

Herentals



Historical walking tour



Introduction

Historical walking tour in Herentals

Herentals is the historical capital of the Campine (de Kempen). The name 'Herenthals' has been mentioned since 1150. It signifies a 'hill where the hornbeam grows'. The town got its rights of freedom in 1209, more than 800 years ago. Herentals knew its greatest prosperity during the fourteenth century, when the wool and textile industry flourished.

But Herentals has remained a lively town to this day with a wide range of sports and recreation facilities and a modern cultural centre. It attracts thousands of visitors from Belgium and abroad every year.

The walking tour has been marked out with copper rivets on the ground. Special marks have been used for those who wish to follow a shorter route and for wheelchair users. Inside this flyer you will find a general outline.

Enjoy your walking tour!

1. Lakenhal

The clothmakers' hall in the very centre of Herentals is the most important witness of the rich past of the town. It was built by the wool weavers and cloth makers in order to do their business.

The oldest texts refer to it as the 'gulden huys' (golden house), 'meethuys' (measuring house) or 'loothuys' (lead house). It was last refurbished as recently as 2010. The building is now used for social and cultural purposes. During the many exhibitions which take place in the clothmakers' hall the entrance is free.

North of the building stands the octagonal belfry which dates back to 1543. Its spire is some 35 meters high. Since the middle of the sixteenth century there has been a carillon in the clock-tower. The present carillon was inaugurated in 1965. The belfry tower features on the world heritage list of UNESCO.

At the south side you see the statue of the Farmers' War (de Boerenkrijg), erected in 1898. It commemorates the battle which took place near Herentals on 28 October 1798 and which was one of the bloodiest episodes of the uprising of the Campine farmers against the French troops.



2. Zandpoort

The Zandpoort (sandgate) was first mentioned in 1402. The outer walls are covered with gobertange sandstone; inside a lot of regional bog ore has been used. In 1643 the gate was thoroughly restored and rebuilt, the outside getting a flat façade in a sober Renaissance style. The last restoration dates from 2007.

In 1583 a bark mill was constructed on the bank, south of the gate; it was used to grind bark and grain. After a fire in 1881 it was replaced by a wind mill, the so-called 'Rijkerooymolen'. This mill is usually called the 'bank mill' (walmolen) but sometimes it was referred to as the Driesen mill after its last owner, Carolus Driesen. This Driesen mill was an open standard mill fitted with two pairs of grey millstones; one such stone may be seen at the Molenvest.

The mill was heavily damaged by a storm and finally disappeared in October 1940. You could still make out the mill hill at the corner of the Wasserijstraat until the early sixties but since then a house has been built on the spot.





3. The Saint Joseph's secondary school

The school in the Collegestraat is the successor to the Latin School which dated already from the beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1613 secondary education was entrusted to the Augustinians who had to leave their monastery in 1796. The school was reopened in 1820 as a municipal institution; in 1834 it came under the archbishopric's responsibility. In 1889 the school, which until then was situated on the corner of the main market place and the Hofkwartier, found a new accommodation in its present location. The well-know Flemish novelist Ernest Claes was an alumnus of this secondary school. The people of Herentals remember Claes as the chronicler of the college life. A short quotation from his *Studentenkosthuis 'Bij Fien Janssens'* (student boardinghouse at 'Fien Janssens'): *Herentals has shown me the Campine soul in its primitive beauty; it has sucked me up in it, and has made me a 'Campinian'. It became a second place of birth to me. And I remember it with the same love and tenderness with which I think back to its school.*

4. The Saint Waldetrudis' church

The Saint Waldetrudis' church is commonly called 'de Bovenkerk' (upper church). It stands in the middle of the oldest part of Herentals. The church is a jewel of Brabant gothic style. The position of the tower in between the choir and transept is remarkable. The tower seems to sink into the nave. This can probably be explained by the fact that the tower and the transept are the only remains of the original fourteenth-century building.

The church is richly decorated with parapets, gargoyles, niches, and turrets. It is worth a closer exploration. At the south side, on top of the sacristy, you will see the so called 'zilvertoreke' (silver turret). This octagonal turret served as the church's treasure room.

The church can boast a lot of art treasures including the Saint Crispian and Crispinian altarpiece and valuable paintings by the Francken brothers and by Jordaens, De Vos and Cossiers.



5. Besloten Hof

The 'Besloten Hof' was built as an enclosed convent in 1410. It was used by Norbertine sisters until they were dispelled by the French republicans in 1797. In 1836 the order of the Franciscan sisters took over the convent.

