

The Dutch Sherlock: Forty Years of Detective Work



In loving memory of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Junior.

And in honor of the entire van Ledden Hulsebosch family for supporting the Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Center and for looking after the heritage and legacy of their famous great-grandfather and ancestor, the founding father of forensic science in the Netherlands, our own Dutch Sherlock Holmes—Co van Ledden Hulsebosch.

The Dutch Sherlock: Forty Years of Detective Work

*By the Famous Dutch Forensic Pioneer
Co van Ledden Hulsebosch*

Maurice Aalders en Arian van Asten (red.)

Amsterdam University Press

The publication of this book is made possible by the Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Center, Netherlands Center for Forensic Science and Medicine.



We thank Evelien Witte van der Veer, Jasmijn Boonacker, and Inge van der Bijl of Amsterdam University Press for supporting the realization of this special project, for developing the business case, and for proposing the book title.

Cover illustration: with images from iStock.

Cover design: Rouwhorst + Van Roon, inspired by the original design from 1946 (public domain)

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 90 4856 562 7

e-ISBN 978 90 4856 563 4 (ePub)

DOI 10.5117/9789048565627

NUR 686 | 910

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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
About the Author: The Work and Life of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch	11
About the Translation and the Use of ChatGPT	15
About the Authors of the Epilogues	17

Forty Years of Detective Work by Co van Ledden Hulsebosch

Foreword	31
Introduction	33
1. My First Expertise	35
2. Treasure Hunt in the Ashes in a Stove	39
3. As an Expert for the Court in Ghent	45
4. Disappearance of a Batch of Diamonds	54
5. Peculiar Traces of Dust	60
6. Rice Powder	63
7. Sixty-seven Thousand Guilders in Securities Recovered	66
8. The Murder of the Notary C. S. in Gorinchem	69
9. A Political Attack?	75
10. Murder in the Celebesstraat	83
11. Theft at a Bank Solved by a Police Dog	86
12. He Had the Silent Witness “in Hand”	91
13. The Murder of the Cat Farmer	94
14. Shoe Wax	103
15. Amateur Snapshots as Evidence	108
16. “Visiting Cards”!	112
17. One Hair Made the Difference	119
18. Murder or Suicide?	123
19. Petty Thief	126
20. Simulated Robbery	130
21. Who Bears the Cost of the Damage?	135
22. Poison!	142
23. How the Mysterious Thefts in Professor Saltet’s Laboratory Were Solved	158
24. A Lame Student Joke, for Which Heavy Penalties Were Paid	163
25. The Dishonest Postal Worker	167
26. How the First Lamp for Ultraviolet Ray Investigation Came to Our Country	172
27. The Treacherous Glass Splinter	182

28. The Corpse in the Suitcase	185
29. The Severed Head of a Woman	191
30. Dust Provided the Evidence	195
31. Assisting Criminal Justice in Belgium	198
32. The Anonymous Letter	201
33. Fine Sleuthing by Dogs!	203
34. The Murder of Tania Schovers	210
35. Bombs	216
36. Cigarettes with Water Damage	226
37. Ill-fated Bloodstains	229
38. Arsonists	235
39. To Whom Does This Pocketknife Belong? Whose Key Chain Is This?	245
40. The Pickpocket	248
41. He Had It in Writing	252
42. A Burglar with ... a Brain	257
43. The Evidence-Providing Phonograph Cylinder	260
44. Restoration and Reconstruction of Documents	266
45. Charred Papers	274
46. Emergency Relief	278
47. Yellow Powder	282
48. " <i>Souches</i> ," or Physical Fits	287
49. What One Little Blood Spatter Proved	294
50. How the Stolen Jewels Were Recovered	299
51. Counterfeiters	305
52. The Clever Swindler	310
53. Faked or Actual Theft of Mail	315
Epilogue	321

