

# münster historical

City Hall of the  
Westphalian  
Peace





## City Hall (Rathaus) and Citizens' Hall (Bürgerhalle)



City Hall of Münster:  
with its *Friedenssaal (Hall of Peace)*  
known worldwide as the location of  
the *Westphalian Peace*, and with its  
magnificent gables considered also  
architecturally to be one of the most  
important building monuments and  
one of the most beautiful secular  
buildings from the Gothic period.

## Council Chamber (Ratskammer)

A first assembly room on this site, situated directly opposite the former Michaelis Gate to the Episcopal area of immunity on the Cathedral Hill, dates from the 12th century. The original structure consisted of a half-timbered building erected at some distance from the market street, which was replaced, possibly already before 1200, with a stone building. This probably two-storey stone building is already documented in 1250 as a meeting place for the lay judges; its lower story is the current *Friedenssaal*.

# Citizens' Hall

At the start of the 14th century the need arose for a covered room for meetings of the citizenry. To the west in front of the stone building a large gabled house was constructed, which reached as far as the building line of market street. The exact dating of the citizens' hall is disputed, but it could have originated around 1320.

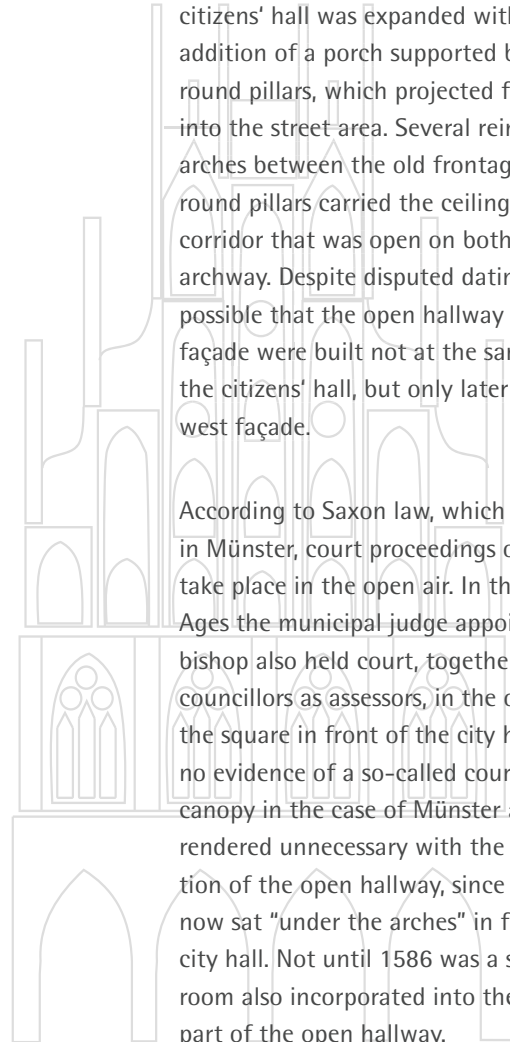
After completion of the citizens' hall a division of the building's interior into two parts is first recorded by a chronicle in 1337. The councillors met in the rear part of the city hall in the council chamber, while the citizenry came together in the front part of the building in the citizens' hall. Today parts of armaments and weapons owned since ancient times by the city as well as a replica of the fairground sword can be viewed here.



# Open Hallway and Display Façade

Towards the end of the 14th century the citizens' hall was expanded with the addition of a porch supported by five round pillars, which projected four metres into the street area. Several reinforcing arches between the old frontage and the round pillars carried the ceiling over a corridor that was open on both sides, the archway. Despite disputed dating, it is possible that the open hallway and display façade were built not at the same time as the citizens' hall, but only later before the west façade.

According to Saxon law, which also applied in Münster, court proceedings once had to take place in the open air. In the Middle Ages the municipal judge appointed by the bishop also held court, together with two councillors as assessors, in the open air on the square in front of the city hall. There is no evidence of a so-called court porch as a canopy in the case of Münster and this was rendered unnecessary with the construction of the open hallway, since the judge now sat "under the arches" in front of the city hall. Not until 1586 was a small court room also incorporated into the northern part of the open hallway.



