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**WHO ON EARTH WAS PLANTIN?**

Christophe Plantin, a bookbinder-printer from Caen, settled in Antwerp around 1550 and started his own printing business a few years later: the Officina Plantiniana. Soon after he had printed his first books, renowned writers and scientists found their way to his firm. Plantin published lots of religious and scientific books. Some of which have influenced western thought. Plantin was also a gifted businessman who managed to skilfully manoeuvre religious and political conflicts of the time. In less than twenty years Plantin’s printing business became one of the most successful in Europe. After Plantin, the Moretus family printed beautiful books in the Antwerp Vrijdagmarkt for many more generations to come.

**Migrant with a network**

At around thirty years of age Christophe Plantin (ca.1520-1589) moved from France to Antwerp, along with his wife Jeanne Rivière (ca.1520-1596) and their daughter Marguerite. Christophe and Jeanne met each other in Caen, Normandy, where Plantin had been an apprentice at a bookbinder-printer’s. Christophe Plantin came from a simple background and throughout his life he used to call himself ‘man of the people’ or at times ‘homo plebeius’, when using Latin, the language of the intellectual elite. Plantin trained in the book trade, but was primarily an autodidact. A few years after his arrival in Antwerp he had amassed sufficient capital to start up his own printing business. The Officina Plantiniana (the Plantin publishing house) came into being.

The company capital probably came from the secret society the Huys der Liefde. This group of intellectuals and tradespeople preached tolerance and a mystical religious experience. The printing press was vital for the dissemination of their ideas.

The second half of the sixteenth century was not an easy time, and life was no easier for publishers and printers. Religious squabbles were the order of the day and if you did not belong to the official religion you were running a major risk. Plantin came out as Catholic but remained a member of the Huys der Liefde. When a Calvinist pamphlet was found in his printing firm Plantin went into hiding in Paris. In the meantime his household effects were sold publicly. The creditors-people who bought them were most likely friends who wanted to prevent the government from seizing Plantin’s possessions. Plantin only returned to Antwerp once his name had been cleared.

**Expansion**

It was now 1563 and the success story was starting out well. A few financiers believed in Plantin as an entrepreneur. The Officina Plantiniana became a company. In the space of five years Plantin printed 260 publications. There were publications by Greek and Latin authors, Hebrew bibles, scientific treatises but also simple almanacs. Liturgical works and urban bye-laws came later on. Plantin was not just a bookseller; he was a man of conviction. He believed in the social role of books, the importance of education, the sciences and the importance of the Greek and Roman authors. Plantin’s fame grew steadily. The printing business expanded and the working capital increased. After four years the company was shut down, probably because the associates were convicted Calvinists. Closing down the company did not actually have much influence on the growth of the printing plant. Plantin was not just active in Antwerp. He had sales points in Paris and Frankfurt as well. He started up a second printing firm in Leiden. Plantin also traded in maps, prints and globes and had a profitable business in lace, where a few of his daughters worked.

**At the summit of his success**

Plantin proclaimed his loyalty to the Catholic Church in all sorts of ways. Amongst others by preparing a scientific edition of the bible, a multilingual bible that went back to the sources. Plantin managed to convince the Spanish King Philip II to support the project financially. In the space of five years Plantin had achieved this immense task: a bible in five languages and eight bindings. This in itself was the greatest typographic enterprise of the sixteenth century. Plantin was given the honorary title of ‘printer to the King’ and the monopoly on religious prints for the Spanish market. The investment paid off. Around 1575 the firm had reached the height of its success: sixteen printing presses, 20 setters, 32 printers, 3 proofreaders and a number of salespeople and domestic staff. The Officina was a typographic enterprise of the very highest quality.

**Humanist**

Plantin built up a large network of contacts. He corresponded with leading scientists and intellectuals from all over Europe in French, Latin, Spanish and Italian. Like a lot of those thinkers he was convinced that the cultural heritage of the ancient Greeks and Romans was crucial if one wanted to become a better person.

**Forefather**

Forefather Plantin was not just a printer, businessman and manager. He was also at the head of a family and the forefather of nine generations of printer-publishers.