Introduction

During the annual symposium on October 26, 2023, the Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Center (CLHC), celebrated its tenth anniversary. Ten years earlier, on September 13, 2013, the Netherlands Forensic Institute (NFI), and the Faculteit der Natuurwetenschappen, Wiskunde en Informatica (FNWI, Faculty of Science) and the Academic Medical Center (AMC) of the University of Amsterdam (UvA) signed a collaboration agreement that marked the start of the CLHC, the first forensic expert and academic network organization in the Netherlands. In preparation for this official start, the name of the center was being discussed and explored by those involved in the initiative. The first name suggested was the “Amsterdam Center for Forensic Science (ACFS),” concise, functional, yielding an attractive abbreviation, but, on the other hand, not very inspirational. Professor Rick van Rijn, forensic (pediatric) radiologist, then came up with the idea to name the center after the famous Dutch and Amsterdam-based forensic pioneer Co van Ledden Hulsebosch, who developed and successfully introduced forensic science into criminal investigations in the Netherlands. This idea quickly got broad support, but it also raised several questions. Were relatives of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch still alive? If so, were they aware of the forensic legacy of their famous ancestor and would they agree to the use of the family name for the new center? After some searching (a well-developed skill for most people involved in the forensic science field), the CLHC associates came into contact with the van Ledden Hulsebosch family and specifically the grandson, Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Junior, who happened to be named after of his famous grandfather. Already retired and at a respectable age, Co Junior turned out to be a very energetic and enthusiastic man with a vivid memory of the great crime and justice stories that his famous grandfather told him when he was a young boy. He had also actively been maintaining records, documents, and artifacts related to the forensic career of his grandfather. He quickly consulted with the van Ledden Hulsebosch family and all the members gave their permission to link their family name to the forensic academic center that was going to be established. And things did not stop there! Co Junior became fully engaged and started to attend the annual symposium, even if it meant that he had to travel from far. During the symposia he was always very visible and approachable, he spoke to the younger generations of forensic scientists and the students of the MSc in forensic science program at the UvA.

He also on several occasions contributed with expositions on the work and life of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch. Together with the CLHC scientists and experts, he contributed to the development of the historical page on the CLHC website.¹ It

¹ <https://www.clhc.nl/about-clhc/on-co-van-ledden-hulsebosch.html>.



Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Junior (middle) with CLHC directors Maurice Aalders (right) and Arian van Asten (left) at the inaugural event of the Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Center on September 13, 2013.



Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Junior with a special exhibition on the work and life of his famous grandfather at the CLHC Annual Symposium in October 2018 at Amsterdam Science Park.

was also Co Junior who scanned the *Veertig Jaren Speurderswerk* (Forty years of detective work) memoirs, allowing those not in possession of a printed copy to read it electronically by downloading the pdf files from the CLHC website. Unfortunately, Co Junior did not live to see the realization of this book, the English translation of these memoirs with views and reflections from several Dutch forensic experts and scientists. He would have undoubtedly loved and supported it! Co Junior passed away early 2020 at the respectable age of 86. We still think and talk about him often here at the Co van Ledden Hulsebosch Center. We dedicate this book to him and the van Ledden Hulsebosch family and we hope that with this English edition we have made a small but valuable contribution to the conservation and dissemination of the fascinating history of forensic science in the Netherlands.

Maurice Aalders and Arian van Asten

January 2024, Amsterdam

About the Author: The Work and Life of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch

Christiaan Jacobus (Co) van Ledden Hulsebosch was born in Amsterdam on March 20, 1877. He studied pharmacy at the University of Amsterdam, obtained his pharmacist's license in 1902, and subsequently started working at his father's pharmacy at Nieuwendijk 17 in the city of his birth. Co's father had conducted basic forensic research on behalf of the police and judicial authorities for some time. His son soon became fascinated with this special task of his father and decided to explore the realm of forensic science further. His career in the field of scientific police research started on March 9, 1902, when his father was summoned to help the Alkmaar police force with the investigation of an alleged sexual assault. With his father attending a conference in Brussels, Co traveled to Alkmaar in his place and successfully solved the first in a long series of cases through the analysis of "silent witnesses" left at the crime scene. The use of "silent witnesses," physical (trace) evidence, such as cigarette butts, blood spatters, burnt matchsticks, fingerprints, and so on, was still relatively uncommon in those days. Most cases were solved on the basis of witness statements and the interrogation of suspects.

