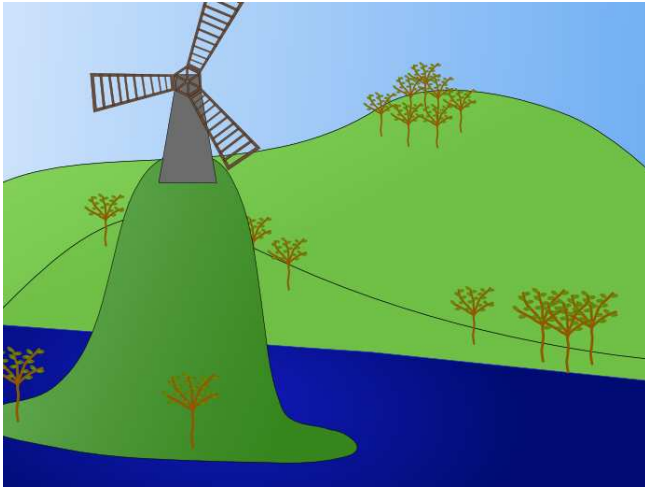


17<sup>th</sup> April 2008

## The Windmill that had no wind

By Jeremy Quinton



Not many years after the death of Miguel de Cervantes, in the early 1630s, a windmill was built in the city of Amsterdam. The windmill was called “De Otter”, and was one of dozens of mills built at the time.

The De Otter windmill cut wood to build the Dutch ships that sailed around the world, and to build the thousands of houses needed as the city’s population grew. At this time, the Netherlands was a superpower - together with Spain - with one of the strongest economies & armadas in the world.

De Otter kept working for many years, until a moment when the city had expanded so much around it that wind could no longer reach its sails. And so as the amount of wind that powered the mill continued to decrease, the sails turned slower and slower...generating less energy, and completing less work.

These days, the “window of space” through which the wind can pass is almost closed. The density and height of the buildings that surround it mean that even the direction of the wind has changed, and is unpredictable too, blowing in gusts.

In short, De Otter doesn’t work like it used to.

The future? Pressure is mounting to build more high-rise offices and flats in the area, so that would mean even less wind to power the sails.

But as one of the city’s most important examples of industrial heritage, there are plans to ensure that it continues to work as it did in the past. Or to move it to a new location where a good supply of wind is guaranteed!

I’d never heard of De Otter until last week. It was a story that I enjoyed in itself, particularly for its irony. But it also made me think, believe it or not, of a problem that many of us encounter as students from time to time when we learn a language...perhaps especially now, around this time of year. Any idea what?

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