



Kasteel van Loppem

STICHTING JEAN VAN CALOEN

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van het kasteel van Loppem

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**New
presentation
of the kitchen**

Life in and around the kitchen of Loppem Castle

Since the web magazine's inception in the summer of 2022, seven of the eight issues have been dedicated to a specific work of art from the permanent collection. We have highlighted objects that had been recently acquired by the Jean van Caloen Foundation or ones that were undergoing restoration. The final issue of 2025, "From Noble Summer Residence to Public Monument", was published to commemorate the castle's opening to the public 50 years ago. This issue is dedicated to one room of the castle that visitors encounter along their journey: the kitchen.

Since the opening of Loppem Castle in the summer of 1975, the kitchen layout has remained unchanged. While much attention was (rightly) given to the neo-Gothic interiors, the events of October-November 1918, the medieval collections, and, in recent years, the collection of world art, the kitchen has consistently been neglected. Visitors can see that it is the castle kitchen, but that's about it. Information is lacking and there is a mishmash of objects, some of which are damaged or do not even belong in the kitchen. The presentation resembles a

The new kitchen layout



sembles a storage area for kitchen utensils rather than a museum display. In short: this space deserves better. We want to take visitors on a journey of discovery, introduce them to the various sub-collections—including fragile pieces, including historical paper goods—and showcase the richness and diversity of the collection. It is precisely this paper heritage that prompted us to do launch the project. Research in the castle's extensive archives yielded fascinating discoveries

about life in and around the kitchen and about food culture in the 19th and 20th centuries. This material deserved to be seen rather than just sitting in storage; it was a valuable resource to share with interested castle visitors, especially the younger ones who may not realize that induction cooktops, (microwave) ovens, dishwashers, refrigerators, and espresso machines are all relatively new additions to our kitchens. Furthermore, many products that we see on our tables every day were either unavailable or difficult to access a century and a half ago.

Food is timeless and universal to every culture. In recent decades, it has also become the subject of more scientific research. The food culture of the 19th and 20th centuries within the aristocratic milieu teaches us not only about what was served but also reveals a great deal about the concepts of social relationships, conventions, and associated rituals. Savina de Gourcy Serainchamps (1825-1912), wife of Charles van Caloen (1815-1896), was

known not only for her artistic skills and interests, but also for her practical approach. When architect Edward Pugin (1834-1875) drew the plans for the castle in 1858-59, she insisted on placing the kitchen not in the cellars, but on the ground floor. In those years, it was still common practice in castles and manor houses to hide the kitchen underground due to noise, odours, circulation, and fire risk, as well as to avoid constant encounters between masters and staff. All sorts of aids had to be employed in order to serve the food hot: the lady of the house used a table bell to signal the maid that she could serve the next course. Alternatively, a chaffing dish (chauffe-plat) integrated into a cast-iron radiator could be used to ensure dishes arrived hot on the table, as was done in Bruges at Langestraat 21. The lady of Loppem wanted the kitchen close to the dining room. However, it was separated from the dining room by the service corridor on one side and the service staircase from the office on the other. There are actually two kitchens in the castle: the "wet



The kitchen stove inside the neo-Gothic fireplace (with the uprights decorated with 'medieval' heads), the beating heart of the kitchen. On the left, the wall clock and the door to the service stairs.

kitchen" and the "hot kitchen." The "wet kitchen" houses the sink where fruits and vegetables, or dishes, could be washed. Naturally, only cold water came from the manually operated pump. This room is closest to the service entrance on the side of the castle, making it easily accessible for staff and suppliers. The gardener also came through this entrance, and via the parlour, to bring in the fruit and vegetables. Of the "outdoor staff," he was the only one permitted to enter the castle. The "wet kitchen" is connected to the "hot kitchen," the only room in the castle that was always warm thanks to the cooker. A properly functioning cast-iron kitchen stove, or cuisinière, was of paramount importance. The neo-Gothic fireplace has characteristic straight sides decorated with images of "medieval" heads, similar to several late-Gothic examples still preserved in Bruges. The Bruges firm H. Vuylsteke-Knockaert was commissioned to install the cast-iron kitchen stove in that fireplace. The top of the cooker features an opening that can be covered or uncovered with a lid. The ovens are located beneath the top. Heat circulates inside. Below there are warming ovens that keep dishes warm. On the right-hand side there is a kettle with a tap for dispensing hot water. Finally, coal could be added through the sliding lid. Today, the kitchen stove is still the focal point in the kitchen.

