

# KIPDORP



Kipdorp Gate c. 1863-1864



Woodcut from 1568: Pauwels van Overbeke

## A bridge to the past

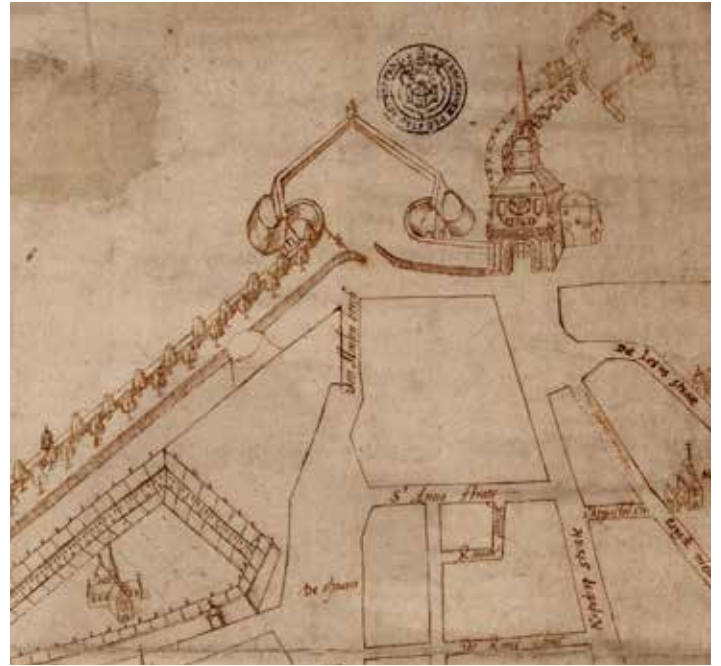
The 16th century remnants of the Spanish ramparts under Antwerp's Leien were well-preserved. They were excavated during the construction of the Noorderlijn tram line. Some sections of the ramparts were demolished to accommodate the tram line. The remnants of Kipdorp Bridge and Bastion will be incorporated in the new square in front of the opera, to be called Operaplein, and will remain permanently visible to the public, as an open-air heritage site.



1223

## Kipdorp, an old hamlet becomes a new gateway

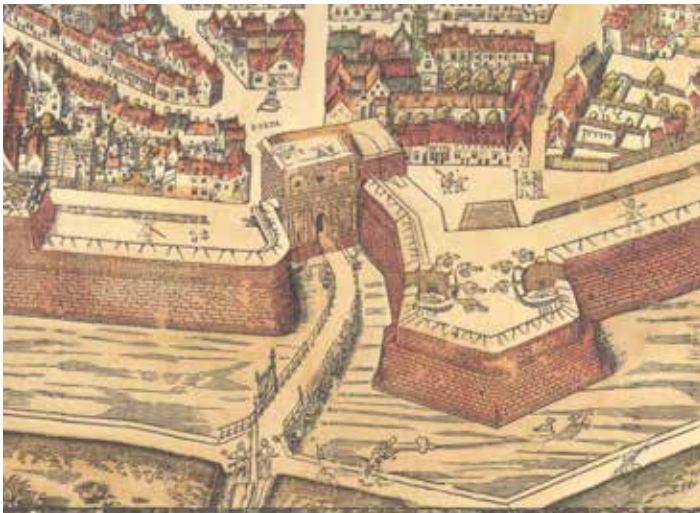
The gate's name, Kipdorppoort, refers to Kipdorp, an old hamlet to the east of Wijngaardpoort. Nowadays this hamlet would be located at the top of a street in the city that is called Kipdorp. The hamlet is first mentioned in 1223. It was incorporated within the city walls circa 1300. The word 'kip' may possibly refer to a 'small elevation', namely the higher sand ridge near Kipdorp. It was here that they built Kipdorp Gate, one of the five gateways to the city in the Spanish ramparts.



