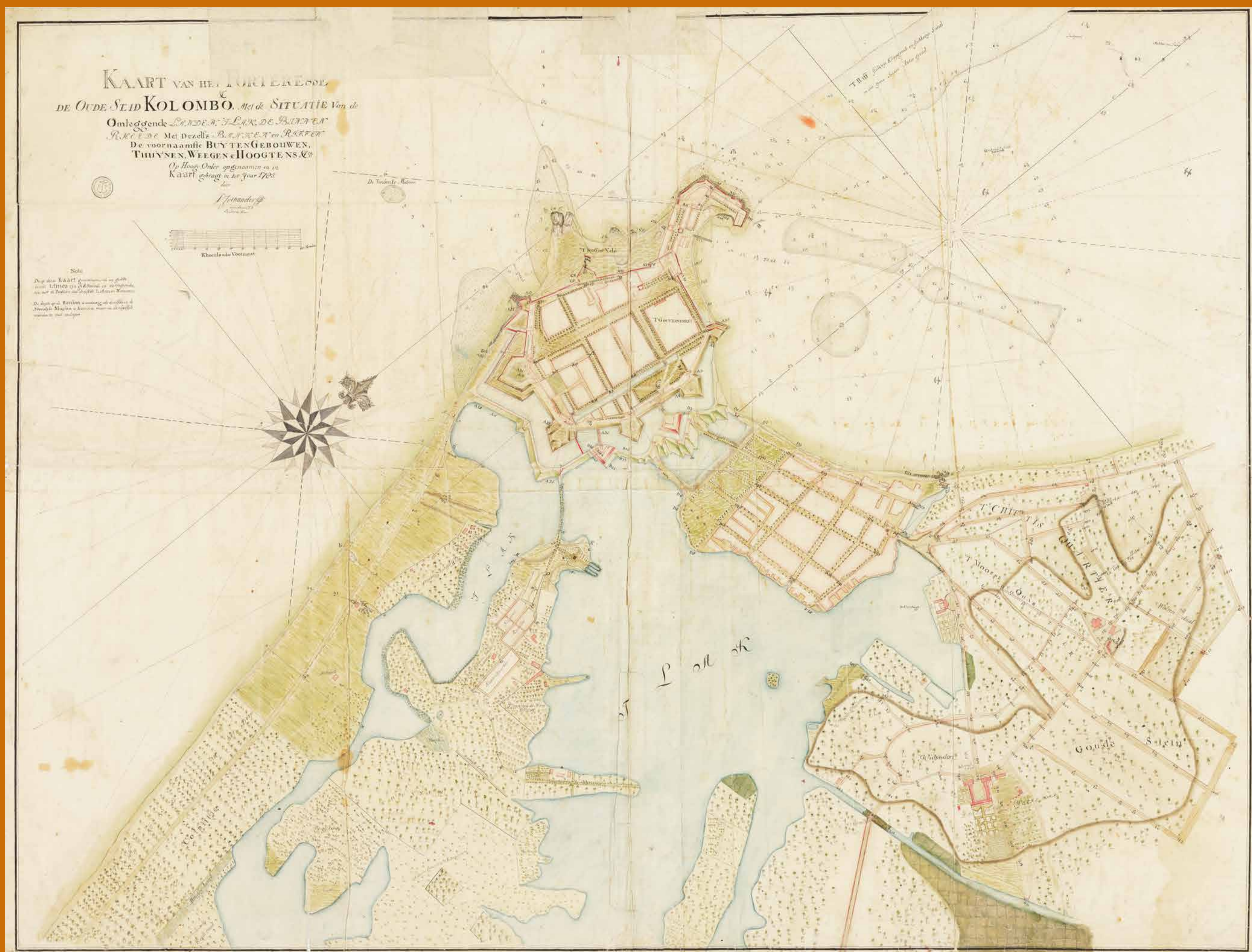


Colombo Fort...