Not only were dishes prepared in/on it, but it could also be used to keep things warm (both dishes and plates) or to heat irons. In the left corner of the kitchen, the wall clock is proudly displayed. This was crucial for keeping track of baking and cooking times as well as serving times. The shape of the clock case is clearly neo-Gothic in style,



Wall clock in the neo-Gothic style, circa 1860, but with a mechanism from the 1750s (Ferdinand Cheval(l)ier from Paris).

which makes perfect sense given the setting of Loppem Castle. However, there was considerable surprise when, a few years ago, research into the clock revealed that the mechanism itself was much older. This is a wall clock with a verge escapement, the oldest type of escapement or regulating mechanism in mechanical clocks. And indeed, the dial indicates that this clock was

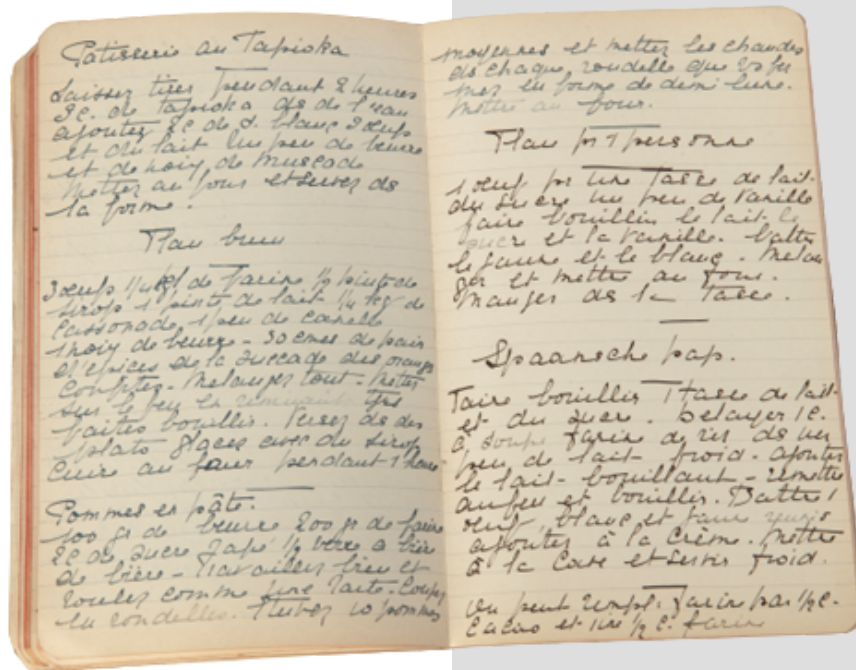
made by Ferdinand Cheval(l)ier in Paris around 1750. Originally, the clock case must certainly have been in the Louis XV style, the style common in Paris in the mid-18th century. Charles and Savina van Caloen, however, rejected the style of this period. In their eyes, the only true art style was that of the Neo-Gothic or l'art chrétien, which was truly Christian and national, a fitting style to express the Christian customs and traditions of the country. That's why, around 1860, the case of this wall clock was converted to the neo-Gothic style, including the letter panels and the inscription "Remember your last hour," even in the kitchen... Above the mantelpiece, God's all-seeing eye warns that swearing is not appropriate here. Two other important components, still present today, were the table and the countertop. At the scrubbed oak table, the staff could not only eat but also carry out all kinds of preparations, from peeling potatoes to carving meat. The pine countertop could be used to store kitchen utensils or prepare food. For hygiene and fire safety reasons, the kitchen is the only ground-floor room in the castle with a natural stone floor, and its walls and vaulted ceilings are plastered. At the request of the practical Savina, Jean-Baptiste Bethune (1821-1894), who succeeded Pugin, provided a dumbwaiter next to the service staircase and access to the cellars. From this compartment,

the staff had access to the office, where dishes arrived from the kitchen via the serving hatch. The maître d'hôtel or maid could, if necessary, finish the dishes there before they were brought to the adjoining dining room. This gives us an idea of the staff working in and around the kitchen.

