

Gimborn, a Dutch division of the Pelikan company.

By Allard Borst

Introduction.

Collecting pens to me is more than just having a load of shiny pens in my showcase. It is researching the history of my pens that makes collecting truly interesting.

After I added a 1950s Gimborn fountain pen to my collection some time ago, I discovered that it was very hard to find any, let alone documented information about this company. In this article the first results of my research are presented.

History of the Gimborn company

The Gimborn company started in 1855 when Heinrich Karl Friedrich von Gimborn (1830-1893) took over his father's pharmacy in the German town of Emmerich not far from the Dutch-German border. In the same year Gimborn started a chemical-pharmaceutical firm in Emmerich. This company was named *H. von Gimborn Chemische Fabrik & Dampf Pulveriser Anstalt* and is nowadays known as H. von Gimborn GmbH. The Gimborn company started making ink in 1860 but most of the products were health related. In those days ink was a pharmaceutical product that was sold by travelling salesmen.

Heinrich had a daughter and two sons: Clara Von Gimborn (1860-1890), August (Max Theodor) Von Gimborn (1866-1927) and Max (Theodor Heinrich) Von Gimborn(1872-1964).

Gimborn in the Netherlands.

In 1886 Heinrich von Gimborn started a factory in 's Heerenberg, a Dutch town right on the border. After Heinrich's death in 1893 his two sons inherited the company. August took over the Emmerich factory and Max concentrated on the factory in 's Heerenberg which produced all kinds of inks at first and other office supplies later on with health products remaining the core business. For some reason or other Max and August split up in the early 1900s. One of Max's letters I have in my possession suggests some kind of disagreement among them but that is not 100% clear.

In 1907 Max bought a house in Zevenaar named "De Doelen" and started his office there. Some nearby buildings were rented where the newborn firm of H. van Gimborn started its production. Peculiar detail, Max changed the German affix "Von" into the Dutch "Van" and yet referred to his father's company by using the initial "H" instead of his own.

By then Gimborn inks were advertised as "the first and best Dutch product". Around the turn of the century protectionism was very strong all over the world and the Netherlands were no exception. Max might well have seen benefit in being as Dutch as possible.



How Dutch is Dutch?



Advertisement for Gimborn products, 1911

An indication that nationality did matter is suggested by a letter sent to the Dutch magazine “Neerlandia” by a Mr J.M. Kluppell in 1908. In [this letter](#) he said that the Dutch public was being fooled by the slogan Van Gimborn used. Kluppell stated that Max von Gimborn was a German and so was his company. In fact he went as far as to claim that the company didn’t have an office in the Netherlands and that orders sent to the Dutch address were taken directly to Emmerich .

One might think this letter to be of little meaning; yet apparently Max van Gimborn thought otherwise. One month later Max van Gimborn had [his answer](#)

published in the same magazine. He denied everything Mr Kluppell had said and even had a solicitor make an official statement that was published with the letter. This solicitor stated that he had been at the Gimborn factory in Zevenaar where he witnessed that inks were really made there, that there was an office and that all the people who worked for the company were Dutch and lived in Zevenaar or the vicinity. Regarding Max van Gimborn the solicitor merely stated that he lived in Zevenaar. Obviously he couldn’t deny the fact that Max was German as it wasn’t until 1916 that Max was granted the Dutch nationality.

Changing his nationality didn’t mean the end of the debate about Gimborns roots though since in the 1920s another discussion about this issue took place in the stationary magazine “De Kantoorboekhandel”.



Max van Gimborn became a Dutch citizen in 1916.

On the move.

Like many of the targeted readers of this article Max van Gimborn was a keen collector. He didn't collect vintage fountain pens or ink but had a collection of trees, especially conifers (rather more space consuming than fountain pens, I suppose). For that purpose he bought a garden in Zevenaar and part of this garden still remains.



1926 advertisement. Gimborn was located in Doorn and still produced health related products.

In 1924 Gimborn moved to the Dutch town of Doorn as did the Gimborn office though production remained in Zevenaar. It is said that one of the main reasons for Max van Gimborn to move to Doorn was that the soil in that part of the Netherlands is better suited for growing conifers. Whether this is true or not, we know for a fact that Van Gimborn started an arboretum in Doorn that can still be visited. Moving the office to Doorn, away from the production lines apparently wasn't a great idea since some time later the Gimborn office moved back to Zevenaar.

In 1931 the ownership of the firm moved into other hands. Max van Gimborn sold his company to Pelikan. Max died in the town of Doorn in 1964.

Apparently Gimborn was a successful firm in itself since the company name remained and it hardly seems that Pelikan had any influence on the company. After Pelikan took over the company was very successfully led by Mr E.C.J. Sparenburg. He opened a new factory in Indonesia (the former Dutch Eastindies) in 1934. A permit for a second ink factory in Surabaya was granted in 1954, but this factory apparently was never built.



New Gimborn factory. Zevenaar 1956.

In 1956 a new factory was opened in Zevenaar producing all kinds of stationary and providing a job to about 135 people. Even at that time the name of Gimborn remained and the only noticeable Pelikan influence could be found in the similarity between the first Gimborn fountain pens and the Pelikan 140 series.