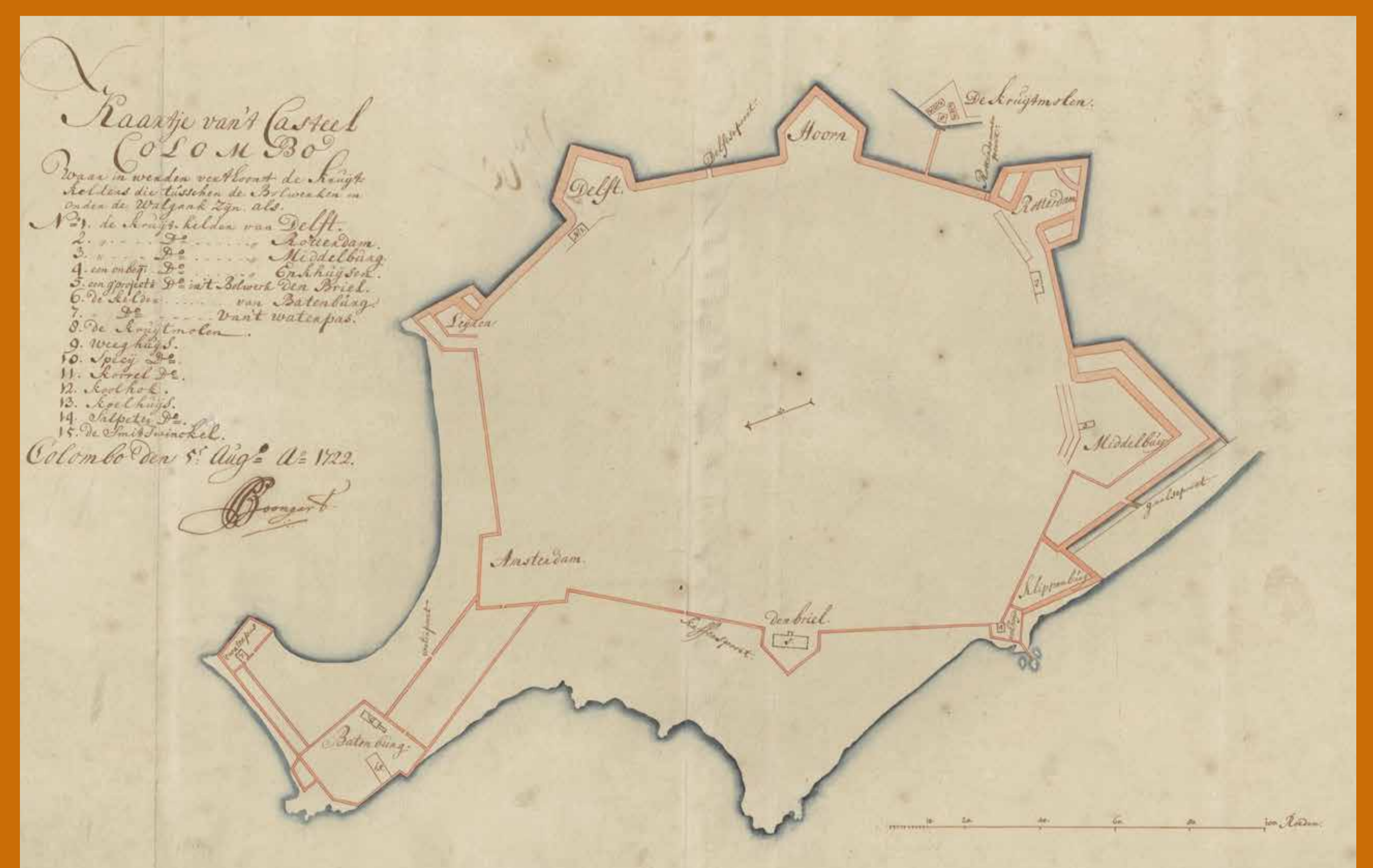


Map of the Fortress and the Old Town of Colombo, with the situation of the surrounding lands and the Lake, 1785

If you were to put a dial over the round part of the Castle, you would see at five o'clock the Delft gate between the bastions Delft and Hoorn. Through it goes the road to the Old Town of which the ramparts have been demolished end 17th century. At six o'clock, between Hoorn and Rotterdam, goes the path to Slave Island. In the seventeenth century they were lodged at the Caffirs Field ('T Caffers Veld'), accessible through a small postern gate [see photo below], located at 12 o'clock.

Samuel Pieter Foenander, surveyor. National Archives, The Hague, 4.VEL, inv.nr. 954

After the capture of Colombo in 1656, the VOC realized that the full extent of the Portuguese fortress could not be successfully defended. It was therefore decided to separate the core part, which they called the 'Castle', and the residential area. Due to the war with Kandy (1665-c. 1675) the demolition of the ramparts of 'The Old City' had to be postponed till the end of the seventeenth century. Seventy years after the British takeover modern warfare made the ramparts of the fort obsolete. Colombo's defences were therefore demolished between c. 1869 and 1871, but not completely! The name Fort has remained and owing to extensive research by archaeologist Chryshane Mendis many Dutch remains have been identified. However, most of them are in the grounds of the Colombo Harbour and the Naval Headquarters and are inaccessible.