Don't hesitate to enter the gate and immerse yourself in the calm of the enclosed court. The buildings around the inner courtyard date from the seventeenth century. Through the gatehouse you look straight at the old deanery (1682). Pay attention to the old Herentals coat of arms, which was placed in the façade between two windows at left of the entrance.

The fifteenth-century chapel was partially destroyed during the French Revolution but was restored in 1855. Behind the chapel one finds the beautiful convent from 1661, where the nuns lived in community. At this moment they share the court with the 'Wit-Gele Kruis' (or White-Yellow-Cross, a Christian health charity).

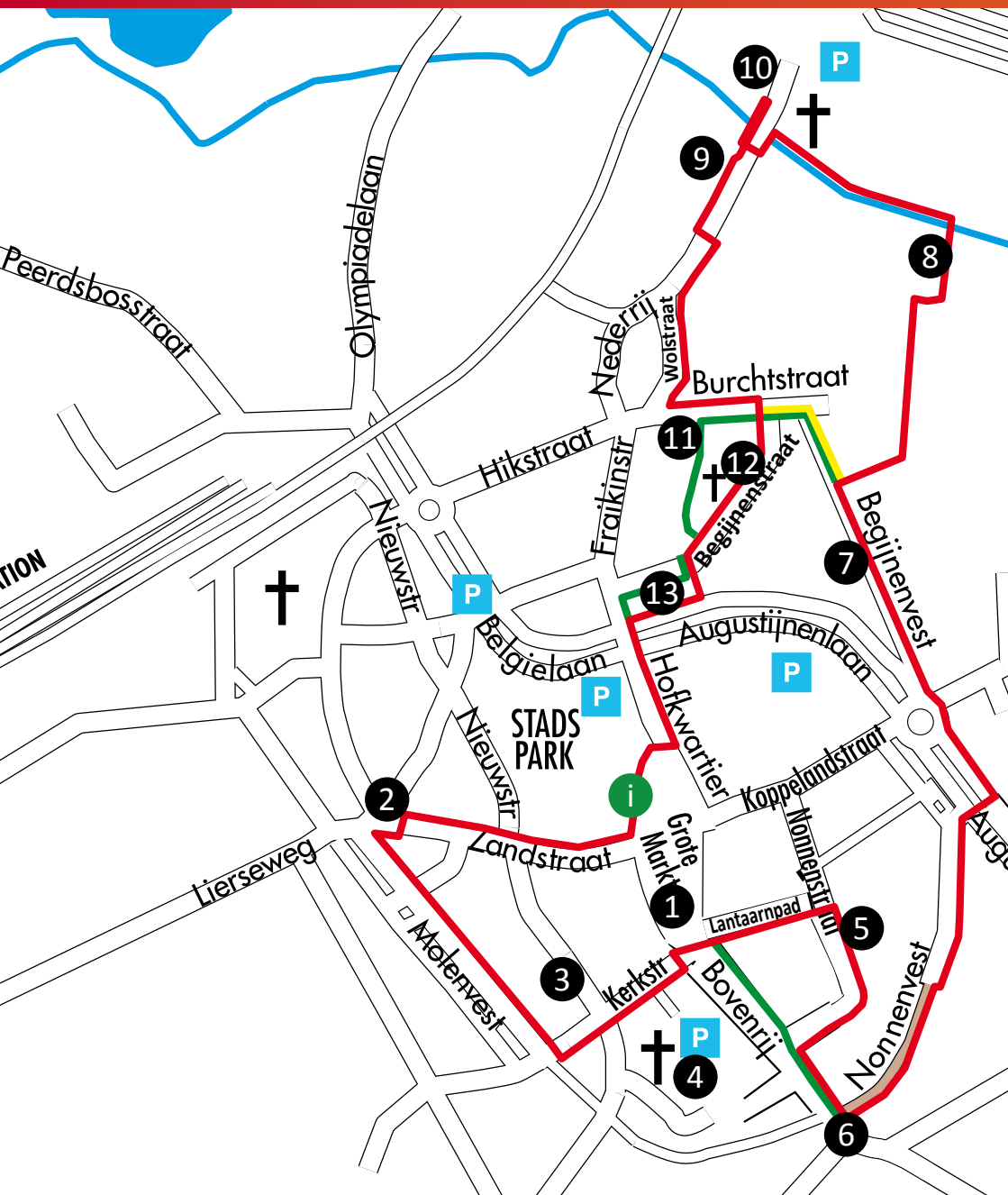


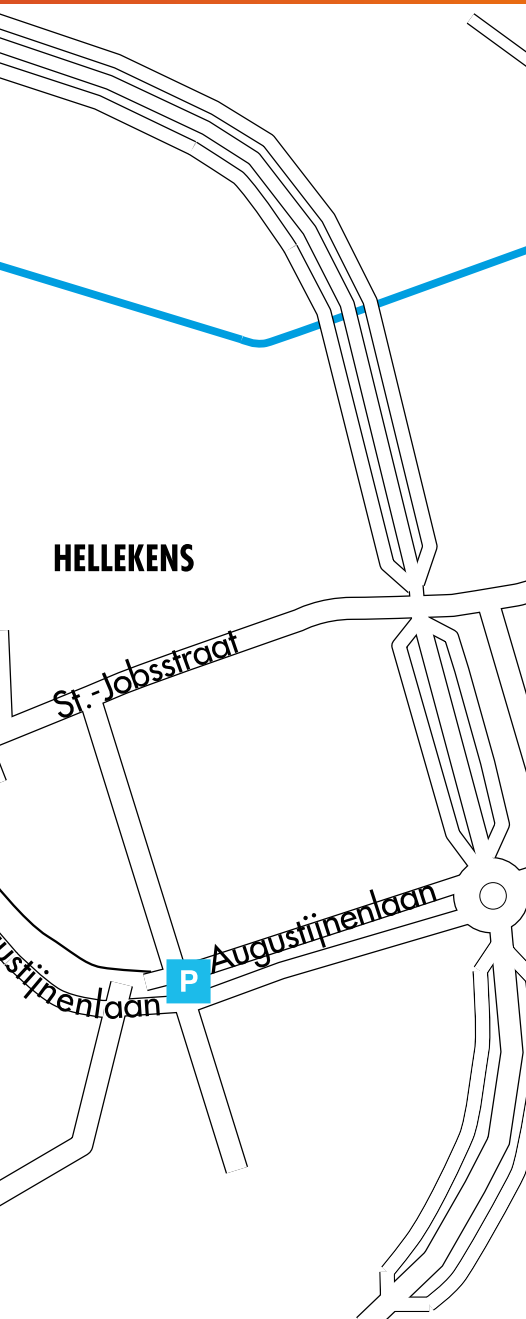
6. Bovenpoort

The first mention of the Bovenpoort (Upper gate) dates from 1361. The walls are covered with gobertange sand stone. Inside, a lot of the local iron stone was used. Together with the Zandpoort, the Bovenpoort was part of the town rampart. The gate has quite an eventful history: it fell into disrepair and was rebuilt many times. As it was in a bad condition with no money being available for repair works, the town councillors decided in 1754 to have a big part of the gate demolished; it had lost all of its military and strategic value anyway.

In 1772 a real restoration was started up. It has turned out to be decisive for the current appearance of the gate. Both copper ornamental vases on top of the roof date from that time. A more recent minor restoration took place in 2006.







Key

i. Tourist information office, departure and arrival of all walking tours

1. Lakenhal
2. Zandpoort
3. Saint Josephs' secondary school