Kipdorp Gate, pen drawing, c. 1601-1650

1543

## Construction of Kipdorp Gate



Detail of Kipdorp Bridge, Bastion and Gate, woodcut by Virgilius Bononiensis, 1565

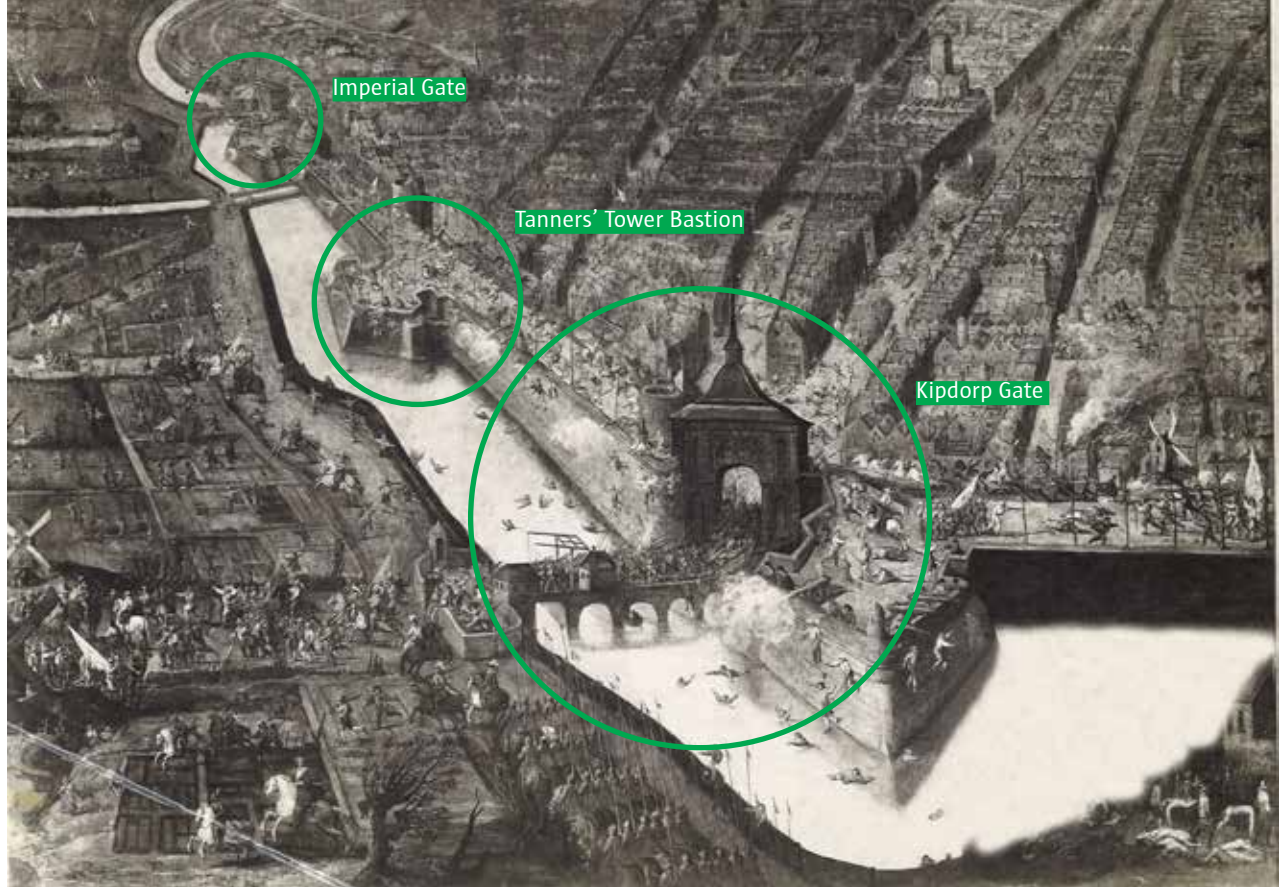
Construction started on Kipdorp Gate between 1543 and 1548. This monumental gateway was defended by a bastion and could be accessed by a bridge across the moat around the city. It connected with the road to the Kempen region and northern Brabant. Civilians, traders and dignitaries could enter the city via the 'Eyendijk' land ridge, the present-day Turnhoutsebaan, and this gate. In winter, Kipdorp Gate was open from 5.30 am until 10 pm, in summer from 3.30 am until 11 pm. Then the gates were irrevocably closed, forcing latecomers to sleep outside the city walls.

