

HISTORY UP TO AND INCLUDING THE 19th CENTURY

“In the North we saw the tribes of the Chauki,, called the Large and the Small. Twice a day the ocean floods over the land in broad streams. It then covers an eternal apple of discord of nature: it was impossible to say whether it now belongs to the land or to the sea. At that place an unfortunate people now occupy high hills or platforms (‘terpen’ or artificial mounds), as high as the highest-known flood tides require, because their fate has, after all, inflicted this on them. They are like sailors when the water has flooded the surrounding area, and shipwrecked sailors when it has receded. Around their huts they hunt fish that retreat with the sea. From reeds and rushes they weave rope for their fishing nets. Mud, which they dig up with their hands, they dry more with the wind than in the sun, and with this earth they heat both their food and their bodies numbed by the North Wind.” So runs Pliny the Elder’s report of his journey in about 47 A.D. The mud or earth in this report probably means peat. Fishing existed, evidently, but fishing ports were still far in the future. Nevertheless, these were not the first inhabitants of this area, as evidenced by the discovery of the most northern ‘hunebed’ or megalith (excavated near the Kloosterlaan), now displayed in the Aquarium at Delfzijl (opposite the Eemshotel).

The first harbour mentioned in the manuscripts is that at Emetha, now called Westeremden. Soon after that followed the town of Groningen in 1000 A.D. on the foothills of the Hondsrug, with a connection to the open sea via the A, the Hunze and the Reitdiep. For centuries this was Groningen’s only link with the sea.

One of the sources which mention Delfzijl is the “Delfzijl Chronicle”, specifically: *“1272 – In olden days the Delf (later the Damsterdiep) was a narrow, sluggish river which ... flowed into the Eems and was often visited by the Roman fleets. Its mouth was called by the monks Eemderhaven in the vernacular.”* This probably referred to Emetha.

Better navigability was needed, and it was decided to dig a trench to the water outside the dike. According to J. van Veen in “Canals in Groningen”, the Damsterdiep (the Delf) is a waterway which was **dug** as early as prehistoric times. In this context he comments that it would seem more likely that it was made in the interests of discharging water owing to the increased silting up of the Fivelboezem. Today the natural drainage from land to sea can still be found in the province, in the form of the so-called “maren” or drainage channels, which are now not much more than wide ditches. However, their former role is still clearly expressed in their names.

The Chronicle continues: *“In this trench a sluice was constructed in the year 1272 ... This sluice was named by the country people Dorpsterzijl, after all the villages of the surrounding area. At this discharging sluice rose a hamlet, at first very insignificant but which later became a sconce or fortification which took the name Delfzijl.”*

Until about 1850, however, Delfzijl remained a port of modest size. It suffered greatly from the “staple duty” imposed by the city of Groningen (broadly speaking, this duty meant that merchants from outside the city were only allowed to offer their merchandise for sale in the city). All the same, since 1657 there had been a tow barge connection between Delfzijl and Groningen. In the summer of 1669 Jörg Franz Müller, a German, made a journey from Emden to Amsterdam. In his report he relates how he boarded the “trekschuit”, or tow barge, in Delfzijl: *“... [it] was drawn by a horse. This little vessel goes as fast as a trotting horse ... After we had arrived in Dam (Appingedam) via the deep (Damsterdiep), I paid the skipper 9 stuivers and there transferred to another tow barge ...”*

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

☎ +31 596 640400 - ✉ +31 596 630464 - 📧 info@groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com