The cook as a pivotal figure

The cook ruled the kitchen and was also responsible for it. If anything went wrong, she was called to account by Savina de Gourcy, who was strict, having worked with several cooks. Every morning, after breakfast, the cook discussed the menu for the day with the lady of the castle, for both lunch and dinner. Naturally, she ensured that a dish was never served twice in the same week. The cook was assisted by a (kitchen)maid and meticulously recorded the recipes in notebooks. These were stored in a specially designed wall cabinet in the kitchen. This culinary heritage is now preserved in the castle archives. The preserved recipes give us a good idea of what was prepared and show, for example, how the dishes were adapted during the war years. Depending on the period, they are written in French or Dutch. The cook was also responsible for the pantries. She was the only staff member who had keys to the cellar. She wore these keys on her chatelaine, a belt hook with chains attached

attached to a belt around her waist. This way, she always had the keys at hand and they couldn't get lost or be used by anyone else. The cook and maid generally stayed in the kitchen(s). The gardener brought them the requested fruit and vegetables from the greenhouse, the orchard, or the vegetable garden. The cook herself never served; that was reserved for the serving staff, the Maître d'hôtel in livery, sometimes assisted by a maid in a black dress with a white apron and cap. The latter could possibly be the kitchen maid, but in that case, she had to change clothes. As is known, Loppem Castle was a country residence. The Van Caloen family stayed there from early May to mid-November. When they left Loppem to spend the winter at their city residence in Bruges (Dijver 11), the live-in staff, including the cook and the (kitchen)maid, moved with her. The gardener remained permanently in Loppem, living in the gardener's cottage on the castle grounds. Work in the vegetable garden or orchard was then put on hold, allowing



One of the historical recipe books preserved in the archives, opened at a page with pastries, pudding, and 'Spanish porridge'. Circa 1910.



As on many castle estates, an ice cellar was also built here, right next to the pond. Blocks of ice were cut from the frozen pond and stacked in the ice cellar. To preserve the ice in optimal conditions, the ice cellars were usually located on the north side of a hill, had thick walls, were covered with a thick layer of earth, and shaded by trees. Today, the ice cellar serves as a bat sanctuary, so it is inaccessible and can only be seen from a distance.

to prepare for the next season or maintain the tools. When it froze, he had to saw blocks of ice from the pond and store them in the nearby ice cellar. Refrigerators didn't exist yet, and wealthy families used ice cellars. In summer, the remaining ice was used to keep drinks or food cool.

What was served?

In the home, daily meals were characterized by a certain simple, yet varied cuisine. They always consisted of a starter, a main course, and dessert, both at lunch and in the evening. Moreover, nothing was wasted. Using leftovers was generally accepted, even in the aristocratic kitchen. Meals with guests, on the other hand, were more luxurious, as we will see later.

Veal, pork, and lamb, as well as potatoes, milk, and butter, were supplied from the local farms surrounding the castle. Meat could also be delivered to the castle by the local butcher. The

castle's meadows and forests provided pheasants, hares, and other waterfowl. A chicken and rabbit run was located near the coachman's lodge. Friday was fish day in Catholic families (as were Wednesdays during Lent) with eel, sole, turbot, or cod brought by the fishmonger. Bread was baked at the castle.

The vegetable garden yielded a variety of vegetables such as soup vegetables, asparagus, beans, cabbage, spinach, chicory, and sorrel, as well as parsnips and cardoons (related to the artichoke family). Some fruits also came from here, including strawberries, raspberries, juniper berries, and gooseberries. Various grape varieties (Black Alicante, Buckland Sweet Water[A1] , Foster's White Seedling[A2] , Frankenthaler, and Muscat Hamburg) ripened in a small greenhouse. The espaliered trees against the inner walls of the vegetable garden provided apricots, pears (44 varieties!), quinces, peaches, and greengages. Sweet cherries as well as sour cherries, and especially apples (11 varieties) came from the orchard. This wide variety was the result of

Highlighting a few objects and artworks

The new kitchen layout highlights certain objects. For example, several waffle irons can be found in the kitchen, both for classic waffles, heart-shaped or not, and for the thin dessert waffles known as lukken. The latter are crispy,

flat waffles that are made primarily at Christmas and New Year's and a typical West Flemish product. Two of these irons possibly date back to the 15th century and were undoubtedly purchased by Jean van Caloen (1884-1972). Around 1930, he purchased several speculaas (spice biscuit) moulds from the Bruges pastry and confectioner Ernest Van Mullem (1865-1947). We will feature these two specific collections in a future web magazine. Also of particular interest are the two multicolour faience colanders, made in Makkum (Friesland) in the second half of the 18th century, decorated with flatfish and herring. Finally, and again a purchase of Jean van Caloen, a tureen in the shape of a wild boar's head from 1750-1763 made in the pottery of Bruges resident Hendrik Pulinx the Elder (1698-1781). This pottery was located on the Minnewater lake.

