

YIPPEE!

YOU WILL TREK FROM ALBATROSS TO ZEBRA

YOU CHOSE A TRIP STRAIGHT THROUGH THE CENTRE OF MECHELEN



- - - - - **STOP!** - - - - - This booklet contains two walks. Do you know Mechelen inside out? Then quickly turn this booklet upside down and back to front, where you'll find a hike that explores the banks of the Dyle. With the river as your tour guide, it will take you along Mechelen's water's edge. It's up to you whether you prefer to walk along the Dyle or explore the centre. When you turn this page, you will pile into the centre, accompanied by a colourful collection of animals.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET?

Below, you will find some **markers** that recur during the walk. They help you identify the different parts of the text:



always indicates **the way** you should follow



refers to the many fun **things you can do** during the walk, marked on the **Big Plan**. Get stuck in!



GAME INCENTIVE

If you see  , a difficult word is explained.



The **boxes** contain many **fun facts** about houses, places, people and animals you will come across along the way.

It's best to allow a whole morning or afternoon for the walk. Of course, you don't need to spend as long at each stop, and you can also skip tasks. The walk is as long or as short as you make it!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE PRESENT TO YOU... THE CITY OF MECHELEN!

A cheerful collection of animals will guide you to the city's most important tourist destinations and will reveal many of its secrets on the way.



The animals await you in churches and courtyards,
in towers and on houses.
What are you waiting for?!



Your journey of discovery through Mechelen starts at the **Tourist Office of Mechelen**, right by the **MARKET SQUARE**. Walk across the **MARKET SQUARE** and find yourself a spot right in the centre of it.

Do you notice anything peculiar about some of the facades on the **MARKET SQUARE**?

Well spotted: there's an **animal** sitting on a lot of the houses along this square! In fact, it looks like a real menagerie ...
But why are those animals there?



In the street where you live, the houses all have **numbers**, but that hasn't always been the case. In the Middle Ages, people often recognised a house by its **name**. The animals that secretly keep an eye on you belong to the name of the house on which they're sitting. In that way, people unable to read could easily **find** these homes. That's rather **CLEVER**, isn't it?

033

034

Maybe it's hard to imagine this **MARKET SQUARE** full of trees and shrubs... And yet! **MARGARET OF AUSTRIA**, a royal lady who lived a long time ago, dreamed of a proper **deer hunt** on the square. She ordered the **MARKET SQUARE** to be magicked into a real **forest**, into which the deer were released. From the balcony of the house that's now called **DE MET**, Margaret and her entourage watched the chase. All that trouble for just one afternoon of fun!

CHARLEMAGNE was also present that day... He was Margaret's nephew and only a boy at the time, but a few years later, he would be a very **important person indeed** for Mechelen. In fact, you can find proof of this on this **MARKET SQUARE**. After all, Charlemagne is still keeping his eye on one of the houses on this square. Can you spot which one?



Charlemagne

Does that name ring a bell?

He was born in Ghent in the early 16th century and raised in **Mechelen** by his auntie **Margaret of Austria**.

To us, Charlemagne is best known as the Emperor on whose empire the sun never set.





Since you're sky gazing, have a good look ... **FOUND IT: St Rumbold's Tower** and the **City Hall** are connected with a **cable!**

Here's why: every **second Sunday of September**, 20 giant **bells** are attached to this cable. Those bells slide down and halfway down the **MARKET SQUARE**, they burst open. From every bell, 20 little plastic bells appear, each with a **number** attached to them. Those numbers entitle you to a real **bronze** bell! So if you happen to be around on that date, you may well be the one grabbing hold of one of those numbers and taking a bell home with you! ...



Now stand with your back to the City Hall and walk in the DIRECTION of ST RUMBOLD'S CATHEDRAL.

Just before you cross the street, you will notice in the **left corner** of the square a piece of **road** which, a long time ago (in the **12th** century!) linked this spot to the east of the country. Just stand on it and travel back in time ...

Plop! You are now a **medieval merchant** who came to Mechelen to stock up on **salt** and is taking it back to his village by **horse and cart**. He undoubtedly had a long **journey** ahead of him, because it was much harder to travel on those **bumpy** roads than it is on the **smooth** motorways of today ...



35



Take care in crossing the street and continue walking in the direction of **ST RUMBOLD'S CATHEDRAL**. Walk along the monument to murdered, crashed and missing children.

