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LONDON & PROVINCIAL STAMP CLUB

An interesting cover from my collection

When I was accumulating material for my WWI collection I came across the cover pictured below, Baarle-Hertog I discovered was a Belgian enclave within the borders of neutral Holland. Intrigued I did some research via the internet and the following might be of interest to club members.



Territory of Belgium surrounded by the Netherlands (the Dutch district of Baarle-Nassau). Baarle-Hertog consists of twenty separated parcels of Belgian territory messily clustered together, located about five kilometers from the main Dutch-Belgian frontier. To make things more interesting, there are a few Dutch enclaves *within* these Belgian enclaves, and there is even a Belgian enclave within a Dutch enclave within a Belgian enclave within the Netherlands (called a counter-counter-counter enclave). The division between the Netherlands and Belgium sometimes extends across streets and through buildings.

The circumstances that led to this chaos originate in the twelfth century. The area back then comprised of both ducal fiefs and portions of those fiefs. Count Dirk VII of Holland and Hendrick I, the Duke of Brabant had rival claims over the territory. After the death of the duke the territory was somehow inherited by a Godfried of Schoten with both free land and perpetual land titles. Under the Charter of 1190 Godfried was forced to hand the land over to Duke Henry, who then immediately leased it back to Godfried.

Perhaps because of their trivial size, and the nightmare complexity of the territorial arrangements, statesmen never bothered to settle the Baarle-Hertog question in any major European treaty. The 1648 Peace of Munster the the enclaves and the surrounding territories merely got new owners : The United Provinces and the Spanish Southern Netherlands(modern day Belgium). The Treaty of Fontainebleau of 1785 between the Dutch Republic and Emperor Joseph II never got around to reincorporating the Dutch parts of Baarle-Hertog before the entire area was subsumed by France. Yet the enclaves were still divided between the municipal borders of Antwerp and Noord-Brabant. The French wanted a common border for the sake of determining tax levies, but the Belgian Revolution of 1830 stopped that. A few cartographic mistakes followed and the ownership of more parcels became undetermined. The boundaries between Belgium and the Netherlands were finally deliniated in the Treaty of Maastricht of 1843, except for 50 km of Baarle-Hertog territory that comprises of 5,732 parcels of land. Since then there have been two attempts - in 1875 and 1996 - to re-determine nationality for the sake of local government expediency, but the parliaments of both countries in both instances voted against changes.

By: Stuart Henderson