The subject of this contribution is not the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944, nor the sacrifice of British and Polish troops during one of the last great battles of the Second World War, but rather the aftermath of this battle and its impact on the people of Arnhem, starting from 23 September 1944, when the German military ordered the immediate expulsion of all of Arnhem's civilians. To understand what happened back then, we will draw on a range of contemporary eyewitness reports which bring home the brutal realities of forced evacuation, of the subsequent large-scale plunder and of the destruction of Arnhem between September 1944 and Liberation in April 1945. We will also analyse how, during the next quarter-century, Arnhem made a full recovery, rebuilding and reinventing itself until in 1969 post-war reconstruction was complete. Beyond the standard narrative of the Battle of Arnhem as given in Cornelius Ryan's *A Bridge Too Far* (1974) and in Lou de Jong's Arnhem discussion in his *History of The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War* (vol. 10A-1, 1980), we have an important source for Arnhem's destruction and rebuilding in the findings of local historians. Their accounts provide a remarkable insight into the dynamics of conflict and discord versus the traditions of concord and consensus-building in the Netherlands – of which Arnhem’s history before, during and after the war is a paradigm case.
Introduction

In September 2014 the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem was commemorated, in the presence of many veterans, with a wide-ranging programme of events of great symbolic and emotional impact, in gratitude, respect and admiration for those very many Allied soldiers who gave their lives for freedom and justice in the bold and daring attack that was Operation Market Garden. While its aim was to shorten the war and finish it by Christmas 1944, in reality the Battle of Arnhem became the last German victory in Europe, and for the many millions of Europeans all over the continent this defeat of the Allies delayed the end of war by another nine months until May 1945.

In what follows, I will focus not so much on the battle itself as on its aftermath, and on the consequences it had for the civilian population of the Arnhem area. In so doing I am following on from an earlier Anglo-Dutch conference held at University College London, in April 1989, under the patronage of HRH Prince Bernhard. During this conference, Piet Kamphuis, Deputy Head of the Military History Section of the Dutch Army, was one of the first to discuss the impact of Operation Market Garden on the civilian population of the Netherlands.

As Kamphuis stated, in a presentation broadly following De Jong’s Koninkrijk, the airborne landings near Arnhem on 17 September 1944 generated immense excitement among the civilian population, and high hopes of victory and liberation, which, however, were dashed by very heavy fighting, extremely dangerous battlefield conditions, and severe German retribution against the Dutch resistance and civilians; and it all ended with widespread dejection at the Allied defeat. Also, ‘in the entire occupied part of the country, a price had to be paid’: the defeat at Arnhem split the country in two, with the southern half of the Netherlands enjoying liberation, while for the north it meant the continuation of Nazi occupation for many months until April–May 1945. As punishment for the Dutch national railway strike of September 1944, the Germans prohibited the transport of all goods by barge, so supplies of food in the western part of the country ran out, and the desperate Hunger Winter ensued, which exacted the very high toll of 18,000 dead. Meanwhile, even if by 23 September the battle was lost, fighting continued everywhere; the resistance was heavily involved in organising safe places, food, medical care and escape lines for hundreds of surviving Allied soldiers, and the entire population of Arnhem and surroundings,
some 180,000 people in all, were summarily ejected by the German military command, followed by the wholesale looting and destruction of the city. And of all this—that is, of the heroic Allied defeat, of the terrible toll on occupied Holland during that last winter, and especially of the enduring Anglo-Dutch solidarity in the fight against Nazi Germany—‘Arnhem was and is the symbol’, as Kamphuis concluded.\(^6\)

It is now twenty-five years since Kamphuis gave his presentation, and today we know a lot more than he could have presented. It is time, therefore, to try to take his topic further, going beyond battlefield history and focusing on the aftermath of this battle and its impact on the people of Arnhem.