Walk past the main entrance of the Cathedral, cross the street and enter the Minderbroedersgang. At the Cultural Centre and Puppet Theatre De Maan, you'll find a cool **Game Incentive**.



GAME INCENTIVE

Have a great time at this Game Incentive!



All done? Then retrace your steps. Can you find the **mock-up** for **ST RUMBOLD'S TOWER** to the right of the Cathedral's main entrance?

Which has the highest tower?

Have you wondered why the **tower** of this church looks like the **tip** is missing? Actually, the tower was meant to be another **65 metres taller**. The tallest buildings in those days were the **pyramids** in Egypt, which were already **150 metres** tall. With a church tower standing **167 metres** tall, the Mechelen residents would have made it into the **Guinness Book of Records** of that time! But it wasn't to be... 500 years ago, there were many **wars**, which cost a lot of money, so there was no money left for buying towers. The people from Mechelen had to make do, therefore, with the **97.30 metres** which St Rumbold's Tower measures to this day.

⚠️ **mock-up** - model of a building in miniature

⚠️ **Guinness Book of Records** - a book in which the most incredible records are brought together



36

37



You don't have to look up long to realise that the tower is made up of **two sections**: a **darker** and a **lighter** section.

The stone that was used for the top section is different and only turns white when you paint it ...

The **falcons**, which chose the tower to make their nest, don't seem to be bothered by this in the slightest!



Now step into the cathedral and start exploring.

Welcome to **ST RUMBOLD'S CATHEDRAL**. Shhhh... A cathedral is a very important church, which is extra **large** and **decorated**.

As soon as you walk in, it's obvious: **WOW**, what a **gigantic** building! Above every side door, there's a stained-glass window so big you'd need to be blind not to notice ...

Facing the **altar**, the stained-glass window to the left is the oldest. If you look closely: in the right-bottom corner, you will discover the **artist** who made this stained-glass window. The man's name was **PLUYS**, but instead of signing his name on the window, he painted himself on the scene, which was the done thing in those days.

⚠️ **altar** - table at the front of the church where the priest consecrates the bread and wine



Stained glass? But why?

Maybe you're lucky, and just when you're visiting the cathedral, the sun is piercing through the coloured windows and you can see the church bathing in a sea of magical light where the dust twinkles like stars. You'd go to Mass for less!

Stained glass, of course, did not only make churches beautiful. They also tell a story. Actually, stained glass windows were the Bible for the poor, just like the statues in and on the church buildings. In the Middle Ages, only the rich learnt to read. The poor worked every waking moment of their lives and had no time, nor money, to go to school.

Paintings, stained glass and statues told stories in a way that everyone could understand.

38

39



Stop by the wooden pulpit.

The **priest** used to **climb** up the stairs to speak to his congregation. He had a little **roof** over his head. No, not to protect him from the rain, but it was a **sounding board** which projected his **voice** into the church, a bit like **speakers** today!

40



Once, this pulpit was in another church, where it leaned against the wall. So, it wasn't round, like it is now. Here in this church, it was given a place without a wall, so **Jan Frans Van Geel** made it round. The name of the artist may not mean anything to you, but you're bound to know a work by his son **Jan-Lodewijk**. Have you ever heard of the **Lion of Waterloo**? The Van Geel family must have been fond of animals, because even the culprit is covered with them!



see if you can guess!

If you know that the stained-glass windows are **18 metres** tall, and when you see how many times those windows fit in the distance between **your feet** and the **highest point** of the church, then how tall do you reckon the church is?

The church is 32 metres tall no less! And for its width, you add another 14 metres on top of that: 46 metres!

Let's **crunch some numbers**:

Wow! ST RUMBOLD, who, high above the altar, has a good view of what is happening in his church, stands **3 metres 75 tall**. By comparison, your **dad** is probably not much taller than **1 metre 90!**

You know why the artist made this statue so **huge**? **ST RUMBOLD** is very **high** up, so he had to be extra tall for people to notice him in the church. Your dad in the same place would look **pint-sized** from where we're standing ...



41



You have an exciting journey ahead of you ... right up to the top of St Rumbold's Tower!

You'd better gather up your strength, because the Tower has **538 steps**. Don't worry, there are a few rooms where you can have a rest. Buy your ticket at the front desk and pick up a brochure that will guide you through the Tower.

