the combined graves held about fifty bodies in all. Later, grave 145 became the *Mond* (mouth) of this *graf van zeven zerken*.

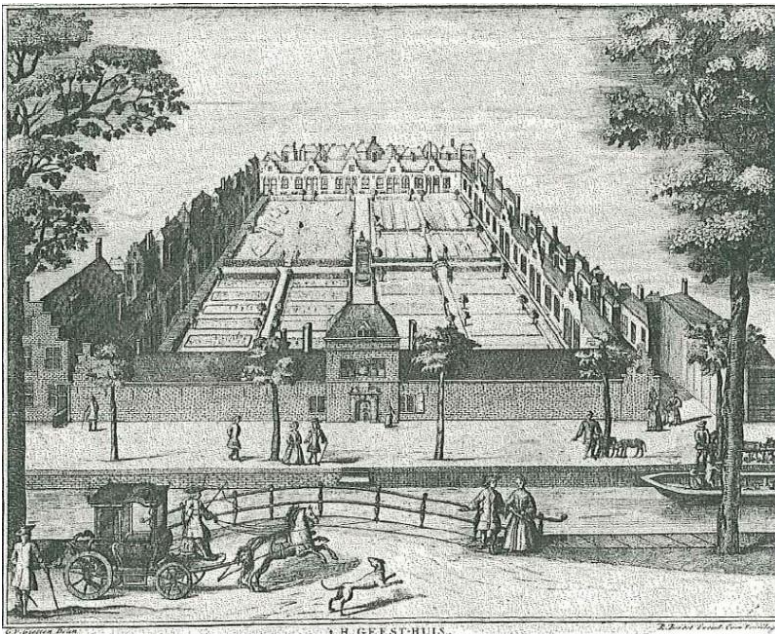
Spinoza's house was on the Paviljoensgracht, opposite the well-known Heilige Geest hofje (Holy Spirit almshouses). He had died there on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1677.

Between 20<sup>th</sup> February and 18<sup>th</sup> March 1677 seven people (two women, two children and three men) were buried in *huur graf* (rental grave) 162, almost right opposite the pulpit in the protestant *Nieuwe Kerk*, Den Haag. On one day, Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 1677, three people had been buried in grave 162: Maerijge van Tessel, a [single] woman from the Prinsestraat, next a child of Louis Lemans from the Kalvermarkt, and third Benedictus de Spinoza.<sup>2</sup>

The inscription in the Grave Book reads as follows<sup>3</sup> :

*den selfde dito is begraven  
benedictus Spinosa, woenede  
ouer de Hilge geest huigen (huisen)  
12 – 0 - 0*

*on the same day was buried  
Benedictus Spinosa, who lived  
opposite the Holy Spirit almshouses  
(twelve guilders)*



Left: Heilige Geesthofje 's-Gravenhage, engraving approx. 1730, Gerrit van Giessen (1692-1750) (<http://www.monumentenzorgdenhaag.nl/monumenten/paviljoensgracht-51-tm-125>)

Right: Spinoza House (Domus Spinozana). (<https://www.spinozahuis.nl/voorbeeld-pagina/>). In Spinoza's time the house had a stepped gable.

<sup>2</sup> Servaas van Rooijen, A.J. (red.). 1889. De Grafplaatsen van de de Witten en Spinoza in de Nieuwe Kerk. *Haagsch Jaarboekje 1889, 1<sup>e</sup> jaargang*. Den Haag, p. 53-57

<sup>3</sup> W.A. baron Snouckaert van Schauburg. 1911. *De Wapenheraut*, ed. D.G. van Epen, 's-Gravenhage, p. 476

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The church charged a total of 66 guilders for the seven burials in grave 162. The day after 18<sup>th</sup> March, the grave would have been closed, and grave 163 be readied for the new burials. *Huur graf* 162 and its neighbours were invisibly located under the *Herenbanken* (Gentlemen's benches), opposite the pulpit.