Jeanne Rivière was Plantin’s wife for approximately 40 years. Five of their daughters made it to adulthood: Marguerite, Martine, Catharine, Madeleine and Henriette. In the Plantin-Rivière family the only thing that mattered was the firm. The daughters were given a solid education. They helped improve the printer’s proofs or worked in the linen and lace trade. Plantin kept an eye on his business interests when his daughters got married. Of his five sons-in-law three worked in the Officina and there was one lace and linen trader.

**Uprising, setback and end**

In 1576 the firm moved to the house of the Gulden Passer on Vrijdagmarkt. It was the period in which political chaos and religious disputes had increased substantially. The Uprising against King Philip II spread. Spanish troops plundered Antwerp. The city sided with the insurgents. Plantin became the official printer of the States-General, the establishment which led the Uprising, and the Antwerp Calvinistic city council. The unstable political situation meant that, on his 63rd birthday, Plantin decided to set up a backup business in the northern city of Leiden. It was something to fall back on, in case things got out of hand in Antwerp. Plantin became the official printer at the newly established Leiden University and opened the very first scientific printers and bookshop in the Northern Netherlands. In the meantime, his sons-in-law kept the Officina going in Antwerp.

**Plantin unable to thrive in the North.**

When Antwerp fell into Spanish hands in August 1585, Plantin was already on his way home. The economy was in a bad way and that could also be felt in the printing press. Plantin entered the final years of his life in a state of disillusionment and died on 1 July 1589.

**THE MORETUS FAMILY: 300 YEARS OF THE BOOK FIRM**

Following the death of Christophe Plantin his eldest daughter, Marguerite (1547- 1594), along with her husband Franciscus Raphelengius (1539-1597) carried on with the Leiden branch. This branch of the firm continued to exist until 1619. Martine (1550-1616), the second daughter, worked in the lace trade for many years. On her 20th birthday she married Jan Moerentorf (alias Moretus). Jan Moretus (1543-1610) had been working in the printing business since his 14th birthday. He was Plantin’s right hand for many years before becoming his favourite son-in-law. Jan and Martine inherited the Officina. In Plantin’s time Jan Moretus had a central role in national and international trade. He was also responsible for the accompanying administration such as bookkeeping, correspondence, shipments and supplies. Jan Moretus was also a loyal employee. So he was the right man to continue Plantin’s life’s work. Jan I Moretus also mastered lots of languages. He spoke Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Greek and Latin. This knowledge of languages came in handy during the numerous business trips he went on but also in contacts he had with intellectuals from all over Europe. Just like his father-in-law, Jan I Moretus was a self-made man. He had not had much formal education but was able to converse with the intellectuals of the time as an equal. In business terms he turned out to be a worthy successor to his father-in-law. He managed to keep the firm going in difficult (economic) times. In spite of his earlier Calvinistic sympathies Jan Moretus became the most successful printer of the Catholic Reformation. Liturgical and religious works formed the lion’s share of the production. Technically, they were perfectly honed publications with a lot of emphasis on rich and artistic illustrations. The texts by classic authors and scientific treatises are real treasures of printing. Jan Moretus died in 1610. He had been involved in the Officina for more than half a century. Martine died six years later. Of their eleven children just five made it to adulthood. Jan and Martine created the conditions so that the firm could continue to exist undivided. In their will they specified that the Gulden Passer should fall to the most capable son. This did not necessarily mean the eldest. This particular rule was respected by all the generations to come and as a consequence of this the firm had an exceptionally long lifespan. The last book was printed in 1866, around 300 years after Plantin first arrived in Antwerp.

**Generation 3: intellectual**The brothers Balthasar I (1574-1641) and Jan II (1576-1618) took the business over from their father. Jan II died young so Balthasar took over the Gulden Passer on his own. He was born paralysed down his right side and this probably explains why he was an insecure man who liked to stay in the background. Balthasar remained single his whole life. He is the only intellectual of any standing in the history of the Gulden Passer. As a humanist and poet he earned a great deal of fame in Antwerp and beyond. In the first half of the **17th** century Antwerp developed into a bulwark of the Catholic Reformation. Printing was one of the means the Church used to achieve this. Balthasar Moretus noted a lot of religious orders. Along with his school friend Pieter Paul Rubens, Balthasar created wonderfully illustrated Baroque books. Alongside this the Officina continued to print scientific treatises and humanistic works. The big money came from Spain. There the Hieronymite cloister of San Lorenzo had the monopoly on the Spanish market (including the South American colonies) for the production and sale of liturgical works. In order to achieve sufficient quality and production they could only go to Balthasar Moretus. The production for this gigantic market was the firm’s core business. The profits from the firm enabled Balthasar I to develop the Gulden Passer into a beautiful palace, with an inner garden, parlours and portraits from his friend Rubens’ studio.