Two still-life paintings adorn the walls. One, "Still Life with Flowers and Vegetables in a Landscape," is likely of Italian origin and dates from the 17th century. The other, "Still Life with Herring, Onions, and Wine", is by Pieter Claesz (1597/8-1661) and dated 1646. Both works are very appropriate subjects for culinary culture. The large painting "Noah's Ark" (circa 1620-1640) is attributed to Hans III Jordaens (1590-1643). These three works never hung in the kitchen when it was in use as such. They were only added around 1975, when the castle opened to the public.

Pieter Claesz (Berchem,
Antwerp, 1597/8 – Haarlem,
1661)
Still life with herring, onions
and wine
1646

Archives at the service of the kitchen

The research in the castle archives was a resounding success. In addition to the recipe books already mentioned, dozens of menus are also preserved. They testify that, during meals with guests, not only were more luxurious dishes served, but also many more dishes were served than on weekdays. This was, of course, a confirmation of status and prosperity. This special printing work is highly varied. The van Caloen family often employed lithographer Charles Vande Vyvere-Petyt (1852-1922) from Bruges, especially for more formal occasions. For example, the menu printed for





Anonymous
Colander with herrings
Makkum (Friesland)
1750-1800

the New Year's Eve dinner in 1881 resembles a full-page miniature from a medieval book of hours. The same printer supplied the menu for the wedding meal of Jean Fremin du Sartel and Marie-Thérèse van Caloen on December 27, 1911. The front of the menu was decorated, as per regulations, with the couple's alliance coat of arms. Some menus were pre-printed and then filled out by hand. They were placed next to each plate and served a dual purpose. The guest's name was on the front to ensure they were seated correctly, according to etiquette. The back indicated what would be served. A charming example is cut out in the shape of a porcelain plate and saucer in trompe-l'oeil (L. Herreboudt-Claeys, Bruges). Another supplier who created menus was F. Claeys from Brugse Steenstraat.

At these lunches or dinners, several dishes were served. A variety of appetizers, such as soup, oysters, fish, and meat, followed one another. Depending on the season, the main course that followed featured game, fish, meat, and vegetables, sometimes supplemented with foie gras. Dessert usually consisted of pastries, ice cream, and fruit. Something for everyone.

Porcelain cards with the best addresses

The castle archives contain several impressive albums of porcelain cards. Approximately 4,500 porcelain cards are preserved, making this unique collection one of the largest in Bruges and the surrounding area.

Porcelain cards are occasional prints, often lithographs, printed in colour and gold on glossy cardstock and produced as advertising for a business, factory, or institution. Their appearance and feel resemble porcelain; this result was achieved through the use of a lead white coating. Porcelain cards were in circulation from the late 1830s. However, the use of lead white was banned in 1864 because it was toxic and therefore posed a danger to printers and lithographers.

These graphic masterpieces not only provide information about the shops and businesses in the city at the time, they are also a feast for the eyes and therefore coveted collector's items. The most famous creator was printer Edouard-Alexis Daveluy (1812-1894), who settled in Bruges and attracted clients both domestically and internationally. In 1842 he was allowed to call himself a purveyor to the royal household. The albums in Loppem contain porcelain cards of Ghent, some from Oudenaarde, Ostend, and Brussels, but primarily those from Bruges shops, factories, boarding schools, hotels, churches, and other monuments and landmarks, such as the mausoleums of

the Bold and Mary of Burgundy. Naturally, for this research, we focused on addresses where we know Savina de Gourcy was a customer. For example, the shop "Confiseurs & Pâtisiers F. Dubois et Fils" on Steenstraat was highly regarded by her for its quality and exclusivity. Besides gingerbread and chocolate, they offered pastilles in all sorts of flavours (English mint, lemon, raspberry, marshmallow, etc.), a variety of syrups, as well as jellies and preserves. Syrup could also be found, along with liqueurs, at Thérèse Faveers's on Philipstockstraat. The "Désiré De La Rue" house on Moerstraat supplied champagne, while Miss De Schryver on Vlamingstraat supplied wines, liqueurs, punch, and olive oil. Mustard was available at Monteyne on Sint-Jansstraat. For conservation reasons, the menus, porcelain cards, and recipe booklet on display have been replaced with full-size reproductions as paper does not tolerate prolonged exposure to light.