The wider perspective of this contribution is defined by the theme of discord and consensus in modern, post-war Dutch history—a theme with wide-ranging socio-cultural and political ramifications—witness phenomena such as Verzuiling (pillarisation), its counterpoint in the polarisation of Dutch society in the 1970s, and the consensus-oriented ways of the poldermodel.\(^7\)

Here, the grand narrative which the Arnhem case presents runs as follows. Before the war Arnhem was a provincial town of comfort and leisure. Severely jolted by the German onslaught of May 1940, it had to suffer four years of Nazi occupation, until the battle of September 1944, followed by evacuation and the almost total destruction of the city. When Liberation came in April 1945, there were only ruins in Arnhem; it was a dead city with almost no people. But over the next quarter of a century, the united efforts of rebuilding and renewal have ensured the rebirth of Arnhem, rising Phoenix-like from its ashes, as a new and modern model garden city of the post-war era.\(^8\)

Within this overall narrative, however, we encounter markedly different visions. There is a considerable distance between, on the one hand, the narrative of the destruction of Arnhem in the work of Van Iddekinge and Kerkhoffs, both published in 1981, and on the other hand, the way in which Van Meurs et al. in 2004 have portrayed the Second World War as almost a blip in Arnhem’s twentieth-century history.\(^9\) For many people, the battle and its aftermath have been a deeply shattering experience, a catastrophe triggering a lifelong quest for answers as well as a strong and living tradition of commemorations. For others, however, the war and its consequences are something of the past: ruins and devastation have been replaced by a beautiful new city, and in these modern times what we need is to move forward rather than dwell on the past.

These different views may well reflect the very different experiences of people from different generations. But for the historian looking
at Arnhem’s recent history, they pose two major questions. First a question of fact: what actually happened to the people of Arnhem in 1944–5, during the evacuation, destruction and plunder in the Arnhem war zone? How did they cope and survive, and how did they pick up the pieces, rebuilding the city and commemorating those terrible events? Secondly a question of interpretation: what can the sometimes very different views and stories of participants as well as historians reveal about the dynamics of discord and consensus in Arnhem before, during and after the war?

Revisiting the Battle of Arnhem: September 1944

After D-Day in June 1944, Arnhem in September 1944 was the toughest battle on the Western Front, and it was here that the Allied drive forward came to a standstill.

Over the past seventy years an entire library has been produced of battlefield history, making Arnhem one of the best documented cases of why and how a battle was fought and lost. What the world knows of this battle is dominated to a very large extent by Cornelius Ryan’s standard work A Bridge Too Far (1974), its many translations, and the epic, multi-star film this bestseller was made into by Sir Richard Attenborough in 1977. In his book, Ryan, himself a war correspondent, gave voice to the very many participants and eyewitnesses he interviewed, and on this basis presented a painstaking, almost hour-by-hour account of the battle. The first message of his book – namely that everything which could go wrong for the airborne soldiers did in fact go very badly wrong – was strongly reinforced in Attenborough’s film. So too was its corollary: the Battle of Arnhem as a story of fighting under impossible conditions, holding out against all odds, with many shining examples of courage and humanity, until the heroic but inevitable defeat of the British airborne troops.

The Ur-text underlying this and other histories of the battle is the very thorough investigation by the Arnhem military historian Lt. Col. Theodoor A. Boeree who, from September 1944 onwards, assembled a large collection of documents and information, and systematically interviewed all the military leaders involved, both Allied and German. With this first-hand information, Boeree’s work set the standard for all subsequent histories of the Battle of Arnhem – not just those of Ryan and De Jong, but also Kershaw, Middlebrook and many others. However, as there had long been a rumour that the Arnhem defeat was due to
Boeree’s first priority was to put on record ‘incontrovertible proof that there was no betrayal’, and that ‘King Kong’, i.e. the Dutch double agent Lindemans, ‘was not the betrayer of Arnhem’. In consequence, many other matters, though noted as important, were relegated to ‘what could make up a second book’.

So what about that second book? Here we may think, first of all, of the human dimension of the battle, for example in the story ‘Number 4078 Private Malcolm’ by Maria Dermoût (1994), written in the autumn of 1944 during her evacuation from Arnhem, about her grandson, Bas Kist, who was then ten years old and for whom ‘the world had, in the course of a very few days, changed forever’. One day, the little boy comes home all excited and shows his new-found treasures – a red cap, a leather belt and a canvas bag, all belonging to a British soldier, about to be buried by the farmer with whom they were staying. When the boy, cap on his head, reads out ‘Four Nil Seven Eight, Private Malcolm’, his grandmother, for a fleeting moment, senses and can almost see the dead soldier. Then quickly she tells the boy to hide away those things, for fear the Germans may find them and take reprisals.