Few facts about shipping are known concerning the period up to and including the 19th century. Nevertheless, seamen knew how to find the harbour when they needed to. The literature reveals a number of memorable incidents. For example, in 1591 the port of Delfzijl was visited by Prince Maurits, who had a fleet of 150 ships with him. In 1628 Piet Hein visited the port with his “Silver Fleet”. On 6 December 1665 Admiral M.A. de Ruyter came to the port from Guinea on his way home with the whole of the West Indian fleet and 30 captured English vessels, and dropped anchor in the roads. Interest was enormous. “*Noblemen and commoners, citizens and farmers appeared and tried to behold De Ruyter and the fleet ...*” (report by G. Brandt). The cargo found its way overland to the province of Holland. On 6 August 1672 the East Indian fleet, consisting of 14 ships under the command of Arnoud van Overbeek, repeated this feat. This time the cargo was taken in small ships across the Wadden to Holland. In 1705 the whole of the Greenland fleet, no fewer than 96 ships, descended on the port with a total of 1100 whales on board. These references deserve an explanatory note. It must be deduced from old town plans of Delfzijl that the “port of Delfzijl” consisted to a large extent of anchorages on the river in the vicinity of the fortification. In the harbour dolphins and buoys were available. Hence ships predominantly anchored in midstream or were tied up to mooring posts. In 1920 only 26% of all ships were handled on the quay; by 1938 that proportion had risen to 92%. In 1758 the Aldermanic Council of the City and Lands appointed Cornelis Jacob de Vriese as, in effect, the fortification’s superintendent of navigation, on the death of J. Brinks who had held the position until that time. The position amounted to that of dock-master.

In 1802 and 1809, as a neutral port and because of war conditions elsewhere, Delfzijl attracted a remarkable amount of shipping. In 1812 it was a hive of activity with transport ships taking troops to East Friesland and other destinations. The abolition of the staple duty and the port’s neutral status were the first stimuli to modest growth. On 9 August 1840 the port was visited for the first time by an iron steamship, the S.S. *Telegraaf*, making for Emden from Norway. On 20 March 1844 the first regular service came into being with Emden with the bringing into service of the S.S. *Kronprinzessin Marie*; the cargo was taken to and from Groningen city via the Damsterdiep using lighters. In 1849 a number of large ships carrying German emigrants even left Delfzijl for America. On the waterfront there were now two shipyards and a sawmill. But the real spur to growth would come at the start of the 20th century.

A special meeting of the Provincial Council in 1856 decided, among other matters, that the waterway connections in Groningen province needed to be substantially improved; the construction of the Eems Canal formed part of these efforts. This work was carried out in the period 1866-1876 and the canal officially inaugurated on 15 December 1876. During discussions of the proposal to dig the Eems Canal, the chairman of the Provincial Council went so far as to predict that Groningen could become a second Hamburg and Delfzijl a second Altona! Unfortunately by the time the canal was brought into use it was already too small, as the shift from sailing ships to the much larger iron steamships was taking place at that time. Not until 1962 was the Eems Canal altered. This fact, together with the favourable situation of the port of Delfzijl, which had an open connection with the sea, brought about a steady increase in activity at Delfzijl. The railway link with Groningen, which came into use on 15 June 1884, also contributed towards this. In 1891 this line was extended into the port as far as the newly-built coal hoist for bunkering ships.

The Eems meandered greatly in former times, and its main fairways were equally tortuous. Right up to the middle of the 19th century sailing up the Eems continued to be a precarious business. Senior pilot G.M. de Vries writes: “... on the Dutch side too there were known to be pirates. In the night of 3 and 4 November 1854 the fishing smack “*De Amsterdam*”, coming from Koningsbergen and destined for Amsterdam, went aground in the Doekegat below Uithuizermeeden. The ship was destroyed and plundered by twelve “sea robbers” from Delfzijl ...”. Because of the hard life which its inhabitants wrested from the sea in the mid-19th century, Delfzijl had the less flattering name of Little Algiers. Not until 1 July 1857 was a State Pilotage Service set up for the river, followed by the setting up of the Emslotsgesellschaft (Eems Pilotage Company) at Aurich on 25 August 1858 for traffic to the German ports. Buoys and lightships on the Eems have always been provided virtually entirely by the Germans.

