



Leiden 2025

The SMD(E) Visit and AGM:

A Secretary's Point of View

by

Donna Heys, Secretary
SMD(E)



Every year we hope to offer our members an in-person visit opportunity, providing a chance to meet other members of our community and discuss and learn about the Mayflower and our ancestors. We also hold our AGM at this time. This year, our destination was Leiden, the Netherlands (July 4-5), the city in which many of our ancestors lived and worked for 11 years before crossing to the New World. If you were able to come, I hope you delight in this personal review; if not, I hope you enjoy sharing our experience. Perhaps you will be able to come to our next gathering in Scrooby!

ARRIVAL IN LEIDEN

We were the last of the party- at least those meeting for food- to arrive in the city of Leiden on Thursday, July 3, 2025. The French air traffic controller's strike made our already-late flight even later. Fortunately, our SMD(E) Historian Julie Wilson had been my 'feet on the ground' in the planning stages of this event, and had done a cracking job; our hotel was literally across the street from '**Freddy's**', the chosen venue for the evening. As my husband John and I dashed from the railway station (also just over the road, in the other direction), we glanced in through the window at **Freddy's** and saw our party, all chatting and enjoying their evening. Just a hasty check-in and we, too, could relax.



Meeting up at Freddy's

The waiters were quick to set up an extra table for us, as we hugged friends and introduced ourselves to new faces. The chatter indicated that this place, this group, this event- was going to be something special. We were not to be disappointed.

DAY 1, July 4: Pieterskerk, Erfgoed Leiden, Leiden Water Board (Gemeenlandshuis)

Gathering

By pure coincidence, it transpired that Governor General Lisa Pennington and her husband David Furlow would be in Amsterdam this day, as they were about to embark on a Rhine cruise with their son Ryan and his girlfriend Marina. 'I think we can get there in time to join you for part of the tour', Lisa had told us; we were so excited to see them again, having just enjoyed their visit to our European chapter. And, they were becoming Associate Members! Julie, her daughter Marijke, my husband John and I all went to the railway station to greet them and then proceeded to the meeting place to begin our walking tour.

It was apparent from the start that Leiden offered photo opportunities at every turn; superb architecture jostled with bicycles and flowers in abundance. The sighting of the Molenmuseum De Valk (windmill) on the way to our meeting place, (outside 'The Mayflower' Hotel, of course!) on Beestenmarkt called for a quick session as we took turns posing in front of the iconic scene.



We arrived at the meeting place just in time. Our guide was to be Sarah Moine, Director of the Leiden American Pilgrim Museum (Sarah succeeded the late founder Jeremy Bangs). Having never seen Sarah, I had in mind a Miss-Marple-esque, academic-type older lady, with tweed skirt and brown tie-up shoes. Nothing could have been further from the truth! All the Mayflower descendants and Associate Members lined up for a photo in front of the Mayflower Hotel before setting off.



Left to right: Rick, Mark, Ryan, Marina, Steve, Sue, Mike, Marijke, Vicki, Jonathan, Carmen, Lisa, David, Lynn, Donna, Natalie, Julie, Laurie and John

To Pieterskerk



Museum De Lakenhal

Our route was to take us along Beestenmark and Oude Singel, where we stopped outside **Museum De Lakenhal**. Sarah gave us a quick explanation of the name, which arose from the weaving industry, and we then proceeded to cross the canal onto Lange Mare. We paused outside **Marekerk**, a 17th century Protestant church, before taking a short diversion to the right, which took us to **Vrouwenkerk**. A church no longer, this is a piece of the wall of the last place of worship for the Mayflower passengers before leaving Leiden. Now just a striking section of masonry with an interpretation plaque, the remains proved irresistible as a cat perch.



Marekerk



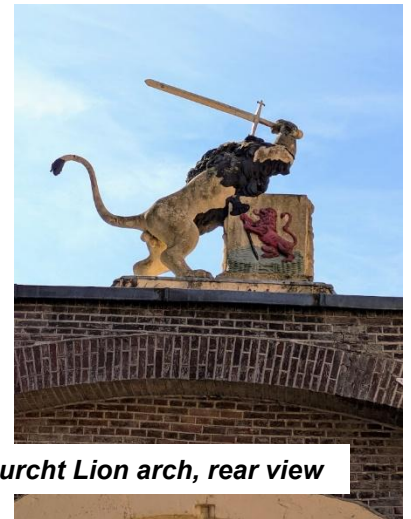
Vrouwenkerk



Back on our route, we continued along Donkersteeg and crossed Oude Rijn via Sint

Jansbrug before proceeding left along Oude Rijn and then right on Van der Sterrepad. After a brief stop to view the **Burcht**, the remains of a medieval castle on a lofty mound, we left the grounds and passed under an **arch at Burgsteed**, which depicting a lion and the keys of Leiden, a recurring, symbolic architectural theme.