When the *Nieuwe Kerk* first opened in 1656, a few wealthy church members bought premium family graves (*koop graf*, or purchased grave) for 400 guilders, in the centre of the church, right in front of the pulpit. Standard family graves, on different attractive locations in the church, would cost 300 guilders. Around 1700 there would be about 60 family graves, including a dozen premium graves. Such graves were sometimes covered by inscripted, sculpted flat tombstones. Also, the church would charge a fee for every time the *koop graf* had to be opened for a new burial. Lifting the heavy tombstone was hard work and the opening of the grave in a central location would create the necessary nuisance. In addition, after a number of years the church would charge the owner of a *koop graf* for the necessary clearing, levelling and reconstructing of the grave in the church floor. If the owner did not pay the bill, the Kerkmeesters would have to decide that the the *koop graf* would be forfeited, the right of property would return to the church, the grave cleared and sold to someone else. This is what ultimately happened to grave 77, property of Johan de Witt, *Raadspensionaris* (Grand Pensionary) of the States of Holland, who bought the grave in 1665 and whose sad remains were buried here in 1672, having been killed by a mob of rioters, together with his brother Cornelis.<sup>4</sup>

The large majority of citizens would normally be buried outside, in the graveyard of the church. An analysis of the grave books shows that from 1667 onwards the Nieuwe Kerk must have offered a new kind of grave: a *huur graf* (rental grave).<sup>5</sup> It was an alternative for people who preferred to be buried inside the church but could not - or would not - pay the hefty sum for a *koop graf*. Some seven to ten people would be buried in a single common grave, with their last address added as reference. Records show that generally one was not allowed to select a rental grave in a specific location: apparently a person would be buried in the grave that happened to be open at that time. No names would be carved on the flat tombstone; it merely mentioned the grave number. After the rental grave was closed it would be opened only many years later for collective clearing and the same tombstone would be used again.

A rental grave was also the choice of (or for) Pieter Aaronsz. Noorwits (1612-1669)<sup>6</sup>, architect/builder and first warden and grave maker of the *Nieuwe Kerk*, who was buried in *huur graf* number 94, almost in the centre of the church.

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<sup>4</sup> Wildeman, M.G. 1893. Nog iets over de Grafplaatsen van de de Witten en Spinoza in de Nieuwe Kerk. *Haagsch Jaarboekje* 1893, 4e jaargang. Den Haag. p. 117-121

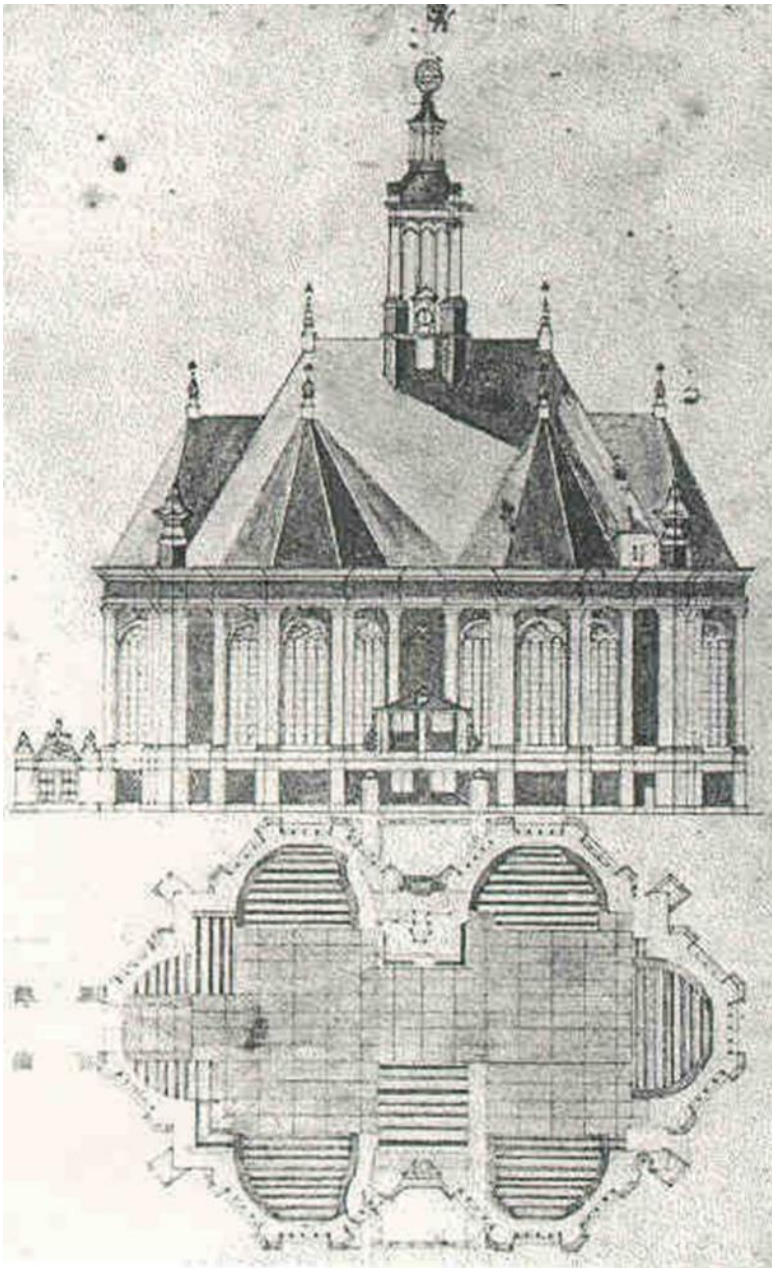
<sup>5</sup> I have not found a designated *Huur graf* in the Grote Kerk. The Kloosterkerk had rental graves in the choir in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>6</sup> [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter\\_Noorwits](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_Noorwits); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nieuwe\\_Kerk\\_\(The\\_Hague\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nieuwe_Kerk_(The_Hague))