The menu for New Year's Eve, exactly like a page from a medieval book of hours, fits perfectly into the world of Charles and Savina van Caloen. The meal took place at their city residence (Dijver 11 in Bruges) on December 31, 1881. The menu was published by the famous Bruges lithographer Ch. Vande Vyvere-Petyt.



Menu (verso) and place (recto) at the table in the form of a porcelain dish, circa 1868-1890

Cooking for crowned heads and a president

The kitchen was a world of women, albeit with daily visits from the gardener, but Savina de Gourcy and the cook (assisted by the maid) were in charge. Between October 1914 and October 1918, the castle was transformed into a general staff headquarters for successive stays by German senior officers. The kitchen staff then consisted exclusively of German army cooks. After the occupiers withdrew, the cook of the Caloen family and the maid were able to return to stirring the pots. From 24 October to 21 November 1918, they even prepared meals for King Albert I, Queen Elisabeth and their entourage. And on 9 November, they were asked to prepare lunch for French President Raymond Poincaré and his entourage, who had been invited by the Belgian royal couple. Albert van Caloen was also invited to join them that afternoon. Meals were prepared for 17 guests. The

When they left on 21 November, the king gave Albert van Caloen, via his secretary, an envelope containing 1,000 francs to be distributed among the staff for their good care during Loppem's stay of almost a month. Part of this will therefore also have gone to the cook and the maid. From 30 November to 10 December 1918, King George V of the United Kingdom visited the battlefields in northern France and Belgium, accompanied by his sons, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) and Prince Albert (later King George VI). On 4 December, Albert van Caloen received word that, at the request of Albert I, the British party would be spending the night of 9 to 10 December at the castle. The ruins of Ypres were visited on 8 December, and the following day, this time accompanied by King Albert I (who returned to Laeken in the evening), they visited the destroyed port of Zeebrugge.



Top: The porcelain card not only shows the facade of the House Dubois but also lists all the delicacies offered there.

One of the customers was Savina de Gourcy (porcelain card, 1839-1864).

Bottom: The House Désiré De La Rue advertises on a porcelain card that it sells champagne (porcelain card, 1839-1864).

in his war diary, Albert van Caloen recounts how, on the morning of Monday 9 December, a lorry arrived at the castle with supplies for the British monarch and his entourage (table linen, sheets, towels, etc.). Servants arranged everything. Albert notes that after midday, "le cuisinier (un français qu'on dit millionnaire)" settled into the castle kitchen to prepare dinner.⁽¹⁾ The king and his sons, and his brother-in-law the Duke of Athlone, arrived around 4 p.m. The Caloen family was introduced to the monarch, who invited Albert van Caloen to dinner at 8 p.m. We know who sat where at the table. The company consisted exclusively of men, 14 in total. The king sat at the head of the table, opposite the fireplace, with his back to the Blue Salon. To his right sat Albert van Caloen, to whom the monarch said that it must be rare to be invited to your own table. Albert replied that it was the second time he had been invited to his own home by a king (the first time was by Albert I during President Poincaré's visit). The lord of the castle had the Prince of Wales on his right.

Unfortunately, it is not known what the chef prepared, apart from the fact that Albert van Caloen noted that "le dîner est simple mais excellent" (the dinner is simple but excellent). It is known that the British monarch, unlike his father Edward VII, was much more moderate in his appetite and preferred simple cuisine (although he also enjoyed Indian cuisine). Champagne and port were served. After dinner, coffee and cigars were served at the table. The next day, 10 December, after an "English breakfast" at half past eight, the king and his entourage left Loppem Castle.

(1) It is possible that Albert van Caloen made a mistake in his war diary and was actually referring to the Swiss chef Gabriel Tschumi (1882–1957). In 1899, he began as an apprentice in the kitchens of Buckingham Palace under Queen Victoria. He rose through the ranks to become the head chef to Edward VII and later to his son and heir, George V, until 1932.

Conclusion

The new kitchen layout aims to create a more attractive space within the visitor's itinerary, where young and old can learn about how a 19th-century kitchen functioned. Much has changed in 150 years, including the kitchen itself. The glass enclosure has been retained, allowing visitors to peer inside while keeping the delicate, historical objects safe. A trilingual text provides the necessary explanation. The most important objects have been placed closer to the public. Finally, the space has been enlivened by the addition of three mannequins representing the cook, the kitchen maid, and the gardener. Their clothing has been reconstructed using archival photographs, as even the clothing tells an important part of the story.

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