Did you know that you can hear the two **carillons** of the **St Rumbold's Tower** **five** kilometres away? When the **wind** blows in the right direction, of course ... Those carillons each consist of no fewer than **49** bells! And for those who wonder how heavy they are ... **WAIT FOR IT ...** one weighs **38,000** kg and the other is even **2,000** kg **heavier!**

! carillon - a musical instrument with wooden keys which you strike with your fists. Those keys are connected to the clappers of the bells. By tapping the key, you pull a string, which, in turn, pulls the clapper and wham, there's your first note!



42

43



Well done! Now that you're on top of Mechelen:
can you see Brussels and Antwerp?
Will it be quicker to get down, do you think?



The night that gave the people from Mechelen their **nickname** ...

One night in 1687, the **moonlight** caught St Rumbold's Tower. The townspeople thought that the glow on the tower was a real **fire**. They panicked and started to **extinguish** the fire straight away, until they realised that they had got it all wrong ... Since that mad night, the people from Mechelen are referred to as **MANEBLUSSERS [MOON EXTINGUISHERS]**.



Now you're back down, it's high time for a break, but not for you!
On the **Game Incentive** to the right of the cathedral, you can let off some steam before we continue on our way.



GAME INCENTIVE

Have a great time at this
Game Incentive!



Does anybody know what the character lying on the grass is called? Everyone knows him as the **OPSINJORKE**, but first he was called **Sotscop** or **Vuylen Bras**. Opsinjoorke is known as a drunk and awful groom. To punish him, he is taken through the city in a **piece of cloth** and thrown up into the **air**. The people of **Antwerp** claim that the Opsinjoorke is theirs. In **1949**, they even managed to **kidnap** him, but luckily, the people of Mechelen brought him back! You'll find this madcap person in the **Ommegang**, a procession that has filed through the streets of Mechelen for centuries.





Walk to the corner of **SCHOOLSTRAAT**.

The house on the corner of **Schoolstraat and Wollemarkt** is **HET KORAAAL (THE CHORAL)**, where none other than the **grandfather** of the famous composer **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** practised with the **choir** in which he sang. Does this name sound **German** or **Flemish** to you? Either could be right. Ludwig himself was German, but his grandfather was born in **Mechelen**, so that's why it's **VAN** Beethoven and not **VON** Beethoven!



Follow the **WOLLEMARKT**. Stop when you get to the bend in this road.

In the gigantic **white house** lives an important person. None other than the **archbishop** himself stays in this **archbishop's palace**! There's a grand total of two people who live here: the **archbishop** and his **caretaker**. Suddenly, this huge building looks even bigger! Luckily, it's **busy** enough in there during the day as it houses the **offices** of the **archdiocese**. Besides, the **archbishop** is too busy with meetings and meeting people to feel alone in this big house ...

! **archbishop** - honorary title for important people in the Catholic Church who elect a new Pope

! **archdiocese** - a collection of dioceses or ecclesiastical provinces





Continue until you encounter **WATER** on your left.
Cross the street, but watch the cars.

'T GROEN WATERKE [The Green Water]

The **confetti** on this water is a water plant called **duckweed**.
The canal itself is a **manmade rivulet**.

MECHELEN RIVULETS

Not so long ago, Mechelen was full of **rivulets**. They were meant to **collect** the water of the Dyle when there was a threat of floods. Since water runs from high to low, these rivulets were dug on the side of the **lowest bank**. Most rivulets were **covered** or **filled in**, because they were a breeding ground for **bacteria** and all kinds of **diseases**. Meanwhile, some rivulets have been re-opened, because being near water in the city creates atmosphere. But no worries, you won't catch anything from it: there is now sewerage everywhere.



WANT TO HEAR A FUNNY STORY?

On the side of the buildings by the water, you would often see little decks where the **toilets** would be. They were called **HEIMELIJKHEDEN [SECRET PLACES]**... Quite strange, though, when you consider people were sat there where all and sundry could see them. Not exactly a secret then! One day, the Mother Superior of the convent nearby sent an **angry letter** to the city council, **complaining** about the **young men** who would sail under her secret places on **boats** and would aim at the **buttocks** of the nuns using **KLYDPIJPEN [shooting pipes]**! She was in luck: her complaint was heard and shortly after, there were far fewer boats on 'T GROEN WATERKE [the green water].