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Pieter Noorwits was succeeded by his wife, Teuntje Sluijters (also known as Teuntje Pieters, *weduwe van controlleur Norwiths*), she was *kosterinne*, in charge of burials at the time when Benedictus de Spinoza was buried in the Nieuwe Kerk.



*Pieter Noorwits, Design drawing, June 1649 of the Nieuwe Kerk, showing the Herenbanken facing the pulpit in the centre and the church benches in six 'ronden' surrounding the church floor.* <sup>7</sup> *Huur graf 162 was invisibly located under the Herenbanken.*

From the beginning, the area reserved for rental graves had included the area covered by the *Herenbanken* (Gentlemen's benches). These benches had been constructed specifically for the members of the *Sociëteit van 's-Gravenhage*, the founders of the church. Sixteen rental graves, in different clusters, were located underneath this wooden structure. Three, five or

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.monumentenzorgdenhaag.nl/monumenten/spui-175>

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seven grave cellars were interconnected to form communal graves that later on could only be reached from the side, where one grave would function as the Mond (Mouth). These graves were first opened for burial during 1676 and 1677, after the death of Noorwits. Here in 1677, Spinoza was buried in grave number 162, a new grave, in a series of seven *zerken* (stones) holding some 50 bodies in all.

Because the benches were located directly on top of the tombstones, the graves were not visible. It is the only location where the *Nieuwe Kerk* grave book mentions the amount charged for a rental grave: 12 guilders for a grownup and 3 guilders for a child.<sup>8</sup> This *impost* had to cover the location cost of using the grave until it would finally be cleared and used again, many years later.

So, as a matter of reason (not by chance!) Spinoza was buried in grave 162 in the Nieuwe Kerk, the third row from the wall, three rows away from the most expensive graves in the church, invisibly located under the *Herenbanken* (Gentlemen's benches), right opposite the pulpit.

As a matter of reason (not by chance!) grave 162, located underneath the benches of the *Sociëteit van 's-Gravenhage* in the *Nieuwe Kerk*, was in the safest place in any of the churches in Den Haag: invisible, virtually impossible to reach or to be tampered with, until the final clearance of the graves. It was a perfect choice for Spinoza's friends who had to find a suitable resting place for Spinoza's body. Even if we do not know the reason.

Wim Goris

Den Haag, October, 2019

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<sup>8</sup> There were four burial classes, and a Pro Deo class for the poor. The *impost* for Third class was 6 guilders, unmarried people were charged double. W.A. baron Snouckaert van Schauburg. 1909. *De Wapenheraut*, ed. D.G. van Epen, 's-Gravenhage, p. 129

# **The grave of Benedictus de Spinoza, Nieuwe Kerk, 's-Gravenhage**

**This document will be tabled in Domus Spinozana, Paviljoensgracht, Den Haag**

**PLEASE ADD YOUR COMMENTARY (until December 31, 2019)**

**Name**

**E-mail address**

**Date**

**Editors: Domus Spinozana**