

Museum Bronbeek

Abstract

Museum Bronbeek was founded in 1863 as part of the Colonial Military Home for Disabled. It is situated close to the city of Arnhem and contains a large collection of militaria, as well as ethnographic and other objects.

History of the museum

After [King Willem III](#) ceded the Bronbeek estate in Arnhem to the Dutch state in 1862, a home was established there in 1863 for invalided colonial soldiers who had served in the [Royal Dutch East Indies Army](#) (KNIL). From 1880 onwards, the home was also open to members of the Royal Navy, and from 1963 this was extended to other branches of the armed forces.

Over the years, members of the Dutch Royal Family, the Ministry of Colonies and retired civil servants and military personnel donated objects such as weapons, banners, medals and portraits to the home. As such, the home gradually took on a museum function.

Until 1959, the home and its museum were administered by the Ministry of Colonies. Nowadays, it is part of the Ministry of Defence. Until 1950, the objects in the museum were still displayed in a typical nineteenth-century manner: the walls were covered with paintings and a large number of objects were displayed on either side of a narrow path.

In 1951, the museum layout was redesigned in collaboration with curators from the [Tropenmuseum](#) (the current Wereldmuseum Amsterdam). The new layout was more ethnographic in nature and a section on the Second World War in Asia was added. After a complete renovation of the museum and building in 1998, the museum's focus changed in 2010: it became a colonial military history museum, focusing on the conduct of the colonial government.

Museum Bronbeek opened a new permanent display of the collection in 2024.

[image] *Interior of Museum Bronbeek's ground floor in 1980* ([Paul van Galen / Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed](#))

Provenance research

Museum Bronbeek's collection is searchable on the museum's [collection website](#). The library of more than 15,000 books is searchable through [Worldcat](#).

Archives related to Bronbeek can predominantly be found at the [National Archives of the Netherlands](#) in The Hague. There is also material at the museum itself, which can be consulted via the [collection website](#). The museum is currently working on a digital reconstruction of its archive.

In 2024 Museum Bronbeek launched a [website](#) with 6,000 biographies of Knights in the Military Order of Willem. Various publications on the Military Willem Order have been collected, supplemented and made available online via this website. It is possible to search by name, year, rank or army unit. Individual pages contain personal information,

information on postings and archival references. The museum also manages a [blog](#), where articles about the museum's collection research can be found.

The museum manages various datasets on KNIL muster rolls, military personnel deployed between 1945 and 1950, and Japanese prisoners of war and civil servants. The datasets can be used in the museum and the indexes will be available in the future via the [dataset register](#) of the Colonial Collections Consortium.

Related Aids

- [Sources](#)
- [Army and navy personnel in colonised territories](#)
- [Indonesia](#)
- [Hoofdcursus Kampen](#)
- [Stichting Koninklijke Defensiemusea](#)
- [Volkenkundig Museum Justinus van Nassau](#)

Primary sources

Book:

Smits, J. C. J. Gedenkboek van Het Koloniaal-Militair Invalidenhuis Bronbeek. Arnhem: P. Gouda Quint, 1881. Book from 1881 written by the first commander of the home. It gives a history of the early period and a detailed description of the interior of the house at that time. The book contains many illustrations clearly showing various objects.

<https://www.google.nl/books/edition//xhlCAQAAMAAJ?hl=nl&gbpv=1,WorldCat882982014>

Secondary sources

Website:

Ridders Militaire Willems-Orde Website (in Dutch) with 6,000 biographies of Knights in the Military Order of William. Pages contain a large amount of information about individual soldiers (rank, posting, etc.).

<https://www.rmwo.nl/>

Website:

- Museum Bronbeek collection website * Collection website of Museum Bronbeek, on which the entire collection is searchable.

<http://museumbronbeek.nl/>

Book:

Bevaart, W., Liesbeth Brama, and Doris de Witt. Bronbeek : Ontstaan En Ontwikkeling van Een Militair Rusthuis En Museum (Utrecht: Matrijs, 2025). Book from 2025 (in Dutch) about the history of Bronbeek. This is a revised and updated version of the original book 'Bronbeek: tempo doeloe der liefdadigheid' from 1998.

Relevant Data

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