The lavish architecture of the gable can only have been planned and started at a time when the economy was flourishing. The demonstrable continuity from 1370 in the Council and the office of mayor was probably helpful in this respect. However, completion of the display façade was delayed, presumably as a result of the economic consequences of the plague and fire disasters in the years 1382/1383. As a result of the numerous repairs, repaintings and destruction, few remains of the original design were preserved.



A more precise dating of the series of paintings, in particular the crowning of the Virgin Mary in the top gable shrine, is not possible. Sculptures or reliefs representing the crowning of the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven are widespread on European cathedrals and churches from the end of the 12th up to the 16th centuries. The appearance of such a sculpture on a secular building such as this city hall gable from the end of the 14th century is unique, however.

In 1576 substantial alterations were made to the city hall. From then on an overall span roof connected the front-facing part of the building with the open hallway and citizens' hall and the rear council chamber.

# Destruction during the war and reconstruction

On 28 October 1944, during an allied air raid, several incendiary bombs hit the city hall. Shortly afterwards the splendid display façade lost its support and crashed down on to the Prinzipalmarkt. Only the bottom arches and two tracery windows of the first storey remained intact.



Views of the city hall destroyed by war, Stadtmuseum Münster, Jack collection

All of the interior architecture of the *Friedenssaal* with wooden panelling, chandeliers and paintings had already been removed at the start of the war, thus allowing it to be saved. On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the *Westphalian Peace* on 24 October 1948 it was therefore possible at least to visit the faithfully reconstructed *Friedenssaal* again.

After the end of the Second World War in 1945, there were initially no plans for the erection of a new city hall. The city lacked the financial resources for this purpose, which were still more urgently needed for housing construction. Finally the merchants' association succeeded in 1950 in launching an initiative under which the old city hall of Münster would be resurrected without financial support from the city. The city authorities agreed and only looked after the administrative side of the process.

Ultimately a committee was formed for the reconstruction of the city hall, scheduled to take place over several years. In addition to architects, art historians and representatives of the city and of various professions, the committee also included numerous personalities from public life.

The plans for the reconstruction of this symbolic building also met with broad agreement outside the city. The laying of the foundation stone on 9 July 1950 became the occasion of a resounding celebration for all citizens after the war. Subsequently numerous donations were made to the project, including donations from other regions of Westphalia in recognition of the enormous importance of the city hall of Münster as an architectural monument, also for Münsterland as a whole.

In 1952, two years after the laying of the foundation stone, it was already possible to hold the topping-out ceremony. A further two years later the splendid gable – reconstructed largely according to the model of the destroyed original – radiated its beauty once again. Finally, on 30 October 1958, the building, with its rich tradition, was ceremonially returned to the city authorities. The interior furnishings were in line with contemporary requirements of a meeting and conference facility for a city parliament.

# Westphalian Peace

In 1648 the *Westphalian Peace* was agreed, thus marking the end of the 30 Years War. This war, which was initially a German war, had spread so rapidly over central Europe that it ultimately involved virtually all European powers at least for a certain time. Confessional and political disputes, which had been occurring increasingly since the middle of the 16th century, cast the European continent into one of its most serious crises. In the course of the war the religious motives receded almost completely into the background. Increasingly it was the interests of power politics that determined the course of events.

Triggered by the *Prague Defenestration*, in which Bohemian nobles threw the Catholic King Ferdinand II's governor out of a window of the Prague Castle, and followed by the election of the Calvinist Elector Friedrich V von der Pfalz as the new Bohemian king, the regional conflict grew into an empire-wide war.



*The Prague defenestration, Stadtmuseum Münster*

Initially the Catholic side under Ferdinand II, who had now been elected emperor, was able to win a number of important victories. An example was the battle of Stadtlohn in western Münsterland in 1623. However, the further course of the war was marked by the intervention of major European powers. On the Protestant side first Sweden under Gustav Adolf and subsequently also Catholic France entered into the war. An equilibrium in terms of military power arose, and an end to the bloody battles appeared possible only by means of negotiations.