Continuing along Nieuwstraat, we turned right onto Bestchuitsteeg and stopped in front of one of the oldest houses in Leiden- the former site of the **Leiden American Pilgrim Museum**. Sarah explained that the LAPM lost the lease and had to find new premises, but at any rate it was a very small property and more space would be beneficial. We would soon be having a preview of the under-construction new home of the LAPM in Pieterskerk.



Burcht Lion arch, rear view



GG Lisa Pennington in front of the former LAPM

Crossing Nieuwe Rijn, we turned right up Botermarkt then left on Koornbrugsteeg to again turn right on Breestraat and pause across from the **Stadhuis van Leiden**, or Leiden City Hall. Never wishing to pass up a photo opportunity, the Descendants quickly posed on the magnificent external staircase for another shot for the family album. Turning left on Pieterskerk Choorsteeg, we emerged from the tiny lane onto Langebrug. In front of us was the restaurant for which we had reservations

that evening, **In Den Bierbengel**, as Sarah spoke a few words about our ancestors and the area.

There was just one more stop before we reached the Pieterskerk area; a tiny alley running to the right from the Pieterskerk Choorsteeg, **William**



Sarah and In Den Bierbengel



Brewstersteeg was the location of Brewster's workshop and home. Just a few bricks of the original building remain, but that didn't deter our Brewster kinfolk posing again in front of the famous location.

Emerging from the lane, the magnificent **Pieterskerk** met us with late-Gothic splendour. Before we entered, however, we continued around the church to see memorial plaques dedicated to the Leiden Protestant community. Across the street was a courtyard which had been the site of **John Robinson's house**. Although it now housed private homes, the public were invited to go through the gate and quietly view the premises.



Memorial plaques on external wall

Inside the **Pieterskerk** at last, and a well-earned cup of coffee had been arranged in the small but beautiful café. Our guide Sarah Moine was now 'back in the office', as a

section in the church premises was soon to be the **Leiden American Pilgrim Museum**. But before we saw the newly dedicated rooms, Sarah had some artifacts to show us, so we all entered the stunning **Churchwarden's Room**, dating from 1648. Sarah showed us rare old Bibles, tiles, coins and more. Then through another couple of doors and we were there- the new, unfinished Museum. Sarah quickly talked us through the plans and updated us on the progression,



stressing how funding issues were at the forefront of the establishment of the displays*. But it was now lunchtime, and even Mayflower descendants have to eat. We split the group into two, so as not to overwhelm the café, and as one half ate, the others had a look around the inside of the magnificent Pieterskerk. There is a Mayflower exhibition and John Robinson memorial plaque, and a copy of the Mayflower Compact, amongst a plethora of other memorials and architectural

features. Artist Jan Steen is buried there, and it is the site of Rembrandt Van Rijn's family grave, although he was buried in Amsterdam.



Site of John Robinson's house



Sarah and the table full of artifacts

Refreshed by the food and drink, we said goodbye to GG Lisa Pennington and her family, as they had to get back to Amsterdam, then Julie and her daughter Marijke guided us as we set off walking to our next appointment with Cor de Graaf, Leiden's head archivist.

**A post-visit fundraising initiative by the SMD(E) has raised over £1000 in donations for the Museum. See details at the end of this report.*