On one level, this is just a simple war story of a dead soldier. But by giving him his name, Maria Dermoût remembers Private Malcolm as an individual person – whereas at Arnhem the dead were so very many. The story may remind us also that even today, seventy years on, there are still some 140 Allied soldiers unaccounted for, missing in action in the fields, the woods, the streets or ruins of Arnhem.

Since then, many other things have come to light. The German side of the battle, for example, has been thoroughly investigated, and with the publications by Tieke, Tiemens, Kershaw and Berends we are today much better informed on the operations of the German military at Arnhem. Further pieces to the battle jigsaw have been added in the book by Irwin on the three-man Jedburgh Special Forces teams, dropped behind enemy lines in support of the fighting at Arnhem; and also in the analysis by Jeffson of how vital intelligence from Ultra was ignored during Operation Market Garden. As a result of this and other new information, we now know far more precisely what went wrong at Arnhem, and how, and why. This in turn has led the Dutch military historian Klep to focus on the many errors in the British planning of this operation and to present a much more critical assessment than Kamphuis gave twenty-five years ago.

In a way, this is the normal course of events in historical research: new questions and new findings, new sources, new insights,
new views and assessments, and new lines of critical scrutiny often necessitate a revision of accepted opinion. The challenge here is for new generations of scholars to identify what research is needed in order to improve the historical record as given in the standard works by Bauer, Ryan and De Jong – and thus to fill the ‘second book’ Boeree envisaged.23

The evacuation and destruction of Arnhem: September 1944 until April–May 1945

If war is the motor and driving force of history, then this is certainly true of Arnhem in the twentieth century. In the 1930s Arnhem was a proud and pleasant city, green, modern and full of enterprise, home to large international companies such as KEMA, AKU and ENKA, and with a new bridge built across the Rhine in 1935.24 Then, May 1940 brought the German occupation which, with its fascist New Order and Führerprinzip, constituted a fundamental attack on Dutch civil society, on its traditional principles of liberty, justice and equality, and its ancient freedoms of religion and association.25 By the summer of 1944, as a result, there was no mayor, alderman or city council left in Arnhem.26 The only civil organisation still functioning was the Red Cross under Dr Van der Does.

On Saturday, 23 September 1944, at the end of the battle, the German military ordered the immediate evacuation of the population of Arnhem. According to Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer Hanns Albin Rauter, the highest German police and security authority in occupied Holland,27 this order came right from the top, i.e. from Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, as Rauter stated after the war during his trial as a war criminal28 – at a time when Model was already dead. The fact is that the order was issued by SS-Obersturmführer Helmut Peter of the Feldgendarmerie of the 9th SS-Panzer division ‘Hohenstaufen’.29 There has been some debate about who issued that order, whether they had the authority to do so, and the fact that this may well have been a war crime. But no one could be under any illusion as to the seriousness of the German threat attached to it: the Red Cross authorities were given three days to complete the evacuation, after which there would be systematic carpet bombing of the entire city – ‘mit Bombenteppichen muss gerechnet werden’.30 Given what had happened in May 1940 to Rotterdam, and more recently in Stalingrad and Warsaw, such a message, coming from the German SS-Feldkommando, could not be taken
lightly. And so, having obtained the order in writing, Dr Van der Does and the Red Cross set out to implement it.