Across the street, you can see a narrow **alley**. Referred to as the **KLAPGAT**, this is where the women of Mechelen would gather in former times after Mass to have a good **NATTER (klapke)**. The ladies were popularly referred to as **KLAPPEIEN = slanderers**.

The news that was exchanged here was clearly not always that kind!

46

..! **bacteria** - a tiny insect that causes diseases

..! **klappen** - the Mechelen word for babbling.

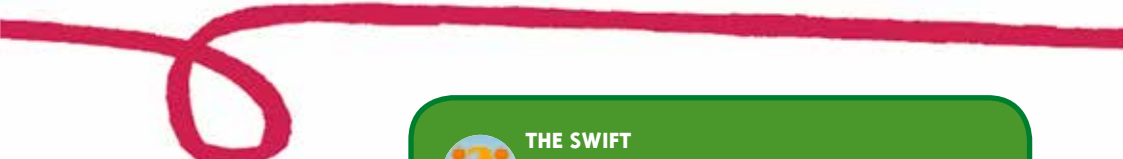


Turn into Schoutetstraat across from Klapgat. At number 3 is the REFUGE OF THE ABBEY OF ST TRUIDEN. Walk into the courtyard and examine the tower of the building in great detail.

Do you not notice anything? Overhead, the tower is riddled like a **sieve**! No, this is not a medieval version of our **air-conditioning**. Neither are they **shooting holes**, because they are all equal in size. The holes in the tower are **STARLING POTS**, small spaces that invite starlings to build their **nests**. The eggs of those birds were once a true **delicacy**. So all you needed to do was to climb up the tower to retrieve the eggs from the nests in secret.



◦47



THE SWIFT

Another bird, the swift, still makes good use of the starling pots.

The swift is not actually a real swallow but is related to the hummingbird.

Its legs are so short that they make it difficult for them to move on the ground, and so they have chosen to spend most of their life flying. Even mating and sleeping is done in flight! Only for brooding does the female look for solid ground under her feet.

The funny thing is, the swift can only take off from a flat surface after a run. So if there's not enough space, they sometimes rely on a helping hand from us to get launched ...





A little further on at number 4 is **DE POSTHOORN**.



48

The stone **horn** on the facade reminds you of the fact that Mechelen had the **first postal services of Europe**. This was started when **Margaret of Austria** lived in Mechelen. The Mechelen post would bring your letters to cities all over Europe, which was **NOT EASY** in those days, given that there were no **planes** or **high-speed trains**!



Walk to the corner of the street and enter the courtyard garden of the **REFUGE OF THE ABBEY OF TONGERLO** on your left.



Today, those buildings house a **carpet weaving mill**. Take a walk in the **courtyard garden** or just plonk yourself down on one of the benches and enjoy this oasis of **tranquillity**. For the **plant experts** among you: all plants that are planted in this garden can be found on old **tapestries**!





Walk out of the garden, turn left and cross the road, into the **SMALL BEGUINAGE**. Do not linger on the square, but walk into the lane that crosses this beguinage.



Take your time to enjoy the **tranquillity** of these houses here. Cars are not allowed past the garages.



In the Middle Ages, a number of **women** who had decided to pray and do good deeds for the rest of their lives came to live here. At first, they lived among the townspeople, scattered all over the city, but they soon moved to the same place. That's how they ended up in the **SMALL BEGUINAGE**.

But that wasn't the end of it. The **SMALL BEGUINAGE** also provided housing for ordinary townspeople. Something which the Church thought too dangerous. So the beguines were instructed to build a completely new beguinage outside the city **walls**. But not all beguines moved out. The **sick women** stayed put. That's why Mechelen ended up with not one, but **two beguinages**, one inside the city walls and one outside.

When war broke out, it was too dangerous outside the city walls, so the beguines of the Large Beguinage moved back inside the city walls. The buildings they picked were used by **cellite brethren**, but they were simply bullied into moving ... **FEISTY LADIES**, those beguines!

! cellite brethren - brethren who primarily cared for the sick

The **SMALL BEGUINAGE** housed mainly **sick beguines**. And those among you who thought that beguines were poor people, are not quite right. There were indeed **poor** beguines, who lived together in one house or **convent**, but there were just as many **rich** beguines, who even came from the aristocracy and who had enough money to own their **own house** within the beguinage walls.