Onwards to Erfgoed Leiden



Cor de Graaf, Lead Municipal Archivist

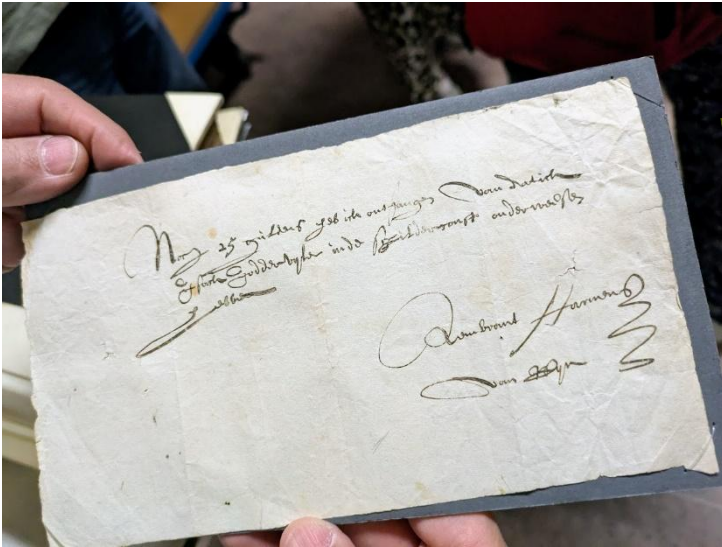
We were thrilled to be allowed to visit the Leiden archives, as the premises itself is closed for building works. Cor de Graaf met us outside and escorted us into the storerooms-my goodness, taking family historians there was like taking children into a sweet shop! Cor had assembled books and documents that contained records of our ancestors. We were able to view, and even hold, books that held their signatures. We asked questions, and received answers. Most of the documents are now available online. How was the scanning done? Interestingly, not in-house, but it is contracted out and scanned by a group of neurodivergent people who do not mind working



Steve holding one of the record books

in the dark. If we hadn't all had aching feet and another visit to get to, we could have stayed there all day, listening to

Cor and tapping into his knowledge. One of the final documents he dug out for us was a receipt for art lessons given by Rembrandt and signed by his hand.



Rembrandt's signature

Leaving the archives, we turned the corner to walk along the Vliet, where there is a statue commemorating the departure of the Pilgrims from Leiden, at a point just a short distance along the waterway.



Gemeenlandshuis

We had to retrace our route back to Breestraat, just down the road from the City Hall, where we were expected at 3.30 for a private tour of the **Gemeenlandshuis**, the head office of the Water Board (Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland), the body that controls the water and dyke system of



Gemeenlandshuis

the Netherlands. No longer in regular use, this magnificent building is now only open to the public on special occasions. We were tired beyond words, so grabbed seats as we heard about the building from our two delightful guides, Hanneke and her colleague.



Hanneke (right) and colleague

In den Bierbengel Restaurant

We were thankful to have a short time-gap before our booking for dinner, so some of us found a small drinking establishment nearby and relaxed before meeting up in the restaurant for some excellent Dutch

cuisine and good company. We had another long day ahead of us, so finished the day with a stroll back to our accommodations, tired but happy.



In den Bierbengel, left to right: Mike, Carmen, Jonathan, Rick, Steve, Sue, Donna... and of course, the table behind!

DAY 2, July 5: Delfshaven-Pilgrim Fathers Church, AGM, Pelgrim Brewery

To Delfshaven

We met at the railway station early the next morning, to catch the train to Delfshaven. It was from this town, near Rotterdam, that our forefathers boarded the Speedwell and left for England in 1620. Travelling on the Dutch railway system was simple; trains ran to time and were accessed by tapping your contactless credit card as you entered and exited the station. It was a joy to see the countryside and to pass through the Hague. We had to make one change onto the metro system, and were in good time for our meeting at **The Pilgrim Fathers' Church**.



Stained glass window: SPEEDWELL

Our guide Jan Wielaard from Gilde Rotterdam took us outside to the front of the church and told us some of the history of the area. It was from this point that the Pilgrims are believed to have departed, having only spent a day in Delfshaven. The guide also told us about local Dutch naval hero Piet Hein, who was born in Delfshaven. There is no proof that the Pilgrim fathers actually visited the church. The talk continued in the Annie Verbeek Auditorium.



Jan Wielaard and the group on the quayside, in front of the Pilgrim Fathers Church



Inside the Annie Verbeek Auditorium

The AGM

A lunch was provided in an annex of the Pilgrim Fathers Church, known as the Annie Verbeek Auditorium. A wonderful set of panels edging the room displayed the Mayflower story. Following our meal, the Associate Members left for a pre-arranged tour of the local brewery next door, the **Pelgrim Brewery**. As the tour was short in

duration, they had time to visit a local windmill and then go for a coffee. In the meantime, the Board members present prepared for the AGM, and were joined by the Full Members attending. By holding the AGM during the annual gatherings, many members are able to attend in person. The AGM went out via Zoom to the other Full Members. The room was beautiful and the technical facilities marvellous; we had a strong internet connection and a large screen on which to project our slides, which linked in with the external Zoom broadcast. Another webcam which we had brought with us was pointed back into the room to show the attending Full Members, so they were represented on the screen with the others who had signed in. Every effort was made to include anyone who wished to attend, either virtually or in reality, and the splendid setting and historical context ensured it was an AGM not to be forgotten.