Over the next three days, 150,000 people were evacuated to safer areas. Everybody had to go, young and old, women and children, sick and wounded, but also – and this was extremely dangerous – the many people who had had to go into hiding underground: Jews, students, policemen, as well as a large number of escaped British soldiers\(^\text{31}\) and the Dutch civilians who had helped them and now risked summary execution by the German military. From Arnhem, people were fleeing everywhere, ending up in places such as the Zoo\(^\text{32}\) and the Open Air Museum,\(^\text{33}\) both just north of the city. Many also went to neighbouring villages and cities, expecting to return home after a short while, but then having to stay there until well after Liberation. Many others were forced very much further afield; some as far away as Friesland.\(^\text{34}\) Chaos ensued, and the city fell prey to widespread looting and destruction. Meanwhile, a few well-organised people managed to rescue considerable food stocks, which they took to places where large groups of evacuees had ended up; others, at great personal risk, succeeded in rescuing many priceless art treasures.\(^\text{35}\)

All this is related in much greater detail in the major scholarly account of what happened in Arnhem during the year 1944/5. This is the standard work by the Arnhem historian Van Iddekinge, which is based on the collection of eyewitness accounts brought together in the municipal archive and library of Arnhem, in the Boeree Collection and other collections. Iddekinge’s monograph was, however, not published until 1981, and came out only after the volume of De Jong’s Koninkrijk dealing with Arnhem in the last year of the war had been published in 1980. This may help to explain why every year in September there is a commemoration of the battle, whereas the subsequent destruction of Arnhem and the suffering of its people appear to be largely outside Dutch national consciousness and memory of the war.\(^\text{36}\)

It was only after the publications by Arnhem historians such as Iddekinge and Kerkhoffs in 1981 that the plight of the Arnhem refugees really began to receive scholarly attention. Of particular interest here is the Vroemen Collection, which holds a wide range of materials – photographs, diaries, interviews, reports, letters, eyewitness accounts and personal recollections, from Dutchmen, Belgians, Canadians, Britons, Americans and Germans – all documenting their experiences during and after the Battle of Arnhem.\(^\text{37}\) New refugee stories keep coming out and are being actively collected today.\(^\text{38}\)
After the battle and the evacuation, the destruction of Arnhem took off and continued until Liberation in April–May 1945. The Netherlands as a whole was plundered too: bridges, railways, church bells, bicycles, radios, industrial installations, railroads, harbours and shipyards, hospitals, universities and research facilities, sluices and dykes – everything was stolen or else destroyed. In 1945 the Dutch claim on Germany for war damages and reparations amounted to 3.6 billion guilders in total. 39

But Arnhem, according to Konijnenburg, was the town that suffered most. Arnhem and everything in it, in punishment for the support its population gave to the airborne enemy, was declared forfeit by the German leadership – i.e. Von Rundstedt and Seyss-Inquart, according to Konijnenburg 40 and Iddekinge 41 – and made over to plunder crews from Germany. While no civilians were allowed into the Arnhem zone, on pain of deportation or death, these crews and their Dutch helpers proceeded to plunder and destroy Arnhem on a truly colossal scale, affecting all sectors of society and economy: factories, shops, banks, offices, laboratories, machines, stocks and supplies, raw materials, farms and livestock; but also Dutch culture – paintings, libraries, antiques, museums and special collections; as well as all private property, houses, furniture, clothing, valuables, pianos, beds, books, paintings and other household goods. 42 Everything of value was taken and carried off, and the rest was destroyed, thrown out into the streets, put to fire, or left covered in excrement. The loot, systematically collected by a wide range of German organisations, 43 was registered in the Beutesammelstelle, 44 the loot-gathering station at the Burgemeestersplein, before being shipped off to Germany in many wagonloads per day.

Because of the administrative thoroughness of the Germans, we are quite well informed about the extent of the destruction. This is also clearly documented in the many eyewitness accounts printed straight after the war, such as the report by De Boorder and Kruiderink and Arnhem’s Calvary by Frequn et al. 45 There is also the extraordinary photographic record of the actual looting while it was going on, made, at great personal risk, by the Arnhem photographer De Booij, 46 and the two volumes of pictures of Arnhem’s ruins, taken in 1945 by Nico Kramer. 47 The total damage at Arnhem was estimated by the city authorities at 400 million guilders, or more than 10 per cent of the national war claim of 3.6 billion. 48 Outraged, the underground newspaper Het Parool of Monday, 16 April 1945 declared on its front page ‘Arnhem: de grootste misdaad der Duitschers – stad werd “verbeurd verklaard” en totaal geplunderd. Normaal leven voorlopig onmogelijk.’ 49
To cover up their robbery, the Germans often torched buildings, streets and neighbourhoods. As against this, all through that period, volunteers from the Arnhem Fire Brigade and the Technische Nooddienst (Technical Emergency Service), at very grave personal risk, battled to extinguish those fires, doing everything they could to save their city. Directly after the war, however, it was they who were vilified, and who then had to defend their actions and their good name.50 Those unsung heroes have had to wait very many years before they got any public acknowledgement from the city authorities for their vital service.