**Generation 4: Y Viva España**

Balthasar II (1615-1674), son of Jan II and nephew of Balthasar I, had already been working in the firm for ten years when he took it over at 26 years of age. He was rather a practical and sober businessman which was good news for the company during those difficult economic times. In 1648 the Schelde was cut off. The Catholic Reformation had passed its height and the printing sector in Antwerp had been dealt a heavy blow. The Officina survived thanks to the production for the Spanish market. It was the life buoy and the reason why the printing business still existed. Balthasar II was the last one to still publish non-liturgical works. The work produced continued to be typographically exceptionally meticulous. Balthasar II was one of the richest men in Antwerp. He could have attended prestigious social functions, but Balthasar II was not into appearances and honorary positions, especially if they cost him time and money. This did not mean that Balthasar II was not sociable. Within his company he developed and financed the already existent health service. This was a surprisingly modern aspect to the business. Balthasar II married Anna Goos (1627-1691) who also came from a well-to-do family. Following the death of her husband she advised and assisted her son, Balthasar III during his first years at the head of the Officina. She was an energetic business woman.

**Generation 5: worldly**

Balthasar III (1646-1696) was another competent manager, but he also belonged to a generation that was more interested in worldly affairs. Balthasar III went on a journey to Italy at the end of his studies. In 1692 he was ennobled and given the title of ‘esquire’. After some lobbying he was even able to continue with his involvement in trade and industry. In contrast with his father, Balthasar III accumulated all manner of honorary positions. Aside from a few exceptions the entire book production now concentrated on liturgical publications for the Spanish market. As the Hieronymites were unable to pay their bills in the middle of an economic crisis, serious problems loomed for the Officina. Balthasar travelled to Madrid to try to sort things out. He succeeded in his mission, not least because of the energetic coaching he received by letter from his mother. Balthasar III died at fifty years of age. His children were not yet grown up. His wife Anna Maria de Neuf (1654-1714) took over the running of the firm. Anna Maria turned out to be a competent businesswoman just like her mother-in-law Anna Goos. After Balthasar IV (1679-1730) had reached adulthood Anna Maria de Neuf continued to be closely involved in what was going on in the business.

**Generation 6: capital**

Under the management of Anna Maria de Neuf and her sons Balthasar IV and Jean-Jacques (1690-1757), the Officina continued to thrive and it remained the biggest printer’s-publishing house of the Southern Netherlands. There was a notable evolution within the family: Balthasar was the last Moretus to train as a printer. His brother Jean Jacques was the first of the family to enjoy a university education. The profits from the firm were increasingly invested in real estate and securities. The family’s high living standard was no longer dependent on the firm. Marrying well and successful money speculations meant the members of the family could henceforth live off their investments. The printing press became a hobby with a rich past, the family’s pride and joy.

**Generation 7: upheaval**

When François Jean Moretus (1717-1768) took over as manager the Officina was still a large business. But in 1764 it experienced a serious setback. The Spanish king cancelled all the privileges of foreign printer-publishers in a fit of protectionism. The entire Spanish market disappeared from one day to the next. Customers from other regions remained faithful to the firm but the production volume declined rapidly. François Jean married Maria Theresia Borrekens (1728-1797). They had thirteen children seven of whom died young. When François Jean passed away his children had not yet reached adulthood. His widow, Maria Theresia Borrekens, ran the firm for almost thirty years.

**Generation 8: decline**

There was still not much activity in the printing press. Following the death of Maria Theresia the firm was passed down to her five sons. During French rule business declined. The sales that were made were mainly from the existing stock. The firm even closed down for a few years but then started up again: a final but ultimately vain attempt.