Plan of the Castle of Colombo, 1722

The map is oriented south-north. Clockwise one sees from the top: Hoorn, Rotterdam, Middelburg, Klippenburg and the small bastion next to it: Enkhuizen; then, at the bottom: Den Briel. Then the bastions Amsterdam, Leiden and Delft. At the top, nowadays in the harbour area, lays bastion Batenburg – on the bay side, outside the 'Watergate', was the shipyard (Scheepstimmerwerf).

C.P. Boomgart, surveyor. National Archives, The Hague, 4.VEL, inv.nr. 951

The Slave postern on the grounds of the Navy Headquarters

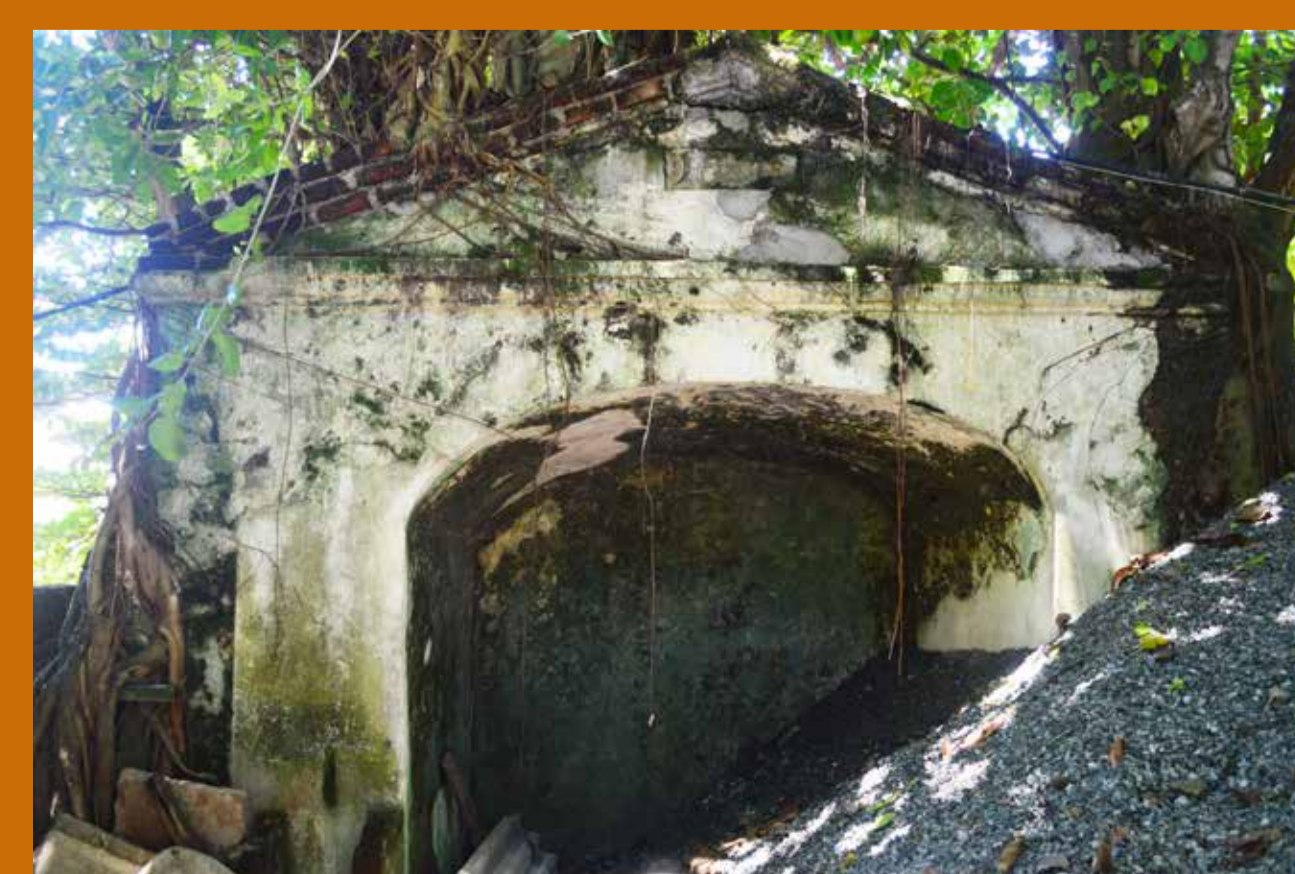


Photo Minol Pieris, 2016.