The devastation of Arnhem was of course most terrible for its people, who in the summer of 1945 returned to their empty, plundered or destroyed dwellings, when Arnhem had become a city of ghosts, of rats and ruins, weeds and silence. But nothing could stop the evacuees from coming back, walking for days on end if necessary, and starting to clean up and repair with their own hands what was left of their homes and possessions. Today still, quite a few Arnhem people who lived through the ordeal of 1944/5 are very angry about what happened.51 Their lasting bitterness forms another counterpoint to the assessment given by Piet Kamphuis.

When trying to put things in perspective, two comparisons are relevant. First, on the national level, looking at the loss of life we note that during the Battle of Arnhem some 3,000 airborne soldiers were killed plus 188 Arnhem civilians (of whom about forty were summarily executed by the Germans); during the ensuing evacuation period an estimated 2,000 civilians died, many as victims of summary executions, razzias and deportations, starvation and actions of war; while more than 100,000 Arnhem people were ejected and lost everything. In this respect, Arnhem can be compared to Rotterdam, where, during the German fire-bombing in May 1940, 900 civilians and 185 Dutch soldiers were killed, while 80,000 people had to flee and lost everything.

The second comparison is an international one. We know that in September 1944 there was a widespread fear that Arnhem was set to become a major battle front and would end up as a second Stalingrad or Warsaw. Directly after the war, however, the Arnhem writer Johan van der Woude, in his Arnhem, Contested City (1945), a vivid account of life during the war right up until Liberation, came to a different assessment: it had indeed been a terrible period in Arnhem, but not as terrible as in London or Coventry, Sebastopol or Leningrad.52
Rebuilding the city and the nation: 1945–1969

After Liberation, freedom and the immense energy it released among the people of Arnhem formed a major impulse and triggered a vast effort at rebuilding and renewal of the city. In 1945, the immediate and overriding priority for which everyone and everything was mobilised was a campaign to clean up what was left of the city. Doelman, a visitor from Rotterdam, wrote that Arnhem in July 1945 was a ‘dead town’, in need of everything. A report he quoted from the municipal social services department stated that the people of Arnhem did not have anything left: no beds, chairs, windowpanes, pans, cutlery, coffeepots, curtains, pencils, telephones, absolutely nothing. So Doelman’s message to the rest of the Netherlands was: Come over and help Arnhem! And that is what happened: the city of Amsterdam, together with the Red Cross, straightaway adopted Arnhem, and all through the summer, the services, the citizens, engineers, nurses, carpenters, cleaners, mechanics, etc. of Amsterdam came over in large numbers and helped the people of Arnhem on their way.

Right from the start, the Arnhem cry for help rang out far and wide across the world. Every week Mayor Matser, a genius at public relations, was in the news worldwide, and help came pouring in from everywhere. By Christmas 1945, many people in Arnhem received aid packages from Switzerland and other countries as far away as the Philippines and Brazil.