AGM in progress



Descendants at the Speedwell's departure point



Pelgrim Brewery tour



The Pelgrim Brewery and the post-AGM 'wind-down'



With the AGM finished, we tidied up and went next door to the **Pelgrim Brewery**, where we had reservations for our evening meal. We were early and had time for a much-needed beverage. The food was superb, and Julie's husband Koos was able to join us; how nice it was just to relax and chat, knowing that it had all gone well,

including the AGM, and we had seen so many wonderful sites and items pertaining to our ancestors' time in the Netherlands.

We retraced our journey, ending up back at Leiden railway station. We were tired but not quite ready to end the party, and after all, we WERE just passing Freddy's, the perfect place for a nightcap...



Final evening drinks at Freddy's: Top left- Lynn, Laurie, Natalie, Mark; Right- Steve, Sue, Koos, Julie; Bottom left-Julie, Vicki, Mike, John

THE LEIDEN HIGH

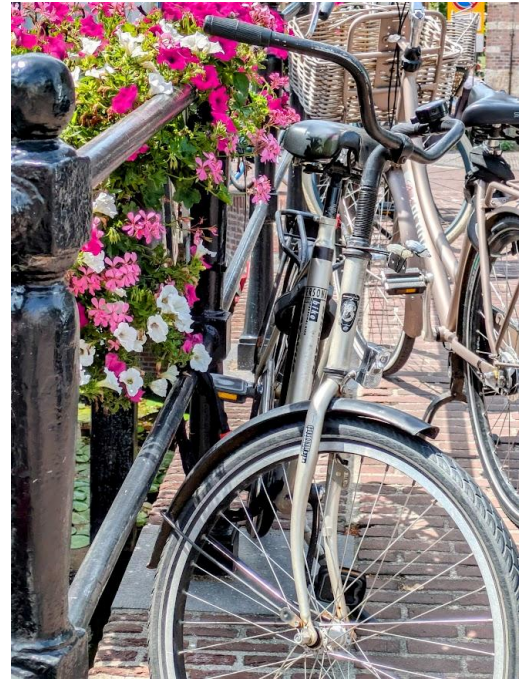
15 Full and Associate Members attended the Leiden visit. The group was augmented briefly by GG Lisa Pennington and family. A WhatsApp group chat had been set up prior to the visit, and that worked well as an easy way to communicate. People made new friends, knowing we were cousins and that our ancestors had shared this remarkable experience. Everything had gone well, even the AGM. Full Member Rick Meeken had come forward after the AGM and offered to top up the funding needed for the SMD(E) Incorporation. I was in tears, not because we no longer had to worry so much about money, but because we had created a group who cared enough so that something like this could happen spontaneously. Commitment and camaraderie, and above all great friendship, abounded.

We parted that night, after our final drinks in Freddy's, and felt we had known each other forever. We sent messages on WhatsApp about our journeys home, and the Leiden High we all felt. It took a few days for that to wear off.

'See you in Scooby?' 'If you're up my way, stop by'. 'It's been amazing'.

And it was.

Thanks once again to Julie Wilson for her incredible work on organising this visit. Thank you, too for everyone who gave permission for their photos to be used in our reports.



POST-VISIT LAPM FUNDRAISER

8th August 2025

Historian Julie Wilson presents Sarah Moine *with a commemorative certificate representing the donation from the members of **The Society of Mayflower Descendants (Europe)** in support of the new **Leiden American Pilgrim Museum***





The Society of Mayflower Descendants (Europe)

is pleased to make a
financial contribution in support of the

Leiden American Pilgrim Museum

in recognition of extraordinary contributions
to education about the Pilgrims and
the preservation of our Mayflower heritage.

Amount €1200
Date 8 August 2025

Carmen Kew, SMD(E) Governor

Julie Wilson, SMD(E) Historian

This contribution made possible by gifts from SMD(E) members

Steve and Sue Brewer
Lynn Buendgen
Donna and John Heys
Carmen and Jonathan Kew

Rick Meeken
Mark Primmer
Julie Wilson
Anonymous donor