



# The craft of the miller

operating windmills and watermills

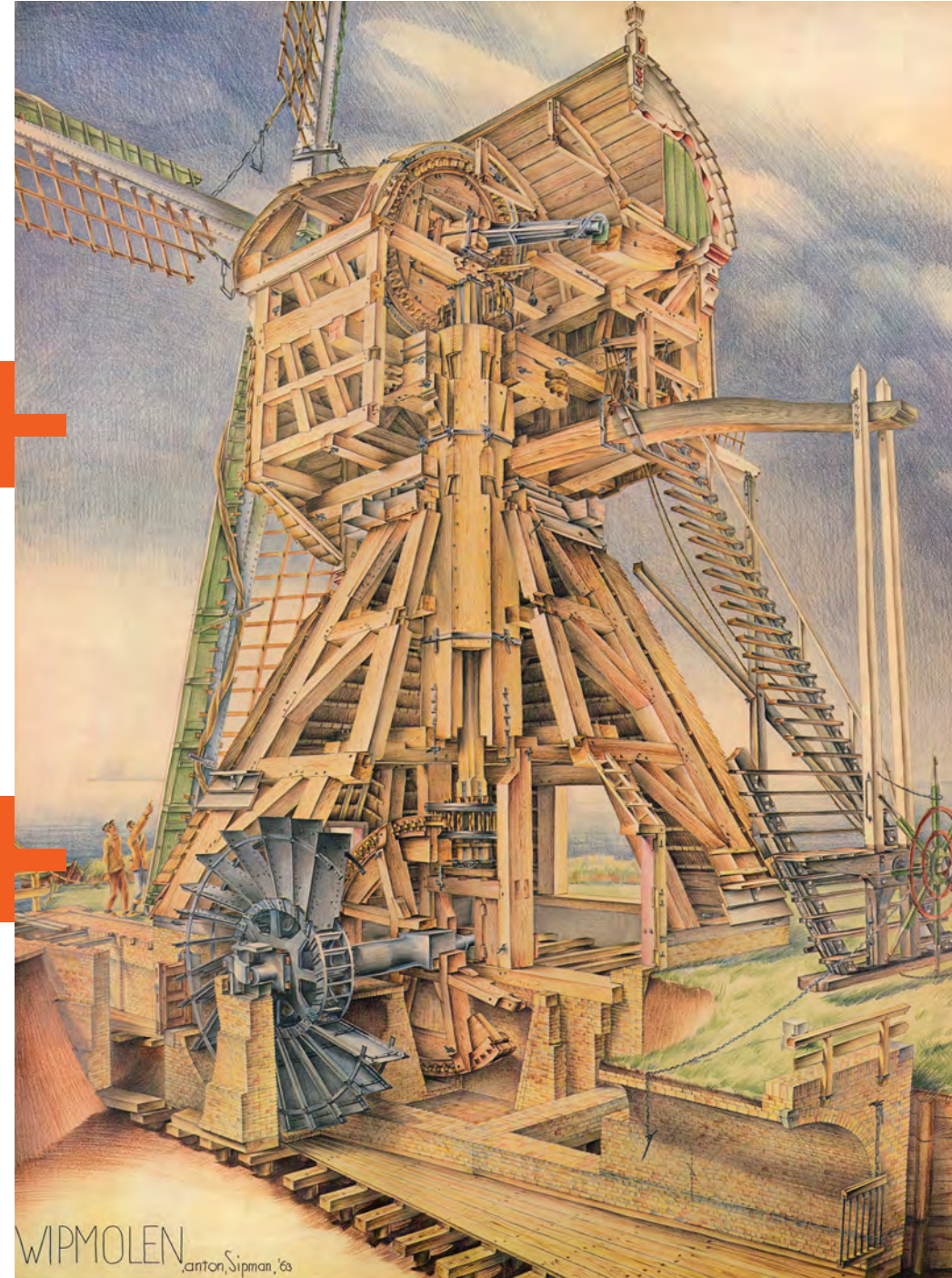
The craft of the miller is the Kingdom of the Netherlands' first nomination for inscription on the Representative List of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### A vital craft for sustainable development

The miller's craft has literally helped to create the Netherlands. Windmills and polder mills were used since medieval times to drain land in parts of the Low Countries that were situated below sea level. Mills were also instrumental in industrial renewal. To this day, they continue to generate wind and water power that is used to grind grain, produce prepared mustard and linseed oil and drive sawmills for timber.