From the beginning there was also a strong impulse to commemorate the terrible events of the preceding year. The Arnhem Monument to Justice was inaugurated: a broken pillar of the Court of Justice, which had been destroyed during the battle. The first airborne ceremony, in September 1945, inaugurated a strong tradition, and ever since the battle has been the occasion of airborne commemorations at places of memory in Arnhem, Oosterbeek and surroundings. In 1946, the first film of the Battle of Arnhem was shown, Theirs is the Glory, produced by the British Army, using authentic participants – survivors from Oosterbeek and airborne soldiers re-enacting the battle on location. This film has been of iconic significance, with its narrative of the battle as a tragic British defeat, of heroism, suffering and sacrifice, all for the ultimate victory of freedom, justice and democracy over Nazi Germany. What Kamphuis noted in 1990 – namely Arnhem as the symbol of this fight – really has its early beginnings in this film.
The following two decades, from 1945 till 1969, were the years of reconstruction and renewal. Led by the inspirational mayor Matser, all of Arnhem had but one single priority – to rebuild the city. All available energies, manpower, planning, organisation, enterprise and capital were channelled into a concerted effort to repair, rebuild and replace the war damage and destruction. From rubble to clean-up, from ruins to temporary huts, then from huts to new and modern buildings – everything proceeded apace while houses, bridges, schools, churches and offices were being repaired. The central focus throughout this period was to realise the *Arnhem's Stadsplan 1953*, the blueprint prepared by Arnhem’s chief urban developer, Van Muilwijk. Rebuilding was much more than just undoing the damage. In true modernist fashion it also involved renewal – not just the construction of many new buildings of high-quality architectural design, which today are recognised as modern monuments in Arnhem, but also the engineering of new social values and a new public image of the town as a modern, green, enterprising and industrious model city.

Directly after the war, cultural life picked up again too. The very active WAK organisation united the writers, painters, musicians and sculptors of the artistic community of Arnhem. The theatre was rebuilt and inaugurated through a reunion of artists with the patrons they had been working with underground during the occupation. Modern European art, culture and music were brought in. Marshall Aid was used to develop hotels and stimulate the tourist industry. And there was a considerable English influence: Arnhem entered into a city link with Croydon; the Sonsbeek sculpture garden exhibitions began which brought Henry Moore to Arnhem; and in the streets one would see trolley buses, lunchrooms and tea rooms. It all created an image of Arnhem as a pleasant, cultured, modern garden city.

With this newly built and cultured environment also came a new view of society and education. The secondary school I attended was linked to the Putney School for Girls; education in future would have to be not just academic but also character building, and in addition to very good English teachers we also had lots of sports, like hockey and tennis, and a debating society. There was also a German teacher who brought home to us that the war we fought was with the Nazis, not with the Germans. Here, reconstruction went well beyond restoration and the production of new buildings in a new city: it also brought about a renewal of society and its values.
Unfinished business

Silences and ignorance: the discontents of reconstruction

The immense achievement of the reconstruction era has come at a cost. The priorities of the Matser years had been clear: rebuilding first, second and third – and everything else would have to wait. Many Dutch people, moreover, were too busy anyway rebuilding the city and their lives to have much time for looking back, reflection or critical scrutiny of events in the past. Also, though many people had their memories, their nightmares and their pain, what they had been through was generally not much talked about. As a consequence of these various factors, on many matters to do with the war in Arnhem there is, still today, a lot of ignorance, incomplete knowledge, and misrepresentation of what actually happened back then.

A case in point is the publication in 2004, by Van Meurs et al., of a 400-page book on Arnhem’s history in the twentieth century, containing a very short chapter, entitled ‘Tweede Wereldoorlog’ (six pages, containing eight photographs with short texts), sitting in the middle of the volume, between fifteen other thematic and longitudinal chapters, with a wealth of information on topics such as urban development, city administration, demographic development, health care, education, culture, media, sports and garrison (though not the police). Throughout, the focus of this book is on continuities and long-term trends running through Arnhem’s twentieth-century history. As a consequence of this approach, the war and the battle are presented as hardly more than a blip. Compared to the narrative in Iddekinge and Kerkhoffs, which present the war and the battle as a shattering period of absolutely defining importance, the new view of Van Meurs et al. amounted to a complete reversal of analysis and appreciation.

Now, while, of course, there are many continuities linking the pre-war and post-war periods in Arnhem’s history, it would be too much to conclude from this that the war was merely a blip in Arnhem’s history. In any case, to make this argument, Van Meurs et al. would have had to adduce a full investigation into life in Arnhem under the German occupation for the period 1940–5, showing, for each of the fifteen thematic sectors, Wie es wirklich gewesen, and what impact the occupation years have had for the people of Arnhem. Thus, for example, the chapter on
Arnhem as a garrison town would have had to explain its strategic location during the war, its military significance, the many large barracks in and around it, the concentration of many kinds of German troops who came to Arnhem for rest and recreation, the presence of the military airfield and the crucial air control centre nearby at Schaarsbergen and Deelen, and also the number of high-ranking Germans (such as the top general, Christiansen) who were resident in Arnhem during the war, many of whom, after Liberation, were prosecuted there on the Rennen Enk estate.