As one of the most important conditions for promising peace negotiations the first task was to select two cities as locations for negotiations, which on the one hand were each in the area of influence of one of the two parties to the conflict, but on the other hand close enough to each other, so that rapid exchange of information could be ensured. Both negotiation venues also needed to have intact urban infrastructures, as numerous delegations were to be expected from all parts of the empire, as well as from the neighbouring European countries.

Münster and Osnabrück fulfilled these conditions and so the negotiations started in the two cities in 1643/1644. Münster in particular presented itself as scene of this first European peace congress since, because of its strong fortification, it hardly showed any war damage. In Osnabrück the Kaiser's envoys negotiated with those of the Diet and of Protestant Sweden. In Münster the imperial delegates met those of the French king. In addition, the Dutch negotiated here with the Spanish on recognition of their state sovereignty and the equally significant end of the 80 Years War.

After five years of negotiations the peace agreements were signed in 1648. On 15 May the Spanish-Dutch Peace was agreed in the *Friedenssaal* of the city hall of Münster, named after that event. The painter Gerard Ter Borch recorded this scene in a painting (original in the National Gallery in London; copy in the city museum of Münster). An etching based on this famous painting can be seen in the *Friedenssaal* next to the fireplace.

On 24 October the Westphalian Peace was concluded. Sweden and France forced the limitation of the imperial central power in the empire and a strengthening of the principle of a federal constitution. Equality in the legal treatment of religions was also decided for the first time. Switzerland and the Netherlands were granted recognition of their state sovereignty.



This represented the first time that a war in Europe had been ended not militarily, but by means of diplomatic negotiations. Admittedly this peace agreement did not resolve all European problems, and further wars subsequently occurred, but the constitution established in the agreement proved of such basic significance for the empire that it would endure until secularisation in 1803.

*Invocation of the Spanish-Dutch peace in the Münster city hall, Stadtmuseum Münster*

# City Hall and Friedenssaal (Hall of Peace)

This oldest part of the current city hall was built in the second half of the 12th century. As council chamber it was initially the meeting hall for the city council. Since the council was also responsible for the lower jurisdiction, the so-called court of lay assessor, the room also served as courtroom. Both uses are still recognisable from the current furnishings.

How does a council chamber become the *Friedenssaal*?

In this room on 27 May 1643 the imperial document was read out, according to which the City of Münster was declared neutral for the duration of the peace negotiations, which would ultimately end the 30 Years War, and was therefore relieved of all duties to emperor and empire. Subsequently the more than 150 envoys, who had travelled here for the peace negotiations, were greeted by the council.



Although the actual *Peace of Westphalia* of 24 October 1648 was not concluded in this room, it did play a major role during the years of peace negotiations as the central venue for social events. For many years Münster, with this negotiation venue, was a hub of European diplomacy.

## Pax optima rerum



„Pax Optima Rerum“, hearth stone, Stadtmuseum Münster

As a memento of the conclusion of peace in 1648, in the fireplace on the south wall there is a one metre high cast-iron stove plate, which shows in the centre a cushion with a crown and sceptre. Above this are three doves with olive branches in their beaks. The inscription reads: "Anno 1648. Pax optima rerum, 24 Oct." (freely translated: "Peace is the greatest good", 24 October 1648)





## Sovereigns and envoys

The 37 portraits on the west wall and a part of the south wall of the *Friedenssaal* are reminders of the peace negotiations, which ended the 30 Years War in 1648 with the signature of the *Peace of Westphalia*. Soon after the conclusion of peace the city council had these portraits of the sovereigns and of the most important envoys hung in memory of the years of peace negotiations.

Viewed from the direction of the mayor's table, the portraits, reading from top right to left, start with Emperor Ferdinand III and the two peace mediators Fabio Chigi and Alvisio Contarini. These are followed by the imperial envoys, then the legations from France, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands. On the fireplace side are the six German electoral envoys. The short side shows the envoys from Basle as well as Johann von Reumont, the Münster city commandant.



Johann von Reumont, city commandant of Münster

During the last expensive restoration of the portraits (in preparation for the 350th anniversary of the *Peace of Westphalia*) numbers were discovered on the frames, which appear to indicate the original hanging sequence. The current hanging corresponds with that sequence.

