The collection of copperplates by members of the Wierix family in the Jesuit church ‘De Krijtberg’ in Amsterdam

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of the year 2000 the presbytery of ‘De Krijtberg’ at Singel 448 in the heart of Amsterdam had to be totally vacated because of future renovation activities. This house, erected in 1835 by contractor Nicolaas Swarte, replaced a seventeenth-century building, that had been one of the ‘stations’ of the Jesuits in Amsterdam since 1654. After the embarrassing sell-out in the late 1960s (by the Jesuits themselves) of some of their most important and valuable art works, such as for instance the altar piece Christ carrying the cross, painted in 1657 for this very church by the famous Antwerp artist Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678), it was not to be expected that anything unknown would surface. The Dutch Jesuits had later remorsefully established a commission that made a detailed inventory of all works of artistic and historical importance in each one of their houses in order to prevent them from ever being secretly removed or sold.

A BOX WITH COPPERPLATES AND PHOTO-ENGRAVINGS

In view of the above it came as a big surprise when on 15 August 2000 the Jesuit priest Ad Merx (born 1920), who had been a resident of the presbytery since 1966, produced a simple cardboard box, which he had kept in his room for more than thirty years. On its cover the following words were written: ‘Kopergravures negatieven (Hier. Wierix 17e eeuw)’ [Copperplates negatives (Hier. Wierix 17th century)].

This box contained altogether 75 copperplates by members of the Wierix family, two copperplates by the Amsterdam engraver J. Beerendonk, and three photo-engravings. Every piece was wrapped up in printed or blank paper.

The pieces of printed material, possibly offering an indication as to the whereabouts of their contents at the time of packaging, can be described as follows:


Copperplates by members of the Wierix family

How did this collection of 75 copperplates by members of the Wierix family end up in Amsterdam? We know that the Amsterdam bookseller Cornelis Claesz (1551-1609) in the year of his death published a Catalogus Ofte Register van alle de Printen ende Caerten, die te coop by Cornelis Claesz. op 't Water in 't Schrijf-boeck, 3 B.P.M. Dongelmans, Van Alkmaar tot Zuydrecht. Alfabet van boekverkopers, drukkers en uitgevers in Noord-Nederland 1801-1850 (Amsterdam 1988), p. 40.

A new edition in the Hollstein series of the work by the Wierix family by Zsuzsanna van Ruyven and Harriet Stroomberg, to be published in 2001, will include a description of all known copperplates.

5 A detailed description of this collection in Appendix 1.