**Generation 9: books closed**

The ninth generation was the final one to work in the firm. The industrial era had dawned and the Officina’s machinery was no longer up-to-date. If the firm wanted to survive then Albert Moretus (1795-1865) needed to invest in new printing presses, something which he did not do. His younger brother Edward (1804-1880) shut the printer’s down for good in 1870. In 1876 he sold the Gulden Passer to the city of Antwerp and so begins the story of the Plantin-Moretus Museum.

**PLANTIN: INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHER, TRENDSETTER AND INNOVATOR**

It is 1453. In the German city of Mainz Joannes Gutenberg printed the first text with lead typeset. His discovery won over Europe and the world, a real information explosion followed. People everywhere could finally read the same texts and see the same images. Typography was the first mass medium ever, the internet of the sixteenth century.

Gutenberg died bankrupt. Printing books costs a lot of money before it becomes profitable. From the very beginning the printing press functioned as a capitalist business. The printer was an entrepreneur who needed to make a profit in order to make back his investment in typefaces, ink and paper. Texts were treated as commodities on the brand new market of the printed book. Scientists, humanists, artists, political and religious leaders, everyone embraced the printing press and successfully used it for their own needs. Texts by big thinkers and reformers such as Erasmus and Luther could reach a wider audience. The printed book accelerated social changes in the society of the day. And Plantin made an important contribution with his numerous humanist and scientific publications. Thanks to his business instinct he managed to build up a successful career as a publisher of international importance.

**Antwerp art market and city of books.**

It is 1555. Plantin has established one of the most successful publishing companies of all time, the Officina Plantiniana. The French man migrated to Antwerp, at the time the most important trading centre above the Alps, in order to fulfil his ambition. Foreign traders had specialised in the international distribution of goods over the whole of Europe and far beyond. It was the ideal climate for a young entrepreneur with international ambitions. Alongside Venice and Paris, Antwerp developed into one of the three typographic capitals of Europe. The city also had an active art market for paintings, sculptures, books and prints. From his arrival he traded in prints and globes himself, before he published his first book. That provided him with the right contacts with the best print makers, famous designers, draftsmen and engravers.

**Plantin’s business is a success.**

The figures do not lie. In 1561 he used 4 presses, with this he could already measure up to the biggest European printers. In comparison: Willem Silvius, one of the most successful Antwerp printers, published approximately 120 works in his entire 21 year career. That is as many as Plantin in the first seven years of his career. In total Plantin printed 1887 works, the equivalent of 55 a year.

**Trendsetter Plantin**

In the beginning of his career Plantin primarily dealt with illustrations with woodblocks, a handy and cheap technique. The woodblocks were printed along with the typefaces. Fifteen years later he specialised in printing with copperplate and etching. That produced finer lines, with more gradations between black and white. Unfortunately this technique was more expensive, because text and illustration were printed separately. Plantin was the first to systematically use copperplate with sophisticated illustrations in order to distinguish himself from his competitors in terms of quality. He made the more expensive technique profitable by adapting to the new market of religious books. Books for worship and personal prayer were guaranteed to sell. Plantin reused the copperplate in different works. Henceforth purchasers wanted to see these illustrations. Other printers throughout Europe followed Plantin’s example.

**Plantin attached a lot of importance to attractive fonts.**

In the beginning of his career Plantin had to content himself with typeface materials that other printers could also easily purchase. But he soon opted for more exclusive fonts from French designers such as Garamont and Granjon and from the Ghent-born Van den Keere, in order to outclass his Antwerp competitors. Plantin introduced a variety of elegant French fonts in the Southern Netherlands. Granjon was at the basis of the modern Times New Roman font, Garamond is still one of the fonts available on computers. In order to make sure other printers did not use his exclusive fonts Plantin also purchased the stamps and dies. They were the most valuable assets of his business. With these materials Plantin could make fonts like none other. His impressive collection is the only one in the world with work by so many 16th century type cutters. Plantin went on to specialise in printing with special characters: Greek, Hebrew, Old Syrian, Aramaic, and also maths and music.

**Publisher of masterpieces**

The most important humanist intellectuals and scientists of the time had their works published by Officina. Plantin could now disseminate new discoveries by top scientists internationally. The new presentation in the museum uses four themes to highlight the exceptional importance of Plantin in the dissemination of knowledge. The four subjects are language, sciences, people and society, and religion. Ten masterpieces stand out, books which have influenced western thinking and shaped the world.