## Five city gates

The monumental gates of the city ramparts all had a façade in the typical renaissance style of northern Italy, featuring columns, friezes, hewn stone and carvings of lions. The gates from north to south were Mud Gate (near Londenbrug), Red Gate (between Paardenmarkt and Tunnelplaats), Kipdorp Gate (near Operaplein), Imperial Gate (near the former National Bank), and finally Beguines' Gate in the ramparts that connected to the citadel (in Frankrijklei near Kasteelpleinstraat).



Kipdorp Gate after the ramparts were demolished in 1865



Adaptation of a painting by Antoine Sallaert, view of the battlefield near the moat during the French Fury

1583

## Armed combat near the bridge: the French Fury and the Fall of Antwerp



The French soldiers were expelled from the city by the armed citizens of Antwerp. Engraving by Frans Hogenberg, 1583-1585

In the late 16th century, Antwerp was under Calvinist rule, led by William of Orange, who formed an alliance with the French Duke of Anjou in 1581. They agreed to jointly defend the city against the Spanish siege.

But the duke was merely interested in capturing the city himself. On 17 January 1583, he turned up at Kipdorp Gate, with a French garrison. The people of Antwerp immediately took up their arms, fending off the French. This culminated in the French Fury, a

bloody struggle, with bodies stacked in heaps that were more than two metres high in some instances, according to accounts.

Many citizens, noblemen, and 1,500 French soldiers died or drowned in the moat. After this defeat, the French left the city, effectively putting an end to the French support for the Dutch rebellion against Spain. This paved the way for the Spanish strategist, Alexander Farnese, to recapture the city in August 1585.

This 'Fall of Antwerp' is often regarded as the turning point in the definitive division of the Netherlands. The Southern Netherlands were once again ruled by a governor, who was appointed by the Spanish king. Catholicism became the only religion to be tolerated in the realm, while the Northern Netherlands were a Protestant nation. The victory over the French was commemorated circa 1600 with the renovation of Kipdorp Gate on the city side.



# From the wall ...to the moat

The excavation of the moat has yielded plenty of information about life around the ramparts from the 16th to the 19th century. Most of the waste was disposed of in the water, as the city did not yet have a proper sewage system. The engineer corps was tasked with cleaning the moat twice a year. This meant stripping the reeds and the water plants, as well as removing bodies from the water. Drownings were frequent, almost weekly even, and they included children. Various objects have been found during excavations of the moat strata near the city wall, including pottery, slaughter waste, metal buckles, leather shoes, pipe bowls and shanks, toys (marbles, wooden balls of a skittle game) and more.



Masquerade - Carnival on the ice, near Kipdorp Gate. Painting by Denis Van Alsloot, c. 1620



Buckle found on the medieval road on the site where Kipdorp Bastion was subsequently built



Shoe soles found in the moat layer



Pipe bowl, second half of the 18th century



jeton or token, 16th century

## A typical Antwerp feature: the pyramid



The rounded corners of the bastions and the city wall with a half pyramid were a typical feature of the Spanish ramparts. This provided a solution for the transition from the right angle of the foundation to the (still) rounded corner of a wall (in the 16th century). Over time, the architecture of fortifications evolved, to completely straight angles, to eliminate blind spots for the artillery.

Historic maps show how these pyramids were capped with a half sphere, a typical renaissance-style decorative element, devised by the Italian engineer Di Boni. This sphere, a fragile construction element, was not preserved in the case of the bastion near the Tanners' Tower. Part of the sphere has however remained intact on the Imperial Bastion and the city wall near Kipdorp Gate.

## Structure of a bastion

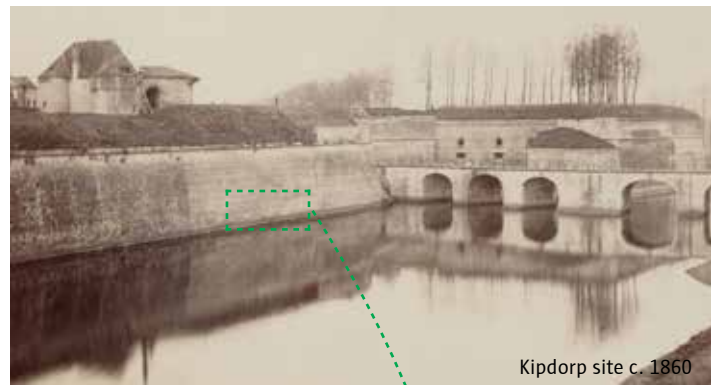
A bastion is a large, pentagonal outcropping in the city wall, with two faces, two flanks and a connection with the city. The soldiers reached the gun platforms on the flanks through a passage in the wall. Bastions were invented by Italian engineers. It was much easier to attack the enemy from these bastions, and protect the city walls from its flanks. The Imperial bastion, the Tanners' Tower bastion and Kipdorp Bastion had long faces and short,