### Iconic value

Mills and millers were depicted by Dutch master painters from the seventeenth century onwards, making Dutch windmills famous around the world. Their immense value in draining the land and in the country's constant battle against the water has invested the mills with a near-iconic value, from which people in the Netherlands have derived a shared sense of identity and continuity. The miller's craft is certainly not unique to the Netherlands. Historically, mills and millers were active in many countries, predominantly to grind grain. However, in the Netherlands the miller's craft acquired a special cultural and historical significance, which from the nineteenth century onwards propelled growing efforts to preserve the mills and pass on to new generations the knowledge and know-how needed to keep them in operation.

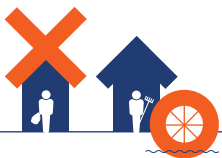




## Millers and their mills

The miller's craft serves a multitude of functions in the Netherlands. Some of these functions are connected with the use of mills to drain the land. Even today, in times of heavy rainfall the polder mills still serve as a backstop to drain off excess water.

There are also some flour mills still in operation, at which the miller's craft continues to be practised. There are approximately 40 professional millers still active today. They sell their artisanal products from shops at their mills. Together with the many people who volunteer their time in and around the mills, they keep the miller's craft alive. Indirectly, they also create jobs in related occupations, for bakers and at supermarkets that sell their artisanal products, and for millwrights and restorers. With the current rise in demand for sustainable products, millers are also seeing a growing market for their artisanal products, which often are not available in regular shops. Among their customers are many people of Turkish, Moroccan and Eritrean descent.







The Netherlands also has a number of millers still active at industrial mills, including sawmills where wood is cut for furniture production.

As well as forming hubs where Dutch people come to buy sustainable products, millers also fulfil an important cultural role, welcoming and hosting guided tours for the many visitors and school children who are eager to learn more about the cultural history of the miller's craft, the technology behind the mills and their role in Dutch history.

Windmills are also a striking and characteristic feature of the Dutch landscape. In the heyday of Dutch milling in the nineteenth century, the country had more than 10,000 active mills. Nowadays, some 1,200 are still in operation, both in rural regions and in towns and cities, where they continue to soar high above the urban streetscape. Some mills can also be booked for weddings, their historic trappings giving them a special appeal. Since 1973 the Netherlands has had a National Mill Day, which attracts approximately 100,000 visitors a year and in which some 950 millers now participate. Every year between April and October, there are also around 19 provincial and regional mill days.





## Sustainable energy landscape

The Dutch landscape has long been a source of sustainable energy. At a time when fossil fuel sources like coal, gas and oil are at risk of becoming depleted and moreover account for a large share of polluting greenhouse gases, promoting the use of wind and water power is a policy priority of governments around the world. The craft of the miller can contribute to these efforts. Currently, experiments are being conducted with the use of historic windmills that can generate electricity from wind and water power.

## The craft of the miller

The miller's craft draws on a range of skills and techniques needed to run a mill. Operation of a windmill requires knowing how to respond to ever-changing weather conditions, not only to attach the sails and position the mill so as to catch the wind, but also to take precautions against dangers such as lightning strikes or storms that could cause a mill to turn out of control. Traditional sayings such as 'to have been hit by a windmill' hint at the crucial safety requirements that every miller has to meet. Today, millers' guilds employ safety coaches and regularly organise safety workshops for mill operators. The operation of a watermill, which is driven by not wind but water, demands a wholly different set of skills, such as knowing how to regulate quantities of water runoff, water management in the inland area and the clearing of watermill sluices.





### Other skills of the miller

Within a mill there are also a multitude of tasks that need to be attended to, which vary depending on the type of mill. For the operation of a flour mill, the main skills required are the dressing or sharpening of the millstone, which is necessary in order to grind grain into flour. The millstone is the flour miller's most important tool. Second in importance is product knowledge, certainly at a time when food production is subject to a broad constellation of hygiene requirements. They also have to be knowledgeable about the market and the best channels for getting their products to consumers.