**Classic and bible texts**

Plantin published numerous linguistic works and textbooks. He persuaded top humanist Justus Lipsius to publish his editions of Latin classics such as Tacitus and Seneca with him. For theologians, Plantin brought out a multilingual bible in five languages: Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Old Syrian and Aramaic. Plantin’s son-in-law Raphelengius also worked on it. This natural linguist was the Netherlands’ leading specialist in oriental languages. Thanks to him the new university of Leiden was the first in the Netherlands to teach Arabic. Raphelengius himself wrote the very first Arabic dictionary in Europe. As of 1585 he ran the Leiden branch of the publishing house and specialised in oriental printing with specially adapted fonts.

**The first Dutch dictionary**

Thanks to printing, everyday language developed a standard spelling, grammar and dictionaries. As a migrant himself Frenchman Plantin had experienced first-hand how difficult it is to learn a new language. Indeed, it never fully worked out for him. He did not have a good dictionary so he decided to begin writing one himself. He soon passed the work on to his proofreaders, including Cornelis Kiliaan. In 1573 Plantin published his dictionary *Schat der Nederduytscher spraken*. Kiliaan fell under the spell of Dutch words and devoted the rest of his life to them. In 1599 Jan Moretus published the *Etymologicum Teutonicae linguae*, the first explanatory dictionary of Dutch. Kiliaan collected not just words, he also provided an etymological explanation. He compared Dutch words to German and French equivalents with the same stem. This new approach was unique in Europe.

**Learning languages**

Plantin published grammar and conversation books for learning Dutch and French. The so-called ABC books for learning ‘Duytsch’ or ‘Diets’ or Dutch were popular with young children. In 1567 the publisher brought out *Dialogues francois pour les jeunes enfants*, a bilingual textbook with French and Dutch dialogues. The final dialogue describes Plantin’s profession, printing. It is the oldest known text on this subject.

**Measuring is knowledge**

The discovery of new continents and trading routes broadened the horizons of European scholars. Humanist scholars rediscovered the classical sciences. This intense study signified the beginning of critical and independent research and led to major breakthroughs in astronomy, medicine and botany. Plantin’s publishing house disseminated new discoveries by researchers from the Netherlands worldwide. He published 55% of all the scientific books in the Southern Netherlands about cartography, medicine, astronomy, maths, physics, botany.... In the port city of Antwerp maths served the needs of the trade market and shipping. Plantin printed one of the most influential mathematical works of the time, De Thiende (The Tenth) by Bruges-born Simon Stevin.

**The world on paper**

The beginning of the Golden Age of the South Netherlands cartography coincided with Plantin’s activities. In total he brought out 55 geographic works. In the beginning he printed popular travel tales about newly discovered countries. Later follow country descriptions such as those by Lodovicus Guicciardini and the magnificent Ortelius atlases. The inventor of the modern atlas, Abraham Ortelius, began his career as someone who was employed to colour in maps at Plantin. In 1570 the cartographer put all the known maps of the world together in a book in the same format. This was the very first atlas, the book was a commercial success that was admired and used throughout Europe.

**Publications on human anatomy and medical botany**

In 1566 Plantin published the work of Joannes Valverde, Vivae imagines, in fact it was a copy of Fabrica, the work about the human anatomy by the Leuven scientist Vesalius. It was Plantin’s first book with copperplates and was proof that he could deliver high quality works.

**Nature at its most beautiful**

Plantin attracted the best artists for the herb books by the sixteenth century ‘botanic team of three’, Dodoens, Clusius and Lobelius. The expensive publications sold well thanks to the exceptional quality of the illustrations and Plantin’s international network. *Stirpium historiae pemptades sex* was the name of the masterpiece by Mechelen physician Rembert Dodoens. This herb book was a combination of all his previous books and consisted of 965 pages and 1,309 magnificent illustrations. Dodoens systematically described the plants, their origin, flowering period and use. Right up until his death he continued adding information. The Moretus’ reprinted the book until 1644. In the eighteenth century a Japanese version of it was made.