recessed low flanks. These are typical features of the 'old Italian system' of the first half of the 16th century. The end of the face of a bastion featured an orillon, or rounded projection. The bastion walls were reinforced with buttresses on the inside and the bastion was filled with earth. Soil absorbed the impact of cannon balls better than the masonry, and was easier to top up.

○ 1864

## The city is bursting at the seams: the demolition

During the second half of the 19th century, the Spanish ramparts were no longer deemed useful. Moreover they also hindered the city's further development. The fortifications were demolished from 1864 onwards. The Leien were built on top of the filled moats (1867-1869) but the blueprint of the Spanish ramparts was preserved intact underground.



Kipdorp site c. 1860



City wall, Kipdorp site in 2017

## 2002-2019 The Kipdorp site relives



Kipdorp Bastion and Bridge during the excavation works in 2017



The restored Kipdorp site in 2020

### Archaeological investigation

The city started to systematically conduct archaeological research into the Spanish ramparts during the redevelopment of the Southern Leien (2002-2006).

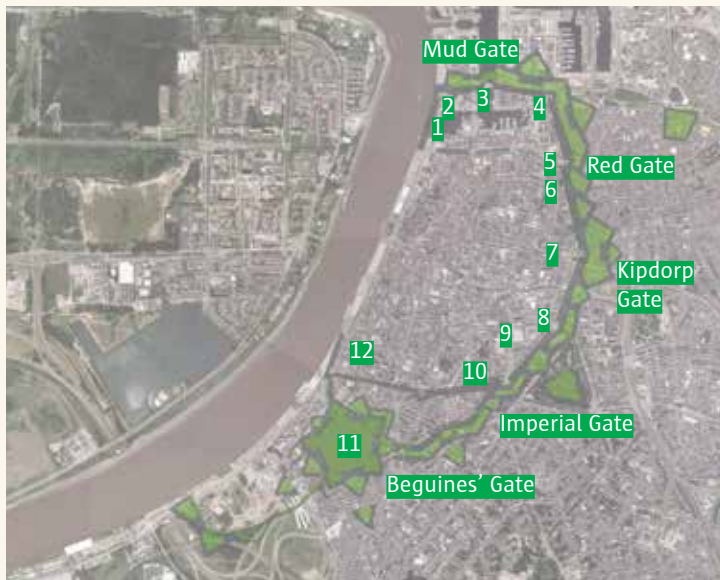
The archaeologists examined sections of the Imperial Gate, the Bastion and Alva's citadel at the time. In 2006, the upper section of the Kipdorp bridge could be excavated. Six years later, deep shafts were dug to investigate whether the Kipdorp site could be incorporated into the design of the new Operaplein. As part of the redevelopment of the Northern Leien (2016-2019) the well-preserved remnants of the Kipdorp site were fully excavated to a depth of 7 meters below the modern road surface. After the

construction of the tunnels below the Operaplein, the archaeological site was restored to its original layout by reusing the original stone masonry. The embrasures and floors of the casemate were reconstructed using new brick masonry.

### You can see the monumental Spanish ramparts in two locations:

- Visitors can see part of the Imperial Bastion and Gate in the underground car park "Nationale Bank" (Level -3)
- Since December 2019 the restored Kipdorpsite is permanently visible





# Noorderlijn and the Spanish ramparts

## Overview and map of the Spanish ramparts

1. Historic occupation, dwellings in Rijnkaai
2. City wall near Kattenberg Bastion
3. Mud Bastion
4. Schijn (river) Bastion
5. Red Gate Bastion
6. Half-bastion and bridge near Red Gate
7. Kipdorp site: city wall, bridge and bastion
8. Tanners' Tower Bastion
9. Blue Tower
10. Imperial Bastion
11. Alva's Citadel
12. Saint Michael's Bastion