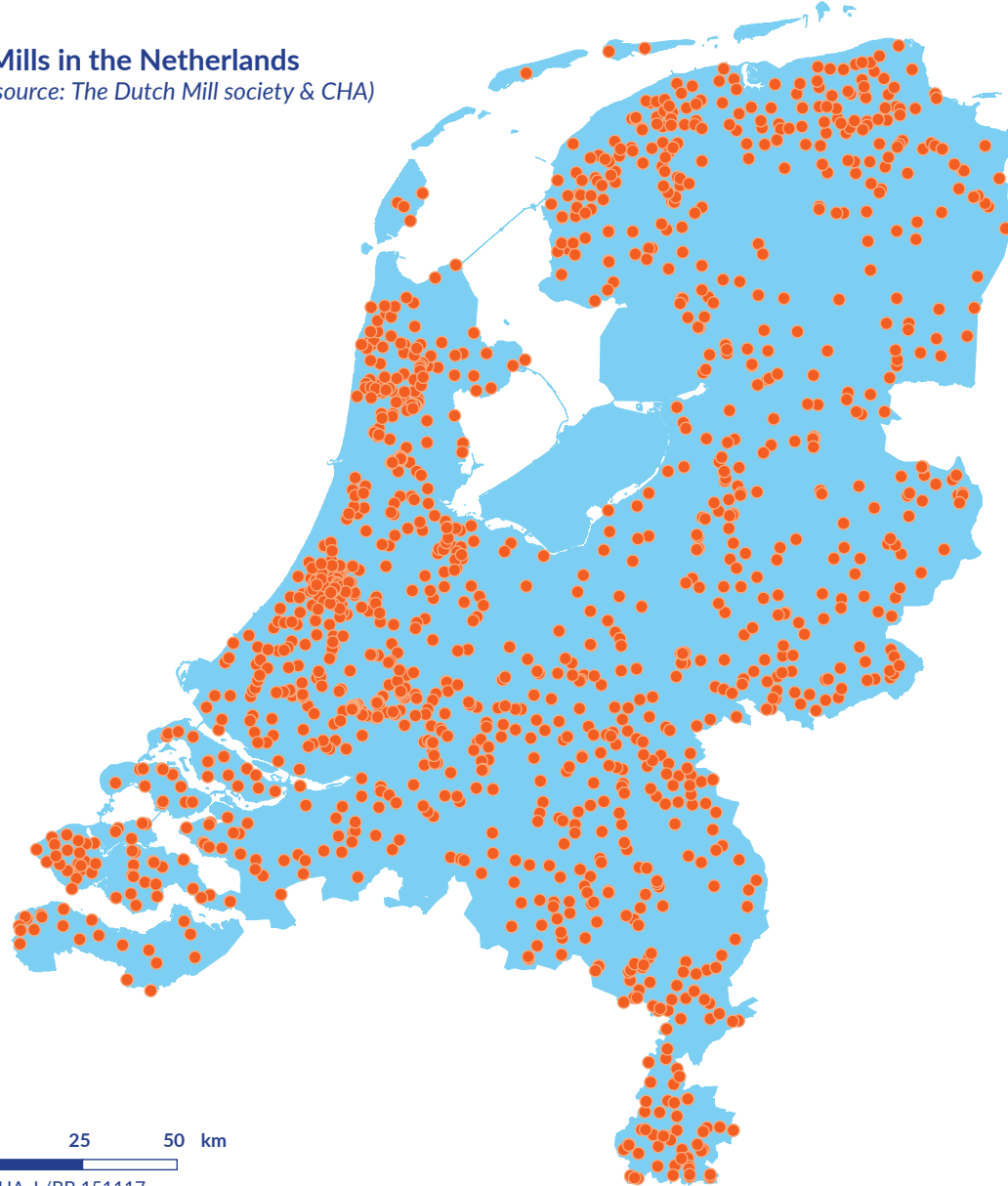
### Guilds of voluntary millers and locally organised infrastructure

The miller's craft is practised by qualified millers who have the skills needed to keep their mills in operation. Most millers practise their craft on a voluntary basis in their spare time and are responsible for mills where they generally work one or two days a week. Traditionally, millers have been male, but in recent years a growing number of women have joined their ranks.