**About people, power and society**

Printers do not just bring expensive or scholarly books out onto the market, they also produce large quantities of printed matter such as calendars and banns. In the 16th century Antwerp was the centre for the production of calendars or almanacs. Printers liked working for the government. Printing new laws led to a fixed income. Plantin worked alternately for the Spanish King Philip II and the States-General of the Netherlands. As of 1579 Plantin was Antwerp’s official printer. The Plantin printing press published the banns of Antwerp for almost two centuries. They were read out loud in the town hall and posted in the city. This is where the word ‘placard’ originates. These placards regulated daily life in the city, with calls to capture criminals and bans on illegal dumping or too much racket on the streets. In order to strengthen their image, rulers disseminated pictures of joyous entries, triumphal processions or funeral processions. In 1559 Plantin published the prestigious album about Charles Quint’s funeral procession in Brussels. This made his name as a publisher, even though he only printed the short text. The 12 metre long procession with 33 coloured engravings read like a comic strip.

**Books for worship**

In Plantin’s printer’s the presses served the Catholic faith with numerous editions of the bible and books for worship. As a response to the reformation of the Protestants the Catholic Church organised the Council of Trente in the middle of the sixteenth century. The cardinals present decided that all the prayer books and liturgical works should contain the same text. Replacing all the old books was a massive task. Printers who were lucky enough to get a contract had a guaranteed sale of their products for a long time. Plantin received the contract to print liturgical works for the Netherlands and Spain.

**Bibles and emblem books**

Plantin also had the biggest share of the market for bibles. He printed them in different languages and formats. As of 1566 he also printed different editions of the Old Testament in Hebrew. With this product Plantin was also able to serve the Jewish market, which stretched as far as North Africa. Most bible editions were in a discrete small format. The big bible editions made Plantin into a household name, the smaller editions made his earnings. At the end of the sixteenth century emblem books were very fashionable. They combined text and image, with a few words to accompany each image. The images helped believers to interpret religious texts and to meditate upon them. The very first religious emblem book was published by Plantin. The genre was very successful and religious emblem books were particularly popular with Jesuits.

With the support of Philip II, Plantin created his absolute masterpiece, the **multilingual Biblia polyglotta or Biblia regia**. In exchange for a subsidy, the King sent his curate Arias Montanus to Antwerp to keep an eye on proceedings. The whole firm was occupied for four years, from 1568 to 1572. The entire work consisted of eight parts. This opus magnum was a testimony to Plantin’s skilled workforce. A team of linguists took care of the translations and scientific tracts. The five languages were printed with specially adapted fonts and characters. It was an expensive enterprise. The Old Syrian font, for example, cost Plantin 243 guilders (one and a half years’ salary for his workers). Top artists such as Filips Galle and Joannes Wierix took care of the sophisticated copperplate. The bible made its way around the world and Jesuits in India and China promoted this tour de force as the height of European erudition.

**THE HOUSE AND PUBLISHING HOUSE BECOME A MUSEUM**

In 1873 the rumour spread that squire Edward Moretus was negotiating with foreign collectors in relation to the sale of the household effects of the Officina Plantiniana. Prince Philip of Belgium promptly began a campaign to keep this valuable heritage in Antwerp. Exactly 300 years after Christophe Plantin set up his business in this district, esquire Edward Moretus sold his town house ‘De Gulden Passer’, including household effects and printing firm, to the Belgian State and the City of Antwerp. The inventory made at the time of the deed of sale indicates all the important works of art from the current collection. After the purchase the City of Antwerp carried out modifications in order to return the seventeenth century patrician mansion to its original character. Information from the house of mourning inventories was used for the refurbishing: every room was given an accurate description as to its function and contents. The inventories teach us, amongst others, a lot about the use of gold leather wallpaper and verdures, or the precise location of the family portraits in the large lounge.

**The layout evolves**

The Plantin-Moretus Museum opened its doors in 1877. The richly decorated period rooms around the Renaissance inner courtyard were pervaded with the atmosphere and luxury which the Moretus’ had grown accustomed to in their home. The sixteenth and seventeenth century workrooms of the Officina: the foundry, the printer’s room, the printer’s, the correctors’ room, the bookshop and the manager’s office are all still there as though the inhabitants of the house had never left. The same atmosphere which is still present in the house today. After the opening they continued to renovate in order to return the house to its historic grandeur. Old photos show that the stable was done out as an elegant period room with verdures and crystal chandeliers.