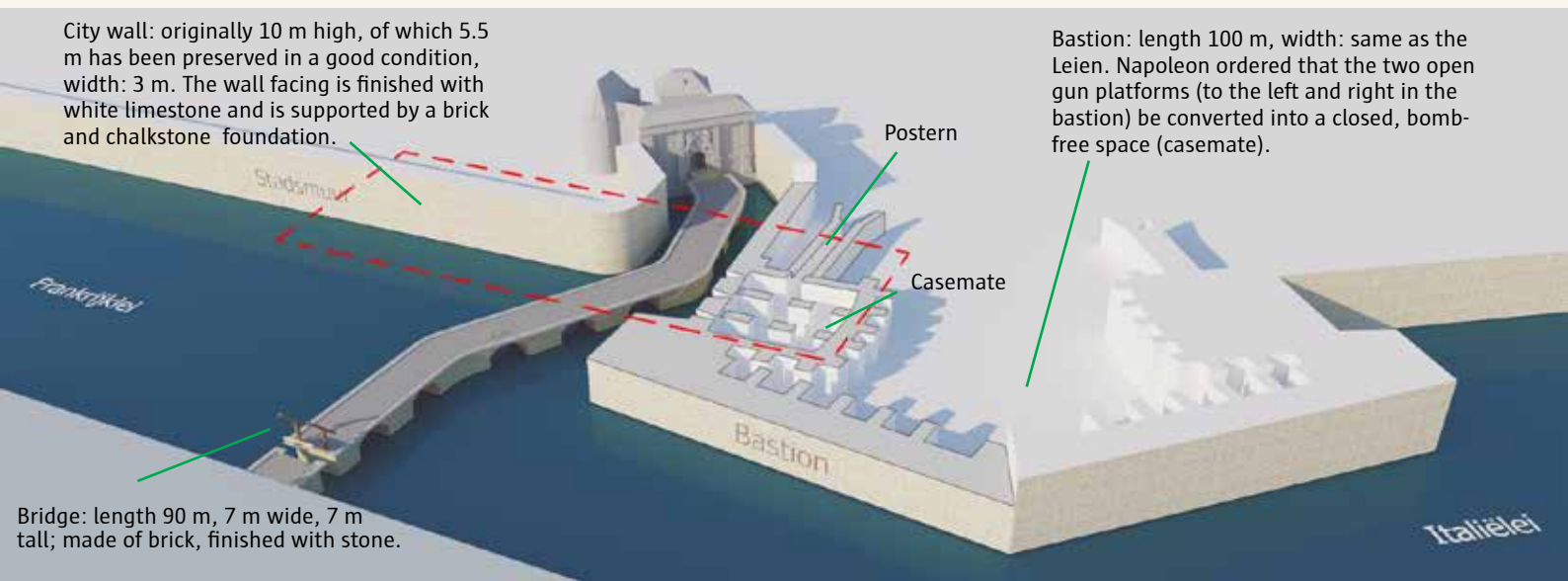
The Spanish ramparts were commissioned by Emperor Charles and designed by the Italian engineer Donato di Boni. Compared with the late-medieval ramparts, this pioneering design provided the city with better defences against heavy artillery. It comprised nine bastions, eight faces (straight walls), five city gates with monumental bridges, a moat and a wall on the outer side of the moat. It took ten years (1542-1553) and the work of thousands of labourers to build, including women and children.

The northern section of Antwerp's Leien or boulevards was redeveloped between 2016 and 2019. A new tram line will make it easier to get to the north of Antwerp. A large square was built in front of the Opera, with an underground car park, and tunnels for through traffic. Antwerp's past is also revealed in the margin of this large-scale construction project. The Noorderlijn tram line overlaps with the northern part of the Spanish ramparts, the city's 16th century fortifications.

## Kipdorp site: visible after the redevelopment of the Leien

City wall: originally 10 m high, of which 5.5 m has been preserved in a good condition, width: 3 m. The wall facing is finished with white limestone and is supported by a brick and chalkstone foundation.

Bastion: length 100 m, width: same as the Leien. Napoleon ordered that the two open gun platforms (to the left and right in the bastion) be converted into a closed, bomb-free space (casemate).



Bridge: length 90 m, 7 m wide, 7 m tall; made of brick, finished with stone.

### Colophon

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