49

Some beguines earned an extra penny **making lace**. In the early 18th century, Mechelen lace was very popular. To give you an idea: in Mechelen, there were no fewer than **150 lace shops** and no fewer than **4,500 lace workers** earning their living doing this!



! **convent** - house where nuns or brethren live together

! **lace making** - making web of thread using bobbins and pins



BEGUINE is, in fact, a **swear word** in the language of the time. It was then used for someone who spoke **unclear**, as if he/she was muttering a prayer. So clearly, the beguines were not always popular ...

ETTER, JEFKE! = Speed up, Jefke!

Children had to pull their weight, too. Their quick, delicate **fingers** came in very handy when making lace. They didn't always work fast enough, at which point the supervisors would give them a mouthful:

ETTER JEFKE! (= dialect for **SPEED UP, JEFKE!**). That's why the straight piece of lace made by children, was referred to as **ETTERJEFKE ...**





Time to play!

Retrace your steps and walk out of the **SMALL BEGUINAGE** the same way as you came in. Turn right. Turn into Kerkstraatje until you come to **CHURCH OF ST CATHERINE**. Can you find the maze?



GAME INCENTIVE

Have a great time at this Game Incentive!



Scouts: WORK to be done! Study the card and try to get to the COURT OF BUSLEYDEN. The directions below will help you find it. Best of luck!



Walk into the courtyard of the **COURT OF BUSLEYDEN**. **WELL DONE**, you found it!

50

The **COURT OF BUSLEYDEN** has adopted the name of the man who had it built, **HIERONYMUS VAN BUSLEYDEN**, the confidant of **Charlemagne**.

The renovated building is currently being used as a museum where you can visit temporary exhibitions. But great things are about to happen! From 2018, you will be able to visit the new city museum here, full of Mechelen treasures.

Stride (= walk slowly like Kings or princesses) through the garden of the **COURT OF BUSLEYDEN**. More than 500 years ago, **HIERONYMUS VAN BUSLEYDEN** had this city palace built. After the bombings of the First World War, this building was in need of restoration, and was turned into a **city museum** in 1938.

Did you know that **gardens in the Renaissance** had no flowers? So when the garden was re-done in 2005, only grass was sown and perennials planted.





Leave the Court of Busleyden via the main gates and turn left, walk down the **Biest** until you end up on a large square. This is the **CATTLE MARKET**. Find **NEPTUNE**, the god of the sea.

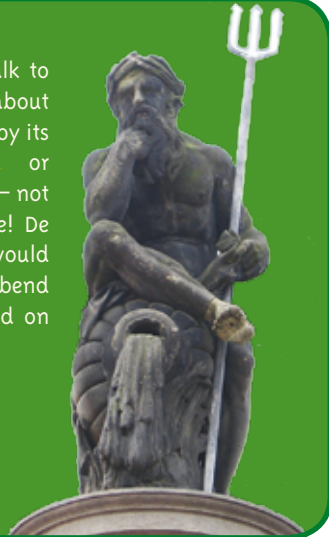
You may wonder what the god of the **sea** is doing here in Mechelen, high up on his throne. **Sea ... fish... water... PUMP... You guessed it!** This is where the townspeople came to pump up water. No **taps** to switch on and off in those days ... Those didn't arrive until **1927!**

QUEEN ELIZABETH OF BELGIUM, pictured on the right with her husband King Albert I, came especially to this spot to inaugurate the first tap with running water in Mechelen. What she didn't know was that the running water came from a man **hidden** between the statue and the wooden fence, holding a **bucket** 🪣! On the day of the inauguration, the connection wasn't ready, but they couldn't very well send the queen **packing** without having seen running water...



DE VADDERIK

If you want to talk to the townspeople about this Neptune statue, call it by its local name, **VADDERIK** or **VADSIGAARD** [SLUGGARD] – not exactly an attractive name! De Vadderik was a sloth, who would rather die of hunger than bend down to pick up the bread on which he was sat...





Say goodbye to the Vadderik and walk into **KEIZERSTRAAT**.
Halfway down that road, you can see the **LAW COURTS** on your right.
Walk into the courtyard and plop yourself down on the bench for a moment.



This is where **MARGARET OF AUSTRIA** lived at one time. In the building on the right, there was an impressive **throne room** which Margaret used as her office and received high **guests**. Her **private chambers** and the **royal chapel** were round the back. The windows of her **bedroom** opened onto the **courtyard** where you're having a breather.