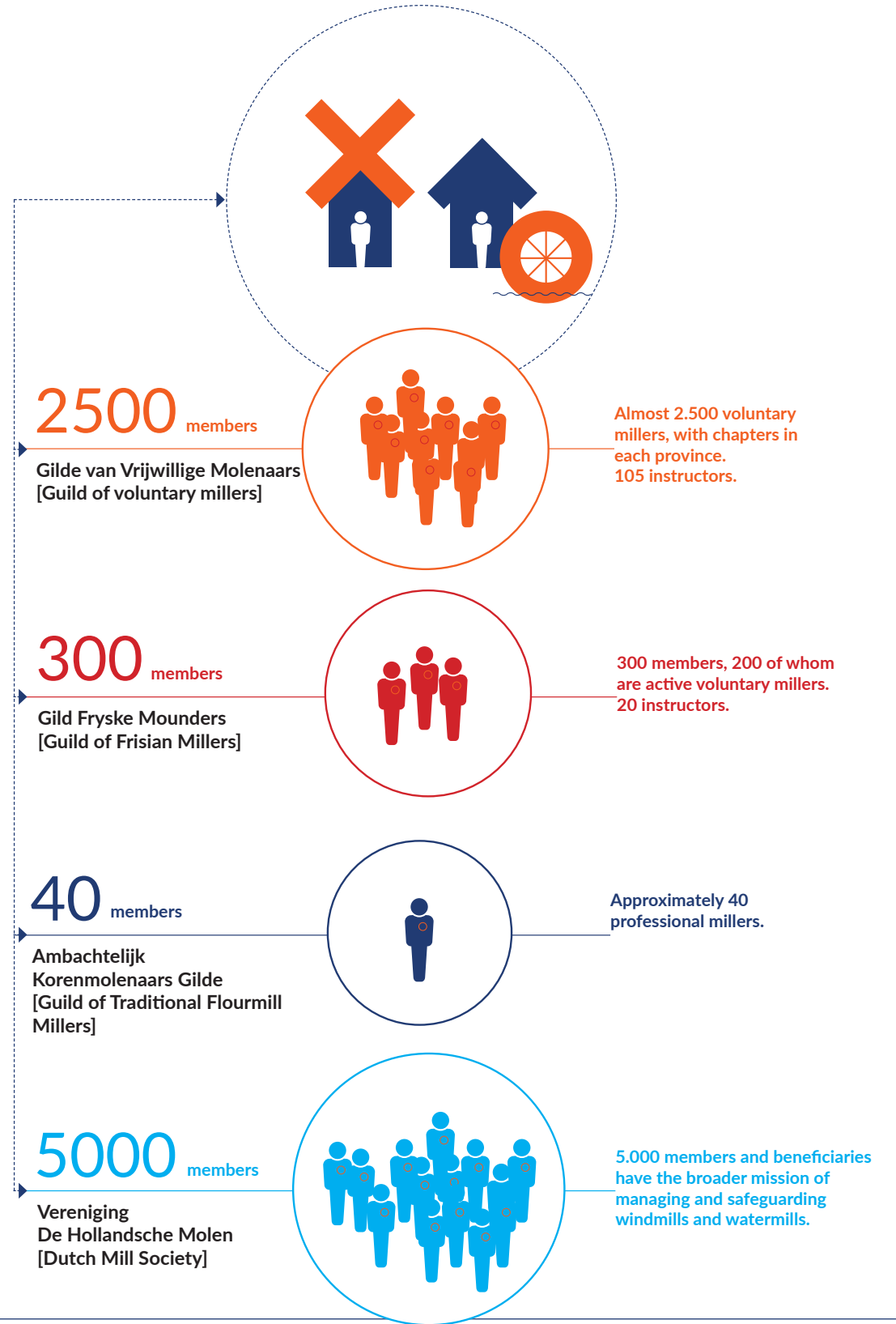


## Mills in the Netherlands

(source: The Dutch Mill society & CHA)



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CHA, L/BB 151117







The Guild of Voluntary Millers was founded in 1972. Financed by the Dutch government, it is a nationwide association with a network of provincial departments and boards that help to organise regional training activities. Anyone wishing to learn the miller's craft can apply to the Guild to receive training, for which they must seek out an instruction mill themselves. The training course is mainly practical in nature, supplemented by theory insofar as needed. Most recently updated in 2017, the course further ensures that aspiring millers learn to operate a mill safely, requiring them to spend a minimum of 150 hours doing practical work at different mills in every season of the year. The course culminates in examinations administered by the Dutch Mill Society. Since 1972, more than 2,000 people have passed the examinations and obtained the qualification to become voluntary millers. The Guild of Frisian Millers has 16 mills available for training purposes. During the past 40 years, around 35 apprentices have been trained there each year.

### Action plan for safeguarding

The organisations concerned are already working together on safety issues. In the years ahead, they wish to collaborate more closely, while continuing to respect each other's unique qualities and approach.

In the coming years, the main focus of this collaboration will be on:

1. Recruiting new millers and instructors
2. Maintaining training to the current high standard
3. Providing cultural education at schools
4. Promoting the miller's craft among the general public
5. Highlighting the relationship between intangible and tangible cultural heritage for a broad audience

The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands and the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage will support the millers and mill societies as they develop these safeguarding initiatives into a concrete action plan, and will also assist them in organising 'inspiration days' on specific topics such as promotion and education. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will provide financial support and monitor the whole process.





### Sharing of knowledge and skills

The Netherlands aims to work with other countries to develop an international network of mill societies that can share knowledge internationally. Although the Dutch guilds are already in contact with German, British, Danish, Belgian and French mill societies, there is no international network as yet. The Cultural Heritage Agency and the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage plan to catalogue the societies and foundations dedicated to the preservation of mills and to safeguarding the miller's craft in other countries as well as the specific safeguarding measures being undertaken there. The Agency and the Dutch Centre will also collaborate with the guilds and the Dutch Mill Society to organise a multi-day international conference in 2020 to bring together mill societies worldwide that are involved in safeguarding the craft of the miller. Specific input for this conference from the Netherlands will concern how to work with voluntary millers to keep the miller's craft alive and also highlight the relationship between intangible and tangible cultural heritage.





Ministry of Education, Culture and  
Science of the Netherlands



De Hollandsche Molen



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