Sweden



Johan Adler Salvius



Johan Oxenstierna

Spain



Gaspar de Bracamonte y Guzman Graf von Penaranda



Philipp IV.

France



Henri II. de Bourbon Orléans



Ludwig XIV.

Imperial envoy, Kurböhmern



Johann Maximilian Graf von Lamberg



Johann Ludwig Graf von Nassau



Maximilian Graf von Trautmannsdorff

Emperor, peace mediator



Ferdinand III.



Matthias Mylonius Biörenklou



Schering Roesenhane



Antoine Brun



Joseph de Bergaigne



Abel Servien



Claude des Mesmes Comte d'Avaux



Ferdinand Ernst Graf von Walnstein



Isaac Volmar



Johann Krane



Alvise Contarini



Fabio Chigi

Envoy from the city of Basle



Johann Rudolf Wettstein

Fireplace

Electoral envoy



Graf Johann von Sayn-Wittgenstein



Georg Christoph Freiherr von Haslang



Hugo Everhard Cratz Graf von Scharfenstein

Netherlands



Barthold van Gent



Godart van Reede

Porch



Johann van Mathenesse



Adrian Pauw



Johann von Reumont



Franz Wilhelm von Wartenberg



Johann Ernst von Pistorius



Hugo Friedrich Freiherr von und zu Eltz



Adriaen Clant van Stedum



Willem Ripperda



Frans van Donia



Johan de Knuyt

# Masterpieces of carving

The panelling on the long sides of the room was created in 1577 on the basis of a uniform concept. The date can be found on the panel of the entrance door, which is decorated with the figure of the Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ. The designs are by Hermann tom Ring, the most important Westphalian painter of the 16th century. The City of Münster's natural desire to be represented as the leading Hanseatic city of Westphalia certainly contributed to the impetus for this lavish furnishing. With their severe form these examples of panelling are true Renaissance masterpieces.



## West wall



On the west wall adjoining the entrance door is a bench, the rear panelling of which bears the figures of Christ, his twelve apostles and the patron saint of the cathedral, St. Paul, so important for Münster. The fields of figures are separated by narrow columns on moulded plinths; at the top they are bordered with a decorated triangular gable with an angel's head in the middle.

## Eastern window wall

On the central surfaces of the window pillars the eastern window wall shows the four Evangelists. The representations have been carved in the manner of the engravings of Heinrich Aldegrever from 1549. The most northern niche is decorated by a figure of Moses as law-maker, the other window niches show the seven free arts: grammatica – dialectica – arithmetica – rhetorica – musica – geometrica – astrologica. These figures too (like the figure fields on the opposite side) are crowned with decorated triangular gables and the heads of angels. Worthy of special note are the medal heads in the centre of the plant arabesques below the triangular gables – a typical genre for the period.

## North wall

The front side (north wall) of the room is dominated by the wall of cupboards, the judge's table and the mayor's bench. At the back of this bench small wall cupboard drawers are incorporated in two rows one above the other, twelve on the left and ten on the right. Objects of special value are their 22 doors, which, with their reliefs, are among the few preserved works of Münster handicraft from the 16th century.

A special main theme cannot be recognised in this wide variety of biblical scenes, figures of saints, as well as illustrations of human vices. The doors appear to have been carved around 1536, some possibly earlier. Presumably they were taken over from earlier furnishing of the room and adapted for use in the new panelling of 1577.

To preserve the impressive furnishing of this room, in 2002 all wood surfaces, including the judge's table and the judge's cabinet, were extensively restored by the 'restaurum' workshop. A specially compiled restoration report documents the work that was performed.



## Fireplace

In 1948 – to replace the fireplace from 1577 on the south wall, which was destroyed in the war, and which showed a representation of the judgement of Solomon (1 Kings 3, 16-28 ) with symbols of justice and wisdom – the merchants' fireplace from the Krameramtshaus of 1621 was moved to this location. The relief on the front wall shows the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16, 19-31). The gable figure of Justice with sword and scales, personification of justice, fits in well in this room, which was also once a courtroom. Appropriately for a Hanseatic merchant city, at the sides of the fireplace there are also emblems of trade and shipping. A cast-iron stove plate (see also *Pax optima rerum*) serves as a further reminder of the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia on 24 October 1648.