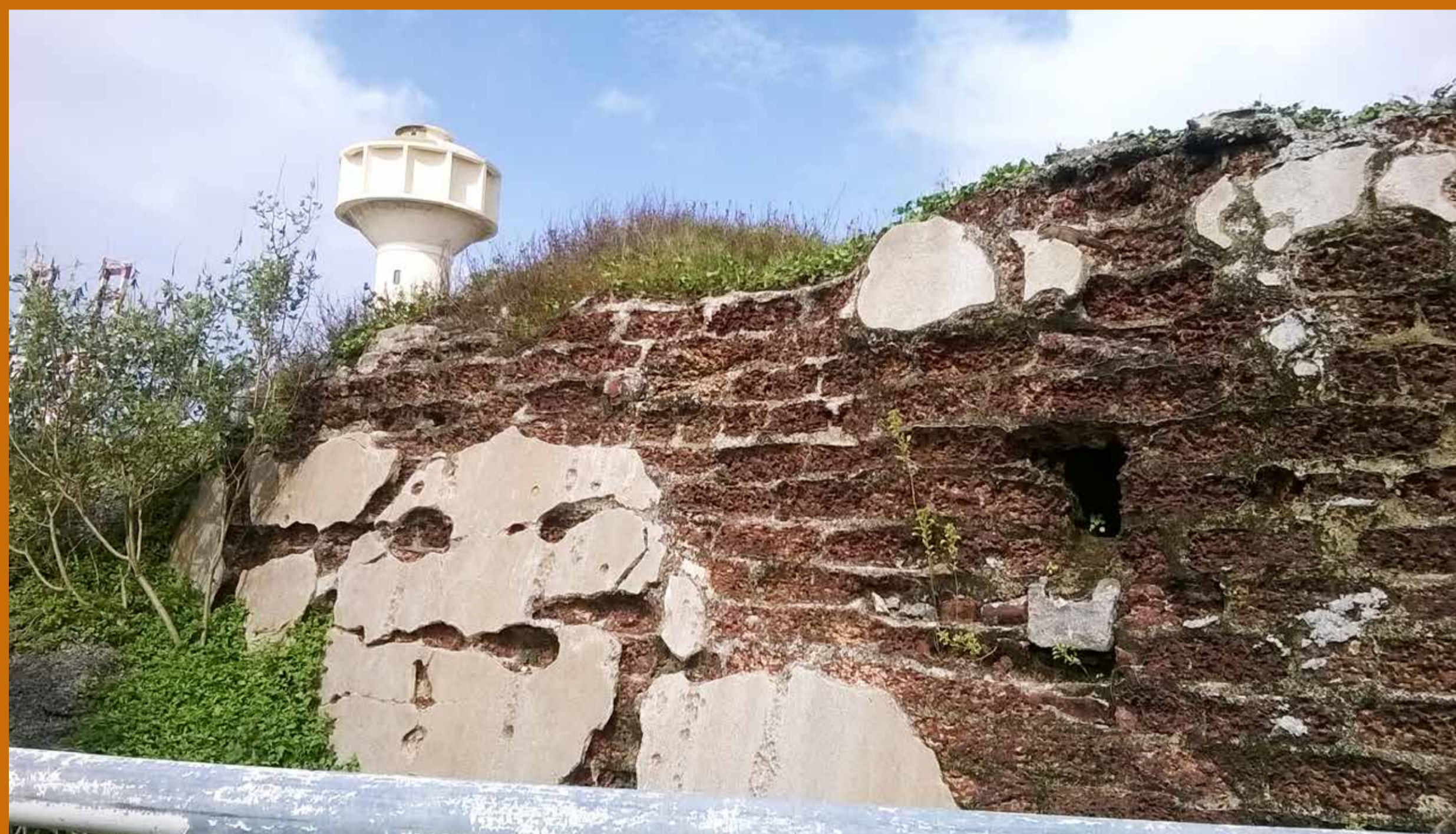
A map dated 1698 in the Dutch National Archives (4.VEL 948) shows between Hoorn and Rotterdam the postern gate and the small bridge to go to the Slave Island. This map mentions also 'the former slave postern' at the harbour between Amsterdam and Den Briel. The slaves were indispensable for the maintenance and new construction works of the fortifications, a number of them worked at the various workshops of the VOC.