Postcards from the 1900s, 1920s and 1950s illustrate how the emphasis in the museum layout constantly changed. Before the Second World War more drawings, graphics, woodblocks and copperplates were on display. That is probably due to the former curator, Max Rooses, who was a great authority on seventeenth century art. He was the founder of the Print Cabinet, today one of the 50 biggest in the world.

During World War II the museum collection was removed and safely stored in the castle of Lavaux-Sainte-Anne. In 1944 bombs damaged the site on the Vrijdagmarkt. After the war the city restored the museum and it was given a new layout. Printing, with an overview of Christophe Plantin’s work, the Moretus’, Antwerp printers and other great European printers was now central to the museum. The new presentation meant the museum was ready for the future. The layout fitted in with the surroundings and turned the museum into more of an experience. Visitors got to know Christophe Plantin as a family man, businessman, publisher, employer and humanist. They were introduced to his family, friends and employees. The 10 masterpieces demonstrated the importance of this publishing family. The Ortelius atlas, mathematical works by Simon Stevin, the first Dutch dictionary..., are all books which have shaped the world. Films, soundscapes and a place where everyone can have a go mean that, more than ever before, 300 years of family and business history are brought to life.

**NUMEROUS DECORATIONS**

In 1938 the outer facades of the house were classified as a monument. In 1997 the entire monument was protected, including the interiors and household effects. This was crucial in order to submit a dossier to UNESCO. As of 2005 dozens of works from the Plantin-Moretus Museum and the Print Cabinet have been included in the *Topstukkenlijst van Vlaanderen* (Top Flemish masterpieces). On 15 July 2005 the Plantin-Moretus Museum was registered as ‘Plantin-Moretus House-Workshops-Museum Complex’ on the list of the UNESCO World heritage. It stands out as the only museum on the prestigious list. The impressive site is a unique combination of a majestic patrician mansion with the only furnished pre-industrial printing plant-publishing house in the world.

In 2017 the Museum Plantin-Moretus will have been around for 140 years.

In 2001 the Plantin-Moretus archive was added to the UNESCO ‘Memory of the World’ list. The almost perfectly conserved company archive documents the activities of the firm and living culture from 1555 to 1876. It’s a goldmine for the study of the history of humanism, the reformation, the sciences and printing. The archive and building complex are world heritage because the publications of the Officina and the building complex bear witness to the important role this centre of 16th century European humanism played in the development of science and culture.

In December 2013 the Plantin-Moretus Museum was registered on the UNESCO list with increased protection of monuments in times of armed conflict. The international community pledges to protect the site and not to use it as a bomb shelter. Belgium increases this protection by giving priority to the protection of the complex in the event of natural catastrophes, for example. The Horta House in Brussels and the Flint mines of Spy were added to this list in 2013. Along with a few other monuments in Belgium the Museum Plantin-Moretus can now bear the typical blue plaque.

**A well-preserved accessible collection**

The UNESCO recognition imposes strict requirements both for the conservation of the building and the collection as for accessibility for the public. The museum didn’t satisfy all the UNESCO requirements for the conservation of world heritage. The new presentation guarantees a better protection of the paper heritage. Light is one of the biggest enemies of paper and is as far as possible kept out of the exhibition halls. Every two years all the items on display are changed. They can then be placed in the new depot. The new reading room is also housed in this building. All the stages of the production process of a book can be consulted on site and are placed alongside one another: the manuscripts, designs for illustrations, printer’s material (typefaces, drafts, copperplates and woodblocks), the printed books and prints *and* the archive that documents the whole process. The reading room attracts around 1,000 visitors annually. In order to enable visitors and researchers to explore the collection from home an accelerated digitisation has been implemented. All the drawings and a large section of the print collection and the manuscripts are now available to consult online. Digitising the archives and old books requires more time, but you can already access the key works. The accelerated digitisation has been made possible thanks to the efforts of volunteers who are passionate about printing and books. Other volunteers get involved in helping with the restoration, working as printers or hosts/hostesses or helping out during events.

The majority of visitors to the museum have a university education. That is not all that surprising in a museum full of books. The museum welcomes lots of school classes, but it also tries to reach out to socially vulnerable groups. Non-native newcomers, people with low literacy skills and people with a handicap all get a modified programme with the museum tool ‘Listening eyes’. Innovative elements of which are language and the creative use of words.