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

☎ +31 596 640400 - ✉ +31 596 630464 - 📧 info@ groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com

THE 20th CENTURY

In the course of the 20th century the picture presented by the Eems and its environs changed totally. Until the end of the 19th century the Eems (Amasus Fluvius) was of secondary importance to the city of Groningen because the Reitdiep was used as the main waterway. The situation changed completely after the closure of the Reitdiep and the inauguration of the Eems Canal. What is striking is that, except at the Dollard, the river has no territorial border with Germany. The reason for this lies in the Middle Ages. On the German side an enfeoffment from Emperor Frederick III to his courtier Ulrich Cirksena van Greetsiel, in which the Emperor granted the latter an area in fief in 1454, is invoked. With regard to the waterways, the enfeoffment prescribes “...auch dem Wasser die Embse, und allen anderen Schiffreichen Wassern” (also the Eems Water, and all other ship-rich waters). Under Napoleon this arrangement, like others, was declared to have lapsed. Although these rights were not restored at the Congress of Vienna (18 September 1814/9 June 1815), Germany still relies on this old enfeoffment. Nowadays, the line of the lowest point of the bed of the main waterway is in principle regarded as the internationally accepted territorial boundary.

After the Second World War and after lengthy negotiations, the Eems-Dollard Treaty was concluded on 8 April 1960. Its basis is the reciprocal recognition of a disputed area, within which provisions apply with regard to buoyage, rules of navigation, powers regarding the guarding of the border, exploitation of mineral resources, etc. Later (8 December 1984) this treaty was supplemented with the Eems Radar Treaty to regulate the supervision of shipping movements. Consultations concerning this take place in the Dutch-German Permanent Committee for the Eems.

From the end of the 19th century management of the port at Delfzijl lay with the government, which carried out many improvements. The most important of these were the construction of a quay wall for ocean-going ships, the linking of the dockyards to the railway network and finally the creation of further moorings for inland navigation vessels. Between 1917 and 1927 many improvements were carried out by the then provincial port administration, including the enlargement of the quay, the purchase of loading bridges and in 1927 the construction of the Balkenhaven, which has now largely disappeared under the new East Commercial Quay. In that same year the activities of the Provinciale Stuwadoorsbedrijf (Provincial Stevedoring Company) came to an end and Stuwadoorsmaatschappij N.V. resumed these activities ten years later.

At the beginning of the 1930s the expansions just carried out already turned out to be inadequate, as in the early 1930s, after years of hard struggle, efforts to direct exports of industrial products from the ‘Veenkoloniën’ – fen communities – via the port of Delfzijl were at last successful. Owing to the worldwide economic crisis the expansion plans had to be put on one side. Quite soon after the end of the crisis the Second World War broke out and the port suffered great damage. At the end of the war Delfzijl was the Germans’ last bastion in the Netherlands and was very heavily fought over. Not until 1948 did transhipment reach pre-war levels (approximately 450,000 tonnes).

In the 1950s the pattern of agriculture-linked industry was finally broken and as a consequence the nature of the goods transhipped at the port of Delfzijl changed greatly. The discovery of large salt reserves in the ground near Winschoten led in 1958 to the establishment of an industrial complex specialising in basic chemicals in the Municipality of Delfzijl. The discovery and exploitation of the gas deposits under Slochteren also radically altered the province’s profile and resulted in further industrialisation. However, gas extraction resulted in the ground level of the province sinking to such an extent (this was discovered in the mid-1980s) that the old commercial quays in Delfzijl were under water unacceptably often, a phenomenon which was further aggravated by the rise in sea levels. The economic damage as a result of the quays being under water was so great that it was decided to build a completely new, fully equipped quay area between the dock basin and the Eems. Where fresh uses could not be found for them, the buildings on the old commercial quay were demolished.

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

☎ +31 596 640400 - 📠 +31 596 630464 - 📧 info@ groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com