Maybe you're more familiar with the name **MARY OF BURGUNDY**? Well, Margaret was the daughter of Mary of Burgundy and **Maximilian of Austria**. Her mother died when Margaret was only a little **girl**. She was raised by her step-grandmother, who was also called Margaret, not of Austria, but of **York**.

Being a **princess** might sound very appealing but it wasn't always the case. Just take Margaret of Austria. She was only **three** when she had to **marry** none other than the **French dauphin**, who was ten years her senior! He, however, had other plans, and Margaret was sent home. A while later, she was married for a second time, this time **Don Juan of Spain**. But he died shortly after their wedding. And yes, Margaret married a third time! The lucky man was **Philibert II**, Duke of Savoy, and you guessed it... Philibert drank **spring water** that was so cold, it killed him!





Margaret of Austria was fond of **art**. The most beautiful **music** echoed at her court, and her international art collection was renowned far beyond Mechelen: Indian **masks**, ivory **vases** from Africa and even a real **elephant paw** formed part of her collection!

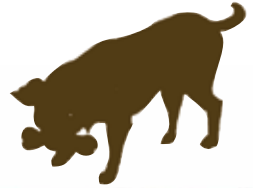


54

Speaking of **ANIMALS**...

Margaret had a **parrot** to whom she was greatly attached. One ill-fated day, that parrot was eaten by a **dog**. To comfort his mistress, Margaret's poet wrote two **poems** in which the parrot laments he can't handle life without his **queen**. The poet was probably a little **smitten** with Margaret himself and the declarations of love from the parrot were actually his own!

55



Leave the **Law Courts** and turn left, heading back to the **Cattle Market**. Walk along the **Cattle Market**, **Befferstraat**, up to the corner of the **MARKET SQUARE**. Take a right turn.

Look for the façade with the words **BEITEL [CHISEL]**, **PASSER [PAIR OF COMPASSES]** and **PENSEEL [BRUSH]** on it. No, this wasn't a shop for students of the academy. **Chisel**, **pair of compasses** and **brush** were the instruments of three major Mechelen **artists**. Can you guess the professions that go with each instrument? That's right, the chisel is that of the famous Mechelen **church builder**, the pair of compasses belonged to the famous Mechelen **architect** and the brush was that of a famous **painter**...

56





Make a little turn to the right and face the flags on the building that is guarded by Charlemagne.

Do you know the flag on the extreme left? YEP, it's that of the Province of Antwerp. Do you recognise the colours? That's right: red-white stands for Antwerp, red-yellow for Mechelen and white-blue for Turnhout.



57



Walk into the direction of the Tourist Office of Mechelen, the place where you started your journey. Before you get there, you'll see the BELFRY on your left.

The BELFRY was once a prison, which is evident from the windows. It seems impossible to escape. And yet ... Once, there was a jailer who worked here and wanted to make his job more fun. Together with the prisoners, he decided to organise a party and by the end of the evening, he had drunk so much he couldn't even walk straight... Needless to say, the prisoners seized the opportunity to escape, and their jailer was sentenced to death. So think twice if you're a jailer and you want to organise a party ...



58



Just before the **Tourist Office of Mechelen**, the Mechelen **mascot**, the **OPSINJOORKE** will give you a little wave. Here, you can see the **cloth** used to throw the **Opsinjoorke** up into the air during the Mechelen Ommegang procession.

059



Your journey of discovery through Mechelen ends where you started, namely at the Tourist Office of Mechelen.

Was it a **beastly** fun trip? The authors of this booklet can't wait for your **reactions!** Did something funny or exciting happen during your journey, or something you liked so much it will stay with you for the rest of your life? Please share it with us!

060



-  /visitmechelen
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GREETINGS FROM MECHELEN!

Colophon

Mechelen sends you on your way is an initiative of **Toerisme Mechelen** and **Mechelen Kinderstad**. **Concept and realisation** tapis plein vzw (2006). Changes to layout edition 2015: www.magelaan.be – **Illustrations** Tom Schamp **With the cooperation of** Dienst Toerisme, Heritage Mechelen, Guides Association, Department of Archaeology, Diversity Department, Physical Planning Department, Marketing & Communication Department, City Archives **With thanks to** ABC vzw, Herborist Bianca Kruit, Michel Leriche

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Hope to see you again soon!

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