If this kind of investigation had been done for each of the fifteen thematic sectors, then Van Meurs et al. might have had a case. But it has not been done, and so – however interesting the mental exercise of thinking away the war and the battle – their book is lacking a basis in research. So their case is not proven, and those six pages must be seen as untenable, the outcome of amnesia and ignorance rather than of research.

The battle, Liberation and reconstruction have made a real caesura in Arnhem’s twentieth-century history. On many aspects of this history we are quite well informed, but there is also quite a lot of unfinished business and a need for historical research as a critical counterpoint to ignorance, amnesia and myth-making. In particular, what still needs to be investigated is Arnhem life under occupation, along the lines of the work undertaken by Gerhard Hirschfeld.58

A good starting point would be the Arnhem Freedom Trail of 2007, an impressive online map of lieux de mémoire in Arnhem, containing a great amount of solid but little-known information on places and events to do with all aspects of the war in Arnhem, both before and after that week in September 1944. This holds for the realities of accommodation – e.g. the Arnhem newspaper and its muddling through in order to survive the war59 – just as much as for the collaboration of the three NSB mayors – Liera, Schermer and Hollaar – who were running Arnhem between August 1944 and April 1945, which would make a very interesting topic for research. In this connection, we should note that the Arnhem city council, ever since the war, has repeatedly demanded – and has been promised several times – an account of the wartime actions of the city authorities, who, however, have consistently remained silent on this.

If we want a full and proper scrutiny of Arnhem’s war record, then the following three topics would seem to me to merit further investigation. First of all, with respect to the reign of terror by the occupation regime and their Dutch collaborators, we are fortunate in having the painstaking reconstruction by Diender,60 more than sixty years after the
event, of one particular case of summary execution of Dutch civilians in Arnhem during the battle. It is true that after the war the two highest police authorities in Arnhem were prosecuted, sentenced to death and executed: first, in 1946, Major Feenstra of the Marechaussee, then later Rauter in 1949. Still, one would want to learn more about the realities of terror in Arnhem – the Jew hunts, the Silbertanne murders, the razzias during and after the battle, further summary executions, and the role of the various police forces under their command. Note here that, unlike those of Tilburg and other cities in Brabant, the Arnhem police so far have not offered a full historic account of their role during the occupation years.

Secondly, on the role of the resistance during the war years in Arnhem we do not yet have a comprehensive monograph. Information here is often scattered and fragmentary, and so not nearly enough is known, for example, of how school resistance against Nazi takeover attempts began in Arnhem at the Protestant Van Löben Sels Primary School, or how in 1944 the Arnhem jail was twice successfully broken into by the resistance to liberate a number of their friends. The Arnhem municipal archive contains many unpublished reports as well as the invaluable collections of Boeree and Vroemen, which are being digitised at the moment. Those sources contain quite a few names from which further research should start – a roll call of ordinary Arnhem people, men and women from all walks of life, who chose to resist the Nazis, such as Paul Bresser, Bijlsma, De Booij, Van Daalen, Bart Deuss, Van der Does, Dommering, Djiland, De Greef, Alex Hartman, Mrs Van ’t Hart, Hoefsloot, Jonker, Marga Klompé, Han Knap, Van Krimpen, Pieter Kruyff, Laterveer, Harry Montfroy, Onck, Onnekink, Overduin, Johannes Penseel, Sjoukje Tiddens-Hoyting, Tiemens, Versluys, Gé Wunderink, and quite a few others as well.