The industrial development during the 1950s again highlighted the need to make further improvements to the port. The Havenschap Delfzijl (Delfzijl Port Authority), formed in 1958, first of all did away with the old harbour outside the dikes (1958-1964). A new, higher quay was constructed along the front of the existing facility. The crane operations were renovated and for the Soda Factory (now Akzo Nobel) an extension to the Handelshaven or Commercial Dock (the first initiative for the Zeehavenkanaal) and an inner dock (now Oosterhornhaven) were constructed. The Damsterkade was also built (1962-1964). In 1966 the Zeehavenkanaal was continued to the aluminium plant, and later in 1973 the dock entrance was completed at the level of Oterdum. The old dock entrance was partly closed in 1976 and completely closed in 1978 because it became evident that the dock was silting up quickly as a result of the flow of water through it. The Oosterhornhaven was enlarged and took on its present form in 1974. Along the banks in the outer and inner docks jetties and quays were constructed, including in 1984 a 300-metre-long floating jetty which is used mainly by the fishing fleet from Urk but also provides berths for sea-going and inland navigation vessels. Owing to the closure of the Zuyder Zee (now the IJsselmeer) and the growth in the size of the fleet, the fishing fleet was forced to relocate to other ports. Over the years the port of Delfzijl, and later Eemshaven too, provided berths for an average of 40 fishing vessels; at the beginning of the 1990s this number declined substantially as a result of the quota scheme, “flagging out” and the migration of large shoals of fish to other parts of the North Sea.

The port of Delfzijl hosts a number of nautical events. For over 125 years now, the Royal Sailing and Rowing Association “Neptunus” has held its annual festivities on the Whitsun weekend. Until about 1991 the port of Delfzijl also had an annual “Scheepvaartdag” (Shipping Day), held on the first Saturday in October and combined with the Jazz Festival. After it was decided in 1991 to drop the Shipping Day in connection with Delfsail '91, it did not take place again until 1997, when it was held on the last Saturday in August under the name of “Havendag” (Port Day). Because another sailing event was scheduled for 1998, the next Havendag was postponed until 1999. In 1986 a “Sail” was held for the first time, organised by the Municipality of Delfzijl and the port authority, more as a try-out and small compared with the sailing events which succeeded it in 1991 and 1998, each of which drew around half a million visitors. Information about the sailing events can be found on the Internet at: www.delfsail.nl.

The industrial developments referred to earlier provided the impetus for the construction of Eemshaven, about 20 kilometres to the north of Delfzijl in the Municipality of Eemsmond (the present name of the municipality). Eemshaven is first mentioned in the port authority’s annual report for 1967. The great exodus of people from agriculture at that time had resulted in the government report entitled “Policy Document on Development in the Northern Netherlands”. The Groningen Provincial Executive submitted to the government the report entitled “Eemshaven 1967”. On 8 February 1968 the Provincial Executive decided to implement the Eemshaven project. The basic plan was to construct a dock for ships up to 40,000 dead-weight tonnes, with the possibility of deepening it later for ships up to 70,000 tonnes. The Groningen hydraulic engineers J. van Veen and N. Nanninga can be regarded as the spiritual fathers of the plan to locate the future Eemshaven there. An interesting detail concerning this choice is, of course, that the port is close to the location of the vanished port of Emetha, referred to previously. In 1973 the first stage of the works was completed and on 7 June of that year the new dock entrances at Delfzijl and Eemshaven were opened by Her Majesty Queen Juliana from the passenger ship “Rottum”. Eemshaven came into the ownership of the port authority, which managed it under private law, and it was not until 1 January 1988 that public-law management of Eemshaven was transferred by the Municipality of Hefshuizen to the port authority.

In 1976 the first “customer” came to Eemshaven: AG Ems brought into use a small site and a jetty along the Doekegat Canal for passenger transport to and from the German island of Borkum. The so-called “Butterfahrt” traffic (tax-free shopping at sea) operated by the Kamstra shipping company also moved from Delfzijl to Eemshaven.

Although Eemshaven had clearly been designed for large-scale oil refinery and basic chemicals activities, the economic recession (oil crisis) threw a spanner into the works. Nevertheless, ships which had been laid up for longer or shorter periods since the early 1970s were an important source of income for the port authority;

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

☎ +31 596 640400 - ✉ +31 596 630464 - 📧 info@ groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com

an outstanding example was the oil tanker “Aiko Maru” (length 365 m, width 70 m, 430,000 dead-weight tonnes), at that time one of the largest tankers in the world. The ship arrived on 22 April 1983 and briefly revived the time of Admiral de Ruyter. Once again “citizens and farmers” streamed to the waterfront and the longest queue ever seen in Groningen Province extended from Eemshaven as far as Delfzijl (22 km). On 25 April 1988 the ship left for Southampton under the name of *Embassy*.

