



ALKMAAR 70
70 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP
BATH - ALKMAAR



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APPEAL LAUNCHED TO FIND BATH'S LOST "ALKMAAR CHILDREN"

**Search starts as Bath celebrates 70 years of friendship with its
Dutch twin city**

An Appeal has been launched in Bath and its twin city, Alkmaar, for information on the original children from the Dutch city who came to stay in Bath at the end of World War 2, in 1945. The appeal comes as the two cities launch a year-long celebration of their links – believed to be the oldest twinning between any cities in the world.

The following year, in August and September 1946, a large group of Bath children were invited back to Alkmaar, as thanks for the hospitality shown to 50 children from Holland who had suffered in the notorious Dutch "Hunger Winter" of 1944/1945. Information on these Bath children is also being sought.

Chairman of the Bath-Alkmaar Twinning Association, Martin Broadbent, said this might be the last chance to get in touch with people who were part of one of the most extraordinary chapters in the two cities' 20th century history. He said:

"We very much hope some of the original Alkmaar children are still alive. They would be in their 80s now, so we still have hope. We'd like to gather their memories, and those of their hosts here in Bath, into an permanent digital archive so future generations won't forget how we came to be linked: it is a dramatic and heart-warming story, and part of our two communities' very special shared history."

The Association is also keen to hear from any of the first Bath children to visit Alkmaar, or any Bath families who hosted one of the children from Holland in 1945.

Bathonians first came to know about the plight of people in Alkmaar through the testimony of Eli Prins, a Jewish refugee from the historic Dutch city. Mr Prins made a dramatic escape from Alkmaar and came to live in Bath in 1940, joining the Bath Air Raid Wardens to help protect the city. His tales of the sufferings in his homeland in the Winter of 1944 moved his new friends so much, they launched a local "Alkmaar Appeal". Within a few weeks, Bath had raised the equivalent of £250,000, and dispatched over 50 crate loads of food and clothing to the Dutch city as soon as the War in Europe had ended, in May 1945.

Bath also decided to offer medical care and recuperation to 50 children from Alkmaar, who came to the city in December 1945. They stayed with local families over Christmas and into the New Year. The Bath Chronicle reported at the time how excited the Dutch children were:

"It will be the best Christmas for years' said Greetle and Tinie of Alkmaar"

(Bath Chronicle report, December 15th 1945)

The following year, Alkmaar offered a return holiday visit to Bath's children as a thank you: an incredible opportunity for local children who had little memory of anything other than a Europe at War.

"Exactly 70 years ago this month, Bath children were being hosted in Alkmaar, and the circle of friendship between the two cities was complete," said BATA's Martin Broadbent.

"What started as sympathy became friendship, and that spirit continues now, 70 years later. We have a host of activities planned to mark this special relationship, which is so full of meaning and symbolism, perhaps now more than ever."

Plans for the 'Alkmaar 70' year celebrations include:

- the planting of 5,000 tulip bulbs, donated by Alkmaar, across the City, including in several schools;
- the launch of online "educational resource' pages, providing material for local teachers to use the link as a curriculum aid
- exchange visits by young musicians from both cities;
- several Bath sports club are arranging special visits, including badminton, rowing, judo, pétanque and swimming;

- a sponsored visit to Alkmaar by a small group of Bath children, to commemorate the trip first made 70 years ago;
- several of the city's Festivals are planning to include a Dutch theme in 2017, including the Bath comedy festival and the Bath folk festival

The special year will culminate with a formal civic visit to Bath by the Mayor of Alkmaar, Mr Piet Bruinooge, in July 2017.

Anyone with information on the original Alkmaar children, or the Bath children who made the return visit, can contact the Bath-Alkmaar Twinning Association via their website www.bath-alkmaar.eu, or by emailing the secretary, Victor Windt, on vic.windt@mac.com.



Photo of the original 'Alkmaar children' who came to recuperate in Bath in December 1945 after the 'Hunger Winter' in Holland.

(Hi-res version available)