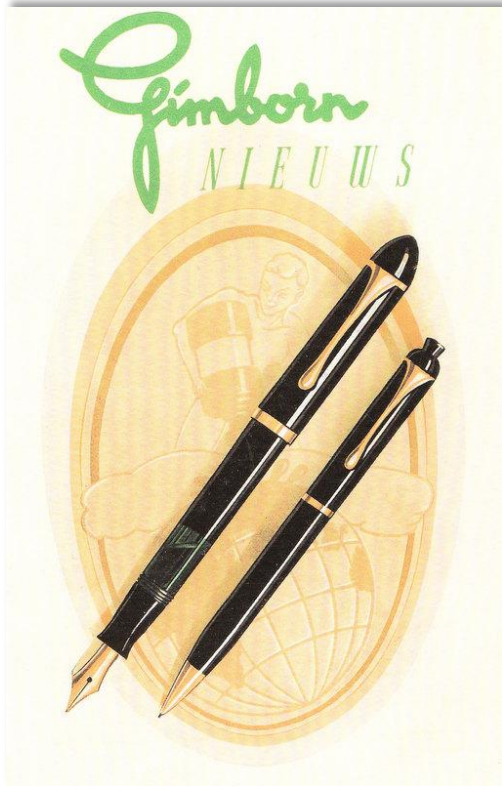
This bird has flown...

In 1980, Gimborn celebrated their 125th anniversary. However, in the following year the company name was changed into Pelikan Nederland BV.

In the 1980s and 1990s the Pelikan company had to cope with severe financial losses especially in the stationary department. Finally, after many reorganisations the Zevenaar factory closed down in 1993 and Pelikan left the Netherlands in 1995.

Gimborn fountain pens.

In 1951 Gimborn launched the 150 model fountain pen. This pen was almost identical to the Pelikan 140 series except for a few details: it was slightly longer, had a different clip and no reference to the name of Pelikan of course. The nib was stamped Gimborn and this name may be on the barrel of both pen and pencil as well. The Gimborn 150 model was equally long as the Pelikan 300 model.



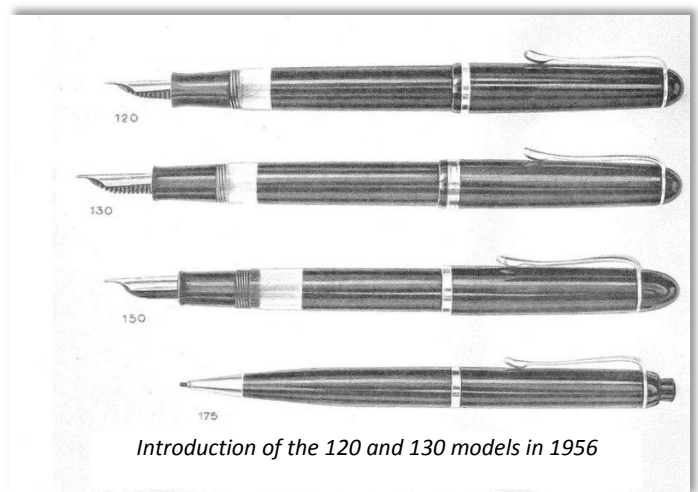
The introduction of the 150/175 models in 1951.

pens and pencils were assembled in Zevenaar from Pelikan parts. These were sold to the shops at Dfl. 19,50 (pen) and Dfl. 7,50 (pencil). The retail prices were Dfl. 32,50 and Dfl. 12,50.

In 1956 two new fountain pen models were introduced: the 120 model (or Junior), the 130 model (or senior), the 150 model was then named Master. The picture shows the differences in feeds between model 150 and the models 120 and 130. The cap bands differ as well.



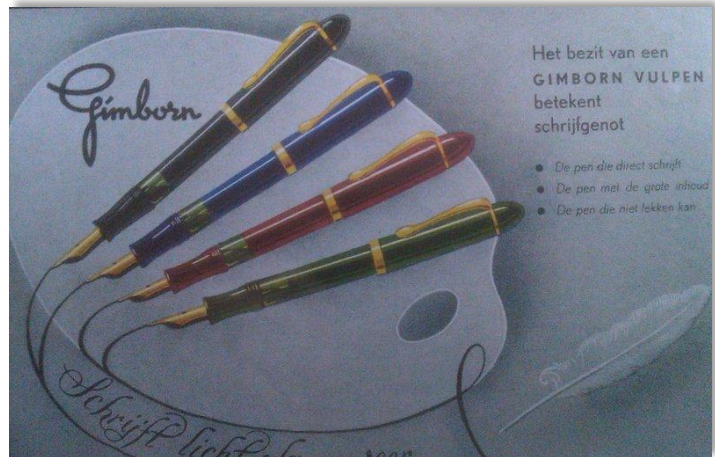
From left to right: Pelikan 140 model, Gimborn 150 model and Pelikan 300 model.



Introduction of the 120 and 130 models in 1956

At this time Gimborn fountain pens were produced in other colours too. Apart from black there were the colours Venetian red, Peacock blue and Emerald green.

In the period between 1956 and 1958 the Gimborn/Pelikan pens underwent a cosmetic change. The green ink window was replaced by 4 round ones. It could very well be that for these later pens and maybe for the 120 and 130



models parts from other manufacturers were used as well.



Late 130 model. Picture kindly provided by Werner Rüttinger.

After 1960 the piston filler production was discontinued

. In 1962 cartridge filler

fountain pens were

introduced. Van Gimborn kept producing these pens until the 1970s. Some of these models bear a very strong resemblance to the Pelikan and Pelikano fountain pens that were produced in the same years .

After Gimborn was integrated in the Pelikan concern in 1981 the production of Gimborn pens stopped. Shortly after that however Pelikan released the Legend series. As far as I know these pens were sold exclusively in the Netherlands. Maybe we have to consider this Pelikan Legend series to be the farewell gift of the company to the Dutch as it was the last Dutch Pelikan related fountain pen series to be released.



Some 1970s Gimborn pens. Picture kindly provided by Frans Maathuis



A farewell gift, The Legend series.

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