The third and final topic on which there should be further research concerns the Jews of Arnhem. In this contribution, we have been looking at the aftermath of the Battle of Arnhem and its impact on the civilian population. But we should never forget that long before that battle the Jewish population of Arnhem had already largely been extinguished through Nazi deportation and mass murder. It was not until 2003 that the first monograph on the fate of the Jews of Arnhem was published, documenting how from Arnhem more than 1,500 of its 1,700 Jews were deported and murdered in German concentration camps. Quite a few Arnhem Jews were saved because Johannes Penseel and his wife Maria Elisabeth helped them, very early on, to go into hiding and to escape from German deportation and extermination, and in 2008, in
recognition of their help to the Jews of Arnhem, they were both posthumously recognised as ‘Righteous among the Nations’ by Yad Vashem, the State of Israel’s official Holocaust memorial. Further research can be very revealing, as we can see in the case of Mr Spinoza Catella Jessurun, a Jewish survivor who came back from hiding in the summer of 1945 but then had his house in Arnhem taken from him by the city authorities. When he sued them over this, the Arnhem court emphatically decided in his favour, making it clear that the city government no longer could do as they pleased during the war, since the rule of law was now back in Arnhem.63

It is fitting and proper that the oldest and most important war memorial of Arnhem is a tribute to Justice, the broken pillar of the old court building mentioned previously.

The dynamics of discord and consensus

From the perspective of the central theme of discord and consensus, our findings can be summarised as follows.

In general, Arnhem’s twentieth-century history before, during and after the war is in line with the national pattern of Dutch history under German occupation64 and during post-war reconstruction.65 The Battle of Arnhem in September 1944 and the subsequent forced evacuation and destruction of Arnhem while the Allied and German troops were continuing the war constituted a terrible ordeal which has exacted a very high toll on the people of Arnhem. During that ordeal, a few good men and women stepped forward, from the Red Cross, the fire brigade, the technical emergency service and the resistance. At a time when all other civil institutions and organisations in Arnhem failed or had been destroyed by the Germans, they formed the backbone of Arnhem’s civil society, and with their courageous initiatives they managed to save much of the city. But when the war was over, it was they who were blamed and vilified. Over the next twenty-five years, starting with the mass clean-up of 1945–6, there was a great and united endeavour to rebuild the city. Rebuilding in the Arnhem case was much more than restoration, and the city was effectively reinvented as a modern, model garden city, with industry, leisure and international allure. At the same time, the reconstruction years also brought the construction of a new and forward-looking consensus, dominated by post-battle rejuvenation of city and society – but with no time for anything other than rebuilding,
and as a result little attention to important matters which have had to
wait a very long time before being investigated.

In these various respects, Arnhem is not very different from the
general narrative of post-war Dutch reconstruction. However, whereas
shortly after the war an extensive discussion of the Arnhem case was
included as a centre-piece in the national survey of war damage by
Konijnenburg, it is to be noted that sixty years later, the war is regarded
as little more than a blip in Arnhem history as portrayed by Van Meurs
et al. (2004) and, at the same time, Arnhem’s destruction and rebuilding
is conspicuously absent from the narrative on post-war recovery, recon-
struction and renewal of the Dutch nation as a whole given in the work
by Schuyt and Taverne. In my view – contra Van Meurs et al. and Schuyt
and Taverne – Arnhem, its destruction and its recovery after the war
should be seen as a paradigm case of these historical processes in the
Netherlands.

Arnhem’s twentieth-century history is marked by a very special
combination of its local, national and international dimensions. The
balance between them in Arnhem historiography is tilted towards the
international, as if Arnhem were just a theatre for outside actors from
Germany and Britain fighting it out with each other. There is a con-
comitant lack of research into the local dimension, and there are many
hidden histories of the war years in Arnhem which still need to be writ-
ten – in particular the story of the Arnhem resistance, of the German ter-
ror against civilians, the war record of the city authorities and the role
of the three NSB mayors running Arnhem between August 1944 and
Liberation, as well as the involvement of the Arnhem police. In-depth
studies of these topics will have much to contribute to a clearer under-
standing of Arnhem’s war history.

Over the past decades, a number of important new studies have
been published, and publications such as the online Arnhem Freedom
Trail 2007 and the monograph on the Jews of Arnhem by Klijn present
us with lots of unique and valuable information and insights. We know
that the past will continue to be contested, and that – as Pieter Geyl
said – history is a never-ending discussion. But when we engage in fur-
ther research and scrutiny of the past, we also know that we have a solid
basis upon which to build.

‘BEYOND A BRIDGE TOO FAR’