In mid-1975 a start was made on the construction of the 600-metre-long commercial quay in Eemshaven; this quay came into use in 1978 and in 1984/1985 was extended by 550 metres. In addition, the extension of the Juliana Dock Basin was completed in that year. The building of the quay marked the start of the establishment of small businesses at Eemshaven, which grew slowly but surely from that moment on. In 1993 a start was made on construction of the Bulk Quay on the north side of the Julianahaven. Forced to do so by problems with the draught on the River Ems, in 1996 the Meyer Shipyard in Papenburg, Germany, decided to take its largest ships to Eemshaven for completion and provisioning; the first was the very luxurious passenger ship “Galaxy”, one of the largest of its kind in the world. Once again the times of Admiral de Ruyter and the “Aiko Maru” were recalled: over a period of approximately six weeks nearly half a million people came to Eemshaven to view this ship.

Eemshaven has the largest gas-fired power station in Europe with a capacity of 1,675 megawatts. The windmills which have also been erected at Eemshaven form part of Europe’s largest windmill park, reckoned according to their total generating capacity of 34 megawatts.

MANAGEMENT OF THE PORT

Before 1819 the fortification’s port and sea works were maintained by the State. In that year their management and maintenance were transferred to Groningen Province, which in turn transferred them to the Municipality of Delfzijl on 1 January 1820. Though the State contributed to the costs, the small municipality could not fulfil this role properly, and hence from 1 July 1897 the State again took responsibility for management and maintenance. With great energy the State set to work to enlarge and improve the port. In 1906 negotiations were opened with Groningen Province because it was considered that the management and operation of the port were not in good hands, either under the State or under the Municipality of Delfzijl. From 1911 the Province again took over maintenance and operations, under the name of Provinciaal Havenbedrijf, a situation which was to last until 1 January 1958.

During the 1950s the industrial development already referred to demanded a new form of management which would respond satisfactorily and effectively to new trends. For that purpose, the “Havenschap Delfzijl” (Delfzijl Port Authority) was created by Act of Parliament on 1 January 1958. Stakes in the port authority were held by the State (50%), Groningen Province (30%) and the Municipality of Delfzijl (20%).

Owing to large financial deficits in the development corporation, in the mid-1980s the State expressed its wish to quit the port authority. After a financial restructuring operation, the State actually withdrew on 1 January 1998. The new joint “Delfzijl/Eemshaven Port Authority” arrangements formally came into force on the same date and the Municipality of Hefshuizen, in which Eemshaven is situated, joined as a partner. On 1 January 1992 the port authority’s crane company was transferred to Havenbedrijf Delfzijl B.V., a joint venture between various stevedoring companies at the port of Delfzijl..

The Delfzijl/Eemshaven Port Authority has itself already undergone a reorganisation. The departments which had existed for many years became “units” and were divided up where necessary, many members of staff being given new positions within these units. An important new place was reserved for the core business, which consisted of “Sites and Infrastructure” and “Docks and Logistics”. To them was assigned the role of implementing the new objective: “Docks full, sites full”. The new organisation actually came into being on 1 October 1997 and this was coupled with a new name intended to strike an international chord:

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

☎ +31 596 640400 - ✉ +31 596 630464 - 📧 info@ groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com

“Groningen Seaports”. At the end of 1997 the first issue of the bilingual clients’ magazine “Turntable” was published; the name refers to the turntable role of the two ports on the North Sea.




Who’s who at Groningen Seaports

Dr. J.C. Gerritsen	Chairman of the Board
H.D. Post	Managing Director
ing. H.W. Sijbring	Director Business Unit Port Technology
J. Stokroos	Director Business Sales & Shipping
W.H. Boneschansker	Director Business Operations
drs. R.O. Genee	Manager Communication & Public Affairs

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like to know more!

Groningen Seaports

Handelskade Oost 1 – PO Box 20004 – 9930 PA Delfzijl – the Netherlands

 +31 596 640400 -  +31 596 630464 -  info@ groningen-seaports.com

website: www.groningen-seaports.com