4. Saint Waldetrudis' church
5. Besloten hof
6. Bovenpoort'
7. Town ramparts
8. Fish ladder
9. Old hospice
10. Chateau Le Paige
11. Saint Joseph's institute
12. Beguinage
13. Cloister of the Augustinians

■ Long route = 5 km

■ Short route = 3.4 km

■ Wheelchair route = 3.2 km

How to reach Herentals

By train

The trainstation is within walking distance from the town centre. Hourly several trains to Antwerp. (www.b-rail.be). Busterminal for local busses near the station. (www.delijn.be).

By car:

- Coming from Antwerp: via E313, exit Herentals West
- Coming from Hasselt: E313, via exit Herentals oost (east)
- Coming from Eindhoven (the Netherlands): via E34, exit Lille Herentals

Parking

Free parking: Belgiëlaan and Augustijnenlaan

Paid parking:

- Grote Markt
- behind community hall 't Hof
- corner Saint Waldetrudis church and Kerkstraat

Tickets can be bought at the vending machines



7. Town ramparts

In 1209, after the assignment of privileges by Henry I, duke of Brabant, the new town was allowed to build fortifications, so that the inhabitants could withstand the attacks of plunderers and bands of robbers, and defend their welfare. This was important not only for Herentals itself but also for the duke. Together with both town gates, the Nonnenvest (nuns' moat) and the Begijnvest (beguines' moat) are all that is left of those mediaeval fortifications. They consisted in an earthen embankment built with the sand that came from the ditches alongside. The ramparts were planted with trees to stabilize them; that is why cutting wood on the ramparts was severely punished. The authentic profile is still visible at the Nonnenvest, where the ramparts reach a height of ten to twelve meter.