# Display cabinet

## The golden cockerel



The *golden cockerel* is an artistically formed, gilded silver vessel, presumably created around 1600 in Nürnberg. It holds a little more than a bottle of wine and is proffered to important guests of the city as an honorary goblet. Legend has it that once a Münster councillor donated the *golden cockerel* after his cockerel, flying into the air, made it clear to the beleaguers of the city under Prince-Bishop Christoph Bernhard von Galen that it was pointless to wait for the onset of famine.

## Slipper

The *slipper* dates from the period 1620–1640 and its exact origins remain unresolved, as does the reason why it was kept. Originally the shoe was attributed to Elisabeth Wandscherer, who was personally beheaded in 1535 by her husband, the King of the Anabaptists, Jan van Leiden. Another version sees in the shoe the one-time possession of Anne von Bourbon, Duchess of Longueville (1616–1679). She had accompanied her husband Henri II d' Orleans, Duke of Longueville, to Münster for the peace negotiations (1643–1648).

## Severed hand

Little is known about the exact origins of the *severed hand*, which is the subject of numerous legends. The small oak box on which it rests dates from the second half of the 16th century. Tradition has it that it is the hand of a forger. However, its presentation in the courtroom may also be seen in general terms as a demonstrative sign of the corporal punishment that was customary at that time.



The following objects can be classified as pertaining to the room's function as a place of justice:

## Courtroom bar

The wooden courtroom bar, originally standing in the middle of the room for trials, separates the judge and his assessors from the litigants and spectators.

## Table

A table below the centre of the ceiling – at the position where, on court days, the bar stood – refers to the interrogations, with the expression urging impartiality on the part of the judge: "Audiatur et altera pars – Men hoere beide Parte" (listen to both parties).



## Chandelier

The chandelier, the work of a Flemish wrought-iron craftsman, cannot be exactly dated. Its base ring rests on the strong antler beam of a stag with eight antlers and is decorated with enchanting hunting scenes and depictions of animals. On its front, above the city coat-of-arms, there is a small, late Gothic Madonna figure from Mechelen with a halo. Entwined leaves surround the candleholder. The bars of the support are held together by a golden crown; two golden spheres also decorate the ceiling pole. The ceiling support emerges from a carved rose, a symbol of secrecy and discretion. The circular transcription in golden letters (from the Book of Wisdom, chapter 1,1) is seen as a direction to the judges and its translation reads: "Love justice, those of you who judge the world".

## The Friedenssaal today

As the city's most important room for representational purposes, the *Friedenssaal* still fulfills its function to this date. Today the city's official guests are still greeted here by the Lord Mayor and his representatives. Here they enter their names in the city's guest book and receive the honorary drink from the *golden cockerel*.

24 October 1998 marked a special high spot: on the occasion of the opening of the *European Council Exhibition "1648 – War and Peace in Europe"* the representatives of all the former warring parties came together, including the royal heads of state of Sweden and the Netherlands. Together with numerous high-ranking guests from Germany and abroad, they also commemorated in the *Friedenssaal* the 350th anniversary of the *Westphalian Peace*.



Also in the anniversary year of 1998 the Westphalian Peace Prize (*Westfälischer Friedenspreis*) was awarded for the first time. The award, which carries with it prize money of 50,000 Euro and which is now awarded every two years in Münster, is intended to commemorate the historic peace settlement, achieved only after years of negotiations, which ended the 30 Years War in Europe.

## Further literature

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## Stadtmuseum Münster

You will find interesting historical facts about the *City Hall of the Westphalian Peace* in the Stadtmuseum.

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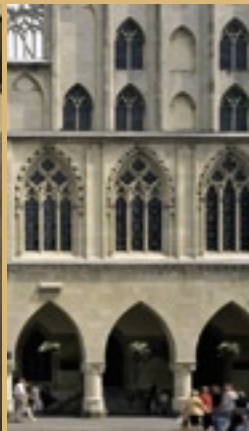


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In addition to the details of the *Friedenssaal* (Hall of Peace), all other important tourist information on Münster can be obtained in the council hall.