... virtually erased c. 1869-1871



View at the remnants of bastion Batenburg within Colombo Harbour, 2019

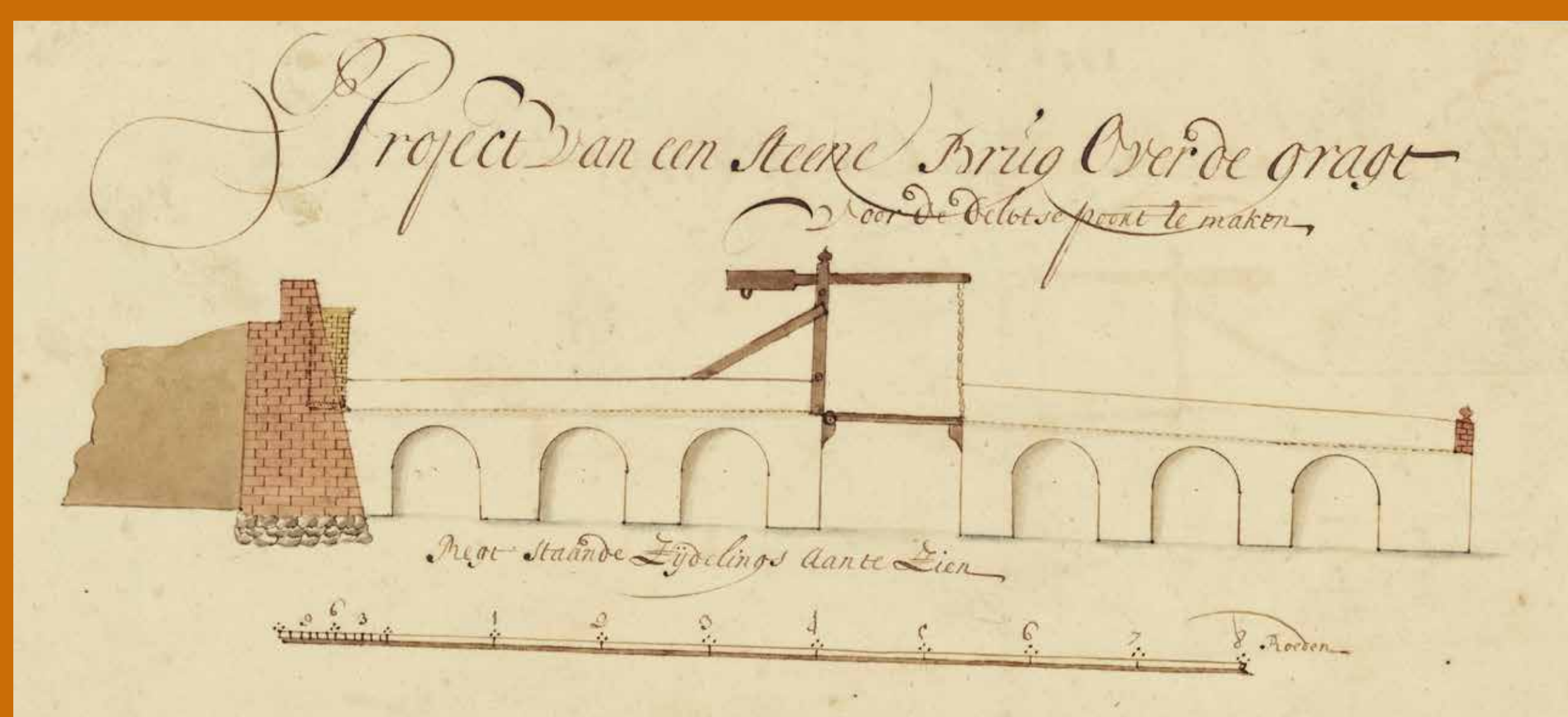
Photo Chryshane Mendis



Detail of bastion Batenburg, showing laterite building material, 2019

Due to the heavy monsoon rains in tropical environments, ramparts had to be covered. The VOC used various materials for their forts in Sri Lanka, depending on the location and on the availability of raw materials, e.g. blocks of coral, of natural stone and of laterite (*kabook*): The latter was mined not far from Colombo. When exposed to the air, the excavated clay iron stone dried to hard, brick-like blocks.

Photo Chryshane Mendis



Project of a stone bridge in front of the Delft gate, 1697

The connections over the canals consisted of a fixed part and a part that could be opened: the drawbridge.

Jan Christiaensz Toorzee, surveyor (attributed). National Archives, The Hague, access 4.VEL, inv.nr. 947 C (detail)



View at the remnants of bastion Den Briel, with fancy arrangement of guns, 2016

Photo Chryshane Mendis



Remains of the Delft gateway inside the Commercial Bank premises down Bristol Street, 2016

The Delft gate on the east side of the Castle gave access to the Old Town, called Pettah from the British Occupation.

Photo Chryshane Mendis