8. Fish ladder

In the fifteenth century the wool- and textile industry flourished in Herentals. For their production the cloth makers took advantage of the nearby 'Kleine Nete' (small Nete) and its arms. Indeed, water was essential for the manufacturing of fine linen; besides the river could be used to drive water mills and generate energy.

The weir in the river, several meters upstream from Chateau Le Paige, doesn't serve to generate energy but to control the river's fall.

Unfortunately, the weir prevents fish from swimming upstream to spawn. To overcome this problem a remarkable construction was built: beside the weir a river bypass was made where the water flows down a series of broad steps. No fewer than twenty species of fish have been shown to use this bypass!



9. Old Hospice

The hospital of Herentals, dating from 1253, is surely the oldest one of the Campine region. From a guest-house it has progressively developed into a real hospital. It was part of a convent of Augustinian nuns.

You can see four buildings, the architecture of which is of historic importance. The entrance gate and the old cloister date from the seventeenth century. Please pay attention especially to the sixteenth-century chapel with its gothic windows, sharp lantern turret and low outside hall. It is used now for marriages and funeral ceremonies. In the old convent several social service institutions nowadays find their lodging. The hospital's barn shows the oldest part of the estate. Some of the beams in the roof's structure are as old as the early fourteenth century.

The Old Hospice forms a remarkable whole together with the red-brick hospital from the interwar period, the hospital from the second half of the twentieth century, and the brand-new wing from the twenty-first century.



10. Chateau Le Paige

The Le Paiges were a notable family in Herentals. Several members of the family have been mayors of the town. At Henri Le Paige's birth in 1806 his father had 30 oak trees planted on the domain in the Nederrij. This was to be the beginning of an arboretum which today has more than 70 different kinds of trees from the whole world. The garden pond, together with the earthen walls with pavilion and icehouse, are remainders of the old town ramparts.

The chateau itself was built in 1892. The architecture can be called eclectic, with Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical features forming a hybrid 'neo' style. In the interior we find early art nouveau features.

The wrought-iron gate at the front garden was made by an artist from Herentals, the iron founder Van Aerschot. Since its restoration in 2000 the chateau has a social and cultural function. During exhibitions one can enter it free of charge.





11. Saint Joseph's Institute

This institute has a long history. From 1820 on, the beguinage developed into an educational centre. The beguines started a domestic science school for poor girls. In 1835 the lay teachers Maria Theresia and Jeanette Van Heteren came to live and work in the beguinage. The school was converted into a municipal primary school for girls in 1850. The lessons were given in two small houses at the west side of the beguinage. Maria Theresia Van Heteren was the headmistress. In 1848 a Teacher Training College was founded. Almost all the beguinage houses along the Burchtstraat were used for it. The number of pupils grew gradually, and a new school building was put into use in 1904. The 1914 extension gave the school its present dimensions.

12. Beguinage

The old beguinage must have been founded before 1266 on the other bank of the Kleine Nete (Nieuwland or 'new land'). The current beguinage was built in the seventeenth century: the gate in the Burchtstraat in 1630, the gate building in the Begijnenstraat already in 1622. The oldest house of the beguinage is the Founding House (1657) in front of the entrance of Saint Catherine's Church (1599-1614).

Across 'Ons Heer op de koude steen' ('our Lord on the cold stone') against the church we see the infirmary. In this house the poor and sick beguines were taken care of. The infirmary has been preserved in its original state. It is surrounded by a row of eighteenth-century houses.

In former times the beguinage was much larger in size, but in the 1860s part of it was pulled down. Nowadays the beguinage is under the administration of the OCMW (Commission for Social Welfare). The private houses are let on a long lease and the leaseholders are obliged to renovate the houses according to specific prescriptions.





13. Cloister of the Augustinians

In 1613 the Augustinian friars established themselves in Herentals in order to give instruction in the Latin School. In 1616 they laid the foundation stone of a cloister of which only the infirmary (1692) has remained. The cloister has suffered terribly under the 'Boerenkrijg' (Farmers' War). During the battle of Herentals in 1798, on October 28th, the cloister buildings were set on fire and largely destroyed by the French troops. The Augustinians never returned to Herentals afterwards.

The infirmary has served as a tobacco storehouse and then as a fire station. The last radical rebuilding took place in 1992, when it became the new home for the town archives. The modern extension which includes the new entrance definitely catches the eye.

Tourist information office

Grote Markt 35 | 2200 Herentals | (0032)(0) 14 21 90 88
www.herentals.be | toerisme@herentals.be

Opening hours

Monday to Friday: 9.00 - 12.00 and 13.30 - 16.00
(closed on Monday afternoon)

Saturday: 10.00 - 14.00

Sunday: 10.00 - 14.00 (only in July and August)