In addition to carefully assessing these traces and the criminalistic evaluation of their relevance, Co van Ledden Hulsebosch also experimented with chemical



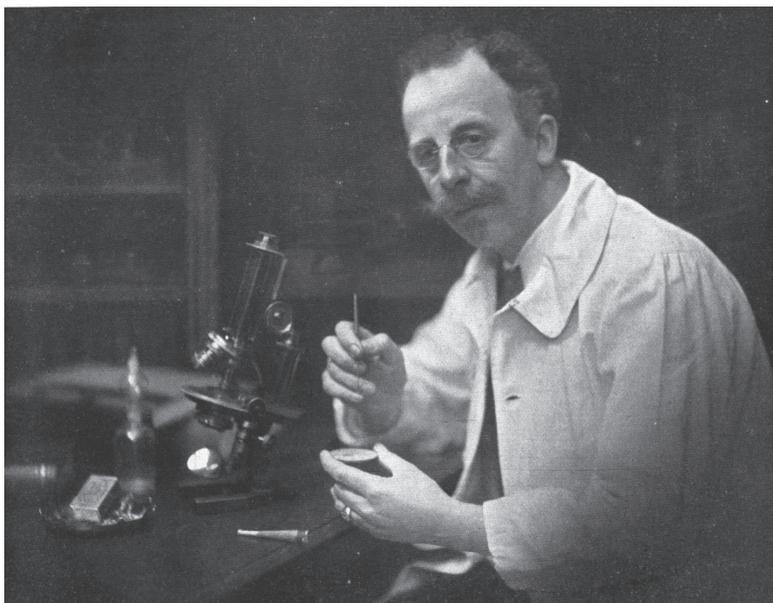
Co van Ledden Hulsebosch investigating and casting a shoe mark at a crime scene in 1937.



The forensic laboratory of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch at Nieuwendijk 17 in the city center of Amsterdam in the beginning of the 20th century.

methods in order to improve trace visibility and developed chemical analysis techniques for the assessment of suspicious substances. An excellent example would be the use of ultraviolet fluorescence in the identification and analysis of “Flecke und Spuren von Sperma, Harn, Weißfluß, Schweiß und Blutserum” (“sperm, urine, white discharge, sweat and blood serum stains and traces”) all of which “deutlich aufleuchten” (“clearly illuminate”). He personally obtained the required UV lamp from Marie Curie herself. In 1914, he established the very first school for scientific police investigation with the “science of forensics” as its core subject. Two years later, he became the official chemist of the Amsterdam Police. In 1923, he was appointed as private lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, where he taught the “science of criminal investigation.”

Despite preferring to work on forensic cases in the privacy and calm of his laboratory in Amsterdam (“The Workshop,” as he called it), Co van Ledden Hulsebosch provided assistance on cases in both the Netherlands and abroad. In 1929, he cofounded the Académie Internationale de Criminalistique (International Academy of Criminalistics) in Lausanne, Switzerland. At that time he was an established forensic police expert both nationally and internationally. In the Netherlands he became somewhat of a science celebrity and he was often interviewed by journalists



Co van Ledden Hulsebosch at work in his laboratory (nicknamed "The Workshop").



The front cover of the popular memoirs of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch entitled *Veertig Jaren Speurderswerk* (Forty years of detective work).



The front cover of the acceptance speech of Co van Ledden Hulsebosch in celebration of his appointment as scholar in forensic science at the University of Amsterdam (1923).



Co van Ledden Hulsebosch teaching forensic science to Dutch police officers from Indonesia in 1921.

and articles on his work appeared in local and national newspapers. Radio interviews were even recorded in his laboratory where he talked about the methods he applied to solve famous cases. In light of the substantial public interest, he wrote his memoirs, entitled *Veertig Jaren Speurderswerk* (Forty years of detective work), of which the first edition was officially released shortly after the end of the Second World War in 1947. This book, containing a substantial collection of case stories, was a great success, and was eventually produced in five editions.

For his outstanding contributions to science and criminal justice, Co van Ledden Hulsebosch was appointed Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau, a high Dutch royal commendation, and was awarded the Officer's Cross in the Belgian Order of Leopold II. In later life, he suffered from poor health and several illnesses. Co van Ledden Hulsebosch died in Amsterdam on April 18, 1952, at a relatively young age of seventy-five.